



SnackbarGames

GAME NEWS, REVIEWS AND FEATURES SINCE 2002

JUNE/JULY 2011

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JUNE/JULY 2011 - ISSUE 01

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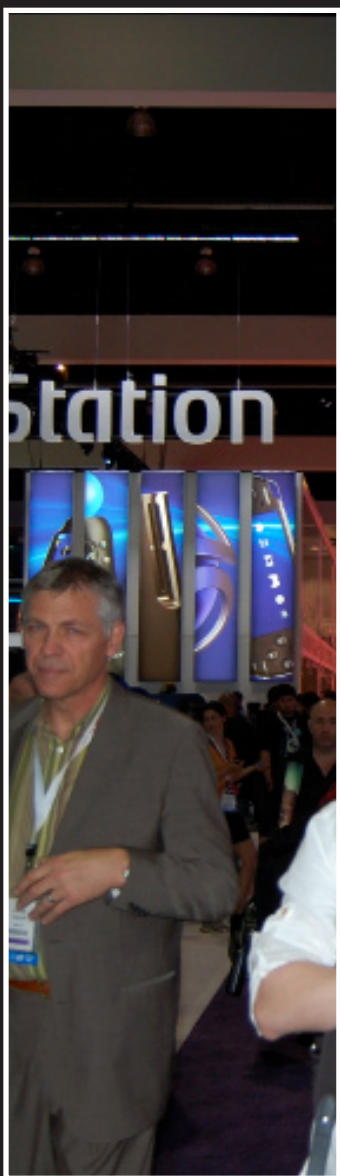
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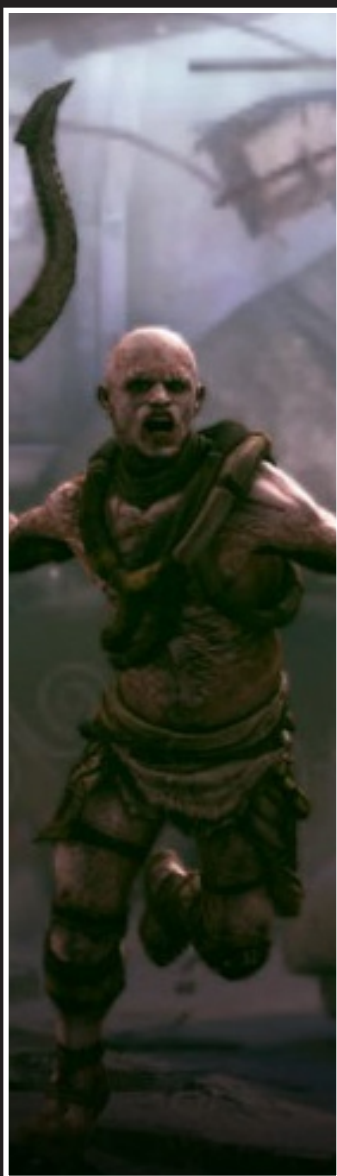
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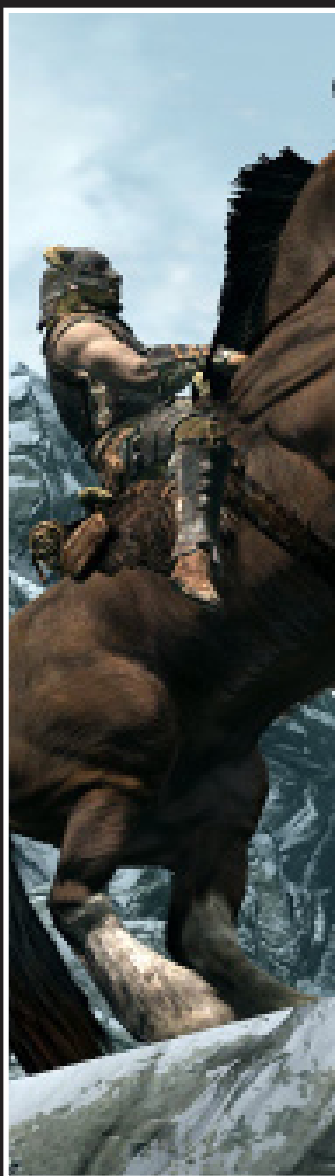
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Getting you answers: E3 '11

You told us what you wanted to know from this year's show, and we're happy to find out for you. Here's this year's batch:

CHECK OUT KONAMI!

Of course there was Metal Gear Solid 3D, still on pace for a 2011 release, though employees were unsure if it will be released before the Metal Gear Solid HD Collection. Metal Gear Solid Peace Walker was playable though, and it looked very sharp, considering it started life as a PSP game. Finally, Metal Gear Solid Rising is still a thing, though it is absent from E3 this year. Of course, PES 2012 was there, time will tell if it can overtake FIFA this year, but it looked very nice and realistic.

Looking at smaller profile releases, Dr. Lautrec and the Forgotten Knights is looking less like a Professor Layton knockoff and more like a possible 3DS sleeper hit. **-SV**

DOES HARVEST MOON: TALE OF TWO TOWNS 3D HAVE ADDED FEATURES?

Unfortunately, it appears these two games are one and the same. That said, it looks to continue the promising run of Harvest Moon portable games. It controls and feels much the way Grand Bazaar did, and the art really lends itself very well to the 3D effect. A Tale of Two Towns is coming out on both the Nintendo DS and

the 3DS, but the only difference between the two will be some upgraded graphics and 3D in the 3DS version. Basically, Natsume is pulling a Twilight Princess with this to up sales, though I don't blame them in the least. It looks to be a good entry in the series no matter which version you pick up. **-SV**

ANYTHING YOU CAN FIND OUT ON SILENT HILL DOWNPOUR? GUARDIAN HEROES?

Silent Hill Downpour looks fittingly depressing and wet. We checked out both the 360 and PS3 versions, with the PS3 version running in 3D. While they both controlled perfectly fine, the 3D didn't work very well in this build of the game. It led to greatly degraded visuals compared to the 360 version (which looked very slick, enhancing the dark and forbidding atmosphere) but also made it harder to control the camera effectively. I died a lot more on the PS3 version than the 360 version because of this.

Guardian Heroes is a tough one to talk about. It is, without a doubt, a game that is 100% outside my normal experience. I died a lot while learning the controls, which do take some time to get used to. Eventually I got used to them and finally started killing my enemies. It takes a combination of side-scrolling beat-em' up gameplay and RPG elements, allowing

you to level up and power up all of the characters you can play as...and there are a lot of them. Basically, if you enjoyed the original on the Sega Saturn, or you're a fan of other Treasure games, you'll probably love this one too. **-SV**

ANYTHING OTHER THAN SKYWARD SWORD FOR WII?

Actually, despite Nintendo not mentioning anything for the Wii other than Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword, there is quite a bit still coming out for it. A new Mario & Sonic 2012 Olympics game will be released, but also the Kirby Wii game, Fortune Street (a localization of party board game Itagaki Street) and Rhythm Heaven are all set to be released for it this year. **-SV**

It is strange that they ignored all these at the briefing, but Rhythm Heaven is great. Kirby Wii has four-player drop-in drop-out local co-op with each character (Kirby, Meta Knight, Waddle Dee and King Dedede) controlling differently. Fans of Mario Party, or more appropriately Dokapon and Culdcept, will enjoy Fortune Street. And those are just the first-party offerings. Among the random things at the show are a surprisingly-solid Centipede: Infestation, a great-as-usual Lego Harry Potter game and... yeah, you're right. It's not a great show for that system. **-GR**

Our most anticipated: 2011, part 2

JUSTIN LAST



Sly Cooper: Thieves in Time: 3D platforming was good to Sony on the PS2, and I could never truly decide if I preferred Ratchet & Clank or Sly Cooper. I've gotten plenty of PS3 playtime out of the Future trilogy of R&C games, and while The Sly Collection was great fun on PS3, I can't wait to see what Sanzaru can do with the franchise while Sucker Punch (hopefully) keeps supplying us with Infamous games.

Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception: Uncharted 2 was my personal game of the year for 2009, and the Uncharted games deliver movie-quality setpieces, whitty writing, and some of the best single-player gunplay I've ever found. I can't wait to step back into Drake's shoes.

Assassin's Creed: Revelations: I was excited for this one before E3, and the trailer shown have me even more excited to see what the future (past? both?) have in store for Altair, Ezio, and Desmond in Constantinople.

GERRY PAGAN



PlayStation Vita: When the 3DS was first announced, I was impressed with how they managed to push such an impressive graphic resolution on a handheld. Then the NGP was revealed and demonstrated. Needless to say, I was blown away. With E3 revealing that the game will be priced the same as a 3DS, I'll be among the many lining up to get this on day one.

Kirby Wii: A true Kirby Super Star successor with 4-player cooperative play? With KSS being among my favorite games of all time, it took me less than a second to get interested.

Dragon's Crown: An online 4-player beat-'em-up on the style of the old D&D arcade games/Golden Axe, sporting 2D art by Vanil-laware. Also capable of being taken on the go with the Vita, and currently priced at \$30. This one is a no-brainer.

ANDREW PASSAFIUME



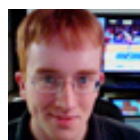
Twisted Metal: I love everything new they're adding to this franchise while they remain faithful to the gameplay that made this series as successful and fun as it has been over the years.

Ace Combat: Assault Horizon: Outside of the handheld titles, the Ace Combat series has yet to disappoint. The addition of helicopters plus the small, but useful gameplay changes makes this one game I really can't wait to try out for myself.

Mass Effect 3: Seeing the demo at EA's press conference had me both excited and worried. The combat seems great, but it was all combat.

Since then, previews have shown that it will still feature what we love about the series, including the amazing conversation system.

GRAHAM RUSSELL



Heroes of Ruin: It will be a while before we see this Square Enix-published action-RPG, but it seems like it will be a 3DS classic. The procedurally-generated levels, robust online play and visual charm make me hope for something truly special.

Awesomenauts: Getting two buddies over to take on all comers in arena-based combat just seems like a great time. Ronimo has a knack for making things fun and distinctive, and my fingers are crossed that they'll hit another one out of the park.

Paper Mario 3DS: We didn't even get our hands on Paper Mario at this year's show. We got confirmation that it's on its way, though, and I have an undying devotion toward that series. Of course, I'd also take a new Advance Wars, but I guess I'm happy Intelligent Systems keeps working on whatever it can.

SHAWN VERMETTE



Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim: I went into E3 with high expectations for Skyrim, and it didn't disappoint. The new information about the way character development will work is exciting, and the new combat and magic systems really look like they'll greatly improve the variety and enjoyment of fighting. Top that off with the new, shiny graphics engine and story, and it's definitely still top on my list after E3.

Final Fantasy XIII-2: Final Fantasy XIII-2 appears to do exactly what I wanted out of a sequel to Final Fantasy XIII, even the parts I didn't even think I wanted. The ability to add captured monsters to your team, the quick time events during boss battles, and the addition of interaction with NPCs and towns are all great ideas and seemed to work well during my time with the game.

Star Wars: The Old Republic: This title is something I never thought would be in a list of top 5 anything. I love Star Wars, and the Knights of the Old Republic games are my favorite Star Wars-based games. So I was extremely sad when I first heard that BioWare was making an MMO instead of a sequel to KotOR. I remained disappointed all the way until I saw BioWare explain their approach and plan for The Old Republic. Now, I'm hoping that the monthly payments are low enough I can afford them, or that they offer a lifetime subscription.

WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FORWARD TO? LET US KNOW! SEND AN EMAIL TO EDITORS@SNACKBAR-GAMES.COM.

MOBILE PICKS

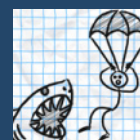
Our top picks for the three major mobile platforms:

Android: Grand Prix Story



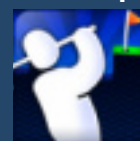
With Kairossoft's third outing, there's a marked return to the roots of what made them great. In this one, there are a few changes, as you build up racers and fine-tune vehicles to work your way up to the big-league circuits. The genre's watch-numbers-pile-up tedium is solved in an interesting way: performance is shown as a race, full of swerving and passing and such.

WP7: Parachute Panic



All you have to do is guide the skydivers safely to a boat. While you're doing that, you will encounter helicopters, storm clouds, and even a UFO. You tap to destroy obstacles and open parachutes, and you drag to guide your divers around. Parachute Panic is a game almost every gamer can enjoy playing on a Windows Phone 7 device.

iOS: Super Stickman Golf



Super Stick Golf was fun. Super Stickman Golf, the direct sequel, is more so. In addition to the full original game and a larger added campaign, there's a new mode in which players compete simultaneously. Somehow, in the same engine, you can play a turn-based thinking game and a frantic swing-fest. What makes the main game more compelling is the addition of various special balls, allowing for mulligans and sticking to walls.

RAGE: Post-apocalyptic fun

Since it was first announced in 2007, RAGE has been compared to games like Fallout and Motorstorm, due to its post-apocalyptic setting and driving elements. However, after our time with it at E3, another game comes to mind: Borderlands.

RAGE takes place a number of years after the destruction of civilization by the impact of the asteroid Apophis. You play as a survivor of the impact who comes out of cryo-freeze in an Ark, a kind of subterranean building in which the government cryogenically froze a number of scientists and other individuals hoping that they would be able to rebuild civilization after the destruction of the Earth. Unfortunately, you are the sole survivor in your Ark and you've lost all memory of your identity and post-impact objectives.

At E3, we didn't get to see any of the racing, but we got plenty of time with the combat. It does not feel like Fallout at all, other than the setting of the game, as it provides a very good shooter experience with plenty of weapons, utilities, and ammo options to choose from.

We played through an attack on a bandit faction's base, where we got to see the RC Bomb Car and automated turrets in action, along with our only combat against normal humans. The RC Bomb Car is fun to use, as you'll get to drive it personally and detonate it remotely when it reaches your preferred destination. Watch out for enemy fire, though, as not only is the car vulnerable to weapons fire, but you are a sitting duck while controlling it. More enjoyable to use were the automated turrets, as they come equipped with legs and motion servos. They'll scamper



around the surrounding terrain looking for enemies to shoot, along with following you as you make your way through a hostile base. Human opponents also seem to be a bit smarter than your average mutant. Mutants simply run at you, wielding whatever weapons they get their hands on, while humans will employ strategy and the environment to their advantage while trying to kill you.

Overall, RAGE feels very smooth and well along in its development, which is good since its extended development period is nearing an end finally. It hits PC, Xbox 360 and PS3 this October. **-SV**



Solatorobo: Red the Hunter

It's been almost twelve years since we saw an entry in the Little Tail Bronx series. With CyberConnect2's original Tail Concerto being lost in the mix of .hack// and Naruto Ultimate Ninja games over time, a spiritual successor to the game finally came out last October in Japan: Solatorobo: Red the Hunter.

The game drops you straight into the action. Controlling Red Savarin and his machine, DAHAK, you're asked to retrieve a confidential file upon an enemy ship called the Hindenburg. In standard action-RPG style, the game has you moving crates around to figure out puzzles, countering missile attacks in battle, and defending yourself.

With fairly simple controls and a colorful cast, the game shapes itself up to be an exciting entry in the Nintendo DS library. **-EA**



Doctor Lautrec

If you've ever played a Professor Layton game and thought to yourself that the game would be much cooler if Layton had a mustache, Luke was a girl, and Layton and Luke sometimes engaged in some turn-based combat, then... wow. You have quite the imagination. Also, Doctor Lautrec and the Forgotten Knights is the perfect game for you.

Dr. Lautrec is a french archeologist, who bears more than a passing resemblance to Professor Layton, right up to his top hat. In combat, there are various positions on the screen upon which you can place the various treasures you've collected. Each position grants the treasure animatis various benefits or drawbacks, so a sound strategy is a must for winning these battles. When exploring, you'll actually move Dr. Lautrec around from an isometric perspective, rather than the point-and-click Layton. **-SV**

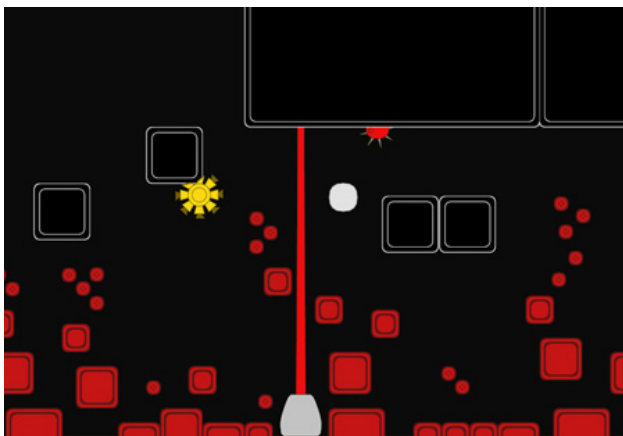


Rune Factory: Tides of Destiny

The Rune Factory series has always managed to balance a kind of “RPG-lite” dungeon crawler with the farming simulation gameplay of its progenitor. Changes to the formula are generally small and slow to happen. Imagine our surprise when we realized that Rune Factory: Tides of Destiny takes this formula and plays Yahtzee with it.

In Tides of Destiny, you’ll originally play as a male who happens to possess the spirit of female childhood friend as well. Until a certain point in the story is reached, you’ll play as the male lead, after which you’ll be given a choice of continuing the story as either the female or the male character.

Previous Rune Factory games have remained focused on the farming aspect of the game. In Tides of Destiny, it’s almost an afterthought. You’ll be more of a manager than a farmer, and with captured monsters doing all the actual work. **-SV**



Sound Shapes

In Sound Shapes, a Vita title developed by Jonathan Mak and Shaw-Han Liem, players create levels that make music, then play them to bring the music to life one note at a time. If you really wanted to, you could have a lot of fun without ever entering the creator. Your character jumps and sticks to surfaces, and the complexity comes in the form of the environments you must traverse. What makes Sound Shapes so much more than that already-fun title is the building musical themes as you move around to collect blocks here and there and avoid various obstacles.

We glimpsed some of the advanced tools, but we’ll have to get more into those in the full version. Of course, if they turn out too daunting, we’ll be happy enough to explore the detailed levels shared by those more diligent than we are. **-GR**



Mario & Sonic 2012

The Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Games titles are an interesting phenomenon. As Sega’s chance at selling a game at Nintendo numbers, it gets a lot of the company’s attention, but as an installment in a sports game series, it just doesn’t get much critical attention or passion from fans and developers alike. The last title, released to coincide with the ’10 Winter Games in Vancouver, swapped the original’s waggle-fest formula for one that made some interesting co-op activities and focused on making the games more game-like. M&S 2012 continues that effort.

The Dream Events are even more ridiculous this time around, and we are both excited and confused by that. Dream Discus, for example, has you riding a disc back and forth in the air, collecting rings and avoiding various obstructions. This seems interesting, but how is this discus, exactly? **-GR**



Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning

Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning is a big game. This is by design; 38 Studios chief Curt Schilling brought in who he could, picking up developer Big Huge Games to realize a world created by R.A. Salvatore and envisioned by Todd McFarlane. The game’s set in a fantasy world, and it features many gameplay aspects you’ve seen in games like Dragon Age, Fable and Oblivion, but it has its own feel. The focus is making not just a large, sweeping world, but a large, sweeping game to inhabit it.

Your character is the only one in the world without a set fate, and the game progresses with your choices determining your destiny. There are deep job systems, from picking flowers to blacksmithing to straight-up stealing. If you could make money doing something in a fantasy world, it could be here. It’s a very wide-open structure. **-GR**

Awesomeonauts: Be cool

Awesomeonauts, the latest project from Swords & Soldiers developers Ronimo Games, is first and foremost trying to be amusing. Don't get us wrong; there's some serious gameplay under the candy-coating. But with an aesthetic inspired by '80s cartoons and a theme song that's simultaneously funny and fun, it won't be long before you're saying "awesome" at least once or twice a minute.

The game is a multiplayer arena battling game, described by co-founder Jasper Koning as inspired by PC phenomenon League of Legends. It's not exactly that, though. Players team up for 3-on-3 battles, in which players attack each other and powerful gatling turrets in an effort to get to the other team's base and claim victory. Each side generates little minions to bolster forces and generally make it harder to break through. You can acquire and upgrade abilities within a given match, but there's no traditional leveling to unbalance teams. (There's progression to unlock things and advance, but it mostly just opens up more balanced options.) Why 3-on-3 and not 4-on-4, though? Koning said the team has created each map with two paths, and having 3-member teams leaves things unbalanced and in flux. From what we played, that's true; you can pool your resources and make a run at an enemy turret, but you'll leave the other path unguarded. You can split up and play zone defense, but it's unlikely you'll be able to breach enemy lines or survive turret assaults if you do.

There are six classes, all of which with varying degrees of awesomeness. There's the jetpack-toting, maneuverable monkey



(awesome), the enemy-chomping, life-stealing robot (awesome), and the swift-shootin', rough-and-tumble cowboy (also kind of awesome), among others. You can match up with friends online, or even gather two friends and take a full team into battle with the online masses. The game will support mixing and matching between the two, if you so choose. (Unfortunately, there won't be cross-platform multiplayer. We thought we'd ask.) If you need it, there are also bots for offline play or filling out a match, and be warned: those guys totally know what they're doing.

The team's officially targeting a Q3 release, but they're aiming for September. We hope you'll join us in the awesomeness. **-GR**



FIFA 12

You've heard it all before: this year's edition has this many updates or these new features. Perhaps it has enhanced graphics or more teams. It definitely has updated rosters, and just maybe the gameplay has been refined. Well, in FIFA 12, the soccer franchise seems to have distinct improvements over past iterations.

The big improvement comes from the inclusion of more accurate animations and movements. In most sports games, this really doesn't make much of a difference, but in soccer, it makes a world of it. The sport is about the subtle nuances of how the ball moves and feels as the player dribbles, jukes, passes, or volleys. FIFA 12 seems to have achieved a level of realism in the touches and movements of the ball that I would have thought out of reach. FIFA 12 looks to be the soccer game fans of all ages have been looking forward to. **-SV**



Dark Souls

If you enjoy the sound of weeping and gnashing of teeth (or doing the same yourself), then you owe it to yourself to play Demon's Souls sometime. If you've already played it and are looking for more punishment, look out for Dark Souls later this year.

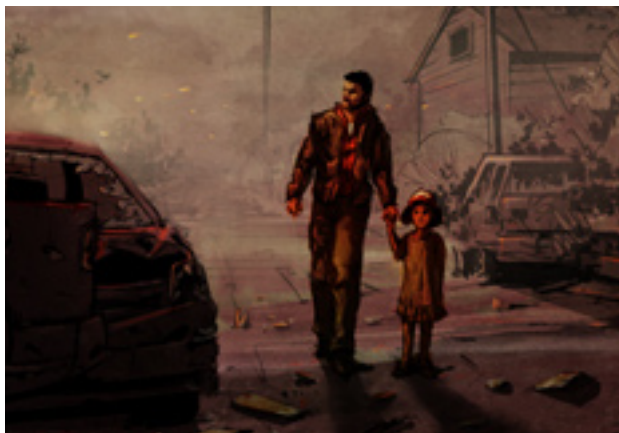
Dark Souls, the game's spiritual successor, and it retains much of the same gameplay and difficulty that Demon's Souls revealed in. You'll still lose all your souls upon death, but instead of experiencing an instant reversion to Soul Mode, your character will slowly become less and less human each time you die. In place of the Nexus, there will be bonfires you can visit to restore your health and save your progress. While this sounds like it would make the game easier, I don't think it will, as using one will respawn every enemy you've defeated. It could make for easier soul farming, but it will still be just as risky. **-SV**



El Shaddai

El Shaddai is based on the biblical Book of Enoch and has you following Enoch himself (in some nice designer jeans no less) fighting some of the most fantastical enemies you'll ever see in a game. You'll also be followed by Lucifell, a friend and/or rival meant to guide you on your rather strange journey. It's clear they are taking a lot of liberties with the religious text, but in a way that makes the story more interesting in the long run.

While you may be initially grabbed by El Shaddai's aesthetics alone, the gameplay is nothing to scoff at. Enoch is a very capable fighter, equipped with a strange sword/bow hybrid that can combat enemies at close range and from afar, making the combat not unlike something found in Bayonetta. El Shaddai also features many sections of 2D platforming, which feature some surprisingly solid jumping mechanics. The game is definitely worth checking out during the rather slow release schedule. **-AP**



The Walking Dead

Rather than continue the story of comic protagonist Rick Grimes, this episodic adventure stars a cast of new survivors, centering around Lee Everett, an escaped prisoner trying to get out of Atlanta at the same time Grimes is venturing into the city. This allows the team to explore the same environments and events without being a retread of the original story.

Everett quickly meets a 7-year-old girl, Clementine, who becomes his companion in his journey. Even though a child plays a large role in the game, the content itself will be less kid-friendly. The game's on track for an M rating, and it's because they're staying faithful to the source material.

Gameplay wasn't revealed yet, but Telltale says it will be much more similar to the recently-revealed style of Jurassic Park than the point-and-click style of the company's usual fare. **-GR**



Deus Ex: Human Revolution

The original Deus Ex is generally considered a gaming classic. In the second game, the Eidos Montreal team is implementing what they're calling "multi-path multi-solution gameplay," which is essentially just letting players accomplish tasks through different means.

Along the way, you'll be able to allocate points to different augmentations, letting you run faster, jump higher, cloak yourself and generally be a more capable person. If you're the type of person who likes to re-spec your character in the middle of a playthrough, you're out of luck: that's not an option here. Human Revolution promises a 30-hour main campaign, as well as extra side missions. If that's true, that's quite a bit for a game that's more action-shooter than traditional RPG. **-GR**



Metal Gear Solid 3D

Metal Gear Solid: Snake Eater was first released in 2004 for the PlayStation 2, and it is considered by many to be the best in the Metal Gear series, as it featured many gameplay mechanics such as the camo index and the CQC, while boasting a story good enough that it remains one of the highest-rated games ever.

So, the good news and bad news about what we got to see at E3: it is pretty much the same game we played in 2004. The controls are accurately recreated, the graphics look sharp on the 3DS screen, and the 3D seems to work well. Many of us were hoping for updated graphics, but it looks like that hasn't happened.

If you're a fan of Metal Gear, or you just want a good third-party 3DS game, then keep your eye out for Metal Gear Solid 3D later this year. **-SV**



FEATURESCOVERSTORY



SKYRIM

THE ELDER SCROLLS RETURNS

BY SHAWN VERMETTE

As you walk outside, you see a bright, cloudless sky that stretches from peak to peak. The snowy mountains cutting short the endless vista you would otherwise be able to look out upon. Ascending the nearest mountain, you are attacked by bandits, whom you quickly dispatch with fireballs and arrows. Climbing higher still, you hear a loud roar as you come across a clearing with a large stone building in it. Alighted atop the topmost tower is a dragon. It sees you and swoops down to attack. **Welcome to Skyrim.▶**



Hundreds of years after the events of *Elder Scrolls: Oblivion*, Bethesda takes us back to the iconic land of Tamriel. The king of the Nords is dead, and all Skyrim is involved in a civil war over the future of their land. Additionally, the dragons have returned, as prophesied by the *Elder Scrolls*, and are being led by Alduin in an attempt to destroy the world.

You are the last-born Dovahkiin, or dragon-born. You have the power to, not only kill dragons, but absorb their souls and learn their language. This language is a language of power. Speaking words in dragon brings with it various abilities and powers, such as time manipulation, teleportation, and even control over the elements. This is a good thing because dragons are tough, and they can attack at any moment of the game. You'll definitely need to learn those dragon words in order to defeat them.

Aside from the main quest, you can do pretty much whatever else strikes your fancy in *Skyrim*. Want to earn a little extra cash? Join the blacksmith in making weap-

ons or help the lumberjack chop up logs. There are over 150 dungeons for you to find and explore, and dozens of dynamic quests that will change depending on how you've played and where you've been throughout the game.

Gone is the somewhat rigid leveling system from *Oblivion*. You'll continue to earn experience in skills the more you use them, but you no longer pick a class at the beginning of the game that will determine what skills are most important to your overall level. Instead, all skills will have an influence on it, and the game will naturally adapt to your chosen style of play, enhancing how you play, rather than shoehorning your play into a class. Perks, a la *Fallout 3* and *New Vegas*, will be making an appearance as well. These will allow you to specialize yourself in any way you see fit as you grow in level and power.

Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim was our Game of the Show at E3 this year, and you'll get to see it yourself when it comes out on November 11, 2011 on the PC, Xbox 360, and PlayStation 3.







A TRIBUTE TO THE NEO GEO POCKET COLOR

BY MATTHEW JAY

Nintendo has ruled the handheld gaming market since the Game Boy hit shelves in 1989, but many have still tried to compete. Sega had the Game Gear, Atari failed miserably with the Lynx and in 1999 SNK released the Neo Geo Pocket Color. Despite releasing a couple home consoles, most notably the Neo Geo AES, SNK was always primarily known as an arcade manufacturer. Their forays into the console market with the Neo Geo's intense graphic capability and crazy prices were seen as gaming for the truly hardcore. With the NGPC... that hadn't really changed. At least it's cheaper. And now it's become quite easy to find with online auction sites and Amazon. You can even get a good chunk of the console's library for around 20 bucks. The console itself can be had for \$20-50 and it usually comes

boxed with a game. That's what happens when you sell half the product you've made. (Just ask Sega.)

In '99 the Game Boy Color had been out for a year, and rumblings of the GBA had already started. Even with two iterations –the Neo Geo Pocket and Pocket Color– a fantastic library, the greatest handheld joystick ever and connectivity with Sega's Dreamcast, the poor thing never had a chance. Was it the lack of a backlight, little third party support or just the fact that gamers can be pretty narrow-minded that killed it? Probably the latter.

These are just a few of the games I've enjoyed on the console, but there is a whole great library on this thing, most of it relatively cheap. I cannot recommend this console enough for any fan of handheld gaming or fighters.

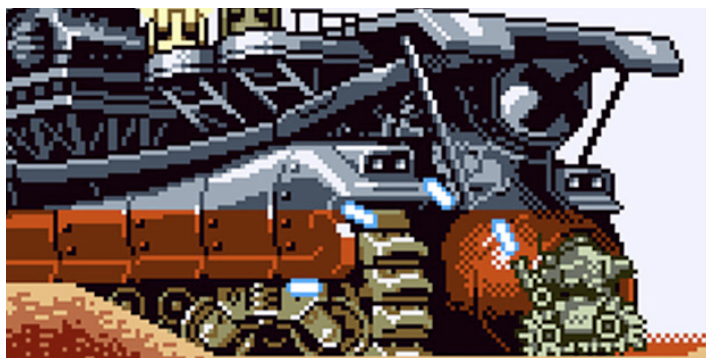


SONIC THE HEDGEHOG POCKET ADVENTURE

Like I said earlier, the NGPC had very little third-party support. But they did have Sega at their backs. Sonic the Hedgehog Pocket Adventure is one of the easiest-to-find, cheapest and best games on the console. Eventually it was used as a pack-in with the retail NGPC.

Sonic Pocket Adventure plays like Sonic 2 remixed, taking the best Sonic game and making it even better. Some of the levels are shorter but they become tighter and more fun. Stages from Sonic 2 that I've hated since I was a kid

are suddenly infinitely more playable and every Robotnik fight is improved over the original. For instance, the fight in Casino Zone is way better than its Genesis counterpart. In Sonic 2, you wildly fly back and forth across the half-pipe stage and hope you'll hit Robotnik somewhere other than the giant drill coming out of the bottom of his ship. Sonic Pocket's boss produces two platforms on either side of him that move up when the other moves down. It gives you a sense of control over the fight, while being difficult and fun. A lot of the game is like this and it's an incredibly enjoyable experience. This might be my favorite 2D Sonic game.



METAL SLUG 1ST AND 2ND MISSION

While there were only a couple third party supporters for the console, SNK brought all its big guns to the Neo Geo Pocket, including the flagship title Metal Slug. Not really much to say about these two except that they're the best handheld port of the series I've played yet. Metal Slug 1st and 2nd Mission retain the quick pick-up-and-play arcade gameplay and

difficulty all in a gorgeous little package. While most companies that were making handheld ports of well-known titles at the time would try and emulate the visuals of a much larger screen, SNK embraced the Neo Geo's small screen and modeled their characters accordingly. That gave us the adorable yet functional chibified versions of classic SNK characters. These sprites were especially effective in the genre SNK and this console are most well known for.



CAPCOM VS. SNK: CARD FIGHTERS CLASH

Despite being largely out of the public eye, the Neo Geo Pocket was not without its trendy games. In 1999 Pokemon ruled the world. So much so that Nintendo was just looking for excuses to make games out of it. After three versions of the same title and a pinball game, they even made a Game Boy version of the real-world card game. Much cheaper than actually buying the cards and saving you from having to interact with children in fear of that pesky court order, the

Pokemon TCG game was basically Pokemon but instead of catching them all you collected them. I'm not saying Capcom vs. SNK Card Fighters Clash is a ripoff of this formula, but the games are uncannily similar. Visually it's almost exactly the same, as the player wanders from place to place, collecting cards, building decks and battling. Even the cheaply-animated sprites never stop kicking their feet when standing still. Only in this game the cards are based on your favorite Capcom and SNK characters, thus making it way better (I actually really like Pokemon, but come on).



FIGHTERS

Anyone who owns a Neo Geo Pocket Color will tell you it has some of the best handheld fighters ever made. All the best SNK fighting series got at least one entry on the NGPC including Last Blade, King of Fighters, Final Fight and Samurai Shodown. They even gave the ladies of SNK their own game, Gals Fighters. The best of the bunch is definitely Capcom vs. SNK: Match of the Millennium. With 22 playable characters, beautiful visuals and an incredibly deep fighting system, CvSNK:MotM is one of the most satisfying portable fighting experiences ever. It's also

one of the few NGPC games that can connect to the Dreamcast for extra content. Yeah, SNK was doing that way before Nintendo. And the NGPC was the first handheld with a menu including features like an alarm clock, calendar, horoscope and language settings. NGPC carts were manufactured in Japan and the localization was done in-house. Most carts have both languages built in and will switch depending on what your console is set to. That and it's region-free, so importing is a breeze. This also leads to some fun mistakes in the translation like Robotnik telling me to "GET MORE CHAOS EMERALD!"



unlimited fun the sandbox

BY ANDREW PASSAFIUME

Grand Theft Auto III changed everything. The GTA series is one of the most popular in the history of video games, but it was Grand Theft Auto III that really made the largest impact. Being able to go anywhere and do anything you wanted was, at the time, something we just never thought could happen. Today, a sandbox game is nothing special; we see it in a lot of games today, with implementations ranging from great to pointless. What is it about these games that is so attractive to gamers?



I love games with a good structure to them, linear or non-linear, but having a game that allows you to do whatever you want in between sections of the story or campaign? That's always something special. A sandbox can allow gamers to really connect with the world they are in and gives the designers a chance to make the world a character of its own. Or it can just be good for blowing everything up in your path for no good reason at all.

As I mentioned earlier, *Grand Theft Auto III* is not only the real original sandbox game, but it also exemplifies both instances I mentioned above. Not only does it allow you to really get connected with Liberty City, you can also pull out a rocket launcher and aim it at passing cars if you feel the need to blow off some steam. Yes, earlier games in the series allowed you to do this, but putting it in a 3D space really made it special.

Of course, this destruction had to be limited in some way, so the wanted level system was retained from the earlier games in the series, making sure that if you got too crazy with your chaos, you would still be stopped no matter what. Other games continued with this tradition, although some just let you outright cause as much chaos as humanly possible. A restriction is necessary in a lot of instances, but sometimes you just need a game that lets you go as crazy as you want without much in the way of obstacles.

The first game that really helped the player feel all-powerful was *The Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction*, but there was always something stopping you from going too power-hungry. And then *Crackdown* came around and changed everything, at least for me. It implemented the same kind of law enforcement that prevented you from going too crazy, but soon enough the "keys to the city" mode was released as free DLC. This let you spawn whatever weapons and items you wanted and also gave you unlimited health and power, basically turning the game's city into your own playground.

Nobody played *Crackdown* for the story or the missions. They played it for

the character abilities and the destruction. You were a human, but you also felt powerful. Being able to leap from building to building and fall down great distances without much repercussion is always fun. *Prototype* and *inFamous* both tried this and, to some extent, both were successful. *Prototype*'s chaotic New York City was far less interesting to explore, but the powers bestowed upon you made up for it and gave it more of a *Crackdown* vibe than most other, similar games.

Let's also look at the superhero genre. I mentioned *The Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction*, but for these games, it all began with *Spider-Man 2*. It gave you free rein over *Spider-Man*'s abilities and allowed you to explore New York City as much as you wanted. Swinging around NYC in *Spider-Man 2* is still one of the most enjoyable gaming experiences I've ever had, and it made it clear that games that give you superpowers should allow you to use them in a sandbox environment.

Even without superpowers, the right gadgets can make all of the difference. Just *Cause 2*, by all means, does not have a compelling single-player campaign. What it does have is an excellent open world and one amazing piece of technology: the grappling hook. You can grapple onto buildings, cars, planes, and even people to create some of the most enjoyable free-roaming experiences you'll ever have.

And then we have the very story-heavy games, like *Fallout 3* and *Red Dead Redemption*. These games really breathe new life into sandbox games by providing you with excellent worlds to explore, but not allowing you to go absolutely crazy inside of them. Giving you ample reason to explore a game world beyond just blowing things up is always welcome, and these two games did it right above any other.

A major problem that is brought up with these games, specifically *Red Dead Redemption*, is the lack of connection between the story events and what you do with the character outside of these events. John Marston, the main protagonist, is someone trying to, well, redeem himself,

but outside of the missions you can find yourself robbing banks, killing innocents, and doing all sorts of misdeeds that don't feel appropriate to the character you've come to know.

This is a legitimate problem with sandbox games, especially those trying to deliver a heavy narrative. While it is fair to say that you can simply not do those things, allowing your John Marston to match up with the game's John Marston, but there are no restrictions on what he can and cannot do. This is both a good and bad thing, really splitting a lot of the audience in half on whether they feel this sort of design is appropriate for a game like this.

L.A. Noire attempted to limit what you can do outside of the story, but it just left a lot of people wanting more. While it is a joy to see 1940s Los Angeles lovingly recreated, you never have any reason to explore or go outside of where you are meant to, and Cole Phelps never pulls out his gun for any reason except when necessary. You are penalized for hitting cars and driving over pedestrians, making the sandbox merely an illusion and not a fully-realized world.

Some appreciate what *Team Bondi* did here, which made sure that the same disconnect you find in *Red Dead* does not happen here, but it also gives you little reason to do anything but the story. *Mafia II* had a similar problem, presenting you with a fully-realized city with little to no reason for you to explore. It's an interesting experiment, but one I feel does not benefit this style of game at all.

It's clear that the sandbox game has evolved quite a lot from the days of *Grand Theft Auto III*, almost to the point where you find two different styles of sandbox experiences. It's hard to say where these games will go in the future, but I do find that a sandbox game, if done right, can benefit the experience overall. Should all games allow you to free roam outside of the structure of the game's campaign? Not at all. But if done right, you can create a unique experience that allows your players to get lost in a virtual world.

ASCE

FEATURESGAMINGUNPLUGGED



ASCENSION

WE TALK TO GARY GAMES'
JUSTIN GARY
ABOUT OUR FAVORITE
UNPLUGGED TITLE OF 2010,
THE NEW EXPANSION,
RETURN OF THE FALLEN,
AND FUTURE PLANS.

BY CHRIS INGERSOLL

Snackbar Games: First off I wanted to say that Ascension was my Unplugged Game of the Year last year, and it wasn't even close. I haven't taken to a game like this since Race for the Galaxy.

Justin Gary: Thanks a lot man, I appreciate that. That's really awesome. We've been really stoked by the response Ascension has received.

SBG: What about this deck-building style of game made it interesting to you?

JG: The genre really fascinated me as soon as I saw Dominion. As you know, we all have experience with collectible/trading card games like Magic: the Gathering. The experience of trading card games like Magic is fun, challenging, and rewarding, but a huge expense. The deck-building genre let me put that experience in a compact format, in one box as opposed to my entire life savings. It's the best intersection of the traditional board game world and the collectible gaming world.

SBG: Plus there's the ease of expandability, I'm sure. How many more expansions do you guys plan to put out for Ascension, and do you have a tentative release schedule (e.g., one a year, two a year)?

JG: We currently have designs on the third and forth expansions, with a story arc tentatively planned through six, plus miscellaneous add-ons. We'll keep it up as long as there is interest. We don't have a set schedule; when we think it's good, that's when it goes out — not before. The next set will hopefully be ready in time for the holidays. ►

RETURN OF



SBG: Will future expansions be stand-alone playable like Return of the Fallen?

JG: They will be stand-alone; the next will be a large set, about the size of Chronicle of the Godslayer. We have a sort of "block" design in mind that will alternate large and small releases, with those "blocks" being essentially self-contained to keep things manageable.

SBG: Which brings me neatly to my next question. With Return of the Fallen combined with Chronicle of the Godslayer (and a few promos), the Portal deck is currently a little over 170 cards, which is at least five inches tall when sleeved and already quite the chore to shuffle sufficiently.

Will future expansions address this?

JG: Ideally, future expansions will allow you to customize your pool. While you could combine every card we put out, we don't really recommend it for just that reason. We'll also have suggested lists for different play experiences, and we hope that players will do the same on their own. We envision it as either "play out of the box" (sets 1 and/or 2, sets 3 and/or 4) or "customize decks".

SBG: Finally, I have a couple of questions that are more or less specific to, or at least triggered by, Return of the Fallen. First of all, was it my imagination or were these cards much easier to sleeve than those

F THE FALLEN

Ascension: Return of the Fallen is the first expansion to my Unplugged Game of the Year for 2010, Ascension: Chronicle of the Godslayer. Unlike most other game expansions, however, Return is also playable as a stand-alone game for two players right out of the box. It includes two sets of ten-card starter decks as well as an assortment of Mystics, Heavy Infantry, and a Cultist plus honor stones. In addition to making this expansion stand on its own, this also allows games of Ascension for up to six players. Rules for solitaire play are also included for those interested.

Return continues the storyline of Chronicle, with the titular Fallen (the demon Samael) appearing as an actual card to defeat along with a host of new monsters (including the Fire Tyrants that were somewhat suspiciously absent from Chronicle). The four factions fighting against him have some new tricks up their sleeves as well, including the ability to reach into the void (central discard pile, home to banished cards and defeated monsters) to acquire heroes and constructs — or defeat monsters — found there. This can be used proactively as well as reactively; banishing a card that only you can reclaim from the void is almost as good as acquiring it directly.

Return's other new mechanic is called Fate; some cards have effects (highlighted in a black text box that makes them easy to notice) when they are added to the center row, which usually affects all players regardless of whose turn it is. Interaction between players has also increased slightly, as more monster rewards force opponents to lose constructs and/or cards, and one low-strength common monster can even steal a couple honor stones from the player who has the most when it is defeated. One hero card even lets other players draw cards when played.

The cards in Return have a few other subtle new features that have no actual impact on gameplay but are still welcome. The first is an expansion symbol in the lower corner; in addition to easily allowing you to remove them from the Portal deck if you wish to, they also indicate how many copies of the card exist in the entire deck. Of course, this is less useful when combining the two sets, as the entire Portal deck expands to 165 cards (plus promos, if any) when played in this manner; it is highly unlikely that any but the longest 6-player games will burn through even half of that stack. This is quite unwieldy, especially

when sleeved, but still manageable if you devise an efficient system (tip: shuffle smaller piles, and divide the combined deck in half when actually playing). On the plus side, the printing issue that made the cards in Chronicle difficult to sleeve has been corrected.

Games of Ascension played with Return tend to take a little longer than they used to, as the starting Honor pool has been increased to 30 per player; games with three players now start with a pool as large as those with four players did with Chronicle (although the starting pool for two players has not changed). I haven't yet tried a six-player game, but I would imagine that it could take as long as an hour, especially while players are getting used to the new cards.

Overall, Return of the Fallen is a strong addition to an already great game, with a lot of unique effects and a general increase in variety thanks to the dilution of the Portal deck. It isn't strictly necessary, but what expansion is? Return retails for \$30 and comes in a box that is perfectly-sized to hold all of the (sleeved) cards and stones from both sets — assuming you remove the plastic insert and find some way to divide the box in half like I did.

printed in the base set? Did something change in the printing process?

JG: (laughs) Not your imagination! When we first produced Chronicle, the printers included a specific type of gloss that made the cards just slightly thicker than normal. That has been corrected and all future releases will be of the correct glossiness/thickness.

SBG: That's good to hear. My other observation is that one card (Adayu, the Chosen), allows players to acquire or defeat a card without paying its cost, and specifically includes that reminder text. This is in contrast to cards like Reclamax or Serpentcall, which allow players to acquire a card

in the Void but do still require the cost to be paid. Should/will Avatar of the Fallen, from the base set, receive reminder text errata to distinguish it from these newer cards (and have the simpler "unbanishable" keyword while you're at it)?

JG: The templating rule we've adopted is that "acquire" (as seen on Avatar of the Fallen and Cetra, Weaver of Stars) is free, but "acquire as if in the center row" implies that you have to pay the cost. We're trying to get it as clear as possible, and we admit that it is a fine distinction, but our templating is consistent.

SBG: Is there anything else you would like to add before I let you go?

JG: We're really excited about Return of the Fallen; it's the culmination of a lot of groundwork established for Chronicle but which was cut for streamlining purposes. We're also really hyped about our iPhone app (a free trial is available in the App Store). I give Dominion a lot of credit and really enjoy the game, but it can take a while to set up and take down; one of the main philosophies behind Ascension was to make the deck-building experience as streamlined as possible. The iPhone app is really perfect for what we wanted to do with Ascension.



Will Xenoblade and The Last Story get a North American release?

It's taken a long time, and Nintendo of America still insists it isn't happening, but rumor says that Xenoblade's North American localization has already been completed, and that The Last Story is in the works. Will Nintendo of America reverse its stance soon?



ANDREW
40%

At this point, it's really hard to say one way or another. I wouldn't be surprised if they are just hiding the announcement of these two games for a North American release because of Operation Rainfall. It's basically free marketing for them, allowing the word to be spread about these games. But I still wouldn't be too surprised if these games never see a release at all, considering Nintendo is probably giving up on the Wii altogether once Skyward Sword is out.



GERRY
83%

A big chunk of Nintendo of America's "hard-core" fanbase has been feeling alienated due to their terrible localization record, myself included. Leaving their current console in such a long drought doesn't bode well for their promise to cater to the same crowd with the Wii U, so I hope this rumor does turn out true.



GRAHAM
72%

I definitely want this to happen, as I'd love to play those games in English without the troubles of obtaining a European system and such. But if anyone can sit on games, it's Nintendo. It's not their fault, either; they released more obscure titles like Rhythm Heaven, Glory of Heracles and The Legendary Starfy on DS in the States, and they didn't sell. Only if you own all three can you throw the first stone.



SHAWN
85%

I think it is very likely that this is happening, because whatever else they are, Nintendo of America is not stupid. They realize that they've got nothing big this year for the Wii other than Skyward Sword.

REVIEWS



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L.A. Noire



5

PROS:

Facial expressions are amazingly accurate, portrayal of 1940s LA is spot-on

CONS:

Women all look old, no matter how old they are supposed to be

L.A. Noire is a hard game to quantify. It is entirely unlike most games from Rockstar, or most other developers for that matter. It's more of a gritty take on an interactive virtual novel than anything else. Whatever it is, though, it's definitely worth the price of admission.

You play as Cole Phelps, a war hero and fledgling cop who's trying to make the streets of 1940s Los Angeles safer for the people. Cole starts out as a beat cop, but by the end of the tutorial phase is promoted to traffic detective. The goal of the game is to rise through the ranks until you reach the top desk, Arson. Rarely will you concentrate on that though, because the game is so enticing and draws you in so much.

L.A. Noire's story is split into a number of individual cases that you'll work at each desk, Traffic, Homicide, Vice, and Arson, with each one consisting of several phases. You'll find yourself searching crime scenes for evidence, questioning witnesses, chasing down suspects on foot and by car, interrogating suspects, and even participating in a few shootouts. While each case plays out similarly, it never felt tedious or repetitive because the environment and cases are so well realized in the world that Team Bondi recreated. The gameplay really reminds me of a fully-fleshed out Phoenix Wright game, from the search for evidence to the interactions with those you talk to. When questioning a witness or suspect, you have the

option to accept their statement as truth, doubt them, or outright accuse them of lying. Though, when accusing someone one of a lie, you have to have evidence to back up your assertion. Depending on how you treat each witness and suspect, the cases all play out in different ways. Getting interactions wrong could lead to cases taking longer than they otherwise would take, harmful endings for people who could have been saved, or arrests of the wrong suspect. The game takes all of this in stride and gives you a rating on each case. This gives L.A. Noire more replayability than you may think, since you can replay cases later in an attempt to do a better job or get a different ending.

The graphics in L.A. Noire are phenomenal. The people are instantly recognizable by their faces, and facial expressions are amazingly accurate. The only gripe we have is that every woman looks to be in their mid-40s or 50s, even the children. The city itself is a nearly-faithful recreation of late 1940s downtown Los Angeles, and is enjoyable to just cruise around when you aren't in a hurry to get to a crime scene. The soundtrack is vintage 1940s as well. (We did recognize a song or two also used in Fallout 3, amusingly.)

It may not be what most people expected out of Rockstar, but L.A. Noire is without a doubt one of our favorite games to date, and should be experienced by anyone. **-SV**



NCAA Football 12

It seems that the NCAA Football series has always played second-fiddle to Madden. That makes sense, after all; the sales numbers show that it's not even close. Still, the past treatment of NCAA as a re-skinned version of last year's NFL title has always irked us a bit. Now, though, it seems NCAA is making more steps out on its own.

It starts with a familiar base, though; on any given play, it feels like it always has, and that's probably how most like it. There's a new collision system to make tackles look more realistic, and the grass is three-dimensional now, but those really don't affect how the game plays. (Don't get us wrong, they're nice to have.) No, the changes occur in the game's various modes.

The dynasty mode has been tweaked somewhat, and we're glad to see the changes. Most of the focus was put on implementing the new Coaching Carousel functionality. Each coach has a contract with individual goals, and how well you execute those objectives determines your job security. You can be a head coach, as you always have been, or you can choose to be an offensive or defensive coordinator.

The Road to Glory mode has been fleshed out a bit, with a senior high school season to kick things off. The idea here is to create your own school through TeamBuilder and play your actual opponents, which does seem nice. (Next year, can we get the option to play completely through high school?) Once you get to a school (which is determined by your high school performance), you work your way up the depth chart and gradually get more options and such. It's most obvious at quarterback, as you get the option to flip plays and call audibles as you gain trust and prestige with your coach.

Ultimately, NCAA is finally a worthy stand-alone product. We just wish it were more of a game and less of a sandbox at times. **-GR**



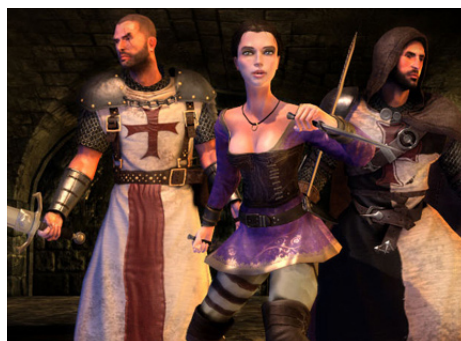
Transformers: Dark of the Moon

I don't expect much from a Transformers game. All I want is to control giant robots that can change into cars, shoot other giant robots until they explode and be able to switch between combat and vehicle form at will. That's it. Thankfully, Transformers: Dark of the Moon delivers on all of those points and is a fun, if shallow, game all the way through.

Throughout Dark of the Moon you will assume control of numerous Autobots, and they all have different abilities and weapons. Each controls similarly enough that you won't feel lost when you transition from controlling Bumblebee in South America to controlling Ironhide in Detroit. You can swap between combat, vehicle, and stealth mode forms at will, and weapons work like you would expect in any other third-person shooter. The stealth mode form is a new addition, though, and it combines the better maneuverability and speed of the vehicle form with the ability to take down enemies of the combat form.

Levels are linear, but the combat is fun, and the Autobots control well. Shooting feels accurate and different weapons feel, well, different. You may find yourself favoring the plasma cannon over the machine gun, but it comes down to personal preference vice choice to check a box on a design document. The online modes offer nothing that you can't elsewhere, but the ability to change into an airplane at a moment's notice adds a nice bit of spice to the standard deathmatch game types. If you enjoy the single-player campaign, then the multiplayer will surely extend the game's time in your Xbox.

The story is paper-thin, but if you're picking up any part of the Transformers film franchise (or anything even loosely associated with Michael Bay) for things like intricacies of plot, characters with more than two dimensions or anything else, you're in the wrong place. **-JL**



The First Templar

The First Templar has a lot going for it: unique setting for an RPG, limited party size (meaning that you'll never pick up a character that you don't use), well-defined levels with well-defined primary and secondary objectives and active combat skills that entrench you in the scenario rather than remove you from it. What brings it down is that, for all of its high points, The First Templar looks dated and controls like a PS2 game. Everything feels like it could and should have been pushed out just a bit further to take the experience from good to great.

The First Templar is marketed as an action-RPG. In reality, it feels more like an action game with light RPG elements. The distinction is subtle, but it's clear. You won't be relying on a pool of mana and downing health potions like there's no tomorrow. Instead you'll be dodging, blocking, and swinging swords to defeat your opponents.

Throughout the experience, The First Templar is a two-player game. Regardless of whether the second character is human or AI-controlled, your active party will only ever have two characters in it. I wish that more games were designed with cooperative play in mind, and that they all elegantly downgraded to a single-player mode.

Where The First Templar falls short is in its implementation. The graphics look dated, the voice work is abysmal, and the levels are often times too small to feel fully realized.

The First Templar has a lot going for it, and I look forward to seeing what Kalypso does with the concept in a sequel. If you're looking for action combat, a complete inability to ever get lost and an easy game to play with a friend over Live, then you could certainly do worse than The First Templar. All others should patiently wait with me and hope for a sequel. **-JL**

4

PROS:

More game modes, innovative ideas

CONS:

Maybe give us some structure, will ya?

4

PROS:

Stealth force mode is a great addition to the gameplay

CONS:

Campaign is a bit short, narrative is shallow

3

PROS:

Fully cooperative gameplay, no objective guesswork

CONS:

No economy, very small levels with an obvious path



Dungeon Siege III



4

PROS:
Scripted story,
well-thought-out
characters

CONS:
Limited customization,
no four-player local

Dungeon Siege III, the first in the series to appear on consoles, is all about the comfortable fun. It's about co-op, looting, gaining experience and taking down hordes of enemies. These elements are reliably enjoyable to play through, and we haven't seen a full retail take on the genre for a while now.

In the game, you take on the role of one of four characters: Lucas, last in the line of nobles and your all-purpose melee sword guy; Katarina, Lucas' illegitimate half-sister and a master of guns of all types; Reinhart, a veteran mage whose spells aren't purely long-range; and Anjali, some sort of legendary fire being who, you know, attacks with fire. You can choose any of them from the start, and while the main story is largely static, each plays through it from slightly different lenses. Each of these characters has two different "stances," and you can switch between the two for various tactical reasons. Typically, one's good at crowd control and the other's good for more damage to one enemy, but that's not always the case.

Obsidian Entertainment, taking over development of the series as they have with so many others in the past, bring an experienced hand to the series, and unlike previous efforts, their presence is nothing but an improvement for the series. We haven't had any problems with glitches in DSIII, thankfully, and generally everything is polished. How does it play, though?

The team took a very to-the-point approach, wanting you to get from Point A to Point B Killing Monsters. There are breadcrumbs you can trigger to the next point in your quest, menus are mapped to the D-pad for easy access, weapons and equipment are all color-coded by quality and you can push down the stick to collect all nearby gold and orbs. (We wish they had taken that last one a step further, and allowed you to set it to automatically pick it all up, including equipment.)

Dungeon Siege III supports multiplayer, as any game like this should. Four can play together online, though one must host and the rest must progress through that player's campaign. Additionally, each must use a different character, so sometimes there's a fight over who's who. You can join up with a friend on the couch in drop-in drop-out local play, which is a nice inclusion, and Player 2 usually joins in as whatever other character is helping you out at that moment. We really wish Obsidian had tried to include four-player local play, as that really makes a game like this magical. As it is, though, it's a decent package.

If, like us, you're still yearning for the days when games like this were released more regularly, Dungeon Siege III scratches all the right itches, and you should definitely grab it soon. If, however, you don't have an undying love for the genre, Obsidian's approach may fall flat. **-GR**



InFamous 2

Cole McGrath can't catch a break. After finishing off Kessler at the end of inFamous, he found out that this villain was just the beginning, and a greater threat called The Beast would be coming to destroy the world. Little did he think The Beast would strike so soon.

The sequel's story takes a back seat to the action, and while the dramatic comic book-inspired cutscenes do a decent job of filling in the story, the end result is a generic hero's quest with an obligatory twist at the end. Karma is once again at play here, so a "good" playthrough will get slightly different story missions than a "bad" one, leading up to two completely different endings depending upon how you play. While it is nice to experience both endings, what really makes the game worthwhile is the action.

Confronted with adding new powers to an already full suite, Sucker Punch lets the player quickly select different power-button mapping with ease to choose their favorite combination of skills. By the end, almost every button has several different choices of old and new powers to combine. Unfortunately, power acquisition is feast or famine. It takes Cole a while to get new powers, but once he does, he tends to get multiple powers at once that make skill learning uneven at best.

Adding a layer to the game is the addition of user-generated content. Similar to LittleBigPlanet, inFamous 2 gives you an impressive array of tools to generate your own side missions for you or others to complete. With the help of characters from the game you can generate scripted events or completely change the feel by generating an arcade game within the game.

inFamous 2 feels like a worthy sequel to the excellent original. Set pieces are bigger, powers are plentiful and the action is awesome. Unfortunately, the end came too soon. **-PB**



Wii Play Motion

The original Wii Play was largely a tutorial for the Wii remote, disguised as a series of simple games and bundled with a controller for not much more money. It racked up sales, not because it was a particularly desirable disc to have, but because it was usually a cheap way to snag another controller. Wii Play Motion, bundled this time with a Remote Plus and showing off its advanced functionality, bears quite the resemblance to its predecessor. The difference? Though none of the twelve included minigames show any sort of advanced replayability or draw, they feel like they have just a bit more personality to them. It's enough to make an already-short experience a bit sweeter.

Our theory behind the character boost is this: the games in Wii Play Motion were done as a series of small projects by different studios, from Prope to Skip and more. The result is something like the All-Star Weekend of games: a bunch of guys having fun, showing off a bit and not exactly showing good fundamentals or working well together. Some examples:

Cone Zone: In this one, you balance scoops of ice cream by holding the Remote vertically.

Veggie Guardian: Did you want a whack-a-mole minigame? Because that's what this is. Hit the moles before they can steal your food.

Skip Skimmer: Take the disc-throwing antics of other games and modify it into a one-shot stone-skipping competition.

Jump Park: Bounce around to collect gems. You jump at the angle you're facing, which is determined by the tilt of your controller.

Teeter Targets: Our favorite in the collection. It's essentially a pinball-like setup, where you tilt paddles to flick marbles into targets.

Wii Play Motion isn't a game to rush out and pick up, but if you want another Remote Plus, it's a fun little bonus, and you'll probably get more out of it than the original Wii Play. **-GR**



Cars 2: The Videogame

It's only the second Cars movie, but Cars 2 is the fourth game in the franchise. THQ published and developed the previous games, but Disney decided to go in-house with Cars 2, and it shows. The game surpasses previous ones in the series, with added features such as weapons, four-player capability and enhanced graphics. Still, is Cars 2 worthy of your time, or should you save that money for when the bigger AAA games come out later this year?

The overall feel of Cars 2 is so much better than that of any previous ones in the series. That may be due to a longer development cycle, but it could also be due to Avalanche Software, the team behind the well-made Toy Story 3. That studio knows how to crank out good movie-based video games, and it shows.

Missions are split up into six levels, with six race modes included in each one. You earn spy points for winning each event, which in turn unlocks more tracks and game modes.

Playing through the missions will take you about five or six hours. At the beginning they start out fun, but the repetitiveness definitely starts to kick in around the halfway mark. The game throws far too many Survival missions at you, sometimes three in one level, and there aren't enough battle races.

Cars 2 features a few local-only multiplayer options. Four players can play any mission together, and there are two special multiplayer modes: Arena and Disruptor. Arena is very similar to the hunter missions in the main game, except you're trying to battle your friends instead of bots. Disruptor is a bit different: one bomb is planted in the middle of each map. Each team has a base, and the goal is to take the bomb and get it to the enemy base. It would have been nice to play the Disruptor modes against CPU players, but unfortunately that's not an option. **-BT**

4

PROS:
Great level-building tools

CONS:
Ho-hum story,
uneven powering-up,
and over too soon

3

PROS:
Cheap bonus for a remote,
more charm than the original

CONS:
Still not much staying power

4

PROS:
Solid gameplay,
great atmosphere

CONS:
Repetitive at times,
A.I. can be a pain



Akimi Village



4

PROS:

Great visuals,
training Akimi is easy,
feels like a refined
Keflings experience

CONS:

No local multiplayer,
music isn't great

Akimi Village is the spiritual successor to NinjaBee's A Kingdom for Keflings and World of Keflings, and it shows in just how much more streamlined everything seems. Like the Keflings games before it, Akimi Village casts you as a giant charged with building the infrastructure for a tiny society. Unlike the Keflings games, however, you have a reason for doing so.

As the game opens, you find yourself stuck on a floating island whose citizens, the Akimi, need your help. The island is covered in a black fog called gloom, and by creating and managing the village's infrastructure you'll unlock seeds that can be planted around the island which push the gloom back. Push back all of the gloom, and the island's protector spirit will send you home. It's as good a reason as any to administrate a pretend city, and ridding the island of gloom is a good motivator to push forward, unlock new blueprints, and set the little Akimi to work chipping away at rocks and turning straw into bricks.

If you've played either of NinjaBee's Keflings games then you know what to expect here in terms of graphics, music, and gameplay. Akimi Village looks like a children's storybook, the buildings are chunky and exaggerated, and the little Akimis' motions are all just a little bit over-the-top. It's cute without being saccharine, and everything is easily identifiable. The music grates a little bit as time goes on, but since

there's no dialogue, you won't be cheapening the experience by turning the music down and listening to your own music while you play.

Gameplay is simple but nuanced. You could do everything yourself – chip away at stones, walk them over to the Work Hut, chop down some bamboo, walk it over to the work hut, build a scaffold, and walk it over to complete the introductory gate. Or you can pick up an Akimi, set him down on the bamboo which turns him into a bamboo gatherer, pick him up again, and set him on the Work Hut which tells him to chop bamboo from that grove and take it to the Work Hut when he's done. Being an industrious little worker, he'll just keep on doing that until all of the bamboo is gone (don't worry – it grows back over time). The same concept applies to the rocks, forest, and any other resource that needs to be harvested.

Akimi Village has no enemies and no time limit. The challenge comes in creating an efficient village to rid the Akimi's island of gloom. It's just as laid-back and relaxed and NinjaBee's most recent XBLA offerings. Where it is lacking, however, is local multiplayer. The relaxed pace and focus on building and nurturing would make Akimi Village an ideal game for a parent to play with a younger gamer. If you turned off natural disasters in SimCity and just want to relax while playing a game, then Akimi Village won't disappoint. **-JL**



PlayStation Move Ape Escape

When thinking of Sony's monkey-based Ape Escape series, we normally picture open environments, tons of monkeys to capture and 3D platforming. With the Move, Ape Escape tries to forgo the platforming part, as it ventures into the not-as-open-or-free world of rail shooters.

The goal in PlayStation Move Ape Escape is the same as all the other games: catch tons of monkeys and stop the big bad monkey named Spencer. Armed with a multi-tool that swaps between the player's gadgets (and coincidentally looks just like a Move remote), you travel through time tracking Spencer down through 15 levels of not-quite-fast-paced monkey-catching action.

Every stage is segmented into capture mode, in which movement stops entirely and monkeys rush you to be caught, and shooting mode, when the camera auto-scrolls through the stage to the next spot (where you'll repeat capture mode). The transition between these two modes tends to be somewhat slow, as well as the shooting mode being particularly slow-paced.

The controls for most of the tools work fine, particularly the fan and slingshot, though the former is just because the controls just involve flailing the remote. The aiming with the slingshot is superb, but there's one dubious design choice with charge shots involving extending your arm forward, pressing two buttons on the Move remote at the same time and then retracting your arm. Another fuzzy control option involves using the face buttons on the move remote itself to pan the camera left and right, which would be better if mapped onto the Move's navigation controller.

PlayStation Move Ape Escape is a particular love-it-or-hate-it game based on the series alone. If you're a longtime Ape Escape fan, or just looking a new take on rail shooters, it may be worth a shot. **-GP**



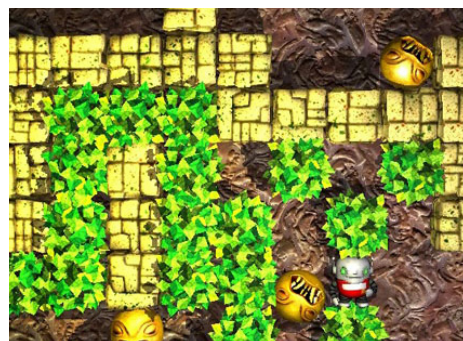
Backbreaker: Vengeance

Backbreaker: Vengeance takes the Tackle Alley game mode from the original and adds in two more modes: Vengeance and Supremacy.

Each of Backbreaker: Vengeance's game modes come with specific features and elements. Tackle Alley has you taking control of the ball carrier while avoiding, running over, and even jumping over tacklers trying to make your way into the end zone. Vengeance switches things around, you are now the tackler, and your goal is to stop the opposing ball carrier from scoring. Supremacy is the most distinct of the three. You go up against three different players, fighting to see who can score first. After each wave, the player with the lowest score becomes a defender, thus making it even more difficult for you to score. It's nice to see three different game modes, but only Supremacy stands out, and it only has 10 challenges; compare that to 20 for both Tackle Alley and Vengeance. There is also Xbox Live for each mode mentioned, but it suffers from serious lag.

The gameplay, unfortunately, remains close to its troubled predecessor. There are some instances when you hit a button and the game does not recognize it. It occurs more than you think, and can be a real nuisance during challenges, and makes the game even more galling to play. The game exclusively uses a zoomed-in camera, and it is almost impossible to see if somebody is coming at you from the sides.

Animations and visuals are by far the bright spot for Backbreaker: Vengeance, as the physics are some of the best you'll ever see in a sports game. For \$15, you expect more than just great physics and animation. Fans of the original Backbreaker might enjoy this new iteration, as they definitely picked the right part of the game to focus on. Most football fans, though, will want to avoid it. **-BT**



Boulder Dash-XL

Boulder Dash was first released on the on Atari 8-bit computers in 1984, and later released on other systems such as the Commodore 64 and ColecoVision, as well as being ported to the NES. The Commodore 64 version also made its way to the Virtual Console in 2008 and 2009 for Europe and North America respectively. Now, though, this classic computer game finally gets an update with new graphics and everything on Xbox Live Arcade.

The idea of Boulder Dash-XL is simple. You control either Rockford or Crystal, two cute mining robots where they have to collect diamonds with a quota that changes every stage and avoid cave-dwelling creatures and then run like hell to the exit before you lose health from getting hit too much, run out of time or meet an untimely death due to falling boulders.

More often than not, you'll be suffering from that last one. Several times, we found ourselves crying out in disbelief that we had just gotten killed by one and had to start this lengthy stage over again. (We found most of our deaths to be our own fault.)

The game provides you with several different modes of play: your typical arcade mode which seems to be the main focus of all the modes, a Zen Mode which takes all your cleared caves and removes the timer so you could learn the maps and plan accordingly, a Puzzle Mode where you have to collect all the diamonds to open the exit and advance, and a Score Attack mode with specially designed maps. There's also a Retro Mode in a complete 3D 8-bit style. You'll never find yourself with nothing to do.

Boulder Dash-XL is perfect for those who love a good puzzle game and are extremely patient in the process. Along with the 100 caves in Arcade Mode, the extra modes will keep you busy for a while. **-EA**

3

PROS:
Party fun, vibrant
Ape Escape setting

CONS:
Doesn't quite get the
controls right

2

PROS:
Great physics engine,
polished visuals

CONS:
Gameplay and audio leave
much to be desired

4

PROS:
Tons of content, challenge

CONS:
The taste of your tears after
you get crushed by the
same boulder five times



Puzzle Agent 2



4

PROS:
Well-crafted puzzles,
interesting story

CONS:
Basically a second
episode, not a
step up

The original *Puzzle Agent* was a surprise to a lot of gamers who expected just another traditional Telltale adventure title. What we got was a unique mix of Professor Layton-style puzzles with clever writing and a rather intriguing story. However, many questions were left unanswered by the very end of the first game, leaving plenty of room open for a sequel.

Puzzle Agent 2 picks up shortly after the events of the first game and follows Nelson Tethers, the only member of the FBI's puzzle division, returning to Scoggins, Minnesota. There, he continues the investigation of a string of missing persons reports that have been popping up ever since the events of the last game. Not only is the writing just as good as the original, but the story actually manages to be more involving this time around. I was very surprised with how deep the story got near the end of the game.

The gameplay is nearly identical to the first game, almost to a fault. As you go around the town of Scoggins, uncovering more of the mystery, you'll run into a number of different puzzles that are the real meat of the experience. These puzzles are well-designed and usually quite challenging, really allowing you to stretch

your brain. The hint system is back, giving you a chance to use three hints per puzzle if you're really stumped. Just like the first, using hints or submitting wrong answers will lower your overall score on the puzzle. Unless you really care about getting a perfect score on all puzzles, these ratings don't really affect anything in the long run, but it's fun to try and go for all perfects.

The main problem with *Puzzle Agent 2* is it's more of the same. That might not be a bad thing, but you will see a fair number of puzzles that are just repeats from the first, which is a bit disappointing. Most of the puzzles are brand new though, but even those end up repeating two or three times before the end of the game. The puzzles are great regardless, but it's a little disappointing when you find that a good chunk of them are rehashed from the original.

If you liked *Puzzle Agent*, you'll like *Puzzle Agent 2*. The puzzles are a bit improved and the story takes some very interesting turns, but it is essentially the same game. But if you're really ready for better crafted puzzles wrapped in a well-written package, then this is the game for you. **-AP**



Runespell: Overture

Sometimes these PopCap-y games get a little old. They're either too easy or they're simply another form of Tetris Zen, putting blocks here, switching jewels or shapes there, removing a stick or inserting a ball. Occasionally there are, ahem, gems in titles like Plants vs. Zombies or Puzzle Quest in which you are making some sort of progress, there is a definite end goal in sight and you will feel like you will have successfully consumed a game. It was a great ride and now is an appropriate time to stop, a lesson Runespell: Overture has taken to heart.

Runespell is a storied game with 1-on-1 fights, similar to Tetris Attack or Puzzle Quest. Instead of jewel and skull and block puzzle antics, you and your opponent have stacks of playing cards like in Solitaire. You use your own cards and the opposing players single cards to make combinations to eventually build poker hand combinations.

Poker has little to do with this game. The combination happens to be poker-based and that's it. There is always a button to quickly show the different hands if you don't remember, and it could just as easily be jewels, rocks, or some other symbol instead of face-cards.

The story has multiple dialogue options along with side-quests and fights, but the story is generally pretty linear. It's not a bad story and not badly written, either, but the joy is in the fights. Runespell's strongest suit is its difficulty curve with the challenge swatting you down early on in the story, but not so hard that you can't figure out what you did wrong.

Unfortunately, Runespell: Overture doesn't have multiplayer, which seemed like it would have been a simple affair. Still, it's an enjoyable strategy-based questing game that takes a while to play through. Maybe, like Magicka, a player-versus-player option will be added down the road. One can only hope. **-MW**

4

PROS:

bite-sized play, good save system, strategic but simple

CONS:

no multiplayer, battle music loops and tires quickly



Back to the Future, Episode 5

As we played through the final episode of Back to the Future's first season, OUTATIME, we couldn't help but be disappointed. After all, we came through the first four episodes, and followed Marty through his various adventures in locations both familiar and new. This last part, we thought, should be better than this.

Then, though, the game kept going.

The last installment ended with Marty facing a betrayal by Edna-timeline Doc, as a change of heart makes him want to create a future with a more positive outcome for his one-time wife. It all seems framed to end at this 1931 science exposition, and that didn't seem fitting for an epic conclusion at all. Luckily, it moves on after a while, and pulls a few story twists.

Besides that, there were a few new gameplay elements thrown into Episode 5. Sometimes you need to aim at things in action sequences, which is pulled off a little better than those decision-tree-based fight scenes found earlier in the season. Besides that, it makes as many references as possible to earlier game events, much like the story of both the game and the movies do to earlier plot points. Yes, at one point you'll be moving around a speeding car, avoiding the driver and doing random tasks. There's also one notable sequence where you play the genre-standard use-random-objects-on-other-random-objects game. It's... not overdone, at least.

A big deal has been made of the appearance of Michael J. Fox in this installment. Much like the episode as a whole, this starts out seeming like a lame half-measure, but it works out fairly well at the end.

It feels like they finally took the series off auto-pilot about halfway through this last part, which is nice. (Earlier would have been nicer.) What's more, the epilogue sets things up nicely for season two. All we ask: bring some fresh gameplay next time, would you Telltale? **-GR**

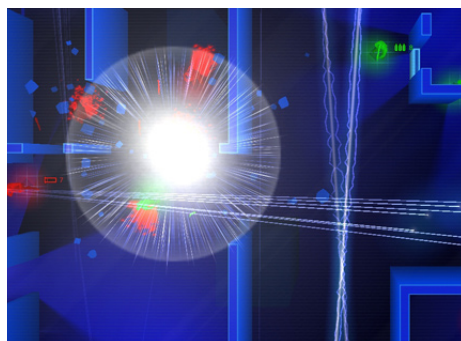
4

PROS:

Strong end to the season, solid premise for the next one

CONS:

It's the same stuff we've seen



Frozen Synapse

Do you love Chess's analog nature? Chess by mail? A chessmaster playing 25 people all at once, rotating around tables? Such is Frozen Synapse. Frozen Synapse is a turn-based, top-down-view strategy games that gives you a randomly generated and positioned handful of gun-wielding units inside a randomly generated room filled with walls, tables, and ledges, and your objective is to either hold sections or eliminate the enemy using machine guns, shotguns, sniper rifles, rocket launchers, or grenade launchers. Those are the only types of units you'll ever get, with most games only giving you two or three types total. You'll see where your opponent's guys start, then you don't see them anymore unless your units do, top-down style.

The unique catch here is that, unlike in Chess or any other turn-based game, you take your turns simultaneously. You map out each unit's trajectory meticulously, from where they aim to whether they engage on sight or not, to which way they are facing at the end of their destination, with an infinite number of waypoints you can set to say which direction they go. They usually never do, of course, which is what makes matches so exciting and full of comeback potential.

I haven't even started on the single-player campaign. It's fifty-five levels, also randomly generated with some key parts of the levels staying the same for the objectives' sake. There is a lot of writing for during and in-between the missions, similar to Starcraft (it is all text-based). The levels and their objectives are challenging and great at teaching you principles, tricks, and strategies.

Frozen Synapse is one of those shrinking species of games that bestows both spectacular single and multiplayer options. It also is fun to play for ten minutes or two hours at a time. Plus you can buy a second copy at a discount. **-MW**

5

PROS:

Simple concept, tons of replay and social options

CONS:

Server issues, A.I. is a little weak



Zelda: Ocarina of Time 3D



5

PROS:
Improved graphics,
controls work great

CONS:
An empty Hyrule
plains is more painful
now than it used to be

Almost 13 years ago, Nintendo released what is widely considered to be one of the best games ever, if not the best. The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time was the perfect marriage of 3D action-adventure, puzzles, dungeons and an iconic franchise. About five years later, Nintendo released a remixed, more difficult Master Quest, bundled with the original as a preorder incentive for The Wind Waker on GameCube. Now, Nintendo has released what we consider the definitive edition on the 3DS.

Ocarina of Time 3D includes the three modes, the original version of the game, the Master Quest and a Boss Rush mode. The classic game should be familiar to anyone reading this, but just in case you've never played Ocarina of Time, here's a quick rundown. You play as Link, an inhabitant of a small village in the kingdom of Hyrule. Together with your fairy friend, Navi, you will set off on an adventure that will prove to take you across Hyrule, through time, and to a date with destiny.

There are two control schemes to work with, motion or standard. If you ever want to use the 3D, then you'll ignore the motion controls, as using them in conjunction will simply serve to make you ill. The standard controls work perfectly, and within moments I had adjusted

to the 3DS control scheme. The lower screen is used to display your maps and items. The second screen, along with its touch controls, make for a far more intuitive, and faster, way of viewing your current position and inventory.

Graphically, Ocarina 3D is more than just a 3D implementation: it got an entire graphical overhaul. Everything is much sharper and vibrant than in previous versions, and being on a smaller screen definitely helps keep it looking great. And the sound is just as great as it was on the N64.

The only downside to the game is the same complaint that people have had ever since its first release: the lack of anything to do or see across the vast expanse of the Hyrule plains. You'll spend a good deal of time traveling from area to area across the plains, and emptiness is almost enough to knock it down a notch. Almost.

The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time 3D is the best game currently available on the 3DS, remake or not. If you've never picked it up before, now is the perfect time. And if you're one of the countless Ocarina fans, getting a graphically-overhauled portable version of it that feels and looks as good as it does must be a dream come true. **-SV**



DualPenSports

DualPenSports has the distinction of being the first minigame compilation on the 3DS. It also has the distinction of being the first game to use two styli at the same time. Unfortunately, the very fact that it requires two styli to play renders it uncomfortable, unwieldy and un-fun.

DualPenSports includes minigames based on seven different sports: archery, basketball, baseball, boxing, paragliding, soccer and skiing. Each of these sports has a different, but simple, method of control. You'll use the included styli to do all sorts of swiping, tapping, and sliding across the touchpad, in an attempt to increase your score in each event. This is normal for a 3DS game, but as I said, you have to use both styli, which is where the trouble starts.

Since you have to have a stylus in both hands, you can't hold the 3DS while playing it. This will no doubt result in many a sore neck and, in my case, sore wrists and fingers. You'll need to either place it on a table in front of you, or somehow wedge it into your lap. This, of course, causes issues with the 3D. Also, since the 3DS only detects one touch at a time, the ensuing issues make the whole premise of trying to use two at a time silly.

Graphically, it looks a lot like Wii Sports and Wii Sports Resort. You'll create your own Mii-like character when you first start up the game, and all the AI competitors you face will also be Mii lookalikes. However, the graphics come nowhere near taxing the system, they could have easily been used on the DS.

In the end, DualPenSports is an attempt at doing something new in the mini-game arena. Unfortunately, it fails in the most basic of tenets for a game on a portable system: it is not a portable game, the gimmick's not fun and your time would be better served playing something else. **-SV**



Cubic Ninja

This Ubisoft game was thought up as a way to take advantage of two things the 3DS does best: depth of field and tilt controls. You move the system back and forth, sliding the ninja into the background and through various three-dimensional holes and pathways. There are spikes to avoid, fans to navigate around and various switches and buttons to activate. Add in some enemies and boss battles, and that basically rounds out the experience.

If you've ever played a 3DS, you can see what problem this is leading to: 3D and tilt controls can't work simultaneously. The sensation of tilting the system around is, at its heart, an enjoyable experience. The problems stem from two things. First, the system doesn't seem to calibrate based on your normal holding position, so it's like a shirt that just doesn't fit right: functional, but awkward. Second, there isn't a very large center area, so whenever you try to aim for something in a middle area rather than a side or corner, it can be frustrating to get it to stop. We had to just try to get CC to fall past these holes and hallways and hope he got stuck there long enough for us to send him on his way.

Navigating the 100 story mode levels does take a decent amount of time, and were the basic controls more solid, it would be varied and interesting enough. (As it is, the whole game is coated in this film of quiet frustration.) The different characters change variables, like weight, friction, bounce and even size. They change things up a bit, and there are definitely some areas made easier with certain ninjas.

Cubic Ninja's level editor is fairly easy to use, and people who want to get into the game can use this to create some difficult challenges.

We love the idea of Cubic Ninja. The execution, though, just can't be ignored. **-GR**



Final Fantasy IV: Complete Collection

Square Enix has never stopped pumping out Final Fantasy games, but my personal favorite is Final Fantasy IV. Everybody has played this one by now – it was first available on the SNES, then the PSX, GBA, DS, and now the PSP. Why would you consider playing it again? Because the PSP version returns to sprite-based art and includes Final Fantasy IV: The After Years along with an Interlude bridging the two games that isn't available anywhere else. For those who have never played FF4, or those that want the entire story on a single platform, Final Fantasy IV Complete is the version to pick up.

Odds are that if you're at all interested in this collection you've played Final Fantasy IV. New content is probably why you're here, and Final Fantasy IV Interlude and Final Fantasy IV: The After Years are it. The After Years was originally only available on the Nintendo Wii through the WiiWare download service, and it follows Cecil's son Ceodore as a new villain emerges and threatens the world 17 years after you saved it in the original game. You'll control and meet many of the same characters that you got to know over the course of Final Fantasy IV, and everything should feel familiar.

Interlude serves to bridge Final Fantasy IV and The After Years with a chapter showing some of the events that take place in the 17 years between the two. It fits well between the two games, and the style meshes well with the rest of the package.

You're really getting the most bang for your buck with this package. Upgraded sprite graphics, cutscenes from the DS version, content previously only available via WiiWare, and a chapter that can't be had on any other platform make The Complete Collection the definitive version of Final Fantasy IV. Now maybe SE can move on to giving Final Fantasy VI a similar treatment on the PSP. **-JL**

2

PROS:
It attempts something that hasn't been done before

CONS:
There's a reason it hasn't been done before

2

PROS:
Polished menus, decent level editor

CONS:
Basically just the controls

5

PROS:
Tons of content, beautiful upgraded sprites, great musical choices

CONS:
Lack of diagonal movement

SCENES

A LOOK AT E3'S
CHARACTERS



IN THE NEXT ISSUE
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