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*Who will you become?*

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Jump in.

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Printed in the United States of America



### DJPubba\_Tim Lindquist

I found a very big mushroom near the trash can. There were three mushrooms but only one of the three was big. It was the winner of most biggest mushroom I've seen yet, award, even counting those big portobello mushrooms you can get in a sandwich. To reward it, I put a quarter on it.

Now playing: *Disgaea 3*, *Meebzork* (5200), *Xari Arena* (5200), *Crazy Climber* (Famicom), *Akumajo Special Boku Dracula* (Famicom)



### Wanderer\_Thomas Wilde

I should probably be further into the *WotLK* beta than I am, but once I learned *Corpse Explosion*, it became hard to do anything else.

Now Playing: *Wrath of the Lich King* beta, *Dead Space*, *Painkiller*



### Racewing\_Geson Hatchett

I've decided that there's too much fiction in the world, yet too little of it that isn't disappointing on some level (especially when videogame-related). The good news is that I've finally decided to do something about it. The bad news is that I had to sacrifice half my sanity to gain the power to do so. Well, here goes nothing!

Now Playing: *Bionic Commando: Rearmed* (XBLA), *Bangai-O Spirits* (DS)



### Hitoshura\_Iaian Ross

My backlog of games is reaching critical mass. The Olympics recently pushed it back another two weeks, as all that I was doing was watching them during that time. I missed the World Cup and Turin in 2006, and also missed Euro 2008 -- all of them due to work. I was not going to miss watching Beijing 2008 this year.

Now Playing: *GT5: Prologue*, *Disgaea 3*, *Persona 4*, *Etrian Odyssey II*, *FFT:A2*, *Civilization IV: Beyond the Sword*



### Sardius\_Danny Cowan

SGE 2K8 went off without a hitch, thanks to this year's uncommonly generous, helpful, and all-around fantastic crowd. Thanks again for everything, guys! Highlights included Bomberman: Fight for the Future, Jeff Gordon Crazy Ghost Racer, ATV Deer Hunt: Finish the Fight, Tiger Woods Nut Buster 09, SMB2 Quiz-O-Rama, and one holy mother of an NES speedrun tournament. PROTIP: Do a super jump!

Now Playing: *Saints Row*, *Bionic Commando: Rearmed*, *Persona 3: FES*



### Roger Danish\_Greg Off

I've decided I want to live on LittleBigPlanet where I can dress in a sack and walk down the street without people pointing or offering me change. Strike that. I like change. Please send me all your change so I can afford LittleBigPlanet when it comes out. Thank you.

Now Playing: *LittleBigPlanet*, *N+*, *Shadow of the Colossus*, *Silent Hill: Homecoming*



### 4thletter\_David Brothers

I'm involved in more hustles than I can count right now. That's cool, though. I never sleep, because sleep is the cousin of death.

Now Playing: *Madden NFL '09* (PS3)



### James\_James Cunningham

I don't know what happened but EA has finally lost its Evil Empire reputation, at least with me. The company that churned out endless warmed-over retreads of what it thought people wanted, banking only on sure-fire hits while feasting on the souls of its talent, seems to be dead. It feels weird not to hate them any more but what the hell, I'll take my good gaming wherever I can get it.

Now Playing: *Final Fantasy Fables: Chocobo's Dungeon*, *Bangai-O Spirits*, *Galaga Legions*



### HonestGamer\_Jason Venter

I love RPGs, but sometimes I wish that someone could compress the awesomeness and dump it into a fruit smoothy so that I could quickly enjoy it and maybe move on with my life. Until that happens, I guess I'll continue to waste weeks, months and years playing video games. Do I really have a choice?

Now playing: *Disgaea 3: Absence of Justice*, *Final Fantasy IV* (DS), *Master of the Monster Lair* (DS)



### Dack\_Steve Hannley

Now let me get this straight. You want me to let my client of 15 years, one of my best friends, die in the jungle alone, for some money and a G5? Yes. A G5 airplane? Yes....and lots of money .....playaaaa

Now Playing: *Dead Space*, *Tales of Vesperia*, *The Bug - London Zoo*



### Kitty\_Karin Renoux

I moved into a new apartment, and to celebrate I've been playing scary games in the dark with my room mates. It's amazing that all these years later, *Silent Hill* can still make a room of anxious girls jump.

Now Playing: *Silent Hill*, *Silent Hill 2*, *Resident Evil*



### Wolfie\_Terry Wolfinger

Terry is working like a dog at an advertising agency in Pasadena, so he didn't have time to play WoW as usual nor write a bio. So this is Pubba writing this. I could totally be so mean but I like Terry so I won't.

Now playing with some cute girl, no doubt.



### Lynxara\_Alicia Ashby

Happy birthday to me! Another year older, and hopefully none the wiser. (Wisdom is the stat that opposes Fun.)

Now Playing: *Strong Bad's Cool Game for Attractive People*, *Final Fantasy Fables: Chocobo's Dungeon*, *Disgaea 3*, *Civilization IV: Colonization*



### Arlieith\_Thomas Shin

I've barely had time to watch the Olympics! All I know is that if Lefties are cheaters and if Koreans are haxx0r, then Left-Handed Koreans are :psyduck:. Speaking of Koreans, *Mabinogi: Generation 3*'s new combat system is crazier than playing *DoTA*. I love it.

Now Playing: *Mabinogi: Generation 3* (PC), *Street Fighter IV* (Arcade), *MegaMari* (PC)



### Ashura\_Brady Hartel

*Bangai-o Spirits* is badass. It's a lot different than the Dreamcast version, but still a lot of fun. I love the level load feature, it reminds me of connecting to a BBS with a 2400 baud modem. Someone should make an archive. Also happy bday, Lynxie!

Now Playing: *Bangai-o Spirits*, *Braid*, *Metal Gear Online*



### Jeremy\_Jeremy Peeples

The usual summer gaming drought left me with more time to enjoy classics and sleeper hits that I haven't played in a long time, or never played before because I simply forgot I had them.

Now Playing: *No One Can Stop Mr. Domino!*, *RC De Go!*, *Strider 2*, *Bionic Commando (NES)*, *WWF No Mercy*, *VF 5: Online*, *Carve*, *Otogi*



### Big Wym\_Jeb Haught

Damn, WAR is coming and I'll have to upgrade my outdated PC in order to get decent framerate. Between WAR and *Wrath of the Lich King*, I guess it's time to say goodbye to the sun. Good thing I completely lost all interest in AOC because two MMOs at once are already more than enough to handle.

Now Playing: *Warhammer Online: Age of Reckoning*, *Soul Calibur IV*, *MGS4*



## the rundown

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## 10 on the cover dead space

This quarter's blowout is in honor of *Dead Space*, a game willing to bring the classic survival horror experience back into a twitchy post-*RE4* world. Look no further for heavy coverage of gameplay, story, the many multimedia extensions of the property, and an exclusive interview with *Dead Space* producer Chuck Beaver.



## 32 features copy protection, iphone gaming

Take a hilarious trip down memory lane as Sardius and Ashura take a look at video game copy protection schemes of the past, from the simply ridiculous to the absolute evil of trying to play pirated *Earthbound*. Dack also takes a look at the recent launch of games for the iPhone and iPod touch to see if this hardware really has what it takes to "kill" dedicated portable gaming systems like the DS and PSP.



## 48. previews gears of war 2, persona 4

We've got massive coverage of *Gears of War 2*, complete with an exclusive interview with designer extraordinaire Cliff Bleszinski. For those of you who like bright colors more than manly violence, we've also got a look at Nintendo's *Animal Crossing: City Folk*, and we turn our hardcore eyes toward the goofy magnificence of *Persona 4*. All this, and coverage from the latest tournaments!



BE CAREFUL WHEN YOU FIGHT THE MONSTERS, LEST YOU BECOME ONE.  
-FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

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# WELCOME TO THE CRACKS

what do you see?

# DEAD SPACE

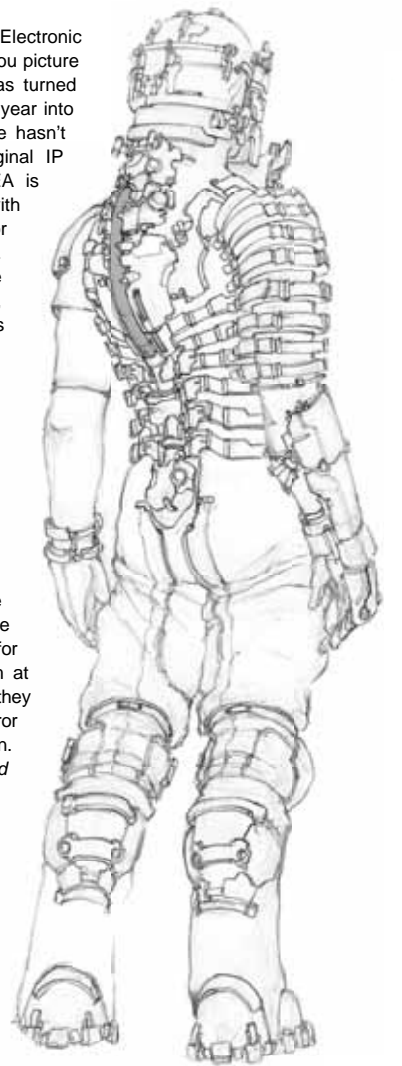
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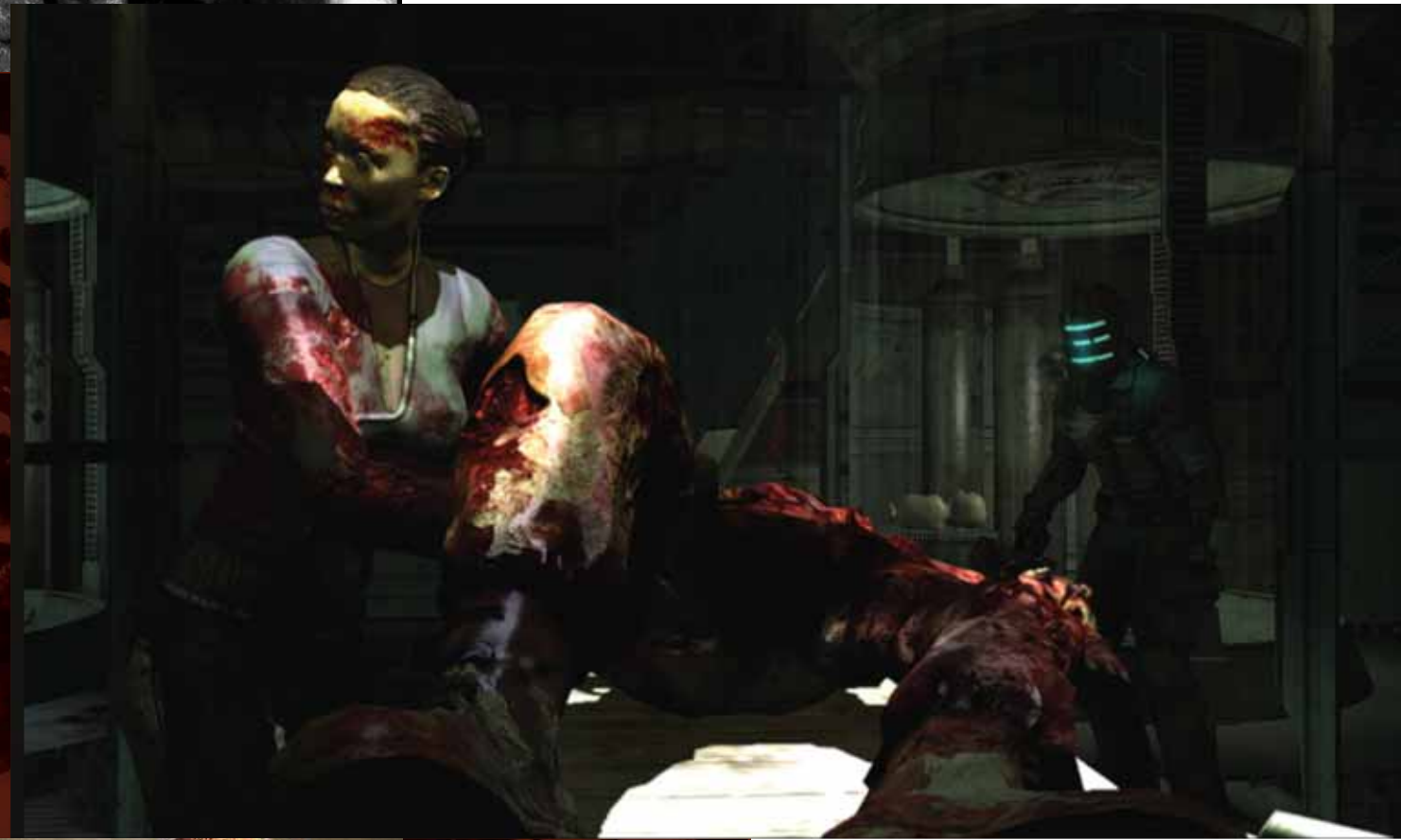
by wanderer and dack

When you think of Electronic Arts, the last thing that you picture is a "new" game. EA has turned out quality entries every year into existing series, but there hasn't been a major new original IP in awhile. This year, EA is looking to change that with their brand new horror game, *Dead Space*. Although it might not be EA's usual cup of tea, *Dead Space* is a serious survival horror game.

The idea of setting a horror story in space isn't a new one, but it has always been a great way to set up some scares. With the claustrophobic feeling of a space station combined with the thought that there is nowhere to go outside the walls, space seems like the perfect fit as the setting for a horror story. The team at EA Redwood said that they spent time studying horror films to find inspiration. This is very true as *Dead Space* pays homage to quite a few entities. The game will remind you of countless horror films as you play through it. *Alien* and *Event Horizon* particularly seem to be main influences, as the setting and creatures are quite similar.

Because the team used horror films as their inspiration, many of the scares in the game feel like what you'd experience from a movie. Movies, however, don't seem like the only influence in *Dead Space*. The game is very reminiscent of quite a few horror games like *Resident Evil 4* and *Doom 3*. *Dead Space* may take much of its inspiration from previous established works, but it doesn't come out feeling unoriginal. Instead, it spins everything into a unique experience.





## « Isaac

### Where am I?

In space, no one can hear you scream. In *Dead Space*, there'd be nobody alive to hear you, anyway.

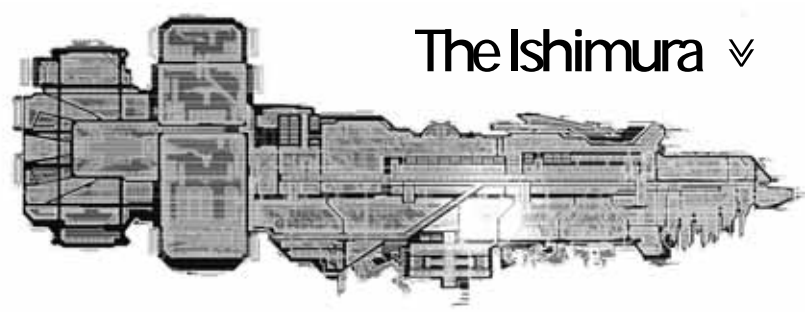
You play as Isaac Clarke, a space engineer for the Concordance Extraction Corporation. Not much is known about C.E.C., other than the fact that they are a mining company. Something has gone wrong on board of the U.S.G. *Ishimura*, a huge ship owned by C.E.C. The *Ishimura* is the first "Planetcracker" ever built, a ship that dismantles entire planets to extract valuable minerals.

Earth has been through a catastrophic event caused by an overuse of resources, so finding new planets to provide fresh minerals is vital. A total communications blackout has occurred with the *Ishimura*, and in response a team of C.E.C. employees have been sent to investigate the lost signal and repair the necessary equipment to restore communications. Isaac is a part of this team. Not much is known about Isaac other than the fact that he sports a cool looking suit and has some sort of a connection to the woman shown in the video. Joined by Isaac is a small team of security

officers, including Hammond, the head officer, and the female computer technician Kendra.

As the small ship you're on approaches the U.S.G. *Ishimura*, the scope of the gigantic ship first sets in. Glistening against the beautiful light radiating off of it by a nearby sun, the ship is truly the size of a small city. It has strange architecture that looks something like a giant drill. Soon, a complication occurs that sends the ship on a crash landing inside the *Ishimura*. Shaken, but still determined to get the job done, the crew enters the eerily quiet and empty ship. You go into a room by yourself to assist the team when all of a sudden all hell breaks loose. Alarms start blaring and a mysterious beast starts tearing through your crew members. Having no way to get to them, you run to the nearest elevator.

Without warning, you get your first look at the creatures as one of them tries to rip into the elevator. Luckily, you survive this and get away. Kendra and Hammond were also lucky and escape from the brutal slaughter in time to not be hurt. Now you're alone in the huge ship and have to navigate your way through the corridors in and attempt to complete your mission — and get out alive.



### The Ishimura

# M O O N

THE MOON HAS MORE THAN ONE DARK SIDE





## Read Space

It's not particularly unusual for a game to have a tie-in comic book. It is unusual for the tie-in to be any good. The bar here is not set particularly high, although more recent tie-ins (such as the *Mercenaries* comic from last year) have been a big improvement over how things used to be. (By way of an example, go dig up the old Wildstorm *Resident Evil* comics from the late nineties. They're painful.)

*Dead Space* the comic book started coming out in March of 2008, with a script by Antony (*Wasteland, Queen and Country*) Johnston and art by Ben (*Fell, 30 Days of Night*) Templesmith. The six-issue series is set on the mining colony where an strange alien artifact is found, where its discovery spurs first controversy, then madness and suicide.

“A story like this one has a lot of pitfalls ... but Johnston wisely keeps things very simple.”



## «Sometimes, light can be helpful.

The ship seems even bigger inside as it does on the outside. Since these planetcracking expeditions can last for years, there are huge life-support facilities. Instead of bustling with scientists and workers, however, the long and winding corridors are devoid of any human life. But you're not alone. The ship has been infested by horrifying creatures called Necromorphs. They walk on two feet, but have long, sharp appendages protruding from their body. They may be large, but they are incredibly fast. Their glowing eyes and grotesque appearance truly make the Necromorphs an effective enemy. They won't come out of spawn points or be in the area when you first walk through the door like in many games. Instead, the Necromorphs will pop out of vents, walls and pretty much anything they could possibly burst out from. There are even a few instances where what looks like a corpse will jump up and attack you. Once one appears, it will only take seconds until it's on you. The terror of the Necromorphs is enhanced by the excellent

sound in the game. You'll hear a slight sound from a string instrument when one appears. If you're not looking at him, a moment of panic occurs as you know it's there but not exactly where. The sound from the Necromorph isn't the only effective sound. As you explore the dark and blood stained corridors of the *Ishimura*, you won't hear music. Instead, you'll hear the clanking of Isaac's boots and the heaving breathing from his suit. You'll hear the ship settling, the unsettling sound of doors opening and other background noise that makes *Dead Space* realistic and even scarier.

The lighting in the game is simply fantastic, with excellent use of shadows. For instance, in a room early on in the game, there is a large object hanging from the ceiling that is slowly swaying. The shadow is realistically across the whole room, and as you explore you'll feel as if there is someone else in the room. Once in a while, you'll even see Isaac's shadow in front of you and think a Necromorph



is there for a split second. The great shadows in the game isn't the only impressive use of lighting. Not all of the hallways and rooms are dark. Some are bright, but the lighting is still creepy. It's a strange shade of light where you can easily see everything around you, but still it doesn't feel very inviting. The darkest places are wonderfully done in a way where you can still see what is going on (taking away the frustration of not knowing where you are) but dark enough to still feel like you're in near pitch-black environments.



Templesmith's art is an acquired taste, and if this was more overtly a science-fiction book – with lots of space combat or lasers or aliens or something – he'd be painfully miscast. Fortunately, it's a story of paranoia and religious mania, which his art's very well-suited towards. Templesmith conveys emotion extraordinarily well.

The script helps him along. A story like this one has a lot of pitfalls, such as melodrama or overplaying the science-fiction setting, but Johnston wisely keeps things very simple. It's a human story, and he makes it about characters that are recognizably human. It helps that he wrote a great deal of the dialogue for the game, which goes a long way towards making both feel like they're part of a greater whole.



Two of the coolest aspects of *Dead Space* are the anti-gravity rooms and decompressed environments that you'll come across every now and then. In the anti-gravity rooms, you have to find your way from one side of the room to the other without a pathway. You simply look where you want to jump and hit a button to do so. When you reach where you wanted to jump, the perspective shifts as if you were right side up. If you're standing on the ceiling of the room, it feels as if you're on the floor. In many instances there are objects that you have to get around and avoid, adding strategy to these fun rooms.

The decompressed parts are ripped open to the deadly vacuum of space. Since you aren't able to breathe, you have to navigate your way through these areas before your oxygen runs out. While you're in the decompressed sections, you aren't able to hear anything since sound can't travel in a vacuum. Sometimes, a Necromorph will jump out, and because you can't hear it approaching, it's genuinely shocking.

On your way to fix the ship and return home, you'll uncover what happened and who the Necromorphs really are. Much of the story is told through video logs found around the ship, which is a great way to tell the story as it takes away the need for unnecessary characters. The U.S.G. *Ishimura* is truly a horrifying yet beautiful place. The of the blood-stained walls of the awe-inspiring ship make a great setting for *Dead Space's* action.



"Sometimes, a Necromorph will jump out, and because you can't hear it approaching, it's genuinely shocking."

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## The Animated Movie

The animated movie of *Dead Space* is the first announced EA project in conjunction with Starz Media's animation unit, Film Roman ("The Simpsons," "King of the Hill"). It is, at the time of this writing, going to air on broadcast television before a DVD release.



The *Dead Space* comic details the beginning of the necromorph infection planetside, whereas the animated movie reveals how the infection managed to make it up into the *Ishimura*.

While it features no characters from the games (such as the hapless scientists who've left audio logs all over the ship for Isaac to find), the movie is meant to tell a second chapter of the story that concludes in *Dead Space* the game. It's currently scheduled to air in a very similar timeframe to the game's ship date.



Not quite "the movie," but *Dead Space* producer Chuck Beaver hand made an Isaac Suit for EA's booth at San Diego Comic Con. How cool is that?

## The "Survival" Part

In the modern survival horror genre, combat tends to be about the control of space. You play a character that's equipped with missile weapons, who's generally vastly outnumbered by enemies that want to rush you down. There are exceptions now and again, but the challenge remains the same: how do you neutralize the enemy's numerical advantage?

In a lot of games, the first and most obvious answer is to use your equipment intelligently. Certain weapons will generally have a broad area of effect, coupled with the ability to stun enemies or knock them backward. If the player can figure out a way to force the enemy to approach him through a bottleneck, that's the short road to victory. You find a point in space and defend it.

*Dead Space* is built to make this process tougher than it was in most games that came before it. Necromorphs can take substantial amounts of punishment, can move fast, and most importantly, can appear from almost anywhere, crawling through the *Ishimura*'s ventilation system. They can climb walls, burst through steel bulkheads, emerge suddenly from dead bodies, and survive without a problem in hard vacuum. Just running away, luring them towards you, and shooting them as they charge doesn't really work. Necromorphs are too mobile and like to come at you from strange

angles. What further complicates this is that the *Ishimura* doesn't have a lot of narrow alleys or dead-end corridors for you to work with.

Instead, *Dead Space* is an oddly tactical game, particularly for its genre. Instead of using your environment, you're asked to alter it. You're given a number of tools to slow down or stop an enemy's progress early on, and surviving the game comes down to knowing when and how to use them most efficiently.

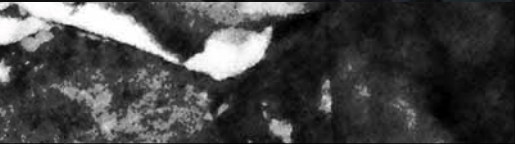
First off, there's dismemberment. Sort of like zombies, who traditionally only die if you take off their heads, necromorphs take the most damage from dismemberment. You can empty an entire clip of plasma charges into a necromorph's body without really doing more than annoying it, but aim for its knees and it falls down hard. Take out an arm and it can't stab you with it. Knock off its legs, and you've bought yourself a few seconds while

it figures out how it's going to chase you now.

This is where the dismemberment comes into play. There is almost no situation in *Dead Space* where shearing off an enemy's limbs is not immediately beneficial to you. Some enemies will even explode or spawn additional monsters if you hit them in the wrong place. You have to be precise and fast.

The *Ishimura* is a mining ship, and Isaac Clarke's an engineer. Surprisingly few weapons in *Dead Space* are actually designed as such; most of them are repurposed mining tools, which makes them excellent for taking off legs. A plasma cutter that's designed to carve seams of ore out of solid rock will remove





You can heal in combat by pressing the X button, which uses up the least powerful first aid kit in your inventory, but you aren't allowed to leisurely rearrange the contents of your bag, select a new weapon, reload another, read a file, and then return to combat. This is one of the oldest tropes in survival horror, being able to use the inventory screen as a way to pause and regroup, and its absence creates a surprising amount of tension all by itself.

The common thread here is that Dead Space asks you to think more about your tactics than most survival-horror games. The past dilemma of survival horror has been resource management; instead of the player needing to know how to use his weaponry, the question is largely when and when not to fight. Combat itself in other horror games is usually fairly straightforward, often involving multiple shotgun blasts, but you need to be very conscious of its cost.

In Dead Space, how to fight is just as important as whether or not you should. You're given a lot of personal combat options that, in other games, are generally relegated to environmental factors. If there's a bottleneck in Dead Space, you probably created it, as opposed to having found and exploited it; if there's a safe place, it's because you did something to make it that way. Dead Space's enemies are relentless, and surviving against them tests your ability to think on your feet.

Isaac's other two primary crowd-control tools are also meant for mining. The stasis module temporarily slows down time around a target. It can be used to halt out-of-control machinery, neutralize live wiring, or stop a necromorph in its tracks for a few crucial seconds. It can't be used too often before it has to be recharged, but knowing when and how to use it can save your life.

The kinesis module allows Isaac to manipulate objects without touching them. It's not really limited by scale, either; Isaac can pick up an audio log from across a room, or use the kinesis module to open a door that he can't possibly budge by hand.

With a little practice, you can use telekinesis as another weapon. Used directly against a necromorph, it just pushes them back a little bit, but you can propel fuel canisters or random debris fast enough to cause serious damage. At the same time, you don't have several of the genre's traditional crutches to fall back on. Isaac's inventory screen is projected in front of you in real time, making it nearly impossible to casually reload or check your map while you're in combat. You can do it, sure, but you're likely to be distracted by the necromorph chewing on your face.



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«Yes. There is something behind you. Shoot it

Necromorphs spawn from dead flesh, so they need more of it Enter you.



## Liquefied Assets

Another unconventional design decision in *Dead Space* is in its approach to the player's power level. Most action games start you off slowly, with a low-powered weapon, choosing to gradually introduce most of your equipment and abilities over the course of the game. *Dead Space* does have a few weapons and upgrades that you have to search for (see sidebar). Most of what it has to offer is on display from the word go, though.

Early on, you'll find one of the Store kiosks, vending machines located throughout the *Ishimura* that sell ammunition, health packs, armor upgrades, and new weapons, in exchange for the credits that can be found in item boxes or which drop off dead necromorphs. The Stores tend to be available near the starting point of each successive chapter of the game, allowing you to backtrack to them at any time.

What this means in practice is that you can acquire most of the weapons in the game from Chapter One onwards. The ones that aren't immediately available for purchase,

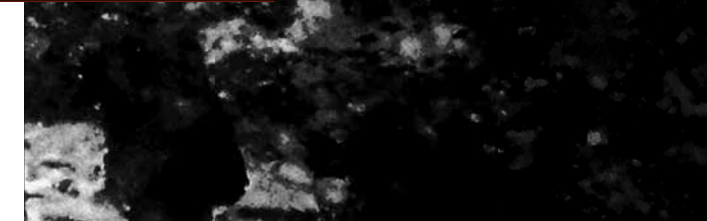
such as the contact beam and the ripper, are found very early on. There is no late-in-the-game superweapon in *Dead Space*; what you have by Chapter Five or so is what you have for the duration.

The general idea here is to try out all the weapons as soon as you can, then specialize your arsenal according to your tastes. Instead of being constrained to what you can find lying around, you can sell anything you can't or won't use to the Store, then use the extra cash to stock up on upgrades and ammunition.

You still have a limited and somewhat random amount of resources to work with, but most of what you find can be converted into whatever you need it to be.

## Peace Through Superior Firepower

Throughout the game, you'll find Power Nodes as drops from powerful enemies, in special cabinets scattered throughout the *Ishimura*, or available for sale at the Store for 10,000 credits apiece.



These Nodes can be used to open several doors throughout the ship that can't be bypassed in any other way; generally, these rooms contain extra ammunition. More importantly, Power Nodes can be used to upgrade your weapons, Isaac's RIG suit, Kinesis module, and stasis module.

You cannot find enough Power Nodes throughout the course of a single run through the game to fully upgrade your entire available arsenal. The idea is that Power Nodes enable you to customize Isaac towards your individual style of play. Instead of gradually improving everything you have, you can specialize Isaac in the kind of combat you most prefer.





«It's not just about the kaboom.

## How to shoot aliens & Influence People

Dead Space is set up to reward experimentation and specialization. By the time you've reached Chapter Four, it's a good idea to try out most of the guns, then pick one to start upgrading with Power Nodes. This will give you the damage potential that you need for the end of the game. If you find any ammunition for guns that you aren't using, you can sell it for spare cash at the Store.

You can carry up to four weapons at once, which are automatically hotkeyed when you acquire them. If you decide to change one out for another, it's as simple as selling it at the store and picking up a replacement.

### Plasma Cutter

The "handgun" of *Dead Space*, this is your go-to weapon for much of the game. It doesn't pack much of a punch, but it fires rapidly and ammo is plentiful.

Its alt-fire mode turns its barrel vertically or horizontally, allowing you to alter the gun's firing angle. This becomes very useful for dismemberment purposes (and on some level, I've been waiting my entire life to write that sentence); you can fire a horizontal blast to take out something's knees, then rotate the barrel to shear the tentacles off of something that's perched on the wall.

### Line Gun

This means business. The line gun is a high-powered mining tool meant for excavating seams of rock or ore. For our purposes, it fires a broad swath of plasma energy, doing substantial damage to anything

it hits even before you install any upgrades. A shot from the line gun can take out an entire tightly-packed group of necromorphs.

The trade-offs are fairly obvious. It has a low rate of fire, a low ammo capacity, and reloads slowly. The shots from the line gun also have a noticeable travel time compared to most of the other weapons in the game, making it difficult to use at medium to long range against moving targets.

The line gun's alt-fire plants a short-lived, glowing proximity mine on whatever surface you've targeted, which detonates if anything - including you - gets close.

### Force Gun

The force gun is the "shotgun" of *Dead Space*, and occupies a similar niche. It doesn't do extraordinary amounts of damage and is useless for dismemberment, but it fires in a broad arc and knocks enemies back. It's excellent for throwing a necromorph into an environmental hazard, or for simply getting them off of you.

The alt-fire tosses a small concussion grenade that detonates after a few seconds or on impact with an enemy. It does substantially more raw damage than the main force gun, but is only truly useful in close quarters. In large areas, it's difficult to get a clean hit.

### Contact Beam

If you get the chance to use it, the contact beam is *Dead Space's* big gun. It delivers a substantial amount of raw explosive force... if you manage to get the shot off. You need at least two seconds to charge the contact beam before it'll fire, and most necromorphs are fast enough that you won't get that chance. As an alt-fire, Isaac blasts the beam into the ground, knocking enemies around him back.

### Pulse Rifle

Unlike most of the other weapons in *Dead Space*,

the pulse rifle actually is a weapon, as opposed to a repurposed mining tool. It fires rapid bursts with low recoil and high accuracy. Unfortunately, it's not much good for dismemberment purposes.

One of the real benefits of the pulse rifle is that its bullets, unlike the plasma waves produced by the cutter or line gun, have no real travel time. This makes it an excellent weapon at long range, which is invaluable in certain fights.

The pulse rifle's alt-fire burns off twenty-five rounds, or half the standard clip, to fire in a burst around Isaac. This is, again, excellent for creating space, although its high ammo expenditure can be a problem.

### Ripper

At this point in time, any horror game worth the name has a chainsaw in it, and this is *Dead Space's*: a short-ranged magnetically-propelled sawblade that tears into enemies for a few seconds at a time. If you have the time to use it, you'll find this does great damage and dismembers enemies easily.

The alt-fire mode actually launches the sawblade, inflicting less damage but giving you extra range.

### Flamethrower

It may be a bit much to refer to this as a weapon, as equipping this literally means Isaac pulls out a can of fuel and a lit blowtorch. It generates a relatively narrow arc of flame, inflicting damage, igniting targets, and sometimes making an enemy run around the room, wreathed in flames, in a very satisfying sort of way.

Of course, it's useless if the necromorph in question doesn't care; it'll simply wade through the fire to hit you. The flamethrower really comes into its own against the scuttling swarms of alien bugs, which are difficult to avoid and hard to dispatch with other guns.

The real reason to use the flamethrower is its alt-fire mode, which sprays a small section of the ground with a patch of burning fuel. You can use this to close off a hallway or set traps for your opponents, which makes it one of the most tactically useful weapons in the game.

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## There's something missing here...

*Resident Evil 2* was the last survival horror game that didn't feature the ability to do a quick, one-hundred-eighty-degree turn, which was and is one of the major criticisms leveled against it.

*Silent Hill* and *Resident Evil 3* came out shortly thereafter with quick-turns, and since then, the ability's been featured in every survival-horror game to date... except *Dead Space*.



With that in mind, we asked Chuck Beaver, *Dead Space's* producer, about the quick turn. "...we had it in, we've had it out, we've had it in..." Beaver says. "We're sort of struggling with whether it's going to work for the game. A lot of people seem to feel that you can turn around fast enough with just the sticks, and a lot of people feel that if it's in the game... the gameplay is so lethal that there's a lot of white-knuckling of the controller, as we found out, and people tend to activate it on accident, which is even more lethal than if you're just trying to do it and don't have it. We took it out for that reason, because people were clicking L3 and R3 quite a bit on accident.

"We don't have a lot of button space left for a 180 turn, so in the end, before we ship, if we can find a place for it, we might try to put it back in. It's one of those on-the-fence kind of things, where we're trying to figure out where's the best place to land."

## «The plasma cutter isn't just a weak handgun substitute.

### In Transition

Survival horror is a genre in transition. The standard-bearing series, *Resident Evil* and *Silent Hill*, are both changing; the former is smoothly transitioning into more of a horror-themed action game, and the latter is being farmed out to Western developers. *Alone in the Dark* crashed and burned upon entering the current generation, *Eternal Darkness* is AWOL, and *Fatal Frame's* latest installment, as of this writing, is running into problems due to Tecmo's legal hassles. *Condemned* is the closest the genre has come to a new franchise, and it's not all that close.

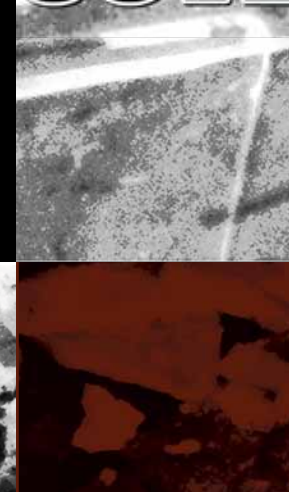
Until *Dead Space* came along, it looked like survival horror was going to quietly relegate itself to a small niche, like 2D fighters or adventure games, where a really good one in the classic mold only came along every couple of years, and the rest were simply third-person shooters with zombies instead of terrorists.

While *Dead Space* does bring a lot of influences into it from *RE4* and elsewhere, it's one of the few games in recent memory to actually put some thought into the horror aspect. The *Ishimura* is a quiet and evocative place, full of quiet surprises and unfortunate events, with a slowly mounting sense of wrongness that gradually



intensifies as you move forward through the game. If *Dead Space* succeeds, it may, and hopefully will, breathe some new life into a genre that desperately needs it.





## «No rest for the weary..»

### A Conversation with Chuck Beaver

After playing through the first half of *Dead Space*, we had a conversation with Chuck Beaver, *Dead Space*'s producer, by phone, concerning the game's influences, design, goals, and multimedia efforts.

HGM: I was curious about the beginning, so to speak. What was the big idea that led you guys down the road that eventually resulted in *Dead Space*? EA is not generally a development house that one thinks of when one thinks of horror. Aside from the fact that you guys own *System Shock*, there's not a lot in the EA portfolio that says "horror game."

Chuck Beaver: [laughter] Exactly. That actually came about through Glenn Schofield, our executive producer. He had, from the very beginning — and this is almost three years ago now — a very specific game in mind that he wanted to make. He was all about a gory, science-fiction, survival-horror, third-person shooter, and we set out to make that.

He wanted to make it the scariest game that he'd ever played; he wanted to make it [in] a sci-fi setting; he wanted to make... a lone, sort of everyman protagonist,

as opposed to a space Marine, you know... We laid out the basic tentpoles and started putting the flesh on those bones, and that's pretty much what we have even today, which is kind of rare. You don't really end up making the game you set out to make after three years, but we did, and it was the vision that he had.

As far as the M-rating goes, and how we came to do something so dramatically different from EA globally... at the time, about three years ago, EA was looking to do more wholly-owned IP and start doing less licensed IPs. They were looking for good ideas and studios to promote and find ones they could greenlight.

Glenn put his idea together and pitched it. We put a small team together and built a vertical slice, a good example of what we were talking about, so we could show them... and that turned out to be positive and they had a really good reaction to that and they let us keep going. We got birthed in that way, we got a good blessing on a good idea and we made a couple of good execution swipes at it and it led to the product.

HGM: ...and the everyman protagonist is why you've got Isaac, the silent everyman... kind of a blank slate you can project stuff onto.

CB: Yeah, because we liked the idea, especially emotionally, of it not being — you know, space Marines are sort of these big testosterone-filled figures in control of their worlds, and it's all about fantasy fulfillment, of being a hundred percent in control of a non-controllable world. It's a very strategically successful, fantasy-fulfillment idea.

Our world is much more... we wanted it based in the survival-horror genre, not only is the world out of control, it's almost paralyzing and terrifying [in terms of] how out of control it is, and the protagonist is

usually just you, or a girl with a nightgown and a knife in a corner, cowering. You're underpowered, and the fantasy fulfillment is that you still survive given those strange odds. You're up against these unearthly terrors, and it's just you, and somehow, through your wits and guile, you're managing to make it through.

That's what we focused our fantasy fulfillment on, and why Isaac felt so right to us, as kind of an everyday man.

HGM: Can you talk a little bit about the other influences you had when you were putting the game together? One of the criticisms I see [in online discussions about the *Dead Space* is that it seems to take a lot of bits and pieces from other works — films, games — and assemble them into a whole. ...are you willing to talk about anything else that influenced you guys as you were putting it together?

CB: Yeah. It's easy for people when they're looking at frames of the game online [to say that], but when you play the game you get a sense that we've created something that's unique apart from all of our influences. After you've got the controller in your hand, and especially after looking at frames live on TV, you can tell me if you agree with that. I'm finding that a lot of people think that the game stands fine on its own when you play it.

...we're all really huge sci-fi/horror fans. We've probably seen more than our fair share of sci-fi and horror movies, so they all probably had a big subconscious influence on us as we went forward. A lot of people want to say that *Event Horizon* is there, just for mood and atmosphere...

HGM: That did jump out at me.

CB: Yeah. We wanted to have a specific look to each frame of the game that was as unique as, say, *Blade Runner* is... You can tell a frame is from *Blade Runner*. We wanted to be able to tell a frame [is from] *Dead Space*.

*Event Horizon* did a good job of owning their sort of Gothic horror, scary, evil, Damien kind of thing [laughter], and we went with our own version of that. Our architecture's inspired by dark and brooding medieval

architecture where you have a lot of flying buttresses and repeated ribs and things that tend to make spaces have a lot of unknown and uncertain negative areas that are just suggested in the background, that something might be behind. That kind of architecture from that period is really great for that. That was a lot of our look; we tried to get our own look.

As far as emotional targeting, I would say *Alien*, the first one, versus *Aliens*. You've got Ripley, and her whole hero's journey, and the whole scene of her just trying to get to the end, knowing she's got to get through the corridors of this ship, and the Alien is probably around one of those corners, and she's got this gun with a flamethrower on it, and she has to go down these scary corridors. That sense of isolation and being alone and knowing you have to go through the ship and knowing it's full of deadly menaces is exactly the emotional target that we were shooting for.

HGM: That sense of isolation, of being stalked...

CB: Right. No one's going to come after you. It's just you, and your wits, and what you've got around you.

HGM: ...and the only friend you've got keeps mentioning how she's trapped inside the computer core and there's something beating on the door...

CB: Right... Everyone is getting weak and you're the only one who's ambulatory, running around and figuring things out.

HGM: Also, the beginning of it's kind of a sci-fi bug hunt, and I've started getting to the parts where it looks like something supernatural is starting to happen... that was briefly in the E3 demo and now I'm starting to see more of it.

CB: I think we might've given away too much. In the E3 demo, those things, if you're paying attention like you are, and making observations, you're like, "Oh, that's part of this larger thread." The whole game is that way, especially if you reach back through the comics and the animated feature, you'll see all these threads in all the properties.

HGM: I've read the first four comics now. I didn't know about the animated feature, though. Can you talk some more about that? I understand Jimmy

Palmiotti's involved.

CB: Yeah, Jimmy Palmiotti and Justin Gray wrote that in conjunction with the animation team and Film Roman. We've had that in development since the beginning as well... and we wanted them to come out day and date with us. They were handed the part of the story that happens after the comic book, but before the game starts.

The comic books are handling the infections that started on the colony and how the colony begins to fall, and then the animated feature takes it from there and shows how the infection vector gets from the colony up to the *Ishimura*, and then covers the fall of the *Ishimura* and how it gets to be in the state that we see it when we get to the game with Isaac.

When the game starts, it's the first time you ever see Isaac. The first two properties don't even have Isaac in them.

HGM: One of the things that's utterly unique to *Dead Space* as far as I can tell is the zero-gravity combat. Those must've presented a significant design challenge. Can you talk about that a little bit?

CB: Yeah, that was actually really challenging to get right. What you're seeing is the end result of just months and months and months of work.

Turning off gravity is pretty easy... because it has to be simulated in the first place. It's this value in the Havok engine that is set; everything is obeying gravity, and gravity has a value. Turn it off, and everything floats.

We got that far pretty quick, and then we tried to make levels where you would change gravity, or you would walk over a gravity threshold and suddenly gravity was off, or suddenly gravity was in different directions on the same level. As soon as those gravity fields started trying to be different on the same level, we had a lot of coding to do, so that was hard.

Then we had to get Isaac. What was he going to do in zero-G? Trying to get him to jump safely, and figure out what his speed was going to be, what he looked like when he jumped, his animations, trying to make him look like he was really in space... that was a huge amount of work.

In the end, what're you're seeing is the polished end result. It turned out quite well. It was more of a tactical advantage, where you were able to jump at much greater speeds than you were at before, and you're kind of moving slow, which was also a design decision. How does he move when he's in gravity? Are his boots on, which is making him stick to the hull more, and he has to really struggle to walk?

So we did that, and that was the mix that we ended up with, so he's slower when he's walking in zero-G, but he has this ability to jump, and then all of your enemies are suddenly also able to jump, so some of the dynamics change instantly when you're in those spaces. After a lot of experimentation, that's the mix that we ended up with.

HGM: In the classic survival-horror formula, you have a set value for your available resources; it's what's lying around, period. In *Dead Space*, you have drops from enemies and credits, which can be immediately translated into more stuff at the Store, which makes it possible, at least on lower difficulties... to "buy" your way through an encounter by shotgunning first aid kits.

It's an interesting design choice. Horror to some extent is about limited resources, and whether or not I have what it takes to A) survive the situation in front of me, and B) having enough after I'm done there to survive what's next. With the credits and the randomized drops, you've introduced a big X-factor into that, where a big chunk of my available resources are fluid. They're whatever I want them to be. How do you reconcile the limited resources and the management thereof with so much fluidity?

CB: That's actually a pretty good take on that whole thing. The drops aren't infinite; the enemy drops and the stuff you find aren't infinite. Keeping them fluid allows you to have another playstyle choice.

Let's say that you fell in love with the line gun, or stasis. You wanted to use stasis and the line gun the whole time. We essentially wanted to give people the ability to go in and, just like you were saying, liquify their assets and then get the ones that they like, and not have to be constrained only to what the drop system was giving them. If you find a playstyle that really worked for you, if you wanted to do the alt-fire for the contact beam all the time, you have the ability to sort of manage the system and get it there.



« Tear them apart before they do the same to you.

In the end, since the entire drop system is finite, you don't end up overpowered or overarmored at any point... well, maybe you do, depending on how good a shot you are [laughter], but again, that's another skill test, and another design choice we put in there. The better you are at the game, the more you're able to get through it in a more efficient fashion.

HGM: The other thing that's interesting in how you've chosen to design the game is that you don't really have an infinite defense choice the way that other games do.

CB: An infinite what now?

HGM: ...in *BioShock*, you have the wrench... some kind of infinite ability to defend yourself. With *Dead Space*, that pistol whip that Isaac gets is kind of the last great act of defiance. It's almost worthless.

CB: Exactly.

HGM: You guys have created a game where, even with this fluidity of resource, it is possible to... find yourself in a situation where you are completely out of ways in which to defend yourself.

CB: Did you find yourself in that position?

HGM: Once or twice, yeah.

CB: We don't want that to be the case where you don't have anything. The infinite resource for us is TK, so essentially, if you can whack off a limb of a necromorph, the talons and different key body parts form weapons. You can pick those up with TK and toss them back. They're actually very effective weapons.

HGM: I hadn't tried that. That's a good point.

CB: Yeah. That's the infinite way out. You always have TK. You can pick up those exploding canisters, or the big barricades, which will help you knock back enemies. Between the stomp and the melee, and then the knockbacks, if you get [low] on ammo you can get control of the fight again... until someone drops something and you can power back up and have at it again... and then continue that cycle until you have your ammo back up. Chop off a limb and use that as a weapon until you're back up on ammo.

HGM: Are you still going to get a simultaneous release for the game and the movie?

CB: They're going to be very close. The movie is going to go out... we're going to go out on October 21st, and they're going to go out on different dates for DVD and broadcast... so right about that time they'll be going out with the movie.

HGM: At E3, we discussed that you do go through the game on successive rounds. What do you keep on your second time through the game?

CB: I actually just finished a full-cycle playthrough now that it's all in. You keep all of your upgrades, so everything that you're doing right now, when you restart, you keep all of your upgraded weaponry and all of your upgrades on your RIG, so you can continue to play the metagame on the second round through, fully upgrading all of your weapons and the armor.

With the weapons, if you upgrade all of the Damage [nodes], they'll all get new sound effects and visual effects at the end at max damage.

There are some other unlocks when you finish the game. I don't want to tell you what those are; I think we're going to hold those for some other PR releases later, but you have additional gifts at the end of Round One.

HGM: New stuff to play with.

CB: Not like new weapons, but you get new parts of the economy. You get gifted some economy.

HGM: For somebody who's just picking up this game and going into it cold, what would you recommend as an upgrade path?

CB: Really? You want me to answer that? [laughter]

HGM: It might be something for the readers.

CB: It's so funny that you say that, since that's actually the subject of a huge amount of debate in the team, because everyone has their default positions on how they would do it. It's almost like we're talking about the religion of MMOs and RPGs in who does what.

I would recommend tricking out your favorite weapon first. Go all the way to max damage on a weapon, because then it sort of plays into what you were talking about, with the ability to liquify your assets and get the assets that you need out of the stores.

If you like the plasma cutter, trick it all the way out, and then bias your ammo purchases towards the plasma cutter. The upgraded weapons are quite powerful. If you kind of butter-knife your upgrades across everything, it's okay, but then you're going to have to switch weapons a lot, and you're not really going to get any one weapon that does a lot of damage at the end.

I'd take that as a path, and then I'd give yourself at least one health upgrade on your RIG. That would be a pretty standard way to go. My personal preference is to give my stasis an duration upgrade, and as much of a health upgrade as I can, then I can work it from there, because I like to stay alive and I like things to stay put.

HGM: ...I thought it'd be an interesting question, because... you are kind of dropped into the deep end.

CB: The health is pretty indispensable. You have to get at least one or two health upgrades... and then the rest should go into a weapon.

HGM: The [extra] air came in handy too.

CB: Oh, you did Air?

HGM: I found myself freaking out [when in space] where I was sort of shotgunning air kits, so I decided to start upgrading the RIG, because having two minutes to play around with between needing to find an air tank...

CB: [laughter]

HGM: You do drop people into the deep end and expect them to sink or swim. There are a lot of parts of the game where there's no warning about what's about to happen... *Dead Space* is a very pop-out-and-getcha game.

CB: There's a lot of that where we don't want to ruin the surprise of the horror. That's what – if you watch a lot of horror films, and the horror genre – it's trying to master misdirection and unpredictability. We tried to institute that as much as we could in the game and keep you off your feet. You're not really sure what's happening, you're never sure when it's safe or not, because we really do want you to have that horror genre experience. We want you to walk away from the game and think, "Wow, that was really f---g great and scary."

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# iPhone Gaming

Feature by Dack



## Introduction

If you know anyone that has an iPhone, chances are that you already know about the applications. Many iPhone fans would have you believe that the games for the iPhone are the best thing since sliced bread. Is this just an exaggeration from Apple fans, or is the iPhone really a good way to play some of your favorite games? In our iPhone gaming blowout, we'll be taking a look at many of the best and most hyped games so you'll know if the investment is worth it for gaming. If you already have an iPhone, you'll learn which games are essential to have and show off to all your friends.



## Don't have an iPhone?

Many people are surprised to learn that you don't need an iPhone for the iPhone experience. The newest in the long line of iPods, the iPod touch is practically the same as the iPhone. In fact, they pretty much look identical. Strip the iPhone of its phone and 3G capabilities, and you're holding an iPod touch. Once you download the \$10 update, your iPod touch can use all of the applications. It's ridiculous that Apple charges to update your iPod touch (even if you buy a brand new one), but it's most definitely worth it. If you like the phone you have, you should absolutely take a look at the iPod touch before buying an iPhone.



## Labyrinth

One of the most addicting iPhone games is one of the simplest. *Labyrinth* is a virtual version of the classic wooden box/metal ball maze game that many of us have played or even built as a kid. All you do is tilt the iPhone to make the metal ball move through the maze. As you progress through the levels, there are more and more holes the ball can fall through. If this tragic event does occur, you must start over the game. The objective is to simply reach the end. The game lets people design their own maps which you can easily download for free from your iPhone. You can grab *Labyrinth* for only \$6.99, which is a very good price considering how many hours you'll spend on this gem.



## Tetris

*Tetris* is the one game that most people—gamer or not—have played at some point in their life. Even though it's simply fitting shapes into each other, *Tetris* never gets boring. *Tetris* on the iPhone is no exception. The touch screen controls work very well for it. You tap the screen to rotate the shape, slide your finger fast in a downward motion to drop the shape quickly and slide your finger slightly to slowly lower the shape. *Tetris* has been updated and feels more modern than past installments. The background changes depending on your performance, adding some variety to the game. The music in the background is actually very well done and is almost as addicting as the game. Although at \$9.99 it's one of the pricier iPhone games, *Tetris* is well worth it and is sure to be one of the most played iPhone games next to *Labyrinth*.



## Scrabble

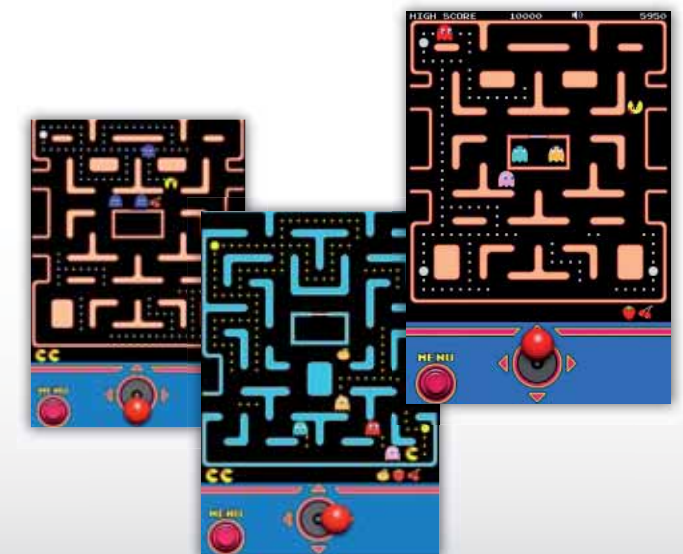
Another famous game to go iPhone is *Scrabble*. The board game that many of us have played shines on the iPhone. The game looks exactly like the actual board game. The touch screen controls work fabulously. You choose the tile you want and drag it where you want it to go on the board. Playing *Scrabble* against the computer is fun, but the game is at its best when you're playing the 2 player mode with the person next to you. *Scrabble* is a great game to get if your friends don't have iPhones and you're looking to pass the time before a movie starts or as a cure to boredom.



## Ms. Pac-Man

It's no secret that *Ms. Pac-Man* is the favorite retro game of many people. The simple game of munching pellets and avoiding ghosts is just as fun today as it was 25 years ago. While it will always be best played on arcade cabinets, *Ms. Pac-Man* has been successfully ported to many systems.

Unfortunately, the iPhone isn't one of them. The game looks and runs well, but the controls are horrible. You have the option to play the game two different ways. One way is to use your finger on a virtual control pad to move *Ms. Pac-Man*. Sadly, the control pad is very unresponsive making it hard to move the right direction, especially if you need to make a quick turn. The other way uses the accelerometer. You simply tilt your iPhone in the direction you want to go. Unfortunately, this works even worse than the virtual control pad. It's not accurate at all. Half the time you'll move in the complete opposite direction as you're trying to tilt it. Tragically, this is just a game that does not work at all well on the iPhone. Novices will get tired of dying so fast, and pros will become incredibly frustrated. Because of its control scheme, *Ms. Pac-Man* is nearly unplayable.



### Super Monkey Ball

Another game that is killed by the control scheme is *Super Monkey Ball*. One of the most hyped iPhone games, *Super Monkey Ball* has turned out to be very disappointing. Like other iPhone games, it uses the accelerometer to control the action. *Super Monkey Ball* is similar to *Labyrinth*, which uses the accelerometer controls to great avail, so you'd think it'd work well. However, the controls just aren't accurate. When you tilt the iPhone, the monkey ball doesn't roll like you think it would. In a game that require perfect accuracy, these controls just don't work well. You'll find it hard to roll straight ahead at times. I remember playing the game on the Gameboy Advance and the N-Gage for hours on end. When a game is beaten by the N-Gage version of it, something is definitely wrong. Sega really should have spent more time perfecting the controls. If you've ever played *Monkey Ball* before, you'll absolutely hate this version. Save your money.



### Bomberman Touch

A name that has been through many generations of gaming, *Bomberman* makes his iPhone debut in *Bomberman Touch*. *Bomberman* really feels like a retail game. There are plenty of levels, good looking menus and a story to boot. Considering that it's not even expected that it would have a story, the fact that it has one that's pretty entertaining is impressive. While the game will always work the best on a classic d-pad, the touch controls are serviceable. You simply slide your finger in the direction you want to go. Like most *Bomberman* games, *Bomberman Touch* is very fun. The objective of the game is simply to blast your way through the maps in attempt to blow up all of the enemies on screen. With all of the levels and the great presentation, *Bomberman Touch* is a bargain at \$9.99.



### Crash Bandicoot Nitro Kart 3D

With the terrible tilt controls of *Monkey Ball* and *Ms. Pac-Man*, how could a racing game possibly pull it off? Surprisingly, the controls work well for *CBNK3D*. The game is very responsive and accurate. You never get the frustrated feeling that it's not working like it should. Instead, *CBNK3D* is a very fun racing game that is reminiscent of *Mario Kart*. You race around inventive courses while collecting powerups that hurt your enemies. Of course, the objective of the game is to come in first place. The accelerometer controls work very much like the motion controls on the Wii. If you're a veteran at any Wii racing games, you'll be right at home with *CBNK3D*. This is easily the best racing on the iPhone, and is really a good example of the potential of the iPhone controls.



### Conclusion

The iPhone isn't even half a year into its life, but it already has a large library of games. Quite a few of these games are very fun and well-made. Sadly, the bulk of the games do have control problems. There is, however, a huge potential for iPhone games. With the great touch screen and accelerometer, it seems like it mixes the main features of both the Wii and the DS. It's quite apparent that developers haven't had enough time to figure out how to make their games work to their full potential on the iPhone. Without a control pad, some games will never work as well as they can. Hopefully,

later on in its life, the iPhone will get impressive original games. For now, however, the iPhone is simply above the average cell phone in terms of gaming. I wouldn't recommend getting an iPhone if the main purpose you want it for is gaming. Luckily, the iPhone has so many cool features that it is still a great gadget even with just a few good games. It's still possible for it to be a main handheld gaming system, but right now, enjoy the other features of it, the great games listed above and keep your eyes peeled for good hombrew games in the future.

# sardius and ashura's WHEN GAME COMPANIES » STRIKE BACK

Stop. Before you can continue, you must do the following:

Open your favorite web browser, and navigate it to the following site: <http://www.wikipedia.org>. Scroll down, and in the text input box type "Hardcore Gamer Magazine." before clicking on search. Proceed to scroll down to the second section, look in the second paragraph, third sentence, look for the three words quoted after the fourth word. Good. Now you know what this article is about. Please fill it in below before continuing:

-----

Okay, so we're not that mean, but that's how a lot of copy protection used to work back in the PC days. Before Steam and DRM and even serial numbers, you had to slide wheels and read incomprehensible short stories written by people who could barely write their own names. You see, during the floppy disk era copy protection worked sort of like this- You'd get 1-90 disks with the game on it, and then you'd get something *else* to go with the game that was crucial to actually doing anything in it.

The idea was, while copying the disks would be easy, copying the documentation would be a pain in the ass. The lamest of these were the "just the manual" games. IE: You would get the game and the manual, and when you started up the game it would ask you to do something like this:

"Hi! Welcome to *Dr. K. Frogginbottoms and the World of Mad Industry*. Before you can play, however, please turn to page 6, paragraph 4, line 3, word 5, and input this six letter word below if the typeface in the manual isn't so small you can't read it."

You would open the book, turn to the page, scan the paragraphs, and low and behold the elusive word would be there. You'd be all "Danish. Oh, of course." and type it in. Alternatively, if you lost the manual, you would have to try to figure out what they were talking about on page 6 that is also six letters. Danish, baby!



### Manual Progression

This lasted about all of five minutes, though, since people who were patient enough to copy 50 floppy disks were also patient enough to run a manual through a copy machine. This failing is what led to the more diverse, more clever copy protection pamphlets. The simplest of these were essentially badly-written short stories that applied the above manual technique, but sometimes they got a bit more surreal or strange.

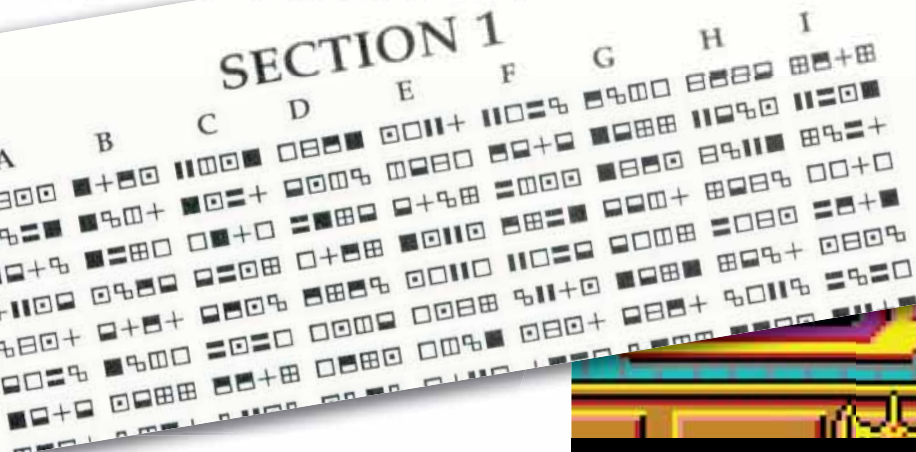
The *Monty Python's Flying Circus* game apparently came with a Hungarian Phrase Book which required you to match up cheeses on screen with their names, for instance! The games which continued to use the manual trick created manuals which were deliberately

hard to photocopy. *Wizardry IV: Bane of the Cosmic Forge* had a manual which tried to make you blind! Its manual used black text over dark red paper, which was, at the time, almost uncopyable and just really hard to read in general. Some people who played these kinds of games would just leave them running overnight so they wouldn't have to worry about the hassle and eye damage. Even Japanese games like *Castlevania* for the C64 had stuff like this, as seen below.

Some games' manuals and codebooks would be printed in such a way that they looked almost completely red, and when you held a red visor to the page it would only then reveal the secret codes you needed to get past the copy protection screen.



This scan was brightened for your benefit.



## The Semi-Operable Game

Eventually game programmers would try to theme their copy protection into the game in a such a way that it would explore the world of the game a little more, connecting it to the intrinsic gameplay experience itself. You already had games which came with little stories and things in addition to the manuals, but these took it one step further. They would allow you to play the game for a while, but eventually there would be a point in the game where you couldn't continue without providing some kind of information. This information wouldn't be in the game, obviously, it would be in whatever bit of flair they included with the game. The idea most likely being that people who managed to make it this far into their pirated game and liked it would then go out to buy it when they couldn't progress, creating a kind of makeshift "demo" so to speak.

One of the coolest ones of these was for *Maniac Mansion*. The deal in this game was that there was a locked door on the second level of the mansion, protected by an Nuke'em Alarm system, and to open it you would have to would have to input a certain disarm code. You wouldn't find this code in the game, though, it would be in the "quick reference guide" — with like 92 pages of barely decipherable pictographs — that came with it. "NUKE'EM ALARMS - Nukes Burglars in their tracks! ... (Nuclear Reactor not included.)" indeed. If you failed to input the correct code, you weren't just barred from progressing in the game, oh-no- The entire mansion would *blow up* in a fantastical nuclear explosion.

Oh, and you would also die.

This sucker's nuclear!

## Maps & Slidewheels

*Hard Nova*, from EA, took a little bit of a different approach. It came with a star chart that actually helped you a lot in the game. It showed you locations of planets, stars, and the gates of starness. Relavant statistics also bordered the map, and you would need to look for one of these every time you booted the game, or it, well, booted you. The map was in full color, but even in photocopyvision it would still work.

The creators of *Starflight II* were wise to these photocopy shenanigans and devised a different type of starmap for their game, though. The map still contained useful information about the game, however, it was color-coded, and the copy-protection scheme in the game required you to count a certain amount of colored stars in a certain section of the map. It's about as frustrating as it sounds, compounded further by the fact that the red and orange stars looked pretty similar. If you failed the copy protection you could actually continue playing the game for a while, but eventually police ships would come to hunt your ass down.

There was another wrinkle in these copy-protection deals, too, that being the slidewheel. These were essentially two circular pieces of paper with a pin in the middle that allowed the circles to slide around and be adjusted. There were little holes cut into the top circle that, when aligned in the way the game specified, you

could get the answer you needed to begin or continue your game. One of the cooler ones of these came with *Monkey Island 2*, if only because, well, just look at that thing on the page before this one. It's awesome. This is another one of those ideas that came about because game developers figured that people wouldn't rip apart these things for their friends, and that it would be hard to photocopy every single combination of the wheel. Despite this, homebrew slidewheels certainly existed.

## Remember your Charlemagne

Sometimes the coolness of the copy protection wasn't the type of method used, but how it was. The SCUMM adventure game *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* is probably the best example of this.

Early on in the game, there was some simple copy protection where Indy would have to translate something for Marcus Brody, and if you failed, you, well, couldn't continue. This wasn't really all that impressive, and was honestly pretty much the norm of quasi-demo copy-protected games. The coolest, and somewhat mean thing is what they pull on you later. During the course of the game, you get various information about the Holy Grail, and when you manage to make it to the end you have to pick the right one. Just like the movie, right?

Well, here, it's not the dusty cup of a carpenter, not by a long shot. It's one of many on display in the knight's chamber, and the only way to figure out which one is the right one is by checking the information you found earlier in the game by looking it up in Henry Sr.'s Grail Diary. The Grail Diary which... came with the game. Seriously, how cool is that? The game actually came with a pretty awesome reproduction of the diary from the film, which also included history about Indy and his father and a bunch of other interesting history about the Holy Grail. Unfortunately, later printings highly condensed the diary to make it cheaper to manufacture, and this diary goes on eBay for quite a pretty penny nowadays.

Now, if you didn't do your research like a good archaeologist and picked the wrong grail, poor Indy grows old... and *explodes!* That seems just a little familiar, huh?

You really can't save your progress during the final leg of the game, either, so if you fail you have to go all the way through all the harrowing traps to get back to the end to try again.

CRACKED BY ECHELON!



## Too Cool for School

When these methods didn't work, or game developers felt they needed to bolster their copy protection efforts, their only other recourse was to turn to the genre of television that can only be trumped in horribleness by infomercials: the PSA. Blaring its way onto TV in the late '80s or early '90s during our beloved afternoon favorites such as *Ducktales* and *Chip 'n' Dale Rescue Rangers*, "Don't Copy That Floppy" was the PC Game industry's lame attempt to scare kids into not pirating their games.

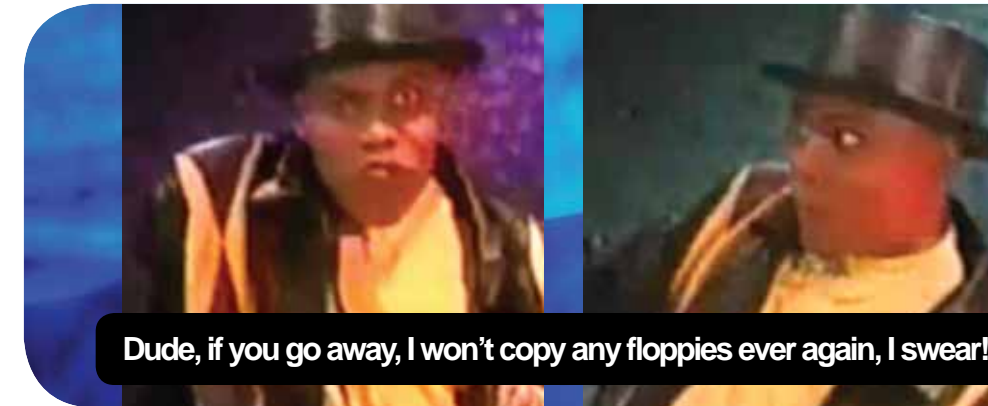
It began with two ethnically sensitive high schoolers in the school library playing some indistinguishable game by continuously mashing on the qwerty and function keys like some kind of epileptic platypi. After the girl of this weary tale emasculates her male friend by pointing and laughing at his low score, she then mentions that it's almost fourth period and she doesn't want to get caught in the library! Oh noes! The boy says, but wait! I may have a fake-sounding New York accent, but I brought this disk, and we could copy this game onto my brother's computer! Okay, the girl says, no problem... and as she pops the disk in, BAM, the computer fritzes out as television static appears on the monitor.

The PSA doesn't dwell on how amazingly unlike actual PC behavior this is, as a rapper looking like the illegitimate love child of MC Hammer and Alex DeLarge appears bluescreened onto too-cool-for-school digital backgrounds which makes the opening to "Saved by the Bell" look hi-tech. He fades in with the clever use of a mosaic and threshold filters, and proceeds to appeal to the day's youth. "Don't copy that floppy!" he begs, "I'm getting paid close to minimum wage...!" Okay, so the second one isn't an actual lyric, but it should've been.

After about ninety minutes of this guy repeating himself, it is then cuts to actual game programmers who try to persuade you how cool buying the games would be. "We might decide, oh, this game didn't sell well... so we might not make a sequel... all because of piracy." "There's boxes... and manuals... which you *need* to be able to play!" "Dude, I made Neverwinter Nights!" "One copy, one computer!" "We need YOU to be a part of our team!" "The power is yours!" We've done some paraphrasing, but seriously, this is what they say. Our friend the rapper eventually returns to appeal to the kids to not to copy that floppy again, only this time his voice is distorted with reverb to sound both demonic and intimidating. He continues to rap, and rap, and rap some more, before he then tells the kids that the ball

is in their court: dribble, shoot, or pass! The clever use of basketball vernacular convinces the kids not to copy the disk with what looks like Mac OS for the visually impaired, and they instead challenge each other to one more game.

It's as campy, lame, and hilarious as it sounds. Luckily, there's no sweeping this under the rug, either. The credits let you know that you're allowed to make copies of the video for promoting the ethical and legal use of software, and thanks to those dutiful Youtubers concerned with piracy it's available for all to see with a minimum amount of searching.



Dude, if you go away, I won't copy any floppies ever again, I swear!

## Transition

Eventually all of these neat knick-knacks that PC game programmers created fell by the wayside, mostly because they were obsolete. Hard copy protection lead to serial numbers, serial numbers led to the crackers making keygens, and then this lead to things like DRM, Steam, and other services. This has gone even further with the spread of the internet, with a lot of games phoning home to make sure it's legit. The closed nature of most home game consoles is pretty much the only reason why piracy hasn't been as abundant there, or why it's slow to ramp up in the early life of any given console. Early consoles such as the NES used proprietary cartridge formats which took special devices to copy, and in the process, did away with the need for virtual all PC copy protection methods. Despite — or perhaps because — of this, a lot of fun and unique copy protection has shown on up game consoles.

Despite every method employed, copy protection on PC games has pretty much always been a failure. People still manage to find ways around paying for their games. The media has always been pretty easy to copy, the architecture is open, and there's generally a crack for a game's specific protection method usually within days if not hours of the game's release.

## Go-Go Consoles!

Once the Sega Dreamcast's GD-ROM hardware protection was bypassed, pirates had a field day with its software library. Dreamcast ISOs flooded the Internet for the remainder of the console's life, with game developers seemingly helpless to fight back. Developer frustration over the Dreamcast's lack of hardware anti-piracy measures manifested itself in a particularly interesting way in the Visual Concepts-developed *Ooga Booga*, which remains one of the few Dreamcast titles to feature software-specific anti-piracy protection.

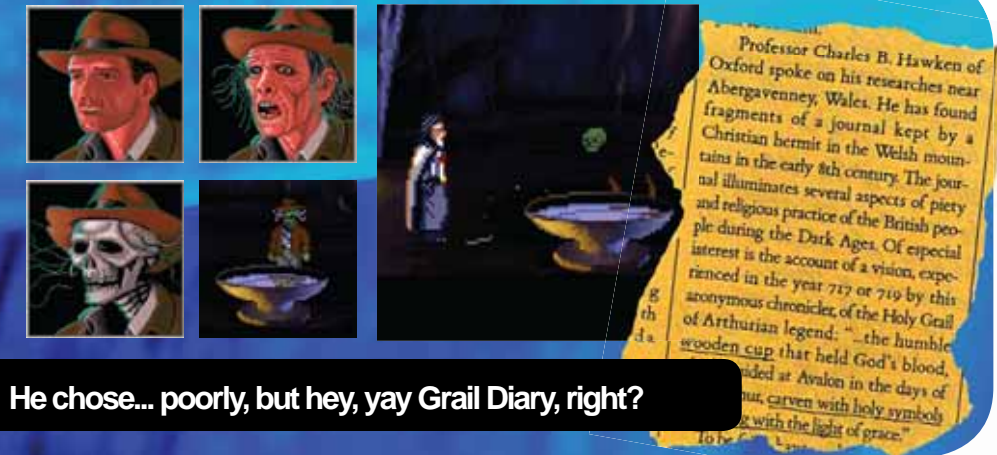
Upon boot-up, a copied version of *Ooga Booga* jumps to a screen that features a pirate character and the text "PIRACY DETECTED!" Would-be copyright infringers are greeted with a cheerful "Ahoey there, whale boy!" from the character. Subsequent attempts to start the game are answered with a lewd pirate dance and taunts like, "I'll feed ya to the sharks, matey! Yar har har har! I'll shiver yer timbers!"

As hilarious as the sequence may be, its actual anti-piracy effectiveness lasted for exactly...negative six days. Dreamcast warez group Echelon was supplied with a retail version of the game one week before its intended release, and the protection was defeated shortly thereafter. Downloaders of the ISO not only

played *Ooga Booga* for free a week before its official debut, but they never felt the effects of its anti-piracy measures.

Fortunately, Echelon saw the humor in the situation and left the pirate intro screen in their cracked version of the game. Prior to release, Echelon's cracking team changed the accompanying text to "CRACKED BY ECHELON!" and a hack was introduced that allowed the game to be loaded by pressing the Start button. "This game was definitely funny," reads Echelon's .nfo file packaged with the pirated *Ooga Booga*. "What a useless protection though, the game is out cracked 6 days BEFORE the retail date. Oh well, try again guys."

Owners of the non-pirated version of *Ooga Booga* can enjoy the pirate character's antics in-game by entering the password "WAREZWRONG".



He chose... poorly, but hey, yay Grail Diary, right?

Check out all those extra enemies.

## Earthbound

EarthBound is a nutty little RPG with a heart of gold. It may also be the best game of all time *forever and ever*, depending on who you ask. Despite featuring an exceptional narrative and a middling everything else, *EarthBound* has driven its sizable fanbase completely insane with consuming passion. Even Nintendo of America seems too frightened to acknowledge the existence of *EarthBound*'s many crazed fans.

Though the unceasing madness of its fans may have been unplanned, *EarthBound* certainly intended to drive owners of Super Nintendo cartridge copiers crazy with its advanced and downright sadistic anti-piracy measures. Though the game features the same superficial level of authenticity checking present in SNES games of its era (which was often accidentally triggered by hapless Game Genie users), *EarthBound*'s protection scheme goes far beyond what many would consider reasonable or sane.

Playing a pirated version of *EarthBound* unleashes the hellish wrath of its developers, who did their damndest to make the experience as unenjoyable as possible. Internal code checks are performed at several points during gameplay, and if any inconsistency or hacking is detected, *EarthBound* immediately becomes a very different experience. Enemies will spawn much more frequently than normal, and random encounters can occur in even normally safe areas. Crashes and freezes will slow your progress to a crawl. It's speculated that Nintendo hoped to make the pirated *EarthBound* experience so frustrating that pirates could never realistically play it to completion.

What if you did play it through to the end? Oh, you poor fool. Muscle your way through *EarthBound* on Super Ultra-Hard Piracy Mode and you'll be rewarded with a cataclysmic crash immediately before the final boss battle. After rebooting, you'll find that all of your save data has been erased.

Similar protection was found in Nintendo's canceled North American localization of *Mother* (aka *EarthBound Zero*) on the NES, wherein an anti-piracy screen would claim that your hacked version would "no longer function" after triggering a copy protection checkpoint. It's unknown whether this claim could be followed

through in practice, but given the harsh punishment that awaited *EarthBound* pirates on the SNES, it's easy to believe that Nintendo would develop a game that could *erase itself completely*.



"This software is an illegal copy of a Nintendo game. The use, possession or sale of this counterfeit cartridge is illegal and infringes Nintendo copyrights."

Nintendo Co., Ltd.  
Kyoto, Japan /  
Redmond WA, USA.

"This illegal copy of NES EARTH BOUND will no longer function."

## But the Developer's Soul Still Burns

Other games adopted *EarthBound*'s "slow burn" approach to anti-piracy as well, though none managed to be as mean-spirited in execution. Most recently, DS flash cart owners were surprised to find an early ending to *Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: Ring of Fates*. After fifteen minutes of playtime, a pirated version of *Ring of Fates* cuts abruptly to a screen featuring a pair of moogles and the text "Thank you for playing!!" So polite!

The practice extends far back in console history, with developers often implementing clever ways to detect and thwart ROM piracy. The Traveller's Tales action-puzzler *Puggsy* for the Sega Genesis was particularly ingenious.

Back in the day, Genesis cartridge copiers often defaulted to simulating battery-backed SRAM to store save data. While this was a lazy convenience that didn't negatively affect a majority of non-battery games, *Puggsy* performs an internal SRAM check after its fifth level. Since the game uses passwords instead of save data, SRAM obviously has no business being present in an official cartridge version of *Puggsy*. If SRAM is found after this point, the program jumps to an impatient-sounding (and typo-filled) warning screen that calls the player "silly" for thinking his or her piracy would go unnoticed.

One title stands out as featuring what is perhaps the best balance between *EarthBound*'s player punishment and the abrupt endings of *Puggsy* and *Ring of Fates*: *Spyro: Year of the Dragon* for the Sony PlayStation. The first two entries in the Insomniac-developed *Spyro* series were well-received among PSOne owners... and were popular targets for piracy. Though the initial *Spyro* games were shielded by anti-mod checks at boot-up, hackers soon developed patches and "stealth" modchips to defeat the protection.

*Year of the Dragon*'s mod detection is much more sinister. It still features the same easily defeated boot-up protection as before, but this time, it only exists to lull crackers into a false sense of security. Altering the game in any way actually sets off a series of booby-traps in the code, all of which trigger during gameplay. Players could in fact enjoy several hours of a hacked *Year of the Dragon* without any ill effects, until encountering a character critical to game progression.

If modified disc content is detected at this point, the character responds with *voiced dialog* explaining that *Spyro*'s world is about to descend into utter chaos due to the player owning a cracked version of the game.

I'm sorry, Spyro, but you seem to be playing a hacked version of this game. This may be an illegal copy. Since this copy has been modified, you may experience problems that would not occur on a legal copy.



O.K. THATS ALL THE THE LEVELS OF PUGGSY YOUR ALLOWED TO PLAY NOW GO AND PLAY A CARTRIDGE VERSION OF THE GAME INSTEAD OF THIS SILLY COPY. UNTIL THEN.....BYE TRAVELLERS TALES 93

## Acknowledgements

Keeping the Pirates at Bay: Implementing Crack Protection for *Spyro: Year of the Dragon* — [http://www.gamedevelopment.com/features/20011017/dodd\\_01.htm](http://www.gamedevelopment.com/features/20011017/dodd_01.htm)

EarthBound Images Courtesy of Starmen.net — <http://starmen.net/mother2/gameinfo/antipiracy/>

Insert Credit's "80s copy protection schemes: a retrospective" thread — <http://forums.insertcredit.com/viewtopic.php?t=10172&sid=3750026b1941002c2d465ee1415351f8>

The Nuke'M Alarm Security Door Copy-Protection Codes — <http://members.fortunecity.com/harang/doorcodes.html>

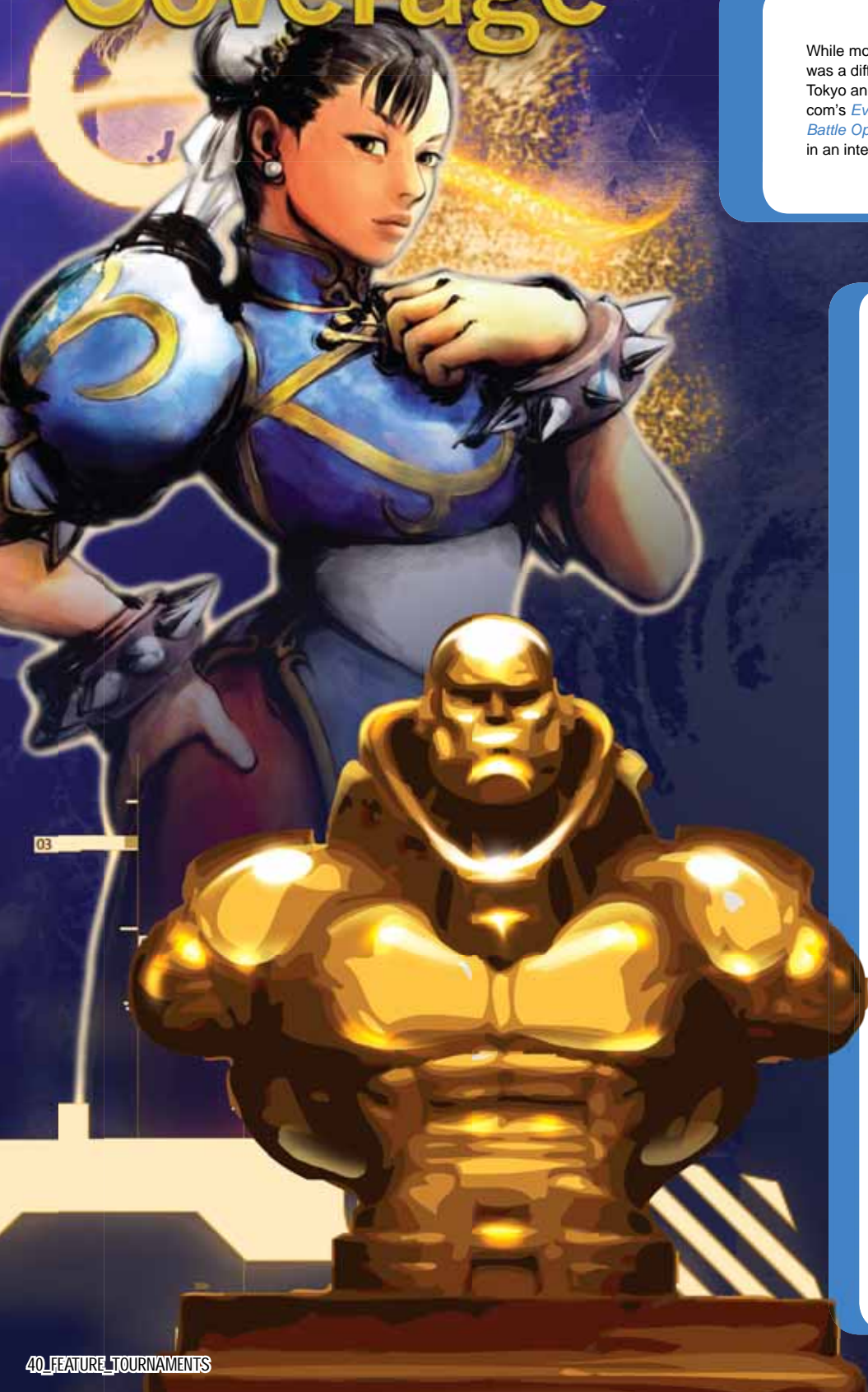
It's actually possible to continue playing beyond this point, but the experience won't be a pleasant one. Items crucial to gameplay are removed entirely. Intentional crashes occur randomly. In the European version, the in-game dialog language changes on a regular basis.

In a feature written for Gamasutra, *Year of the Dragon* developer Gavin Dodd explains that the protection's effectiveness was worth the trouble it took to develop. Crackers did indeed take the bait and patch the game to remove its simple boot-up protection, unaware that this would create a host of other problems. Since its effects were triggered randomly, inconsistent reports from players confused crackers for weeks before a full crack was released. In the end, the pirates may have only been thwarted for a short while, but their weeks of annoyance must have been priceless to the hard-working developers at Insomniac.

# Tournament Coverage

By Arlieth

03



While most of the world prepared for the Olympics, there was a different kind of battle raging in the hallways of Tokyo and at the Tropicana in Las Vegas. Shoryuken.com's *Evolution 2008* and Arcadia Magazine's *Super Battle Opera* once again featured the world's best players in an international showdown.

### Capcom Episode IV: Too Late for US Arcades?

A hands-on demonstration of Capcom's newest release, *Street Fighter IV*, was available for American players at Evolution 2008. It's managed to trickle into various arcades in the United States, and players have been driving ridiculous distances and waiting in half-hour lines for a crack at the new incarnation of the series.

*Street Fighter IV* and *Tatsunoko vs Capcom* mark the beginning of a long-awaited arcade comeback by Capcom, followed by SNK-Playmore's *King of Fighters XII* and Arc System Works' *Blazblue*. But in the eight years between *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike* and its successor, arcades across the USA have been crushed under economic pressures and a community backlash against the opening of new arcades. It's actually easier to open a topless bar than an arcade in many places; in Los Angeles, CA, there's actually a moratorium prohibiting the issuing of new game arcade licenses.

So what took Capcom so long to get back into it? Following a huge drop in popularity with the *SFIII* series, Capcom managed to gain some ground back with its Versus titles... until Marvel and Capcom broke off their partnership and all copies of Marvel/Capcom crossover games faded from the shelves. Since then, Capcom has had to deal with juggling the concerns of dedicated gamers against its more profitable franchises like the *Mega Man* and *Devil May Cry* series. Failures such as *Capcom Fighting Evolution* (which *SFIV* designer Yoshinori Ono worked on) and the cancelled *Capcom All-Stars* did little to encourage an investment into *Street Fighter IV*.

However, once *Street Fighter II* popped back on Xbox Live, and once key members of the old *SF2* tournament scene infiltrated Capcom's operations like Spanish Ninjas, Capcom began to listen to the faint echo of fans (and their loose change) clamoring for a true sequel.

The question is, will it be enough? If US arcades weren't suffering enough already, the hefty price tag for *Street Fighter IV* (\$24,000 for a set of four boards) ensures that perhaps only a dozen places, at best, can afford to stay afloat. Without major traction and sponsorship behind it (i.e.: Championship Gaming Series or Major League Gaming), it might not be able to gain much momentum. And if *SFIV* can't live up to its hype, it may signal the final KO for arcades in the USA.



REASONS WHY YOU SHOULD VISIT [HARDCOREGAMER.COM](http://HARDCOREGAMER.COM) NOW:  
• IT'S LONG (SEE LEFT)  
• CHRISTOPHER WALKEN WOULD APPROVE\*



\*STATEMENT NOT APPROVED BY CHRISTOPHER WALKEN  
• MOAR CHICKENS POWER  
• GAMES YOU LIKE  
• EXTRA GAMES INFO

GO LOOK HURRY



**Tournament:** Evolution 2008  
**Dates:** August 8-10  
**Events:** Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike, Marvel vs. Capcom 2, Tekken 5: Dark Resurrection, Super Smash Bros. Brawl, Super Street Fighter II Turbo, Capcom vs. SNK 2  
**Special Features:** Street Fighter IV, Tatsunoko vs. Capcom, Super Street Fighter II Turbo: HD Remix, Blazblue  
**Organizers:** Shoryuken.com  
**Website:** <http://www.evo2k.com>

This year's Evolution was plagued with a number of controversial decisions and hiccups. The biggest one is that their primary sponsor of previous years, Toyota Yaris, decided to withdraw. This sudden lack of capital caused a large number of perks to be axed, like sponsored regional qualifiers and thousands of dollars in guaranteed prizes. Two arcades stepped up to host regional qualifiers, Family Fun Arcade in Granada Hills, CA and Super Just Games in Chicago, IL. In a way, this year's Evolution was a throwback to the Cal Poly Pomona days of early Evolution tournaments... except it was still on the Las Vegas Strip.

There were three significant decisions made for this year's event. First and foremost, registration for brackets was online-only, with no in-person registration accepted. Secondly, *Guilty Gear XX: Accent Core* was dropped from the lineup. And finally, the *Super Smash Bros. Brawl* ran a very unusual ruleset, enabling selected items and Final Smashes. All of this put together, along with the lack of significant prize money, made for a smaller turnout.

Traditionally, the *Brawl* tournament scene features restricted stages, no items, and no Final Smashes. By doing so, they seek to emulate the controlled conditions that are present in other fighting games and eliminate the 'luck' factor in favor of skill. However, Evolution decided to go against the grain and create a tournament event that retained as much of the original spirit of *Brawl* as possible.

Japan still managed to send powerhouses to the U.S.A.: Shinya Ohnuki, BAS, Kusumondo, Tokido, Kindevu and Miu. But in against all odds, veteran champion John Choi managed to take first in both *Super Street Fighter II Turbo* and *Capcom vs. SNK 2*, both traditionally dominated by Japan! Ohnuki still managed to take first place in *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike* but this year's Evolution was the first time that Japan did not dominate in 1st Place across a majority of games.



### Final Results

#### Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike

- 1st: Shinya Ohnuki (JPN)
- 2nd: Justin Wong (USA)
- 3rd: Amir Amirsaleh (USA)

#### Capcom vs. SNK 2

- 1st: John Choi (USA)
- 2nd: BAS (JPN)
- 3rd: Ricky Ortiz (USA)

#### Tekken 5: Dark Resurrection

- 1st: Ryan Hart (UK)
- 2nd: Gandido (PR)
- 3rd: Cano (PR)

#### Super Smash Brothers Brawl

- 1st: "CPU" Asim Mehta (USA)
- 2nd: Ken Hoang (USA)
- 3rd: Hall (USA)

#### Super Street Fighter 2 Turbo

- 1st - John Choi (USA)
- 2nd - Shinya Ohnuki (JPN)
- 3rd - Alex Valle (USA)

#### Marvel vs. Capcom 2

- 1st: Justin Wong (USA)
- 2nd: Chunksta (USA)
- 3rd: Smoothviper (USA)

#### Total Medals:

- USA: Gold: 4, Silver: 3, Bronze: 5 Total: 12
- JPN: Gold: 1, Silver: 2, Bronze: 0 Total: 3
- UK: Gold: 1, Silver: 0, Bronze: 0
- PR: Gold: 0, Silver: 1, Bronze: 1



### An interview with Mr. Wizard of Shoryuken.com

**HGM:** What made you guys decide to pick a items/final smash ruleset for *Brawl*?

**Mr. Wizard:** It was discussed in 2004 when we wanted to use *Melee*. We did not want to use a handicapped version of the game, so we just did it with *Brawl*.

**HGM:** How do you think it turned out?

**Mr. Wizard:** Coming from a hardcore, never-ban-anything background, I think it turned out pretty well. The crowd was into it, and showed that the game can still be played with skill.

**HGM:** Was there anything at this Evo that you would have liked to re-do, or have added, that you weren't able to?

**Mr. Wizard:** We would love to re-do the hotel selection. While the strip was the ultimate goal, I think we went too ghetto for most people's concerns. We will definitely get a better hotel with working air conditioning next time.

**HGM:** Is there anything else you'd like to share with our readers?

**Mr. Wizard:** Evolution 2009 promises to be the best Evo ever. With the onslaught of new games coming out, this will be the true test on finding out tactics and strategy for spankin' new games. See all of you there!

**HGM:** Thanks! See you next year!

# EVO 2008 CHAMPIONSHIP SERIES

**Tournament:** Super Battle Opera 2008, the Sixth Arcadia Cup

**Dates:** August 15-17

**Events:** Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike, Tekken 6, Super Street Fighter II Turbo, Guilty Gear XX: Accent Core, Virtua Fighter 5, Arcana Heart 2, Melty Blood: Act Cadenza ver.B2, The King of Fighters '98: Ultimate Match, Fist of the North Star

**Organizers:** Arcadia Magazine

**Website:** <http://www.tougeki.com>

Immediately after Evolution, several of our top players hopped aboard an airplane and flew to Japan to compete in the prestigious Super Battle Opera. America has an honorable tradition of getting eliminated in the first round... but they managed to break that streak this year!

Regional qualifiers were held by Family Fun Arcade of Granada Hills, CA, Super Just Games of Chicago, IL, and Planet Zero of Houston, TX, and organized by Shoryuken.com and Planet Zero. The U.S. sent teams for *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike*, *Super Street Fighter II: Turbo* and *Guilty Gear XX: Accent Core*.

There have been rumors that with the release of *Street Fighter IV*, the tournament lifespan of *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike* has reached its limit. Indeed, in Japan there are reports of *3rd Strike* cabinets being practically abandoned in favor of *SFIV*, and Super Battle Opera traditionally maintains a policy of showcasing the newest popular fighting games in Japanese arcades, with the notable exception of *Super Street Fighter II: Turbo*. However, we fully expect to see SNK-Playmore's *King of Fighters XII*, Arc System Works' *Blazblue* and French Bread's *Melty Blood: Actress Again* to make huge waves at next year's Arcadia Cup.

For interested players, American qualifiers for SBO 2009 will be organized by Shoryuken.com with an English-language website at <http://www.superbattleopera.com>. Stay tuned for updates!



# 08

### SFIII 3rd Strike: Team Family

Michael "Pyrolee" Fauson (Yun)  
Raymond "Kai" Tang" (Chun-Li)  
Kentaro Inoue (Makoto)

**Results:** Eliminated in the first round against Loserdog(Urien), OJA (Yun) and Roshihikari(Yang). Pyrolee still retains the record for highest ranking American player in *3rd Strike* in SBO 2004 (Advanced to Quarter-Finals) with Frank Melendez and Arlieth.

### SFIII 3rd Strike: Team East Meets West

Justin Wong (Chun-Li)  
Ryan "Gootecks" Gutierrez (Urien)  
Jonathan "KOFiend" Sung (Yang)

**Results:** The only American team to advance past the first round this year! In the first round, they defeated Munakata (Dudley), Easuto (Twelve) and Izumi (Chun-Li). They were later eliminated by semifinalists Boss (Makoto), Ochibi (Yun) and Rikimaru (Chun-Li).

### Super Street Fighter II Turbo: Team Barely Legal

Nicolai "NKI" Inabit (Chun-Li)  
Justin Wong (O.Sagat)

**Results:** Eliminated in the first round by semifinalists Hakase (Dhalsim) and Tamashima (Balrog/Boxer).

### Super Street Fighter II Turbo: Team Who?

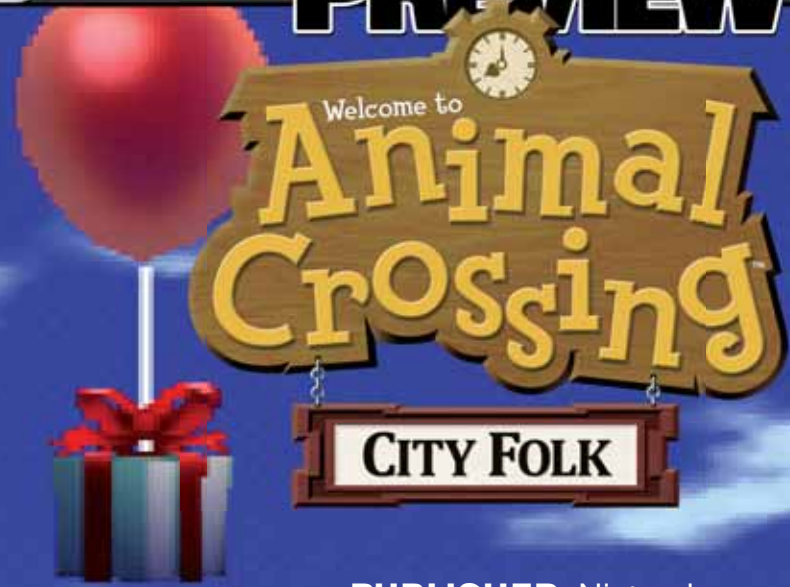
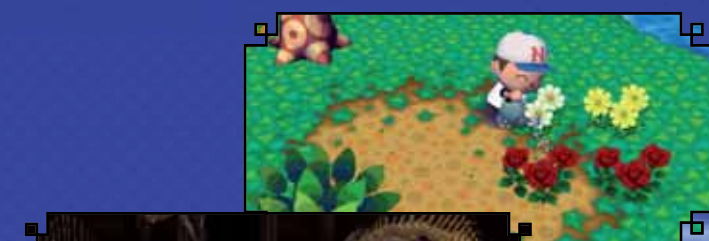
Darryl "The Muffin Man" Austin (DeeJay)  
Warren "Evil Elvis" Patten (Ryu)

**Results:** Eliminated in the first round by semifinalists YuuVega (Vega/Claw) and Noguchi (Balrog/Boxer).

### Guilty Gear XX Accent Core: The Avengers

Raekwon (Potemkin)  
Jais (Bridget)  
Kensou (Chipp)

**Results:** Eliminated in the first round by Fumo (A.B.A.), Goro (Jam) and Kakeru (Slayer). There was a huge controversy with the Planet Zero team's composition as the actual winning team in Houston was Raekwon (Alabama), Jais and Zinac (both from Kentucky). However, due to a closed-door decision by Planet Zero, Zinac, who uses Faust, was dropped from the team and replaced with a local Houston player, Kensou. Planet Zero owner John Leigh has received criticism by the fighting game community in the past for local favoritism, but many believe that this went too far.



Nintendo has been making chores fun again with *Animal Crossing* for years. Originally brought stateside in September of 2002, the franchise has enchanted casual gamers and critics alike. Both the original GameCube release (itself a re-imagining of the Nintendo 64 edition from Japan) and *Animal Crossing: Wild World* for DS sold like crazy, despite sharing much of the same DNA. Now the pattern is about to repeat with *Animal Crossing: City Folk*. This time, it's Wii-bound.

For this newest version, Nintendo isn't making any massive changes. Chores still play a major role. So do customization and seasonal events. However, there are some interesting additions such as a new urban setting where you'll be able to shop at a boutique run by a character named Gracie (Tom Nook can surely use the competition) or attend a theater to see what's playing on the big screen. You can even learn new emoticons and there's an auction house where you can put up items for your online friends to purchase. You can also send them pictures by computer that you have taken in-game and saved to your SD card.



**PUBLISHER:** Nintendo  
**DEVELOPER:** Nintendo  
**GENRE:** Simulation  
**CATEGORY:** Critterfied  
**RELEASE DATE:** 11/16/08  
**PREVIEW:** honestgamer



Another nice touch is that you should be able to move content between the Wii and DS versions of *Animal Crossing*. That should add to your options, plus Nintendo has even reported that free downloadable content could happen. The games have always been good about staying fresh over long periods of time and that would surely help.

That's not the end of the tweaks, either. Nintendo has also announced a microphone attachment that will be available for separate purchase so that people can gather around their television sets in one room to exchange commentary with others halfway around the world. Finally, Mii integration is also included. You'll be able to guide your favorite avatar around the world in custom threads that you designed, something that should really help you get into the game.

*Animal Crossing* has always been an involving experience and the enhancements should make a good game even better. Family members and friends who experience the adventure together will surely bond while having plenty of fun along the way, whether they live in the same household or halfway around the globe. It might not sound like much on paper, but we wouldn't be surprised if *City Folk* becomes one of this holiday season's biggest hits.





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>> INTERVIEW

HGM: First of all, I'd like to thank you for taking the time for this interview. When you envisioned the first Gears of War, did you expect it to be as popular as it became?

Cliff: We hoped. You get into this haze during development so you never know. When it came out and we had a 94% average from MetaCritic and five million copies sold, I thought "Great! I think we did ok." And then you start getting nervous about the sequel.

HGM: If you had to briefly describe Gears 2, what would you say?

Cliff: Oh geez. More epic, more intimate. You're fighting against hordes of Locusts this time, there's more weapons, more characters, it's more epic in scale. It's also more personal, more intimate. Yeah, it's Marcus Phoenix in the story, but it's also Dominic Santiago's story. He's looking for his wife. He has a photo that he holds out while saying "have you seen this woman, have you seen this woman?" The collector's edition of Gears 2 actually has a print of that photo, which adds a personal touch. Gears 2 also has more intimate violence.

HGM: Do you find that people use enemies for cover a lot when playing multiplayer?

Cliff: Oh yes, it fundamentally changes the core of the game because one of our desires was the idea of portable cover. Say we are in a battle, and I down one of your teammates, you are going to be drawn to him because you want your buddy, and I will be drawn to him because I can take him as cover. If I get him as cover, it basically is a 'get out of jail free' card. His body absorbs one clip of ammo or one grenade, and I can use my pistol at the same time. We also have this big metal shield you can carry around that never deteriorates. We really want to take the idea of portable cover to the next level. Also, if you have someone as a hostage, you can break their neck.

"You know, the violence in Gears will make you laugh more than it will make you sick. ... It's more Looney Tunes than anything."

HGM: Nice, that has to be satisfying.

Cliff: Yeah, we agonized over that sound for a few days. It had to be the right 'snap.'

HGM: That's funny, because most games have a subdued sound effect for breaking necks in order to nab the Teen rating.

Cliff: We'd ok with our 'M' (rating). We have an 18-35-target market. You know, the violence in Gears will make you laugh more than it will make you sick. It's big, bulky guys in spacesuit armor versus lizard men, and they're mutilating each other in quick fashion. It is what it is. It's not guys in baseball caps gouging out each other's eyeballs or anything like that.

HGM: When you describe it that way, it somehow doesn't seem as special.

Cliff: When the violent stuff happens, you're more than welcome to laugh. It's not gonna make you nauseous. You'll probably say "Oh my god, that guy just exploded, that was hilarious!" It's more Looney Tunes than anything.

HGM: Do you play MMOs at all?

Cliff: No. I don't do heroin either.

HGM: Do you see Gears ever becoming an MMO in the future?

Cliff: If there are future games in the series, what we can do is extend the online functionality. It's not going to turn into a turn-based world where you start riding dragons or anything like that. I think in Gears 2, we have better stats systems, a screenshot system where you can post your shots online, better party system, better community. I think that's where shooters are going.

HGM: Some recent games released on consoles as sequels would be considered little more than an expansion pack on a PC, how does Gears 2 buck that trend?

Cliff: The campaign is an entirely new experience. Most people's memory of Gears was, like, gray columns. We're really getting out of that mold as far as having snowy mountains and stuff. You go much deeper into the underground than you ever did in the original, and you see the local indigenous flora and fauna that are in the hollow, potentially Locust cities, I don't want to spoil too much about what you see.

HGM: Thanks again for your time Cliff, see you on the battlefield!

STRONG ENOUGH TO BREAK THE BRAVEST HEART

# GEARS OF WAR 2

AN INTERVIEW WITH CLIFF BLESZINSKY BY Jeb Haught



A game designer for nearly twenty years, Cliff Bleszinsky is best known for heading the Epic Games design team and creating the Gears of War franchise. During the 'Cliffy B' years, he became the equivalent of a flamboyant rock star to the video game world, but now he has toned down his presence and just wants to focus on making great games. We recently caught up with him at the San Diego ComicCon amidst his busy schedule and sat down for a brief chat about the much-anticipated sequel, Gears of War 2.



PUBLISHER: ATLUS USA DEVELOPER: ATLUS GENRE: RPG CATEGORY: VERY WEIRD RELEASE DATE: 12/09/08 # PLAYERS: 1



Riding on the coattails of last year's *Persona 3*, *Persona 4* looks to milk not only this winning formula, but also the Playstation 2 for all its worth. The big surprise is how quickly Atlus intends to release it over here. The Japanese version that we're playing with was released in early July, and here they're promising December 9th 2008.

*Persona 4* changes little and presents small tweaks to fine-tune what *P3* has already done. Most of the settings, game mechanics, and time-management concepts remain largely unchanged. The story now takes place in rural Japan, rather than a bustling city. The ally combat AI has been greatly improved, to the point where AI party members will take hits for the main character if they know the damage could kill him (and end your game). Entering the random dungeon in *P4* is done during the day-time, so now you have to pick between improving your personality stats, hanging out, or spelunking. The dungeon is entered through a TV in a crowded store, which makes for some very weird moments. The main characters walk into a TV store with makeshift weapons and jump into a TV screen in broad daylight with (presumably oblivious) people standing around. *P4* is so enthusiastically weird, that the constant use of yellow with upbeat contemporary and hip hop music doesn't seem so garish.

Unfortunately, *P4*'s intro is excruciatingly slow. The dialogue and voice needs to be extremely captivating, because sitting through more than three hours of scenes until the actual game begins is a tall order for many RPG players. Let's hope Atlus doesn't botch this up, because nothing would hurt more than crashing down off the high that was *P3*.



GET HIM! GOT HIM! OOOH~  
**WARHAMMER ONLINE**

Warhammer Online: Age of Reckoning

WAR has arrived at my doorstep, and I feel compelled to defend my comrades against the malevolent legion of Order.



Those ignorant Humies, pompous High Elves and puny Stunties don't stand a chance against the combined forces of Destruction (Greenskins, Chaos, Night Elves). It's a long road to conquer the Order's capitol city of Altdorf because each zone must be captured and defended before it can be taken. But when that fateful day arrives, various public quests open up that offer the best rewards in the game. Of course it takes a virtual army to accomplish this daunting task...

So I was finishing up a public quest with some other random players in Ostland when a guild announced that they were planning on raiding Mandred's Hold castle in the local RvR area (every zone in WAR has a specific RvR (PvP) area that automatically flags any player who enters as vulnerable to attack by the enemy). Since I didn't know anyone in the guild, I clicked on a small tab below my character name to see what open parties were available (all parties are created as 'open' by default, which means anyone else in the area can join by simply clicking on the 'join' tab in the open party listing). I quickly joined a Warband (raid party), purchased a couple of siege weapons, and then headed for battle!

Upon entering the RvR area, my character's level was automatically adjusted from rank 11 to rank 18. This is Mythic's way of trying to put participants on an equal playing field so the outcome relies more on skill than level number. Another great way to prevent the 'griefing' of low-level players is that high-level players are literally transformed into a chicken if they attack enemies in a low-level zone.

I joined several players that were running towards Mandred's Hold, and we could hear the sounds of combat increase in volume as we approached the battle zone. My adrenaline started pumping as I arrived at the castle to see dozens of players on each side engaged in a mighty struggle for supremacy! Tanks were rushing into battle

while ranged support let fly a hail of arrows and impressive magical attacks. I quickly set up a catapult and started firing on the defenders near the front door, but it didn't take long for them to send a small team to annihilate my almighty weapon.

I then focused on attacking individual enemies and healing teammates. As a Chaos Zealot, I have control over dark magic as well as healing, which can be difficult to control effectively in most MMOs. Fortunately, Mythic has incorporated separate targeting reticules for offensive and defensive targets, so I didn't have to switch between healing and damaging targets. This simple factor makes combat much more efficient and fun, since players can keep one offensive target while switching between defensive targets, and vice versa.

I guess the enemy suddenly remembered the basic strategy of always killing healers first, because I died several times in quick succession. I decided to switch to my big, mean, ugly as sin Black Orc tank and rush the front lines. We finally destroyed the front door by using a battering ram siege weapon, and rushed to the second floor to murderize the Keep Lord and his minions. After a furious battle with both live and NPC defenders, it was just one Keep Lord versus thirty warriors of Destruction! Several minutes later, he was dead, and now we had to defend the castle we just conquered. Lucky for us there is a fifteen-minute timer that must run down before the castle can be retaken, so we had some time to relax. With a strong focus on RvR and countless user-friendly features, *Warhammer Online: Age of Reckoning* will be a great alternative to the child-dominated grindfest known as *WoW*.

by BigWymr

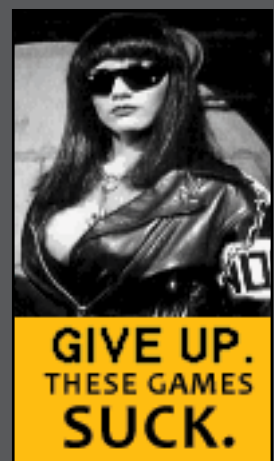
# THE DARK SIDE OF RETRO GAMING

I'd be a happier and better person if I never knew that Aerosmith existed. This isn't possible, though, since the band prides itself in being unavoidable in our everyday lives. You can't see a movie about a hairy man-grandma nanny without also hearing Steven Tyler sing about it. When Bruce Willis tragically explodes at the end of Armageddon, the Aerosmith song at the credits won't help you hold back the tears. You won't want to watch the Super Bowl for fear of them making a surprise return at halftime, and even the otherwise unimpeachable *Wayne's World 2* suffers the taint of Aerosmith's inoffensive blues rock.

Aerosmith has also extended its reach to the world of video games, in order to ensure that no segment of the population is spared the wrath of America's greatest rock band. Most recently, the band has driven the penultimate nail in the *Guitar Hero* series' coffin with the ineffably terrible *Guitar Hero: Aerosmith*, in which — totally not joking here — you play as an opening act for Aerosmith, and are kicked off the stage by angry, Aerosmith-hungry fans after every second song.

The *Dead or Alive* series suffers the lingering effects of Aerosmith as well, most memorably in *Dead or Alive 2 Ultimate*'s opening cinema sequence. Somehow, a series of quick cuts centered around a purple-haired ninja girl and her lost sister makes even less sense when Steven Tyler is constantly screaming, "DREAM ON! DREAM ON! DREAM ON! AAAAAAHHH!"

Aerosmith didn't always play such a tastefully understated role in video gaming, however. In the mid-1990s, Aerosmith strived for no less than complete domination of the medium. Two titles stand out as featuring more Aerosmith than any video game thereafter has ever been allowed to contain by law.



Like her? Congratulations; You've seen all there is to see in *Revolution X*.

## Revolution X

*Revolution X*, at its core, is an improbable combination of excess that could only find fertile soil in the untamed, godless world of arcade light gun shooters.

The genre's birthed some amazing, appalling things over the years, too. *Duck Hunt* inspired a generation of dog-hating hipsters, *CarnEvil* taught us that prerendered clowns will indeed explode into technicolor chunks when blasted with a shotgun, and the proliferation of *Target: Terror* ensures that bar patrons nationwide will always be able to enjoy an FMV terrorist bloodstain before vomiting all over the *Golden Tee Golf* machine.

Detonative clowns and sunglasses-wearing terrorists be damned, though; *Revolution X* represents the lowest point in the history of the light gun genre. The story: fun-hating Nazi jerks have taken over America. They've banned music, taken away our video games, and worst of all, they've kidnapped Aerosmith. It's up to you, armed only with a machine gun that also shoots razor-sharp compact discs, to liberate our great United States from those who would deny us the music of everyone's favorite band.

Basically, *Revolution X* is ass salad. It's a guided tour of things that make you say, "Oh God, *not this*," whenever they pop up in a video game. One of the bosses is a giant skull made out of snot. The levels are packed with digitized bikini girls in various states of bondage and distress. You shoot dudes who are sitting on toilets. It's a marvelous embarrassment on just about every level.

And it's got Aerosmith — lots and lots of Aerosmith. A 15-second loop of "Eat the Rich" plays throughout a majority of the game, and

when you're not listening to Aerosmith's music or watching a digitized Aerosmith perform on stage, you're borrowing Steven Tyler's car or rescuing drummer Joey Kramer from a...school bus that's...driving...through the Middle East? That's it, I don't want to talk about this anymore.



## Quest for Fame: Aerosmith



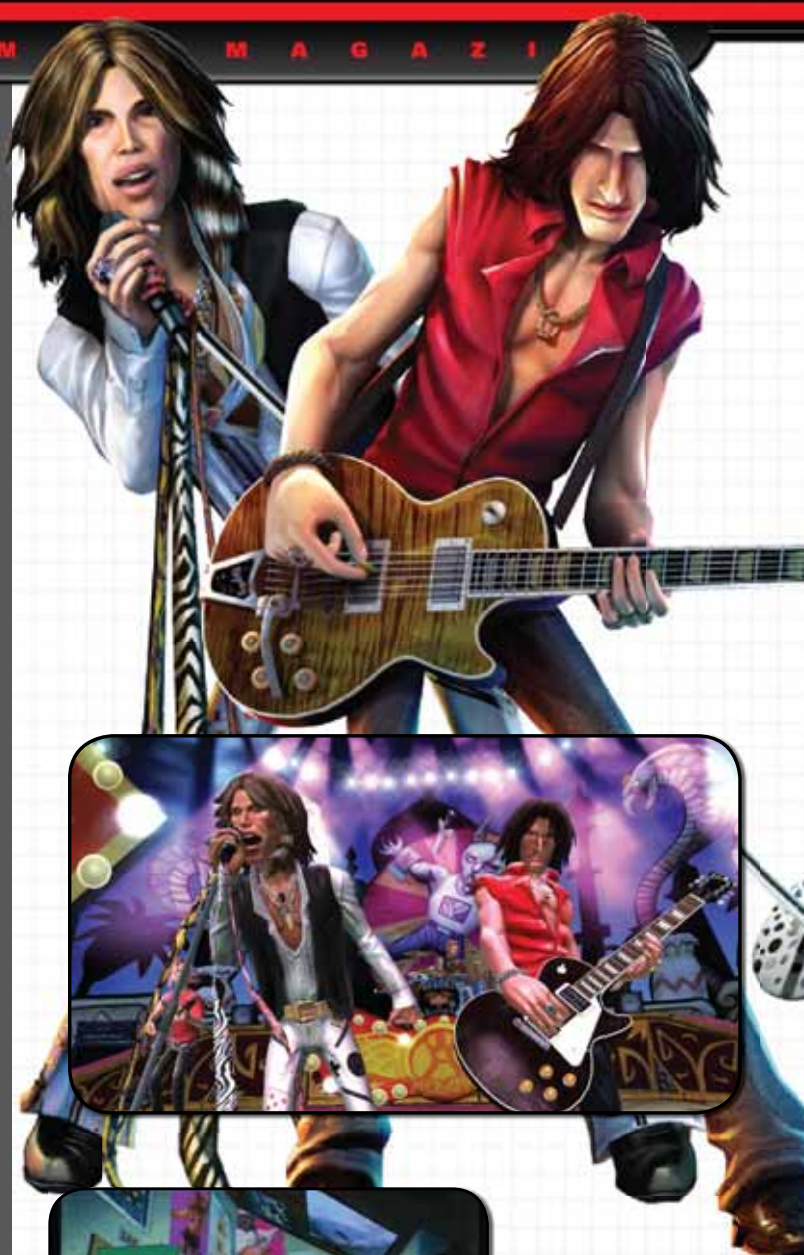
Did you enjoy *Guitar Hero* before Aerosmith drove the franchise deep into the Earth's mantle? Do you like point-and-click adventure games without puzzles, dialogue, or plot? Most importantly, are you an idiot? If so, you may enjoy *Quest for Fame*, an evil future creation that was sent back in time to destroy the rhythm gaming genre before its birth.

Originally released on PC platforms in 1995 (and followed by a PlayStation port that never saw release outside of Japan), *Quest for Fame* charges you with playing a terrible-sounding MIDI guitar along to terrible-sounding Aerosmith music. Luckily, you won't have to worry about challenge, complexity, or any bothersome fretwork; just jam on the strum buttons (the entire game can be played using only the L1 and R1 buttons on the PlayStation controller) and you're on your way to rocking out to hits like, uh, "Eat the Rich." Great. It's not like I haven't heard enough of that song after capturing 400 screenshots of *Revolution X* or anything.

Reprising your role from *Revolution X*, you again play as World's Biggest Aerosmith Fan. The game begins in your apartment. After strumming along to "Eat the Rich" for a few minutes, you begin to hallucinate animated .gifs appearing on your walls and ceiling — is this the god-like power of Aerosmith at work? Soon, in a traditional band-forming ritual, a grungy guy bursts into your room and demands that you come to his garage across town so that you can discuss Aerosmith, Aerosmith's music, and what it would be like to meet Aerosmith.

At the garage, you play "Eat the Rich" with a full band, and then perform "Eat the Rich" again when your bandmates request that you practice it to perfection. After that, you're off to your first gig, which features a group of about three FMV actors copied and pasted over and over to simulate a large crowd, a hand-drawn bartender (because hiring animators was cheaper than finding another actor), and yet another stirring performance of "Eat the Rich."

At this point, my aged PlayStation made a clicking noise and refused to load the next scene. Which is a real shame, because maybe after another ten performances of "Eat the Rich," I'd finally understand why Aerosmith is America's greatest rock and roll band. Or maybe I'm supposed to find that out on my own. Aerosmith really does work in mysterious ways.



THE ONLY WAY TO WIN IS TO PRESS EJECT. IT'S RIGHT THERE. I WON'T TELL STEVEN.



Better than Graveyard Crashers.

## Castle Crashers

XBOX Live Arcade • 1200 points (\$15.00)



Developer: The Behemoth • Genre: Side-scrolling Brawler  
Release Date: 8/27/08 • # Players: 1-4

There's a deficit of 2D princesses this month (see also *Braid*) but the knights of the kingdom are ready to do their part in the rescue effort. *Castle Crashers* is an unapologetic throwback to the classic arcade brawler, made only slightly more complex but quite a bit deeper by the addition of some light RPG elements.

The setup will be instantly familiar to anyone who's ever played a brawler: grab a friend or three and start hitting things. The knights have a variety of combos involving weak and strong attacks, as well as magic and arrows for ranged attacks. New combos are learned when the knight levels up, and skill

points become available for attack, defense, magic, and agility. New weapons open up as you find them, and while they all attack with the same animations they have both positive and negative stat effects. There are even animal helpers that can attack enemies, find hidden items, increase experience points, regenerate health, and much more. The fighting is a blast, there are a ton of weapons and animal helpers to find, and the humor and variety in design makes every level both fun and funny to play through.

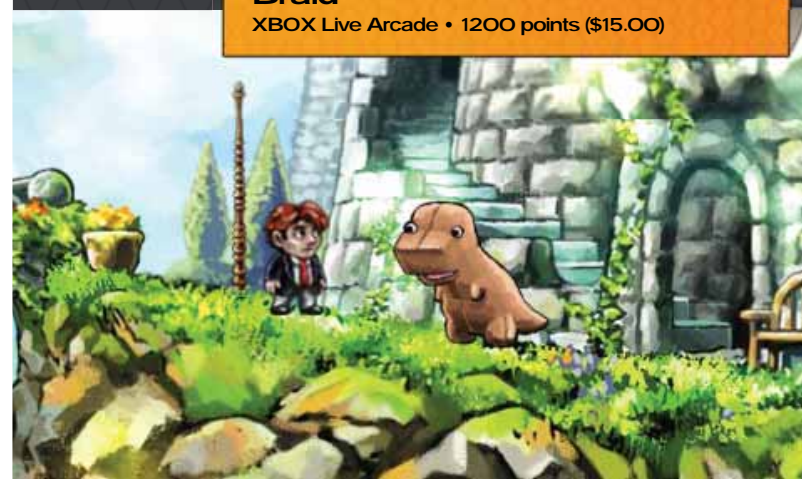
The problem is that, at press time, *Castle Crashers* is as glitchy as it gets. The online play can be pretty iffy, with dropped games

being far too common. Combat works 99% of the time, but there are infinite juggles to exploit and I personally glitched a boss to death in one hit. If *Castle Crashers* gets a patch, then it earns an extra point for being so damn much fun, but at present it's just a bit too broken to give it the score it would have deserved.

By: James • Score: 3.5 of 5

## Braid

XBOX Live Arcade • 1200 points (\$15.00)



Developer: Number None Inc. • Genre: 2D platformer  
Release Date: 8/6/08 • # Players: 1

What is it about princesses that make them require so much chasing after? She's gone again, snatched away while angry at Tim for his unspecified mistakes, and he's got to solve a series of evilly clever 2D side-scrolling puzzle levels while playing with time in his quest to track her down. The story's ending is ambiguous and the beginning a secret, but using Tim's time-reversing ability to affect the world in order to complete the puzzles is clearly brilliant. Each area introduces different rules that work with Tim's basic time abilities, creating new and ever-trickier challenges. For example, Area 2 introduces green items that

are immune to time reversal, while Area 3 has time flow forward when walking right and in reverse when going left. This makes for some fantastic platforming that requires a heavy dose of brainpower. Some puzzles are a bit too clever for their own good, however, and the bonus Star pickups require ridiculously obscure actions to collect. *Braid* is excellent and gorgeous, a little over-hyped, but maddeningly fun overall.

By: James • Score: 4 of 5

## War Twat

http://www.retroremakes.com • Free



Developer: Retro Remakes • Genre: Arena Shooter  
Release Date: 5/13/08 • # Players: 1

Time is precious, and as you get older it's harder to find space in the day for a round of destructive mayhem. That's not a problem with the completely psychotic *War Twat*, in which a round that lasts over 30 seconds is not only impressive but will satiate the need for audio-visual overload. You play a little dot shooting a constant fan of firepower and everything kills you. Enemies, bullets, and even accidentally wandering off screen when the chaos makes you lose track of your position all result in Game Over, usually followed by a quick tap on the fire button for another 20 seconds of ass-kicking. *War Twat* provides a quick, pure blast of adrenaline to the part of the brain that only knows how to react, and while it's deep as a bottle cap it's ridiculously fun while it lasts.

By: James • Score: 4 of 5

On the Download

## Pixeljunk Eden

PlayStation Network (PS3) • \$9.99



Developer: Q-Games • Genre: Platformer  
Release Date: 7/31/08 • # Players: 1-3

*Pixeljunk Eden* is a weird one, even by my standards. A small insect-like creature called a Grimp swings through a 2D side-scrolling garden on a silk thread, taking out Prowlers either by crashing into them or catching them on the thread's arc. When the Prowlers pop open they leave behind pollen, and the more Prowlers the Grimp hits in a single jump the larger the pollen

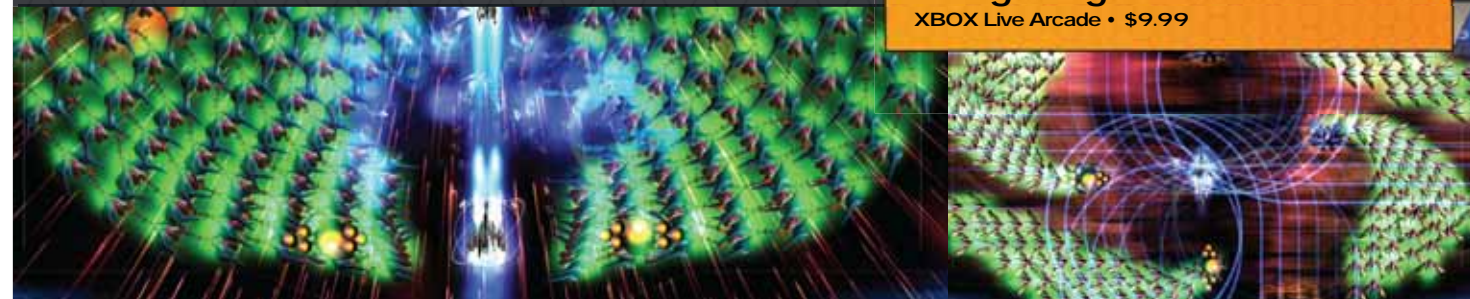
payload gets. Once the pollen is collected it flies to the nearest seed, which will grow into a new flower when the Grimp touches it. This opens up new areas that eventually lead to the Spectra, a variable number of which need to be collected to complete the level before the clock ticks down. To top the whole strange experience off, everything is presented in a style that looks like colored,

flat-shaded silhouettes. Despite the time constraints, which are actually pretty generous, *Pixeljunk Eden* is a peaceful, relaxing, and oddly pretty chill-out game that's very easy to lose a good chunk of time in.

By: James • Score: 4 of 5

## Galaga Legions

XBOX Live Arcade • \$9.99



Developer: Namco • Genre: Vertical shooter  
Release Date: 8/20/08 • # Players: 1

The bonus levels from the original *Galaga* have turned into a full-blown game in *Galaga Legions*. Swarms of enemies fly on predetermined paths, politely indicated by a line drawn on the screen, and attempt to overwhelm the Galaga ship by sheer force of numbers. The ship has learned a new trick, however, and can dump two indestructible options pointing

in one of the four primary directions with a flick of the right stick. The options fire at varying speeds, shooting slowly at distant enemies and getting much faster the closer they get, whether working autonomously or attached to the ship. These simple additions opens up a world of technique, allowing control of multiple sections of the screen if only you can

get there fast enough to dump an option and get out before being overwhelmed. Fortunately, the swarms have a weakness in the form of a large enemy that takes out the entire pattern when destroyed, so crowd control is more than just mindless bullet streams. Good judgment and reflexes are essential, but if that doesn't work then rote memorization will do.

*Galaga Legions*'s biggest weakness is that, as a score attack game, it never varies its enemy patterns from one game to the next. It's an incredible shooter that feels like bullet hell with enemies replacing the bullets, but a little variation would have made it perfect.

By: James • Score: 4 of 5



When is a *Super Robot Taisen* title not a *Super Robot Taisen* game at all? When it's *Mugen no Frontier*, a game that is really just a sequel to Monolithsoft's *Namco x Capcom*. Instead of mainstay *SRTOG* characters like Sanger Zomvolt or Kyosuke Nanbu, you'll hang around with a bunch of generic new guys, the protagonists of *Namco x Capcom*, and... uh, KOS-MOS from *Xenosaga*. Your characters don't even pilot robots, instead using a small selection of mecha as strikers in combat. There's no reason to even call this a *Super Robot Taisen* game, save to exploit fan loyalty to the franchise.

To be fair to *Mugen no Frontier*, it does want to please all the disparate groups of fans likely to sit down and try playing it. It's just... well, not very good at it. The game's Banpresto-style original characters are insipid, and the plot has only a few cameos and scraps of backstory to hold an *SRT* fan's interest. The plot is just bad, a linear series of fetch-quests interspersed with tedious backtracking. It's not even much of a crossover game, unless you've got an absurd level of affection for *Xenosaga*... or the *Namco x Capcom* protagonists... or, uh, the *SRTOG2* bad guys.

*Mugen no Frontier* is interesting when it comes to its look and gameplay, though. Where *Namco x Capcom*'s combat involved chaining discrete moves together into combos via different button presses, in *Mugen no Frontier* your characters have a variety of longer multi-hit combos at their disposal. To succeed in combat, you need to chain up to five such combo sequences together such that your enemies are juggled in the air for as long as possible. If you're good at this, you can pile on the damage by having different characters "pass" the enemy to comrades as their turns end, and use assist characters as strikers to help make sure your enemy never leaves the air. It is possible to juggle bosses such that all four of your party members attack him or her in one long, unbroken chain, racking up immense hit counts and damage totals.



If your reflexes fail you, you'll find that even the game's random encounters can use nasty defenses like barriers and Forced Evasion to shut down your attacks. Grinding for levels or acquiring better gear can never make up for any basic deficiencies in your attack technique, although they can help you weather the high damage enemies tend to dish out. The combo animations themselves are truly spectacular, easily some of the best 2D sprites ever to appear on the DS. On your first time through, acquiring new super attacks and combos at level up is a real treat. You'll listen to a lot of great music as you play, although roughly three-quarters of it is recycled from the soundtracks of *NxC*, *Xenosaga*, and scads of previous *SRT* games.

*Mugen no Frontier*'s strong gameplay would make it entirely salvageable if the game wasn't so short. There are only a few optional bosses and no real sidequests. You can do everything the game has to offer on your first pass through, in about 20-25 hours. Unfortunately, about half of that time is spent backtracking through old dungeons in addition to fighting bosses second and third times, which makes the game's New Game+ feature not terribly attractive. While the actual combat system and visual spectacle Monolithsoft developed for *Mugen no Frontier* are incredible, the rest of the game just isn't worth it.

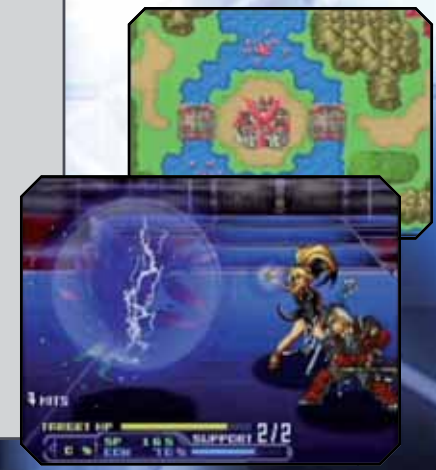


### Worth Importing?

Not if it means paying the \$50-60 (before shipping) that most import shops are going to charge you. This is a game that's worth about \$30, at most. You're best off waiting for a possible North American version, or for a way to catch it on sale.

**Review by:** Lynxara  
**Publisher:** Namco Bandai  
**Developer:** Monolithsoft  
**Release Date:** 05/29/08

**Genre:** RPG  
**Category:** Action  
**# of Players:** 1  
**Rating:** 3.5 of 5



So the *A* in this game's title originally stood for *Advance*. That's right, the latest PSP *Super Robot Taisen* game is simply a high-end GBA port, in many ways quite similar to the PSP ports of *Riviera* and *Yggdra Union*. Where a lot of GBA-to-PSP ports are mere cash grabs, the original *SRTA* is actually a game desperately in need of updating. Released in 2001, early in the GBA's lifespan, it asked a player to put up with primitive maps, immobile sprites, and attack animations that couldn't ever be turned off. Playing it was a dreadful slog, but a lot of fans put up with the torture because it featured an unusually good story. A lot of *A*'s characters, mecha, and plotlines were later incorporated into *SRTOG2*.

*A Portable* offers players all the features they'd reasonably expect from one of the modern PS2 *SRT* games, including the fluid battle cinema sprite animations, gobs of voice acting, and a lot of customization options for your pilots and mecha. Instead of the Pilot Point system the *OG* games introduced, *AP* uses a "Skill Part" system where items gained in battle let you choose to equip new skills to pilots. Every pilot has an individual Ace Bonus ability they acquire after killing so many enemies, and every mecha has a unique Full Upgrade Bonus you get for maxing out all of its stats. The Bonus powers can completely change the way a unit works by offering it some sort of power-up or special ability. If you min-max the Bonus system, you can make the game quite easy, but it also makes it possible for devoted fans to clear the game using only their favorite robots.

Where *AP* gets interesting to a long-time *SRT* fan is its changes to the underlying game engine. It's the first game in well over a decade to seriously alter the way the AI behaves, or how the hit and dodge ratios are calculated. Enemies are more aggressive, and they gain bonuses to their hit percentages if they can gang up on a single unit with successive shots. The AI is smart enough to go after your repair and refuel units first, very rarely wasting attacks on elite units that can't be damaged. You have to play this game with a lot of care and thought put into your movements on the battlefield. Tactics that brought you through older titles are going to be useless here.



While *AP*'s developers did have the foresight to tweak the stats of individual mecha to fit the new game mechanics, they didn't fix a few things they really should have. *AP* doesn't have any new bonus units, secrets, or levels, and only one new enemy. The level designs are essentially unchanged, which forces you through a lot of tedious and ill-conceived battles. The poorly-balanced *G Gundam* units are even worse now, since Shining/God Gundam and Master Gundam have Bonuses that let them raise key stats to levels impossible for anything else in the game. Well over half of the sprite animations and voice clips are simply recycled from earlier PS2 *SRTs*, for the most part in a seamless way. The original animations created just for this game are gorgeous, but there aren't enough of them.

*SRTAP* suffers from only one damning flaw: you're expected to run it off UMD. This is not really advisable. Much like its predecessor *MX Portable*, attempting to run *AP* off UMD results in crippling load times and desync between combat animations and voice clips. You need to rip the game to your memory stick if you want to actually play it. Either way, it drains battery very quickly, even with animations turned off. There's no excuse for these functionality issues. In terms of content alone this game deserves a 4, but any game that won't run correctly without end-user hacking doesn't deserve a final score that high.

### Worth Importing?

*SRTAP* is a good enough ride that I'd recommend this one to players who don't mind having to run the game off the memory stick, or having to stay near a wall outlet while playing it. Otherwise, save your money.



**Review by:** Lynxara  
**Publisher:** Namco Bandai  
**Developer:** Banpresto  
**Release Date:** 06/19/08  
**Genre:** Strategy RPG  
**Category:** Anime  
**# of Players:** 1  
**Rating:** 3 of 5

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# STRIDER 2

The original *Strider* debuted in arcades in 1989, and on the Sega Genesis in 1990, and has been widely regarded as a classic since its initial release. Like the original, and unlike the severely lacking follow-up from '93 called *Strider Returns* that Capcom had nothing to do with, *Strider 2* provides a ninja-filled, sword-slashing action romp that remains enjoyable no matter when you play it, continuing the series' tradition of providing players with a timing gaming experience.

The first entry was heralded for its fast action, impressive graphics, smooth controls, and exceptional music, traits that were carried over to the sequel and were mostly expanded upon. Gameplay-wise, you still hack and slash your way through levels, but now do so with a new dash feature that dramatically increases the pacing of the game. It's a change that helps the sequel stand out from the original; however, it does come at the expense of allowing players to simply enjoy the game at their own pace and soak in the ambiance of the levels, since you now spend 90% of your time rushing around slashing foes in half.

with one arm and slashing with the other.

This is definitely a game created for folks with a strong desire to slash many enemies into as many different pieces as quickly as possible, and it's one thing that sets it apart from the original, which had a fairly leisurely pace to it by comparison. *Strider 2* is action, action, action, with some platforming thrown in to serve as a bridge towards more frantic, and impressive action. While the first *Strider* had some fairly big bosses, the sequel takes those several steps further by offering up many screen-filling sub-bosses, and then piling on major bosses so large that, like *Shadow of the Colossus*, you must carefully climb their massive frames in order to hit their weak point.

As with the original, the plethora of attack positions is fairly impressive, as you can hack at enemies while standing, in mid-jump, in mid-cartwheel jump, while hanging on a ceiling or a wall, and you've also got a special attack available that gives Hiryu access to a long-range attack. You'll have to make use of all of your skills just to survive some early parts of a stage, including a mid-air stage that, like the mid-air vehicle stage, challenges you to avoid plummeting while slashing at enemies, and adds cannon fire that can knock you out during a jump - forcing you to carefully time your movements in order to avoid certain peril.

There's a bit more freedom in *Strider 2* than in the original - you can take multiple paths through levels, and can conquer the game in any order you see fit. If you want to partake in stage 3, then 1, then 2, and then the fifth and final stage, you



Climbing on robotic dragons in the middle of skyscrapers? Awww yeah.

Despite that, just like with the original, *Strider 2* holds up well as a product that made use of the technology of its time to provide an exciting gaming experience, and to be fair, the sequel does end up delivering some things that simply weren't possible when the first game came out. Level one alone sees *Strider* Hiryu battle waves of enemies, then a giant spider boss, then a rotund rocket-launching sub-boss; do battle with a rival ninja high in the sky with only hover vehicles to balance on; then another giant spider boss, before facing a swarm of enemies while hanging from a ceiling

Platform: Sony PlayStation, Arcade  
 Publisher: Capcom  
 Developer: Capcom  
 Release Date: 7/2000 (PSOne), 12/1989 (Arcade)  
 Genre: Action  
 Category: WITH NINJAS!  
 # of Players: 1

Endured by Jeremy



Go ninja, go ninja, go! Er... yeah, sorry.



Egads, not the science too!



Imagine this plastered all over hospitals.



I wish real-life anti-terrorism was this cool.

can. It wreaks havoc with the plot when you do this, as it causes all sorts of continuity issues because the cutscenes are stage-centric, but it's nice to have that kind of freedom available, and the razor-thin plot's only really good for providing some great-looking illustrations during the between-level cutscenes anyway.

Beyond the incredible action found in the main game, *Strider 2* comes bundled with some nice bonuses. Included on the *Strider 2* disc is an unlockable character named *Strider Hien*, who provides a completely different way to play the game because his attacks are long range instead of short range like *Hiryu's*. While that works well at increasing the sequel's replay value, a far more exciting bonus



No terrorisms on my Satellite Dish, plz.

comes in the form of a second disc containing the most accurate home version of the original arcade game. As someone who was used to the Genesis version, I found the arcade game to be a massive upgrade - with far more detailed sprites, and a better-sounding soundtrack.

The option to play through the game with either the original soundtrack or a remixed version of it blaring was also added, and is a nice touch for those who may have grown weary of the original soundtrack, or perhaps they just didn't like it for whatever reason. I found it to be a nice alternative to the original, but I'd still rather play through the game with the original soundtrack playing, as the remixed audio just doesn't fit the action all that well, and lacks the heart that makes the soundtracks of both the original game and the sequel seem special. In both cases, the soundtracks worked at both enhancing the experience and adding to the ambiance because of how well the songs fit the levels.

While there are many aspects of *Strider 2* that are almost universally beloved by its fan base, there is one element of its design that has split the game's fan base since its PSOne release - its handling of unlimited continues. You're given unlimited continues that not only place you right where you left off, including in boss battles, which are definitely made easier than they should be since you can simply whittle down a foe and continue as many times as you like since damage to

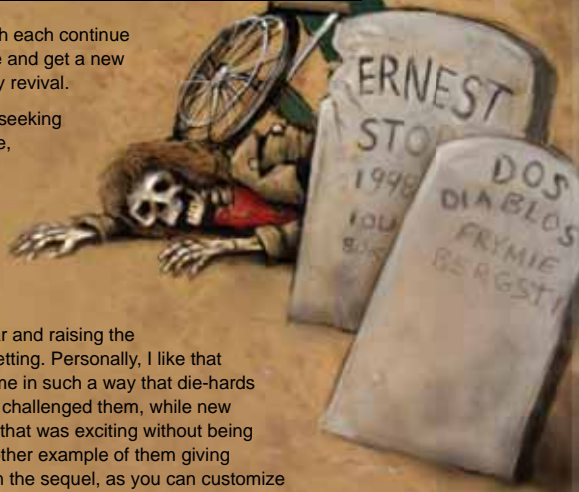
a boss doesn't reset with each continue - allowing you to just die and get a new special attack with every revival.

Fortunately, for players seeking a hair-pulling experience, you don't HAVE to use unlimited continues if you don't want to, and you can stack the deck against yourself by giving yourself a one-hit maximum life bar and raising the difficulty to its highest setting. Personally, I like that Capcom crafted the game in such a way that die-hards could have a game that challenged them, while new players could have one that was exciting without being frustrating. It's also another example of them giving players more freedom in the sequel, as you can customize a lot of settings in the game and tailor it to your liking far more than the original. There are times when I want a challenge from this game, and conversely, there are also times when a simple, quick play session is all I desire, and I appreciate being able to have one without also having to deal with the headaches caused by the higher difficulty settings.

In spite of its flaws, I still think that *Strider 2* is an excellent overall game, and I'm a bit saddened that it never got a second chance to be exposed to players, as it was never given a Greatest Hits release, nor was it included on any of the recent Capcom compilations. In the future, I'd love to see it get a PSN release, or better yet, an enhanced version on either PSN or Xbox Live that adds more levels to the mix, or like *Bionic Commando: Rearmed*, completely improves the game from top to bottom.



Cyborg. Wooley. Mammoth. That's all that needs to be said about this game.



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The original *Keio Flying Squadron* was a cartoony side-scrolling shooter starring Rami and her pet dragon Spot, fighting against the forces of the millenia-old raccoon genius Dr Pon through an entertainingly bizarre 17th-century Japan. While *Keio 2* has the occasional bonus shooting level as a reminder of the series's roots, it's primarily a platformer, and a pretty good one too. What really sets it apart from the crowd is sheer force of personality, and the goofy world is packed full of detail and animation. In the first level alone, there are kappa soaking in hot springs, raccoons strolling around in bath robes, and a wooden kappa sign waving a friendly welcome to Rami as she runs through the woodland spa. The little details throughout the game that keep things lively, making for a world that's as fun to explore as it is pretty.

*Keio 2*'s bright, vibrant levels are filled with variety, not only in look and design but also play styles. Sure, the usual suspects, such as a rollercoaster level (the mine cart cliché's cuter cousin), show up, but there are also a pair of sidescrolling shooter levels, a chase by an angry mob of raccoons, a mouse-driven train, bonus levels bouncing off kappa heads, and new enemies to go with the regular changes in scenery. The boss fights are a bit heavy on rote-memorization patterns, but they're well animated and insane enough to make up for it. You can't go wrong with a large robot designed like a balding, middle-aged man holding a cup of tea, cab attached to the back for its raccoon driver, that goes super-saiyan once its taken enough hits. The only major knock against the game is the audio, which features the triumphant return of the original voice actors from *Keio Flying Squadron* in all their Community Theater Rejects glory.

*Keio Flying Squadron 2* is a rock-solid platformer that deserved a US release. It came out at an awkward time for gaming, with 3D in the process of taking over the world, but it's cute, fun, and has a lot of variety in the level design. The PAL release works fine in a US Saturn using only a Game Shark to unlock the region, and there are no problems with the video format. *Keio 2* is good gaming, simple to run on a US system, and well worth tracking down if you can avoid paying insane collector prices.



Pedobear approved this game before he even existed.



Is this Giant Enemy Crab's true origin?

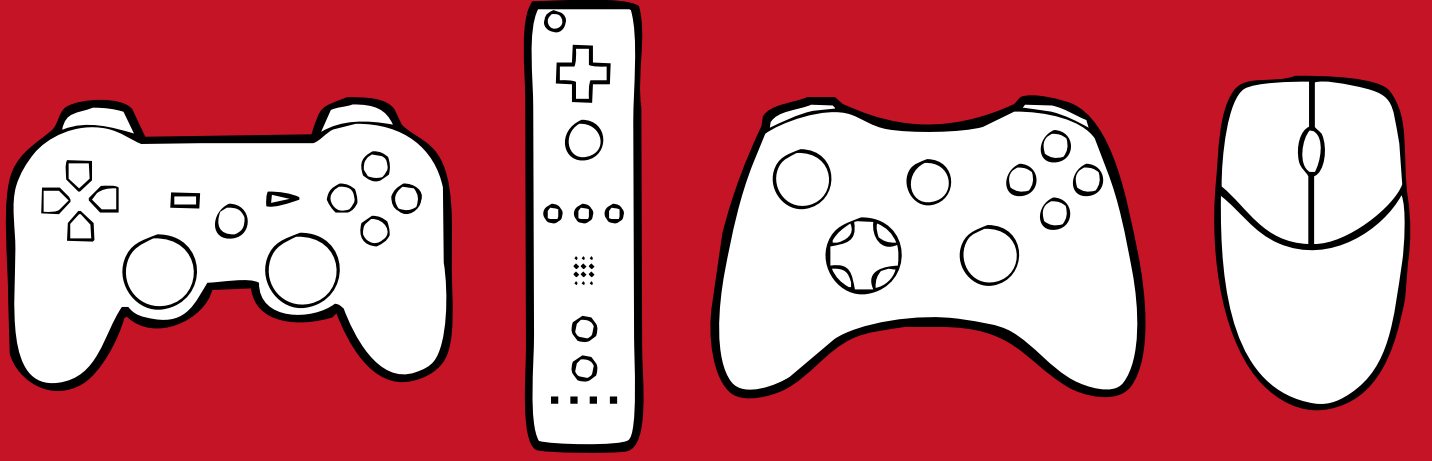
Forget Japan, this is European and fan-translated gaming. The English stuff you've never heard about.

The Games America Forgot.

Publisher: JVC • Developer: JVC • Genre: Platformer • Category: Bunny Girl • # Players: 1 • Rating: N/A • Format: PAL

## Keio Flying Squadron 2

by james



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# INDIANA JONES

Review by Adam Pratt of ArcadeHeroes.com

Pinball has seen a resurgence of late, helped in part by nostalgia and in part some great games being released by the only pinball maker in the world, Stern. One of those games is *Indiana Jones*. I have personally seen this game beat out video games in weekly earnings a few times already and there is a good reason why — the game is a ton of fun.

The point of the game is to unlock four scenes from each film by hitting the targets near each toy which represents the treasure that Indy was after in each movie. Unlocking all of the scenes is quite a challenge for any player but it is an entertaining ride as there are many fun sound bites from the series along with short movie scenes and the catchy Indiana Jones theme song played in the background.

It is true that there was an *Indiana Jones* pinball table released by Williams back in 1993, not long after the release of the third film. This new pin by Stern comes along right the release of the most recent *Indy* film, *The Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*. The new game incorporates elements from each film, with a strong focus on the first three movies. It seems that Stern was not able to secure any footage or sound bites from the latest movie beyond two-second clips from the trailers, even in the updates that have come along after the movie's release, which is rather disappointing.

The most noticeable toy on the table is the Ark of the Covenant, which also happens to be the most rewarding playmode: it that launches an 8-ball multiball when activated, with four balls spilling out of the ark after you are shown a clip of the Ark opening scene from *Raiders*. While this happens a magnet holds your ball so you don't have to worry about that and can watch the scene. There is a multiball involved with the Temple of Doom sequences but it's far less impressive than the Ark multiball. There is a Last Crusade bonus mode but it does not involve a multiball. The final toy you'll see is a motorized wall with an image of the sword-wielding arab from the first movie which you must shoot by hitting the target below, which will then cause other pinballs in an enclosed mini-playfield to bounce around and hit more targets. Overall the playfield is not too crowded, so there's no problems seeing what is going on, but it has enough to keep the player captivated.

This all comes together to create a very addicting and entertaining game that can never be accurately experienced virtually on a PC or a game console. It is even more fun when played with someone else, where you can compete against each other for the high score. Don't pass this one up if you come across it at a local arcade or bar!

Rank: 5 out of 5

Indiana Jones Pinball by Stern Pinball Inc.  
Players: 1-4  
Category: Pinball  
Genre: Swashbuckling adventure  
Released: May 24th, 2008



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