# HARDCORE GAMER

## GAMER

MAGAZINE®

v1i5 . and now: explosions

COVER 1of2

JAK X
-COMBAT RACING-

### Race like a crazy #@%!

If you survive that, then have a gander at how we score:

**Resident Evil 4**

If that doesn't kill ya instantly, read about this new game for an old system:

SEGA GENESIS

**Beggar Prince**

Then, for the love of Pete, why not see how we're on about this monthly gaming thingy:

GAMETAP

$4.99 USA    ISSUE 5    $6.99 Canada

### As if that weren't enough...

.A sneaky peek at Evolution 2k5,
.Several gaming hotties (mostly girls),
.Plus a few weird Japanese games from Japan.

# HARDCORE GAMER MAGAZINE®

v1i5 . and now: explosions

COVER 2 of 2

## RATCHET DEADLOCKED

**Perfect Score!!**

*Also reviewed:*

**Resident Evil 4 and...**

*a new game 4 an old sys:*

GENESIS

**Beggar Prince**

*For the love of all Petes, why not see how we're on about this monthly gaming thingy:*

GAMETAP

**As if that weren't enough...**

.A sneaky peek at Evolution 2k5,
.Several gaming hotties (mostly girls),
.Plus a few weird Japanese games from Japan.

$4.99 USA   ISSUE 5   $6.99 Canada

8 28814 00007 4   11

Wolfin '05

PlayStation®2

LIVE IN YOUR WORLD.
PLAY IN OURS®

Begin here: a weary traveler on the most hazardous of journeys. Mile upon mile you're ridden in search of the power to save your one true love. Yet now you find yourself here, standing in the shadow of a beast who will devastate the tiny, insignificant being who dared to disturb its slumber. Unless you arm yourself with the one weapon large enough to slay him. One weapon: Your mind. And should you put use it wisely, you shall topple a creature whose size is comparable only to your valor. And end here: atop a mountain that cannot be scaled, but must be slain.

The weapon? Yourself. Nor can you see. Nor yet you must employ it with every move you have the courage to make.

SHADOW
OF THE
COLOSSUS

www.shadowofthecolossus.com

# HARDCORE GAMER

## Biographical Data

### DJPubba_Tim Lindquist
I spent all of this month trying to catch the frogs instead of working.

*Now Playing: Frogger (All)*

### Wanderer_Thomas Wilde
Work's been piling up, I had to run out of town at a bad time, and there's a chance that my recent embarrassing last-place finish at the *Stacked* tournament in Las Vegas might be televised on MTV2. Clearly, it's time to retreat into retrogaming for a while, and do what I've been trying to do for twenty years: beat Count Dracula in the original *Castlevania*. Sucka's got to pay.
*Now Playing: Castlevania (NES), Nintendogs, Cold War (Xbox)*

### Syriel_Adam Pavlacka
Melf is officially insane. How any man can think that *Gate of Thunder* is better than *Lords of Thunder* is beyond me. Next thing you know he'll be claiming that *1942* is better than *Radiant Silvergun*. That said, if you're a shooter fan (none of this trendy "shmup" stuff for me!) be sure to check out the incredibly underrated *Philosoma*. It's a gem of a game that came out early in the PSone's life and shouldn't be overlooked.
*Now Playing: Dragon's Lair II (Arcade), Meteos, Ikaruga (NGC)*

### Racewing_Geson Hatchett
So I recently played all of the *Advance Wars* games. In a row. Without stopping. I'm pretty sure I'm addicted. For the last month, my dreams have been filled with glowing squares and oversized tanks and numbers and stats and my God it *just doesn't stop*. Someone please help before that Neotank hiding around the corner gets me. What do you mean, you can't see it? *I can!*
*Now Playing: Advance Wars: Dual Strike (NDS), The "Ogling Legal-Age Yuffie" Game (Final Fantasy VII: AC)*

### Shoegazer_Dave Hulegaard
I saw something this month that will likely scar me for life: watching the mad gaming skills of a pair of Frag Dolls, up close and in-person, making a mockery out of challengers. When complimenting team member Jinx on a game well-played, she jacked my *Nightmare Before Christmas* bracelet! These girls are just downright heartless!

*Now Playing: Burnout Revenge, Ultimate Spider-Man, and Stubbs the Zombie.*

### KouAidou_Elizabeth Ellis
My Lucasarts collections have long been lost in the mists of a household full of unlabled CD spindles, but thanks to the help of a few friends, I was recently able to relive my sordid adventure gaming days in the form of some classic old Sierra titles. It was sweet, remembering a time back before Roberta Williams went mad with power, and deep down, I know I'll never get back the piece of my soul that *Phantasmagoria* took away.
*Now Playing: King's Quest 2: Romancing the Stones (PC), Quest for Glory 2: Trial by Fire (PC)*

### Roger Danish_Greg Off
Rounding out the shouts outs this month I need to give some mad props to the rest of the MRA Krew, cuz they're cool like that. Apologies to Channa for the unfortunate incident at the Bigfoot Lodge (he's not my friend!). A big what up to Gina and Lucas — two crazy kids wrapped up like savages. And Caryl... she like the scissor. Snap!

*Now Playing: Shadow of Colossus, Ratchet: Deadlocked*

### Lynxara_Alicia Ashby
Okay, I'll say it: I didn't download Advent Children, because I don't actually care. Call me when you're releasing a new Final Fantasy *game*, Square-Enix. Anyway, the Q4 crunch has reduced me to a game-playing zombie... thank goodness there's a lot of good stuff coming out this fall.

*Now Playing: Super Robot Wars alpha 3, Jump Superstars, Twelve: Sengoku Fuushinden, Pump It Up: Exceed (PS2)*

### 4thletter_David Brothers
Comics worth reading: *Ex Machina*, Grant Morrison's *Seven Soldiers* megaseries, *All-Star Batman and Robin the Boy Wonder*, *100 Bullets*, *Gotham Central*, *Majestic*, *The Unnamed Awesome Comic That Somebody Better Hire Me To Write Or Else*.

*Now Playing: Ninja Gaiden Black (because nothing else matters)*

### James_James Cunningham
Every few years, that time in a gamer's life that fills him with both dread and joy comes about. No, not the outbreak of new consoles, something even harder on my wallet — PC upgrade time! Motherboard, CPU, graphics card, RAM, and a few other minor bits all need to be sorted out because the one game that just can't be lived without is finally here. In my case, it's *Serious Sam 2*.
*Now Playing: The Neverhood (PC), We Love Katamari, Castlevania: Aria of Sorrow, Every Extend (PC).*

### HonestGamer_Jason Venter
Everyone seems to hold their best titles for the holiday season. I guess they figure they have a better chance if they release their stuff when everyone else is doing the same. That makes April lonely. The way I see it, everyone should hold off until April. It's the best month. Yeah, I'm an Aries. What's your point?

*Now Playing: Burnout Revenge (Xbox), Makai Kingdom*

### Hitoshura_Iaian Ross
Upon hearing that *Advent Children* was up, I did what any sane person would've done at 2am: Go to sleep and forget about it. Former Square EA staffers Xseed are bringing *Wild Arms 4* over in January. This I find hilarious because there's a possibility it'll arrive before *Alter Code: F*. Too bad there aren't any bookies taking any bets. In the midst of this, *DDS 2* is knocking me on my ass.
*Currently Playing: Digital Devil Saga 2, Makai Kingdom*

### Wolfie_Terry Wolfinger
I'm currently playing Darkwatch on my PS2. I dig the character and the overall look of the game; very moody and gloomy. The attention to detail is very impressive due to some very nice art direction. And blowing away walking corpses is just so much fun!

*Now Playing: Darkwatch (PS2)*

### Metalbolt_Anthony Mertz
Cartoon Network's decision to air *Bobobo-bo Bo-Bobo* is fantastic! They are, of course, airing it dubbed, killing part of the reason that it's so great. I find my solace knowing that more people will be able to indulge in some insane nose hair crime fighting. Soon, police everywhere will lay down their Glocks for the more powerful, and confusing, nose hair attack!
*Now Playing: Fable: The Lost Chapters (PC), True Crime: Streets of LA (GCN), Catch (my backyard)*

### Arlieth_Thomas Shin
Here in California, the arcade scene has apparently gone into hibernation after the excitement of Evolution. Winter Break will bring a regional tournament to brush the dust off of the joysticks, so veteran arcade gamers can take this season to pick up new additions like Texas Hold'em and DotA. This off-season allows the mid-tier players at arcades to compete freely without the intervention of top-tier players. Guess what I'm busy doing.
*Now Playing: Defense of the Ancients (PC), Ys IV: MotS (SNES), Codename: Panzers Phase II (PC), SMT II (SNES)*

### Melf_Ken Horowitz
I can't talk long...they're after me. Sometime last night a large, angry group of games from my pile of shame got together and decided they wanted my head on a pike. After a bitter struggle, in which three Dreamcast games were horribly scratched, I was ousted from my home and am forbidden to return unless I agree to finally finish everything I bought last year. Pray for me...you could be next.
*Now Playing: Astro Boy Omega Factor, Jade Empire, MAMEoX emulation*

### Jeremy_Jeremy Peeples
I've spent the better part of the last month getting reacquainted with an old friend — my Dreamcast. Since then, *Fire ProWrestling D*, *Giant Gram*, and *Crazy Taxi* have been in heavy rotation, and I've been joyous.

*Now Playing : Metropolis Street Racer, Fire Pro Wrestling 2, Columns, WWF No Mercy, Blast Corps, Power Stone*

### Sardius_Danny Cowan
Used game stores are overflowing with cheap PSOne and N64 games, and my collection of crappy last-gen platformers is growing daily. They're good for a quick laugh, but most are bad to the point of being unplayable. Take *Rascal*, for instance. Ever think about how much more awesome *Mario 64* would be if it controlled like the original *Resident Evil*? If so, I hate you!
*Now Playing: Rascal (PS1), Blues Brothers 2000 (N64), Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles*

# GAMER

## Contents

### Previews

Fresh, hot and tasty, these previews will fill you up with half the fat and all the flavor. For a starter, we've got a heapin' helpin' of *THAW*, *Suikoden Tactics* and *Timeshift*. For the main course, we've got chilled *City of Villains*, seared *Marc Eckō's Getting Up* and blackened *Trapt*. Rounding out the menu, for desert there's the delectable The *Chronicles of Narnia*, drizzled with a hint of *Shrek Super Slam* and accompanied by a steaming cup of *America's Army*. Yummy!

**14**
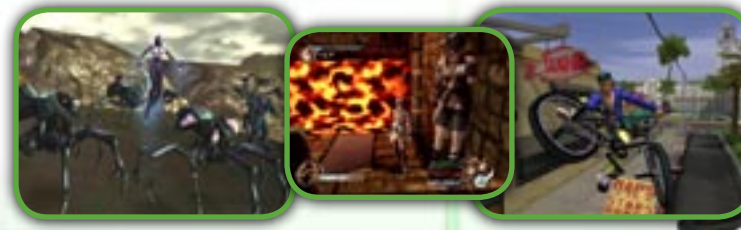
### Feature
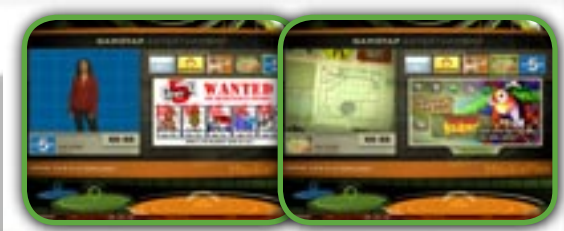
Break out the Mr. Microphone, Rubix Cube and Shrinky Dinks, cuz we're gonna party like it's 1983! Relive the retro years with some of the best classics of the generation for your PC, PS2, GC, Xbox and PSP. *Tecmo Bowl*? We got it! *Mappy*? We got it! *S.T.U.N. Runner*? We got it! *Super Ghouls 'n Ghosts*? We got it! *Toobin'*? We got it! Parcheesy? Nah, we ain't got that. Are you weird or something?

**30**

### On the cover

Sure, you could wait for the inevitable *Jak* and *Ratchet* crossover video game or you can just read up on both stellar games reviewed in one sitting for this month's cover feature. Choke on our dust while we detail *Jax X: Combat Racing*'s tight controls and blistering speed, and prepare to be morphed into a chicken (our life's dream!) with *Ratchet: Deadlocked*. We got 'em spread across two collectible covers, which means you need to buy 'em both. Ain't capitalism grand?

**40**

by Arlieth & Lynxara

# EVOLUTION 2k5

**World Fighting Game Championships**
*Las Vegas, NV*
*August 12-14*

Since 2002, there has been one word that could summon the world's most fearsome competitors of fighting games: Evolution. From Capcom's classic *Super Street Fighter II: Turbo*, to Namco's gorgeous *Tekken* series, Shoryuken.com has once again hosted the ultimate fighting game tournament of the year: Evolution.

The main event hall of Las Vegas's Green Valley Ranch was packed with competitors from throughout the globe. Representatives from England, Japan, Korea, Canada, and more were prepared to endure a gauntlet of elimination pools over twenty-four hours in length. There was one added twist to this tournament: Shoryuken.com was partnered with Major League Gaming (www.mlgpro.com), and it was with MLG's assistance that Evolution secured its Las Vegas


That's CigarBob's cabinet up there.

venue, resulting in over 1,500 players in attendance. *Halo 2* had fifty-two four-man teams (or in the case of the Frag Dolls, four-woman teams), while *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike* celebrated its sixth year with over 300 players swarming in their elimination pools. There were many excellent matches that were played on the huge projector screen, much to the delight of spectators.

It is well-established that the finals of every Evolution are priceless. In *Super Street Fighter II: Turbo*, the Japanese Dhalsim player Gian defeated Ohnuki and Tokido's Chun-Lis with unbelievable offense. The East Coast also made a comeback, as Darkside Phil's Vega secured the top American position in *Super Turbo*, with veterans Buktooth, NKI, Jason Cole and Peter Hin in Top 8. One of the highlights of the tournament was definitely having the final matches played on Balrog's Las Vegas stage.

For *Capcom vs. SNK 2*, the Japanese precision-player BAS finally won a major tournament; he was long overdue for a victory. Combofiend, Southern California's top *CvS2* player, takes top U.S.A. position for 4th place after razor-thin victories against East Coast powerhouse Justin Wong, and Japanese players Tokido, Nestor and Knit in loser's bracket. The north California player "Ohayo" shared Top 8 with Justin in the end.

In *Marvel vs. Capcom 2*, the venerable Duc Do recaptured the world championship with his signature Spiral play, with *MvC2* World Champion Justin Wong eliminated and placed in 4th by fellow NYC player Yipes, who took 2nd. Magic-boy Harry Potter secured his

position by taking the coveted 3rd place. Duc Do's victory may very well jumpstart MvC2 competition once again in the States, because it has been a very (very) long time since Justin has lost an *MvC2* Major.

With many of America's top *Tekken 5* players eliminated during semi-finals, it seemed as though Korea would, once again, capture both *Tekken Tag Tournament* and *Tekken 5*. In a three-way battle for the *Tekken 5* Championship, Christopher "Crow" Villareal from Houston, TX defeated both Korea's MadDogJin(Steve) and Japan's Yuu(Feng) with his Steve Fox for the world title, and was greeted with deafening applause from the crowd.

Finally, in *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike* Justin Wong turned in a strong performance with Chun-Li, even sending Ohnuki to the Loser's bracket. Ohnuki made a comeback after defeating Knit, defending his title as the #1 Chun-Li player in the world. Ricky Ortiz managed to be the only other American *3s* player in the finals, taking 5th with Kokujin (Dudley).

Justin got no 1st Place love this year. Maybe next year, Justin.

Full Evolution Results at **www.evo2k.com**


Texan darling Vanessie shows off her custom joystick.

# WEAPON OF CHOICE



*Power without control is defeat.*

For those of you that would like to enter the next Evolution, the most important consideration is your choice of joystick. While U.S.-style 360° optical sticks may be preferred on the arcade scene, they turned out to be a liability for many players. Constant unplugging and replugging of these sticks carries the risk of damaging the 5V port on PlayStation 2s and shorting the stick out. Therefore, it's recommended that you use a Japanese "gumball" style joystick, which uses microswitches instead of optical ports. These sticks also require less pressure to use, preventing the stick from sliding around on the floor too much. If you are an arcade player, the difference in the stick's spring resistance will take a while to get used to, however. NubyTech's Anniversary Edition joystick (**www.ebgames.com**, $59.99) is an excellent, microswitch-based US-style alternative.


Halo 2 and Super Turbo finals in STEREO~

*Extra: Interview with Tekken 5 World Champion "Crow"*

Profile: "Crow"
Real Name: Christopher Villareal
Location: Houston, TX
Characters: Steve Fox, Jin Kazama

**HGM:** How long have you played *Tekken*, and what *Tekken* game was it?
**Crow:** Since I was about 17 or 18 years old, and I started off on *Tekken Tag Tournament(TTT)*.

**HGM:** What do you like about Steve Fox?
**Crow:** He's fast and agile, and he fights like a real boxer, the way he bobs and weaves.

**HGM:** How did you get involved in the *Tekken* community in the first place?
**Crow:** Back in 1999 I think, I stumbled upon TekkenTag.com. It was cool to see a community of people who all played *TTT*. At that time, I didn't even know about Tekken Zaibatsu, but I eventually found out through the forums.


That's Crow with the shirt on his head.

**HGM:** How would you describe your playing style?
**Crow:** I'm very aggressive in *Tekken 5*. Back in *Tekken 4*, I used to be more defensive, but my style has changed since then. There's still those elements of distance and control, but overall, I'm very offensive.

**HGM:** What other games do you enjoy?
**Crow:** I like to play *Street Fighter*. *Street Fighter* doesn't have as many maneuvering options like wave-dashing and infinite levels, but instead it has corners which puts a lot of pressure on you. I love *SF* and *Marvel [vs. Capcom]* for its execution and combos, and the speed keeps me on my toes. *Tekken*'s a bit slower and more technical, so it's a nice change of pace.

**HGM:** Did you have someone to aspire to when you first got started?
**Crow:** Jangiksu, a Korean *TTT* player. He played Mishimas [i.e. Heihachi, Kazuya]. He was the reigning champ in Korea at the time. He was also handicapped too- he was blind in one eye! And even though others could execute better, wave-dash better and stuff, he still managed to come out on top.

**HGM:** When did you feel that you could capture the Evolution Championship?
**Crow:** It was during my match with Mad Dog Jin (Korea). I knew [the Nina-Steve] match really well. I think he took me too lightly when we first started playing, but when he finally realized what was going on, it was too late.

**HGM:** Okay, I have to ask: What's up with the hood?
**Crow:** It helps me focus on my match and block out the crowd noise. I've been distracted in tourneys before. I first started doing it at TIT7 (*Tekken* In Texas), when I thought to myself, "Hey, why don't I put this shirt on my head so I can focus on the game more?" I've been doing it ever since.
(Note: Crow had randomly caught the shirt as a throw-prize. You could say it was a lucky catch.)

**HGM:** What advice do you have for *Tekken* players to raise themselves to the next level?
**Crow:** Lots of practice and competition. I have a great scene in Houston for *Tekken*, [with] awesome players, and I feel that in your scene, if you raise their level, they'll raise yours in return. Also, experience is really important. There's a lot of people saying that these up-and-coming players will become the next champs, but if you look at martial artists, they really don't reach the peak of their careers until middle age, when they can combine both their execution and their experience.

# HIT THE ROAD... AGAIN



Sam and Max fans will finally get another chance with the comic duo of detective dog and lunatic lagomorph. The 1993 classic *Sam and Max Hit the Road* by Lucasarts was an unforgettable adventure game that oozed tongue-in-cheek parodies, off-the-wall humor and packed loads of mini-games so addictive that players spent more time playing those than the adventure itself. After two aborted sequel attempts and twelve years later, creator Steve Purcell teamed up with Telltale Games (www.telltale.com), which is heavily comprised of frustrated ex-staff from the cancelled Lucasarts *Sam and Max: Freelance Police* project.

"If there's a better match, I don't know who it is," said Purcell at the announcement.

This game will not be a remake of *Freelance Police*, but instead will be created from scratch. Telltale Games, which releases games in a downloadable, episodic format, is currently working on their upcoming game *Bone*. Gamers who want to keep up with Sam and Max news can visit Telltale's site for updates.

# QUEST FOR ANTONIA

The sun was hot and the drinks were cold when Sony Online Entertainment held the finals for the Quest for Antonia at the Skin Poolside Bar at the Palms Casino in Las Vegas, Nevada. Five girls selected as finalists for the event by SOE were there to complete for a $10,000 modeling contract and the right to tour the country with SOE in Queen Antonia's full regalia.

The five finalists selected by SOE were:

- Carin Ashley of Jupiter, FL
- Teresa Noreen of Duluth, GA
- Bridget Peters of Las Vegas, NV
- Anna Wainscoat of Davis, CA
- Holly Weber of Newport Beach, CA

Accompanying the five finalists was a sixth "Wild Card" finalist selected the evening before at the Palms' trendy Ghost Bar. At this competition walk-in contestants were allowed to present themselves as candidates to portray Antonia before a panel of SOE judges and the press. The victory easily went to a fitness competitor and military police officer named Sonja Bruce. With her muscular physique, she looks like she could break the other competitors in half if she felt like it. For that matter, she could probably break the judges.

A panel of judges representing media outlets such as Maxim, G4, and MTV watched as the girls proceeded through the pageant, judged on categories such as her resemblance to Antonia, poise, and sheer good looks.

Between rounds, SOE personnel worked up the crowd by giving away free copies of U*ntold Legends*, *Champions: Brotherhood of the Blade*, and *Everquest II* subscription cards. A "gaming



All six finalists pose for the camera.

cabana" demonstrating *Everquest II: Desert of Flames* expansion, *Champions: Brotherhood of the Blade*, and *Matrix Online* was also up and running in a small shaded area next to the bar. Finally, to make sure nobody at Skin that day ignored the gaming festivities, a pair of bikini-clad models with PSPs strapped to their hips were walking around the pool, giving out free demos of SOE's *Gripshift* and *Frantix* titles.

At the Gaming Cabana, it's the *Desert of Flames* terminal that draws the most attention between rounds. Scott Hartsman, EQII developer and mind behind the Quest for Antonia pageant, was on hand and happily giving demos and freebies to passers-by.

The big feature he's showing off with *Desert of Flames* is the

inclusion of an entirely new PvP mode. "We wanted to create something that was like fantasy *CounterStrike*," Scott says. Players select a monster to play as in the PvP arena, instead of using their usual in-game characters. Combat takes place in one of "six to eight" arena maps. Each map has a different gimmick; Scott's demonstrated a "slow healing" map where HP regen moves at a crawl. The map really looks like a high-fantasy variant of a FPS multiplayer map, full of stairways, platforms, and arbitrary walls to be used for cover. Scott shows off the way players can use map terrain to get the drop on enemies by playing a sniping monster with a flaming body.

The new PvP modes tie in with the main game by restricting a player's monster selection to whatever they've killed or bought with their account's character. So, more powerful players will be able to select from a wider range of monsters, without leaving lower-level players wholly without a chance of winning. This spin on PvP seems like an experiment, geared toward attracting casual players to *Everquest II*.

After the break for the judges to deliberate, the verdict is finally announced. The judges have awarded victory to petite, soft-spoken Anna Wainscoat. Anna was ecstatic over her victory when HGM caught her after the pageant ended for comment. "It's great, I'm so excited." When asked about whether or not she thinks the Quest for Antonia promotion will help grow *EQII*'s playerbase, her answer is quite earnest. "I really hope so. I've been trying to get people interested ever since I got picked as a candidate, just among my friends? And I really want to see if I can get more girls to play, the game is so much fun."

When asked about her own *EQII* character, Anna would only divulge that she was running a Wood Elf Priest, but not the character name or server. "I wanted to be on the side of good, you know?" said Anna with a smile. "And I'm a healer." So remember, *EQII* players: whenever you run across a Wood Elf Priest, it just might be Anna.

Once the verdict was announced, the judges scattered and Sony began breaking down the sets. HGM stopped by the Gaming Cabana again to get a few more comments from Scott Hartsman. "I do not envy the judges," Scott replies, when asked his opinion on the judges' verdict. "After spending the last four days with these girls, I would've been happy if any one of them had been selected."

We ask Scott if he thinks the pageant will draw more players into *EverQuest II*'s online community. For all that Scott organized the pageant, his answer is philosophical. "I dunno that it will bring in more players... I do know that a consistent spokesmodel who plays the game is really important for us when we travel around the country giving demos. You don't want someone who will be all 'tee-hee, I don't know anything' when somebody asks her a question."

When Anna's character is mentioned, Scott is quick to point out that as far as he knows, all of the girls have characters now. "They all went and played the game on their own after they got picked. They're aspiring models, and that means doing lots of legwork chasing opportunities around. They wanted to do their homework and know the product."

BLOW $#!% UP... AGAIN.

SERIOUS SAM II

New kickass game engine.
Wild new physics and game environments.
New, obscenely powerful weapons.
Blowing crap up was never this much fun.
Seriously.

www.serioussam2.com

# TONY HAWK'S AMERICAN WASTELAND

by **Syriel**

**Publisher :** Activision
**Developer :** Neversoft
**Release Date :** Fall 2005

**Genre(s) :** Extreme Sports
**Category :** Skateboarding
**# of players :** 1-2, 8 Players Online

Somehow, some way, Neversoft has managed to pump out a *Tony Hawk* game every year for the past seven years, and every year, the game it gives us is fresh and creative. The trend is set to continue this year with *Tony Hawk's American Wasteland*. We recently sat down to an extended play session with a near-complete version of the game and came away quite impressed.

For the home consoles, the word to remember is "organic." Everything in the game, and we do mean everything, is tied into the sprawling game world. Aside from the initial load at the start of the game, the entire thing is streamed on-the-fly. This includes game options such as character customization. Want to buy a new shirt? Just walk into the shop. There's no need to exit back to the main menu.

Set in the mid-'80s, the game tells the story of an up-and-coming skate punk in Los Angeles. You're hot stuff back home, but you quickly realize that you're in the big leagues now and your skills need major improvement. As you progress through the story, new areas of the city will slowly open up as you build the ultimate skate park. Cinema sequences are told storyboard style, with illustrations done by famed skate artist Jimbo Phillips.

In case you need a break from skating, the game features a full set of BMX missions. Hop on the bike at any time and tear up the town. Because the bike features its own set of physics, it's almost like getting two games in one. Finally, there are the classic missions. Playable solo or in co-op, classic missions are completely separate from the main game and feature the best of old-school *Tony Hawk*.

# Suikoden Tactics

**By : Racewing**

Publisher : **Konami**
Developer : **Konami**
Release Date : **Novermber 2005**

Genre(s) : **RPG**
Category : **Strategy / Tactics**
# of players : **1**

Another RPG series is going the way of the tile and square, and it's one that few people saw coming. With immersive and intuitive battles, a cast change-up and an all new storyline, *Suikoden Tactics* hopes to secure itself a place among *Suikoden* fans, strategy fans and newcomers to both.

The recently-announced title takes place in the same timeline as *Suikoden IV*. Specifically, there will be events taking place before, during, and after that game, making *Tactics* a sidestory that spans the length of *Suikoden IV*. (The introductory battles, in fact, let you take control of *Suikoden IV*'s hero, and his friend Snowe, as children.) The central figure, however, is a new hero named Kyril, as he almost obsessively attempts to uncover the secrets of the Rune Cannons.

What sets this game apart from the strategy game pack is the dynamics of team relationship. Onscreen characters and their affinities will affect their outcome of the battle as much as your strategic mind will. Previous *Suikoden* games have had combination attacks and proximity effects involving two or more people in battle. Such trademarks carry over to *Tactics*; some characters will automatically protect others, pulling them out of their area (tile?) at the moment of their being attacked. Others will experience helpful status or elemental effects due to their placement on the battlefield. Team attacks, of course, are present for big damage. There's also banter between the characters for certain events, such as protection or healing.

Helpful icons assist the player by quickly prompting them with important facts, like who needs healing, location effects, and which enemies will die instantly it if you attack them on that turn. Attack direction plays a part as well, as more damage will be dealt from the side or rear rather than a head-on confrontation.

# TIMESHIFT
**by Syriel**

Publisher: **Atari**
Developer: **Saber Interactive**
Release Date: **March 2006**

Genre(s) : **First Person Shooter**
Category : **Time Twister**
# of players : **1 player, undetermined multiplayer**

Every once in a while, a game simply appears out of nowhere and impresses the hell out of you. *Timeshift* is one of those games. Set for release on the PC and Xbox 360 early next year, the game uses the concept of time travel in a novel way, and promises to change the way you think about first person shooters.

Split between 1911 and 2007, the game passes up many of the traditional FPS trappings in favor of creative play. "*Timeshift* has no health pickups, no ammo pickups, no lava pits, no buckets of ooze -- none of that s--t," said producer Kyle Peschel when describing the game. The focus is on combat and learning how to use your time powers: the ability to slow, stop and rewind time.

All three powers are limited in duration, but they are available from the start. Your suit also recharges quickly, allowing players to experiment. "You are meant to be using your time powers," said Peschel. "They're not just for bosses." Like any good thing though, there's a catch -- none of your powers apply to you, ever. If you get shot, rewinding time will put the bullet back in your opponent's gun, but the damage is done. You won't heal. You can use your suit's medical technology to heal yourself, but that'll deplete the same batteries that power the time-travel gadgetry.

Some of the more creative uses of time powers include stopping time, grabbing a weapon out of an enemy's hand, and then starting things up again. Slowing time is always fun during shootouts, but it also comes in handy while trying to slip past a security system.

*Timeshift* is an ambitious project in an oversaturated genre, but its creative take on the material, not to mention incredibly gorgeous visuals, might just be enough to make it stand out from the pack. Be sure to keep an eye on this one.
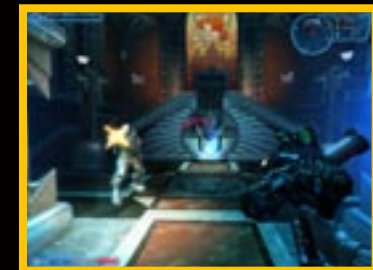
# CITY OF VILLAINS

by **HonestGamer**

**Publisher:** NCSoft
**Developer:** Cryptic Studios
**Release Date:** 10/30/05

**Genre(s):** MMORPG
**Category:** Action
**# of players:** Many

Sometimes it's fun to be bad. If you're sick of being the one to always save the day, a potential cure is nearly here: *City of Villains*. It's another MMORPG from the people who brought you *City of Heroes*, and this time they're letting you live life on the other side of the coin. All we can say is "It's about time!"

Take the basic structure from the first game, only with new objectives that include executing heists, kidnappings and other evil deeds. Mix it with the ability to construct your own fortress and to choose from five devious sounding new classes: Brute, Destroyer, Dominator, Mastermind and Stalker. Finally, throw everything in a blender with new areas that are specific to *City of Villains*. It sounds like a tasty recipe to us!

Before you ask, though, the answer is "no." You don't need *City of Heroes* to play this. It stands nicely on its own. The thing is, you'll probably want to own both. There will be all of those PvP matches online (not every zone from *City of Heroes* will be available, but some will definitely be shared), plus people who own the first game will find certain parts of the new pack that they can take advantage of. Heroes need bases, too!

Start plotting and scheming. The game's release date is looming and you don't even have a suitable outfit or a realistic approach to world domination. Then again, that's what all those henchmen are for!

PlayStation.2  XBOX  PC

## MARC ECKŌ'S
# getting up
## CONTENTS UNDER PRESSURE

**Publisher :** Atari
**Developer :** The Collective
**Release Date :** 11/15/05

**Genre(s) :** Action
**Category :** Rebel
**# of players :** 1

Although the mayor of New York City may not think of graffiti as a form of free expression (he's already called on Atari to cancel the game), not everyone is so limited in their worldview. As an urban art form, graffiti has been used for everything from mere decoration to visual protest. You'll find both forms in *Getting Up*.

Preview by Syriel

The game tells the story of Trane, a young kid growing up in the projects of New Radius. What was once a city teeming with culture has been stifled by the oppressive new government and its militant Civil Conduct Keepers, or CCK. While most citizens have simply fallen in line, Trane rebels and is determined to reveal the truth to the masses.

You'll start the game as a "toy," or beginner, with little more than a marker and the ability to scribble your name on the walls. As you progress, Trane will learn new skills from graffiti legends and slowly step up to larger and more impressive designs. Using paint well, however, takes skill. You can't just slap a button. Instead, the game requires rhythmic movement while spraying. Mess it up and your masterpiece will be littered with ugly drips.

It's not all paint and pictures, though, as the city of New Radius is big, and there are plenty of people in Trane's way. To survive, you'll have to combine athleticism with combat skills, as one moment you may be climbing a wall or running through the subway tunnels and the next, fighting off a group of thugs.

Visually impressive with an intriguing concept, *Getting Up* promises to be just as much an artistic statement as it is a game. We can't wait to check out the full version.

---

# TRAPT

by Syriel

| | |
|---|---|
| **Publisher:** Tecmo | **Genre(s):** Gothic Horror |
| **Developer:** Tecmo | **Category:** Puzzle |
| **Release Date:** October 2005 | **# of players:** 1 |

Though the name is new, *Trapt* is actually the latest release in Tecmo's long running *Deception* series. Unlike traditional titles, the *Deception* games have always focused on killing your opponents in the most imaginative ways possible. Of course, there's a catch; you cannot harm enemies directly. Instead you must set up different traps and lure your victims to their doom.

In *Trapt*, you play as the young princess Allura. Framed for your father's death by your evil stepmother, you must outmaneuver bounty hunters, not to mention castle guards, until you can prove your innocence. While the general gameplay sticks to the *Deception* formula, the traps in *Trapt* are bigger, badder and better than earlier games.

Standard traps are split into three types -- floor, wall and ceiling -- and one of each type can be set at any given time. Savvy players will align their traps in succession, resulting in devastating combo moves that deal extra damage to the hapless victim. Many rooms in the game feature natural dangers that can be used in conjunction with traps; however, these can harm Allura if you're careless. So be careful, and watch your step.

New to the series are the deluxe Dark Illusion traps. Limited to one use per mission, the Dark Illusion traps are built into some of the larger rooms. You have to arm them before use, but if you manage to trap someone with one of them, it is a guaranteed, not to mention graphic, kill.

One Dark Illusion we saw had Allura knock an enemy onto a spiked water wheel. The wheel then started spinning at high speed before launching the victim across the room and impaling him on a fish hook. The hook moved over a pool of water where a large fish gobbled up its prey... and that was one of the tamer Dark Illusions.

# XYANIDE
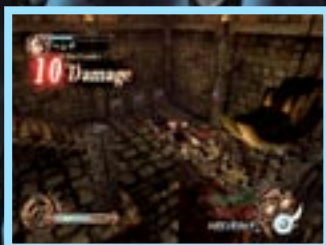
**Preview by Syriel**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Publisher:** Playlogic | **Genre(s):** Shooter |
| **Developer:** Playlogic | **Category:** Sci-Fi |
| **Release Date:** 2005 | **# of players:** 2 |

On a barren moon in the outskirts of known space, the demonic witch Aguira has just been sentenced to death by the Judges of Mardar. In the middle of the execution, the penal ship is hit by an asteroid made of Xyanide, a substance that can materialize thought. Realizing that it is her only chance of escape, Aguira creates a nightmarish world to dispose of her foes.

Survival in *Xyanide* requires both a fast trigger finger and solid maneuvering skills, because unlike most shooters, this isn't a one-hit, one-kill wonder. Pretty much everything in the game is shielded--even the first level baddies--which means you'll be under pressure from the moment you start.

Armed with two primary weapons, you have the choice of focused fire or covering more ground with the scatter shot. A secondary fire allows the player to launch a barrage of missiles at a foe. As you upgrade your fighter, a number of rechargeable specials become available for use. These range from the defensive (freeze an opponent) to offensive (nuke). Two separate upgrade paths, mechanical and organic, offer different weapon loadouts, adding a bit of replay value.

In a nod to the genre's roots, *Xyanide* sports a two player simultaneous option, allowing for twice the destruction. Each ship is highlighted by a neon glow to ensure you don't loose track of it in the mess of bullets. Thankfully, friendly fire is not enabled.

Despite its 3D looks, *Xyanide* is a decidedly 2D game as all action occurs on a flat plane. You'll move with the left analog stick and fire with the right. In some ways it's a throwback to earlier times, but the simplified system allows you to concentrate on shooting ships rather than worrying about where to go next.

## DISNEY and WALDEN MEDIA present

# THE CHRONICLES OF NARNIA

## THE LION, THE WITCH AND THE WARDROBE

by Honestgamer

| | |
|---|---|
| Publisher: **Buena Vista Games** | Genre(s) : **Adventure** |
| Developer: **Traveler's Tales** | Category : **Action** |
| Release Date: **November 15, 2005** | # of players : **1 or 2** |

*The Chronicles of Narnia* is in some ways the younger reader's equivalent to *The Lord of the Rings*. It's no surprise that Disney quickly brought the epic series to the screen, shortly after Peter Jackson proved that people still like knights and swordplay in their movies. The most popular of the seven-book series, *The Lion, the Witch, and The Wardrobe* tells the story of a time when the kingdom of Narnia was caught in a never-ending winter. A little girl from England leads her three siblings through a mysterious wardrobe, into this magical world.

The game brings all of this to life. Players control not one child, but all four. You'll be able to switch between each of them on the fly, except when the plot won't allow it. This mechanic is used to its ultimate advantage. You'll solve puzzles and win battles by knowing who to use at what time. Much of this is accomplished by on-screen icons that give you a hint as to who can have the most effect on a certain situation. The children can also join together for group attacks. For example, Edmund and Lucy can throw each other to break through simple barriers, while Susan can ride on Peter's back as she fires shots with her bow and arrows.

Though many of the worlds will center on ice and snow, look for occasional changes from the norm and even mini-games such as one that finds you riding an iceberg down a raging river, or another that has you kicking enemies from trees. Some areas require you to move with stealth. There are a number of ways the developer changes things up, so you'll be on your toes. If you want something magical this winter, keep an eye on *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

## SHREK SUPER SLAM

Preview by Syriel

**Publisher :** Activision
**Developer :** Shaba Games
**Release Date :** 11/01/05

**Genre(s) :** Fighting
**Category :** Animated Mayhem
**# of players :** 1-4

When word came around the HGM offices that another *Shrek* game was in the works, no one was all that excited. Thankfully, with *Shrek SuperSlam* Activision and Shaba Games appear to be taking the cautious approach; they're making a good game first, and applying the license second.

Inspired most directly by *Super Smash Bros.*, *Shrek SuperSlam* is a fighting game that focuses on continuous combat, where the goal is to score points rather than kill your opponent.

The game features twenty different characters and sixteen levels, taken from and inspired by both of the *Shrek* movies. You'll be able to play as the Puss-in-Boots, Donkey and even the Shrekster himself. The arenas are aptly named, with the Poison Apple Inn and Kung Fu Dojo looking particularly good at this point.

You can jump right into the action with melee mode, or learn a bit about Shrek's universe by playing through story mode. The mega challenge offers a break from the fighting, with fifty different mini-games to play. Multiplayer options include king of the hill, where the goal is to stay at the top of the mound for a certain amount of time, as well as a melee mode.

Although the basic moves are easy to learn, the game mixes things up a bit with potions, weapons and magical items. These power-ups are randomly dropped during each match and can be picked up by any fighter.

Success for *Shrek* is going to depend on striking that fine balance between ease of play and the depth of the fighting engine. It's a small target, but if the team can nail it, *Shrek SuperSlam* might be the surprise party game of the year.

# TRAINING WITH

BY: 4THLETTER

## AMERICA'S ARMY
### RISE OF A SOLDIER™

**Publisher :** Ubisoft
**Developer :** Secret level
**Release Date :** October 3rd, 2005
**Category:** Team Leading, Friend Making, Stuff Kicking

**Genre :** First Person Shooter
**Players :** 1-16
**Rating :** "T" for Teen

We recently got a chance to head down to Fort Benning, GA, courtesy of Ubisoft, and check out America's Army: Rise of A Soldier. Not only did we get to spend precious time with the game, but we got to check out the base, go through an (almost certainly watered down) approximation of basic training, fire off a wide variety of guns, and take a flying leap out of a thirty-four-foot tower. Your humble correspondent politely declined the latter. There is a reason that I write for a living, rather than jumping out of airplanes. The guns, however, were very cool. The sniper rifle didn't have the kick that I was expecting, and they're doing wonderful things with laser sights nowadays.

This was the kind of get-together that everyone should do once. We later learned that the developers for the new America's Army title went even more in-depth than we did, all in the name of authenticity. This included riding around in Black Hawk helicopters, spending tons of time on the firing range, and consulting with Army liasons to make sure that the feel of the game accurately reflects today's Army. As the official website declares, the "developers don't rely on imagination."

America's Army: Rise of a Soldier is going to be the first officially licensed United States Army game. It isn't going to simply retread the same paths that other games have already worn bare. Instead of being yet another supersoldier in a war against an evil empire, or the elite special ops hero coming out of retirement, you build your own character. You can choose to specialize in a variety of roles, plus one additional role for online play. Your performance dictates your rank and upgradeable abilities. The thirty-five single-player missions are split up between the seven roles, each of which comes with a training stage so that you understand how your role works and what your function will be on the battlefield. You have to qualify for the roles, rather than just picking them.

The last thing anyone wants is someone with that new car smell on their fire team, who'll bring the entire group down due to a lack of experience.

Ubisoft and Secret Level understand one thing: being good at online games isn't any fun if you're anonymous. With this in mind, they've implemented a persistent online character. Your rank, role, and upgrades are all stored for online play. If you're at the top of the heap in sniping, but dead last as a grenadier, this will be reflected in your online character. In short, your character represents you and your skills. The better you perform, the better he will perform. This includes your performance in career mode. Your rank measures your performance and also serves to match you up with more or less equally skilled players online, so you'll never be short on challenges.
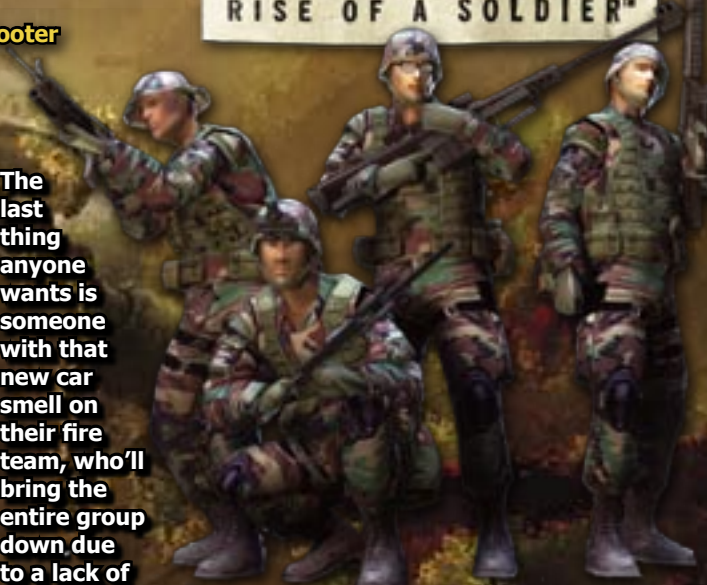
We played a few multiplayer maps and got a demo of a snowy single-player stage. The gameplay zips along nicely without being unrealistic. Gunfights tend to be short and to the point, which is helped a bit by an intriguing auto-aim system. The game will lock-on and help you plant your crosshairs near the enemy, but won't completely focus on the enemy. In other words, the game will get you pointed at the broad side of a barn, but it's up to you to focus on it and shoot it full of holes.

America's Army is sporting a killer radar system, as well. If someone on your fireteam has spotted an enemy and keeps him in his line of sight, then that enemy will show up on your radar, as well. If the enemy drops out of sight, he drops off the radar.

This isn't your grandfather's military shooter. You won't find excessive violence and rampant cursing, but you will find rock solid gameplay and a host of innovative features to keep you interested, not to mention the pride that comes in having a higher rank in online play than all your friends.

## A MISSION BRIEFING WITH ZACH HUNLEY

We spoke at length with Zach Hunley, Focus Designer for Secret Level, about America's Army: Rise of a Solder. One of the most interesting things we talked about was the lack of cursing and over-the-top violence in the game. In his own words:

**Hunley:** [The lack of it] is definitely an Army thing. We're trying to make kind of a morally correct game. You know, we're not trying to make some game that's gonna appeal to people who just want to go out and cause a lot of violence. We just wanted it to focus on the tactics and the authenticity and the realism.

**4thletter:** To get it authentic, but not excessive.

**Hunley:** Exactly. Even in our training, we talk about real Army training. In the Army, nobody ever aims for the head. Ever. That's definitely a very game-y thing. We actually teach players in the game to point for center of mass, which is actually the exact term that they use in training for the Army. If you're aiming for center of mass, there's a much greater area to actually hit.

There's kind of a lot of reasons we shied away from the extreme violence, or vulgar language, or things like that. A lot of it is representing the real Army. People may have a lot of it is a misperception of what they think the Army is supposed to be like, from movies and shows, whatever. They think the Army's supposed to be a certain way, where everybody's swearing and yelling at each other, and there's this excessive violence, which it's just not like. That's the whole thing. Despite people's perception, we decided, "No, we're actually going to be authentic."

**4thletter:** So you want to represent the Army well and…

**Hunley:** Exactly, exactly, as opposed to saying "okay, let's represent what we think people think the Army is." We wanted to make sure that it is the actual, authentic style.
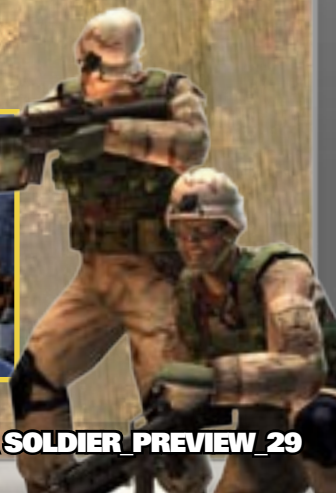
# RETRO CENTRIC
### by Roger Danish and Syriel

# GAMETAP
## EXPAND YOUR PLAYGROUND.℠

**Publisher:** Turner Entertainment
**Platform:** PC
**System Requirements:** PC Running Windows 2000 or XP
RAM: 256mb
Free Disk Space: 5gb
Video Card: Standard Issue
Broadband Internet Connection
Support for keyboard & mouse, as well as most USB peripherals

It seems old arcade games never die, and thanks to the ever-expanding digital medium, they always find a home on one system or another from one generation to the next. This phenomenon, which is now known as Retrogaming, has become big business. Many video game publishers, which include Atari, Activision, Namco, Capcom, Midway, SEGA and even Konami and Tecmo, have cracked open their vaults, dusted off their old-school titles, and repackaged them in an attempt to cash in on our nostalgia for all things classic (as well as draw in a whole new generation of gamers who have never played games like *Tempest, Space Invaders, Asteroids* and *Defender*). In addition, with the advent and popularity of freeware emulators, such as MAME, many of these same publishers are looking for other avenues in which to stop the piracy of these gone-but-not-forgotten titles while still making a buck off of them in the process.

This is where Turner Entertainment's *GameTap* comes in. (Yep, you read it right, this is the same Turner that produces and provides programming and broadcast content for many of the cable channels you watch and enjoy, including Cartoon Network, CNN and Turner Classics.) Turner has done the impossible and has created a revolutionary new piece of software that will allow gamers access to a huge vault of old and new games spanning the gamut of systems and platforms.

For those of you not familiar with the name *GameTap*, it's an "all-you-can-play" gaming service. For a monthly fee of $14.95, subscribers can choose from an ever-growing list of licensed classics (old and new), then download and play them on their PC (up to two PCs per household) using a broadband connection. The game library is currently over 1,000 titles strong, although Turner will be rolling these out in waves, starting with 300 available at launch. While it hasn't divulged the complete launch catalog as of yet, Turner has released a partial list, which includes coin-op, Atari 2600, Genesis, Dreamcast, PC, IntelliVision, Game Gear, 32X and Master System titles (see the accompanying sidebar for some of the specific titles in each category). In addition to these systems, others, such as the ColecoVision and Commodore 64, have been confirmed. Through its own proprietary software and emulation, these games are exact duplicates of their old-school counterparts, and with the exception of using a USB gaming peripheral or keyboard, they play just as they originally did on their respective hardware.

You're probably wondering how exactly this works. Basically, you can securely download and install the Turner-developed client software from www.gametap.com. This software acts as a gateway to the *GameTap* virtual vault where you will be able to navigate through a multi-tiered, 3D space that holds a selected subset of your personalized game collection. These customizable tiers include "hot picks," which are updated weekly, and user favorites. One tier organizes the games by genres while another arranges them by the platform on which the game first ran. In addition, a "search tier" provides look-up capabilities for the entire library. Once selected, each title displays an associated "InfoCard" that showcases the game's information including year, platform, publisher, description, screen shots and bonus material (which can include classic commercials and original Turner programming — more on this in a moment).

Once you select a game for play, it is partially downloaded to your hard drive in encrypted form, which is accessible only via the GameTap client. Depending on the size of the game and the speed of your Internet connection, download times may vary. However, the initial time investment period will be fairly short and transparent. Not only does Turner employ unique caching technology that allows the game to be downloaded in the background as you begin to play, but it also offers unique, broadcast-style quick-clip programming shorts that help pass the time. These video clips, which are streamed using Turner's technology, typically run around one to two minutes and offer game previews, reviews, behind-the-scenes footage and hilarious shorts. One such short is a series called "A Day in the Extra Life," where the camera focuses on the two extra life icons at the bottom of the game screen as they discuss such banalities as what happened on the Sopranos or naming their kid Dig Dug. The end experience is super cool and really a great package for anyone looking to have access to a wide history of playable video games at their fingertips. In addition to all this, top scores form the GameTap community will be tallied and accumulated for bragging rights and, for parents monitoring their children's game play, *GameTap* even includes parental controls.

The big question is, will players pay for the service? While $14.95 per month is a reasonable price to have access to this amazingly huge library of games (although there are a few glaring omissions, such as any and all NES titles; Nintendo is hoarding these for itself with Revolution), you ultimately don't get to keep the games you download — they are only accessible through the client and the client is only active as long as you continue to pay for the service — and a solid portion of these games can be found on any number of retro compilations that are already available at retail. Ultimately, we wouldn't be surprised if Turner doesn't have grander plans to offer this service as a set top box or incorporated into existing cable box technology, which would be a huge boon. While having this on your PC is a cool thing, getting it to the living room TV is even better. Only time will tell whether or not this massive undertaking and very cool idea is a hit or miss. One thing is for sure, Turner has the marketing muscle to really push the software and the idea of legally having access to all these classics, hits (and misses) is a very enticing proposition.

## ARCADE TITLES
Asteroids®
BurgerTime
Centipede®
Defender
Dig Dug
Galaga
Joust
Missile Command®
Pac-Man
Robotron 2084
Space Invaders

## ATARI 2600
Adventure™
Combat™
Demon Attack
H.E.R.O.
Haunted House™
Kaboom!
Pitfall!
River Raid
Yars' Revenge™

## DREAMCAST
Crazy Taxi (Dreamcast/PC)
Ecco the Dolphin: Defender of the Future
Hydro Thunder
Mr. Driller

## GENESIS
Altered Beast
Columns
Eternal Champions
Golden Axe 2
Gunstar Heroes
OutRun 2019
Phantasy Star II
Shadow Dancer: The Secret of Shinobi
Shining Force
Shining in the Darkness
Sonic 2
Sonic 3
Sonic the Hedgehog
Streets of Rage 1-3
Virtua Fighter 2

## INTELLIVISION
Astrosmash
Night Stalker
Skiing

## PC-WIN
Beyond Good and Evil
Dark Reign 2
Heroes of Might and Magic IV: The Gathering Storm (Expansion Pack)
Myst
Rayman Arena
Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow
Tomb Raider: Angel of Darkness

## SEGA MASTER SYSTEM
Aztec Adventure
Kenseiden
Phantasy Star

## SEGA 32X
Cosmic Carnage
Knuckles Chaotix
Kolibri
Zaxxon's Motherbase 2000

## GAME GEAR
Alien Syndrome
Shinobi II
Sonic Drift 2
Sonic Labyrinth
Tails Adventures

# RETRO CENTRIC

**GameTap** promises to provide access to hours upon hours of retrogaming goodness to all of our PC owning friends, but what about console owners? There's always the option of going with MAME and a modded Xbox, however, if you prefer something a bit easier to use, you might want to take a look at one of these collections.

## NAMCO MUSEUM: 50TH ANNIVERSARY

**Publisher:** Namco
**Developer:** Digital Eclipse
**Platforms:** NGC, PC, PS2, Xbox

By this time you've probably got about ten different versions of *Pac-Man* spanning just as many consoles, but the little bugger never seems to get old. In celebration of the company's 50th anniversary (no, it wasn't making video games back then) Namco has released the latest version of its *Namco Museum*. The following games are included in the collection: *Bosconian, Dig Dug, Dragon Spirit, Galaga, Galaga '88, Galaxian, Mappy, Pac-Man, Ms. Pac-Man, Pac-Mania, Pole Position, Pole Position II, Rolling Thunder, Rally X, Sky Kid* and *Xevious*.

While the emulated games are better than previous attempts, there's no glaring reason to pick up this collection if you already have the games listed. Namco opted for the barebones approach instead of going with a deluxe retrospective. There's no history of the company, no behind-the-scenes info, no interviews, no bonus goodies, no nothing--it's a bit disappointing. On the other hand, the collection is only $20, so it's not a huge dent in your pocket if you end up getting it for just one or two games.

## CAPCOM CLASSICS COLLECTION

**Publisher:** Capcom
**Developer:** Digital Eclipse
**Platforms:** PS2, Xbox

World Warriors rejoice! The original *Street Fighter II* is back in all its glory, along with a solid collection of Capcom titles spanning the years from 1984-1992. All in all there are 22 games, including: *1942, 1943, 1943 Kai, Bionic Commando, Commando, Exed Exes, Final Fight, Forgotten Worlds, Ghosts 'n Goblins, Ghouls 'n Ghosts, Gun. Smoke, Legendary Wings, Mercs, Pirate Ship Higemaru, Section Z, Son Son, Street Fighter II, SFII Champion Edition, SFII Hyper Fighting, Super Ghouls 'n Ghosts, Trojan* and *Vulgus*.

All of the games are based on their arcade originals, save for *Super Ghouls 'n Ghosts*, so hardcore fans of the NES *Bionic Commando* might be disappointed. For everyone else it's hard to deny the quality that's packed into this collection. The emulation is solid, and each game is packed with extras like concept art and historical notes. Unlocking the bonus goodies takes a bit of work, but it's worth it in the end. If Capcom can keep up this level of quality, we'd love to see a *Capcom CPS-2 Collection* or the *Capcom Console Collection* showing off some 8-bit goodness. Come on, Capcom, you can do it!

## TECMO CLASSIC ARCADE

**Publisher:** Tecmo
**Developer:** Tecmo
**Platforms:** Xbox

When you think of the word "classic," good things usually come to mind. Unfortunately Tecmo seems to have been under the impression that classic simply means old, because the *Tecmo Classic Arcade* is packed with a selection of mediocre titles.

Fire up the disc and you'll find arcade versions of *Bomb Jack, Pinball Action, Pleiads, Rygar, Senjyo, Solomon's Key, Star Force, Strato Fighter, Swimmer, Tecmo Bowl* and *Tecmo Cup. Rygar* and *Tecmo Bowl* are the two biggest names here, but because the versions that most people grew to know and love debuted on the NES, these aren't the droids you're looking for. The lack of *Ninja Gaiden* is also a huge oversight.

At a retail price of $30, *Tecmo Classic Arcade* offers less than other collections, yet costs $10 more. With nothing here to justify the price, you're better off dropping your dollars elsewhere.

# RETROCENTRIC

## NAMCO MUSEUM BATTLE COLLECTION

**Publisher:** Namco
**Developer:** Namco
**Platforms:** PSP

Import gamers have been playing this one for awhile, but Namco's made the wait worth it, thanks to the inclusion of a great deal more content on the US version of the game. Inside this pint size package are the following: *Bosconian, Dig Dug, Dig Dug 2, Dragon Buster, Galaga, Galaxian, Grobda, King & Balloon, Mappy, Motos, Pac-Man, Ms. Pac-Man, Rally-X, New Rally-X, Rolling Thunder, Tower of Druaga* and *Xevious.*

In addition to the originals, the UMD also features arranged versions of *Pac-Man, Dig Dug, Galaga* and *New Rally-X.* The arranged modes feature updated graphics and sound as well as new enemies, providing a fresh take on some old titles. The PSP is particularly suited to vertically oriented games thanks to its 16x9 screen. Namco has taken advantage of this by giving players the option to rotate the PSP and play that way, thereby preserving the original screen layout. Despite its name, the *Battle Collection* doesn't feature much in the way of multiplayer, so if you pick it up, expect to spend most of your time flying solo. Now, if only PSP games didn't retail for $40, we'd be in heaven!

## MIDWAY ARCADE TREASURES: EXTENDED PLAY

**Publisher:** Midway
**Developer:** Midway
**Platforms:** PSP

You knew it had to happen. After the success of its console releases, the *Treasures* line is finally making the leap to handhelds and, like its console brethren, Midway is doing everything it can to ensure the result is worth it. We recently sat down with an early version and the following games are set to be included: *720, Arch Rivals, Championship Sprint, Cyberball 2072, Defender, Gauntlet, Joust, Klax, Marble Madness, Mortal Kombat, Mortal Kombat 2, Mortal Kombat 3, Paperboy, Rampage, Rampart, Sinistar, Spy Hunter, Toobin', Wizard of Wor, Xenophobe, Xybots.*

Aside from the rocking collection of games, what's notable about *Extended Play* is the sheer number of multiplayer titles on the list. That's not just a coincidence, as Midway is hoping to implement WiFi support for a majority of the games. Yes, that means four-player *Gauntlet* lovin' on the go. Visually, all of the games look sharp on the PSP's bright LCD screen and gameplay was solid so long as we stuck with the d-pad. Unfortunately, *Marble Madness* was a bit wiggy, but here's hoping the development team can work out the kinks before release. Look for this one to show up in time for the holidays.

## MIDWAY ARCADE TREASURES 3

**Publisher:** Midway
**Developer:** Digital Eclipse
**Platforms:** NGC, PS2, Xbox

Midway has made a name for itself when it comes to classic compilations. Whereas other publishers tend to package and repackage the same old stuff, Midway has opted to produce a number of well polished and varied compilation discs that offer a great deal of fun and value. Its latest release is no exception.

The first of the Treasures discs to have a theme, Midway Arcade Treasures 3 offers up eight racing games for your retro pleasure. It contains *Badlands, Hydro Thunder, Off Road Thunder: Mud, Sweat 'N Gears, Race Drivin', San Franchisco Rush The Rock: Alcatraz Edition, San Francisco Rush 2049, S.T.U.N. Runner* and *Super Off Road* including the *Bonus Tracks Pack.* All of the games are well-emulated, and sitting down for a round of *Race Drivin'* or *Hydro Thunder* is always fun, but the most intriguing aspect of the collection is watching the evolution of the genre. About the only major absences are *Arctic Thunder* and the *Cruis'n* games. Where are they, Midway?

R.I.P.

SHOOTER ALLEY

# GATE OF THUNDER

by Melf

Whenever someone mentions shmups, everyone has their opinion about which system had the most and the best. I'm quite partial to the TurboGrafx-16 in this regard, as its selection of quality shooters is unmatched by almost any other console out there. NEC's little underachiever was so friendly to the genre that it went so far as to include one as the pack-in of the HuCard/Super CD-ROM² hybrid: the Turbo Duo. Hudson Soft's *Gate of Thunder* was one heck of a treat for Duo owners, and gave them



YES, THIS TANK IS GUARDING THIS GIGANTIC EMPTY EXPANSE OF ROCK.



EXPLOSIONS = GOOD.

something to smile about at a time when frowns practically came with the system at purchase.

## Inspired by the Best

Ironically enough, *Gate of Thunder* bears no relation to Hudson's other Duo and Sega CD shmup *Lords of Thunder*, aside from the similarity in name. If I had to compare it any other shooter, it would have to

be Technosoft's magnum opus, *Thunder Force III*. The two games are similar enough that it's almost as if Hudson raided Technosoft's office in the dead of night and stole a beta copy. This might suggest that *Gates* is nothing more than a *Thunder Force* clone, but let me assure you that there's much more to it than that. Making great use of the CD-ROM, Hudson Soft was able to toss in everything but the proverbial kitchen sink. Do you like synth guitar? *Gates of Thunder* has some redbook audio

PROTECTED FROM ALL SIDES BY... WHATEVER THOSE GREEN THINGS ARE.



SEE, MOUNTAINS REALLY DO GROW IN THE SKY.



YOU'LL ONLY BE SCREWED IF THE ENEMY TURNS AROUND.

goodness for you. Enjoy parallax scrolling? Feast your eyes on backgrounds several layers deep and ripe with color. There are even some pseudo-3D effects sprinkled here and there.

## Heroism is Hard

Even with all its good points, *Gates of Thunder* can sometimes be a little too old school for its own good. For example, you can literally decimate bosses with the earthquake weapon, sometimes before the battle has even truly begun. This leads you to think it's smooth sailing to the end credits, but there is a downside. Getting hit leads to the dreaded *Gradius* Effect, where your once unstoppable war machine is reduced to a pea-shooting slug. All your power-ups are stripped away, and you must begin the cycle anew, granted you live so long.

While the Duo's stock pad is adequate, it can initially cause some confusion, since button I is used to change weapons.

This means that you need to tap button II twice to make your defensive options fire backwards. I probably don't need to explain how this can be problematic in heavy fire situations, and I found myself instinctively pressing the wrong button on more than one occasion.

## One of the Duo's Greatest

The TurboGrafx-16 is known far and wide as a shmup monster and rightfully so. There's just so much to love here, and any faults found can honestly be considered nitpicking. Taken for what it is and compared to what was around at the time, *Gates* stands head and shoulders above the rest. Did I mention that the Duo pack-in disc also includes *Bonk's Adventure*, *Bonk's Revenge*, as well as a hidden version of the Hudson classic *Bomberman*? As if you needed another reason to get yourself a copy. Do it now; you'll thank me later.



INDIGENOUS TO THE SKY-MOUNTAIN REGION IS THE EVER POPULAR ROBOTIC SNAKE WITH A LASER FOR A BUTT.



SHOOTERS: ALL ABOUT DAVID AND GOLIATH.

# THE DARK SIDE

## OF RETROGAMING

by **Sardius**

## EPISODE III SUCKED.

**Well, it was okay in parts, I guess, but overall there was too much talking and not enough melty-faced Hayden Christensen in burning lava for my tastes. In the end, the movie served its purpose of being the expected mediocre wrap-up to the disappointing *Star Wars* prequel trilogy, and we can all be thankful for that.**

It's a shame that so many horrible video games were spawned from the prequels, though. *Star Wars* games used to have a fairly good reputation up until recently; the old vector-based arcade titles were fun, and the *Super Star Wars* trilogy for the SNES was downright excellent. Nowadays, on the other hand, we get things like *Super Bombad Racing*.

Somewhere in between the good stuff of yesteryear and the crap of today falls Namco's *Star Wars*. This adaptation of the original 1977 *Star Wars* movie was released in Japan for Nintendo's Famicom in 1987, and offered a somewhat, uh, *unique* retelling of *Episode IV*'s plot. Some might say that Namco's ridiculously fractured storyline is the result of a *Star Wars* license being applied to a generic platformer at the last minute before the game shipped. I, on the other hand, prefer to think that this game represents all that Japan always wanted *Star Wars* to be.

And let me tell you, the Japanese take on *Star Wars* is AWESOME.

Now, I'll admit, it's been awhile since I've seen *A New Hope*. I know it had something to do with outer space, and there was a big deal about some dude shooting first, but I'm kinda fuzzy on the rest of it.

Regardless, I'm pretty sure that the part where Darth Vader goes nuts and turns into a giant scorpion was cut from the version I saw.
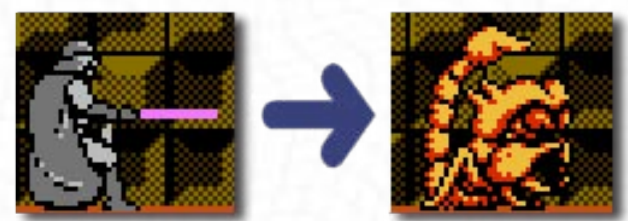
Likewise, the touching scene in which Chewbacca showers Luke with sloppy Wookiee kisses after being freed from an ice prison must only be available on some rare import DVD collector's edition I'll never see.

Thankfully, Namco lovingly restored these scenes and rendered them in low-res 8-bit pixels for their game here, giving you a complete *Star Wars* experience for the very first time ever on your Family Computer console.

Never-before-seen insight into Wookiee sexuality aside, the game itself is merely your basic platformer, featuring simple sidescrolling levels broken up by boss fights and the occasional shooter segment. You play as an oddly black-haired Luke Skywalker, who will spend the majority of the game jumping on tiny moving platforms and bonking enemies with his lightsaber. Your defeated foes will leave behind Force gems, which can be redeemed for a number of temporary Force power-ups...nearly all of which are completely useless.

This is a shame, because useful power-ups could have turned the game into something other than an impossibly hard journey into frustration. Get this: you get three lives to start, one hit kills you, and there are no continues. Those poor Japanese kids who played this game back in the day had it *rough*.

Once a Womp Rat so much as grazes Luke's foot, he crumples to the ground and dies instantly. This fact coupled with Namco's love of ridiculously difficult jumping puzzles means that your entire stock of lives can be lost in a matter of seconds at any point in the game. After that, all the Force in the world ain't gonna bring your dead Jedi ass back to life.

Brave the difficulty of Namco's *Star Wars*, though, and you'll see Luke through a number of weird situations and environments. Each level takes place on a different planet, though after Tatooine, it's difficult to discern whether each location is strictly based on those from the movie series or not. I don't think Kessel contains any Egyptian ruins, for one thing, but hey, Namco was trying their best to make a game out of the ten minutes of *Episode IV* they saw, so cut them some slack here.

The made-up locations at least offer an excuse to mix up the gameplay every once in awhile. Practically every platformer cliche

is represented here, from an underwater level filled with deadly sea life to an obligatory ice stage with slippery footing and cheap deaths galore. The jungle planet Yavin 4 is host to Luke's final encounter with Darth Vader himself. Naturally, this occurs shortly after Luke meets Han Solo for the first time and rescues him from a branch-barred cage inside a tree.

You know, just like in the movie.

The game culminates in an attack on the Death Star that, bizarrely, plays out like a top-down view racing game. Blasting down TIE fighters becomes secondary to picking up time extension icons and passing checkered flags before the timer runs out. Sadly, the end of this level is where all of Namco's crazy deviations from the original *Star Wars* script cease; a brief cinema depicts Luke blowing up the Death Star, after which the awards ceremony from the end of *A New Hope* is recreated through art that's awful even by 8-bit standards.

The awards ceremony, incidentally, is the first respite you'll have from the *Star Wars* theme music, which is blared in the background of every single level in the entire game. At times -- perhaps, say, after yet another clone of Darth Vader turns into a living pterodactyl skeleton and kills you three times in a row -- the music will become so oppressive that you may briefly consider how great your own death would be, since it would provide a surefire escape from a world of unceasing 8-bit John Williams music.

Finishing the game frees you from such thoughts, fortunately, but still leaves you entirely confused as to what you just experienced. The pseudonym-filled credits sequence is of little help until it reveals that development was done by "Wanwan House," who according to a brief Google search appears to be "A Beauty Parlar (sic) and Hotel for Pets" based in Japan.

Then suddenly, the whole thing makes *perfect* sense. Let's hear it for Namco's *Star Wars*, the first and only game developed by dogs.

Here at HGM, we knew we had to do a cover story about *Jak X: Combat Racing* or *Ratchet: Deadlocked*. We just couldn't decide which of these two very different games to run with.

Despite being the products of two different developers, both are the fourth games in their respective 3D platforming action-adventure series, and both have quietly built up devoted fan followings over the course of just a few years. Both series saw enormous tone and style changes occur in their sequels, which shocked fans even as the gameplay kept them coming back for more. Finally, both Sony-published franchises have quietly become powerful draws that help keep fans sticking with the PS2 despite its aging hardware.

Ultimately, we decided that we had to cover both games. So what follows is a pair of in-depth reviews that examine what long-time fans, and first-time gamers, can expect to see in the upcoming *Jak* and *Ratchet* titles. From the first bolt to the final race, our crack review team looked at everything these games have to offer. What happened to Daxter and Clank? Just how dark are things this go-round? Most of all, how good are the games? Read on.

## JAK X —COMBAT RACING
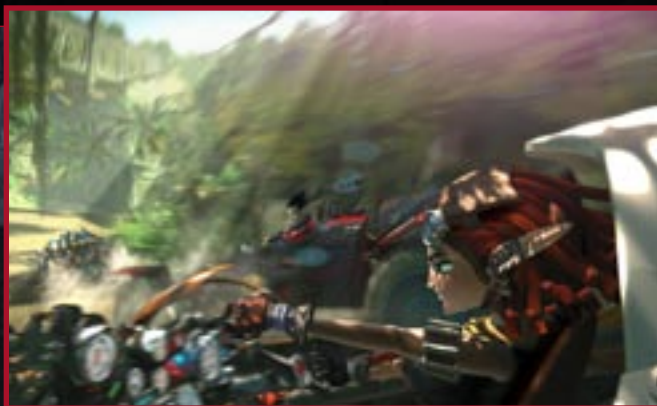
In the beginning, there were two boys named Jak and Daxter, and they were bad. The village elder told them to stay away from the island, but did they listen? Of course they didn't. The result of their naughtiness was immediate and long-lasting. Poor Daxter fell into a pit of black ooze that turned him into a furry mutant. The elder wasn't particularly sympathetic when they returned home, but he told the boys to consult his cohorts in other villages for a possible cure. So began their adventure.

Aside from its sassy heroes, you might say *Jak and Daxter: The Precursor Legacy* was a 'normal' platform game. There was a winding level hub, a swamp, a volcano and more. There were even mini-games that involved racing down canyons on speedbikes, or herding animals. It was like a cartoon, and in the end the two boys from a small little village saved the world. Daxter, unfortunately, remained mutated.

If its predecessor was normal, though, *Jak II* most definitely was not. Its plot propelled Jak into the future (with Daxter at his side). He was tortured and injected with a dark serum. The result was one very angry protagonist who decided that hopping around wasn't enough; he wanted guns! He got them, too, and he stole vehicles and he angered the city watch as he raced around a sprawling city hub.

This all happened by design. Naughty Dog's creative director, E. Daniel Arey, explains: "Early on we felt that to truly make the narrative of the Jak adventure games evolve (as all good stories do) then the character Jak had to evolve as well. From being the starry-eyed young boy in *Jak and Daxter: The Precursor Legacy* to the tried and true hero who had been through the crucible and survived in *Jak 3*." As you may recall, the start of the third game in the trilogy found Jak and Daxter cast out of the very city they saved, forced to race vehicles and battle monsters in order to make things right. Then they had their victory, and it seemed that everything was back to something a little closer to normal. That brings us up to *Jak X: Combat Racing*. There's a new plot, a new threat and new villains. That's normal, perhaps even a tad dull. In fact, the most interesting thing about the most recent game in the series is what it doesn't have: platforming action. Sometimes all a hero wants is a really good race...

Perhaps you're thinking that Jak and Daxter are sell-outs for abandoning their rich platform legacy, but there's something you should know: they have good reason. After sipping some poisoned wine, they find that the only way they can live to see another year is if they form a ragtag team of racers and secure first place in a futuristic race that's filled with people and creatures just itching to play dirty. Most of the team members don't even like each other, nor do they care for the newscaster who's looking to make a name for himself by covering the event. It's one of those cases where no one is happy, except the players who get to drive like maniacs and pretty much have the time of their lives.

*Jak X: Combat Racing* begins pleasantly, with Daxter talking it up in a tavern. As the men around him pour drinks and listen to his tale, a mysterious stranger saunters into the bar, spoiling for a fight. Before Daxter can flee, Jak comes roaring onto the scene in a souped-up vehicle and saves the day. Not so bravely, they ride away into the night while their enemies scheme behind them.

"There are a number of recurring themes in the Jak and Daxter games," says Avery. "At the core, Jak is the hero we all want to be, and Daxter is the chicken we're all afraid we really are. Daxter's humor and 'path of least resistance' heroics has been a mainstay in all of the games." The opener does a nice job of driving that recurring theme home, while also serving as a decent indication of the actual game that waits just beyond the introduction. When it comes time to mix it up on the track, you'll usually be firing weapons instead of listening to Daxter's amusing dialogue. The trade-off is fair.

Let's say you're in a typical race. Power-ups line the track ahead of you. The participants wait for the light, then burst forward from the starting line amidst clouds of exhaust. Motors rev loudly. Fuel economy goes out the window. As the first vehicle crosses over the glowing icons, he or she receives a weapon. There are a few kinds here, some that fire homing missiles and others that just let out a burst of gunfire before piddling down to nothing.

Defensive items also play a key role. The minute you take the lead, you know that you've basically just painted a big red target across your butt. Everyone and his dog (apologies to Daxter) will want a piece of you. In this position, the only thing you can do is drop a distraction. You'll know it's time to do so when the red crosshairs zoom in on your vehicle. You have only a second to react, but it's enough time if you've managed to grab some defense. Of course, people ready to deal you some pain tend to be more visible than power-ups, so good driving is also advised. It's extremely important to take corners at breakneck speeds while also aligning yourself with the next string of power-ups. Since you're moving quickly and you can't grab everything, you often must decide if you want to go for boosters, weapons or defensive tools. The strategy required is most welcome.

Despite your best intentions, though, it can be hard (if not impossible) to escape a race unscathed. The good folks at Naughty Dog even took the time to make sure that you get nice little cut-scenes that replay your moments of shame. If you crash and burn, you can count on the camera to pan cinematically as it shows your blazing scrap of metal bouncing along walls. Then you'll see an icon that represents the dastardly fellow who took you out of commission. At first I thought this was cool, but it quickly grew frustrating.

Story by **honestgamer** and **4thletter**

Since the replay camera is mapped to the same button as the acceleration, it's far too easy to trigger a slow-motion cinema that you just don't care to see. It's quite jarring. Also, the number of times you'll see these scenes in later matches, where it sometimes feels like you're just bouncing from one enemy's explosive rockets to the next, struck me as excessive. Still, it's perhaps to be expected from a combat racer that doesn't want to be a walk in the park. In many ways, the presentation comes off feeling the slightest bit like a *Burnout* game, only... furrier.

There are nods to other franchises, too. Anyone who has played a recent street racing game has at one point or another entered a garage to select upgrades. You can do the same here. Good performance in early races gains you access to spoilers, fenders and so forth, meaning you can adapt your unique set of wheels to more closely reflect your awesome personality. Win a few matches and you are awarded new vehicles and hefty cash prizes. The new vehicles present a conundrum: do you save your shekels for that next vehicle you might unlock, or do you just upgrade your current ride until it can outstrip anything you might win later on? The choices are rough, particularly when maxing out any of the karts requires a large monetary investment. You get to worry about things like armor, top speed, acceleration and more.

The customization in some ways makes *Jak X: Combat Racing* feel like it wants to be a role-playing title. It's easy to get lost in a series of races, then realize that the only reason you're re-visiting old ground is your desire to earn more money toward that elusive upgrade you've been chasing. It's nice that such options exist. You can really take things at your own pace, with no one to blame but yourself if you keep repeating the same tracks and get bored. With that said, I personally wouldn't have minded seeing lower prices for the vehicular tweaks. It takes a



few expenditures before you really start noticing performance differences.

Besides the RPG elements, there are other ways this game presents more than just straight-forward racing. Naughty Dog has added a few welcome diversions. One of them finds you working against a timer as it ticks down to nothing. The only way to forestall this is to grab glowing icons that litter the track. Each freezes the clock for a set number of seconds, but the best of them require that you launch yourself into the air or navigate tough corners with near-perfection. There are places where it all gets quite frantic and you really have to plan out in your head which route to take each time around the track. The icon you got the first time through won't be available on the second pass, but there's one just to its left or right that's maybe harder to reach. It's quite engaging (and familiar to those of you who played *Jak 3*).

The thing is, everything feels tighter here. The control, though still floaty in places, isn't as frustrating as those races through the dunes that you may recall from before. Vehicles seem a great deal more responsive (unless you're sliding through a mud slick, of course). Arey readily admits that the execution is key, and also elaborates on the general development process over at Naughty Dog: "Gather feedback both internally and externally from the last game(s), find a fun and unique angle, draw concepts like mad, build the concepts into geometry, code even madder, bring in a bunch of actors to scream into a mike, make it sound good, put it all together and watch it catalyze, test the heck out of the game until it plays well, refine and repeat as necessary, and get 'er done!" Arey isn't just using the words for PR purposes. In *Jak X: Combat Racing*, there's less of the frustration and more exhilaration.

It would be a mistake to think that *Jak X: Combat Racing* offers only improved versions of what you saw in *Jak 3*, though. Another event finds you racing around a short lap and working furiously to blow up as many of your opponents as you can within the time limit. The number of points you get increases by one with each trip around the course, so you have to decide whether or not you want to blast right to the second or third



lap before you get busy, or if you want to go for broke right away, or maybe just something in between. Again, strategy is key, something I liked a lot.

Then there are the deathmatches to consider. Open arenas play host to ramps and tunnels where you can blast your rivals to pieces. The one who does the most damage is the winner. The strategies you might employ here are numerous. Do you go straight in and mix it up with everyone, risking that your aggressive nature will lead to your own crashes, or do you hang back and fire from the perimeter while taking the chance that someone will swoop in at the last minute and finish off the guy you've been pelting for the last few seconds?

*Jak X: Combat Racing* was apparently made specifically for people who like to challenge themselves to improve. It's pretty easy to come in third (particularly during the early challenges), but you don't get as much money as you might have if you really spent time honing your driving skills. Placing first feels much better and your wallet will thank you. This helps to off-set some of the reluctance you might experience when revisiting areas to earn money for the vehicle upgrades. After all, why settle for anything less than total domination? The medals system, which seems like such an obvious thing to include, is so effective here because it really does keep things fresh. It's not like the variety is tremendous, but it's just enough to keep you entertained as you unlock one location after another. Likewise, humorous cut scenes show up just when your attention begins to wane, reminding you that you really do want to go just a few more rounds to see what happens next.

"The idea that Jak games are always a blend of gameplay, not just the same actions over and over, but a "cocktail mix" that keeps the player guessing and switching modes, that has always been a theme even from the first game," says Arey. "As for change, we always try to mix it up, and each Jak game has its own unique blend of action, character, surprise, and humor."

A lot of that comes down to the art direction. This doesn't feel like a kart racer with Jak and Daxter thrown in for good measure. That's at least partially because this isn't the first kart racer the team has made. Not only that, but they obviously enjoy the whole process. According to Arey, the game "was a real kick to make. Like *Crash Team Racing*, we found ourselves playing *Jak X: Combat Racing* almost as much as the time we were taking to make it." If you have any doubt that this was a labor of love, just look at the gritty yet cartoon-tinged feel that dominates the game from beginning to end. Textures have nice detail—more than enough given the high-speed racing—and are varied, with one map looking completely different from the next. You'll see metallic tunnels, icicles and fog-covered lakes, even lush jungles. It's all here, lending to the overall atmosphere so that you never have to wonder if this project began as something else entirely.

At times, it can be hard to sum up everything that makes the game such a thrilling ride. In the end, Arey puts it best: "*Jak X: Combat Racing*... is not about saving the world on a grand scale with monsters and some dark global force. This game is about friendship and a cool sport that Jak has loved since we first drew goggles on the character's design sheet. Racing is fun, and racing is slick, and there isn't a lot of heavy drama to resolve on the track, just a ton of fast action and cool high speed combat." That sounds about right to me.

## INTERVIEW

### E. DANIEL AREY
CREATIVE DIRECTOR, NAUGHTY DOG

**HGM:** The upcoming *Daxter* game for the PSP is a pretty traditional platformer, like the original *Jak* game. Can you see another *Jak & Daxter* platformer coming out for consoles? What about the PS3?

**AREY:** Just like any developer, we at the Dog Pound love the games we create. They're our babies, and we live with them day and night (sometimes for very long nights), and nurture them for years. When we moved on after making four *Crash* titles it was hard, like sending your baby off to college. As for the *Jak and Daxter* games, we've had a wonderful time making the series and watching it grow. The *Daxter* PSP game will rock and we've have a lot of fun working with Ready At Dawn. Fans of the series will get a kick out of the PSP story showing the early part of the *Jak II* narrative from Daxter's point of view. All in all, Jak's universe is a great world to play in, and every time we go back, we find something new and interesting to make it fresh. Right now we are hard at work finishing up *Jak X: Combat Racing* and want to make sure that game is the best it can be. After that, we'll see.

**HGM:** About how long is the average development cycle for a *Jak* game, from concept to gold master?

**AREY:** Setting up the engine, pipeline, and concept took a couple of years for the first game, and another two years for *Jak II* due to it's radical shift. But the last two *Jak* games have each been completed in under a year! In fact, *Jak X: Combat Racing* has been a fast and furious 10-month cycle, and what a roller coaster ride it's been! The only way we can do this fast development cycle and still achieve the quality we want is with a solid engine, a reasonably oiled pipeline (most of the time!), and a great team of people who burn the midnight oil, and then ask OPEC for more. It's exhausting, but a lot of fun.

**HGM:** After *Jak X* and *Daxter*, can fans look forward to new titles in the series? What type of game do you think such a title would be?

**AREY:** Both *Jak X: Combat Racing* and *Daxter* for PSP are coming down the pipe soon, so that's a ton to look forward to right there. Both games have lots of new gameplay and new insight into story and character that will make the fans of the series smile.

**HGM:** Are there any plans afoot now to take the *Jak* series, or *Daxter* for that matter, onto the next-gen consoles?

**AREY:** I like the term "plans afoot," don't you? But after polishing up *Jak X: Combat Racing*, I'm sure most of the feet around Naughty Dog are going to just want a little rest time, wading through some tropical warm water, or maybe getting a nice long massage. All I can say is that when we get back, our feet will hit the ground running on something new and cool... okay, now I've taken the foot motif a little too far.

**FINAL SCORE :**
# 4 of 5
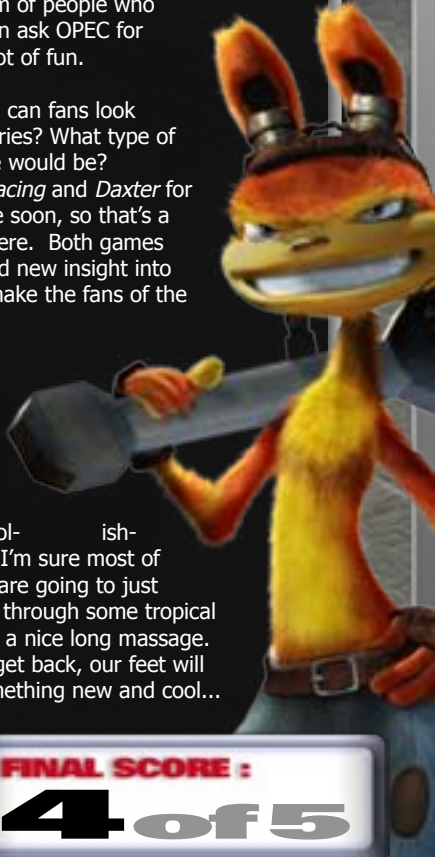
# Ratchet DEADLOCKED

Imagine how hard it must be to create a new videogame franchise in this day and age. You've got to deliver solid gameplay for the hardcore gamers, a great story for the canon nuts, and sales for the men in the suits who sign the checks. Insomniac Games pulled it off with *Ratchet & Clank*. The series is now four games strong and shows no sign of slowing.

The first *Ratchet & Clank* came as a bit of a surprise. It's got all the elements of a three-dimensional platformer, but a bit of the old RPG level up system as well. The more you use your guns, the better they get. How cool is that? Combine that with witty dialogue, a great sense of humor, funny talking animals (a staple of high-brow humor), and sarcastic robots, and you've got the makings of a hit on your hands.

Each new entry in the series only escalated the theme. The guns got bigger, the plot became funnier, and the jokes only got better. *Up Your Arsenal*, the third in the series, showed that Insomniac Games had essentially mastered the platforming mechanics of the game. They even went so far as to add a fun multiplayer mode even while expanding the stages and scope of the game.

*Ratchet & Clank*, if you aren't getting the point, is a fun series. It's kind of bright and happy, even when you're killing robots by the hundreds, which is a nice change from the usual scowling (anti-)heroes we tend to get nowadays. Everything from Clank being a well-known, galaxy-saving Secret Agent (and Ratchet his chauffeur) to the often bumbling villains and super-heroes-turned-apes inject each game with a healthy dose of humor. Each entry in the series is fun to play *and* watch.

The newest sequel, *Ratchet: Deadlocked*, looks to have a slightly altered feel. We're talking grim and gritty here: Ratchet & Clank end up trapped in a brutal "American Gladiators" meets *Lord of the Rings* game show called the Dreadzone. It's an oppressive idea, to be sure, but Insomniac Games pulls it off deftly. Brian Hastings, Chief Creative Officer of Insomniac Games, says that they "wanted to do something fresh and new that would set *Ratchet: Deadlocked* apart from the previous Ratchet and Clank games. As a team, we were looking for both a creative challenge and an opportunity to expand the Ratchet universe a little bit."

They've definitely expanded the universe. Ratchet begins the game by being kidnapped by Gleeman Vox, owner of the Vox network and the Dreadzone. He's decided that his ratings and merchandising income just aren't high enough, so he's going to jazz up the competition by putting a three-time savior of the galaxy in harm's way.

Let's talk tone. Those of you half-expecting Ratchet to have a new personality, spew four-letter words, and maybe have some spikes or chains added to his costume aren't even close. Instead, we get our lovable mascot just the way we like him. The backstory of the game is dark in nature, not Ratchet. His new look comes as a result of being stuck into a suit of upgradeable armor (and customizable, as there's a variety of skins for it) for the game show. Clank's no longer attached to Ratchet's back. Instead, he's playing Otacon to your Solid

Snake and feeding you data from off the playing field. This is a pretty interesting new dynamic, as Clank will often remind you of where you need to go and what you need to do if you seem to be lost. He is also, of course, very, very droll. He's even more reminiscent of Alfred from the Batman comics in *Deadlocked* than he was before. He's the perfect mix of sarcasm and wit.

Walking the fine line between seriousness and humor "was actually pretty tough for us in the beginning," says Hastings. "We had to find a way that we could present that aspect of the story such that the satire came across, but it didn't feel to dark and heavy. The end result really worked, in my opinion. The story presents a satirical look at violence in entertainment taken to an extreme, but it does so while keeping a sense of humor and without getting into moralizing about it."

They pulled it off beauitifully. The trademark *Ratchet & Clank* sense of humor remains intact throughout the entire game. Your guns start out big and only get more extreme as you go along. The cinemas both represent the bleakness of the DreadZone well, even as they make you chuckle. The game is chock-full of advertisements, public service announcements, and hype spots for the Dreadzone. Clank's dry sense of humor shines through when he communicates vital data through your radio uplink.

Even the dark and violent DreadZone competitions come with their fair share of humor. A pair of annoucers, one male, one female, are funny on their own, but they're here to commentate on your performance. The better you do, well, the more they mock you. The male is your stereotypical Dick Vitale/Bob Costas type, while the female often sounds extraordinarily unimpressed with everything. She calls Ratchet a "bleeder" at first sight. The announcers are at their absolute best when commenting on each other. There's some fine interplay and quality comedic dialogue at work here. It also adds an absurd angle to the mood of the game, which helps to keep it from becoming *too* serious. Ratchet and Clank are trapped in a life or death situation, but the humor adds a layer of surreality to the game.

You may have heard that *Ratchet: Deadlocked* focuses heavily on the multiplayer aspect of the game. The singleplayer mode reflects this. Picture a cross between *Unreal Tournament*'s fast-paced, frantic gameplay mixed with hectic platforming mechanics and light RPG elements. *Deadlocked* is about killing your enemy for bolts and experience. The platforming from the previous games has not been totally done away with (the swingshot makes it through intact, in fact), but it has been scaled back. The real focus here is on surviving, and

when she was attacked by two psychotic fans.

## GOING MOBILE

While this isn't the first time a popular home console video game franchise has been ported over to the small screen of a mobile handset, it is the first time a PlayStation brand-exclusive property has made the transition. In this all-new adventure titled *Ratchet & Clank: Going Mobile*, the fuzzy Lombax and his robotic companion find themselves trapped inside your cell phone. In order to save them from impending doom (or at least excessive overage charges), you will have to lead them through a 2D, vid-comic-style blast-fest inspired by its console cousin. Fans familiar with the series will find plenty of similarities, including a large arsenal of weapons (with some returning from previous adventures, such as the bolt-busting R.Y.N.O.), grinding on rails, using the Swingshot to grapple across gaps, calling on Clank's Propeller Pack propulsion and, of course, the video game mainstay — double jump.

Available for download at the end of October through most major carriers, *Ratchet & Clank: Going Mobile* promises to provide a meaty pick-up-and-play adventure. With over ten levels in the game's Story Mode, as well as arena-style combat with an unlockable Challenge Mode, Sony Pictures Digital is promising well over five hours of play. In addition, for those of you who have to unlock everything they can in a game, beating the mobile version will unlock two Skins for *Ratchet: Deadlocked*. Very cool indeed.

Hopefully, we'll see more of this interconnectivity between consoles and cell phones. It would be great to get all of Sony's first party titles on to a small screen (well, smaller than a PSP, that is) for some quick fix gaming. If the quality and trend continues, then sign us up!

very seamless. Sometimes, you'll only notice them when you need to use them to hack something or use one of their other exclusive features.

The Dreadzone competition takes place on a wide variety of worlds, each with its own distinct characteristics and challenges. It seems to be set up to maximize the differences between the areas, so that you never feel like you're doing a dozen cookie-cutter planets in a row.

Story progression is simple: The more you win, the better your rank. The better your rank, the better the enemies that you end up fighting against. Eventually, you'll work your way up the ranks and hopefully become a superstar and escape at the same time. While you're ranked low, however, you'll be berated every time you check your score. "Are you sure you know how to use that gun?" was one of the many snarky comments the game throws out.

The *Ratchet & Clank* gameplay is oddly suited to multiplayer. There's five gametypes available: Deathmatch, Capture the Flag, Conquest, King of the Hill, and

that leads directly into fighting. Fighting, of course, requires weaponry.

The weapons are louder and flashier than in the previous games, and are upgradeable in a variety of ways. Alpha upgrades may make them shoot faster, increase ammo, increase damage, or increase accuracy, among other things. Omega upgrades, though, are where it's at. They allow you to add special features to your guns. Feeling mightily sadistic? Mod your gun to leave hot pools of magma behind every shot. Do you prefer to knock your enemies down before you kill them? Blow them down with the impact upgrade. Feel like having a little *Hexen*-style action? Turn your enemies into animals and engage in behavior that'll make PETA cry.

The vehicles that you get to drive around are quite cool, as well. *Deadlocked*'s approach to vehicles is the same as its approach to weaponry: overkill. The bigger the better. Expect the screen to be filled with even more carnage than usual when you step behind the steering wheel. On occasion, the particle and lighting effects that the guns give off can obscure the screen, but it was never a huge problem. In fact, it looked very cool. You're in command of a ridiculous arsenal of weapons and vehicles and the game wants you to know it.

The biggest additions to the action are two bots that accompany you on missions. They'll shoot bad guys, guard you while you work screws, and crack wise about anything and everything. The bots aren't stupid, but they won't do your job for you. You can tell them to do certain tasks, including resurrecting themselves, guarding each other, and tossing out EMP bombs, via the d-pad. Other things they do are automatic. If you need to unlock something and are left helpless, they'll surround you with a shield until you're done, for example. *Ratchet: Deadlocked* avoids all the usual problems of having bots (and by "usual problems" think "extraordinarily crap A.I."), thereby neatly sidestepping turning the game into one long, drawn-out escort mission. The nearest comparison for the bots' style would be the way the A.I. soldiers worked in *Star Wars: Republic Commando*. The bots work even better in *Deadlocked* than they do in that (excellent) game. They will kill enemies (quite well, in fact) and guard you as you operate switches. They're very competent, but you can order them around directly if you don't feel like turning a screw yourself. They're more helpers than subordinates. This leads to there being an emphasis on commanding, which keeps the focus on actually playing the game. In this sense, the bot integration is

Juggernaut. Deathmatch and Capture the Flag are pretty self-explanatory. Conquest is focused on controlling as much of the map as possible by capturing various nodes. Want to keep the other team away from your node? Upgrade its defensive weapons and play keep-away. King of the Hill and Juggernaut are ideas that have been ripped straight from an elementary school playground. Juggernaut features one person as "it." He's super-strong, fast, and sometimes even invisible. You can only score points if you're the Juggernaut, but that also makes you a target. King of the Hill is simply a matter of controlling a certain piece of real estate and slaughtering anyone who tries to take it from you. Easy, right? Try again.

*Ratchet: Deadlocked* proves that sometimes "If it ain't broke, don't fix it" doesn't apply. *Ratchet: Deadlocked* gives the *Ratchet & Clank* franchise a shot in the arm that it didn't even necessarily need by way of a new look, expanded gameplay, even more humor, a robust multiplayer mode, and some slick innovations.

Where does the series go from here? Brian Hastings told us that "that is actually a very closely guarded secret. But, I'll tell you anyway. Dating sim. It's going to be a combination of robotic dating sim and *Katamari* game. Maybe."

**FINAL SCORE :**
# 5 of 5

# INTERVIEW

**BRIAN HASTINGS**
CHIEF CREATIVE OFFICER, INSOMNIAC GAMES

**HGM:** *Deadlocked* is the fourth entry in the Ratchet series. What elements of the earlier games got re-used for it? Do you try to avoid re-using things from prior games?
**HASTINGS:** We actually rewrote just about all the gameplay code for *Ratchet: Deadlocked*, so we didn't reuse much at all. We moved to a new skeleton for Ratchet and completely reanimated him and repro-grammed his control code. We also added a new lighting model and rendering pipeline to give more sophisticated shadowing and depth. All the underlying enemy code and movement systems were re-written as well. The GUI and HUD interface systems got completely rewritten. The way levels get wired, the arena systems, the combat code, and all the other core systems with how Ratchet interacts with enemies got rewritten. Core technology systems like collision detection and some of the renderers remained the same, but most everything else changed. It's actually kind of scary thinking back about how little we reused this time around.

**HGM:** About how long is the average development cycle for a *Ratchet* game, from concept to gold master?
**HASTINGS:** This time around it was probably about 11 months. If you count concept and pre-production time it's a bit longer than that, but if you're counting actual full-team production time then 11 months is pretty accurate. The *Deadlocked* team did an outstanding job tackling a lot of truly daunting challenges in a short amount of time. I'm more impressed with what we were able to accomplish this year than I've been with any project Insomniac Games has done.

**HGM:** Is there a consistent development process you follow to develop each Ratchet game, or has each one come about as the result of a different method?
**HASTINGS:** We have a method that works for us, but we continually refine it and improve it for each project. Each project has new surprises

and challenges that may pose difficulties for how we do things. Overall I feel like our techniques have been getting better and our production process has been getting a little smoother each of the last four years. It would take a whole book to describe all the techniques and methods we use to creating games, but I guess I could sum up a good chunk of it with these words: Collaboration and Iteration.

**HGM:** Is there any chance of seeing a future *Ratchet* title that returned to the 3D platformer format (puzzles, gadgets, etc.)? If not, why?
**HASTINGS:** Puzzles, gadgets, exploration and adventure are key aspects of what makes the *Ratchet* universe interesting to us at Insomniac. Ratchet and Clank's universe allows for infinite possibilities and creativity, and all of us here are eager to expand it in new and more exciting ways. I can't say much beyond that right now, except that it's the goal of everyone at Insomniac to ensure that the next time you play *Ratchet and Clank* you're going to be blown away.

**HGM:** What are your future plans for the *Ratchet* franchise? Any chance of Ratchet titles showing on the PS3, PSP, or other systems?
**HASTINGS:** I'd like to do a *Ratchet and Clank* laser tag game with real gravity boots and a R.Y.N.O. in every kit. But it turns out there are some liability issues we'll have to get around…

**HGM:** Is there anything you want to tell our readers about *Ratchet: Deadlocked* before we let you go?
**HASTINGS:** I've loved each of the *Ratchet* games for different reasons, but *Deadlocked* is currently my favorite. It's by far the most adrena-line-inducing of the *Ratchet* games to date, and I think it's also the funniest. The full-game cooperative play and the multiplayer mode also make it an ideal game to play with friends, which is something we've been trying to support more and more. If you're an experienced *Ratchet* player and you really want a challenge I suggest playing it on "Hero" difficulty mode. As developers we get really good at our own games, but Hero mode raises the intensity to a point where even us at Insomniac are often on the edges of our seats while we play.

So, what have we learned today? Multiplayer action following an intense one-player experience is going to be the name of the game in the new *Jak* and *Ratchet* titles. You'll spend both games scrambling around for upgrades — be it for your guns or your car — and trying to achieve perfection. In both games, competition has become the name of the game to help set up the new emphasis on multiplayer action. Best of all, we know that while the games may appear to have hopped genres, but they're still going to be something that franchise fans will recognize.

Keeping a franchise fresh through a series of sequels, especially sequels that hit yearly, is tough. *Ratchet* and *Jak* change so much from title to title, as part of obvious efforts to make all the games feel really different, not just improvements on what came before. *Jak*'s gone so far as to entirely alter its genre, while *Ratchet*'s merely looking at similar sorts of gameplay in a very new light. Gamers, being what we are, ultimately don't (or *shouldn't*) care so long as the new games are as much fun as the old ones. That's probably the most intimidating challenge any new *Jak* or *Ratchet* game has to face.

*Jak X* and *Ratchet: Deadlocked* have brought all the popular elements of a modern mainstream game to the party this time, though. They've got multiplayer, they've got single-player campaigns that are dozens of hours long, and they've both retained the sense of humor that they began with as 3D platformers. In an industry where success means constantly appearing new while feeling familiar, this would appear to be the golden formula.

THINK LIKE A BRAINIAC.
DRIVE LIKE A MANIAC!

GripShift™

BE THE MASTER OF FASTER.

Gear up for an outrageous mix of stunt driving, puzzle solving and platform action.

Create and customize with the Track Editor. Share with friends through the PSP™ (PlayStation®Portable) system's wireless feature.

Play multiple modes, including wireless multiplayer, challenge, and bonus games.

http://psp.station.sony.com

# HARDCORE REVIEWS

resident evil 4

**Review by Syriel**

**Publisher :** Capcom
**Developer :** Capcom
**Release Date :** 10/25/05
**Rating :** MATURE

**Genre(s) :** Survival Horror
**Category :** Action
**# of players :** 1
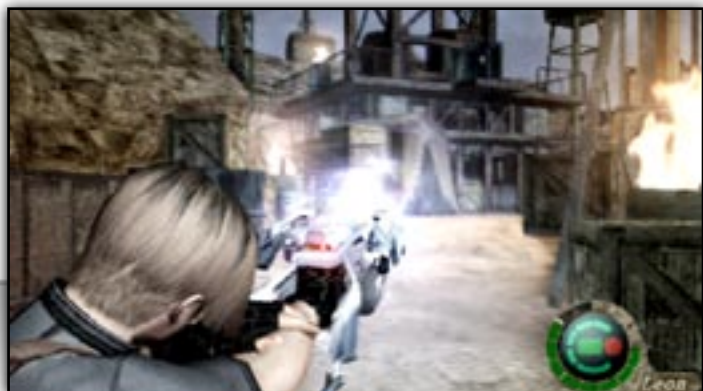
**When *Resident Evil 4* was first announced as a GameCube exclusive, PlayStation 2 owners the world over cried. Sure, the series had appeared on a number of other consoles over the years, but the core games always ended up on Sony's platform. Eventually word leaked out that the game would be making its way to the PS2, but not until it had enjoyed a period of exclusivity on the little purple box. Now, the wait is over--*Resident Evil 4* is coming home.**

Seen as a "fresh start" by the developers, *Resident Evil 4* does away with much of the backstory that drove the prior titles. Set six years after the Raccoon City incident, the game follows the exploits of Leon Kennedy, one of the heroes in *Resident Evil 2*. Now a US government special agent, Kennedy has been tasked with rescuing the President's daughter from the clutches of a violent religious cult.

The first thing you'll notice when playing *Resident Evil 4* are the visual upgrades. Gone are the static, pre-rendered worlds, replaced with fully-explorable environments. You are free to wander wherever you like, though the extremely linear nature of the game prevents players from getting *too* inquisitive. The PS2 version maintains the clean look of the GCN version, so any fears about the game losing detail were unfounded. In fact, the PS2 version even offers true widescreen support, which is a step up from the letterboxed original.

Another big change is the pacing. Prior games in the series were very slow and methodical, as you deliberately moved from room to room. While this helped up the suspense

factor, it was starting to get a bit repetitive. In a bid to try something new, *Resident Evil 4* eliminates the dim-witted zombies and replaces them with infected humans. These "not-zombies," as they are referred to by Capcom's developers, are quite spry and agile, drawing *Resident Evil 4* firmly into the realm of an action game.

In the first fifteen minutes, you'll have to barricade yourself in a house, avoid hidden booby traps, and fight off a teeming mass of not-zombies as they climb in windows and chainsaw their way through locked doors--and that's just the beginning. As you progress through the game, the action level ramps up and the monsters get bigger and badder. At one point you'll be trapped in a cabin with Luis, an Antonio Banderas look-alike, while fighting off an invading mob *Evil Dead* style, before moving on to battle an ogre that looks as if he stepped right off the *Lord of the Rings* set.

While the battles are impressive, something has been lost in the creature design. Perhaps it's a simple matter of genre saturation, but unlike the earlier games, there's nothing really *disturbing* here. This is disappointing, because one of the hallmarks of both the *Resident Evil* and *Silent Hill* games has always been nightmarish character design.

Control is another issue, as Kennedy still moves like a Buick and has a turning radius to match. This isn't bad when navigating through open environments, but it can be a royal pain when fighting in close quarters. A quick turn feature helps slightly, yet highlights a game design oddity--it's actually faster to use the quick turn to pull a 180, than it is to turn and face an opponent to your left or right. Combat is another issue, as you cannot move when armed. This makes it incredibly difficult to sneak up on an enemy or dodge an incoming attack. Oh, and don't even think about strafing. Apparently, the US government doesn't train its agents to side-step anymore.

Despite its incongruity, the control scheme is consistent so most

## NEVER BUY THE FIRST RELEASE

If there's something that Capcom has taught us all, it's that you should never buy the first version of any *Resident Evil* game, no matter what platform it comes out on. Ever since the series debuted, the company has made a habit of porting the games and re-releasing them with enhanced features. The same is true of *Resident Evil 4*.

While the core game is more or less identical to the GCN release, an entire additional side-story has been included. Titled *Separate Ways*, this new mission features the mysterious Ada Wong. Taking approximately five hours to complete, it parallels the events in the main game and explains a lot of the coincidental occurrences. For example, early on, Kennedy is about to be slaughtered by a group of villagers when a church bell rings and calls them away. Now you know the reason.

Unfortunately the extra mission is locked away when you first start *Resident Evil 4*, so those who have played the GCN version are going to have to find the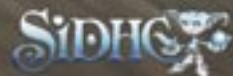ir way through the terror once again. In the end though, it's worth it, especially if you're a hardcore *Resident Evil* fan. *Separate Ways* answers a bunch of questions, all the while asking more... and leaving fans wanting more.

gamers should be able to compensate for its restrictions. It's at that point you really start to have fun, for underneath it all is the simple joy of bloody exuberance. Unlockable extras such as new costumes and a new gun, add a bit of humor, while location based damage makes it easy to blow off an opponent's head and watch as the corpse stumbles along with blood spurting out of the stump. Superbly mixed surround sound means you'll be intently listening for every crack and pop, wondering if it was just the wind or a not-zombie sneaking up behind you.

**Rating :** 4 of 5

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

Capcom has done an amazing job. Minor issues aside, my only complaint is the lack of puzzle solving, which has been a trademark for the series. Still, a great game nonetheless.

**FINAL SCORE :**
**4 of 5**
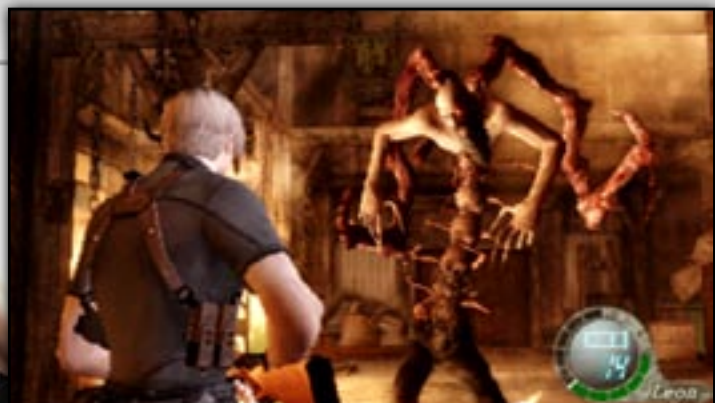
# INDIGO PROPHECY

**Review by 4th letter**

**Publisher :** Atari
**Developer :** Quantic Dream
**Release Date :** 9/21/05
**Genre(s) :** Adventure
**Category :** Cinematic
**# of players :** 1
**Rating :** MATURE; Blood, Partial Nudity, Sexual Themes, Strong Language, Use of Drugs and Alcohol, Violence

**My first draft of this review consisted of the words "Buy Indigo Prophecy or else I'll kill you." That's it. For some reason, my editor doesn't feel that that makes for a quality review of a high-quality game. He reiterated this idea to me at gunpoint. Read on.**

*Indigo Prophecy* has given me more "Oh, holy *crap*!" moments per hour of gameplay than any game since last year's *Ninja Gaiden*. *IP* is both a hodgepodge of a variety of genres (and mediums!) and a wholly new creature. I've seen the game described as an "interactive movie." This is about as close as you can get to truly describing the game. It owes just as much to David Lynch and David Fincher as it does to *Resident Evil*, *Silent Hill*, old-school text-based adventure games, and those really awful Choose Your Own Adventure novels.

Here are your keywords: variety in gameplay. Most games tend to be one-trick ponies when it comes to gameplay, through no fault of their own, with maybe a minigame or two tossed in to lighten things up. *Indigo Prophecy* could easily be described as a collection of plot-related minigames with a strong exploration element thrown in for good measure. That wouldn't be very fair, however, because everything feels very cohesive. There wasn't one moment when I stopped and went "Wait, why am I doing this?" In the first hour of the game alone, I got rid of a dead body, watched some TV, investigated a murder scene, and fast-talked a policeman. These weren't cinemas or scripted scenes. I picked up my controller and did these myself.

This wouldn't be possible without *IP*'s easy-to-learn control scheme. For all intents and purposes, you can use two analog sticks and two triggers for actions. Quantic Dream dug into their bag of dirty tricks and created a way for players to perform any action in the game, no matter how esoteric. This is strangely freeing and helps with the feeling of being immersed in the scenario. You don't have to worry about ammunition, or special moves, or anything. You simply have to hit the buttons that the game tells you to, so your character will hopefully survive the big scene. The system isn't perfect, and sometimes the commands that flash on-screen aren't quite bright enough, but it works and works well.

The graphics deserve a special mention. They aren't in the super-realistic style of a *Splinter Cell*, but they are quite good. The

## AM I WATCHING A MOVIE, OR PLAYING A GAME?

It's easy to turn off your interest when you hear "cinematic storytelling" in regards to a videogame. It inevitably means that you'll be watching the game more than you'll be playing it, and no one likes that. *Indigo Prophecy* neatly sidesteps the issues and allows you control over the portions that you formerly would've had to sit through. In many cases, you decide your character's speech, through the magic of the right analog stick. You don't get to pick full sentences. Instead, just to keep things moving along at a quick pace, Quantic Dream programmed in keywords like "trust," "love," "kiss," "stern," and "lie." Once you pick the keyword, the dialogue continues on, using the theme that you selected. Depending on how you answer, you may end up changing how other characters react to you, what evidence you leave behind, and how the game progresses.

On the flip side, *Indigo Prophecy* wears its film influences on its sleeve. The main menu is set up similar to a DVD menu, complete with options to select chapters of the game and bonus treats. The pause menu even features play and stop buttons. Each of the forty-plus chapters is accessible from this menu. If you want to see how character's would've reacted if you'd said or done something differently, replay it.

Unlike DVDs, however, the bonus features are unlockable. You'll acquire various cards while playing the game that give you bonus points, which lets you buy movies, concept art, and other things.

textures are quality, as well. Sweaters, faces, floors, and even mirrors all look like the real thing. Where the game really shines, though, is in the area of animation. The game is fully motion-capped, and it shows. Everything from playing a guitar to fighting for your life looks incredible. One of the best showcases of the animation is early on in the game, when you meet someone in the park. There're a few kids horsing around in the background while your character meets another, and they just look incredibly true to life. You can see the care that went into capturing even unimportant things, like a character's fidgeting. Each character has their own distinct personality, and the animations are detailed enough that you can probably tell this just by how they walk and move. This is brilliant work.

This is the kind of game that gives me hope for the next-gen systems. It manages to mesh a decent variety of gametypes, high-quality animation, and an intelligent story into a coherent, and original, whole. The game stands well on its own, but I'd love to see other developers pick up on this kind of game-making and storytelling. Most "cinematic game experiences" tend to involve a few lengthy cinemas, with the occasional bit of bullet-time thrown in for good measure. *Indigo Prophecy*, on the other hand, is the real deal.

**Rating :** 5 of 5

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

I respect *IP* for its innovation, but the latter half of the game stretches its mechanics to the breaking point. This is well worth checking out, but deeply frustrating at times.

**FINAL SCORE :**
# 4.5 of 5
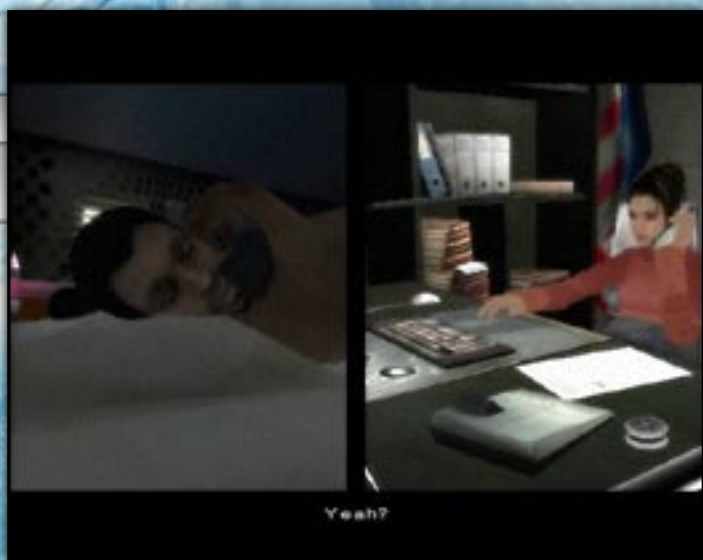
# BEGGAR PRINCE

**Review by Sardius**

**Publisher :** OlderGames
**Developer :** C&E Inc.
**Release Date :** 2005
**Rating : NOT RATED**

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

**Sega Genesis owners rejoice!** Long have you envied the Super Nintendo's vast catalogue of quality RPGs while you have attempted to enjoy disappointments like *Sword of Vermilion* and *Phantasy Star 3,* but at last your time has come. Soon, your favorite console will see the release of *Beggar Prince,* a title that holds its own with even the best 16-bit role playing adventures!

No, you didn't just fall through a rift in time, and this is not an article from a 1992 issue of Video Games & Computer Entertainment Magazine. Later this year, Super Fighter Team in conjunction with OlderGames Development & Publishing is set to release *Beggar Prince,* the first commercially-sold Sega Genesis cartridge to be published in the United States in seven years.

*Beggar Prince* tells the tale of Steven, spoiled prince of the kingdom of Shatt, who has grown bored of his privileged status. One day he decides to escape his castle and switch clothes with a street beggar for a day of freedom among the commoners. Little does the prince know that the evil Cat Minister will use his absence as an opportunity to usurp control of Shatt. Barred from entering his own castle due to no one believing his royal heritage, Steven embarks on a quest to prove his identity and take his rightful place as heir to the throne.

*Beggar Prince* was originally released as *Xin Qi Gai Wang Zi,* a Taiwanese Sega Genesis title published in 1996. Super Fighter Team has worked with the game's original developers, C&E Inc., to give the game

a full English translation and American release. We played an early version of the cart that had some bugs in it, but found the game to be an enjoyable throwback to the gloriously simple 16-bit days, before RPGs became bogged down with Materia Junction Spheres and other such needless complexities.

Gameplay in *Beggar Prince* is typical of what one would expect from early Japanese-style RPGs -- there are towns to visit, people to talk to, and randomly-encountered enemies to defeat. *Beggar Prince,* however, manages to distill these elements to create a more simplistic RPG experience than even the original *Dragon Warrior* had to offer. The game doesn't even have a money system; all useable items are looted from treasure chests, and all weapons and armor are automatically equipped upon discovery. Fortunately, this simplicity works in the game's favor, allowing the player to better focus on exploration and plot, rather than item organization and stat micromanagement.

The battle system is original and well implemented. To even the odds against the hordes he will face alone, the prince is granted several moves in battle before his enemies are allowed to attack. The number of moves you're allowed to make is represented by a meter that drains in degrees determined by the power of the attacks or spells used. After your meter is empty, the enemies get their turn, with their attacks being similarly constrained by a meter that is shared among the group.

Graphically, *Beggar Prince* is really quite nice-looking in comparison

## INTERVIEW: SUPER FIGHTER TEAM
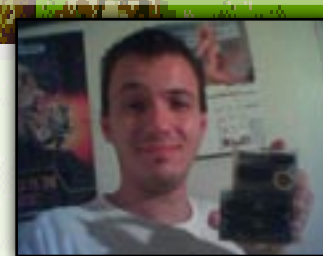
**Brandon Cobb**
(President, Super Fighter Team)

**Sardius:** So why release a new Sega Genesis game in 2005?

**Brandon Cobb:** Genesis fans deserve a great, new game to play and enjoy. If we don't give them one, who will?

**Sard:** Considering the large amount of Genesis games that never made it to American shores, what made *Beggar Prince* stand out as being worthy of US release?

**Cobb:** It's a huge game full of killer graphics, memorable characters and unique, enjoyable gameplay. I'm strict in choosing which RPGs I play; *Beggar Prince* stands out well enough for even the most picky of gamers.

**Sard:** How did you go about licensing *Beggar Prince* from the original publisher, C&E Inc?

**Cobb:** I have a good professional relationship with C&E. When I told their president I'd like to have our company work on an official release of the game for USA and Europe, he was very excited to help make it happen.

**Sard:** Did you encounter any difficulties with the project?

**Cobb:** All sorts of them, yes. C&E hadn't beta-tested nearly enough, so there were many bugs we had to track down & fix. This was a very complex process, but well worth it. I went through many cups of coffee ensuring everything was solid and ready to go.

**Sard:** Are there any other projects on the horizon for Super Fighter Team?

**Cobb:** A puzzle game I designed, *Super Fighter Block Battle,* is in development for Symbian-based mobile phones. We're also trying to acquire more Genesis game licenses from our friends in Asia.

to other Genesis RPGs. The console's limited color palette is hardly an issue here, with some locations looking more like they were rendered using the Super Nintendo's superior hardware. The entire game has a look and feel to it that is most similar to the original release of *Lunar: The Silver Star* on the Sega CD. Details like the short, squat character sprites, the portraits that display during dialogue sequences, and your character's brisk walking speed will evoke fond memories in fans of *Lunar,* who will probably find a lot to like in *Beggar Prince.*

In the vein of Working Designs' take on *Lunar,* an attempt has been made to spice up *Beggar Prince's* dialogue for its English translation. The result is hit or miss; while the translated dialogue is entirely readable and free of grammatical errors, certain sections are overdramatic to the point of being hilarious. You'll

shake your head at lines like "The pain I feel stems from deep down in my heart," and "The sight of your predicament sent me into a rage!" Intentionally amusing or not, though, the dialogue always provides an incentive to keep playing, if only to hear what the next dumbass villager is going to say.

Occasionally goofy dialogue isn't the game's only problem. About five minutes of *Beggar Prince's* music will convince you that none of the game's programmers gave a damn about sound design. The dungeon music in particular is an awful, instantly grating tune that becomes intolerable even before you get halfway through the first cave. You'll be missing nothing by muting the game and playing something -- *anything* -- else as background music instead.

These problems, along with some occasional gameplay repetition -- even the prince himself balks at the idea of going on yet *another* fetch quest at one point -- keep *Beggar Prince* from being as great as it could be. Otherwise, it's a solid adventure that will please RPG fans nostalgic for the 16-bit days of yore.

**Rating :** 4 of 5

*Related links:*

**Beggar Prince Official Homepage:**
www.beggarprince.com

**OlderGames Development & Publishing:** www.oldergames.com

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

The simplistic battle system and hateful music will alienate modern RPG fans, but those yearning for 16-bit nostalgia could do far worse than Beggar Prince.

**FINAL SCORE :**
# 3.5 of 5

*Prince: Wah! It's a mermaid! I don't believe it!*

*Prince: I'll deal with you two idiots another day.*

*Prince: It seems my arrival has caused some restlessness.*

# BURNOUT REVENGE
## BATTLE RACING IGNITED

Review by **Syriel**

**Publisher :** Electronic Arts
**Developer :** Criterion
**Release Date :** 9/13/2005
**Rating :** EVERYONE 10+; Violence

**Genre(s) :** Racing
**Category :** Extreme
**# of players :** 2, 6 online

**For a series based on crashing exotic cars into one another, there is a surprising amount of depth in the *Burnout* games. Every year Criterion has evolved the series, trying out new features and experimenting with the physics engine in creative ways. Whereas *Burnout 3* required precision driving, especially in the latter half of the game, *Burnout Revenge* takes something of a more direct approach, and encourages the player to plow head-on into traffic.**

The rules for surviving a collision are simple. You can safely hit almost any car from behind. Hit a truck or a bus and you crash. Hit an oncoming vehicle, or t-bone one on the side, and you crash. A new mode, Traffic Attack, helps players get the hang of bashing traffic. You have to reach a target damage level while a timer continuously counts down. The only way to add more time is to smash up some cars.

While hitting a car is easy enough, it isn't always the best choice. Colliding with traffic will earn you boost, and a well timed collision can knock a wreck into an opponent's path, thereby earning a takedown, but collisions also hinder your speed. If you're trying to go as fast as possible, weaving through traffic can be the better option.

Crash mode has been redone this time around, with less emphasis on hitting a specific target and more on causing mass damage. In *Burnout 3*, finding the perfect route to the 4x multiplier was a guaranteed way to win. Here, you have to bounce off as many cars as possible. Every hit fills your boost meter and every time the boost meter fills you can set off a massive crashbreaker explosion. Multiple crashbreakers are possible, and cars completely destroyed by a crash or explosion add to your multiplier.

Crashbreakers have been implemented into the races, giving you the option of blowing up opponents after you crash. Use this tool wisely

however; if you are successful, you'll be rewarded with full boost when you return to the track; if you miss, you restart with nothing. Aftertouch also returns, giving you the option of maneuvering your wreck in slo-mo, into the path of an oncoming opponent.

The track design really shines in *Burnout Revenge* with multiple pathways, secret routes and crossovers in nearly every course. Learning the shortcuts provides a time advantage, but each one also carries a risk, such as oddly placed obstacles. Crash challenges are more complex, though some stages feel oddly repetitive.

For the most part, *Burnout Revenge* is incredibly polished, but there are a few annoyances that crop up. Perhaps the biggest is the lack of a replay option. This is a game based on massive crashes, yet there is no way to review your handiwork. It is doubly disappointing as *Burnout 3* had it. Another issue is the view mode. The game resets to the default view every race, and smacking the view change button gets old quickly. Veteran *Burnout* players will also notice that the difficulty has been taken down a few notches. *Burnout Revenge* is almost too easy.

Despite its flaws, it's hard to go wrong with *Burnout Revenge*. It may be a bit different than *Burnout 3* but it's every bit as enjoyable.

**Rating :**
4.5 of 5

**FINAL SCORE :**
**4.5 of 5**

**2nd opinion** by 4thletter • **Alternate Rating :** 4.5 of 5

*Revenge*'s expanded tracks and crash modes only build on an already incredible franchise. Quality work.

---

# WWE DAY OF RECKONING 2

Review by **Shoegazer**

**Publisher :** THQ
**Developer :** Yuke's Media Creations
**Release Date :** 8/29/2005
**Rating :** TEEN; Blood, Language, Sexual Themes, Violence

**Genre(s) :** Sports
**Category :** Wrestling, Multiplayer
**# of players :** 1-4

**As hard to believe as it is, just six years ago *WWF Attitude* was the absolute best wrestling experience that a fan of Vince McMahon's superstars could look forward to playing. When almost all hope had dissipated, a miracle happened. THQ was able to tag-in and restore prominence to the decaying WWF license. Years later, here comes *WWE Day of Reckoning 2* to prove that the same classic gameplay experience of their N64 titles is still alive and well.**

As with any wrestling title, there are two important keys to winning the audience over: presentation and accuracy. *Day of Reckoning 2* is quite an impressive upgrade in presentation when compared to previous installments. Each wrestler's entrance is a near carbon copy of the real deal, and only a couple of them seem outdated. For example, Smackdown's Heavyweight Champion, Batista, enters the ring to his old theme music, and the recently traded Raw superstar Kerwin White is still Chavo Guerrero here. These types of last minute changes are nothing new for long-time wrestling game fans, and don't mar the experience. The familiar arenas are also accurately depicted and look great.

The playable roster is about as updated as you could hope for, with only a couple of exclusions (like Matt Hardy, who wasn't under contract at the time of production), but that is made up for by the additions of new blood such as Eugene and "The Masterpiece" Chris Masters (interestingly, Muhammad Hassan remains in the game despite being "dropped" from the company). As always, the phenomenal create-a-wrestler function is deep and can go as far as your imagination can take it.

While the characters' likenesses and signature moves have all been implemented with painstaking detail, one thing that really irked me is that the story mode's wrestler dialog feels so antiquated. Die-hard fans will surely recognize all of the trademark one-liners, but will wonder why Chris Jericho is using his schtick from like three years ago. However, looking past that, the story mode is quite pleasing overall and will often produce even more interesting story arcs than what's happening on TV.

If you're familiar with the previous GameCube *WWE* games, you're going to feel right at home with the control scheme. In fact, it actually feels more responsive than in the past. The new match-pacing feature requires you to use your stamina meter effectively, or you'll tire out and be unable to continue your attack or defend yourself. Using rest holds to recharge your stamina meter definitely adds a lot more strategy as well as mimicking the product that you see on television closer than ever before.

Though it's a solid enough title to keep wrestling fans occupied until next year's version, *DoR 2* is not without a few blown spots. At times it can resemble a classic Bret Hart match, while at others it can look more like Big Show versus Viscera in a lingerie showdown. The animations have been improved, but are still a bit clunky compared to the Smackdown series, and tag matches... those awful tag team matches... will truly test the patience of even the most hardcore wrestling fans.

*DoR2* comes with only a short list of gripes, so if you want some... come get some. The GameCube champ... is... here!!

**Rating :** 3.5 of 5

**FINAL SCORE :**
**3.5 of 5**

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

This sequel's a step sideways rather than forward from the first game, but it's still a solid title. I do miss the licensed music, however.

# Romancing SaGa

Review by **Lynxara**

**Publisher :** Square-Enix
**Developer :** Square-Enix
**Release Date :** 10/10/2005
**Rating :** E10+; Mild Fantasy Violence, Mild Suggestive Themes

**Genre(s) :** RPG
**Category :** Non-linear, 16-bit
**# of players :** 1

**Romancing SaGa is an updated remake of a classic SNES Squaresoft title of the same name, never released in the US in its original form.  In theory, it's an epic story about eight chosen heroes who are fated to rise up and stop the resurrection of an evil god in the fantasy world of Mardias. You can opt to play through the story with each of the characters as your protagonist, allowing you to experience the grand adventure in eight unique ways. Romancing SaGa blends its epic story with nonlinear gameplay that allows you to craft your five-person party to your own specifications and wander freely throughout the setting. Combat is turn-based, menu-driven action with a wide range of offensive and defensive options available to every character. It's all topped off by superb cel-shaded graphics, innovative cut-scenes, and a fantastic score.**

Doesn't this sound fun? Well,it's not. It's a great idea that's been completely botched from start to finish. Take the characters' individual storylines and the non-linear gameplay, for instance. In practice, this means that the first part of each game is maybe an hour or so of character-specific cut-scenes and dialogue. Then they end, and you're dumped into Mardias with only a very vague idea of where to go or what to do. Each character has a personal quest, but even if you figure out what it is you'll find finishing it is irrelevant. Doing any particular thing is, in fact, irrelevant. Romancing SaGa interpreted "non-linear" to mean "stumble around aimlessly until you find the plot and make the game end."

Then there's the combat system. Yes, it's classic turn-based menu-driven stuff, but with all the resource management that defines turn-based gameplay stripped out. You begin every battle with maximum HP and MP, and only have to worry about tracking about three other resources from battle to battle. Running any resource down to zero requires making a long chain of stupendously bad combat decisions. Regardless of what skills you give your party, you will probably win every battle you enter
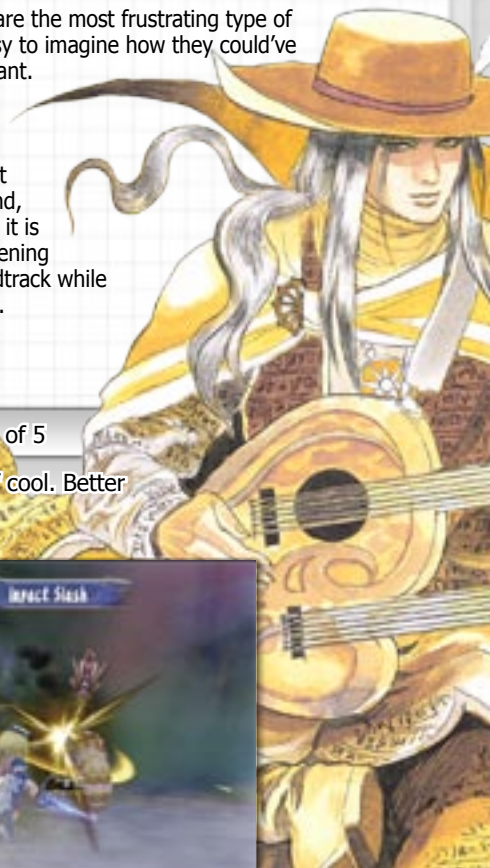
with minimal effort. The only exception to this will occur when you wander into a part of the game that you're not supposed to be in yet, which will kill you instantly.

Good presentation could've done a lot to improve this title, but the slick cel-shading and great music are hurt by abysmal art direction and terrible voice acting. The characters, despite being 3D renders, are all super-deformed in the style of the original game's 16-bit sprites. This does not result in something cute or charming. Instead, Mardias appears to be an epic fantasy world populated by terrifying midget-things. Watching them in motion can only be described with words like "ghastly". While you're wincing at this, you also have to cope with bored voice actors slowly reading nearly every line of text in the game to you. Your only escape is to never talk to anyone and pray you don't accidentally trigger a tutorial.

Games like Romancing SaGa are the most frustrating type of bad game, because it's so easy to imagine how they could've turned out as something brilliant. It's as if the creators were so enamoured with their idea that they forgot to do little things like balance the combat engine and playtest. In the end, the only thing it has going for it is good music. So, I suggest listening to the Romancing SaGa soundtrack while you're playing something else.

**Rating :** 1.5 of 5

**FINAL SCORE :**
## 2 of 5

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

Weird-looking characters aside, this game is almost kind of cool. Better tutorials or a better hint system could've saved it.

---

# FABLE THE LOST CHAPTERS

Review by **Honestgamer**

**Publisher :** Microsoft
**Developer :** Lionhead Studios
**Release Date :** 9/20/2005
**Rating :** MATURE

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

**The tale behind Fable: The Lost Chapters is tragic but typical of the genre. You were a young boy growing up in the peaceful little hamlet of Oakvale. Your greatest concern was finding a box of chocolates for your sister on her birthday. Then, raiders changed everything. They fired a lot of arrows, swung a few swords and torched your home. You're the only known survivor, saved by a man who takes you to a guild so that you can train to become a warrior and someday have your revenge.**

A half-hour into the game, you'll leave the Guild of Heroes to find a lush world filled with beautiful forests, cascading waterfalls and caves and swamps that exist almost solely to look spectacular. If you're like me, you'll find yourself pausing frequently to stare at luminescent mushrooms caught in the rippling reflection of a shallow pool of water, or trotting across a bridge and staring into the distance where a collage of amber and green leaves rise toward a vibrant blue sky. The game's visual direction is astounding. Even the finest details are paid their due. Trees and grass sway in the breeze. Insects flutter about in the distance.

Of course, Fable is about more than looking pretty. The ability to choose your alignment carries at least equal weight. As a member of the guild, you take on missions that either develop the plot or help you to gain experience and fame. Many objectives force a decision. For example, do you defend an orchard from bandits, or do you participate in the same raid in evil's name?

You're not just limited to the 'big' choices, though. As your character develops, you can spend your time in the heat of battle, or you can invest in property or marry or even entertain local villagers with your heroics. Your alignment also affects how you are received, and your appearance changes depending on the equipment you've found and the choices you've made. These points really help to develop what at its core is a rather plain and even sometimes tedious experience.

I blame the tedium on the backtracking. Though you find warp portals early on, they usually only get you near your destination. Worse, the auto-save feature sometimes forces a save in the middle of a quest, then returns you to a given point against your will. It's too easy to get stuck in a boring side quest, unable to proceed because you're too weak to resume your main objectives. Melee combat also suffers from a slow camera, so incidental fights in the middle of your wandering can easily destroy you. Then it's back to that last inconvenient save point for another attempt.

Still, such nuisances are tolerable, if only because you'll want to see that next cave or find that next weapon or see what reaction you get if you walk into a village and start lopping off heads. Because the world is so immersive, such diversions are a great deal more fun than you'd likely imagine. If you like games that encourage you to play around, give Fable: The Lost Chapters a chance. Where else can you find an RPG that lets you tap dance and fart from the same menu?

**Rating :** 4 of 5

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

The Lost Chapters has higher resolution graphics, better control, customizable tattoos, new armor, new weapons, and new quests. It's still Fable, just better.

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

## Virtua Tennis WORLD TOUR

Review by **Shoegazer**

**Publisher :** Sega
**Developer :** Sumo Digital Ltd.
**Release Date :** 10/04/2005
**Rating :** EVERYONE

**Genre(s) :** Sports
**Category :** Tennis, Multiplayer
**# of players :** 1; 1-4 via Wi-Fi (Ad-Hoc)

**Chances are that if you were a Sega Dreamcast owner during the summer of 2000, you rushed right out and bought** *Virtua Tennis*, **either because you were oddly intrigued, or utterly starved for a new release. Chances are that if you are reading this review right now, you've played more than your fair share of matches over the past five years, and are either still oddly intrigued, or utterly starved for a new PSP release. Which ever the case may be, say hello to this sleek, brand new, younger cousin of the Dreamcast cult-classic, because** *Virtua Tennis World Tour* **is hitting the PSP with all the force of a Roger Federer overhand smash!**

As a portable system owner, there are a couple of key things that you should want from your handheld gaming entertainment: pick-up-and-play gameplay, a high fun factor, and when possible, a multi-player option. Sega's *Virtua Tennis World Tour* certainly accomplishes all of that. No matter what your skill level may be, you'll feel right at home from the get-go thanks to the easy-to-comprehend control layout. As you have likely come to expect from previous tennis games, each button is assigned to a specific type of hit, and it will be up to you to learn when the time is right to unleash each type. Half of the fun is planning your strategy several returns in advance, and then watching it all come to fruition as you launch one down the baseline past an unsuspecting player guarding at the net. MUWA-HA-HA-HA!!

*World Tour* also supports your attention span regardless of how little (Exhibition Mode, Mini-Games) or how much (World Tour Mode, Create-a-Player) of a time investment that you're looking to put into it. As if that weren't already enough, there are also multi-player modes where you and up to three other players can compete in either singles or doubles match chaos via the Wi-Fi ad-hoc mode. If you're more the solo type, the new expanded career mode will offer several hours of character customizing, training and global touring to occupy your time as you compete to become the best in the world.

Of course, all of the fast, frantic gameplay of the original jam-packed into one UMD does come with a small price. That big, bulky Dreamcast controller has been replaced with a tiny nub of an analog stick, and four face buttons so close together that it's very easy to mash the wrong button in the heat of battle. Otherwise, *World Tour* is a near-perfect replica of the original.

Though it's a minor complaint in the grand scheme of things, gamers looking for something that takes advantage of the powerful system specs will not find it here. The series was never a graphical powerhouse to begin with, but it loses something more in the translation to PSP. Still, if a lower polygon count is what keeps the game's speed in tow, than it was certainly a fair exchange.

Whether you're a true tennis aficionado, or, like Roger Danish, you can't name a tennis event other than Wimbledon, you simply can't go wrong with *Virtua Tennis*. Even with a new developer at the helm of *World Tour*, the magic of the series is still fully intact, and to some extent, made even better as a portable offering. Sega has easily managed to deliver an addictive title that is a definite must-have for gamers who may be questioning why they dropped 250 bones on their PSPs.

**Rating :** 3.5 of 5

### FINAL SCORE :
## 3.75 of 5

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

I may not be the most knowledgeable tennis aficionado, but I do know a good game and *Virtua Tennis World Tour* is it. This is a perfect complement to the still-lacking PSP library!

---

## X-MEN LEGENDS II RISE OF APOCALYPSE

Review by **Racewing**

**Publisher :** Activision
**Developer :** Raven Software
**Release Date :** 9/20/05
**Rating :** TEEN; Mild Language, Violence

**Genre(s) :** RPG
**Category :** Action (and lots of it)
**# of players :** 1-4, Online Co-Op

**I haven't had this much fun blasting random minions and endbosses with mutant powers since Konami's original** *X-Men* **beat-'em-up.**

*Rise of Apocalypse* is everything the original *X-Men Legends* tried to be. I enjoyed most of the original for what it was, but always thought that the execution could have used a bit more... streamlining. The gameplay was clunky and slow in as many places as it rocked. It was easy to get lost in the later stages, and even in the X-Mansion hub. Finally, the level system, while novel, wasn't exactly conducive to players in a beat-'em-up setting, as it forced the action to stop way too often. Eventually, my friends and I just got bored with it.

Be happy, everybody, for this sequel fixes just about every gripe people could have had with the first game. The gameplay is faster, and "flows" better. The AI is better, and coordinates its attacks. Team attacks are easier to implement. You can now have the computer automatically grant new powers to your characters when they level up, and distribute items and accessories among the group. However, you can still fine-tune your characters at your leisure. Finally, Sanctuary beats the pants off of the X-Mansion as far as hubs go; its smaller size means that it's now quick and easy to find your next objective, as well as talk to relevant characters, and explore the game's hidden features.

The X-Men and the Brotherhood are now forced to work together to combat a common foe: Apocalypse, and the people who have joined him. You know what that means. Want to team up Juggernaut, Rogue and Colossus to ensure that every enemy you encounter dies in two hits? Your wish is the game's command. Want to play as just the Brotherhood? You can do that, and you'll get an experience bonus to boot, since they work well together. You can even put together a Femme Fatale team (Storm, Rogue, Jean and Scarlet Witch) and have some of the damage you inflict converted to health while you fight. X-Men fans will be quite happy with the roster of unlockable characters the game sports, along with the above-average writing, visuals, voice-acting and story.

You'll have to pick and choose your team wisely, because some characters are essential to progression. Only a select few are able to build bridges, put out fires, or crack security codes, leading to either goodies or new quests. Of course, you'll have to bring some folks that can straight-up fight as well. All of these will be required if you want to best Apocalypse, his four Horsemen, and the dangers you and your friends will find should you take the game online.

The original game, while commendable, was a love-or-hate title. This one will definitely mend some bridges. There are a few more fetch quests here than I'd like, but it's a minor gripe. Whether you're by yourself or have a bunch of friends with you, *X-Men Legends 2* proves to be seamlessly playable. The fact that it offers a lot of bang for your buck is gravy. Don't worry about spending your hard-earned cash on this one; it's worth it.

**Rating :** 4 of 5

### FINAL SCORE :
## 4 of 5

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

*X-Men Legends II* is better than the first *and* includes Deadpool as a playable character. How can you go wrong?
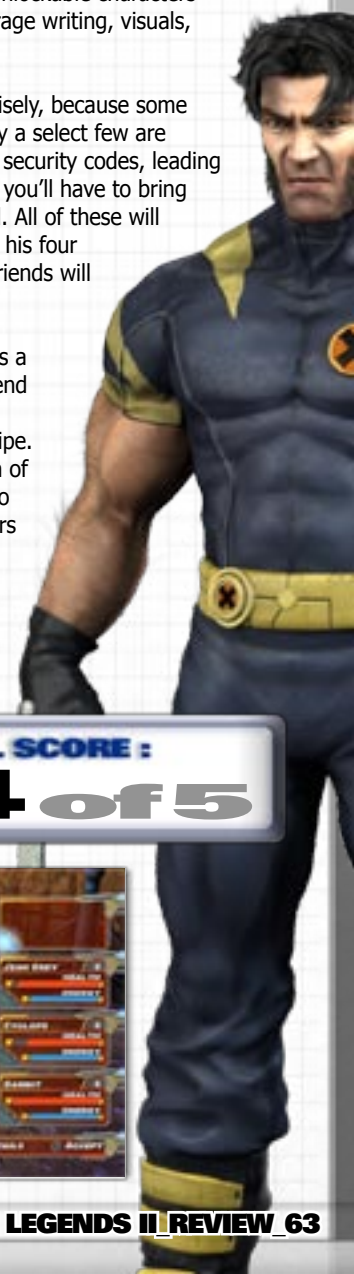
# Castlevania: Dawn of Sorrow

Review by **Syriel**

**Publisher :** Konami
**Developer :** Konami
**Release Date :** 10/4/05
**Rating :** TEEN; Blood and Gore, Fantasy Violence

**Genre(s) :** Adventure
**Category :** Gothic
**# of players :** 1, 2 versus



*Castlevania: Dawn of Sorrow* **is a direct sequel to** *Aria of Sorrow* **on the GBA, and spoils the best ending of that prior game as soon as you press Start. Once you do, though, you're in for a short, but sweet, ride that serves as a worthy sequel to** *Aria of Sorrow,* **yet fails to evolve the series in any meaningful way.**

Set one year after the last game, *Dawn of Sorrow* once again follows the adventures of Soma Cruz. This time around an evil cult is trying to resurrect the dark lord Dracula, even if it means sacrificing Soma in the process.

The gameplay is familiar, with a sprawling non-linear castle for you to explore. Initially, large sections will be blocked off, only to slowly open as you earn new powers and abilities. The DS's upper screen is used as a real-time map, making navigation completely painless.

As before, Soma's main source of power is his ability to dominate souls. Split into four types (Bullet, Guardian, Enchant and Ability) souls are randomly obtained from defeated enemies. Souls can be used for magic attacks or combined with weapons to create improved combat gear. Players can link up via the DS's wireless connection to trade souls with each other *Pokemon* style, or populate a short dungeon and race each other through it.

In making the jump to the DS, *Dawn of Sorrow* benefited most from improved graphics. The game is extremely sharp, colorful, and well-animated, making it easily one of the best-looking titles on the hardware. While it did suffer from the occasional bout of slowdown, these instances were few and far between. Touchscreen support has been added, but it is more of a throwaway feature than an

integral part of play. All bosses must be banished by drawing a simple pattern on the screen, and a limited number of rooms have ice blocks that must be broken by dragging the stylus across them.

Ultimately, *Dawn of Sorrow's* biggest weakness is its familiarity. For better or for worse, the game feels more like *Aria of Sorrow* "version 2.0" than something entirely new. It is also relatively short; most players should be able to complete the core game in a day or so. The fact that many of the boss monsters have extremely simple attack patterns doesn't help matters.

Thankfully a number of bonus features are unlocked once you finish the main game, so there is a good deal of replay value. Hard Mode ratchets up the challenge, while Julius Mode allows you to play with Julius Belmont, Yoko Belnades and Alucard. Don't be surprised if you end up enjoying Julius Mode more than Soma's adventure. Boss Rush Mode makes an reappearance, challenging players to beat all of the boss monsters in the shortest possible time.

Much like a favorite candy bar, *Dawn of Sorrow* is a tasty treat sure to be on every DS owner's "must have" list. It's fun while it lasts, but it feels like you've seen it all before, and it's over way too soon.

**Rating :** 4 of 5

**FINAL SCORE :**
# 4.25 of 5

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

Remember Syriel's a high-level *Castlevania* scientist. For the rest of us, this is about thirty hours of monster-bashing, castle-exploring fun on the go.
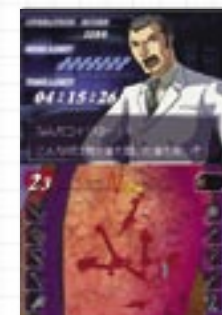
---

# TRAUMA CENTER UNDER THE KNIFE

Review by **Honestgamer**



**Publisher :** Atlus Software
**Developer :** Atlus Software
**Release Date :** 10/04/2005
**Rating :** TEEN

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

**Unless you count** *Trauma Center: Under the Knife,* **the latest DS game from Atlus, I've never grabbed forceps and a scalpel and poked an exposed liver. I've never battled mysterious diseases and medical terrorists, and never felt the tension that comes from knowing that a patient's life lies in my hands. The world is a better place because of this. You don't want me anywhere near the operating room. Still, I leapt at the opportunity to try my hand at saving virtual lives. Then I found out that the game isn't all it could have been.**

When you first play *Trauma Center,* you won't notice its flaws. The visuals are certainly attractive, with nice character artwork and believable backgrounds. The top screen often includes dialogue sequences, while the bottom lets you choose a destination on the world map, or conduct an operation when the need arises.

That need arises quite frequently. Surgery is the game's true focus, with few exceptions. This is where the game excels, and where it doesn't. A typical operation begins with your current assistant briefing you on the situation. Then you get to grab at the tools indicated. The interface is quite intuitive, but interrupted by counter-productive blurbs of text. For example, you might be in the middle of a cut, slicing organs and applying anesthetic or whatever else the operation calls for. Suddenly, everything crashes to a halt as the 'talk' icon appears in the upper right corner. So you tap it and get a few unhelpful lines of text, then your timer is counting down and you must select a tool and try to get back into that zone you somehow managed to find. The minute

you do, there's a complication in the surgery. Quickly, you react, only to find that yet again, your 'helpful' assistant is interrupting you.

This might not sound so bad, but it happens repeatedly. Worse, you'll have to suffer through it again if you fail at an operation and make another attempt. What could have been a fun experience quickly becomes tedious.

Brutal difficulty only exacerbates the issue. Those interruptions from your assistants are so annoying because every second counts. You have to cut open wounds, excise bugs, poke things with needles, suture wounds and much more. Everything happens so fast that you can't spare even a single misstep or you may very well fail. You're working against not only a timer, but also dropping vitals. A special move called the 'Healing Touch' lets you slow down time, *Matrix*-style, but it's only a temporary respite from an overly demanding timer.

This all joins together to mean that the minute you run into a truly challenging surgery—which you will do quite frequently—you'll find yourself lost in the middle of a sea of frustration. Suddenly, you're pressing buttons to skip through dialogue you've already read, gritting your teeth as your assistants ruin your surgeries, and simply wishing you were playing something else. Even a 'Challenge' mode that tracks your score independently of the story mode can't save this cartridge. It really is a shame.

**Rating :** 2 of 5

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

*Trauma Center* cleverly blends the unique features of the DS system with the high-tension feel of surgery. It's easily one of the most innovative games ever made.

**FINAL SCORE :**
# 3 of 5

## We ♥ Katamari™

Review by **Racewing**



**Publisher :** Namco
**Developer :** Namco
**Release Date :** 9/20/2005
**Rating :** EVERYONE; Fantasy Violence

**Genre(s) :** Puzzle
**Category :** Rolling Up Stuff
To Roll Up Bigger Stuff
**# of players :** 1-2 Simultaneous

**If you're reading this magazine, odds are you've made up your mind about *We Love Katamari*. Heck, we had it as last month's cover story. Still, as a game magazine, reviewing is what we *do*, so let's make the most of this, shall we?**

The events of the original *Katamari Damacy* were adapted into a video game and marketed worldwide, meeting with significant success. In fact, it was such that the Prince and King of All Cosmos became instant superstars. The King still watches over Earth, while the Prince and his cousins run freely on the planet now, having fun and rolling where they will. This time, they take requests from the people of the world. Besides, there's still a lot of empty space to fill up. The first game only restored the stars immediate from Earth. The job still isn't done yet.

I swear I'm not making any of this up. I *couldn't*. Even if you imported the Japanese release months ago, it's worth picking up again. The story and dialogue provide comedy and fourth-wall references galore. It's side-splitting from start to finish.

The core of the game hasn't changed. You still roll a large sticky ball known as a "katamari," which gets bigger the more you stick to it. The first game usually had you roll up to a certain size, or gather as much of a certain object as possible. You can still do those here, but there are other missions with different objectives now, such as cleaning a messy room for a housewife, gathering up candy for children, making a snowman, or wreaking havoc in a school in the name of show-and-tell. These missions go a long way towards helping to break the possible monotony brought about by nonstop rolling. The game's also far longer than the first.

There's a two-player Versus Mode here, which is a barrel of fun, but the big addition is that you can play the single-player mode cooperatively. This requires lots of verbal communication and physical synchronization, but is highly rewarding and adds to the game's bizarre-fun factor immensely if you have the right rolling partner.

The graphics have been cleaned up a bit from the first game, though they're still incredibly low-poly. Still, at least now they're less pixellated, and the artwork looks even richer now. As far as the soundtrack goes, I slightly prefer the first game's to this one, but honestly, neither is "better" than the other. Both are quirky, quality, and highly enjoyable in their own way.

If you liked the first *Katamari Damacy*, then this is a no-brainer. Buy it on release day and don't look back. However, if you're still new to the series, you're seriously missing out on some greatness here. The first game's being sold at budget price, so go get that, enjoy its humor and simplicity, then come back to this one, which expands on the first in every way. You'll appreciate it that much more.

**Rating :** 4.5 of 5

### FINAL SCORE :
## 4.5 of 5

**2nd opinion** by 4thletter • **Alternate Rating :** 4.5 of 5

The new objective-based levels make this game. Building a giant bonfire was incredibly fun.

---

## GripShift™

Review by **Shoegazer**



**Publisher :** Platform Publishing
**Developer :** Sidhe Interactive
**Release Date :** 9/12/2005
**Rating :** EVERYONE; Comic Mischief

**Genre(s) :** Racing
**Category :** Action, Puzzle
**# of players :** 1-4 (Wi-Fi/Ad-hoc)

**When a new platform launches, game publishers generally feel that it's the best time to try out new concepts. In particular, Platform Publishing is getting set to bring two more brand new properties to Sony's PSP, with *Gripshift* next up on the calendar. The concept here is easy to grasp: create a profile, pick a character, pick a vehicle, and you're off to the races. Sounds simple enough, but what's *really* under the hood once you press the Start button? A whole lotta crazy jumps, insanely twisted roadways, and a few loop-de-loops that will make your stomach drop to your knees.**

Though the game's loading screen will repeatedly insist to you that *Gripshift* is a "Puzzle-Platform-Racing-Action game," make no mistake: this game is nearly all puzzle-based. Granted, it's not a traditional puzzle game like *Tetris* or *Lumines*, but after a few easy tutorial laps around the track you'll quickly notice that you're not racing in Kansas anymore. Suddenly you're racking your brain trying to devise the quickest path around the race track, while collecting all of the needed stars along the way. In short, don't buy this thinking that you're getting the PSP's very own *Mario Kart* killer, or you will be sorely disappointed.

*Gripshift* actually does several things very well here. It's incredibly accessible in the sense that you can pick it up at your leisure, and clear a few levels without any extensive training sessions. With so many levels to complete, and a slew of car parts, race tracks and mini-games to unlock, there will always be something new to do every time you play, yet it doesn't feel overwhelming. It also has a pretty good soundtrack made up of choice hip hop, rock, techno, and acid jazz tracks.

Sidhe Interactive also deserves major kudos for including the robust Track Editor mode. It seems somewhat limited at first, but once you start tinkering with all of the different menus and options, you'll soon be designing tracks that will run circles around that old *Excitebike* track you made and still show off to impress your friends. Best of all, you can share your favorite creations with other PSP users via wi-fi.

The only real negative elements to mention about *Gripshift* are in the controls and in the lack of effort put into the Race Mode. Even the more advanced PSP users may experience difficulty trying to maneuver their car around the track due to the super-loose analog sensitivity. I found myself using the D-pad permanently after just half of a race with the analog nub.

I was also fairly turned off by the fact that *Gripshift* is almost completely tailored as a puzzle game experience, and the Race Mode, where you get to square off against other racers, feels like an afterthought. Why not make both modes compelling and appeal to a broader audience? It certainly had all the makings of something special, complete with wacky power ups, but ultimately lacks enough options and variety to keep you interested. Furthermore, you can't even access any of the Race Mode elements until you unlock them in the single player mode first. Boooooooo!!

Overall, *Gripshift* feels a lot like a game that missed its era. It captures the same spirit and charm of games like *Roll Away*, or *Super Monkey Ball*, yet somehow seems a bit more frustrating. For gamers that are into games a bit less cut-and-dry than standard racing fare, please proceed to my final score. For everyone else, you'd better subtract a full point from it first.

**Rating :** 3 of 5

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

*Gripshift* feels like it ought to be fun, but aggravation sets in quickly. Constantly falling off *Gripshift*'s creative levels leeches the entertainment from what might have been a clever little time-waster. Almost good.

### FINAL SCORE :
## 2.5 of 5

## CODENAME: PANZERS PHASE TWO

Review by **Arlieth**

## motoGP 3
Ultimate Racing Technology

Review by **Shoegazer**

**Publisher :** Stormregion
**Developer :** CDV
**Release Date :** 7/25/2005
**Rating :** TEEN

**Genre(s) :** RTS
**Category :** WWII
**# of players :** 1-8

**Publisher :** THQ
**Developer :** Climax Studios
**Release Date :** 8/30/05
**Rating :** EVERYONE

**Genre(s) :** Racing
**Category :** Motorcycles, Multiplayer
**# of players :** 1-4; 1-16 Live



**While there's been a whole slew of WWII games set in the European Theatre, *Codename: Panzers Phase Two* decides to deviate from its predecessor and takes place in North Africa. With a storyline covering the Axis, Allied and Partisan (Soviet) factions, the game tries to create a cinematic experience with narratives, camaraderie and cutscenes, but this produces lackluster results. Fortunately, the game delivers where it counts: strategy.**

If you haven't played the first *Codename: Panzers*, you're in for a treat. The combat system is highly detailed, with location-specific armor and ammunition capacity concerns with your tanks. Some tanks, like the Semovente Basotto and the SU-85, do not have rotatable turrets, forcing you to keep a close watch on their frontal armor. The heavier artillery units must be transported by truck, and the soldiers operating it are vulnerable to small-arms fire, which is where para-troopers can make themselves useful. Mobile artillery units can be seen raising and lowering their barrels before firing, anti-aircraft guns will shoot down your reconnaissance planes, and damaged units even have garbled radio transmissions. Night-time battles are tense, as you must weigh the consequences between reduced visibility or the discovery of your position when turning your headlights on.

There are a few concessions to fantasy, however. Your fighter-bombers will wipe out entire squadrons of infantry at mach speed (even faster than your artillery). Flak 88s won't blow Shermans apart in one shot, and flamethrower troops can cook Axis Tiger Tanks like a can of chili, forcing its crew to bail out. Your crew can then miraculously pilot the tank after it cools down without any engine damage.

The gameplay of *Panzers* emphasizes tactics over micromanagement, more than most RTS games. Your army has a maximum of twenty-five units, ten of them which can be tanks. Infantry can be equipped with binoculars, mine detectors, molotov cocktails and more. All units gain levels and experience, making unit preservation a top priority. Because experience follows the soldiers and not the vehicles, your tank crews can abandon a dying *Panzerkampfwagen* and live to fight another day. The player's accomplishments are also rewarded with Prestige points, which allow you to purchase and upgrade your forces between most missions. To maximize these points, secret objectives must be achieved during the course of the mission. Doing this will often make life easier; liberating captured pilots could grant you free air strikes, for example. You'll need all the help you can get, since this game's difficulty level is quite high.

The game becomes especially hard during urban warfare missions, as the importance of infantry and artillery becomes more apparent. Throwing all of your tanks at the enemy in this game will simply not work, because there's no factory producing your tanks. It's a welcome change from the current RTS formula of resources and production. The graphics may be a little dated, the voice-acting spotty at best, but these do little to detract from a solid game. If you're an RTS fan, *Panzers Two* is definitely worth a look.

**Rating :** 4 of 5

It wasn't too long ago when arcade-style racing games like *Cruisin' USA* and *Rush* were the standard by which other racing games were judged. Then *Gran Turismo* came along, and changed what gamers expected from the racing genre. Those same expectations are also true for the motorcycle racing genre, which has grown leaps and bounds since the days of *Hang-On*. As the new breed of racing games are beginning to appear indistinguishable from one another, it's refreshing to see a title like *MotoGP 3: Ultimate Racing Technology* come along and break free from the pack.

What *Gran Turismo* has done for car lovers, *MotoGP 3* does for bike lovers. While it's not on the same level of detail as *GT4*, its sheer depth has never been seen before for motorcycle gearheads. When beginning your career, you have the option of selecting from a list of professional riders, or starting from scratch and creating your own. You can tinker around with everything from logo creations and color schemes, to bike styles and team names. On the surface it seems all pretty standard fare, but if you spend some time sifting through all of the menus, you'll discover just how deep it really is. The menu navigation could be a bit more user-friendly, but it's not unmanageable.

*MotoGP 3* also boasts realistic sound that is captured perfectly by the in-game Dolby Digital support. This one will really rock your system if you have the set up to support it. If only the same could be said for the game's soundtrack. The in-game tracks are slightly muted and boring, but Climax has apparently planned in advance for the complaint and put in custom soundtrack support.

While all of the single player modes will keep you occupied, the multiplayer modes are where this game truly shines. Without

XBOX Live, you'd easily be missing 50% of the entire experience, and that would be a shame. Online, all of the different racing modes are available: MotoGP, Street Racing, Stunt Mode, etc. If you choose to create your own match, there are many different tweaks for you to adjust so that you can calibrate the match to very specific requirements such as reserved spots for friends, rank requirements, bike class requirements and so on.

Unless you are a true *MotoGP* fanatic, however, the fun factor can dwindle quickly during your play sessions. Unlike a car racing game, *MotoGP 3* is very, very unforgiving. If you don't take a corner perfectly, you're going to eat the pavement, which can get frustrating since the rival AI races a perfect lap every time. The rubber band physics always put you back into the thick of things... until you crash again. Wash, rinse, and repeat.

*MotoGP 3* is exactly the kind of game that ought to come with a big warning label on the package. It might read something like "Warning: Please know at least something about the sport of motorcycle racing before attempting to play. If not, we suggest something a little easier, such as *Ninja Gaiden*." No joke, this game is unmercifully tough (especially on newbies), but if you've got an interest in the sport and a whole lot of patience, there is certainly something to be had here. Even if the MotoGP tracks get old after a while, you've still got the new extreme mode with 16 street racing tracks and a stunt mode to mix it up a bit.

**Rating :** 3.5 of 5

**FINAL SCORE :**
# 4 of 5

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

Come into *Panzers* with a real strategy, or prepare to get burned. Excellent, but tough, game.

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

Climax has offered yet another solid entry into my favorite motorcycle racing series. I await the next installment on Xbox 360 (hear me Climax!).

**FINAL SCORE :**
# 3.75 of 5

## FRANTIX

Review by **James**

**Publisher :** Platform Publishing
**Developer :** Killer Game
**Release Date :** 9/20/2005
**Rating :** EVERYONE

**Genre(s) :** Puzzle
**Category :** Grid-based running around
**# of players :** 1

*Frantix* **is an unapologetic throwback to a genre that hasn't been seen on consoles (handheld or otherwise) for several years now. It's a straightforward puzzle/action game involving running around, pushing blocks, avoiding beasties, and figuring out how to gather all the gems on the way to the exit. While it's nice to see an old genre making a comeback, certain issues sabotage the experience and keep** *Frantix* **from ever being mentioned in the same breath as classics like** *The Adventures of Lolo* **or** *Fire 'N Ice.*

It's nice to see the action/puzzle genre again, but *Frantix* feels like a game that could have used another month or two to sort out the rough edges. The lack of plot or any real reason to be running through the levels isn't a problem; most stories for this kind of game are so weak that leaving it off doesn't feel like an omission.

Graphics are crisp and colorful, though there's an occasional bit of slowdown when a bunch of catdragons all get running at once. They even went so far as to fix one of the long-running flaws of the block-pushing genre, allowing anything pushed against an obstacle to be pulled back a space rather than leaving it trapped there forever. For that one innovation the guys at Killer Game get a shiny gold star. The only real problems start when it comes to the controls.

Running through levels, pushing blocks and avoiding creatures while picking up the required icons to escape is, in general, a good time. It isn't amazing, but it's still a nice way to keep one's brain occupied during a twenty-minute break. The problem is that, when the timing is tight, *Frantix*'s control just won't be up to it. Have a bomb with a burning fuse that needs to be moved into another room to take out that catdragon in front of the door? Good luck with it, because Bear

(or whichever character you play as) is pretty touchy. It's very easy to move one space too many, and when that means restarting the whole level because the block being pushed fell into the quicksand, never to be seen again, it doesn't take long for frustration to set in.

Most levels aren't very long, but going through the motions again and again while hoping that, this time, the game will do what you're pretty damn sure you're telling it to do gets old fast. On the plus side there are usually at least four levels open to play on, so you can put an aggravating stage on hold for a while.

*Frantix* is a decent game with some very satisfying puzzles to solve in its 230-plus levels. It's a bit basic but perfect for small chunks of gaming. The only major problem is that the control sabotages the game just when it's needed most, which is a shame. It would be nice to see a good new game in the fondly remembered block-pushing, puzzle-solving genre.

**Rating :** 3 of 5

**FINAL SCORE :**
# 2.5 of 5

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

Hey, I remember *The Adventures of Lolo*. That was awesome. I think I'll go play that instead.
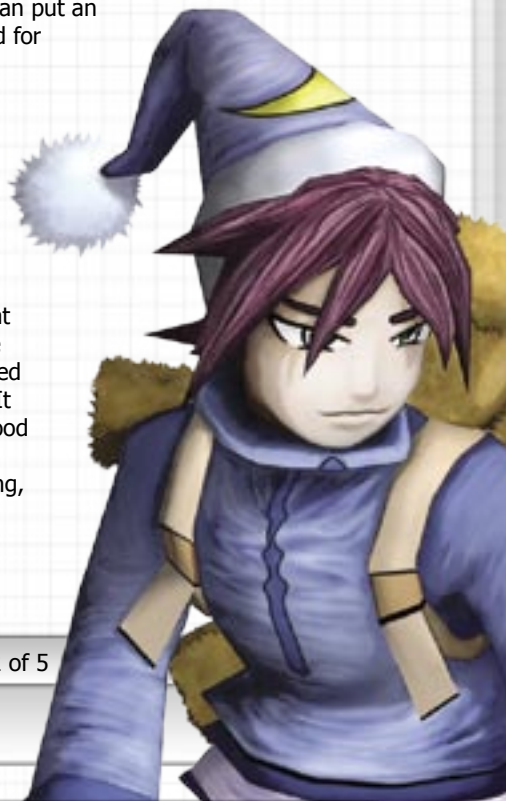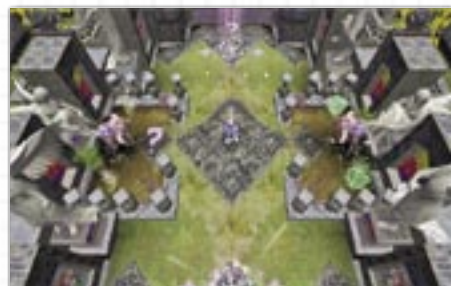
---

## SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI: DIGITAL DEVIL SAGA 2

Review by **Honestgamer**

**Publisher :** Atlus Software
**Developer :** Atlus Software
**Release Date :** 10/4/2005
**Rating :** MATURE

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

**If you play** *Shin Megami Tensei: Digital Devil Saga 2* **before you've played its immediate predecessor, you might think the game is just another good role-playing title in the long string of genre gems that the Playstation 2 has seen in these past few years. However, it's much more than that. It's also one of the most compelling sequels I've ever experienced.**

Those who completed the first game earlier this year helped a band of characters to explore a world known as the Junkyard. The goal was to defeat each of the other clan chiefs and ascend to Nirvana. The setting for *Shin Megami Tensei: Digital Devil Saga 2* is the Nirvana you found at the end of the first game. Simply put, it's anything but.

As you explore the new world, you'll find that the wet nature of the first game is gone, replaced by a scorching sun that turns humans to stone. That's not the only change, as several of your friends have gone missing. You'll spend the first few hours reassembling your crew to the best of your ability. You'll also meet new characters who propel the story through one breath-taking plot twist after another. By game's end, when you're barely sure who can be trusted and who can live and who can't, you'll find every notion you had in the first game challenged. There's tremendous depth, and it's one of the most exciting reasons to lend the game forty hours of your time.

Those who don't play simply for the story will be pleased to find that there's more that's new than just the setting and plot. The sometimes limiting nature of the magic system in the first game has been replaced

by something akin to the *Final Fantasy X* sphere grid. Skills are set on a virtual honeycomb, and learning one skill opens up the two that lie to its adjacent left and right. This actually works quite well, as you can choose either to take a character along its obviously intended path, or to branch off into entirely unexplored regions. Since the move to Nirvana stripped the characters of the skills that they gained from the Junkyard (a game device that the plot actually manages to describe convincingly), you'll find that everyone is a clean slate just waiting to be tampered with. Control freaks will be in heaven.

Parents of young RPG enthusiasts, however, may not be so pleased. The game definitely explores mature themes, and not in an "I just swore for no good reason" sort of way. Though there is some profanity (spoken with conviction by the talented voice actors), this is more about betrayal and love and the meaning of life and God. Violence isn't over-the-top, but it's definitely present in full force. If this were a movie at the local cinema, the kids would stay at home.

Of course, the point may be moot. A steep difficulty level is sure to keep most younger gamers away, and some of the philosophizing can even tire adults. Massive and sometimes redundant dungeons will keep away all but the most intrepid of adventurers. If that describes you, though, get ready for a devilishly good time. If only every sequel could be this good!

**Rating :** 4.5 of 5

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

With *Final Fantasy* getting staler by the game, *SMT* comes along to become our brand new RPG core series. Tougher then tough, *SMT:DDS2* plays outside the box.

**FINAL SCORE :**
# 4.5 of 5
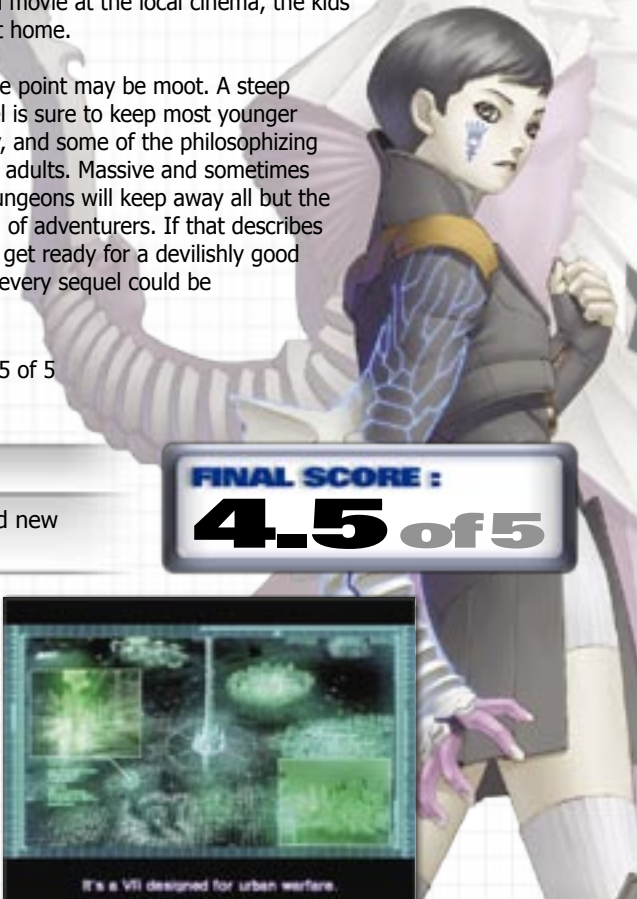
# Dance Dance Revolution EXTREME2

*Review by* **Sardius**

**Publisher :** Konami
**Developer :** KCET
**Release Date :** 9/27/2005
**Rating :** E10+; Mild Lyrics, Suggestive Themes

**Genre(s) :** Rhythm
**Category :** Dancing
**# of players :** 1-2
**Notes :** Supports EyeToy, Online



PERFECT!!

**Dance Dance Revolution** has changed little since its debut on the PSOne in 2001. There have been graphical upgrades and new music tracks with each release, sure, but Konami could otherwise be accused of repackaging and selling the exact same game every year. With *Dance Dance Revolution Extreme 2*, Konami is at last attempting to try something new with the series, which is an exciting prospect for longtime fans. The end result, however, is of questionable merit.

*DDR*'s core gameplay remains completely unchanged for *Extreme 2*. As always, play involves stepping on a special mat controller along to on-screen cues that follow a musical beat. *Extreme 2* contains many familiar gameplay modes and options found in previous *DDR* releases, as well as the new online play—a first for PS2 dancing games—which features player-versus-player matches and internet ranking.

In a radical departure for the series, *DDR Extreme 2* contains no Arcade mode, which was the main focus of all other *DDR* games for the PS2. Replacing Arcade is something called Dance Master mode, a mission-based quest to become the most bootylicious damn dancer one can be. In this mode, players are faced with a series of dance challenges that become progressively more difficult, with completion of these tasks being rewarded with the unlocking of new features and songs.

A *DDR* game is only as good as its songlist, and *Extreme 2*'s soundtrack is the best the series has seen since 2002's *DDRMAX*. The crossovers from Konami's other rhythm games are impeccably chosen, with songs like "Love is Orange" and "Injection of Love" being particularly brilliant. Heck, even the newly-licensed American pop tracks from the likes of the Chemical Brothers and Fatboy Slim are surprisingly listenable, for the most part.

The problem is that one might never get to hear most of *Extreme 2*'s soundtrack. Of the game's 74 total songs, only 23 are initially available, and those wear thin fast. Worse, the only way to unlock hidden tracks is to play through Dance Master mode: an excruciating task for players of any skill level. *DDR* veterans will be bored stupid by the first hour of Dance Master, which consists of dead-simple "don't dance badly"-type challenges on Light and Beginner difficulties. After that point, the difficulty ramps up considerably, leaving novices stuck with no hope of further progress. Either way, players are unlikely to see the new quest mode through completion and unlock all that the game has to offer.

Fully unlocked, *Dance Dance Revolution Extreme 2* is the best *DDR* release to date thanks to its incredible selection of songs and an interface that has been refined to perfection. Don't expect to buy the game and enjoy it for all its worth right away, though; it's only after hours of slogging through a terrible unlock system that *Extreme 2* starts to shine. If you're a hardcore *DDR* fan and think you're up to the task, you'll have to dance like you've never danced before to uncover all the fun to be had here. Good luck.

**Rating :** 3 of 5

**FINAL SCORE :**
# 3.25 of 5

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

I'm not sure it's the *best* DDR mix to date, but it's definitely the best American mix. Mission Mode's nice and all, but why no Arcade Mode, Konami? There's more to gameplay than unlockables.
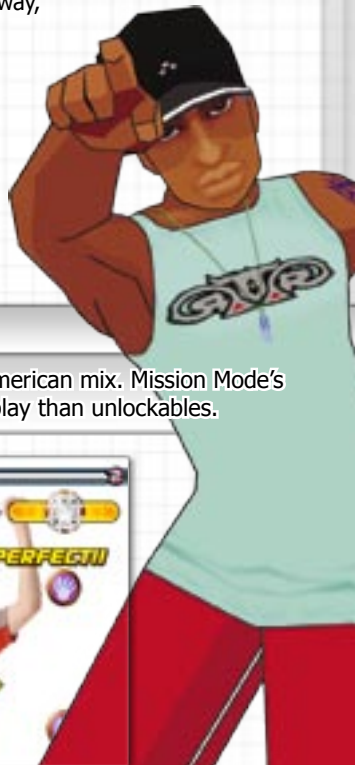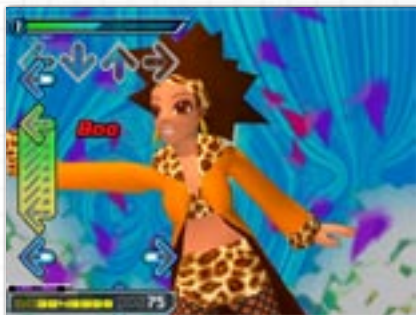
# RATCHET DEADLOCKED

## DREADZONE STATION

Here's where the magic happens. If you can survive the brutal qualification exercises, you too could enter the running to be the next champion on DreadZone! That is, however, a very, very large "if."

### The Training Level

Perform as directed to calibrate your battlesuit. You're equipped with your Dual Vipers (equipped with an Aiming Alpha Mod) and a Magma Cannon (customized with a handy Ammo Alpha Mod). While you're hunting the wild and dangerous hologram opponents, get a feel for both weapons and how they operate.

When you have the hang of the controls, use the teleporter to reach your next objective: the qualification training.

> **TIP:** As in past *Ratchet* adventures, bolts are hidden in virtually every light, panel, and random bit of technology. Get into the habit of wrecking everything you can with your weapons to pick up the pocket change that's hiding inside. Remember, gratuitous vandalism equals a fat stack of bolts.

## THE QUALIFICATION COURSE

**DEADZONE STATION**

- Big AI
- Bot Upgrades
- Clank
- Holovendor
- Node Crank
- Rank-o-Meter
- Stalker Turret
- Teleporter
- Transport

START

BATTLEDOME

QUALIFICATION COURSE AREA 2

QUALIFICATION COURSE AREA 1

START

CANTAINMENT AREA
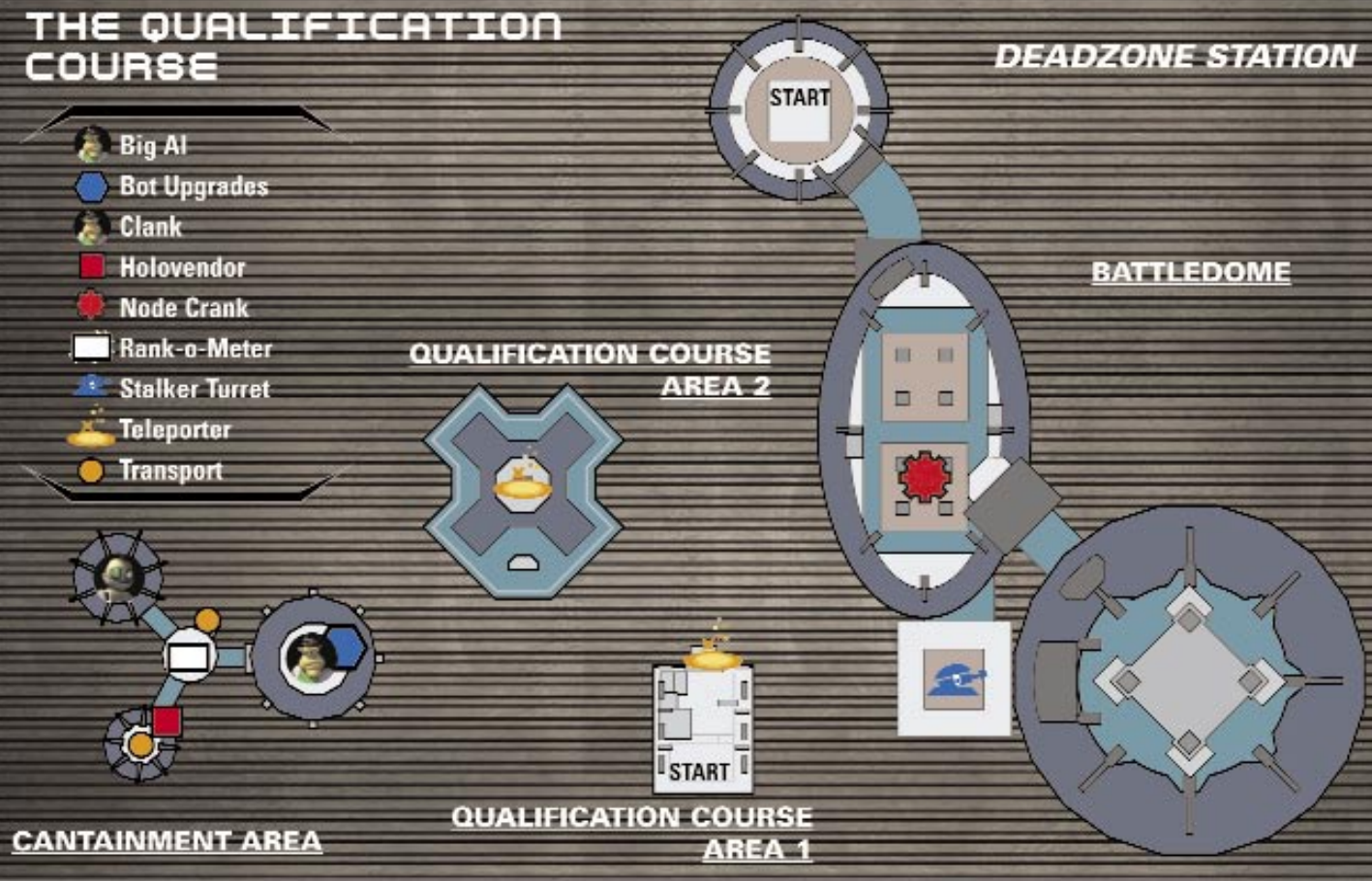
### The Qualification Course

To enter the Dread-Zone competition, you need to demonstrate your skills against a mixed force of Blade Balls, DZ Strikers, Tremors, and Tri-Spike Swarmers. Stay on your toes here—it may be the first real fight in the game, but it's no cakewalk. Ratchet's low on Nanotech and packing some weak weapons, so the Strikers pose a genuine threat.

Keep a fair distance away from the enemies' spawn point and use your Dual Vipers to blast them as they appear. If one closes the gap between you and it, switch to the Magma Cannon and take it out.

### The Containment Area

Talk with Clank and AI to learn a few things and, in Single-Player mode, get your combat bots: Murph and Green.
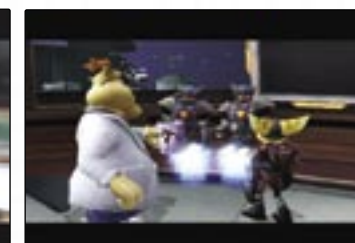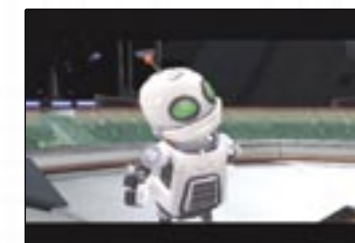
At this point, you probably won't have much money, but check out what's for sale anyway. You can get an Acid Omega Mod from the vendor, and AI's selling upgrades for your bots. Right now, all he's got is the Royale paint job; pick it up if you like it. You probably can't afford the Shield Link yet, but get it as soon as you can.

After you've spoken with Clank and received your bots from Al, use the newly arrived shuttle near the vendor to reach the Battledome.

**TIP:** The DreadZone Arena has one real rule: never stand still. Enemies have a habit of teleporting, respawning, or being dropped off right behind you, and it's not unusual for an otherwise-unremarkable opponent to suddenly whip out a plasma blaster. Even if you think the area's clear, keep moving.

### The Battledome

You begin in a pitched gunfight with a passel of Rhyno Swarmers and DZ Strikers. Don't stand still, but more importantly, don't waste any ammunition on the Dropship that brings in enemy reinforcements. It's not shielded, but you would need a lot more firepower than you have to destroy a Dropship.

You lose one of your bots after this fight. Revive it, as instructed, and hop across the new platforms to reach the next battle. Before you drop down, use your Dual Vipers to pick off a couple of the Strikers who are patrolling below you.

Once the hallway is clear, it's time for another all-out brawl against alternating waves of Strikers, Tremors, and Blade Balls. After they've been dealt with, you can move on to the next challenge.

Cross the next lava field to find a node crank. You can turn it yourself or send a bot to do it, but either way, you need to deal with a bunch of Blade Balls.

Turning the crank raises the platforms you need to reach the final challenge of this round: a 70 millimeter Stalker turret. You can use the blast shields for cover, but due to the turret's shielding, nothing you've got makes a dent in it. Drop an EMP on it to take down its force field, then unload on the turret with whatever weapons you have left.

### The Containment Area

Now that you've survived your first battle, you can make a few choices about what to do next. A large shuttle is waiting for you in the Containment Area, ready to take you to Catacrom Four.

You can also opt to return to the DreadZone Stadium, using the smaller shuttle near the vendor, to participate in a couple of optional challenges. It's a good idea to use these challenges to build up your score, increase your

Nanotech, and upgrade your weapons. You can use the extra firepower in the battles you will face on Catacrom Four.

### Optional Challenge: Grist for the Mill

There's not much to "Grist for the Mill." It's all-out combat in a small, constantly-changing arena. To win, you need to take out ten waves of DZ Strikers and Rhyno Swarmers. Between you and your bots, you shouldn't have any trouble surviving this.

Don't rely on hard cover, as it's prone to vanishing right when you need it. Instead, circle the room and rain firepower upon enemies as they arrive. If you need some breathing room, use the Magma Cannon to knock a few opponents into the lava.

If you pick your shots carefully, you can pick up the Skillful and Fiver Skill Points without really trying. As you and your weapons become more powerful, this is also a good place to try for the Can't Touch This Skill Point.

### Optional Challenge: The Big Sleep

"The Big Sleep" is the same kind of challenge as "Grist for the Mill," but this time, you're slowly losing life as you battle. Fortunately, each new wave of opponents brings a few Nanotech medical crates with them, so you can heal with relative ease.

That doesn't mean you should sleepwalk through this, of course. Your gradual loss of life makes it very easy to suddenly kick over dead if you're not careful. Let your bots do most of the work, and use the Magma Cannon to thin out the crowd. It also helps to jump around a lot, and to use the flaming platform traps to your advantage. Moving around prevents an errant Swarmer or Blade Ball from getting the drop on you, while you can knock DZ Strikers into the flaming traps with your Cannon.

## CUSTOMIZING YOUR RIDE

Vehicle customization is a big factor in *Jak X: Combat Racing*. The better your vehicle is functioning, the better you'll perform in the thick of things. Here we cover everything you need to know about customizing your ride.

You must access the Garage in order to select and customize vehicles. You can enter the Garage by highlighting the Customize option at the Main menu and pressing ✕, or by pressing ● at the Choose Event menu in Adventure mode. Doing either brings you to the Garage menu, where you have access to the following options:

- Select Vehicle: Choose a vehicle to customize and/or race.
- Tune Performance: Spend your hard-earned Precursor Orbs to purchase Upgrade Units for each of your vehicle's four statistical categories—engine, gearbox, armor, and turbo.
- Modify Body Parts: Customize your vehicle with the assortment of body parts you've unlocked.
- Re-spray Paint Job: Alter the color of your vehicle to make it stand out in the crowd.
- Accessorize: Further personalize your vehicle with accessories you've unlocked.

Press ⇧ and ⇩ to move between the Garage menu's option fields. Select the option you desire, then press ✕ to proceed.

### Selecting a Vehicle

Highlight "Select Vehicle" at the Garage menu and press ✕ to visit the Select Vehicle menu. Here you may view each of the vehicles you've unlocked, and pick one to customize or race.

Press ⇦ and ⇨ to cycle through the vehicles in your Garage. A 3D model of each vehicle appears onscreen as you cycle through them. Use the right analog stick to rotate the model.

Highlight the vehicle you want to race or customize, then press ✕ to select it. You are then returned to the Garage menu.

You're ready to race a vehicle once you've selected it. However, if you'd like to customize the selected vehicle before you hop into the driver's seat, be sure to check out the other Garage menu options first.

### Performance Tuning

Tuning your vehicles' performance is the most important thing you can do at the Garage. It's the only way to upgrade your vehicles' stats, which makes you a far more challenging competitor. Highlight "Tune Performance" at the Garage menu and press ✕ to visit the Tune Performance menu.

You must spend Precursor Orbs in order to purchase Upgrade Units for your vehicle's statistics. Your total number of available Precursor Orbs is displayed in the "Your Orbs" field at the top of the Tune Performance menu. Your selected vehicle's current stats are shown in the four fields below, along with the amount of Precursor Orbs required to purchase the next Upgrade Unit in each statistical category. (The word "Maxed" appears if the stat cannot accept additional upgrades.) The 3D model of your selected vehicle remains onscreen.

Here's what each vehicle statistic means:

- Engine: Upgrading this statistic improves your vehicle's top speed. This is perhaps the most important statistical category—if you can't seem to get ahead of the pack, you need to upgrade this stat.
- Gearbox: Upgrading this statistic improves your vehicle's acceleration and adds a tiny bit to its top speed. Veteran racers tend to upgrade this stat only after all others have been maxed-out.
- Armor: Upgrading this statistic increases your vehicle's total hit points, which allows it to sustain more damage from attacks and collisions before it becomes destroyed. This is a very important category—upgrade this statistic as soon as your vehicle's engine stat is high enough and you're able to get ahead of the pack.
- Turbo: Upgrading this statistic improves your vehicle's turboing efficiency, allowing it to boost for longer periods of time on each Blue Eco pick-up. This is quite useful—veteran racers tend to upgrade this after their vehicle's engine and armor stats have been maxed-out.

Use ⇧ and ⇩ to cycle through the different fields. Press ✕ to select a stat to upgrade. You're then asked to confirm the upgrade purchase—press ✕ to accept or ▲ to cancel.

> **TIP:** If you're having trouble clearing an event in Adventure mode, just keep trying—you'll build up Precursor Orbs in the process. Use them to upgrade your vehicle's performance stats and increase your odds of beating the event on future attempts.

### Modifying Body Parts

You periodically unlock vehicle body parts as you earn gold medals from certain Adventure mode events. Once you've unlocked a body part, you may then install it onto your vehicles to customize their appearance, free of charge.

Highlight "Modify Body Parts" at the Garage menu, then press ✕ to visit the Modify Body Parts menu. Each available body part category is listed along the left side of the menu, and the 3D model of your selected vehicle remains onscreen.

- The digit next to each body part category represents the total number of body parts that are available.
- The word "NEW!" appears next to categories that feature newly-unlocked body parts.

Use ⇧ and ⇩ to scroll through the available body part categories. Highlight the category of body parts you want to view, then press ✕ to proceed.

After selecting a category, a list of every available body part style in that category appears along the left side of the screen. Use ⇧ and ⇩ to cycle through each body part style.

The body parts appear on your vehicle's 3D model as you cycle through them, showing you what they will look like if you choose to install them. Highlight the body part style you want to install, then press ✕ or ▲ to accept your choice and return to the previous list of body part categories.

> **TIP:** Adding wide Front and Rear Fenders to your vehicle increases its width, which can help you smash drones in Rush Hour events.

> **TIP:** Once you've unlocked it, installing the Hybrid Array Trunk can help you line up enemies for destruction. This is especially useful in Death Races.

# HARDWARE

Nintendo's Game Boy micro hit the hardware house this month, and it's a mighty fine piece of kit. Once you've held it, you won't want to let it out of your hands. We also play with the bloody *Resident Evil 4* Chainsaw Controller and two wireless offerings, including a PS2 controller that promises 300 hours of battery life!

## Logitech
# Cordless Precision
Wireless Controller
Systems: PlayStation 2
Price: **$29.99**

**Features**
2.4 GHz Wireless, 30 ft range, 300 hours of battery life, Automatic on/off, No vibration motors

Yes, you read that right. The Logitech Cordless Precision controller sports 300 hours of game time on a single set of AA batteries. This wondrous feature comes at the expense of the vibration function, but if you can live without the rumble it's well worth it. You can pretty much put a pair of batteries in this bad boy and then forget about them for months.

The lack of motors also results in a lighter controller, which is a plus during extended gaming sessions. The circular d-pad is golden if you happen to have a hankering for retro games and the analog sticks snap into place without feeling stiff. The four action buttons, as well as the four triggers, are well placed and comfortable for hands of all sizes. PStwo owners will appreciate the redeisgned receiver--prior versions sat too low to use on the slim system.

If you absolutely, positively *MUST* have a vibrating controller, then the Cordless Precision isn't for you, but if you can do without pick one of these up immediately.

## Intec
# Rechargeable Unlimited Wireless
Wireless Controller
System: Xbox
Price: **$24.99**

Review by **Syriel**

**Features**
2.4 Ghz Wireless, 30 foot range, 60 hours of battery life, Rechargeable battery, Auto shut-off, Turbo function, Switchable vibration motors, Power cable

Intec's latest entry into the wireless market solves one problem by bundling a rechargeable battery pack with the unit, but introduces another--how to charge it! Instead of coming with a charger, the controller ships with a wire to connect the controller with the receiver. Whenever the Xbox is on, the controller charges. Of course, if your Xbox is on you're probably playing it, so the only real option is leaving the system turned on all night. Ugh. Thankfully you can forgo the battery pack and just use standard AA's.

Slightly smaller than the Controller S, the RUW suffers from surprisingly stiff buttons. It is difficult to roll smoothly from one button to another, uneven placement means you'll likely hit the edge of the B button more often than not and it is near impossible to register a diagonal on the angular d-pad. The black and white buttons are also higher than normal, making them easy to hit accidentally.

## Nubytech
# RE4 Chainsaw
Super Deluxe Game Controller
System: PS2
Price: **$59.99**

Review by **Syriel**

**Features**
Custom chainsaw design, Detachable cord, Display Case, Motion sensor, Unique paint splatter, Individual serial number

Designed for the ultimate *Resident Evil 4* fan, the Chainsaw Controller is just as much a collectible as it is a controller. Arriving in a custom display case, this is one unit that's not meant to be stored in a drawer. One nice touch is the working pull cord--give it a yank to start the game.

Actually playing with the Chainsaw Controller is somewhat awkward due to the button placement. Reaching the two analog sticks is no problem, but the four action buttons are a bit out of reach. If you can get used to the button layout, a built-in motion sensor helps out in tight situations. Instead of pressing a button to raise and lower your gun, just lift the controller. It's actually rather intuitive.

This isn't going to replace your Dual Shock, but it does make an excellent conversation piece. Don't buy it thinking it's going to enhance your game. Buy it because it looks effin' cool.

## Nintendo
# GameBoy.micro
Portable Game System
Price: **$99.99**

Review by **Syriel**

**Features**
Compatible with all GBA games, Super bright, backlit, 2" TFT screen, Headphone jack, Less than 3 ounces, Removable faceplate

With the Game Boy micro, Nintendo has managed to pull an Apple--it has taken a piece of technology that started life as a geek toy and turned it into a fashion accessory. One look at the micro and even the most ardent non-gamer out there is going to be smitten by its sleek looks and clean lines, not to mention diminutive size. Smaller than most cell phones, this is one gaming system that truly can fit in your pocket. Compared to this, the PSP is positively gargantuan.

Though the screen is noticeably smaller than the screen on the Game Boy Advance SP, it keeps the same resolution. As a result, images actually look sharper when played on the micro. Text is still easy to read, even in text-heavy games such as RPGs, and movement is crystal clear. Because the screen is backlit, images are incredibly bright, even in notoriously dark games such as *Castlevania: Circle of the Moo*n.

A removable faceplate allows you to customize your micro, but also serves as a nifty screen protector. On the off chance that a faceplate becomes scratched up, simply remove it and snap on another. It's a no muss, no fuss way of ensuring that the image is always crystal clear, even when the micro spends half the day in your pocket, bouncing around next to a set of keys.

To compensate for the smaller size, both the d-pad and the action buttons have shrunk in size slightly, but not so much as to be uncomfortable. It is the new L and R buttons that take a bit of getting used to as you can't just tap the edge of the button. You need to press the center of it in order to make a hit register.

Fixing one of the SP's most nagging problems, the micro adds a standard headphone jack so that you can listen on the go without needing to purchase a bulky adapter cable.

Where the micro makes concessions is in the hardware compatibility arena. Due to its small size, none of the existing Game Boy Advance peripherals will work with it. This means no e-Reader and no using the micro as a controller for your GameCube. The wireless adapter is also right out. Additionally, the micro is limited to playing Game Boy Advance Games, just like the DS, so don't even think about popping in a Game Boy Color or classic Game Boy cart.

The Game Boy micro is one gadget that's worth picking up. It may not be the next generation of portable gaming, but seeing it in action is enough to make anyone hanker for a little gaming-on-the-go.

Sleek, svelte and sexy, the Game Boy micro is one gadget that's worth picking up.

## Ultimarc.com
# Mini-PAC and Arcade VGA
PC to Arcade Interfaces
System: PC
Price: **$29.99 and $89.99**

Review by **DJPubba**

**Features**
True plug-and-play
Trackball and spinner support
Programmable
Works in DOS, Windows and Mini-Pac works on Macs

If you want to put a PC into an arcade cabinet to get that authentic arcade experience in your own home, these guys are going to make your life a whole lot easier. Ultimarc has taken the pain out of two of the most hurtful things about the achieving retro nirvana — getting the video to display properly and getting the controls to work.

When I say there is no pain, I'm talking about true plug and play simplicity. No soldering, no crazy drivers, no hacking keyboards, no fuss. You plug them in and they work.

The Mini-Pac is a small USB device that connects between your arcade joysticks, buttons, trackballs, spinners — and your computer. You can buy it without a harness for $29 or $69 with. Your computer sees the Mini-PAC as a joystick and mouse. To connect it, you plug each wire of the harness into each button and joystick direction, the connectors into your trackball and spinner and the USB cable into your computer. Done.

Arcade VGA is a NVidia R9200 with a custom BIOS written to display correctly on arcade monitors. You plug it in, turn it on and your computer is instantly displaying perfect video on your arcade game's monitor. Emulated classics go from looking like blocky pixel piles to crisp raster-lined bliss.

If you've scored an arcade cabinet and have a PC — with these — you're mere minutes away from playing the classics the way they were meant. Perfect for GameTap.

# FANART

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

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

HGM PICK!
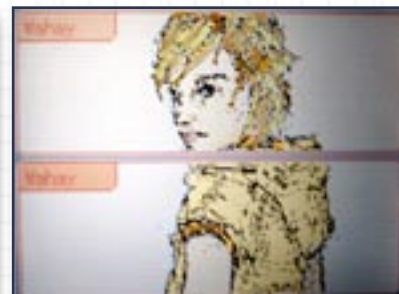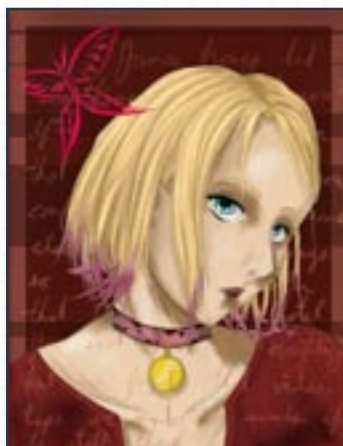
**Title : Heather from SH3**
**Artist : Jonathan Duncan**
**Age : Undisclosed**
**Location : Undisclosed**

**Title : Maria from SH2**
**Artist : Andrew Brennan**
**Age : Undisclosed**
**Location : Undisclosed**

**Title : Luigi the Haunted**
**Artist : Andrew Dickman**
**Age : 23**
**Location : California**

**Title : The Minish Cap**
**Artist : Jenny Cheng**
**Age : 16**
**Location : Columbus, OH**

**Title : Great Ninja Yuffie**
**Artist : Chevi**
**Age : 21**
**Location : Seattle**

**Title : Mischief Makers**
**Artist : Andrew Dickman**
**Age : 23**
**Location : California**

GAMER / THQ

Here at HGM we love fan art, and so do our friends at THQ. So we're giving away a THQ Game Pack featuring Evil Dead along with Destroy All Humans, Day of Reckoning 2 and Dawn of War: Winter Assault. All you have to do to get this multi-platform bundle of joy is send in your most awesomest piece of fan art. If it's chosen as the pick of the month, you get free games! How cool is that? Make sure you include your name, age, mailing address and email address with your submission so we can contact you if you're picked. This is not a contest or sweepstakes. It is a promotion from HGM and THQ.

**Import Review by: Lynxara**

From **Super Robot Wars** to **Sunrise Eiyuutan** to those games with SD Devilman playing volleyball, Japan has raised the nonsensical crossover into a video game artform. Sometimes these games are dreadful schlock, but sometimes they're shockingly good. *Jump Superstars* definitely falls into the latter category.

*Jump Superstars* takes as its basis various manga that have run in the pages of *Weekly Shonen Jump*, one of Japan's most popular phone book-sized manga compilations. It has a monthly American counterpart published by Viz, featuring many of the same series that ran in the Japanese version. The US version of *Shonen Jump* is wildly popular, which makes *Jump Superstars* a uniquely accessible crossover game. While English-speaking fans will probably scratch their heads at titles like *Busou Renkin* and *Gintama*, a glance at the series roster for the game will reveal a lot of familiar properties with English versions available at your local bookstore.

*Jump Superstars* is a 2D fighting game that operates in the *Super Smash Brothers* tradition. It emphasizes short, chaotic battles where items play a major role in the outcome of a fight. The battle items are the usual sorts of things you see in a *Power Stone* clone: speed-ups, bombs, super meter boosters, etc. It has a simple control system, using the A button to jump and the other three buttons for attacks of varying strengths. Really powerful attacks done with the X button consume super meter, which you get a ridiculously huge amount of. Fights proceed for a full sixty seconds, with KOing your rival or being KOed only resulting in points being awarded or taken away from your fight score (as necessary). The winner of a match is whoever ends the bout with the highest score.

What's interesting about playing *Jump Superstars* is seeing a traditionally-3D gameplay style flawlessly implemented in 2D. Each fighting arena is set up as if it was a comic book page, with action progressing on a number of different elevated platforms. Your characters have a very springy jump and can move around the giant battle stages easily. If you feel like fighting dirty, you can use attacks to break holes in the edges of the comic page you're fighting in. Then you can fling rival characters out of the gaps to score ring out victories, letting you fulfill wild fantasies of personally ejecting your least-favorite series from the pages of *Shonen Jump*.

Complicating battle is an elemental damage system which assigns each character in the game, and some attacks, a particular attribute. Literally translated, each character represents Laughter, Power, or Knowledge. But you can also interpret these elements as Comedy, Action, and Plot: the three essential parts of a great *Shonen Jump* manga. Comedy trumps Action, Action trumps Plot, and Plot trumps Comedy. This system means that you can't simply pick an action series like *Naruto* and proceed to kick the crap out of the amusing weirdos from *BoBoBo-Bo Bo-BoBo*. They're *too funny* for you.

Instead, you need to construct a Battle Deck that lets you create a balanced offense. Your battle deck is represented visually as a 4 x 5 grid that occupies the touch screen of the DS while battles occupy the touch screen. You fill your Battle Deck by going into a submenu and dropping comic book panels that represent characters into your deck. The bigger the panel, the more powerful that character is. Characters can be Battle characters you control in a fight, Support Characters who'll leap in to attack the enemy for you, and Help characters who confer minor stat boosts. You summon a character's effect from your Battle Deck by touching their icon on the touch screen during a fight. Strong decks are built around a careful selection of Battle and Support characters that can handle any situation.

To get a wide range of characters for your Battle Deck, you begin by playing the game's one-player mode. By satisfying challenges set for you in each level, things like winning without even being KOed or using a Support Character 5 times, you earn more characters and comic book panels. This gets excessively repetitive after awhile, as each challenge only grants one unlockable, and there's hundreds of unlockables you need to get if you want to make Battle Decks that draw on all of the characters the game has to offer. Still, it also means that a fan that pays for the import is definitely going to get a lot of playtime out of their copy even if they can't take advantage of *Jump Superstars*'s great multiplayer mode. Up to four players can engage in head-to-battles, and only one of those players has to have a copy of the game.

Fans showing up to play a game that focuses on characters from plot-heavy series like *Hikaru no Go*, *Ichigo 100%*, or *Death Note* should also be warned that this game fundamentally belongs to the teen fighting manga. You'll wade through countless levels full of *One Piece*, *Naruto*, *Dragonball Z*, and the like before you see anything you're interested in. When you get there, you'll find your shows contributed only a few cast members as Support Characters. Fans of action franchises that cater to an older audience, like *JoJo's Bizarre Adventure* and *Yu Yu Hakusho*, may also leave feeling jilted. You'll find your shows are represented by only one or two fighters, while the more marketable action series get virtually their entire main cast featured as Battle Characters.

It's the multiplayer mode that really makes this game worth getting. The main game is fun, but dream matches that let you beat up your friends' favorite manga characters with your own team is *really* fun. If you don't plan on using the game for multiplayer fights, then the repetitive single player mode, somewhat simplistic graphics, and forgettable music will be more of a turnoff.

**FINAL SCORE:**
# 4 of 5



## SERIES ROSTER

### WORTH IMPORTING?

Just about anybody with a DS and affection for Shonen manga can enjoy this game. DS games are region-free, so you'll be able to easily play it in an American system. Some parts of *Jump Superstars* are text-intensive, but this title has received extensive translation support both from the online fan community and even sites like IGN. Anything you could possibly want to know about navigating the menus, making a strong Battle Deck, or how to unlock your favorite character is out there in English somewhere.

* indicates this title is domestically available now or has been licensed for upcoming US release.

BLACK CAT*
BLEACH*
BOBOBO-BO BO-BOBO*
BUSOU RENKIN
D.GRAY-MAN*
DEATH NOTE*
DR. SLUMP*
DRAGON BALL Z*
EYESHIELD 21*
GINTAMA
HIKARU NO GO*
HUNTER X HUNTER*
ICHIGO 100%
JOJO'S BIZARRE ADVENTURE*
KATEKYO HITMAN REBORN!
KOCHI KAME
MR. FULLSWING
NARUTO*
ONE PIECE*
THE PRINCE OF TENNIS*
PYUU TO FUKU! JAGUAR
RUROUNI KENSHIN*
SHAMAN KING*
SLAM DUNK!
STEEL BALL RUN
YU-GI-OH!*
YU YU HAKUSHO*

## YOSHINOYA

Import Review by : **Kou Aidou**

You'll see their friendly orange signs on every corner of Tokyo. The Yoshinoya, one of Japan's largest and oldest native restaurant chains, offers a tasty bowl of beef on rice for just about $5 US. This entry in the Superlite 2000 series from Japanese developer Success, appropriately titled *Yoshinoya*, takes you inside the exciting world of the Yoshinoya service industry. The result is an odd little puzzle game that's a lot more fun than it sounds.

When you begin, you're assigned to a store, and you get to pick your character and your shift. The gameplay in the levels is simple: all you have to do is walk up to customers as they take their seats, and give them their order. There are four possible dishes you can serve them, each represented by one of the four buttons on the PS2 controller. In order to complete a shift, you have to successfully serve a certain number of customers in the time you're given.

There's a catch, of course. If you wait too long to serve a customer, or you give them the wrong order, they'll get angry and storm out. An angry customer will break your perfect chain of service and lower your store's satisfaction rating. If your satisfaction rating hits 0, or you run out of time without reaching the level requirements, your manager will be very disappointed in you... in other words, you lose.

If you successfully work all three shifts and please your customer, your manager will transfer you to a more demanding location. You'll be given more seats, more demanding customers, and less time to serve them in. While you can put more time on your clock by executing combos (get two or more customers who want the same dish in adjacent seats, and serve them all at once), managing these careful seating arrangements while still keeping *all* the customers satisfied requires a real talent for multitasking.

After you prove yourself as a server, you have to prove yourself as a chef. This takes the form of a showdown with a single customer at each location. In order to serve this customer their *perfect beef bowl*, you must execute a complicated timing game. These customers get progressively more exacting and

bizarre, including a showdown with a literal *eating machine*.

Gameplay aside, the joy of *Yoshinoya* is the way it employs that uniquely Japanese ability to make mundane activities seem like epic tasks. Unsatisfied customers literally smoke with anger, while a carefully executed combo will get your customers dancing on their stools. Creating the perfect beef bowl is represented as an achievement of galactic proportions. When your protagonist leaps into the air at the end of a successful day, it's hard not to share his elation.

### WORTH IMPORTING?

*Yoshinoya* is pure, simple fun, and its visual sense of humor doesn't require a lot of knowledge of Japanese to enjoy. If you've got a craving for quirky puzzle games that *Katamari* just can't satisfy, *Yoshinoya* might be worth a look.

**FINAL SCORE :**
# 3.5 of 5

---

# Twelve
## 戦国封神伝

Import Review by : **Lynxara**

Guess what! In Japan, they release *games* for the PSP! I know, the concept is just *mindblowing*.

Even when you can find something to play on your PSP that's not a decrepit PlayStation port or Mahjongg, the hardware's limitations can still hold that game back. *Twelve: Sengoku Fuushinden* is a classic example of a game that could've been really good on different hardware. As it stands it's interesting, but its playability is severely limited.

*Twelve* is your classic anime-style RPG, featuring a cast of marketable archetypes and an impressively epic, sweeping plot inspired by Chinese mythology. The setting blends aspects of feudal Japanese and Chinese history with some gigantic battle sequences involving airships and high-tech carriers. The story sequences are told with attractive still art and static backgrounds, but every single line of dialogue has full voice acting.

When you go into the battle scenes the game's graphics go from simple to eye-popping. The battles are unusually small, allowing a maximum of sixteen allied units and a roughly similar number of enemies on the screen at once, but the SD battle sprites are sharp, high-resolution, and fantastically animated.

Aside from the harsh limits for onscreen characters, battles proceed in the most old-school traditions of strategy RPGs. Character movement is determined by a grid, and there are separate enemy and player turns. You can opt to have characters attack, cast spells, or use special abilities both before and after movement. Unfortunately, old-school difficulty is not in the gameplay. If anything, combat is a bit mindless. Your characters tend to be overpowered and you rarely need to use the advanced combat options at all. There's also very little in the way of character customization options.

On top of that, the battle graphics are apparently so good that they make your PSP want to die. Every single onscreen character movement in battle is plagued by lag, slowdown, or intolerable loading times. Since there's not much to the game but dialogue sequences and battles, it makes *Twelve* really hard to enjoy.

If *Twelve* had presented the same graphic quality and battle engine on any console hardware, or even without the full voice-acting on the DS, it would've been a light but potentially satisfying strategy RPG experience. The intriguing storyline and incredible 2D graphics could've made up for the simplistic battles. Sadly, it's up against the PSP's horrible load time problems, so *Twelve* becomes something mediocre.

### WORTH IMPORTING?

If this sounds like something you'd like, you're probably better off saving your money for *Generations of Chaos*. *Twelve* is a really beautiful game but story and atmosphere are its strong points, not the gameplay. There's also very little translation support for it.

**FINAL SCORE :**
# 3 of 5

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

Here are some of the cooler things we saw at Otakon 2005. If you were there, and you were cooler than this, stop whining and be glad this page isn't filled with crossplay -- we'll do it! We'll fill every page with nothing but big hairy men dressed as schoolgirls.
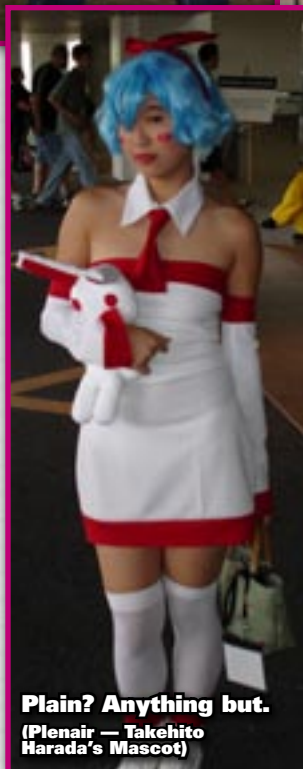
On the other hand, you could just send us pictures of yourself in cosplay. We like this option better. Everyone wins: you, us, our layout guys' sanity. Post the goods on our forum at www.hardcoregamermag.com and maybe we'll print it. Maybe.
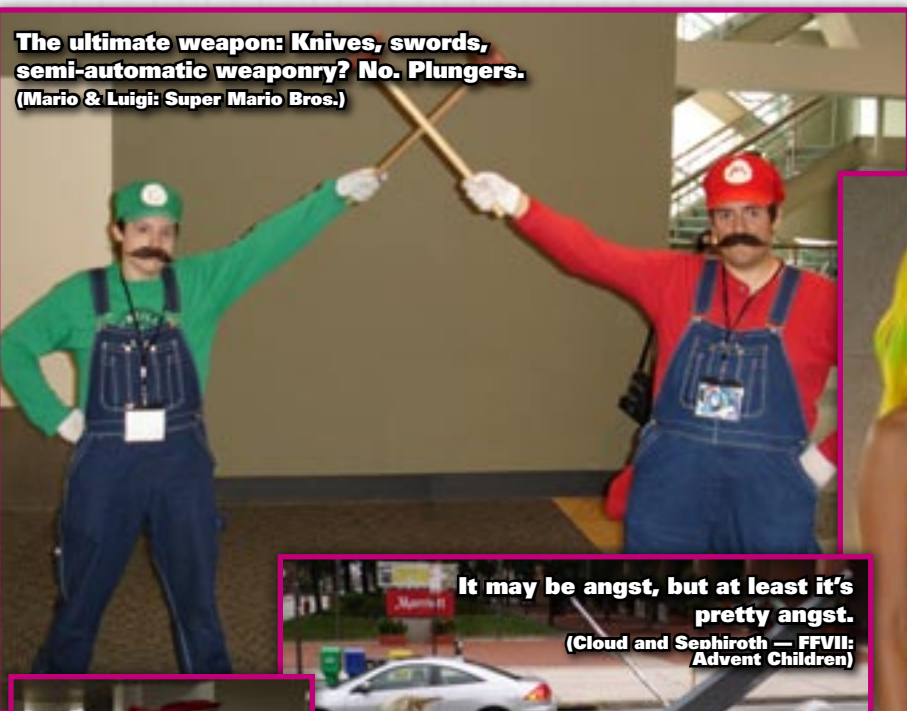

The ultimate weapon: Knives, swords, semi-automatic weaponry? No. Plungers.
(Mario & Luigi: Super Mario Bros.)


In HGM, we pause *you*.
(Captain N — Captain N;The Game Master)


Don't worry, we'll fit you in!!
(L-Shaped Tetris Block — Tetris)


It may be angst, but at least it's pretty angst.
(Cloud and Sephiroth — FFVII: Advent Children)


Final Boss Killer.
(Guardian Force Siren-FFVIII)


Plain? Anything but.
(Plenair — Takehito Harada's Mascot)


Get... over here? What? You knew it was coming.
(Scorpion & Sub-Zero — Mortal Kombat)


They go steady and Zelda's already dressing him.
(Adult Link & Zelda — The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask)

## INTERVIEW WITH THE
## COSPLAYER

**Cosplayer:** Adella
**Location:** Las Vegas, NV
**Website:** http://www.adellacosplay.com

**HGM:** When did you start cosplaying?

**ADELLA:** My first costume was Aeris Gainsborough, worn at Anime Expo 2001 in California.

**HGM:** What are your favorite video games, and have any of them influenced your choices of costumes?

**ADELLA:** Final Fantasy 7 would be my favorite of all. I'm a big RPG player so a lot of my other favorite costumes are from RPGs such as the Zelda series, Castlevania, Star Ocean, and most of the Final Fantasy games.

**HGM:** What is it about cosplay that you find the most rewarding?

**ADELLA:** Definitely showing off the final product of something you've been working on for a very long time.

**HGM:** Do you have any funny stories about cosplaying?

**ADELLA:** At my first convention a boy who was about 8 years old started crying thinking I was really Aeris. It was really cute, and so I played the part for him and gave him a flower.

**HGM:** How much work goes into a typical costume?

**ADELLA:** A lot of work. It really depends on the costume, but for a cosplayer who wishes to go all out and make sure things are 100% perfect, even the small detail work and accessories can make you very frustrated and take up quite a bit of your free time.

**HGM:** Are there any games coming out soon that you think you may cosplay from?

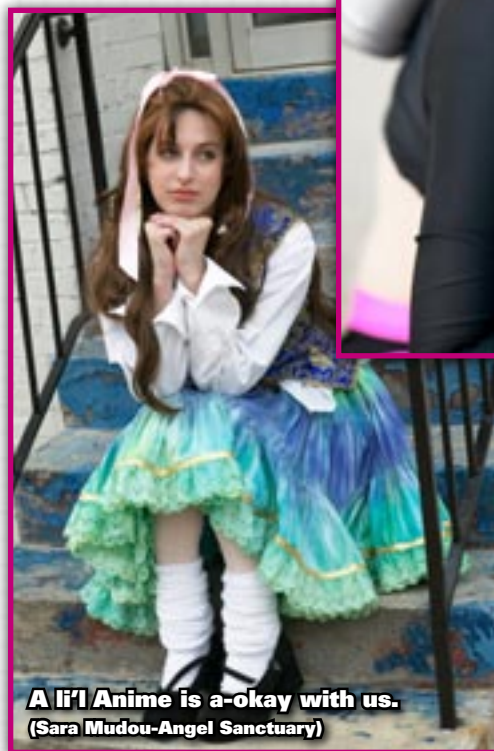**ADELLA:** Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess will definitely be one of them!


Who knew she existed in real life?
(Aeris Gainsburough - FFVII)


Ulala? Ooh-la-lah~
(Ulala-Space Channel 5)


Zelda? Who's Zelda?
(Malon -The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time)


A li'l Anime is a-okay with us.
(Sara Mudou-Angel Sanctuary)


On the prowl, even at the opera.
(Helena Douglas -Dead or Alive 2)

Interview and Photos copyright Kyle Johnsen/Cosplay.com

# FUNNIES



©Wolfie



©Mads

An Epic Tale of War, Romance and Betrayal...

"...an RPG, with the kind of innovative systems and gameplay, story and characters that can incite a movement."
- PLAY Magazine

SPECIAL DELUXE BOX SET INCLUDES:
Full color 100+ page artbook and mini-strategy guide featuring the artwork of renowned Korean Artist, Hyung-Tae Kim!
Full-size Magna Carta poster!
Dual-sided coversheet!

MAGNA CARTA
TEARS OF BLOOD

PlayStation 2

RPG

ATLUS
IMAGINATION REALIZED
WWW.ATLUS.COM