

## GEEKED Videogame reviews by Seth Mcm Donlin



### CHROMEHOUNDS

**PUBLISHER** | SEGA  
**DEVELOPER** | FROM INTERACTIVE  
**PLATFORM** | 360  
**PRICE** | \$59.99  
**ESRB RATING** | T (TEEN)

**WHAT'S COOL:** Good graphics; simple, yet convincing sound effects; an interesting mix of weapons and other components; engrossing online component.

9 out of 10  
 geeks agree:  
 War is fun!

**WHAT'S UNCOOL:** The lackluster single-player campaign is really just an extended tutorial for the game's online component.

#### GAMEPLAY



#### GRAPHICS



#### SOUND



UNINFORMED GEEKS STILL under the illusion that *Chromehounds* is nothing more than a next-gen mecha combat sim are in for a huge surprise, because it doesn't take long to figure out that this game is anything but typical. Whether this news is good or bad, however, depends entirely on the particular geek's attitude toward cooperative online play. Those who love it will most likely find themselves drawn in by the title's somewhat unique form of competition. Those who don't will likely be trying to get rid of their copies faster than a bio-chem textbook at the end of freshman year. In fact, if you happen to notice a surfeit of used copies floating around your local video game retailer, it's much more of a reflection on this stark dichotomy than on the actual merit of the game itself. Judged on its own, *Chromehounds* is actually a fairly interesting game.

The premise is that 20 or so years in the future, after the ravages of a third world war, three new nations (roughly modeled on the Balkans, Saudi Arabia and a former Soviet Republic, such as Chechnya) square off in a major regional war over—what else?—mineral resources. The dominant military weapons of the time are called Hounds but are really nothing more than the typical mecha that geeks have grown familiar with from such successful series as *MechWarrior* and *Armored Core*. The player takes on the role of a mercenary Hound pilot and it's up to the player to decide which side to take in this three-way, high tech slugfest.

Up until this point, everything but the near-future setting seems pretty standard for a mecha combat sim. It's here, however, that the game reveals its rather unique nature. As it turns out, the single player campaign—a collection of 50 or so mini-missions—is nothing more than a lengthy tutorial for the game's extensive online component. The missions themselves are broken up into six separate story arcs, each of which tells a bit more of the back story leading up to the eventual declaration of war while at the same time familiarizing the player with the workings and appropriate tactics of the different general classifications of Hounds.

Soldier Hounds are, as the name implies, the basic backbone of a Hound squad. Defenders are slower moving and more heavily armored. Scouts are light and nimble and specialize in capturing communication towers that allow the rest of the team to stay in contact with each other. Snipers mount precise, long-range weaponry and Heavy Weapons Hounds serve as the Hound unit's artillery. Finally, the Commander Hound carries special communications equipment that helps the team to stay in contact, even in the absence of the immobile communications towers; which, as important as this sounds, becomes even more so when you log onto Xbox Live.

Online, you'll have to cooperate with fellow geeks to form six-man teams, which will then be pitted against each other as part of the ongoing war between the three states. As you win battles—everything from capture the flag to last man standing missions—you'll earn credits (which you need to reequip you Hound), unlock new components and secure more territory for your chosen country. Eventually one country will win the war, the server will reset and the entire war will start all over again, meaning that—if you enjoy this kind of thing—you could be in for months and months of online fun. Of course, if you don't, you should simply avoid this title like the plague. It's as simple as that.

## DISC JUNKIE by Paul Gaita

### A TIP SHEET FOR COMPULSIVE DVD BUYERS



#### MULTIPLEX

The pick to click this week is *The Wire: The Complete Third Season* (HBO) and I'll go on record here that if you're a cop show fan, you won't ever need to bother with another series beyond this fascinating program from producer David Simon (who was behind the equally great *Homicide: Life on the Street*). What puts *The Wire* head and shoulders above the rest of the police program brigade is the sheer quality behind every aspect of the show, from the cast (lead by Dominic West and Idris Elba as opposite sides of the Baltimore drug trade) to the writing (Richard Price and George Pelecanos are among the scripters this season) to the series' absolute adherence to delivering a true portrait of police and criminal life in modern society. It's complex—you may need to watch each episode more than once to grasp the full extent of the plot machinery—but the five-disc set delivers some of the most rewarding television in recent years. Get the previous two seasons, check out this one, and ready yourself for the fourth season, which is slated for this fall.

I think Fox's *Prison Break* aspires to the complexity of *The Wire*—the series is built around a labyrinthine conspiracy plot that's interwoven with a jailbreak storyline—but it's a flashier program, full of heavy-handed contrivances that strain credulity at every turn. Having said that, it's also superior popcorn TV that ramps up the tension at every given turn, and it's got a terrific supporting cast, including Robin Tunney, Stacey Keach, Muse Watson, and Robert Knepner as one of the vilest heels ever on the small screen.

On the reissue front, you've got two chances to check out Audrey Hepburn at her most girlishly glamorous in *Sabrina*—first in the three-disc *Audrey Hepburn Collection* (Paramount), which pairs it with *Breakfast at Tiffany's* and *Roman Holiday*, and also in *The Billy Wilder Collection* (Paramount), which also features the special edition discs of *Sunset Blvd.* and *Stalag 17*. Which to get? Depends on what you want: the Hepburn set is frothy and fun, while the Wilder collection is darker fare, especially *Sunset*, which is still one of the essential Hollywood-

is-Hell films. Classic Hollywood types also might wanna give a look-see at *The Jayne Mansfield Collection* (Fox), which offers the glitzy-fun *Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?* (with Tony Randall and Jayne's then-spouse, legendary bodybuilder Mickey Hargitay) and the amazing *The Girl Can't Help It*, with killer performances by Little Richard, Gene Vincent, and Fats Domino.



#### ARTHOUSE

The title to get the most attention this week is most likely *Manderlay* (IFC), Lars von Trier's self-consciously contentious follow-up to *Dogtown*, but I think that you'll find more subtle enjoyment in MVD's *Jazz Shots* series, which compiles vintage clips of classic jazz performers (Miles Davis, Art Blakey, Count Basie among them) in full swing on TV and in festival settings. Hardcore jazzbos will find the lack of info about the clips a bit aggravating, but the series (which divides the performers by East and West Coast affiliations) both fills the gap in jazz on DVD and provides some much-appreciated cool for a blazing summer. Also to eyeball: *Toshiro Mifune: The Ultimate Collection* (Animeo), which showcases the samurai's samurai in five non-Kurosawa action-dramas, including the amusing Zatoichi meets Yojimbo, which pits him against Shintaro Katsu's blind masseuse/swordsman.



#### GRINDHOUSE

All the good stuff's from overseas this week: *Revenge of the Living Dead Girls* (Image) is atmospheric and gore-heavy zombie horror from France, while *Night of the Bloody Apes/Curse of the Doll People* (Brentwood) mixes Mexican wrestling, mad scientists, man-gorillas and killer toys on a delirious double bill from South of the border. But there's also goofy good fun from right here in the States courtesy Brentwood's *Van Nuys Blvd./Little Laura and Big John* double feature: the former is slap-happy teen comedy thrills about the make-out scene on the Valley street, while the latter is a Bonnie and Clyde revamp with Fabian (!) in the lead.

## MANGA by Lyn Jensen



### MANGA'S ANSWER TO AMERICAN IDOL

MORE THAN A dozen talented young American manga artists have burst upon the scene via TokyoPop's Rising Stars of Manga contests: Felipe Smith, Amy Kim Ganter, Wes Abbott and more. Like a *Project Runway*/*American Idol*-style reality series, the *Rising Stars of Manga 6* compilation gives fans a fresh look at seven newcomers and provides insight into what makes the cut.

One local artist, Anthony Go Wu of Westlake Village, is represented with "The Orphans," a convoluted prologue to a much larger story about pirates, ninjas and talking monkeys. (Pirates are big this year; I'm not sure about the talking monkeys.) The story is dark, the artwork literally so, but both are distinctive. Wu lists Felipe Smith as one of his favorite manga artists, and there is some semblance in style.

"Bomango," by Rob Ten Pas, is the Grand Prize winner and the one most likely to work as a series. About a boy and girl who scavenge trash and find treasure, this story could easily follow *Peach Fuzz* and *Van Von Hunter* into the Sunday funnies. "Rob...created a rich and complete

world in 20 pages," explains Rob Valois, a contest judge.

Best of the rest may be "Departure" by Eden, the deceptively simple third-place winner that makes so much from so little, partly because of its rich, gorgeous tones. Its potential as a series may be limited, but, like the overall winner, it creates a world in a few pages.

Collectively, the entries demonstrate how the line between American and Japanese style is becoming murkier and murkier. "The Little Miss Witch Hater" by Ryo Kawakami, a Japanese-American, shows the most authentically Japanese aesthetic with its flowing lines, while the others all show far more Western influence.

*RSOM6* also includes previews of upcoming manga from *RSOM* alumni, the most promising of which may be *Bombos vs. Everything*. Originally drawn by Andy Helms, it began as the *RSOM4* Grand Prize winner, with the judges praising its "turn-of-the-century comics" style, similar to *Fullmetal Alchemist*. Now another *RSOM* alumnus, Maximo V. Lorenzo, has taken it over and given it a more surreal look.

Starving comic artists, take note! Submissions for *RSOM7* are being accepted until January 12, 2007. Don't wait 'til then to create your own little manga. Check [www.tokyopop.com](http://www.tokyopop.com) now for details and get drawing!