

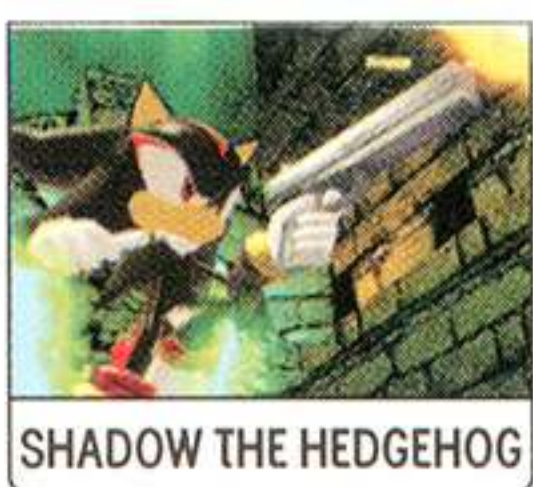
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JAK X



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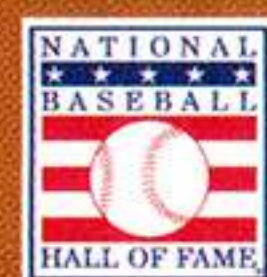
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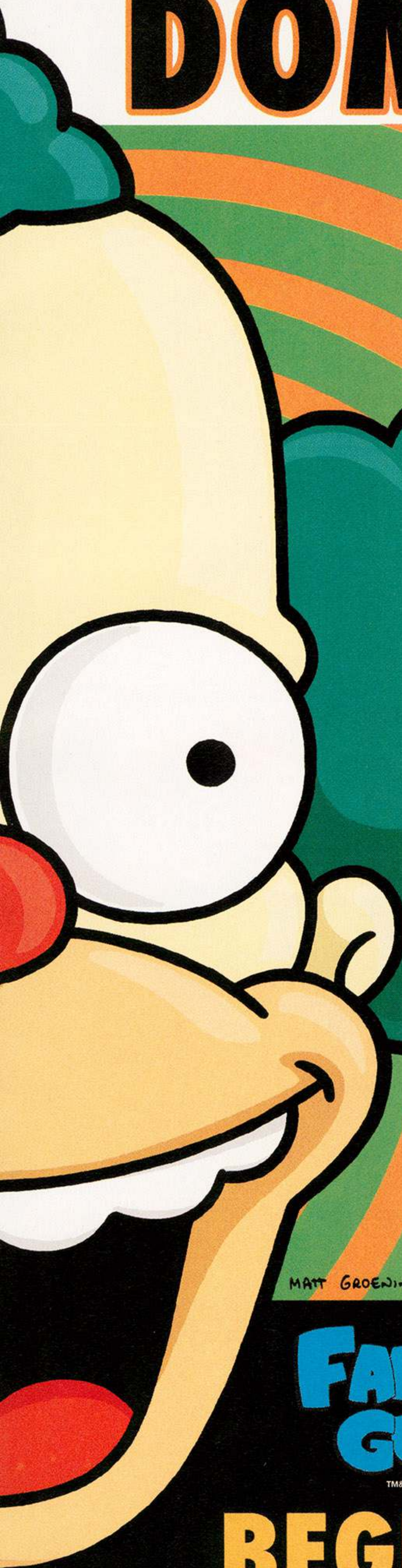
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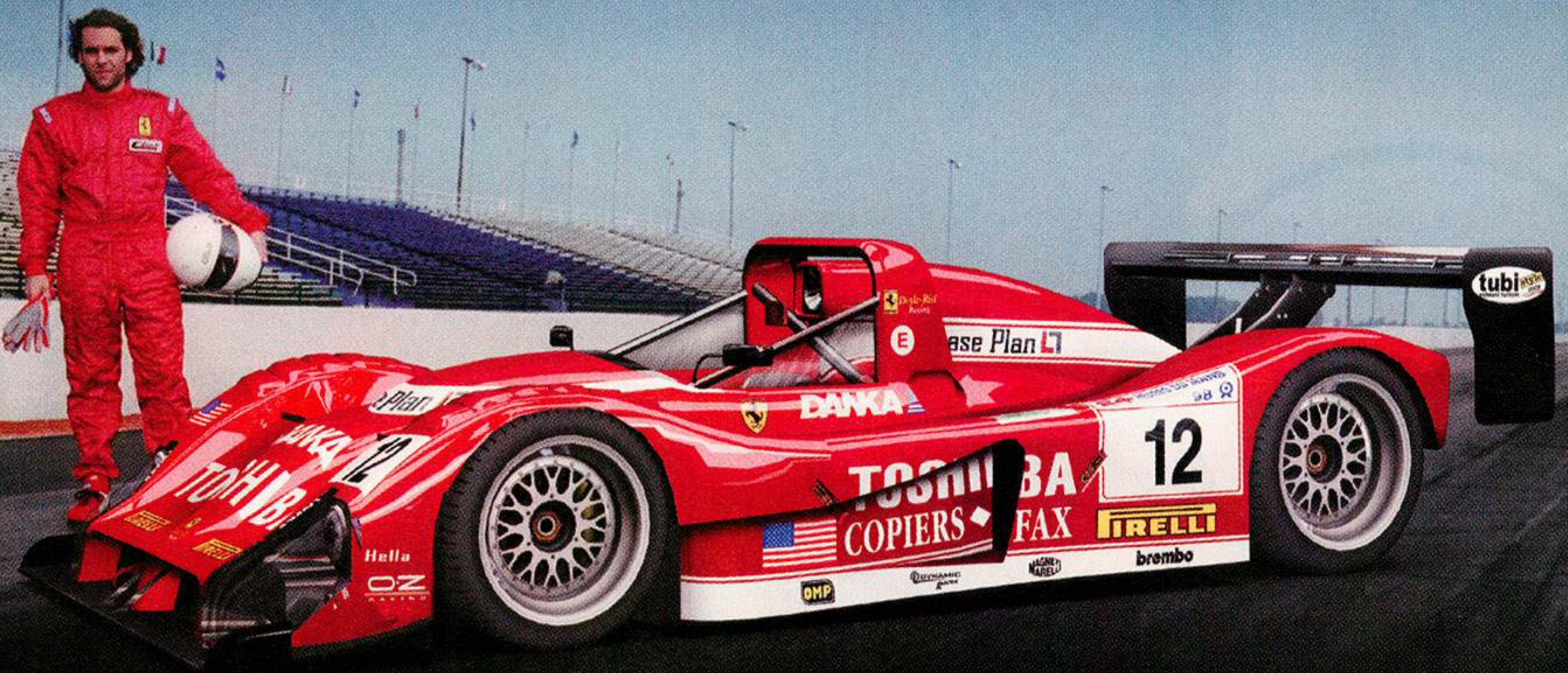
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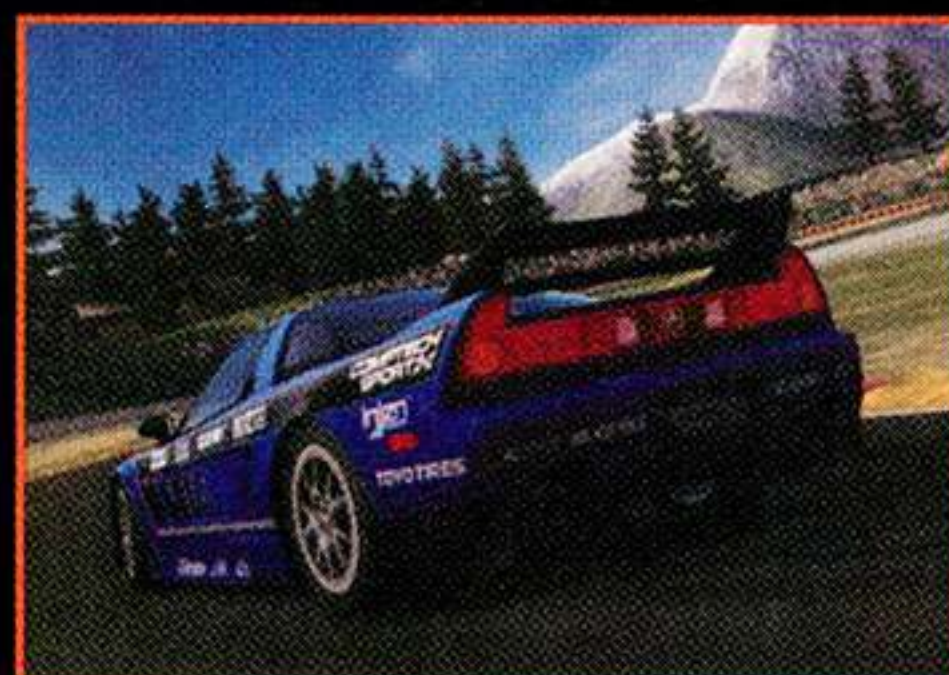
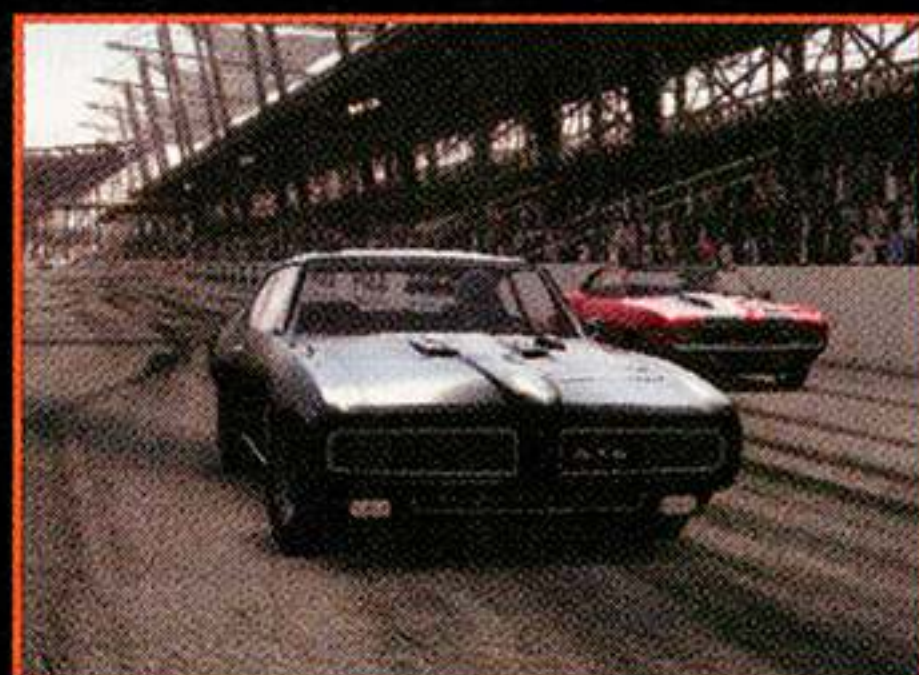
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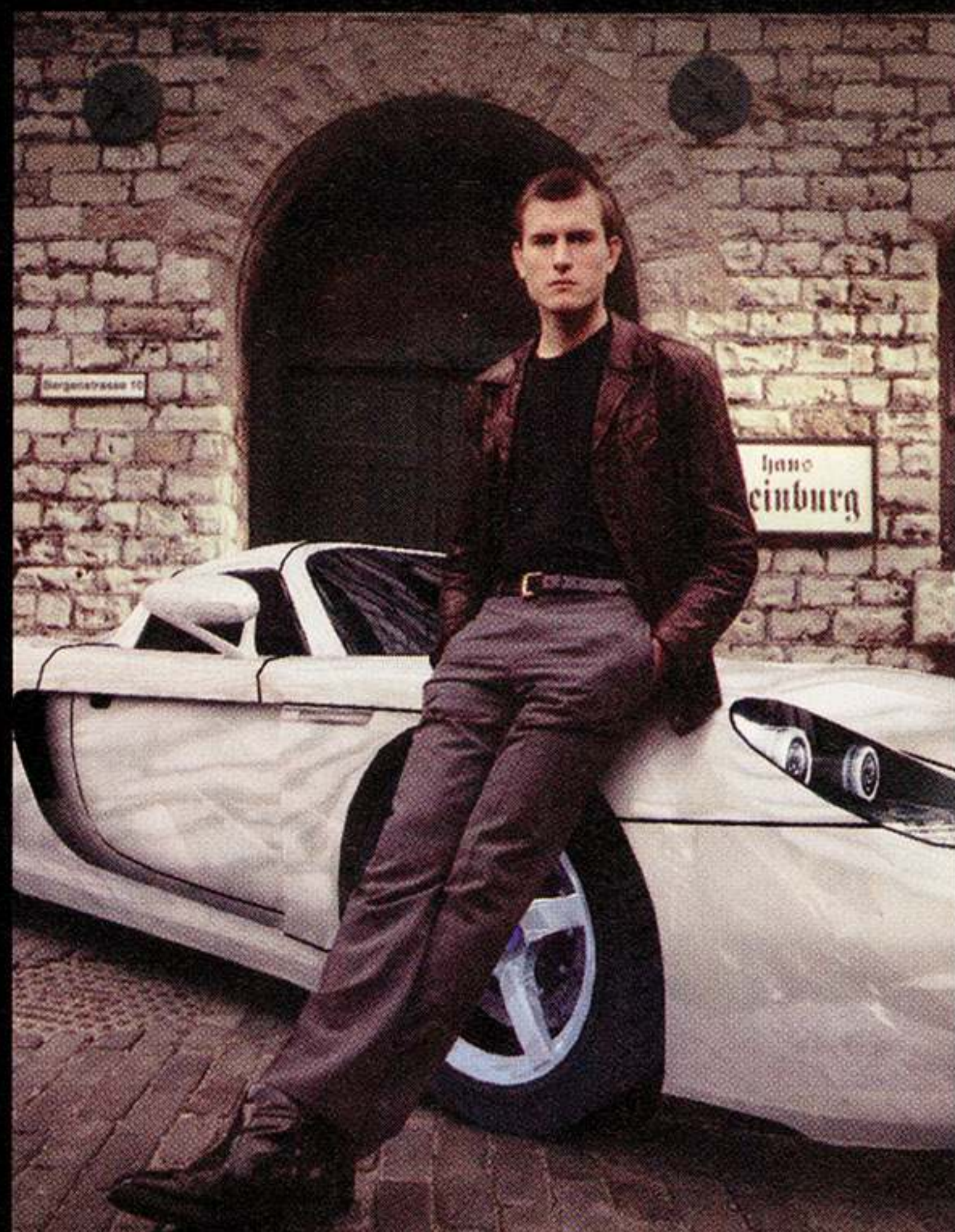


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it's good to play together



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Hylan Blvd.

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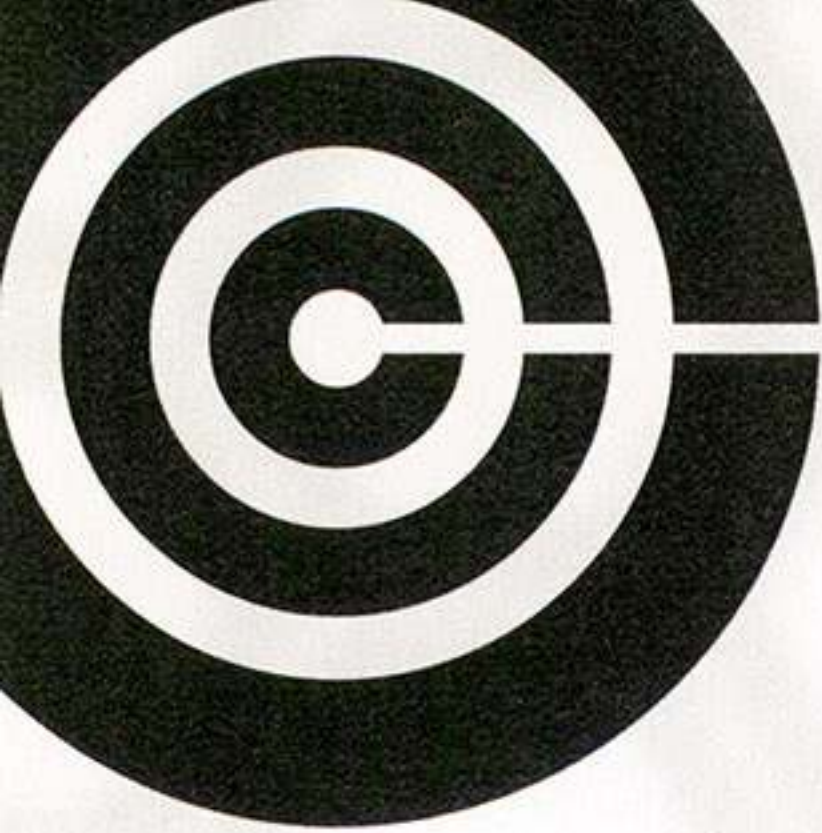
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112 COVER STORY: PHANTASY STAR UNIVERSE

You survived the *Phantasy Star Online* addiction and went through the “babies are crawling on my ceiling” withdrawal—now get ready for the relapse. The sequel looks amazing. Disclaimer: Read with caution.

WE'RE GIVING AWAY PSPS... WITH GAMES! SEE PAGE 109 FOR DETAILS.

LETTERS

16 E-mail EGM@ziffdavis.com, but please no spam about pills or adding inches

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Meet the new playable characters for the sequel
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I am the law!

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editorial



When I wrote last month that the Nintendo DS is in trouble “mainstream-wise” when facing competition from Sony's PSP, it irked some

hardcore Nintendo fans. I'm not apologizing for what I wrote, but woe is the editor who enters Mario's gangland turf without some backup, so I'm explaining my thoughts more fully here.

The PSP is a better designed machine, and the PlayStation brand is too strong, period. I challenge you to show any neutral party both the DS and PSP, then

explain all the features (from DS' touch screen to PSP's MP3- and movie-playing capabilities) to gauge reaction. In fact, you could skip the explaining part—I know a lot of mainstream gamers who are sold on the PSP's big screen alone. And don't forget the Nintendo name doesn't have the same cachet it used to. Today, people know “PlayStation.”

That's not to say we don't respect Nintendo and what it does for gaming. The DS touch screen? Ingenious. Nintendo's games? They score higher than any other publisher's games in *EGM*. The company itself? I've said it before and I'll say it

again: It's the single best developer in the world. But all that stuff won't stop the DS from being No. 2 to the PSP in sales. And I'm not the only guy who predicts the PSP will be a mass-market monster—TheHollywoodReporter.com recently quoted an analyst saying Sony's machine will crush Apple's iPod.

Next month, we'll give those N fans the ultimate peace offering: the first in-depth look at the next *Zelda*. If they only knew how hyped we are for this game, they'd stop accusing us of being anti-Nintendo. Heck, they might even ask us to join their gang. —Dan “Shoe” Hsu, Editor-in-Chief

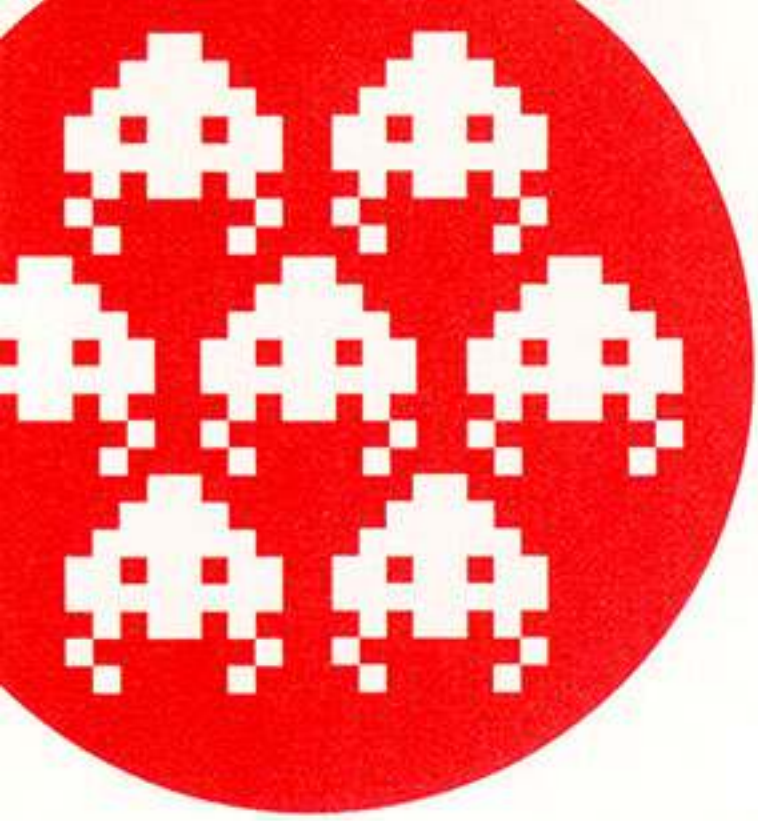
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yes, we're allergic to sunlight

the review crew



DAN "SHOE" HSU, Editor-in-Chief
Shoe broke his wrist while introducing a little *SSX* trickery into his real-life snowboarding. Now he's limited to...ahem, one-handed activities. Let's just leave it at that, shall we?
1UP.com Blog: egmshoe.1UP.com
Now Playing: *Metal Gear Acid*, *Advance Wars 2*, *Phantasy Star Online Episode III: C.A.R.D. Revolution*, *FreeCell* (PC)
Fave Genres: Currently, anything he can play with one hand

MARK MACDONALD, Executive Editor

After a hellish month sweating over our PSP launch feature, Mark found stomping on the handheld for a stress test sidebar—destroying it in the process—oddly enjoyable. "Revenge," he says, "is a dish best served cold. And by my foot."
1UP.com Blog: egmmark.1UP.com (coming soon!)
Now Playing: *Ridge Racer*, *Lumines*, *Psychonauts*, *God of War*
Fave Genres: Action, Adventure, Shooters



JENNIFER TSAO, Managing Editor
Jennifer always makes a sincere effort to try out good games she might not normally play—which this month meant getting her *Gran Turismo 4* game on. Luckily for drivers everywhere, there's no link between her videogame skills and real life.
1UP.com Blog: egmjennifer.1UP.com
Now Playing: *Psychonauts*, *Lumines*, *GT4* (poorly)
Fave Genres: RPG, Adventure, Action Sports, Rhythm-Action

CRISPIN BOYER, Senior Editor

Like *God of War* anti-hero Kratos, Crispin has a harsh past he's trying to forget (you try reviewing every *Army Men* game ever made). Kratos hit the high seas and had threesomes to dull his memories. At least Crispin has a chance with the high-seas part.
1UP.com Blog: egmcrispin.1UP.com
Now Playing: *God of War*, *Lego Star Wars*, *Republic Commando*
Fave Genres: Action, Adventure, RPG



SHANE BETTENHAUSEN, Previews Editor
While visiting Japan to check out Sega's *Phantasy Star Universe* for the cover story, Shane indulged in some local comfort food—those creepy shrimp with the heads, legs, antennae still intact. Man, those babies really tickle goin' down.
1UP.com Blog: egmshane.1UP.com
Now Playing: *Wipeout Pure*, *Tekken 5*, *God of War*, *Meteos*
Fave Genres: Action, Adventure, RPG, Fighting, Karaoke

DEMIAN LINN, Reviews Editor

Demian sure would like to get some quality time in with his PSP; from what he's seen it's a pretty sweet rig. But his girlfriend put her foot down. She needs it to play *Lumines 24/7*.
1UP.com Blog: egmdemian.1UP.com
Now Playing: *Brothers in Arms*, *Lumines* (watching, not playing), *World of Warcraft* (PC), *NBA Street V3*
Fave Genres: Action, Hockey, Racing, Fighting



BRYAN INTIHAR, News Editor
Recently, the crew was chitchatting about *Friends*, and one jackass editor called Bryan the "Joey" of *EGM*. So Big B went out and bought a pair of glasses to look a little smarter. Is it working? Drop him a line on his 1UP.com blog.
1UP.com Blog: egmbryan.1UP.com
Now Playing: *God of War*, *Castlevania: Symphony of the Night*
Fave Genres: Action, Adventure, Sports

The Contributors

- **DAVID S. J. HODGSON** feels bad for all the evil videogame overlords whose bases are infiltrated by superspies again and again. So this month he has some tips for the architects.
- **NICH MARAGOS** brought the popcorn with that heart attack-inducing butter and helped out with our feature on movie games.
- Interpreter **HIROKO MINAMOTO** provided invaluable translation assistance for the *Phantasy Star Universe* cover story.

Guest Reviewers



ROBERT ASHLEY
Robert wishes he could transport himself into the future to play the (hopefully) next *Psychonauts*.



JOSHUA CAIN
Though he's back at school, young Joshua can't seem to let the days he spent at *EGM* go.



SHAWN ELLIOT
Do you remember riding four miles to 7-Eleven to play such and such game? Shawn does.



GREG FORD
Management moved Greg to a different place at the office. Has anyone seen his stapler?



JAMES LEE
The intern struggles with Carrot Top—annoying punctuation—there are three types of dashes?!



PATRICK MAURO
Syndicated radio guy shaves the beard and gets serious as a heart attack about PSP gaming.



CHRISTIAN NUTT
Christian was too busy moving this month to have his picture taken. Here's his stunt double.



JOHN RICCIARDI
EGM's man in Japan helped out with this month's cover story. Later, he choked on a shrimp.



JUSTIN SPEER
Even severe weather delays couldn't stop Justin from hitting his monthly deadlines.

■ Since their publications aren't as rad as ours, we sympathized and let the people at **OFFICIAL U.S. PLAYSTATION MAGAZINE** and **1UP.COM** write for us.

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Intern James Lee

DESIGN
Art Director Monique Convertito
Associate Art Director Stefan Belavy

CONTRIBUTORS
Tom Byron, Che Chou, Robert Coffey, John Davison, Jon Dudlak, eBay, Chuck Ernst, Dana Jongewaard, Chris Kohler, Matt Leone, Thierry "Scooter" Nguyen, Jeremy Parish, Andrew Pfister, Ryan Scott, Gerry Serrano, Giancarlo Viaranini, Todd Zuniga

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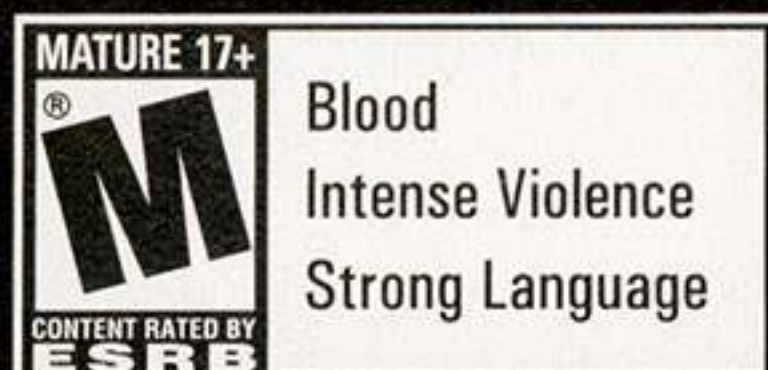


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Letters

ranting, raving, and a crummy child



■ You suck, you crummy little baby. (Hey, the kid plays on Live—he's used to it.)

Problem child

My wee bro Addy is an absolute *Halo 2* fanatic and (pre)schools people of all ages online (embarrassingly, even myself). However, when he's not exploring every corner of each map and exploiting every glitch in the game, he sets silly goals for himself—for instance, tallying -200 kills. He also asked me to take a photo of his

antiaccomplishment and send it your way. Hook the kid up.

—Mark and Addy McKool

OK, good.

Slowga

Holding Pattern (*EGM* #190) reported the status of cancelled and stalled hits but didn't cover *Final Fantasy XII*. What's happening with it?

—Jason Nicholayson

Previews editor and resident RPG buff Shane Bettenhausen says: "Square Enix never really committed to a date here in the United States, but the game has definitely slipped from its announced Japanese date (it was

Letter of the month

...Beats TV/VCR repair

"What field would you like to work in?" While my classmates listed medicine and law, I couldn't say...until *EGM* arrived with the answer. An article back in Issue #176 spotlighted a slew of game-related job opportunities, including what was to become my passion: 3D animation. Long story short, I applied to the DigiPen Institute of Technology, the college the story described as the "Ivy League of game-design schools," made the grade, and am happy to say that I'm moving to Redmond, WA, to obtain a degree in production animation. I don't know if you hear it enough, but here it is from me: Thank you! Thank you for not only offering reliable reviews, but also for applying the same dedication to all of your articles.

—Zachary Berger



Congrats, Zach. Make a game as good as the one you're getting from our grab bag (unless it's a stinker), and you'll have no trouble paying off those loans.

supposed to ship before the end of March 2005). Frankly, we're not sure what's up with the game. We've seen no new screenshots since last May, and we've also heard rumblings of internal strife within the development team. Still, we expect Square Enix to get its act together and ship the game before the end of 2005."

EA bleed

Not to jump on the EA-bashing bandwagon, but my ears have had enough; EA Trax contaminates everything EA touches. *NFL Street* had instrumental tunes. *NFL Street 2* barrages you with what

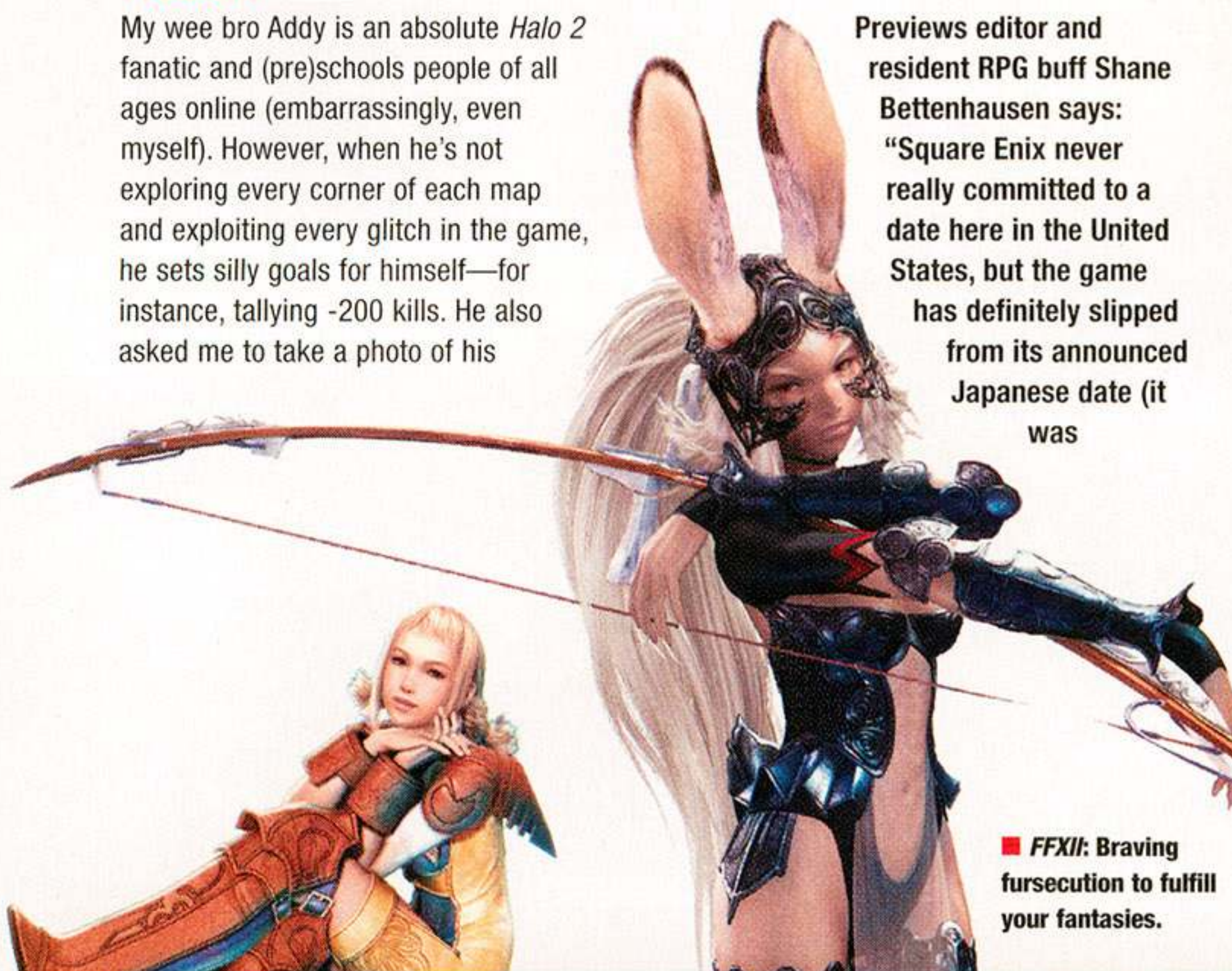
amounts to audio ads for crappy "artists." Fine, I'll turn it off, but what about these announcers? Every EA Big franchise is filled with some idiot's slangified sound bites, so I'm forced to play with sound effects alone. I suppose I should've seen this coming when *Crüe Ball* came out all those years ago.

—Phil

An Xbox custom soundtrack is your ears' best friend. Otherwise, we're with you: Unless its playlist is as diverse as *Grand Theft Auto's*, a game should stick with noncommercial cuts.

Technical difficulties

I purchased a 36-inch Sony Wega HDTV ▶



■ *FFXII*: Braving fursecution to fulfill your fantasies.

POST OFFICE

Rambling and ranting from our message boards, boards.1UP.com (look for *Electronic Gaming Monthly's* forums)



■ Sam Fisher post-Denny's dinner: "Keep a lookout—this'll just take a minute."

Play Sam again

Is sneak-em-up *Splinter Cell Chaos Theory* your spy bag?

Dead_In_Red: I didn't buy the last game when the scores were 10/9.5/9.5, so why would I now?

Camdude12: What's it gonna take to convince you to get this game? Hell, even if you don't dig the *Metal Gear Solid* series, you've gotta get it.

HymenCrusher: I've never finished a *Splinter Cell*. I've gotten halfway on each of the previous installments and lost interest twice. The A.I. is too anal.

Xavi: Damn, this board is full of haters.

Magichighs: I skipped the first *Splinter Cell*, but after playing *Pandora Tomorrow*, I'm converted. I love *Metal Gear*, but Sam's series is just as good, although for completely different reasons.

Fools' gold
Got a great April Fools' gag?

Xavvi: *Halo* hero Master Chief as an unlockable character in the new *Soul Calibur*.

Tanklor: EA creates a console.

DevilDarkness: Nintendo announces its new *Legend of Zelda* is actually a [next-generation console] Revolution launch title.

Kaiser1245: ...Or that Nintendo has followed Sega's suit and canceled its next console.

Maleficentogre: Instead of bluffing in a big story, introduce it in one of those tiny news tickers along the bottom of the page.

Roboman: Nintendo goes online.

Xehirut: Sheng Long as a secret character in *Street Fighter Anniversary Collection*.

Disappeared: How to unlock *Halo 2's* real, hidden ending.

CONTACT EGM

E-mail us at EGM@ziffdavis.com—if your subject line doesn't mention renegotiating home mortgages, we'll read it! Or write to:

EGM Letters

101 2nd Street, 8th Floor
San Francisco, CA 94105

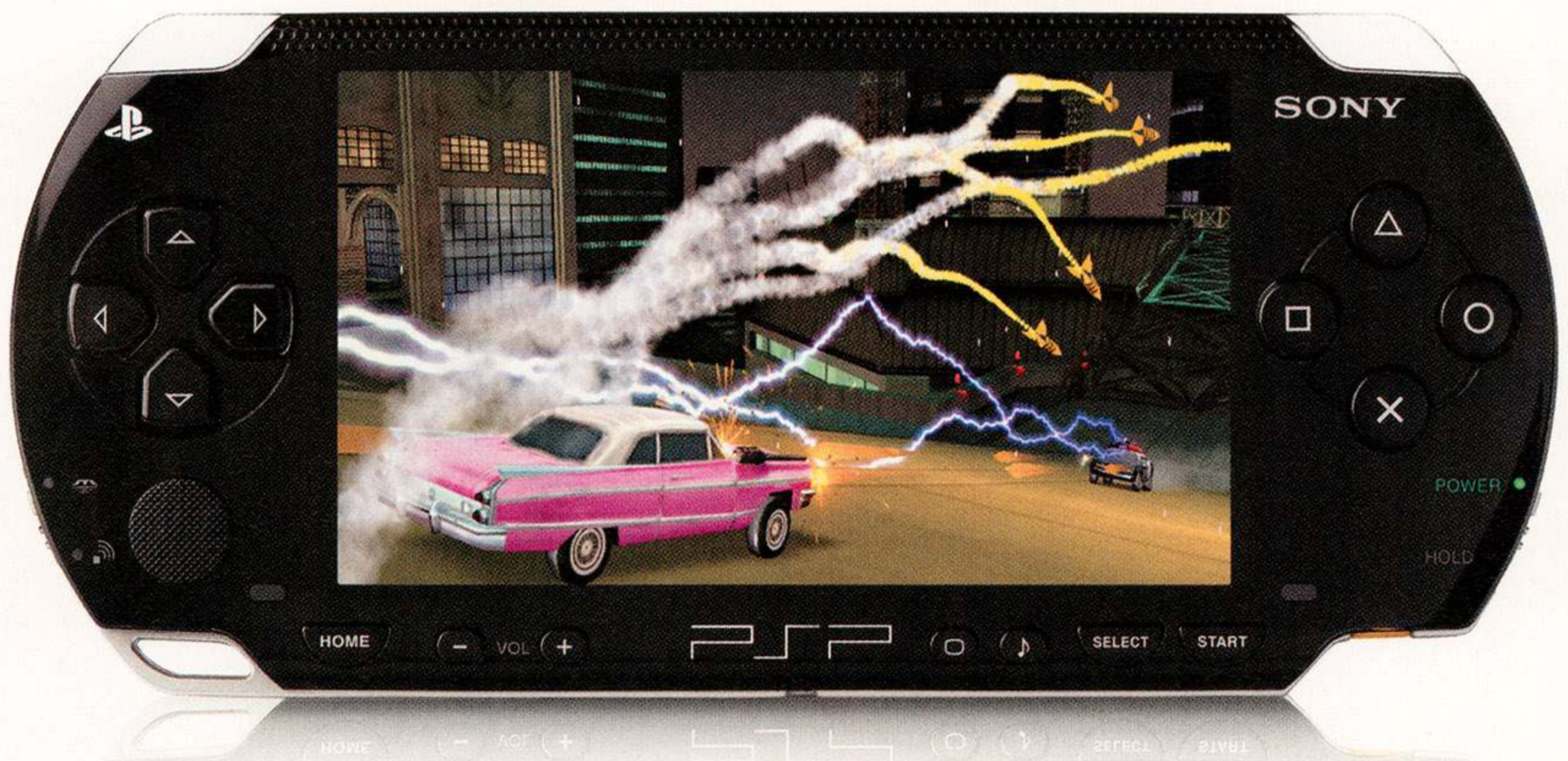
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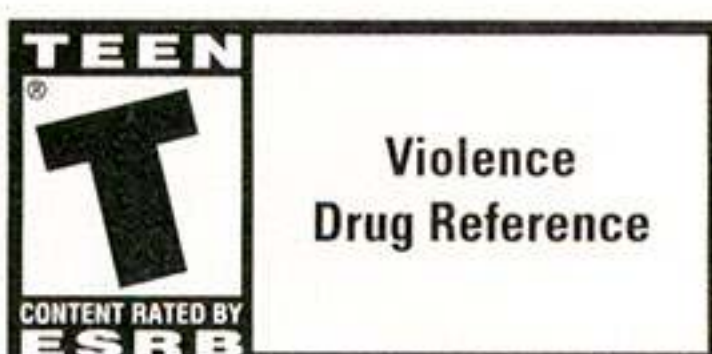
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BONUS GALLERY

Going the extra mile for love of the game



Joan of Arcade

To welcome candidates into our Catholic youth group community, we all dressed up in costumes. Of course, I jumped at the chance to pay tribute to arcade classic *Arkanoid*.

—Franco Chan

But does it double as a confession booth? Regardless, the end is nigh.



Hot seat

Behold my masterpiece, built for the sole purpose of playing *Gran Turismo 4*. It houses a true T-frame racing seat complete with a Mazda RX-7 slider, along with a Logitech Driving Force Pro wheel, and is constructed entirely from aluminum. Oh, and it's set up in front of a 50" Panasonic LCD screen.

—Joe Corona



Pixel painter

If gaming wasn't already a form of art, it will be...now that I'm concentrating on doing a series of drawings and paintings about gaming culture. Here's to the art history books of the future that'll showcase *Metal Gear Solid's* influence and innovation.

—Bobby Charalampidis



Mad hatter

I've been crafting, crocheting, and costuming for years, and when I came across the cute and quirky *Katamari Damacy*, I had to make a hat. Since people seem to want them, I've decided to sell some. Prices, ordering info, and eBay notices are at www.mad-teaparty.net.

—Xiola

► last year. I chose the 4:3 screen over the 16:9, but I'm wondering if I made the right long-term choice. Most movies are already made in widescreen format, and with high-definition DVD on the horizon, how long can it be before console games make the same leap to a higher dedicated standard? Are 4:3 televisions an endangered species where gaming is concerned, or will Sony, Microsoft, and Nintendo continue to play it safe with all of us who own the old standard?

—Aaron Marshall

You can have the best of both worlds either way, since 4:3 televisions usually have a widescreen mode and vice versa. But looking ahead, 16:9 is probably the way to go. Of course, no game will require it, but more and more are taking advantage of it.

Blockbusted

Two weeks ago, I tried renting *Prince of Persia: Warrior Within* for GameCube, but the

cashier carded me (I'm a minor). One week later, I tried my luck again—same game, same location, but the Xbox version instead—and guess what? They let me rent it! In other words, they automatically assume us GameCube owners are underage.

—John Kurelek

Sure, John, but didn't you just say that you are underage?

Shop talk

At one time, I could drop by a mom-and-pop game shop and shoot the breeze with fellow fanboys. Nowadays, it's all presales, warranties, magazine subs, and discount cards. I can't walk into a major retailer without some on-commission clerk shoving offers in my face. Back then, we were fellow enthusiasts; today, they're only enthusiastic about taking my money.

—Giunta Core

Have you preordered the new *Legend of Zelda* yet?

April foolery part 1

Boy, I can't wait for the first of April so I can preorder the new *Legend of Zelda* and get that wicked remade *Wind Waker* bonus [See last issue—Ed.]. I won't sleep the night before, but luckily the denuded *Dead or Alive: Xtreme Beach Volleyball* gals will be there to keep me company, and I'll probably kill time (and Sonic and Tails) by firing up *Super Smash Bros. Melee*, too. Then, when it's time to go, I'll put on my trusty GameShortz and race to the neighborhood GameCrazy like Gandalf on a runaway go-kart.

—Kyo Locke

April foolery part 2

I hate you! I actually fell for your April Fools' gag (getting a graphically updated *The Wind Waker* with a *Zelda* preorder). EB Games' clerks looked at me like I was an idiot when I asked 'em about it. I felt like an even bigger bozo when I went home to reread the story and realized I'd been had.

—Josh

April foolery part 3

When I saw the April article about the *Zelda* bonus disc, I was elated, ecstatic even. But the more I thought about it, the more I thought, "They're yanking my chain." The more I thought about that, the more I thought about yanking the rip cord of my chain saw and laying waste to your offices. Heartless jerks.

—Jon W

Oops!

Butt cheeks, breasts, blunts, the F-bomb—scanning the Sunny Logo cell phone accessories ad in *EGM* #190 was a lot like browsing the back room at Spencer Gifts. What happened? Our sales team approved one page, only to have the advertiser slip in something entirely different to another department that missed the not-so-PG-rated contents. We've since changed our policy to prevent similar snafus from happening in future issues and apologize to anyone we've offended.

GAME DESIGN-O-RAMA

Got proof that game design is best left to the pros? Send your concept (with art) to EGM@ziffdavis.com, subject: design-o-rama



PRESIDENT EVIL: 4 MORE YEARS

Provided with a possibly corrupt cabinet's sketchy intelligence, U.S. President George W. Bush investigates a remote, ramshackle hamlet for weapons of mass destruction. Once inside, the commander in chief makes a startling discovery....

—Jason Lee

God knows what horrors await the beleaguered man, but judging by the box, we'd say a guerrilla *Photoshop* lab of some sort.



■ You bought the *San Andreas* Sasquatch gag but called BS on this?

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PlayStation 2



LIVE IN YOUR WORLD.
PLAY IN OURS.



PlayStation 2

FIRST LOOK: SOUL CALIBUR III

Publisher: Namco
Developer: Namco
Release Date: Fall 2005

Soul survivor

Fighting-game fans know that *Soul Calibur* feels better than most other fighters, but can they actually explain *why*? Luckily, the game's producer can: "We have a staff of human-movement experts who animate each character and a separate team that incorporates these moves into the game, matching intuitive controls to them and drawing out the uniqueness of each character's combat style," says *Soul Calibur III* Producer Hiroaki Yotoriyama. "Finally, another team adjusts and optimizes it all in order to ensure balance. It seems easy when I explain it, but the process wouldn't be possible without effective coordination between the entire staff." But the perfectionism pays off: Even the second *Soul Calibur*'s blade-based martial artistry is still unsurpassed—and that's in a marketplace where feature-packed *Tekken 5* drop-kicks jaws to the dojo floor and *Dead or Alive Ultimate* dishes up semi-nude minxes (not to mention photo-realistic 3D elephants).

Stellar gameplay might be the series' secret weapon, but cool visual trappings are crucial, too. *Soul Calibur III* will further up the ante for the series, with bizarre new characters and lush, beautiful fighting arenas. "We've greatly improved presentation and style," Yotoriyama says. "Environments are much more expressive and dynamic, with destructible walls and floors." But while the producer

is happy to talk about how his team does what it does, he's tight-lipped about the *what* and *why*. Why, for instance, no online support? Why is the game for PS2 only, when *Soul Calibur II* for GameCube outsold the version on Sony's system?

We did, however, dig up this much: *Soul Calibur III*'s cast will feature every character from previous installments in the series, including big brute Rock, crackerjack Chinese swordsman Hwang, and prissy French fencer Raphael (who, if you're following the yarn about possessed souls and stuff, reigned supreme at the close of the last chapter) along with never-before-seen bruisers Zasalamel (Gesundheit!), Tira, and Setsuka. Again, Yotoriyama would rather the world "see it with their own eyes" at this May's E3 games expo in Los Angeles, but we're expecting the unexpected.

While other fighters' hardened hooligans are often variations on a few familiar themes, *Soul Calibur*'s tend to please players of all temperaments and tastes. And if none of these fit your favored style of swordplay, you can make your own, selecting sex, costumes, and specialty weapons. "It's definitely unlike any fighting game you've seen before. It's incredible," says Yotoriyama, "I promise."

—Shawn Elliott

Setsuka

She can really accessorize: Her parasol becomes a sword.

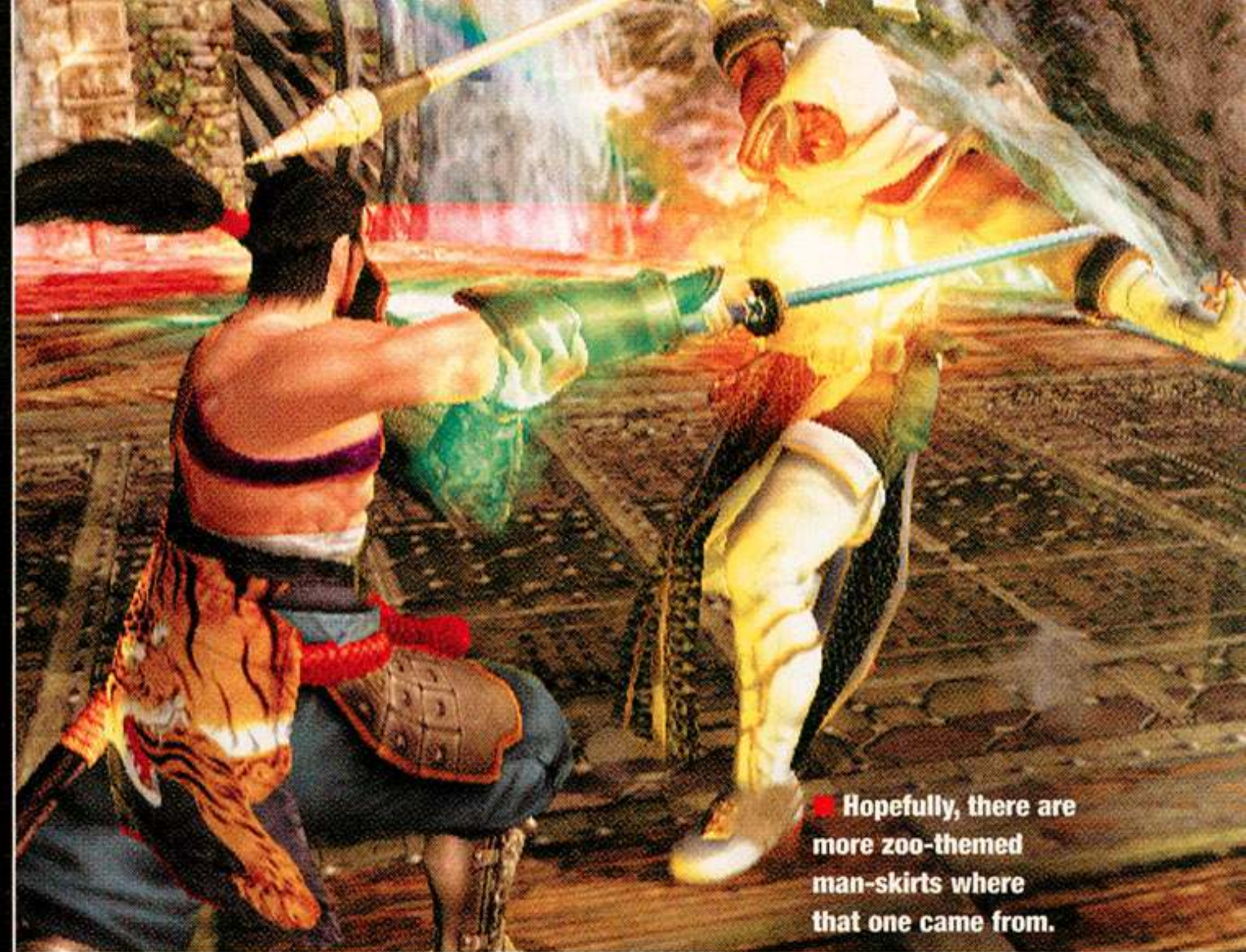
Tira

This Cirque du Soleil-ish gal wields a deadly circular blade.

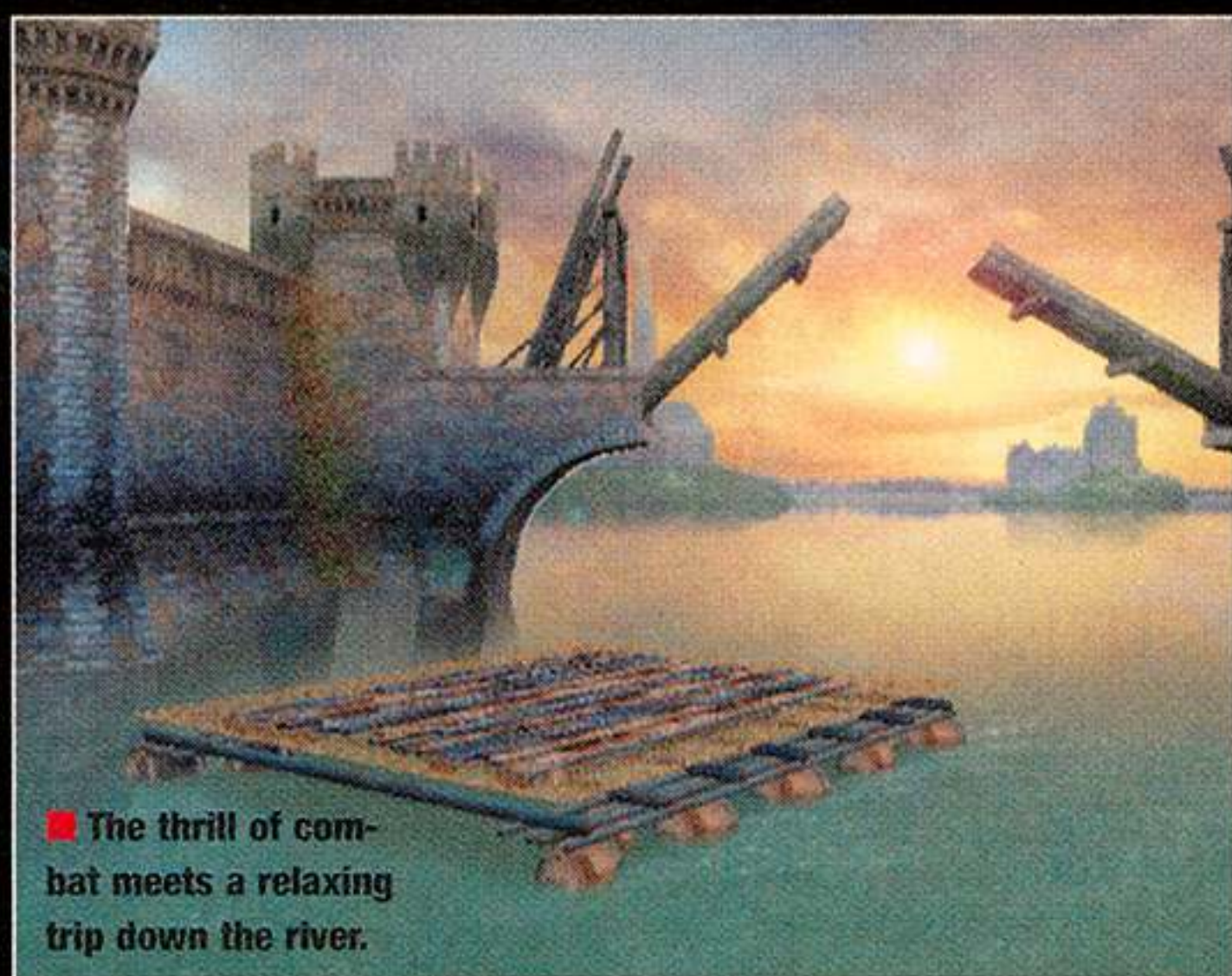




■ New to *Soul Calibur III*: breakable walls and floors.



■ Hopefully, there are more zoo-themed man-skirts where that one came from.



■ The thrill of combat meets a relaxing trip down the river.



■ It's good to see that Taki hasn't clued in to the fact that Lycra went outta style in 1986.



Don't Like These Characters? Make Your Own.

Take it from *Tekken 5* (page 130): Grooming tough guys with tribal tats and designer gear is so now. Rumor has it that *Soul Calibur III*'s story mode takes the trend a side step further, letting fighting fashionistas build and beautify their own characters (as if S&M model Voldo needed a makeover) with an assortment of specialty weapons, warrior couture, and even combat styles nicked from the already available cast. Imagine long-legged Ivy in Voldo's exhibitionist stances and hold that thought.

Zasalamel

A one-eyed Moorish knight with a scythe? Sure, why not.





NHL GAMES ON ICE?

How the NHL lockout is affecting next season's hockey titles

The National Hockey League is calling it quits...for now. After a bitter 153-day lockout in which players and team owners couldn't come to a labor agreement, NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman canceled the entire season. And with the 2005-06 season still very much in question, there's concern that some companies will stop creating new hockey games.

Well, puck fans, you can rest easy: Even if there's no pro hockey to watch this fall, there will be plenty of action on your console's frozen pond. "The [NHL] lockout is not affecting our future prod-

ucts as much as people think," says Electronic Arts' David Littman, a member of the *NHL* development team. "We are currently working on *NHL 2006* and trying to make it the most fun and authentic hockey game that we can." 2K Games, maker of the *NHL 2K* series, is also going ahead as planned. "It's really unfortunate that the lockout had to happen," says 2K Games Project Manager Ben Bishop. "But we are deep into designing new features and modes to maintain the best hockey game on any console." Seems like the NHL could learn a thing or two from these devoted developers.... —Todd Zuniga

Has the NHL lockout soured you on the next batch of hockey games?

58%

Totally—my \$50 will be spent elsewhere



42%

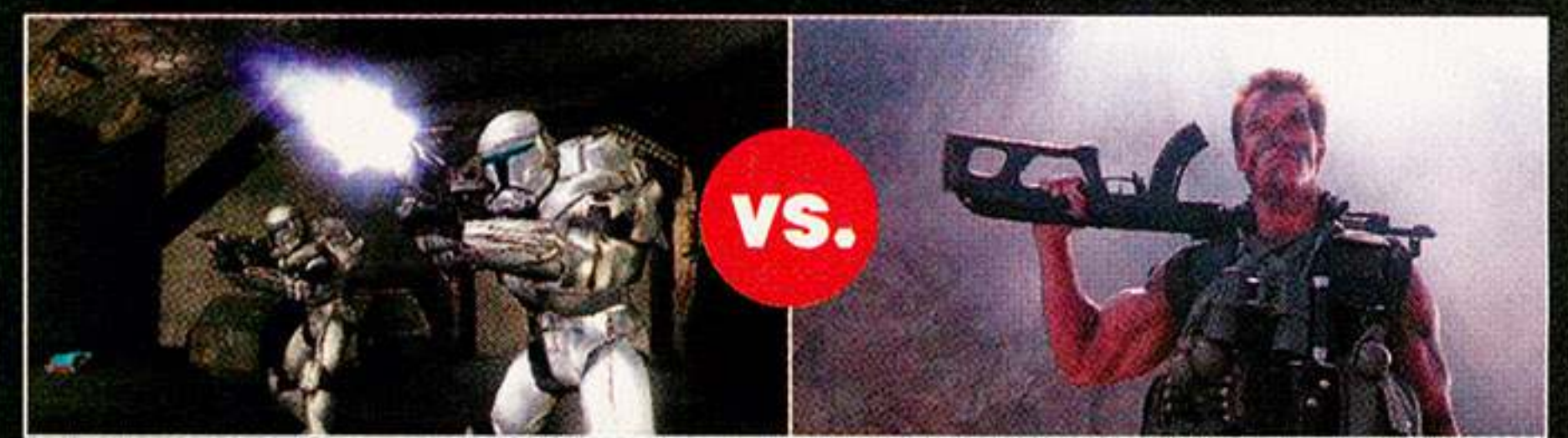
Heck no—see you at center ice

Source: 1UP.com poll, 2/05

Photograph by Craig Jones/Getty Images

GRUDGE MATCH

Goin' commando



STAR WARS: REPUBLIC COMMANDO

ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER IN COMMANDO

Around these parts, we don't take the title of "commando" lightly. It's a rank you've got to earn through excessive military posturing and implausible killing sprees. So to see if LucasArts' new squad-based shooter is worthy of the name it claims, we're going to the ultimate source: pre-gubernatorial AHHHHHOLD.

TIME LINE

| | | | |
|--|--|--|---|
| | Conceptually unpredictable period between <i>Episode II</i> and <i>III</i> | | Awesome period between <i>Conan</i> and <i>Total Recall</i> Advantage: Arnold |
|--|--|--|---|

BACKUP

| | | | |
|--|---------------------------------|--|--|
| | Three other Jango Fett-ish pals | | Spunky stewardess with a rocket launcher Advantage: Arnold |
|--|---------------------------------|--|--|

ABILITIES

| | | | |
|--|----------------------------------|--|--|
| | Commanding allies with the D-pad | | Mass murder, bulldozing for fun and profit Advantage: Arnold |
|--|----------------------------------|--|--|

OPPOSITION

| | | | |
|--|---|--|---|
| | General Grievous. Get it? His name's <i>Grievous</i> and he's a bad guy Advantage: Draw | | Mesh-wearing ex-friend turned fabulously evil Advantage: Draw |
|--|---|--|---|

AS A GAME

| | |
|--|--|
| <i>Halo</i> , <i>Metroid Prime</i> , and <i>SOCOM</i> meet <i>Star Wars</i> Advantage: Star Wars | If it existed, we'd keep replaying the part where the guy gets an ax in the nuts |
|--|--|

WINNER: ARNOLD

You have to be ready to fail if you go up against the one-man army that is commando John Matrix...especially when he spouting lines such as "I eat Green Berets for breakfast, and I'm very hungry right now!"

NEWS TIDBITS: PROOF THAT BIGGER ISN'T ALWAYS BETTER

TIME 01'17"344 SPEED 84km/h
BEST 01'09"264

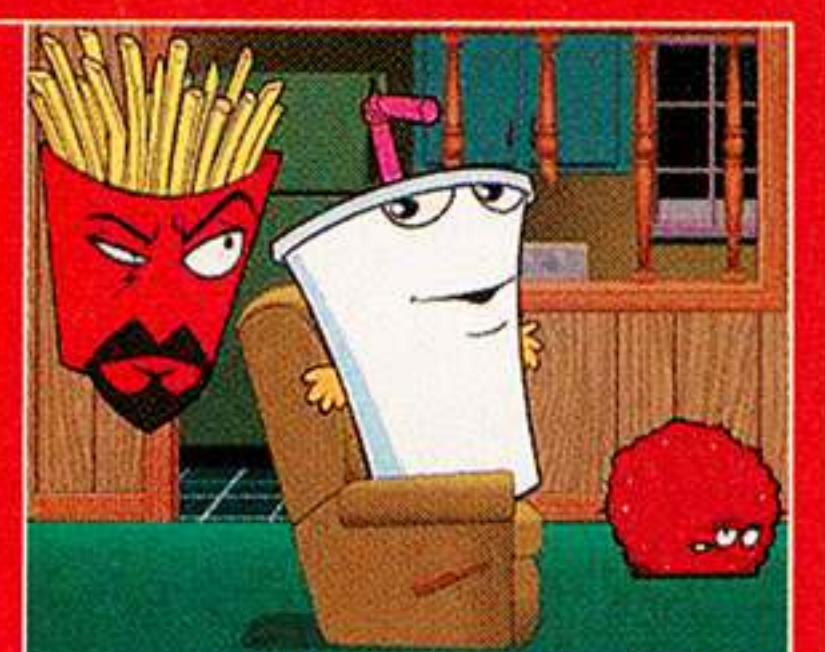


Tighten Those Bindings

Talk about milking a game's popularity for all it's worth—later this year, Square Enix will make *Final Fantasy VII Snowboarding* available for mobile phones. You may remember this as a minigame in the PS1 role-playing classic, in which the spiky-haired hero Cloud could hit the slopes while visiting the Gold Saucer amusement park.

Game Systems Get All Mature

Midway continues to expand its software lineup, as it recently acquired the rights to make games based on a handful of programs from Cartoon Network's Adult Swim block, including *Aqua Teen Hunger Force*, *Sealab 2021*, and *Space Ghost Coast to Coast*. Look for the first titles to arrive sometime in '06.



ALL 4 ONE. ONE 4 ALL.



UNTOLD LEGENDS

BROTHERHOOD of the BLADE



Action RPG Combat

Wield your blade and cast powerful spells in this action-packed, hack 'n' slash RPG.



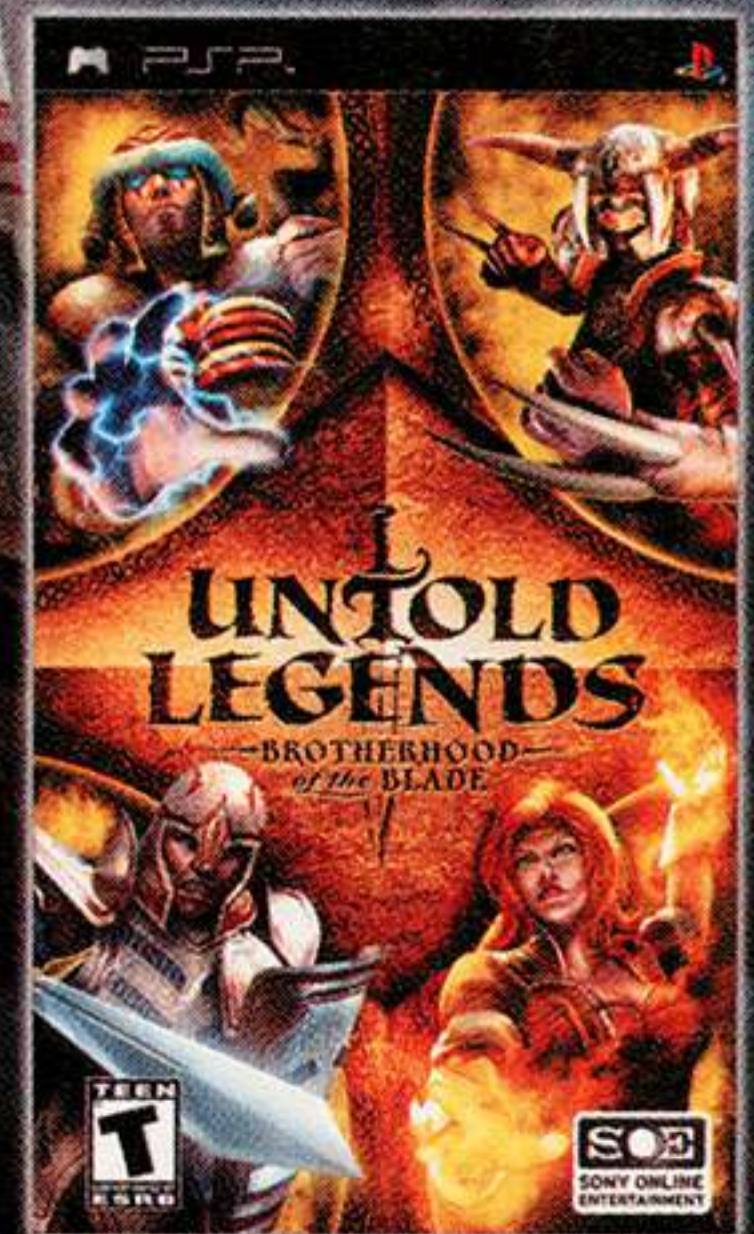
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PS2/XB/GC

FIRST LOOK: **SHADOW** THE HEDGEHOG

Publisher: Sega
Developer: Sega Studio U.S.A.
Release Date: Fall 2005

Sonic loses his lock on the lead role

Sega Studio U.S.A.'s Takashi Iizuka smiles wanly before debuting the first footage of *Shadow the Hedgehog*. At first, Iizuka wants to see EGM's reaction to the video, but curiosity overtakes him and he scrambles around the conference table to check out the footage again for himself. The most surprising thing about the game—besides the fact that Shadow, not Sonic, is the star—is that this mascot's packing heat.

Yes, *Shadow the Hedgehog* is *Sonic* gameplay blended with a darker style, courtesy of the series' antihero. "The goal of the team was to bring Shadow to the forefront and present his history and let the users know what he's all about," Iizuka notes. It's obvious that Sega hopes to capture a slightly older, more sophisticated audience with this game. Who can blame it? The moodier style of Sony's *Jak II* certainly attracted attention.

Clearly, narrative will play a bigger role in this adventure than it has in the previous *Sonic* games. We know that Shadow was originally the product of a dark experiment designed to engineer the ultimate life-form—which apparently is a prickly, angsty fur ball in the *Sonic* world—and that this game's tale will delve deeply into his true nature. According to Iizuka, "Many people find Shadow as appealing as Sonic." That explains his bump up from special guest star to leading man.

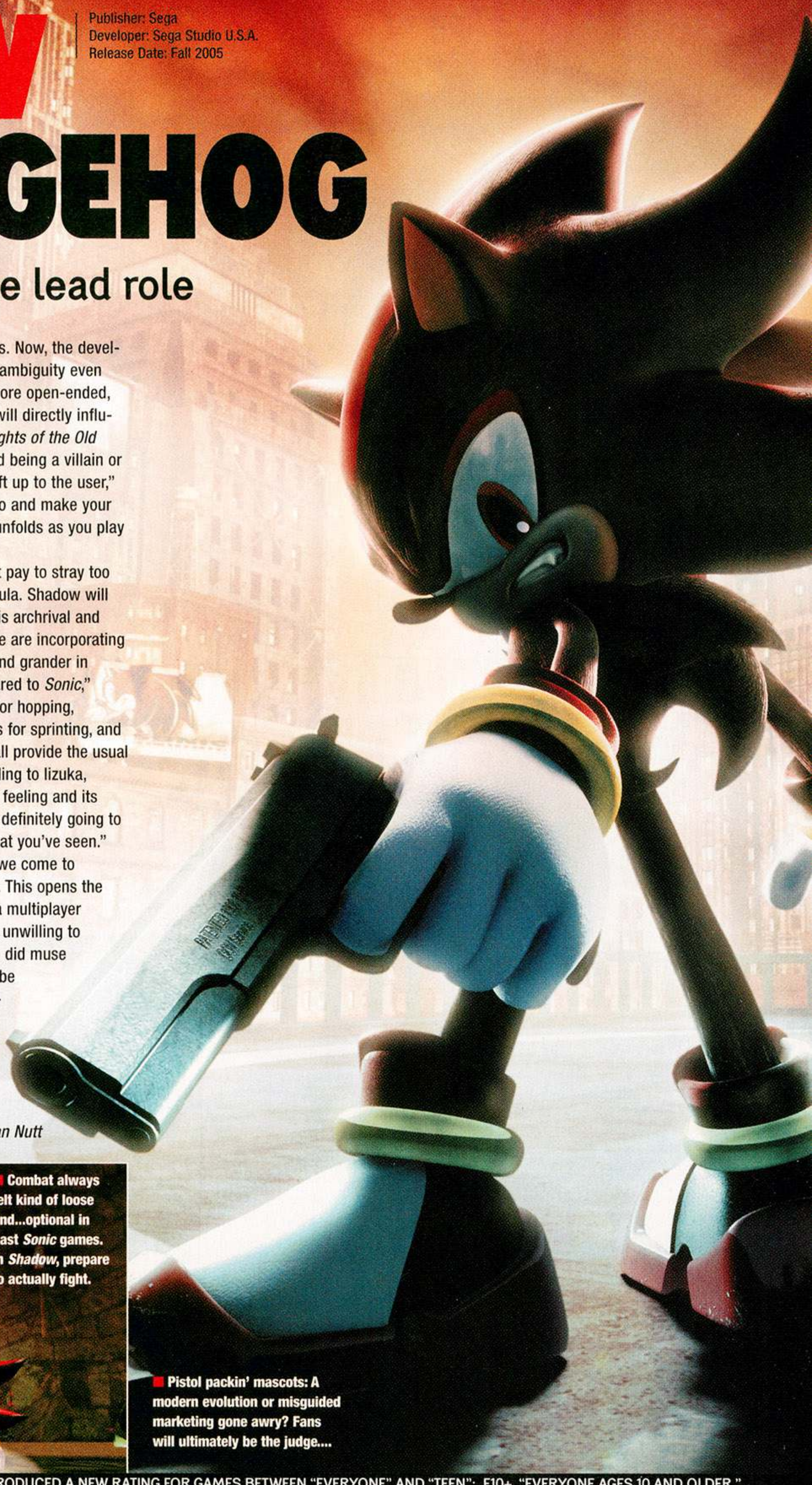
Starting with *Sonic Adventure 2*, the *Sonic* series has offered choices between

"hero" and "dark" paths. Now, the developers are pushing that ambiguity even further. Game flow is more open-ended, and Shadow's actions will directly influence the story, à la *Knights of the Old Republic*. "Going toward being a villain or being a hero—that's left up to the user," says Iizuka. "You just go and make your own decisions...and it unfolds as you play the game."

Of course, it wouldn't pay to stray too far from the *Sonic* formula. Shadow will have all the moves of his archrival and more. "With *Shadow*, we are incorporating things that are bigger and grander in terms of powers compared to *Sonic*," Iizuka adds. Platforms for hopping, wickedly curving spirals for sprinting, and obstacles for avoiding all provide the usual challenges—but according to Iizuka, "Each level has its own feeling and its own way of play, so it's definitely going to be a departure from what you've seen."

And then, of course, we come to Shadow's new sidearm. This opens the delicious possibility of a multiplayer mode. While Iizuka was unwilling to confirm or deny this, he did muse that "it would probably be really fun to play death-match with more than one player...we'll leave it at that." Hey, it worked for *Ratchet & Clank*, right?

—Christian Nutt



■ **Combat** always felt kind of loose and...optional in past *Sonic* games. In *Shadow*, prepare to actually fight.

■ **Pistol packin' mascots:** A modern evolution or misguided marketing gone awry? Fans will ultimately be the judge....

>> THE ENTERTAINMENT SOFTWARE RATING BOARD HAS RECENTLY INTRODUCED A NEW RATING FOR GAMES BETWEEN "EVERYONE" AND "TEEN": E10+, "EVERYONE AGES 10 AND OLDER."

SONIC SPIN-OFF HIGH JINKS

Shadow isn't the first spin-off in Sonic's 14-year history...



Sonic R

Platforms: Saturn, PC

Genre: Racing

Memorable feature: European pop soundtrack—with vocals!

Lasting legacy: Racing games are fun, but footrace games...not so much. Neither this nor a similar PS1 title, *Running Wild*, found many fans.



Knuckles Chaotix

Platform: Sega 32X

Genre: Platformer

Memorable feature: Playing as two mascots tied together. Kinky.

Lasting legacy: *Chaotix's* third-rate costars faded into obscurity...until the whole motley crew reunited in *Sonic Heroes*. Shame about that.



Tails Adventures

Platform: Game Gear

Genre: Platformer

Memorable feature: Imagine *Sonic*, but slower...and starring a dippy fox.

Lasting legacy: Somehow this chirpy fox went on to star in other games like *Tails' Sky Patrol* and *Tails & the Music Maker*. A travesty, really.



■ **Shadow's** constant gunplay will likely earn the game a Teen ESRB rating.

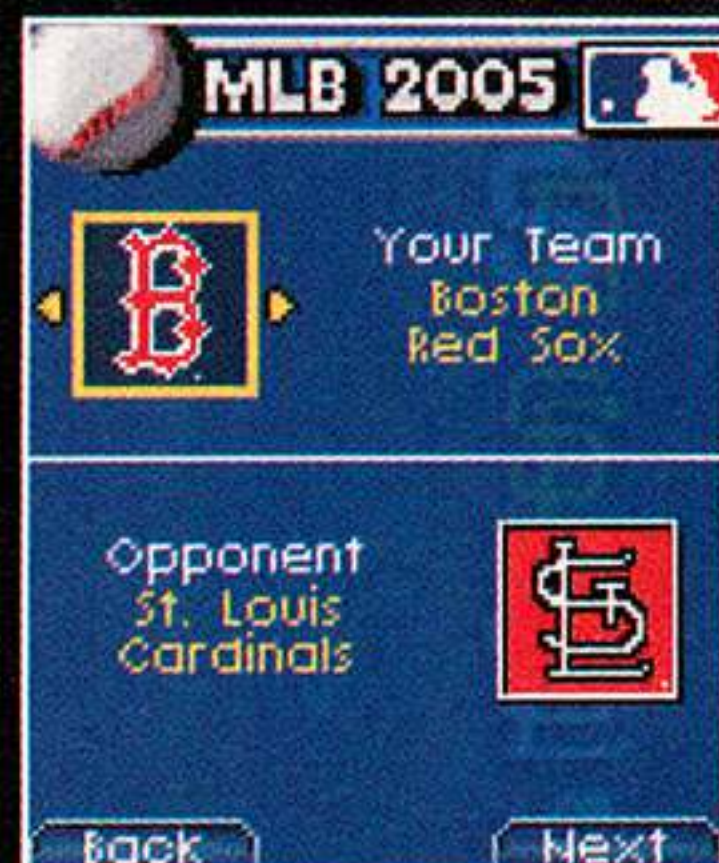


■ Expect **Shadow's** level design to feel a bit less linear than that in past *Sonics*.

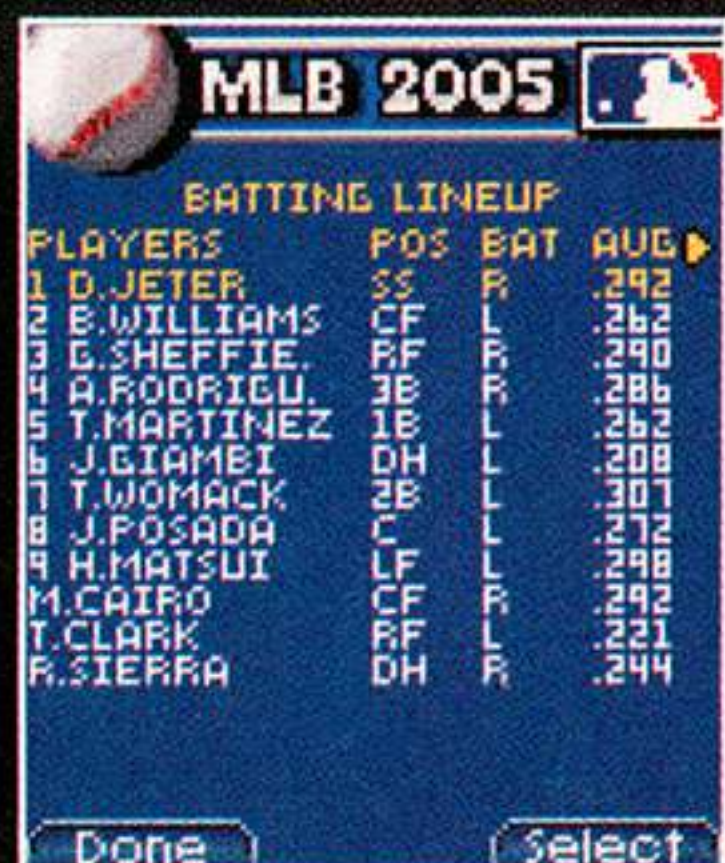


WHAT GAMES WILL GET THIS RATING? ESRB PREZ PATRICIA VANCE SAYS, "...RACING GAMES WITH MORE EXTREME CRASHES OR FIGHTING GAMES WITH SUPEREROES." UHH, OK.... >>

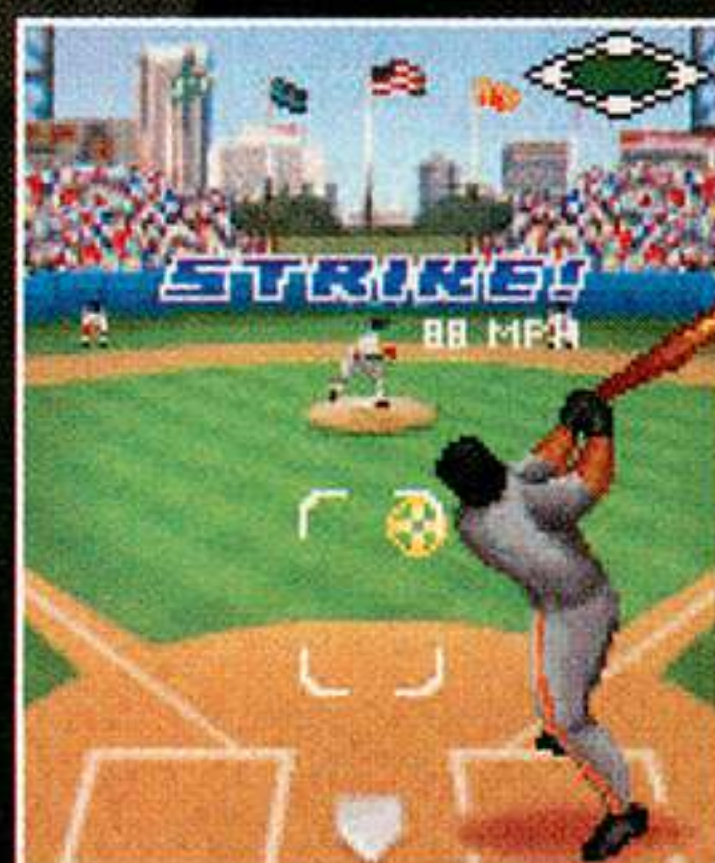
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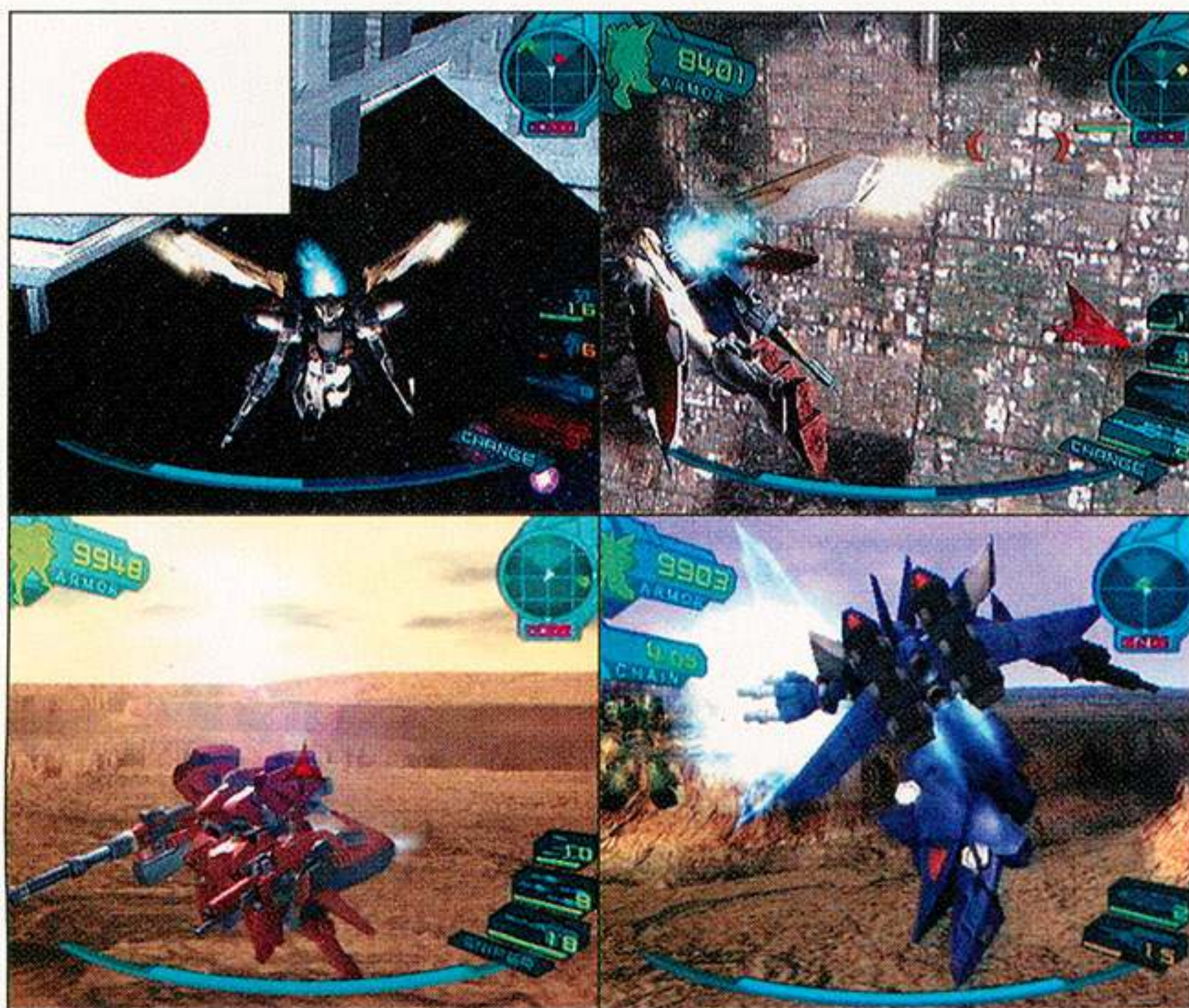
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press start

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Nobody understands me except for my robot



■ PS2

A.C.E.: ANOTHER CENTURY'S EPISODE

What's so ace about A.C.E.? Well, it's the first robot game in recent memory that isn't a strategy sim and, more importantly, it's actually a bit of fun to play. Imagine *Zone of the Enders* (PS2) with licensed mechanical hulks from nine different anime series (*Gundam* and *Brain Powered*, just to name a few), and you'll get a sense of A.C.E. Sure, the graphics don't quite match *ZOE's*, but the lightning-fast gameplay here (courtesy of the *Armored Core* folks) more than makes up the difference.

Does it have a snowball's chance in hell of coming here? Tough to say: Although *Armored Core* has a die-hard American fan base, the complex licensing behind A.C.E.'s lineup could make it hard for any U.S. publisher to touch.



■ GBA

SUPER ROBOT WARS: ORIGINAL GENERATION 2

An arcadey robot game? That's not hardcore enough! Then how about the latest in the *Super Robot Wars* series—the ultimate shrine to robot freaks worldwide packed into a convenient strategy-RPG form and released in Japan at the rate of one every nine months? The "Original Generation" subtitle means that this game doesn't use any licensed characters. Rather, it's a whole new story, with 38 different robot units and enough depth to rival the most hyperdetailed of war games.

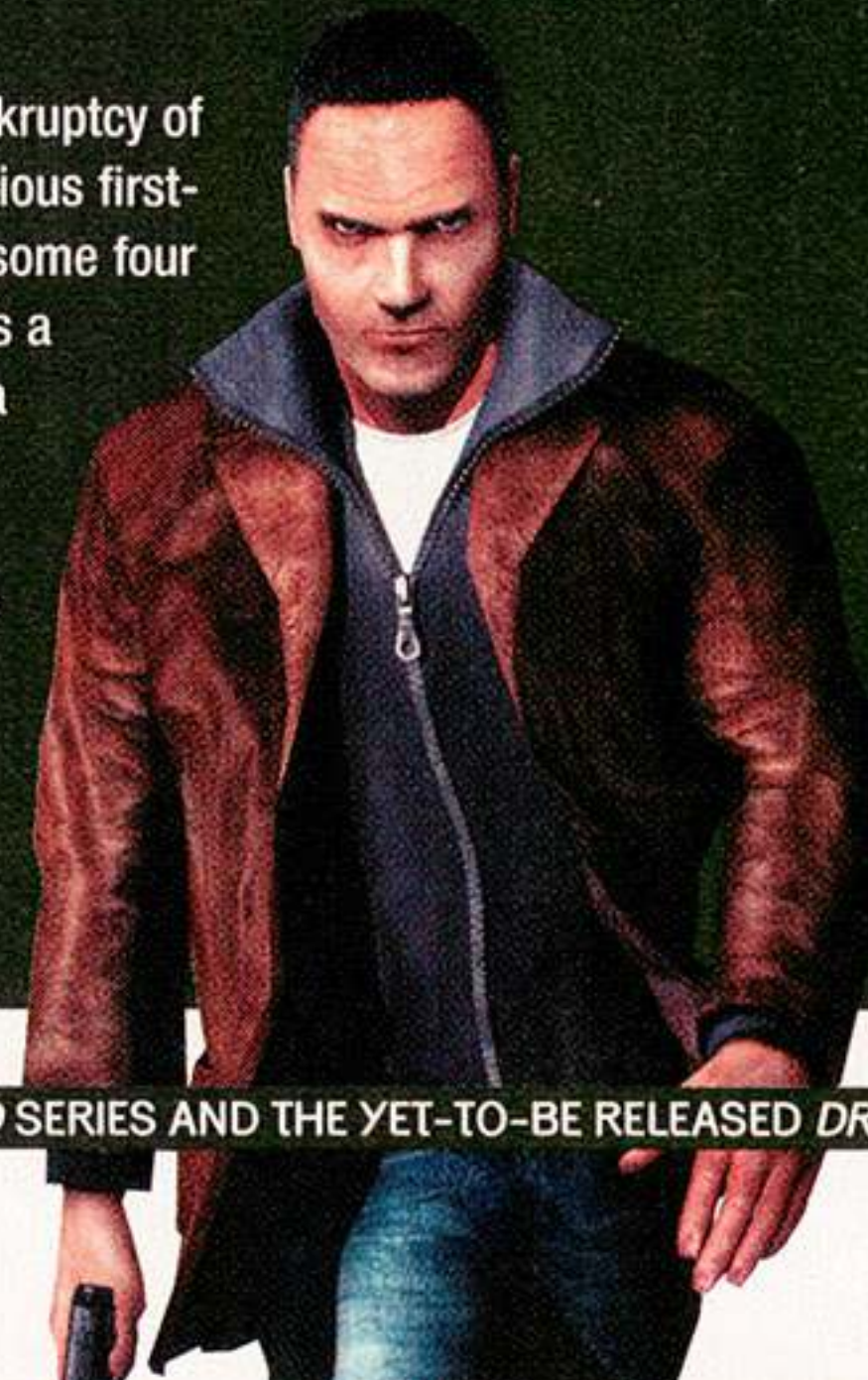
That'd make it easier to release here, right? Sure, but even if *Original Generation 2* doesn't make it Stateside, the game is so visually impressive that it's worth importing.

UNDER THE RADAR

Platform: PlayStation 2
Publisher: Sierra
Developer: Swordfish
Release Date: April 2005

COLD WINTER

After several damaging delays (including the bankruptcy of the original developer, Rage Software), this ambitious first-person shooter will finally see release this April, some four years after the project began. *Winter* casts you as a British MI6 agent caught spying in China—after a daring escape, you must find your way to safety. Detailed environments, real-life weapons, and acutely intelligent enemies make it a tense game of survival, and the ability to target (and messily blow away) specific body parts imparts a gritty, gory sense of realism. Factor in fast-paced, customizable online action for up to eight players, and this could be a serious sleeper hit...



WHAT'S PLAYING IN THE

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

Man alive, is this the deadliest time of the year on the computer side of things. But since I'm a "glass is half full" kind of guy, I'm gonna use this software drought to go back and catch up on the PC titles I might have missed.

Painkiller



Why do they call it *Painkiller*? Because no other game blunts the serrated edge of existential angst quite like this orgy of sweet carnage. DreamCatcher's first-person shooter stays competitive with the likes of *Half-Life 2* and *Doom 3* thanks to its gorgeous, incredibly inventive level design, an extra circle of hell's worth of insane monsters, and the best set of weapons since the original *Half-Life*. Also, optional per-level goals and a strategic tarot card subgame add some much-needed challenge and depth to *Painkiller*.

The Sims 2: University



Playing this one doesn't so much let me catch up on EA's life sim as it lets me rediscover it. The first in the inevitable five years of expansion packs, *University* probably adds more meaningful content than all the add-ons for the first *Sims* combined. There's a whole new life age, a ton of new behaviors (including a bunch of pranks), new careers, objects...the list goes on and on. The only notable omission: no "Thank you, sir, may I have another" fraternity paddle initiations. Oh well, at least I can now enjoy zombies and a man-eating cow plant. Seriously.

—Robert Coffey,
Computer Gaming World

>> DEVELOPER LEVEL 5, MAKER OF THE DARK CLOUD SERIES AND THE YET-TO-BE RELEASED DRAGON QUEST VIII, SAYS IT IS NOW WORKING ON NEW RPGS FOR BOTH PS2 AND PSP... >>>

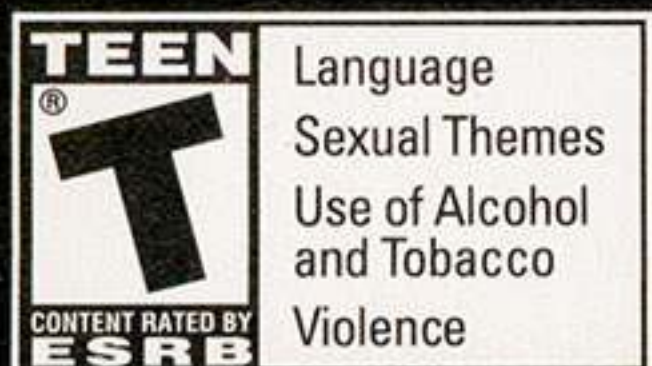
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PlayStation 2

SOCOM 3

Publisher: Sony CEA
Developer: Zipper Interactive
Release Date: Fall 2005

Buckle up and dive in

Everyone always complains about games that teach you how to kill—like it's a *bad* thing.

What about *SOCOM*? According to developer Zipper Interactive, for every five recruits who attempt the rigorous training required to become a member of the U.S. Navy SEALs—the all-weather badasses sent on the clandestine missions too hairy for regular soldiers—three are there because they've played Sony's popular squad shooter, either online or off.

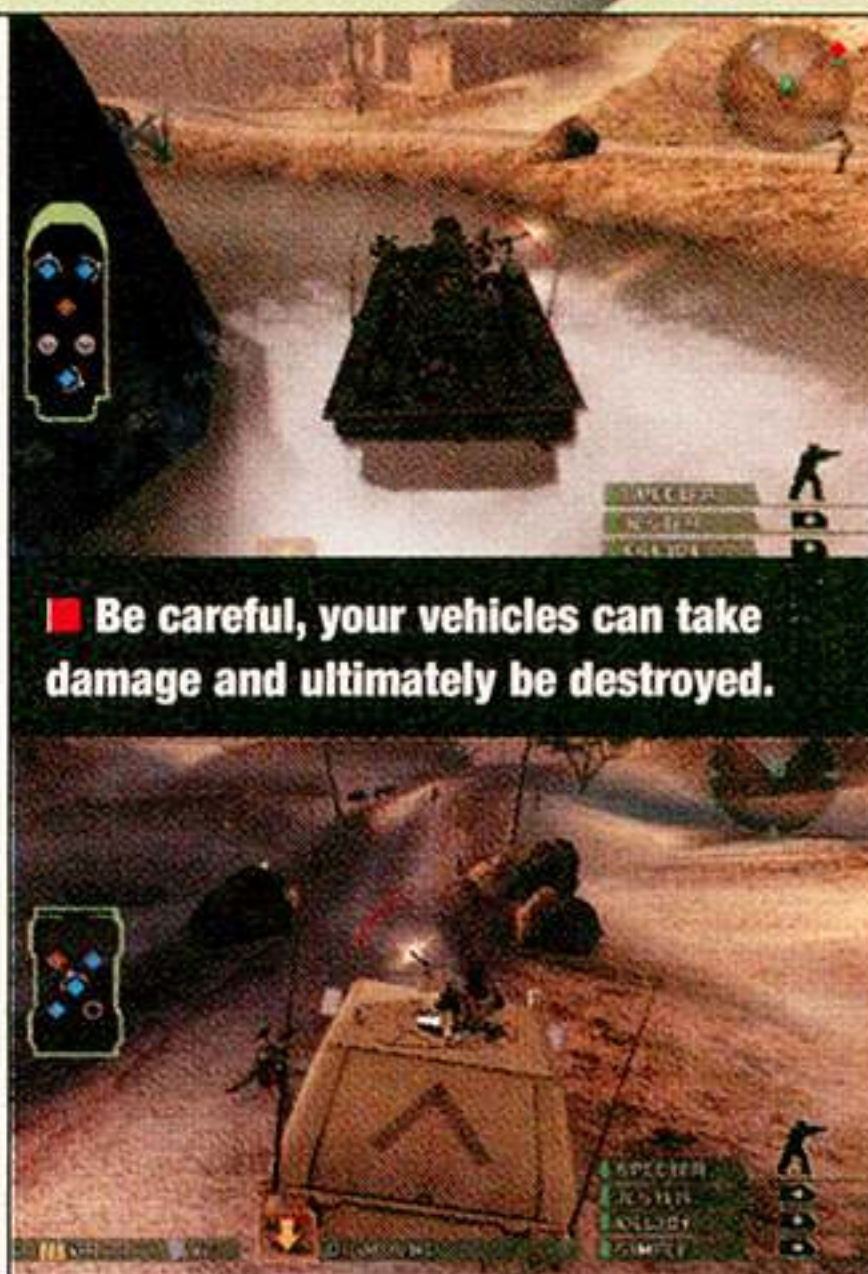
And that's a good thing. In addition to understanding the value of a good stealth kill and a solid head shot, *SOCOM* vets already know how to work as a team, issuing orders to squadmates (via menus or the optional USB headset), rescuing hostages, rigging explosives—the sort of stuff that keeps our real-life world safe (for us good guys, anyway). So what's left for future trainees and armchair commandos to learn this fall when *SOCOM 3* hits the PS2? Plenty:



Swamp Thing is back...and he's pissed.

License to Drive

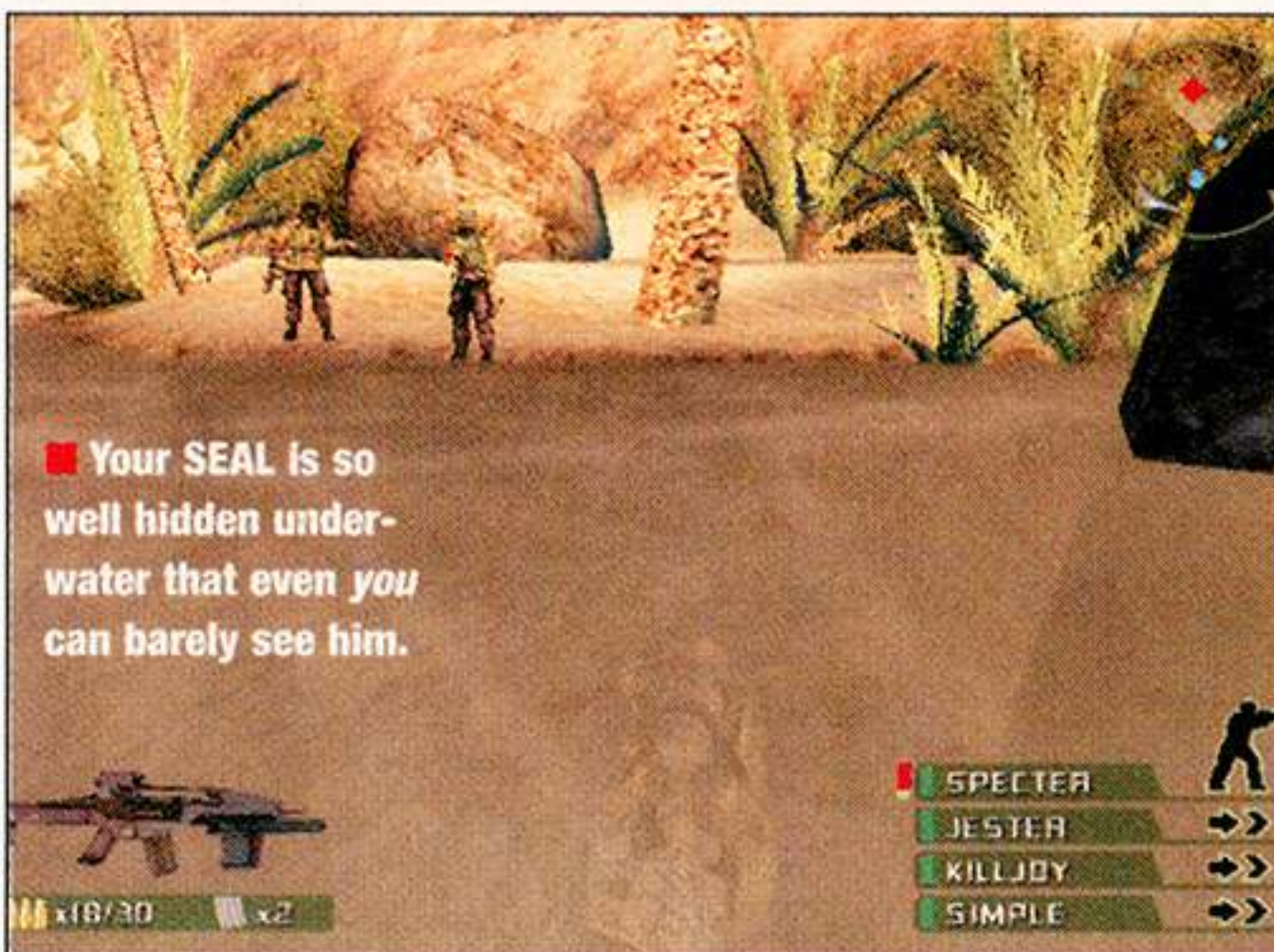
"Vehicles have been something people have wanted since the first *SOCOM*," says designer Scott Rudi, "and we're finally getting them in." Players can get behind the wheels (and guns) of almost 20 mean machines: dune buggies, Hummers, boats, even (yes!) tanks. If you get tired of driving, you can always let one of your A.I. squadmates take over the wheel while you man a turret, but Rudi says *SOCOM 3* never turns into the typical on-rails shooting gallery. "*Call of Duty* said they have vehicles and you end up, like, riding in the backseat of a Volkswagen for two missions," he says. "That's not us. If you want to stop and get out [at any time] it's no problem."



Be careful, your vehicles can take damage and ultimately be destroyed.

Sink or Swim

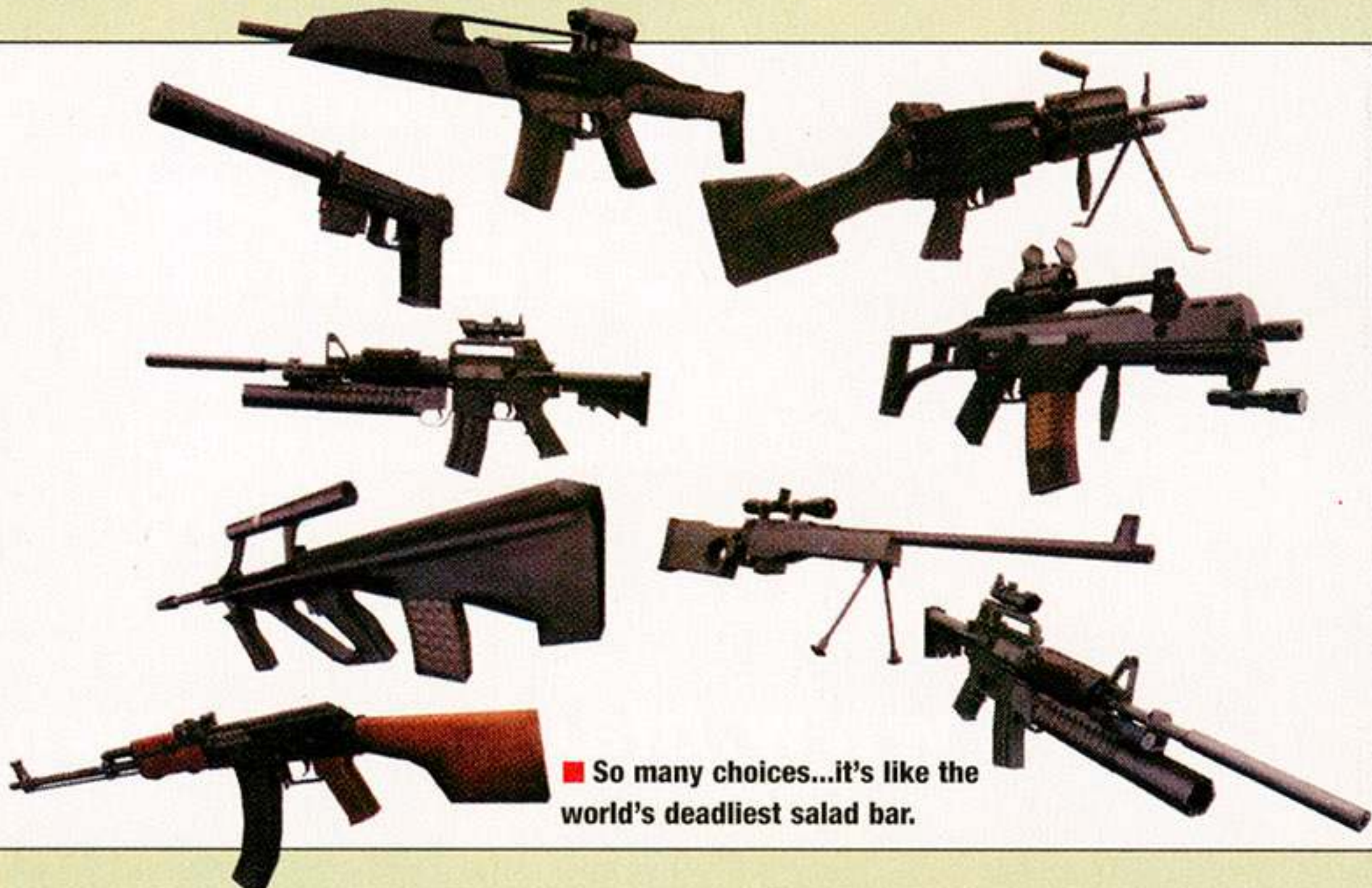
Being comfortable in the water is a big part of what separates SEALs from other Special Forces units—candidates must be able to swim 500 yards in under 12 minutes before they spend nine weeks learning how to SCUBA dive (they are called SEALs, after all). But *SOCOM 3* is the first game in the series that actually lets you get your feet wet. Walk right into rivers and lakes to wade across them or submerge yourself and move to avoid being seen.



Your SEAL is so well hidden underwater that even you can barely see him.

Customize Your Loadout

SOCOM has always offered a choice of various tools to get the job done—pistols, rifles (silenced and otherwise), shotguns, you name it. But now you can actually trick out your guns just how you like 'em, Burger King style. Equip your trusty M4A1 assault rifle with your choice of a laser sight, pistol grip, suppressor, grenade launcher, bipod, flashlight, thermal scope, etc. Of course, most of these attachments have the same drawback they would in real life—they weigh you down and cause you to move and aim more slowly.



So many choices...it's like the world's deadliest salad bar.

Other improvements include levels five times as large as those in *SOCOM II*, a checkpoint save system, bigger action scenes to balance out the stealth sections, and improved A.I.—your foes now fire around corners, retreat when in danger, and use civilian shields, while your buddies anticipate where you're going and can flank or lay down suppressing fire at your command.

The game still has a long way to go (expect online multiplayer details in the months to come), but the team promises they'll be working hard right up until release. After all, they have more than us virtual soldiers to please. "When you meet a Medal of Honor recipient and they ask for *your* autograph," says Zipper cofounder Jim Bosler, "that's pretty cool." —Mark MacDonald





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■ If you're gonna possess someone, go for a dude wielding a big goo gun.

■ GameCube

Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: n-Space
Release: May 2005

GEIST

Ghost in the machine

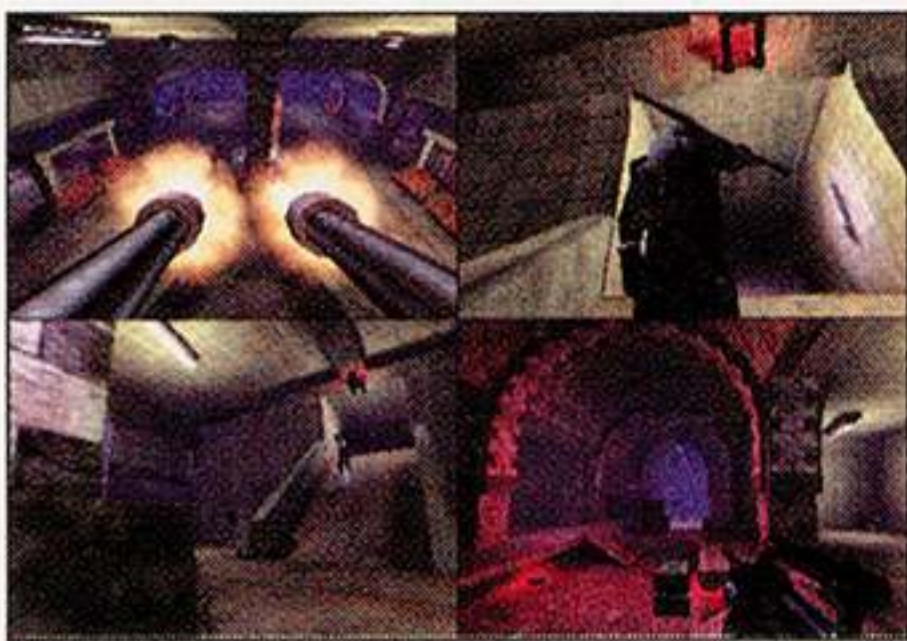
Like its titular ghostly protagonist, Nintendo's *Geist* continues to mystify gamers. Is it a first-person shooter? An adventure game? An inanimate-object simulator? Here's the premise: You're John Raimi, a government agent investigating the nefarious Volks corporation. Well, at least you were Raimi—after Volks agents capture, torture, and experiment on you, your spirit becomes severed from your body. Now, vengeance

is yours: Possess all manner of man, beast, and object to wreak some sweet revenge.

And although *Geist* may appear to be a first-person shooter, it's really much more. "If you come in expecting a generic FPS, you'll be shocked," explains Associate Producer Jeff Kallas. "It's truly a unique gameplay experience." Sure, you'll get some gunplay when you possess various guards and turrets, but often you'll be thinking, rather than shooting, your way out

of scrapes. The game's areas offer plenty of different things to inhabit—people, animals, computers, etc.—and players have an immense amount of freedom to figure out the best solution to each puzzle. "We really wanted the player to feel like the environment was alive," says Kallas.

With interlocking seamless levels, beefy bosses, tentacled alien invaders, and splitscreen versus action, *Geist* actually has a lot in common with Nintendo's other recent high-profile first-person adventure—*Metroid Prime 2: Echoes*. But hopefully, *Geist*'s four-player versus action will fare a bit better than Samus' disappointing first foray into deathmatching. "We have a bunch of cool, highly customizable modes that really take advantage of the possession concept," says Kallas. "I think gamers will be pleasantly surprised by how different the game feels."



OVERHEARD



"Why shouldn't I play *Mario Kart* online?"

It's a natural. I don't understand. It feels like rejecting what's obvious."

—Former Nintendo bigwig and current Microsoft Games manager Ken Lobb on the weaknesses of the Xbox's competition.

"No place for Hideo."

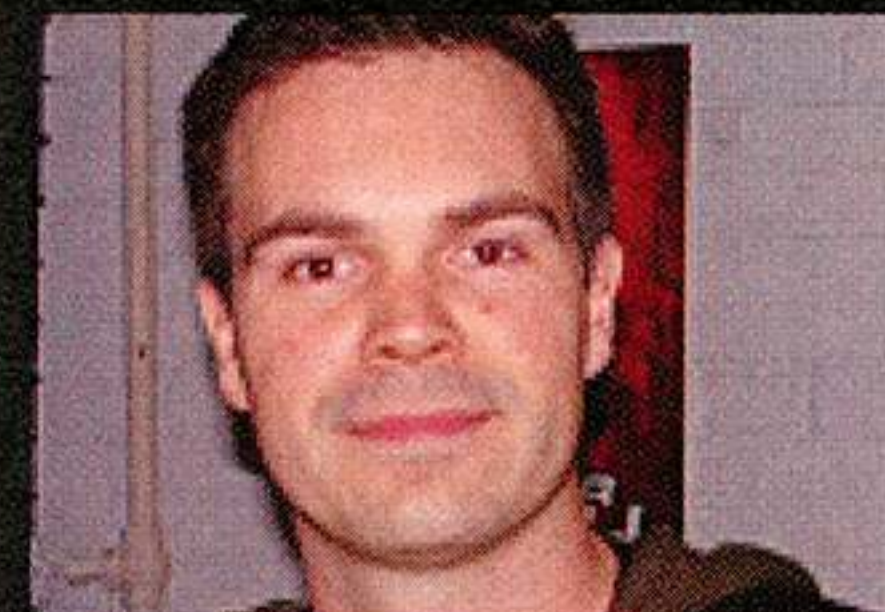
—After announcing that Metal Gear Solid 4's theme would be "No place to hide," MGS creator Hideo Kojima announces, in his own little way, that he will not be directing the game.

"The goal for the future is to eventually let people do more things like this."

—Sony Online spokesman Chris Kramer on a feature in the PC online RPG *EverQuest II* that allows players to order a Pizza Hut pizza from within the game. We're not sure if this is a great or terrible idea.



THE HOT SEAT



He's the shadowy figure behind the scenes, the guy who quietly delivered to us *Splinter Cell Chaos Theory* and all of its spy-thriller intrigue. We finally tracked him down, so this month, *Chaos Theory* Lead Producer Mathieu Ferland is the mark for our Hot Seat...

Secret Agent



James Bond Jason Bourne

MF: Even though Bourne has more skills, in the end, Bond always leaves with the girl.

Really Solid



Metal Gear Solid Metal Gear Solid 2 Metal Gear Solid 3

MF: The introduction of Raiden as the main playable character was a great idea. I like the guts of the concept.

Next-Gen Console



PS3 Xbox 2 Nintendo Revolution

MF: The games available will make the real difference. I'll have to get them all...so I have to vote for what I call the PlayXenolution-1.

Bigger Tom Clancy Threat



Iran North Korea

MF: Play *Splinter Cell Chaos Theory* and you'll get the answer! (Oops, did I just plug my game? Shame on me....)



NEXT-GEN CONSOLE REPORT

What one developer expects from the future

Shots fired! Shots fired! Recently, both Sony and Microsoft let off some preliminary rounds in the next-gen console war, as the current console leader at a

technology conference debuted the chip (dubbed Cell) that will power PlayStation 3, while Gates' gang secured two Xbox 2 RPGs from the creator of the *Final Fantasy* franchise.

But that certainly ain't enough info for one issue. We also sat down with Tim Sweeney, CEO and founder of Epic Games (the folks who make those *Unreal* first-person shooters), and he

gave us the lowdown on game development in the next generation—including how much better games will look, online advancements, and the importance of a hard drive. —Bryan Intihar

EGM: Epic Games has two unannounced next-gen titles in development. What are some of the things you want to do that aren't possible on today's systems?

Tim Sweeney: With the next generation, we want it all: very realistic physics and vehicles, unprecedented visuals with high-dynamic range lighting and shadowing, high-detail characters with realistic animation and interaction, pervasive support for multiplayer, user expandability with game maps and mods, and seamless environments with realistic A.I.

EGM: What about online play?

TS: The previous generation started opening up online play to the masses, but it came in the middle of that genera-

tion and wasn't supported pervasively. With this next generation, I hope to see thorough online support in all games working flawlessly out of the box. The upcoming generation will also be powerful enough to support many massively multiplayer games, which would really change the nature of console gaming over the next couple of years.

EGM: Generally speaking, will the leap ahead in technology be as great as from PS1 to PS2?

TS: All along, we've been creating Unreal Engine 3 [the development tool Epic will use to make its next-gen titles] in anticipation of an order-of-magnitude leap in graphics power, and we don't think we are going to be disappointed. Graphically, comparing this generation with the leap from PlayStation to PlayStation 2 is realistic.

EGM: So will this increase in technology mandate more R&D costs, and thus, pricier games?

TS: If developers used the previous generation's brute-force development techniques to create next-generation games, the development costs would be astronomical. You would need to spend \$20-40 million to develop a hit title with team sizes of 120-plus developers. You would need to price games at \$100 to support those costs, and of course, nobody is going to pay that. Which is why new development techniques pioneered by high-productivity development tools like Unreal Engine 3 are essential to this next generation. So, though the amount of content going

into our next-generation games has increased by a factor of 10, our team sizes are only increasing 30-50 percent. This approach enables independent developers like Epic to create hit games on \$5-10 million budgets and be able to prosper without increasing game prices. Ultimately, the game market won't grow if software prices continue to increase.

EGM: What if these machines don't have a hard drive; is that a good or bad thing?

TS: As the first console to feature a built-in hard drive, Xbox gave developers unprecedented flexibility to support persistent data, downloadable content, and efficient streaming. It sent



Xbox 2 Gets a Fantasy Maker

Hironobu Sakaguchi may have failed in Hollywood (remember the unspectacular CG flick *Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within*?), but he'll always be remembered as the man who gave us the acclaimed *Final Fantasy* role-playing series. And now his new development studio Mistwalker will create two exclusive RPGs for Microsoft's next-gen system. Sakaguchi told a Japanese website that one of the games will be a cute, lighthearted affair starring super-deformed characters, while the other will be more mature and feature "an incredible setting that appears seamlessly real." Both should help Microsoft's presence in the Japanese market, where a lack of RPGs has made Xbox a dust collector.



■ Apparently, size doesn't matter: The Cell processor—the CPU Sony will put into PS3—is no bigger than a thumbtack.

a message to the world, saying, "From now on, hard disk storage is a feature you can always count on." So it would be an unfortunate step backward if next-generation consoles were to ship without hard drives. However, developers are well known for tailoring games and technology to the hardware that's available, maximizing the strengths and minimizing the weaknesses. ■

■ Epic's next-gen dev tool is downright scary.



>> REZ (PS2) AND LUMINES (PSP) CREATOR TETSUYA MIZUGUCHI HAS STRUCK A DEAL WITH MICROSOFT TO MAKE EXCLUSIVE TITLES FOR THE COMPANY'S XBOX SUCCESSOR... >>

TO SAVE THE FUTURE
YOU MUST UNCOVER THE PAST



Xenosaga

EPISODE

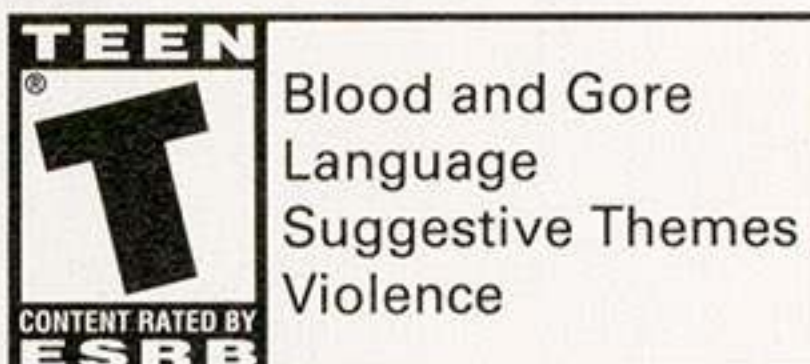
II

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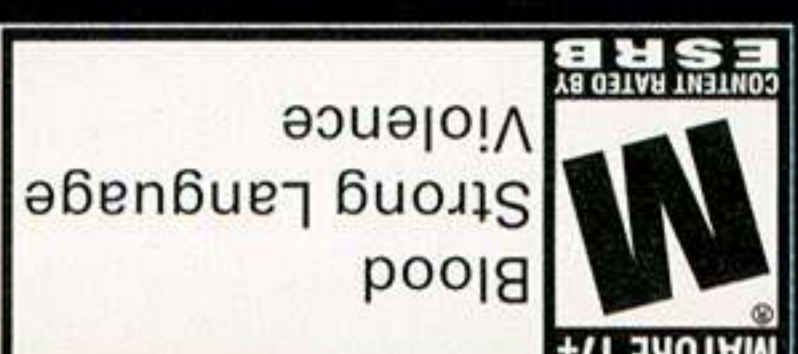
PlayStation 2

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UBISOFT



PlayStation 2



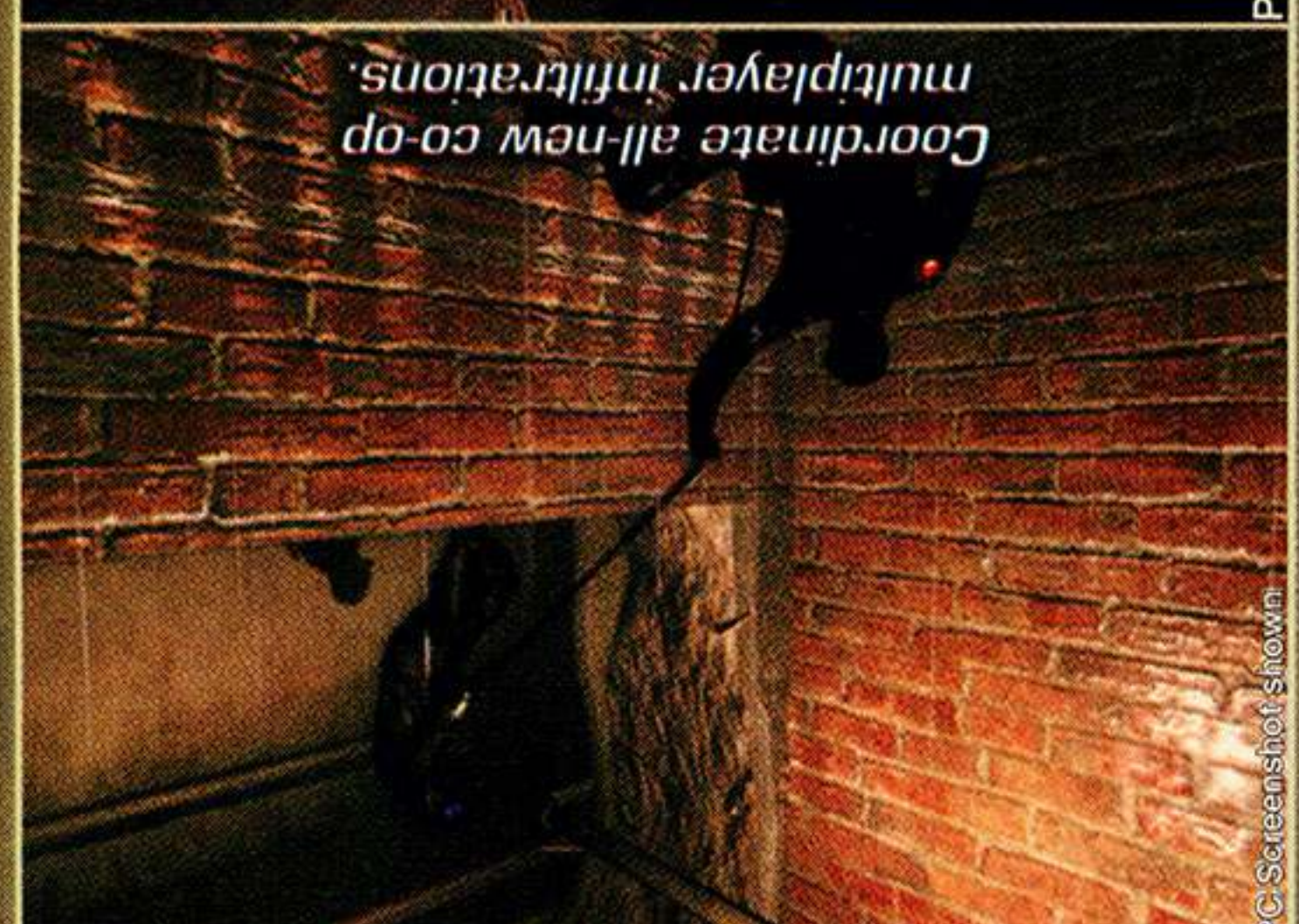
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PlayStation 2 Screenshot shown



Coordinate all-new co-op multiplayer infiltrations.

PC Screenshot shown



High-adrenaline stealth kills, submission strikes, and firefights.

Nintendo GameCube Screenshot shown



Unpredictable enemy encounters through multipath levels.

Xbox Screenshot shown



ROTATE 180°

SPLINTER CELL

Tom Clancy's



TWIST 360°



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■ Link goes for the enemy's head while his horse nuzzles the poor guy's crotch.

Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Nintendo
Release Date: Fall 2005

■ GameCube

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA

Finally—new info on everyone's most-wanted game of 2005

OK, we get it—you *really* want to play the new *Legend of Zelda*. Ever since this much talked about (but rarely seen) GameCube adventure burst onto the scene last May, only a certain Master Chief and his second *Halo* have knocked it out of the top slot in our Hot Ten list. And that only happened on one occasion.

But it comes as no surprise why more than 60 percent of you chose it again this month as your most anticipated title. Nintendo is ditching *Wind Waker's* Saturday-morning-cartoon-style visuals in favor of a more mature and realistic look. Link is no longer a young and wide-eyed hero; he's now 16 years old and riding his

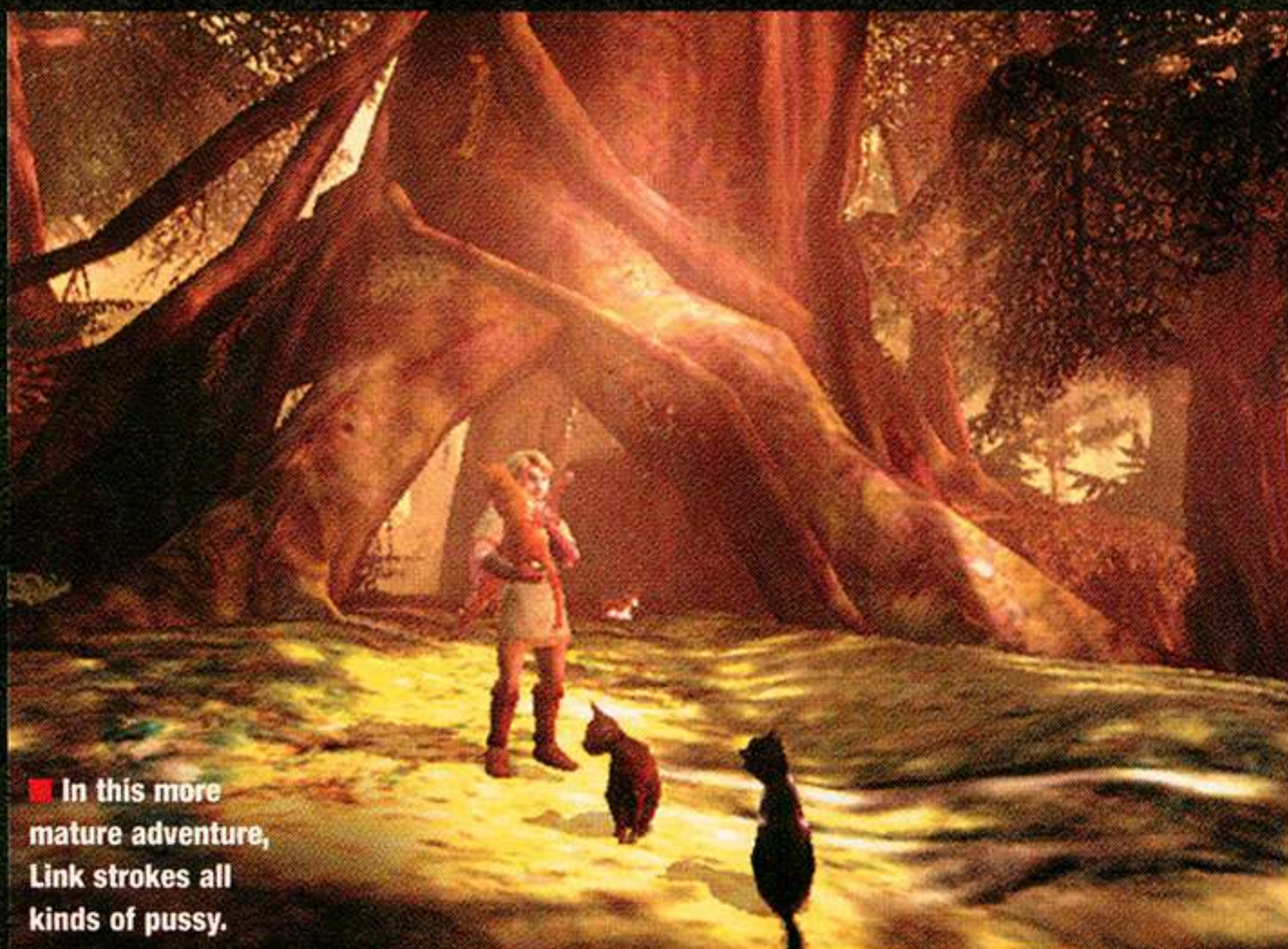
trusty steed to this journey sportin' a bit of an attitude (but didn't we all at this age?). Trouble is, outside of a few choice words from *Zelda's* developers in the past and what we can speculate from looking at these new screenshots (read our thoughts on the next page), so much about this game remains a mystery. Will Link's lady friend Zelda play a significant role in this adventure? Any chance we'll draw blood during combat? Will Link finally speak? Hopefully, we can soon answer these questions and several more, as next issue we're traveling to Nintendo's home base in Japan for an exclusive look at the biggest title of the year.

—Bryan Intihar



■ If anyone can pull off the chain-mail-skirt look, it's Link.

>> HEADING TO CHICAGO BETWEEN THE MONTHS OF MARCH AND SEPTEMBER? YOU MAY WANT TO SWING BY THE MUSEUM OF SCIENCE AND INDUSTRY FOR A NEW TEMPORARY EXHIBIT,



■ In this more mature adventure, Link strokes all kinds of pussy.



Who's the Boss?

If you were to ask most *Zelda* fanboys, they would probably say that the franchise's current No. 1 villain, Ganondorf, would be the logical choice for Link's main adversary in this upcoming game. But Nintendo isn't afraid to change up the bad guys, as it did just that in *Majora's Mask* (N64) and, more recently, *The Minish Cap* (GBA).

“It may be suitable to have a central Hyrule field with multiple branches off it, or it may also make sense to have more diverse, geographically distant locations to travel between.”

—Producer Eiji Aonuma



The Dungeons

From the looks of it, the camera seems to shift to a higher, more angular viewpoint (like in the SNES *Zelda*) while you explore these puzzle-filled constructions.



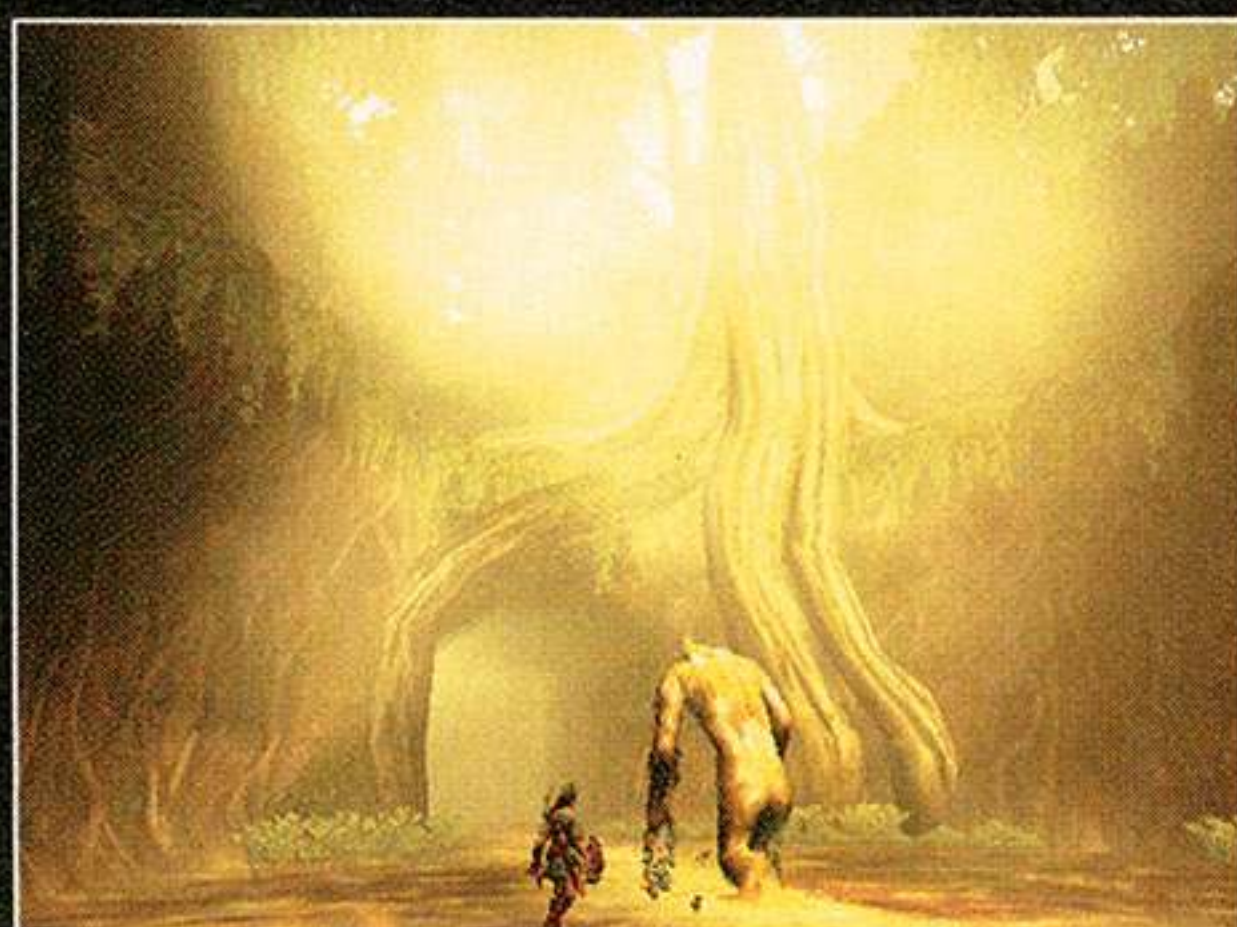
The Enemies

A new assortment of ghastly creatures surely awaits, but you can also expect the return of familiar faces, like these newly armored stalfos warriors.



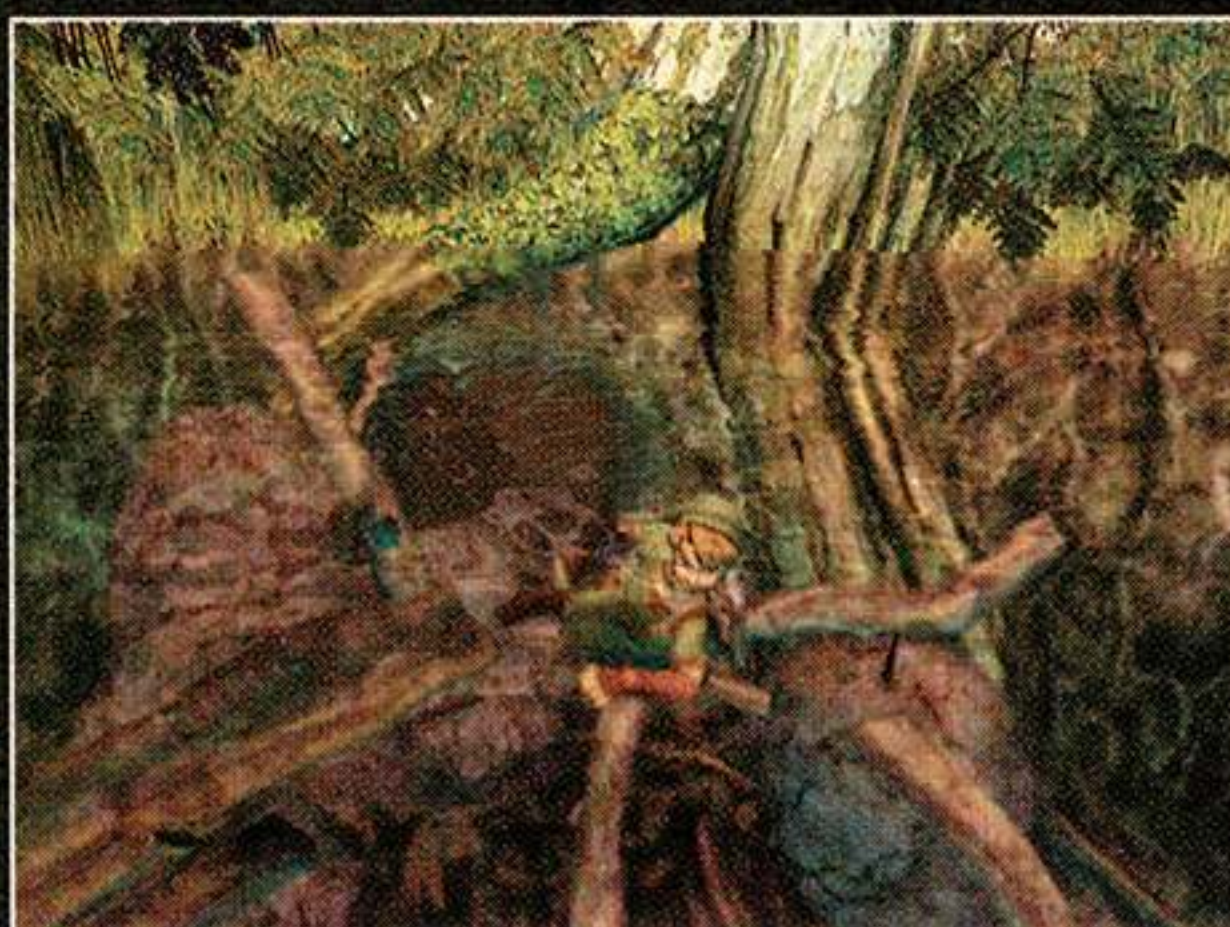
The Weapons

It appears this over-the-hill monkey ain't giving up Link's boomerang. Wonder if our pointy-eared friend will wield any new weapons during his adventure....



The Bizarre

Remember Link's fruity friend Tingle? A peculiar ally isn't anything new for this franchise, and we sure hope this Sasquatch-lookin' fella is on our side.



The Environments

The majority of *Zelda* images have shown Link either in the forest or riding his thoroughbred across open fields. What other outdoor locales will the elf visit?



The Combat

For the first time ever, Link can slice-n-dice foes while riding his horse. On-foot fighting should feel similar to *WW's*, but with a much higher body count. 🐾



■ The continued popularity of *MechAssault* proves that gamers love freebies.

ONLINE THIS MONTH

Out with the new and sticking with the old

Time to trade in that old copy of *Ghost Recon*. The sequel is out, so nobody plays the first one anymore, right? Wrong. Online games actually have more longevity than you might initially realize—just take a look at some of these original online installments that gamers still continue to play. Remember, the more aliens you see (on a scale from one to four), the livelier the game's online community. —Ryan Scott

Champions of Norrath (PS2)
Unsurprisingly, the original *CON* is pretty deserted. For starters, the online mode just isn't as everlasting as it is in titles such as *MechAssault* and *Ghost Recon*. The hack-n-slasher is also a little rough around the edges when compared to its sequel: Shoddy menus and no lobby make for a somewhat irritating online interface. Verdict:



■ Playing *Champions of Norrath* online these days? Then you're probably fighting solo.

Ghost Recon (XB)
Despite the recent release of *Ghost Recon 2*, the original maintains a very enthusiastic fan base, as evidenced by the deluge of *GR1* posts showing up daily on the GhostRecon.net forums. What's missing from the follow-up? Ironically, many players cite differences in the single-player mode as their main criticism. As one fan puts it, "*GR1* has more openness—open maps, open-ended mission-objective completion, and freedom of movement." Verdict:

Rainbow Six 3 (XB)
Both *RS3* and its sequel, *Black Arrow*, are home to some of the most hardcore gamers Xbox Live has to offer. They don't care which of these first-person shooters you're playing—so long as you're not just some random newbie seeking to crowd their action. *RS3* still has a multitude of dedicated servers, so if you don't have *Black Arrow* yet, there's really nothing to lose sleep over. Verdict:

MechAssault (XB)
You're bound to find plenty of online competition in the first *MechAssault*. The reason is a no-brainer, too: The game was included free with a whole lot of Xbox Live Starter Kits, and its user base has stayed loyal and consistent. Sure, *MechAssault 2: Lone Wolf* rocks even harder, but there's no reason to give this one up when people are still playing it. Verdict:



■ Fans still flock to the original *Ghost Recon*.

SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs (PS2)
Some people prefer the gameplay in the original *SOCOM*, citing it as a more realistic squad-based military shooter than its successor. But *SOCOM II* definitely has the edge when it comes to mindshare, thanks to a better online clan system, more maps, and stronger anti-cheating measures. Check out the forums at *SOCOM-2.com*, where you'll find a thriving community of dedicated fans—some of whom still play the first game. Verdict:

Join the Team

Online gaming clans have been big in the PC scene for years, and with the widespread success of Xbox Live, they've gotten quite a foothold on the console side as well. If you're curious to see a sampling of what's out there, visit sites like the popular *ClanBoard.com*—and don't forget that many Live-enabled games (including *Halo 2*) feature built-in clan support right out of the box.

WHAT'S UP AT



1UP.COM



Everyone has a secret weapon—the Empire has the Death Star, Donald Trump has his hair (we're still waiting to see its true power), and for us, it's this website. Check it out for up-to-the-millisecond gaming news.

EGMEXTRAS.1UP.COM

Like the URL implies, here's where you go for stories that we simply can't cram into these pages. For instance, you may have noticed that this issue lacks an Afterthoughts piece. Hold the hate mail, as we've posted online an extensive look-back chat with the *Gran Turismo 4* crew.

BOARDS.1UP.COM

Think *Metal Gear's* top-down camera is outdated? Or maybe *Halo 2's* dual-wielding feature is supremely overrated? Then this is the place to, as Madonna once sang, express yourself.

CHEATS.1UP.COM

For all you tricksters, this 1UP.com site includes more than 100 cheats for *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*. It's also got one for *Catwoman*, but sadly, this doesn't make the game any less of a stinker.

Featured Club: I Spy a Cutiepie

Apparently, the nearly 600 members of this club believe they are totally chic instead of totally geek. Decide for yourself at cutegamer-club.1UP.com.

Featured Blog: John Ricciardi

This regular *EGM* contributor (and former full-time staffer) now calls Japan home. John is always updating his online journal (johntv.1UP.com) with entertaining news and notes on the international gaming scene.

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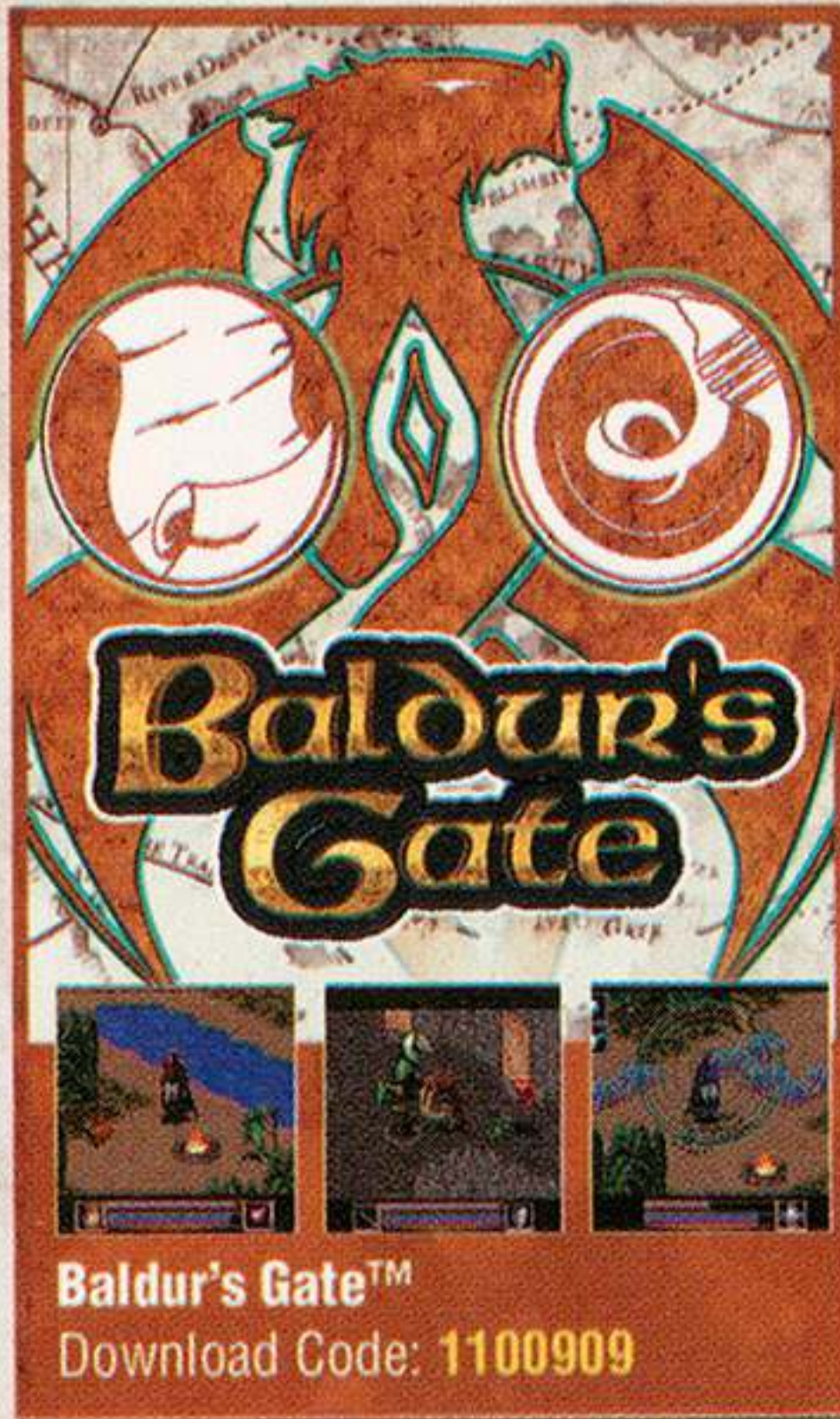
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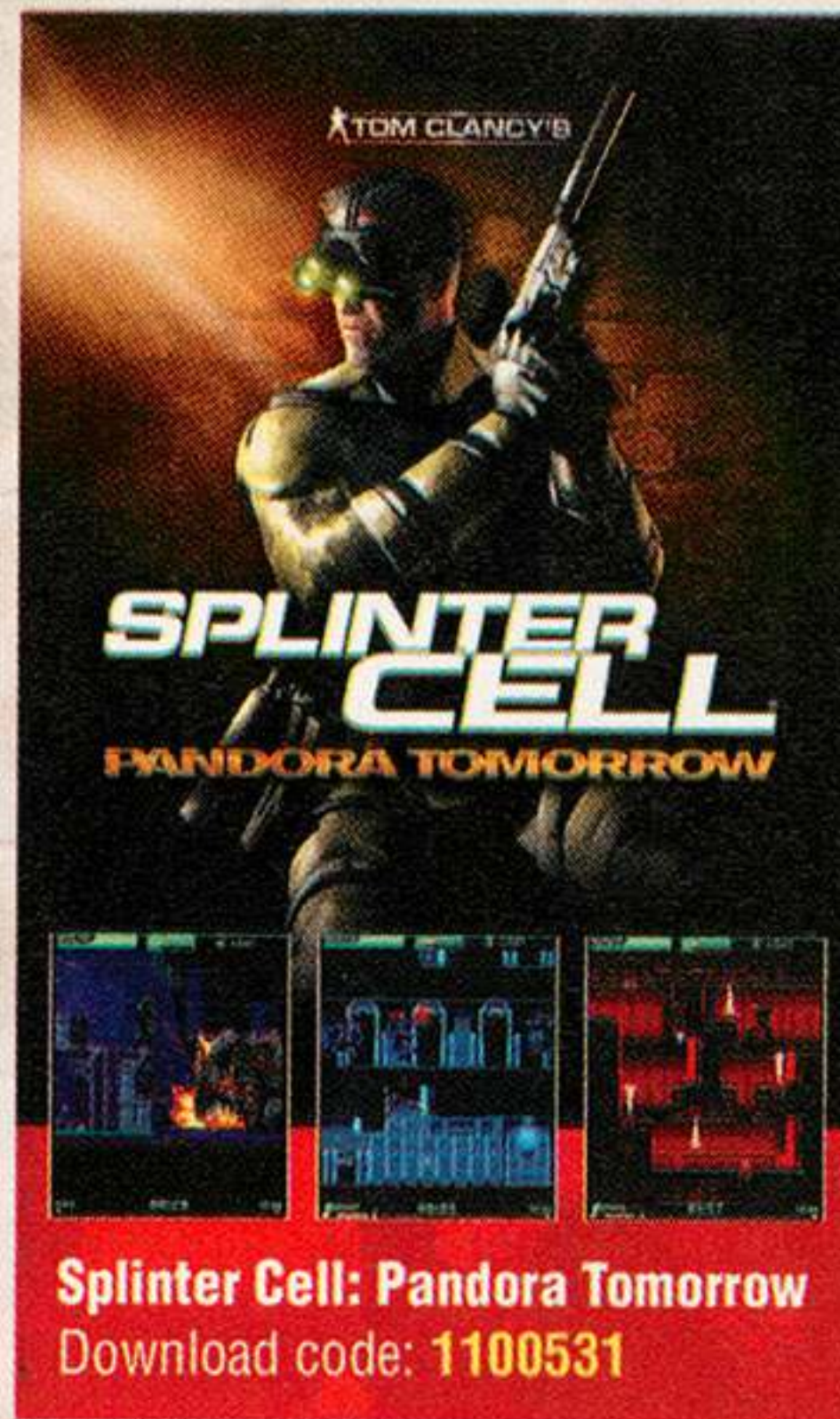
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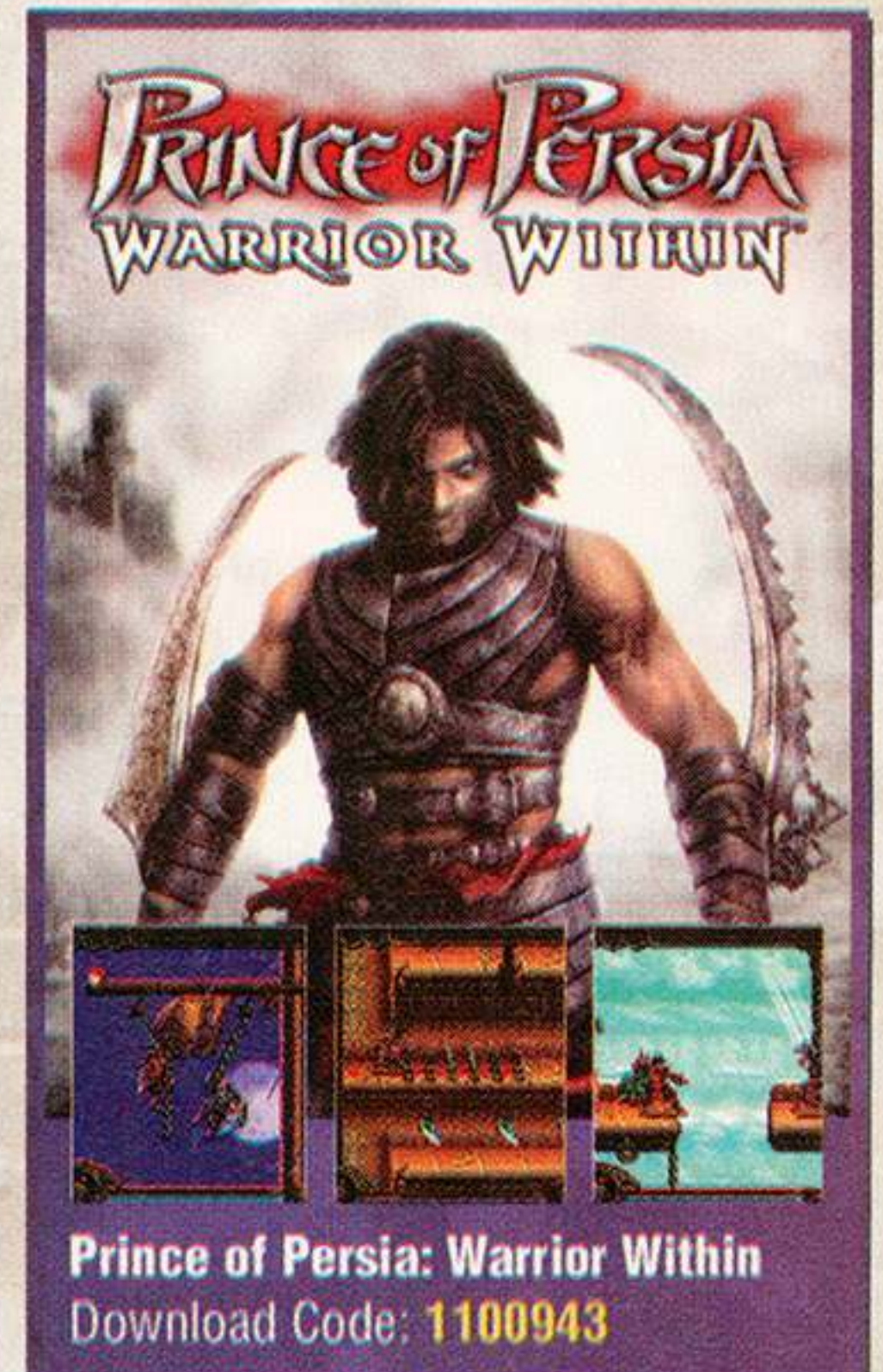
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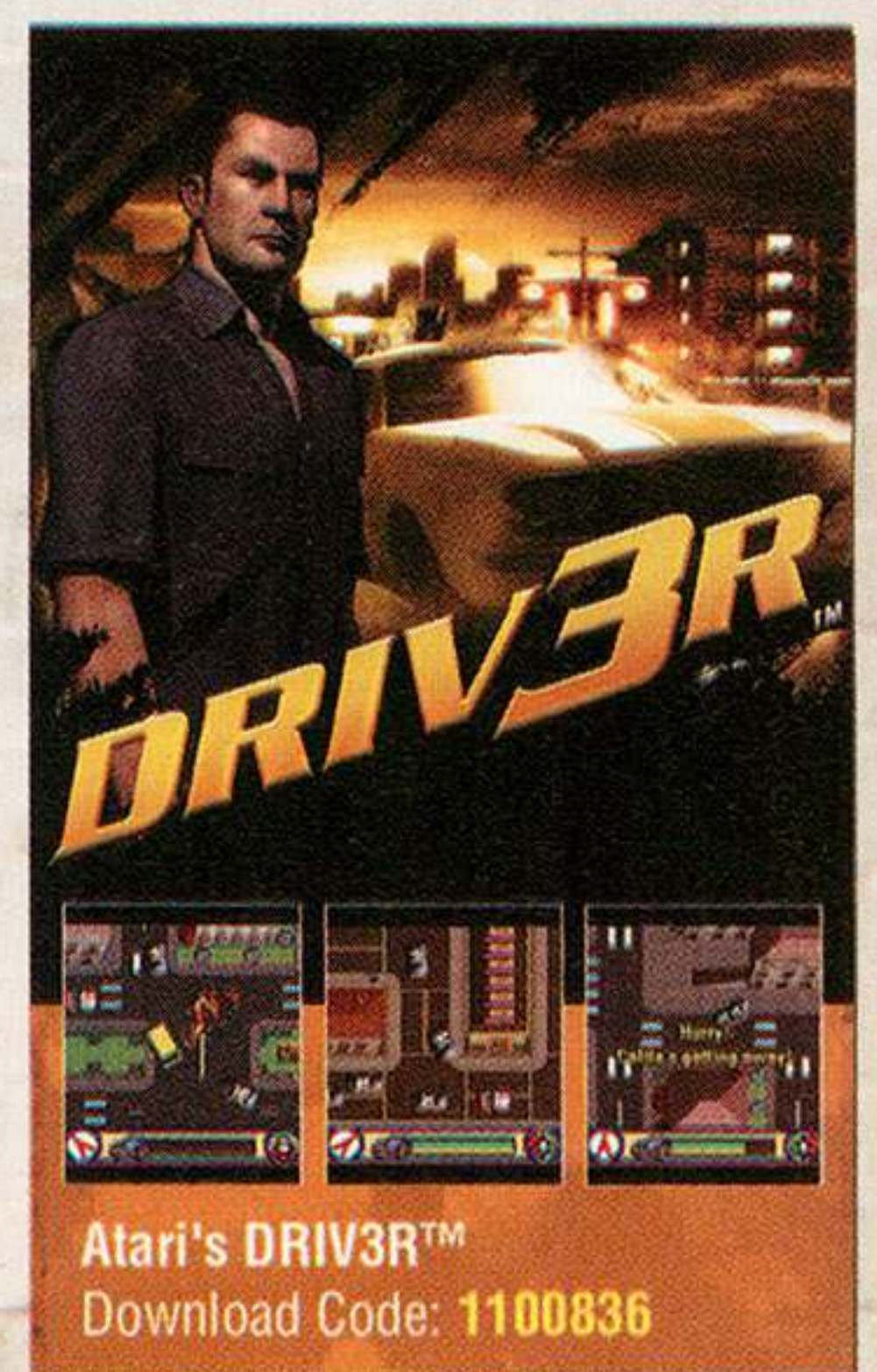
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TOP 10 RINGTONES

- 908326 - Lil Jon & The Eastside Boys - Lovers and Friends
- 908072 - Ludacris - Get Back
- 908324 - T.I. - Bring Em Out
- 908480 - Linkin Park/Jay-Z - Numb/Encore
- 907216 - Ciara - 1,2 Step
- 908554 - Omarion - O
- 907871 - Ja Rule - New York
- 907759 - Lloyd Banks - Karma
- 907104 - Green Day - Boulevard of Broken Dreams

MORE POPULAR RINGTONES

- 904239 - 2Pac - California Love
- 900305 - 50 Cent - In Da Club
- 900433 - 50 Cent - PIMP
- 904193 - Akon - Locked Up
- 901642 - Alicia Keys - If I Ain't Got You
- 903120 - Beastie Boys - Ch-Check It Out
- 902945 - Beastie Boys - Sabotage
- 904751 - Beyonce & Sean Paul - Baby Boy
- 900403 - Beyonce feat Jay-Z - Crazy In Love
- 901236 - Big Punisher - 100%
- 901925 - Blink 182 - I Miss You
- 900748 - Blur - Caramel
- 901641 - Britney Spears - Toxic (Chorus)

- 900358 - Christina Aguilera - Dirty
- 900458 - Coldplay - Clocks
- 901241 - Def Leppard - Pour Some Sugar On Me
- 900235 - DMX - Ruff Ryder's Anthem
- 900017 - Dr. Dre - Next Episode
- 901078 - Eminem - My Name Is
- 900018 - Eminem - The Real Slim Shady
- 900024 - Fabolous - Young'N (Holla Back)
- 904362 - Franz Ferdinand - Take Me Out
- 907031 - Franz Ferdinand - This Fire
- 900082 - Game Theme - Super Mario Bros
- 907042 - Game Theme - The Legend of Zelda
- 907115 - Good Charlotte - Predictable
- 906949 - Green Day - American Idiot
- 901710 - Green Day - Longview
- 900833 - G-Unit - Stunt 101
- 901674 - Hoobastank - The Reason
- 904994 - Incubus - Megalomaniac
- 900461 - Inner Circle - Cops
- 901092 - Jay-Z - Change Clothes
- 901672 - Jay-Z - Dirt Off Your Shoulder
- 900034 - Jay-Z - Big Pimpin
- 904538 - Jet - Are You Gonna Be My Girl
- 907030 - Jimmy Eat World - Pain
- 903130 - J-Kwon - Topsy
- 908079 - Justin Timberlake - Good Foot
- 904181 - Kanye West - All Falls Down

- 902822 - Led Zeppelin - Good Times Bad Times
- 905240 - Lil Flip - Game Over
- 904748 - Lil Jon & The Eastside Boyz - Get Low
- 900681 - Linkin Park - Numb
- 907027 - LL Cool J - Headsprung
- 904182 - Ludacris - Diamond in the Back
- 903059 - Michael Jackson - Rock With You
- 900052 - Missy Elliott - Get Ur Freak On
- 907008 - Mobb Deep - Shook Ones Part. II
- 900060 - Nelly - Hot in Herre
- 900063 - No Doubt - Hella Good
- 907171 - Notorious B.I.G. - Hypnotize
- 900706 - OutKast - Hey Ya!
- 900651 - OutKast - Miss Jackson
- 900758 - Pharell feat. Jay-Z - Frontin'
- 900504 - R. Kelly - Ignition
- 901034 - Rick James - Super Freak
- 900435 - Sean Paul - Get Busy
- 901990 - Sir Mix-A-Lot - Baby Got Back
- 904567 - Slipknot - Duality
- 905196 - Snoop Dogg - Nuthin But A G Thang
- 907184 - Snoop Dogg - Drop It Like It's Hot
- 905427 - Terror Squad - Lean Back
- 907158 - The Killers - Mr. Brightside
- 902140 - The Used - Buried Myself Alive
- 902995 - Twista - Overnight Celebrity
- 904755 - Usher - Yeah!

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PlayStation 2

SONY'S MASCOT CHALLENGE 2005

A triple dose of fresh PS2 platforming

When Sony shipped *Sly 2*, *Jak 3*, and *Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal* last fall, it felt like hop-n-bop overload—all the games were worth playing, but working that much platforming into a gamer's busy schedule is murder. This fall won't be any easier, as Sony has brand-new installments slated for all three of those lovable mascots' series. Plan your vacation (or hooky) accordingly. —Shane Bettenhausen & Bryan Intihar



■ Not to be outdone by Jak, Ratchet goes for his own dark-and-brooding makeover.

JAK X

Publisher: Sony CEA
Developer: Naughty Dog
Release Date: Fall 2005

What's it all about? *Jak II*'s hoverbike-stealin' antics and *Jak 3*'s copious dune buggy action paved the way for this eventual evolution—a full-on racing game. Taking place after the last game, *Jak X* (working title) reunites most of the trilogy's good guys in a desperate race to save everyone from death by poisoning. And that's a very literal race: Only by defeating the diabolical Krew in a massive competition can they snag the cure.

Don't expect the game to unfold like a traditional racer, though: Missions (standard race, time trial, time box, and death-match race) flow freely in a nonlinear, *Grand Theft Auto*-ish fashion. And the racing itself echoes the violent clashes of *Twisted Metal* more than the kid-gloves action of *Mario Kart*. You'll outfit your rides with various short- and long-range guns, mines, missiles, turbo boosts, and repair kits. And all this vehicular mayhem won't be limited to single-player races: Take on your foes in splitscreen heats, and...rumor has it...full online play.

Our thoughts: Car combat's a big leap from the *Jak & Daxter* days, but hey, at least they're trying something different.



■ Vehicles are fully customizable: Go ahead and put a spoiler on your dunebuggy.

>> BACK TO THE FRONT LINES—ACTIVISION HAS ANNOUNCED THAT THIS FALL IT WILL RELEASE FOR CONSOLES (PROBABLY PS2 AND XBOX) ANOTHER INSTALLMENT IN ITS *CALL OF*

■ While Jak and Ratchet keep on changin', Sly's still livin' the burglar highlife.



SLY 3

Publisher: Sony CEA
Developer: Sucker Punch
Release Date: Fall 2005

What's it all about? While Jak and Ratchet usually handle situations with guns blazin', the pickpocketing raccoon prefers sticking to the shadows before robbing his foes blind. Sly keeps to the same MO in this third episode, as he and his unusual gang of thieves use stealth, disguises, and misdirection to recover Sly's secret family fortune.

As in the last game, both Bentley (he's the turtle) and Murray (the hippo) will accompany our main man on complicated heists in locales such as Venice, Australia, and China. But these three ain't the only playable characters. You'll now step into the shoes of Sly's adversaries, which include Inspector Carmelita Fox, the lounge lizard Dimitri, and a host of other miscreants. This one should also last a little bit longer than the previous two editions, thanks to the ability to go back and replay completed missions using your new moves and abilities, plus a batch of minigames. And Sony's even hinted at a multiplayer mode—online co-op perhaps?

Our thoughts: Sounds a lot like the last one, but a multiplayer mode (especially if it's playable online) could be the perfect change-up.

RATCHET: DEADLOCKED

Publisher: Sony CEA
Developer: Insomniac
Release Date: Fall 2005

What's it all about? The fourth *Ratchet* game in four years—not a bad time to shake things up a bit. First off, you'll notice that Clank, the series' pint-sized metallic sidekick, isn't in the game's title or any of these screens. So does this mean Ratchet is flying solo? Not quite. While Clank's status remains unknown, you'll definitely be running, jumping, and shooting with a number of other characters, as *Deadlocked* will feature squad-based play (Insomniac says it will reveal another "genre first" very soon). Ratchet also has a brand-new look: Our hero dons a slick battle suit while competing in the galaxy's combat-based reality show. And aside from less linear play and even more ways to customize the series' trademark firearms, *Deadlocked* will include a more user-friendly multiplayer mode and allow you to play through the single-player levels with friends via the Internet—very nice.

Our thoughts: It's shocking stuff—Ratchet's gone from cuddly fuzzball to Master Chief competitor. Still, *Deadlocked* seems like a cool evolution for the series. Now, if only more people would play it online....

■ Ratchet: now more machine than fuzzball?



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BUT EIGHT DAYS IN HELL MADE US BROTHERS."**

- SGT. MATT BAKER



MATURE 17+
M
Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Strong Language
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

PC
DVD-ROM
SOFTWARE

PlayStation 2



ONLINE
BROADBAND ONLY



XBOX LIVE
ONLINE ENABLED

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COUNTDOWN TO 2001 THE 10 MOST OVERRATED GAMES

As we keep on truckin' toward *EGM's* 200th issue, we must take pause for bathroom breaks and yet another controversial topic: the top 10 most overrated videogames of the past 16 years (which is how long the mag's been around). These are the ones that were either massively overrated when they came out, or not really as good as we remember them. You'll probably need little encouragement to go discuss our choices on our 1UP.com message board.

10 Ico • PS2 • 2001
This will upset the art school kids, but *Ico* hasn't really changed our lives. It's not that we don't appreciate the relationship between its characters and the understated themes, but the "games as art" folks need to get a grip. We've got a ways to go before the Louvre....
But is it actually good? Absolutely, though you don't need to write your master's degree thesis on it.



9 Shenmue • Dreamcast • 2000
This epic tale of a young man avenging his father's death was billed as the reason to own a Dreamcast. And for many, it was. But for the rest of us, *Shenmue* was little more than a glorified point-and-click adventure game with quasi-interactive fight scenes sprinkled here and there.
But is it actually good? Yes, if you're the type of gamer who likes to take your time. Or drive virtual forklifts.

8 Banjo-Kazooie • Nintendo 64 • 1998
Developer Rare had a real knack for looking at Nintendo's own games and making similar ones, replacing Mario and Co. with goofy talking animals and calling it a day. *Banjo-Kazooie* was patterned after *Super Mario 64*, but in the first of many similar decisions, Rare's game focused on collecting arbitrary widgets and whatzits.
But is it actually good? If you're cloning Nintendo games, even bad results will be better than most.

7 Final Fantasy IX • PS1 • 2000
Nostalgia is a tricky thing. *FFIX* brought back many traditional series elements, but it also introduced a weak plot and lame characters.
But is it actually good? Of the three celebrated PS1-era *Fantasys*, this one is the least essential.

6 NiGHTS • Saturn • 1996
Crowned by many to be Sega's answer to Nintendo's *Mario*, *NiGHTS* actually is more of a 2D racing game than 3D platformer. While it had beautiful art and excellent music, there's not that much to *NiGHTS* beyond flying really fast and collecting as many colored orbs as you can.
But is it actually good? The concept is unique enough to be worth checking out.



As quickly as *Super Mario 64* breathed life into the 3D platforming genre, *Donkey Kong 64* sucked it all out.

5 Perfect Dark • Nintendo 64 • 2000
Rare's follow-up to *GoldenEye 007* was a justifiably big deal. But maybe the unconditional love for that game (along with *PD's* choppy animations and blurry graphics) clouded judgments of this one.
But is it actually good? Aside from the visual problems, *PD* had a lot going for it. But in this age of *Halo*, it's hard to believe what we tolerated back then.

4 Donkey Kong 64 • Nintendo 64 • 1999
As quickly as *Super Mario 64* breathed life into the 3D platforming genre, *Donkey Kong 64* sucked it all out. And it's the game where Rare cemented its reputation as masters of the "collect-a-thon" style.
But is it actually good? Walk around your local grocery store for a full day, filling your cart with bananas. Then tell us if you had any fun.

3 Killer Instinct • Arcade/SNES • 1994/1995
Only thing worse than *KI's* laughable characters and brain-dead combo mechanics was its speed-fueled announcer who made sure the whole arcade knew that you just got knocked out by an ULLLLTRAAA COMMMB0000!
But is it actually good? Sure, if you know nothing about fighting games.

2 Donkey Kong Country • SNES • 1994
Facing an impending 3D assault on two fronts (PS1 and Saturn), Nintendo needed something big to keep the focus on its aging SNES. Rare delivered with *Donkey Kong Country*, and the masses—fooled by the pretty plastic graphics into thinking they were playing the second coming of *Kong*—rejoiced.
But is it actually good? *DKC2* and *3* were improvements, but as a whole, this series got more respect than it truly deserved.

1 Battle Arena Toshinden • PS1 • 1995
Our top choice is the perfect example of why you need to be extra careful when judging a system's launch games. It was 3D, it was flashy—*Battle Arena Toshinden* was exciting and new. But later Namco showed us what really could be done with 3D fighting on the PlayStation (*Tekken*, *Soul Blade*). And to this day, we still don't know how *BAT* received three other installments.
But is it actually good? Oh God, no.



Honorable Mentions

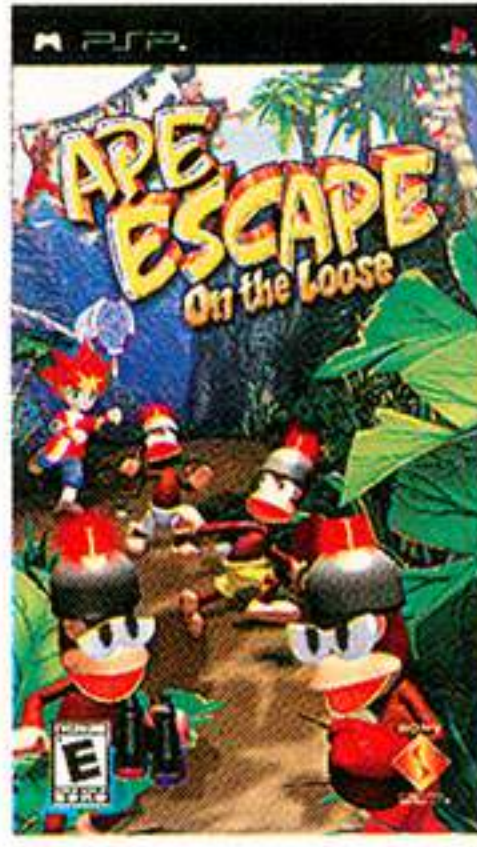
■ *Mortal Kombat* • Arcade/SNES/Genesis • 1993/1994

■ *Turok 2: Seeds of Evil* • Nintendo 64 • 1998

■ *Tomb Raider* • PS1/Saturn • 1996

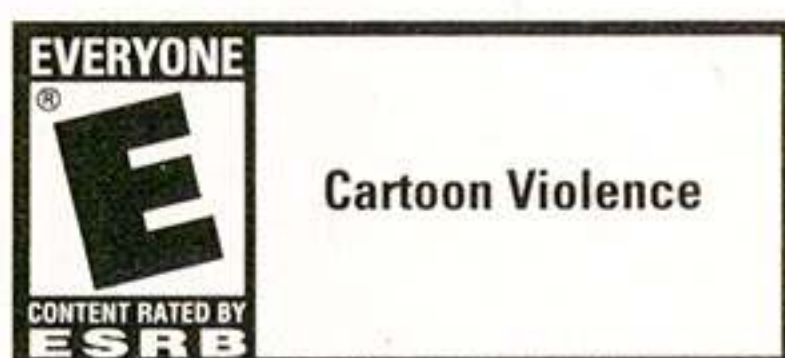






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Xbox

SHOW AND TELL: PARIAH

Publisher: Groove Games
Developer: Digital Extremes
Release Date: May 2005

If you build it, people will die

If you think you've got bad luck, just look at Jack Mason—a stressed-out MD who finds himself stuck in a disease-infested alien wasteland. But Mason's struggle is only one part of *Pariah*; this sci-fi first-person shooter also sports an ambitious multiplayer mode (both online and off) that calls for you to wear the cap of "game designer." We've brought in James Schmalz, creative director of developer Digital Extremes, to explain how his game matches up with the *Halos* of the world.

—Bryan Intihar

■ Dr. Mason isn't alone: Meet Karina, the sexy escaped inmate who fights alongside him.



Tracks of Destruction

James Schmalz: Crushing your buddies under the heavy treads of a vehicle is always a joy. With a large array of multiplayer modes and up to 16 players on the field at a time, each of *Pariah's* four vehicles can turn the tides of battle in an instant.



Make 'Em Bigger

JS: All of *Pariah's* weapons can be upgraded with power-ups that you'll find either hidden on the battlefield or on your victims' corpses. The plasma rifle here can be charged to deliver one helluva punch to an entire group of enemies. Green goggles optional.



The Battlefield of Your Dreams

JS: Our simple-to-use map editor—with which you can design your very own battlegrounds—allows you to unleash your creative side. You have everything from trip mines and 10-ton vehicles to entire fortresses you can move and place.



The End Result

JS: A view of a home-brewed map in all its glory. After editing your perfect battlefield, share it with friends online and show them who's boss!



Splitscreen Slaughter

JS: Don't go it alone! Make sure you have a friend to cover your back. Either in the single-player game or against bots in multiplayer, there are many ways to bring a friend in to help you kick ass...or to kick his ass.



THE SALES CHARTS | FOR JANUARY 2005

TOP 10 BEST-SELLING GAMES



- 1 Resident Evil 4 • GC • Capcom
- 2 Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas • PS2 • Rockstar
- 3 The Legend of Zelda: The Minish Cap • GBA • Nintendo
- 4 Mercenaries • XB • LucasArts
- 5 Mercenaries • PS2 • LucasArts
- 6 Need for Speed Underground 2 • PS2 • EA Games
- 7 Halo 2 • XB • Microsoft
- 8 Madden NFL 2005 • PS2 • EA Sports
- 9 Kingdom Hearts: Chain of Memories • GBA • Square Enix
- 10 Super Mario 64 DS • DS • Nintendo

Source: NPD TRSTS Video Games Service. Call (516) 625-6190 for questions regarding this list.

TOP 10 PS2



- 1 Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas
- 2 Mercenaries
- 3 Need for Speed Underground 2
- 4 Madden NFL 2005
- 5 NFL Street 2
- 6 NBA Live 2005
- 7 Call of Duty: Finest Hour
- 8 Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater
- 9 World Championship Poker
- 10 The Punisher

TOP 10 XBOX



- 1 Mercenaries
- 2 Halo 2
- 3 Need for Speed Underground 2
- 4 The Punisher
- 5 Stars Wars KOTOR II
- 6 MechAssault 2: Lone Wolf
- 7 NFL Street 2
- 8 Ghost Recon 2
- 9 Madden NFL 2005
- 10 Call of Duty: Finest Hour

ON THE AUCTION

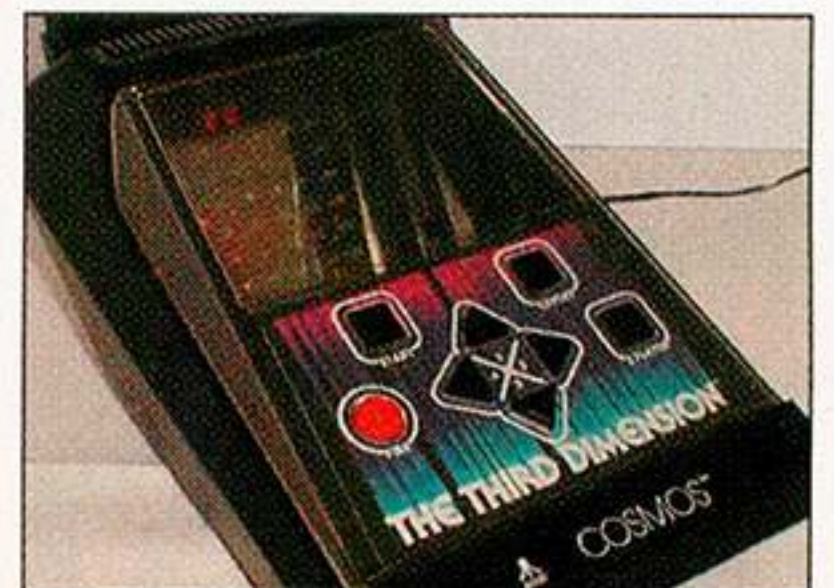
Block

Here's proof that you can really buy almost anything if you look hard enough on the Internets.



Item: A 7-foot-tall Master Chief statue—it's the perfect addition to any Richie Rich's extravagant game room.

Winning Bid: \$1,400.00



Item: Only five prototypes of Atari's Cosmos, a holographic portable game system, were ever made. And here's one of them.

Asking Price: \$19,152.83



Item: The custom-made, neon-lit Millennium Falcon casing makes this one of the slickest (and most expensive) Xboxes in the galaxy.

Winning Bid: \$1,500.00

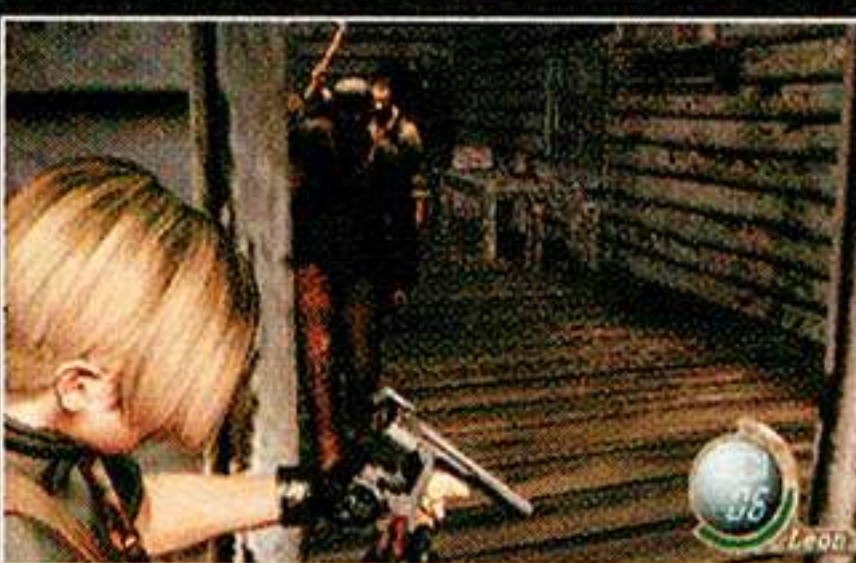


Item: One-hundred bucks for a Metal Gear Solid 3-branded bandanna? Congrats to whoever just earned our Sucker of the Month award.

Winning Bid: \$102.50

Source: Blockbuster Video

TOP 10 GAMECUBE



- 1 Resident Evil 4
- 2 Mario Party 6
- 3 Super Mario Sunshine
- 4 Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker
- 5 Super Smash Bros. Melee
- 6 Need for Speed Underground 2
- 7 Mario Power Tennis
- 8 Sonic Mega Collection
- 9 Paper Mario: Thousand-Year Door
- 10 NFL Street 2

TOP 10 PORTABLES



- 1 Legend of Zelda: Minish Cap • GBA
- 2 Kingdom Hearts: COM • GBA
- 3 Super Mario 64 DS • DS
- 4 The Incredibles • GBA
- 5 Final Fantasy I & II • GBA
- 6 SpongeBob: The Movie • GBA
- 7 Pokémon FireRed • GBA
- 8 Pokémon LeafGreen • GBA
- 9 Donkey Kong Country 2 • GBA
- 10 Super Mario Advance 4 • GBA

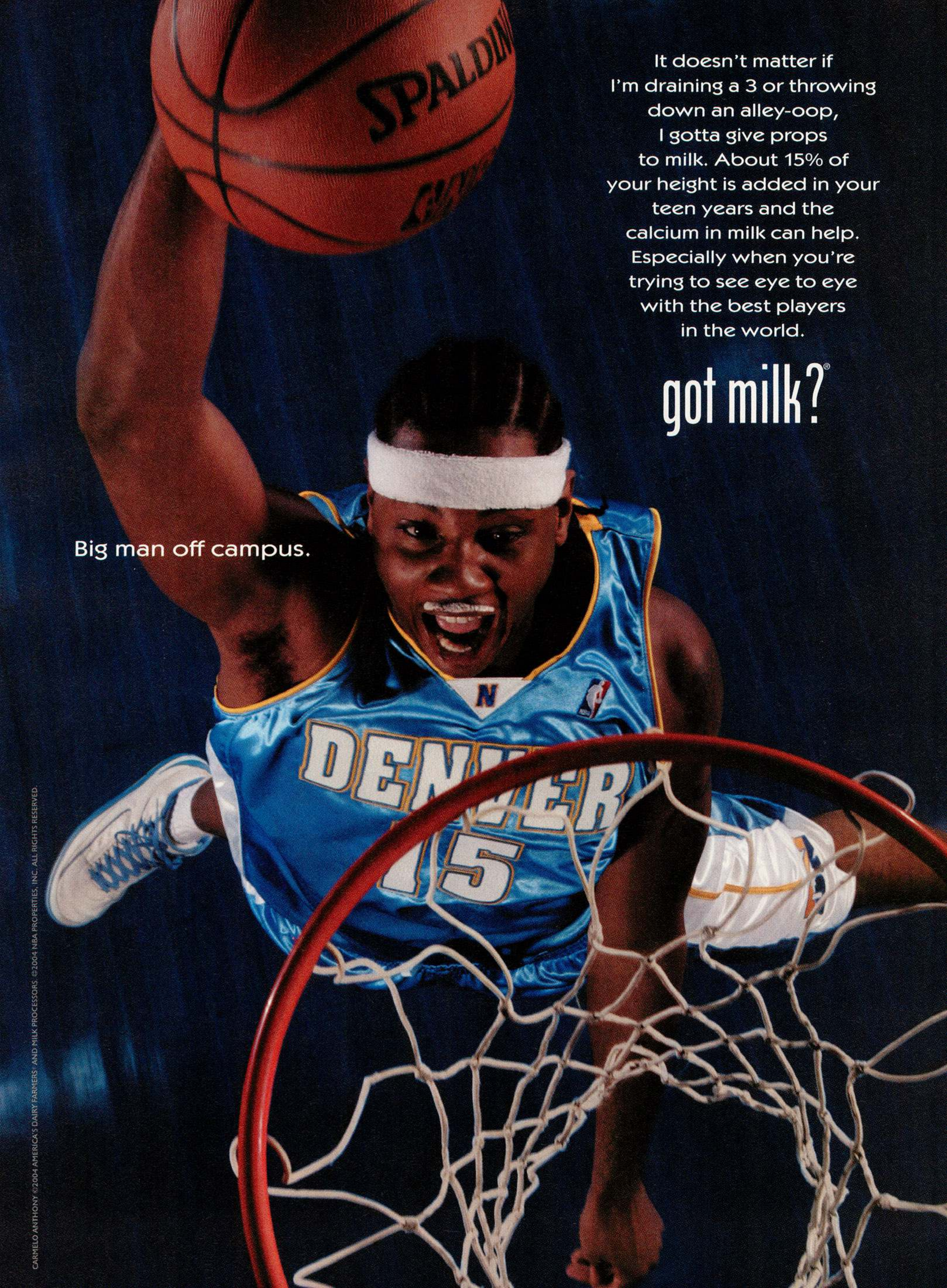
TOP 10 RENTALS

FOR THE WEEK ENDING 2/20/05



- 1 GTA: San Andreas • PS2
- 2 NBA Street V3 • PS2
- 3 Mercenaries • PS2
- 4 NFL Street 2 • PS2
- 5 The Punisher • PS2
- 6 Mercenaries • XB
- 7 NFS Underground 2 • PS2
- 8 Halo 2 • XB
- 9 Star Wars Battlefront • PS2
- 10 Playboy: The Mansion • PS2

BLOCKBUSTER

A high-angle, close-up photograph of Carmelo Anthony in a blue Denver Nuggets jersey, number 15, performing a dunk. He is holding a Spalding basketball with his right hand, positioned above the hoop. He has a white headband and a white headband. The background is dark, and the lighting highlights his muscular physique and the texture of the basketball and jersey. The jersey has "DENVER" and "15" visible. The NBA logo is also visible on the jersey.

It doesn't matter if
I'm draining a 3 or throwing
down an alley-oop,
I gotta give props
to milk. About 15% of
your height is added in your
teen years and the
calcium in milk can help.
Especially when you're
trying to see eye to eye
with the best players
in the world.

got milk?[®]

Big man off campus.

THE RUMOR MILL

Take this gossip on a full stomach



■ C'mon, loyal *Killzone* soldier, our rumor mill doesn't stink that bad.

Warning: You're about to receive a full dose of videogame gossip. This month (just like every month, if I do say so myself) is stockpiled with mind-blowing rumors that'll definitely have you begging and pleading for more. And once you've finished this hefty round of scuttlebutt, why not send me a message at quatermann@ziffdavis.com. It doesn't matter if your e-mail is full of praise or calling me every filthy name in the book—I really want to hear from you. Now enough chitchat; let's get onto the business at hand. —The Q



■ *True Fantasy Live Online*—it ain't dead yet.

The fantasy lives on

Normally, I'm not the kind of person who gets real emotional, but when Microsoft canned its massively multiplayer *True Fantasy Live Online*, even I went for a Kleenex. Now I hear that the game might be making a triumphant return, as another publisher is extremely interested in bringing *TFLO* to a next-gen console (probably Xbox 2). Sah-weet!

PSP gets evil

Man, I still have the shakes from playing the terrific horrorfest that is *Resident Evil 4*. And it seems Capcom really gets a kick outta hearing me scream like a little schoolgirl, as I've gotten wind that the series is now headed to PlayStation Portable. Expect this one to play a lot like *RE4* and—get this—star a grown-up Sherry Birkin, who first appeared in *RE2* as a lost kid wondering the zombie-filled streets of Raccoon City, searching for her father.

Reentering the Killzone

OK, so Sony's overly hyped first-person shooter didn't exactly make us forget about Master Chief. Perhaps the sequel can do the trick: Look for *Killzone 2* to

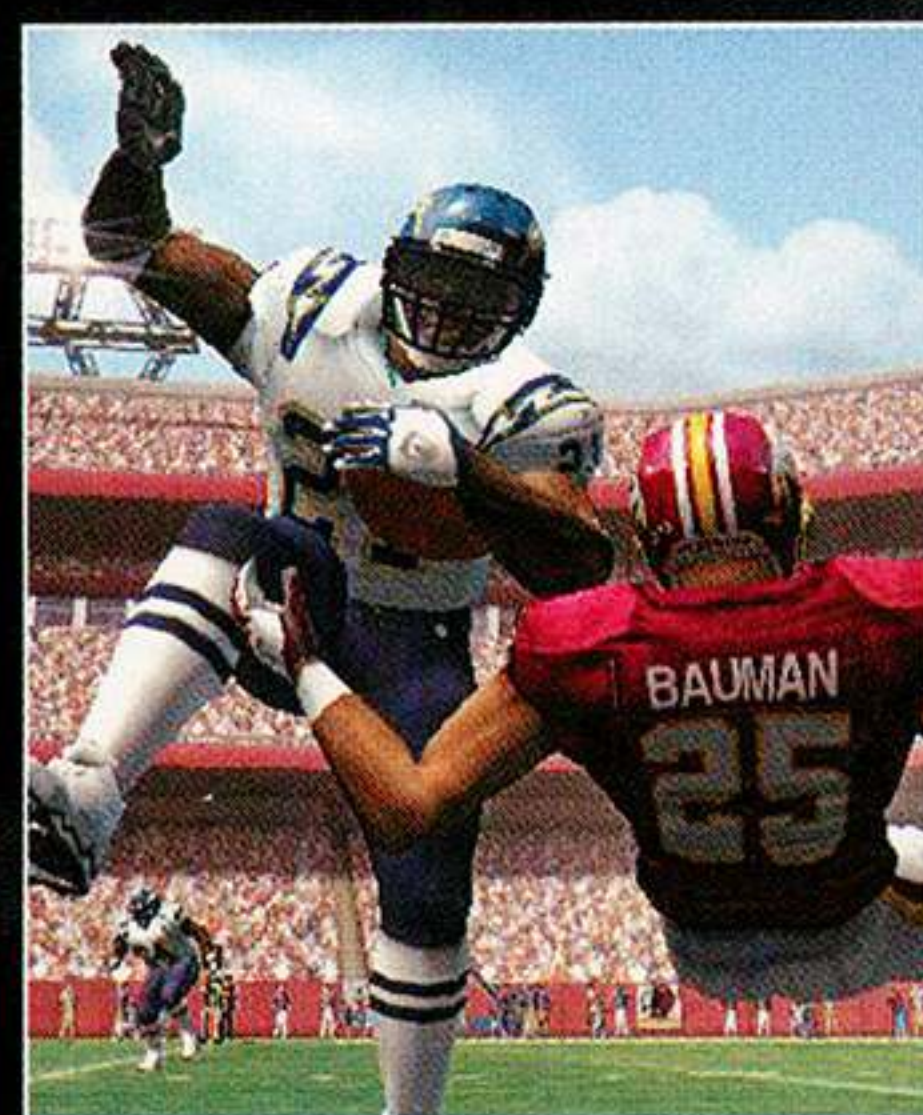
blast a few holes in your PlayStation 2 this holiday season—and apparently, the developer is addressing several of our complaints by making the enemies a lot smarter, the voices less repetitive, and the online mode much more robust.

Call it xPod

Many believe that when Microsoft launches Xbox 2 (which remains on track for a fall '05 release), the company will offer hard drives in different sizes. Now there's a new twist to this tale: It looks like these storage units will be multifunctional portable devices, meaning they will not only save your games, but they will also let you listen to MP3s (like an iPod) and watch movies on them on the road. Very nice.

No time for sleep

So developer Insomniac is churning out yet another *Ratchet & Clank* game (check it on page 46) for PS2—no surprise there. Yet according to those in the know, that ain't the only project the studio has in the works: Apparently, a different team is burning the midnight oil on a PS3 first-person shooter, which should be ready to go at the console's launch.



Believe It or Not

Q: Now that EA Sports has the ESPN license, does this mean John Madden is getting the boot?

A: Well, not just yet. Folks around the gridiron say that EA will slowly integrate more ESPN talent (like Chris "Boomer" Berman) into its football titles. Then when Madden's contract expires (which is supposed to happen within the next few years), the megapublisher will reevaluate how it brands this lucrative franchise. 🐞



The Used

ON Major League Baseball 2K5

From: Take 2. For: PlayStation 2, Xbox

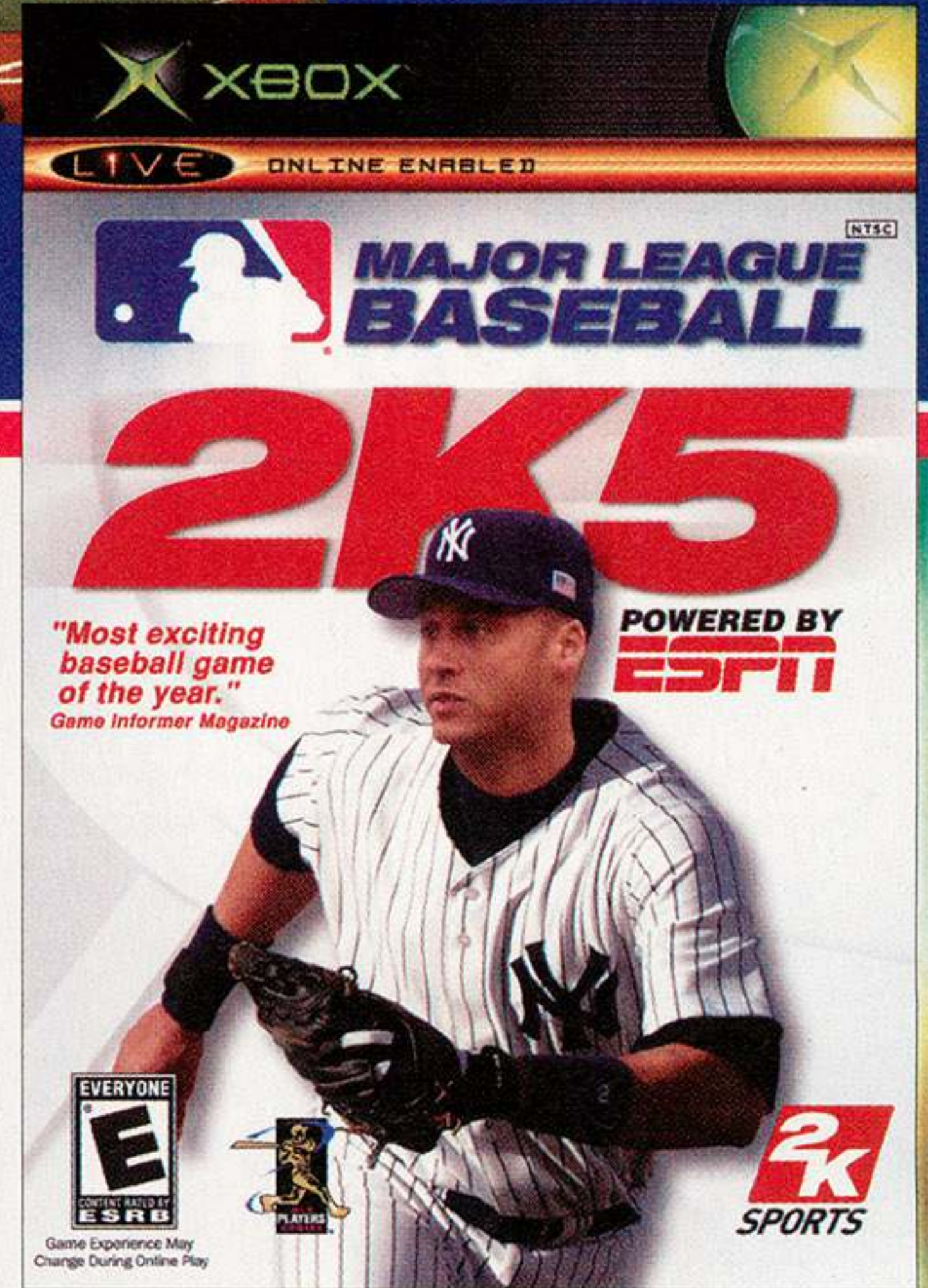
Die-hard MLB fans and self-styled video game junkies the Used put us up on *Major League Baseball 2K5*:

You've got to love a game that goes for less than the cost of nosebleed seats; the \$20 asking price is money well spent. The game includes personalized skyboxes (try killing time with trivia challenges and shuffleboard simulations) and an ESPN-powered, TV-style presentation.

But besides authentic pregame reports and riveting play-by-play coverage, you're also getting some amazing action here. The K Zone pitching interface—players must line up crosshairs to successfully skirt

tosses past home plate—is idiot-proof. Maximum fielding mechanics make scoring diving catches and double plays a cinch. Baserunning functions are the best we've ever seen. Built-in broadband features (peep provisions for online leagues) come off superb too, as does an exhaustive franchise mode. And dozens of graphical touches like picture-in-picture displays and authentically recreated arenas round out the package.

In terms of overall atmosphere, such as athletes who resemble their real-



world counterparts, the title's totally convincing. Vocal contributions by Jon Miller, Joe Morgan, and Karl Ravech kick its credibility up another notch. You'll be lost in the moment the second the sound of screaming fans and the crack of the bat blasts from your speakers.



photo credit: Seth Smoot



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Bowling for Soup

ON
Pennant Chase Baseball

From: Nintendo®. For: GameCube

Bowling for Soup's "Greatest Day" may be the title track for *Nintendo® Pennant Chase Baseball*, but it's not the only reason the game's a star player, says the band:

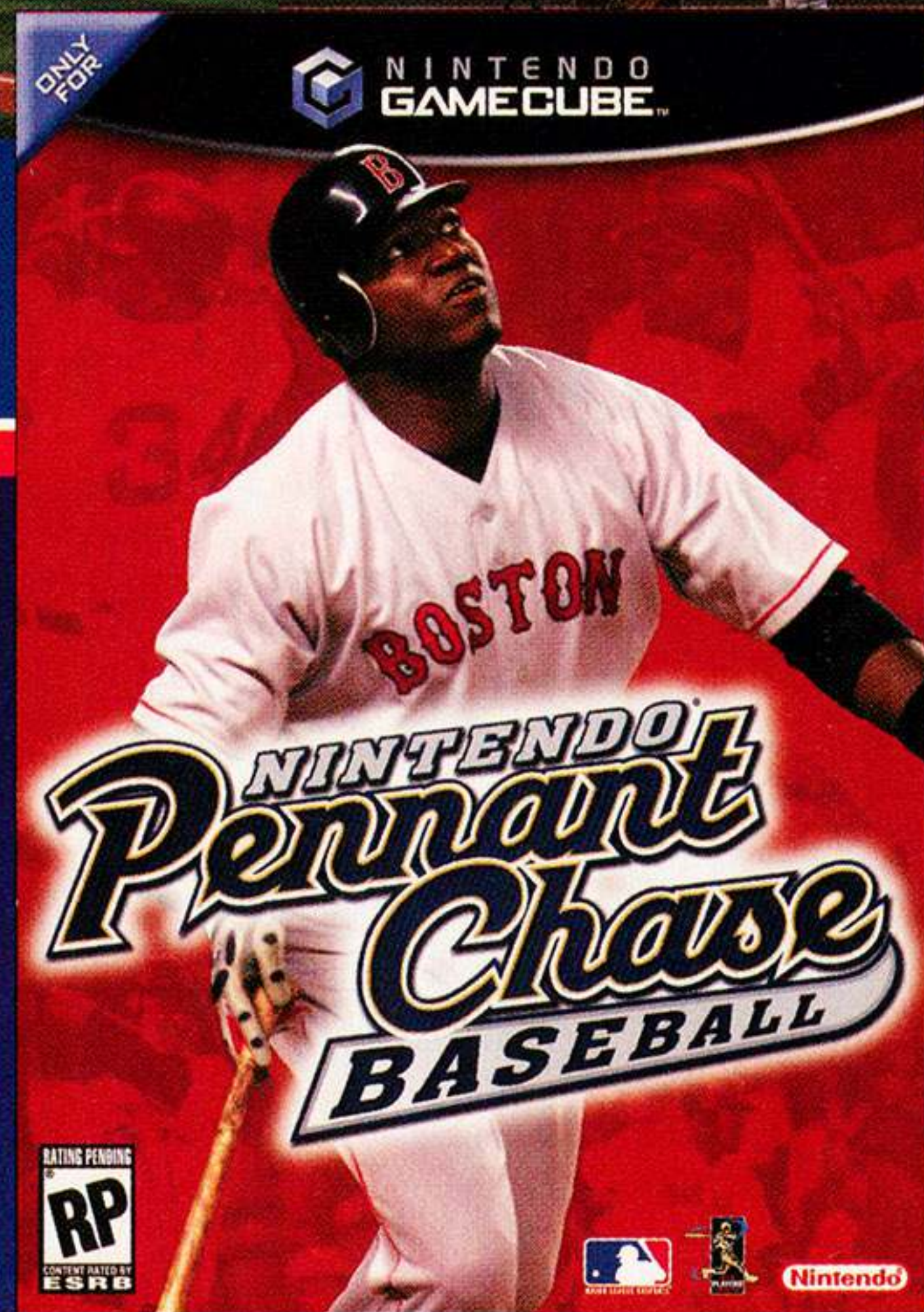
Who's on first? Not Mario, although truthfully, we would've loved watching him bean Bowser. Instead, you get the complete roster of official MLB players and teams, each sporting the most current stats possible. Tailored toward thrill-starved GameCube owners, this platform-exclusive affair appears primed for World Series stardom. It's a pretty impressive showing for a prospect that wasn't even on scouts' radars last season, if we do say so ourselves.

Go ahead and laugh; if Boston can pull it off, so can Nintendo®. Appropriately enough, the publishers partnered with Red Sox slugger David Ortiz, whose likeness adorns the title's

cover. Consider it a good match, given that both prove capable performers in a pinch. Feel free to sweat the spiritual connection as you rack up the RBIs at 30 big-name ballparks.

Pick off runners at Wrigley. Bat for the bleachers at Yankee Stadium. Aim the odd fastball at Curt Schilling's kisser... whatever. We won't tell. If it's an available option on the diamond, rest assured, it's in the game.

An added bonus: Cubs commentator Bob Brenly and Mariners standbys Rick Rizzs and Tom Hutyler call the shots as the excitement unfolds. And the visuals aren't bad to boot, with a full-fledged 3-D graphics engine translating



half-hearted jabs at the controller into eye-opening stunts. Frankly, at a glance, you'd never guess the game was making its rookie debut.

Granted, we're bummed Yoshi and Princess Peach are no-shows. But assuming you're on the market for an enjoyable arcade experience, well then, bat's all folks!

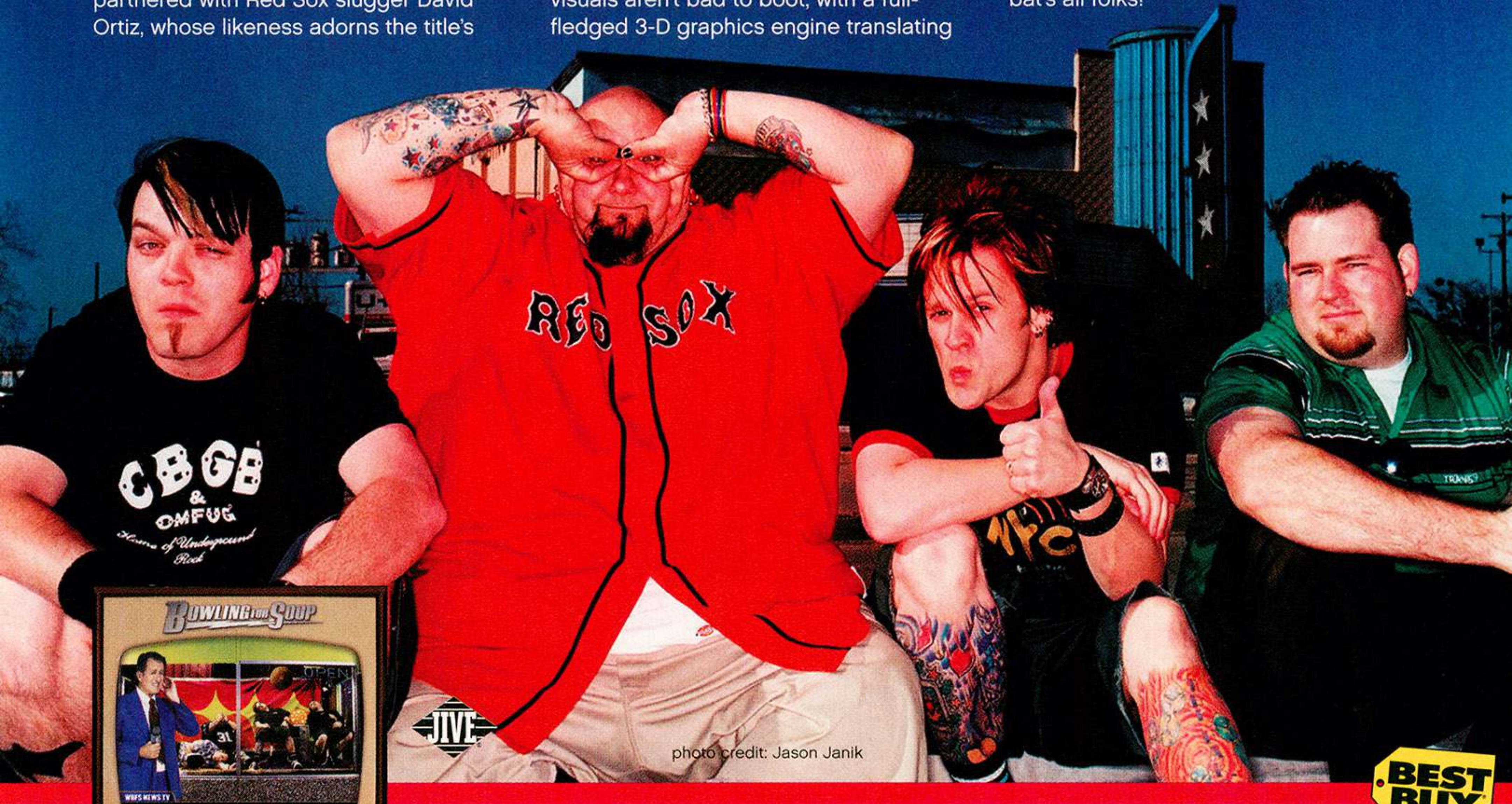


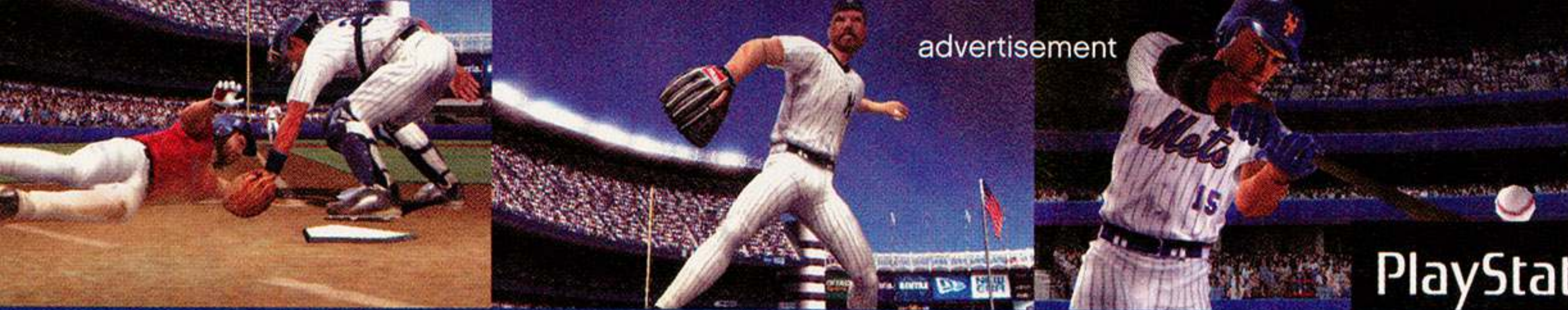
photo credit: Jason Janik



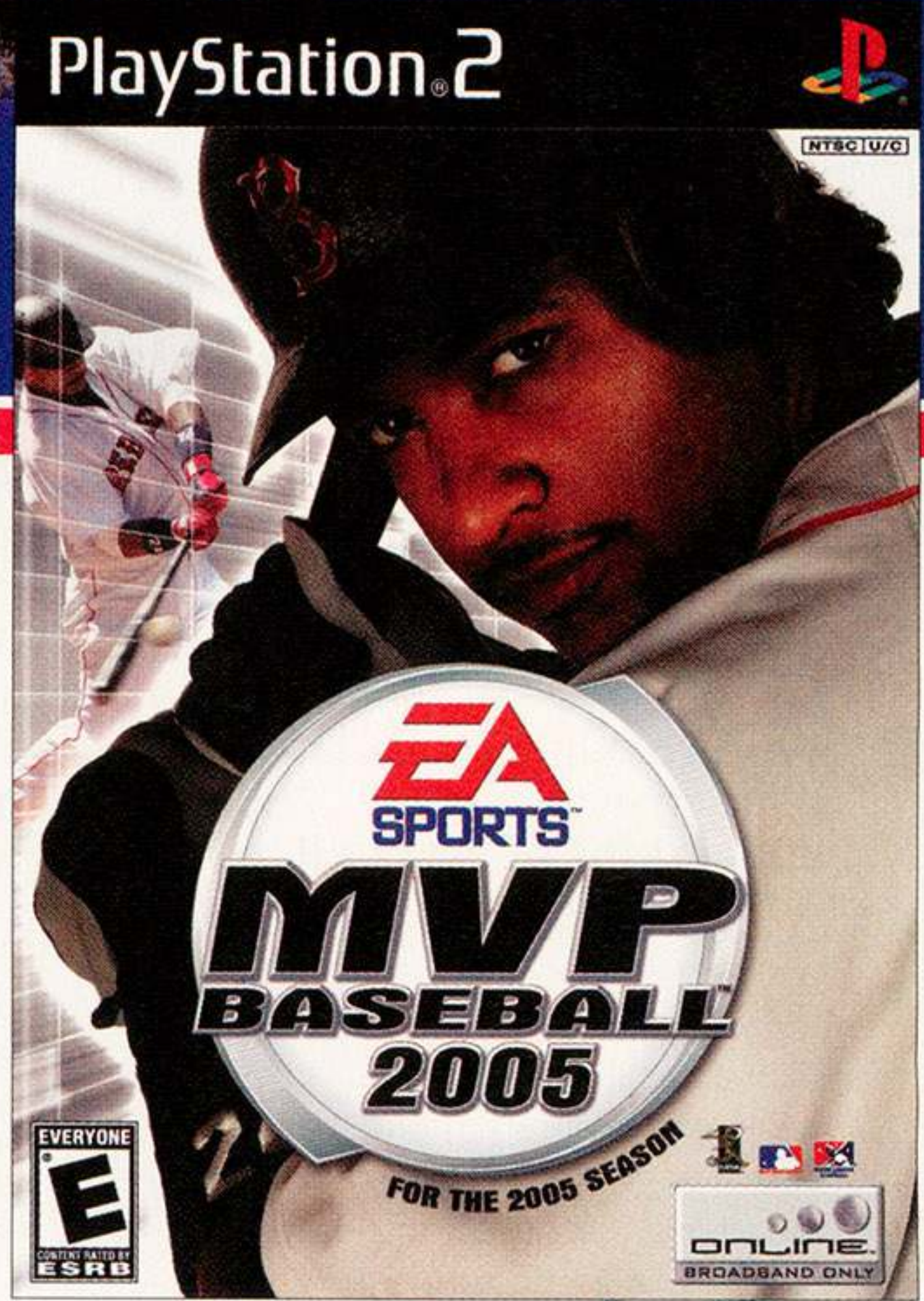
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Louis XIV

ON MVP Baseball 2005™

From: Electronic Arts. For: GameCube, PC, PlayStation 2, Xbox, PSP

Louis XIV see MVP Baseball 2005™ making headlines... and not just because the game features their smash single "Finding Out True Love Is Blind":

Whoa...looks like EA Sports™ just belted another one out of the park. Last year's MVP is back and batting a thousand with enhanced controls, slicker play, and more addictive mini-games. So even if you don't dig outfitting stadiums from seats to scoreboards in the all-new owner mode, it's still a sweet simulation of America's national pastime.

Our favorite features? Let's start with the just-added precision pitching meter that allows for greater accuracy on the mound. Then there's the unique Hitter's Eye system, which allows you to determine whether a slider or curve ball is coming based on color-coded throws. An improved user interface also makes it easier to avoid outfielders, steal bases,

and climb walls for picture-perfect catches. The fact that you're provided options for creating custom ballparks and recruiting rookies from the minor leagues is pretty crazy as well.

Anybody who's stuck home Saturday night isn't confined to playing alone, either; the range of online features offered is insane. Kicking a friend's ass over a broadband connection is so much fun we're almost ashamed to admit it.

Packing support for Spring Training and loads of legendary players to unlock, it's an all-star outing. And remember...it's all fun and games until somebody slings beer at the TV. Now, that's what we call foul ball.

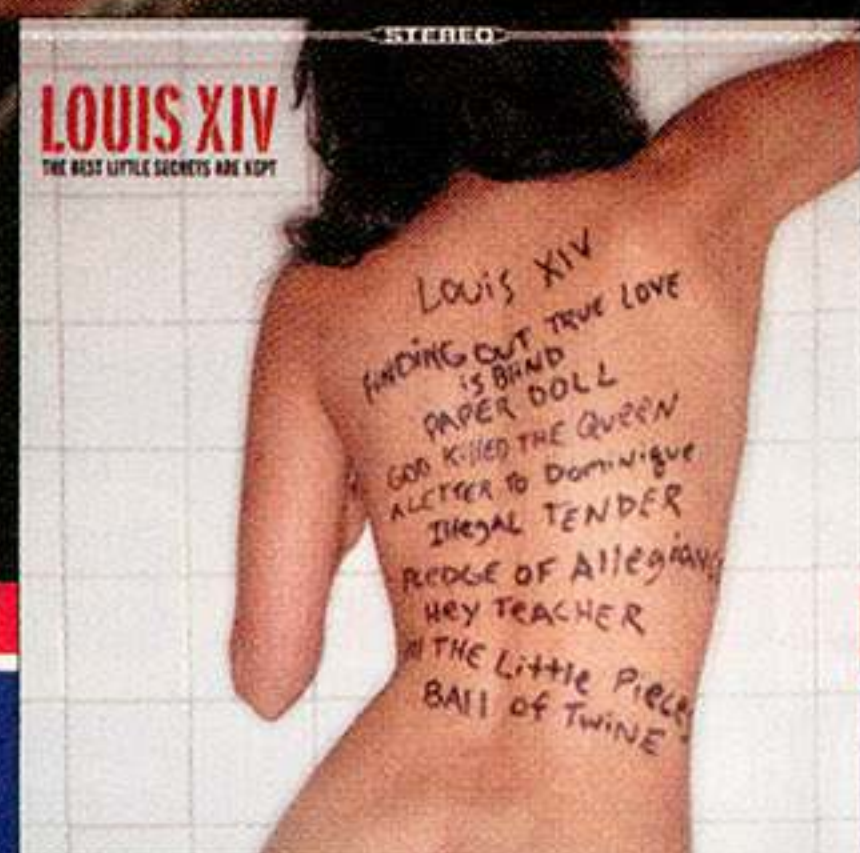


photo credit: Andy Willsher



The Best Little Secrets Are Kept now available on Atlantic Records. louisxiv.net BestBuy.com



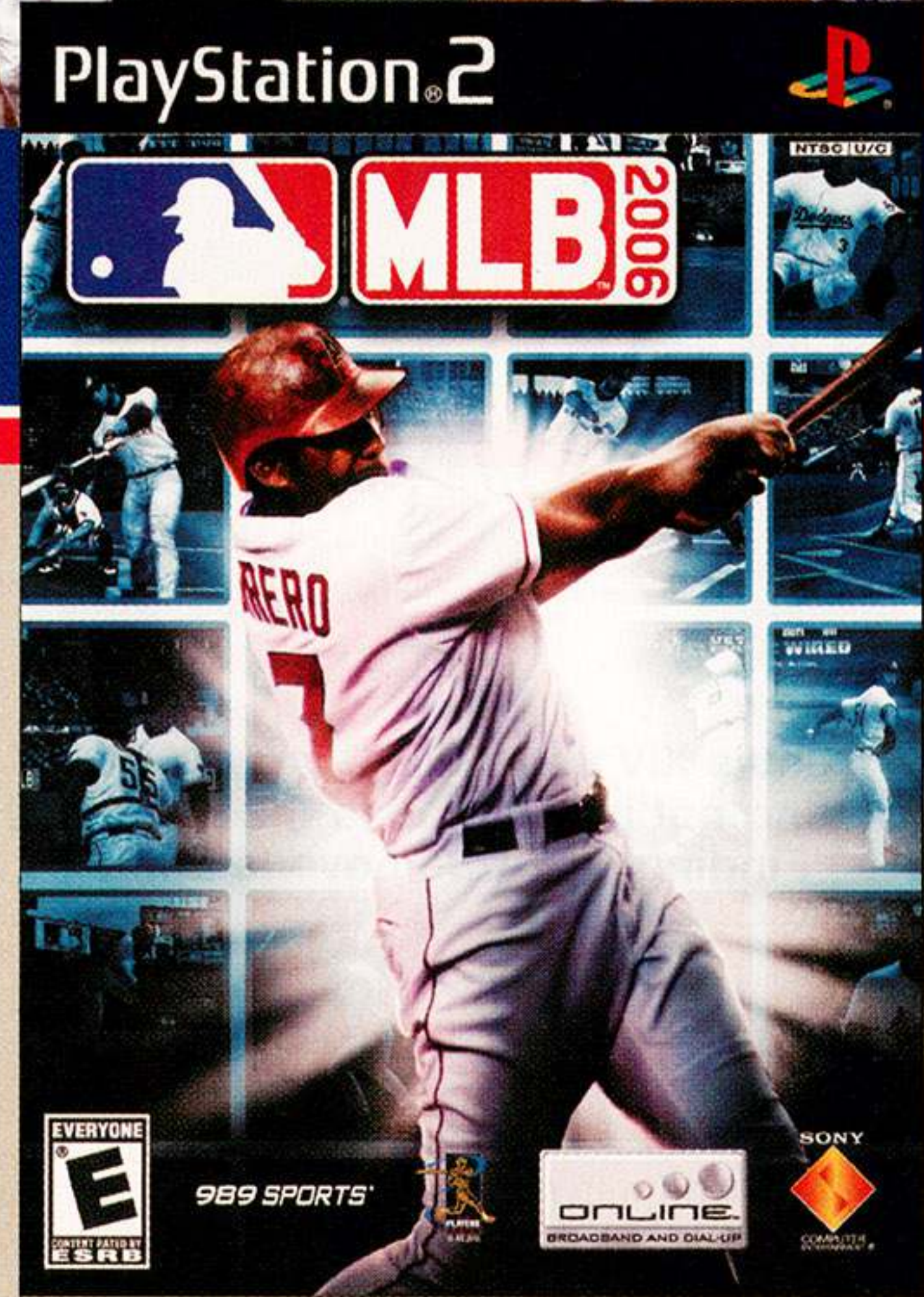
advertisement



the High Speed Scene

ON MLB 2006

From: Sony. For: Playstation 2, PSP



Hard-rockin' heroes the High Speed Scene take us out to the ballgame with *MLB™ 2006*, with a soundtrack that includes their latest jam "All About It":

Talk about a grand slam; hands-down, this is the most realistic romp we've ever seen. Armchair enthusiasts and anal-retentives alike will adore the game's attention to detail. Now boasting ear-shattering audio, awesome animation, and tools that monitor pros' performance on and off the Astroturf, the *MLB* franchise finally earns itself a place in baseball's Hall of Fame.

Never mind options for accessing all-time favorites like Lou Gehrig or Babe Ruth; it's the software's knack for capturing baseball's nuances that we're really psyched about. The game's Branch Point Technology makes running and fielding transitions utterly seamless. A unique confidence system also causes throw accuracy to decline

depending on how intimidated a pitcher is by opponents. Fielding fly balls isn't a foregone conclusion anymore either; the less developed a player's abilities are, the harder it is to catch pop-ups and potential homers.

As for the hottest new addition, check out career mode. Beginning in the minors, you'll follow in the footsteps of league legends while negotiating trades, promotions, interviews, and salary adjustments. Slackers need not apply: The harder you hit the gym and more time spent training, the further you'll rise up the ranks.

Other highlights include the ability to issue verbal commands and a franchise option that tracks player morale. The coolest extra has to be EyeToy support. Using the USB camera (sold separately), gamers can literally snap self-portraits and plaster 'em onto athletes' heads. Here's looking at you, kid...

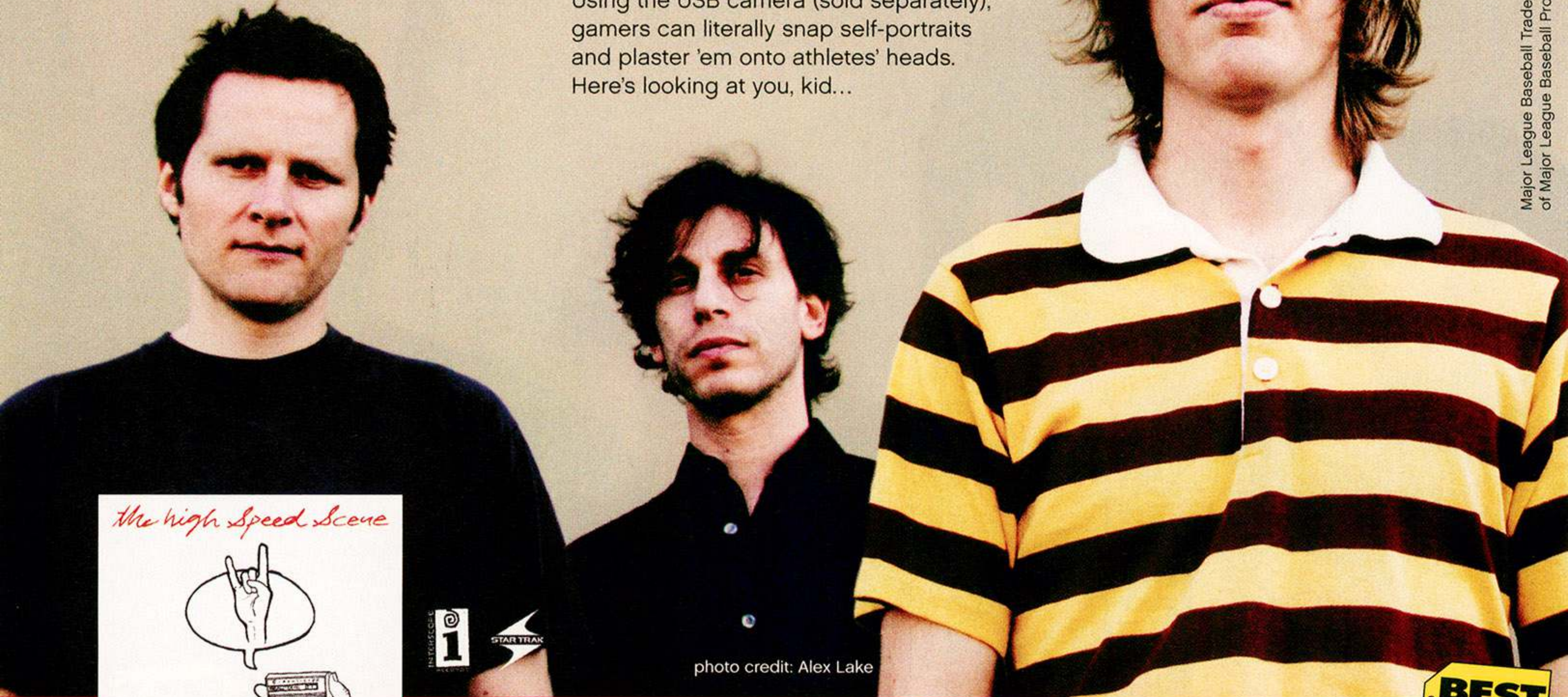


photo credit: Alex Lake

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Their self-titled debut album now available! thehighspeedscene.com



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THE HOT TEN

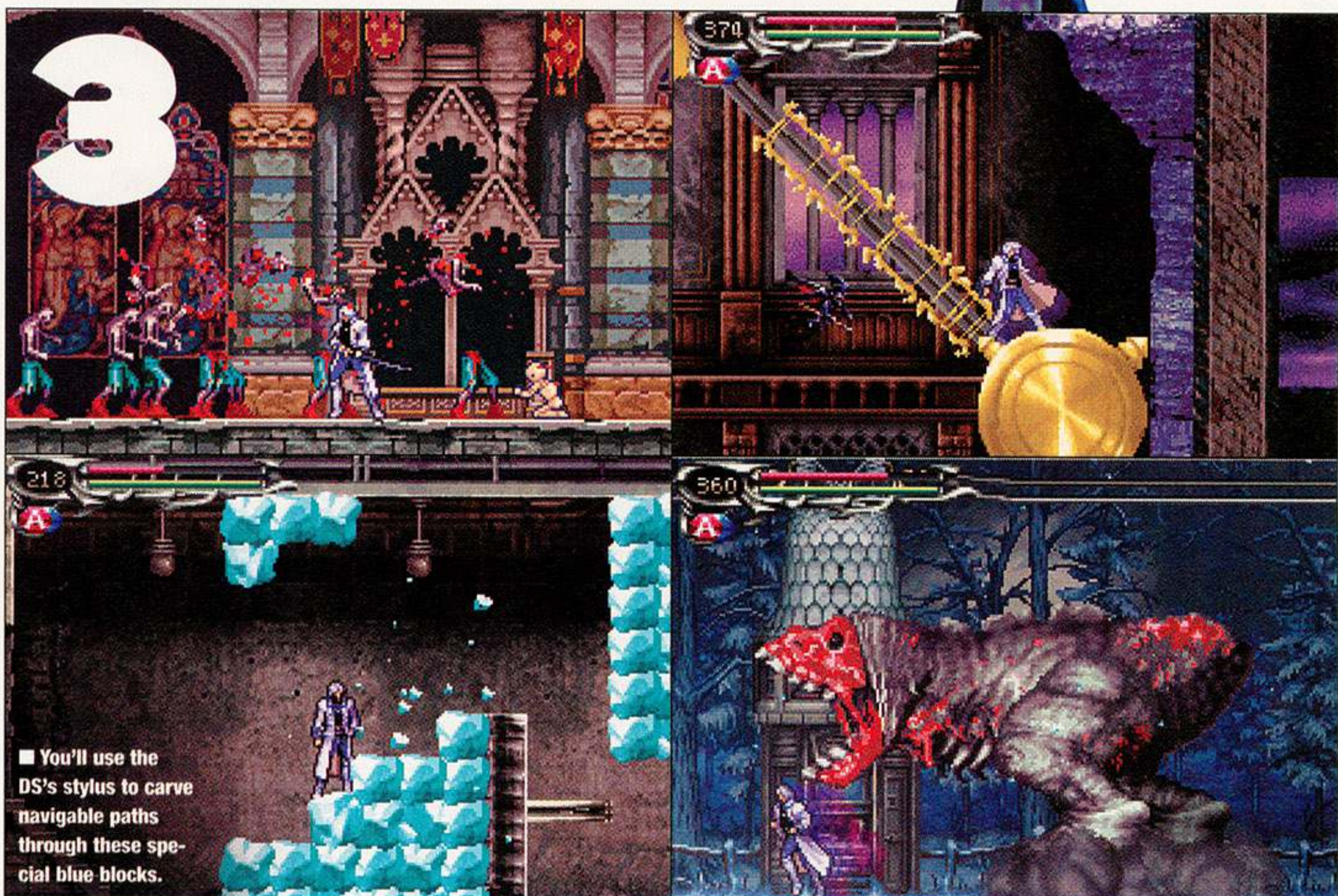
Games so scorchingly hot, pressing these pages to your face will singe those eyebrows right off

Disagree with the list? You're the ones who created it. Choose and/or lose at egm.1UP.com.



Perfect Dark Zero's Joanna Dark gets ready for her coming out party.

- 1 **The Legend of Zelda**
GC • Fall 2005
- 2 **Final Fantasy XII**
PS2 • Fall 2005
- 3 **Castlevania**
DS • Fall 2005
- 4 **Wanda and the Colossus**
PS2 • Fall 2005
- 5 **Kingdom Hearts II**
PS2 • Fall 2005
- 6 **Perfect Dark Zero**
XB2 • November 2005
- 7 **Animal Crossing DS**
DS • Summer 2005
- 8 **Castlevania: Curse of Darkness**
PS2 • Fall 2005
- 9 **Dirge of Cerberus: Final Fantasy VII**
PS2 • Fall 2005
- 10 **Mario Kart DS**
DS • June 2005



You'll use the DS's stylus to carve navigable paths through these special blue blocks.

CASTLEVANIA

DS • Fall 2005 — Surprisingly, Konami's upcoming DS installment in its long-running *Castlevania* franchise actually gave *Zelda* a little competition this month. Frankly, it deserves it: As the direct sequel to the excellent *Castlevania: Aria of Sorrow*

(GBA), this should serve up more of the quality gaming we've come to expect—a massive, complex map to explore, a diverse arsenal of weaponry, oodles of creepy bosses, and one amazingly metrosexual hero named Soma Cruz.



CASTLEVANIA: CURSE OF DARKNESS

PS2 • Fall 2005 — *Darkness* promises to deliver what 2003's *Lament of Innocence* could not—a fully realized 3D adventure worthy of the series' blood-curdling PS1 ancestor, *Symphony of the Night*. Complex level design, tons of unique equippable weapons, and new demonic A.I. partners should certainly help.



MARIO KART DS

DS • June 2005 — By now, plumber turned action-game superstar Mario has spent more hours behind the wheel than he has behind the toilet plunger. The year 2005 will be a banner one for *Mario Kart* fans: This DS version will be the first to offer online multiplayer karting action, and Nintendo and Namco will also bring *Mario Kart* to arcades as an all-new, four-player, sit-down racer with new tracks and power-ups.



press start

COMING SOON

Online gang warfare...the perfect gift for Mom



Darkwatch's Tala wants to suck your...blood

MAY 2005



25 to Life
Eidos • PS2/XB — When law-dispensing cops and thugged-out gangstas meet in this online arena, expect cursing aplenty.



Advent Rising
Majesco • XB — Sci-fi fans can finally exhale: This ambitious, long-delayed adventure will (most likely) release in May.



Arc the Lad: End of Darkness
Namco • PS2 — More RPG-ing in the *Arc* series, but this time with real-time combat and online versus matches.



Atelier Iris: Eternal Mana
Nippon • PS2 — Give 'em what they want: another RPG about magical artifacts, spunky princesses, and floating cities.



Darkwatch
Sega • PS2/XB — It's a first-person shooter...set in the Old West...with vampires! What could possibly go wrong?



Death, Jr.
Konami • PSP — Make the hard decision—fight ancient demons or be grounded and sent to military school.



Enthusia Professional Racing
Konami • PS2 — A serious racing game that has a feature inspired by *Dance Dance Revolution*...the hell?



Haunting Ground
Capcom • PS2 — A recently orphaned 18-year-old hottie finds herself imprisoned in her own inherited spooky castle. Before long, a deformed man starts chasing her—OK, this is how *Lemony Snicket* should have gone down, preferably rated NC-17.



Forza Motorsport
Microsoft • XB — Vroom your way around the racetrack in beautifully rendered cars you wish you could afford.



Glimmerati
Nokia • N-Gage — Oh, man. Another racing game? You gearheads are just getting spoiled this month.



Hot Shots Golf
Sony CEA • PSP — Trying to squeeze a full 18 holes into your morning commute could prove difficult. Try playing hooky.



Juiced
THQ • PS2/XB — Expect 7.2 trillion possible custom-car creations, even though everyone picks the Nissan Skyline.



MotoGP 3
THQ • XB — The camera will shake and everything will blur as you reach top speeds in this welcomed sequel.



Outlaw Volleyball: Remixed
Global Star • PS2 — Quit playing with yourself. Your favorite volleyball game is back with some naughty online play.



Outlaw Tennis
Global Star • PS2/XB — Play with features like exploding balls and outfits that even Serena wouldn't touch.



Rainbow 6: Lockdown
Ubisoft • GC — Killing terrorists has never been so chic. Too bad this version lacks the online play of its console cousins.

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Code: 15404



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Code: 17358



Code: 17020



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3. Lovers And Friends 22602
4. Drop It Like It's Hot 17890
5. What U Gon' Do 19386
6. Knuck If You Buck 17906
7. Go DJ 22728

Rock / Pop

1. Boulevard Of Broken Dreams 19791
2. Numb 12856
3. Float On 15985
4. Take Me Out 16256
5. Santeria 296
6. Amber 12090
7. Are You Gonna Be My Girl 13970

Country

1. Save A Horse, Ride A Cowboy 15684
2. Friends In Low Places 12935
3. Some Beach 16918
4. On The Road Again 10045
5. Live Like You Were Dying 15785
6. Devil Went Down To Georgia 859
7. It's Five O'clock Somewhere 11979

Retro Cool

1. Super Mario Bros. Theme 433
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Combat Fighting

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Black Jack

Fight in the underground fighting championship against the top fighting masters in the world. Can you fight your way to the top?

Code: 10978



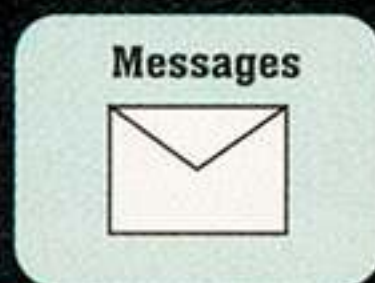
Slots

Move joystick to the right/left to select one of three possible options: BET ONE, BET MAX and SPIN. Press the fire key to choose selected option.

Code: 11059

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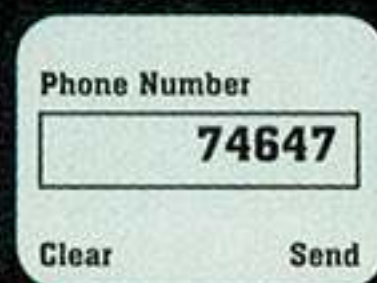


Messages



Write Message
MOB EGMB
12345

Clear OK



Phone Number

74647

Clear Send



New message
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2. Write the word MOB then a space then EGMB then a space then the code of the product you want.

3. Send the message to phone number 74647.

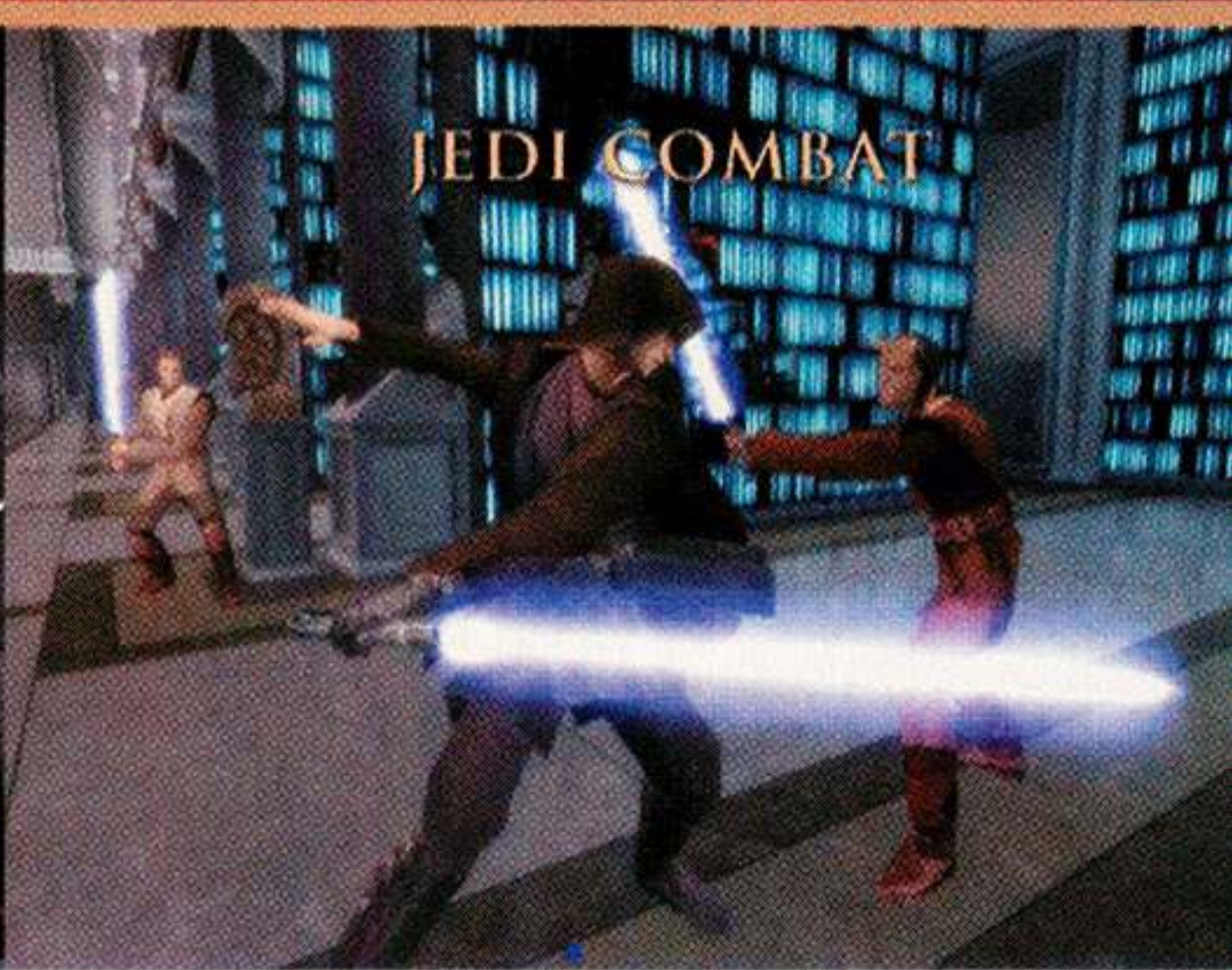
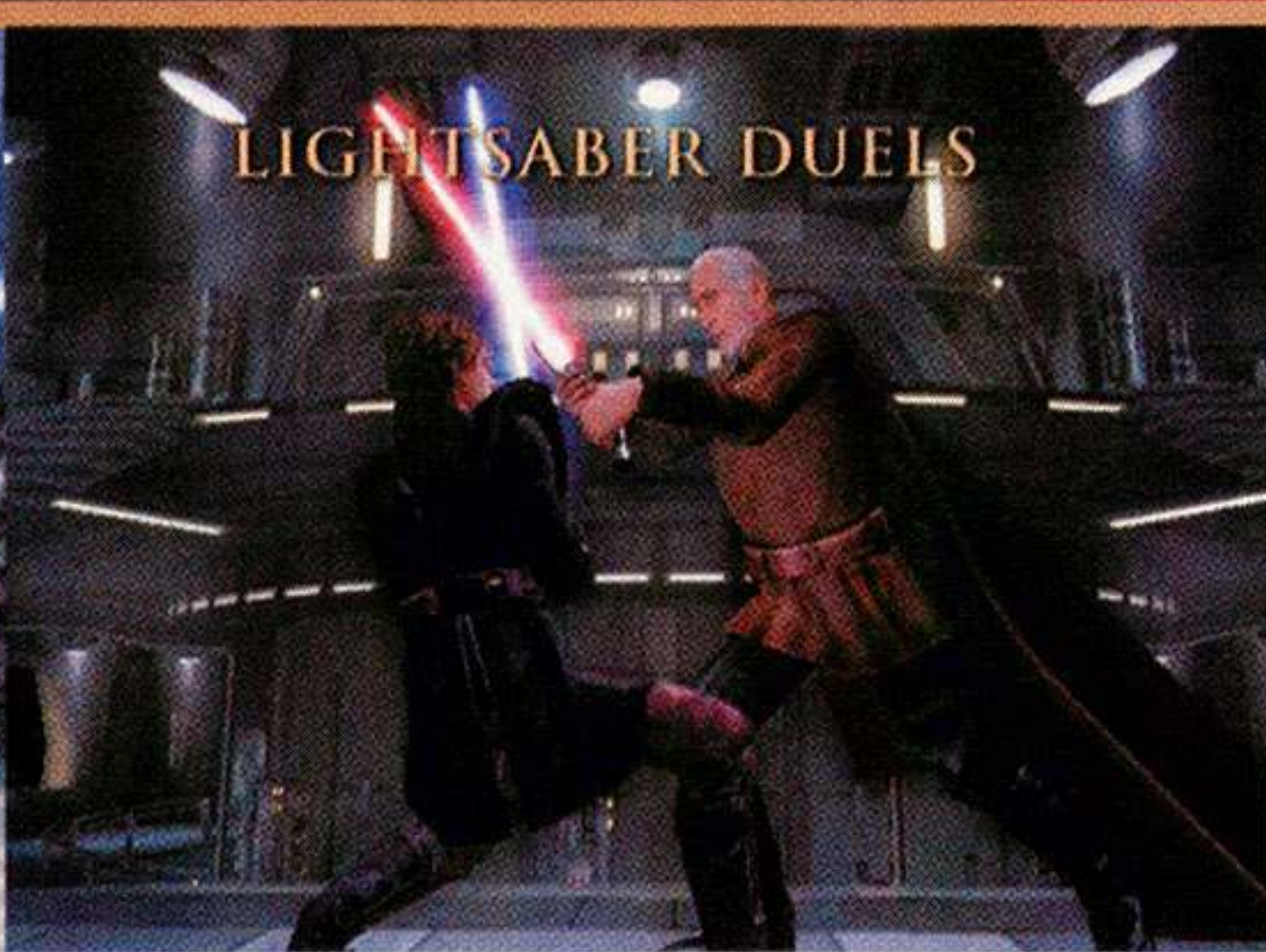
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PlayStation®2

GAME BOY ADVANCE

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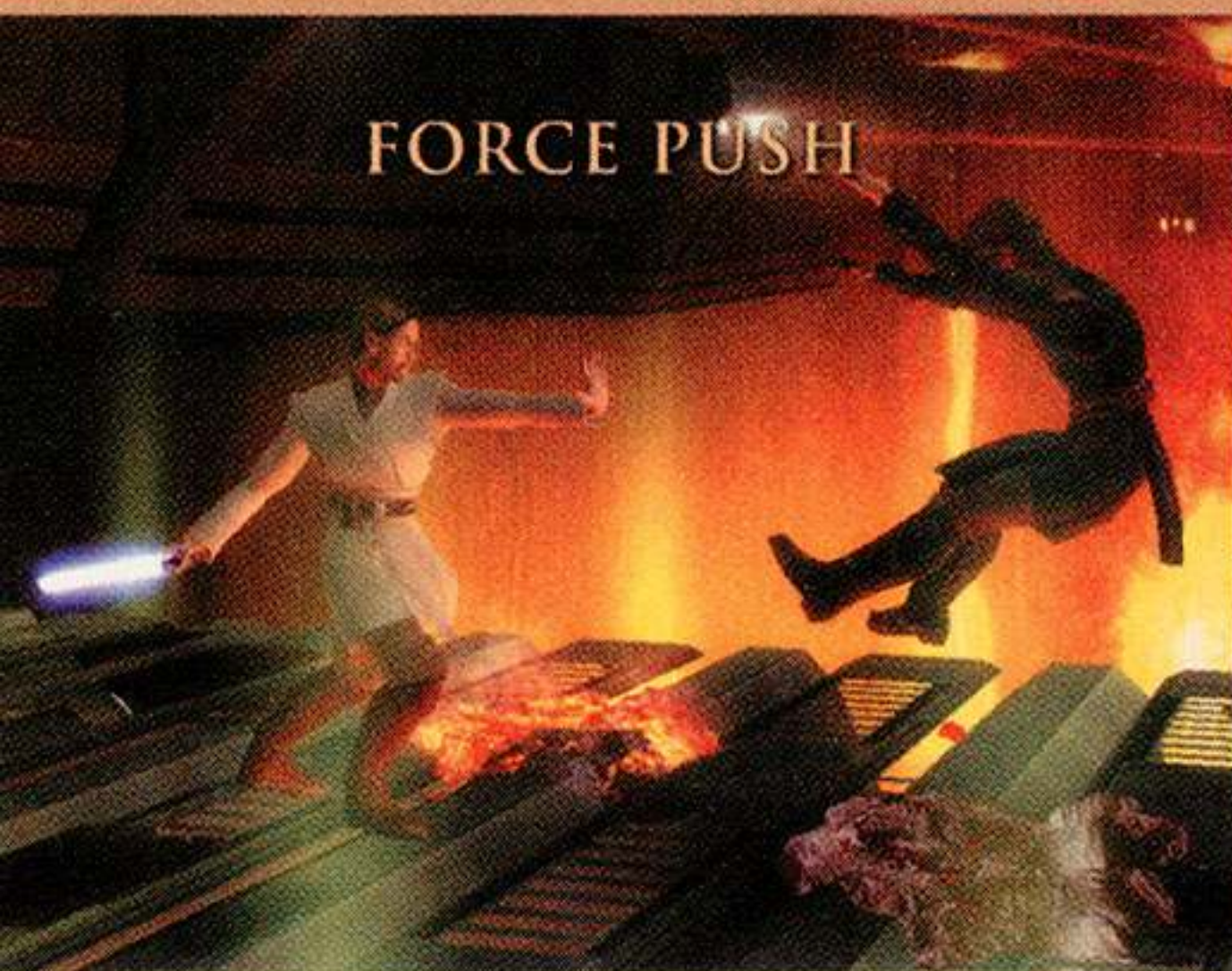


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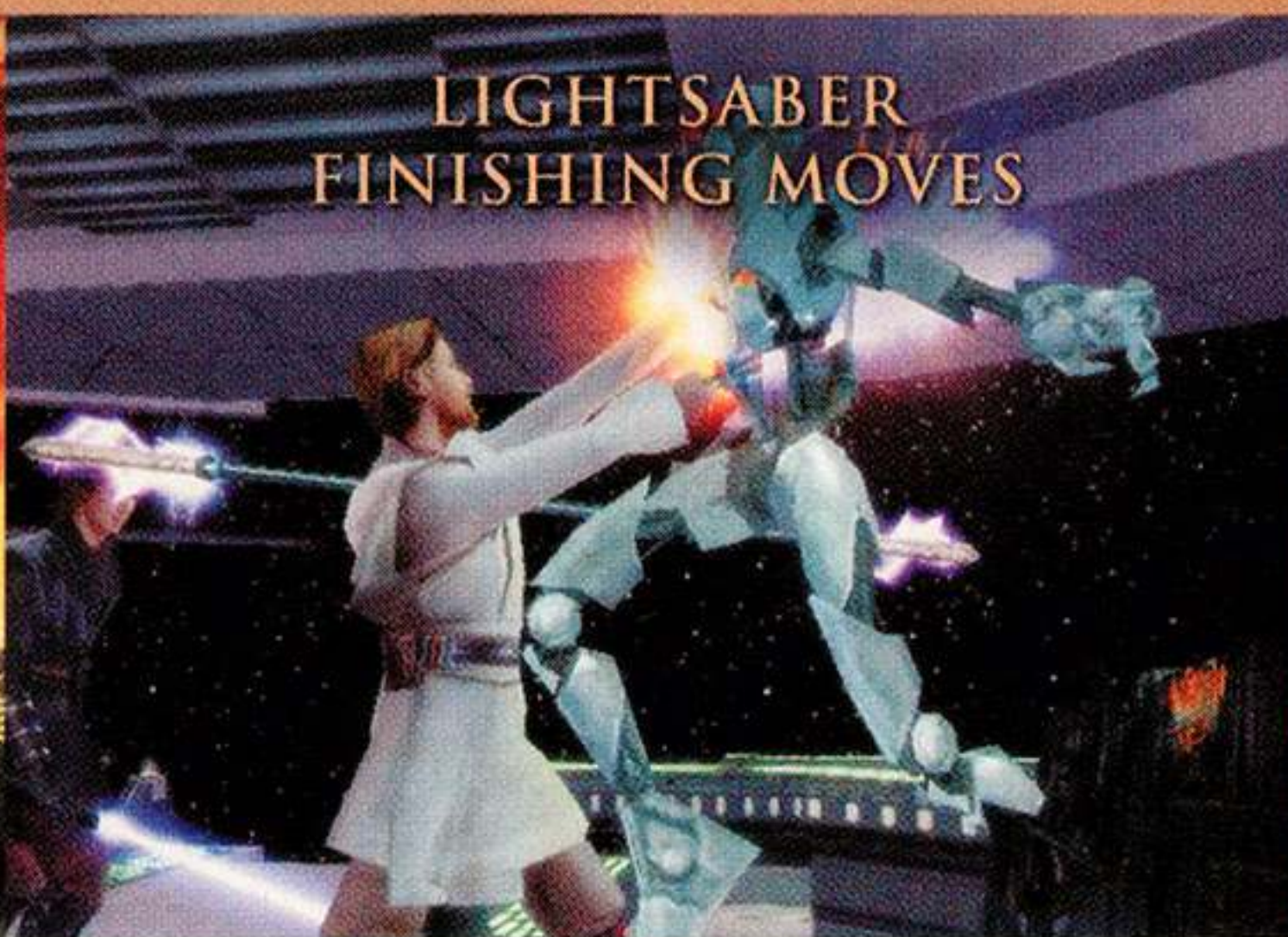
STAR WARS EPISODE III REVENGE OF THE SITH™

05.05.05

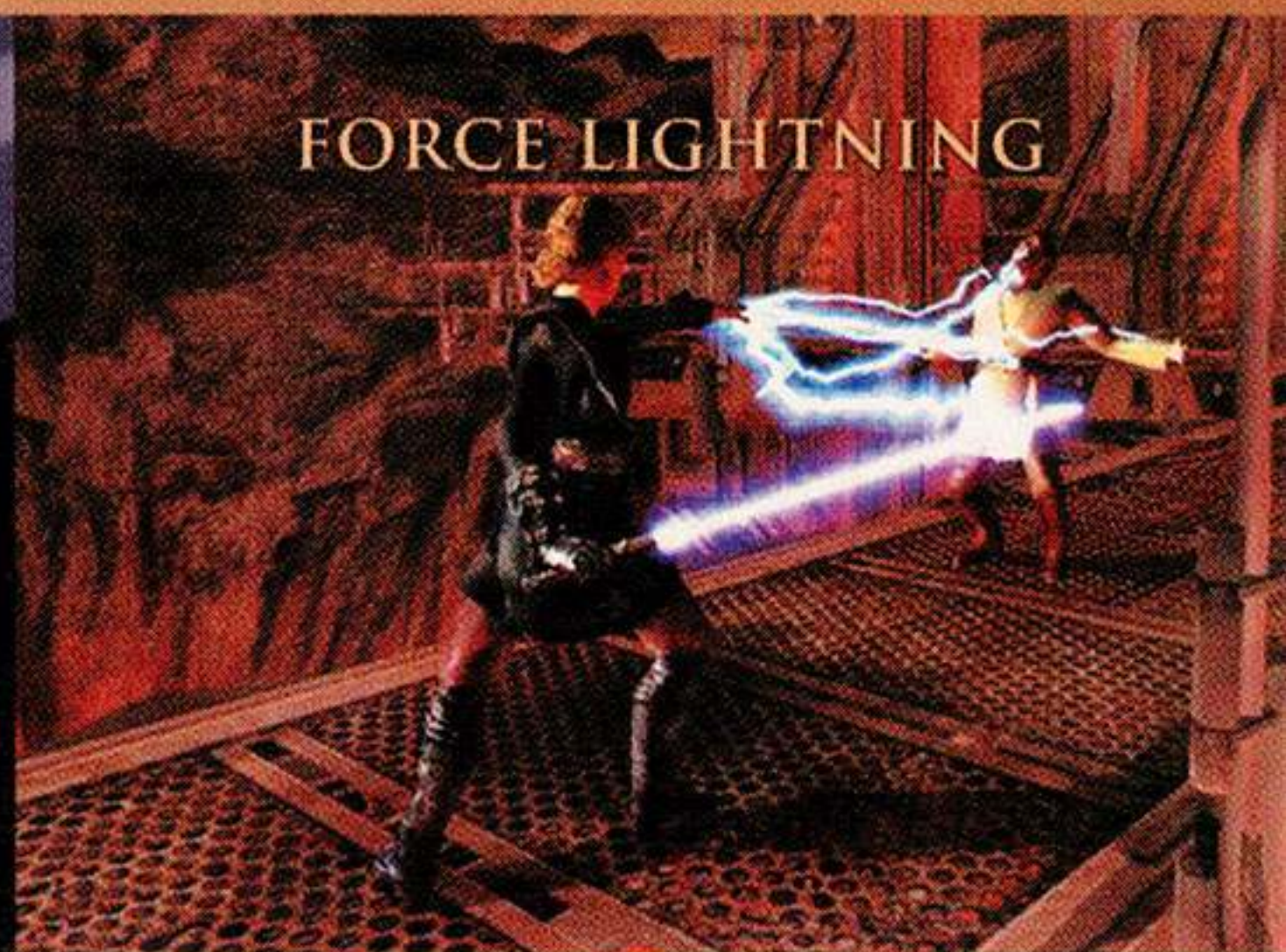
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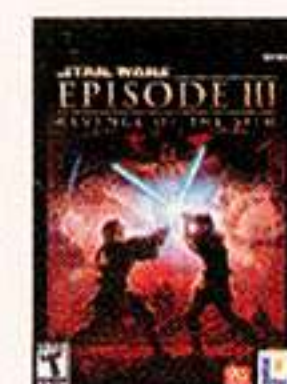
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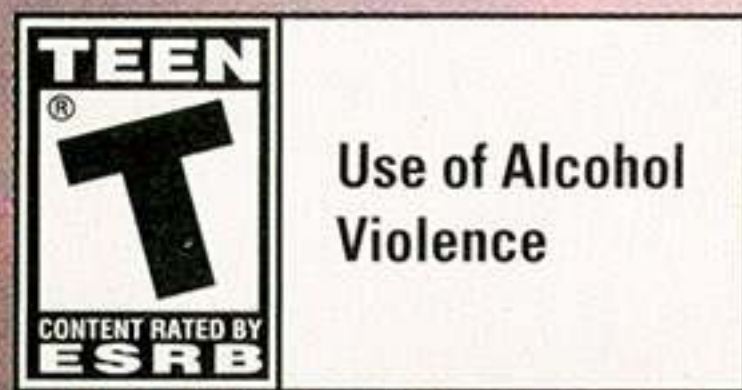
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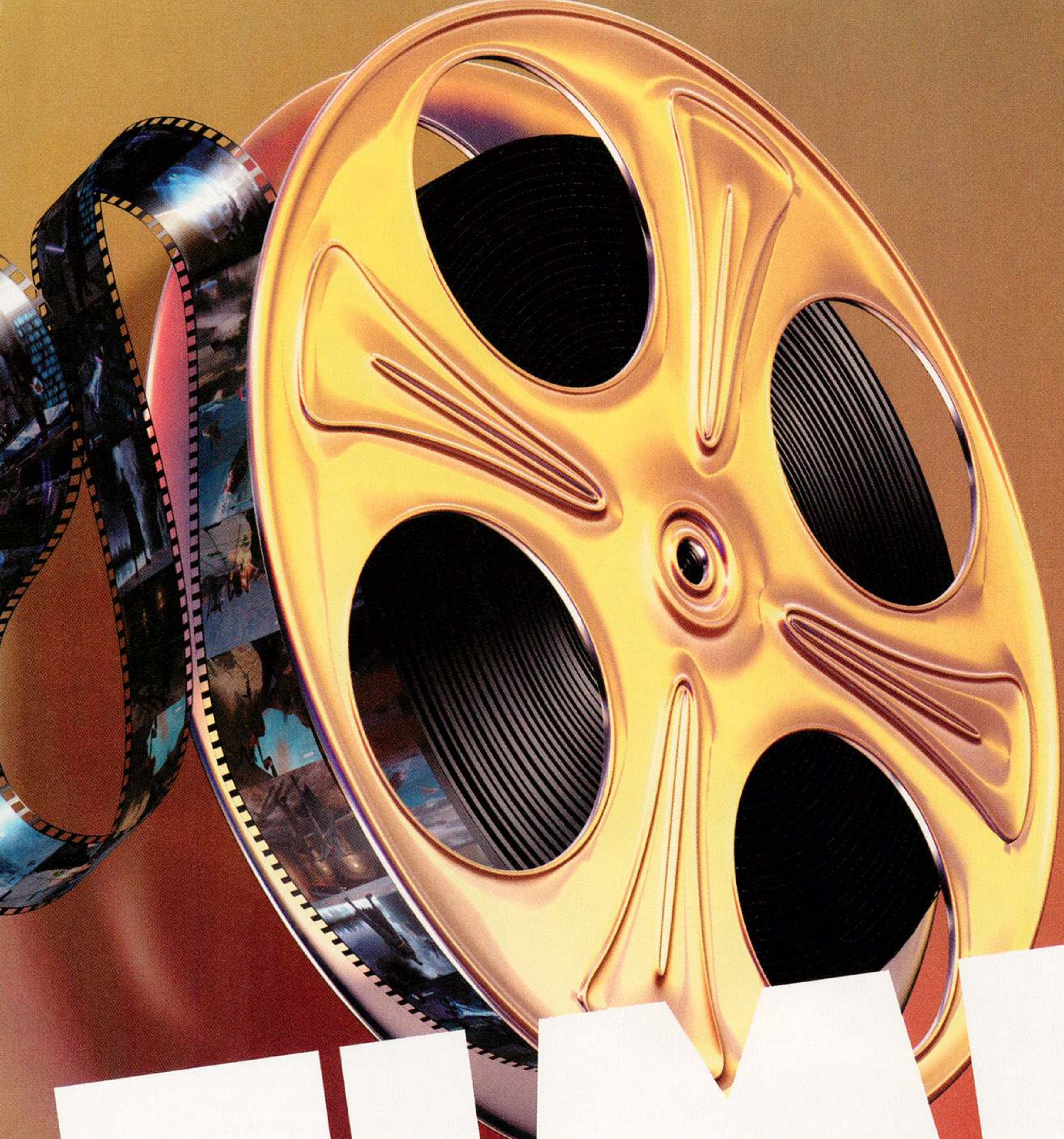
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Mild Language
Sexual Themes
Violence

3D Render by Chuck Ernst

REEL



TIME

Coming soon to your game console:
every major movie you can imagine

By Shane Bettenhausen, Crispin Boyer,
Justin Speer, and Nich Maragos

Movies run at 24 frames per second; videogames hit 60. Box-office revenues have fallen below game sales. And have you seen *The Chronicles of Riddick* in theaters, then played the killer Xbox game? Let's face it: Videogames beat the crap out of movies when it comes to pure entertainment potential. Sure, that potential isn't always reached (see—or, rather, don't see—anything *Van Helsing* related), but that hasn't stopped Hollywood and the games industry from trying. See for yourself in these coming attractions.... >



JAWS

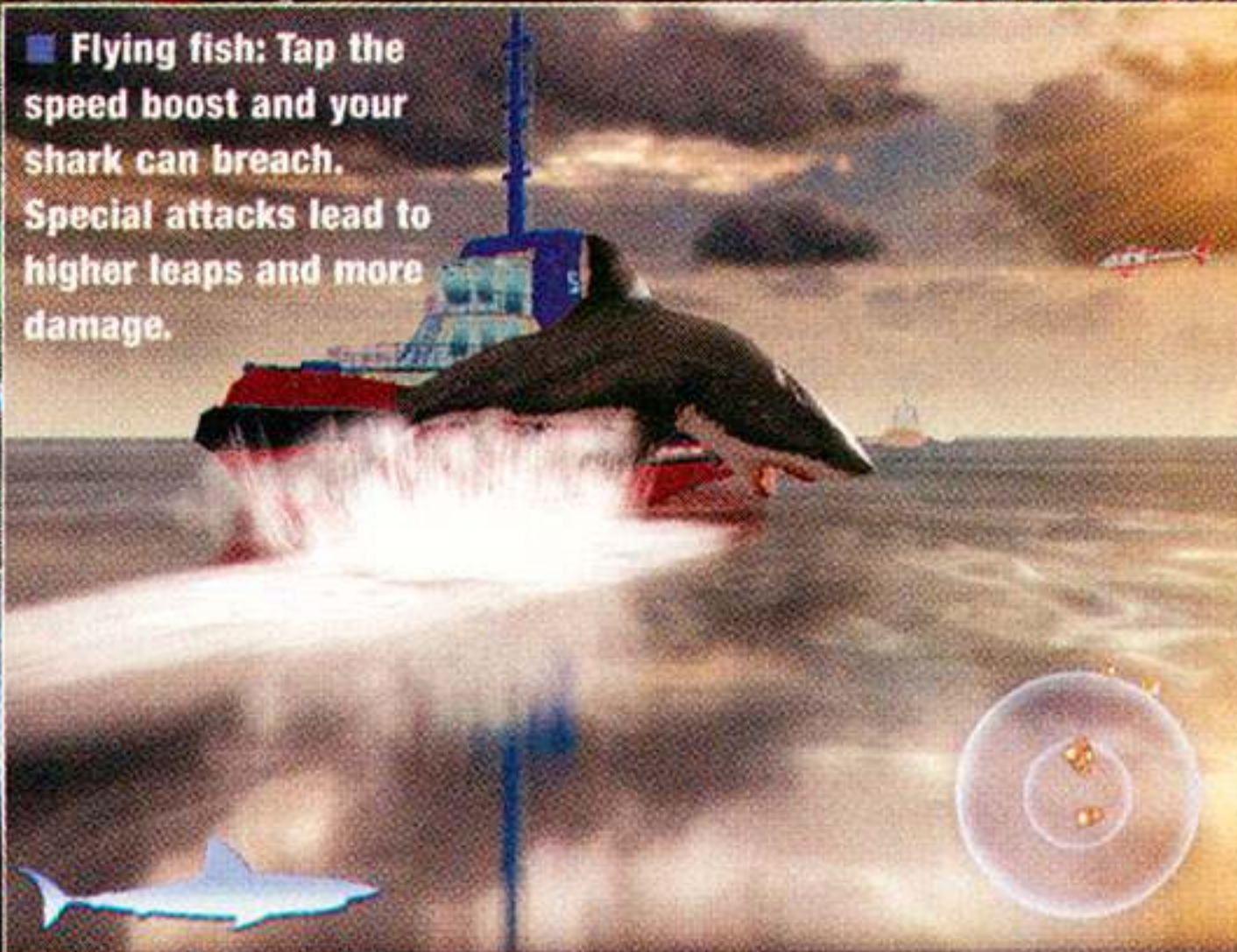
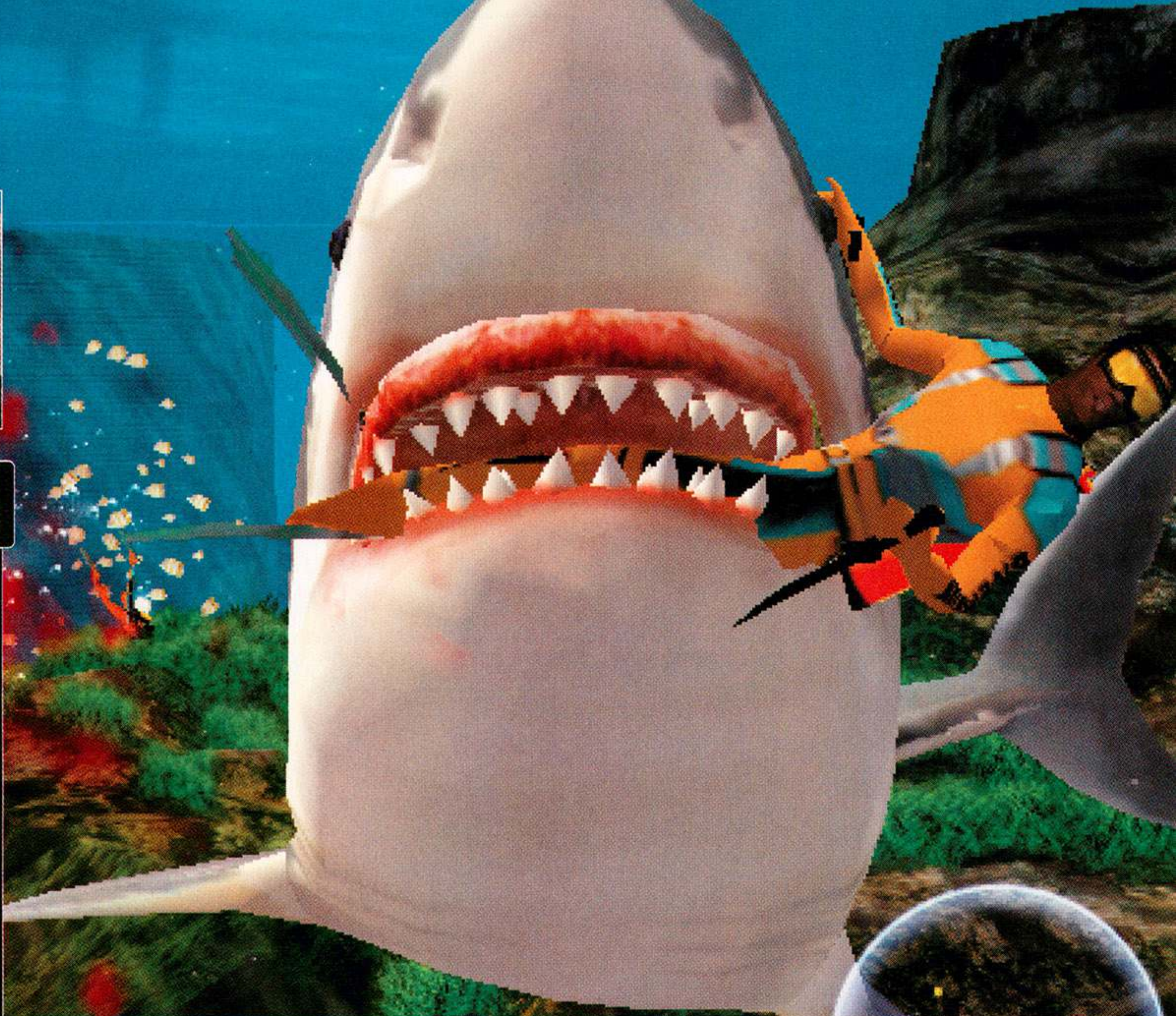
PS2/XB • Majesco • August 2005

On your TV screen: You only need to know two things about this killer-fish simulator to get hooked: You play as the man-eating shark, and the game has a "dismemberment engine." (Give your victims a good thrashing, and they'll disintegrate into bait-size bits.) Foolish beach bathers may be the special of the day, but *Jaws*' makers encourage you to sample the rest of the menu. "Seals, dolphins, other sharks, killer whales—the list goes on," says Producer Sean Scott. "The game will be chock-full of humans, creatures, boats, minisubs...."

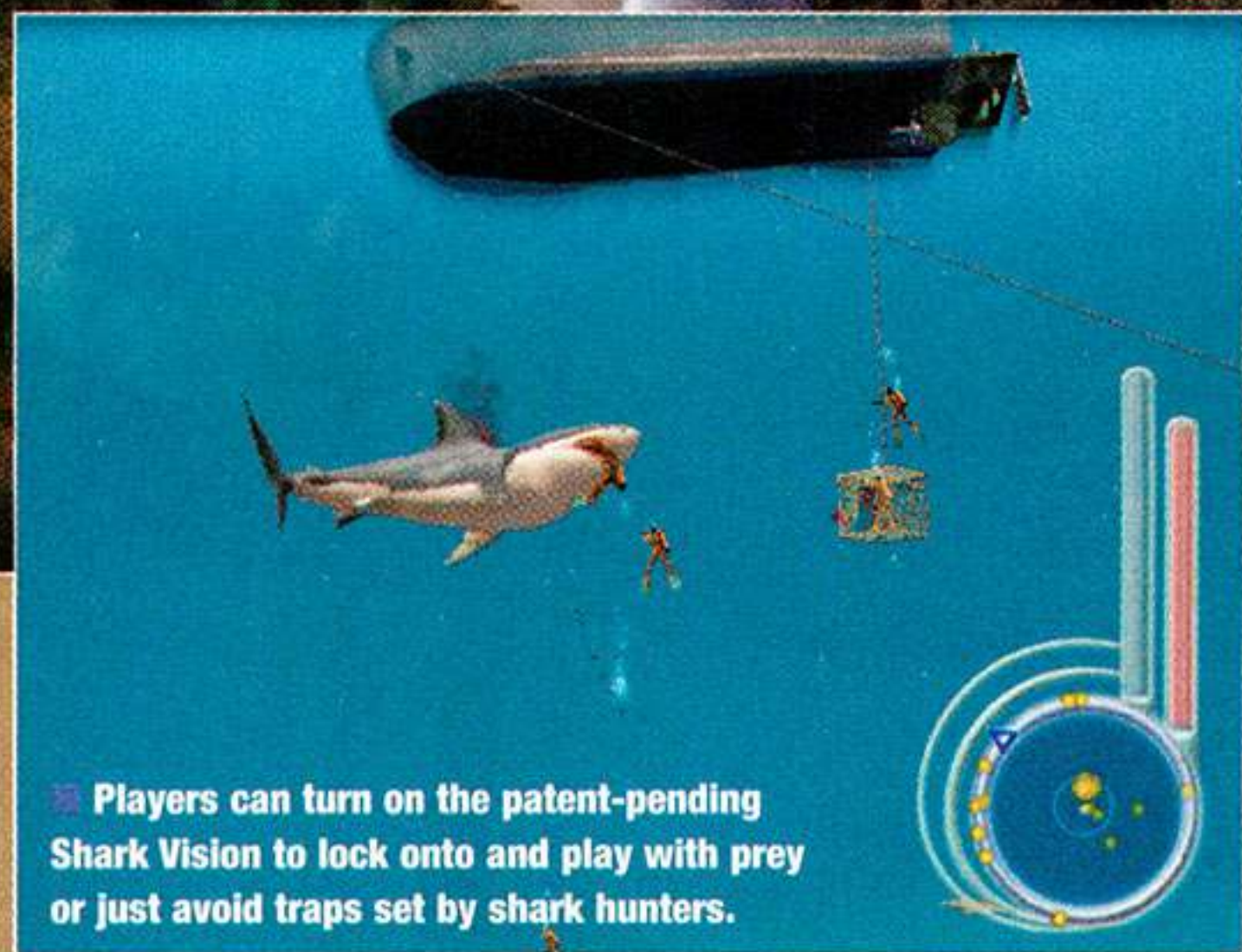
Jaws is not a scene-for-scene retelling of the classic flick (otherwise, the final boss would be Roy Scheider's Chief Brody, and you'd have to explode on cue). Instead, the game is set 30 years after the movie, whose Amity Island setting has developed into a thriving, industrialized city. You become a wanted fish after you devour the son of a local CEO, who then hires a shark hunter to track and kill you. What follows is a series of story missions, as well as side adventures and a wide-open ocean bound to become your own all-you-can-eat buffet. Think of it as *Grand Theft Auto* of the sea. "The style is free-roaming like *GTA*, *Spider-Man 2*, and *Mercenaries*," Scott says.

Of course, the game's makers are chumming *Jaws*' waters to attract fans of the flick's key moments. "[*Jaws*] will emulate certain scenes," Scott says, "such as dragging the first female victim through the water, being chased and shot with harpoons attached to barrels, causing panic on the Fourth of July beach, etc." Great...and here we thought it was safe to go back in the water.

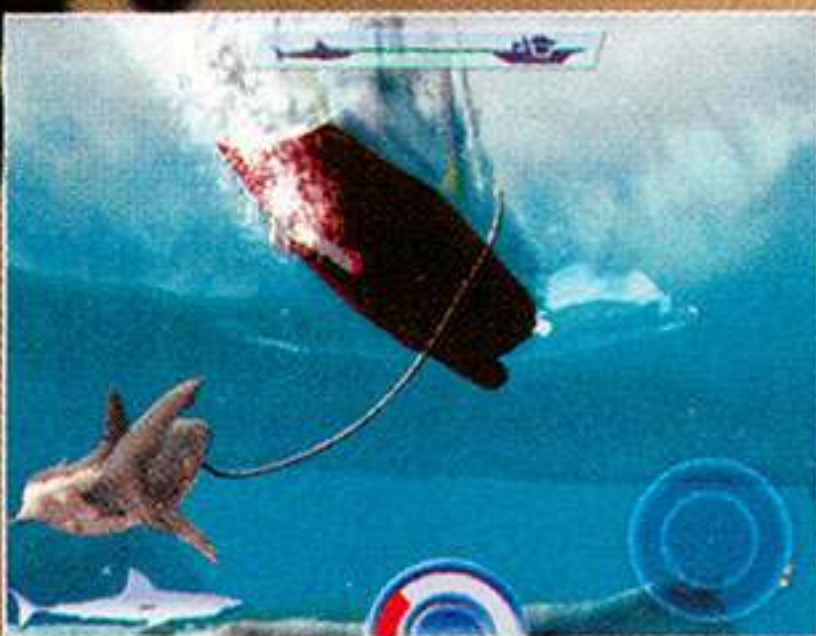
On the silver screen: Randy teenagers stopped skinny-dipping at the beach—or even in their swimming pools—overnight in the summer of 1975, when Steven Spielberg's *Jaws* convinced us all that toothy, white-bellied death lurked just beneath the water's surface. The flick's depiction of a great white shark that turned a New England island community into a smorgasbord became the first summer blockbuster. ▶



■ Flying fish: Tap the speed boost and your shark can breach. Special attacks lead to higher leaps and more damage.



■ Players can turn on the patent-pending Shark Vision to lock onto and play with prey or just avoid traps set by shark hunters.



■ Get harpooned and the game becomes a tug-of-war. "One option is to head for the boat and ram it, bite it, or tail-whip it to destroy it," says Producer Sean Scott.

REEL FACTS

Jaws the movie is based on a Peter Benchley book, which itself is based on a series of real shark attacks off the Jersey coast in 1916.

Readers polled on 1UP.com voted that the *Jaws* flicks "jumped the shark" with *Jaws 3-D*. (See www.jumptheshark.com if you're clueless about the phrase.)

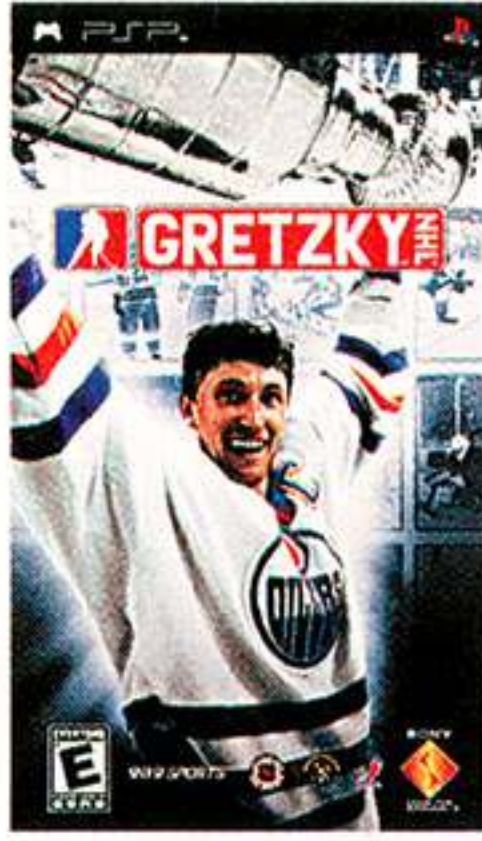
Jaws is being developed by Appaloosa Interactive, the Hungary-based makers of the *Ecco the Dolphin* games. *Jaws* stars Ecco's playful fellow dolphins—as appetizers.

The game features no stars from the movie, although it does have spin-off characters such as Chief Brody's son, a marine biologist bent on capturing you for science.



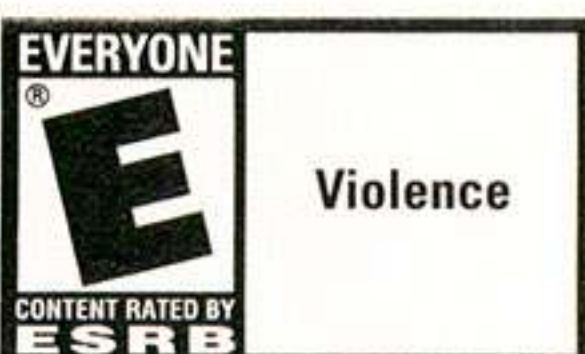
■ Hello, chum.





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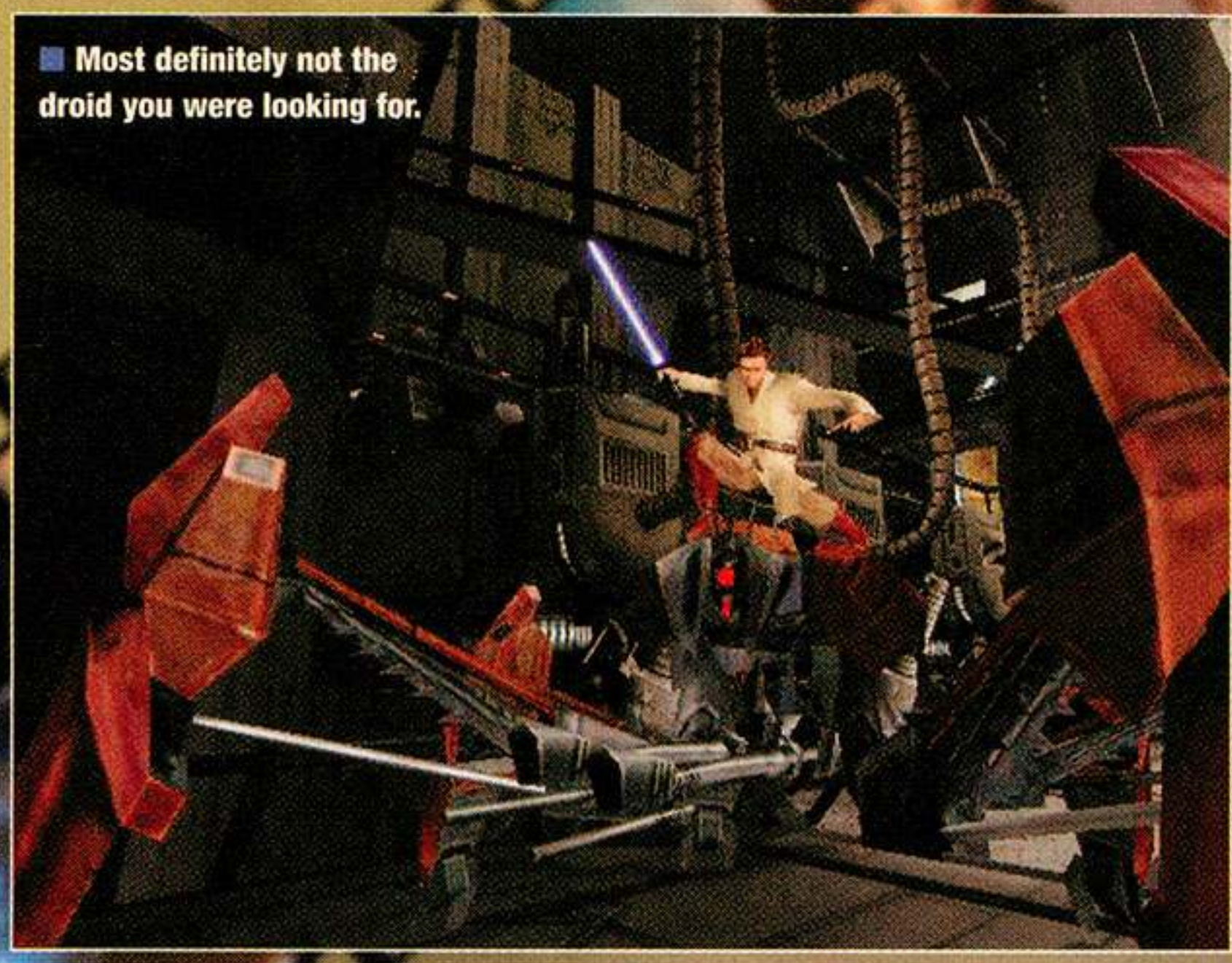
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▶ STAR WARS EPISODE III: REVENGE OF THE SITH

PS2/XB • LucasArts • May 2005

On your TV screen: LucasArts wants *Revenge of the Sith* to be “the ultimate Jedi action experience.” Nobody on the development team is talking about using the Force to navigate floating space platforms or push around crates. Tighten your grip on your lightsaber, young Jedi; this one is all about the combat. “There’s a wide variety of combat in the film,” says Associate Producer Justin Lambros. “We want to represent that and make it even more diverse in the game.” Lead Combat Designer Anthony Doe elaborates, “You’ll see over 100 unique abilities, from swinging the saber through seemingly countless combos to delivering deadly Force powers.” Many of these techniques were imparted to the team directly by the film’s stunt coordinator, Nick Gillard. “There are lots of moves that don’t work in the movie,” mentions Gillard. “We can now put these into the game. We can be so much more extreme.” This extremity is sure to come in handy while hacking through lowly battle droids, cutting down more cunning clones, and dueling powerful Jedi as either Anakin or Obi-Wan—each with his own powers and techniques. Of course, other famous Jedi will appear in versus mode....



■ Most definitely not the droid you were looking for.



■ Who’s that blue guy? These days, they’ll give just about anybody a lightsaber.

On the silver screen: In what’s purported to be the darkest entry in the *Star Wars* series, Anakin Skywalker will complete his transition to the dark side, leading to conflict with his mentor, Obi-Wan, and intergalactic marital strife with his wife, Senator Amidala. Details are tight, but judging from the trailer, Wookiees will howl, starships will explode, and Sith will seek revenge. Internal sources claim it may contain the longest fight in cinema history within its climactic finale. ▶



■ “I don’t like sand. It’s coarse and rough and irritating and it gets everywhere.”

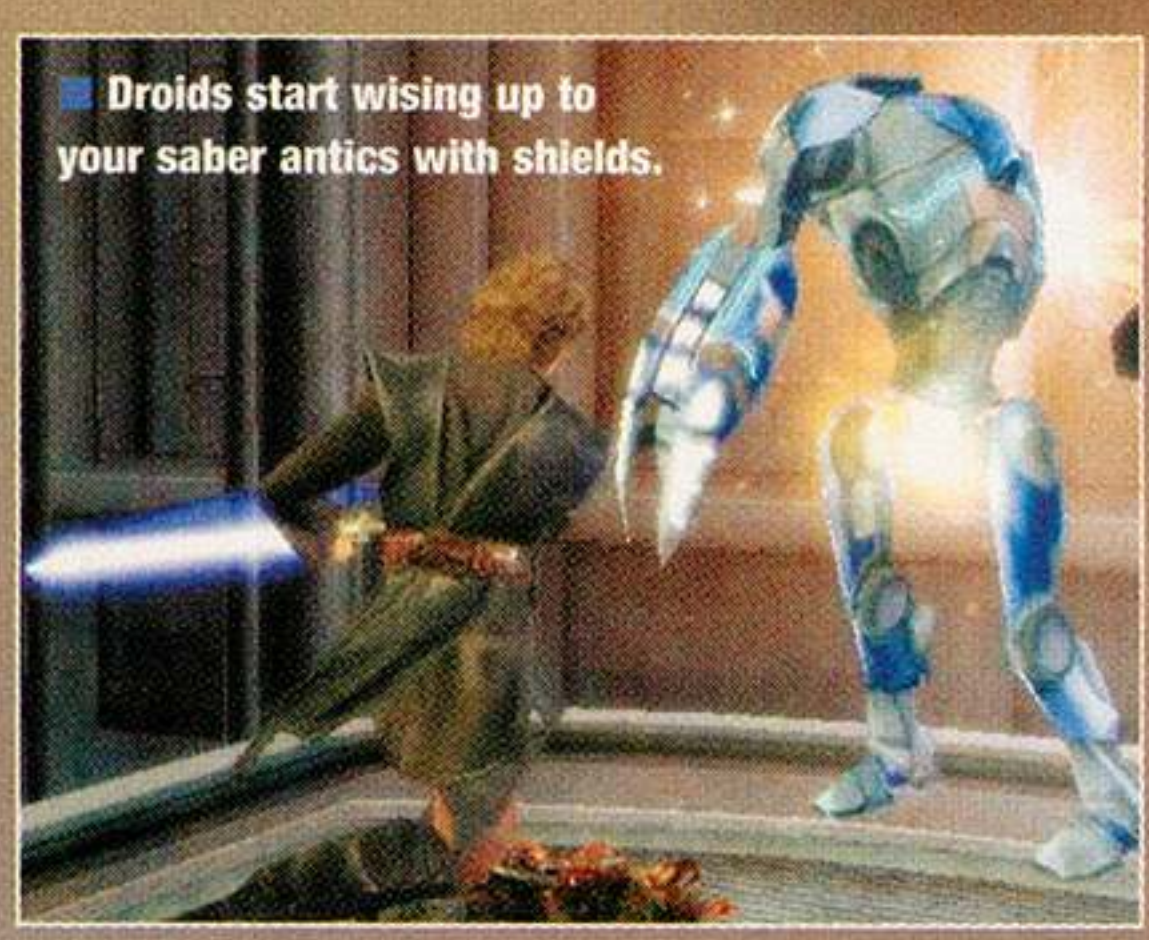


■ Artoo glides fearlessly into the thick of combat.

REEL FACTS

George Lucas has announced to the world that *Episode III* will be the last *Star Wars* film he’ll make. Is this a Jedi mind trick or what?

Hayden Christensen, aka Anakin Skywalker, met with the game’s developers to school them in the art of lightsaber combat personally. There were no reports of amputated hands.



■ Droids start wising up to your saber antics with shields.





Gang war—Bloods versus freaks in blue spandex bodysuits.

FANTASTIC FOUR

PS2/XB/GC • Activision • June 2005

On your TV screen: Like the upcoming movie, the *Fantastic Four* game spotlights the veteran superheroes' teamwork. In this beat-em-up, you'll switch between up to four onscreen characters to dent Doombots and pulverize puzzles, either solo or with a pal. "Each member of the Fantastic Four can use their powers in unique ways to help each other," says Producer Julia Humphreys. "Sue can place a protective force shield around her teammates, while Reed [Mr. Fantastic] can use his high-tech gadgetry to heal wounded players. Johnny (the Human Torch) can set the environment on fire, and Ben (the Thing) can hurl enemies into the inferno you just created." While the game's look and story fit closely with the movie, expect a few side plots and villains straight from the comics. Moleman, anyone?



Massive boss encounters will keep the whole team busy.

On the silver screen: With superhero movies busting blocks left and right, Marvel is bringing the classic (don't call them second-string) hero team the Fantastic Four to the big screen to revisit their origin and clobber their archnemesis Doctor Doom. While slightly low on star power (*Dark Angel* star Jessica Alba is the biggest name attached), look for eye-popping special effects when Mr. Fantastic stretches his body like rubber, the Human Torch gets his flame on, or the Invisible Woman disappears. Oh, and the gravelly Thing clobbers the ever-lovin' crap out of cars.



REEL FACTS

In 1994, an unknowing cast and crew toiled away on a *Fantastic Four* movie never intended to be released; this low-budget dud was produced for the sole purpose of retaining movie rights. If you really can't wait for the 2005 version, bootlegs are out there....

The cloaked, metal-faced Doctor Doom was reportedly George Lucas' source of inspiration for Darth Vader—but don't count on Doom being anybody's father.

BATMAN BEGINS

PS2/XB/GC • EA Games • July 2005

On your TV screen: A darker *Batman* film means a darker *Batman* game: "We brainstormed a great deal and came to the conclusion that if we could integrate fear into a videogame, it would not only be very cool, but pretty innovative as well," says Reid Schneider, the game's producer. "Once we had that central concept in mind, the stealth component was a natural progression, and the fear-based combat soon followed."

Essentially, *Batman Begins* is a stealth-action game in the vein of *Splinter Cell* (in fact, several team members also worked on Ubisoft's seminal stalker), but one where you have to prey on your foes' weak minds before moving in for the takedown. You can pummel enemies with traditional weapons, but creatively scaring them by manipulating environmental objects is far more effective: "A terrified foe's ability to shoot weapons, fight, or even function becomes massively diminished. In some cases they will lie on the ground paralyzed with fear; in other cases they will run out of the room screaming," Schneider says. The level set in Arkham Asylum should be particularly interesting in that regard, and we can't wait to see what Schneider is hinting at when he says, "Batman will deal with his own fears in the game."

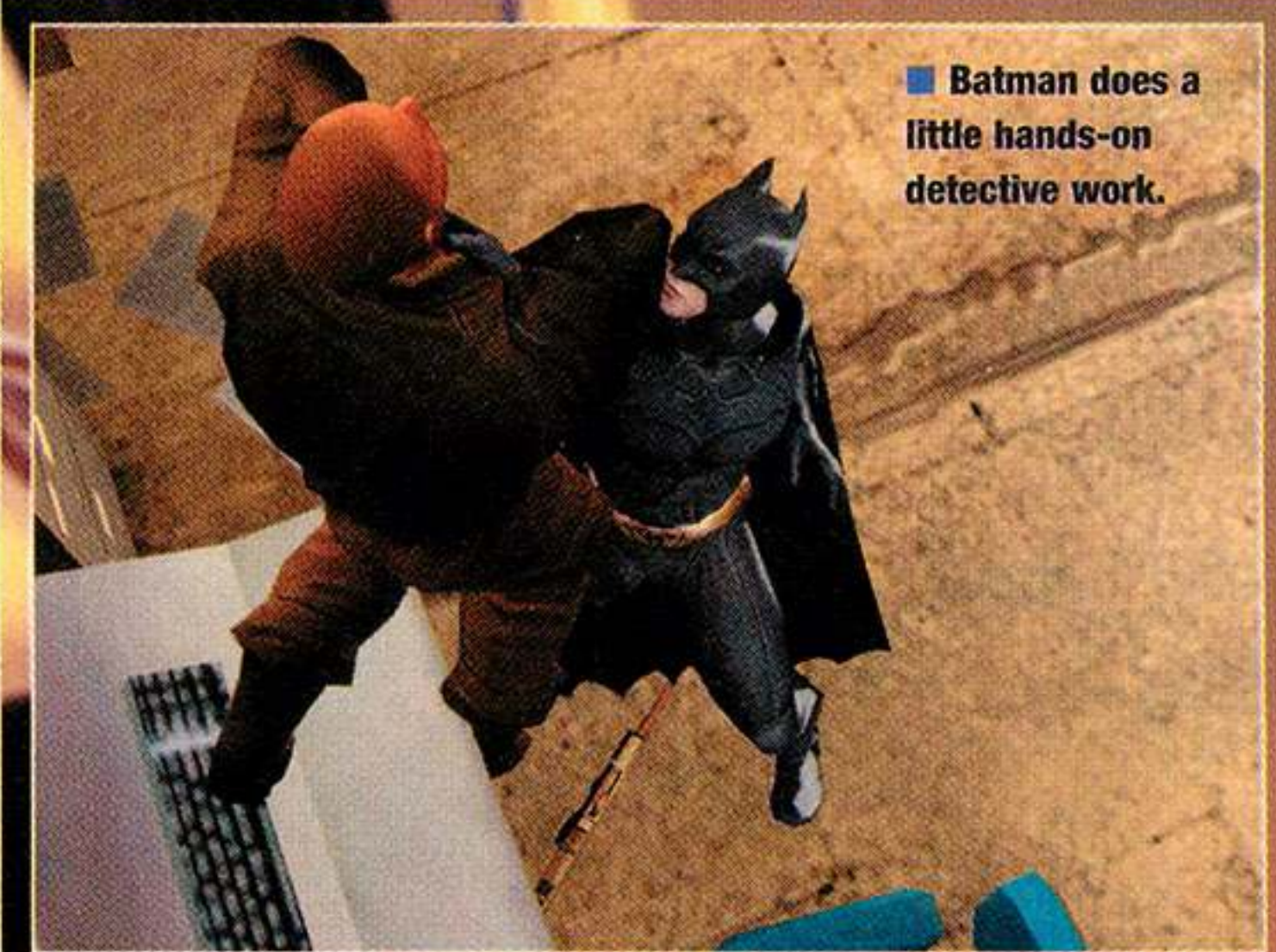
On the silver screen: If you'd given up hope for a real *Batman* movie after the progressively garish and outlandish sequels to the stellar 1989 flick, *Batman Begins* will cheer you up (in a dark, moody, Gothic sort of way). Directed by Christopher Nolan (the dude behind indie hit *Memento*), this new film has the bright idea of actually taking Batman seriously, and derives most of its story line from *Batman's* old-school MO of striking fear into the superstitious and cowardly lot of criminals. ▶



■ Note the absence of batsuit nipples.



■ Batman—the bane of security guards the world over.



■ Batman does a little hands-on detective work.



REEL FACTS

Actor Christian Bale (*American Psycho*), who plays Bruce Wayne/Batman in the flick, provides Batman's voice in the game.

Although supervillain Scarecrow terrorizes Gotham in the flick, Batman never fights him face-to-face in the game. In fact, *Batman Begins* (the game) contains no bosses at all.

Begins sports a gas-guzzling new Batmobile, which looks more like a Humvee from 2009 than his traditional jet-powered coupe. You'll also be able to drive it in the game....



■ Elevators are totally passé.

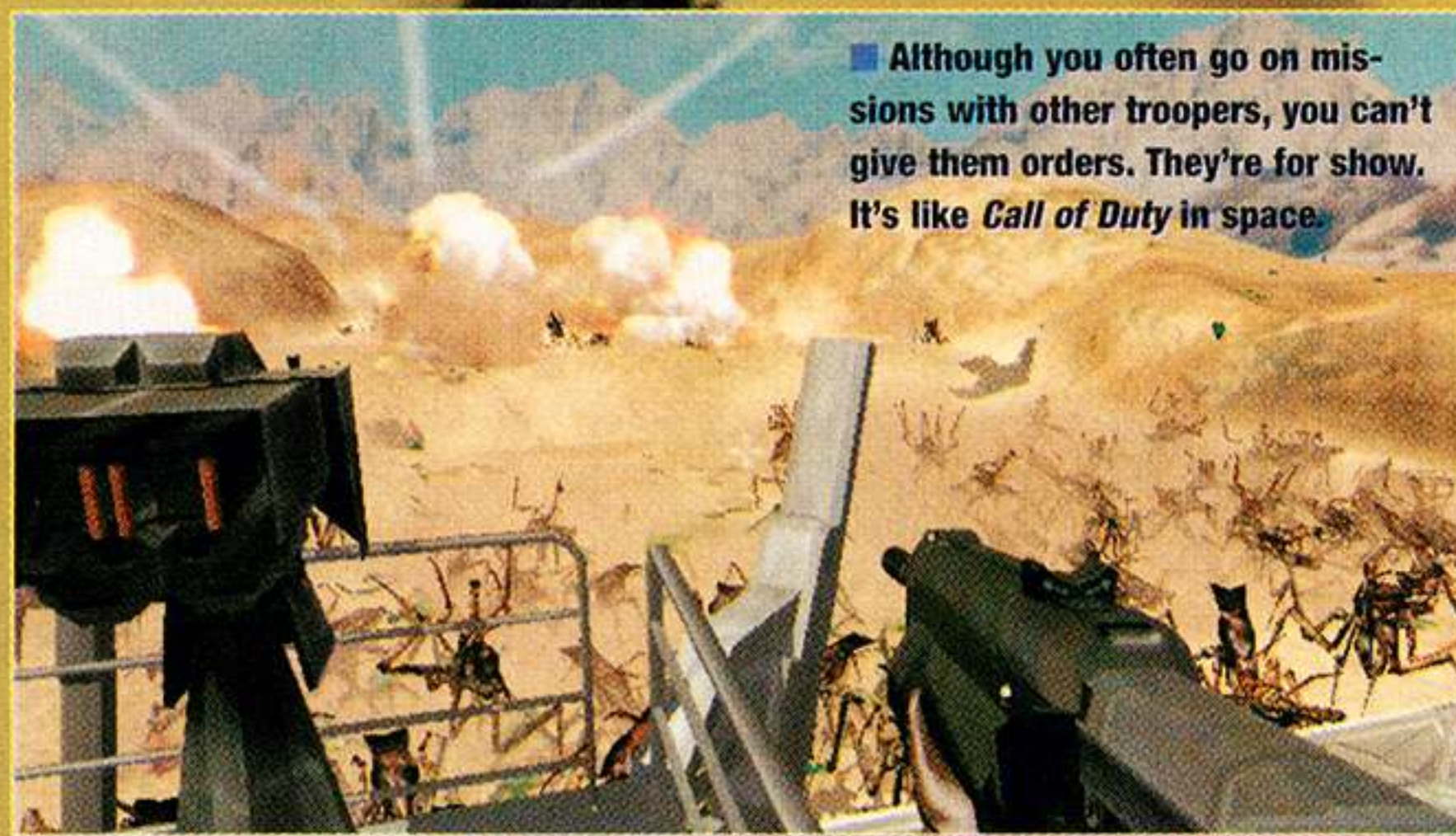
STARSHIP TROOPERS

Xbox • Empire • Fall 2005

On your TV screen: Forget shiny teen starlets: Supersize alien insects are the real stars of this first-person shooter. "We want that atmosphere of 'Bugs, sir—millions of them,'" says Chris Jones, producer at U.K.-based developer Strangelite (*Starship Troopers* is its first original game). "Our Outpost 29 [level], for example, based on Whiskey Outpost in the film, will be attacked by waves of 300 warrior bugs—that's 300 onscreen at once."

While many missions dump you into these balls-to-the-wall battles, you'll also embark on small-squad and solo infiltrations into labs, bug nests, and abandoned outposts. Some missions even let you bring along up to seven pals for co-op online bug blastin'. You'll have to supply your own co-ed shower scenes.

■ **Roach motel:** *Starship Troopers* hosts 20 kinds of enemies, from the 100-foot-tall plasma bug to the (relatively) small 10-foot-tall swarming warrior insects.



■ Although you often go on missions with other troopers, you can't give them orders. They're for show. It's like *Call of Duty* in space.

On the silver screen: This campy sci-fi flick's perky cast of *Beverly Hills 90210* understudies spent half the film hooking up and the rest getting torn to gory shreds, eaten alive, or melted to pink goo by swarms of computer-generated space bugs—the real stars of the movie.



REEL FACTS

Paul Verhoeven directed the *Starship Troopers* movie. His previous film: *Showgirls*. Where's that game?

Robert Heinlein's thoughtful *Starship Troopers* novel is on the official reading list of the U.S. Marine Corps. Not surprisingly, the movie isn't listed as a must-watch.

The game is set after the movies, so "As a general rule, the characters from the films are 'not around,'" says Producer Chris Jones.

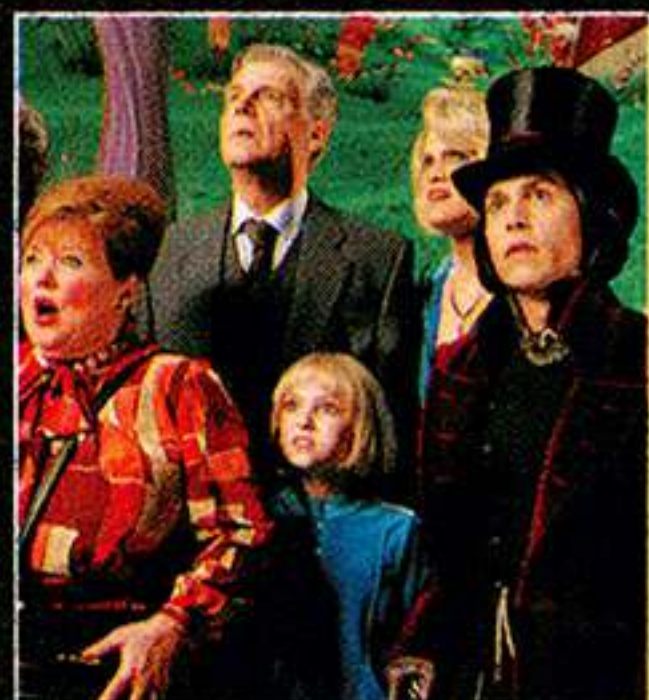
Like in the film, the bugs in the game have their own hierarchy, which includes warriors, projectile-spitting artillery insects, flying air forces—even special operatives.

COMING DISTRACTIONS

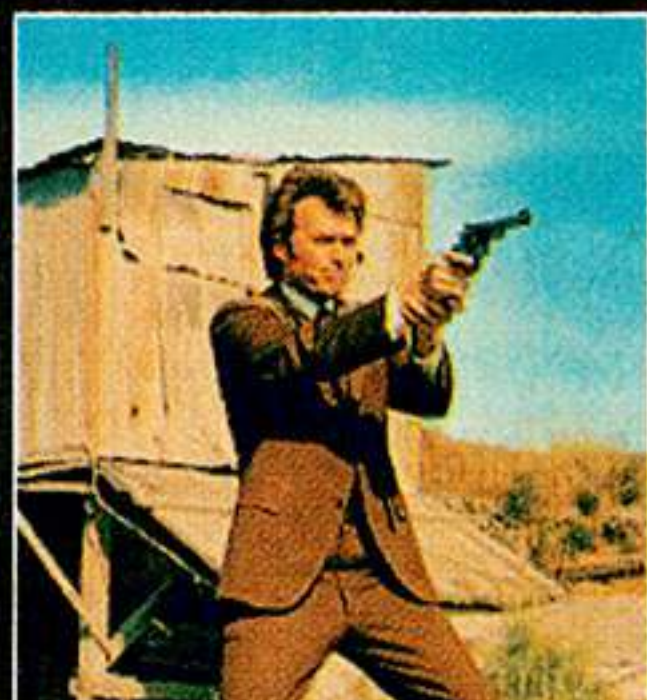
Packed with zombies, giant gorillas, bullet-time kung fu, and femme fatales, these late-breaking movie games are rated L for "Let's hope they don't blow"



Aeon Flux
Majesco • Fall 2005
Kinda like *BloodRayne* but with what's-her-face.



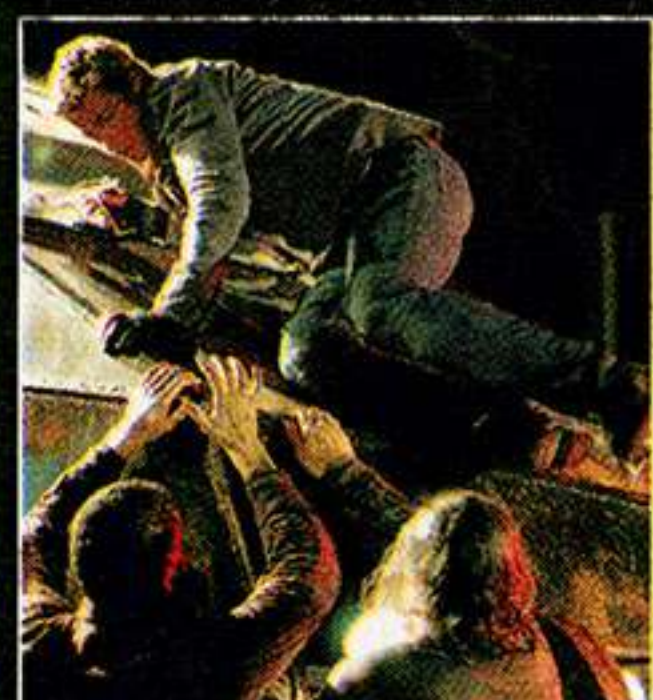
Charlie and the Chocolate Factory
2K Games • June 2005
Made by Oompa Loompas.



Dirty Harry
Warner Bros. • 2006
Clint Eastwood has input. Must be feeling lucky.



King Kong
Ubisoft • December 2005
Filmmaker Peter Jackson is directing the game, too.



Land of the Dead
Hip • 2006
Director George Romero brings out his undead.



Matrix: Path of Neo
Atari • Fall 2005
Guide Mr. Whoa himself through all three movies.



Reservoir Dogs
2K Games • 2006
Seen the film? You know this game won't end well.



The Warriors
Rockstar • Fall 2005
Worth it for the gangs of baseball-playing mimes.



The Latest in Baby Games (Based on Baby Movies)

Young tykes (and EGM's own Seanbaby) need licensed games just as much as the rest of us. Look for *Madagascar* (above) from Activision in May, *Narnia* from Buena Vista this fall, and THQ's *Cars* (based on the next Pixar flick) way off in June 2006. ▶



■ Family-friendly games...we think.

REMIXED FOR THE PSP™

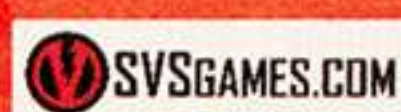
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FILM SCHOOL

EGM's Seanbaby picks the best of the worst and the worst of the best flick-based games

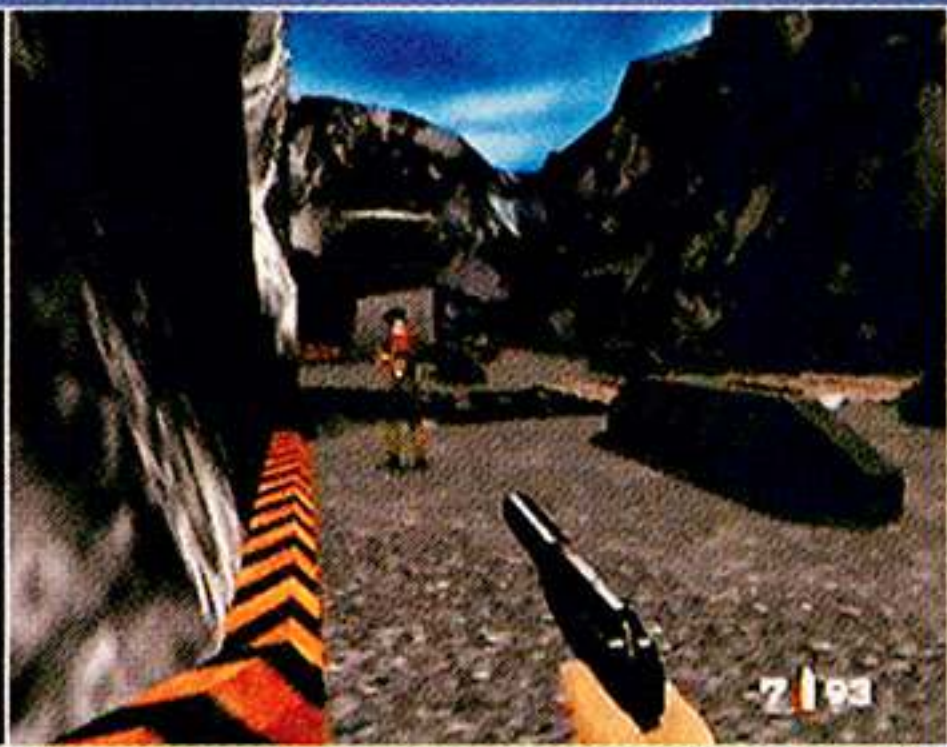
GOOD GAMES BASED ON BAD MOVIES

Moonwalker • Sega Genesis
Ripped from today's headlines, the film and game tell the incredibly true story of Michael Jackson turning into a car, a robot, and a spaceship to keep storm troopers and their drugs away from kids. Sounds like someone at Jackson's Neverland Ranch Madness Factory left a banana peel by the "awesome" button.



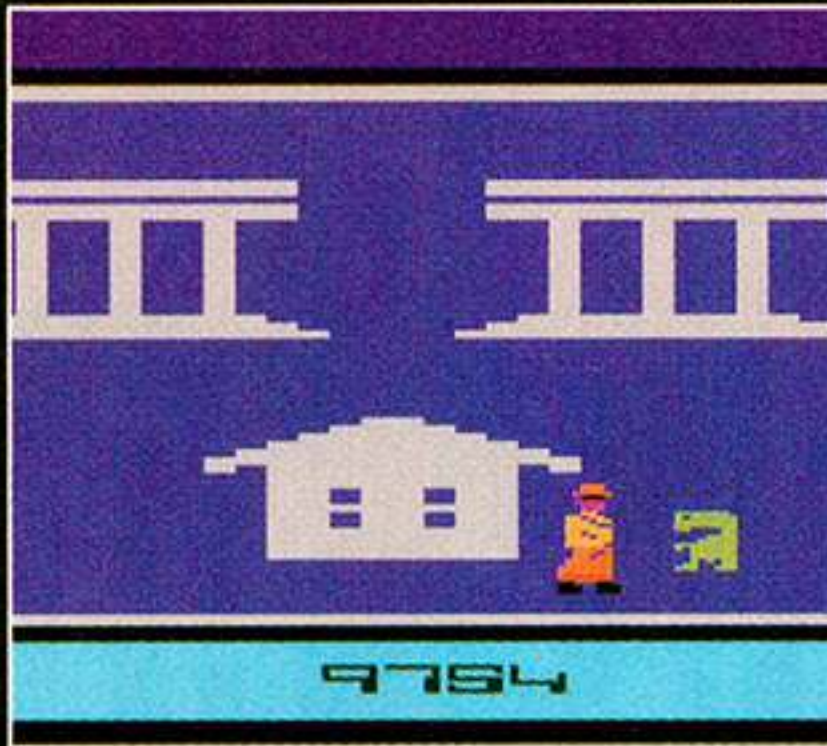
Star Wars: Episode I Racer Dreamcast/N64
Until they film a sequel to *Scarface* in the style of *Weekend at Bernie's*, the new *Star Wars* flicks will remain the worst letdowns in movie history. But just because the idea for a space bike came from the same guy who made Jar Jar Binks doesn't mean it can't be in a cool videogame.

GoldenEye • N64
This game's developers focused on making a fun shooter with 007 characters rather than religiously following the plot of the movie, which was something about a satellite and how James Bond could twist any conversation into a celebration of what his dong will do to you. We get it, James. You want to hump everyone!



Chronicles of Riddick • XB
Since Sylvester Stallone has made 47 bad movies in a row and Conan is now criminalizing sorcery as California's governor, it was up to Vin Diesel to star in a film about a tough guy killing everyone he meets. The question isn't why that worked as a game—it's why it doesn't work with every movie-based game ever made.

BAD GAMES BASED ON GOOD MOVIES



E.T. The Extra Terrestrial • Atari 2600
The movie showed the wonder of friendship. But since the game *Chuck Norris Superkicks* already covered that topic, *E.T.* instead involved falling into pits. It's the worst movie-to-game blunder since *Most Valuable Primate: The Game*, which you don't remember thanks to the brave Timecop who died doing the splits through time to eliminate it from history.

Porky's • Atari 2600
Hormonally amped teenagers learned a lot of life lessons from this early '80s tale of horny high schoolers played by actors in their early 30s. The game—which had you pole-vaulting across a highway to reach a strip club—wasn't as educational. I'm no marketing genius, *Porky's*, but I still figure that dudes who masturbate to *Track & Field* make for one tiny target audience.



Total Recall • NES
This is a true story: A few years ago, one of the producers of this game wrote to me and every reviewer who bad-mouthed it to scream, "Get over it already!" Hey, I have an idea. How about you keep doing teary-eyed Google searches for your own name and sharpening that knife, Mike Arkin. Meanwhile, I'll keep bitching about the game's hopping elves and bad karate.

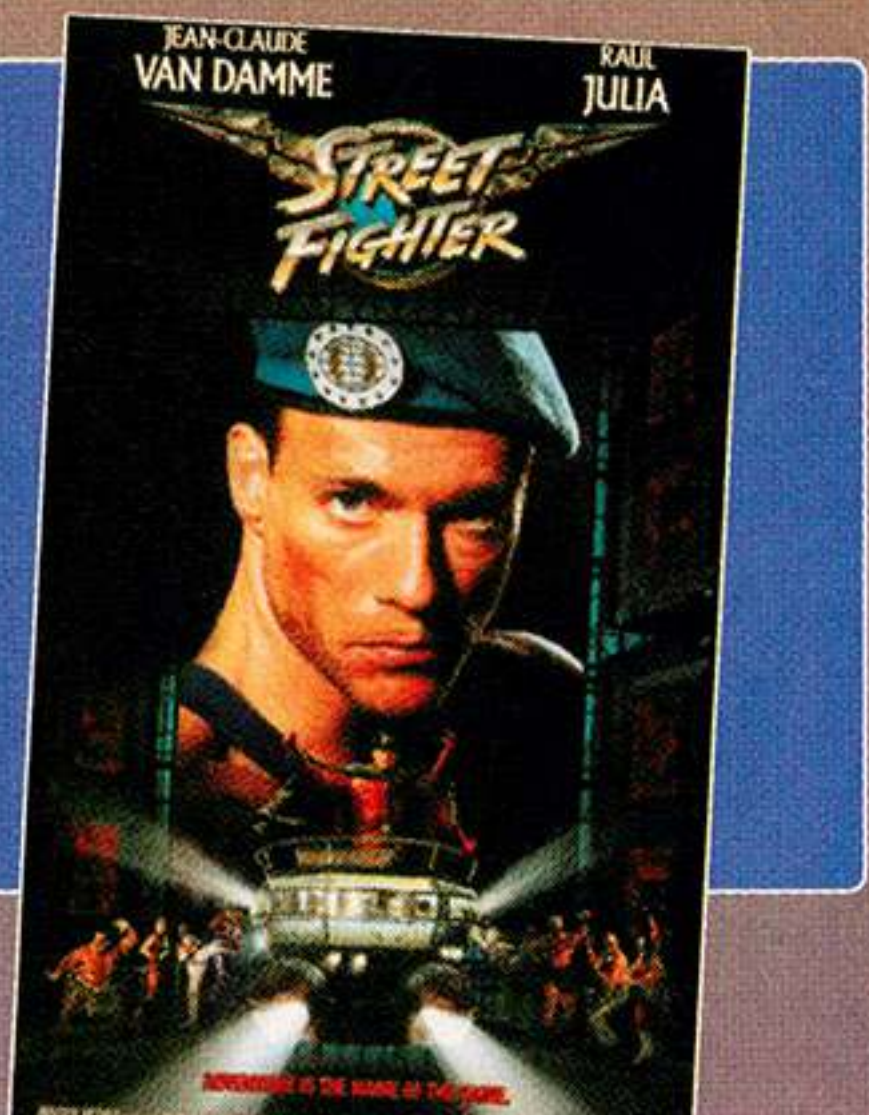
Bill and Ted's Excellent Video Game Adventure • NES
This game's makers tried to capture the comedy of the movie, but since you can't base a videogame on Sigmund Freud picking up chicks with a corndog, the creators had to inject humor with dialogue sequences. Their solution: "The Goddamn Unskippable Cut-scene," which to this day is still being used to delight gamers.



BONUS MATERIAL

Wrap your head around this: a bad game based on a bad movie based on a good game

Street Fighter: The Movie • PS1/Saturn
The *Street Fighter* movie starred a cast of great actors as lame fighters. After everyone agreed it was terrible, Capcom decided to remake its sweet fighting game with the updated, crappier characters. And here's where it becomes genius: Capcom made the game bad. So now we have a once-great game starring once-great characters, and it all sucks! Amazing!



"Stealth with a sexy twist" XBN

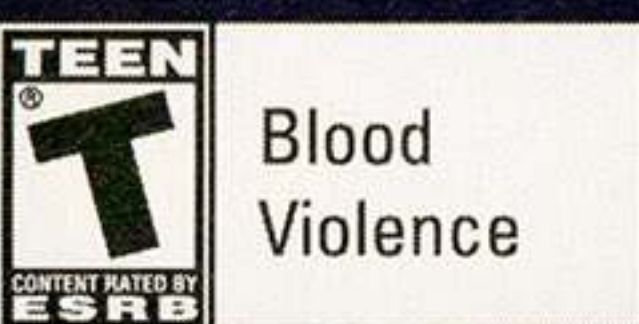
STOLEN

THEY SAID IT COULDN'T BE DONE.

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COMING SOON...



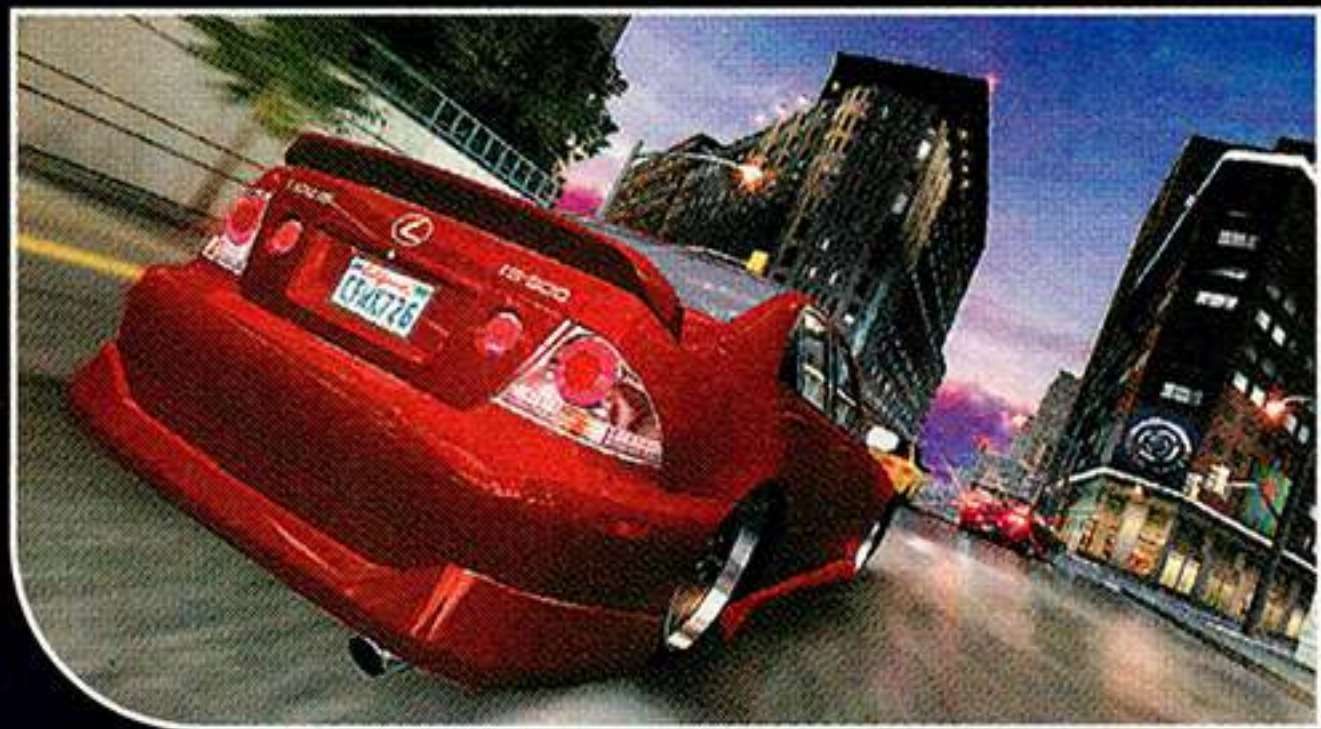
PlayStation 2



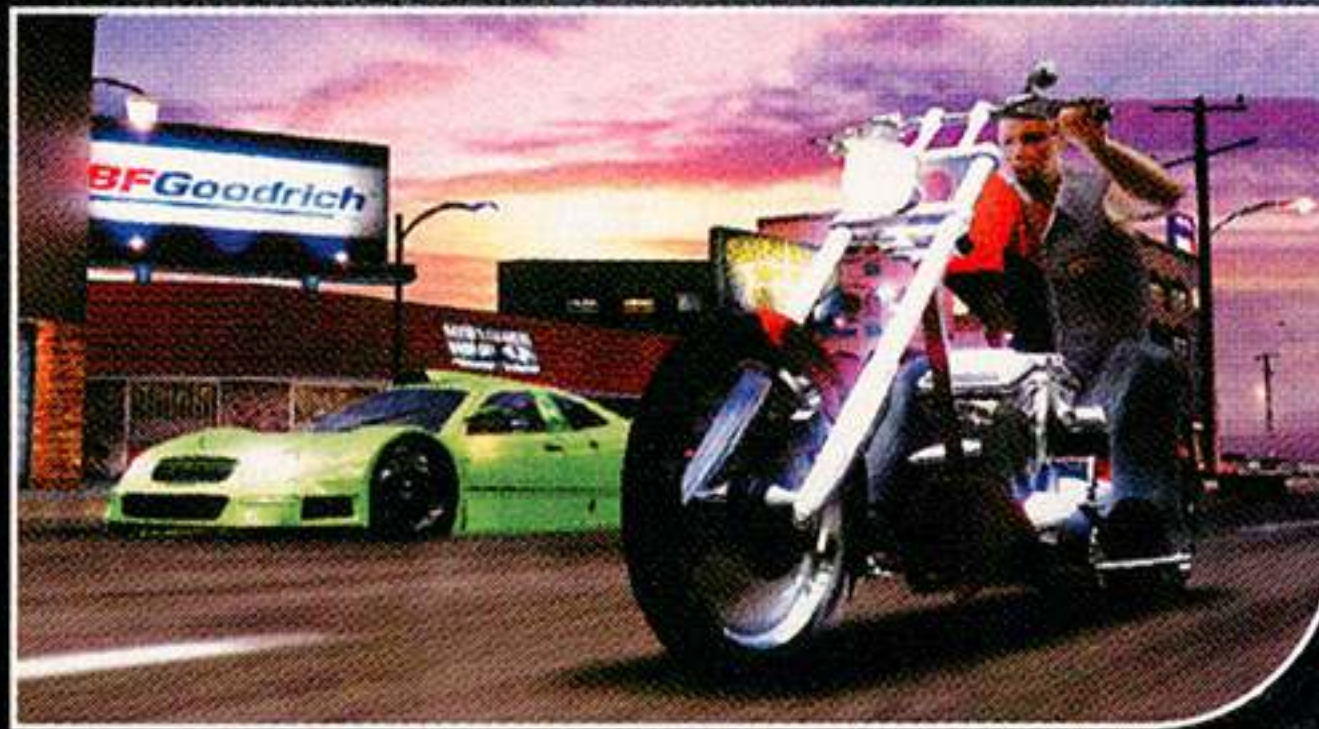
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INSIDE THE PSP

The music, the movies, the accessories, and—oh yeah—the games. We blow the lid off Sony's powerful new handheld for an all-access tour

By Mark MacDonald and the EGM All-Stars





Photographs by Aaron Lauer

Hey, wanna see a magic trick? We can make \$250 disappear, just like that, right out of your wallet. All it takes is one good look at Sony's new PlayStation Portable (aka PSP), and—poof—it's as good as gone (most likely along with another \$100 or so for a couple launch games).

How does the PSP do it? A magician never reveals his secrets, but it probably has something to do with that unfreaking-believable huge screen—after 15 years of staring at sub-3-inch handheld game screens, seeing the PSP's ginormous 4.3-inch display will put you

in a trance. Or maybe it's the supercrisp HD-quality video, or the CD-quality sound, or the wireless networking features, or the slim, supersexy design, or (lest we forget) the most powerful 3D gaming guts of any portable, ever.

Of course, an even better trick might be getting your hands on one any time soon. Sony says one million PSPs will be available on its March 24 launch date, but most game stores stopped taking preorders months ago, a sure sign demand will outstrip initial supply. That's certainly been the case in Japan, where the PSP was almost impossible

to find on store shelves, even months after launch.

So if you're one of the lucky ones, congratulations. If you're still scouring eBay, good luck. Either way, you'll want to read the next 16 pages, where we crack the PSP wide open (literally and figuratively) to provide everything you need to know about your newly (or soon-to-be) acquired portable powerhouse—setting it up, photos, movies, music, accessories, battery life, and most importantly, reviews of all the launch games.

And now, for our next trick.... >

THE SYSTEM



(All objects are shown actual size)

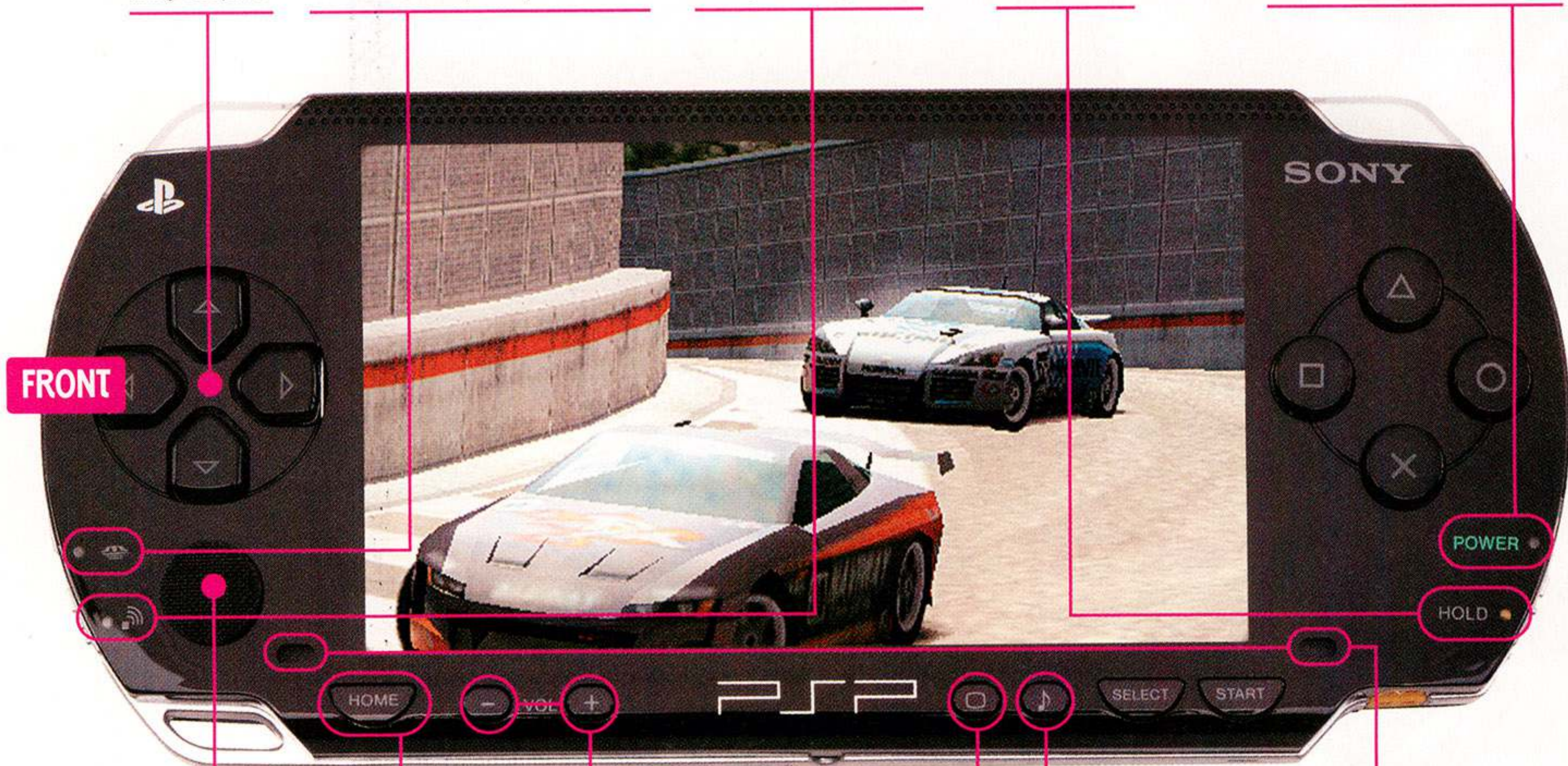
D-pad: A little "tighter" than the DualShock's but otherwise identical to your trusty PS2 pad's.

Memory Stick access indicator: Flashes orange whenever the PSP loads or saves to your stick. Important only so that you never remove a Memory Stick when it's being accessed (otherwise you could lose or corrupt data).

WLAN access indicator: Lights up green when using wireless networking to connect to other PSPs or the Internet (which drains your battery faster).

Hold indicator: Turns yellow when the power switch is pushed down and locked into hold mode.

Power indicator: Lights up solid green when the PSP is in use, flashes when the battery is low, and glows orange while the PSP is charging (once it's fully charged, the light goes dark).



Analog stick: Unlike typical controllers, the PSP's stick doesn't tilt—it always stands straight up, like a little plastic mushroom. Its base can be pulled and pushed away from the middle to different degrees (it always recenters itself if you let go). And that, Billy, is where analog control comes from!

Volume buttons: Duh.

Home button: Push this at any time for the option to return to the PSP's main menu; also handy since it brings up the time, date, battery life, and volume displays.

Display button: Adjusts the screen brightness to one of three levels (the darker you keep the screen, the more battery life you save), with a special fourth, brightest setting available only when the PSP is plugged in via the AC adapter. Hold down this button to turn off the display (handy for saving battery life while you listen to music, for example).

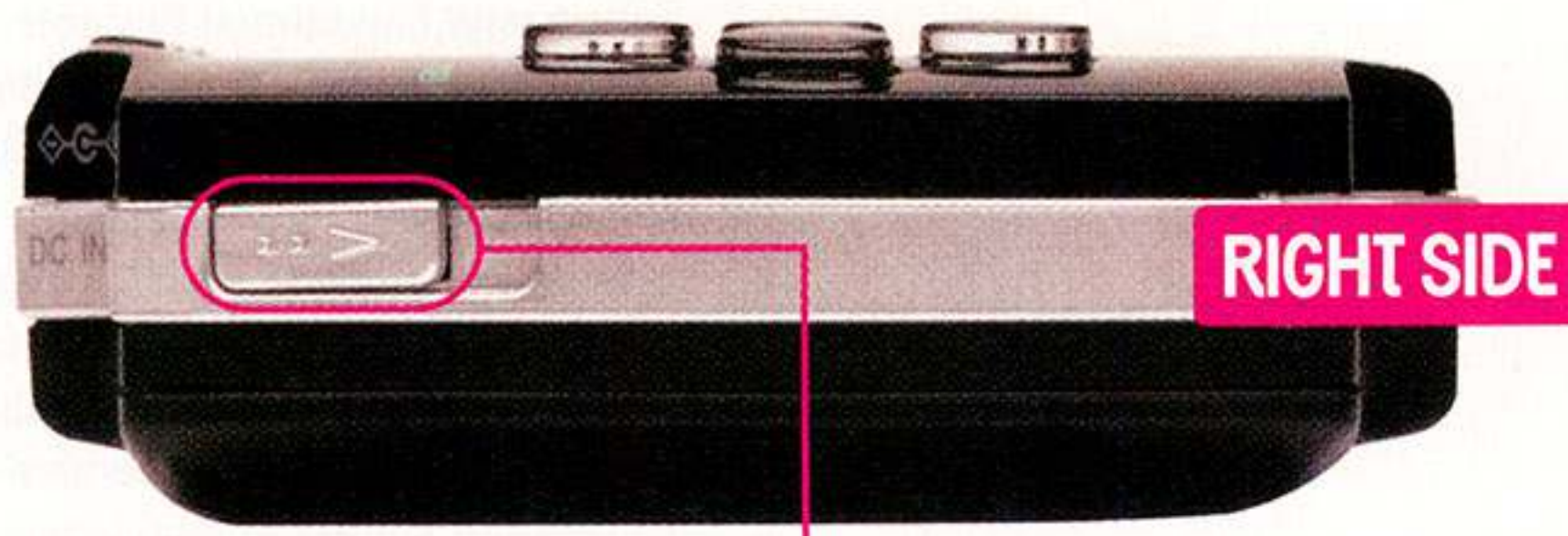
Sound button: For use only when you have headphones plugged in, this switch changes the tone of the PSP's audio with every press, with four settings (heavy, pops, jazz, unique) of different bass and treble combinations. You can also hold down this button to mute the PSP at any time.

Speakers: Yes, these two little holes, and not all the tiny ones on top, are where the PSP's stereo audio comes from.



WLAN switch: Just for you paranoid conspiracy-theory types, you can manually disable your PSP's wireless abilities with this. Big brother is watching, and he wants to know your high score in *Lumines*!

Memory Stick Duo slot: Guess what goes in here?



Power switch: Push this up and quickly release it to turn the system on or put it in sleep mode (which will effectively pause whatever you were doing at the time) or

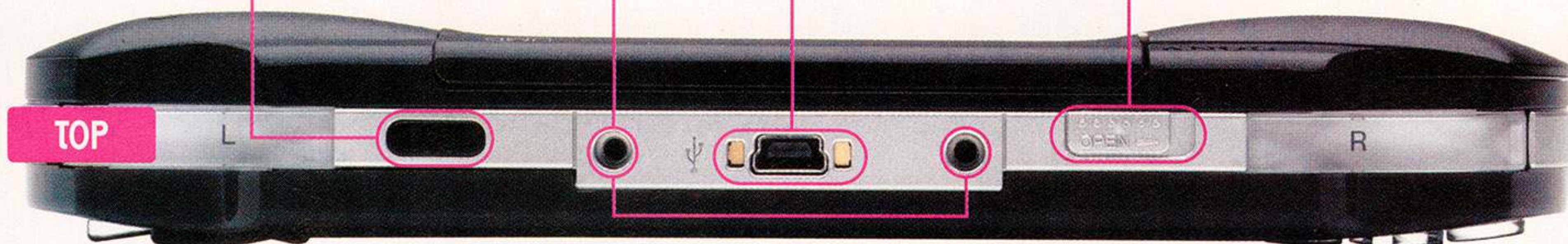
hold it up for a few seconds to turn the PSP off. You can also lock it in the down position to enter hold mode, to keep your PSP from turning on accidentally.

IR port: Has no real use...yet. Could be used to communicate with other electronics in the future (use your PSP as a universal remote?), perhaps including the PS3.

Accessory holes: Future peripherals, like the digital camera and GPS system Sony teased us with when it first demoed the system, may use these to clamp down onto the PSP.

USB connector: This USB 2.0 slot is the same kind most digital cameras use, but if you don't already have a compatible cable (and you ever want to move stuff to and from your Memory Stick), you'll have to buy one—it doesn't come with the system.

Open latch: Push this to eject your UMD the old-fashioned way (as opposed to twisting your system and taking advantage of a glitch in some PSPs that fires the disc out like a cannon).



Headphone jack: Sure, you can use normal headphones with your PSP, but the nifty white ones that come with the system include an iPod-style mini-remote that you can clip anywhere and use to adjust the volume and fast-forward or rewind.

Memory Stick Duo: Remember that word *Duo*—a regular-sized Memory Stick (roughly twice the length of a Duo) won't fit. The 32MB stick that comes with the system has plenty of space for your game saves, but if you want to store movies, music, or photos, you'll want something bigger. Check out our accessories rundown on pg. 98 for more.

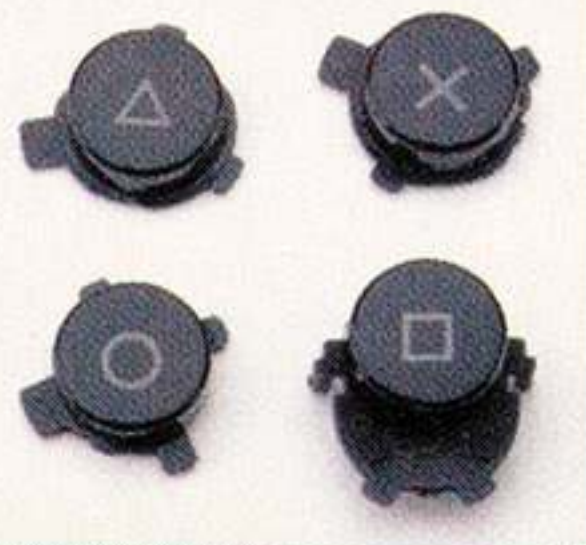
UMD: Games, movies, and music will be sold on the PSP's proprietary Universal Media Disc format, which, at 2.5 inches in diameter, is a little bit smaller than a GameCube disc.



LINGERING PSP QUESTIONS: WHAT'S UP WITH...



...the different colored PSPs? Sony showed us a rainbow of PSP colors—white, red, blue, yellow, and more—when it first unveiled the system. But for now, black is the only option. We think the other colors will come out eventually, but it will probably take at least a year (it took over three years for the PS2 to get some color, after all).



...the hardware problems? You might have heard about the troubles Sony was having with defective PSPs in Japan. Many models shipped with "dead pixels" (dots on the screen that don't light up or always remain one color), sticky square buttons (as you can see, it's shaped a bit differently than the other buttons since it's so close to the screen), and plain-old dead units. One or two dead pixels isn't uncommon with LCD screens, unfortunately—as many Nintendo DS owners already know. As for the square button problem, Sony says it's been fixed. Still, check your system closely when you first get it.



...the accessories? Sony showed us lots of ideas for future PSP add-ons: a digital camera, an attachment that turns the system into a phone, an external battery pack, etc. None of these have been officially announced, so they may just be pie-in-the-sky mock-ups that never come to fruition (see also: the PS2 monitor, keyboard, and mouse Sony promised years ago). But then again, Sony *did* bring out the EyeToy...

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|---|---|
| \$250 (includes 32MB Memory Stick, headphones, AC adapter, carrying case, demo disc, and wrist strap) | \$150 (includes stylus, AC adapter, and wrist strap) |
| SIZE | |
| 6.7 x .9 x 2.9 inches | 5.9 x 1.1 x 3.3 (6 while open) inches |
| WEIGHT | |
| .62 lbs | .61 lbs |
| SCREEN SIZE | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4.3-inch LCD • 16:9 ratio | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two 3-inch LCDs • 4:3 ratio |
| SCREEN RESOLUTION | |
| 480 x 272 pixels | 256 x 192 pixels |
| AVAILABLE COLORS ON-SCREEN | |
| 16,800,000 | 260,000 |
| MEMORY | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 32 megabytes • 4 megabytes DRAM (plus optional Memory Stick) | 4 megabytes |
| GAME MEDIA | |
|  <p>Universal Media Disc— 1.8 gigabyte capacity</p> <p>(Note: 8 gigabits = 1 gigabyte, so PSP discs can hold about 14 times the amount of data as DS carts.)</p> |  <p>Cartridge—1 gigabit capacity</p> |
| WIRELESS COMMUNICATION | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IEEE 802.11b (Wi-Fi)—up to 11 Mbps transmission • Up to 16-player multiplayer | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IEEE 802.11 (Wi-Fi)—up to 2 Mbps transmission • Up to 16-player multiplayer |
| BATTERY LIFE | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2.5 hours playing UMD movies • 3 to 6 hours playing games (see pg. 104 for details) | 6 to 10 hours playing games |
| OTHER FEATURES | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • USB 2.0 port • Analog stick • Can display JPG format pictures, play MP3 music and MPEG4 video files | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Touch screen • Backwards compatible with Game Boy Advance • Built-in microphone  |

True fear lies deep within your mind...

Fear. Panic. Terror.

You're lost in an eerie castle.

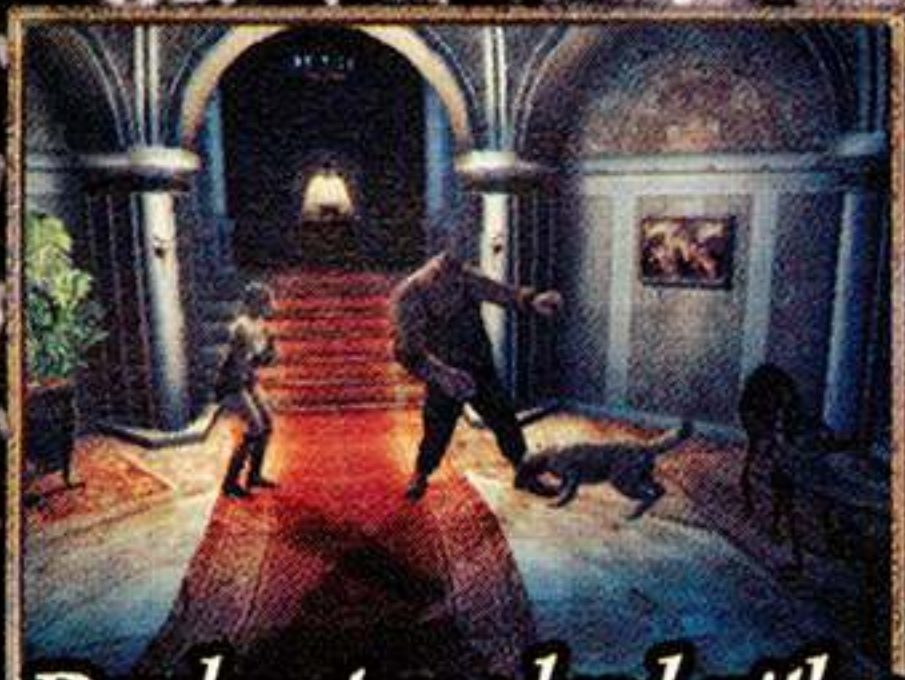
You're being chased. There is nowhere to run.

Your only hope for survival lies in the place you'd least expect.

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Develop strong bond with canine ally for protection



Panic Mode creates heightened tension and fear

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PSP REVIEWS

Call in some favors from the Mob, take compromising photos of the local EB clerks, whatever—it's gonna be tough to get your hands on a PSP at launch. But if you do, what are you going to

play? There are a bunch of games to choose from, and we've logged stick time with almost all of them. If you like racing, you're set; puzzle fans, check; anyone who's been pining for a

collectible card game starring a favorite action hero...well, uh, you're covered, too. Read on for our verdicts and extended impressions of the games we got too late for full reviews.



METAL GEAR AC!D

Go on, take a hit

SHOE: This isn't your kid bro's card-collecting game. Instead of facing foes wielding comparable decks (like in a *Pokémon*-style card game), you use your hand to complete spy-thriller scenarios in the *Metal Gear Solid* vein. If you play the game like it wants you to play it (that is, all stealth like), you can use cards to sneak past guards and cameras, timing everything just right so you never get caught. You'll get more bonuses, but expect extremely frustrating trial-and-error-and-reloading-your-last-save gameplay; it took

me 15 hours just to reach the game clock's eight-hour mark this way. So screw it—I Rambo'ed my way through the rest of the game and had a much better time.

But more than that, the variety kept me spying. Almost every stage introduced something new, whether it was getting a partner to control or wearing disguises—though mostly, you need to worry about getting from point A to point B alive, which is fun enough. Give this one a try to experience something truly different, though be warned, it's a seriously hardcore game.

Partner Up

Partway into *Ac!d*, you'll unlock two things. The first is playable partner Teliko, who helps you through some of the coolest moments in the game. The other is link mode—two players face each other and A.I. guards (who hold discs that you must gather) on random stages straight out of virtual reality land (or *MGS: V.R. Missions* on PS1, if you'd prefer). Although everything here looks well-lit, these maps play under the later-in-the-game "nighttime" rules, which has annoying line-of-sight restrictions that can cause enemies to disappear right in front of you.



Ac!d's pretty hardcore, like a card-collecting game mixed with *Final Fantasy Tactics'*...uh, tactics, and *Metal Gear Solid's* sneaky done in a turn-based fashion.

SHANE: Casual gamers beware: Just because you dig the *MGS* series, don't assume you'll enjoy a hit of *Ac!d*. With glacially paced tactical card gameplay that feels totally unlike Solid Snake's other stealth hits, this one's for strategy geeks only. *Ac!d's* turn-based levels start off easy enough, but the difficulty escalates too quickly: A handful of one-detection-and-you're-history missions will fiercely test your patience. Also, the complexity ramps up, too—just when you think you know what you're doing, the game debuts a new, convoluted way to fire guns. Thanks.

Ac!d still offers strategy fans a deep game steeped in the unique mythos of the *Metal Gear* series. The story's a bit on the weird side (talking marionettes?), but it's nothing that series fans aren't used to.

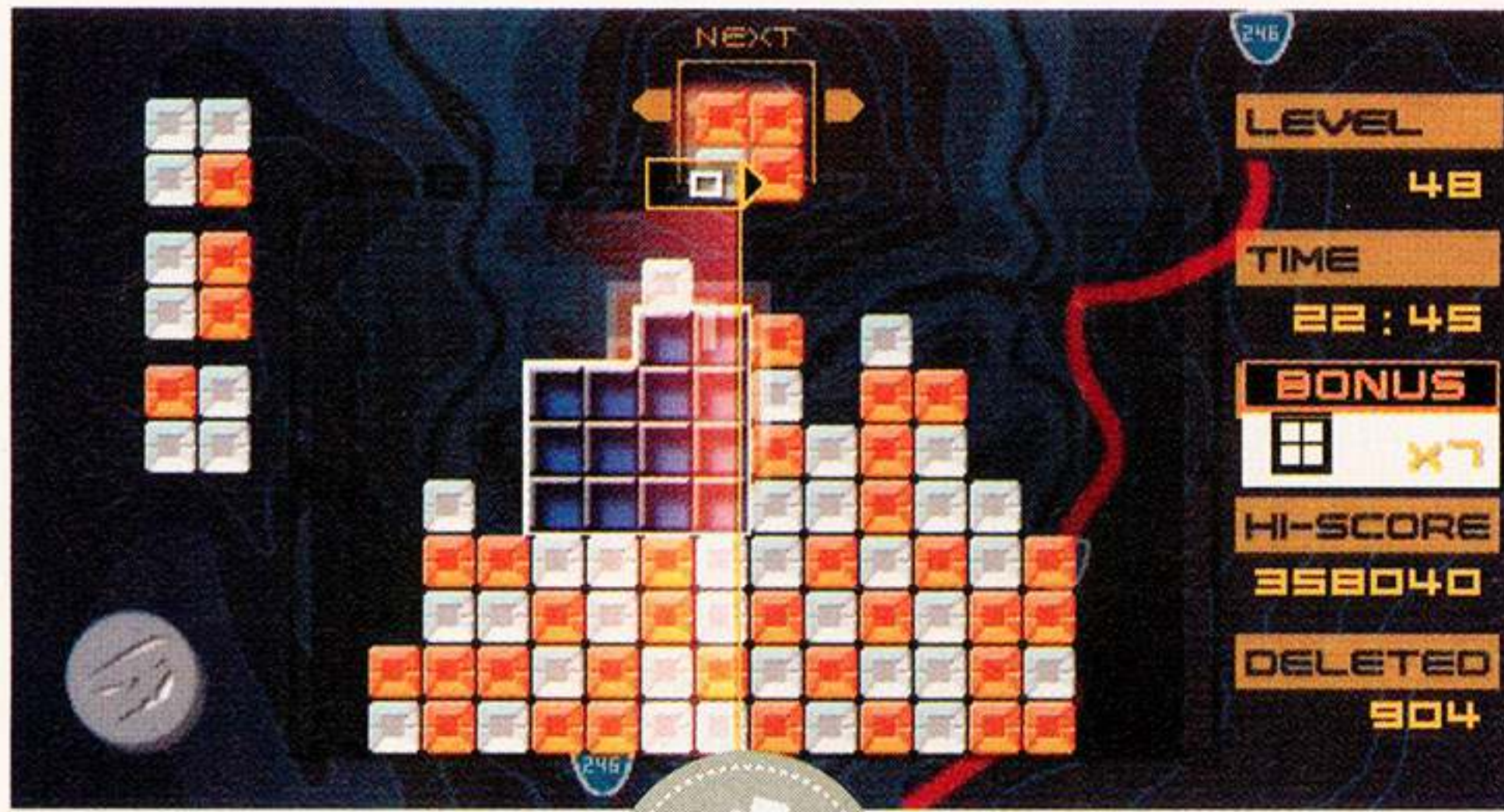
OFFICIAL PS MAG—SCOOTER: *Ac!d* paradoxically has everything you expect in a *Metal Gear* game, but is totally different than every other *Metal Gear*. Sneaking around highly guarded complexes? Check. Insane villains? Check. Boss fights against bipedal nuclear tanks? Sure thing. Except it's all turn based. As someone who likes *Metal Gear* and turn-based games, I quite dig it, but I know *Ac!d's* unique formula will alienate most of you.

My quibbles with the gameplay include stuff like inconsistent A.I. and how you have to use a card to do anything, even just move one step in front of you. And the story is actually weirder than *MGS2's* at times, with plenty of secret agendas. I like it, but you have to realize what you're getting into.

| | | | |
|-----------------------------|------|-------|---------|
| THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10) | 8.0 | 7.0 | 8.0 |
| | SHOE | SHANE | SCOOTER |

Publisher: Konami
Developer: Konami Japan
Players: 1 (2 via wireless LAN)
ESRB: Mature

www.konami.com



LUMINES

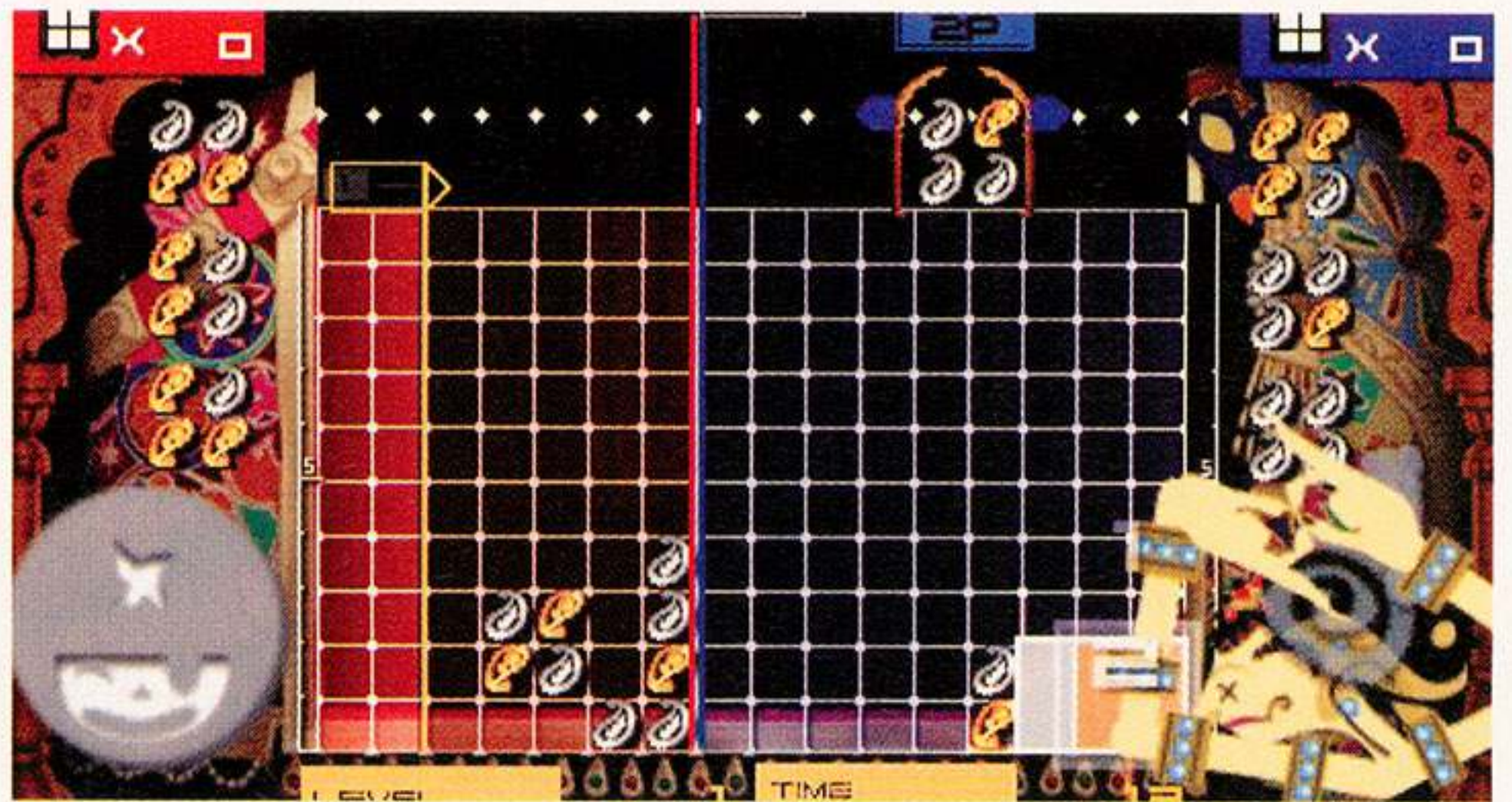
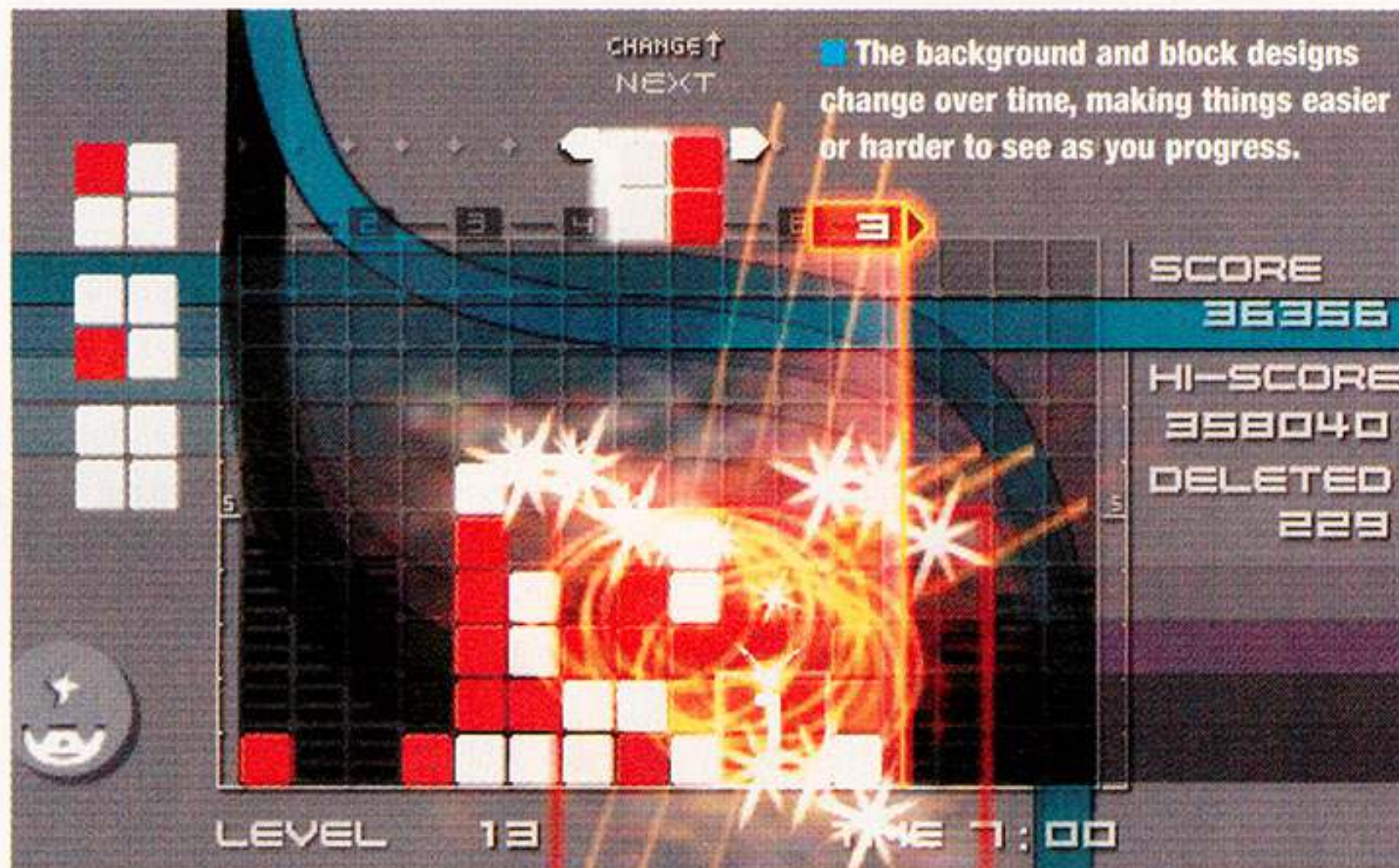
Block-rocking beats



SHANE: *Lumines* aspires to be the PSP's hip 'n' happenin' answer to *Tetris*—an addictive falling-block puzzle game that's perfect to play on the go. And it largely succeeds: Like its Russian ancestor, this game takes a moment to learn but hours to master. At first, you probably won't even get what all the fuss is about. With only two colors of blocks to pair up and a rhythmic "time line" that removes all matched

blocks from the board, gameplay feels terribly basic. It's only after you spend a few hours learning the unique strategy of setting up combos that it all clicks.

Lumines is also an immensely stylish game—aesthetically intriguing visuals and jammin', interactive tunes keep the puzzling fresh. It's fun just to put on some headphones, turn up the volume, and lose yourself in the beats.



■ In versus, the leading player gets a bigger playfield...so once you start losing you're done.

Sadly, a weird design choice keeps *Lumines* from being truly classic. None of the modes (save for the swift, fun wireless versus matches) delivers a balanced gameplay experience. Challenge (the game's main mode) takes waaaaay too long to ramp up—you'll snooze through the first 20-plus minutes—while CPU versus and puzzle modes get far too difficult too quickly.

MARK: Shane has it backwards—it's *Lumines*' versus mode that's shockingly unbalanced; one bad break and it's almost impossible to come back against a decent player, much less the bitch of a CPU. No, challenge mode is the draw here, and it is glorious. Once everything finally clicks (don't give up until you score 50K, trust me) you can go back and use that easy first 20 minutes to experiment with bigger combo setups, perfect new tricks, or test theories. That's the true beauty of *Lumines*: You're

always learning, always getting just a little bit faster, a little bit better. But then beauty abounds in this game; the bright visuals and hypnotic driving beats complement the gameplay perfectly. An awesome on-the-go treat for your eyes, ears, and mind.

1UP.COM—CHE: The brilliance of *Lumines* can only be discovered by peeling back its subtle layers. At first, the game will strike you as a cool-kid variant of *Puzzle Fighter*. But like all good puzzle games, there comes an epiphany—a sort of Zen understanding—of the game's core mechanic, after which you'll be hopelessly hooked on its hypnotic sights and sounds. But beyond that, *Lumines* ventures into abstraction by design, letting you essentially remix and rearrange the game's 40 or so techno tunes based on your style of play. Like a turntable for your mind, no two games will sound exactly alike.

| | | | |
|-----------------------------|-------|------|-----|
| THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10) | 7.5 | 8.5 | 9.5 |
| | SHANE | MARK | CHE |

Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Q!
Players: 1 (2 via wireless LAN)
ESRB: Everyone

www.ubi.com



UNTOLD LEGENDS

Good, if not quite legendary

MARK: For an action-RPG, *Untold Legends*' story is forgettable, its combat fairly basic hack-n-slash, and its load times completely insane (I clocked one at almost two minutes). In fact, the entire game follows one simple formula it doesn't even try to disguise (go to X dungeon, kill Y boss, get Z item, return to town for next errand) that's repeated over and over.

So why couldn't I put it down? Simple: deep character-building options. Countless grades of equipment can be bought or found; level up and choose which abilities and cool special attacks to buff. Top it off with sharp graphics and smooth multiplay-

er and you've got a package anyone with an inner *Dungeons & Dragons* dork will enjoy.

JENNIFER: I'm starting to sound like Goldilocks. First, I whined that *Champions: Return to Arms* (PS2) had bosses that were too hard. Now I'm complaining that its PSP counterpart is too easy; the bosses require almost no change whatsoever in tactics. Sigh...maybe next time they'll get the difficulty just right.

Untold Legends is a portable *Champions* and not much more—but, luckily, that's a fantastic thing: Scrumptious hack-n-slash, satisfying

quests, and splendid multiplayer make a fine porridge indeed.

SHANE: Get ready to mindlessly pummel facsimiles from each and every page of the *D&D Monster Manual*. Derivative and creatively bankrupt as it may be, *Legends* at least pulls off the standard-issue dungeon hacking with pizzazz—sharp visuals, copious labyrinths to venture through, and a googleplex of equipment to hoard make it the deepest PSP launch title of the bunch. And it's especially engaging with some pals: Four-player wireless questing gives the soulless adventure some much-needed spice.

| | | | |
|-----------------------------|------|----------|-------|
| THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10) | 7.5 | 8.0 | 6.5 |
| | MARK | JENNIFER | SHANE |

Publisher: Sony Online • Developer: Sony Online • Players: 1 (2-4 via wireless LAN) • ESRB: Teen • www.untoldlegends.com



After a few bumpy seconds in our seven-player (eight is the max) Wi-Fi tests, the racing was silky smooth, lag free, and a total blast.

RIDGE RACER

Pole position in the PSP lineup



MARK: If you read my staff bio in the front of the magazine, you might've noticed racing is not listed as one of my favorite genres, but *Ridge Racer* is on my Now Playing list. That about sums up my review right there—this is a polished, well-balanced game even non-gearheads will love.

For starters, *Ridge Racer* looks better than any launch game has a right to. The sharp, incredibly detailed graphics (helicopters fly by, flashbulbs go off in the stands, cows graze on the side of the

road) glide by smoothly, even at the incredible speeds of the later cars. But this is much more than a visual showcase for your new system—*Ridge Racer* has the gameplay goods. Control (on the D-pad at least) is tight and responsive; bumping other cars and the side of the track is just right, not too harsh or too forgiving; and the essential skill of drifting around corners is painless to learn but with subtleties (and three different car/drift types) that take time to master.

Ridge Racer may start off way too easy and get abruptly tough with the 1-on-1 racing duels, but unlockable cars and the large number of excellent tracks will keep you behind the wheel.

JOHN R: After 2003's utterly atrocious *R: Racing Evolution*, I'd pretty much given up on my beloved *Ridge* series. But lo and behold, with the birth of the PSP comes the glorious rebirth of one of the greatest arcade racing franchises of all time, and to say I'm thrilled would be the understatement of the year. *Ridge* PSP marks a triumphant return to form for the series; the drift mechanics have been completely restored, resulting in a racing game that offers 100 percent adrenaline-fueled, arcade-style fun. The track selection is excellent, the number of cars and races is staggering, and the visuals and music are top-notch. This is the reason I bought a PSP and it's the reason you

should too. Oh, and I'm analog all the way—the D-pad is for babies.

OFFICIAL PS MAG—GIANCARLO: Curse you, Namco! Just as I was coming to grips with the fact that there hasn't been a real *Ridge Racer* game since the launch of the PS2, you have to go and release what essentially amounts to every *Ridge Racer* fan's dream—a collection of tracks from every game. These old courses are not only still incredibly fun to race on, but they also hold up well with the new drifting boost feature, which gives added incentive to perfect your drifting skills. Of course, the main single-player mode will just keep you glued to the PSP in general as you try to unlock new cars and circuits, but multiplayer is also just a total blast to play. My only complaint is that races end shortly after the winner crosses the finish line, denying other racers any chance to move up. That's hardly fair to the guys battling for third.



| | | | |
|-----------------------------|------|---------|-----------|
| THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10) | 8.5 | 9.0 | 9.0 |
| | MARK | JOHN R. | GIANCARLO |

Publisher: Namco
Developer: Namco
Players: 1 (2-8 via wireless LAN)
ESRB: Everyone

www.namco.com



PSP VIDEO

Watching movies, TV, and whatever else on your PSP

The first batch of UMD movies (not including *Spider-Man 2*, which comes with the first 1 million PSPs) hits on April 19. Here they are with suggested retail prices (you should be able to find them about \$5 cheaper) and rotten-tomatoes.com freshness ratings (the percentage of critics who liked the movie):



RESIDENT EVIL: APOCALYPSE
\$19.95
21% — rotten



HOUSE OF FLYING DAGGERS
\$28.95
87% — fresh



ONCE UPON A TIME IN MEXICO
\$19.95
69% — fresh



HELLBOY
\$19.95
78% — fresh



XXX
\$19.95
45% — rotten



SPIDER-MAN 2
Free with first 1 million PSPs
93% — fresh



For now, the only way to play *Resident Evil* on your PSP is to buy the crappy movie.

UMD video looks amazing on the PSP screen—bright, colorful, and crisp as fresh lettuce. But with a suggested retail price only about \$5 cheaper than most DVDs, it remains to be seen just how popular the format will be with the Hollywood studios and the public at large. (We can only hope UMDs become available for rent, especially at airports). Unless Sony drops the price or

starts including UMD drives in more home devices, the format could very well go the way of the laser disc.

But there is another way to watch video on your PSP: directly off the Memory Stick. The MPEG-4 video format the system is compatible with can't compete with UMD movies in terms of quality, but it doesn't look bad by any means and goes much easier on your battery life (about six hours versus two and a half). You can fit over three hours of MPEG-4 video on a 1 gig stick as well, compared to two hours on a single UMD disc.

Currently, running video from a Memory Stick isn't as easy as playing music, but there is an excellent free program called 3GP that will get just about anything working on your PSP. Head to Web tech magazine engadget.com and search for "Sony PSP" for a full how-to.

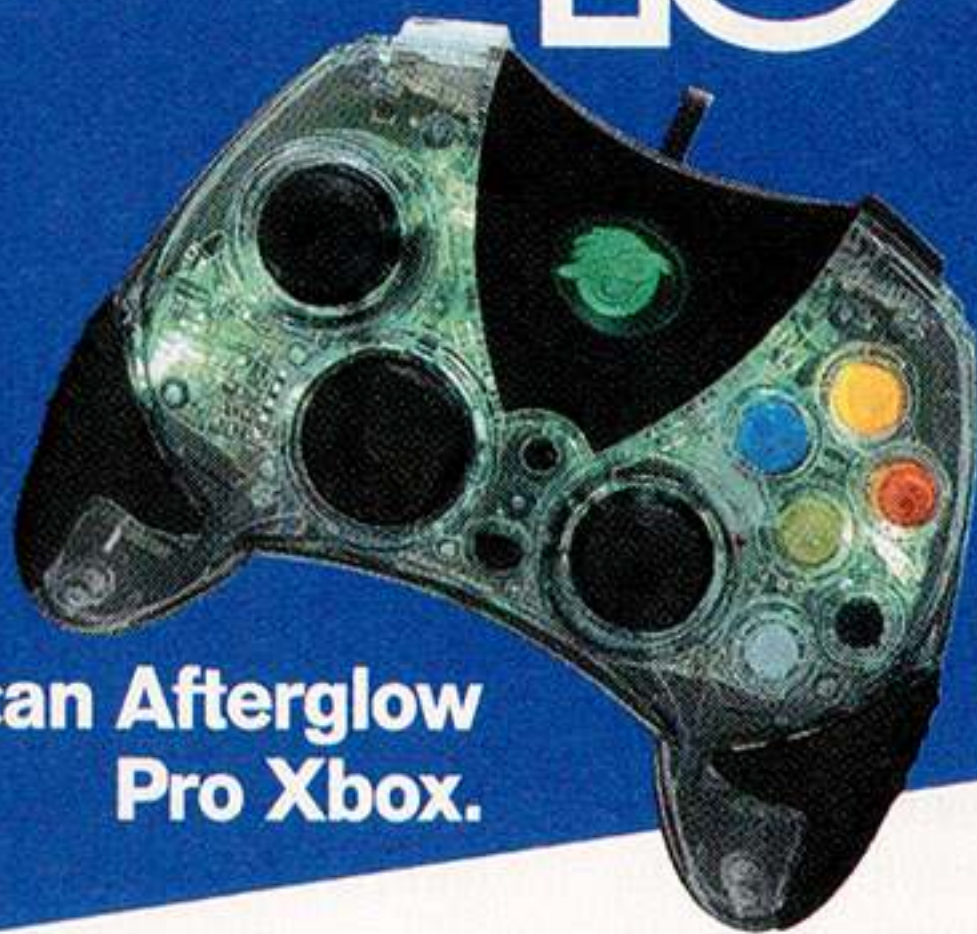
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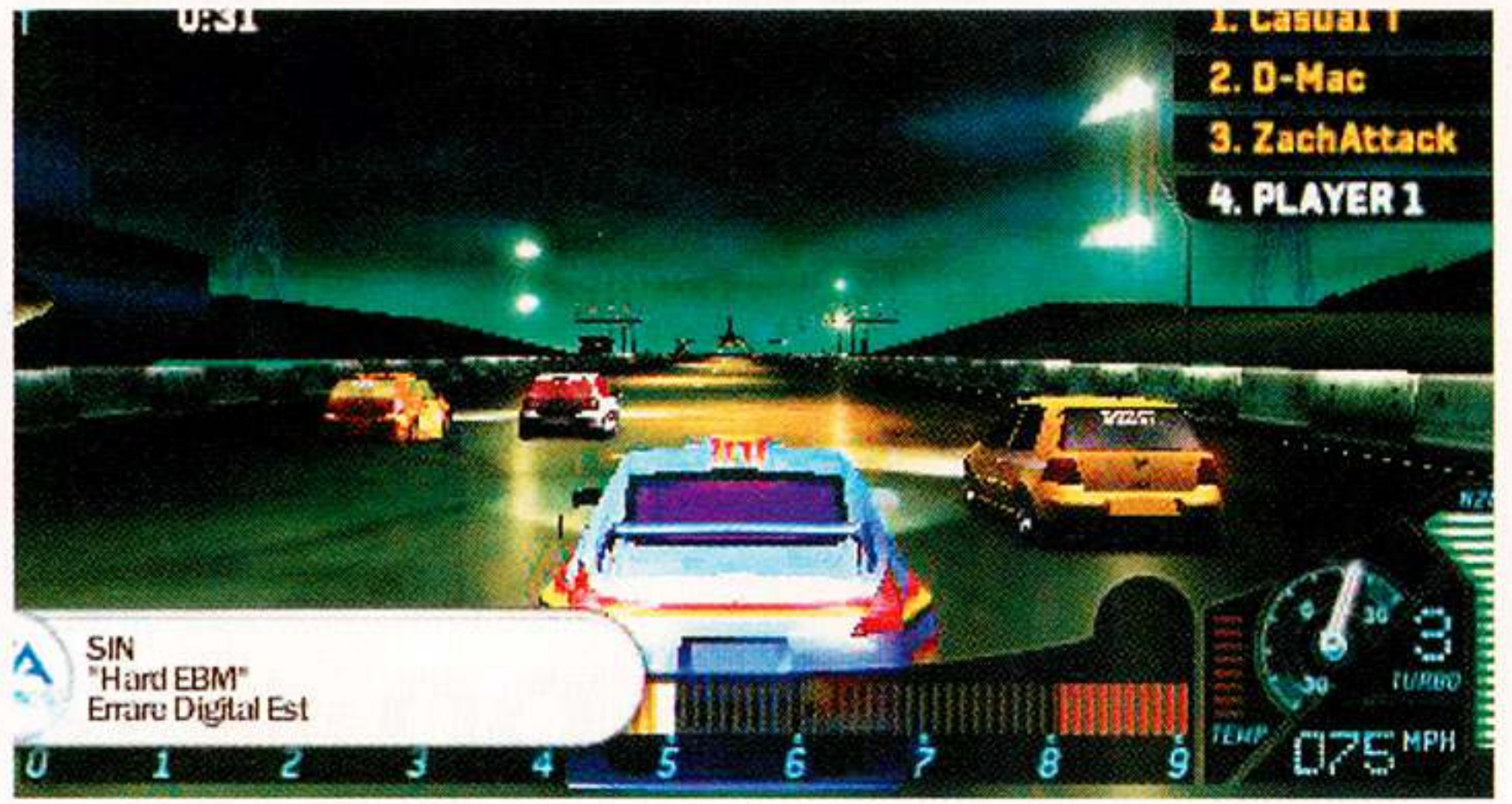
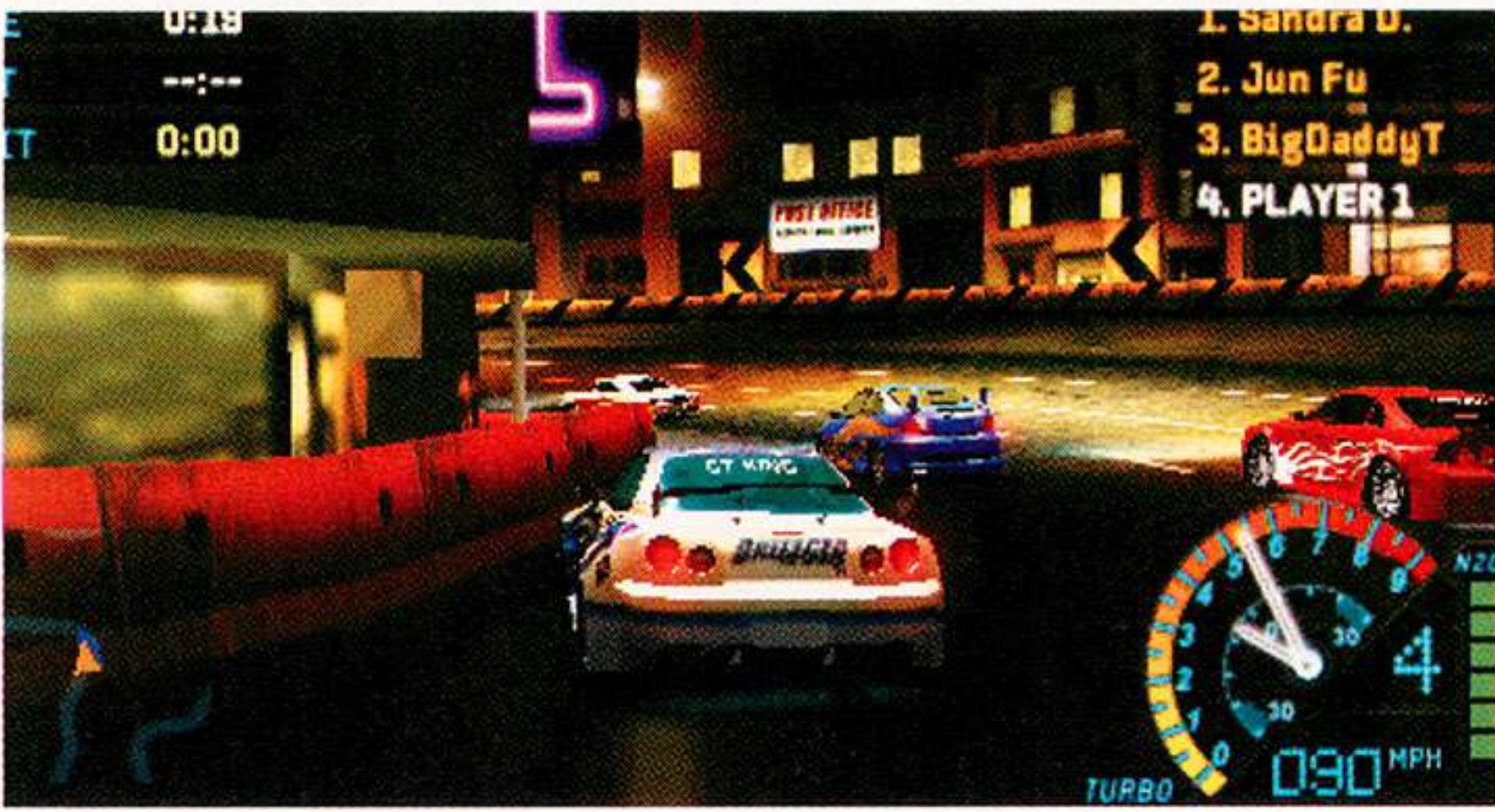
\$14.99

Tetris Worlds, Hot Wheels Stunt Track Challenge, Disney Princess.



THE NEW

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Rice rocket in your pocket

JOHN R: If you, like me, are a *Need for Speed* fan who doesn't have an awful lot of free time to spend driving around a huge city looking for races and chatting on the phone with Brooke Burke, you'll be pleased with the direction EA took with *Underground Rivals*. It has wisely ditched the free-roaming city aspects of *Underground 2* (and, in fact, the entire story mode altogether) for a leaner, meaner game of *NFS* that's perfectly suited for a handheld.

That's not to say *Rivals* is slim on content, though. The two main gameplay modes offer enough racing thrills to keep speed freaks busy for weeks, with a wide variety of race types, both old and new (wait'll you try nitrous run) and a host of cars to tinker with. It doesn't hurt that the game looks great, too; it may not be as pretty or smooth as *Ridge Racer*, but it's close, and the sense of speed is really pretty astounding.

Complaints? Upgrading your ride can be

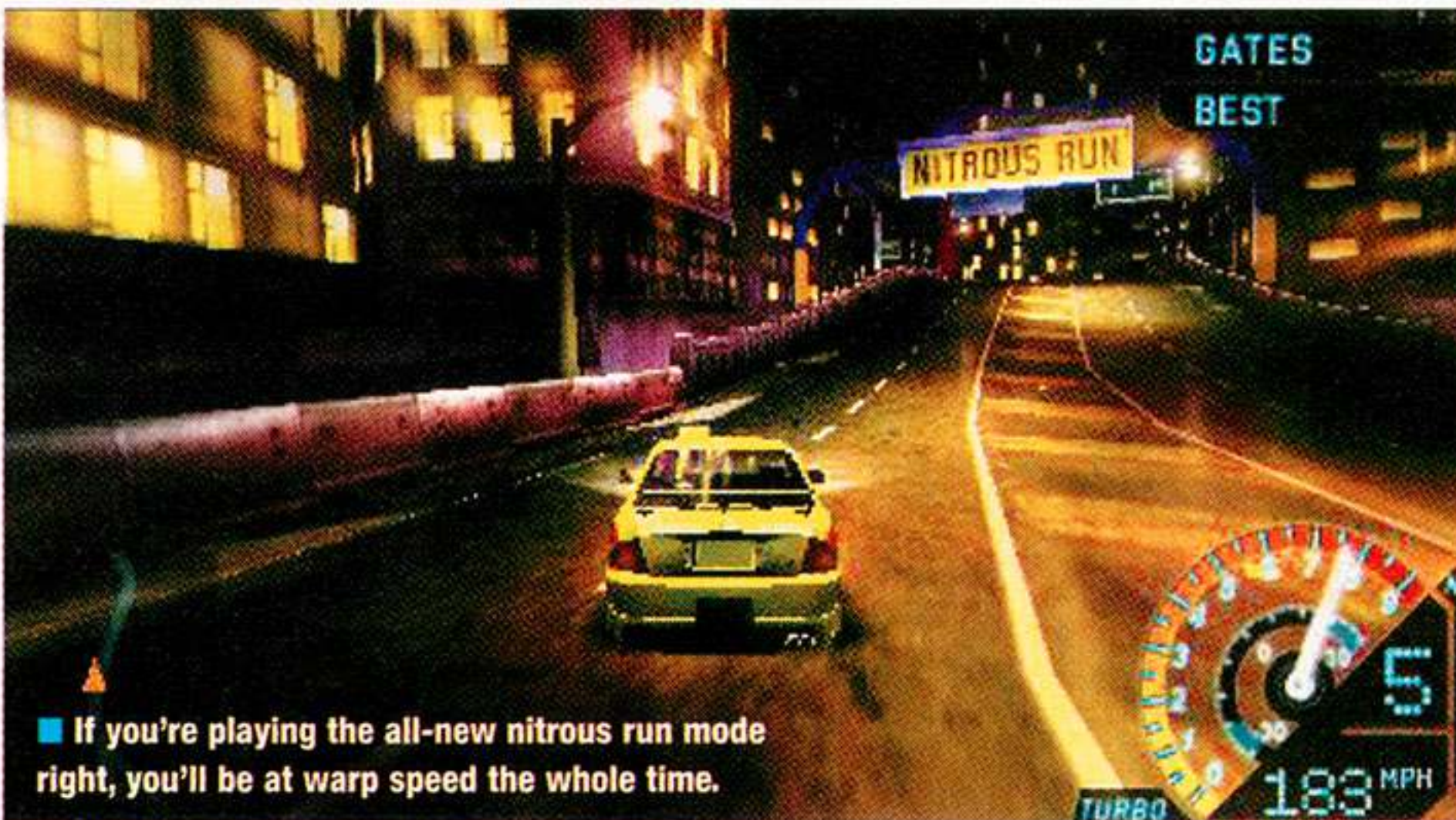
a bit confusing at times, especially if you're not a car geek. And if you're a stickler for licensed parts (I'm not), you won't find 'em here, aside from different brands of wheels. But what does bug me—wireless play for only two players when *Ridge Racer* offers it for eight people? For shame, EA!

G. FORD: For a game called *Rivals*, I expected a little more personality...you know, maybe some actual characters or confrontations. But instead of the stories, antagonists, or open cities seen in recent street racers, this game features uninspired menu-wading to get you to the action. That's my only major complaint, though. When you get on the road, everything's suitably impressive. *Rivals'* graphics, speed, and controls are sickeningly good, making it easy to lose a few hours a pop to the addictive minigames (notably Drift Attack and Drag), modding, and

more traditional street races. An impressive effort.

DEMIAN: Like G. Ford, I was a little miffed that *Rivals* ditched the open-plan city of console big bro *Underground 2*, but I suppose it makes more sense to jump straight to the races for the portable version. But there's something from *Underground 2* that I miss even more: You can't recharge your nitrous meter by drifting, drafting, or generally driving like an idiot.

Rivals does look great, though. Not only do the streets have that signature *Underground* wet look, but lights blur as you pass and the camera shakes as the speedometer climbs. I'm with John on the multiplayer front—just two-player LAN matches are disappointing, and the pass-the-PSP 1-4 player events (you try to beat your friends' times) are nothing special. *Rivals* is very good, but if you're getting only one street racer at launch, make it *Ridge*.



■ If you're playing the all-new nitrous run mode right, you'll be at warp speed the whole time.

| | | | |
|-----------------------------|---------|---------|--------|
| THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10) | 8.0 | 8.0 | 7.5 |
| | JOHN R. | G. FORD | DEMIAN |

Publisher: EA Games
Developer: Team Fusion
Players: 1-4 (2 via wireless LAN)
ESRB: Everyone

www.eagames.com



PSP MUSIC

Uno, dos, tres, catorce!



■ Will you download ATRAC3 files from Sony's online music store connect.com or MP3s from iTunes (both above)... Or rip them from CDs yourself? We heard of a deal where you can get over 20 hit albums like these (below) for a single penny!



Great news—the PSP plays ATRAC3plus files!

Yes, that is sarcasm. Digital music fans have actually been bitching for years about how Sony's recent digital audio players sometimes supported only the company's proprietary format (short for Adaptive Transform Acoustic Coding, if you must know), especially since just about the only place you find it is at Sony's online music store www.connect.com.

But now the great news, for real: The PSP also plays MP3 files, by far the most popular compression format in digital music (most songs you've downloaded or burned off CD are probably MP3s). Sony claims ATRAC music sounds better than similarly sized MP3s, but public tests have been inconclusive. Honestly, unless you're a real audio

buff you probably won't be able to tell the difference anyway.

Copying songs over to your PSP is as easy as doing it with any digital audio player: When you format your Memory Stick, the PSP creates a music folder automatically. Just dump your songs there and they'll show up in your menu. Don't toss your iPod just yet, though. The biggest Memory Stick currently available is 1 gig (which is enough space for about 240 songs, though a 2-gig stick was just announced), and the audio interface offers only simple options like random play and repeat; there's no sorting by artist, album, etc. Of course, this could all change in a future downloadable PSP system update, which might just have something to do with why Apple dropped iPod prices in February....

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PlayStation 2



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Blood
Strong Language
Violence

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www.thq.com



What a waste—a third of your screen for a map, a fifth of your screen for a horse's ass.

DYNASTY WARRIORS

Chinese take-out

SHANE: Compared to publisher Koei's impressive *Dynasty Warriors 5* for PS2 (reviewed on page 134), this version feels like it belongs in an Asian history museum. Sure, you can't expect a handheld game's visuals to match its PS2 cousin's, but you can expect it to at least fill the screen—too much of the lovely LCD is wasted on a largely unnecessary map. And the simplistic, occasionally choppy action on the other chunk isn't much to shout about, either.

Gameplay fares a tinge better. Cutting down legions of fools provides a grisly, visceral rush, thanks to tight controls. Conveniently brief missions invite short gameplay sessions, but every level feels awfully similar. With little to do besides hack-n-slash, there's not much depth.

OFFICIAL PS MAG—GIANCARLO: This is indeed *Dynasty Warriors* in portable form, and as such, it does an excellent job of

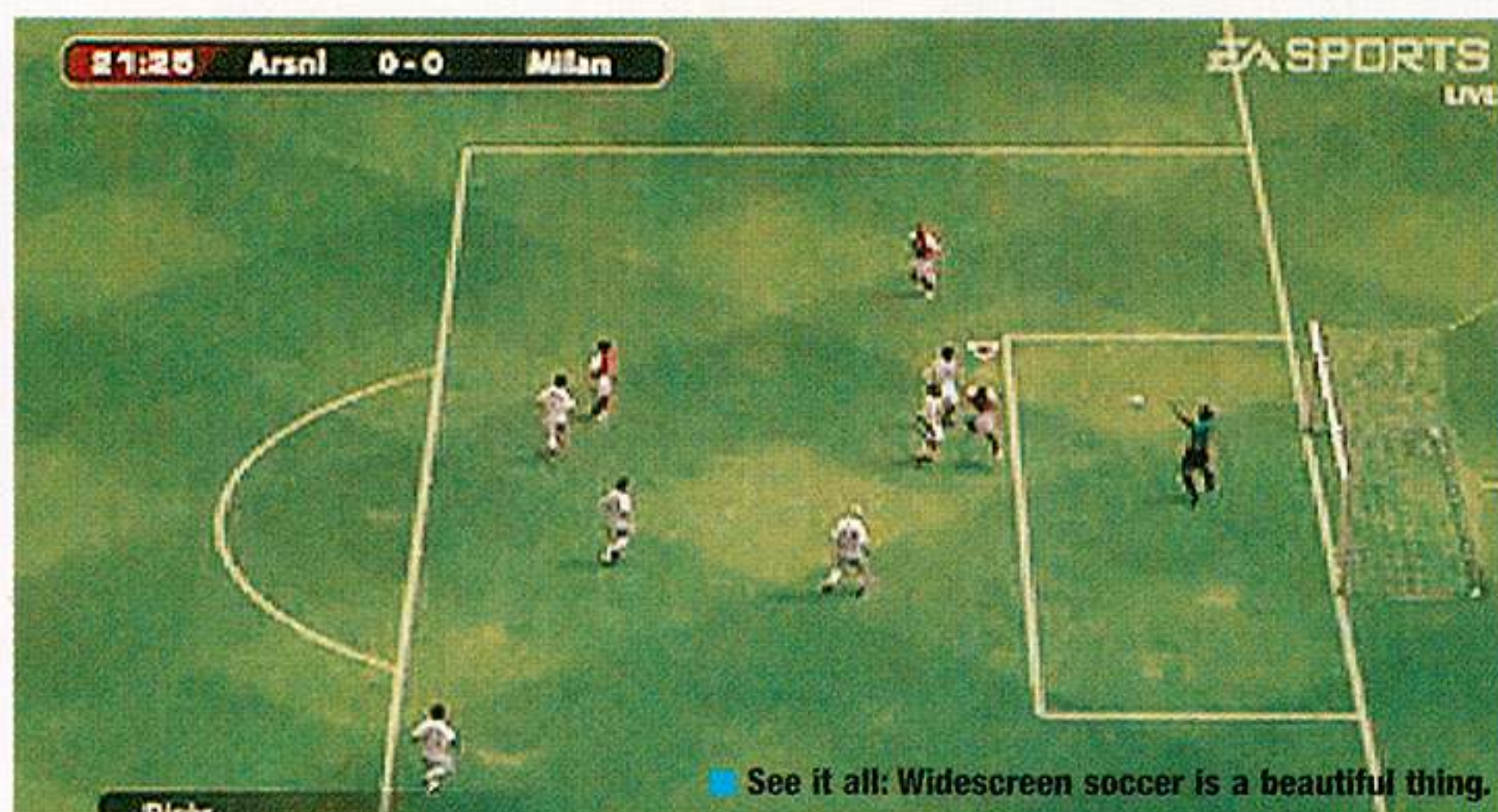
replicating the PS2 version's fun, large-scale battles. However, your teammates are often totally incompetent and will stand around in the midst of a fight while you're busy doing all the dirty work. Also, due in part to the camera position and because the actual action takes up such a relatively small amount of screen real estate, it's often difficult to gauge where enemies are in the middle of combat.

1UP.COM—CHE: If you've played *Dynasty Warriors* before on a console, then this kid brother version will feel comfortably familiar. The same claustrophobic skirmishes and addictive hack-and-slash mechanics prevail here, but having only one analog stick means you'll be spending most of your time fighting with a stubborn camera. This game is either unoptimized or taxing the PSP to the limit, because there's plenty of awful slowdown to boot.

| | | | |
|-----------------------------|-------|-----------|-----|
| THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10) | 5.0 | 6.0 | 6.5 |
| | SHANE | GIANCARLO | CHE |

Publisher: Koei
Developer: Omega Force
Players: 1
ESRB: Teen

www.koei.com



See it all: Widescreen soccer is a beautiful thing.

FIFA

Heads-up play

PATRICK: This handheld soccer title does not disappoint—it has a crisp look, Wi-Fi action, and exclusive new modes. I dig the midseason mode especially, in which you can play using the real stats accumulated so far this year. Can Arsenal catch Chelsea for the Premiership? Play it out and get back to me.

FIFA uses the PSP's screen size to full advantage, giving you a great look at the whole field. Now you can see if your streaking striker is offside before delivering the through ball. And I hope any developer who makes sports titles copies the save and quit mode in *FIFA*—simply start it back up; you'll see a few seconds of your previous gameplay, and you're back in. Excellent!

BRYAN: Even in miniature form, *FIFA* beautifully captures soccer's sights and sounds, as the Beckhams and Ronaldos

look spot-on and crowds bellow team-specific chants. Also, being able to pick up my favorite squad's actual '04-'05 season from the halfway point is a nice touch. Gameplay is pretty solid, though I wish I could remap the button layout; switching from the analog stick to the D-pad for special moves is tricky.

DEMIAN: Play soccer in widescreen and it's hard to go back; the extra acreage definitely ups the success rate on risky through-ball passes and other offensive plays. Although I often felt my guys were moving a bit slowly (especially with the ball), I can't fault the controls much—stretching from the analog nub to the D-pad to execute a dribble move or first-touch when receiving a pass is a little annoying, but I can't think of a better system. There's no franchise mode, but I'll swap wireless multi for that any day.

| | | | |
|-----------------------------|---------|-------|--------|
| THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10) | 8.5 | 7.5 | 7.5 |
| | PATRICK | BRYAN | DEMIAN |

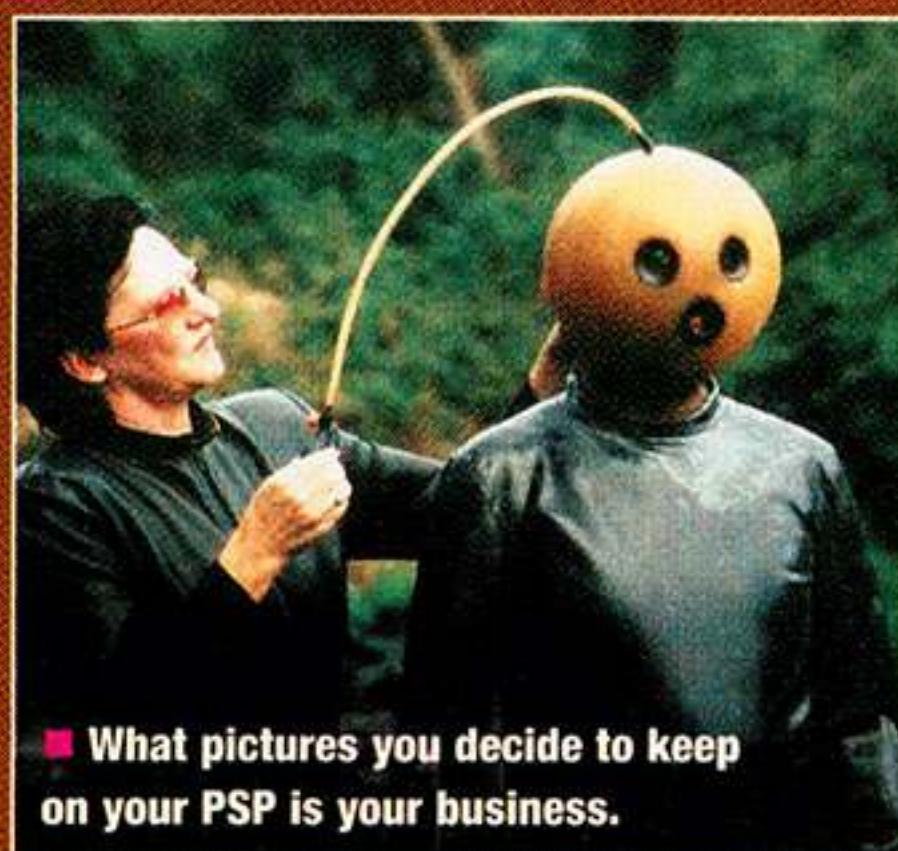
Publisher: EA Sports
Developer: EA Canada
Players: 1 (2 via wireless LAN)
ESRB: Everyone

www.easports.com



PSP PHOTO

You oughta be in pictures



What pictures you decide to keep on your PSP is your business.

Still pulling out your wallet to proudly display snapshots of your loved ones? So last century. Store JPG format pictures on your PSP instead—just plop



them in the photo folder automatically created when you format your Memory Stick and voilà. Once you're looking at them, there's a whole range of digital-



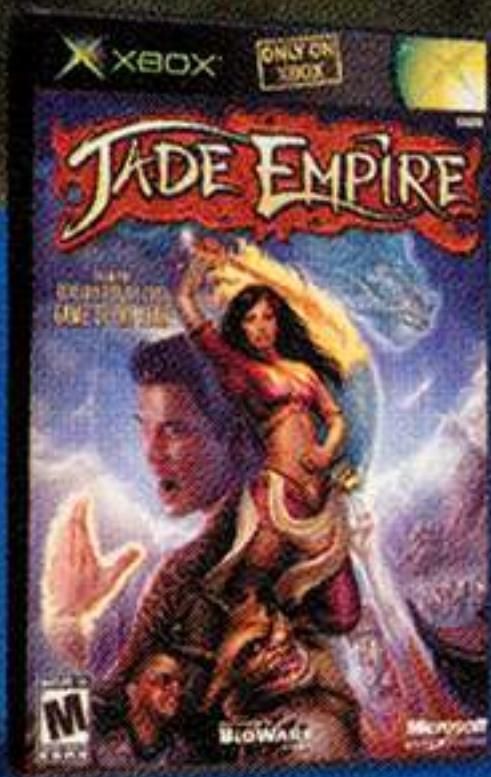
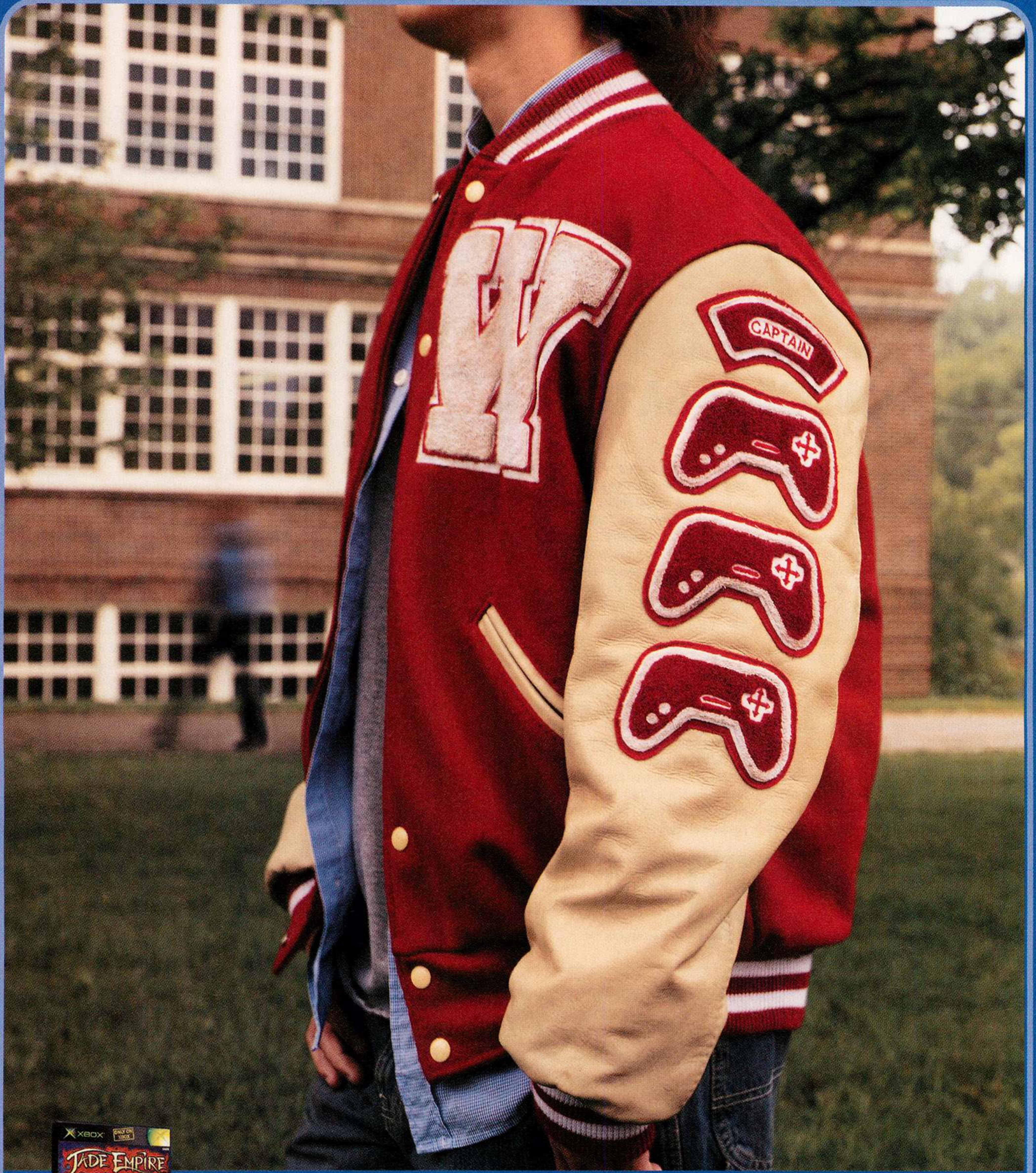
Preserve precious family photos. Wait, that's not your dad.

camera-like options for your photos: stretch them to fill the screen, zoom in and out, rotate, or start a slide show. Not a huge feature, but a nice little extra.



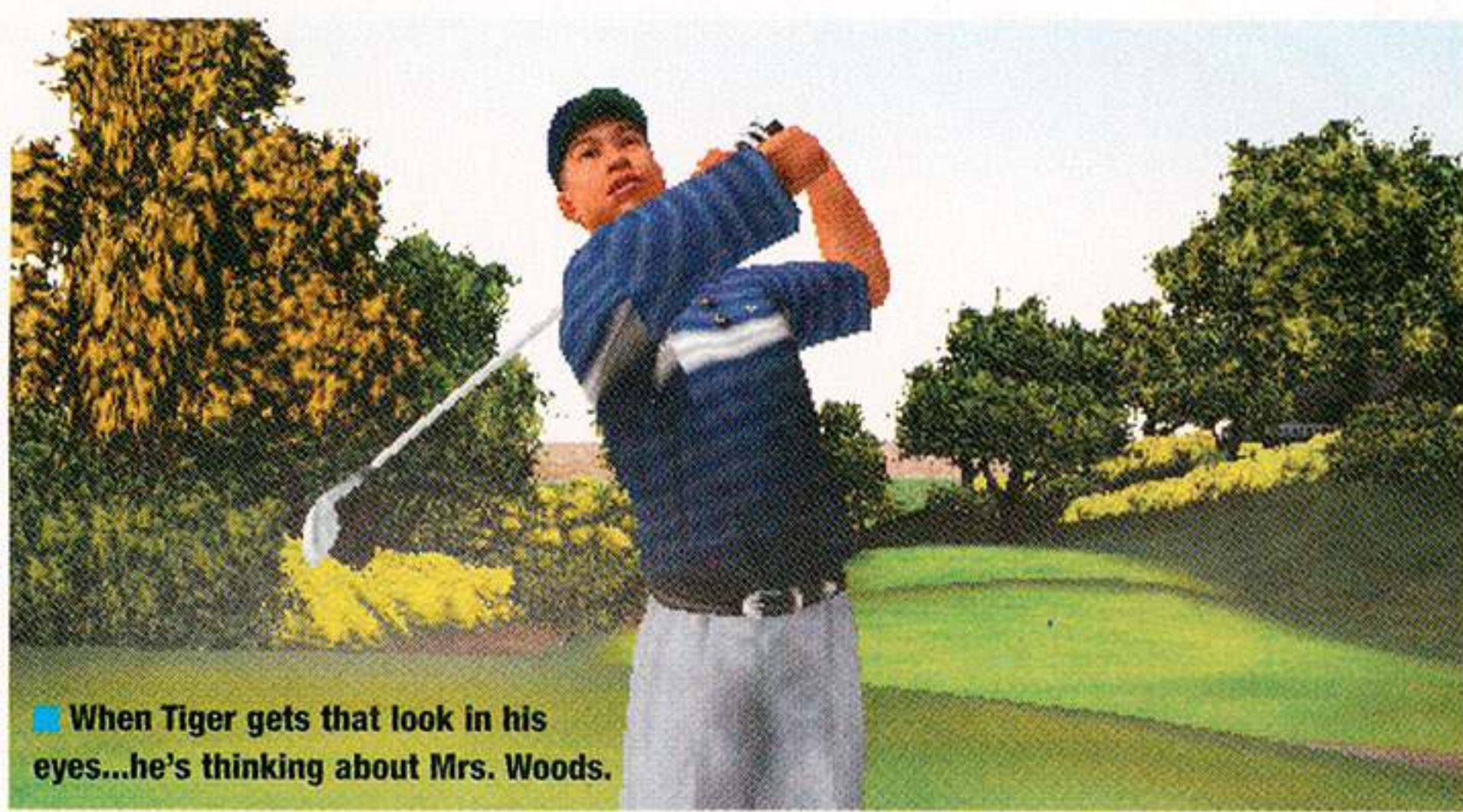
Cool free program alert!

If you're planning on putting a huge number of pics on your PSP, Google "PSPPhoto PSP" and download this awesome freeware program. It takes whatever you drag and drop in it—including compressed Zip files—and converts them to the perfect size for viewing on your PSP. Some fans have even used the program to move their favorite "graphic novels" to their systems for easy on-the-go reading. Maybe official comics and books will go on sale soon?

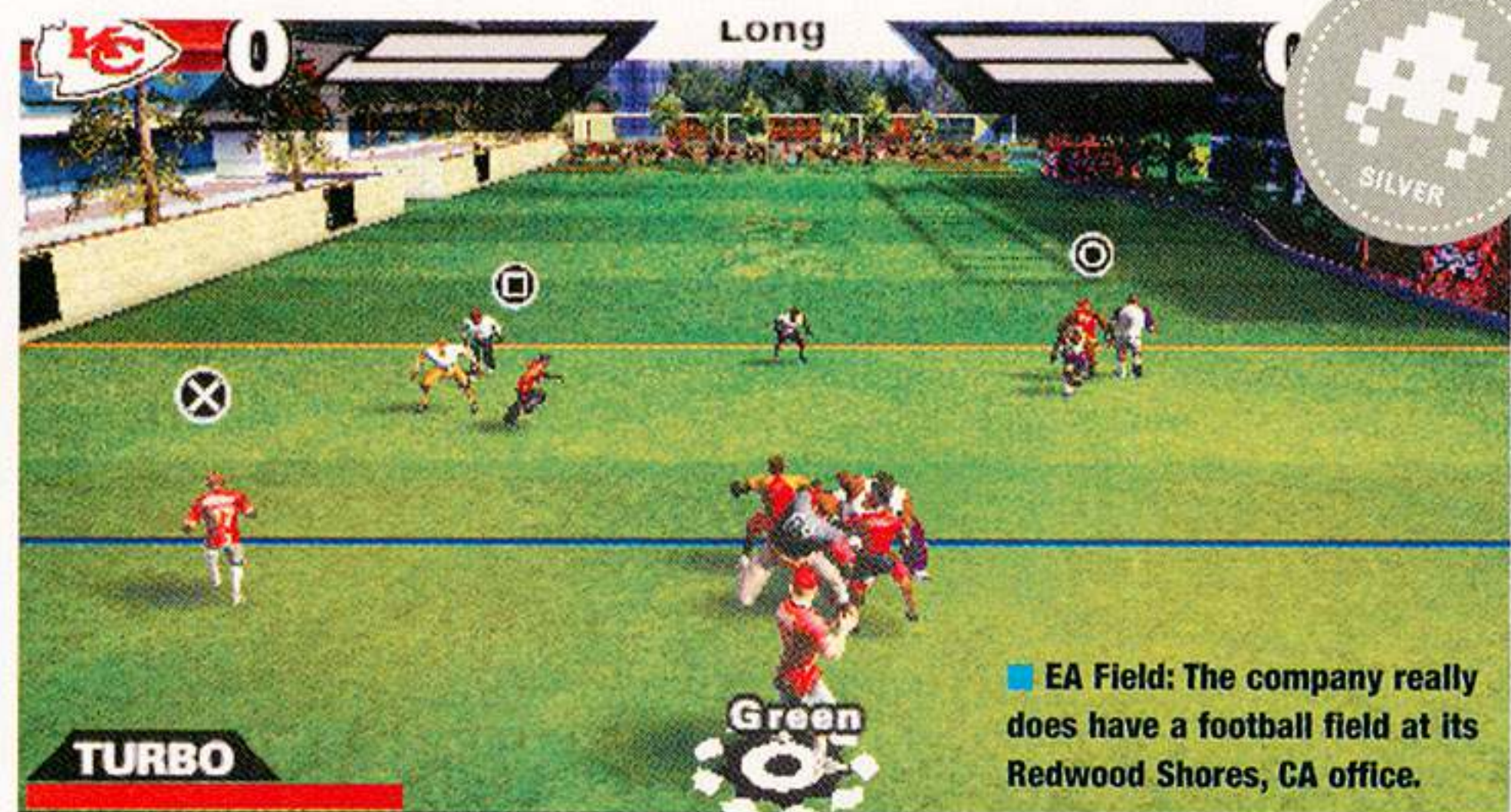


Earn your stripes. And your black belt. *Jade Empire* from BioWare is now available. This RPG lets you learn the strategies of the great martial art masters, defeat powerful enemies and take back the streets of ancient China. At Best Buy,™ gamers rule.





■ When Tiger gets that look in his eyes...he's thinking about Mrs. Woods.



■ EA Field: The company really does have a football field at its Redwood Shores, CA office.

TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR

Loses some stripes

BRYAN: Even when the real-life Tiger is struggling, he's one of the best around. And the same holds true for his videogame. Most of this traveling golf course is well under par; it looks superb and features tons of modes (you can't beat teeing off against legends like Arnold Palmer and Jack Nicklaus), and just like in the console editions, there are almost too many options for customizing your golfer.

But sometimes *Tiger* misses the cup: The analog nub is too sensitive for the series' signature swing system. Just one little bump while riding the bus will send your ball into the rough. This and the frequent load times are why my golf clap isn't as zealous as it might have been.

CRISPIN: A good portable golf game is a beautiful thing (see the *Mario Golf* series on Game Boy), and *Tiger* comes close to nailing such potential. It looks great, packs

a solid variety of quick-play challenges (plus slick multiplayer modes), and has the same nifty swing and putting systems as the big-console versions. Trouble is, control here isn't as accessible. Like Bryan, I blame it on the PSP's touchy analog nub, which launched occasional unpredictable shots even after I thought I had mastered my swing. Add in the longish load times, and *Tiger* falls short of the hole.

PATRICK: This *Tiger* has eight licensed courses (including golfer mecca Pebble Beach), a Legend's Tour, plus the great create-a-player feature synonymous with the series. Like the other guys, I found the frequent loading a bit annoying, and I had similar control problems: The up/down motion of the swing on the console stick feels more precise than the analog slider on the PSP. You've got to take extra care to ensure a straight shot.

| | | | |
|-----------------------------|-------|---------|---------|
| THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10) | 7.0 | 7.5 | 8.0 |
| | BRYAN | CRISPIN | PATRICK |

Publisher: EA Sports
Developer: EA Canada
Players: 1-4 (2 via wireless LAN)
ESRB: Everyone
www.easports.com

NFL STREET 2: UNLEASHED

What a showboat

BRYAN: Three different *NFL Street* titles in 15 months—man alive, that must be like some kind of record. Anyhoo, the good news is that EA's hard-hitting, arcadey football franchise is the perfect fit for the sporto with a PSP. And actually, I'd rather run for pay dirt in this version than in the two console installments, as this style of play—where matchups last roughly 10 to 15 minutes—is what gaming on the go is all about.

Unleashed also moves at a blisteringly fast pace (unlike some other PSP sports games), looks comparable to its visually impressive big brothers, and is simple to control. It's unfortunate that the game recycles *Street 2*'s "own the city" mode, but at least it has some legs.

G. FORD: Minus a few lame minigames (I'm looking your way *Style Standoff*) *Unleashed* is mighty impressive. As

Bryan says, the controls are spot-on and the action is quick—turn off the music and there's even less loading. Granted, single player can get old—something fans of arcade-style sports games are familiar with—but solid multiplayer keeps the drive going. When I challenged Patrick to some wireless action, our battles were smooth and lag-free.

PATRICK: Playing *Unleashed* makes me realize what a spaz I am—note to self, shaking the PSP makes it hard to see. Once I calmed down, I loved the fact I could view the whole field with a camera angle wider than that of the game's console counterpart. The new *Street* events, the addition of some different throwback guys (like Jerry Rice as a Niner), plus the inclusion of some throwback locales from the first *Street* make this feel like so much more than a port.

| | | | |
|-----------------------------|-------|---------|---------|
| THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10) | 8.0 | 8.0 | 8.0 |
| | BRYAN | G. FORD | PATRICK |

Publisher: EA Sports Big
Developer: EA Canada
Players: 1-4 (2 via wireless LAN)
ESRB: Everyone
www.easportsbig.com

PSP MUST-HAVES

Essential add-ons for your handheld

Carrying Case:

PlayGear Pocket Case
www.logitech.com • \$25
One part case, two parts transformer, Logitech's formfitting tote is all kick-ass. The tension lid can act as a visor for those sunny afternoons or flip over for use as a stand. Openings on the back for shoulder-button access and audio ports mean you can pimp strut to school or the office while listening to Usher.



Also Consider:

Leather Case • www.notestation.com • \$39
Gen-u-ine leather, complete with magnetic snap and spots for extra UMDs and Mem Sticks. Nice.



Sure you've got the lint cloth and carrying case that came with the PSP, but chances are you're going to need an extra accessory or two. But wait! Put your wal-

Screen Care:

Protective Sheets by Intec
www.intec-link.com • \$7
Supplement your protection ensemble with these clingy plastic sheets that fit perfectly over your PSP screen, eliminating dust and grime buildup.

Screen Armor by Nyko

www.nyko.com • \$10
An anodized aluminum shell with a rubber underside is the ultimate barrier between the harsh outside world and your PSP screen.

Monitor Brush by Kensington

www.kensington.com • \$5
Use this instead of your T-shirt for wipe downs.

let back into your pocket and slowly step away from your videogame retailer. First, read our rundown of the must-have peripherals for your new system.

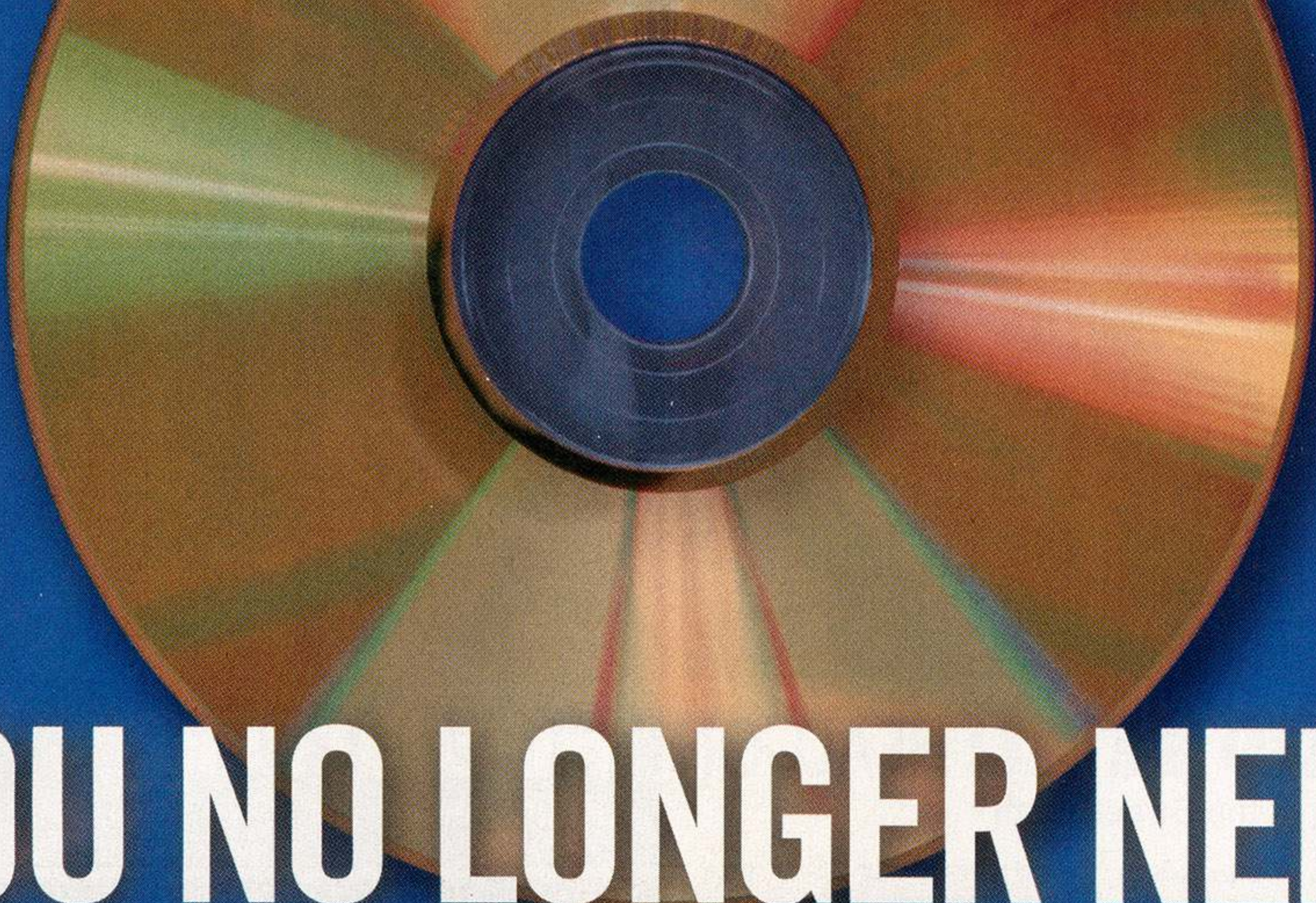
Mem Sticks:

The 32MB Memory Stick Pro Duo that comes with the PSP is just fine for game saves, but you'll want a bigger stick if you plan to listen to audio or watch MPEG versions of *Three's Company* at a moment's notice.

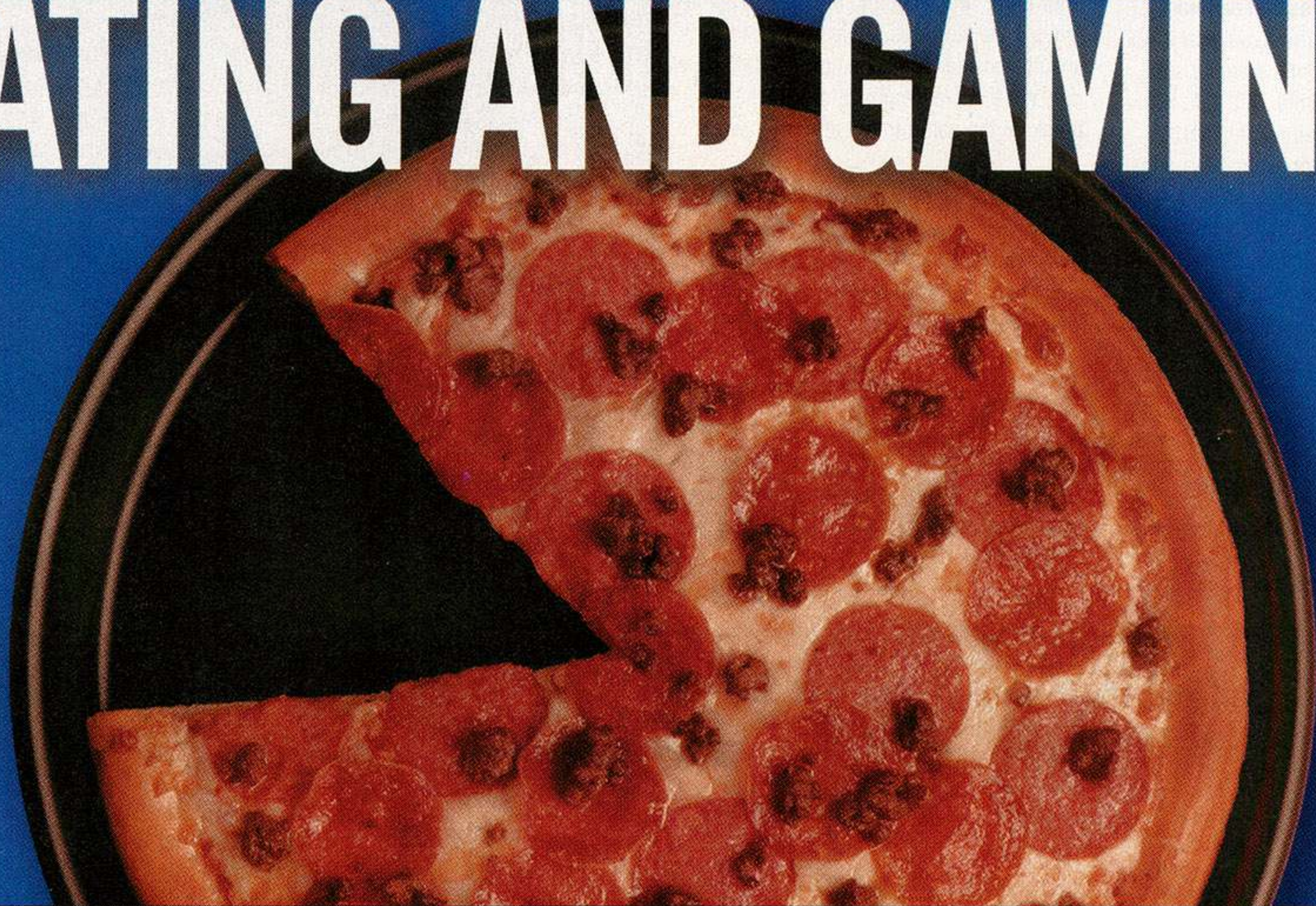
You could go with a Sony stick and pay a premium or opt for a Day-Glo version from SanDisk. The difference? Virtually none (except for the price—Sony's sticks cost about twice as much). In fact, according to SanDisk, it codeveloped and is a co-patent-holder on the technology alongside Sony. Isn't competition grand?



\$89 for a 512MB stick
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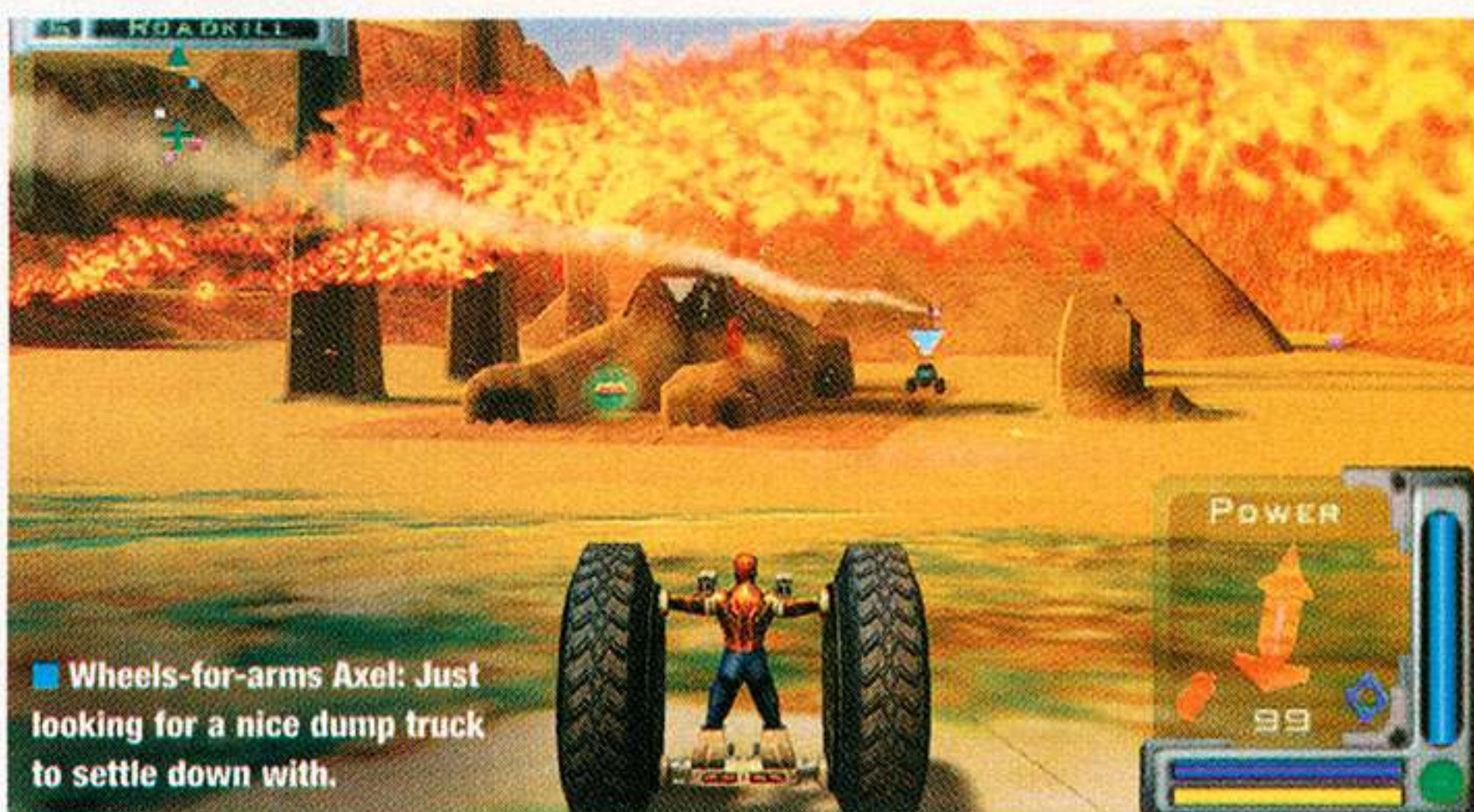
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■ Wheels-for-arms Axel: Just looking for a nice dump truck to settle down with.



■ Fast enough for ya? Yes.

▶ TWISTED METAL: HEAD-ON

Getting long in the Sweet Tooth

If you're old enough to remember when cars with machine guns and heat-seeking missile launchers mounted on their doors were the hottest thing on a PlayStation disc, you'll recognize *Head-On* as a throw-back to the *Twisted Metal 2* era.

The old characters are here: Sweet Tooth, Mr. Grimm, Outlaw, and a grip of their pals. And they still look as though they've escaped from a bad comic book rather than an asylum. The creepy coat of darkness painted onto the PS2's *Twisted Metal Black* has been shed in favor of the earlier sunnier style. Even levels from *TM2* (L.A. and Paris, notably) have been reimagined.

Visually, it's smoother around the edges than its forebear and throws around some modern lighting effects, but it's not spectacular. Unfortunately, *Twisted Metal's* core gameplay feels pretty archaic—especially the silly directional pad sequences used for

special moves. Worse, the camera behind your car seems pretty sluggish, slow to catch up as you constantly spin around in dogfights. The series never truly embraced the analog stick, but it should be noted that the PSP's analog nub is pretty useless here. Stick with the D-pad.

What worked for the series in the past mostly works here. The stranger weapons, especially those that require detonation after firing, are still fun to use. At this point, though, the stewards of the franchise should consider some kind of real defense (and not the D-pad combo for shields) to break up the game's tired attack patterns.

BOTTOM LINE: If you're a fan of the series (and know a few more), the Wi-Fi online mode could be worth it. Otherwise, there seem to be plenty of better things to do with a car on the PSP. —Robert Ashley

WIPEOUT PURE

Uncut speed

It's a shame that Sony couldn't provide *EGM* with reviewable copies of *Pure*, as you'd probably be spying three remarkably high scores right here. The basic premise mirrors that of the PSP *Ridge Racer's*: Combine elements from every game in the series' well-respected lineup to create an all-in-one über-racer. A lot of the content is actually new (12 original tracks, several new vehicle classes), but you'll also recognize tracks and crafts borrowed from *Wipeout*, *Wipeout XL*, *Wipeout 3*, and *Wipeout Fusion*.

Even if you missed those classics, you'll quickly adapt to *Wipeout's* brand of antigravity racing—the purposefully floaty physics, massive hills, hairpin turns, and deadly leaps. A creative arsenal of power-ups enhances the action, and a new twist—the ability to “burn” your pickup to regain shields—forces

you to rethink your racing strategy.

Although it's easy to be swayed by the PSP's processing muscle, *Wipeout Pure's* visuals completely exceed all expectations. The game offers not only superbly speedy action, but also aesthetically pleasing design. Whether you're zipping through glass tubes beneath the ocean or careening off walls in a neon *Tron*-inspired dreamscape, you will be awed. And the other *Wipeout* presentation staples—absurdly hip menu designs and rockin' techno tunes—remain intact. Eight-player wireless races complete the package, though true online multi sure would have been nice.

BOTTOM LINE: The PSP launch lineup is lousy with top-quality racers, but *Wipeout Pure* may very well be the best of the bunch. —Shane Bettenhausen



Publisher: Sony CEA
Developer: Incog
Players: 1 (2-8 via wireless LAN/online)
ESRB: Teen
www.playstation.com



Publisher: Sony CEA
Developer: Sony Liverpool
Players: 1 (2-8 via wireless LAN)
ESRB: Everyone
www.playstation.com

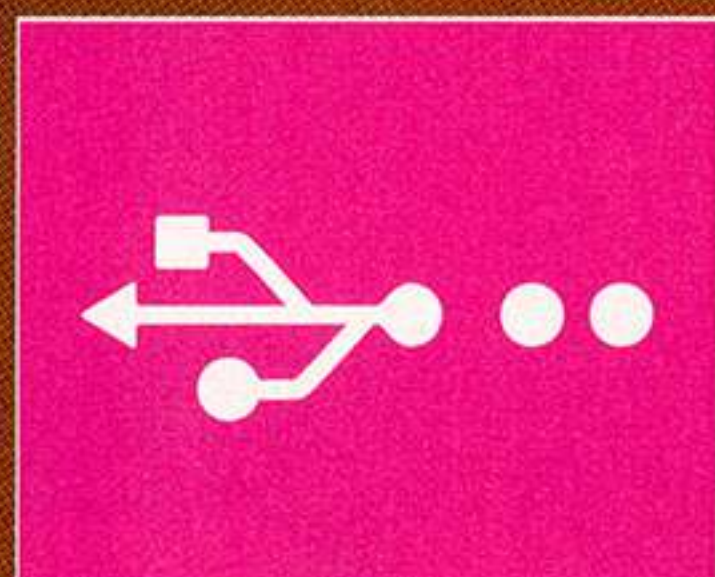


SYSTEM SETTINGS: ESTABLISHING AN INTERNET CONNECTION, CHECKING

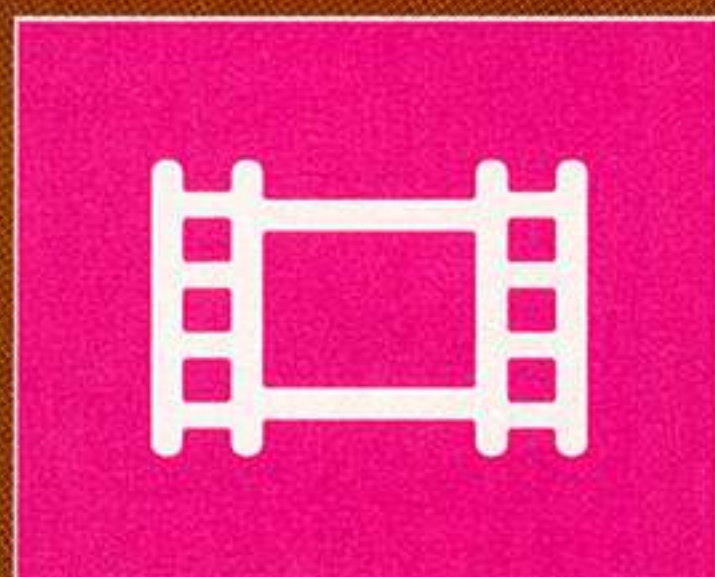
What all those funny little menu icons really mean



Network Update: Connect to the Net and see if any new software has been released for your PSP. Sony can use this to keep your system up to date with any big fixes, added features, new peripherals, etc.



USB Connection: Once you have a cable set up between the USB 2.0 connection on top of your PSP and your home computer, click here to link up and fiddle with your Memory Stick; it should appear as an external drive.



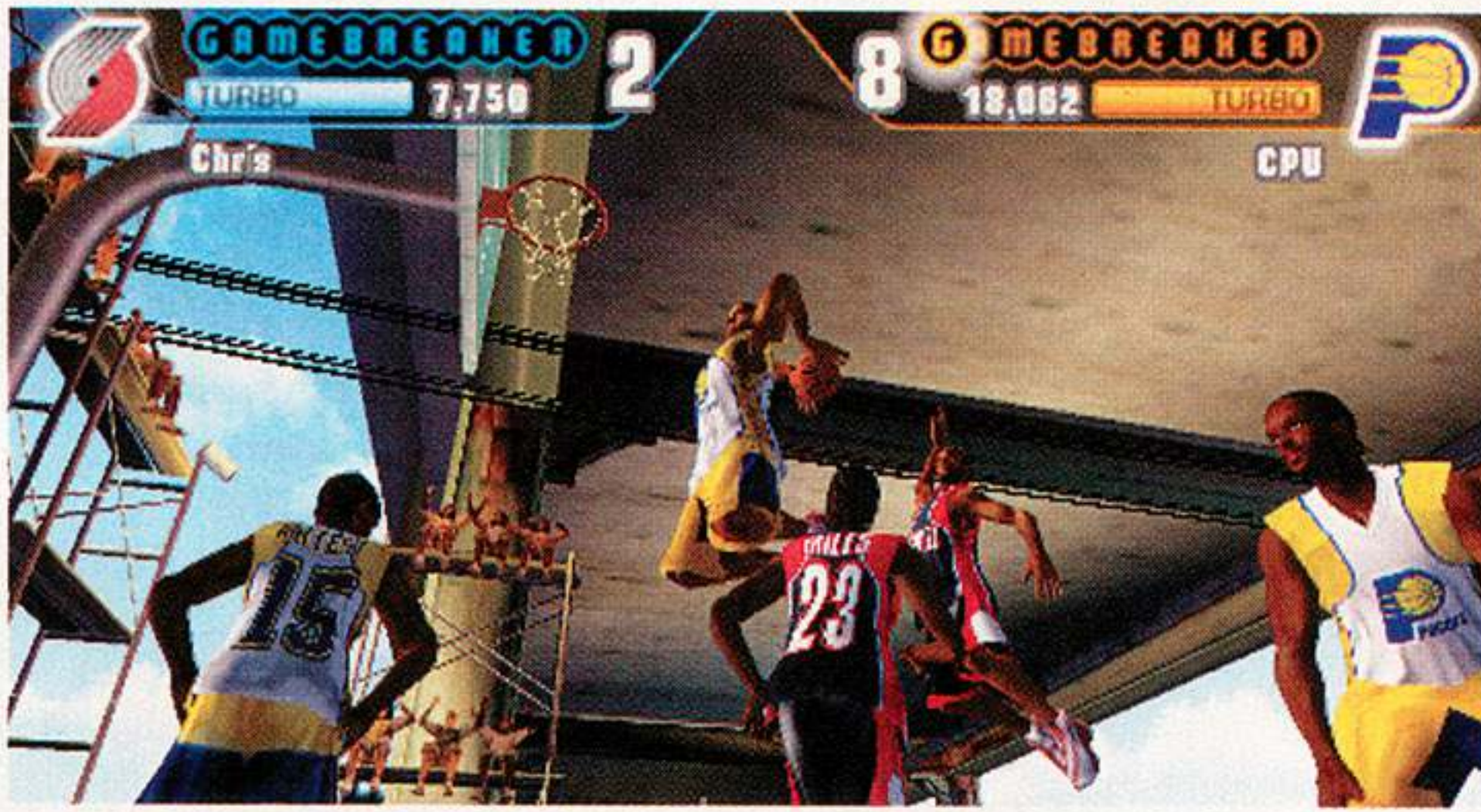
Video Settings: Set the language for the menus, audio, and subtitles of any UMD movies you pop in. Plus, you can jack up the volume here just for movies; games and music volume will remain at normal levels.



Photo Settings: Set the speed at which the PSP will cycle through your digital pictures in slide show mode (about 2, 5, or 8 seconds each). As we all know, speed is the most crucial element of any vacation slide show.



System Settings: A catchall for lots of little things: see how much battery life you have left, format your Memory Stick, set the language and a nickname for your system (it will show up when playing wireless multiplayer).



NBA STREET: SHOWDOWN

Called for traveling

Forget *NBA Live*. Don't bother with *NBA Basketball 2K*. These days, no hoopster can compete with Electronic Arts' *Street*-ified rendition of the sport, at least not when it comes to pure fun. So it didn't shock anyone when the company announced that the blockbuster arcade series was also heading to Sony's sexy PSP. How does *NBA Street* make the transition to the smaller screen? Well, it ain't as "fannntastic" as I had hoped.

On the court, loyal fans will feel right at

home. Sure, two fewer shoulder buttons shrinks your tricks list quite a bit, but there are still plenty of ways—such as sending the ball up for an alley-oop with a soccer-style kick—to dazzle the crowd. It's also really simple to execute these showboat maneuvers. It's too bad, though, that *Showdown's* gamebreakers (special moves that earn you extra scoreboard points while taking some away from your opponent) are in the vein of *Vol. 2's* near-automatic shots and dunks rather than

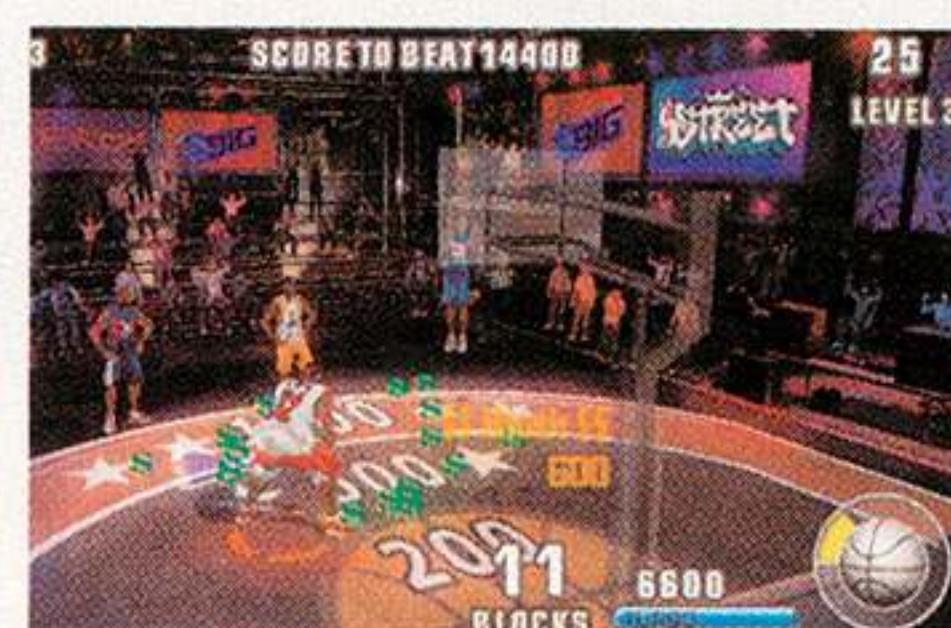
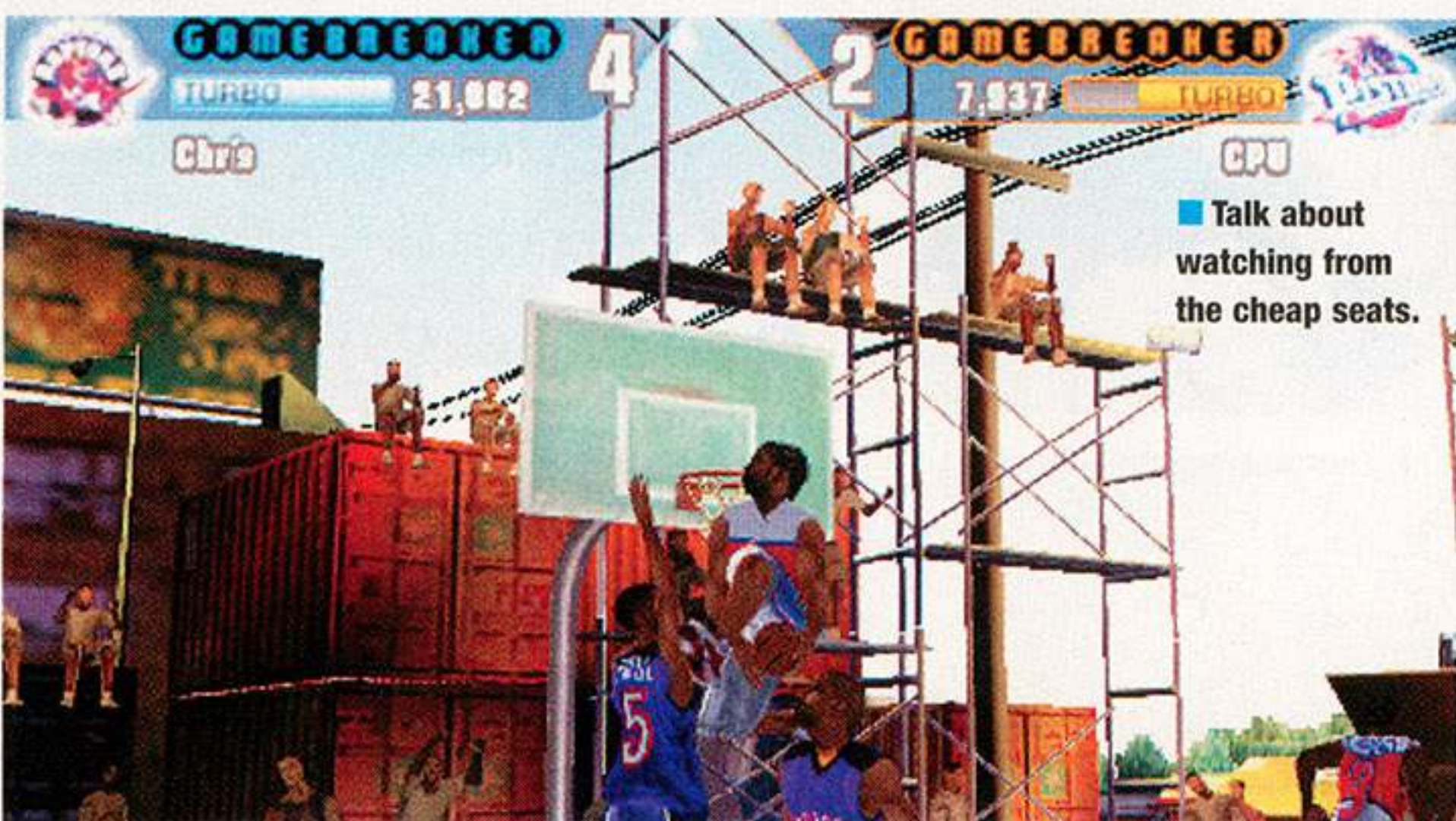
V3's more intricate (and more prone to fail) dunktastic finishers.

Graphically, this is one of the better-looking sports titles at launch, as players such as Shaq-Fu and King James are spot-on representations of the real thing. But match it up against the PSP version of *NFL Street* (which, mind you, features more players onscreen), and the visuals simply don't have the same polish.

But the biggest disappointment comes in the game's feature set. *Showdown's*

king of the court mode is a heavily watered-down version of *V3's* solo experience, and the two minigames—Shot Blocker and Arcade Shootout—get old after only a few sessions, even with four people passing the PSP around.

BOTTOM LINE: Nothing is necessarily wrong with *Showdown*, but when the final buzzer...buzzes...this one still feels like a step back for the acclaimed roundball series. More next month. —Bryan Intihar



Publisher: EA Sports Big
Developer: EA Canada
Players: 1-4 (2 via wireless LAN)
ESRB: Everyone
www.easportsbig.com



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Date and Time Settings: Set the time (regular or military), the date (standard or day then month then year, if you're feeling European), time zone (from a huge list that includes most major cities), and daylight savings on or off.



Power Save Settings: Adjust how long the system waits without input until it turns off its screen and also how long until it automatically goes into sleep mode. While you're here, turn on WLAN Power Save to conserve battery life.



Sound Settings: Set AVLS (Automatic Volume Limiter System) and protect your eardrums against sudden loud noises and toggle on or off the pleasant little "ding" that sounds when you scroll through the PSP's menu.



Security Settings: Concerned parents and paranoid gamers can set up a four-digit lock-out code here, along with a control level from 1 to 11 to adjust what games and movies the system will play, similar to what's on the PS2.



Network Settings: Configure ad hoc mode (three different channels or auto detect, for talking with other PSPs) or establish settings like encryption and your IP address for connecting to the Net in infrastructure mode.

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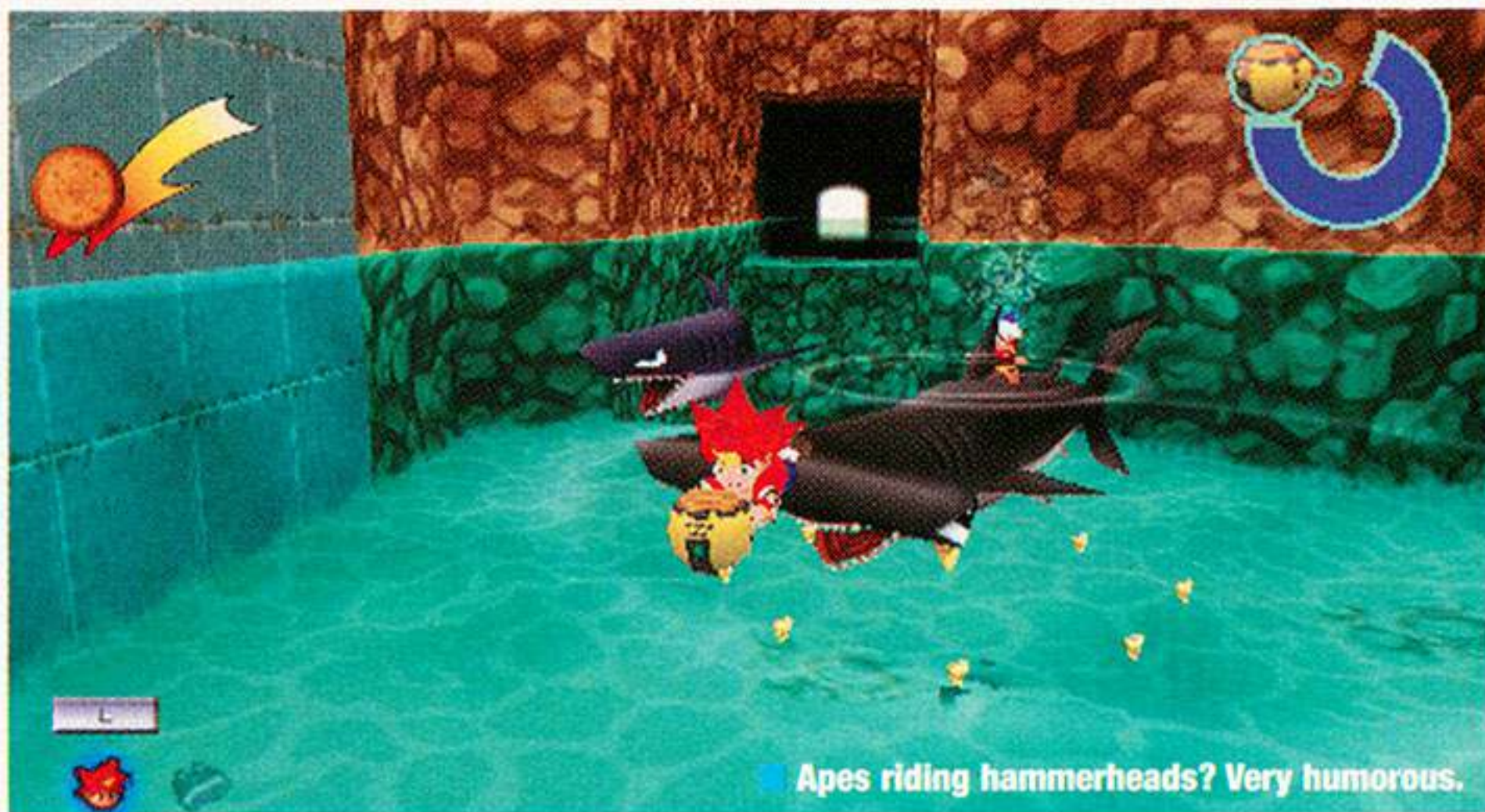
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APE ESCAPE: ON THE LOOSE

Gotta catch 'em all...again

On the Loose is pretty much the same game as the 6-year-old original *Ape Escape*. Back then it pioneered use of Sony's DualShock analog controllers, utilizing the right stick in innovative ways (like steering a little RC car independent of your character). Given the lack of dual sticks on the PSP, you might guess that this new version makes clever use of the analog nub, but you'd be wrong. The actions originally performed with the right stick are simply mapped directly to face buttons.

Ape Escape sans control gimmicks becomes a fairly innocuous platformer with a simian fetish. You hop around brightly colored cartoon sets as a spiky-haired kid (named...Spike) and search for monkeys with an arsenal of monkey-hunting gadgets. The levels hold up well, steadily introducing more gear and moving through time periods (from dinosaurs to a modern-day carnival). Catching the little siren-headed

apes can be as simple as running them down, but most require some puzzle solving, usually figuring out what gadget to use.

Though *Loose* looks better than the original *Ape Escape*, it's not one of PSP's best on the graphics front—if it weren't for the vibrant colors, the environments would seem pretty desolate.

A set of two-player minigames, the only real new addition, attempts to make use of PSP's Wi-Fi capabilities. If you managed to find someone to play them with, though, you'd feel like a fool. Of the four available, only Boxing stands up to multiple attempts, and it plays more like Rock 'Em Sock 'Em Robots than a videogame.

BOTTOM LINE: Much of what made *Ape Escape* charming is lost without two analog sticks, but the weirdo concept and quality level design survive the transition.

—Robert Ashley

IMPRESSION

SO-SO

Publisher: Sony CEA
Developer: Sony CEA
Players: 1 (2 via wireless LAN)
ESRB: Everyone

www.playstation.com



IMPRESSION

SO-SO

Publisher: Ignition
Developer: Awesome Games
Players: 1 (2 players via wireless LAN)
ESRB: Everyone

www.ignitionent.com



ARCHER MACLEAN'S MERCURY

Possible sequel: Reginald Fortesque's Barium

If your ideal handheld experience involves guiding a blob of metallic goo around a maze, your meager dreams are about to come true. *Mercury's* a fairly basic puzzle game, but its premise—don't allow your amorphous body to lose any of its mass while traversing the levels—makes the ordeal quite challenging.

But the real question here is, "Who the hell is Archer MacLean?" I actually asked that question to a colleague while playing this game at Sony's PSP debut press conference, and was a bit shocked when a stately British gentleman nearby spoke up, "Why, I am Archer MacLean, good sir!" He went on to enthusiastically explain the finer points of *Mercury* while I repeatedly failed to complete the second level. He also brought me up to speed on his personal history: Turns out, he's a well-respected maverick game designer in the U.K. who made it big with

Dropzone (Atari 800), *International Karate* (C64), and some random snooker simulator (snooker is a wacky British version of billiards). I asked him about the planned USB motion sensor that would allow *Mercury* players to control their blob by physically tilting the unit—this clever peripheral has been mentioned several times, but never shown. Apparently, the device is still in the works, but they've run into a bit of a snag: It contains lead and is therefore poisonous if swallowed. Oops. No word yet on when that cool add-on will hit shelves, but it definitely won't be out when *Mercury* launches.

BOTTOM LINE: It's not quite as engaging a puzzler as *Lumines*, but you'll have fun messing with *Mercury* in short bursts. The tricky difficulty might prove to be too much for some players, though....

—Shane Bettenhausen



BATTERY AND STRESS TESTS

We put the PSP through hell at the EGM labs



Turn this pic sideways and it looks like a Jedi thing happenin'.

Durability Tests

PSP dropped four feet onto carpet: Face it, it's going to happen sooner or later—you're going to drop your expensive new PSP. Luckily, we have good news: The battery popped out and gave us a scare, but the unit itself still worked just fine.

PSP dropped four feet onto a hard surface: This was painful even to watch. The PSP hit the ground with a loud "thwack," but turned back on and worked OK. The UMD drive door, however,

would never quite shut all the way again (though games did work), and it started making loud noises while loading.

PSP stepped on: The PSP took 175 pounds of game editor standing on it for about one second before it let out this horrible "blurp" sound that will haunt us forever. The screen went screwy and stayed on for about five more seconds, then turned off. It's been dark ever since. Maybe it's for the best; the next test we had planned was dropping the PSP into a toilet.

Battery Life Tests

All of the following times were logged using a PSP at medium screen brightness and 2/3 maximum volume, no headphones. Sadly, no UMD movies were available for testing (Sony claims 2.5 hours for them).



| | |
|---|--------------------|
| Playing Metal Gear Ac!d: | 5 hours 45 minutes |
| Playing video off Memory Stick: | 5 hours 37 minutes |
| Playing Ridge Racer multiplayer using wireless: | 3 hours 11 minutes |
| Average time required for a full recharge (0 to 100 percent): | 2 hours 10 minutes |

I LEARNED ABOUT SOBRIETY
THROUGH THE ABUSE OF MY FRIEND
IN JUNIOR HIGH
NAME: RUSTY
DRUG OF CHOICE: WEED
CLOUDS OF SMOKE DISTORTED HIS VISION
UNABLE TO SEE THAT HE WAS A GENIUS
THE FIRST KID THAT SHOWED ME HIS POETRY
THAT INSPIRED ME TO WRITE

THE RED VEINS IN HIS EYES
TRACED THE TIMELINE
OF THE PURPLE HAZE HE LIVED IN
'TIL HE WAS CAUGHT ON CAMPUS
WITH A NICKELBAG OF HERB

NOW I'M COLLEGE BOUND
I STAYED SOBER
THROUGH THE DAY HE DROPPED OUT
OF HIGH SCHOOL
AND I DON'T KNOW WHERE HE IS NOW
BUT I HOPE HE KNOWS
THAT HE CHANGED MY LIFE
AND HE COULD'VE CHANGED THE WORLD
IF ONLY HE COULD'VE STAYED
SOBER.

-JOSE





DARKSTALKERS: THE CHAOS TOWER

Almost worth the wait

Has it really been seven years since the last *Darkstalkers* game was released in America? Apparently so, which begs the question: Why would Capcom choose to resurrect an ancient franchise that's all but faded into obscurity to use as its debut PSP title? I'm not quite sure myself, but nevertheless, here it is.

To be fair, *Darkstalkers* is by no means a bad game. In fact, for a long time the series trailed behind only *Street Fighter* in the world of 2D fighting games—no small feat, to be sure. What *Darkstalkers* lacks in precision-tuned gameplay and character balance, it more than makes up for in personality and visual flair. And *Chronicle* does an excellent job of melding the series' three main entries—*Darkstalkers*, *Night Warriors*, and *Darkstalkers 3*—into one all-encompassing title, complete with every character, move set, and play style from all three arcade games. Needless to say, fans

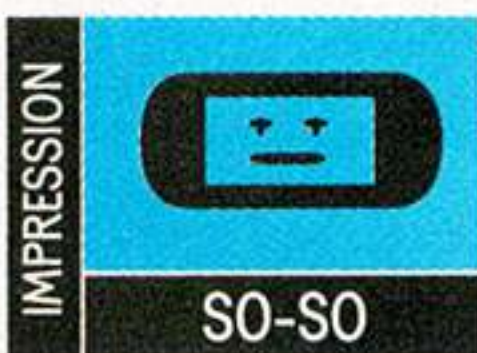
of the series will be more than pleased.

Exclusive to the PSP version is the survival-esque tower mode, which makes for an interesting single-player diversion; with 100 floors of battles to fight through, many of which include special handicaps or bonus goals, it'll keep even hardcore players occupied for a good while.

Unfortunately, you'll spend nearly half that time looking at a "now loading" screen. It's too bad, because aside from the excessive load times, this really is a competent port. The animation is superb, the art is beautiful, and there's a ton of bonus stuff to unlock. And with head-to-head Wi-Fi play, the replayability is virtually endless—IF you can deal with all the waiting around.

BOTTOM LINE: If you're hard up for hardcore 2D fighting action and can deal with long load times, *Darkstalkers* is for you.

—John Ricciardi



Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Capcom
Players: 1 (2 via wireless LAN)
ESRB: Teen

www.capcom.com



SPIDER-MAN 2

Spidey can't go out and play

The *Spider-Man* series is one of the few that relies on vertical gameplay, given Spidey's swinging and zipline mechanics where he—even in midconversation—needs to be able to quickly take off in any direction. So PSP's widescreen format is actually something of a liability for this game, unlike a first-person shooter or football game. To compensate, developer Vicarious Visions removed the awesome "locomotion" style web-swinging system from the console *Spider-Man 2* and went back to the style of the first *Spider-Man* movie game—so players grab on to an invisible ceiling with their web, rather than swinging from actual buildings or objects. As a result, it's easier to move around, since you don't have to take into account the vertical angles of your web, but it's less fun since you miss out on the feeling of

speed and general *Spider-Man*-ness. In another "OOF!" blow to our webslinger, *Spider-Man 2*'s free-roaming city also gets the big ax; you can't go down to street level and pass the time collaring purse snatchers and jaywalkers.

It's not all *Spider-Man 1*, though. The game mixes the level structure and swinging from the first game with the improved character models, fluid animations, and special abilities like the charge jump (the longer you hold the Jump button, the higher you go) from the second, and the controls feel pretty solid, too.

BOTTOM LINE: Based on the nearly complete version we tried, it's extremely pretty and offers fun objectives, but the screen shape and awkward camera control sometimes make quick, precise movements difficult. —Matt Leone



Publisher: Activision
Developer: Vicarious Visions
Players: 1
ESRB: Teen

www.activision.com



NEED MORE TIME

Quick-hit sports games...and *Offroad Fury*...and *Rengoku*



■ *Gretzky NHL*

Unfortunately, certain companies could only give us a few hours with their respective launch titles. Since that's not nearly enough time to give each game a fair shake (that'll happen next issue), here are some hands-on impressions. And if you see other mags reviewing them, don't say we didn't warn you.... Sony's internal sports studio,

989 Sports, had a disastrous debut on PS2 (remember the god-awful *NFL GameDay 2001?*), but from what we've played so far, its initial PSP showing is faring much better.

Though none of the games include announcers, they are the only sports games at launch to feature full online support.



■ *World Tour Soccer*



■ *MLB*

Leading the charge is *Gretzky NHL*, which plays faster and smarter (so no more offside courtesy of moronic CPU-controlled players) than the recent PS2 edition.

World Tour Soccer is also outperforming its console counterpart, boasting simpler controls and a beefy season mode. Even a very, very early version



■ *Offroad Fury*

of *MLB* (it still has icons for PS2-specific buttons appearing onscreen) plays error free. The only big question mark is *NBA*; it's simply too difficult to shoot the rock.

Offroad Fury: Blazin' Trails has definitely picked up the pace since our last run around the track. Now, if only the developers can improve those two-

minute-long load times when booting up a course. As for *Rengoku: The Tower of Purgatory*, well, its ho-hum (unless you really love customizing robots) third-person combat and sparse sci-fi environments had most folks putting the game down after only 10 or so minutes—not good.



■ *Rengoku*

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COUNTRY WESTERN

| | |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| EG59444 - Brad Paisley | I'm Gonna Miss Her |
| EG59720 - Josh Gracin | I Want to Live |
| EG59445 - Darryl Worley | Awful Beautiful Life |
| EG59677 - Leann Rimes | Nothin bout Love Makes Sense |
| EG59676 - Keith Urban | You're My Better Half |
| EG59496 - Tim McGraw | I Like it, I Love it |
| EG59443 - Brad Paisley | Mud on the Tires |
| EG59678 - Shania Twain & Mark McGrath | Party for Two |
| EG59718 - Josh Gracin | Endless, Helpless, Hoping |
| EG65039 - Dixie Chicks | Heartbreak Town |
| EG59446 - John Michael Montgomery | 4-Wheel Drive |

COOL WALLPAPERS



HIP HOP

| | |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|
| EG59460 - Fabolous | Young'n Holla Back |
| EG65000 - Ciara | Next to You |
| EG59703 - Angie Martinez | New York New York |
| EG59692 - Missy Elliot | Get Your Freak On |
| EG65006 - Chingy | Leave wit Me |
| EG59407 - Ludacris | Get the F*** Back |
| EG59691 - Snoop | Beautiful |
| EG50636 - Nas | I Can |
| EG59405 - Chingy | Balla Baby |
| EG52290 - Nelly & Christina | Tilt Ya Head Back |
| EG59547 - Big Pun | Still not a Player |
| EG59757 - Cypress Hill | Hits from the Bong |
| EG65017 - Snoop | Signs |
| EG59464 - Mase | Keep it On |
| EG59694 - B.I.G. | One More Chance |
| EG59669 - Trick Daddy | Thug Matrimony |
| EG65032 - Nelly | N' Dey Say |
| EG59408 - Snoop | Drop it Like its Hot |
| EG59685 - Young Buck | Shorty Wanna Ride |
| EG59551 - Ja Rule | New York |

ROCK

| | |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| EG59436 - 3 Days Grace | I Hate Everything About U |
| EG51769 - Slipknot | Duality |
| EG59479 - Aaron Lewis | Outside |
| EG50478 - Simple Plan | Addicted to You |
| EG59731 - Aerosmith | Jaded |
| EG59760 - Default | Wasting My Time |
| EG59728 - Aerosmith | Angel |
| EG59480 - Matchbox 20 | Bent |
| EG52251 - Maroon 5 | Harder to Breathe |
| EG59537 - Limp Bizkit | Nookie |
| EG50064 - Linkin Park | Somewhere I Belong |
| EG59482 - Linkin Park | Breaking the Habbit |
| EG59535 - Korn | Alive |
| EG59709 - Kid Rock | Back From the Dead |
| EG52243 - Green Day | American Idiot |
| EG51710 - Maroon 5 | She Will Be Loved |
| EG50334 - Bon Jovi | Wanted Dead or Alive |
| EG50915 - Blink 182 | Feeling This |
| EG65031 - Good Charlotte | It Wasn't Enough |
| EG50343 - Coldplay | The Scientist |

TOP RINGTONES / WALLPAPERS

| | |
|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| EG59476 - Green Day | Blvd. of Broken Dreams |
| EG65006 - Chingy | Leave Wit Me |
| EG59715 - Lloyd Banks | Karma |
| EG50397 - Korn | Freak on a Leash |
| EG59683 - JadaKiss & Mariah | U Make Me Wanna |
| EG 59682 - T.I. | Bring Em Out |
| EG65030 - Good Charlotte | I Just Wanna Llve |
| EG59433 - Slipknot | Vermilion |
| EG59673 - Three Days Grace | Home |
| EG59443 - Brad Paisley | Mud On the Tires |
| EG59672 - Gavin DeGraw | I Don't Want to be |
| EG59541 - Lil Jon & Boyz | I Don't Give a F*** |
| EG52098 - Ben Harper | Wicked Man |
| EG65016 - Snoop | Let's Get Blown |
| EG65024 - Trick Daddy | Sugar Gimme Some |
| EG59719 - Josh Gracin | Wheels |

WALLPAPERS



JAVA GAMES



NOTE: Compatibility Chart
 Nokia ● Sony ● Samsung ● Siemens ● Motorola ●
 A game with a color dot, i.e. RED, is compatible with SOME models of the corresponding make, i.e. Nokia. You will still need to go to www.dirtyhippo.com to ensure it is compatible with your model.

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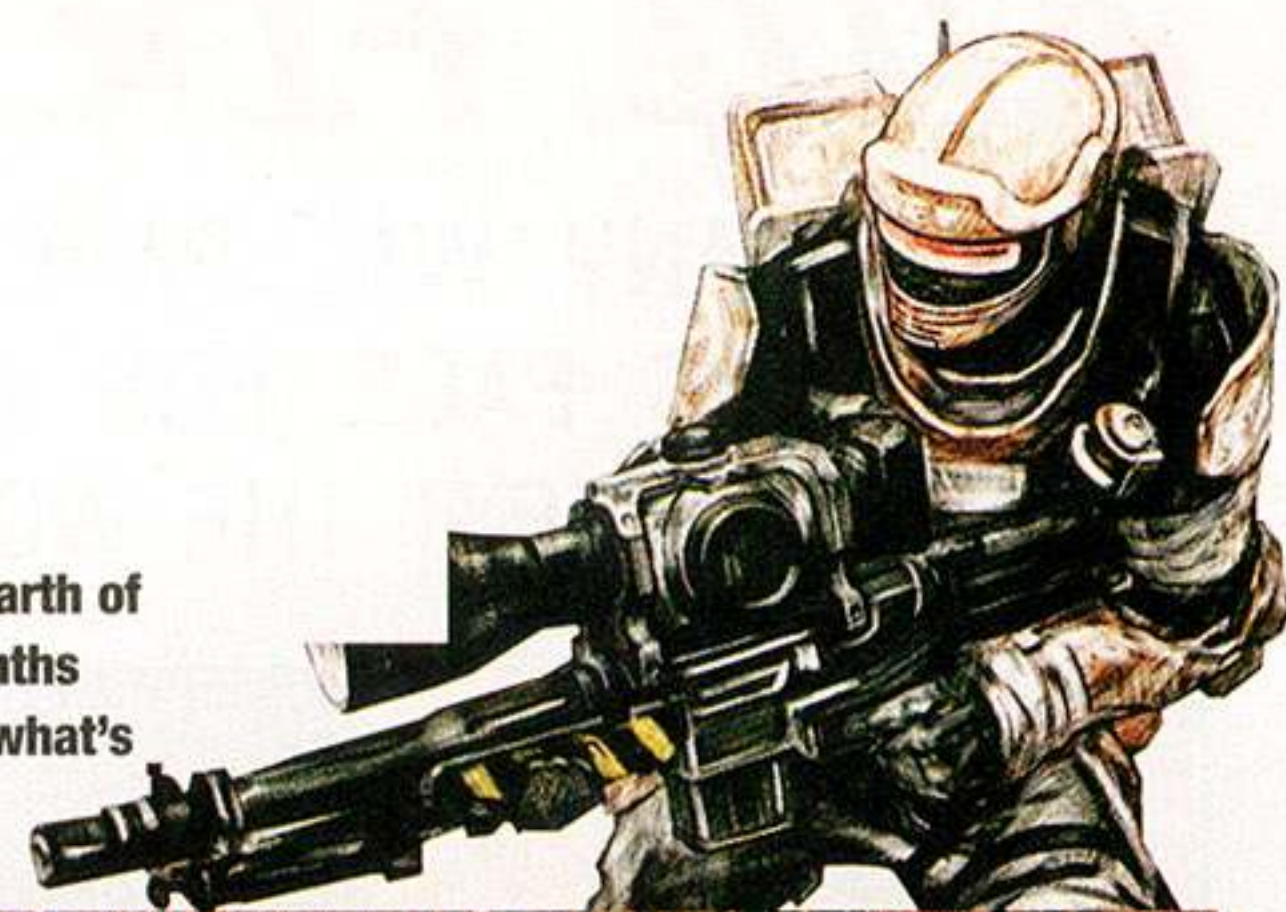


COMING SOON

The PlayStation Portable's launch lineup assaults the senses with tons of game-play options, but what will you do when you've solved all of those first-day

titles? Hopefully, publishers will be able to fill the next few months with enough quality games to keep us busy. Too many hardware launches start strong

only to succumb to a bleak dearth of staggered releases for six months (cough...Nintendo DS). Here's what's currently on the PSP radar.



■ The bugs in *Arms*' mainframe are, uh, actually quite literal.



■ You'll need to switch weapons depending on what enemy type you're facing: bug, robot, or human.

CODED ARMS

Konami • Summer 2005 — This futuristic shooter hails from an unlikely place—Japan. How does this hyperdetailed game spawn in a society that infamously gets motion sickness from first-person shooters? “A lot of Japanese players are still afraid of FPS games,” explains *Coded Arms* Producer Yasuo Daikai. “But the guys on our team all love classics like *Doom*, *Quake*, and *Unreal*, along with recent games like *Halo* and *Half-Life*—it’s our ultimate dream for our game to compete with the shooters on home con-

soles.” With its stunning visuals, massive single-player game (expect around 30 hours of nonstop action), and towering bosses, it might actually nudge up pretty close to current-gen FPS territory.

Arms' trapped-inside-a-virtual-world-run-amok plot allows for lots of bizarre enemies, absurdly big weapons, and complex levels (including a few never-ending, randomly generated ones). Plus, you'll be able to hook up with three other players for some wireless deathmatch violence.



PURSUIT FORCE

Sony CEA • Fall 2005 — Rockstar's upcoming *Grand Theft Auto* for PSP will have some competition from the other side of the law: Sony's *Pursuit Force* casts you as a rookie cop tasked with bringing down five major gangs in Capital City, a sin-soaked metropolis in a fictionalized version of Nevada.

Walking the thin blue line means you won't be staging break-ins or getting action from hookers, but you'll still be able to steal cars...even while they're moving. Leaping from car to car during 150 mph chases, engaging in deadly gunfights on freeways, and exploring oodles of dusty back roads should inject some much-needed excitement into your commute.

■ Most of the action takes place behind the wheel—including tense shoot-outs.





ADVENT SHADOW

Majesco • June 2005 — This action-adventure works as a side story to the upcoming Xbox title *Advent Rising*, but you won't have to tackle that epic to appreciate *Shadow's* blend of acrobatic gunplay and vehicular combat. Gamers who play both games, however, will come away with a deeper understanding of the complex story line penned by well-known sci-fi author Orson Scott Card.



INFECTED

Majesco • Fall 2005 — Prepare to bloody the city streets as you splatter legions of undead in this gory *Dawn of the Dead*-inspired shooter. Perforating shambling zombies solo should provide some thrills, but fighting infection in wireless deathmatch games might be the real draw: Defeated foes will contract your specific "virus," thereby passing it on to other players they come in contact with.



GT4 MOBILE

Sony CEA • Summer 2005 — Sony has remained mysteriously tight-lipped regarding this PSP version of *Gran Turismo 4*. While it won't be able to deliver the same absurd level of visual polish seen in the PS2 game, it should be capable of offering the one thing its console brother couldn't—online play. Eight-player races over the PSP's Internet matching service would simply rule....



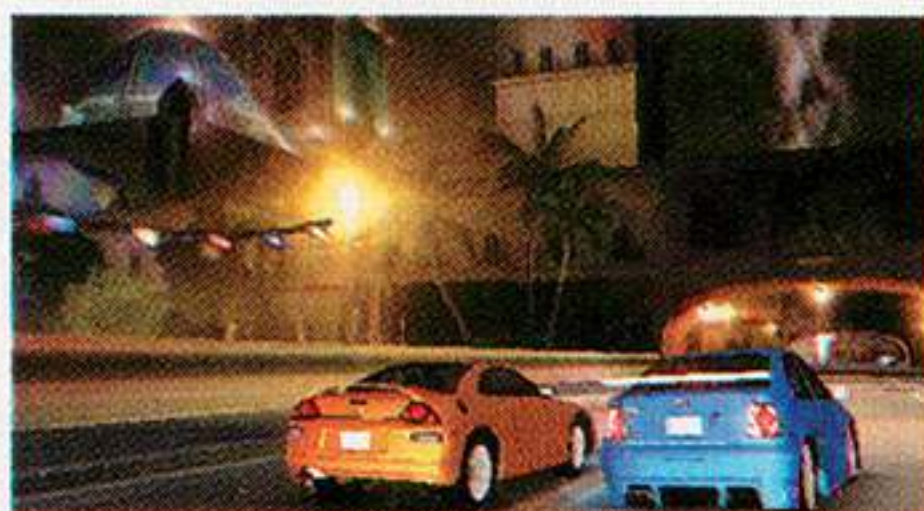
SMART BOMB

Eidos • April 2005 — Who knew that combating the threat of international terrorism looked...so much like a pile of Tinker Toys. In this puzzle game, you try your darndest to imagine that you're defusing deadly bombs under the expert tutelage of gruff Colonel Cage and his lovely protégée Michelle Grace. In reality, you're spinning doohickies to correctly turn gears and reflect lasers.



BUST A MOVE

Majesco • Summer 2005 — This seminal puzzler invades PSP in predictable form (we seriously dare you to name a console in the past 10 years that hasn't had a version of *Bust-A-Move*). But hey, even if it's not revolutionary, this dependable mix of cuddly characters, high-pressure versus combat, and totally radical geometry still keeps us comin' back to same old puzzle game again and again.



MIDNIGHT CLUB 3: DUB

Rockstar • April 2005 — The era of dumbed-down portable ports might be ending. All the sexy rides, over-the-top shortcuts, and breakneck street racing of *Club's* console cousin survive in this PSP version. You'll still be able to race your decked-out cars, trucks, and bikes through three huge, traffic-filled cities—Atlanta, Detroit, and San Diego—in either single-player races or wireless multiplayer contests.



DEATH JR.

Konami • May 2005 — The grim reaper's rowdy son might have slipped from his original position as a PSP launch superstar, but don't count him out just yet. As one of the only original PSP games in a sea of ports, this creative platformer (think: *Mario* with guns) can get away with being a tad tardy. Soon, you'll be swingin' a scythe and dealing lead at other-worldly demons.



HOT SHOTS GOLF

Sony CEA • May 2005 — We're not really sure why Sony chose to delay the release of this pick-up-and-play golf romp (it was a launch title back in December for Japan...maybe they're adding true online play), but at least it'll be a good reason to power up the ole' PSP come summertime. Dependable gameplay, fully customizable golfing avatars, and nice-looking greens are par for the course.

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Intense Violence
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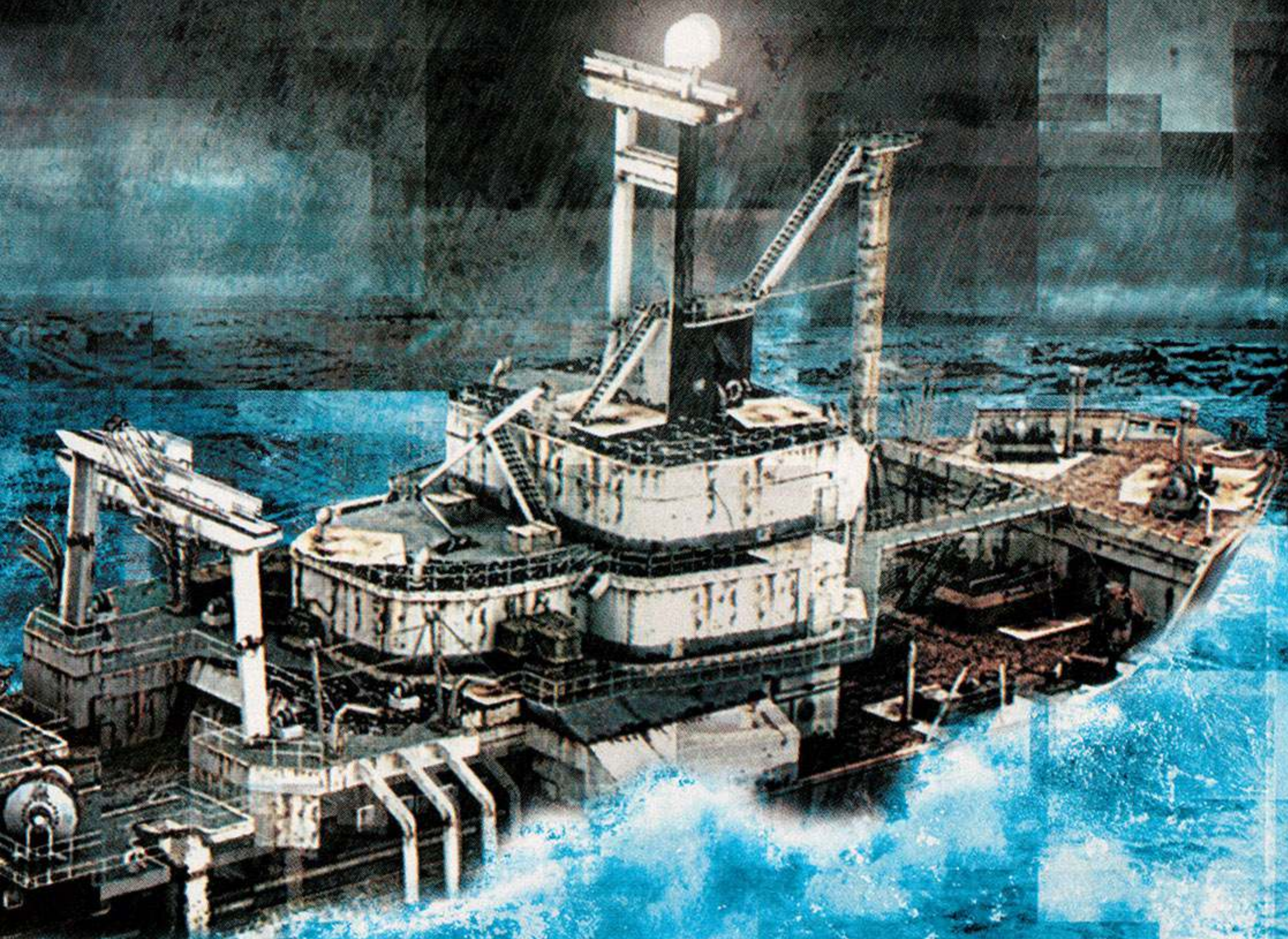


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EXPANDING UNIVERSE

Clear your schedule—Phantasy Star Universe's online and offline adventures will suck your social life into a black hole

By Shane Bettenhausen

It's the videogame equivalent of a support group: Get a band of *Phantasy Star Online* veterans together and the conversation invariably turns to the harrowing subject of addiction. Gamers didn't simply play Sega's pioneering online role-playing game, they became junkies with it—whether it was with the original Sega Dreamcast version, its beefed-up GameCube port, the voice chat-enabled Xbox revision, or terrifyingly enough...all three, *PSO* held a tight grip on players' lives for hundreds of hours.

Fundamentally, *PSO* was a hack-n-slash treadmill—you cleaved your way through armies of enemies in an eternal quest for cooler gear—but jogging on that treadmill felt wildly engaging. The blend of gorgeous art, challenging bosses, and most important, combat that actually required button-pressing skill made it tough to put down. Playing with your buddies (or random dudes all over the globe) made the quest for schwag all the more addictive: Making someone jealous of your giant chain-saw sword or frilly magical parasol helped validate all those squandered hours.

Five years after *PSO* first captured gamers' free time, Sega finally unveils a true sequel—not just some expansion pack or a weird offshoot—*Phantasy Star Universe*. Scheduled to hit the PS2 (and PC) in time for the 2005 holiday shopping season, this RPG threatens to consume even more of your life than its predecessor did. Not only does *PSU* expand upon the addictive online play of its forerunner, but it also includes a full-featured offline game to keep you busy when you're playing solo. ▶





CHOOSE YOUR PHANTASY

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“We think that [Final Fantasy fans] can also like PSU.”

—PSU Director Satoshi Sakai

► **Phantasy Star Offline**

Here’s a strange fact: More than half of all GameCube *Phantasy Star Online* players never played it online. (Apparently, they didn’t notice the word “online” in the title....) So rather than trying to force unwilling consumers to merge onto the information superhighway, Sega’s devising an alternate plan for *PSU*: offer a

deep, rewarding single-player experience. “There are a lot of gamers out there who know and like traditional RPGs like *Final Fantasy*,” says *PSU* Director Satoshi Sakai. “We think that those gamers can also like *PSU*, not just the online gamers who already know the *PSO* brand.”

When you first boot up *Phantasy Star*

Universe, you have a choice: Create your character for the online multiplayer game or tackle the sprawling, 40-hour-plus offline quest. Nothing you do in one affects the other in any way, so it’s really like having two games in one. The single-player adventure casts you as Ethan Waber, a headstrong lad living on a massive space station in the three-planet

Grarl star system. As the game opens, the planets are celebrating 100 years of mutual peace when a mysterious alien force known as Seed brutally assaults Parum, the human world. Creepy living missiles drill into the planet’s surface, mutating the wildlife into dangerous monsters. Ethan’s no hero, but when he discovers that his little sister is under

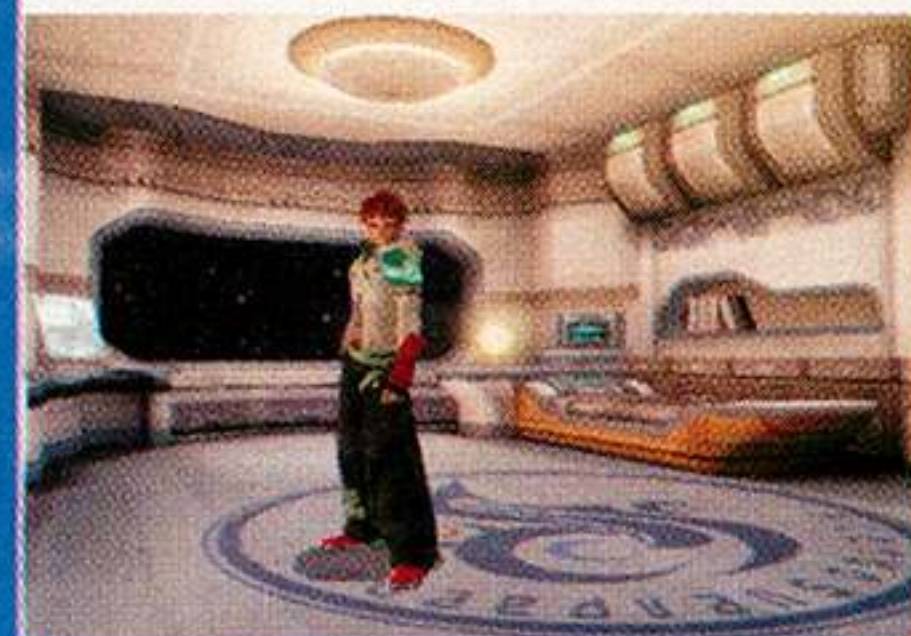


■ *PSU*’s first boss is a loving (yet deadly) homage to *PSO*.



Home Decor

Ethan’s space-station bachelor pad starts out with some truly minimalist decor, but you’ll be able to furnish and decorate your room to match your personal tastes à la *Animal Crossing*. You’ll even be able to produce and sell unique items to other players in the online portion of *PSU*.



Old-school Inspiration

Although *PSU* obviously builds on the futuristic foundations of *Phantasy Star Online*, it also draws from a more antiquated source. "We looked back at the first *Phantasy Star* games for inspiration when designing the worlds of *PSU*," says Creative Manager Takao Miyoshi. (The series began on the long-dead Sega Master System way back in 1988.)

PSU introduces the all-new Grarl star system, but its three planets—Parum, Neudaiz, and Motwob—neatly mirror the worlds gamers explored in the old *Star* games: Palma, Dezolis, and Motavia. And series faithful will spot other points of reference, like the addition of vehicles (all four original *Star* games let players cruise around the overworld in various crafts) and the new "cut-in chat" system that displays conversations in a way reminiscent of *Phantasy Star IV*'s cutting-edge comic-book-style cinemas.

PSU's new beast race even came from classic games: "We really wanted to include playable alien characters," Miyoshi explains. "We considered adding the Motavian farmer race from the old *Phantasy Star* games, and that evolved into the beastman idea."



■ Ethan's not the best spellcaster, but he can bust out some cool techniques with the right equipment.



attack, he takes up a sword and travels down to rescue her....

Unlike *PSO*'s simple single-player dungeon hack, this adventure delivers the goods you'd expect from a quality RPG—deep characterization, dramatic cut-scenes, spoken dialogue, and massive towns to explore. And although the meat of the game is traditionally linear

(with a set progression of missions with predetermined party members), you'll also be able to explore the worlds at your leisure with whatever party you choose, leveling up and uncovering secrets.

The offline game's basic gameplay doesn't differ much from what *PSO* vets know and love: You'll still run around in lush environments beating down

baddies, but now with the aid of up to three A.I.-controlled party members. You'll only have direct control over Ethan, but you will be able to tailor your buddies' behavior, like having them heal, cast spells, or attack all-out.

Your quest to defeat Seed will lead you to three planets—but everything you see in these screens is from Parum, the geo-

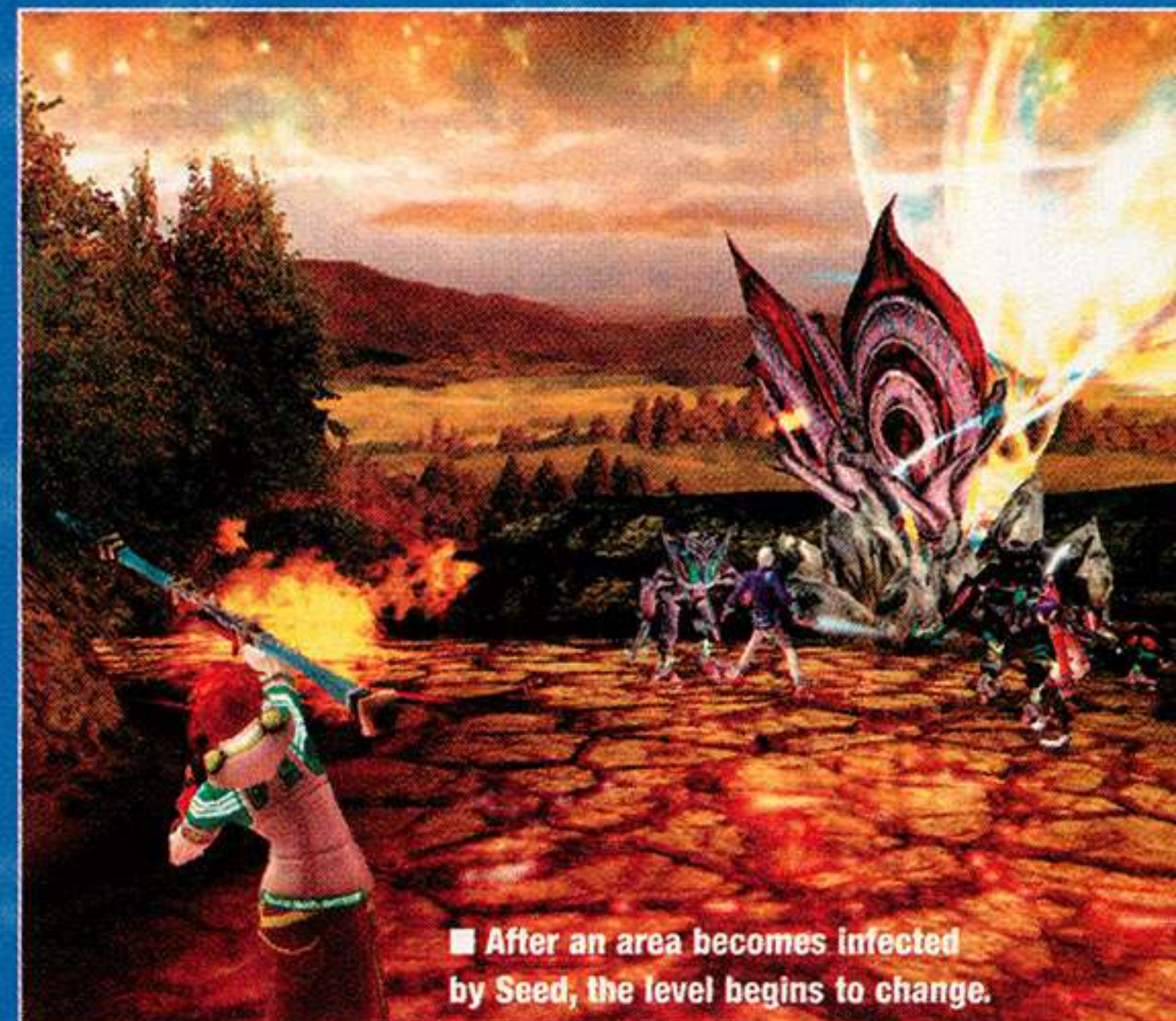
graphically diverse homeworld of the hume race. You'll also visit Neudaiz, the watery realm of the mystical newman people, and Motwob, the beast race's desert planet. Before the game's end expect to venture through roughly 20 dungeons, face over 15 bosses, and even do a few patently un-*PSO*-like things, like solving complex puzzles. ➤



■ Unlike *PSO*'s lonely solo mode, *PSU*'s quest offers plenty of characters and cut-scenes.



■ Expect a return of classic *Phantasy Star* spells, like Foie (shown here).



■ After an area becomes infected by Seed, the level begins to change.



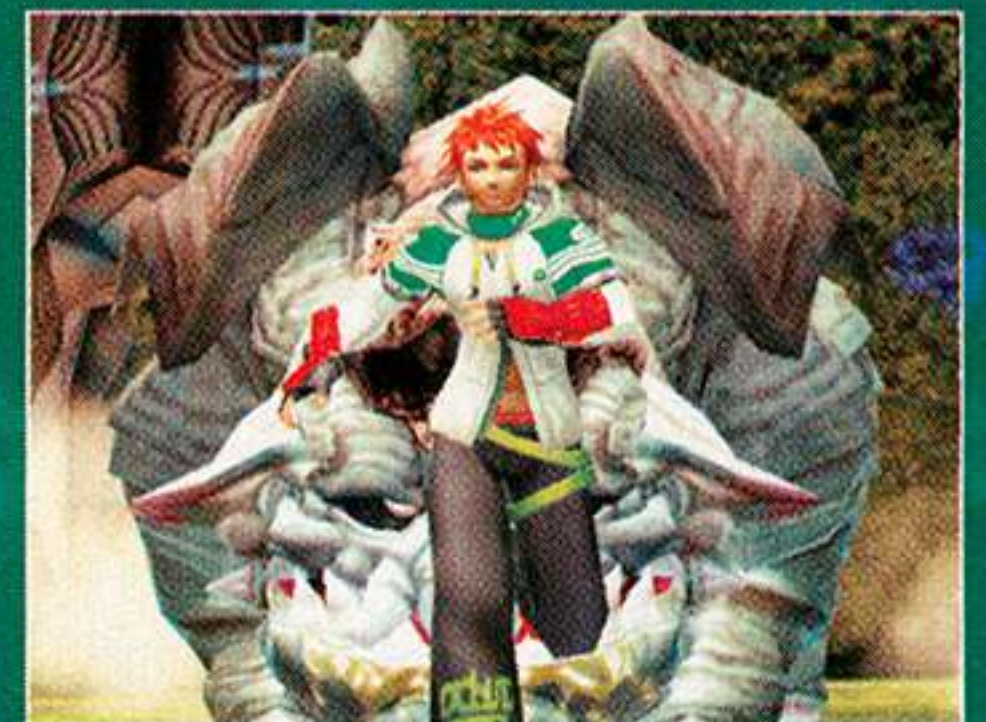
■ It's all about teamwork—you slash the dragon in the foot while we go after its ass.



“Each *PSU* race has its own specific strengths and weaknesses.” —*PSU* Director Satoshi Sakai

PSO Keeps on Truckin'

Does the birth of *Phantasy Star Universe* mean that *Phantasy Star Online* is over? Not a chance. Although the Dreamcast *PSO* servers recently powered down for good, the GameCube and Xbox communities will persist for the foreseeable future. What's more, the world of *PSO* continues to grow—look for the latest iteration, *PSO Episode IV: Blue Burst* (containing the first two episodes and an all-new one, *IV*), to debut for PC in the States this summer. The game will actually be free: Users will only have to pay the \$13 a month necessary to purchase a Hunter's License account.



► You're Not the Only Hero

The addition of a genuine single-player game is certainly a boon for the project, but we all know where the real action (not to mention cross-species marriages) goes down—online. This is where you'll spend countless hours felling foes with your friends, amassing an army of impressive weaponry, and working on international

relations with players around the world.

First, the basics: You'll need a broadband connection to get *PSU* up and running, but don't bother with the optional HDD disk drive: It won't be supported, as the redesigned PS2s can't access it. Sega hasn't officially decided on whether the PS2 version will offer voice chat yet, but text chat (via USB keyboard) is a given.

Actually, if you have a rockin' PC, you might just want to play that version—it sports much crisper visuals, and we expect that you'll be able to play alongside your PS2 buddies.

If you spent hours agonizing over what color to make your hero's coif in *PSO*, expect a deluge of decisions in *PSU*'s exponentially deeper character creation

mode. “Now, you can change the color of the lips, eyes, hair, clothes, shoes, and socks,” says Lead Artist Kosei Kitamura. “Plus, you can carefully change the shape of the face and body—with the female characters, you can create some impressive bustlines and even adjust the firmness of the breasts.”

Deciding your avatar's cup size makes

Weekly Questers

Every so often, Sega would offer a downloadable quest for *Phantasy Star Online* players. *PSU* aims to offer similar content but on a much more frequent scale—every week. Sega also hints that the quests will be a bit more epic in scope than those in *PSO*. Don't worry if you're not around to play the quests when they debut—you'll still be able to download them later.



■ In the online game, you'll face toughened-up versions of the offline game's many bosses.





■ *PSU's* online dungeon layouts will be randomly rearranged every time you play.

Robotic Operating Buddies

PSO had mags—weird little robots that boosted your stats in exchange for a little tender lovin' care. *PSU* ditches mags in favor of hardier metallic buddies called partner robots. These pumped-up bots won't increase your abilities, but they provide a host of other services. "Each player customizes his own partner robot by feeding it items and buying it parts," Designer Shintaro Hata explains. Your robot performs some crucial item-management functions, plus it can actually accompany you on missions as an A.I.-controlled fightin' machine. "In *PSU*, you can have several characters in an online mission, but you can fill empty slots with partner robots," says Hata. We're not quite sure how these seemingly cute little 'bots will fare in the heat of combat....



■ Later, mags.

up for the loss of one major player decision—character class. In *PSO*, you had to pick a race and a starting class (hunter, ranger, or force), but here, you just choose a race. "Each *PSU* race has its own specific strengths and weaknesses," explains Sakai. "Newmans are good at magic techniques, beasts are adept at fighting, cast are good with guns, and humes are fairly

■ Nearly all of *PSU's* enemies are new...though you might find a rappy here and there.



balanced." But this isn't actually a downgrade: As you play the game, you'll be able to allocate different skills to various attributes, creating a fluid job system that allows for customization.

Likewise, the combat system sports some serious tweaks. First up, some characters will be able to dual-wield guns and swords, allowing you to attack both far-off enemies and encroaching foes without having to switch your equipment. Plus, all guns can now be aimed and fired in a first-person perspective, although you can't actually move while dealin' lead (this isn't *Halo*, people). The core of *PSU's* combat—the timing-based combo system—remains fully intact from *PSO* but with a host of improvements. "The maximum natural combo for a weapon is a

six-hit," says Sakai. "But you can also insert technique attacks into the combo to make it longer." Compared to *PSO*, the reaction time between pressing the button and your character's animation feels substantially faster, and a new sidestep move (think: combat in the 3D *Zeldas*) allows you to target an enemy and quickly strafe around him. The most crucial change, however, is that you can now bring a larger number of players into battle. The party size will definitely be a bit higher than *PSO's* four-person limit, but Sega's not quite ready to commit to a number.

Of course, all this action comes at a price: Expect to pony up roughly \$13 a month to take your fantasies online. But really, that's not too pricey for pure, uncut multiplayer RPG euphoria. ▶



■ Transit between the game's three worlds happens via superspeedy spaceships.

Hunters' License to Drive

Adding vehicles to *PSU* seems like a stunning innovation for the series, but it's actually a throwback to the olden days—even the first 8-bit *Phantasy Star* game had the ragtag band of warriors, mages, and magic cats piling into a hovercraft. Expect to mount various vehicles in both the online and offline games. "You'll be able to ride futuristic motorcycles, hoverboards, and even large animals," says Designer Shintaro Hata. "How you'll use the vehicle depends on the mission—in some missions, each player might have a bike, but in others, all the online players will ride on one big tank like in *Halo*."

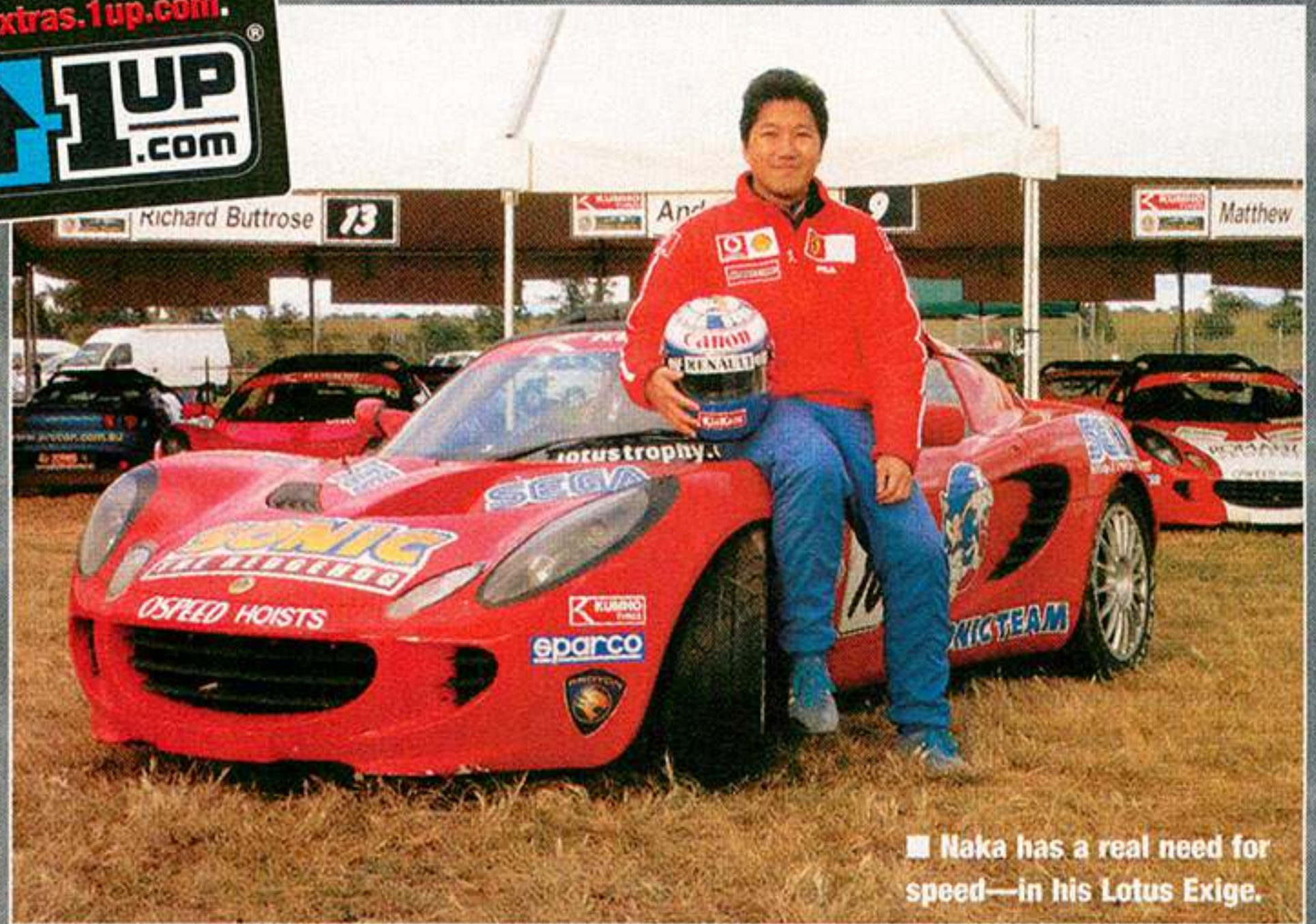


■ New to *PSU*: Enemy leaders will have a distinctive look, so you can defeat them first to confuse their underlings.





For even more of EGM's interview with Yuji Naka, check out egmextras.1up.com.



■ Naka has a real need for speed—in his Lotus Exige.

► EGM INTERVIEWS PSU VISIONARY YUJI NAKA

A candid talk with Sega's R&D creative officer

EGM: Could you briefly explain the history of the *PSU* project?

Yuji Naka: The *PSO* series has now entered its fifth year, and this is the right time for a new start. Online RPG games are basically limited, but I want to move on and make a difference in the genre. I spent a very long time on the *Phantasy Star* series, and we've spent many years

risky to launch an online game like *PSU* for these brand-new systems too early.

EGM: What will Sega do to combat cheaters in *PSU*?

YN: We have experienced the cheaters for the last five years, and we've amassed a lot of info on how to deal with them. The *PSU* security will be like that

"I really want to make a difference in the [online RPG] genre."

—*PSU* Creator Yuji Naka

gathering a lot of feedback from the users. So, we certainly have a lot of stuff to include in the game.

EGM: Did Sony's decision to drop the PS2's HDD support affect your plans?

YN: I'm not going to change my mind, and Sony will still support our network game, even without support for the HDD. Actually, I haven't even shown this game to Sony yet...you're the first people outside the company to see it.

EGM: It's rather late in the PS2's life cycle...any chance of porting this to other systems?

YN: I'm not quite sure yet. The PS2 is the hardware with the biggest market [share] right now, and the next-generation platforms won't have a very large installed base at first. It would be fairly

of the PC version of *PSO*—all character and item info will be kept on servers.

EGM: Do you think a game like *PSU* would work on a handheld?

YN: I literally don't think it's possible to put *PSU* on PSP, as we're using the full power of the PS2. But if the PSP network is stable enough, we could conceive of porting *PSO* to PSP. It's an interesting concept, but we don't have enough people to do that at this point.

EGM: Are you excited about the next-gen consoles debuting this year?

YN: I think it is too early. The PS2 and GameCube are still both very good platforms. Personally, I don't want the next-generation hardware to come out this early, because they will be very difficult

and expensive to develop for. Seriously, it might take three times the effort to make one game. With next-generation platforms, players will expect games to look as good as CG movies—it will be very difficult. It will be cool when you can play a game that looks like a movie, but there's no way a company will be able to make a game in one year like that.

If fans of a franchise have to wait three years for the next game, that will be a shock to them. People who like games want to play them more often these days. Like *Half-Life 2*—it took five years to come out! What's next? Will gamers be willing to wait 15 years for a game? [Laughs] The father will start programming a game, [and] he'll have to pass it on to his son to finish it after he dies. On PC right now, there aren't a lot of games being released like [there] used to be. I think the same thing will happen to consoles: It'll take a lot of time to develop a top-quality game.

EGM: Which game that you've worked on is your favorite?

YN: *Sonic the Hedgehog*. If I hadn't worked on *Sonic*, I probably wouldn't be working in the game industry now. That's how important *Sonic* is to me. And although it's been 18 years since I first started *Phantasy Star*, I've released more *Sonic* titles, so it's the most important. *Sonic* has anime and lots of toys, so the *Sonic* franchise is so big...I have a lot of good memories of it. There was talk of an anime based on *PSO* two years ago, and it might still happen in the future.

EGM: Have you recently played any games from other publishers that you've liked?

YN: Other publishers? [Laughs] Well, in the past year I've been playing a lot of Nintendo games, including all of the DS games. I really enjoyed *WarioWare Touched!* I also played a lot of *Gran Turismo 4*, and I even bought the steering wheel. The wheel is so great, with its force feedback. I go to the circuit and race real cars, and while

the wheel isn't quite realistic, I do enjoy playing the game with it. In the future, I'd love to make a game that uses force feedback extensively. When you play a game, there are three important factors: It used to just be looking and hearing, but now it's also touching. It took Nintendo 20 years to create a game that you can control via touching, and that's a really big innovation. That *GT4* steering wheel costs \$200, though, so kids can't buy that...only adults with a lot of money can. If there was a controller for around \$30 that gave you feedback, [that] would be amazing.

The game industry should focus more on touching and interacting with games, rather than just focusing on churning out games. I want somebody to create a controller that actually looks good...a controller that you hold that actually makes you look good. When you hold a normal controller, you bend over and don't look very cool. I want a controller that makes you look cool like when you're playing a guitar. That kind of factor could push games beyond movies in the entertainment industry.



■ Naka owes his continued success to this small mammal.



■ *Phantasy Star Online* on your PSP? Naka seems to think it's a pretty keen idea....



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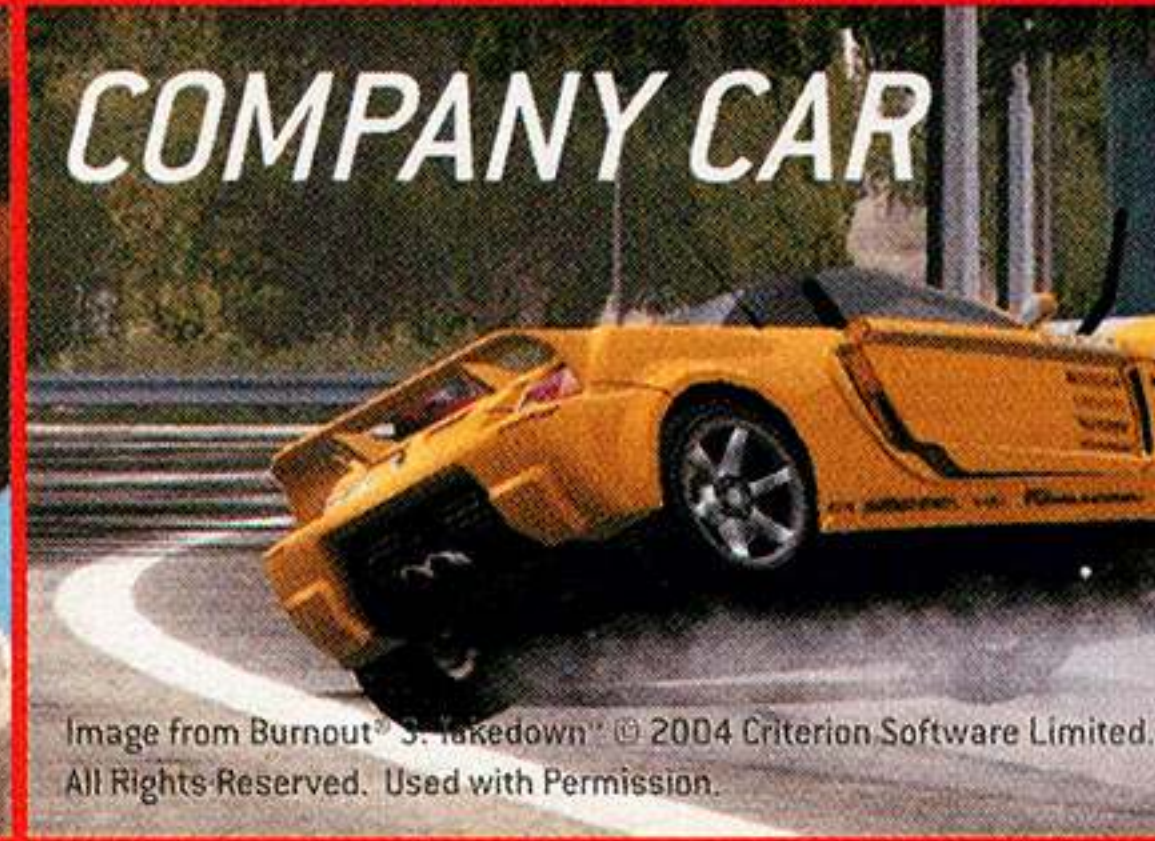


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review crew

considering changing our scale to zero to six thumbs up

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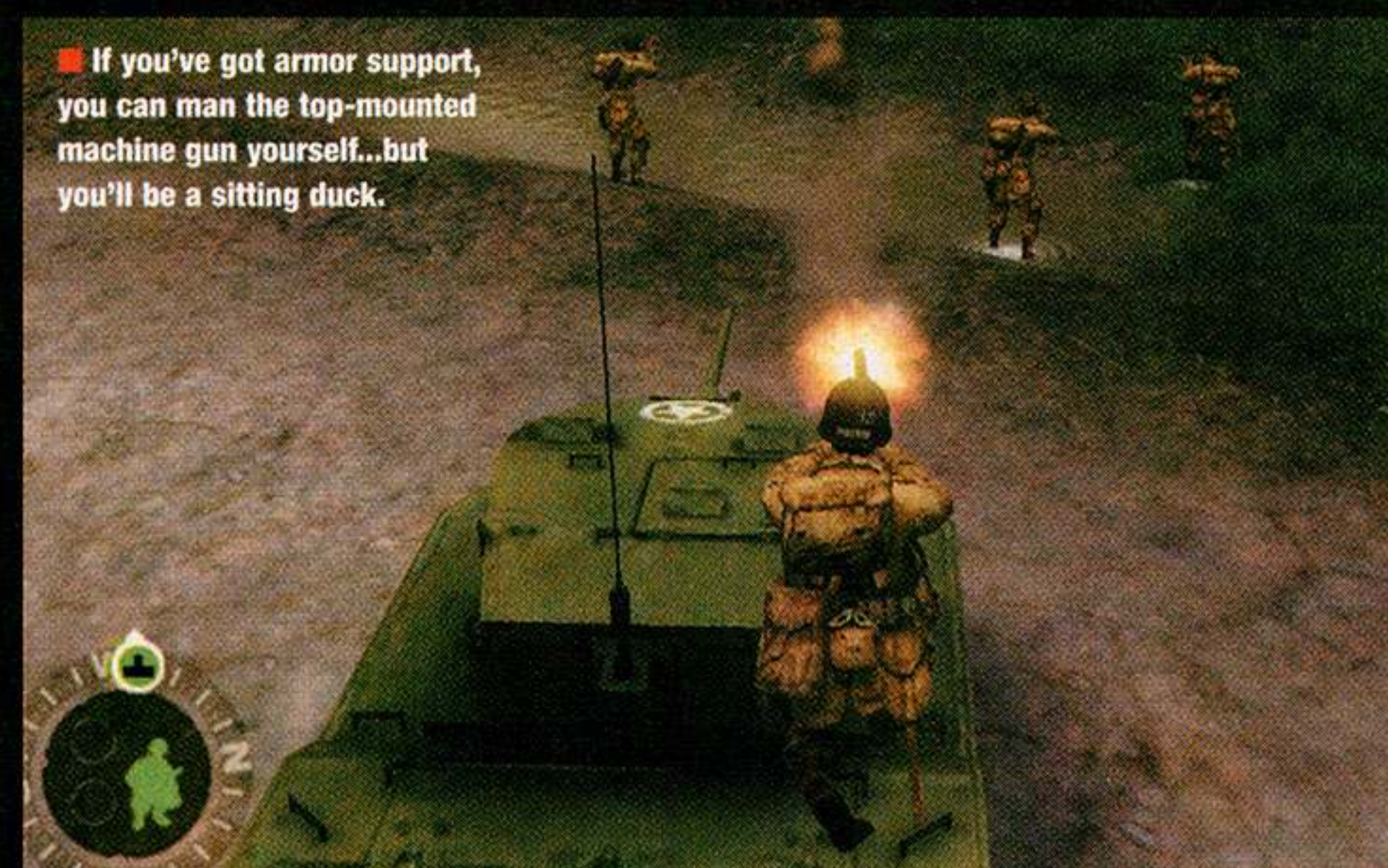
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■ If you've got armor support, you can man the top-mounted machine gun yourself...but you'll be a sitting duck.



What's the diff?

Aside from the obvious (like the Xbox's slightly improved graphics and the convenience of playing over Xbox Live), there's little to separate the PS2 and Xbox versions of *Brothers*. Both control layouts are a little different but equally functional. The Xbox game also has a couple of more disturbing bits (like a dead GI hanging from a tree).

PS2/XB

ONLINE
(PS2/XB)

BROTHERS IN ARMS:

The really great war

DEMIAN: Turns out I'm not too old for this s*** after all. *Brothers in Arms* takes the World War II shooter, one of the most beaten of any dead-horse genre, and makes it great again by concentrating on squad tactics, historical accuracy, and the crushing dread you feel cowering in the dirt as bullets crack overhead. This isn't one of those games in which Rambo's grandpa wins the war pretty much by himself.

Brothers follows the (mostly true) story of Sgt. Matt Baker, starting with a botched parachute jump on D-Day and continuing for the next sleepless week as Baker tracks down his scattered squaddies and battles across the countryside and villages of Normandy. And though the game's cinematic cut-scenes are sometimes emotionally

heavy-handed, when your boots hit the ground, the battles are intense, strategic, and tough. *Brothers* has a whole lot of *Full Spectrum Warrior* (XB) in it; order one team to lay down suppressive fire on an enemy position, then outflank the Germans with the second half of your squad. But *Brothers* fixes *Full Spectrum*'s biggest fault, too—just because your foe is behind cover doesn't mean you can't cap him when he peeks his head over the berm. Assuming your aim is dead as you look down the sight of your unsteady M1, that is.

It's disappointing that low fences and even invisible walls will make sure you stay on the preset path, and the realism factor suffers a bit when your would-be ambushers are betrayed by large red dots indicating their positions well before

you engage (though, to be fair, you can turn this option off). But *Brothers in Arms* is still the best WWII game I've played on a console, and its online objective-based modes will keep you fighting long after you finish the single-player campaign.

SHAWN: The last great war is great at last. Sharp, substantial shots that sound like the sky is cracking make you dip your head down, take-one-and-you're-toast realism keeps it held there. A single firefight—a Kraut on an MG42, his spotter, and a potshot-prone rifleman—is as serious and sensational as the whole Wehrmacht war machine in movieland shooter *Medal of Honor*, not just because it's lethal (well, yeah, that matters), but because it takes know-how as well as nerve



■ The *Psychonauts* crew fills two short busses when it goes on field trips.

THE RATING SYSTEM



At *EGM*, we evaluate only games that have been deemed final and reviewable by their publishers. Three editors rate each game independently, and we use the whole scale. **5.0 IS AVERAGE.**

AWARDS



Platinum — straight 10s. For games that are life-changing.



Gold — for games with an average score of 9.0 or higher.



Silver — for games with a mean score of 8.0 or higher.



The highest-scoring game each month gets a star.



The lowest-rated game with unanimously bad scores.

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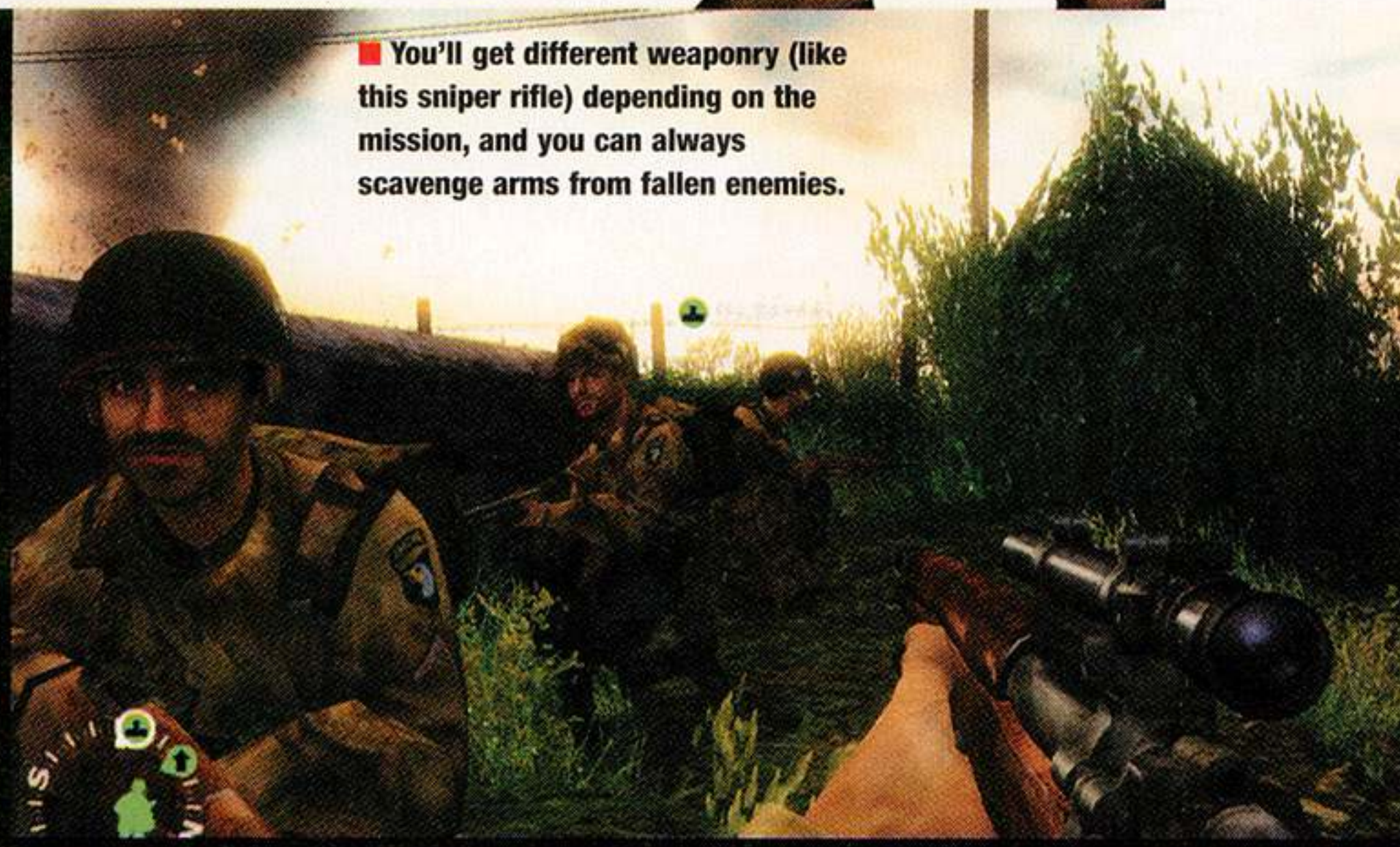
ESRB KEY (Also check out www.esrb.com)

E-Everyone: Saccharine fun for the whole family: dancing elves, rampant sharing, and possibly Smurfs.

T-Teen: Like PG-13 movies, Teen games often feature fisticuffs, mild violence, and madcap antics.

M-Mature: For the 18-and-over crowd. Intense violence, gore, pixilated sex, drugs; parents no likey.

■ You'll get different weaponry (like this sniper rifle) depending on the mission, and you can always scavenge arms from fallen enemies.



ROAD TO HILL 30



to successfully flank and suppress tactically savvy Fritzes, shoot true down shaky iron sights, and think outside the kill box in big, wide battlefields with room to maneuver both east and west at once with separate squads. *Brothers in Arms'* war, in other words, is hell, not another desaturated, olive-drab *Halo*.

1UP.COM—CHE: I know what you're thinking: Videogaming needs another WWII shooter like

the world needs another world war. But keep the cynicism in check, because *Brothers in Arms* isn't just any ol' WWII shooter—it's the best real-military shooter on consoles yet. What makes this game such a wonderful and hellacious journey into the heart of warfare is its ability to let chaos reign. Unlike *Medal of Honor* or *Call of Duty*, *Brothers in Arms* has completely dynamic explosive firefights. The outcome of each skirmish is often unpredictable, thanks to

the sophisticated A.I. routines the game uses to control both your squad and your enemies. My favorite *Brothers* mission was laying siege to a tranquil farm in the French countryside with a Sherman tank and three other guys in my squad. There were many different ways to tackle the scenario, and just like in real life, there was no "wrong" way to win. Ubisoft and Gearbox have just raised the bar for tactical shooters to dizzying heights. 🎮

Good: Gritty, tactical combat
Bad: Invisible walls? Whose idea was that?
Hard Enough to Break You: Authentic difficulty level



THE VERDICTS
(OUT OF 10)

8.5 **9.0** **9.0**
 DEMIAN SHAWN CHE

Publisher: Ubisoft
 Developer: Ubisoft Shanghai (PS2)/Gearbox (XB)
 Players: 1-2 (2-4 online)
 ESRB: Mature

www.brothersinarmsgame.com



Big guns: always a good thing. Building forts: not so much.

PS2/XB

WORMS FORTS UNDER SIEGE

Cruel animals

Good: Warped *Worms* humor

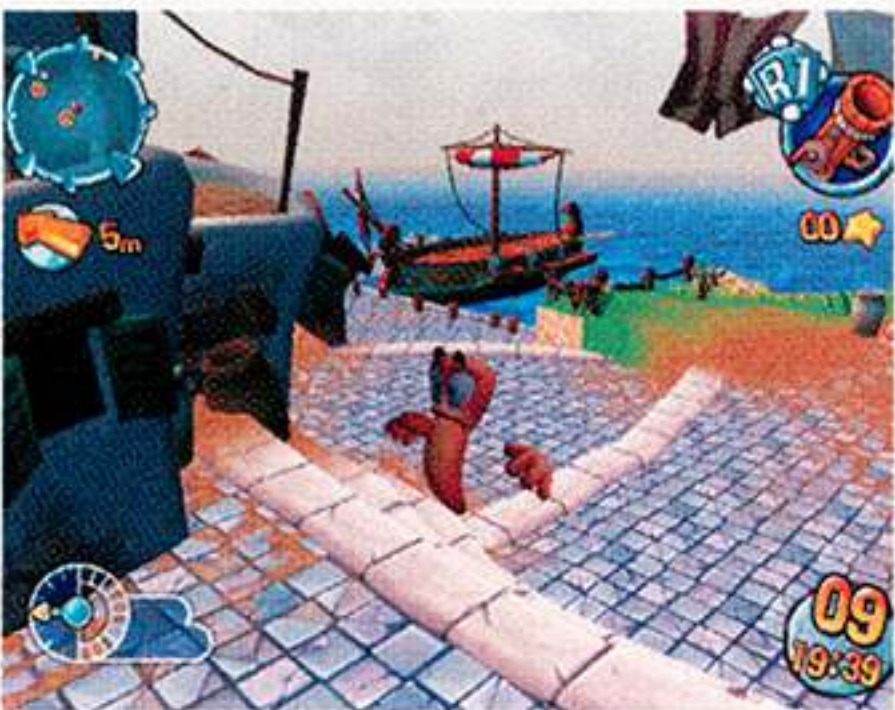
Bad: CPU-controlled worms waste time working out moves

Largest Earthworm Ever Found: 22 feet long. Believe it



SHAWN: The premise is the same: simple critters, complicated combat. Squirmy soldiers still fight dirty with oddball ordnance (including a bomb in a sombrero called "chili con carnage" and a fridge filled with explosive vermin), and sidesplitting s*** still happens when you miscalculate velocity or trajectory and wipe out your own invertebrates.

But while an hour felt right in the formerly flat (as in 2D) turn-based strat series, here it crawls. Blame it on *Forts*' base-building feature: In addition to annihilating rival annelids, you must fortify castles with citadels and keeps, construct hospitals to care for casualties and munitions depots to amass new weapons of moderate destruction, and, of course, sack the other maggots' wee cities. The idea, I suppose, is to give the series the legs of more evolved strategy games, but it's gotten along fine without 'em. This new animal is super-eccentric (as always), but extra-convoluted and less entertaining—I miss the destructible, down-to-earth battlefields and sudden death that doesn't mean another 30 minutes of attrition; I'd rather dump dyna-



mite on a couchmate mid-bungee jump than trade catapult and cannon fire from fixed positions.

ROBERT: This game actually slows down time. Its characters move at the speed of Elmer's glue. Its central gimmick (building forts) stretches the length of battles well beyond anyone's capacity for enjoying them. Your patience drains away along with any remnant of the trajectory-guesstimation fun this franchise once did so well, as *Forts* is too complicated by the third dimension to let you land decent shots. And don't bother with the single-player mode—I watched an A.I. worm sit completely motionless for 30 seconds before spending the remainder of his turn trying to hop onto a ledge. He must have had the same worthless camera I did, 'cause he never made it.

1UP.com—JEREMY: While *Forts* has plenty of *Worms*' personality—and tons of goofy annelids ready to dish out hot death to the enemy—this take on the series seems much more involved and slower paced than the norm. There's nothing wrong with a little depth, but the clumsy 1996-vintage game camera makes getting a sense of the battlefield more of a chore than a thrill. Addictive as the action can be, it would be far more enjoyable with a better interface. Not to mention online support: Unlike the recent *Worms 3D*, this is strictly a pass-the-controller affair. It's true that earthworms thrive in dirt; unfortunately, *Forts* drags the *Worms* name through the mud.

| | | | |
|-----------------------------|-------|--------|--------|
| THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10) | 6.5 | 4.0 | 6.5 |
| | SHAWN | ROBERT | JEREMY |

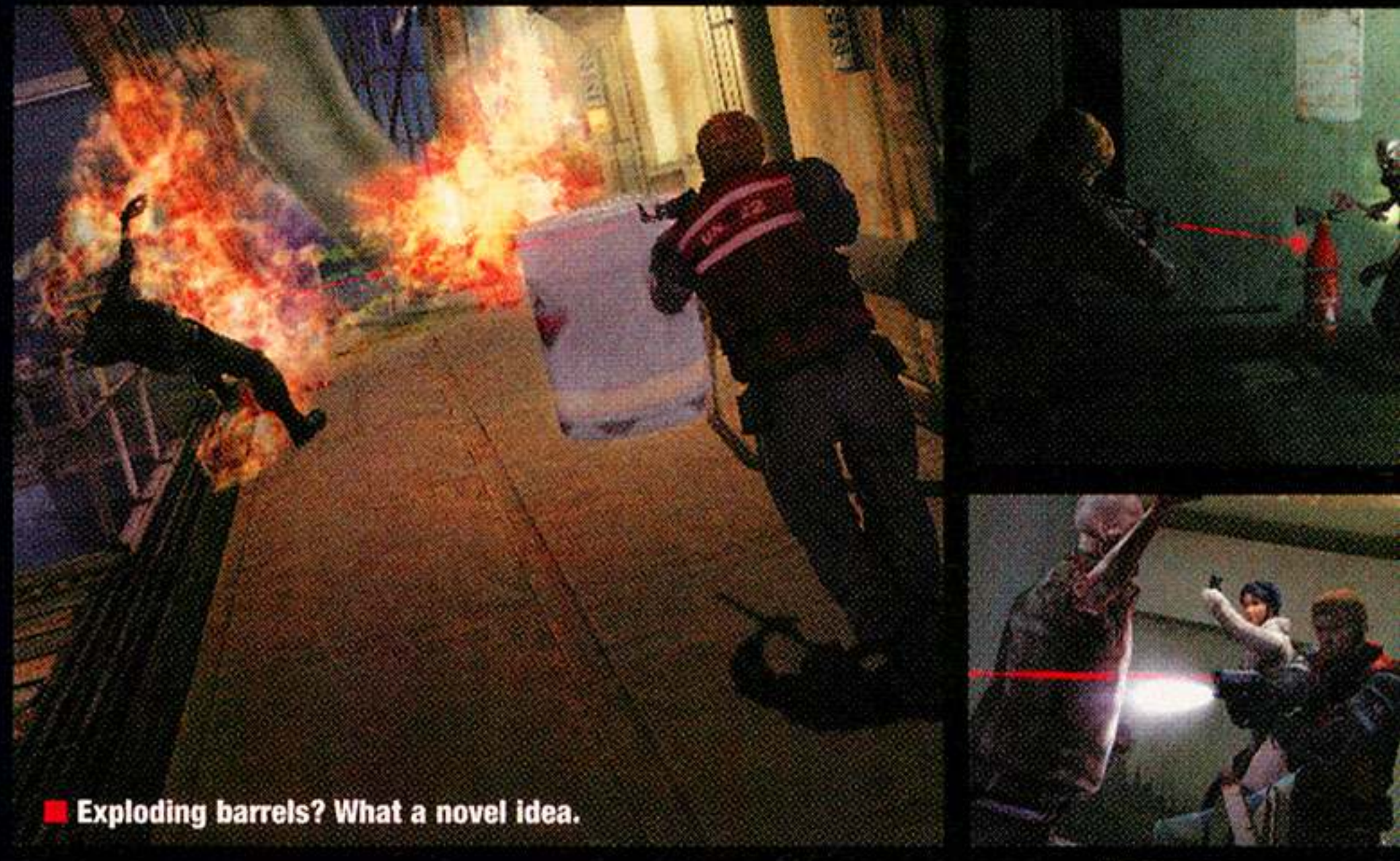
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Team 17
Players: 1-4
ESRB: Teen

www.wormsforts.com

PS2/XB

COLD FEAR

Forecast: slight chills, moderate chance of terror



Exploding barrels? What a novel idea.

Good: Scary atmosphere and impressive weather effects

Bad: You've seen it all before—and better

Bonus Feature: Possible motion sickness



JUSTIN: Like *Resident Evil 4* (GC), *Cold Fear* unleashes brain-infesting parasites that turn Europeans into zombies and gives you an over-the-shoulder view when you're shooting them. It also relies on a fixed camera perspective between bouts of gunplay to help facilitate cheap scares and a female partner who needs some manly protecting. Occasionally, a game can do something extraordinary with ordinary elements, but *Cold Fear* ends up being second-string survival-horror marked by puppetlike physics and way too many exploding barrels.

The oil tanker and offshore-rig settings lend the game a creepy industrial atmosphere similar to the movie *Alien*, but, unfortunately, you're never doing anything very interesting. In between chasing down electronic keys and missing door handles, you'll pop parasite-heads with ho-hum weaponry and experience a complicated enough sequence of events to keep you moving and vaguely entertained until the end. If you're hard up for horror, it might make a decent rental.

JAMES: First of all, they're not zombies; they're "Exocels," which sounds more like a brand of motor oil. And the only way to finish them off is with head shots, which is fine by me because popping their noggins with a shotgun is so satisfying—I could swear that their heads are made of bubble wrap. I don't mind the camera, either: Transitions from overview to aim mode are smooth, and you can actually walk at a decent speed with your gun drawn.

From the raindrops drizzling on the game's camera to the swells of the ocean, *Cold Fear* puts you out there at sea. But do yourself a favor and start on a harder difficulty than the default—you know it's too easy if you start wishing screeching zombies would jump at you a little more often, and the final boss takes two minutes to defeat.

G. FORD: "The damn thing's stuck." "The damn thing's stuck." "Great. It's locked." Our hero ain't happy, but who can blame him: so many doors, yet so few options. Necessary evil you say? I like to think the survival-horror genre can evolve, but OK, I'll play along. Do we still need to deal with horrendous fixed camera angles and cuts, though? Trying to crush an undead's head while the camera keeps switching angles is trying—James may be a fan, but I can't go back after playing *RE4*.

It's a shame, too. *Cold Fear* has a spooky atmosphere and can be enjoyable in stretches. But all said, the haphazard camera, horrendous save system, frequent backtracking, and lame final boss fight force this game into run-of-the-mill shockfest territory.



| | | | |
|-----------------------------|--------|-------|---------|
| THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10) | 6.0 | 7.5 | 5.0 |
| | JUSTIN | JAMES | G. FORD |

Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Darkworks
Players: 1
ESRB: Mature

www.ubi.com



■ The snake-charmer boss: nearly impossible and she insults your outfit.

■ PS2/XB

RED NINJA

SHAME OF THE MONTH

Get your panties in a bunch

Good: Gal ninjas, cool attack moves

Bad: Heinous camera, roller-coaster difficulty

Strange: Butterflies that give you tips throughout the game



JAMES: A hot ninja in a thong killing bad guys with a merciless rain of blows and a razor-sharp wire—sign us up! But *Red Ninja* is a letdown. You must destroy plans for the first automatic gun (which would destroy the ninja industry) while frolicking around in half an outfit—think Skinimax's version of *The Last Samurai*, but with even more budget camera work. Walk too close to a wall and the camera will clip through it, giving you a primo view of the wall itself but nothing else, and yet the camera always sneaks in a thong shot every time your ninja crouches. I can forgive a surprising amount of gratuitous ass shots, but I couldn't ignore the camera problems with the second boss battle—wrestling with your viewpoint while leaping from branch to branch up a tree is the opposite of fun.

The controls have their share of problems, too; the learning curve for the wall run is as steep as a damn wall itself. And though your wire weapon is good for doling out unique and plentiful pain (ah, the decapitations!), those few moments of catharsis can't make up for the uneven difficulty and excruciating camera.



CRISPIN: You'll have no problem seeing buttock in *Red Ninja*, whose she-ninja spends most of the game in lingerie right out of Ancient Chinese Victoria's Secret. But seeing anything else is the problem. James is right: The camera is the game's fiercest foe. It can't keep up with the action in the nutty boss battles. It's sluggish during tricky jumping bits. It goes absolutely retarded when you enter an enclosed area.

And if the nausea-inducing camera doesn't kill your patience, the wacky wall-running and platform-leaping sections will. *Red Ninja* plays like a *Prince of Persia* that hates you. Stealth killing and dismembering enemy feet with your wire weapon may be nifty, but who cares when everything else is such an ordeal.

OFFICIAL PS MAG—GIANCARLO: If you've played any *Tenchu* game, then you know what you're getting from *Red Ninja*. The motivation to stay stealthy simply isn't there, thanks to a lack of different stealth kills and an insane camera that rarely stays in a useful position. In fact, many of the platforming elements (and there are plenty) in the game are made needlessly frustrating because of the camera's flightiness. Likewise, combat isn't all that great outside the main character's wiry weapon. Some of the kills you can perform are cool and there's some fun to be had experimenting with various ways of death dealing, but I have to echo my fellow reviewers here—other aspects of the game are so shallow that they suck the enjoyment right out.

| | | | |
|-----------------------------|-------|---------|-----------|
| THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10) | 4.5 | 4.0 | 4.0 |
| | JAMES | CRISPIN | GIANCARLO |

Publisher: VU Games
Developer: Tranji
Players: 1
ESRB: Mature

www.vugames.com

■ PS2/XB

LEGO STAR WARS

Short and snappy



■ Some assembly is required, but that's what the Force is for.

Good: Slick visuals, fun two-player mode

Bad: Screwy camera, levels that suck with two players

Least-Shocking Spoiler: Lego Anakin becomes Lego Vader!



CRISPIN: You don't have to wait until May to get *Episode III* spoilers from a videogame. You'll find a few minor ones right here in this cutesy action title starring Denmark's most overpriced toys. *Lego Star Wars* re-creates—in Lego form—the laser-blasting, Force-wielding, saber-dueling scenes from *Episodes I, II*, and the upcoming *III*. The action is simple and fun, a mix of shooting and platform hopping with some arcade-style challenges tossed in. Better still, another player can join in at any time to take control of a second character—a fun option occasionally hampered by a screwy camera and vehicle stages clearly designed for solo play.

Just don't expect much of a challenge—or a long game. *Lego Star Wars* is a breezy experience made for kids (its manual even has a "Help for Parents" section). In fact, children of the collect-'em-all *Pokémon* generation will probably get the most out of it, since replay value here relies on revisiting levels to gather hidden Lego pieces. Amassing such items lets you buy new characters and other extras. Persistent players will even unlock a cool slice of *Star Wars* from a long time ago, back when it was good.

DEMIAN: Finally, some blatant product placement I can really get behind. *LSW* may be a simple action-platformer with a crappy camera you'll curse...but Lego Jar Jar! Lego Samuel L. Jackson and Darth Maul! For me at least, this is one of those rare times when cool characters and visuals can make up for sometimes-

flawed gameplay.

The game's short length, infinite continues, and co-op mode (although a couple of sections, particularly the pod-racing bit and a *Zaxxon*-like stage, are actively harder with two players) make it an excellent rental for older folks, while kids will be happy to replay the levels to death and track down every last secret.

OFFICIAL PS MAG—SCOOTER: *Lego Star Wars* axes all the stupid parts from the recent movies (and lo, they were many) and leaves only the cool bits. Take the fact that the third level (out of six) of *Episode II* is the Jedi brawl near the end as proof. Tragically, this awesome editing job means you can warp through the abridged events of the first three movies in four hours. Yeah, yeah—you can replay levels to earn new characters, secrets, and loot, but you can still crank through it the first time in one long sitting. That said, the ability to play as Lego Darth Maul, Boba Fett, and Darth Vader in a better-paced version of the prequels is good enough for me. This is the best *Star Wars* game for kids ever.



| | | | |
|-----------------------------|---------|--------|---------|
| THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10) | 7.0 | 7.0 | 7.5 |
| | CRISPIN | DEMIAN | SCOOTER |

Publisher: Giant/Eidos
Developer: Traveller's Tales
Players: 1-2
ESRB: Everyone

www.eidosinteractive.com



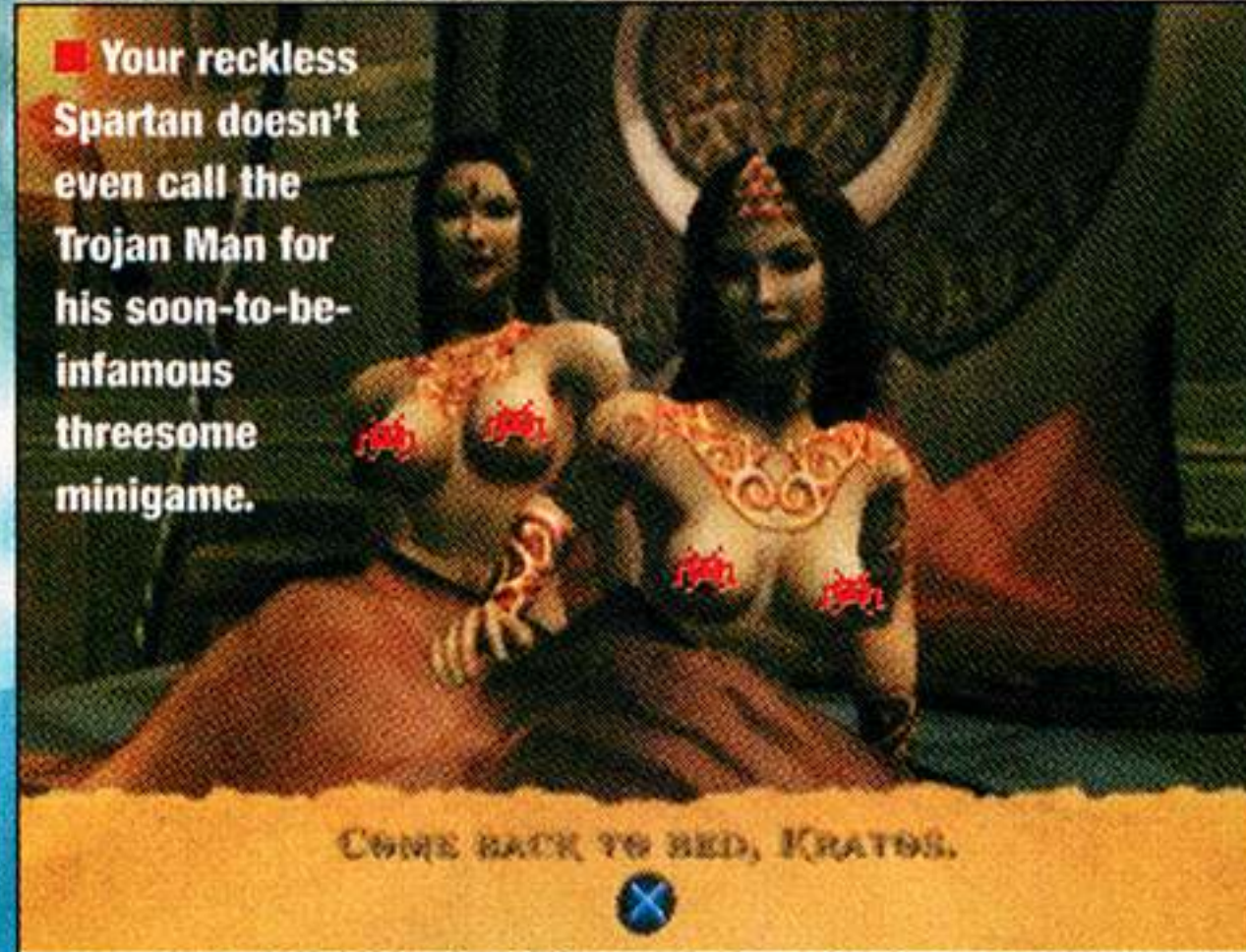
MATURE 17+
M Blood
 Strong Language
 Violence
 ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org
 Game Experience May
 Change During Online Play.



PlayStation 2



XBOX LIVE



PlayStation 2

GOD OF WAR

Smash of the titans

CRISPIN: I don't care if you're Solid Snake sheathed in Master Chief's armor supercharged with *Ninja Gaiden* kung fu—you do not mess with Kratos, *God of War's* pale-skinned antihero. Bear witness to his badness: He sacrifices fellow Spartans to solve grisly puzzles. He hops into bed with togaless hotties. He's an unstoppable blade-whirling dynamo who topples creatures so towering, some pre-*Simpsons* Homer called them Titans. And he does it all without dropping one painful one-liner. You listening, Prince of Persia?

The why behind Kratos' white-hot rage—and even his ultrawhite skin—is slickly explained via flashbacks as you progress to Hades and back through this brutal, beautiful action-adventure. But if you decide the plot is Greek to you and just want to hack crap up, then carte blanche. *God of War's* control and combo scheme (see sidebar) is as much a work of art as the game's presentation, which rivals a Hollywood sand-and-sandals epic. And you rarely find puzzles this clever and well

integrated in other hack-n-slash adventures.

Some may gripe that, at 10 hours long, *God of War* is over too quickly. But that's only because it pulls you along with one killer sequence after another while not suffering from common adventure-game flaws: It rarely makes you backtrack, and it has checkpoints everywhere. Play on the trickier Spartan difficulty if you want to extend the experience. Just don't let Kratos down. By the end of the game, he literally sh**s bigger than you.

BRYAN: He may look like a cross between Mr. Clean and the pasty-white teenager from that *Powder* flick, but Kratos is more than deserving of the title "action-adventure hero." Thanks to his lightning-quick (and combo-heavy) combat skills, *God of War's* main man makes tearing off a Medusa's head and driving his blades through the gullet of a snarling Minotaur seem like particularly gory child's play. Kratos scales mountainsides and leaps over the bottomless pits of hell with the

elegance of a certain Prince. And he certainly ain't no dummy, either, as the game is brimming with *Zelda*-worthy puzzles. I only wish this haunted Spartan had a few additional boss encounters. But that's just me being picky. Once you consider *War's* absolutely dazzling visuals, epic tunes, and surprisingly powerful story, there's more than enough here to label it divine.

OFFICIAL PS MAG—DANA: This game is waaaaay too good-looking to be a PS2 title. Kratos' primary weapon, the blades of chaos, is also incredibly cool. I'm typically a button masher when it comes to combat, but the combo animations were so rewarding that I spent a lot of time in empty rooms practicing my moves.

And everything else? Overall, *War* offers a great mix of fighting and puzzles. It's not that long (I also beat it in about 10 hours), but the cycle of puzzles and action was starting to get a bit old by the end, so the length is just about perfect. **PS**



Challenge This
Beating *God of War* unlocks a mountain of making-of vignettes and glimpses of the sequel. But good luck finishing the extra Challenge of the Gods mode. It drops you into 10 progressively tougher arenas, the last of which takes a half hour to lick. And maybe, maybe the world's most hardcore player will beat the game on its special God difficulty, but we'd have to see it to believe it.



Greatest Hits

Two of *War's* designers were *Street Fighter II* tournament players, and it shows. Combat lets you juggle enemies, toss them into each other, and reverse their attacks. As long as you don't miss and keep rolling from enemy to enemy (or use magic attacks to zap multiple foes), you'll keep your hit count rising—we've seen 700-hit combos. Less-finessed players don't need to mess with combos to beat the game, but playing cool yields more ability-boosting red orbs.



True Spartans end melees with "Ruthless" kills.

Good: Spectacular graphics, slick puzzles, perfect control
Bad: Not enough bosses, a bit short
Best Extras Nugget: The Cyclops originally had a wee-wee



THE VERDICTS
(OUT OF 10)

10
CRISPIN

9.5
BRYAN

10
DANA

Publisher: Sony CEA
 Developer: Sony Santa Monica
 Players: 1
 ESRB: Mature

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■ Shortly after this battle ended, U2 began the soundcheck for illegal rooftop concert No. 1,225.



■ PlayStation 2

TEKKEN 5



Tastes like Tekken

SHAWN: Shorten the skirts, pretty up the postcard beaches and temples, introduce a few fresh faces, and add to the clock-cleaning arsenals of old faves. For *Street Fighter*, it was *Turbo*, it was *Super*, it was *Super Turbo*, but it wasn't a sequel. If this *Tekken* had an adjective and not an up-ticked (as in all-new) number attached to its title, all the above might've seemed more like swank bonuses than prerequisites for a passing grade. Yes, this is *Tekken* with dead serious, stance-shifting chopsocky and silly asides like kung fu bears and joey-in-the-pouch kangaroos. Yes, this is *Tekken* with the intricate rock-paper-scissor kick rules that put the series a tier above the *Dead or Alive*s and (just barely) below the *Soul Caliburs* and *Virtua Fighters*. And no, it hasn't changed enough to give nonfans that you-want-this, you-need-this feeling.

The iron-fisted faithful, on the other bruised hand, will want to see black widows Nina Williams and Christie Monteiro sashay ever so close to *Playboy* resolution; to roughhouse with

newcomer and Wesley Snipes wannabe Raven (who, more so than kenpo king Feng, is as fulfilling to master as his ninjitsu-based fighting style is flashy); and to play a *Tekken* that both works as well as 3 and looks better than flawed beauty 4. Make what you will of the added, arcade-exact *Tekkens 1-3*—I like, but they too show how the more things change, the more they stay the same.

CRISPIN: Hunter-gatherer type gamers will gush over the hope chest of doodads they can buy to customize *Tekken 5*'s characters. Me, I'm not that obsessive—especially since playing so much of the arcade mode to get this stuff is tedious. But I'm not gonna kick this gift horse in the teeth, since the main game here is as fun and accessible as ever.

Just don't expect major changes beyond the usual tweaks, needed player balances, and audio-visual sizzle (she's a real looker). The *Tekken* team wisely got rid of the last game's uneven arena floors, and new mystery ninja Raven is especially

slick. It just would have been nice to play something really fresh (hint: online play) to get me pumped about remembering those 10-hit combos.

SHANE: While not in the same league as deep, technical fighters such as *Soul Calibur* and *Virtua Fighter*, *Tekken 5* stands proudly as the best brawler for regular people. And the game offers so much quality gameplay that even hardcore frame-counters shouldn't write it off due to its scrubby combo system. Hell, it's fun to go slumming in the button-mashing ghetto once in a while.

Plus, it's hard to hate a game that looks this pretty: The stunning characters sport elaborate detail, and some truly original stages (from penguin-packed iceberg to hottie-packed pool party) provide lovely scenery. Add ample unlockables, the moderately enjoyable Devil Within mode, three classic *Tekkens*, and arcade mode's sweet (albeit stolen directly from *VF4*) character customization system, and this is a worthy buy. 🐼



Tekken for Granted: Rating Tekken's Complementary Content

Our scale: One King of Iron First Tournament trophy=sidestep; five=unblockable



Character Customization

Don do-rags, sweatbands, shades, and other regalia. Too bad you earn most of the money for it in...



...Devil Within

A cereal box geegaw to *Tekken 5*'s kung-fu-grip action figure, this barren adventure-y mode is blah.



Tekken History

The brawlers look whittled blocks, but *Tekkens 1, 2, and 3* still rule with slightly rusty iron fists.



Good: Bull-tough new contenders, boatload of bonus content
Bad: Lack of online play, fundamentally unchanged fighting
Freakfest: Grizzly bears vs. boxing kangaroos



THE VERDICTS
(OUT OF 10)

8.0
SHAWN

8.0
CRISPIN

8.5
SHANE

Publisher: Namco
 Developer: Namco
 Players: 1-2
 ESRB: Teen

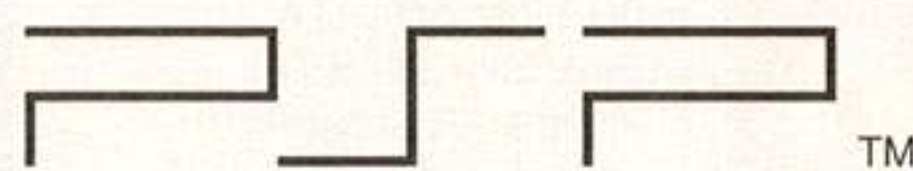
tekken5.namco.com

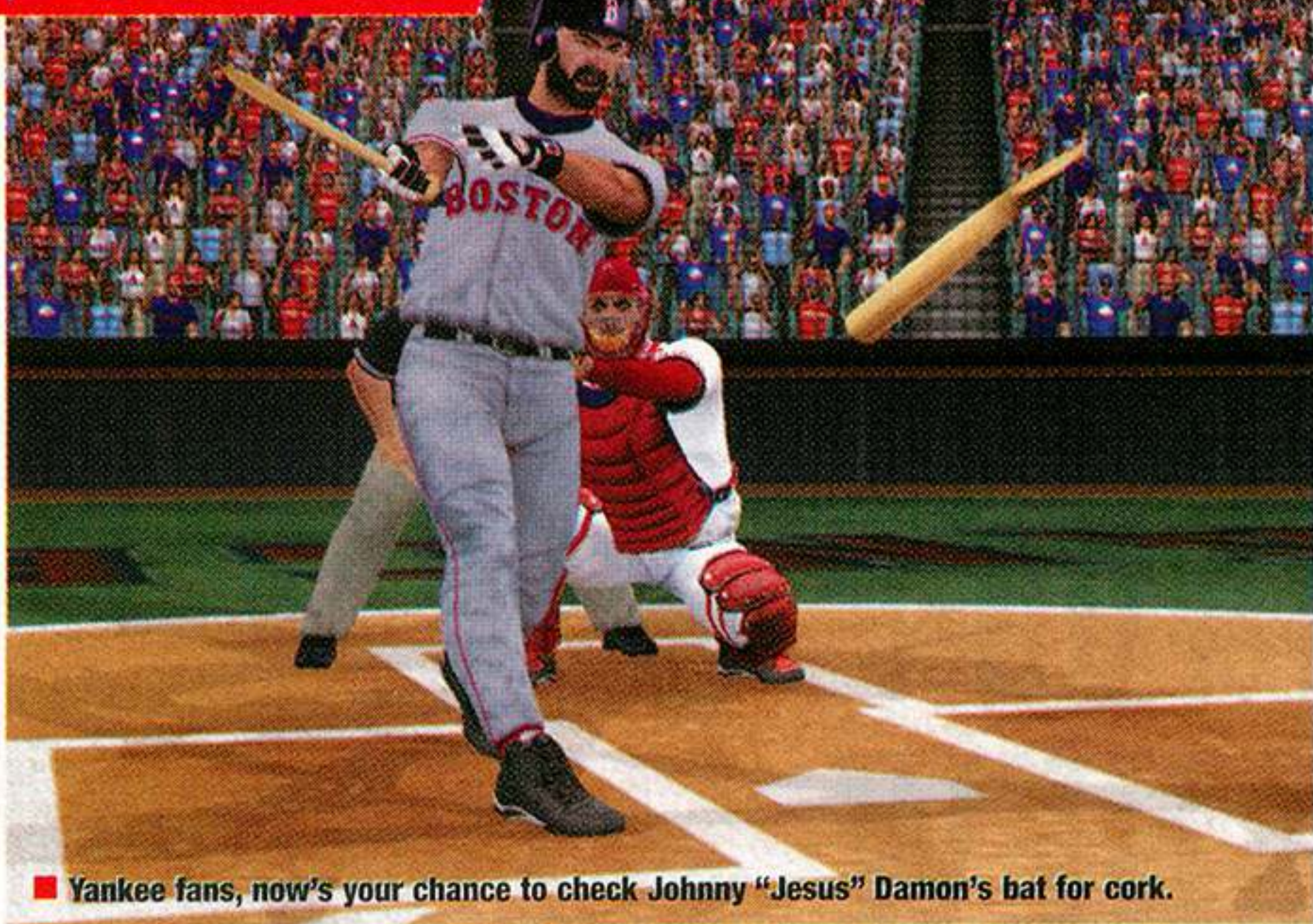


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PlayStation 2

@NLINE

MLB 2006

Not ready for a playoff run

Good: Solid fundamentals, lots of depth

Bad: Lacks other games' fireworks

Cool Feature: Fast-forwarding through slow innings



G. FORD: *MLB* made great strides last year, proving to be an entertaining baseball sim that fell a bit short of the elite level. And though the game has undergone some necessary tweaks, *MLB* still falls a step behind its flashy competition.

There's plenty to build on here, though. I find the simple baserunning controls to be the best of the bunch. Hitting continues to improve, as the game now has check swings and drag bunts. *MLB* even takes a page from *MVP*'s excellent pitching system and has added a similarly effective pitch meter. And the various franchise, season, and career modes are insanely deep—ever fancy upgrading the grass in your stadium or hearing what players think about your rehab facilities? No? Well, I guess I haven't, either.

But while *MLB* has the basics down pat, it lacks *2K5*'s sublime ESPN presentation and *MVP*'s addictive minigames—the stuff that elevates them from mere sims to experiences you'll want to frequently replay...and makes this game feel bland in comparison. *MLB* is certainly a solid distraction, but there's no reason to choose it over the big boys.



BRYAN: A's, Giants, Cubs—all solid ballclubs that came within an eyelash of making the playoffs last season. Unfortunately, *MLB 2006* suffers a similar fate. This one still sports the slickest animations in the baseball biz, as you'll turn double plays and snag scorching line drives with Ozzie Smith-like grace. And though it really ain't my bag, stat junkies will appreciate the superfluous number of options found in the franchise mode.

So what's the problem here? Well, the same as last year: The series remains a visual mess (freakishly tall player models with little muscle definition), and on the field, you won't find anything that *MVP* and *2K* haven't been doing for years. *MLB* needs to stop playing it safe; otherwise, it'll always be watching the fall classic instead of partaking in it.

PATRICK: The game that took a monumental leap from '04 to its '05 version takes but a short step forward this go-around. The most obvious changes include a needed pitch meter that also gauges confidence, plus a more interactive career mode. The ability to skip ahead and only play the at bats of your guy as you bring him through the minors allows you to cultivate your player without enduring entire minor league games. One of my favorite aspects of *MLB* is the ability to step back in time and play in places like the Polo Grounds, Forbes Field, and other venues that have since fallen victim to the wrecking ball. It's not a home-run hitter of *MVP* caliber, but *MLB* is a competent major leaguer.

| | | | |
|-----------------------------|---------|-------|---------|
| THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10) | 7.0 | 6.5 | 7.0 |
| | G. FORD | BRYAN | PATRICK |

Publisher: Sony CEA
Developer: 989 Sports
Players: 1-2 (2 online)
ESRB: Everyone

www.989sports.com



PlayStation 2

SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI: DIGITAL DEVIL SAGA

Feed your inner demon



Good: Great characters and story, deep but accessible

Bad: Dungeons drag on too long, cliff-hanger ending

Battles: Become buffets, as you eat your enemies



CHRISTIAN: Last year's stylish and complex *Shin Megami Tensei: Nocturne* proved that publisher Atlus has the role-playing chops to run with the likes of Square Enix. Where *Nocturne* lagged—accessibility and polish—*Digital Devil Saga* excels.

A group of young soldiers, battling in some sort of futuristic purgatory, becomes transfigured into voracious demons. The story's a weird but appealing blend of action movie, horror, and *Final Fantasy*. I quickly became attached to the *DDS* crew; they look amazingly cool in human or demon form and have interesting, distinct personalities.

DDS carves out its own ominous identity through its stylish visuals and excellent soundtrack. The gameplay isn't as punishing as *Nocturne*'s, but it's still deep: Borrowing *Final Fantasy X*'s Sphere Grid, the game offers a ton of character-building options on top of its speedy and strategic battle system. The dungeons can drag, but thanks to frequent save points, you can always take a break.

My only big complaint is the cliff-hanger ending, a setup for this summer's sequel. *DDS* is a challenging ride with good gameplay and slick presentation.

SHANE: *DDS* takes the blueprint of Atlus' previous PS2 *Tensei* title, *Nocturne*, and spruces it up with an attractive coat of *Final Fantasy X* shellac. It's amazing what a difference adding voiceovers and slick cinematics makes—this actually feels like a cutting-edge, modern RPG. An intuitive skill tree (Christian's Sphere Grid comparison is right on) replaces *Nocturne*'s

obtuse demon forging, and speedy, simplified battles strike a perfect balance between strategy and fun. Thankfully, the elements that make this series so special—creative characters, a totally f'd-up story, arduous dungeons, and copious boss battles—remain intact.

DDS feels a bit short compared to *Nocturne*, but at least it's entertaining throughout. And its off-kilter narrative will keep you guessing up until the very end....

OFFICIAL PS MAG—SCOOTER: I really like *DDS*, but not quite as much as *Nocturne*. The *Final Fantasy*-ization of *DDS* (more cut-scenes, the Sphere Grid rip-off thing) means that it's more newbie friendly, but without as much depth as its predecessor. I miss chatting with and fusing demons myself. Despite all that, I love the crazy plot, the imaginative character and enemy designs (even if 90 percent of bad guys are lifted straight from *Nocturne*), and the Press Turn battle system (also carried over from the last game). Even with the nonending that basically says, "Buy the sequel!" *DDS* is a great *Final Fantasy* alternative.



| | | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------|-------|---------|
| THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10) | 8.0 | 8.5 | 8.0 |
| | CHRISTIAN | SHANE | SCOOTER |

Publisher: Atlus
Developer: Atlus
Players: 1
ESRB: Mature

www.digitaldevilsaga.com



PlayStation 2

RISE OF THE KASAI

Mark of broken promises

- Good:** Simple yet pleasing-to-the-eye combat
- Bad:** An unpredictable A.I. partner
- Three:** The number of new playable characters



BRYAN: Some may call the stunningly animated bloodfest *The Mark of Kri* a cult classic, but I can't imagine anyone saying that about the sequel. When Sony announced *Rise of the Kasai* last spring, it promised a brainy CPU-controlled partner who would provide aid during missions and online co-op play. Yet *Kasai* fails to deliver on both of these features.

First off, your A.I. buddies are pretty flaky. Sure, they'll occasionally fulfill their duty and help you slice-n-dice enemies into snack-size toon bits (which remains as easy and sadistically enjoyable as in the original), but more often they'll either play the role of spectator, take their sweet ol' time activating switches (yawn), or even worse, snake your much-needed health pickup. And normally, the cancellation of the two-player online mode wouldn't be such a big deal. Problem is, every environment still feels designed with this mode in


mind, which translates into some tiresome exploration and backtracking. It's a real shame, too, because *Kasai* has a lot for going for it, including a healthy mix of brawling and sneaking, plus a compelling narrative that's beautifully illustrated through top-notch cut-scenes.

CRISPIN: Once in a while in *Rise of the Kasai*, as you dice or dodge its horde of enemies with the same stealth-combat tactics perfected in the cult-hit original, the game lives up to its killer potential. You'll feel in tune with your A.I.-guided partner as you spy him skewering foes a few corridors away or covering you from afar with his bow.

I wish more of the sprawling levels encouraged that kind of teamwork instead of sending you on dull hunts for switches. Your partner will handle his end of the job—usually. I caught him staring at walls, running

in zigzags, or just jogging in place against a tree enough times that I wished I could issue orders or—better yet—play with a flesh-and-blood buddy online.

OFFICIAL PS MAG—TOM: OK, I may be the lover on this one, but I feel a game doesn't have to be challenging to be good, and *Kasai* is proof. With generous save points, fairly straightforward puzzles, solid controls, and a great story, *Kasai* just lets you get through the game and enjoy the trip.

Sure, the A.I. is dumber than dirt. Sneaking up on a guard and slashing his throat is great, but it gets weird when the guy standing *right next* to your victim doesn't even notice. And that's assuming your ants-in-the-pants A.I. pal doesn't recklessly charge into battle before you have a chance to go for the stealth kill in the first place. *Kasai's* far from perfect, but it's still plenty fun. 



Tati (left, decapitating), Baumusu (right, also decapitating), and Griz (superold guy, far right) are *Kasai's* new characters.

| | | | |
|-----------------------------|-------|---------|-----|
| THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10) | 6.0 | 6.0 | 7.0 |
| | BRYAN | CRISPIN | TOM |

Publisher: Sony CEA
Developer: BottleRocket
Players: 1
ESRB: Mature

www.playstation.com

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Chinese disco; not dead.

PlayStation 2

DYNASTY WARRIORS 5

Where history comes alive...and kicks ass

Good: Chaotic battlefields, tons of replay value
Bad: Still not much different from the other 47 *Dynasty* games
Most Luxurious Beard: Guan Yu, for the fifth year in a row



JUSTIN: Due to history, tradition, and consistently strong sales, publisher Koei's battlefield beat-em-up *Dynasty Warriors* has changed little over the years. But virtuous change, however slow, will eventually lead to righteousness—or at least a very enjoyable action game. By dismissing the limited create-a-warrior mode and promoting the stories of heroic individuals, *Dynasty Warriors 5* moves away from tedium and background facts toward variety and a fleshed-out setting.

The fighting is simplistic, but there's room to slip into the groove of your character and enjoy cutting down hundreds of enemy soldiers, assisting allies, and taking on rival officers on dynamic battlefields. The exposition is hugely melodramatic, but the personal perspective and context are worth the pain. Because the characters have personalities, they inevitably inspire some kind of feeling through repeated exposure. Maybe you'll decide Liu Bei isn't as noble as he claims to be, or that Zhang He is an effeminate punk in dire need of a beating. Whatever your opinion, you'll know who they are when you start your next game.



ROBERT: *Dynasty Warriors* has spawned more offspring than an orgy of rabbits. And while many gamers could care less about this new entry, a hardcore following of devotees drools at the prospect. I'd say they're on to something, and it's not the hackneyed storytelling or campy kung fu movie clips.

Dynasty Warriors is all about clear-cutting forests of foot soldiers with unrealistic ease and theatrical flair. And it's about excess, taking out thousands of nameless nobodies in a single level, and releasing seven variations on this theme for \$50 a pop. With the fog finally pushed back to a manageable horizon and smooth gameplay, this is the version to get.

1UP.COM—CHE: If you love the *Dynasty Warriors* series and have bought every single upgrade and remix Koei has released in the last couple years, then skip this review and go buy the game. Everything you love about the series remains unmolested, except now, the graphics look cleaner (less fog), the game runs more smoothly, and the upgradeable weapon system has been beefed up to role-playing-game-lite proportions. But if you're a newbie to the franchise, *Dynasty Warriors 5* is the best entry point the series has ever had. The game is the ultimate hack-n-slash orgy, and it follows a simple rule: Repeat what feels good. And it feels damn good to mow down hundreds of soldiers with your single Chinese badass. It's a *Final Fight* clone with a zone, and once you fall into its trance, beware your wallet.

| | | | |
|-----------------------------|--------|--------|-----|
| THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10) | 8.0 | 7.5 | 8.0 |
| | JUSTIN | ROBERT | CHE |

Publisher: Koei
 Developer: Omega Force
 Players: 1-2
 ESRB: Teen

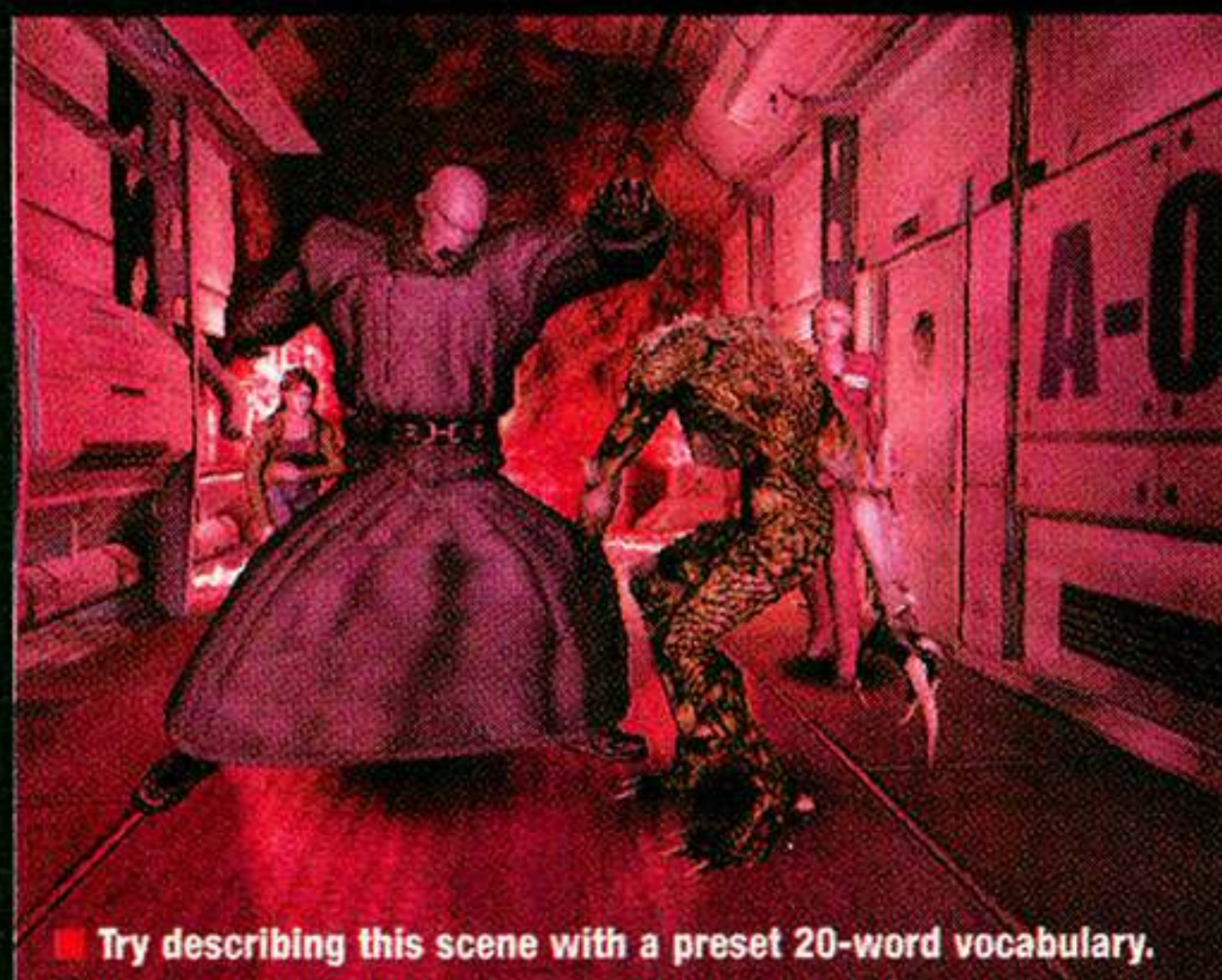
www.koei.com

PlayStation 2

ONLINE

RESIDENT EVIL OUTBREAK: FILE #2

Outbroken, too



Try describing this scene with a preset 20-word vocabulary.



Good: Sharp graphics, moody music
Bad: Lack of voice or keyboard chat ruins it...again
One More Time, So They Can Hear It in Japan: VOICE CHAT!



MARK: Seeing as how screens of *Outbreak: File #2* were floating around before the original online survival-horror game was even out, it's not surprising how little has changed. Once again you pick from the same cast of eight citizens, each with his or her own strengths and weaknesses, and join up to three others online (or A.I. teammates offline) to try to escape the zombifying virus spreading through poor Raccoon City. Once again gameplay is all about ammo conservation, careful use of healing items, and simple switch-flipping puzzles. The few modest "improvements"—everyone has access to important items like keys, you can ask other characters to use items, the online lobby/friend system is better—fix mistakes Capcom should've gotten right the first time.

Except, of course, for the biggest mistake, back full force. Perhaps I wasn't clear enough the first time: THIS GAME NEEDS VOICE CHAT. With no way to talk (not even via keyboard) to each other save eight simple preset phrases, what should be simple cooperative tasks turn impossibly frustrating. Offline is no better since your A.I. cohorts are even dumber than the zombies. ("Hey, lockpick-specialist woman: Maybe there's a reason I am standing next to this locked door, calling your name and 'Come here' over and over? No? OK, just keep running in circles then. Thanks.") Freakishly die-hard fans of the series (like myself) will play *File #2* just for the pre-RE2 Raccoon Police Department level; everyone else, avoid it like the T-virus.

JAMES: Second *Outbreak*, same problems: You can only carry four items (except for Yoko—must be wearing cargo pants), and the awful A.I. in single player hasn't changed. Of course, many of us want to pick up a copy for the multiplayer, but the online play for *File #2* is unashamedly the other Olsen twin of the original. You're stuck with the same damn macros ("Please wait," "Thank you," etc.) to communicate with your buds. Only Timmy from *Lassie* would be able to understand you: "What's that, boy? Jim is being eaten on the hospital roof by a shirtless man with an ax?"

CHRISTIAN: Sure, the total inability to communicate here sucks, but somehow Mark and I managed to work around it. Worse are those stupid *Resident Evil* puzzles. Not only are they completely uninteresting; they just don't fit in with online play—especially when you can't talk. "Hey, I found another Mr. Raccoon token! Let's go back to the office." Nope. As far as offline goes, it's standard *Resident Evil* with admittedly excellent graphics and atmosphere, and awkward A.I. pals.



| | | | |
|-----------------------------|------|-------|-----------|
| THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10) | 5.0 | 5.0 | 4.5 |
| | MARK | JAMES | CHRISTIAN |

Publisher: Capcom
 Developer: Capcom
 Players: 1 (2-4 online)
 ESRB: Mature

www.capcom.com



Xbox ONLINE

STAR WARS REPUBLIC COMMANDO

Finally, stormtroopers who can shoot straight



Each squadmate has special skills. You can do their jobs—just not as speedily.

| | | | |
|-----------------------------|---------|--------|------|
| THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10) | 7.0 | 7.0 | 8.0 |
| | CRISPIN | DEMIAN | JOHN |

Publisher: LucasArts
Developer: LucasArts
Players: 1-4 (2-16 online)
ESRB: Teen

www.lucasarts.com

Good: Fun and simple squad tactics
Bad: Linear levels, pushover enemies
Guest Starring: Temuera Morrison, *Episode II's* Jango Fett



CRISPIN: Ever since George Lucas started futzing with separatists and trade federations and clone armies, it's become a chore to unravel—or even care about—what's going on in his galaxy far, far away. But you don't need to worry about any of that business in *Republic Commando*, a fun shooter on its own merits, thanks to its squad of three commandable clone supertroopers. Issuing orders to your band of identical brothers is easy: Just point your crosshairs at a breachable obstacle or ideal sniping position, and your men do the rest.

It's a slick system that makes for spectacular firefights, as your squadmates coolly do their job, make clever small talk, and zap you back to life when you fall in a hail of laser beams. If only the numskull enemies were as smart or the linear levels a little more imaginative. By the end of the game, once we reached the Wookiee 'hood Kashyyyk, I felt like I'd blasted through more than enough droids for one weekend, and the so-so multiplayer modes didn't exactly extend my interest. The abrupt ending's a letdown, too, forcing players to wait until May's *Episode III* flick to see what happens next.

DEMIAN: As the leader of supersoldier quadruplets, I'm glad that my brothers are fairly smart, even if I do have to take the

lead when the Federation droids and Trandoshan slavers get a little rough—because I know that when I charge into battle against all odds and catch one too many blaster shots, the boys will jolt me back to life. Well, assuming they don't all get wiped out.

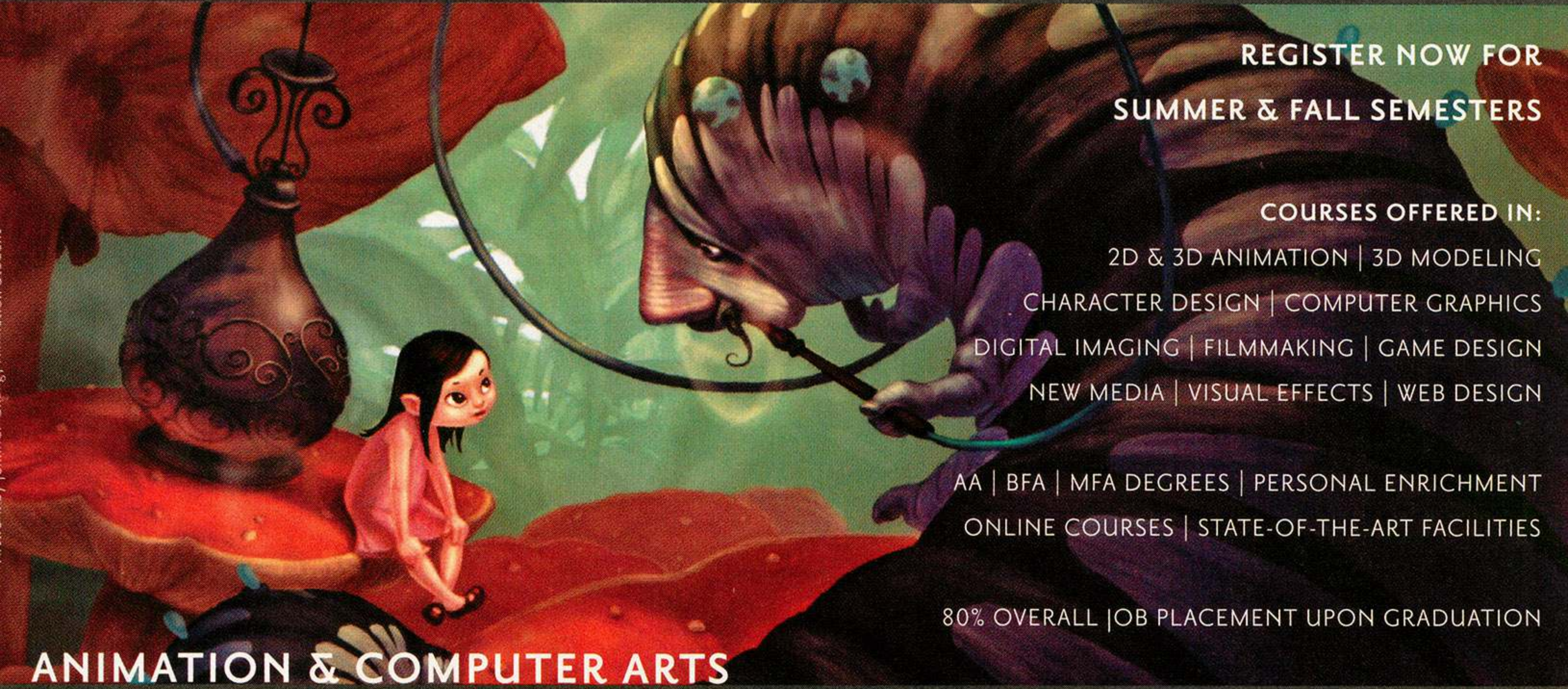
Commando's squad control aspects aren't particularly complex, but they work well enough. And the single-player campaign is short but action packed, spanning the gap between *Episodes II* and *III*—although once you're done scratching your head at the ending, *Commando's* barely there online multiplayer modes won't inspire you to keep the Republic/Federation war raging.

1UP.COM—JOHN: What makes *Commando* different is that you're not a pimped-out Jedi superhero as in most of the previous *Star Wars* games; here you're just a grunt, and the resulting gritty underdog atmosphere brings a more contemporary feel to a game that could easily have been just another shooter. The tactical elements are simple and elegantly implemented, and despite being shockingly linear, it's a beautifully paced experience that provides some genuinely exciting battles. The best *Star Wars* game since the original *Knights of the Old Republic*, for sure.



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Working through personal issues: Main guy Raz even journeys into his own brain for a bit of DIY therapy.



Xbox

PSYCHONAUTS

Psychoanalysis

SHAWN: If I respect *Psychonauts* more than I was riveted by it, that's because for every two bits of out-of-the-box thinking, I found one piece of boilerplate platforming. Emotional baggage, repressed memories, figments of imagination—all wonderful ideas for a game that treats pathological minds as physical places—aren't more than things to hoard by the tens and hundreds, same as the coins and stars in any ordinary collect-a-thon. At times, too much irrelevant rigmarole—doubling back on previously treated clinical cases (read: levels) to fetch more doodads; second, third, and even fourth iterations of the same brain-teasing puzzle—keeps hero Raz, a psychic tot at summer camp, on the clock like some opportunistic shrink. In a game where you can clairvoyantly control yourself through the cat's eyes of an enemy in order to wallop 'im in the dark, any been-there, done-that sections tend to stand out.

But criticism's the stuff of short-term memory where cult status is concerned. *Psychonauts'*

artistic oomph—the black-lit velvet painting landscapes, the topsy-turvy worlds where walls are floors and floors are roofs—is lightning in a bottle. Its one-of-a-kind wit (from the conspiratorially minded mailman whose route is a Twilight Zone of Peeping Toms and probing G-men, to the nut with a Napoleonic complex whose mind is a hex-based board game) makes it an instant classic.

ROBERT: You've jumped over bottomless pits and punched bad guys before, but *Psychonauts* presses these conventions into the service of its story and characters. It injects meaning and purpose into what has traditionally been adventure for adventure's sake. As you explore the surreal, mazelike minds of characters, you'll also interact with them, literally wrestling inner demons and sorting out childhood memories. In short, the story doesn't stop when the game starts.

And there is a game here—one that shoots for *Mario* and *Zelda* but falls a bit short. The last hour

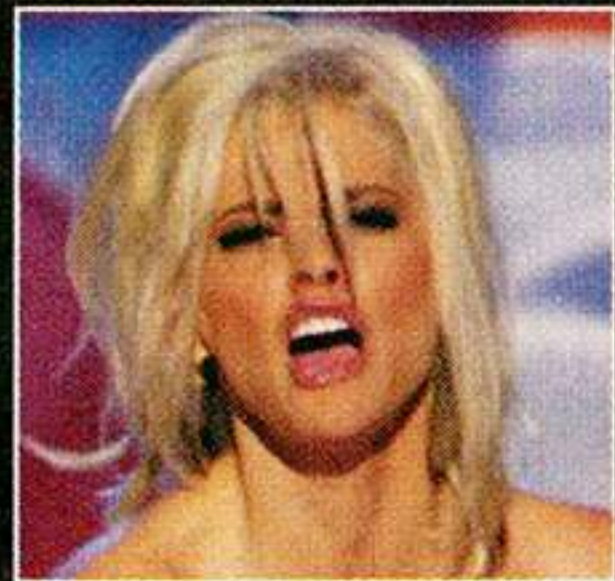
or so features some regrettable platforming bits that really outstrip character control. But Shawn is wrong about the backtracking; except for one early level, you only go back if you want to.

JOSH: Anyone who doesn't fall for the unique characters, hilarious dialogue, and brilliantly conceived environments of *Psychonauts* has no soul. The James Brown of games, *Psychonauts'* personality overcomes its flaws. Most of the puzzles are clever (a few obvious ones get tedious), but the platforming fails to capture that elusive "feel" you get with a *Mario* or *Ratchet* game. The art and gameplay styles change dramatically depending on the level, so some are mind-blowing, but others don't quite measure up (the boring conspiracy level and needlessly difficult final stage were particularly disappointing). Nitpicks aside, *Psychonauts* is a refreshing alternative for those of us not preoccupied with eating McDonald's and watching reality TV. **A-**



Lost Mind Levels

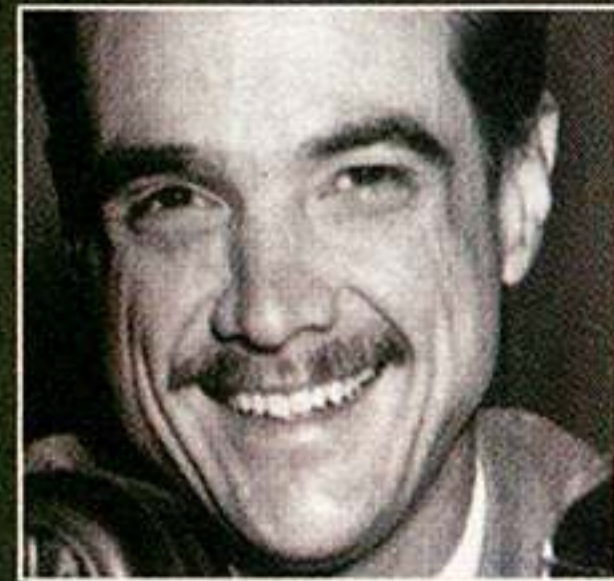
Famous nut jobs whose fractured psyches would've made perfect settings:



Anna Nicole Smith
Level layout: The world according to Anna: octogenarian tycoons, lawsuits, 7-11 snack aisles, TrimSpa tablets.



R. Kelly
Level layout: Scatological candyland of bodily function confections, 15-year-old Oompa Loompas.



Howard Hughes
Level layout: The world's a filthy, infectious wasteland; ritualistic washing regains health.

Good: More psychedelia than Spencer Gifts
Bad: Some compulsory collecting
Dysfunctional Dialogue: "I work in excrement."



THE VERDICTS
(OUT OF 10)

8.0
SHAWN

9.0
ROBERT

8.0
JOSH

Publisher: Majesco
Developer: Double Fine
Players: 1
ESRB: Teen

www.psychonauts.com



■ If this guy looked more like Burt Reynolds, maybe this caption would be funny.



Xbox

ONLINE

SILVER

UNREAL CHAMPIONSHIP 2: THE LIANDRI CONFLICT

Fight for your right to fight

SHAWN: It's a sort of sponsored bloodsport: Globalist on a galactic scale, the Liandri company broadcasts the cutthroat ascension ceremonies of other cultures. Would-be emperors vie for title and throne; suits sell it as ready-made entertainment. Call the non-Nerf *American Gladiator* story mode a so-so excuse for *Unreal Championship* to do the first-person shooter-cum-fighter thing it does—not that one is necessary, so long as you're online.

You've heard it before: "Yadda yadda, it's not *Halo*." But this one doesn't have to be; it's ballsier and, in some ways, better. When a Spartan swipes a superpowered plasma sword, he pisses off a whole lot of people until someone finally pries it from his stiff fingers; however, here you've always got a poker of some sort, ready to use where and when you want. As far as blaster vs. blade battles go, the feature's a stroke of cutting-edge genius. Spears and swords can block and bat back bullets (split-second timing required), so bouts aren't about hoarding the biggest boomsticks. Sleepy in

other shooters, here 1-on-1 matches sizzle with almost artistic control (try sniping mid-somersault) and performance-enhanced feats (speed, agility, stalking, etc.), and maxed-out eight-man free-for-alls feel just right (any more players might've made for an unfun clusterfrag). It gets iffy only when two play supersamurai at the same time—when two people are flailing in each other's faces, it's tough to tell who's winning or why.

ANDREW: I like how the *Unreal Tournament* (PC) and *Championship* series are quite different, yet at the same time share the same "feel." *UC2* is clearly made for a console, with its controller-friendly layout and limited weapon selection (a bigger arsenal would be a headache without a keyboard), and, unfortunately, some slowdown issues when too many players are onscreen at once. But it still features unique game modes and a wide selection of solid maps, like its PC bro.

The most exciting difference, though, is

Championship's third-person view, especially when it comes to melee weapons. I often found myself playing exclusively with beam swords, just because it was so rewarding to make kills by deftly deflecting shots. If you find *Halo 2's* multiplayer a little slow, try *Unreal*.

1UP.COM—CHE: In a lot of ways, *UC2* is exactly what the online doctor ordered. A return to the whiplash speed of *Quake*, *UC2* is deathmatch at its most claustrophobic and relentless. Luckily, it's not deathmatch at its most "pure." Unlike a lot of online shooters, *UC2* isn't afraid to give its characters unique strengths and weaknesses; sure it's harder to balance a game this way, but the gameplay benefits from such rich depth. *UC2* is also the first online shooter to feature a melee system that works (but could use improvement). The problem is, whacking someone with your sword lacks a tactile sense of power. Still, *UC2* does so much right you'd be shortchanged not to check it out. 🎮

Ways to Slay

In addition to classic deathmatch (team and free-for-all) and capture the flag, *Unreal Championship 2* features three new modes and over 40 maps.



Nali Slaughter
Fragging the peaceful Nali people faster than your opponent does is as silly as it sounds.



Overdose
Unreal's ball-based bloodsport is as frantic and fast paced as *Halo's*, but with orbs, not skulls.



Survival
Go 1-on-1 for bragging rights in winner-stays bouts while others watch and wait their turns.

Good: 40-some mode-specific maps

Bad: Sword-to-sword combat is sort of clunky

Mortal Kameo: *Mortal Kombat* character Raiden is unlockable



THE VERDICTS
(OUT OF 10)

8.5

SHAWN

8.0

ANDREW

8.0

CHE

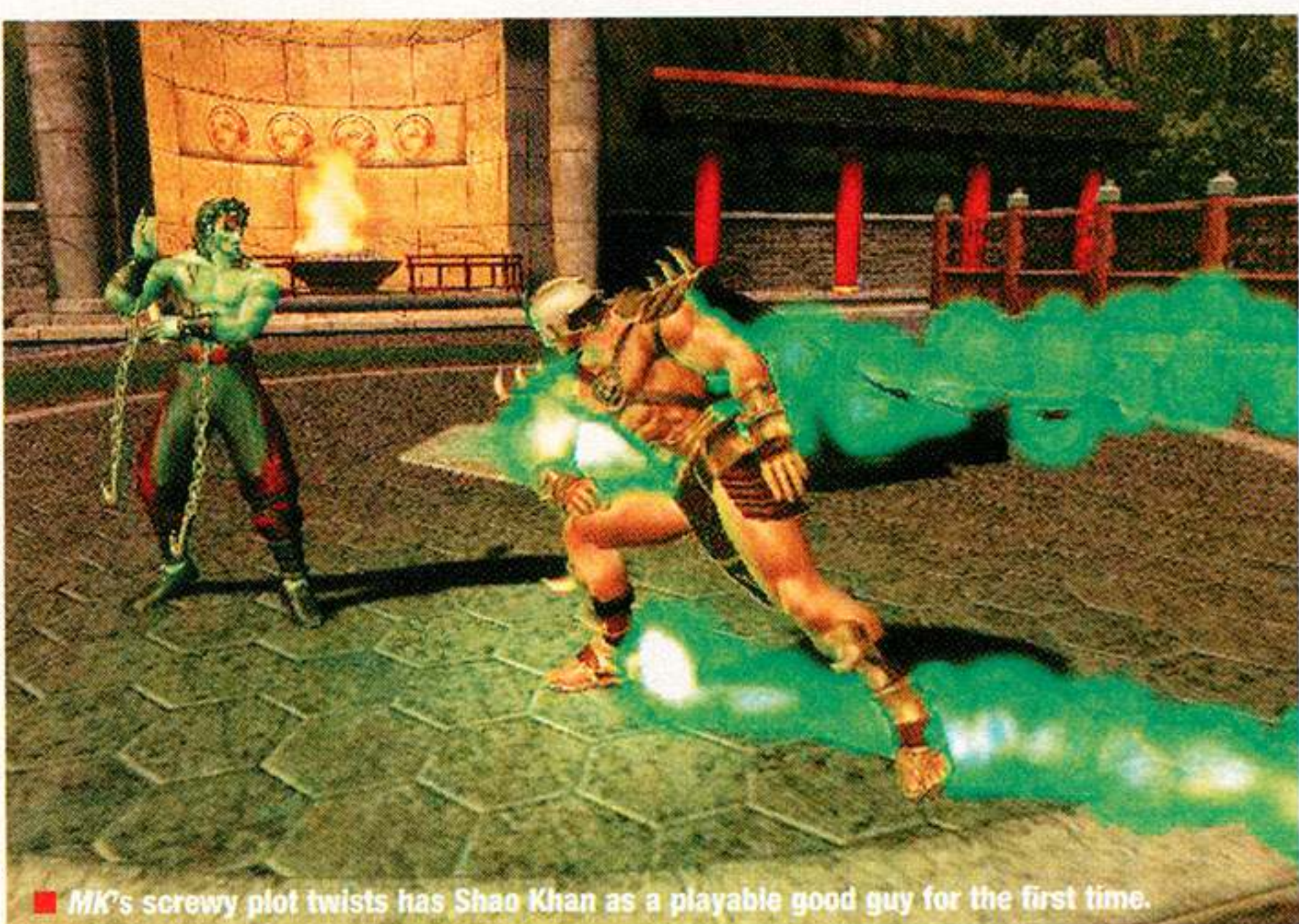
Publisher: Midway
Developer: Epic
Players: 1-2 (2-8 system link or online)
ESRB: Mature

www.liandriconflict.com

GameCube

MORTAL KOMBAT: DECEPTION

Late to the bloodbath



■ *MK's* screwy plot twists has Shao Khan as a playable good guy for the first time.

| | | | |
|-----------------------------|-------|-------|------|
| THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10) | 6.0 | 6.5 | 7.5 |
| | SHANE | JAMES | MATT |

Publisher: Midway
Developer: Midway
Players: 1-2
ESRB: Mature
www.midway.com

Good: Plenty of modes
Bad: Shoddy, stilted gameplay
Noticeably Absent: The online play in PS2/XB versions



SHANE: The newest *Mortal Kombat* installment comes to the Cube a few months late, but at least it's got a few extras to sate the growling tummies of patient GameCubers. Classic *Kombat* bosses Goro and Shao Khan join the roster, and most of the other versions' unlockable characters are now available from the outset. But these minor tweaks can't make up for this port's one glaring omission—online play. But then again, the smoothest network matches ever conceived still couldn't make this a great fighting game. *Mortal Kombat's* cheesy characters (aimed squarely at a junior high schooler's concept of cool), dialed-in combos, unbalanced special moves, and tacky visuals simply cannot compete with legitimately good titles like *Soul Calibur II* (also available on GC). The game earns an above-average score here because the developers wisely included other gameplay modes that help enrich the overall experience. Puzzle *Kombat* succeeds as a decent *Puzzle Fighter II Turbo* (PS1) clone, *Konquest* mode delivers a mildly entertaining pseudo-role-playing game, and *Chess Kombat* injects a little strategy into the series.

chocolate to peanut butter. They've added and subtracted some bits (Sub-Zero's cheap shish-kabob-sword move is cut), but it still equals out to a rental for me. Trying new characters is always fun, but single-player replay value is low. Play with a friend and you'll start to get that ol' *MK* feeling, though. Just make sure your pal isn't easily angered—bouts that end after one well-timed kick and a spray of gore (thanks to some of the stages' instant-death booby traps) are the things broken controllers are made of. *Deception* can be mindless fun, but I can't help but feel that the developers are just trying to do too much with this game.

1UP.COM—MATT: The run button, the weapons, the multiple fighting styles—for better or worse, every game in the *MK* series has introduced an important new feature. So it's rough that the key addition to the PS2 and XB versions of *Deception*—the aforementioned online play—isn't here. Nobody expects a Cube title to have online support these days, but without it, *Deception* feels a bit too similar to the previous *MK* game, *Deadly Alliance*. Still, the GC port is right up there with the others techwise and has many more characters unlocked from the start, so if you hate the Internet, this is a good way to go.

JAMES: Shane's a fan of *Deception's* extra modes, but for me, when chess meets the *Kombat* universe, the relationship isn't quite

DS

POKÉMON DASH

Dashin' for the cash-in



| | | | |
|-----------------------------|--------|----------|---------|
| THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10) | 5.0 | 6.5 | 6.0 |
| | DEMIAN | JENNIFER | JOHN R. |

Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Ambrella
Players: 1 (2-6 via wireless LAN)
ESRB: Everyone
www.nintendo.com

Good: The learning curve is about zero
Bad: If you're old enough to read *EGM*, you're too old for *Dash*
Archival: If you don't come in first, Meowth will



DEMIAN: Close your eyes during the title screen (and your ears during Pikachu's incessant, grating "Pika!" exclamations) and you'd never guess the little yellow blob you're controlling is the king of all Pokédome. In this kid-aimed, top-down racing game, you'll stroke the touch screen to propel your furry blur from checkpoint to checkpoint across sprawling maps and hope you don't contract repetitive stress injury along the way. There are natural hazards (water, lava, etc.) to avoid, but strategy begins and ends with following the onscreen arrow to your next destination and learning the courses. Your max speed is capped too, so even if you're some kind of savant when it comes to frantic screen rubbing, you won't go any faster. So *Dash* may be a blatant attempt to milk the *Pokémon* franchise, but the game's real sin is that it doesn't steal nearly enough from the *Poké* series. A little character collecting (it might be nice to race as a puffball not named Pikachu now and then) and character-specific special powers would have broken up the monotony at least. Even compared to other games aimed at the 12-and-under set, *Dash* is just mediocre.

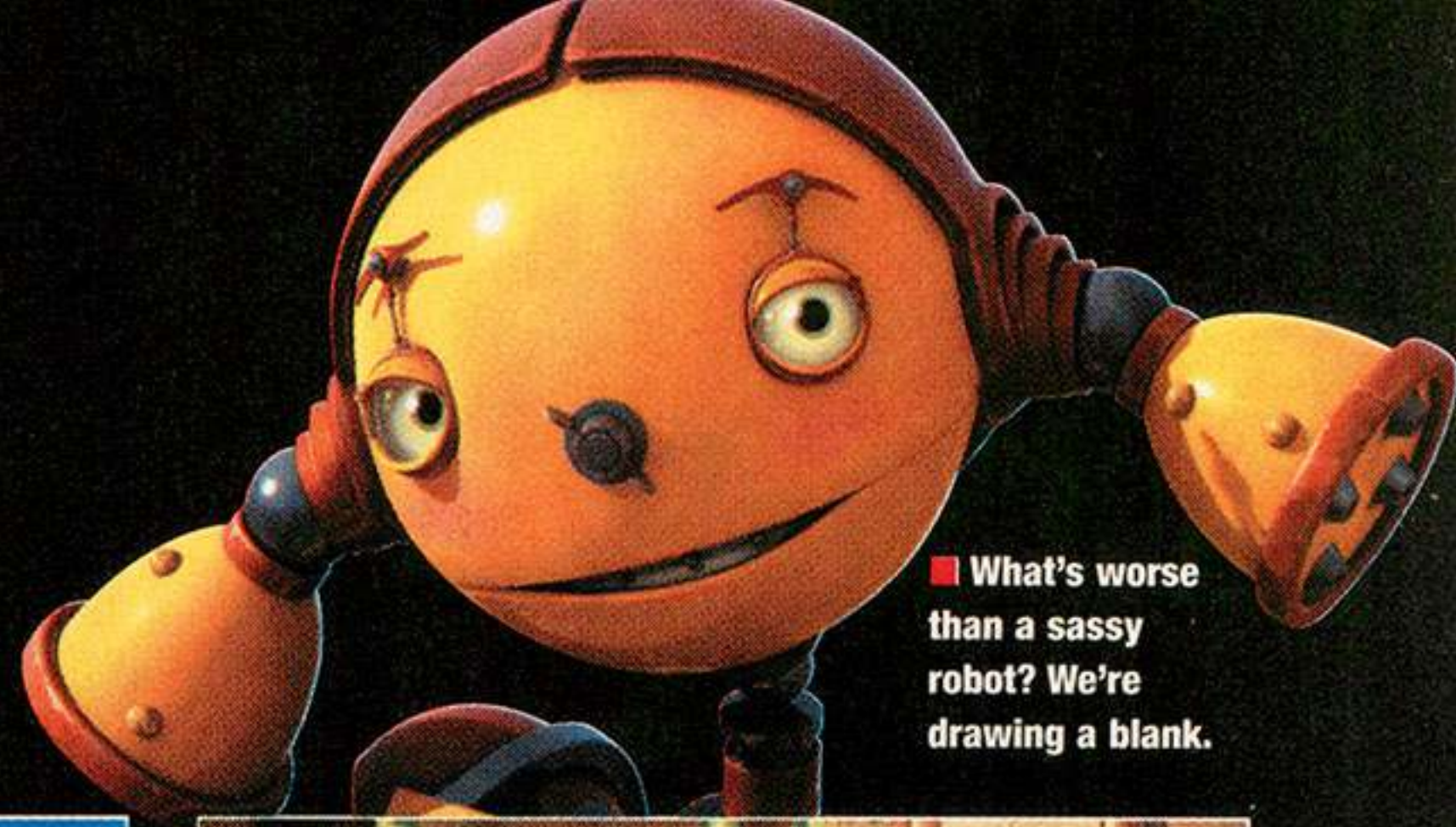
not enough to it. I enjoyed feeling like I was in my own miniaturized *Amazing Race* (complete with angry shouting and confidence-crushing trash talk) as I tried to find the fastest combo of sprinting, ballooning, and sailing to the next goal. It's also tasty faking out opponents by leading them on a wild goose chase or following their lead to the goal (instead of doing the hard work and finding it yourself) then popping a few balloons to whiz past them in the mad dash to the ground. But the limited variety of terrain and transport types mean the race gets boring, fast.

JOHN R: Believe it or not, even with its ultra-simple play mechanics and sickeningly cute visuals, *Pokémon Dash* isn't half bad. Beneath the candy-coated exterior lies a racing game with a surprising amount of depth, held back by the fact that you can retry any course as often as you'd like, thus eliminating any real sense of challenge. The Regular GP is a piece of cake anyway, but Hard and especially Expert will force you to memorize the courses in order to win, which can be a real struggle. The puzzle-esque bonus courses you can unlock by linking up with the GBA *Pokémon* games are a nice touch, and with over 380 variations in all, eager Pokéfreaks will find plenty to keep themselves occupied.

JENNIFER: *Pokémon Dash* is a cute and fun little racing game that has a great multiplayer component, but there's simply

REVIEWS WRAP-UP

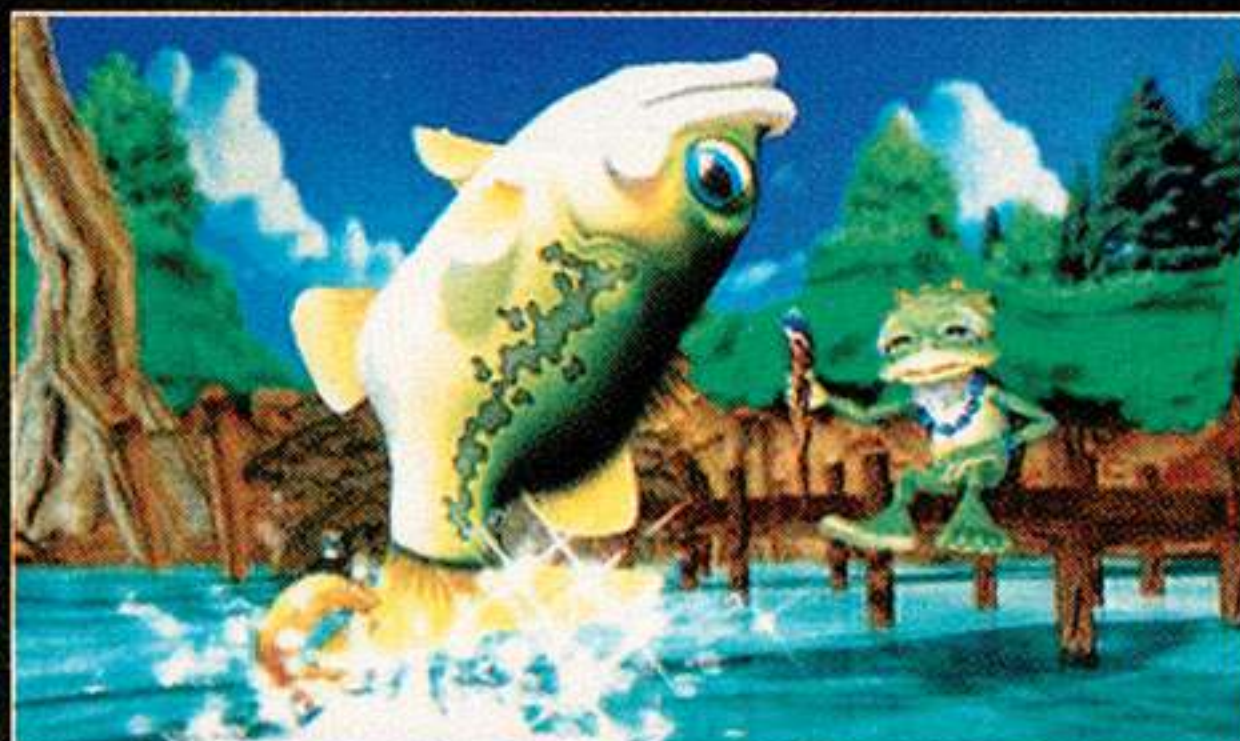
The games that were too little or too late



■ What's worse than a sassy robot? We're drawing a blank.



Constantine • PS2/XB • THQ • ESRB: M — With brainless enemies, near-PS1-quality graphics, and a serious lack of variety, *Constantine* is about as broken as a game can get. When fetch quests and inane puzzles are your only sources of entertainment, that's saying something—something not printable in a family mag.



Finny the Fish & the Seven Waters • PS2 • Natsume • ESRB: E — In this free-roaming underwater adventure, you'll solve simple puzzles and forage for fish food (just watch out for anglers' lures). *Finny* controls well but it's way too short—small fries may swallow it hook, line, and sinker, but grown-ups will find it too shallow.



Robots • PS2/XB/GC • VU Games • ESRB: E — This scrap-heap adventure takes you down countless trails of nuts and bolts in search of a pile of gadget parts. Monotonous collecting strangles most of the life out of this game's cold metal body. Then poor control and a needy camera pull the plug for good.

RACING ON A SHOESTRING

Quick looks for driving-game fans with limited cash flow



Drive to Survive • PS2/XB • Empire • ESRB: T Thanks to this game, we can add "godless train wreck" and "corn bread" to our list of insults. They're what opponents yell at you incessantly as you drive your redneck racer around (arcade classic) *Super Sprint*-inspired tracks. It's a bargain-priced game with quick-thrill playability, but so is paddleball. Save up for something better.



Top Gear: RPM Tuning • PS2/XB • Kemco • ESRB: T Kids bitten by the brand-name bug want licensed rice-rocket, tuning kits, and MTV tunes. Kids whose pop-pas say, "We're strapped for cash, so we ain't writing a check" get generic rides and rims and roachy techno in *Top Gear: RPM Tuning*. It has big cities, like *Midnight Club*, plenty of parts, like *Need for Speed*, but is pretty plain, like the \$19.99 price tag says.



Racing Gears Advance • GBA • Orbital • ESRB: E This one might cost almost as much as those other two games combined (\$30), but it's dough well spent. *Racing Gears* harkens back to classic driving games with its not quite top-down view, but its solid controls, short-cut-filled tracks, copious part upgrades (including weaponry), and replayability make it well worth your modern dollar.



WIN THE GAME OF THE MONTH CONTEST

Hey, old-tyme readers, remember that "Eat My Shorts" *Simpsons* quote contest we used to do? No? Well good, because this isn't it. But it's similar. Our pop-culture scientists have secreted away one movie quote (or more! We might do more—don't think we won't!) somewhere in

this issue. Find it, and you may have already won our Game of the Month. All that's left to do is e-mail the quote, the movie it's from, and the page you found it on to EGM@ziffdavis.com, subject: **Movie Quote: EGM #191**. Include your full name and mailing address (no stinkin' PO

boxes!) in the e-mail. Also, don't send us any swear words because our e-mail filter keeps us blissfully innocent. And that's it! We'll pick three winners at random and send each of them a copy of our GOTM. This issue's prize: *God of War*.



REVIEWS ARCHIVE

Like normal reviews but cuter



■ We played the new *Playboy* for its (huge) articles.

TREND SPOTTING

We all know that great actors have appeared in videogames (no, Jenna Jameson in *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4* doesn't count). The Academy Awards have already been given out this year, but we decided to take a look at the few games with voice acting from past Oscar winners.

| | |
|--|--|
| | Judi Dench <i>GoldenEye: Rogue Agent</i> (PS2/XB/GC) 7.5, 7.5, 7.5 |
| | Christopher Walken <i>True Crime: Streets of L.A.</i> (PS2/XB/GC) 9.5, 5.5, 6.5 |
| | Tom Hanks <i>Toy Story 2</i> (PS) 7.0, 7.5, 7.0, 9.0 |

bargain bin bounty



DEAD OR ALIVE: XTREME BEACH VOLLEYBALL

■ Xbox
■ Released: January 2003
■ Original Scores: 8.0, 6.0, 7.5
Keeping your eye on the ball has never been harder ever since these bikini-clad babes hit the beach. Pathetically, we've discovered that playing Barbies with these characters—mixing and matching outfit selections—is more fun than customizing our rides in those street-racing games. For only \$20, have some fun in the sun.



| GAME | SYSTEM | VERDICT | SCORES (out of 10) | AWARD |
|--|-----------|---|--------------------|--------|
| American McGee Presents Scrapland | XB | ■ The broken-record gameplay forces you to play through repetitive missions | 6.5 5.5 6.5 | |
| Asphalt Urban GT | DS | ■ If you're looking for a great racing game for DS...keep lookin' | 6.5 5.5 6.0 | |
| Backyard Wrestling 2 | PS2/XB | ■ Everything wrong with professional wrestling tied up in a mediocre package | 5.5 5.0 6.5 | |
| Champions: Return to Arms | PS2 | ■ Hack and/or slash to find cooler stuff that lets you hack and/or slash some more | 7.5 7.0 6.0 | |
| Dead or Alive Ultimate | XB | ■ The bouncing boobs of <i>DOAs 1</i> and <i>2</i> look way nicer revamped for Xbox | 7.0 7.5 7.5 | |
| Death by Degrees | PS2 | ■ We're grateful to have Nina on board—too bad decent gameplay didn't come with | 5.0 5.0 6.0 | |
| Devil May Cry 3: Dante's Awakening | PS2 | ■ The new fighting-style system and crazy combos make up for its insane difficulty | 8.0 7.0 9.0 | Silver |
| Donkey Kong: Jungle Beat | GC | ■ Why work when you can bang on the drum all day in this unconventional platformer? | 8.0 7.0 8.0 | |
| Donkey Konga | GC | ■ (Mostly) great songs and a quality bongo controller make for a lively party game | 8.0 7.0 7.5 | |
| Doom 3 | XB | ■ We promise you'll jump when things go bump in the night in this beautiful shooter | 9.0 9.5 9.5 | Gold |
| EA Sports Fight Night Round 2 | PS2/XB/GC | ■ We pity the fool who doesn't climb into the ring with this boxing champ | 8.5 8.0 8.5 | Silver |
| Feel the Magic: XY/XX | DS | ■ A stylish mix of romance and minigames that takes advantage of the DS' abilities | 8.0 9.0 7.0 | Silver |
| FIFA Street | PS2/XB/GC | ■ Soccer has been <i>Street</i> -ified, and it's decent but not great | 6.5 5.5 7.5 | |
| Fullmetal Alchemist | PS2 | ■ Rabid fans of the <i>Alchemist</i> anime show will lap it up; everyone else, not so much | 6.0 5.5 6.0 | |
| The Getaway: Black Monday | PS2 | ■ Potty-mouthed gamers can learn some new words from this so-so cinematic caper | 4.5 7.0 6.5 | |
| Ghost Recon 2 | PS2 | ■ This PS2 team shooter wouldn't pass Game Programming 101 | 2.5 3.0 5.5 | |
| Ghost Recon 2 | XB | ■ Nothing remarkable about the Xbox version either, save its solid online play | 6.0 6.0 7.0 | |
| Gran Turismo 4 | PS2 | ■ Still the best driving sim, but not a lot has changed since <i>A-Spec</i> | 9.0 9.5 9.0 | Gold |
| GunGriffon: Allied Strike | XB | ■ One of the Dreamcast's finest-looking robot shooters. Wait, this is an Xbox game? | 3.5 2.0 5.0 | |
| Kessen III | PS2 | ■ Though cinematic and ambitious, it never manages any serious action or strategy | 7.5 6.0 6.5 | |
| Kingdom Hearts: Chain of Memories | GBA | ■ The cards say you'll experience a bit of action-RPG déjà vu...which isn't so bad | 7.0 7.0 7.5 | |
| <i>The Legend of Zelda: The Minish Cap</i> | GBA | ■ Shrinky Link reinvents himself in this surprisingly deep pocket-sized adventure | 9.0 9.5 8.5 | Gold |
| Mario Party 6 | GC | ■ Still fun, but the rehashed board-game antics linger like an uninvited guest | 6.0 6.5 8.0 | |
| MechAssault 2: Lone Wolf | XB | ■ Online robot battles crush <i>Lone Wolf's</i> single-player game under 40 tons of steel | 8.0 8.0 8.0 | Silver |
| Mercenaries | PS2/XB | ■ Go anywhere, steal any vehicle, and blow up any building in this awesome actioner | 8.5 8.5 9.0 | Silver |
| MLB 2K5 | PS2/XB | ■ Hits one outta the park thanks to its innovative pitching system and spiffy visuals | 8.0 8.0 8.0 | Silver |
| Mr. Driller: Drill Spirits | DS | ■ Simple, addictive puzzle action that truly shines in its wireless multiplayer mode | 7.5 7.5 7.0 | |
| Musashi Samurai Legend | PS2 | ■ This swordsman swings a mean blade, but repetitive levels hamper the fun | 6.5 5.0 6.0 | |
| MVP Baseball 2005 | PS2/XB/GC | ■ This hardball sim's swan song is the best version yet thanks to its slick minigames | 8.5 8.5 9.0 | Silver |
| MX vs. ATV Unleashed | PS2/XB | ■ A worthy game that appeals to more than gearheads with its countless unlockables | 8.0 7.0 6.5 | |
| Nanobreaker | PS2 | ■ Go on a one-man blood drive in this wildly gory hack-n-slash adventure | 7.5 6.5 4.0 | |
| NBA Street V3 | PS2/XB/GC | ■ Only His Airness soars higher than this arcade-rich roundballer | 9.0 8.5 9.0 | Silver |
| NFL Street 2 | PS2/XB/GC | ■ Backyard football for the big boys...and it's good | 8.0 8.0 9.5 | Silver |
| Oddworld Stranger's Wrath | XB | ■ Action, platforming, and first-person shooting meld in this refreshing, odd game | 8.5 8.5 8.5 | Silver |
| Pathway to Glory | NG | ■ While calling it the best game on N-Gage isn't saying much, it's still pretty good | 7.5 7.5 7.0 | |
| Phantom Dust | XB | ■ Amass more psychic powers than Miss Cleo in this slick arena-combat game | 8.5 7.5 8.0 | Silver |
| Ping Pals | DS | ■ Be a pal and tell others to not waste an Andrew Jackson on this poor text messenger | 1.5 0.0 0.0 | |
| Playboy: The Mansion | PS2/XB | ■ It's a third-rate <i>Sims</i> clone, but with giant, cartoon boobies | 5.0 4.5 4.5 | |
| Pocket Kingdom: Own the World | NG | ■ The N-Gage's first online RPG, not that you can tell while playing | 5.0 4.0 7.5 | |
| Project: Snowblind | PS2/XB | ■ The NRA has its poster game in this weapons-crammed futuristic blaster | 8.0 8.5 7.5 | Silver |
| The Punisher | PS2/XB | ■ <i>Punisher</i> fans should play this ultraviolent shooter; others can pass | 6.5 8.0 6.0 | |
| <i>Resident Evil 4</i> | GC | ■ Witness the near-perfect rebirth of Capcom's venerable survival-horror franchise | 10 9.5 10 | Gold |
| Ridge Racer DS | DS | ■ Six-player wireless LAN races (on one cart): good; bad graphics and bad control: bad | 6.5 6.5 2.5 | |
| Sega Classics Collection | PS2 | ■ Awesome Sega coin-ops are "updated" into monstrosities while Sega fans weep | 4.5 6.0 4.5 | |
| Shadow of Rome | PS2 | ■ Blood spills, skulls split, and meat falls off the bone in this fun gladiator adventure | 6.5 7.0 8.0 | |
| Shining Tears | PS2 | ■ Dumb-as-dirt A.I. muddles this otherwise likable action-RPG | 6.5 6.5 5.5 | |
| Spider-Man 2 | DS | ■ If your spider sense is on the fritz, let us warn you to avoid this ho-hum adventure | 6.0 5.5 3.0 | |
| <i>Splinter Cell Chaos Theory</i> | XB | ■ Back with cool co-op features and graphics more shocking than Kim Jong-il's hair | 9.5 10 9.0 | Gold |
| Sprung | DS | ■ Hook up with young hotties at a ski resort. Slightly more fun than chlamydia | 4.0 5.0 1.0 | |
| Star Fox: Assault | GC | ■ "Dogs of war" takes on new meaning in this Nintendo comeback shooter series | 8.0 8.0 6.0 | |
| Star Wars Knights of the Old Republic II | XB | ■ Not as good as the first game, but still, a <i>Star Wars</i> game that doesn't suck! | 8.5 7.0 9.0 | Silver |
| Street Fighter Anniversary Collection | XB | ■ <i>Street Fighter II + Street Fighter III = Street Fighter Awesome</i> . But where's <i>Alpha</i> ? | 8.0 8.5 9.0 | Silver |
| Suikoden IV | PS2 | ■ Uneventful yet functional RPG set adrift on the choppy seas | 6.5 6.0 5.5 | |
| Super Mario 64 DS | DS | ■ It's-a remake of one of the best platformers ever! Only it's-a much harder to control | 8.0 8.0 9.0 | Silver |
| Tenchu: Fatal Shadows | PS2 | ■ Slick-looking stealth kills can't make up for a catastrophic camera | 4.5 6.0 4.5 | |
| TimeSplitters: Future Perfect | PS2/XB/GC | ■ The ultimate twitch FPS with a killer sense of humor finally takes the online leap | 7.5 7.5 9.5 | Silver |
| Tork: Prehistoric Punk | XB | ■ The platforming clichés in this punkosaurus have been around since the Stone Age | 7.0 6.0 5.5 | |
| The Urbz: Sims in the City | PS2/XB/GC | ■ <i>The Sims'</i> suburban theme gets kicked uptown and outside but loses something | 7.5 5.0 7.0 | |
| The Urbz: Sims in the City | DS | ■ Now with fewer bodily functions and more button-mashing minigames | 8.5 7.5 9.5 | Silver |
| Viewtiful Joe 2 | PS2/GC | ■ More of what you (hopefully) know and (should) love from <i>Joe's</i> first outing | 8.0 8.0 8.5 | Silver |
| WarioWare: Touched! | DS | ■ Its wacky minigames keep you—and those watching you play—entertained | 9.0 8.5 9.0 | Silver |
| WarioWare: Twisted! | GBA | ■ Spin your GBA like a nutcase in this collection of new three-second microgames | 9.0 9.0 9.0 | Gold |
| World Soccer Winning Eleven 8 | PS2/XB | ■ Sorry, John Madden, but this is the new poster boy for sports-gaming realism | 9.5 8.5 8.5 | Silver |
| Xenosaga Episode II | PS2 | ■ Not <i>Xenosaga Episode II</i> , but more like <i>Xenosaga Episode I: The Deleted Scenes</i> | 7.5 6.5 7.0 | |
| Yoshi Touch & Go | DS | ■ Draw clouds with the stylus and control Mario's green steed's environment | 7.5 7.5 8.5 | |
| Ys VI: The Ark of Napishtim | PS2 | ■ A solid, challenging action-RPG the way they used to make 'em | 7.5 6.5 8.0 | |

*Games in red denote previous Game of the Month winners.



**“THE CONCEPT OF
BLOGGING HAD NEVER
INTERESTED ME. BUT
SINCE DISCOVERING
1UP, BLOGS HAVE
BECOME PART OF MY
DAILY RITUAL.
I LOVE WRITING THEM,
READING THEM AND
PLANNING THEM WELL
IN ADVANCE BEFORE
THEY GO ONLINE...”**

[ALBERT]

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SEANBABY'S REST OF THE CRAP



This stuff'll kill ya

Sometimes when I'm alone, I imagine what it would be like if Jean-Claude Van Damme asked me how I manage to apply such intellectual criticism to the world of terrible videogames. I imagine I'd tell him, "Sometimes I feel guilty, JCVD, when I hold thrown-together licensed crap like *Monster Garage* up to the same standards as normal games."

"Normal games like my hit, *Universal Soldier*, on the Super NES?" he'd ask while lifting 15,000 pounds with one leg.

"Ha ha ha ha ha!" I'd reply, not really under-

standing what he said through his accent, but positive that I love him for it. I'd make it clear, though, that until we establish a minor or "special" league for videogames that were made by, for example, a *That's So Raven* marketing team, it's my job to judge these games as if they were made by people who were really trying. If that makes me insensitive to the shortcomings of apathetic stupids, I can live with that. Can you?

—Seanbaby

■ *Monster Garage* host Jesse James' left forearm: where Led Zeppelin albums come from.



■ Toxic Porta-Potties, eh? Can you guess Carmen's location?*

Carmen Sandiego: The Secret of the Stolen Drums • PS2/XB/GC

When I was a kid, a *Carmen Sandiego* game involved clues based on geography. For example, a robbery witness might not know anything except that the thief owns a prize-winning dairy cow. And since there wasn't a "How the hell do you know about their cow?" button, you'd take it as pertinent testimony and follow up on the lead by staking out Wisconsin. It was a stupider time, but because of it, I can name up to one state with dairy cows to this very day.

This new *Carmen Sandiego* game has you sneaking around security cameras and skirting along narrow ledges. That's just as dull as the original but without any educational value. The only thing I learned from this game is that the fronts of robots are immune to stick attacks. And knowing this, someone still programmed them to stand in a corner and stare at the wall. Say what you want about how lame educational games are, but I got more satisfaction in discovering that I know cows live in Wisconsin than I got from outwitting a retarded robot with my tiptoeing.

Brain teaser: If you're on the tail of a suspect who enjoys importing rubber, lumber, and Malayan art, where should you look? We'll give you the answer next month! Here's a sneak preview: "Last month's brain-teaser answer was 'Singapore.'"

*Answer: Delaware



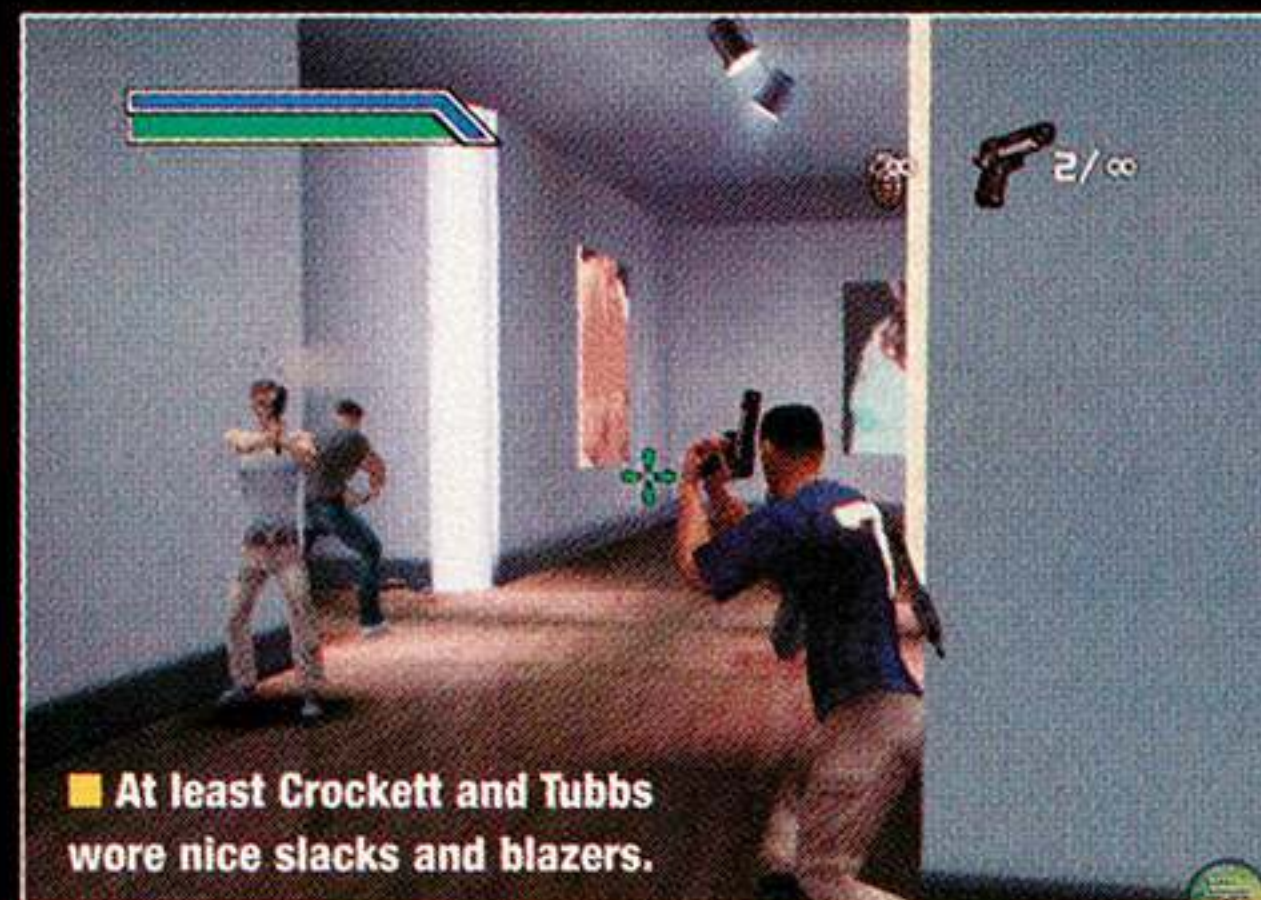
Destroy everything!

Monster Garage: The Game • XB

On *The A-Team*, it was common for the heroes to get trapped inside a warehouse while the bad guys outside shout, "You sit in there with that old Jeep, welding gear, and broken-down watermelon launcher until you're ready to talk!" So I thought *Monster Garage*, a game based on turning cars into weapon platforms, would be playable as long as I could imagine an entire *A-Team* scenario around it. It would start with the Harlem Globetrotters hiring me to retrieve an Egyptian amulet from the collar of an elusive house cat.

But even that magical scenario couldn't save *Monster Garage*. I don't even think they can legally call this "interactive." You don't make any actual decisions during the building of your supercar; you remove the doors and the suspension in exactly the order it allows. That's the strategy part. The game part comes when you choose to install stuff manually. Then it cuts to a floating power driver that you navigate through inches of *nothing* and hold *one* button to unscrew *two* screws. It's so disrespectful to your entertainment standards that you'll think *Monster Garage* is calling you out. That's how tough the game is!

Monster Spreadsheet: The Game: Following a step-by-step auto-repair manual isn't fun. You could make a case, however, that *Monster Garage: The Game* is the most badass reading comprehension quiz ever.



■ At least Crockett and Tubbs wore nice slacks and blazers.

Bad Boys: Miami Takedown • PS2/XB/GC

Fans of the *Bad Boys* films have waited more than a year for this action masterpiece, so I'll cut right to the review—presented in nuggety form for your pleasure.

Gameplay: What separates this from other third-person shooters, besides how bad it is, is the Bad Boy Meter. It keeps track of how naughty you are by getting badder and badder for every surrendering criminal you execute. It's also made badder when you destroy innocent objects such as pinball machines and abandoned cantaloupes. And in case you're wondering, blasting a surrendering criminal in the face and shooting nearby fruit are both given about the same amount of naughtiness.

Police Chief says: "You're a loose cannon, Lowrey! Shoot one more cantaloupe and I'll have your badge!"

Grand theft visuals: I can't prove it yet, but I'm almost positive these graphics were stolen straight from *Crappy PlayStation 1 Action Game: The Game*.

Oh so bad! According to the back of the box, "Mike Lowrey and Marcus Burnett of TNT are back and OH SO BAD." Boy oh boy, they sure are! It's nice to see that deliciously flamboyant elderly people can still get work as videogame copywriters.

Photograph by AP/WideWorld Photos

Let the games begin.



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Videogame lessons for aspiring evil overlords

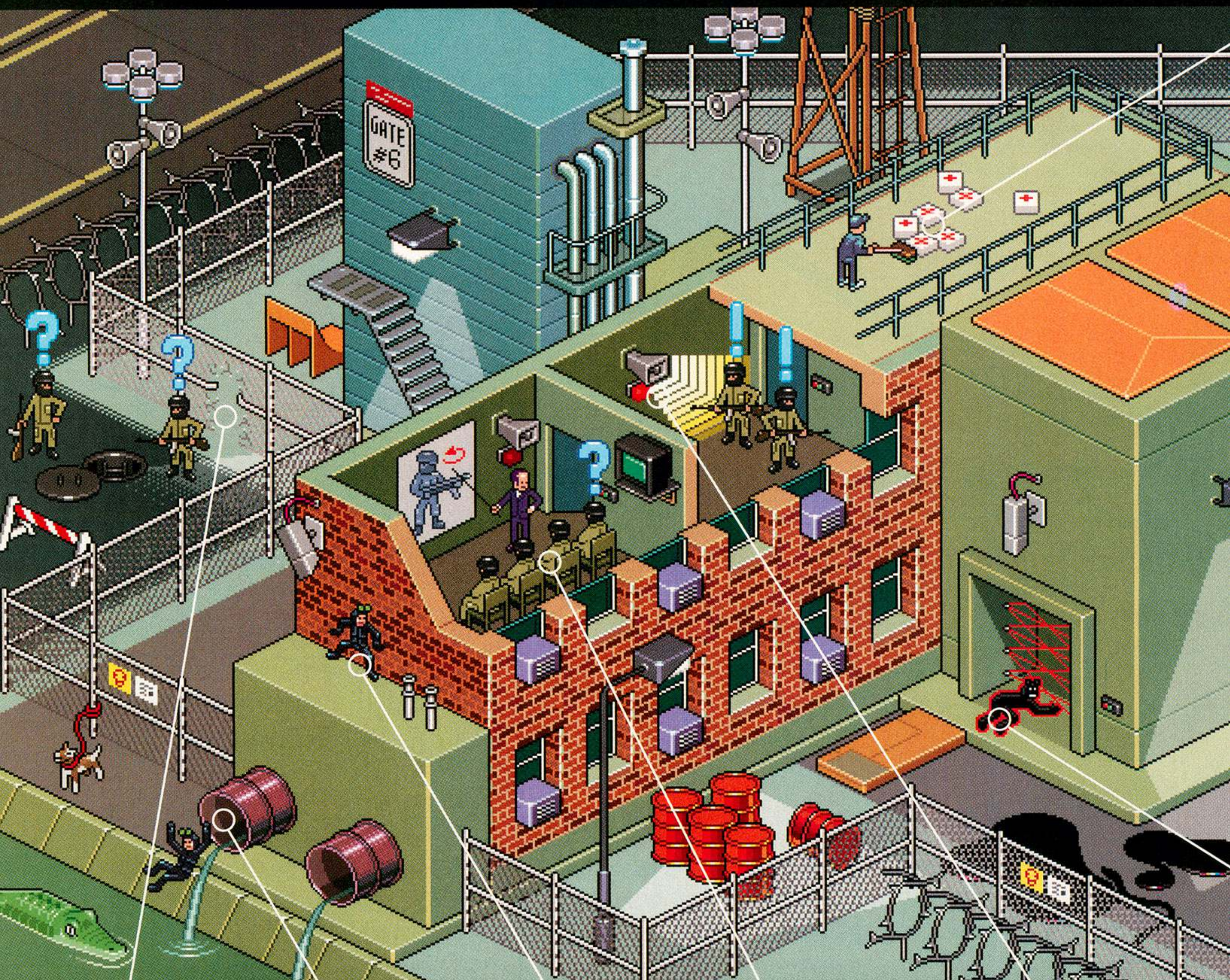
Whoever said videogames aren't educational never tried to rule the world from a secluded fortress guarded by faceless goons,

laser trip wires, and possibly a mechanical bipedal walking tank in the garage. Anyone who's trespassed on bad-guy property in a *Splinter Cell* or *Metal Gear*

Solid game knows that these high-tech hideaways have some serious security flaws. But since real-world evil overlords are too prone to dramatic arias of

pretentious exposition to explain such things, it's up to us to list gaming's golden rules for spoofing spies.

—David S. J. Hodgson



Be observant

Start becoming paranoid about open manholes outside your base or man-size holes cut in your chain-link fencing.

Detour your ducts

Spies think it's cute to crawl around in air ducts and sewage pipes. So when constructing your base, make sure all air-conditioning units are window-mounted. Any internal ducts should lead directly into a pit full of whatever vicious indigenous beast you can capture and forget to feed.

Don't be camera shy

Another place spies love to hide: directly beneath security cameras. So spend a little more cash for the deluxe models that scan below as well as side to side.

Fund employee education

You'll be lucky if your average black-market henchman is smart enough to tie his combat boots. So implement seminars that focus on such basics as turning 180 degrees at random intervals, learning to shoot a gun, and investigating cardboard boxes that move on their own.

Throw a good light show

Unless your base is hidden in Daytona Beach, flashing lights and whining Klaxons indicate an intruder, not the beginning of a rave. Be sure your henchmen realize this and investigate (in groups)—and continue to remember the incursion afterward.

Tidy up once in a while

Leaving medical supplies lying around will only encourage injured spies to heal up and keep on do-gooding. Employ janitors to sweep corridors for these items. Better yet, replace the health packs with rat poison or extra-strength laxatives.

Take the sense out of fashion

Be sure to confiscate those high-security key cards from guards wearing the slightly different uniforms. Otherwise they're a prime target for spies looking to access your most sensitive areas. While you're at it, color-code locked doors with a green light and unlocked doors with a red light to thoroughly bewilder your foes.

Wake 'em up

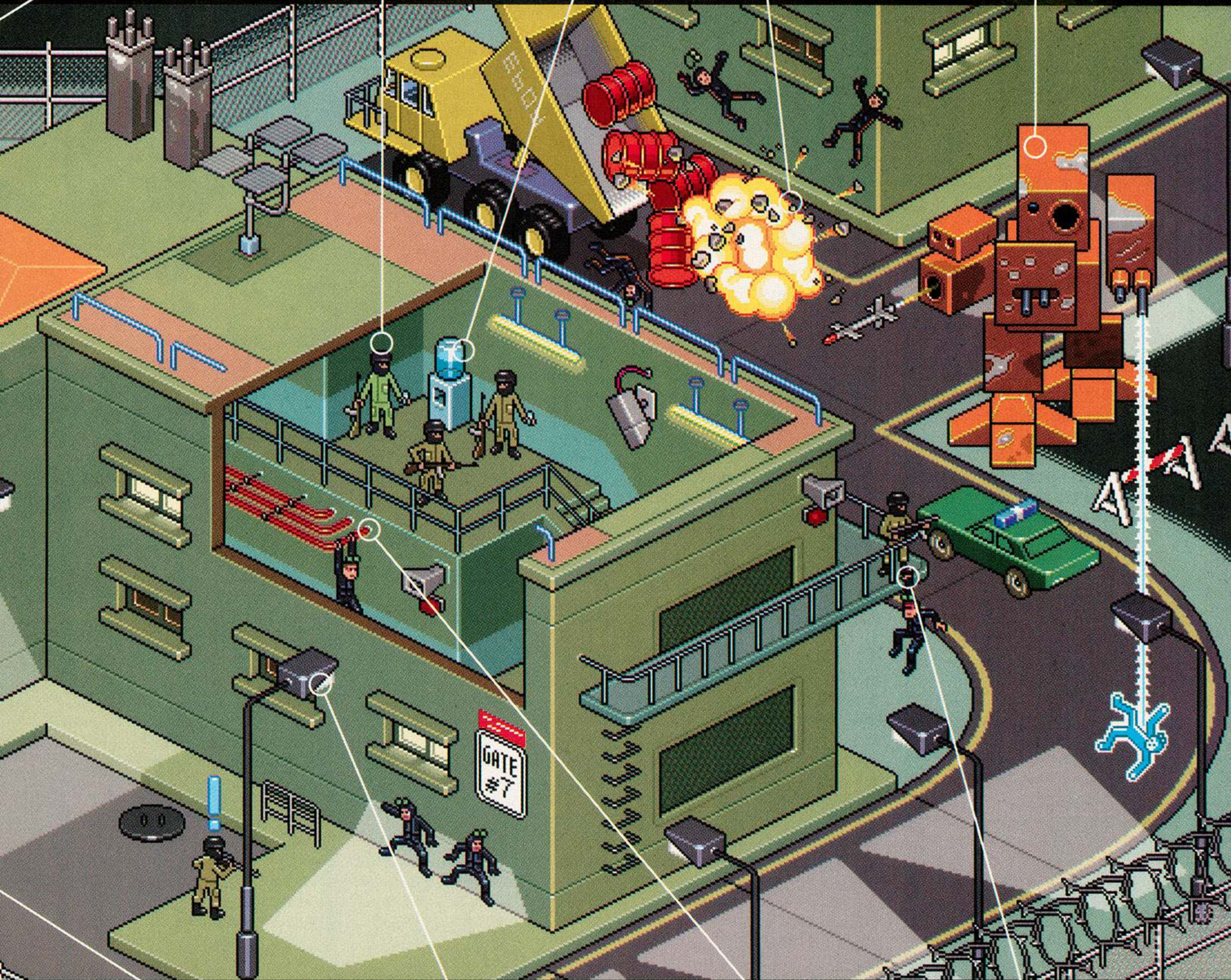
Henchmanning takes it out of your goons. Drop NoDoz in their water coolers, or try more potent, less legal stimulants. Don't feel guilty—they're bad guys, too.

Roll out the barrels

Not only are barrels of explosive materials unsightly—they're dangerous! Torture the provisions manager responsible for leaving them lying around, and order all barrels to be rolled directly away from your base, ideally on fire, and at the incoming heroes.

Protect your investment

Before piloting your giant walking tank in a final battle with a would-be hero, be sure to weld reinforced plating over all weak spots. At the very least, make sure these weak spots don't flash orange. And remember: Your machine can walk for a reason. Maneuver it around whatever cover your hero is hiding behind, then shoot him until he falls over. There is little need to stop doing this.

**Fill in the gaps**

Laser-wire walls are the security method of choice for the discerning despot, but they're usually installed with all manner of horrific defects, such as man-sized gaps between the laser beams. Don't skimp on the lasers; create a wall even the skinny Olsen twin couldn't squeeze through.

Light up your life

A recent poll of superspies showed that these guys rate their night-vision goggles up there with tranquilizer guns and season one of 24 on DVD, so have your electrician install powerful lights in all dark, shadowy areas. Flip the switch and watch the spies scatter like cockroaches. Oh, be sure to use bulletproof lightbulbs, too.

Screw building codes

Good-guy governments spend millions training their spies, pumping them full of steroids, and funding expensive gym memberships. These ripped-ab agents have tremendous upper-body strength. Your lesson here: Don't insulate overhanging pipes. They should be scalding hot.

Take a feet-on-hands approach

Guards patrolling along catwalks should watch for the fingertips of hanging spies...and step on them. But if all fails and your foe does breach your inner sanctum, keep your diatribes down to a snappy two-minute rant and simply shoot your foe with the biggest gun you've got.



FINAL WORD

Gaming south of the border



■ See more of these guys at carqui.1UP.com and miyazawa.1UP.com.

Since "GOALLLLLL!!" and "Beef Meximelt" are the only foreign terms we know, we asked *EGM Mexico* Editor-in-Chief Adrián "Carqui" Carbajal (above left) and *EGM Brazil* Executive Editor Pablo Miyazawa (above right) to expand our horizons in this month's Final Word.

Which country has a better selection of games? Mexico or Brazil?

Carqui: We are neighbors of the United States, which gives us a geographical advantage—the games arrive here faster. Besides that, we have official distribution from Microsoft, Nintendo, and Sony.

Pablo: Unfortunately for us, we can't really count on the gaming giants' support. Of the three biggest companies, only Nintendo is officially here. The rental stores and bargain bins are the place to be if you are a Brazilian gamer. The

importers do a very good job, too, since they can get almost every product about one week after its U.S. release.

What were your best of 2004?

Pablo: Well, I must say our choices were pretty different from the U.S. *EGM*'s. Our

"Mexican gamers are more excited about next-gen consoles than anything else."

crew chose *Metal Gear Solid 3* as the best game of the year. *Halo 2* won the Xbox award, and *MGS3*, again, grabbed the PS2 award. *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* was the runner-up on this one. *Mario 64 DS* was the winner in the handheld category. There were only two categories on which we agreed with the U.S. *EGM*: the GameCube (*Metroid Prime 2*) and the multiplatform (*Burnout 3*) games of the year.

Carqui: We chose the same games as 1UP.com—you know, *Halo 2*, *MGS3*, *Ninja*

Gaiden, *Burnout 3*, *GTA: San Andreas*, and *Metroid Prime 2*. It was a great year.

What are you looking forward to in 2005?

Carqui: It's all about hardware. Mexican gamers are more excited about the next-gen consoles than anything else. The PSP and second-gen games for DS also are getting buzz.

Pablo: Brazilian gamers are all about the next generation, too. I just can't wait for this May's E3 [Electronic Entertainment Expo, the gaming industry's annual trade show]—I am pretty sure it's going to be the best show since 2001.

Carqui: This E3 will be the greatest....

What games do your countries generally like that U.S. gamers don't seem to care for, and vice versa?

Pablo: I've noticed that you don't care about soccer games as much as we do. The *Winning Eleven* games are huge hits in Brazil. Everyone plays them, there are several competitions all over the country,



■ *EGM Mexico* and *Brazil*: big fans of soccer.

in Brazil—but people are just getting used to going online with their PS2 and Xbox. Since the gaming giants are not based in our country, the online support doesn't really exist. But that doesn't mean we can't play—broadband connections are everywhere, and the Brazilian online community is very much alive and kicking.

What are you playing right now?

Pablo: *Lumines* for PSP has totally blown me away. I am so addicted; I see thousands of blocks falling down when I shut my eyes for sleep. *WarioWare Touched!* is awesome, too. And there is *San Andreas*, of course. There is still a lot to do, see, and play, so I'll keep on playing it until Rockstar delivers me another *GTA*. I just can't get enough of it.

Carqui: We're all about the PSP right now. Not all games are our favorites, but our team is hooked on *Ridge Racer*, *Metal Gear Ac'd*, *Vampire Chronicle*, *Lumines*.... My current PSP unfavorite is *Winning Eleven 8* because I owe money to Pablo from a bet, but I want a rematch.

Pablo: Just say when and I'll be ready!

Pablo: My crew plays *WE* every day. That's why we always fail to meet our deadlines.

How big is online gaming down there?

Carqui: It's growing but it isn't big—our economy does not allow many people to have broadband.

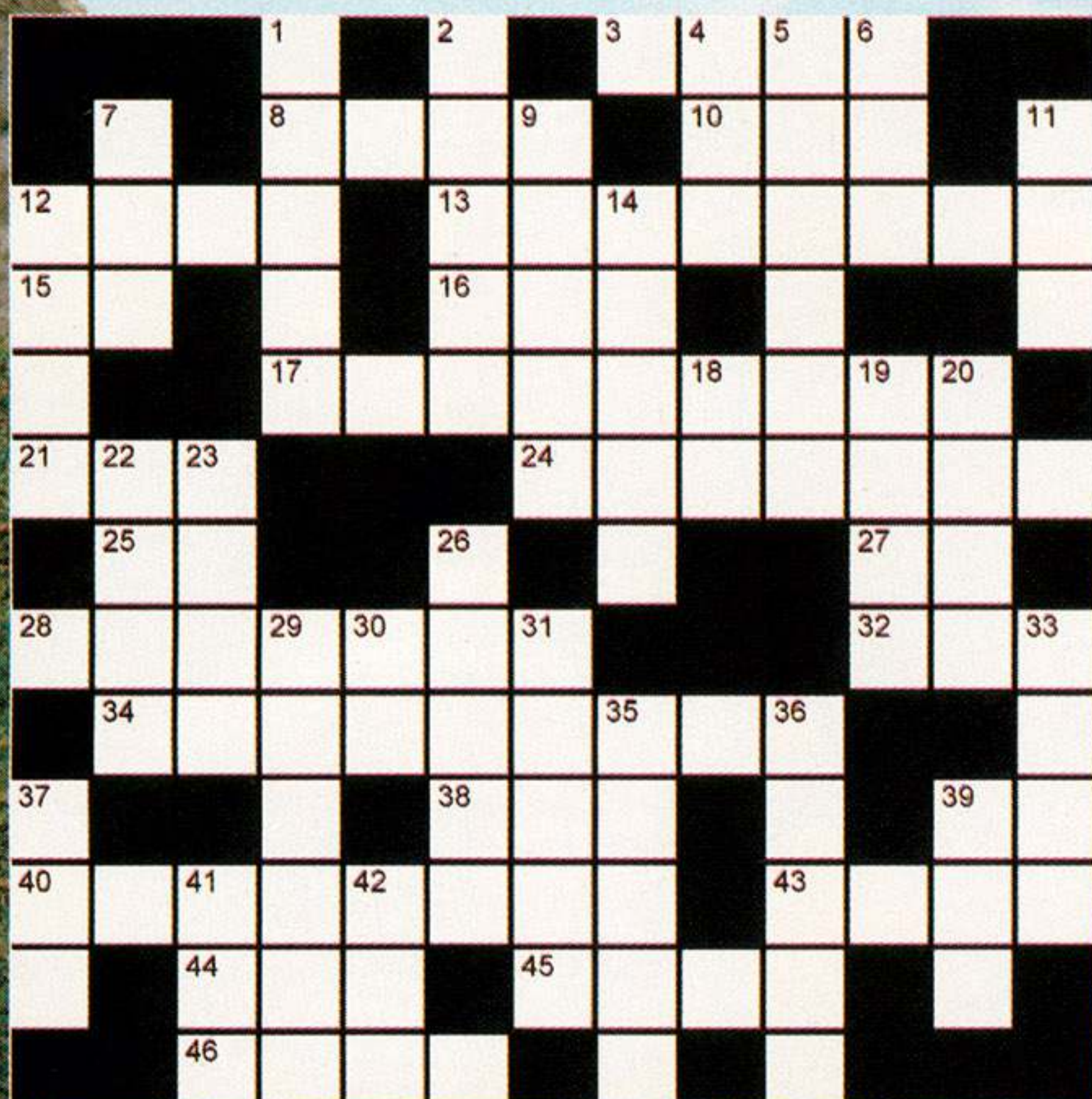
Pablo: We feel the same here. Online gaming is very strong on the PC side—massively multiplayer RPGs are getting big



■ *Metal Gear Solid 3*: *EGM Brazil*'s 2004 game of the year.

PHANTASY STARS

(Solution on page 148)



ACROSS

3. Use a spell in *Phantasy Star Online*
8. Talk like *Darkstalkers'* Felicia?
10. Runs the "E1" train seen in *Project Gotham II's* Chicago
12. N64 *Zelda* tagalong
13. Like Sigma in *Mega Man X* games
15. Final PS1 *Final Fantasy*
16. Yours should be at least 18 to play *Manhunt*
17. Alternate, as in "fire"
21. Like the drivetrain in a *GT4 WRX*
24. *Halo 2* multiplayer map
25. Animated film flop nearly turned PS1 game *Titan*
27. The two triggers on an Xbox pad
28. Bad guys, usually
32. Ecco's right hand
34. Original *Phantasy Star Online* platform
38. 46 ACROSS is a form of it
39. Doc Ock's (*Spider-Man 2*) initials
40. Like a machine in N64 *Indiana Jones*
43. Hardheaded TurboGrafx-16 mascot
44. GameCube graphics chip brand
45. Like Xbox *Pinball*
46. *Jet Grind Radio* sprayings

DOWN

1. Stars of Xbox's *Spy vs. Spy*
2. *Mortal Kombat 3* ninja
4. Smokin' *Mario Tennis* serve
5. Wins in a row
6. Like PS1's *Fu*
7. Sega CD *Eternal Champion*, for one
9. *PSO* planet
11. Like PS2 *Odyssey* or *Gunner*
12. Williams of *Death by Degrees*
14. *Marvel vs. Capcom* Spidey foe
18. 34 ACROSS, for short
19. *Phantasy Star II* fighter
20. *King of Fighters* lass
22. *Harry Potter* tool
23. Wal-Mart bargain bin PS2 hit
_ Hunter
26. PS2's "Defender of
Grayskull"
29. *Phantasy Star* currency
30. NCAA Hawkeyes' state
31. *Robots'* in-game
currency
33. Tom of *Animal Crossing*
35. *Shin Megami Tensei*
publisher
36. *Tomb Raider 2* locale
37. Like *Tomba 2's* evil swine
39. *Taiko: Drum Master* tough mode
41. Like *Silent Hill 2's* Eddie?
42. 18 *Wheeler* truck synonym

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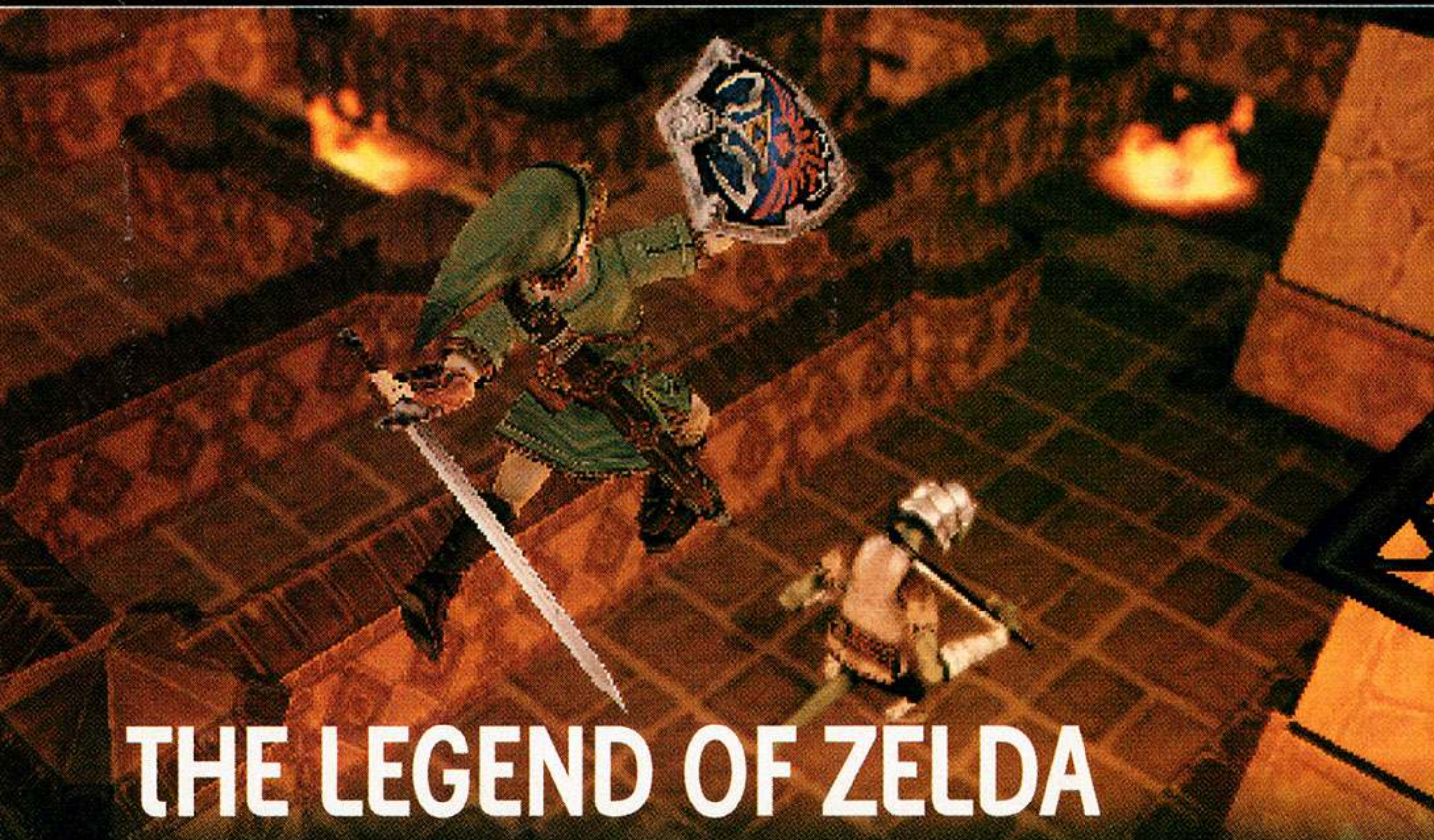
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NEXT MONTH: JUNE • ISSUE #192



THE LEGEND OF ZELDA

By the looks of it, Link's gotten all mature on us. Besides having hair in funny places and thinking about girls, our beloved elf is coming back with a whole new look. The franchise decided to leave the kiddie cartoon stuff to Saturday mornings and went with a more badass style. We've got the inside dope on **one of the most anticipated games of the year** for the GameCube. We all know you can't get enough of that maiden-rescuing, Triforce-gathering, heart-collecting

fun, so we're going to spill the beans on *The Legend of Zelda*.

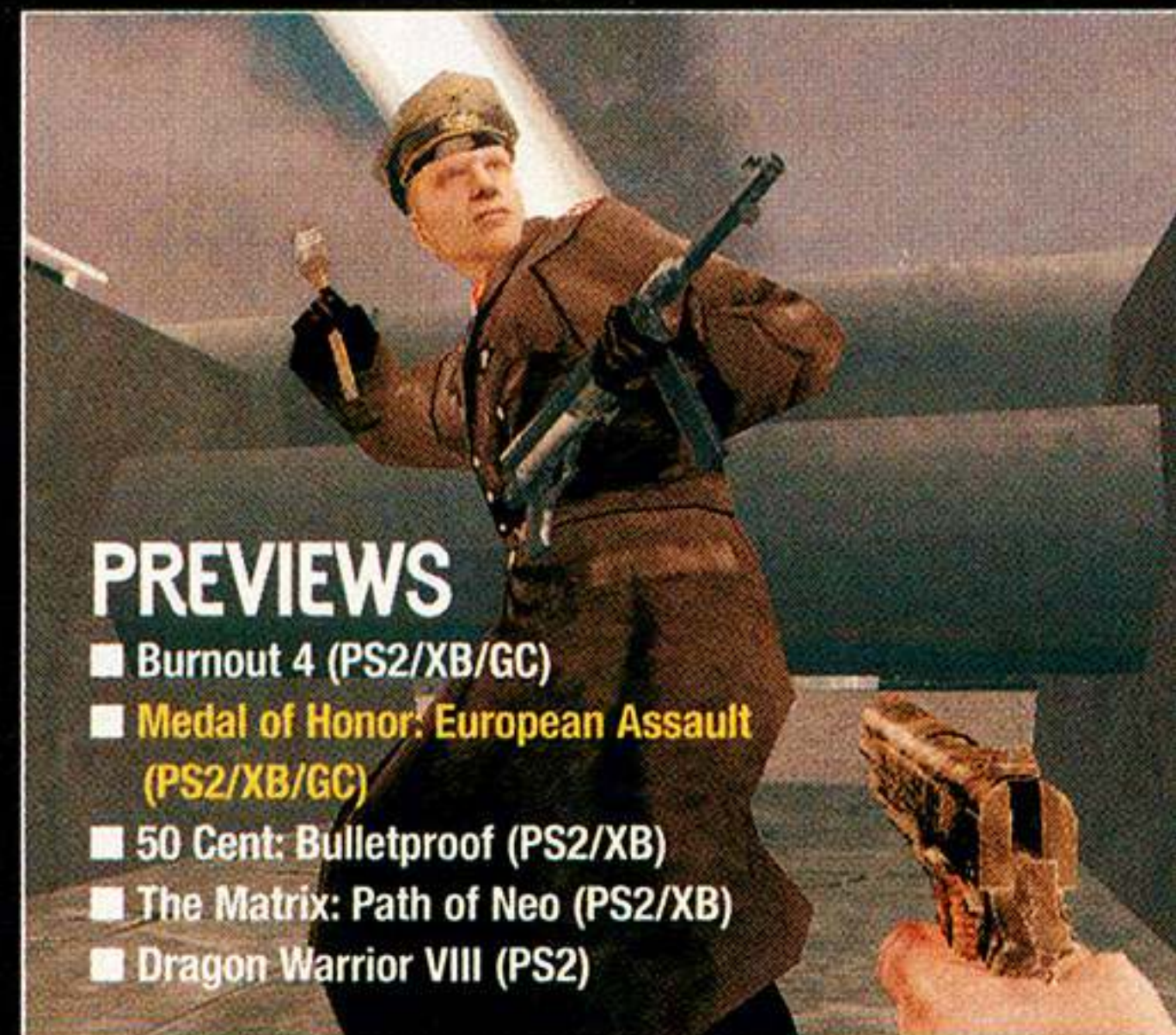
We've got one more thing up our sleeve that will get you up out of your seat and cheering for joy. Oh, it's just a little thing we like to call **the PlayStation 3**. We'll report back to you from the PlayStation 3 debut event in Japan. Finally, the unveiling of the PS3!

Then we're going to continue our travels and fly on over to Loserville to **meet some online cheaters**. We'll

get a hold of some punks and try to understand why they do it—then tell you what's being done to put a stop to all that cheating lameness.

It's getting close to that time of the year again.... We're talking about the **Electronic Entertainment Expo**: the annual gathering place for media and pseudocelbs to drool over games they've never heard of before. For the next issue, we're going to start covering what will be at E3, so be sure to grab a copy!

ON SALE MAY 3



PREVIEWS

- Burnout 4 (PS2/XB/GC)
- Medal of Honor: European Assault (PS2/XB/GC)
- 50 Cent: Bulletproof (PS2/XB)
- The Matrix: Path of Neo (PS2/XB)
- Dragon Warrior VIII (PS2)



REVIEWS

- Jade Empire (XB)
- Fire Emblem: The Sacred Stones (GC)
- Rainbow Six: Lockdown (PS2/XB/GC)
- Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition (PS2/XB)
- Pariah (XB)

(All planned editorial content is subject to change.)

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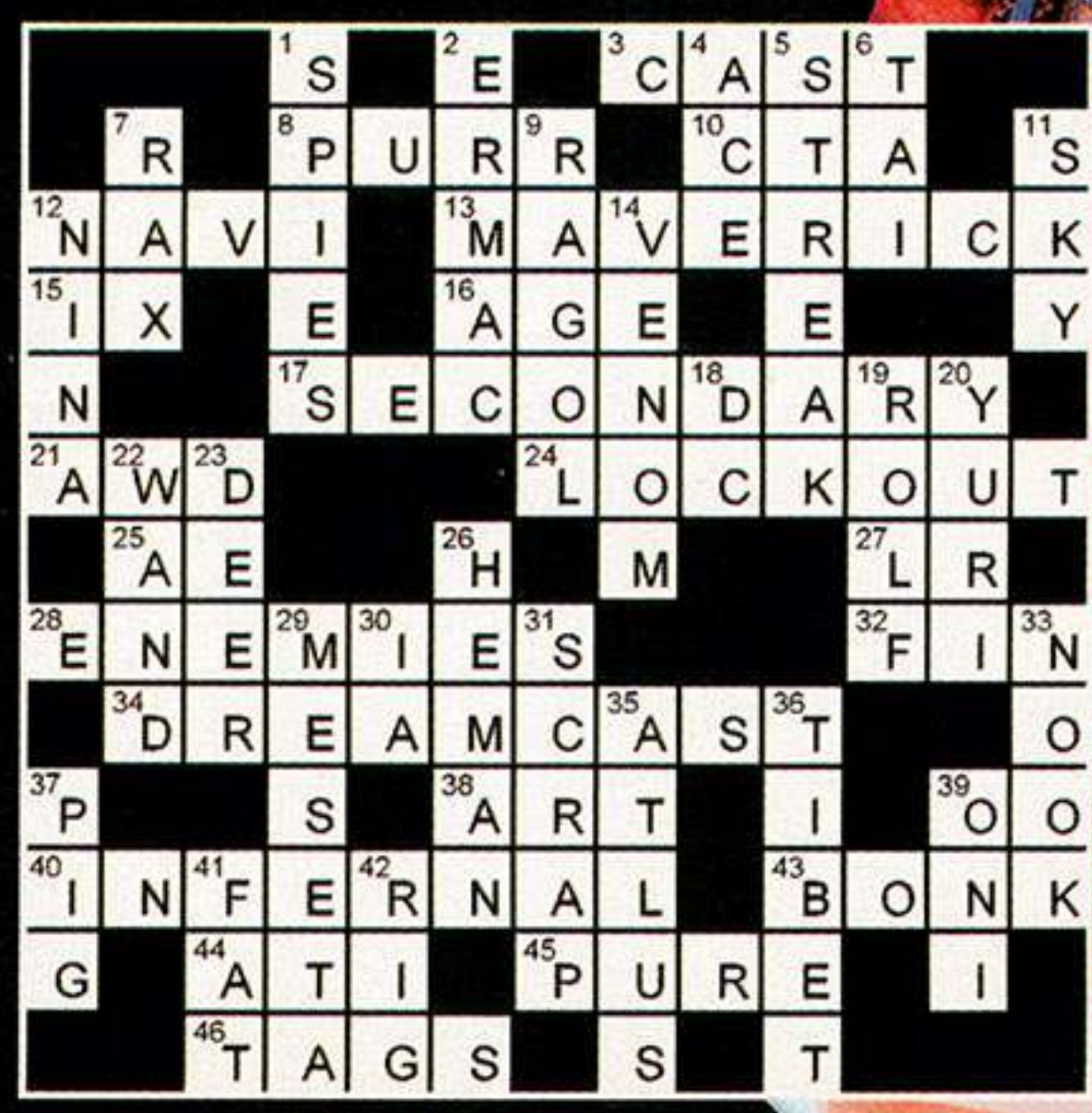
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SEE HOW LONG YOU CAN RUN AT TOP SPEED CARRYING A 60 POUND MACHINE GUN BEFORE YOU COLLAPSE AND VOMIT ON YOUR SHOES!

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DO U HAVE BOSOMS?!

SIR-- THERE'S A PROBLEM WITH SURVIVAL-HORRORLAND! ONE OF THE ANIMATRONIC, ALL-DEVOURING SOUL WORMS HAS SNAPPED ITS TETHER AND IS BURROWING UNDER THE PARK!

WHAT? WHICH WAY IS IT HEADED?

ROAR!

DRAT, RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF EDUCATIONAL SOFTWARE LAND! THERE WILL BE IRATE PARENTS TONIGHT!

CONCEIVABLY, THIS COULD BE SEEN AS VERY EDUCATIONAL.

WELL, IF THEY'RE SCARRED FOR LIFE ANYWAY, WE MIGHT AS WELL GIVE 'EM A DECENT SHOW.

CATCH YOU IN 30 DAYS, VIDEOGAMERS!

NO! THE GIFT SHOP!

OH, THE COMMERCE AND HUMANITY!

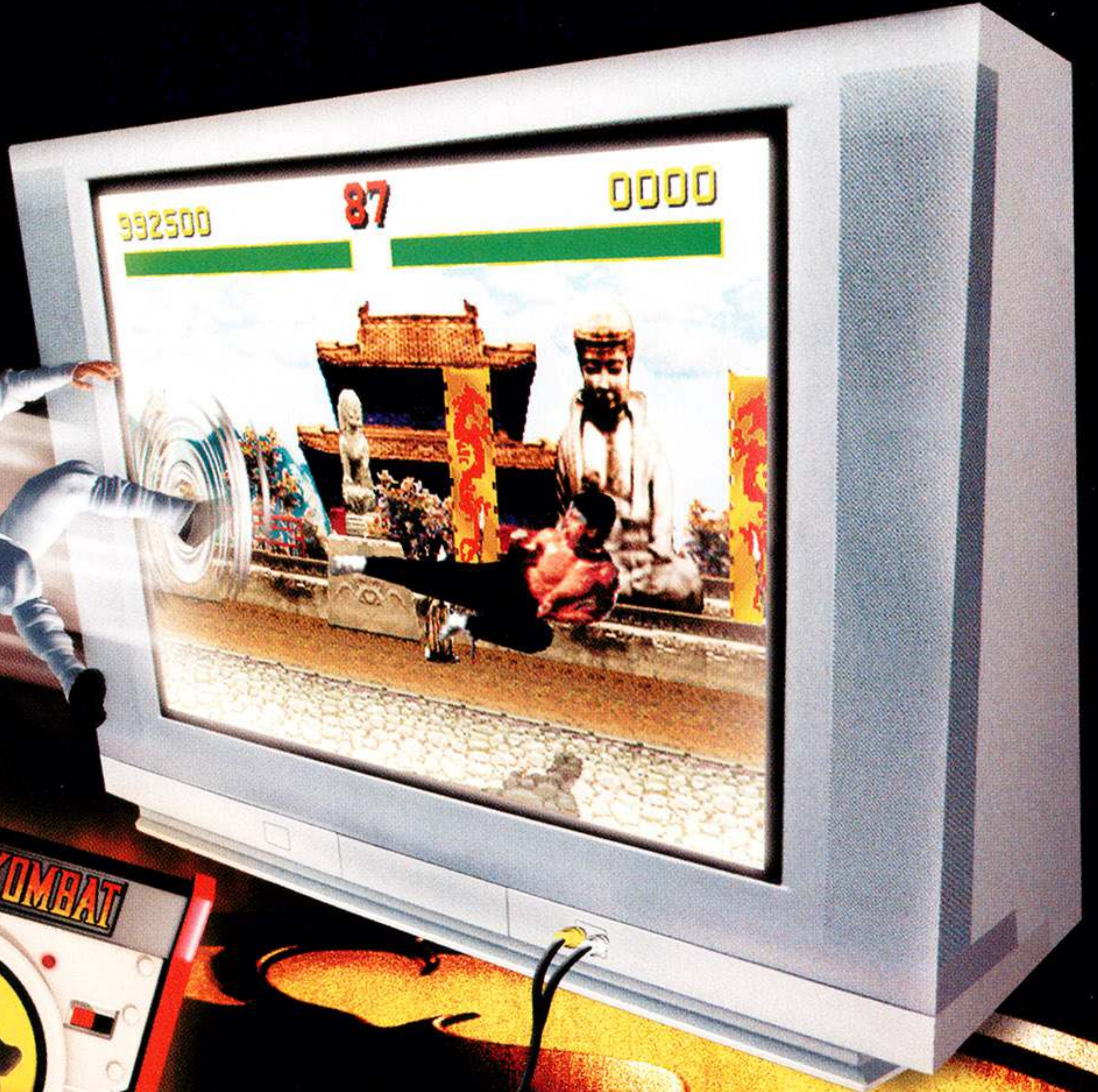
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GAMES



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Introducing Raze's Hell. Play as Raze, whose land has been overrun by Kewletts – evil cuties trying to impose their crazed views upon the masses. Utilize your intense hatred for all things cute and an overwhelming arsenal to ensure that the streets flow with the blood of the vile Kewletts. Includes single-player, co-op mode and killer Xbox Live™ multi-player modes.



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