

# EEE! WHAT FUN!

One more round of great games is in the works for current consoles

Remember the last season of "Seinfeld"? It wasn't as daring as the first couple years, but the characters were familiar, the performances smart and polished, and so you laughed anyway.

So it is with the video games coming to stores in the second half of this year. On the whole, they don't break much new ground; the really innovative stuff is being saved up for the next generation of game consoles, which should begin appearing just before the holidays.

But from the sneak peeks at new games I got last month at the industry's biggest trade show, the Electronic Entertainment Expo, your current console is going to get one last whopper of a workout before you think about trading it in.



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The best-looking sequel to hit any console for this fall, based on the limited play time I got at the E3 show, is clearly "The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess," which bows on GameCube this fall.

Gone are the cartoony cell shading and the little-boy hero of the last "Zelda," the stunning "The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker." The teaser preview by Nintendo at the show had beautiful 3D renders of a teenage Link, fighting on horseback and with his trusty sword, again questing his way through beautiful landscapes, this time rendered more realistically.

Other sequels you'll want to keep an eye out for include Electronic Arts' "Burnout Revenge," the next installment of its auto racing-and-crashing games. Now there's a three-dimensional aspect to the game, with multiple levels of freeway, allowing you to treat your car more like a golf ball — and causing accidents on multiple levels at once. Crunchy fun. Oh, and there's more racing, too — including some tracks set in a fictional Detroit.

"Soul Calibur III" from Namco will have fans of the beautiful fighting game drooling over new, dynamic backgrounds, some new moves for familiar characters and the ability to make your own fighter. It's not a huge improvement over the last "Soul Calibur," but a nice update for fans of the series.

"Battlefield 2" from EA will draw in fans of the popular multiplayer online shooter with fresh new graphics and some new vehicles to play with.

Not every new game this fall will be a sequel or knockoff of previous games. Capcom's "Okami," for PlayStation 2, was a nice surprise. It's an action-adventure game drawn in a Far East charcoal-brush painting style, featuring a lead character of a white dog with mystical powers.

You can stop the action on screen and use the dog's tail like a paintbrush, drawing right on screen, to make things happen in the game world — a slash for an attack, loops to swirl up a wind, a long squiggle to draw a way to get to a higher ledge. It's reminiscent of "Wind Waker" in its graphics and its style, but the addition of the screen-drawing aspect made it refreshingly new.

For just pure beauty, no demo matched "Shadow of the Colossus," a fantasy adventure that used some gorgeous scenery and some of the best-rendered horses ever seen on the PS2. It remains to be seen whether the gameplay will live up to the looks, but it'll be worth a gander when it releases in September.

"Nintendogs," Nintendo's simulation of a dog's life for its portable DS system, will have many folks spending far too much time with a stylus in hand, talking to their virtual pup. You adopt one, raise it, teach it tricks, dress it up and let it play with other people's dogs using the DS' wireless connection. Sounds dorky, but those puppies are so cute — and they respond to voice commands.

There were a few hints around the show of what's in the works for those new consoles when they debut. One jaw-dropping title was shown for the PlayStation 3, due out next year: Electronic Arts' "Fight Night." A stunning display of lifelike human characters completely under the gamer's control, it demonstrated why some developers may be reserving most of their excitement for the new consoles. Most of the playable next-generation titles were for Microsoft's Xbox 360, because that console is expected to launch sometime this fall.

Sega's "Full Auto" tapped into my run-and-gun addiction right away. It's a fast-moving racer in which you take out opponents not only by out-speeding them but also by blowing them up. Think of it as a very sophisticated, extremely beautiful "Roadblaster," coming soon in high definition and surround sound.

Sega also had a playable demo of "Condemned," its Xbox 360 survival-horror title, and there the star wasn't the graphics treatment (which was lovely) or the speed (we're talking zombies) — it was the intelligence.

You've got a gun and they've got a crowbar? You can actually see them look at the crowbar, think and dive behind cover as they go look for a gun.

Bethesda Softworks' "The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion," a role-playing game, is just as lovely as the early screenshots had indicated. Especially stunning are the indoor lighting, outdoor trees (mmmm... realistic trees!) and the incredibly intelligent bunch of characters who wander the world and interact with each other in random patterns whether you're talking with them or not.

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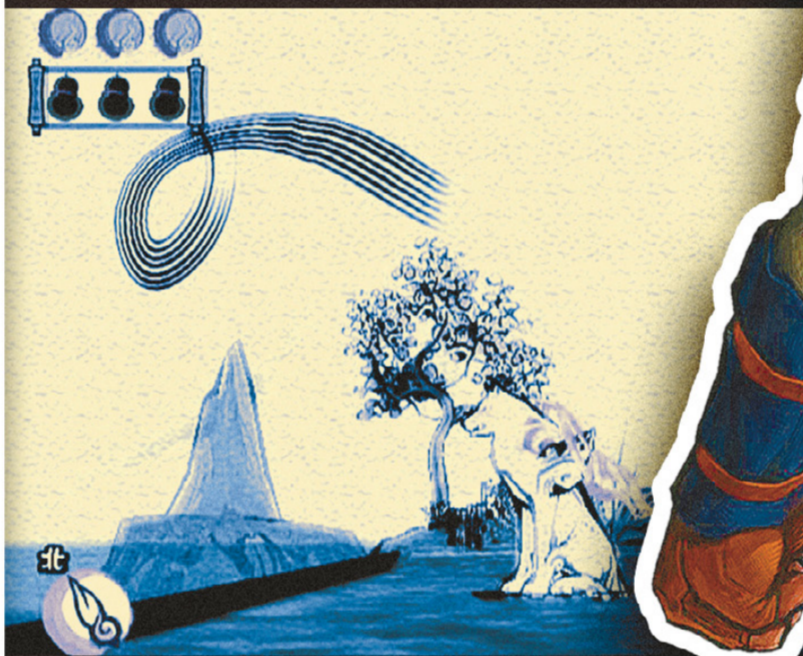
## GAME ON!



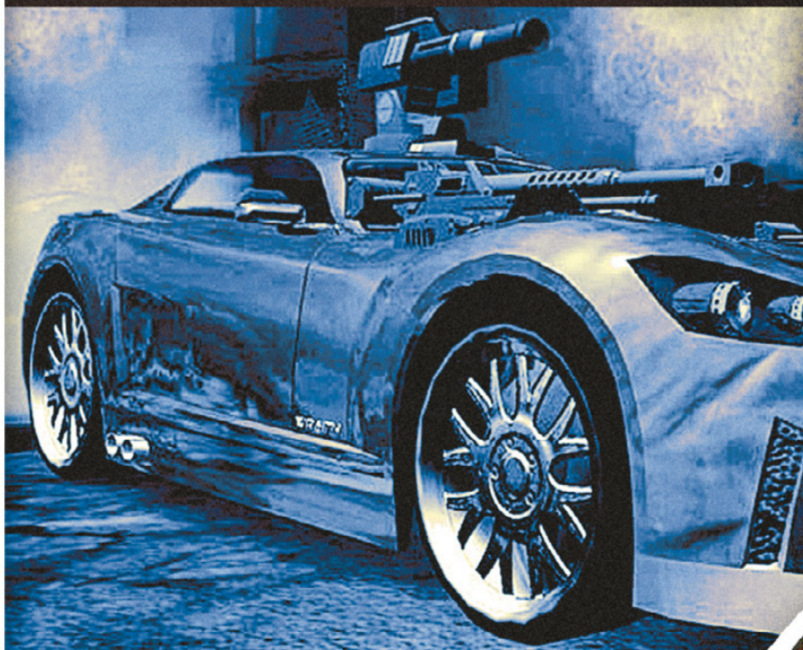
'SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS'



'SOUL CALIBUR III'



'OKAMI'



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'FIGHT NIGHT'

LINK FROM  
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