



XBOX

OFFICIAL XBOX MAGAZINE

2006 PREVIEW BLOWOUT!

THE LATEST INFO ON:

- GEARS OF WAR
- SPLINTER CELL 4
- MEDAL OF HONOR

...PLUS OVER **50** MORE!

FROM THE MAKERS OF GTA!

CRACKDOWN

WE EXPOSE THE NEXT GREAT CRIME DRAMA (HINT: YOU'RE A GOOD GUY!)

WHICH GAME GETS OUR FIRST **10** EVER?!

- ▶ ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION
- ▶ FIGHT NIGHT ROUND 3
- ▶ GHOST RECON ADVANCED WARFIGHTER

TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND

THE GAME THAT'LL MAKE OR BREAK THE SERIES – SCORED INSIDE!

WHERE ARE ALL THE XBOX 360S?

WE CRACK THE FACTS ON THE STORY BEHIND THE BIG LAUNCH!

April 06 / Issue #56



\$9.99US \$12.99CAN



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MATURE	17+
	Blood Language Violence
ESRB CONTENT RATING	www.esrb.org



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game studios

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WITH ONE EXCEPTION.

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ZERO**

perfectdarkzero.com

 **XBOX 360**



TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

Blood
Language
Suggestive Themes
Violence



SEEING IS BELIEVING

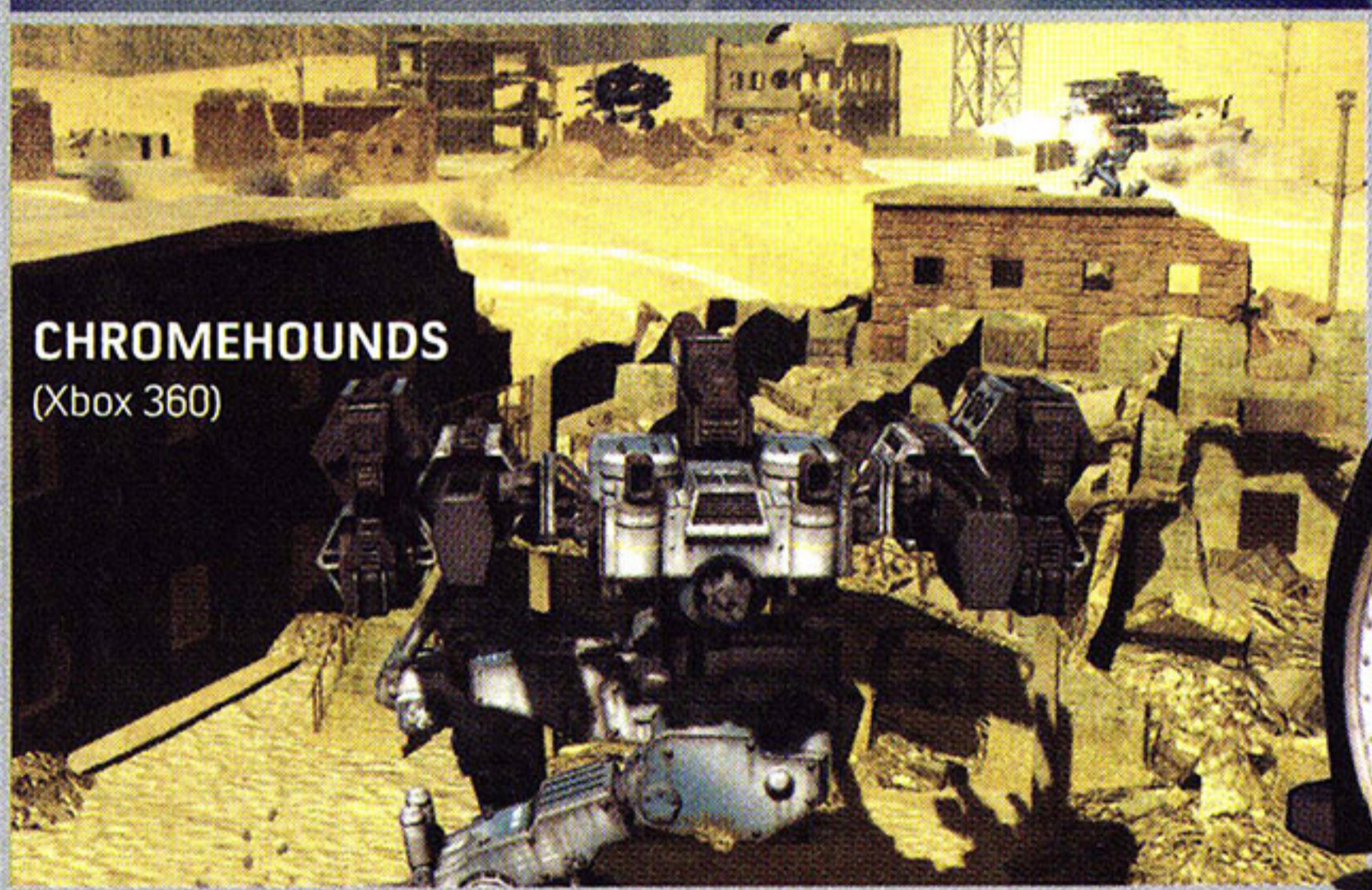
COMING SOON

www.tombraider.com

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2006 PREVIEW BLOWOUT!

COVER STORY!



CHROMEHOUNDS
(Xbox 360)



22 More than 50 hot new Xbox and Xbox 360 games detailed, including *Crackdown*, the impressive open-world game from the creator of *GTA*!



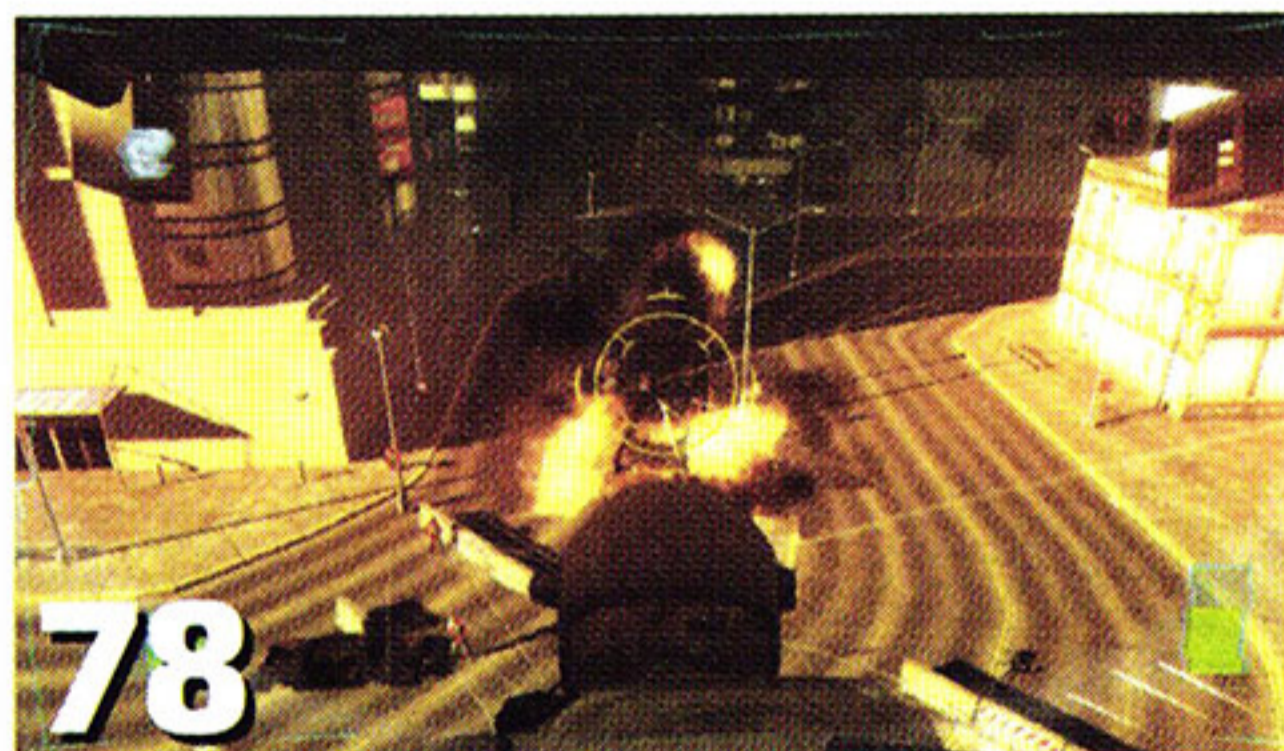
72 **FIGHT NIGHT ROUND 3** (Xbox 360, Xbox)



75 **BLACK** (Xbox)



66 **THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION** (Xbox 360)



78 **TOM CLANCY'S GHOST RECON ADVANCED WARFIGHTER** (Xbox 360, Xbox)

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MESSAGE CENTER pg. **14**
Your letters, our responses.

XBOX NEXT page **22**

Your regularly scheduled Xbox Next previews section has been replaced this month by the meaty, massive 26-page 2006 Xbox Preview cover story. You're welcome.



XBOX NOW page **65**

You can't throw a rock without hitting a review for a big game this month.

XBOX 365 page **86**

When launches go haywire. Plus: BioWare interviews Bungie.



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XBOX NOW

DEPARTMENTS



10 **WE ♥ XBOX** Brothers in Arms 3 (Xbox 360)



86 **XBOX 360 LAUNCH: WHAT HAPPENED?**



It only plays like it's still there. The new Xbox 360™ Wireless Controller. Unmatched precision and performance to instantly reflect your every move. And with an advanced ecosystem of wireless products, you'll have the freedom to get the most out of Xbox 360, because they come from Xbox.



Wireless Networking Adapter



Universal Media Remote



Play and Charge Kit



Jump in.





DISC

PLAY, WATCH, AND LEVEL UP WITH THE ALL-NEW HYBRID DEMO DISC!

PLAYABLE DEMOS FOR ORIGINAL XBOX AND XBOX 360...ON ONE DISC!



DRIVER: PARALLEL LINES (Xbox)

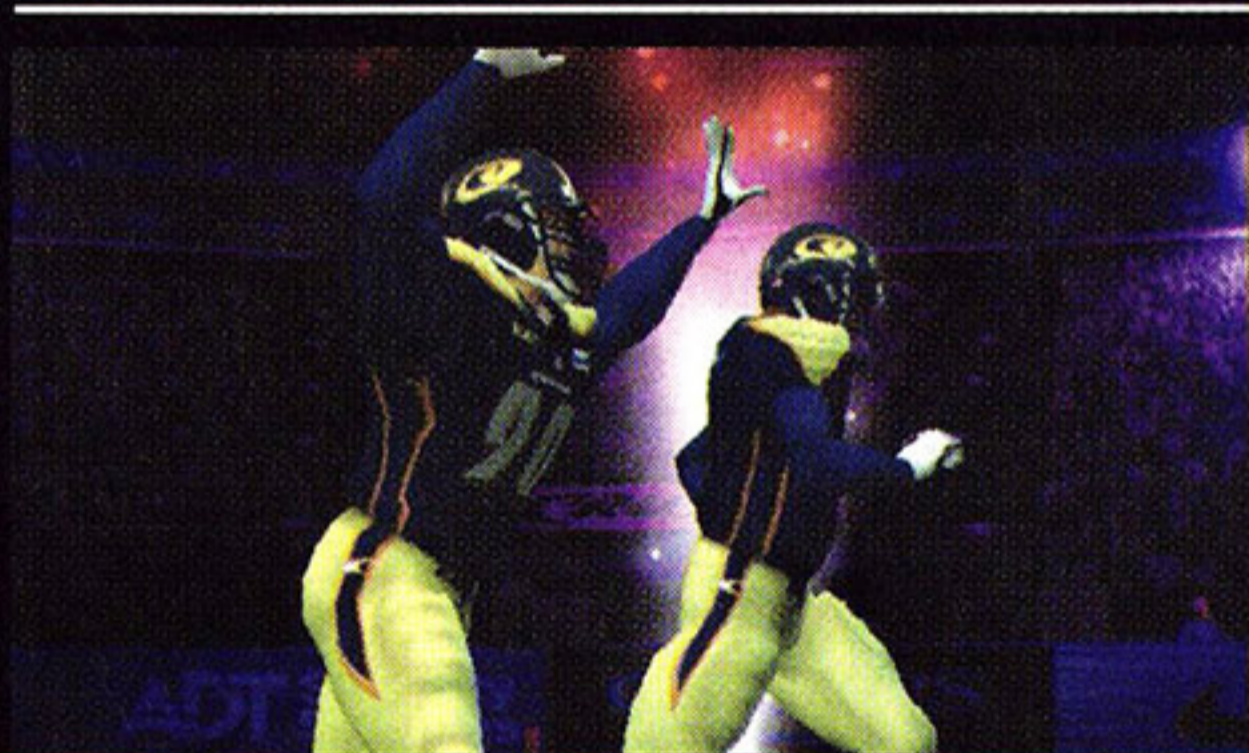
- DEVELOPER: Reflections Interactive
- PUBLISHER: Atari
- ESRB RATING: Mature

This free-roaming, open-world shooter has all the 1970s cars, hairstyles, and attitude you could possibly want. The demo begins with a thrilling car chase in which you must lose the cops (hint: change vehicles often to confuse them), and once you succeed, you're free to explore the city. So be sure to look for all the hidden ramps to jump off, different cars to jack and drive, and all the little nooks and crannies you can explore on foot.



ORIGINAL XBOX DEMOS

SPORTS HOTNESS!



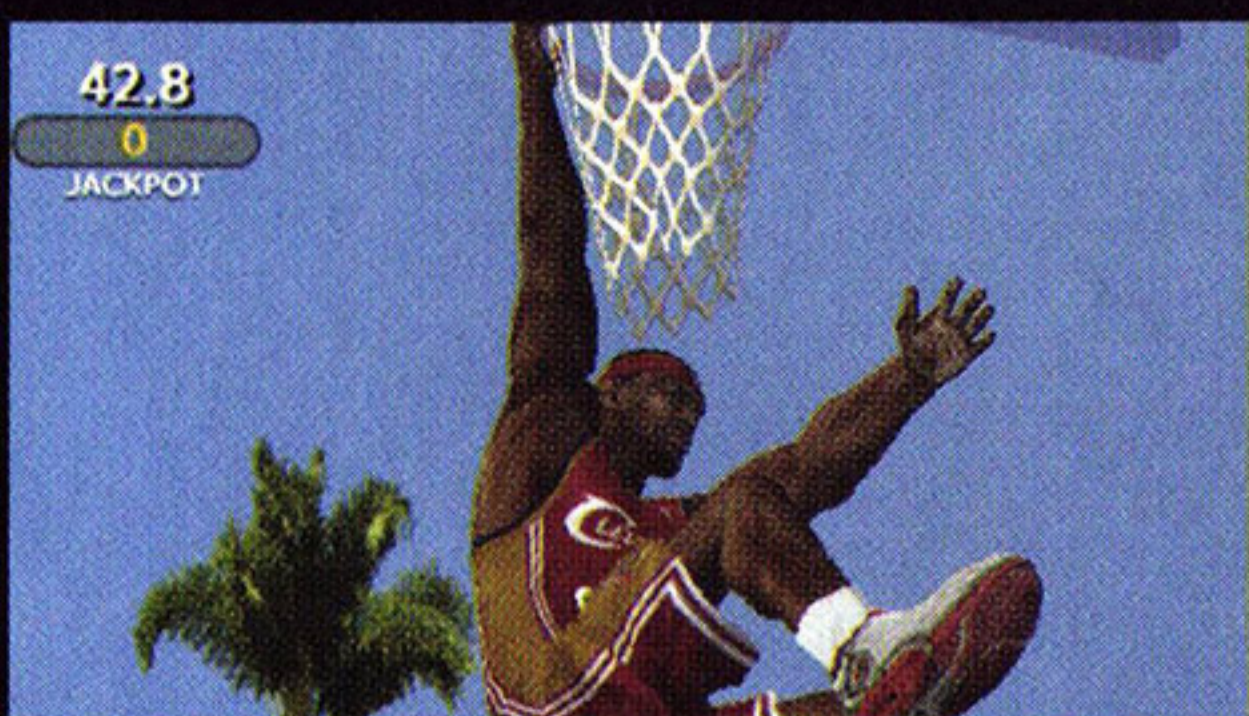
Challenge! Score at least 49 points (that's seven TDs) with one team.

Challenge Points: 4,000

Proof: Take a pic of the score and send it in!

ARENA FOOTBALL (Xbox)

- Developer: EA Tiburon
- Publisher: EA Sports
- ESRB Rating: Everyone



NBA BALLERS: PHENOM (Xbox)

- Developer: Midway
- Publisher: Midway
- ESRB Rating: Everyone



XBOX 360 DEMOS A LARGE SAMPLING...



CALL OF DUTY 2 (Xbox 360)



CONDEMNED (Xbox 360)



KING KONG (Xbox 360)



FULL AUTO (Xbox 360)



KAMEO (Xbox 360)



QUAKE 4 (Xbox 360)

DOWNLOADS



EXCLUSIVE CONDEMNED XBOX 360 THEME!



GHOST RECON XBOX 360 GAMER PICTURES! (Earn 800 OXM Points to unlock!)

PLUS! Take a look at the gravity-bending upcoming Xbox 360 shooter *Prey* in a special video feature where we take you inside developer Human Head's studio in frosty Madison, Wisconsin. The game is much hotter than the weather!

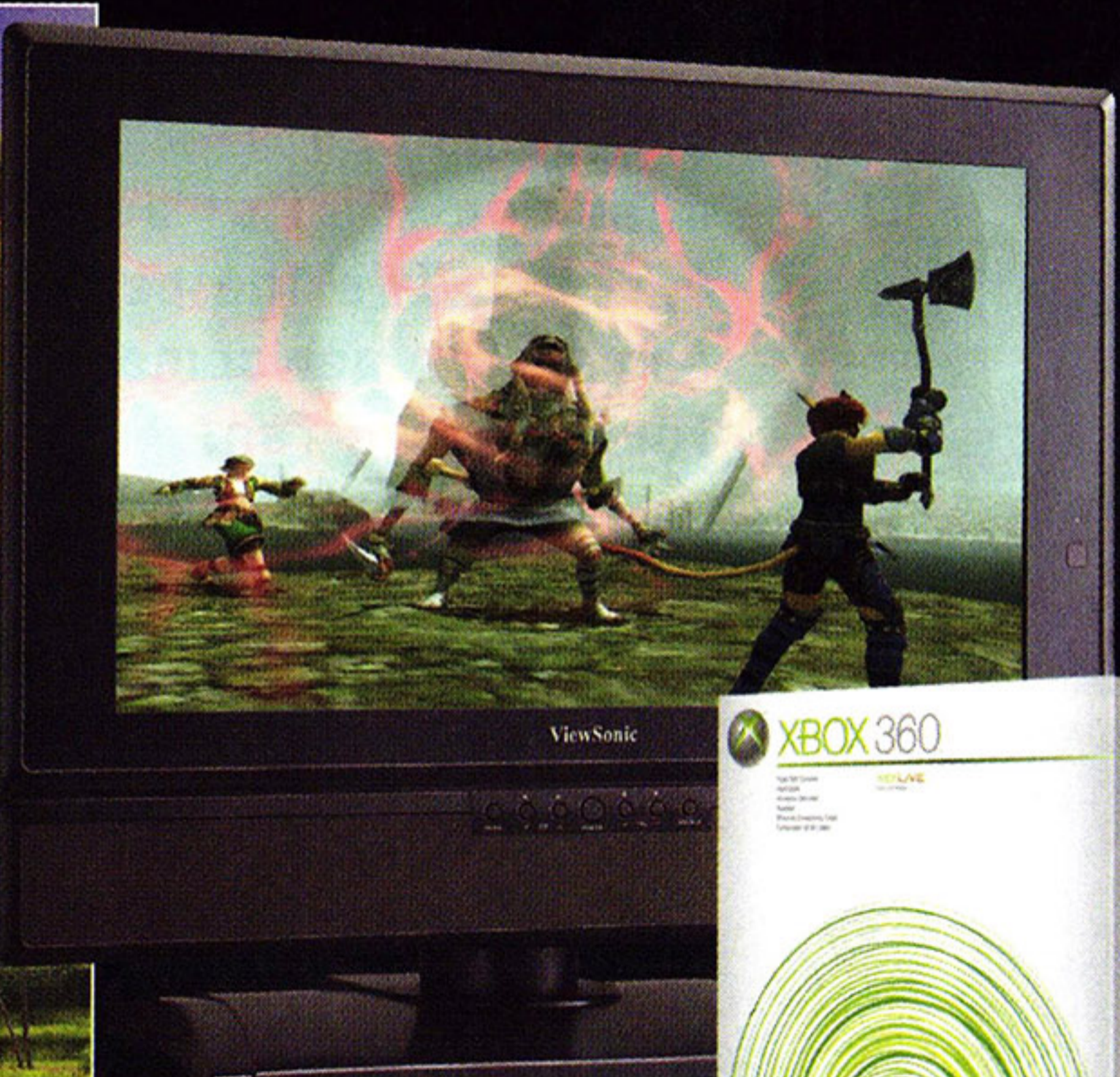
WIN!
FINAL FANTASY® XI
 Online game
 (with free one month trial)
An Xbox 360
 Premium package
A Viewsonic 20"
High Definition TV

FINAL FANTASY® XI

ONLINE

AMAZING FINAL FANTASY XI AND XBOX 360 GIVEAWAY!

Join the next generation of gaming in this exclusive contest.



How to Enter:

- Simply send your name and address to ffxi@officialxboxmagazine.com.
- The entry deadline is **April 14**
- Odds of winning a prize depend on number of eligible entry forms received.

Grand Prize (1)

One Grand Prize winner will receive a copy of FINAL FANTASY XI, along with the strategy guide, plus an Xbox 360 Premium package, and a Viewsonic N2050w 20" Nextvision® Wide-Screen LCD TV.

Second Prize (10)

Ten lucky second prize winners will receive a copy of FINAL FANTASY XI (complete with one month free trial), and strategy guide.

*Final package may differ

PlayOnline.



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No purchase is necessary to win and as a contestant you have not yet won. To register, send an email with your name, age, phone number, and address to FFXI@officialxboxmagazine.com. Entries must be received no later than **April 14, 2006**. The winners will be chosen on or about April 30, 2006, and will be notified by e-mail (or regular mail). The odds of winning depend upon the number of entries received. Future US is the sole sweepstakes sponsor. Future US cannot be responsible for lost, late, misdirected, or incomplete entries. The prizes are the following: (1) One Xbox 360 (the value of which is \$400.00), (2) One Viewsonic N2050w monitor (the value of which is \$750.00), (3) Eleven Fantasy XI Online games (the value of which are \$49.99 each, total of \$549.89), and (4) Eleven Fantasy XI Online Strategy Guides (the value of which are \$15.00 each, total of \$165.00) and are nontransferable and no substitutions will be allowed. Winners will be determined by a single random drawing of all valid entries and the decision of Future US shall be final. You may obtain the name of the winner by sending a stamped, self-addressed envelope to Fantasy XI Online Contest, 4000 Shoreline Court, Ste 400, South San Francisco, CA 94080. This contest is open to residents of the United States only. Entrants must be at least 13 years of age. Entrants agree that the information provided for the contest, namely, their names, addresses and telephone numbers, may be provided to Square Enix, Inc. If a winner is a minor, the prize will be awarded in the name of winner's parent or legal guardian, who is solely responsible for all applicable federal, state and local taxes. If a winner is a minor, that winner must also provide a signed parental or guardian consent form, provided by the sponsor, within 7 days of notification attempt. Failure of the minor to return the guardian consent form will result in the forfeiture prize and selection of an alternate winner, who will be chosen through a random drawing from the remaining eligible entries. Return of any prize or prize notification as undeliverable will result in disqualification and an alternate winner will be selected. The winners must be required to sign an affidavit of eligibility/release of liability/prize acceptance within seven days of receipt; failure to do so upon request will result in forfeiture of the prize. By acceptance of the prize, the winners agree to the use of their name and/or likeness for purposes of advertising, trade, or promotion without further compensation, unless prohibited by law. Neither Future US nor Square Enix, Inc. shall be responsible for any damages or expenses that winners might incur as a result of this contest or the receipt of any prize. In addition, contestants release and hold Future US and Square Enix, Inc. and their employees harmless from any and all damages and claims of any kind in connection with the contest. Future US reserves the right to confirm the winner for eligibility and compliance with the rules and regulations. Winners are responsible for paying any income taxes on the value of the prize received. Void in Rhode Island, Puerto Rico and where prohibited by law.

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TOM CLANCY'S Rainbow Six CRITICAL HOUR™

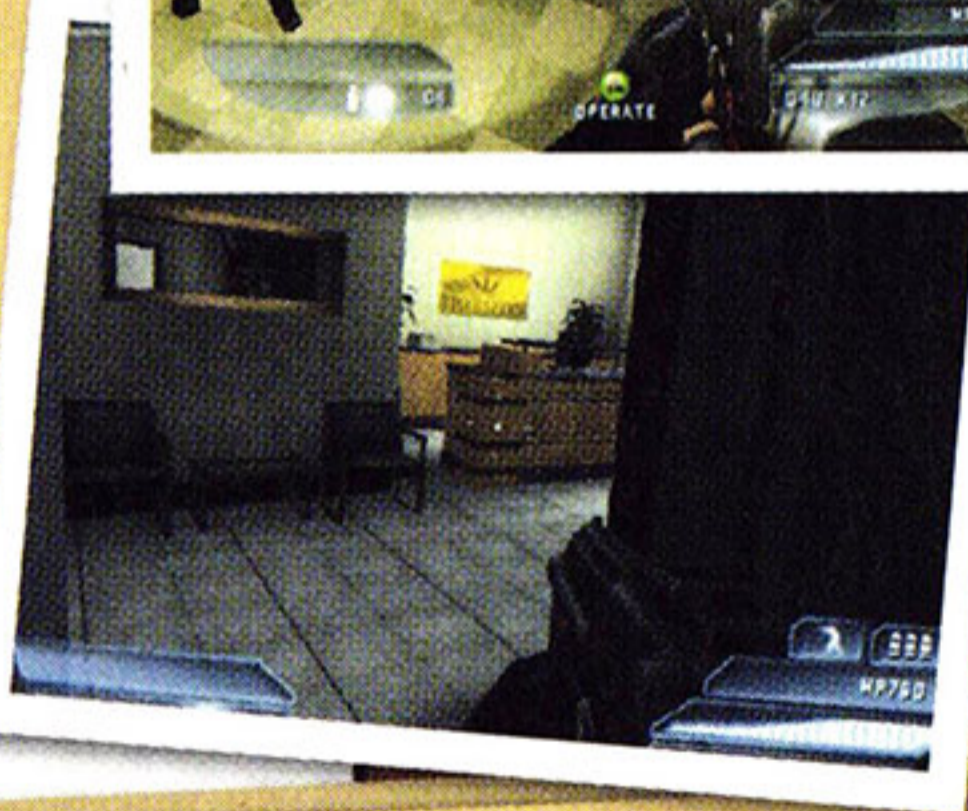
PUBLISHER: UBISOFT DEVELOPER: RED STORM/UBISOFT RELEASE: MARCH

Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six Critical Hour is the **BEST OF THE BEST**, in every sense – the most **MEMORABLE LEVELS** from one of the most popular gaming series of **ALL TIME**. Rainbow Six® actually **CREATED** the tactical-shooter genre, and it still stands today as the best **BALANCE** of realism and gameplay available. Rainbow Six Critical Hour brings the **PAST AND PRESENT TOGETHER** with state-of-the-art graphics and classic, **AWARD-WINNING** maps and missions – all at an unbeatable price of **\$29.99**. It's the perfect entry into the series for newcomers and a **MUST-HAVE** for any true fan.

Operation Deep Magic

Date: Sep. 26, 2000 04:00
Location: San Francisco, California
Origin: Rainbow Six

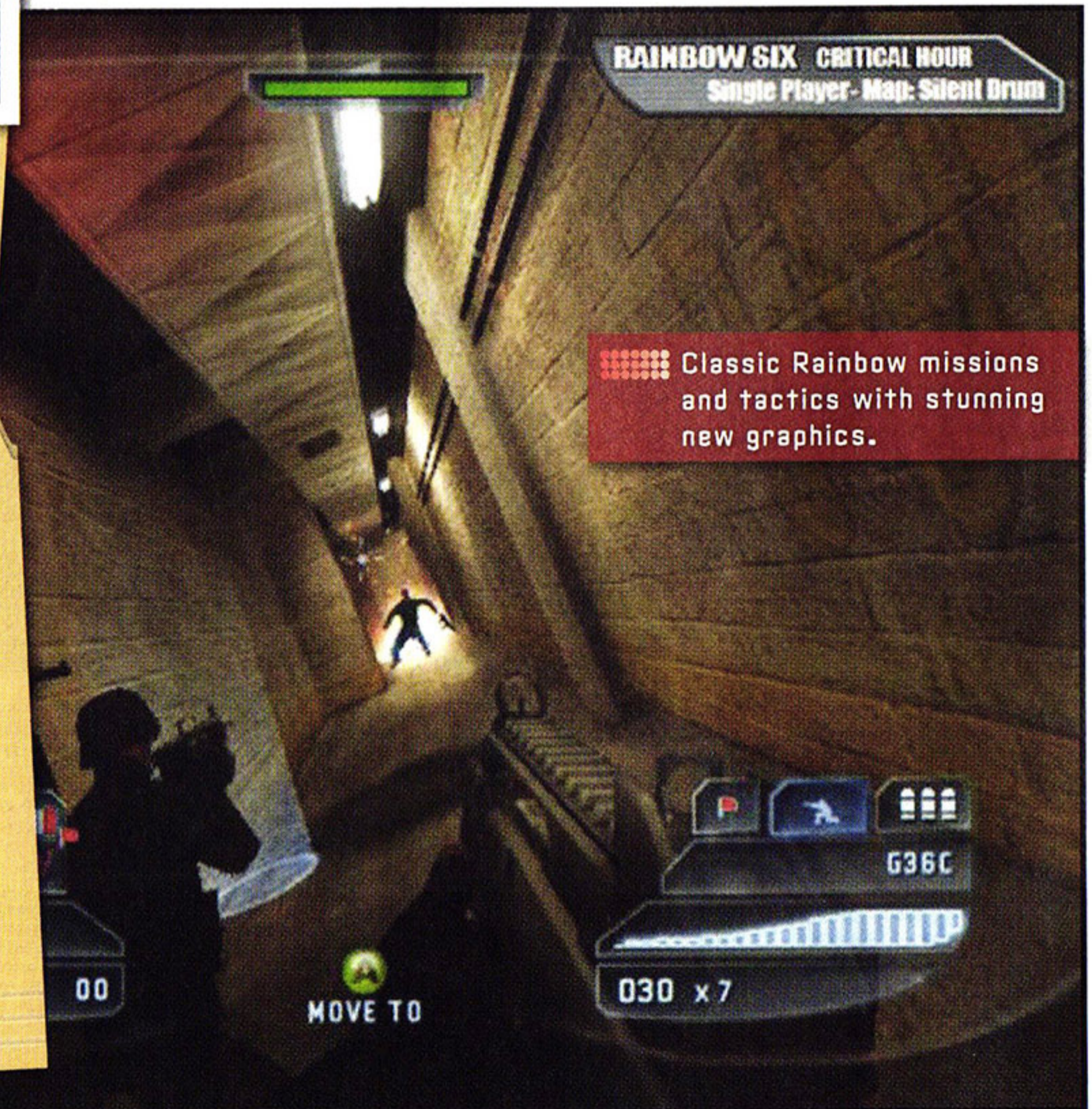
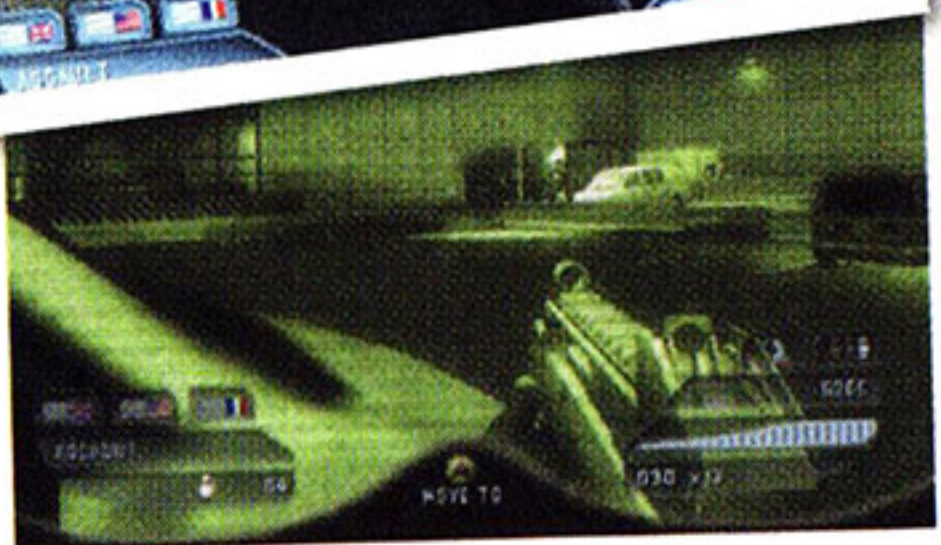
Mission:
Infiltrate Horizon's heavily guarded skyscraper headquarters and extract information about the Phoenix Group.



Operation Zero Gambit

Date: Mar. 27, 2002 02:00
Location: Cherkasu, Ukraine
Origin: Rainbow Six®: Rogue Spear®

Mission:
Assault the Ukrainian nuclear plant and neutralize the terrorists.



In 1998, a revolutionary new experience came to gaming in the form of reality-driven, team-based Rainbow Six. Pioneering the realism we've come to refer to as "One Shot, One Kill," Rainbow Six put you in charge of the world's most elite anti-terrorism squad, Team Rainbow. Founded by counter-terrorism expert John Clark, Rainbow is the world's last defense against freedom's most dangerous enemies. With its emphasis on close-quarters combat and deadly authenticity, the Rainbow Six series has redefined video game realism.

Rainbow Six Critical Hour takes place on the occasion of founder Clark's retirement, and offers both die-hard fans and those new to the series a chance to experience the greatest moments from the series. You'll infiltrate the terrorists' biological warfare labs in the mission codenamed Fire Walk. You'll breach enemy security to save hostages in the mission codenamed Razor Ice, from the original Rainbow Six. Rainbow Six Critical Hour lets you play through the very best single-player missions in series history.

Best of all, Rainbow Six Critical Hour brings today's technology and action to those amazing Rainbow Six missions. Veterans of

Rainbow Six will thrill to experience levels like The Canals of Venice with all-new lighting and intense new AI. And if you are new to the series, this is your chance to play the best of the best and get a taste of what Rainbow Six is all about.

Beyond thrilling single-player missions, the Rainbow Six series is known for its unbeatable multiplayer gameplay. Rainbow Six Critical Hour ups the multiplayer ante with superior gameplay modes including

Persistent Elite Creation™ mode on the Xbox® video game and entertainment system from Microsoft. The Xbox version also boasts the new Assassin and Free-for-All modes – even more intense multiplayer gameplay modes, and your chance to revisit some of the finest multiplayer game maps in the business.

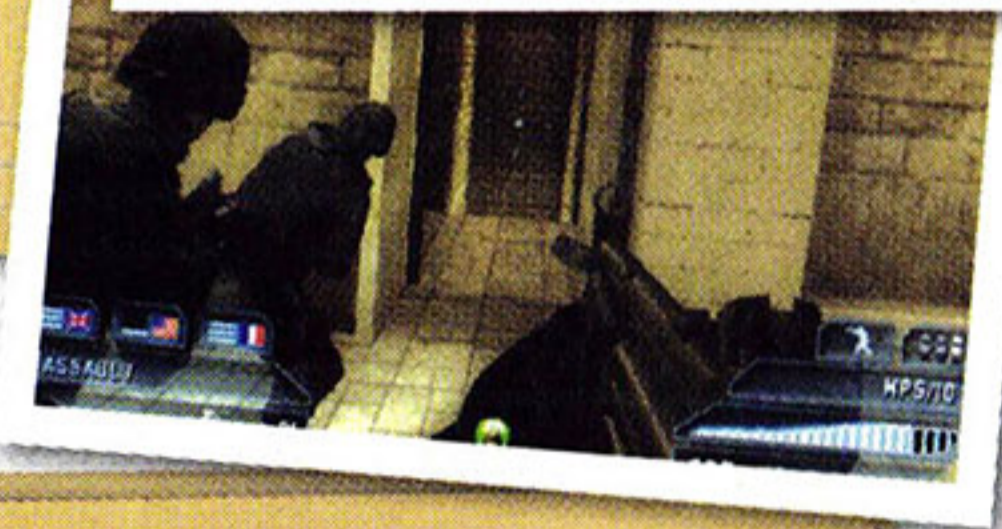
This is Rainbow Six at its finest. No matter how you look at it and no matter which system you're playing on, Rainbow Six Critical Hour brings it all, and brings it hard. This is the tactical action that put Rainbow Six on top – an all-in-one, incredible gameplay experience, and at a price that's almost too good to be true.

"This is the tactical action that put Rainbow Six on top"

Operation Aztec Palace

Date: Jun. 20, 2003 14:00
Location: Venice, Italy
Origin: Rainbow Six®: Urban Operations®

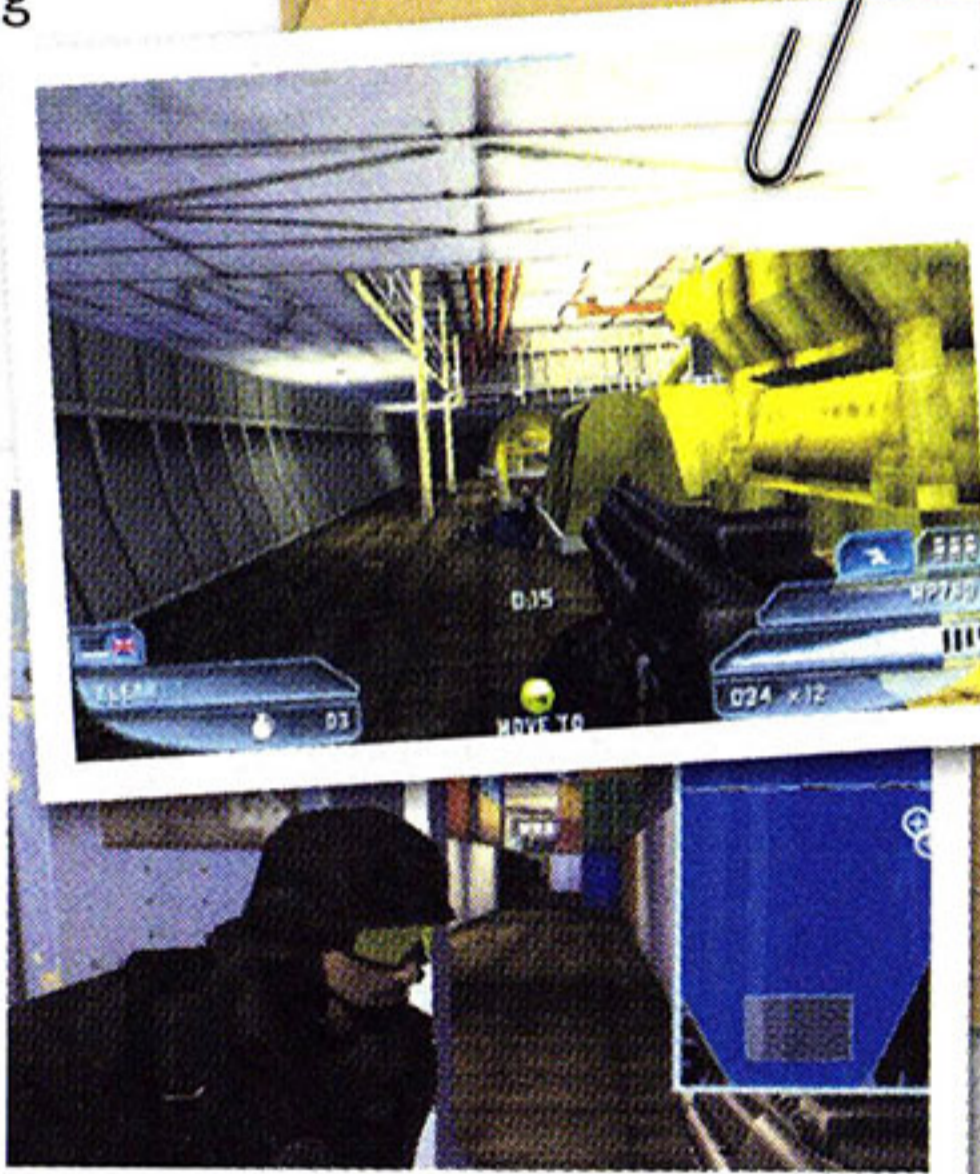
Mission:
Sneak through the canals of Venice and assault a Venetian library housing a collection of rare medieval manuscripts.



Operation Razor Ice

Date: Sep. 19, 2000 23:00
Location: Southampton, England
Origin: Rainbow Six

Mission:
A stealth mission where you board a boat, disarm a bomb, and save Dr. Winston, who is being held captive by the Phoenix Group.



Operation Infinite Seven

Date: Aug. 18, 2003 05:45
Location: Mexico City, Mexico
Origin: Rainbow Six: Urban Operations

Mission:
An assault mission where Team Rainbow has to flush Marxist revolutionaries out of their downtown headquarters.



THE BEST OF THE BEST – ONLINE!

Rainbow Six Critical Hour combines the best maps of the past and present with a dizzying array of multiplayer game types. The 7 classic maps were chosen by the fans and have proved to be some of the most intense multiplayer experiences on any system.

CO-OPERATIVE PLAY

Up to four players can join in for any of the single-player missions or play the addictive Terrorist Hunt.

VARIETY OF GAME TYPES


The Xbox version comes with, Total Conquest, Retrieval, Team Sharpshooter, Team Survival, Free-for-All Survivor, Free-for-All Sharpshooter, and Assassin.

P.E.C. MODE – Xbox Only

The class-based multiplayer of P.E.C. mode is back with all new maps, skills, and player levels. Each of the four character classes (Commando, Combat Medic, Spec Op, and Engineer) has added a new skill to really up the intensity level online. And with Rainbow Six Critical Hour you can take your P.E.C. characters all the way up to the 60th level.

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► Subsurface scattering gives Baker's nose this pinkish haze, kind of like when you hold a flashlight up to your hand. It's typically done only in prerendered cinemas, but *BIA3* cranks it out in real time.

Brothers in Arms 3

WWII's best arrives on Xbox 360

You'll have to wait until next issue for our exclusive cover story on the debut of Gearbox's amazing WWII shooter on Xbox 360, but we couldn't resist tempting you with a sneak peek at this gorgeous in-game screenshot. Yes, screenshot – although it's of course posed for dramatic effect, it's otherwise snapped in-game. Check out the real-time soft shadows on Sgt. Baker's face, the volumetric smoke curling around the leg of the soldier in the midground, and how normal mapping and offset mapping combine to beautifully and realistically light the bricks in the pavement. We're not so sure what those scary techno-jargon words mean, but we don't care. We want more!

► When crap blows up – and man will it ever! – the bits and pieces are motion-blurred to create a sense of velocity.

► Hmm...what's that "R" on their helmets, and what was there before? Gearbox coyly tells us we'll have to play the game to find out. Those cheeky Texans...

DRIVER ALERT ###
STEADY RAIN OF MISSILES WITH
SCATTERED CONCRETE AND GLASS
NEXT FIVE MILES.



Game experience may change during online play.

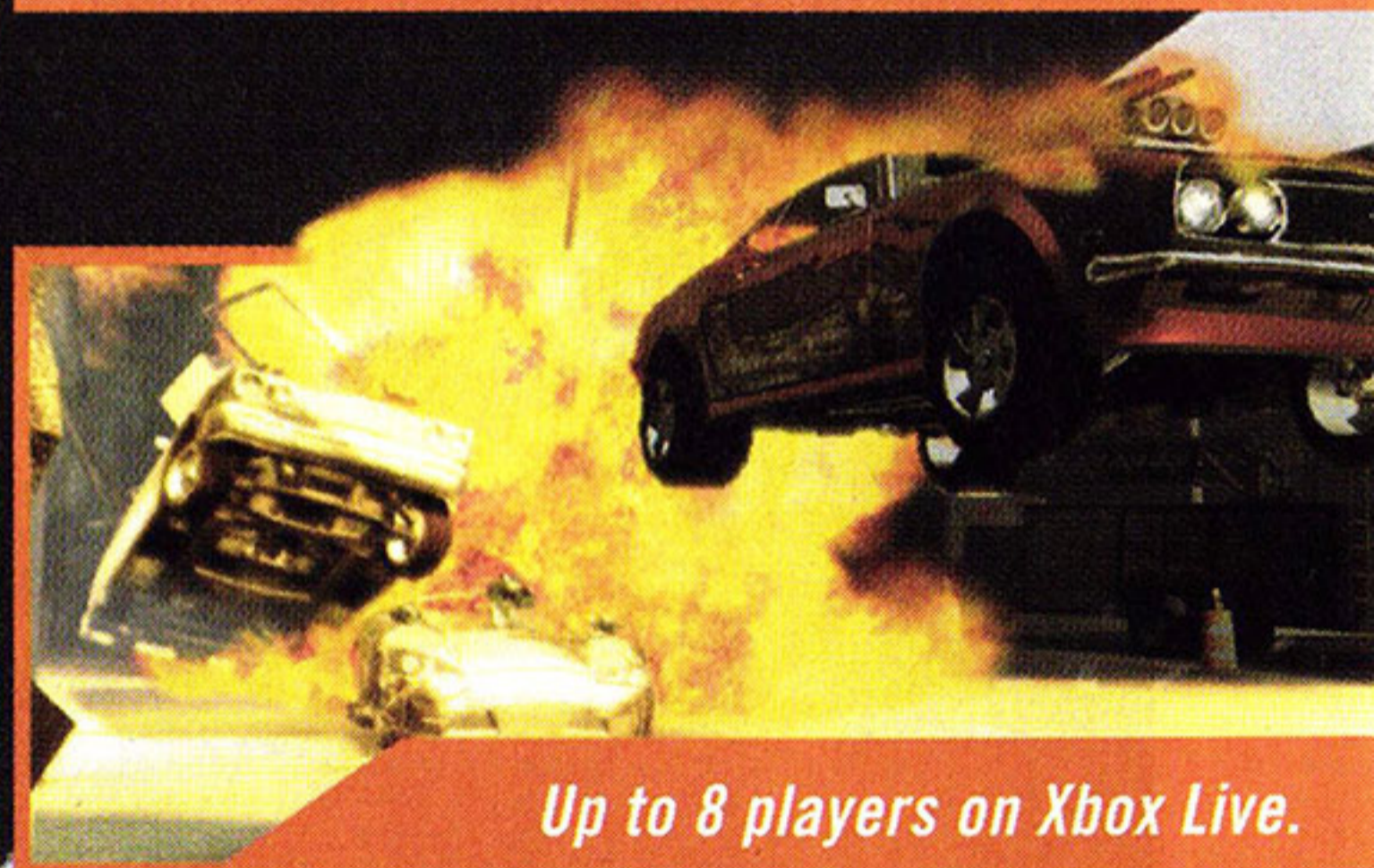
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14,899,463,219 possible outcomes.



Up to 8 players on Xbox Live.



"Unwreck™" for a second chance.

"CRUSHINGLY REAL... I LOVE IT."

- Dan "Shoe" Hsu, *Electronic Gaming Monthly*

5 OUT OF 5 STARS (GAME OF THE MONTH)

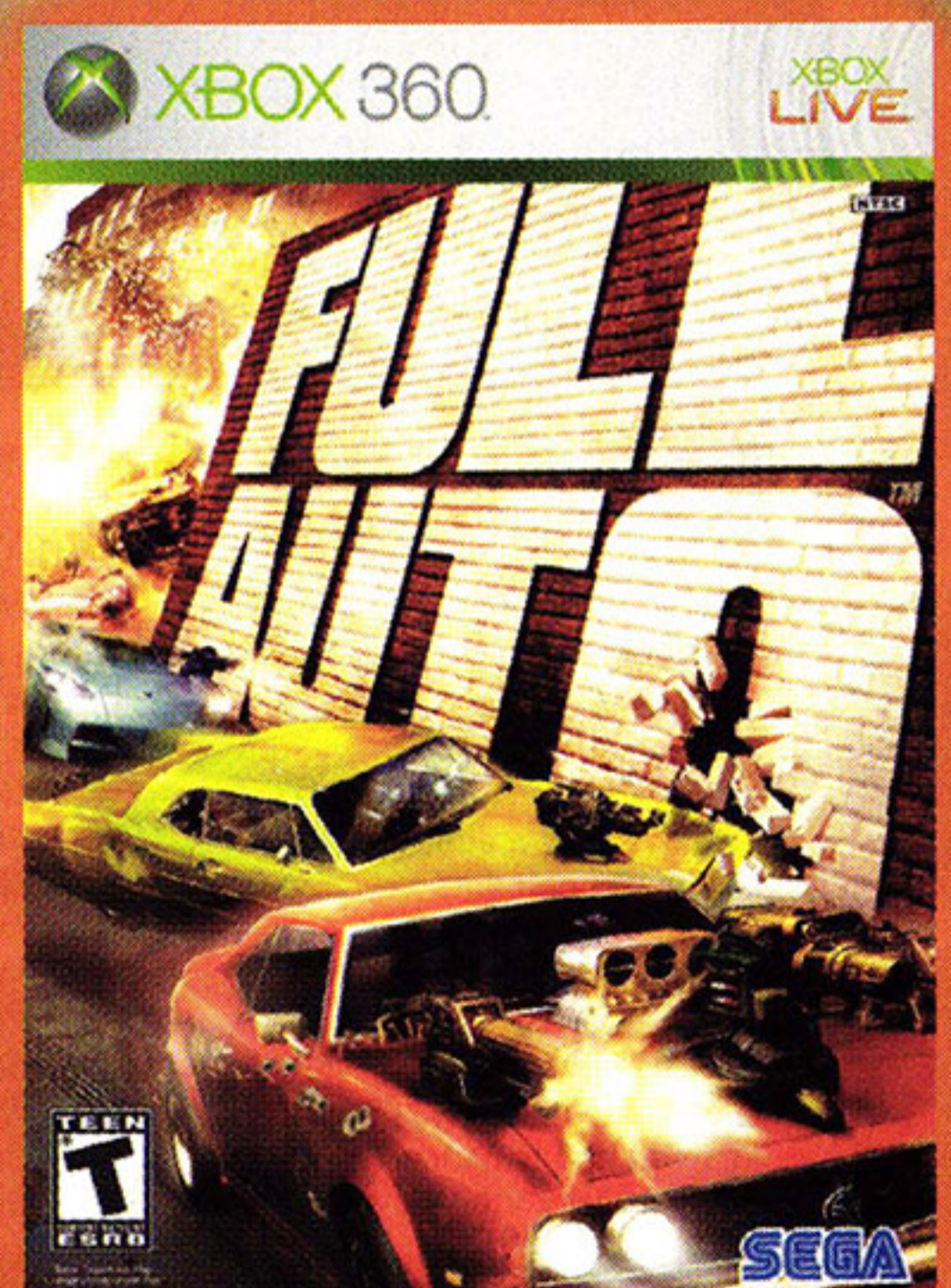
- Maxim

"THE MOST SENSATIONAL CAR COMBAT EVER."

- *Official Xbox Magazine*

8.5/8.0/8.0 OUT OF 10 (SILVER AWARD)

- *Electronic Gaming Monthly*



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SPOILER WARNING

How about including spoiler alerts on pages that have them? In the February issue, you gave away a serious plot twist on the upcoming *Splinter Cell* game, *Double Agent*. Fisher's daughter gets killed? Thanks OXM! *Cough*NOT!*cough*

— ANONYMOUS

We say: We're generally very mindful about not giving away key plot details in our previews or reviews, and reminders like these always help. In our defense, though, the death of Sam's daughter isn't really a big spoiler — it's merely part of the backstory detailing why Fisher has seemingly gone cuckoo. If you visit the official *Double Agent* website (www.bewaresamfisher.com), in fact, one of the teaser bits there also reveals the young Fisher's demise.

HEX-ED OUT

I recently had to reformat my Xbox 360's hard drive because of a corrupt gamer profile. When it was done, I'd lost the incredibly addictive puzzle game *Hexic*. Does Microsoft have any intentions of putting *Hexic* on Marketplace? If it's already complimentary on your hard drive, why can't it be a free download on Live?

— JASON DELLER

We say: You're not the first person to put this question in our box, Jason. We took your inquiry straight to a Microsoft spokesperson and got them to pony up a solution. The straight-from-the-horse's-mouth answer is: "Microsoft wants to make sure that Xbox 360 consumers know that they own the content they purchase or download from Xbox Live Marketplace. Consumers who accidentally delete their copy of *Hexic* should call 1-800-4MY-XBOX to get the game restored to them." Go ahead and get dialing, Jason.

WE HEART REAL-LIFE KAMEO

I recently saw an ad on TV for *Kameo*, and there was a live actress playing her. I have fallen madly in love! Can you introduce me?

— VIC TENORIO

We say: We can't introduce you to her, Vic, but we can tell you a little bit about her. The *Kameo* actress' name is Erika Rosenbaum. She's from Montreal, and can be seen in *Wicker Park*, *Where the Trust Lies*, and *The Last Kiss*. We're told that she enjoys surfing and traveling, and no, you can't have her phone number. Sorry.



► TV commercial star = hottie.

KOXM playlist

What's your favorite custom soundtrack for your favorite Xbox 360 game? Email us your five-song playlist, the game that goes with it, your Gamertag, and (if possible) a digital pic of yourself to letters@officialxboxmagazine.com with the subject header "KOXM Playlist."



Name:

Caesar Chiguichon

Gamertag:

None yet!

Game:

King Kong

Playlist: **Kong of the Jungle**

1 "Jungle Boogie" — Kool and the Gang

2 "In the Jungle" — Beach Boys

3 "Welcome to the Jungle" — Guns 'N' Roses

4 "I Just Can't Wait to be King" — Lion King Soundtrack

5 "Hakuna Matata" — Lion King Soundtrack

Meet the Team

OXM STAFF UPDATE: EVERYONE SAY "HI" (AND "WHAT WERE YOU THINKING?") TO OUR MARVELOUS NEW MANAGING EDITOR, COREY COHEN!

Top 5 things I wish for in a new *Halo*:

- 1 More playable characters. C'mon, you know you want to play as a Grunt!
- 2 Bayonet action. I hear the Plasma Sword, but how about some firepower behind it?
- 3 A newer, more evil enemy — Uh, oh! Covenant and humans in friendship-pact shocker! News at 11!
- 4 More variety in power-up candy.
- 5 Will Master Chief ever find love? Real Spartan romance, not freaky holographic Cortana love.

Top 5 games I can't wait to play now that I'm at OXM:

- 1 *Fight Night Round 3*: I've loved EA's boxing games since *Knockout Kings 2001*, and this looks insane.
- 2 *Lego Star Wars: The Original Trilogy*: Even better than *Lego Boba Fett*? *Lego Jabba!*
- 3 *Prey*: In 3D Realms I trust.
- 4 *Star Trek: Legacy*: Ships from every *Trek* series. <Drool...>
- 5 *Stacked*: Poker on Xbox Live...I'll enjoy taking Paul's virtual dollars.

Top 5 reasons I'm thrilled Corey is now our Managing Editor:

- 1 Now I get to blow deadlines instead of enforce them.
- 2 Corey's great fun to play poker with (i.e., his chips usually become mine).
- 3 When issues come out, there will actually be pages I haven't read yet.
- 4 Hatching secret plan to recruit Corey for our *Top Spin 2* doubles matches. Mmm, fresh meat!
- 5 Being the reviews guy is very good times.

Top 5 things I hate about Dane that you'll wish you didn't know:

- 1 He spends all day talking about weird stuff like "old money names" (just look at his staff bio!).
- 2 He researches HDTVs on the Internet all day instead of working.
- 3 He splices subliminal images into the disc video features. Images of food.
- 4 He can sleep on the job with his eyes open. Seriously.
- 5 He hums the theme song to *The A-Team* incessantly.

Top 5 videogame characters I'd like to be:

- 1 Raz (*Psychonauts*). Only if I could crawl around in my own head.
- 2 Sam Fisher (*Splinter Cell*). So I could be in good shape when I'm old.
- 3 The Prince (*Katamari Damacy*). My house is very messy.
- 4 Mario (*Super Mario Bros.*). For his 1337 plumbing skills.
- 5 Zack (*DOA Xtreme Beach Volleyball*). He's the ultimate ladies man, no doubt about it.



Francesca Reyes
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



Corey Cohen
MANAGING EDITOR



Paul Curthoys
EXECUTIVE EDITOR



Dave Rees
GAME DISC PRODUCER



Tom Price
SENIOR EDITOR

MORE HEX-ING MYSTERIES

My 360 hard drive came pre-loaded with a bunch of stuff that I didn't necessarily care about (I think they were themes and stuff), so I deleted them. I only left the *Hexic* game on there, but it still said the available space on my hard drive was only 16 GB. Does *Hexic* really take up that much space, or did I get a bum drive?

— BRIAN A. ARMSTRONG

We say: No worries, Brian. A fair amount of space is set aside for games to use as caching space (so they'll load faster), so no, *Hexic* isn't some massive 4GB file, and you don't have a bum drive.

FINAL RANT-ASY

After receiving your February issue, I decided to take some time to play the *Final Fantasy XI* beta, anxiously looking forward to the game. I started right around 1:30 in the afternoon. After about 50+ screens (I lost count), hitting a website, being freaked I would have to pay for this demo, and hours of installing the PlayOnline client, its updates, *FFXI* itself, and then its updates – all while trying to handle text boxes through the game pad – I was finally ready to play the game.

When I finally got into the game, I tried to enjoy it, but the text boxes are so small on my 52-inch widescreen HDTV

that I can't read them to save my life! And without a keyboard, I couldn't make out the characters on the pop-up keyboard to type anything in.

My point? I want you guys to make sure you include the whole experience when you review this game, not just the stuff you do in Vana'diel; make sure that this is totally clear to anyone getting into this game.

— "CMDR ROO"

We say: We agree with all of your points. We weren't jumping up and down with joy about the two-hour install either, though we've been digging the beta once we finally created characters and started playing. You're right, though: We should and certainly will take all of the "experience" stuff – the installation process and the PlayOnline software – into account when we review the game. After all, the experience surrounding the gameplay is pretty much 50 percent of any MMORPG.

PERMANENT RECORD

Do Xbox 360 achievements last forever? If I, for example, erase my *Condemned* saved game files to make room on my hard drive, will I lose all of my achievements that went with those saved games? Or what if I finish the game using only melee weapons, and then I go back and play the game

continued on pg. 16 ►►



Reader Jonathan Kinnelon asks, "Hey Thomas, what's your day like as the intern at OXM?"

Thomas Answers:



"I arrive around 1:30pm after classes and immediately check my email for any games, magazines, or prizes that need to be mailed. After that I usually continue working on any reviews I'm doing and make sure our game and issue library is in order. Other than that I'm at the mercy of the staff! Lunch runs, copy-machine jobs, and anything else that needs to be done."

Got a hot button topic you'd like to ask us? Email us: letters@officialxboxmagazine.com with the subject line "Hot Button."



LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

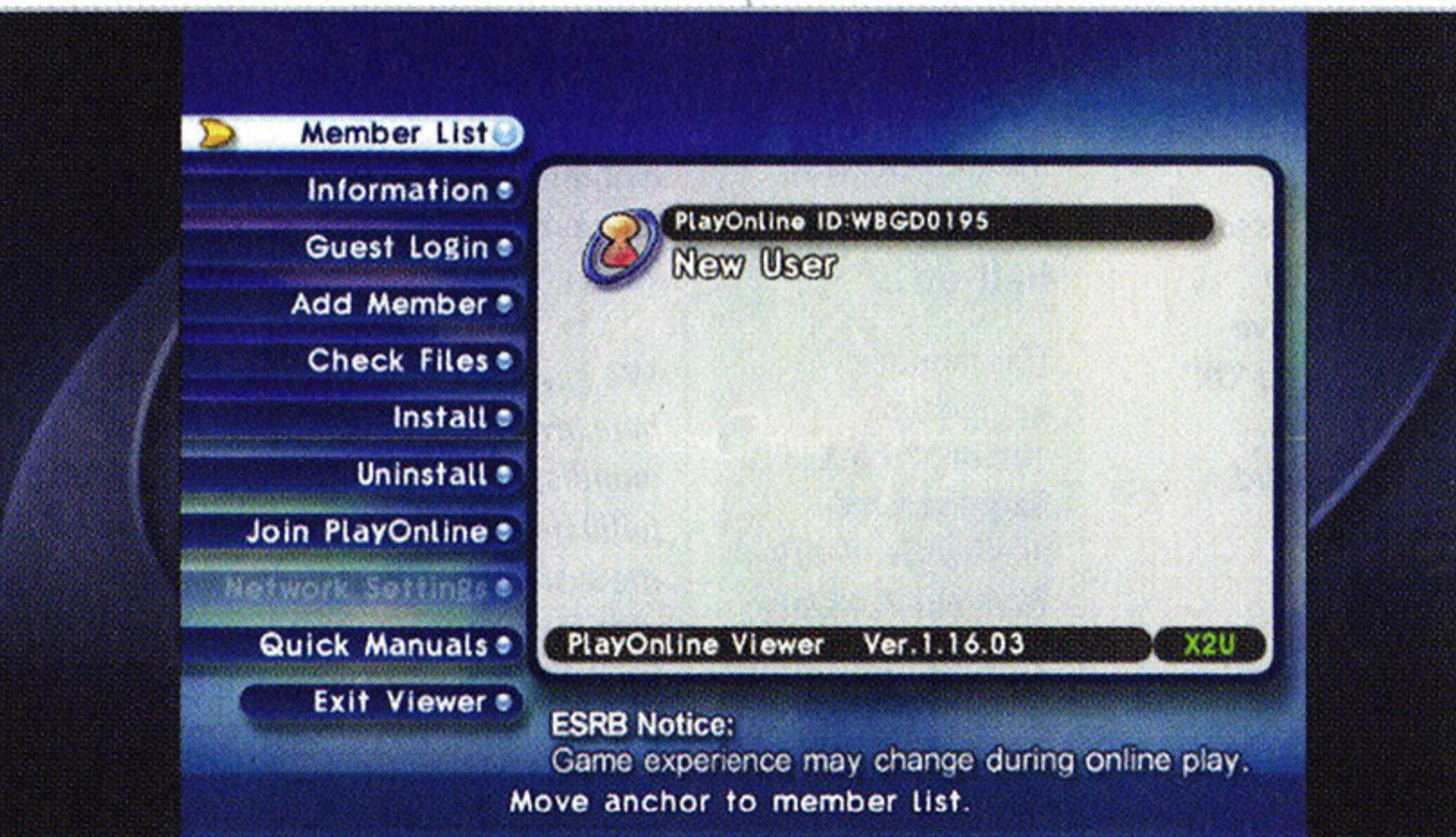
CAN XBOX LIVE ARCADE HELP GAMES LEVEL UP?

I'm gonna get a bit stream-of-consciousness here, but I recently read an interview with the indie music collective Godspeed You Black Emperor. In it, they were criticizing Brit alt-popsters Radiohead for being on a major label. There were plenty of barbed words about globalization and sundry political concerns to be had.

What does this have to do with games? Well, it came to mind with all the recent hubbub over Xbox Live Arcade and the string of independent garage developers pushing pixels for its runaway Marketplace success.

Is Xbox Live Arcade giving smaller development houses a chance to make paper while offering up titles that capture the "essence" of gaming? Yes, and *Geometry Wars* proves this. Will this grassroots style of game development effect change in an industry that's increasingly obsessed (and rightfully so) with bottom-line profits? And in effect, will this finally bring about a chance for games to grow into an entertainment medium that allows for more sophisticated debate? I know I'm not the only one who's tired of talking about a game only in terms of how many levels it has or if it's 720p.

More importantly, is there room in this multimillion-dollar industry for new ideas that expand gaming? Absolutely. But with restrictive budgets and next-gen costs, many of them have been explored more often on handhelds. Still, times and technology are changing, and Xbox Live Arcade has proven that there's a cost-effective way to do it all on consoles. Is this a sign of the times? I certainly hope so.



► Believe us, PlayOnline will factor into our *FFXI* review.

MISSION STATEMENT

OXM is the most complete, entertaining, and dynamic information source for Xbox gamers. The magazine and disc are expressly created to enhance the passion for Xbox gaming shared by readers and editors alike. OXM publishes the best, most revealing stories; digs deepest for the most valuable insight; and is resolutely committed to providing Xbox gamers the most reliable buying advice. We are Official Xbox Magazine, and we are officially dedicated to giving the Xbox community the best games magazine and disc that money can buy.

COREY'S PAST INCLUDES FIVE YEARS AS MANAGING EDITOR ON OUR SISTER MAG PC GAMER, A RUN AT THE PRESIDENCY, AND LOTS OF ONLINE POKER. ALL COMPLETELY TRUE. NOT.

Top 5 best things about my new car, a 2006 Infiniti G35 Coupe:

- 1 298 horsepower. I call it "Eff You" power because if you don't want to let me merge, well...you get the idea.
- 2 Heated seats. For those frosty 50-degree February mornings in S.F.
- 3 Sirius satellite radio. Because FM radio has gone to hell.
- 4 Bluetooth hands-free phone system. Call me!
- 5 A sunroof. My DeLorean's gull-wing doors kind of rule one out there.

Top 5 worst injuries I've sustained in my life:

- 1 Torn cartilage in my knee. Surgery is now imminent.
- 2 Stretched shoulder ligaments, causing frequent shoulder dislocation. Fun!
- 3 Cracked tailbone. It was a freak roller-skating accident.
- 4 Numerous broken fingers and toes. But my hands and feet are still very lady-like, thank you very much.
- 5 Bit in the face by a dog. Really.

Top 5 favorite things about the amazing Fight Night Round 3:

- 1 Slo-mo knockdowns.
- 2 I can punch my 12-year-old son without actually laying a finger on him (because I never would)...and he'll laugh about it!
- 3 Putting tattoos on my character. The ink in this game looks so real!
- 4 Xbox Live play – reaching out and punching someone from the comfort of my living room.
- 5 The wound-healing mini-game!

Top 5 "old money" names (Note: the names below may or may not belong to friends of mine that have yachts, personal Gulfstream jets, summer homes in the Hamptons, and their own private Caribbean island):

- 1 Cornelius P. Westhausen
- 2 Archibald Montelius Rockefeller
- 3 Dr. Gustavus Von Finkleberg
- 4 Phillip Hamilton Richards III
- 5 Todd, Chad, Preston...you get the idea. Seriously, what are these parents thinking?

Top 5 games I wish I could review but the staff would never let me, instead feeding me such gems as Sonic Riders:

- 1 Final Fantasy XI. I dig them MMORPGs.
- 2 Oblivion. Ryan had to go to Maryland for it, so I don't think my chances would've been very good anyway.
- 3 Fight Night Round 3. Tom takes it bad enough when I beat him in a match.
- 4 Halo 3. Yeah right.
- 5 Splinter Cell Double Agent. Ryan would choke me, Sam Fisher style.



Ryan McCaffrey
SENIOR ASSOCIATE EDITOR



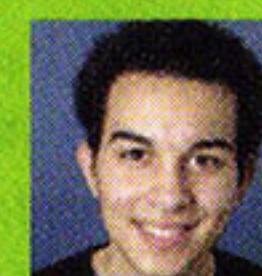
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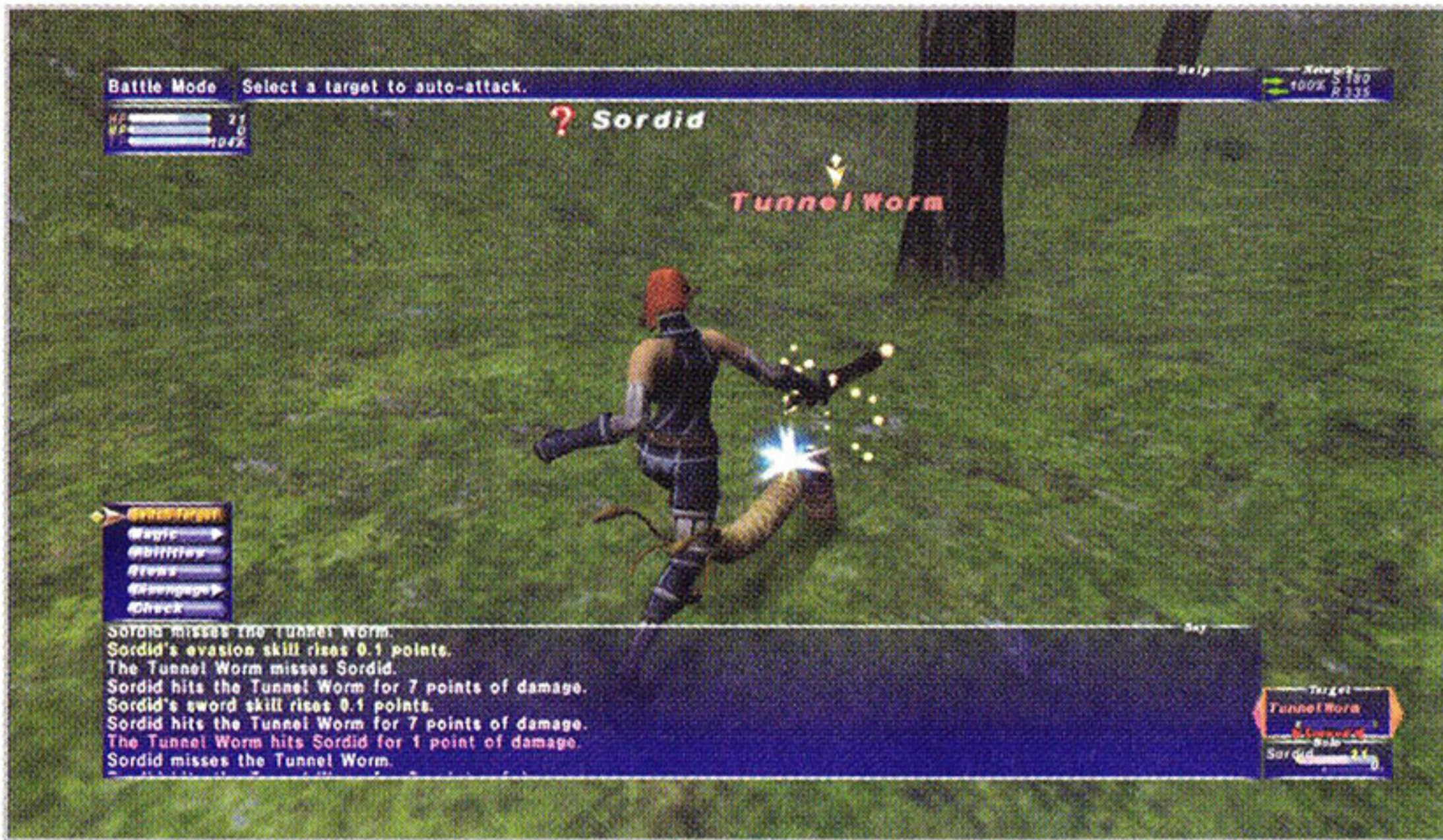
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Dane Frederiksen
MULTIMEDIA EDITOR



Thomas Baxter
EDITORIAL INTERN



► Small FFXI text! It burns our eyeballs!

with firearms; do I lose my Melee Master achievements? — RON

We say: Though we don't see why you'd ever want to delete files off of the Xbox 360's hard drive, Ron (there's plenty of space!), we can tell you that your achievements are permanent. Once they've been achieved, they can't be un-achieved (is that even a word?), nor can they be overwritten by other achievements.

BREAK OUT THE BIFOCALS

Am I blind or is smaller text in games (like the coin count in the lower corner of the screen in *Kameo*) hard to read on my 1080i HDTV? I mean, my set is on the smaller side, but I thought high-definition was supposed to be clearer? — JONATHAN WALKER

We say: You're not blind. That's the good news. Unfortunately, the bad news is that smaller numbers or text often does blur out a bit on smaller 1080i sets because 1080i sets are, as indicated by the "i," interlaced, meaning they only draw every other line in a single pass, just like a standard non-HD television. Hopefully developers will bear this in mind when building their games in the future.

UNINSTALLING FFXI

After installing the *FFXI* beta and trying it out, I've decided that it's not for me and I'd like to erase it and get my 5GB of hard-drive space back. I have searched every category of the Memory menu in the 360 Dashboard and cannot find a listing to delete the beta. I seriously demand instructions on how to purge this unnecessary bulk from my drive. Please help as your magazine never stated that I would be permanently giving up so much space! — DAVID GAZDECKI

We say: For whatever reason, the means to uninstall the *Final Fantasy XI* beta are, just like the installation process, not conventional. And we'll be honest: We

couldn't figure out how to uninstall it when you guys started asking us about it. So we went to Square Enix, and they told us how to get it done:

- 1) From your PlayOnline main menu, select "Uninstall."
- 2) You will be prompted with the message: "To uninstall the PlayOnline Viewer/Final Fantasy XI beta version, go to the install menu and select 'Uninstall Software.' Open the install menu now?"
- 3) Select Yes.
- 4) Select Uninstall Software from the Install Menu.
- 5) You will be prompted with the message: "Uninstalling the PlayOnline Viewer beta version and Final Fantasy XI beta version will delete all mails, messages, and all other relevant data. Uninstall now?"
- 6) Select Yes.
- 7) You will be prompted with the message: "The PlayOnline Viewer beta version and Final Fantasy XI beta version have successfully been uninstalled. Select 'OK' to exit the PlayOnline Viewer."
- 8) Select OK, and your PlayOnline and Final Fantasy XI will have now been uninstalled from your hard drive.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTION

I love the new disc, but my only beef is that all of your old discs don't work in my 360. Will there be an Xbox Live update so they can be played in the 360? There is some great stuff on there that would be a shame to have to throw or give away if you got rid of your original Xbox. — EVAN NIXON

We say: Sorry Evan, but the chances of our 50-plus complement of Xbox demo discs being made backwards compatible for the Xbox 360 are, frankly, slim to none. A lot more work than you might think goes into creating, testing, and certifying the emulator patches for each Xbox 1 title to get them to work on an Xbox 360. So for Microsoft to do that for our entire catalog of old demo discs, when in reality most folks play the demos on our disc for a month or

COVER CAPTIONS
FEBRUARY 2006

More good stuff from you guys for February's *Ghost Recon* cover. Winner Nathan Zarzaur gets a copy of *GRAW* upon its release for this quip:



"I think LensCrafters got confused when I gave them that coupon that said 'next pair of glasses half-off...'"

This month's runners-up:
"Uh oh, I think Sarge saw me playing *Geometry Wars* again on my Cross-Com!" — GREGORY KEATHLEY

"Base, this is Tango 6. There are no Xbox 360s at this Best Buy. Over."

— JAMES WILSON
Send your funniest captions for this month's cover to letters@officialxboxmagazine.com with the subject line "Cover Captions 56," and the best will see their names here!

two and then never fire them up again, just doesn't make much practical sense. Sorry.



THIS LETTER IS RATED 'E'

After sifting through my Xbox game collection, I noticed that most of my games are rated 'M' for Mature. So, how do games get 'M' or 'AO' (Adults Only) ratings?

— PEYTON

► Like NC-17 for a movie, AO kills sales.

We say: The ESRB, or Entertainment Software Ratings Board, is an independent panel that rates all games prior to their release, similar to how the MPAA puts PGs, Rs, etc. on movies before they hit theaters. Basically, the publisher comes in, shows their game to the board, the board asks questions about it, and then the ESRB assigns it a rating. As for the difference between 'M' and the taboo 'AO'? The ESRB website says Mature games "may contain intense violence, blood and gore, sexual content, and/or strong language," while Adults Only titles "may include prolonged scenes of intense violence and/or graphic sexual content and nudity." They're pretty different after you read those descriptions.

WE SUCK

What's the deal? I didn't get my disc this month! So I filled out the disc replacement form on your website and I still never got it. What gives? — THOUSANDS OF YOU

We say: We can do nothing but apologize here, everyone. Over the past several months, there was an issue with one of our fulfillment houses resulting from a glitch in the system. Needless to say, our heads were sore from banging them on our desks for a week straight when we heard the news, and even more needless to say, the problem has been resolved and those responsible have been dealt with (boiled in hot, gooey oil, for starters). We sincerely apologize to all affected readers.

THE UHD ERA

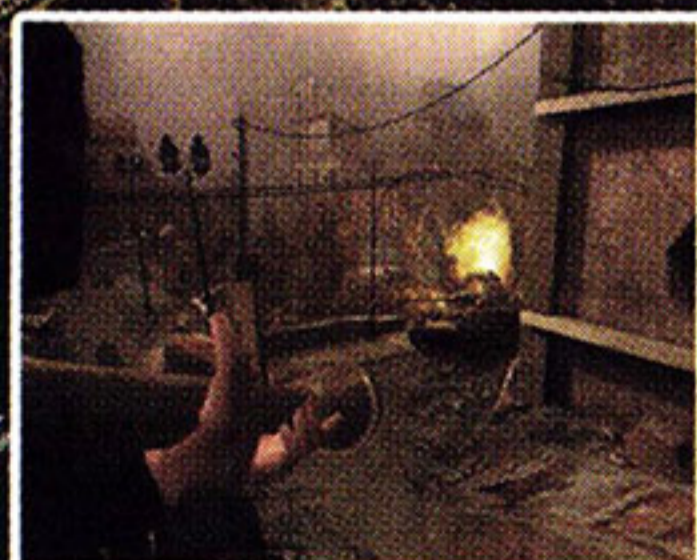
I read somewhere that the PlayStation 3 will be able to display images in 1080p HDTV. Can my Xbox 360 push that same resolution? — EVER OLVERA

We say: No, the Xbox 360 does not support 1080p — just the now-standard 720p and 1080i. But the reality is 1080p is still generally super-pricey (with larger sets costing roughly double what a similarly sized DLP set goes for) and will not factor

continued on pg. 18 ►►

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PlayStation 2



XBOX LIVE

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► **Stargate** the first-person shooter's been canned, but the license isn't dead.

into videogaming in the Xbox 360/PlayStation 3/Revolution generation. Sure, the PS3 may support it, but we'd be willing to bet that 95 percent or more of all PS3 titles will stick with 720p/1080i just like 360, and all you'll ever get in 1080p is the occasional niche game (much the way Dragon's Lair 3D was one of the very few 1080i Xbox 1 games).

DISAPPEARING ACT

I read in a fall '05 issue that *Stargate SG-1: The Alliance* was due for a Christmas '05 launch. After no review came in the new issues, I did my research and went to the websites and forum boards to figure out its release date, only to find out no one really knows when it's coming out. Can you guys shed some light on this?

— MATT COKER

We say: After previously being in publisher Namco's hands, the *Stargate* first-person shooter (above) hasn't been seen by the public in quite some time. The official website hasn't been updated since last June. It turns out that the game has, unfortunately, been cancelled. But all is not lost for *Stargate* fans longing for a videogame version of the sci-fi franchise. *Cheyenne Mountain* is developing an MMORPG called *Stargate Worlds*, which MGM Interactive will publish. It's only been announced for PC so far, but an Xbox 360 version would not be out of the question.

THE READERS HAVE SPOKEN

I really enjoyed and now miss the bottom fillers. They were both informative and

quite funny at times. I'd really to see them make a return.

— RON RODRIGUEZ

We say: We asked for your feedback and, boy oh boy, did we get it. Quite literally no one wrote in and said they disliked the bottom fillers, a.k.a. those little nuggets of text we had at the bottom of the magazine's pages. You all dug them, and after being without them for a bit, we realized that we missed them too. So as you can now see, they're back. Thanks to everyone for writing in and giving us your feedback!

RTS MIA

I'm a huge fan of the real-time strategy series *Age of Empires*, which is even making an appearance on Nintendo DS, of all things. Since it's a Microsoft PC game and the 360 can support a mouse and keyboard, might it also come to 360?

— BOBBY BILLIOT

We say: It certainly could happen in theory, Bobby. But keep in mind that the DS has a very RTS-friendly point-and-click interface with its stylus pen — standard — and a mouse and keyboard are neither standard with the 360 nor couch friendly.

GOT A QUESTION ABOUT YOUR SUBSCRIPTION OR NEED A DISC?

For subscription, disc, or any other non-editorial inquiries, please visit our Frequently Asked Questions page on our website at www.officialxboxmagazine.com/faq.html. You'll find answers about how to handle missing discs, not getting the latest issue, and other concerns.

HALO Contest Winners

The following lucky readers each scored a set of *Halo 2* Series 3 action figures courtesy of Joyride and RC2 — just by reading *OXM* and entering the giveaway!



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Sioux Falls, SD

David S. Benjamin
Floresville, TX

Dennis Flores
Brooklyn, NY

Oscar Gonzales
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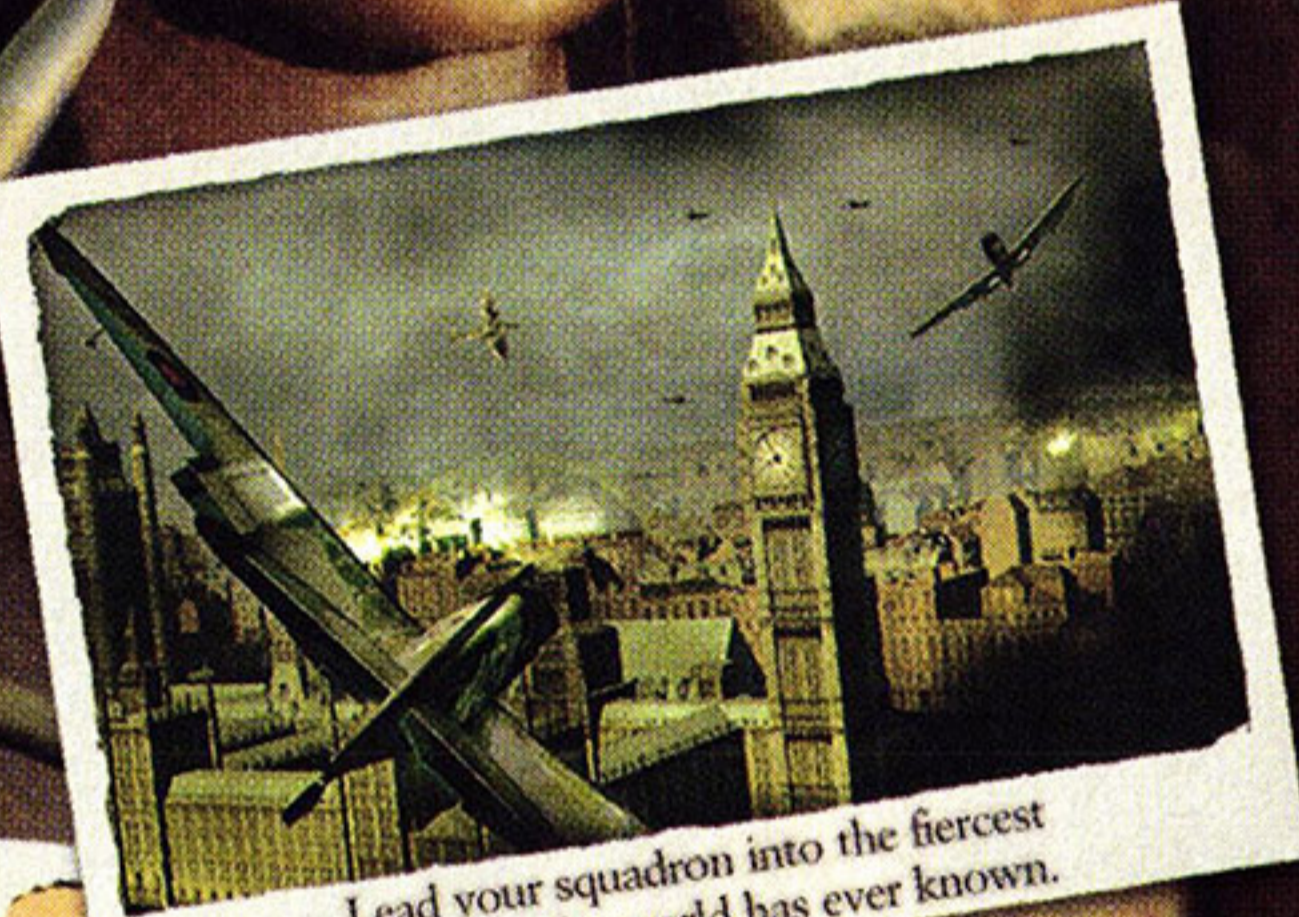
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THEY FLEW LIKE EAGLES.
THEY FOUGHT LIKE LIONS.

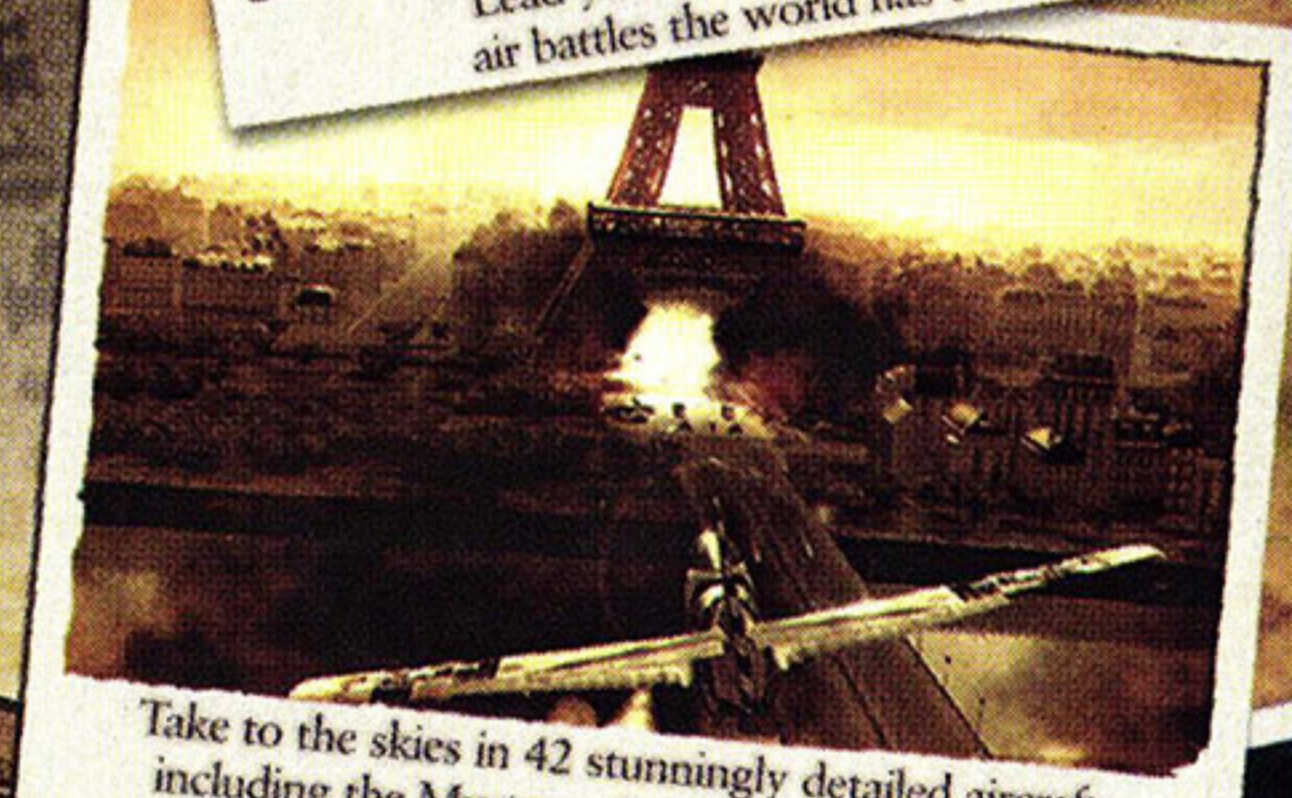
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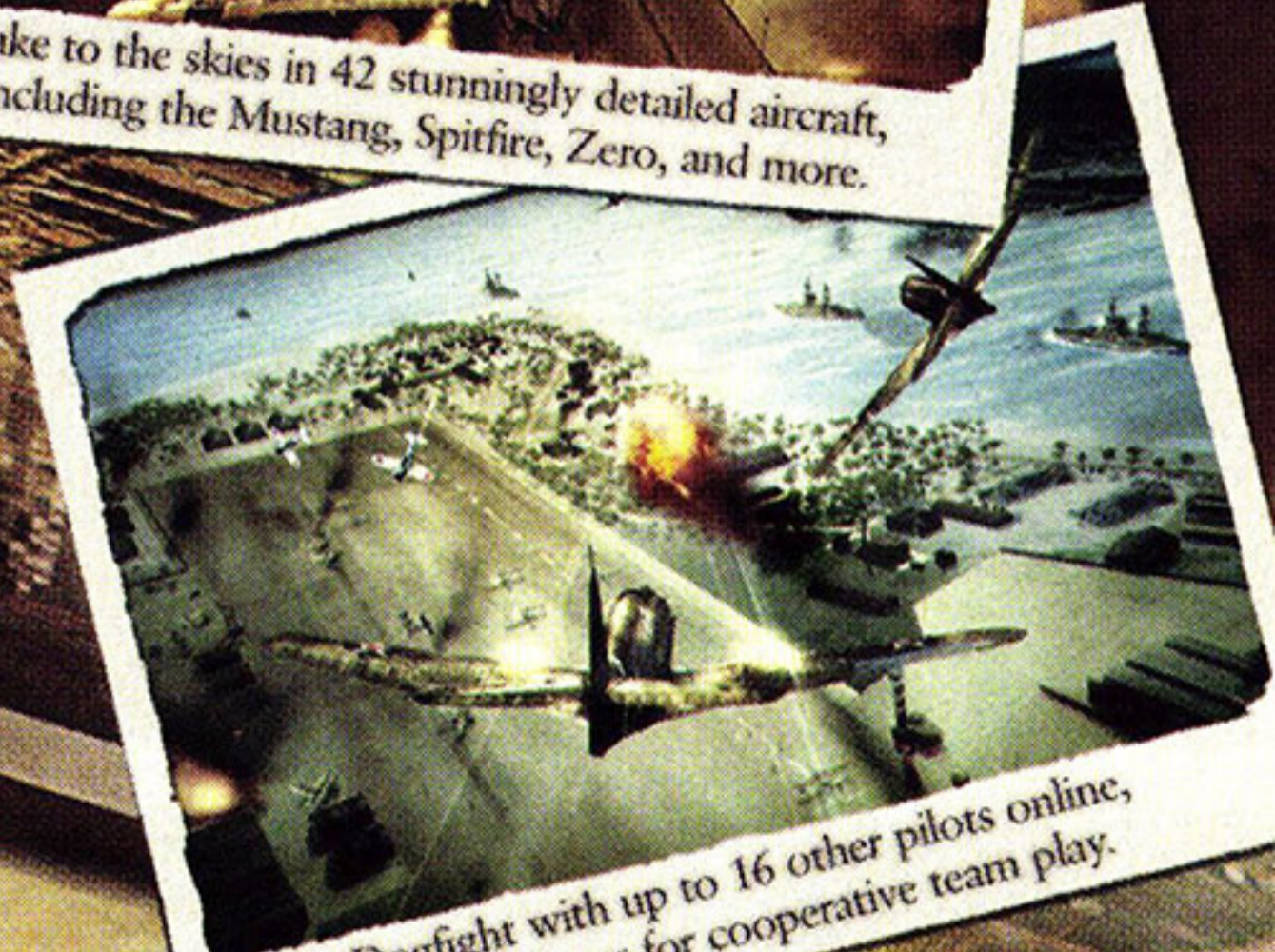
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PlayStation 2



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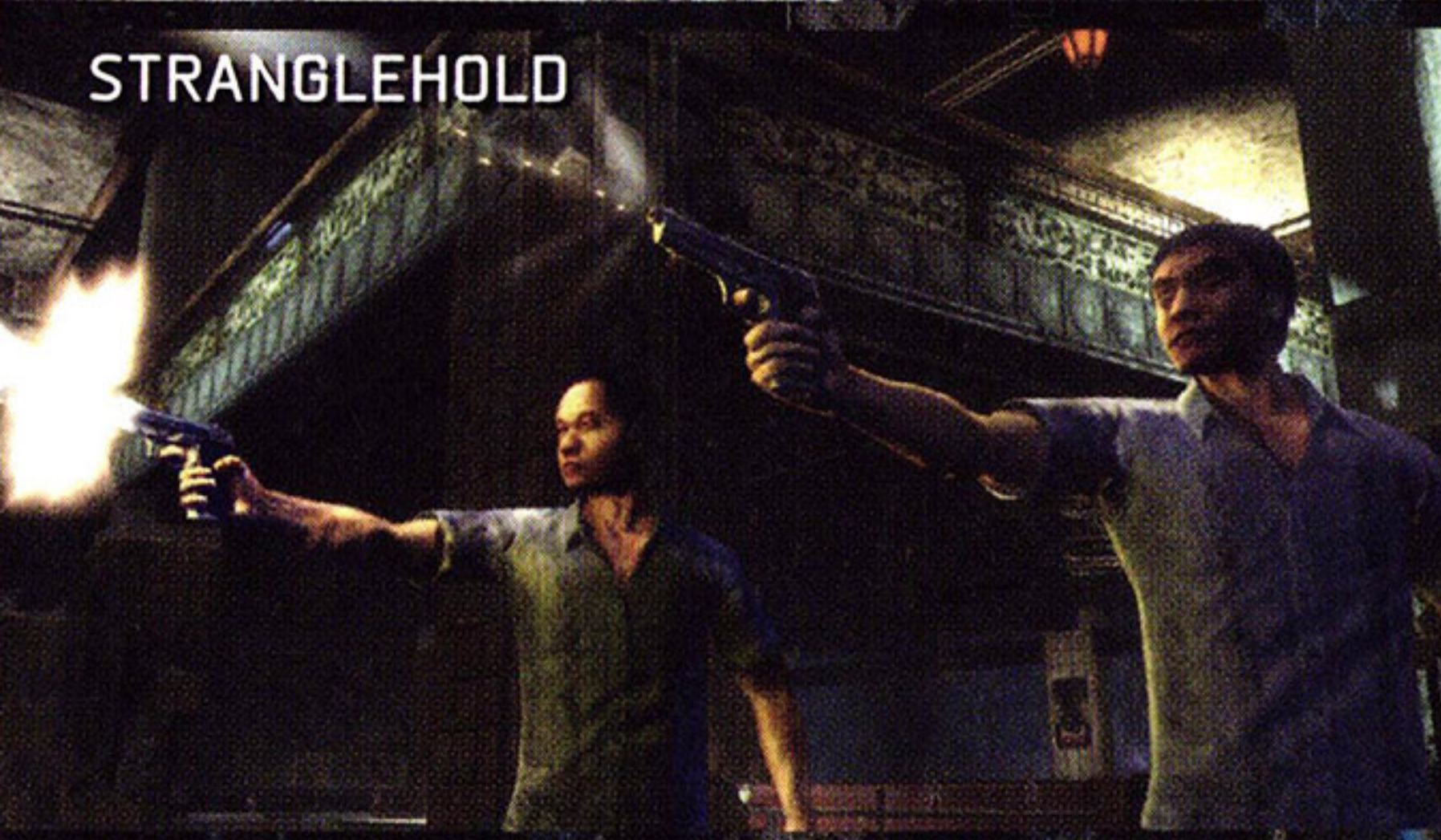
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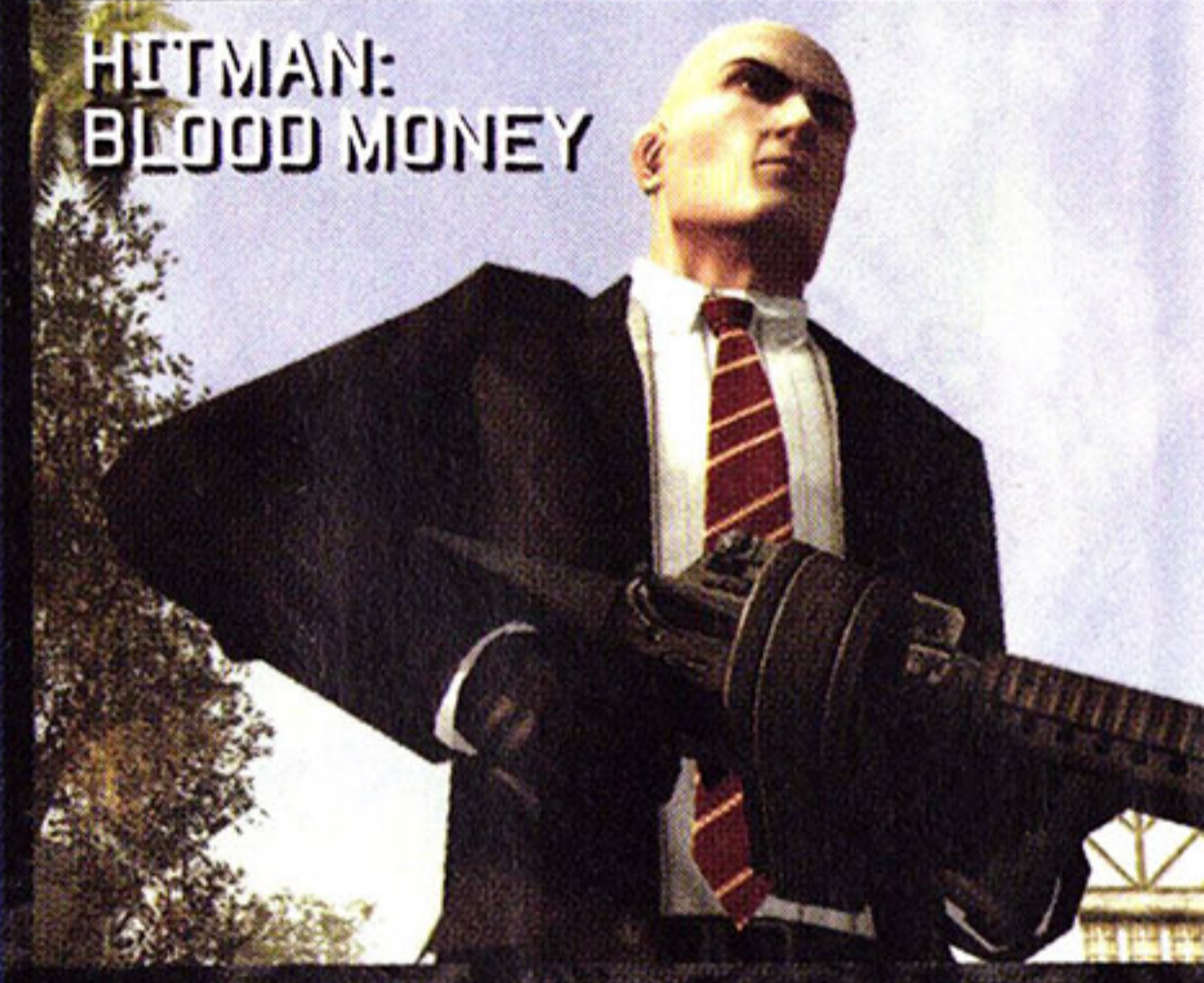
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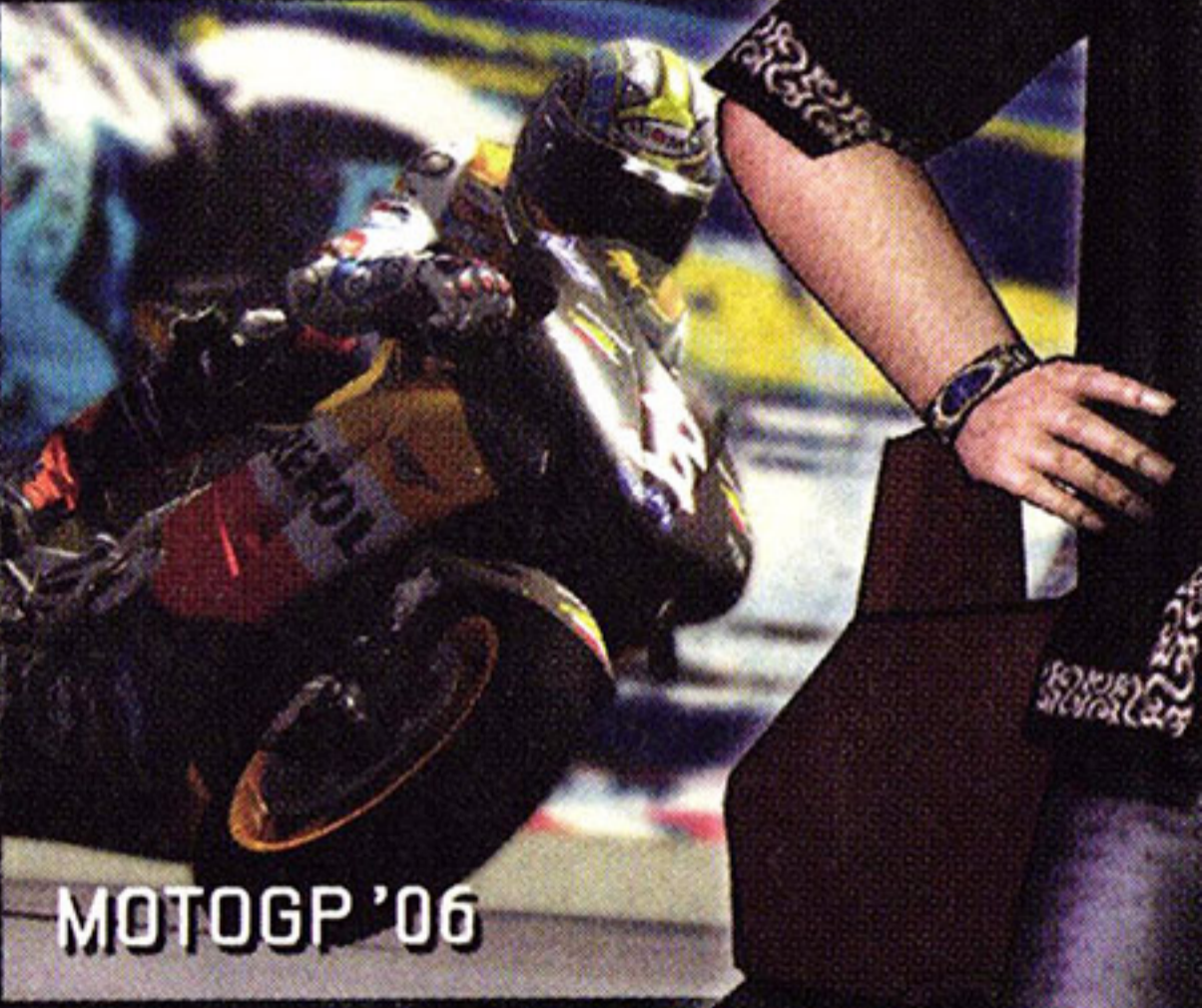
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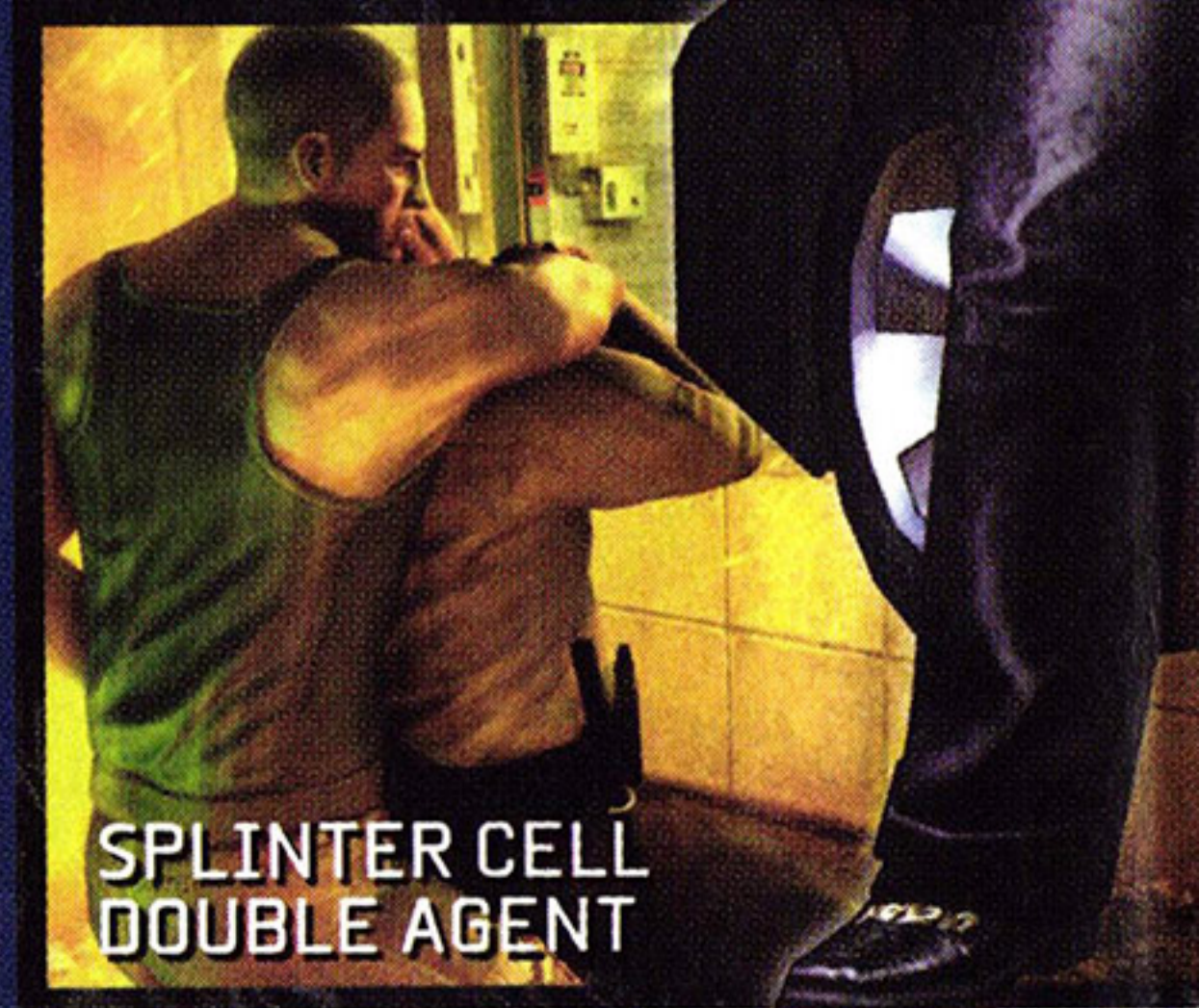
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BLOOD MONEY



X-MEN 3



MOTOGP '06



SPLINTER CELL
DOUBLE AGENT

IN PREVIEW



The Official Xbox Magazine's guide to all the games you can't wait to play in 2006

Blame it on our short attention spans, but even though we're currently sitting on a backlog of great games from the past year, we can't help but start looking forward to what's coming up. It's not our fault that 2006 is looking very exciting so far, with a bumper crop of new

Xbox 360 titles on the way as well as plenty of tempting titles headed to original Xbox. We've compiled more than 50 games that get our blood boiling – and we're still months away from E3. So sit back, relax, and let us take you on a tour of the best videogames you'll be playing (and wanting to play) this coming year..

continued on pg. 24 ►►



Leveling up your superagent means you can throw a punch that'll launch your foes into the stratosphere.

Crackdown For Two

The role of a superagent doesn't have to be a lonely one. In fact, it's a world built for two over Xbox Live. The entirety of *Crackdown's* main adventure is geared for you and a friend to finish as a team online over two Xbox 360s. While we didn't get a chance to see co-op in practice, Jones provided us with an example of how you and your buddy can lend each other a hand.

"If you're driving a car with your friend in the passenger seat and you reach a wall that's too high to jump or drive over," he tell us, "you can exit the car, pick it up, then toss it over the wall. Then you can simply jump over the wall and hop back in on the other side." Brilliant!

CRACKDOWN



So you wanna be a superhero

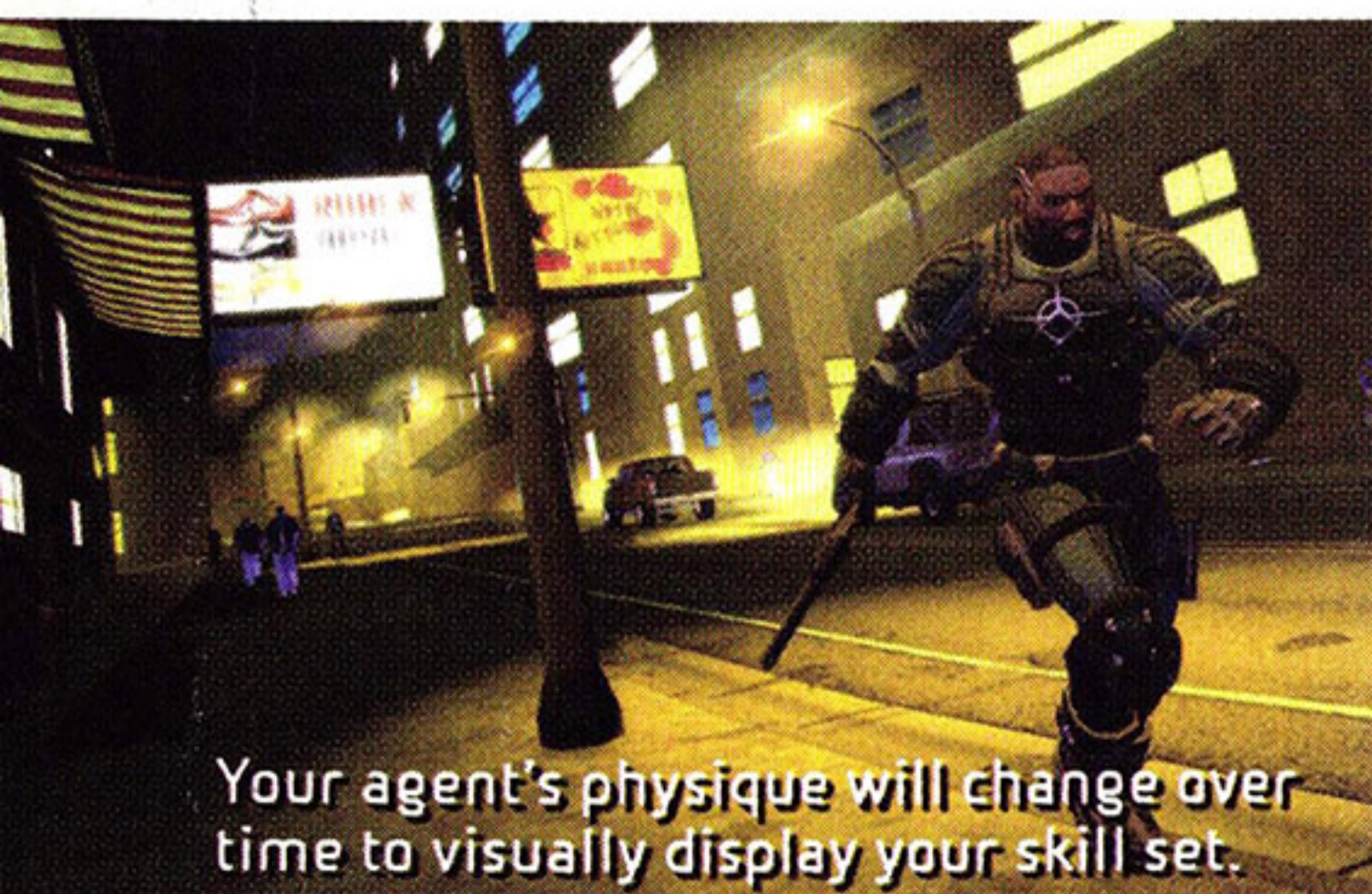
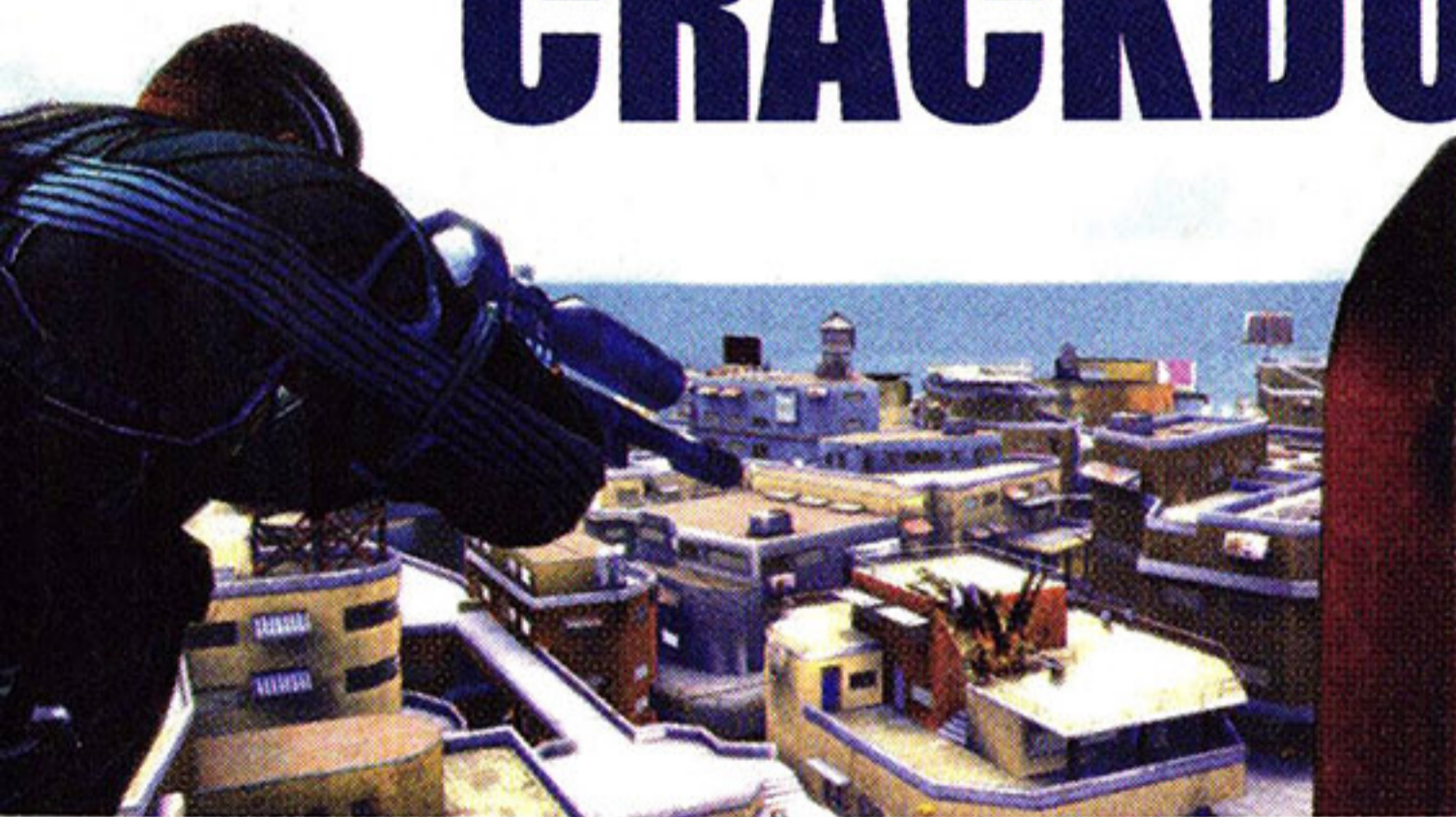
PLATFORM: XBOX 360
PUBLISHER: MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS
DEVELOPER: REAL TIME WORLDS
RELEASE DATE: FALL 2006

There's something about *Crackdown*, Microsoft's open-world, sandboxed, secret-agent thug-'em-up that's got us all tingly. Could it be that the man behind it, David Jones (founder of developer Real Time Worlds and former founder of DMA Design) is also responsible for a little game called *Grand Theft Auto*? Or is it that *Crackdown's* non-linear approach to the action genre is wildly open-ended in a way reserved for the *Oblivions* and MMORPGs of the gaming world? Maybe it's that you can shove the superheroes of the world aside while you leap tall buildings in a single bound while tossing cars like confetti?

Whatever it is, *Crackdown* definitely has our attention as one of the big games to watch this year. From the gangland action to its clever take on Live Achievements to full co-op online play...seriously, can a game really be all things to all people? David Jones and his team at Real Time Worlds think it's something even your mom could play and love. Wait...let's qualify that...

It's a Shooter!

Gangs rule the world in *Crackdown*, plain and simple. From the influx of weapons to the means of transportation, it's a gangster's paradise in



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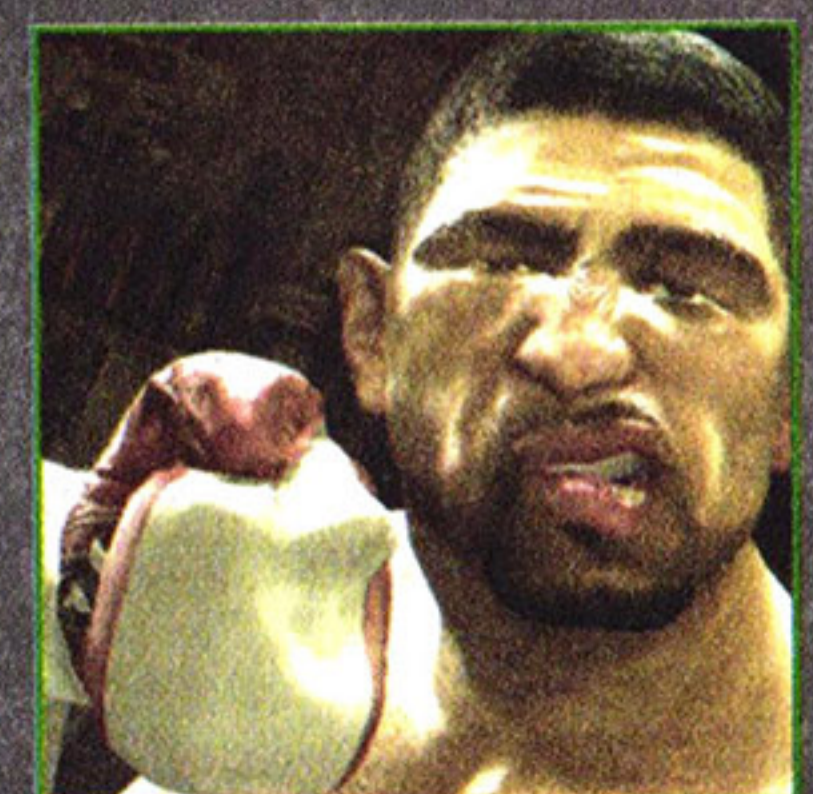
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- *Condemned: Criminal Origins* playable demo (free)
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NEW AND UPCOMING RELEASES**

- *Fight Night Round 3* (Xbox, Xbox 360)
- *NBA Ballers Phenom* (Xbox)
- *College Hoops 2K6* (Xbox 360)
- *Stacked With Daniel Negreanu* (Xbox)
- *The Outfit* (Xbox 360)
- *Burnout Revenge* (Xbox 360)
- *Blazing Angels* (Xbox 360)

**All game releases are subject to change.





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			29		31 FREE XBOX LIVE GOLD WEEKEND!	1 FREE XBOX LIVE GOLD WEEKEND! Gauntlet: Seven Sorrows (Xbox) 6PM ET/3PM PT MotogP 3 (Xbox) 9PM ET/6PM PT
2 FREE XBOX LIVE GOLD WEEKEND! Links 2004 (Xbox) 6PM ET/3PM PT Madden NFL 06 (Xbox) 9PM ET/6PM PT	3 Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter (Xbox) 9PM ET/6PM PT	4 Tony Hawk's American Wasteland (Xbox 360) 6PM ET/3PM PT Perfect Dark Zero (Xbox 360) 9PM ET/6PM PT	5 MYSTERY GAMER! Burnout Revenge (Xbox 360) 6PM ET/3PM PT	6 Burnout Revenge (Xbox) 6PM ET/3PM PT Doom 3: Resurrection of Evil (Xbox) 9PM ET/6PM PT	7 Full Spectrum Warrior: Ten Hammers (Xbox) 6PM ET/3PM PT	8 Fight Night Round 3 (Xbox) 6PM ET/3PM PT Fight Night Round 3 (Xbox 360) 9PM ET/6PM PT
9 Major League Baseball 2K6 (Xbox) 6PM ET/3PM PT Major League Baseball 2K6 (Xbox 360) 9PM ET/6PM PT	10 Far Cry Instincts: Next Chapter (Xbox) 6PM ET/3PM PT Far Cry Instincts: Predator (Xbox360) 9PM ET/6PM PT	11 MYSTERY GAMER! Stacked with Daniel Negreanu (Xbox) 6PM ET/3PM PT	12 Project Gotham Racing 3 (Xbox 360) 6PM ET/3PM PT World Championship Poker 2 (Xbox) 9PM ET/6PM PT	13 Halo 2 (Xbox) 6PM ET/3PM PT NBA 2K6 (Xbox 360) 9PM ET/6PM PT	14 FRAG DOLL FRIDAY! Perfect Dark Zero (Xbox 360) 9PM ET/6PM	15 Top Spin 2 (Xbox 360) 9PM ET/6PM PT
16 NBA Live 06 (Xbox) 6PM ET/3PM PT NBA Live 06 (Xbox 360) 9PM ET/6PM PT	17 Star Wars Battlefront (Xbox) 6PM ET/3PM PT MVP 06 NCAA Baseball (Xbox) 9PM ET/6PM PT	18 Star Wars Battlefront II (Xbox) 9PM ET/6PM PT	19 MYSTERY GAMER! Fight Night Round 3 (Xbox 360) 6PM ET/3PM PT	20 Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six: Lockdown (Xbox) 6PM ET/3PM PT Full Auto (Xbox 360) 9PM ET/6PM PT	21 Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon 2: Summit Strike (Xbox) 6PM ET/3PM PT Full Auto (Xbox 360) 9PM ET/6PM PT	22 Call of Duty 2 (Xbox 360) 9PM ET/6PM PT
23/30 4/23: Need for Speed Most Wanted (Xbox 360) 9PM ET/6PM PT 4/30: Ridge Racer 6 9PM ET/6PM PT	24 Dead or Alive 4 (Xbox 360) 9PM ET/6PM PT	25 MYSTERY GAMER! Halo 2 (Xbox) 6PM ET/3PM PT	26 Splinter Cell Chaos Theory Versus (Xbox) 6pm ET/3pm PT Splinter Cell Chaos Theory Co-op (Xbox) 9PM ET/6PM PT	27 Quake 4 (Xbox 360) 9PM ET/6PM PT	28 FRAG DOLL FRIDAY! Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter (Xbox 360) 9PM ET/6PM PT	29 Tiger Woods PGA Tour 06 (Xbox) 6PM ET/3PM PT Tiger Woods PGA Tour 06 (Xbox 360) 9PM ET/6PM PT



Pick Up and Play

In *Crackdown*, cool points go to your ability to pretty much use anything (or anyone) in the game. In one area of the game, we got a chance to basically stockpile bodies in a dumpster, then pick up the dumpster and toss it into a car for maximum effect. Tossing cars also never gets old. As silly as it sounds, just think of the possibilities for achievements – or just for kicks, alone. Real Time Worlds hopes that the open-world environment will foster the same kind of wacked-out experimentation that *Halo* inspired in Warthog lovers or that *Super Mario 64* inspired in 120 star completists.



Pacific City. It's an ideal situation if you're one of the lowlifes skirting the law for a living, but not if you're one of a new race of superagents cloned for maximum law enforcement by a governmental body simply called The Agency. You've got a job to do, and the local police force certainly won't have your back.

"Basically, normal police forces have given up hope," Jones tells us. "So we have this new force set up called The Agency, which is kind of like the last bastion of the city."

The Agency's objective is simple: Clean up the city at all costs. This means taking out the "trash." But to get more specific, your cleaning job begins at the top of the food chain – the gangs. Pacific City's roughest and toughest make their homes in different areas of the teeming metropolis, going about their business as if they ruled the city – and in fact, they do.

Three different but equally brutal gangs run Pacific City: the Volk, Los Muertos, and the Shai-Gen Corporation. Each gang has seven kingpins that you'll have to take down in order to get at the lead kingpin. If you do the math, *Crackdown* packs in 21 kingpins with three bosses. That's a lot of fighting.

And here's the twist: Every single one of these 21 kingpins is totally accessible and present in the game world right from the start. But having

access to a kingpin and possessing the full suite of skills to effectively take him down are two totally different things. To try to take any of them on without developing your character's powers and abilities qualifies you as reckless and, most likely, worm fodder.

So getting up to the level where you can really play with the big boys is your biggest battle. And how do you get from zero to 60? Patience, young grasshopper.

It's an RPG!

The Agency's policy of cloning its agents for deployment onto the streets of Pacific City means you'll start the game as just a mere sapling. By diving into different aspects of *Crackdown*, be it handling firearms, lifting and throwing objects (or people, whatever floats your boat), or honing your other athletic abilities (jumping, melee attacks, etc.), you'll further develop your character's strengths.

For instance, if you're cuckoo for brute strength, you'll notice that your agent's physique will begin to reflect his training. Buffer arms, a steadier aim, broader shoulders – these are the things that a true high-level agent must possess to really put the hurt on the various kingpins fouling up your city. And if you put enough time into your character and into *Crackdown* in general, the payoff promises sweet, sweet things. This approach to completing the game's main quest is tailor-made for anyone who doesn't want to invest too much time into strategizing other ways to take the bad guys down.

"There should be no player that can't finish this game," Jones boasts.

Hey, wait a minute...so, you're saying that even our mothers can finish *Crackdown*?

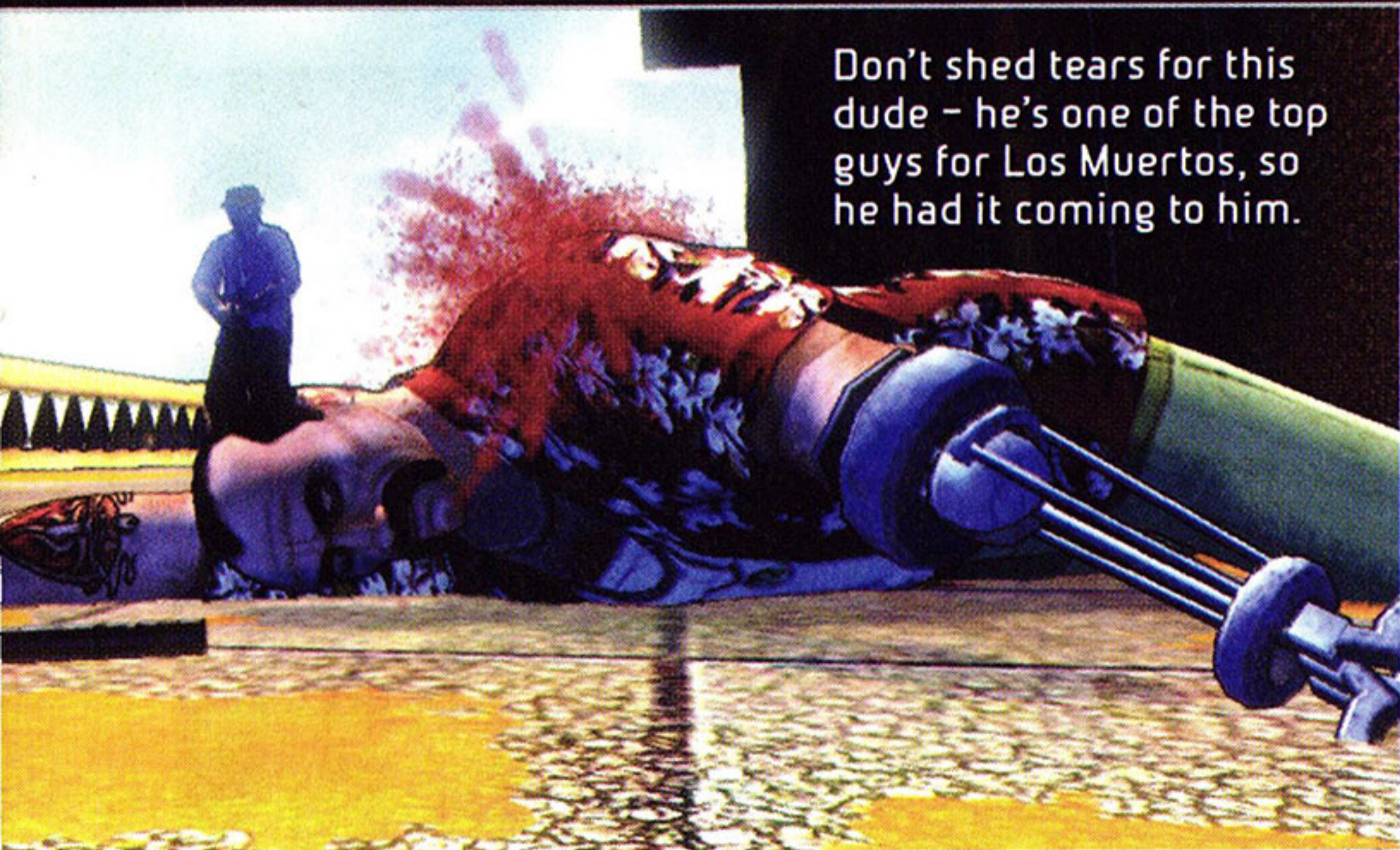
"Absolutely," Jones tells us. "If she just sits there and plays for a few hours each day, she'll have this amazing character eventually, and she can go and decide when she wants to go and take on these [kingpins]."



Crackdown's graphic-novel look is definitely inspired by superhero comics.

continued on pg. 26

CRACKDOWN CONTINUED



Don't shed tears for this dude - he's one of the top guys for Los Muertos, so he had it coming to him.

Sex and Violetta

While storyline isn't the main thrust of *Crackdown's* addictive, open-world appeal, it certainly isn't a weakness, either. Each of the gangs is populated by sinister and wicked characters who'll put you through your paces if you're not on your game, so to speak.

Take, for instance, Violetta. Microsoft global product manager Craig Evans refers to the busty female kingpin for Los Muertos as a "recruiter." He explains, "Think of her as a 'madam.' She recruits gang members through sex. But as she says, 'You gotta kill before you spill.'" Yikes. Welcome to the world of *Crackdown*, boys and girls!



It's a Strategy Game!

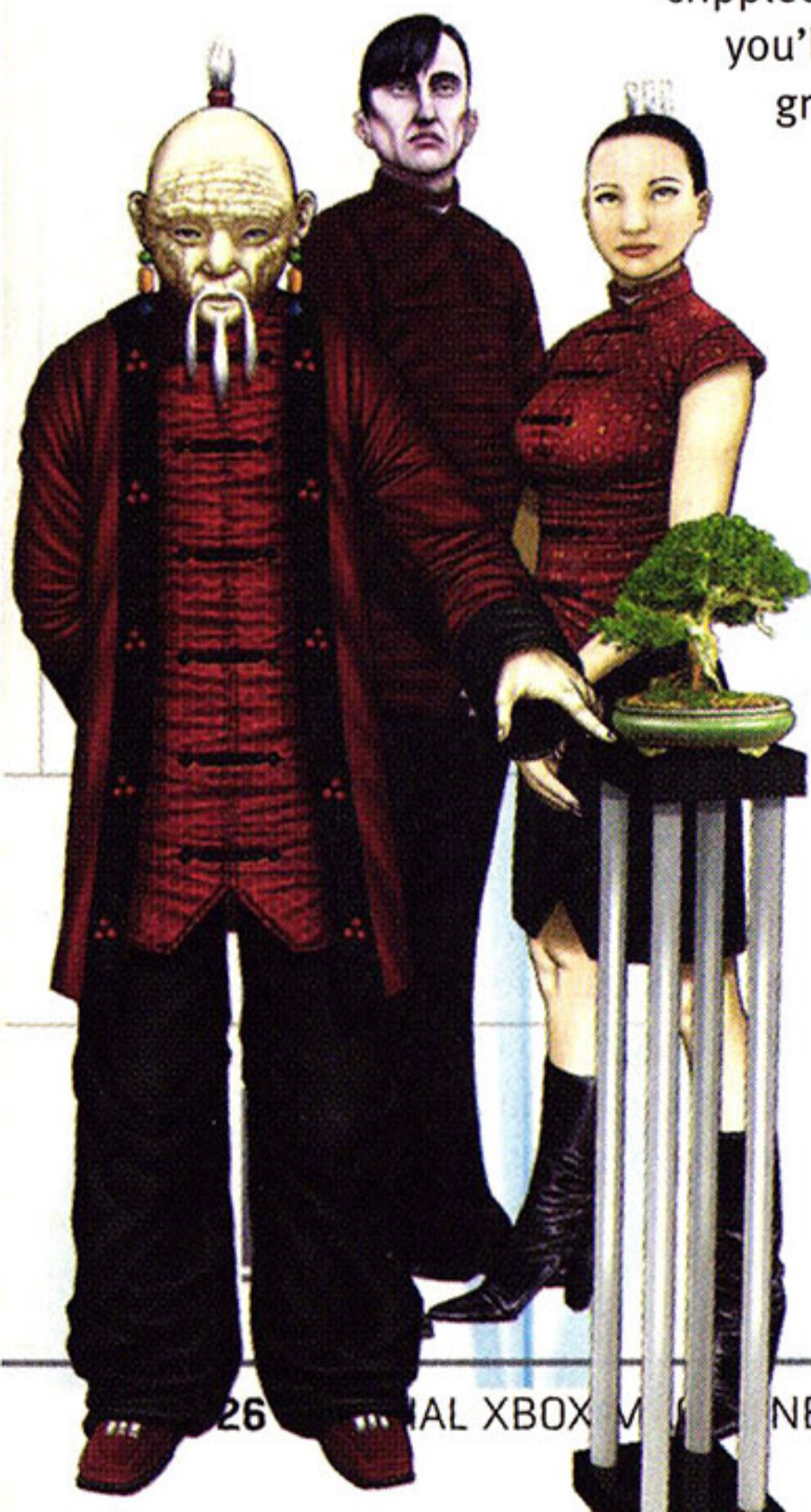
But what if you fancy yourself craftier and more strategic than, say, your mom? Well, *Crackdown* offers different ways to approach every situation. And that's what we call "sandbox." There's no one way to tackle any specific objective (other than having to make sure to actually kill kingpins, of course).

Say you want to start chipping away at the members of the Volk, the Eastern European gang of thugs. Each one of its leaders serves a different purpose within the group, and the Volk love themselves some illegal importing. They recruit everything from illegal labor to firearms - and when you're cruising Pacific City to find out where they hang, you'll most likely find Volk members working the docks, waiting for their shipments. So if you're smart, you'll attack the gang members and the kingpin managing the import of firearms. Once this arm of the gang is eliminated, you'll discover that the gang's effectiveness with firearms has now been

crippled - something you'll not take for granted for one

minute when you enter into any sort of firefight.

"For the real hardcore guys, they're going to want to take down these guys as fast and effectively as possible," explains Jones. "They will definitely be chipping away at the gang's hierarchy to make the gang weaker."



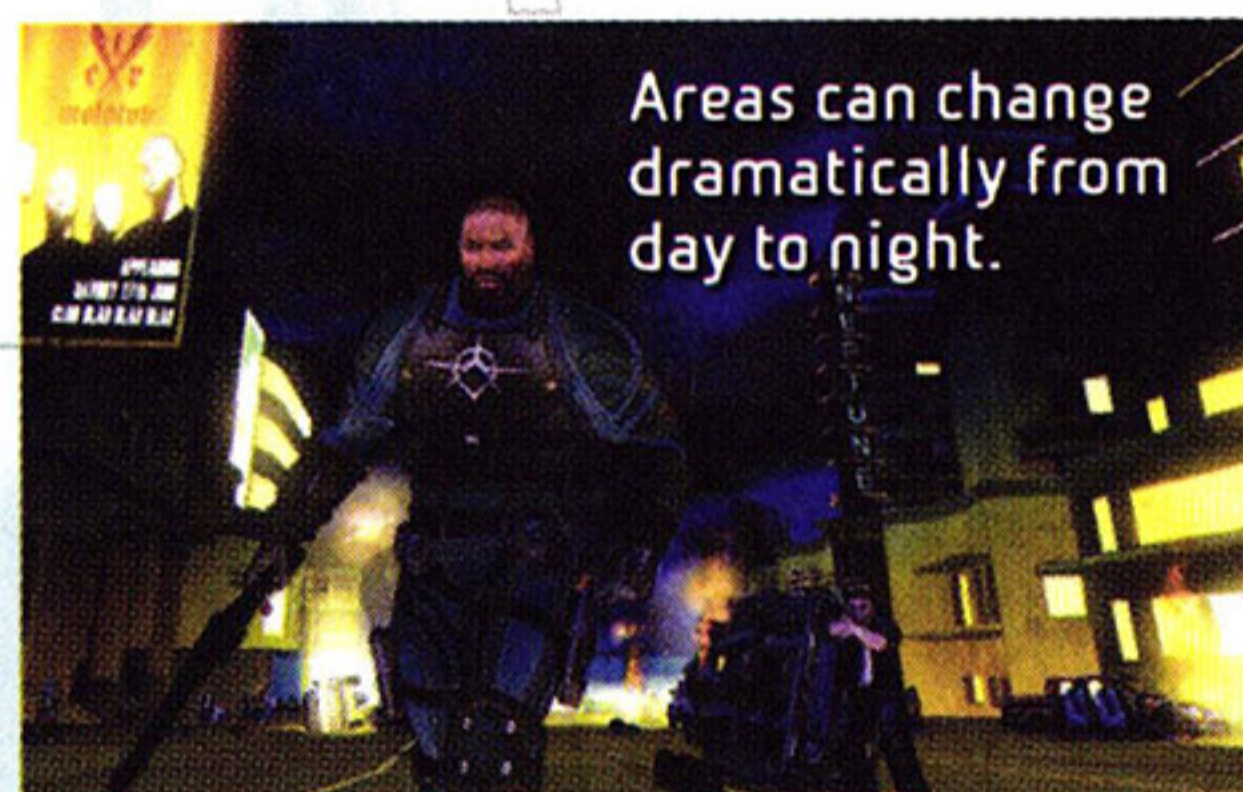
It's a Driving Game!

Not surprisingly in a wide-open world, cars and driving play a huge part in the *Crackdown* formula. But probably not in the way you're thinking. Sure, you can drive superpowered Agency cars (more on this in a bit), but carjacking? You can definitely commandeer any car on the street, but why do that when you can grow powerful enough to simply pick one up at will to use as a projectile weapon?

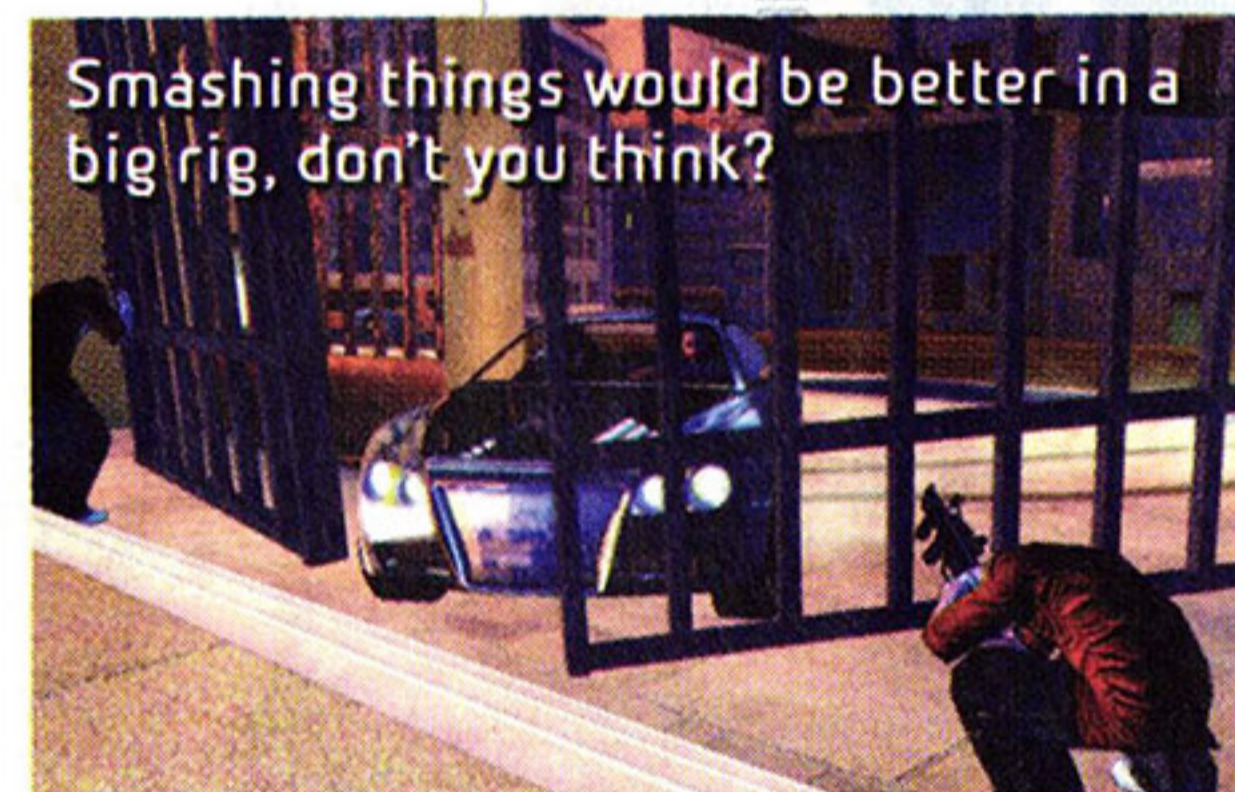
But cars have other uses, of course, and the Agency puts three vehicle types at your beck

and call to serve your various requirements. And what might your driving needs be?

The sleek Agency sports car is perfect for going under objects and screaming down city streets at high speeds. The SUV-style Agency vehicle is geared to steamroll over obstacles. And, lastly, the Agency-created big rig is all about ramming the crap out of objects. Therefore, you won't want the sports car or the SUV to help you bust through a kingpin's front gates - that's a job custom made for the big rig.



Areas can change dramatically from day to night.



Smashing things would be better in a big rig, don't you think?

Five Things You Didn't Know About David Jones

- He coded *Lemmings 1 & 2* for the Amiga from start to finish all by himself.
- He owns a purple Lamborghini Diabolo (which made a cameo in *Grand Theft Auto*).
- He actually strongly considered making an adult title starring porn star Asia Carrera.
- He and his wife are avid *World of Warcraft* players - his wife even runs her own guild in Blizzard's addictive MMORPG.
- He met the Queen of England in Dundee, Scotland, and spoke with her about videogames.



continued on pg. 28

MIDWAY

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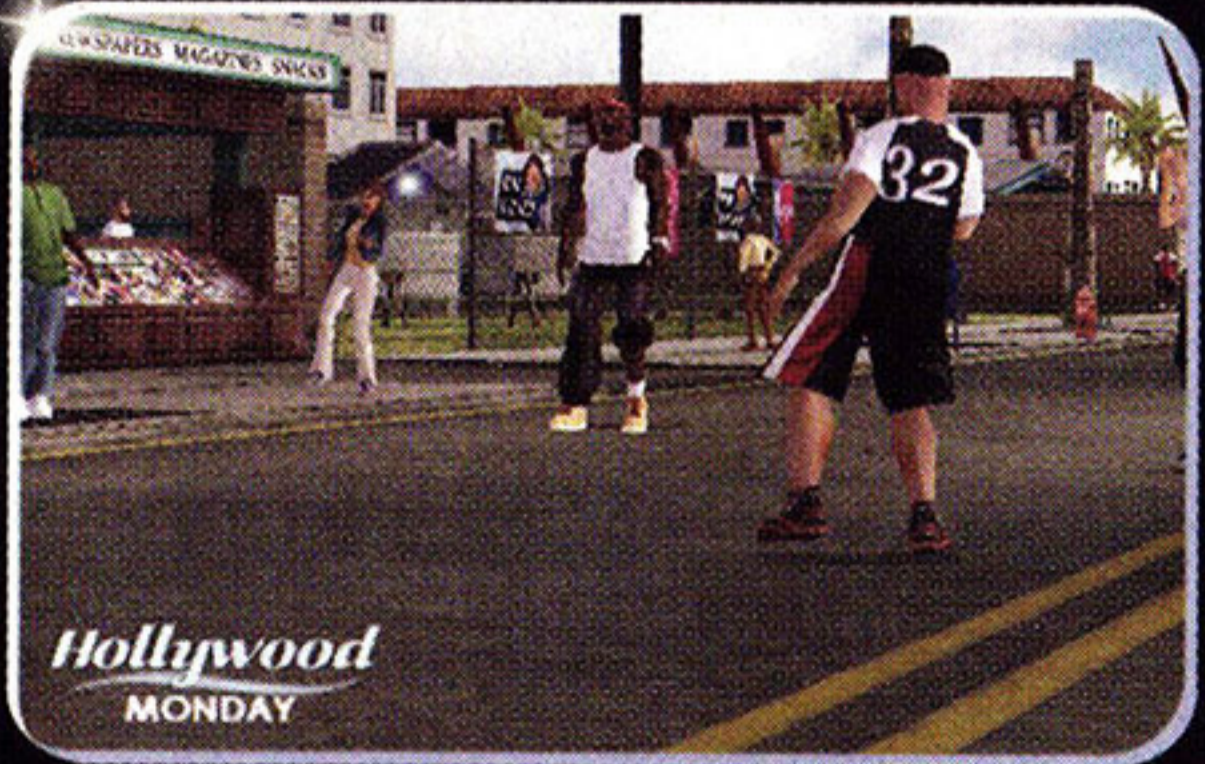
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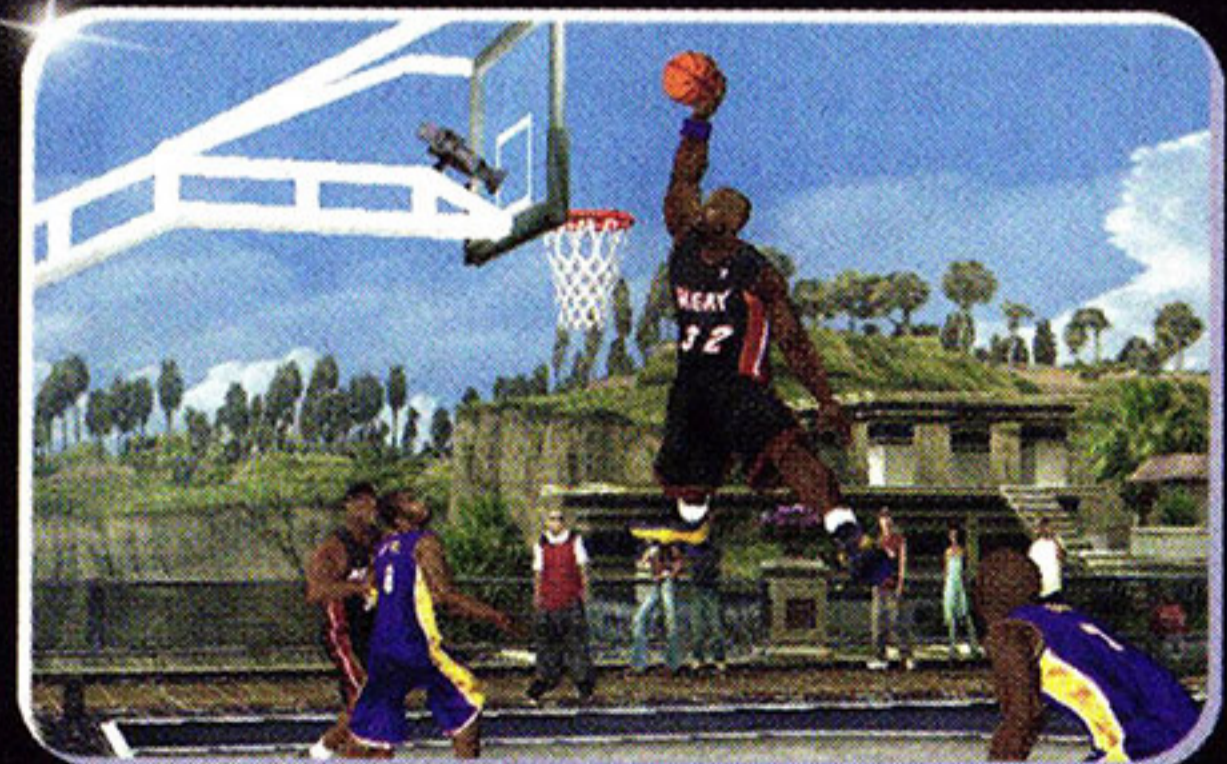
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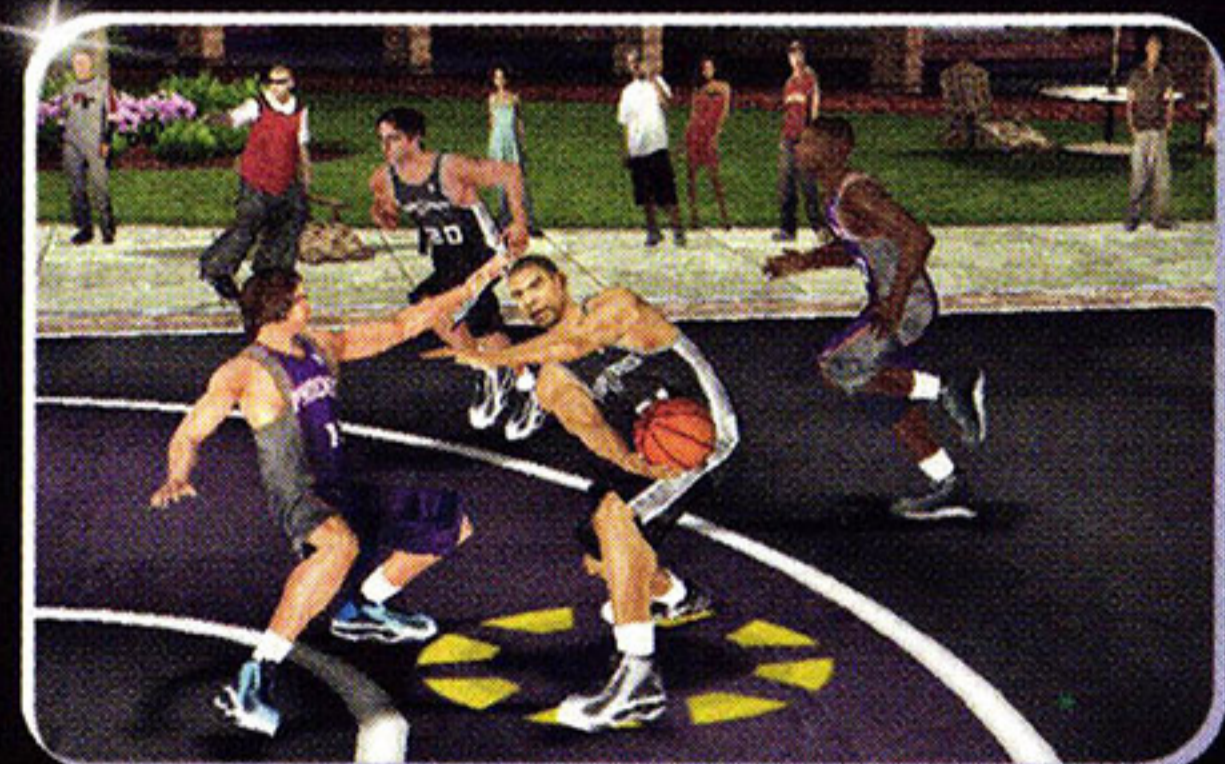
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CRACKDOWN CONTINUED

But just having powerful Agency vehicles isn't everything; you'll need to build up your driving skills by spending time in the saddle in order to really unlock the power in each of these special rides. The higher your driving skill, the more changes your Agency auto will undergo. If you're maxed out on driving skill, the minute you hop into, for example, the sports car, it'll morph into a much more powerful version of itself. So instead of the starter sports car you get from the Agency, it will transform into a sleeker, more vicious-looking metal beast – right before your eyes in real time. Each Agency vehicle has multiple tiers that you can achieve. Jones assures us that there will be side quests in the game where you'll be able to test your pedal mettle with optional races.

It's All About Live Achievements!

Which bring us to another aspect of *Crackdown* that should drive diligent gamers into a tailspin of sleepless nights – Achievements. Jones claims they've packed in 50 secret and not-so-secret Live Achievements throughout the game. They'll range from mishaps like the longest fall to your death to air-juggling an enemy with a rocket launcher. What?!

"When you shoot somebody with a rocket launcher, they tend to go pretty high," Jones tells us. "We have seen people sit there for hours trying to see who can keep a dead body above ground for as long as possible using the rocket launcher. It's timed, and that becomes an Achievement. It's posted onto Xbox Live, and we can have the top 20 people and the times they have managed to keep someone in the air for."



Crackdown's targeting system can actually pinpoint certain "hot spots" on an object.

But if that's not cool enough, there's also a little something called Agency Vision – a visual mode in which your agent can don special Agency shades and, as Jones explains, "things that the Agency has placed into the world become immediately apparent." Think of it this way: Certain messages imbedded into signs, billboards, and buildings are suddenly readable and can give you hints or direct you to the nearest Agency supply point where you can regain health, save your game, or respawn if you die.

But Jones hinted at another use for Agency Vision. If you're signed onto Xbox Live while playing *Crackdown*, certain billboards can display Achievements earned by fellow agents.

"[Say] I've just fallen 1,000 feet to my death and set a new Achievement," he proposes. "It actually gets broadcasted to all the other gamers out there through Agency billboards. It says 'Agent Jones has just fallen 1,027 feet to his death! Congratulations to Agent Jones! This is a new record!'"

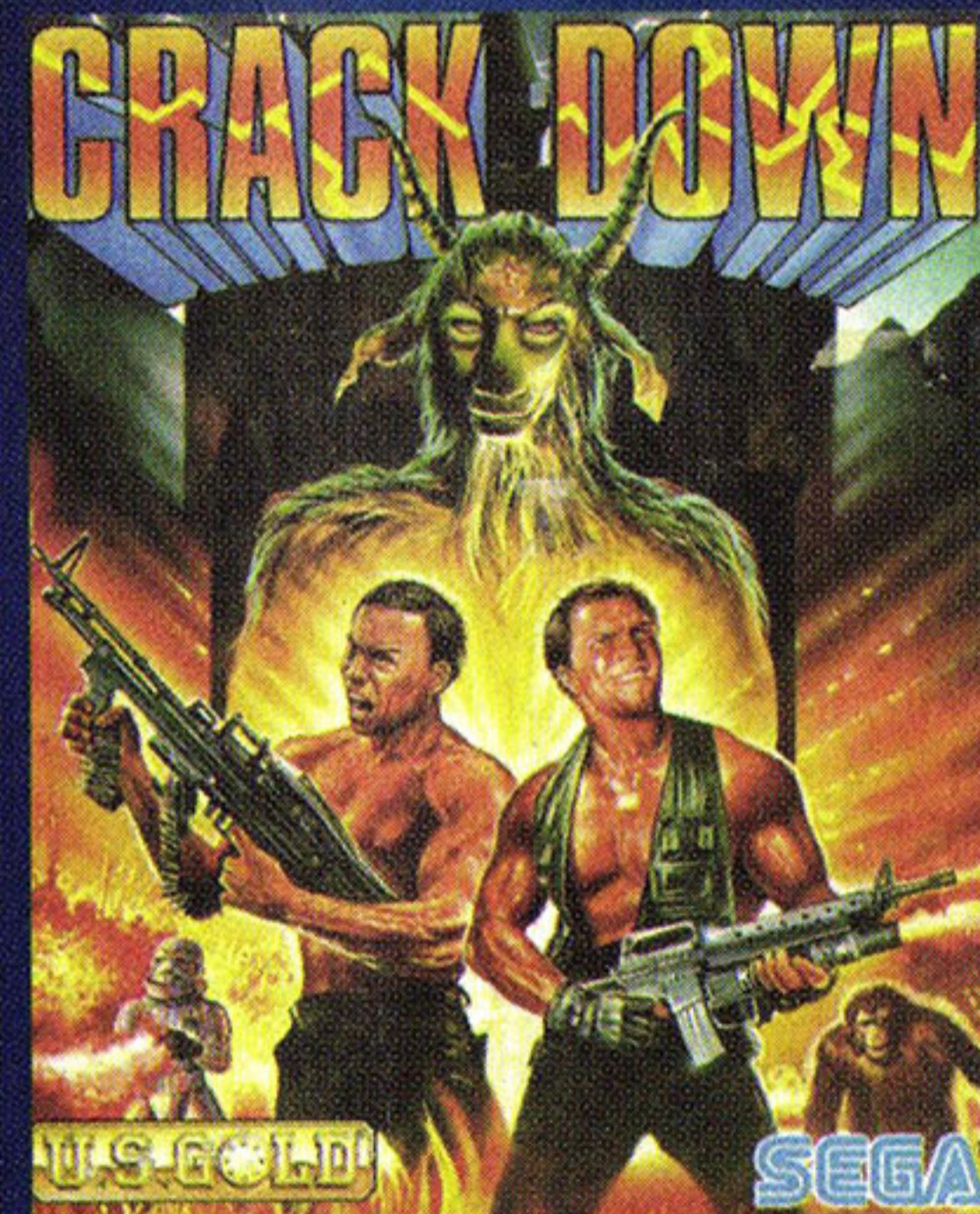
Bragging rights have just been knocked up a notch, thanks to *Crackdown*. And for aspiring virtual superagents, the carrot has just assumed the "dangling" position. And is there any greater motivation than bragging rights? We think not.

■ TARGET AUDIENCE: GAMERS WITH A SUPERHERO COMPLEX



Not That Crackdown!

Just in case anyone (like gamers who owned every single Genesis title in existence) out there thinks that *Crackdown* is not actually about gangs and the superagents who hunt them, but instead about goat devils and the supersoldiers (and Storm Trooper-alikes and upright monkeys) who hunt them: You're wrong. Microsoft's *Crackdown* is not Sega's 16-bit, top-down shooter *Crack Down*. And we can all thank God (or goat devils) for that.

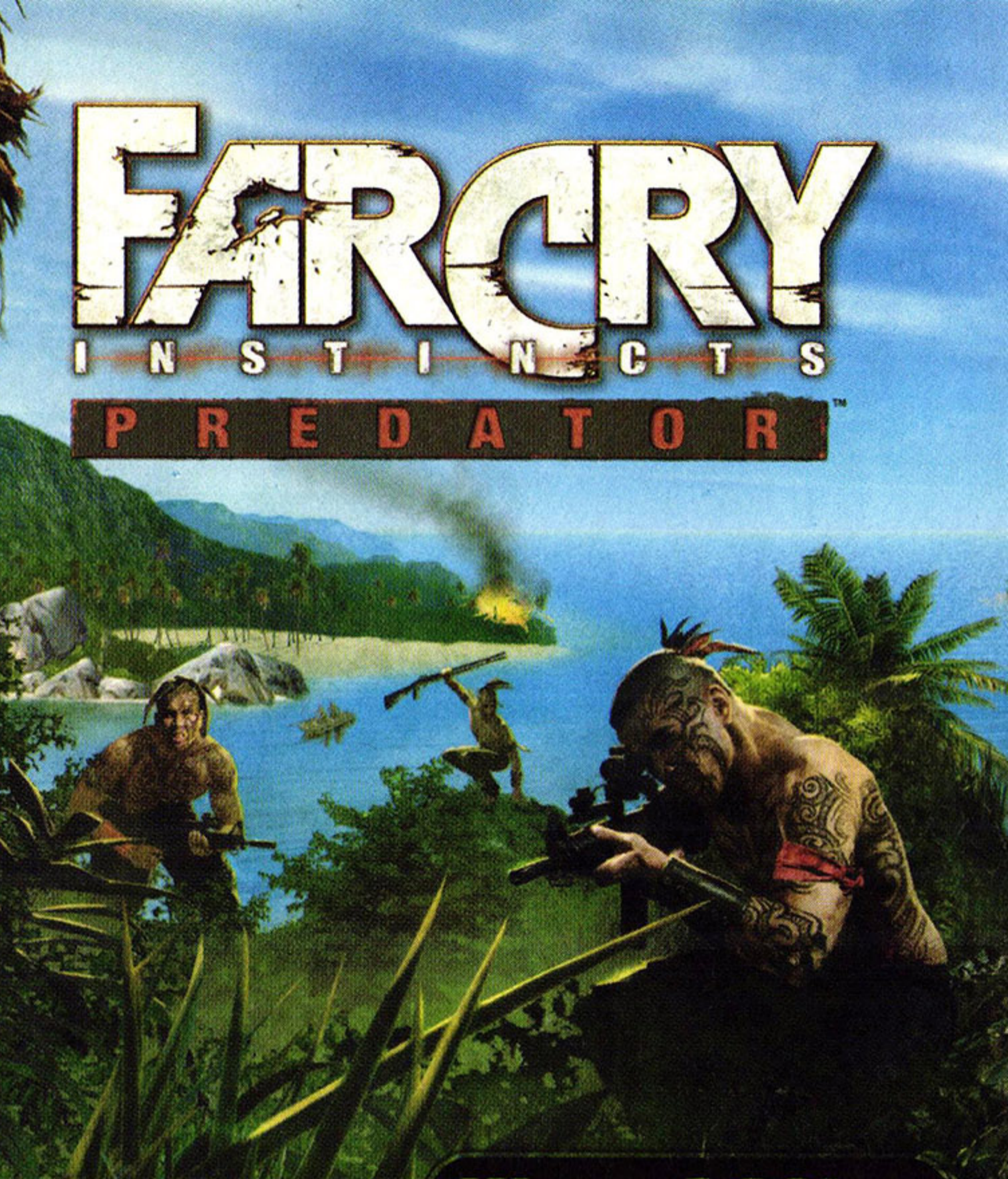


Oh, this is totally normal. No funny business here. It's just us guys. And a monkey. And a walking, pending Lucasfilm copyright infringement. Oh, and Satan, too.

continued on pg. 32

FARCRY

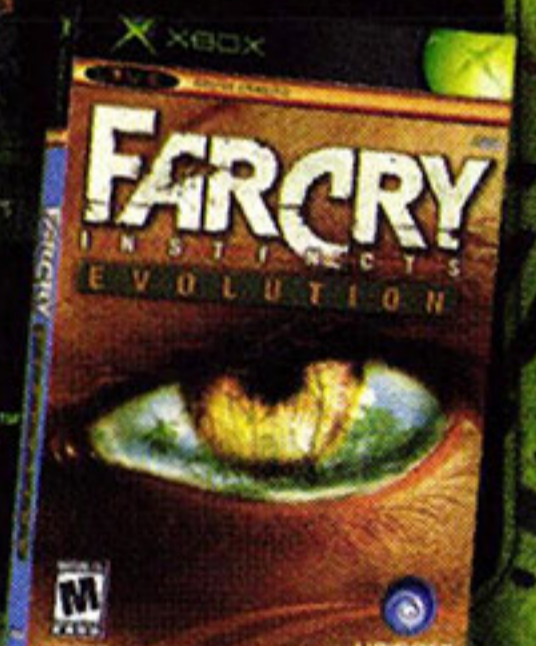
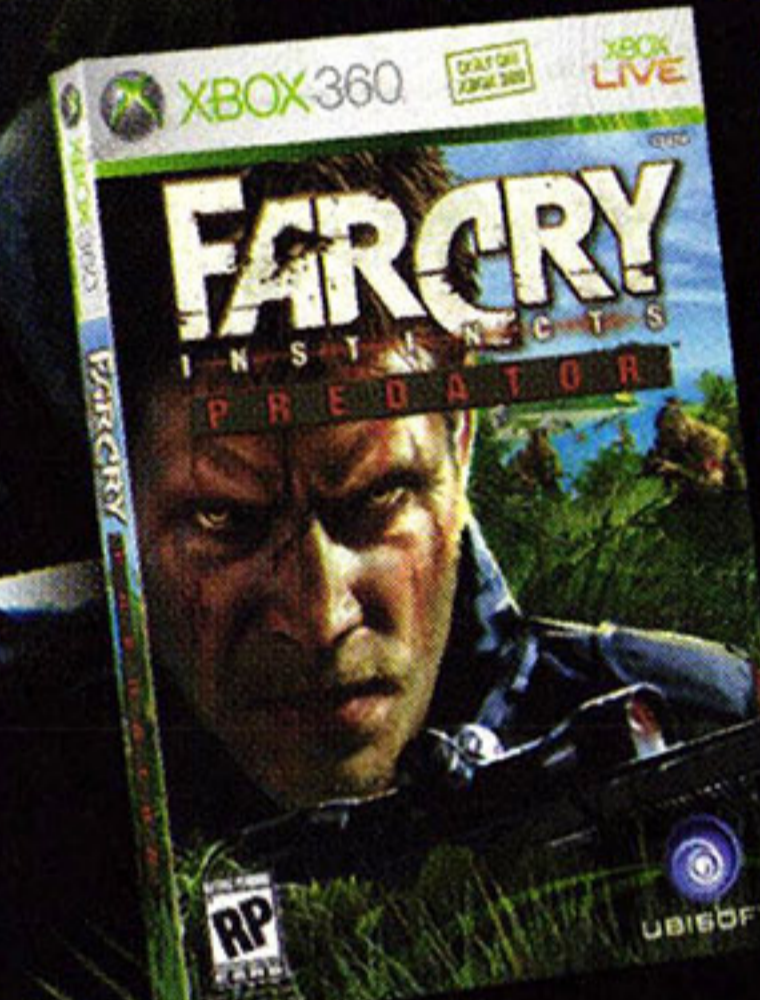
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When we say "destructible environments," we're really not kidding.

JOHN WOO'S STRANGLEHOLD

Controllers akimbo

PLATFORM: XBOX 360
DEVELOPER: MIDWAY
PUBLISHER: MIDWAY
RELEASE DATE: Q4 2006

Back in 1993 when Hong Kong director John Woo's operatic, ultraviolent cop flick, *Hard Boiled*, introduced the world to the acrobatic, trigger-happy Inspector Tequila (Chow Yun-Fat), cinemaphiles were pleased as punch. This is what action films were supposed to be – and the ripples of Woo's stylish flair for cinematography were felt throughout every entertainment medium, videogames included.

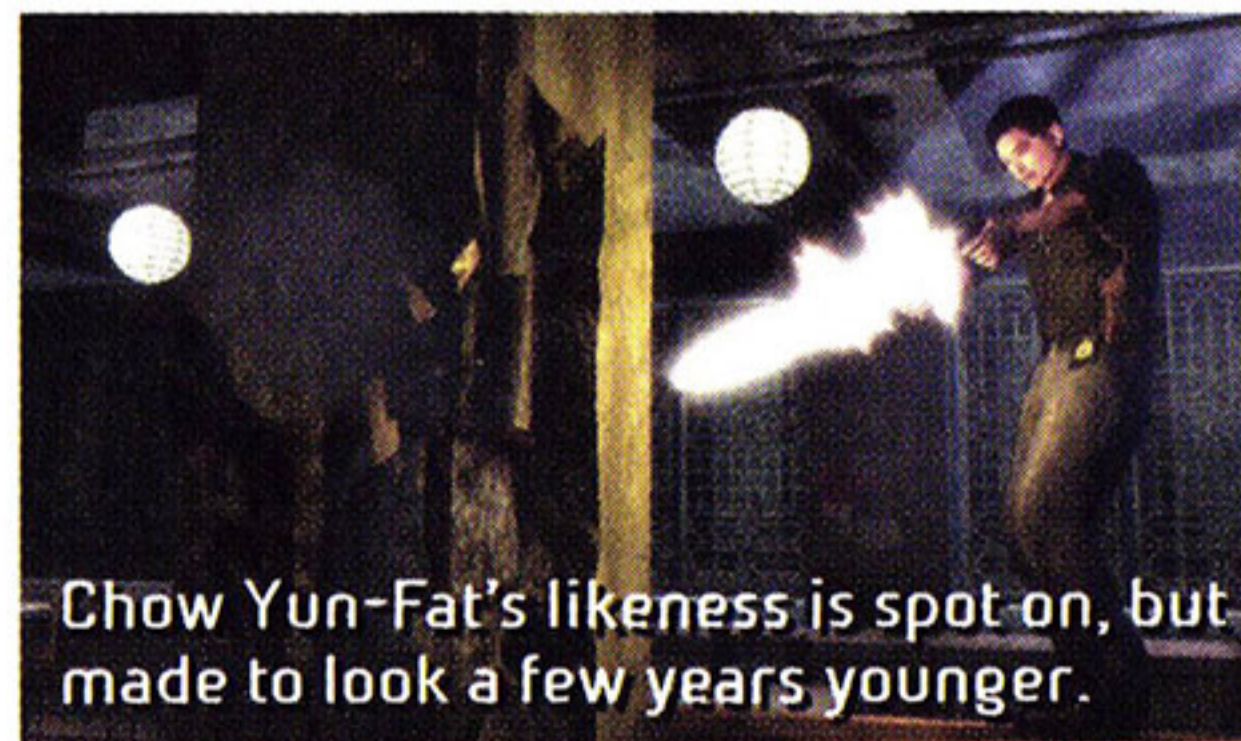
So it seems fitting that Inspector Tequila's sequel should be committed not to celluloid but to polygons in *John Woo's Stranglehold*, an



What do you call a Mexican standoff in Hong Kong? No really, what?

Xbox 360 game based on the detective's further exploits. And both Chow and Woo are playing direct roles in the game's development, along with Midway and the *Psi-Ops* team.

Stranglehold takes place a few years after the events of *Hard Boiled*, and Tequila is now married



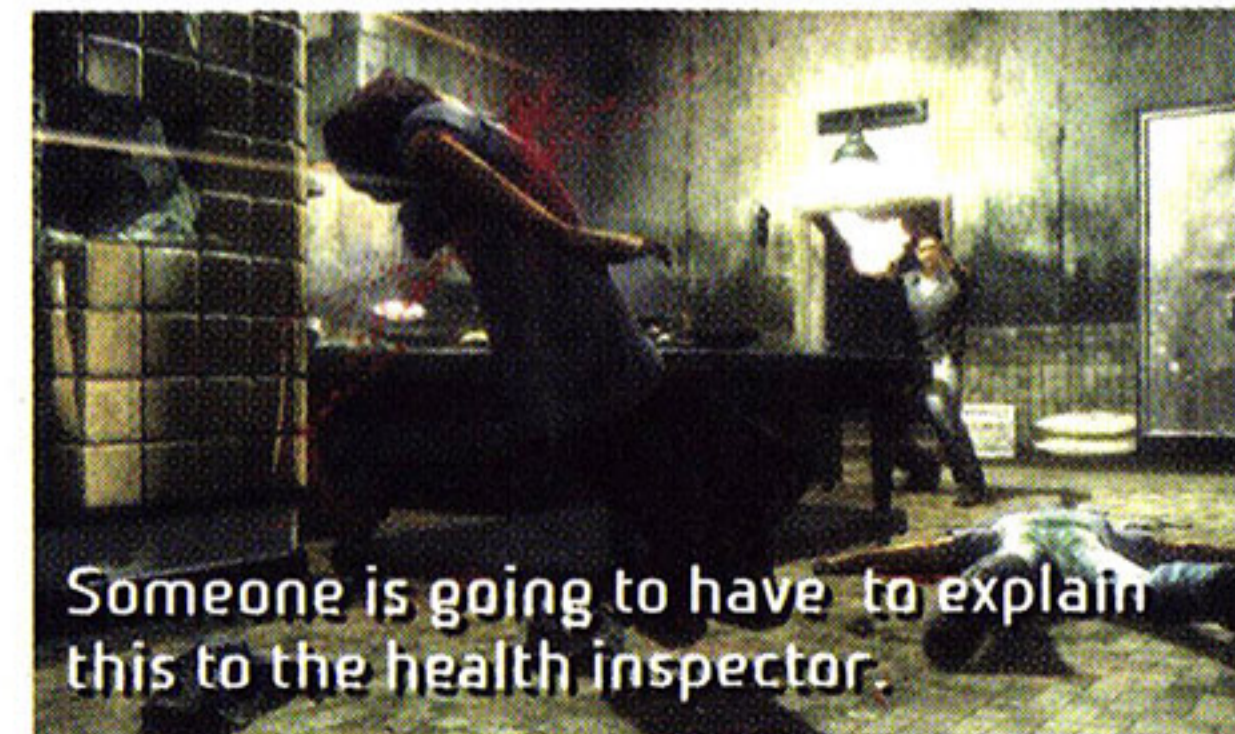
Chow Yun-Fat's likeness is spot on, but made to look a few years younger.

to the daughter of the head of the Dragon Triad. When a new upstart gang of hoods starts making life rough for everyone, Tequila is pressed into service to protect his wife and, by proxy, help out the biggest triad in Hong Kong.

A lot of what makes *Stranglehold* exciting – especially to those who aren't as familiar with the unique brand of Hong Kong action cinema John Woo is so well known for – has to do with the Xbox 360's horsepower. Characters and environments, from rickety Far East slums to

posh Chicago penthouses, all look and respond in an amazingly realistic manner. But what truly anchors the game to its action-movie roots are the destructible environments and gunfights, which are more choreographed than a Broadway musical. If you've ever watched a John Woo movie, then you know it involves rainstorms of bullets that literally tear rooms apart – splintering wood, shredding fabric, and doves fluttering down from nowhere (seriously, watch one of his films) – and each of these elements will appear in *Stranglehold*. But the total destructibility, cool stunt moves, and accurate physics make for some downright beautiful firefights – the stuff our action-film fantasies are made of.

TARGET AUDIENCE: PISTOL-PACKIN' PAPAS



Someone is going to have to explain this to the health inspector.

PREY

Prey on, preya!



Nice body-mod, insect face.

PLATFORM: XBOX 360
DEVELOPER: HUMANHEAD STUDIOS
PUBLISHER: 2K GAMES
RELEASE DATE: WHEN IT'S DONE

The "you got your peanut butter in our chocolate" metaphor may be a tired one, but that doesn't mean the strange mash-up of Native American magical realism and hardcore alien sci-fi won't make for a quite tasty first-person shooter. Add in a spirit guide in the form of a spectral hawk, your character's grandpa and some brain-bending, gravity-defying multiplayer levels, and you've got a first-person shooter that can abduct us anytime.

■ TARGET AUDIENCE: MULDER AND SCULLY

TEST DRIVE UNLIMITED

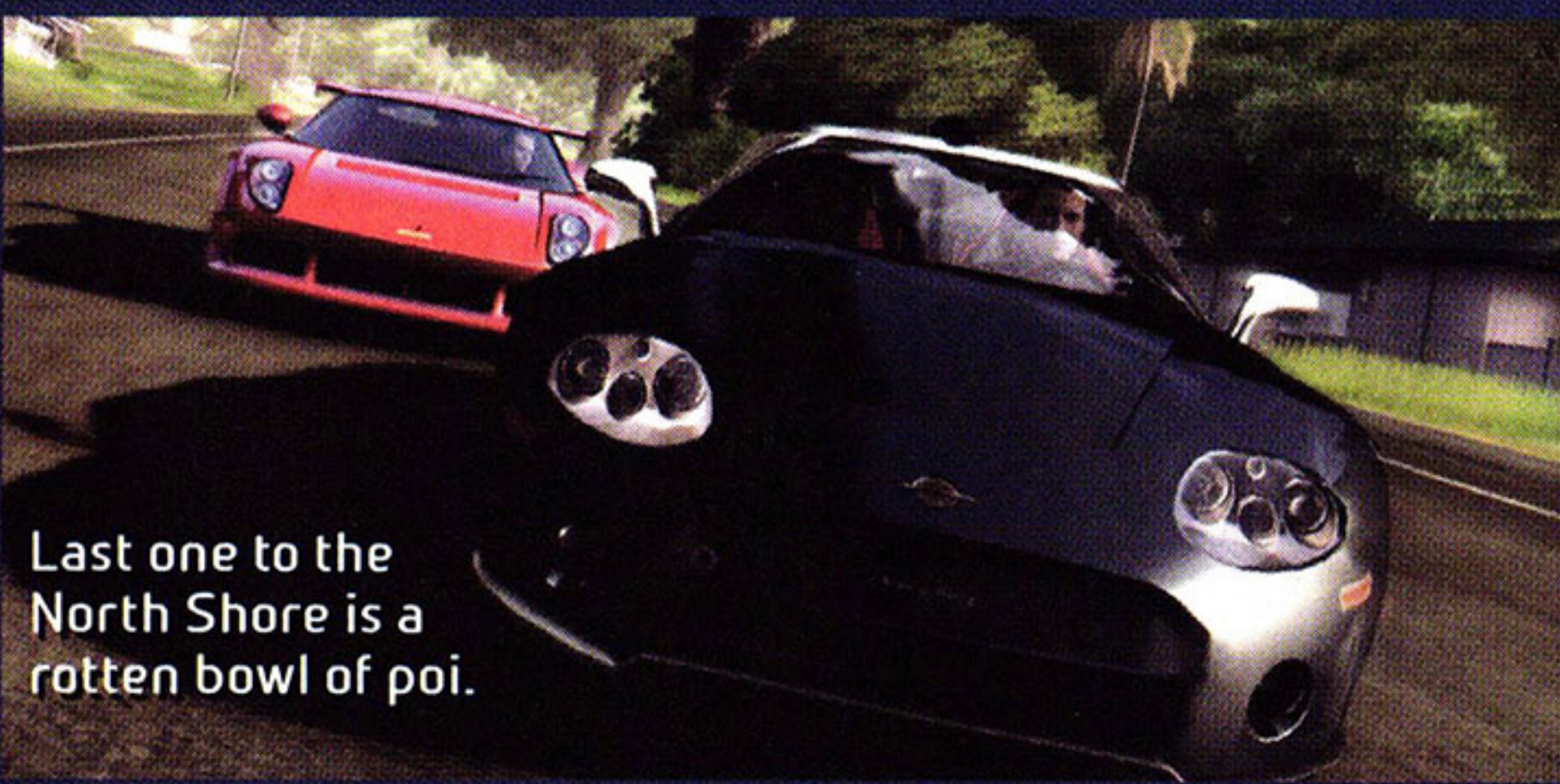
Racing paradise



PLATFORM: XBOX 360
DEVELOPER: EDEN
PUBLISHER: ATARI
RELEASE DATE: JUNE 2006

Atari's hoping to inject some life back into its long-running (but sometimes stumbling) *Test Drive* series with a fresh dose of online play. Collect cars to race across a detailed re-creation of the Hawaiian island of Oahu, while remaining always connected to Xbox Live. Thousands of players might be on the roads, but you'll only see and race against the eight most suitable opponents – kind of like a constantly updating OptiMatch. Keep a Ferrari and a mix plate warmed up and ready for us.

■ TARGET AUDIENCE: HAWAIIAN RACING ENTHUSIASTS



Last one to the North Shore is a rotten bowl of poi.

PAINKILLER: HELL WARS

Tylenol versus Advil in Hell! Oops, hang on...



Welcome to Hell. I'm Julie, your cruise director.

PLATFORM: XBOX
DEVELOPER: PEOPLE CAN FLY
PUBLISHER: DREAMCATCHER
RELEASE DATE: FEBRUARY 28

If you're going to tread on *Doom's* turf, it's polite to at least bring something new to the table, and *Painkiller: Hell Wars* minds its manners. Except "manners" is probably the wrong word, because what it brings is unabashedly over-the-top carnage. As an everyday guy killed in a brutal car accident, you're mysteriously denied entry to Heaven, and figuring out why means slaughtering demons – lots of demons – in combat that's all brawn and no brains. The gore gets airborne thanks to creative weapons like a stake gun and alt-fires that really change up the firepower (the shotgun also lobbs grenades). Since *Painkiller* also serves up Xbox Live multiplayer and a level lineup that combines the best maps from the 2004 PC original and its expansion pack, the only question is whether two-year-old graphics can cut it on today's Xbox. Find out in our review next issue.

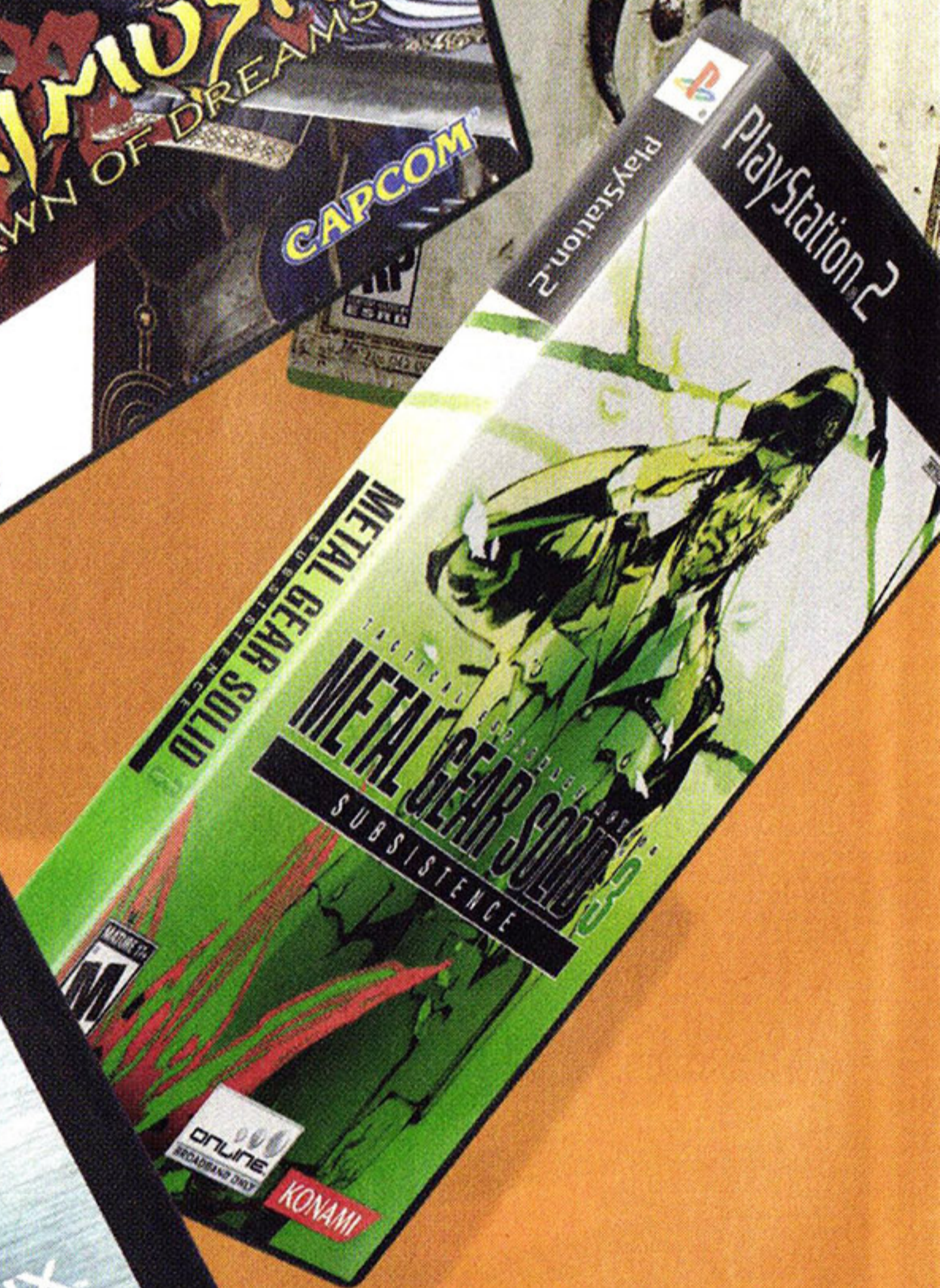
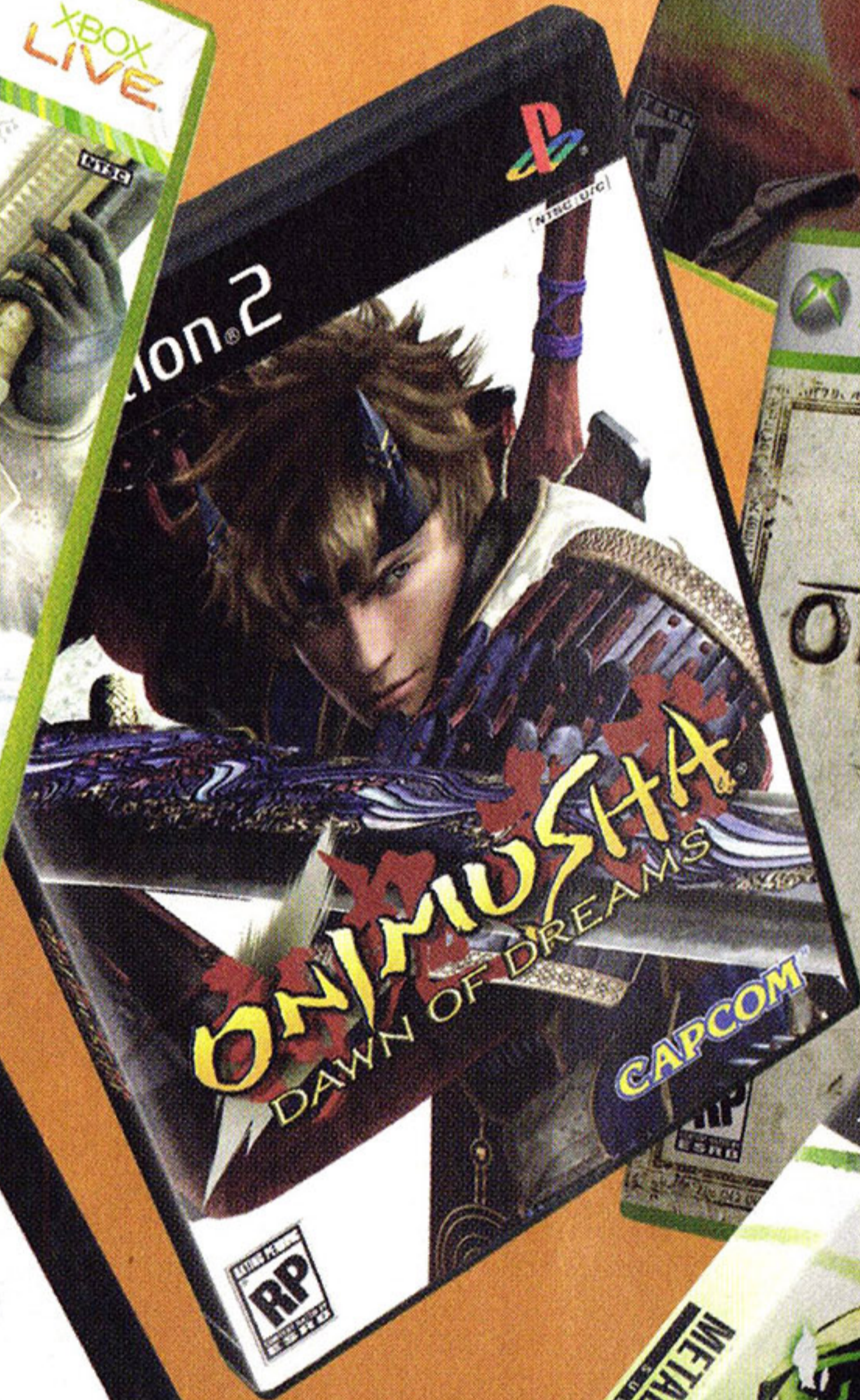
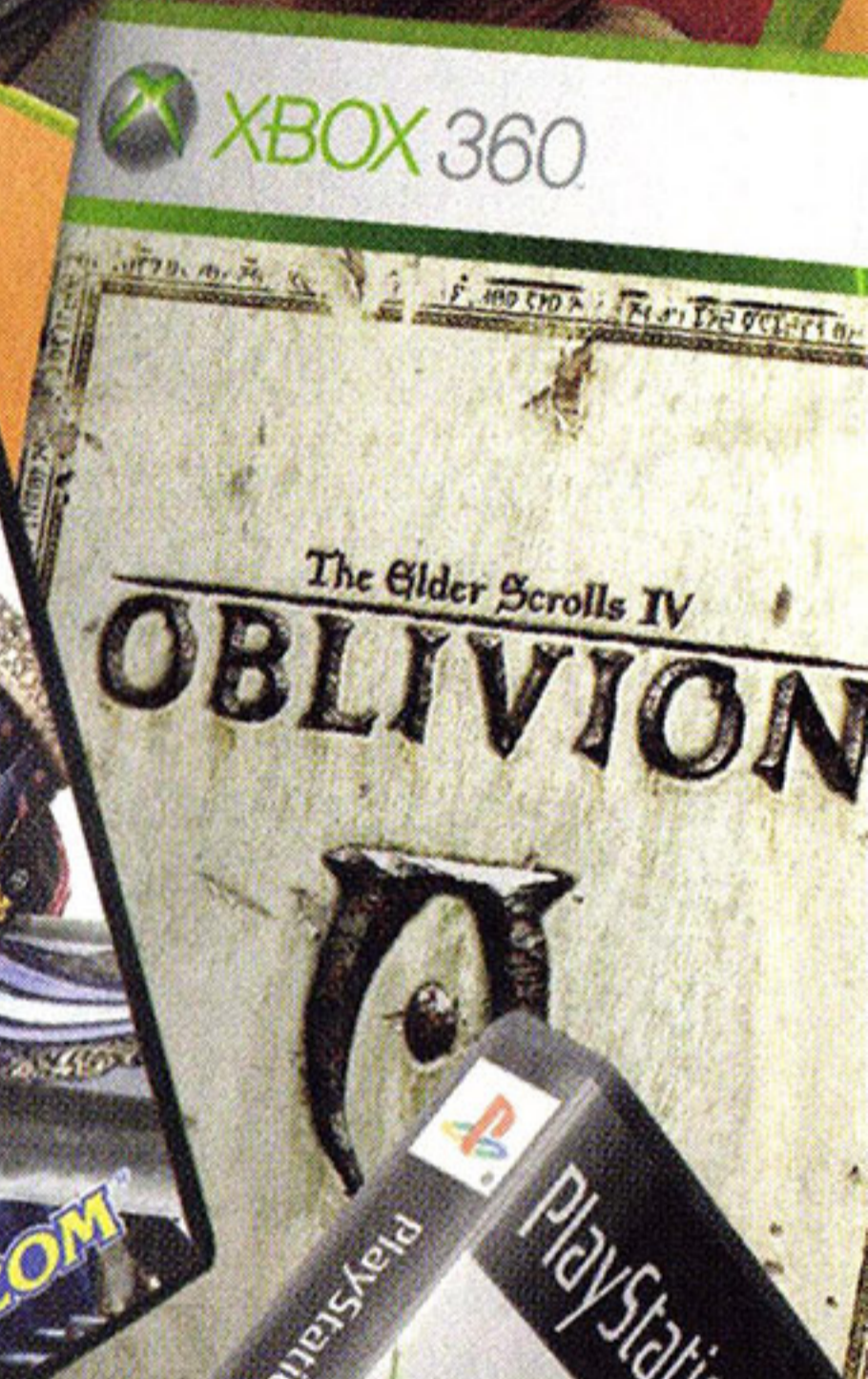
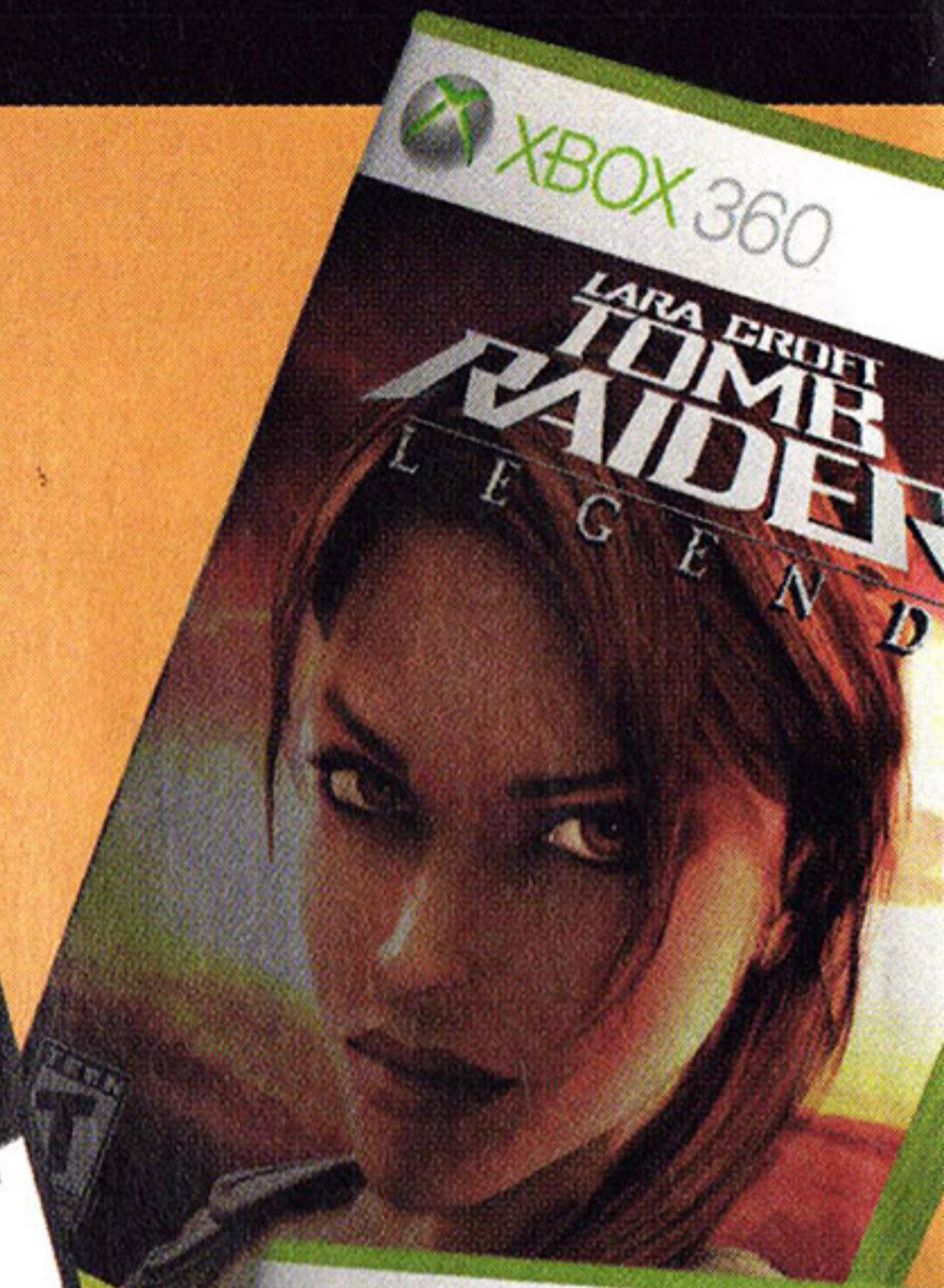
■ TARGET AUDIENCE: ANTI-DEMON TASK FORCE AGENTS

continued on pg. 36

XBOX 360

PS2

NINTENDO DS



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Create your own Tolkien armies out of all your favorite Middle-earth creatures.



FLATOUT 2

Do your own stunts



Do we really need to say: "don't try this at home?"



PLATFORM: XBOX
DEVELOPER: BUG BEAR ENTERTAINMENT
PUBLISHER: EMPIRE INTERACTIVE
RELEASE DATE: SUMMER 2006



Driving games are a dime a dozen these days, but ones that let you catapult the driver out the front window into a gigantic dartboard or down a lane into a very large set of bowling pins are a teensy bit more rare. *FlatOut 2* offers up even more of the carnival-style minigames than the original did, but it also looks to improve its basic racing modes (you could race in that game?) by adding city-themed tracks and dialing down the realism to make the races less about having to duck and dodge to avoid debris, and more about refining your skills so you can dash across the finish line first.

■ TARGET AUDIENCE: CRASH-TEST DUMMIES

ROGUE TROOPER

Post-modern combat

PLATFORM: XBOX
DEVELOPER: REBELLION
PUBLISHER: EIDOS
RELEASE DATE: SPRING 2006

Watching your buddies die on the battlefield can bring a tear to the eye of even the toughest genetically engineered supersoldier. But when your squadmates' DNA "spirits" are downloaded to inhabit your equipment – your gun, backpack, and helmet, to be exact – to help out with upgrades and special attacks, it can make the whole post-apocalypse a little less lonely and lot more fun.

■ TARGET AUDIENCE: BRITISH COMIC-BOOK FANS; BLUE PEOPLE



I can see you behind that rock, you know.



THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH II



The battle rages on, and on...

PLATFORM: XBOX 360
DEVELOPER: EA LOS ANGELES
PUBLISHER: EA GAMES
RELEASE DATE: SUMMER 2006

Your PC-game-playing buddies rant and rave about real-time strategy games like they're the second coming. *StarCraft* this, *Age of Empires* that. So why haven't console gamers been able to experience this genre to the extent that our PC-gaming brethren have? Blame those pesky mouse/keyboard control schemes – something EA definitely wants to address with its upcoming 360 debut for *The Lord of the Rings, The Battle for Middle-earth II*. The publisher promises an intuitive control scheme for the Xbox 360 conversion of the upcoming sequel, but we'll be happy as long as it works better than *StarCraft* did on the N64.

If there's one thing that the first *Battle for Middle-earth* on the PC really nailed, it was re-creating the grand scale of the movies' epic battles. Just imagine thousands of orcs backed

up by huge oliphants charging the gates of a castle defended by elven archers; destruction on a mass scale. Classic battles like Helm's Deep are refought here, but the game allows you to create your own fortifications, units, and even heroes to make your own little world that's still faithful to the *LotR* franchise.

And for the 360 version, *Battle for Middle-earth II* takes the multiplayer show over Live – something that may now be standard for most games hitting the system, but is still a welcome addition. And with the retooled console-specific controls, maybe we can finally give those PC gamers a run for their RTS money.

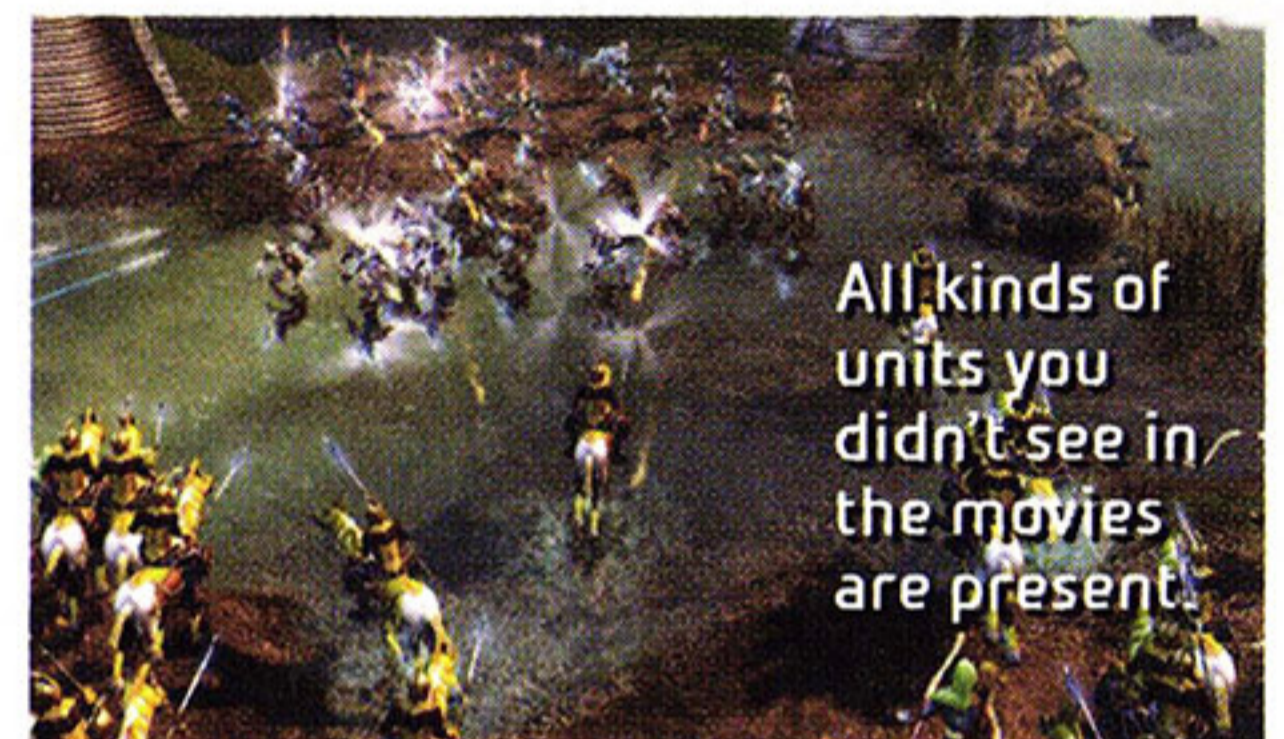
You can build your own fortifications, but expect them to get torn down.



■ **TARGET AUDIENCE:** LOTR FANS (ALL 4 BILLION OF THEM)



It's not all hordes of orcs running across the plains of Rohan.



All kinds of units you didn't see in the movies are present.



The air is toxic on Nu Earth, but you're genetically modified, so there.

4 176

Is it just me or is it really cold in here?

TIMESHIFT

Back to the future



TimeShift's sci-fi storyline spans multiple timelines.

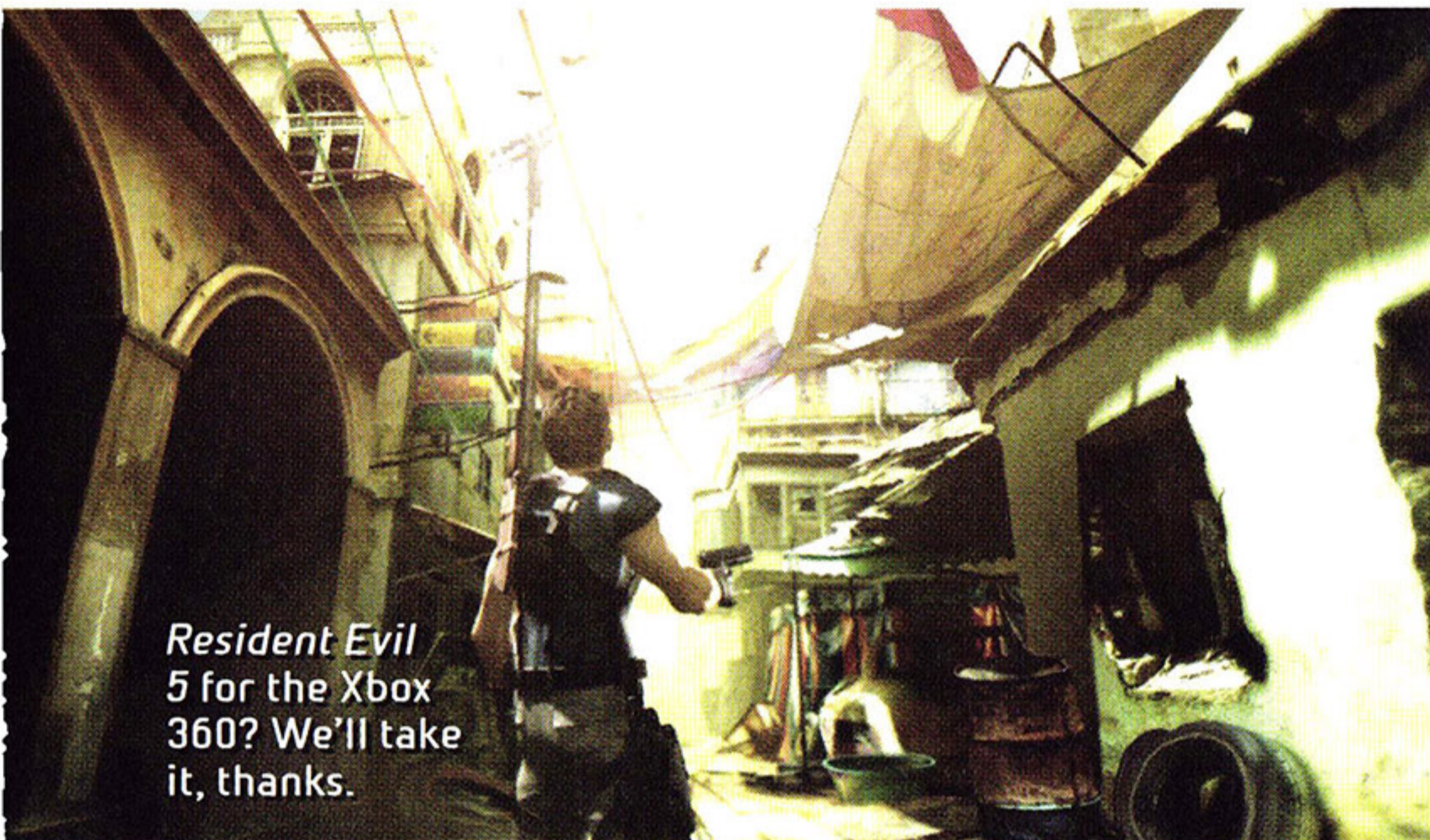
PLATFORM: XBOX 360
DEVELOPER: SABER INTERACTIVE
PUBLISHER: ATARI
RELEASE DATE: SPRING 2006

Taking the concept of playing with time and stamping it straight into a 360 FPS, *TimeShift* offers up countless opportunities. We've seen it done in countless other genres, but in a shooter? Just think of it...pausing time, fast-forwarding, rewinding... Oh the damage you could do. Place those powers in a steampunk-style game like *TimeShift*, and you've got a fine mix of time-traveling storyline and a bio-suit with time-manipulating abilities. Freeze the action to sneak by guards or better yet – freeze exploding objects in midair to use them as a ladder to reach new platforms. Create your own opportunities to bypass obstacles or to tackle tough enemy situations. The options are yours to create.

■ **TARGET AUDIENCE:** DOC AND MARTY

continued on pg. 38

2007 AND BEYOND



Resident Evil 5 for the Xbox 360? We'll take it, thanks.

Jackie Estacado, who's sent on a job only to find that it's a trap and his family's boss, Uncle Paulie, wants him dead. Fortunately (or not), Jackie's possessed by an ancient demonic force that gives him all kinds of wild abilities, evening out the odds in his fight against the mob. With a new

■ **Resident Evil 5.** On Xbox 360. Sweet! While even White House phone taps couldn't track down details, the early screenshots showcase heart-stopping graphics. Hordes of lumbering zombies and other nasties are in hot pursuit, and while you probably know what to expect – and love – from the gameplay, the visual firepower should make it a whole new ballgame.

■ One of the most intriguing RPGs headed to Xbox 360 with a vague release date is **Lost Odyssey**, executive-produced by Hironobu Sakaguchi, a.k.a. Mr. *Final Fantasy*, now Mr. Mistwalker. *Odyssey* tackles a complex story line (penned by a famous Japanese short-story writer) involving Kaim Argonar, a man who lives a thousand years and faces many loves, families, and deaths. The imagery mixes dragons with sci-fi cityscapes as time goes on, heading toward a "mystical industrial revolution" that has humanity drifting to the dark side. Sounds utterly fascinating...and we're anxious to see how this ambitious concept will transition to gameplay on Xbox 360.

■ If you were a publisher, you'd want your own Sam Fisher, right? VU Games is eyeing *Splinter Cell's* turf by signing the rights to **The Bourne Identity**. But before you start bleating "Maaattd Daaamon" in your best *Team America* voice, the key detail is that VU nabbed the rights to Robert Ludlum's books, not the excellent pair of recent flicks. While *The Bourne Identity* is rumored to be the first one out of the gate with a possible E3 unveiling this year, the publisher can also explore Ludlum's repertoire of spy novels.

■ **Halo 3** will probably hog the spotlight in 2007 if all the release date rumors are to be believed, but we're counting on a mess of other must-have titles to wing their collective way to 360, too. Here's a look at the brightest stars of the not-so-distant future. And remember, like Grandma always says, patience is a virtue. Like that helps with the waiting...

■ If you still reminisce fondly about the first time you virtually shived your cellmate in *Chronicles of Riddick* for Xbox, then there's little doubt that you're hot to jump on whatever developer Starbreeze has to offer up next...even if it's based on a Top Cow comic you've never heard of. **The Darkness** follows mob hitman

unannounced publisher in to fill Majesco's shoes after it dropped the title, this game might be released later rather than sooner, but Starbreeze's track record virtually guarantees that it'll land on its feet.

■ It's no secret that Team Ninja is slaving away on making **Ninja Gaiden 2**, and since head honcho Tomonobu Itagaki recently told Japanese gaming mag *Famitsu* that his team's next game will be **Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball 2**, don't count on Ryu giving your thumbs a knuckle-cramping workout until 2007 at the earliest. Itagaki also revealed that taking "interactivity" to the next level will be a big focus of the game. Does this mean enemies will actually jump out of the screen to kick our ass?

HITMAN: BLOOD MONEY

Getting closer to its target



PLATFORM: XBOX
DEVELOPER: IO INTERACTIVE
PUBLISHER: EIDOS
RELEASE DATE: MAY 2006

■ Before *GTA* made "sandbox mode" a household phrase, there was *Hitman*, a game that made the most out of the inherent fun of playing as an assassin stalking his prey by cutting you loose in a world stocked with tons of clever ways to take your target down. *Blood Money's* all about making that world even more of a living, breathing place, and creative methods of execution still play a starring role.

You can drop chandeliers on unsuspecting heads, shove people over railings, pounce from the trapdoor in an elevator's ceiling, blow out

the floor of a glass-bottomed hot tub dangling over a cliff, and even dress as a clown – a very unfriendly clown. But if that's too much freedom for you, you can spend some of your blood money on mission intel that points you in the right direction.

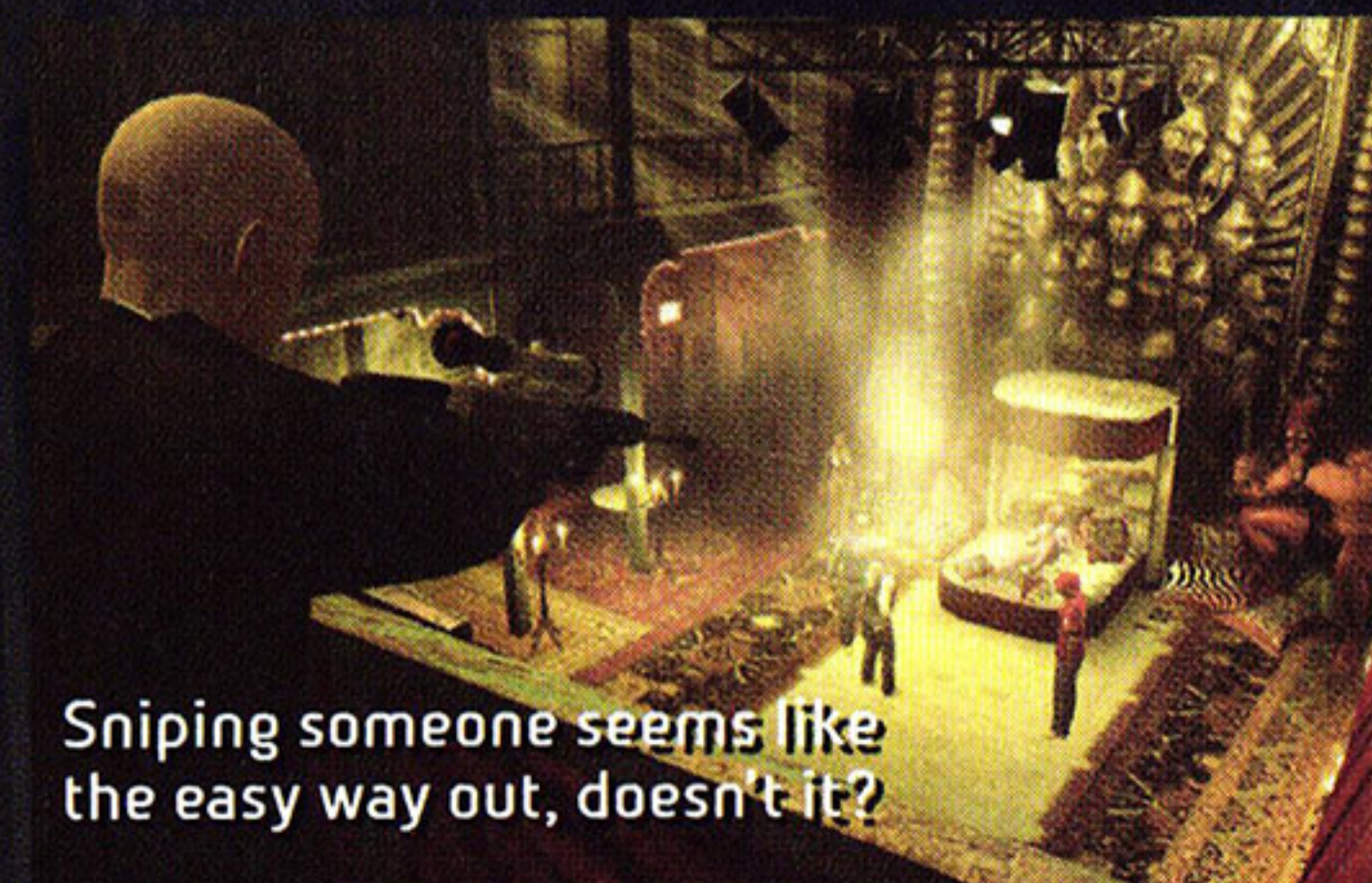
All those innocent bystanders won't be such dummies any more, either – if you make a mess, you'll have to pay hush money or risk getting a police sketch in the paper, which increases the chances of being recognized on your next job. Developer Io Interactive is also making it a priority to make Mr. 47 feel less balky by lathering lots of love on the controls, camera, and targeting in the hopes of making this his best outing yet.

■ TARGET AUDIENCE: BALD ASSASSINS IN NICE SUITS

continued on pg. 40



Does Agent 47 have to snipe a bitch?



Sniping someone seems like the easy way out, doesn't it?

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SCARFACE

Taking on *GTA* at its own game

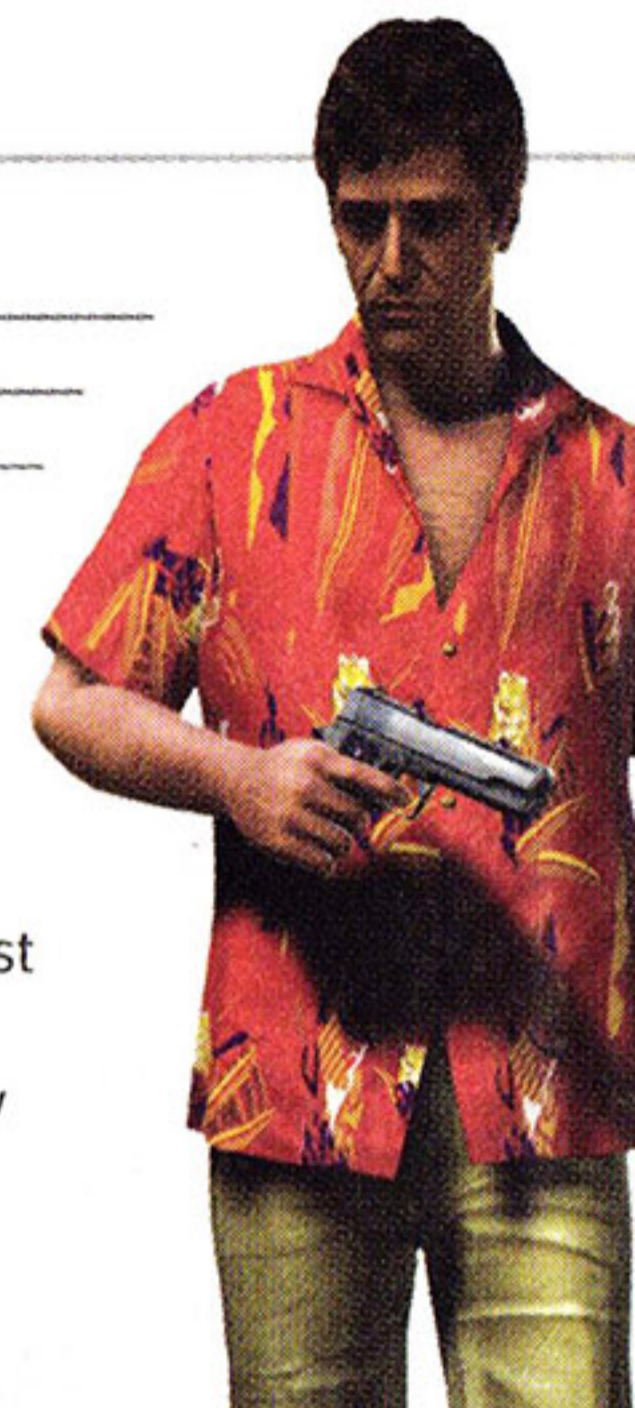


Now you can say goodbye to my little friend, you cock-a-roaches.

PLATFORM: XBOX
 PUBLISHER: VU GAMES
 DEVELOPER: RADICAL
 RELEASE DATE: FALL 2006

Tony Montana equipped with a chainsaw and a F--- You button? Yup, had us at "say hello." Picking up where the movie left off – sort of – *Scarface* posits that Montana survived the final shootout and is out for revenge against rival Sosa. But first, he must rebuild his turf in an open-world Miami stocked with a deep drug-dealing economy and three rival gangs that wish he actually was dead.

■ TARGET AUDIENCE: POTTYMOUTHS



MASS EFFECT

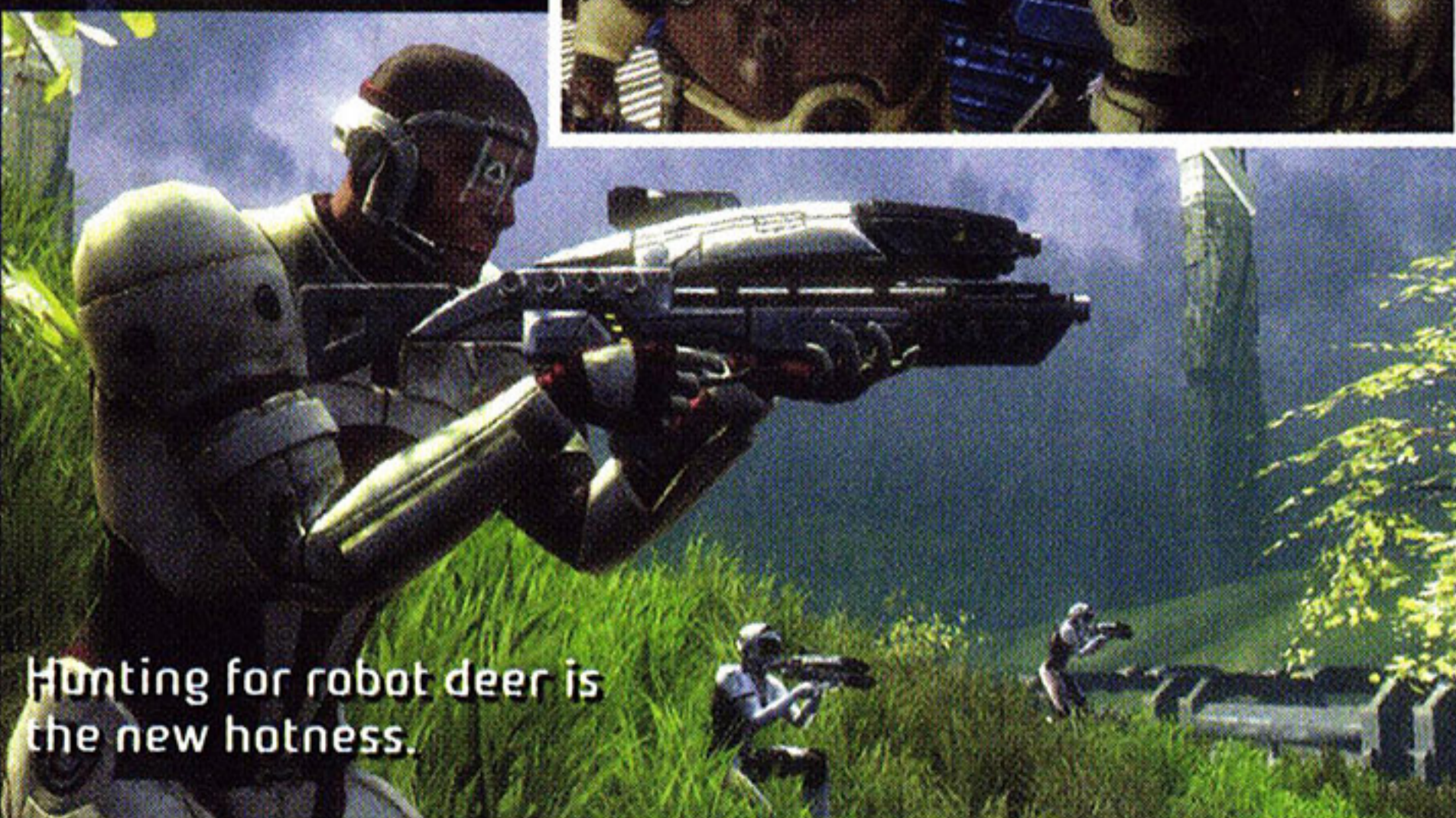
Galaxy wars



PLATFORM: XBOX 360
 PUBLISHER: MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS
 DEVELOPER: BIOWARE
 RELEASE: TBD

Not content with merely letting you conquer mythological China (*Jade Empire*), RPG master BioWare has its sights set on something significantly bigger. Try the universe. *Mass Effect* aims to be the ultimate role-playing epic – protect the galaxy from enemies of the alien kind. But are you protecting your world in the name of your race (be it human or otherwise), the entirety of life as we know it (all races included), or for your own personal gain? This is the added layer of complexity (Ethics? In an RPG? Gee whillikers!) that promises to make this space drama something for the gaming ages.

■ TARGET AUDIENCE: CITIZENS OF THE GALAXY



Hunting for robot deer is the new hotness.

X-MEN 3

Simply Marvel-ous



They don't call him Nightcrawler because he likes fishing.

PLATFORM: XBOX, XBOX 360
 PUBLISHER: ACTIVISION
 DEVELOPER: Z-AXIS
 RELEASE: MAY 2006

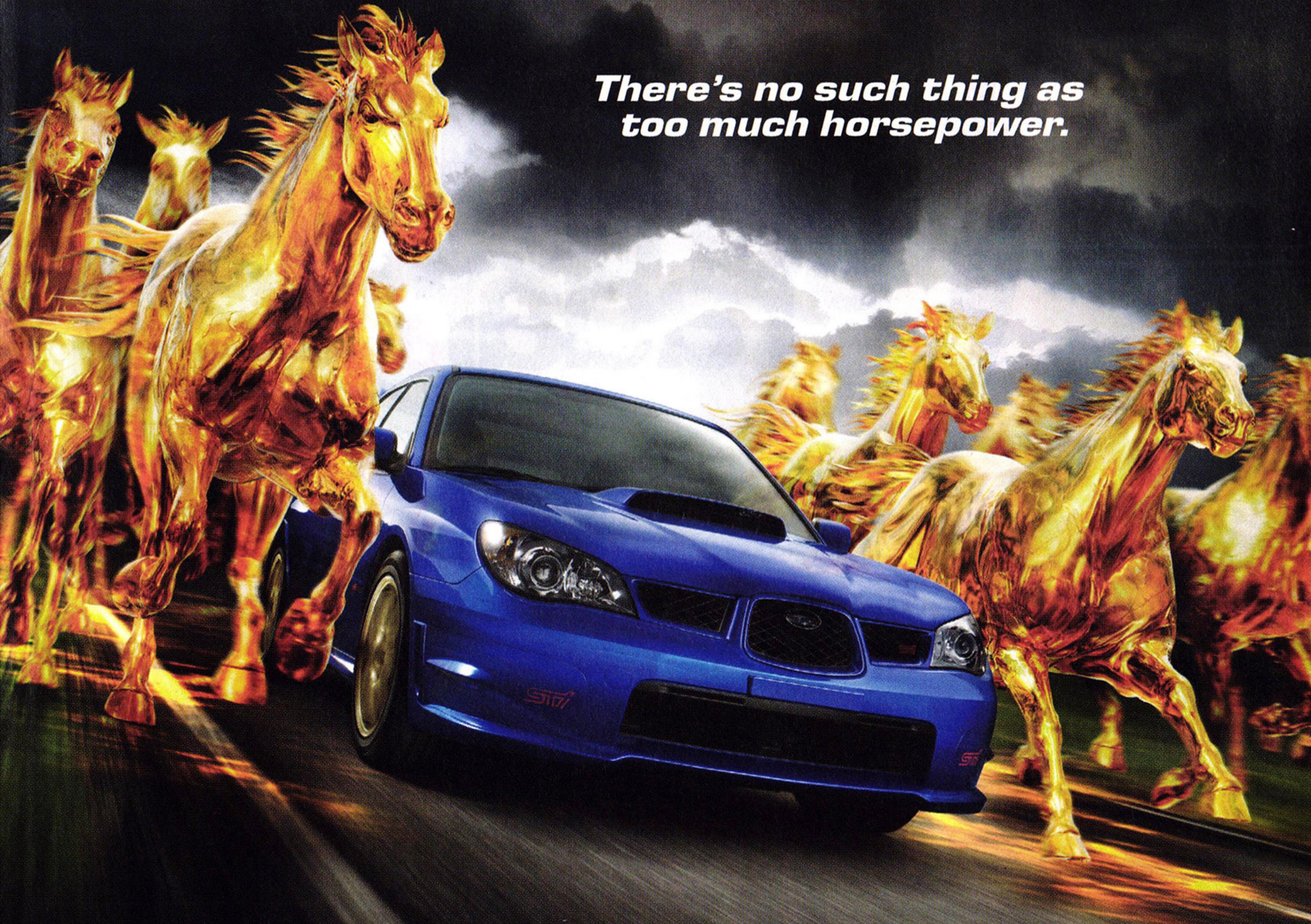
With theaters bracing for the blockbuster spring opening of a third *X-Men* movie, Activision is readying its own polygonal installment. *X-Men 3*, the game, steers clear of retelling the story on the silver screen, opting to flesh out the backgrounds of three characters – Wolverine, Nightcrawler, and Iceman. First up, Wolverine's thorny past is revisited as you explore his exploits in Japan. Cue the ninjas for some mano-a-claw combat. Nightcrawler (who doesn't appear in the film) and his teleporting abilities are put to good use in his section of the game. And last but not least, Iceman: Less of a fan of fisticuffs, he's able to zip around on self-made ice bridges while shooting down fiery foes with projectile attacks.

By swapping characters at scripted moments during the game, *X-Men 3* aims to vary the gameplay and give you a chance to level up each character's abilities. The objective is to feed fans' need to know more about the mutants while kicking a little virtual ass. That's definitely something very different and different is good.

■ TARGET AUDIENCE: MUTANT LOVERS

continued on pg. 46

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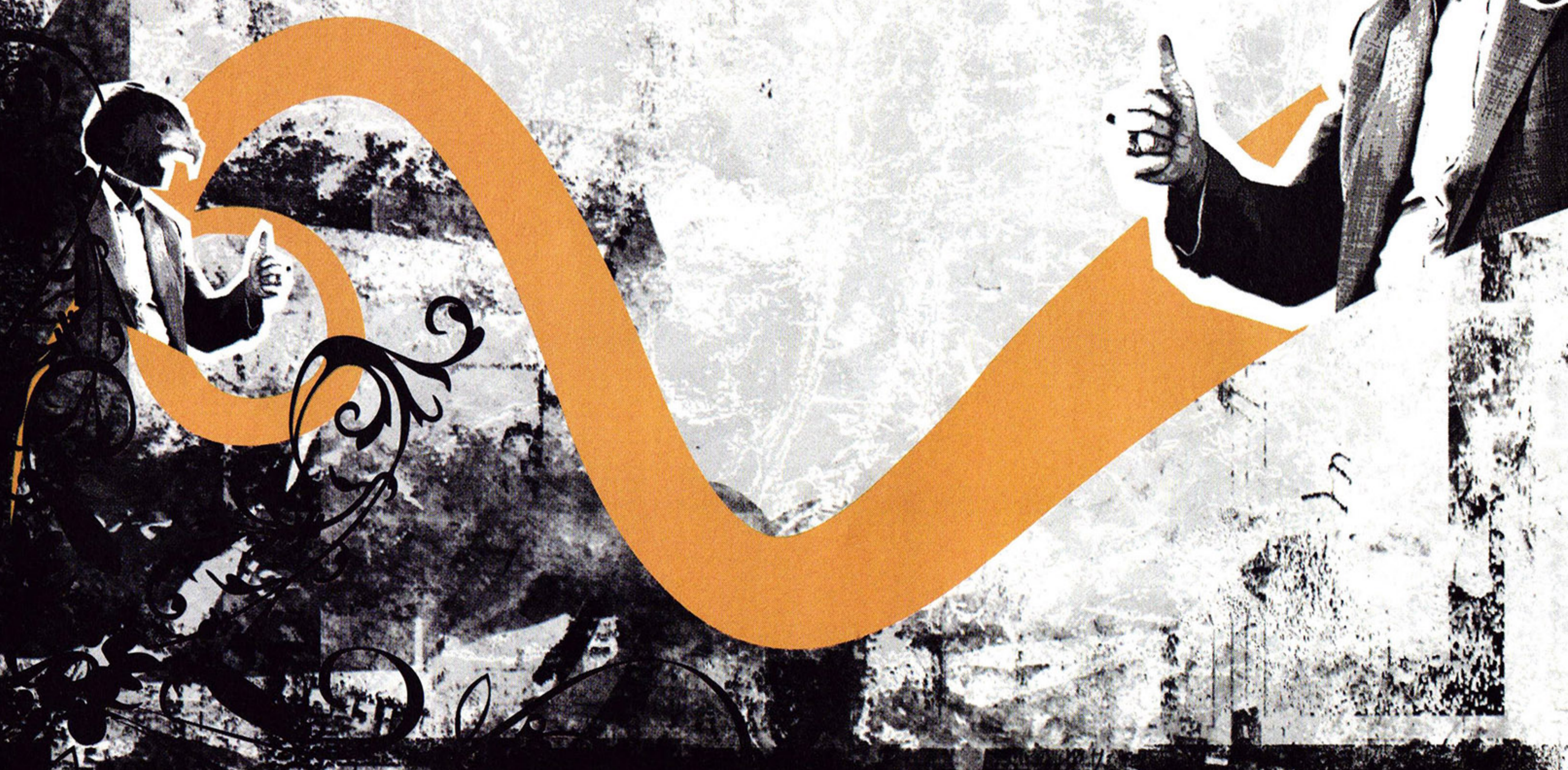
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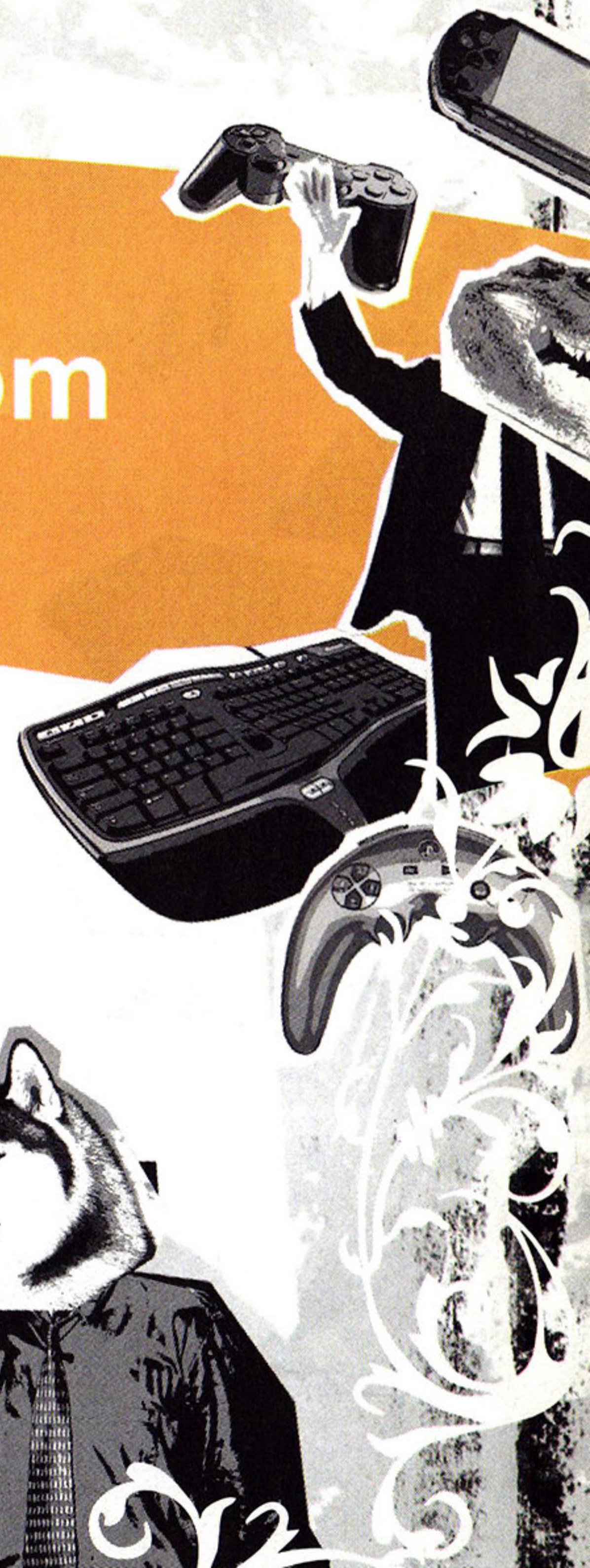
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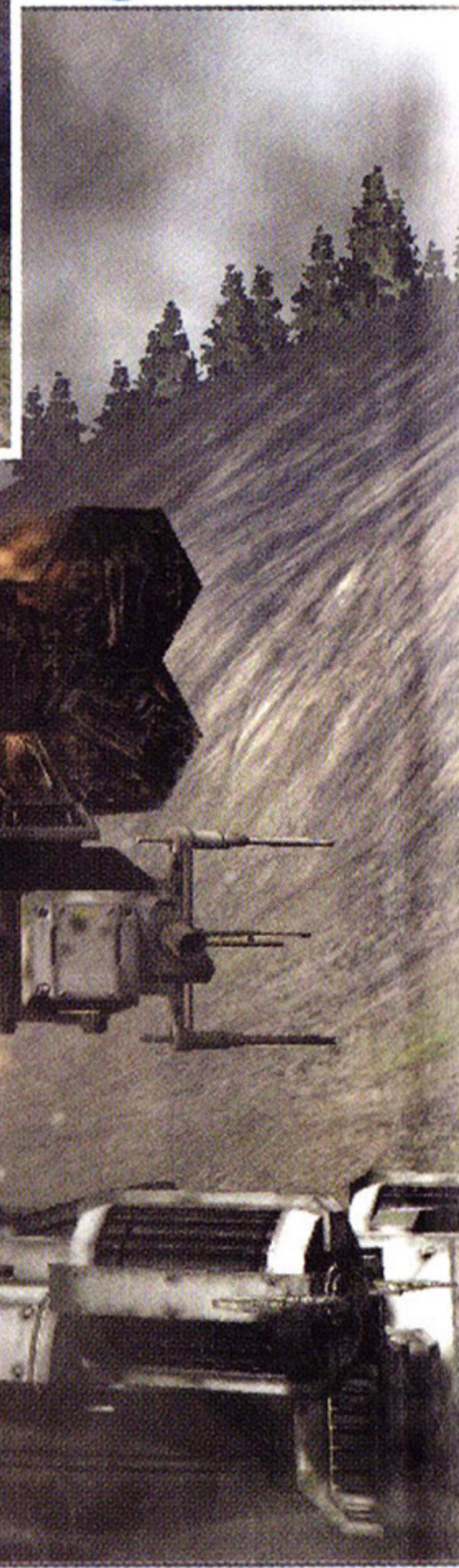


FROM THE CREATORS OF

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No two hounds will be exactly alike, thanks to a ridiculous amount of parts to choose from.

CHROMEHOUNDS

Dogs of war

PLATFORM: XBOX 360
 DEVELOPER: FROM SOFTWARE
 PUBLISHER: SEGA
 RELEASE DATE: FALL 2006

Just what the Xbox 360 needs: a serious mech game for hardcore fans of the genre. *Steel Battalion* satisfied the need on Xbox, but it looks as if 360 will get a mech experience all its own. But, wait – don't call them "mechs." Developer From Software, the Japanese studio behind the excellent *Armored Core* series on PlayStation, would prefer that you refer to them as "hounds." But these mobile, deeply customizable weapon platforms are no dogs. *Chromehounds* shows off some of the most astounding graphics we've

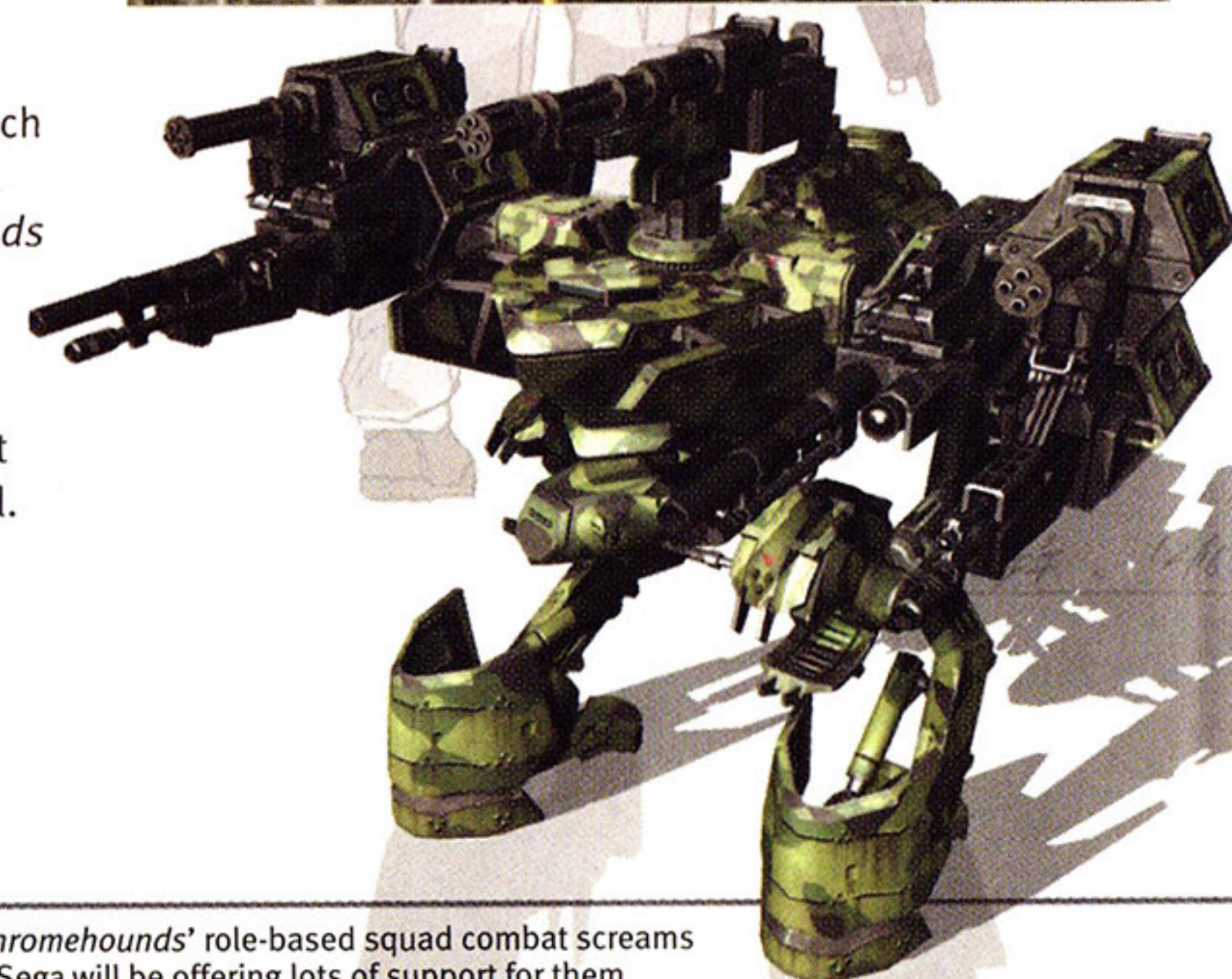
seen yet on 360, ranging from the insanely detailed hounds to the amazing lighting and particle engines that make battles come to terrifying life.

Far more complex than a *MechAssault* game but mining some of the same territory creatively, *Chromehounds* is mainly about two things: squad combat and customization. You build your hound from the ground up, choosing from hundreds of different parts; you can mix dozens of chassis, cockpits, weapons, and other body parts into millions of combinations. Once mechs are built, they fall into one of six roles: attacker, defender, sniper, heavy gunner, scout, and tactical commander, which guides teams of six in combat. The depth of gameplay is insane, qualifying *Chromehounds* for true simulation status.

There's too much detail about *Chromehounds'* gameplay to go into here, but you can believe we'll be talking a lot about it between now and when it's released this fall. And if you think the screens are amazing, wait until you see it in action. Two parting shots: 60fps. Believe it.

■ TARGET AUDIENCE: MECH PILOTS
 ITCHING FOR A SCRAP

Weapons can be mounted on other weapons on other weapons, on more weapons...



A 7200 controller isn't necessary for *Chromehounds!*



MEDAL OF HONOR: AIRBORNE

Death from above

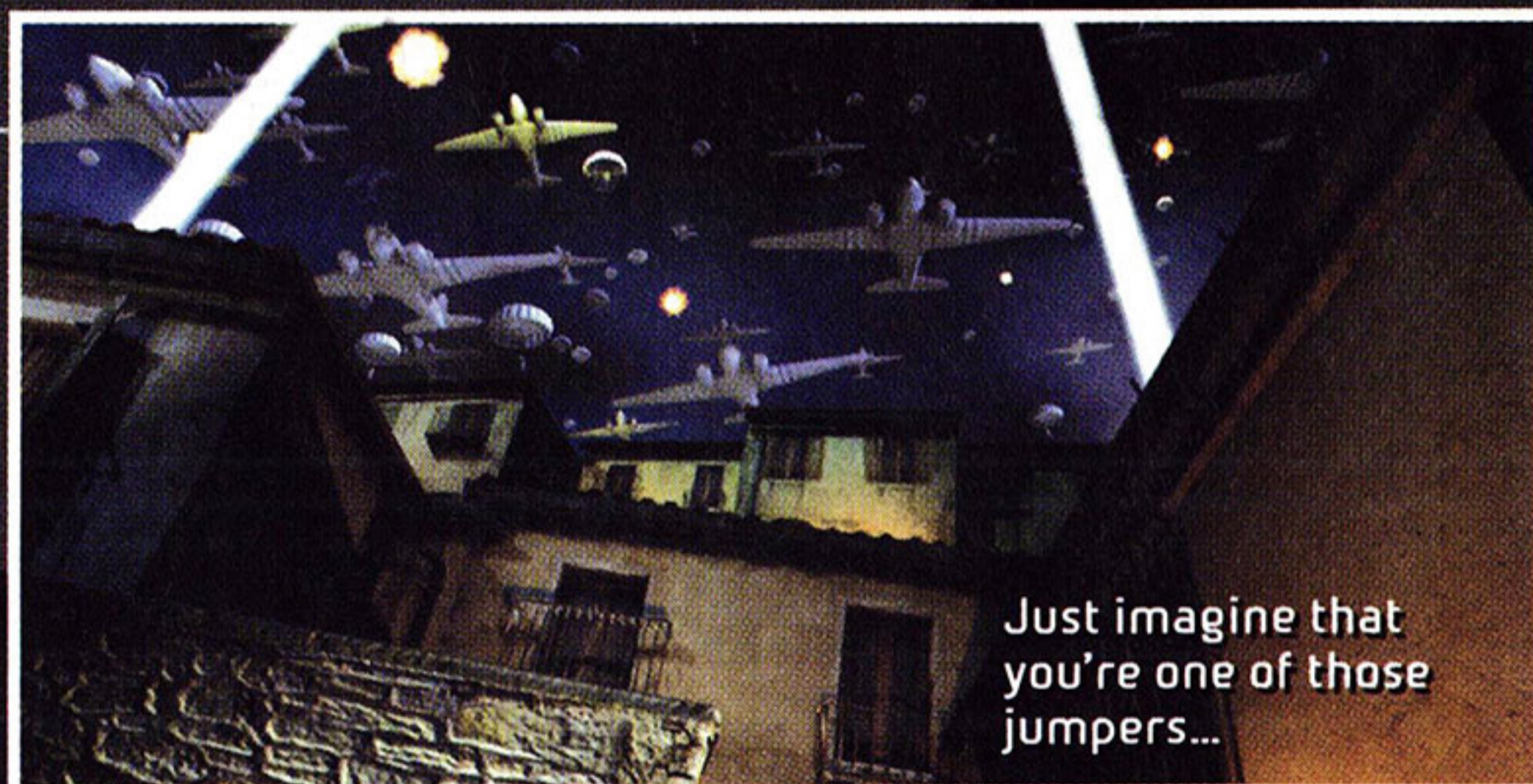


PLATFORM: XBOX 360
DEVELOPER: EA LA
PUBLISHER: EA GAMES
RELEASE DATE: WINTER 2006

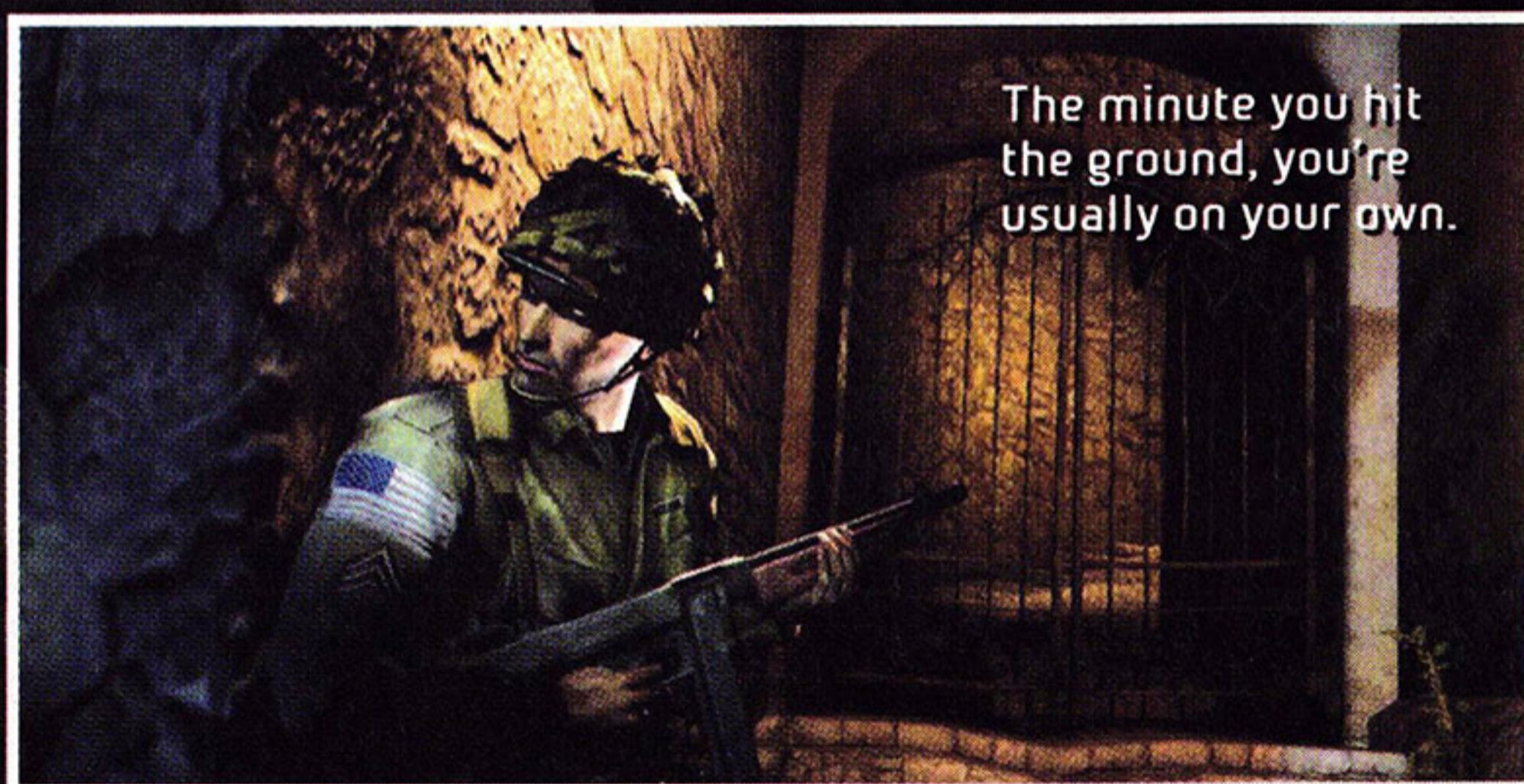
The minute EA announced its new *Medal of Honor* game for Xbox 360, we knew it – this new generation of gaming has officially started cookin'. *Medal of Honor: Airborne* not only brings with it the series' classic wartime shooter style, but also a good handful of new ingredients to tweak the gameplay as well. The biggest tweak? You've read it right in the title: This time you're airborne! As a paratrooper in WWII, you begin each level by dropping into a large map anywhere you want, starting the battle from that exact landing spot. It's a new twist on the series' trademark approach to WWII first-person gaming. And this twist should keep mission structure and gameplay constantly fresh and full of surprises.

Of course, it's next generation, and this means *Airborne* comes with all the bells and whistles you'd expect from a 360 experience. But it's the gameplay that's looking really interesting this time. Moving away from the linear approach, and really making the game a true progression from past chapters in the series with improved AI and physics in addition to the graphics, *Medal of Honor* has its eyes squarely on reclaiming its title as captain of the WWII first-person shooters with *Airborne*.

■ TARGET AUDIENCE: FANS OF SKYDIVING AND SHOOTING ALIKE



Just imagine that you're one of those jumpers...



The minute you hit the ground, you're usually on your own.

URBAN CHAOS: RIOT RESPONSE

Civic superheroes

PLATFORM: XBOX
DEVELOPER: ROCK STEADY
PUBLISHER: EIDOS
RELEASE DATE: JUNE 2006



Hey, Jack Thompson? Try this one on for size: *Urban Chaos: Riot Response* may be violent, yes. And sure, it has its share of crazed thugs in hockey masks wielding firearms. But check this out: You're a good guy. In fact, you're the good-est of good guys ever. The heroes of *Riot Response* are the brave folks charged with keeping us safe in real life: police officers, firefighters, and EMTs. And in a city that's getting its rear end handed to it on a silver platter by rioting thugs, your job as a member of a special police task force is to quell the violence, help your fellow civil servants (i.e., fire and rescue), and fend off the crazies trying to keep things, well, crazy. This time there's no doubt you're one of the good guys.

■ TARGET AUDIENCE: JACK THOMPSON-ITES

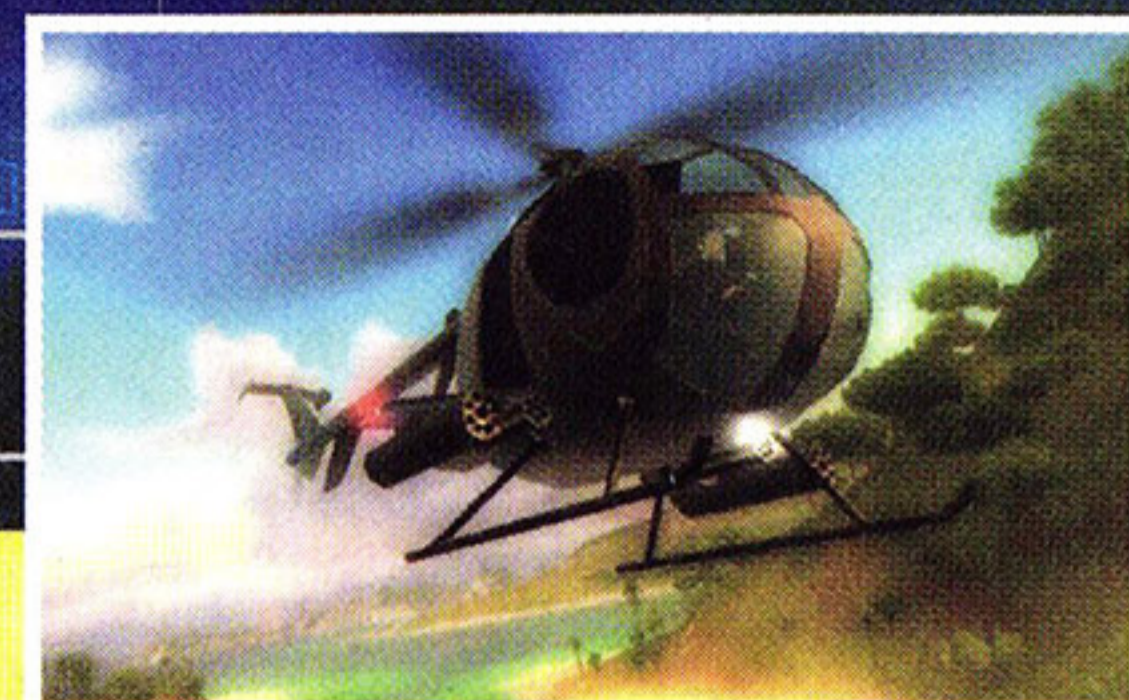


Don't let Jason over there hurt the paramedic; you'll need her help.

continued on pg. 48

JUST CAUSE

iViva la revolución!



PLATFORM: XBOX, XBOX 360
 PUBLISHER: EIDOS
 DEVELOPER: AVALANCHE STUDIOS
 RELEASE DATE: FALL 2006

Who says open-ended sandbox-style games have to be about stealing cars, gangbanging, and selling drugs in the inner city? In *Just Cause*, you get to commandeer vehicles, run with rebels, and sell drugs in the middle of a lushly rendered jungle. See, totally different!

Get under *Just Cause's* mosquito net as Rico Rodriguez, a CIA operative working undercover in the remote jungles of San Esperito, a banana republic run by a dictator named Mendoza. The bulk of your adventure puts you on track to overthrow Mendoza by fomenting revolution and destabilizing an island nation with peasant uprisings, assassinations, and subterfuge.

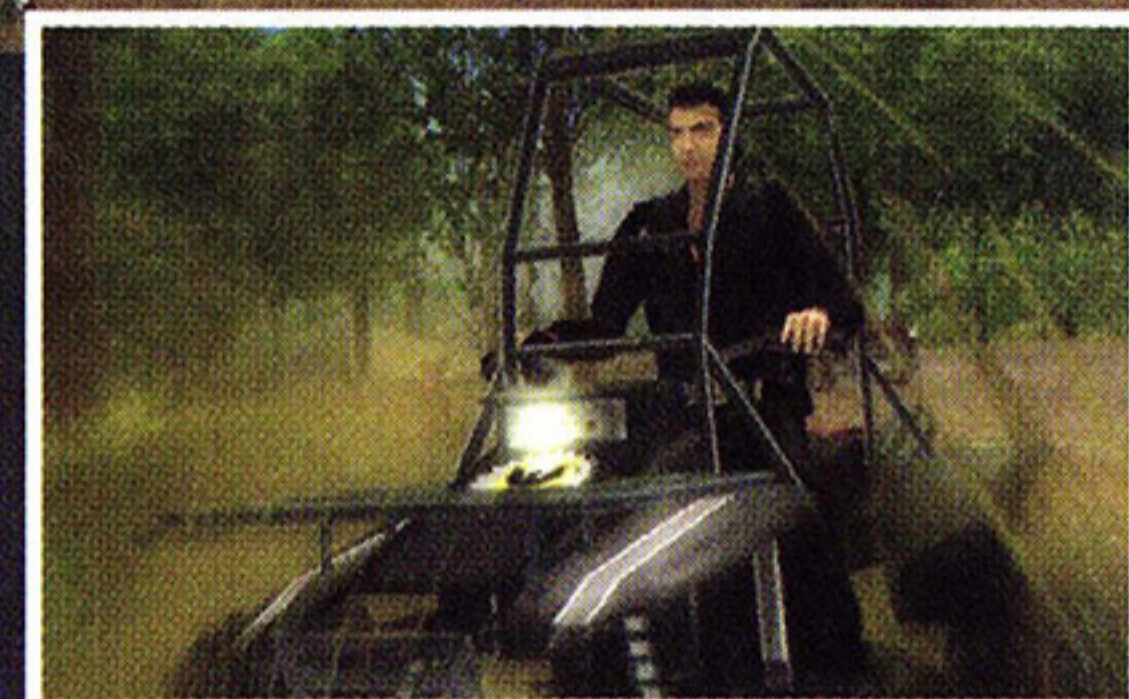
And if political intrigue and insurrection don't interest you, then perhaps the massive open world of San Esperito will. Approximately 32 square kilometers in size, *Just Cause's* virtual playground is waiting for you from the get-go. How you choose to get around from uprising to uprising (the ones you help to initiate, of course) remains entirely your choice. All sorts of vehicles are yours for the taking, from helicopters to boats to fighter jets.

Too bad the name "Contras" was already taken.



And the stunt moves you use to jump from any moving vehicle to another (even planes) are straight out of *Fear Factor*. And for wannabe politicians, *Just Cause* should deliver action from beginning to end.

■ TARGET AUDIENCE: THE SANDINISTAS



LEGO STAR WARS: THE ORIGINAL TRILOGY

Plastic fantastic



PLATFORM: XBOX
 PUBLISHER: LUCASARTS
 DEVELOPER: TRAVELER'S TALES
 RELEASE DATE: FALL 2006

After lifting the lid on the latest Lego-ized iteration of the *Star Wars* gaming legacy in our last issue, the fans have spoken. Screw *Halo* when you can tool around as a miniature Chewbacca in a galaxy filled with toy-sized X-Wings! And this is what LucasArts has planned – revive the Original Trilogy and its myriad of memorable characters in Lego form for more movie-based adventures. Creating new characters and customizing new vehicles is just the beginning. Expect more details very soon.

■ TARGET AUDIENCE: ANYONE READING THIS RIGHT NOW

How many Legos would it take to build a to-scale Death Star?



continued on pg. 48D



**“IN WAR, TRUTH IS
THE FIRST CASUALTY.”**

—AESCHYLUS

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IS THE FIRST CASUALTY.”**

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Killing zombies with an ax is so dangerously hardcore they should add it to the X-Games.

DEAD RISING

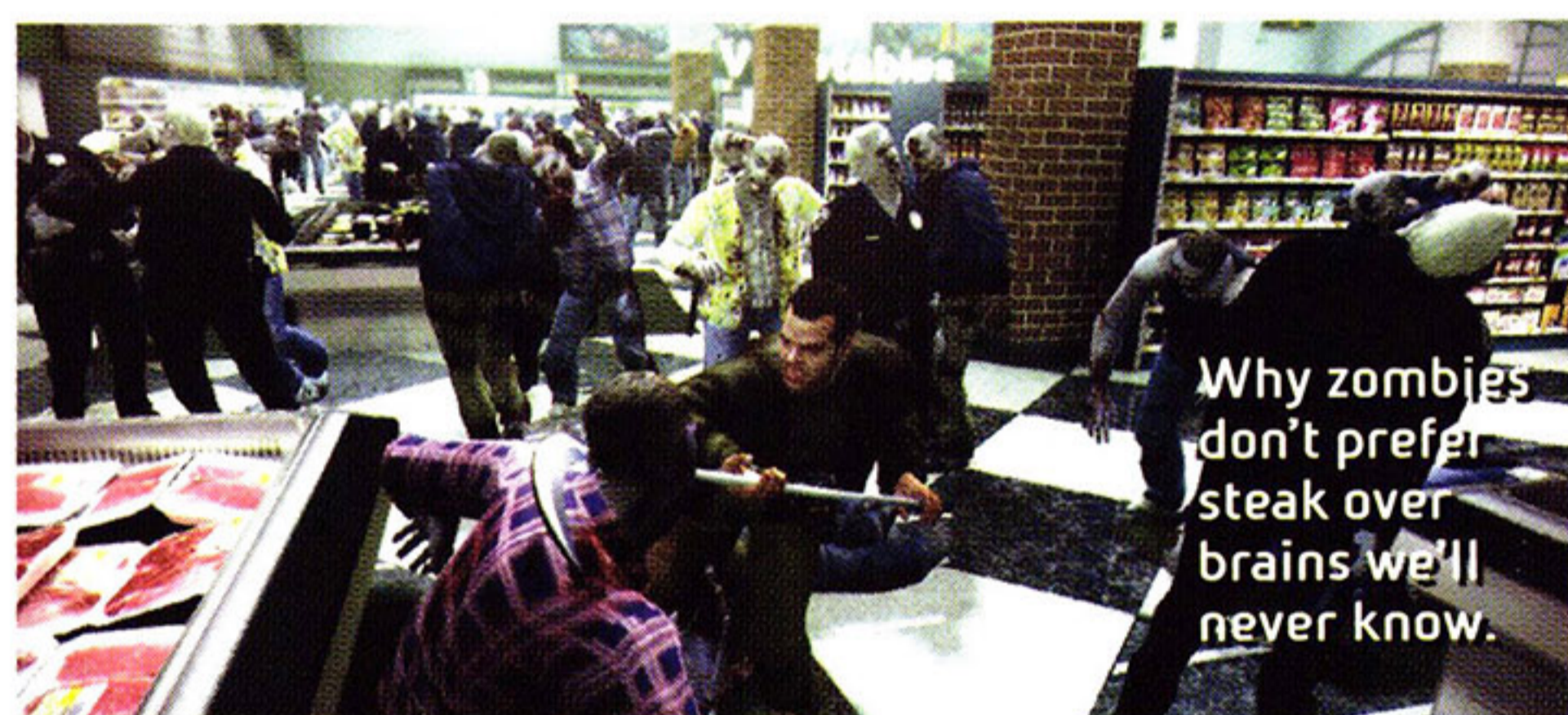


Over one million zom

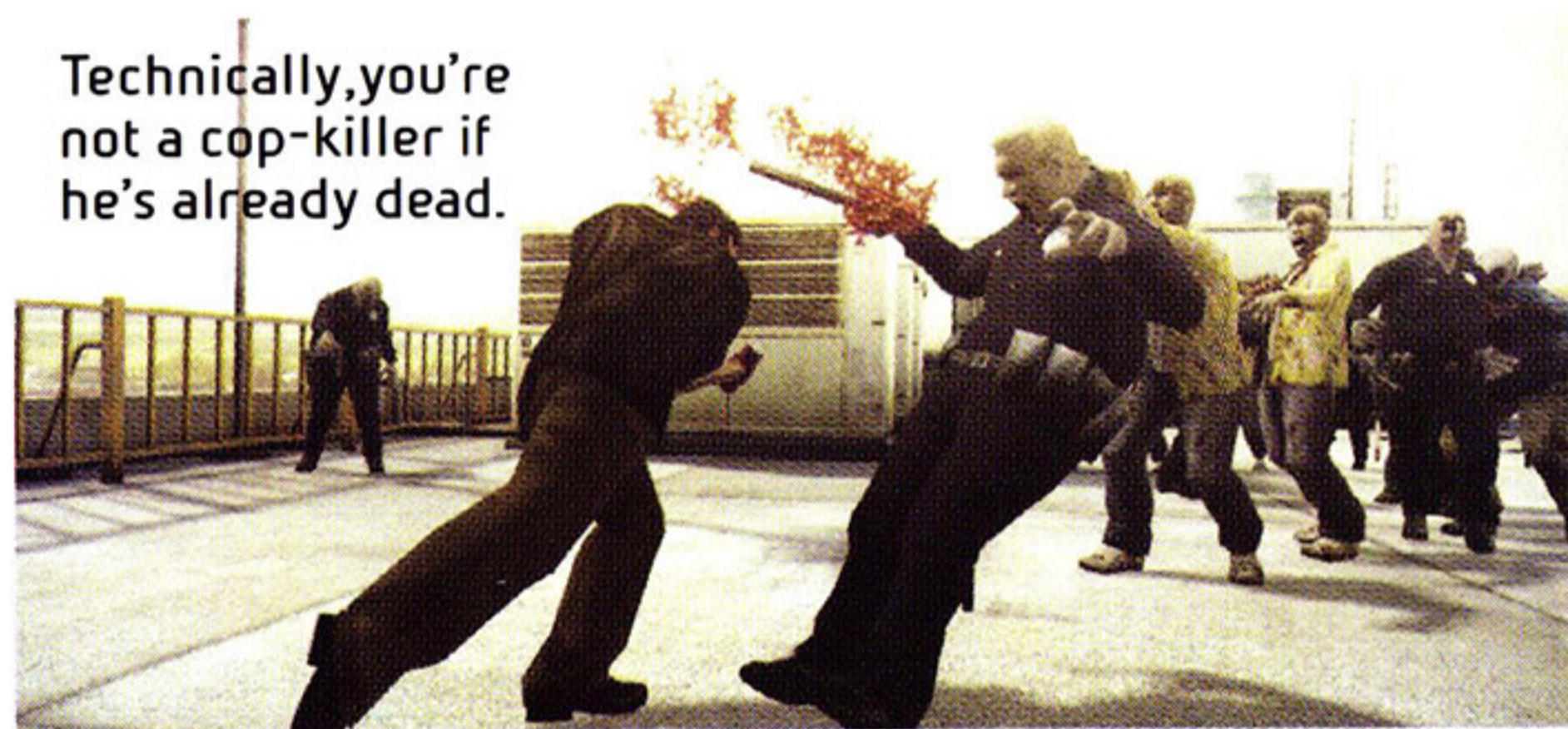
PLATFORM: XBOX 360
 PUBLISHER: CAPCOM
 DEVELOPER: CAPCOM
 RELEASE DATE: SUMMER 2006

After *Dead Rising* was announced at E3 last year, Capcom's tweak on the zombie horror genre it actually birthed with the *Resident Evil* series turned heads with its "everything-but-the-kitchen-sink" approach to weapons. Trapped in a mall by an ever-encroaching tidal wave of zombies, you'll have plenty of unorthodox weapons at your disposal, be it the standard chain saw or the less-standard lawn mower.

In every area or storefront of the mall, you'll have to fight your way through to the exit, saving



Why zombies don't prefer steak over brains we'll never know.



Technically, you're not a cop-killer if he's already dead.

The "Other" Sports Games of 2006

You can count on the EA Sports stalwarts, but here are some other titles to get sweaty with this year

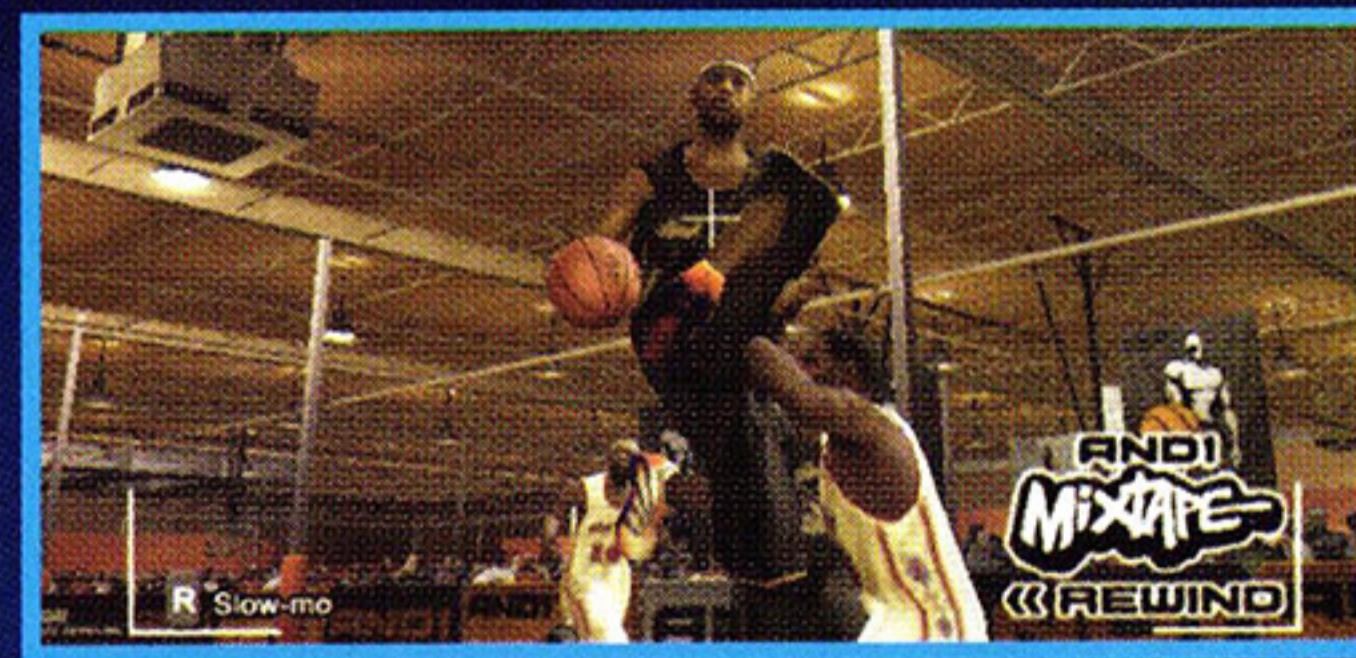


TOP SPIN 2

PLATFORM: XBOX 360
 DEVELOPER: INDIE BUILT
 PUBLISHER: 2K SPORTS
 RELEASE DATE: APRIL



All you really need to know about *Top Spin 2* is this: They didn't break it. In fact, our initial impression is that it's better. Career mode is much deeper. It took us about 12 hours to max out our first character, compared to the original's four to six. Specialty shots are also handled differently, operating off of momentum. So Ryan can't hit top spin baseline winners on every shot now, much to Paul's delight and relief.



AND 1 STREETBALL

PLATFORM: XBOX
 DEVELOPER: BLACK OPS
 PUBLISHER: UBISOFT
 RELEASE DATE: MARCH



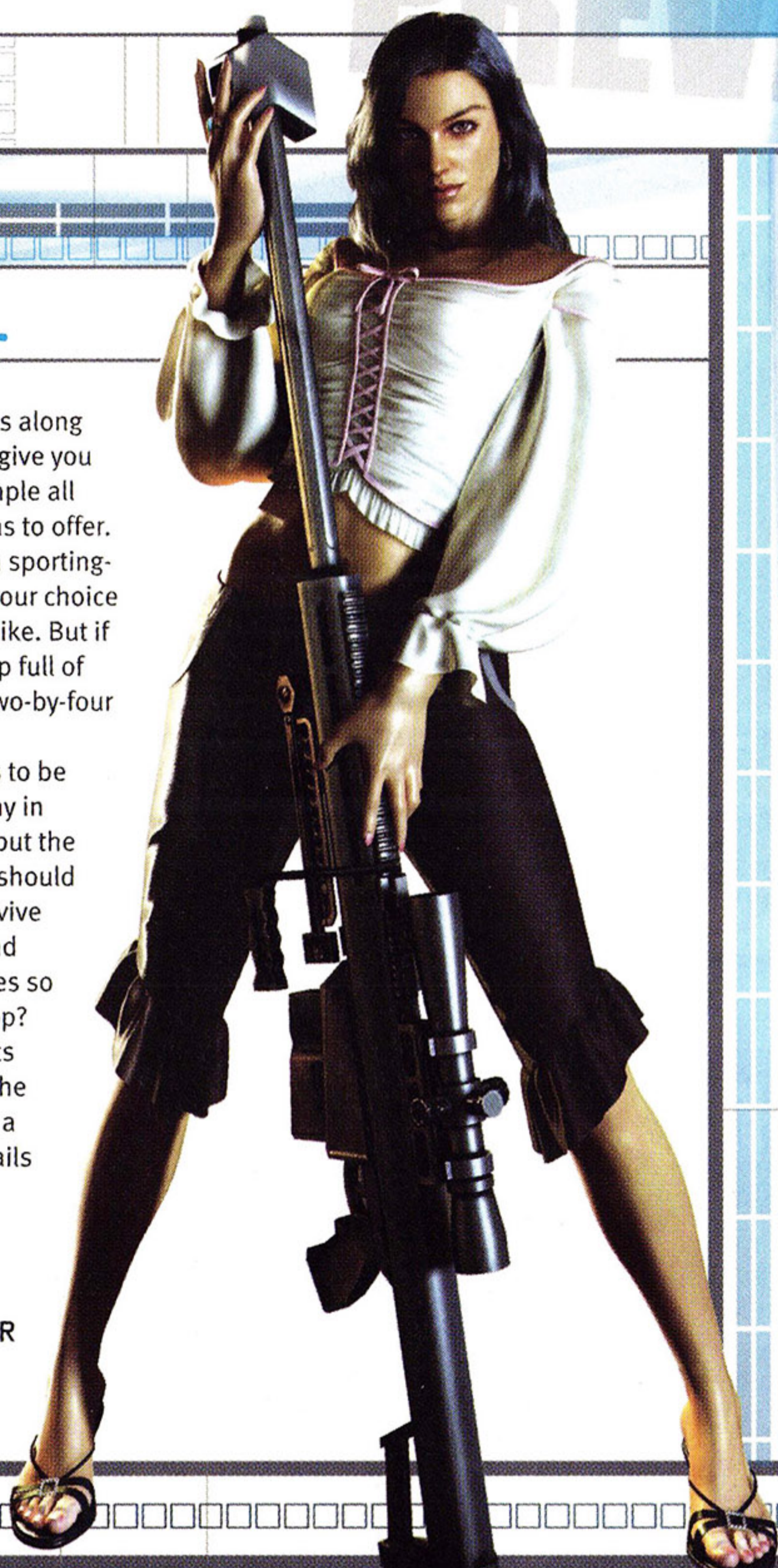
Though *And 1 Streetball* does feature real street ballers, they're not NBA superstars and it's not really about the licensed folks anyway. Instead, it's a hoops game where the slickness of your moves count as much as the points – kind of like a fighting game merged with a basketball title. Look for things to get pretty over the top – but real – like when you stuff your arm halfway into the hoop on a dunk. Seriously!

bites served...

other hapless live humans along the way. And this should give you ample opportunity to sample all the weapons the plaza has to offer. For instance, if you're in a sporting-goods store, you'll have your choice of baseball bats and the like. But if you find yourself in a shop full of housewares, perhaps a two-by-four will do the trick.

Dead Rising promises to be more than a one-trick pony in the combat department, but the real rush of its gameplay should come from how you'll survive the zombie onslaught. And just why are those zombies so eager to shop till they drop? Capcom hasn't let any cats out of the bag regarding the storyline – but we expect a full update and more details in time for next issue.

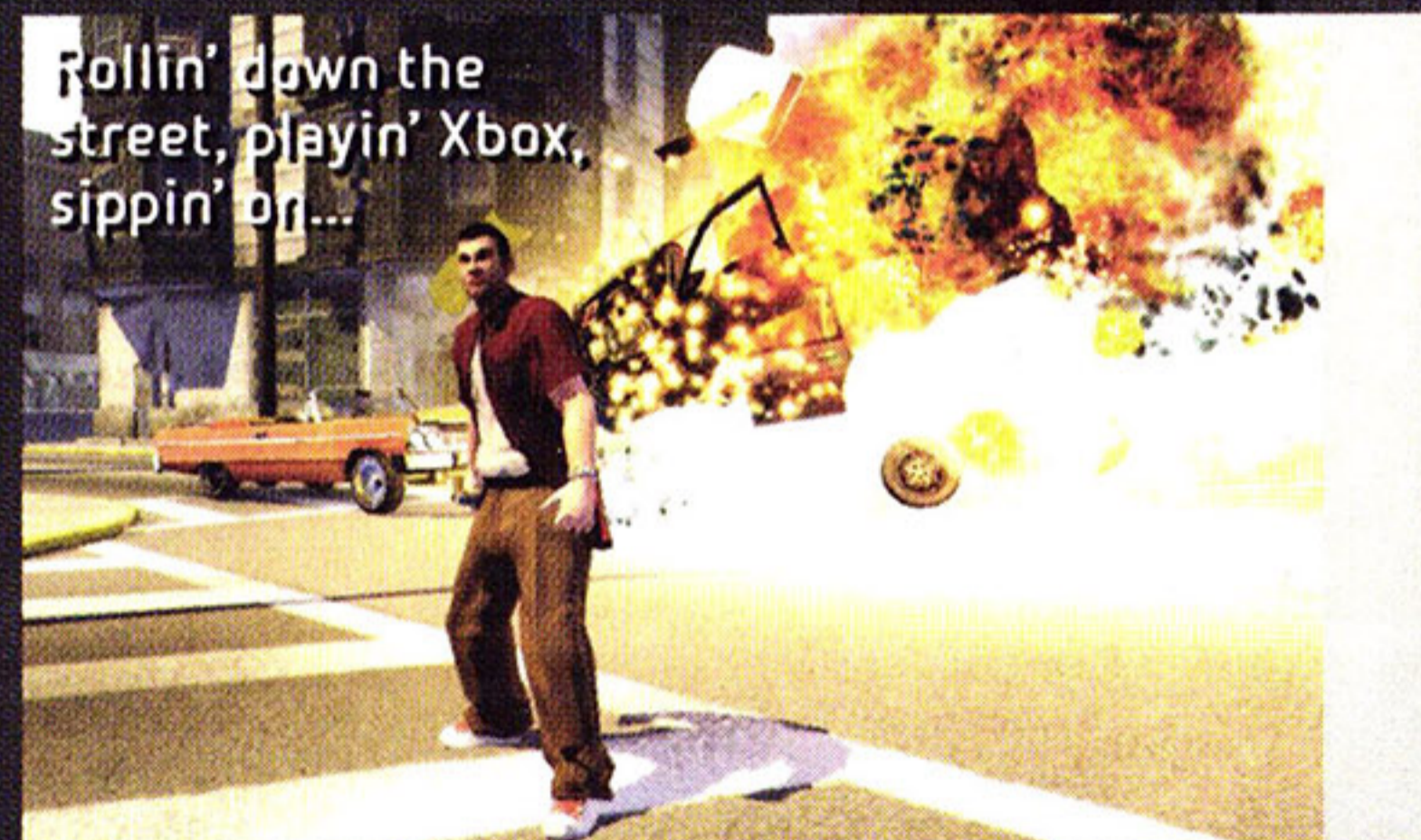
■ **TARGET AUDIENCE:**
THOSE WITH AN
UNDEAD CHIP ON THEIR
SHOULDER



SAINT'S ROW

Smooth criminals

Rollin' down the street, playin' Xbox, sippin' on...

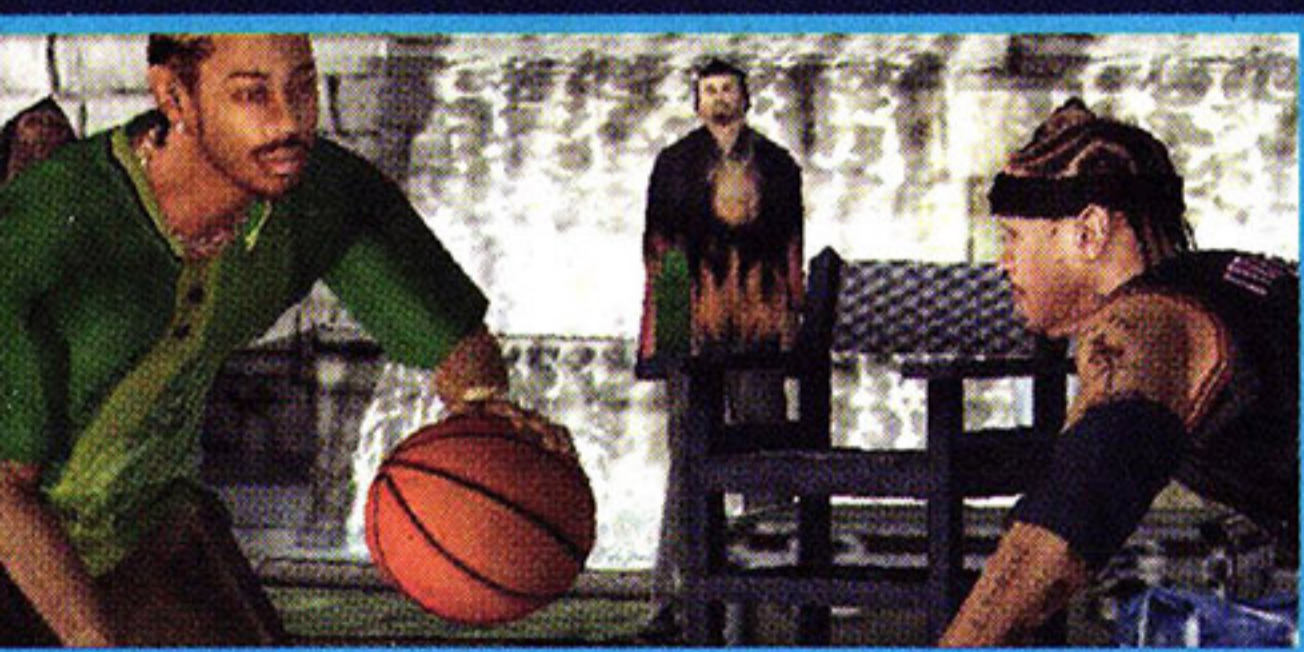


PLATFORM: XBOX 360
DEVELOPER: VOLITION
PUBLISHER: THQ
RELEASE DATE: SPRING 2006



No, pimpin' ain't easy; neither is carjacking, mugging, or insurance fraud. But you'll get to try your hand at those things and look fly as you do it in Volition's gangland simulator. Pick out your threads, detail your ride, and expand your criminal empire by controlling entire parts of a huge open-ended city in this potential *GTA* rival.

■ **TARGET AUDIENCE:** FLEDGLING THUGS LOOKING FOR A VIRTUAL LEG UP

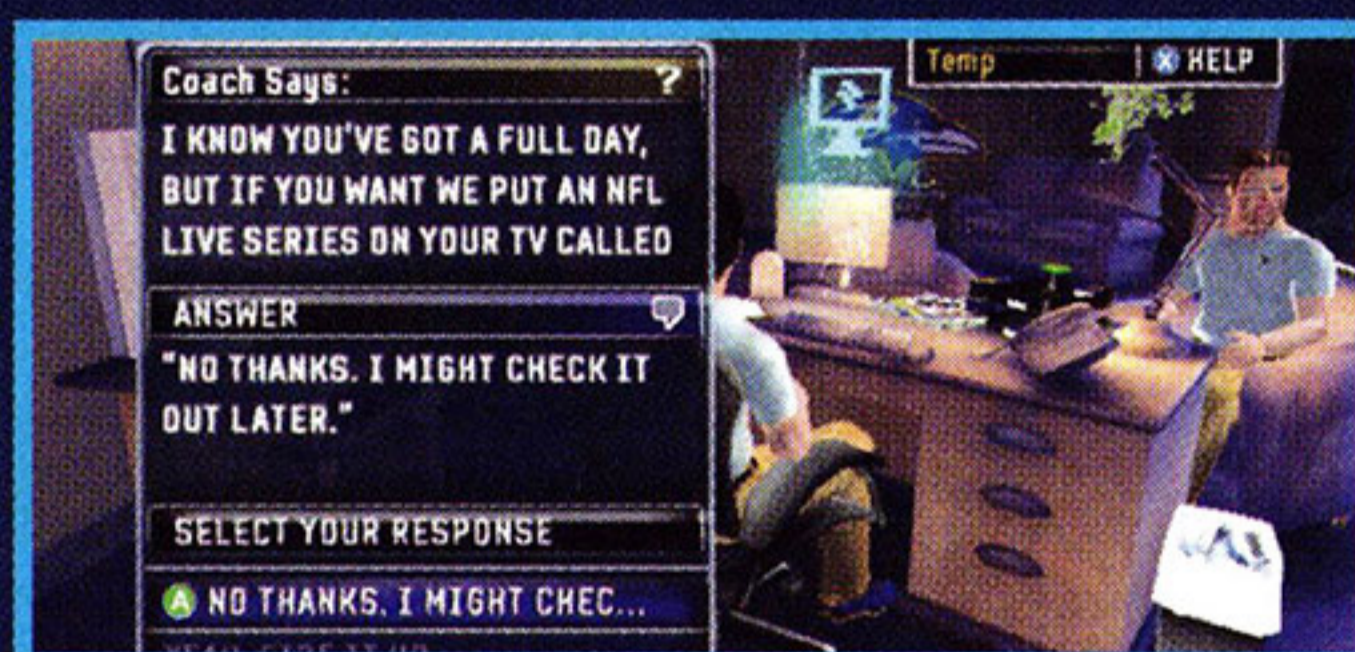


NBA BALLERS: PHENOM

PLATFORM: XBOX
DEVELOPER: MIDWAY
PUBLISHER: MIDWAY
RELEASE DATE: APRIL



Filling the void left by the classic one-on-one b-ball titles of yore (*Jordan vs. Bird*, anyone?), *Ballers*'s second turn on Xbox fills out the story line a bit, again chronicling your rise to the top. This time you have an open Los Angeles to explore for pickup games with celebs like Ludacris. Naturally, the on-court action's been tweaked too. Expect heavy trash-talking in the newly added Xbox Live multiplayer mode.

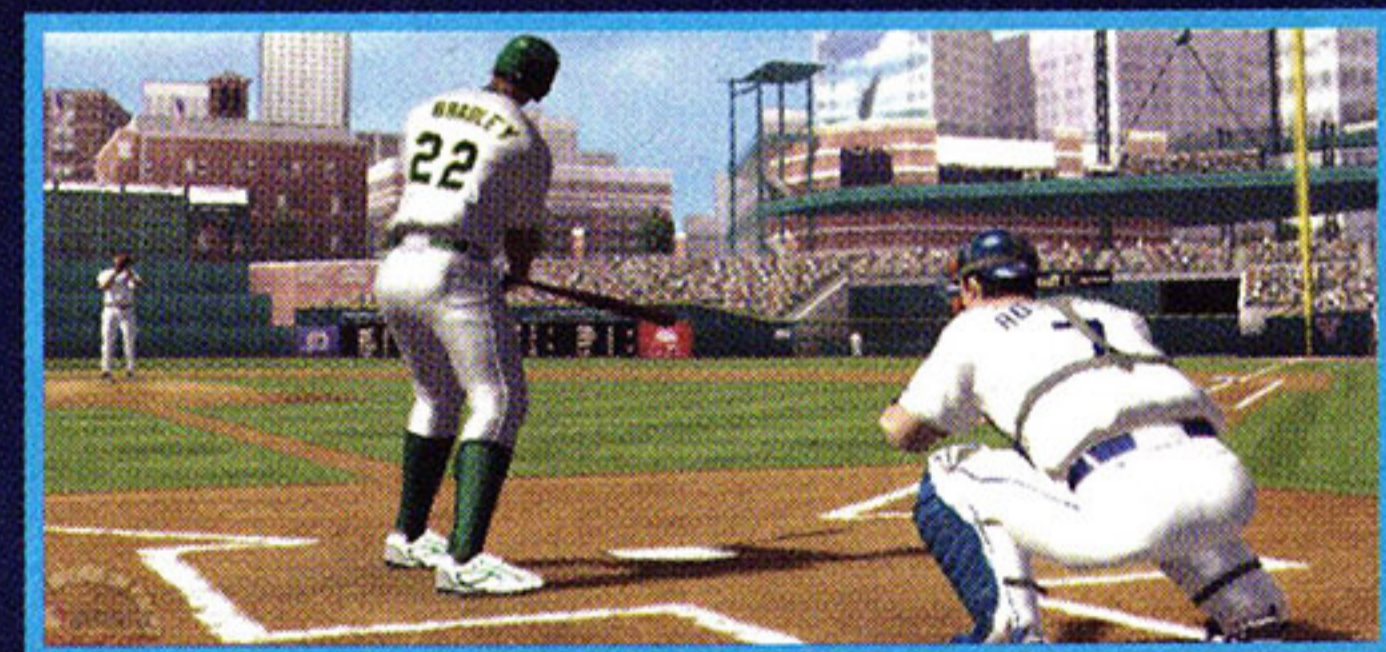


NFL HEAD COACH

PLATFORM: XBOX
DEVELOPER: EA TIBURON
PUBLISHER: EA SPORTS
RELEASE DATE: SUMMER



Focusing on the stuff that happens on *Madden*'s sideline, *NFL Head Coach* is a "sports strategy sim" – meaning you control everything that happens outside the lines, like coaching, drafting, hiring, firing, and everything else that goes into building a winning franchise. Create a coaching legend to rival Lombardi or Landry, minus the cool hat. Think of it as the *Madden* for your brain instead of your thumbs.



MLB 2K6

PLATFORM: XBOX, XBOX 360
DEVELOPER: KUSH GAMES
PUBLISHER: 2K SPORTS
RELEASE DATE: APRIL

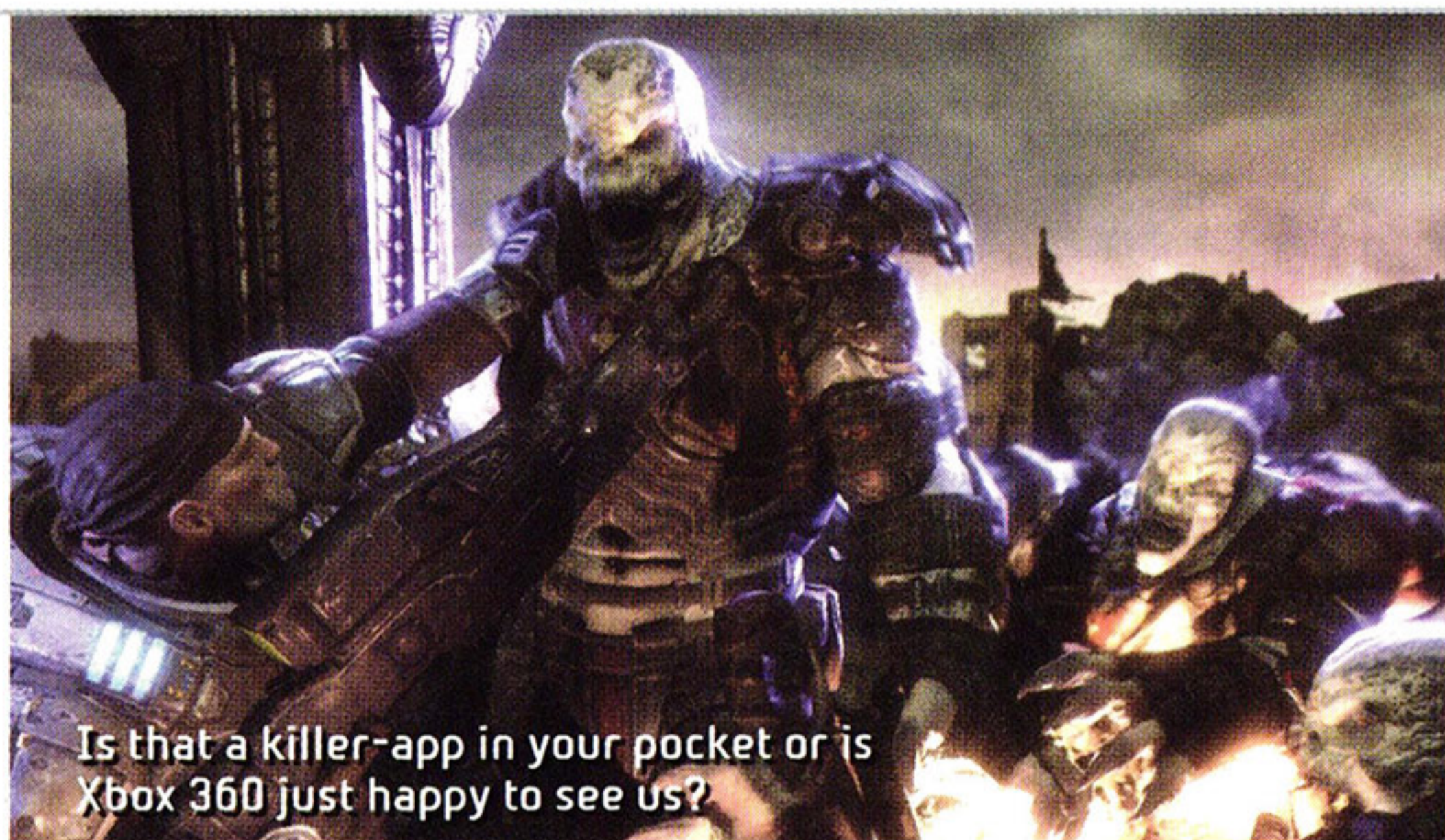


A new batting system, new pitching interface, and new fielding component mean that the latest *MLB* offering (and first for Xbox 360) has had every major piece of it ripped out and rebuilt. The analog swing system has potential, the new pitching mechanic can only be better than last year's, and fielding finally allows you to control your throws. Expect gorgeous ballparks and *NBA 2K6*-like player looks and animation to back it up.

continued on pg. 50 ▶▶

GEARS OF WAR

The next big thing



Is that a killer-app in your pocket or is Xbox 360 just happy to see us?

PLATFORM: XBOX 360
 PUBLISHER: MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS
 DEVELOPER: EPIC
 RELEASE DATE: LATE 2006

From the minute Epic's shooter stormed Microsoft's E3 2005 press conference with its monsters-in-space footage, it rang every 360 bell and blew every next-gen whistle with gorgeous environments, white-knuckle gaming, and buckets of immersion. While Microsoft has been keen to keep it out of the limelight of late, we expect new details on Epic's gang of beautiful creatures very soon.

■ TARGET AUDIENCE: ANYONE WITH A PULSE



TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND

Hello, beautiful



PLATFORM: XBOX 360
 DEVELOPER: CRYSTAL DYNAMICS
 PUBLISHER: EIDOS
 RELEASE DATE: Q2 2006

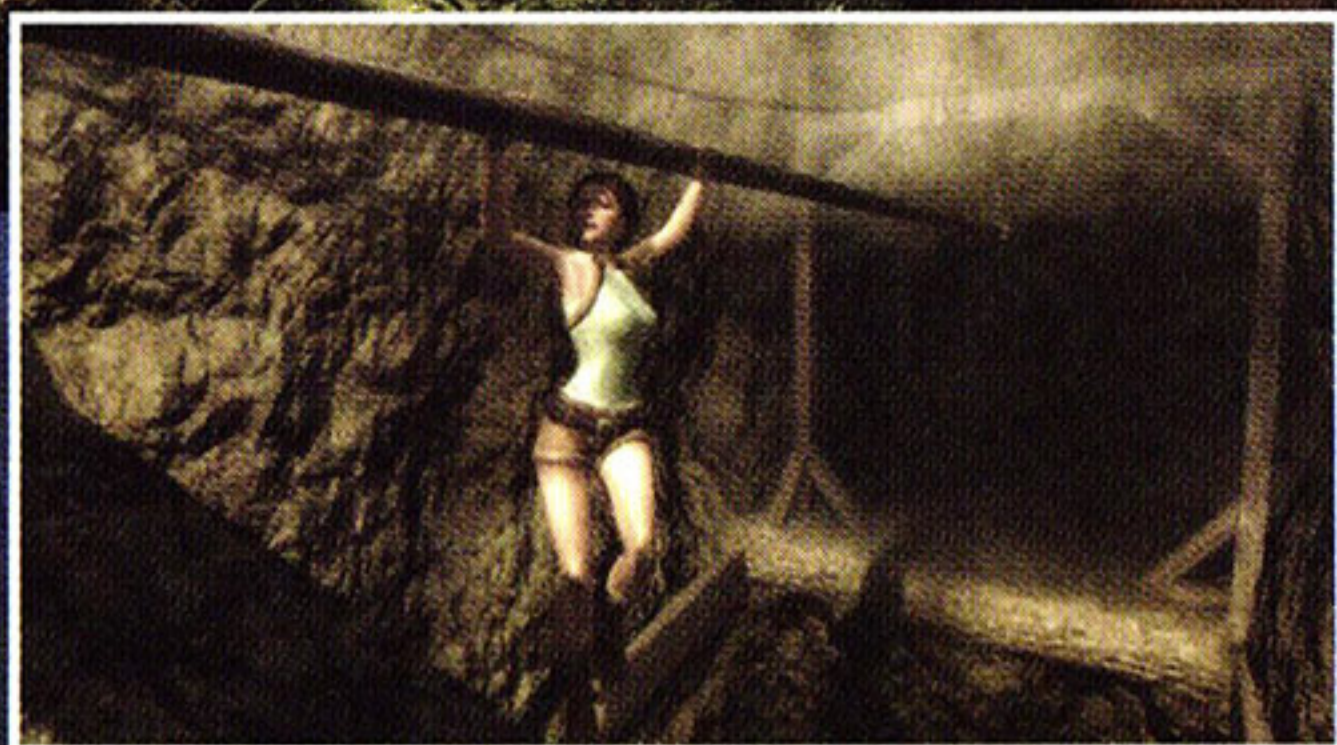
You can read all about the Xbox version of Lara's latest adventure in our exclusive review on page 70. But we got our grubby hands on a few screens of Lara's adventures on Xbox 360, which are the same gameplay-wise as the Xbox, but oh so much more next-gen. Damn, homegirl is lookin' fine.

■ TARGET AUDIENCE: JILTED LOVERS OF LARA READY FOR ANOTHER GO-AROUND



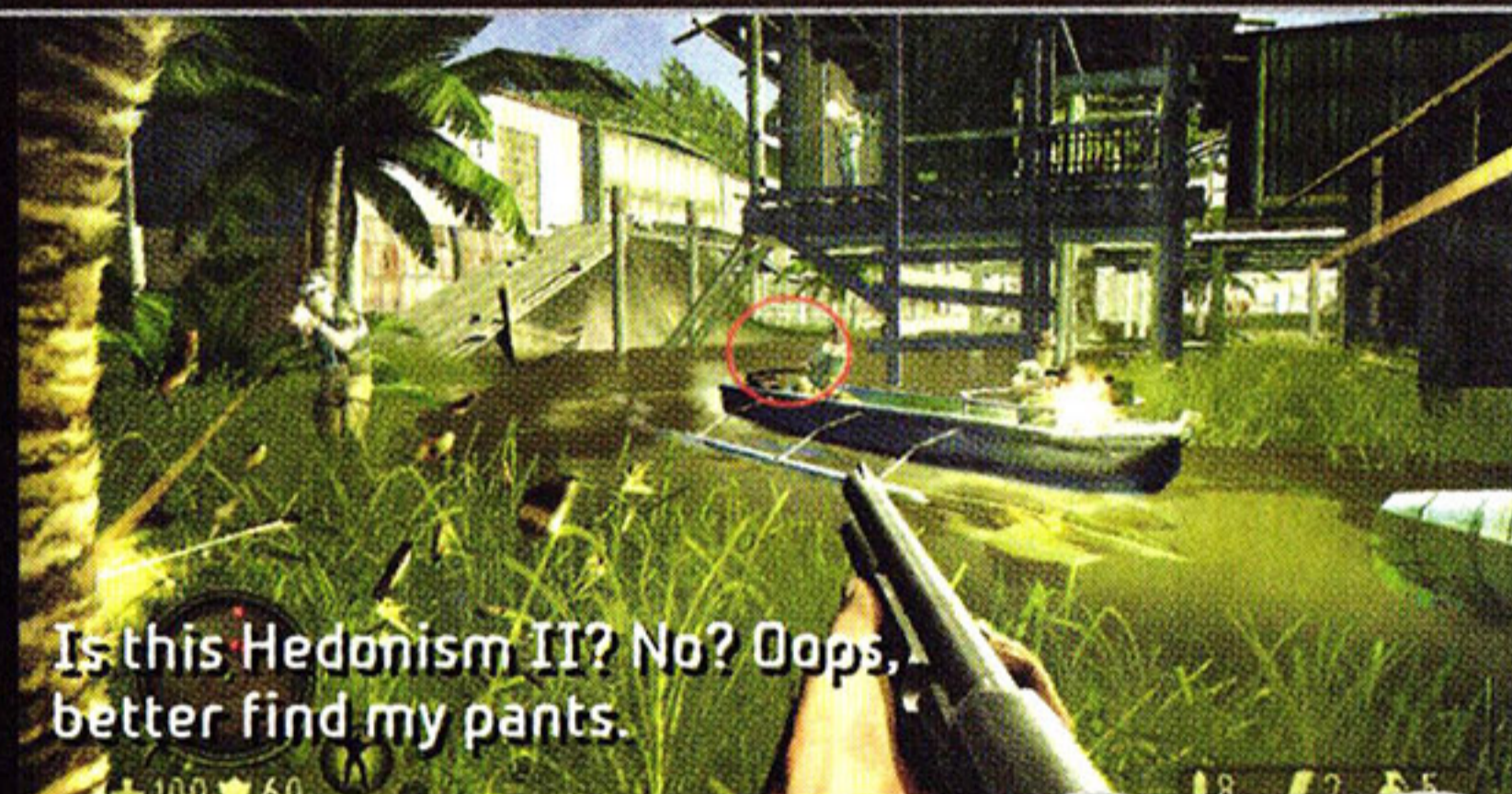
Lara advises you to check your sexual harassment handbook before making that "nice blouse" comment.

Lara dons her old-school outfit for a next-gen outing on 360.



FAR CRY INSTINCTS: PREDATOR/NEXT CHAPTER

Jungle love



Is this Hedonism II? No? Oops, better find my pants.

PLATFORM: XBOX, XBOX 360
 DEVELOPER: UBISOFT MONTREAL
 PUBLISHER: UBISOFT
 RELEASE DATE: APRIL 2006



Predator and *Next Chapter* are the 360 compilation and Xbox 1 stand-alone expansion, respectively, for last year's impressive outdoor-heavy first-person shooter. With a refreshingly smooth framerate, revamped water effects, and seriously increased draw distance (how far out toward the horizon you can see), *Predator* takes the six new single-player missions of Xbox's \$30 stand-alone *Next Chapter* disc and integrates them into the whole of the original *Instincts* for a jam-packed Xbox 360 cornucopia of jungle-licious goodness.

Both versions also include eight brand-new multiplayer maps, a new gameplay type (the *Domination*-esque Seek and Secure), and tweaks to the impressive level editor that lets you build your own custom multiplayer maps and then upload them to Xbox Live.

■ TARGET AUDIENCE: OXM EDITORS WHO NEED A VACATION

continued on pg. 52

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IT'S A GUARANTEE

TOM CLANCY'S SPLINTER CELL DOUBLE AGENT

Sam's really angry...

PLATFORM: XBOX, XBOX 360
 DEVELOPER: UBISOFT SHANGHAI (XBOX 360), UBISOFT MONTREAL (XBOX)
 PUBLISHER: UBISOFT
 RELEASE DATE: SEPTEMBER 2006



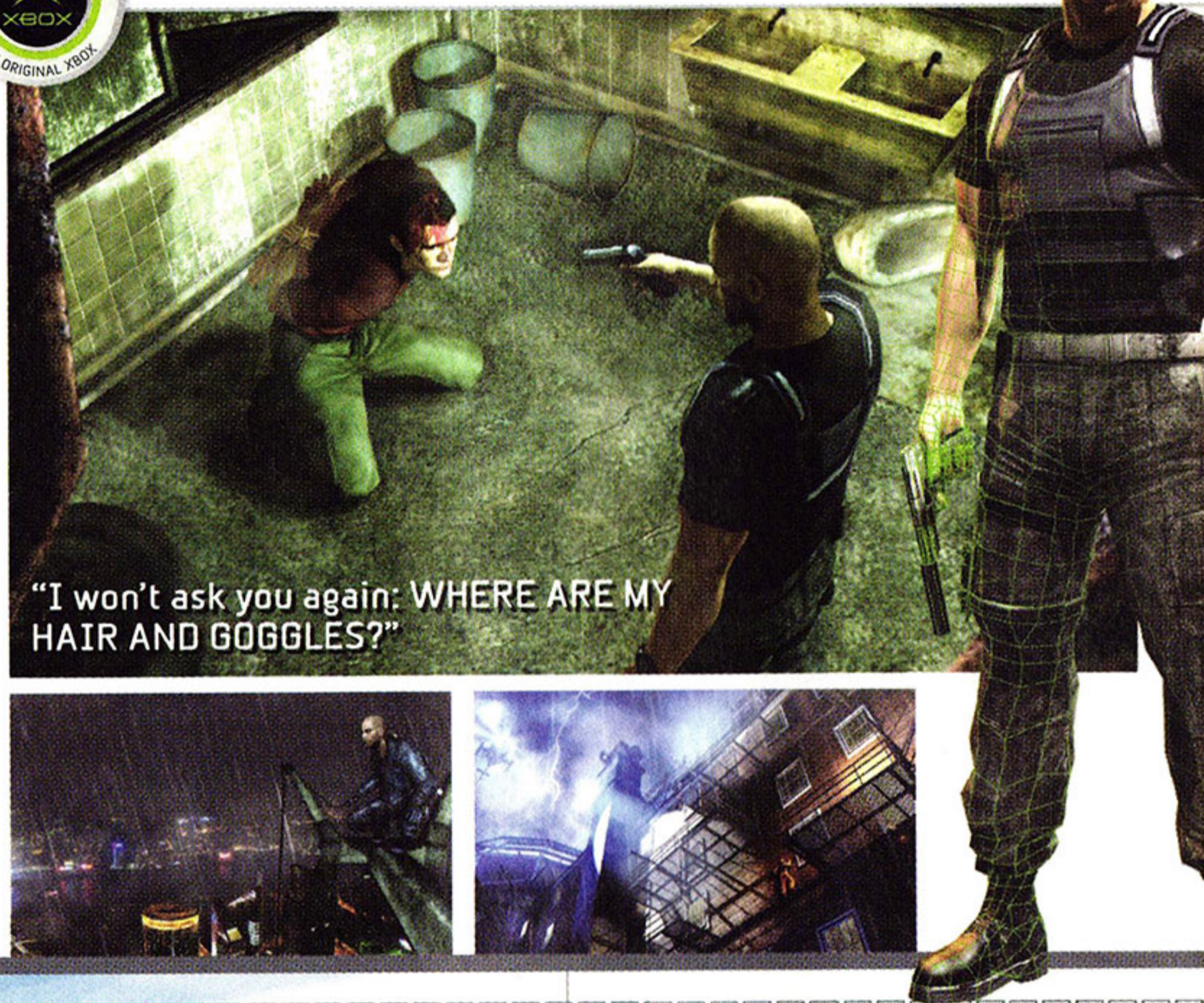
With a bevy of big-league sluggers to compete with (including *Gears of War* on page 50 and *Oblivion*, reviewed on page 66), as well as an incredible predecessor to try to live up to, we're not going to call *Double Agent* our Game of the Year just yet. But you do have to admire what the developers are trying to pull off.

That is, they're trying to reinvent one of the greatest franchises in Xbox history for its 360 debut. In this outing, Sam Fisher's daughter has been killed and Sam is going

way undercover – actually *joining* a terrorist cell – in order to get to the bottom of it.

Unfortunately, that's about all we know for now. Its release has been pushed back to September, which we don't mind. And really, with as many twists and turns and moral dilemmas hinted at for *Double Agent*, do you really want to know ahead of time anyway?

TARGET AUDIENCE: ANY GAMER WHO LIKES TO CHOKE TERRORISTS INTO UNCONSCIOUSNESS



DREAMFALL: THE LONGEST JOURNEY

Sweet dreams are made of this

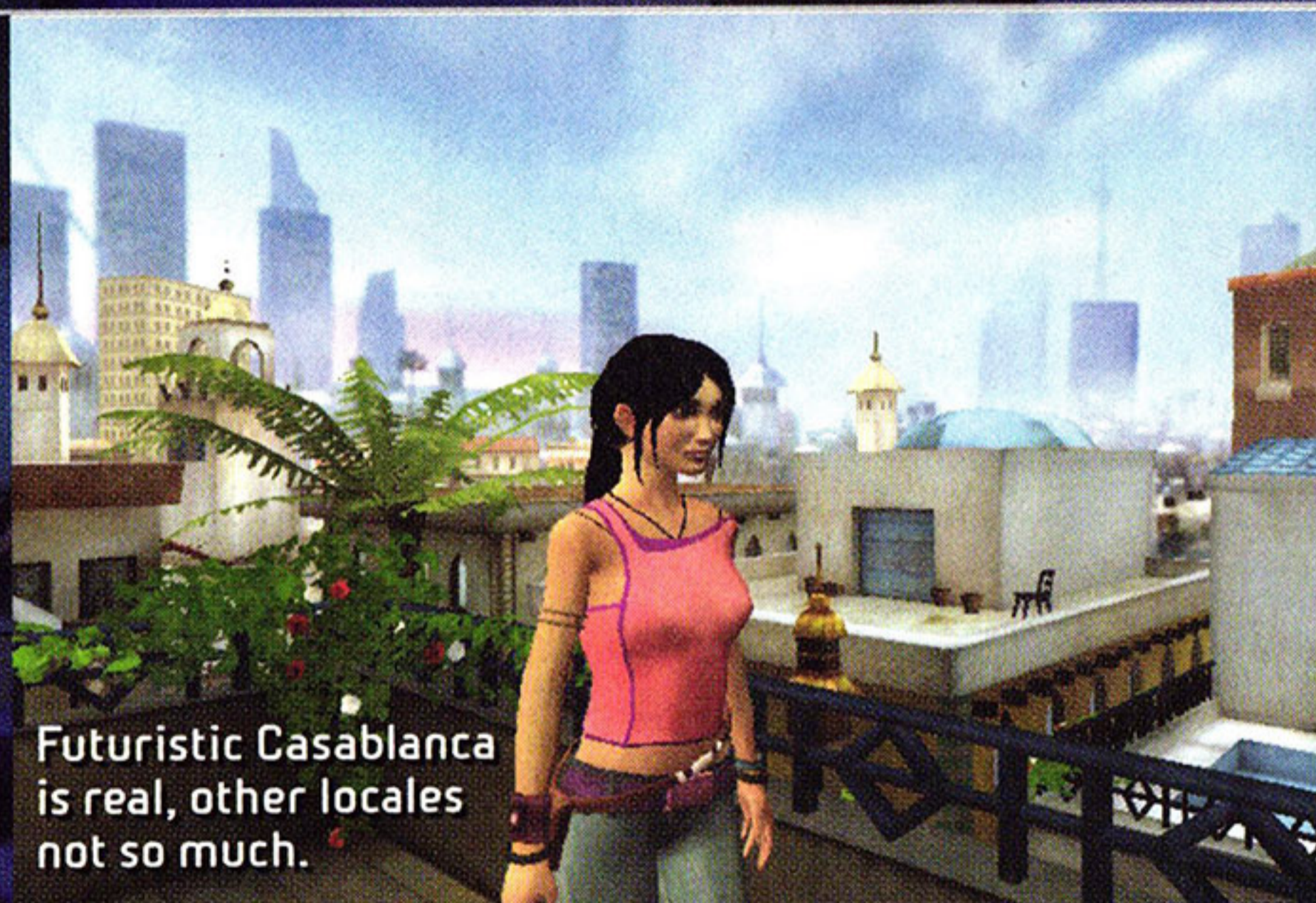
PLATFORM: XBOX
 DEVELOPER: FUNCOM
 PUBLISHER: ASPYR
 RELEASE DATE: APRIL 2006

Say it with us: Adventure games are not dead. In fact they're back and better than ever thanks to games like *Indigo Prophecy* and *Dreamfall: The Longest Journey*. Gone is the old point 'n' click method; *Dreamfall* is more like a third-person action game with an advanced hand-to-hand combat engine and lots of on-foot exploration. Set across multiple cities, dimensions, and dreamscapes,

Dreamfall promises to be a visually artistic experience – something no gamer ever gets enough of. Plus, it's got a creepy, talking robot monkey named Wonkers that'll either be the cutest thing you've ever seen or the most nightmarish. We're going with the latter.

TARGET AUDIENCE: ADVENTURESOME TYPES

continued on pg. 54 >>





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Burn rubber in London. Power-slide through turns in Tokyo. Pick-up kudos catching air in New York. Project Gotham Racing 3 puts you behind the wheel of the world's fastest exotic cars. Racing in the world's most exotic cities. Like a fuel-injected bat outta hell. ProjectGothamRacing3.com



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Jump in.



MOTOGP '06

MotoGP '06 may look slick, but the superior handling is the bread and butter here.

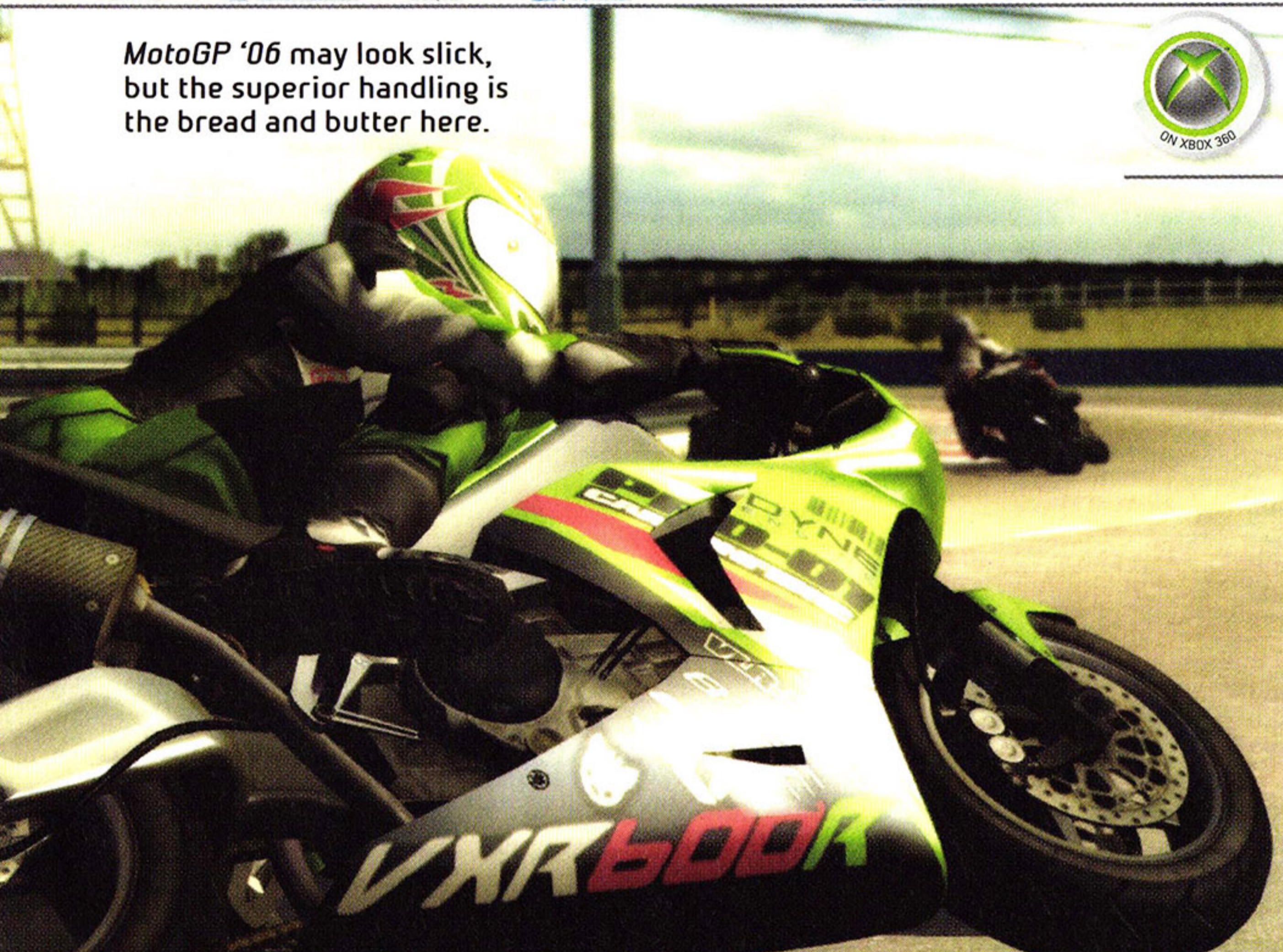


Keep the "hard" in "hardcore"

PLATFORM: XBOX 360
 PUBLISHER: THQ
 DEVELOPER: CLIMAX
 RELEASE DATE: MAY 2006

THQ's gorgeous motorcycle racer may not draw in the gaming crowds like a strict auto racer, but it's never been for lack of solid gameplay or delicious graphics. The original *MotoGP* was one of the first titles on the original Xbox to put the punch in Xbox Live gameplay, and *MotoGP '06* promises to keep the torch burning with online multiplayer races, as well as plenty of updates to the riders, tracks, and stats to keep consistent with the 2006 season.

And the racer's balance between realistic and arcade-y handling will get put to the test in a revamped Extreme Mode – where circuits have been widened to accommodate any speed demon's need for, well, speed. And just like



BATTLEFIELD II: MODERN COMBAT

Is a battlefield ever really pretty? Apparently so...



PLATFORM: XBOX 360
 DEVELOPER: DICE
 PUBLISHER: EA
 RELEASE DATE: MARCH 2006

The online-heavy *Modern Combat* fills a void in the multiplayer shooter world, and for its imminent redeployment on Xbox 360, we're getting all of what we already love on a much grander scale. For starters, the outdoor

environments are exponentially more gorgeous. The visuals are, it so happens, one of developer DICE's four main focuses for the next-gen *Battlefield*. Everything has been given a serious facelift. Lighting (the tanks in particular have a very realistic "grit" to them now), character models, landscapes, and the smoke and explosion effects have all been retooled.

The second point of emphasis for 360 *Battlefield* is upping the immersive experience. This translates into the interface and

heads-up display being streamlined and the aforementioned particle effects nicely intensifying the wow factor.

Next up is the cohesion between single-player and multiplayer. You don't have to have line of sight to swap controls between your teammates in the solo game (a seriously welcome addition), for instance. The single-player AI has also been tweaked to be more useful to you.

Finally, a lot of emphasis was placed on opponent AI. We've seen it in action, and it's decidedly more challenging. They're much smarter now, meaning they'll anticipate your moves, flank you, and not just stand around waiting to get shot.

So really, think of *Modern Combat* for 360 as *Battlefield 2.5*. It's still bringing the same 24-player, dedicated-server love that it's already known for, but it's tightening up some loose ends from the current-gen release and going under the knife for some major plastic surgery. As a bonus for loyal fans, all of the downloadable content from the Xbox 1 release is on the disc out of the box for the 360 version.

TARGET AUDIENCE: LOVERS OF PRETTY VEHICLE-BASED FIRST-PERSON MULTIPLAYER SHOOTERS (YES, AS IN HALO)

Extra graphical detail really brings the battles to life.

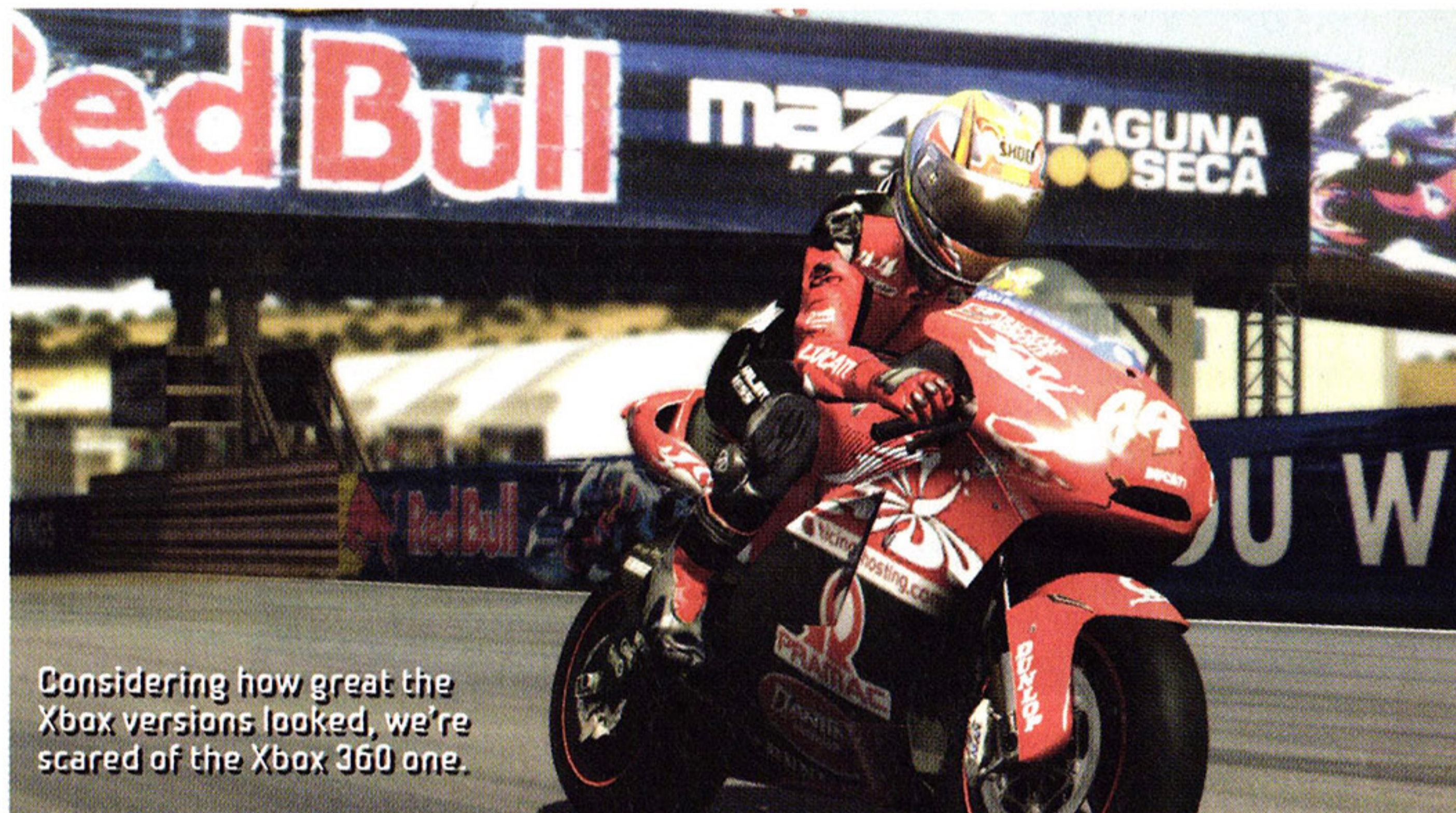


you'd expect from a series that's continually banked on its lush visuals, everything's been rebuilt from the ground up for next-gen. That means crowds of hundreds of thousands watching along tracks with eye-popping levels of detail in everything from the tarmac to the grass to the bikes themselves.

■ TARGET AUDIENCE: CROTCH ROCKETEERS



Just gorgeous, really.



Considering how great the Xbox versions looked, we're scared of the Xbox 360 one.

AMERICAN MCGEE PRESENTS: BAD DAY L.A.



I don't like Mondays



Vehicles are key to the *Battlefield* experience.



Real-life combat is all about teamwork – and so is virtual combat.



Hairspray flamethrowers – now that's good times.



A fire extinguisher can often get you out of a fix.

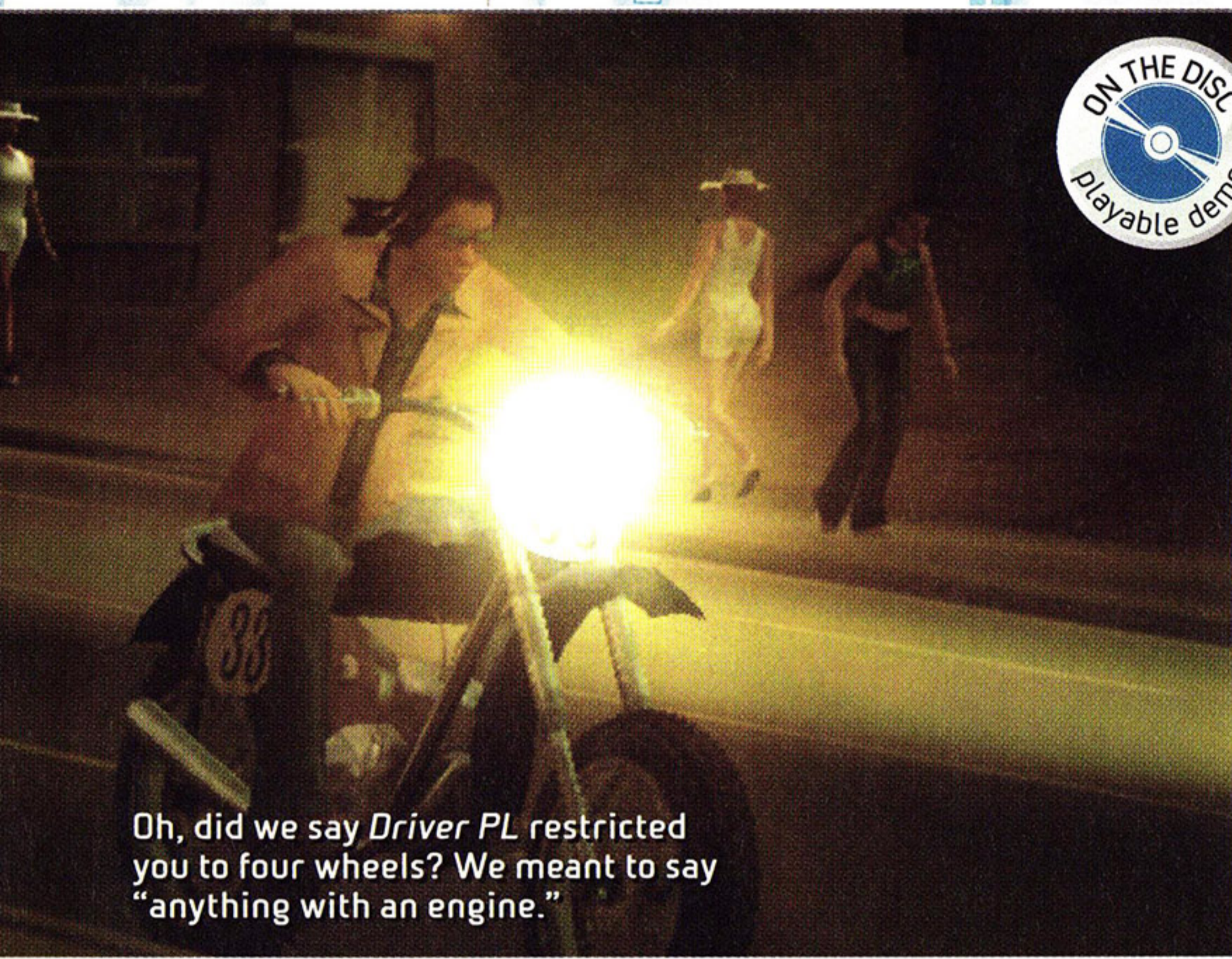
PLATFORM: XBOX
 DEVELOPER: THE MAURETANIA IMPORT EXPORT COMPANY
 PUBLISHER: ENLIGHT
 RELEASE DATE: Q1 2006

Let's see...a game that places you in the role of a modern-day Los Angeles homeless guy who must battle all sorts of natural and manmade disasters – terrorists, earthquakes, zombies, meteor showers – all done in a cartoonish graphical style? Yep, sounds like a winner to us. From the darkly comic and weird mind of American

McGee (*American McGee's Alice*, *Scrapland*) comes this unconventional yet deeply satirical game that plays upon the "fear culture" that grips our present-day society. Black humor is our favorite kind, especially when it makes fun of things like nail clippers being confiscated at the airport (they become the most powerful weapon in the game). You might think every day in L.A. is a bad one, but you've never experienced one quite like this.

■ TARGET AUDIENCE: DAVE CHAPPELLE FANS

continued on pg. 56



DRIVER PARALLEL LINES

White lines...blow away

PLATFORM: XBOX
 DEVELOPER: REFLECTIONS INTERACTIVE
 PUBLISHER: ATARI
 RELEASE DATE: MARCH 2006



Taking the series back to its roots, the fourth chapter in the sometimes brilliant but wildly uneven *Driver* series puts you behind the wheel of dozens of different cars. Featuring a young, cocky wheelman for a string of getaway missions in the 1970s, *Driver Parallel Lines* has a huge plot twist halfway through – but no spoilers here. And this time around, the amount of on-foot adventuring is kept to a minimum with more time spent on four wheels. Count on a soundtrack featuring all the rock, disco, and new wave fit to be listened to while you race, execute drive-bys, or cruise the streets of a virtual New York.

■ TARGET AUDIENCE: SIDEBURNED WHEELMEN

Oh, did we say *Driver PL* restricted you to four wheels? We meant to say "anything with an engine."

MMORPG WTF?

The lowdown on the coming wave of games in Xbox 360's blossoming massively multiplayer RPG genre!



FINAL FANTASY XI

PLATFORM: XBOX 360
 DEVELOPER: SQUARE ENIX
 PUBLISHER: SQUARE ENIX
 RELEASE DATE: APRIL 18



Still playing the beta? Enjoying it? Free is good indeed, but it can't last forever. The final retail release is just around the corner, and that means you'll have to start paying. But as anyone who's dug deep into the beta version can attest to, there's plenty of value to be had in continuing your life in Vana'diel. And this is just a taste of what's to come for *FFXI*. With new content on the way in the form of an upcoming expansion pack, you've certainly got some leveling up to do! Our advice? Keep playing the beta!

A.P.B.: ALL POINTS BULLETIN

PLATFORM: XBOX 360
 DEVELOPER: REAL TIME WORLDS
 PUBLISHER: WEBZEN
 RELEASE DATE: 2008



Given how far out it is, there's nothing new to update on this cops-vs.-robbers online war, but its premise is certainly unique among the growing console MMORPG genre. And we're extra enthused about it because we had a chance to meet Real Time Worlds founder David Jones for our *Crackdown* feature (on page 24), and we're now convinced that *A.P.B.* will rock.

MARVEL ONLINE

PLATFORM: XBOX 360
 DEVELOPER: TBA
 PUBLISHER: MICROSOFT
 RELEASE DATE: 2008



Who's behind the developer mask of Microsoft's superhero-driven *Marvel Online*? No one's saying, but we feel pretty confident in getting damned excited about it, regardless. After all, the PC's *City of Heroes* proved that people do want to band together and form superhero leagues and, just think – that game doesn't even have real comic-book characters!

HUXLEY

PLATFORM: XBOX 360
 DEVELOPER: WEBZEN
 PUBLISHER: WEBZEN
 RELEASE DATE: 2007



There has been one attempt at a massively multiplayer first-person shooter (MMOFPS) – the PC's *Planetside* – and it's a better game than its subscriber base reflects. So the promise of taking lessons learned from *Planetside* and mixing in the Unreal Engine 3 gets our attention in a hurry. In a postapocalyptic future where mutation has split humanity into two species, a war wages for control of lunarites, a new energy source conceived by the genius scientist Huxley. A persistent world lets you take part in small player-vs.-player skirmishes or actual large-scale battles in which players have to work together as an army. *Huxley* is a wildly ambitious project, and if it achieves half of what it's striving for – well, then consider us stunned.



continued on pg. 58

Kameo

Elements of Power

punch-throwing.

boulder-heaving.

ice-spear-hurling.

fire-spewing warrior.

I'm an

Mess with me,
you mess with all of me.

You are Kameo. Morph into 10 different formidable elemental warriors at will. Explore enchanted lands. Then crush, clobber, char, freeze, elude, ensnare, and destroy the evil boss Thorn and his minions. Only you have the power to restore peace to the kingdom. Make that, several powers... Kameo.com



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Jump in.

XBOX 360

TOO HUMAN

More human than human



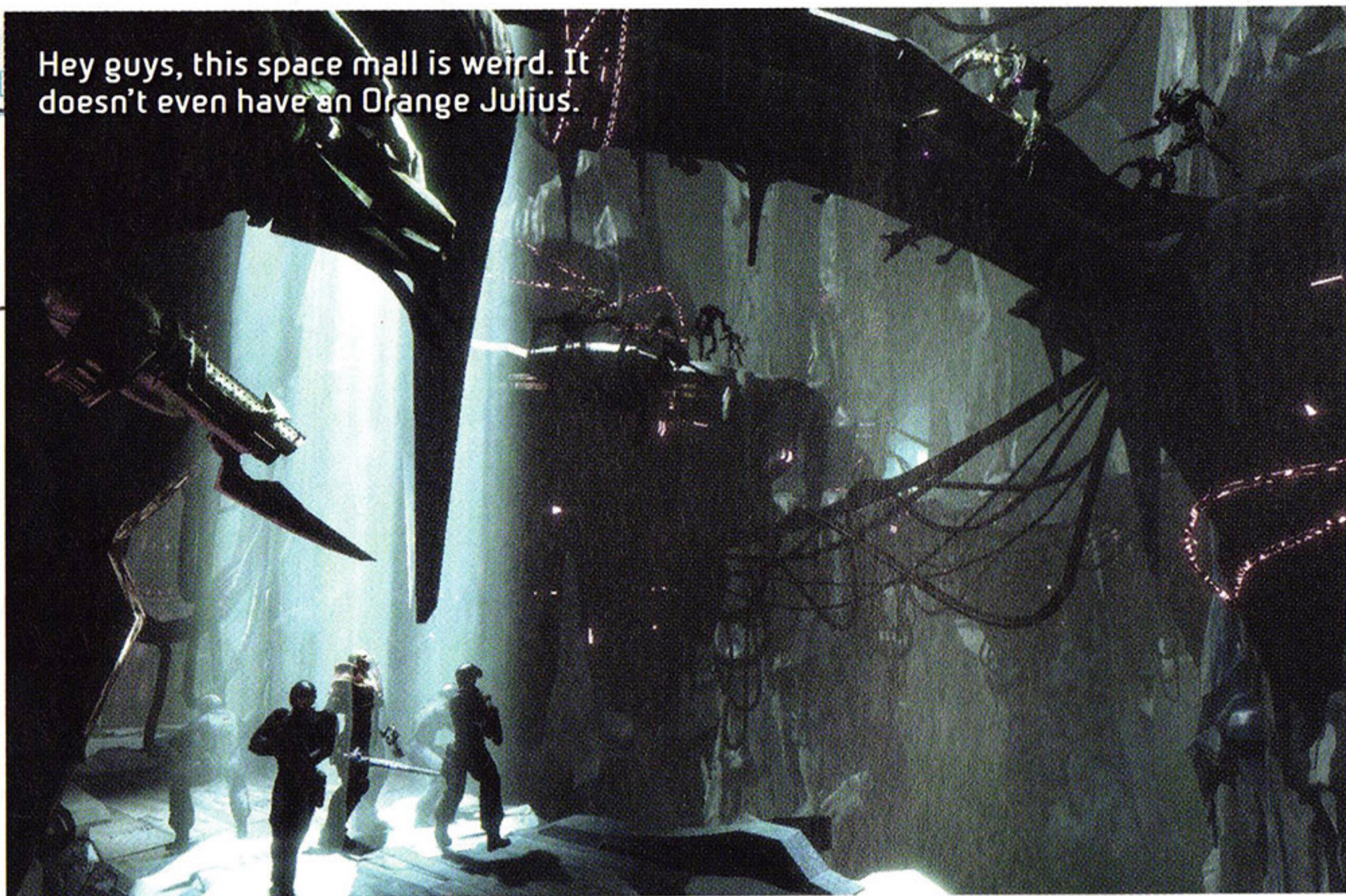
PLATFORM: XBOX 360
 DEVELOPER: SILICON KNIGHTS
 PUBLISHER: MICROSOFT
 RELEASE DATE: HOLIDAY 2006

It's almost as if Silicon Knights set out to make a game that truly lived up to the company's moniker. Get a glimpse of *Too Human*, and you'll see a futuristic world full of metallic robot enemies being cleaved apart by the sword-wielding Nordic god Baldur in full battle armor.

But the stakes are much higher than that. The main characters in the game (like the aforementioned Baldur) are actually gods who appear human. Whether the title *Too Human* refers to their appearance compared to other gods or their inherent weaknesses, we can't really say (and Silicon Knights ain't saying either at this point). What we can say is that the game promises to be chock-full of awesome melee combat as well as good old-fashioned shooting and blowing things up.

Though information on *Too Human* remains spotty at this early point in its development, one thing is certain – it'll be epic. Envisioned

Hey guys, this space mall is weird. It doesn't even have an Orange Julius.



as the first part of a trilogy, *Too Human* sports a very cinematic feel, thanks in no small part to its use of a heavily modified version of Unreal Engine 3. No matter what, *Too Human* will be a major offering for the Xbox 360 when the first installment finally arrives later this year.

■ TARGET AUDIENCE: GODS, HUMANS, AND EVERYONE IN BETWEEN



LOST PLANET

Ice pirates



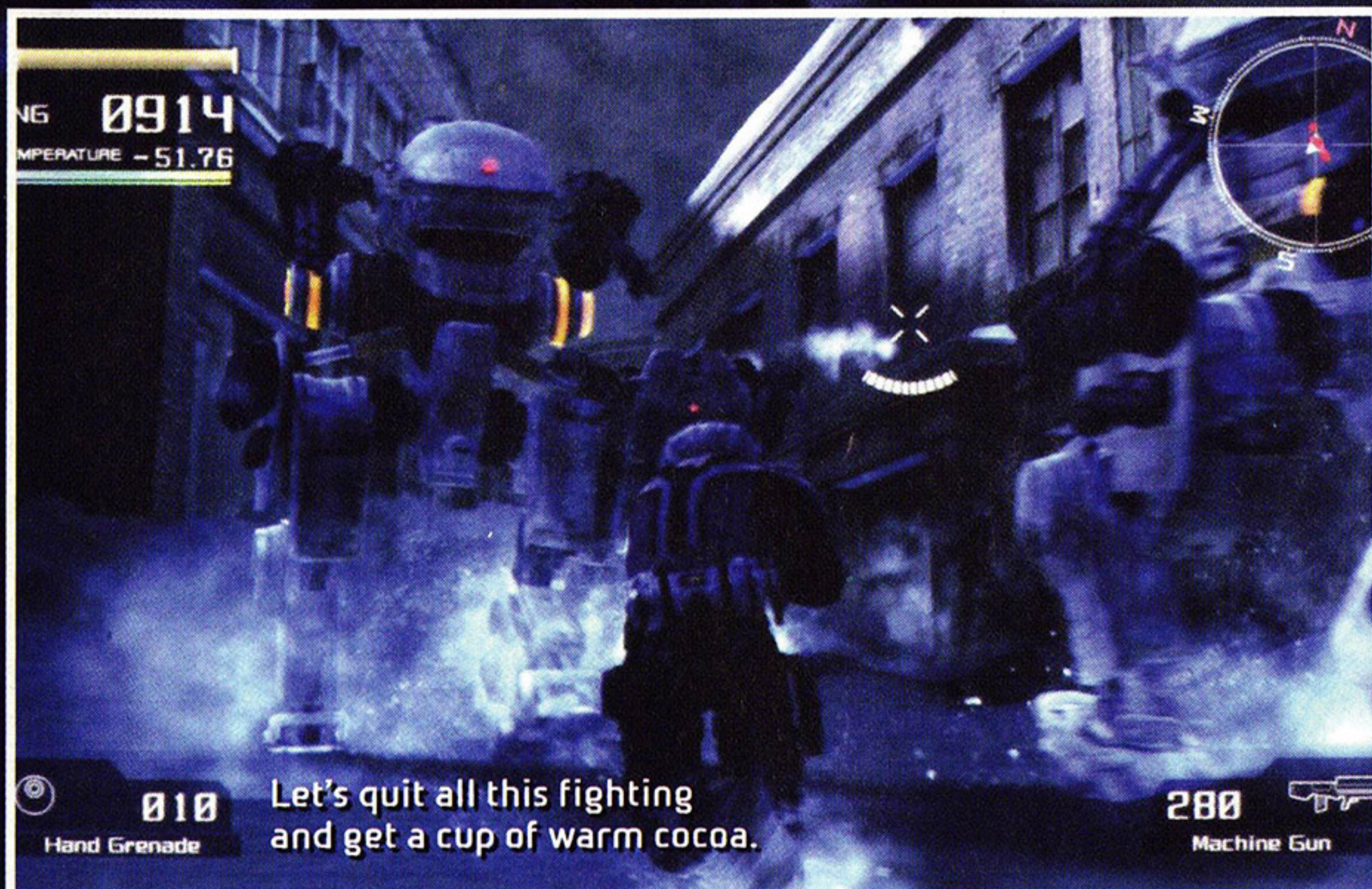
PLATFORM: XBOX 360
 DEVELOPER: CAPCOM
 PUBLISHER: CAPCOM
 RELEASE DATE: TBD

There's a very good reason Microsoft has gone out of its way to court Japanese developers: They make some seriously awesome games. Cool art, interesting story lines, strange settings... Japanese game makers often craft wildly creative worlds – which translate into unique experiences for gamers. Based on early glimpses of *Lost Planet's* gameplay, expect those wildly creative worlds to hit Xbox 360.

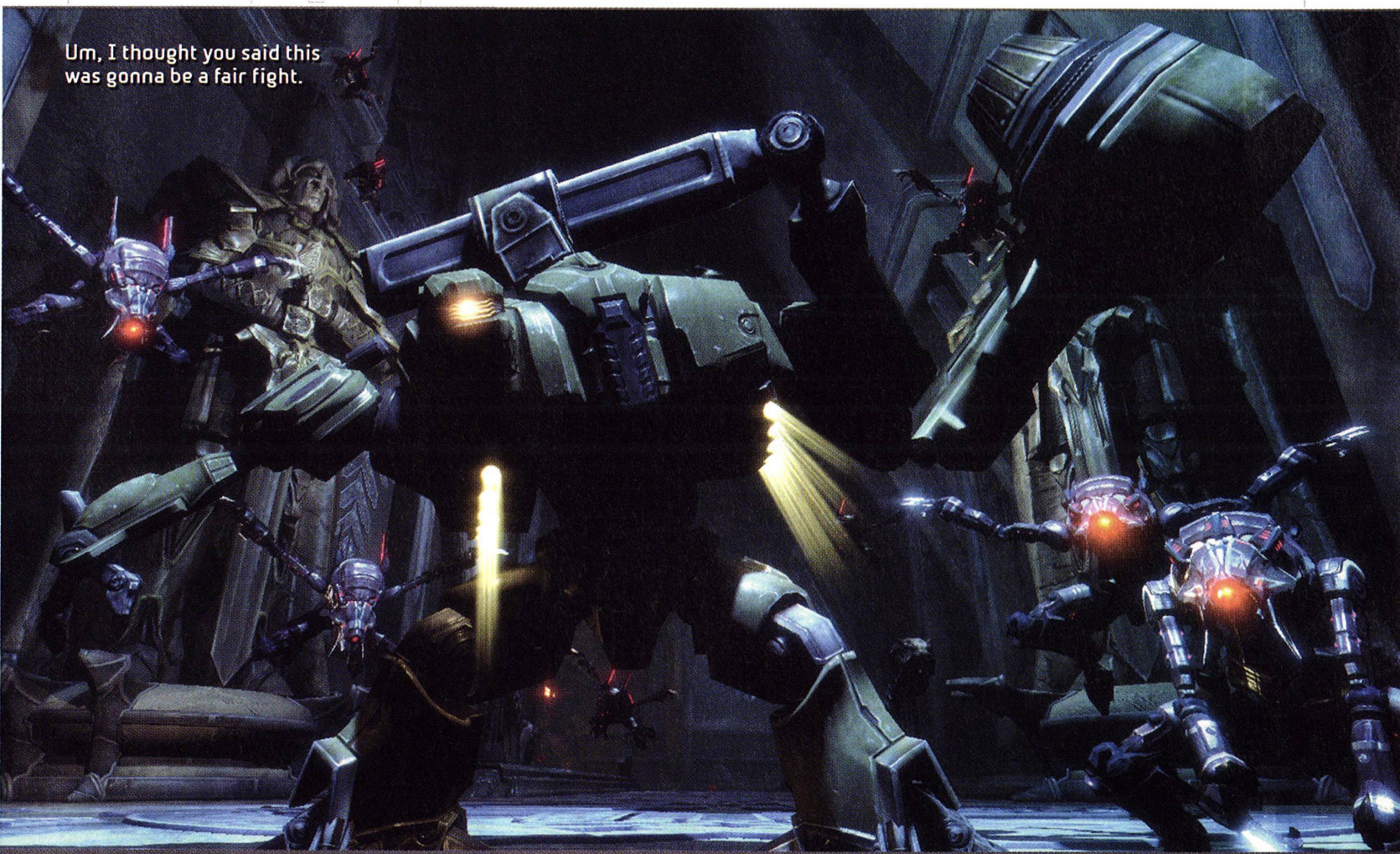
While not quite a giant mech game on scale with, say, Capcom's other franchise, *Steel Battalion*, you'll still be able to hop in and out of mechanized battle suits for intense firefights. Be thankful, as they'll come to good use when you're dueling 30-foot robot spiders in the snow. But like we said, Japanese games tend to focus on story, and early details suggest there will be a compelling plot behind all the machines-vs.-monsters gameplay.

There's been plenty of hype about *Lost Planet*, and while it hasn't yet been officially announced for a U.S. release, we certainly have a hunch that good, battle-suit-wearing things will come to those who wait. We'll have more details very, very soon.

■ TARGET AUDIENCE: COLD-WEATHER TYPES



Um, I thought you said this was gonna be a fair fight.



BULLY

Gimme your lunch money



PLATFORM: XBOX
 DEVELOPER: ROCKSTAR VANCOUVER
 PUBLISHER: ROCKSTAR
 RELEASE DATE: FALL 2006

With last year's retro, movie-based gangland beat 'em up, *The Warriors*, Rockstar proved that it was more than just a one-trick *GTA* pony and that games like *Manhunt* were (hopefully) an aberration. That's why we have such high hopes for the company's upcoming yet still largely unrevealed *Bully*. Certain anti-videogame violence crusaders (you know who you are) have already been holding up *Bully* as an example of the negative images presented to kids by games (i.e., that bullying is "good"), but we know Rockstar is far too clever to create a game that's as simplistic as that, right? Right.

■ TARGET AUDIENCE: FRESHMEN

continued on pg. 60 ►►



School is like prison; take lunch money or have yours taken.

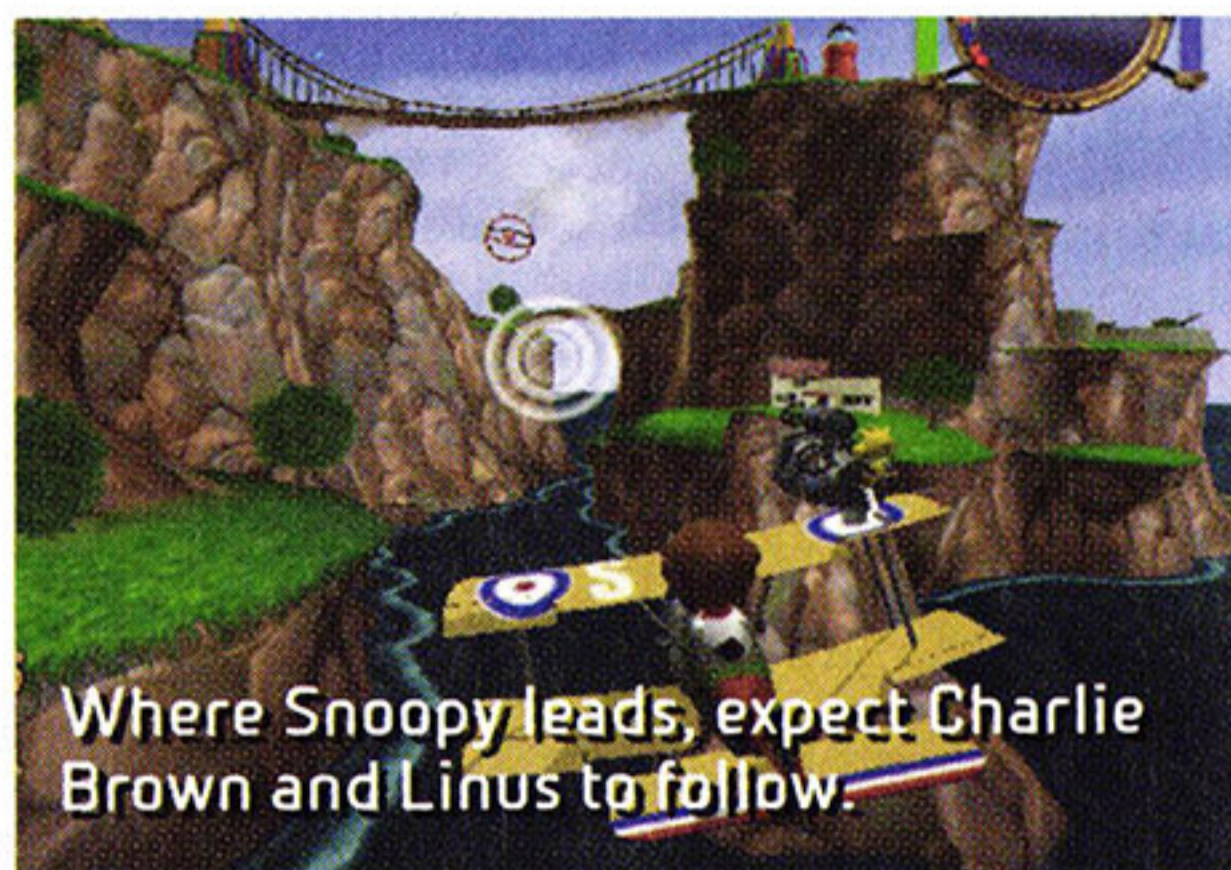
SNOOPY VS. THE RED BARON



You're a good shooter, Charlie Brown

PLATFORM: XBOX
 PUBLISHER: NAMCO
 DEVELOPER: SMART BOMB INTL.
 RELEASE: FALL 2006

Namco's new line of cleverly licensed, youth-friendly titles has made room to include *Snoopy Vs. The Red Baron*. But is it a shooter or a kid's title? On one hand, you can take to the skies as Snoopy in his famous, dog-fightin' Sopwith Camel plane to take out enemies,



Where Snoopy leads, expect Charlie Brown and Linus to follow.

Please tell us that that's Woodstock on Snoopy's wing, handling gun-turret duty? It is!



There's nothing more satisfying than shooting down enemies as a dog. In a plane.

including his dastardly alter ego, The Red Baron. But on the other hand, you'll barrel-roll with the rest of the *Peanuts* gang, which should please younger fans. (We're actually dying to play as Pigpen, ourselves.) We've found the answer to our question: It's both! Races, multiplayer options galore, and a cheeky opportunity to tweak the license material definitely has our ears perked in its direction. Dance on, crazy beagle!

■ TARGET AUDIENCE: GREAT PUMPKINS AND CO.



Xbox Live Arcade

One of the glowing successes of the Xbox 360 is the popular Xbox Live Arcade service and the excellent games contained therein. From casual games to classic arcade remakes, Live Arcade has something for everyone, and it's about to get a whole lot more. Here's a quick look at some of the games currently arriving or due in the near future.



ASTROPOP

DEVELOPER: POPCAP GAMES

DATE IT GOES LIVE: AVAILABLE NOW

Deftly weaving puzzle and action elements, *AstroPop* has already developed quite a following among PC gamers. Stack colored blocks on to your spaceship, then launch them back up at matching bricks on a descending grid (peppered with power-ups and traps) to eliminate them. Could this be the product of a one-night stand between *Space Invaders* and *Tetris*? From the looks of things, it could very well be.



HOOPWORLD

DEVELOPER: STREAMLINE STUDIOS

DATE IT GOES LIVE: SPRING 2006

A reworking of basic basketball featuring three-on-three stunt-heavy gameplay and flaming balls, *Hoopworld* has all the makings of an amazing multiplayer experience. Featuring a range of creative characters and incredibly non-basketball-skewed environments, *Hoopworld* rewards trickery, especially when done in concert with other players. Completely unique – get those Globetrotters costumes out now.



KINGDOM UNDER FIRE: CIRCLE OF DOOM

High-def elf thongs

PLATFORM: XBOX 360
DEVELOPER: BLUESIDE
PUBLISHER: TBA
RELEASE DATE: TBA



Teeming with vampire and elves, the *Kingdom Under Fire* series' has won a place in gamers' hearts with its imaginative mix of both action and real-time strategy gameplay – but all that's changing with its 360 debut. *Circle of Doom* is switching genres to become an action/RPG that mixes the series' familiar, frantic battlefield combat with dungeon-crawling through randomly generated lairs packed with masses of swarming monsters.

Party-based multiplayer over Live is hardwired in from the start as there's no boundary between single- and multiplayer – you can choose to play alone, or friends and strangers can join you along the way to work as a team. *Circle of Doom* isn't a direct sequel to the first two *KUF* games (and fear not, loyal fans – Blueside promises that its franchise will still continue on Xbox 360 as its fans expect with an as-yet-unannounced game), but we're already sharpening our swords.

■ TARGET AUDIENCE: MEDIEVAL METALHEADS



FEEDING FRENZY

DEVELOPER: SPROUT GAMES
DATE IT GOES LIVE: AVAILABLE NOW

Aquariums may be fun to look at, but who hasn't fantasized about dropping a tiny great white shark into the tank to re-enact a miniature version of *Jaws*? Well, the sea's your oyster with *Feeding Frenzy*, a fish-eating game spread out over 40 levels where your predator gets bigger as he consumes. But be warned, you'll face bigger threats from other predators in the sea. Eat to live, live to eat.



JEWEL QUEST

DEVELOPER: IWIN
DATE IT GOES LIVE: AVAILABLE NOW

A classic tile-matching game, *Jewel Quest* sports a cool Mayan-looking theme (very *Indiana Jones*, if you ask us), as well as plenty of secret items, trap tiles (they're cursed, wouldn't you know), and buried artifacts for you to uncover as you turn sand tiles into gold. Ah, if it were only that easy in real life. Will *Jewel Quest* be the next *Bejeweled*? Time will tell, but it certainly has potential to be as addicting.



STREET FIGHTER II

DEVELOPER: CAPCOM
DATE IT GOES LIVE: SPRING 2006

Just in case you thought that the actual old-school arcade titles coming to Xbox Live Arcade were all strictly being delivered by Midway and Namco alone, try Capcom's seminal *Street Fighter II* on for size. Announced for Xbox Live Arcade during the CES trade show earlier this year, we're expecting Capcom's fireball-chucking king of 2D fighters to make a splash like no other when it hits Marketplace.

continued on pg. 62 >>

WHAT'S UP WITH...?

Remember us? Of course you do! We are the games that love to tease with promises of greatness, only to dive deep undercover and leave you to wonder and speculate on our fate. Wonder no more, 'cause here's the scoop.



DEMONIK

DARK SECTOR

■ **STATUS:** On its way
 ■ **WHAT IS IT?:** Back when *Dark Sector* was originally announced as being in development for next-gen systems, developer Digital Extremes (*Pariah*) heralded its gameplay as a unique blend of just about every genre you could think of: stealth, shooter, adventure... And now it's got a U.S. publisher ready to take the game's hybrid nature to Xbox 360. Everyone say thank you to D3!

that was not to be. Activision has since dropped it from its publishing roster and now the resource management-cum-machinima creation tool, *The Movies*, has been set adrift in search of another publisher. Someone please snap this up! We don't want to wait too long to try our hands at being virtual directors!

STARCRRAFT: GHOST

■ **STATUS:** On its way
 ■ **WHAT IS IT?:** Only the stealth shooter that's been on our must-have lists for the past three years running. Still slated for Xbox (Blizzard vehemently denies rumors that it's headed to Xbox 360), Nova's adventures have undergone much change after swapping developers from Nihilistic to Swingin' Ape, but Blizzard is keeping tight wraps on its console baby until it's ready. But rest assured, it's aiming for 2006. But then again...



[EM]-ENCHANT ARM-

DEMONIK

■ **STATUS:** Looking for a publisher
 ■ **WHAT IS IT?:** Terminal Reality's splendid-looking, body-jacking *Demonik* had all the makings of an incredibly clever take on action games when we saw it last year at the 2005 E3 show. But with Majesco's recent decision to solely publish budget-priced games, there's no longer any room in its portfolio for a full-priced stunner like *Demonik*. Cross your fingers that some smart publisher gobbles it up.



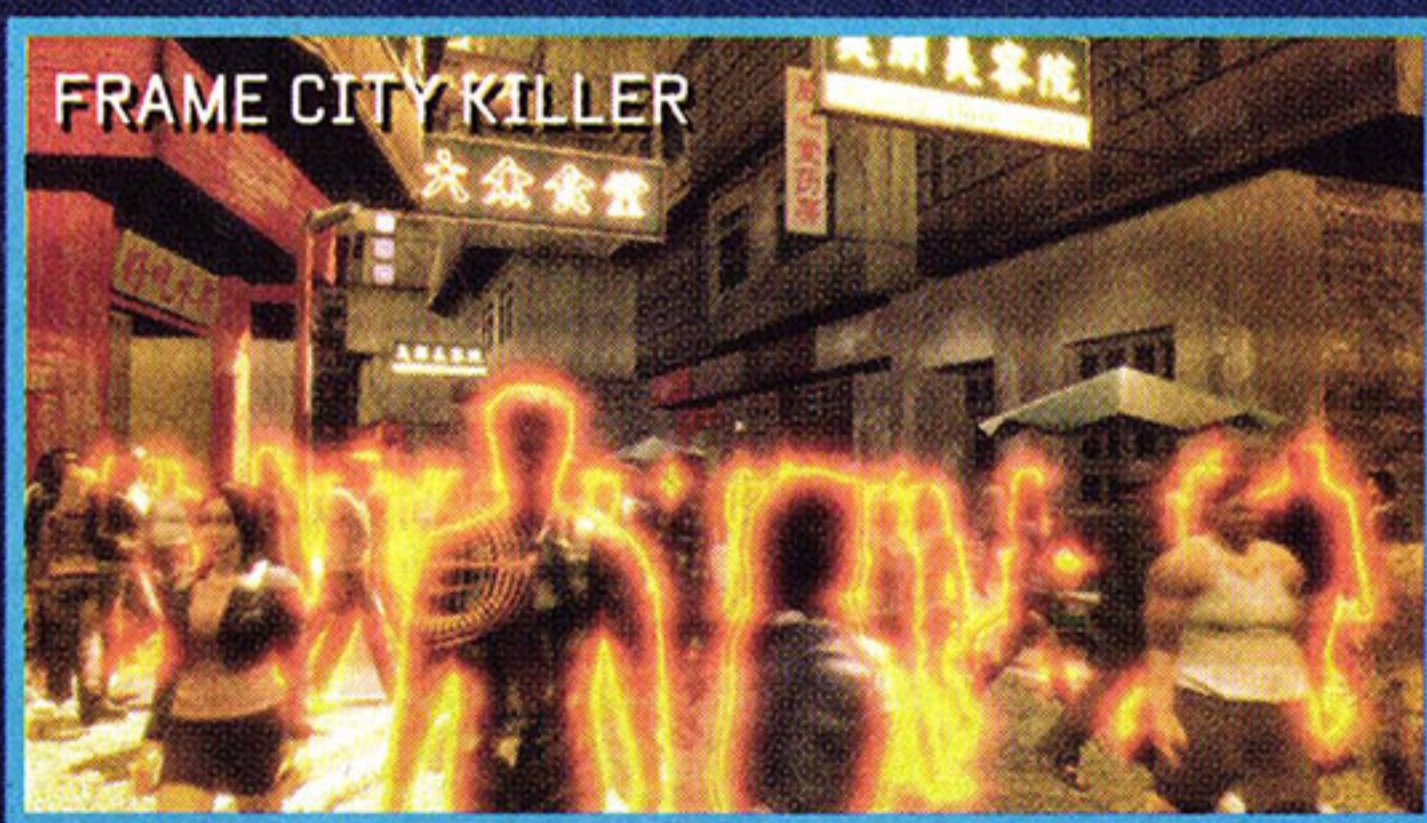
POSSESSION

[EM]-ENCHANT ARM-

■ **STATUS:** Still in Japan
 ■ **WHAT IS IT?:** Straight-up traditional RPG from the Far East school of development, *[eM] eNCHANT arM* (yes, that's how it's really spelled) represents From Software's maiden voyage into 360 waters. Filled with futuristic worlds where "enchancing" (a process of creation using ethers) runs rampant, there's still no word on whether any U.S. publishers will be bringing this game Stateside.

FRAME CITY KILLER

■ **STATUS:** Set for a 2006 release
 ■ **WHAT IS IT?:** The first time a Japanese developer has used the Unreal Engine 3 for an original game is exactly what has happened with Namco's futuristic, third-person shooter, *Frame City Killer*. Unveiled last year during Microsoft's big Xbox 360 push, *Frame City* has suddenly dropped from view, but it's still planned for a 2006 release.



FRAME CITY KILLER

POSSESSION

■ **STATUS:** Looking for a publisher
 ■ **WHAT IS IT?:** Blitz Games had some interesting concepts going when it debuted *Possession* at E3 last year – but what has happened to the *Stubbs*-like revenge tale of a test subject raging against the machine that experimented on him? Will we still be able to convert and lead 300 to 400 zombielike minions to success over "The Man"? We hope so, but no U.S. publisher has been announced in the year since we saw it last.

INDIANA JONES

■ **STATUS:** Very much alive, but still very much under wraps
 ■ **WHAT IS IT?:** Last year, LucasArts teased the public with a logo for a next-gen installment of the *Indiana Jones* game series. What is it? Is it coming to Xbox 360? When is it coming? All good things to those who wait, and LucasArts ain't spilling no beans on its fedora-wearing hero's latest virtual adventure. But we suspect things will be cleared up really soon. We mean it.



CITY OF METRONOME

THE MOVIES

■ **STATUS:** Looking for a publisher
 ■ **WHAT IS IT?:** The make-your-own-virtual-flick game released for PC not too long ago and Activision promised that it would grace consoles shortly thereafter. But

CITY OF METRONOME

■ **STATUS:** Looking for a publisher
 ■ **WHAT IS IT?:** Team Tarsier's adventure seems esoteric on the surface, but we're counting on it being truly marvelous once it snags a publisher's support. Sounds and visuals that guide you through puzzles and an ominous, apocalyptic Dickensian-themed city – now that's what we call quite possibly totally awesome.

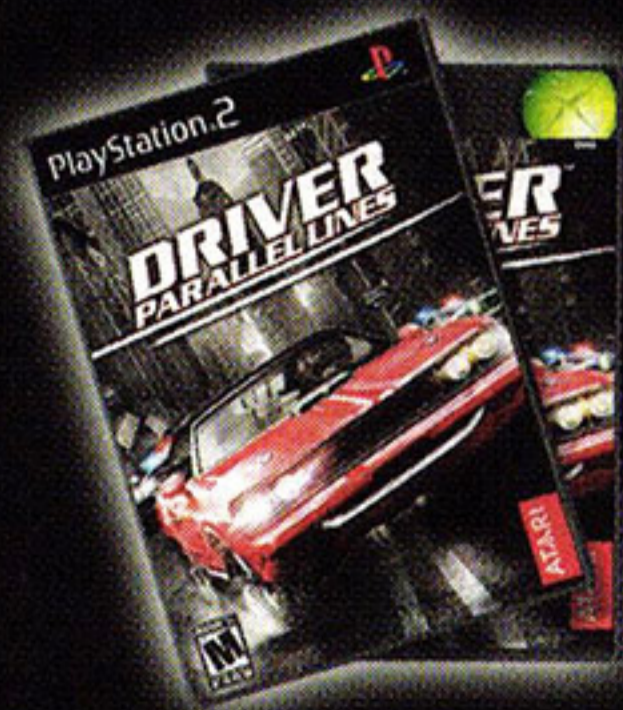


SET UP.
LOCKED UP.

GET OUT.
GET EVEN.

New York City, 1978. You were the fastest wheelman on the street. You were a legend. You were money. Until they set you up and sent you down. Twenty eight years inside for someone else's crime. Now you're getting out. Guess what? You got a new job...

...It's called revenge.



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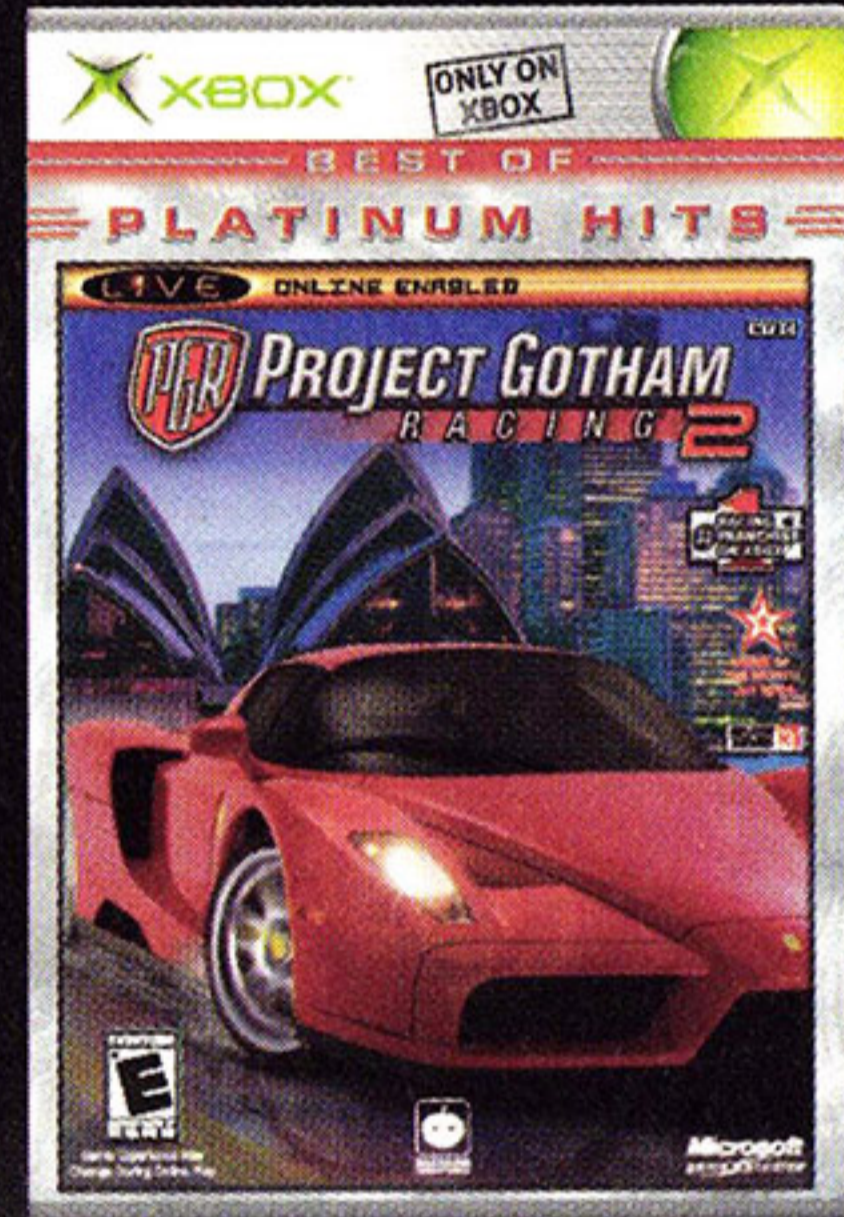
PlayStation 2



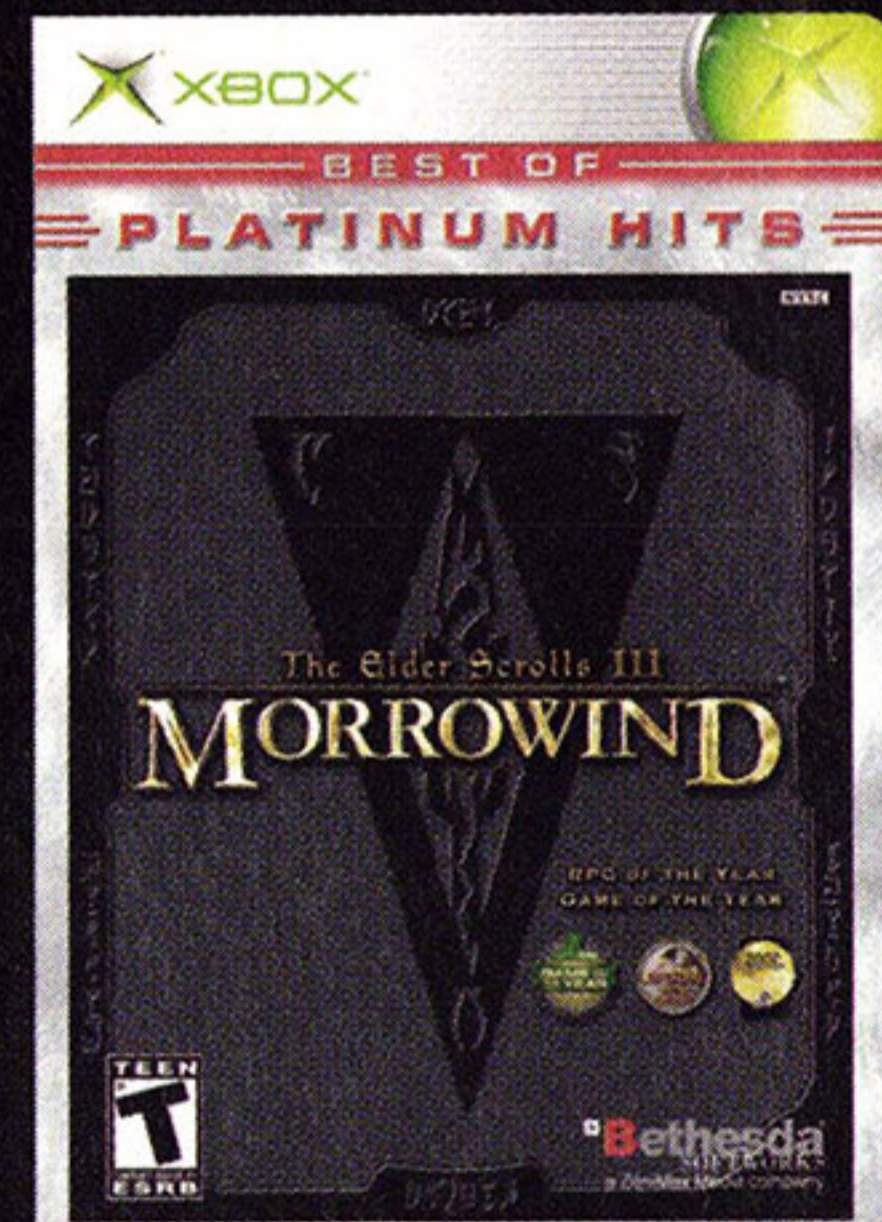
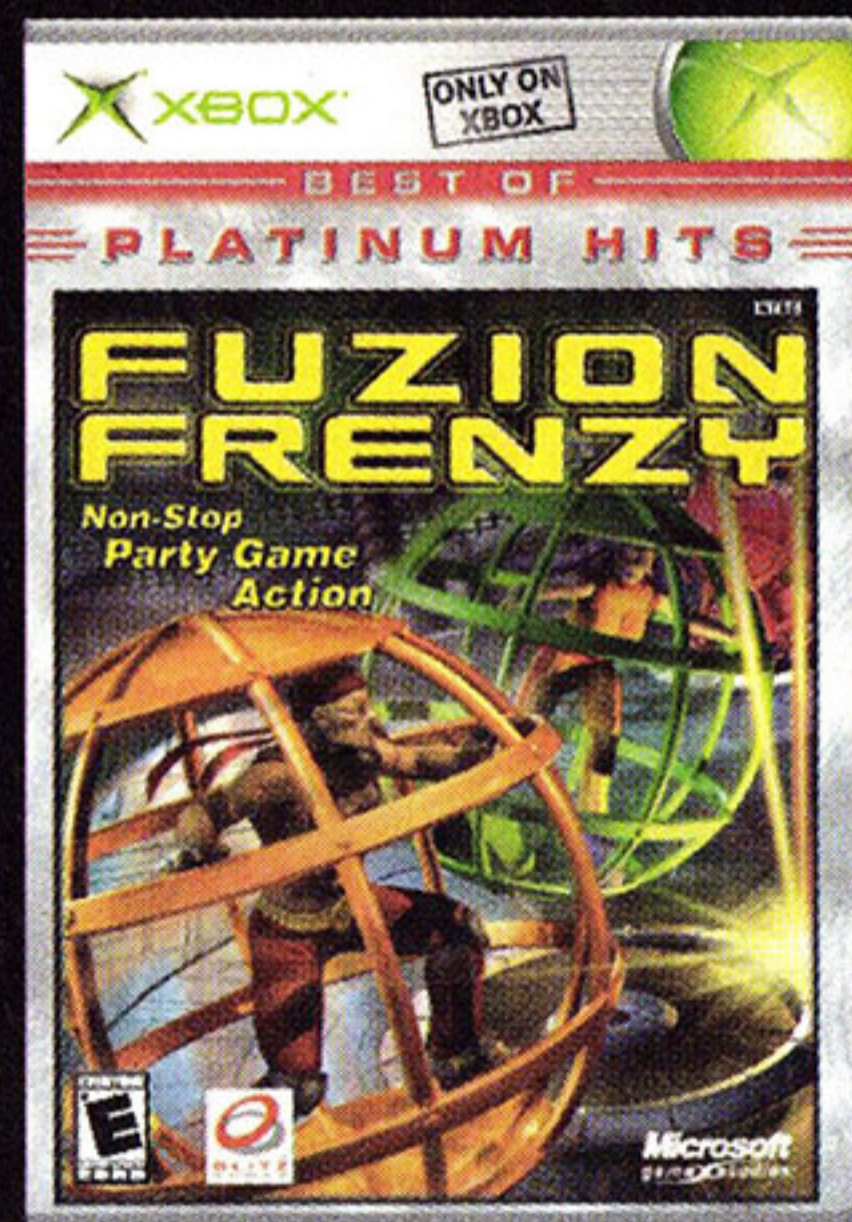
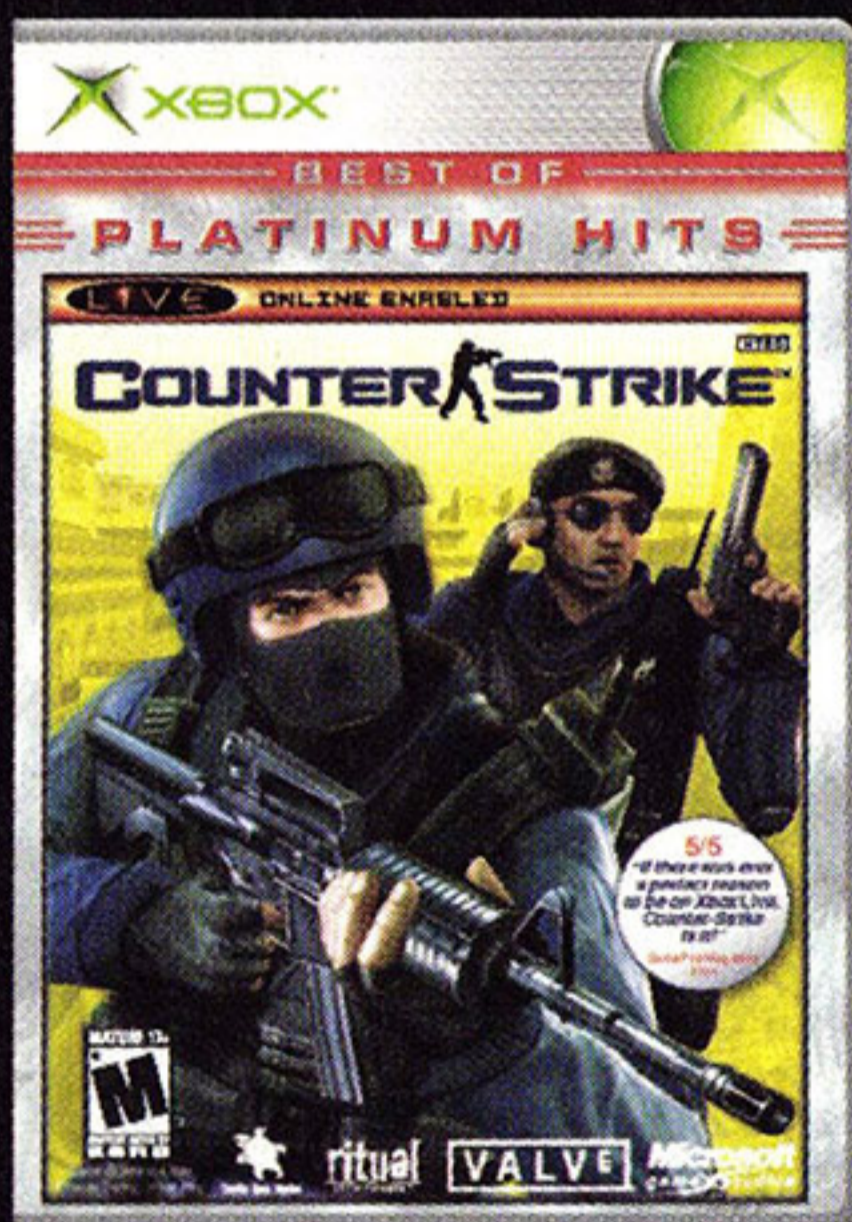


BEST OF PLATINUM HITS

Introducing Best of Platinum Hits!



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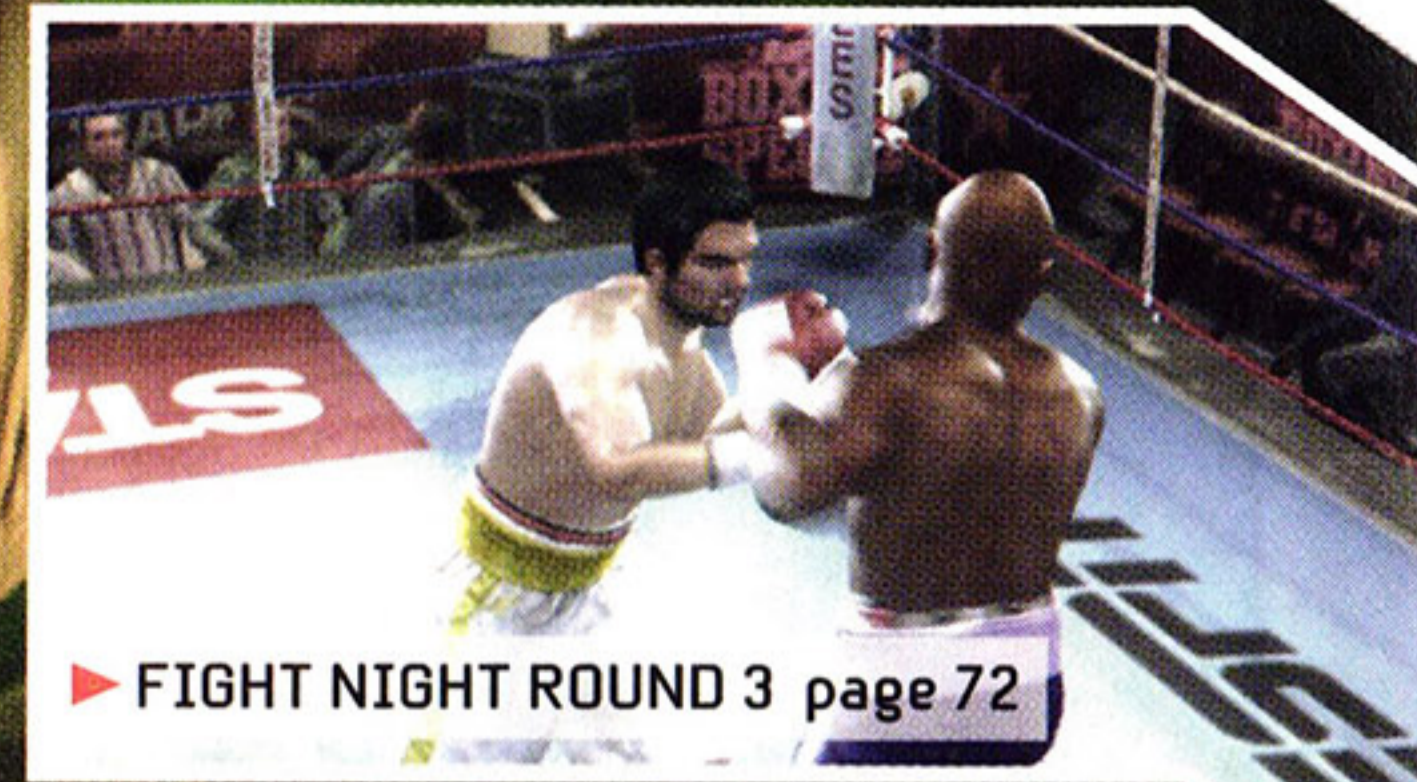


it's good to play together
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▶ FIGHT NIGHT ROUND 3 page 72

THE VERDICT



In a month like this month – with a lot of good games – many of our scores bunch up at the top of the spectrum. So here's what separates the 10s from the boys. Err, the 6s...

- 10
- 95
- 90
- 85
- 80
- 75
- 70
- 65
- 60
- 55
- 50
- 45
- 40
- 35
- 30
- 25
- 20
- 15
- 10
- 05
- 00

😊 OMG, *OXM's* first 10! So *Fight Night Round 3* on Xbox 360 must be perfect, right? A shining beacon of ideal gameplay? Not even close – potting's nperfct, after all – but it does mean that everyone who owns a 360 needs to own a copy of this game and play it. A lot. And that's an order!

😊 Stepping down a notch, *Ghost Recon* and *Fight Night* for Xbox 1 are still fantastic, gotta-play-them games – that's what the whole Editor's Choice business is about. But they've got a few warts. Nothing too serious, but something you'd notice and wish wasn't in your prom picture.

😊 A bit farther down in the standings, games like the new *Full Spectrum Warrior* have a lot of good things going for them, but there's a big problem or two, something that limits them to the serious fans or just plain gets annoying when you're trying to appreciate their finer qualities.

😊 And games like *FIFA Street 2* and *Curious George* are drifting dangerously close to the hot seat. They've got some issues, and really should seek professional help. An otaku's rose-colored glasses can see you through, but think carefully before going here.

▶ Marc Ecko's Getting Up page 76

MEET THE REVIEWERS



THOMAS BAXTER
Also known as the intern, Thomas spends his time locked away in the storage closet, only emerging when the staff needs him to make a lunch run.



MATT PECKHAM
Give *Rugby 06* reviewer Matt an actual pigskin and watch him flail. But catch him in a digital ruck, and he'll hook like a butterfly, swing like a bee.



DAN AMRICH
Dan cannot kick your ass, even though he reviews fighting games for *OXM*. In fact, in high school, he got knocked out cold by a kid two years younger – and on crutches.

Platform: Xbox 360 Publisher: 2K GAMES Developer: BETHESDA ESRB: TEEN
 Live/Multiplayer: Single-player only Selling Points: Xbox Live Marketplace downloads, 100+ hours of quality gameplay



► This NPC pep talk prior to entering an Oblivion gate is one of many highlights.

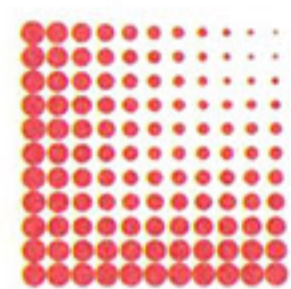


The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion

For just pennies per day...



► This Sauron-meets-Diablo freak is one of many foes awaiting you in the game's Oblivion plane.



“Are you in or are you out?”

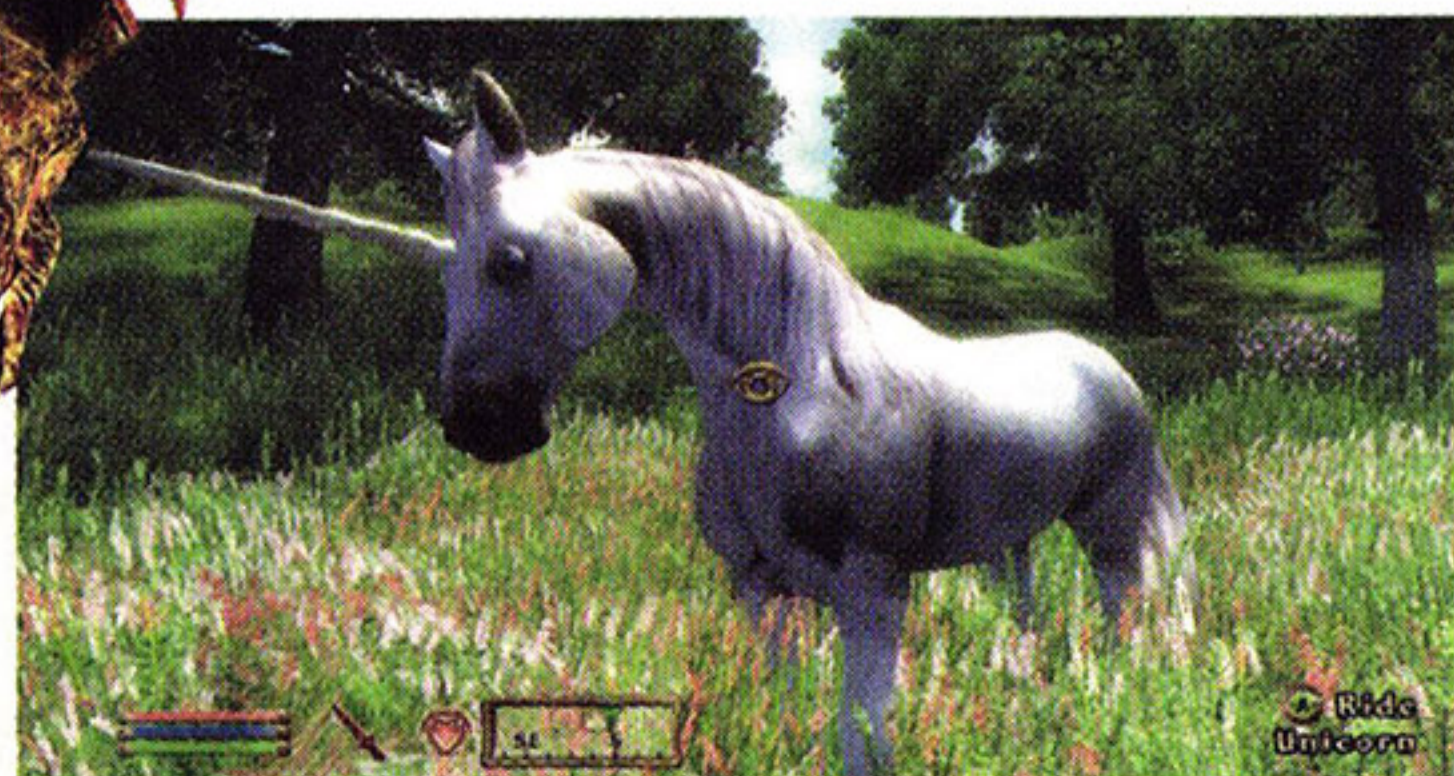
One of *Oblivion's* myriad of non-playable characters (NPCs) poses this question to your character during the spectacularly epic fourth chapter in the *Elder Scrolls* series (and the first since 2002's *Morrowind* on Xbox). And it's the same question you'll have to ask yourself as you contemplate whether or not to purchase Xbox 360's first true RPG.

Think carefully, because once you feed the *Oblivion* disc into your Xbox 360, your new console is going to want to chew on it for a long, long time. *Oblivion* is that good. It's also mind-bogglingly grand in scope and colossally huge in size. Fortunately, its breadth does not require the hundreds of hours of commitment (or tedium) the way a massively multiplayer RPG does; indeed, its main story can be completed in 20-25 hours.

But the heaping 100-hour helping of gameplay is there if you want it. And you likely will because the primary story arc is not what you'll remember most about *Oblivion*. In fact,

“As you explore the great outdoors, you'll discover all kinds of surprises...”

it's the least awesome part of the game. The driving plotline (which involves the search for a new emperor and the simultaneous race to stop hell itself from spilling into Tamriel – y'know, RPG stuff...) does, to its credit, feature its share of great moments. For instance, once you find the heir to the throne, you'll embark on a 20-minute horseback caravan with the heir and his bodyguard, trekking north into a sanctuary into the mountains, through the snow, and past danger. Another quest has you traveling to all nine of the land's architecturally unique and





culturally diverse cities to recruit aid from each respective governor in advance of a monstrous clash between Tamriel and Oblivion.

However, it's the rest of *Oblivion's* detailed, fleshed-out world that will keep you hooked for months (you can keep playing after the primary plotline is concluded). The vast landscapes are visually breathtaking and unlike anything we've ever seen on either Xbox, resplendent with dynamic, region-specific weather, gorgeous lighting 24/7, and diverse geography.

Speaking of geography, it genuinely takes a long time to hoof it across Tamriel. In fact, were it not for the "fast travel" option (select any visited area from your map to transport there instantly), *Oblivion* would be a 400-hour bore. Still, don't neglect the wilderness entirely. As you explore the great outdoors, you'll discover all kinds of surprises, including shrines you can pray at for stat buffs, caves to plunder, mines to clean out, forts to investigate, and even entire hidden towns to explore. Fortunately, both required and optional quests do a decent job of occasionally forcing you out into uncharted territory. But these pilgrimages only scratch the surface of what's out there.

That same depth is applied to all aspects of *Oblivion* – even your character. Ways to customize your avatar are endless, cramming in enough skills, specializations, and combinations to satisfy any roleplayer (you can even create a custom character class and give it a unique name). And layers upon layers of activities ensure that you always have something to try your hand at. How about joining a mage's guild and following its entire quest arc, crafting your own spells (in one or more of several schools

of magic) and staves along the way? Or becoming a master in all things mercantile, wooing shopkeepers, honing your social skills, and sweet-talking your way to incredible wealth? Perhaps, like us, you could take the larcenous route,

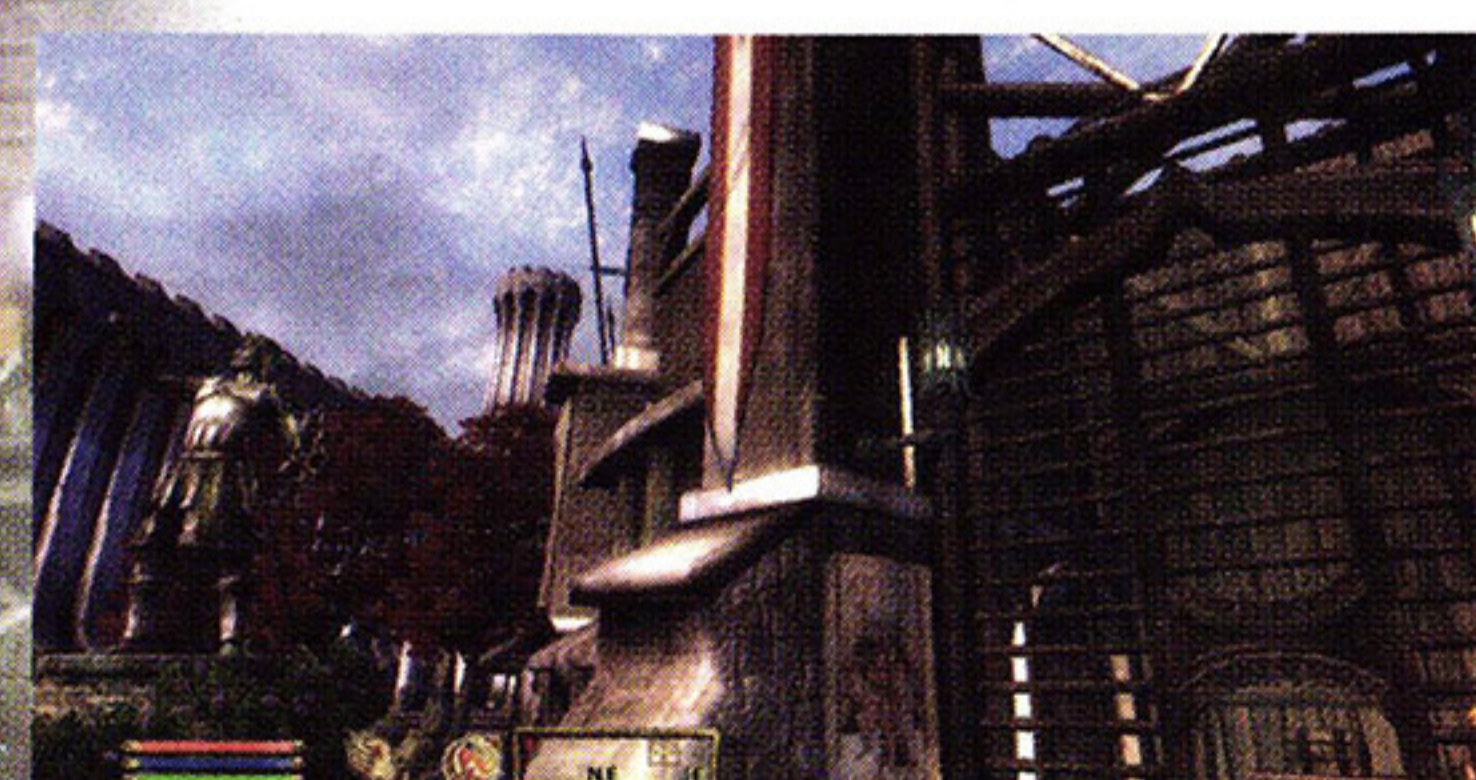
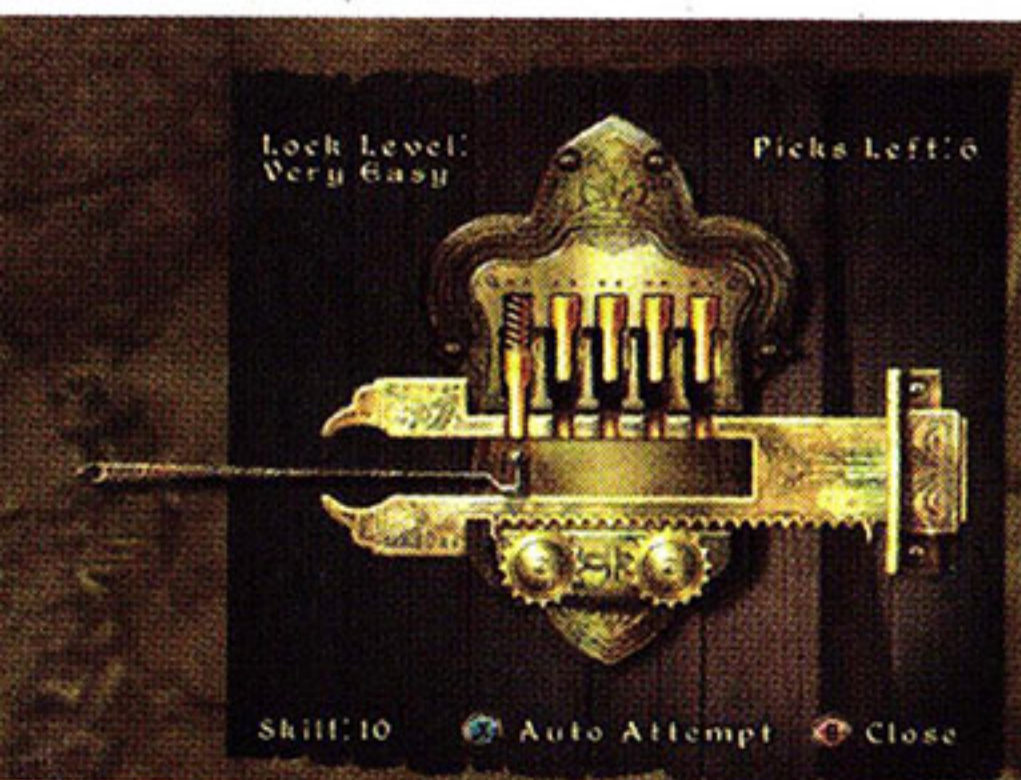
perfecting the art of lockpicking and thieving your way to a big bank account, selling your stolen wares to fences who will move them for you (then buy your own house in each city with the profits)?

For a quick but relevant aside, it's worth noting that because of its exclusive nature, we

Hell Is Where the Heart Is

EXTREME STAIRMASTER

With its brimstone-spawned monsters and frequent trips into hell, we couldn't help but be reminded of the classic action/RPG series *Diablo* when playing *Oblivion*. That is to say, it reminds us of *Diablo* if *Diablo* were made into a 3D, full-blown, hardcore RPG. Anyway, the fiery planes of Oblivion look a lot like *Diablo II's* fourth act, so there's plenty of lava, broken concrete, and imposing black towers to ascend. At the top of each tower is a Sigil Stone that permanently closes the gate, and the stones can be applied to weapons to give them magical properties.



TIP: You can press the Back button and "wait" anytime enemies aren't nearby. So if you've just finished a tough battle, just wait an in-game hour to quickly recharge your HP.

The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion (continued)



► The snowy northern city of Bruma is a great example of the geographical diversity.

“There was always something to do, and somehow it never felt overwhelming.”

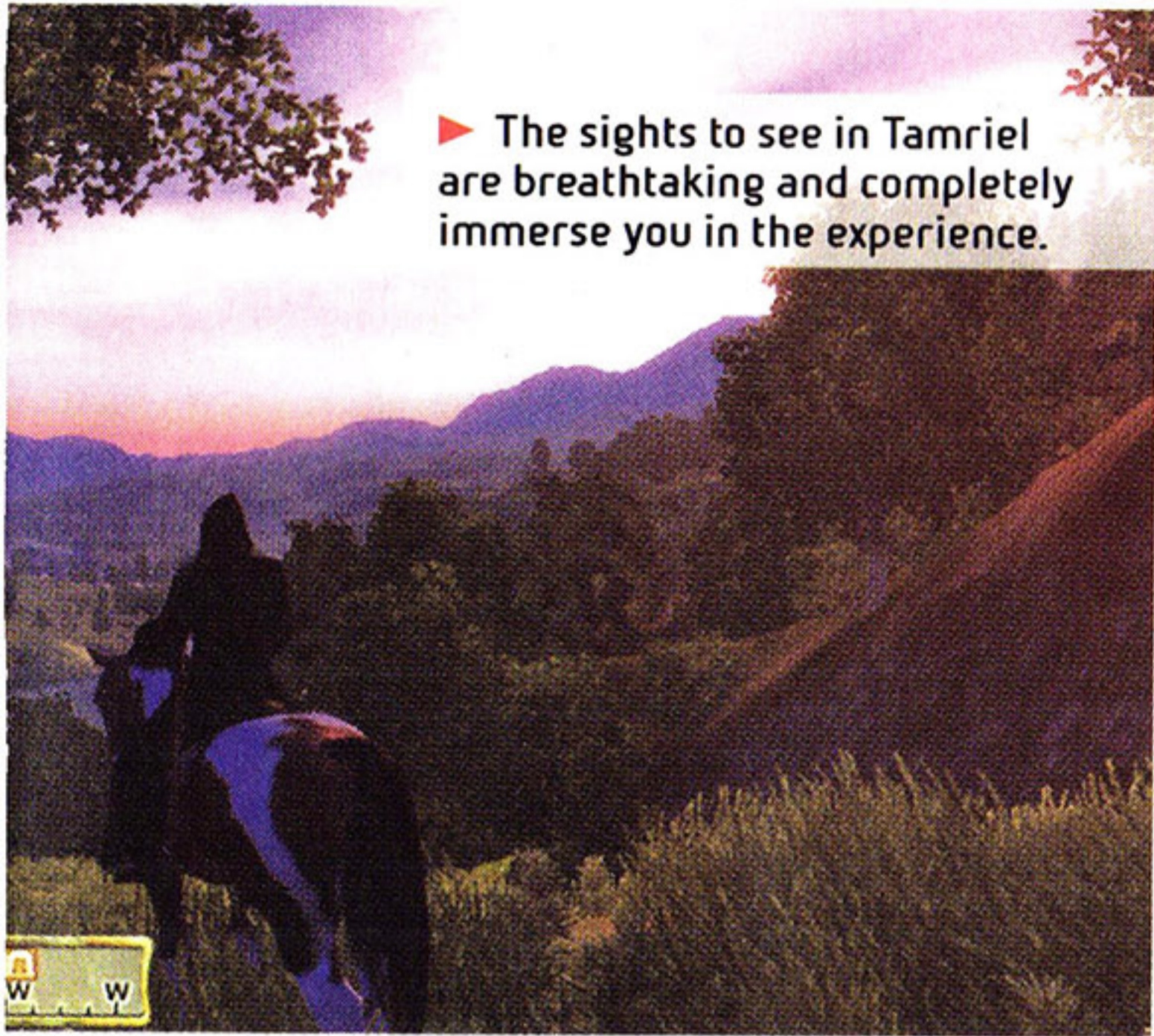
did not evaluate *Oblivion* by traditional means. Rather, we went to Bethesda's studio to play the game literally just as the finishing touches had been applied – Microsoft hadn't even gotten their hands on it yet. This meant going on a gaming binge over our four-day stay during which we clocked in 44 hours in Tamriel. We didn't think we could take any game for that long, no matter how good it was, but delightfully, the hours and days flew by. There was always something to do – our

quest log usually had a dozen or more active tasks available – and somehow it never felt overwhelming. There never was a dull moment.

Unless, that is, you count loading screens as dull moments. Though never unforgivably long individually, the sheer amount of them you'll look at during a 40-hour adventure adds up. Some, like when you venture between rooms in a house, are quick. When you enter a city or fast-travel, however, consider having the collector's edition's



► If you play a stealth character, you never want to be outnumbered by your enemies.



► The sights to see in Tamriel are breathtaking and completely immerse you in the experience.

Pocket Guide to the Empire novella handy.

A couple of other minor – primarily technical – issues keep *Oblivion* from being truly legendary, but they certainly don't strip it of must-buy status. While you won't find any of the crushing bugs or head-scratching glitches that have always plagued the series, the aforementioned loading times are joined by noticeable framerate choppiness in large or busy areas, as well as quest "quirks" that manifest themselves out of the NPCs' otherwise laudable 24/7 schedules. Yes, the world is populated with folks who live their own lives, but sometimes that makes your quest more annoying to complete, such as when a countess won't take her ring off and put it in her jewelry box so you can steal it – even at bedtime! (Hint: just come back some other night when her routine is different.) Furthermore, the latter portion of the main quest

Make It More Hugerer

Unique Marketplace downloads

In our October 2005 cover story, we told you about some downloadable goodies that would be available for *Oblivion*. Since then, plans have changed, and we got a look at what will be online when the game ships and what's coming shortly thereafter. We previously mentioned horse armor (in steel or elven flavors), but the planned in-game holidays didn't pan out. However, we were promised that several other downloads will take its place. Stay tuned...



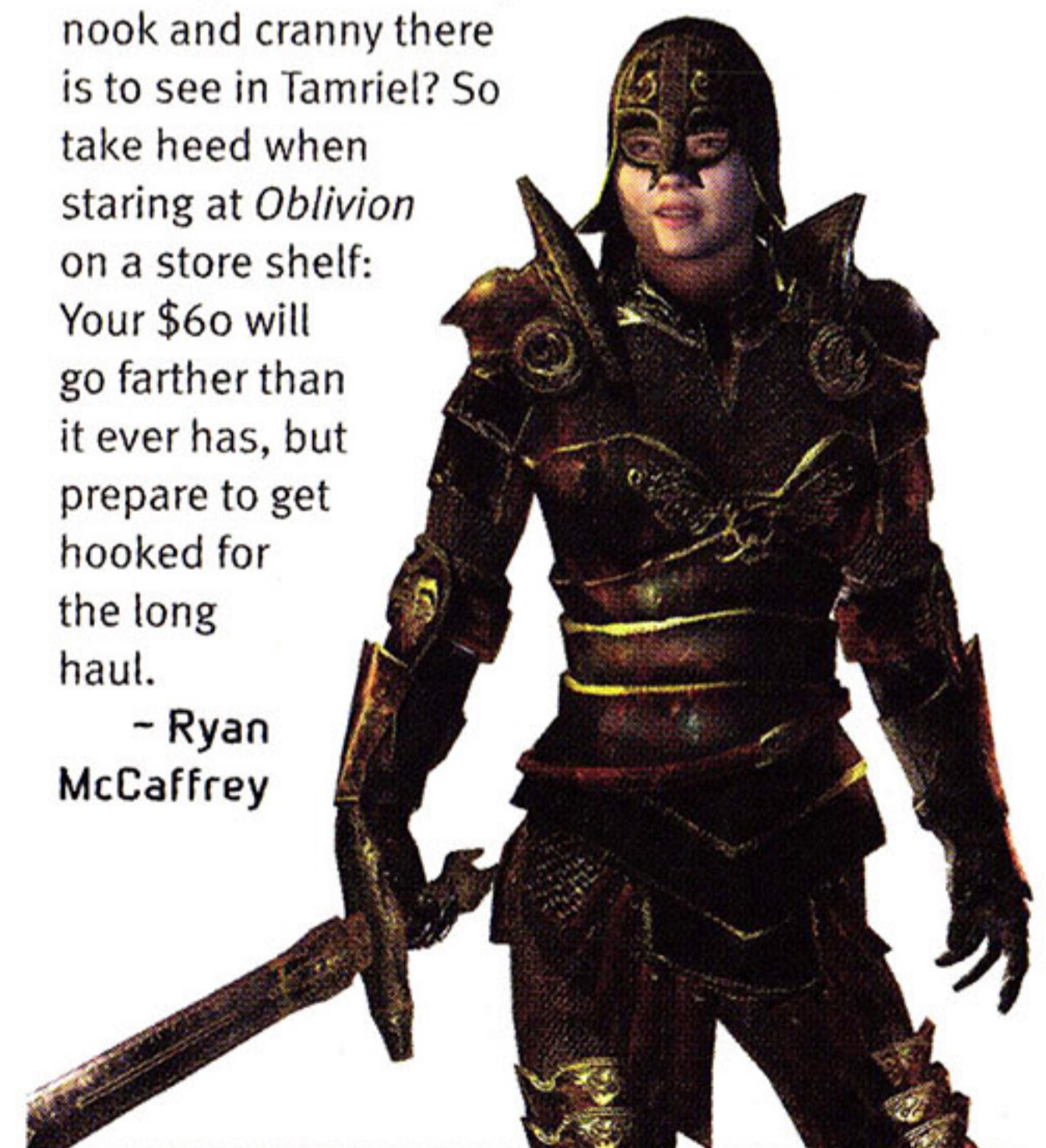
Ride Armored Black Horse

– particularly the last boss – gets controller-hurlingly tough, though to the game's credit, you can adjust the difficulty on the fly.

But to think wishfully about an *Oblivion* that's loading time free or has a locked 60 frames per second would be to take for granted the envelope-pushing marvel that it ultimately

is. *Oblivion* raises the bar so high that most RPGs would be (and have been) satisfied with a fraction of what's here. After 44 hours with *Oblivion*, what higher compliment can we pay it than to say we can't wait to play it again, create a new character with an entirely different skill set, and visit every nook and cranny there is to see in Tamriel? So take heed when staring at *Oblivion* on a store shelf: Your \$60 will go farther than it ever has, but prepare to get hooked for the long haul.

– Ryan McCaffrey

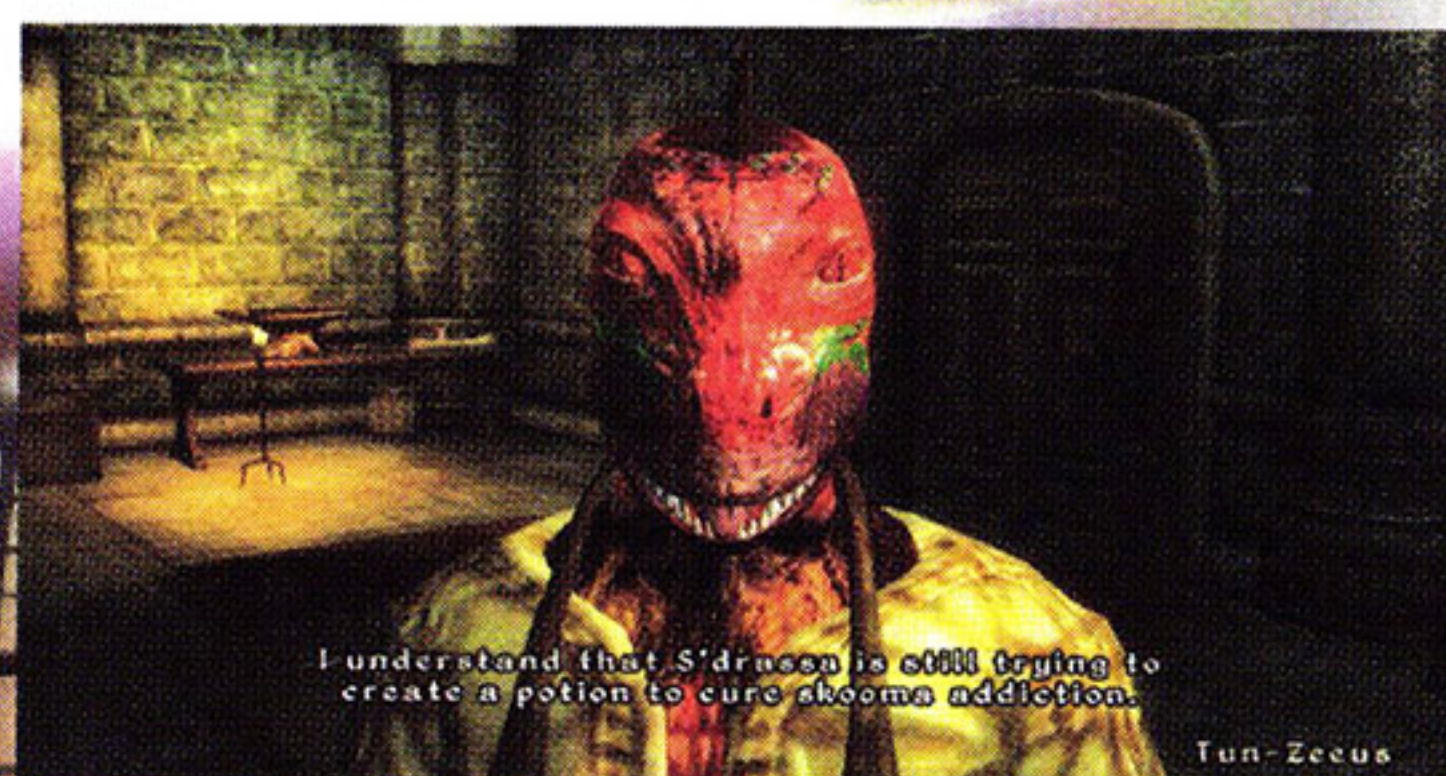


Oblivion by the Numbers



A few interesting notes from our review session

- Hours played: 44+
- Number of save games: 400+
- Number of days passed in game: 80+
- Number of quests completed: 56
- Number of quests we'd taken but hadn't completed when we had to leave: 14
- Number of items stolen: 1529
- Number of locks picked: 117



THE VERDICT

- + Pick any synonym for "fun," "deep," or "huge."
- + Stunning presentation with luscious visuals and a memorable musical score.
- The envelope-pushing comes at a technical price.
- ? If you took a week off to play, would it be enough?

OFFICIAL XBOX MAGAZINE

9.5



► Who knew that spelunking in some creaky old ruins would make us feel so at home?



Tomb Raider: Legend

Welcome back, Lara. Fancy a grapple?

Don't mind us if we get a little choked up about Lara Croft's latest outing, *Tomb Raider: Legend*. After all, she's been there to guide us through the early, fumbling days of 3D gaming. She's also been there at the very start of action/adventure gaming, defining the genre with battles against T-Rexes and early iterations of a fussy, manually controllable camera.

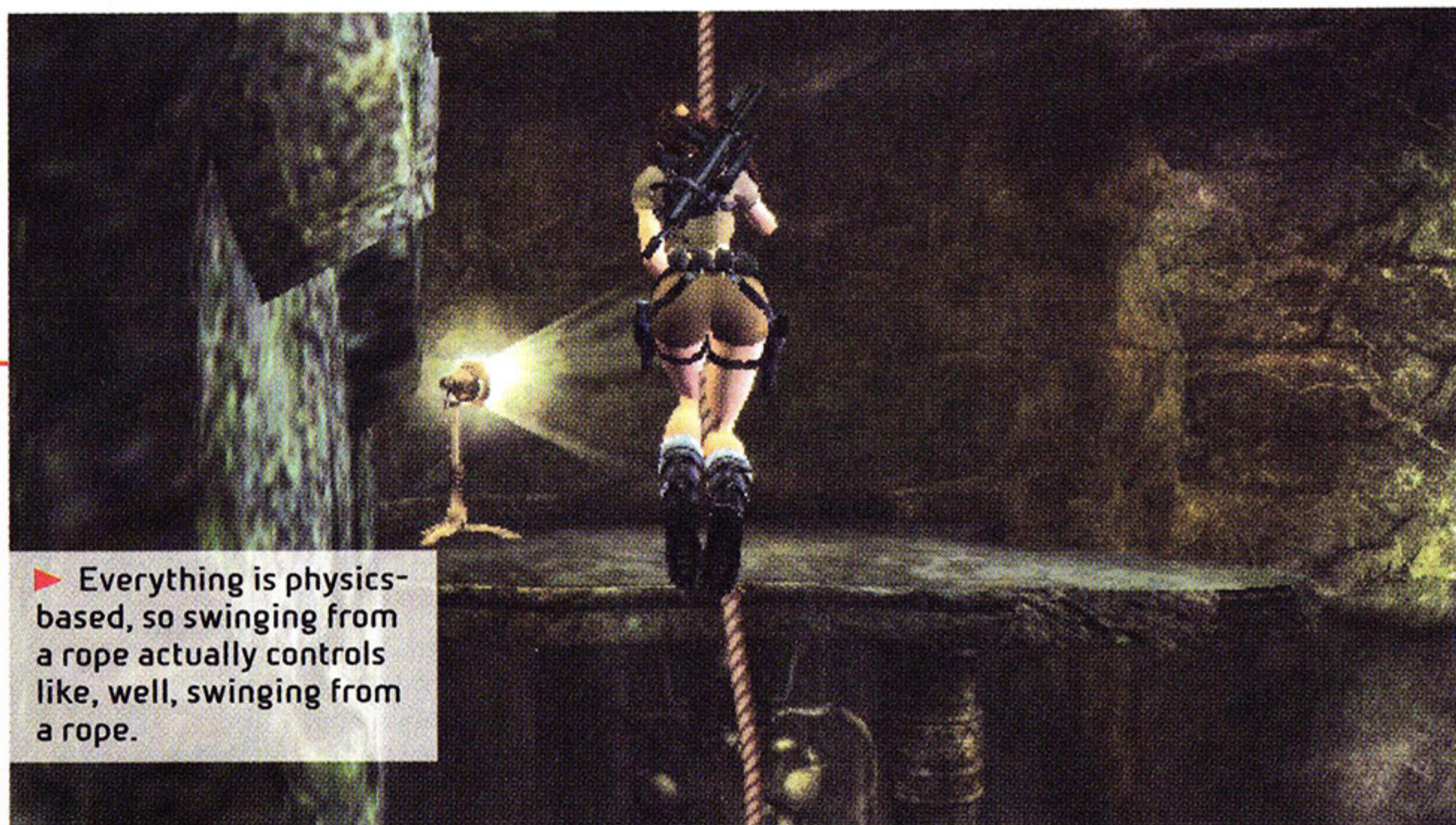
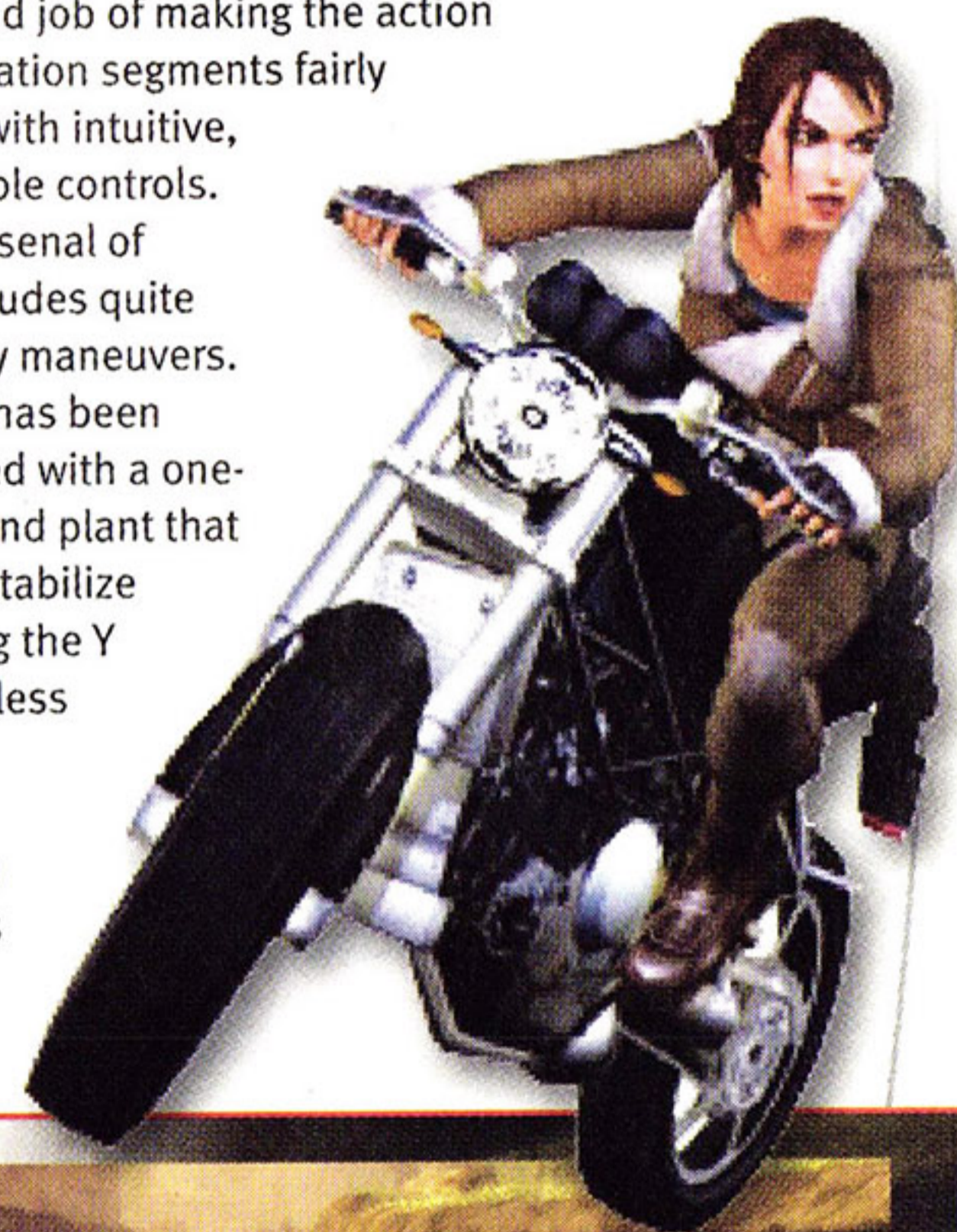
But you're wise to be skeptical. Things haven't always been so rosy for the first lady of

gaming. But from the moment you leap, dive, or grapple your first cliff edge in *Legend*, you'll discover that this time around – things just feel right. Heck, even the crate-pulling feels good.

Played out against a backdrop of childhood tragedy, the action heats up rather quickly from the minute you drop down into the game's first stage. Gunplay, standard adventuring (jump, swim, etc.), and all your new gadgets take a bit of getting used to for those who've romped with Lara before. But Crystal Dynamics has

done a solid job of making the action and exploration segments fairly seamless with intuitive, customizable controls.

Your arsenal of moves includes quite a few crafty maneuvers. Grappling has been complicated with a one-handed hand plant that you must stabilize by pressing the Y button (unless you want to take a tumble). In fact, Lara's as agile and

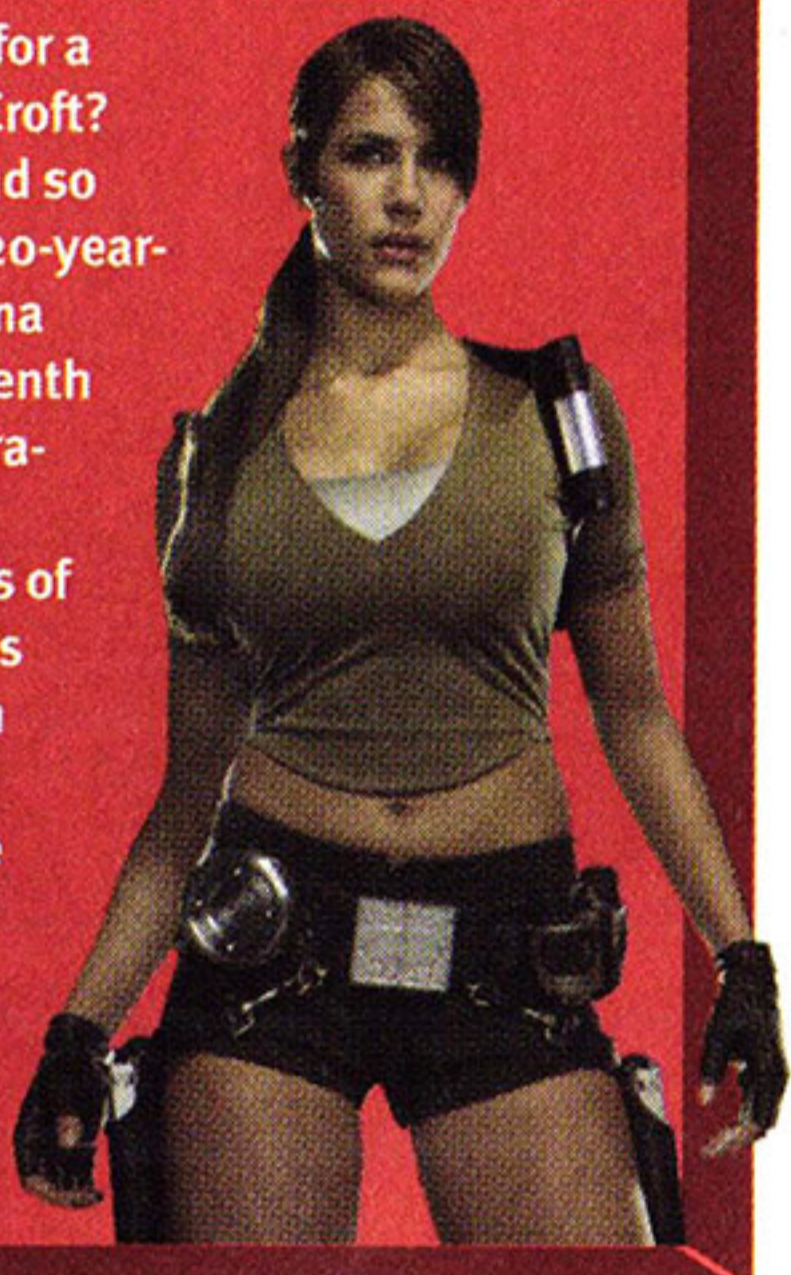


► Everything is physics-based, so swinging from a rope actually controls like, well, swinging from a rope.



HALLO, LOVE...

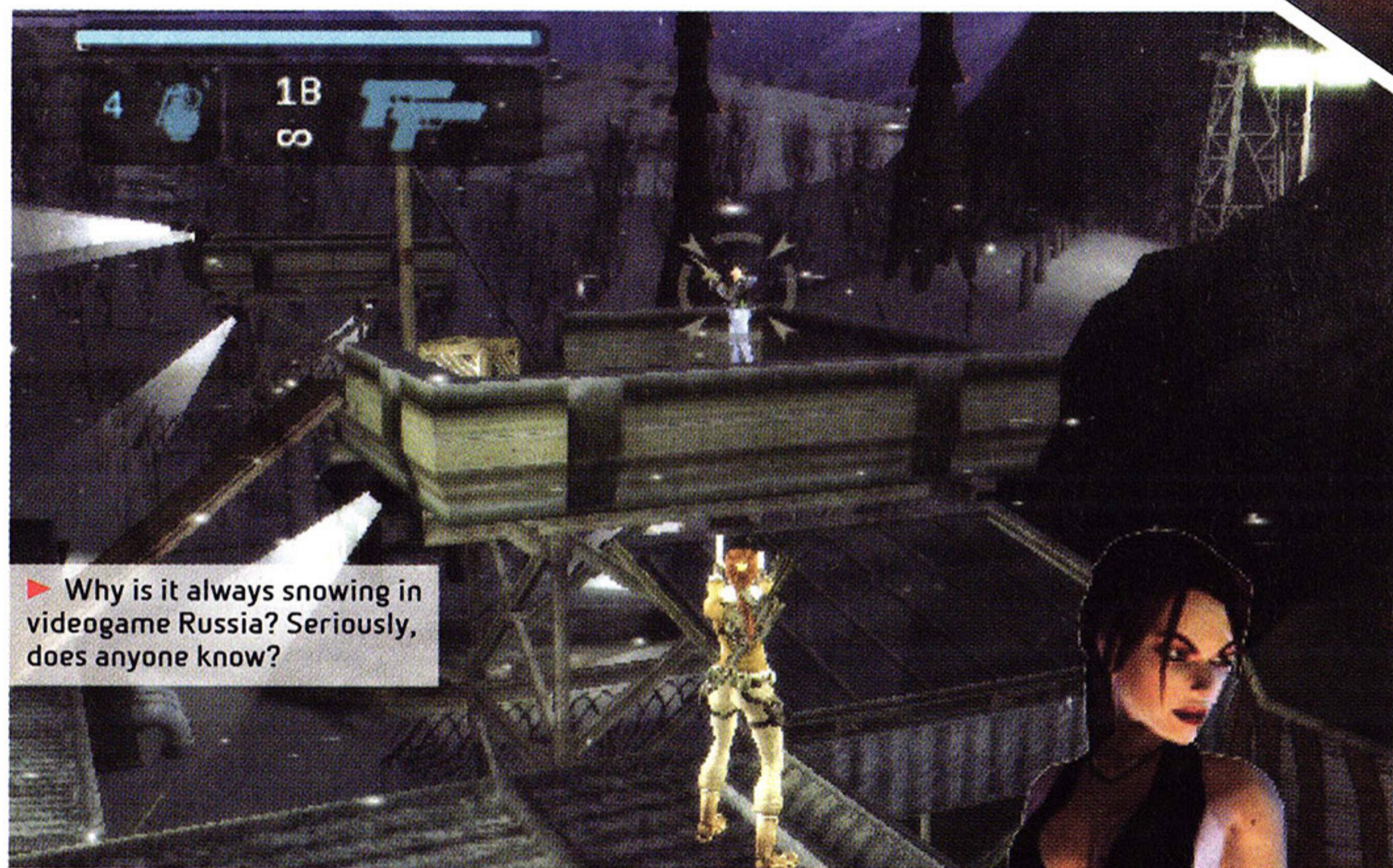
Is the world ready for a new real-life Lara Croft? Eidos thinks so, and so does fresh-faced, 20-year-old Londoner Karima Andebibe. The seventh in a long line of Lara-a-likes, Andebibe now joins the ranks of former Croft models and actresses such as Angelina Jolie. What's next for the former retail sales assistant? Why, full SAS survival training, of course!



limber, if not more so, than a certain Persian prince. Leaping, swinging, and shimmying along ledges – all are incredibly responsive, and Lara's body language serves as your guide for where to hop to next. Because of this, adventuring in *Legend* stays fun, fresh, and challenging throughout – something the series has always done best.

Another strong point during your journey is *Legend's* plethora of ruins-based puzzles. While you'll still have to pull a switch or two, the game banks a lot more on the environment. As an example, in the first puzzle room you enter, you're given two crates (they're baaack!), a stone seesaw, and a mission – get those crates to a higher ledge. Pulling one onto the seesaw is your first move, but learning that you must jump onto the far end to toss it up onto the ledge is another. Simply running to the far end won't do. You gotta jump. And this is just a taste of *Legend's* gaggle of organic puzzles. They range from clever to frustrating, but boring? Not a chance.

But exploration is just one part of the formula; combat provides the game's other ingredient. And frankly, it's the weaker of the two. Fickle lock-on targeting, finding creative ways to use your magnetic grapple, tossing grenades, swapping between one of two firearms (you can only hold two at any given time, *Halo*-style), and occasionally manning mounted turrets – combat may feel tighter and more varied than any of Lara's previous outings, but it never matches up to the marvel of adventuring. And certainly, anything in the game is better than the handful of tedious motorcycle-riding sequences. Thankfully,



► Why is it always snowing in videogame Russia? Seriously, does anyone know?



► The Croft mansion is its own entire level filled with secrets, unlockables, and a puzzle or two (or a hundred).

the key word is “handful” – you won't have to suffer long or often.

So, what's Lara's best new ability? The magnetic grappling hook. Snagging items, hooking enemies to pull close, finding a way to cross a seemingly impassable gap – the grappling hook handles it all while making you feel oh-so-smart when you discover new ways to use it.

But are we overly happy about Lara's new adventure because of how we remember her early days? Or is *Legend* a true return to form for

the series? A little of both, really. *Legend* hits its share of potholes with uneven graphics (at least on Xbox; we'll have word on the 360 version next issue), a checkpoint system that doesn't always behave, and combat that sometimes feels flat – but the minute you drop into the Himalayas, faced with a labyrinthine series of jumps, poles, and crevices, most of the foibles become background noise. And the feeling of having a world of possibilities opening up in front of you – that's exactly what *Tomb Raider* is all about.

– Francesca Reyes



THE VERDICT

- + It just feels right – it's good to have Lara back.
- + Plenty of collectibles and extras.
- Combat isn't quite as polished as we'd like it to be.
- ? We see the guns, but where does she store those idols?



8.0



► Getting hit with a stun punch starts this first-person mode where you must block everything to survive.



Fight Night Round 3



TKO - Technological Knock Out



Real life has no health bars. You have no way of knowing if the guy you're mixing it up with in the alley behind Tacky's Tavern is a half or a quarter of the way to kissing the pavement. His hit points are not floating above his head. All you know is he's breathing real heavy, spitting blood, and his right eye looks like a butterflied slice of pork loin. What's a nerd raised on videogames like you (or me) supposed to do in this situation? You forget everything videogames taught you and use your instincts. Pound that eye like it said something bad about your mama.

With its lack of any heads-up display info, *Fight Night Round 3* takes a similarly instinctual

approach to its pugilistic gameplay, requiring you to interpret your opponent's (and your own) condition, visually – from the level of damage on his face to the way he's moving around the ring as his body sags with exhaustion – instead of flashing any sort of handy health or fatigue meter onscreen. This gives the game a feel that's entirely more satisfying than any other we've experienced, and it marks an entirely new way of playing. Welcome to the next generation of gaming – it has officially arrived.

The only reason this visual feedback works as well as it does is *Round 3*'s adjective-defying Xbox 360 graphics. The borderline photorealism doesn't just make for boxers that

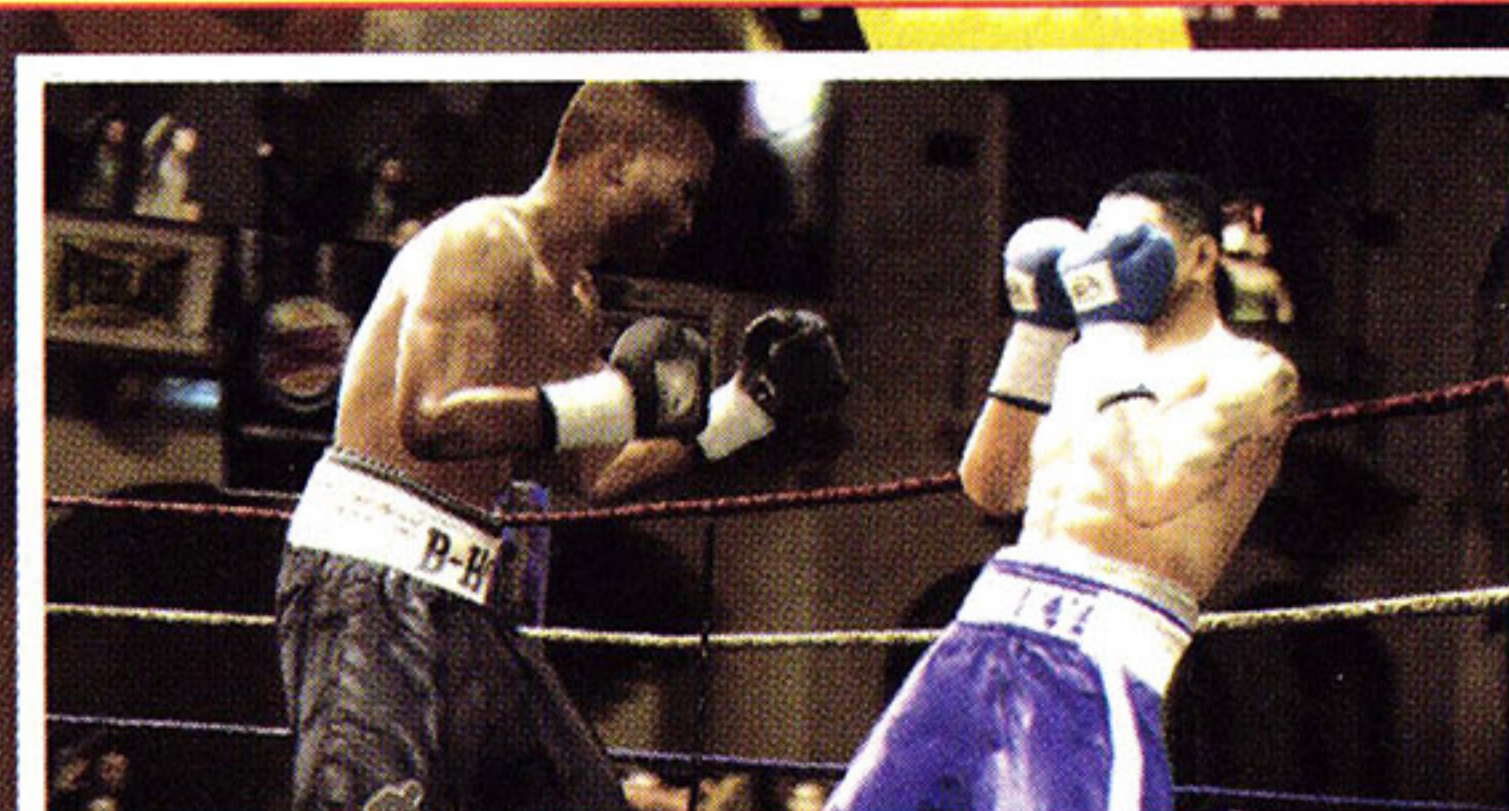
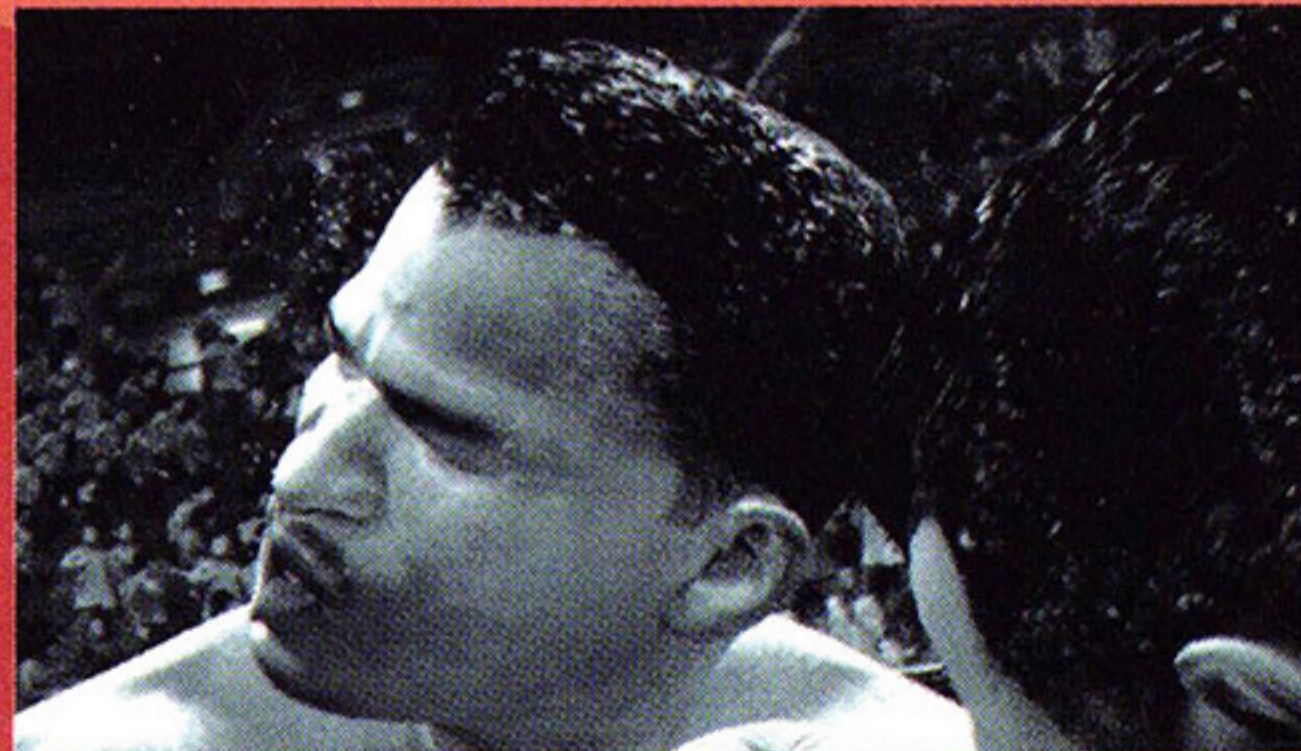
look like their real-life counterparts. The super-high polygon counts and super-slick lighting and textures let you see every cut, every swollen eye or lip – even the distinct look of concern on a tired fighter's furrowed brow in a way no other platform could – and that creates nuanced feedback for the player that's just doesn't currently exist in videogames.

Don't think we've gone all artsy-fartsy or pretentious. Even though *Round 3*'s graphics and gameplay do signal a profound paradigm shift in gaming and might truly be the standard bearer for the next generation of games, you don't need a Ph.D to enjoy the game. Heck, you don't even have to like boxing to appreciate *Fight Night*'s rip-roaring brand of head-to-head gaming. All you have to do is enjoy tenderizing another guy's face into hamburger with a hailstorm of punches. And really, who doesn't enjoy that?

As groundbreaking and new as *Round 3* feels, it's still a not-entirely-unexpected iteration of an already-great sports series. Executive Producer

Raging Bullfight

If you don't know anything about boxing, then you might think *Rocky* is a great boxing movie. It's not. The "boxing" in *Rocky* gets more absurd with each sequel and has very little to do with the actual "sweet science." But *Raging Bull* – now that's a great boxing movie, showing up close and personal the kind of real, irreversible punishment boxers take. The iconic slow-motion spit and blood showers coming off Robert De Niro playing Jake LaMotta are echoed in the *Fight Night* series. Now you can actually take part in one of the fights that was a cornerstone of that movie in the ESPN Classic mode. Jake LaMotta vs. Sugar Ray Robinson was a classic, and EA presents it in black and white just like Scorsese's movie (and real footage of the fight) did for some authentic flavor. Now if you could only spot Joe Pesci in the corner.





▶ Classic matchups like Duran vs. Hagler play out much the same way they did in real life.



▶ Haymakers can be drawn back even further, but are dangerously easy to counter.

Kudo Tsunoda and his team at EA Chicago have created a winning and innovative formula that only gets better as it's refined. The buttonless punching scheme (you control your character with just the two analog sticks) has been improved with a new impact punch system that also leads to a new first-person mode. It's an interesting addition to the series, but not as crucial to making *Fight Night* so sublime.

What is extremely crucial to making *Round 3* so sublime is the way it incorporates a whole new slew of fighting styles. In *Fight Night*

Round 2 you could only choose your stance and base style: right vs. left handed and power vs. speed. Now in addition to choosing between orthodox and southpaw stances (i.e., right or left), you can also choose from more base styles – anything from textbook to wild to the George Foreman-esque mummy style. There are multiple punching styles (lethal uppercuts, hard straights, hookmaster, etc.) and blocking options (standard, cross, Philly Shell, etc.) so that every boxer has a fairly unique combination of styles. Each one has advantages and

“Welcome to the next generation of gaming – it has officially arrived.”

disadvantages, but with so much variation in boxer attributes and overall strategy and tactics, it doesn't break down into a simple rock-paper-scissors style of fighting. No two fights – whether with human opponents or AI – will be exactly the same.

The best place to see how these different stylistic combinations can work against each other is in the ESPN Classics mode. Here, classic matchups like Ali vs. Frazier and Leonard vs. Hagler are re-created to a surprisingly realistic degree. And again, *Round 3* succeeds in re-creating each boxer's unique styles in the ring.

A lot of other improvements have been made to the game, the type anyone would expect from a sequel in a top-notch sports franchise. Most importantly, the career mode has been improved significantly, making progress through your boxer's career a lot more interesting than just climbing up the rankings chart. Meeting other big name stars on their way up, as well as developing rivalries with other boxers, makes for a compelling, if bruised, story arc.

Round 3 gets just about everything right. The presentation, especially the fist-pumping hip-hop soundtrack, is slick as all get- continued on pg. 74 ▶▶

Boxing 101

SOME STRATEGIES TO HELP YOU BECOME KING OF THE RING

Following the old axioms of “simple to learn, difficult to master” and “practice makes perfect,” *Fight Night* rewards time spent with it. The control system, which uses the two thumbsticks and triggers, almost exclusively, encourages you to develop your own styles – combos don't happen through memorized button chains like “traditional” fighting games. So here are a few rules for beginning brawlers to land a few in the ring and still escape with teeth intact.

1. DON'T WEAR YOURSELF OUT

You'll get easily tired if you throw too many punches that miss or get blocked. Take your time and choose your openings, and do whatever you can to make the other guy miss.

2. GO FOR THE BODY

Sure, turning a guy's face into kielbasa filling is cool and dramatic, but if you want to control the fight, go to work on his midsection. Repeated punches to the pancreas have a way of discouraging a boxer from standing up.

3. LEAD HIM AROUND

You want your opponent moving into your punches, especially if he's elusive. If you're a righty, try to get him to move around you clockwise. Of course the opposite is true if

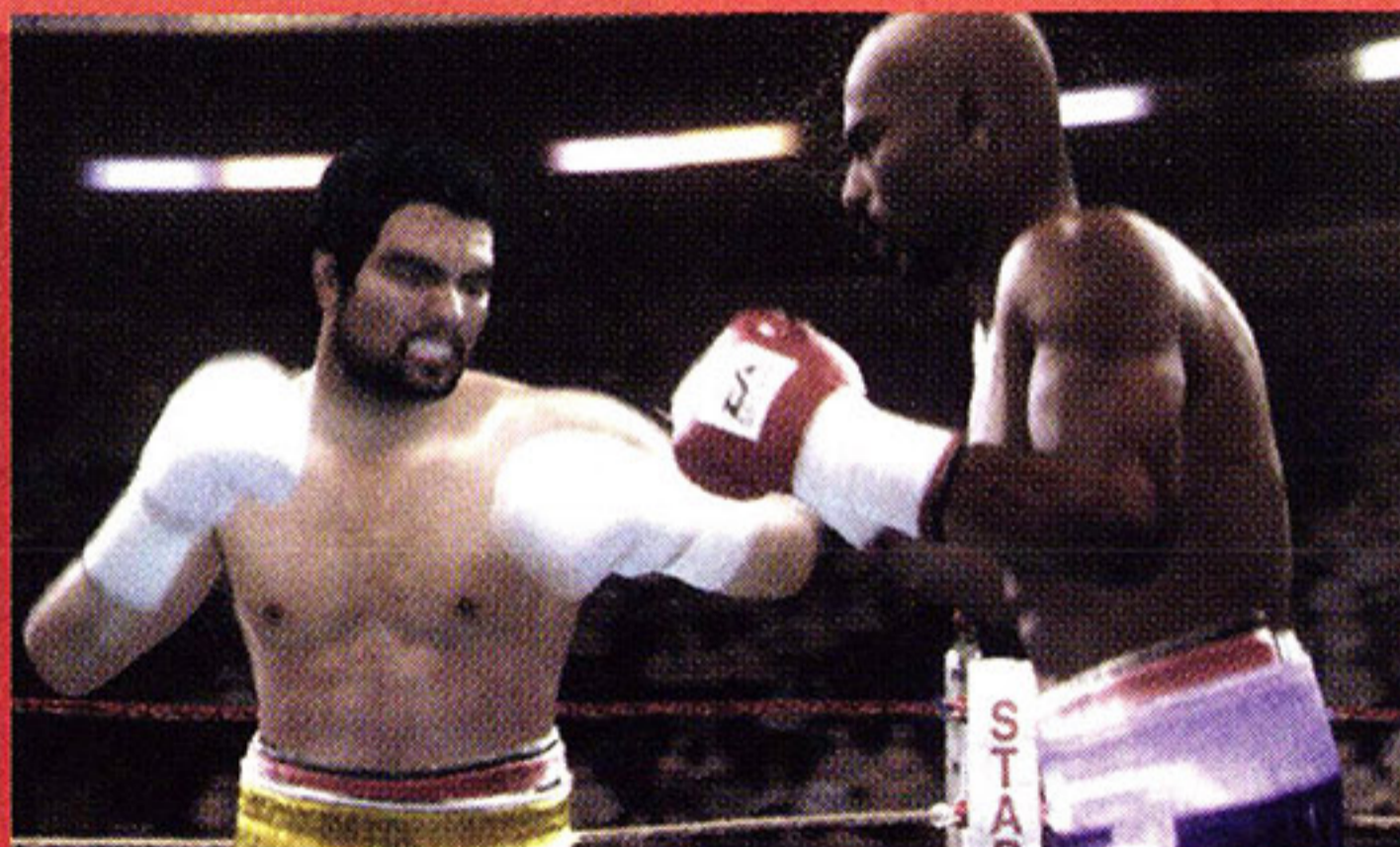
you're trying to avoid his strong hand, and you'll need to circle away from his hook.

4. COUNTER, COUNTER, COUNTER

Never let an opportunity to counter pass you by. If you make a guy whiff or if you parry his shot, you better follow it up with a strong shot back at him.

5. COMBOS CAN BE BRUTAL

Instead of throwing every shot you can at a guy, try to set him up for two- or three-punch combos, since they do a lot more damage. Mix them up, too – like starting with a right jab to the body followed with a left hook to the chin. You can also throw two quick right and left jabs by rolling the stick back and forth across the top of the arc.





▶ Oh that compress hurts, does it?



▶ No substitute for beating real flesh.

out. The online mode is well done, allowing you to choose competitors who are looking for the same kind of fight as you. The character-creation tools are as powerful as we've come to expect from any EA Sports game. But more real-world boxers – especially more of the classic fighters – would be a welcome addition, as would more

“Rivalries with other boxers makes for a compelling – if bruised – story arc.”

arenas. And next year's edition really needs a replay option, maybe even a photo mode like *PGR3*'s so you can relive some of your most glorious moments.

Ultimately this is why *Fight Night Round 3* is so incredible; despite some very minor quibbles it's chock-full of glorious moments. It's an amazingly progressive game designwise, but it's such pure visceral fun that the genius that went into it seems to absorb into your subconscious while you break polygonal bones in virtual faces. Which just makes it all the more brilliant. To put it simply, *Fight Night Round 3* kicks our ass.

– Tom Price

THE VERDICT

- + No HUD.
- + The ripples in a guy's face when you punch him.
- Kinda light on the number of venues and real-life boxers.
- ? If games look like this now, what are they going to look like in five years?

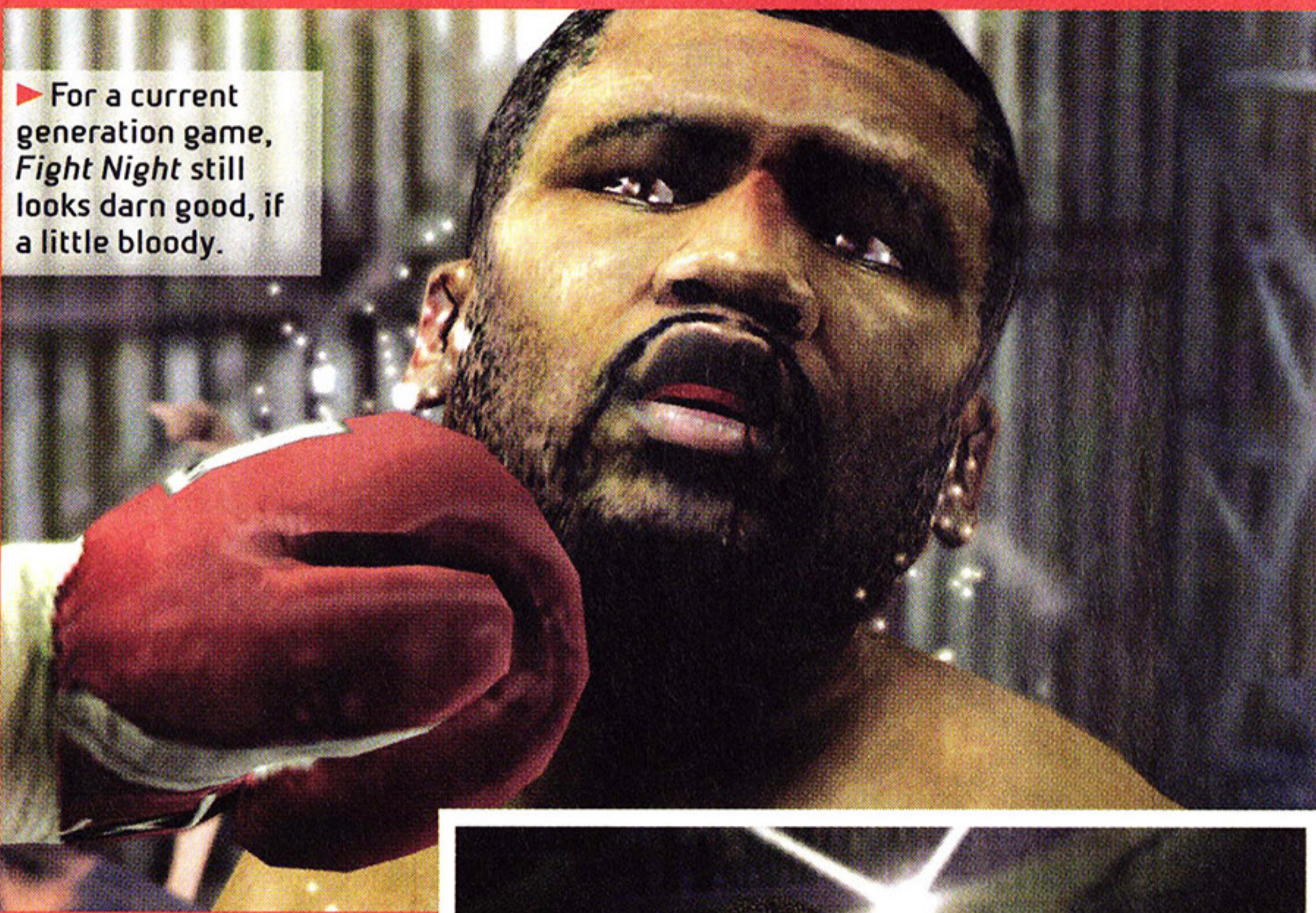


Fight Night Round 3

Don't call him a lightweight

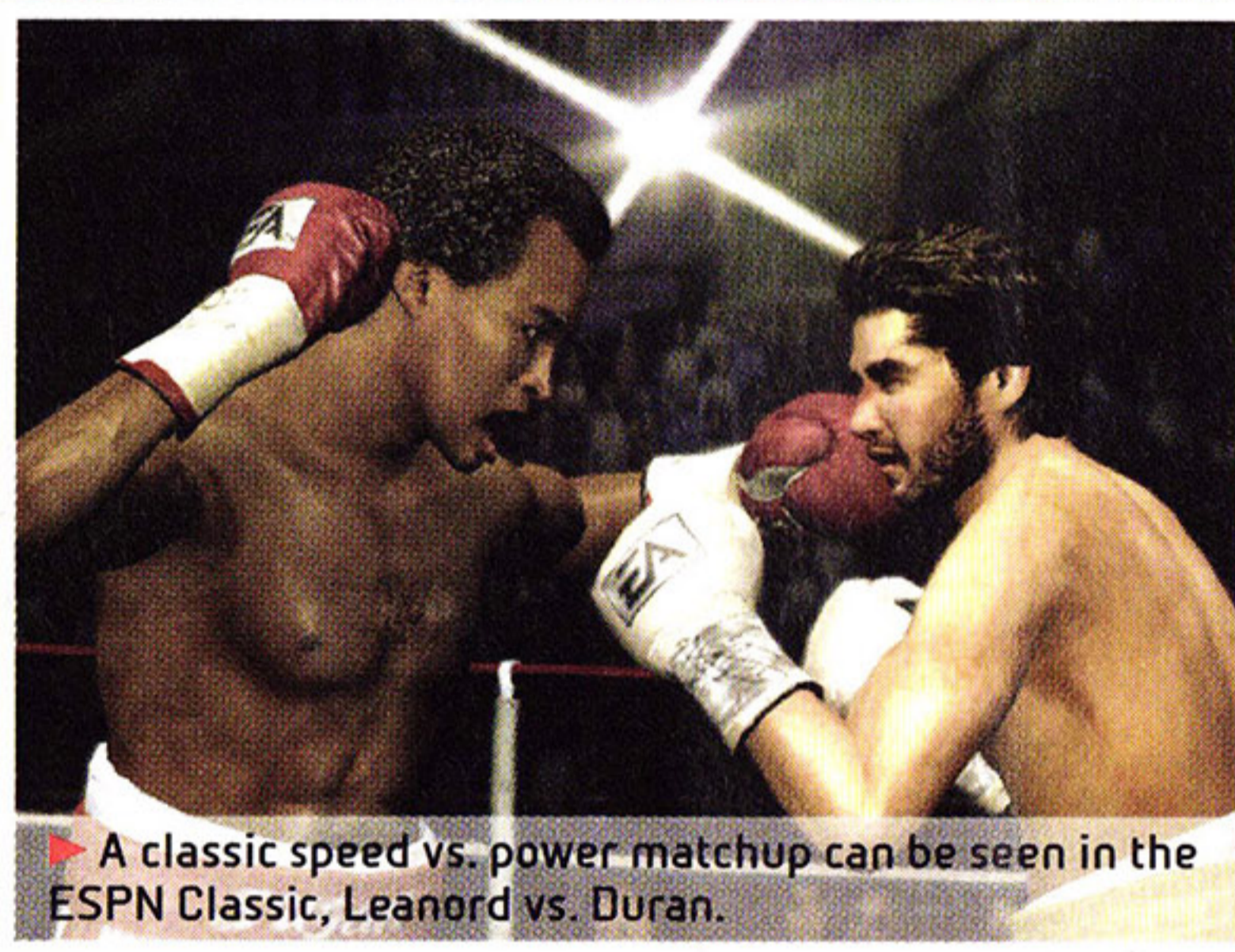


▶ For a current generation game, *Fight Night* still looks darn good, if a little bloody.



Even though *Fight Night Round 3* for Xbox isn't the jawbreaking work of staggering genius that the 360 version is, that doesn't mean it isn't a great game. *Round 3* for Xbox is exactly what you would expect from a sequel in a great sports series (one of the best in EA Sports' stable): a great improvement that maintains what's successful about the series while adding useful elements.

But that said, *Round 3* for Xbox isn't quite the must-buy that the 360 version is. If you're not a fan of the series already, it's doubtful that this version of *Fight Night* will convert you. But if you're both converted and/or dying to swing away, you'll find enough upgrades and additions to please your pugilist's gaming palate. The new stances and styles for blocking and punching significantly up the strategic and tactical nature over *Round 2*. The awesome ESPN Classic mode, which re-creates classic matchups, the new first-person



▶ A classic speed vs. power matchup can be seen in the ESPN Classic, Leonard vs. Duran.

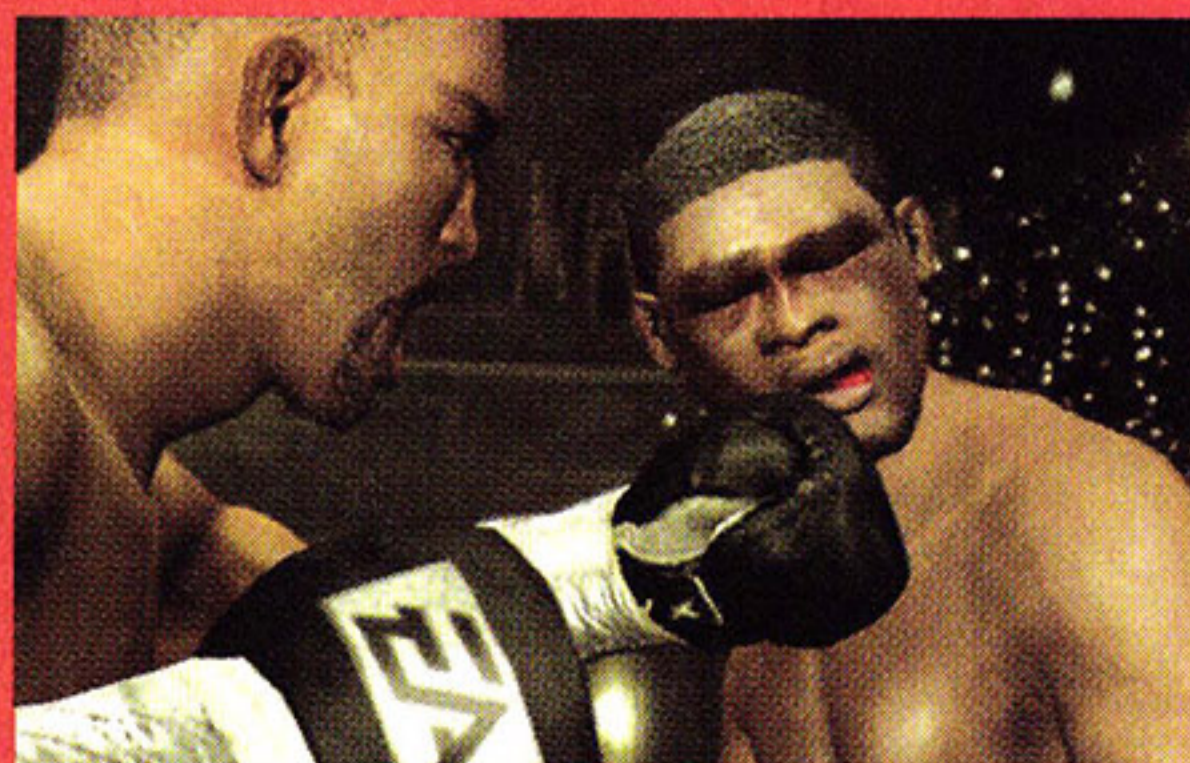
“stunned” mode (when your boxer's about to eat canvas, the game flips to a first-person view while you struggle to stay on your feet – it's like its own minigame), and the improved cutmen also carry over.

Consider us spoiled by the 360 version, but *Round 3* does its job as a sequel no more or no less than you'd expect. And if you think this is damning it with faint praise – we're not. It's solid, it subtly improves on all the great things the entire series has always done. But, man – you really gotta see it on 360 to enjoy *Round 3* the way it should be experienced.

– Tom Price

THE VERDICT

- + Matches every main feature of the 360 version.
- + Still packs that visceral *Fight Night* punch.
- It's hard to look at those graphics after you've seen the 360 version.
- ? Where's our favorite boxer of all time, Leon Spinks?



Platform: XBOX 360 Publisher: EA SPORTS Developer: EA CHICAGO ESRB: TEEN Live/Multiplayer: 2 on same screen and Xbox Live Selling Points: Photorealistic graphics, 1080i

Platform: XBOX Publisher: EA SPORTS Developer: EA CHICAGO ESRB: TEEN Live/Multiplayer: 2 on same screen and Xbox Live; leaderboards Selling points: Punching people is fun; 480p Backwards compatible: NO



▶ Despite the silencer on the pistol, there's not much need for stealth when you're blowing up a building in a spectacular fireball of carnage and destruction.



▶ If you don't start driving a fuel-efficient hybrid vehicle, this will happen to you.

hints at both but never goes so far as to commit to either one.

As for the firearms themselves (which Criterion touts as the star of *Black's* show, even referring to its game as "gun porn"), they have a good weight and feel to them, but they're visually unremarkable in their variety. Only the riot shotgun yields any real visceral satisfaction.

Throw in a half-baked plot, undercooked character development, and a harsh gauntlet for a finale, and you have an experience that will divide gamers in two camps. Half will love the balls-out approach to pure, nonstop shooting with little regard for depth or strategy. The other half (which this reviewer falls into) has seen more than our share of good shooters on Xbox. And without any multiplayer component to lengthen *Black's* already short experience (an omission only the stronger shooters, like *Half-Life 2*, can get away with), *Black's* whiz-bang production values aren't enough to overcome its very straightforward gameplay. It may be initially enjoyable and easy to pick up, but the thrill doesn't last and it never quite distinguishes itself enough from the rest of the FPS pack on Xbox.

— Ryan McCaffrey

Black

There's nothing "covert" about blowing everything to smithereens

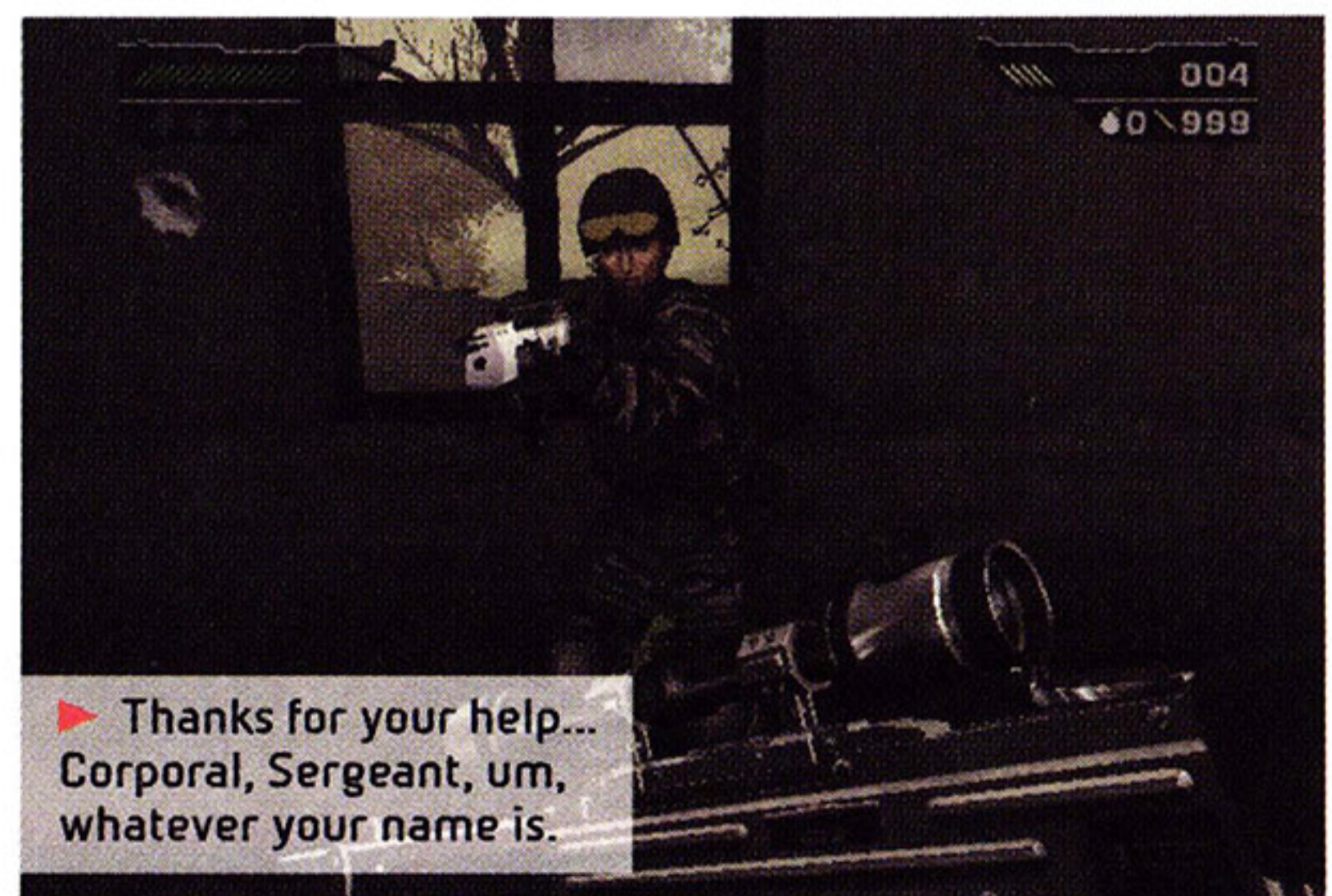


It's probably not that fair to compare Criterion's new first-person shooter *Black* with its renowned *Burnout* racing franchise. But each shares a fundamental design goal: to boil its respective genre down to its most visceral component – spectacular crashes (*Burnout*) and explosive gunplay (*Black*). From there, the game builds your entire experience around this core element. But while *Burnout* succeeds effortlessly by mixing in compelling twists such as traffic checking, road rage, and eliminator rounds, *Black* ends up feeling like a fledgling start to a series, rather than a complete standalone experience.

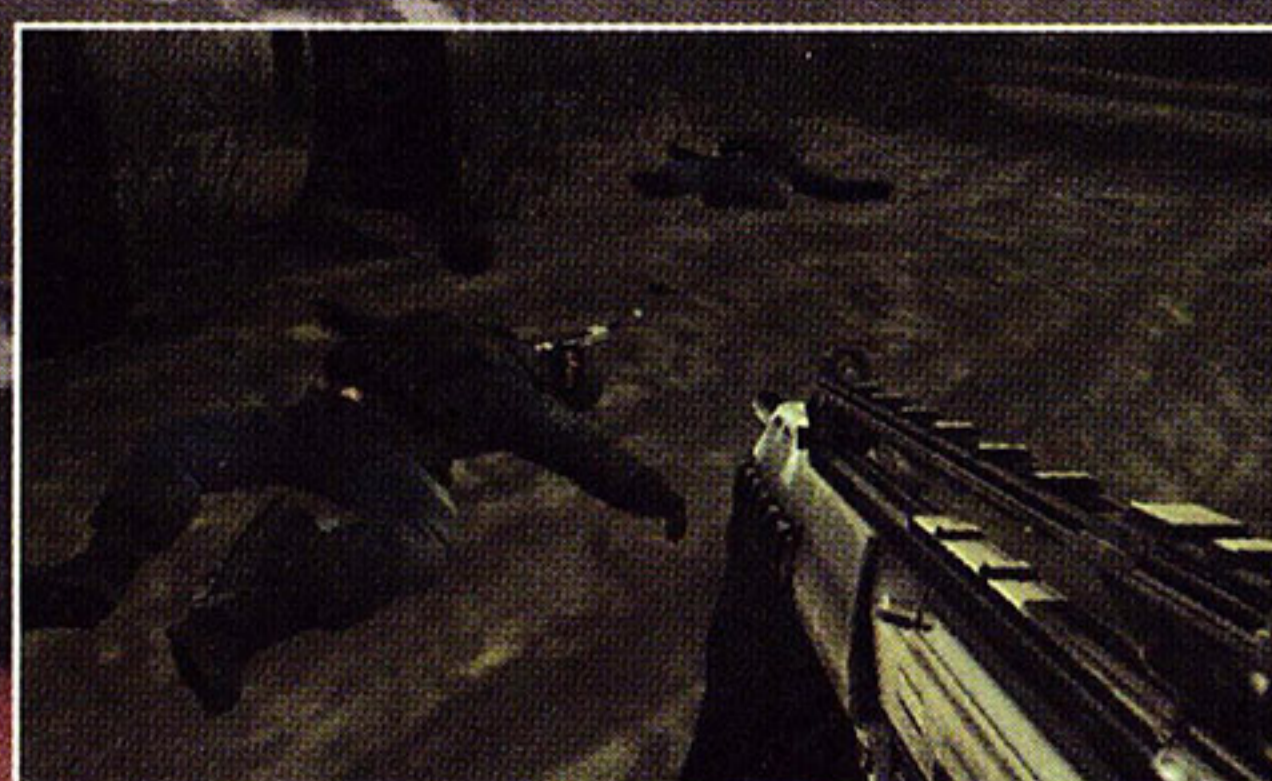
Throughout the eight-mission campaign, you're quickly trained to shoot early and often at enemies and exploding red barrels. You'll face off against the same few types of faceless foes a hundred times per level, emptying clips into each one and looking for big red detonators to blow them to smithereens. *Black's* gameplay

never strays from this formula – put brain on hold, shoot lots, heal, repeat – even in the few instances when squadmates help you out. But even indestructible allies have little effect on your strategy or experience, and over the course of the game's six to eight hours of gameplay, the frenzied, constant shootout quickly peaks and devolves into a state of diminishing returns.

And the much ballyhooed environmental destruction is fairly limited – we did this much damage to a game world three years ago in *Red Faction II* – while the opponent AI is utterly average. Meanwhile, the frequent deployment of weapon silencers and a one-hit melee-in-the-back kill button sends a mixed message: Is *Black* a stealth shooter or an explosive, high-octane boom-fest? It drops



▶ Thanks for your help... Corporal, Sergeant, um, whatever your name is.



THE VERDICT

- + Blowing things up = fun.
- No variety; shoot the same four guys 100 times a level for six hours.
- Weak storyline with tedious cutscenes.
- ? What's with the last scene? We thought it was setting up a last level, not *Black 2*.



7.0



► Painting the side of a moving train take a whole lot more than aerosol!

Marc Ecko's Getting Up: Contents Under Pressure

Talkin' 'bout a revolution

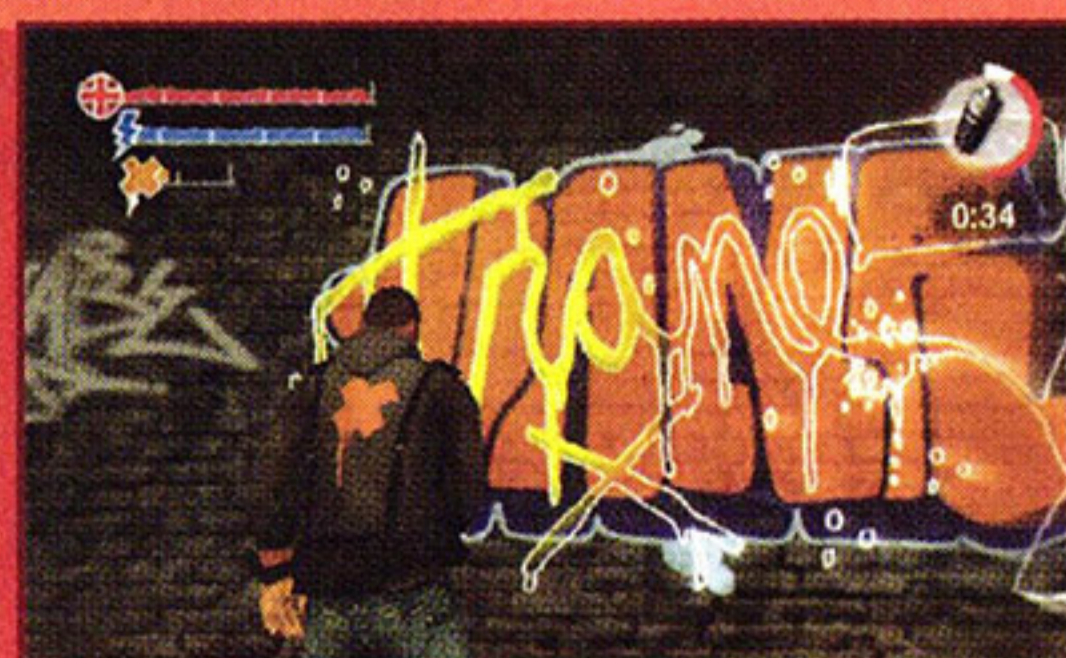


Graffiti has a fascinating dual nature – it's about raw, unchecked, almost noble artistic expression, but it's also about the street-crew respect that comes from getting your tag up in glorious spots. Which is kind of the perfect set-up for *Marc Ecko's Getting Up*, a game you'd probably expect to be mired in the predictable onslaught of clothing brands and heavy-handed "urban" attitude. Instead, it's intriguingly different and creative, but it's also clearly at war with the commercial necessity of its release date, and sadly, it isn't as polished as it should be.

Fortunately, the upsides far outweigh the problems. When we interviewed Marc Ecko about the game last summer, he talked repeatedly about "flipping the script," and it's easy to understand why once you play the game – it does just that on so many levels. For starters, the storyline begins like a simple tale of dueling graffiti gangs, but halfway through, you learn that your enemies are really your friends, and there's something much bigger at stake here...like rebelling against an oppressive government. It spawns that rarest of beasts – a videogame story that's actually absorbing – and *Getting*

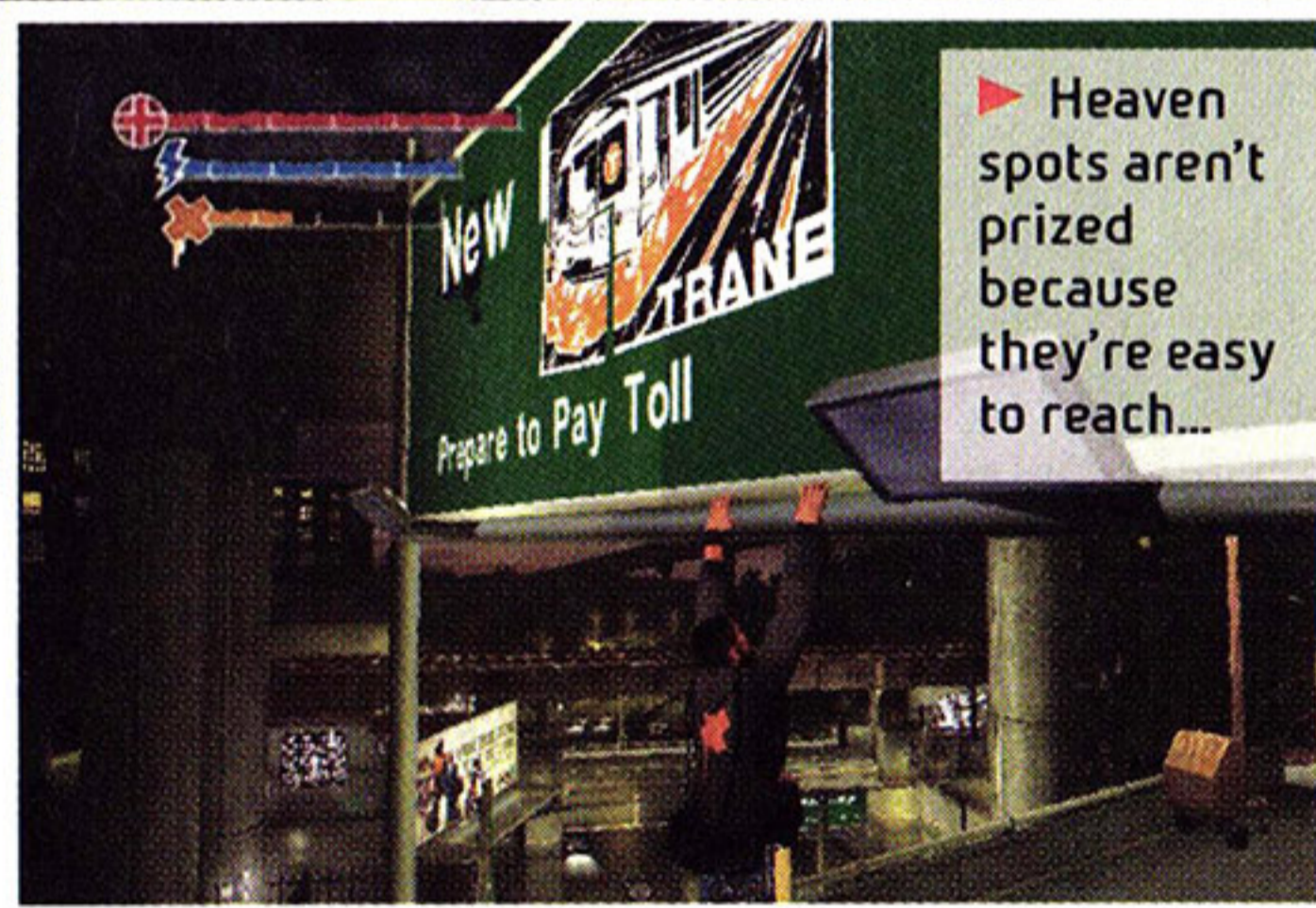
Up absolutely nails the atmosphere with appearances by tons of graffiti legends.

On the gameplay side, *Getting Up* deftly mixes third-person combat with a sharp approach to putting up paint (see sidebar). The combat is pretty deep, packing in grapples, reversals, throws, combos, and weapons that are more than enough to handle the less-than-challenging enemy AI. Although the fighting wears thin toward the end, the graffiti never gets old. *Getting Up* is a big long game, and as you get deeper, cool options open up, ranging from murals to wildstyle pieces to roll-ups and wheat-



ARTIST AT WORK: To put up a piece, hold R Trigger to see its outline, then start spraying at different rates with X and Y. Wave the R stick around to fill in the colors, being careful not to drip by spraying one area too long. You have to pause occasionally to shake the can, and when you're done, you're rated on factors like time, no drips, tagging in a "heaven spot," and more.

► In *Getting Up*'s world, graffiti is public enemy number one, and everyone from the orange-clad cops to the, uh, butchers will scrap with you the second they spot you.



► Heaven spots aren't prized because they're easy to reach...

pastings posters. Since the environments veer from subways to amusement parks to freeways and skyscrapers, you're never bored.

If this sounds like a breath of fresh air, it is – but it should've been a hurricane. At times *Getting Up* is just far too exasperating. Part of that stems from an unruly camera that fights you more than it helps you. And another part surfaces in unintuitive level design that means mental calisthenics are required to sort out where to go next. Solving challenging puzzles is perfectly fine, but staggering blindly around a level for an hour until you find the one pole, fence, or ledge that's climbable is just not cool.

Getting Up is a fascinating game, but it's also a frustrating one. The perfect way to approach it is to shelve your hardcore gamer pride, download a walkthrough to get you through the annoying bits, and just wade into its rampant creativity with both eyes wide open.

– Paul Curthoys

THE VERDICT

- + Nails the graffiti scene.
- + Creative gameplay that keeps getting better as the game goes on.
- Soured by frustrating camera and pathfinding.
- ? Why didn't they delay this again until it was perfect as it could've been?



FIFA Street 2

Turns too many tricks

The first *FIFA Street* probably shouldn't have been released – it was half, maybe two-thirds of a complete game. This sequel patches all that up by fleshing out the missing details, but unfortunately, the gameplay stills feels as off-kilter as a tipsy soccer fan weaving his way home after a match.

The biggest new feature is a career mode that actually could've been sorta fun to play through; it deftly mixes up match types as you build your rookie player into a star. But

the gameplay revolves far too much around uncorking crazy strings of tricks, rather than playing some "football." We're not soccer grinchers – we can certainly dig some crazy tricks – but there's almost no point in scoring when the AI just focuses on racking up the new Gamebreakers, which can instantly win the game. You might have some fun if all you care about is channeling your grade-school hacky-sack sessions, but if you're looking to actually play street soccer, you'll wonder why your soccer pitch turned into a circus act.

– Paul Curthoys



► A rare moment where the focus is actually on scoring goals.

THE VERDICT

- + Now has all the features you'd expect.
- Excessive emphasis on tricks over actual street-soccer action.
- Unfair Gamebreaker move.
- ? Hey EA, where's *Tiger Street*? We're still waiting and hoping...

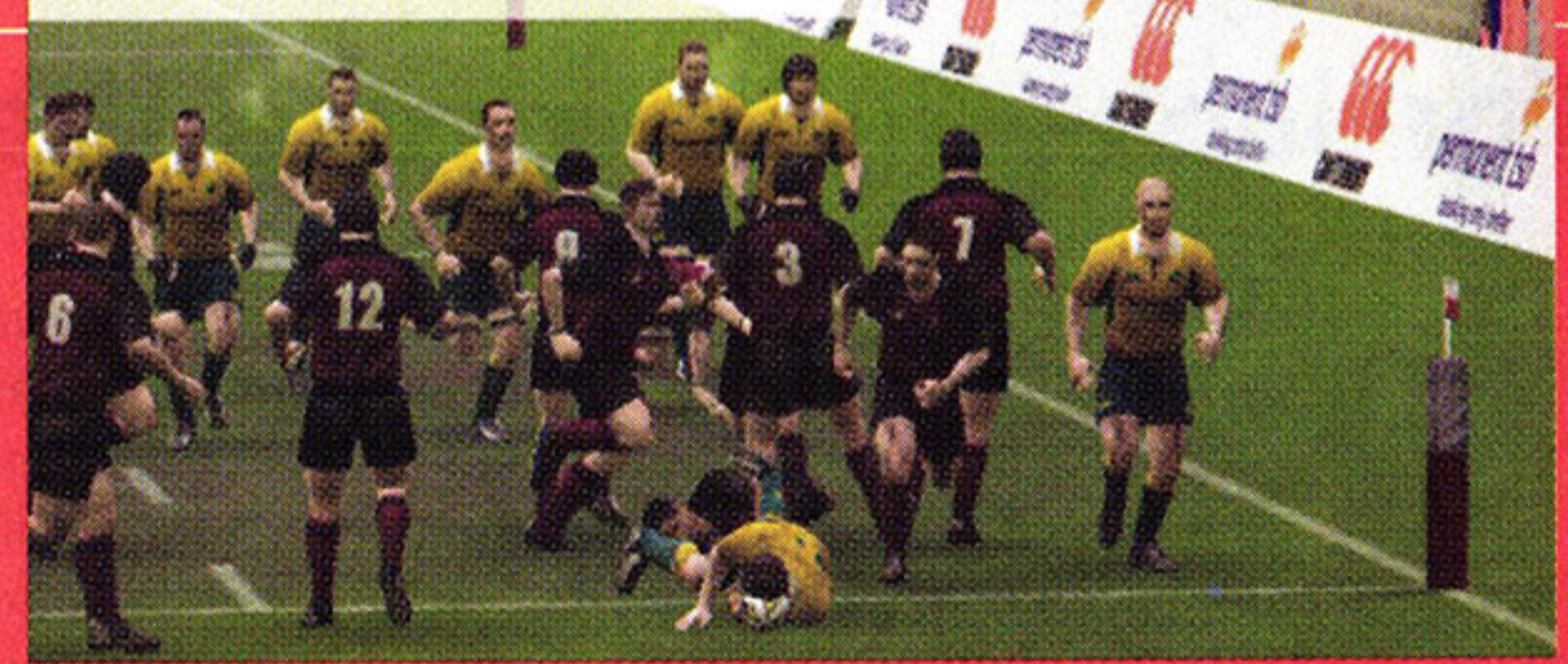


Rugby 06

Take this ball and scrum it

Flush with breakneck dashes and frizzled pile-ups, *Rugby 06* can be a lot of fun when it's not tangling your eyes and teasing your thumbs during cramped rucks, scrums, and attempts to nail this year's newest, sweetest feature: offload passing, which lets you toss the ball mid-tackle. Impact players inject a list of rugby pros who are yours for the tinkering, while quick penalties and line-outs (throw-ins) update the 2005 version alongside ripping-fun high tackles (clothesline hooks) and tactically cool set plays. The field looks sharper, the players animate more smoothly, and last year's neglectful tutorial gets tweaked

► Taking it down to the mat in smooth, replayable motion.



with expanded practice options, though it still pedantically assumes you know your mauls from your marks.

Following the action and its muddle of player bodies is the only real issue, and a tighter, less far-flung camera could have fixed it. Otherwise, the 2006 edition of *Rugby* looks to be EA's banner season.

– Matt Peckham



► The player models are visibly jacked over 2005, but nothing's gonna remedy those poncy shorts.

THE VERDICT

- + Offload passing revs up the offensive dynamic.
- + More than 25 tactical set plays with custom control mapping.
- Tough to track and offload to half-tackled runners.
- ? Am I actually getting juiced about a British sport?



GHOST SQUAD

Regroup

▶ Video feeds (above right) move the story, and Cross-Com (above left) gives you extra eyes.



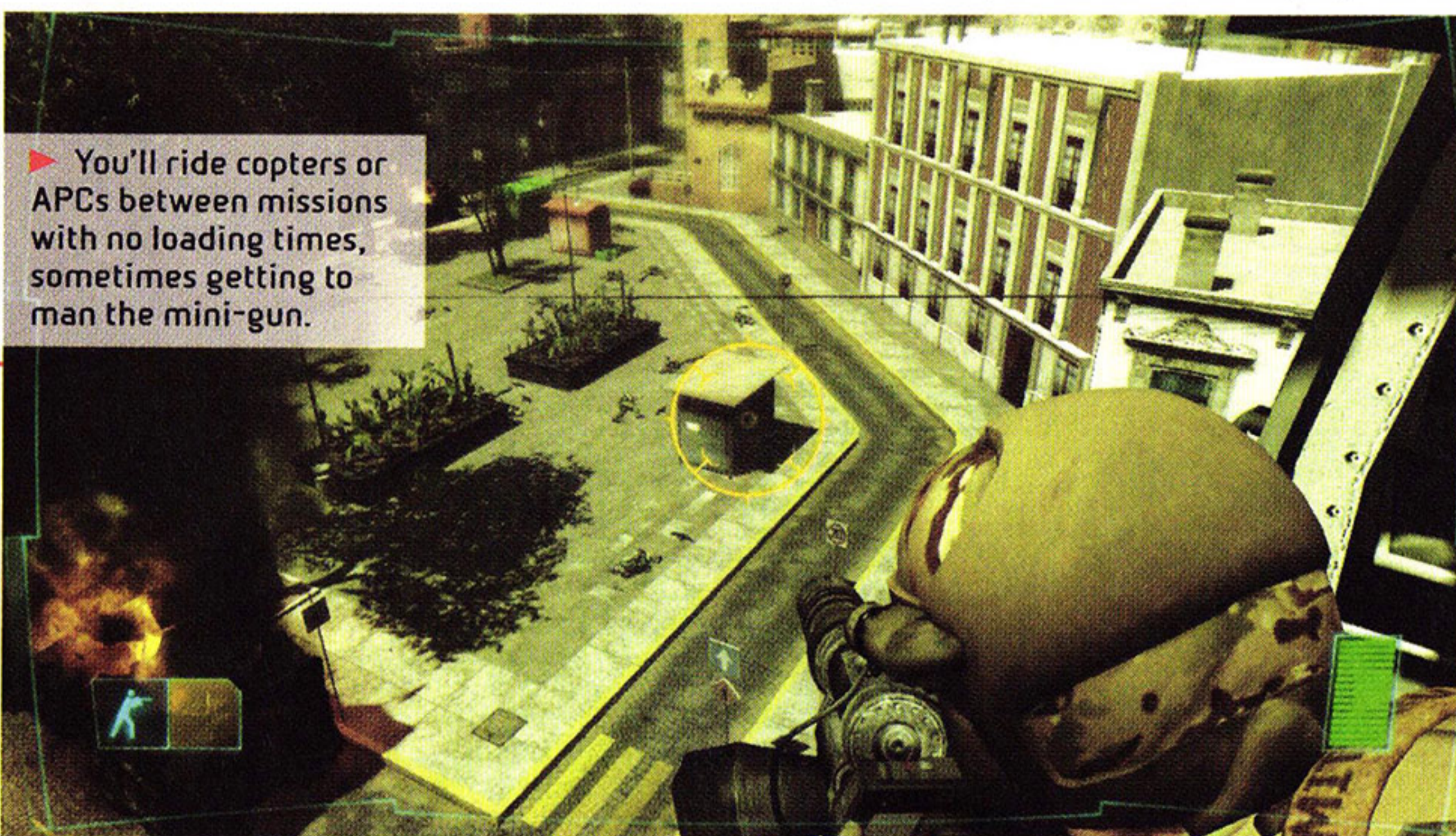
Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter

The looks finally match the gameplay

It's imminent now. That moment when you're standing in a videogame store and some kid picks up the box for the latest Clancy gem, *Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter*, and starts talking about how "sick" or "ill" the graphics are. And you, being an old-school Xbox gamer and

Clancy-game veteran, will have that "old guy" rebuttal: "I remember back when *Ghost Recon* was ugly, when we shot at blocky enemies and went prone amidst seven-polygon trees!" Indeed, there's truth in advertising in the "Advanced" portion of *GRAW*'s name. The designers have painted one incredibly expressive

digital canvas specifically for Xbox 360 – as opposed to a mid-range 1997 PC – and their subject is Mexico City. There is absolutely no mistaking *GRAW* for a current-gen game. The HDR* lighting, which runs the gamut from dawn to mid-afternoon to dusk, creates a remarkably believable urban landscape across its 12-mission single-player campaign. That campaign, which chronicles an attempt by Mexican insurgents to rise to power, as well as the capture and subsequent rescue of both the U.S. and Mexican presidents, inspires a good bit of eye-rolling by the final sequence (which is itself underwhelming), but as the saying goes – it's not about the destination but rather the journey.



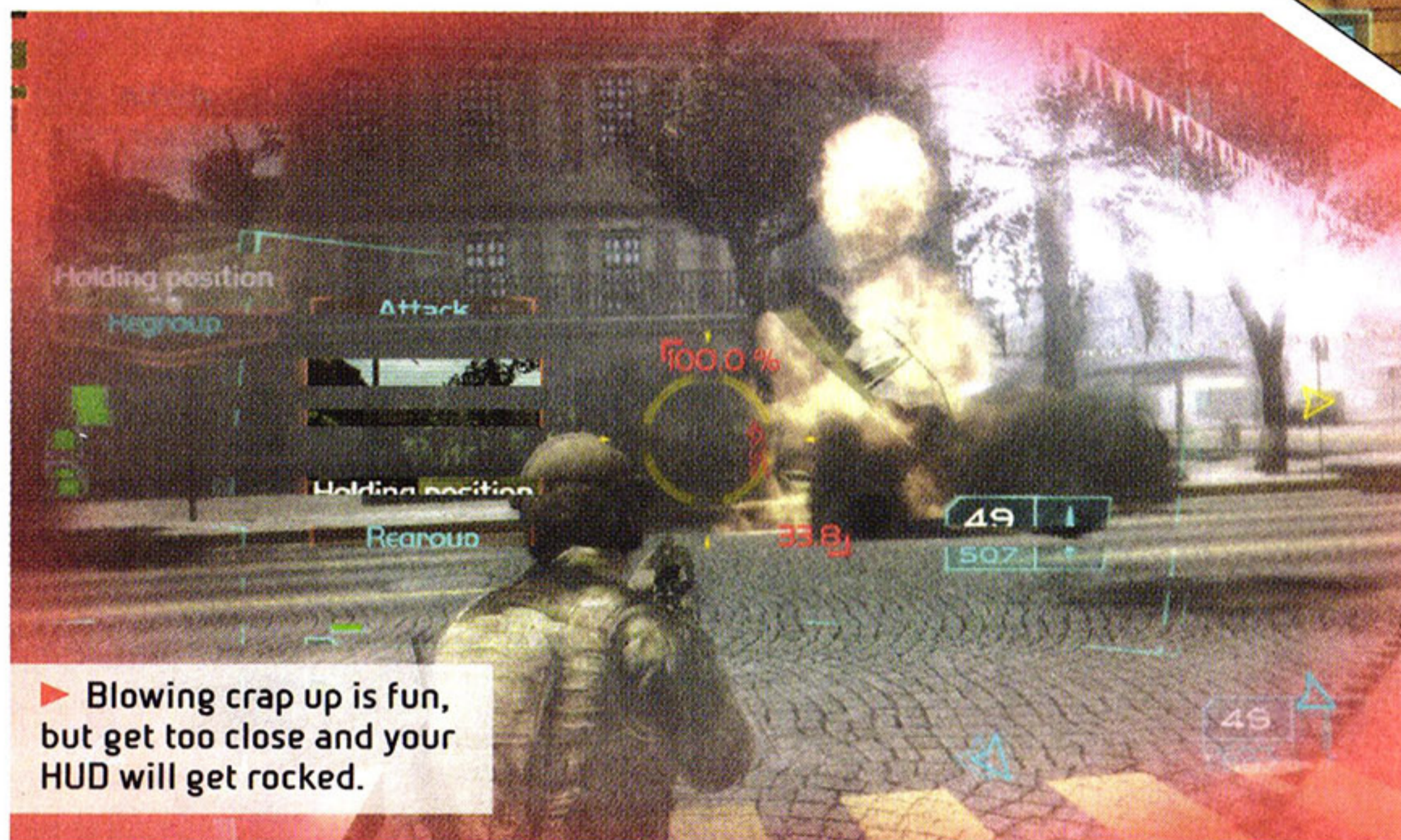
▶ You'll ride copters or APCs between missions with no loading times, sometimes getting to man the mini-gun.



Platform: XBOX 360 Publisher: UBISOFT Developer: UBISOFT TIWAK/RED STORM ESRB: MATURE Live/Multiplayer: 16 on split screen, System Link, or Live Selling Points: Still the best sniping experience; Cross-Com in multiplayer



▶ Moving from cover to cover is key, and sometimes that cover is mobile and at your command.



▶ Blowing crap up is fun, but get too close and your HUD will get rocked.

During that voyage, some *GR* veterans' feathers might ruffle at the direction *Advanced Warfighter* takes; like *Ghost Recon 2*, it strays a bit from the established sniping-terrorists-in-a-forest paradigm the series made its name with – especially early on. You'll be blowing the snot out of enemy transport trucks with a mini-gun in a helicopter, nuking fuel tankers, and ordering tanks to fire on opposing armor a lot for the first few levels. It's fist-pumping fun, but die-hard *Recon* fans will no doubt wonder if the series has devolved into just another action game.

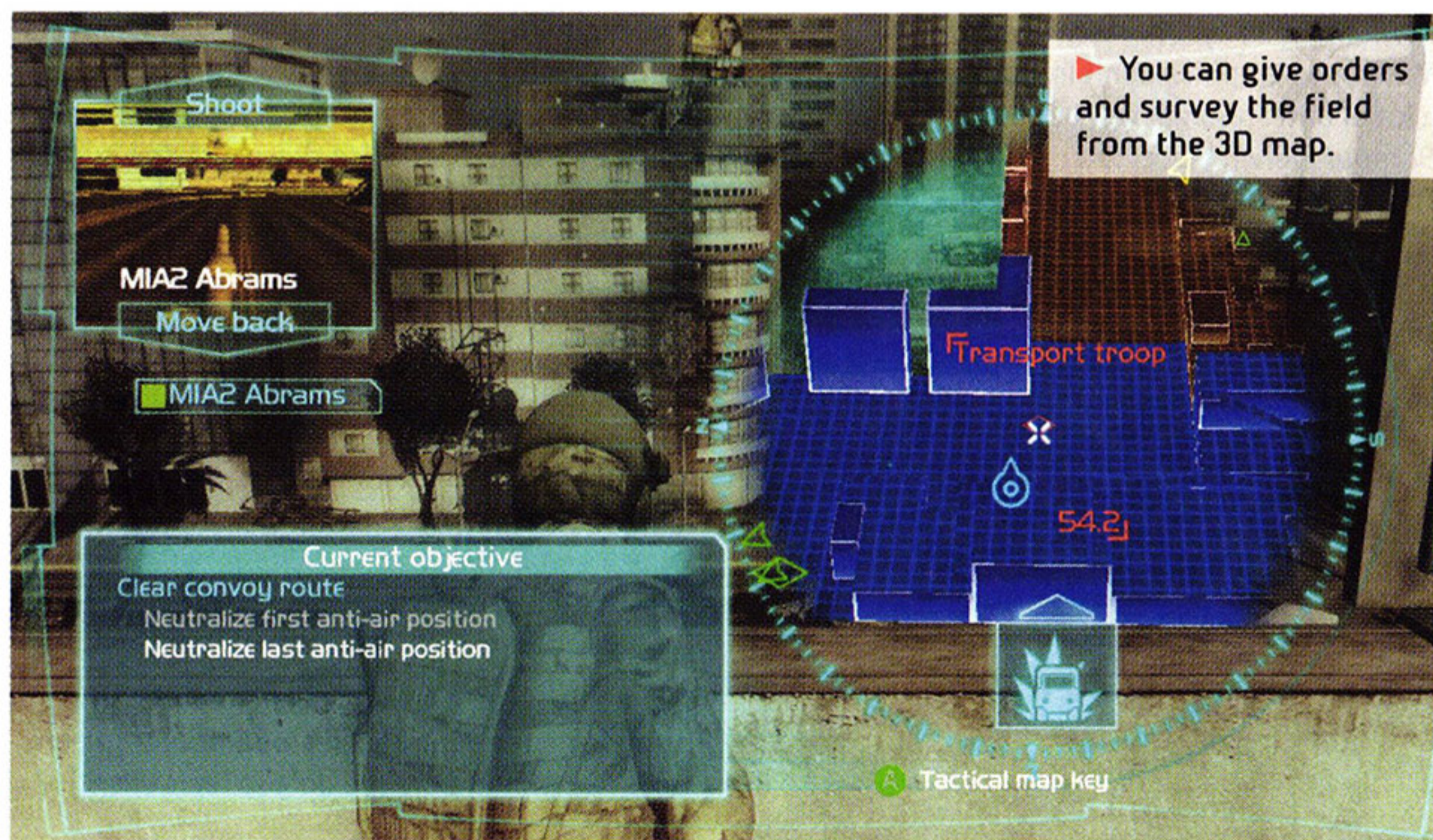
Fortunately, later portions of the campaign do remind you that this is still *Ghost Recon*, offering numerous grin-inducing sniping binges that are enhanced by a couple of key additions to the

series: Cross-Com and the UAV. The latter is a beacon that gives you a bird's-eye view of the battlefield, identifying enemies on your HUD. The former complements it by giving you a picture-in-picture live feed of what your fellow Ghosts are up to, letting you see in two places at once.

Unfortunately, your supposedly elite-trained Ghost allies muddy up the fun. To put it bluntly, none of them seem competent. They'll stand out in the open during heated firefights, step out in front of you when you're trying to fire from around corners, and won't even mimic your stance (as they did in previous *Recon* games). They hinder more than they help, and the times you get to run solo are more of a relief than they should be for a game so steeped in squad dynamics.

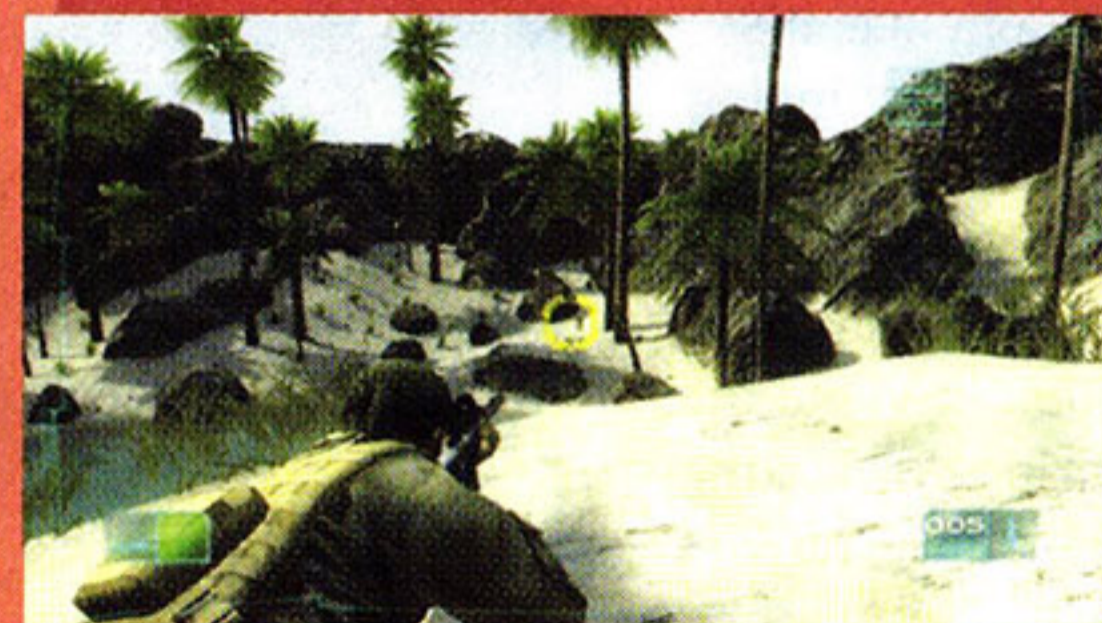
Though campaign play is good but flawed, multiplayer is thankfully a home run (see below). When the original *Ghost Recon* launched for Xbox, it was a killer app for the fledgling Xbox Live service. Now here in the early days of Xbox 360, *GRAW* will continue to wear that badge of honor again for some time. So whether you're easily dazzled by superb graphics or are itchin' for some multiplayer-lovin', *GRAW* scores on both fronts as an impressive new chapter in the series.

– Ryan McCaffrey



Sweet Multiplayer

Red Storm has clearly mastered this whole one-shot-kill tactical multiplayer thing. This is easily the ultimate *Ghost Recon* multiplayer experience, and not a single dud crops up in the map complement (they're literally all highlights, but Dry Dock, Junkyard, Rocky Cove, and Desert Gulch are particularly great). Unique character outfitting, full game customization (Don't want grenades? Easy...), a slew of game modes, the UAV's brilliant integration into multiplayer, and a four-mission co-op sequence make the package so good and so deep that it could literally be its own review. Huge thumbs-up.



THE VERDICT

- + Fantastic multiplayer.
- + Awesome presentation; graphics are amazing and sound effects are up to the excellent Clancy standard.
- Ghost AI is lousy.
- ? What's with the jarring EA Trax-inizing of the in-helicopter soundtrack?



9.0

Platform: XBOX 360 Publisher: EA Developer: CRITERION SOFTWARE ESRB: EVERYONE 10+ Live/Multiplayer: 6 over Live Selling Points: Save and share; Uh, hello - it's *Burnout*!



► It's the same fast and furious action, now with silkier framerates than before.



► Shiny and pretty? Yes. Next gen? Doesn't look like it. *WE'VE WON THE LIMITED R175 ST*

Burnout Revenge

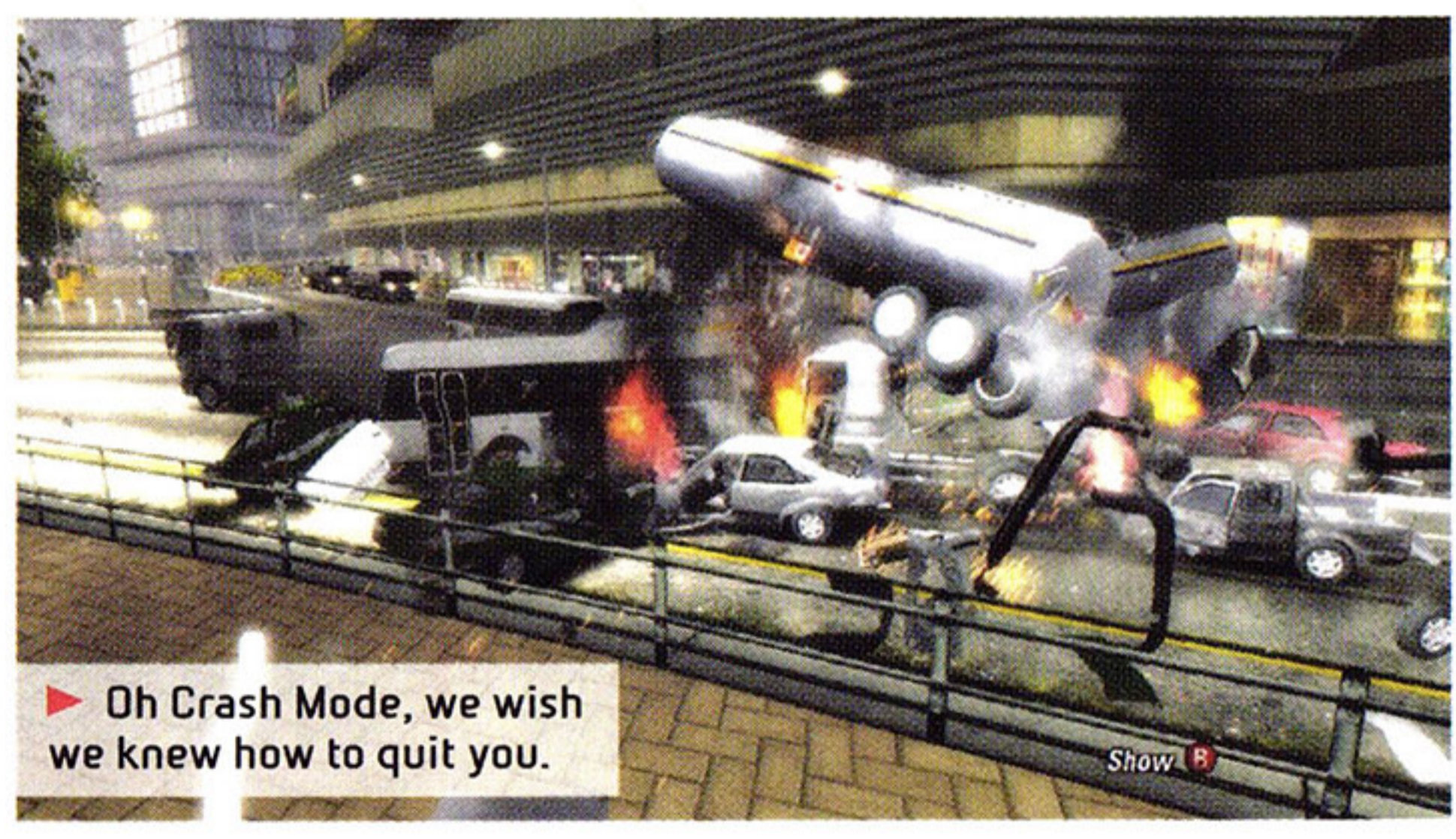
Is the bloom off the rose?



We still love the *Burnout* series with all our hearts, especially last year's *Burnout Revenge* for Xbox. But it's hard for us to get super-excited about what's essentially the exact same game that appeared on Xbox repackaged for Xbox 360. Since slight (but admittedly welcome) additions to the online component are the biggest upgrade to the experience, it's hard to give a ringing endorsement to long-time fans. Of course, if you never played *Burnout*, then put this magazine down now and go buy it; you've suffered without for too long.

But for those of you looking for "Next-Gen *Burnout*," this isn't it. More like "*Hi-Def Burnout*." Maybe the graphics don't look as impressive as a lot of other 360 games, but then again, old-gen *Burnout* looked better than anything at its time. This version has a much cleaner look and there's

a lot more detail, especially in the world around you, but there's not much in the way of graphical realism. Still, *Burnout* has always subscribed to its own idiosyncratic visual style, and we're down with that. We're also down with the super-slick 60-plus frames per second that the 360



► Oh Crash Mode, we wish we knew how to quit you.

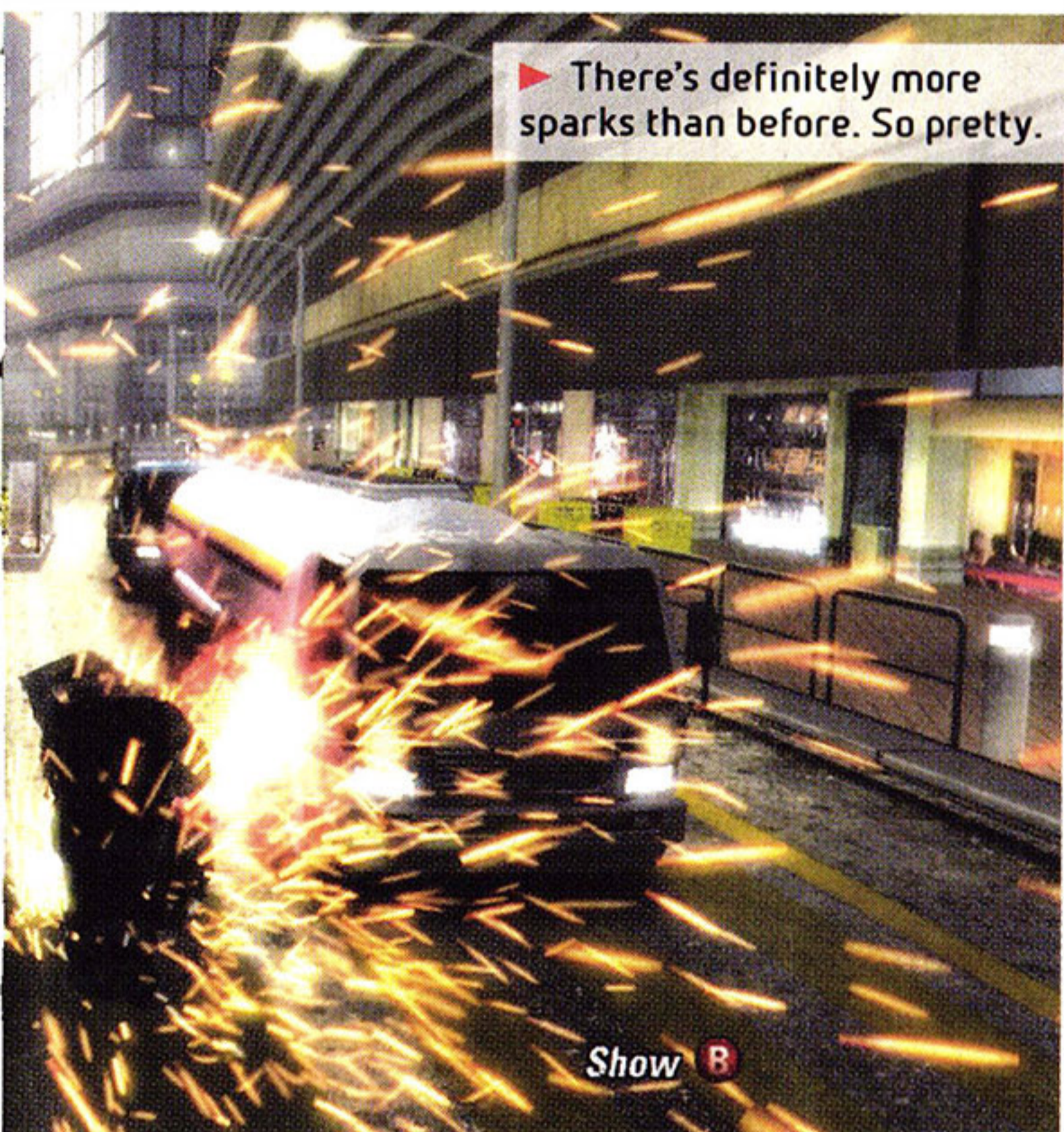
"Next-Gen *Burnout*' this isn't. More like 'Hi-Def *Burnout*.'"

maintains, even with all the crazy sparks and other particle effects flying around every screen. Believe it or not, *Revenge* on 360 feels even faster than before.

Four Things We Want To See in the "Real" Next-Gen *Burnout*

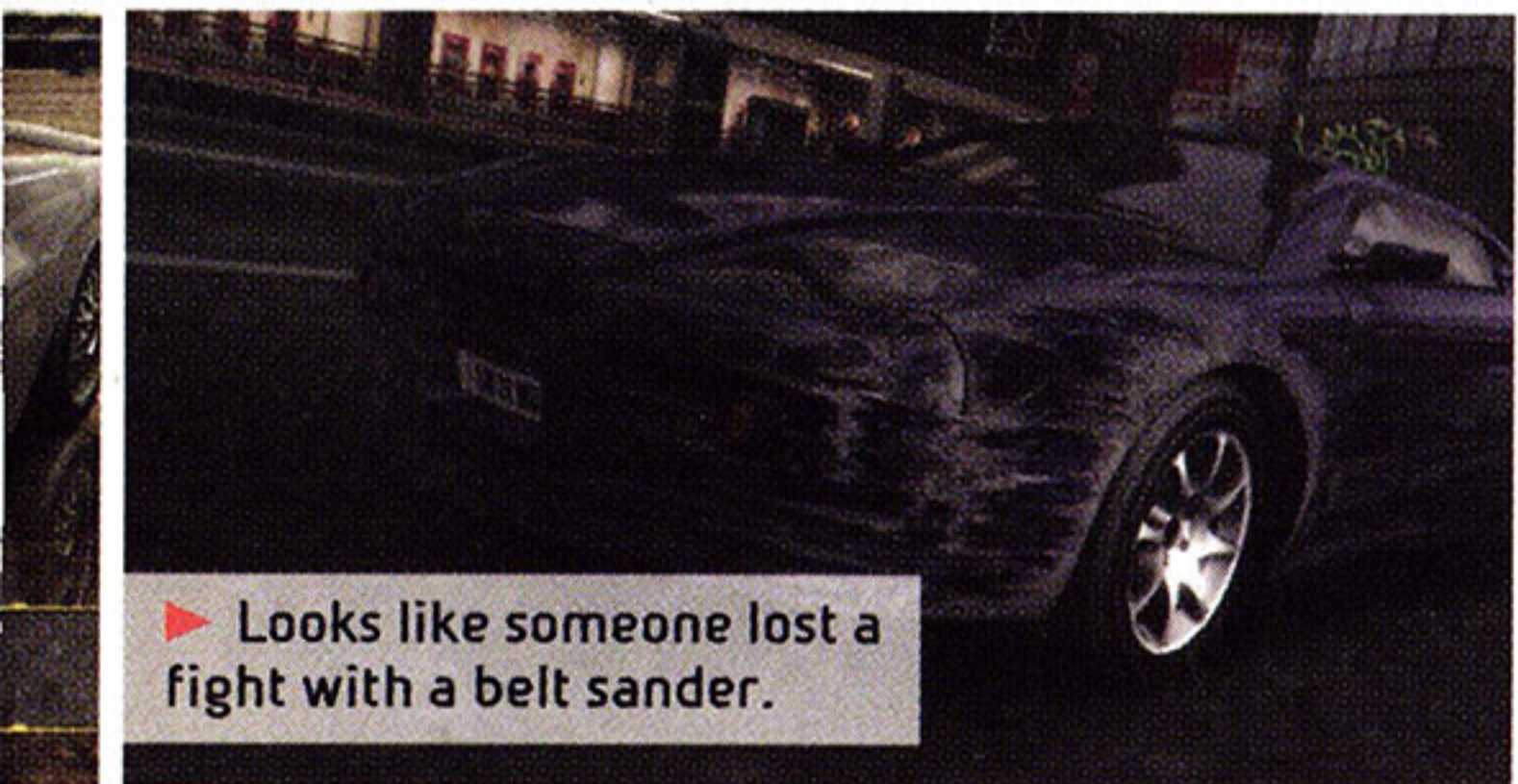
We don't pretend to be game designers, especially not ones who could tell the smarties at Criterion how to make a good *Burnout* game. They obviously know how to do that. But we do have a small wish list for what we'd like to see when *Burnout* gets the true next-gen treatment:

- GRAPHICS** We want *Burnout* to maintain its iconoclastic look, but maybe look more "next-genny," if you know what we mean. It doesn't have to look like *PGR 3* or anything, just give our jaws a workout.
- SOUND** I'm not about to complain about EA Trax because I listen to custom soundtracks anyway, but how about a radio tuner-type thing so I can change songs while I'm driving?
- CRASH MODE EDITOR** So I can design my own junctions and let my friends play them over Live.
- FEWER IN-GAME ADS** Can you lighten up on the in-game ads, marketing dudes? I'm getting fat enough sitting on my ass playing games; don't make me hungry for a cheeseburger while I'm at it.



▶ There's definitely more sparks than before. So pretty.

Show B



▶ Looks like someone lost a fight with a belt sander.

The enhancements to *Burnout's* online capabilities are more sensible than innovative. Tracking revenge rivals online, as well as giving gamers the opportunity to find their rivals and compete against them, is a great way to make a sort of anti-Friends list. We're also big fans of the new Save and Share Mode, which lets you post your crash replays online. We expect to see people put some ridiculous stuff up on Live.

Although this isn't the next-gen *Burnout* that we hoped for and the new features don't really make a second purchase essential, this is far from an indictment. *Burnout Revenge* for 360 is a fantastic experience, capturing the essence of the series better than any of its predecessors. But if you're still playing *Burnout Revenge* on your Xbox, you might want to consider waiting until the series' next installment. We still love us some *Burnout* and can't wait for its first real next-gen appearance. This isn't it, but it'll do nicely.

- Tom Price

THE VERDICT

- + Save and Share Mode
- Not enough new content. How about a new city?
- Graphics, especially the damage models, leave us wanting more
- ? Could EA Trax maybe hire someone who doesn't love only punk pop?



8.5

Curious George

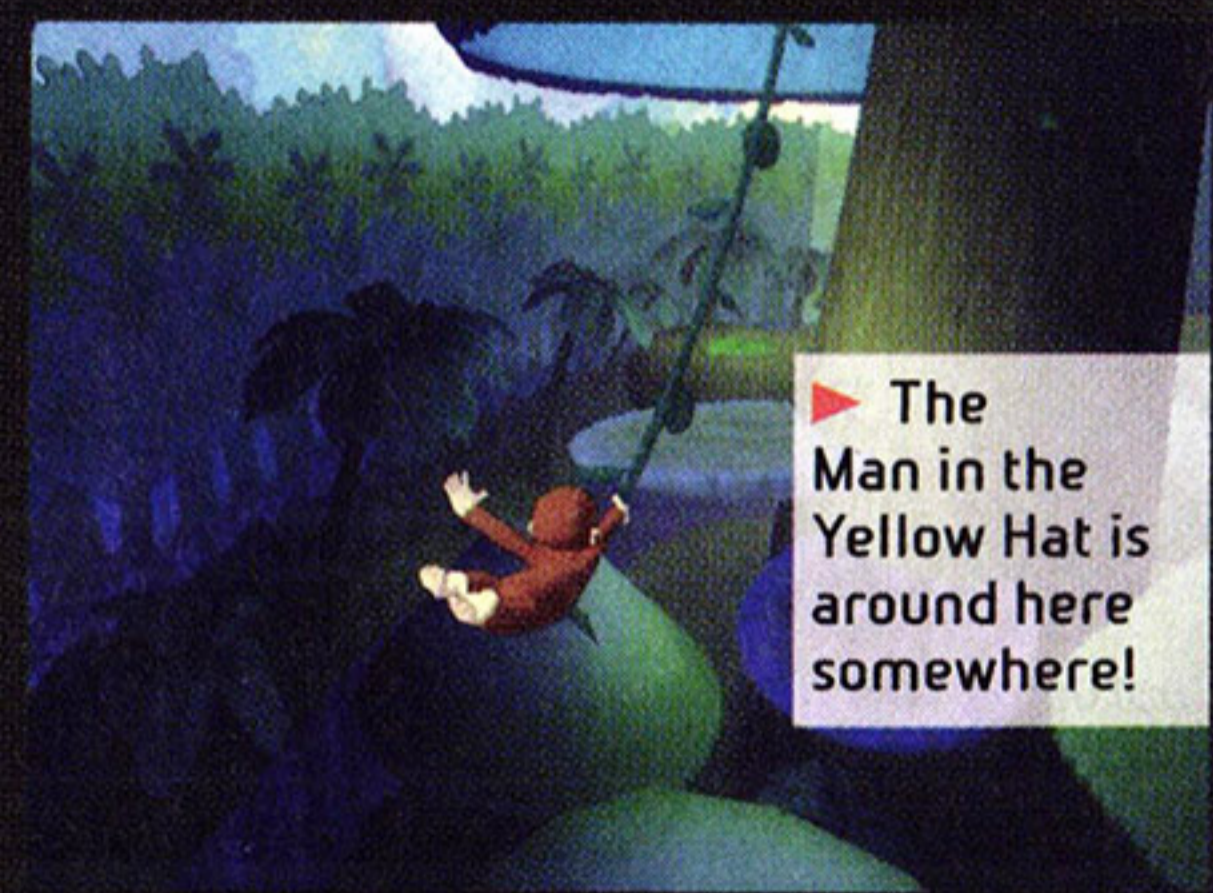
A little too much monkey business



Whether you own up to it or not, everyone has a soft spot for *Curious George*, the star of the whimsical, 60-year-old children's books and now a recent animated flick. Naturally, that means a videogame tie-in and a chance to play it with your favorite rugrat.

But some design missteps mean they'll need a lot of your help. *Curious George* mixes the expected platforming with mini-games like a *DDR*-style dance number, but the platforming makes extensive use of a double jump with tricky timing, while many of the mini-games require a careful reading of the onscreen directions before proceeding. Colorful graphics and frequent movie clips make the 12 diverse levels, which stretch from the jungle to the city streets, otherwise fun to explore. Don't expect to be able to use *Curious George* as a babysitter, but if you're looking to sit down with your little one and play a cute platformer, the two of you should have a good time passing the controller back and forth.

- Paul Curthoys



▶ The Man in the Yellow Hat is around here somewhere!

THE VERDICT

- Too complex for its intended audience to play without help.
- + Good variety in the levels and mini-games.
- + Bright, cheery graphics.
- ? Why do the items that George is curious about repeat so often?



6.0

College Hoops 2K6



March Madness goes next-gen

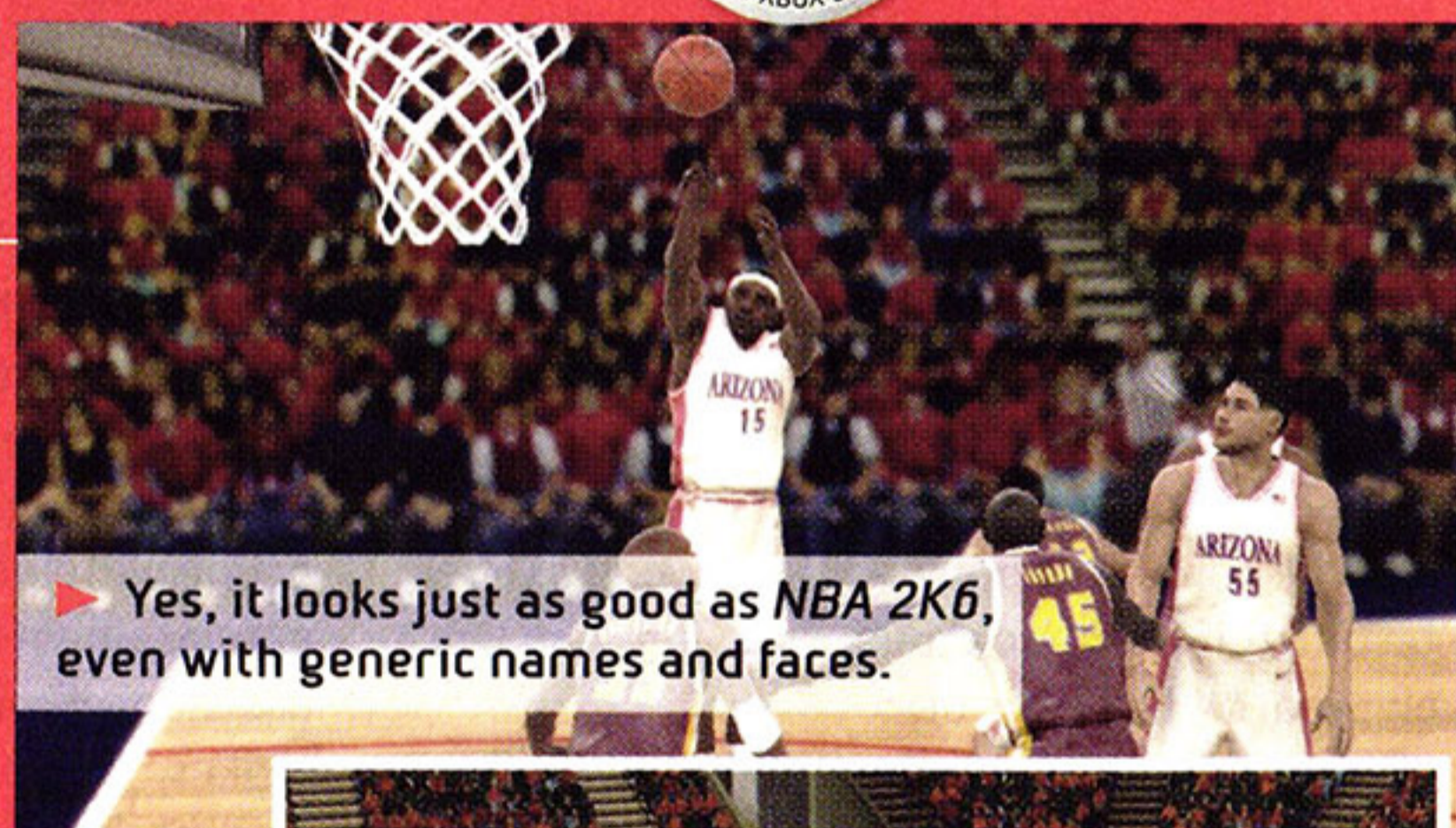
Just as it did with *NBA 2K6*, Visual Concepts has taken its latest

College Hoops version for Xbox, gussied up the visuals (way up), tweaked a few of the minor gameplay details, and put it out for Xbox 360 a few months later. That's the gist of it.

What that means is that, aside from an awkward control scheme we still find unintuitive, you get the same fantastic NCAA-basketball offering. While *College Hoops 2K6* might not seem like it plays all that differently from *NBA 2K6* at first glance, the plethora of coaching options (substitutions, match-ups, pressures, etc.) effectively separate it from the pro game and make it its own experience.

If you've already purchased *College Hoops* for Xbox 1, there's nothing new here to justify dropping another 60 bones. You're probably too deep into your season or dynasty mode to want to start all over again anyway. But if you held off on Xbox and you dig the college game and atmosphere, this is your best (and only) bet on 360.

- Ryan McCaffrey



▶ Yes, it looks just as good as *NBA 2K6*, even with generic names and faces.



THE VERDICT

- + Plays great; excellent coaching options.
- + Terrific presentation and animation.
- Awkward controls, particularly in the post.
- ? What's with the scary, Barbie-doll-faced cheerleaders?



8.0

Platform: XBOX 360 Publisher: THQ Developer: RELIC ENTERTAINMENT ESRB: MATURE Live/Multiplayer: 8 over Live and System Link; 2-player co-op over Live, System Link, and split screen; content downloads; leaderboards Selling Points: Crazy multiplayer options, great combat storyline



▶ Capturing this motor pool lets you buy fresh, heavily armored whips.



▶ Don't be afraid to splurge for top-of-the-line stuff when setting up defenses.

The Outfit

Wreck Shop



If you're at Ye Olde Xbox 360 Shoppe holding up a copy of *Call of Duty 2* and *The Outfit*, wondering which WWII shooter you should buy, you'd better understand that they're about as similar as *Project Gotham Racing 3* and *Burnout Revenge*. In other words, not at all. *The Outfit* does not aspire in the slightest to reflect the sights and sounds of real-life combat in dubya-dubya-two. It aspires to be one thing and one thing only: fun. And you know what? It is. Loads of.

But if *The Outfit* is so much action-packed fun – with its cigar-chompin', one-liner-spewin' protagonists demolishing the French

countryside, one occupied farmhouse at a time – then why does it also feel so smart? Because the developers at Vancouver-based Relic don't subscribe to the notion that fun equals dumb. Taking cues from games like *Mercenaries* and *Battlefield 1942* (a PC-only game, unfortunately), *The Outfit* enhances its squad-based shooter action with the ability to drop in vehicles, gun emplacements, reinforcements, and other assistance from HQ in the form of air and artillery strikes. This is no army of one.

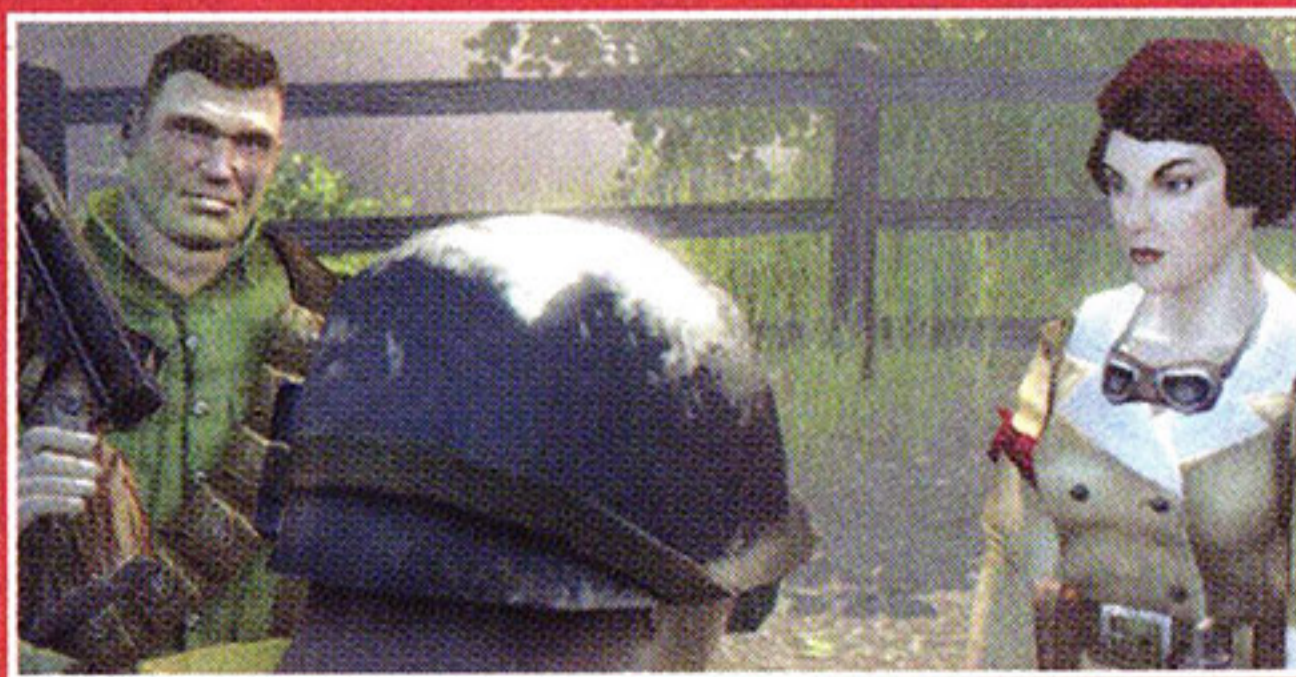
The Outfit's seamless integration of real-time strategy elements (or Destruction on Demand,

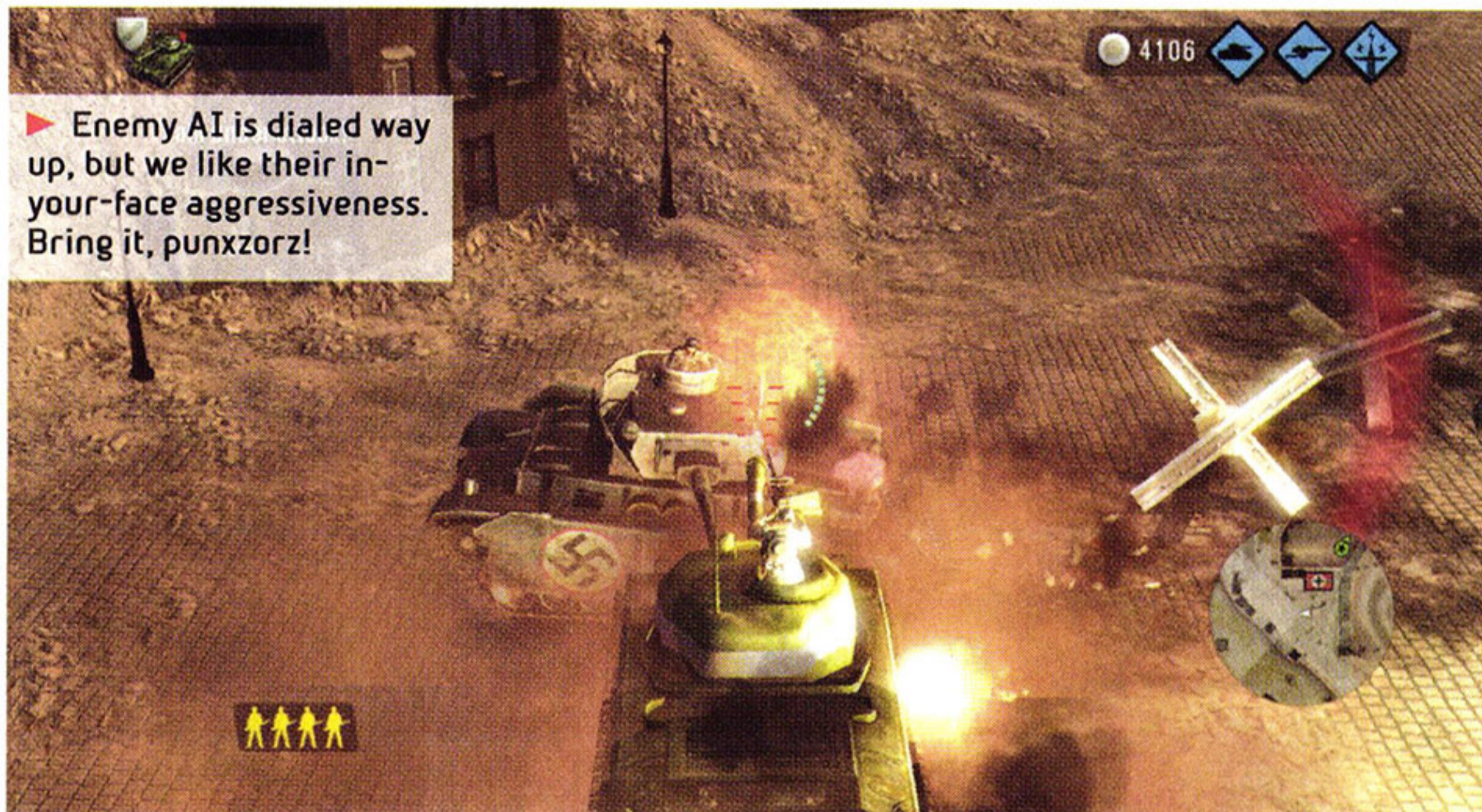
“The multiplayer action just jacks up the awesomeness a couple more notches.”

as Relic labels it) into its boom-tastic gameplay is done so well that it shouldn't scare off anyone intimidated by the word “strategy.” A typical mission involves you starting out on foot as one of the three “heroes” of *The Outfit* (see sidebar). You command a four-man squad that works to capture flag points and equipment factories which allow you to build vehicles, and are then delivered to you on the battlefield via air drop. Purchases like gun emplacements to cover your property, tanks, and other vehicles help you get through the incoming fire to the next objective.

Spoiler Alert!!! Don't Read This, Seriously

Okay, we warned you. Last chance to turn around. You sure? Okay, part way through the lovably ridiculous storyline of *The Outfit's* single-player campaign, one of the major characters dies. We won't tell you who, but let's just say you're down a hero for a bit. You do get a replacement, but not one you'd ever expect: a Wehrmacht commander who's defected. Now some people might feel a little awkward playing as a member of Hitler's army, but in *The Outfit*, there are the “good” Germans (the Wehrmacht) and the “bad” Germans (the Nazi-led SS). This dude is a good German, and he soon becomes one of your squad leaders, packing his own set of primary and secondary weapons, a deviously tricky squad attack (you gotta see it for yourself) and the ability to call in German-made weapons and vehicles. This character is fun to play if you can get around the guilt you might feel playing for “that side.” But hey, it's just a game, right?





▶ Enemy AI is dialed way up, but we like their in-your-face aggressiveness. Bring it, punxorz!

And even buying airstrikes is totally necessary to beat the game. But they will all cost you FUs (field units, we swear) – credits you earn from putting the smack down on your enemies.

For all the cool innovative gameplay *The Outfit* brings to the WWII shooter table, it suffers from a few frustrating points. These points mostly involve wonky vehicle controls and some overattention to the game balancing, which mar the experience by making weapons feel a little weak across the board. Maybe it's nostalgia for *Wolfenstein's* literal firehose, but Tommy Mac's flamethrower should be more fun to spray at a horde of screaming Nazis – but it isn't.

But still, these flaws aren't deep enough to dissuade us from charging through *The Outfit*

multiple times to acquire all the achievements and to, you know, have fun. The fact that the game plays like an open-ended experience, even though it can feel as boxed into corridors as *Doom* at times, just speaks to how much fun it is to build defenses and play combat tug of war with the balls-to-the wall AI.

The multiplayer action – including co-op play over Live as well as split-screen – just jacks up the awesomeness a couple more notches, but we can't help thinking how cool it would be to have a quasi-sandbox mode that'd enable you to play multiplayer-type games by yourself. Maybe that'll make it into the sequel – something that we're already getting pumped up for.

– Tom Price



▶ The more open-type missions – the ones with bigger battlefields – are usually the most fun.



▶ Yes, tanks can be taken out by hand. Very carefully.



▶ Wonky controls often result in sticky situations.

Meet The Crew

Even though the Destruction on Demand items stay the same, the three squad commanders you can cycle between every time you spawn all have unique attributes and their own set of weapons. Here's a quick breakdown of what makes each hero fun to play and what situations they're best suited for.



Deuce Williams

Deuce is the leader of "The Outfit," so it's no wonder he packs so much firepower. His bazooka is great against armor and gun emplacements, so use him to soften up the hard targets at any position, then command his squad to melee – they'll charge the enemy soldiers and slash their necks. Don't worry – they're just Nazis.

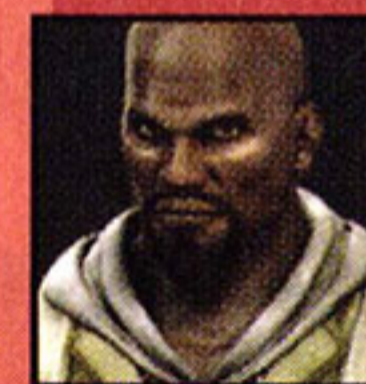
Primary Weapon: Bazooka

Upgrades to: Heavy bazooka, anti-tank rifle

Secondary Weapon: .45 revolver

Thrown Weapon: Standard grenade

Squad Attack: Melee charge



J.D. Tyler

We're not sure if John Davis Tyler learned his stealthy sniping skills on the mean streets of New York, but he and his four main road dawgs can

take out a nest of Nazis with a few long-range snipes backed up with a Molotov-cocktail and trench-shotgun charge.

Primary Weapon: Light rifle

Upgrades to: Rifle, sniper rifle

Secondary Weapon: Trench shotgun

Thrown Weapon: Molotov cocktail

Squad Attack: Vehicle attack



Tommy Mac

Farm boy Tommy Mac can dish it out as well as he can take it – he has the highest health rating plus two pretty serious offensive weapons. He's kinda

slow, so you want to call him in to hold off an attack on one of your capture points. The wall of fire his Zippo puts up should make anyone think twice about charging him, even a tank. The guy's also got powerful sticky bombs that exact more damage than your average grenade.

Primary Weapon: Grease gun

Upgrades to: Tommy gun, light machine gun

Secondary Weapon: Flamethrower

Thrown Weapon: Sticky bomb

Squad Attack: Tear-gas attack

THE VERDICT

- + Great concept executed well. Not great, but well.
- + Multiplayer modes up the yay-hoo.
- The jeeps handle more like tanks.
- ? Will a sequel that works the little kinks out be made? We hope so.



8.5

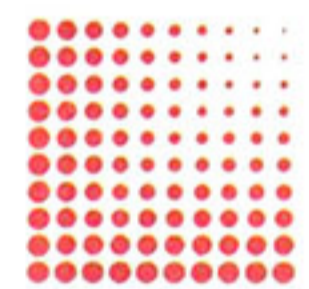


▶ Use your brain – not your trigger finger – to achieve victory in *FSW*.



Full Spectrum Warrior: Ten Hammers

A blessing that you'll curse



The following is the biggest qualifying statement we've ever made: *Full Spectrum Warrior: Ten Hammers* is a great game, but you will hate it by the time you make it to the end. If you make it at all.

Set in fictional Zekistan, the new *FSW* – still a wholly unique blend of action and strategy – again mirrors real-life politics, dumping your four-man Alpha and Bravo (and occasional Charlie and Delta) Army squads in the middle of some serious Middle East unrest. But unlike the first game, *Ten Hammers* mixes up the locales, partly by dividing the campaign up into chapters that give you occasional playtime as British coalition forces. Presentation is impeccable; sharp graphics and sound feature a moving orchestral

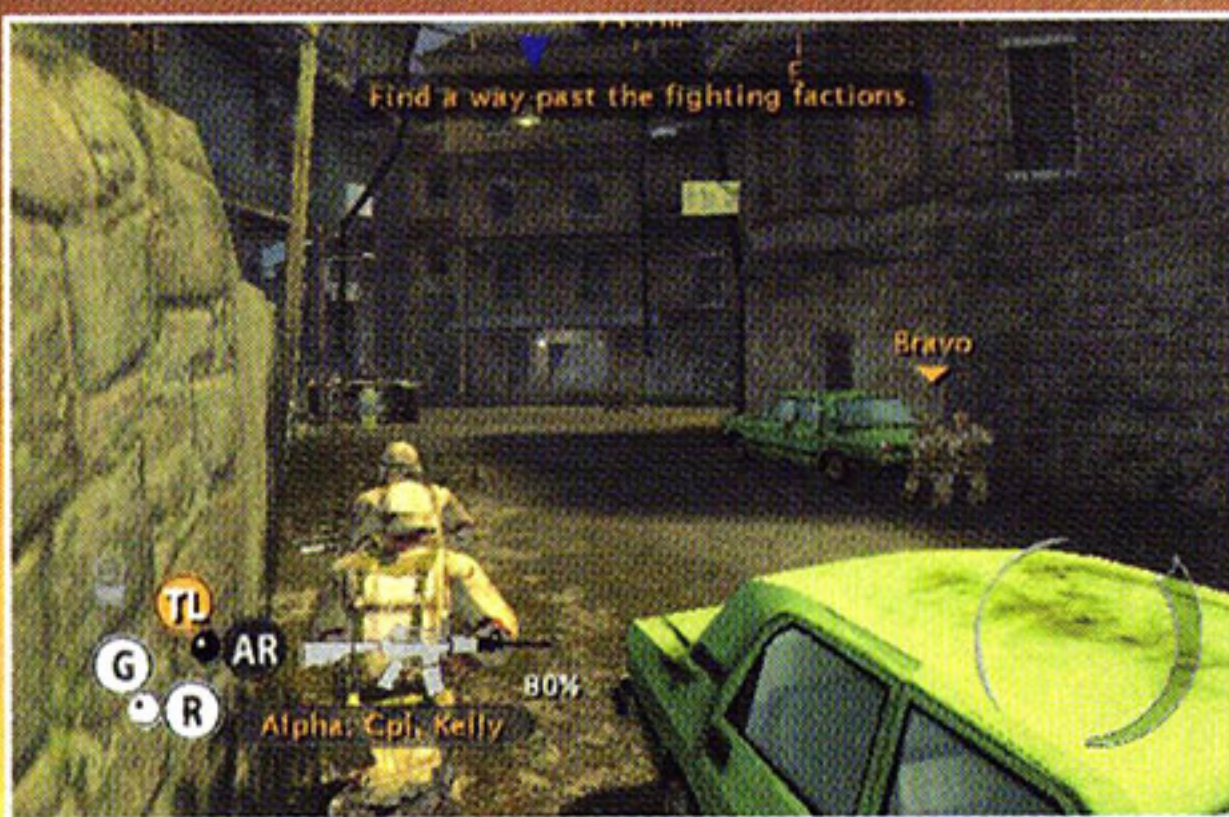
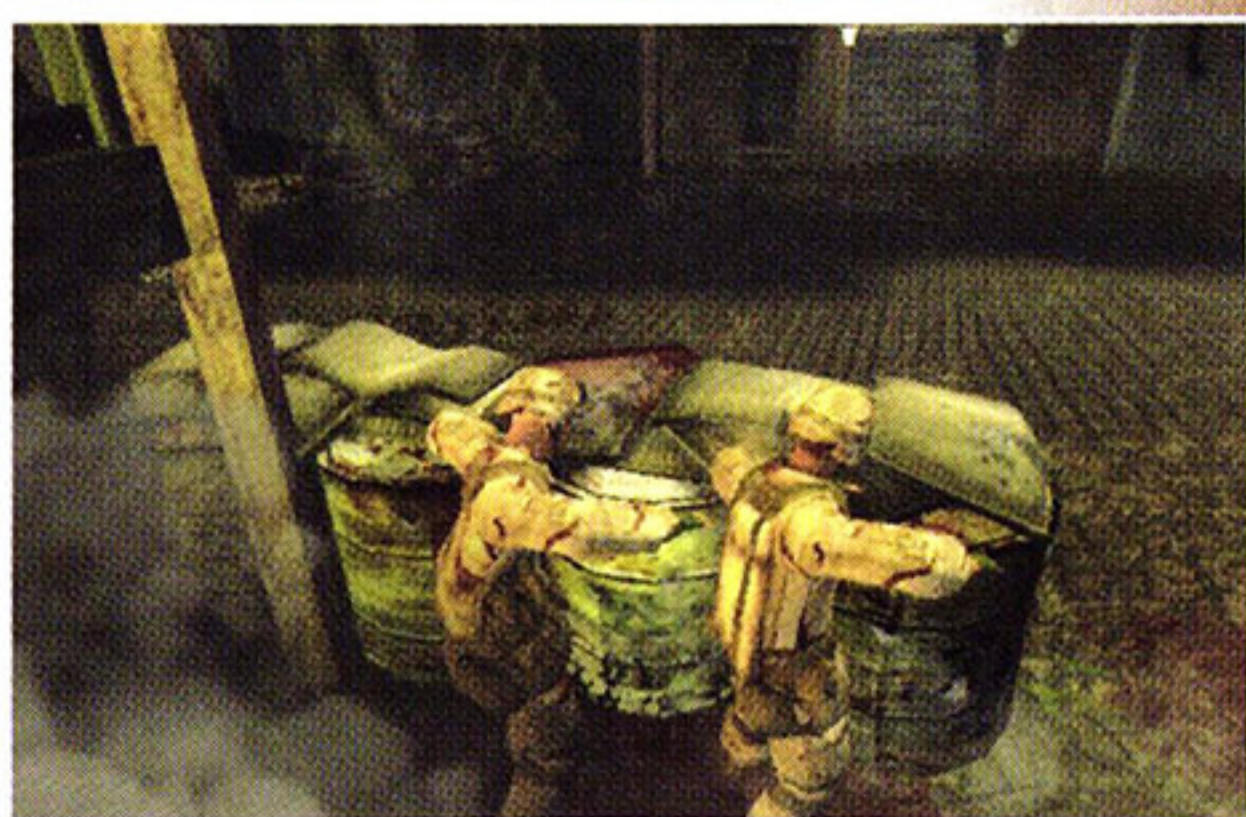
score and a steady unapologetic stream of profanity (straight from the soldiers' mouths). Other improvements include precision-fire mode, which lets you step out from cover, zoom in on a specific spot, and take down entrenched

“And though death can befall even a well-trained real-life soldier...perhaps *Ten Hammers* mimics this too closely.”

enemies. You'll need to use this almost exclusively by the end of the game. Another highlight is the refined command interface.

You can now deploy a number of new tricks, like splitting your squad into two-man buddy teams. But the most welcome improvement is the ability to command your other teams while guiding a different team, which means you don't have to constantly switch back and forth between crews to move each one around. It saves a lot of time and cumbersome camera swiveling.

Crushing the whole experience, though, is the difficulty level. See, *Ten Hammers* gets tough. Really tough. It begins innocently enough, ditching the first game's mind-numbing but ultimately necessary training sequence in favor of a first mission that throws you right into the thick of battle. (Fear not, noobs – it gives you plenty of instructions along the way with tips you'll need.) However, the challenge



Publisher: THQ Developer: PANDEMIC ESRB: MATURE Live/Multiplayer: 2-player co-op and 8-player adversarial on Live Selling Points: 480p widescreen, wholly unique strategy experience



Open ground isn't sufficient cover in *Ten Hammers*. Your squad should ideally do battle in Popemobiles.

Charlie

85%

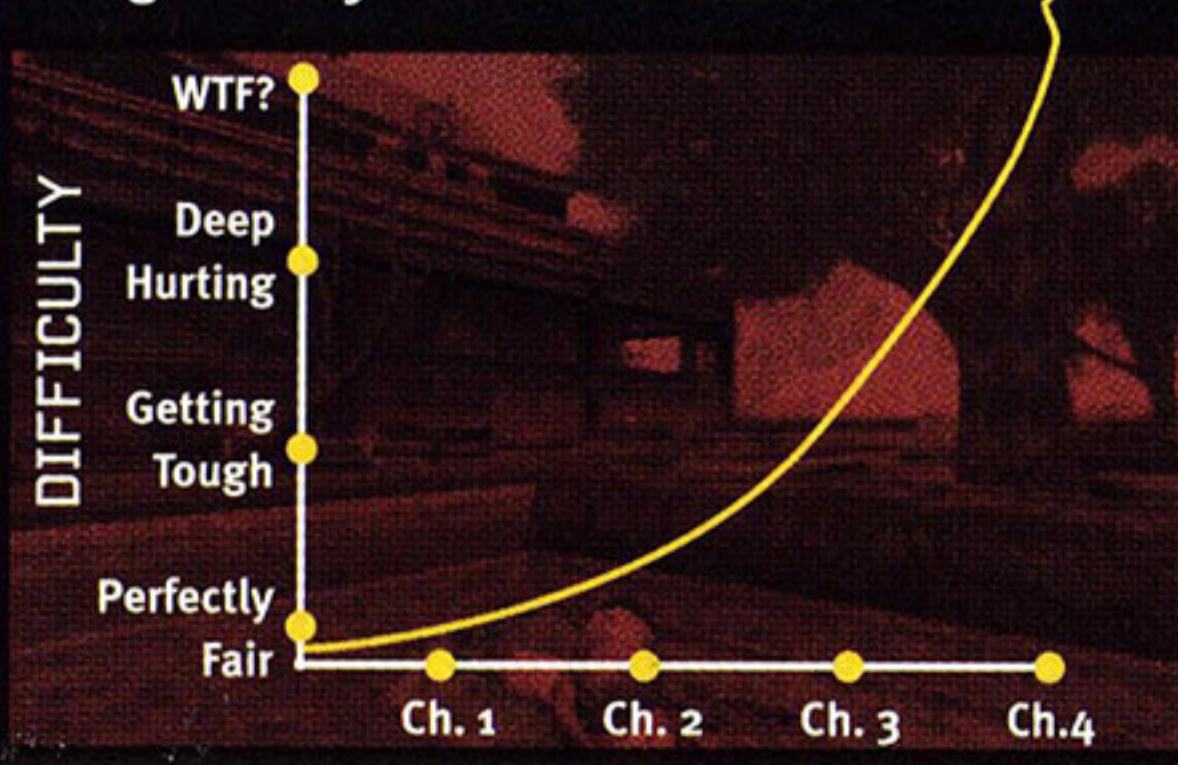
Cpl. Marquez

ramps up quickly, and the entire second half of the game literally steamrolls the fun in favor of realism. Random stray bullets bring down seemingly covered men, corners cease to be safe, and RPG-toting enemies pop out of nowhere. In the latter chapters of the game, you'll easily need two hours to get through each mission, replaying pieces and re-doing lots of bits as you beg for another checkpoint.

Look, we understand, respect, and enjoy the fact that *FSW* champions realism. And though death can befall even a well-trained real-life soldier without prejudice, perhaps *Ten Hammers* mimics this too closely, stripping the enjoyment out of something that is, at its heart, supposed to be entertainment. And before you ask, we were playing on the lowest (also the default) difficulty setting. At least the returning co-op play rocks and the new adversarial mode is interesting, but *Ten Hammers* as a whole is merely good when it could've and should've been outstanding.

- Ryan McCaffrey

Full Spectrum Warrior: Ten Hammers Single-Player Pain-o-Meter



THE VERDICT

- + Still among the most unique, cerebral experiences on Xbox.
- + Intuitive improvements to the command interface.
- Punishingly hard!
- ? Where are those night vision-requiring midnight missions we hoped for?

King of Fighters '94 Re-bout

Experience it again for the first time



If you could rebuild a landmark fighter with modern technology, would you? You'd need a pretty good reason to rewrite history... yet that's the only thing that feels amiss from *King of Fighters 94 Re-Bout*.

Is Xbox Live a good enough excuse? What about the franchise's 10th anniversary (um, plus two years)? Both seem to have driven SNK Playmore to rebuild the three-on-three brawler that pioneered fighting-game mash-ups. Sparkling new player sprites, full 3D

backgrounds....*Re-Bout* barely resembles the blocky NeoGeo original (which is also included). It still plays like the 1994 game, but with a whole lot of plastic surgery.

But with the superior *KOF 02/03* available for Xbox too, there's little reason to pick it up if you're not an SNK diehard. It's a fine love letter to fanboys and a yardstick that shows how far fighters have come, but for the masses, the remixed *Re-Bout* can't quite measure up.

- Dan Amrich

He's on fire! In the snow! Oh, you wacky video games!



THE VERDICT

- + 3D backgrounds, updated sprites, Live support, and that sweet Xbox sheen
- + Nostalgic celebration for hardcore fans...
- ...but for hardcore fans only.
- ? Why remake this instead of fan-fave *KOF 98*?

Sonic Riders

Sonic blues



Until now, only Crash had put in an appearance on the Xbox kart-racing circuit, but it was just a matter of time before Sonic popped his furry blue head into the mix. Coming at us in his usual "xTreme" form, Sonic and his friends don't just race typical karts - they race Extreme Gears, which are hovering skateboards that hit speeds of over 300 mph. As you progress through story mode, which is surprisingly short with only six tracks, new Gears and 20 characters can be unlocked. Those six tracks get vicious at times with sharp turns, huge jumps, and grinding rails, but once you've conquered them, you're left feeling kind of empty, as if there's no real meat to the game. Forget pushing game design forward - *Sonic Riders* doesn't attempt to do anything particularly new or inventive on the mascot-racing circuit and offers up



A lava level? Hola, Señor Cliché!

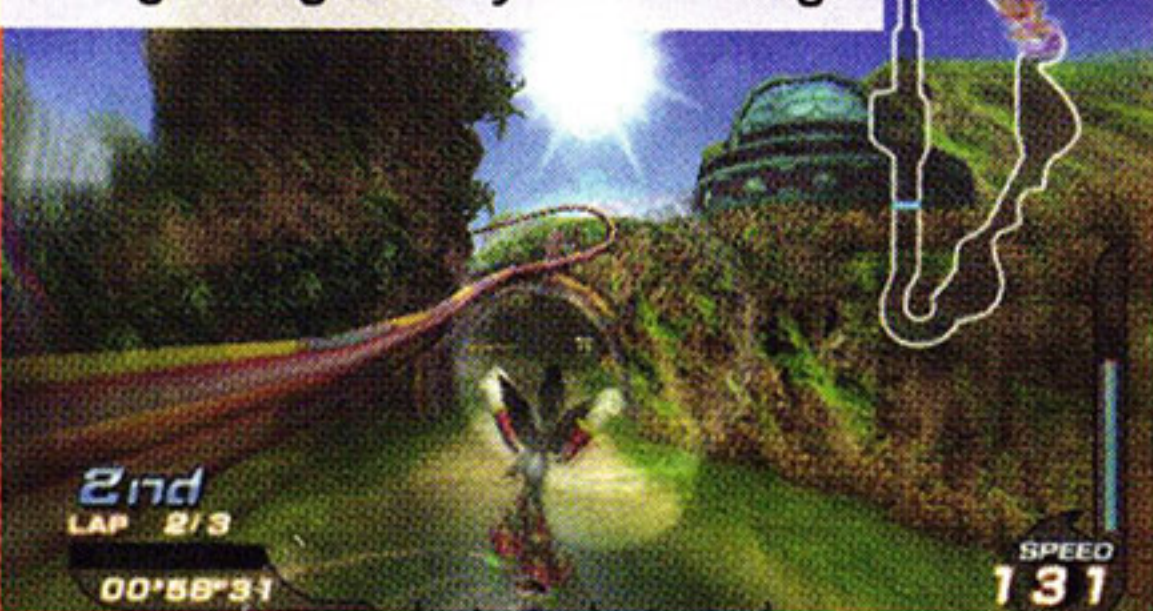


The sensation of speed in *Sonic* can actually rival *Burnout's* at times.

only short-lived fun tailored strictly for Sonic's most diehard fans.

- Thomas Baxter

Every time you land a trick, the game grades your landing.



THE VERDICT

- + Extreme Gears (hovering skateboards)
- Only six tracks in Story Mode.
- Three Battle Mode tracks.
- ? What's with the pit stops? If we wanted a more realistic game we'd be playing NASCAR.



The Untold Story of the Xbox 360 Launch



What's the real deal with the shortages? *DXM* separates hype from fact to give you the straight, unvarnished truth.

It happens every time. Game-console makers say they're going to ship millions of consoles on schedule, but the schedules always slip. It's happened before, and it happened again with the launch of Xbox 360. Microsoft had to debut the system in four major territories around the world – the U.S., Canada, Europe, and Japan – without enough product on the shelves, because this time delays happened so late in the process it was too late to reschedule the launch.

Media reports of shortages were widespread during the holidays. Gamers were angry at Microsoft and wondered if the company was deliberately creating a shortage to stoke demand. Peter Moore, corporate vice president in charge of Xbox, denied those charges and said Microsoft was paying dearly for air freight to ship as many consoles as it could to catch up with growing demand.

In January, the company reported it had shipped 1.5 million across the four regions. By year's end, it had shipped 900,000 units in North America, 500,000 in Europe, and 100,000 in Japan. But when the original Xbox debuted in 2001, 1.4 million units shipped in North America alone. Chris Liddel, chief financial officer at Microsoft, claims Microsoft will miss its 90-day goal of 2.75 million to 3 million units shipped – instead, his company's hoping to ship 2.5 million units in that time. New hardware manufacturer Celestica will begin production in February so that Microsoft can still hit its target of 4.5 million to 5.5 million units sold by June 30, 2006.

In many ways, it wasn't so bad. Microsoft shipped just about as many Xbox 360s this time as it did Xbox systems last time. The fiscal-year shipment target remains intact, and Microsoft still has many months to ship consoles before Sony's PlayStation 3 hits the shelves in North America. The past holiday season may very well

Similar items from all eBay sellers

Item Name	Winning bid
XBOX 360 GAME System Console "PREMIUM" 2nd Edition	US \$485.00 (Reserve met)
Microsoft Xbox 360 Game console Premium System Bundle	
NEW Xbox 360 Game System Console PREMIUM NEW	
NEW Xbox 360 PREMIUM Game System Console FREE shipping	

Ended: Feb-07-06 17:22:27 PST
 Start time: Feb-06-06 17:22:27 PST
 History: 26 bids (US \$0.99 starting bid)
 Winning bidder: krea504 (1) 8
 Item location: Columbia, SC United States

► Systems were still going for well over MSRP into February.

be forgotten if the 360 shortage quickly comes to an end thanks to more product landing on shelves. Microsoft executives say that as problems go, a product shortage was a good problem to have.

LAUNCH AFTERSHOCKS

But plentiful early shipments were key to Microsoft's strategy, and much of the game industry was counting on Microsoft enabling a smooth transition into the next generation. Instead, Electronic Arts missed its earnings targets, saying in press releases that the shortage of Xbox 360s was severe and caused people not only to stop buying Xbox 360 software, but current-generation software as well. In January, EA laid off five percent of its work force.

Retailers fell short of their allotted Xbox 360 system-delivery expectations, disappointing many customers who prepaid for their consoles. Since most console purchases take place during the holidays, it's possible that customers who were turned away without an Xbox 360 this time may simply wait for a PS3 next time. Moore states that retailers were never told that they would get a lot of systems. He said the stores jumped the gun by presuming

CONTEST ALERT: See that little screenshot on the spine of this issue? It's part of a contest! Simply email the name of the game shown and the page number it can be found on to letters@officialxboxmagazine.com with the subject header "Spine Contest 5." The winner gets a copy of that game.



► If he looks this bummed at the front of the line, imagine how those at the back of the line must feel.

they would have a lot more consoles at launch. Still, the retailers made their assumptions, and the gamers who didn't get their preordered Xbox 360s were none too pleased.

On top of this, the shortage of Xbox 360s helped Sony and Nintendo sell plenty more of their respective handheld systems. Microsoft's lost sales were gains for Nintendo and Sony, and those gamers may not have money left over for an Xbox 360. Sony may be late to the game with the PS3, but Microsoft wants to sell 10 million units before Sony can even sell one. Is it still possible?

WHY DID THE SHORTAGES HAPPEN?

"Whenever you do something this complicated – building a console from the ground up – there are always new and unique challenges that you encounter," said Todd Holmdahl, Microsoft's vice president in charge of hardware and manufacturing. "With 1,700 parts, it takes one part in the supply chain to cause you issues."

But it wasn't one single obstacle that caused

A TIMELINE

From April through September, the teams worked in small groups to determine everything from the chip strategy to the two SKUs to the name of the console to the fact that a basic version of Xbox Live would ship for free with the console. In October 2003, Bill Gates and Steve Ballmer signed off on the decisions. A couple months earlier in August 2003, Microsoft signed a deal with ATI Technologies, which began work on the graphics chip. The microprocessor contract took longer, in part because Microsoft was reluctant to part ways with Intel. But IBM signed up to make the CPU in November 2003. Both were working speculatively before they signed the deals, but could accelerate once the paperwork was done.

The 360's industrial design was going on in parallel during much of 2003. Astro Studios in San Francisco and Hers Experimental Laboratory in Osaka, Japan, finalized their work in February 2004. It was six months behind schedule, but it didn't damage the schedule.

For instance, development kits based on Apple Macintosh G5 computers shipped in February 2004. This allowed developers to start experimenting.

Both chip makers had to finish their designs

in fall 2004, which was a shorter schedule than normal for similar projects. IBM put 400 engineers on the design, while ATI had as many as 180 working on it. Executives in charge of the design at both companies state that they finished their work on time: ATI in September 2004, and IBM that December.

THE BUSINESS OF CHIPS

But prototypes don't just magically appear. Holmdahl notes it can take as long as 16 weeks to get a chip back from the factory since the

THE XBOX 360 DATELINE

March 2001: Sony announces Cell microprocessor alliance with IBM and Toshiba.

November 2001: Microsoft launches Xbox.

November 2002: Microsoft launches Xbox Live.

April 2003: Robbie Bach decides to launch the next Xbox, code-named Xenon, on a worldwide basis in fall 2005.

Spring-Summer 2003: Xenon team specifies what will be in the box and what kind of services it will support.

July 2003: Industrial design effort under way.

August 2003: ATI Technologies agrees to design graphics chip.

October 2003: Bill Gates (below) and Steve Ballmer sign off on Xenon plan.



November 2003: IBM signs deal to design microprocessor.

February 2004: Industrial design of Xbox 360 completed. Microsoft ships

Apple G5 alpha development systems to game developers (image below).

March 2004: J Allard announces 3,000 development kits have shipped.

September 2004: ATI finishes design on graphics chip.

November 2004: First ATI prototypes come back from factory.

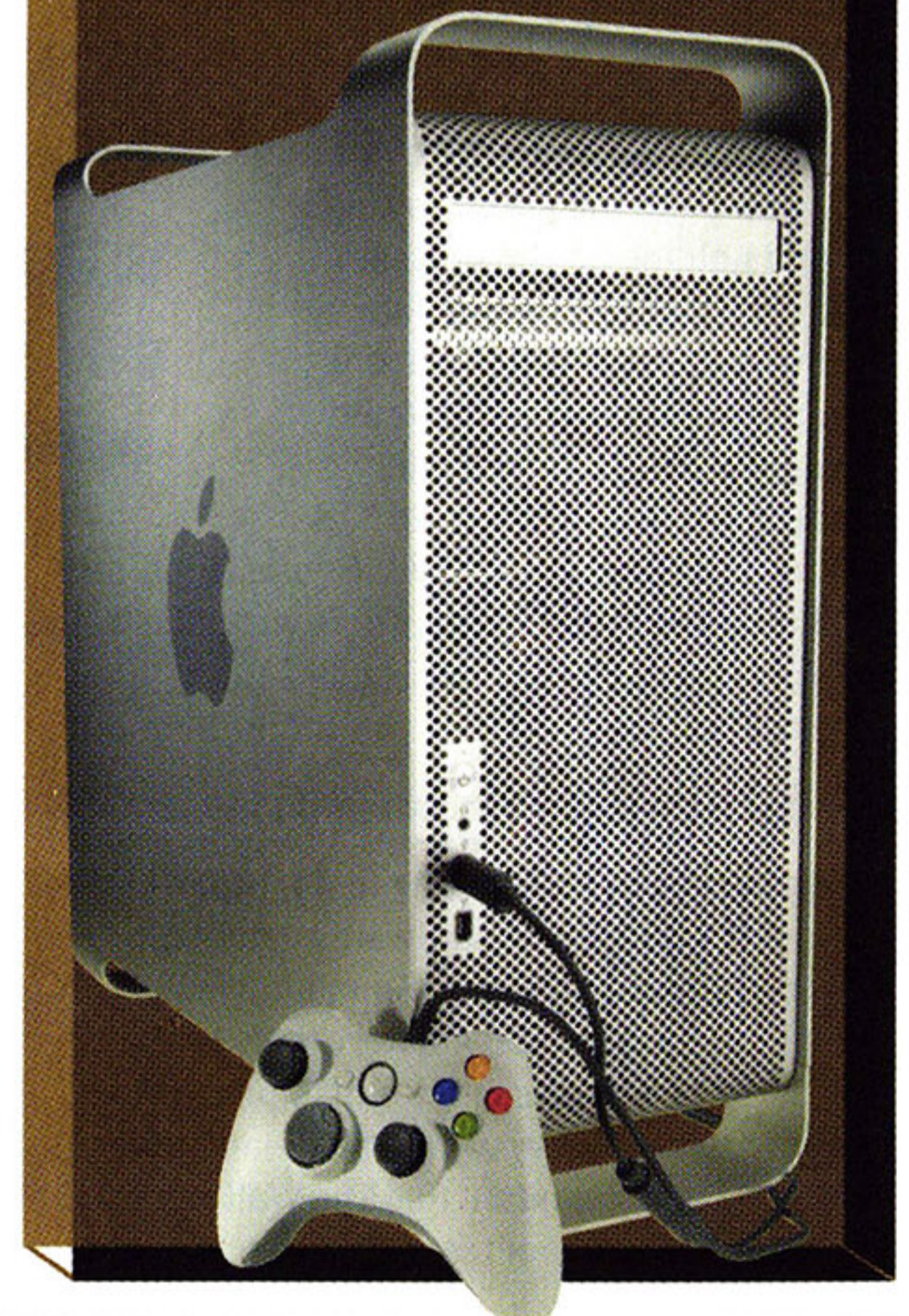
December, 2004: IBM finishes microprocessor design; Microsoft ships new development kits.

March 2005: First batch of debugged chips due back from factory.

June 2005: Second batch of debugged chips due back from factory.

July 2005: Microprocessor and graphics chips finalized. Microsoft starts shipping final dev kits. System assembly due to begin.

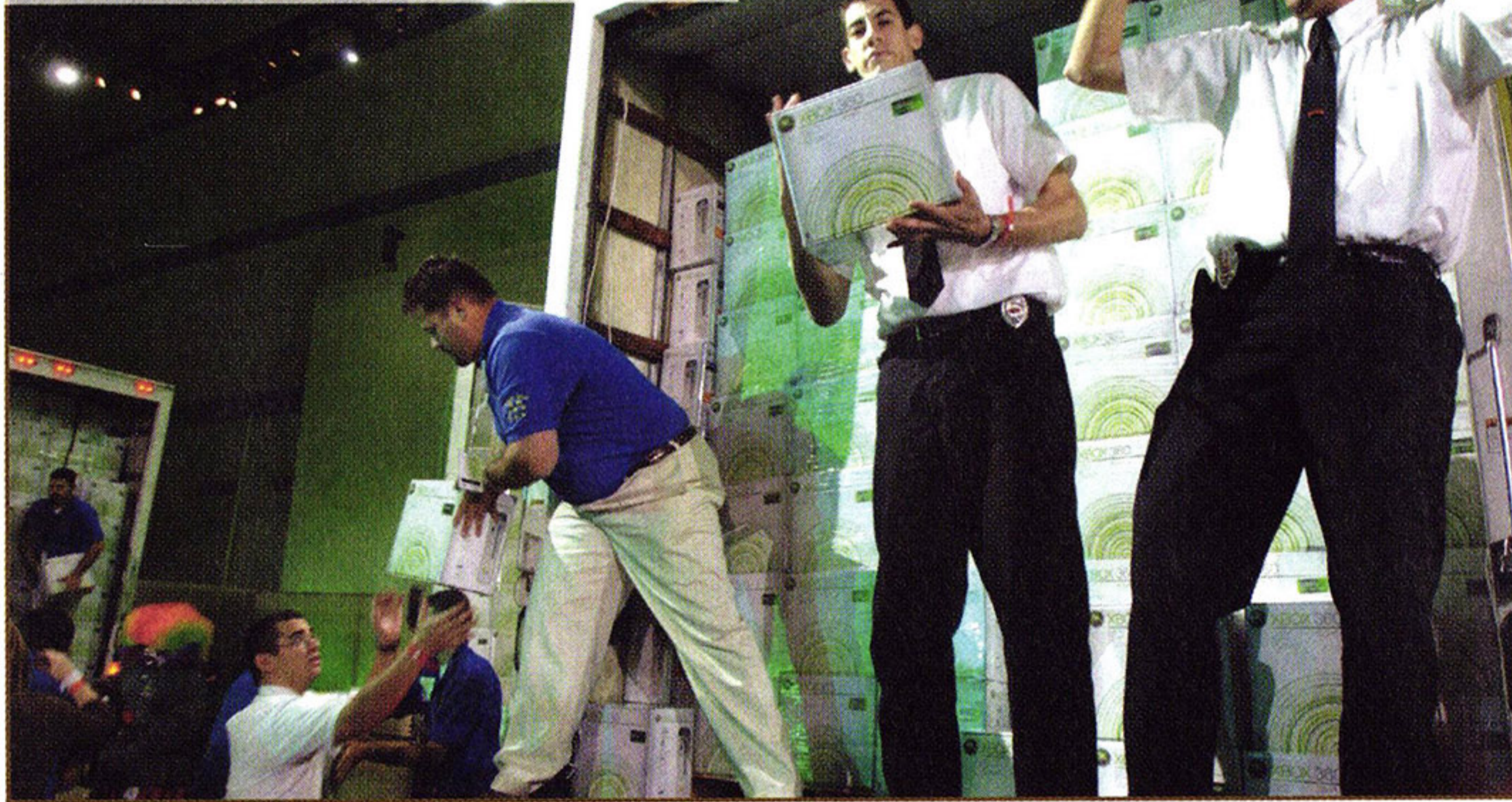
continued on pg. 89 ►►



"Microsoft still has many months to ship consoles before PS3 hits the shelves."

the shortages; rather, a cascading series of small delays was the culprit. First off, the worldwide launch simply made it challenging. Robbie Bach, then chief Xbox officer, decided upon this strategy when he declared in April 2003 to his internal teams that Microsoft would launch in fall 2005. At that point, the technologists inside Microsoft had been contemplating their next move for about a year. Bach's decision set J Allard's technology group in motion, working to define all things Xbox 360 (at that time, the project was still named Xenon).

Who knew that the middle of the Mojave Desert would be the best place to find a 360 for the first three months after launch?



sophisticated machinery has to layer dozens of processes onto the chips before they're fully "baked." Luckily, both chips were running game code within 48 hours of their arrival from the production line, and that allowed Microsoft to ship development systems with the prototypes in December 2004.

Still, those early chips didn't run at full speed, and flaws in them had to be debugged. Bob Feldstein, Microsoft's vice president of engineering, reports it took a couple of passes through the factory to uncover the trickiest bugs of the bunch – the ones that caused games to hang. Fortunately, Microsoft had built in the traditional six-month cushion for chip debugging.

Both IBM and ATI began manufacturing their final chips around July 2005. This appears to be a little later than scheduled, but it still wasn't a disaster. Dave Orton, CEO of ATI, says that the yields on the chips were good and the graphics chips weren't holding up the process. IBM, likewise, had its own factory up and running and was working with a second source, Chartered Semiconductor, to make the microprocessors in a second factory. Jim Comfort, an IBM vice president, said its chips were on schedule. There were small slips here and there, but everything still appeared to be moving along okay.

MORE CONSIDERATIONS

But there was a lot of testing to do. Leslie Leland, Microsoft's director of hardware evaluation, said that the hardware team in Mountain View, CA, had to run all sorts of regulatory tests on the first batch of samples. They had to bake them in ovens to see if they were reliable and then conduct tests. Holmdahl told *The Wall Street Journal* that one set of tests at one factory was

taking too long, so Microsoft's engineers had to rewrite the testing software so that it worked much more quickly. That cost Microsoft 10 days in the Xbox 360's production cycle.

Factories always need some start-up time. They make the first models and then test them. They work out the kinks in the production line, and it usually takes weeks to hit full capacity. On big boxes, such as game machines, full capacity usually runs about 100,000 a week per factory that's working 24 hours a day, seven days a week. If there's any sort of stoppage, a lot of boxes are lost.

So when crunching the numbers, if a console maker wanted to have five million units available at launch, it would have to start making boxes

"...the launch was compromised. There simply weren't enough weeks left to make up for the earlier delays."

50 weeks ahead of time. In a two-year cycle such as in the case of the Xbox 360, that would mean starting production just a year after the program began. Given the lead time on chip design, that just wasn't possible. It'd be like filling a glass with water while simultaneously building the glass itself.

Fortunately, there's a way around that: If the console maker enlists four factories to make machines, it could make 5 million boxes in just under 13 weeks. But the odds are strong that, after the launch, those factories would be idle during the post-launch months. That could cause crippling expenses. So the key is to balance the

number of factories, capacity, and lead-time, explains Jim McKusker, senior vice president at Xbox 360 contract manufacturer Flextronics.

BUILDING BOXES

McKusker says that the original aim was to start assembly of final units in July, when in fact the assembly began in August. Flextronics had to deftly switch over from making original Xbox units to making Xbox 360s in the same factory in China. Wistron, the second contract manufacturer, had to do the same thing. Both factories had the capacity to make 120,000 units a week, but only when they were running at full tilt. But this raises the question: How long did it take to get the factories up and running? Clearly, it wasn't on time.

In August, Microsoft announced a third contract manufacturer, Celestica, would make consoles as well. But it said later that the plan was always

to have Celestica not begin assembly until sometime in 2006. Should Microsoft have had the third factory up and running earlier? Why couldn't it get another factory running to help with the crunch?

McKusker at Flextronics notes that price tags could run high if a company were to get a lot of factories geared up for a launch and then have to run at lower capacity later on when demand is met. The costs of having too much capacity on hand can be crippling – a risk Microsoft didn't choose to take. Holmdahl also said that the hardware engineers were a limited resource. They couldn't spread themselves thin to get each factory ramped simultaneously.

It isn't clear when the factories made it to full capacity. But the time lost in bringing the two factories up to full speed was critical. At maximum capacity, they were making 240,000 units a week. But since they didn't hit their highest production numbers right away, the launch was compromised. There simply weren't enough weeks left to make up for the earlier delays.

Lastly, shipping by boat is the most economical way to distribute the goods on a worldwide basis. It takes at least six weeks for goods to reach store shelves if they are shipped by boat. By contrast, in 2001, Flextronics used factories located in Mexico and Hungary so that it could simply truck consoles to store shelves in their respective territories. That meant that replenishment took only days, not weeks. This time around, production in China was so much more cost effective that it made sense to use Chinese factories. Microsoft started air-shipping the consoles once it realized how dire the shortage was. But this measure still wasn't enough to put enough consoles on store shelves by launch day.

ZERO HOUR

Peter Moore said that there wasn't a single component shortage to blame, but a variety of them. Memory components were in short supply at one point. Complaints of overheating boxes cropped up, suggesting a systematic quality problem. But both Moore and Holmdahl denied this was the case. "The yielding-out of the factories was fine," Holmdahl said. "Compared to the first time, we are very happy with how it turned out."

But putting out a smidgen more units than it did in 2001 was a bad miss. Microsoft had done an effective job of building up the Xbox 360 brand and marketing it in the run up to launch day, and Xbox 360 was second only to Apple's iPod as a desired holiday gift. Demand was, in effect, much higher for Xbox 360.

Besides, launching in all three territories was complicated. The shortage came up so late in the cycle that Microsoft couldn't cancel launches in any of the regions. Each factory had to have multiple configurations of packaging to ship boxes to Japan and the different countries in Europe and North America, and the materials inside each Xbox 360 were changed for each region. So, Moore explains, even though the demand for consoles in Japan came up short, there was no way to repackage and ship that oversupply to Europe or North America on a timely and cost-effective basis.

WHAT NOW?

The consequences of Xbox 360's launch shortage are still playing out. Microsoft gave Sony and Nintendo some breathing room on their own launches. The system failed to ignite demand in Japan, at least so far. It allowed Sony and Nintendo to sell a lot more handhelds, racking up profits that those companies can plow back into exclusive game development.

The bad publicity could also take a toll. Even if not that many Xbox 360s overheated, the media reports about them are enough to scare away some buyers, who may wait for Microsoft to release new, revised versions of the 360 before they plunk down money.

Game publishers may be slow to forgive Microsoft for its part in missing their financial targets, and Sony and Nintendo may try to capitalize on that ill will. If Microsoft had launched millions of machines this past holiday season, it very well could have delivered a knockout punch. Now it has to look forward to going toe-to-toe with its rivals from a less comfortable position that it might've liked.

But it's this level of competition that will end up serving us, the gamers, better in the end by provoking a scramble to sign up more exclusive Xbox 360 games to entice more consumers, along with a bigger push behind the system's unique and flagship strength, Xbox Live. It might've taken us a while to finally get our systems, but if Microsoft is to make good on its promise of broadening the gaming experience – system shortages or not – gamers only stand to gain.

XBOX 360 DATELINE

CONTINUED...



August 2005:

Microsoft says 5,000 final dev kits have shipped. System assembly begins at Flextronics factory in Doumen, China. Wistron also begins assembly. Debugging systems takes longer than expected.

September

2005: Full scale manufacturing gets under way (later than



scheduled). System testing slower than expected, so Microsoft revises software.

Early October

2005: Sea-based shipments are due to begin from China to North America, but not enough systems are in the pipeline.

November 22, 2005:

Xbox 360 launches in North America with roughly 300,000 units available.

December 2, 2005:

European launch.

December 10, 2005:

Japanese launch.

December 2005:

Microsoft begins air-shipping consoles for faster delivery.

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– *Electronic Gaming Monthly*



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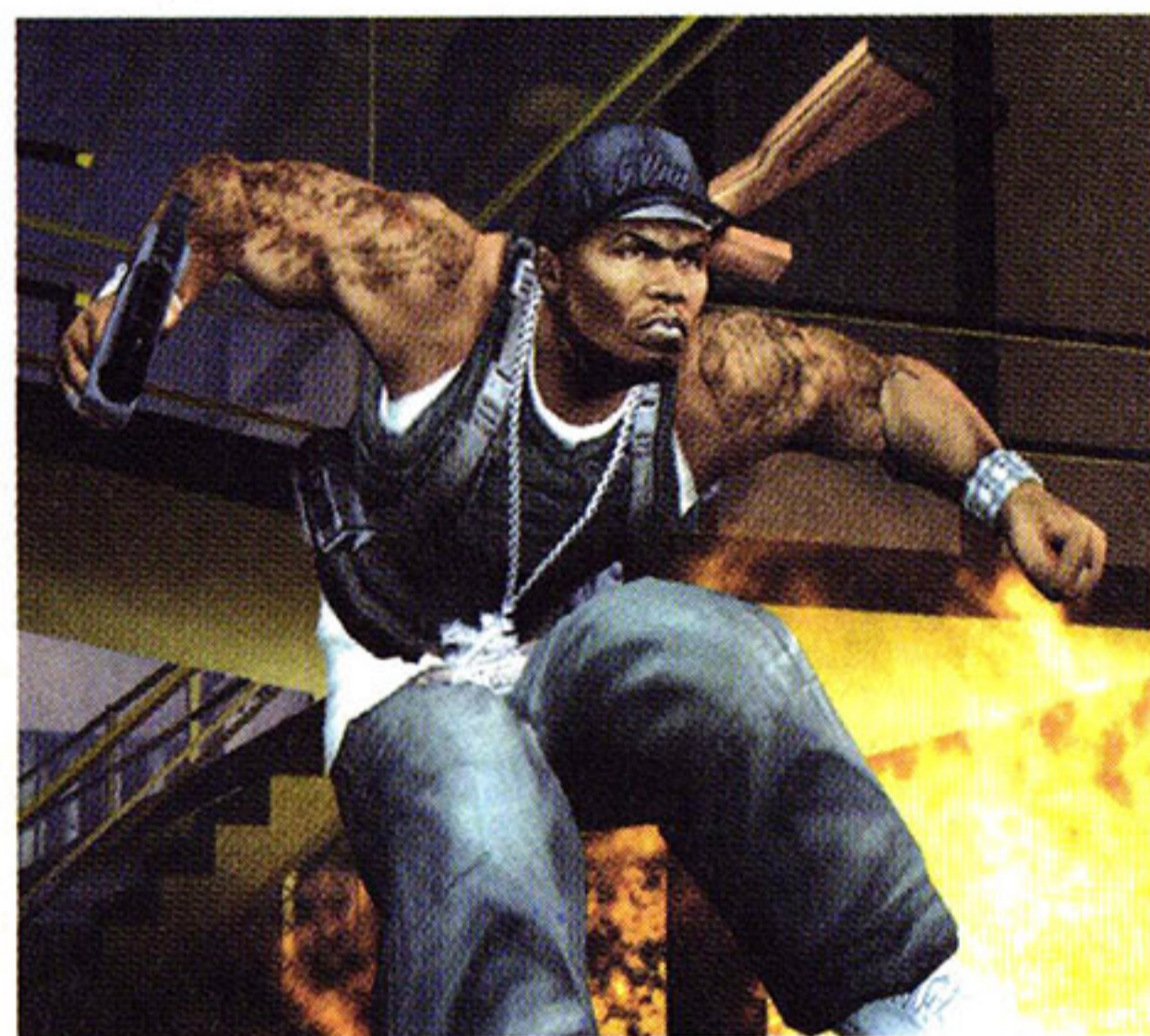
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Inbox

A glimpse at what's happening in the videogame industry from the skewed perspective of our email inbox



► Meet King Midas, circa 2005.

BREATHED A sigh of relief, by the suits at publisher Vivendi Universal. Rapper **50 Cent's** Vivendi-published thug-life videogame **Bulletproof** is the latest project to go platinum for the Survivor of Nine Gunshot Wounds after VU Games announced the game had sold a million copies, making it VU's biggest 2005 success not named **World of Warcraft**. Want to bet there's an executive at Activision right now banging his head on a wall for not scoring Fiddy for **True Crime: New York City**?

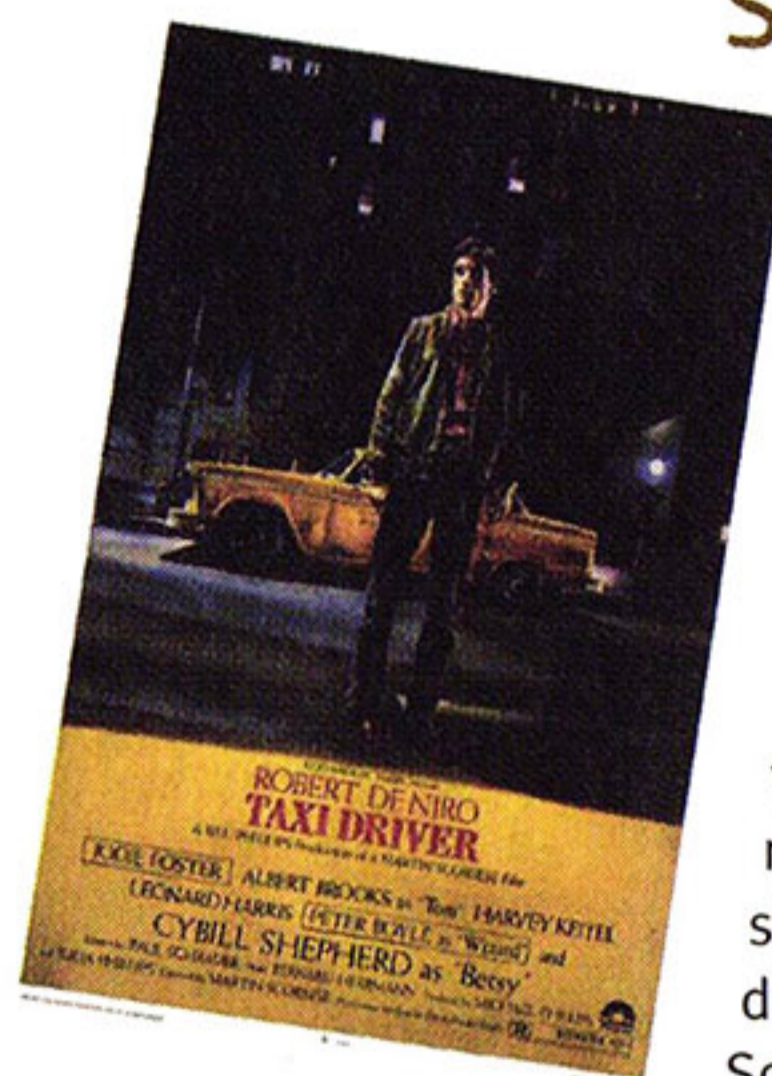
RE-AFFIRMED By **Microsoft**, its plans to continue supporting the **original Xbox** in the wake of the 360's launch. Following rumors that production had forever ceased on the "V1" Xbox, as it's referred to around Microsoft campus, the Redmond giant issued a statement to website GamesIndustry.biz stating, "We remain very supportive of the Xbox platform and there have been no announcements about **plans to cease or alter production.**" Notice it said it hasn't made any *announcements* about ceasing production. That's not to say it hasn't actually halted the assembly lines. Hmmm...

RUMOR MOLE

On the bad-news front, The Mole hears that, for the time being, the planned Xbox 360 version of the upcoming MMORPG **Vanguard: Saga of Heroes** is off because it "just got too big."...Despite the head-scratching move by Sega to only release **Phantasy Star Universe** on current-generation platforms and only on PS2 at that, don't give up hope just yet for an Xbox 360 version...Don't count on an Xbox 360 version of the loooong-in-development stealth-action title **StarCraft: Ghost**. If it ever sees the light of day, it will be on current-gen platforms only...Also in the Blizzard camp is the question of the killer-app MMORPG **World of Warcraft** showing up on Xbox 360. Will it happen? The Mole hears no, unless it's a separate, console-specific product in the vein of **EverQuest Online Adventures** for PS2...While we're musing about killer apps, cross your fingers for the PSP's **Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories** to see an Xbox 1 release this year...Rumors have (once again) been swirling about Microsoft getting into the handheld gaming arena to compete with Sony's PSP and Nintendo's GBA and DS. The Mole's here to tell you it's not happening. A music-playing device – an xPod, if you will – would be another story.

HURTING

Psychonauts and **Advent Rising** publisher **Majesco**. Despite hype for the latter and universally glowing reviews for the former, neither sold a lick (we blame ourselves for not buying 15 copies of *Psychonauts* each), and it's finally caught up to the publisher, who's had to cut Terminal Reality's in-development Xbox 360 title **Demonik** and the movie-license game based on the film **Taxi Driver**.



► Apparently spy work keeps you fit and can actually reverse the aging process.

DELAYED Until September, the release of **Splinter Cell Double Agent**. The bump comes as no surprise to the cynical curmudgeons here at the Inbox, who speculate Ubisoft signed off on the delay when it realized that it was putting out *Splinter Cell* games so fast that **series star Sam Fisher had actually begun to get younger** in each game. Seriously, how can a 50-year-old Sam in the original *Splinter Cell* suddenly look 35 some four years later? And can we get some of what he's having?



SLASHED

Prices for most original Xbox games by **EA**. The company reported strong sales of its Xbox 360 launch lineup to close out 2005, but as 360 momentum ramps up and the general gaming consciousness turns to thoughts of next-gen gaming, current-gen sales have slowed. A total of 48 EA offerings have been discounted, each **marked down \$10-\$20**. So in case you missed out on that hot copy of **Catwoman** last year, now's your chance to pick it up on the cheap. Or not...



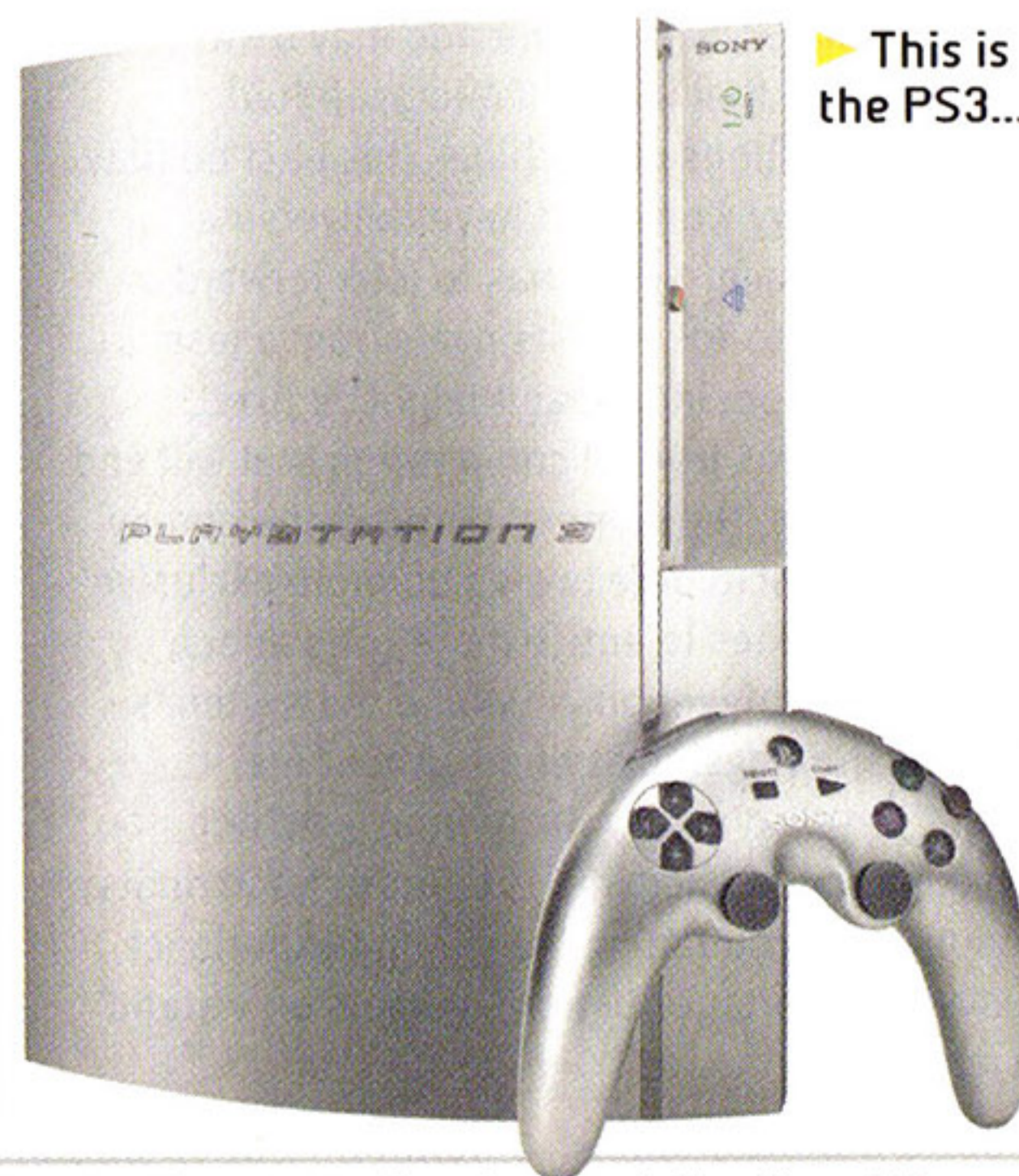
BURNED

Some of the offices at publisher **2K Games'** New York City headquarters, when a five-alarm fire broke out at street-level retail shops and spread to 2K's third-story digs. We were tempted – really, really tempted – to make some wisecrack about the burning of anti-videogame attorney **Jack Thompson's** "pull-GTA-off-store-shelves-now-or-else" letters being the fire hazard that started it all, but six people were injured in the blaze, so it's no laughing matter, and we wish them a full and speedy recovery.



PONDERING

A Sony copycat version of **Xbox Live** for the **PlayStation 3**, according to an SCEA email survey sent out to customers. Among the topics the survey asks its respondents about is whether or not they'd like "a single



► This is the PS3...

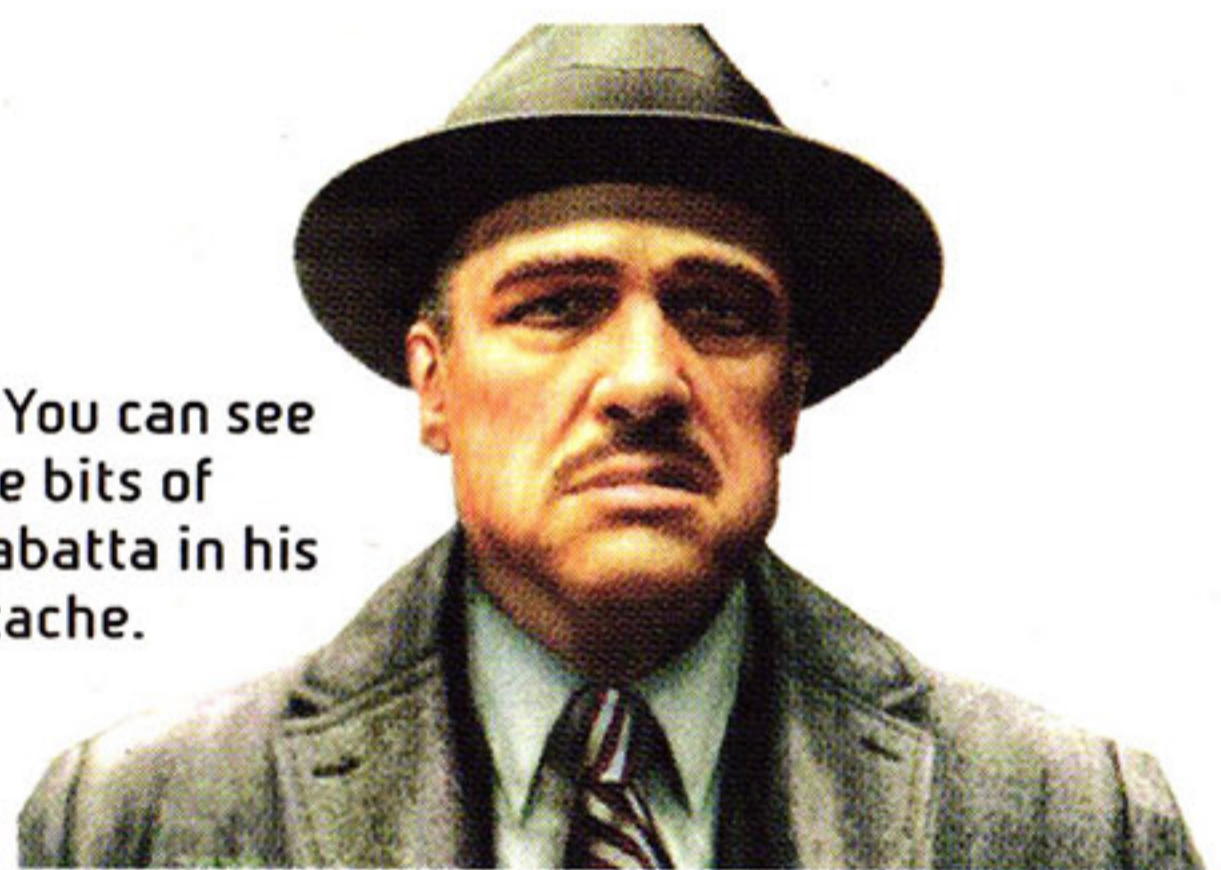
"GEOMETRY WARS HAS BEEN OUR HALO."



– Xbox Live Arcade Group Manager Greg Canessa, on the wildfire popularity of the five-dollar Arcade title by PGR3 studio Bizarre Creations, which has seen over 200,000 trial downloads and 70,000 purchases.

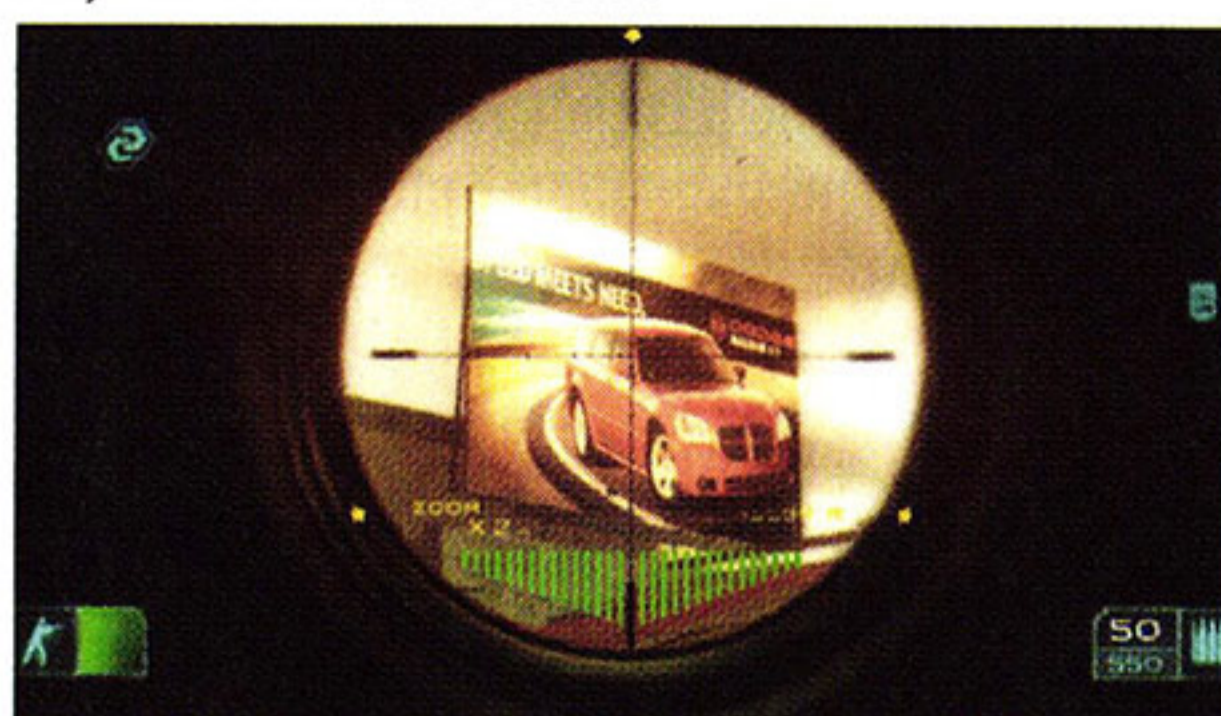
identity and password for all online games," "headset support in all online games," "Friends List," and "private messaging across games," to name a few. Best of luck to Sony on catching up with four years of Xbox Live's smooth-as-silk evolution. They'll definitely need it.

STAGGERED The releases of EA's upcoming sandbox free-roamer **The Godfather** for Xbox and Xbox 360. The current-gen version should be out about the time you read this, but **the pumped-up 360 edition won't be making you an offer you can't refuse until summer.** Hats off to EA for taking the time and extra effort to really next-gen-ify the game, but we're not sure if we want a detailed-to-the-pore version of **Marlon Brando's** face. Eek.



▶ You can see the bits of ciabatta in his 'stache.

BALLOONED To over \$8 billion, the amount of revenue to be generated by "advergaming" (a.k.a. in-game advertising) by 2008, according to David Wanetick of investment publication The Wall Street Transcript. While conservative ad placement is no problem and can even go so far as to enhance realism, we swear that if we play one game where **ads pop up** in the middle of the action (like the ones that currently ruin our weekly **Smallville** viewings), hell hath no fury like the Inbox's scorn.



▶ Dodge: Now available in Mexico City!

ANNOUNCED A PC game to be used as a **National Guard** recruitment tool by publisher **Playlogic** and developer **Rebellion** (*Aliens vs. Predator*). Following in the footsteps of the Army's brilliant **Full Spectrum Warrior** and the Marines' **Close Combat: First to Fight, PRISM: Guard Shield** will have you defending U.S. targets from terrorist attack. So does its National Guard backing mean we only have to play it one weekend a month in order to remain in good standing with the game's publisher?

REVEILED By everyone, the recently released thug shooter **25 to Life**. The game was chastised for its violent content by New York senator **Charles Schumer** last year, well before its release. Now the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund (**NLEOMF**), upset at the cop-killing gameplay, is the latest to jump on the anti-25 to Life bandwagon. It's calling for a boycott of the title by retailers. Might we suggest dumping them all in a landfill, **Atari 2600 E.T.**-style – a fate befitting a game we scored 2.0 in last month's issue?



UNKNOWN The release date for the **PlayStation 3**. While **Nintendo** president Satoru Iwata has publicly stated that the next Nintendo console, the remote-controlled box codenamed **Revolution**, will be out in America before Thanksgiving, Sony has been far more coy about its plans for rolling out its **George Foreman Grill**-shaped system. With rumors of unfinished hardware, non-existent game development kits, and numerous analysts predicting a slide into next year, chances are slim that anyone will be winging its boomerang controllers across their dorm room for at least a Blu-Ray moon or two.



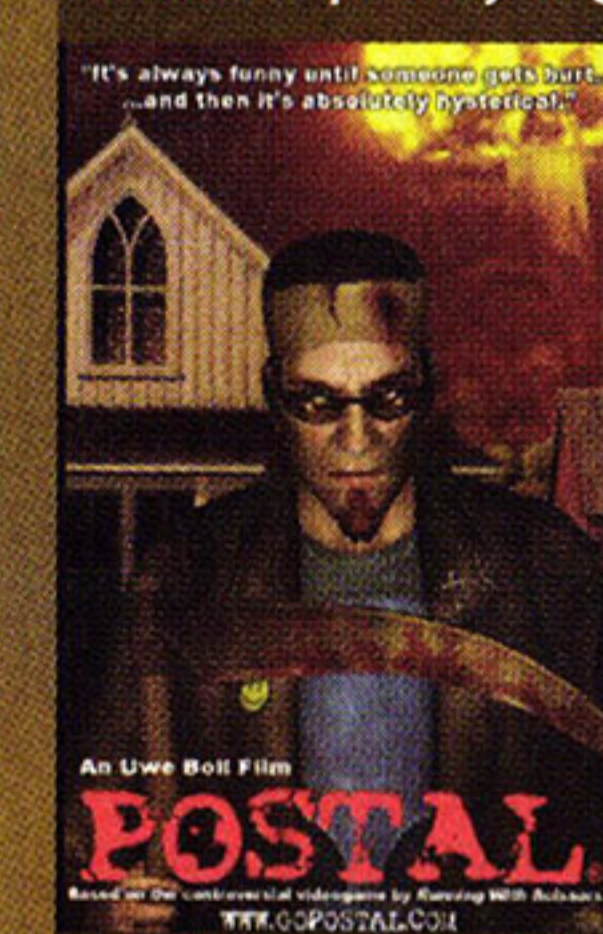
▶ ...This isn't the PS3.

COMING To Xbox 360, two new games from independent PC developer **Derek Smart** and his software house, **3000AD**. The games – **Hostile Intent: Planetfall** and **KnightBlade: Line of Defense** – are new IPs, the former being a pure action outing while the latter aims to be a genre-bending ship combat title. Veteran PC gamers are probably already smiling at the mention of Smart, whose outspoken nature has landed him in the middle of many Internet message-board flame wars. Hey Derek, we don't know you yet, so feel free to stop by our message boards anytime!

Floating in the Boll

THE LATEST ON UWE BOLL'S DEATH-DEFYING VIDEOGAME FILMMAKING CAREER

Like a fiery train wreck, we can't help but be completely engrossed by all



things Uwe Boll. The director's single-handed destruction of the videogame-film genre makes our blood boil, but at the same time, we admit that we're glued to our

DVD players, giggling at the cinematic disaster that worsens with each new Boll movie. We already seem to mention him every month here at Inbox, so we've decided to make him a regular part of our little Inbox sideshow.

THIS MONTH, UWE IS...

Watching *House of the Dead 2*, the sequel to his first (but somehow, not his worst) videogame film adaptation. The kicker? He's not involved with this one. How a sequel to a film that grossed \$13.8 million worldwide gets made, we'll never know, but unsurprisingly, it's a Sci-Fi Channel, made-for-TV flick. An early review on website *Ain't It Cool News* ironically noted that "there is not a single house in this movie" before saying, "Maybe it's better than the first one, but who gives a s---?"

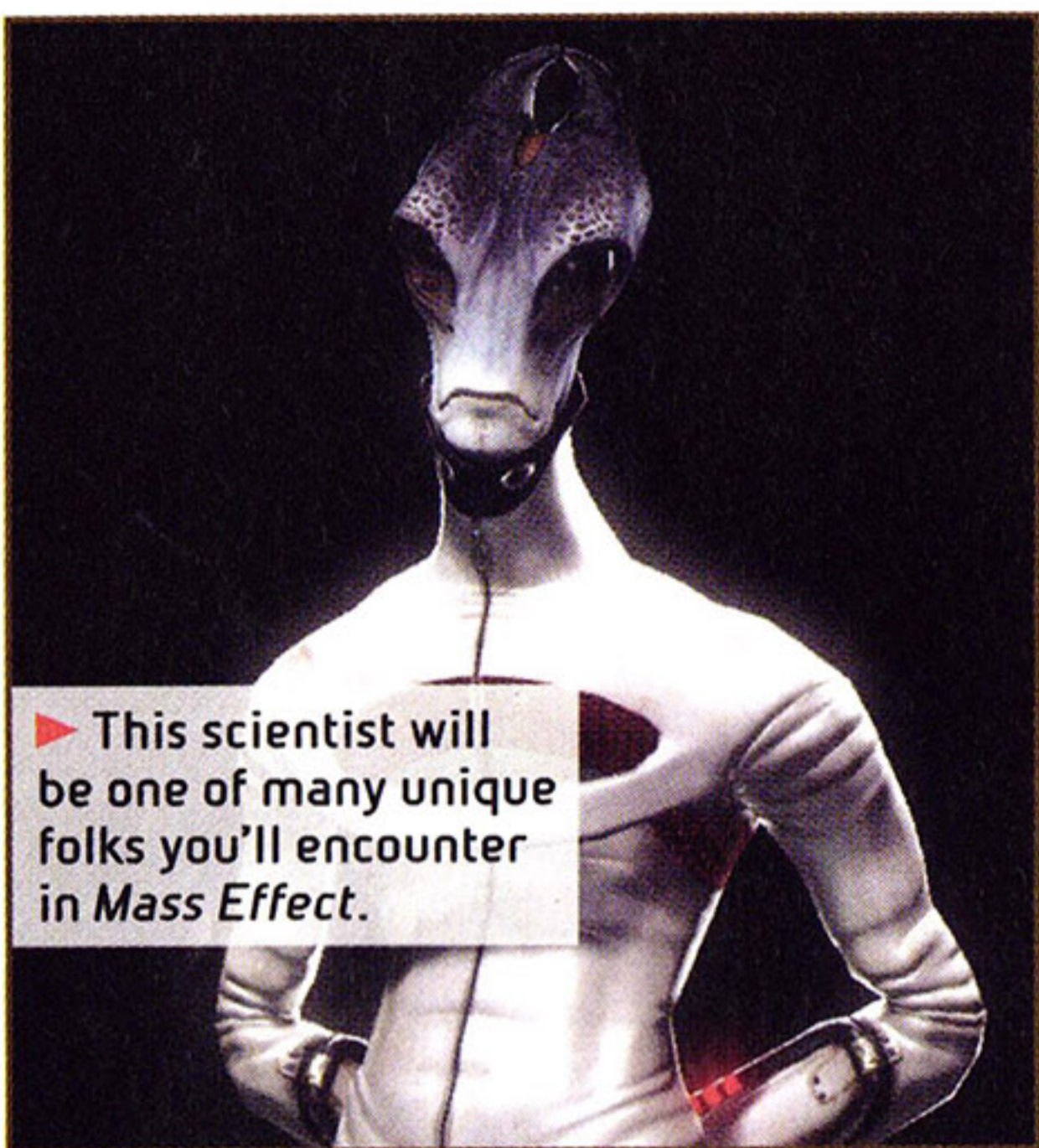
NEXT MONTH

We catch up with one of Boll's other sins of celluloid, among them *Postal*, *Dungeon Siege*, and *Far Cry*.

Idol Chat: BioWare and Bungie

Where great game makers ask each other great questions

After Lionhead's Peter Molyneux (*Fable*) went one-on-two with BioWare co-CEOs Greg Zeschuk and Ray Muzyka (*Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic*, *Jade Empire*) last month, the tables turned and the Canadian duo had the chance to grill a fellow industry luminary. Muzyka put some intriguing queries before Bungie's Michel Bastien, a producer on *Halo 2*.



► This scientist will be one of many unique folks you'll encounter in *Mass Effect*.

RAY: How did the team at Bungie come up with the original design for *Halo*?

MICHEL: Jason Jones, co-founder of Bungie, began working on the concept for *Halo* back in 1998 with a small team of people. After completing *Myth*, Jason had decided that he wanted to make another first-person shooter that would violate as many of his (and other players) expectations as possible and emphasize what he enjoyed most about the other games he was playing at the time. This is where core design concepts such as rechargeable shields, the two-weapon and two-grenade limit, melee attacks, vehicle combat, and many others came from.

Simultaneously, he inspired his artists to come up with the basis for the *Halo* universe: an image of marines holding an assault rifle standing by a Warthog, and another of an Elite carrying a plasma rifle standing by a Ghost. Everything else, including the Master Chief and the fiction, was built on this foundation and became *Halo* as we know it.

RAY: What are your favorite games of all time?

MICHEL: *Descent* had a profound influence on me as a gamer. It's the first game with which I became obsessed to a point I couldn't put it down before I felt I had mastered it. I spent a few hundred hours playing it online over Kali, and for the first time, I was thinking about the components that made the game the experience it was: its weapon set, environment design, controls, and so on. Other favorites are *GoldenEye* for its near-perfect gameplay balance and multiplayer map design (for the time), *Super Smash Brothers* for its overly technical and precise gameplay, *Lumines* for its addictive simplicity, and of course, *Halo*.

RAY: Where does the team find inspiration from outside of videogames?

MICHEL: We have an internal message board called Bungie Idea Leeches where dozens of ideas are exchanged every day. Whether ideas emerge from games, movies, literature, music, scientific websites, or what have you, they become a part of this enormous library of references and inspirational material. At the moment, many of us are into *24*, the TV show. Like many other shows, *24* deals with a bunch of fascinating storytelling challenges that are interesting to games, such as shattering your

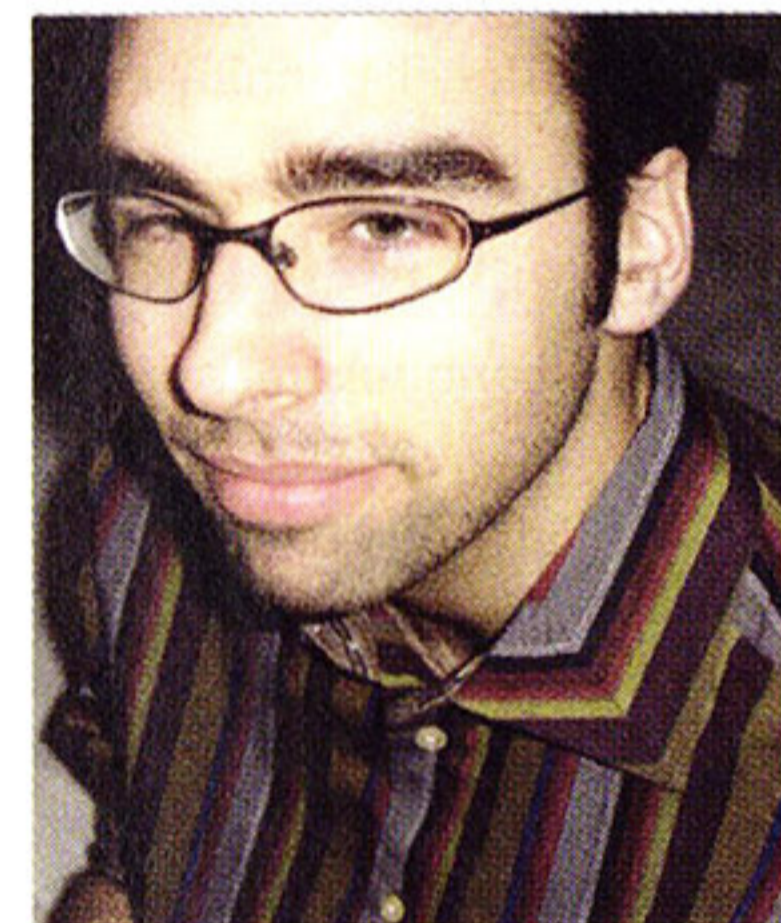
expectations, addicting you every hour, creating impossible situations for the hero, making you care about secondary characters, and so on.

RAY: How has developing for 360 changed Bungie's approach to making games?

MICHEL: The power of the 360 – not just the box itself but the entire platform, including Xbox Live – greatly expands the possibilities of what we can do in our games. As a result, developing for this new platform has forced us to be much



► Ray Muzyka (BioWare)



► Michel Bastien (Bungie)

more disciplined in planning the design and development of our games – it's now critical to push for validation of our ideas as early and as efficiently as possible before our artists begin in earnest to create all the content needed to fulfill the vision of the game. The cost of creating assets that either get cut from the final game or that need to be significantly modified later in the development cycle is just too high now. Ultimately, this forces us to focus on fewer ideas but thoroughly polish them to a point where we're really happy and proud of the results.

RAY: So far, in developing for the 360, what has been the biggest challenge for the Bungie?

MICHEL: There's an enormous technical challenge associated with moving to a next-generation platform. It has forced us to revisit many tools of our content-creation pipeline, which in turn influences how we author content. The goal is very clear: Put as much control and power as possible in the hands of the content creators. Achieving it has required (and will continue to require) a super-close collaboration between engineers and content creators – even more so than in the past. It's really cool to see that happening throughout the studio everyday.



► Bungie wanted to make a first-person shooter that "would violate expectations."

Next Month

Check back with Idol Chat next month as Michel takes his turn asking questions of another leading light in videogaming.

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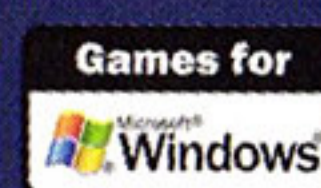
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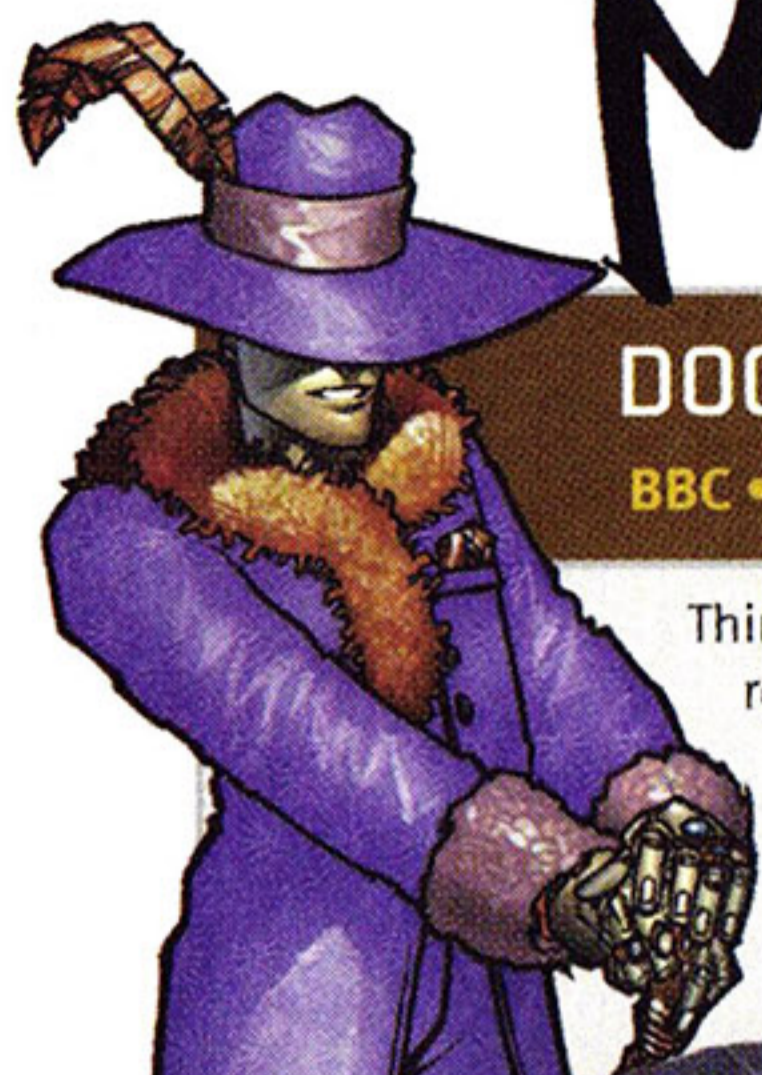
Thirty-something science fiction-loving PBS-programming addicts will joyfully reminisce about the BBC's low-grade sci-fi series *Doctor Who*. First materializing in 1963, the series hit its peak in the late '70s and '80s before falling into forgettable disrepair.

This 2005 TV series is a terrific return to form; its tight storylines clip along powered by the writing chops of Russell T. Davies (*Queer as Folk*). The sci-fi series retains its roots – the Doctor doesn't have guns, but instead wields a mean sonic screwdriver – but the effects are surprisingly believable (or at least, acceptable), and the dialogue fresh and entertaining.

Christopher Eccleston as the Doctor is sassy and properly eccentric, while his fresh-faced sidekick Rose (played by Billie Piper, famous in the U.K. for being the 18-year-old pop-starlet missus – since divorced – of a famous British radio DJ/entrepreneur) is surprisingly excellent.

This five-DVD collection includes all 13 45-minute episodes along with a slew of bonus material, commentaries, and documentaries, some surprisingly rough and real. If you know what the TARDIS is and what the acronym stands for, then this set belongs in your DVD library.

– Ryan McCaffrey

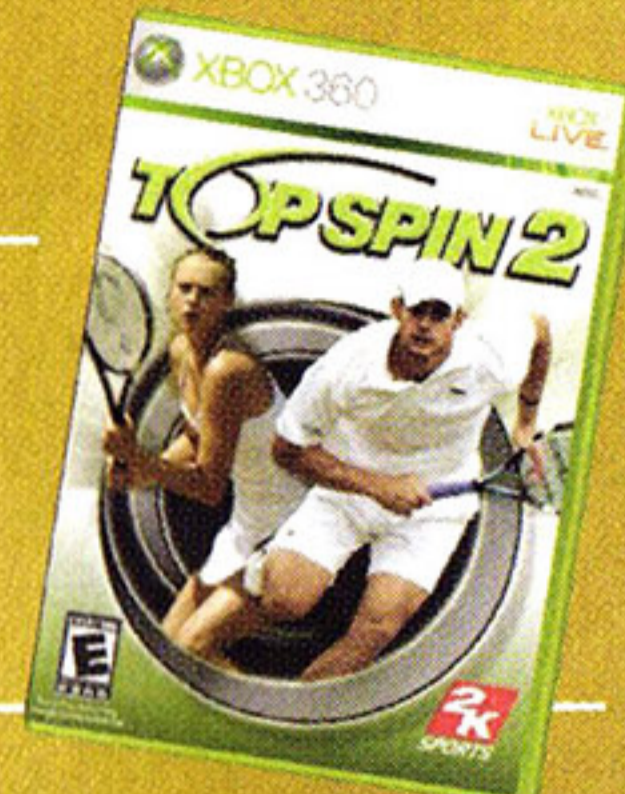


APRIL CALENDAR

Note: All release dates are subject (and likely) to change, but were confirmed at press time.

4/3

Top Spin 2 (Xbox 360)
2K Sports



4/4

The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe (DVD)
Disney

4/4

Commandos: Strike Force (Xbox)
Eidos

4/4

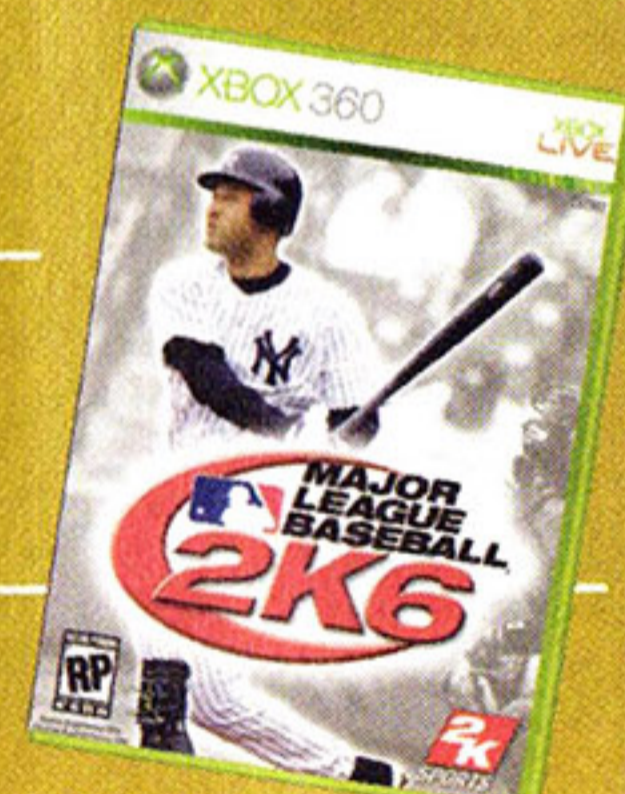
Dawson's Creek: The Complete Sixth Season (DVD)
Sony

4/5

NBA Ballers: Phenom (Xbox)
Midway

4/10

Major League Baseball 2K6 (Xbox 360)
2K Sports



4/11

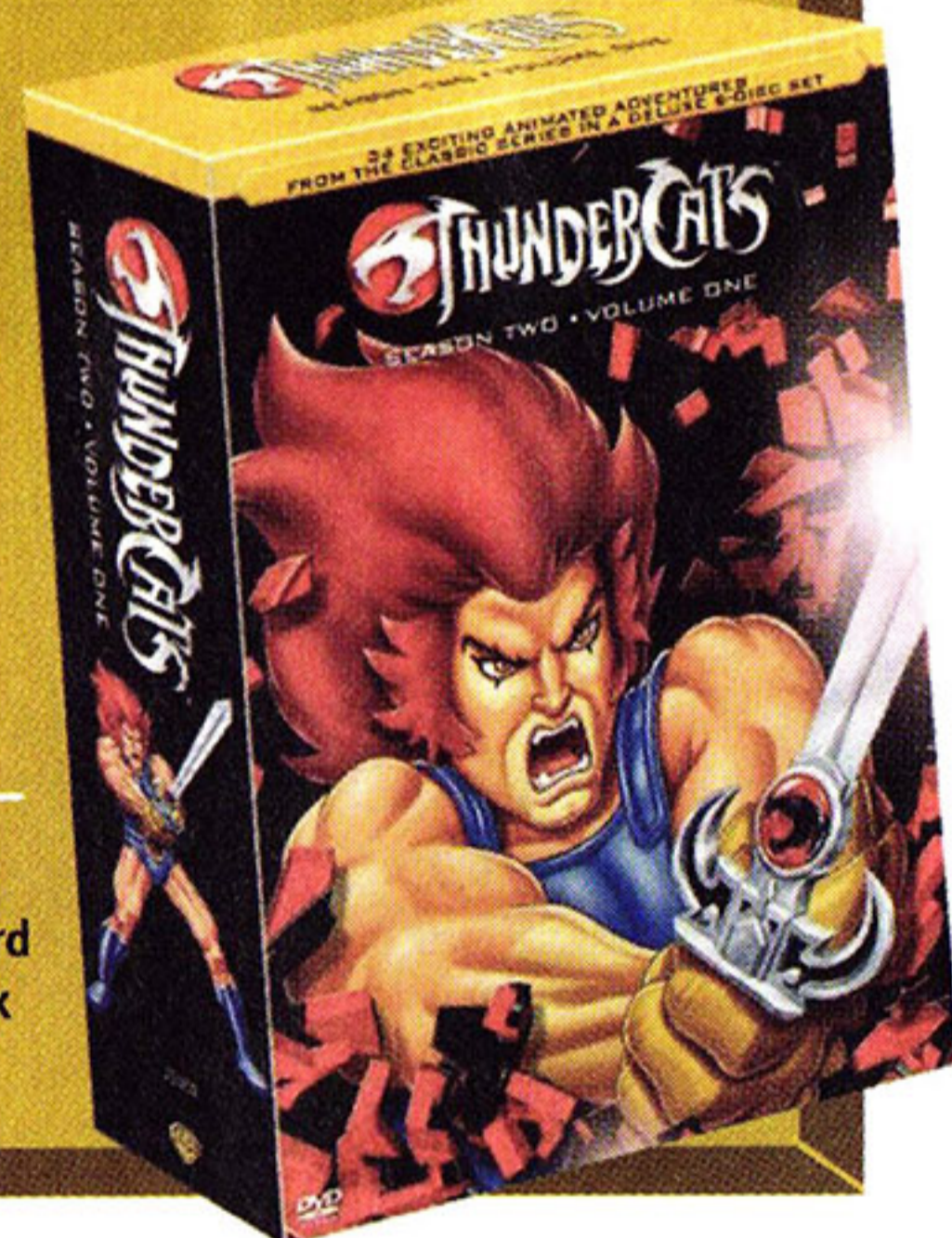
Tomb Raider: Legend (Xbox)
Eidos

4/18

Final Fantasy XI* (Xbox 360)
Square Enix

4/18

ThunderCats Season Two: Volume One (DVD)
Warner Home



*Final Fantasy XI requires hard drive and Xbox Live Silver.

CODE OF THE MONTH!

BATTLEFIELD 2: MODERN COMBAT (XBOX)

ALL WEAPONS CODE

While playing a game, hold White and Black, and then press Right, Right, Down, Up, Left, Left to unlock all weapons. Hurry, this code must be entered quickly or else it won't work!



Ad Index April 2006

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LiveSpace

LiveSpace gives *OXM* readers a way to connect with other like-minded (in other words, non-quitting, good-etiquette-minding) gamers and sort through the noise to find invaluable matchups on Xbox Live. If you'd like to join in on the good times, send an email to letters@officialxboxmagazine.com with the subject line "LiveSpace" and include your gamertag, a couple of achievements you're proud of, some games you'd like to play with other *OXM* readers, and a short bio of yourself. Basically, just follow the format below.

GAMERTAG: DO ACYS LAW 00


	Reputation: ★★★★★
	Gamerscore: 2800
	Zone: Pro

▶ **Achievements:**
Beating *Call of Duty 2*; I am currently playing *PGR 3* and *DOA 4*.

▶ **Wants to Play:** I have almost every game there is, and I am willing to be taught any lesson in them all.

▶ **Hi, My Name Is:** I am an ex-Marine who loves to play all types of games. But my favorites are war games. I am a captain in my Clan (DOOMS DAY). I own two 360s and three Xboxes; I live in a small town in Indiana. My family is dedicated to only Xbox!


GAMERTAG: PLAGUE MARINE 7

	Reputation: ★★★★★
	Gamerscore: 1530
	Zone: Underground

▶ **Achievements:**
I am a Mountain Dew everytenmintues.com winner! I won the war in *COD 2* and raced up the Black List to number 7 on *NFS: Most Wanted*. What more can I achieve? Respect!

▶ **Wants to Play:** *DOA 4* and *Halo 2*. I love good competition online. It helps me get better.

GAMERTAG: SOUTHERNZOMBIE

	Reputation: ★★★★★
	Gamerscore: 2065
	Zone: Pro

▶ **Achievements:**
50 wins in *DOA 4*; gold game completion in *Condemned*; beat Razor in *Most Wanted*.

▶ **Wants to Play:** *DOA 4* and *Halo 2*. I love good competition online. It helps me get better.

▶ **Hi, My Name Is:** When I'm not working at Wal-Mart, I spend most of my time playing *Halo 2* and *DOA 4*. I'm always looking for new people to play with, so feel free to send me a friend request.

Halo 2

Eyes a New Vista

Xbox's killer app being readied for next-gen version of Windows



Following in the footsteps of the original *Halo*, Master Chief's second tour of duty will see a PC release as well, exclusively for the upcoming Windows Vista operating system.



The move isn't surprising, given the success of *Halo for Windows* in 2003, which hit store shelves nearly two years after the Xbox debut and still went on to top PC sales charts. And while a level editor will once again be included for gamers to create and modify their own multiplayer levels, a couple of other key things are different this time around.

First, *Brothers in Arms* developer Gearbox Software isn't helping this PC conversion; instead, those duties will fall to an internal team at Microsoft Game Studios who will be working closely with Bungie on the project.

Second, while all nine of the battlegrounds from last year's *Multiplayer Map Pack* will be bundled in with the game, the question of whether or not any new content will be included, such as new maps or online co-op play, has yet to be answered.

No release date was given, but since Windows Vista is due out this fall, we would expect *Halo 2 Vista* to ship in time for the all-important shopping season as well.

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Expires 5/1/06

THE BUSINESS OF XBOX

Defining Next-Gen Gameplay



By Geoff Keighley

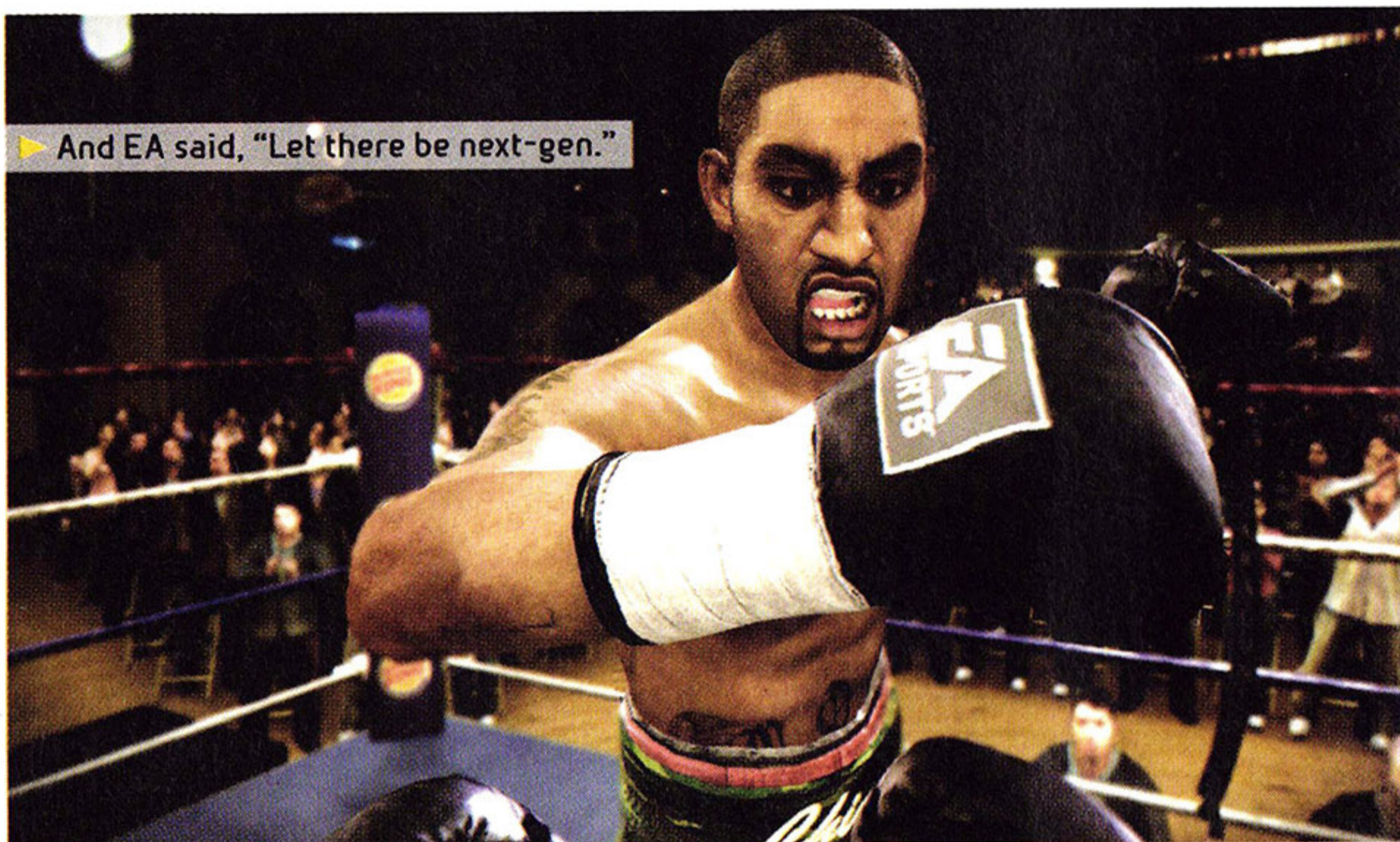
geoff@officialxboxmagazine.com

A 14-year game-journalism veteran, Geoff writes for publications ranging from Business 2.0 to Entertainment Weekly. He also hosts a show on the Spike TV network.

In the past week, I've played two games that deliver true next-generation gameplay. And only one, *Fight Night Round 3*, is on the Xbox 360. No, the other isn't a PlayStation 3 game. Instead, it's *Black*, a game for the original Xbox from EA and Criterion Studios. How can I justify calling *Black* a next-generation game when it doesn't run in 720p and doesn't have that cool motion-blur feature like in *Perfect Dark Zero*? The reason is simple: *Black* delivers next-generation gameplay. And more importantly, both of these games demonstrate just what was wrong with the majority of the 360 launch lineup.

Back in November, a lot of Xbox fans wondered why some of us game critics were so harsh on the 360's initial batch of software. Well, EA has now launched two games that hammer home those initial concerns but also demonstrate why 360 games are only going to get better. In *Fight Night Round 3*, EA has delivered a game that has "next generation" written all over it. In fact, I've begun to show the title to friends as an example of what next-generation graphics will look like. *Project Gotham Racing 3* had similarly eye-catching visuals, but you had to appreciate them like you appreciate a piece of art hanging on a wall.

Fight Night, on the other hand, is the first 360 game that uses the mighty graphics horsepower of the 360 to dramatically improve the quality of the gameplay. Besides letting players actually see their boxer's health deteriorate onscreen, when you land a right hook in *Fight Night Round 3*, the graphics – complete with flying sweat and blood – enhance the immersive nature of the experience. To be blunt, *Fight Night* is a stunning contrast to some of the supposed "next-gen" launch games like *Kameo: Elements of Power*. Let's call a spade a spade: *Kameo* looks downright embarrassing by comparison.

▶ For Geoff, *Black* ups the ante.

▶ And EA said, "Let there be next-gen."

The release of *Fight Night* is, to be sure, great news for the 360. But a couple days after playing *Fight Night*, I started working my way through *Black* for the original Xbox. Sure, the textures are low-resolution and there's no Xbox Live multiplayer, but as I played through the game, I

are simply gussied-up versions of old-generation gameplay paradigms, especially when games like *Black* are in the market to satiate Xbox 1 owners.

What does all this mean for game developers and publishers? Hopefully the success of a game like *Black* illustrates that there's a ton of potential

left in the current generation of consoles. While *Black* would undoubtedly be even more impressive on Xbox 360, publishers should be mindful of not pulling away from the current game systems too soon. Consider, for instance, that the Xbox currently has an installed base about 15 times that of the 360. Even in the face of all the hype about the 360, supporting

"Developers can't afford to continue to ship 360 games that are simply gussied-up versions of old-generation gameplay paradigms."

current platforms will be vital if game publishers want to be around in five years. And it's up to us in the press to champion current-generation games and admit when an Xbox 1 game is a better experience than many 360 titles.

Yet for those developers that do go ahead and create 360 games, they need to be aware that saying a game is next-generation because it uses Havok physics or because it runs in 720p is not enough. Instead, the games that usher in the next generation will be those that give the player a greater sense of immersion and a more reactive play environment. *Black* is proof that the amount of innovation in a game is not necessarily correlated to the power of the machine it runs on.

started feeling the same way about *Black* as I did about *Fight Night*.

How can I justify calling both games next-generation experiences? It's simple: Both *Black* and *Fight Night* prove that the next-generation experience is tied to innovative gameplay, not pure graphics. To be sure, part of *Fight Night*'s charm is due to its improved graphics on the 360 – the Xbox version is, without question, nowhere near as compelling. *Fight Night* uses its improved graphics to meaningfully enhance the play experience, just as *Black* delivers an FPS play mechanic that is arguably more cutting-edge than *Call of Duty 2* or *PDZ*. The bottom line: Developers can't afford to continue to ship 360 games that

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PlayStation 2



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TOUR

the BLACK EYED PEAS

the BLACK EYED PEAS

KONIG SPRINT III



Looking for a ride with a planet-friendly vibe?
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 gas/electric Civic Hybrid.



This year, the hands-down-choice band for the Honda Civic Tour was The Black Eyed Peas. Their funky style and off-the-hook energy are a perfect match for the 2006 Civic, redesigned with more spirit, performance savvy and flat-out fun than ever. As part of the tour, The Peas got to add their unique flair to a shiny new Civic Hybrid. To view their customized ride and get info on when The Peas will be driving their groove to your town, go to hondacivictour.com.

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