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PlayStation 2

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...tighter than I expect... this IS where the Tone is kept...

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73/100

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# MAKAI KINGDOM

Chronicles of the Sacred Tome

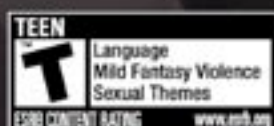
"In short, Nippon Ichi appears to be going far to ensure that Makai Kingdom is the richest and most complex game the company has released for the PS2"

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

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PlayStation 2



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Printed in the United States of America



### DJPubba Tim Lindquist

This month I bought extra grip tires that don't get enough traction to get up the hill in my driveway, five new phones that don't work with our phone system, an answering machine with the wrong power supply, a wireless mouse that has "invisible wall" syndrome and a wireless keyboard that doesn't work with the bluetooth adapter I use. I'm afraid to try the ink cartridges I got for the color printer.

Now Playing: Genji, Crazy Climber (Arcade), We ♥ Katamari, Namco Museum (PSP)



### Wanderer Thomas Wilde

Thanks to compilation discs and emulators, I've been revisiting most of the games I played as a kid... and I suck at all of them now. Clearly, I need to go on some kind of training journey to recapture the skill of my youth. All of these RPGs and easy 3D games are dulling my twitch reflexes.

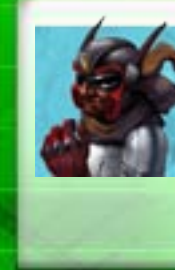
Now Playing: Taito Memories vol. 1, Capcom vs. SNK 2 (Xbox), Venture (Colecovision)



### Syriel Adam Pavlacka

Everyone loves Christian Bale in *Batman Begins*, but it seems as though most people aren't familiar with his earlier work. If you haven't yet seen them, head out to Blockbuster (or do the Netflix thing if you're hip) and check out *Equilibrium* and *American Psycho*. The first is an Orwellian action film featuring some mighty impressive stunt work while the second is an inspired commentary of American selfishness and indulgence.

Now Playing: We ♥ Katamari, Burnout 3 (Xbox), Rez (DC)



### Racewing Geson Hatchett

I've been splitting my time between getting back into novels and salivating over the DS's fall/winter game lineup. As a result, Peter David currently owns the right side of my brain, and if anyone's willing to help me stop obsessing over *Viewtiful Joe DS* and *Sonic Rush*, I'd be most grateful.

Now Playing: Psi-Ops (Xbox), Devil May Cry 3, Princess Peach's Pillowfight Party (My Imagination)



### Shoegazer Dave Hulegaard

Paying homage to the days of \$80 SNES carts, this month I celebrated the ten-year anniversary of my beloved *Chrono Trigger* with a play-through. So many decisions: Do I kill Magus? Do I want 3 Prism Helms, or 1 Prism Dress? Ugh! How can I concentrate on this bio when Guardia needs me??

Now Playing: Chrono Trigger (SNES), Madden NFL 06 (Xbox), Radiata Stories



### KouAidou Elizabeth Ellis

I can't believe they made me do work this issue! As a girly girl in a male-dominated fandom, I fully expect to be able to coast on my natural charisma and a careful exploitation of the hormones of my co-workers. I tell you, it's all Lynxara's fault. Working her fingers to the bone, churning out quality product on an endless coffee high... she's ruining it for the rest of us!

Now Playing: Hayarigami: Revenge, Super Robot Wars Alpha 3 (PS2), Master of Orion 2 (PC)



### Roger Danish Greg Off

I decided to dedicate this space for the next two months to the peeps down at MRA: The lovely and talented Big Face (or "Count Facey" as she's known in some circles), Auntie Nan's favorite Trailer Trash hatin' nephew, Laurent "I don't know you" Dela Cruz, and C.H.A.N.N.A (Cool, Hip, Awesome, No, Not Angry). Holla!

Now Playing: Shadow of Colossus, Genji: Dawn of the Samurai, Ratchet: Deadlocked, Burnout Revenge



### Lynxara Alicia Ashby

I spent August in a twilight funk, staying up all night drinking coffee and tapping away on new pieces of writing. I discovered that a pot and a half of coffee consumed on 20 hours without sleep unlocks life's bonus stage. If you jump on the midget's head at the end of the cloud, you'll get enough of an air boost that you can collect all the stars!!

Now Playing: Super Robot Wars alpha 3: To the End of the Galaxy, Castlevania: Dawn of Sorrow, Pump It Up: Exceed (PS2)



### 4thletter David Brothers

I spent most of July fixing my car (BY HAND!), but I always make time for good music. Ask your local music salesperson for anything from Kool G Rap, Eric B. & Rakim, Lauryn Hill, Curtis Mayfield, and Gang Starr. If they don't have any, beat them about the head and shoulders.

Now Playing: Minna Daisuki Katamari Damacy, Madden NFL 06 (Xbox), NCAA Football 06 (Xbox)



### James James Cunningham

James spent the month overloaded. Learning to drive, working, gaming, writing, reading, and friends & family all conspired to grind him down to a thin paste. He managed to crawl out alive, though, and a day's rest put him right again. In other news, he decided writing in the third person sucked, so I stopped doing it with this sentence.

Now Playing: Killer 7 (Gamecube), Atelier Iris, Meteos, and Nanostray



### HonestGamer Jason Venter

It should come as no surprise to most of you that I ♥ cheese. It's my favorite dairy product. This means something very important: if I had to live without one or the other, I'd sacrifice ice cream in favor of cheese. When you think about it, cheese goes with just about anything but chocolate syrup. Mmm, cheese!

Now Playing: Nanostray, Sid Meier's Pirates!: Live the Life (Xbox), Radiata Stories



### Hitoshura Iaian Ross

There are times when the games I play would make anyone question my sanity. Still up at 3 in the morning, and slowly growing tired, I stumble upon a demonic angel who sounds exactly like Donald Duck. There's also the issue of listening to a flamingly gay final boss monster who has a severe identity problem. "Ohhh Nooooo!" I don't take many stories in games as seriously as I used to.

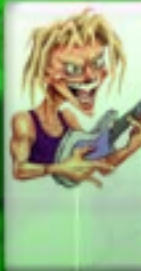
Currently Playing: Star Ocean Till the End of Time, Makai Kingdom



### Wolfie Terry Wolfinger

Here are some answers to some frequently asked questions: Yes, "Wolfinger" is my real last name. No, I do not actually have any "wolf" fingers. (It's actually my toes that bear the mark of the lycanthrope!) Ah, the irony... Maybe I should change my name, but Terry WolfToe would just sound plain silly, now wouldn't it?

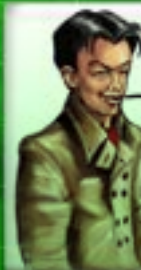
Now Playing: Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas (PS2)



### Metalbot Anthony Mertz

By the time you read this, I will have either succeeded, or failed, at single handedly putting together cosplay for a group of eight people. If successful, I congratulate my future self on a job well done. If a failure, I would like to extend my deepest sympathies to myself, and plead that I not commit seppuku from all the shame that this failure has brought me.

Now Playing: Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex, The Typing of The Dead (PC), Kakuto Chojin (Xbox)



### Arfeth Thomas Shin

People always ask why I always pick Makoto's special pink color in *SF3: 3rd Strike*. It's not because I think pink is the new black. Nor is it because I think she mixes her reds and whites in the laundry. The real reason was because, for some reason, people took cotton-candy-pink Makoto a lot less seriously than badass-black Makoto. It all became a moot point after her 100% combo was discovered.

Now Playing: Gunz: The Duel (PC), Drummania 10th Mix (Arcade), Star Wars: Battlefront (PS2)



### Melf Ken Horowitz

*Ordyne*, *Keio Flying Squadron*, *Cotton*; they're all over my TV lately, and I don't care who knows it. Perhaps I should be worried about how at ease I am with this genre overall, but I just can't tear myself away from all the pretty colors. Could all those bunny plushies on my futon mean something after all? Nah, probably just my imagination...

Now Playing: Panorama Cotton (Mega Drive), Men of Valor (Xbox), Tempo (32X)



### Jeremy Jeremy Peeples

The bulk of my month has been spent recreating current and classic wrestling feuds in *WWF No Mercy*, God's gift to wrestling fans. Much of the rest has been spent trying to top personal records in *Columns*, a game so amazing it makes *Sega Classics Collection* worth owning.

Now Playing: WWE Day of Reckoning, Fire Pro Wrestling 2, Columns, Sega Classics Collection, Sonic the Hedgehog



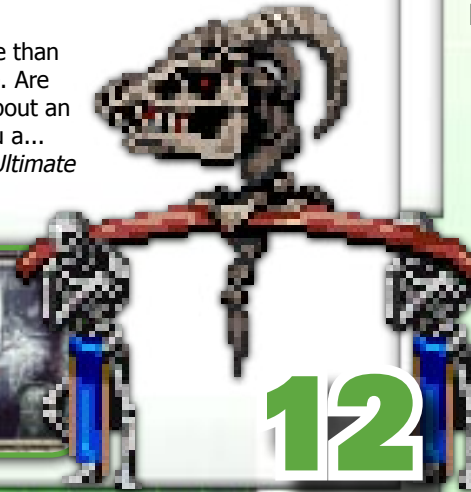
### Sardius Danny Cowan

The reality of living with one's significant other is starting to set in. We are having issues regarding the sharing of video games and usage of the living room TV. My solution? Whining about it behind my fiancee's back in a magazine. That, and lots of crying.

Now Playing: Pop'n Music 11 (PS2), Um Jammer Lammy (PS1), Bashi Bazook: Morphoid Masher (NES)

Previews

We've got more and better previews in this issue than ever before, and there's something for everyone. Are you a conqueror? Look at *Civilization IV*. How about an adventurer? Check out *Indigo Prophecy*. Are you a... fun liker? We've got *Castlevania*, *Viewtiful Joe*, *Ultimate Spider-Man*, *X-Men Legends II*, and the rest!



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Feature

**TREASURE**  
VIDEO GAMES



Treasure is a group of some of the best and most creative game developers on the planet, with both mainstream appeal and the respect of die-hard gamers the world over. With a sequel to the classic *Gunstar Heroes* on the horizon, we thought it was time to look back on their past while looking forward to their awesome new creation for the GBA, *Gunstar Super Heroes*.



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On the cover

**We ♥ Katamari™**

Is there a man, woman, or child upon this planet who would not, if given the opportunity, love katamari? We ♥ *Katamari*, and in our cover story, we'll show you why you should, too. (How many others have used that horrible play on words by now? Everyone? Sorry.) Check out our hands-on preview, as well as an exclusive Q&A with Keita Takahashi, the director of both *Katamari* games.



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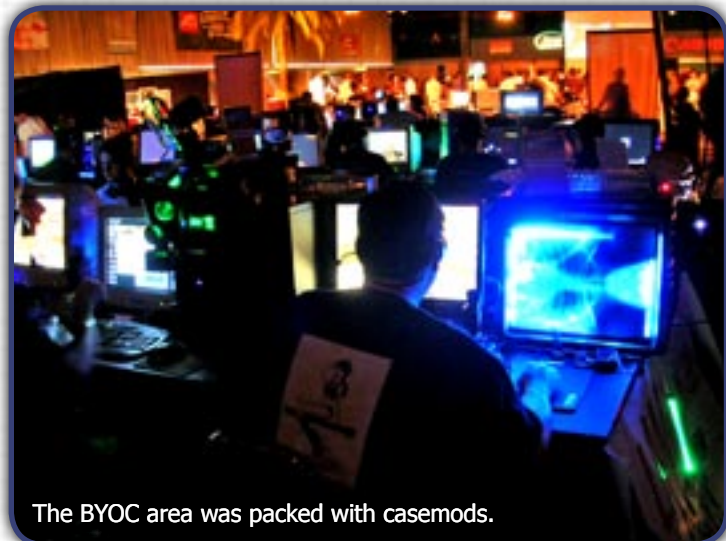


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## LANFEST 2k5

Newegg.com recently hosted their second LANfest at the Pasadena Convention Center in California, featuring tournaments for *Counter-Strike* versions 1.6 and Source, as well as *Call of Duty*. With over \$70,000 in total prizes, including the chance to win the custom-built gaming rigs made for the tournament, internationally renowned teams such as Complexity, PowersGaming and Weekend Warriors showed up to dominate their competition. Over six million watts of electricity were necessary during the non-stop July 30-31st event to power the 400-man BYOC (Bring Your Own Computer) area, which also hosted tournaments for *Painkiller*, *Unreal Tournament 2k4* and



The BYOC area was packed with casemods.

*Warcraft III: The Frozen Throne*. Finally, the infamous Jonathan "Fatal1ty" Wendel made a scheduled appearance, crushing audience participants as they fought him in one-on-one duels in *Painkiller* in an attempt to wrestle prizes from his (wishfully) cold, dead hands.

It turned out that *Counter-Strike* tournaments of this caliber require special attention. Han Park, VP of Manhattan's web2zone Cyber Center, was there as a professional consultant and referee for the matches. He says that web2zone is often contracted for their expertise,



The good men of Inside The Game doing webcast commentary. Good job, fellas.



Team Forbidden at play. Referee Evelyn watches from the back.

since high-profile events require iron-clad rules to make sure everything goes smoothly. "We've had a lot of experience organizing these tournaments. We've seen every known bug, glitch and exploit there is. That's why we're here."

For the spectators and casual gamers, there was another scene to check out: case mods. Paul Capello of [thebestcasescenario.com](http://thebestcasescenario.com) was there exhibiting his recently-completed Project Nighthawk, designed to resemble a the F-117A Nighthawk Stealth Bomber. For you more distinguished gentlegamers, Jeffery Stephenson presented his classic "Humidor CL Server," perfect for CEOs wishing to both store their cigars and run a wireless network in a single case. Gamers who participated in the BYOC area also had the opportunity to submit their case mods in a competition to win equipment from AMD, A-Open, Logitech and D-Link.

A controversial decision to isolate the tournament room from spectators was unpopular with many attendees, but was deemed necessary to preserve the integrity of the games. During the tournament, rules of silence-upon-death were enforced with an iron hand by the

## XBOX 360 PRICED



\$299

**Hard drive will be an add-on**

On August 17 at a news conference in Leipzig, Germany, Microsoft finally made the long-awaited announcement of the launch price of the Xbox 360. Fans were shocked to hear that two versions of the next gen console would go to market in November: a "Core System" version with no hard drive, wired controller, and standard AV cables for \$299.99; and then a \$399.99 version that includes a 20 GB hard drive, wireless controller, component AV cables, headset, and media remote control. Microsoft also announced prices for a variety of 360 accessories, including the 20 GB hard drive (\$99.99), wireless controller (\$49.99), 64 MB memory unit (\$39.99), and headset (\$19.99). With the Xbox 360's HD essentially selling as an optional add-on, will developers write games that take full advantage of it? Gamers across the internet worry that the answer to that question will be "no".

Interestingly, our sources tell us that specialty retailers are receiving ten times as many \$399 than \$299 bundles.

A F-117A Nighthawk Stealth Bomber cockpit — at LANfest?!



web2zone staff, preventing any sort of team-cheating (intentional or otherwise) from occurring. Outside the tournament room, radioITG.com provided live webcasting and commentary on the matches.

Many teams attending LANfest were easily distinguishable by their distinctive shirts featuring sponsor's logos. Mike Devine, owner of Weekend Warriors ([wewclan.com](http://wewclan.com)), says that the gaming scene is only moving forward in attracting sponsors to finance cutting-edge teams. "For a lot of our team members, it's practically a job. They practice daily for hours as a team and receive a salary. It's not enough to live off of, though many of these players are in college and have outside financial support, but it's definitely enough to be considered a professional gamer."

For these professional teams, it's not about the salaries, cash prizes and free computers; it's the prestige. The chance to make your mark on the scene and defeat well-established teams not only bestows bragging rights, but the attention of potential sponsors as well. It's easy to forget that most of, say, Michael Jordan's wealth came not from his



CS 1.6 1st Place (WEW)

salary, but from his Air Jordans. Fatal1ty, a professional gamer who's earned more than \$400,000 in his career, walks the same path: the Creative Fatal1ty Gaming Mouse will feature insertable weights to increase the solidity of the mouse's feel. How much more hardcore can you get?

## PS3 PRICED?

**In the war for next-gen dominance, we, the consumer, is teh win.**

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Other products by Sony Computer Entertainment  
Platform: PlayStation 3



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**System requirements**

**Features:**

- Sony PlayStation 3 is slated for release in Spring 2006
- Games will use Blu-Ray discs as media format
- Features a powerful Cell processor and a dynamic RSX graphics chip
- Completely backward compatible, all the way to the original Sony PlayStation
- Built-in Wi-Fi access for easy connection to gaming services and the Internet

On August 18, sharp-eyed [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com) watchers spotted the PS3 up for pre-order at a \$299.99 price. Sony has released no official information about the PS3's US price or release date, and the \$299 price mysteriously disappeared from the Amazon page by the end of the day. Was it just a mistake, or something more? With the PS3 not set for release until late 2006, it's far too soon to tell.

## ZELDA DELAYED

**The Twilight Princess will not be here soonish**

In an August 16 press release, Nintendo announced that the eagerly anticipated *The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess* for GameCube would be pushed back from November 2005 to an unspecified date after March 31, 2006. The delay comes at the request of the development team, who promise to use the time to add more levels, features, and depth to the game. The news has bitterly disappointed *Zelda* fans across the internet (and the HGM offices), but seven new screenshots released along with the delay announcement are keeping hopes high.



# Our guides aren't for everyone.



## Official Strategy Guides



### **Genji: Dawn of the Samurai™**

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



### **Castlevania@: Dawn of Sorrow™**

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



### **Makai Kingdom™**

Another masterpiece from the creators of *Disgaea™* — *Makai Kingdom* combines the best elements from Nippon Ichi's past S-RPGs into one amazing game.



### **Phantom Brave™**

The official guide will help gamers uncover all of *Phantom Brave's* many, many secrets, without spoiling the story.



### **Shin Megami Tensei™: Nocturne™**

An RPG this good deserves more than just a guide. It deserves a 400 page monster.



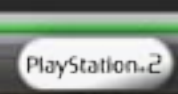
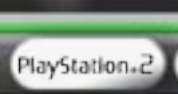
### **Disgaea: Hour of Darkness™**

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**(Some people don't play video games.)**

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# GENJI

DAWN OF THE SAMURAI

**Publisher :** SCEA  
**Developer :** Game Republic  
**Release Date :** 9/20/05  
**Genre(s) :** Action  
**Category :** Adventure  
**# of players :** 1

Preview by  
**Roger Danish**

At first glance, you might think this looks a lot like something you'd see from Capcom, and you'd essentially be right.

The game, which mixes ancient Japanese fiction, blazing swords, fantastical characters, and a mixture of action and adventure, was created by Game Republic, a new Japanese development house headed up by Yoshiaki Okamoto (*Genji's* story has roots in real Japanese history and literature, but *not directly* from the source that most people assume — *The Tales of Genji*). Okamoto-san was something of a Capcom fixture, having produced and worked many of their biggest franchises (*Street Fighter II*, *Resident Evil*, *Mega Man*). He also founded Flagship, the company that penned the stories for *Resident Evil* and *Onimusha*. Okamoto left Capcom in 2003 to start his own company, and *Genji* is the first fruit of his labors.

*Genji* takes place in 1159 A.D. in feudal Japan. It revolves around Yoshitsune, a young samurai and descendant of the vanquished Genji clan, and Benkei, a warrior-monk who fights to return the Genji to power. Together, these two must battle the Heishi, an evil cult who have taken control of Kyoto, and use an ancient power called Amahagane to rule the countryside with an iron fist.

The game unfolds over three long chapters and mixes swift and fluid combat, an engaging storyline (with over an hour of CG cinematics), a hefty helping of exploration, and RPG/character progression elements. Shipping at the end of September, *Genji: Dawn of the Samurai* is one of this year's surprising treats and could end up being a fantastic new first-party franchise for Sony.



**Publisher :** Activision  
**Developer :** Treyarch  
**Release Date :** 9/13/05  
**Genre(s) :** Action/Adventure  
**Category :** Comic  
**# of players :** 1

Preview by **4thletter**

"With great power comes great responsibility." Sound familiar? Yeah, I figured it would. It's time for the latest Spider-Man game to grace your home consoles. This time, it's based off of the "Ultimate Spider-Man" comic, which retells Spider-Man's origin and adventures in a modern context. Is the second verse the same as the first? Let's see.

The basic engine is more or less what we saw in *Spider-Man 2: The Movie*, but the graphics have been changed from that oh-so-slick CG. Treyarch is using a form of cel-shading to match *Ultimate Spider-Man* to the comic's style. Spider-Man and Venom both look spectacular.

The gameplay is comfortably familiar, with a few notable tweaks. Webswinging is easier, but much more precise now, and leaping about the expanded city with Venom is a bucket of fun. Playing with Venom is almost like having a playable Hulk in the game. He's all about brute force, while Spidey focuses more on speed and agility. If the rest of the game has boss fights as inventive as Venom versus Electro, I'm sold twice over. How cool is it to be able to throw cars at Electro?





# BATTLEFIELD 2 MODERN COMBAT

**Publisher :** Electronic Arts  
**Developer :** Digital Illusions CE  
**Release Date :** 10/05

**Genre(s) :** First-person shooter  
**Category :** Military  
**# of players :** Up to 24

Preview by **James**

World War II may be over, but the conflict never ends. With *Battlefield 2: Modern Combat*, DICE and EA bring the fighting to the modern era, placing the combat in Kazakhstan. Placed squarely between Russia and China, with huge oil reserves, there are any number of good reasons for the world to fight in Kazakhstan's arid wastelands. That's exactly what China, the US, the European Union, and the Middle East Coalition do, each bringing the standard toys of war as well as their own specialized equipment to the party.

While sporting a robust single-player mode, the *Battlefield* series is best known for multiplayer gaming. With *Battlefield 2*, DICE has brought a 24-player skirmish to Xbox Live, complete with over thirty vehicles, fifty weapons, and thirteen maps to play around on. Doing well in battle also powers up your soldier, giving him increased health, making him deal more damage, and snagging a promotion or two along the way. Multiple character classes, complete with unique weapon loadouts and special abilities, add yet more variety to the proceedings. The scenery may be yet another bleak and war-torn dusty hellhole, but the action within should keep the average military FPS fan happily shooting for a good while.



# SPARTAN™ TOTAL WARRIOR

**Publisher :** SEGA  
**Developer :** Creative Assembly  
**Release Date :** 10/25/05

**Genre(s) :** Action/Adventure  
**Category :** Historical  
**# of players :** 1

Preview by **4thletter**

Spartans have been getting good press lately. Kratos landed a starring role in the classic *God of War*, and there was that business at Thermopylae a while back. Creative Assembly's *Spartan: Total Warrior* is simply the latest Spartan thrust into the mainstream.

You might remember the *Total War* series on PC. It focused more on the big picture, than on the little guy. *Spartan: Total Warrior* seeks to change that formula. You play the most capable Spartan in the entire world, of course, but your allies are more than able to take care of themselves.

The game keeps the controls simple. You get in, you fight, you kill people, and perhaps escort an ally or destroy a giant clockwork Roman. The emphasis is more on speed and cool kills than on historic realism, and you'll get the hang of wading through waves of enemies in no time flat. It's pure old-school action. Just to keep it fresh, though, there'll be post-level upgrades and unlockables throughout.

The areas are spacious, thankfully, since *Spartan: Total Warrior* will have you facing down entire armies at a time with your fellow soldiers. There's something to be said about the sheer fun involved in charging to war with a few dozen of your Spartan brethren.







# CIVILIZATION IV

Preview by Syriel

**Publisher :** 2K Games  
**Developer :** Firaxis  
**Release Date :** Fall 2005

**Genre(s) :** Strategy  
**Category :** Turn based  
**# of players :** 1 - 18

It's been nearly fifteen years since the original *Civilization* shipped on floppy disk, but the series hasn't lost its magic.

Religion is the biggest addition, with *Civilization IV* featuring seven different religions to choose from. Declaring a state religion will offer a bonus to any city that keeps the faith, but keep an eye out for foreign missionaries. If a city converts away from the state religion it will lose any associated bonus. Smart players will be able to use religion as a covert form of cultural imperialism.

Combat has evolved a bit thanks to the addition of artillery units. In *Civilization III*, players soon learned that large forces were nearly unstoppable due to how the damage system worked; only the lead unit would take damage. Artillery changes that by injuring every unit in the stack. As a result, one player cannot easily steamroll around the map.

The development team has also spent more time focusing on the personalities of the leaders, with roughly half of the playable civilizations offering two to choose from. The different personality types will affect how the A.I. leaders interact with the player both on the battlefield and in trade negotiations. Trying to deal with Caesar in the same manner as Napoleon simply won't work.

Online play is another major concern for the development team. *Civilization IV* supports the traditional play-by-email and LAN options, as well as the new pit boss mode.



Preview by Syriel

More than just a collection of new levels, *Winter Assault* adds a whole new race to the gameplay of *Dawn of War*. Briefly seen as an ally in last year's singleplayer campaign, the Imperial Guard is now fully realized. Unlike the other races, the Guard's play style is distinctly defensive. It consists of normal humans, and its forces are relatively weak in small numbers. Once they're massed, though, they can be nearly unstoppable.

The strength of the Guard lies in its vehicles and its strategy. With a focus on long-range artillery, it's possible to blast a hole in the enemy lines, then rush in with your infantry to finish the job. The Guard is also blessed with an unusually high number of leader units, allowing for sharper command on the field. Economic bonuses at the base help keep the cannon fodder flowing; a skilled player can call up replacement troops just as fast as the enemy can destroy them.

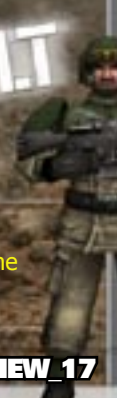
In addition to the Guard, each of the existing races also features a brand new unit. The Space Marines get the skull-faced Chaplain, who helps keep troop morale high, while the Orks see a melee boost with the Mega Armored Nobz, cybernetic warriors that can pack a massive punch. The Eldar will see the addition of the Fire Dragons, which are exceptionally adept at damaging vehicles, and the Chaos Marines have the Khorne Beserker, a super speedy death dealer.



# DAWN OF WAR WINTER ASSAULT

**Publisher :** THQ  
**Developer :** Relic  
**Release Date :** Fall 2005

**Genre(s) :** Strategy  
**Category :** Real Time  
**# of players :** 1 - 8





Preview by Racewing

# Shining Force Neo

**Publisher :** Sega  
**Developer :** Sega Studios  
**Release Date :** Fall 2005

**Genre(s) :** RPG  
**Category :** Action  
**# of players :** TBA

The *Shining* series of RPGs, popular back when sprites ruled the roost, were memorable for either their wonderful strategic gameplay or their sickeningly hard turn-based battles.

Those days, however, are long gone. For the newer generation of machines, Sega's flagship series looks to conquer yet another genre: the Action-RPG. The first entry was *Shining Tears*, and the latest will be released this fall. Some people are cool with the new direction that the *Shining* series is going, and some would rather things go back to the way they used to be, but at least for now, it's here to stay.



**Publisher :** Square-Enix  
**Developer :** Square-Enix  
**Release Date :** October 10, 2005

**Genre(s) :** RPG  
**Category :** Turn-Based  
**# of players :** 1

Preview by Lynmar

The *SaGa* franchise is what helped make Squaresoft in Japan, but it's had a hard time finding a North American audience. For *Romancing SaGa*, Square-Enix is taking the line back to its critically acclaimed roots with a remake of the original, never-released-in-America SNES game. In many respects, this will be the first genuine *SaGa* game that Americans have ever seen.

The gameplay is faithful to the 16-bit original, offering eight playable characters that follow unique storylines. Decisions made with each character will have lasting effects on the game's setting, the fantasy world of Mardias. While each character has a distinct plot to follow, the way the plots interact makes the adventure feel very open-ended.

Visually, the game has been given a complete overhaul. The graphics are now a blend of 3D and 2D, with some spectacularly detailed attack effects. The combat system makes it obvious that this was once a 16-bit game, heavy on menu navigation and micromanagement.

Old-school gameplay matched to modern graphics is something a lot of RPG fans have been asking for, and that just happens to be what this game is all about. It'll be fun to see how well that combination works out in practice. *Romancing SaGa* comes to the US on October 10th.





PlayStation-2



# DICE

DNA INTEGRATED CYBERNETIC ENTERPRISES

Preview by Shoegazer

**Publisher :** Bandai  
**Developer :** Natsume  
**Release Date :** September '05

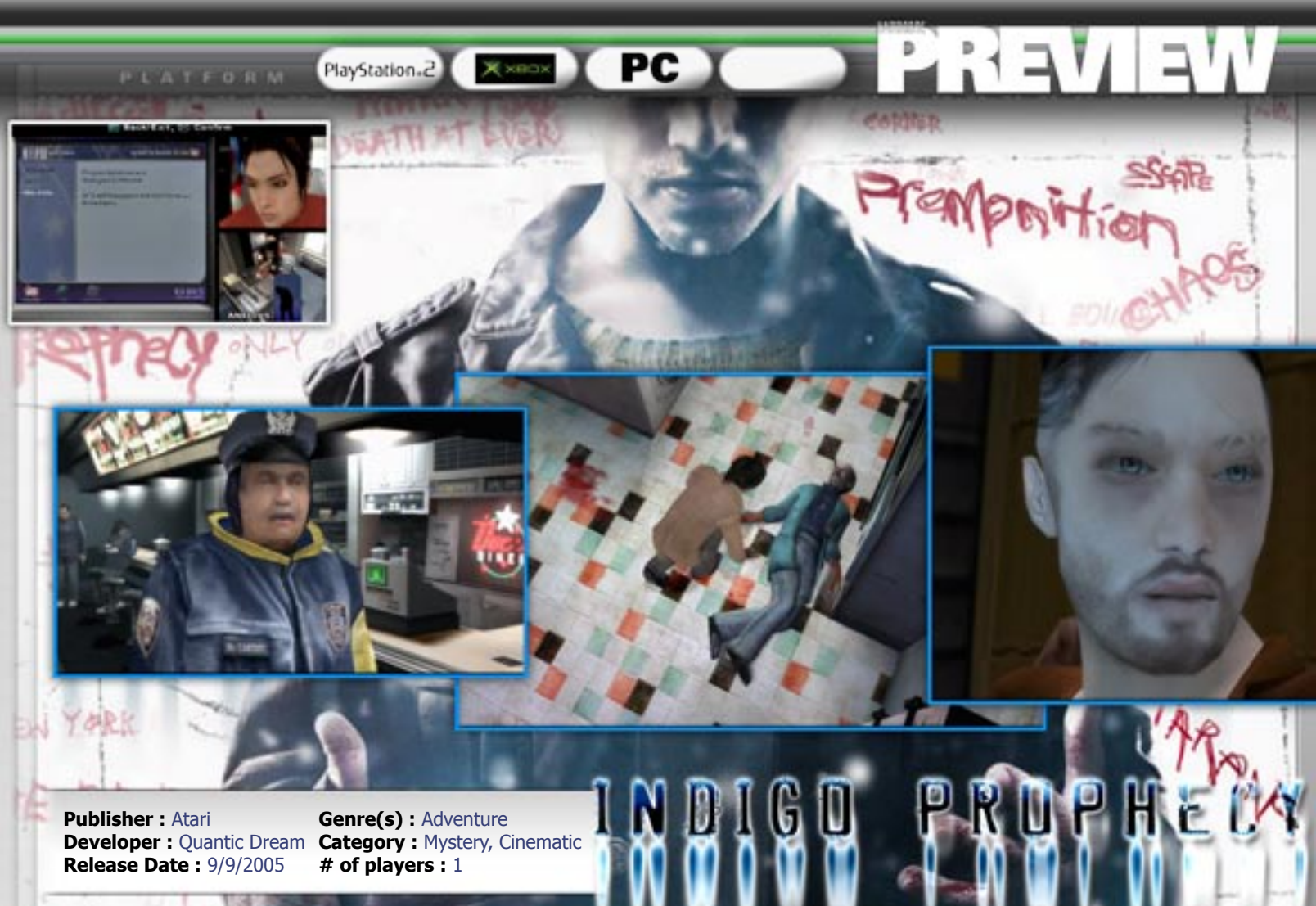
**Genre(s) :** Action, Shooter, Children  
**Category :** Sci-Fi, Animation  
**# of players :** 1 - 2

When a nasty situation arises in a galaxy near you, who can you look to for help these days? The DNA Integrated Cybernetic Enterprises, that's who!

Based on the popular kids' cartoon of the same name, *DICE* the video game brings home the excitement of the hit TV show in mission-based singleplayer fashion. Select from a number of playable *DICE* characters and experience the raw power of each member's individual Dinobreaker: giant robotic dinosaurs, armed to the gills with customizable weapons, that can also transform into super-charged vehicles. Battles can be fought from both inside the friendly confines of a Dinobreaker, or on the outside where hand-to-hand combat skills reign supreme.

Between missions, players will have access to their garage where collected scrap metal can be used towards upgraded Dinobreaker parts and bots. A One-on-one fighting mode is also available in-between missions for 1-2 players.

With loads of unlockable content such as hidden characters, weapons, fighting arenas, and two never-before-seen Dinobreakers created specifically for the game, *DICE* is looking to fill that dinosaur-shaped void for kids this September.



PlayStation-2

XBOX

PC

PREVIEW



**Publisher :** Atari  
**Developer :** Quantic Dream  
**Release Date :** 9/9/2005

**Genre(s) :** Adventure  
**Category :** Mystery, Cinematic  
**# of players :** 1

# INDIGO PROPHECY

Preview by Wanderer

In one half of *Indigo Prophecy*, you're Lucas Kane. To find out why you went into a trance and killed a man, you have to outrun the NYPD. In the other half, you're police detectives Carla Valenti and Tyler Miles, who're trying to solve the murder Lucas committed.

Playing *Indigo Prophecy* is a constant process of trying to outwit yourself. You can call it an adventure game, but it's hard to define so simply. It's more like an interactive David Lynch movie, both atmospheric and surreal, where every choice you make legitimately changes what'll happen next.

In a given environment, you can interact with almost anything you can see, using experimentation, exploration, and the occasional minigame to change the story. For instance, in the first chapter, Lucas has to clean up the scene of his murder. How well you do that will determine whether Carla and Tyler can find you in the chapters to come.

It's decidedly bizarre, but *Indigo Prophecy* both looks and feels genuinely innovative. If nothing else, it's something new, and we don't see enough of that.



# LEGEND OF KAY

Publisher : **Capcom**  
Developer : **Neon Studios**  
Release Date : **Fall 2005**  
Genre(s) : **Action**  
Category : **3D Platforming**  
# of players : **1**

Preview by **Racewing**

## KAY WAS JUST YOUR AVERAGE EVERYDAY MARTIAL ARTS STUDENT...

# CAT

That is, until the Gorilla Army and hordes of opportunistic rats showed up on the otherwise peaceful island of Yenching, and completely took it over. Kay, mind you, isn't in favor of any of this. With only the sword in his hand and his master's training to go on, he sets forth to defeat the armies and save his home.

To do so, he'll have to undergo intense hop-and-bop action, while slicing through foes with his sword, along with other weapons such as giant hammers and wearable claws, and smashing enemies with kung-fu combination attacks. Kay will have transportation in the form of animals such as dragons and boars, and will, of course, have to solve puzzles in addition to beating foes silly and fighting massive bosses.

Kay packs just enough twists to make many parts of the old platforming formula new again, and also sports the best-designed mascot that I've seen in years. (Really, where was this guy when we had to deal with the likes of Bubsy and Aero the Acrobat?) Hopefully the entirety of Kay's game will be as cool as he himself is. We'll find out this winter when it comes to the PS2.



Publisher : **NIS America**  
Developer : **Idea Factory**  
Release Date : **Spring 2006**  
Genre(s) : **Strategy RPG**  
Category : **Kingdom Builder**  
# of players : **1**

Preview by **Wanderer**

You've developed characters, facilities, vehicles, and armies in strategy RPGs before, but I can't think of one offhand that lets you develop your own kingdom.

*Generation of Chaos* is set in a world at war. To end the fighting, Allen of Zodia sets out to unify the world under his rule. When he--and thus you--begin, his kingdom's small and weak, but as you go, you can conquer neighboring nations and slowly solidify your base of power.

In times of relative peace, you can improve your lands' economy, military strength, or fortification by sending commanders there. You have to be careful to avoid spreading your forces too thin, however, as your commanders also carry out your orders on the battlefield. Each commander can build up and release super moves to destroy enemy troops, and you can further weaken your opponents by means of espionage.

NIS America's promising that *Generation of Chaos* will provide huge thirty-on-thirty map battles, with many commanders to recruit and a long, character-driven story. So far, it sounds good to me.

## Generation of Chaos





# VIEWTIFUL JOE: RED HOT RUMBLE

**Publisher :** Capcom  
**Developer :** Capcom Production Studio 1  
**Release Date :** November 2005

**Genre(s) :** Fighting  
**Category :** 2D, Multiplayer Mayhem  
**# of players :** 1 - 4

Preview by Shoegazer

Imagine that Hollywood was looking to do a remake of the movie *Krull*, and the only way to cast the role of Prince Colwyn was to schedule a no-holds-barred slugfest between Brad Pitt, Tom Cruise, Orlando Bloom and Mark Ruffalo. That is the predicament our hero Joe finds himself in with *Viewtiful Joe: Red Hot Rumble*.

Captain Blue is looking to fill the leading role in his newest film, and everyone wants a piece of the action. Actors square off in a battle royal audition where, through a series of intense action film scenes, two to four players fight to be declared the winner. Think *Super Smash Bros. Melee* with a huge helping of Joe and a splash of weirdness. The goal of each battle is not just to put a beatdown on your opponents. You have to have the highest point total at the end of an audition if you hope to please Captain Blue.

With co-op support, interactive environments, boss fights, wacky mini-games and a huge cast of characters (both from the games and the cartoon series), look for *Red Hot Rumble* to put a fresh new spin on a stagnant genre this winter.



**Publisher :** Konami  
**Developer :** Konami  
**Release Date :** 10/4/05

**Genre(s) :** Adventure  
**Category :** Metroidvania  
**# of players :** 2

# Castlevania: Dawn of Sorrow™

Preview by Wanderer

One year after *Castlevania: Aria of Sorrow*, Soma Cruz pursues the priestess of an evil cult into her monster-infested castle. She intends to resurrect Dracula, and to do that, she'll have to kill Soma. With no other option, Soma decides to strike first.



This is *Aria of Sorrow* plus one, with a bigger castle, a ton of new enemies, and more than a hundred abilities to acquire. Soma still has the power to absorb monsters' souls, providing you with weapons, powers, and skills to help you navigate the castle's traps. Once you've beaten the game and seen all three endings, you can take on Boss Rush Mode, play through the game once again as Julius Belmont (and friends), or set up your own dungeons with Enemy Set Mode.

The big question here is the same question every new *Castlevania* game faces: "Is this going to surpass *Symphony of the Night*?" I'm not sure about that, but it definitely surpasses *Aria of Sorrow*. If you've got a Nintendo DS, you should be looking forward to this game. If you don't, and you're a *Castlevania* fan, you should be getting one to play this game.





# TOTAL OVERDOSE™

**Publisher :** SCI  
**Developer :** Deadline  
**Release Date :** 11/14/2005  
**Genre(s) :** Action  
**Category :** Comedy, Sandbox  
**# of players :** 1

Preview by Wanderer

I came out of E3 raving about Deadline's *Total Overdose*. At the time, I thought it was a selfconsciously cinematic shooter, like *Max Payne* or *Dead to Rights*, except *Total Overdose* is deliberately funny. As it turns out, that's only half the game.

*Total Overdose* is set in the Mexican city of Los Toros, a hotbed of drug activity. Ramiro Cruz, a convict masquerading as his DEA-agent twin brother, is going undercover with the cartels to learn the truth about his father's murder. This will involve '80s-action-movie-style violence.



When you're in Los Toros, you can go nuts in the time-honored sandbox manner, stealing cars, attacking criminals, or searching for bonuses. In story missions, you'll take out enemy gunmen with slow-motion shootdodges and vehicular manslaughter, all to a unique soundtrack of Mexican hip-hop. By stringing together combos of creative kills, you'll earn points towards improving Ramiro's skills, so it's in your best interests to make this messy. Go for the headshot, jump from a moving car, run guys over with a tractor, and blow everything up.



**Publisher :** Eidos Interactive  
**Developer :** Avalanche Software  
**Release Date :** 10/25/05  
**Genre(s) :** 3PS  
**Category :** Gangland  
**# of players :** 1-16

Preview by 4thletter

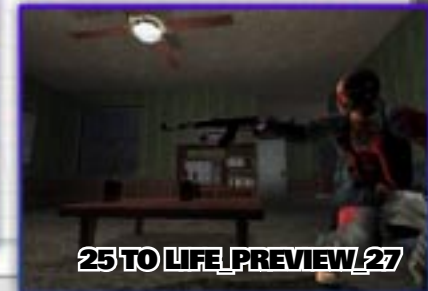
Anybody remember playing cops and robbers as kids? Get ready to take it to the big leagues.

*25 to Life* isn't all cop-killing and gang-banging, despite what you may have heard on CNN. It's going to bring us an all-out single player mode, where you get the perspectives of both the cops and the gangsters, and a robust online multiplayer mode. When I say robust, I mean *robust*. Think 16 players, customizable characters, both lethal and non-lethal weapons, voice chat via the headset, and unlockable gear to show off.

Take your game online and pick sides. Do you feel the need to play the role of the police and capture crooks, or do you want to walk on the wild side? Each side has different bonuses and drawbacks. Cops are better trained, so they have better aim, but the gangsters are coming to the party with fully automatic heavy weaponry.

Add in a hip-hop soundtrack that features KRS-One, Ghostface Killah, and Gangstarr, and you've got the makings of a hit game on your hands.

# 25 TO LIFE





## BATTLE RACING IGNITED **BURNOUT** REVENGE

**Publisher :** Electronic Arts  
**Developer :** Criterion Games  
**Release Date :** 9/13/05

**Genre(s) :** Racing  
**Category :** Battle Racer  
**# of players :** 1-6 (Online)

Preview by **Sardus**

The *Burnout* series has gone through quite the evolution since its initial 2002 release. What started as a fairly typical racing game eventually became the addictive crashfest of *Burnout 3: Takedown*. With *Revenge*, developer Criterion Games promises to refine its destruction-based racing formula even further with all-new features, along with a host of improvements to familiar gameplay modes.

As the title indicates, the gameplay focus is on exacting vengeance upon one's opponents. Tracks are now designed to offer more chances at taking down rival drivers, with branching pathways and vehicle-launching ramps adding to the carnage. Ramming into nonrival traffic has also become a crucial gameplay element; any vehicle in your path can be sent flying into a competing racer — instant rival takedown.

Crash mode has also been redesigned to offer a departure from last year's version, which placed more of an emphasis on icon collection than actual crashing. The game type now features multiple start points and locations more conducive to vehicular destruction, which will hopefully recreate the fun and challenge found in *Burnout 2's* Crash mode.

No word yet on whether the game will retain *Burnout 3's* awesomely bad emopunk soundtrack, though.



**Publisher :** Atlus USA  
**Developer :** Atlus R&D 1  
**Release Date :** 9/13/05

**Genre(s) :** RPG  
**Category :** Traditional  
**# of players :** 1

Preview by **Hitoshura**

"Are you ready for the real world?" Those final words at the end of this year's *Digital Devil Saga* set the stage for this fall's continuation of the story, in *Digital Devil Saga 2*.

After the events of *DDS*, Serph, Gale, and Argilla find themselves in an underground town. Many people are forced to live here because the Black Sun on the surface turns everyone, except for demons, to stone. With no other sources of food, the mysterious Karma Society is hunting the people down. With such a hellish setting, expect grittier cutscenes, and more mature subject matter that isn't just there for shock value.

A few new features have been added to *DDS2*, such as customizable Karma Rings that you equip like armor, a redesigned Mantra grid, and at least one new playable character. You can use your save data from *DDS* in *DDS2*. Depending on what choices you made for Serph in the first game, you can unlock a variety of secrets in the second.

*DDS2* seems to have improved upon the standard set by *DDS*, and looks to be one of this year's best RPGs.



It's okay. I didn't either, at your age.



# X-MEN LEGENDS II

RISE OF APOCALYPSE II

**Publisher :** Activision  
**Developer :** Raven Software  
**Release Date :** 9/20/05  
**Genre(s) :** Action/Adventure, RPG  
**Category :** Comic  
**# of players :** 1-4

Preview by **KouAidou**

After years of disappointment for fans of the franchise, last year's *X-Men Legends* finally got it right. *X-Men Legends II: Rise of Apocalypse* look poised to offer even more of the great hack-and-slash (and crush, and fry, and electrocute) action that the first game provided, now with an even bigger cast of playable mutants.

This time around, Professor Xavier's X-Men must join forces with the Brotherhood of Mutants to stop the invasion of *über*-mutant Apocalypse. This means controlling long-time villainous favorites, including the man himself, Magneto. You'll also get to play around with heroes that weren't available in the first game, such as Bishop, Sunfire, and Blink.

The core gameplay is intact, with a few minor tweaks. The auto-map is more user-friendly, and players can now choose to have their stat points and equipment automatically distributed on the fly; you no longer have to stop the action to level up. You'll also have a variety of skins available from the start of the game, allowing you to change the costume of any X-Man on your team to one of a number of classic designs.

Of course, the most exciting feature will be the addition of online play, which promises to bring the tremendously fun multiplayer mode with it.



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# TREASURE

VIDEO GAMES

## WELCOME BACK TO GUNSTAR

Story by Lynxara

Most big names in video game software -- like Konami, Capcom, or Tecmo -- got their reputation from publishing lots of games made by lots of people. Treasure is the opposite sort of company; it is a developer that rarely publishes its own work. Usually it develops games for other publishers, producing a mere handful of titles each year.

Lately, Treasure's been developing games for the oft-neglected GBA, a near-perfect platform for hosting the 2D action titles at which Treasure excels. Its next big project is *Gunstar Super Heroes*, a direct sequel to its very first title. This title has immediately garnered the kind of hype and fan anticipation that 2D games, and especially GBA games, just aren't supposed to. Understanding why involves taking a step back to the early '90s.

## GUNSTAR HEROES

Treasure spun off from Konami in 1992, founded by a programmer named Masato Maegawa. After what Maegawa describes as an "unscheduled visit" with Sega executives, he asked the company's president to support Treasure's efforts by publishing its titles. The meetings were a success, and Maegawa quickly gathered up some other like-minded programmers from the Konami Tokyo division to get started on Treasure's first title.



What Maegawa's new company began work on turned out to be something special. *Gunstar Heroes* was in theory a simple 2D action game about gun-slinging heroes fighting

alien invaders. What was unusual about it was the sheer unrelenting action that the title delivered. The player and a buddy picked up the roles of the young cowboys, then filled the screen with projectiles as they blasted their way through a gauntlet of crowded stages and unbelievably gigantic bosses. Every *Gunstar Heroes* level was frantic,



introducing new challenges as soon as players had learned to cope with the last obstacle. The cooperative play, letting you share the experience with a friend, made it even better.

### Gunstar Heroes

was a hit when it came out, both in terms of sales and playground buzz. It managed that perfect alchemy of impressive graphics and accessible gameplay that distinguishes hit video games to this day. Since *Gunstar Heroes* was also a system exclusive, it quickly became identified with the Genesis and cited as one of the best reasons to go buy one.



Treasure attempted to follow up the success of *Gunstar Heroes* with its second major title, 1994's *Dynamite Headdy*. While *Gunstar Heroes* was an answer to the genre that produced titles like *Contra* and *Metal Slug*, *Dynamite Headdy* was Treasure's spin on the just-as-prolific 2D "mascot" platformer. Although it followed the basic platformer formula, it did so using some truly bizarre power-ups and unusually open-ended level design. Sega did its best to sell the game to retailers, claiming that *Headdy* could become the next Sonic the Hedgehog. Despite Sega's aggressive advertising and decent sales, *Dynamite Headdy* failed to repeat the intensity of *Gunstar Heroes's* success.

## SATURN TREASURES

Sega was quick to push Treasure into developing for its next-gen Saturn platform. Given the Saturn's enormous 2D processing power, the hardware seemed perfectly suited toward making Treasure's games bigger and better. Unfortunately, the Saturn came out just before the mainstream market's tastes shifted overwhelmingly towards 3D graphics and gameplay. While Treasure would indeed produce some of its greatest titles on the Saturn, the marketplace was largely indifferent to most of them. The games have since faded into relative

obscurity, and command high prices from collectors.

*Guardian Heroes* debuted on the Saturn in 1996 to so much critical acclaim that it became an instant classic. It seamlessly blended a *Final Fight*-style beat 'em up with the frenetic side-scrolling action of *Gunstar Heroes*. On top of that, Treasure added in some RPG-like mechanics like leveling and money acquisition to give the game unprecedented depth. The graphics were, right out of the gate, a tantalizing glimpse at the arcade-perfect 2D that the Saturn could easily deliver.

Unfortunately, *Guardian Heroes's* release was poorly timed. The market had just developed an infatuation with the crude polygons of early 3D games, and the beat-'em-up genre was increasingly viewed as a poor genre. Sales were poor, especially for a game that had received such positive reviews, and the partnership between Sega and Treasure came to an end. Copies of *Guardian Heroes* are now in extremely short supply. Buyers interested in snagging a copy on the secondhand market can expect to pay upwards of \$100 for an intact disc and packaging.

The next publisher Treasure worked with was ESP Software, to release *Silhouette Mirage*. Much like *Guardian Heroes* it was a great game that came out on the wrong system at the wrong time. *Silhouette Mirage* was a visually stunning 2D platformer that entered the marketplace a year after *Super Mario 64* had moved the genre into 3D. Treasure's final Saturn release through ESP Software didn't even merit a North American version.



In later years this final game, a 2D shooter called *Radiant Silvergun*, would be considered one of the defining Treasure titles and a new beginning for the shooter genre (see sidebar). However, at the time of its release, it went largely unnoticed. Shooters, like beat-'em-ups, had fallen out of favor with the mainstream.



## HIDDEN TREASURES

The years between the demise of the Saturn and the rise of the GBA would be rocky ones for Treasure. Although it kept developing titles at a steady pace, bad luck (or, in the case of the brawler *Rakugaki Showtime*, a lawsuit) kept its best games off of successful platforms and away from North American audiences. The games that did see a US release were among the most mediocre.



The best domestic Treasure title to emerge from this period was unquestionably *Bangai-O*, for the ill-fated Sega Dreamcast. Despite little marketing from publisher Conspiracy, *Bangai-O* managed to become a cult hit thanks to word of mouth and rave reviews from internet sources. Conspiracy published one more Treasure title for the North American market, a truly bizarre game called *Stretch Panic* that failed to duplicate *Bangai-O's* cult success. The real turning point for the company came in 2003 with the releases of *Ikaruga* and *Wario World* for the GameCube.

Odds are you're familiar with *Ikaruga*. It's a shooter that uses rendered 3D graphics but moves them in a 2D plane. Like a lot of shooters, it was originally released on the Dreamcast in Japan, and quickly picked up a vocal import following that loved the unusual "bullet absorption" gameplay and rigorous difficulty level. The sudden death of the Dreamcast in North America kept that version from seeing localization, but Atari picked up the GameCube port. Game-starved GCN owners and Treasure fans alike gave the game quite a warm reception.

ENCOUNTERED A PAGE END  
UNDO  
BE ATTITUDE FOR GAINS  
1: BE PAGE TURNING  
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3: BE PAGE TURNING

*Wario World* was intended to be the first Wario platformer and Treasure's big entry into the world of 3D gameplay, but ended up being panned by reviewers and gamers alike. The title was only four levels long, and painfully easy to boot. Compared to the relative success of *Ikaruga* on the GameCube, *Wario World's* failure made a powerful statement about Treasure's destiny as a developer. It meant that a significant portion of the gaming market was ready to accept 2D gameplay again.



For Treasure, 2004 became a banner year. All of its offerings were published on major platforms and



showcased 2D gameplay, and all were met with mainstream success. Treasure's comeback was all the sweeter for the critical acclaim heaped on two of its 2004 games, *Astro Boy: Omega Factor* and *Gradius V*. *Astro*

*Boy* inspired loving comparisons to the side-scrolling greatness of *Gunstar Heroes*, while *Gradius V* finally let Treasure immediately release one of its masterpiece 2D shooters to the North American market. While reviewers still felt the need to apologize for the 2D gameplay, it was undeniably fun. The market was shifting once again, but this time in Treasure's favor.

## SUPER HEROES

If *Gunstar Heroes* was a hit because it felt inventive and familiar all at once, then *Gunstar Super Heroes* inherited all of its daddy's good genes. It could, in fact, be called the Pieta of Treasure's 2D renaissance. Sprite animations throughout the game are smooth and push the limits of the GBA screen's resolution. Enemies spawn in thick and endless hordes. When you shoot them down, explosions pepper the screen and can make it difficult to see what your other foes are doing. There's even some limited voice-acting, for the brief and distinctly *Mega Man X*-style story sequences. Modern gamers who've never heard of or cared about the original *Gunstar Heroes* will have no problems playing this one, since the premise is simple and fully explained



A game session begins with the player selecting one of the two Gunstar Super Heroes for their session, either fiery

Red or snarky Blue. There's no real gameplay difference between them, but they exchange different dialogue sequences with the bosses. In standard gameplay levels, your Super Hero can jump with the A button, swat at enemies with a sword when you tap the B button, or you can hold down B to make him fire projectiles out of his gun in a steady stream. Tapping the left trigger button lets you select from one of three kinds of shots: a standard laser, a green beam that turns at ninety degree angles upon impact, and slow red projectiles that explode in wide-radius bursts.

Addressing the important technical issue of making its games work on a portable without the projectiles and enemy hordes creating technical problems is one of Treasure's primary goals with the development of *Gunstar Super Heroes*.

"We decided to place emphasis and priority on creating gorgeous and dynamic effects without processing failures, and on illustrating huge bosses that fill the entire screen without glitches or lags," stated Maegawa. "One [effect] that we are especially proud of is the seven-joint boss, Seven Force, which has new transformations and movements."

## GENESIS



This is an understatement. The *Gunstar Super Heroes* version of Seven Force has seven distinct forms that the game will cycle through randomly during the fight. Some of the transformations will cause immediate changes to the control scheme as you fight them, and none of them use remotely similar behaviors. It's easily one of the greatest pattern bosses ever to grace a game.

Many other locales from the original *Gunstar Heroes* re-appear in Super Heroes with new 32-bit facelifts, including a brutal new Dice Palace and a pair of unnamed "shooting and air stages." Maegawa also promises the addition of entirely new levels that play to the GBA's hardware strengths, such as a 3D level, a revolving level, and a level viewed from overhead.

The revolving levels are mind-blowing. The first variety of them is a shooting level where the enemies spiral up at you from the background. Your Super Hero is standing on the roof of a vehicle and can shoot left, right, up, or diagonally. However, shots will only hit enemies once they've traveled out of the background and into the same horizontal plane that your Super Hero occupies. The challenge of the level is to move your Gunstar's ship relative to the background enemies by tapping left or right on the D-Pad. If you position the ship successfully, enemies won't collide with you when they emerge into the forward plane, and then you can shoot them down.

## RADIANT SILVERGUN

The fact that you can't play this game without dropping a lot of money (and we mean a lot, probably over \$150) on a rare import is a shame, because it really is amazingly good.

*Silvergun's* chain combo system is a demanding test of a player's reflexes, and no other shooter made since has implemented anything quite like it. Fans have been crying out for a port to a modern system for years, and the recent GameCube port of *Ikaruga* has only intensified the demand. Unfortunately, the word from senior localization editor Jason Kuo is that there are no plans in the works for a modern-console port of *Radiant Silvergun*.



A single stage uses the second form of revolving scroll, but is one of the most memorable in a game loaded with outstanding levels. Your Super Hero has to rescue sixteen baby chicks from a labyrinth that's infested with weird metallic bugs and flame-spewing serpentine creatures. If you're hit, you'll lose a little health and all the baby chicks you've collected will scatter. You can rack up the most points by collecting all sixteen chicks before running to the exit, but you can't kill off all the enemies in the maze. Some of them you simply have to find a way to dodge, and the way the maze scrolls around you as you move makes doing this a real test of your reflexes.

## GAMEBOY ADVANCE



If Maegawa's goals for *Gunstar Super Heroes* were to avoid technical problems, he's definitely succeeded. The preview build we played was flawless. Not even the thickest fields of projectiles or most complex boss sprites caused display problems. With these technical hurdles conquered, who knows what Treasure might be able to do with the GBA or the similar DS in the future.

## BURIED TREASURE

Perhaps the biggest challenge that *Gunstar Super Heroes* has to overcome is marketing. Despite being the most ubiquitous gaming platform in the world, the gaming press - and most gamers - don't seem to take the Game Boy Advance seriously. It's usually regarded as a dumping ground for kiddie schlock and licensed shovelware.

Jason Kuo, senior localization editor, is quick to admit that this perception is one of the foremost challenges that Sega anticipates in publishing the game. "Marketing a GBA game in the current market can be tough. For the most part, recognizable licensed GBA titles sell well. Sadly, most titles that offer great gameplay, but have no recognizable license

rarely do anything more than mediocre numbers compared to a GBA title with a recognizable license and poor gameplay."

"However," Kuo adds, "*Gunstar Super Heroes* has received accolades from hardcore gamers, and so we hope for its success." Certainly, the game deserves to be a success. It's simply good, solid gameplay, and there's not too many GBA titles you can say that about. We look forward to October 25th, the game's release date.



## PARTING SHOTS

### INTERVIEW WITH TREASURE PRESIDENT MASATO MAEGAWA

HGM: Treasure's level designs are consistently praised by fans, and rightly so. What do you think is important when you design a game level?

Maegawa: What is most important is creative thinking. Variation of objects, elements, and environments throughout each stage is inspirational towards development.



HGM: Treasure's been doing a lot of development for the GBA lately. Is there any particular reason why?

Maegawa: The GBA as a platform is better suited to develop 2D games on. In the case of home consoles, we are often asked by a publisher to develop in 3D, which makes it pretty difficult to bring 2D game development to life. We are attracted by the mobility aspect of handhelds because you can take the game with you anywhere you go.

HGM: Treasure games have a reputation for being unusually challenging. Do you think this makes the games more fun?

Maegawa: Undoubtedly, a challenging game draws out the appeal of the game by enabling gamers to recognize the unique gameplay system and to maximize the hardware's specs and functions. This time, we attempted something new that has not been done on other GBA titles. We figured out how to execute a smooth, 3D scrolling by overlapping two semi-transparent rotating planes on top of each other and by materializing the pseudo-3D planes by moving pixels with the four-fold scrolling.

HGM: So what's next for Treasure? Any plans to develop for the next-gen handhelds (DS, PSP) or consoles (Revolution, PS3, Xbox 360)?

Maegawa: We have plans to develop on some of those consoles.

HGM: What video games do you guys play? Any favorites or titles you draw inspiration from?

Maegawa: I would like to refrain from mentioning specific titles, but I enjoy mainly action titles on home consoles. Also, I play largely MMORPGs on the PC. I often play games that are popular regardless of their genres.

# ATARI FLASHBACK 2.0

by Syriel



With the next generation of console hardware right around the corner, a lot of the hype we've been hearing about upcoming games has focused heavily on the visuals. From Sony's scripted *Killzone* demo to the stunning graphics of Epic's *Gears of War*, both Microsoft and Sony have been chanting the mantra of visual supremacy.

As any hardcore gamer knows, though, graphics in and of themselves don't make a game fun. You can render something with millions of polygons, polish it off with high-resolution textures, and spice it up with plenty of lighting tricks, but if the shiny object on screen isn't any fun to move around, then all is for naught. After all, when it comes right down to it, every video game is little more than pushing pixels around on the screen.

Today, it takes a large team of programmers with budgets of millions of dollars to make those pixels move, but back in the early days of the industry it wasn't unusual for a "team" to consist of two or three programmers, with some games requiring only one. Welcome to the dawn of the video game era.

The Atari may not have been the first console on the market (both the Magnavox Odyssey and the Fairchild beat it home), but it was undoubtedly the most successful, with young Baby Boomers wasting countless hours in front of the Atari 2600. Yes, the games were simple and they often looked nothing like their arcade counterparts, but they were fun and in the end that was all that mattered.

Facing competition from the technically superior Mattel Intellivision system, Atari eventually released upgraded consoles (even pioneering backwards compatibility years before Sony claimed to be the "first" to do it), but none of the later iterations were able to penetrate popular culture to the same degree as the original.

More than twenty-five years after the "heavy sixer" (so named due to its noticeable weight and six configuration buttons) debuted, the Atari 2600 is far from a dead system. A quick scan of eBay turns up hundreds of auctions for the common titles, and the rarer gems trade for tidy sums in the collector's market. Prototype games are still being discovered -- sometimes after being buried in the back of someone's closet for years -- while homebrew programmers have mastered the system and are busy creating new software for it. Yes, you heard right; new software is still being released for the Atari 2600.

If you're into classic gaming, tracking down a system is fairly trivial, but for the rest of us it can be something of a chore. How do you know that system you just picked up at a garage sale actually works? Where do you buy a replacement joystick? Most importantly, how do you connect that old RF switch to your brand spanking new HDTV?

Atari took a stab at solving these problems with last year's release of the Atari Flashback system. Modeled after the Atari 7800, it was an impressive effort, selling over half a million units, but suffered from a few key flaws such as uncomfortable joystick controllers and inaccurate emulation. The core of last year's Atari Flashback wasn't actually an Atari. Instead, it was an "NES-on-a-chip," and the games were recreations rather than the original code. As a result they played decently enough, but didn't quite capture the magic of the real thing. For the Atari Flashback 2.0, however, Atari decided that "good enough" wasn't acceptable.

The Atari Flashback 2.0 is a brand new machine, designed from the ground up. It consists of a complete "2600-on-a-chip," a 40-games-in-one ROM and a little circuitry to hold it all together. Amazingly light, the case draws its inspiration from two separate 2600 models, the 1978 and 1980 releases. The small switches on the front have been replaced with easy-to-press buttons, but the grooved surface and the faux woodgrain are completely intact.

Even the box evokes a bit of nostalgia, as it is plastered with goofy looking pictures of people having "fun."

The original Atari 2600 controllers have been recreated and connect to the back of the unit via standard plugs. Though the joysticks still feature the angular contours of yore, the internals have been updated allowing for a slightly more comfortable experience. Because they are detachable, you can use the new controllers on an original Atari 2600 as well as use any existing peripherals with the Atari Flashback 2.0. Nice.

Topping the list of hardware innovations, though, is the standard A/V cable on the back of the system. Unlike the Atari 2600, which only offered an RF connection, the Atari Flashback 2.0 plugs right into your TV via the composite video connector. The resulting picture quality is surprisingly good, especially for those of you who remember playing though a snowy picture thanks to interference on channel 3 or 4. Our only complaint with the setup is the fact that the A/V cable is permanently connected to the console.

After we connected everything, it was time to power up the system. Unlike current generation consoles, which have to advertise their presence with a lengthy boot sequence, the Atari Flashback 2.0 immediately presents you with a custom boot menu offering four choices: Adventure Territory, Arcade Favorites, Space Station and Skill and Action Zone. Choose a category to bring up a list of available games and select the one you wish to play. To start a new game, simply power cycle the system.

What makes the game selection on the Atari Flashback 2.0 stand out is its variety. Big name titles such as *Pitfall!*, *River Raid* and *Adventure* all make an appearance, alongside arcade classics

## The Ultimate Hardware Hacker

So, you think you're good at hardware hacking? Done a little case modding in your time? Chances are good that Ben Heckendorn has you beat when it comes to hacking console systems. The creator of the original portable Atari 2600, Heckendorn has made a hobby out of converting video game consoles into portable variants. If you have the time, check out his site at [www.benheck.com](http://www.benheck.com). Amongst his many creations is a PlayStation Portable fashioned out of a PSone, and dubbed the PSP long before Sony decided to enter the handheld market.

## Games, Games, Games!

YOU'LL FIND THE FOLLOWING TITLES PACKED INTO EVERY ATARI FLASHBACK 2.0 SYSTEM.

### Adventure Territory includes:

- Adventure* (1 player)
- Adventure II* (1 player)
- Haunted House* (1 player)
- Return To Haunted House* (1 player)
- SecretQuest* (1 player)
- Wizard* (1 or 2 players)

### Arcade Favorites includes:

- Arcade Asteroids* (1 or 2 players)
- Arcade Pong* (1 or 2 players)
- Asteroids Deluxe* (1 or 2 players)
- Battlezone* (1 player)
- Centipede* (1 or 2 players)
- Lunar Lander* (1 player)
- Millipede* (1 player)
- Missile Command* (1 or 2 players)
- Space Duel* (1 or 2 players)

### Space Station includes:

- Caverns of Mars* (1 or 2 players)
- Quadrun* (1 player)
- Saboteur* (1 player)
- Space War* (1 or 2 players)
- Yars' Revenge* (1 or 2 players)
- Yars' Return* (1 or 2 players)

### Skill and Action Zone includes:

- 3D Tic-Tac-Toe* (1 or 2 players)
- Aquaventure* (1 player)
- Atari Climber* (1 player)
- Combat* (2 players)
- Combat 2* (2 players)
- Dodge'em* (1 or 2 players)
- Fatal Run* (1 or 2 players)
- Frog Pond* (2 players)
- Hangman* (1 or 2 players)
- Human Cannonball* (1 or 2 players)
- Maze Craze* (1 or 2 players)
- Off The Wall* (1 or 2 players)
- Outlaw* (1 or 2 players)
- Pitfall!* (1 player)
- Radar Lock* (1 or 2 players)
- River Raid* (1 or 2 players)
- Save Mary* (1 player)
- Video Checkers* (1 player)
- Video Chess* (1 player)

like *Asteroids* and competitive two player games like *Combat*. Keen eyes will also notice a number of previously unreleased prototype and brand new homebrew games, giving even the most avid Atari fan something new to play.

Despite their relative simplicity, most gamers will find that the included games are quite enjoyable. As one of the earliest shoot-em-ups to hit the home console, *River Raid* may not be able to compete with the likes of *Ikaruga*, but it features a surprising amount of depth. Players will have to control their speed as well as keep an eye on their fuel level, as they maneuver through enemy territory, shooting down ships, planes and bridges all while avoiding incoming fire.

*Save Mary* has you mastering the art of block stacking in order to rescue your beloved girlfriend from the fast rising waters of a broken dam, while *Video Checkers* will challenge your strategic ability. The Atari can be a surprisingly astute opponent, as we quickly found out.

As a solid collection of Atari 2600 games, the Atari Flashback 2.0 is well worth the cost. For the budding hardware hacker and hardcore fan, the Atari Flashback 2.0 gets even better. Since the new system uses miniaturized versions of the original hardware, it's technically capable of running any original Atari 2600 software. The only thing standing in your way is the lack of a cartridge port, but as you'll soon find out, this is only a minor obstacle.

Atari certainly had the hardcore fans in mind when designing the Atari Flashback 2.0 as the internal connections are well documented; it's relatively easy to connect a real cartridge port to the system. You'll have to void your warranty and do a little soldering, but when you're done you will be able to run nearly any game. The truly adventurous (we're talking to you, Ben Heckendorn) will also love the small size of

the system board, making it ideal for incorporation into a custom design.

No matter if you're looking to relive your youth or just satiate a little retro fever, it's hard to go wrong with the Atari Flashback 2.0. Well-constructed and packed with an enviable collection of titles, it puts other plug-and-play games to shame. Now, if only someone would do an Intellivision Flashback console, we'd be in heaven. No matter how good it is, emulation cannot compare to the "real thing."

FINAL SCORE:  
**5 of 5**

## Homebrew Atari Spotlight 2600 Homebrew

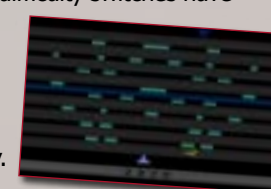
by Melf

Gamers in the know are well aware that the discontinuation of a console doesn't necessarily mean that it must be confined to the dank, dark depths of basements and closets. The rise in interest in retro gaming has led to a surge in the number of homebrew games being released. Long after they were put out to pasture, many consoles like the Atari 2600, Atari 5200, Colecovision, Intellivision, and even the Dreamcast have come back to enjoy new titles that were either left incomplete when the manufacturer moved on, or even entirely new games from up-and-coming developers who wish to share their love—and talent—with others.

The inclusion of several homebrew and unreleased prototype games within the Flashback 2.0, while very cool, is merely the tip of the iceberg. There's just so much more neat stuff out there that we couldn't resist showing off a few of the ones that really grabbed our attention. Compared to other consoles, the Atari 2600 has been receiving the lion's share of homebrew games over the last couple of years, with a slew of titles appearing at trade shows and on retro store sites. Many even sport authentic cartridges (with label), boxes, and manual, making them instant collector's items. Literally dozens of titles have been released since Ed Federmyer first introduced us to his SoundX utility cartridge in 1994, and the homebrew scene shows no sign of slowing down. Now is a great time to get into the 2600, and the support offered by such sites as Atari Age ([www.atariage.com](http://www.atariage.com)) make the it one of the more interesting consoles to collect for. Some of these games are better than others, but a few manage to stand out among the crowd. Here are a few of the homebrew games that we feel are worth tracking down.

**BACKFIRE** (By Chad Lare)  
My first impression of *Backfire* was that it resembled *Atlantis* in style. It is, however, much more complicated, and the spike in difficulty can sometimes catch you off guard. *Backfire's* challenge level is so high that the standard difficulty switches have no effect! With your guns anchored at the top and bottom of the screen, you must maneuver either left or right to destroy the planes that are passing by. The closer to the middle they are, the more points you earn. As you take them out, the screen changes, and green defectors obstruct much of your firing area. Hit them and your shots bounce right back at you. You must also take care not to shoot your own gun! UFOs offer points and extra lives, and failing to shoot them down will make the stage almost impossible.

(continued on page 39)



## Curt Vendel (Atari Flashback Lead Engineer)

Interview by Melf

Curt Vendel, the lead engineer and project manager for the Flashback line of consoles, sheds some light on the project and how it's developed.

**HGM:** The first Flashback console sold well enough (over 500,000 units), but there was a general feeling among fans that something was missing. How soon after it shipped did the decision to revise it come about?

**CV:** Atari requested engineering meetings in early Dec '04 to receive product specifications for the next console designs.

**HGM:** Were there any ideas that didn't make it into the final 2.0 design?

**CV:** USB to Host connectivity and Media slot for multi-game paks.

**HGM:** The new unit looks pretty slick, even sporting a 2600-style box. Were you trying to appeal to the entire spectrum of Atari fans, beyond just those who originally enjoyed the 2600 during its heyday?

**CV:** The Flashback 2 is a replica 2600 system with updated buttons replacing the old '70s stereo toggle switches. The idea was to create a modern rendition of a videogaming icon console and joysticks.

**HGM:** The RCA output is very nice, considering that the 2600 was originally played in snowy RF. Was it ever a consideration to include more advanced connections, like S-video, for example?

**CV:** The development hardware could actually produce VGA, [but] this was not incorporated into the final silicon. Only composite output [was].

**HGM:** Probably the biggest difference between the 2.0 and the original Flashback is that the new unit uses an actual 2600 chip, as opposed to simply emulating the hardware. Were there ever any plans for the first unit to use the chip, or was the decision made for the revision only?

**CV:** Originally in May of 2004, Atari contacted my engineering firm to produce their first console. After two weeks, we submitted a timeline of four months to development and six months to production. Unfortunately, that timeline would not put them into the holiday '04 sales season, so it was either [we] get something out the door with this opportunity, or Atari may not be willing to reconsider this kind of hardware project again in the future. Atari up until that point had been strictly a software and licensing company; this would be their first in-house hardware product, so it was a big gamble. So we produced on an off-the-shelf chip platform and re-wrote twenty games and [the] menu in ten weeks.

**HGM:** The first Flashback unit had a mixture of 2600 and 7800 games. Why the decision to go 2600-only this time? Any chance of a 5200 unit?

**CV:** Since Flashback 2 is a modern rendition of the 2600, a 2600-specific chip was developed. As for the future, we already have a new chip about 85% laid out, and if Flashback 2 does as well as expected, the next jump from version 2 to version 3 (if it is called that) will be even bigger than the jump from version 1 to version 2.

**HGM:** Compatibility with authentic 2600 peripherals goes a long way towards making the experience as authentic as possible,

and the Flashback 2.0 unit comes with two new authentic joysticks. How improved are they over the original 2600 sticks?

**CV:** Utilizing gold contact points and conductive rubber pads greatly improves the reliability. The sticks themselves have been completely redesigned with solid plastic shafts that screw into a new 8-way base plate with rubber center ring. The old hollow shaft covered in rubber design had major problems. The new CX-40B's have improved on much of the original CX-40's design in durability and reliability while keeping the feel of the joysticks very close to the originals.

**HGM:** I love the fact that there are seven unreleased games included, and seven which are entirely new. I'm sure fans are wondering where they came from. Is this all there is, or are there more 2600 games waiting for their chance to shine someday?

**CV:** To appeal to a broad spectrum of gamers, including hardcore 2600 fans, the decision was made to look at the 2600 library and see what games had never been ported to the 2600, look at some of the more famous games in the 2600 library, and create sequels. There are a couple of hidden games in the console as well. Ideas are already on the drawing board for the next chipset to bring even more games to that platform that had never been done as well, so there is a lot of creative thinking and coding going on at Atari.

**HGM:** Atari seems to really want to establish a relationship with the homebrew community, hence the four homebrew games included. How were the games chosen?

**CV:** After reviewing many of the homebrews, a list and description of games were presented to Atari management in two meetings. Several games were chosen and the homebrew authors [were] contacted to see about making Atari-specific versions of their games for Atari and its Flashback 2 console.

**HGM:** Are there any plans for a version 3.0?

**CV:** [It's] already on the drawing boards and will go into more formal discussions after FB2's launch.

**HGM:** Two games, *River Raid* and *Pitfall*, were licensed from Activision. Could this mean future projects may see more third party games included?

**CV:** Possibilities are always open. Hopefully other companies that had some shining star translations done on Atari hardware will want to consider having their games licensed on future products through Atari.

## Aaron Curtis (Fall Down Programmer)

Interview by Melf

**HGM:** How did the decision to port *Fall Down* to the 2600 come about?

**AC:** I just sort of stumbled across the Atari homebrew scene back in 2004 one day while I was looking for a replacement joystick. There was really a wealth of information easily available, with tutorials, detailed hardware guides, and the like (the community deserves a lot of credit for all this). So anyway, having a good bit of experience with assembly programming already, I was like "Hey, I should do this."

As for *Fall Down*, I've always thought of it as a good project to

try when first learning a system (I've done several versions). Also, out of the ideas I had, it was the one that fit best within the Atari's limitations; it didn't need much memory, it only uses two sprites, it scrolls vertically (one of the few things that works well on the system), etc.

**HGM:** How long did the project take you?

**AC:** I guess most of the coding was done over the course of about two months last year. After that it took a few more months to get the manual and label art ready (Dave Exton did these, and I have to say he did a great job). During that time I added a few extra features, like the AtariVox support.

**HGM:** The 2600 doesn't offer much memory to work with. How did you get around the limitations?

**AC:** As I mentioned earlier, it was more a matter of picking a game that I knew wasn't going to need a lot of memory. Even so, I did find myself running out fairly early on, I guess since I wasn't used to working with that little memory.

Generally you have to overlap data, i.e. have an area of memory that corresponds to several things, depending on what the game is doing. That, and you have to watch your stack usage, since it's included in the 128 bytes.

**HGM:** Was there anything you wanted to include but had to leave out?

**AC:** There are some obvious things that didn't make it for technical reasons, like multiple high scores, in-game speech via the AtariVox, or just better graphics in general.

Also, at various times, I wanted to add some different power-ups or game modes that didn't work out, but those were largely due to incompatibilities with the existing code. For example, one guy suggested a "Joust" mode where the screen scrolled the other way.

Generally though, I had enough time to fool around with the game that everything I could think of either went in or at least was attempted.

**HGM:** How has *Fall Down* been received by the retro community?

**AC:** Fairly well, I'd say. I entered an early version in the 2004 Mini-Game compo (minigamecomp.org.uk), where it was received pretty well. Also, the game has gotten a lot of praise on the AtariAge forums, where I'd been posting updates during development. Cartridges have been available from AtariAge for a couple weeks now, and from what I hear they're selling pretty well... obviously not enough to make me rich (wait, wasn't that the whole point? heh), but better than I expected.

**HGM:** Are you working on any other homebrew projects, on other consoles maybe?

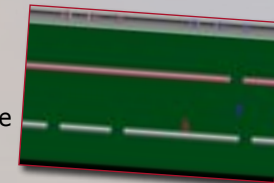
**AC:** I'll probably enter something in this year's Mini-Game compo, so yes. As for other consoles though, I only really tend to write for systems that I actually have, so that's somewhat limiting. I'm honestly not much of a collector.

## Homebrew Spotlight

(continued from page 37)

**FALL DOWN** (By Aaron Curtis)

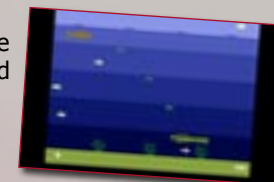
This is by far my favorite out of this list, and *Fall Down* is solid proof that you don't need millions of polygons to make an impressive game. Based on a classic TI-86 calculator game, the action revolves around the struggle between RED and BLUE to capture vertically-scrolling platforms. Beat your opponent to the nearest opening, and turn the platform to your color, gaining you a point. The more you progress, the faster the platforms scroll. There are power-ups and even speech, using Richard Hutchinson's AtariVox. Even cooler is that the AtariVox will save your high scores!



Very impressive for a homebrew title and highly addictive, *Fall Down* features multiple levels of challenge, including options to make a player invisible via color-alternating backgrounds. There's nothing but fun here, folks, and while it's leagues better with a friend, the computer AI is no push-over.

**GO FISH!** (By Bob Montgomery)

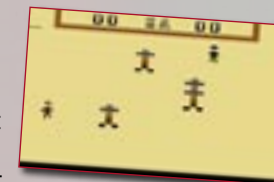
Intellivision fans will immediately see the resemblance to *Shark! Shark!* here, but please, stay for a while and see why *Go Fish!* is just so darn cool. One of the few 2600 games to sport continuous music (even at the title screen), it has you taking on the role of a wee little fish that must eat to survive. The more you eat, the bigger you get. The bigger you get, the more the shark will see you as a meal in your own right. I found it to be quite fun, swimming around, looking for lunch. It seems to be the most repetitive out of this bunch, but it's amazing what Montgomery squeezed into this tiny cart. It's an impressive feat.



*Go Fish!* also uses the AtariVox to save your high scores. There's no *Jaws* theme, though.

**GUN FIGHTER** (XYPE)

First things first: this is not *Outlaw*. One look and it becomes painfully clear that this blows the pants off of Atari's 1978 western shooter in many ways, and even makes that game obsolete. You know you're in for something special when the intro plays an 8k rendition of Johnny Cash's *Ring of Fire!* This is your standard one-on-one duel of old, and you can maneuver in eight different directions as you attempt to gun down your opponent. Shots ricochet off walls, and cacti and stampedes offer cover, but it's the challenge of gunning down your foe before you run out of ammo that makes this game so much fun. You can even get your hat shot off! All this makes for some decent strategy, and *Gun Fighter's* frantic pace is tons of fun.



**STAR FIRE** (XYPE)

George Lucas should either be flattered or calling his lawyer. *Star Fire* borrows so heavily from his famous saga that you may initially be left wondering how to react; however, once you begin playing, you really won't care. This game is fun, pure and simple, and that's what counts. Based on the 1979 arcade game, *Star Fire* injects a ton of new features for the home release. The programmers even added some cool effects, like your HUD scrambling when you take a hit, and overall, *Star Fire* actually looks pretty darn good for a 2600 game. It's colorful, well-detailed, and plays very fluidly.



Most of these games were released in limited quantities during the Classic Gaming Expo or another, similar event, which means that your best bet at attaining a copy would be to scour eBay or your local message board. Playing new, fully-packaged 2600 games on the actual console is a rare treat, and the extra effort needed to find them is a worthy investment.

**Exclusive!**

# HACKING THE ATARI FLASHBACK 2.0

by ATARI

Performing any sort of console modification is serious business. As soon as you crack the case, you're voiding your warranty and stepping into a virtual no man's land. While "modding" has typically been used as a dirty word by console manufacturers, Atari is wholeheartedly encouraging its fans to mod their Atari Flashback 2.0 consoles.

The following how-to will take you through the entire process step-by-step, showing you exactly what to cut and where to solder. If you mess up, you're on your own; neither HGM nor Atari are going to buy you a new console. If you do complete the mod however, you'll end up with an Atari Flashback 2.0 that not only plays the built-in games, but will also run all of your old cartridges. In the words of our illustrious editor-in-chief: sweet.

And now... onto the fun.

## BEFORE YOU START

Not so fast. Before you start hacking away, you'll need a few items. Collect everything on this shopping list before you start, and the project will be much easier to complete. Most items can be found at Radio Shack. The Atari cartridge connector and guide can be found at B&C Atari Sales & Service, which is located on the web at [www.myatari.com](http://www.myatari.com).

Single pull, single throw (SPST) toggle switch

3-way switch

28 gauge ribbon cable (a 40 wire IDE cable works well)

Atari cartridge connector

Atari cartridge guide

PC board

Soldering iron (15-20 watt)

Desoldering braid

Solder

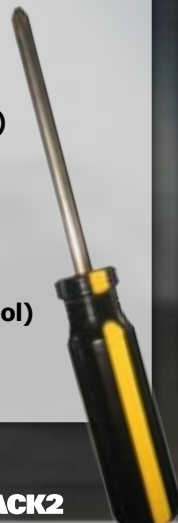
Phillips screwdriver

Drill

Dremel (or other cutting tool)

Wire cutters

Voltmeter



## OPENING THE CONSOLE

**1** Turn the unit upside down and locate the five screws on the bottom of the console. Note that two of them are under labels. One

is under the tamper-proof warranty label, while the second is under the product ID label in the center.

**2** Remove the top half of the case to reveal the PCB.

**3** The main board is held in place by six screws. You will need to remove all of them.

**4** The board with the difficulty switches is held in place by two screws. Remove them.

**5** The power switch board is held in place by two screws. Remove them.

**6** The AV cable is held in place by a tension retainer stalk with one screw and a washer. Remove them.

**7** With all the screws removed, carefully slide the system board towards the front end of the console. Slowly angle it up and out in order to remove it. Note that the power and difficulty switches have springs between the plastic buttons and the boards, so they may jump out. Keep an eye on all three of them.



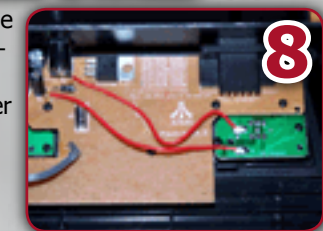
## WORKING WITH THE SYSTEM BOARD

**8** Before proceeding with the mod, take a look at the back of the system board. There is a legend here listing all of the connections that you will need to make (and break) in order to complete the mod. If you ever get stuck, refer back to this legend.

**9** Now, take a look at the front side of the system board. This is the area we will be focusing on for the majority of the mod work. You will need to solder wires to each of the small solder pads located here. If you are not confident in your soldering ability, stop now and reassemble the console. Otherwise, continue on.

**10** Locate all twenty-four cartridge pinout connections. The board is silk-screened to show pin numbers for each connection point. We've also highlighted the points in red in the above image. Pay particular attention to points 1, 17, 18, 19 and 23, as they can be difficult to properly identify.

**11** Take your time and tin each solder point. This will make it easier to attach the wires later on.



**12** Be careful not to bridge any of the solder points, as a connection will cause a short. You can use desoldering braid to remove excess solder from the board.

**13** Locate the black wire connected to IC2 and use your desoldering braid to remove it.

**14** Connect the end of the wire to the common point on the 3-way toggle switch.

**15** Connect a wire from the original point to one side of the 3-way toggle.

**16** Connect a wire from C4 to the other side of the toggle.

**17** Locate J3 on the system board.

**18** Solder a wire to each of the two pads.

**19** Connect the two wires to the SPST switch.

**20** When the 3-way switch is set to the original connections and the SPST on J3 is open, the console will play the built-in games. When the 3-way switch is set to C4 and the SPST on J3 is closed, the console will ignore the built-in games and look for a cartridge.

## INSTALLING THE CARTRIDGE PORT

**21** Fit the cartridge guide around the cartridge connector and mark the location of the screw holes on the PC board. Double check the height of the connector inside the guide.

**22** Drill the holes on the PC board. This will allow you to easily connect the finished assembly to the cartridge guide later on.

**23** Place the cartridge connector in the PC board. Double-check the height in relation to the guide one last time before soldering it to the PC board.

**24** Start soldering the wires to the cartridge connector. It is easiest if you do these in order from one to 24.

**25** Use the voltmeter to double check all connections and make sure you do not have any shorts.

**26** Now, strip the other end of the wire approximately 1/16th of an inch



and solder the cartridge connections to the main board.

**27** Use the voltmeter to double check all connections and make sure you do not have any shorts.

## TESTING YOUR WORK

**28** Connect the AV cable to a TV and plug in the power.

**29** Set your toggle switches to use the built-in games.

**30** Turn the power on and verify that the system works.

**31** Turn the power off and set the toggle switches to use the cartridge port.

**32** Insert an original Atari 2600 game cartridge.

**33** Turn the power on and verify that the system works.

## MAKING IT ALL LOOK PRETTY

**34** You will need to cut a hole in the top of the unit for the cartridge port. The best location is in the center near the front.

**35** Slide the cartridge guide into the hole and secure it with plastic bonding glue.

**36** Insert the cartridge port into the guide and screw it in place.

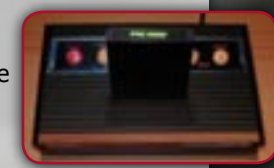
**37** Drill two holes in the back of the unit for the two toggle switches you added to the system.

**38** Secure the two switches.

**39** Carefully reassemble the system and screw everything in place.

**40** Hook it up to the TV and give everything one more test. Congratulations! You now have an Atari Flashback 2.0 that is capable of playing all the built-in games as well as any original Atari 2600 cartridge!

**TIP** If you are having trouble playing an original game, make sure the cartridge contacts are not corroded. A dirty edge connector on the game can prevent it from playing. Often, a quick swab with rubbing alcohol will clean it.



# 真女神転生

(Shin Megami Tensei) by Arifeth

If you've been playing one of the recent Digital Devil Saga games or SMT: Nocturne and were wondering what the subtitle was all about, here is your answer. The original Shin Megami Tensei is an SNES game with a complex storyline, three distinctly different paths, and over fifty hours of gameplay... all in 1992. There were earlier games in the series — Digital Devil Monogatari Megami Tensei was an MSX game released in 1987 (the MSX was a NES contemporary game system released only in Japan) but SMT on the SNES was the first really popular game in the series. The SMT series is the third biggest RPG series in Japan, behind Dragon Quest and Final Fantasy, so it's a damn shame that it never made it to the States. Upon playing it, however, you'll see why.

After an odd dream where you encounter two people who will later become your allies, you wake up and find a mysterious program that allows you to control and communicate with demons. You soon learn just



FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH A FRIEND.

how useful this program can be, as you battle, recruit and parlay with a host of mythological creatures, ranging from Oberon, Lord of Faeries, to the demon Belial. Depending on your alignment, demons will be favorably inclined towards you, or attack you outright. Also note that in this game, the term 'demon' is a catch-all phrase to include both angelic beings and gods, as well as the traditional demons themselves.

It's this sort of controversial backdrop that makes this game so enthralling, and is also why this game



SURE MOM, I'LL GET YOU SOME COFFEE... HOW DANGEROUS CAN IT BE?

The game takes place in 199X Tokyo. Demons have begun walking the earth, and it's becoming apparent that life in Japan is about to turn upside down. The US Army is occupying Japan to fend off the demons, a revolutionary faction by Commander Gotoh is calling for peaceful co-existence, and there's a small resistance group who just wants everyone else to get the hell out of Tokyo and leave them be.

Platform: Super Nintendo Entertainment System  
Publisher: Atlus (Disgaea, River City Ransom EX)  
Developer: Atlus (Persona, Super Dodge Ball Advance)  
Release Date: 1992  
Genre: RPG  
# of Players: 1  
Note: There is an English emulator patch at <http://agtp.romhack.net>.



ONE OF MANY MINOR DEVILS YOU'LL MEET.



MY NOSE IS NOT A DOORBELL!



never made it to America. Both the Law and Chaos factions have incredibly good arguments to make, and you soon realize that there is no clear "good" or "evil," but the core philosophies of Law and Chaos themselves. Your allies are split between the two factions as well, but your own alignment is a result of the consequences of your actions. Dumping dead demons from your party without bothering to resurrect them, refusing to believe that humanity must be at war with demonkind, and making donations at Gaian temples will shift your alignment to Chaos. Showing mercy to dangerous enemies, agreeing that all of Japan should be nuked to wipe out the demons (and killing innocent people in the process), and recruiting Law-aligned creatures such as Angels and Goddesses will, naturally, shift you to Law. Both sides believe that the ends justify the means, and Japan is their warzone. Then there's the mysterious Neutral faction, that simply wants to save Japan from apocalyptic ruin.

a new one based on an array of arcane fusion guidelines, with a possibility of random results if you throw a human into the mix. Successful fusion involves familiarity with the different demon classes and their sub-races, level management, and alignment decisions. Investing time into the details of fusions will yield spectacular results, however, and it will be your only edge against Heaven and Hell as you delve into the hidden truth behind this war on Earth.

In addition to the storyline, the gameplay itself is deep and complex. You can fuse two or three demons together to create

Since this game was made in 1992, the interface is a bit clunky, and you'll be relying on your automap (and the Mapper spell) to navigate efficiently. Also, the graphics are rather bland with lots of dungeon crawling, so don't expect any crazy Mode-7 effects or rendering. At certain points in the game, the lack of linearity may disorient you. You'll mostly be playing it for the story, however. Check this game out, and you'll soon find out why it's so popular in Japan.



SINCE THE BEGINNING OF TIME, WOMAN = TROUBLE.



I SMELL COFFEE!



**BLOW \$#!% UP... AGAIN.**

# SERIOUS SAM II



**New kickass game engine.  
Wild new physics and game environments.  
New, obscenely powerful weapons.  
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Seriously.**

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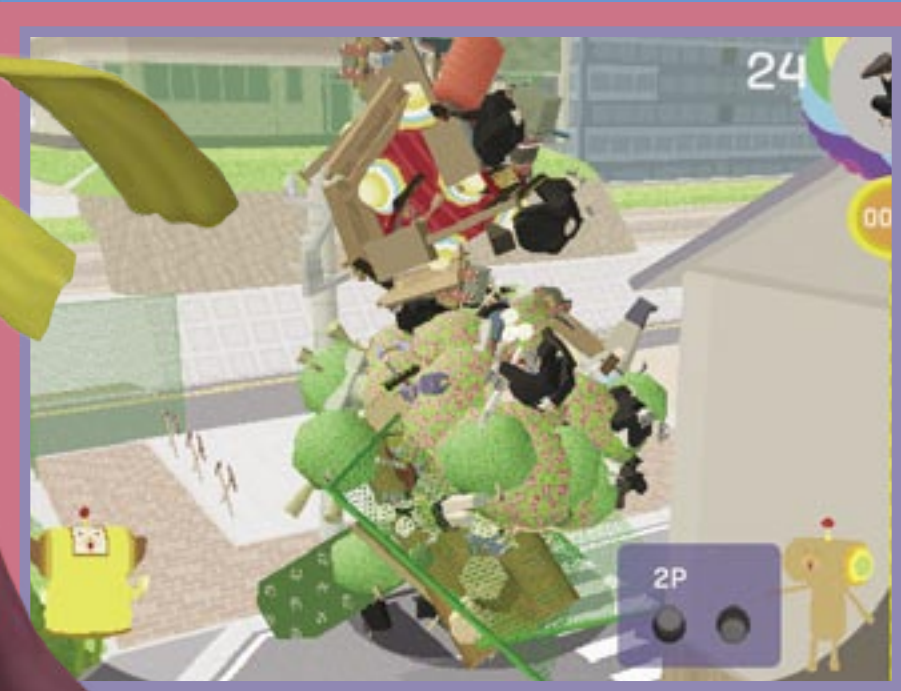
Looking out over the vast expanse of the video game aisles in your local game store, it's easy to get disillusioned. In one corner you've got the fighting games; in another, the first person shooters. Up in the front is the flavor of the month (how many World War II games have *you* seen lately?), and tucked in the back are the various PC titles. For the casual gamer, it is a simple matter of grabbing whatever the sales guy offers up and plunking \$50 on the counter. For the hardcore, though, a trip to the game store is something of a treasure hunting expedition. Sure, you could just grab a game and go, but you want something quirky and original. Something that stands out from the pack. Something like *Katamari Damacy*.

Released in late 2004, *Katamari Damacy* was first revealed to the press at that year's Electronic Entertainment Expo. At the time, Namco hadn't yet decided to localize the title. It was simply trying to gauge the interest of the US press. The big question at the time was whether American gamers would take to the odd title with its strange music, eclectic characters and simple premise.



**KATAMARI TRIVIA**

- There are approximately 3,400 objects in *We ♥ Katamari*, and each one has its own description.
- The character producer is featured in the game as one of the people you can roll up. The development team snuck him in there without telling him.
- The Japanese box art for *We ♥ Katamari* is a photo of Namco of Japan employees holding up signs that spell out the title of the game. Namco's chairman is standing in the left hand corner.



Soon after the show floor opened, the buzz started to spread about Namco's new game and almost everyone made a point to check it out. The diminutive Prince had won over the press, and they'd convinced Namco to give the game a shot stateside.

"*Katamari* was a very unique title," said Yoshi Niki, business unit director at Namco. "It was well received among the press, so we decided to give it a shot and bring it over to the US."

Convincing retailers to stock the game was a different



Story by Syriell

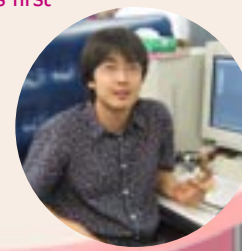
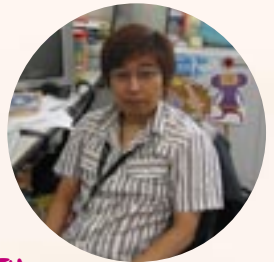
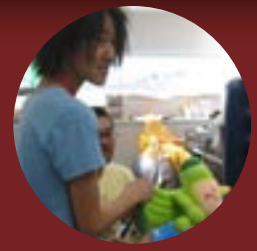




matter. Despite the game's low retail price of \$20, few wanted to take a risk and devote valuable shelf space to an unknown game when that same space could be dedicated to a "sure thing." This was compounded by the fact that Namco used a viral marketing approach to spread the word of the game, as opposed to blasting it out over the airwaves with a huge advertising campaign.

"There was nothing like it at the time," said Yoko Nakao, senior marketing manager at Namco. "They [the retailers] just weren't sure."

Despite the minimum marketing, word got out to the gaming community in a big way and demand for the game was high upon its release. While Namco will not release exact numbers, anyone who tried to purchase a copy of *Katamari Damacy* can vouch for the fact that the initial shipment sold out... and fast. Since most stores only stocked two or three copies, if they carried it at all, the game was quickly fetching obscene prices on eBay. Namco



### INSPIRING KATAMARI CREATIVITY

The team that worked on *We ♥ Katamari* is as varied as the game itself. We've tracked down their prior projects in an attempt to trace the Katamari Family Tree.

Takeshi Ugajin, Art Director and Lead Modeler: *Mr Driller*

Yu Miyake, Sound Director: *Ridge Racer* and *Tekken* series

Takashi Kurihara, Living Object Modeler and Movie Designer: *Klonoa* series

Keita Takahashi, Director: *Katamari Damacy* was his first video game



produced more copies, but the rabid fan reaction surprised both Namco and the retailers that carried the game.

"At E3 it got a great reaction, but that doesn't necessarily mean it is going to sell well in the US," said Wayne Shiu, Namco's marketing specialist.

"We were really surprised with the outcome," said Niki.

Of course, we shouldn't be surprised that the success of *Katamari Damacy* led to a sequel. Set for release this fall, *We ♥ Katamari* (pronounced *We Love Katamari*) expands on the mechanics of the original, introduces new areas to explore and, for the first time, adds a two-player cooperative mode.

As the story goes, the King of All Cosmos has risen to superstardom after filling the sky with the Prince's katamaris. In order to keep his subjects happy, the King has asked the Prince to once again fill the night sky with large katamaris. This time though the Prince isn't working alone; his cousins are along for the ride. You can choose to play as either the Prince or one of the cousins, but the end goal is always the same: roll up as much stuff as possible.

Interestingly, Keita Takahashi, the director and creative genius behind *Katamari Damacy*, wasn't planning on doing a sequel. In fact, he was originally dead set against it, only relenting when he saw how popular the first game had become.



"I wasn't interested in making a sequel, as the industry is often filled with useless sequels," said Takahashi-san, "but I was asked to make one, so I did. I wanted to make it even more goofy than the first -- to add more variety and make people laugh more."

Humor is definitely a large part of *We ♥ Katamari*. However, the real stars of the game are the varied and expansive worlds. Each area is larger and more detailed than those found in the first game, and they progress logically as your katamari grows in size. For example, one of the early levels starts you out inside a house where you can roll around on the floor and gain size before making your way up onto the kitchen table. Collect some more items, and soon your katamari will be big enough to make it over the lip of the sliding patio door.

Size is a key component of gameplay, as the Prince can only roll up items that are smaller than his ball. Initially you will be quite limited, but as your katamari grows in size you'll soon be grabbing things that once blocked your path. In one of the later levels, you can even roll up the Eiffel Tower!

Although the item placement appears to be random to the casual observer, there is a distinct method to the madness. The level design ensures that there's always a path available for exploration.

"When designing the game, I wanted it to appeal to non-gamers as well as gamers," said Takahashi-san. "The main concept when [we were] laying out the levels is that there is always something the user can roll up. The user should never be stuck."

Exploring those levels by yourself is fun, but it takes on a whole new dimension when playing in *We ♥ Katamari's* new two-player cooperative mode. Instead of featuring two katamaris, as one might expect, the two player mode has each player controlling one side of the same katamari. In order to progress, both players have to work together and coordinate their movement so that they are in sync.

When we first sat down with the cooperative mode, it was a bit of a challenge to really understand the play style, but after a while things started to flow smoothly. The trick to doing well is communicating with your partner-in-crime to plan your moves. In our case, "communicating" consisted mostly of yelling and swearing, often followed by a bout of laughter, which bodes well for *We ♥ Katamari's* potential as a party game. Simply watching two people play is almost as much fun as being behind the controller yourself.

According to Takahashi-san, the cooperative mode was designed with communication in mind. It was inspired by an art project that he created while studying at the University of Art in Japan. A student of sculpture, one of Takahashi-san's creations was a coffee table that transformed into a robot. Shown at the 2005 Game Developer's Conference, the table cannot be operated by a single person.

"The coffee table is sort of a communication tool. It takes two people to transform," said Takahashi-san. "That's why I included the co-op mode in *We ♥ Katamari*. It's a communication tool."

Veterans of the first game will be pleased to hear that *We ♥ Katamari's* music styles are just as varied and creative as the first game. As



## Q/A WITH KEITA TAKAHASHI

**HGM:** How was the original game conceived? It is true that it started as a student project?

**KT:** Yes. It did actually start as sort of a personal project.

**HGM:** How did you come up with the characters of the Prince and the King?

**KT:** It's difficult to answer. I was tasked with creating characters for a driving game. Of course the game was cancelled, but I wanted to use them in another game. I don't have an explanation as to why the characters ended up as they did.

**HGM:** Were you surprised by how well *Katamari Damacy* sold worldwide?

**KT:** I was very surprised by the popularity of the game. I even shed a tear or two. We only expected to ship it in Japan. Seeing the popularity in America, I was moved.

**HGM:** *Katamari Damacy* has a lot of female fans in the US. When you designed the game were you trying to target female players?

**KT:** No, I didn't try to appeal to any group in particular. I'm not a big gamer, so I don't feel as though I am locked into the same design patterns as most game designers.

**HGM:** Why don't you play many games?

**KT:** Most games are really boring.

**HGM:** Which games do hold your interest?

**KT:** Lately the only game to interest me is *Ico*. When I was younger I used to play *Dragon Quest* on the Super Famicom. [ed. the Super Nintendo in the US.]

**HGM:** Do you think that video games are a good outlet for your creativity?

**KT:** I don't want to limit myself to games. One of the big frustrations I have with video games is that your only interaction with the game is with the controller. You're just sitting there looking into the screen.

**HGM:** What do you think about the next generation of machines, such as the Xbox 360 and the PlayStation 3?

**KT:** I'm not really a hardware oriented person. I don't know too much about them.

**HGM:** So what's next for *Katamari*? Will we see it on another platform?

**KT:** I've done all I can do with *Katamari*. I definitely want to move onto something new.

**HGM:** If the Prince met Pac-Man, who would win?

**KT:** Well, we don't know how big Pac-Man really is, so it's a bit hard to decide. And Pac-Man eats everything as well!



players move from level to level the music will change in theme and tempo to fit the design of the stage. That said, the team wanted to make sure that the player was always in control. As a result you have the option of selecting your favorite music track before each level.

Attempting to combine such varied music styles was a challenge, but one that the team relished, according to Yu Miyake, the sound director. Miyake-san and his team started working on the audio for *We ♥ Katamari* as soon as the first design documents were in place. By working collaboratively, they were able to ensure that the music could change styles without breaking the overall theme of the game. The team also concentrated on writing music that was memorable as opposed to something that just played in the background.

"You remember old-school game songs, right? Atari? Nobody remembers theme songs these days," said Miyake-san. "Nobody can sing them. Is it that users out there have bad memory or that we're not making good music as composers?"

Artistic design is also heavily apparent in the visual presentation of the game's manual. Pulling from the character designs seen in the game, the manual is surprisingly light on text and instead relies on vibrant graphics to convey the operation of the game.

"Current manuals are full of text. They're boring and no one reads them," said Takahashi-san. "I wanted to make the manual more accessible to casual users so they can get something out of them without having to read through all the text that no one bothers to look at it."

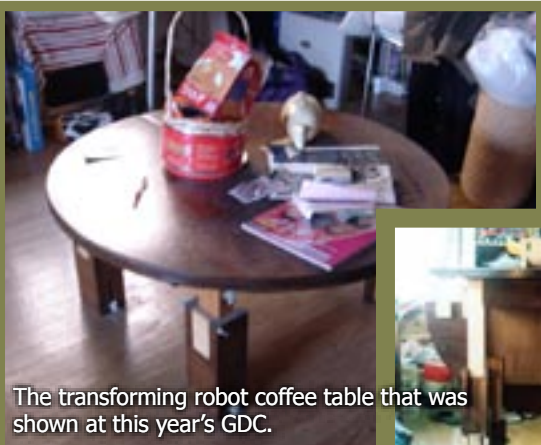
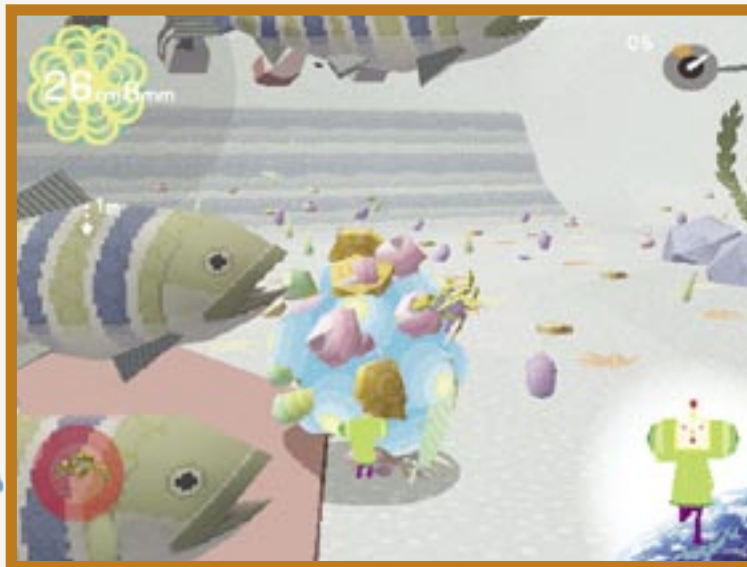
From what we've seen, *We ♥ Katamari* is on track to replicate the success of its first outing, thanks to its masterful blending of simple fun and quirky attitude. It is one of those rare games that appeals equally well to hardcore gamers as well as casual players, proving once again that creativity will beat fancy graphics any day.



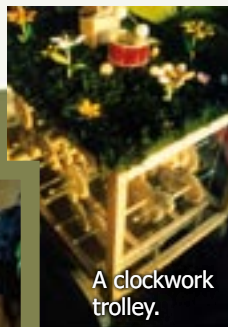
### REAL LIFE KATAMARI

To help promote the game at this year's E3, Namco had an adhesive katamari ball in its booth and encouraged show attendees to stick items onto the ball.

"We publicized that we were collecting items, and fans brought stuff just to put on the katamari," said Yoko Nakao, senior marketing manager at Namco. "One fan even brought a custom katamari."



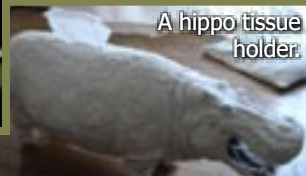
The transforming robot coffee table that was shown at this year's GDC.



A clockwork trolley.



A goat flower pot.



A hippo tissue holder.

### TAKAHASHI-SAN GETS ARTISTIC

Creativity is a key component of *We ♥ Katamari* so we wanted to show off some of Keita Takahashi's artwork. Think of it as a peek inside his mind.



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*Wulfen '05*

# RADIATA STORIES™

Review By: Lynxara

Publisher : Square-Enix  
Developer : tri-Ace  
Genre : Action RPG  
Category: Team Leading, Friend Making, Stuff Kicking

Release : September 6, 2005  
Players : 1  
Rating : Teen

A young boy named Jack Russell sets off to Radiata Castle in order to become a knight like his father. Unfortunately, he turns out to be rude, incompetent, and just a bit too egotistical for the job. He's easily upstaged by Ridley Silverlake, a nobleman's daughter who's trained for knighthood her entire life. Both young heroes are eventually driven by chance and circumstance into the middle of a world-threatening conflict between the human race and Radiata's fairy peoples.

*Radiata Stories* takes the unusual tactic of trying to tell this epic storyline from something like an ordinary person's point of view, with an emphasis on situational humor. You'll spend much of your time following Jack through the streets of Radiata City, which are as gigantic and labyrinthine as those of a real-world metropolis. Jack spends his days in the game taking missions from the city's various Guilds, talking to friends, and sometimes just bumming around. As you go about your day, time will pass and day will slowly

turn into night and then back again. The overworld map is rendered to the same "scale" as the city streets, with every bit of town and country beautifully detailed, and this helps the game world feel truly expansive. All of the models handle the transition from night to day beautifully and really help the game feel somehow alive. Unfortunately, *Radiata* doesn't make equally good use of sound; the score is a pleasant blend of smoky jazz, techno, and big band instrumentals, but the voice acting is forgettable and some of the sound effects are truly weird and obnoxious.

The detailed environments of *Radiata Stories* are interactive, sort of: Jack can kick basically every onscreen object, and sometimes this will trigger some kind of event or reveal a hidden item. You can kick enemies or small animals to make them attack you, and even ordinary

## Jack and Ridley Rude & Noble?

passers-by will jump Jack if you kick them twice in a row. Interactive environments are always fun, of course, and kicking things is amusing at first. However, kicking is the only way to interact with environmental objects, and the novelty wears off after awhile.

Combat in *Radiata Stories* follows the old tri-Ace tradition: real-time battle, where you control the main character and the game's AI controls your allies. Battles take place in special 3D battlefield areas that you can view through a manually or automatically controlled camera. Jack's basic combat moves are reminiscent of Sora's in *Kingdom Hearts*: simple strikes, blocks, and dodges. Advanced techniques draw on a special energy gauge called the "Volty Meter." You can spend Volty on guard-crushing moves called Volty Blows, spectacular sure-hit special attacks called Volty Breaks, or on maneuvers that let Jack order his AI allies to perform specific tasks like healing an ally. Probably the best use of Volty in the game is to organize your party into Link Formations that optimize the group's actions in a given way, such as for offense or defense.



Gathering allies is extremely important to success in battle, and probably where you'll have the most fun in *Radiata Stories*. There are 177 recruitable characters, each with a unique series of events that must be followed in order to make them join you. Simple recruitments only call for you to speak to a certain character, while more challenging ones might require you follow a certain plotline, fetch a certain item, or raise Jack to a certain experience level. Generally, more powerful allies require you to perform more complex actions, and the most powerful characters in the game are extremely easy to miss. This gets frustrating after spending so long with the game; the recruitment conditions for each character are entirely opaque and sometimes maddeningly arbitrary. Any player who hopes to recruit all the allies in the game will definitely want to find a FAQ, a strategy guide, or a near-infinite store of patience.



"Fun, but also frustrating" is the phrase that basically sums up what playing *Radiata Stories* feels like. You can interact freely with the environment, but only when the story says you can. Jack's appearance, move-set, and skills can be fully customized, but you can't alter the skills and

equipment of your allies in any way. If you do put a lot of effort into recruiting allies, the plot eventually splits into two "routes" that forces you to give up half of them. Even the interesting combat options aren't available until more than a third of the way through, and are so powerful that they make combat feel excessively repetitive after awhile. In a lot of ways *Radiata Stories* is a fresh and innovative game, but it's also a stylistic experiment that fell short of its potential. It's just too easy to imagine features tri-Ace could've added, like customizable allies, that would've made the game a lot more fun. Action RPG fans and gamers looking for something different will probably find *Radiata Stories* well worth a look, but don't show up expecting the polished gameplay tri-Ace showed off in *Star Ocean 3*.

Score: 3.5 of 5

2nd opinion by [honestgamer](#) • Alternate Rating : 4.0/5.0

Despite an in-game map, the gorgeous world on display here is far too easy to get lost in. That's not always a good thing. Still, a comical story and interesting characters make up for it. It's hard not to love the experience. Just bring a better map.



### JACK'S FRIEND LIST

When a character agrees to join you, he or she will enter their name in your Friend List. Then you can visit the Warrior Guild, Theater Vancoor, to configure your party as you see fit. You should always use the strongest allies available, even if this means your party is without a healing or even an offense character. Since Jack is so customizable, you can have him play whatever role is needed to round out your party.



If you're using a group of defense or healing characters, like some of the Olacion order priests, then you'll want to equip Jack with a heavy weapon like an Axe and use him to assault the enemy directly. If you end up with a party composed of tough warriors or magic-users, then you'll want to invest your money in Items for Jack to heal the party with and try to keep him out of harm's way in fights. A more balanced party will usually let Jack focus on attacking and commanding equally, but be ready to toss a healing item on short notice.

Thanks to the route split you'll encounter halfway through, it's impossible to collect all 177 playable characters in a single game. You'll end up having to play at least twice if you want to snag them all. If you choose the Fairy route at the split, then you'll lose all your human allies but get the chance to recruit strong Fairy allies, and vice versa for the Human Route. Each route offers a slightly different storyline and results in a slightly different ending for the game, so you'll definitely want to do them both if you can.

FINAL SCORE:  
**3.75 of 5**

## nintendogs™

Review by **Syriel**

**Publisher :** Nintendo  
**Developer :** Nintendo  
**Release Date :** 8/22/2005  
**Rating :** **EVERYONE**; Comic Mischief

**Genre(s) :** Simulation  
**Category :** Virtual Pet  
**# of players :** 1

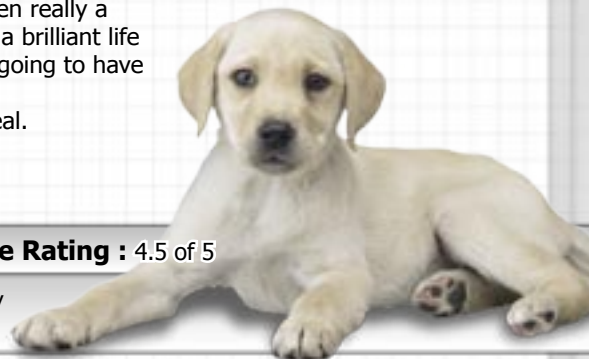


should it decide to squat and relieve itself. Nintendo said the game was a full simulator and it wasn't lying. For all the work though, the game is surprisingly enjoyable and you'll soon find yourself looking forward to spending some time with your virtual pooch.

When you're done playing for the day, you can put the game in "bark" mode and close the DS. While in bark mode the game will actively search for other *Nintendogs* owners in range; if it finds one, it will exchange information and let you play with the other puppy. You can record an audio greeting as well as give your dog a gift to pass along before turning on bark mode. Enabling bark mode also has the side benefit of unlocking other breeds.

There are a total of 18 breeds in *Nintendogs*, but only six will be available from the start. Which six you get depends on the version of the game you buy. Borrowing a page from the *Pokemon* series, there are three separate versions of *Nintendogs*.

Despite the work involved (and the obvious marketing ploy behind multiple versions) there is a lot to love about *Nintendogs*. It's by no means a hardcore game — hell, it isn't even really a game — but it *is* a brilliant life simulator that is going to have a great deal of mainstream appeal.

**Rating :** 4 of 5

You'll start the game by picking out a puppy at the local kennel and bringing it home to your humble abode. Like a real pup, your newfound friend is initially a bit unsure of itself and its surroundings. The game will walk you through naming your dog and teaching it how to sit, but after that you're on your own.

Perhaps the coolest part of the game is that your dog responds to your voice. Rather than playing with menus, you simply call your pup by name and it'll come running over. Want it to perform a trick for friends? Tell it to sit down or play dead and it will — assuming you've trained it well. While it is best to train your dog in a quiet location, the voice recognition is surprisingly robust as the game responds to commands even in crowded environments such as a train.

Once you've spent a little time training your pooch, you can take it out for a walk around town or enter it in a contest. You can test your skills at Frisbee, see how agile your pup is or test its obedience. Contests are a great way to earn money so you can purchase more supplies for your dog.

Yes, just like a real animal, you'll need to feed your dog, bathe it and remember to give it water. When out on the town you'll even have to pick up the doggie treasures that it leaves behind,

**FINAL SCORE :**  
**4.25** of 5

**2nd opinion** by Sara (age 6 1/2) • **Alternate Rating :** 4.5 of 5

It's really — I mean — REALLY cool. But I already spent a lot of cash in the game!



As the first PSP title to be shown back in early 2004, Backbone Entertainment's *Death Jr.* had a lot to live up to. It's a hard thing to do, especially when your main character is already dead. This much anticipated and long-awaited title, picked up by Konami along the way, could have been the PSP's first great action title. Unfortunately, this somewhat disappointing hybrid platformer/shooter has fallen short of expectations, mainly due to its overall lack of polish, some frustrating controls and a camera that should be taken out back and put out of its misery.

*Death Jr.* starts out promisingly enough, with a great CG intro, some really quirky and interesting characters, and a basic video game plot. The latter isn't groundbreaking or original, but good enough to whet your appetite for what should have been a great action/shooter experience. The premise has you playing as the pint-sized offspring of the Grim Reaper, who must save his equally bizarre set of schoolmates (Stigmartha, Dead Guppy, Pandora, etc.) after inadvertently opening a box that he shouldn't have during a field trip to the museum. After a few minutes of gameplay and wrestling with the game's sometime awkward controls and camera, however, *Death Jr.* quickly becomes an exercise in frustration.

As a hybrid action/platformer and third-person shooter, *Death Jr.* suffers from trying to do too much while not doing any of it well enough. While you can use DJ's scythe to get up close and personal with the game's many hordes of enemies, you'll more than likely find yourself continually relying on his guns to blast everything in sight. The game's shooting mechanics are solid, but switching weapons (done with the D-pad) forces you to take your thumb off the analog slider, which leaves you open to attack and often results in you

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

*Death Jr.* has a spark of goodness hidden inside, but it's obscured by the poor camera and utterly broken lock-on function. A sequel with these issues fixed could be fun, but this doesn't quite work.

Review by **Roger Danish**

## DEATH JR.

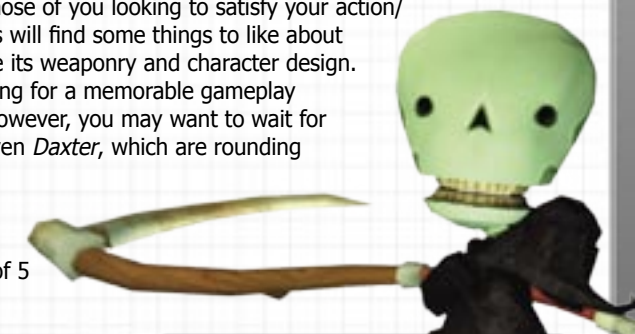
**Publisher :** Konami  
**Developer :** Backbone Entertainment  
**Release Date :** 8/17/2005  
**Rating :** **TEEN**; Blood and Gore, Language, Violence

**Genre(s) :** Action/Platform  
**Category :** Shooter  
**# of players :** 1

taking cheap damage. On the plus side, the developers at Backbone thankfully thought to include a lock-on/circle strafe function, which works well against the game's many hordes of attacking creatures; even though there are a variety of cool and unique weapons (including homing, exploding hamsters), DJ's standard twin pistols can get you through most of the game. Where the game really starts to tear at the seams is with the platforming segments, especially pinpoint jumps, and swinging from hooks. I found myself fighting the camera during these portions of the game, mostly due to the lack of a second stick, constantly having to readjust and tweak the angle so I could successfully make a simple jump.

Visually, *Death Jr.* is also a mixed bag. The main character designs are definitely Tim Burton-esque, but once DJ is separated from his pals, there isn't much interaction with them. You're left fighting a bunch of standard-issue, uninspired baddies. In fact, the story pretty much falls apart after the intro. The game's engine is solid and runs at a steady rate, but overall there's not much in the way of attention to detail.

In the end, I sort of enjoyed my time with *Death Jr.*, but I really wanted to. Those of you looking to satisfy your action/shooter needs will find some things to like about the game, like its weaponry and character design. If you're looking for a memorable gameplay experience, however, you may want to wait for *MediEvil* or even *Daxter*, which are rounding the corner.

**Rating :** 2 of 5

**FINAL SCORE :**  
**2.25** of 5



PlayStation.2



PLATFORM

PlayStation.2



PC



# MADDEN NFL 06

EXCLUSIVE NFL LICENSE

Review by 4thletter

**Publisher :** Electronic Arts  
**Developer :** Tiburon  
**Release Date :** 8/9/2005  
**Rating :** EVERYONE

**Genre(s) :** Sports  
**Category :** Football  
**# of players :** 1-8

It's time for the biggest national holiday that businesses love to hate: **Madden Day**. This year, expect record numbers of people calling in sick, husbands neglecting their wives, and fistfights over whether that long bomb pass was skill or a fluke.

*Madden NFL 06* continues EA's tradition of introducing possibly gamebreaking new features and seeing how they work. The good ones (Playmaker control, Michael Vick being a demigod) stick around for the next year. The bad ones never get mentioned again. This year, we get QB Vision and Precision Passing. Precision Passing lets you put a little extra touch on your passes and place the ball high, low, left, or right of your receiver and away from defenders. Once you get it down, you're golden. It really adds a new level to the game.

QB Vision, on the other hand, will decide if you love or hate this game. This innovative feature changes the tried and true Madden gameplay to a large extent. Your QB now actually has to look in the direction of the receiver he wants to hit if he wants to be accurate. If you don't like QB Vision, you can turn it off. It adds something of a steep learning curve to what used to be a pick-up-and-play game, but it gives the game a more realistic edge. It demands a more measured gameplan and calculated passes.

These new additions, among others, make *Madden 06* feel much more authentic than the previous games. You aren't just playing a quarterback, you *are* the quarterback and have to keep track of everything.

The graphics have gotten an upgrade, mostly in the form of new animations. You can tell when a player was brought down courtesy of



a face mask, for example. It's also nice to see players automatically hopping over downed players on the field or completely demolishing a lineman and proceeding to sack the QB for negative yards. EA's really delivering on its "If it's in the game, it's in the game" slogan. Some of the hits are brutal.

NFL Superstar mode is deserving of respect. It takes Season mode and stands it on its head. Instead of just playing games, you need to manage having an agent, training, and plenty of other things. It sounds overly complicated, but it's surprisingly easy to get into. It's just another stab at making *Madden NFL 06* more authentic.

The presentation of the game is functional and attractive. The menus are easy to use and brightly animated, complete with real video clips from your favorite team. The soundtrack is decent, and continues the trend of spotlighting lesser-known artists (Chamillionaire and Stat Quo in this case) in addition to more established acts.

*Madden NFL 06* isn't an all-new game, but it's close to it. There's a heap of new stuff to get used to, and a steep learning curve to climb, but it's definitely worth the effort. It's extremely rewarding to toss a pass, alter its trajectory just so, and come up with the big play for the win. You can't buy bragging rights like that.

**Rating :** 4 of 5

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

*Madden 06* should prove to naysayers that an exclusive license doesn't mean yearly reshapes. A slew of upgrades make the greatest football franchise ever even better.



You could almost hear the ice-shattering sigh of relief from hockey fans across the world last July when the NHL announced that its lockout would finally come to an end. Hockey is back and soon, after more than a year off, the players from the coolest game on Earth will lace up their skates once again in pursuit of Lord Stanley's Cup. Despite the lockout, EA was able to work with the NHL to put the game's new rules into *NHL 2006* even before they were announced to the media. It's in the game, indeed.

Three things that you can always count on from an EA Sports title are quality, TV-style presentation, and insanely deep game customization. The beauty of *NHL 06* is that the default settings are tuned to the player that wants an accurate replica of an actual NHL game, but a more experienced player can adjust the sliders to match whatever style of hockey they prefer. Think the goalie's agility is too unrealistic? Turn down the AI. Think the defensemen don't play hard enough? Turn up the frequency at which they'll dive in front of the goal to block a shot. Whether you're slow and methodical, or lightning fast and bone-crushing, the sheer amount of customizable gameplay tuners is dizzying.

*NHL 06* is reminiscent of the gameplay from an era gone by in hockey games. Scoring will require strategy, which means that you'll actually use a balanced mixture of break aways, one-timers, dekes and wrap-arounds as opposed to simply skating up the middle and attacking the goal head-on. Hero Players, indicated by a star icon around them, can perform super shots by pressing the new right analog Skill Stick in any

**2nd opinion by 4thletter • Alternate Rating :** 3.5 of 5

*NHL 06* is fun, but difficult, stuff. You'll earn every point that you make.



**Publisher :** Electronic Arts  
**Developer :** EA Canada  
**Release Date :** 9/14/2005  
**Rating :** EVERYONE 10+; Mild Violence

**Genre(s) :** Sports  
**Category :** Hockey  
**# of players :** 1-4 (Online and XBOX Live Compatible)

direction. Only the best goalies in the NHL are able to stop these shots, so be sure to attack when you've got a guy like Steve Yzerman free and clear from the pack.

Thanks to the new rules of the NHL, playing a standard three-period game is relatively quick, so getting through an entire season hardly seems like a chore this year. Long-time fans of the franchise will also appreciate the more subtle improvements, such as the inclusion of multiplayer mini-games which adds party game value. However, the real jackpot here for old-school EA fans is the near-perfect port of the 16-bit classic *NHL '94*, which is available from the main menu.

Though most of *NHL 06* is exactly what the franchise needed, there are still a few rough spots left to iron out for next season. The Dynasty mode serves its purpose, but feels outdated in comparison to other EA titles. Also, despite the complaints of hockey sim purists about big hits being "over the top," EA has got to make body checking more punishing, like *Madden's* Hit Stick. A well-placed hard body check not only insures that the opposing player will lose puck control, but it's also just hilarious to knock them over the rail and into the penalty box. Make it an option that can be toggled on or off, whatever, but give us back the tools to dish out the pain! Sadistic fun has always been synonymous with video game hockey.

In the end, what you're left with is unquestionably the greatest hockey game of the current generation, but some overall lack of polish and a lackluster Dynasty mode take the score down a tad. Quibbles aside, make no mistake that if you have even a remote interest in hockey, you need *NHL 06*. Go get it now!

**Rating :** 4 of 5

**FINAL SCORE :**  
**3.75 of 5**



# DARKWATCH

Review by Wanderer

**Publisher :** Capcom  
**Developer :** High Moon Studios  
**Release Date :** 8/16/2005  
**Rating :** MATURE; Supernatural Violence, Sexual Content  
**Genre(s) :** FPS  
**Category :** Gothic Western  
**# of players :** 1-2 Players (PS2)  
**# of players :** 1-16 Players (Xbox)

It's easy to get sick of first-person shooters. There are days I'm convinced that the entire industry is out to drive them into the ground as hard and fast as they can. However, all it takes is one good FPS — one FPS that gets it — and suddenly, I can remember why they're popular to begin with.

*Darkwatch* is one of those games. It's got a couple of minor flaws, but it does almost everything right. It's got an underused setting, an intense gunfight every thirty seconds, some truly sick opponents who require shooting, cool vampire powers, and a bizarre assortment of steampunk weaponry with blades on 'em. I'm not sure what else you'd need for a good shooter, besides caffeine and a weekend off, but rest assured, *Darkwatch* has almost anything else you'd put on the list.

The story, in short: Jericho Cross is robbing a train when he finds out it's transporting an ancient vampire. In the ensuing chaos, Jericho gets bitten. As he's slowly losing his humanity, he's approached by the Darkwatch, a secret organization dedicated to fighting the supernatural. From that point onward, it's up to you whether Jericho redeems himself, or runs headlong into damnation.

You'll probably notice early on that *Darkwatch* has a bit of *Halo* in it. Jericho's even equipped with a blood shield, and *Darkwatch* shares much of *Halo's* focus on infantry combat. *Darkwatch* has a boss fight or two, but most of your time's spent blasting hordes of the undead.

The word I keep coming back to is "intense." *Darkwatch* has a way of turning lethal at a second's notice, where a routine shoot-and-loom abruptly becomes a hard-fought battle for survival. There are very few enemies in *Darkwatch* who're just cannon fodder; all of them bring something to the table, whether it's speed, gunplay, or durability.

**FINAL SCORE :**  
**4.25 of 5**

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

Atmospheric and full of frenetic action, *Darkwatch* is an FPS that stands out in an otherwise stagnant genre. Despite some repetitiveness, it's very much worth your time.



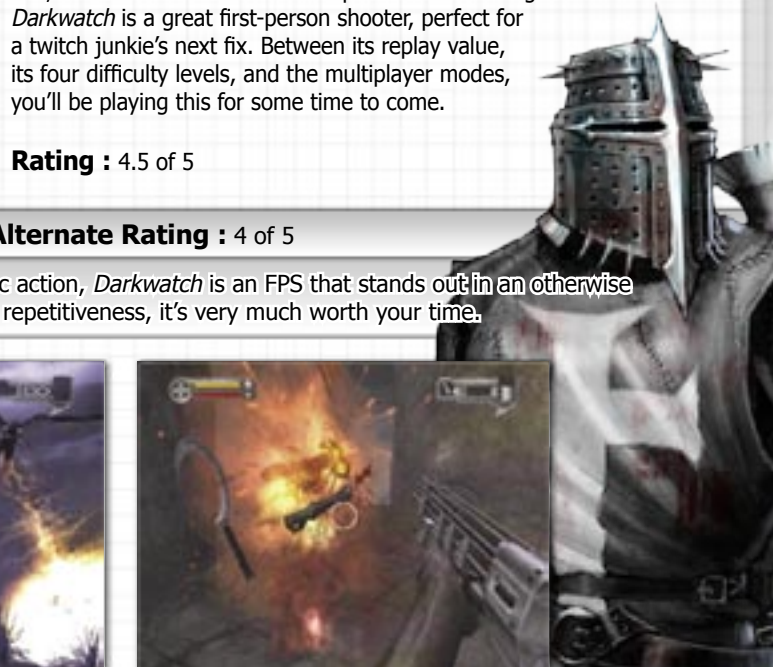
*Darkwatch* rewards precision over sheer firepower, since you almost need to land a headshot on everything. This is a sniper's dream game. You'll need that, the judicious use of dynamite, and Jericho's powers to get through the singleplayer game intact.

After that, there's multiplayer, which is solid. With mounted guns, sticks of dynamite, Jericho's vampire abilities as powerups, and the occasional vehicle, it can be a lot of fun.

For all these reasons, and more besides, *Darkwatch* is one of the best shooters to come out in a while. It's when the game strays from pure shooter action that it falls down. Jericho's horse is a great addition, but the Coyote Steamwagon's frustratingly difficult to steer. It's also a pain when you're forced into bizarre situations, like having to use blood vision to see or getting your vampire powers abruptly taken away. Imagine a level of *Halo 2* if you could only use the battle rifle's scope to look around, or if your shields were gone, and you'll get an idea of how annoying it gets.

Still, one or two bad levels don't spoil the whole thing. About 80% of *Darkwatch* is a great first-person shooter, perfect for a twitch junkie's next fix. Between its replay value, its four difficulty levels, and the multiplayer modes, you'll be playing this for some time to come.

**Rating :** 4.5 of 5



# BEAT DOWN FISTS OF VENGEANCE DOWN

Review by Honestgamer

**Publisher :** Capcom  
**Developer :** Cavia  
**Release Date :** 8/23/2005  
**Rating :** MATURE  
**Genre(s) :** Action  
**Category :** Brawler  
**# of players :** 1 or 2 (versus only)

should help, but don't because they mean you'll do more wandering and fighting to pay for the fare. As a result, traveling around the map is a pain in the butt. Getting lost and facing even more load times can be downright brutal. A confusing map system provides no relief, and the compass is only active on occasion. Exploring the slums really isn't fun at all.

Unfortunately, the game's action doesn't add much to the mix. Fights come in one of two forms: group brawl or one-on-one. The latter is executed like the most generic street fighting game you've ever played. You can learn a few special moves, but mostly just mashing buttons will lead you to victory. In the case of the brawls, the same is true, except now you must grapple with a camera that sometimes won't let you see your enemies.

The one innovation that brings hope back into the picture is the 'black list' system. Essentially, this is a network of thugs who answer to you. As you pound various goons, you can add them to your posse. Two of them can accompany you to any rumble. They even participate in the group brawls, and you can use them for tag team support against the game's tougher bosses, although the simplistic AI means fights are seldom dangerous.

Unfortunately, the black list innovation is too little, too late. When you complete the game once, you can save your file and play through as another character. By that point, though, you're probably going to be more interested in playing something else. When it comes to buying or renting this one, proceed with caution.

**Rating :** 1.5 of 5



Following a spectacular doublecross, five members of a crime syndicate known as Cartel find themselves separated and fighting to survive in the city they once terrorized. With such an intriguing beginning, one might expect *Beat Down: Fists of Vengeance* to be spectacular. Unfortunately, numerous flaws soon kick that notion in the face.

The game begins by having you select your anti-hero. Each has unique skills. For example, Raven punches quickly, while Lola kicks well. Your choice affects not only your fighting style, but also the game's twisting plot. The story here is quite rewarding, enough so that it might drag you through the messy game. The memorable moments include a raid on a narcotics lab, where you set an explosive charge and must run for your life before it detonates. Unexpected objectives like those definitely add to the overall experience. The problem is that just nearly every other element of the game works against it.

First, consider the load times. They last over 20 seconds and occur frequently as you explore the game's tiny map. The city looks like one big slum blurred together, with a few luxurious buildings on its east side for token variety. Despite the bland visuals, the map is cut into numerous pieces with load times that bookend each one. This means that more than half the time you spend crossing a map might be spent staring at load screens.

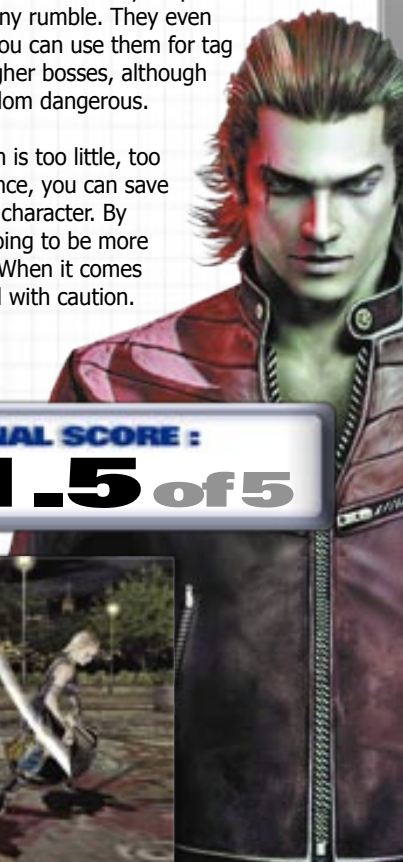
Rather than try to minimize such pains, the developers magnified them. Missions force you to dart all over the map. Expensive cab rides

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

While it does breathe some new life into an old genre, *Beatdown* is simply too slow-paced to stay fun for any length of time.



**FINAL SCORE :**  
**1.5 of 5**



## SIGMA STAR SAGA

Review by **JPeoples**

**Publisher :** Namco  
**Developer :** WayForward  
**Release Date :** 8/16/2005  
**Rating :** EVERYONE

**Genre(s) :** RPG/Shooter  
**Category :** Hybrid  
**# of players :** 1

After innumerable delays, WayForward's shooter/RPG has arrived. The story of aliens invading Earth may seem ripped from the arcades of 1977, but the rest of *Sigma Star Saga* is entirely original. At its core, this is a near-traditional RPG with a far different battle system.

Instead of pitting you against a small number of foes in either a turn-based or more action-oriented format, *Sigma Star Saga* tosses you into a horizontal shooter. For the first time in forever, random battles are actually fun. They're also truly random, since SSS places you in a random ship when you're beamed into a battle. This forces you to learn on your feet, and keeps things fresh at the same time. The only real downside to them is that they occur far too often. This impedes your progress, and damages the pacing.

Thankfully, the game executes the specifics of horizontal shooting well. Pretty much everything you'd expect in a full shooter is here. You can fire in eight directions; upgrade your ships, weapons, and equipment; and of course, look forward to facing massive bosses after destroying wave after wave of enemy ships. The shooting elements could have fallen apart if the execution wasn't done just right, so it's good to see that they're done justice.

While the RPG sections compliment the shooting, they're comparatively disappointing. Many of the characters are almost devoid of personality. While it's hard to care about some of them, it's not a complete wash. The witty writing manages to inject some much-needed humor, and breathes some life into the generic characters.

Speaking of which, they look fantastic. While the art style for their



profiles is standard fare, their in-game sprites look unique. All of the characters are crisply detailed, large, and well-animated, which is a godsend. Sadly, the shooting sections don't work as well. There's too much going on to follow on a small screen, and the ships and shots are too small to see easily. At the same time, the environments are far too plain. Many of them appear to be palette swaps of other areas, only with different layouts.

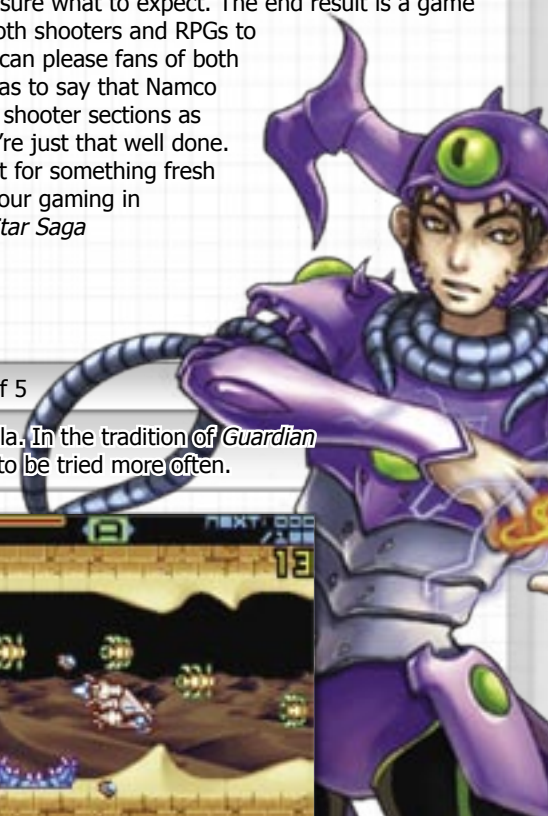
I will say that WayForward did an admirable job with the musical score, finding a nice mix between sci-fi and majestic music. The sound effects are just as impressive. They also made sure that each effect fit the action, and made all of the audio nice and loud, a huge help given the GBA's shoddy speakers.

I'm rather pleased with how well *Sigma Star Saga* turned out. Given the concept, I wasn't sure what to expect. The end result is a game that does justice to both shooters and RPGs to varying degrees, and can please fans of both genres. I'd go as far as to say that Namco could just release the shooter sections as their own game; they're just that well done. If you're in the market for something fresh for your GBA, or for your gaming in general, give *Sigma Star Saga* a chance.

**Rating :** 4 of 5

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

*Sigma Star Saga* is a refreshing take on a tired formula. In the tradition of *Guardian Legend*, it offers a great fusion of genres that needs to be tried more often.



## PAC 'N ROLL

Review by **James**

**Publisher :** Namco  
**Developer :** Namco  
**Release Date :** 8/24/2005  
**Rating :** EVERYONE

**Genre(s) :** Platformer  
**Category :** Marble Madness-esque  
**# of players :** 1



After this spring's Pac Pix, Namco takes a second shot at doing something different on the Nintendo DS with its most famous icon in *Pac 'N Roll*. A demon summoned by ghosts has rendered Pac-Man a quadruple amputee, in addition to abducting all his friends, and the only way to set things right again is to sacrifice a goat to the elder Pac-Gods.

Wait... scratch that last bit. The only way to set things right is to roll along through five themed worlds, eating dots and avoiding ghosts while controlling Pac-Man with the touch screen.

*Pac 'N Roll*'s hook is that it works more like *Marble Madness* than a normal platformer. The touch-screen acts like a trackball, and Pac-Man rolls along in the direction the stylus is dragged. A quick stylus stroke makes Pac-Man zip along, while a slow steady line is good for trickier maneuvers. Drawing a fast line into the red border around the edge of the screen makes Pac (we can call him Pac, right?) do a dash move, good for breaking boxes and climbing up vertical surfaces. Holding the stylus in place acts as an emergency brake, causing Pac to either screech to a stop or hold steady on an inclined surface. The game's one non-touchscreen control is the D-pad, which controls the camera, and the controls usually work pretty well together.

Pac-Man also has a few powerups. The usual power pill makes an appearance, useful for clearing the ghosts out of the stage, and Pac

also gets a pair of hats that change how he moves. The wing hat makes him light, susceptible to breezes but also able to get good airtime, while the knight's helmet weighs Pac down but provides missile protection, stability in the wind, and the punch you need to break through steel crates. Both hats are useful in places, but the helmet is clearly the headgear of choice for most situations.

All these controls and abilities end up getting used in levels that, overall, are pretty easy. It isn't until a series of high-speed jumping areas in world 5 show that, while the controls are good for many things, fast aerial maneuvers aren't among them. Losing more than ten lives in a row at the same spot is the opposite of fun.

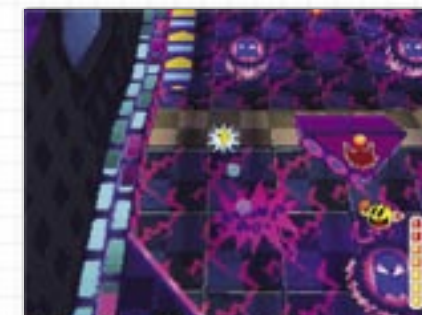
Additional game modes can be unlocked as you go. Beating a level opens up Time Attack, and getting all the dots in the level unlocks a Challenge. The Challenges can be anything from eating a number of dots or ghosts within a time limit, to making it through a level without eating a single dot. Time Attack is about as fun as usual, and the Challenges add a nice twist to otherwise familiar levels.

The problem with *Pac 'N Roll* is that, while it's pretty fun, it never rises into greatness. It's just too easy and basic, except when it's cheap and aggravating, and while it's rarely anything but entertaining it never becomes special. The potential is there, and maybe a sequel can bring it out, but right now it lives in the land of "somewhat entertaining" or "not half-bad" games.

**Rating :** 2.5 of 5

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

*Pac 'N Roll* offers some neat gameplay concepts, but ultimately, there's not nearly enough depth or fun here to make it worth your money.



**FINAL SCORE :**  
**4 of 5**

**FINAL SCORE :**  
**2.25 of 5**





Review by Metalbot

**Publisher :** Mastiff  
**Developer :** Andamiro  
**Release Date :** 8/18/2005  
**Rating :** TEEN; Suggestive Themes

**Genre(s) :** Music  
**Category :** Dancing  
**# of players :** 1-2



**Pump it up: EXCEED is not Dance Dance Revolution. You dance on a pad, and there are arrows that show your steps. Let's stop the comparison right there. Pump it up: EXCEED is its own game, and does well with the things that it brings to the table. Pump it up: EXCEED is better than DDR in many ways. Dance Dance Revolution fans read on, because your world is about to be shattered.**

The dance pad for *PiU:E* features diagonal arrows, forcing you to step forward and backward in large movements, which is refreshing. It also has a button centered between the arrows, used as a transition step, or extra step. These two things together put *PiU:E* closer to reality, making you do real dance steps. The pad is very durable, and has a textured underside that keeps you from sliding around. Dance like crazy, because this pad isn't going anywhere!

Further separating itself from *DDR*, the dance steps in *PiU:E* go with the music. Whether you are grooving to The Sugar Hill Gang, rocking out to The Crystal Method, or jamming to Korean pop songs, you will be moving with the music. While other dancing games are more like full body puzzle games that feature music as a backdrop, *PiU:E* manages to use the genre's full potential by having every step, of every song, coincide with the music you are dancing to. Games like *DDR* come close to this but fall short, having too many steps that don't follow the music. *Pump it Up: EXCEED* unlocks the real magic of its respective genre, by making you feel the music while you move to it.

*PiU:E* has three game play modes: arcade, home and sudden death. Arcade mode is exactly as it sounds: straight up arcade-style

dancing. If you miss too many steps in this mode, you lose. Home mode, on the other hand, is a little more lenient. You can miss every step of a song, and it keeps going. However, you still need to score a good grade to move on. The least forgiving of the three is sudden death mode; one mistake and you're done. With this broad range of gameplay modes, both veterans and rookies alike can enjoy this game.

Even with all of this greatness, a few things stand out as odd. You can't unlock an arrowless version of the music videos that play in the back of each song, which is a huge letdown. Most of them are incredibly entertaining, and would be nice to watch on their own without arrows getting in the way. The lack of an edit mode simply boggles the mind. Someday, someone will give us this feature, but not today, and not in this game.

Putting these few complaints aside, *Pump it up: EXCEED* is definitely worth the price of admission. Andamiro got so many things right, you'll be robbing yourself of fun if you don't play this! That is, if you like to get jiggy with it.

**Rating :** 4.5 of 5



**FINAL SCORE :**  
**4.25 of 5**

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

*DDR* has a little more depth, but *Pump* makes you do actual dance steps! Definitely worth checking out if you want to game your groove on.



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about to be **killed**  
for the **11th time** tonight

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# ADVANCED PASSING TECHNIQUES

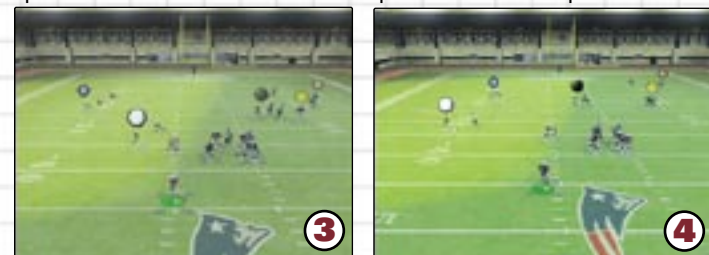
## QB VISION CONTROL

The biggest addition on the field in Madden NFL 06 is QB Vision Control. It lets you feel like a real NFL QB by scanning the field, looking off defenders, and making perfect throws within your quarterback's unique field of vision. Your passing cone will depend on the quarterback you are using. If you are using a quarterback with low awareness, his vision cone is not going to cover much of the field, making it hard to complete passes, such as with Bears' quarterback Rex Grossman. On the other hand if you are using a quarterback such as the Patriots' Tom Brady, who has high awareness, his vision cone will cover most of the field making it easier to complete passes.

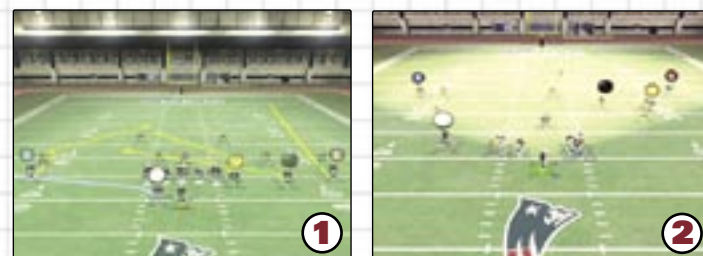


Notice in screen shot 1, the slot receiver (black pass icon) is lined up on the right side of the field. He is the play's primary receiver, indicated by his pass route being orange and his pulsating pass icon. If the ball were to be snapped, the quarterback's vision cone would lock on to him. If you decide that you don't want him to be the play's primary receiver, you can select another receiver as the play's primary receiver. To do this press the R trigger and then press the receiver's pass icon to make him the play's primary receiver. In screen shot 2 the receiver lined up on the far left is now the play's primary receiver. Once the ball is snapped, the quarterback's vision cone will lock on him. In screen shot 3, also notice the quarterback's vision cone is now locked on the far left receiver who is running a corner post. Also notice that the quarterback's vision cone shows the halfback running a delayed flat route. Both receivers are in the quarterback's vision cone and the ball can be thrown to both for a complete pass. Take another look at third screen shot. Notice the three receivers on the far right. The quarterback's vision cone is not on any of them. This means if the ball was thrown to any one of them, chances are the pass would not be completed on higher difficulty levels.

In screen shot 4, the slot receiver (black) is now in the quarterback's vision cone. He is also quarterback's best option.



## Put the Vision Cone in the Middle Before the Snap



By default the quarterback's vision cone will be locked on the play's primary receiver once the offense breaks the huddle. We have already shown how to select another primary receiver before the ball is snapped. You also have choice of not selecting any primary receiver before the snap. To do this press the R trigger and then press the **A** button on the Xbox or the **X** button on the PS2. The quarterback's vision cone will now change to the middle of the field. Once that is done, no receiver is selected as the play's primary receiver. Look at screen shot 1. Notice that no receiver has an orange pass route, which means no primary receiver has been selected. This works best against human opponents who like to cheat their pass coverage towards the play's primary receiver. In screen shot 2, the quarterback's vision cone is now in the middle of the field as soon as the ball is snapped.

## SLIDE/AVOID FOR RECEIVERS



Think of this as what the slide is for the QB, but except now it can be used for receivers. If the receiver looks like he is about to be creamed by the defender, tap the dive button and the receiver will go to the ground to avoid being hit too hard.



## TWO WAYS TO USE QB VISION CONTROL WHEN THROWING

There are two ways to use QB Vision Control passing. You can either use the R stick to move it to the area you want to throw the pass or hold down **R2**, then select the receiver you want to throw the ball to, and then press the receiver's pass icon to throw the pass.

### USING THE R STICK

#### Strengths

- Allows the user to scan the field without holding down the right trigger.
- Using the R stick allows the user to beat the blitz quicker because it does not require pushing the pass receivers pass icon twice to throw the ball.
- Works best with quarterbacks with wider vision cones.
- User is able to get rid of the ball quicker as soon as the ball is snapped. Good for quick passes in the flat.

#### Weaknesses

- Harder to lock on a particular receiver. Often while moving the R stick, the user will overshoot the cone on the intended receiver he wants to throw the ball to. By the time the user gets the cone back on the intended receiver, it is already too late.
- Quarterbacks that have smaller vision cones make it almost impossible to use the R stick when it comes to completing passes consistently.
- Moving the quarterback with the L stick or D-pad while trying to move the cone with the R stick is extremely difficult.

### USING THE R TRIGGER

#### Strengths

- Allows the user to lock on to a receiver without having to move the R stick.
- Works better than the R stick when the quarterback's vision cone is not very wide.
- Better maneuverability for the quarterback while in the pocket when scanning for open receivers down the field.

#### Weaknesses

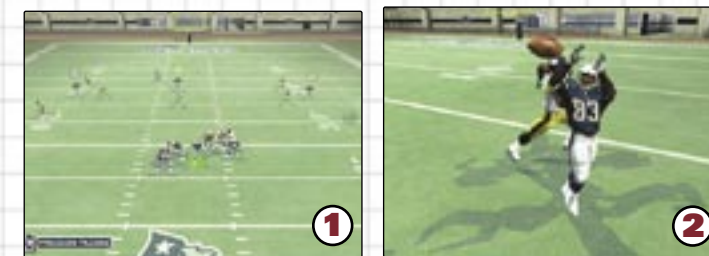
- Takes longer to throw the ball because the user must press the intended receiver's pass icon once to lock on, then must press the intended receivers pass icon again to throw the pass.
- The user is unable to get rid of the ball as quickly on short passes after the snap as compared to when using the R stick.

## QB PRECISION PLACEMENT

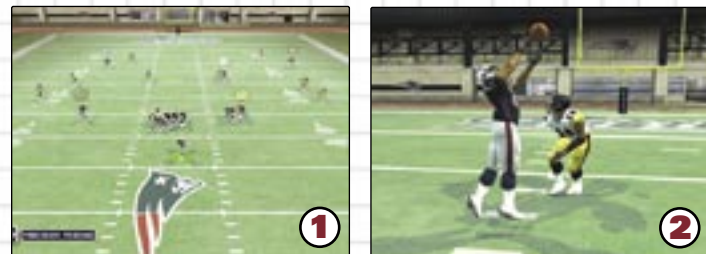
Another new addition in Madden NFL 06 when passing is the QB Precision Placement. It allows you to put the ball exactly where you want it. Lead the receiver to an open area, throw it behind him so he can come back to it or throw a jump ball and let him go get it. Most top ballers would adjust Pass Lead Sensitivity slider higher so when the ball is thrown, they could lead the receiver and make spectacular catches. Last year, the Pass Lead Sensitivity slider was taken out of the console versions of Madden. You could still lead the receiver by pressing left, up, right, or down, but not with the same precision as previous editions of Madden. EA decided to put it back in the game, but instead of the user having to adjust the Pass Lead Sensitivity slider, EA added QB Precision Placement. In this section of the book we will show the ins and outs of this new feature and how effective it can be if used correctly.

### Left or Right on the D-Pad or Stick

Press the D-pad or the L stick left or right to lead the receiver. The harder you press the D-pad or L stick, the more the receiver will be led by the pass. In the screen shots we show the receiver on the right running a post corner route against 4-3-Normal Cover 3. Once he breaks to the corner, we press hard right on the D-pad so ball is thrown to where only he can make the catch. Other types of routes you may consider leading receiver's right or left are ins, outs, drags, slants, corners, and crossing routes.



## QB PRECISION PLACEMENT CONTINUED



### Press Up on the D-Pad or Stick

By pressing up on the D-pad or stick, the ball will be thrown higher in the air. The harder you press up on the D-pad or stick, the higher the pass will be thrown. In screen shot 1, the receiver on the left is running a deep post against Nickel-3-3-5 Cover 2. Throwing the ball up higher in the air allows the receiver to aggressively go and snatch the ball out of air in front of the free safety. A few other routes where you can push up on the D-pad are routes such as drags, streaks, and fades. When running drag routes, it allows for the ball to take a higher projectile so that it has a better chance of clearing the defensive line. By pressing up on the D-pad when running streaks and fades, it allows the receiver to go up and get the pass. Randy Moss or any receiver who has a high jumping attribute is perfect for throwing the ball high and allowing them to go get it.

### SMART ROUTES

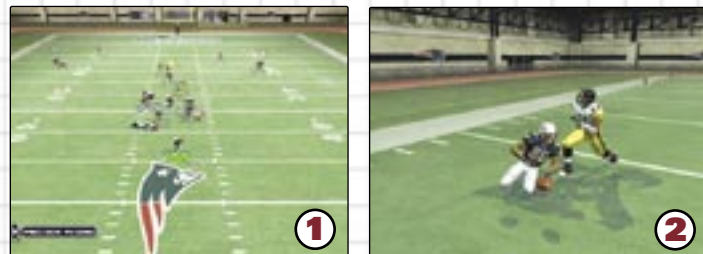
It seems like every year EA tweaks the way receivers run their pass routes. Last year, for example, option routes were where a receiver would have three routes he could run. He had a primary and two secondary pass routes to choose from depending on what type of coverage he read.

The new tweak this year is called "smart routes." By pressing the hot route button, then pressing the receiver's pass icon, and finally, pressing R3 down, the receiver will now run a smart route. Essentially what this means is the receiver will run the same pass route that he is assigned to run, but either shorter or longer depending on where the first down marker is on the field.



As an example, a receiver could normally run a 5-yard curl, which is well short of the first down marker. However, in this case, he is now running a 10-yard curl route which is just past the first down marker. This is because he now is running a smart route. Once the ball is snapped he runs down to first down marker and curls back to the quarterback to make the catch.

snapped he runs down to first down marker and curls back to the quarterback to make the catch.



### Press Down on the D-Pad or Stick

The final way to use QB Precision Placement is to press down on the D-pad or stick. By doing this, the ball will be thrown lower to ground. In screen shot 1, the receiver on the left is running a deep hitch route against man coverage. We press down on the D-pad so the ball is thrown down towards the ground. Doing this will make it so only the receiver will have a chance to make the catch. In screen shot 2, the receiver goes down in front of the cornerback to make the grab.

### QB Precision Placement Tip

By pushing upper left or right on the D-pad or stick, you can lead the receiver and also make him go up to get it. Try using it on corner routes and see what the results are.

### Producer's Call

#### EA's Favorite Offensive Strategies

- Establish the run early; this will help set up the play action which can lead to one-on-one coverage for you wide out.
- Keep your opponent guessing by running multiple plays out of the same formation. It's hard to guess where the offense is going if it looks the same every time they line up.
- Watch the linebackers as soon as you snap the ball and check for the blitz. There is nothing worse than looking down field to throw a pass and you're sacked when your tight end or running back is open in the flats.
- Make sure you think about who your ball carrier is when using the Truck Stick. You don't want to try to run over Ray Lewis with Warrick Dunn. Jerome Bettis vs. Allen Rossum is the kind of matchup you are looking for.
- When using your QB vision, look off less aware safeties because they will be more easily influenced by which receiver you lock onto.
- If someone keeps blitzing up the middle against you and you're having a tough time getting the pass off, use slide protection pinch to clog up the middle with your offensive linemen.

## SLIDE PROTECTION

One of the most requested features that players have been asking for in Madden for some time is a way of changing the pass block protection schemes to counter nanos and enhanced blitz packages. EA has finally listened to these requests and has added slide protection. This allows for players to adjust the offensive line pass blocking protections on the fly before the snap. There are four ways pass protection schemes can be adjusted. Below is a list of all four of them, with how to perform them and their strengths and weaknesses.

### SLIDE PROTECTION OUT

Press the slide protection button, and then press the D-pad or L stick up. The defensive line will now pass protect out.



#### Strengths

- Puts the offensive linemen in better position to counter heat from the outside from both sides.
- Use it to counter when the defensive line is spread or fanned out.

#### Weaknesses

- Puts the quarterback at risk from being sacked from the inside.
- Don't use it if the defense overloads the middle of the offensive line with multiple defenders.

### SLIDE PROTECTION IN

Press the slide protection button, and then press the D-pad or L stick in. The defensive line will now pass protect in.



#### Strengths

- Puts the offensive linemen in a better position to counter heat from the inside.
- Use it to counter when the defense sends multiple defenders up the middle.

#### Weaknesses

- Puts the quarterback at risk from being sacked from the outside on both sides.
- Don't use it if the defensive line is spread or fanned out.

### SLIDE PROTECTION LEFT

Press the slide protection button, and then press the D-pad or L stick left. The defense will now pass protect to the left.



#### Strengths

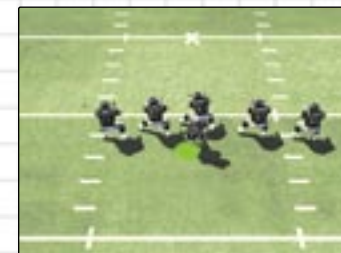
- Puts the offensive linemen in better position to counter heat from the right side of defense.
- Use this when the defense shows blitzes and overloads the left side of the offensive line.

#### Weaknesses

- Puts the quarterback at risk from being sacked from the left side of the defense if any defenders should blitz.
- Do not use if the defense overloads the right side of the offensive line.

### SLIDE PROTECTION RIGHT

Press the slide protection button, and then press the D-pad or L stick right. The defense will now pass protect to the right.



#### Strengths

- Puts the offensive linemen in better position to counter heat from the left side of defense.
- Use this when the defense shows blitz and overloads the right side of the offensive line.

#### Weaknesses

- Puts the quarterback at risk from being sacked from the right side of the defense if any defenders should blitz.
- Don't use it if the defense overloads the left side of the offensive line.

## FORMATION SHIFTS

If you didn't use formation shifts in Madden NFL 2005, you need to in Madden NFL 06. Formation shifts allow the offense to have up to four different formations for a play. When you think about it long and hard it means if your playbook has 300 plays, your team's playbook can actually have up 1,200 plays. That number may seem crazy, but it's true. Using formation shifts allow the offense to create plays on the fly, to create mismatches, and to beat tight man coverage. We suggest you spend a lot of time in practice mode learning the ins and outs of your playbook's formation shifts.

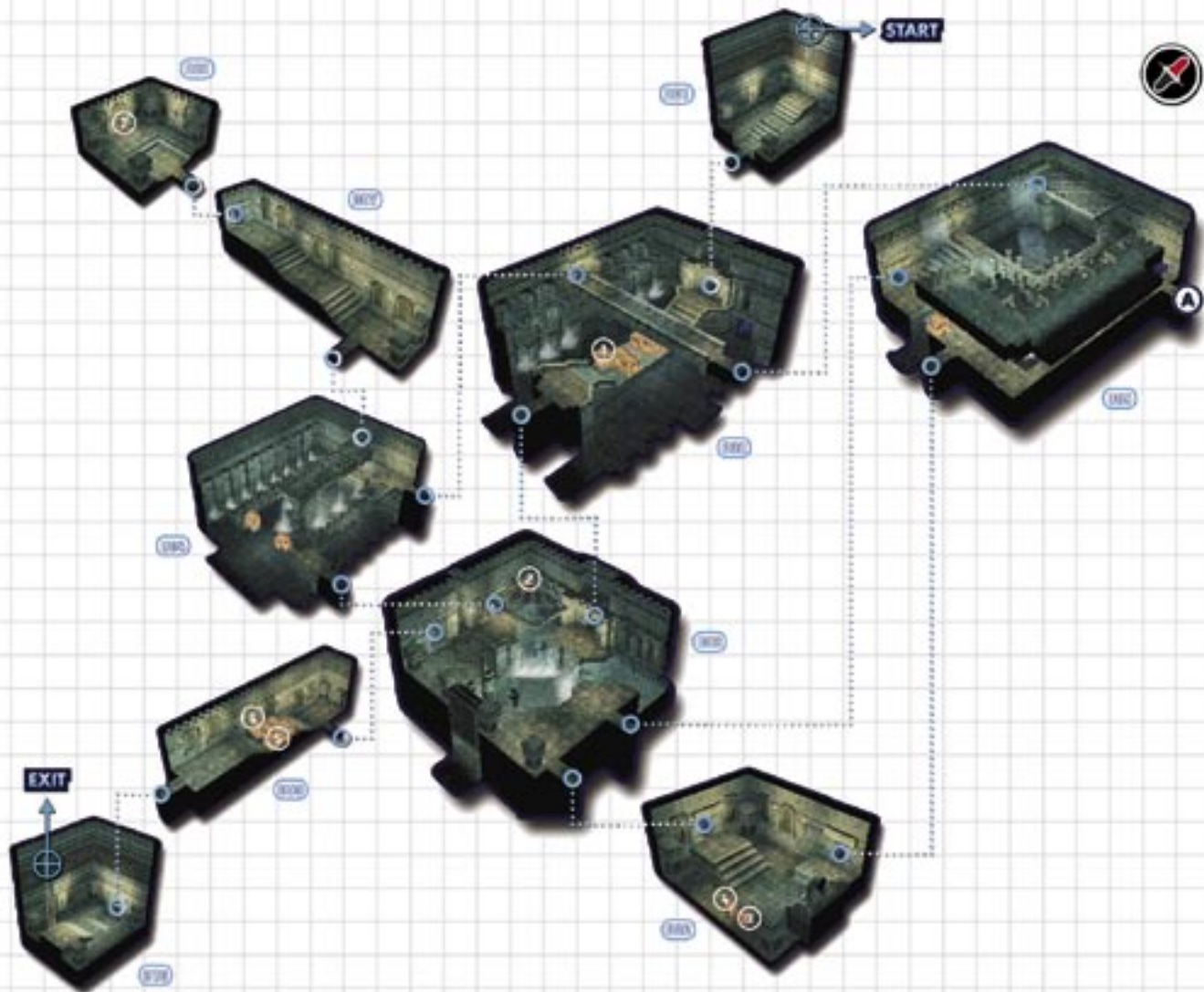
The offense comes out in the Split Backs-3WR Deep Slants out of the Rams playbook. We use the package personal to put in both halfbacks. On the Rams' roster, Marshall Faulk is not the team's starter, but he still is one of the better pass catching backs in the game. At the line of scrimmage, we press down on the formation shift button and press left on the D-pad. The offense shifts to the Singleback-Normal. Faulk now lines up in the slot and is matched up with a slower defensive back that is playing tight man coverage. We send Faulk in motion to the right and snap the ball just after he clears the right tackle. Quarterback Marc Bulger takes a one step drop and then fires the ball to Faulk in the flat for a 5-yard pick up.



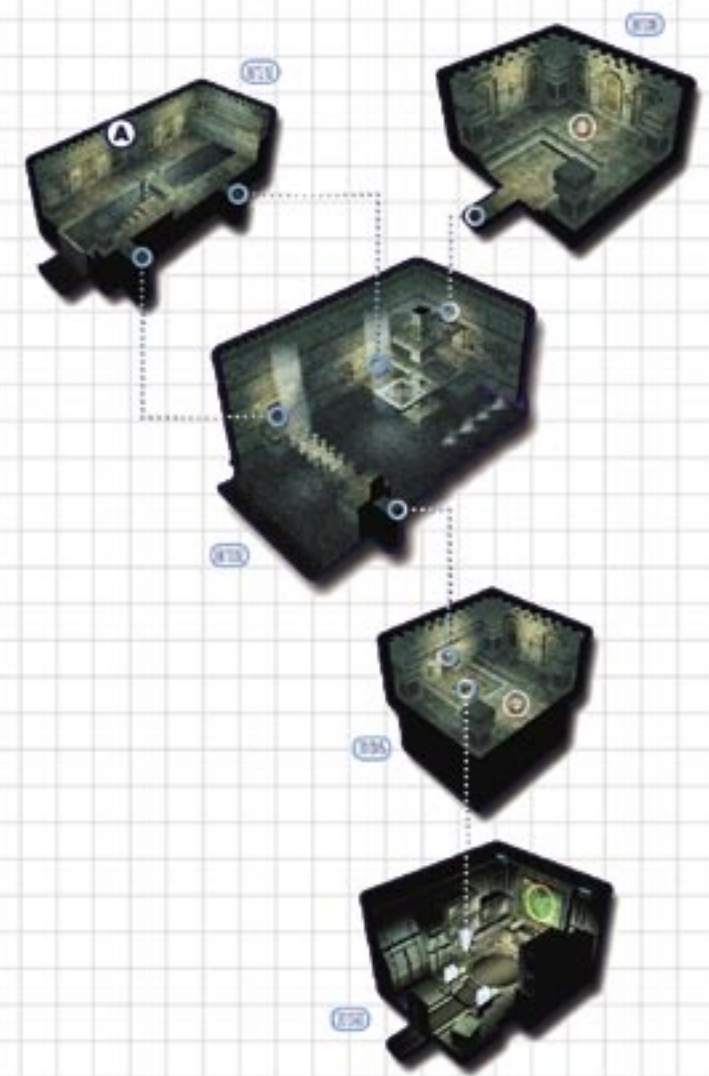
# UNDER ALDEHYDE DUNGEON

We believe a light that is beyond the darkness.

<b>TOOLS TO CLEAR</b>														x 06
<b>TOOLS TO COMPLETE</b>														x 00



- ITEMS -					
01	REQUIREMENT: POTION BERRY	07	REQUIREMENT: 5000 GELLA	n/a	
02	REQUIREMENT: HEAL BERRY x3	n/a	08	REQUIREMENT: 2000 GELLA	n/a
03	REQUIREMENT: 1000 GELLA	n/a	09	REQUIREMENT: SKILL [COUNTER UP 2]	n/a
04	REQUIREMENT: WITCH EP. 2	n/a			
05	REQUIREMENT: HEAL BERRY				
06	REQUIREMENT: REVIVE FRUIT				



**FLOOR:006**  
Grab the handle on the machine and keep turning it clockwise to lower the water gate in floor:003. Once the gate is lowered you can walk across it as a bridge.



**BOSS: BERSERK (BATTLE 1)**  
Don't try to fight, but rather stay alive for five turns. After five turns Berserk will tell you that you are too weak and then retreat. If he kills anyone, make sure that they are alive at the end of the fight to avoid losing any of their maximum hit points. The way experience works with this guy is that for every 1 hit point worth of damage you deal you receive 1 experience point more—in addition to the minimum of 100 that you get for this fight. To survive easily you will want to defend on turns 1 and 4 and attack on turns 2, 3, and 5. The party member that gets hit during turn 1 needs to be healed on turn 2 by Cecilia. On turn 3 use Shield magic, defend on turn 4 and then attack during turn 5.

**FLOOR:003**  
This is the first time that you must hang onto cages. To hang, stand underneath a cage and press the X button. This grabs onto the cage. While hanging you can move around by using the left analog or drop down by pressing the O button. If you reach the edge of a cage press the X button and you will flip up to the top.



BERSERK		BOSS #257	
	<b>PRIMARY STATS</b>	<b>ELEMENTAL DURABILITY</b>	<b>ITEMS DROPPED</b>
	LEVEL: 10	EARTH: --	--
	HIT POINTS: --	WIND: Halved	--
	EXPERIENCE: 100	FIRE: --	--
GELLA: 500	ICE: --	--	
<b>DOWNLOADS</b>		<b>THUNDER</b> : Active	<b>ITEMS STOLEN</b>
		<b>THUNDER</b> : Weak	--
		<b>LIGHT</b> : --	--
		<b>DARK</b> : Halved	--





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Land ahoy! 7 colorful stages full of crazy gimmicks. Pick up and use objects to fight your foes!\*

6 game play modes: including 2-player Grand Battle versus mode!\*

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This is the unofficial *Street Fighter* edition of the hardware section, where we talk up some of the products that tie in with the fifteenth-anniversary celebration of the series. If you like 2D fighters, we've got some suggestions for you.

The *Street Fighter* Saturn pad makes me think of the awesome controllers of yesteryear. It'd be great to see somebody release new controllers and sticks based upon the NES Max, SNES Super Scope, or what's arguably the best light gun of all time, Sega's Justifier. Maybe we could even get a brand new NES Advantage, to tie in with the Revolution's release.

NubyTech

## Street Fighter Anniversary Edition Arcade Stick

Review by Wanderer

Arcade Style Controller  
Systems: PlayStation 2, Xbox  
Price: **\$59.99**

**Features**  
Eight-button arcade-style layout  
Decorated with artwork from Udon Studios  
Plexiglass top  
Ships with a *Street Fighter* poster

This isn't going to make the hardcore *Street Fighter* players put down their custom Hori sticks, but for retro gamers like me, this is solid. Everything about it screams "arcade," from the stick to the buttons. If you use this to play old-school *Street Fighter II* or some of the games on *Midway Arcade Treasures*, it's an instant nostalgia rush.

Admittedly, the price is a little steep, especially for a controller that you can't use with most games made after 1998, but you'll know where the money went. If you're a fan of the classics and you've got sixty bucks to spend, this is the next best thing to slapping together your own from real arcade components.



## Headbanger Audio Ear Subs

Review by Wanderer

**Features**  
Electronic amplified subwoofer  
"Speed Chamber" ergonomic earbuds  
Spare ear buds

Earphones  
System: PSP  
Price: **\$29.99**

I'm a little behind on my audio gear, so when I heard of earphones with a subwoofer, I was somewhat surprised. There's a miniature 'woofer attached to the cord, and it really makes your PSP's sound pop. As a bonus, the buds don't slip out of your ears constantly the way that earphones do. (Just don't turn the volume up too loud, or there's this effect that's kind of like a sonic Q-Tip. I shan't elaborate.)

The price may be a little steep, but those who're looking for truly solid audio options need look no further. These are a solid pick for gameplay, and if you're using your PSP as an MP3 player, they're a must-have. Now, how do I get a set of these for my iPod?



## Pelican Wireless PL-6607

Review by 4thletter

Controller  
System: PS2  
Price: **\$24.99**

**Features**  
Hand-painted Controllers with matching Camouflage Dongles  
50 Feet of Wireless Range  
Up to 300 Hours of Battery Life  
Rubberized Satin Grip Finish for Optimum Comfort

The PL-6607 would be more comfortable if I had smaller fingers. The battery pack is a little too large for the tiny controller and the analog sticks are just slightly too small. The D-pad could also stand to be bigger. The controller has survived hours of hardcore play in *Katamari Damacy*, despite my heavy hands, so Pelican is doing something right.

Technically, though, this is a quality pad. Everything performs as promised with no interference. If you've got small hands, the PL-6607 should be right up your alley. Bear-pawed individuals should look elsewhere.



## Prime Global Enterprises Comfort Stylus

Review by Wanderer

Stylish, Fashionable Accessory with Inherent Utility Function  
System: Nintendo DS (or any touch screen)  
Price: **\$5.99**

**Features**  
Flexible stylus  
Rubberized grip  
Bends around thumb

The Comfort Stylus is kind of weird, but you get used to it. It's a couple of inches longer than the DS's kid-sized stylus, and the flexible shaft lets you bend it as you see fit. You can coil it around your thumb to make for easy onscreen action. If it has a flaw, it's that it isn't quite as flexible as you'd think, so you can't wrap it around your thumb as neatly as I'd like.

This is a neat middle ground between thumb control and a stylus. If the DS's standard stylus is too small for you, the Comfort Stylus provides a handy and ergonomic alternative. It even fits neatly into the DS's stylus slot.



## Kidz Gear Headphones For Kids

Review by Melf

Headphones  
System: Any  
Price: **\$19.99**

**Features**  
Built-in independent volume control  
Foldable for easy portability  
Custom designed for children 2 years and older

Now here's something I've been needing for some time. My little girl is really getting into the GBA (anything *Dora* is a must), and loves to sit and fiddle around with these comfy headphones. The lack of an adapter for the SP is a pain, but they'll work nicely on any other handheld you may have- or anything with a headphone jack, for that matter. Nicely portable, the phones are surprisingly small, given the design style, and their padded cups are very easy on young ears. Kidz Gear made these specifically for children, so you won't be able to steal them away unless you're unnaturally small-headed (and I mean that in the most innocent way possible).

Very solid construction, complimented by the neat volume control, makes them convenient as well as comfortable. Now just give me a pair in a standard adult size for the same price!



## NubyTech Street Fighter Anniversary Edition Controller

Review by Wanderer

Controller  
System: Xbox  
Price: **\$24.99**

**Features**  
Six-button layout  
Lenticular hologram of Guile, Akuma, or Bison  
Ships with a *Street Fighter* comic book by Udon

This is a nice piece of work, if only because it's a lot like the late, great Saturn's controller pad (not the big honkin' 3D one — the nice small six-button pad). It feels deceptively light, but it's not flimsy at all. It fits nicely in your hands, and I've had no problems with the pad or the buttons.

The biggest problem that the controller has is that the hologram's displaced the Start button. It's now above the face buttons, so you'll often hit it by accident when you're trying to hit Y. Other than that, it's the best possible controller if you're playing 2D fighters on your Xbox.





Import Review by Wanderer

Hey, this has arcade-perfect *Darius Gaiden* on it.

Now that the shmup fans have run off to import this sucker, the rest of us can talk. For them, this is a must-buy; the rest of you will take some convincing.

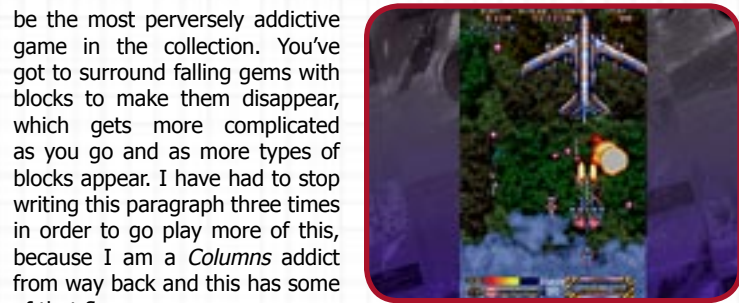
*Taito Memories Vol. 1* represents twenty-seven years of Taito's history, with twenty-five games ranging from 1978's *Space Invaders* to 1997's *Puchi Carat*. Each of the games has a date attached, so you can go through each title and see how both Taito and arcade games in general evolved over the years, from beeping sprites in the '70s and '80s to screaming anime girls and falling-block puzzles in the '90s.

It's bizarre to see *Lunar Rescue* and *Elevator Action II* on the same disc, and realize that they're two points on a line. It isn't a straight line, of course, but it's still a line.

I hadn't heard of a lot of these games before I started, but there's something for everyone here, from Japanese baseball (*Aa Eikou No Koushien*) to sidescrolling platformers (*Bonze Adventure*) to inscrutably Japanese action games like *Pu-Li-Ru-La*. The latter is *deeply* weird; imagine Harry Potter meets "FLCL" meets Konami's *The Simpsons* arcade game. You're a little kid in a gloriously hand-drawn 2D world, who goes around fighting robots and transforming them into cute animals with your magic wand. Then the guy with the giant nose shows up and I start wondering if I'm hallucinating this.

If you like old-school beat-'em-ups, there's *Growl* (where Not Indiana Jones Really and his biker friends beat up Nazi poachers) and *Lightbringer* (a.k.a. *Dungeon Magic*), which is what happens when Mike Hagar gets to be the Dungeon Master. If you're more of a servant of the classics, you could go for one of the three versions of *Space Invaders* on the disc, which is admittedly overkill, or *Lunar Rescue*.

*Puzzle Fighter* fans will want to check out *Cleopatra Fortune*, which may



be the most perversely addictive game in the collection. You've got to surround falling gems with blocks to make them disappear, which gets more complicated as you go and as more types of blocks appear. I have had to stop writing this paragraph three times in order to go play more of this, because I am a *Columns* addict from way back and this has some of that flavor.

The big names on the disc are *Darius Gaiden*, one of the most beloved shooters in existence; the equally great *Elevator Action II*; and, of course, the arcade version of *Bubble Bobble*.

# THE GAMES

- Aa Eikou No Koushien*
- Alpine Ski*
- Bubble Bobble* (locked)
- Cameltry* (locked)
- Cleopatra Fortune*
- Darius Gaiden*
- Don Doko Don*
- Elevator Action Returns* (US: *Elevator Action II*)
- The Fairyland Story*
- Flipull*
- Grid Seeker: Project Storm Hammer*
- Jigoku Meguri* (US: *Bonze Adventure*)
- Kiki Kaikai* (locked; bootlegged as *Knight Boy* in the US)
- Kuri Kinton*
- Lightbringer* (US: *Dungeon Magic*)
- Lunar Rescue*
- Majestic Twelve* (US: *Super Space Invaders '91*)
- Metal Black* (locked)
- Pu-Li-Ru-La*
- Puchi Carat*
- Rastan Saga*
- Runark* (US: *Growl*)
- Space Invaders*
- Space Invaders DX*
- Syvalion* (locked)



# TAITO LEGENDS?

We hit some confusion while we were writing this up. As it turns out, not only is there a second volume of *Taito Memories* coming out shortly in Japan, but Empire Interactive is working on a compilation for the PS2 called *Taito Legends*.

The latter disc, thankfully, is coming to the U.S. and Europe, although no release date has been announced. Here's an unofficial list of the games that'll be included:

- Aqua Jack*
- Battle Shark*
- Bubble Bobble*
- Bubble Symphony*
- Colony 7*
- Continental Circus*
- Darius Gaiden*
- Double Axle*
- Dungeon Magic*
- Electric YoYo*
- Elevator Action*
- Exzibus*
- Gladiator*
- Great Swordsman*
- Jungle Hunt*
- New Zealand Story*
- Ninja Kids*
- Operation Thunderbolt*
- Operation Wolf*
- Phoenix*
- Plotting* (AKA *Flipull*)
- Plump Pop*
- Pop 'N' Pop*
- Rainbow Islands*
- Rastan*
- Rayforce*
- Scramble Formation*
- Sea Fighter Poseidon*
- Space Gun*
- Space Invaders*
- Space Invaders Part II*
- Super Qix*
- ThunderFox*
- Tube It*
- Volfied*
- Zoo Keeper*



This is also where the problems start.

One of the weirder things about this collection is that five of the games — *Bubble Bobble*, *Cameltry*, *Metal Black*, *Syvalion*, and *Kiki Kaikai* (this one was the basis for the *Pocky & Rocky* series in the US) — are initially locked. As near as we can tell, they're set to release gradually as you play the other games in the collection, with the first of them appearing after two and a half hours.

This is bizarre, and since *Bubble Bobble's* one of the locked games, it's also a pain in the ass. You can almost make do with *The Fairyland Story* and *Don Doko Don*, but it's hard, man. It's deaf when you want espresso.

Because one of the greatest reasons to have the disc has to be unlocked, *Taito Memories vol. 1* goes from a must-have disc to one that's simply highly recommended. It's not exactly a chore to unlock the games — however will I put up with playing several hours of *Darius Gaiden* and *Elevator Action II*? — but it's a pretty glaring flaw in what's otherwise a really solid collection.



# はやりがみ 流行り神

警視庁怪異事件ファイル

Revenge

(Hayarigami)

Import coverage by KouAidou

With all the great strategy RPGs that the talented folks at Nippon Ichi have made (*La Pucelle*, *Disgaea*, *Phantom Brave*, *Makai Kingdom...*), we wondered if they would ever branch out into other genres. Turns out they have, and it's quite a different sort of thing than we expected — a visual novel. While this is a common game genre in Japan, it is almost unheard of in the West. Our exposure to the format is generally limited to datesims and anime spinoffs, which hold limited appeal to anyone but the most diehard of fanboys. This month, we intend to show that not all visual novels are created equal with Nippon Ichi Software's latest Japanese release, an original visual novel in the mystery/horror vein entitled *Hayarigami: Revenge*.

*Revenge* is a budget re-release of NIS's 2004 *Hayarigami: Keishichou Kaii Jiken Fairu* (Hayarigami: Unusual Police Case Files). The re-release features an improved interface and a new drama CD, but with many of the same graphics and scenarios as the original.

### Story

The Japanese have always had a love for the macabre. From stories of spirit-projection in the middle ages, to the wandering street-demons characterized in the prints of the Edo period, to the more recent tales of "Hanako-san," the ghost that haunts the third stall in every Japanese school bathroom, the country has long expressed a fascination with things not of this world. It is on this fascination that *Hayarigami* is built.

Ghost stories. Urban legends. Things that happened to "a friend of a friend." *Hayarigami* is a story about all these things. It is also the story of Kazumi Junya, a detective who works in the haunted 5th basement of Tokyo police headquarters. Along with his intimidating but soft-hearted



小暮さんによると！人目の自殺者は  
はやりがみ  
(長谷部成美)

ACCORDING TO KOGURE, THE FIRST SUICIDE  
VICTIM WAS HASEBE NARUMI.

## HAIRYWHO?

### What's Hayarigami mean anyway?

The roots of the word "hayarigami" mean, loosely, "Fad God." According to the producer, Niikawa Souhei (one of the masterminds behind NIS's *Disgaea* and *Phantom Brave*), hayarigami come into being instantly through the telling of a rumor. As it spreads from person to person, the rumor takes on a life of its own as a kind of god. Although they disappear shortly after conception, in a way, the existence of a hayarigami makes a rumor really true for a time.

partner Kogure Souchirou, Kazumi has the privilege of investigating some of the most unusual cases in the city. While investigating incidents like a string of mysterious chain letters circulating in the wake of a string of serial murders, the two learn that some of the "half-truths" in these stories are not merely limited to half.

### Gameplay

Kazumi's adventures unfold sort of like an interactive *X-Files* with an Eastern flavor. Each "scenario" is like a different episode, and begins with Kazumi describing the case he's currently working on. As events unfold, you get to make decisions about how Kazumi conducts his investigation, which can include anything from picking the questions he asks a subject to the locations he investigates. Risky or dangerous actions are more difficult for Kazumi to perform, and require you to spend a "courage point" to try them. Courage points are only given out at the beginning of the scenario, so you need to be careful: spend them all too early, and you may be cut off from important options later on.

You can also influence Kazumi's general attitude about the case. After a major piece of evidence comes to light, Kazumi enters "Self-Question" mode. Here, you navigate through a dialogue tree to determine Kazumi's conjecture about the case. If one line of reasoning brings you to a conclusion that seems unlikely, you can start Kazumi's reasoning over again. Once you draw Kazumi's final conclusion, it will determine his actions for the rest of the scenario.

The game also provides you with a few tools to make things easier on you. The first is your F.O.A.F. (Friend of a Friend) file, which stores information about various urban legends and institutions that are



WHAT DO I DO? SHOULD I SHOW HER THE NEWSPAPER CLIPPINGS? OR...  
>SHOW HER THE NEWSPAPER CLIPPINGS  
\* CHECK HER REACTION  
\* CHANGE THE SUBJECT



「川原ミユキ……？」  
「正解。ふふふっ」

·KAWAHARA MIYUKI.....?!· BINGO. HEHEHE..

the blanks to help organize your thoughts about the case. When you reach the end of the scenario, you will be given one last chance to fill in the chart with your final conclusion about the relationships and motives in the case. You will then receive a final grade based upon the accuracy of your conclusion.

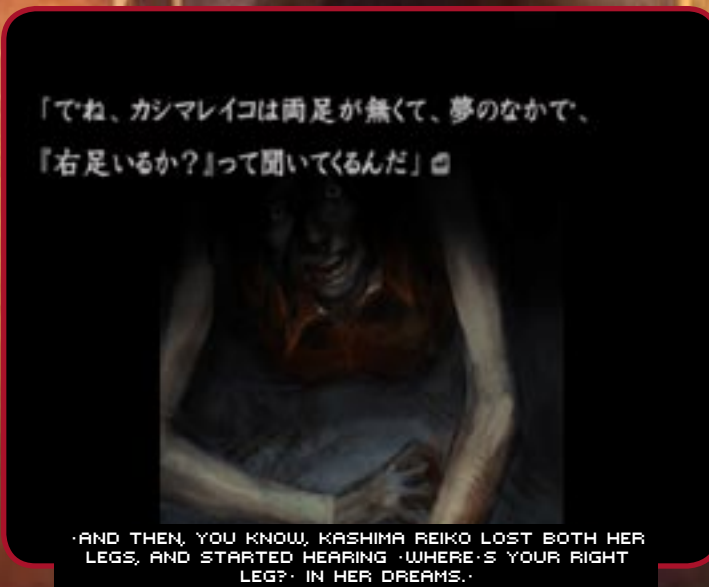


·THAT FACE...IT WASN'T HUMAN...·

This simple but intuitive system makes it easy to completely immerse yourself in the world of the game, which is defined visually through the use of still-art hand-painted by mangaka Sugawara Ken. These paintings are nothing short of breathtaking, and blend perfectly with the game's moody soundtrack, noir-style prose, and devilishly effective use of the Dualshock 2's vibration function to create an engaging (and sometimes truly terrifying) experience. The grading system feels superficial. Like a really good novel, *Hayarigami* is its own reward.

mentioned to Kazumi during the investigation. These entries are clearly meticulously researched, and include the history of how, when, and where the urban legends came to be. They're a fascinating read on their own, but they also serve as a measure of your success in the game. In order to fill up the database completely, you may need to play each scenario multiple times and follow different paths.

In addition to these database terms, your conversation choices unlock other keywords that appear in your "inference logic" file. This looks like a character relationship chart, containing profiles of characters, events, and clues that Kazumi has come upon in his investigation. At any point during the scenario, you can open this file and fill in



「でね、カシマレイコは両足が無くて、夢のなかで、  
「右足いるか？」って聞いてくるんだ」

·AND THEN, YOU KNOW, KASHIMA REIKO LOST BOTH HER LEGS, AND STARTED HEARING 'WHERE'S YOUR RIGHT LEG?' IN HER DREAMS.·

## WORTH IMPORTING?

As beautiful and stylish as the game is, it's just not worth importing unless your Japanese reading skills are extremely advanced. The vocabulary is on the level of a real novel, and there's no voice acting to help you through it. The artwork enhances the story, but does not tell it, so while the direction is fantastic, it's simply impossible to really appreciate if you can't read the text.

Still, all is not lost. With the growing mainstream interest in the Japanese horror cinema that inspired *Hayarigami*, the massive popularity of NIS's other import titles in the US, and Nintendo's recently taking a chance on the similar *Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney* for the DS, prospects for *Hayarigami* getting an official American release aren't as dim as they might once have been. If sold at the same budget price that *Revenge* sells for in Japan, *Hayarigami* could easily become a cult hit.



Fan art is all about giving exposure to aspiring artists who might not otherwise have a way to get their artsie parts seen. If you are one such artist, point your web browser toward [www.hardcoregammag.com](http://www.hardcoregammag.com) and check out the Fan Art section of our message boards. That is where you can post your arts to get them considered for this section. You may also email submissions to [fart@hardcoregammag.com](mailto:fart@hardcoregammag.com).

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



**Title : Untitled**  
**Artist : Chris Smith**  
**Age : Undisclosed**  
**Location : Undisclosed**



**Title : Katamari**  
**Artist : Sara**  
**Age : 6 1/2**  
**Location : WA**



**Title : Grand Summoning**  
**Artist : Freddy Velazquez**  
**Age : 32**  
**Location : Orlando, FL**



**Title : DANTEcrazy**  
**Artist : ChaosKnight**  
**Age : 19**  
**Location : Canada**



**Title : Vivi Doesn't Look Too Happy**  
**Artist : Jenny Cheng**  
**Age : 16**  
**Location : Columbus, OH**



**Title : Frame City Killer**  
**Artist : ChaosKnight**  
**Age : 19**  
**Location : Canada**

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# SUBMISSIONS

WRITTEN BY READERS

Welcome to Hardcore Submissions. This section of the magazine is written by you, our readers. For official rules and guidelines for submitting your own articles for this section, check out the Submissions forum on our web site at [www.hardcoregamermag.com](http://www.hardcoregamermag.com).

This month's pick is a review of a freeware game, but it's a little more than just some random freeware game. It actually started life as a commercial game for the PC and 3DO. Later, an intern at the original development studio (Toys for Bob) worked on porting the code to modern systems. When his internship ended, the source was released to the public. Fans of the game themselves then took over and released playable builds for multiple platforms.



**Author : Joe Mannix**  
**Location : Alpine, TX**

*The Ur-Quan Masters* is, first and foremost, free. It's also a multi-platform port of a classic PC and 3DO game called *Star Control 2*. Set in the year 2155, you command a starship in a quest to save Earth from an enslaving alien race known as the Ur-Quan. Instead of being any one kind of game, *The Ur-Quan Masters* is the sum of several genres that make an excellent whole. Exploration will be required to find allies and diplomacy will be necessary to get them on your side. Resource-gathering will help you build starships, and combat will happen often. All of these aspects have a different game engine to handle it, yet they are all easy to learn.

*The Ur-Quan Masters* looks primitive since its 'parent' was made in 1992. It makes up for that with a ton of depth in gameplay and storyline. There is a learning curve at first, but you can learn as you play or check the internet for help; it's a fully documented game. There are hundreds of star systems to explore and over twenty alien races to interact with. Some races will gladly join you, others need convincing, and some will always be your enemy. The game shifts into "Melee" mode for combat, where one ship from each fleet will do battle until one side is defeated.



Combat is like *Asteroids* with player vs. player elements, conducted by rotating your ship and applying thrust while firing at your enemy. It's simple to learn yet has lots of nuances to it since each race has their own ship design. Half the fun of this game is playing around with all the ships, and it will hold your interest. The other half is exploring the huge plot this game has. Despite the number of races, most of them are fully developed with a real personality, history, and

motives. You can spend hours with the story, or skip much of it if you want. While the graphics are simple, the music is fantastic. You're sure to find a few tracks you love, and fans of the game continue to create new 'packages' of music to add in.

This is primarily a computer game, though it is available for several operating systems. Ports for Windows, MacOS, and many distributions of Linux can all be had. While this is a remake of *Star Control 2*, the game is completely legal to download since the original creators explicitly gave the source code to their fans. *The Ur-Quan Masters* is a worthy update of a genuine classic, and you should give it a try.

**Links:**

**Download the game:** <http://sc2.sourceforge.net/>  
**UQM Wikipedia:** <http://uqm.stack.nl/wiki/>

**Note:** The UQM Wiki does contain plot spoilers, but between it and the UQM forums on SourceForge, you will find all the info you need to beat this game if you get stuck.



# FUNNIES

Thanks for readin'



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Seeya next issue... HGM Staff



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- BONUSSTAGE.COM



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