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NINTENDO DS™

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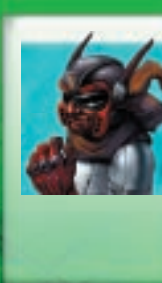
DJPubba Tim Lindquist
 The fourth quarter is always crazy. This one will be especially so with two new system launches at the same time. America should just go ahead and take the rest of the year off to play games, because there's no way we're going to have enough time for all the fun stuff that demands our gaming attention. Oh, and now I'm hearing rumblings that there may not be any preordering possible. OMG CHAOS.
 Now playing: *Dead Rising*, *Disgaea 2*, *LocoRoco*




Wanderer Thomas Wilde
 Well, see you all at Christmas. It's Q4. I've got work to do.
 Don't listen to laian. At best, he rented his soul out.
 Now Playing: *Final Fantasy XII*, *Rule of Rose*, *Dead Rising*, *Enchanted Arms*



Lynxara Alicia Ashby
 These new console launches are always hardest on an importer. Do I spring for a Japanese PS3 or an American one? Is it worth owning two Wiis? Decisions, decisions....
 Now Playing: *Enchanted Arms*, *Disgaea 2*, *Valkyrie Profile: Silmeria*, *Rogue Galaxy*



Racewing Geson Hatchett
 See all these other people talking about their video game-related "problems?" *Weaksauce*, every one of 'em. I work at a Gamestop smack in the inner city ghetto. Looking at the game and system release lists, I figure that come November 15th, I'm gonna hafta start packin' heat, yo. See you in December... hopefully!
 Now Playing: *Mega Man ZX*, *Saints Row*, *DBZ: Budokai Tenkaichi 2* (Great Saiyaman Mk2! THANK YOU, Spike!)




Shoegazer Dave Hulegaard
 There is no humility quite like playing a round of *Guitar Hero II* against Marcus Henderson, the ultra-talented rocker responsible for the guitar tracks in the games. I think I had a better shot at competing with Shigeru Miyamoto to create the next loveable Nintendo character. Speaking of which, Nintendo, can I please just buy a damn Wii already??
 Now Playing: *Guitar Hero I & II*, *Madden NFL 07*, *Okami*




KouAidou Elizabeth Ellis
 After *Final Fantasy VIII* broke my will, *IX* left me bored, *X* had me throwing the controller at Lynxara's TV 30 minutes in, and *XI* was... you know... online, I thought I would never play another game in the series. And yet, after all that, I'm right back where I started. Damn.
 Now Playing: *Final Fantasy I & II Advance*, *Final Fantasy IV Advance*, *Final Fantasy XII*




Roger Danish Greg Off
 I'm typing my bio from Japan this month, after getting a chance to finally spend some hands on time with the PS3 and its launch titles at TGS. I have to admit, Sony had me more than a little concerned coming out of E3. However, they've more than redeemed themselves. I'll take *LAIR*, *Ninja Gaiden 3*, *MGS 4*, *DMC 4*, *Motorsport*, *Resistance*, *Ridge Racer 7*, and even *Genji* over *Fantavision* any day.
 Now Playing: *Resistance: Fall of Man*, *Motorsport*, *Ultimate Ghosts 'n Goblins*



4thletter David Brothers
 I decided that I have too much free time, so I've taken to not telling people "No" when they ask me to do things and playing *Disgaea 2* inbetween. This results in sleepless nights, but hopefully a lot of money! What's that you say? "What about your friends?" Well, what about them? As usual, come to 4thletter.net to check out cool comics commentary.
 Now Playing: *Scarface* (Xbox), *Disgaea 2*, *Justice League Heroes* (Xbox)




James James Cunningham
 The endless internet arguments over the Wii are raging in full force, and I just don't care. \$250 with a pack-in game, \$60 for an extra controller, and who knows what for all the games I'll end up with. Sounds good to me! At the very least it's got to be sturdier than the 360, which I've replaced twice so far. *Dead Rising* is a system-killer.
 Now playing: *Dead Rising*, *Rengoku II*, *LocoRoco*.




HonestGamer Jason Venter
 With two consoles coming out on almost the same day, not to mention their very distinct launch software, I'm going to have to start believing in Santa pronto. In fact, consider me his biggest fan as of... November 17. You hear that, big guy? Your biggest fan!
 Now Playing: *Tales of the Abyss*, *Disgaea 2*




Hitoshura laian Ross
 I've had absolutely zero free time this past month. I didn't even have time to write a page for this issue because I've sold my soul to the devil himself to get the *Shin Megami Tensei - Devil Summoner: Raidou Kuzunoha vs The Soulless Army* official strategy guide (what a mouthful) out the door.
 Now Playing: *Devil Summoner* (for brevity's sake)




Sardius Danny Cowan
 THQ's party at the Austin Game Conference had an open bar and a free buffet. Bad move, THQ. Did you think I'd forgotten *Family Dog*, or *Wayne's World*, or any of those *Home Alone* games? I don't think I ate enough taquitos or drank enough beer to make up for all the crap THQ sold to kids in the SNES era, but everyone told me the next morning that I sure as hell tried.
 Now Playing: *LEGO Star Wars II*, *Rhythm Tengoku*, *New Super Mario Bros.*



Wolfie Terry Wolfinger
 This has been a good month indeed! First, the second season of "Lost" has come out on DVD and I've already watched every episode!! Twice! They were awesome!! And season 3 will have started by the time this issue sees print. I can't wait!! Secondly, I finally got my 360!!! I am now dismembering zombies with gleeful delight.
 Now Playing: *Dead-muthuh F-in'-Rising*




Metalbot Anthony Mertz
 The town I live in is so small that it's not even a town, it's a borough. No one has ever heard of it, and no one famous originated here... until now. This will put Emmaus, PA on the map: the "Nintendo 64 kid" is from here! I'm so proud.
 Now Playing: *SiN Episodes: Emergence*, *Battlefield 2* (PC)




Arbeth Thomas Shin
 So, I heard somewhere that there are *Super Smash Bros.* players who give lessons out to aspiring players for hourly fees. I would like to take this moment to say that I like ramen. However, you'll have to pay me in hamburgers if you want me to teach you a *Beatmania* game.
 Now Playing: *Guitar Freaks X*, *Heroes of Might and Magic V*



Ashura Brady Hartel
 I like pie. It is good.
 Now Playing: *Dead Rising*, *Melty Blood: Act Cadenza*, *Adobe Indesign*



Jeremy Jeremy Peeples
 Wii's launch is my most anticipated since the DC. While I can't see any launch ever topping that one, I can see the Wii's coming close. Now I'm off to finish a mountain of assignments so I can actually afford it without descending into madness.
 Now Playing: *Yakuza*, *Crazy Taxi*, *Shenmue II*, *Tetris DS*, *Brain Age*



Mads Amadeo Garcia III
 With an increased workload doing the weekly website comic, Mads the art monkey has had scant time to train on his keyboard skills, but things are progressing. By next month, he will finally be ready to type up his own bio. He still flings his own poop at people though, but we like to think that we're taking it one step at a time.
 Now Playing: *Summon Night*, *Guitar Hero II*, *Final Fantasy Tactics*

GAMER

MAGAZINE

Contents

Previews

Too many games... too few pages... must... use... ancient technique passed down from wandering, magazine-making bards – stubby format. Yeah, well, we still managed to find space to talk all about *Splinter Cell* a lot of times. Also: *Flicky*, FTW.

The Next Generation of Splinter Cell: p32



SEGA!: p23



10

Feature

LOST: Virtual Reality



(if found, please contact the video game industry)

38

On the cover



grand theft auto

New City Stories

Sultry women, fast golf, slow explosions and mounds of dirty cocaine. But, wait! That's not all. Act now and... we'll... ah, just turn to page ->

48

- 8 : NEWS
- 10 : PREVIEW: NFS: CARBON
- 14 : PREVIEW: FULL AUTO 2
- 15 : PREVIEW: RESISTANCE: FALL OF MAN
- 18 : PREVIEW: CALL OF DUTY 3
- 19 : PREVIEW: MARVEL ULTIMATE ALLIANCE
- 20 : PREVIEW: RIDGE RACER 7
- 23 : PREVIEW: SEGA GENESIS COLLECTION
- 24 : PREVIEW: SOCOM COMBINED ASSAULT
- 24 : PREVIEW: SOCOM FIRETEAM BRAVO 2
- 24 : PREVIEW: MGS PORTABLE OPS
- 24 : PREVIEW: SILENT HILL ORIGINS
- 26 : PREVIEW: DBZ: BUDOKAI TENKAICHI 2
- 26 : PREVIEW: KILLZONE LIBERATION
- 26 : PREVIEW: GOD OF WAR II
- 26 : PREVIEW: FAMILY GUY
- 28 : PREVIEW: SNOOPY VS. RED BARON
- 28 : PREVIEW: TOMB RAIDER LEGENDS
- 28 : PREVIEW: WARHAMMER MARK OF CHAOS
- 28 : PREVIEW: TALES OF THE ABYSS
- 30 : PREVIEW: WTF (WORK TIME FUND)
- 30 : PREVIEW: TOKOBOT PLUS
- 30 : PREVIEW: FLUSHED AWAY
- 30 : PREVIEW: SIMS 2 PETS
- 32 : PREVIEW: UNDERCOVER: THE NEXT GENERATION OF SPLINTER CELL
- 38 : FEATURE: LOST: VIRTUAL REALITY
- 44 : MOBILE: FATAL FURY MOBILE
- 44 : MOBILE: ELEVATOR ACTION 3D
- 45 : MOBILE: T.I. STREET RACING
- 45 : MOBILE: NFL FOOTBALL 2007
- 45 : MOBILE: FLYING TOASTER
- 45 : MOBILE: AIR STRIKE 1944
- 48 : COVER STORY: GTA VCS
- 58 : REVIEW: FINAL FANTASY XII
- 60 : REVIEW: GOD HAND
- 61 : REVIEW: NARUTO: CLASH OF NINJA 2
- 62 : REVIEW: ENCHANTED ARMS
- 63 : REVIEW: LEGO STAR WARS II
- 64 : REVIEW: RULE OF ROSE
- 65 : REVIEW: JUST CAUSE
- 66 : REVIEW: GODFATHER
- 67 : REVIEW: SAINTS ROW
- 68 : REVIEW: AGE OF PIRATES: CARIBBEAN TALES
- 68 : REVIEW: BAD DAY L.A.
- 68 : REVIEW: SAMURAI WARRIORS 2
- 68 : REVIEW: SCARFACE
- 69 : REVIEW: NBA 07: THE LIFE VOL. 2
- 69 : REVIEW: PROSTROKE GOLF
- 69 : REVIEW: GANGS OF LONDON
- 69 : REVIEW: BOUNTY HOUNDS
- 70 : REVIEW: RESERVOIR DOGS
- 70 : REVIEW: DIRGE OF CERBERUS
- 70 : REVIEW: STAR FOX COMMAND
- 70 : REVIEW: RENGOKU II
- 72 : JAPAN: MELTY BLOOD: ACT CADENZA
- 74 : JAPAN: SD GUNDAM G GENERATION PORTABLE
- 75 : JAPAN: RHYTHM TENGOKU
- 76 : HARDWARE
- 78 : FAN ART
- 80 : COSPLAY
- 82 : FUNNIES




GEARS OF WAR

EMERGENCE DAY II.12.06

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Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Strong Language

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Jump in.

XBOX 360



VALVE UPDATES COUNTERSTRIKE

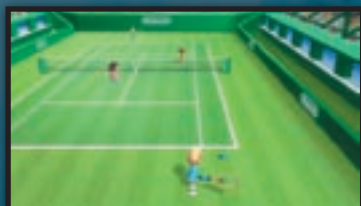
When Valve launched *Half-Life 2*, its multiplayer portion included *Counter-Strike: Source*, a version of the popular online multiplayer shooter that ran off of the new Source engine but was otherwise unchanged. Seven years after the mod's debut, Valve is finally implementing some actual gameplay changes in *Counter-Strike*. One of the updates is an overhaul of the weapon and equipment economy, resulting in price changes for every in-game item. A more radical change is the reworked radar system, which allows you to automatically pass along an enemy's name and position to your teammates if you keep them in sight for a few seconds. Valve promises more changes in the near future, so for people who used to play C-S in the good old days, it might be time to check it out again.



WII WILL ROCK YOU

While Nintendo introduced its next-gen Wii console at E3 2006, the actual launch date and the all-important price remained a well-kept secret. Due to the time zone difference, Japan was the first to announce it will launch the Wii on December 2, 2006 for an estimated ¥25000 (\$212.42). North America gets the console a few weeks earlier on November 19 for \$249.99. Last, but not least, Europe will be able to purchase theirs on December 8 for €249 (\$316.98).

The North American and European retail packages include the console, one wireless Wii remote controller, one nunchuk controller and the *Wii Sports* title, which includes baseball, bowling, boxing, golf and tennis games. In Japan, gamers will have to purchase *Wii Sports* separately. Each Wii title is set to retail for about \$50 in North America, ¥4800-¥6800 (\$40-\$58) in Japan, and €49-€59 (\$62-\$75) in Europe.



IF I PLAY IPOD GAMES WITH ITUNES

The latest version of Apple's online music and video store, iTunes 7, not only offers music, TV series, and full-length movies, but games. The titles are all casual games compatible with fifth-generation and later iPods, and retail for \$4.99 apiece. Available titles include EA's *Tetris*, *Mahjong* and *Mini Golf*; *Pac-Man* from Namco; and PopCap Games's *Bejeweled* and *Zuma*.



MORE TRADE SHOWS CLOSE WHILE LEIPZIG GROWS

It turns out that E3 wasn't the only industry trade show in trouble. Games Market Europe, the UK's only remaining trade show, finally shut its doors. This leaves the Games Convention in Leipzig, Germany as the only major trade show in Europe. Leipzig Fair organizers reported a huge increase in attendance during this year's four-day exhibit, which ran from August 23rd to the 27th. Visitor turnout neared the 200,000 mark, a 50% increase over last year.



SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI

Tokyo, Taisho Era, year 20...

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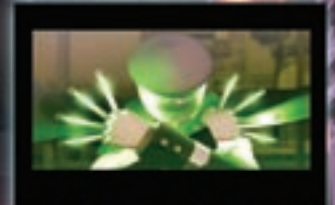
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Devil Summoner

RAIDOU KUZUNOHA vs THE SOULLESS ARMY



PlayStation 2





Preview by Shoegazer



NEED FOR SPEED CARBON

Publisher: Electronic Arts Genre(s): Racing
Developer: EA Black Box Category: Street/Drifting/Tuning
Release Date: 10/31/06 # of Players: 1-2 (Up to 8 online)

It's been nearly three years since EA Black Box was behind the wheel of the *Need for Speed* franchise, and they're coming back strong with the release of *Carbon*. Despite taking the series back to its roots, last year's *Most Wanted* didn't quite become the runaway hit it was expected to be. EA took consumer feedback very seriously and is trying to take the series to the next level. Welcome to the dangerous, adrenaline-fueled world of canyon racing.

At its core, *Carbon* picks up where *Underground* left off, continuing the ever-popular theme of street racing and drift racing. However, this time it's all about taking control of the city, block-by-block, by beating rival crews on their own turf. To completely succeed, you must defeat the crew leaders in a life-or-death canyon duel.

All of the familiar car tuning options will be returning, while introducing a new tool called Autosculpt, which allows you to customize various components of your ride with the help of the right analog stick.

The series has never strayed too far from gamers' expectations, but with *Carbon*, EA hopes to raise the bar for what people expect. Take on the city this October.



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PlayStation 2



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PlayStation 2



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www.destroyallhumansgame.com



www.thq.com

Preview by Shoegazer

FULL AUTO 2 BATTLELINES

If you were to conduct a survey, about 90% of game developers would say that there were still things they wanted to do with their game if they had only had the time. For Pseudo Interactive, those leftover ideas were enough to do a full-fledged sequel.

Instead of hyping the racing component this time around, the focus is solely on creating the most dynamic mass destruction possible. That's right; size *does* matter in Meridian City. You can use the environments to create huge chain reactions that will crush your opponents. If you think of *Full Auto 2* as a love affair between *Burnout Revenge* and *Twisted Metal*, you'll be on the right track.

The single player campaign is also being given a PS3 makeover, making for a much deeper experience. You'll be battling for control of six city districts, and there will be over twenty-five fully-customizable vehicles with which to do it. Rather go online? Try one of five unique multiplayer modes for up to eight players, including Base Assault and Cat & Mouse.

Full Auto 2 will definitely be one of the more interesting titles available in the PS3 catalog. It's shaping up well, and could wind up being an unexpected sleeper at launch.

Publisher: Sega
Developer: Pseudo Interactive
Release Date: 11/14/06
Genre(s): Combat Racing
Category: Vehicular Manslaughter
of Players: 1-2 (Up to 8 online)



RESISTANCE FALL OF MAN

Preview by Shoegazer

There is probably no compliment in this industry greater than being entrusted to develop the flagship title for a console launch. There is probably no greater pressure either, especially when the flagship title is a new IP. Luckily, Ted Price and the crew at Insomniac Games know a little something about creating successful new IPs, and *Resistance* is shaping up to be another standout on their resume.

Taking place in an alternate version of the 20th century, an unknown species called The Chimera have unleashed a deadly virus that turns humans into Chimera, leaving Europe in ruins. The United States and Britain have united as mankind's last chance to stop them. Though their chances of survival look bleak, US Army Ranger Sgt. Nathan Hale will rise to protect humanity with a wide range of weaponry and vehicles at his disposal.

With a single-player campaign, co-op play, and forty-player online chaos, *Resistance* is giving gamers a lot of what they might want. Incredibly advanced AI and a proprietary physics system to distinguish human and alien weaponry round out an already impressive package, so if you're in line at midnight to snag a console, you may want to check this one out.



Publisher: Sony Computer Entertainment America
Developer: Insomniac Games
Release Date: November 17, 2006
Genre: Action
Category: First Person Shooter
Players: 1-4 (up to 40 online)



1.976HGM

FINAL FANTASY V ADVANCE

One of the "forgotten" *FINAL FANTASY* games is finally being brought back to life for Game Boy Advance. *FINAL FANTASY V*, the relatively obscure classic known mostly for its sophisticated and in-depth job system, will soon be rereleased for American fans to enjoy, with new challenges, new dungeons, and plenty of other exciting additions designed to please both hardcore and first time players alike.

FINAL FANTASY V initially came out for the Super Famicom® in Japan, but was skipped over for North American release for years in favor of titles with more straightforward game play (and perceived Western appeal). Rabid fans later went so far as to actually translate *FINAL FANTASY V* themselves, which gave rise to a small but dedicated fanbase.

For its American debut on Game Boy Advance, *FINAL FANTASY V Advance* is being spruced up with amazing new graphics, a new translation, extra jobs, a bonus dungeon, and special new options like a music player and a bestiary. Even if you think you've mastered the original game, think again; there are new challenges waiting here that'll kick your butt.

FINAL FANTASY V Advance begins in the Wind Shrine, where the King of Tycoon has come to investigate an irregularity in the winds. He's just in time to see the magical wind crystal shatter, which stops the wind everywhere in the world. The king's daughter, Princess Lenna, who followed him to the Wind Shrine, finds a mysterious old man, Galuf, lying unconscious next to a meteor. Lenna, Galuf, the explorer Bartz, and the pirate Faris are drawn together by fate to find out the mystery behind not only Galuf's meteor, but the elemental crystals and the evil plot of the man known as Exdeath.

In this epic adventure, players must acquire shards of the shattered elemental crystals as they progress through the game, allowing them to take on various jobs. These jobs will be familiar to *FINAL FANTASY* fans, including such old favorites as knights, dragoons, black mages, and white mages. Defeating enemies will earn ABP for your jobs, which in turn will allow a character to use a job's unique skills even while they're using a different job entirely. This provides you with all sorts of interesting ways to achieve total dominance over your foes.



Lenna: What's happened? What's the matter?



This new release further improves this system by adding extra classes: the gladiator, a powerful warrior; the necromancer, who uses dark magic to manipulate the souls of the damned; the oracle, with the power to change the fates of enemies and party members; and the cannoner, who creates explosives by combining items.

You'll need those classes' extra power to explore the depths of the new dungeon: the Sealed Temple, which boasts thirty floors' worth of powerful monsters and challenging puzzles. The Sealed Temple is further guarded by the Cloister of the Dead, where you will once again encounter all the bosses you've fought throughout the game, and a brand-new boss — a legendary evil mage designed by *FINAL FANTASY*'s equally legendary character designer, Tetsuya Nomura.

If you've played *FINAL FANTASY V* before, there is more than enough new content in *FINAL FANTASY V Advance* to bring you back. If you're any kind of *FINAL FANTASY* fan and you haven't played *FINAL FANTASY V* yet... well, there's something wrong with you, but now you've got a perfect chance to fix it.



STAFF INTERVIEW

We happened to catch Mr. Hiroyuki Miura, Producer and Mr. Yoshinori Kitase, Project Planner, on a short break from their busy schedule to ask them a few questions.

Q: What are some of the abilities of the new job classes? What new skills do they have?

A: (Miura) Gladiators specialize in swordplay. Characters with this job have unique abilities such as "Bladeblitz," which attacks the entire enemy party at once, and "Finisher," an attribute attack which inflicts a great deal of damage on an enemy. Cannoners can "Combine" some items and bullets to create combination bombs. They also can "Open Fire," firing their cannons in various ways to attack. There are also other new jobs in this special version. Don't miss it!

Q: What's the backstory of the Sealed Temple? How does it relate to the larger *FINAL FANTASY V* storyline?

A: (Miura) The Sealed Temple was built by ancient people, and, as its name suggests, someone very evil is sealed in there. It was intentionally built in a different dimension from *FINAL FANTASY V*'s world. To go to that dimension, you will need to have a transportation device similar to the meteor that will let you move between dimensions. The device should be somewhere in the world! I'm certain that the sealed evil is someone who should have never been released in the world of *FINAL FANTASY V*.

Q: What is your favorite part of this game? Is there any history about that part that we don't know about that you can share?

A: (Kitase) My favorite scene is where Galuf jumps on the flying dragon to go help Bartz and others. At that time, I was working on an overall in-game events presentation with Mr. Sakaguchi (Hironobu Sakaguchi, one of the founders of the series). We divided the sequence in two, and Mr. Sakaguchi and I each worked on a part.

A hero jumping on a moving train, horse or car is the must-have scene in Hollywood action movies, and these scenes excite the audience. I worked on the presentation of this scene with Hollywood action movie elements in mind. Of course, a Hollywood movie and 2D pixels are not comparable, but I believed that if we could perfectly synchronize the text, music and the characters' animation in the game, we could create the same level of synergy and sense of excitement.

Q: The crystals representing the elements figure very prominently in these early *FINAL FANTASY* games. What do they mean to you personally?

A: (Kitase) Clear and colorless, mirror-like crystal can reflect the image of the person looking into it. I think that means the power of a crystal can be used for good or evil depending on the person. Depending on the person's state of mind, different perspectives emerge and influence different outcomes. (Sometimes it brings happiness and sometimes it can cause a great deal of despair).

I think this has something in common with our modern day experience. The crystal represents this universal truth of the human mind.

FINAL FANTASY V
ADVANCE
COMING
11 / 8 / 2006

SQUARE ENIX

GAME BOY ADVANCE

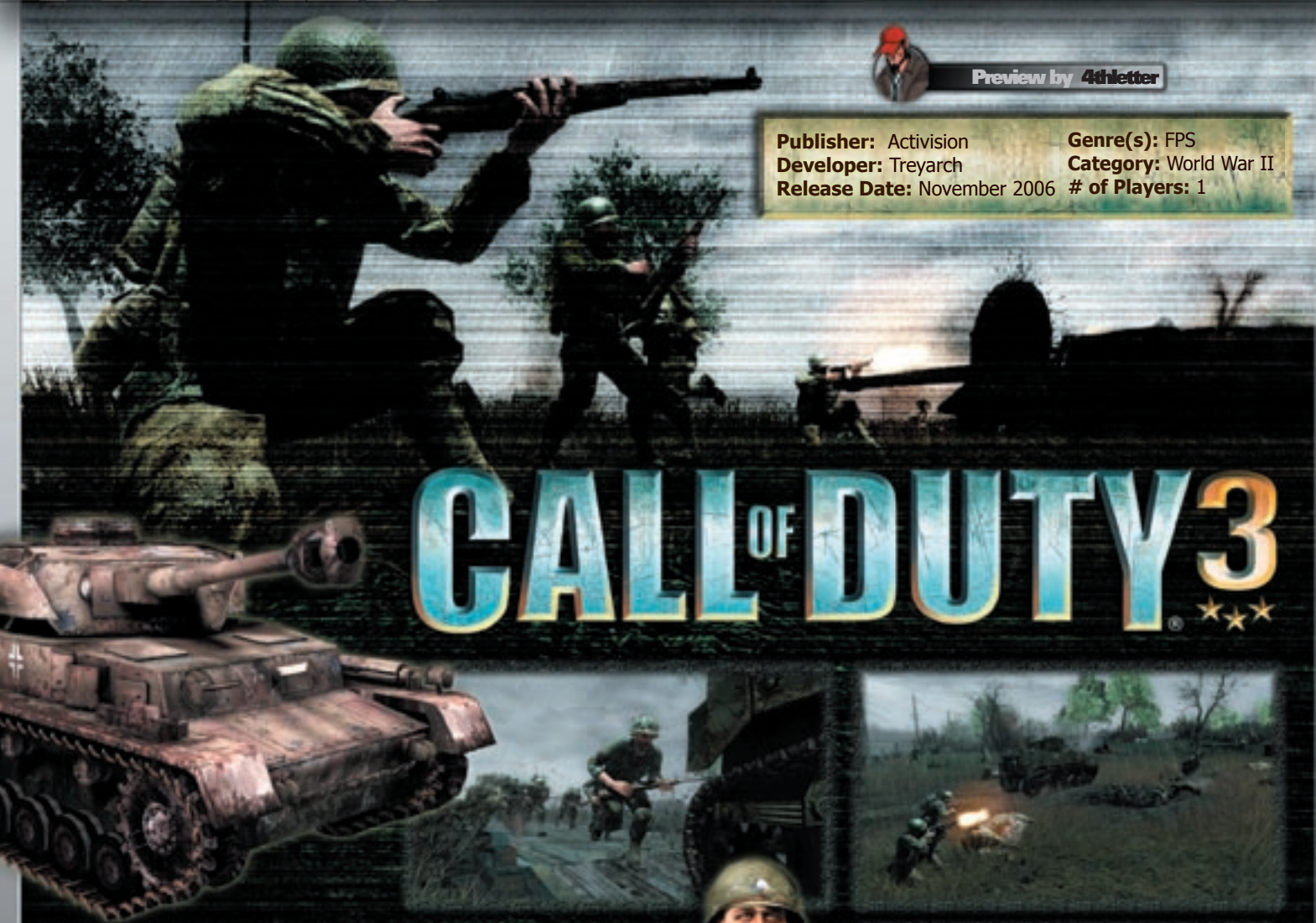


THE JOB SYSTEM

FINAL FANTASY V refined the job system that influenced several future games in the *FINAL FANTASY* series. By finding the shards of the shattered crystals, Bartz, Galuf, Lenna and Faris gain powerful new abilities and become able to wield new weaponry, as they gain an array of jobs. These include such *FINAL FANTASY* mainstays as dragoons, white mages, black mages, and thieves among many others.

By earning ABP from successful battles, the heroes of *FINAL FANTASY V* can master their currently equipped jobs, allowing them to use that job's trademark ability even after they assume another job. This is a key strategy for getting past the game's later dungeons (bosses, etc.) unscathed!





Preview by 4thletter

Publisher: Activision
Developer: Treyarch
Release Date: November 2006
Genre(s): FPS
Category: World War II
of Players: 1

CALL OF DUTY 3

World War II shooters are pretty much America's version of Japan's RPGs with pretty-boy protagonists. There are zillions of both of them, and probably 90% of those zillions look and sound the same. Perhaps we should combine the two to introduce a shot in the arm to both genres?

Nah, there are other ways to innovate. *Call of Duty 3* is pushing for a more realistic war experience. Case in point: you're deep in the enemy camp with little backup. You spot a Nazi a few feet away just as he spots you and you begin to take aim. Will the Nazi stand there and take the bullet (like they have done in the past few games) or will he rush you, grab your gun, and try to kill you with your own weapon? Just FYI: the last one is the right answer.

That's what *CoD3* is bringing to the table. Running around ruined towns shooting up zee Germans only gets you so far. The French Resistance was one of the most harrowing fronts in WWII. You and your squad are going to be dropped directly into the middle of it and will fight until Paris is finally liberated. You start at Normandy, and go all the way through to the end of the war, so expect a long and difficult haul.

World War II is a tired setting, but the *Call of Duty* series keeps showing us that an old dog can learn new tricks. Liberate Paris in November.



Preview by 4thletter

MARVEL ULTIMATE ALLIANCE

Oh, Marvel Comics, who doesn't love you? *Spider-Man 2* and the *X-Men Legends* series are classic, and barring well-intentioned missteps like *Marvel Nemesis* or *X-Men: The Official Game*, you've got one up on your Distinguished Competition. Where do you go from here?

Easy; you take it directly to the fanboys. *Marvel Ultimate Alliance* builds on the *X-Men Legends* style and throws at least twenty playable Marvel characters at you. Ever wanted to sling Captain America's shield at a bad guy? You can do it. You can go upside a bad guy's head with Thor's Mjolnir and put the hurt on another with Blade. Regulars like Spidey and Wolverine are also making appearances, along with a few surprises.

Even more surprising is the attention to detail that Raven Software is bringing to the game. The characters have

unlockable costumes. That's par for the course, but how many of those unlockable costumes change how the characters play? Spidey in his black costume has different stats than he does in his old red and blue outfit. That sort of detail is implemented in the game. The costumes aren't just eye candy.

If you need a little more convincing, think on these things. You can have Spider-Man, Ghost Rider, and Wolverine on one team. That's three-fourths of the New Fantastic Four. There are over a hundred and forty Marvel characters in the game, so one of your favorites may make a cameo. Thor is in the game, so there is also a very good chance you might be able to score a Beta Ray Bill skin. Who can resist that?

Publisher: Activision
Developer: Raven Software
Release Date: 10/24/06
Genre(s): Action RPG
Category: Secret Wars
of Players: 1-4

RIDGE RACER 7

Say it with me, kids: RIIIIIIIIIDGE RACER!

Namco's *Ridge Racer* series is one of the cornerstones of the PlayStation brand, so of course there's a new title in the series to go along with the PS3 launch. Much like the 360-exclusive *Ridge Racer 6*, *RR7* is a system exclusive designed to exploit the strengths of the PS3. This means mind-blowingly detailed high-resolution pseudo-realistic graphics that give the *Ridge Racer* driving fantasy an unprecedented level of intensity.

It also means twenty-two unique tracks, forty cars, a 160-race career mode, worldwide online multiplayer for up to fourteen simultaneous racers, and a mind-bogglingly detailed car customization and tuning system. For the first time in the *Ridge Racer* series, you'll be able to alter the look and performance of any car into one of thousands different possible combinations. Even more customization content will be available via download from the PS3's online service. Online multiplayer in *RR7* will blend traditional competitive play with a variety of co-op modes like Team Battle and Pair Time Attack. A worldwide leaderboard called the "World Hub" will track every player's performance.

Despite these neat features and fantastic screens, *RR7* is going to face an uphill battle when it comes to getting the respect of the hardcore. Much like *Genji 2* and its GIANT ENEMY CRAB, *Ridge Racer 7* emerged from the flaming wreckage of Sony's E3 2006 press conference as an enduring symbol of corporate failure and stale gameplay. Of course, the final proof is in the gameplay, and in all likelihood few of *RR7*'s vocal naysayers have ever laid hands on the game.

Can Namco Bandai deliver a product good enough to make the internet eat its collective words? We'll find out this fall.

Publisher: Namco-Bandai
Developer: Namco-Bandai
Release Date: Q4 2006
Genre(s): Racing
Category: Arcade
of Players: 1 - 14

Preview by Lynara

*A Heavenly
Slice of China*

DYNASTY WARRIORS 雙 真 傳 2 Vol 2



Ancient China's greatest warriors have rocked the foundations of heaven and earth for over 2,000 years. Now the *Warriors Worth a Thousand* return in the sequel that edipses the original.

- For the first time, multiplayer combat with Battle Royal for up to 4 players (ad hoc).
- Includes the complete pantheon of all 48 Dynasty Warriors® with branching story paths for each kingdom.
- Unleash Double Musou attacks with your officers.
- Own a stable of up to 8 horses and elephants that gain experience during battle.
- Musou, Multiplayer, Free, and Camp modes, plus over 50 stages and 31 maps.

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MATURE
Blood and Gore
Language
Suggestive Themes
Violence
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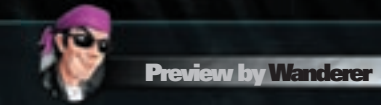
SEGA GENESIS COLLECTION

Sega Genesis Collection is full of surprises. You'd expect a Genesis collection to have *Sonic the Hedgehog*, *Shinobi III*, *Golden Axe*, and *Altered Beast*, but Sega's thrown in *twenty-four* other games, from major hits to cult classics.

Some of the picks have come out of left field. Was anyone really expecting *Ristar* (oh, sure, it's always been brilliant, but no one seems to know about it) or *Gain Ground* to make the cut in a collection like this? Does *Comix Zone* have a huge underground fandom that I've somehow missed? It's odd.

Even if you're a Sega fanatic who already has all these games on cart, Sega's trying to suck you in by putting a ton of unlockables on the disc. Playing all the available games will unlock five more titles, developer interviews, and trailers for *Virtua Fighter 5* and the upcoming PS3 *Sonic the Hedgehog*. All told, there's a hell of a lot of value in this collection.

This collection includes: *Alex Kid*, *Altered Beast* (Genesis), *Bonanza Bros.*, *Columns*, *Comix Zero*, *Decap Attack*, *Ecco*, *Ecco Jr.*, *Ecco 2*, *Flicky*, *Gain Ground*, *Golden Axe*, *Golden Axe II*, *Golden Axe III*, *Kid Chameleon*, *Phantasy Star*, *Phantasy Star III*, *Phantasy Star IV* (hell yes), *Ristar*, *Shadow Dancer*, *Shinobi III*, *Sonic the Hedgehog*, *Sonic 2*, *Super Thunderbird*, *Sword of Vermillion*, *Vectorman*, *Vectorman 2*, and *Virtua Fighter 2* (the weird 2D-ish version). **Unlockables Include:** *Altered Beast* (arcade), *Future Spy*, *Tac/Scan*, *Zaxxon*, and *Zektor*.



Publisher: Sega
Developer: Digital Eclipse
Release Date: 11/7/2006

Genre(s): Compilation
Category: SEGA!
of Players: 1-2

PLATFORM PlayStation.2 PSP

PREVIEW



Metal Gear Solid: Portable Ops is the "missing link" in the MGS story. In 1970, Big Boss and Roy Campbell must prevent FOXHOOUND from launching a stolen nuke at Russia. Portable Ops allows Big Boss to capture and recruit enemy soldiers, forming a brigade of unique troops. The squad you build over the course of the singleplayer mode can be used to fight your friends via wireless multiplayer.



METAL GEAR SOLID PORTABLE OPS

Publisher: Konami
Developer: Kojima Productions
Release Date: Winter 2006
Platform: PSP

Genre(s): Action
Category: Stealth, Long Soliloquies
of Players: 1-4



Travis O'Grady's just a truck driver making an ordinary delivery. Unfortunately, it's in the hours leading up to the events of the original Silent Hill, and Travis will have to fight his way back out of town. Silent Hill: Origins uses a new, Resident Evil 4-esque camera, and incorporates elements of the first game's Silent Hill and that of the movie, featuring familiar locations like Alchemilla Hospital. Perhaps most importantly, Origins features a full soundtrack by Akira Yamaoka.



Publisher: Konami
Developer: Konami
Release Date: 2007
Platform: PSP

Genre(s): Survival Horror
Category: Go For The Gross-Out
of Players: 1



Consider this: SOCOM is to PS2 as Halo is to Xbox. The long-running series hits the PS2 yet again and this time boasts some impressive additions. Four player online cooperative play is in effect, as well as being able to change your soldier's loadout according to your personal specifications. Instant Action mode has been added to the game, which allows you to essentially play Skirmish-style missions once you complete a stage.



SOCOM U.S. NAVY SEALs COMBINED ASSAULT

Publisher: Sony Computer Entertainment
Developer: Zipper Interactive
Release Date: November 7, 2006
Platform: PS2

Genre(s): Shooter
Category: Realistic
of Players: 1



SOCOM made the transition from PS2 to PSP gracefully, and now it's back for more. Expect everything that made the original game good, plus plenty of new additions. There are more weapon customization options, more Crosstalk, and deeper stages. The graphics have taken a step up, as well. The character models for both your duo and the enemies are sharper and more detailed. Get your online multiplayer action on the go again this fall.



Publisher: Sony Computer Entertainment
Developer: Zipper Interactive
Release Date: November 7, 2006
Platform: PSP

Genre(s): Shooter
Category: Realistic
of Players: 1-16 (online)

A SWEEPING SAGA
AN ANCIENT BETRAYAL
A BATTLE TO END ALL BATTLES



NINETY-NINE NIGHTS

INTENSE ACTION

IMMERSIVE BATTLES



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DBZ: Budokai Tenkaichi 2 stands alongside Super DBZ as part of the "hey, let's give DBZ fighting games some actual depth" revolution. The engine's balance issues have been fixed and tweaked, making it fun for competitive play, and tons of new features have been added, including a revamped story mode, in-battle transformations, fusions, and tag-team battles. A roster boasting over a hundred twenty characters sweetens the deal. If you're reading this issue, look for it to come out soon.

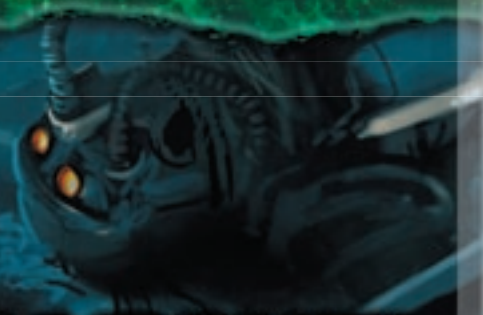


Publisher: Atari
Developer: Spike
Release Date: PS2: 10/31/06; Wii: 2007
Platform: PS2, Wii

Genre(s): Fighting
Category: Dragon Ball Z
of Players: 1-2



Killzone: Liberation is a surprisingly cool top-down shooter, set in an endless monochrome war zone. Liberation is set immediately after the PS2 game. Hellghast is still oppressing south Vekta and must be expelled. Diplomacy is right out, of course, so lots of gunfire will be required. Moving from cover to cover, keeping an eye on enemy placement, and giving commands to the occasional helper, all from a bird's-eye view, just might bring peace to Vekta at last.



KILLZONE™ LIBERATION

Publisher: SCEA
Developer: Guerilla
Release Date: November 2006
Platform: PSP

Genre(s): Military Action
Category: Run & Gun
of Players: 1-6



God of War was a smash hit for the PS2. The tale of Kratos's revenge, or perhaps the killer gameplay, enthralled gamers. The man with the baddest weapons around is back for another go, though now he's more god than man. Expect the newly crowned God of War's story to go down in typically mythological fashion, with a line of broken and bloody bodies left in his wake. His quest? To meet the Fates.



Publisher: Sony Computer Entertainment
Developer: SCE Studios Santa Monica
Release Date: February 2007
Platform: PS2

Genre(s): Action
Category: Sacrificious
of Players: 1



Family Guy is making the transition from television to video games this winter, in a move that should elate fans of the show and horrify unwitting parents. Peter Griffin and company are going to be voiced by the regular cast of the show, with Brian, Peter, and Stewie as the main characters. Expect non sequiturs, random gags, and raunchy humor... so basically expect the show but with less censoring.



Publisher: 2K Games
Developer: High Voltage Software
Release Date: October 16, 2006
Platform: PS2, PSP, Xbox

Genre(s): Action
Category: Giggity, Giggity
of Players: 1-2



SNOOPY VS THE RED BARON

Snoopy and the Red Baron have been battling things out in the skies for years now, and soon they'll be doing so on your PlayStation 2. The game's design owes a lot to *Rogue Squadron*, but with a slower pace and a presentation faithful to the "Peanuts" comics. If the team can do proper justice to the license and can iron out some of the sluggishness and unclear objectives that marred the preview build, then this could be a game to watch. How can you go wrong with birds for wingmen?



Publisher: Namco Bandai
Developer: Smart Bomb Interactive
Release Date: October 2006
Platform: PS2, PSP, PC

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



After a poorly-received PSP port, *Legend* should finally be done justice on a portable. Crystal Dynamics worked hard to bring the core gameplay intact on the DS, and wisely continued the trend of basically making the GBA games into *Prince of Persia* with a female lead. The DS version uses the touch screen to allow you to quickly shoot enemies and cycle through your weapons and health quickly, while the GBA version uses thrilling comics instead of CG to tell the tale. Both versions could stand to look better, but visuals aside, they should deliver what's needed in a quality game.



LARA CROFT TOMB RAIDER LEGEND

Publisher: Eidos
Developer: Crystal Dynamics
Release Date: October 31 2006
Platform: DS, GBA (not pictured)

Genre(s): Adventure
Category: Action
of Players: 1



WARHAMMER MARK OF CHAOS

In a bid to bridge the gap between the tabletop and virtual *Warhammers*, *Mark of Chaos* puts the focus back on battle tactics. This is as close to tabletop *Warhammer* as you can get, without it being turn-based. There's no base building and no resource management; there's just full-on war. Like its recent *40k* RTS brethren, you can customize your armies' colors and look. After all, it wouldn't be *Warhammer* if you couldn't!



Publisher: Bandai Namco
Developer: Black Hole
Release Date: October 2006
Platform: PC

Genre(s): RTS
Category: Art of War
of Players: 1-8



The Playstation 2 has had its fair share of killer RPGs, and *Tales of the Abyss*, the latest in the long-running series, may add to that number. *Tales* fans know what to expect by now and the latest game is poised to deliver. Cooking and active battles are back, along with a cast of endearing characters and all of the epic adventures you'd expect. There's even a cool new system that helps you get to know the innermost fears of each hero, right through dungeons and exploration. Clear your winter calendar for this one; it looks big.



TALES OF THE ABYSS

Publisher: Namco Bandai
Developer: Namco Tales Studio
Release Date: October 10, 2006
Platform: PS2

Genre(s): RPG
Category: Epic
of Players: 1

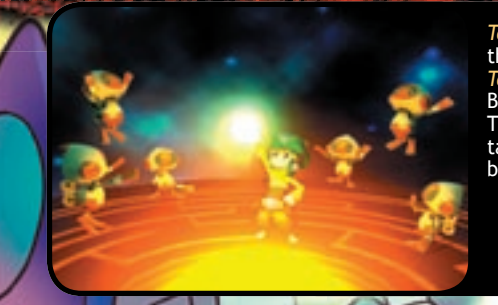




Work Time Fun is one oddball game. It's a collection of minigames in a variety of styles, and a *WarioWare* clone at heart. Each job draws a paycheck depending on how well it's performed, and the money is used to buy new jobs from vending machines. Putting caps on an endless stream of pens, leading a protest march to the park while avoiding police, and guessing a woman's phone number are just a few of the many... let's call them unique... challenges.



Publisher: D3 Publisher
Developer: SCEI
Release Date: October 2006
Platform: PSP
Genre(s): Minigames
Category: Bizarre minimalism
of Players: 1-2



Tokobot was a title that didn't quite make its mark on the PSP. Tecmo is giving it another chance on the PS2 as *Tokobot Plus*, where it will hopefully find a wider audience. Bolt, your player, is going around and collecting Tokobots. These cute little machines can team up to form propellers, tanks, and many other things. *Tokobot Plus* is shaping up to be a pretty decent dungeon crawler/puzzler.



Publisher: Tecmo
Developer: Tecmo
Release Date: October 3, 2006
Platform: PS2
Genre(s): Platformer
Category: With Our Powers Combined
of Players: 1-2



Flushed Away is the latest work by Aardman Features, the team behind the claymation films *Chicken Run* and *Wallace & Gromit: The Curse of the Were-Rabbit*. *Flushed Away* ditches the crusty old claymation format, however, and sets itself apart from the pack by boldly choosing computer animation as the medium for its not-at-all-derivative story about talking animal people. I don't know about you guys, but I'm totally excited. As a game, *Flushed Away* shows slightly more promise as a kid-friendly, action-oriented platformer that features stealth elements. This game could shape up to be a winner! Watch for it this October.



Publisher: D3
Developer: Vicious Cycle
Release Date: October 24, 2006
Platform: PS2, GC
Genre(s): Sewer-Based Action
Category: Claymation!
of Players: 1



Look out, *Nintendogs*! *The Sims* is gunning for you. In the upcoming expansion to the best-selling game, you can give your Sims a little more love in the form of a cuddly dog or cat (sadly, there doesn't seem to be room for pets of the more exotic variety). You can customize a lot about your pet, whether you want a roly-poly puppy, a sleek Siamese, a noble guard dog, or a fat loafy cat. You can then bring out your pet's potential through breeding, training, and even career management, or, like most people, you can just sit back and watch them be adorable. The *Pets* expansion is coming to every system under the sun this fall.



Publisher: EA
Developer: Maxis
Release Date: 10/17/06 (consoles, PC), 10/26/06 (handhelds)
Platform: DS, GBA, GC, PC, PS2, PSP
Genre(s): The Sims
Category: Pets
of Players: 1



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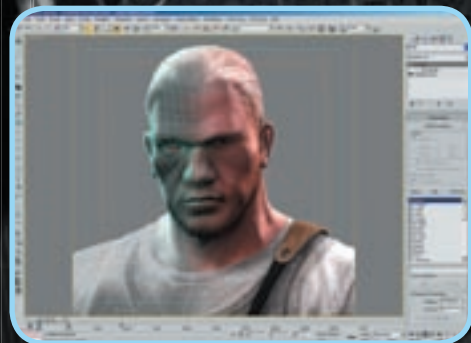


UNDER COVER: THE NEXT GENERATION OF SPLINTER CELL

By Daniel Kayser of GameTrailers.com

The gaming industry is huge. The now-global business of video games has surpassed all expectations for what it could become when the first titles hit the market over twenty years ago. At its core, the gaming industry still strives to merge the worlds of creativity and technology while meeting the demands of business.

The process of trying to meet those business demands while putting out high-quality, innovative games is truly fascinating. This is especially true when a company is attempting to take a successful franchise through a transition in console generations. Ubisoft is in this position with the upcoming *Splinter Cell: Double Agent*. With this title, Ubisoft hopes to introduce new features that will completely redefine what the term "stealth gaming" means. Of course, since past games in the *Splinter Cell* series have all been enormously successful, any major changes could be viewed as inherently bad and a disruption of the formula. If the games remain the same for years on end, however, players eventually will grow tired of them.



The team working on *Double Agent* in Shanghai, China, is well aware of the enormity of the task set before them. "We were huge fans of the *Splinter Cell* series, but at the same time, when approaching a fourth installment, we felt a huge pressure to move forward, to make the series evolve," says Daniel Roy, Producer on *Double Agent* for the Xbox 360. "That's the kind of thinking that brought us to the 'Double Agent' concept: it has allowed us to respect the core values of the series — stealth, tension, political intrigue — and yet bring an element of innovation and change to the game."

Innovation and change can't happen overnight in the big business of games. It takes time and manpower, especially when dealing with the next gen consoles. For instance, concept work on *Splinter Cell: Double Agent* began immedi-



ately after *Pandora Tomorrow* hit the shelves in 2004. Production on the game itself began in early 2005. In total, nearly 350 people have worked on *Splinter Cell: Double Agent*, including its current-gen, next-gen, online, and offline components. The single player campaign on Xbox 360 version alone has employed approximately a hundred fifty people.

The stated goal of *Double Agent* is to push *Splinter Cell* into the next generation. Daniel Roy explains, "Even though we added a lot to the *Splinter Cell* core experience in *Double Agent*, we've been fortunate to be able to rely on a lot of past technological and gameplay accomplishments. We already knew how to create a visually stunning game, and also how to create situations in-game that would be filled with tension. I would say that it's both the positives and negatives that drove us forward when creating *Double Agent*: we wanted to make a game that would not rest on its laurels, and would push the envelope in terms of content and variety. With such a good series as *Splinter Cell*, it would have been easy to just do '*Chaos Theory 2*.'" For that matter, such a game probably would have sold a solid million copies. Whether anyone still cared about *Splinter Cell* by the time Ubisoft trucked out a hypothetical *Chaos Theory 4* is a different prospect entirely.

The initial target for achieving a feeling of true advancement in *Splinter Cell* was with the new game's storyline. So as soon as *Double Agent* begins, series hero Sam Fisher is immediately exposed to a life-altering tragedy: the death of his daughter Sarah, a relatively obscure supporting character in the previous *Splinter Cell* titles. Despondent, Sam wants to take on a mission more dangerous and all-consuming than

anything he dared handle before. His cell's commanding officer, Lambert, offers a mission more deadly than anything that they have tackled before: infiltrating an enemy terrorist cell and taking it down from within.

It sounds a little cliché when it's simply spelled out like that, but the changes become more compelling when you consider how they're going to impact gameplay. *Double Agent's* Sam Fisher has become a hardened and inherently unpredictable man, so his decisions can truly be whatever you want. He'll frequently be tasked with carrying out horrific orders that the old Sam Fisher could have thought about accepting. This change in Sam's character is all part of the core strategy of expanding the franchise. Changing the lead character's circumstances likewise changes the player's circumstances, and opens up new situations for a player to explore. It is, of course, a risky choice; gamers have had three titles to grow close to the old Sam Fisher, and may ultimately be uninterested in or even outraged by the changes to the character.

"When we started *Double Agent*, we knew that people would expect more from the latest *Splinter Cell* than pretty graphics," says Roy. "We felt that upping the resolution of our textures would not be enough to really mark the change of generations. So we spent a lot of time thinking about what "next generation" means for all aspects of our game. We wanted the story to be more ambitious, the presentation to be more dramatic, the gameplay to be more varied and intense, and the tension to be upped a notch. Oh, and of course,



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Gothic 3

A NAMELESS HERO BECOMES A LEGEND.

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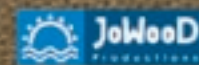
DESTROY YOUR ENEMIES WITH LIGHTNING, FAST ATTACKS, DEADLY CLOSE COMBAT AND LONG RANGE WEAPONS.



EXPLORE THE LUSH LANDSCAPES OF A VAST AND DIVERSE WORLD AND ANSWER THE BURNING QUESTION - ALLY OR ENEMY?



DETERMINE THE PATH OF YOUR HERO, THE FATE OF MANKIND AND YOUR COMPLETELY UNIQUE GAMING EXPERIENCE.



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UNDER COVER: THE NEXT GENERATION OF *SPLINTER CELL*

we wanted the prettier graphics and more beautiful environments! As a result, the pressure to produce something next-gen has been huge for everyone on the team, at all levels. It forced us to rework some parts of the game that we would have otherwise accepted."

So how did the team approach the task of maximizing the technical aspects of *Double Agent*? "Here's a little secret," confesses Roy. "We didn't set a quality benchmark per se. We were in telling everybody, 'Okay, we're making a next-gen game'. We left the definition of 'next-gen' as broad as possible, so that people could internalize it, and apply it in their own, individual ways. Every time we finished something, we looked at it thinking, 'Okay, now how do we make it better?' It's been a tough process for some, as it can be frustrating to always work at something and not simply accept it as good enough. The fact that there were no Xbox 360 games out there when we started out has helped this, because there were no existing examples of what was a truly 'next-gen' game out there. When Xbox 360 games started coming out, we quickly realized we would have to depend on our own standards for the rest of the project... up until the very end, we've been looking at everything and wondering how to make it better."

Optimizing a game for the next generation can mean subtle changes just as well as it means the obvious high-res textures and boosted polygon counts. Take *Double Agent*'s music, for example. By utilizing the multi-core processing and huge memory allocation of the Xbox 360, the music team has managed to create something more than just pleasant background noise. There are no musical tracks in *Double Agent* per se; rather, there are multiple streams of music that are directly tied to the gameplay situation.

Here's an example. The music on a particular level demonstrated at Shanghai featured twelve separate layers of instrumentation. Layers rise into the level's music as the tension of a given scene rises, then fade away as tension dissipates. As Sam approaches an enemy, a rhythmic drum line steadily builds to a crescendo. If Sam turns away, the drum line fades into the atmospheric sounds that accompany the game's stealth sequences. The idea that music should be used as a gameplay element that creates true immersion is unheard of outside the world of rhythm games. In *Double Agent*, Ubisoft's Shanghai team may have set a new benchmark



for use of audio in video games.

In today's mass market, it is ultimately the consumer that determines how successful a game is, regardless of the developer's ambitions. What does Ubisoft do to try and please existing fans while continually reaching for new ones with every project? "It's gonna sound like I'm sucking up when I say this, but it's 100% true: we design the games for the consumer," says Roy. "It's actually a big corporate value at Ubisoft, to approach game production with the consumer in mind. It means respecting the hardcore fans of the series, because they're the ones who have been loyal for so long, and they usually know your games better than you. It also means not 'talking down' to the mass market audience, but rather to try and understand how they play, what they enjoy. We listen to consumers from

day one, when we brainstorm on our new game concepts, and we go back to the consumers at the end, when we want to know if our game is as fun and as challenging as it should be. One of the most rewarding experiences in game design is actually to sit next to a videogame player, put a pad in his hands, and watch him play your game for the first time."

Splinter Cell: Double Agent is hoping to take gamers into the next generation of stealth action while meeting all the objectives of a successful game franchise. Only time will tell how *Double Agent* will fare at the retail level, any publisher's final benchmark for success. Long-time *Splinter Cell* fans have good reason to be excited, though. *Double Agent* gives us a whole new Sam Fisher and a whole new world of stealth action to explore.

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LOST: Virtual Reality

(if found, please contact video game industry)



"Next you can check out my Power Glove. It's so bad."



The limitations of a two-dimensional television screen are obvious. In the past, game developers thought that making games more three-dimensional would be a matter of transcending those limitations. No one thought the future would be about increasing poly-counts and draw distances; instead, it would be about making players experience games as directly as they experienced the real world.

Obviously, this future of "virtual reality" gaming never happened, and probably never will. The evolution of the virtual reality movement is fascinating in its own right, though, as that yearning for a more realistic gaming experience ended up directly resulting in the 3D rendered graphics we enjoy today. To emphasize the difference between 3D rendered graphics and virtual reality graphics, this article is going to refer to the latter as "3-D."

Nintendo Entertainment System

There are three true 3-D titles for the NES: *3-D World Runner*, the very popular *Rad Racer*, and *Orb 3-D*. The first two games were developed by Squaresoft, with Acclaim publishing *3-D World Runner* and Nintendo of America publishing *Rad Racer*. *Orb 3-D* was published by a company called Hi-Tech Expressions.

These NES games used one of the simplest 3-D techniques, anaglyph images. This technique was made famous by the 3-D movie craze of the 50's. An anaglyph is a type of stereoscopic 3-D image created by presenting two distinctly different, but similar images of an object. The two different images are usually viewed approximately 2.5 inches apart, to simulate the typical distance between the human eyes. Each image is filtered through one of a contrasting pair of colors, usually red and blue. *Orb 3-D* came with trademarked "3-D GrenoVision glasses" that, despite the fancy name, merely replaced the traditional blue filter with a green one.

The eye covered by the red filter sees only the red portions of the image, while the eye covered by the blue filter sees only the blue parts. As the eyes work to make sense of the visual stimuli, the brain interprets the color differences as the result of differences in distance. It composites the different visual data into one image, which comes into focus in three dimensions. The 3-D effect only works on a horizontal plane, so moving your head from side to side allows you to see "deeper" into the image. The ability to see 3-D anaglyphic images varies among individuals and doesn't work for some people.

To see 3-D in a game like *3-D World Runner*, the player must don a pair of red/blue anaglyphic glasses that work with the color filters in the 3-D images. To enhance the effect, you should darken the room and close all of the window curtains and shades. This prevents exterior light from leaking into the room and diluting the quality of the effect.

As a footnote, there is a game that could be considered the fourth 3-D title for the NES. *JJ*, also known as *Jumpin' Jack*, was a sequel to *3-D World Runner* that was only developed and released by Squaresoft for the Famicom in Japan. *JJ* eschewed the anaglyphic approach of previous NES 3-D titles



in favor of a more sophisticated technique that involved altering the refresh rate of the screen. A player who wanted to view the 3-D effect wore a pair of more sophisticated 3-D glasses called "shutter glasses". More information about how shutter glasses work is contained below.

GCE Vectrex

The first 3-D hardware peripheral for a console was the 3-D Imager for the GCE Vectrex, released in 1983. There were three games that used the 3-D Imager: *3-D Crazy Coaster*, *3-D Mine Storm*, and *3-D Narrow Escape*. The peripheral itself was a special headset that plugged into one of the Vectrex controller ports. The 3-D effect came from a tri-color wheel, each designed for a specific title and inserted into the Imager. Once the Vectrex powered on, the color wheel would spin within the glasses to create the illusion of playing your game in 3-D.

You're probably wondering how a monochromatic system like the Vectrex somehow pulled off anaglyphic 3-D. That was the genius of the 3-D Imager's tri-color wheel. Each wheel was split between a black section, and then a colored section that incorporated red, blue, and green. When the Vectrex spun the wheel, it used the black portion to block one eye, while the other eye would see images in a given color. The Vectrex unit drew frames to match each eye's view at the corresponding time, thereby creating the illusion of a three-dimensional image in motion.

This technique is superior to the cheaper anaglyphic techniques that most of the NES 3-D titles used. Its workings actually foreshadowed the development of the "shutter glasses" that wouldn't be widely used on any system for several years. It's further proof that the GCE Vectrex was a system ahead of its time.

Sega Master System

Sega's 3-D effort was the next innovation in virtual reality gaming. Unfortunately, Sega

released them under the simple and lackluster name of "The Sega 3-D Glasses." These high-speed LCD shutter glasses synchronized with alternating onscreen images via an electrical wire.

Essentially, the right and left lenses of the shutter glasses turned on and off sequentially, forcing the observer to view images on the television through one eye at a time. Viewing a Sega 3-D game in 3-D mode with-



Don't you want to stop reading this magazine and go play Space Harrier 3-D right now??

out the glasses created a confusing strobe-like flashing effect, but with the glasses it resulted in full-color 3-D images. At reasonably high refresh rates, the human brain is able to treat the separate images shown the two eyes as one and composite them together in the same way that results in anaglyphic 3-D images. While most individuals can view this form of 3-D, viewing it for long periods of time can result in disorientation, nausea, and other unpleasant feelings in some.

There were seven 3-D games released for the Sega Master System: *Blade Eagle 3-D*, *Maze Hunter 3-D*, *Missile Defense 3-D*, *Out Run 3-D*, *Poseidon Wars 3-D*, *Space Harrier 3-D*, and *Zaxxon 3-D*. Although it's often described as a failure, even scoring that many titles makes the Sega 3-D Glasses one of the most successful peripherals in gaming history.

Sega Genesis

The next evolution of 3-D seemed to be full virtual reality, and in 1991, virtual reality was becoming a hot commodity. Sega of America wanted to build on their previous experience with 3-D in order to bring an even better product to the masses in an inexpensive form, priced between \$149.99 and \$199.99. The project was called Sega VR, and announced as a joint venture with IDEO.

Sega VR was a virtual reality head-mounted display (HMD) meant to completely immerse the player in a video game environment. A working prototype was on private display during the 1991 Fall Consumer Electronics Show in Chicago. The VR headset was secured to your head by a comfortable headband and an elastomeric band that arced over your head to help minimize the weight of the unit. The Sega VR HMD contained two separate LCD video screens, each mounted directly in front of the eye. The unit contained an internal sensor, so when you turned your head it would track your movement, then correct the displayed images accordingly. So it would be as if you had actually "turned your head" in the virtual setting.

Sega had working demos of *Spectre* and *Tank Commander* at the show. At least one of them was a sort of war game, where you were surrounded by aggressive enemies on the ground and in the air. You could fire at them to destroy them, but more would quickly appear to take their place. When you turned your head, you could see what was attacking you from your flank. This was a critical skill since enemies attacked from every direction. Each side of the VR headset contained an earphone, which supplied dynamic stereo sound to the player. Sounds helped you figure out the position of an out-of-sight enemy, and the game implemented realistic sound behaviors like the Doppler Effect to make this easier.

The Sega VR demo was fantastic, so what



Discarded Jaguar VR parts can now be found in the robotic vacuum cleaning assistant, Roomba.



caused the product to be shelved before release? The official statement from Sega mentions a safety concern: that the immersion was so real, Sega feared that children would run with the headset on during the action and injure themselves. A statement from Sega's vice-president for product development hinted at the truth when he admitted that the unit "couldn't deliver the experience we wanted."

The real culprit in the death of Sega VR appears to be "cybersickness." During external testing of the product by SRI International, word leaked out that prolonged use of the Sega VR HMD resulted in adverse symptoms ranging from sore eyes to queasiness. The phenomena had already shown up in military experiments with virtual reality, which had been going on for over four decades. Often pilots who underwent VR training reported feelings of nausea, which the government dubbed "simulator sickness." When Sega's managers received similar reports from SRI International, the project was canned.



Virtual Reality: So much fun, it's painful.

Gone for Good?

Sega VR wasn't the end of the industry's flirtation with virtual reality and 3-D graphics. Atari developed a product called Atari JagVR that didn't even make it as far through the production process as Sega VR, and of course, there's also Nintendo's infamous Virtual Boy. After the massive commercial failure of the Virtual Boy, the industry never seriously concerned itself

with virtual reality or 3-D graphics again.

Someday you may come across one of the Sega or Atari VR prototypes, or even one of the old anaglyphic or shutter 3-D games. It's hard to play with one of these interesting devices for long without realizing how much potential virtual reality gaming had. Now there's not much that can be done with it, other than to imagine the games that might have been....



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FATAL FURY

PREVIEW

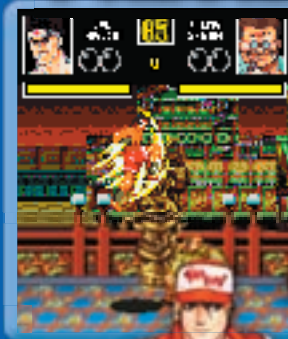
Fatal Fury Mobile is based on the second title in the fighting series that expanded and features the biggest roster of classic SNK characters to date on mobile. Kim Kaphwan, Mai Shiranui, and four others join the classic group of Terry, Andy, and Joe.

The preview version we secured features five playing modes plus a tutorial. Quick Play and Single Match allow for a quick fight. Training and Survival are self-explanatory while Tournament gives you a shot at defeating all other characters.

The action is swift and convincing. Each character possesses weak and strong versions of a punch and a kick. A flying kick and low punch are also accessible, along with two special moves unique to that character (like Terry's Burning Knuckles or Mai's Kacho Sen). All moves have a keypad button associated with them but for a special move, multiple buttons need to be pressed in sequence.

The game is faithfully reproduced in original 2D form with scrolling backgrounds and lots of color. Characters take up a good chunk of the screen size and move well while the audio can be set to effects or music during game play.

Fatal Fury Mobile, in general, plays well in its preview form and is very close to the original *Fatal Fury 2*. It includes the deepest roster of fighters to date and allows for complete control of all the fighting action. The current version still needs some refinement, but there's still plenty of time for that.



Publisher: Hudson Entertainment
Developer: Living Mobile
Release Date: October 2006

Genre: Fighting
Category: VS
of Players: 1

ELEVATOR ACTION 3D

Elevator Action 3D is a modernized version of the classic Taito game released back in 1983. As in the original, users play a spy attempting to retrieve top-secret documents from buildings. The difference now is that the game switches perspective and is played as a first-person shooter.

In each building there are 10 floors to sneak through and to clear each one, five documents must be found. Standing in your way is an intricate maze of elevators and enemy spies on the hunt. Missions are timed so it's imperative to find your bearings and move quickly. The mission is a failure if your three lives are lost or you do not make it to the exit with all five documents before time runs out.

Every time you recover a document, you get extra time. Also, building maps are available to show where the documents are hidden, what the floor layouts are, and where elevators are located along with what floors they service. Using your maps is crucial to making a successful escape.

Some floors feature extra health pick-ups, since you can only take five hits, and others contain a power-up called "Nanosense". It's basically the same as bullet time because it slows enemies' movements down while you fill them full of lead. Another advantage is the ability to shoot out lights and get protection under the cover of darkness against enemy spies.

Elevator Action 3D remains true to the original in many aspects of the gameplay. The difficulty increases rapidly, which bodes well for those who enjoy FPS, but this still doesn't really feel like a 21st century game. Not that it should be some sort of *Splinter Cell* clone, but just a little more depth and polish would have helped. In any case, it remains a decent title to consider downloading.



Publisher: Square Enix
Developer: Taito Inc.
Release Date: September 2006

Genre: Shooter
Category: FPS
of Players: 1

FINAL SCORE:
3.5 of 5

REVIEW

REVIEW

T.I. Street Racing is a racing game that pits you against T.I. and the P5C in underground drag races. You begin as a nobody who must earn the respect of the P5C by racing and defeating each member. On the way to becoming an honorary member of the P5C, you must fine-tune your ride's performance and wager to win cars, cash, and honeys.

There are four classes of cars to get behind the wheel of and each of those offers four choices, for a total of 16 rides. To start you must first purchase a car from the lowest class. Any money leftover can be used to upgrade it with performance parts and visual style.

Contestants wager on the race, and the winner takes home the cash. In certain races, pink slips will also be up for grabs so always make sure that you return to the Garage and tune your car to the max. Tuning involves purchasing upgrades for engine, turbo, body and bling (stereos, rims, etc.), but you can also adjust the gear ratios on your car to your liking.

One of the benefits of improving your car and winning races is that you can gain a loyal following of honeys, and by getting a certain amount of them in your corner, you will be challenged by one of the P5C. If you defeat that member, your rep goes up and a new class of car is opened to purchase and race with. If you open up that final class and beat T.I. in a race, you become an honorary member of the crew.

Since the races are drag-style only, there is no steering involved. All you need to worry about is accelerating, shifting gears at the right moment, and injecting a nitro boost if necessary.

Being that this game features T.I., it has many soundbites from the artist to move you along. Even more impressive is the use of music throughout the game, which features five songs including *Ride Wit Me*, *ASAP* and *24s*.

T.I. Street Racing is a surprisingly well executed game that has depth and longevity. Its simplistic game play allows for gaming at any time and you also have the option of collecting all cars and tuning them to the max after you've beaten T.I. It might feel a little excessive on the racing at times when you have to win enough money and gain enough honeys to get to the next class, but it still never fails in keeping your attention.



Publisher: Warner Brothers
Developer: Cashmere Productions
Release Date: September 2006

Genre: Sports
Category: Racing
of Players: 1

FINAL SCORE:
4 of 5

In *NFL Football 2007*, players can once again expect a realistic feel to the game since it's fully licensed and provides 11-on-11 game play. It continues to include many of the features from previous versions such as customizable playbooks, stat tracking and downloadable roster updates. New this year is the addition of player injuries and fatigue to allow for substitutions during play.

There are only two modes available this time around, Quick Play and Season. Unfortunately, the highly competitive and enjoyable two-player mode from last year is gone. Quick Play allows you to choose teams for an exhibition game and Season continues to include all 16 games plus the playoffs, Superbowl and Pro Bowl.

Once your favorite team has hit the field, players will be able to call plays suited for the team or change them on the spot. On defense, whatever character you're controlling will be allowed to freely move around in hopes of intimidating the quarterback. Difficulty is variable and selectable. On easiest difficulty, it will not be uncommon to blow out teams by 30 points, but in the hardest, you'll be lucky to complete a pass.

NFL Football 2007 comes in 2D and 3D varieties and isn't much of a change in terms of gameplay from last year's version. Injuries and fatigue are new, but the loss of two-player mode hurts the game. The ambiance is also very bland, making it a struggle to even want to lead your team to the top. It's still, however, packed with simulation features that should appeal to those looking for this sort of football game.



Publisher: THQ Wireless
Developer: Magellan Interactive
Release Date: September 2006

Genre: Sports
Category: Football
of Players: 1

FINAL SCORE:
3.25 of 5

REVIEW



T.I. STREET RACING



FOOTBALL 2007



REVIEW

FLYING TOASTER

Flying Toaster tells the tale of a scientist who unwittingly creates a toaster with special powers that becomes a superhero. Once created, Flying Toaster is immediately called upon to save the world from a deadly attack.

There are a total of eight levels to clear, but this game isn't about shooting enemies or rescuing bystanders. Instead, you just have to avoid oncoming dangers and reach the end of the level. Make the Flying Toaster ascend and descend by pressing and releasing a button, finding the safest path toward the end.

Along the way, the Flying Toaster must replenish its energy by collecting slices of bread. There are also power-ups like pizza to make you fly faster, hot dogs to let you withstand collisions, and a super power-up for temporary invincibility. Traps also lurk such as hamburgers that make your toaster larger and more difficult to maneuver.

Levels become harder as you progress, but memorizing a secure course is easy given the five lives you begin the game with. Continuing afterwards per level is also possible. This makes the game simple to clear but players should still find a good challenge in navigating some of the levels. *Flying Toaster* features two different areas as backgrounds for the action and they both stand out with interesting visuals. The music gives your flying adventure a jolly atmosphere that suits the weirdness and one-button controls ease of play. Sadly, the adventure is short-lived. Still, if you're feeling nostalgic for that old screensaver and looking for something simple, *Flying Toaster* is a decent choice.

Publisher: Vivendi Universal
Developer: Vivendi Universal
Release Date: October 2006

Genre: Casual
Category: Flying
of Players: 1

FINAL SCORE:
3.5 of 5



AIR STRIKE 1944

FLIGHT FOR FREEDOM

The year is 1944 and a ruthless dictator has set his eyes on conquering the whole of Europe. The final stronghold remaining is London, but that city will crumble without reinforcements from the United States. The only solution is to send in Air Strike, an elite squadron of fighter pilots, and help defeat the menace.

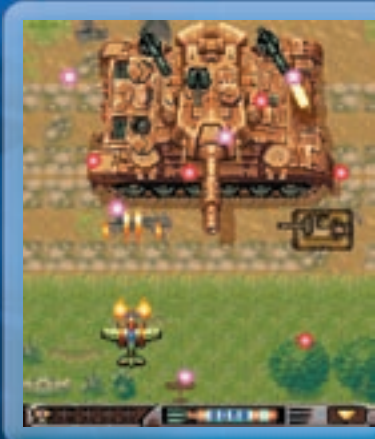
The Air Strike team is made up of three pilots, therefore players can to select from any one of them to complete the game's nine missions filled with both in-the-air and on-the-ground targets. Each pilot's airplane has different speed and firepower capabilities, but like any true shooter, power-ups like shields, extra firepower, and extra lives can be picked up. Between certain levels, your pilot faces large and imposing Bosses. The game is set in a historically familiar setting, but outside of that it fictionalizes the plot with colorful characters and comic book antics. This helps brings the game to life as you move through familiar video game territory like the air raids in London, the beach landing at Normandy, and the dictator's castle base in Germany. Each plane is directly inspired by WWII's legendary fighter aircraft, if not exactly historically accurate, and each handles very differently.

Air Strike 1944 is a good shooter, filled with action and explosions. The game looks good, moves steadily, and sounds serviceable, but unfortunately, it lacks the control to allow for a more enjoyable experience. The control issue is mostly just the constraints of current cell phones. It's still a solid title for anyone looking to download a decent shooter. It does provide three different difficulties and three different aircraft, and if you happen to be lucky enough to get past the control issues and finish the game, you can unlock a fourth plane and an extra difficulty level.

Publisher: Gameloft
Developer: Gameloft
Release Date: September 2006

Genre: Shooter
Category: Aircraft
of Players: 1

FINAL SCORE:
3.5 of 5



REVIEW

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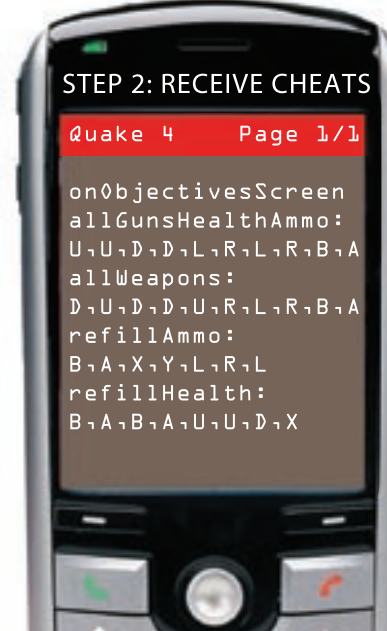
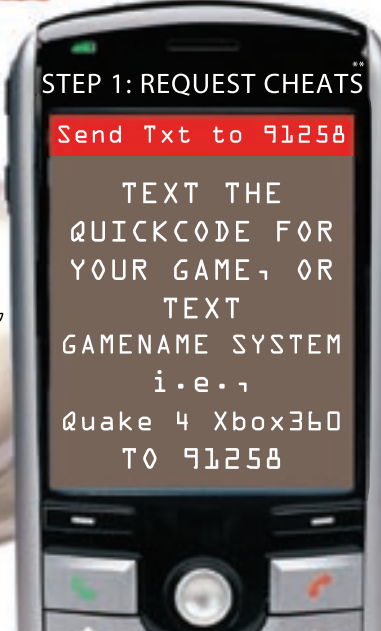
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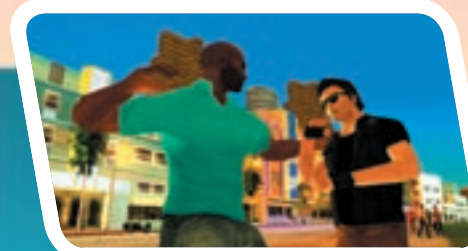
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It's time to return to the "me" era of the '80s: when big hair and even bigger drug habits were the norm; when "Reaganomics" ensured the rich would get richer; when "Star Wars" had nothing to do with George Lucas and everything to do with keeping the Russians from nuking us off the face of the planet; when MTV played actual music videos and, well, you get the point. The '80s are once again host to a *Grand Theft Auto* game with *GTA: Vice City Stories*, Rockstar's second *GTA* set within the balmy borders of a fictionalized Miami.

Before getting started, it's important to note that Rockstar's first *GTA* PSP title, *Liberty City Stories*, has gone on to be the best selling PSP game of all time, reaching a whopping 2.5 million sold between the US and the UK. That translates into one out of every three PSP owners owning a copy of the game. While some may feel the series is starting to lose its luster, Rockstar still is confident that there is still a lot left to say and do with this burgeoning and controversial sandbox franchise. In fact, they boldly predict that *Vice City Stories* will be the number one selling game this holiday season



on both handhelds and consoles, including next gen releases. While this remains to be seen, there's no arguing that the latest *GTA* title impresses, especially considering it's on Sony's PlayStation Portable.

Vice City Stories takes place in 1984, a full two years before the first *Vice City*. You play as Vic Vance, a 28-year-old marine who made his first *GTA* appearance at the beginning of *Vice City*. If you recall, at the beginning of the game there was a drug deal down at the docks between Tommy Vercetti, Ken Rosenberg, and Vic and his brother Lance. However, the deal quickly went south and both parties involved were ambushed by Ricardo Diaz, which resulted in Vic being shot and killed in the process. You get to take control of his Vic's life during the two years leading up to that unfortunate incident. While Rockstar is keeping the details of the storyline

Grand Theft Auto Vice City Stories

Publisher: Rockstar
Developer: Rockstar Leeds
Release Date: October 30, 2006



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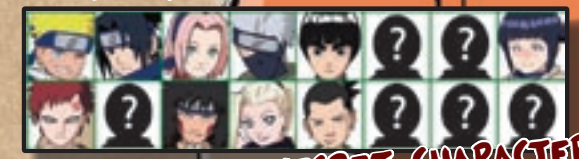
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close to its vest, it revealed that Vic does not come from a life of crime. The events that take place in the game are what change things for him and make him reevaluate his station in life.

After getting the opportunity to have some hands-on time with an early version of *Vice City Stories*, we could definitely tell that the developers at Rockstar Leeds are not resting on their laurels. They've invested serious time and effort in squeezing the PSP for every ounce it's got to offer and have come up with some pretty impressive results. Some of the overall improvements to the game include an increased draw distance (pushed twice as far out as before), increased poly counts (resulting in twice as many cars and



pedestrians on screen at any given time), faster load times, better AI, and a host of new additions, features, and game mechanics that include swimming, new vehicles (including jet skis, hovercraft, BMX bikes, ATVs, helicopters, and yes, even planes), four new multiplayer modes, a new combat system that allows for grappling, throwing, and instant kill moves, as well as a new empire building mode (which we'll get to in just a moment). Rockstar has also mixed up the missions, putting back in the more complex, multi-part objectives found in the console versions in response to feedback from fans who felt that *Liberty City's* pick-up-and-play missions were too short. While

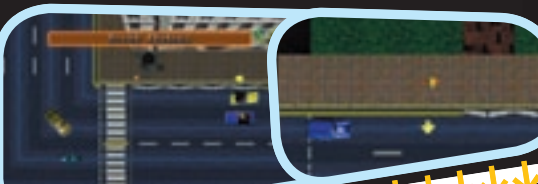


GTA HISTORY

Grand Theft Auto
PC release date - 2/28/98
PS1 release date - 6/30/98



Grand Theft Auto: London, 1969
PC release date - 3/31/99
PS1 release date - 4/30/99

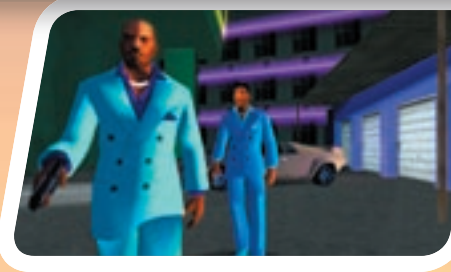


Grand Theft Auto 2
PC release date - 9/30/99
PS1 release date - 10/25/00
DC release date - 4/30/00



Grand Theft Auto III
PS2 release date - 10/22/01
PC release date - 5/20/02
Xbox release date - 1/2/04

GTA III takes place in Liberty City, an East Coast city filled to the brim with crime. Your silent protagonist, after being double-crossed by Catalina from *San Andreas*, ends up facing jail time. A convenient kidnapping leads to him and another prisoner escaping. Instead of skipping town, the main character sticks around to earn some money. He begins working as a thug for the various criminal organizations in town, despite the fact that many of them are at each other's throats. He eventually finds love, or rather, love finds him, by way of Maria, a mafioso's wife. He finally gets revenge on Catalina at the end of the game. His name is revealed to be "Claude" in *San Andreas*, though it's never mentioned in this game.



VCS is still roughly the same size as *LCS* and doesn't have the "everything but the kitchen sink" gameplay of *San Andreas*, it does go far beyond anything you've seen or played in a portable game.

Of all the additions to the game, the inclusion of the new Empire Building mode is by far the biggest. This new gameplay feature is somewhat similar to the territory feature in *San Andreas*, except that instead of taking control of city blocks, you are now taking over businesses. There are six types of businesses you can run — which include prostitution, loan sharking, smuggling, robbery, and drugs — with 30 sites total that can be taken over across Vice City. These six business types are broken down into two risk levels: Low and High, and within these levels are three sizes: Small Time, Medium Venture and High Roller. The amount of money you make depends on the size business you choose to run. Of course, the higher the money the greater the risk you take, as running your own businesses is an involved and dangerous process. Other gangs run businesses as



well, and they will attack if you cut into their piece of pie. Recruiting gangs to help run and protect your investments is key. There is also a good amount of strategy that comes into play, as planning which business to put at which location can affect your cash flow. Think about it for a minute. You'll want to put the smuggling business down by the docks for ease of transporting goods and the prostitution business downtown where all the action is.

Of course, taking over a business is a dangerous and hostile proposition. To do so, you first have to locate the available business on the city map, which tells you the type of business it is, who owns it, and the risk level. Once you decide on a business, find and blow up a parked vehicle outside to

Grand Theft Auto Advance
GBA release date - 10/26/04



grand theft auto vice city

PS2 release date - 10/27/02
PC release date - 5/12/03
Xbox release date - 1/2/04

Vice City takes place during the 1980s. It emulates the feel of classic cinema like *Scarface* and slightly less classic television like *Miami Vice*. Pastel and Hawaiian shirts abound, as well as track suits and funky synth-pop. You play Tommy Vercetti, fresh out of jail and eager to regain your place in the Forelli family. Along the way, he's going to cross criminals, be double-crossed, and eventually take control of Vice City's crime scene. Lance Vance, your partner, has Tommy's back throughout most of the game, but he's out for himself first and foremost. Tommy is forced to take out both Lance and Sonny Forelli by the end of the game.



PS2 release date - 10/26/04
PC release date - 6/7/05
Xbox release date - 6/7/05

grand theft auto San Andreas

San Andreas is the second game in the in-game timeline. Carl "CJ" Johnson returns home to the city of Los Santos in the early '90s after the death of his mother. His former gang, the Grove Street Families, has taken a downturn. CJ goes from trying to solve his mother's murder to being forced out of Los Santos, into the arms of the psychopathic Catalina, and then all around the state of San Andreas, building his rep and bank account. He goes from low-budget thug to owner of an auto-body shop and partner to Wu Zi Mu, a blind gang leader. CJ ends up fighting against, and occasionally for, crooked government agents, cops, and his own family. The ending, in true *GTA* style, is a storm of gunfire, action, and explosions.



Liberty City Stories takes place three years before *GTA III*, but after *San Andreas*. Toni Cipriani returns to Liberty City after offering a mafioso as a favor to Don Leone and is eager to get right back to work. *Liberty City Stories* partially fills in the background to Liberty City itself. Many of the areas in *GTA III* exist in *Liberty City Stories*, though in unfinished form. The story itself serves as a true prequel to *GTA III*. Toni is a figure in *GTA III*, though a few pounds heavier. Toni faces all the usual hardships that *GTA* protagonists face, though with the added drama of his own mother putting a hit out on him.

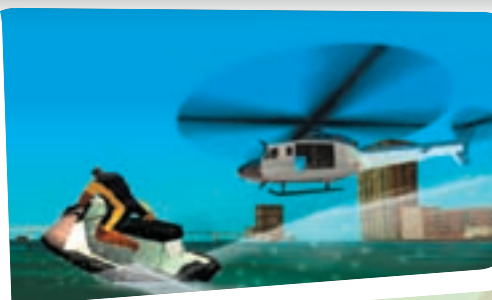
PSP release date - 10/24/05
PS2 release date - 6/6/06

Sag Cheese

How many of you out there played the smash-hit PC title *e-Advertismen* from a couple years ago? Surely you remember it. It was the game that allowed you to pretend to be an actor in a commercial for a bunch of licensed products. Now, we have some bad news for you: we just made that up. *Vice City Stories*, on the other hand, has the next best thing.

A production company out on Prawn Island is filming an advertisement for their naughtily-named chocolates and needs a stuntman. Vic Vance is the man. The first portion of the mission involves riding a jet ski around the bay. It's not as easy as it sounds, of course. There is a preset course to follow, as well as a cameraman on a helicopter shooting footage of you. If you fall off your jet ski, you're going to have to get back on as soon as possible. You don't want to give them a bad impression, do you Mr. Stuntman?

Once the jet ski portion of the mission is done, you're going to have to take it to the next level: a motorbike run through the streets. Complete this mission properly, and maybe these guys will let you check out the commercial when it's done.



get the attention of the gang inside. If it's a Low Level risk, you can probably take on the gang members that come pouring out of the building by yourself. If it's a High Level risk, you'll want to recruit some backup first (you can bring along up to three of your own gang members). Once the rival gang has been eliminated, you have to go inside and bash up the place to render it inoperable. As soon as this has been achieved, you can then buy the business and choose what type you want it to become. If you can ultimately take over all 30 locations, a super secret is unlocked. Finally, each business type has its own unique side mission associated with it. For prostitution, it's "Odd Job," which has you dropping off and picking up hookers. For Loan Shark, it's "Repo Man," where you have limited time to locate and pick up bikes, then return them to the depot before the timer runs out.

Unfortunately, even with the game so close to shipping, Rockstar was still working diligently to finish it and it was not reviewable. However, from the short time we had with it, it's clear that they are committed to making *Vice City Stories* a huge step up from *LCS*, and it's definitely going to impress its diehard fans and new gamers alike. We'll have the full review next month, but you can rest assured that *Vice City Stories* is the ultimate in portable gaming and continues to push the series in new and interesting directions. Just imagine what they'll come up with on Xbox 360 and PS3 later next year.



Taking the Fall

New vehicles seem to be added into every *GTA* title. How cool was it to go to town on a motorcycle for the first time? In addition to jet skis, you're going to get to pilot a helicopter in this visit to Vice City.

Vic and Lance Vance are not just brothers, but business partners. They're keeping the profits all in the family, so to speak. One problem: those profits aren't quite as high as they should be. Lance is sure that a certain gang is stealing your product. There's one way to solve this problem: a helicopter ride. You're going to be in the driver's seat, so you'll have to handle staying on the gang's trail and letting Lance shoot them full of holes.

Eventually, you're going to reach a construction yard and another problem arises: Lance is surrounded by thugs who really don't appreciate being fired upon from a helicopter. You've got to get to your brother, take out the goons that're trying to kill him, and rescue him to complete the mission. It's the proverbial ugly job that *someone* has to do.

The helicopter opens up Vice City like never before. Rooftops aren't completely off-limits and sometimes a view from above can give you a new outlook on things, not to mention the fact that driving a helicopter while your brother shoots out of it is extremely cool.

Jive Dive

If you've ever seen an action movie, you've seen a car chase. Car chases are used for a few reasons. They show the drama and tragedy inherent in the human condition. Laws are broken as pedestrians are endangered by things beyond their control. Death lurks around every corner for both participants and bystanders... or maybe, just maybe, car chases are really, *really* cool.

Lance Vance is extraordinarily good at making enemies. You're going to meet up with him at Escobar International airport shortly before the you-know-what hits the fan. You two are going to need to make a quick getaway, and that means *car chase*. Lance is going to take the wheel while you man the guns.

This mission is a classic car chase. You're going to have to pick off enemies as you ride at high speeds down city streets, including a few jumps. Lance is going to total the car after a particularly bad jump at one point, which leaves you and him trapped in a parking lot. What follows is that other action movie mainstay, the running shootout. Luckily, the shooting controls will make it a little easier on you. Hold R1 to lock on, use the d-pad to cycle targets, and hit down on the d-pad to switch over to manual aim. All's fair in love and war, just so long as you're the last man standing.

Homes on the Range

Some people think that golf is a boring sport. Who wants to watch some guy knock a small white ball around for hours? *Vice City Stories* livens up the game with a stroke of genius: explosions.

Gonzalez is a golf nut. Business associates must join him on the green. The way that he and his associates play golf together helpfully provides Gonzalez with a special insight into the way that they will do business together. Did we forget to mention that Gonzalez is an incredibly powerful drug lord?

Jesús has betrayed Gonzalez, much to his chagrin. Now, he's strapped to a buoy, along with a decent amount of explosives. Your mission is to join Gonzalez on the driving range and play a round of golf. Hitting is going to be familiar to the sports gamers out there. You have to press X to adjust the power and aim of your shot.

Explosions and golf are all well and good, but it wouldn't be a *GTA* game without another twist on the status quo. Gonzalez is impressed enough with your skills to reveal a secret or two. The local government is looking to cut a deal with him, and not the kind that involves a lesser jail term in exchange for turning state's evidence. They want to trade arms for drugs.

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Fan Interviews

With Rich Rosado, Associate Producer of *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City Stories*

Rich Rosado worked with the revolutionary *Grand Theft Auto III* and the whole family of *GTA* titles that followed it. In fact, you can actually hear him as one of the pedestrian voices in *San Andreas*! He's been with Rockstar games since 2001, where he worked with a little game you might've heard of called *Max Payne*. In addition to his work in creating *Vice City Stories*, he also worked on *GTA's* PSP debut, *Liberty City Stories*.

korn: Is *GTA: VCS* going to be a continuation of the *Grand Theft Auto* series, or is this game just a side story to flesh out the franchise? Are there any new areas in the level map that differ from the PS2 counterpart?

Rich Rosado: *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City Stories* is a whole new game, [with] an entirely new storyline and all new characters. As a game, we have expanded on what we have learned from previous installments in the franchise to make what we feel is a defining version of *Grand Theft Auto*. In terms of the map, the game takes place roughly two years prior to the events of *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*. If *Vice City* itself is an alternate Miami, the timeline for our game captures a grittier Vice City, much as Miami was a different city just a few years prior. A lot of construction is going on, and the glamour that many associate with that time period is just beginning to emerge. As for the map, there will be some new areas. How we expanded on the city, and how it ends up as the map you saw in *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*, was great fun to pull off.

MPHtails: Will we have as many "mini-missions" this time around, such as the Sunshine Autos races and the Ice Cream Truck/Drug Running?

RR: It wouldn't be a *Grand Theft Auto* title without them. We love to provide gamers with the ability to wander around and explore the world we have created for them. Some old favorites have returned, as well as some new ones that take advantage of the environment of Vice City. There are a number of water-based missions since the waterways are so important. You will be able to save lives, you will be able to fight crime, but the means by which you engage in those activities will be tweaked for new gameplay mechanics.

Honrosie42: Do you attempt to design the missions more like the console versions, or do you design things with a "pick up and play" style due to the handheld nature of the PSP?

RR: We feel that we did a pretty good job in *Vice City Stories* of walking the fine line between the two. *Liberty City Stories* was our first time designing a *Grand Theft Auto* game on the PSP, so there was a level of experimentation going on in all aspects of the game, and mission structure was one of them. With *Vice City Stories* we wanted to create more detailed, action-packed missions as we feel today's *Grand Theft Auto* players are accustomed to more sophisticated missions. An extra year of technical design has allowed us to really push the PSP hardware to open up the mission design and really flesh some great things out.

Honrosie42: Does the scaled down nature of the PSP present any tricky problems in recreating the *GTA* games?

RR: Absolutely. Unique challenges faced us at every turn. First, the size of the media, 1.8GB, is such that we invented new ways to fit all the data, all while retaining the massive open-city environments that *Grand Theft Auto* is known for. From a mission standpoint we planned development around the concept that most people would be playing the title on the go — during commutes or on the subway. As such, the missions were designed to be short, explosive, and action-packed. While this worked for a lot of people, we had some vocal fans who really wanted more complex missions. In an attempt to please everyone while staying true to our original design, we have included a variety of missions that take advantage of the complexity of the city and vast number of activities available.

Designing games in general is an enormously difficult endeavor. We take each of the lessons learned from one version of a game and expand on them in new versions. With the PSP, we're attempting to create games that are as amazing as anything you would see on any other console, including next gen systems.

goodfellaron: Does *GTA: Vice City Stories* make use of the PSP's upcoming new GPS feature?

RR: Integrating GPS into games could lead to some interesting game elements. However, we want all features to be available to all PSP players. By working on GPS exclusive features, we must tell players to purchase an accessory to experience the full game.

gh_07: Now that you have made *Liberty City Stories* and *Vice City Stories* on the PSP are you thinking about making *San Andreas Stories*?

RR: As a company we are very committed to creating cutting edge content for the PSP. It's an amazing piece of portable technology that is uniquely suited to the kinds of games we like to make. Since we are just learning to fully utilize it, there are no concrete plans for new versions.

Remy-Soujirou3: Am I seeing things or are Lance and Victor Vance identical twins? Also, supposedly, the main character, Lance Vance, changes his name to Quentin in the game. Is this by any chance Rockstar is paying homage to film director Quentin Tarantino?

RR: While there is a resemblance, you do notice several key differences (one of which is that Vic is shorter than Lance). As for Quentin, while he is a good director, I'll chalk that up to coincidence.

8bithaven3: The *GTA* series has put out some great games in the past but what are the new things that you are adding to the gameplay to keep it fresh?

RR: It gets harder and harder to create gameplay that is both fun and new. We try our best to listen to what our fans liked and did not like about our previous titles, and with games in general and incorporate that feedback into new games.

So, what are we adding? A lot of work went into the mission design in general. We made a very serious effort to avoid redundancy. The dozens of missions in the game are designed to be as fun and exciting as possible.

AngstOverlord: Are we ever going to get a playable female character in *GTA*? As much fun as I had with CJ in his underoos, I couldn't identify with him at all.

RR: You never know... strong female leads can indeed make for great gaming. I am sorry you could not relate to CJ, but was it due to the fact that he was a man, or the setting he was in? Would simply switching him to a female have made it better, or simply come off as a gimmick to cash in on a broader, female audience?

AngstOverlord: Secondly, is the music going to have new pieces, or will it be the same as the console edition? I revel in 80's music.

RR: So do we, and in doing so we have created an entirely new soundtrack for *Vice City Stories*, with songs such as Foreigner's "I Want To Know What Love Is," Dio's "Holy Diver" and much more. We are incredibly proud of this soundtrack, it contains over one hundred licensed tracks and is quite possibly the best, deepest collection of songs ever assembled. It was also spectacularly difficult to fit it all on the UMD. I hope you enjoy it!

AngstOverlord: Finally, will swimming be enabled in this game? Drowning in a three-foot deep puddle just cramps my style.

RR: Break out your trunks! Not only is swimming in the game in an incidental way, like when you drive your car off a pier, for example, but the waterways around *Vice City* play a role in the game in a broader sense than ever before.

snowstorm52: What new vehicles are in the game that weren't in *Vice City* for the consoles?

RR: There are some vehicles, such as the JetSki, that are entirely new to the *Grand Theft Auto* universe. With so much water surrounding Vice City, the team here really focused on making the water-based vehicles feel completely different than land-based vehicles. So for example, the JetSki is really fast but can take very tight turns by holding down the Right Shoulder button while maintaining the 'feel' of a *Grand Theft Auto* vehicle.

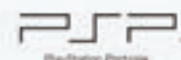
In addition to completely new vehicles, we are also proud to have been able to include helicopters, which are making their debut on the PSP in *Vice City Stories*. Being able to fly the choppers is awesome! It opens up a huge dynamic in the game, with the verticality of Vice City and the rooftops, and it's such an incredible way to see and get around the city.

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REVIEWS

- 58 Final Fantasy XII
- 60 God Hand
- 61 Naruto: Clash of Ninja 2
- 62 Enchanted Arms
- 63 LEGO Star Wars II
- 64 Rule of Rose
- 65 Just Cause
- 66 Godfather
- 67 Saints Row
- 68 Age of Pirates: Caribbean Tales
- 68 Bad Day L.A.
- 68 Samurai Warriors 2
- 68 Scarface
- 69 NBA '07: The Life Vol. 2
- 69 Prostroke Golf
- 69 Gangs of London
- 69 Bounty Hounds
- 70 Reservoir Dogs
- 70 Dirge of Cerberus
- 70 Star Fox Command
- 70 Rengoku II

We love to game. It's a passion that starts at the controller, but goes beyond into our lives, forming a video game mindset that we're all a part of. It's not just about being hardcore. Hardcore Gamer Magazine and Luv2Game are all about living a gaming *life* and loving it. Reviews, previews, and strategies are just the start! We want to share with you the kind of gaming content that thrills our hearts as gamers. Feel free to read, explore, connect, and voice your opinions. We've designed this community to be like a game itself, with a point system that rewards you for having fun. Be proud to be a gamer, and be heard and even published here on L2G and in print in HGM. We're gamers. You're gamers. We all love to game and that's why we're here.

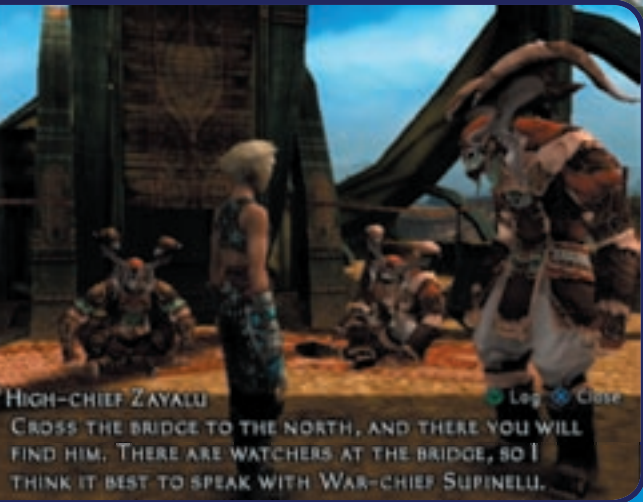
HGM REVIEW GAUGE

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

FINAL FANTASY XII

The *Final Fantasy* name has a lot of baggage attached to it, both positive and negative. With the 12th entry in the franchise, Square-Enix acknowledges this, bringing in recognizable elements from the classic games in the franchise while modernizing some of their anachronisms that have begun to draw complaint. The result is an engaging, if occasionally uneven RPG.

The story returns us to Ivalice, the setting originally introduced in *Final Fantasy Tactics*. After a prolonged conflict with the Archadian Empire, the King of Dalmasca attempts to make a peaceful surrender to the Archadian Emperor, only to be betrayed and killed by the the captain of his guard as part of an Archadian plot. Two years later, the Emperor's son, Vaane, is sent to become consul of Dalmasca's capital city Rabanastre, and it turns out he has plans of his own... particularly concerning Nethicite, the mysterious stone that serves as the birthright of the Dalmascan Kings.



HIGH-CHIEF ZAVALLU
CROSS THE BRIDGE TO THE NORTH, AND THERE YOU WILL FIND HIM. THERE ARE WATCHERS AT THE BRIDGE, SO I THINK IT BEST TO SPEAK WITH WAR-CHIEF SUPINELLI.

The more human story centers around Vaan, a young Rabanastrian who lost his older brother in the war years earlier. On a plot to rob the palace during Vaane's initiation dinner, he gets caught up with the dashing sky pirate Balthier and his slinky sidekick Fran, who are after the same prize. They then link up with the Dalmascan resistance in the form of the former captain of the guard Basch (whose betrayal, it seems, is in question), and a girl who turns out to be the Princess Ashe, the thought-dead heir to the Dalmascan throne. Along with Vaan's childhood friend, the practical Penelo, the group ends up on a quest to put an end to Vaane's sinister plots, and restore Dalmasca to its proper rule.

As described, this may all seem eye-rollingly familiar, and in truth, it does basically boil down to the traditional RPG standbys of journeying across the world, visiting Relevant Town A to pick up Mystical Item B, and having the plot explained through cutscenes. It's fortunate, then, that the world and characters are as engaging as they are. While some of the plot complexities seem unnecessary, the characters are genuinely interesting, and the writers do a good job of keeping them from becoming the stereotypes they appear to be at first glance. Because the party is so small, and each character is connected directly to the plot, no one is extraneous, and the chemistry is divine.



Publisher: Square-Enix
Developer: Square-Enix
Release Date: 10/31/06
Rating: T; Alcohol Reference, Fantasy Violence, Mild Language
Genre(s): RPG
Category: Final Fantasy
of players: 1

The world, meanwhile, is huge and intriguing. There's a certain pleasant, *Star Wars* flavor to the worldsetting, thanks to the diverse Ivalician races and technology that seem more science fiction than fantasy. The series has finally said goodbye to the oft-maligned overhead world map, and replaced it with a set of massive, interlocking 3D areas that merge seamlessly with one another. The areas are, in fact, so huge that travelling back and forth between them can feel like a chore. Fortunately, you can easily teleport between save points, and your automap makes navigation easy. Each region is rendered in painstaking detail with its own distinct look, making the world feel truly immersive.

The series has also abandoned its traditional random battles, replacing them with something that, at first glance, resembles a more modern action hack-'n'-slash. Don't be fooled, though; the ATB system is still there, albeit in an altered form. You still get to input commands, but you must take the initiative to do so. Otherwise, your party's actions will be defined by Gambits: effectively, programs you write to define how

your characters behave. Manual commands will always override Gambits, though, and while Gambits are a convenient way to handle very mundane tasks, a smart player will quickly realize that leaving battles entirely to the computer is a good way to end up dead. The main flaw in the system is that some of the most desired gambits aren't available from the start. Programmers need to learn that the basic functionality of the game shouldn't be an unlockable.

When you defeat monsters, in addition to experience to gain levels, you'll receive "License Points," which you can use to unlock items on a character's chessboard-like "license grid." Some licenses make it possible to wield new weapons, new armor, and new spells, while others give a character bonus HP or a more efficient use of potions. Fans of traditional JRPGs will be disappointed that each character's license grid is identical, meaning that there is no pre-defined difference between your characters; anyone can use any weapon or spell as long as you have the LP to wield it, the gil to buy it, and have found the store that's selling it. Others, however, will be pleased that this system encourages a semblance of actual role-playing; since each class of weapons and armor has its own style and function, trying to give the same licenses to everyone simply isn't practical. For the first time since the earliest *Final Fantasy* games, you define the role your characters play in the party.

Graphically, the game's priority is clearly simple practicality. This makes sense, given the real-time battle system, and those who hate to have battle interrupted by five-minute spell graphics will be grateful. Nevertheless, it's a bit surprising from the franchise that effectively founded the concept of an RPG based on visual splendor. The plot-related cutscenes are long, plentiful, and look pretty enough, but they're more of a joy to listen to than they are to watch, especially thanks to a great script translation; a dramatic, well-directed score; and a cast of decent-to-excellent voice actors, many of whom really seem to relish the opportunity to ham it up.

In the end, how much you enjoy *Final Fantasy XII* will depend on your expectations and your play-style. It is a very challenging RPG; the licensing system limits the effectiveness of powerleveling, meaning that victory will rely on strategy, resource management, and effective organization of Gambits. Though the world is huge, the game's main plot will only take you through so much of it. If you only go from point A to point B, you'll probably spend about half the game in cutscenes, but to do and see all the game has to offer may take well over a hundred hours and multiple playthroughs.

Final Fantasy XII aspires to greatness, and might have achieved it if not for a bit of roughness around the edges. It's not flawless, and it won't be everything to everyone, but don't think that just because it's a *Final Fantasy*, it can't still be a very strong game on its own merits. If Square-Enix continues to build on the foundation it's established here, its #1 franchise may finally regain its former glory.

Rating : 4 of 5

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

I wonder if somebody at Square Enix has been playing *Knights of the Old Republic*. *FFXII* takes about ten hours to really get going, but most of the changes have been for the better. The next set of innovations had damn well better involve the story, though.

FINAL SCORE :
4 of 5



Attack	Vaan	HP 181 261	MP 27
Attack	G Balthier	HP 177 228	MP 29
Attack	G Fran	HP 208 208	MP 35
Potion	G Amalia	HP 110 191	MP 42



Review by Kou Aidou



REVIEW GOD HAND

PlayStation 2

Review by Racewing

Publisher : Capcom
 Developer : Clover Studio
 Release Date : 9/14/06
 Rating : M; Blood and Gore, Language, Suggestive Themes, Violence

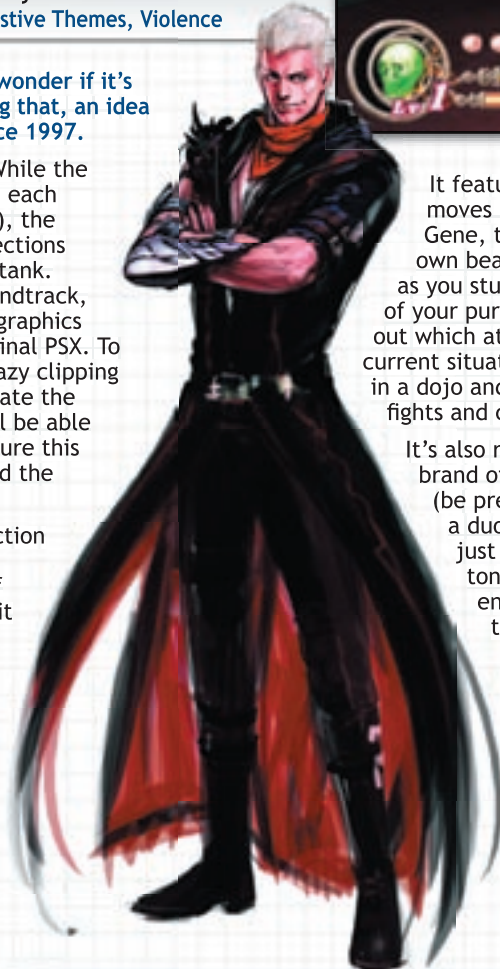
Genre(s) : Beat-'Em-Up
 Category : Create Your Own Combo v.2
 # of players : 1

The more I play *God Hand*, the more I wonder if it's actually a finished product... or, barring that, an idea that Capcom's been kicking around since 1997.

Let's take the controls, for example. While the right stick is put to good use (flick it in each direction for an array of useful dodges), the left stick controls movement in all directions simultaneously, much like a simplified tank. It's awkward, to say the least. The soundtrack, while good, is sparse. Meanwhile, the graphics aren't much of a step up from the original PSX. To drive this point home, it's got some crazy clipping issues. If you should ever bother to rotate the camera when you're near a wall, you'll be able to see into the next room. I'm pretty sure this problem was solved in 3D games around the turn of the century.

In short, I have to glance at the instruction booklet every so often to make sure I'm not playing *Mega Man Legends 3*. Of course, that's when I execute a nine-hit multi-punch-kick-uppercut-launch-dragon punch-flying kick combo that hammers a bad guy into a wall, smashing scenery in the process. Afterwards, I curbstomp him a few million times in the space of five seconds, just to make sure he's dead. Mega Man could never do this.

It may not be as shiny, but *God Hand* is every bit as good as a brawler as we've come to expect from the minds behind *Viewtiful Joe*.



It features a freeform combo system based on buying moves at a shop between stages, and applying them to Gene, the main character. Think of it as debugging your own beat-em-up. Canned combos are a thing of the past as you study the individual timing and damage potentials of your purchased moves, mix and match them, then figure out which attack works best for your personal style, or in the current situation. The game allows you to practice your combos in a dojo and extra missions, as well as gain money with bonus fights and casino gambling.

It's also really funny. No subject is taboo in Clover Studios' brand of parody. Over-the-top stereotypes are in full effect (be prepared to fight a Mexican Elvis impersonator and a duo of flagrantly homosexual male feather-dancers, just to name a couple), yet the humor they bring is all tongue-in-cheek. It packs shock value, but it's hardly enough to be offensive. Get this: they even managed to slip a Giant Enemy Crab joke in there. Poor Sony. Their own video games are laughing at them now. If you like a little meat and challenge with your brawlers, as opposed to having legions of armies fall to a single swipe of your sword, *God Hand* is right up your alley. The controls may come with a learning curve, and it sometimes may look like a PSX game running on Bleem, but it's one of the most satisfying fighting adventures to be had this year.

Rating: 3.5 of 5

2nd opinion by [honestgamer](#) • Alternate Rating : 3.5 of 5

The unexpected humor at every turn does a lot, but not enough, to make up for the moments where you suddenly find yourself pummeling thin air. This still belongs in any serious brawler fan's



REVIEW SHONEN JUMP'S NARUTO CLASH OF NINJA 2

PlayStation 2

Review by Showgazer

Publisher : D3 Publisher/Tomy
 Developer : Eighting
 Release Date : 10/26/2006
 Rating : T; Cartoon Violence

Genre(s) : Fighting
 Category : 2.5D
 # of players : 1-4

Prepare yourself, *Dragonball Z*, because a new challenger is quickly capturing the attention of anime enthusiasts. *Naruto's* wake is rapidly spilling over to the video game industry as well. The familiar cries for more adventures of Goku and Trunks are fading, being replaced with a demand for more Sasuke and Rock Lee. Well, cry no longer, as there will soon be more *Naruto* games than you can shake a Nine-Tailed fox at, beginning this fall with *Naruto: Clash of Ninja 2*.

When the original *Clash of Ninja* was released earlier this year, it was a part of a three-year-old game from Japan. Sure, it was serviceable for fans of the series looking to take control of their favorite Genin brawlers, but it was little more than an introduction. While *Clash of Ninja 2* is also a part of a three-year old game, it's been completely revamped and given a whole host of additions.

The series has always featured very bright and detailed character models, and *CoN2* is no exception. In fact, the animations are even more fluid, making for the most faithful translation of the characters' individual attack styles to a home console. The trade-off for this attention to detail is a fairly lackluster collection of stage backgrounds, although every so often, a subtle little detail will momentarily distract you. For example, in a fight where I was using Naruto, I noticed Hinata standing behind a tree watching the match from afar. Again, the game's fanservice is certainly not in question.



The gameplay, though vastly improved, is unfortunately still a bit too basic for experienced fighting game fans, resulting in a game where you need only a minimal use of strategy for success. Granted, this game is intended for a younger audience, but even the average eight-year-old has *Soul Calibur II* experience by now, making *Naruto* seem a bit like the early days of *Tekken*. The inclusion of four-player modes is greatly appreciated and tacks on plenty of additional hours of entertainment, and a reason to unlock all twenty-three characters.

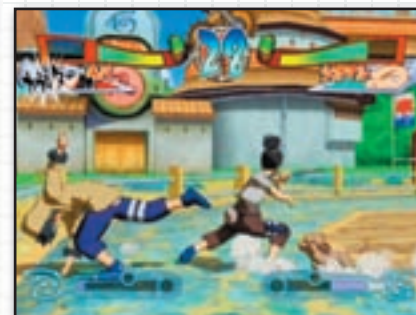
The single player mode is surprisingly deep thanks to a Story Mode which allows you to play out some of the most famous battles from the anime series. You can't change history, though, so even if you beat Ino with Sakura in the Chunin exam's preliminary battle, a cutscene still shows it ending in a double knockout.

Like I said, the fanservice here will be enough to satisfy even the most diehard *Naruto* fan, but it's a bit like cotton candy: it's light and fluffy and makes you happy to have it in your hands, but you'll soon get tired of the taste and desire something a bit more solid. Perhaps that will come in the form of *Naruto: Clash of Ninja 3* next March.

Rating : 3.5 of 5

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

There's enough content and depth in *Clash of Ninja 2* that it really feels like a game you don't have to be a *Naruto* fan to like.



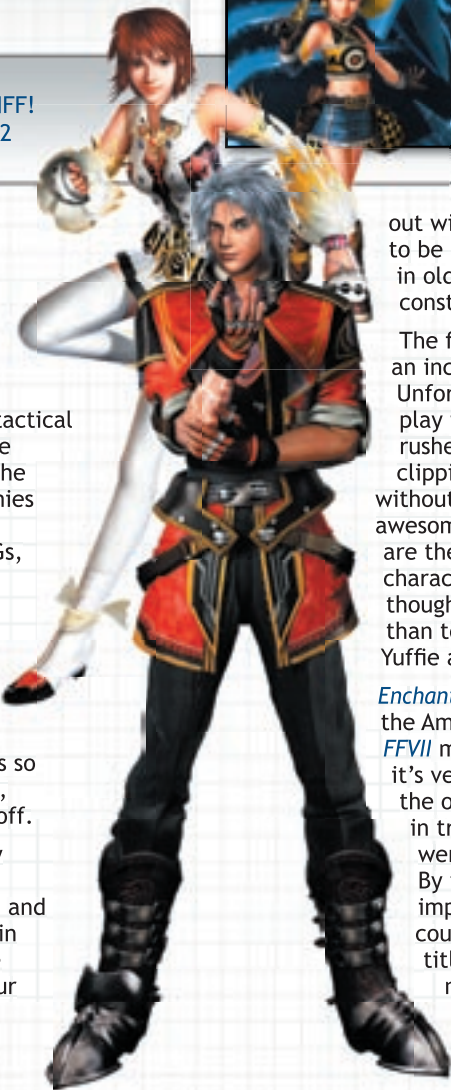
ENCHANTED ARMS



Review by Lynxara

Publisher : Ubisoft
 Developer : From Software
 Release Date : 8/29/06
 Rating : T

Genre(s) : RPG
 Category : ICBINFF!
 # of players : 1-2



Enchanted Arms is an incredibly uneven game, often engrossing and disappointing at the same time. Hardcore J-RPG fans (like me) are going to love it for its rock-solid combat system, even as we frown in disapproval at how damned much of the plot is just a workmanlike rehash of *Final Fantasy VII*. Again.

The combat is reminiscent of a simplified, more tactical *Shin Megami Tensei: Nocturne*. Most encounters are random, and built around the idea of exploiting the game's elemental damage system to defeat enemies quickly. You always begin battles at full power, eliminating the tedious healing grind of most RPGs, but every turn you spend in combat eats away at your total number of VP. At 0 VP a character is dead on his or her feet, with 1 HP and no power to fight. The battles take place on a miniature version of the grid maps that're familiar to fans of tactical RPGs like *Disgaea*. All enemies and allies start at a random point on their half of the 4x6 grid, and every attack only affects so many tiles. Achieving perfect victories is difficult, but it's oh so satisfying when you start pulling it off.

You can fight using the game's customizable story characters, or golems. Golems are basically the magical monsters you beat up in dungeon crawls, and have preset skills. You can find some way to obtain virtually all of them for your own use, even some bosses. Up to four characters can be active in your party at any time, and you can carry up to eight golems with you. There's an online multiplayer mode where opposing teams of golems fight it

out with each other, but it's honestly too broken to be much of an attraction. Much like multiplayer in old-school *Pokemon*, it boils down to everyone constantly using the same three uber-golems.

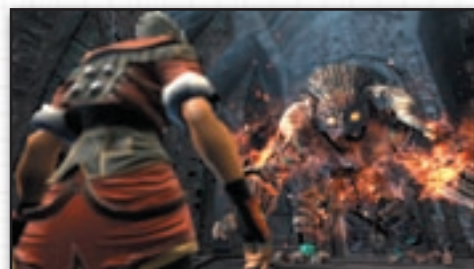
The first few hours of *Enchanted Arms* are an incredibly striking visual experience. Unfortunately, the spectacle doesn't last. As you play farther in the game you'll see more signs of rushed production and outright sloppiness: glaring clipping errors, sterile level designs, dialogue without lip-flap, that sort of thing. After awhile the awesome battle system and challenging boss fights are the only reasons to keep going. Few of the characters are especially memorable or interesting, though the ones who are really deserve better than to rub shoulders with standard-issue clones of Yuffie and Garnet.

Enchanted Arms fails at being the J-RPG that'll make the American mainstream flock to the 360 the way *FFVII* made us flock to the PlayStation. Instead it's very much a niche title, in the same vein as the output from Atlus and NIS America. In fact, in true Atlus fashion, copies of *Enchanted Arms* were already becoming scarce as of this writing. By the time you read this, they'll probably be impossible to find without resorting to eBay. Of course, if you're the kind of gamer who loves titles like this, you're probably used to that by now.

Rating: 3.5 of 5

2nd opinion by 4thletter • Alternate Rating : 3 of 5

The game starts out pretty good and manages to stay that way up to about midway through, as Lynxara says. As-is, it's an okay game, but definitely nothing ground-breaking or genre-shattering. It's decent.



LEGO STAR WARS II THE ORIGINAL TRILOGY



Review by Sardius

Publisher : LucasArts
 Developer : Traveller's Tales
 Release Date : 9/12/2006
 Rating : E10+; Cartoon Violence

Genre(s) : Third-Person Action
 Category : Stud Sweeping
 # of players : 1-2



At times, I really hated *LEGO Star Wars II*. It may have the look of a family-friendly kids' title, but cheap deaths, unavoidable attacks, and horrible vehicle missions often made for a very frustrating experience.

The trouble is, I can't stop playing it.

To put it bluntly, some parts of *LEGO Star Wars II* are just no damn fun at all. Story missions will grind to a halt quite often as you're forced to build ramps for your handicapped droid characters, leaving you vulnerable to fire from what is often an infinite supply of respawning enemies. It's especially frustrating when attempting to earn the "True Jedi" bonus achievement for every level, as dying usually means losing a significant amount of the required LEGO Studs.

This is not to say that Story mode is entirely without merit, however. Though simplistic, the action segments are enjoyable enough, and puzzles can be genuinely clever at times. The Story mode's cutscenes alone provide ample reason to play the game through to the end, as it's impossible to resist the allure of seeing your favorite moments from the original Star Wars trilogy translated into LEGO format. These scenes are all brilliantly directed, and will constantly surprise you with their wit and charm. The game's attempts to compensate for the fact that none of the characters can speak are particularly hilarious.

Most of your enjoyment will be had after you struggle through

Story mode's levels for the first time, however. During subsequent plays in the exploration-based Free Play mode, the fun in *LEGO Star Wars II* really starts to shine through. It's satisfying to return to a previous level where once-aggravating puzzling can now be skipped, and tough enemies can be decimated using a variety of powerful unlockable characters. At this point, levels can be tackled at a leisurely pace, and the process of discovering all of the hidden secrets tucked in the game's nooks and corners is incredibly rewarding.

Unfortunately, the vehicle-based missions are all pretty much the opposite of fun, whether it's your first attempt or your fifteenth. These stages mostly consist of being shot at by unseen enemies from all angles, with no chance to fight back or to recover health at any time. Good luck trying to achieve "True Jedi" status on the tortuous Hoth level without resorting to using cheats. You'll need all the help you can get.

Despite *LEGO Star Wars II*'s many frustrating moments, however, exploring completed levels is all kinds of fun, and the sheer amount of stuff to unlock ensures dozens of hours of playtime. It's a rough ride on your first playthrough, but if you can make it through each level once, the addictive fun that awaits you on the other side will prove to be worth the effort.

Rating : 4 of 5

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

Sardius doesn't mention it, so I will: this game is extra-fantastic when played co-op, although some of the more difficult levels may be enough to permanently strain a friendship. I SAID "COVER ME WHILE I BUILD THE RAMP," NOT "DICK AROUND AS THREEPIO." Good times.

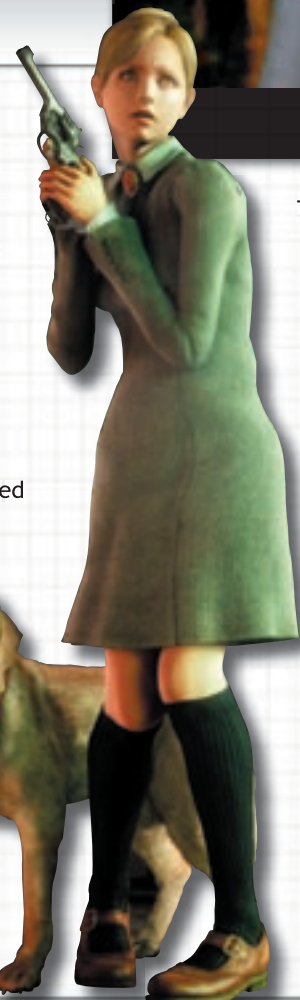
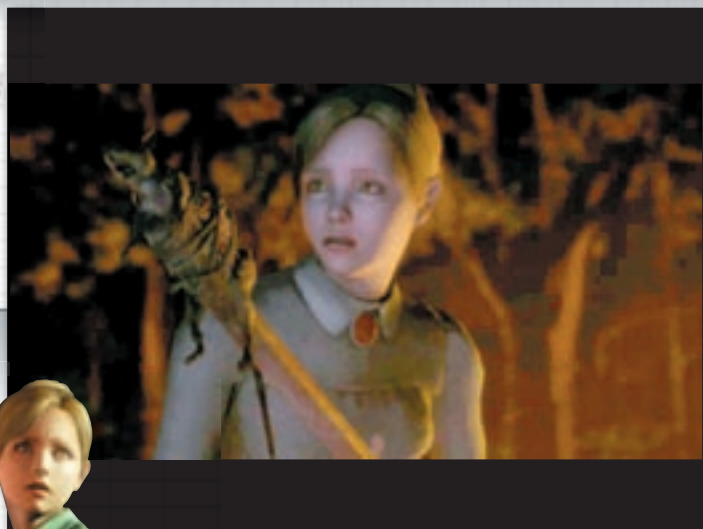


FINAL SCORE :
4 of 5



Review by Wanderer

Publisher : Atlus
Developer : SCEI
Release Date : 9/12/2006
Rating : Mature; Surreal Violence
Genre(s) : Horror
Category : Recreational
Child Abuse
of players : 1



In order for a horror game (or a movie, or whatever) to be effective, you need to flex your imagination a little. You've got to empathize with the characters and treat the subject with a degree of seriousness. You have to be willing to believe in the reality that the game represents, if only long enough to be scared.

The best horror games make it easy to suspend your disbelief, through their atmosphere or a sense of immersion. That isn't the case with *Rule of Rose*. It has a deeply surreal and ominous atmosphere, but the clunky gameplay overpowers it.

In 1930 England, a recently orphaned girl named Jennifer chases a little boy into an orphanage that isn't as abandoned as it looks. Jennifer soon finds herself at the mercy of a group of demented children who call themselves the Aristocrat Club; at the same time, she's somehow simultaneously trapped within the orphanage and within an airship in flight, with an abused dog named Brown as her only ally.

Jennifer seems to have stepped into the role of the protagonist of a twisted fairy tale. *Rule of Rose* is set in a world of pure story logic, where buckets talk, doors require gifts, children know secrets that adults simply cannot comprehend, and reading a storybook literally transports you to another place.

This is a solid foundation, and *Rule of Rose* has the graphics, music, and design to back up the promise of the premise. What it doesn't have is gameplay. The puzzles solve themselves, Jennifer is one of the most inept combatants in video game history, and you spend most of the game following Brown around as he finds items for you.

It doesn't help that the game's monsters are for the most part not even vaguely frightening. They're little kids wearing masks and a school headmaster who's cosplaying as Voldo for no adequately explored reason. The enemies actually make Jennifer look bad, because they somehow pose a threat to her.

Rule of Rose looks good on paper, but it simply doesn't work as a game. The only reason to play all the way through it is to get through the story. Most gamers aren't going to have the patience to get that far, relegating *Rule of Rose* to bargain-bin status.

Rating : 2 of 5

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

I think that this game might've been a little more interesting from the point of the view of the dog. He ends up doing most of the work, at any rate. You'll probably do a bit of screaming, but that's due to the controls, not the horror.



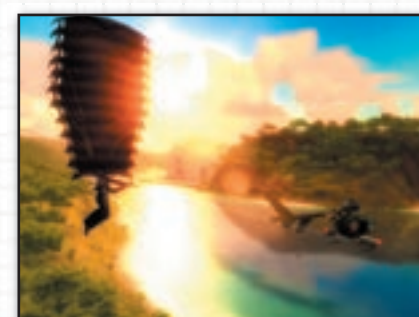
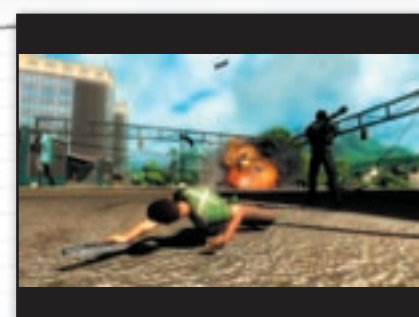
It's not often that a game is so bad that I feel the need to show it off to my friends. *Final Fight: Streetwise* is one such title. *Richard Scarry's Busytown on the Sega Genesis* is another. These games are predictably awful, but are awesome to play when you're with the right crowd and are drinking the right beverage.

Just Cause, on the other hand, makes for great party fare because its comedy is so unpredictable. Will the sound effects suddenly decide not to work? Will your character die instantly when he attempts to jump over a fence? Will an enemy drone accidentally wander into a cutscene, ruining the intended drama as he clips through speaking characters with a glitchy, zombie-like shamble? These kinds of possibilities make *Just Cause* very entertaining to watch, but they're not much fun in a game that's meant to be enjoyed in a non-ironic way.

In concept, *Just Cause* sounds like a potentially fun take on *Grand Theft Auto's* open-ended approach to gameplay. You play as a CIA stuntman out to topple a corrupt South American government, and as such, you have access to *x-treme* equipment like a use-anywhere parachute and a grappling gun. The somewhat interesting storyline is a plus, and features like on-demand vehicle drops and quick extractions add a new

2nd opinion by Lynxara • Alternate Rating : 2.5 of 5

There aren't any bizarre graphics glitches in the 360 port, but *Just Cause* is still easily the worst of the sandbox games glutting the market in Q4. It's like they decided to make a game out of all the really boring, annoying parts of the *GTA* series.



Review by Sardius

Publisher : Eidos Interactive
Developer : Avalanche Studios
Release Date : 9/27/2006
Rating : Mature
Genre(s) : Third-Person Shooter
Category : Like GTA But Worse
of players : 1

layer of convenience to the standard sandbox formula.

Most of the stuntman gimmicks are all but worthless in terms of actual gameplay, however. Sure, jumping from the driver's seat to the roof of a moving car looks cool, but... why would you ever want to do such a thing? The parachuting and parasailing mechanics suffer from similar problems, as it's often faster and easier to just walk or drive somewhere than it is to slowly drift in by parachute.

It's also a shame that none of these stunts makes shooting enemies easier, as *Just Cause's* targeting system is completely broken. The automatic lock-on only works sometimes; the aiming reticle will often drift right over whatever you're trying to target, leaving you to absorb enemy fire while you struggle to make the game understand what you're trying to shoot.

Just Cause suffers in the graphics department as well, especially during the Sega Saturn-quality CG cutscenes. The in-game graphics don't fare much better, as much of the gameplay environment is constructed from paper-thin, blurry sprites. Granted, I was only able to play the PlayStation 2 port, but even in the unlikely case that the Xbox 360 version had more effort put into it, there's no excuse for a \$40 PS2 game to look and play this badly. *Just Cause* gets points from me for offering so much unintentional comedy thanks to its bugginess, but if you're in the market for something that's actually fun to play and doesn't look like a rushed Nintendo 64 port, this isn't your game.

Rating : 2 of 5

FINAL SCORE : 2.25 of 5



The Godfather

Review by Shoegazer

Publisher : Electronic Arts
Developer : EA Redwood Shores
Release Date : 9/19/2006
Rating : Mature; Blood, Intense Violence, Sexual Themes, Strong Language

Genre(s) : Action/Driving
Category : Hi-Res Ports
of players : 1



Remember last year when EA revealed "target" footage of what the Xbox 360 version of *The Godfather* could look like? I was extremely impressed, but the long delays made me antsy, so I went ahead and bought the current-gen version earlier this year to tide me over. Much to my surprise, the game wasn't really all that exciting, and my interest in a next-gen version suffered a bit. However, the release date has finally come, and it's time to see if EA was able to reach the potential of their target footage. In a word: no.

That's not to say that the game looks bad. It's downright spectacular in some spots, but there were some lofty expectations, so ultimately it feels like a let-down. What's surprising is how well the current-gen version stacks up against its hi-rez cousin. One could speculate that missing several deadlines forced the development team to simply "rez up" existing code. Seeing how some parts of the game look considerably better than others, it does make you wonder.

Aside from a shiny coat of paint, what you're getting here is essentially what you got last time, with some new side missions thrown in. The concept and gameplay are identical, which is to say that it's a mellowed-out *Grand Theft Auto* with the *Godfather* license. Though diehard film buffs will be largely turned off by the liberties taken with the



source material, everyone else will probably look right past it. Even though I appreciate the game's innovative approach to its controls, they just don't feel right for this type of game. They're a bit too slow and cumbersome for when the action gets hectic on screen. I can't see someone having a whole lot of patience for the more complex controls unless they get drawn into the story enough to do so. The story, character customization and mission depth are definitely the game's strongest points.

My other major gripe is the living, free-roaming world that you are not allowed to explore at your leisure. If you veer too far away from a mission objective, a warning prompts you to get back on course or your game will end. It would be much more appreciated if you could get to know the streets, alleys and various storefronts, before being thrown into a mission requiring you to get to those places within a certain time limit.

The frustrating part is that as much as I want to like this game, I just can't. The presentation quality is through the roof, and the mission structure is fun (you get to do all the bad mob stuff for crying out loud!), but despite it all, the game is largely just one giant yawn. After playing the superior *Saints Row*, *The Godfather* already feels outdated and ready to sleep with the fishes.

Rating : 2.5 of 5

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

A few of Shoe's complaints hit home, but basically, he's wrong. This is a textbook example of how to make a quality 360 port out of a last-gen title: properly cleaned-up graphics, tons of new features, and even some great Marketplace downloads. If you want a sandbox game that's a little more thoughtful than *Saints Row*, check *The Godfather* out.



Saints Row

Review by Lynxara

Publisher : THQ
Developer : Volition
Release Date : 8/29/06
Rating : Mature

Genre(s) : Open World
Category : Get Your Cinna-On at the Cinna-Bon
of players : 1-12

Is it possible to make a good game that contains no originality whatsoever? *Saints Row* answers that question with a resounding "yes." *Saints Row*, in fact, is a game clearly driven by the principle of figuring out what people already want and then giving it to them.

People mostly seem to want *Grand Theft Auto*, but with nicer graphics, multiplayer, and no struggling to unlock the interesting parts of the game. In *Saints Row*, the entire city of Stilwater is available for you to explore from the very beginning, so you can get right to running around doing whatever the hell you want. There's so much freedom, in fact, that *Saints Row* occasionally feels like playing *GTA* with cheat codes on. There are in-game missions, though nothing forces you to do them, and there's no consequence for failure other than perhaps losing a little money. All of the game's other activities, which let you amass money, respect, and unlockable customization options like better clothing, are playable at any time and demand nothing but patience and planning to defeat. The sense of freedom in *Saints Row* is absolute and total.

Volition's bread and butter before *Saints Row* were third-person shooters like *The Punisher*. This means that *Saints Row* inherits 3PS-style shooting controls that are far superior to *GTA*'s, along with hilarious rag doll physics via the ever-popular Havok engine. The downside is that the driving controls for *Saints Row* are pretty crap, since you don't usually do that sort of thing in a shooter. The only other significant negative

in *Saints Row* is the thoroughly idiotic "townsperson" NPC AI, which does "realistic" things like wander into busy intersections and stand around. The AI for "friendly" NPCs is quite good, and you can rely on your various homies to help you out a lot in every mission and activity. So why do the bystanders insist on diving in front of speeding cars?

These few complaints are really the worst you can muster up for *Saints Row*, though. It's a completely solid sandbox experience, with sharply detailed graphics and a robust selection of licensed music to listen to. The online multiplayer is a very welcome addition to the genre, though a bit slight. The five online games are primarily variants of familiar old FPS competition types. They're not profoundly engrossing or even all that substantial, but a fun way to blow off steam. The best of them are the co-op activities, like *Blinged Out Ride*, which can be very satisfying if you get a good group for it.

Playing *Saints Row* is not intellectually stimulating, does not inspire deep philosophical musings about the nature of interactive entertainment, and won't completely change the way you think about video games. It is instead a very fun way to kill an hour or so, doing socially responsible things like running down grandmothers and helpless old men in a blinged-out convertible. Sometimes in life, it's the simple pleasures that matter.

Rating : 4 of 5

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

I wanted to dislike this game, to be honest, but it is surprisingly well done. It's kind of like playing dress-up, but with more killin' and pimpin'. The quality soundtrack helps, too.





Publisher : Playlogic International • **Developer :** Akella
Release : 9/12/06 • **Rating :** TEEN • **Genre(s) :** Adventure
Players : 1 • **Platform(s) :** PC

That's right, it's another pirate game. That's right, it's set in the Caribbean. I bet that without even reading this, you know about 90% of what happens in it. There is sea combat, there is fencing, and there are commissions from governors and escorting of shipments. There is also some really stunning art, particularly out in the open sea, where your epic naval battles can end up being fought against backdrops of stormy midnight seas or dazzling sunsets, and there is a highly dramatic score to match. Unfortunately, presentation is the best part of the game; everything else is pretty by-the-numbers, including the plot of your noble hero looking to avenge lost family. It's fun and all, guys, but there's a lot you can do with pirates. Can we see something new already?



FINAL SCORE :
3 of 5



Publisher : Koei • **Developer :** Omega Force
Release : 9/19/06 • **Rating :** TEEN • **Genre(s) :** Beat 'em Up
Players : 1-4 • **Platform(s) :** Xbox 360

The good news is that *Samurai Warriors 2* for the 360 contains all of the gameplay improvements and features we praised in the PS2 version, as well as a system-exclusive online multiplayer mode. The bad news is that Omega Force put basically no effort into improving *SW2's* graphics, resulting in absolutely the ugliest game yet published for the 360. It would've been pretty lazy to put this out for the Xbox, but as a 360 title it's just unforgivable. Play it on an HDTV and just try not to wince! Better yet, play it in two-player split-screen co-op mode and try to see what the hell you're doing!



FINAL SCORE :
2 of 5



Publisher : Aspyr Media • **Developer :** Enlight Software
Release : 9/6/06 • **Rating :** MATURE • **Genre(s) :** Action
Players : 1 • **Platform(s) :** PC, Xbox

Both *Alice* and *Scrapland* were very imaginative. Unfortunately, American McGee must have run out of imagination, because now we've got *Bad Day L.A.* If you can imagine playing *State of Emergency* while simultaneously watching *South Park* and *Chappelle's Show*, then you'll have a pretty good idea of what *BDLA* is all about. If you can't stand *South Park* or *Chappelle's Show*, then don't even bother with *BDLA*. If you can, you still shouldn't bother with it. The gameplay is riddled with balance and control issues, the dialogue was written by someone who doesn't understand that dirty jokes aren't always funny just because they're dirty, and the promised political satire is nearly nonexistent. Save yourself the aggravation and forget that *BDLA* ever happened.



FINAL SCORE :
1 of 5



Publisher : Vivendi Games • **Developer :** Radical Entertainment
Release : 10/8/06 • **Rating :** MATURE • **Genre(s) :** Sandbox
Players : 1 • **Platform(s) :** PS2, Xbox

Your enjoyment of *Scarface* is directly dependent on how much you like the film. It's a faithful sequel, even down to the blue language. *Scarface* is a lot of fun, but somewhat one-note in terms of gameplay. You'll shoot, drive, taunt, sell drugs, and intimidate people. The selling and intimidating are neat, but are performed the same way. *Scarface* is a descendant of *GTA*, but the emphasis is less on random mayhem (Tony will not shoot anyone who has not wronged him first) and more on following a story. However, the Enforcer and Assassin missions are a treat. It's a fun game with a great cast, but could use a little more gameplay variation.



FINAL SCORE :
3.5 of 5

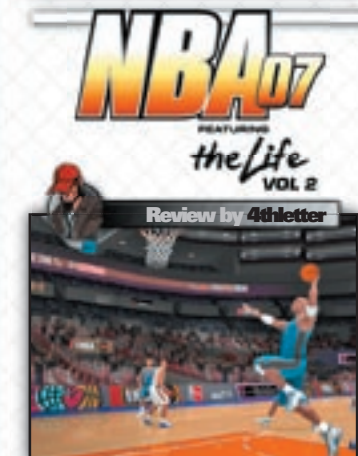


Publisher : Namco Bandai • **Developer :** Xpec Games
Release : 9/13/06 • **Rating :** TEEN • **Genre(s) :** Action
Players : 1-2 • **Platform(s) :** PSP

It's tough not to draw comparisons to Sega's *Phantasy Star Online* games when you're playing *Bounty Hounds*. Xpec's made a few modifications to *PSO's* formula, however. *Bounty Hounds* features enemies far more menacing and aggressive than in the *PSO* games, and they attack in larger numbers (which results in surprisingly little slowdown). It also has a novel dual-weapon system that gives you the ability to utilize a shield, a force dash, and devastating super attacks that are specific to each of the game's myriad armaments. The PSP's imprecise analog nub, some small camera issues, and a confusing radar system can make locating enemies and your next objective frustrating. Still, even with these hiccups, this is a decent original PSP action title.



FINAL SCORE :
3 of 5



Publisher : SCEA • **Developer :** SCE Studios San Diego
Release : 9/26/06 • **Rating :** EVERYONE
Genre(s) : Sports • **Players :** 1-8 • **Platform(s) :** PS2

How do you describe a basketball game that is just all right? *NBA '07* is perfectly decent, but kind of middle of the road. "The Life" is a neat mode, but not really worth the hype. It takes your usual create-a-character system, grafts life simulation mechanics onto it, and tosses you into the mix. The basketball is fast, and the shooting method is pretty neat. Stealing the ball tends to result in a reaching foul way too often, though. What's left is a decent, but not great, b-ball game with rough transitions between possessions. Having your characters go from being downcourt to magically upcourt via a black screen is weak.



FINAL SCORE :
3 of 5

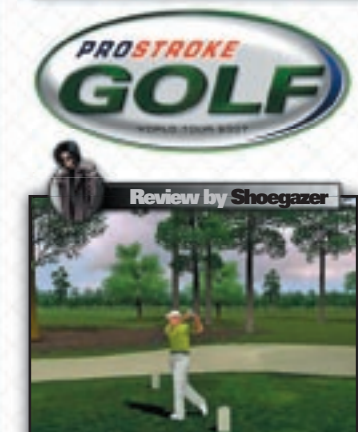


Publisher : SCEA • **Developer :** SCEE London • **Release :** 10/06
Rating : MATURE • **Genre(s) :** Sandbox • **Players :** 1-5
Platform(s) : PSP

It's sad how close *Gangs of London* comes to being good. Several gangs are vying for control of, well, London, and each has a campaign to play through. There are a variety of missions to choose from, like kidnapping, defense, assault, and even racing, with several available at a time on the London map. The Free Roaming missions and Pub mini-games throw in even more gameplay options, even a set of zombie-killing missions, but the controls are so sluggish for both on-foot and driving that it always feels like a chore. Still, the Gang Battle board/card game has an addictive quality the rest of the game lacks, so it's not a total loss.



FINAL SCORE :
2.5 of 5



Publisher : Oxygen Interactive • **Developer :** Gusto Games
Release : 8/29/06 • **Rating :** EVERYONE • **Genre(s) :** Sports
Players : 1-2 • **Platform(s) :** PS2, Xbox

Gusto Games has put together an interesting golf title here for a budget price. Be forewarned, though; *ProStroke* encompasses the word budget in just about every way. This one is bowling shoe ugly, but the simple interface and gameplay depth save it from being just another clearance bin attraction. The controls are completely fresh too. Use the right analog stick to swing and the left stick to control your body weight on the follow through. It adds a whole new satisfying level of strategy. You won't find the same depth here as you would with EA's offering, but it does have a solid career mode, and a respectable course editor. It's a decent alternative for golf veterans or beginners, and the price is right at \$29.99.

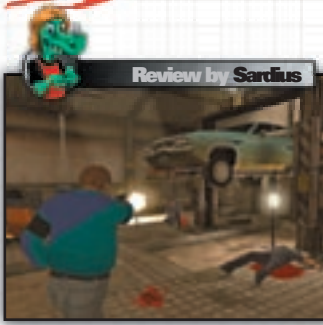


FINAL SCORE :
2.5 of 5

reservoir dogs

Publisher : Eidos Interactive • Developer : Volatile Games
 Release : 10/24/06 • Rating : MATURE • Genre(s) : Third-Person Shooter • Players : 1 • Platform(s) : PS2, Xbox, PC

How does a dialogue-heavy film like *Reservoir Dogs* translate into a violence-heavy video game? Surprisingly well, actually. Outside of some occasional disrespect for its source material (the game begins with a rousing paintball match between the principal characters), *Reservoir Dogs* manages to duplicate much of the attitude and style of a Quentin Tarantino film. This is mostly due to an intriguing combat system that encourages hostage taking and police negotiation rather than indiscriminate murder. The formula could have been refined a little, but for a licensed title based on a fourteen-year-old film, *Reservoir Dogs* does the impossible by not completely sucking.



FINAL SCORE :
3.5 of 5

煉獄 武 RENGOKU

Publisher : Konami • Developer : Hudson Soft
 Release : 9/06 • Rating : TEEN • Genre(s) : Dungeon-crawler
 Players : 1-4 • Platform(s) : PSP

I've seen *Rengoku II: Stairway to H.E.A.V.E.N.* get trashed in every review I've read, and I just don't get it. It's a sci-fi brawler with tons of weapons, a combo system relying on good use of those weapons, and fast, slick gameplay. While the environments are repetitive and there's really only one enemy with a million different weapon configurations, the endless battles have an addictive flow that kept me glued to the PSP. The difficulty level can be brutal, and death means leaving all your equipped weapons in a pile to be collected later, but rearming is easy enough and a new loadout might offer a better chance of survival. Besides, no other game lets you wear a giant sword as a hat.



FINAL SCORE :
4 of 5

STARFOX COMMAND

Publisher : Nintendo • Developer : Q-Games • Release : 8/28/06
 Rating : EVERYONE • Genre(s) : Shooter • Players : 1-6
 Platform(s) : Nintendo DS

After nearly a decade-long downward spiral, *Star Fox* has returned to form on the DS... mostly. A pre-level RTS kills the fast pace, and the touch screen controls take time to get used to. Fortunately, shooting has been assigned to every single button on the system, allowing for easy combat both off- and online. *Command* truly shines as an online game; it allows you to have a ton of fun blasting random strangers to bits, and it's worth buying the game for.



FINAL SCORE :
4 of 5

DIRGE of CERBERUS

Publisher : Square Enix • Developer : Square Enix
 Release : 8/15/06 • Rating : TEEN • Players : 1
 Genre(s) : First/Third-Person Shooter • Platform(s) : PS2

If you actually paid \$50 for this thing, I feel sorry for you. It takes a special breed of idiot to pay full price for an offensively generic action game disguising itself as a sequel to the most overrated RPG of all time, and God help you if you were that idiot. Despite some decent cutscenes and voice acting, it's hard to imagine anyone finding *Dirge's* hours of boxy corridors, keycard collecting, and crate smashing a worthy addition to the *Final Fantasy VII* universe. If you are one of these people, however, please feel free to enjoy upcoming "sequels" like *Batman: The Real-Time Strategy Game* and *Grand Theft Auto: World War II Stories*.



FINAL SCORE :
1.5 of 5

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...at last the enemy ship came out of the night, fired its braking thrusters and landed. I had command of a rifle squad less than a click from the ship and watched through binoculars as the carrier ship's ramp wound down and Infantry Fighting Vehicles starting pouring out. I gave the order to fire and my two missile crews shot hypervelocity kinetic rockets at both the ship and the vehicles. We had gambled and taken the Ideoclans by surprise but we wouldn't be able to repeat it. We were to find out that the losses to the enemy were only minimal...

Available October 2006



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Publisher: ECOLE · Developer: Watanabe Seisakujo / ECOLE · Release Date: August 8th 2006 · Genre: Fighting · Category: Demon/Macabre · Players: 1-2

MELTY BLOOD: ACT CADENZA Through the Looking-Glass, Black Light transparently.

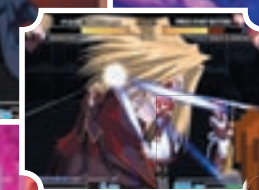
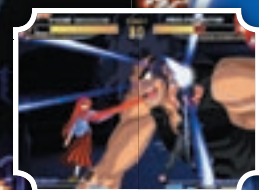
Melty Blood: Act Cadenza is a fighting game that came from the most unlikely of places. It started life as a Doujinsoft (read: "fan made") PC game by a circle called Watanabe Seisakujo, a.k.a. "France Pan". Like a lot of doujinsoft titles, it took the world of a popular PC-based isual novel as the basis for its story. In this case, it's Tsukihime, a title about a sickly assassin and the supernatural women that love him shortly before he kills them.

Melty Blood was truly the little fighting game that could, evolving from a rinky-dink fan-fighter to a fully fleshed monster. It quickly gained a major cult following among Japanese fighting fans, slowly bleeding its way over into the American Gaming/Anime scene. The only thing keeping Melty Blood from even greater success was its hardware. Who competes in fighting games on a PC, unless they're screwing around on Kaillera? Serious Melty Blood players had a hard time finding competition.



Then a company called ECOLE made the surprise announcement that they were working on an arcade port of Melty Blood, renaming it Melty Blood: Act Cadenza. ECOLE, "best known" for creating games like Death Crimson, Utau Tumbling Dice, and Cox-Bax, created some unrest in fans with their announcement. Could they actually pull this off? I mean, they made a game called Cox-Bax! I don't even want to know what the heck that's about.

Not to worry! Against all odds, ECOLE somehow managed to make it work. We're guessing through the clever use of magic and, uh, bacon. Act Cadenza was well-received by the fighting crowd, though one major complaint surfaced: "there's no home port." Fighting fanatics' wishes were finally answered when ECOLE announced a release for PlayStation 2. The only question is: how good is it?



Whichever programmers at ECOLE handled the port somehow managed to cram a game requiring a metric ass-ton of video power — technically speaking — onto a PS2 disc. This means you get all the great

sprite animations that made people take notice of the PC game in the first place. Little details like the flow of Arcueid's skirt as she moves stand out just as much as the bizarre monsters that leap out of Nrvnqr (read: "Nero") Chaos's body. Sadly, the sprites aren't hi-res, like the recent 2D fighter The Rumblefish. You will see pixels. If you're used to playing the recent 2D KOF games, that's nothing too shocking, and the fluidity of the sprites themselves more than make up for it. Just look at Kohaku's walk cycle!

Great animation isn't anything without gameplay, though. MB:AC may seem a little simpler than most fighters at first. Attack-wise, you're only given three buttons: weak, medium, and strong, as well as a parry. Unlike a lot of other games, you can pretty much chain any attack to any other without breaking your combo. Since holding a direction on the pad while doing a standard move sometimes results in an alternate attack (a.k.a. "command moves"), this really opens up a lot of possibilities.

Then there's the special moves and supers, called EX-Moves and EX-Edges. When the super bar maxes, you can also do an Arc-Drive. This is not only sweet-looking, but also does massive. Whenever you fill your super bar to 100% or above (with a maximum of 300%), you can initiate Blood Heat Mode. This allows you to refill your life gauge a bit, as well as giving you the option to do even more powerful super moves... but wait, there's more! When you initiate this mode at 300%, your character goes into Max-Heat, a mode which allows you to do a Last Arc if you parry an attack. The Last Arc, to explain it in highly technical terms, cancels your enemy's Christmas.

That may sound a little confusing, but it's the sort of thing fans expect from a modern fighting game. Luckily, MB:AC takes a different not-so-stereotypical turn when it comes to the characters. The best thing about this game is that almost all of its characters play differently than any other fighter in any other fighting game. There are no clones, and no characters who handle almost exactly like Ryu/Kyo/Randomgamefigureheadman. All of the attacks and animations match the characters' personalities, and none of their moves seem forced or unnatural. It seems like the creators really tried to get into these character's heads, instead of just arbitrarily attaching moves to them.

While I haven't had the honor of playing the arcade version of Act Cadenza, the controls are better on the PS2 than they are on the PC. This is not to say the original is sluggish, as both versions require insane timing, but the PS2 version seems quicker and more refined. The character balance has been improved as well, so there's none of that infinite combo jibba-jabba that was going on in the PC game. The combos can get crazy, mind, and there are some broken characters, but it's not as nuts as it used to be.

On the downside, the backgrounds still lack the life that you'd expect in a current-gen fighting game. What's worse is that the game doesn't have a progressive scan mode, which should've been ridiculously easy to implement. If SNK can have it in all their recent endeavors, ECOLE could've done it here. I don't want to see scanlines marring such beautiful sprites! The extras aren't that bountiful either. Other than arcade and versus mode, you only really get the standard fighting game standbys: unlockable art, survival mode, a couple of hidden characters, and so on. You know the drill.

Other recent fighting games like The Rumblefish failed miserably at reinvigorating the 2D fighting genre, but Act Cadenza has triumphed. It's everything one could want out of a new fighter on a console, and really stands out in light of the next Guilty Gear XX rehash, Accent Core. Arc System Works, please take some notes from Melty Blood. Please.

Worth Importing?

Yes! Hell yes! If you like good fighters and you're bored of constant fighting game rehashes, get this game. If you pick it up, be sure to go online and research some of the really cool story behind the game and characters.

FINAL SCORE: 4.5 of 5

Review by Ashura



Publisher: Sega Genre(s): RPG
Developer: Sonic Team Category: Wow, It's Shiny
Release Date: Q4 2006 # of Players: 1 - A Whole Lot

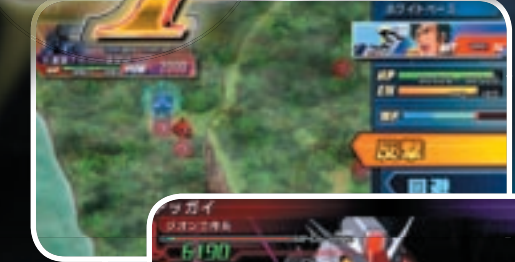
This is another one of those imports that seemed like it was going to be so much cooler than it actually was. SD Gundam G Generation Portable was the first PSP game to top the Japanese sales charts, and was widely reported to be an enhanced port of the 2000 PlayStation title SD Gundam G Generation F. This is a big deal because G Gen F is far and away one of the best Gundam games, and is a great strategy game in its own right.

In G Gen F, your goal was to build up a team of original pilots and mecha drawn from the entirety of the Gundam franchise. You acquired teams by essentially visiting a particular Gundam storyline to capture mecha and pilots while engaging in turn-based, grid-driven strategy warfare. Once you acquired a unit or its blueprint, you could mass produce it, customize it, merge it into a new unit, or just level it up. You had to be careful, though; once a unit was shot down, it and its pilot were gone for good, along with whatever investments you made in them.

In broad strokes, all of this is true of G Gen Portable, but G Gen P still feels anemic compared to the original. G Gen F included an incredible variety of alternate play modes that are outright gone. The G Gen F roster included lots of obscure Gundam manga and side-stories to play with, but G Gen P only includes battles and units based on the various Gundam anime. G Gen P does add 17 new battles and a host of units based on the two recent Gundam SEED anime, but this doesn't make up for everything else that's been taken out.

What's worse is how G Gen P completely lobotomizes G Gen F's legendary difficulty curve. You can unlock blueprints for many new units simply by seeing them in action, and you begin the game with G Gen F's most powerful machine as a default unit. Instead of having to make sure you capture and sell lots of enemy units to acquire more capital to improve your army with, there's a new "Haro Ranking" mechanic that lets you acquire money simply by shooting down enemies. G Gen P ultimately doesn't demand much strategy at all. You just need enough patience to clear each map.

Perhaps worst of all, though, is G Gen P's game-killing load time glitch. Sometimes, when you're loading a large amount of new data, such as after finishing a level or when ending a turn, the loading process hangs. There's no remedy besides resetting and starting over from wherever you last saved your progress. There's no way to know when it'll happen. Knowing that you could lose all of your progress at any moment makes playing SD Gundam G Generation Portable seem profoundly pointless.



No. Get a copy of the original G Generation F instead. There aren't any SEED units, but everything else about it is so much better.

FINAL SCORE: 2 of 5

Review by Lynara

リズム天国 (Rhythm Tengoku)

Genre(s): Rhythm
Category: .59
of players: 1
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Nintendo
Release Date: August 3, 2006



Why isn't rhythm-based gameplay more popular? The genre's inherent learning curve may have something to do with it. As fun as they may be, games like Guitar Hero and Dance Dance Revolution are hostile toward beginners, since a player has to master their unconventional control schemes before either title can be enjoyed. This problem dates back to the genre's earliest days, as even a simple rhythm title like Parappa the Rapper required memorizing the PlayStation controller's button configuration, which was an immediate impasse for many casual gamers.

You don't need to buy an expensive and cumbersome controller to play Rhythm Tengoku, however. Rhythm Tengoku doesn't require you to memorize button placements, nor is it difficult enough to scare off casual players. If you're able to press your Game Boy Advance's A button in time to a simple beat, you're well on the way to mastering the bulk of Rhythm Tengoku's minigames.

Rhythm Tengoku (or "Rhythm Heaven") was developed by the same team behind Nintendo's WarioWare series, which will become very obvious within the first few minutes of play. Everything from Rhythm Tengoku's art style to its frenzied gameplay screams Wario, and several sound samples are bound to be familiar to WarioWare fans.

Unlike WarioWare, however, Rhythm Tengoku's forty-eight minigames are all rhythm-based. Simple cues in the background music tell you when to press buttons in order to complete a variety of consistently weird objectives. One game has you bouncing a rabbit across an army of sea creatures, for instance, while another features a man in space batting a stream of baseballs along to a salsa beat.

As abstract as these objectives may sound, the gameplay never feels unnatural, as your innate sense of rhythm will guide your button presses more than on-screen cues. Many levels can be played just as well with your eyes closed, in fact. This is a good thing, as Rhythm Tengoku has a habit of dimming or distorting the screen during certain challenges, forcing you to rely entirely upon the musical beat and your own sense of rhythm to succeed.

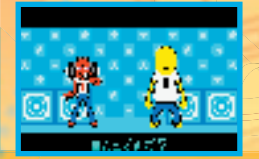
Boss stages come in the form of "remixes": longer levels that combine elements from previous challenges with rapid objective switch-ups and tempo changes. While challenging, these remixes – and all the other stages – are fairly easy to pass on your first or second try.

Obtaining all of Rhythm Tengoku's achievements and unlockables, however, requires exceptional or even perfect play in all levels. This is a difficult process that will challenge even the most hardened rhythm game veterans.

WarioWare's simple, reflex-based gameplay works wonderfully in the context of a rhythm game, and the end result is something that can be enjoyed by both the casual and the hardcore. This is the best portable rhythm title since Osu! Tatakae! Ouendan, and you'd better damn well import it if you know what's good for you.

WORTH IMPORTING?

The unlockable bonus material is entirely in Japanese, but gameplay itself is unaffected by the language barrier. Buy this now!



FINAL SCORE: 5 of 5



Next-Gen Line-up

Quick Look at the Wii and PS3

Nintendo Wii

Date: November 19th

Price: \$249.99

Pack-Ins: One Remote, One Nunchuck

The Wii is coming with a *Wii Sports* disc and will be fully backwards compatible with the GameCube. The Wii Channel Menu will allow for console customization, online activities, and easy game launching. Plus, you'll make Reggie happy if you buy one, and a happy Reggie makes for a safe and contented populace.



Reviews by 4thletter



Sony PlayStation 3

Date: November 17th

Price: \$499.99 (20GB), \$599.99 (60GB)

Pack-Ins: Bluetooth Motion-Sensing Controller

The PS3 is coming with everything from standard to 1080p video output, built-in Bluetooth and Blu-Ray, and reduced noise output. The 60GB model is the one to go for, since it'll sport built-in wireless internet and a number of other fancy-shmancy high-tech features. The rumors of it being able to give you a back massage are, sadly, untrue.

Nyko

Zero Wireless Controller

• Wireless Controller • System: PC, PS2, PS3, Xbox 360 • Fall 2006

A good controller is a wonderful thing, and sometimes you have to go third-party to get it. Gone are the days when a third-party controller meant uncomfortable ergonomics and a turbo button. Third-party controllers nowadays feature different control schemes, better battery life, or other options that first-party pads don't offer.

Nyko's going to stake their own claim in the next-gen third-party field this Fall with a new series of controllers. They're leading off their Zero line with a PS2 pad. Look for it to sport 25 hours of battery life and easy recharging via USB. The face buttons and charge indicator light are going to be backlit for those late-night gaming sessions. Finally, you're looking at a respectable wireless range of thirty feet. Nyko promises us that PS3, Xbox 360, and PC versions of the pad will be released following the launch. In the geek speak portion of the specs, expect "heat dissipating aluminium panels" to, er, dissipate heat for those hot and sweaty moments. Look for the Zero line to start hitting this Fall.



Features
Backlit face buttons
Fully analog
Rechargeable batteries
25 Hours of play time



Microsoft

Xbox Live Vision Camera

• Web Camera • System: Xbox 360 • Price: \$39.99

Here's a quick quiz for you. The Xbox Live Vision Camera is a) a cool little gadget that will increase your enjoyment of Xbox Live, b) a cool little gimmick that you'll use every once in a while on Uno, or c) the worst possible thing to happen to Xbox Live. If you answered C, your brain is probably filled with visions of the worst excesses of the internet being beamed right into your living room at thirty frames per second.

For those of you who aren't cringing in pain right now, you'll realize that right now, the camera is a neat addition to the Xbox Live lineup. The potential for face-mapping in games is pretty awesome, as is voice chat. Using Xbox Live as free long-distance is good, but using it as free video long-distance is even better.

Features
640x480
30fps
Horrorfying people online



XBOX LIVE



Pelican

TSZ Pad / PL-3601 for Xbox 360

• Wired Xbox 360 Controller • Price: \$24.99

Features
10 foot USB cable
Larger Buttons
Variety of Colors

Third-party wireless controllers for the 360 are still the stuff of legend, but there are plenty of wired ones for you to give a try. Take Pelican, for example. Pelican knows controllers, and the TSZ pad for 360 proves it. It provides a nice counterpoint to the standard Xbox 360 pad.

The TSZ goes in a couple different directions than the official wireless pad. The finish is slick and shiny, compared to Microsoft's textured and dull case. The controller isn't so slick as to drop right out of your hands during heated play, of course. The reflections are quite attractive, too. The face buttons are larger than they are on the default pad, which is very nice. When you press the bumpers, you hear a loud click. The TSZ can be a noisy controller, depending on what you're playing, but it's a solid one.

Saitek

Chess Explorer

• Computer Chess Set • Price: \$89.95

"What?" you ask. "A chess set? In *Hardcore Gamer Magazine*? Are you kidding?"

Not at all. Chess is one of the oldest games out, yes, but it's also got a hardcore following. Saitek's Chess Explorer is actually a pretty neat little bit of hardware. It features an intelligent on-board computer that won't hesitate to school you. An easy to read LCD screen tells you what moves to make for the computer. An "Info Mode" will let you see what the computer is thinking, which is perfect for training. If you screw up, you can take moves back. If you're getting crushed, turn down the difficulty. You've got plenty of options, so use them.

Chess is cool, despite what your friends may think. It's a relaxing game and good mental exercise. Can't break that puzzle in the RPG du jour? Take a break, play a few rounds, and give your brain an analog work out. You might end up hooked.



Features
64 Playing Levels
Learn from the Experts
Save games

Fan art is all about giving exposure to aspiring artists who might not otherwise have a way to get their artsie parts seen. If you are one such artist, point your web browser toward www.luv2game.com and check out the Fan Art section of our message boards. That is where you can post your arts to get them considered for this section. You may also email submissions to fart@hardcoregamer.com.

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



Title : Tingle is a stud
Artist : Andrew Sanchez
Age : 25
Location : Sarasota, FL

Artist's comments: Tingle 'n' Me's Down-home, Ragtime, Hillbilly, Hobo Band, or TMDRHHB as our fans know us. It includes Tingle on the banjo/dulcimer, Makar on the big fiddle/washtub bass, and me on the empty moonshine bottle/cellophane comb.



Title : Meet Cheri
Artist : Jared Thorbahn
Age : 21
Location : Newark, OH



Title : Pawappwa.
Artist : Douglas De Guzman
Age : 23
Location : Las Vegas, NV



Title : Slimes and Kisses
Artist : Jesus Terrero
Age : 19
Location : Miami, FL



Title : Link
Artist : Austin Cook
Age : 18
Location : Sanford, FL



Title : Sora in an Ultimate Form
Artist : Dane Romley
Age : 26
Location : Shadow Hills, CA



Title : Dude Don't Mess With Elves!
Artist : Olaf Minkowicz
Age : 21
Location : Brooklyn, NY

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(Some people don't play video games.)



by Metalbot

Sophitia Alexandra and Raphael Sorel: Soul Calibur 3



Joan Kartright: War of Genesis III



Maria Renard and Richter Belmont: Castlevania Symphony of the Night

Cosplayers: Mary and JoEllen Elam (Featuring Chris and Matt)
Location: Dallas, Texas
Website: www.firefly-path.net
Next Con: TNT Mexico
Awesomeness on a scale from 1 to 10: 17.5

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