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v118 . sunrise of destiny

ONIMUSHA DAWN OF DREAMS

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the Musha!!**



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SPLINTER CELL DOUBLE AGENT



**Plus we jam packed this
issue full of previews
and reviews like mad.**

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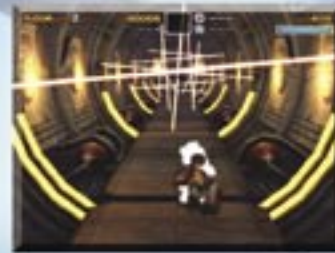
Walker '06

As if that weren't enough...

We also give sum lovin' to sum mobile phone games,
.Roger Danish shows off his weird game systems.
.plus check out the new site [Luv2Game.com!](http://Luv2Game.com)

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PlayStation 2

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Printed in the United States of America



DJPubba Tim Lindquist

Oh, man. I spent waaaay too much time trying to get a Vectrex controller working on a PC without modifying the controller. Unfortunately, I have not yet succeeded and the deadline is rather angry about being stood up. Rather than present a half-baked part 2 of the Vectrex article, I've decided to put it off until next issue to make sure it's done justice.

Now Playing: *Vectrex Controller Interface Toss* (Vectrex/PC), *Castlevania: Aria of Sorrow*.



Wanderer Thomas Wilde

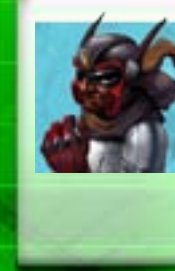
The unofficial theme of this issue is Capcom rereleasing old games with minor add-ons. They managed to do the impossible and make the original *Resident Evil* worth replaying, but *Monster Hunter*? A new version of *Devil May Cry 3*? Capcom, you know I respect you, but how many times are you going to make me buy the same games? I've already got three #\$@!ing copies of RE...

Now Playing: *Castlevania: CoD*, *Haunting Ground*, *Resident Evil: DS*, *Mario and Luigi: Partners in Time*



Syriel Adam Pavlacka

Due to the moon's effect on the tides, the way the wind blows, a feeling in my gut, and the changing of the seasons, I've decided that I will only play and review games with the letters I, M, F and D in them. While this may be considered an odd decision by many of our readers, I think it makes perfect sense. But then again, I also believe that I have a fairy godmother, a "secret" friend named Harvey, and that my toast whispers obscene suggestions every time I bring it to my mouth.



Racewing Geson Hatchett

My God. *Valkyrie Profile: Sylmeria*. *Kingdom Hearts II*. *Xenosaga 3*. *Tales of Legendia*. *Grandia III*. And, if we're lucky, *Final Fantasy XII*. Remember when it was "cool" and "hardcore" to hate on Square and Namco for no good reason? Yeah. I'm scared too. (Of course, if a new *Skies of Arcadia* were announced tomorrow, it'd blow everything I just mentioned off the face of the earth, but that's not the point. Or is it...?)

Now Playing: *Ape Escape 3*, *The Adventures of Blackfire*, *Queen of the Galaxy!* (My Imagination)



Shoegazer Dave Hulegaard

Is it a little sad that 2006 is just underway and I'm already counting down the days 'til E3? I'm as anxious as anyone to see Nintendo and Sony put up or shut up, but there's still some life flowing through the current generation. My predictions for '06? Square Enix will astonish, Sony's PSP will tap out, and innovation is not dead... merely dormant.

Now Playing: *Black*, *Wild Arms 4*, *MVP NCAA Baseball 06*



KouAidou Elizabeth Ellis

I was all set to write the cover feature, then real life went and bobshacked me. Fortunately, David was man enough to step up to the plate and do it for m... err, I mean, um, help me out a little bit. Yeah. Please enjoy this month's *Onimusha* feature, co-written by the two sexiest members of the HGM staff.

Now Playing: *Sid Meier's Pirates!*, *Civilization IV*



Roger Danish Greg Off

A quick trip (and I mean quick) to Japan for an interview with the creators and producers of the *Grandia* series for next issue's cover feature has thrown me for a serious loop (or perhaps it was the Teriyaki McBurger Seto I ate at McDonalds before I got on the plane, I don't know). Unfortunately, a trip to Akihabara was not in the cards, but I did find a used *Bust a Move* for the PSP for the dirt-cheap price of \$10.00 at a nearby electronics shop in Shinjuku. So I got that going for me.



Lynxara Alicia Ashby

I got engaged, and in the same month Bandai releases the first good *Gundam* game ever in the US! And I'm playing *Final Fantasy IV* on my GBA! Folks, this is a great time to be alive. Go find your favorite video game and give it a hug.

Now Playing: *Final Fantasy IV Advance*, *MS Saga: A New Dawn*, *Dance Dance Revolution Ultramix 3*, *Mario Kart DS*, *Legend of Heroes*



4thletter David Brothers

I think if I had to pick my favorite record of 2005, it'd be Royce da 5'9"''s *Independent's Day*. It's midway between *Rock City* and *Death is Certain* in tone, but twice as good as either of them. Every track is bumpable, to be sure, and Royce's rhymes have never been tighter. "Looking At My Dog" is incredible. Runner-up album? *Ghostface* and *Trife's Put It On The Line*.

Now Playing: *Dead or Alive 4*, *Hexic HD*, *Geometry Wars*



James James Cunningham

As I write this it's going on 8AM and I'm just finishing up the *Age of Empires* review. A light snow is falling, my cat is looking at me funny, and I'm fanasizing over what a good night's sleep must be like. Fortunately I don't work until the afternoon, so deadline hell isn't going to completely kill me dead. This time.

Now playing: *Dragon Quest VIII*, *Geometry Wars 2*, *Dead or Alive 4*, *Tokobot*



HonestGamer Jason Venter

It's a good thing I didn't resolve to take better care of myself in 2006. I'm already sitting in front of my computer and eating pudding straight from the kettle. That's not a great start. When it comes to resolutions, I know myself too well. That's why I resolved to keep doing what I'm doing. It seems to be working.

Now Playing: *Mega Man X Collection* (PS2), *Wild Arms 4*



Hitoshura Iaian Ross

I got a PSP over the holidays. Sure, there are hardly any games to choose from, and I couldn't care less about UMD movies. None of that matters, since *Wipeout Pure* is so damn fun. It makes me glad I got the Giga Pack when there's about 60 megs of extra content for the game.

Now Playing: *FFIV:Advance*, *Wipeout Pure*



Wolfie Terry Wolfinger

So after surviving the holidays and being gone for a week, the first thing I wanted to do was play *World of Warcraft*. That game's so addictive... but to my horror, when I returned home, I found my PC wasn't working!! Never mind the work I had to do -- I needed my WoW fix!! So I was three days without the computer, then another couple to fix the bugs, and finally I could install the new patch and level up my Undead Rogue! Lv124 and rising.



Metalbot Anthony Mertz

I hate it when I'm so addicted to two games, that while I'm playing one of them I feel bored because I want to be playing the other! Being stuck between *Battlefield 2* and *Final Fantasy III* is slightly annoying. At least with *Raven Shield*, I could minimize and play *FFIII* between rounds!

Now Playing: *Final Fantasy III* (SNES), *Battlefield 2* (PC), *Rock N' Roll Racing* (SNES), *Super Mario Blue Twilight DX* (PC)



Arfeth Thomas Shin

I've discovered some disturbing, yet interesting things about the nature of *Dead or Alive 4*'s combo system. I have also played *Guitar Hero* for the first time, and beat 20 Expert songs. Then I tried playing *Guitar Freaks* at the arcade and tore it to shreds. Konami, you've just been out-hardcore'd by Americans!

Now Playing: *Guitar Hero* (PS2), *Dead or Alive 4* (Xbox 360), *Guitar Freaks 11th Mix* (Arcade)



Ashura Brady Hartel

Name's Ash, Housewares. Er, layouts. Why does a layout artist have a bio, you ask? Well, I... don't know either! But I do play videogames, uh, hardcore. Just like the magazine's cover says! (See cover for details.) Game wise, *Neo Geo Battle Coliseum* has sucked my brain out. Yes, despite evil load times. Oh, and *Metal Gear Online!* Any game that has people fighting over the possession of a tiny plastic frog has to be rocksome.

Now Playing: *Neo Geo Battle Coliseum*, *Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence*, *Metal Gear Online*



Jeremy Jeremy Peeples

FF IV Advance owned my soul this month, and made me want to get back into some SNES and PSOne classics I hadn't dug out of the archives in many a year. It felt good to acquaint myself with some forgotten classics, while still enjoying my newer, regularly-played games.

Now playing: *Uniracers*, *Ignition Factor*, *Columns*, *Final Fantasy IV Advance*, *Metal Gear Solid*, *Final Fantasy VII*



Sardius Danny Cowan

Important update from last issue: I now own a DS and *Animal Crossing*, and all is well. Unfortunately, I now also own a Philips CD-i, which I got for free in exchange for a plate of cornbread (thanks Prozi!). Next up on my list of games to buy: *Eugene Levy's Wacky World of Miniature Golf*. STROOOOKE LIMIT!

Now Playing: *Link: The Faces of Evil*, *Zelda: The Wand of Gamelon*, *Sandy's Circus Adventure* (CD-i)

Contents

Previews

You want previews? You need previews? You wish you could live tucked neatly away inside a great big preview, sticking your head out every once a week for a breath of fresh air and a ray of sunshine? Well then, welcome home little buddy. Our previews are always clean and odor free. Why not set awhile and see for yourself?



10

- 8 : NEWS
- 10 : PREVIEW: MGS SUBSISTENCE
- 11 : PREVIEW: RESIDENT EVIL DS
- 12 : PREVIEW: STATE OF EMERGENCY 2
- 13 : PREVIEW: ACE COMBAT
- 14 : PREVIEW: CAPCOM CLASSICS
- 15 : PREVIEW: MONSTER HUNTER
- 16 : PREVIEW: JAWS UNLEASHED
- 17 : PREVIEW: FIGHT NIGHT ROUND 3
- 18 : PREVIEW: MLB '06
- 19 : PREVIEW: PURSUIT FORCE
- 20 : PREVIEW: THE OUTFIT
- 21 : PREVIEW: NARUTO
- 22 : PREVIEW: DISGAEA 2
- 23 : PREVIEW: SPLINTER CELL: DOUBLE AGENT
- 24 : PREVIEW: COMMANDOS STRIKE FORCE
- 25 : PREVIEW: FIELD COMMANDER
- 26 : PREVIEW: KING OF FIGHTERS: NEO WAVE
- 27 : PREVIEW: UNTOLD LEGENDS
- 30 : FEATURE: CONSOLE CURIOSITIES
- 34 : FEATURE: MOBILE GAMING
- 38 : GRAVEYARD : BIG FOOT
- 40 : STRATEGY: FF4 ADVANCE
- 44 : COVER FEATURE: ONIMUSHA: DAWN OF DREAMS
- 54 : REVIEW: MSSAGA
- 56 : REVIEW: RUB RABBITS
- 58 : REVIEW: SAMURAI SHODOWN V
- 59 : REVIEW: WINNING ELEVEN 9
- 60 : REVIEW: DEVIL MAY CRY 3 SE
- 61 : REVIEW: PQ: PRACTICAL INTELLIGENCE QUOTIENT
- 62 : REVIEW: MIDWAY CLASSICS EXTENDED PLAY
- 63 : REVIEW: APE ESCAPE 3
- 64 : REVIEW: APE ESCAPE ACADEMY
- 65 : REVIEW: THE SIMS 2
- 66 : REVIEW: ARENA FOOTBALL
- 67 : REVIEW: AGE OF EMPIRES DS
- 68 : REVIEW: FINAL FANTASY ADVANCE
- 69 : REVIEW: TEEN TITANS
- 70 : REVIEW: MEGAMAN X COLLECTION
- 71 : REVIEW: KINGDOM OF PARADISE
- 72 : REVIEW: WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP POKER 2
- 73 : REVIEW: GAUNTLET - SEVEN SORROWS
- 74 : JAPAN: NARUTO GEKITOU NINJA TAISEN! 4
- 76 : JAPAN: RYUU GA GOTOKU
- 77 : JAPAN: POKEMON FUSHIGI NO DUNGEON
- 78 : FAN ART
- 80 : COSPLAY
- 82 : FUNNIES

Feature

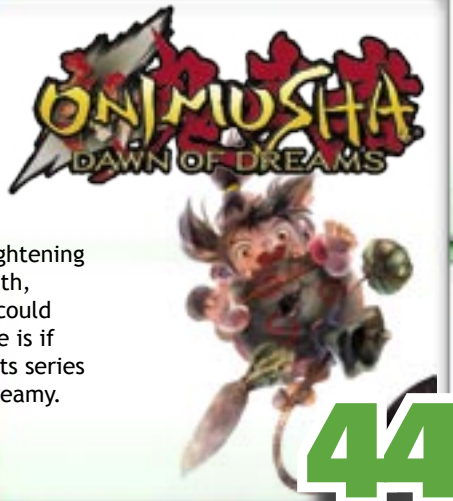


Phil: "Say John, where did you get the nifty gadget ya got there right in your hands?"
 John: "Well, Phil, it's none of your goddamn business now, is it?"

30

On the cover

Thanks to Capcom, Onimusha: Dawn of Dreams provides halting action comfort and super hyper delight without the usual side effects (which can include drowsiness, shortness of breath, nausea, tightening of the chest, headaches, diarrhea, dry mouth, chiggers and leakage). The only thing that could possibly cause us to love Capcom even more is if they were to bring back the Ghouls n' Ghosts series on next gen portables - that would be so dreamy. Now bring us our Pee Monkeys!!!



44

i play. i win. i gloat. i kick back. i catch a movie.
 i hear some tunes. all thanks to one little card.

Turn your PSP™ (PlayStation® Portable) handheld entertainment device into a fully loaded multimedia machine. How? With a SanDisk® gaming memory card. It gives you the power to play music, view pictures, watch movies and of course save countless game data, all with one little card. Also available for PC gamers — the new Cruzer Crossfire™ USB Flash Drive. It lets you take your game demos, trailers, game saves and casual games with you wherever you go. The Cruzer Crossfire carries music and photos for Xbox 360™ users.



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WORKING DESIGNS

Fans who logged in to the Working Designs forums on December 13 found an unpleasant surprise waiting for them: an announcement from Victor Ireland himself that the small publisher was closing up shop after nearly 20 years in the business. From there the information quickly propagated across the internet as the announcement became undeniably official. Working Designs was no more.

Whether you loved or hated Working Designs' localization style, there's no denying that their bold decisions to publish distinctly Japanese games in the US market at a time when no one else would have changed the industry. Certainly, had it not been for Working Designs, it's doubtful that cult favorites like *Lunar: The Silver Star*, *Alundra*, *Popful Mail*, or *Magic Knight Rayearth* ever would've escaped the narrow confines of the import scene.

These days a variety of American publishers localize quirky Japanese stuff, from small guys like NIS-A right up to Nintendo themselves, and thanks to the internet the import scene is thriving like never before. Things weren't so easy back in the era of the TurboGrafx-16, the SNES, or even the Sega CD. Although Working Designs is a name that's about to fade into video game history, it's time for the hardcore to take a moment to reflect on how different our world would be without all that company accomplished.

No, it's not just a car blinged up in the 360's white and green color scheme. Billed as a partnership between Microsoft and Nissan, the Urge represents the first "fully integrated gaming system within a vehicle." This means that there's a lot more to the Urge than just a 360 installed in the backseat.

Players can use the Nissan Urge - while it's in a parked position with the engine off - to play *Project Gotham Racing 3* with the Urge itself acting as a controller. While the game is displayed on a seven-inch flip-down screen, the driver can steer with the car's own wheel, brake with the car's own brake pedals, and accelerate with the gas pedal. When not being used for gaming, the LCD monitor functions as a rearview mirror.

You may be wondering who on earth would want such a car, and indeed the Urge is targeted at a very narrow demographic: echo boomers, the generation born between 1982 and 1995. Echo boomers are so named because they're the by and large the children of the post-war baby boomers, and often described by sociologists as "echoes" of their parents in many ways. "Nissan conducted an Internet survey of 2,000 echo boomers, a majority of which said technology and gaming are among the most important attributes in their first car," said Bruce Campbell, vice president of design at Nissan Design America. "Xbox 360 offered the latest in technology and was already a favorite among this audience."

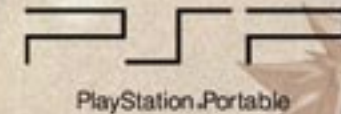
Like many concept cars, the Nissan Urge design may never be mass-produced, and even in concept form it's only compatible with PGR3. Still, it promises some interesting new integrations of technology and gaming in the future. Steering wheels you could take off your car and carry inside to play *Ridge Racer*? D-Pads built right into the armrests of your seat? The sky's the limit. The Nissan Urge will be displayed to the public January 14-22 at the North American International Auto Show in Detroit.



NISSAN URGE THE XBOX 360 CONCEPT CAR

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Portables have been missing strategies...
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The world is in a constant state of chaos.
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Destroy your enemies with spectacular super moves!



Experience real time battles!



Massive 30 versus 30 combat!

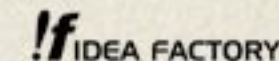


10 different kingdoms to play as, with different stories and endings.



GENERATION OF CHAOS

COMING SPRING 2006



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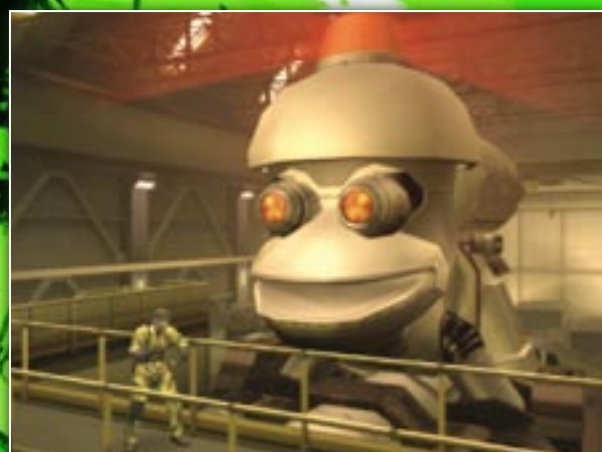


Preview by Jeremy

TACTICAL ESPIONAGE ACTION METAL GEAR SOLID 3 SUBSISTENCE

Publisher: Konami
Developer: Konami
Release Date: March 14, 2006

Genre(s): Action/Stealth
Category: Third Person
of Players: 1-4



Last year's *Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater* gave many players a Merry Christmas, and while *Subsistence* just missed the holiday season, it is hitting right in time to let folks enjoy it for the last nine months of the new year. Konami has added a ton of new stuff to it, and allows Hideo Kojima's classic series to essentially come full circle.

First off, this comes with the MSX2 versions of *Metal Gear* and *Metal Gear 2: Solid Snake*, which haven't been seen on a U.S. console before. This is easily the most intriguing extra for long-time *Metal Gear* fans, and should erase the nightmares that *Snake's Revenge* scorched into the brains of '80s players. Then you've got multi-player online modes, a boss battle-only mode for those who want to perfect their techniques, and even a new third-person camera angle to play with.

Given all these additions, this could easily end up feeling like a whole new game, even for veteran players. The new camera angle in particular should really spice up the single-player action, since it'll give you an entirely new way to play through the adventure and advance the plot. For those who don't want to do that, Konami has come to your rescue with a feature-length movie full of crucial cinema scenes and gameplay sections. While this kind of thing was done before with *Shenmue*, it'll be nice to see it done with actors who actually emote, and characters who can poke fun at themselves.

These slices of *Metal Gear* pie come packed on three discs, and should hit stores in time for St. Patrick's Day.



RESIDENT EVIL® Deadly Silence

Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Capcom
Release Date: February 8th, 2006

Genre(s): Survival Horror
Category: Retro
of Players: 1-4

Resident Evil: Deadly Silence is, when you first put it in, the original PSOne *Resident Evil* from 1996: famously bad voice acting, poorly-aged graphics, giant clouds of pixellated blood, and all. At first, it looks like Capcom's dusted off yet another old game, as is their wont, and tried to figure out how to make you pay for it again.

Then you'll notice you can skip the cutscenes now, you can manually reload your current weapon with the Y button, and that you have access to your knife at all times, *RE4*-style. Capcom's actually made a few positive changes.

You can also crack into Rebirth mode, where the old mansion's been livened up with new touchscreen puzzles (giving mouth-to-mouth to the ill-fated Richard Aiken by blowing on the microphone; spinning a record by hand; solving chest puzzles reminiscent of *Onimusha*; and more), reshuffled items, and a new first-person combat mode, where you use your touchscreen to dispatch enemies with your trusty knife. Timing is of paramount importance when knife-fighting, as you have to stuff incoming attacks with sidewise slashes. If you attack an enemy just before it hits you, you'll get a critical hit and a one-shot kill.

Playing the main game can also unlock seven out of the nine characters you can use in *Deadly Silence's* online multiplayer modes. In the Versus mode, the enemies you kill can cripple your opponents (for example, killing a purple enemy leaves your opponents unable to run), while in co-op mode, you work together with a team to survive the dangers of the Spencer mansion.

Resident Evil: Deadly Silence is a positive spin on an old game, and amazingly, it isn't just another tired port. Like *RE4*, this is a solid reinvention of an old formula. Now, Capcom, let's see some new games, huh?



Preview by Wanderer

STATE OF EMERGENCY 2



Preview by Roger

Publisher: Southpeak Interactive
Developer: DC Studios
Release Date: February 2006
Genre: Action
Category: Shooter

The first *State of Emergency*, developed by Scottish-based VIS Entertainment and published by Rockstar, owed a lot of its success to *Grand Theft Auto*. Having been released during the height of *GTA III* mania, *SoE* rode that game's coattails to a certain extent, capitalizing on Rockstar's knack for releasing games with uberviolent and controversial content. The game was fairly well-received critically, and went on to sell high numbers (over one and a half million units world wide, to date). Sadly, the sequel has spent the better part of the last four years wallowing in development limbo, as bad business decisions, buy outs and bankruptcies have kept it from being finalized and shipped to retail shelves. Thankfully, Canadian-based DC Studios, along with Southpeak Interactive, had the good sense to resurrect the title and are busy putting their own finishing touches on this chaotic and mayhem-filled action shooter. Grittier and more realistic than the original, *State of Emergency 2* incorporates a much more involved single player story mode, but the core theme of Sticking it to The Man remains the same. Taking place four years after the original, familiar faces, such as Spanky, MacNeil, Bull and the rest of the Freedom movement are still inciting havoc in an effort to rid the world of the oppressive Corporation. *SoE2* has a full host of new features, additions and improvements that promise to raise your adrenaline levels to dangerous extremes. Included in the mix is a new, cinematic singleplayer story mode that unfolds over 12 missions, a variety of enemy types (each with their own unique AI), the ability to control your own gangs and issue commands, the ability to switch characters on the fly, and five multiplayer modes (deathmatch, flag attack, last man standing, etc.).

ACE COMBAT ZERO THE BELKAN WAR

Preview by Shoegazer

Publisher: Namco
Developer: Namco
Release Date: Spring, 2006

Genre(s): Flight Sim
Category: Action
of Players: 1-2



Flight simulation games for console have never seemed to reach the same level of popularity as they do on the PC, save for one series: *Ace Combat*. Namco's long-running franchise returns to the skies this spring in the form of *Ace Combat Zero: The Belkan War*.

As the title suggests, *Zero* takes place earlier in the series. To be exact, it's set fifteen years prior to the events of *Ace Combat 5*, and it chronicles the history of the Belkan War. Keeping true to the series, you are able to pick your aircraft and weaponry, before selecting a mission. *Zero* offers real world aircraft such as the F-15C Eagle and the F/A-18C Hornet to use in your playground of mass destruction.

The most exciting addition is the new player rating system, in which your progress is tracked, and you are awarded a rating based on your play tendencies. Players can be classified as Soldier, Mercenary, or Knight, which will effect

how the storyline progresses, adding huge replay value.

With improvements also coming to the wingman controls and POV camera, *Ace Combat Zero* is looking to keep both old and new fans happy.



CAPCOM CLASSICS COLLECTION REMIXED



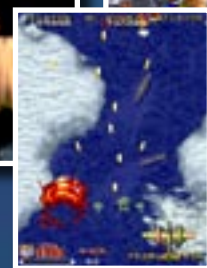
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Capcom
Release Date: March 2006

Genre: Compilation
Category: Retro
of Players: 1-4



Preview by Wanderer

Do you want to carry around a ton of classic games on your PSP? Then you probably do already. Let's not kid ourselves. Do you want to do so legally? Well, then, you're in luck! Twenty classic arcade games will, once again, get crammed into a single UMD when *Capcom Classics Collection Remixed* ships for the PSP in March of this year. Only a few of the games have been announced for the collection, but some of these are a big deal. *Three Wonders*, for example, has never had a console port before, and *Captain Commando* will accommodate up to four players using the PSP's wireless functionality. Other games in the collection include *Strider*, the original *Street Fighter*, *Varth*, *Quiz and Dragons*, *Magic Sword*, *1941*, *Avengers* (not to be confused with *Captain America and the Avengers*), and *Block Block*. You'll also be able to mess with the games' control setups and aspect ratios, tilting the PSP sideways to play vertical shooters the way nature intended. Capcom's also promising some unique bonus material, such as downloadable music, remixed tracks, and original artwork.



MONSTER HUNTER FREEDOM

Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Capcom
Release Date: Q1 2006

Genre(s): Adventure
Category: Bounty Hunting
of Players: 1-2

Monster Hunter Freedom builds upon the fledgling *Monster Hunter* franchise, providing fans of the series with plenty of bonus content and enriching the experience of playing the older games, including the Japan-only *Monster Hunter G*.

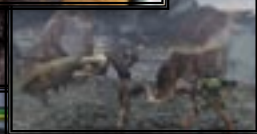


Preview by Wanderer

In a unique fantasy world, players can customize their own character down to the hair, face, and voice. Working out of the newly expanded village, which serves as a hub for the game, you can team up with up to three other players to go on cooperative missions, exchange items, and swap out special guild cards.

When you're in the field, you can earn quest rewards or pillage items from defeated monsters, and in turn, use those to upgrade your weapons and armor. While you're at it, you can store and manage your items by visiting your new and improved house, where your hunter can rest, relax, and access the new Felyne Kitchen. By preparing special dishes, you'll pick up buffs that'll last for the duration of an entire quest.

With all this, as well as the new "Treasure Hunters" cooperative mode, a graphical facelift, and a variety of new minigames, *Monster Hunter Freedom* promises to improve upon the PS2 game. We'll see if they can live up to that at some point in the coming months.





Preview by Wanderer

JAWS UNLEASHED

Publisher: Majesco Genre(s): Action
Developer: Appaloosa Interactive Category: Feeding Frenzy
Release Date: Q1 2006 # of Players: 1

Steven Spielberg's *Jaws* has been adapted for video games before, but usually, you were the hunters, trying to stop *Jaws* before it killed again.

This time, you're the shark itself, and you've worked up an appetite. You'll get to tear animals, people, buildings, and boats apart in a destruction-based action game that's... well, frankly, it creeps me the hell out.

Appaloosa – which, in a slightly ironic twist, is the developer that brought us all *Ecco the Dolphin*—has set you up with more than ten environments, set around the shores of the thriving community of Amity Island. With this new settlement comes new people, and new prey for you. You can hunt humans, take on dolphins, and crucially, work to evade Michael Brody and Cruz Ruddock, the biologist and hunter who've sworn to take you out.

Jaws Unleashed can be played as a mission-based action game, where you wreck boats, chase swimmers with the aid of your target-lock "Shark Vision," and casually dismember people using a specially constructed engine. Alternatively, you can go sandbox with it, dismantling Amity's infrastructure and roaming the seas in search of targets. Bosses will include powerful hunting boats, giant squid, and killer whales.

Between the easy-to-learn combat system and the crowd-pleasing bloodshed, *Jaws Unleashed* is... well, frankly, I can barely play it, because sharks freak me out. I gave it to some friends, though, and they are currently laughing disturbingly and chasing down swimmers. If this sounds like the kind of thing you can handle, the evil chuckles coming from the other side of the room would suggest that *Jaws Unleashed* is a sickeningly good time.



FIGHT NIGHT ROUND 3

The "sweet science" has rarely, if ever, looked this good. I suck at *Fight Night Round 3* – seriously, if you see me online, go for it; I am a free win—but I have to stand up and appreciate the graphics, the craft, and the sheer number of options available to you.

All of the established boxers in the game are presented in nearly photorealistic brawls, letting you see the sweat on their foreheads and the ripple as they take a haymaker to the chin. Muhammad Ali, Evander Holyfield, Sugar Ray Leonard, and a host of other boxing giants are here for you to play with, complete with their trademark moves and taunts.

When you're actually in the ring, the first thing that'll spring out at you (I almost said "hit you," but, well, lame) is the sheer sense of impact the 360's power brings to the game. When you get hit in *Fight Night Round 3*, you know it. Some of these impacts are brought across so realistically that they practically hurt me.

Fight Night Round 3 allows you to play out a number of the most famous bouts in boxing history, either by training a boxer up from the bush leagues in Career Mode or skipping straight to the bouts in ESPN Classic mode. Robinson vs. Lamotta, Leonard vs. Duran, Ali vs. Frazier, and more are available, allowing you to change or reinforce boxing history.

I'm not going to pretend I know a lot about the genre or the series, but I'm having fun with *Fight Night Round 3*. Hopefully, I'll know what I'm doing in time to not suck when the game drops.

Preview by Wanderer

Publisher: EA Sports
Developer: EA Chicago
Release Date: February 2006

Genre(s): Sports
Category: Boxing
of Players: 1-2

MLB '06 THE SHOW



Preview by 4thletter



Publisher: Sony Computer Entertainment
Developer: SCE Studios San Diego/SCEA
Release Date: March 2006

Genre(s): Sports
Category: Pro Baseball
of Players: 1-4

For the past few years, sports games in general have been dominated by the twin juggernauts that are EA Sports and Sega Sports. Any upstart franchise who wanted a chunk of the market had to settle for a distant third place, no matter the quality of the game. *MLB '06: The Show* has a fighting chance this year, though, what with being one of two Major League Baseball games on the market.

MLB '06 is taking the old "if it ain't broke..." angle this time around and focusing more on presentation and game modes than gameplay. The hitting and pitching were fairly tight in the build we played, so there's really no reason to blame them for that, particularly with the new additions. Rivalry Mode is extremely interesting. You play a series of games between two different teams, complete with stat-tracking. If your buddy swears up and down that his White Sox can beat the snot out of your Yankees, put him to the test and prove him wrong in this mode.

Also in the line-up are a variety of features that make the game a neat experience. When you're batting, you can guess at what kind of pitch is about to be thrown. If you're right, you're that much more likely to really nail the ball. There's even a concession to the fact that baseball games can run fairly long in the form of a Fast Forward feature. If your game is going nowhere, leaving you bored, or if you're sneaking in a quick game at work, hit the Fast Forward option on the menu and zoom to a new inning, or even the end of the game.

The first game of the season hits on March 1, 2006. Keep your eyes open.

PURSUIT FORCE



Publisher: SCEA
Developer: BigBig Studios, Ltd.
Release Date: March 2006

Genre: Action
Category: Cop
Number of Players: 1

POLICE
serve and protect



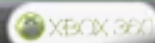
Preview by Syriel



When it comes to exciting games, the PSP has been coming up dry as of late. Sony is looking to change that with the localization of *Pursuit Force*. Originally released in Europe last year, *Pursuit Force* was plagued with balancing issues that ended up hurting the quality of the game. As a result, when Sony decided to bring the game stateside, it took the time for a revamp, keeping the story and features intact, while completely rebalancing the gameplay. We recently had a chance to play with an early build and it appears as if the time spent was worth it.

The premise behind *Pursuit Force* is one of an interactive action movie. You are a typical supercop that can perform death-defying feats in the name of truth and justice. Of course, sitting in your way are five fiendishly evil gangs with dastardly plans. To prevail you'll hop in and out of vehicles, arm yourself with a variety of weapons and even spend a little time going *mano-e-mano* with the thugs. Don't worry though, *Pursuit Force* isn't trying to be another *GTA* and time on foot is a relatively small part of the game.

Controls were certainly a high spot, with an intuitive system that made it easy to hop from one speeding car to the next while pursuing your foes down the freeway. It's possible to shoot your opponents from a distance, or race right up to them and jump over to their vehicle before taking them out at close range, all while the gangsters are busy shooting at you. It may not be the deepest experience out there, but *Pursuit Force* is looking like it could be a breakout hit in the somewhat lacking PSP library.



Preview by Prodnal

When *The Outfit* is released, many may take a quick look and say, "Oh, just another WWII shooter. I guess this one was late to the big dance." Although Relic and THQ may be following some big names in a theme that's been nearly played out, there is something special in *The Outfit* that's bound to get it noticed.

The Outfit is similar to other squad-based third person shooters with its focus on achieving specific tactical objectives throughout the game, but it makes its mark with style. The ultimate goal is to retake occupied France from the Nazi regime, and you're going to do it Jerry Bruckheimer style.

Beginning with the inclusion of iconic playable squad leaders - an Infantry Lieutenant, an Airborne Ranger, and a Mechanized Infantry Captain - *The Outfit* characterizes itself as something a little different than your average WWII game. Nearly everything in *The Outfit* is destructible. From barrels to trucks to cathedrals, players will be able to take out anything in their path, and we do mean *anything*.

Helping keep the action going is the Field Unit system. As you complete mission objectives, the game awards FUs, which can be redeemed for anything from replacing your dead squadmates to placing machine gun sentinels or calling in an air raid. Because reinforcements can be called in at any time, it ensures a constant level of action.

Even more promising was *The Outfit's* multiplayer action. With two player teams, head-to-head action was not only highly strategic and destructive, but the pace of the game is quick, and sometimes feels frantic as the tide can quickly turn against you. With a fun single player experience and the possibility of massive battles over Xbox Live, *The Outfit* may just be the next big WWII bonanza.

Publisher: THQ
Developer: Relic
Release Date: Q1, 2006

Genre(s): Third Person Action
Category: WWII
of Players: Up to 8 Players on Xbox Live

The Outfit



Preview by Lynara

Publisher: D3
Developer: Tomy
Release Date: Spring 2006

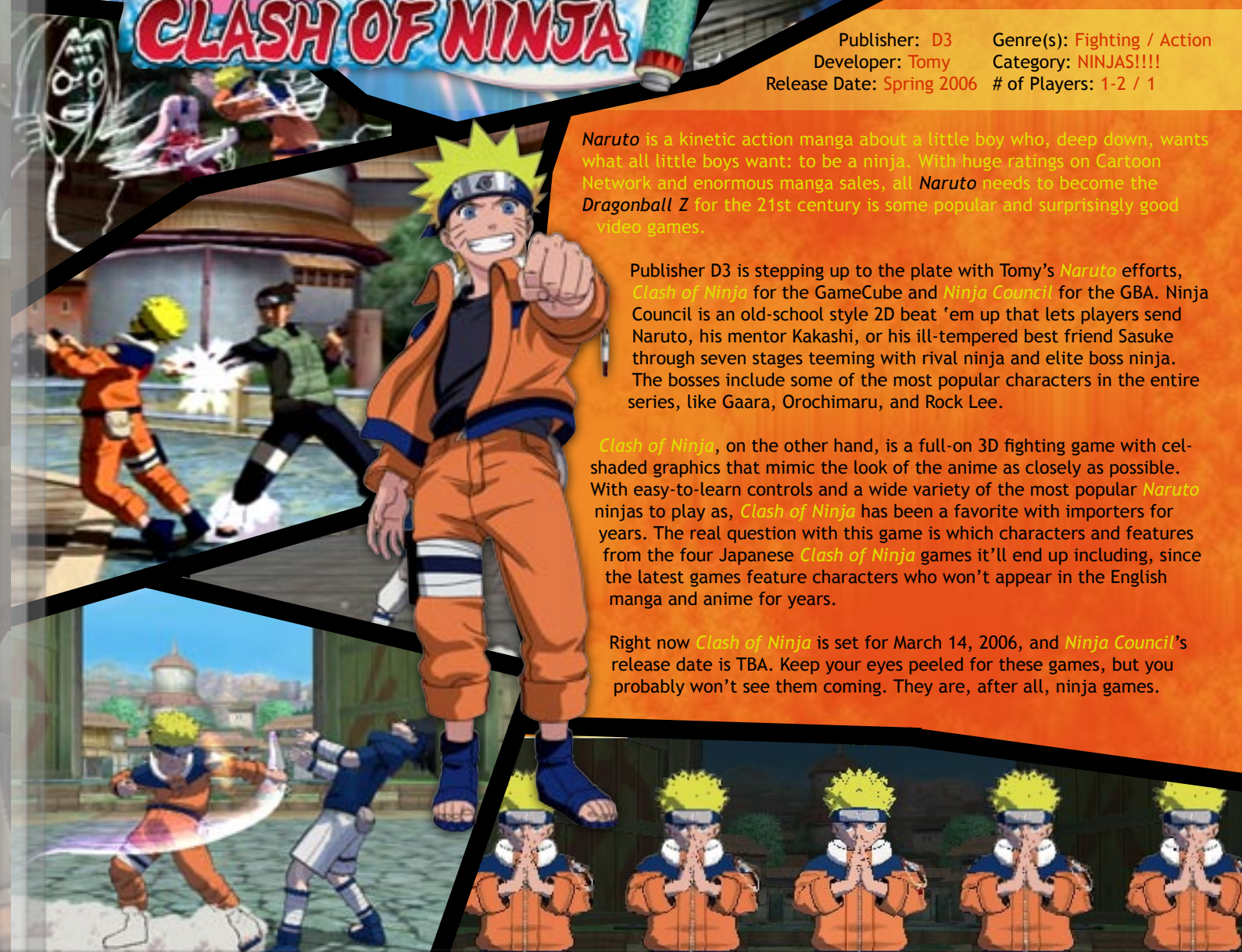
Genre(s): Fighting / Action
Category: NINJAS!!!!
of Players: 1-2 / 1

Naruto is a kinetic action manga about a little boy who, deep down, wants what all little boys want: to be a ninja. With huge ratings on Cartoon Network and enormous manga sales, all *Naruto* needs to become the *Dragonball Z* for the 21st century is some popular and surprisingly good video games.

Publisher D3 is stepping up to the plate with Tomy's *Naruto* efforts, *Clash of Ninja* for the GameCube and *Ninja Council* for the GBA. *Ninja Council* is an old-school style 2D beat 'em up that lets players send Naruto, his mentor Kakashi, or his ill-tempered best friend Sasuke through seven stages teeming with rival ninja and elite boss ninja. The bosses include some of the most popular characters in the entire series, like Gaara, Orochimaru, and Rock Lee.

Clash of Ninja, on the other hand, is a full-on 3D fighting game with cel-shaded graphics that mimic the look of the anime as closely as possible. With easy-to-learn controls and a wide variety of the most popular *Naruto* ninjas to play as, *Clash of Ninja* has been a favorite with importers for years. The real question with this game is which characters and features from the four Japanese *Clash of Ninja* games it'll end up including, since the latest games feature characters who won't appear in the English manga and anime for years.

Right now *Clash of Ninja* is set for March 14, 2006, and *Ninja Council's* release date is TBA. Keep your eyes peeled for these games, but you probably won't see them coming. They are, after all, ninja games.



魔界戦記 ディズガイア2 (DISGAEA 2)

Preview by Hitoshura

In 2003, a little game by the name of *Disgaea: Hour of Darkness* quietly made its way onto store shelves. However, no one could've foreseen the impact it would have by making Nippon Ichi a household name almost overnight. It convinced the little-known developer to set up branches in both Europe and North America to tap into this unexpected success. Here we are three years later; Nippon Ichi is still going strong with a number of solid games under its belt and is looking to wrap up its PS2 lineup with a bang by returning to the madcap world of *Disgaea* in the form of *Disgaea 2*.

Disgaea 2 is looking to be everything a sequel to any game should be, by taking the same basic concept and improving it with tweaks and additions. The most obvious improvement is that the graphics are now (finally) in high-resolution mode. To those thinking NIS had abandoned the traditional grid some system, you will be pleased to know that *Disgaea 2* will return to traditional grid-based movement. Other notable mentions include, a Courthouse system, some new classes as well as old ones returning with some redesigns, an improved throwing system, and almost everything that made the original such a joy to play will be returning.

Disgaea 2 will focus mostly on a new netherworld with new main characters to keep things fresh. The story promises to be hilariously chaotic with the hero, Adell, intending to summon Overlord Zenon as a means of exacting revenge but summons his daughter Rozalin by mistake, who demands Adell return her to her father. As always, NIS promises to include some way of assembling cast favorites from their previous SRPG efforts to please die-hard fans. You can start leveling to 9999 when *Disgaea 2* is released this August.

Publisher: NIS America
Developer: Nippon Ichi Software
Release Date: August 2006

Genre: RPG
Category: Strategy
of Players: 1



8 dm



Preview by 4thletter



Tom Clancy's SPLINTER CELL DOUBLE AGENT

Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Ubisoft Montreal/Shanghai
Release Date: March 2006

Genre(s): Action
Category: Stealth
of Players: 1-6

How do you improve on one of the best games of the past console generation? Easy: you turn everything on its head and stir 'til it's ready.

Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory gave us a Sam Fisher that was at the top of his game. Fisher was scarily efficient at the whole "saving the free world" thing and he knew it. In *Splinter Cell: Double Agent*, tragedy strikes. Sam loses someone dear to him, and then proceeds to lose his cool and almost his job. He decides to get back on his feet and is promptly given an unexploded bombshell of an assignment: infiltrate a terrorist cell, gain their trust, and then destroy them from the inside.

Double Agent picks up from there. You'll play a variety of roles. Sam Fisher the Convict has to convince a member of this cell that he's worthy of his trust, then break out of jail. Sam Fisher the Newbie Terrorist must convince his new masters that he is on their side and eager to do some serious damage on their behalf. In the midst of all this, Sam Fisher the Hero must make sure that he doesn't get too used to playing these roles and tip too far over the edge.

The missions of the game will reflect Sam's predicament. Once you join the terrorist cell, you'll have a variety of missions to accomplish on their behalf. At the same time, you'll have missions from your bosses at the NSA. The trick is figuring out which missions you need to do to complete the goals for both sides, while also not attracting suspicion. Put yourself in deep cover this March.





Preview by 4thletter

COMMANDOS STRIKE FORCE

Publisher: Eidos Interactive
Developer: Pyro Studios
Release Date: Spring 2006

Genre(s): First-person Shooter
Category: World War II
of Players: 1, 7 PS2 online, 15 Xbox Live and PC

Commandos Strike Force is quite a change from the old *Commandos* games. The previous titles were third-person action-adventure games, with a fair bit of stealth involved in some of the missions. *Strike Force*, on the other hand, joins the ranks of roughly eleven million World War II-based first person shooters.

Good news! The tried-and-true class-based gameplay from the earlier games remains intact. Each of the different classes sports some sort of gimmick to make it special. The sniper, for example, is wholly stealth-based and extremely lethal. He comes equipped with a sniper rifle for long-range murder, throwing knives for mid-range, and a stealth kill for when you're within spitting distance. Add binoculars to that line-up and you have a great scout that doubles as a silent killer. The Green Beret may be a bit more familiar to your average FPS-jockey. He has a machine gun (to begin with, at least), a few grenades, and the ability to dual-wield his guns. The spy can disguise himself as an enemy unit and infiltrate their camp, as well as choke out Nazis with a length of piano wire.

In some missions, you'll have to use a few of the units in concert to pass through. You can swap between them via a button-press, which makes unit management a snap.

Can *Commandos Strike Force* measure up to the other titles in its sub-genre? It's got some stiff competition, but we'll find out soon enough. Watch for it this Spring.



Preview by James

Publisher: Sony Online Entertainment
Developer: Sony Online Entertainment
Release Date: March 2006

Genre: Military Strategy
Category: Turn Based
Number of Players: 1-2



War is a never-ending process, and someone will always be needed to plan strategy and control the battlefield. In *Field Commander*, the forces of ATLAS square off against the evils of the Shadow Nation in a civil war to reunite a shattered country, and it's up to you to win the day.

Let's get this out of the way up front- *Advance Wars*. While grid-based, turn-based military battle strategy is its own genre, the shadow of Nintendo's deservedly popular series will fall over any portable entry in it from now on. Still, my hands-on time with *Field Commander* showed a game worth playing in its own right.

While much will be familiar here, it's all looking sharp thanks to a very capable 3D engine. Units are looking nicely detailed, and the camera swoops in when they attack each other for a dramatic view of the carnage. There are ground, ocean, and air units to build and control, towns to take over, and a country to reunite through 30 story-based missions. Different squads have unique strengths and weaknesses, like low defence/high mobility, and the same is true of the enemy. So far *Field Commander* is promising to have as many layers of strategy as a war gamer could want.

In addition to all this, *Field Commander* is designed with multiplayer in mind. Hot Swap allows two players to switch off on one PSP, standard local and online gaming is available, and there's even a sort of play-by-e-mail option available called HQ Mode. That last mode is done by taking a move, uploading it to SOE's servers, and then waiting for your opponent to get back to you. It's even possible to create and upload missions for the world to enjoy/suffer through. Take that, *Advance Wars*!





Publisher: SNK
 Developer: SNK
 Release Date: February 2006

Genre(s): Fighting
 Category: 2D Martial Arts
 # of Players: 1-2, Live

The *King of Fighters Neowave* serves as part dream match, and part test run of the Atomiswave hardware unit, which was chosen to do SNK's bidding after their Neo-Geo MVS was put to rest. Those who were around for the heyday of 2D fighters know how the formula goes by now—you pick a team of three, and your characters have it out, one by one, until one team's out of the game. *Neowave* takes the series' fighting and presentation (especially the presentation) back to basics, with *King of Fighters 2002*'s roster (plus Kula Diamond, for some reason; never underestimate the power of fanboys, I always say). Nonetheless, it boasts features that give it its own identity.

What sets *Neowave* out from its brethren is its three fighting "Modes," which act much like the the "Grooves" in *Capcom vs. SNK 2* and change how characters play in-game. Super Cancel Mode allows for Capcom-esque fights, with a modular super meter, different super attack strengths, and move cancelling. Guard Break Mode gives you Just Defense from *Garou: Mark of the Wolves*. Finally, M2 Mode can be compared to *Street Fighter Alpha 3*'s X-ISM Mode, providing one long super meter to fuel a single massive super move to be used when the time is right. The last addition to *Neowave*'s gameplay repertoire is the Heat Mode, which ups your attack strength in exchange for gradually decreasing life.

Also of note would be the Xbox Live play, now standard in every SNK fighter that has or will be coming down the pike. If you've got a hankering for some new 2D fighting outside of *Guilty Gear*, SNK's got your number with a good handful of choices, including this one. Look for it close to the time you read this issue.



NEOWAVE THE KING OF FIGHTERS

Preview by Racewing



UNTOLD LEGENDS THE WARRIOR'S CODE

Preview by Wanderer



Publisher: Sony Online Ent.
 Developer: Sony Online Ent.
 Release Date: Q1 2006

Genre(s): Action
 Category: Top Down
 # of Players: 1-16

A peaceful city's been driven into a dark age by the arrival of a seemingly unstoppable warlord. Who could possibly stop hi-oh, right. You and your friends, each of you piloting one of five selectable, customizable fantasy warriors, must navigate the dungeons, cliffsides, sewers, and ruins throughout the land, building up power and magical strength to fuel a final confrontation with the mad warlord.

Untold Legends: The Warrior's Code is a streamlined and focused version of the original game's play style, featuring easier-to-use menus, AI support characters, new weapons (including a really vicious-looking sawblade launcher), and a new take on offensive abilities. The end result is a much faster-paced version of an already fast-paced dungeon crawler, complete with the usual wi-fi multiplayer.

Instead of forcing you to use your upgrade points on passive buffs, *The Warrior's Code* takes them off your skill tree entirely. You can now use special runes to invoke passive effects, and save your points for the powerful arsenal of magical attacks that *The Warrior's Code* offers.

Each character is also a member of the changeling race, which is part of the reason you're on the run from the aforementioned mad warlord. With each kill you rack up, you'll fill a meter, eventually allowing you to transform into a more powerful combat form for a short time.

With all that and a renewed focus on the game's storyline, *Untold Legends: The Warrior's Code* is a marked improvement on its predecessor. It's not going to change your mind about the dungeon-crawler genre, but what it does, it does pretty well.



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CONSOLE CURIOSITIES

[FEATURE BY: ROGER DANISH]

RESEARCH & INFORMATION BY
WELTBRAUER DRINKERS



We call ourselves *Hardcore Gamer Magazine* for a reason. The whole, sad lot of us live, breathe, sleep and eat video games 24/7 and aren't ashamed to admit it. I know where I fall, too: pretty much right at the top of this list. I was the one who would drive for hours to the one Kinokuniya book store / Pony Toys in Los Angeles to purchase the latest PC Engine, Famicom and Mega Drive games before they showed up for their US console counterparts (\$100 bucks for *Dynamite Duke*... what was I thinking?). I was the one who kept (and still have) all of my consoles in mint condition, along with their original packaging, documentation, etc. (dating back to the Fairchild F). I was the one that had to have the Neo Geo Gold System, the Super Famicom and even the 3DO, the day they came out, paying ridiculous money just to be one of the first to play them. I could go on, but as you can see, what some people might consider a "disturbing" fascination with video games has turned into a lifelong passion for me. I'm just glad that I can share my love of plastic, pixels and polygons with other like-minded peers.

During my obsessive exploits, I've often come across some unique consoles and handhelds that you won't find at your local Best Buy or Toys R Us. Some of these funky units, which are typically manufactured overseas in Hong Kong and Korea, can be hard to find, a bit dodgy, and, in some instances, cost tons of money on eBay... but that's what makes them unique, endearing, and special. I've showcased six for your viewing pleasure and will continue to offer up more in the coming months.

GAME AXE COLOR

Manufacturer: Legend Technology Co, LTD (Redant) Availability: Rare
Year Manufactured: 1995 Cost: \$100-150

The Redant Game Axe Color, manufactured in Taiwan, is basically a portable NES. Unlicensed by Nintendo, of course (who is fiercely protective of their intellectual properties and patents), this unique handheld system never made it to the States, but enjoyed a modicum of success in Hong Kong and Japan. Being that it is a NES, its specs are pretty much the same as its console counterpart, with an 8bit NMOS 6502 CPU running at 1.8MHz and 16kb VRAM for graphics. The screen size is fairly impressive when compared to some of the older handhelds (Nomad, Lynx, TurboExpress, Game Gear), sporting a 3.8 inch Passive Matrix LCD with a fluorescent backlight. The LCD screen and sound can be switched on and off to conserve battery power, which is a sad 2.5 hours running off six AAs (you can also use a 9-volt AC adapter). The unit is not configured to play US NES cartridges (the main difference being the size and shape of the plastic casing), but you can use a converter, which typically comes with the Game Axe or can be purchased on eBay. Unlike most handhelds, the Game Axe has the ability to connect to a TV set (using standard SEGA Genesis A/V cables), allowing you to play on your set. It also can take A/V in using a video Y-cable connecting to a 1/8" mini jack. This means you can hook up a portable DVD player to it (only with mono sound, however) and even play another console on the Game Axe's screen.



GENERATION NEX

Manufacturer: Nubytech Availability: Common
Year Manufactured: 2005 Cost: \$59.99

Messiah's Generation NEX is an interesting piece of hardware that has already received a fair amount of press and controversy since its release in October '05. As a NES clone, this small and sleek box (standing at a mere 1.5 inches) is designed to update the look of the old NES box while still tugging at your nostalgic heartstrings. It comes with one wired controller (which is designed more like the SNES controller than a traditional square NES pad), although the original NES controllers (and peripherals) work as well. In addition, you can purchase a pair of 2.4GHz wireless controllers that work exceptionally well, which will set you back another \$60. Features unique to the NEX include dual cartridge slots (it comes with a top-loading Famicom slot and a front loading NES slot) and dual mono sound using standard A/V cables (the original NES was a mono system, so the NEX combines the left and right channels). The controversy comes from the fact that this is not a direct remanufacturing of the NES and uses a custom IC based on the NES algorithm. As such, there are incompatibility issues with some games (Messiah has provided a fairly comprehensive list on their site: http://www.playmessiah.com/onlinestore/gnex_faq-chart.htm), and a host of games have sound, graphical and lock up issues (including *Castlevania III*).



GP2X

Manufacturer: Gamepark Holdings Availability: On Hold
Year Manufactured: 2005 Cost: \$179.99

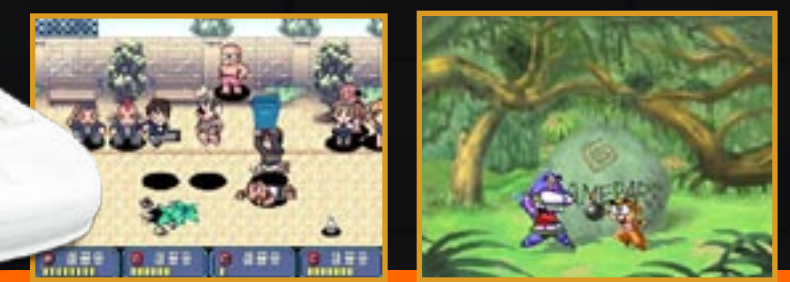
Having established a rabid fan base in the emulation community with their user-friendly GP32, GamePark decided to one up themselves and release a new and more powerful handheld console with the GP2X. Featuring a dual CPU core, 64MB of memory, SD card storage and a Linux OS, this affordable and sleek-looking handheld seemed too good to be true. Unfortunately, when it released at the end of last year, this was the case. GamePark's "first edition" GP2X came with a laundry list of problems, which included broken screens, SD card incompatibility, battery life issues, video playback issues, and shoddy manufacturing (joystick dead zone, small action buttons, bad soldering, etc.). If Gamepark can manage to fix these (and other) issues with their second edition (which is scheduled to ship early this year), then this is a really sweet piece of portable hardware with some exciting prospects. Included in the mix are a 3.5-inch TFT LCD screen, TV Out, video playback (MPEG4, DivX, WMV and more), and the ability to run a host of emulators (SNES, NES, GBA, Genesis, MAME, etc.).



GP32

Manufacturer: Gamepark Holdings Availability: On Hold
Year Manufactured: 2005 Cost: \$179.99

Out of all the various portable handhelds out there on the fringe of gaming, the GP32 is one of the most beloved. While still available but difficult to find (you can usually find them on eBay, even now), this little white console is a very powerful handheld that can pull off some pretty nifty tricks. Unlike its glitchy big brother, the GP32 was solid out of the gate, sporting a 32-bit RISC CPU running up to 133/166MHz, a 3.5 Reflective TFT LCD display (a backlit model was released in 2004), 16-bit PCM stereo sound and DivX and MP3 compatibility. It also runs on 2 AA batteries with a healthy 12 hours of play time before running out of juice. Like the GP2X, the GP32 is an emulator fan's dream come true, with solid emulators for pretty much all of the classic consoles, including Atari 2600, Gameboy, NES, SNES, PC Engine, SNES, Neo Geo pocket, and more. In addition, there are a number of official games out of Korea for the unit. While most are of the old-school RPG variety, a few are arcade style shooters and beat 'em ups.





CONSOLE CURIOSITIES

[FEATURE BY: ROGER DANISH] RESEARCH AND INFORMATION BY MULTIMEDIAAL PHOTICS

TREAMCAST

Manufacturer: Unknown Availability: Rare
Year Manufactured: 2000 Cost: \$229

Most hardcore gamers agree that the Dreamcast never fully realized its true potential, and this beloved system still holds a coveted place upon many of our desks. As evidenced by the still going strong homebrew community, there is still a viable market out there, and one of the cooler console collectibles to show up on the street vendor shelves of Asia is the Treamcast. Basically a remanufactured Dreamcast with an LCD monitor attached to its base, this "portable" system comes in its own soft nylon case (complete with knockoff square Treamcast logo), and is packaged with two Saturn-style six-button game pads, AC adaptor, car adaptor, and remote. The remote is used in conjunction with the system's ability to play VCD, SVCD and MP3s, the former two are popular formats for movies and videos in Hong Kong. Other features include a knob to adjust the LCD screen's brightness (which is backlit), as well as input jacks for headphones or speakers. On the whole, the Treamcast feels as if it was slapped together from preexisting parts (original Dreamcast body), a generic screen, etc. and then modified in someone's garage versus manufactured from scratch. This is probably because it was.

Besides the limited portability (like the PSOne, this unit is not truly portable and does not run off battery power), the only other benefit is that it is completely region-free and will play all import and US discs.



GAMEKING

Manufacturer: Nubytch Availability: Common
Year Manufactured: 2005 Cost: \$59.99

What most people disregard as a straight up Game Boy clone, this 8-bit handheld (the design of which is suspiciously similar to a Game Boy Advance) is actually a unique piece of hardware from China. It plays very basic black and white games reminiscent of Nintendo's original GB handheld. Based around a 65C02 CPU running at a whopping 6.0MHz, the cartridge-based GameKing (and second design, GameKing II – which is basically the same unit made to resemble a PSP), has decent quality sound output capable of multi-channel music parried with a very last-gen LCD black and white screen. Running off 2 AAA batteries, the GameKing has very little in the way of frills, and its games are poor-man clones of basic old-school shooters and the like (including *Bombberman*).

In fact, the most enjoyment to be had from this system is reading the hilarious instructions that come with the unit and games. Here is a brief snippet for your viewing pleasure, from the manual for a shooter called *Ares*:

"Some day in 21st century, the earth was attacked by exotic. For the safe of our earth, a batter was broken between the earth and the exotic."

It doesn't get much better than this. No, really.



**FREEDOM'S
ROLE MODEL
RETURNS**



SPANKY AND HIS CREW
IGNITE THE FLAMES OF REVOLUTION
AS THE CORPORATION FACES A FULL
FLEDGED STATE OF EMERGENCY!

STATE OF EMERGENCY 2

JOIN THE RESISTANCE

PLAY MULTIPLE CHARACTERS WITH SPECIAL SKILLS



SNIPER ATTACKS



NAVIGATE THE RIOT



INTERROGATE PRISONERS



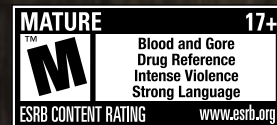
OVER 18 WEAPONS, INCLUDING ROCKET LAUNCHERS TO SHOOT DOWN HELICOPTERS



CONTROL TANKS, HELICOPTERS, SPEEDBOATS AND OTHER VEHICLES



SEQUEL TO THE
BEST SELLING GAME
STATE OF EMERGENCY



PlayStation 2



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Mobile Games What You're in for

If you've ever downloaded a ringtone or sent a text message, by now you should already be aware that you can also play video games on your cell phone. I'm not talking about the likes of monochromatic puzzle and text-based adventures...I'm talking about real honest to goodness gaming experiences.

Mobile games have come a long way from Snake and considering the mobile game industry as a whole is fairly new, it already has an impressive list of games based on well established franchises. Think *Doom*, *Driver*, *Prince of Persia*, *Madden*, *Need for Speed* and *Ratchet & Clank*. These are all top PC and Console titles that are available and have crossed over fairly well into the medium. Familiar companies like EA, Namco, Sony, Sega and THQ constantly publish games from many of their well-known hits. Still other companies have been born out of this new platform and have proven to be successful.

Companies like JAMDAT, I-play, GLU, MFORMA and Gameloft are hardly household names but are quite astute at creating and publishing games that are tailor made for mobile phones. These one-thumb wonders are hardly processor intensive but deliver the once-unique experience where the quality of the game was more important over graphics. Take a look back at the earlier days of video games when greater focus was placed on ingenuity, ease of understanding and unlimited play and that's exactly the type of experience you'll find in most mobile games today.

That's not to say that every mobile experience is worthy. There are some definite eggs laid out there. After all, it's still the new frontier and everyone's headed west to strike it rich. Wireless carriers are doing everything they can to provide the law but wireless games can be easily created and distributed through other means. This makes it easy for people to get taken in, but so as long as you stay informed, you'll be fine. (OK, so maybe that was a cheap plug for our mobile reviews. It's still good advice!)

The question remains, do you still want to play mobile games? Of course you do! Mobile games just about cover every type of genre there is. You'll find arcade classics like *Pac-Man*,



Frogger and *Dig Dug*; old and new favorites including *Tetris* and *Zuma*. Squad-based shooters like *SOCOM* and *Call of Duty*... racing games, puzzle games, RPGs and much more. There's no shortage of creativity and just about everyone from the most fickle hardcore gamer to the extremely casual player is bound to find something to enjoy.

Many of the new mobile games also have the added advantage of using other phone functions. Connectivity for leaderboard rankings is common and the ability to download extra content or play against someone else is already available. A few games have already included PC to Mobile functionality for opening up a new realm of game play. Soon, you'll also be able to play using the phone's camera and even the GPS function for location-based gaming.



24 - I-play

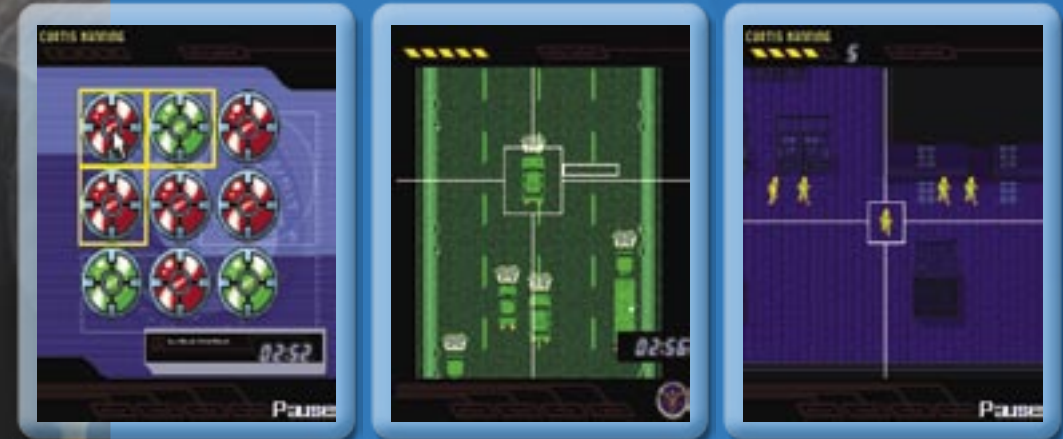
In *24*, you play the role of a CTU agent in a race against time (what else?). You will take on missions and you will also contact, assign and guide Jack Bauer (Kiefer Sutherland) and other CTU agents through some of these highly important missions.

The main objective of a mission could vary from setting up a phone trace, defusing a bomb, decrypting information, infiltrating an area or driving to a location just to name a few. Most will be played out through a series of mini-games and puzzles but in some you will actually get to shoot it out against the bad guys.

The types of mini-games and puzzles vary greatly. For instance, to set up a phone trace, you'll be playing a form of *Qix*. To decrypt a note, you'll have to determine what letters coincide in the proper location in order to form a cohesive statement. Still others will have you creating a pattern, connecting points or much more. They are all non-repetitive and keep your mind working.

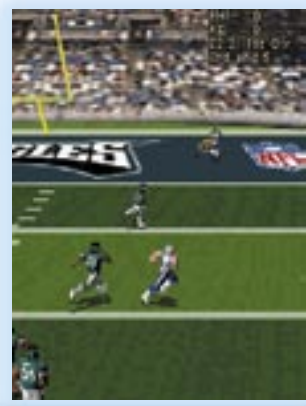
Like the show, time is a central character with the amount taken to complete each mission key. If you fail to complete the mission in the time allotted, you will have failed. To help with this, each agent will have expertise in four categories. They are Field Training, Durability, Concentration and Computer Tech. It will be crucial for you to understand who is more effective at what so that you can assign the right agent to the task. Your time per mission will be added up at the end of the game and determine whether or not you get a commendation for a job well done.

So far, *24* looks to capture the entirety of the show by letting you participate in every facet of the events. Some missions are easy, others are challenging, while still others are just evil. It'll be interesting to see how well it mirrors the actual events of the brand new season. *24* is due out some time in March.



The mobile game industry is hot and heavy right now and you don't have to look any further than EA's acquisition of JAMDAT. More of the same is expected as this new year goes by. As newer devices equipped with faster processors, more memory and cheaper price tags are introduced into the faster carrier networks, games in 3D and with greater multiplayer experiences will become more common. Mobile games will never truly replace console gaming, but because they are on wireless phones, they will remain the most portable and inexpensive form of gaming available.

Give them a shot. You already carry a cell phone everywhere you go, so why not have fun with it? You're bound to find something that can be played in quick spurts and that will satisfy your craving.



BRADY BUNCH KUNG FU

Brady Bunch Kung Fu – Mobiliss

Kung fu fighting isn't the first thing that comes to mind when you think about a mobile game based on *The Brady Bunch*. In fact, it's probably far from that. Still, in *Brady Bunch Kung Fu* players get the chance to choose their favorite Brady and take on the rest of the Bunch. The story commences after their now infamous trip to Hawaii. For some strange reason, the Curse of the Tiki Idol they believed was lifted has followed them home and given them fighting skills and a thirst for whoopass.

The two main gameplay modes are Story and Battle. In Story, you'll snap each Brady out of their Tiki trance by knocking them silly and ultimately destroying the Tiki Idol. Battle has extra mode choices like Vs., Survival, Time Attack and Practice so you can get plenty of fighting in. The entire Brady clan (except the Father) is available to fight with and each has their own style like Greg's Tae Kwon Disco and Carol's Tai Chi.

The game certainly has a light-hearted theme but fighting fans should know that it delivers a hearty fighting experience. Characters possess a variety of unique moves, many of which will remind you of immortal games like *Street Fighter II*. You can perform them using quick keypad button combinations or a mixture of keypad and D-pad. While some of you may resort to button mashing, if you take time to learn and practice the combinations, the game can be very tactical.

Each fighter is not stored locally on the phone, but rather is accessed from a server when the game requests that particular character. This results in a swift game where each character and their moves are highly detailed. Animations are fun to watch and loading times are very short. Sounds consist of punch effects, grunts and a start up tune, but unfortunately it's not the original theme song.

The *Brady Bunch Kung Fu* mobile game has already received awards and it's easy to understand why. It's an impressive fighting game at its core. Sure, the storyline is hokey and you don't normally think of Cindy, Marcia and Bobby as grand martial artists but that shouldn't matter because it's still the most fun we've had with a wireless fighting game. Do yourself a favor and check it out.

FINAL SCORE :
4 of 5



JAMAICAN BOBSLED

Jamaican Bobsled – Glu Mobile

Ya mon, it's time to get irie wit the bobsleddin team dat run tings... I'm talking bout de Jamaican bobsledding team mon. Ya tink ya got wat it takes to bring home dis 'ere gold medal, den you best get ready cause you're in for a ride.

Okay, that's enough of that.

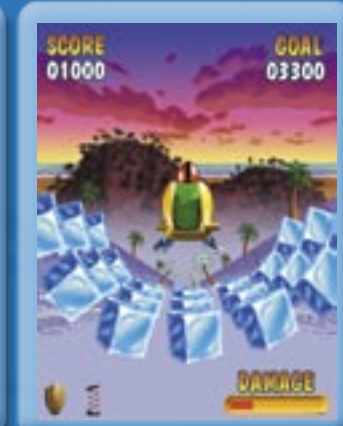
Jamaican Bobsled is a fast-paced racer that sends you flying down icy chutes for championship gold. The two modes included are Championship and Arcade but don't expect to be taking on other opponents. Instead, anything goes as you try to collect enough medals and stay intact to make it to the next level. Championship has 10 levels that will have the team vying for glory. Arcade features 20 levels that include bonus rounds. After each level is cleared, it can be replayed to get a higher score.

Finishing the runs are more difficult than expected since the courses are filled with ice blocks, stones, marauding penguins and even palm trees. These will cause damage to your sled and get extremely difficult towards the latter levels but at least the game is not without lending you a hand in the form of repair wrenches, jump springs and coconut shields. Other forms of power ups include magnets to attract medals and rockets for a temporary speed boost. All of these obstacles and aids result in a wacky ride filled with jumps, flips, crashes and glory.

Controls are one-handed and are very easy for anyone to handle. The sled moves left or right, but can also be commanded to perform a loop so as to collect more medals or avoid dangers. Jumping is put into use with the press of the OK button and all other power-ups are used automatically. The visuals are fun and refreshing with music, sounds and text overflowing with Jamaican "attitude" to set a fun tone to the game.

Jamaican Bobsled is another uncomplicated mobile game that concentrates on only one thing and pulls it off well while maintaining relative freshness. It's certainly a game that you can pick up and play at any time without having to get too involved. If you're looking for simple racing enjoyment and arcade style thrills, this download is a smart choice.

FINAL SCORE :
4 of 5



Time Crisis Mobile – Namco

In *Time Crisis Mobile*, an international crime syndicate has commandeered a compound and threatened the safety of the world once again. As an agent of the VSSE, it's up to you to liberate the compound and take out the Jason Vorhees of video games, Wild Dog. Like most games in the series however, this storyline comes secondary to the onslaught of incoming bullets and enemies.

The two modes featured are Story and Crisis Mission with both of them faithfully reproducing the frantic duck and shoot mechanics of the arcade and console versions. Story mode has three areas to clear and includes both human and machine enemies to light up. There are five crisis missions to take on but they will not be ready to play until you finish the Story mode. These range from clearing specific enemies to taking them all out in a certain amount of time.

Enemies appear from out of everywhere and have varying degrees of strength. The place will light up like fireflies on a summer night so you best be careful to duck at the right time. Once you see that red starburst heading your way, it's probably too late. The game is presented in 3D and looks comparable to the PS1. Enemies are large and the animations, especially when filling them full of holes, are well captured. The audio has two options, one for sound effects and one for music. You can't listen to them simultaneously but they do sound quite well, whichever you choose. (The looping of the music is a little off though.)

Time Crisis Mobile also includes four difficulties and the ability to choose the amount of damage that can be withstood. Once that amount is gone, the game is over but you'll have a few continue credits anyway. Being able to dictate these options, along with the crisis missions, gives the game some extra feet to stand on, otherwise it might have been too quick to finish. Nevertheless, for fans of the game, it's the equivalent of choosing an 8 ounce steak over the 12 ounce; it's a smaller serving, but you know it's just as good.

FINAL SCORE :
4 of 5



BIGFOOT

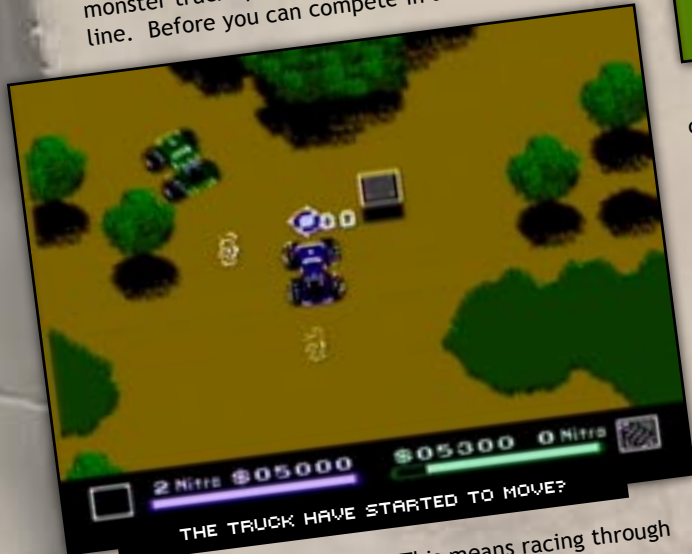
by honestgamer

It's a testament to Acclaim, a company usually known for its wretched games, that even players who don't appreciate monster truck racing can enjoy *Bigfoot*. Featuring trucks galore in a race from the west coast to the east, the game provides enough fun that you'll forget how shallow it is. Add in a two-player mode that calls for weeping and rejoicing in equal measures (in a good way) and you have one of the most overlooked racers on the NES.

The game gets right down to business, with two monster trucks puffing their way to a starting line. Before you can compete in an event, you



SUCKS FOR KNOCKOFF PUKE-GREEN BIGFOOT. HE DOESN'T GET ANY KIND OF ENCOURAGEMENT.



THE TRUCK HAVE STARTED TO MOVE?

first have to get there. This means racing through an overhead course littered with trees, fences, creeks and cash cows. Hitting the peaceful bovines splatters the screen with cash icons that you can use to finance vehicle upgrades once you arrive at the arena, so you'll want to do so. Unfortunately, the animals are located in places that mean the automatically-scrolling screen can push you into devastating bits of forest. The other player may let you hit the

Platform: NES
Publisher: Acclaim (Knight Rider, Turko: Dinosaur Hunter)
Developer: Acclaim (Mary Kate & Ashley Olsen's Sweet 16)
Release Date: July, 1990
Genre: Racing



\$0!?!? BUT THAT'S NOT A LOT OF MONEY.



I WONDER IF YOU CAN SEE THE SIGN FOR PUEBLO FROM SPACE!?



DID THE WHITE BIGFOOT WIN OR IS HE JUST REALLY FAR BEHIND?

Once you arrive at arenas, you can pimp out your truck with tire, engine, shock and gear upgrades before competing in events. A cash prize is up for grabs, but you have to spend money to make money. These new events are viewed from the side, as you'll watch your truck pull tractor trailers, climb up massive hills, or just race through mud pits and over the top of previously-owned cars. It's here that the game will feel more familiar to those who spend their time going to truck events outside of games, and the mode is every bit as rewarding to the rest of us because the strategy involved.

Suppose you arrive with only a little cash from the previous leg in the race. Your truck isn't all it could be, while your opponent has funds to spare. How much do you invest in your truck? What's the least you can pay and still pull through with a win? More importantly, will all that cash lead to victory, or will your opponent come out ahead? These are

important questions and they manage to come up almost every game as one player pulls into the lead and works frantically to maintain it. A good player can reverse the roles, but it won't be easy.

Now, some people who play this won't have the luxury of a like-minded friend. If you're the only one in your household who appreciates some retro mayhem, it's time to start looking at the single-player mode. Shockingly, this is almost as fun. Here, the goal isn't to survive (though you'll want to do that). Instead, try sending as many of your computer-controlled opponents to the poor house as possible. It's fun to count the virtual lives you've ruined. In the end, *Bigfoot* is as fun and challenging a romp as you want it to be. It's difficult to recommend to the crowd that likes only today's games, but older players are in for the time of their lives.



BLUEPRINTS FOR YOUR SURVIVAL

AVOID DESTRUCTION THROUGH THE CLEVER USE OF THE MASTER PLAN

Architect: Hitoshura
Platform: Gameboy Advance



DO NOT BE THE ARCHITECT OF YOUR OWN DEMISE

strat·e·gy n. pl. strat·e·gies 1) The science and art of using all the forces of a nation to execute approved plans as effectively as possible during peace or war. 2) The science and art of military command as applied to the overall planning and conduct of large-scale combat operations. 3) A plan of action resulting from strategy or intended to accomplish a specific goal. See Synonyms at plan. 3) The art or skill of using stratagems in endeavors such as politics and business.

BLUEPRINTS FOR:
final fantasy iv advance

SUBJECT OF BUILD:
cave of trials walkthrough

When you have cleared the Giant of Babel you will be able to swap out any character, except Cecil, for Edward, Yang, Cid, Palom, and Porom at the Tower of Wishes in Mysidia. Afterwards, a dungeon will open up at the base of Mt. Ordeals, where you'll find the entrance to the Cave of Trials. Since you can only bring four other characters along with you out of the five to obtain their respective weapons, you will need to run through this dungeon at least twice. You'll find the weapons at B8 with a boss guarding each one. The maps below will help you navigate this labyrinthine dungeon.



1: Entrance/Exit
A: X-Potion
B: Red Jacket (Armor for Edward)

2: Passage between B1&2
C: Remedy
D: Phoenix Down
E: Coronet (Helmet for Palom)



3: Passage between B2&3
F: Cat Hood (Helmet for Porom)
G: Remedy
H: Funny Mask (Helmet for Yang)

4: Passage between B3&4
I: Red Cap (Helmet for Edward)
J: Cottage
K: Siren
L: Courageous Suit (Armor for Yang)



5: Passage between B4&5
M: Siren
N: Remedy
O: Sage Robe (Armor for Palom)
P: Lord's Robe (Armor for Porom)

6: Passage between B5&6
Q: Grand Helm (Helmet for Cid)
R: Grand Armor (Armor for Cid)
S: Dry Ether





7: Passage between B6&7
T: Megalixir
U: Megalixir



8: Passage between B7&8
9: Warp Pad Out
V: Hand of the Gods (Yang's Weapon - Storm Dragon)
W: Thor's Hammer (Cid's Weapon - Death Mech)
X: Seraphim's Mace (Porom's Weapon - T-Rex)
Y: Triton's Dagger (Palom's Weapon - Master Flan)
Z: Apollo's Harp (Edward's Weapon - Gigas Worm)



STORM DRAGON

HP: 40,000
Str: 139
Def: 4
Mag: 22
MDef: 33
Gil: 0
Exp: 32,000

Type: Dragon
Weak: Ice
Res: Ailment
Absorb: Fire

Have Yang equipped with Ice Claws, and Palom attacking with Blizzaga. Have Porom or Rosa cast Berserk on Cecil.

DEATH MECH

HP: 40,000
Str: 135
Def: 4
Mag: 34
MDef: 34
Gil: 0
Exp: 32,000

Type: Mech
Weak: None
Res: Ailment
Absorb: None

Let Cid tear it apart with his hammer along with Yang having Thunder Claws equipped to assist him.

T-REX

HP: 60,000
Str: 148
Def: 43
Mag: 34
MDef: 54
Gil: 0
Exp: 32,000

Type: Insect
Weak: None
Res: Ailment
Absorb: None

It's not much of a threat, so just hack away at it with various ice-based weapons such as Yang's Ice Claws.

MASTER FLAN

HP: 35,000
Str: 130
Def: 4
Mag: 34
MDef: 38
Gil: 0
Exp: 32,000

Type: Mage
Weak: None
Res: Ailment
Absorb: None

This battle is best fought with one casting of Quake to wipe out the puddings before pounding on him.

GIGAS WORM

HP: 55,000
Str: 155
Def: 4
Mag: 34
MDef: 44
Gil: 0
Exp: 32,000

Type: None
Weak: None
Res: Ailment
Absorb: None

The Gigas Worm counterattacks everything. Have Porom cast Blink on everyone, and the counterattacks will miss.

JANUARY 2006. COMMAND THE FORCES THAT SHAPED THIS NATION'S DESTINY!

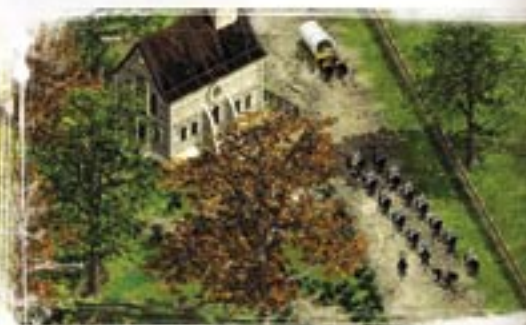
"A game that should appeal to Civil War buffs everywhere, not to mention Texans" - GAMESPOT

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DIVIDED NATION



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www.americanconquest.com





It's a rare thing when trilogies get expanded, *Star Wars* notwithstanding. *Onimusha 3: Demon Siege* was supposed to be the big send-off for the *Onimusha* series... but the ending of the game seemed to put the lie to that. The Nobunaga Trilogy ended with a promise of evil to come. As it goes with these things, when one evil is defeated, a newer, better evil rises up to fill the gap.

Samanosuke Akechi, Jubei Yagyu, and Jacques Blanc were the heroes of the first three games. Samanosuke starred in *Onimusha: Warlords*; Jubei took center stage in *Onimusha 2: Samurai's Destiny*, and Jacques shared the spotlight with an aged Samanosuke in *Onimusha 3: Demon Siege*. Samanosuke and Jubei are both based in part on actual historical figures. Check out our history segments throughout the feature to see how *Onimusha's* history matches up with real history. Historians have yet to find evidence of a time-travelling Frenchman named Jacques in feudal Japan, sadly.



One year later, people are disappearing at an alarming rate from Inabayama Castle. Princess Yuki sends a desperate letter off to Samanosuke, begging for his help in figuring out what's going on. Samanosuke arrives at the castle too late, and finds that not only has Yuki been kidnapped, but that Nobunaga Oda is *still alive* and has an army of genma at his back. Samanosuke is gifted with the power to seal the souls of genma by a clan of ogres known as the Oni. Samanosuke enters Inabayama Castle to find Princess Yuki, seal away the genma, and to destroy Nobunaga and his genma lords.

The next game, *Onimusha 2: Samurai's Destiny*, took a different tack. It's set over a decade after the end of the first game and features the (second) return of Nobunaga Oda. After the finale of the first game, Nobunaga took control of the genma himself as part of his quest for power. Jubei Yagyu is the leader of the Yagyu clan and an expert martial artist. When he returns home one day, he finds his village destroyed and witnesses the murder of some of his clan firsthand. It turns out that the Yagyu clan and the Oni clan were connected of old, and Nobunaga decided to clear out the entire clan, just in case. This was to be a fatal mistake. Jubei Yagyu leaves his wrecked village with hate in his heart and revenge on his mind. Nobunaga is going to pay for what he did to the Yagyu clan.

The last game in the Nobunaga Trilogy was *Onimusha 3: Demon Siege*. Nobunaga is back (you guessed it, *again*) and he's tasked an inventor to look for ways to spread his kingdom not only over Japan, but over the centuries, as well. Genma warriors soon attack Paris in 2004. French military police officer Jacques Blanc helps fend them off, even as he's worried about his young son and his future wife. Samanosuke Akechi, in the past, comes out of retirement in order to help his uncle Mitsuhide Akechi rebel against Nobunaga at Honnoji Temple. Samanosuke ends up in 2004 and Jacques ends up in Japan's *sengoku* period. Both have their own reasons for fighting, but they end up working towards the same goal.

The Nobunaga Trilogy is fairly heavy stuff. People die brutally, genma are slain by the dozens, and the heroes don't always win. *Onimusha* is about war, plain and simple. Samanosuke, Jubei, and Jacques were out for blood and stopped at nothing to defeat Nobunaga. Alliances were formed and broken, genma were murdered, and entire villages were massacred. The Nobunaga Trilogy could easily be considered an old-school samurai movie, full of scowling faces and hardcore themes.

ENTER A NEW ERA

With the intent of making the new storyline distinct from the old, the creators of *Onimusha: Dawn of Dreams* have given it a look and feel more like a modern anime. Comic relief abounds, whether it's coming from Jubei's earnest tomboyishness or Minokichi's bed-wetting and utter absurdity. Soki is the epitome of the cool anime hero. He's lazy, cocky, blonde, and wields two swords. He's got a mysterious past and a determined future. Hideyoshi is Soki's enemy and he lives to fight him.

REAL HISTORY

People like the *Onimusha* games because of their interesting plots, amusing characters, and the way they let you slice through 500 waves of bloodthirsty undead warriors. For those who know a little bit about Japan, though, *Onimusha* offers another level of amusement: seeing just how crazily warped the game's vision of Japanese history is. Try to imagine a game where you play a heroic Benedict Arnold attempting to keep George Washington from crossing the Delaware to awaken evil Indian spirits and gain dictatorial control of the American colonies, and you might have a vague idea of what *Onimusha* looks like from a historical standpoint.

ONIMUSHA

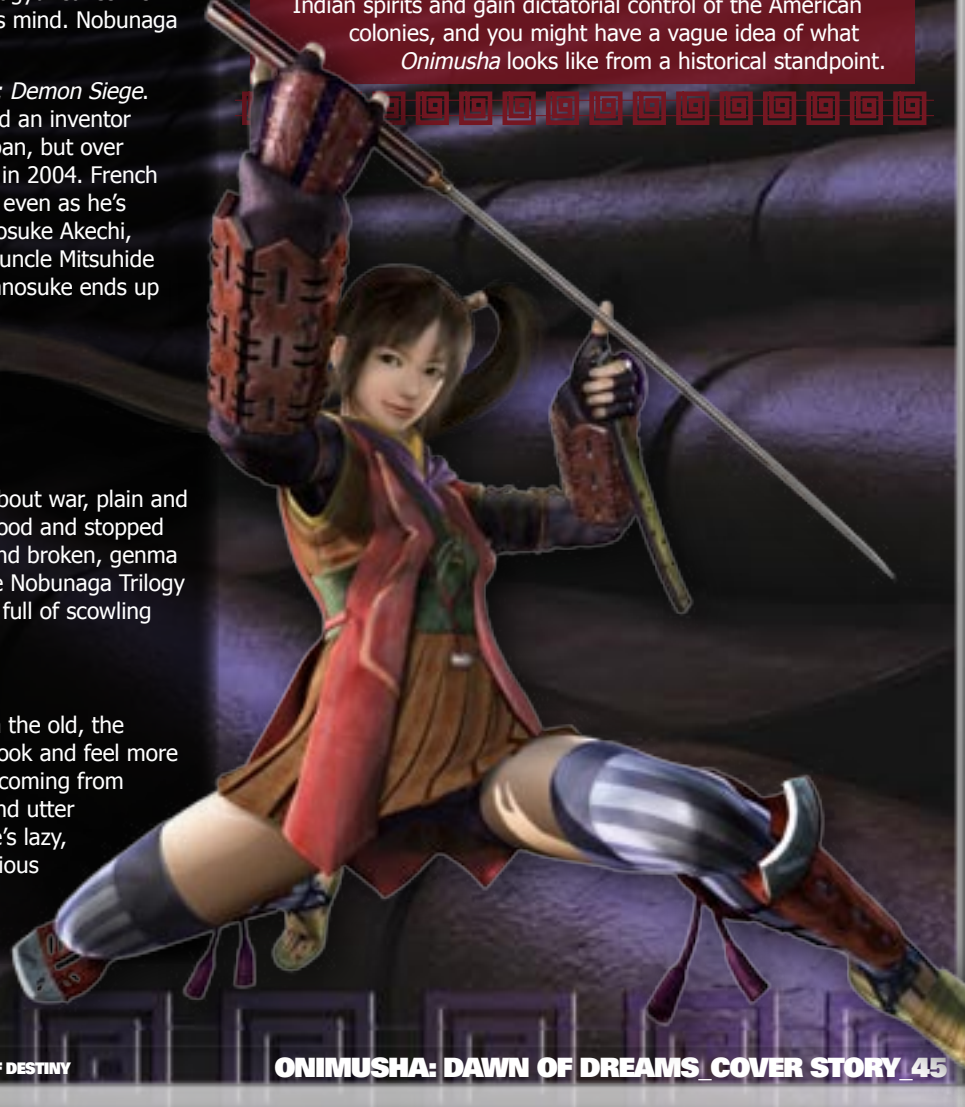
DAWN OF DREAMS

Story by 4thletter & KouAidou

The previous three *Onimusha* games all featured a famous face (in Japan, at least) to play the main character. The third game even went so far as to feature Jean Reno, of *The Professional* and *Wasabi* fame as Jacques Blanc. Not so with *Dawn of Dreams*, which instead provides us with lovingly rendered original character designs. Your main player (yes, there's more than one!), is Soki, a blonde humanoid with demon horns and two swords. He is, as the cool kids say, the very picture of awesome. He and his helpers are out to deliver Japan from Hideyoshi Toyotomi's evil and look good while they do it.

PREVIOUSLY...

Onimusha, at its most basic, is a tale of power. Nobunaga, like most villains, wanted power. He wanted Japan and he wanted an extended life, so he made a pact with demons to get it. This, of course, results in death and destruction for much of Japan. *Onimusha: Warlords* starts off the storyline simply. Samanosuke Akechi is the nephew of Mitsuhide Akechi, a former general of Nobunaga Oda. Samanosuke watched as Nobunaga was felled by an arrow on the battlefield.





Even the game design reflects this new outlook on the series. There's anime-style character designs (note Jubei's perky ponytail, Soki's horns, and Ohatsu's gun), fights against multiple enemies at once, and, er, Minokichi the pee monkey. Actually, he hails from a clan of pee monkeys. The pee monkeys exist to help you out and wet the bed, oddly enough.

We didn't make up the pee monkeys, by the way. They're really in there!

But I digress. *Dawn of Dreams* builds its story off the back of the original trilogy, but knowledge of the original stories is nowhere near necessary. *Dawn of Dreams* takes place fifteen years after the end of the Nobunaga Trilogy and stars many all-new characters. Characters from previous *Onimusha* games may appear, but you don't have to know a thing about the previous games to enjoy this one. Of course, veterans will enjoy the scattered references to the earlier storylines.

Dawn of Dreams introduces a few new gameplay features to the tried-and-true *Onimusha* formula. You can control up to two players on-screen at once. You can swap between them easily with the L2 button or even command the other player via a set of commands mapped to the D-pad. Swapping characters is instantaneous, so that you can better manage your battles. If you feel that one character is in trouble, swap over and see what you can do in that situation.

There's another feature that's new to the series: something that the developers refer to as "Free Camera." *Onimusha: Dawn of Dreams* has moved into the realm of a true 3D action game. Where the first games gave you a path to follow, with perhaps a branching path or two for an extra or powerup, here you're given the freedom to proceed as you wish. This isn't quite *Grand Theft Auto*-style sandbox gameplay, but it's certainly a step in that direction.



The *Onimusha* series has always been good-looking. *Onimusha Warlords*'s pre-rendered backgrounds were nicely detailed and sharp, the facial expressions in *Onimusha 2* were very quality, and *Onimusha 3*'s engine-based cutscenes were extremely well done. *Dawn of Dreams* follows in this respect. The animations are on-point and the attacks are wonderfully flashy. There are more CG-animated cut scenes this time around to help move the story along, and they all look great.

The character designs are fun and just this side of over-the-top. Soki is both menacing and slightly ridiculous with his two little horns, Jubei Yagyu Akane is adorable with her kunoichi gear and lone off-kilter ponytail, and Roberto is just awesome.

The backgrounds are done in a similar manner as *Onimusha 3*. Pillaged villages and towering castles alike are detailed almost to the point of clutter. There are both breakable and unbreakable barrels, boxes, carriages, and trees scattered around. You'll come across a few dead bodies on your journey through Japan, as well. Really, detail is the name of the game. Broken, smoldering, and shattered rubble abound, and the enemies are textured to the point that you can even see the teeth on the weakest of the genma you fight. The genma scream and point at you, even as they circle around, looking for a weak spot. The bosses are gigantic. One of the first enemies you meet is tall enough that he towers over you while you run around on the roof of a house. Each class of enemy has their own distinctive style, from ripped and torn samurai armor to thick, black, tea-kettle like chestplates.



REAL HISTORY

The plot and characters of the *Onimusha* games are based on a very important era of Japanese history: the unifying of Japan in the 16th century (also known as the *sengoku jidai* or "Warring States Period"). After passing hands many times over history between emperor and shogunate, control of Japan was divided into a number of autonomous provinces under the individual rule of powerful feudal lords. Each lord was capable of strictly governing his own territory, but none were strong enough to defeat the others and take full control of the country. All this finally changed when a lord named Nobunaga Oda won a surprise victory over Yoshimoto Imagawa at the battle of Okehazama in 1560, catapulting him on a campaign that would eventually lead to the unification of the whole of Japan.

Nobunaga was the first of three men who would come to be known as the three "great unifiers" of Japan. Accurately depicted in the *Onimusha* games, he was a powerful and uncompromising man who used a combination of force and diplomacy to bring all of Japan under his control. Unfortunately, his campaign fell short when he was betrayed and killed by the forces of his retainer, Mitsuhide Akechi (the uncle of the protagonist of *Onimusha: Warlords*).



INTERVIEW

Yoshinori Ono
Producer for *Onimusha: Dawn of Dreams*

HGM: What was the motivation behind introducing the new camera?

YO: Since the very beginning of the series, we've received feedback that the camera system needed to be changed. However from a development standpoint, the camera had to be fixed because the series is all about action adventure and sword gameplay. We were concerned that if the camera was constantly moved, it may make it difficult to execute critical hits, moves, etc. This time though, by reworking the graphics engine and gameplay system, we found a way to use a free camera without placing a burden on the users to press button combinations for key moves.

HGM: The new main character has horns on his head, which most likely means that he is more than human. Do you have any teasers for us regarding his origins?

YO: Japanese samurais have an armor called "Hachigane" which is worn to cover their forehead. In fact, it was used to symbolize the battalion or squad to which they belong. In this case, the horns are the main character's symbol which also lends itself to the mystery that surrounds him. Players will be able to uncover the mystery behind his identity as they play through the game.



All in all, the game seems to push the limits of the PS2 fairly well. The PS2 has aged the least gracefully of the current gen consoles, and it *does* show in the graphics, but they're enjoyable regardless.

The voice acting provides a nice complement to the graphics. We were provided with an English dub for *Dawn of Dreams* that is more hit than miss. The characters' voices are well-done, and I suspect that Minokichi's grating voice is more on purpose than accident. The only real problem is that in some cases, the voice actors will miss the inflection on a word or sentence, or pause too long mid-sentence. It's a small thing, but it can definitely take you out of the game. It's never good when you realize that the voice coming out of your TV is a person acting, rather than a character in a video game. You purists are out there are in luck, however. You can play the game with Japanese dialogue and subtitles if you so desire.

The new Free Camera system is another change for the better. You are now *much* less likely to get nailed by an offscreen enemy out of nowhere, though I'd be lying if I said it doesn't ever happen. Being able to control the camera is a great addition to the *Onimusha* games, even if it does occasionally fall prey to the usual 3D camera faults. Get used to the camera early on, and its auto-center function, or else you're going to suffer. You'll often end up surrounded by enemies, or have enemies teleport in behind you, and you'll need that coverage. There are segments featuring a fixed camera, as well. They usually tend to be in narrow corridors, so it isn't too big of a deal, but it is a little annoying when you get nailed from behind because your enemy is just off-screen.

The action is not too dissimilar from that of *Onimusha 3*. You've got an attack button, an Oni magic button, a guard button, and a kick button. You can lock-on to enemies, hit them while they're down, and pop them up into the air for air combos. You can deflect and critical (Issen), just like in the other games. You're going to be doing a lot of mashing on the Square button, but the game does a good job of keeping the attacks for your various weapons interesting and varied. There's a couple of low points, though. The block button is more or less useless once you start encountering any enemy but the rank-and-file genma. The fire-arrowing firing genma ignore your guard and everything else seems to break your guard with each attack. That's not fun at all, to be honest. There are times when you'd rather block than counter or deflect, and not being able to block the most basic of attacks is frustrating.



INTERVIEW

HGM: The previous *Onimusha* titles featured a few famous faces playing the main characters. *Onimusha: Dawn of Dreams* seems to shy away from this. Why the change?

YO: With the new action and combo features, which previous *Onimusha* did not have, we found it would be difficult to use actual actors to play these roles since they would need to perform a lot of complex and diverse moves. So we reached a point where we had to decide whether to continue with the previous *Onimusha* style of using well-known actors, or set off in a new direction. In the end, we chose the latter to keep with the tradition of the series constant evolution from its predecessor.

HGM: Is there anything about *Dawn of Dreams* that you're the most proud of?

YO: I would say I am most proud of the graphics we have achieved on the PS2. We tuned the graphics engine used in other Capcom PS2 games to the best of our abilities. I am confident that we were able to push the hardware to its limits with regards to portraying weather and lightning, etc. In addition to the graphics, we also put a greater amount of effort into the cutscenes more so than in any of the previous titles. I am confident that fans won't be disappointed.

HGM: Is there anything you wanted to put into *Dawn of Dreams* that you weren't able to due to time or manpower constraints?

YO: Even though this game is on two disks, there were a number of areas, cutscenes, mission modes, etc. that had to leave out due to space limitations. However, I think we were able to pull off almost everything we wanted in this edition.

HGM: Are there any plans for extending the *Onimusha* license into other media, such as film or television? The structure of the series would seem to lend itself very well to an anime, for example.

YO: We've announced in Japan that we are taking the *Onimusha* property to the big screen. More information will be revealed in the near future.

HGM: Is there a message that you'd like us to convey to the fans of the *Onimusha* series for you?

YO: *Onimusha: Dawn of Dreams* is a title that every gamer can enjoy, from hardcore *Onimusha* fans to those who have never played a samurai action game. Anyone who plays this can find something to suit his or her tastes because there really is something for everyone. We did our best to make this that much closer to what everyone is craving for in an action game, so I hope everyone gets a chance to play it.



REAL HISTORY

Another of Nobunaga's retainers at the time of his death was a peasant named Tokichiro Kinoshita, who changed his name to Hideyoshi Hashiba while serving under Nobunaga. Though peasants were normally not allowed such a high station in the military, Hideyoshi was a brilliant strategist who served Nobunaga well during his early campaigns. He remained loyal even after Nobunaga's death, leading a retaliation against Akechi for his betrayal, and later finished Nobunaga's work by bringing Japan under his own control. He was granted the surname Toyotomi, and though his low birth prevented him from taking the title of Shogun, Hideyoshi's rule over the country during his lifetime was unquestioned.

While Nobunaga never actually rose from the dead to command a demon army, Hideyoshi (whose monkey-like portrayal in the game was true to his real appearance) was in fact thought by some to have gone rather mad during the later years of his reign, as depicted in *Dawn of Dreams*. His madness didn't entail spreading demonic cherry trees over Japan, but it did involve the brutal torture of his nephew's family, severe persecution against upstart Christian converts, and two unsuccessful invasions of China that left Korea completely devastated.





Along these same lines, the hit detection can be a little wonky at times. You have a move you can do where you stab a downed enemy. It's useful for increasing the damage on a series of attacks, upping your kill combo, or simply finishing off an enemy. However, there are times when the game refuses to recognize that you are standing next to a downed enemy, causing you to slash mindlessly at the air until the enemy stands up. What's up with that?



The story in *Onimusha: Dawn of Dreams* is interesting, but slow to build to a crescendo. You're going to be four stages into the game before you start getting anything more than slight hints of the game's plot. There are cutscenes that introduce each stage that help this problem, but not quite enough. The cutscenes are a nice touch, though. They set the stage for the level, give you a bit of info on your goal and generally just provide needed background for the game.

You have a hideout that you can access between stages of the game. Actually, there's more than one hideout, but they all look exactly the same, even down to the stray cat that lives in it, no matter what city Soki claims to be in. That kind of sucks, but the hideout itself is extremely useful. It allows you to revisit beaten stages with different characters, save, upgrade your weapons, combine items, and interact with your other characters. You can speak to them about their past, the mission you just finished, or even upcoming plot points. Mixed in with these weighty subjects are talks about Soki's former flames,



REAL HISTORY

When Hideyoshi eventually died of his illness, he entrusted his retainer Ieyasu Tokugawa to raise his infant son, Hidenori, to succeed him. Instead, Ieyasu betrayed and later killed Hidenori to take power for himself. After defeating his last rival at the battle of Sekigahara, Ieyasu was declared shogun, with almost absolute rule over Japan. Despite his somewhat questionable rise to power, though, Ieyasu managed to set up a peaceful regime that would last 200 years. Does this mean that we'll eventually see a third *Onimusha* trilogy, featuring a villainous Ieyasu manipulating the genma to establish an iron-fisted rule over Japan? Only time will tell.

So where does Jubei Yagyu figure into all of this? Well, he doesn't, really. The real Jubei was actually born well into the reign of Ieyasu Tokugawa, some 20 years after Nobunaga's death, and was not an important historic figure in his own right. He was, however, part of a samurai family of some note (his father, Munenori, served under Ieyasu at Sekigahara) and an amazing warrior in his own right. Jubei became an extremely prominent character in Japanese folklore due to a period of time when he disappeared from official records and his whereabouts were unknown. It is from these stories that the Jubei of *Onimusha* derives his origins (and trademark one-eyed visage), but unfortunately, the legend has outgrown the man behind it.



the genuinely interesting history of the Jubei name, and comments on Jubei's lack of breasts and tomboyishness. The game runs the gamut, mixing vital info with trivia. It's a nice system, as the random trivial facts make you see the characters as fully three dimensional, instead of cardboard cutouts like "Ninja Girl" or "Annoying Sidekick." It's nice to play a game where every piece of info you get isn't necessarily central to the plot.

Onimusha: Dawn of Dreams is really a total package. There are some areas where you'll obviously need the help of people you've yet to meet, and revisiting those areas to gain bonuses or new weapons or scenes. The voice acting is well-done, overall, and the graphics are about at the limit of what the PS2 can pull off. The action stays frantic, the bosses are suitably difficult, and there's plenty of weapon upgrading and item combining to keep you busy. *Dawn of Dreams* moves further and further away from *Onimusha's Resident Evil in Feudal Japan* roots and closer to being a true action game. Barring a few missteps, *Dawn of Dreams* is definitely a step in the right direction. It'll be nice to see this iteration of the series spawn its own trilogy and hopefully take advantage of the next-gen systems. If the developers can pull off these graphics on this hardware, the only place for them to go is up.



FINAL SCORE :
4 of 5

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HARDCORE REVIEWS

- 54 MSSaga
- 56 Rub Rabbits
- 58 Samurai Shodown V
- 59 Winning Eleven 9
- 60 Devil May Cry 3 SE
- 61 PQ: Practical Intelligence Quotient
- 62 Midway Classics Extended Play
- 63 Ape Escape 3
- 64 Ape Escape Academy
- 65 The Sims 2
- 66 Arena Football
- 67 Age of Empires DS
- 68 Final Fantasy Advance
- 69 Teen Titans
- 70 Megaman X Collection
- 71 Kingdom of Paradise
- 72 World Championship Poker 2
- 73 Gauntlet - Seven Sorrows

MS SAGA

A NEW DAWN

Review by **Lynara**

Publisher : Bandai Genre(s) : RPG
Developer : Bandai Category : Domo Arigato, Mister Roboto
Release Date : February 2006 # of players : 1
Rating : E10+; Fantasy Violence, Language, Suggestive Themes

Most all *Gundam* games suck. *Gundam* fans are the first people who will admit this, just before describing which game was their favorite in spite of how much it, in all likelihood, sucked. Now that *MS Saga*'s here, though, *Gundam* fans can be a little less sheepish about their favorite franchise's video game track record. *MS Saga* is the first and only *Gundam* game so far that can be fairly and truly called good. Perhaps not incidentally, it's an RPG designed to tell a stand-alone story accessible to any player, instead of an el cheapo action game tie-in. You don't need to know anything in particular about *Gundam* to sit down with *MS Saga* and have a good time. Everything is neatly explained in the game itself, right down to the initially silly-sounding title.

In *MS Saga* you follow Tristan, an impulsive and angry young man traumatized after watching giant robots destroy the orphanage where he grew up. He resolves to make his own giant robot and use it to kick the evil giant robots' collective metal asses. As is the way of angry young men in RPGs and *Gundam* series alike, Tristan's quest ends up intersecting with a world-changing battle between nations and gathering a motley new circle of friends around him. *MS Saga* is fortunately less a battle between good and evil than a struggle over control of the G Systems, devices created by a prior civilization to synthesize energy into any form of matter the user desires. The way the story plays out somehow manages to be an entirely typical RPG and an entirely typical *Gundam* story at the same time, with plenty of betrayals, noble sacrifices, and dramatic speeches to go around.

MS Saga boasts a strictly turn-based combat system heavily influenced by *Dragon Quest VIII* and PlayStation mecha RPG *Xenosaga*. Of the six units in your party, the three active ones appear in the familiar line across the screen to face off against the one to five enemies that spawn to face you. You can opt to attack with melee weapons like swords and axes, which give the enemy a chance to counter-attack, or shoot at them with ranged weapons that do slightly less damage. Every attack consumes energy, which your robot generates so much of per turn. You can spend energy as fast as it accumulates, or save it up to spend on more powerful techniques called Boosts. How and when you use your character's Boost techniques is at the heart of the game's combat strategy, which can become deeply engrossing once you're far enough into the game to have lots of options to choose from.

Boosts and how to best exploit them are also going to weigh heavily on your mind when you design your characters' robots, called Mobile Suits. While the original designs for each Suit hail from some *Gundam* show or another, *MS Saga* lets you mix and match the parts as you see fit. Different parts alter the characteristics of your Suit, so you can tweak a machine to be a speed demon, high-HP tanker, a powerful sniper, or anything else you can envision. Each part and weapon you put on



Who Came to the Party...

One of the first questions most fans ask about *MS Saga* once they know the premise is about which *Gundam* series got their mecha designs included in the selection. It's a question with an answer more complex than it might seem at first blush.

The vast bulk of the mecha designs in the game come from the "Universal Century" *Gundam* series, which all take place at different points along the Universal Century (or UC) timeline. Specifically, we spotted machines from *Mobile Suit Gundam*, the *08th MS Team OAV*, *Zeta Gundam*, *ZZ Gundam*, and the film *Char's Counterattack*.

There are also machines from two "alternate" *Gundam* timelines represented in *MS Saga*, although both shows combined contribute perhaps less than a dozen mecha to the game. Fans of *Gundam Wing* and *G Gundam G* will have to wait through most of the game, but eventually will see a few of their show's most famous robots make appearances.

A few shows got the nod from *MS Saga* despite getting snubbed when it came to mecha designs. The character designs for the game were provided by *Turn-A Gundam* (and *Street Fighter*) artist Akira Yasuda, and the post-apocalyptic elements of the story may remind many fans of *Gundam X*. Both of these titles are somewhat obscure to American fans, but checking them out can explain a lot of where *MS Saga*'s odd premise came from.

your Mobile Suit affects its appearance in the game, both on the world map and in combat. You can trick out your suits with your own color schemes and custom names if you so wish, and its easy to lose hours of game-play to simply screwing around with the way your team's Mobile Suits look. Even without this, the total playtime is in the 40-60 hour range, so if you do pick up *MS Saga* you'll be at it for awhile.

If the game has any real weakness, it's in just how similar it is to *Dragon Quest VIII*, and how much it lacks in comparison. Right out of the gate, the graphics are much cruder and the music bland and cheesy in comparison. Perhaps worst of all is *MS Saga*'s static camera, which makes getting a close-up look at anything pretty much impossible. Localization for the title overall isn't bad, but it entirely fails when it comes to adding in the English voice acting. Bandai only added voice acting to the pre-rendered cut-scenes, but the vast bulk of *MS Saga*'s cut-scenes are real time. You can easily go fifteen or twenty hours at a time without hearing any voice acting at all, and when you do, it'll be one or two lines.



Second Opinion

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

A solid story, excellent battle mechanic and a cute girl with a penchant for corsets makes for one fine game. *MS Saga* is a great way to get your CRPG fix.

FINAL SCORE : **4 of 5**

Still, even players who just sank ninety hours into *Dragon Quest VIII* will probably find *MS Saga* a fun and rewarding RPG.

Customizing your Mobile Suits is fun, and the story has enough drama to be compelling without ever taking itself too seriously to be enjoyed. In many ways, *MS Saga* serves as an ideal introduction to the basic ideas and archetypes of the sometimes unapproachably dense *Gundam* franchise.

Score: 4 of 5



The Rub Rabbits!

PLATFORM NINTENDO DS

Review by Syriel

Publisher : Sega
Developer : Sonic Team
Release Date : 2/7/2006
Rating : TEEN; Mild Violence, Suggestive Themes

Genre(s) : Party
Category : Sexy
of players : 1-4 (via DS wireless)

When the Nintendo DS first launched, one of the premiere titles was Sonic Team's *Feel the Magic*. This suggestively titled game made innovative use of all the DS's functions without feeling gimmicky. Perhaps its only shortfall was its length, as it could be beaten rather quickly. Sega has corrected that mistake with *The Rub Rabbits*, resulting in another addition to the DS's rapidly growing list of "must have" games.

As in the first game, the ultimate goal of *The Rub Rabbits* is to win the heart of your beloved. Standing in your way is a veritable army of rival suitors as well as another gal that has her sights set on you. It won't be easy, but hey, what relationship is?

Each mini-game is relatively basic, but that doesn't mean they are easy. You'll need a quick hand and a keen eye if you want to come out on top. One of the more memorable games is called "Virus" and has you trying to fight an infestation of pop-ups on your girlfriend's computer. You have to close all of the windows with the evil bunny, while leaving the happy bunnies alone.

Some of the games even require you to rotate or flip the DS in order to change the screen orientation. Although it seems odd at first, the alternate perspectives allow for some innovative gameplay mechanics that would be otherwise unavailable.

Completing the main game unlocks a number of



alternate outfits for your girlfriend, and gives you the ability to replay any of the mini-games at your leisure. In addition to the unlockable fare, the game also allows players to design an original dress and



INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR, TAKUMI YOSHINAGA

HGM: How difficult was it to keep *The Rub Rabbits* feeling original and not simply rehashing *Feel the Magic*?

TY: I really though there were two areas for us to explore. One is multiplayer, secondly is in the single player part where we really take advantage of the DS, above and beyond just using the touch screen.

HGM: The multiplayer component of the game has a heavy focus on co-op. Why did you choose to emphasize co-op over competitive play and why do you think most games overlook co-op?

TY: Really, in coming together with the co-op modes, it was the idea of getting a bond between the body and spirit. What that means is you really connect more with the people that you play with. Even when you think of the multiplayer battle modes, or the twister mode, you have to really talk to one another. That creates more of a community. In terms of other games, well this game is about love. In that respect, it is more about co-op.

HGM: One of the complaints about *Feel the Magic* was its length. What's going to keep players playing in *The Rub Rabbits*?

TY: For one, there is the multiplayer aspect, but when it came to making sure the single player wasn't repetitive it really came down to exploring every feature of the DS and seeing how to best utilize it. Whether you're rotating the DS, using the buttons or the microphone, it really allowed us to explore beyond the touch screen.

HGM: Out of all the mini-games in *The Rub Rabbits* which one are you most proud of? Which is your favorite?

TY: My favorite mode is the Hullabaloo mode, the twister mode. That's the one feature that I am most proud of.



the same time. Each inputs their vital statistics, answers a few questions and then the two of you cut the wedding cake. The resulting screen reveals your compatibility as a couple and specifics about your virtual child.

Finally, there's Hullabaloo, which is possibly the best part of the game. The best way to describe it is "Twister for your hands." The game will generate button patterns that must be held down as the DS is passed from player to player. Accidentally let go and you're eliminated. Yes, it's basic. Yes, it's a simple premise. Pull this one out at a party though and you're guaranteed to have fun.

Difficult to classify, but easy to play, *The Rub Rabbits* is more than just a sequel to *Feel the Magic*. It's a thoroughly enjoyable and addicting gem that thrives on originality. If you own a DS, you *must* own this.

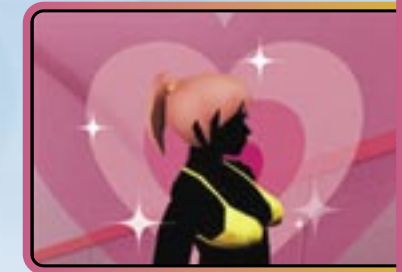
Rating : 5 of 5

bikini pattern for the woman in their lives.

Although *Rub Rabbits* is plenty amusing in its own right, the liberal use of creative innuendo throughout the game is simply icing on the cake. From the first moment you turn on the system, you're bound to be chuckling. Even the standard warning message has been tweaked, just for this title: "Warning: Continuous stroking, blowing and poking could lead to unwanted attention in public places."

Multiplayer options have not been overlooked, giving players the chance to battle it out with others, exchange babies or even make some new ones! Up to four players can compete in the single card Battle Mode which consists of selected mini-games. One of the more amusing ones to try in a group is the Boat mini-game. The object is to be the last man with the girl on board. Simple enough, until you realize that maneuvering is just like paddling a canoe. Instead of using the d-pad to navigate, you must use the stylus to "paddle." Forget to alternate sides and you'll end up spinning in a circle.

Baby Making is a personality matching game that requires two players to hold the DS at



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

Stylish, sexy and satisfying, this irreverent romp on the DS is worth every penny.

FINAL SCORE :
5 of 5

REVIEW

SAMURAI SHODOWN



PLATFORM

Review by Racewing

Publisher : SNK
 Developer : SNK
 Release Date : 1/10/2006
 Rating : TEEN

Genre(s) : Fighting
 Category : 2D One-on-One Slashy-Slashy
 # of players : 1-2

I love *Samurai Shodown 2* more than most people should. I still think it — and the first game should have been ported to one of today's systems long before half the fighting games out there right now. Yes, I'm one of those people.

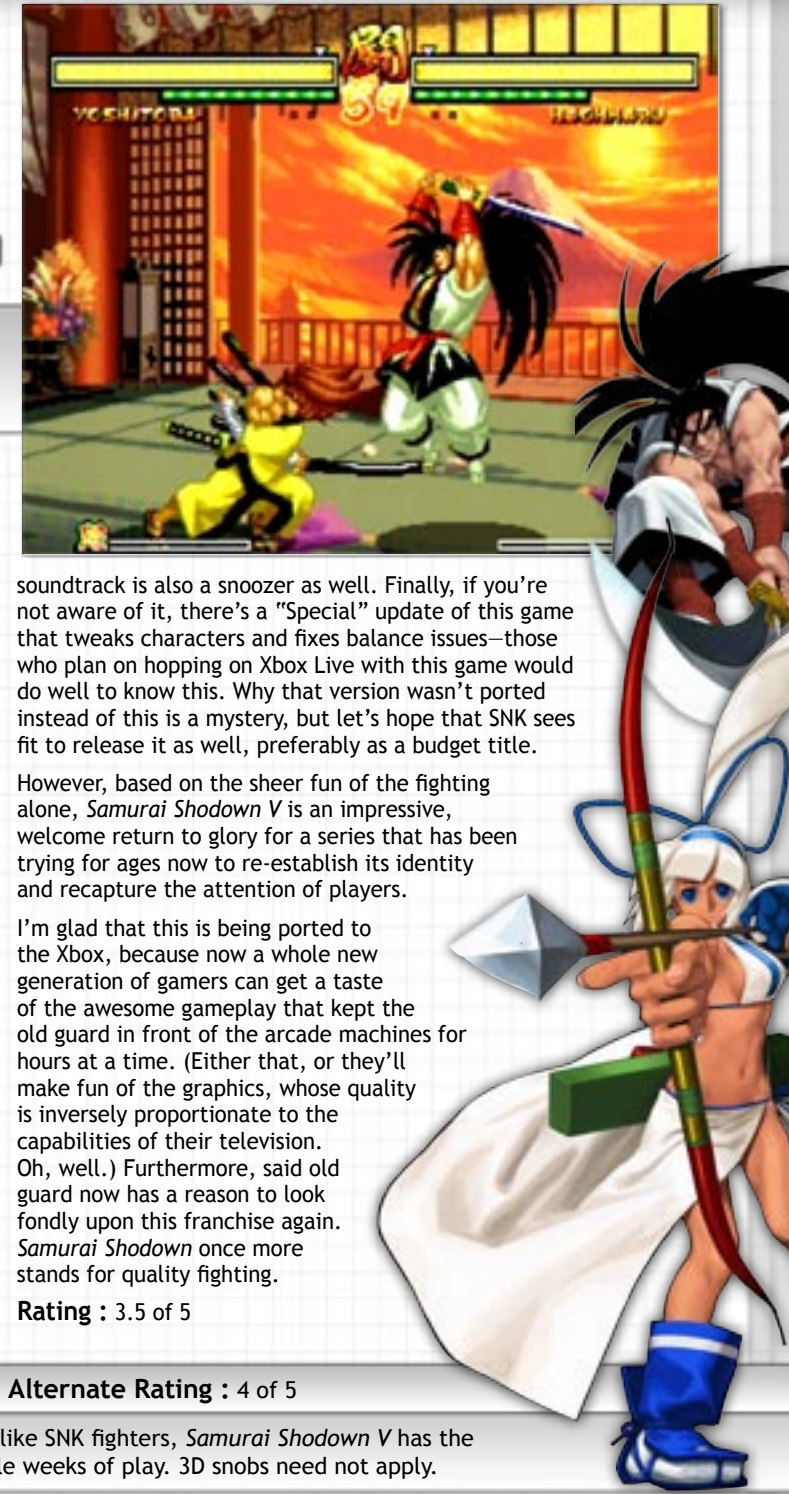
Can you really blame us, though? You had great music, a fun fighting system, a cool storyline, quirky characters with attitude, and the joy of hacking people to death with swords—sometimes in half. Back then, you needed nothing else.

Samurai Shodown 2 was followed with sequels which tried to add features that many players, including myself, found intimidating, confusing, or boring. Whether it was creating two versions of characters, or taking the series into 3D, a bit of the magic seemed to have been lost.

Enter *Samurai Shodown V*, which at last rolls back unneeded features (or turns Bust versions of old characters into new ones), and concentrates on enhancing the core fighting system which made the series great in the first place. The functionality of the rage meter, for example, has been expanded, allowing for strategic use. You can use it normally, or bet the farm whenever you wish, giving yourself unlimited super power for a short time—but once it runs out, that's it for your meter for the rest of the match. There's also an action button, which can be used for special maneuvers such as squatting and hopping. Between this and the massive amount of older-game fanservice the developers packed in, *Samurai Shodown* is, thankfully, fun again.

Not everything is roses, mind you—the load time is atrocious, even by the standards currently set by 2D sprite fighters on optical discs. You can almost take a nap between matches. Also, unless you're willing to repeatedly set your Xbox's system language (and with it, the entire game) to Japanese, you'll be hearing an Americanized announcer so bland that even a dub-defender like myself wants him benched. The

FINAL SCORE :
3.75 of 5



soundtrack is also a snoozer as well. Finally, if you're not aware of it, there's a "Special" update of this game that tweaks characters and fixes balance issues—those who plan on hopping on Xbox Live with this game would do well to know this. Why that version wasn't ported instead of this is a mystery, but let's hope that SNK sees fit to release it as well, preferably as a budget title.

However, based on the sheer fun of the fighting alone, *Samurai Shodown V* is an impressive, welcome return to glory for a series that has been trying for ages now to re-establish its identity and recapture the attention of players.

I'm glad that this is being ported to the Xbox, because now a whole new generation of gamers can get a taste of the awesome gameplay that kept the old guard in front of the arcade machines for hours at a time. (Either that, or they'll make fun of the graphics, whose quality is inversely proportionate to the capabilities of their television. Oh, well.) Furthermore, said old guard now has a reason to look fondly upon this franchise again. *Samurai Shodown* once more stands for quality fighting.

Rating : 3.5 of 5

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

An SNK fighter for those who like SNK fighters, *Samurai Shodown V* has the roster and the depth to handle weeks of play. 3D snobs need not apply.

PLATFORM PlayStation 2



REVIEW

Winning Eleven 9

Review by Shoegazer



Publisher : Konami
 Developer : Konami
 Release Date : 2/7/2006
 Rating : EVERYONE

Genre(s) : Sports
 Category : Soccer/Futbol
 # of players : 1-2;
 Online Multiplayer

Hands down, Konami's *Winning Eleven* series is the most dominating force within the soccer game market. Trouble is, that's only overseas. Despite several quality attempts to take down EA's *FIFA* franchise, dating back as far as the Nintendo 64, Konami has come up short in the United States. With the rising popularity of soccer on this side of the pond, will 2006 finally be the year that *Winning Eleven* breaks through?

As anticipated, *Winning Eleven 9* is as technically sound as they come, and retains the same intuitive gameplay design that long time fans have been accustomed to. In fact, despite being a hardcore soccer simulation, *WE9* could not be easier for a newbie to pick up and play. New additions to the series such as online play, and complete managerial control over your team in the Master League mode, are sure to please seasoned veterans. You can create your own team from scratch and handle day-to-day operations such as negotiating contracts, competing in professional leagues, and even player training drills. PS2 owners also get a special treat, as they can trade information back and forth with the PSP version of the game.

Just as with any other game, it takes a few minutes getting used to the controller functions, but the core gameplay can be quickly digested. Once you've figured out the controls, however, is ultimately when you'll decide whether or not this is the right soccer game for you. There is a great deal of strategy involved within the game of soccer, and the more casual gamer may not have the patience to learn and develop these strategies. Be warned though—true to its hardcore nature—*WE9* is completely unforgiving to players

unwilling or unable to develop strategy. Cheap fouls will get you yellow carded every time, and without pre-meditation behind your passes, you're going to experience many frustrating interceptions.

Unlike most other sports games, your key to success in soccer is to play a strong defense above all else, which can at times make *WE9* feel boring. It's not like the NFL where you have the excitement of marching down the field and scoring a touchdown several times a game. Be prepared to endure many games with a final score of 2-1, 1-0, or even scoreless draws. The A.I. is merciless on both sides of the ball.

The bottom line here is how important the FIFA license is to you, and how much it adds to your enjoyment of the game. Not discrediting EA's constantly improving *FIFA* franchise, but *Winning Eleven* is the better all-around game once again. If you have enough love of the game to own two titles, then you have nothing to fear by adding *WE9* to your library. If you don't need two soccer titles, then you have a very tough decision on your hands. In addition to the lack of a FIFA license, *WE9* also suffers from a lack of "bells and whistles" thanks to outdated graphics and presentation. Then again, that's never really what the series has been about, has it? It's always been about a great game of futbol, which once again, it has in spades.

Rating :
 4 of 5

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

Winning Eleven is the *Fire Pro Wrestling* of the soccer set in every way. It isn't the prettiest, but its gameplay is leaps and bounds ahead of the competition. Well done.



FINAL SCORE :
4 of 5

Devil May Cry 3 DANTE'S AWAKENING Special Edition

Review by **Sardius**

Publisher : Capcom
 Developer : Capcom Production Studio 1
 Release Date : 01/24/2005
 Rating : M for Mature

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

We know what you're thinking: a slightly upgraded version of a successful game...released by Capcom of all people? It may seem farfetched, but put aside your disbelief for a moment and you might want to check this one out. While *Street Fighter II Turbo* for the Super Nintendo may have retailed for \$59.99, this improved version of *Devil May Cry 3* is being released as part of Sony's Greatest Hits series, and will only set you back twenty bucks.

Last year's release of *Devil May Cry 3* marked a return to glory for the series after 2003's disappointing *Devil May Cry 2*. Building upon everything that made the original *Devil May Cry* great, *DMC3* was a difficult but rewarding action title that placed equal emphasis on both style and skill. *Devil May Cry 3: Special Edition* expands on this with a small number of extras to make the package even more appealing.

Most significantly, *DMC3SE* fixes the original release's issues concerning difficulty. Many gamers complained that the game was ridiculously hard even on the unlockable "easy" difficulty, and for good reason; the US version of *DMC3* defaulted to "hard" difficulty, and "easy" was only slightly easier than that. Thankfully, *Special Edition* irons out these problems and features an easy setting that is actually, well, easy.

DMC3SE also introduces a few new modes, some of which may be of value to *DMC3* veterans but are ultimately of little consequence. Speed freaks can try their hand at Turbo mode, which speeds up gameplay slightly. Bloody Palace also makes a return from *Devil May Cry 2*, offering a stage-based fight against a limitless number of monsters. Finally, Digest mode allows you to view any cutscene in the game, meaning you can now watch that awesome part where Dante rides around on the rocket anytime you want.

Unfortunately, the biggest addition to *Devil May Cry 3: Special Edition* is one of the most disappointing. *DMC3SE's* option to play



as Dante's twin brother Vergil may be an exciting prospect for hardcore *Devil May Cry* fans, but Vergil's mode simply consists of a new character swapped into the game's original 20 missions, with no between-stage cutscenes. A bigger problem is that Vergil is not a very fun character to use -- compared to the fast, frantic gunplay found in Dante's game, Vergil's moves are slower and harder to chain effectively. Using Vergil is a fun diversion for awhile, but his game does not contain enough depth to qualify as a major selling point.

The somewhat disappointing quality of its extras makes *Devil May Cry 3: Special Edition* difficult to recommend to those who already own the original release. Compared to the additions found in other Greatest Hits upgrades like *Silent Hill 2* and *Virtua Fighter Evolution*, *DMC3SE* comes up short. At its heart, however, *Devil May Cry 3* is an excellent game, and for those who were put off by the original release's unbalanced difficulty, this version makes for an excellent purchase.

Rating : 4 of 5

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

Although not much of an upgrade, *Devil May Cry 3 SE* is still a fantastic action game. Pick it up if you haven't already.

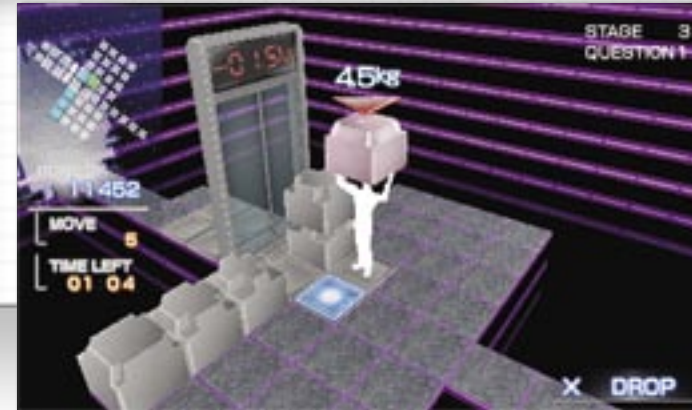
PlayStation 2
GREATEST HITS
EXCLUSIVE

PQ

Practical Intelligence Quotient™

Review by **Roger Danish**

Publisher : D3 Publisher of America, Inc. Genre(s) : Puzzle
 Developer : Now Production, Inc. Category : Problem Solving
 Release Date : 1/10/2006
 Rating : EVERYONE
 # of players : 1

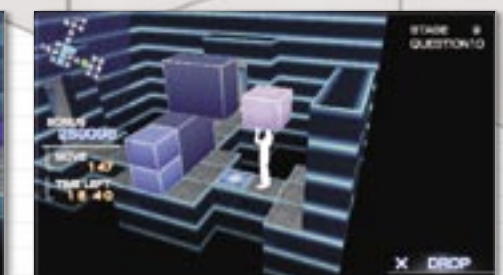


I'm a sucker for puzzle games. Like everyone else on the planet, I fell pretty hard for *Tetris* back in the day (the arcade-perfect Tengen version for the NES, not Nintendo's evil watered-down clone). Even though I have stacks upon stacks of next generation games piled up on my desk, I often find myself playing simple time suckers, such as *Bejeweled*, *Bust a Move*, *Yahtzee* and even *Solitaire* (ok, I know these last two are more games of chance than "puzzle" games, but I think you get my drift). So, when a new puzzle game appears on the scene, my interests are usually piqued. With D3's aptly titled *PQ: Practical Intelligence Quotient* for the PSP, I was more than happy to tackle the review and take a whack at testing my admittedly limited intelligence.

PQ's selling point is that it tests your intelligence by gauging memory, calculation, planning and motor function skills as you attempt to work your brain around each of the game's 100 obstacle-filled rooms. The main gist of the game is to guide your silhouetted avatar through a series of challenging 3D rooms and get to the exit in the least amount of time and steps possible. The first few rooms are a cinch and will have you thinking you missed your calling as the next Albert Einstein, but the difficulty and challenge ramp up quickly as more and more objects appear to hinder your progress and tax your brain, leaving you a twitching, whimpering mess, balled up into the fetal position in the corner of your room. Obstacles, such as switches, escalators, guards, conveyor belts, revolving doors and lasers will have you scratching your head, while the pressure of getting through each room quickly and with the least amount of moves possible adds a layer of anxiety and tension.

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

Not quite as fun, or intuitive, as the PSOne classic *Intelligent Cube*, but puzzle fans ready to put down *Lumines* should definitely give it a look.

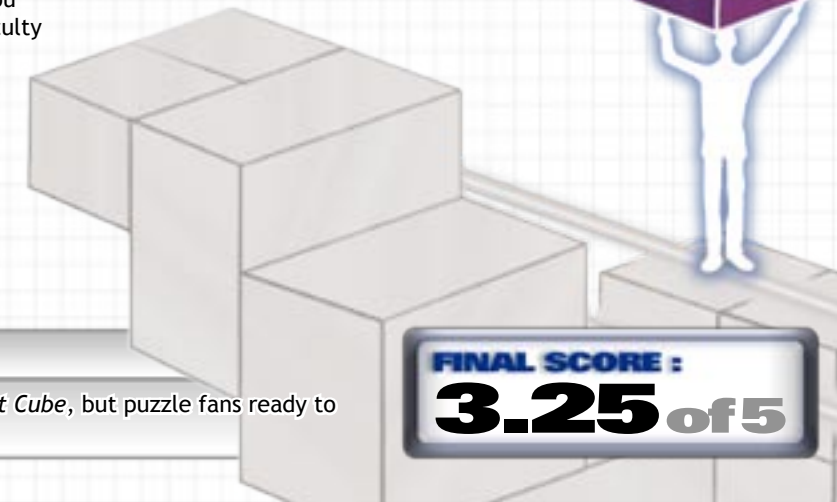
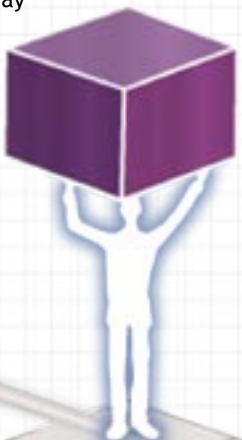


Visually, *PQ* is attractive and sharp in a stark, futuristic kind of way (it's very reminiscent of *Metal Gear Solid's* VR Missions). In fact, maybe because of the similar titles or the unique graphic style, I was sure this was a sequel of sorts to SCEA's *Intelligent Qube* titles (it's not). However, this unique look and 3D presentation has a downside. The camera, which can be controlled by the PSP's L and R buttons, often gets in the way. Even though you can rotate it, there are often times you'll find your view obscured no matter which way you turn it.

It's always refreshing to find something different and original out there, especially in this day and age of licenses, franchises and sequel-after-sequel of "intellectual properties." *PQ* is not a perfect puzzler—in addition to the sometimes annoying camera, a bit of repetitiveness starts to creep in halfway through, but it's fun, challenging, and makes you think. What a novel concept.

Rating : 3.5 of 5

FINAL SCORE :

3.25 of 5

MIDWAY ARCADE TREASURES EXTENDED PLAY



Review by Roger Danish

Publisher : Midway
Developer : Digital Eclipse
Release Date : 12/2005
Rating : E for Everyone

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



For those of us who don't want to waste the time, effort and energy to hack our PSP, retro compilations, such as Namco's *Namco Museum Battle Collection*, Capcom's upcoming *Capcom Classics Collection: Remixed* (see elsewhere in this issue for the preview) and Midway's *Midway Arcade Treasures: Extended Play* can be just the thing. When done right, having these classics downsized to the PSP's ultra-sharp and vibrant screen and in the palm of your hand are really what retro-gaming is all about. But, when done wrong (or even half-assed), you have to wonder why the publisher even bothered in the first place. Unfortunately, such is the case with Midway's disappointing PSP effort.

On the surface, Midway's compilation is an almost perfect collection of retro classics. The list includes *720*, *Arch Rivals*, *Championship Sprint*, *Cyberball 2020*, *Defender*, *Gauntlet*, *Joust*, *Klax*, *Marble Madness*, *Paperboy*, *Rampage*, *Rampart*, *Sinistar*, *Spy Hunter*, *Toobin*, *Wizard of Wor*, *Xenophobe*, *Xybots*, and *Mortal Kombat I, II, and 3* (oddly enough, a few of Midway's classics, such as *Smash TV*, *Robotron 2084* and even *NARC* didn't make the cut). To top it off, the addition of ad-hoc wireless play should have made this title an easy recommendation. However, from the moment you boot up the title menu, it becomes fairly self-evident that this is a quick and dirty cash-in.

Overall, the package is disappointingly basic, offering little in the way of bells and whistles, options or any extras. One of my complaints with *Extended Play* is that it has no option to allow you to orient the size of the game screen to your liking. This leads to some questionable and odd choices in display, such as stretching *Spy Hunter* to fit the PSP's widescreen aspect ratio (versus allowing you to rotate the game screen vertically), or squishing *Sinistar* into a box in the center, rendering it almost

unplayable. Adding insult to injury, many of the game's sound effects and audio are just plain wrong.

Unfortunately, the above complaints are not the only things wrong with this title. Most disappointing

of all is the shoddy emulation of the *Mortal Kombat* games. Unacceptably long load times, frame skipping and major sound glitches plague these titles (especially *MKII* and *3*). When you consider that these are arguably the most desirable titles on the compilation, you have to wonder what Midway and Digital Eclipse were thinking. It's not like the developers at Digital Eclipse, who are the kings of retro emulation for consoles, don't know what they're doing. They also produced *Capcom Classics Collection*, which has all the aforementioned frills that this compilation is missing without the graphic and sound glitches.

Ultimately, I would recommend passing on *Midway Arcade Treasures: Extended Play* and go with one of the others — especially *Capcom Classics Collection: Remixed*—which is so much better in basically every way. If you just have to have *Defender* or *Joust* on your PSP, then go ahead, but don't say we didn't warn you!

Rating : 2.5 of 5

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

MAT sure has a solid roster to choose from, but at \$30, only pick it up if you need to have your classics on the go.



I'll make you guys a deal. Buy this game, and I won't make any unfunny "barrel of monkeys" jokes anywhere in this review. Good? Good. Let's get started.

In this brand new installment of the *Ape Escape* saga, Specter, the "somewhat dangerous" ultra-intelligent monkey, is back once again to try and take over the world. This time, his legion of monkey minions are broadcasting TV shows that are so inane that they really do rot peoples' brains. With the normal monkey-catching team from the original games having fallen victim (and Natalie as the only survivor), it's up to the brand new Japanese B-Team of Kei and Yumi to save the world with a style all their own. But can they hold their own against a human scientist and the fearsome Freaky Monkey Five?

If you haven't turned the page after reading all that, this is the game for you!

It's them against a bazillion monkeys, and on their side are myriad gadgets and vehicles which do everything from helping you move through water, to moving at super speed, and finding and stunning monkeys. If that weren't enough, early into the game our heroes are given Viewtiful Joe-style morphers (thus pushing game's kickass-meter

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

Minor camera issues and a rushed hack job of a localization keep it from being perfect, but *Ape Escape 3* is a joy to play from beginning to end.



Publisher : SCEA
Developer : SCE
Release Date : 1/17/2006
Rating : Everyone 10+; (Cartoon Violence, Crude Humor)

Genre(s) : Action
Category : Monkey-Catching *Insanity!*
of players : 1

into the red) that allow them to transform into themed heroes with their own innate powers.

With tons of pop culture and television parody, the game's humor level's off the scale, and so is the action. Even with all of these gadgets and transformations, catching monkeys is no easy job, simply because they don't want to be caught, darn it all. They'll no-sell your attacks, they'll get mad, they'll knock gadgets out of your hands, they'll steal your gadgets, and they'll run away from you a good deal faster than you can catch up to them unless you use your wits. The best part is that you'll be laughing the entire time, because the monkeys themselves are just so unpredictable and insane.

The game has lots of extra movies, sounds, and goodies that can be unlocked and viewed, used or played at your leisure. Much of the unlocking is integrated into the gameplay, such as being able to film parody movies starring the monkeys. This ensures that getting extra things isn't a chore, nor does it ever feel tacked on. The addition of what may well be the ultimate unlockable, a *Metal Gear Solid* tie-in/parody game, only sweetens the deal.

It's appreciation of the little things that make *Ape Escape 3* so fun, rather than any "paradigm shifts" or "breakthrough experiences." This is a classic example of adding more—lots more—to a game's concept, while still keeping the gameplay intact and fun. The end result is not only the only instance in which monkeys still make for good comedy, but a great game worth plunking down cash for.

In short, it's more fun than a barrel of monkeys.

Okay, so I lied. Buy it anyway.

Rating : 5 of 5

FINAL SCORE :
2.5 of 5

FINAL SCORE :
4.75 of 5



APE ESCAPE ACADEMY

Review by James

Publisher : SCEA
Developer : Shift
Release Date : 02/18/2006
Rating : E for Everyone

Genre(s) : Mini-games
Category : Ape Filled Action
of players : 1-2



Achieving world domination isn't easy. Just ask Spectre, who's tried more than a few times to dominate the planet with his monkey hordes. Having never once achieved this goal, he decides to put his troops through a training regimen designed to hone each monkey's body and mind into a soldier worthy of his command. Graduate from *Ape Escape Academy* and you too can be part of an army destined to rule the world!

This is done through mini-games, of course. Games of reflex, pattern recognition, balance, timing, and even general knowledge will turn you into a crack monkey troop if only you can survive the years of training and make it past the deadly tic-tac-toe board that make up each "year" of study.

Basically, each set of mini-games is taught by a teacher, one of the regular *Ape Escape* bosses from the earlier games, who has control of a 3x3 grid. Each square has a game on it, chosen randomly from the pool of over forty available, and successfully completing it earns an "O". The object of each year is to earn a set number of rows (horizontal, vertical, or diagonal) rather than just succeed at a certain number of games, and it's actually trickier than it seems. Losing just one corner knocks off three rows out of a possible eight, while the center spot is responsible for four. Add in not being able to quit out of a year once started and it's very easy to end up forced to complete a hopeless grid. Fortunately, very few of the games are longer than a minute, so the worst that will happen is either a few minutes of useless play or a frustrated reboot of the PSP.

Despite some issues with the overall setup, though, it all comes down to the quality of the mini-games. For the most part they're a lot of fun, covering a wide range of gameplay styles and themes. A typical game might go- Swing from vine to vine to reach a goal, run the one meter dash, answer some trivia questions, play air-hockey, hand out a basketful of roses within a time limit, dive from a great height while snagging parachutes to give to the falling monkeys who need them, guard a giant banana roasting on a fire from the zombie-like monkeys who want to steal

it, pick the ninja-monkey out of a crowd, and go bowling. The loading screen of each game has the control layout on it, although certain games have subtleties that will only be discovered after losing because of them. For the most part the games are clever, creative and funny, and once played they can be practiced as often as needed in the gallery.

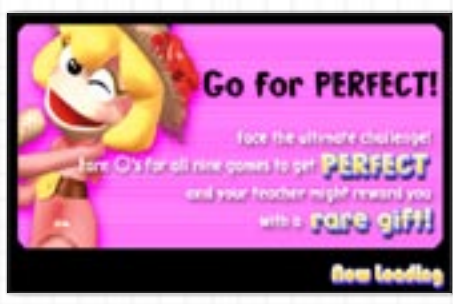
Eventually though, the games will have been played umpteen times and the novelty wears off. While this is true of every game ever made, dealing with one of the longer mini-games that's grown tedious through repetition during the eighth attempt at Senior Year 2 starts to feel suspiciously like work. There are aspects that can increase longevity, like the (sadly untested) multiplayer and the quest for over 300 monkey statues, but the fun wears thin quicker than it seems it should. Still, it's a good time while it lasts, and any game with hordes of monkeys is fine by me.

Rating : 3 of 5



FINAL SCORE :
2.75 of 5

2nd opinion by Racewing • Alternate Rating : 2.5 of 5
When I think *Ape Escape*, I think funny monkeys and great action. Only half the equation is here, and it's boring me. It's too bad Sony couldn't have somehow ported *Pumped & Primed* to the PSP...



The SIMS 2

Review by KouAidou



Publisher : Electronic Arts
Developer : Maxis
Release Date : 12/7/2005
Rating : TEEN

Genre(s) : Strategy/RPG
Category : Life Simulation
of players : 1

EA's multi-platform release of *The Sims 2* promised exclusive features in every version of the game. While most of the major console releases still closely resemble the original, EA chose to go in a totally different direction with the PSP version. The result is something that moves away from classic *Sims* gameplay to give us something that feels a bit more like *Sims: The RPG*.

Rather than giving you the standard role of omnipresent being surveying the lives of many little Sims, *The Sims 2* lets you design a character whose role you will take exclusively through a linear storyline. This revolves around said character's trip to Strangetown, where mad scientists and robotic housewives are the rule, rather than the exception. As the game begins, you will find yourself stranded in Strangetown after an alien abduction leaves you car-less; in order to eventually find your way out without entirely losing your mind, you will need to buy a house and make your own life in Strangetown.

For the most part, this involves keeping your Sim happy and well-adjusted by satisfying a grocery list of needs, wants, and life aspirations, which are regularly assigned in true *Sims* fashion. You are also free to interact with the other citizens of the town, all of whom come packed with an array of skeletons (sometimes literally) in their closets. You can either talk to these citizens and learn things you can do for them, or play social games (like chatting and flirting) to establish relationships. Establishing relationships with people allows you to learn their secrets, which can then be sold for cash.

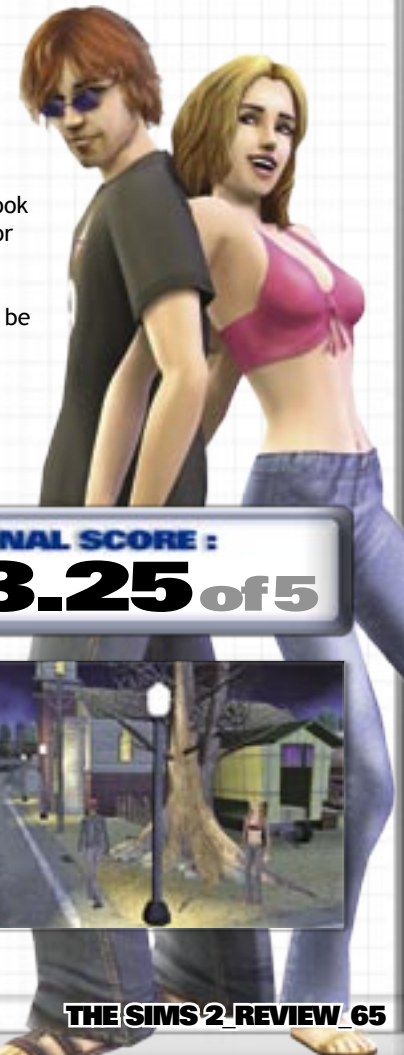
The end result of this is a lot of fetch questing and timing games, and yet, the game's humor, fine graphics, smooth gameplay,

and customizability all add up to an entirely addictive product. There's never a lack of things to do in Strangetown, from snuggling on the sofa with your attractive French Maid (yes, even if your Sim is a girl), to whacking zombies with a shovel for cash. With gameplay well-suited to burning time on long car trips, *The Sims 2* could have been a truly welcome addition to the PSP's gaming arsenal, if not for one heartbreakingly crippling flaw in the system.

This flaw? Load times. Not only does this happen between screen changes, the game suffers from unpredictable pauses whenever a graphic or voice clip is loaded (which, in this game, basically means "any time you try to do anything"). This is not only annoying, but can actually hinder your ability to perform crucial timing games, and makes bonus activities like decorating your house and changing your sim's appearance seem more like a chore than an immersive extra.

If you have the patience to overlook the load time issue, *The Sims 2* for PSP might be worth checking out, but prepare yourself for a lot of frustration. The waiting wouldn't be so bad if the game underneath it wasn't so very, very good.

Rating : 3.5 of 5



2nd opinion by Lynxara • Alternate Rating : 3 of 5
Yet another potentially good PSP game crippled by unacceptably long load times. Reviewing these is getting kind of depressing. So is owning a PSP.

FINAL SCORE :
3.25 of 5





PlayStation 2

Xbox 360

NINTENDO DS

ARENA FOOTBALL

Review by Shoegazer

Publisher : Electronic Arts **Genre(s) :** Sports
Developer : Tiburon **Category :** Arena Football
Release Date : 02/07/2006 **# of players :** 1-4, Online Multiplayer
Rating : Everyone 10+ (Language, Mild Violence, Suggestive)



Can you properly identify the differences between the "Mac" and the "Jack"? Does a quarterback throwing for a hundred eighty yards in a game sound like an exceptional offensive performance? Did you know that a missed field goal is still in play when it bounces off of the rebound net? If you just answered "yes" to any, or all, of the above questions, then EA has a new game on the shelf made just for you!

Tiburon, the very same team of talented folks behind the *Madden* and *NCAA* franchises, have been hard at work on a couple of non-*Madden* related projects behind closed doors. *Arena Football* is the first out of the gate. If you follow the AFL, then most of what you'd expect to find is here. It has the fifty-yard field, the defensive box, 8-on-8 iron man gameplay, and all the official AFL rules.

Tiburon has borrowed some of its assets from *Madden*, such as the detailed character models and the core gameplay mechanics, in an effort to bring the AFL to life, but that's where the similarities end. *Arena Football* is about as far from a *Madden*-style pure football simulation as you can get. In fact, one could argue that this is more like what *Blitz: The League* should have been. It's a fast paced, arcade-style score-a-thon, with easy to pick up and play controls. This one is built specifically to be played against your buddies, trash-talking the whole time.

What would a game from the creators of *Madden* be without at least some degree of technical, slightly advanced components? *Arena Football* introduces the telemetry system that tracks a wealth of information to help you get the edge over your opponent. Check who has the hot hand, and who is ready to ride the pine. The telemetry system tracks everything from stamina to play-calling tendencies so that you can better manage your team's production. This feature is very handy, and will hopefully be carried over to other sports titles in some form.

The biggest problem you'll find here is in the game's simplistic design. It's a near-perfect example of what arcade-style football should be, and it's entertaining to play whether you know a thing about the AFL or not. However, the luster wears off quickly after you discover just how shallow the experience is. The game desperately needs more game modes to keep you busy. Creating your team and players from scratch to compete against the AFL gives the game a fun *Necessary Roughness* feel, but outside of a standard season mode, there is little left to do. Some mini-games would've been nice at the very least. The lack of in-game commentary also hurts the experience just a little. It's simply replaced with generic rock music better fit for EA Trax. That's not a compliment.

At the end of the day, *Arena Football* is to *Madden* as *Rumble Roses* is to *WWE Smackdown vs. Raw*. It's a game designed more to introduce casual-gamer-friendly titles to the masses than it is an attempt to bring the AFL to the masses. Surprisingly, it mostly succeeds, missing the mark on just a few key things that bring down the score. That said, EA is bringing this title out with a user-friendly price tag, and that could be the decision maker for curious gamers, or AFL fanatics. *Arena Football* is not a bad game by any means, but with just a little more imagination, it could have been much better.

Rating : 2.5 of 5

FINAL SCORE :
2.5 of 5

2nd opinion by 4thletter • Alternate Rating : 2.5 of 5

Shallow is an apt word for *Arena Football*. The telemetry feature is sweet, but that's where it stops. Try again next season.



AGE OF EMPIRES THE AGE OF KINGS

Review by James

Publisher : Majesco **Genre(s) :** Turn-based strategy
Developer : Backbone Vancouver **Category :** Historical
Release Date : 1/31/2006 **# of players :** 1-2
Rating : E 10+



Throughout the world's history, countries have continually tried to kick their neighbors' asses for any number of reasons. In Majesco's *Age of Empires: The Age of Kings* for the Nintendo DS, five civilizations spread out over twenty-eight missions do their best to hack, slash, shoot, and convert each other into oblivion.

Age of Empires has had a very succesful history on the PC, with three versions of the real-time strategy game so far. For the DS edition the series has metamorphosed into a turn-based affair, making for a very different game from its PC counterparts. Despite this major change, it's still *Age of Empires* at heart.

Starting off with Joan of Arc's tutorial missions, the game rapidly brings the player up to speed on its mechanics. Peasants are required to build, warriors to fight, and farms and mines keep the economy alive. Certain buildings are required to make certain units, such as a stable for knights, and everything has a build time of one turn no matter how large and complex. Additionally, one topic of research can be completed every round, and when a civilization has become learned enough it can "Age Up", giving it access to new buildings and units. Of course, every single unit, building, and research topic has a cost of food and gold, so it's essential to balance out the military and economy, especially in the early stages of a mission when resources are tight.

While Campaign is the meat of the game, where all the historical bits happen that give *Age of Empires* its flavor, there's also a free-form mode called Empire Map. Choose a side, a set of opponents, a difficulty level, and a map and it's off to battle. While the story of Campaign has its set pieces and plot twists, the Empire mode is pure strategy.

Though *Age of Empires* definitely has its charms, several problems rear their ugly heads. Some minor issues, like audio drop-off in sound effects, are just mildly annoying.

Others, such as the uselessness of the touch-screen when too many units are in a small area, actually hamper the gameplay. While it's easy enough to switch to the plus pad and buttons, constantly changing control methods gets old fast. Of course, selecting the right unit is also easier when so many of them don't look nearly identical. Spearmen and Pikemen (one ranged, the other good against cavalry) in particular are easy to get confused, and it's also easy to lose the scenario champion amidst a handful of mounted units. Constantly checking the top screen for unit information doesn't do the flow of the game any good.

Despite these issues, *Age of Empires* ends up landing on its feet. Even flawed battle strategy can be a lot of fun, and watching a multi-turn plan come together is always rewarding. Whether it's a quick round on a random map or a set of historical battles, *Age of Empires* is a strategically good time despite its quirks.

Rating : 3.5 of 5

2nd opinion by Roger Danish • Alternate Rating : 3 of 5

Surprisingly, *Age of Empires* works on the small screen. While it does have a list of issues, fans of the series and strategy buffs will find something to like.

FINAL SCORE :
3.25 of 5



FINAL FANTASY IV ADVANCE



Review by JPeoples

Publisher : Nintendo
Developer : Square-Enix
Release Date : 12/12/2005
Rating : E 10+; Language, Mild Fantasy Violence, Mild Suggestive Themes

Genre(s) : RPG
Category : Surreal
of players : 1

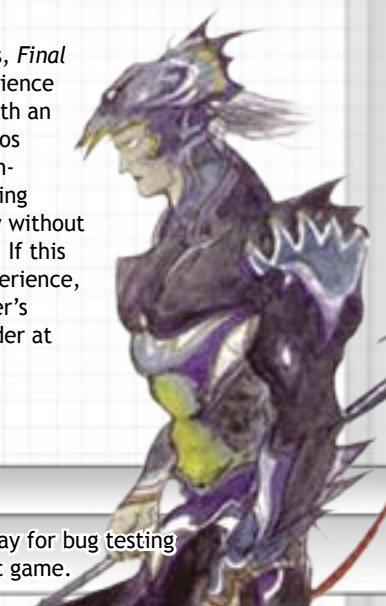


The biggest downside to ATBs is that you're a sitting duck when rummaging through menus for items, but just using it for random battles should minimize that problem. Far too many games today lock you into one battle system, and the freedom offered by having both battle systems available is appreciated, since you can tinker with each to see which one works best for you, and when.

The visuals have also received a boost thanks to the GBA's hardware. Colors are richer and more varied, while backgrounds have more depth to them, and the sprites animate a little smoother. Likewise, the legendary soundtrack full of booming, emotion-filled music has been upgraded a bit, with the music sporting a fuller sound than the SNES original. These changes may seem minor, but they end up giving the story more impact, since you're sucked that much further into the game's world.

While it's a shame it shipped with bugs, *Final Fantasy IV* remains an incredible experience that should be enjoyed by everyone with an appreciation for good storytelling. Kudos to Square-Enix for making this fourteen-year-old tale feel new, and it's refreshing to see an RPG in 2006 that tells a story without flashy cinematics and bloated budgets. If this sounds like something you want to experience, buy this now. If not, hand in your gamer's card, and go stare in slack-jawed wonder at tinfoil. You're just not worthy.

Rating : 4 of 5



It's been fourteen years since *FFIV* first graced our shores. In that time it has hit the PlayStation across the world and the Wonderswan Color in Japan, and achieved astounding prices online in each incarnation. Thankfully, Nintendo has at least temporarily put an end to the insanity by releasing it for their most popular platform. Unfortunately, some damning bugs and glitches have crept into this godsend of a release.

I certainly expected some changes here compared to the SNES original, since this is a revamped version of the Wonderswan Color version, but I never expected it to be riddled with glitches. It's especially disappointing since both Square-Enix and Nintendo releases are usually glitch-free, making the problems here stick out more.

Fortunately, the problems are confined to the battle system, which is damaged in such a way that allows both players and foes to get turns they haven't earned. Sure, it can be a blessing when it's in your favor, but it's also a real killer in boss battles, where it works against you to an extreme degree. It's never fun to die in a game, and it's especially annoying here when there's nothing you can do about it. This problem comes up more in active time battles, an ironic and sad twist since this game pioneered that now-standard feature.

At least everything else is executed well. The GBA blends in well with the battle systems, as you can alternate between the active time battles and more traditional turn-based ones quickly, allowing you to plan ahead a little better. If you're in the mood for a long play session, go with regular turn-based battles. Conversely, if you just want to level up quickly against the all-too-common random foes, the active time battle system works best. You'll be able to get more done in less time, which is great for on-the-go gaming.

FINAL SCORE : **3.75** of 5

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

Square-Enix - The speedy re-translation is most appreciated, but a delay for bug testing would've helped. The extras however breathe new life into this classic game.



It was only a matter of time before the ultra-popular animated incarnation of *Teen Titans* got its own videogame. I wish I could say it were cause for celebration. This game should be a lot better than it is. It wouldn't even require extra work. You'd just need a little bit of common sense. Sadly, that seems to be absent.

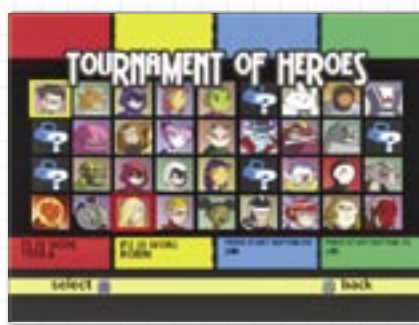
The game's set into two main parts; the first is the Story Mode, which plays a good bit like *X-Men Legends*. In multiplayer dungeon-crawler style, you use the Titans' powers to beat up on random henchmen and bosses. The story set around the game is deceptively above average (the Titans get trapped in a video game; by the end, it's clear that the writers were drinking Hideo Kojima Juice), and the game keeps things fresh by giving the Titans more special techniques and teamwork moves after each stage, as well as changing them up every so often.

It's perfect for multiplayer... or it would be, if not for one flaw which ruins the whole thing: the camera. Said camera is fine for one player, because it follows that player around, allowing them to keep track of the action. Add any more players, however, and the camera stays zoomed out, making it almost impossible to keep track of where you and the enemy are. It's that far gone, and with it, half of the game's purpose is down the drain. Unless you're by yourself, this mode's high-unplayable.

On the other side, you've got Master of Games mode, which is a bare-bones fighting game for, once again, up to four players. As there are no enemies here except the other players, the camera

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

No, see, this is *not* how you do a tie-in game for a popular property. It could've been a rocking multiplayer title, but instead we get something that you have to struggle to enjoy.



TEEN TITANS

Review by Racewing

Publisher : Majesco Games
Developer : A2M
Release Date : 2/2006
Rating : E 10+; Cartoon Violence

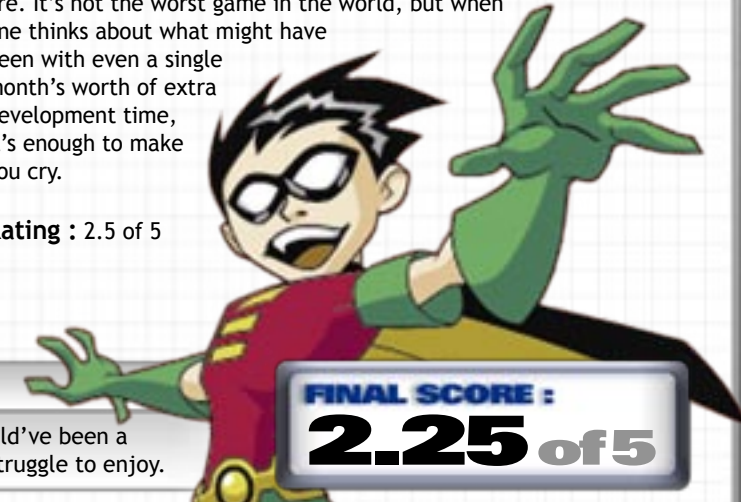
Genre(s) : Action
Category : Superpowered Beat-em-Up
of players : 1-4

isn't really much of a problem. What *is* a problem is the character selection. The developers put over twenty playable characters in this mode, from the headliners to the obscure. Everyone from Control Freak to Terra can be picked and used.

The problem is that lots of characters are basically palette swaps of existing ones, or have the same generic attacks (i.e. Control Freak is a Robin-esque character, Bumblebee is a lot like Jinx, and *everyone's* got a few beams of some sort). The worst occurs when characters are actual carbon-copies. "Red" and "White" Raven are exactly like normal Raven with zero differences. In what I consider a personal insult, Blackfire has Starfire's moveset, and the *same green starbolts* as her sister. Combine this with the fact that the same fighting engine used in the story mode applies to this mode as well, and you can see that it's easy to get tired of Master of Games very quickly.

There are a lot of good ideas in this game, and not a single one of them is executed in a way that makes me able to condone this as a purchase, unless you're a super-serious *Titans* fan, or have kids who are. It's not the worst game in the world, but when one thinks about what might have been with even a single month's worth of extra development time, it's enough to make you cry.

Rating : 2.5 of 5



FINAL SCORE : **2.25** of 5

MEGAMAN X COLLECTION

Review by honestgamer

Publisher : Capcom
Developer : Atomic Planet
Release Date : 1/10/2006
Rating : TEEN

Genre(s) : Compilation
Category : Action
of players : 1

X is the best robot in the world. When others revolt against humans or just wreak general havoc, Dr. Light's final creation stands up to them and ensures that mankind and the world will see a bright tomorrow. Now, his first six adventures are captured on a single disc for your enjoyment. If you have loved the series before and you're missing one or two of its entries—or if you have them all but you'd like to see them gathered in one handy location that doesn't require digging through your closet and hooking up old machines—you already know what to do.

At a glance, *Mega Man X Collection* is nothing more than a collection of six great games (seven if you count the unlockable racing game). The extras are limited and include little on-screen tips that will appear after you've finished the various games (you know, well after they'll do you any good). You can adjust the control scheme, too, and the version of *Mega Man X3* that's included here is the video-spliced Playstation version that was released over in Europe. Otherwise, what you're getting is a clean emulation of all your favorite games in the series, almost exactly as you remember them. Differences include appreciated upgrades like memory card save and diminished flicker from explosion-crowded screens.

Really, they don't need anything else. At the time of their release, these games were much loved by the action gamer community, and for good reason. Without exception, they provide some of the tightest, most action-packed gameplay around today. Finding them all faithfully restored brings a warm glow to one's heart. Another advantage of having all the games in one place is that you can easily follow the convoluted plot. The series began simply, with the story of X's battle against the renegade Sigma, and



progressed by its sixth (somewhat "inaccurate") entry to the point where X and Zero hardly know what to make of the strange ties that bind them. The plot twists include viruses and armies, which you might expect from a story about robots, but also heartache and prophecies.

Besides sci-fi intricacies, you'll likely appreciate the non-linear level progression. You can conquer the bulk of the stages in any order you like, and explore them to find various nooks and crannies. Truly, you'll spend hours discovering every twist and turn, unless you resort to the readily-available FAQs people have posted online. Just a quick exploration of the games isn't enough to explore the exciting mysteries that lie just beneath the surface.

Ultimately, this collection is what it is: a bare-bones gathering of truly great platform titles with the same visuals that charmed us years ago. They've aged a bit, but not so drastically as the 8-bit games on Capcom's previous collection of blue bomber adventures. If you like your gaming in two dimensions, *Mega Man X Collection* is near-perfect. For series veterans and newcomers alike, it's one of the year's simplest recommendations and one of its guiltiest pleasures.

Rating : 4.5 of 5

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

This is a vast improvement over last year's *Anniversary Collection*, and the games here are reproduced almost perfectly. *Mega Man X6* still sucks though.



KINGDOM OF PARADISE

Review by Shoegazer

Publisher : Sony Computer Entertainment
Developer : Climax Entertainment
Release Date : 11/15/2005
Rating : TEEN; Language, Violence

Genre(s) : RPG
Category : Action/
Kung Foolery
of players : 1-2

It's about time we started to see some original intellectual properties arrive on the PSP! Just as it was beginning to seem like PSP owners were doomed to a life cycle of nothing but countless ports and pseudo-sequels, *Kingdom of Paradise* comes along to inject some life into the platform, and does so in mostly impressive fashion.

Kingdom of Paradise is a tremendous technological achievement in that it does what no other PSP game has been able to do before it: it makes you forget that you're playing on a hand-held system. Unlike most PSP titles, *Kingdom* has obvious high production values. It's graphically competent, even to the point of being easily mistaken as a PS2 title, and has an impressive musical score befitting of a classic RPG.

Though the average setting isn't all that detailed, the towns, temples, and harbors that you visit along the journey are fairly big, and well designed. There are lots of NPC characters to interact with, and many actually do have useful bits of information pertaining to your objective. It's reminiscent of *Knights of the Old Republic*, but without the voice acting. Considering the voice acting contained within *KoP*, that is probably a good thing. Some of the actors did a fine job, while others couldn't seem to nail down the character, or read their lines so quickly that it sounded like gibberish. Thank goodness for the captions.

Kingdom of Paradise's combat system is what really makes it enjoyable. By progressing through the game and collecting scrolls, you can create custom combo attacks, and learn new forms with which to pummel your enemies. There are so many variations that you could spend several hours just creating the perfect move set.

The ability to swap items with friends via Wi-Fi is even cooler, as is downloading exclusive content through the Infrastructure mode. Even though the combat system is deep, it's not as thorough or rewarding as, say, *Jade Empire*. You'll never need to press more than one button to execute any combo, which can feel a little too simplistic. You will also learn special chi attacks that become so powerful that you almost need to promise yourself not to use them. Otherwise the game becomes unbalanced, and less interactive of an experience.

Unfortunately, not all is right within the *Kingdom of Paradise*, and I'm not referring to a plot point. The game's storyline never becomes all that interesting, but the combat system is probably still enjoyable enough to keep you going regardless. However, the lack of a functional block button makes battles frustrating. This is especially true of boss fights, where high-powered attacks can make quick work of you. Sure, you can save virtually anywhere, but you'd better save often, because there are no warnings of a major upcoming battle.

It may not be perfect, but the game's 10-15 hour quest is solid. It's the most impressive RPG on the system for certain, just perhaps not the most complete experience overall. There is a two-player battle mode thrown in for added value, and the download support is a really nice feature. Personally, I enjoyed *The Legend of Heroes* quite a bit more, but if "old school" is not your thing, then you've got nothing to lose by picking up *Kingdom of Paradise*.

Rating : 3 of 5

2nd opinon by Lynxara • Alternate Rating : 3 of 5

This game tries hard and brings some good ideas to the table, but the polish isn't there yet and it really lacks depth. Ultimately it's disappointingly mediocre.



FINAL SCORE : 3 of 5

REVIEW WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP POKER 2

FEATURING HOWARD LEDERER

PC

PlayStation 2

PSP

PLATFORM

PlayStation 2

XBOX

REVIEW



Publisher : Crave Entertainment
Developer : Point of View
Release Date : 11/08/2005
Rating : T for Teen

Genre(s) : Gambling
Category : Strategy
of players : 1 (more online)

If you've never understood the appeal of computer poker when you can just gather a group of friends, the beverage of choice and some peanuts for a trash-talking, nut-wagering marathon, *World Championship Poker 2* probably won't change that. However, those willing to look past a few glaring issues will have fun in spite of themselves.

The experience begins with character creation. Clunky navigation aside, this mode is pretty good. You can even customize personality. I chose to create a guy named Harlan who had a cowlick, star-shaped glasses, too many rings, a weight problem and a nervous disposition. Once you've created your avatar (or multiple ones, if you prefer), it's time to get down to the action.

In this case, the 'action' is a group of people sitting around a card table while a jaunty, almost comic tune plays in the background. If you're looking for an intense atmosphere, don't. Your opponents are all stereotypical goofs, and the voices don't always match the faces. One guy I faced had a smooth complexion and silvery hair. He looked about thirty, then took a small pot and commented in an elderly voice that he hadn't won a game in 50 years.

Aesthetics aren't the only disappointment. The gambling itself grows dull quickly, despite the boasted 14 varieties. You'll find that bluffing is king. A pair of fives (or none at all) can easily win the pot if you play right (there's even a timed mini-game built around the concept). The whole time, characters will trade their patented small talk while your victorious character does the same and the announcer repeats a few tired lines.

If you find that you enjoy such matches, a career mode lets you trace

your character's professional life from a friendly game in a basement all the way up to the big leagues. Here, the difficulty increases sharply. Cash gleaned from hapless opponents covers the entry fees to the bigger events spread across the confusing world map, and funds the purchase of items to spruce up your crib. If that's your sort of incentive, rejoice.

Despite the robust career mode, the game's salvation comes not from the single-player mode, but from its online component. You can chat with your opponents while you wait for your turn, and mock them if desired. Really, the game's loose design seems to be devoted to this side of the coin more than it is the offline mode. Though server issues can spring up, and though it's sometimes difficult to find warm bodies to compete with, a good match is hard to quit once you get involved.

If you get past its warts and wrinkles, *World Championship Poker 2* ultimately succeeds at its limited objectives. The potential audience for this type of product is larger than some might think, and any one of them might enjoy the simple pleasure of taking artificial money from computer opponents. Just don't expect anything mind-blowing.

Rating : 3.5 of 5



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

Personality saves this game from being just another average poker title, and the character creation mode is awesome. Creating sarcastic fatty characters never gets old!



GAUNTLET SEVEN SORROWS

Publisher : Midway Games
Developer : Midway Games
Release Date : 12/12/2005
Rating : TEEN; Violence

Genre(s) : Action
Category : Hack'n Slash
of players : 1-4 (Online and Xbox Live compatible)

player fights the same monsters and faces the same challenges over and over again. Sadly, the multiplayer aspect is not much better. Though *Gauntlet*'s simple slice-'em-up gameplay lends itself well to multiplayer, *Seven Sorrows* lacks much of the excitement, cursing, and friendly treachery found in other cooperation-oriented games. Multiplayer in *Seven Sorrows* is a numbing experience that is often devoid of any sort of conversation, as nothing in the game ever requires cooperation between players.

It's a shame that *Seven Sorrows*'s gameplay is so underwhelming, since a lot of attention was paid to the game's presentation. The graphics are beautifully detailed, and impressive hordes of monsters can be rendered with little slowdown. The game's orchestral soundtrack is very nice as well, and the sound effects are full of appropriately meaty thwacks to accompany weapons meeting monster flesh.

In the end, *Seven Sorrows* accomplishes everything it sets out to accomplish with regards to gameplay, and dares not attempt a single bit more. *Gauntlet* fans will be pleased to see how little things have changed from the arcade original, and odds are that those in the market for a *Gauntlet* game aren't looking for innovation or complexity in the first place. Though extremely simplistic, *Seven Sorrows* is competent and fun enough until you tire of pounding your controller buttons into mush.

Rating : 2.5 of 5



When it comes to cooperative multiplayer button-mashers, *Gauntlet* is the name gamers have trusted for more than twenty years. Considered a classic by many, the original *Gauntlet*'s flaws were concealed by the game's cooperative aspect, a novelty in 1985. In an era where an online multiplayer option is a standard feature for many action games, however, *Gauntlet: Seven Sorrows* does not fare nearly as well.

Seven Sorrows drags the *Gauntlet* series kicking and screaming into the console realm, and the basic gameplay of the arcade original has been saddled with action game cliches in an attempt to add depth. You say that console games need a story? Fine, here's a bunch of FMV cutscenes featuring slow camera pans across still concept art! Character development? An inconsequential experience system should do the trick! Puzzles? No problem, let's present the player with tricky prompts like "Destroy the enemy generators," "Pull the switches," and (our favorite) "Keep fighting!"

Despite every attempt made by Midway to make the game appear to be more than it is, make no mistake: *Seven Sorrows* is a *Gauntlet* game through and through. Gameplay boils down to progressing from one point in a level to another, collecting treasure and destroying monster generators along the way. There are a number of attack combos to learn and experience levels to gain, but players will most likely find themselves mashing the "hack" and "slash" buttons throughout the game until their controllers melt or the repetition becomes too much to bear.

As with any *Gauntlet* game, *Seven Sorrows* is best enjoyed with more than one player. Played alone, boredom sets in quickly as the

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

You can have some fun with this as a party game, but the level-up system is remarkably pointless and the combat much too shallow.



FINAL SCORE :
2.75 of 5



So, *Naruto* officially appears to be the Next Big Thing. The show is popular enough to bring in the ratings on Cartoon Network, Hot Topic has an entire *line* of *Naruto* gear for you, and the video games are finally getting localized. *Naruto: Gekitou Ninja Taisen! 4* is one of the most recent and possibly the best yet. Fair warning: it's the fourth game in the series and set at around episode 135 of the anime. In contrast, the US anime has yet to reach thirty-five episodes. Read accordingly.

Gekitou Ninja Taisen! 4 (GNT!4 from

now on, thanks) is a fighting with a few features that you've seen before. There's one-on-one fights, *Marvel vs Capcom 2*-style tag battles, and four player melee matches. It's from the makers of *Bloody Roar*, but don't hold that against it. GNT!4 is a fun romp.

GNT!4's cel-shaded graphics are top notch. No, the game does not look exactly like the show, but it does replicate that anime feel nicely. All the characters are accurately modeled and nicely animated. Everything, from *Naruto's* ridiculous hyperactivity to *Kakashi's* interminable calm, comes through in the animations. There's little-to-no slowdown, barring the traditional end of fight slo-mo. You can even have four people on-screen at once with nary a hitch.

The stages look nice, too, but there's a bit of a problem. They're cramped. Extremely cramped. Most of the stages are some kind of regular, flat geometric shape with invisible walls. There's the odd fence or empty air, but it's always odd when you juggle an enemy up into the air, kick him away, and watch him bounce off an invisible wall and land farther away in the stage. It's limiting, but it does give GNT!4 an old-school feel.

GNT!4 is a standard fighting game, complete with super moves, special moves, and throws, but the evades and counter-attacks are where it truly shines. If you and your opponent attack at the same time, the point of impact flashes as you collide in a stalemate. If your timing is good enough, you can keep this going longer and longer until someone loses their cool.

Even better than that, though, are the *kawarimi* evades. You've seen these in everything from *Dragon Ball Z* to *Samurai Shodown*. It's probably better known as the



NARUTO: GNT!4 VS NARUTO: NH3? When you've got two series for the same show running concurrently, there's bound to be some rivalry amongst fans of both games. It gets worse when they're both in the same genre, as well. This is the situation with *Gekitou Ninja Taisen! 4* (exclusive to GameCube) and *Narutimate Hero 3* (exclusive to PS2). How do the two stack up to each other?

It all comes down to taste. GNT!4 is a straight-up fighting game. There's no clutter on the stages and the fights don't last forever. The characters are set from the beginning, which means no customization. *Narutimate Hero 3*, however, is more *Smash Brothers* than *Street Fighter*. The stages are huge and full of breakable things, and you can pick which specials you want your player to have. The fights feature long life bars, insane special attacks, and characters who change moves mid-battle. Both, however, are worth your time. Break out GNT!4 when you want hardcore action, and NH3 when you want something a little more insane.

"log trick." If you time it right, you can tap the sidestep button just as your opponent is attacking, disappear while leaving a log behind, and counter-attack, all instantaneously. If you'd rather not counter, you can simply evade and *ninja-dash* (including the cool image blur!) away. It's all a matter of timing, as well. You can theoretically evade your opponent's evasion of your original evade, which leads to some fairly awesome fight scenes.

Speaking of awesome fight scenes, know that combos can run pretty lengthy, and the super moves are suitably over-the-top. The game is kind of light on special moves, and each character seems to share the same generic throw, but there's enough variation in the physical and weapon-based attacks to keep your interest. The lack of special moves isn't really too serious, though, because the fights are amazing nonetheless.

Fast-paced is a bit too soft of a word for the game. The life bars are pretty short, compared to some other titles, so you can burn through enemies pretty quickly. The tag battle mode lasts longer, obviously, but you can still finish up pretty quickly.

Basically, GNT!4 is exactly the kind of fun, arcade-y fighting game we need nowadays. It's a hoot to invite over a few friends and get your four-player on, and just as fun to run through the canon-based story mode (and the numerous missions that follow it) by yourself. There's a great character selection, too, plus plenty of unlockables.



操作説明の書



WORTH IMPORTING?

We're due to get the first game in the series under the title *Naruto: Clash of Ninja* in Spring (check our preview in this very issue!), so GNT!4 is a ways off. The game isn't too hard to get through at all, though you'll be skipping a lot of voice-acted cutscenes if you don't know Japanese, but the menus are easy to navigate through if you're good at experimenting. Go for it.

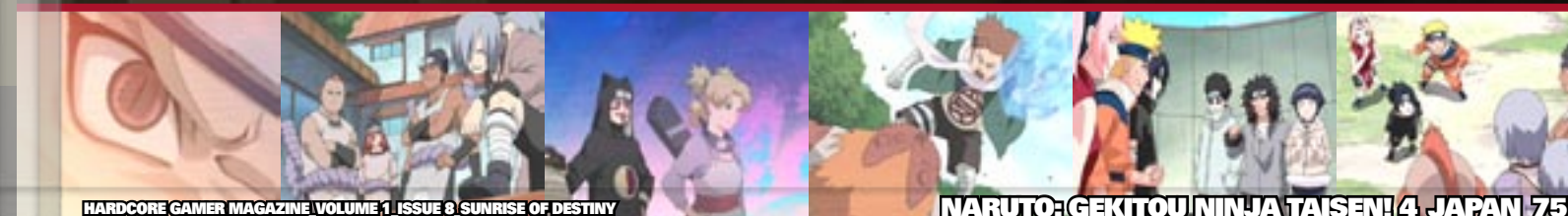
FINAL SCORE:
3.5 of 5



Review by 4thletter

Publisher: Tomy Entertainment
Developer: Eighting
Release Date: November 21, 2005
Platform: GameCube

Genre(s): Fighting
Category: Ninja
of Players: 1-4



龍が如く

(Ryu ga Gotoku)



Review by HonestGamer

Publisher: Sega
 Developer: Sega
 Release Date: December 8, 2005
 Platform: PlayStation 2

Genre(s): Fighting
 Category: Action
 # of Players: 1



If you don't know your Kanji from a plate of spaghetti, *Ryu ga Gotoku* isn't the best choice for a quick import. It's beautiful at even the most mundane moments, but full of dialogue that'll make your head spin, so the game just won't have the proper impact unless you read Japanese. Still, it's pretty cool.

The introduction unfolds in 1995. It's October and you're standing in an apartment, holding a smoking gun while you stare at a dead man. Blood trickles from a hole in his forehead to the carpeted floor. In the distance, sirens wail and some policemen rush up the stairs outside, then burst in shouting. You're so bemused by the sight of a ring on the floor that you don't even care.

Ryu ga Gotoku then jumps back in time and gets to the good stuff. Following character introductions, a brawl begins. The game walks you through the finer points of combat. The protagonist can punch and kick, or wield surrounding objects as weapons. He can also move in close to grab an opponent, then use the man's body as a makeshift mallet. If a desk or something is nearby, pressing the correct button will smash his frame across the furnishings with a satisfying crack (is that a bone breaking?) and some blood. The more pain you inflict, the faster your attack meter fills.

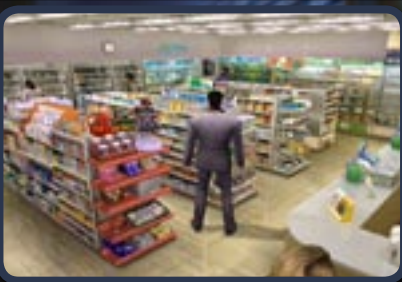
Fights are half the game's focus, while painstakingly-rendered plot sequences are the other. After you learn the various combos available, the fight ends and your friend (who watched uselessly from the sidelines) produces a metallic briefcase. The two of you exit quickly and wander through some streets choked by light mist and pedestrians. Before long, you've parted ways.

From here, you're left to explore the limited space available. You find more fights and also a tavern of some sort, where the game introduces a sexy young lady who wears a ring like the one in the introduction. The promise of tragedy weighs heavy on the air, and the game is cinematic enough to highlight it well.

Facial expressions say as much here as the streams of text. Even the unimportant characters look like they must've taken years to render. The old man in the shop could almost have been cut from a photograph. Objects around him were given proper attention, too. You'll see signs and the writing on bottles of wine, always presented well but never forcefully. Despite the visual splendor, load times are perfectly acceptable. The game is truly a marvel in presentation.

With those consistently high production values, events progress from one fight and one plot sequence to another, with little between but the rain-soaked (and rather tedious) city streets. Those importers who don't know Japanese will definitely wish they did, just because it's so obvious they're missing part of a really special game. At any rate, cracking heads requires no translation; violence is universal.

FINAL SCORE :
4.5 of 5



WORTH IMPORTING?

There's no denying that *Ryu ga Gotoku* is a special game, but its heavy text and involving story mean that you'll be lost without a translation manual. The game looks like it finally got approved for a stateside release, too, so this is one case where patience is sure to pay off.



不思議のダンジョン

青の救助隊

(Pokemon Fushigi no Dungeon)



Review by Lymara

Publisher: Nintendo
 Developer: ChunSoft
 Release Date: November 11, 2005
 Platform: GBA (Red), DS (Blue)

Genre(s): RPG
 Category: Dungeon Crawling, Monster Training
 # of Players: 1



Everybody knows *Pokemon*, but the *Fushigi no Dungeon* series of Rogue-like dungeon crawling games is a bit more obscure to most American gamers. ChunSoft has been making these quirky and tough RPGs for nearly fifteen years, and while one has never been released in English, they've remained fan-favorites with Japanese gamers for years. A crossover with Nintendo's super-popular *Pokemon* franchise was perhaps not inevitable, but certainly not inconceivable.

The result of this crossover is slightly repetitive, even as dungeon crawlers go, but still pretty interesting. You play as a human that has been transformed into one of sixteen pokemon. Which one is determined by your gender and responses to a personality test taken at the start of the game. Assisted by partner pokemon, you try to sort out the mystery of what happened to you while doing good deeds. Most of them involve descending into the Mysterious Dungeon to rescue monsters who've wandered in and gotten stuck, along with the odd fight against nasty boss monsters. The storyline tries to cover up for the repetitive gameplay with charm and humor, but doesn't really succeed.

In the Mysterious Dungeon, you do what you do in just about every Rogue-like: gather up loot and kill every enemy you can in simple turn-based battles. The dungeons seem to be at least semi-randomly generated, although you always find similar sorts of things and fight similar enemies at a given level. Enemies in this game are rival pokemon, who may join you after you've beaten them. By beating up enemies you can collect nearly four hundred pokemon for use in your team, a list that includes virtually every monster Nintendo's ever designed for the games. Your allies are all AI-controlled, and will attack enemies automatically if you can get them into the right position, a process that can result in some interesting combat strategies.

The Red and Blue versions of *Pokemon Fushigi no Dungeon* are basically identical to each other, right down to purchase price. The main difference is in the interface: GBA's Red version has you tap buttons to call up your main menus, while DS's Blue constantly displays your menu on one screen while you play the game on the other. This feature isn't terribly useful, so it leaves the DS version feeling a bit lacking. The GBA game is a very impressive title given the limited hardware, with colorful graphics and detailed animations for all of the game's many monsters.

Whatever version you play, *Pokemon Fushigi no Dungeon* can neatly satisfy a compulsive RPG fan's need to kill and/or collect things while on the go. Just make sure you're at least a little bit compulsive before you try playing it.



WORTH IMPORTING?

We recommend the GBA version if this seems like your kind of thing. Otherwise, take a pass on it. There's been some speculation about this title coming to the US because it's *Pokemon*-branded, so if you're not dead-set on playing it right now then you may want to wait and see if an American version does come out.

FINAL SCORE :
3 of 5

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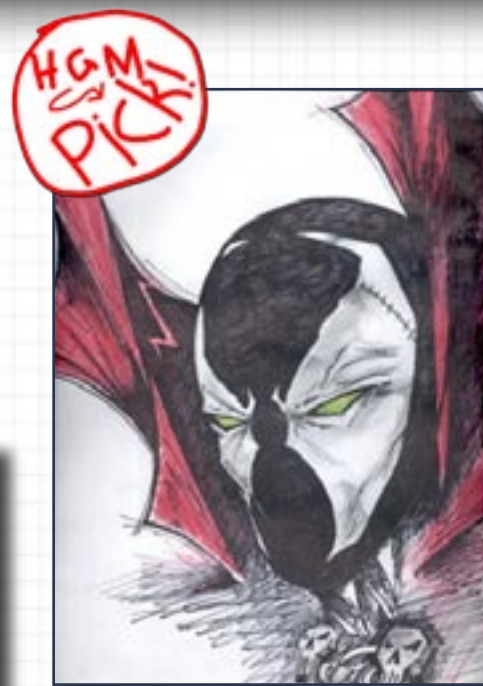
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Title : Super Dimensional Alien Entity
Artist : Circuitface
Age : Undisclosed
Location : Arizona



Title : Scorp & CelDa
Artist : Douglas De Guzman
Age : 22
Location : Las Vegas



Title : Spawn
Artist : wildx7even
Age : Undisclosed
Location : Santa Maria, CA



Title : MegaManX
Artist : robi85
Age : Undisclosed
Location : Mexico



Title : Rukia
Artist : lxyaoxl
Age : Undisclosed
Location : Santa Ana, CA



Title : Captain Blue
Artist : Kathryn Carvalho
Age : 18
Location : Honolulu, HI



Title : Jill Valentine
Artist : Weskershouse
Age : Undisclosed
Location : Aurora, CO



Title : a furie from the warriors
Artist : Eddy
Age : Undisclosed
Location : Anaheim, CA



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Cosplayer: Imari Yumiki
Location: Sacramento, California
Website: <http://www.geocities.com/devilstmeteor>

HGM: How long have you been cosplaying?
IY: Since 1994.
HGM: How many different cosplays have you done?
IY: I've done many cosplays: crossplay, anime, games, manga, pc games. I mostly like to cosplay games though. I guess I'm more of a gamer than an otaku!

HGM: What is the longest you have spent constructing a costume?

IY: If I count up the hours, around two to three weeks. Since I've worked on cosplay for a long time, my time making them isn't too long.

HGM: What do you like the most about cosplaying?

IY: I get to wear awesome clothing and costumes drawn by talented artists. It's sort of being a model, but you can have more fun. Like going to conventions: you can compete in cosplay contests, skits, and other events. Plus many people compliment your costume! You can also meet new friends, as well as really nice staff and photographers. It's just fun cosplaying! (^^)

HGM: Next cosplay you'll do?

IY: Hmm, the latest one I can think of is Lien Neville from *King of Fighters: Maximum Impact*. After that I will probably do another Hitomi costume from *DOA4*. However, I am not always on schedule, I may make something extra time to time.

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.



Hitomi (Dead or Alive 4)



Shion Uzuki (Xenosaga 3)

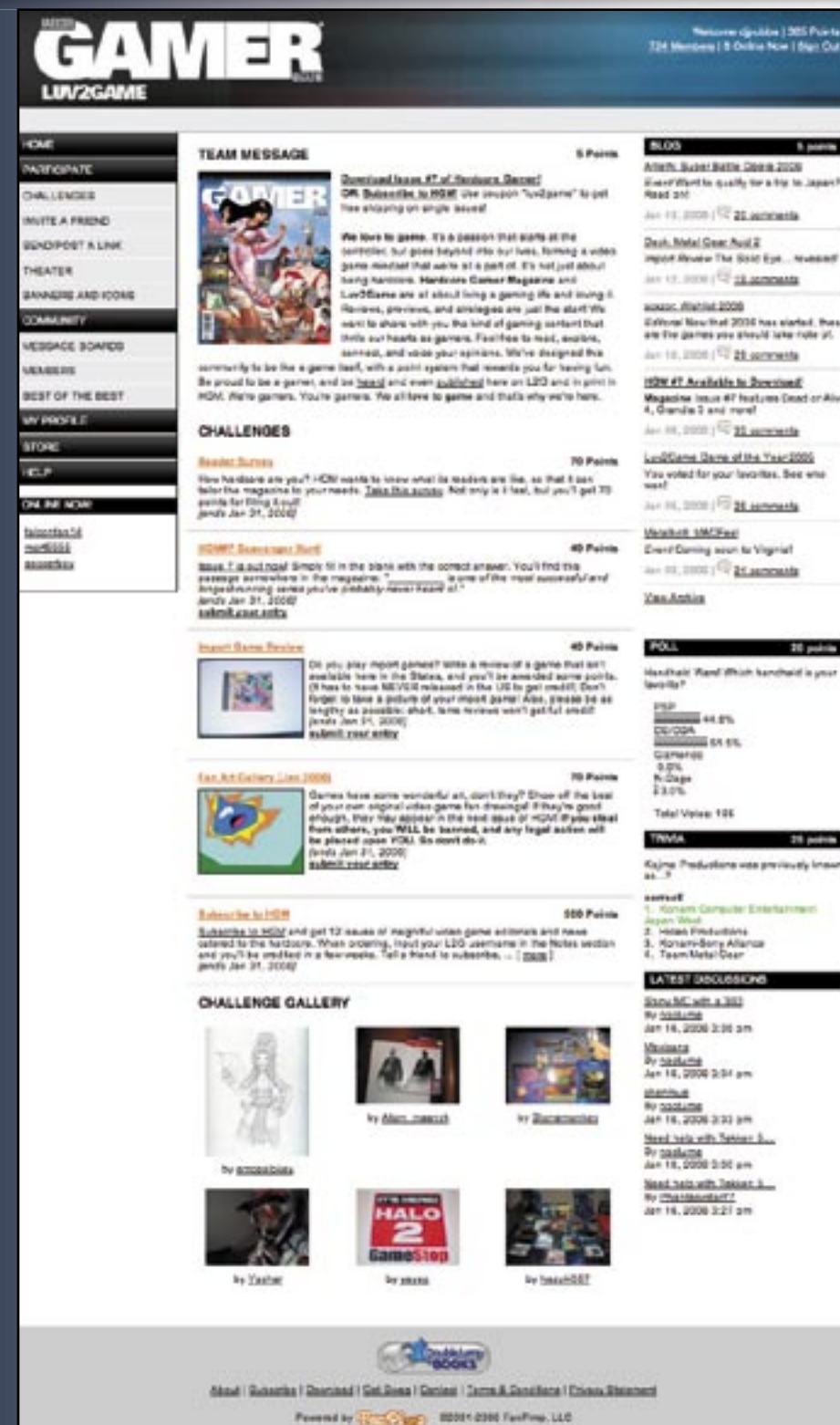


Photographer: Everon Lu

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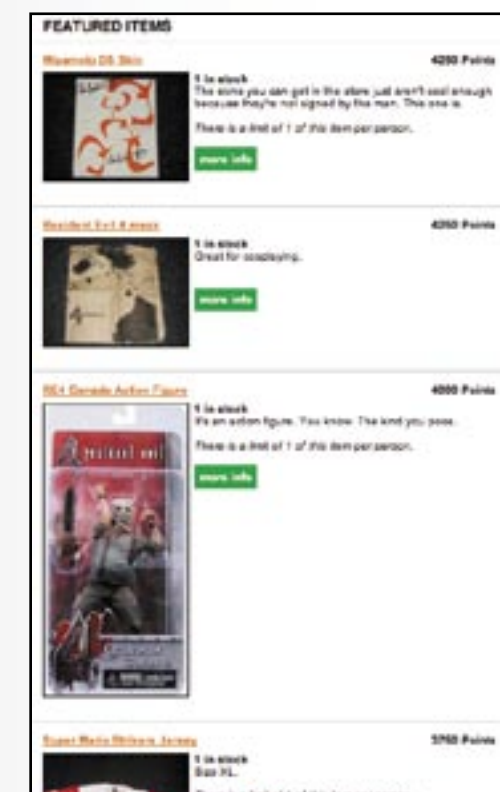


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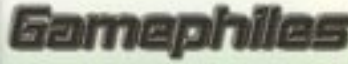


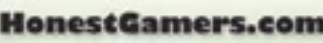
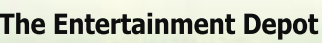














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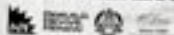
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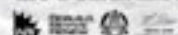
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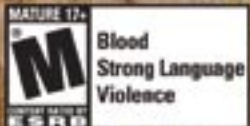
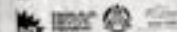
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PlayStation 2



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