

Los Angeles Plays Itself

E3 was swell, but game makers should try harder—and get local.

by MIKE WINDER

"IT'S NOT VERY exciting, is it?" says a disappointed King of All Cosmos in the charming and bizarre sleeper hit of a game *Katamari Damacy*. In *Katamari*, a diminutive prince tries to win his father's affection by rolling a sticky ball (katamari) that grows in size as it accumulates objects as small as a pushpin and as large

Sony announced at a pre-E3 conference that their fully loaded Playstation 3 would be released in November at a jaw-dropping cost of \$599. Now comes a difficult choice: send your kid to preschool or be the first on your block to play *Final Fantasy XIII*. The outspoken Ken Kutaragi, President and CEO of Sony Computer Entertainment, takes home the biggest joystick award for

Theft Auto—but games that truly reflect our culture? Here are a few suggestions we consider eminently reasonable:

Real Need for Speed: Jack-Knifed Big Rig (Xbox 360; Racing)

Now you can bring the white-knuckle excitement of a Sig Alert into your living room! Thrill to speeds approaching 15 MPH as you make the blood-curdling transition from the 405 to the 101, screaming at the lady in the Escalade next to you as she chatters on her pink Razr. Check those traffic alerts or face the shame of missing your therapy session... again! Avoid using your turn signal to earn special power-ups and text message your friends while driving to unlock hidden features. Use Xbox Live to chat endlessly with online gamers about your commute—why should your co-workers have all the fun?

Rise of the Antonios (Playstation 3; Real-Time Strategy)

Hundreds of Antonio Villaraigosas are at your command, and you'll need every one of them if you're going to control the City of Angels. Draw up elaborate plans to solve transportation issues—subways, light-rail, hell, go

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as a skyscraper. But unless the Prince rolls something truly spectacular, the King is barely able to hide his displeasure at the end of each level.

The Electronics Entertainment Expo (E3), the world's premiere computer and video game trade event, rolled into Los Angeles once again, transforming the Convention Center into a colossal pachinko parlor, sans the cigarette smoke and metal balls, but with an overabundance of luscious "booth babes" using their, uh, assets as tractor beams. With Microsoft, Sony, and Nintendo duking it out for dominance in a \$30 billion industry, don't even think about copping a King of All Cosmos attitude on this one. E3 can't be dismissed. So what did the big three bring to L.A. last week?

Microsoft released their next-generation Xbox 360 console last November, giving them a year's head start over Sony. While the software giant's PR blitz attracted oodles of media attention, low supplies of the 360 meant many gamers were left empty-handed on Christmas morning. The 360 also took flak for launching with a game selection plagued by an underwhelming "wow factor." But with its online Xbox Live system earning raves and *Halo 3* and *Grand Theft Auto 4* coming out for 360 in the fall, Bill Gates won't be shining shoes at Pike Place Market anytime soon.

As if the rising cost of gasoline and housing weren't enough,

later suggesting the system may actually be "too cheap" and you'd never compare the costs of eating at a cafeteria to eating at a fine restaurant.

Once the 800-pound gorilla of the gaming industry, Nintendo has taken a back seat to its rivals in recent years. But don't count on the company removing Mario's feeding tube just yet. Nintendo showed off its upcoming Wii (pronounced "whee," really) console, whose selling point is its motion-sensitive controller. To picture how this works, imagine moving your entire arm versus pushing a button to swing a sword. Nintendo is banking that this new gameplay, coupled with a lower price tag than its competitors, will woo (or whee?) casual gamers and non-gamers into their camp.

But how do you woo jaded Angelenos into spending less time blogging or boozing, and more time gaming? Well, as a thank you for hosting E3 for the last eight years, couldn't game publishers set a few more games in Los Angeles? No, I'm not talking the next installment of *25 to Life* or *Grand*

crazy!—even a monorail!—and then get your Antonios to work. Need to be in Dallas to broker a deal with the NFL? At City Hall to address immigrant marchers? In Burbank for a "Sexiest Latino Public Servants" photo shoot? All in a day's work! Look out LAUSD, there's a new Mayor in town!

Through a Scanner Quickly (Nintendo Wii; Puzzle)

Cross the addictive gameplay of Tetris with the daunting task of securing the Port of Long Beach/Los Angeles from global terrorists, and you get fast-paced, post-9/11 fun! Scan each and every container entering our metropolis as they arrive at the busiest port in the nation. Sound easy? Think again. Was that a dirty bomb or a crate of Tickle-Me-Elmo knock-offs? Waste too much time on any one shipment and risk slowing the economy to a crawl as backed-up shipments of Lakers flags and knockoff Gucci handbags multiply like Tribbles. The soundtrack features today's hottest DJs providing 30 adrenaline-pumping remixes of Tom Ridge's euphoric "Let the Eagle Soar." LAA

Eyes for Indie Theaters

The 68 Cent Crew's latest is worth far more.

by ANDRIA REGAN



THEATER IN L.A. is a stone brick-hard sell. I'm not talking *The Producers*, starring big screen actors where you go with your grandparents for a graduation present. I'm talking *theater*—starring performers who are awkward in their day jobs just so that they can geek out in their free time on hole-in-the-wall stages, for little

out...or so he's always threatening. All this while, there is Viejo (Rick Almada), the old shack owner who sits just barely in the background, rocking in his chair.

I must admit the ending of this fantastical play is up for dime store interpretation, fully stocked with canned symbolism. My dime rests on the idea that it's about finding peace and love and new beginnings by traveling outside our own little world, and relieving ourselves of the baggage we lug, filled with all that we mistakenly believe to be valuable. It's to Craft's credit that she doesn't knock us over the head, what with all the romanticism in Shepard's pen—but Craft's no rookie.



The stage is beautifully designed, and the costumes only further complement what is the strength of this production: the acting. Kline, who is either breathlessly terrified, panicked, or tizzed for the entire length of the play, plays a manic Henry. If it was exhausting for him as an actor, it's only more so for the audience, though I don't see a way around it and credit Kline for maintaining such a high level of energy. Cistone, as Amado, at times didn't seem comfortable being the aggressor, left alone with the burden of a knife. He's careful, though, to maintain his balance as a grief stricken lover and a desperate criminal—it works. Romero, as Consuela, isn't asked to be anything more than beautiful, and that she is. My personal favorite was Rick Almada's performance of Viejo. Almada was always in the corner of my eye, his presence continually felt and appreciated. It's a tall order to create and maintain a character in so few lines, and yet Almada shines distinctively, without forgetting to support the rest of his actors.

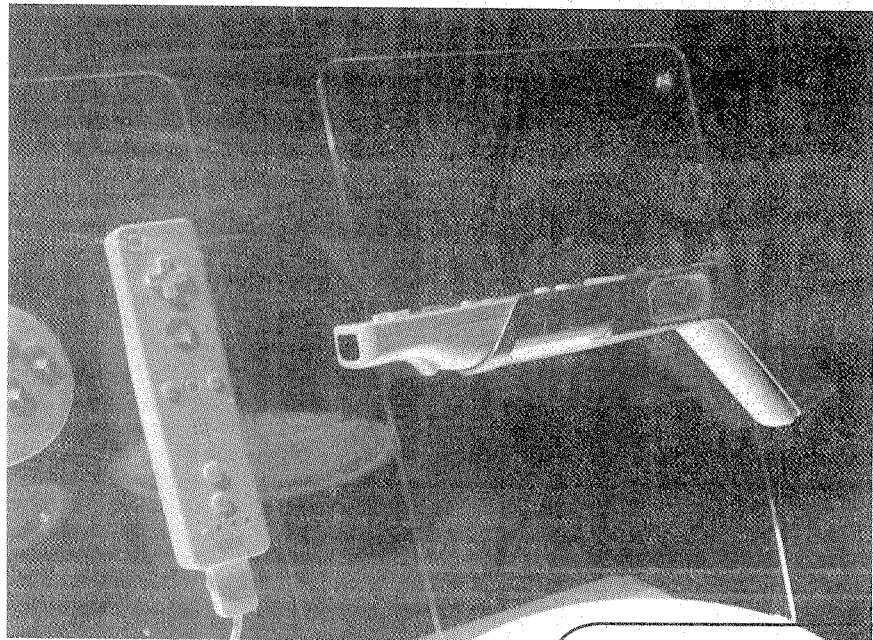
to no money, usually in front of friends and friends of friends. And yet, this theater world survives, like a blade of green grass defiantly growing through the cement of Los Angeles.

The 68 Cent Crew Theatre Company hunkers down in a sweet space on Sunset Boulevard, just east of Western, directly across from Food 4 Less and neighbor to The Hollywood Star Inn (which you'll be glad to know is under new management). The latest project in their five-year existence is *Eyes for Consuela*, written by Sam Shepard and directed by Crystal Craft.

The stage is set with Gipsy Kings strumming through the theater, and rags of sea-green color draped throughout, transforming it into a beautiful shack in what seems to be a Mexican paradise of romanticized poverty. Renting this shack is Henry (played by Stephen Kline), a tormented whitey who's trying to escape the troubles of his dying marriage. While out for a midnight gasp of fresh air, Henry is held up at knifepoint by Amado (played by Danny Cistone), a native who is near devastated by his own torment and guilt. Naturally, conversation ensues. The story is fairly simple, centering around the object of Amado's torment, Consuela (Brenda Romero). She is of course the perfect, near drop dead gorgeous, ideal woman for all men alike (doubt it's a coincidence that she barely speaks, but always looks innocent yet longing). Amado has wronged Consuela, and he must now—and presumably forever—repay his debt, which just happens to include gouging Henry's eyes

When I was rewarded for all my hard work in college, and received my congratulatory card filled with four tickets to *The Producers*, I slapped on my "oh golly gee" face and went with an open mind. I literally counted down each and every musical interlude on my fingers, waiting to escape. Not once did I check my watch during *Eyes for Consuela*. All in all, *Eyes* is a fine theater going experience, if not slightly forgettable. More important though, is that it exposes the bones of independent theater in Los Angeles, and judging by 68 Cent Crew Theatre Company, they're chalked full of calcium, strong like bull, and good to go. LAA

Eyes for Consuela runs through June 7, Tuesdays and Wednesdays at Theatre 68. For more info visit www.68centcrew.com.



This year Nintendo hopes to graduate from the old-school with its new system Wii.