



technology



HANDS UP

Portable game machines are the new battleground in the console wars.

Idle hands may be the Devil's plaything, but video game giants Sony and Nintendo see them as pure profit. The ubiquitous Game Boy system is the best-selling console of all time, as evidenced by everyone from teens to middle-aged businessmen intently gripping the palm-sized plastic boxes on subway cars and in bank lines.

If you thought this year's big gaming story would be the PlayStation 3 or Xbox 2, think again. At the annual Electronic Entertainment Exposition, held each May in Los Angeles, the next generation of game consoles were out of sight and out of mind.

Instead, the assembled masses of journalists, analysts and industry executives obsessed over the latest in handheld gaming — a genre owned lock, stock and barrel by Nintendo's Game Boy since 1990.

The newest challenger to the portable throne is Sony's much hyped PSP, or PlayStation Portable. The highly anticipated handheld sports a sleek consumer-friendly design, and can play games, movies and music - an all-in-one mobile entertainment device.

With a 4.3" screen that dwarfs the Game Boy

standard and graphics that are at least in the same ballpark as the PlayStation 2, the game press dubbed Sony's new handheld one of them most drool-worthy new products in the high-tech pipeline.

Nintendo, the longtime leader in handheld gaming, was not content to sit back and watch Sony take over the genre. With the new Nintendo DS, the house that Mario built aims to hold onto the portable market.

Keeping the clamshell design of the Game Boy Advance SP, the new machine adds a second screen, this one touch-sensitive, to the mix.

While the utility of double screens may seem unclear at first, Nintendo showed off games that featured your character on one screen and a map on the other, or NBA action on the top screen with player stats below.

The two new gaming machines are competing for a huge chunk of the multi-billion-dollar games industry, and both Sony

and Nintendo hope the first move your hands will make is to reach for your wallet to shell out for these new systems. —**DA**

Look for the PlayStation PSP in early 2005 and the Nintendo DS in late 2004.

