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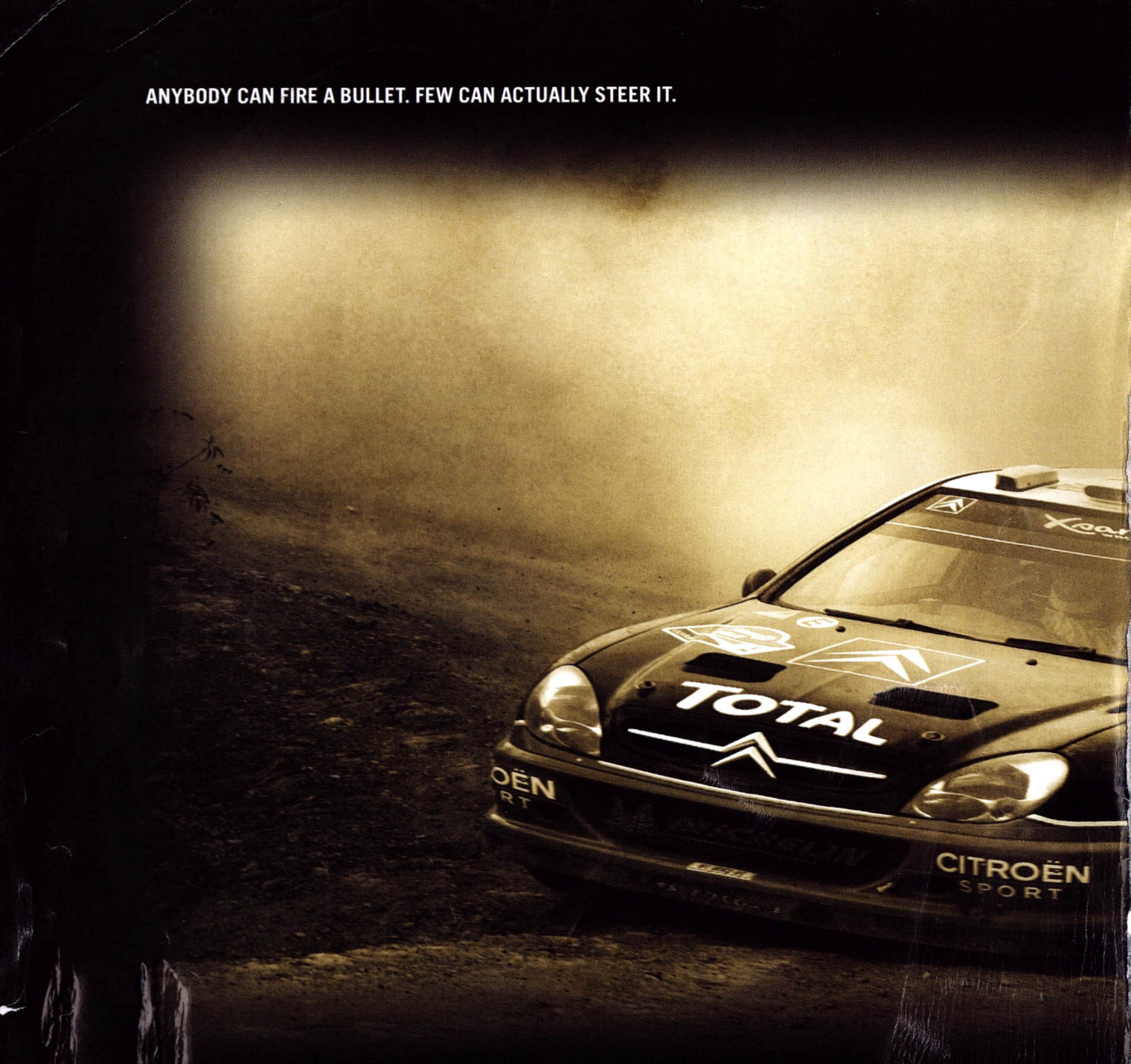

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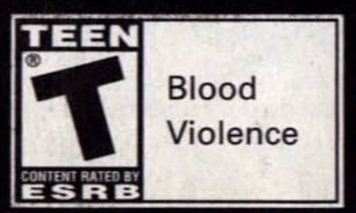


Blood
Violence

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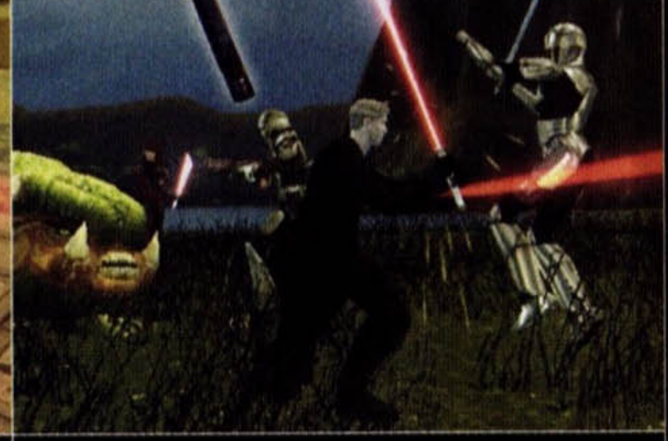

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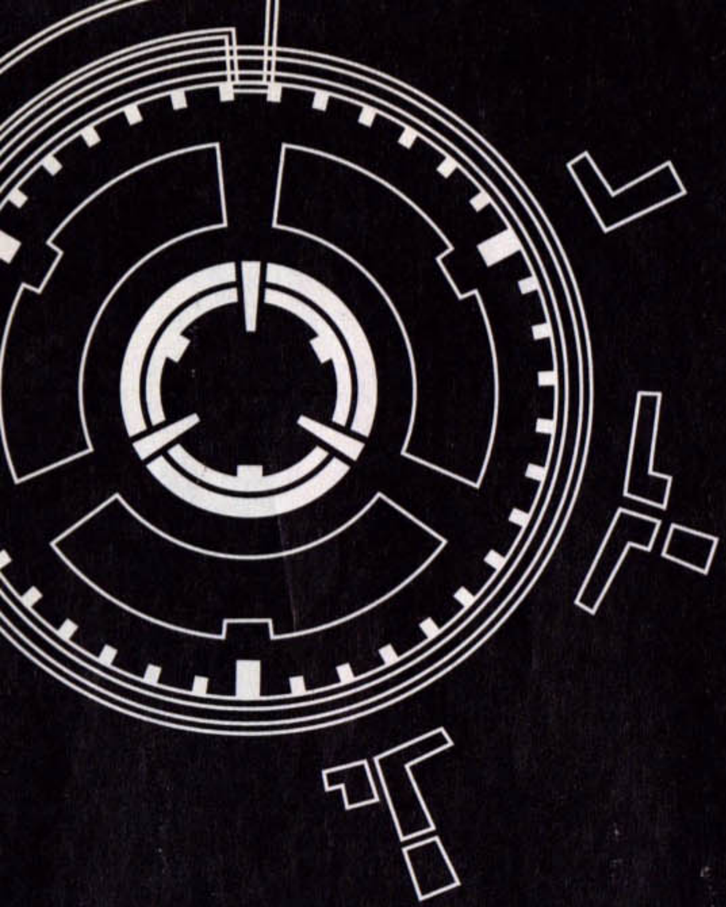

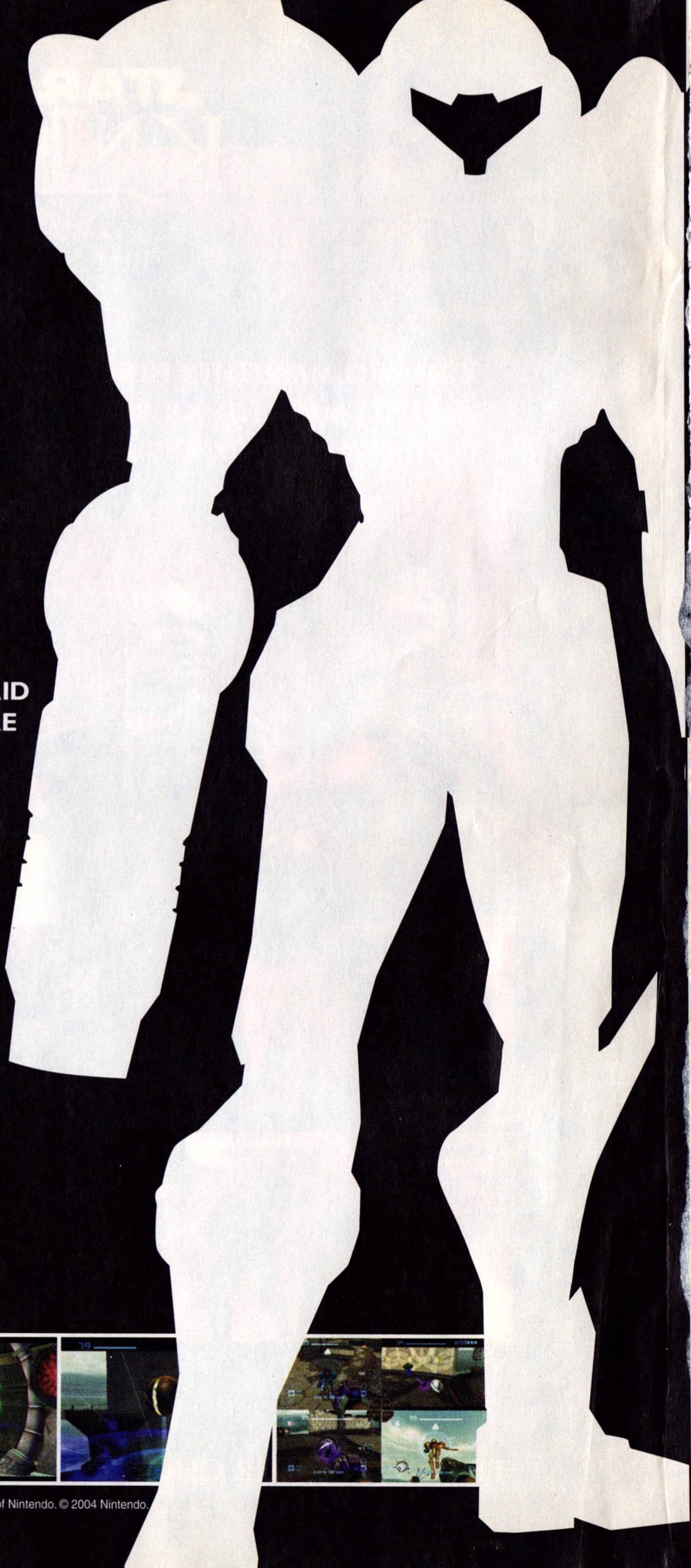

**IF YOU WEREN'T AFRAID OF THE DARK BEFORE**

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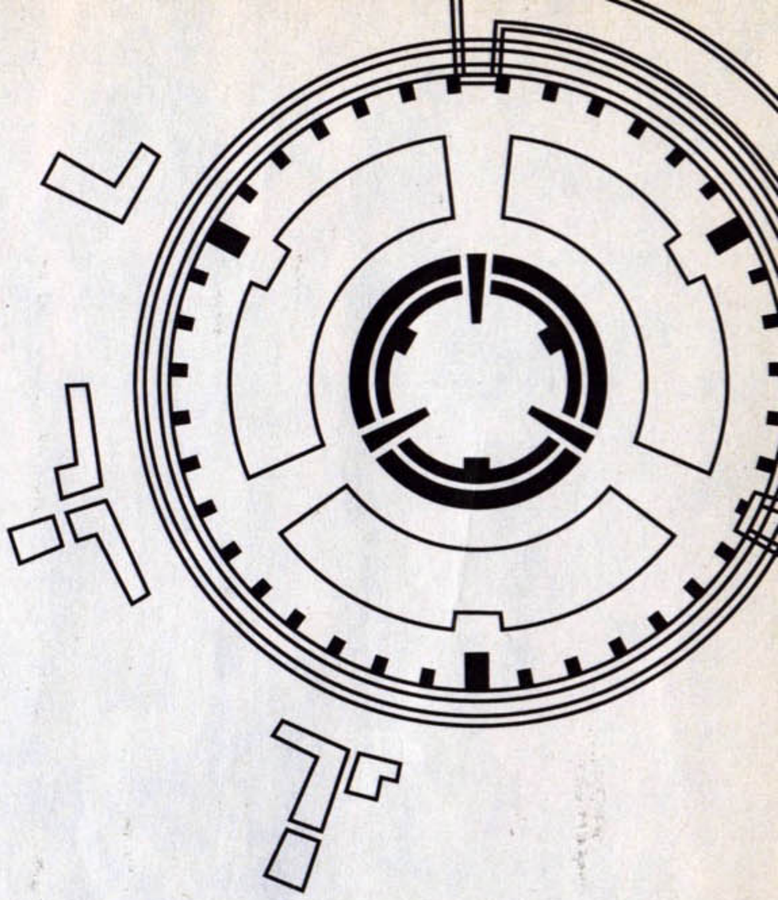

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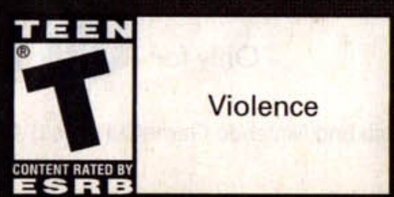


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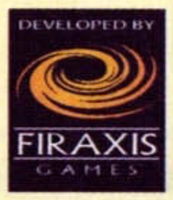

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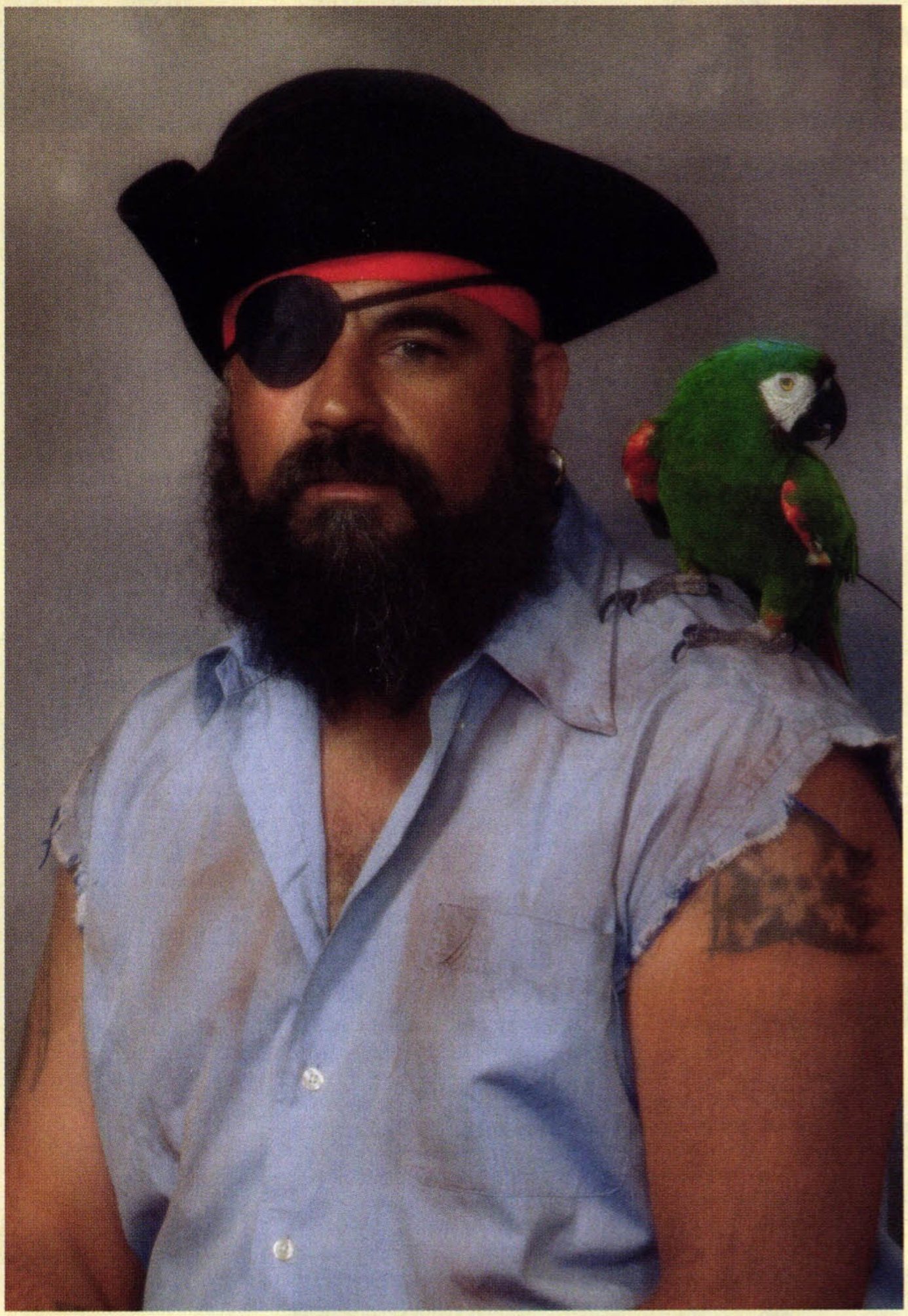

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AFTER

the rest of your life depends on your every decision. You might retire a wealthy privateer. Then again, you might end up in Davey Jones' locker. Shiver me timbers.

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cover story

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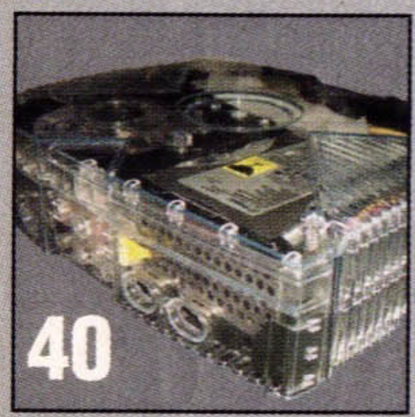
Batman has had a somewhat checkered past when it comes to both video games and movies, but the Caped Crusader's latest game and its accompanying cinematic outing should reverse that trend. The Dark Knight is venturing into the stealth/action genre for the first time ever, thanks to one of the most consistent companies in the industry: Electronic Arts. While the team behind this title has a definite stealth/action pedigree, they're bringing one huge twist to the proceedings: This time, you're the hunter, and fear is your weapon. For more, swing on your Batline over to page 66.

features



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**HOLIDAY BUYING GUIDE 2004**

The holidays are upon us – time for rampant consumerism! Check out our Buying Guide for all the latest gadgets, toys, movies, and more. It's all about giving, folks.

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**FORZA MOTORSPORT**

Microsoft sets its sights on taking over Gran Turismo's crown as the dominant racing simulator on the market. Will it race past the finish line or get lapped? Check out our hands-on feature for answers.

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**NINTENDO DS**

The latest addition to the Nintendo family is finally here! Its launch titles are announced! Its screens are double! We checked out the hardware and games to give you a full report. Remember, we're here for you, people.

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**XENOSAGA II: JENSEITS VON GUT UND BÖSE**

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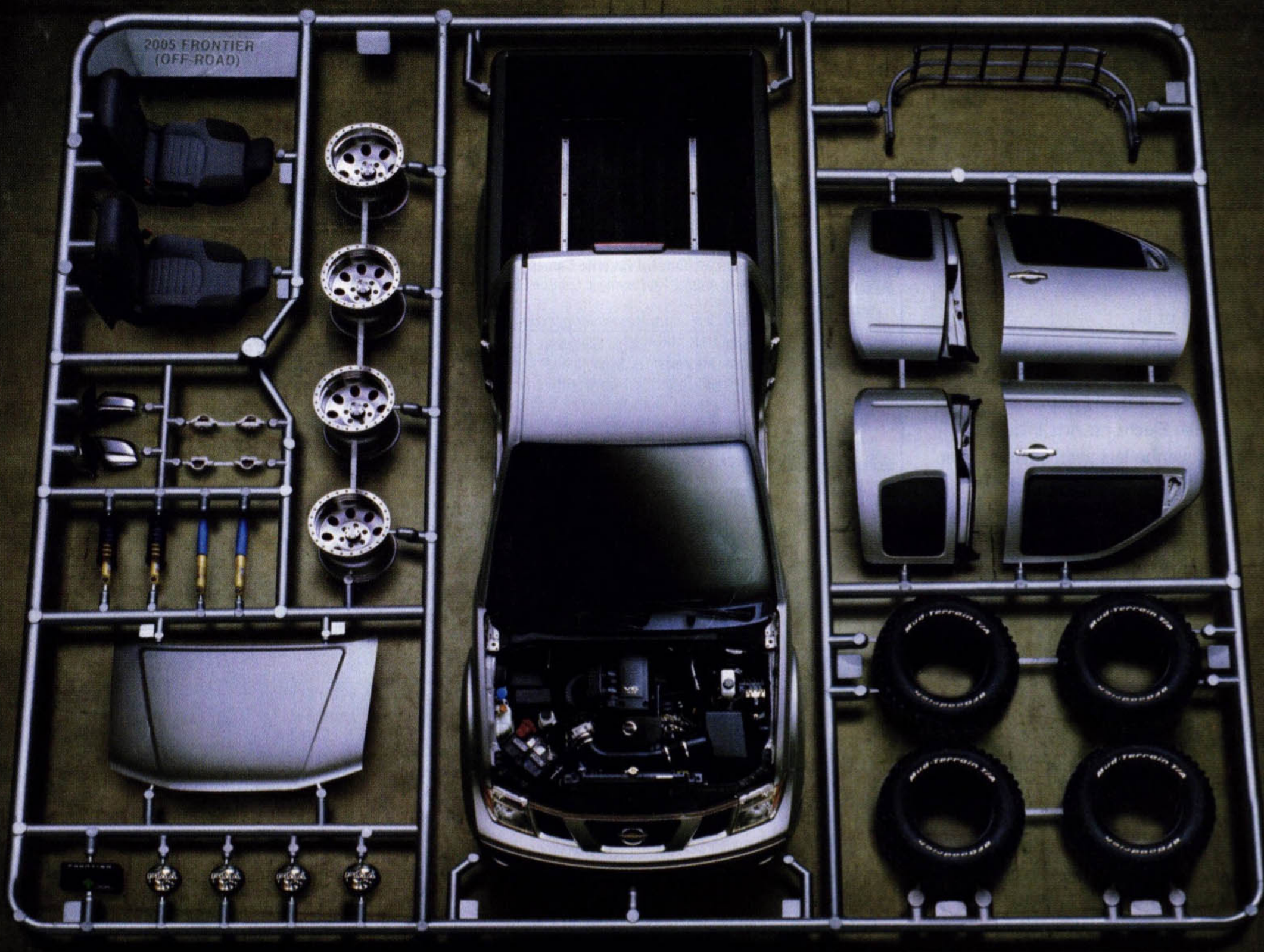


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# STAFF

People Who Actually Get Paid To Play Video Games

## WELCOME TO THE REAL

**ANDY McNAMARA**
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

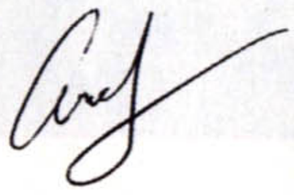
One of the buzz-worthy phrases in the industry right now is "in-game advertising." While the idea is nothing new (I remember Sony's Jet Moto 2 featuring ads for Mountain Dew way back in 1997), it does seem to be something that gamers and game companies will have to deal with, for good or ill.

Industry analysts predict that, with the rising costs of development, in-game advertising will be key to the success of many publishers. In fact, companies like Electronic Arts brought in $7 million in ad revenue last year, a rise of over 50 percent from the previous year. And other companies, like Activision, have inked deals with Nielson Ratings to track its ad value. So, like it or not, in-game ads are here to stay.

In many cases, the practice doesn't bother me. For example, sports games like Madden or Tony Hawk are an instance where I feel that product placements bring the games closer to reality. On the other hand, I can't help but feel Need for Speed: Underground 2 went a tad over the line when it seemed like I drove past a Burger King every other minute.

I won't go so far as to say in-game advertising is good or bad (ads are found in this magazine, and in just about every facet of our everyday lives), but I can't help but think things are going to get worse before they get better. Publishers need to be careful with how they handle it.

If Link shows up in a game wearing Reeboks, I think I'll puke. However, if at the end of the day, publishers are able to make better games with the extra revenue, banners and product placement are perhaps a small price to pay. Only time will tell, but I can't help echo the sentiments of punk rock legends Fugazi and ask the question, "Why can't I walk down a street free of suggestion?"



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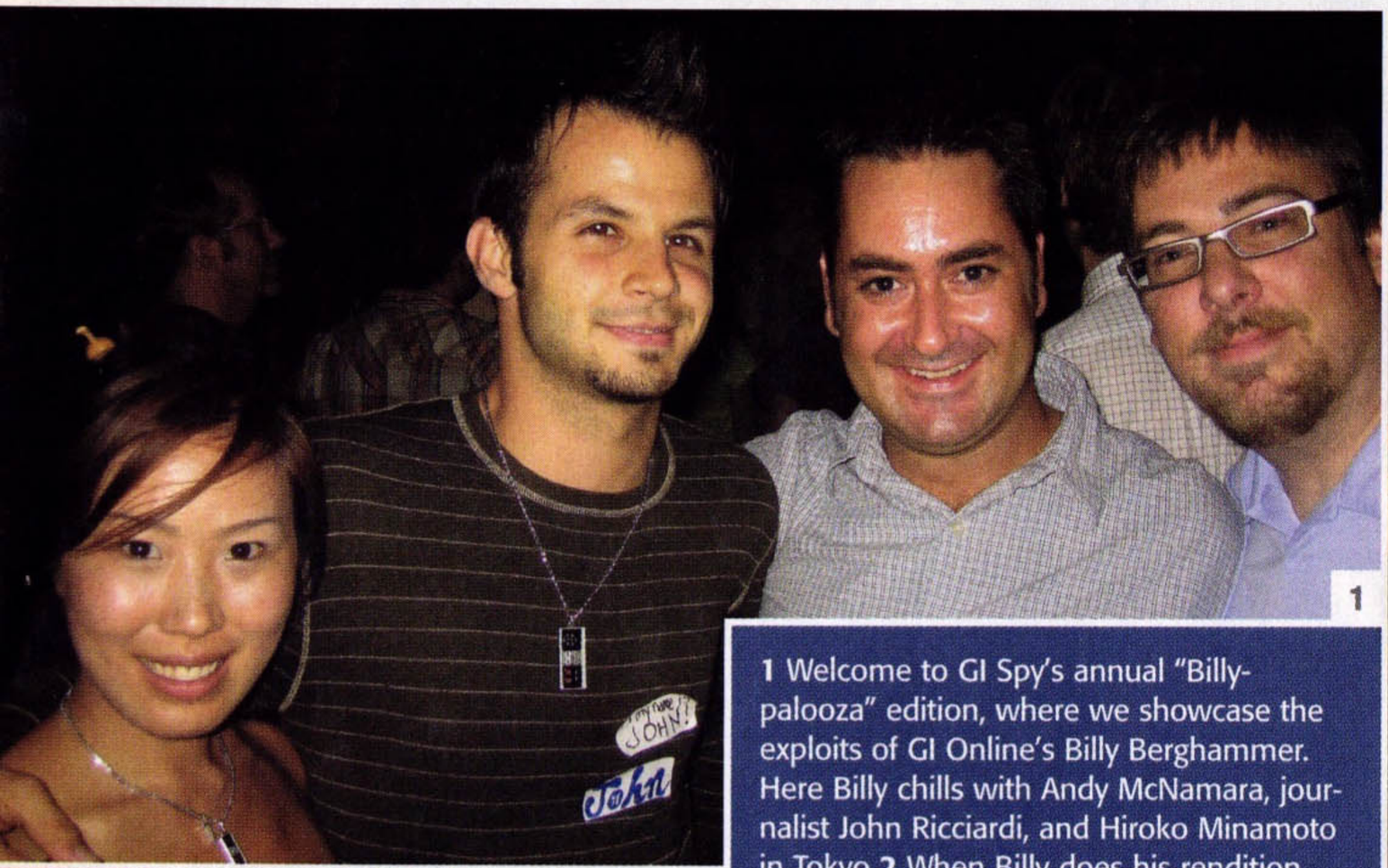
# GI SPY

**Candid Photos From The Seedy Underbelly Of The Video Game Industry**

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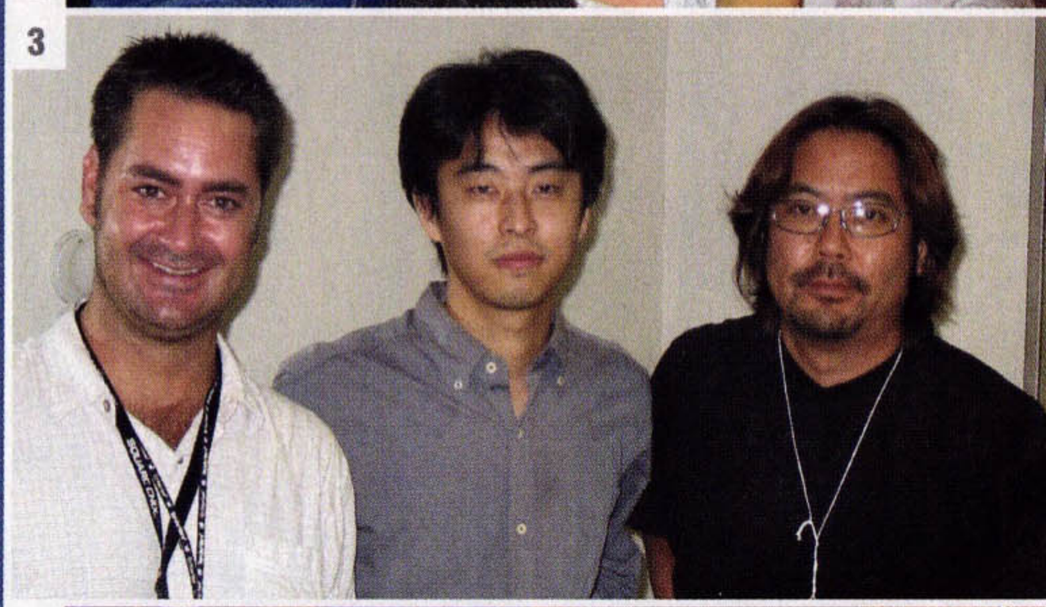

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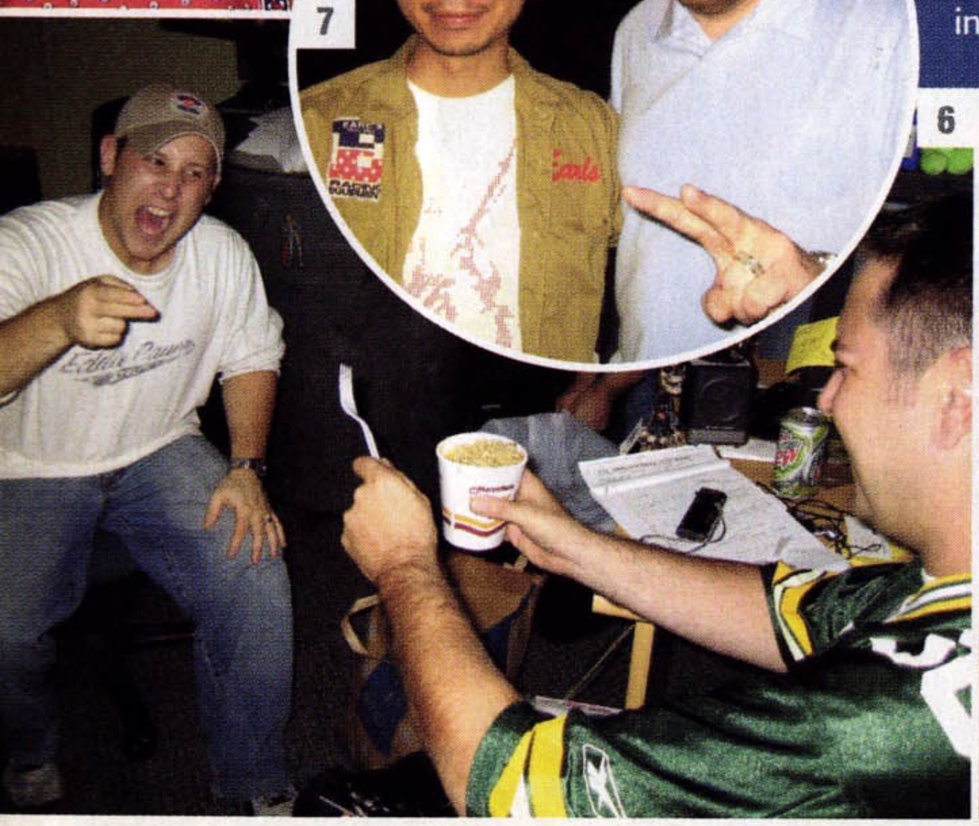

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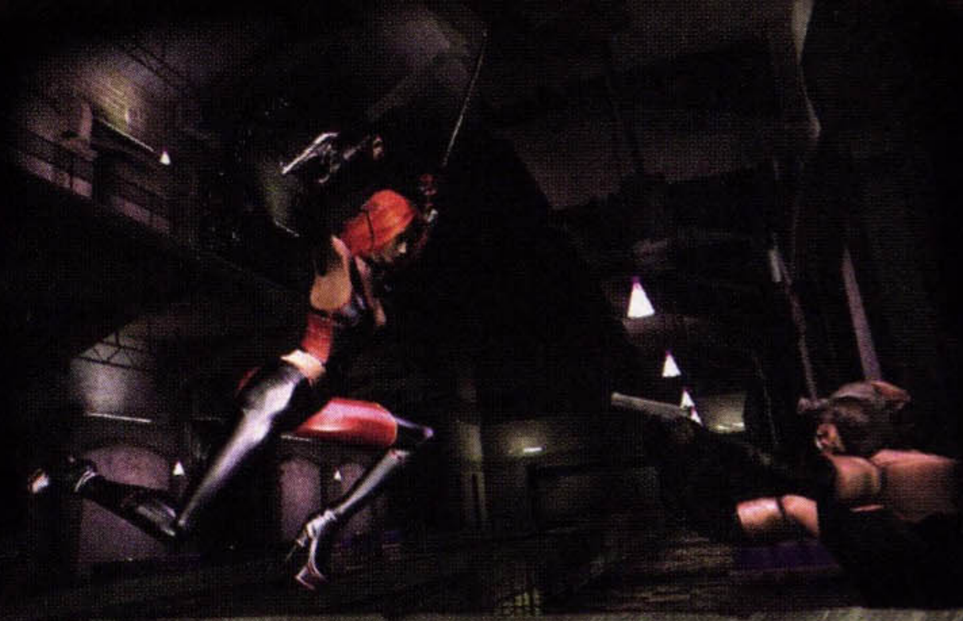
**1** Welcome to GI Spy's annual "Billy-palooza" edition, where we showcase the exploits of GI Online's Billy Berghammer. Here Billy chills with Andy McNamara, journalist John Ricciardi, and Hiroko Minamoto in Tokyo **2** When Billy does his rendition of "Get Low", you know things get crunk up in the karaoke bar! Skeet Skeet! **3** There's no deceiving Keisuke Kikuchi and Tecmo's John Inada: They know that Billy has the "hook-up" for fun in Japan! **4** Miller (center) and Nintendo's Tom Harlin and Tom Leonard enjoy a tender moment with Mario **5** Here's Billy with Capcom's Minae Matsukawa (Darkstalkers Chronicles)! **6** Billy's life isn't one big party! Here, we see him defending himself against Global Star's Matt Schlosberg armed with only a fork and ramen noodles! **7** Andy McNamara's no Billy Berghammer, but Wanda and the Colossus producer Kenji Kaido still thinks he's a nice guy **8** Even one of the world's most creative game designers, Clover Studio's Atsushi Inaba (creator of Viewtiful Joe), appreciates that special flair that Billy brings to the gaming scene



New Deadly Combo System

Dynamic Pole and Rail Combat

(And a couple of other new features worth noting)

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BLOODRAYNE2.COM

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Sexual Themes
Strong Language

XBOX

PlayStation 2

PC CD

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# DEAR GI

The Readers Strike Back

## VIOLENT REACTIONS

Your "Murder By PlayStation" article [Issue #138] struck a very serious nerve with me because I am currently a law student focusing on corporate law. There is no doubt that as a generation we are more desensitized to violence than our parents. However, as humans we possess higher thought processes, and have the ability to distinguish between fact and fiction. My sympathy goes out to the boys' families, but they don't deserve a dime. Plus, the lawyer handling the case should have his license revoked for exploiting the same laws that he took an oath to uphold.

Joshua Whitworth
Via e-mail

Responsibility for violence in gaming does not rest solely with Rockstar, Midway, Sony, Microsoft, Sega, or Nintendo. The problem is poor parenting and children exercising poor judgment. Halo, Manhunt, or Grand Theft Auto do not "make" people do anything. It takes action from a person to commit atrocities against others, and these atrocities will continue with or without video games.

Shaun Skipper
Via e-mail

I agree with the statements of the author of "Murder By PlayStation" in reference to parents being responsible for the material in games that they allow their children to purchase and play. However, I do not agree with some critics' quick jump made towards slashing the throats of video game retailers. There are no specific laws barring the sale of specifically rated games to specific age groups; the ESRB rating system is basically a set of ethical guidelines. Believe it or not, retail stores are here to make money, and sometimes following mere guidelines are at the back of the retail mind. Pleas for enforcing the ESRB's guidelines will fall on deaf retail ears until those guidelines become law.

Ashley Wood
Via gmail.com

Many people need film and gaming to live out experiences that they can not – or should not – have in real life. Through our willing suspension of disbelief, we can use video games not to inspire ourselves, but to provide a cathartic means of venting our anger and our fear. Maybe the reason Thompson is being so hateful is precisely because he has not had a few hours playing GTA 3.

Matthew Swenson
Minneapolis, MN

**■ Surprisingly, none of the letters we received in response to "Murder By PlayStation" supported Jack Thompson's claims that Manhunt should be held accountable for homicide. Apparently gamers don't like being viewed as amorphous lumps of dough lacking free will and ready to be shaped by anything pop culture kneads into them. While video game violence remains a hot topic, these points all illustrate that it is far from a simple issue. With factors ranging from ESRB ratings to personal accountability, there are many things that must be considered before deciding to demonize a particular game due to its content.**

## SQUARE FULL CIRCLE

A blurb in Connect entitled "Square To Xbox Next" [Issue #137] said that Square Enix might consider developing games for the next-generation Xbox. I don't even understand why they started to develop for the PS2. Personally, I think Square Enix should go back to where it started – Nintendo!

Jimmy Sevcik
Via yahoo.com

**■ Oh, little Jimmy, have a seat and you shall hear a legendary tale. Years ago, when Zubaz and *Wayne's World* were delighting us all, Nintendo and Square seemed like inseparable buddies. Relations became strained, however, when Square left Nintendo for Sony's PlayStation (ostensibly due to the N64's reliance on cartridges rather than disc-based media). Relations between the two companies have been strained since, but as Reggie Fils-Aime said in our interview in issue #139, Nintendo has been trying to mend fences across the industry. These efforts have resulted in recent Nintendo exclusives like Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles and Final Fantasy I & II: Dawn of Souls. So, though they aren't exactly holding hands or making out in the broom closet, it looks like Square Enix and Nintendo might be on the road to reconciliation.**

## LOTS OF LOVE IN A LITTLE PACKAGE

I've noticed that in recent months my favorite section of your magazine, the GameCube reviews, has been way too small, sometimes down to one or two measly reviews. What did all of the loyal GameCube fans do to deserve this inequity? Do you have a reason for the insanity, or is it just to smite readers like me?

Patrick McHugh
Camas, WA

**■ While we do enjoy smiting the occasional reader, we usually prefer to do it with a shovel or small tree rather than the pages of our magazine. Here's the deal: our multi-platform reviews have vastly shrunk the number of reviews devoted specifically to one console, PS2 and Xbox included. Nintendo's section may stand out as smaller since it has fewer exclusive titles, but we review every game to come down the pike for the GameCube, from the mightiest Metroid to frolfiest Ribbit King. Rest assured that the 'Cube gets just as much cuddle-time as the other systems. Maybe even a little more when it wears those stiletto heels...**

## BOOTLEG BOOGIE

On page 42 of your October issue [#138], you printed a brief blurb about game music. As an avid fan of game music (and the proud owner of a few dozen soundtracks), it was great to see this often-overlooked art form get some serious recognition. However, I would like to caution your readers that many of the most popular shopping destinations on the Internet unknowingly sell and distribute illegal bootlegged copies of these albums. To ensure that you aren't getting ripped off, I would suggest going to specialty sites (like www.gamemusiconline.com) rather than mainstream e-emporiums.

Zaq Davis
Via yahoo.com

**■ Wait a second...do you mean that there are some people who wish to unjustly profit from the hard work of others? Appalling. Though the circulation of illegal tunes ultimately ends up hurting the industry, the abundance of these bootlegged posers is a testament to the growing popularity of video game music in the U.S. If you want to support the artists and their work, do your research to be cer-**

## THE MAPLE LEAF AFFAIR

I am a student attending Pilgrim Park School in Elm Grove, Wisconsin. In Social Studies we are studying Canada. I have decided to write to you, my favorite company, and ask if you ship to Canada. If so, what obstacles do you have to overcome?

Alec Badge
Elm Grove, WI

**■ You pose an excellent question, since most people aren't aware of the myriad obstacles involved in getting a highly volatile magazine like ours across the border. The barriers to overcome are dangerous and frequent, involving secret agents, abandoned underground tunnels, and cybernetic Mounties riding buzzsaw-equipped steeds. Thankfully, all of our Canadian readers can bypass these hazards and get Game Informer delivered warm and fresh to their door just by paying an extra $20 per year for postage. No sacrifice is too great for our noble northern neighbors, without whom curling would just be flannel-clad ice-sweeping. Just fill out a subscription card or call 866-844-GAME (4263) to start getting GI in The Great White North.**

Send your comments to Game Informer. Snail Mail: Game Informer Magazine • Attn: Dear GI • 724 North First St., 4th Floor • Minneapolis, MN 55401 Email: deargi@gameinformer.com

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**tain you are buying a legitimate recording and not some bargain imitator. You don't want to end up like Joe, whose lack of diligence landed him the complete "Vinyl Fantasy" soundtrack.**

## TASTING THE GAME

How long is it until virtual reality gaming becomes more than a science fiction fantasy? I'm not talking about the simple garbage available now, where you put on an oversized visor and still have to use a controller. I'm talking about total sensory immersion in a virtual world.

Nick
Via aol.com

**■ You're the kind of guy who would take the blue pill, aren't you Nick? Well, we won't be plugging games directly into our brainstems anytime soon, but with recent peripherals like EyeToy, we are a few steps closer. Once you can see yourself in the game, tasting the beef bowls in Yoshinoya and getting a whiff of your chickens in Harvest Moon are visible specks on the horizon. Still, we don't want to be too hasty about it – if *The Lawnmower Man* has taught us anything, it's that rushing into VR before the world is ready can only result in obscurity and sub-par sequels.**

## FABLE FLAV

Despite the epic tone of its marketing campaign, Fable is far from the revolution I was hoping it would be. They abandoned the notion of a free roaming world, and left a game that a blind monkey could beat in 12 hours. Every aspect was basically whittled to death, resulting in a finished product that couldn't even deliver on half of its promises. Lionhead owes me $50 for convincing me this game had a chance of being as good as Morrowind, KOTOR, or Zelda.

Severeth
Via e-mail

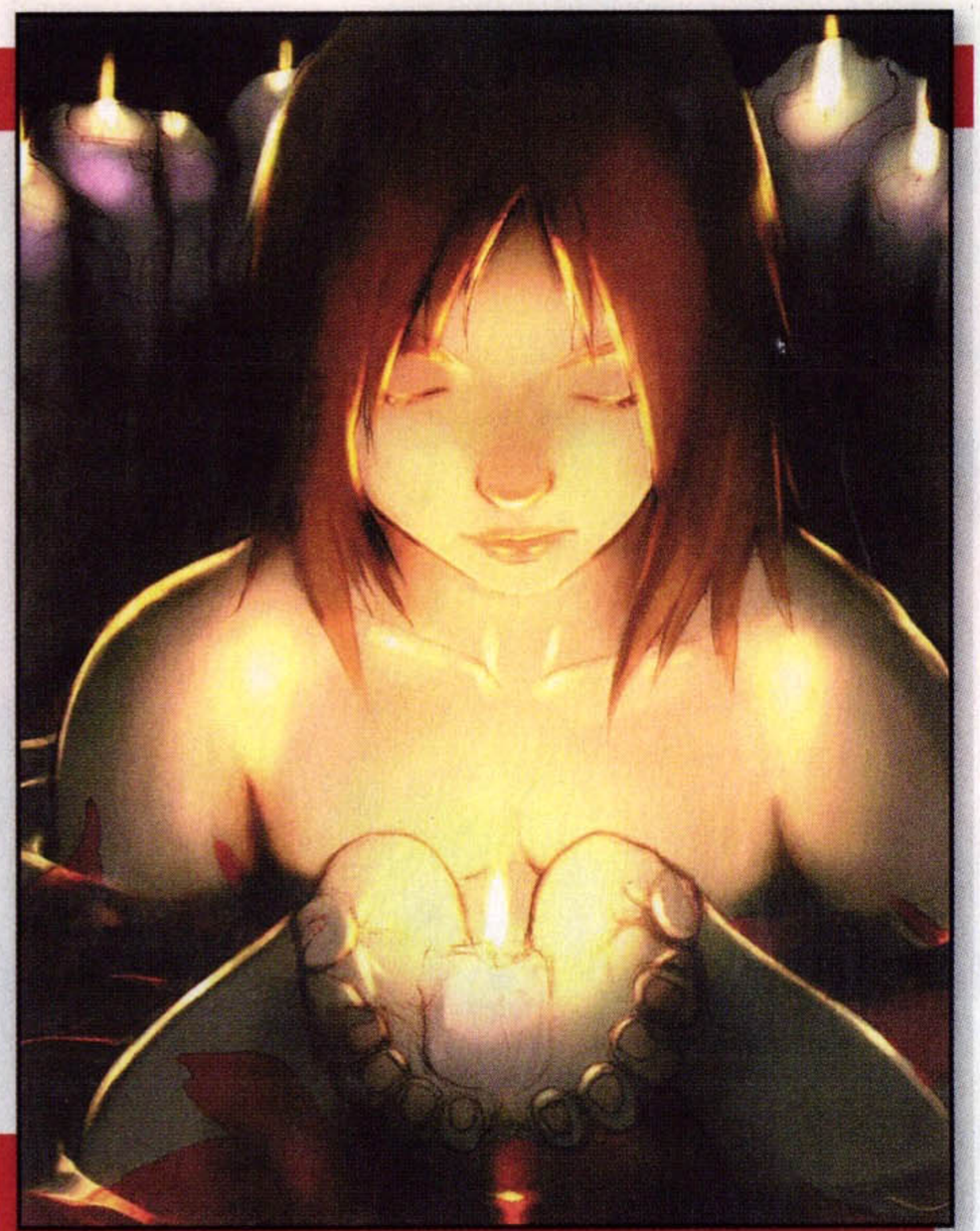
I cannot understand how Lionhead can put forth a product that they claim is an exemplary RPG, and have it turn out to be a lackluster action-adventure title with some weak RPG elements. Every choice has a consequence only in the most basic sense of the word – if you do one thing, something else happens. Before it released, I remember seeing screenshots with the hero standing in wide open fields, able to travel freely, with majestic mountains waiting to be climbed in the distance. What happened? When you make claims about a game that turn out to be false, there should be some sort of repercussion. Lionhead should make an official apology for misleading gamers everywhere. If a company can't acknowledge its mistake, what does that say about its integrity?

Michael Gevins
Via e-mail

**■ Ask and ye shall receive. Peter Molyneux actually did apologize for the features that didn't make it into the final version of the game (see page 32 for more). When there is as much hype and anticipation swirling around a game like Fable, there are bound to be some people who are disappointed when it doesn't deliver everything they think it should. However, it is important to remember that titles should be judged by the content they deliver, not features that might have been scrapped during the development process. Very few of the complaints we received about Fable had anything to do with things the game did poorly; most centered around expectations the game failed to fulfill. Simply put, through the title's long development, some things had to be changed, and though the result isn't exactly what we had imagined, it still delivers one of the best experiences to be had on the Xbox to date.**

## ENVELOPE ART

**HANNAH SWENSON**
Their relationship seemed so perfect… before they each developed a crush on Legolas the Homewrecker



**DECEMBER WINNER!**
**RALPH NIXON JR.**
Here's hoping she didn't accidentally draw herself a kerosene bath

Enter the Game Informer Envelope Art Contest. All you need to do is draw, paint, scratch, spit, or carve the best darn envelope art you can think of and send it to us. Please include your name, phone number, and return address on the back of the envelope. If you're the monthly winner, we'll feature your work in GI and you'll receive a video game prize from the Game Informer vault.

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**DWAYNE BRAGG**
Advertising poster for Mega Man's ill-fated "Psychedelic Robo-Happiness World Tour"

**RYAN GAW**
"Catch this without popping it and we promise not to gnaw off your face."

**ALECIA VALDEZ**
"We're gonna eat the hell out of this picnic."

**JASMINE MILLS**
She's a maniac, maniac on the floor, and she's sending like she's never sent before

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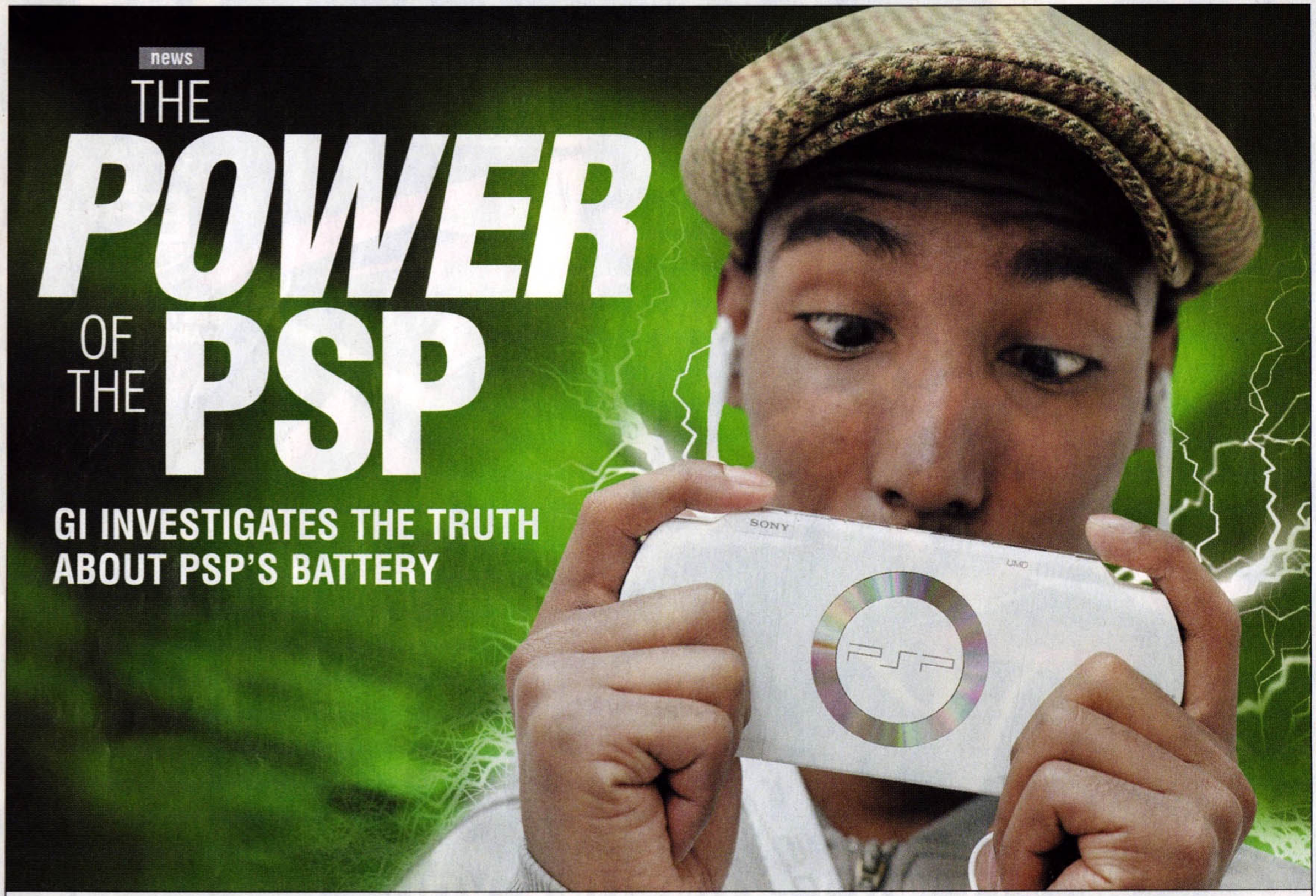
news

# THE POWER OF THE PSP

## GI INVESTIGATES THE TRUTH ABOUT PSP'S BATTERY




Since its introduction, questions have been raised about the battery life of Sony's PlayStation Portable (PSP) handheld. Recently, a new round of rumors have sprung up suggesting that Sony was hamstringing PSP software developers by mandating that games not exceed a certain power limit. It was feared that this restriction would hamper the software's ability to stream off the disc, thereby limiting what a game and a studio could do. However, Game Informer talked with an anonymous development source who set the record straight about devloping for the platform.

Our source characterized a lot of the worry over the PSP's battery life as "something analysts and Nintendo fanboys are excited about more than any developers." At E3, Sony president and CEO of Sony Computer Entertainment America, Kaz Hirai, tabbed the battery life of the unit between two to 10 hours – depending on what the PSP is being asked to do, such as watching movies or listening to music. While our source couldn't accurately say how long the system would run while playing a game, they dismissed that Sony was restricting developers in how software was made for the PSP because of battery life. For instance, any developer worth their salt would arrange their data on the disc efficiently so that the laser of the PSP doesn't have to scan all over the place to find the information it is looking for and needlessly waste the battery. Our source pointed out that studios should be used to arranging their data effectively already if they've had previous experience with the PS2.

In general, the developer we talked to said that making games for the PSP – contrary to some of the rumors out there – was "average" in difficulty, not "hard." However, things would undoubtedly be getting easier once the typical growing pains of a new platform were overcome. Going off on such rumors, our source said, "That's what kills me. Nintendo shows nothing on DS, so all the fanboys are like, 'Nintendo clearly has some super secret thing that will destroy everyone.' Then Sony shows up with all these games, and they're like, 'Sony's f@#%&d.' It's like, 'What are you talking about?' These people are morons. It's been the most problem-free product launch ever from the development side."

Sony may have gone a good ways towards solving the battery problem itself. The company's chief of network system development, Izumi Kawanishi, said that the company would offer a detachable battery that gamers could purchase and use to replace a dead one at any time. The fact that the PSP would not be a closed system is different than what we heard at E3. Kawanishi estimates that the PSP battery will take under two hours to fully charge with the supplied AC adapter.

## MORE ON WI-FI PLAY AND POSSIBLE DELAY

On the games front, Activision has recently announced that it is preparing Spider-Man 2 and Tony Hawk's Underground 2 for the launch of the system in the U.S. Meanwhile, Electronic Arts has confirmed that the initial launch period for the handheld will feature Need for Speed Underground Rivals, Tiger Woods PGA Tour, NFL Street, NBA Street, FIFA Soccer, and MVP Baseball.

EA's executive producer of PSP development, Warren Wall, talked about some of the wireless features that the PSP will support. Head-to-head Wi-Fi play with the system would be initiated with a flip of a switch on the side of the unit. When it's turned on, this feature would automatically detect others in the area. Wall said that EA plans exclusive PSP multiplayer modes for its games. Sony recently confirmed that MMORPG gameplay is also possible on the platform by recently listing the genre as a part of its upcoming software lineup.

Ironically, despite all this talk of software, Sony's chief of network system development, Izumi Kawanishi, recently revealed that the launch of the PSP – which some have said will slip – may be determined by whether or not developers have enough software to back it up. The PSP is currently slated to ship this year in Japan and early 2005 here in the States.

# FEAR IS A FOUR-LETTER WORD

## ALONE IN THE DARK DEVELOPER BACK

Developer Darkwatch is out of the shadows, and is offering a new game steeped in the studio's survival horror background called Cold Fear. Darkwatch's last title was Alone in the Dark: The New Nightmare – a game that not only helped put the franchise that started the genre back on the map, but one which was also a standout title for the Dreamcast.

Cold Fear will be published by Ubisoft for the PlayStation 2, Xbox, and PC next year, and puts you in the shoes of a U.S. Coast Guard officer named Tom Hansen. At the start of the game, Hansen boards a Russian whaling ship tossing about on the high seas. But, far from enjoying the manly fun that you get with a bunch of hardy sailors cooped up together in the Bering Sea, he finds that the ship is abandoned and there is creepy danger about.

Looking at these early screens of the game, it is clear that some of the intense scenes and graphical effects that Darkwatch gave to us in Alone in the Dark have been developed even more for Cold Fear. Check out the misting and water spray of the stormy seas and the light sourcing of the gun-attached flashlight. The game will also switch locations to an oil rig, and many other surprises are sure to be in store.

## LOOSE TALK

**Hot Gaming Gossip**

### EA ON TO PS3?

Electronic Arts CFO and CAO Warren Jenson signaled that the company believes that the PlayStation 3 may release by mid-2006 or even earlier. At an investment research conference, Jenson said that the company expects Xbox 2 to come out in time for the 2005 holiday season, and the PS3 to follow no more than six months later. However, he suggested that Sony may come out in late 2005 to prevent Microsoft from getting too much of a head start.

### DS TO HOOK UP TO REVOLUTION? ONLINE?

Famed VP of sales and marketing for Nintendo, Reggie Fils-Aime, hinted recently that the new Nintendo DS handheld could possibly hook up to both the GameCube and the next-generation system dubbed "Revolution." He said that the DS is capable of doing so, although hooking up with the GameCube might need additional software and accessories.

In other DS rumor news, the Internet (someone tell George W. Bush there's only one) is abuzz with talk that the Warp Pipe team (those that brought you online play for your GameCube via the platform's system link. See GI #130 for more) has been bought by Nintendo to provide online play for the DS. Presumably, this project would allow for wireless play over greater distances than the DS is currently capable of.

### NFL STREET 2 IN 2004?

Electronic Arts' CEO Larry Probst recently admitted that NFL Street 2 may come out a month early. The publisher wants the game to release before Christmas instead of the middle of January. One wonders whether this is related to the need for more sales numbers by EA after Burnout 3 didn't do as gangbusters as the company thought it would.

### BUNGIE'S HALO 3 ON XBOX 2

If you've finished Halo 2 by now (of course you have), then you know that anyone who thought that Bungie wouldn't do a Halo 3 is dead wrong. The developer is already hard at work on the series' third iteration on Xbox 2. The studio has unceremoniously dumped all of the dev units for the original 'box. When we say "unceremoniously," we mean piled bonfire-like, waiting for the garbage truck.

*Got some insider info? Email us at loosetalk@gameinformer.com and we'll be all ears.*

## NAME THAT GAME

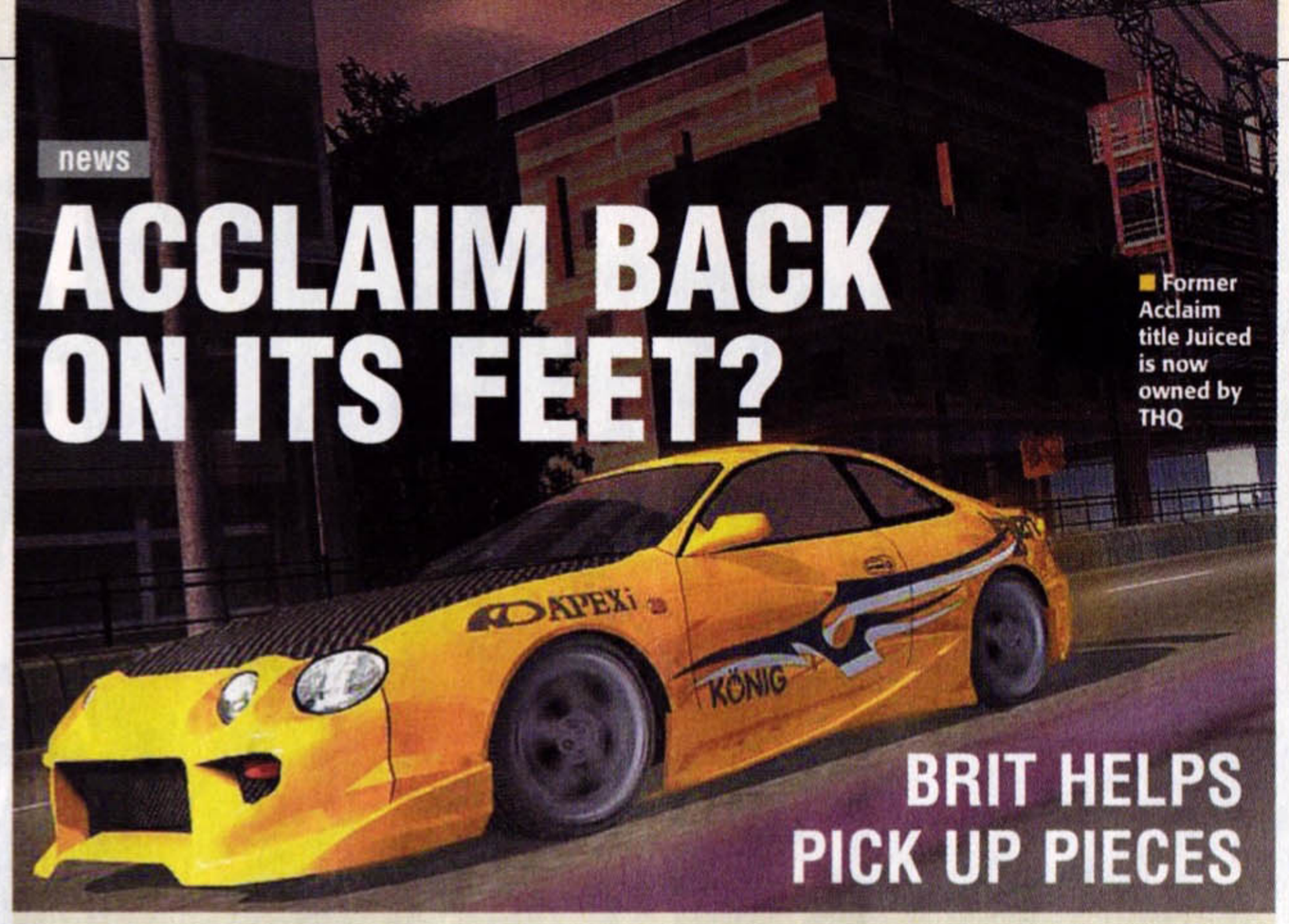
**Test Your Sight**

The Neo Geo Pocket Color never survived as a handheld alternative to the Game Boy Color, but that doesn't mean that there weren't some pretty good games for it. One was a mech strategy title put out by SNK featuring battling bots called Toy Soldiers (Sean Astin was, however, absent). The trick was that at the beginning of each turn you had to pick what five things you wanted your Toy Soldier to do. The results would then be played out on the game board, with everyone moving simultaneously. Parts and upgrades could be purchased, as well as new moves for your mechs.

(Answer on page 30)

news

# ACCLAIM BACK ON ITS FEET?




Former Acclaim title Juiced is now owned by THQ

## BRIT HELPS PICK UP PIECES

Former CEO of Acclaim, Red Cousens, has stepped up from the ashes of the former company, and is working to acquire Acclaim's Manchester and Cheltenham studios (with around 160 employees). Cousens is also trying to pick up the rights to at least four of the former publisher's games, including Interview with a Made Man and Heist. Also sought are intellectual properties and some undisclosed titles from Acclaim's back catalogue. Cousens' new venture will be a wholly seperate company from Acclaim with an all-new name. In the interim, he has dubbed his venture in the U.K. Exclaim. Although some American assets are being targeted, Game Informer has not heard whether or not any employees of Acclaim's former Austin studio will be hired on.

Cousens is currently facing problems, however, in putting Exclaim together. The difficulties reportedly lie in the administrators overseeing the liquidation of Acclaim's assets through its filing of Chapter 7 bankruptcy. Lawyer and Acclaim trustee, Allan Mendelsohn, has barred Cousens from arranging the sale of those assets – including the rights to the Manchester and Cheltenham studios.

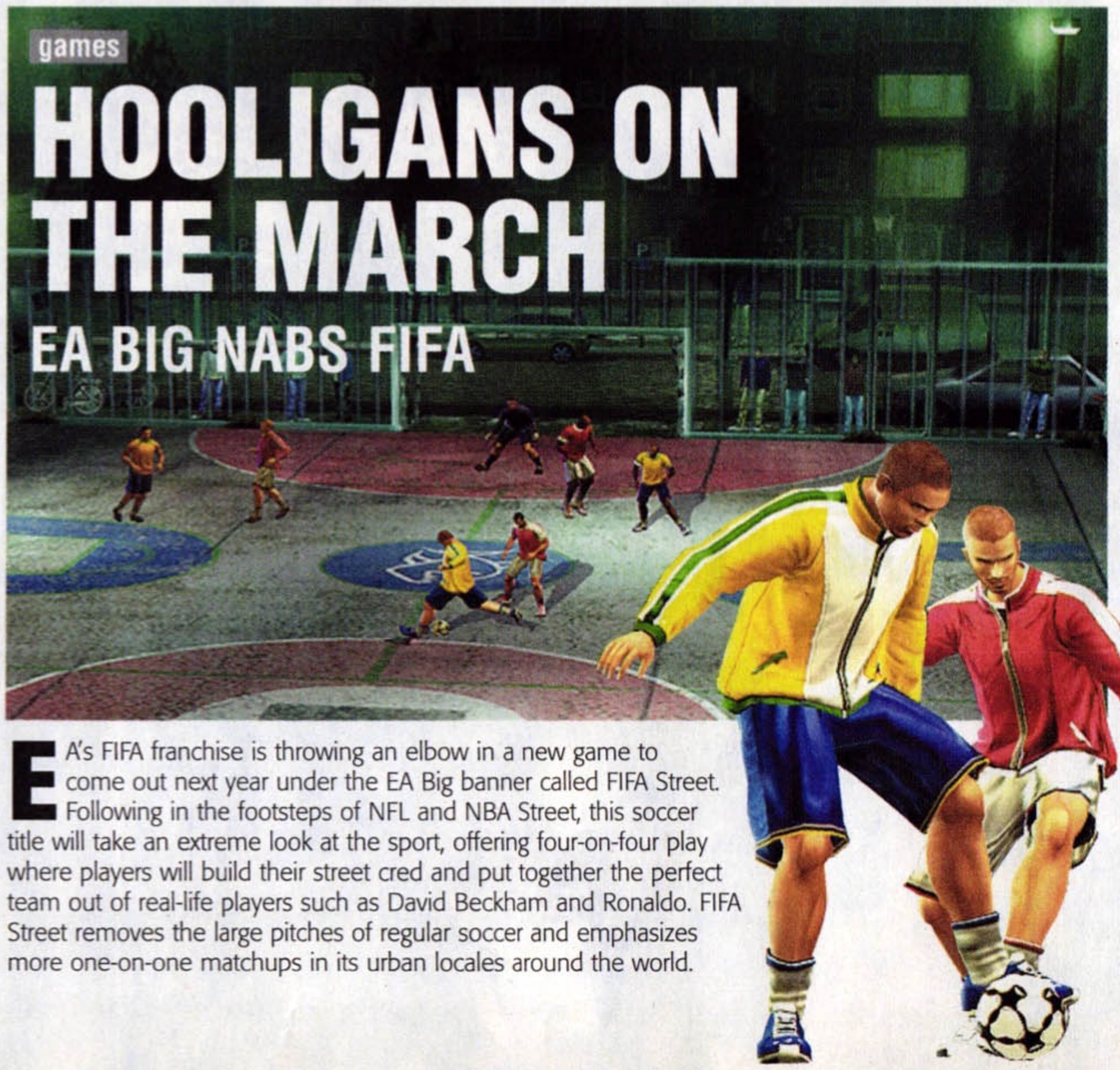
In other news regarding the former publisher, developer Team17 has struck a deal with an unnamed American publisher to release Worms Forts: Under Siege! and Worms 3D: Special Edition (on Xbox).

Finally, THQ has outbid Take 2 Interactive for the rights to the former Acclaim title Juiced. Last issue we reported that Take 2 was close to signing the racing game, but at the 11th hour, THQ won. According to papers filed, THQ's bid was half a million dollars higher, at $10.5 million. Electronic Arts, Midway, Namco, and Atari were also interested. Juiced will be released this upcoming summer.

games

# HOOLIGANS ON THE MARCH

## EA BIG NABS FIFA



EA's FIFA franchise is throwing an elbow in a new game to come out next year under the EA Big banner called FIFA Street. Following in the footsteps of NFL and NBA Street, this soccer title will take an extreme look at the sport, offering four-on-four play where players will build their street cred and put together the perfect team out of real-life players such as David Beckham and Ronaldo. FIFA Street removes the large pitches of regular soccer and emphasizes more one-on-one matchups in its urban locales around the world.

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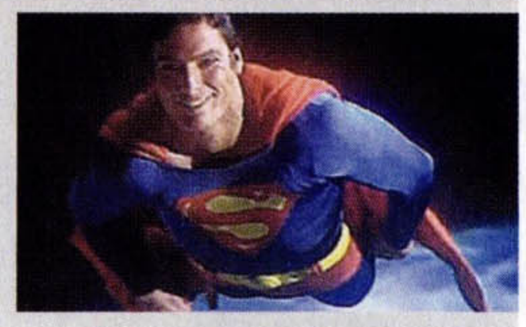
# THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY

**When You Want Your News Categorized With A Sarcastic Editorial Spin**

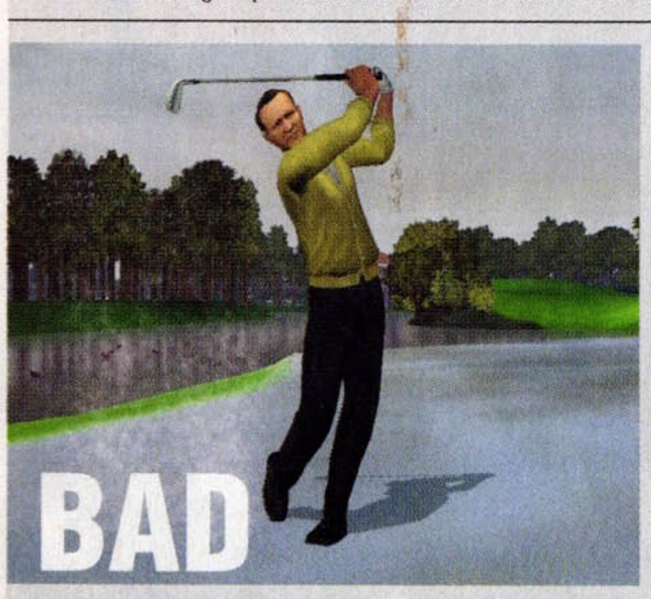
## GOOD



Christopher Reeve was honored in MMORPG City of Heroes. Players gathered in the game and saluted in tandem the late Superman actor who passed away on October 12 due to heart failure caused by an infection related to his paralysis.

## UGLY

Weeks before its vaunted release, a PAL version of Halo 2 featuring English subtitles and French dialogue was leaked on the Internet. The 3GB file was downloaded by hundreds. Microsoft threatened anyone who downloaded the game with a $100,000 copyright fine and perhaps jail time. Said developer Bungie, "Microsoft is currently engaged in a full scale investigation and to those foolish enough to partake in this piracy, you will soon witness the firepower of this fully operational battle station." Not to be outdone, days later Rockstar announced that illegal copies of Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas were leaked to the public.



## BAD

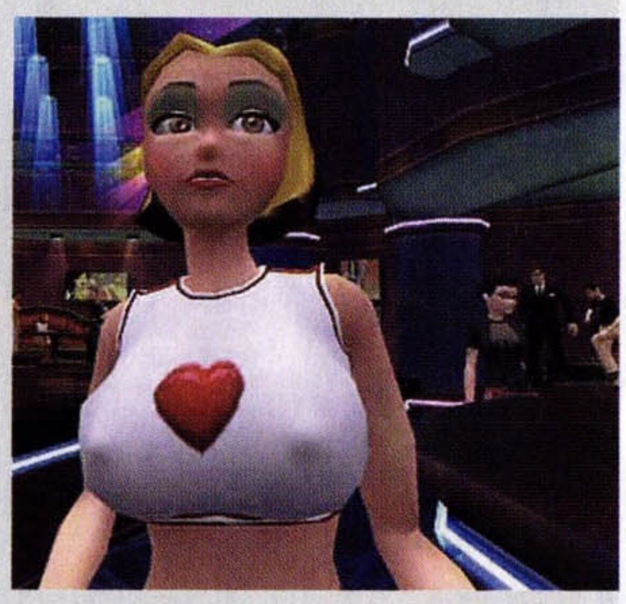
The English-language version of PS2 title Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2005 in Europe was recalled from stores due to a "performance issue" bug. Gamers affected were given a reimbursement, and new PS2 copies of the title were back on the shelves in about three weeks. Taking it in the chops with humor, EA commented, "Even the pros hit one into the rough now and again."

## BAD

Get back into your grave! Sega disappoints old school fans by announcing that Altered Beast for the PS2 will not come out in America.

## GOOD

When Hiroshi Yamauchi talks, Nintendo listens. The former president of the company recently proposed that Nintendo make an animated film project based on Japanese poetry. He even thinks the movie could make it here in the States. Although no longer in charge, it's a poorly kept secret that Yamauchi still calls the shots for the company. If the project doesn't bomb nearly as badly as Square's foray into the market with Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within, we guess it would be a small victory.



## BAD

Australia's Office of Film and Literature Classification has banned Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude from being sold, imported, or rented in Australia. Someone buy this country a sense of humor.

games

# THE HITS JUST KEEP ON COMING

## LIFE AIN'T CHEAP SAYS EIDOS

If Hitman: Contracts broke with the previous games in the series and eschewed the cold and calculated approach, Eidos' upcoming killer, Hitman: Blood Money (coming in spring for PS2, Xbox, and PC) truly goes off the deep end. After other hitmen from the ICA are murdered, Agent 47 believes he is next. He escapes to the U.S. and plots to bring down this dangerous new force threatening the agency.

Expanding on the non-linear concept started in Contracts, Blood Money – like the title implies – has you profiting off the deaths of your victims. The money you make off your murders influences your path through the game and which weapons you'll be able to use.

## R & D

**Game Informer brings the world's worst game ideas to life**

### Frosting Frosting!

The last few months have seen the release of some incredibly quirky games, like Katamari Damacy and ChoroQ. We love strange games like these, and were inspired by their strangeness to create our own quirky niche title. Our concept is called Frosting Frosting!, and puts players in the role of The Pastry Prince of the Universe, a strange (yet adorable) alien who comes to Earth and deems it too full of sadness. He decides to fix Earth's gloomy mood with his Frosting Gun, which covers targets with delicious Frosting of Love. With the help of the his sidekick PiePie, a talking mouse who dispenses advice and throws cupcakes at enemies, The Pastry Prince must cover a certain percentage of each stage with the Frosting of Love in order to proceed. Buildings, cars, trees, dogs, and everything else can be covered in frosting. Hungry birds and fat people will attempt to eat away at the delicious topping he leaves behind, so The Prince must glue them in place with frosting or have PiePie knock them out with a cupcake to keep them out of his hair. If The Pastry Prince is successful in his quest, the entire planet will be a more happy and delicious place, and gamers will have another strange new game to appease their sweet tooth.

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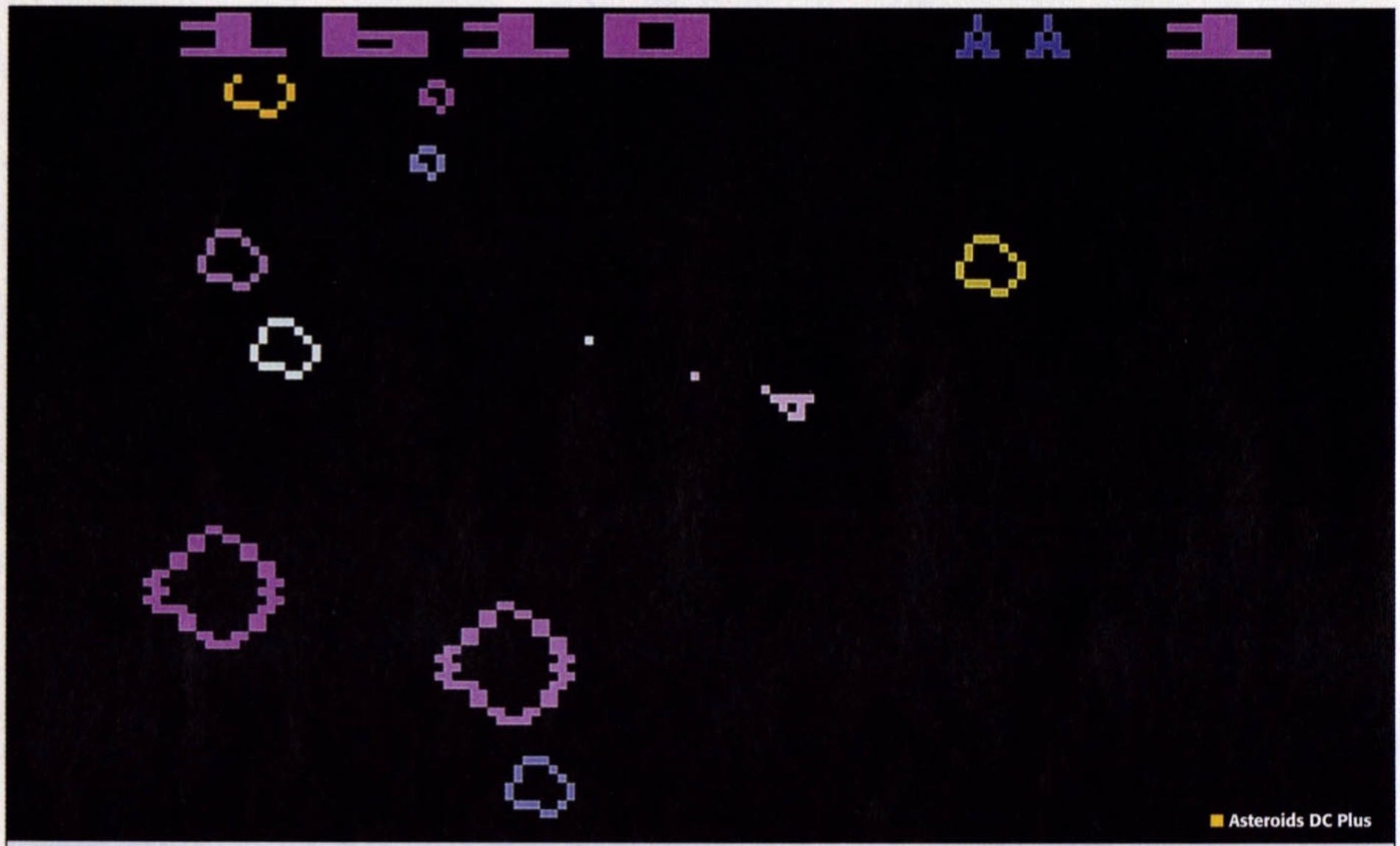
SOE SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT



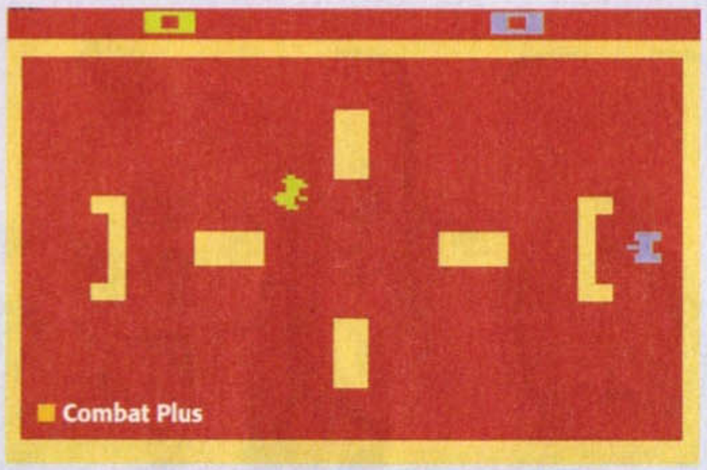
Asteroids DC Plus

news

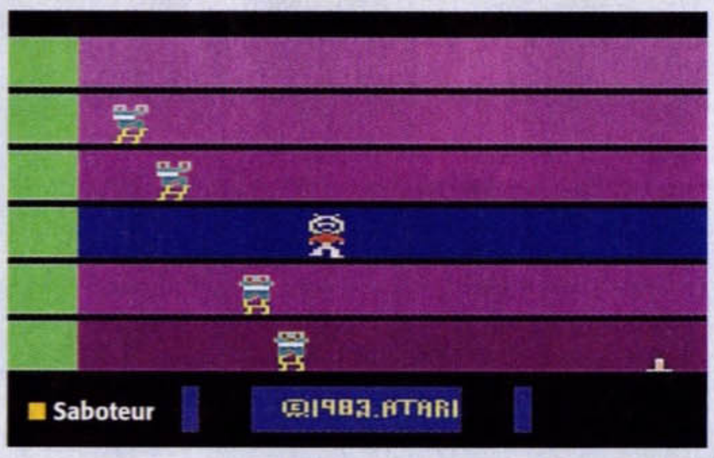
# HOMEBREW GAMING UNDER FIRE?

## ATARI: "NOT THE ENEMY OF THE CLASSIC GAMING COMMUNITY"

Recently, a scare swept through the homebrew development community when some retro gaming sites, such as www.atariage.com, were asked by Atari to stop selling copies of already existing retro games that programmers had added their own content to, carts known as hacks (such as Combat Plus and Asteroids DC Plus). Also targeted were other previously unpublished Atari titles, like Howard Scott Warshaw's Saboteur. Rumors around the retro community were that Atari was sending out cease and desist letters to stop homebrew games and its technology (which refers to people who make new, original games for old systems like the Atari 7800, for example), but Game Informer has found no evidence of this. Instead, Atari has gone after those who illegally use its logo and any hacks of its properties. Thus, hacks of titles like Warlords, Breakout, Combat, and more were taken off the offending sites. As it stands, however, homebrew technology and games are still legally for sale.



Combat Plus



Saboteur

Game Informer talked to Nancy Bushkin, vice president of corporate communications for Atari, who told us that the company is not interested in stifling the creativity of its many fans. When we asked if a homebrew gamer would be legally pursued by Atari if they made their own 2600 title, for example, she replied, "Of course not. An original product is just that: original. And let's be clear: Saboteur was not a homebrew game. It was developed by Atari, has always been Atari's IP, and has only been Atari's to sell."

Bushkin says that Atari has an "informal relationship" with sites like www.atariage.com, and the site was cooperative with the company's wishes. Although it hasn't been able to attend classic conventions like the Classic Gaming Expo, it supports such gatherings and its fans. "Atari is not the enemy of the classic gaming community, in fact, quite the opposite. We value these fans and want to do all we can to ensure that they have legitimate, easy access to the titles they've loved for so many years."

Still, some in the homebrew community are less than pleased with Atari, claiming that it is the fact that the classic community has carried the torch for old systems like the 2600 that have allowed the name to survive and flourish to the point where French company Infogrames could resurrect it. Some see Atari as a "Johnny come lately" for interceding at this point, and have stopped homebrew development for fear of what the company may fault them for. Regardless, Atari is within its legal rights to protect its copyrights and trademarks.

## DATA FILE

More News You Can Use

### PAC-MAN BITES LIL' FLIP IN ASS

Namco is suing Houston rap star Lil' Flip for sampling sounds from Pac-Man and Ms. Pac-Man without authorization in the song "Game Over." Namco is reportedly asking for up to $10 million in damages.

### STREET FIGHTER STARTS NEW STUDIO

Ex-Capcom Street Fighter producer Noritaka Funamizu has started his own studio to be called Craft and Meister. The company has eight employees at the moment, including the former producer of Capcom's Auto Modellista. Says Funamizu, "I wanted to make my own games without having to follow the modern methods."

Auto Modellista

### SONY'S POCKETBOOK RUMBLED

A federal jury in the U.S. has awarded $82 million in damages to Immersion from Sony based on a case claiming the PlayStation manufacturer infringed on two Immersion patents involving force-feedback technology in Sony's Dual Shock controller. Immersion has already won an out-of-court settlement with Microsoft on the same matter to the tune of $26 million. Sony will likely reach a similar licensing agreement with Immersion for future controllers.

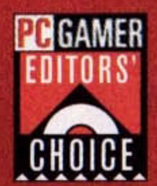
### UEMATSU'S SECOND ALBUM SYNDROME

Final Fantasy music man Nobuo Uematsu and his band The Black Mages are working on an album entitled The Black Mages II: The Skies Above. The first record featured rock versions of Final Fantasy songs. For some clips and samples of the band, go to http://www.square-enix.co.jp/music/uematsu/tbm2/

### GIZMONDO GETS CONFLICT: VIETNAM

Tiger Telematic's Gizmondo handheld system (which also plays MP3s, contains a GPS tracking system, a digital camera, and more), which is set to hit the U.S. in 2005, has signed a deal with developer SCI for a dozen titles including Conflict: Vietnam, Richard Burns Rally, and Carmageddon.

# ROME™
## TOTAL WAR

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*—PC Gamer*

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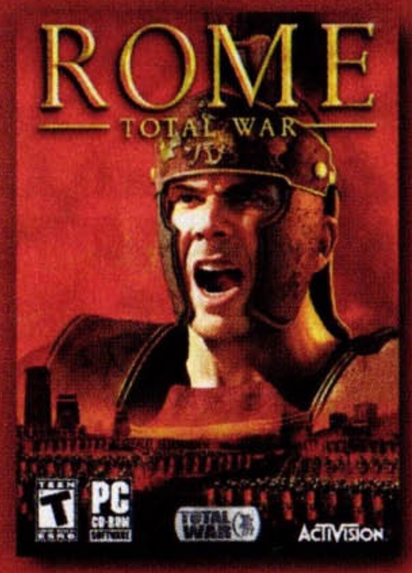


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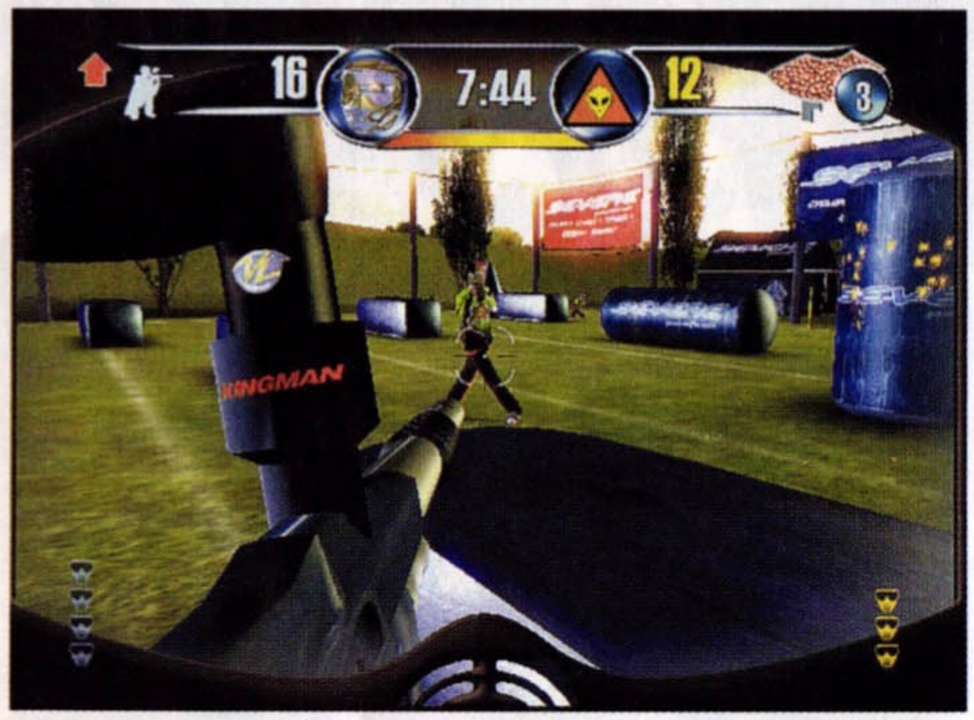
# WARHAMMER BACK ONLINE

## CLIMAX GOES IT ALONE

Back in June, Climax Games announced that it was canceling its MMORPG project Warhammer Online due to the costs associated with the development of the game. It was originally being financed by Games Workshop, but now developer Climax and its CEO Karl Jeffery say that they will continue the project on their own. In fact, Jeffery says that Climax never stopped working on the title, despite the announced cancellation. The release of Warhammer Online is being targeted for sometime in the middle of 2006. The title was going to be published worldwide by Sega Europe, but it is unknown if this deal is still in effect.



games

# WEEKEND WARRIORS UNITE!

## ACTIVISION ENTERS PAINTBALL

Paintball is the fastest-growing extreme sport in the world, a fact not lost on Activision. This month it will release a console paintball game. Greg Hastings' Tournament Paintball features a career mode in which players can advance from rookies to pros, upgrade their gear with over 100 licensed products, and add real-life pros to their team.

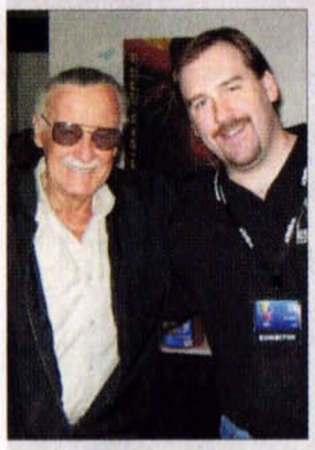
Of course, since the core of paintball is competition, players can take their game to Xbox Live with up to seven-on-seven team play without having to fear that stinging feeling you get in real life! We've had a chance to take the Live mode for a spin, and had a surprisingly good time. Realistically intense, this is the perfect title for dedicated 'ballers who want to practice their skills in the off-season. Or you could be like Kato, who in the recent GI paintball tourney, bowed out early with a mysterious hit on the foot. Hmmm.

## TOP FIVES

**Favorites From Industry Pros And GI Readers**

### DEVELOPER

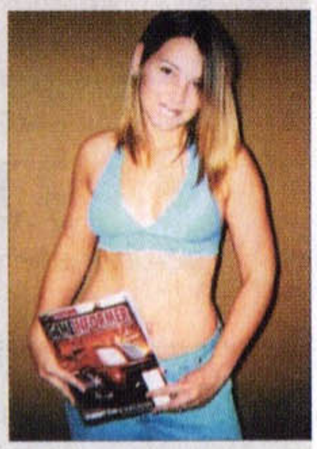
Rob Gee (right, w/Stan Lee) Project Lead, Raven Software



1 Age of Empires – PC
2 Diablo 2 – PC
3 Tribes – PC
4 Quake – PC
5 Fallout – PC

### READER

CARISA BALL
Kentucky



1 The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind – Xbox
2 Halo – Xbox
3 Ghost Recon: Island Thunder – Xbox
4 Grand Theft Auto III – PS2
5 Resident Evil – PSone

*Send Top Fives and a photo of yourself to:*

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email: topfive@gameinformer.com
*(attach digital picture)*

## TOP TEN

**Lists...Everybody Loves Lists...**

### Top 10 Inexpensive Gifts to Save Money for Your Holiday Game Needs

10 iPond: Portable tupperware container full of bogwater – holds up to 10,000 larvae!

9 Soggy sweatpants: Unpleasant to wear, but it feels so good to finally get out of those wet clothes.

8 Turpentine: Replace label with a "1787 Chateau Lafite" sticker. Classy.

7 Hire Dexy's Midnight Runners for a concert: Those guys are singing for nickels these days!

6 Cardboard box: Smells great. Also doubles as a Solid Snake Costume.

5 Any Steven Seagal movie: One of the few things cheaper than actually making a gift yourself.

4 A bucket full of coupons: Better than gift certificates. Individual 1/100 of a cent cash values add up!

3 Flour: Add a few bags to any present to make it heavier, and therefore better.

2 Promotional Literature: From "The Amazing Omniflex" to "So You've Chosen LASIK," these can provide quality bathroom-reading for years to come.

1 Caulk. Sweet, delicious caulk.

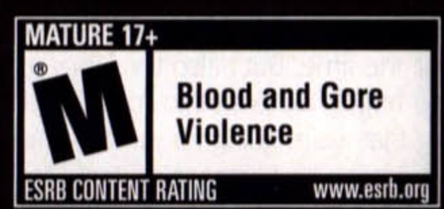
Name That Game Answer: Faselei!

If it seemed like they

# were coming from all sides before,

try it in 3D.

No matter how cool it looks, never stop shooting. Three dimensions. Two playable heroes. One classic franchise returns. Neo Contra. The more things change, the more they stay insane.



PlayStation.2

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# PETER MOLYNEUX

DIRECTOR/LIONHEAD STUDIOS

**>> Peter Molyneux is a true legend in the world of game development, and is generally considered one of the most creative developers in the world today. We sat down with Molyneux and talked about Fable, some of his upcoming projects, as well as the industry as a whole. <<**

### CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

1987 ▶ **Starting Out**

Molyneux helps found Bullfrog Productions, the company he would stay with for the early part of his career

1989 ▶ **The Big Time**

Molyneux strikes gold with Populous, one of the true classics of PC gaming. The game pioneers the "god game" genre, and goes on to sell over four million copies

1992 ▶ **God, Etc.**

Chalk up another "god game" hit for Bullfrog, which released PowerMonger, a title similar to Populous, but with a bit of a malevolent bent

1995 ▶ **Assimilate!**

After a string of successes with the super-publisher, Bullfrog Productions officially merges with giant Electronic Arts

1997 ▶ **Breaking Free**

Molyneux, longing for the days of independence, leaves Bullfrog and EA to form a new development house, Lionhead Studios

2001 ▶ **A New Classic**

Lionhead's first major project is also a major hit. Black & White revitalizes the god genre with a wicked sense of humor and some amazing creatures

2004 ▶ **Spinning Yarns**

Breaking in to the RPG market, Lionhead releases the visionary Fable for Xbox. The game wins critical acclaim and becomes one of the fastest-selling titles in Xbox history

**Obviously Fable has been, by all accounts, a really huge commercial success so far here in the States.**

Well, it was an incredible feeling, partly because you remember the days just sitting down and saying, "Hey, let's do a role-playing game on a console." Going from there to now and seeing so many people out there playing it and enjoying it is an incredible feeling.

**There have been some complaints about Fable on the Internet, and you actually released a statement that apologized for any features that may have been removed from the game. What was your impetus for writing that?**

Well, the main reason I wanted to write it is because people were getting, in some ways, justifiably upset that some of the features that they thought were going to be in the game weren't in the game. One of the problems with me is I have this irresistible urge to talk about the games that I'm working on. Everyone else in the industry is professional about this and waits until the game's almost finished and then starts talking about it. I just shoot my mouth off almost as soon as I think of an idea. I think what people think is that when I say something in the press it means that that feature is there for the rest of time no matter what happens. And sometimes when you look at ideas, you find that they just don't work. It's rather like when you shoot a film – you don't just shoot four hours and that's the film. You shoot, like, 100 hours of footage and then that's edited down to a two-hour film.

> **"...I have this irresistible urge to talk about the games that I'm working on."**

**How do you feel about the Internet in general and the advent of message boards? Do you feel that the criticism can grow out of proportion?**

It is wonderful; it's hugely beneficial to us. Without those Internet communities we just simply wouldn't have the excitement behind Fable. There's no doubt about it. But it's a double-edged sword in that those communities don't just take facts and say, "Right, that's it." They consider things. They analyze things. They comment on things. They criticize things – way out of proportion sometimes. And you just have to realize that that's going to be the case. It's so much easier to criticize something. I've taken criticism and learned from it.

**How satisfied were you with Fable, based on your initial vision to what was the final product?**

I'm immensely proud of what we've managed to do. I absolutely can see things that were wrong with the game that I wish that we had the time to actually make them right. I have a feeling though that it's a never-ending thing. You could go on forever. And, I'm sure if we do take Fable further we'll listen to absolutely all of [the complaints]. That's what we've done with Black & White 2.

**Are you planning Fable 2?**

This is where my big mouth always gets me in trouble. I mean, there is a diplomatic answer to that and the diplomatic answer is it would be scary if we weren't planning Fable 2. Let's put it that way. There's definitely no official announcement.

**You suggested that you might not be as open with the press in discussing projects. Are you going to go towards a more professional, PR-approved approach like a lot of companies?**

We'll just have to see how the reaction all turns out in the end. In some ways, having someone with their arms [waving] around enthusiastically – those days are either going or gone. But, I feel that this should be a place for talking about the passion of developing games before they're actually finished. It would be a sad day for me to stop doing that, but if it's going to hurt Lionhead and the games we're making then obviously I won't do it.

**So, this is probably a good juncture to talk to you about your top-secret "Dimitri" project.**

You journalists, you are just so sneaky. You know that I would spill the beans on Dimitri. But, I have to take the last statement into account. And actually Dimitri is something I haven't spoken about at all. It's an enormously ambitious title in every single sense of the word, and part of the reason I don't want to talk about it is that you would say, "That's insane," if I told you the idea.

**So, right now, Black & White 2 is next up for Lionhead and that's where your energies are at this moment?**

Yeah, it's Black & White 2 and The Movies. I think I'll be on Black & White 2 for awhile and then I'll definitely move over to The Movies. And we'll see where we go from there.

**What about B.C.? By all indications, the clock is ticking on Xbox. Will you have enough time to release B.C. on this generation of hardware, or will it migrate to a next-gen system?**

At this time, I think it's a fair comment to say that if we can't make it into a triple-A game for this generation then it would be probably best not to consider it for this generational cycle.

**What's your take so far on the battle between Microsoft and Sony this upcoming generation? Do you have any thoughts on how that's developing?**

Well, the prize they're fighting over is the future of home entertainment, really. It's a slightly bigger prize than actually we may think it is. The fascinating thing is that it's actually more than just a battle between Sony and Microsoft. It's a battle between Sony, Microsoft, television, and film entertainment. If you look at something like Spider-Man 2, Spider-Man 2 the game made almost as much as the movie did. And that means there's a lot of forces coming into play around the next generation. The next generation is going to be all about making games truly mass market – trying to bring in people that aren't currently playing games and make them see that this is a real alternative form of entertainment...there are billion of dollars at stake.

**Do you think this could have a chilling effect on creativity, with more unique ideas being overlooked for bankable, licensed franchises?**

Absolutely. There is a risk for gamers. I think that's where the risk really lies. The mass market doesn't want exactly the same gaming experience as a gamer does. And a lot of the games that we make now are pitched at gamers. And you can see some of the bigger publishers and some of the bigger developers saying, "Hang on a second. We're not going to pitch it at the gamers anymore. We're going to pitch it at the mass market. We're going to make games simpler and easier and more accessible." And sometimes it's the opposite of what gamers really want. They want to be challenged. They want to be excited all the time. But I also think that games are getting so hugely expensive to make that it's not surprising that we're going for just franchises and sequels because it's a very scary world to invest tens of millions of dollars in unproven games.

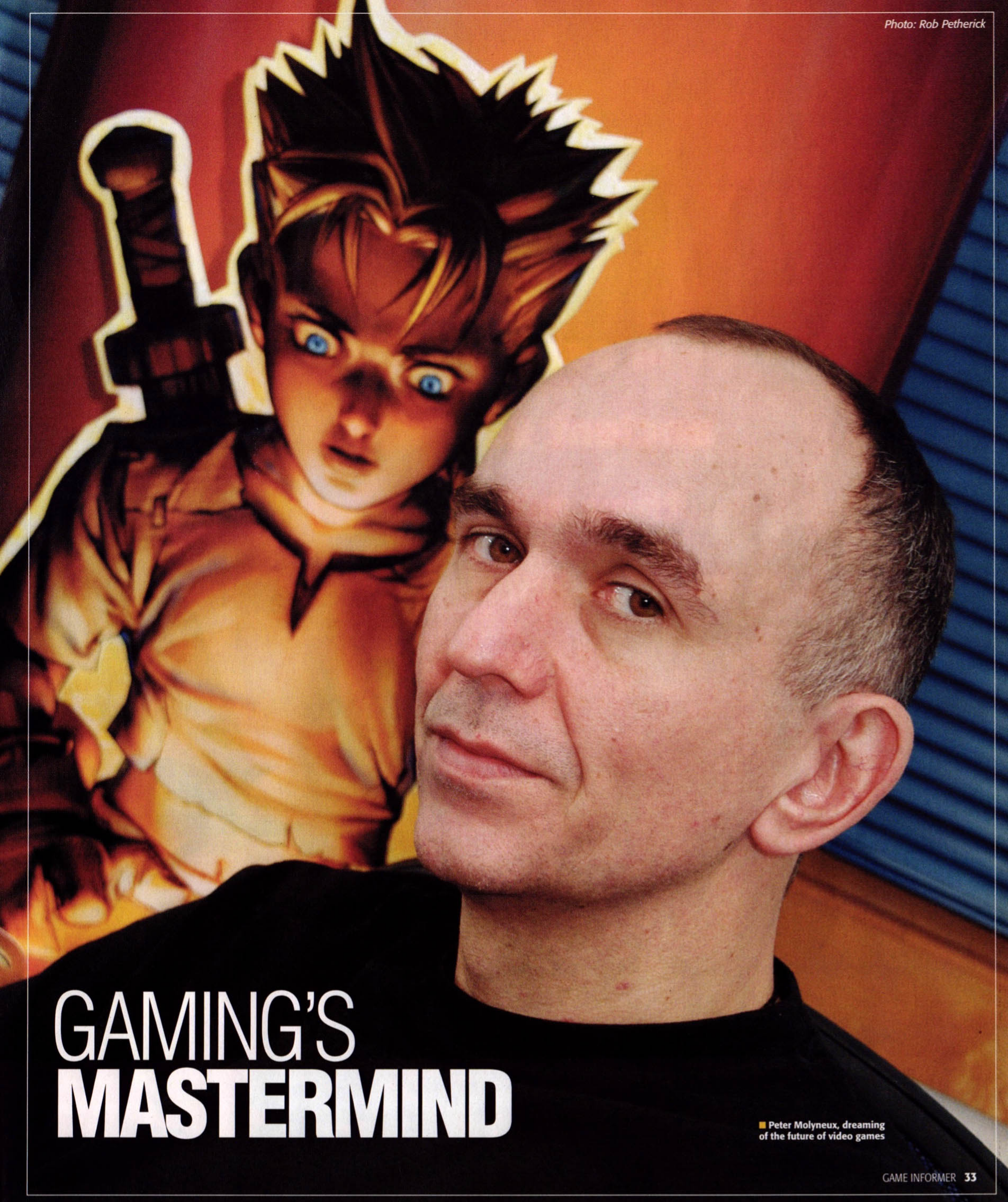

Photo: Rob Petherick

# GAMING'S MASTERMIND

Peter Molyneux, dreaming of the future of video games

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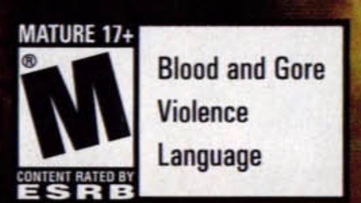
# In search of ancient secrets, they will find an unstoppable foe.

BUNGIE




halo2.com

HALO
Earth Will Never Be The Same

# Tokyo

## A tour of Game Informer's favorite spots for

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Going to Tokyo, Japan is like visiting the future. The cell phones are smaller, the cameras more advanced, the TVs sexier and sleeker. For a technophile, there is no better place in the world. While all the gadgets are fun to peruse, this month in Connect: Places, Game Informer is going to take you on a tour of our favorite spots to shop for the best that Japan has to offer… and that's toys and video games.

The first stop for any Tokyo visitor should always be the Akihabara district – the home of all things electronic. Not only does it have some great arcades like Club Sega **(1)**, it features some of Japan's finest video game shops. An easy first destination is Sofmap **(2)**, Japan's biggest retailer, but Game Informer likes to go a little off the beaten path. For example, Media Land has not only a great selection of current releases, it's also a great place to find hidden treasures like these Famicom disk drives brand new in the box **(3)**. We also found a wide variety of 16-bit era product here **(4)**, as well as a Neo Geo CD for a measly 9,000 yen.

Our next stop is almost always Aso Bit City **(5)**. Not only do they have a great variety of games, there are all kinds of amazing toys to gawk at **(6)**. And finally, no trip to Akihabara would be complete without a stop by Yamigawa Soft. This superstore features music, DVDs, video games, and just plain cool stuff from all around the world. From t-shirts **(7)** to Final Fantasy paraphernalia **(8)**, this place has everything, including a wide variety of game soundtracks **(9)** and DVDs **(10)**. And yes, those are Zelda and Final Fantasy DVDs you see in the picture.

After you explore Akihabara, we highly recommend a trip to Ueno to visit our favorite toy store, Yamashiroya **(11)**. This place is a wonderland **(12)**. We found amazing stuff here including a wall of Studio Ghibli collectibles **(13)**, Godzilla toys **(14)**, Animal Crossing Pez dispensers **(15)**, Final Fantasy figures **(16)**, and even a huge case of Star Wars odds and ends **(17)**.

If you didn't find all the toys you needed at Yamashiroya, your next subway stop needs to be Harajuku. This place has a ton of amazing shopping and yet another great toy store, Kiddy Land **(18)**. While not nearly as chock full of goodness as Yamashiroya, Kiddy Land is still a great stop to find other hard-to-find toys.

For more pictures and more of our favorite shopping destinations, head to this month's Game Informer Unlimited (www.gameinformer.com/magazine). Until our next Tokyo shopping guide, sayonara!

# JAPAN

*toys and games in the Land of the Rising Sun*

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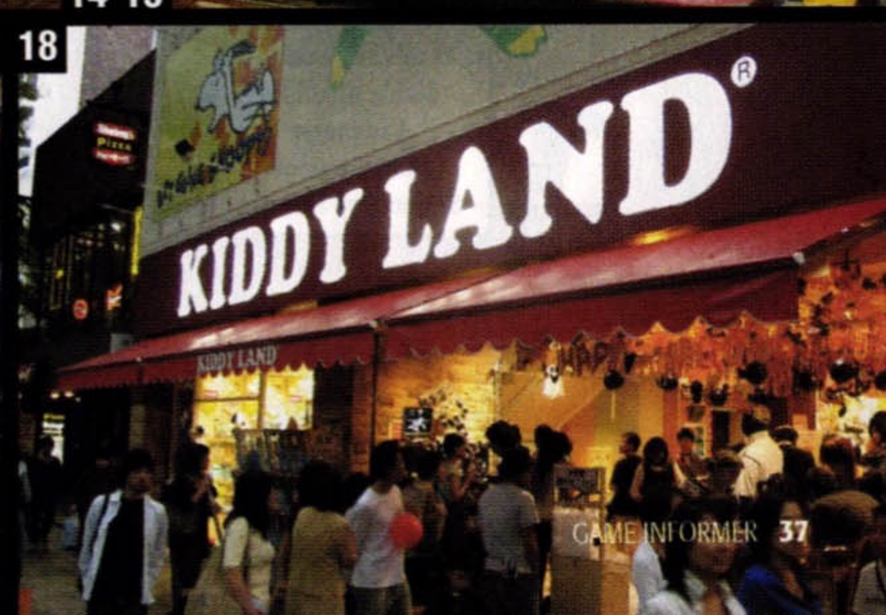

18

# THE EPIC JAK TRILOGY IS COMING

## REST ASSURED, IT WON'T END LIKE THIS.

JAK 3™

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Comic Mischief
Language
Mild Violence
Suggestive Themes

PlayStation.2

NAUGHTY DOG®

www.us.playstation.com.

Official strategy guide now available. Free sample downloads at www.piggybackinteractive.com.

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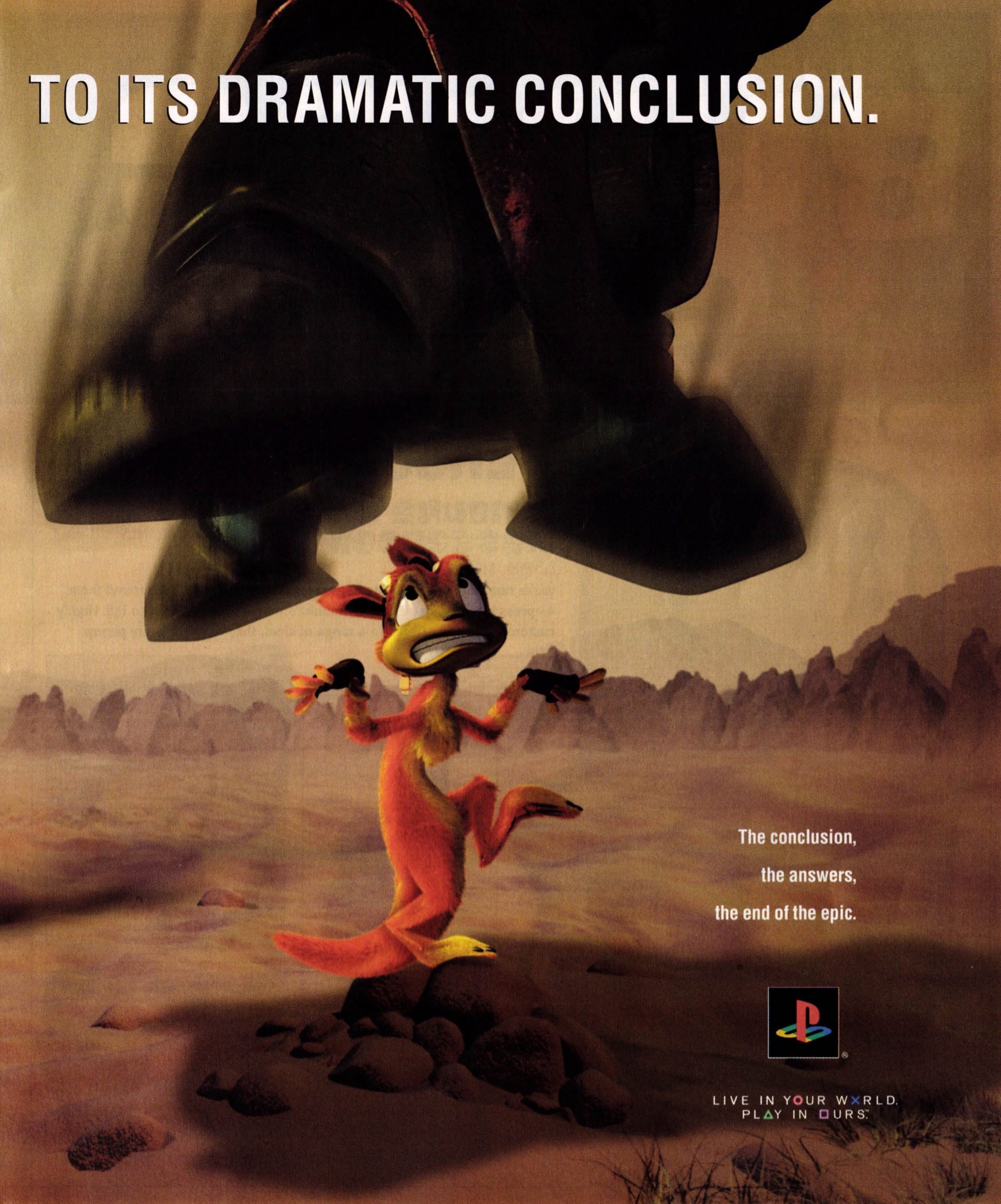

TO ITS DRAMATIC CONCLUSION.
The conclusion,
the answers,
the end of the epic.
LIVE IN YOUR WORLD.
PLAY IN OURS.™

# HOLIDAY BUYING GUIDE

## PERSONAL TECH

### TIMBUK2 GRAPHIC MESSENGER

List Price: $100

**We're notorious for breaking bags (especially during the "lug around these 45 press kits" days at E3), but Timbuk2's messengers have yet to fail. Highly customizable and offered in a range of sizes, they're worth every penny.**

**PHILIPS KEY014/17 (256MB)**

List Price: $149.99

No wires makes this our favorite style of solid-state MP3 players. The USB plug on the unit nestles into your computer to transfer files and recharge the battery in one step. There's also a remote on the neck strap along with easy-to-use controls on the stick. Hit up the parents for one of these by saying you can use it to transport documents to and from school.

**SAMSUNG MM-A700**

List Price: $399

This multimedia phone distributed by Sprint lets you download video clips (which looked surprisingly okay in our tests), capture video, take decent-resolution pictures, and send the whole lot to friends, family, random phone numbers, and computers. Okay, one of those features isn't an officially recommended option, but it does work – not that we tried it or anything.

**SWATCH PAPARAZZI**

List Price: $150

We've covered the MSN Smart Watches before, but this one debuts the service's new channels – local events and celebrity "information." Getting updates on ticket sales and concert dates is undeniably cool.

UNLIMITED ENABLED

**Welcome to a very special edition of Gear – the motherload Holiday Buying Guide. In the coming pages you'll get gadgets, gizmos, stocking stuffers, and random goodness that will blow away any dream of sugarplum fairies. Check out Unlimited for a list of where we found all of these treasures.**

*All prices are suggested retail and are subject to change. Contact your local retailer for exact price and availability.*

### OQO MODEL 01

List Price: $1,899

What weighs 14 ounces, runs a complete version of Windows XP, has a screen that slides up to reveal a keyboard, and is alarmingly handy? The upcoming OQO "ultra personal computer," that's what. Certainly not a solution for everyone, but the more you play with this, the more you realize how freakin' versatile it really is. Full versions of Office and Explorer trump their Pocket PC versions every time.

### BURTON HEADPHONE BEANIE

List Price: $39.95

Snowboarding purveyor Burton has been sticking electronic gadgets into its clothing options for the last few seasons, but this beanie is probably the closest to a mass-market item it has released. While actual sound quality suffers a teeny bit, this hat is cheap and undeniably convenient.

## EXILIM CARD EX-S100

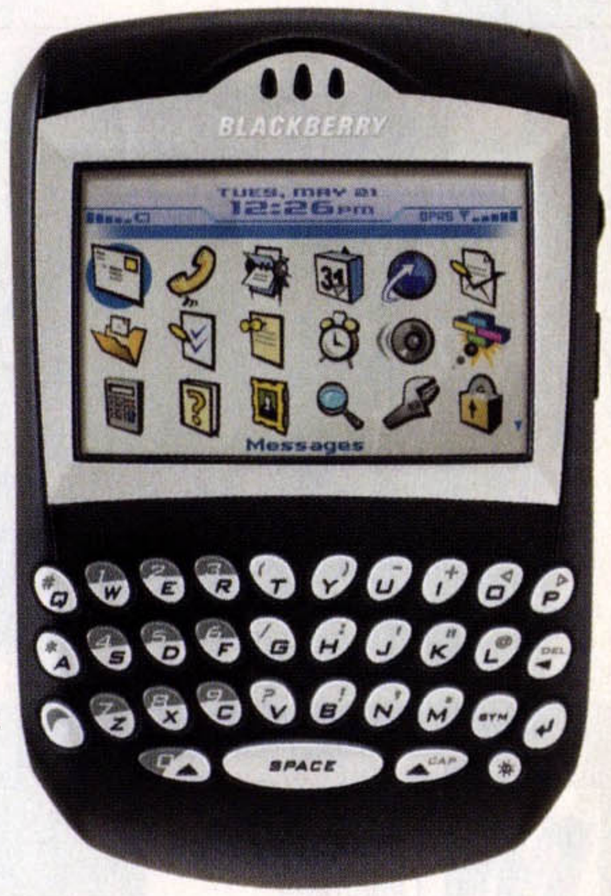
List Price: $399

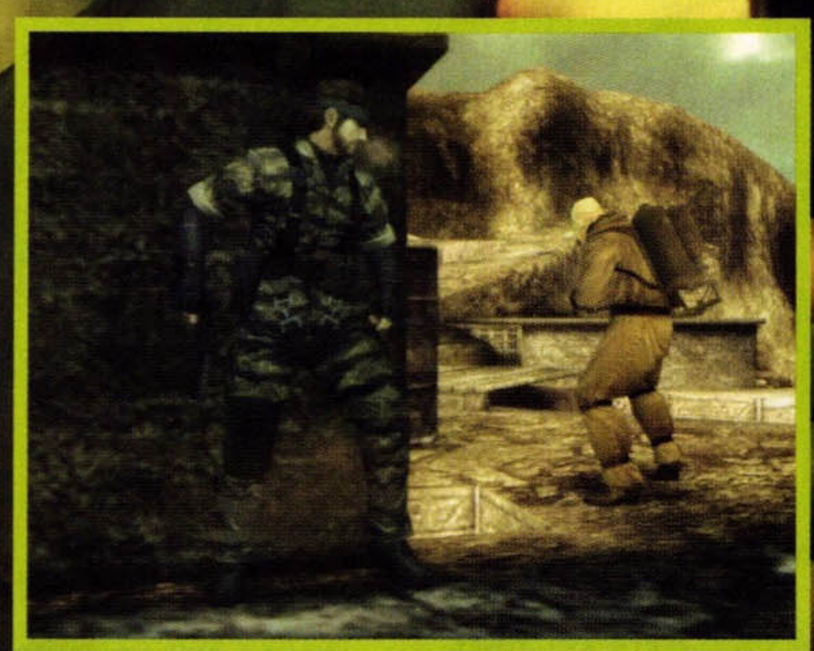
**This is one of the best deals in digital cameras right now. The new 3.2 megapixel Casio Exilim is the smallest camera available with an optical zoom, has all-metal case construction, and a two-inch LCD for reviewing and lining up shots. Interesting factoid: The total volume of the camera is 79 cubic centimeters. See? Math is cool.**

### BLACKBERRY 7290

List Price: $399

Finally, a BlackBerry with Bluetooth and a nice color screen. These little suckers handle SMS, email, Internet browsing, and regular old phone functions in one fell swoop. There are other models available, and the basic ones start at $99. Besides all of these features, we hear that cool people have them, and we'd really like to be cool some day.





**Blood and Gore**
**Intense Violence**
**Language**
**Sexual Themes**

PlayStation®2

**ONLY ON PLAYSTATION 2**

# "Intelligence has confirmed a sudden increase in CHATTER..."

"MGS3 has officially blowN our socks off. It kickeD our asses."
-PSM

"We'd eat a SNAKE to get our hANds on this one!"
-EGM

"Hideo Kojima is truly a MASTER of his craft."
-PLAY

"MGS3 looks astounding, from its inspirAtion to its stoRy to its gameplay." -GameSpy.com

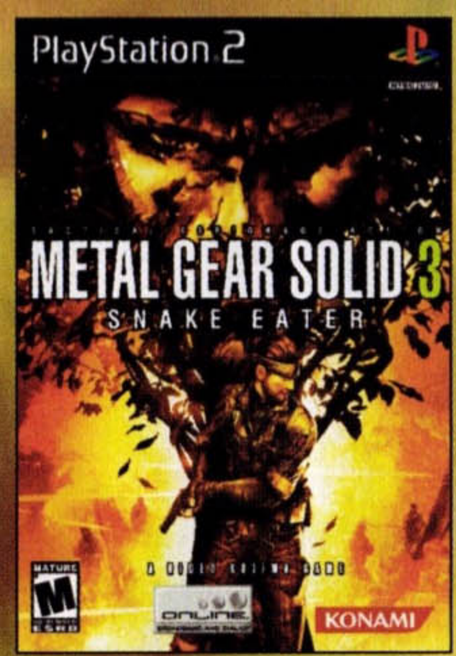
TACTICAL ESPIONAGE ACTION

# METAL GEAR SOLID® 3

## SNAKE EATER

It's 1964 and the U.S. has obtained information that a rival nation is developing weapons of mass destruction. Deep in the jungle, an elite soldier must now combine stealth with survival in a high-stakes mission to infiltrate the enemy and bring the world back from the brink of nuclear annihilation.

WWW.METALGEARSOLID.COM




KONAMI

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# DORM SETUP

## SCEPTRE X17SV-NAGA

List Price: $499

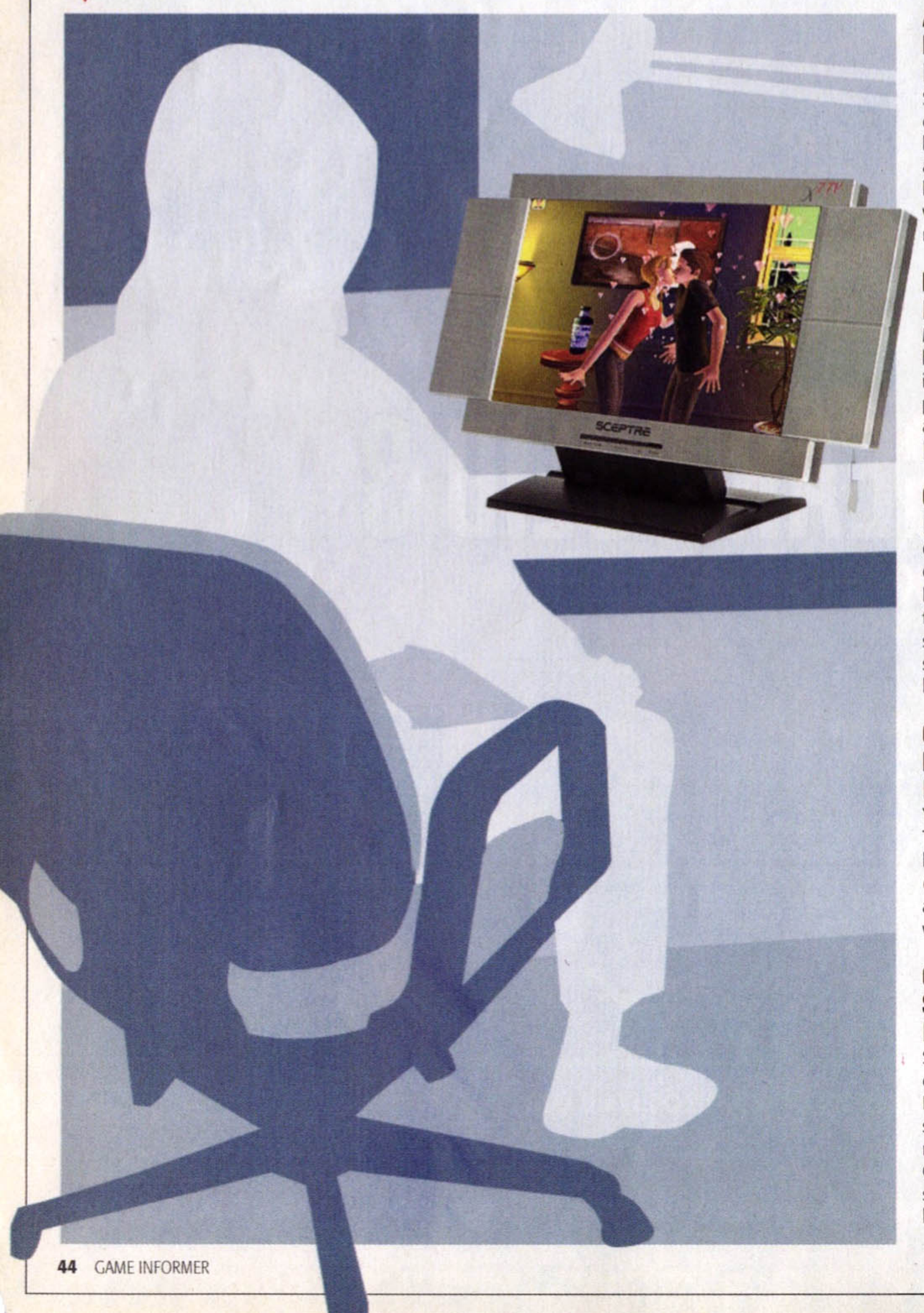
**When it comes to space saving and bang for your buck, this 17-inch model is a nice choice. The Naga's widescreen format and a built-in TV tuner lets you easily use this set for a television and a nice computer monitor. The purchase price includes speakers mounted on the side (which you don't have to use), a remote, and the ability to do picture-in-picture through any combination of the inputs.**

## FRAGBOX 2

List Price: Starts around $2,500

You know how those small form-factor PCs look awesome, fit almost anywhere, and have a nasty tendency to overheat? Falcon Northwest's new FragBox 2 still offers the first two features but does away with the overheating and lack of customization seen in other versions of these micro sets. A bounty of hardware options can fit into their machine, and the base model supports 7.1 surround sound so you don't need a separate receiver/stereo setup.




### ABC MONDAY NIGHT FOOTBALL REMOTE

List Price: $19.99

Sad or awesome? We can't make that call for you, but we do know that this ball is built for throwing in a tight spiral and surfing extended cable. It offers only basic functions, but will get the job done with most TVs, VCRs, cable, and satellite receivers.

### LOUNGE PILLOW

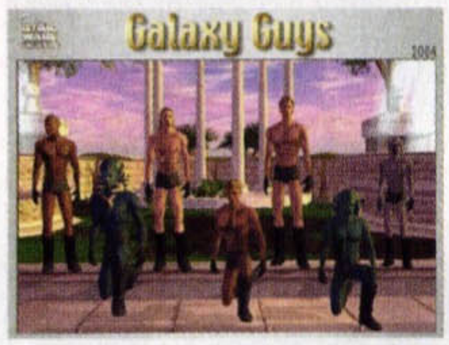
List Price: $200

Monstrous doesn't begin to describe how big this pillow of power by Sumo actually is – it's a chair, beanbag, mattress, or floor pillow. This sucker is washable, rip-proof, and the listed price includes shipping. [Random girl not included, unfortunately].

### GALAXY GUYS

List Price: Free

Okay, there's a Star Wars Galaxies: Galaxy Girls calendar too, but we're gunning for a little equal opportunity here. The one pictured is for 2004, and the 2005 edition should be out shortly. Check furplay.com/swg/news.php for more updates, downloads, and dreamy MMO dudes.




### CABLE-SAFE COMPLETE MANAGER KIT

List Price: $34.95

You know all that crap on your floor? That's bad. Pick it all up with this industrial kit that attaches to any vertical surface (desks, walls, your roommate). There are other versions offered through www.cable-safe.com.

### CREATIVE GIGAWORKS S750 7.1

List Price: $399

Since you're saving all of that money by combining your entertainment center and PC needs, be liberal when it comes to sound. This set is THX certified and will make you more popular than a Ferrari. Okay, that might be overstating, but it will still be good for your social life. The ladies love the surround sound.

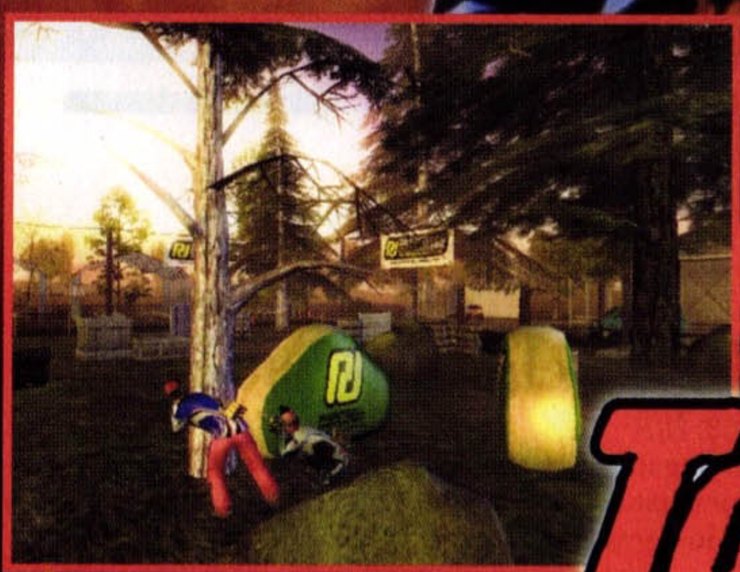
19 Tournaments, 20 locations, 179 field layouts, 145 pieces of licensed gear and more!

SPEED!

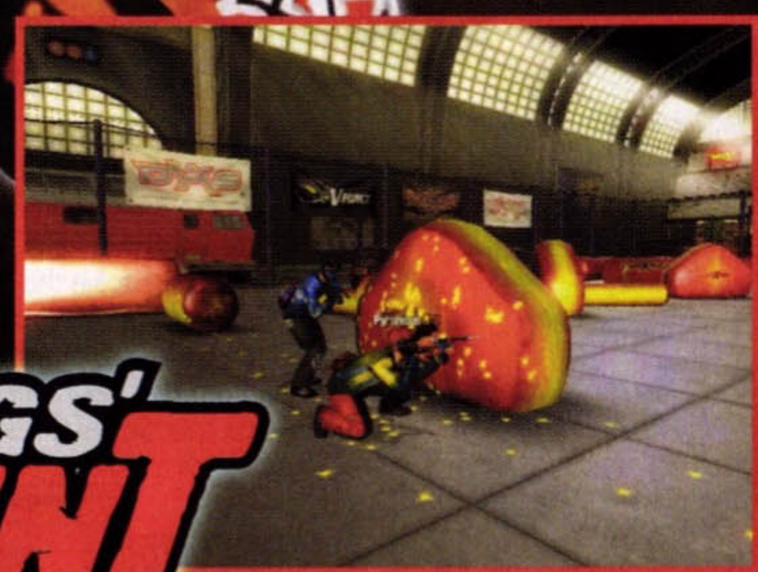
14 Top Pros Including: Greg Hastings, Rocky Cagnoni, Alex Fraige, Keely Watson and more!

ADRENALINE!

INTENSITY!



Develop and advance your career from Rookie to Pro!



Play Xbox *Live*™ online with up to 7-on-7 teamplay!

# GREG HASTINGS' TOURNAMENT PAINTBALL

ONLY ON XBOX

XBOX

XBOX LIVE ONLINE ENABLED

Coming Holiday 2004!

WXP

ACTIVISION

TEEN T Mild Language Mild Violence ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

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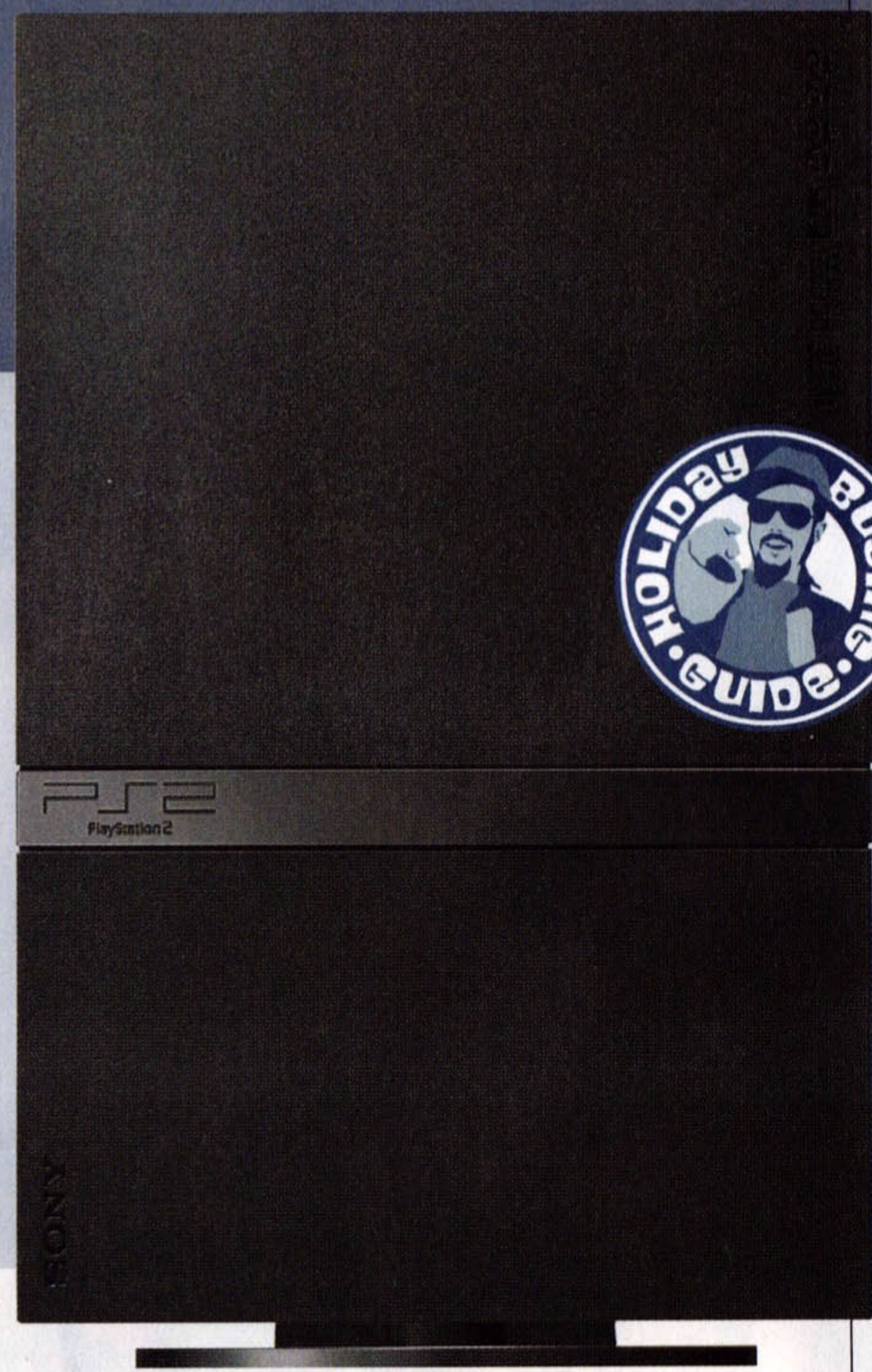
# PLAYSTATION PARTY



## PLAYSTATION 2

List Price: $149.99

**The redesigned PS2 is sleek and practically pocket-sized. Besides its sex appeal, the included features will shave cash output for first-time PS2 players because the system includes Ethernet and modem adapters for online play. The only downside we've found is the lack of hard drive support.**

### PLAYSTATION 2 VERTICAL STAND AND MULTITAP

List Price: $14.99 (Stand), $34.99 (Multitap)

With the announcement of the PS2's new look also came word of these model-specific accessories. Obviously the old stand won't do, but this disc of loveliness will support the sleek system in a vertical position while the Multitap hooks you up with extra controller inputs for multiplayer madness.

### X-MEN MULTI-TAP

List Price: $15.99

Wolverine, Cyclops, Magneto, and Mystique each show up on this four-sided multi-tap from Naki.

### FINAL FANTASY XI ATLAS

List Price: $19.99

So you can't view maps for any area in FF XI except for the one you're currently in, right? Thankfully, BradyGames is publishing a product that will not only solve the problem, but enhance your overall FF XI experience – the Final Fantasy XI Atlas. It includes a removable dust jacket featuring artwork from Yoshitaka Amano, notorious monsters, area-specific bestiaries, and important NPCs.

## LIMITED EDITION PIGGSY

List Price: N/A

Start hunting in the backlots kids, because only 500 of these Manhunt statues were produced as elaborate and disturbing promo items and thank you gifts to Rockstar staff. Ours stay in the office, because the gods know we don't want to wake up with this thing hanging out in the house.

### EVO SPORT GT WIRELESS WHEEL

List Price: $59.99

Wireless is good, especially because the technology finally works well. Four AA batteries give you 200 hours of racing fun at distances up to 30 feet. Pelican's wheel also includes a full compliment of non-slip, racing-styled pedals.

## FLIGHTSTICK 2

List Price: $129.99 (Bundled with Ace Combat 5)

Peripheral manufacturer Hori is teaming up with Namco to offer their Japanese flight stick (unimaginatively named though it is) in a bundle with the American release of Ace Combat 5. It's unclear if the controller will ever be offered separately, but we can say with the utmost certainty that this is the only way to play a PlayStation 2 flight sim.

IT TAKES A REAL TRIGGER TO MAKE A REAL SHOOTER.

# TIME CRISIS® CRISIS ZONE

Annihilate terrorists in the only game with an unlockable option of firing two Guncon®2 guns at once.

Trash interactive environments with a hail of bullets— objects explode and glass shatters.

Unlock bonus game modes plus weapons including laser gun, flamethrower, missile launcher and more.

BRING ARCADE ACTION HOME WITH DUAL GUNCON®2 FIREPOWER.

PlayStation 2

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# XBOX BONANZA

## Crystal Xbox Case

List Price: $35

**These cases comes in a handful of colors (and are also offered for PS2) and, since most of us have had our systems long enough that the warranty is a fond memory (like slap bracelets), the concern over messing up an opportunity for free repairs isn't a factor. So customize with enthusiasm and take advantage of the gaudy neon opportunities the crystal Xbox case affords!**

(actual Xbox sold seperately)

### GAME DR. MOTORIZED

List Price: $49.99

Disc read errors are a pain in the ass. Sometimes it feels like nothing can be done; but eliminating those little scratches and abrasions could bring a game back into action. The motorized Game Dr. ensures that as little manual labor is involved as possible.

### NINJA GAIDEN LEATHER WALLET WITH CHAIN

List Price: $19.99

We think that the chain would jangle more than one would want when hunting down black ninjas in the night, but if your pursuits at the corner store are a little more pedestrian than those in Tecmo's Ninja Gaiden, this wallet will probably fit you fine.

### FREAK CONTROLLER: ALIEN INFECTION

List Price: $19.99

Gemini's Alien Infection Xbox pad is just like the Controller S, except for the addition of festering organs and seeping puss-like foam crawling across its surface. Icky as it sounds, the units are quite playable and not nearly as sentient as we implied in that first sentence.

### COUNTER STRIKE CS-05

List Price: $4.95

Fancy up your cell phone and show Xbox gaming pride with this Counter Strike phone figure and included orange flashlight. There's even a camo wristband, how saucy! This third-party accessory is available through importers like Lik-Sang.

### HALO 2 SLURPEE

List Price: $1.59

Did you know that residents of Winnipeg, Manitoba consume the most Slurpee beverages of any city in the world? Soon they, and everyone else, will be able to nosh on a new and improved Mello Yello-flavored variety nestled in Halo 2 themed cups. Make haste to your local 7-11!

## Dead or Alive Collector's Controllers

List Price: $29.99

**Nuby's dominance in the realm of collectable controllers continues with this set of Dead or Alive-themed units. Trumpeting the upcoming DOA: Ultimate release, they just might help avoid getting your tush handed to you on Xbox Live.**

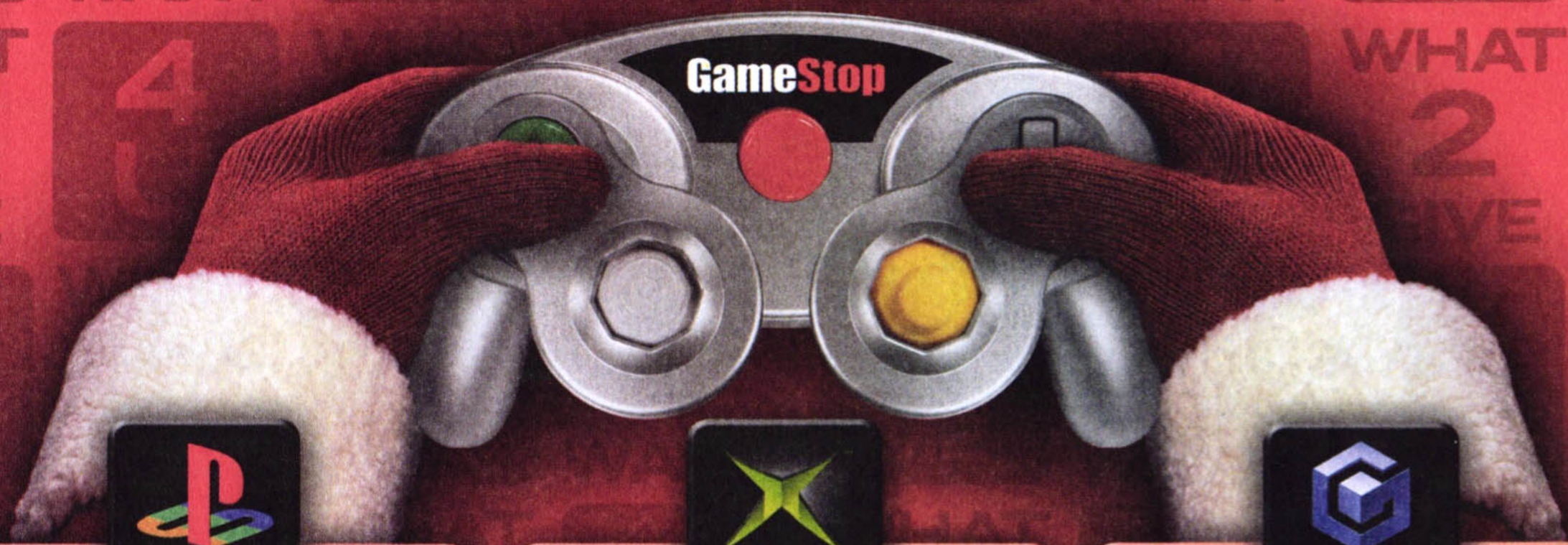
### GAMECOM X20

List Price: $29.99

We featured Plantronics' official Halo 2 headset in last month's Gear, and were so impressed with its Xbox line that we had to recommend another of the company's offerings. The X20 is comfy, sounds great, and the mic pics up just what it needs to (i.e. you trash-talking the opposition).

# TOP TITLES WHAT2GET

WISH LIST & GIFT GUIDE




## PlayStation 2

1_ GTA San Andreas
2_ Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater
3_ Gran Turismo 4
4_ Madden NFL 2005
5_ Need for Speed Underground 2
6_ Tony Hawk's Underground 2
7_ Call of Duty: Finest Hour
8_ Dragon Ball Z: Budokai 3
9_ Ace Combat 5
10_Mortal Kombat Deception

## XBOX

1_ Star Wars KOTOR II
2_ Ghost Recon 2
3_ Halo 2
4_ Prince of Persia 2
5_ Fable
6_ Need for Speed Underground 2
7_ Call of Duty: Finest Hour
8_ NBA Live 2005
9_ Tony Hawk's Underground 2
10_Star Wars Battlefront

## NINTENDO GAMECUBE

1_ Metroid Prime 2: Echoes
2_ Paper Mario 2: Thousand-Year Door
3_ Pikmin 2
4_ Donkey Konga
5_ Baten Kaitos
6_ Mario Party 6
7_ Mario Power Tennis
8_ Need for Speed Underground 2
9_ The Incredibles
10_SpongeBob SquarePants

## GAME BOY ADVANCE / NINTENDO DS

1_ Pokemon Fire Red
2_ Pokemon Leaf Green
3_ Dragon Ball Z: Buu's Fury
4_ Yu-Gi-Oh Reshef of Destruction
5_ Kingdom Hearts: Chain of Memories
6_ Spider-Man 2 (DS)
7_ Super Mario 64 (DS)
8_ Madden NFL 2005 (DS)
9_ URBZ: Sims in the City (DS)
10_Tiger Woods PGA Tour (DS)

## PC

1_ Sims 2
2_ Half-Life 2
3_ Everquest II Collector's Edition
4_ Doom 3
5_ World of Warcraft
6_ Medal of Honor Pacific Assault
7_ Vampire Masquerade Bloodlines
8_ Rome Total War
9_ Star Wars Battlefront
10_Dungeon Siege 2

## WANT ANYTHING ELSE FROM SANTA?

1_ Halo 2 Battle Damaged Figures
2_ Halo 2 16 month calendar
3_ Namco Classic I Pacman, TV Games
4_ Namco Classic II Ms Pacman, TV Games
5_ Sega Genesis Arcade Legends, TV Games
6_ Frogger, TV Games
7_ Halo 2: Assortment 2 Figures
8_ Yu-Gi-Oh Soul Duelist Boosters
9_ Yu-Gi-Oh Collector's Tin w/Boosters '04
10_Red vs Blue Season 2

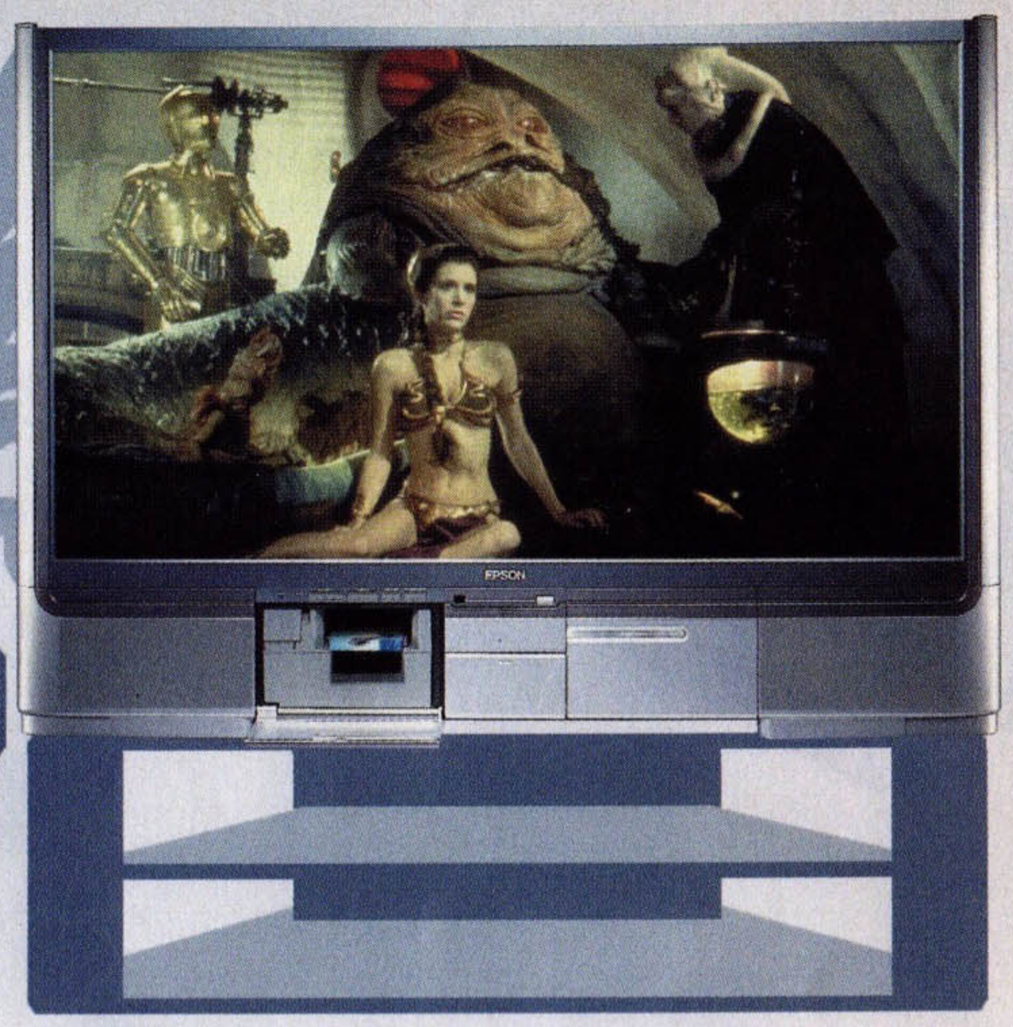
GameStop

# GIFT CARDS

# 4 U 2 GET

THE GREATEST GIFT
A GAMER CAN GET.

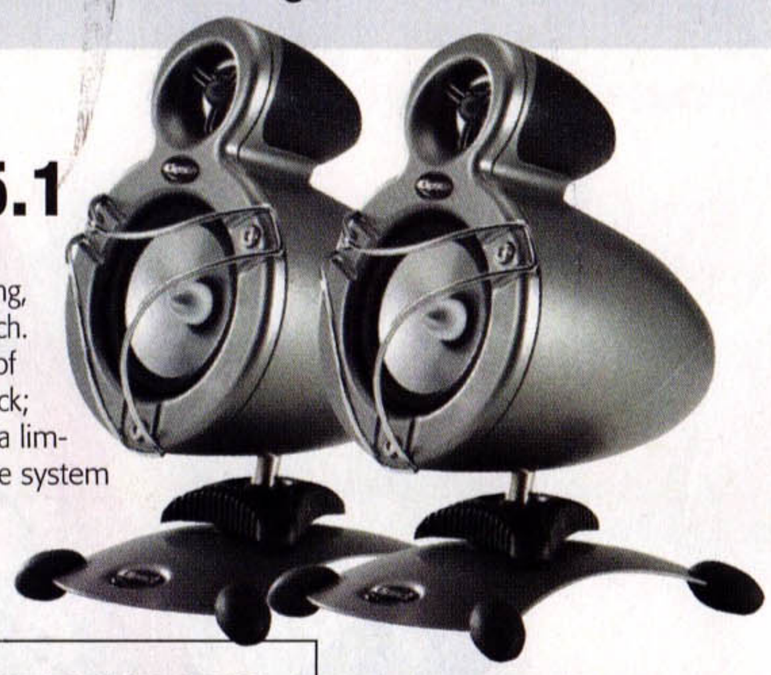
# THE EVERYMAN ROOM




## LivingStation LS47P1

List Price: $3,199

**A 47-inch rear-projection LCD that does 720p without breaking a sweat is one thing. Those features enhanced with a card reader, photo printer, and CD-R drive built right in is entirely another. Here's what that means: take some digital pictures, throw the card in the TV, sort through them using the remote, and either print them out (from the TV) or archive them with the integrated burner.**



## PROMEDIA GMX D-5.1

List Price: $149

You'd be hard-pressed to find a better-sounding, sturdier 5.1 system than this setup from Klipsch. Out of the box it's easily configurable for any of the consoles, DVD, and portable audio playback; and the $149 price tag is supposed to be for a limited time, but even at the full price ($299), the system is still a steal.

## GAMEPOD BY LOFTGOODS

List Price: $699.99

The benefits of this chair are three-fold: mad power (300 watts of speaker and force-feedback juice), many uses (full compatibility with all game consoles and home video equipment), and it's not ugly! With tech used for theme parks and military flight simulators, expect a bumpy ride – in a good way.

## HARMONY REMOTE 688

List Price: $249

Get a TV, DVD player, cable box, TiVo, and a receiver in one room and what do you have? A crapload of remotes, that's what. Logitech's Harmony remote can learn from other units, and players…er, users…can set up macros to get nearly anything done with a single button press.

## INVADE!

List Price: $30

In no way does this line of shirts by Teefly seem to be licensed by any video game company, but we are just too impressed to ignore them. FYI: the somewhat-higher-than-normal shirt cost is because you'll have to cover shipping across the pond (the company is UK-based). Available in red, black, and navy.

## DEV/BLANKET

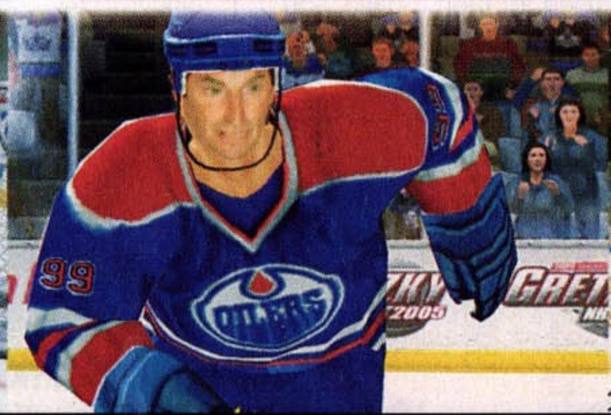
List Price: $39.99

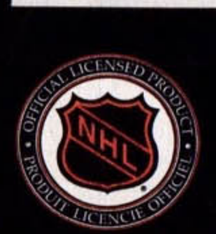
For those who like their cuddling equipment to have ironic programmer flair, Think Geek provides this lovely furry blanket that spells out, well, "blanket" in binary. Cute, huh?

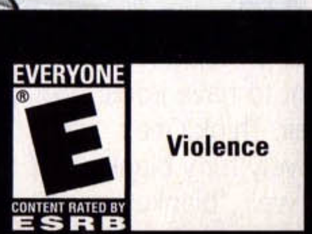
## Simpsons Pinball Party

List Price: call for quote

So maybe not everyone has a Simspons pinball machine of power and glory (our name, not theirs) in their living room, but Stern at least makes one that's so awesome we want to break the bank on it. Talking Homer heads, a skateboarding Bart, and an upper level with the living room set make this more than eye candy – it's also a gigantic, interactive pop-culture dictionary.



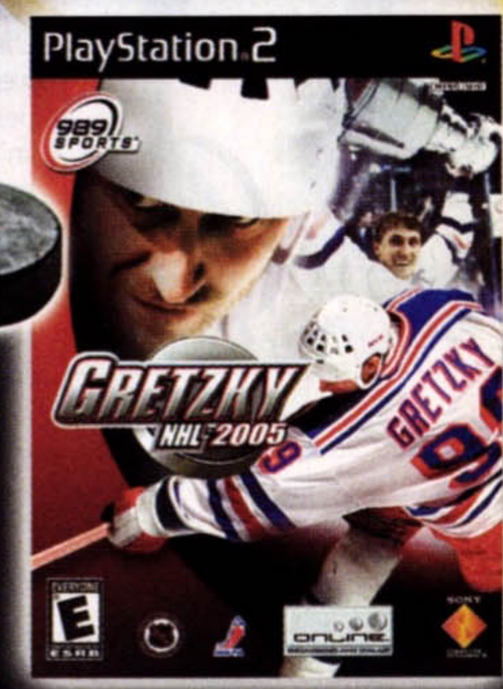





Online play requires Internet connection, Network Adapter (for PlayStation 2) and Memory Card (8MB) marks depicted herein are the property of the NHL and the respective teams and may not be reproduced trademarks of the NHLPA and are used under license by Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc. Entertainment America Inc. 989 Sports, 989 Sports logo and "Live In Your World. Play In Ours." are

# SEE THE GAME THE WAY HE SAW IT.

He saw it all. With Gretzky™ NHL® 2005, you can too. See yourself as The Great One, from four different teams. See yourself break his records with Gretzky Challenge. See yourself play others online or in Rivalry Mode. And with EyeToy's™ USB camera, you can even see yourself as yourself.




989 SPORTS

PlayStation 2

LIVE IN YOUR WORLD.
PLAY IN OURS.™

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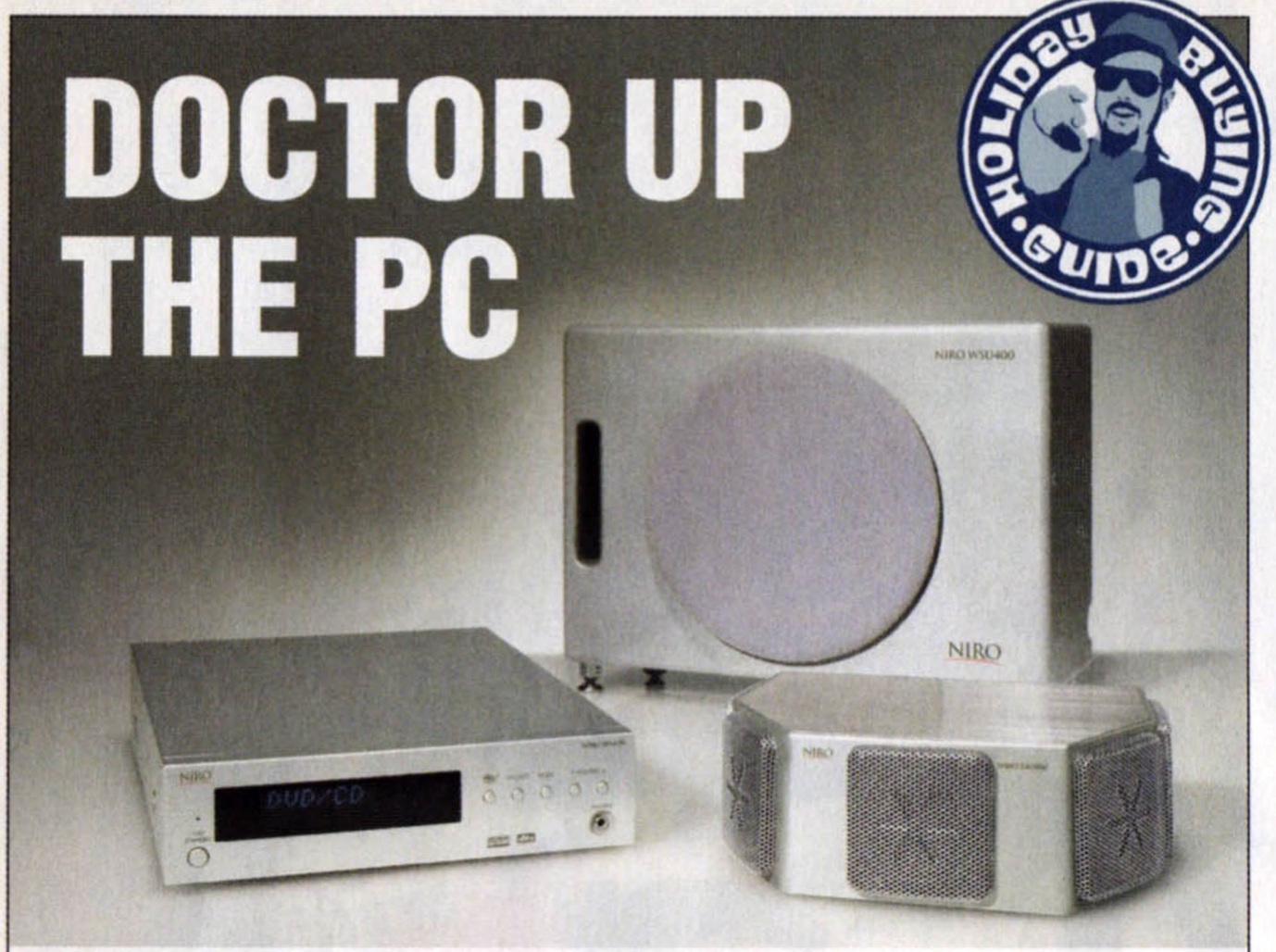
# DOCTOR UP THE PC




## NIRO 400

List Price: $450

Here's a handy bit of technological wizardy – the Niro line of home theater systems replicates a 5.1 surround sound system with just one center unit and a subwoofer. We don't entirely understand the tech, but the good news is that the speaker can be mounted to a monitor and the sound isn't dependent on room shape to make the all-encompassing effect (unlike other similar setups that work by reflecting waves off of walls).

### CYBORG EVO FORCE

List Price: $69.99

With the action-orientated gameplay of Star Wars Galaxies expansion pack Jump to Lightspeed, some MMO junkies will be on the hunt for a better way to control spaceships. This is a nice choice – not so complicated that you have to be a pilot to understand it, but well built enough to withstand any run on the opposition.

### GAMER'S 104 KEYBOARD

List Price: $59.99

We got a chance to play around with these at E3 and have been waiting for Saitek to get them out on shelves. That wait will soon be over. The backlit keyboard has a few levels of light magnitude (which those of us with backlit keyboards will agree is nice indeed), a great wrist rest, and that handy extra number pad.

### FINAL FANTASY MOBILE CONTROLLER

List Price: around $30

Distilling the controls for Square Enix's MMORPG down to their very core, this one-handed controller from Sanwa "should" work for other RPGs and comes in white, black, and blue. Import-only for right now.

### SKULLCRUSHERS

List Price: $89.99

Hunting for headphones is a bigger challenge than one would think. While we have yet to find that holy grail of perfection that suits everyone, this stylin' set from Skullcandy fits the bill for many of our needs. With nice bass, a folding form-factor, and lots of ways to customize their fit, Skullcrushers make compromises we can live with (like cable length, which is shorter than we'd like, but still doable).

### RAZER DIAMONDBACK

List Price: $59.99

We love things that are ambidextrous and involve Teflon. Why? Because they're slippery and limit injuries caused by southpaws using right-handed devices (we feel for the lefties, man). Razer's Diamondback mouse (available in two colors: Chameleon Green [shown] and Magma Red) has both of these features – left or right-handed button configs and Teflon feet for smooth sailing.

## alienware aurora

List Price: $2,778

**The setup we've got here is Alienware's Doom 3 Ultra edition, which basically means that the thing smokes like a beat poet on a Friday night, and a copy of id's horror game comes pre-installed running at just shy of 80 frames/second. Silly, since the eye can't even detect images that quickly, but still! Oh, and this is Alienware's more middle-of-the-road machine. Think about that for a second, and then go have some special alone time.**

**SPECS:**

- AMD Athlon 64 FX-53
- 1GB PC-3200 SDRAM
- 160GB Seagate HDD
- NVIDIA GeForce 6800 GT 256MB
- Creative Sound Blaster Audigy 2 (with 6.1 audio support)
- 6MB/g of Bragging Rights

# MIDWAY ARCADE TREASURES 2

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**20 arcade games for only 20 Bucks!**

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Arch Rivals
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Pit Fighter
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Spy Hunter II
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Xybots
Xenophobe

**October 2004**

**www.midwayarcade.com**

MATURE 17+ M CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Blood and Gore
Drug Reference
Intense Violence

PlayStation 2 XBOX NINTENDO GAMECUBE MIDWAY

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# THE PIMP SUITE

**CINEPOD, MINIPODS, AND BASS STATION**
List Price: varies by dealer
There's a technical term in the home theater industry for components like this – super sexy. Okay, maybe that's not a technical term, but it certainly does apply when it comes to the Podspeakers line. And, they sound sweet to boot.

## LC-45GX6U

List Price: $8,999

**Forty-five inches of LCD goodness (that also does full 1080p) doesn't come cheap, but isn't the happiness that this screen will bring more important than money? It's really just a standard of living issue, so get out there and donate some platelets, sucker!**

**MJ – PETER WALKING AWAY IN GRAVEYARD**
List Price: bids start at $4,500
Alex Ross was commissioned by Sony Pictures Entertainment to make 15 watercolors used during the opening credits of *Spider-Man 2*. Many of these original watercolors are now for sale on eBay and the proceeds are all going to The United Cancer Front (UCF) Women's Cancer Research Program at UCLA. New pieces are going up regularly, so check online to see which are still up for grabs.

**NEAR ME CAT**
List Price: around $300
We watched the video on Sega of Japan's website for this "toy" and discovered two things: real cats can be funny, playful, fuzzy, and loyal pets. The Near Me cat, on the other hand, is a terrifying, soulless shell of a creature that maniacally purrs and paws in response to your actions – like a beloved doll brought to life by the undying agony of hellspawn bent on your utter despair. Seriously.

## navitus

List Price: $699
We suspect that Sony's new Linux-powered remote, besides controlling everything from TVs to air conditioners, also comes pre-programmed with a variety of Pavlovian triggers and phenomenal cosmic power. Becoming a puppet-master god creature for less than a grand? Priceless.

## SHUTTLE G5 9500M

List Price: $3,756
We pimped the hell out of Shuttle's top of the line Media Center PC (250GB of hard drive space should be enough, right?), but they actually start at a far more reasonable price that's just over $1,000. These PCs are designed to sit in your entertainment center and manage photos, run a personal video recorder (think TiVo), and anything else a "normal" computer does by using Windows XP Media Center OS.

A steal at $19.99*

"Best Action Game"

—Spike TV Video Game Awards

TRUE CRIME™

STREETS OF LA™

PlayStation®2 Greatest Hits, Xbox® Platinum Hits,
Nintendo GameCube™ Player's Choice editions.

MATURE 17+ M CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Blood and Gore
Mature Sexual Themes
Strong Language
Violence

PlayStation 2 | XBOX | NINTENDO GAMECUBE | PC CD-ROM SOFTWARE | POWERED BY gamespy | Luxoflux | ACTIVISION

*PlayStation®2 Greatest Hits, Xbox Platinum Hits, Nintendo Player's Choice pricing. Individual retailers may, at their discretion, charge a higher price. PC pricing may be different.
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Screenshots taken from PC gameplay.

activision.com

truecrimela.com

## DIGICAM SP

List Price: $29.99

Remember the Game Boy Camera with the stamp-sized black and white shots? These are at least better than that. With time lapse and motion detection, Nyko's little gadget could be used for mischief galore as twenty images can be stored, tweaked, and edited through the GBA, and extra pics can be uploaded to a PC or website.

## GBA SKIN – OLD SCHOOL

List Price: $5

Basically a really nice sticker, these GBA skins transform that old launch-color silver unit into something more styling to compete with Nintendo's insistence on releasing newer, awesomer colors for their handheld wonderkid. Cheap and reusable.

## GBA MOVIE PLAYER V2.0

List Price: $24.99

It's not a licensed Nintendo product, but this Compact Flash card reader and software make your GBA do things we previously thought were near impossible outside of cartoons. Play big kid movies, music, and e-books downloaded from your PC and even do multiples of those things at once (read an e-book and listen to tunes, for instance). A compact Flash card is required, but not included. Available through our favorite import site, www.lik-sang.com.

## MARIO PARTY BATH TOY

List Price: $8.95

More toys should come in a bath-friendly form. Legos get all stinky when you don't let them air out right and our Mossman He-Man figure was never quite the same after that spa visit with the lavender bath salts. These imported Mario Party soaps dissolve in water to reveal a nice game-themed figure that will survive the suds.

## DS SAFE CASE

List Price: $11.99

**Secret agent style is something that not everyone can pull off, but its benefits are clear. This case by Intec, which comes out at the same time as the DS, uses the company's ubiquitous aluminum suitcase design and has padded nooks for the handheld, games, and some accessories.**

## COLORWARE GAMECUBE

List Price: $199

Customizing everything in one's house is too hip for words right now, but the problems with doing it yourself are voiding warranties and, well, the skill with which your paintjob is applied. ColorWare takes care of both of these issues by letting customers purchase one of their guaranteed systems in 21 automotive colors. If you'd like them to pimp out the 'Cube you already own, that's available too. Check their website for details and warranty info.

## NINTENDO CONTROLLER HOT PANTS

List Price: $12.00

Only a gamer's special someone will see these (or at least we pray to the heavens that that's the case), but for such a paltry sum, many bums will surely be outfitted by these ditties. Showing the old-school controller on the front, the back is emblazoned with Nintendo's logo. We found them at Hot Topic.

# NINTENDO MADNESS

## nintendo DS

List Price: $149.99

**Nintendo's handheld makes it to American shelves in time for the holiday rush, and the launch lineup is a nice selection of titles for portable gaming fans. We've got a bucket of coverage on the unit, the announced games, and our impressions on page 86.**

# LAZER TAG TEAM OPS

THE ULTIMATE GAME OF ELECTRONIC TAG™

Assemble a team of highly skilled LAZER TAG players and lead them into THE ULTIMATE GAME OF ELECTRONIC TAG.

WIRELESSLY SYNC UP TO 24 PLAYERS!

DESIGNATES #1 PLAYER AND TEAM!

2 TAGGER & HUD UNITS with the Team Comm Headset!

## NO TV. NO CONSOLE. NO CONTROLLER. ALL ACTION!

Someone's got you in their sights. You know because you see it in your Heads Up Display. You hear the tagger audio warning you. This is Lazer Tag – the best game of Lazer Tag ever. Features like wireless data transfer to synchronize the game clock and score tracking make Lazer Tag Team OPS the superior Lazer Tag system! Whether you're customizing your game, or playing the classic game of tag, Lazer Tag puts you in the game like no console can.

Enter to win the Tag & Win promotion

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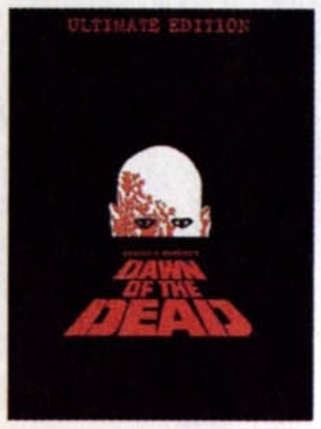
# THOSE OTHER FORMS OF MEDIA




### DAWN OF THE DEAD (Ultimate Edition)

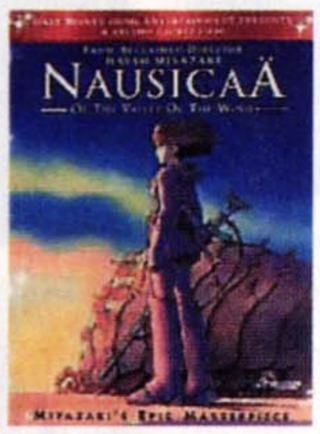
List Price: $49.99

This is one of the few times that the "Ultimate" moniker is unquestionably apt. Four discs offer the theatrical, extended, and European cuts of Romero's beloved gorefest along with buckets of documentaries, commentary, and behind-the-scenes undead action.

### THE RUNDOWN

List Price: $19.99

So this is why that Rock fellow is so well-liked…he can actually be funny and even charming. We know that wasn't the case in that crappy *Scorpion King* thing, but *The Rundown* is an honestly good movie that surprised all of us jaded journalist types.




### NAUSICAA OF THE VALLEY OF THE WIND

List Price: $29.99

This upcoming DVD release from Disney replaces the hackjob version most of the world got in the late '80s by restoring the 21 minutes cut earlier and re-recording the English language track.

### THE ULTIMATE MATRIX COLLECTION

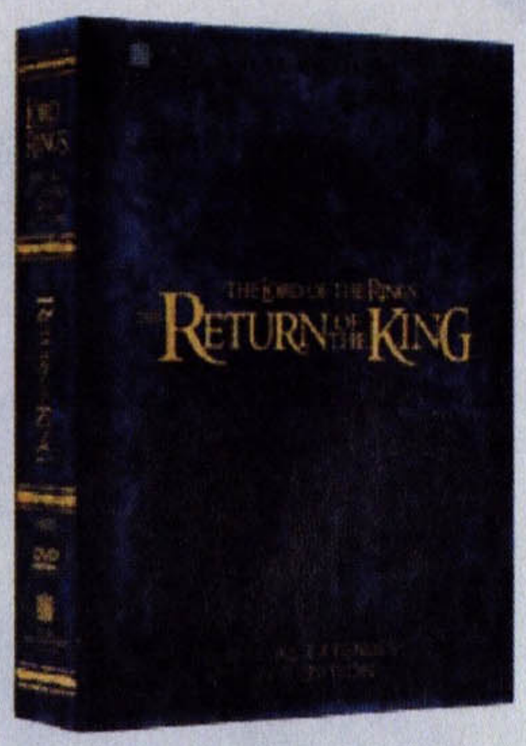
List Price: $79.99

There is one thing that you need to know: Each movie has a commentary track featuring reviewers who hated the movie. Oh, and there are 10 discs that include everything released thus far and much, much more. (Comprehensible plot not included)

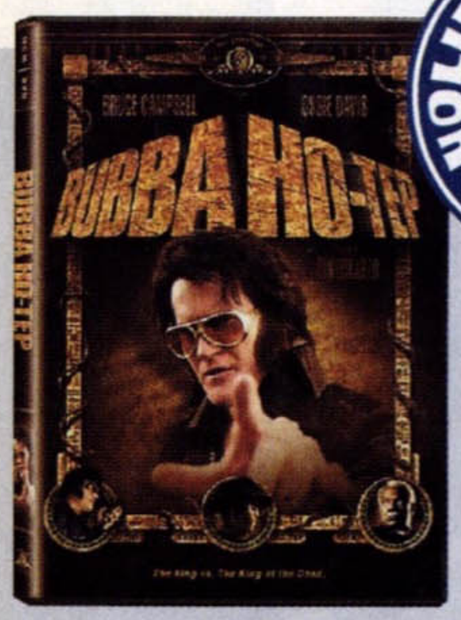
### THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE RETURN OF THE KING Director's Cut

List Price: $39.99

250 minutes. Think about just how long that is. Four hours and some change. But that's four hours of awesome LotR finale goodness. Take the day off of work and watch it twice.



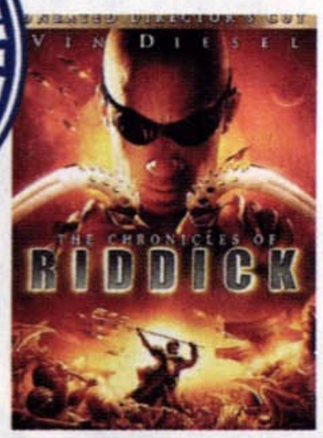

HOLIDAY BUYING GUIDE




### BUBBA HO-TEP

List Price: $19.99

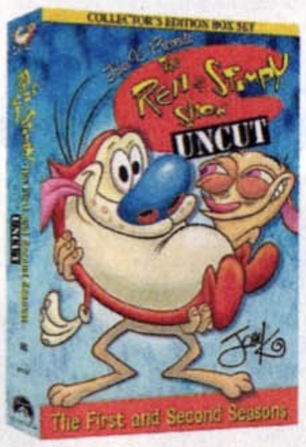
In a nursing home besieged by a soul-sucking mummy, one man claims to be Elvis (Bruce Campbell) and another insists he's JFK (Ossie Davis). It's weirdly heartwarming and the DVD has commentary by "The King."




### THE CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK Unrated Director's Cut

List Price: $29.99

The Xbox game was amazing, and what this film lacks in substance, it more than makes up for in style. Riddick is one terrible person, but we can't help but root for his return.




### REN & STIMPY – The Complete First and Second Seasons

List Price: $38.99

Audio commentary, 30 episodes, and the banned episode called "Man's Best Friend." This is one of the few series that is almost better than you remember.

### THE OFFICE SPECIAL

List Price: $24.99

The British sitcom's last hurrah is worth every cent. And, if you haven't seen the two seasons of the series, check it out or you will be shunned and rotten fish will be thrown upon your friends. It will air on BBC America this Christmas, but you'll really want to own it so you can see it again and again.

### STAR WARS TRILOGY

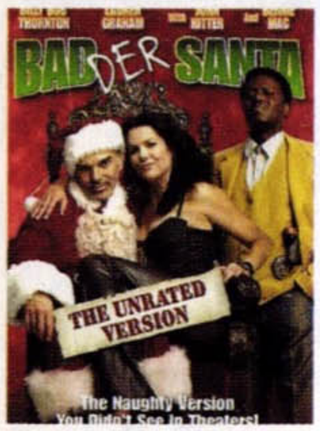
List Price: $69.99

What can we say? This is Star Wars, people, and you owe Mr. Lucas more money no matter how much it irks you. At least he made these awesome to lessen the blow.

### HOME MOVIES SEASON ONE

List Price: $35.99

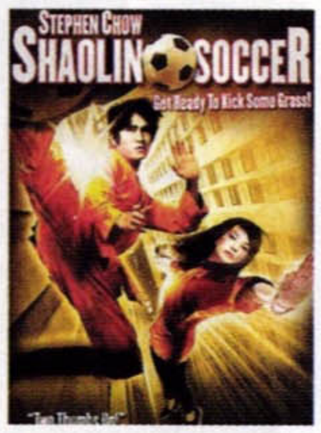
Eight-year-old protagonist Brendan Small suffers through third grade while spouting off pop culture references faster than that ironic hipster in the coffee shop by your house. You may recognize this show as part of Cartoon Network's Adult Swim lineup.




### BADDER SANTA

List Price: $29.99

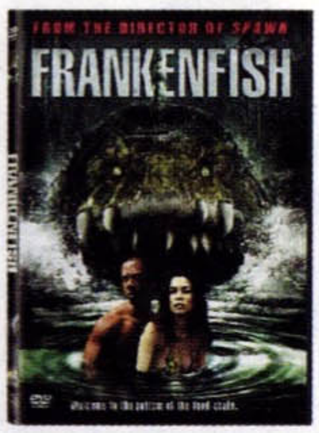
One of the foulest movies that still manages to be funny; this is a sick, deranged, disgusting, disturbing, hilarious movie that is in no way for the kiddie set.




### SHAOLIN SOCCER

List Price: $19.99

Weirdly enough, mixing *Ladybugs* and Jackie Chan flicks brings something good to this world. Shaolin Soccer is that good thing.




### FRANKENFISH

List Price: $24.99

It's like *Jaws* with flesh-eating, ugly-ass fish. Or *Anaconda* in the Bayou. Maybe even *Leprechaun*, but without the shoe cleaning. No matter what, it's awesomely awful.

### THE EYE

List Price: $24.99

We don't want to talk about this. It's scary. And it's still too scary to think about. No, seriously, no talking, really. Hong Kong horror is freakier than almost anything else.

### SENIFELD GIFT SET

List Price: $119.99

Don't succumb to sticker shock, this set includes seasons one through three on eight discs, the original script, Monk's Diner salt and pepper shakers, and playing cards.

# BATEN KAITOS™

## ETERNAL WINGS AND THE LOST OCEAN

"It's possibly the most beautiful GCN title ever made"

– Nintendo Power

The world of Baten Kaitos exists in an era where lands float in the sky and the once-vast oceans are mere legend. With your help, Kalas and Xelha must struggle to reveal the mystery of the lost ocean and destroy the corruption that threatens their world.

Embark upon an emotional journey across a richly imagined world and detailed character development spanning over 60 hours of gameplay.

Vivid, pre-rendered backgrounds are alive with subtle, ambient animations. Enjoy gloriously rendered battle environments and astounding spell effects.

An unconventional card-based RPG system unites all elements of gameplay with over 1000 types of "Magnus" cards.

Blood
Fantasy Violence
Mild Language

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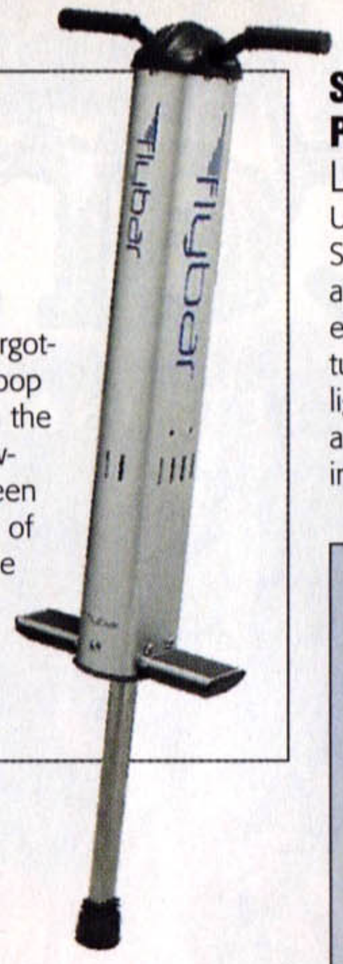
# THE LITTLE THINGS THAT MATTER

## FLYBAR MODEL 1200

List Price: $299.99

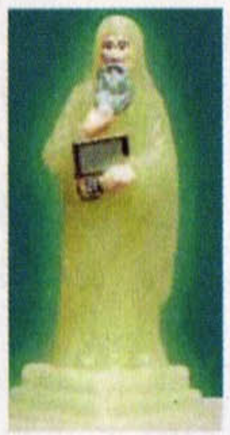
We thought that the pogo stick ambled slowly to the land of forgotten toys supported by a hula hoop on one end and a lawn dart on the other. We were wrong. The newest Flybar supports riders between 80 and 250 lbs. and is capable of launching them five feet into the air. Five feet! The mischief possibilities are immense with this thing, but don't tell your grandparents that.




## ST. ISIDORE PROTECTIVE STATUE

List Price: $4.95

Unofficially dubbed the Patron Saint of the Internet, St. Isidore actually made an encyclopedia-esque collection in the 7th century. The good saint is a guiding light against pop-ups, spam, and auction snipers…and he glows in the dark.



## ALIEN HOMINID DECK

List Price: $49.95

These skateboard decks, manufactured by Bold Distribution, are available through the Alien Hominid website. Pick one of the three designs and exact your retribution on humanity, or just grind along a railing for a while – it's up to you.

## STAR WARS MINIATURES: REBEL STORM

List Price: $19.99 (Starter Set), $12.99 (Expansion Set)

When looking at these, think of them like HeroClix – there's a tabletop role-playing game element using the figures from the classic Star Wars trilogy. A Clone Strike set is scheduled to launch sometime before the end of the year, but supplies (even pre-orders) are dwindling. Currently, there are 60 sweet figures and you get eight with each expansion set purchased. Available at most good comic shops.

## BOX FROG SNOT BOXES

List Price: $8.00

Loop NYC makes awesomely quirky stuff like this roadkill-inspired tissue holder. We suggest these only for those who want to appear mildly deranged.

## SHELOB THE GIANT SPIDER STATUE

List Price: $174.99

Sideshow Weta is putting out a boatload of these high-quality polystone statues, and this Shelob one is both terrifying and so cool that we're really lusting for it. Check out the whole series, which includes the Mines of Moria and Balrog: Flame of Udun scenes. These sets are timed to come out about the same time as the director's cut of *The Return of the King*.

## THE GAMER'S FOOD PYRAMID

**SPECIAL TREATS** – USE SPARINGLY

The ColdCutHotCake: Take any chopped and processed luncheon meat (think bologna), throw it in a skillet until it's warmed through and throw that on a pancake. This delicious treat was created by esteemed doctor of Pancakeology Efram Schanfreise, head of the Center for Pancakeological Studies at the University of Michigan.

**CHOCOLATEY GOODNESS** – 2-3 SERVINGS

We suggest things like Little Debbie snack cakes, Snicker bars, Fun Size Twix, etc. These are an accent piece to their salty and dip counterparts.

**SALT** – 3-5 SERVINGS

Here reside chips of any variety, crackers either buttery and delicious or cheesy and golden, any roasted nuttyness, and whatever else you need to balance the sugar intake in the rest of this plan.

**DIPPAGE** – 2-3 SERVINGS

Yummm. Chips are merely a vessel for dip wonderland. Think salsa, bean dip, highly processed cheese-like product, and such.

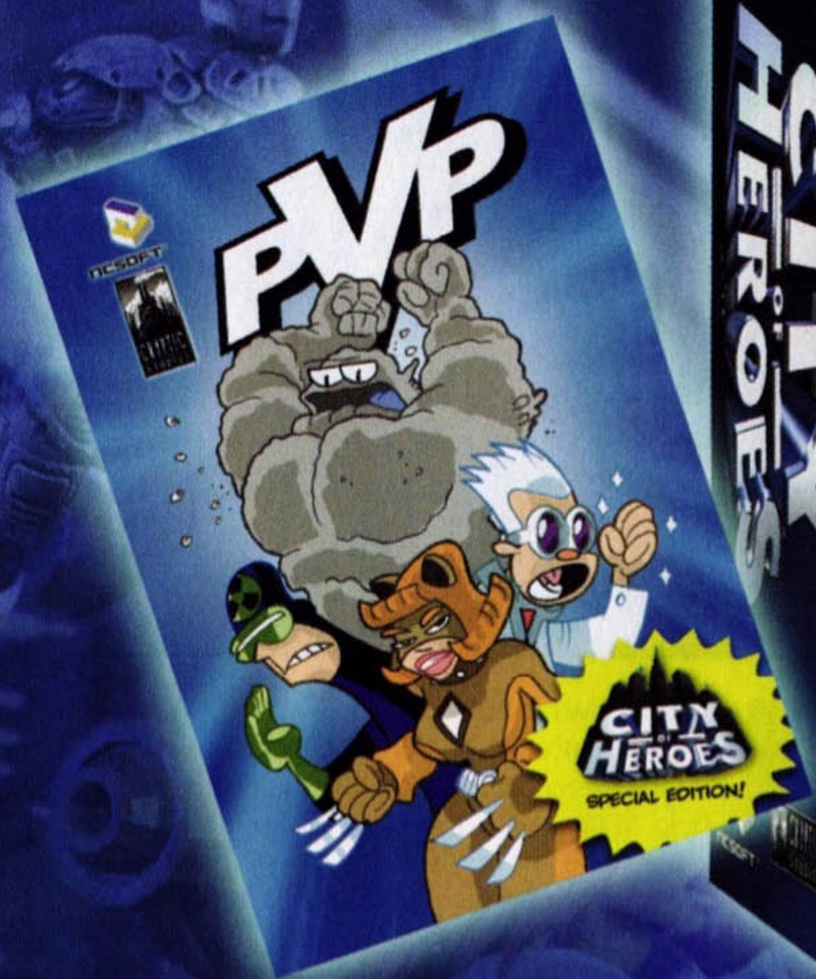
**SWEETS, FRUITY-STYLE** – 3-5 SERVINGS

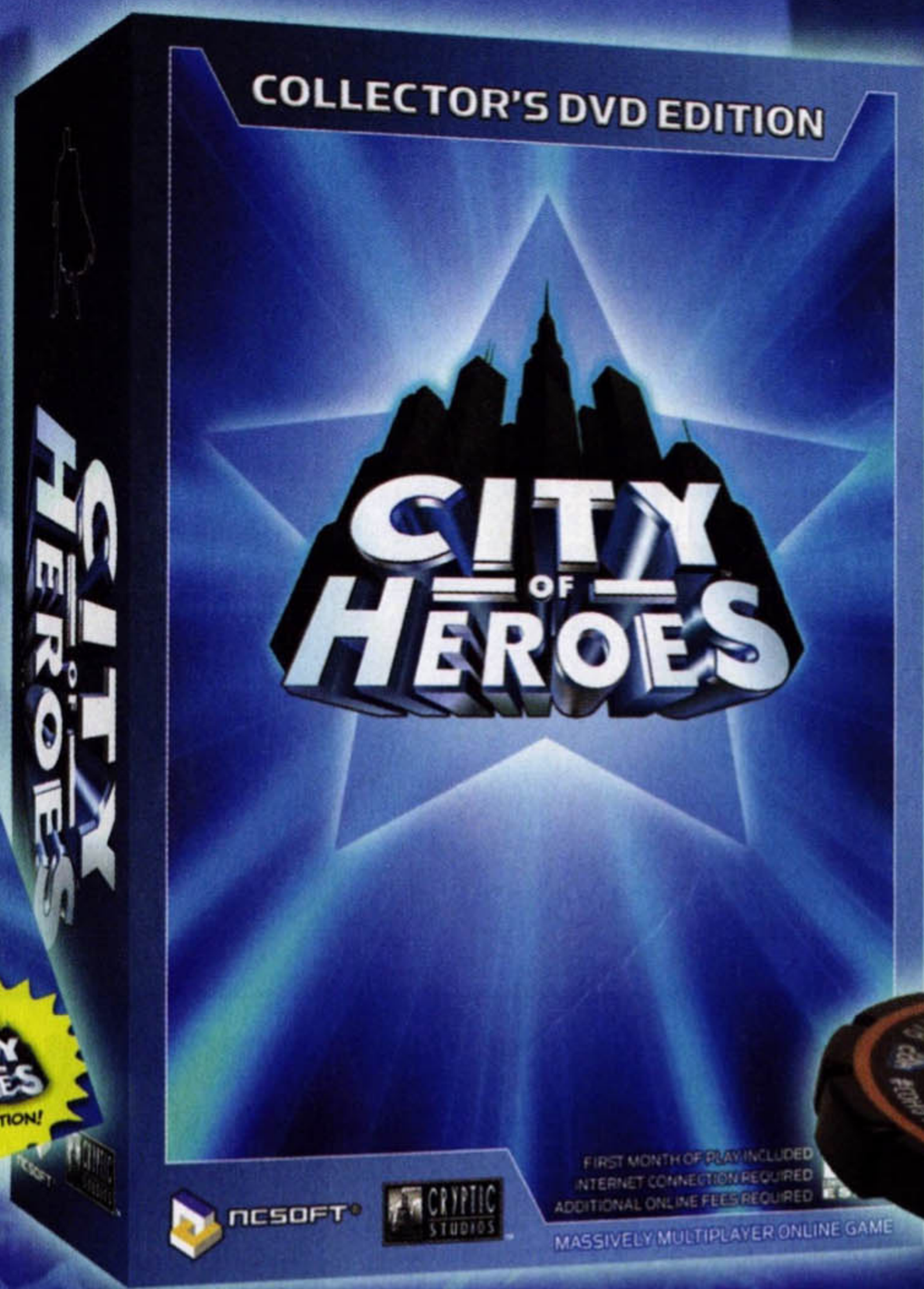
Anyone else remember Fruit Roll-Ups? Well they're still around and come in an alarmingly wide variety of tie-dye-like colors. Go for Fruit By The Foot if you need conversational topics, as they have terrible jokes written on the wrappers.

**BEVERAGES, CAFFEINE** – 6-11 SERVINGS

Soda is the obvious pick here, but any liquid of choice will do. Even those weird energy drinks that make us feel jittery will fulfill this large requirement. Mix for best long-term enjoyment.

# THERE'S NEVER BEEN A BETTER TIME TO BE A HERO!



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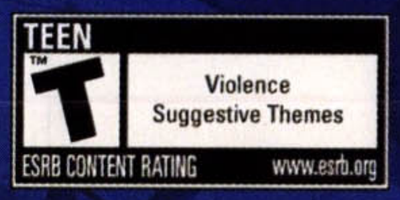


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# NEXT IN LINE

## WHAT DOES THE NEW ROUND OF CONSOLES MEAN FOR GAME DEVELOPMENT?

BY TODD HOWARD, EXECUTIVE PRODUCER, BETHESDA SOFTWORKS

There's a certain allure to being "next." Next in line; your next car; next Christmas; and your next girlfriend.

We're at one of those points in time when gaming is about to go to the next level with the anticipation of new hardware. I know, I know, you've heard it before. "It's not 8-bit – it's now 16-bit, and 32-bit, and 64-bit," and so on. All the clichés circle in your head: "Incredibly lifelike graphics, breakthroughs in gameplay, a new paradigm, and emotion synthesis."

I was looking back at past "next generations" and looking forward to the newest one and the big thing that struck me was the leaps. Computing power for the "next generation" always makes exponential jumps. As with any exponential curve, the leaps get larger and larger. The difference between the current generation of games and the next – by definition – is larger than all the others combined.

So, what will this new hardware allow that you aren't seeing in games today? This is the same question we as developers had to ask ourselves a few years ago, as we began to create the software that will drive you to buy these new devices.

When we started our latest Elder Scrolls title, Oblivion, in 2002, we knew we wanted to target the hardware of the future. We brainstormed a list of things we could do with advances in CPUs and video cards. In previous generations, one of the hardest effects to render had been water, but with the advent of pixel-shaders (graphic effects you can code that manipulate individual pixels on the screen), water is now a common effect that is done really well in games, especially on high end PCs and the Xbox, where pixel-shaders are prevalent.

In Morrowind, we had a great experience creating water effects, so the first thing we knew about Oblivion and the future of games would be that it was going to be a pixel-shader world. Surfaces could now have multiple processes run on them to accurately reflect how they act in real life. Metal would be shiny based on the angle you viewed it at, wood would be chipped and look dry and worn, and skin would finally look real because we could show the amount of translucency and oiliness for every pixel. But beyond that, what was the really big thing we wanted to do?

We've always wanted to do forests. Full forests with grass, weeds, flowers, trees, shrubs, and bushes – all moving realistically, casting shadows, and logically growing off into the horizon. There's this image we've had in our heads – a knight riding through the forest, sunlight creeping through the trees, cresting a hill, and seeing the forest continue below and the mountains in the distance. And, finally, spying a town a mile away, a soft glow emanating from its fire-lit windows.

And it was this experience that we could finally create, finally present in a way that was not fake, in a way that did not require you to make leaps of faith. So we did it. The final effect, and I'm not overstating this, is better than we imagined. It's one of those "wow" moments that make game development worth every second. It's also one of those moments where you think "So, what else can we make it do?"

I know there are many of you who scoff at graphics, who say that graphics – and the industry's focus on it – is hurting the gameplay. I believe the opposite. I believe that a game's number one job is to entertain, in any way possible and, frankly, stunning visuals are entertaining. Plus, graphics and technology can benefit gameplay. They haven't always, but they will.

> **"There is a larger understanding now among developers of what is fun..."**

For instance, in Oblivion, one look at a woman on the screen and you can tell she needs your help. In one second, you can tell from the look on her face, the way she moves, and her overall mood. In a previous generation, it simply couldn't be presented in the same manner. And we're able to do so much more with the characters. With the exponential increase in processing power we're able to think about every NPC in the world – who they are, what they are doing, and where they are going – thousands of them, all in real-time. This was absolutely not possible before.

There's another facet of this as well, and that's pure developer experience. There are obviously certain things you do in a game that make it more entertaining that do not rely on technology. You've seen this honed over the life of the current systems. There is a larger understanding now among developers of what is fun, and how to present that to the player. Whether it's level advancement, rewards, tutorials, loading screens, or saving your game, we've gotten better at understanding one fundamental: no matter what the player is doing, entertain them. Even when they lose, entertain them. I love Burnout 3; you know why? When I crash, it's entertaining.

It's these two things, technology advancement and development maturation, coming together that are going to make the next generation the largest leap the industry has ever taken. The audiences will be larger, the games will be better, and the experience will be richer. Developers behind the scenes are seeing it now. Get in line – you're next. ■ ■ ■

The views and opinions expressed on this page are strictly those of the author and not necessarily those of Game Informer Magazine or its staff.

If you work in the industry and would like to share your opinion, contact senior associate editor Matt Helgeson at matt@gameinformer.com.

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TEEN
T
Blood
Violence
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

# december

sun | mon | tue | wed | thur | fri | sat

**01**

**NEW RELEASES**
- Doom 3 – Xbox
- GunGriffon – Xbox

**02**

**AUSTRALIAN GAME DEVELOPER'S CONFERENCE DEC 2-4**
This development conference is where Australia's leading game industry professionals meet to discuss the finer points of the business. Surprisingly, it turns out these professionals aren't kangaroos and koalas. Did you know that people live in Australia? Weird, huh?

**03**

On this glorious day, many visionary geniuses were born. Filmmaker Jean-Luc Godard turns 74, while acting powerhouse Brendan Fraser turns 36. But most importantly, today is the 56th birthday of the Prince of Darkness himself, Ozzy Osbourne!

**06**

**NEW RELEASES**
- The Lord of the Rings: Battle for Middle-Earth – PC
- Mario Party 6 – GC
- Mario Party Advance – GBA
- Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic II – The Sith Lords – Xbox

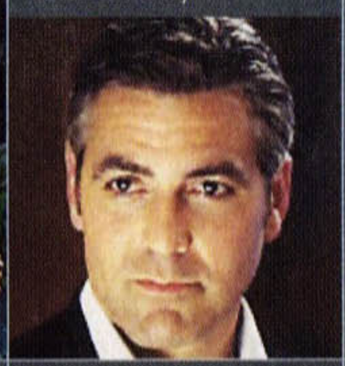
**07**

**NEW RELEASES**
- Chronicles of Riddick: Escape From Butcher Bay – PC
- Kingdom Hearts: Chain of Memories – GBA
- Mega Man X8 – PS2
- Predator: Concrete Jungle – Xbox

**Predator: Concrete Jungle releases Dec. 7**

**10**

The fun, but confusingly titled sequel *Ocean's Twelve* opens in theaters today.



**11**

**NSIM '04 DECEMBER 10**
NSIM '04 stands for the Workshop on Network Support for Interactive Multimedia and Games. Also held in Australia, this workshop focuses on network issues in this and future generations of interactive entertainment. It also has a really, really long name.

**Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic II – The Sith Lords**

**14**

**NEW RELEASES**
- Gran Turismo 4 – PS2
- *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King Extended Edition* – DVD
- *Quantum Leap: The Complete Second Season* – DVD
- *I, Robot* – DVD

**15**

**16**

**17**

Singer, model, and video game movie actress Milla Jovovich turns 29 today. Woohoo! An excuse to run a picture of Milla!

**18**

**19**

**OTAKUCON MIAMI BEACH 2004 DEC 17-19**
This anime convention features everything from LAN games to Japanese pop karaoke, as long as it's nerdy. Special guests, anime screening rooms, and cosplay contests round out this three-day event. We're wearing giant foam Pikachu costumes, how about you?

**20**

**NEW RELEASES**
- Close Combat: First to Fight – Xbox

**21**

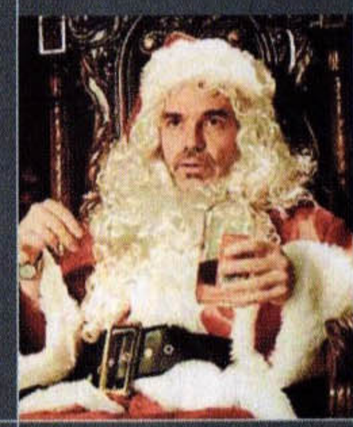
Winter officially begins, which gives you the perfect excuse to stay in and play games. If you go outside, snow might touch you.

**24**

Because absolutely no one demanded it, the film version of *Fat Albert* opens in theaters on December 25.

**25**

*Bad Santa* Day



**26**

**29**

**30**

**31**

**NEW RELEASES**
- Sega Classics Collection – PS2
- Team Fortress 2 – PC
- Super Monkey Ball Deluxe – PS2

For future release dates, go to www.gameinformer.com

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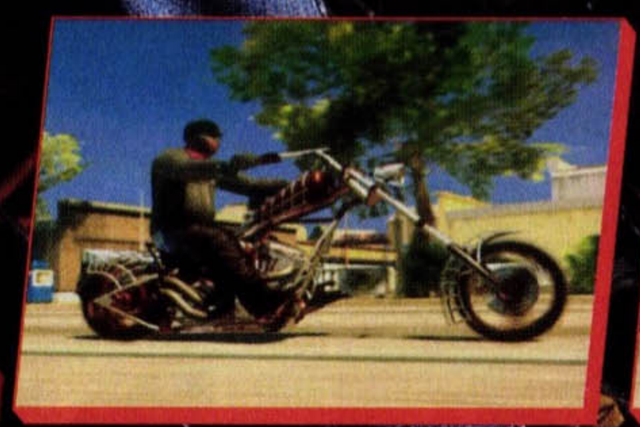
## The game



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> **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS /WARNER BROTHERS
> **DEVELOPER** ELECTRONIC ARTS/EUROCOM
> **RELEASE** SUMMER 2005

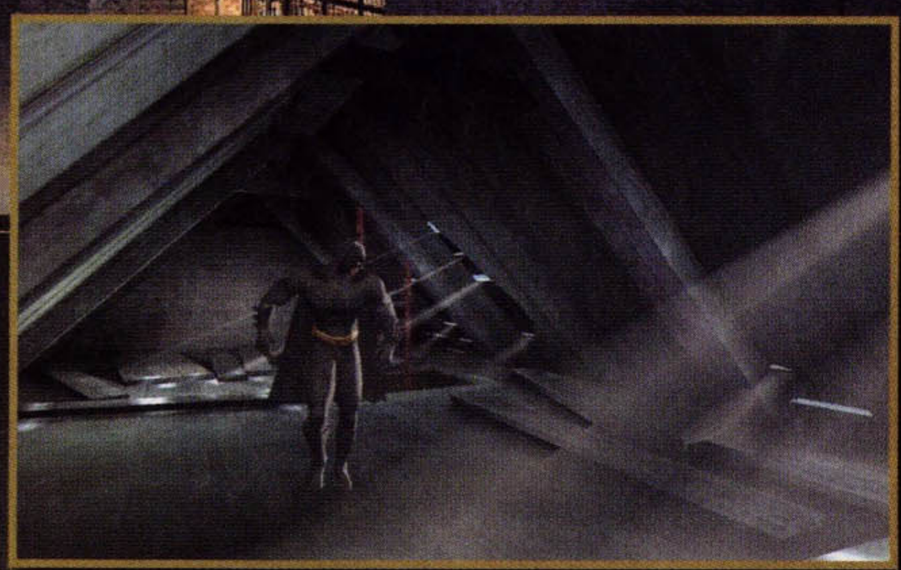
B A T M A N  B E G I N S

# "FEAR IS AN EXCELLENT MOTIVATOR"

If he chooses, as the footfalls of Gotham's criminals pound out a staccato rhythm on the streets, they'll see the tail end of a swooshing cape. But it's just a flash – enough of a shape or a movement that later, when they're held in his unflinching grip high above the safety of solid ground, they'll remember what they saw before and realize what they should have done. They should have run. They should have feared the one who would bring them to justice. They should have known that crime doesn't last long when he's around. They should have feared the Batman.

Those who have encountered him will embellish the legend. They'll spin tales of him lurking in the shadows, like a lion stalking its prey. He works meticulously, and no one will be able to escape. This Batman is a wild creature, intent on the hunt – and he's coming for those who dare to manipulate the system on his watch. The residents of Gotham will not live in fear, but the villains should. He will play with their minds. He will teach them to change their ways, and he'll do it in the best, most efficient way he knows how: by scaring the living daylights out of them.

They, no matter how powerful, will scream for their mothers. They'll cower under streetlights, too frightened to realize that Batman may be many things, but he's not a murderer. He's a vigilante. He's a hero. He's a whispered threat. But also, he's just a man.



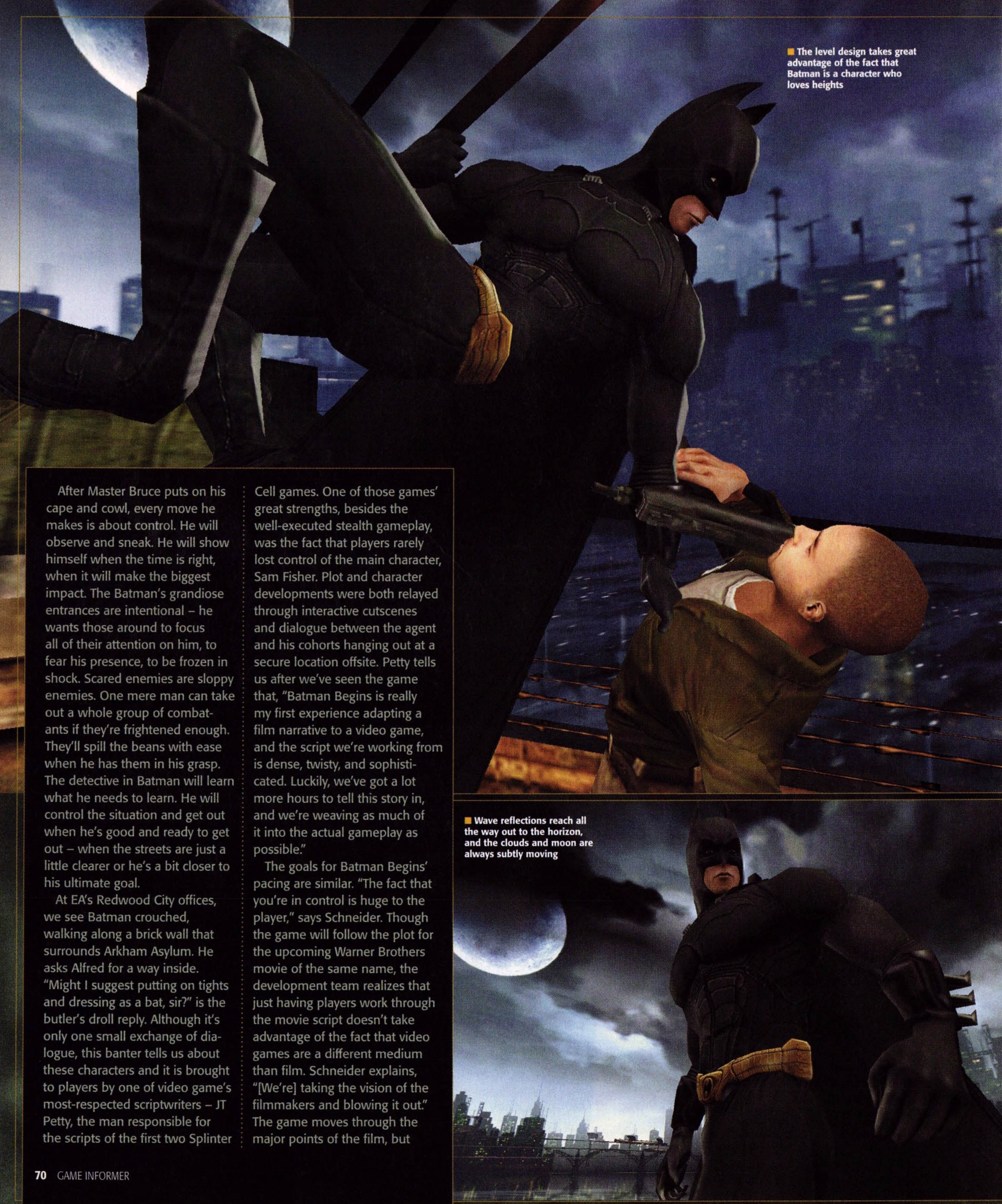
■ The shots on this page show how much detail and depth is going into the environment and lighting design. By the way, all of these shots are from the in-game engine on PS2

What Batman hasn't been in video games could fill a book – he hasn't been an unspoken fear in the hearts of his enemies. He hasn't been the scary one or the smart one or the sneaky one. He hasn't even been very clever, because no one has ever taken up the gauntlet of a modern Batman and merged it with the technology such a character's world needs. That is, until Electronic Arts and Eurocom joined forces with a common goal. Reid Schneider, producer on the Batman Begins project, tells us, "We have the opportunity here to reinvent the franchise." And, by taking on one of comic's most beloved characters, the team also has a huge responsibility to finally get it right, to ask the right questions. Questions like who is Batman, really? What are his weapons, strengths, weaknesses, tools, methods, and ultimate goals? What does he enjoy? Why does he keep doing what he does? What could possibly be the reward for what has proven (at least in the world of comics) to be an unachievable end?

"[Batman is] an incredibly cool character…he's the world's greatest detective," says Schneider. As we spend more time going through what they already have done in the game, it's clear that the whole team knows exactly what's been missing from the development of earlier Batman titles – an appreciation for the subtlety of the character. He is just a man. A very rich man with very cool toys, but still only a human that must be smarter than his opponents. That's his real power. His willingness to mess with people and even, some might say, his enjoyment in toying with them.

Like most comic superheroes, Batman/Bruce Wayne lives a double life. But, unlike the alien Boy Scout that is Superman or the goofy teenager who acquires extraordinary powers like Spider-Man, the Dark Knight has a more, shall we say, flexible moral code. His goals are similarly altruistic, his lies and isolation are akin to other characters, but his means are just outside the line that most real-world humans would honestly find acceptable. From a video game standpoint, his methods are just more fun.

While playing, gamers will scan the environment to find out what exactly they can interact with. Each modifiable item will be highlighted clearly by an on-screen icon. The goal is to avoid making players mash the action button while looking for items



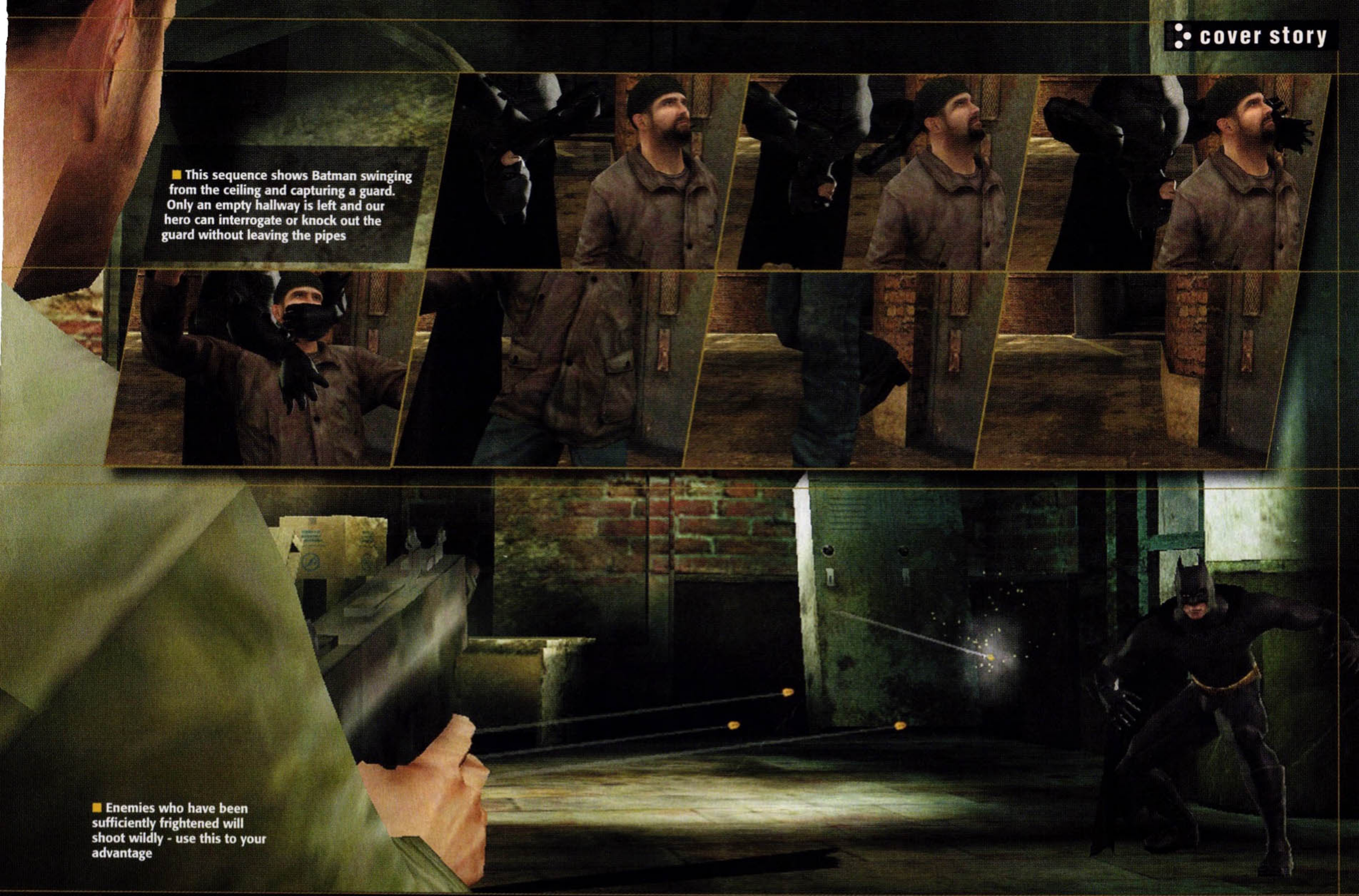
The level design takes great advantage of the fact that Batman is a character who loves heights

After Master Bruce puts on his cape and cowl, every move he makes is about control. He will observe and sneak. He will show himself when the time is right, when it will make the biggest impact. The Batman's grandiose entrances are intentional – he wants those around to focus all of their attention on him, to fear his presence, to be frozen in shock. Scared enemies are sloppy enemies. One mere man can take out a whole group of combatants if they're frightened enough. They'll spill the beans with ease when he has them in his grasp. The detective in Batman will learn what he needs to learn. He will control the situation and get out when he's good and ready to get out – when the streets are just a little clearer or he's a bit closer to his ultimate goal.

At EA's Redwood City offices, we see Batman crouched, walking along a brick wall that surrounds Arkham Asylum. He asks Alfred for a way inside. "Might I suggest putting on tights and dressing as a bat, sir?" is the butler's droll reply. Although it's only one small exchange of dialogue, this banter tells us about these characters and it is brought to players by one of video game's most-respected scriptwriters – JT Petty, the man responsible for the scripts of the first two Splinter Cell games. One of those games' great strengths, besides the well-executed stealth gameplay, was the fact that players rarely lost control of the main character, Sam Fisher. Plot and character developments were both relayed through interactive cutscenes and dialogue between the agent and his cohorts hanging out at a secure location offsite. Petty tells us after we've seen the game that, "Batman Begins is really my first experience adapting a film narrative to a video game, and the script we're working from is dense, twisty, and sophisticated. Luckily, we've got a lot more hours to tell this story in, and we're weaving as much of it into the actual gameplay as possible."

The goals for Batman Begins' pacing are similar. "The fact that you're in control is huge to the player," says Schneider. Though the game will follow the plot for the upcoming Warner Brothers movie of the same name, the development team realizes that just having players work through the movie script doesn't take advantage of the fact that video games are a different medium than film. Schneider explains, "[We're] taking the vision of the filmmakers and blowing it out." The game moves through the major points of the film, but

Wave reflections reach all the way out to the horizon, and the clouds and moon are always subtly moving



This sequence shows Batman swinging from the ceiling and capturing a guard. Only an empty hallway is left and our hero can interrogate or knock out the guard without leaving the pipes

Enemies who have been sufficiently frightened will shoot wildly - use this to your advantage

whereas the movie might spend 20 minutes in Arkham Asylum (for example), the game can and will show much more of that fabled location.

We watch as Batman moves toward a tower built into the security wall. He bounds on top of it and Schneider pans the camera around for us. We see the harbor, with lapping waves reflecting the moonlight. The asylum is in the center, six or seven stories tall, dilapidated and in need of some general repairs. We see what Schneider and the entire team hope will eventually be called "The Batman Look." The goal is a stylized realism, believable but exaggerated. The building looms high in the air, the shadows are just a bit longer than they would be in reality, the grime of a city covers every surface, and the general state of disrepair would have the structure condemned in most real-life metropolises. But, even with all of this subtle exaggeration of features, the look is believable. We can accept Gotham as a real place, albeit a real place that we wouldn't think of as a prime vacation destination.

Back in the courtyard, there are a handful of guards pacing back and forth across the open space. They are armed, scanning the perimeter, and chatting amongst themselves. This is just another night on the job and they banter about preferred doughnut fillings and what their wives are complaining about lately.

Scanning from guard to guard, we see one of the many innovations that will differentiate Batman Begins from its stealth/action brethren. The game accounts for the fear of enemies. Onscreen, this is displayed as an EKG – the targeted character's heart rate, which will climb into the stratosphere if Batman and the player do their jobs right.

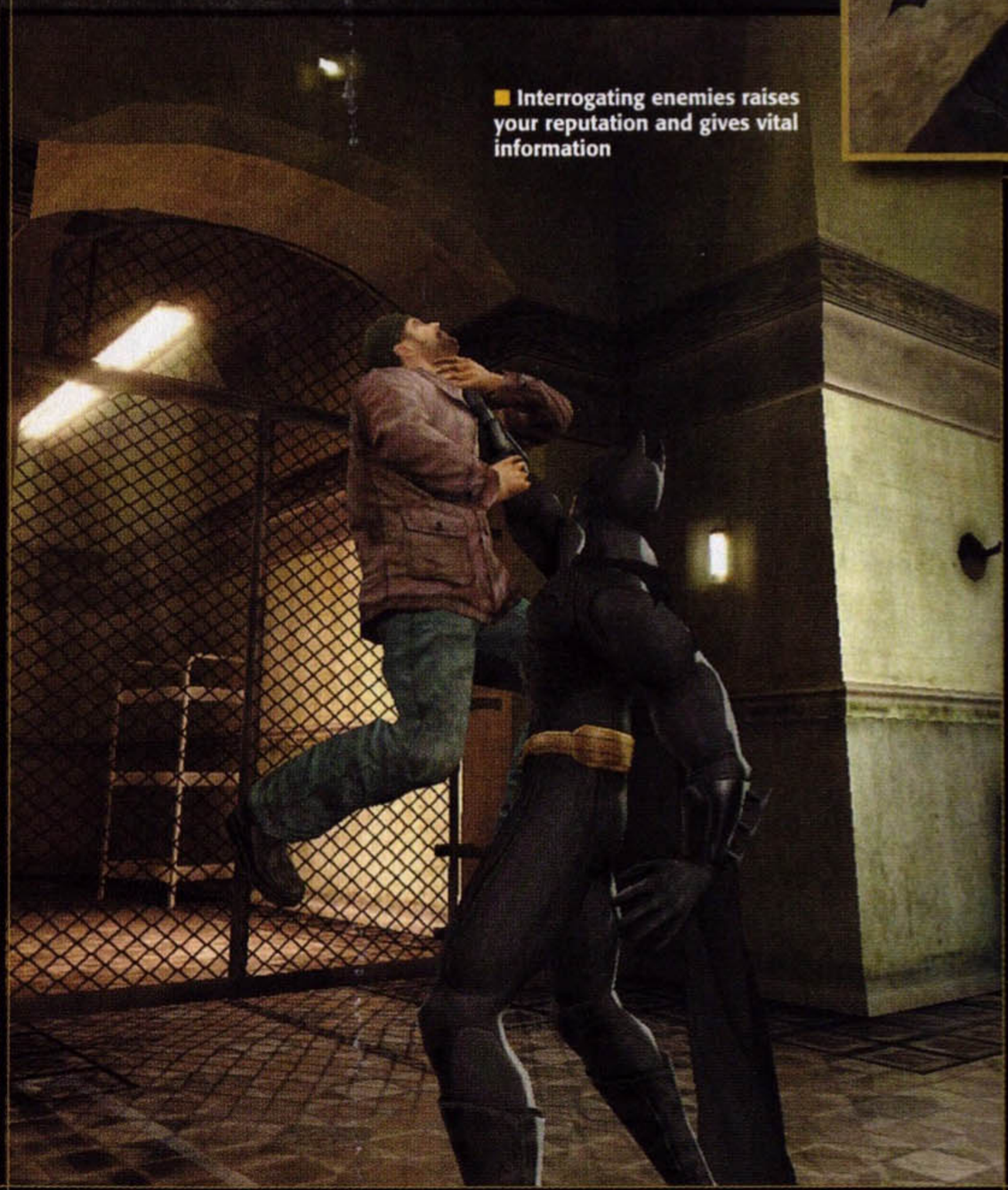
After observing the guards' movement, a weakness is found in their patrol routes of Arkham's exterior. We sneak over to the area where a guard is standing inside a gated area that has access to a basement window. As we near, a scripted event starts. A car pulls up, parks, and another guard gets out. We keep walking closer to the scene. The guards start talking about how one has a new alarm on his car, the other thinks they're annoyances that do nothing but keep him awake at night. The first guy responds, "Well…then don't touch my car." They start their rounds. We have been in control of Batman through the entire event. We keep moving closer. Scanning them, the EKG shows that both guards are calm. Like many stealth games, it is most efficient to divide the enemies and take them on individually. We pull out a Batarang, throw it at the car, and set off the alarm. One guard wanders over to check it out and, in the brief moment he's distracted, we sneak up to take out his friend. Unconscious, he can't warn anyone of our presence. The second guard turns around, sees his partner on the ground, looks up, and registers the commanding silhouette of "the Batman." His pulse races. As will happen any time someone is particularly frightened, a picture-in-picture window pops into the corner showing the guard's reaction. It's priceless. "In horror movies, it's all about the reaction shot," Schneider tells us.

Shifting our attention back to the one remaining, terrified guard, we fight. He's wild – throwing poorly timed punches, too surprised and scared to call for backup, and we incapacitate him easily. Access to Arkham is now just a basement window away and our reputation meter rises.

While it hasn't been officially announced, it's pretty safe to say that the upcoming Batman flick is based (at least in part) on Frank Miller's seminal *Batman: Year One* story arc. The comic outlines Bruce Wayne's parents being murdered on the street, his self-imposed exile from Gotham when he traveled the world to learn the skills he'd need to be Batman, Wayne's return to the city, and the beginning of the Dark Knight's appearance on the streets. In addition, critical characters like Lieutenant

Stealth and observation will pay off by letting players mess with enemies in the most effective manner possible, which just happens to be the most fun

An efficiently brutal combat system mimicks the style used in the film



Interrogating enemies raises your reputation and gives vital information

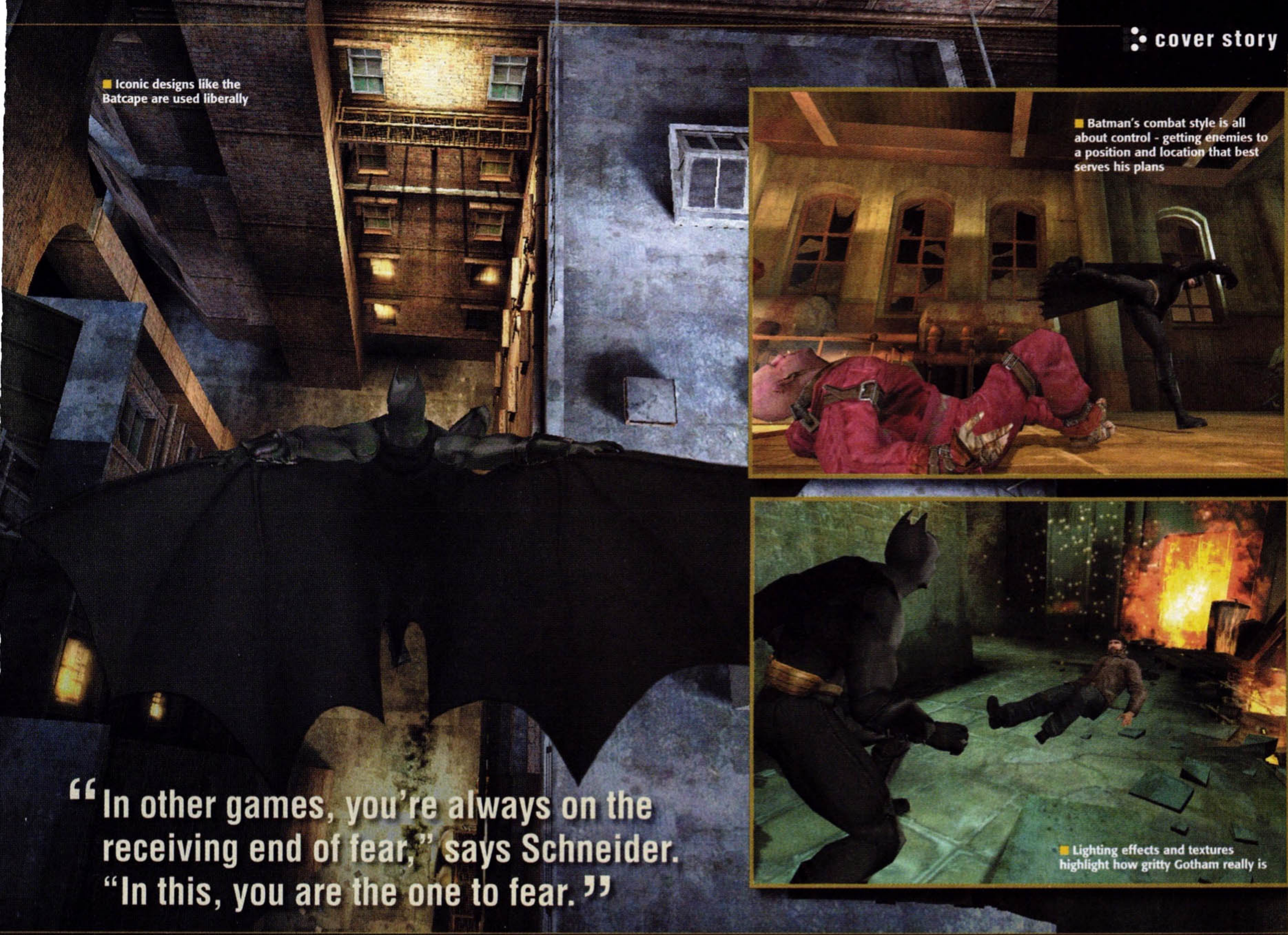
Gordon are brought into the city to set the wrong things right. Batman, to be effective, needs to be feared before he's even seen. At first, a grown man dressed as a rodent with a cape isn't necessarily an imposing figure. His actions, his reputation, must precede him. In the game, there is a meter that shows your reputation in the city. The more fear created, the higher the meter goes, the more commanding the threat of Batman is, and the more fear his appearance causes – it increases exponentially as long as players take advantage of it.

While there are certain sections of the game that players can fistfight their way through, in theory at least, Schneider is quick to point out that, "[Batman Begins] isn't a brawler." The goal is to get players to think about their surroundings, stalk their enemies, time their attacks, build up tension, and make an appearance when the moment is right. You want them to recognize you instantly and fear you before you even arrive. "In other games, you're always on the receiving end of fear," says Schneider. "In this, you are the one to fear."

In this way, the game rewards players for messing with people as much as possible – for making them quake at the thought of you. We saw examples like the car alarm we talked about earlier, but Batman can also take advantage of Gotham's generally run-down condition by dropping poorly supported neon signs near a group of guards. Above this, there are still other interesting examples that differentiate this game's playground from other realism-based stealth titles.

Many of the locations players will move through have an exceptionally vertical level design. Arkham, as we described earlier, looks to be six or seven stories tall. Think about how a man whose entire crime fighting persona is based on a creature that glides, sleeps upside down, and only comes out at night should be able to take advantage of the vertical space afforded to him. Crawling on pipes is only the start of things.

In another scene in the same asylum



Iconic designs like the Batcape are used liberally

Batman's combat style is all about control - getting enemies to a position and location that best serves his plans

Lighting effects and textures highlight how gritty Gotham really is

**"In other games, you're always on the receiving end of fear," says Schneider. "In this, you are the one to fear."**

level, we see Batman standing on a roof. There's a skylight and we can watch a handful of goons below splashing gasoline around, clearly intending to set this wing on fire, probably so that they don't have to patrol it. Our options are many: We could go ahead and try to find a different way in, we could drop down through the skylight and distract them into doing something stupid, or we could take option number three.

Grabbing a nearby guard, we throw him through the skylight. He lands on a pool of gasoline and shattered glass. "The Batman…is coming," he grunts and huffs before passing out. Our enemies grab their guns and start wildly searching, looking out of windows, and peering at the skylight. This is when we drop down, a scripted event starts, and the camera pans to show Batman ready to pounce. "Boo," he growls, grinning roguishly. Now we have control again. We run to the right and a guard recklessly shoots in our general direction, lighting a barrel on fire that ignites most of the room in a chain reaction. Thanks to him, we have only a few more goons to take care of.

Moving from one to the next, we brutalize our enemies using a combat system that could be best described as efficient and to-the-point. Elbows, knees, head-butts, and powerful punches show up frequently. Liberal uses of kicks and sweeps force enemies to the ground. Schneider tells us that the stunt coordinator for the film is overseeing the fighting animations, and that a new style of martial art has been laid out for this modern Batman. The game's combat tree is based, in part, on dailies that the development team receives from the stunt team. In the game, it's totally worthwhile because for the first time, we can see how a gritty, realistic Batman would fight. This sequence shows that, while the gameplay isn't all stealth, it isn't all action either. Instead, it's about balancing the two – enemies can be taken out in this trading of blows, or in a more subtle, stealthy way.

We see two guards walking down a hallway. Batman has his legs wrapped around a pipe that runs along the ceiling. After the guard passes, he drops his upper body down, grabs the guard, hand plastered over his mouth, and draws him up to the ceiling in one practiced movement. The guard's partner says something and, not getting a response, turns back to see an utterly empty hallway. He is afraid, but brushes it off. Maybe the guy went to the bathroom. We see Batman's solid force holding a terrified guard against the ceiling. He has a few questions to ask.

The bulk of Batman's work, at its core, is as a detective. He gathers information, prepares for any field-work, and does his research. What the development team does not want is another survival-horror themed series of locked doors for which you can find keys. "Go-find-the-key sucks. No one likes that," says Schneider. Instead, most of the particulars that players will need for moving from area to area like passwords, kingpin locations, and enemy goals will be acquired by interrogating the foes found along your path.

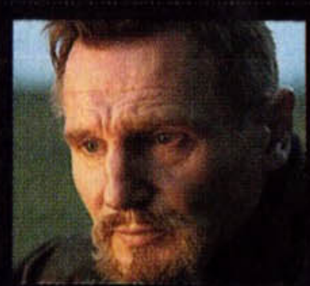
Once a character is entirely in Batman's control, either by beating them into submission or catching them off-guard in a hold, the player is offered two choices: incapacitation or interrogation. When in interrogation mode, Batman will growl questions or commands at his captive. Keep in mind that Batman does not kill; but he's also not opposed to greasing the wheels of information by applying a little pressure. Similarly, players shouldn't be shy about hitting the

## Batman Begins: The Film

Although some specifics are sill unconfirmed (like the extent of the cast's involvement and how the Batmobile is used, exactly), we can give you the skinny on some film-related info. Since the upcoming game will follow the major plot points of the flick, you can take this cast list as a group of characters likely (but not officially confirmed) to appear in the game. To get a feel for what the movie's film noir styling will probably be like, check out *Batman Begins* director Christopher Nolan's earlier work, which includes *Following*, *Memento*, and *Insomnia*.

**Batman/Bruce Wayne [Christian Bale]**
Obviously our hero and his alter ego – if you don't know this, go buy some comics and get educated. We aren't speaking to you until the situation is rectified.

**Alfred Pennyworth [Michael Caine]**
The iconic butler and father figure to Bruce. He's the co-pilot to many of the Dark Knight's escapades and pops off more dry, witty lines in five minutes than we'll say in a lifetime.

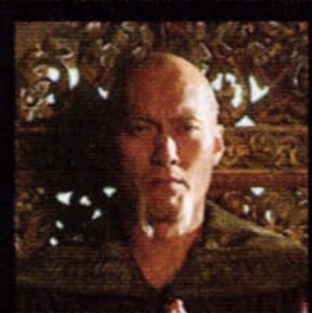


**Henri Ducard [Liam Neeson]**
When Bruce Wayne left Gotham to learn from the masters, this is one of the guys he looked up. An excellent detective and even better tracker, it looks like Wayne learned a lot from him.

**Lucius Fox [Morgan Freeman]**
The trusted businessman in charge of the day-to-day running of Wayne Corp. Rumors indicate that in the film's universe, Lucius is being pushed out of office while Bruce is off learning his superhero trade.

**Dr. Thomas Wayne [Linus Roache]**
Bruce Wayne's sometimes absent, but exceptionally well regarded, father was gunned down (along with Bruce's mother) after the family went to a movie. This crime changed Bruce's life and he vowed to rid Gotham of any criminal element by becoming Batman.

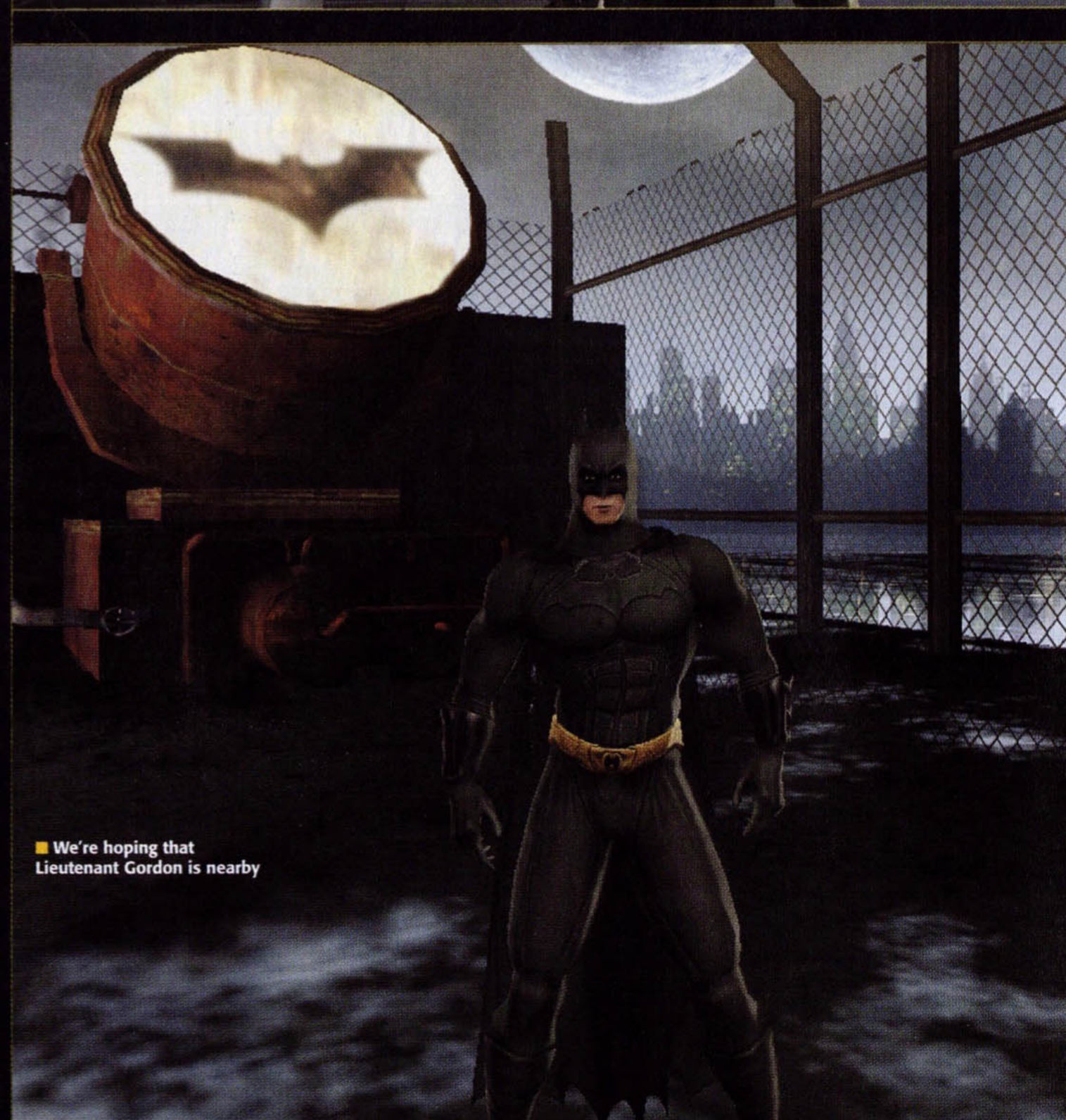
**R'as al Ghul [Ken Watanabe]**
Ghul's past intertwines with Batman's in a bevy of twists and turns: he's tried to force Bruce and his daughter to marry, he's tried to recruit him, he's tried to kill him. Ghul has lived for hundreds of years by using Lazarus Pits, which restore his health.



**Lieutenant Jim Gordon [Gary Oldman]**
Batman's friend eventually becomes Commissioner Gordon and helps the vigilante from the inside, mostly because their goals of ridding Gotham of crime are so closely aligned.

**Carmine Falcone [Tom Wilkinson]**
A Gotham crime lord and resident badass, it's unclear exactly what role he will play in this tale.

Outside, Arkham Asylum is foreboding, dark, and intimidating. Inside, it's worse



We're hoping that Lieutenant Gordon is nearby

The cape animations, at least at this stage of development, look more like the comics' stylized movement than strictly realistic

## "Go-find-the-key sucks. No one likes that," says Schneider.

punch button offered in this mode. When you've gotten all that you can, enemies should be knocked out – partially so that they aren't a threat anymore and partially so that they can tell their superiors about "the Batman" when they wake up. By frequently interrogating enemies, not only will you get required and valuable information, you'll also increase your reputation. We can only hope that the tale spun by someone you've encountered will involve Batman being an eight-foot tall rock of a man with super powers and piercing eyes. They'll fear your approach that much more the next time they're on patrol.

Moving through Gotham's landmarks once you have the information that you need is another area where Batman Begins is stretching the rules of the stealth/action genre. Schneider tells us that, "We're always looking for ways to up [the number of] player's choices." Darting between puddles of shadows outside of a building, Batman can certainly slide down a cable á la Sam Fisher in Splinter Cell, but he can also jump, spread his arms, and glide across with the commanding silhouette made by the character's trademark cape. It's clear that, like a quality stealth title, gamers can look forward to tackling levels in a number of ways, and with a number of bat-gadgets.

We saw the Batarang (which we can reasonably assume would come in multiple forms like stun and electric), and the cape. But, we can't help wondering about grappling lines, explosives, or sonic pagers that could bring in an airstrike of sorts by the bats living in Wayne Manor's Batcave. The team isn't ready to talk specifics about these quite yet, or about the Dark Knight's most revered toy – the Batmobile.

Those who have been following the film's development have already seen the Batmobile. Its design looks to be based off of the tank-like behemoth seen in *The Dark Knight Returns* comic storyline, and spy reports talk of seeing the vehicle cruising around the streets of Chicago during filming. We're guessing that it's a pretty safe bet that this car will show up in the game – it's just too iconic to not make an appearance. Still, Schneider and the team keep mum. It could be said that there is always a need for surprises.

Only our widest reaching guesses can even start to wonder what more the team has up its sleeve, but with all of these impressive features and even more wide-reaching goals, a mid-summer release date looms (the game will come out on the same day the movie premieres). We talked with them about what the challenges are when doing a licensed game, and if they are even more difficult when the game will follow the events in a movie. Petty, whose involvement includes outlining scripted events, level design suggestions, and mission goals, tells us that, "Fear is a huge element in both the game and movie, and something I want to focus on with narrative. It's such a classic formula to try to frighten players, and so rare that we give players the chance to frighten the characters in a game. Fear is first, but this is also Batman's origin story, and the development of his character is as important as the development of all of his skills [and] gadgetry."

Petty adds, "Much of my specific interest in making video games is the characters and universe that you can create. The immersion possible with a video game world is pretty obvious, but I think it's compelling as well to think about the characterization you can engage a player with. A licensed game has the advantage of a fully developed universe, and in the case of Batman, an incredibly well developed iconic character."

Another complication that almost always rears its ugly head in superhero games is how to best deal with the alter ego – a frequently timid, under-powered, everyman kind of character. "We know that when people bring home this game and pop it in, they just want to be Batman," says Schneider. When starting up the game, the first levels are played as Batman. After a few rounds of the Dark Knight hunting, the story will swing backwards, to the time when Bruce Wayne was traveling the world, training to become the superhero icon he is destined to be. From this point, the story will progress through training and the introduction of this hero to the city until it reaches the present day and continuing on to the game (and the movie's) climactic final battles. What this means for players is that, although you will have levels as the alter-ego, they will be when he's at his most badass, his most focused, and really just like Batman without the cape and cowl.

Arguably, Batman, and even Bruce Wayne himself, is one of the most epic characters in the modern age. He is troubled by what he must sacrifice for his cause, he wants nothing more than to be successful, and he is willing to go to exceptional lengths to reach his aim. He is feared, he is imitated, he is studied, he is in constant control of every situation; but he still is just a solitary man. What this game attempts to do is give players every excuse to go bump in the night. And, even more so, give people the sense of control, of power with what they can do – not what will be done to them. Batman is the one to be afraid of, and now, so are you. Criminals, after all, are a superstitious, cowardly lot. Take advantage of it like he would. ■■■

THIS TIME THE DESTRUCTION IS PERSONAL.

PlayStation.2

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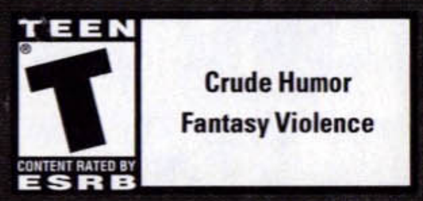

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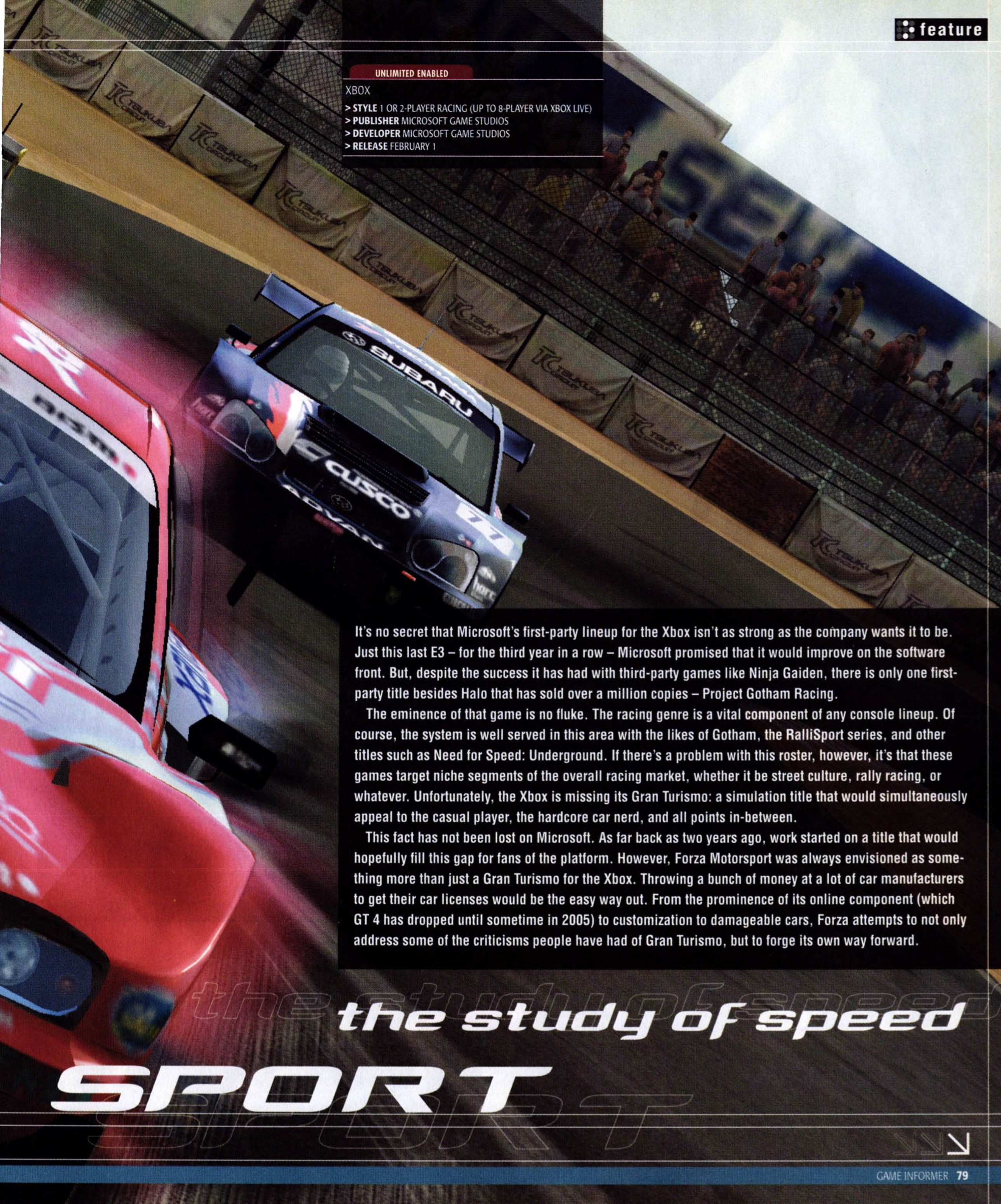
# FORZA MOTOR

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> **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 1

It's no secret that Microsoft's first-party lineup for the Xbox isn't as strong as the company wants it to be. Just this last E3 – for the third year in a row – Microsoft promised that it would improve on the software front. But, despite the success it has had with third-party games like Ninja Gaiden, there is only one first-party title besides Halo that has sold over a million copies – Project Gotham Racing.

The eminence of that game is no fluke. The racing genre is a vital component of any console lineup. Of course, the system is well served in this area with the likes of Gotham, the RalliSport series, and other titles such as Need for Speed: Underground. If there's a problem with this roster, however, it's that these games target niche segments of the overall racing market, whether it be street culture, rally racing, or whatever. Unfortunately, the Xbox is missing its Gran Turismo: a simulation title that would simultaneously appeal to the casual player, the hardcore car nerd, and all points in-between.

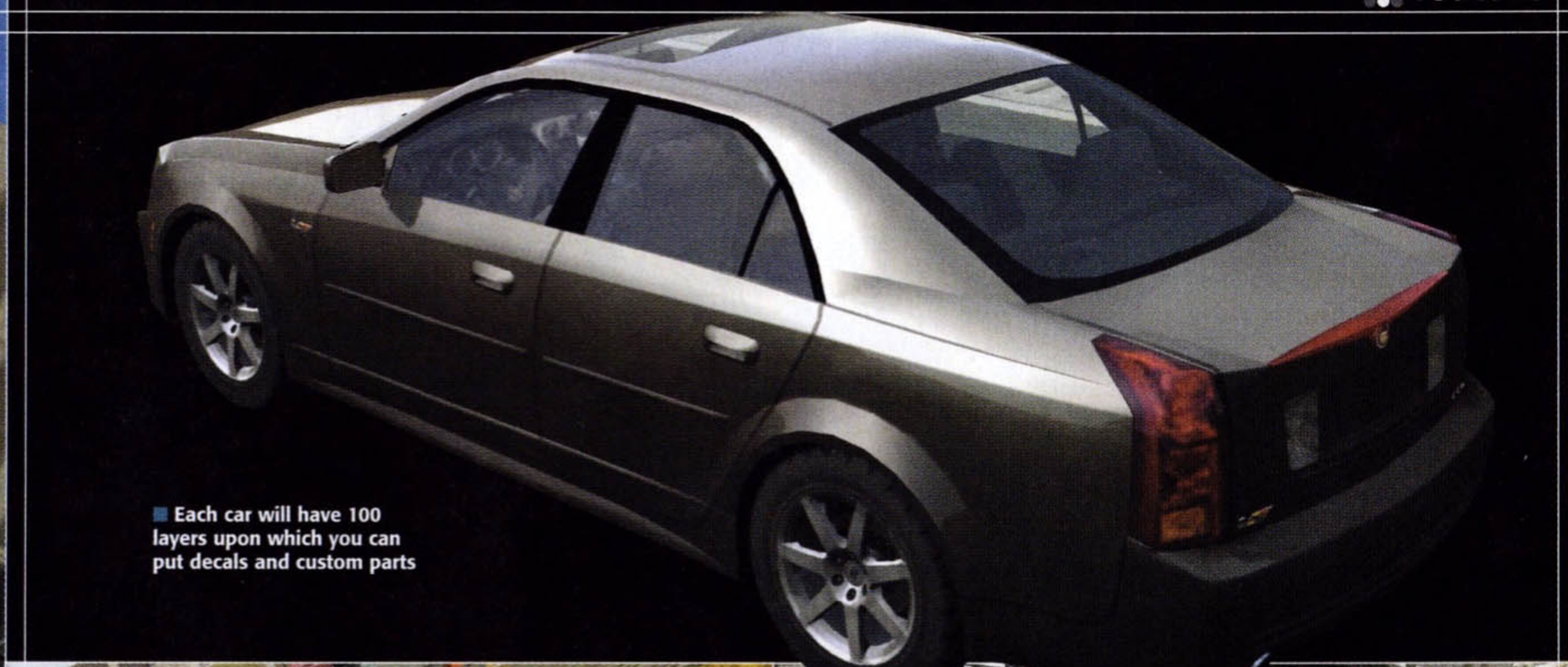
This fact has not been lost on Microsoft. As far back as two years ago, work started on a title that would hopefully fill this gap for fans of the platform. However, Forza Motorsport was always envisioned as something more than just a Gran Turismo for the Xbox. Throwing a bunch of money at a lot of car manufacturers to get their car licenses would be the easy way out. From the prominence of its online component (which GT 4 has dropped until sometime in 2005) to customization to damageable cars, Forza attempts to not only address some of the criticisms people have had of Gran Turismo, but to forge its own way forward.

**"Think only girls wear side skirts?"**

Forza Motorsport isn't short on numbers. Boasting over 200 cars, 200 manufacturers (including parts makers), and a slew of tracks spread over 17 environments, it's obvious that this game has you covered from many angles. However, straight numbers don't tell the whole story. Apart from racing some dead sexy cars like the Ferrari Risi Competizione F333SP, Forza attempts to appeal to your other gameplay needs apart from the desire for speed. Customization of your car is certainly nothing new to racing games, but Forza wants to actually make it fun, spurring you to look forward to turning on the game, going into your garage, and getting your hands seriously dirty.

The first thing that will entice you is that Forza gives you free reign to customize the total look of your car. These rides aren't just there to gleam in some virtual showroom – this is your car. As the Forza team says, "you are what you race." Each car has 100 "layers" on it. That's 100 places that you can affix the game's approximately 100 decals. Although you cannot create your own, each decal can be modified by color, size, and rotation. Add on the multitude

These aren't your father's old beaters. Forza's customization tools will make these babies really smoke



Each car will have 100 layers upon which you can put decals and custom parts

of colors you can paint your ride, and Forza has instantly gone from being just another car sim to a more interesting experience. Do you want your Dodge Viper to look like the one that the fat, boring, rich guy down the street drives on Saturday or the one featured in every other video game out there? Hell, no! This is your car, and it's going to look like however you want it to.

Think only girls wear side skirts? Well, even if you didn't know that side skirts actually run along the frame of a car, you will easily dive into Forza's many upgradeable car parts with no problem. Although the game features a multitude of parts such as intercoolers, suspensions, weight reduction packages, and much more, it's easy to understand each and every upgrade's immediate impact on your ride. All cars have a Speed, Acceleration, Brake, Corner, and Rarity rating from one to 10. Choose a part and see how it affects things. Best of all, even with the numerous licensed parts you can select, you don't have to worry about them having a negative effect because the next part available is always better. You can even swap your entire engine and then take it for a test drive to feel the difference.

The ease you'll feel at picking out all the different parts for your cars is helped by the fact that the structure of Forza's career mode always gives you a variety of opportunities to make some cash. Because there are multiple ways to make dough, you won't have to re-race old tracks as much just to earn more scratch. This variety and ease of making money means you can take an interest in other parts of your car besides just increasing its sheer horsepower rating.

Forza's career path is broken up into seven categories: Drift, Point-to-Point, Endurance, Autocross (where you pass through gates), Spec Races (requires certain car specs), Club Races (similar to Spec Races but less strict), and Pro Series (which has you compete in a series of contests). Each of these contains around 50 levels, and there are at least three races per level. First, however, you must meet any qualifications for each level, which vary from one to the next. Some require a certain class of car, while others demand that you have front-wheel drive, for example. As you can see, Forza offers a wealth of races, and because you can go into any category at any time, there is always something to do. You can enter Drift and e-brake your car around dangerous curves or participate in an Autocross contest. Of course, some areas will be locked until you gain enough points to earn them. These are gained during a race through a combination of good driving and a high finish. In the Drift category, for example, to earn points you must slide your car through specified sections of turns without going off the track.

Money, of course, is also won when you do well, and it is used to buy new cars and upgrade your parts. One of the ratings for each ride is called Rarity, and the higher the number the harder that particular car is to get in the game. Why is this important? Because when you start your career, Forza asks you which area of the world you want to start in (which is not related to real-life DVD region encoding, by the way). If you choose North America, for example, the Chevy muscle cars will be cheaper than the Italian sports cars and vice versa because of the Rarity factor. This throws up a little extra challenge to those persistent players who want to scour the globe for every hard-to-find automobile.

These superior-class cars will require all the skill you can muster. Their handling is light years away from your average ride

Given all the customizing and rare cars in Forza, there's bound to be some jealousy. You're going to pimp your ride out, take it online thinking you're the hottest thing in town, and then have your jaw drop at what your friend is pulling up to the line. Don't worry though, Forza's online component allows you to buy cars from others (you'll also earn money and racing points for your offline career). This isn't just a way for you to get some of those rare cars, but is a great way that the title uses Xbox Live to show off the game's almost limitless sense of individuality through customization.

Following the community-building aspects of Xbox Live 3.0, Forza allows the formation of car clubs. Here you can bring together 100 other players to race and win individually and as members of the same team – complete with your own logo. Who gets to join your club? Whoever you choose. If you start up your own gang with only the cool people invited (which leaves out GI Online's Billy, of course), as administrator, you can decide who is or isn't allowed in. Each club can have multiple administrators, so like a message board, gangs will be able to police themselves. Apart from forming groups who only race a certain kind of car, for example, this feature also allows, for those who only want to race cleanly, a good avenue to find like-minded people. Microsoft opted against racing for pink slips because they felt that it would be too heartbreaking for people to invest hours and hours into their car only to have it taken from them in an online race because some jackass intentionaly rams into them and cheats to win a race and their car.

Forza features over 1,700 different leaderboards, and although XSN Sports had all the life sucked out of it with the death of Microsoft's first-party sports lineup, Microsoft wants to have a dedicated webpage for the game where you can go and look at the leaderboards and other info. Downloads are planned, but the company isn't saying exactly what it wants to do just yet. We were told, however, that it plans to offer lots of free downloads along with fee-based premium content.

We've had some good hands-on time with Forza and, apart from having fun features and a well-stocked catalogue of cars, the game handles just as a sim should. You can really tell the differences between all of the types of rides, and have to adjust your driving accordingly. Winning races is more than a matter of horsepower and how well you accelerate. Effectively braking into corners is one thing you'll immediately pick up on. Do it too hard and too

**"Effectively braking into corners is one thing you'll immediately pick up on."**

Take a look at the individual bystander models in the background

Is that you or your Drivatar? Train your Drivatar well enough, and it can race Career mode races for you

early and you'll lock up the brakes, lose control, and go straight into the crash barriers. Of course, the game contains assists you can toggle on or off, so you'll have to gauge just what you can handle. Forza also features various states of tire wear throughout a race, meaning that different areas of the tire will heat up and degrade depending on your style of racing. Unfortunately, Microsoft has yet to shore up any third-party wheel support for the game, although something may still be worked out.

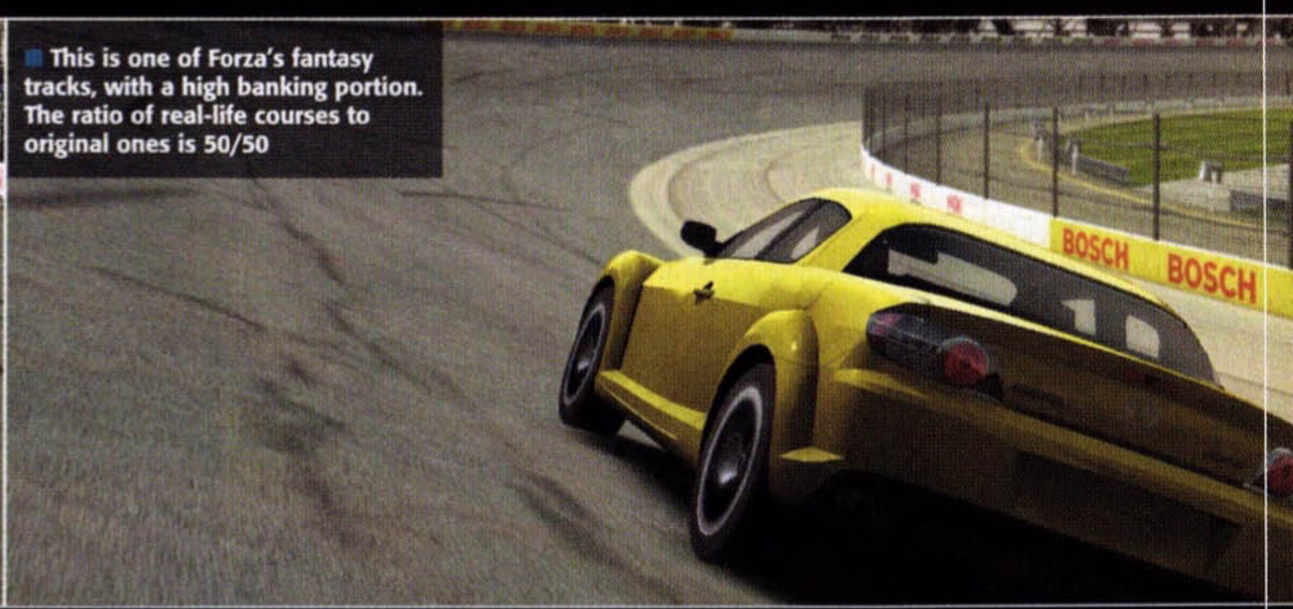
If you are having trouble with a certain race, the game gives you an interesting form of help. Drivatars are AI drivers you can train to compete for you. They will mimic – but also learn from – the way you like to drive. They can be trained in certain areas (like how to take a turn correctly) so that eventually your Drivatar can be substituted for you in races you might not want to compete in. However, you will receive fewer points and less money for races driven by your Drivatar. Also, your Drivatar doesn't go online.

Whether you have a Drivatar handling duties for you or not, understanding the correct racing line is very important. Because Forza features full damage for all of its cars, you are going to be more hesitant to smack it around willy-nilly. Damage isn't just visual, either. Depending on which of the three difficulty settings you've chosen, damage will have a range of effects, from simply being cosmetic to rendering your car undrivable. Perhaps this possibility, coupled with the time and care you've taken to customize your car, will make you more reluctant to use dangerous, fender-mangling driving techniques.

Visually, the damage to your car is impressive, which is no surprise given the care put into the game as a whole. There are real-time shadows and a multitude of objects, whether it be bridges or the cars themselves, that cast shadows at all times. The title runs at a constant 30 frames per second, and it goes the extra mile in its little details. For example, in the Leguna Seca course in California, you can see people watching the race in spotted locations along the mountainside that overlooks the course.

By now, we've come to expect Xbox games, and racing titles in general, to look good. But Forza Motorsport won't succeed just because it does what is expected of it or because it fills some gap in the Xbox's software lineup. It's the hard work of the team and their dedication to opening your eyes to new possibilities in a genre that you thought was already well-covered that will make the difference. ■■■

All the light reflections and shadows are done in real time



This is one of Forza's fantasy tracks, with a high banking portion. The ratio of real-life courses to original ones is 50/50

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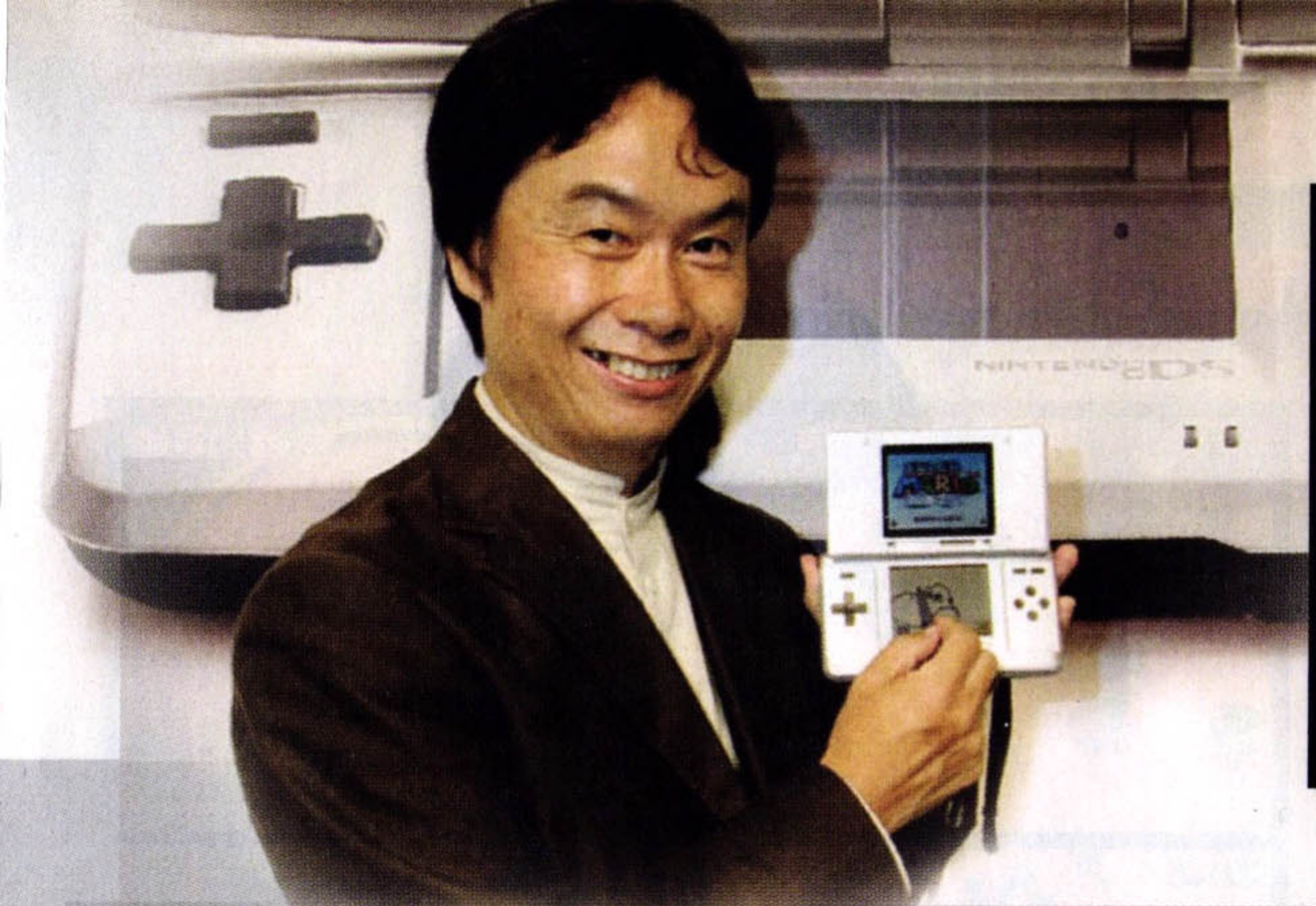
# That Extra Touch



## The GI Perspective:

Trying to describe why the DS is fun is like trying to explain the appeal of Legos – you just won't understand until you get your hands on it. After the war of the handhelds at this year's E3, people walked away acknowledging the potential of the DS, but with the limited technical demos available, many gamers were skeptical of the system's ability to provide an experience that would transend more than diversionary minigames. More than anything else, the DS is a tactile experience, and once we got our hands on some of the unit's real games, we began to see its potential realized. It still has a way to go to in terms of providing solid, continuous gaming rather than bite-sized tidbits, but the system certainly succeeds in its goal of giving players a unique and interesting new way to interact with games. Whether this new interface will give the system as much longevity as home consoles, or even the GBA, has yet to be seen. For the moment, though, the DS does provide refreshing innovation in an industry currently subsisting primarily on sequels.

Even with the next generation of home consoles drawing near, no system in recent months has been generating as much curiosity and rampant speculation as the Nintendo DS. Since E3, the company has been emphasizing how important it is for the future of gaming to reexamine the ways we connect and interact with our games. The DS is one of the manifestations of this philosophy, though on paper the concepts sound too idealistic and abstract to resonate with most gamers. If people are going to understand the DS, they will need to see the ideas in action. We finally had the opportunity to do exactly that when Nintendo held a Gamers' Summit in Seattle, giving the world a chance to scope out the DS and its software offerings before the big November 21 launch date.

When it was first unveiled, there were arguments that Sony's PSP was for more mature gamers, while the DS was aimed at children. However, with a sleek new redesign and launch titles like Ridge Racer DS and Tiger Woods PGA Tour DS, Nintendo is clearly trying to discredit that assertion. "Nintendo feels that the technology will certainly attract an older gamer, and we want software to back it up," explains Tom Harlin, public relations manager for Nintendo. "We are serious about attracting gamers of all ages. The more savvy gamers who want a system that looks cool and plays the best games can pick up DS and feel like they have the total package."

Nintendo's first-party games have undoubtedly created some of the most iconic characters in the video game industry, but after the PSP's showing at the Tokyo Game Show, Nintendo needed to come out swinging with a full arsenal of third-party software to augment its classic lineup. Fortunately, it did just that, announcing that over 120 games are currently in the works, with a majority of those titles being handled by a multitude of respected outside developers. "Nintendo has made a conscious effort over the last number of years to really court third parties to get unique games on our platforms, like Viewtiful Joe and Resident Evil 4," observes Harlin. "Nintendo certainly wants to be competitive in that arena, and the DS launch titles illustrate that."

In addition to getting the preloaded Pictochat and multiplayer-ready Metroid Prime Hunters: First Hunt right out of the box, gamers can look forward to a well-balanced launch lineup for the DS. Nintendo plans to deliver "a good variety, a lot of different genres, a lot of different styles of gameplay," Harlin tells us. Take a look for yourself: on the next few pages we'll give you a rundown of the 12 games Nintendo has promised will be available by the end of the year, as well as a handful that aren't too far behind. Whether you see it as the precursor to an upcoming Nintendo revolution or just a gaming novelty, it is difficult to deny that the DS is in a class by itself.

# Cleared for Take-Off:
## A look at the Nintendo DS Lineup

# Super Mario 64 DS

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** NINTENDO > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 21

## Multiple Screens, Multiple Personalities

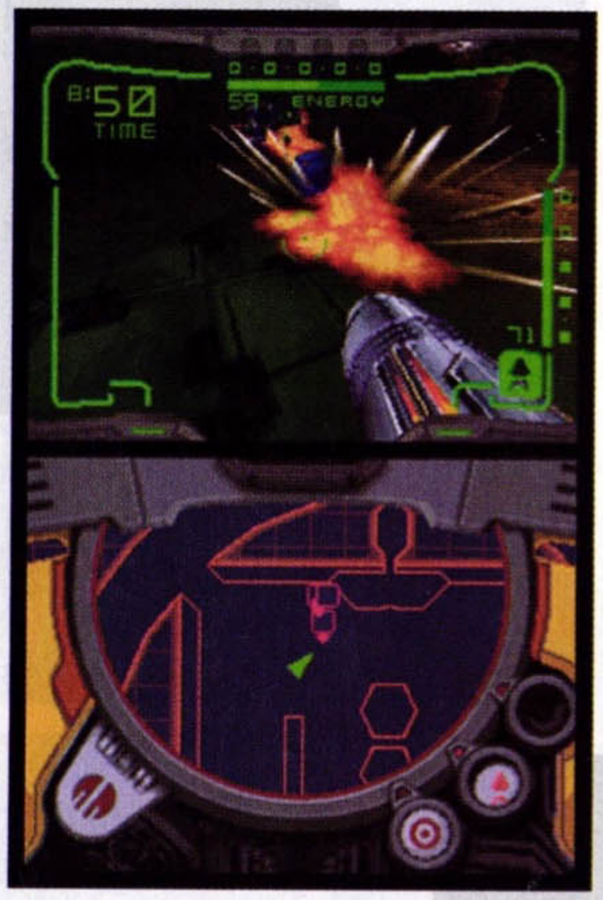
It seems unlikely that Nintendo will ever make the mistake of launching a new platform without Mario again. The perennial plumber will be coming out of the gate with the DS in the form of Super Mario 64 DS (formerly known as Super Mario 64x4). The basics of the game remain the same as the N64 title that introduced Mario to the third dimension and single-handedly originated the 3D platforming genre. However, beyond the core gameplay there is so much new content that it can hardly be considered the same game.

The biggest change for the title as a whole is the addition of new characters. Mario, Luigi, Wario, and Yoshi are all playable, and each one controls a little differently, leaving a plethora of strategies at your disposal as you explore familiar territory in new ways. You'll start out as Yoshi, who is able to use a hover jump to extend his airtime. Though the other three characters eventually become fully available, initially you'll only get to experience them by having Yoshi wear colored caps that correspond to one of the Italian stallions. The red cap lets you take the form of Mario, who can collect various power-ups that give him unique abilities, such as turning into a hulking colossus. With the green cap you become Luigi, who performs a backflip and twirl move at will that was only available with certain flowers in the original. Lastly, Wario's yellow cap allows you to encase your body in metal, making you heavy and able to walk underwater.

The new faces are just the beginning of the extra goodies on DS. In the original Mario 64, players explored the world and found 120 stars that were scattered across the land. For the DS iteration, this number has been increased to a staggering 150 stars, hinting at the vast new areas and levels available to explore. The camera system has also been tweaked, allowing players to use the touch screen (which displays a map of your current surroundings) to rotate the viewpoint to your liking. Though the most anticipated new feature, the multiplayer, was not working when we got our hands on the game, nearly every other aspect – from the music to the graphics – felt polished and complete. It took a while to get accustomed to moving around with the d-pad or stylus, but once the control creases are ironed out, this one is sure to please Nintendo fans across the board.

# Metroid Prime Hunters

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** RETRO STUDIOS > **RELEASE** FIRST QUARTER 2005



## The New Samus

Ever since gamers first met Samus, she's been the adventurous sort. Exploring strange planets and gradually becoming stronger has always been her thing, whether she was doing it in a side-scrolling or first-person format. However, with the upcoming Metroid Prime Hunters, the focus has shifted to fully utilizing her arsenal rather than just expanding it.

Apart from this new emphasis, the most surprising thing about Hunters is the fluidity of the control. Sure, it isn't as precise as PC or console FPS games, but it is much easier and more responsive than we thought a handheld shooter could be. The touch screen controls your aim (though no lock-on feature is available), and the d-pad handles strafing. Also on the touch screen are the toggle buttons for the morph ball and missiles, giving you the ability to switch quickly while still keeping on your toes. If this setup doesn't appeal to you, feel free to change it – players will be able to select from five control schemes to suit their styles (including the awkward, tap-based setup we saw at E3).

Choosing the ideal configuration will be extremely important in the multiplayer deathmatches (which have specialized maps tailored for one to four players), though it will also come in handy as you play through the three single player modes: Regulator (short missions capped off with a boss fight), Survivor (fighting off several waves of monsters), and Morph Ball (timed races through winding courses). Though these modes represent a departure from the typical Metroid adventure, the increased focus on Samus' weaponry and combat prowess adds a new dimension to a character who, until now, has spent more time searching for missile expansions than truly living up to her galactic juggernaut potential.

Though the retail version of Hunters won't release until after the holidays, gamers will get a tantalizing taste of Samus in First Hunt, the demo that comes packaged with the DS unit. It contains all of the modes available in the full game, though in reduced forms. Fortunately, the multiplayer deathmatch will be intact, giving players an early taste of the fierce competition the system allows. Plus, there shouldn't be a shortage of willing participants; along with Pictochat, First Hunt will be one piece of software common to every DS owner across the nation.

## In The Works

Here is a partial list of some other offerings the DS will present in the months after the holiday season. Bear in mind that many of these names are just working titles, and could very well change by the time the games actually hit shelves.

**Atari, Inc.**
- *Atari Classics*

**Atlus Co., Ltd.**
- *Caduceus*
- *ChoroQ DS*
- *The Game of Life DS*
- *Shin Megami Tensei DS*
- *Snowboard Kids*

**Bandai Co., Ltd.**
- *Meteors*
- *Mobile Suit Gundam Seed*

**Capcom Co., Ltd.**
- *Mega Man Battle Network*
- *Viewtiful Joe*

**Electronic Arts**
- *GoldenEye*
- *Need For Speed Underground*

**Hudson Soft Co., Ltd.**
- *Bomberman*

**Koei Co., Ltd.**
- *Dynasty Warriors*

**Konami**
- *Boktai*
- *Castlevania*
- *World Soccer Winning Eleven*
- *Vandal Hearts*
- *Yu-Gi-Oh! Nightmare Troubadour*
- *Dragon Booster*
- *Frogger 2005*

**Majesco**
- *Moonlight Fables*
- *Nanostray*
- *Nintendo DS Video*

**Marvelous Interactive Inc.**
- *Harvest Moon DS*
- *Legend of the River King*

**Namco Limited**
- *Pac'n Roll*
- *Pac-Pix*

**SEGA Corporation**
- *Sonic DS*

**Square Enix Co., Ltd.**
- A new story of *Secret of Mana*
- *Dragon Quest Monsters*
- *Egg Monster Heroes*
- *Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles*

**Summitsoft Corporation**
- *Air Assault 2*
- *Organizer Plus*

**Tecmo, Ltd.**
- *Monster Rancher*
- New title developed by Team Ninja

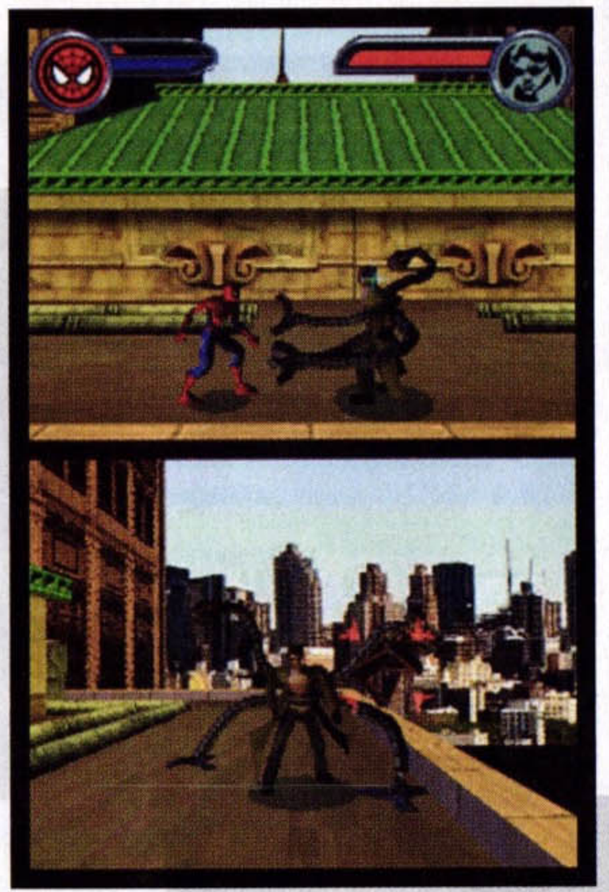
**Telegames, Inc.**
- *Ultimate Brain Games*
- *Ultimate Card Games*
- *Ultimate Pocket Games*

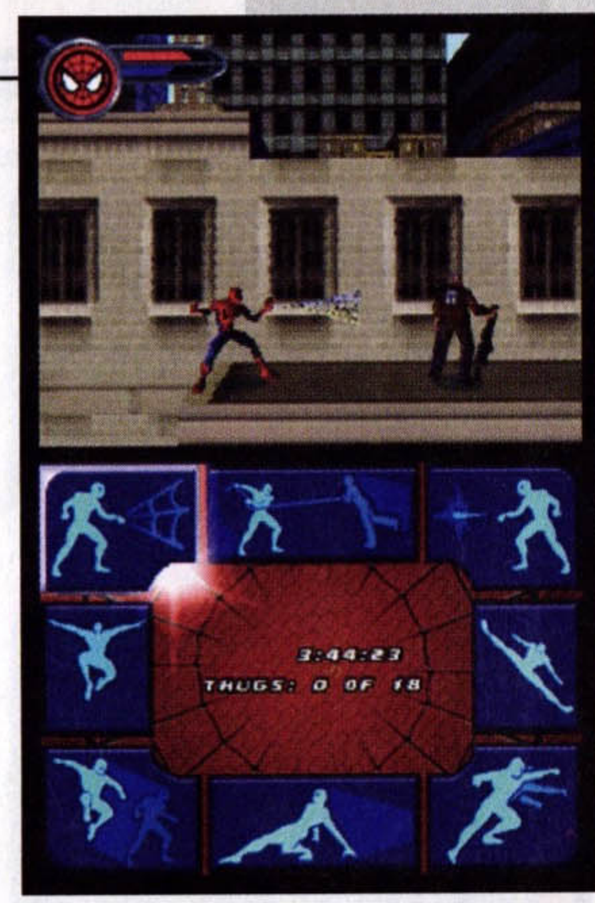
**THQ**
- *SpongeBob SquarePants*

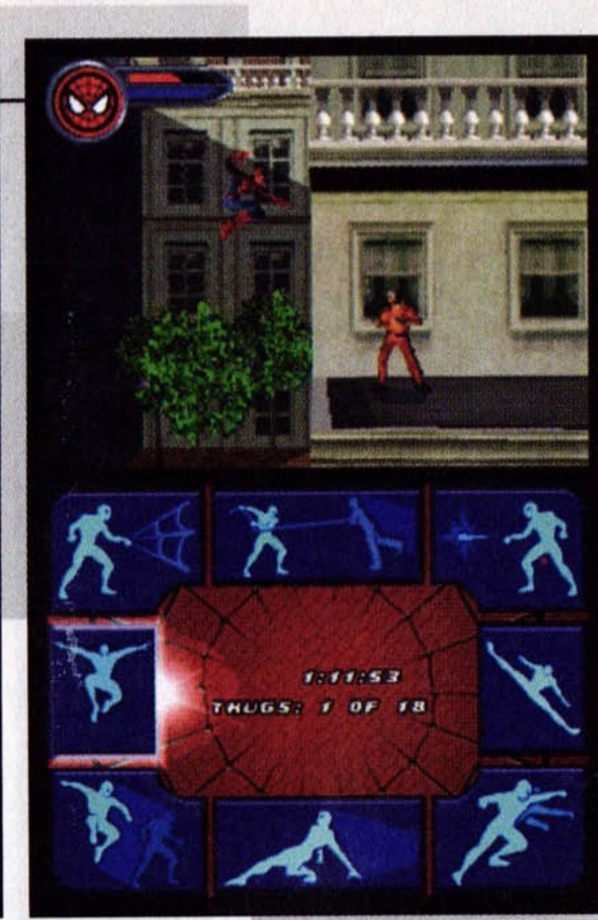
**Vivendi Universal Games**
- *Robots*

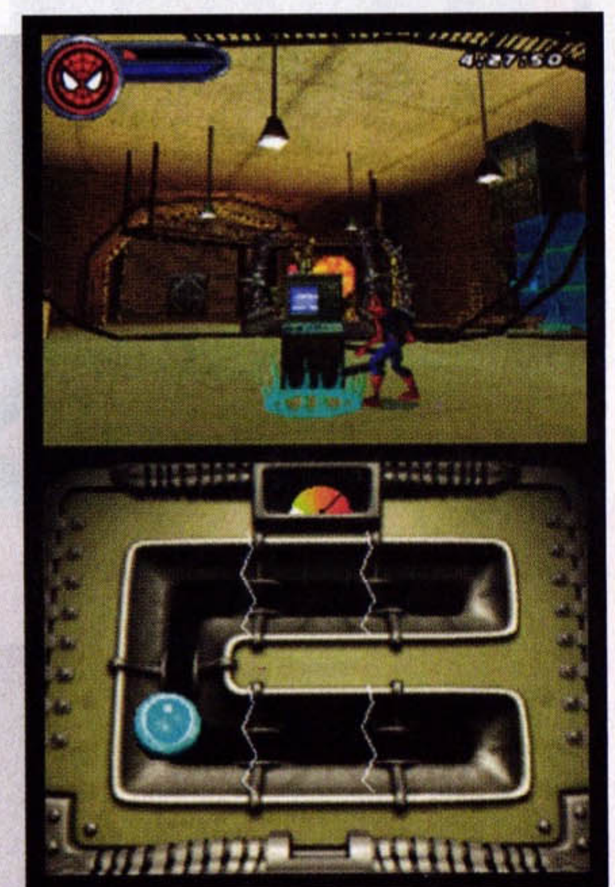
# Spider-Man 2

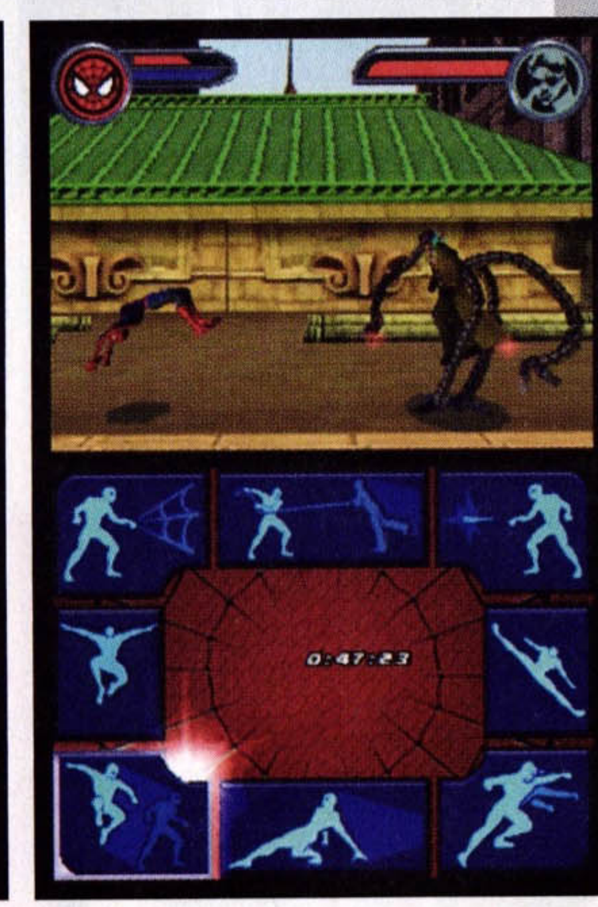
**> STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION **> DEVELOPER** VICARIOUS VISIONS **> RELEASE** NOVEMBER 21








## DS Whatever a Spider Can

Coming out of E3 this year, many gamers were worried that the DS would lend itself to gimmicky novelties rather than actual games. More than any other title at the Gamers' Summit, Spider-Man 2 helped to ease those fears. This title is a straight-up, solid platformer that occasionally uses the touch screen for a minigame or two. Otherwise, the lower screen is always occupied by icons representing the special moves that you can activate with the R trigger. By pressing your thumb to the touch screen, you select which of the moves is mapped to the trigger.

Don't let the simplicity fool you – Spider-Man 2 has the potential to be an amazing 2D platformer. By making extensive use of Spidey's web-slinging and wall-climbing, the action is seamless and much of the environment is open for exploration. Throwing webs around like zip lines, you'll be able to quickly move from surface to surface, crawling on the ceilings to avoid flames before dropping down to rough up some thugs. You'll also be able to swing from your webs (activated like a double jump), though it is less precise and can sometimes land you in trouble.

Though it covers the storyline of the summer blockbuster, it is also important to note that this title is in no way a port of the console versions of the same name. Developer Vicarious Visions has ensured that all of the levels and moves are tailored specifically to be experienced on the DS.

## An Insider's View of DS Development

*Game Informer recently had a chance to talk to Karthik Bala, the CEO and chief creative officer of Vicarious Visions (developers of the DS title Spider-Man 2) about the thrills and risks of developing a title for a system that delves into the gaming unknown.*

**When did you first get development kits for the DS? How long have you been working on the game?**
We first got development kits in early April. After one month of R&D, we kicked into high gear on the project in mid-May. We've had about five months to develop the game. It's been quite a wild ride for the team with a lot of invention required along the way, and, of course, hard work and a lot of late nights. We're really proud of what we've been able to produce for the system launch.

**How was your working relationship with Nintendo?**
It has been terrific. Nintendo has been extremely supportive throughout the project, as has Activision.

**In your opinion, what makes the DS an interesting system?**
It's a really well-designed piece of hardware. Technically, it's a very capable and unique machine – in terms of graphics and processing capabilities. Most of all, it offers new ways for the player to interact with the game. It opens up all sorts of game design possibilities for game developers – which is truly exciting.

**What are some of the exciting aspects of making a game for a unique new piece of hardware?**
It allows us to experiment with game design in new dimensions we've never previously explored. And that is a lot of fun! There's potential for some real breakthroughs in game design – even with established big franchises. Our teams also just love to get to know a new piece of hardware and figure how to push each part of it to the max to get the most game packed into it as possible.

**What were some of the difficult parts of the development process?**
The DS has a suite of new features not on prior handhelds, so in that case we were designing for features we hadn't even "touched" yet. That is both exciting and nerve-wracking, because you don't know exactly how the new idea will be received or whether it will catch on and be successful. Nintendo is making a bold move with the DS and, as developers, we are really excited to create innovative games for the platform.

## Feel The Magic: XY/XX

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** SEGA > **DEVELOPER** SONIC TEAM > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 21

Using a series of quirky minigames to advance a love story, Feel The Magic is an entertaining title that has players frantically using the stylus to complete a wide variety of crazy tasks. One minute you might find yourself protecting your date from enraged, charging bulls, and the next you'll be chivalrously removing venomous scorpions from her back. You old smoothie.

## Tiger Woods PGA Tour DS

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS) > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **DEVELOPER** EA CANADA > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 21

Famous for introducing the analog swing, this series once again needs to create an intuitive way get the ball into the hole. The result is a swing controlled by two meters on the touch screen: one is a boost gauge that you build with some furious rubbing, and the other is a trajectory indicator where you drag the stylus along an arch that allows you to control the direction of your hit. It isn't as precise as the analog method, but it is definitely an inventive use of the two screens.

## Rayman

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT > **DEVELOPER** UBISOFT MONTREAL > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 21

When the GBA launched in 2001, Rayman was right there with it. Well, old helicopter head is back again with the DS in this 3D platforming adventure. The action takes place on the top screen, while the bottom screen keeps track of vital stats, like your lums and health. If there is anyone on the planet who wants a DS but also hates Mario, then Rayman is a good alternative.

## Asphalt Urban GT

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS) > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT > **DEVELOPER** GAMELOFT > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER

Playing more like a racing sim, the steering and acceleration in Asphalt Urban GT are handled by the d-pad and buttons. Though most of the mayhem unfolds on the top screen, the bottom one doesn't go to waste – it presents an easy view of your current course and the positions of your opponents. Like any sim worth its weight in petrol, this title also features over 30 options for tuning and customizing your rides.

## The Urbz: Sims in the City

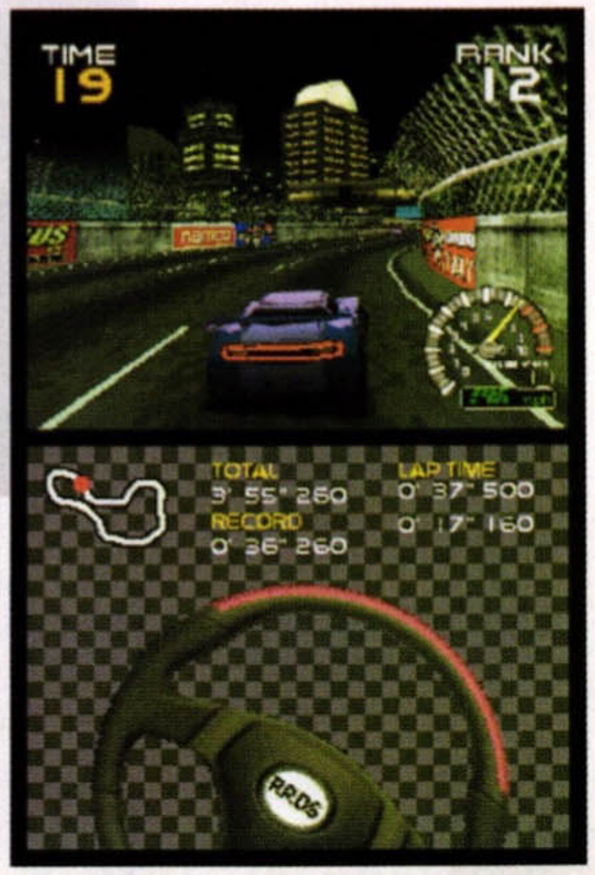
> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SIMULATION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS) > **PUBLISHER** EA GAMES > **DEVELOPER** GRIPTONITE GAMES > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 21

If you've spent some time with the GBA version of this title, much of the gameplay and story will be familiar to you. However, this incarnation of The Urbz features a load of exclusive additional content. For instance, there is an entirely new area called Splicer Island where players complete a series of touch-screen minigames to genetically synthesize pets like the Simasaurus Rex.

## Ridge Racer DS

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 6-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS) > **PUBLISHER** NAMCO > **DEVELOPER** NAMCO > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER

Though this title is largely a port of Ridge Racer 64, adjustments have been made to address the unique options the DS allows. Using the stylus and the lower screen (which also displays the map and lap times), you will use analog steering to direct the course of your vehicle. Players will be able to choose from 20 tracks and have up to six players racing simultaneously.



## Ping Pals

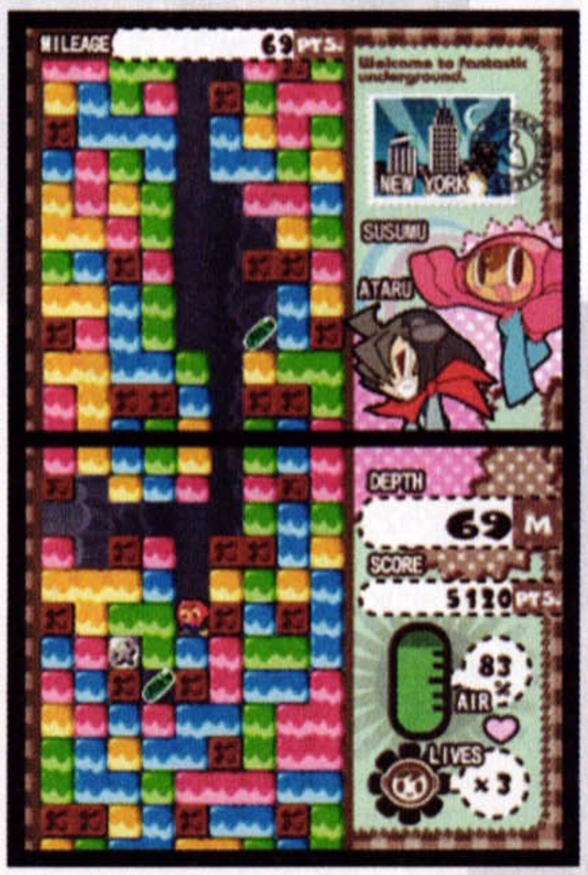
> **STYLE** UP TO 16-PLAYER CHAT VIA WIRELESS
> **PUBLISHER** THQ > **DEVELOPER** WAY FORWARD
> **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 21

If you've got Pictochat fever, Ping Pals might be the cure. It is essentially a beefier chat program, allowing you to customize avatars and collect various items, as well as trade them with friends. Certain new items become available depending on when you boot up; early morning has a different set of goodies than late evening, and special items will also be available for the holidays. If the main reason you want a DS is to chat with your buddies, Ping Pals is the way to go.

## Mr. Driller: Drill Spirits

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER PUZZLE (UP TO 5-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS)
> **PUBLISHER** NAMCO > **DEVELOPER** NAMCO
> **RELEASE** NOVEMBER

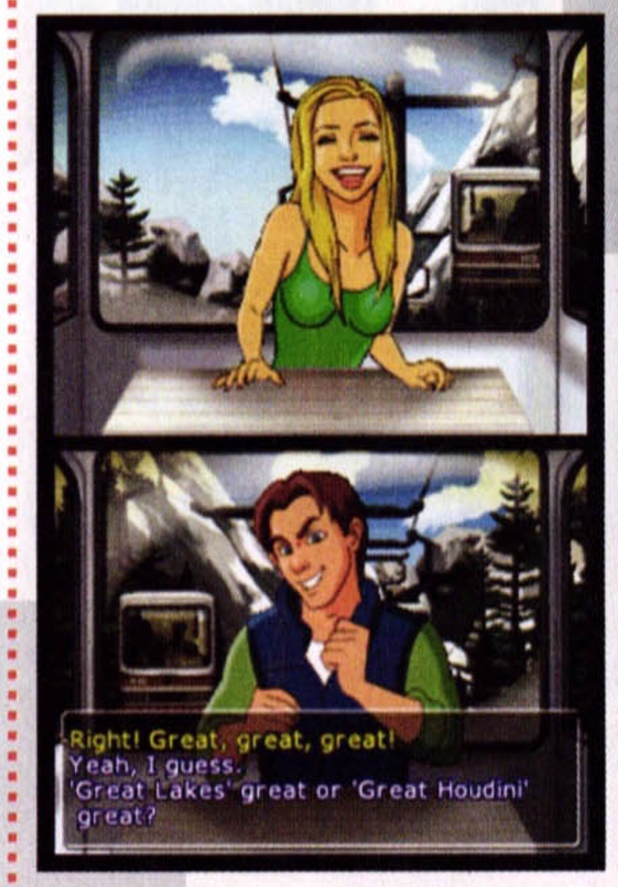
Apart from having more lewd innuendo potential than any other DS title we've played (rivaled only by Yoshi's Touch & Go), Mr. Driller is an interesting puzzle game to boot. You'll use the stylus and touch screen to guide your little driller through treacherous multicolored stones. The vertical gameplay allows you to glance at the top screen to assess the dangers of digging too deep. Up to five players can whip out their drills and plow on through in a race to finish first.




## Sprung

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SIMULATION > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT > **DEVELOPER** UBISOFT/GUILLEMOT INC. > **RELEASE** 2005

We know that one of the reasons you want a DS is to impress members of the opposite sex. Well, now you can learn about dating while you're waiting for someone to be drawn to your vibrant, magnetic handheld. Sprung boasts more than 50 conversational missions in which players use the stylus to select a variety of remarks, trading witty banter in exchange for implied sexual favors. Hot!



## WarioWare, Inc. DS

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO
> **DEVELOPER** NINTENDO > **RELEASE** 2005

Many games that use the touch screen functions of the DS have control schemes that are simpler when compared to their console counterparts, but WarioWare is one of the titles that has actually become more complex. Instead of just jamming the A button, gamers now will be using the stylus to perform the actions in a variety of new minigames, like slicing food as it flies across and carving a muscleman out of a chunk of rock.

## Advance Wars DS

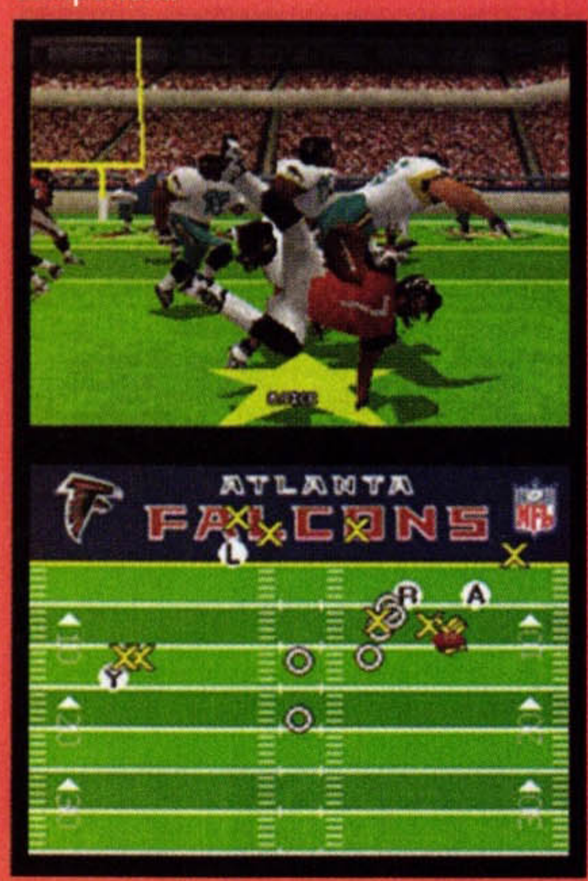
> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (MULTIPLAYER TBA)
> **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS > **RELEASE** 2005

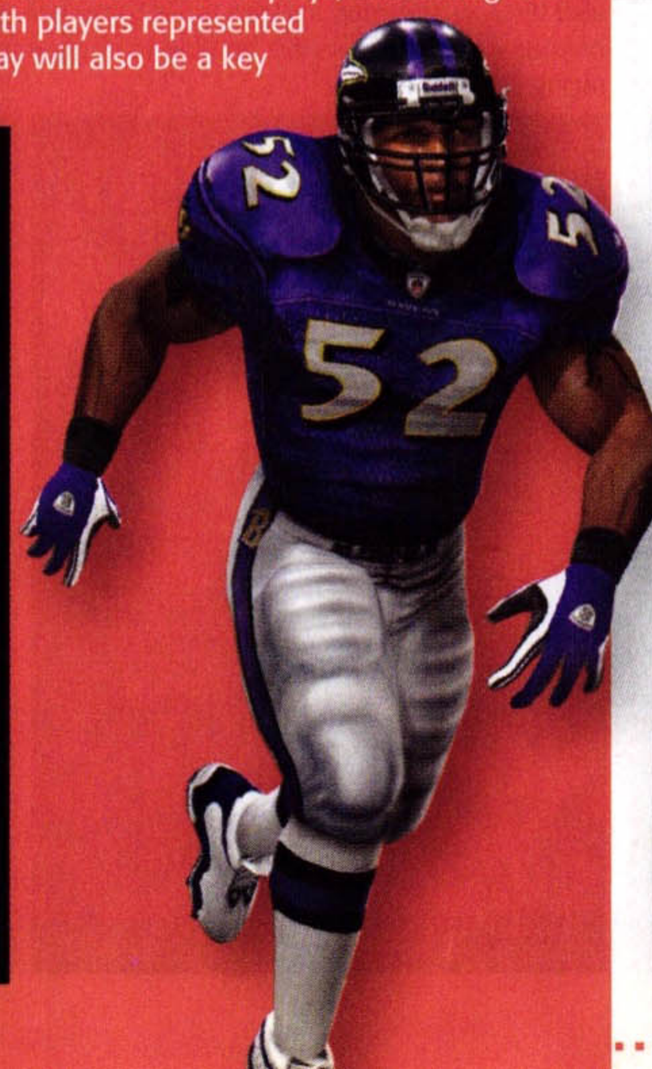
The latest entry in this top-notch series, though graphically similar to its brothers, has several more layers thanks to the unique capabilities of the DS. Coordinate your ground assaults on the touch screen as you watch aerial action unfold up top, from missile attacks to warplane dogfights. This title will undoubtedly fully explore the DS's Wi-Fi functions, allowing players to strategically pound each other into submission.

## Madden NFL 2005 DS

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS) > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS
> **DEVELOPER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 21

With today's amazing football titles, some people may find it difficult to go back to the gameplay mechanics of the N64, but Madden NFL is giving the hardcore fans some good reasons to try. The touch screen is used to select plays, and during the action it switches to a view of the field with players represented by Xs and Os. Of course, head-to-head play will also be a key component.



## Mario Kart DS

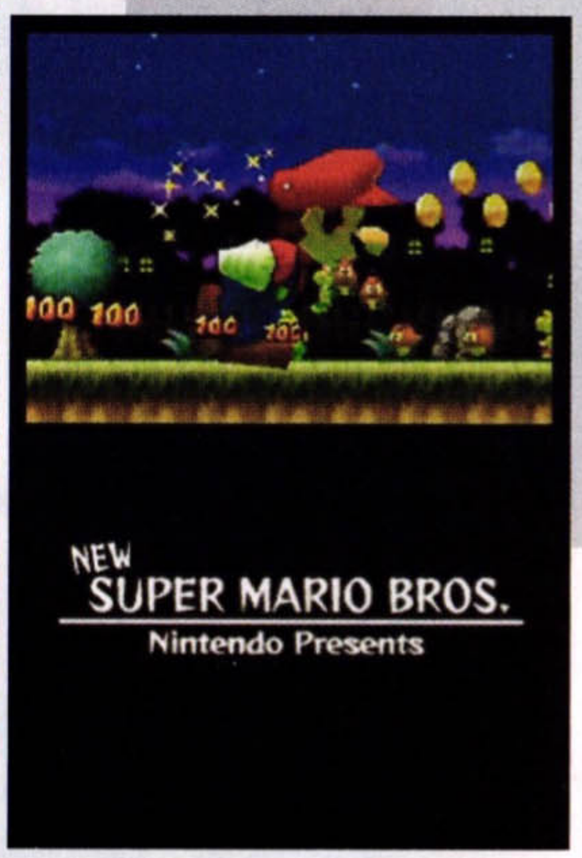
> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER RACING (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** NINTENDO > **RELEASE** 2005

Given the tremendous success this franchise has had on SNES, Nintendo 64, GBA and GameCube there is little doubt that this game will be one of the biggest multiplayer hits on DS. Although there isn't much information available about the gameplay yet, we can assume that it will make excellent use of the Wi-Fi capabilities, allowing you and your friends to go head-to-head in some wild shell-hucking, banana-slipping action. However, it doesn't appear that the dual-screen is used for much except an onscreen map.

## Pokémon Dash

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER RACING (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** NINTENDO > **RELEASE** 2005

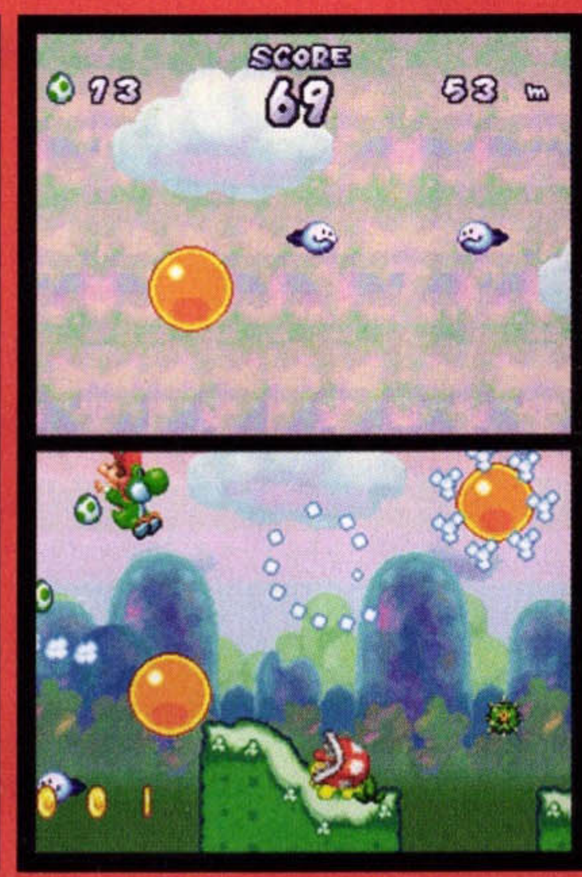
The Pokémon franchise has been no small part of Nintendo's crushing success in the handheld market thus far. Although this title deviates from the "gotta catch 'em all" mentality, it still features everyone's favorite miniature monsters racing around a series of tracks. By shimmying your stylus across the screen, you control the direction and speed of your critter to guide it through checkpoints.




## Super Mario Brothers DS

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** NINTENDO > **RELEASE** 2005

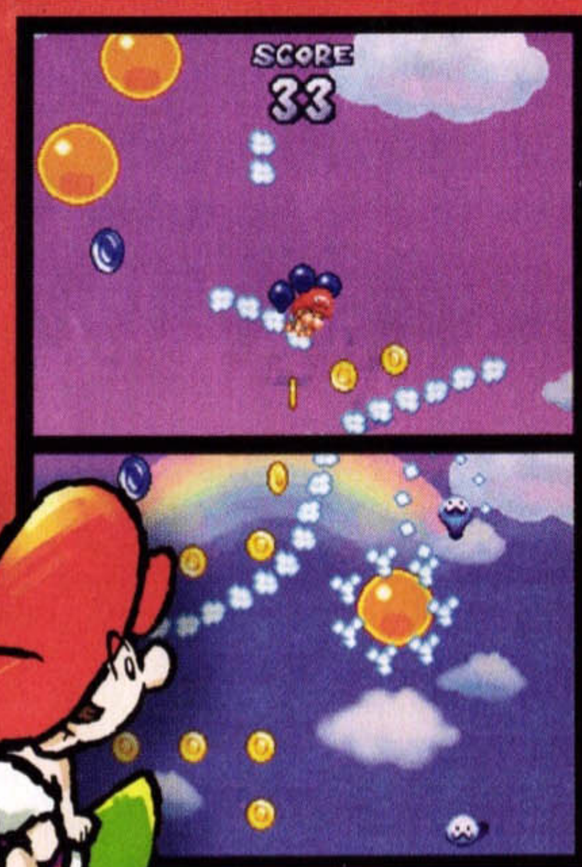
This is perhaps the most mysterious title in the future of the DS. Hungry gamers have been promised a brand new Mario title for the handheld, but details are scarce. From the screenshots available, it would appear that Mario has the ability to exploit a glandular problem and grow to monstrous proportions. Then again, they also show no functionality for the lower screen, so it probably isn't an accurate indicator of what to expect from the final product.

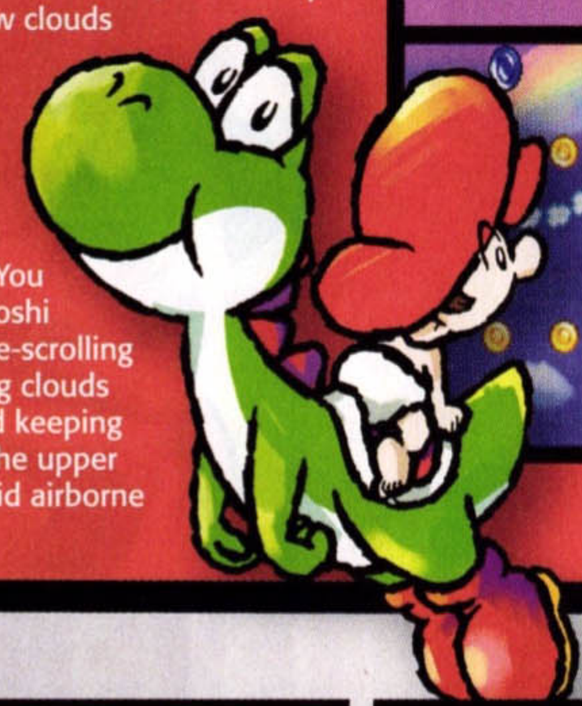



## Yoshi's Touch & Go

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** NINTENDO > **RELEASE** 2005

While this game was playable at E3, it has undergone considerable evolution since we first got our mitts on it. It begins with baby Mario plummeting from dangerous altitudes, and it is up to you to draw clouds beneath him to break his fall and guide him to the ground where Yoshi catches him. You then follow Yoshi through a side-scrolling stage, drawing clouds over gaps and keeping your eye on the upper screen to avoid airborne hazards.



*(Famicom screens shown)*

## Final Fantasy III

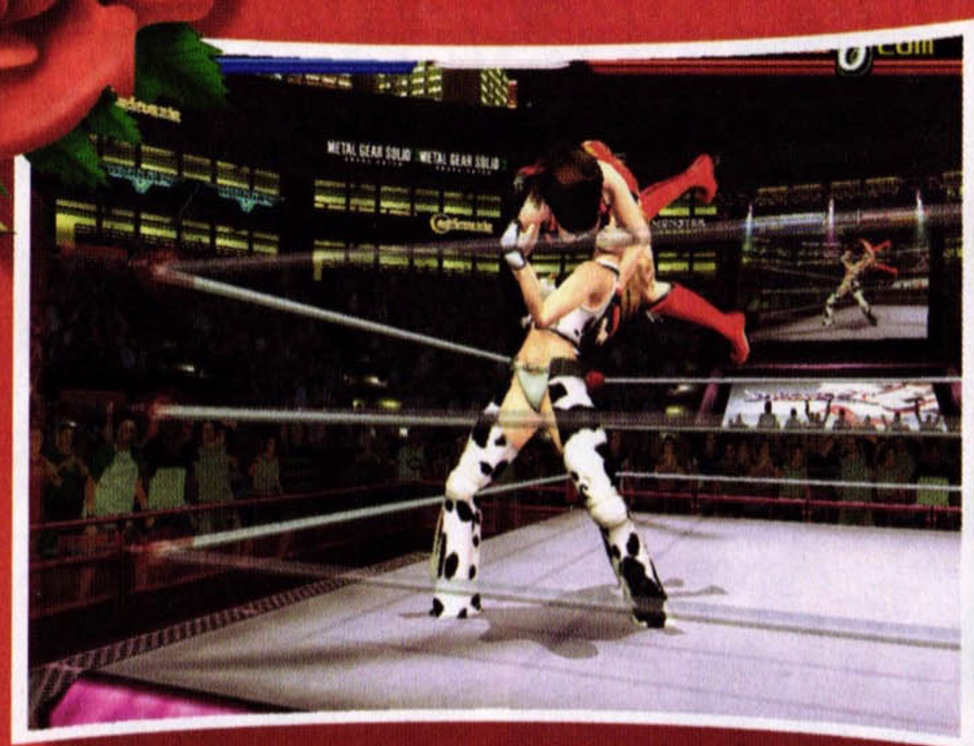
> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX > **DEVELOPER** SQUARE ENIX > **RELEASE** 2005

RPG enthusiasts have been waiting a long time for this. Final Fantasy III (the Japanese one [pictured], not the one that was released for the SNES in 1994) is currently the only entry in the celebrated series that is not available in the United States. Fortunately, Nintendo recently announced that this neglected adventure will soon be receiving a makeover and finally making the journey Stateside. Though much of the content will remain the same as the Japanese release, the title will not be an exact port, and will utilize the system's dual screen functionality.

EVEN WHEN YOU LOSE,
YOU WIN.

"We're impressed... the game plays as good as it looks." – *PSM*

"Looks amazing... plays fantastic." – *Play Magazine* | "Face it. You've always wanted this." – *1up.com*



They're on top of you. You're on top of them. Does it really matter? All female wrestlers. 10,000 polygons per character. And hardcore wrestling gameplay. It's Rumble Roses and it's definitely a win-win situation.

PlayStation 2

www.konami.com/usa

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UNLIMITED ENABLED

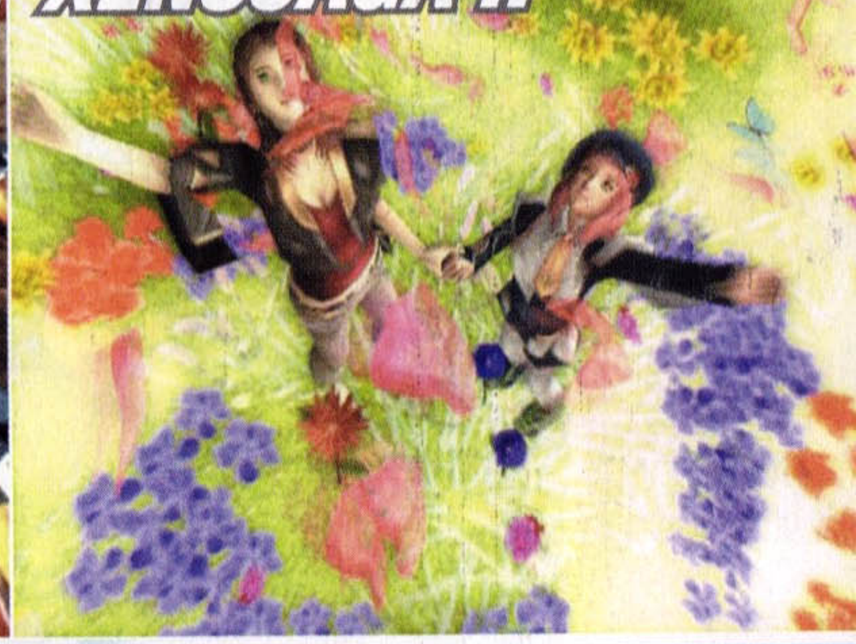
PLAYSTATION 2

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME
> **PUBLISHER** NAMCO
> **DEVELOPER** MONOLITH SOFT
> **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 2005

# Xenosaga EPISODE II

Jenseits von Gut und Böse

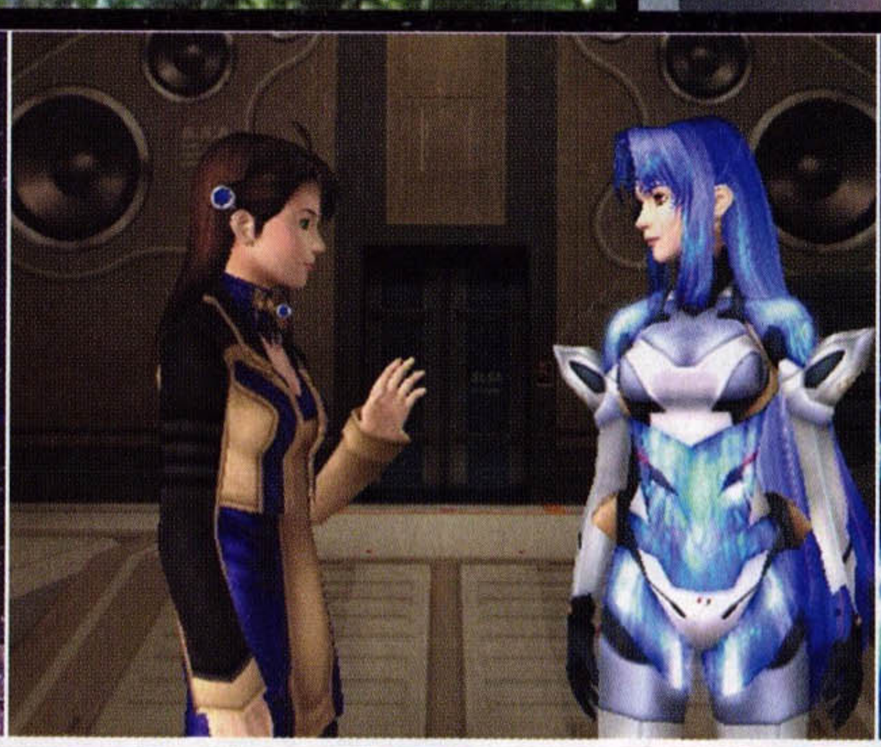
## BEYOND GOOD. BEYOND EVIL: DECIPHERING THE MYSTERY OF XENOSAGA II



Enigmatic. Challenging. Emotional. Xenosaga's cinematic style of storytelling was tremendous in its scope, with hours of dialogue and cutscenes interspersed within the lengthy story. The battle system was unique and difficult – forcing even hardcore role-playing gamers to approach fights with caution. And the story was an epic exploration of spirituality, philosophy, and human nature that left players with more questions than they had answers. But with its quizzical and unresolved ending, Episode I left behind one feeling more than any other: the desire for more.

### KOS-MOS

Mysterious and beautiful, she is an android created with a sole intent – to eradicate the scourge sweeping through the galaxy known as the Gnosis. Her experiences have led her to feel a protective urge towards her creator Shion that seems to go beyond mere programming. A being of immense untapped power, she is the character around which the saga whirls.



That's exactly why we were so excited to get our hands on the first U.S. playable build of Xenosaga Episode II: Jenseits von Gut und Böse. We played through hours of the cinematic story, and started to answer the questions that had been left with us after the completion of Episode I. Amid the complex and involving tale, we also got plenty of time to try out the intricate new battle system that has been introduced. Along the way, we were lucky enough to talk with Nao Higo, who, as the localization producer for the game, is the man in charge of bringing Xenosaga to American shores. He and his team have been working tirelessly to translate the hours of spoken dialogue and add new features for the U.S. launch, but he took some time out of his schedule to fill us in on details for the long-awaited release.

"Because it is a direct sequel, the story pretty much starts where the first one left off," Higo offers. "The story is much more fast-paced and action-oriented than the first game. I think the best way to look at episodes one and two is that the first game sets the stage to tell the grand story, and the second one advances the story and sets it up for the grand conclusion." We were eager to find out for ourselves as we launched into the opening sequence of the new game. While it was true that we'd be returning to our old friends from the first episode soon enough, the very beginning introduces players to some new characters and sheds light onto one of the many unresolved mysteries surrounding the title. Episode II opens 14 years prior to the events of the first game, right in the midst of the Miltian conflict that was spoken of so much in that installment. Right off the bat, we meet a new character named Canaan, a Realian (an artificial human/robot for the uninitiated) who has been chosen for an infiltration mission into the midst of the rioting and destruction occurring on the Miltian planet. He is joined by a familiar face, as the inscrutable Chaos is to be Canaan's partner. From high in orbit above the planet, the two board the E.S. Asher, one of the new mechs designed for Episode II. As the ship's launch bay opens, the music swells and a glaring sunrise splashes across the planetary vista while the game's title screen appears. With cinematic flair intact, there can be no doubt that this game is a true successor to the original. The Asher bursts forth from the ship and spins down through the atmosphere. As defensive mechs rise up from the surface to begin a stunning midair battle, we watch with the same awe that held us transfixed for so many hours in Episode I.

The cutscenes are even crisper and more detailed than before. Perhaps the greatest change has come in the incredibly life-like appearances of the characters. "The reason why we decided to change the visuals for this game is because

## Shion Uzuki

Chief Engineer of Vector's First Division, she was a central figure in the creation of KOS-MOS, the female android upon which the future of mankind seems to depend. The adventures of the first game have taken away much of her shyness and inhibited nature. While her cheerful demeanor remains, she's now much more pro-active and forthright, and her new, more mature look shows it. Only her childlike relationship with her brother Jin holds her back, as she can't let go of the anger she feels towards him about their parents' death.

The fateful clash between Jin Uzuki and Margulis is truly incredible

## Jin Uzuki

A warrior of unparalleled skill, Shion's brother played a dangerous role in the disastrous events on Old Miltia 14 years ago. The personal conflict that followed has left him pursuing numerous jobs – first as a doctor and later as a seller of rare books. He loves his sister deeply, but even his Zen-like spirituality has failed to guide him back into her heart. With the coming galactic conflicts, it seems unlikely that he'll be able to escape his past in the military and not be forced to take up the sword again.

## Margulis

A deadly swordsman who commands the forces of the U-TIC Organization, he played a major but undisclosed role in the Miltian Disaster years ago that left him with a terrible scar across his right eye. Some sort of deep-seated conflict exists between him and Jin Uzuki.

The new zone combat feature encourages observation and memorization

Each character's skill set can now be completely customized to your liking

we weren't able to express enough emotion using the original game models. By going with the current design, the characters are more expressive and are able to convey their feelings better," Higo told us. Gone is much of the anime innocence that maintained the naivety of characters like Shion and Jr. Their adventures seem to have left a stamp of experience on their faces, and the cinematics show these deeply held emotions clearly.

After the phenomenal midair confrontation and subsequent landing, it wasn't long before we were introduced to the challenging new battle system. A significant departure from Episode I, battles seem to move faster and have a greater intensity than before. This is due in no small part to the redesigned boosting feature, which allows characters (and enemies) to butt in the line of combat order and take their next turn immediately. "Xeno I's battle system had a problem where it was difficult to raise the Boost Gauge, which rendered it useless for the shorter battles," explains Higo. "In Xeno II, boosting has been improved so that all of the party members share the same Boost Gauge. This allows the player to raise the Boost Gauge more quickly, which in turn enables the player to use boost and cut in on the turn order more frequently. With boost, you can attack out of turn, as well as cut in before an enemy unleashes a devastating attack in order to prepare your party for the impact."

The frequency and necessity of this new technique mixes with a unique approach to enemy weaknesses. Each one of your character's attacks has a corresponding zone connected with it, either A, B, or C. Every enemy you encounter has a flaw that can be exploited by hitting certain zones in the right order. Higo elaborates, "You can't simply unleash the same powerful attacks over and over and expect to win in Xeno II. By hitting the right combination of zones, you can cause the enemy to drop its defense, allowing the player to follow it up with a devastating hit. Other characters can follow up with a barrage of strikes using boost for even more damage." In practice, this adds an element of observation and memorization to enemy battles, forcing players to carefully choose each individual attack with care. In addition, there are new "double" attacks that allow certain characters to work together for a devastating combo. Combat has also become highly three-dimensional. You'll be able to move characters around to flank an enemy, and thereby raise both your chances to hit and do critical damage. Also, an in-battle character switch option is available that allows combatants to move in and out of the fight, much like in Final Fantasy X. All of these involving strategies combine for a uniquely challenging battle experience, where any random encounter can spell doom for your party if you're not careful. And, like before, boss battles are so complicated that it's not unusual to spend over 15 minutes on a single conflict.

## Jr.

Though he appears to be a young boy, all evidence seems to indicate he is actually much older. As one of the heads of the formidable Kukai Foundation, many believe him to be the son of Gaignan, a guise the two seem willing to perpetuate despite its apparent falsity. He also has a complicated familial relationship with Albedo, a factor that will play heavily into the events and ideas of Episode II. His true name is Rubedo.

## Gaignan

Running the day-to-day activities of the Kukai Foundation as one of its directors, he has a profound connection to Albedo and Jr. All three were originally U.R.T.V.'s designed to combat U-DO, until the day something went horribly wrong. Gaignan works with the Second Miltian government in an attempt to curb the activities of the dangerous U-TIC organization. He was once called Nigredo.

## Albedo

Strikingly similar to both Jr. and Gaignan in appearance, his madness seems to have totally overwhelmed his personality. In the first episode, he kidnapped M.O.M.O. in the hopes of extracting the dangerous Y-data trapped within her, but she was rescued, apparently before he had any success. He has the unnerving capability to regenerate his own lost limbs.

Jr.'s secret-laden past comes to light in this installment

We'll encounter the girl M.O.M.O. was modelled after: Sakura Mizrahi

Some battles are now only for mechs – no soft fleshy fighters allowed

As we juggled some of the new battle mechanics, we navigated the E.S. Asher through the rubble strewn streets of Old Miltia. When we were eventually surrounded on all sides by an insurmountable army of enemy mechs, we were rescued by a long-awaited new character: Jin Uzuki, the mysterious brother of Shion. Before this extensive game-opening flashback finishes, Jin joins the party and encounters a familiar enemy: Margulis. Ever wonder how Margulis got that terrible facial scar? You need wonder no longer. Revelations about that conflict 14 years ago continue throughout the sequence, but we wouldn't dare spoil the fun.

But what you won't mind knowing is that when the flashback ends, you'll be returned to a familiar scene almost right away. The spaceship Elsa is flying over the oceans of Second Miltia, right where you left her at the end of the first game. The passengers and crew are celebrating the successful destruction of Proto Merkabah, and they're heading to land at the planet's space port. The story continues exactly where it left off last time. KOS-MOS must be returned into the hands of Vector Industries, a task that Shion has developed serious doubts about given KOS-MOS's recent human-like actions. M.O.M.O. must be taken for analysis to see if the mysterious Y-data she holds within her can be gathered. What has changed is the companionship that has grown up within the group of friends. Now no longer individuals with their own personal dilemmas, the team now acts much more like a family, supporting and helping each other through the strife that arises as the game continues.

The theme of family seems to be a prevalent one amid the world of Episode II, and in more places than the bonds between the first episode's characters. A heavy and undisclosed wall lies between Shion and her brother Jin, seemingly connected with the deaths of their parents. As this conflict is being fleshed out, we also learn more about M.O.M.O.'s impossible relationship with her mother, a woman overcome by grief and seemingly unable to love M.OM.O. as a true daughter. And perhaps most complicated of all are the apparent brotherly connections between Jr., Gaignun, and the insane villain Albedo.

The exploration of family seems intricately tied to the overall concept of the game: the difficult and blurred line between good and evil. Episode I thoroughly explored its own subtitle of the Will to Power (translated from Der Wille zur Macht) with its questioning of the role of artificial life and the dilemma of what makes something alive. Episode II seems well on track to do the same with its moniker: Beyond Good and Evil. From what we played, we were forced to realize that many of the conclusions we drew from the first game about who was good and bad would have to be reconsidered.

Unwilling to draw such absolute lines, Xenosaga II attempts to tell a more complex tale. While world

CONTINUED ON PAGE 101 ▷▷

## Chaos

A great unknown factor, his young appearance seems to be at odds with his temperament and insightful wisdom. On one level deeply sad, his compassion and concern for those around him seem nonetheless boundless. Almost certainly something more than human, his past may be as much a mystery to himself as it is to everyone else. We learn early on in Episode II that he had a hand in the disastrous conflict on Miltia 14 years ago, where he worked with Canaan on a secret mission for the military.

## Canaan

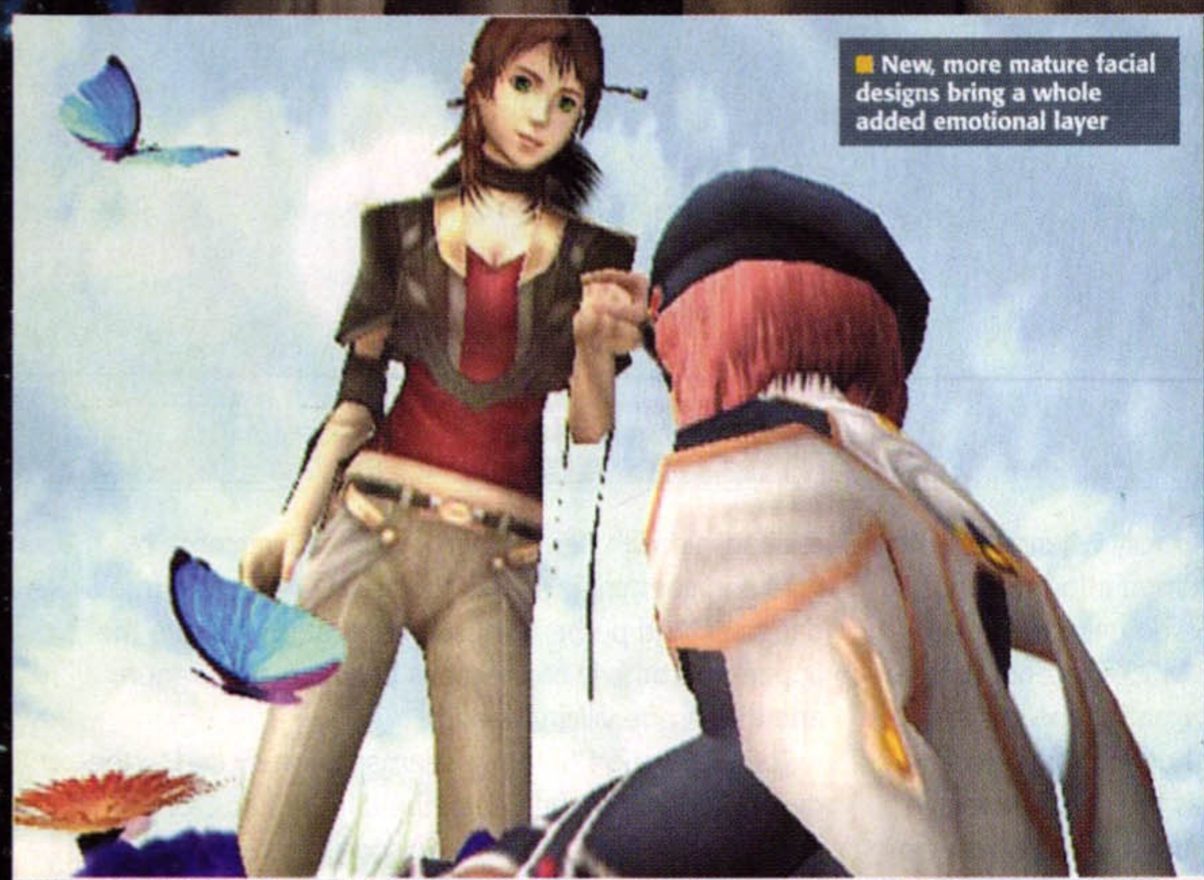
A Realian apparently created with military purposes in mind, he is the first character we encounter at the opening of Episode II as he prepares to descend on Miltia with Chaos. During the descent, he demonstrates phenomenal skills as a pilot, even while exhibiting a cold and seemingly emotionless face.

## M.O.M.O.

The young and sensitive Realian prototype in whose mind is locked a terrible and powerful secret. Modeled after the deceased daughter of her creator, the famous scientist Joachim Mizrahi, she is hopelessly estranged from the mother whose affection she so desperately wants – Joachim's widowed wife.

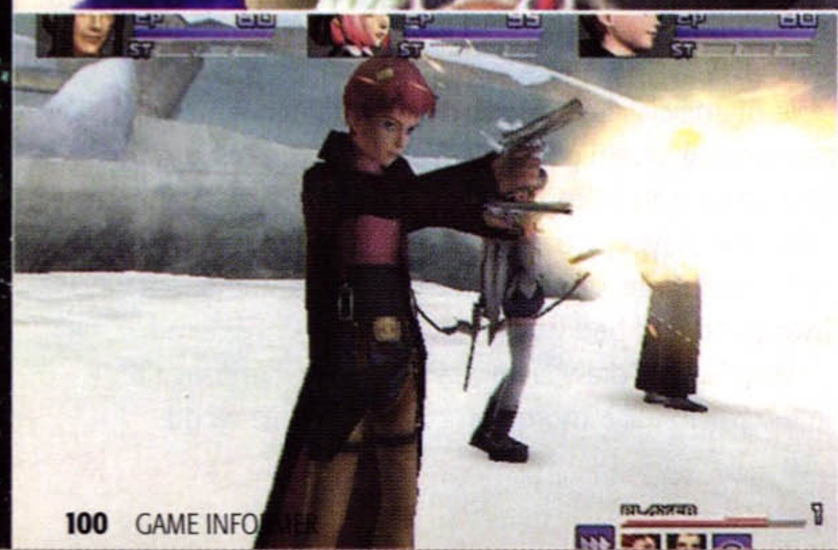
## Ziggy

Once human, he was brought back from death to serve as a combat cyborg for the government. Extremely protective of M.O.M.O., he seems to have some sort of unresolved melancholy about the loss of his family. For this reason, part of him longs to become an emotionless machine, but his newfound friends help convince him to retain his humanity.



New, more mature facial designs bring a whole added emotional layer

Shion exhibits her newfound combat skills



religions, modern philosophy, and Jungian psychology play an important part in the ideas of the game, a central influence on the game seems to be the writings of philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, from whose work the two subtitles were taken. "Nietzsche was not only trying to find out what makes people human, but also how to make them more than human. He is well known for his nihilism, but there is also in his works a quest to raise humanity from simple beings to heroes. I think this is one of the main points Nietzsche was trying to get across in his philosophy, and certainly one of the main themes of Xenosaga," Higo elaborated for us.

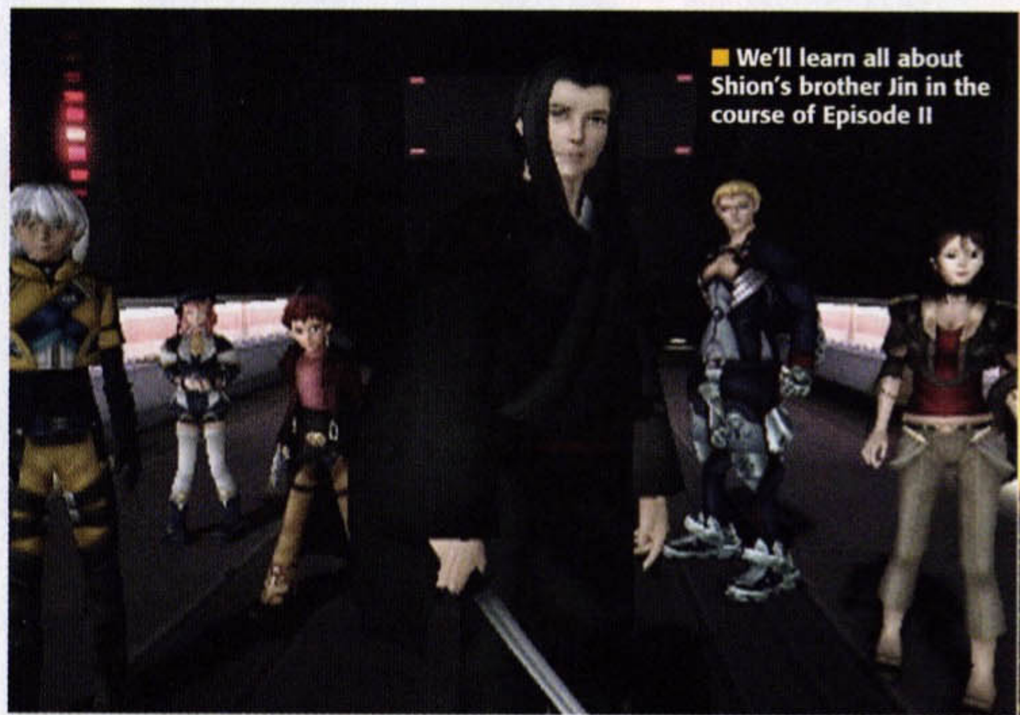
In addition to new thematic ideas, there are lots of other new concepts that have been implemented to streamline and improve the playing experience. These changes were apparent from the moment we loaded a game, at which point a screen comes up with a paragraph entitled "The Story So Far…", where you can immediately become reacquainted with your place in the story and what's going on. (By the way, as was implied by the end of the last game, you will be able to load your Episode I completion data for a special treat. We'll say the word "swimsuit" and leave it at that.) There are other helpful remnants of the first game as well. Early in Episode II you'll encounter a computer terminal that contains data on the story events of the first game.

As you open your menu screen, you'll see yet more changes. The character skill upgrade system has been totally reworked, now allowing for each of your characters to develop into the role you pick for them. Higo told us about the impetus for the change. "The new skill progression system prevents certain characters from being locked into a one-dimensional role during battles. For example, in Xeno I, M.O.M.O. was locked into a support role because she didn't have much firepower. In Xeno II, the new system allows the characters to be more flexible in the roles they play. Does this mean all the characters are essentially the same? No. Each character has their strengths and weaknesses, and you can use the skills to either take advantage of their strengths, or cover their weaknesses." Our time with the game revealed the system to be highly flexible – the more advanced skill trees are unlocked when you purchase the lower level abilities. It means that any one of the characters can become a healer, a support buffer, or a combat caster.

After exploring the new skill system, the early part of the game had us navigating the city of Second Miltia. It's here that you'll first encounter the Good Samaritan Campaign. This huge game-spanning sidequest replaces the numerous minigames seen in Episode I. Instead, you'll now move about the world trying to help people you encounter with their problems. By completing tasks for them, you'll unlock hidden skills and items. This convention has the added bonus of encouraging a thorough involvement in the game world, as you feel compelled to speak with everyone in order to further your progress.

We're loathe to reveal too much more of the multi-faceted story that is at the heart of the new Xenosaga. But we can say that the game gets down to business quickly in answering your numerous questions, and there is a strong focus on the strange relationship between the apparently villainous Albedo and Jr.'s unknown past. New characters like Jin and Canaan only add more depth to the already massive cast, while five hours of dialogue-driven cinematics are interspersed amid the 30+ hour epic.

This begs the question – is Xenosaga too complicated? With numerous interlaced themes of philosophy and spirituality, and a story with so many characters and ideas that it's challenging to keep them straight, can gamers cope? Undoubtedly, many will find the epic story to be too convoluted to be worth their time. But, after having played much of the new game, we're confident there will also be many that will delight in its intricate complexity. When questioned on the enigmatic nature of the Xenosaga games, Higo had this to tell us about its overall concept: "Arthur C. Clarke said that 'any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.' In a sense, therefore, science fiction comes full circle to mythology and magic in its quest to discover what it is to be human. The more things humans create, the more new ideas they dream up, creating a new source for the stories which are the seeds of myth. So while the stories may change, the fact of creation remains the same, connecting humans to the first people telling stories huddled around a campfire." While the total overhaul of the game's mechanics will undoubtedly surprise many fans, Higo's words and our time with the game leave us with little doubt that the deep and involving tale should be well worth the long wait we've endured for it. ■■■


We'll learn all about Shion's brother Jin in the course of Episode II

Cinematic marvels abound

Mechs are even larger than in the first game

Albedo wasn't always the insane megalomaniac he later became

## U.S. EXCLUSIVE!

It's not often that U.S. gamers are treated to something extra when a game comes over from Japan. But, as a special treat for the hardcore player, three new boss battles have been added for the stateside release of Xenosaga II. Nao Higo explains, "While I can't reveal all the secrets of the additional bosses, you can expect that they will be tough – real tough. They are for people who want to keep playing after they clear the game once." From this response, we're expecting confrontations on par with the Weapon battles of Final Fantasy fame. Sounds perfect.

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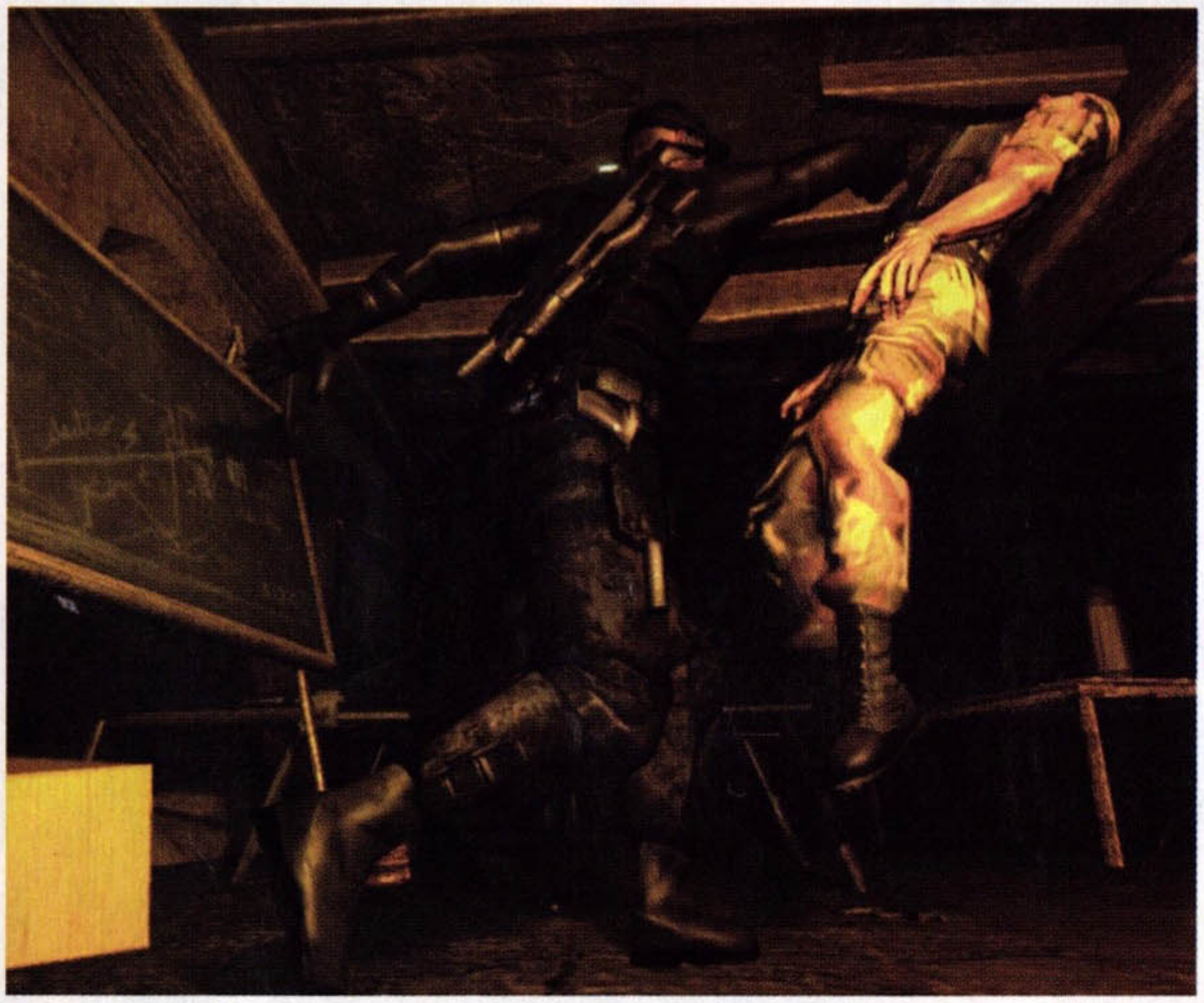
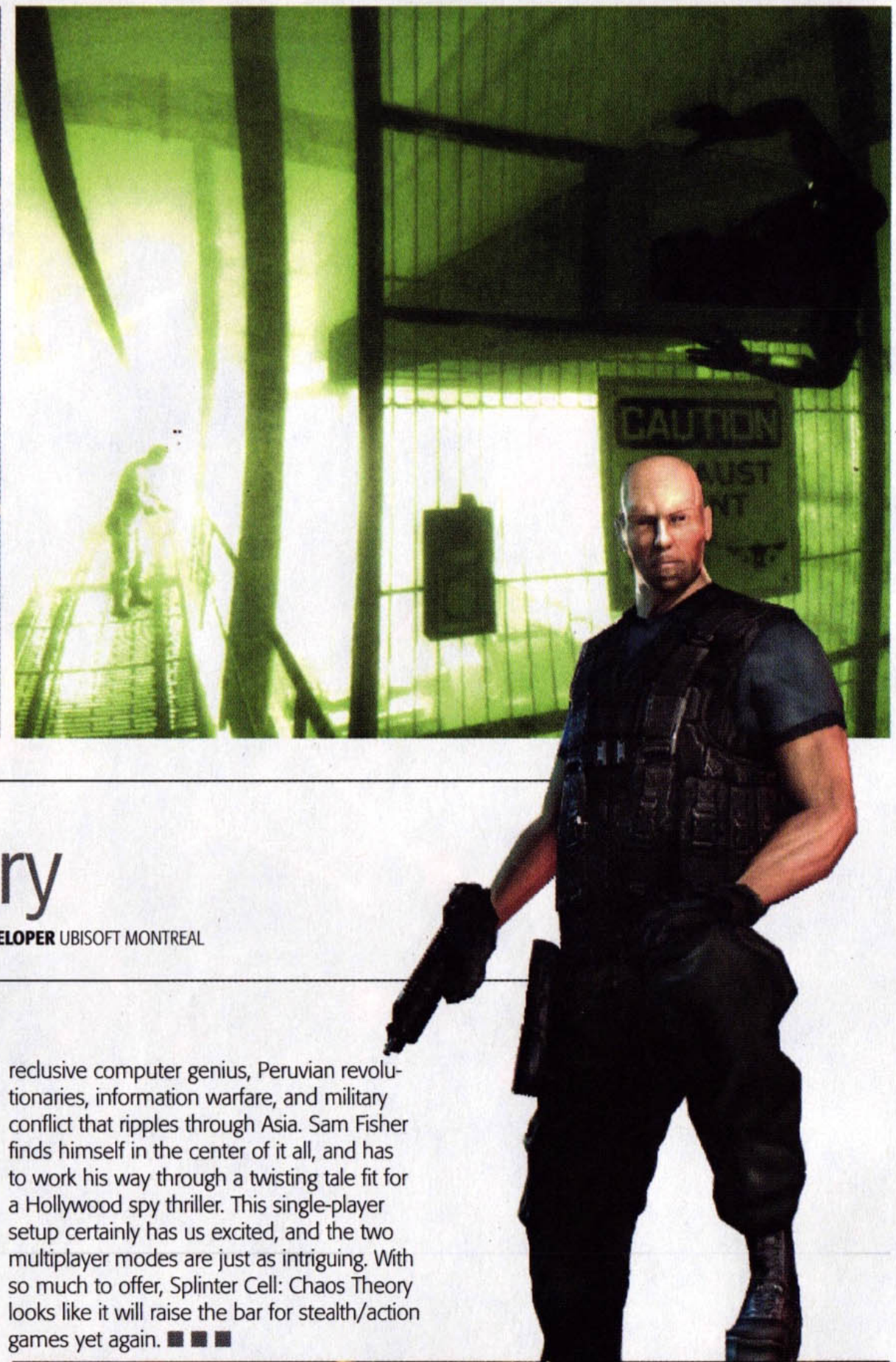





PLAYSTATION 2 I XBOX I GAMECUBE I PC

# Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory

**> STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE OR XBOX LIVE, GAMECUBE TBA) **> PUBLISHER** UBISOFT **> DEVELOPER** UBISOFT MONTREAL
**> RELEASE** MARCH 15 **> ESRB** T

## THE CHAOS GROWS

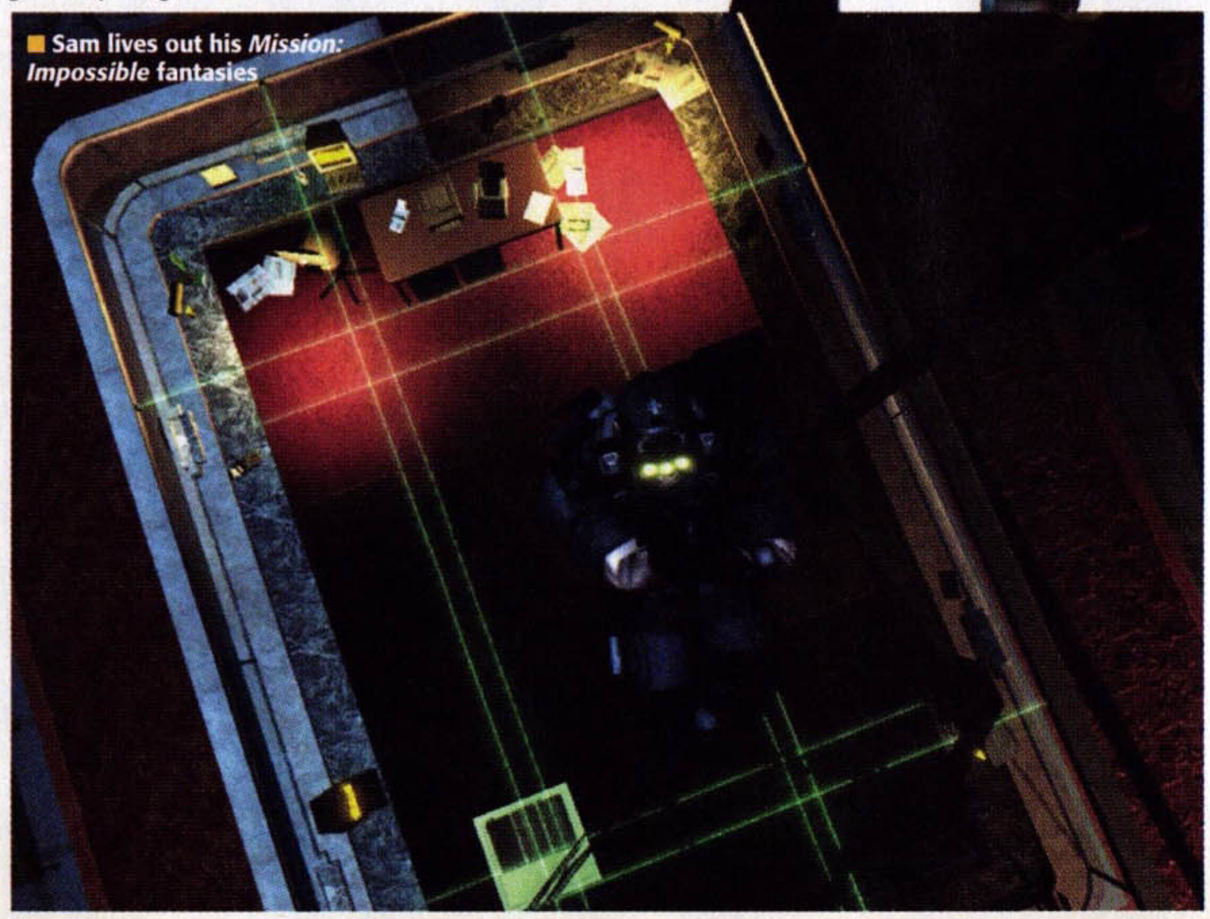
With Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow, Ubisoft introduced an entirely new style of multiplayer gaming and redefined our ideas of what was possible within the stealth/action genre. Ubisoft then revealed that the upcoming Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory would introduce a new cooperative multiplayer mode in which two players would assume the roles of spies and work together to complete mission objectives. Apparently single-player and co-op modes weren't enough, as Ubisoft recently announced that Chaos Theory would also feature the return of Pandora Tomorrow's popular competitive multiplayer. We talked to Matthieu Ferland, the producer of Chaos Theory at Ubisoft Montreal, for a little insight into the three different gameplay modes.

Ferland told us that the competitive mode will be familiar to those who played Pandora Tomorrow, but will feature several improvements and additions, like new moves and gadgets. One change he told us about is a new merc move, which allows them to knock a spy to the ground, step on his neck, and either taunt him until he passes out or simply end his misery. New cooperative moves are also planned, and the cheating issues prevalent in Pandora Tomorrow have been fixed. Several new gadgets have also been added, including poison mines, optic camouflage that provides temporary invisibility, a heartbeat detector, gas masks, and more.

Co-op mode will feature its own unique gadgets, and several moves that help the spies pass obstacles together. Tactics such as cooperative rappelling, boosting, and human ladder climbing have already been revealed, and more moves have been added, including a martial arts-inspired maneuver in which one spy tosses the other headfirst into an enemy or under a laser beam. Ferland claims it's a useful technique for both combat situations and getting through booby-trapped areas.

Co-op may be handled via split-screen for the GameCube (which probably won't see any version of the versus mode), but the single-player experience should be the same across all three platforms. Ferland says that Chaos Theory will be the most tense and nerve-wracking title in the series yet. The open-ended maps will mean there are several ways to reach an objective, many of which will require Sam Fisher to get closer to his enemies than ever before. Sam's character will be opened up greatly as well. Throughout the game, Sam will face many moral dilemmas, and it will be up to the player to determine how to respond to them. Sam's dialogue and attitude will change based on the player's decisions, adding new layers of complexity to Sam's already nuanced character.

Several other familiar faces will return as well, including John Lambert and Douglas Shetland. Of course, any new characters will be central to the plot, which involves a reclusive computer genius, Peruvian revolutionaries, information warfare, and military conflict that ripples through Asia. Sam Fisher finds himself in the center of it all, and has to work his way through a twisting tale fit for a Hollywood spy thriller. This single-player setup certainly has us excited, and the two multiplayer modes are just as intriguing. With so much to offer, Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory looks like it will raise the bar for stealth/action games yet again. ■ ■ ■



■ Sam lives out his *Mission: Impossible* fantasies

While Sam has many new moves, all of his favorite deadly tricks are back

Sam's knife allows for more brutal stealth kills than ever before

Although he's a great spy, Sam is a terrible chiropractor

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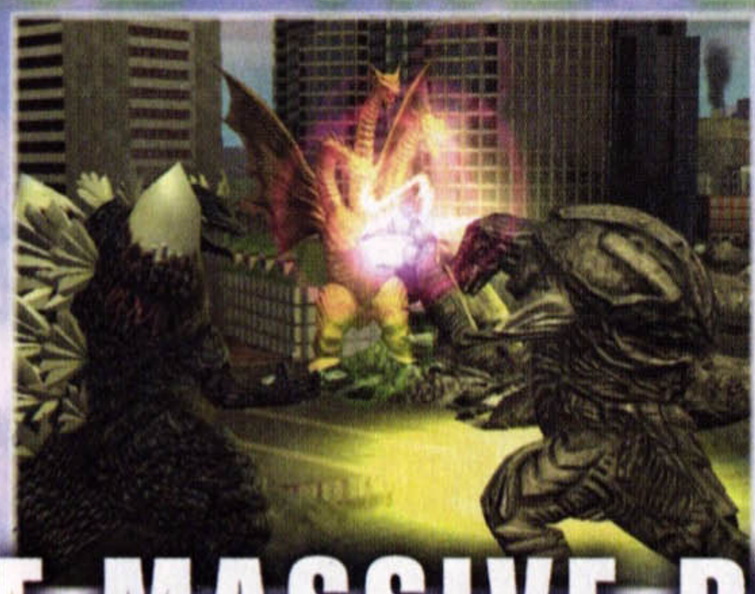
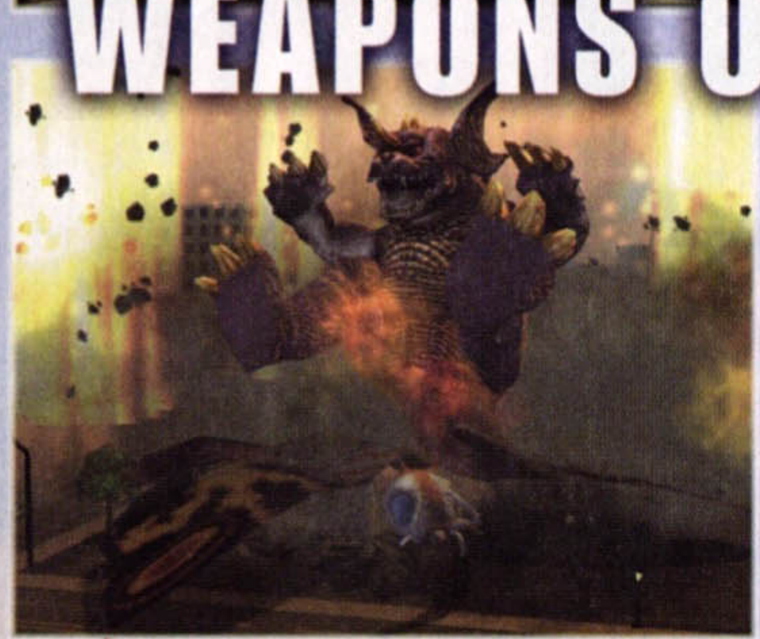
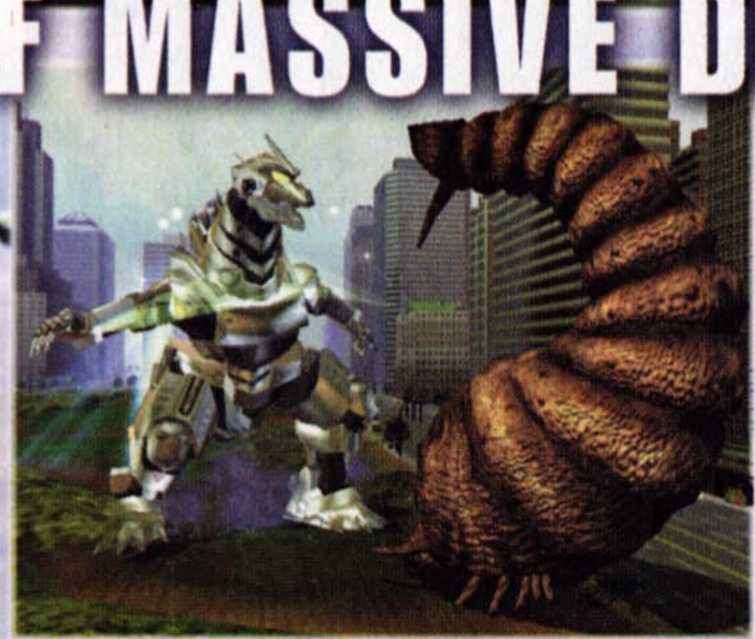
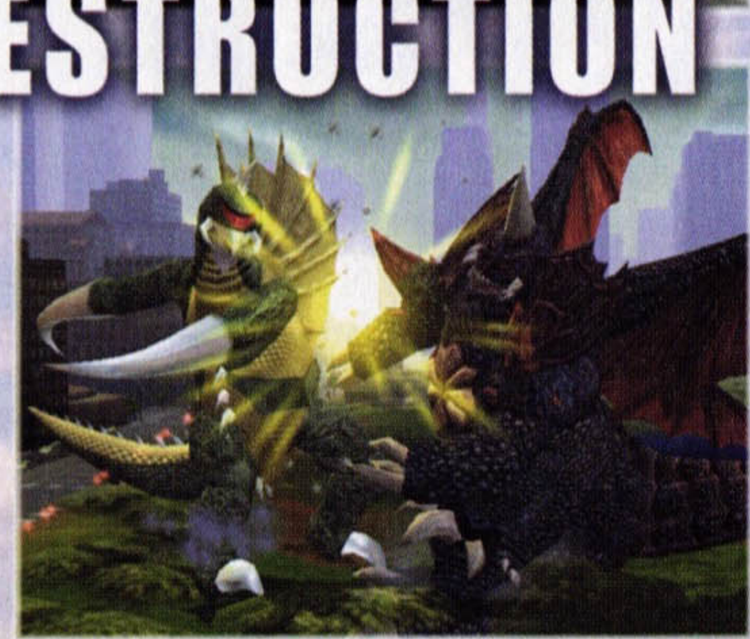


## WEAPONS OF MASSIVE DESTRUCTION







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PLAYSTATION 2

# Tenchu: Fatal Shadows

**> STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** SEGA **> DEVELOPER** K2 **> RELEASE** FEBRUARY 15, 2005

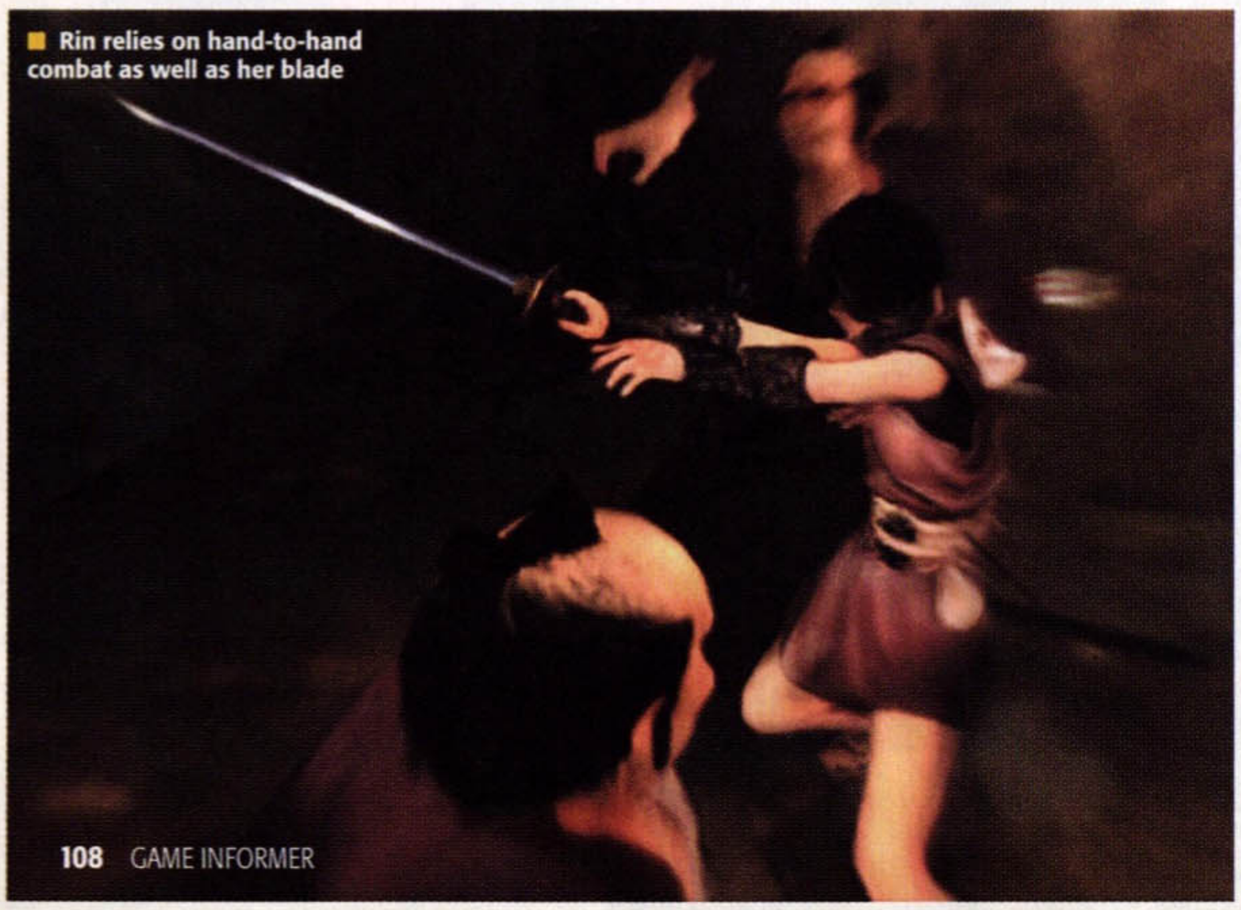
## THE LADY KILLERS

A pair of beautiful women sneaking into your bedroom in the middle of the night might sound like an adolescent fantasy to some, but in Tenchu: Fatal Shadows, it is a precursor to certain doom. Two deadly female assassins are the focus in the newest installment of the popular stealth ninja series (which Sega acquired from Activision), and while fans will be glad to hear that Ayame is making a return, the other leading lady is as unfamiliar as she is lethal.

Known as Tenchu Kurenai in Japan, Fatal Shadows details the events of the year between Stealth Assassins and Wrath of Heaven, in which Rikimaru is thought to be dead and Ayame is searching for answers. Along her journey, she comes to a village consumed by flames, and most of its townspeople slain. It is in this village that Ayame encounters Rin, a skilled young warrior who assumes Ayame is responsible for the carnage. After a brief duel and some quality girl talk, Rin realizes that Ayame is not to blame, and the two soon become brutally effective battle companions.

When Stealth Assassins first released, the action/stealth genre was still in its infancy. However, over the years, it has evolved in many different directions, though the Tenchu series has not always continued to take steps forward. Fortunately, with Fatal Shadows, Tenchu is prepared to return from the darkness and take its place among the sneakiest of secret operatives. Gone are the days when simply crouching in a bush a few feet away from an enemy is enough to conceal you; now the environment will be much more interactive and useful, enabling you to stay hidden by slipping underwater and using nearby reeds to breathe. If that doesn't work and an enemy spots you, it doesn't mean that you'll automatically need to restart the mission. Unlike some stealth games, Fatal Shadows is not based on trial-and-error; it has an involved combat system that will allow you to fight your way out of most circumstances – or at least buy some time to escape.

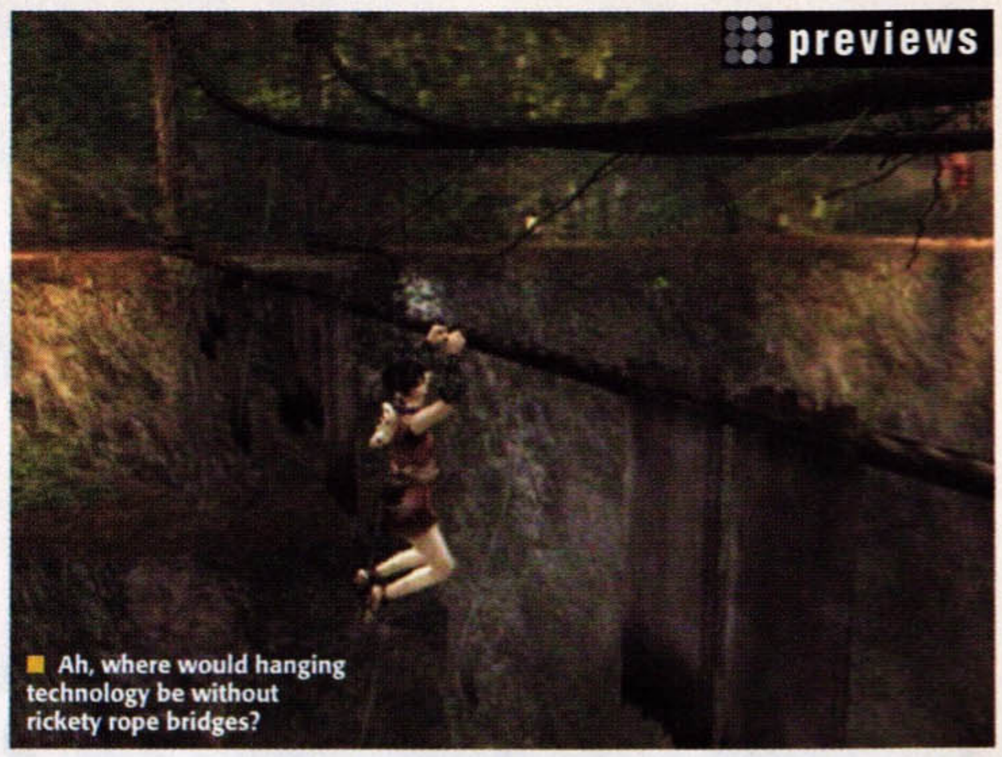
Of course, what is a ninja assassin game without stealth kills? It'd just be running around in pajamas, that's what! For this reason, K2 has vastly increased the scope of this mechanic, allowing gamers with precision timing to execute maneuvers that can take out multiple foes in a single attack. Unfortunately, if your timing is off, not only will you fail to kill your enemies, but odds are good that you will end up losing one or more of your favorite body parts. After all, unlike some previous Tenchu titles, the guards in Fatal Shadows aren't stupid. They won't be oblivious when you leap from rooftops and almost skewer them; they won't give up pursuit after a quick chase; and they will call in for back-up as soon as they spot you or your handiwork (i.e. a bloody corpse), which is why it is especially important to utilize the new body-hiding feature. With all of these elements added into the classic Tenchu gameplay, Fatal Shadows is poised to resurrect the series as a modern marvel rather than a gameplay relic from generations past. ■■■

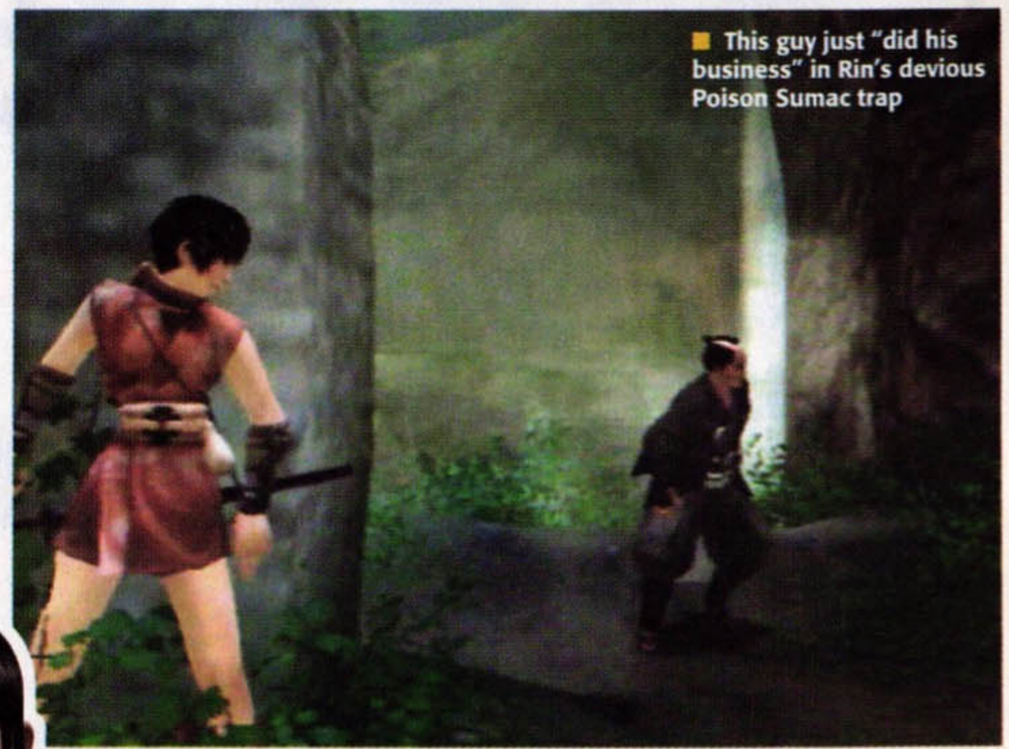


Rin relies on hand-to-hand combat as well as her blade

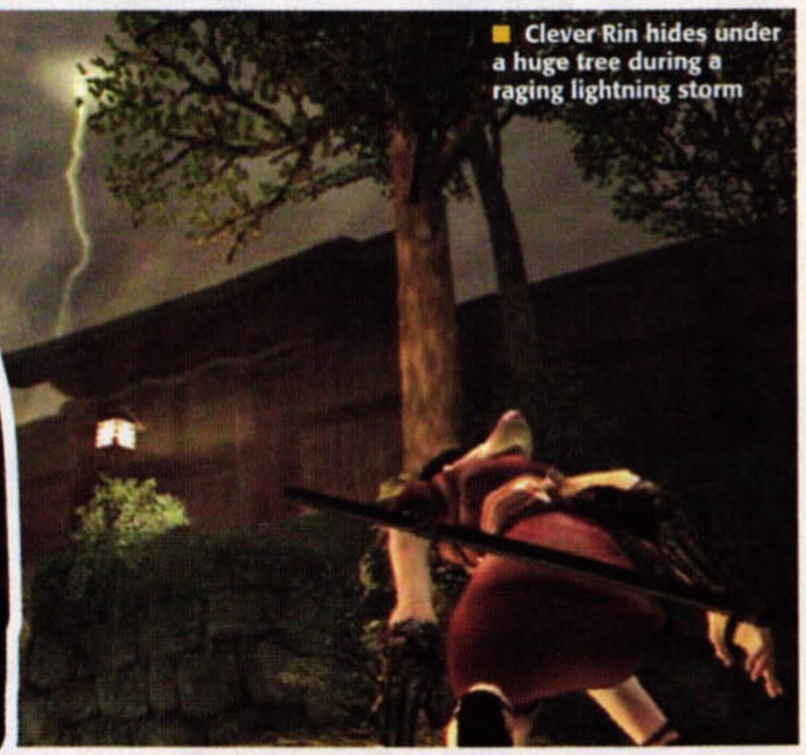
Ayame's main objective is to discover the fate of Rikimaru

Scrolls collected after stealth kills expand your arsenal of moves

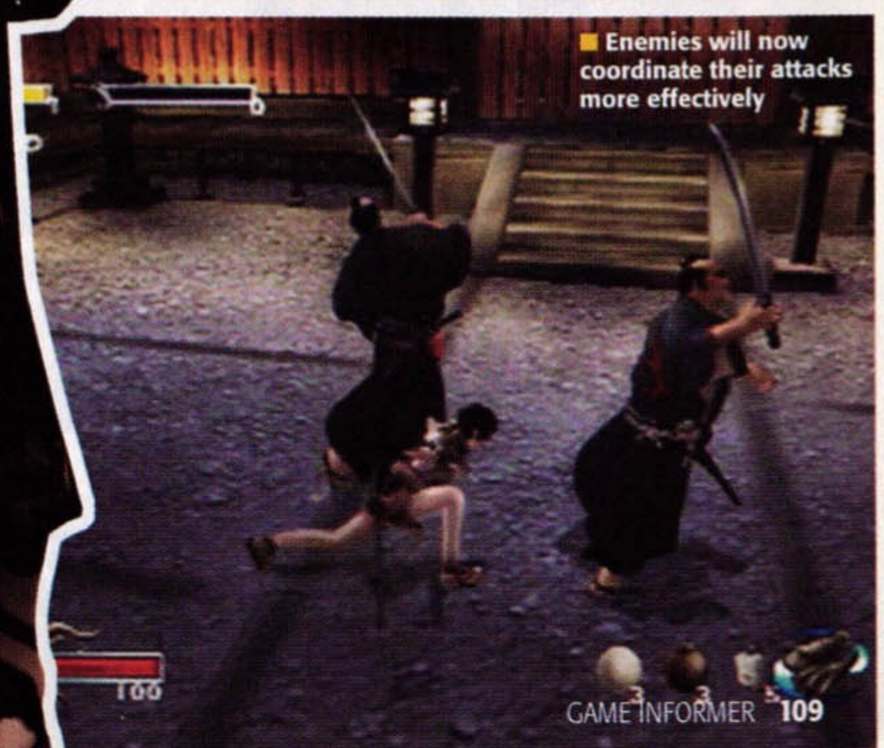

Ah, where would hanging technology be without rickety rope bridges?


This guy just "did his business" in Rin's devious Poison Sumac trap

"Are you hungry? There's plenty of sword to go around!"


Clever Rin hides under a huge tree during a raging lightning storm

Carrying bodies and hiding them is vital to not being detected


Enemies will now coordinate their attacks more effectively

# They Fought For Freedom...
# They Fought For Each Other.

# MEN OF VALOR™

"DEATH DEALERS"

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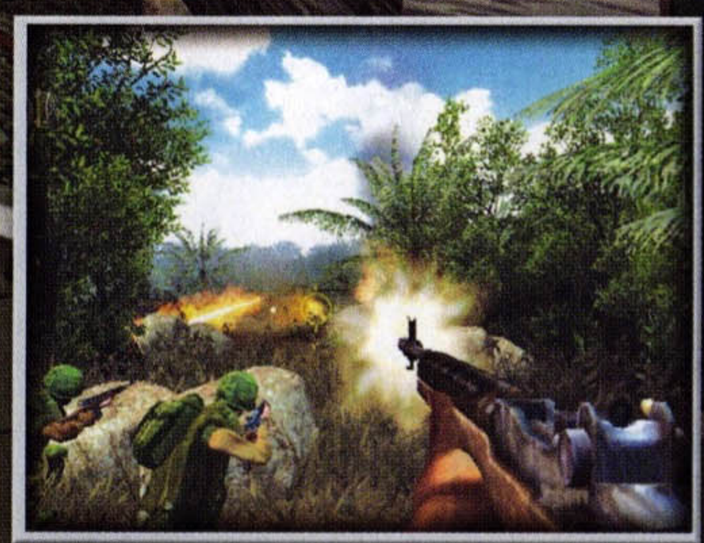
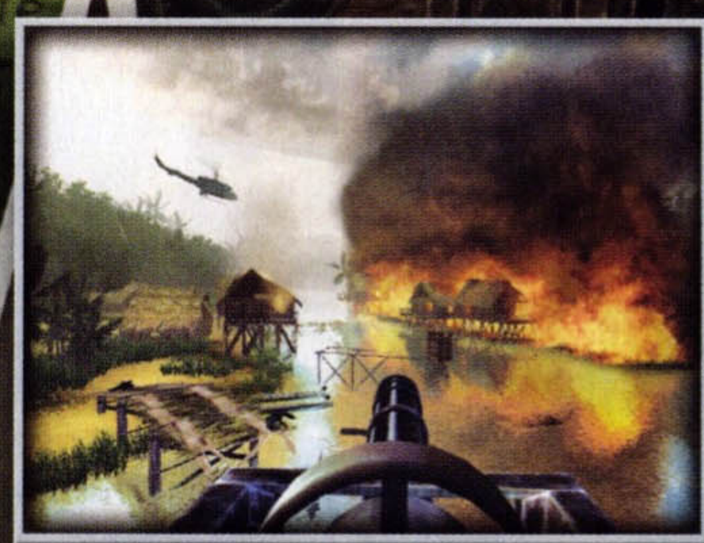


Experience the Real Vietnam War–from Jungle-Based Ambushes to Intense Urban Firefights



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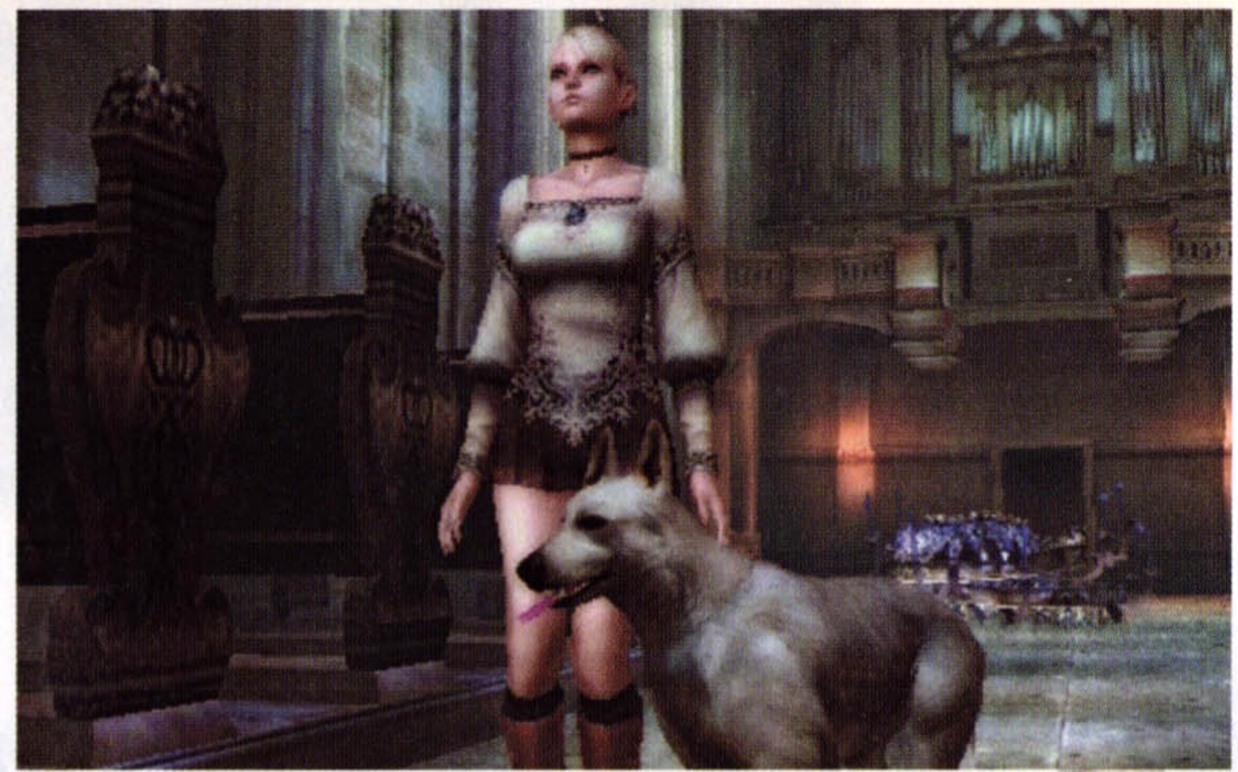
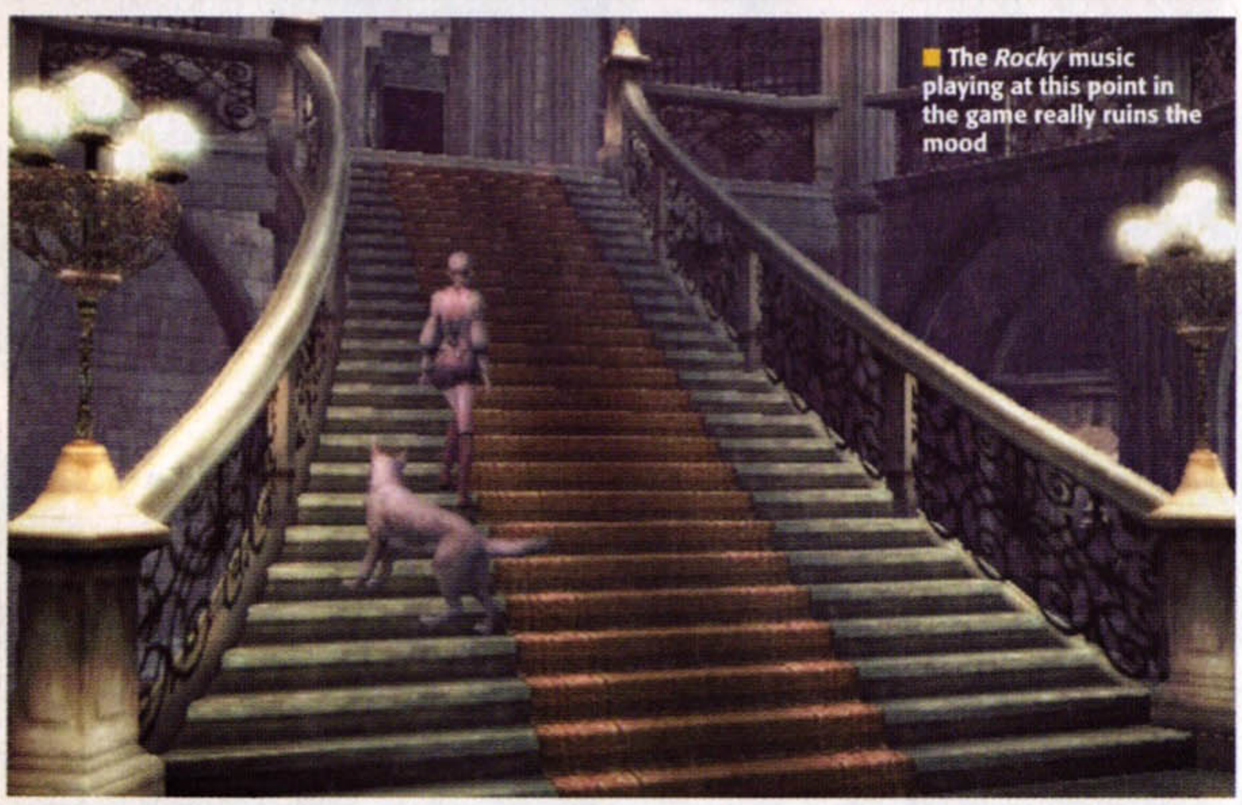
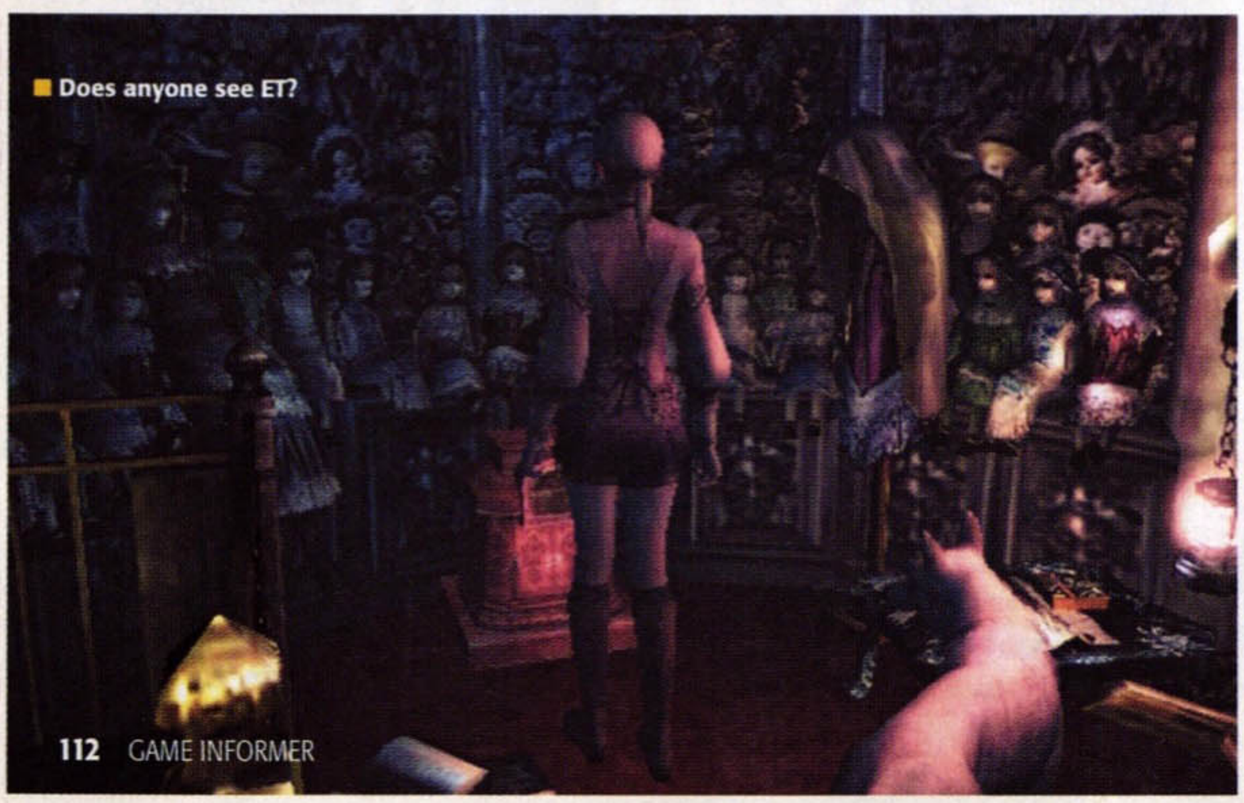
13 Action-Packed Combat Missions Spanning Four Authentic Operations



These dolls had been very, very bad



The *Rocky* music playing at this point in the game really ruins the mood



Does anyone see ET?

PLAYSTATION 2

# Haunting Ground

**> STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** CAPCOM **> DEVELOPER** CAPCOM R&D 1 **> RELEASE** SUMMER 2005

## THIS AIN'T NO SCOOBY-DOO

It doesn't take more than a glance at these gorgeous early screenshots of Capcom's latest survival horror game to realize the tremendous potential this new title has. Haunting Ground puts you in the role of an 18-year-old girl named Fiona, the lone survivor of a tragic car crash that killed both of her parents. Apparently, upon awakening from the terrible accident, she finds herself in a frighteningly eerie castle from which she cannot escape.

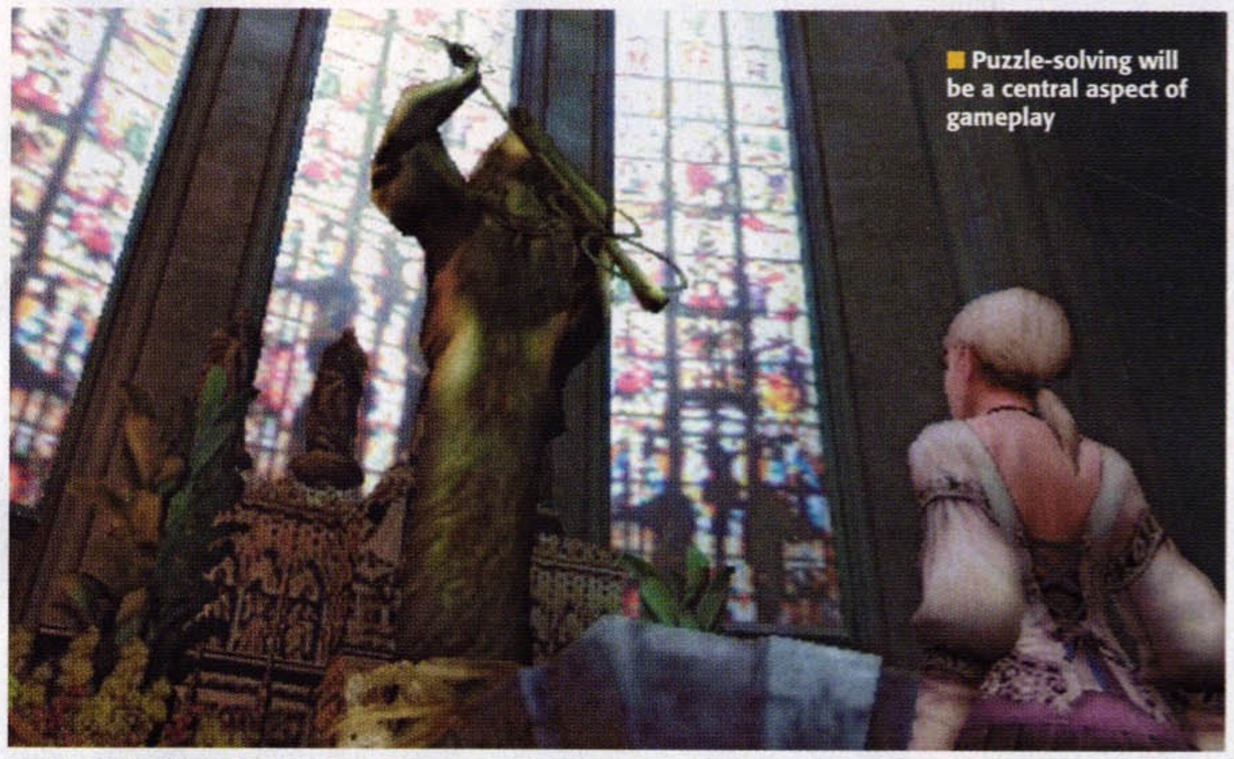
While there are numerous inhabitants in the confining fortress, the most dangerous seems to be a deranged and malformed beast of a man named Debilitas, who relentlessly chases her through the dark chambers of the keep. While this concept of a lone and unstoppable foe has incredible potential by itself, another of the game's unique concepts promises to really set it apart. It's not long in the castle before Fiona encounters a chained and helpless sheep dog named Hewie. When the girl frees him, you as the player begin to play with both characters in tandem. While Fiona must manipulate objects and solve puzzles, Hewie can locate items by smell, travel into small places, and attack enemies while the physically weaker girl escapes. Also of interest is the bond between the two, which will grow throughout the course of the game. As Hewie comes to be more attached to the orphaned young woman, he'll start to be more and more likely to obey her commands and directions.

While these tantalizing screens do little to indicate the involving animation, we know that Hewie has been created using motion capture of a real dog, a point which further distinguishes the unique character and style of the game. Meanwhile, the handling of Fiona as the main character has us even more intrigued. In order to engross players in the fearful situations the young girl is faced with, your controller will pulse along with Fiona's heartbeat. As her heartbeat intensifies and enemies draw near, Fiona's fear will begin to overcome her and she will become more difficult to control. Simultaneously, the player's screen view will become grainy and begin to fade into black and white. When disaster seems imminent, Fiona will finally lapse into a panic mode where she completely loses control.

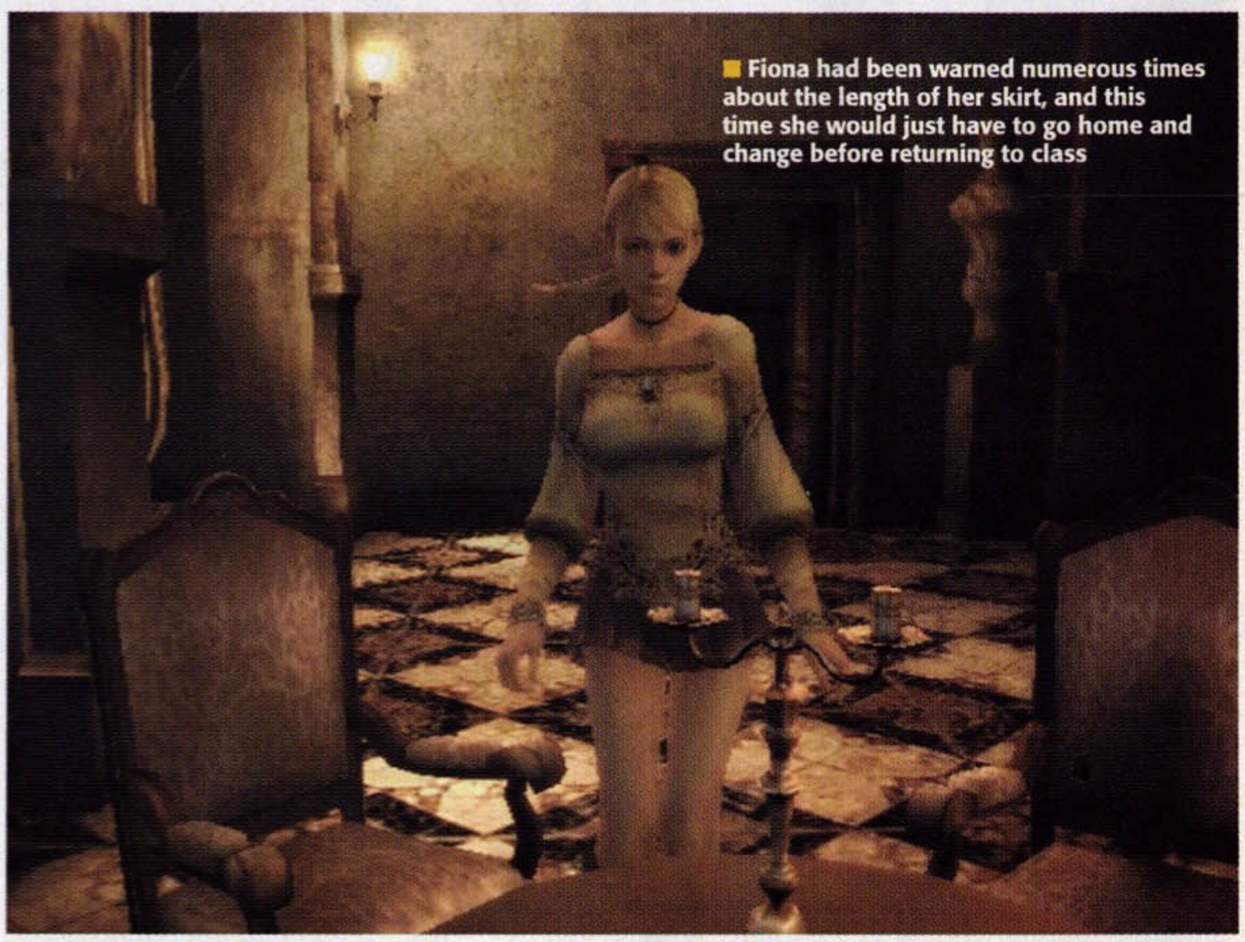
With the growing library of quality horror fare available for the PS2, innovation has become the name of the game. Haunting Ground seems to have that in spades, and even at this phase the visuals look simply stunning. There's little to do at this point but wait until we can find out more about this delicate girl and her canine companion. ■■■

"Good boy! Now that we've got Shake down, let's move on to Attack Scary Monster."

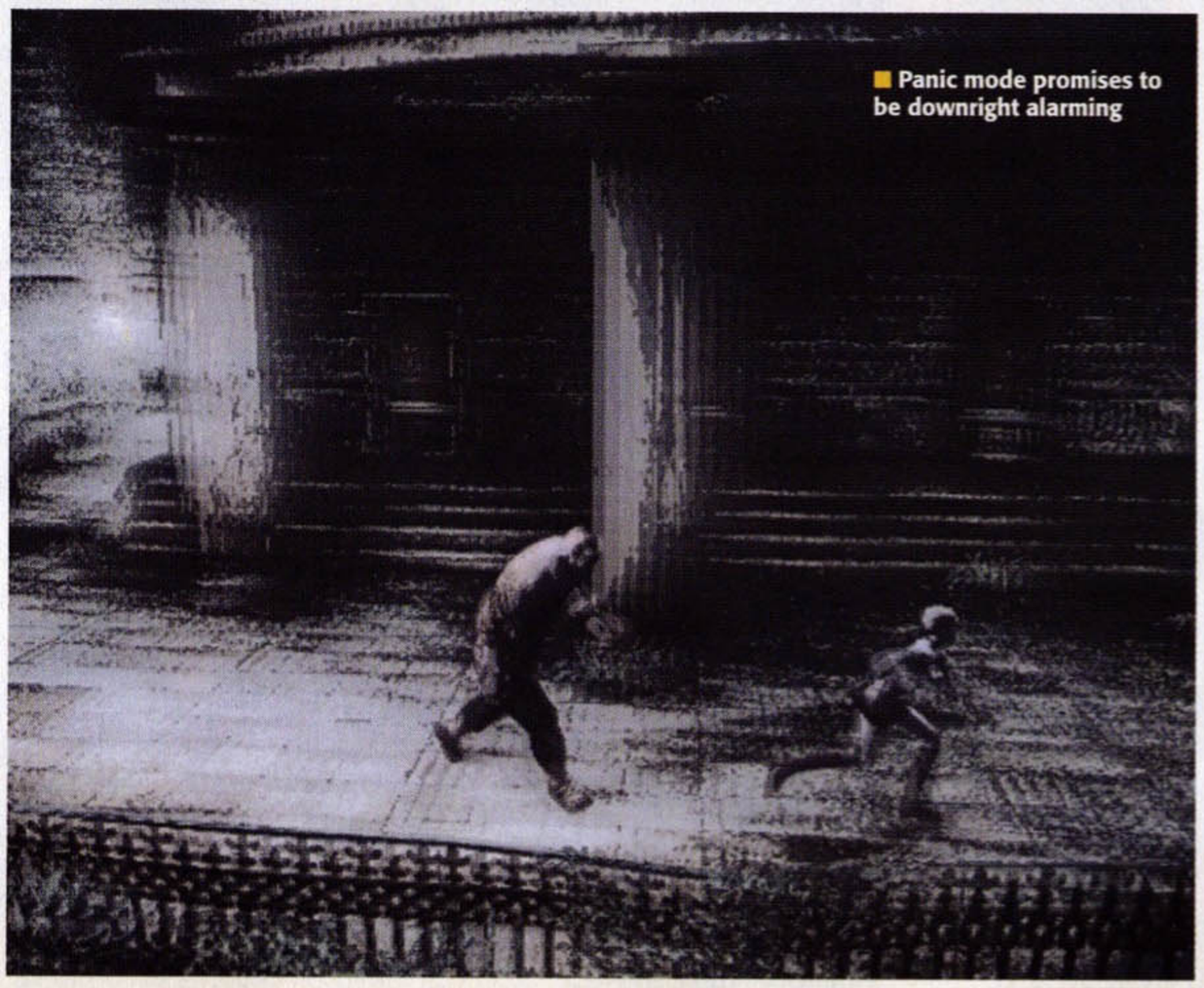
It's like a really creepy senior photo...



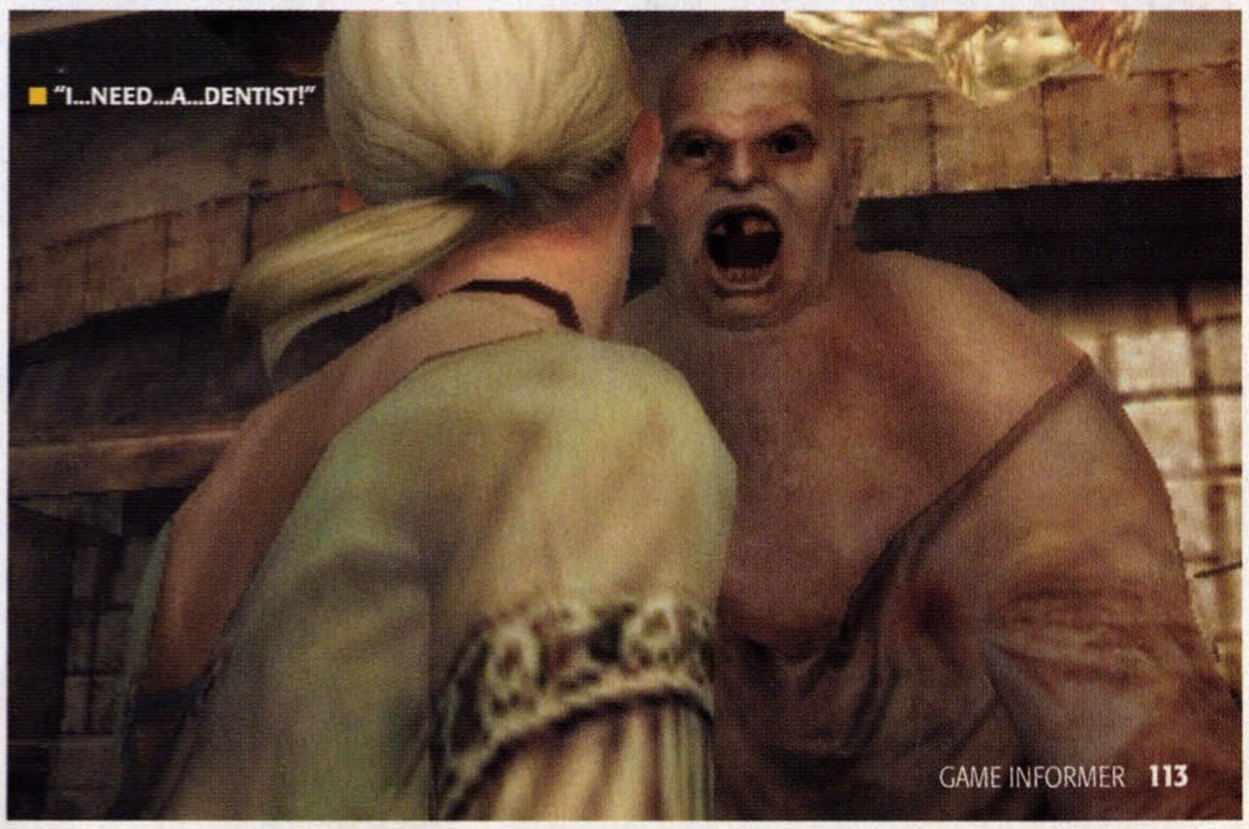
Puzzle-solving will be a central aspect of gameplay



Fiona had been warned numerous times about the length of her skirt, and this time she would just have to go home and change before returning to class



Panic mode promises to be downright alarming



"I...NEED...A...DENTIST!"

One Fate.

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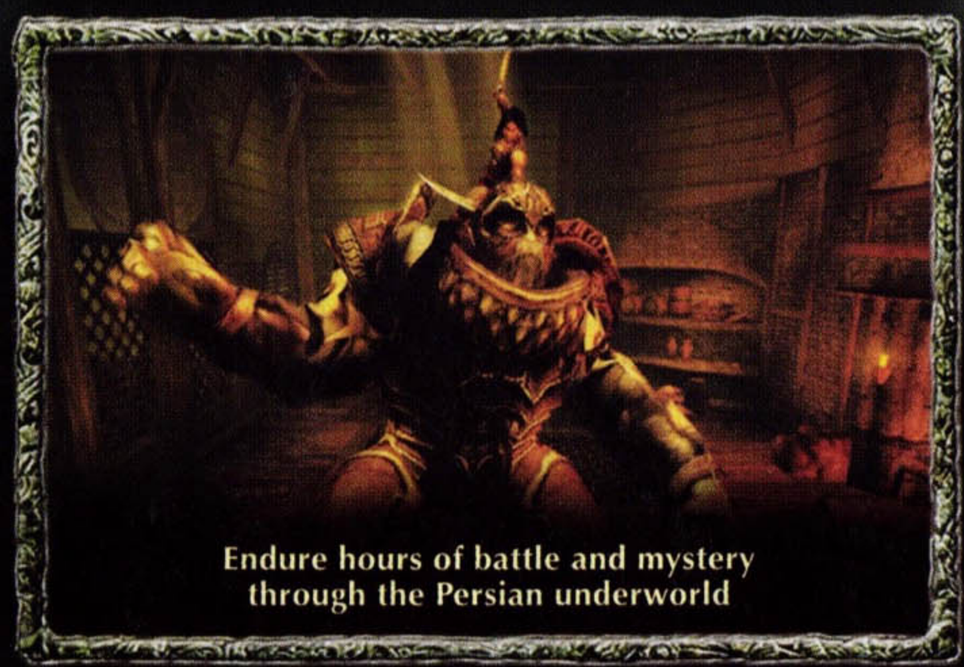

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"Our Most Wanted Game of 2004" - PSE2

"9.6" - Official Xbox Magazine

"10 out of 10" - PSM

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PC CD-ROM SOFTWARE

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NINTENDO GAMECUBE

PlayStation.2

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# One Million Ways to Defy It.

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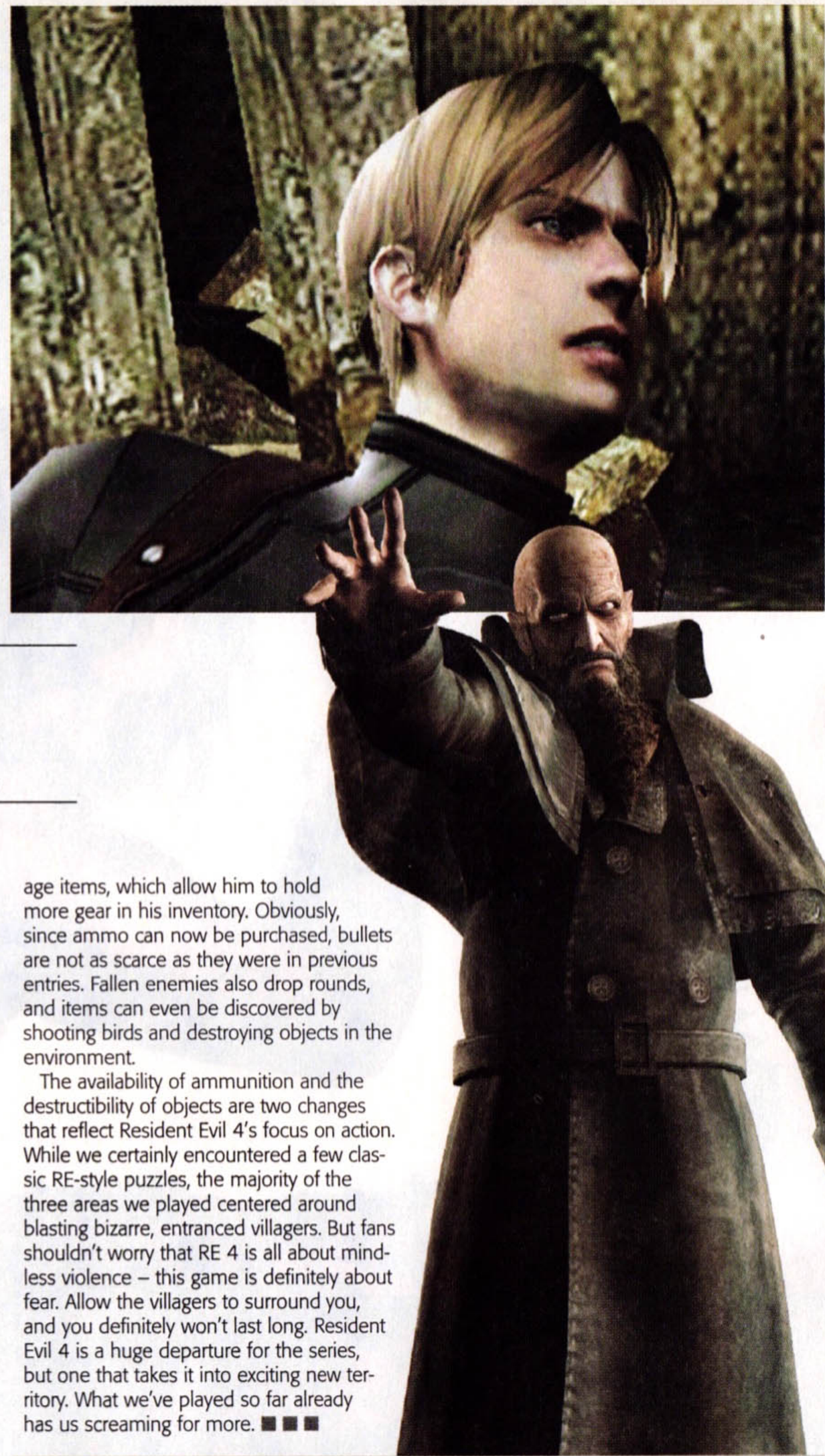
*Game of the Year: Academy of Interactive Arts & Sciences, *U.S. Official PlayStation Magazine, Electronic Gaming Monthly, Official Xbox Magazine* (Staff Pick), *PSE2*



GAMECUBE

# Resident Evil 4

**> STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** CAPCOM **> DEVELOPER** PRODUCTION STUDIO 4 **> RELEASE** JANUARY 11, 2005

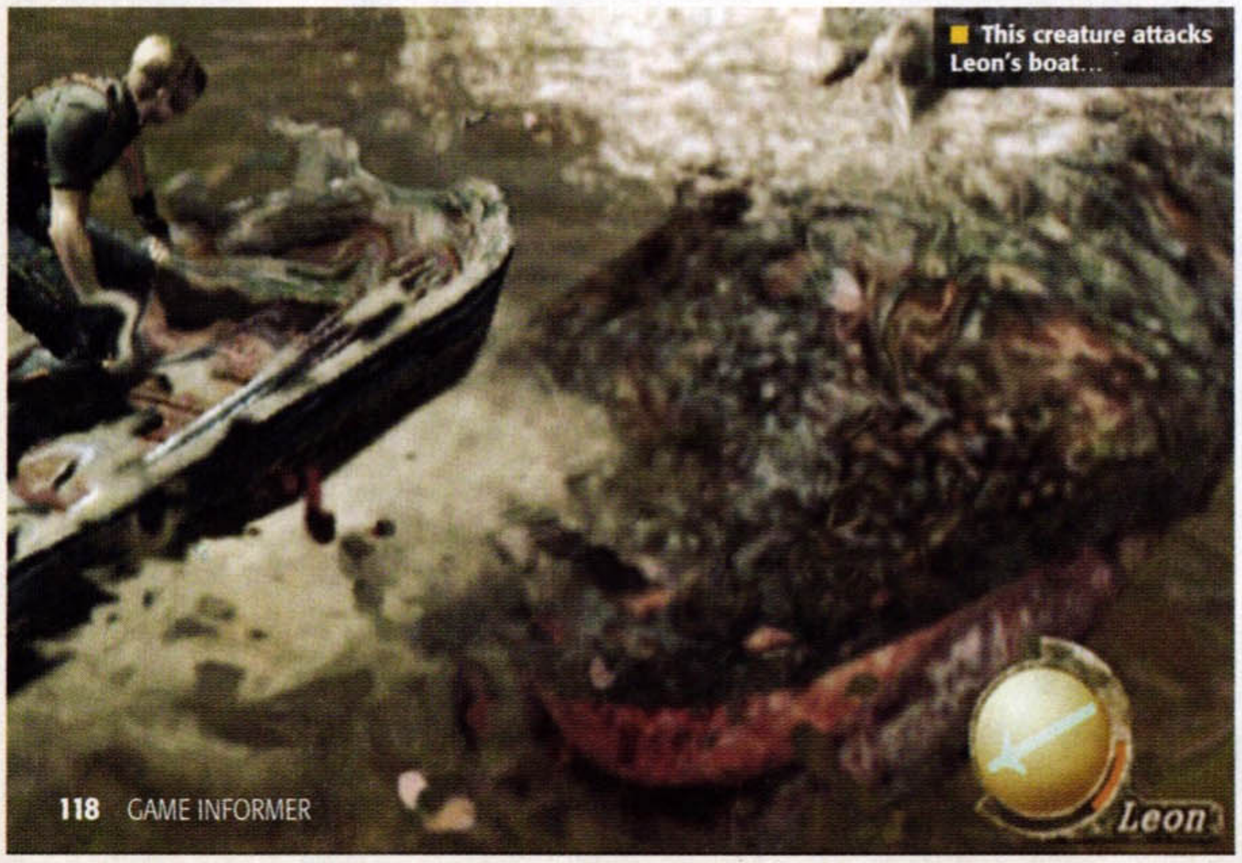
## PLAYING WITH EVIL

There's no doubt that Resident Evil 4 is one of the most hotly anticipated GameCube titles right now. Every little scrap of info on this game is quickly devoured by fans like the flesh of an unlucky citizen of Raccoon City. Although Capcom has been coyly doling out little details over the last several months, few have actually gotten their hands on the title to investigate it up close. Until now.

We recently uncovered a playable version of Resident Evil that revealed far more than the previous build displayed at E3. After some quality hands-on time, we can safely say that fans have every reason to be excited. Not only does it take the series in horrifying new directions, it combines classic Resident Evil features with new elements to create a game that is absolutely unlike any other title on the market. The unique control scheme puts players in the role of Leon, who is steered from behind his shoulder with the analog stick. With the right trigger depressed, Leon aims his weapon and cannot move. This seems restrictive at first, but once you adapt to it, the control mechanic fits perfectly. Special actions can be triggered with the A button, such as jumping through windows and dodging firebombs, and some sequences direct you to hit certain buttons with onscreen cues, somewhat like Shenmue or even Dragon's Lair. These sequences add to the game's unique feel, and lend a surprisingly cinematic quality to the action. For example, while in a battle with a giant monster in a lake, we were knocked from our boat, and instructed to swim back by jamming on the A button to avoid being eaten.

These action sequences, drivable vehicles like the boat, and the new analog control are only a few of the huge new updates this entry holds. Another major change is that Leon collects money and treasures, which can be used to purchase items. He can even buy weapon upgrades and storage items, which allow him to hold more gear in his inventory. Obviously, since ammo can now be purchased, bullets are not as scarce as they were in previous entries. Fallen enemies also drop rounds, and items can even be discovered by shooting birds and destroying objects in the environment.

The availability of ammunition and the destructibility of objects are two changes that reflect Resident Evil 4's focus on action. While we certainly encountered a few classic RE-style puzzles, the majority of the three areas we played centered around blasting bizarre, entranced villagers. But fans shouldn't worry that RE 4 is all about mindless violence – this game is definitely about fear. Allow the villagers to surround you, and you definitely won't last long. Resident Evil 4 is a huge departure for the series, but one that takes it into exciting new territory. What we've played so far already has us screaming for more. ■■■

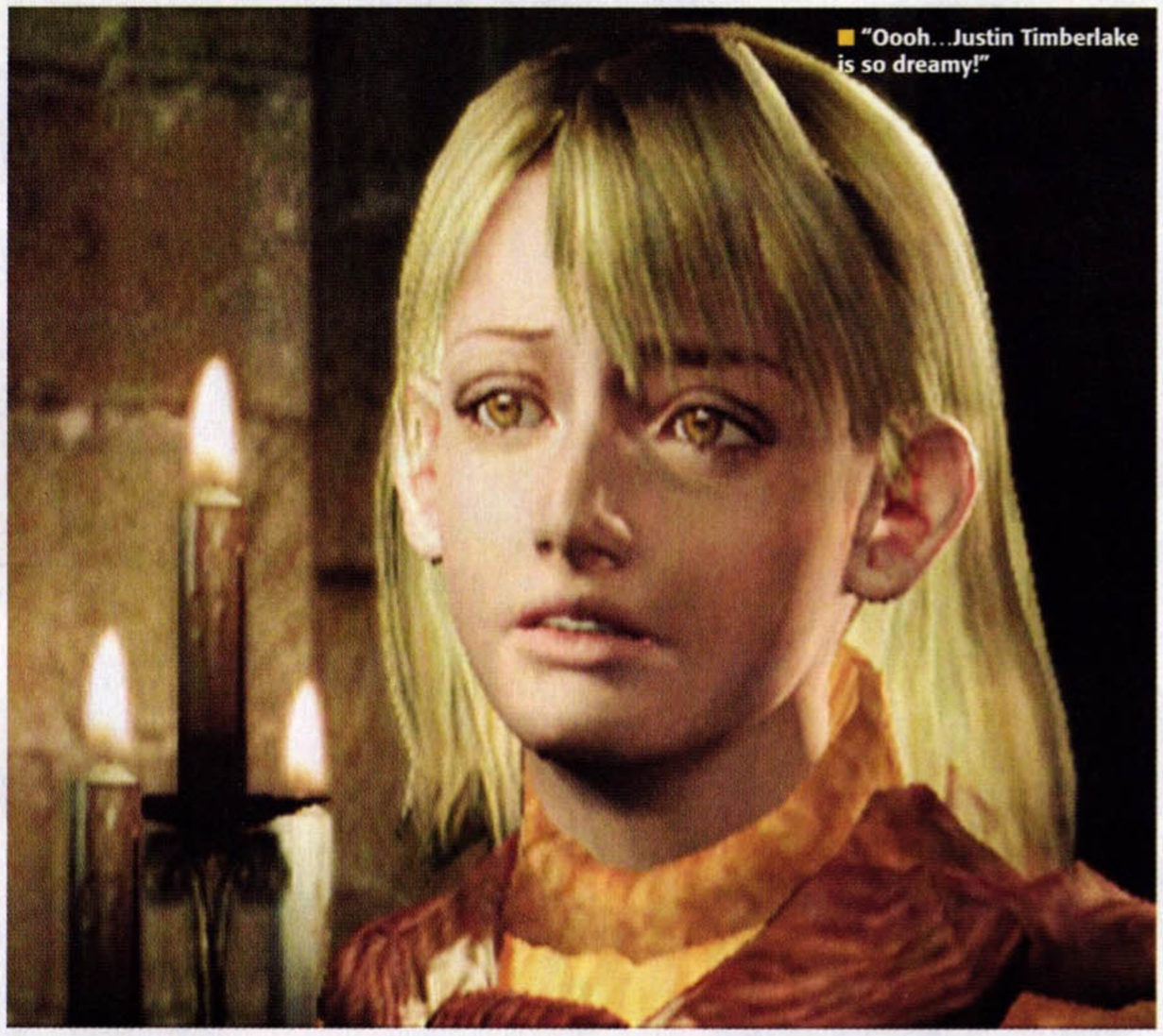



This creature attacks Leon's boat...

...forcing him to do a little spear fishing

"You want play baseball? You am the ball."

"This will take care of that infection."



"Oooh...Justin Timberlake is so dreamy!"

This delightful fellow is the leader of the village. He's definitely not nice, and certainly not human

A well-placed bullet will knock these guys off the catwalks and send them plummeting to their doom

The trick to defeating hordes of enemies is to force them all to attack you from one direction. Let them surround you and you're finished

All I can do is show you the door.

You're the one that has to step through.

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PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | PC

# Project: Snowblind

**> STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA PS2/PC ONLINE OR XBOX LIVE) **> PUBLISHER** EIDOS
**> DEVELOPER** CRYSTAL DYNAMICS **> RELEASE** JANUARY 2005

## THE FUTURE OF WAR

As the explosion ripples through the buildings around you, your vision starts to fade. It's not blackness that confronts you, but blinding light. Everything turns white and jagged, like static on a TV screen. It is then that you realize the explosion came from an EMP grenade. You panic as it hits you that all of your cybernetic implants are temporarily worthless, and once again you are simply human. Although your eyes haven't recovered, you know that your enemies are closing fast. Welcome to Hong Kong.

The year is 2065, and you are Second Lieutenant Nathan Frost. You are one of the world's most advanced cybernetically enhanced super-soldiers, thanks to augmentation provided by the Liberty Coalition. You have powers far beyond those of even the toughest human soldier, and you are going to need them. The sudden military coup in Hong Kong has left you cut off and behind enemy lines. As tempting as it is to run, you have a mission to accomplish. The enemy has a secret weapon in their arsenal, and it's up to you to make sure they don't use it.

This scenario is the setup for Project: Snowblind, the new first-person shooter from Eidos. Although the genre is flooded with quality shooters, Snowblind has enough unique strengths that it could emerge as one of this winter's biggest sleeper hits. The inventive weapons and gadgets in Snowblind are a big part of its draw. Sure it has the standard weapons like a shotgun, assault rifle, and sniper rifle, but it also has so much more. The kicker gun can be used to push objects into enemies, the riot shield is a gadget that creates small energy barriers for cover, and EMP grenades disable cybernetic implants (like those in your own body, so be careful!).

Another intriguing aspect of gameplay is the biomod system, which allows players to upgrade their cybernetic abilities. With biomods, players can earn special skills, like the ability to control nearby robots or slow time. This RPG-esque element adds a lot of strategy and depth that is often missing from other shooters.

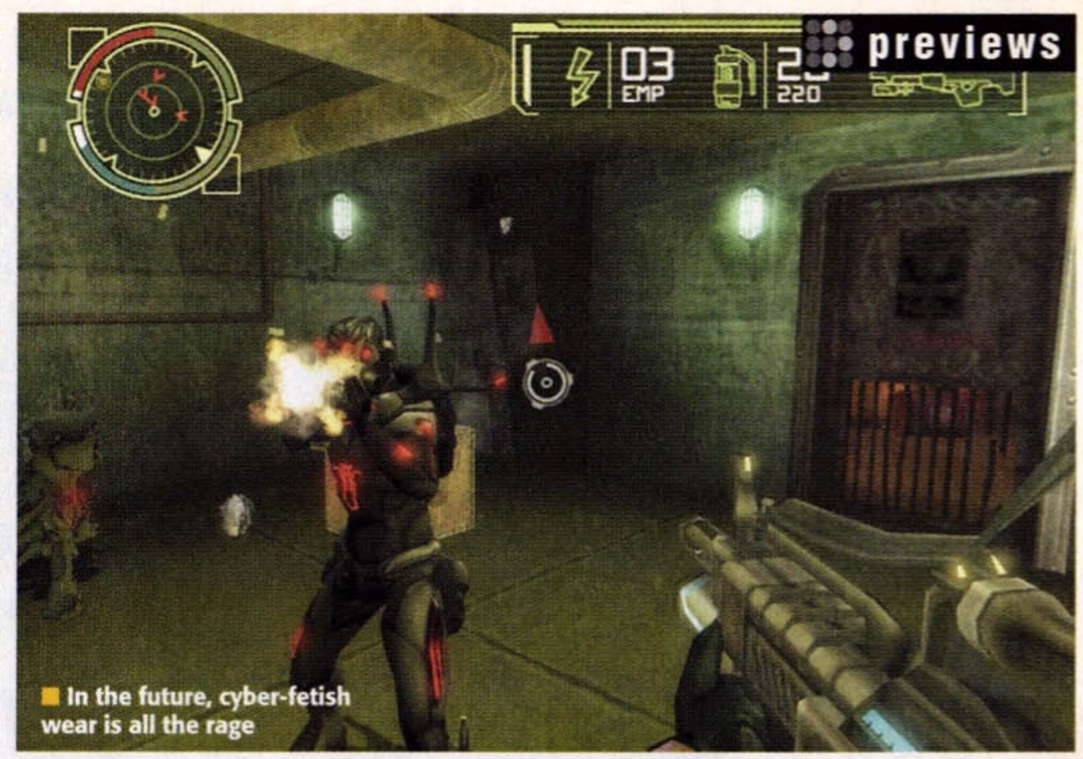
Of course, Project: Snowblind will feature everything you would expect to see in a quality FPS title. Vehicles will play a huge part in the game, as will destructible environments and support from friendly AI troops. Naturally, online play will be supported for up to 16 players, with a bevy of different game types. Details are still foggy, but Eidos claims that Snowblind will feature all of the classic online game types, as well as several others designed specifically for console play. With so many features, Project: Snowblind certainly looks like it could give some of the bigger-name shooters a run for their money. ■■■

■ Expect to see large numbers of friends and foes onscreen at once

■ Notice the damage to the walls. Most weapons will visibly affect the environments

■ Buddhist temples and urban wastelands are among the environments you'll see

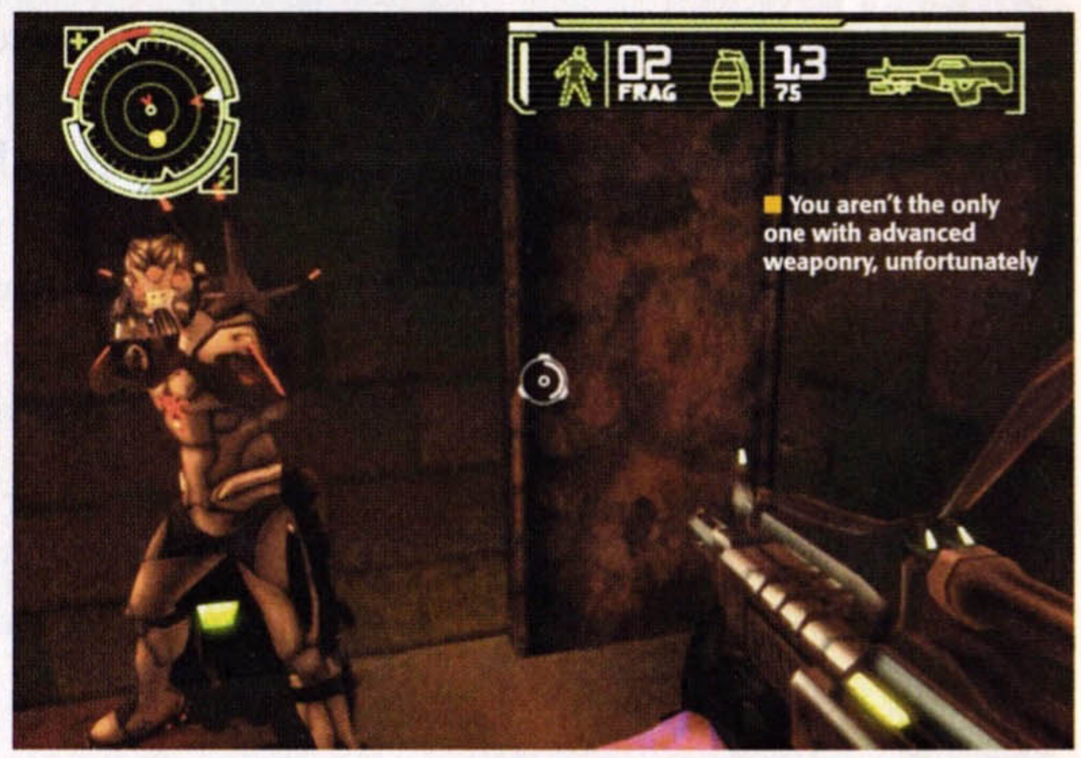
Up to 16 players will be able to duke it out online



In the future, cyber-fetish wear is all the rage

All weapons have alternate fire modes to maximize the carnage you can inflict

"Crap."



You aren't the only one with advanced weaponry, unfortunately

Skills like Bot Domination will allow you to control robots, but until you get it, you have to just blast them

He with the biggest gun wins

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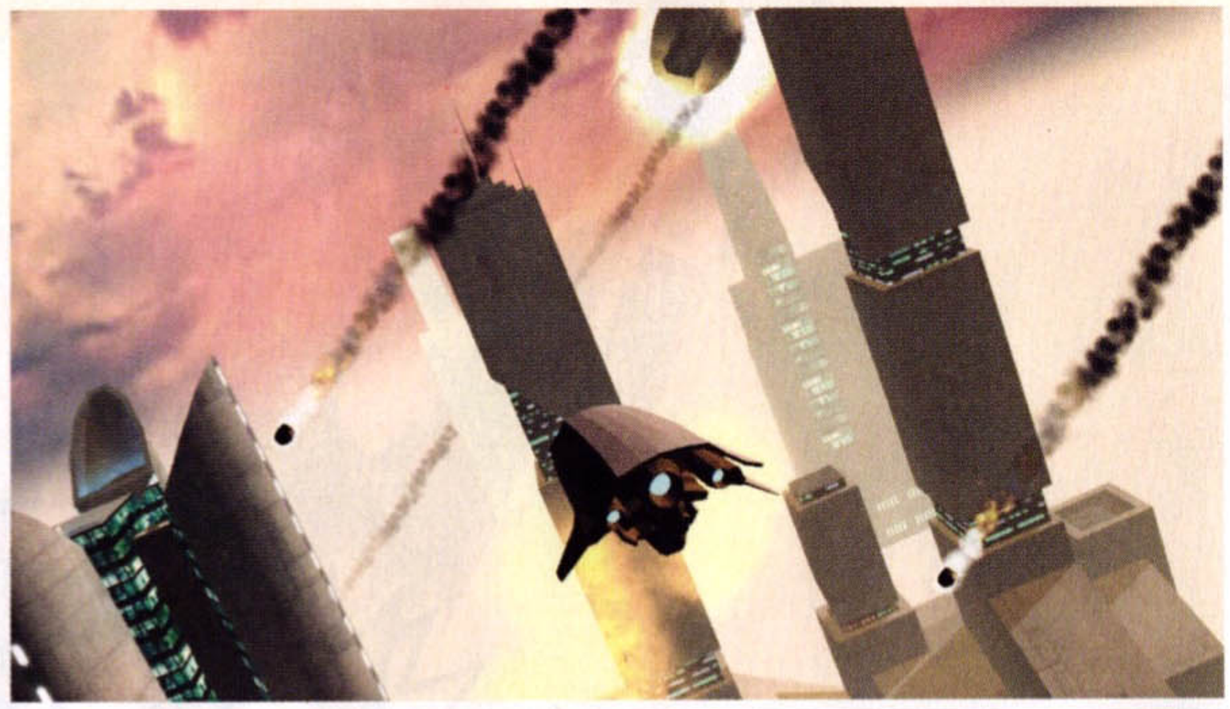


PSP

# Advent Shadow

**> STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** MAJESCO **> DEVELOPER** FULL FAT **> RELEASE** SPRING 2005

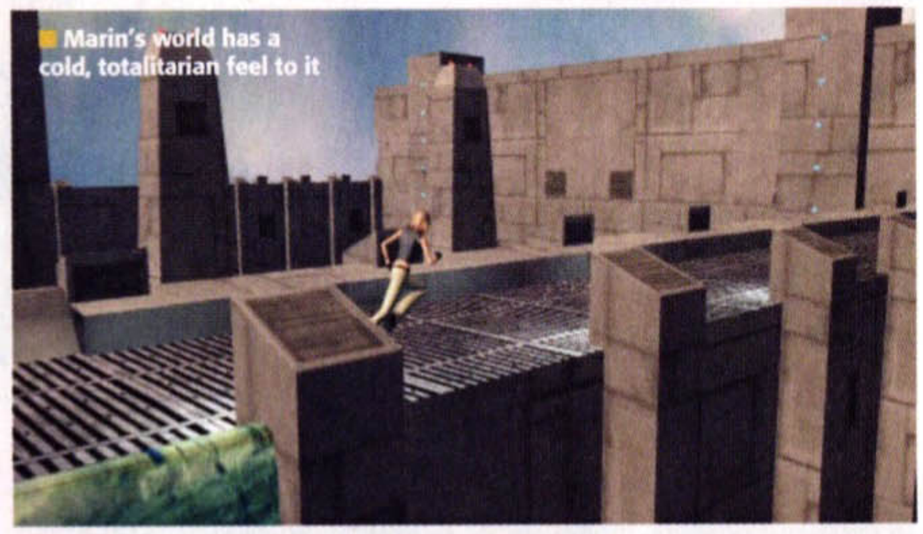
## SMALL GAME, BIG THRILLS

Sometime early next year, Majesco plans to unleash Advent Rising, the first title in an ambitious trilogy of sci-fi games conceived though a collaboration with famed writer Orson Scott Card. This trilogy will chronicle the story of Gideon Wyeth, a young hero caught up in a struggle against the Seekers, evil beings bent on the destruction of humanity. Around the same time that Advent Rising is released, Majesco will also unveil Advent Shadow, a side story based around Marin Steel, a pilot that Gideon encounters during his adventures. Expanding this complex tale even further is an impressive undertaking, but this new game is exciting for another reason – it is a launch title for the PSP.

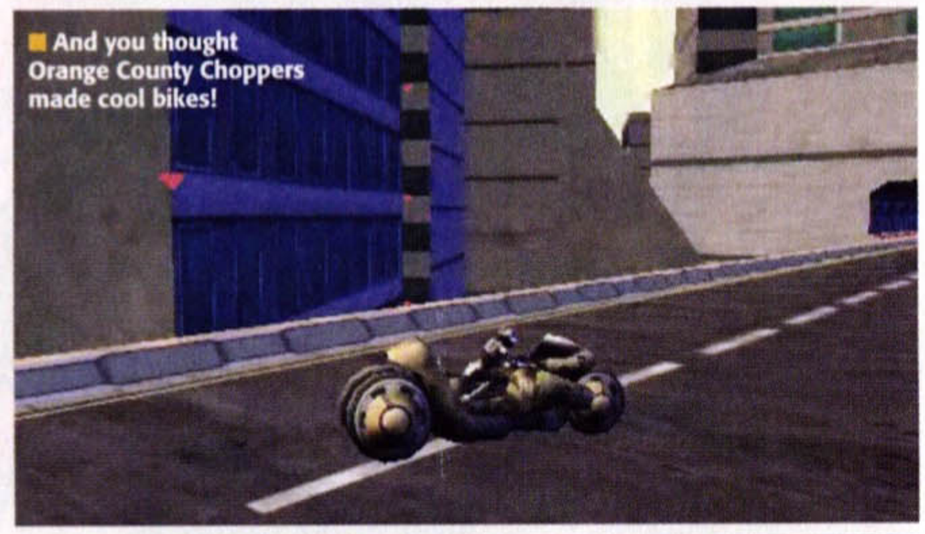
Majesco and Advent Shadow producer Donald Mustard granted us an exclusive look at this handheld spin-off, which will expand on the Advent trilogy mythology, yet still be accessible to those who don't play the console version. Mustard describes Marin as a Han Solo-type character that gets caught up in things when the Seekers invade her planet. The story of Advent Shadow will intertwine with Advent Rising, and the two titles will share characters to tie the universe together. While Mustard assures us that you won't need to play the console games to enjoy the PSP title, those who play both will certainly get the fullest experience. By playing both installments, players will see some of the same events and locations from two different perspectives.

Advent Shadow's gameplay will feature both on-foot and vehicular action, including aerial dogfights and land-based vehicles like tanks. It will also feature destructible environments, an impressive score performed by the Mormon Tabernacle Choir and Los Angeles Orchestra, and fully animated cutscenes. Majesco even provided us with comparison shots that demonstrate how close the PSP characters look to their console counterparts. Mustard admitted that being one of the first developers to create a game for the PSP was challenging, but feels that the end result will surprise and please gamers. Based on what we've seen, we're inclined to agree. Not only does Advent Shadow blow away preconceptions of what is possible on a handheld system, it also gives us the best insight yet as to what the PSP is capable of. It's always very exciting to get an early glance at a game for a new system, but it's even more satisfying when that game looks so promising. With a plot that is certain to thrill, impressive visuals, and a wide range of gameplay, Advent Shadow looks primed to become one of the PSP's hottest titles. ■ ■ ■

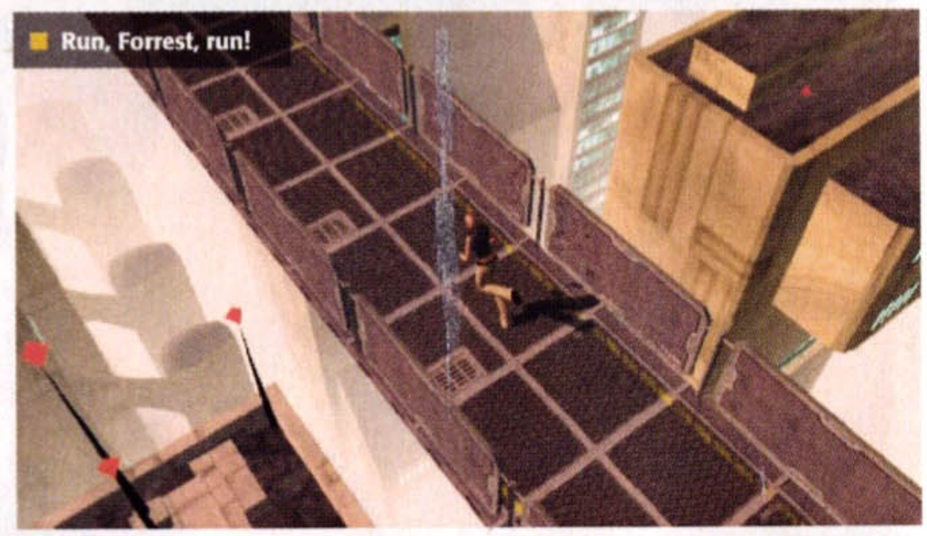
This guy just loves to dance!



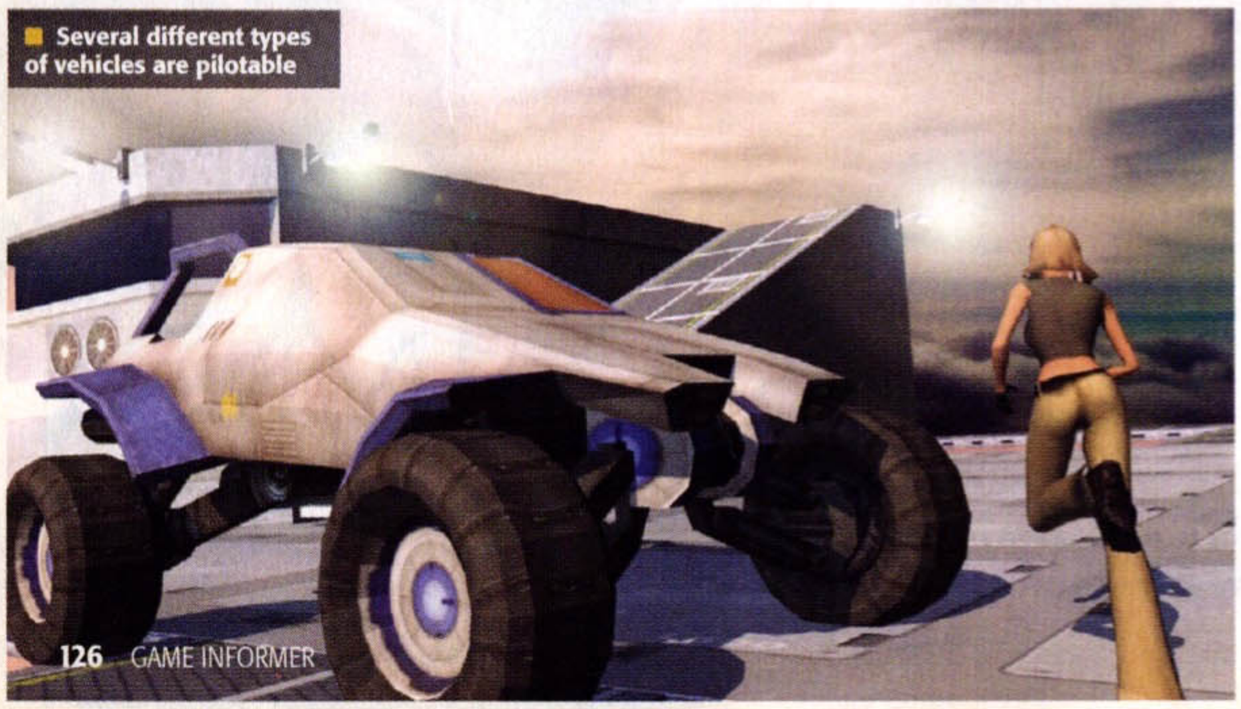
Marin's world has a cold, totalitarian feel to it



And you thought Orange County Choppers made cool bikes!



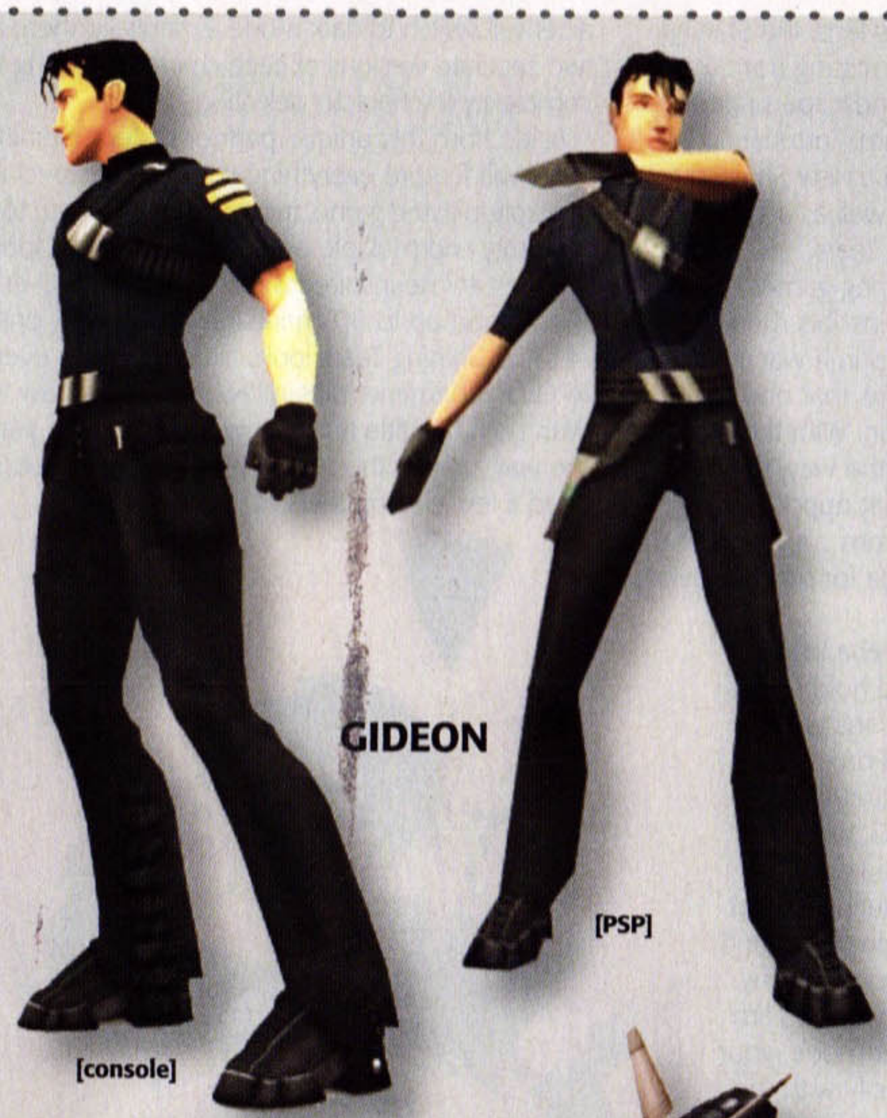
Run, Forrest, run!



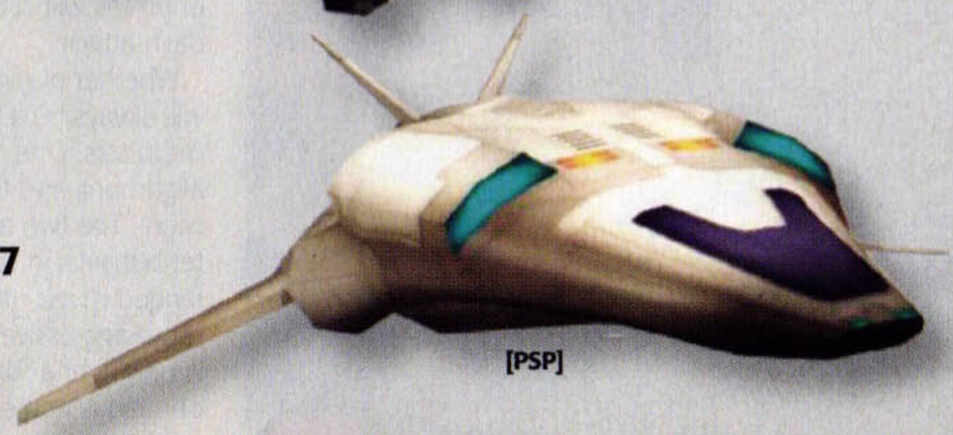
Several different types of vehicles are pilotable

Nothing says action like running from an explosion

Barrels are a problem, no matter what planet you're on



**These shots show both the console and PSP models of Marin, and Gideon, as well as the OXP7 spaceship. While there is a noticeable difference between the two, the PSP title mimics the console versions impressively.**



"NO! She will not dance with you!"

Ooh...pretty sparkles

"A huge army vs. me? How could I lose?"

PLAYSTATION 2

# Shining Tears

**> STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION/RPG **> PUBLISHER** SEGA **> DEVELOPER** NEXTECH **> RELEASE** MARCH 2005

## TEARS FOR FEARS

Much to the dismay of its fans, the Shining Force series has been missing from the console video game landscape since the death of the Sega Saturn. Fortunately, Sega has recently announced both a new Shining Force title for the PlayStation 2, as well as a spin-off – an action/RPG called Shining Tears.

In the grand tradition of role-playing games, Shining Tears stars a young man who has lost his memory. Before he knows it, he is caught up in a war involving two magical rings. It just so happens that one of the enchanted rings is in his possession. With the help of several companions met along the way, the young hero must overcome the forces that oppose him and rediscover his true identity. Hmm…a war over a magic ring. Sounds like a good idea for some movies, or at least a few books.

Although the basic setup may feel a little familiar, Shining Tears does indeed hold several surprises. The biggest shocker for fans will be its gameplay – unlike the Shining Force series, Shining Tears is not a turn-based strategy/RPG. Instead, it is a real-time action/RPG, with gameplay similar to the recent The Legend of Zelda: Four Swords Adventures. Much like that title, Shining Tears offers both single-player and co-op modes. While you will encounter many characters in your quest, your party will be limited to two fighters. In single-player mode, your companion can be controlled directly with the right analog stick – steering the character towards enemies will cause them to deliver a special dash attack.

Whether playing single-player or co-op, there will always be a balance between the two party members. One character will always have a dark alignment, and the other will have a light alignment. The two alignments dictate how the character behaves in combat: light characters use more ranged magic attacks, while dark characters use more aggressive melee attacks. But no character is only light or dark; alignments will switch based on who is in the party. For example, if you choose a light character as your partner, your main character will switch to dark mode. Essentially, there are two separate versions of each character, adding tons of complexity to character selection.

Aside from this unique partner system, Shining Tears will feature everything you would expect out of a role-playing game, including leveling up, tons of items, and multiple endings. The stylized look features anime-inspired 3D characters in 2D environments, and up to 50 characters can appear onscreen at once. Shining Tears looks like it will offer everything RPG fans demand, plus a few interesting new twists. With both this title and a new Shining Force game on the way, fans of the series have the perfect reason to shed a few shining tears of joy. ■■■

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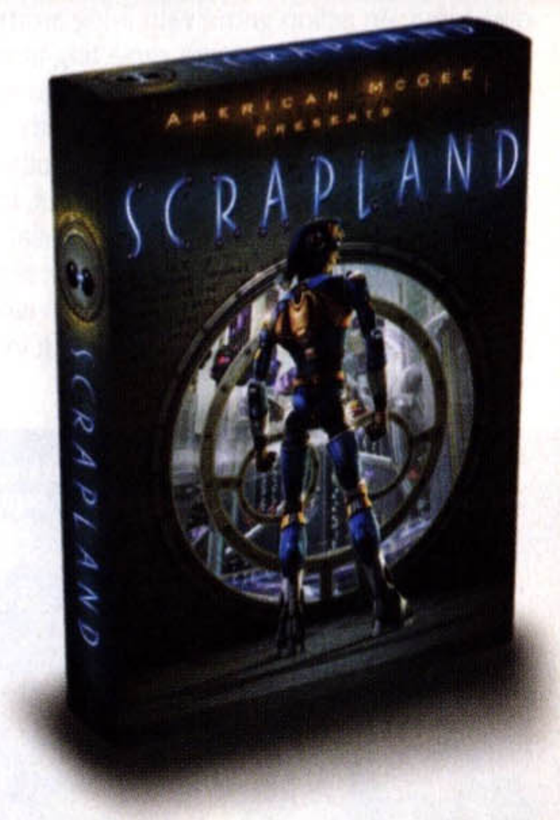

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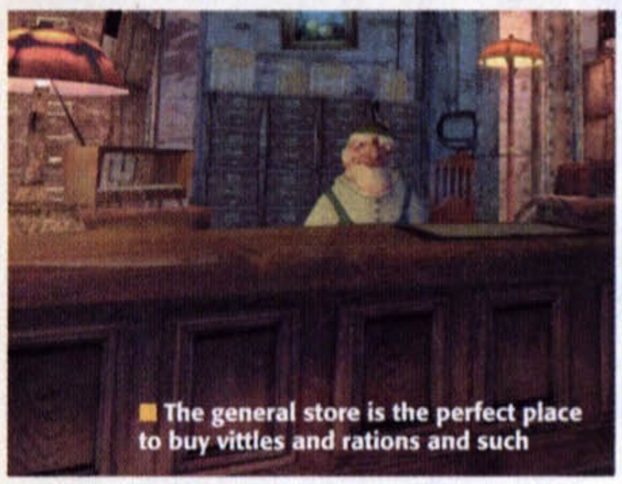
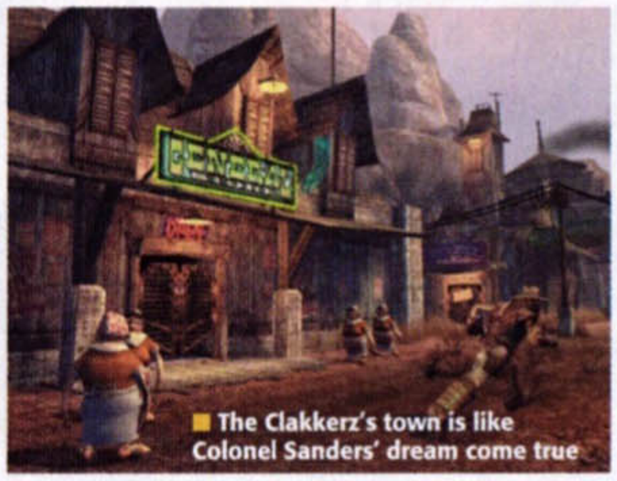
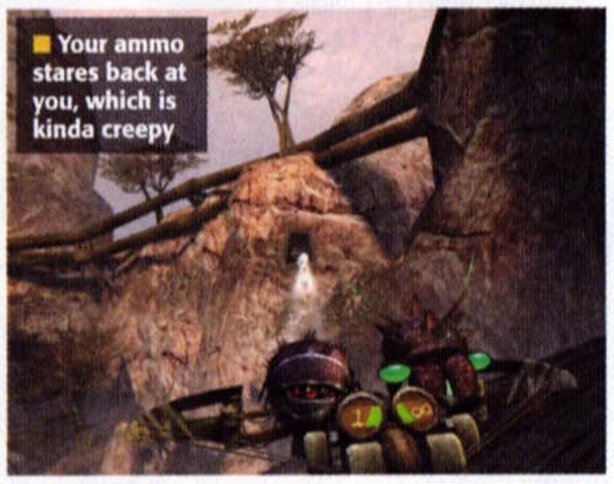


The general store is the perfect place to buy vittles and rations and such



The Clakkerz's town is like Colonel Sanders' dream come true

New missions become available by visiting the bounty store



Your ammo stares back at you, which is kinda creepy

XBOX

# Oddworld: Stranger

**> STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** EA GAMES **> DEVELOPER** ODDWORLD INHABITANTS **> RELEASE** SPRING 2005

## THE GOOD, THE STRANGE, AND THE UGLY

The initial reaction to the new Oddworld game was probably one that its developer is used to: confusion. While Oddworld Inhabitants has a long history of unusual games, Oddworld: Stranger is a complete departure for the developer. An action game with living ammo is not exactly what fans were expecting from the company that created feeble protagonists like Abe and Munch. It's more in line with something Rare would do. But like the other Oddworld games, we have a feeling that, for many gamers, Stranger will turn their initial confusion into devotion. We had a chance to check out the title in action, and we can safely say that this is one game that stands out in a crowd.

Although early previews have focused on the first-person shooting aspects and its literally live ammo, based on what we've seen the majority of the game plays in the third-person. As the Stranger, a western-style bounty hunter living among a community of talking chickens called Clakkerz, players will hunt down various outlaws to collect the bounties on their heads. Exploring the town, talking to the Clakkerz, and platforming through the world all takes place in the third-person. But this mode isn't just for getting around. The Stranger is every bit as deadly in this mode as he is with his double-barreled crossbow. He can deliver a devastating shoulder tackle while running and take apart enemies (and the environment) with his deadly spinning punch.

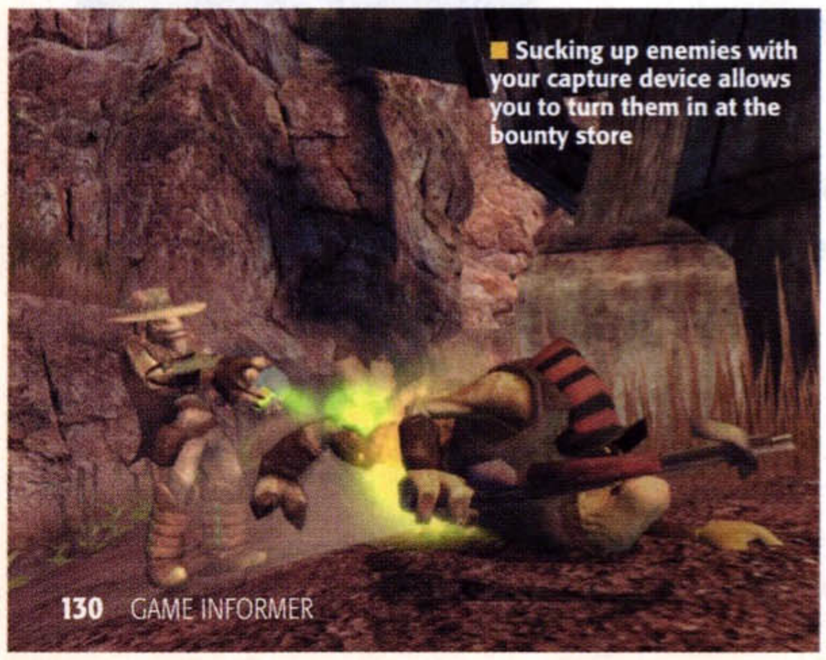
The aforementioned crossbow also has other uses besides shooting enemies. With this weapon drawn, the game switches to first-person view and the Stranger can use his various types of ammo to interact with the environment. For example, the electrified zappflies can start machinery by shooting them at a switch.

The live ammo is far and away the most unique aspect of Stranger. Various types of creatures in the world can be stunned with the Stranger's default ammo, then collected to become part of his arsenal. With two barrels, the Stranger can always have two distinct types of ammunition selected, and can use them in combination. For example, the Stranger can draw enemies to an area with the trash-talking chippunks, luring them into a group of fuzzles (carnivorous furballs that jump on enemies and tear them to pieces). The Stranger can then vacuum up enemies with a storage device on his wrist, and turn the outlaws in for a bounty. But choosing the right way to take your foes out is critical, as outlaws are always worth more alive than dead.

Obviously, Stranger is one of the most unique games on the horizon. It's too early to say if it will be too bizarre, or offer just the right amount of quirk factor. Regardless, we have a feeling that Stranger has many more surprises in store, so plan to keep an eye on this odd title. ■■■

### ODDBOX ONLY?

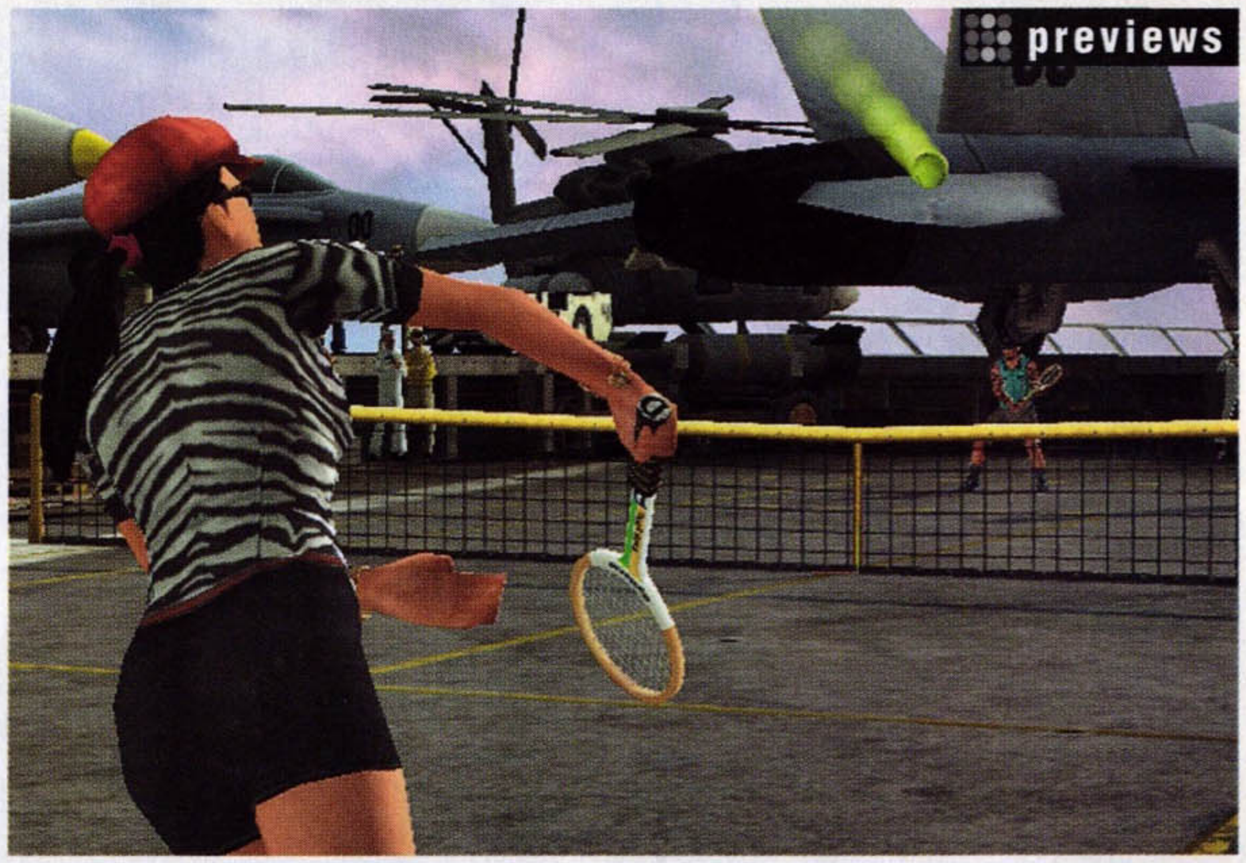
As many readers know, Stranger began its life as an Xbox exclusive title to be published by Microsoft. However, Microsoft cut the project, and it was picked up by EA. The software giant decided to create a PS2 version, but development lagged, and the PS2 version was scrapped. Today, Stranger is once again slated for an Xbox-only release.



Sucking up enemies with your capture device allows you to turn them in at the bounty store

The Stranger has a host of acrobatic moves at his disposal

"You'd better run, boy!"



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

# Outlaw Tennis

**> STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (ONLINE TBA) **> PUBLISHER** GLOBAL STAR SOFTWARE
**> DEVELOPER** HYPNOTIX **> RELEASE** SPRING 2005

## TENNIS PLAYERS DO IT IN THEIR SHORTS

The Outlaw sports series' combination of over-the-top, arcade-style gameplay, copious cheesecake, and adults-only humor has made the franchise a good alternative to more serious sports simulations on the market.

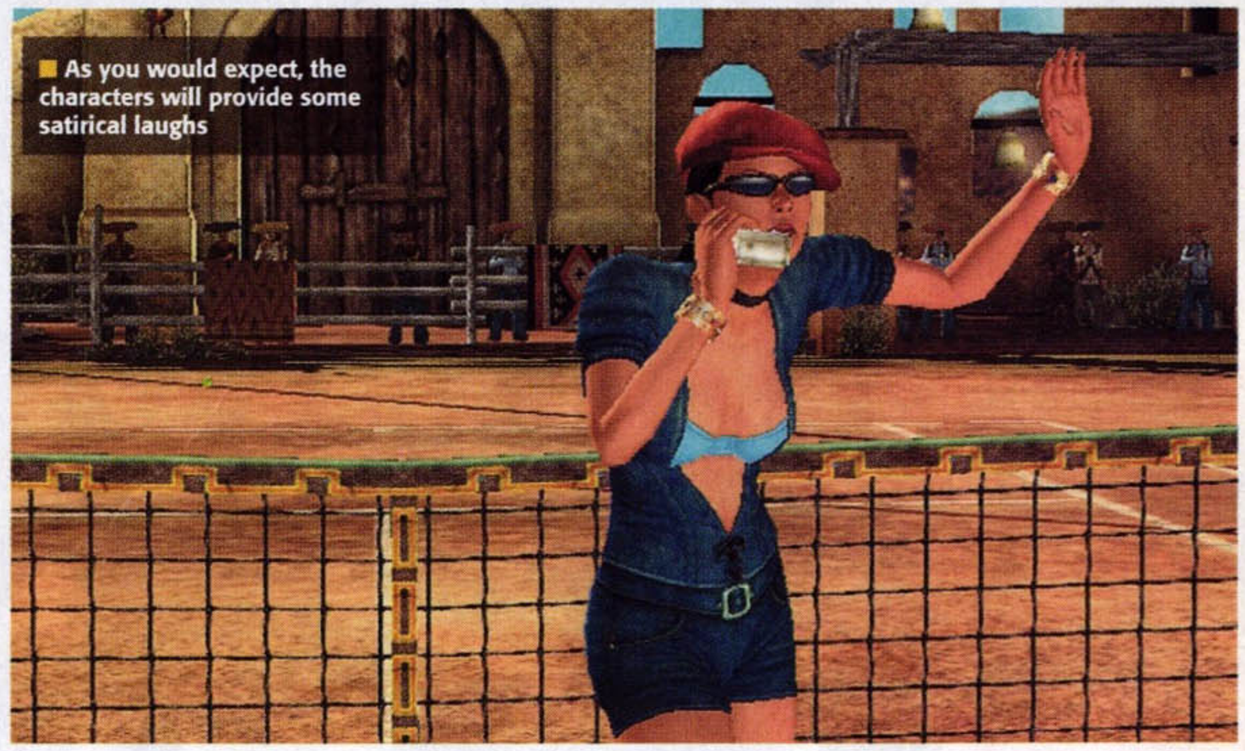
Now, Hypnotix is expanding its repertoire with a new tennis game called, unsurprisingly, Outlaw Tennis. Although the company doesn't have much experience with the sport, Hypnotix president Mike Taramykin feels that its background puts in it a position to create a top-quality tennis game that appeases both racquet-heads and Outlaw fanatics alike.

"Thankfully we already had a talented group of people that had worked on a volleyball game and knew about a lot of the intricacies involved with making a fast-paced 'net' game," observes Taramykin. "I think that we struck a really good balance in Outlaw Volleyball between a simulation and an arcade game, and we wanted to carry the same balance into this project as well."

Of course, no amount of humorous antics can make up for a lack of fundamentals, so Hypnotix is going out of its way to ensure that Outlaw Tennis has the depth of play and feature set to compete with any title on the market. There will be 16 playable characters, five of which are completely new. You'll be able to customize the outfits for each, and also improve the characters' stats in six areas: power, endurance, control, serve, accuracy, and speed.

The environments are equally as diverse, incorporating 12 courts that feature a number of different surface types, ranging from standbys like black top, grass, and clay to wackier fare like hard polished wood, indoor carpet, and snow. These courts will be in locales spanning the globe, many of which display Hypnotix's trademark humor. If you've ever wanted to play a game of doubles on an aircraft carrier or a Colombian drug lord's estate, you're in luck!

As with Outlaw Volleyball, momentum plays a big part in the on-court experience.

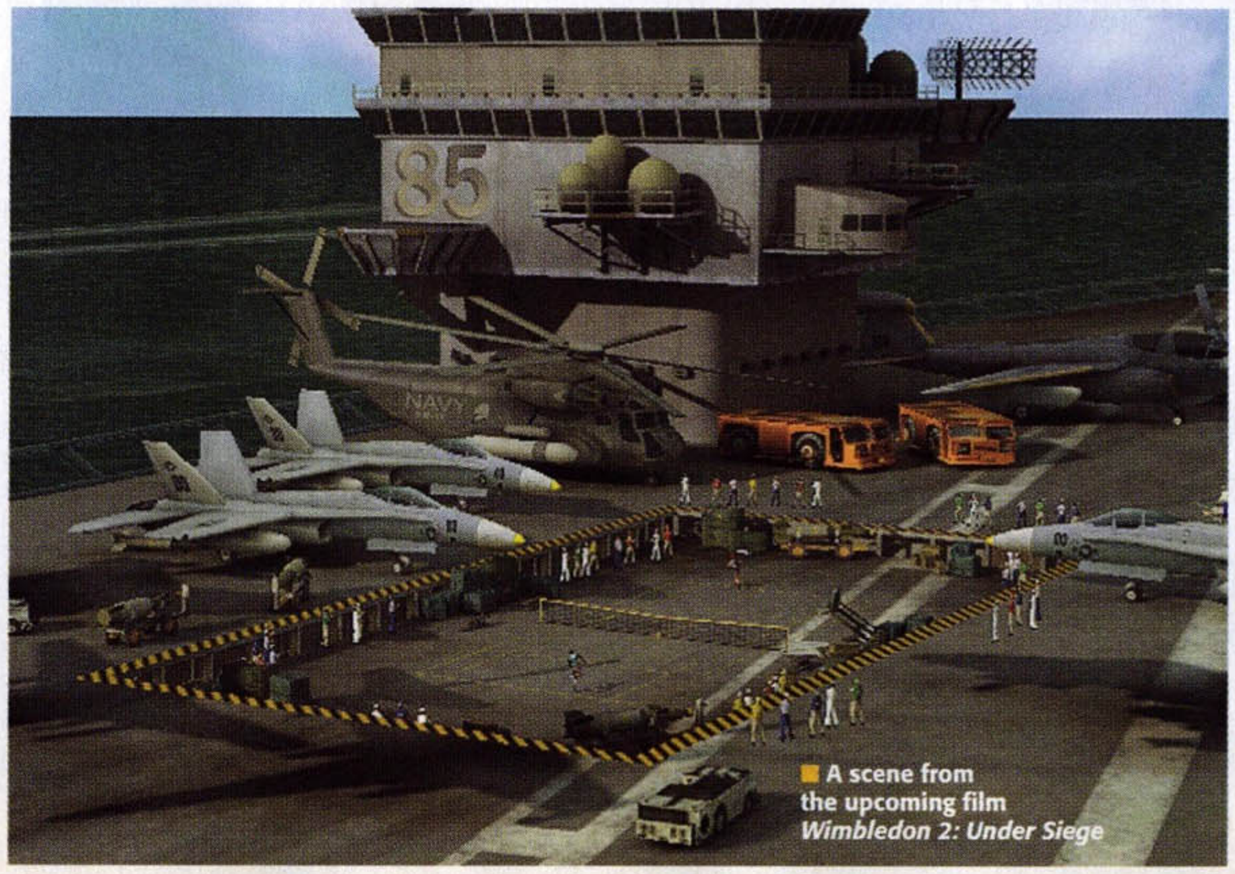


As you would expect, the characters will provide some satirical laughs

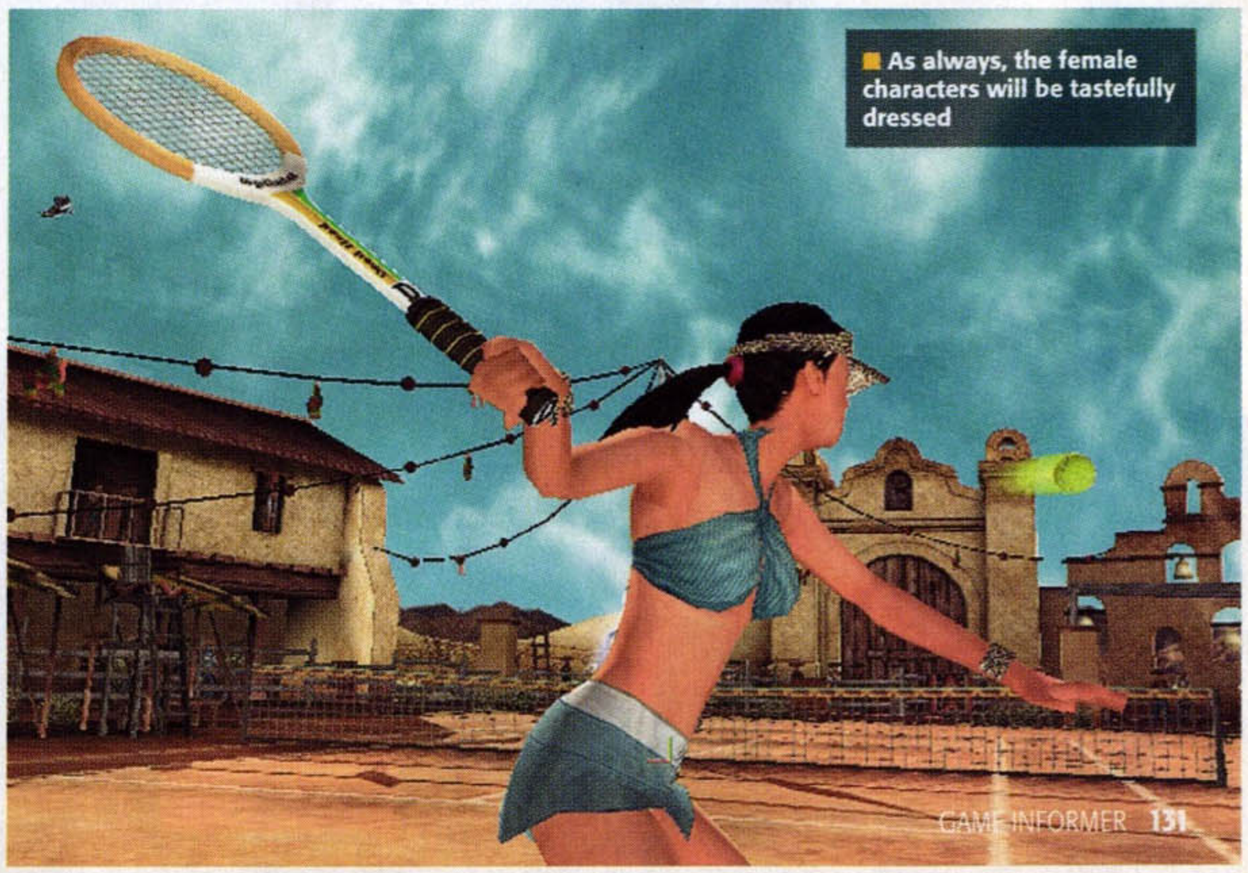
By filling your momentum meter, you'll be able to use your turbo to perform turbo run, turbo serves, turbo shots, and special "signature" shots. Momentum fluctuates on the fly, based on who won or lost the last volley or point. Naturally, fighting also plays a role in gaining momentum.

"We have totally revised the fighting mechanic to make it more like a 'minigame' instead of a watered-down fighter," comments Taramykin. "It was interesting how the fighting system in Outlaw Golf was generally well-received and everyone understood that it wasn't meant to be taken as a serious part of the gameplay. But in Outlaw Volleyball we got very sharp criticism of the fighting system because it wasn't 'real' enough. So in OT we have come up with something that hopefully takes the simplicity of the OG system and adds the head-to-head aspects of OV."

Let's hope he's right, because with Sega's Virtua Tennis series (perhaps) permanently MIA, and Microsoft's Top Spin having been unjustly overlooked, both the PS2 and Xbox need a great tennis title now more than ever. ■■■



A scene from the upcoming film *Wimbledon 2: Under Siege*



As always, the female characters will be tastefully dressed

# VENGEANCE REIGNS FROM ABOVE.

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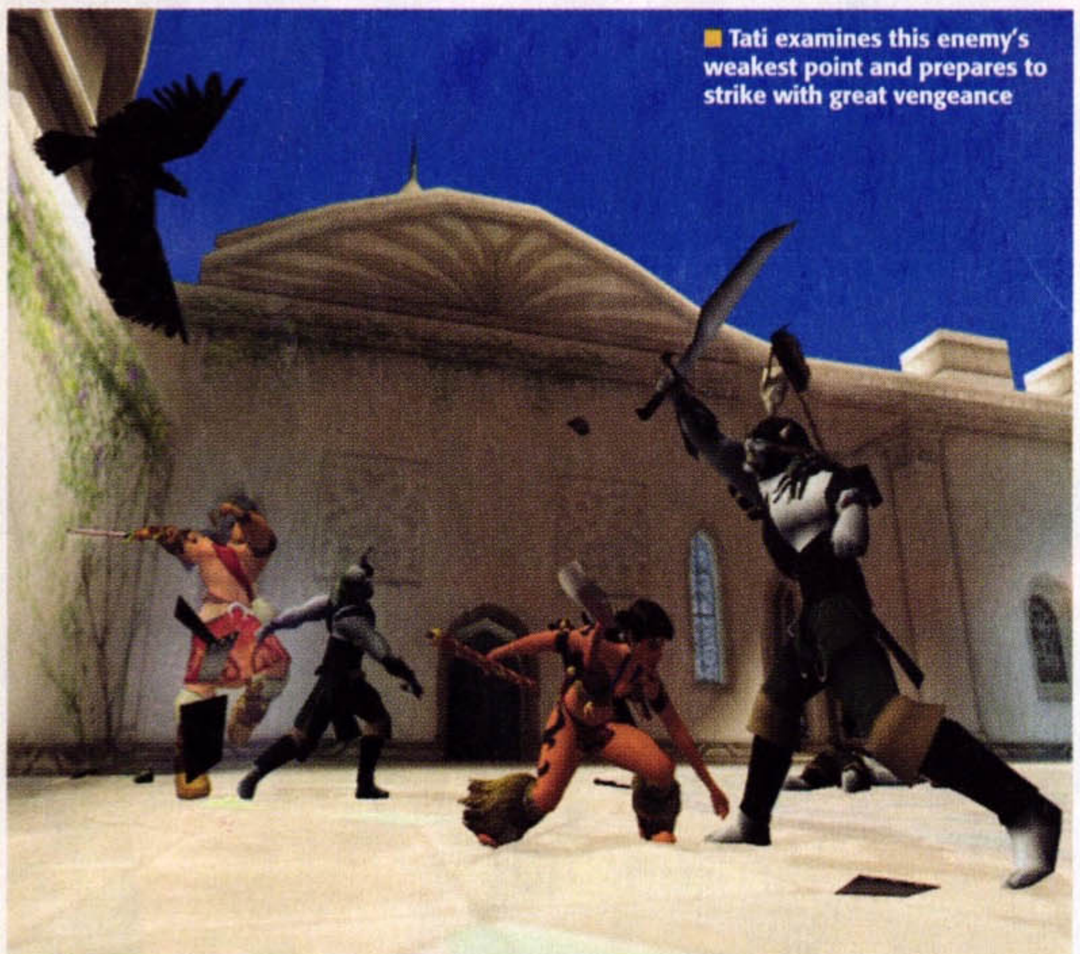
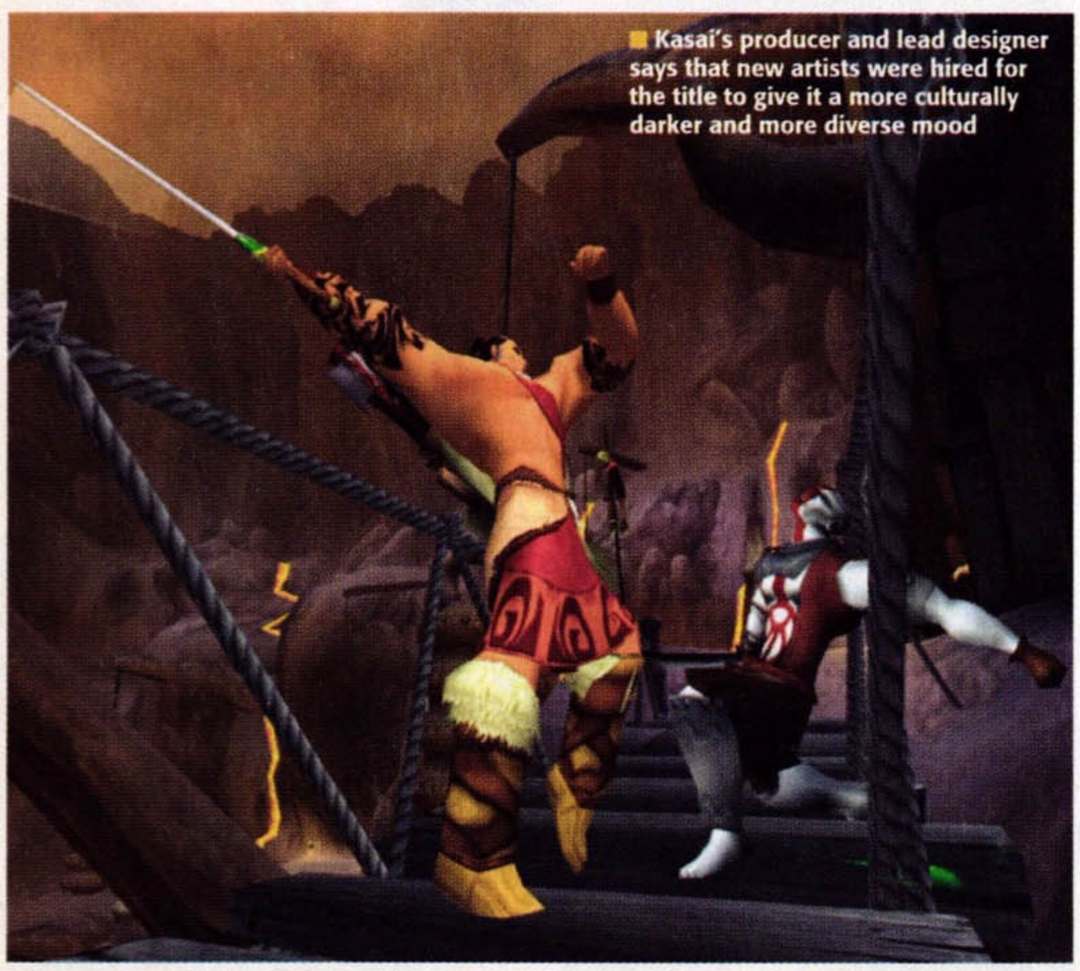


Tati examines this enemy's weakest point and prepares to strike with great vengeance



Kasai's producer and lead designer says that new artists were hired for the title to give it a more culturally darker and more diverse mood

PLAYSTATION 2

# Rise of the Kasai

**> STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (2-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE) **> PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA
**> DEVELOPER** BOTTLEROCKET ENTERTAINMENT **> RELEASE** JANUARY 2005

## RAGE INTO THE DYING LIGHT

At the start of Rise of the Kasai, Rau, the fierce but noble warrior from 2002's The Mark of Kri, is dead. It's a shocking beginning to a follow-up title, but there are many more surprises in store. Serving as both a sequel and a prequel, Rise of the Kasai lets players play events before Mark of Kri and those leading up to Rau's death. Through the help of a magical oracle, Rau and his sister Tati can prevent his foreseen end. Somehow we can't imagine these two deadly warriors accepting this less-than-befitting fate. No, players will have a multitude of ways to fight back the forces of Rau's demise. He will return with all of the ruthless skills from the first game, as well as some new abilities, such as being able to peek and fire his bow (in the first-person perspective) from behind cover. For her part, Tati can not only use the bodies of the dead to scout out areas (like Kuzo), she can also render herself virtually invisible against walls and utilize bomb-like Puffer Mushrooms. These can even be stuck to enemies and detonated later when they near other soldiers. This, of course, is just the tip of the iceberg for Rise of the Kasai. We talked to Jay Beard, president of developer Bottlerocket and the game's producer and lead designer to learn more.

**How will the game's larger levels change the flow of combat and accommodate Kasai's co-op play?**
Designing the levels for cooperative play was both a challenge and a blast. Some gameplay sections start the players together while others start them on opposite sides of the map. We have paths that are separate for the whole section, but offer you glimpses of the other player; while other sections of the game offer the ability to switch paths, go your separate ways, or stay together. We have ultimately gone for variety, trying to create as many challenges for co-op play as possible.

**Will there be co-op kills where both players target one enemy for a superkill?**
Yes. We have a move we call a "Buddykill" that is only available to online gamers (as it requires two players to simultaneously perform a combo). The result is powerful and very deadly.

**Have there been kill animations you've had to cut because they were too gruesome?**
[Laughs] Not yet, but I won't be too surprised if it happens. Although some of these moves are over-the-top, they are always within realistic boundaries for that character, and reflect the character's personality and strength. We do love finding new and interesting ways to kill folks.

**Did the team consider being able to switch between playable characters at will, instead of choosing one or the other just before a level?**
No, not really – although it's a cool idea. We are very much into immersion and mood. We want the player to role-play, and take on the character's personality in the way they play. If we allowed the player to switch characters at will, it would be difficult to set up mood or pacing. One player could be stealthily taking out a couple of guards, while the other could be on the other side of the map in a raging battle. Switching back and forth between these would kill any mood we'd created.

**Talk about how the game's environments will be interactive.**
Players will be able to select some environmental objects and use them to his or her advantage. A group of crates hanging from above can be triggered to drop down onto unsuspecting foe – or your co-op buddy. One that I particularly like is the rope bridge. In classic Hollywood style, you can cut the bridge supports away so it falls into the ravine. This is a lot of fun if you need to stem the flow of enemies coming over the bridge, unless your stupid friend won't get off the damned thing in time. ■ ■ ■

Cut off behind enemy lines with no way to contact help, four young, barely trained soldiers realize their only hope for survival is to head into the heart of darkness. With few rations and dwindling ammunition, the only thing separating them from freedom is 100 miles of ruthless terrain, crawling with unseen enemies and filled with hidden booby traps. Welcome to Vietnam.

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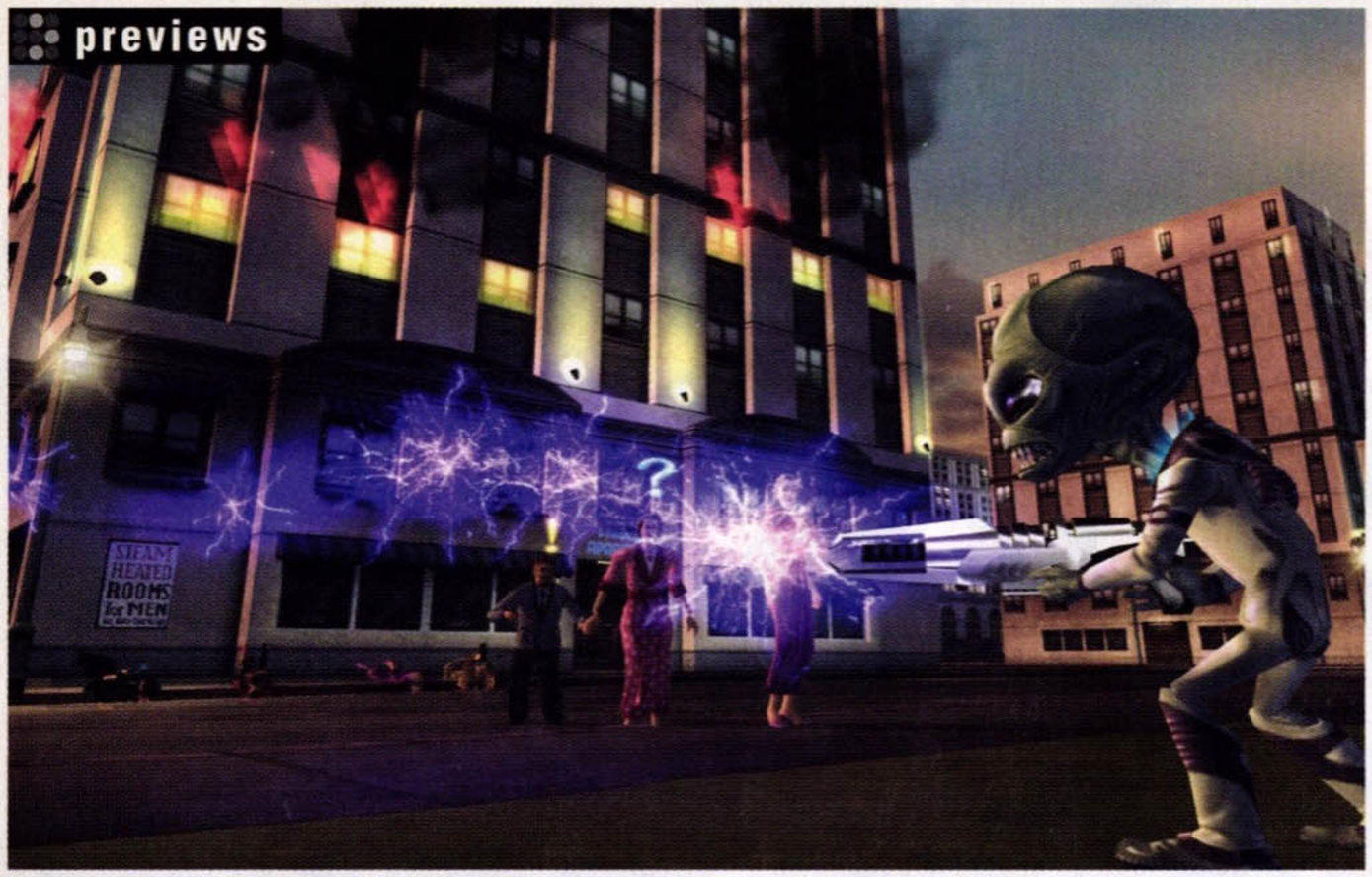
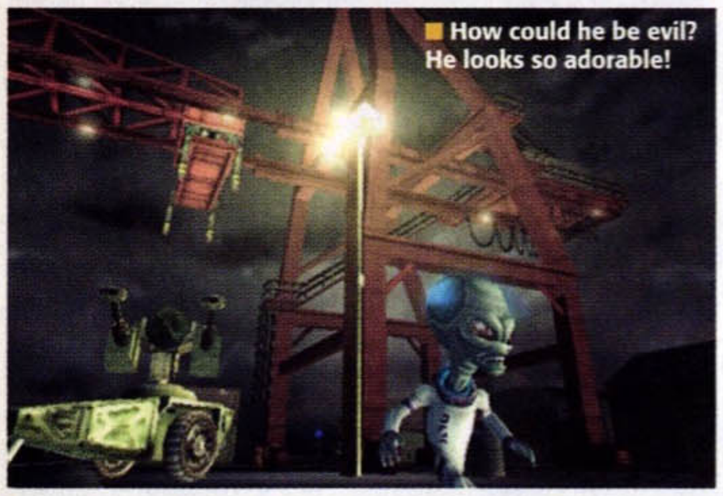


"Ray guns for some, miniature American flags for others!"

Crypto's weaponry is hi-tech and hi-larious



How could he be evil? He looks so adorable!

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

# Destroy All Humans!

**> STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** THQ **> DEVELOPER** PANDEMIC **> RELEASE** SPRING 2005

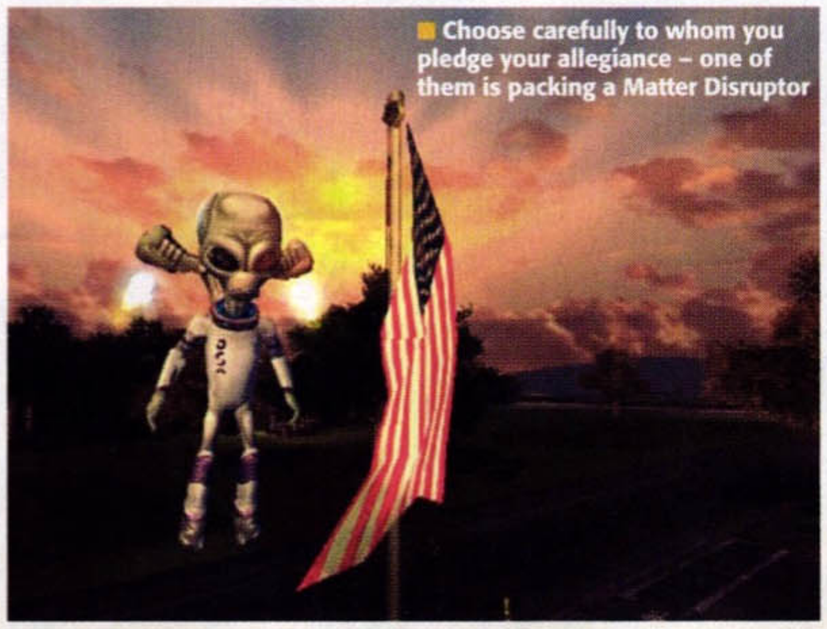
## ...BUT PRESERVE THEIR BODIES FOR SCIENCE

Cryptosporidium-137, or Crypto for short, is not the kind of guy you want to run into on the street. He's short, has teeth with razor-sharp points, and has a deep disdain for humanity. You might initially think that he's just from out of town – possibly Indiana – until you see him leveling buildings and evaporating your fellow humans with glee. This is not your stereotypical anthropomorphic "we bring you peace" kind of space sissy. If you've seen the undisputed film masterpiece *Mars Attacks*, you know exactly what to expect from Crypto.

Pandemic's upcoming alien odyssey was a surprise hit at this year's E3, and as more details about the story are released, we get more and more anxious to pick up a ray gun and betray our own species to further the cause of our cosmic conquerors. Crypto is a Furon, an ancient alien species that has mastered the art of cloning. As a result of years of genetic engineering, the Furon race has been reduced to clones of its most prestigious and productive citizens. Cryptosporidium, in his first incarnation, was known as a warrior who could complete the job at all costs. Cryptosporidium-137 (the 137 indicates that 136 previous Crypto clones have been...decommissioned) is ordered by his superior, Orthopox-13 (you'll notice that all Furon names, when translated, are also the names of various Earth diseases and infections) to infiltrate a 1950s-era Earth, perform some nefarious deeds, and then eradicate humanity.

Fortunately, our planet is not caught entirely unprepared by Crypto's attack. An organization called The Majestic, led by a shadowy figure aptly named Silhouette, has been preparing for the inevitable for years, insinuating itself into the highest branches of government. Its most active agents are the G-men, who are far better equipped than the feeble police forces to handle the Furon's particular brand of mayhem. Though we know that The Majestic is Earth's best defense against the aliens, the fact that there is a shroud of mystery surrounding its activities still makes its true purpose ambiguous. If it turns out to just be another crappy movie starring Jim Carrey, then the aliens have already won. Let us be the first to welcome our new Furon overlords, and inform them that though we are unfit for consumption or galactic coal mining, video game journalists make faithful and trustworthy servants. ■■■

Lame caption about making a milkshake removed by the Federal Anti-Stupid Commission



Choose carefully to whom you pledge your allegiance – one of them is packing a Matter Disruptor

The Furons' tractor beam allows them to steal trucks with minimal effort. CJ, you just got served!

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PC

# Empire Earth II

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 10-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) > **PUBLISHER** VIVENDI UNIVERSAL
> **DEVELOPER** MAD DOC SOFTWARE > **RELEASE** 1ST QUARTER 2005

## MARKING YOUR TERRITORY

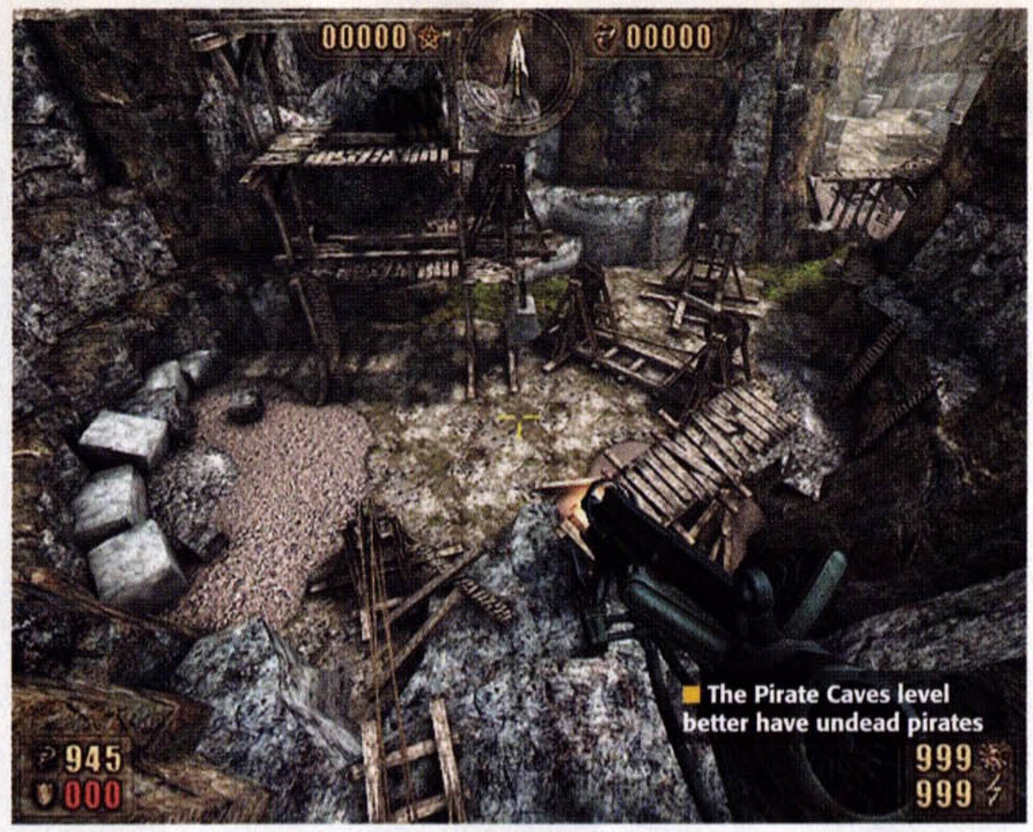
There's been a trend in recent times that is making us very happy: real-time strategy games that push the envelope of convention to deliver new experiences. Empire Earth II looks like it's very much part of this trend – where the original was decried by some for being somewhat vanilla, this sequel is kicking many elements of RTS canon in the throat and replacing them with new approaches to the genre.

In familar fashion, Empire Earth II puts the player in charge of masterminding a civilization's rise to dominance over several historical epochs. You'll have to balance your resources between industry, science, and military in order to make the Earth your empire. That's all old hat, though – the cool things in EE II are in the details. If you've ever been playing an RTS online and had your ally spam "omg expo now noob" and had to try and figure out what's going on, you'll understand how helpful EE II's War Plans screen is. If you've ever spent a minute trying to get your workers to do what they're supposed to, the Civilian Manager will bring a smile to your face. And if you've ever gotten stomped because you had to neglect your economy to focus on micromanaging battles, you'll appreciate the picture-in-picture window. It's elements like these that make EE II exciting – if they all work out as planned, the player will still have full control over what happens while not having to deal with all of the myriad frustrations inherent in RTS games.

The list of sweetness doesn't stop there, either. EE II will feature gameplay-affecting weather, short-term power-ups for excelling in a specific area (like economy or military), and territories à la Risk that confer bonuses to the owner. With all of these elements, Empire Earth II sounds like the kind of title that has a lot of potential to raise the bar for the genre. Bringing all of these cool-sounding concepts together and delivering a fun game is a tall order, though, so cross your fingers and hope that it happens between now and its 2005 release. ■■■

Planning war should be much easier

The most trees in a desert ever



The Pirate Caves level better have undead pirates

PC

# Painkiller: Battle Out of Hell

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 32-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) > **PUBLISHER** DREAMCATCHER
> **DEVELOPER** PEOPLE CAN FLY > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 11

## FIGHTING THE GOOD FIGHT

Earlier this year, Painkiller charmed us with its realistic NPC interactions, detailed emotion system, and deep economic model. No, that's not right. It blew us away with the same reckless abandon with which the main character mowed down the hordes of hell. Soon Daniel Garner's quest to join his beloved in Heaven (wow, he really will do anything for love) will resume with this expansion, which promises more weapons, many more single-player missions, and tweaked multiplayer.

The already-huge solo campaign will be extended by a full10 levels, each of which is promised to be bigger than the ones in the original. The settings won't disappoint either, whether it's a ruined orphanage where Daniel battles the ghosts of children and nuns, or Leningrad during World War II which is populated by Russian and German zombie soldiers. And, of course, the bosses will surely be just as obscenely huge and destructive as before.

We've always loved the over-the-top single-player, but it'd be a tough sell to convince us to play this online rather than any of several other excellent FPSs. Hopefully the multiplayer improvements in Battle Out of Hell will fix that, between the new Capture the Flag mode and additional weapons. Regardless, though, Dreamcatcher is delivering an entire serving of cannon fodder for bloodthirsty avengers of the Lord, and we're hoping that this will convert some of the heathens into giving this excellent title a shot. ■■■

Nothing is creepier than funhouses

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PC

# Stronghold 2

**> STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA ONLINE OR LAN) **> PUBLISHER** GLOBAL STAR SOFTWARE **> DEVELOPER** FIREFLY STUDIOS **> RELEASE** APRIL 2005

## HEADS ON SPIKES

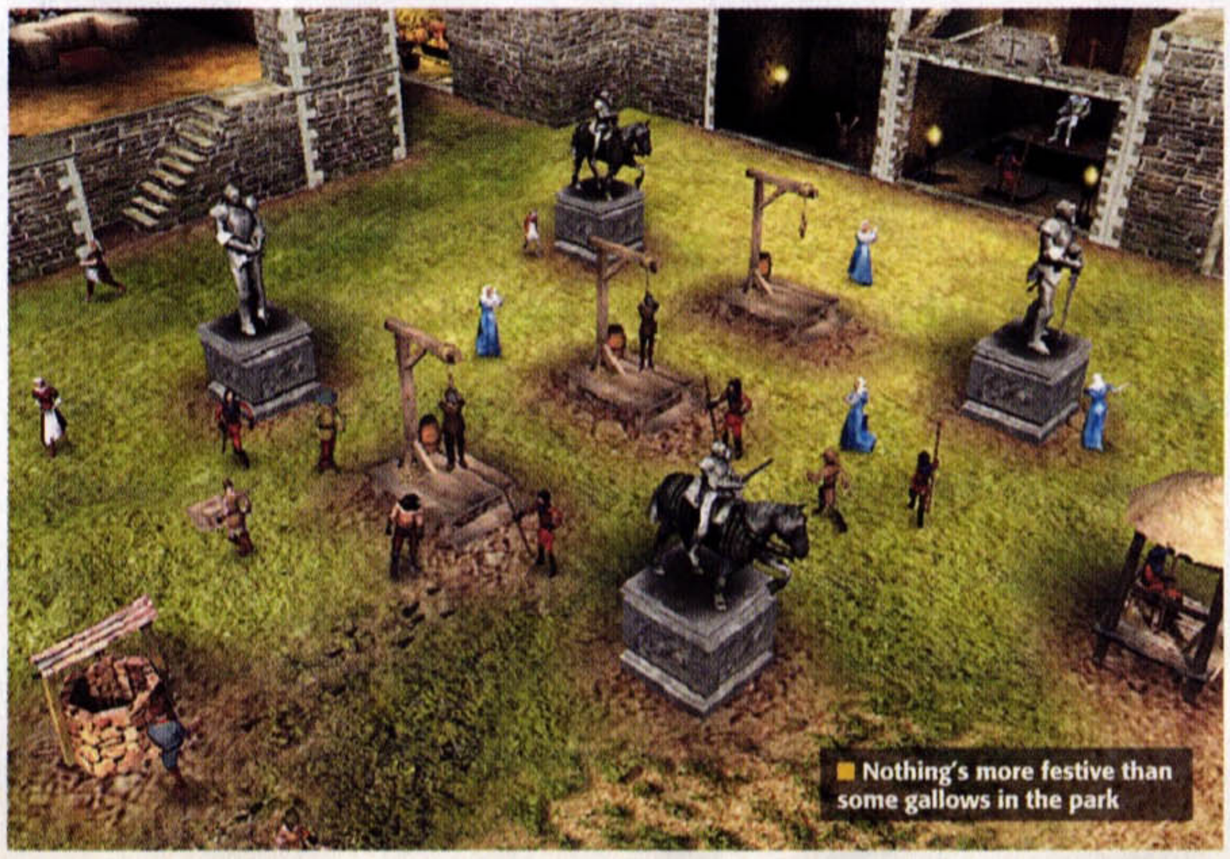
What's better than lording over the peasantry and forcing them to do your bidding? Drafting them into your army and using them to expand your dominion, of course. Stronghold 2 will offer all of this and more, but that in itself is nothing new. As the headline suggests, the interaction with your subjects in this castle simulation goes far beyond abstract policy decisions and menu-based readouts. In Stronghold 2, you'll be able to zoom all the way in and directly see what the common folk are doing and observe firsthand the effects of your leadership.

The Stronghold series (this is actually the third installment, despite the name) is known for combining deep strategy with interesting RTS-style battles and the built-in amusement of simulated people that carry out your will. These elements will certainly be in full force for this title, and many more options for keeping the peasants happy (or obedient, anyway) are promised, from heads on spikes to feasts and jousting tournaments. You'll even be able to design your own coat of arms to fly from the soaring towers of your impenetrable fortress!

Of course, the battle system is getting some significant love as well. Fans of the series will be glad to know that walls are no longer susceptible to the lowliest of daggers – in the previous Stronghold games, enough whacks with even the wimpiest weapon could bring down the walls of the mightiest redoubt. Stronghold 2 will require attackers to bring some serious hardware to get through, giving a much more realistic feel to sieges. Once inside the castle, however, there's still a lot of work to be done. Forces will have to clear out the remaining defenders step by step, room by room. They'll go so far as to fight up and down staircases Errol Flynn-style.

Possibly the coolest new thing in Stronghold 2 is the honor point system. You earn these by holding jousts or feasts, capturing holy relics, and the like. They can be used to improve your dominion in several ways. You'll be able to upgrade regular units into Knights, which more or less wipe the field of enemy troops. That's not even their main use, though – Global Star isn't saying anything about that, other than that it's really, really cool. Our money is on Stronghold 2 expanding the franchise beyond a single castle, and perhaps allowing honorable players to control multiple strongholds. That's all speculation, though.

This title brings the franchise into 3D for the first time, and as you can see, the engine looks robust. Between that and all of the other improvements, Stronghold 2 looks to be one of the most exciting strategy titles of 2005. ■■■



Nothing's more festive than some gallows in the park

Battles look infinitely better now

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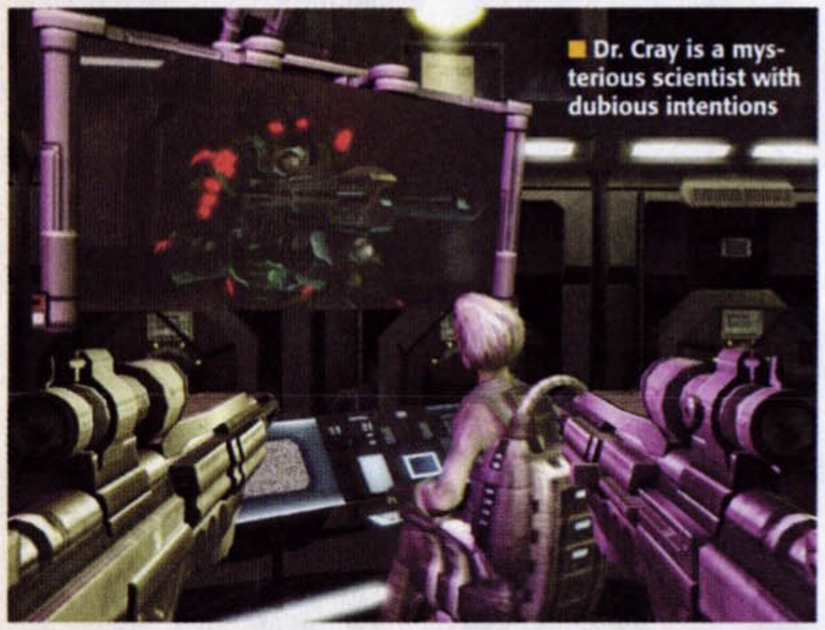
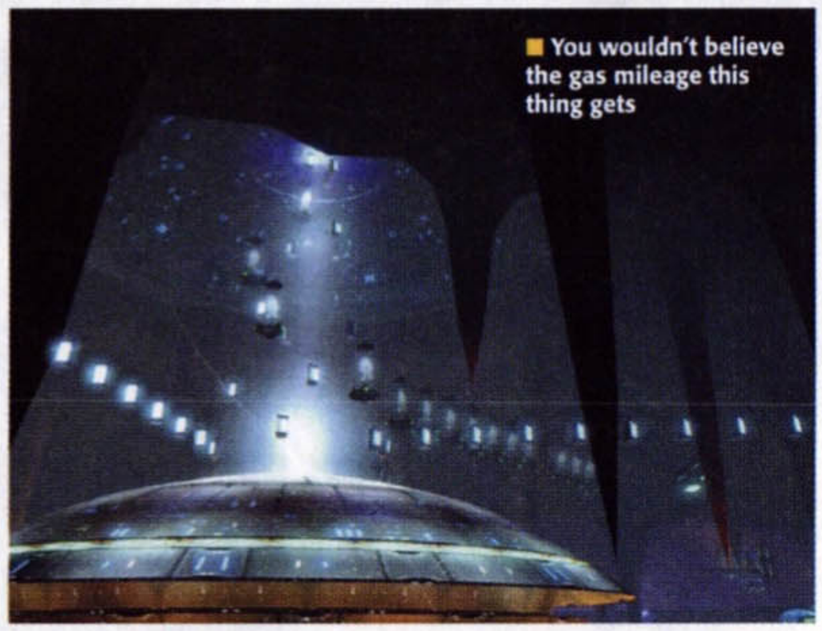
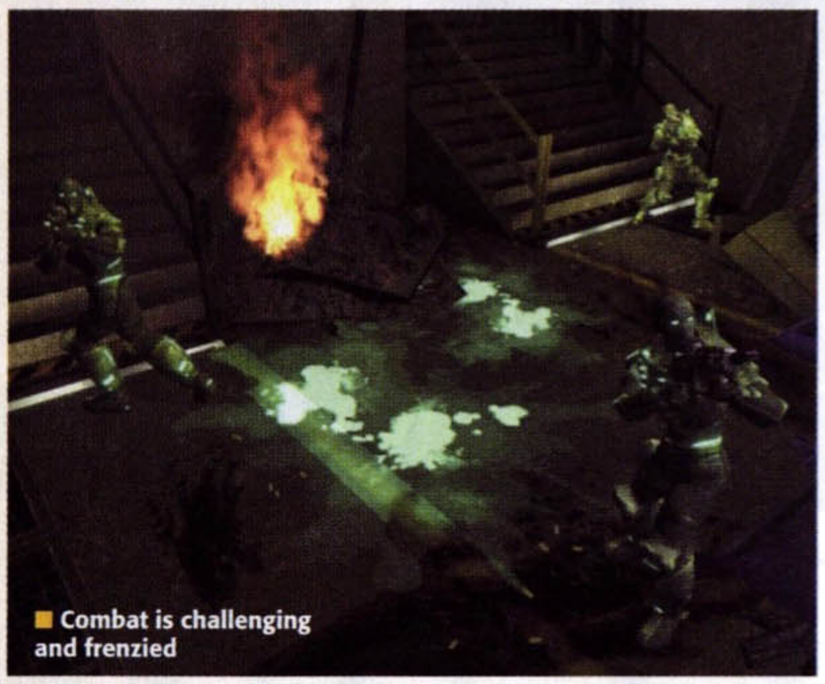
It looks as if dual-wielding is here to stay

Creatures are being designed by the same team that did *Aliens*


Dr. Cray is a mysterious scientist with dubious intentions


You wouldn't believe the gas mileage this thing gets

"You want to probe what?!"


Combat is challenging and frenzied

Early on you'll be accompanied by fellow HAZMAT team members

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

# Area 51

**> STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE OR XBOX LIVE) **> PUBLISHER** MIDWAY
**> DEVELOPER** INEVITABLE ENTERTAINMENT **> RELEASE** SPRING 2005

## CONSPIRACY THEORY

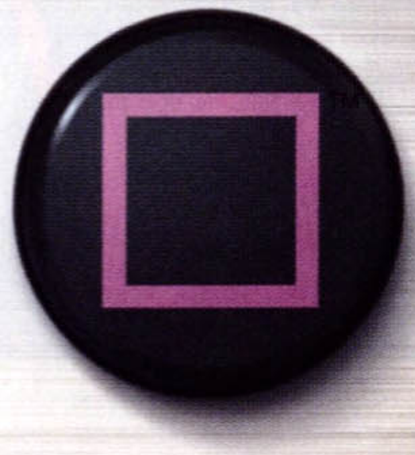
Serving up a heaping dish of government secrets, extreme action, and soaring production values, Area 51 looks to be well on its way to giving us one incredible shooter to look forward to next year. Set in the infamous secret base, it delves into such well-known mysteries as the faked lunar landing, the Roswell UFO crash, and even the rumored alien autopsies that followed. With the aid of David Duchovny (of *X-Files* fame) voicing the lead character, some incredible CG cut scenes, and an intense and highly detailed FPS experience, we're convinced this may be one to watch.

Area 51 has been locked down due to a viral outbreak in the facility. This has left all personnel trapped inside as the mutagenic virus begins to spread. Enter Ethan Cole, of the government's HAZMAT division, who is sent in to investigate and contain the problem. As you might imagine, things are not as they seem, and the secret facility turns out to be housing more secrets than anyone outside had even imagined, not the least of which is an entire alien colony buried deep beneath the earth.

Our first impression of this shooter was surprise at the gorgeous quality of the opening cinematic and the fevered pitch of combat in the initial levels. This opinion was strengthened once we got our hands on a controller, where movement was responsive and the weapons had a visceral and powerful feel to them. Dual-wielding is available, and you'll encounter both conventional and alien weaponry to utilize. In addition, it's not long before Cole becomes infected with the same mutagen that has mind-controlled the rest of the personnel. However, with some help from a suspicious scientist, he learns to harness the virus to perform superhuman actions.

Creatures are being designed by the same studio that worked on *Aliens*, *Predator*, and *Jurassic Park*, and it shows in the frightening encounters you'll face against mutated humans and alien foes. Areas are appropriately claustrophobic at points, and genuinely chaotic at others, as all the government's best kept secrets are revealed in surprising story twists. At one point, we emerged from an elevator onto a studio set where the abandoned moon lander sat upon a fake lunar surface. We promptly drew a bead on the hanging set-piece of Earth and shot it out of the sky. These sorts of humorous moments are interspersed with frightening encounters like when we passed a group of alien surgeons dissecting an apparently live human captive.

Multiplayer is receiving equally notable attention, with 16-player support through all the familiar game modes like Deathmatch and Capture the Flag, as well as a potentially cool team battle mode between the humans and aliens. If everything continues to come together as it has, Area 51 looks to be one secret you'll want to know about in 2005. ■■■



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PC

# World of Warcraft

**> STYLE** MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING GAME **> PUBLISHER** VIVENDI UNIVERSAL
**> DEVELOPER** BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT **> RELEASE** DECEMBER

## DISCOVERING YOUR HERITAGE

*Nerds of persuasions other than the Warcraft kind may not realize it, but Blizzard Entertainment actually does have a richly detailed fiction outlining the history of the Warcraft universe. Of course, the famed developer is weaving much more of the story into its upcoming MMORPG, World of Warcraft, than was ever possible in the three Warcraft RTS titles. The conflict between Horde and Alliance, as well as the other threats that face each nation, are ever-present in the life of a hero. There are a total of eight races in the game, and we got a sneak peek at a typical progression of a member of one of them – the Tauren.*

### COMING OF AGE

Upon creating your hero, you'll begin learning about Tauren society and its relationship to the rest of the world. The chief of your village starts you down the path of a Tauren adult, giving you an introduction to the underlying reverance of nature that anchors everything about how the Tauren look at the world. You'll embark on vision quests, commune with your ancestors, and begin the work of fighting those who would despoil the balance of the natural order. Chief among these are the Venture Co. goblins, who are pushing in on Tauren lands to rape them of their resources. Fortunately for you, they're about half your size.

### WANDERJAHR

After proving your mettle to the elders as a worthy Tauren, you'll start receiving quests that take you out of your race's domain and into other areas of the continent of Kalimdor. Bringing the fight to the enemy is not without its risks, though, and you'll have to venture deep into the Wailing Caverns to put a stop to the depredations of a corrupt sect of Night Elf druids who are poisoning the land. During the course of these adventures, you will also encounter and likely befriend members of the rest of the Horde. It is not uncommon to see orcs, trolls, and Tauren travelling together to further their aims.

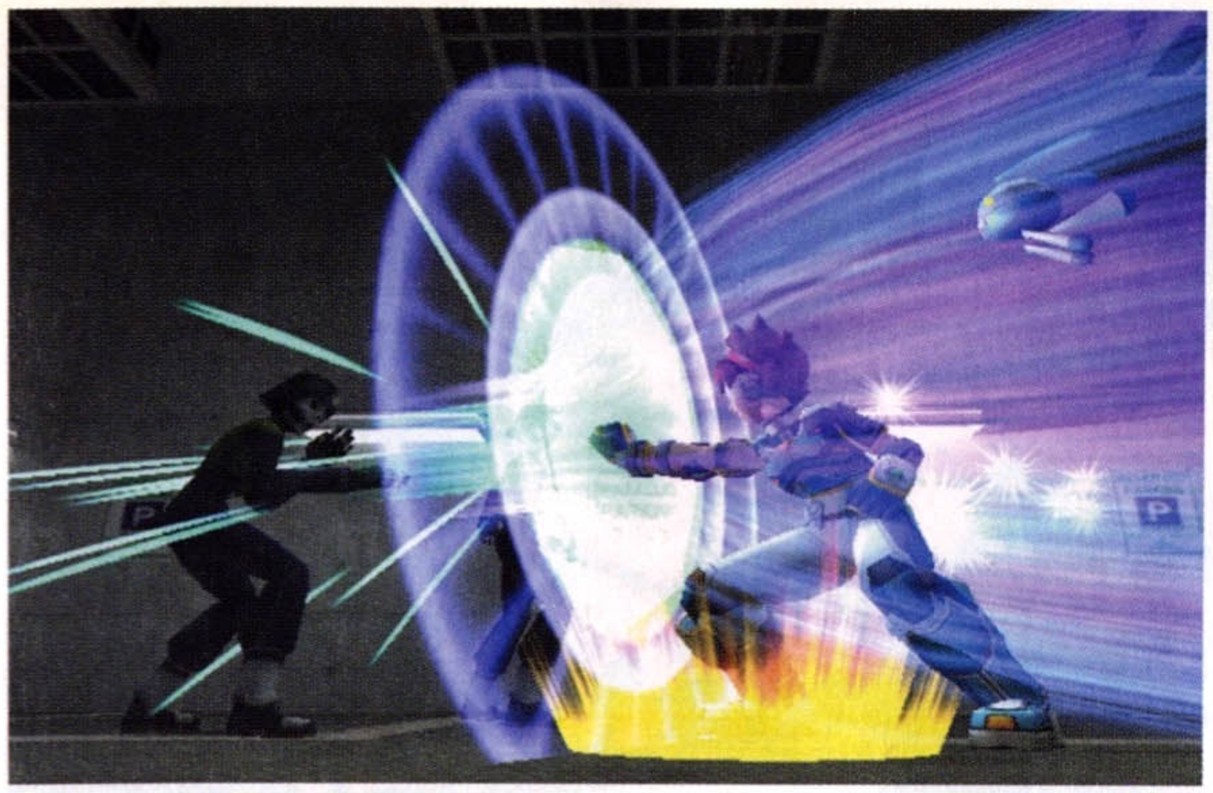
### BECOMING A TRUE HERO

Having successfully defended your people from their immediate foes, your path as a Tauren will inevitably lead to conflict with the encroaching Alliance of humans, Night Elves, dwarves, and gnomes. Only the mightiest of heroes answer the call to prevent these great nations from desecrating all that you and your allies hold dear. But, the strength you have found in yourself over the course of your many adventures should hold true in even the face of enemy champions whose skill and resolve match your own. The embattled Horde needs all of the heroes it can find, and both power and riches await those who can survive in the crucible of war.

### UNCERTAIN ALLIES

As you grow in power and skill, it will eventually fall to you to end the Venture Co. menace for good. To do this, however, it will be necessary to travel across the sea and seek out information in the Eastern Kingdoms. There you will need to explore the lands of the Forsaken, which are the free-willed undead who are nominally allied with the Horde. Much as you may not like their unnerving nature, they are the enemies of your enemies and thus allies by default. Once you've accomplished what you came to the Eastern Kingdoms for, you'll make your way back to Kalimdor and destroy the Venture Co. base in the Stonetalon Mountains, stopping them from defiling Kalimdor with their loathsome presence.

*Obviously, there are many more things to do and dungeons to conquer in World of Warcraft, but these are at least a taste of the kinds of adventures that players will have a chance to undertake. Also, you'll by no means be shoehorned into following a linear path through the world. From what we've seen, the game is structured to give direction to those who want it, while allowing players to freely ignore the tasks they've been given. Any way you slice it, WoW is already a blast to play in beta, and will no doubt be even sweeter when it launches this December.*



PLAYSTATION 2 I GAMECUBE

# Virtua Quest

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG > **PUBLISHER** SEGA OF AMERICA > **DEVELOPER** SEGA AM2 > **RELEASE** WINTER

## THE KARATE KID

A new chapter in the Virtua Fighter franchise is on the way, although it's a little different than what fans may be expecting. Rather than a traditional fighting game, Virtua Quest is actually an action/RPG in the vein of Kingdom Hearts. Don't worry – no Disney icons are involved. Like Kingdom Hearts, Virtua Quest casts players in the role of a young boy who encounters characters from an established franchise.

Virtua Quest stars Sei, a young boy with the unique ability to absorb "Virtua Souls," mysterious items that contain data on the martial arts abilities of the famed Virtua Fighter warriors. By absorbing these Souls, Sei is transported to a special training area, where one of the Virtua Fighters teaches him a new move. Eventually, Sei will learn 45 special moves, all of which can be used in his quest. While his martial arts repertoire will become quite formidable, it is not Sei's only weapon. He also sports a special energy whip, which can be used to swing across distances and as an offensive weapon. Sei can actually pop an enemy up into the air, grab him with the whip, pull him down, and continue his combo! Although the game has a cartoonish visual look, it still delivers the intense action associated with the Virtua Fighter games.

Of course, no action game is complete without villains. As Sei increases in power, his special abilities attract the attention of an organization called Judgement 6, an evil syndicate intent on harnessing Sei's abilities to destroy the virtual world. Only by harnessing the strength of the Virtua Souls can Sei have any hope of defeating the power-hungry criminals. Who will control the virtual world? That will be up to the players that accept the challenge of Virtua Quest when it releases this winter. ■■■

■ Many familiar faces from the Virtua Fighter series will make appearancess

XBOX I PC

# Sid Meier's Pirates!

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (PC), 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (XBOX) > **PUBLISHER** ATARI > **DEVELOPER** FIRAXIS
> **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 16 (PC), SPRING 2005 (XBOX)

## Y'ARR!

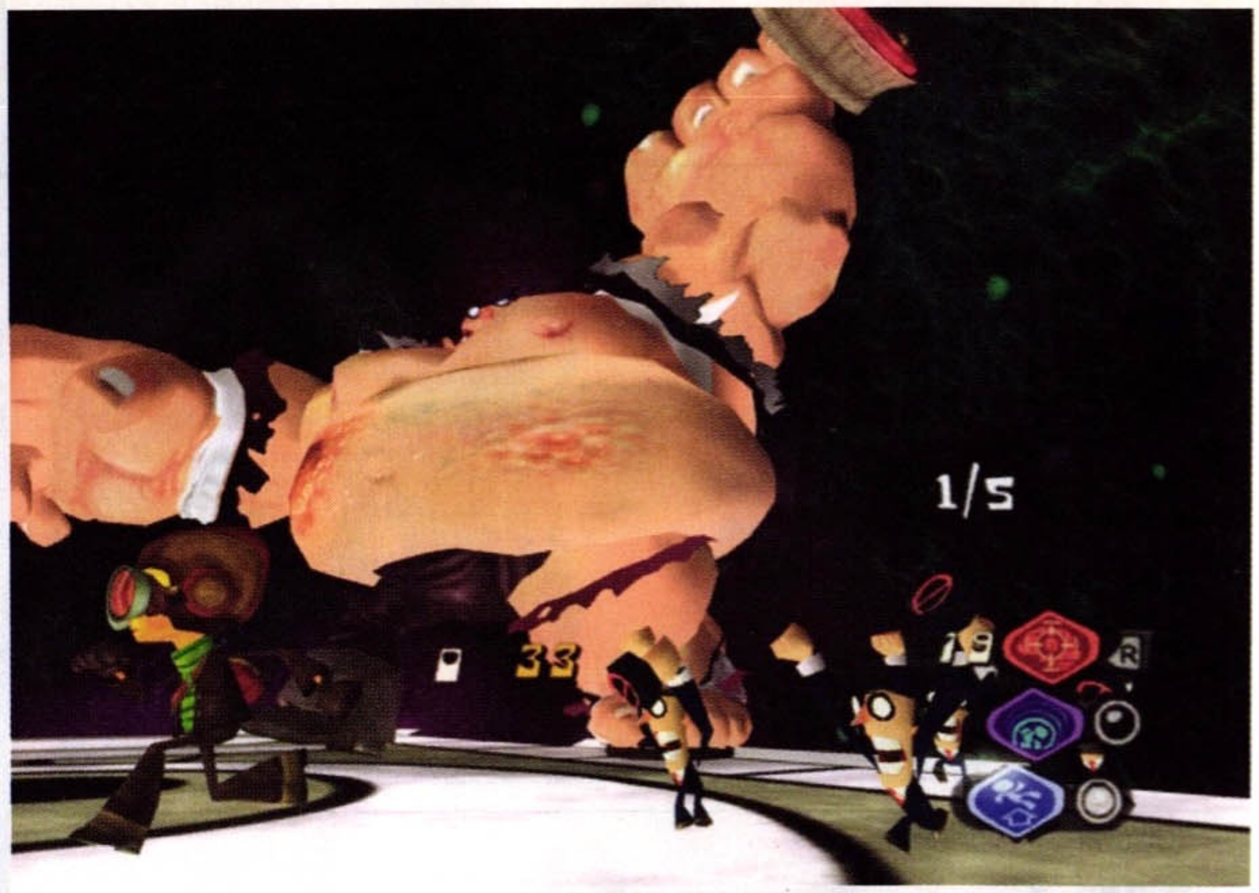
Being an actual pirate would suck. Scurvy, starvation, being hunted by entire fleets of ships – the life of a sea dog was a last resort for most, despite what Hollywood would have you believe. We got a chance to play an early build of the PC version of this title, and Sid Meier's Pirates happily ignores all of these terrible truths and presents a world of adventure, heroism, and swashbuckling goodness for your gaming pleasure.

In many ways a retooling of the 1987 classic of the same name, Pirates seems at first glance to be more of a collection of minigames than a cohesive high seas saga. When you're playing it, though, it becomes apparent that all of the different facets of the game influence each other in many ways. Impress a town's governor by preying on his enemies, and his daughter may ask you for a dance. Win her heart through your fresh moves and she might reward you with a map to buried treasure, a fancy new shirt, or even her hand in marriage. It's relationships between events like these that make you feel more like a part of a Robert Louis Stevenson novel than a spastic cartoon in WarioWare.

Speaking of relationships, the choices you make during the adventure affect how the world develops as well. Sink a galleon full of immigrants bound for a town, and you'll drastically change the course of its growth. Deal with a notorious pirate and trade will flow more easily throughout a region. These sorts of things have a real impact on the Caribbean of the game, and contribute greatly to the sense of immersion. Plus, you have to consider your standing with each of the four major powers as well – if you plunder enough Spanish treasure ships, their entire mighty armada will be gunning for you.

In true Sid Meier fashion, there is a merchantman's hold full of content for players to explore in Pirates – far more, in fact, than we could possibly tell you about here. If exploring and helping to shape a completely open world and amassing more booty than Sir Mix-A-Lot sounds appealing, you'll want to keep this one on your radar. ■■■

■ The dueling minigame is simplistic yet fun



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# Psychonauts

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM > **PUBLISHER** MAJESCO > **DEVELOPER** DOUBLE FINE PRODUCTIONS (XBOX). BUDCAT CREATIONS (PS2)
> **RELEASE** SECOND QUARTER 2005

## JOURNEY TO THE CENTER OF THE MIND

A lot has happened since we last checked in on Psychonauts. With the departure of Ed Fries (Psychonauts' biggest champion at Microsoft), the game was dropped from the company's roster and picked up by up-and-coming publisher Majesco. Even more shockingly, Majesco recently announced that the game would now be coming to both Xbox and PlayStation 2.

Psychonauts mastermind Tim Schafer (of Double Fine Productions) couldn't be happier with how things have turned out. "[Majesco has] been really supportive… they're enthusiasts and they're big gamers. It's great to work for a little company that takes a personal interest in the game."

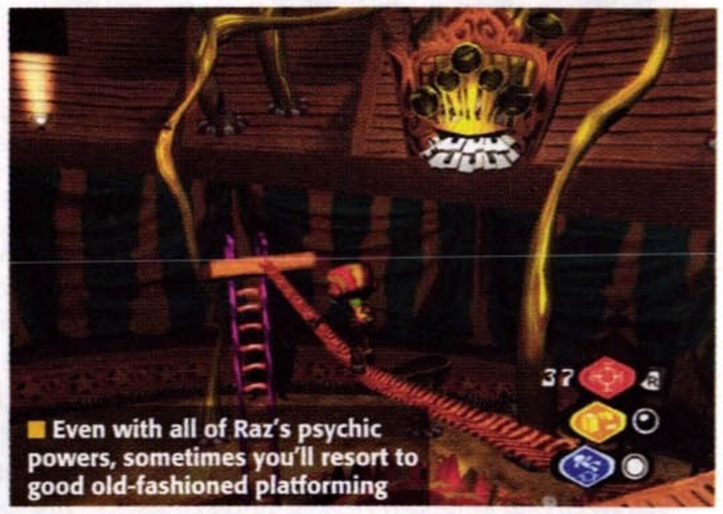
The PlayStation 2 port is being conducted by Budcat Creations, and Schafer is optimistic about how the conversion is progressing. "We work really hard on [Psychonauts], and we're excited about a lot more people being able to play it. I've seen it running [on PS2], and it looks like our game – it looks awesome. Those guys have some tricks up their sleeves. I wouldn't do it if I didn't think it was going to look good."

Schafer also gave us some new insight into the world of Psychonauts. As you've probably read, the game's protagonist, Raz (short for Rasputin) has the ability to enter the minds of various disturbed individuals, and these twisted psyches actually make up 10 of the game's 13 levels. Schafer detailed how Double Fine was going about visually representing the characters' various neuroses during gameplay.

"For example, we have a woman that's bipolar," he explains. "She's really happy, then really sad. Her whole level is a really happy 'musical,' then all of a sudden the main spotlight turns around and it becomes this dark, gothic play. The stage's gameplay flips over completely to represent her mood changing."

Every element of the human mind will be represented, from "personal demons" to more complex traumatic experiences. Another instance Schafer cited was a boss battle in which you must fight your host body's painful childhood memories, depicted onscreen by a hulking, abusive father figure. To combat your foes, you can use one of eight psychic powers, including telekinesis, firestarting, psy-blast (a powerful projectile attack), confusion, invisibility, shield, levitation, and clairvoyance.

These powers can be used in both puzzle-solving and combat, lending the game a versatility well beyond most platformers. For example, if you approach an area full of enemies, you have a few options. You could fight them head on using psy-blast or your flame ability, platform over the area on treacherous high wires and trapeze, or use your confusion power to turn them against each other.



Even with all of Raz's psychic powers, sometimes you'll resort to good old-fashioned platforming

One thing is sure, Psychonauts is a very unique title, both in concept and execution. We asked Schafer if he was worried that the game might be bit weird for the mass market, and he seemed confident that it will find an audience.

"I think that's a misconception, that people don't want unique games," commented Schafer. "You play games…don't you want something unique and different? People think, 'Well, I want that but the public doesn't want that.' I think that's not true, I just think the public isn't being offered a lot of good things." ■■■

This bull represents the rage of the character's mind that you're inhabiting

This boss character uses the power of telekinesis to throw huge chunks of rock at our hero

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– PREVIEW, GMR JUNE 2004

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PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE | PC

# Ghost Recon 2

**> STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE OR XBOX LIVE, GAMECUBE, AND PC MULTIPLAYER TBD)
**> PUBLISHER** UBISOFT **> DEVELOPER** RED STORM ENTERTAINMENT (XBOX, PC), UBISOFT SHANGHAI (PS2, GAMECUBE)
**> RELEASE** NOVEMBER (PS2, XBOX), 1ST QUARTER 2005 (GC, PC)

## A NEW APPROACH

The first Ghost Recon title was a classic example of an excellent PC game receiving an acceptable console port and doing very well. Many PC-impaired gamers who hadn't been exposed to the hardcore stealth action of the franchise quickly became fans when the series made the jump to consoles. For this sequel, however, Ubisoft is going the opposite route: creating the game with the consoles in mind, and bringing it to PC later. They're even going so far as to make two entirely separate games (by two different development studios, no less) in order to realize the potential of each platform.

Ghost Recon 2 is all about being an accurate yet fun simulation of Special Forces action. You can expect to get gunned down in short order if you try to pull a Rambo-style one-man assault; planning and execution get the job done rather than twitch reflexes. Unfortunately, the squad control in the console version of the first game was notoriously cumbersome and difficult to use, especially in the thick of an intense firefight. For Ghost Recon 2, the entire command system has been changed to make it more user-friendly. In similar fashion to Rainbow Six 3, ordering your squad about is a simple one-button or radial menu affair. Even in the early build of the Xbox game that we played, we had no problems jumping right into the role of an elite commando.

On the other end of the spectrum from the drastic squad command improvements, Ghost Recon 2 offers Lone Wolf mode. Some missions in the campaign are played as a Lone Wolf, and you'll be able to replay the squad-based levels in Lone Wolf mode once you've cleared them the regular way. As you might guess, a Lone Wolf fights alone; however, he's also outfitted with the latest and greatest military hardware that the U.S. Army can provide. If you don't think that airburst grenades, gun cameras, and calling in airstrikes do a good job of evening the odds, then we've got a slightly used PSone to sell you.

There's a lot more to talk about with Ghost Recon 2 that we don't want to spoil just yet. Suffice it to say that this title is shaping up to blow the original out of the water in nearly every respect. ■■■

### A TALE OF TWO GHOSTS

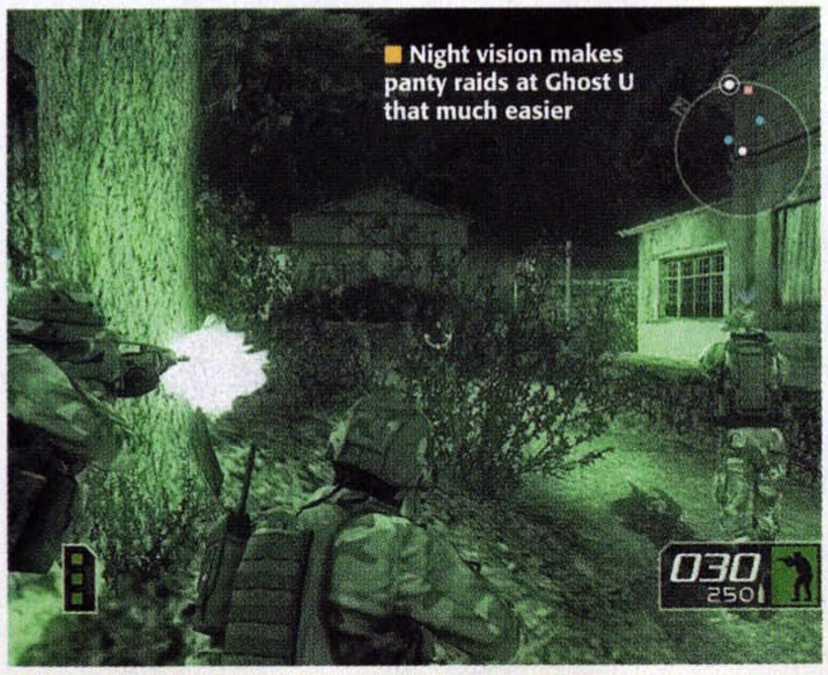
So there are two different versions of Ghost Recon 2 (one for PS2/GC, the other for Xbox/PC), but what exactly distinguishes them from one another? Here's a quick rundown of what makes them unique:

**Technology –** On the Xbox and PC, GR 2 runs on a completely redesigned version of the GR 1 engine. And by completely redesigned, we mean "infinitely better." It still renders out the huge levels of the original to create the feeling of an open war zone, but adds Havok 2.0 physics to a laundry list of other improvements (foliage, water, etc.) to deliver a truly gorgeous game. On the PS2 and GameCube, GR 2 uses the Unreal 2 engine, and the game plays to that technology's strengths by featuring more indoor environments and stealth elements.

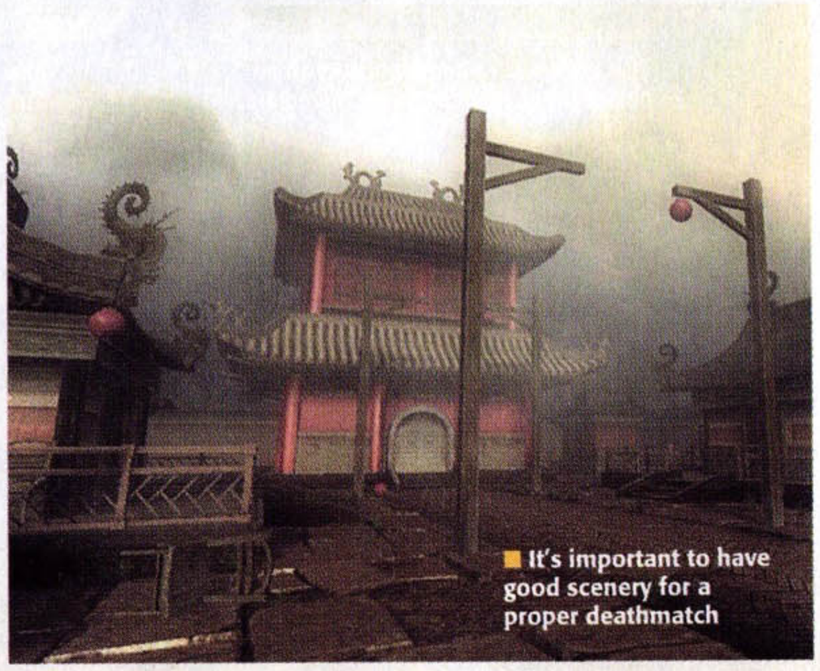
**Setting –** The PS2/GC game takes place before the Xbox/PC one, and has the Ghosts going covertly into enemy territory rather than taking on missions in the front lines. You'll see many more sneaky missions there, interspersed with moments of extreme violence. By the time the Xbox/PC story takes place, the conflict has escalated into open warfare, and the Ghosts have to deal with larger, more open battles and bigger hardware such as tanks and helicopters.

**Multiplayer –** The maps and modes for each version will be 100 percent different. Much like the single-player campaign, the online features will take advantage of the capabilities of each engine, making it a much different experience. In either game, the multiplayer retains the realism of one-shot-one-kill combat, and supports up to 16 players. Also, PS2 players will have access to dedicated servers to optimize their network performance.

■ Character models are nothing short of astounding




■ Night vision makes panty raids at Ghost U that much easier



■ It's important to have good scenery for a proper deathmatch

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GAMECUBE

# Starfox

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** NAMCO > **RELEASE** FEBRUARY

## RETURN TO THE ROOTS

Fox McCloud is one scrappy little guy. Although he's only appeared in a handful of titles compared to other Nintendo luminaries, he remains one of the company's most recognizable characters. It is no wonder, then, that his new title for GameCube is one of the system's most anticipated upcoming games. Fox's new mission, simply called Starfox, has the potential to be the most exciting chapter of the series yet. Not only does it return the series to its roots as a space shooter, but it also retains the on-foot action fans of Starfox Adventures enjoyed.

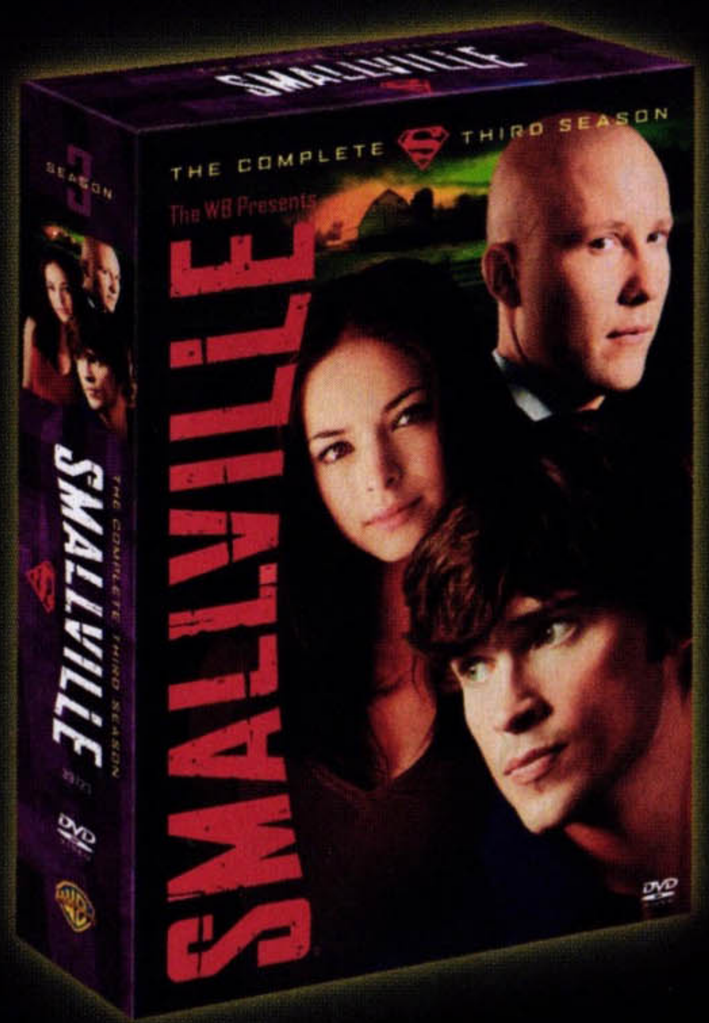
Portions of the game will play out in the third-person action format found in Adventures, but the focus of the title has definitely shifted back to vehicular combat, which will feel instantly familiar to anyone who has played the original games, as the control functions in a similar way. The cast of characters will also remind players of the series' past. Familiar faces like Slippy Toad, Peppy Hare, and Falco Lombardi are all returning, as is Krystal from Starfox Adventures. These characters will be playable in the game's robust multiplayer modes. Multiplayer matches can take place in either vehicular stages or on-foot arenas. Some even combine the two: many maps allow players to commandeer Landmaster Tanks to take out their fellow players. Whether blasting friends into oblivion from the cockpit of an Arwing, dishing out the hurt in an agile and powerful tank, or taking the fight to the street on foot, Starfox looks like it was created specifically to foster friendly competition.

Starfox definitely seems capable of delivering both the space combat fans of the original titles crave, while also appealing to newer fans with the Starfox Adventures-influenced ground-based missions. We'll see how this ambitious meshing of styles comes together when Starfox hits retail early next year. ■ ■ ■

Some multiplayer maps allow for both on-foot and vehicular action

The *Starship Troopers* movies just kept getting worse

Split-screen co-op allows two players to take on missions together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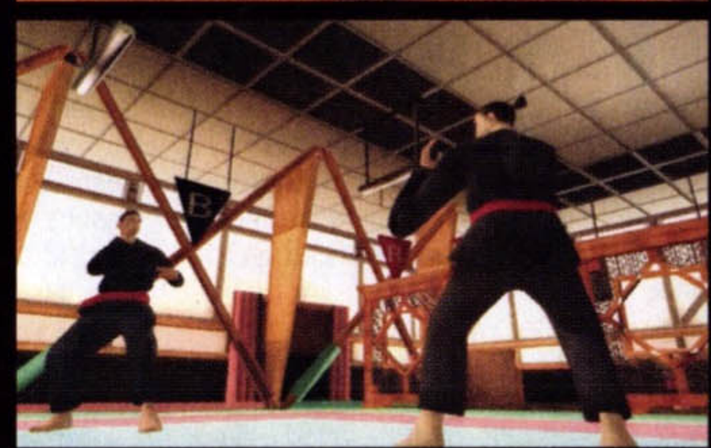

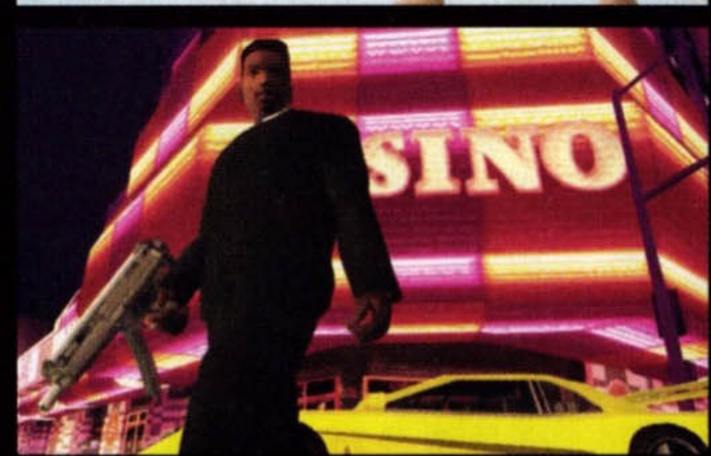


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PlayStation®2

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Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Strong Language
Strong Sexual Content
Use of Drugs

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PLAYSTATION 2

# Outlaw Volleyball Remixed

**> STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA PS2 BROADBAND) **> PUBLISHER** GLOBAL STAR SOFTWARE **> DEVELOPER** HYPNOTIX **> RELEASE** WINTER 2005

## VOLLEYBALL PLAYERS DO IT ON THE BEACH

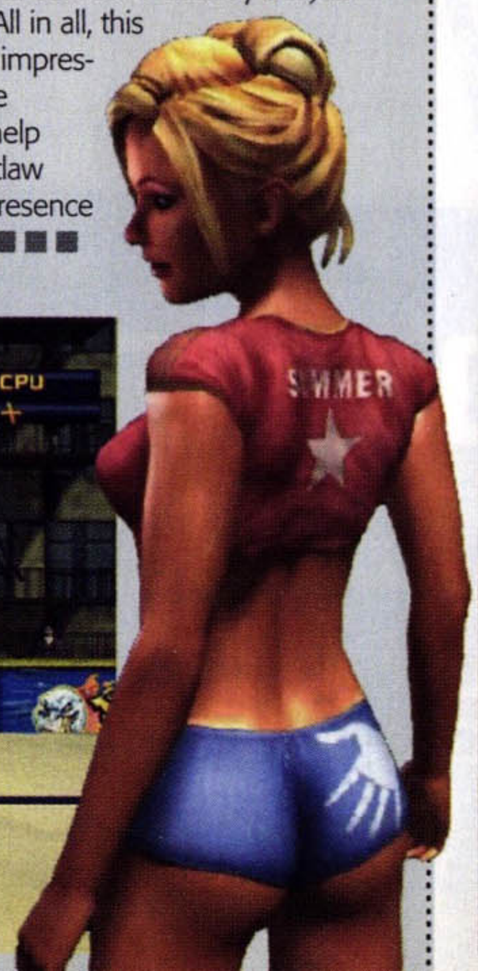
Outlaw Volleyball, released in 2003 for Xbox, has taken its own sweet time in coming to the PlayStation 2, but its sun-kissed visage is finally appearing on the horizon. Thankfully, developer Hypnotix is seeking to appease impatient Sony owners by delivering not a direct port, but rather an enhanced version of the original title.

You know the basics: This is arcade volleyball with 17 characters, a good number of whom are somewhat averse to covering more than 27 percent of their bodies with clothing. It's all so titillating! In fact, a quick perusal of the game's fact sheet uncovered such technical terms as "scantily-clad," "half-naked," and "string bikini." In the interest of journalism, we've been diligently researching these words on the Internet, which is why this preview actually took us three weeks to write!

Hypnotix claims that it has overhauled the control scheme with a new configuration completely tailored to make best use of the PS2 Dual Shock. As before, momentum is key to success, and hot catfights are the order of the day. Hopefully, the company will be careful about improvements on what was already a pretty respectable volleyball gameplay engine, a move that could make Outlaw Volleyball more than just a fun diversion.

There are also some fairly significant additions being made to Remixed. Two new courts have been implemented, one set on top of an aircraft carrier and another that takes the action to the middle of a Vegas casino complete with slot machines and blackjack tables. Also, two new game modes are present that put a new spin on volleyball. One is baseball, where the server is akin to the batter and hits are awarded on the basis of how fast you win the point. Of course, three strikes (lost volleys) and you're out, transferring control to the opponent. Ping Pong takes the rules of that sport (scoring up to 21 and transferring serve every five points until someone wins by two) to the sandpit. All in all, this looks like an impressive port, one that should help establish Outlaw Volleyball's presence on the PS2. ■■■

■ It looks like "El Suave" is packing some heat downstairs!





XBOX | PC

# Close Combat: First To Fight

**> STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR PC INTERNET/LAN) **> PUBLISHER** GLOBAL STAR (XBOX), GLOBAL STAR/DESTINEER (PC) **> DEVELOPER** DESTINEER **> RELEASE** JANUARY 2005

## SEMPER FI!

Developer Destineer has a tall order on its plate with Close Combat: First to Fight. Not only does it aim to create a realistic simulation of leading a Marine fire team in urban combat, the company also plans to deliver a serious online component as well as a balance between the typical babysitting of traditional squad-based shooters and the one-man army of old-school FPSs. From what we've seen, though, this lofty goal may well be within reach for the ambitious developer.

In our hands-on time with First to Fight, it was apparent that the technology behind the game is already in full working order. On both Xbox and PC, it's beautiful and plays smoothly. The AI for your team members and enemies isn't complete yet, but definitely shows potential. For instance, if you issue a move command, your allies will "bound," moving quickly between available cover and supporting their comrades with suppressive fire. Also, if you lay down a huge amount of hurt, the enemies might turn tail and flee the slaughter. If the AI makes good on all the potential it has, it could easily be a major point in favor of this title.

The online modes are also worthy of interest. Co-op and competitive options are present, and both are firmly rooted in the team-based ideology of First to Fight. You'll be able to play the entire single-player campaign with up to four people, eliminating the squad AI completely. Alternatively, your squad of four (with anywhere from one to four human players) can take on another squad in a deathmatch-style setting. Community support is also included, and features clans (Destineer calls them "platoons") and other Xbox Live 3.0 functionality, such as voice and text messaging, leader boards, and stat tracking.

If First to Fight lives up to the promises we've been given about how awesome it'll be, this could make some serious waves in the super-competitive FPS scene. If realistic military action floats your boat, there could be a high tide coming in next January. ■■■

■ 360-degree security at all times is no mean feat

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PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE | PC

# The Movies

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION > **DEVELOPER** LIONHEAD STUDIOS
> **RELEASE** SPRING 2005

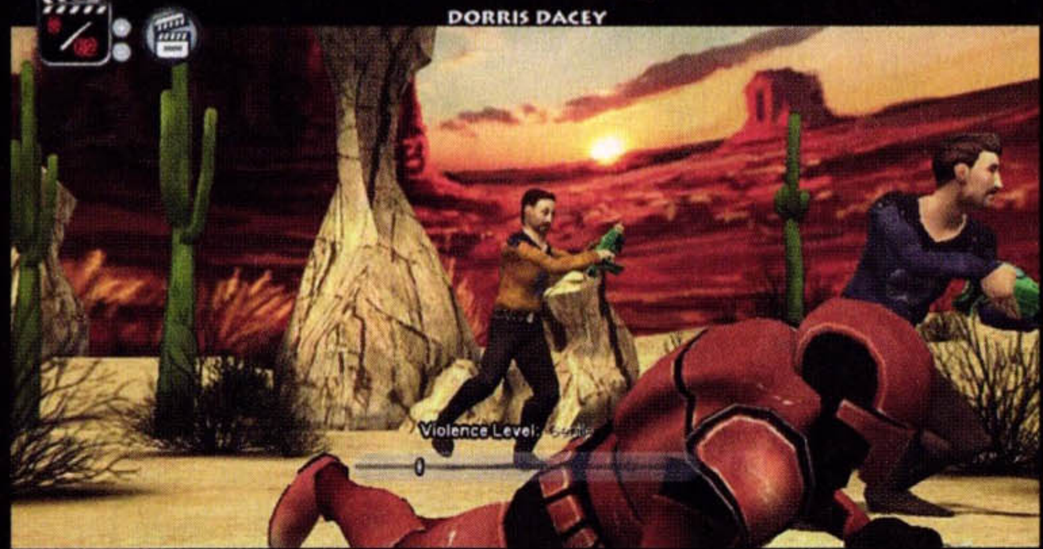
## THE BOULEVARD OF BROKEN DREAMS?

Peter Molyneux got into some hot water recently when he publicly apologized to Fable fans for talking about features in the RPG so far in advance of its release that, by the time the game came out, had been pulled. Will that be the case with The Movies? Molyneux's much-anticipated project has been in the works for a while, and although he has been steadily dispensing the dirt on the title, it looks like The Movies is on track to fulfill all the dreams of success and stardom that you have been craving.

One of Molyneux's overall tenets for the game is that its gameplay is very accessible. Utilizing the pick-up-and-play method that millions have embraced in The Sims, you can lord over your studio lot and control your actors as you see fit. If only getting a star into rehab was as easy as grabbing them out of thin air and throwing them into the clinic (whether it be for alcohol, drugs, weight, plastic surgery, or whatever) as it is in The Movies. On the other hand, if your problems with an actor are more professional, you can remedy that as well. The game lets up-and-coming actors hone their craft by giving you the chance to enroll them in schools. The same can be done for crews who actually shoot your movies. Of course, this kind of hands-on treatment can be avoided for those who simply want to shoot pictures. It's as easy or hard as you want it to be. We imagine there will be quite a few people who only play this game to track the trials and tribulations of their favorite virtual Hollywood star, like they were watching an endless string of news flashes from *Entertainment Tonight* (Miller just can't get over what Lindsay Lohan wore to the MTV Video Music Awards).

We can understand that some might be disappointed that a few features dropped out of Fable during its long development process, but the freedom that The Movies puts at your fingertips cannot be denied. Whether you are a kid from Kansas with Hollywood stars in your eyes or a director with a vision, your dreams can come true. ■ ■ ■

Hammer and Tongs
DORRIS DACEY




■ Jeremy doesn't like westerns that don't feature guys in chaps

PLAYSTATION 2

# Code: Kagero (tentative title)

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/PUZZLE > **PUBLISHER** TECMO > **DEVELOPER** TECMO > **RELEASE** SPRING 2005

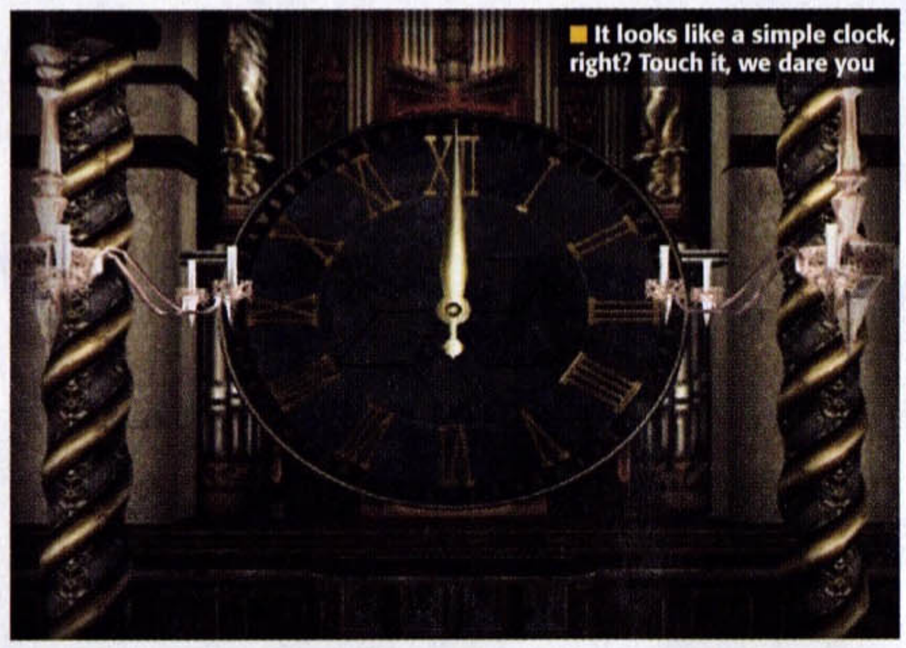
## TRAPPER KEEPER

In 1996, Tecmo introduced a cleverly sadistic PSone title called, fittingly, Tecmo's Deception. The gameplay revolved around setting traps to ensnare and kill those who entered your dungeon. Three sequels followed, and now Tecmo is readying a fourth Deception title, this time for the PS2. The game is currently referred to as Code: Kagero, although that title will change before it hits shelves next spring. What won't change is the gameplay, which still revolves around finishing off intruders in your castle with elaborate and horrifying traps.

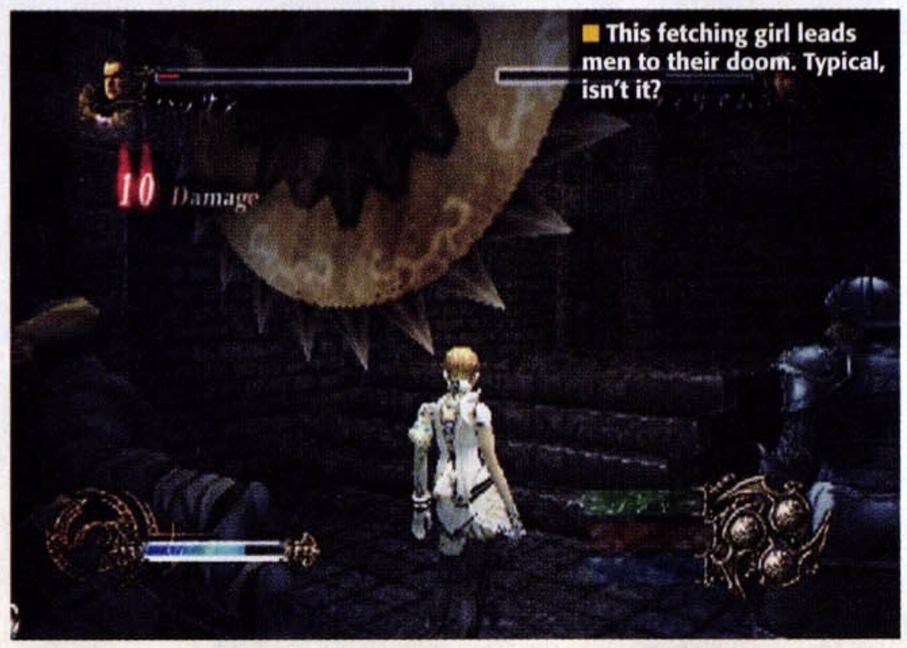
Described as an action/puzzle game, Kagero will charge players with the task of examining the layout of a room by rotating the camera around it and zooming in and out. Once you have determined the best places for them, you will load the room with traps – including such friendly devices as explosives, spiked walls, falling rocks, and more. Some traps will have to be set personally by Kagero's protagonist, a young woman that has been accused of killing her father, who happened to be the king of the land. When pursued by hordes of angry folk who want to see her brought to justice, she decides to prove her innocence the only way she knows how – by committing multiple acts of incredibly brutal and horrific murder!

Kagero will offer 40 to 50 types of traps, many of which can be used in combination. For example, a noble knight who is snagged by a bear trap won't be able to avoid a perfectly-placed spear through the head. It's this type of devious behavior that players will need to enlist in order to fend off all attacks. But caution is required – your traps can kill you as well as your enemies.

The Deception series is one of the most unique in all of gaming, and Code: Kagero is bringing its lethal gameplay to a new generation. With a clever core concept and some beautiful graphics, Kagero is one title that might suck you in, and not let you out. ■ ■ ■



■ It looks like a simple clock, right? Touch it, we dare you




■ This fetching girl leads men to their doom. Typical, isn't it?

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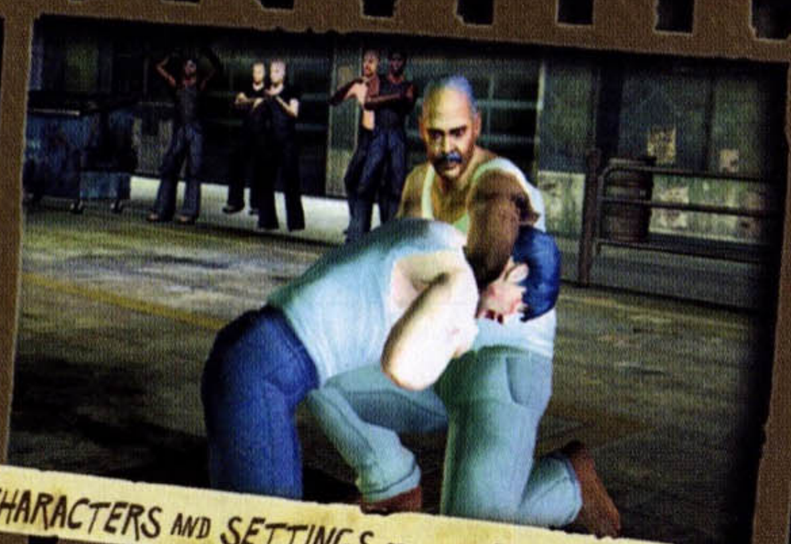
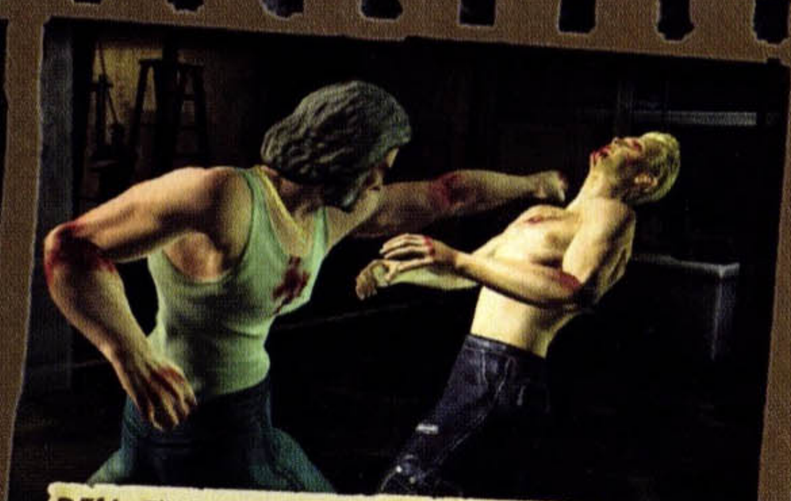

CHARACTERS AND SETTINGS FROM THE FIGHT CLUB FILM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## Halo 2 & Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas

Both of these games are so awesome that we couldn't just pick one Game of the Month. If you have a PlayStation 2, you absolutely need to pick up Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas. If you have an Xbox, you can't live without Halo 2. If you have both systems, the choice is easy…both! These games represent the pinnacle of their respective consoles, and are more than deserving of Game of the Month honors. After you play them both, we challenge you to argue with our decision.

Our crack (or crackhead, we can never decide which) review team rates games in a number of categories to help you sort out the great from the stuff you'll hate. Most games are reviewed by two staff members, and you will find both their opinions on each review. To make things a little easier we have put together some definitions of what the numbers mean, what we look for in a game, and also a cheat sheet so the newbies can understand our advanced video game jargon. It is important to note that the Game of the Month is determined only by the main review score, not an average of the two opinions.

## THE SCORING SYSTEM

| | |
|---|---|
| 10 | Outstanding. A truly elite title that is nearly perfect in every way. This score is given out rarely and indicates a game that cannot be missed. |
| 9 | Superb. Just shy of gaming nirvana, this score is a high recommendation because the game reviewed is head-and-shoulders above its competition. |
| 8 | Very Good. Innovative, but perhaps not the right choice for everyone. This score indicates that there are many good things to be had, but arguably so. |
| 7 | Average. The game's features may work, but are nothing that even casual players haven't seen before. A decent game from beginning to end. |
| 6 | Limited Appeal. Although there may be fans of games receiving this score, many will be left yearning for a more rewarding game experience. |
| 5 | Passable. It may be obvious that the game has lots of potential, but its most engaging features could be undeniably flawed or not integrated into the experience. |
| 4 | Bad. While some things may work as planned, the majority of this title either malfunctions to varying degrees or it is so dull that the game falls short as a whole. |
| 3 | Painful. If there is anything that's redeeming in a game of this caliber, it's buried beneath agonizing gameplay and uneven execution in its features or theme. |
| 2 | Broken. Basically unplayable. This game is so insufficient in execution that any value would be derived in extremely small quantities, if at all. |
| 1 | Pathetic. A morbidly obese game that has stumbled off of the pantry stepladder, whimpering softly as it feebly paws at the waffle mix on the shelf. |

> **Concept:** What new ideas the game brings to the table and how well old ideas are presented.

> **Graphics:** How good a game looks, taking into account any flaws such as bad collision or pop-up.

> **Sound:** Does the game's music and sound effects get you involved or do they make you resolve to always play with the volume down?

> **Playability:** Basically, the controller to human interface. The less you think about the hunk of plastic in your hands, the better the playability.

> **Entertainment:** Flat out, just how fun the game is to play. The most important factor in rating a game.

> **Replay Value**

**High** – You'll still be popping this game in five years from now.

**Moderately High** – Good for a long while, but the thrills won't last forever.

**Moderate** – Good for a few months or a few times through.

**Moderately Low** – After finishing it, there's not much reason to give it a second go.

**Low** – You'll quit playing before you complete the game.

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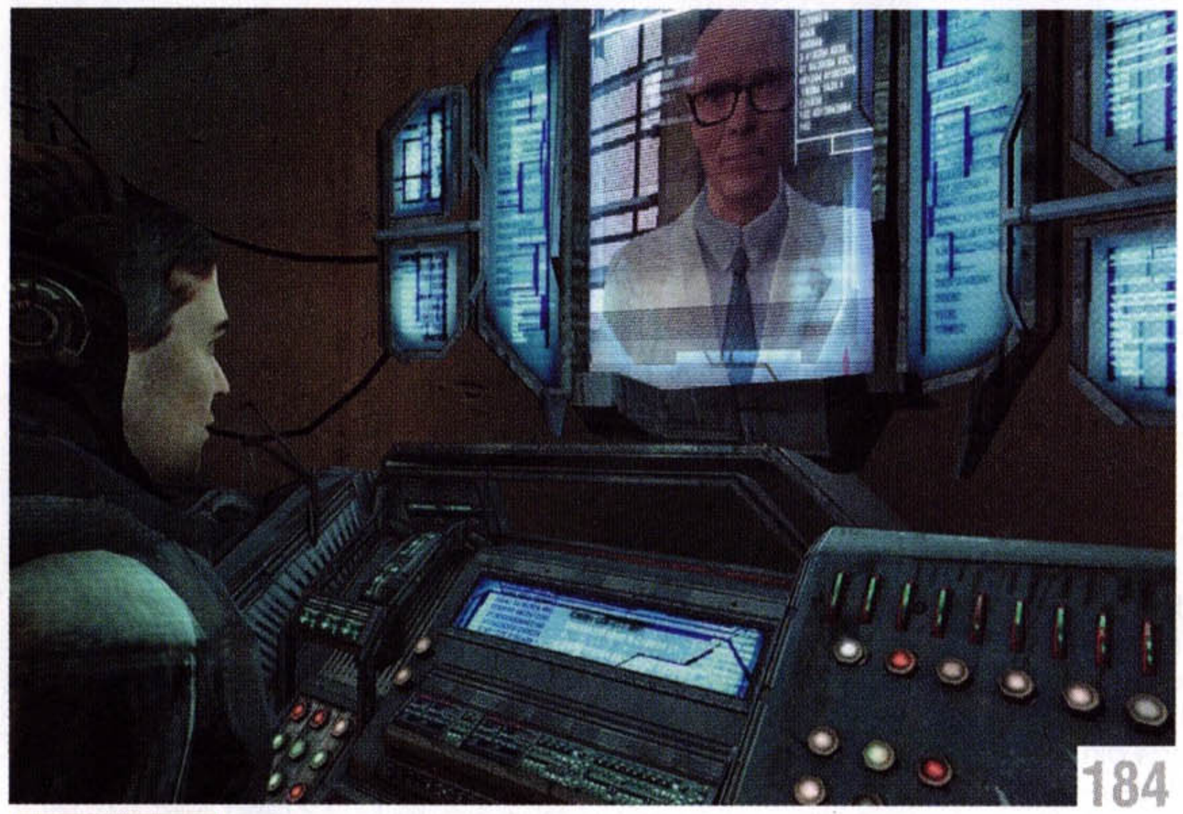

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GAME INFORMER PC GAME OF THE MONTH

# Half-Life 2

The end must be nigh, because Half-Life 2 is 100 percent for sure coming to a retail outlet (or Steam download) near you. We somehow tore ourselves away from the daily grind to play through Valve's latest masterpiece, and relay the word on exactly how and why it rocks so hard. Find out why physics can be a beautiful thing on page 184.

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pg.175

## theedge

*When All Games Aren't Created Equal*

This is where GI breaks down multi-platform games. So whenever you see this logo, there is important multi-system information regarding that product.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| EARLY CHILDHOOD EC | Content suitable for persons ages 3 and older. | MATURE M | Content suitable for persons 17 ages and older. |
| EVERYONE E | Content suitable for persons ages 6 and older. | ADULTS ONLY AO | Content suitable only for adults. |
| TEEN T | Content suitable for persons ages 13 and older. | RATING PENDING RP | Product is awaiting final rating. |

**For our newer readers, here is a glossary of terms and acronyms that commonly appear in the magazine. Video game veterans should move along (these aren't the droids you are looking for).**

**1080i** – A resolution specification used for HDTV. 1080i stands for resolution of 1920x1080 pixels. The "i" means that the video is being interlaced

**480p** – Progressive scanning, this option ("p"= progressive), creates a picture signal with double the scan lines of a conventional interlaced picture, 480i (i = interlaced), to create a noticeably sharper image. The 480p image offers higher picture resolution and eliminates virtually all motion artifacts in a 640x480 pixel resolution setting

**720p** – A resolution specification used for HDTV. 720p stands for resolution of 1280x720 pixels. The "p" means that the video is in progressive format

**action** – A term we use for games like Zone of the Enders and Gauntlet

**adventure** – A term we use for games like Myst and Escape From Monkey Island

**AI** – Artificial Intelligence. Usually used to refer to how well the computer reacts to a human opponent

**board** – A term we use for games like Jeopardy! and Mario Party

**bump mapping** – A technique where varying light effects simulate depth on textures

**cel shading** – A technique used to create 3D rendered objects that resemble hand-drawn animation cels

**CG** – Computer-Generated graphics

**E3** – Electronic Entertainment Expo. The world's largest convention for video games

**fighting** – A term we use for games like Street Fighter and Dead or Alive

**FMV** – Full Motion Video. Usually refers to an animated CG cutscene

**FPS** – Frames Per Second. How many animation frames happen in one second. Also used to denote First-Person Shooters like Doom, GoldenEye, and Unreal Tournament

**framerate** – The frames of animation used to create the illusion of movement

**frontend** – A game's menus and options

**GBA** – Game Boy Advance

**GBC** – Game Boy Color

**GC** – GameCube

**Haloverload** – The desperate euphoria felt by gamers when several of the best games ever release at the same time

**HDTV** – High Definition Television

**isometric** – Three-quarters top down view, like StarCraft or Red Alert 2

**ISP** – Internet Service Provider. The company that provides you with access to the Internet

**jaggies** – Graphical lines that are jagged when they should be straight

**LAN** – Local Area Network. Connecting computers or consoles together within a small space to allow communication between them. Provides fast, simultaneous gameplay

**minigame** – A small, simple game within a larger one

**motion-capture** – Using human models and infrared cameras to record movement for game animation. Also mo-cap

**motion blur** – Phantom frames follow an object to give the impression of realistic speed

**N64** – Nintendo 64

**NES** – Nintendo Entertainment System

**NPC** – Non-Player Character. Those people and creatures you see wandering around in games that are not being controlled by actual humans

**particle effects** – Things like smoke or sparks created in real-time

**PKer** – Player Killer. This is a person who thrives on killing newbie or vulnerable characters in MMORPGs or shooting their teammates in games like Counter-Strike

**platform** – A term we use for games like Super Mario and Crash Bandicoot

**pop-up** – When onscreen objects, usually distant, suddenly appear

**PS2** – Sony PlayStation 2

**PSone** – Sony PlayStation

**puzzle** – A term we use for games like Tetris and Chu Chu Rocket

**racing** – A term we use for games like Gran Turismo and Mario Kart

**RPG** – Role-Playing Game. A game that involves character improvement through collecting and spending points. A term we use for games like Final Fantasy and Dragon Warrior

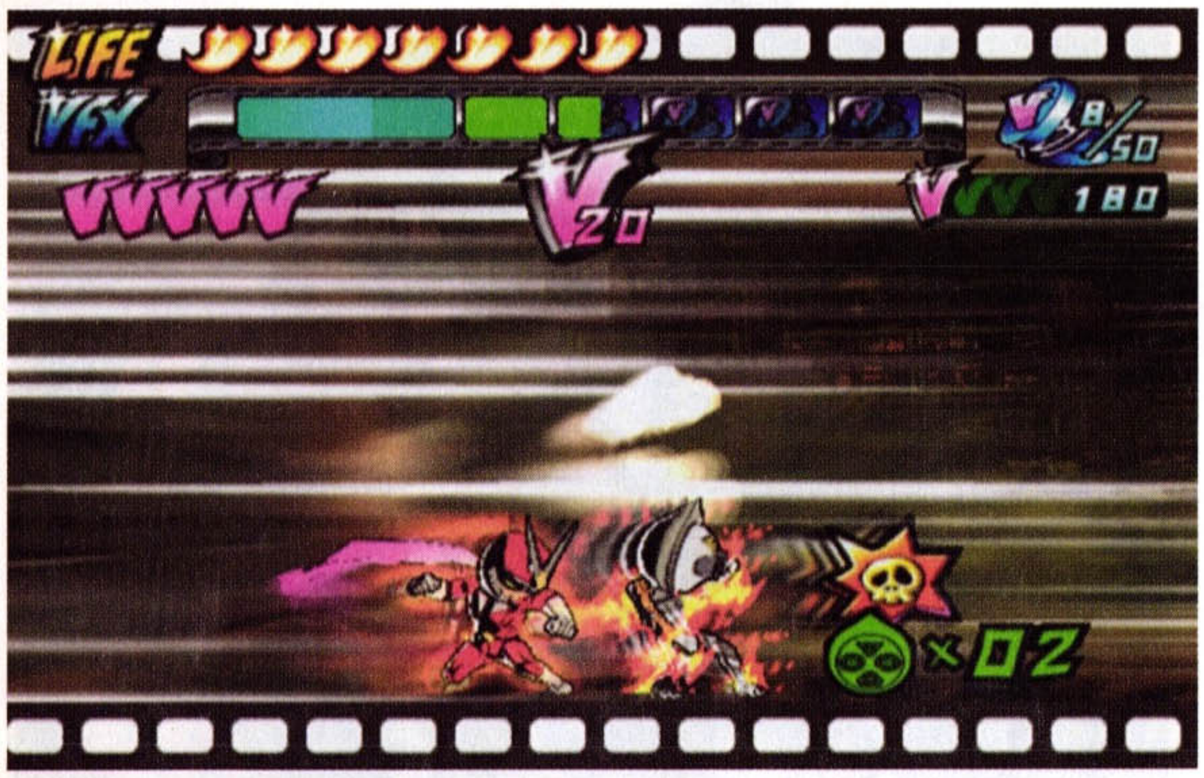
**shooter** – A term we use for games like Mars Matrix and Gradius

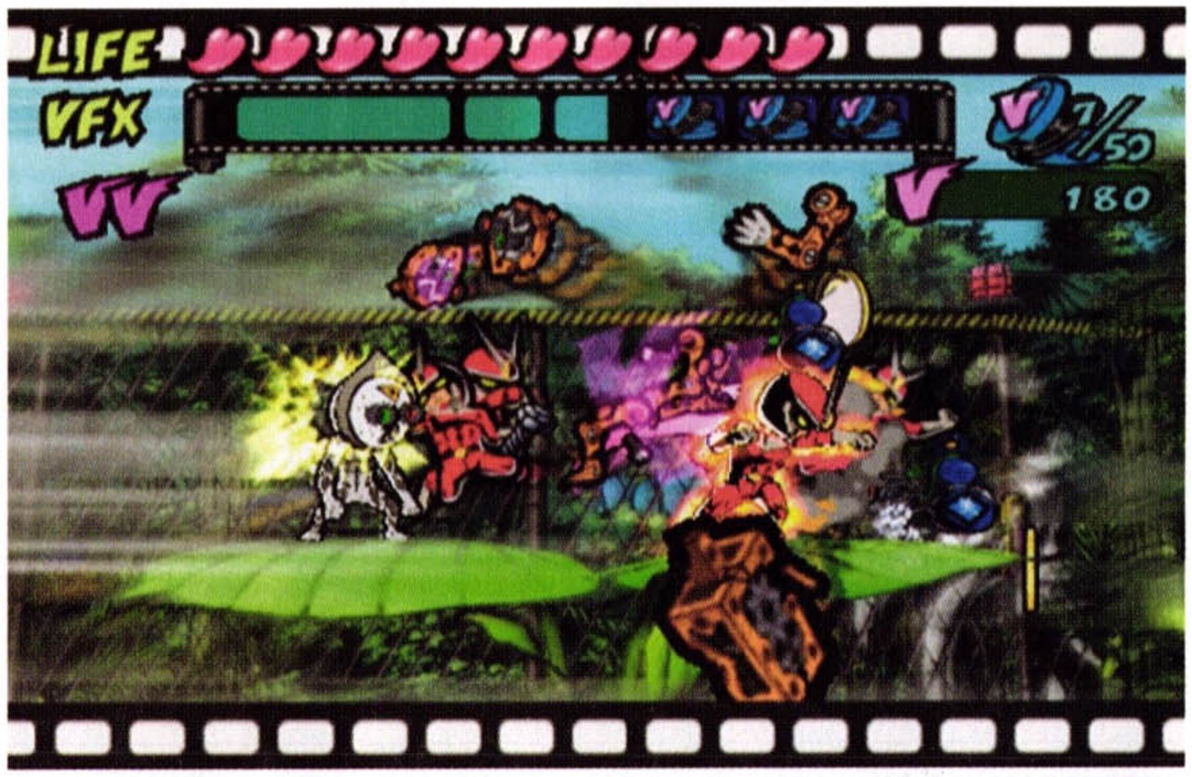
**SNES** – Super Nintendo Entertainment System

**sports** – A term we use for games like MaddenNFL

**strategy** – A term we use for games like Command & Conquer and Fallout Tactics

**third-party** – Something made for a console by a company other than the console manufacturer





VFX powers are repeatedly called upon for puzzles

You may call him flaming, we call him Viewtiful!

Silvia can use a new replay technique...

...to deal three times as much damage on a foe

PLAYSTATION 2 I GAMECUBE

# Viewtiful Joe 2

**> STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** CAPCOM **> DEVELOPER** CLOVER STUDIO **> RELEASE** NOVEMBER 23 **> ESRB** T

## SEQUEL-A-GO-GO, BABY!

When the original Viewtiful Joe was released on GameCube, I completed it twice in a weekend and worked my way through it an additional three or four times on the different difficulty levels within the last year. I even purchased the game again on PlayStation 2 just so that I could play through it as the exclusive bonus character, Dante from Devil May Cry. Some people might say that I have way too much time on my hands and I should get out of the house once in a while. Those in the know can attest that my obsession is justified, and is a testament to the game's fine craftsmanship. I've always called it a gamer's game. Not only does it embrace the mentality of the golden age of gaming, it pushes you to hone your skills. To say the very least, I couldn't wait to wrap my hands around the sequel.

I can safely say that Viewtiful Joe 2 rejuvenates my obsession, but it doesn't take it to the next level. The changes to gameplay are miniscule at best, and I wouldn't necessarily say that I'm fond of most of them. The biggest difference that has been implemented is tag team gameplay, or as Capcom likes to refer to it, Viewtiful Touch.

At any given time, players can tap a button to switch control on the fly from Joe to his lovely lady-friend Silvia. As you may recall, she was also a hidden playable character in the first game. Comparatively, she had the same moveset as Joe and was faster, but was also much weaker and susceptible to greater damage. In this sequel, she's just as nimble, but now she has her own unique attacks. Her standard punch has transformed into a limited range pistol shot. Additionally, whereas Joe can tap into the VFX powers of Mach Speed, Zoom In, and Slow, Silvia can activate Mach Speed, Slow, and a new ability called Replay. When you activate this power, Silvia can deal three times the damage. Of course, if she gets hit in this time, she takes on just as much. If you eat a hamburger while in Replay, you'll gain three times as much health as you normally would. I love everything about this ability, but I wish Joe had it as well. I really – and I stress this point – do not like Silvia's pistol attacks. They don't even come close to delivering the same level of excitement as Joe's furious punches. Truth be told, the only time I keep her on the field is when I have to use her unique talents to solve puzzles. Switching characters is a great idea, but it's neither advantageous nor an integral part of gameplay.

The Six Machine, Joe's transforming craft, is also in the spotlight more than before. I enjoyed the shooter stages in the original game, and I couldn't get enough of them in this title as well. The submarine level is particularly impressive. Outside of this, the remainder of the game is Joe as usual. The stages are wonderfully diverse (you've gotta see the switching room area), and the selection of enemies will make you tap into all of your abilities and techniques. I also have to point out that boss battles really don't get much better than this. I think you'll agree that a certain T-Rex character can best be described as a comic genius.

Of course, for casual gamers, a Kids difficulty is available from the outset. Fans of the series will obviously choose the Adult option. Some of the puzzles aren't as frustrating as they were in the original game, and it is a hair easier. Don't worry, though, it will still push your skills to the limit. Once you work your way through the game, you'll unlock a bonus feature called The 36 Chambers. I don't want to ruin the surprise, but let's just say that Joe 2 has replay outside of unlockable difficulty settings.

Going into this review, I was looking forward to a bit more than the typical Joe formula. While I didn't necessarily embrace the biggest addition that Clover made, I did walk away completely satisfied and ready to work my way through it again and again.—**REINER**

If all guns shot cotton candy, this world would be a better place

**BOTTOM LINE 9**

**> Concept:** Add a second character to the mix and give fans more of what they want

**> Graphics:** The two-dimensional backdrops and cel-shaded characters are as stylish as ever

**> Sound:** The script isn't the best, but some of the character voices do bring about a laugh or two. The soundtrack fits the action at hand

**> Playability:** The tag team tactics are a bit shallow. Combat and the VFX powers are just as praiseworthy as they were before

**> Entertainment:** As long and enjoyable as the first game. The 36 Chambers gives the game a bit of longevity

**> Replay Value:** Moderately High

**Second Opinion 9.25**

Stylish, funny, good-looking, and packed with thrills, Viewtiful Joe 2 reminds me of me. But seriously, this is one heck of a cool title. Like the first game, the graphics are gorgeous, the style is unique, the action is frantic, and the puzzles are clever. If you loved the original title, you'll love this one too. There's a good reason I keep mentioning the first game: they're really pretty similar. Sure, Silvia is now playable from the outset, but she only has one unique power and can be switched to on the fly, so she's really more of an expansion of Joe than her own distinct character. But I didn't really want Capcom to reinvent the wheel with this sequel – the Viewtiful Joe series occupies a unique space in gaming, and I was craving more after the first game. Joe 2 delivers – I wouldn't necessarily call it any better or worse than the first title, but when you're dealing with this level of quality, a step sideways still makes for a great game.—**JEREMY**

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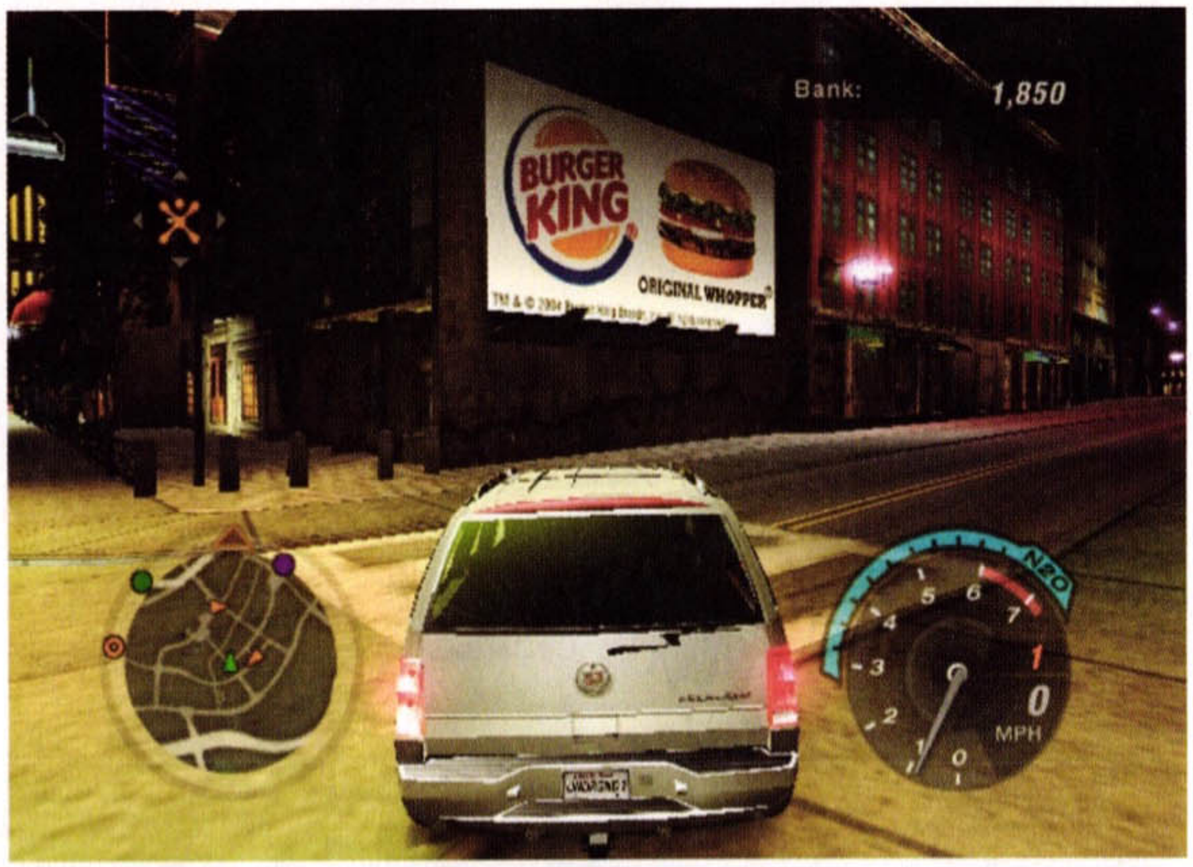



PLAYSTATION 2 I XBOX I GAMECUBE

# Need For Speed: Underground 2

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 6-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE OR XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **DEVELOPER** EA CANADA > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 15 > **ESRB** E

## TWO STEPS FORWARD, ONE GIANT LEAP BACK

Last year's Underground was, for various reasons, my favorite racing game of 2003 (I gave it a 9.5 for those of you that don't remember). Sure, it had some fairly standard racing (the one exception being the outstanding drag racing), but I couldn't help but love all the customization options. In fact, I had such an addiction to modifying my car that I played through the game multiple times with a smile on my face, with little regard for the somewhat repetitive racing.

So, as you may have guessed, I came into this year's edition expecting a lot, and sadly I found myself to be fairly disappointed. The feature that was intended to be this game's biggest innovation – a huge free-roaming city that lets the player explore over 125 load-free, streaming miles of road and pick and choose races – ended up detracting from the experience, not expanding it.

At the beginning, this new innovation is impressive. The graphics are improved, and the framerate is better. Plus, all the cool racing effects – like the nitrous blur effect and the shiny reflective streets – weren't sacrificed to create this huge streaming city.

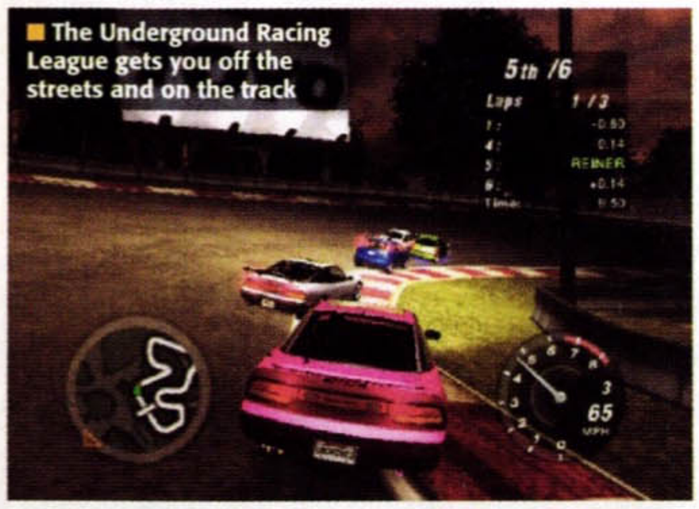
However, the pace of the game is greatly hindered. For example, every aspect for customization is now found in different shops around the city. Want to modify your graphics or change your paint job? Head to a graphics shop. Want to add some performance parts or test your vehicle out on the new Dyno? Drive to one of the performance shops found around the city. What about adding the game's new cosmetic options like the spinners, scissor doors, hydraulics, or even interior tweaks like speakers and monitors to your vehicles you ask? Well, you guessed it – you need to head to a different shop for that as well.

Now throw in the fact that each and every time you enter one of these shops (or any race mode for that matter, except Outrun) you need to pass through a load screen. The load screens and driving around town business isn't such a problem at the beginning of the game, as exploring the world and taking on its Outrun races is pretty fun. But once you get about 25 hours into its 40-plus hour career mode, all the time you waste going from place to place or watching load screens begins to take its toll.

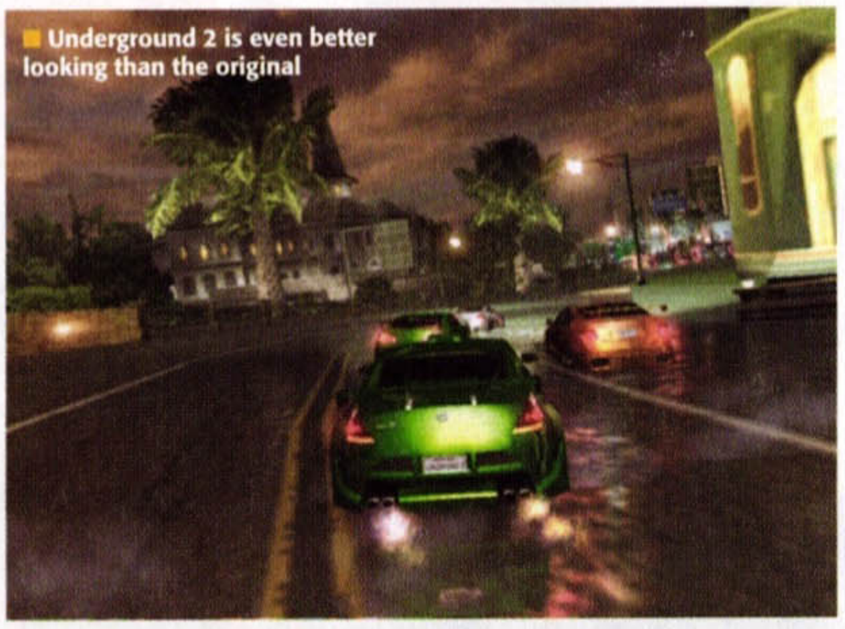
So much so, that in time, I just didn't care about customizing my car anymore – in essence, removing perhaps my favorite part of the game. Even the enjoyable feat of driving across the world to get to a race lost its luster, and I found myself just going through the motions to get across the city and running into cars at will, as the damage means nothing.

One nice feature is that, after you pass a level, you are given an instant port to races via your menu screen. However, this option isn't open until a level is cleared, so it does little to cut down on the monotonous traversing back and forth needed to complete a section of the game.

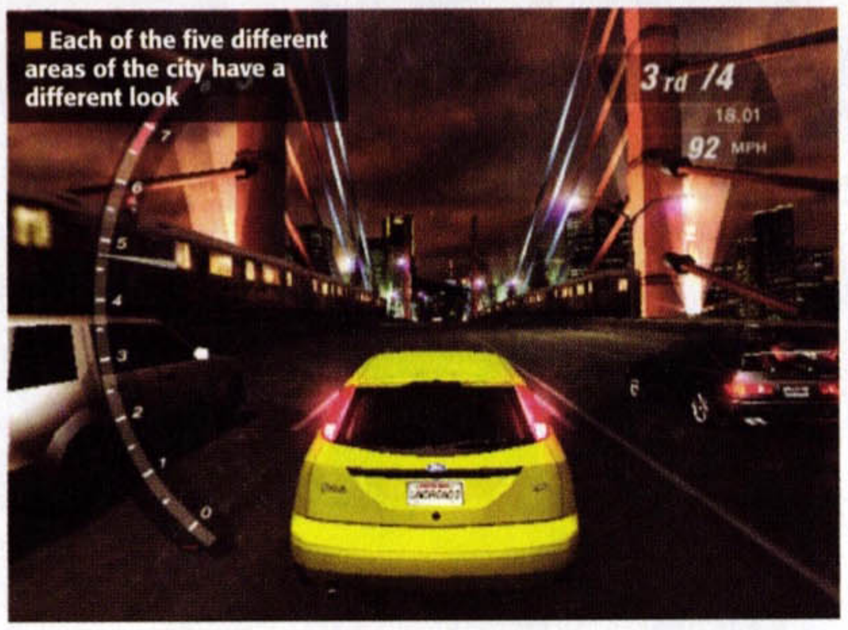
On the positive side, there are a lot of new vehicle makes and models to choose from this time, and even sport utility vehicles. Plus, many of the race modes, like Underground Racing League, are extremely fun. In fact, just about everything in this game is better, except the cumbersome overworld. If you can overlook this one shortcoming, there is a lot to like in Underground 2, I just had a hard time getting over this one, rather large, hurdle.—**ANDY**




The Underground Racing League gets you off the streets and on the track



Underground 2 is even better looking than the original




Each of the five different areas of the city have a different look

### theedge

*When All Games Aren't Created Equal*

The Xbox version is far and away the most impressive looking of the three, but for some strange reason doesn't quite deliver the same sense of speed as the PS2 or GameCube. So basically, it's a wash between the three versions, but if you want to take the experience online, only the Xbox and PS2 versions offer that support.

**BOTTOM LINE 8**

> **Concept:** Take Underground and give it a jolt of GTA's free-roaming world

> **Graphics:** The overall package is slightly better, and the framerate is much improved

> **Sound:** It's good, but nowhere near as interesting as the original's soundtrack

> **Playability:** Tight controls that make it easy to slide around hairpins and weave through traffic

> **Entertainment:** The go-anywhere, do-anything overworld hurt, not helped, this sequel

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

**Second Opinion 8.25**

As much as Underground 2 embodies the essence of illegal street racing and the tuner phenomenon, it also harnesses the tedium and monotony that comes with driving your car to work every day. The open world formula just doesn't work for this game. Cruising from one event to the next with nothing to do along the way is a torturous time sink that will put your patience to the test. This is a real shame too, because the remainder of new content that EA has incorporated is outstanding. The new physics model offers a higher level of realism that allows players to get a sense of weight. The new Outrun races put your skills to the test, and the Street X heats are wildly chaotic. Customization has been taken to the next level, the visual details are all the more magnificent, and the soundtrack is one of EA's best. What could have been one of the year's finest races ends up being a road to nowhere. It's fun, but last year's model drove better.—**REINER**

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## THREE HEROES JOIN FORCES TO DEFEAT EVIL

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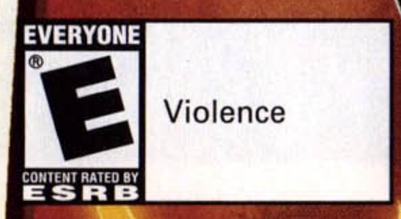


Violence

PlayStation 2

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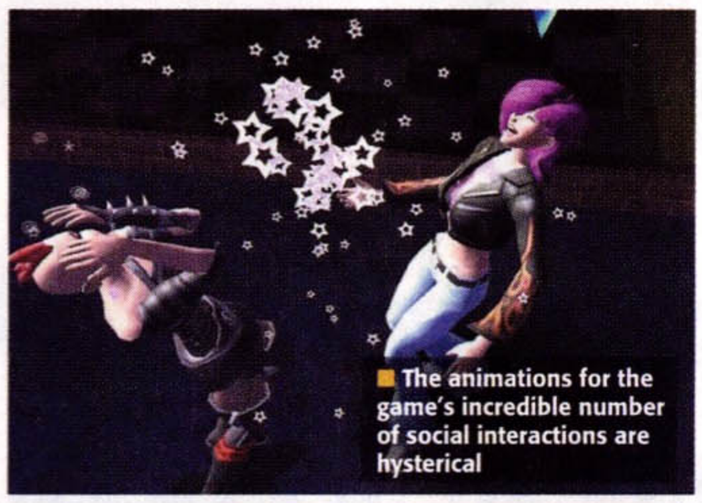
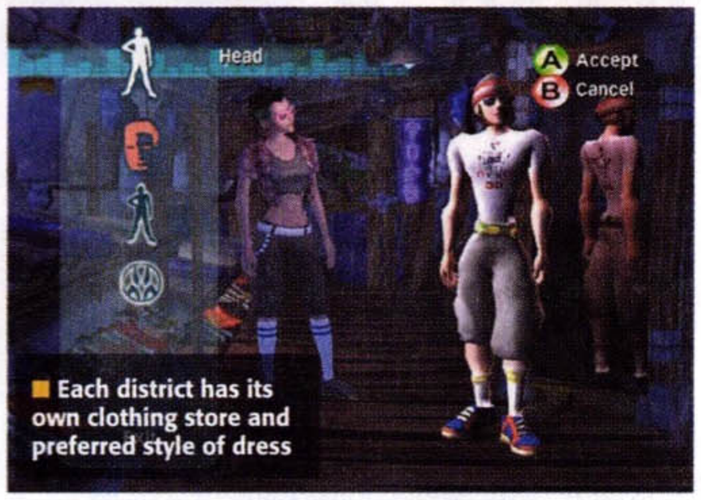


The animations for the game's incredible number of social interactions are hysterical




Each district has its own clothing store and preferred style of dress

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

# The Urbz: Sims in the City

**> STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER SIMULATION **> PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS **> DEVELOPER** MAXIS **> RELEASE** NOVEMBER 9 **> ESRB** T

## STREET KIDS

The sophomore release of the console Sims games, Bustin' Out, unquestionably proved that the ultimate simulation game is more than worthy of couch-surfing gamers' free time. Back for another attack with The Urbz: Sims in the City, EA and Maxis are shifting perspective to city life with mixed results.

I feel like there are two main design decisions that negatively affect players' experiences in the world of the Urbz. The first boils down to the fact that your house (and the items contained therein) isn't the reward anymore. This is because of two new features in Urbz: an inventory system so you can buy things in each district and take them back to your place, and also the ability to modify nearly anything in all of the environments you visit. Players can rearrange the lounge, move the TVs into the bathroom, and generally make almost any sort of decorating chaos they choose. And, you don't have to pay for the stuff that already furnishes the raver kids' sushi bar, for instance. Because of this, I went home as little as possible – I didn't even bother to buy a toilet for my first apartment.

The other issue that I see is the change in goal focus. Unlike Bustin' Out, where you were bettering your character by earning promotions in a real-world order of events, visiting friends' houses and making their home more well, homey, you are now trying to be the most popular kid on the block. I feel that the game opens up too quickly and that, while there are a respectable nine districts, each has very similar goals and features. It got to the point that I wanted to see new areas, but didn't really care about making more friends or trying a random new job, because I knew that all I'd get in return is access to a VIP room just like in all of the others. After a while, the entire city was a nice place to visit, but not somewhere to stay.

Urbz does make changes to the franchise that I adore, though. Assessing the status of your sim is easily done just by looking at them – their animations change dramatically when they're tired, for example. I also like the inventory system as an idea and, even though the same minigame is presented for all jobs, I had fun doing it because there was enough time between sessions.

In some ways, Urbz is a step backward for the series, but there are a lot of ideas here that should be expanded on even more in further games. I just feel like some of the magic from Bustin' Out (more creative goals and rewards) has faded and that what we needed was even more of a revolution.—**LISA**

**BOTTOM LINE 7.75**

**> Concept:** Throw the long-running simulation franchise into the scary city

**> Graphics:** A different art style highlights the more satirical tone of this entry

**> Sound:** EA's partnership with the Black Eyed Peas makes the tunes far more interesting and enjoyable than past entries

**> Playability:** Continuing the PC-like control scheme is a mixed bag for console players

**> Entertainment:** Not as engaging as Bustin' Out, but Urbz definitely has its own style and flavor that I can appreciate

**> Replay Value:** Moderate

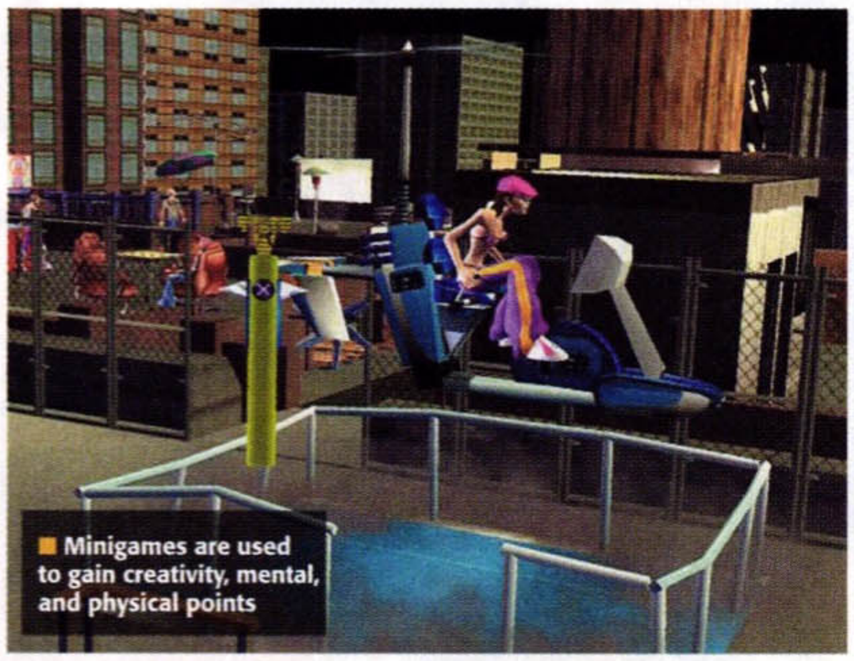
**Second Opinion 7.75**

For years, games have given me a chance to be something I'm not: bounty hunters, superheroes, and now – with the advent of The Urbz – hip. With a huge selection of wardrobe options and trendy furniture, this is the most extensive coolness simulator I've ever played. The Sims' console adventure into the urban jungle has all of the satirical wit you've come to expect from the franchise, plus some welcome deviations. The inventory system is neat, but it is built around the new feature that allows you to place items in all of the environments, not just your own apartment. Unfortunately, this widespread customization sort of removes the player from the ownership of the objects, and decentralizes your playground. It's still fun and hilariously quirky, but it lacks that "I just need to play a little bit longer" quality to make it truly addictive. Now if only spitting loogies into the air and catching them on the way down could impress people in real life, I'd be set. —**JOE**

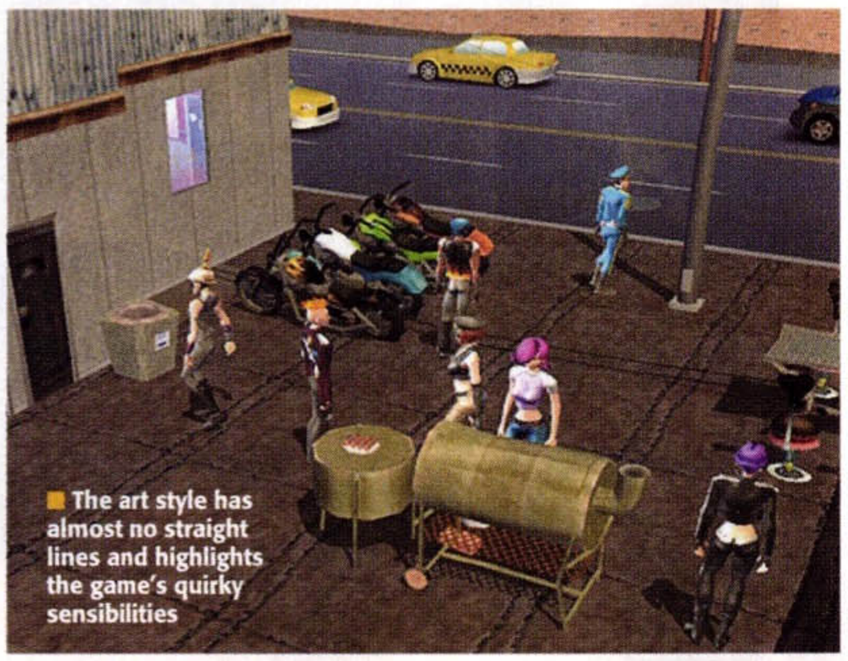
**theedge**

*When All Games Aren't Created Equal*

Each system has its own little set of extras, so the choice is really about which bonus features most excite you. The PS2 offers hard drive and EyeToy support. During the game, as your sim earns higher reputation points, the character's image is slapped onto billboards and fliers decorating the districts. The EyeToy support lets players replace their character's likeness with their own. Like the PS2, the Xbox features hard drive support and, in addition, full 720p resolution. Nintendo players get exclusive clothing options to access through their armoire.



Minigames are used to gain creativity, mental, and physical points



The art style has almost no straight lines and highlights the game's quirky sensibilities

Pro wrestling finally reached its lowest point

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2 I XBOX

# Godzilla: Save the Earth

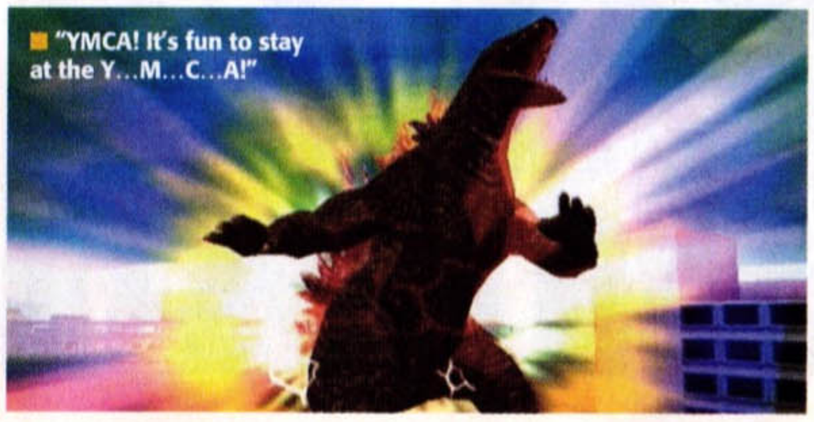
> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER FIGHTING > **PUBLISHER** ATARI
> **DEVELOPER** PIPEWORKS > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 2 > **ESRB** T

## MAD MONSTER PARTY

I once had a six-foot tall giant Godzilla foot display designed for the soundtrack to the Matthew Broderick movie, in which I kept my complete set of *Godzilla* VHS tapes so that all of my visitors knew of my giant monster fanboyism the moment they set foot in the door. I mention this so that everyone knows how freakishly excited I get about anything Godzilla related. Heck, I even go by the name Gamezilla. That's why it pains me so much to say that Godzilla: Save the Earth is a monstrous letdown.

Destroy All Monsters Melee was a simplistic brawler that offered some fun multiplayer, but little else. I was really hoping the sequel would offer a little more depth, but sadly Save the Earth is exactly the same game with a new coat of paint and the addition of some extra monsters and new minigames. Seriously, this is the same game. Monsters have the same move sets, the gameplay is unchanged, and the basic feel is identical. Sure, the graphics are sharper, and the variety of monsters is better, but the minigames mostly stink like Rodan's droppings. All told, this is one of the skimpiest sequel offerings I have ever seen – we're talking Dynasty Warriors skimpy here.

Admittedly, multiplayer still offers basic button-mashing enjoyment; things can get pretty chaotic, especially with four fighters, and the mood of the Godzilla films is definitely present. However, single-player is a bore and can be completed in 30 minutes or so. Sadly, you'll have to beat it several times over if you want to unlock all the monsters and arenas, which grows quickly tiresome. If you've played the first one, there's no real reason to check out this entry, and if you aren't into Godzilla, the simplistic gameplay will hold no appeal for you. It's really a sad day when I can't recommend a title chock full of giant monsters.—**JEREMY**


"YMCA! It's fun to stay at the Y...M...C...A!"

**BOTTOM LINE 6**

> **Concept:** Strap on a giant monster suit, crush things, and somehow make it boring

> **Graphics:** Environments are a little bland, but the monsters look just as cool and silly as they do in the movies

> **Sound:** Sound effects lifted from old Wonder Twins cartoons? Awesome!

> **Playability:** The controls are sluggish and slightly awkward, but feel appropriate, given the lumbering nature of the fighters

> **Entertainment:** Like *Godzilla 1985*, it takes a specific type of person to appreciate this one

> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

**Second Opinion 6.25**

If I had my way with this world, the Godzilla films would win best picture awards each year; I'd create a law that requires schools to offer a Godzilla class; and every Friday the President of the United States would have to wear a Godzilla costume. Without a shadow of a doubt, I am completely obsessed with the lumbering reptilian. Sadly, this game really did nothing for me. Sure, I got a kick out of seeing Jet Jaguar, and tossing a building at someone never really gets old, but the gameplay is virtually identical to Destroy All Monsters Melee. The only new ground that it breaks is in the form of a handful of wretched minigames and challenges. The difficulty level has also been reduced from decently balanced to painfully easy. Multiplayer is still a blast, but if you already got your fill with the predecessor, these thrills are short-lived.—**REINER**

PLAYSTATION 2 I XBOX

# Rocky: Legends

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER SPORTS > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT > **DEVELOPER** UBISOFT
> **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 28 > **ESRB** T

## ANOTHER TOMATO CAN

Although I can't argue with the fact that the original *Rocky* is a masterpiece of inspirational sports filmmaking, it's sad that the caretakers of the franchise haven't been more discerning about how they use the iconic Philly pugilist. Over five sequels, the movie series degraded into what seemed like bad *Saturday Night Live* skits, and Rocky hasn't fared much better in any of the handful of video game adaptations that he's starred in over the years.

Sadly, this trend continues in Rocky: Legends. On paper, it sounds great, allowing you to tackle four seperate career arcs with Rocky, Clubber Lang, Apollo Creed, or Ivan Drago. However, it quickly becomes apparent that these "separate" paths are really just window dressing in the form of some brief cutscenes, as you face mostly the same boxers (in different orders) and see many of the same venues as well.

Of course, none of this would matter if the boxing itself was top-notch, but it's not. Basically, this comes off as a relic from a period of time that historians will henceforth refer to as "B.F.N.2K4" (Before Fight Night 2004). After that game (in my mind) completely redefined the boxing genre with its superb all-analog control, it's really difficult to go back to the old four-button shuffle. Now, this isn't necessarily the fault of the developers; they are simply making a boxing title in the way it's been done for the last few generations of systems. However, I wouldn't be doing my duty to you as a reader if I didn't point out the fact that a much better game in this genre already exists.

The gameplay itself feels stiff and unresponsive, and the blocking barely works at all. Once an opponent has you in the midst of a combo, you're not going to be able to break the sequence with blocking or movement. In addition, ring navigation is sluggish (it's too easy to get caught on the ropes), and other weird issues (your opponents are strangely susceptible to the uppercut) are prevalent. As for multiplayer, this comes up short as well, as I found out (on the day it was released) that Legends' planned Xbox Live features (PS2 had not been slated for online play) had been pulled at the last minute. Score one more round for Fight Night.

While Legends does offer you the most comprehensive Rocky experience to date, it just plain fails to deliver in the ring. Sorry Rocky, but maybe it's time for you to start thinking about hanging up the gloves for good.—**MATT**

**BOTTOM LINE 6.5**

> **Concept:** The Italian Stallion brings his posse along for the ride in a new boxing title

> **Graphics:** The character models are relatively good, and the crowds are fully animated

> **Sound:** "Gonna Fly Now" – check. "Living in America" – check. Hey, where's "Eye of the Tiger"?? Damn you, Survivor!

> **Playability:** Does a barely passable job with the punching, but the defensive mechanics are weak as wet toilet paper

> **Entertainment:** This isn't fit to step into the squared circle with EA's stellar Fight Night

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

**Second Opinion 6.5**

This game personifies an old punch-drunk fighter, slow with the swing, and yet trying to convince himself and others that he still has got what it takes. Although I like that you can play as different fighters in the Rocky lore (where's Sico the robot?), this is boxing by the numbers, and even that's not done that great. The punches aren't consistent, and the flow of the fights is bogged down by the fact that your character is often two or three button presses behind your commands. All that's missing from the aged fighter is a drool cup.—**KATO**

Evil mode lets you control baddies such as the Balrog and the Watcher in the Water, but it's not that great

Helm's Deep isn't just a battlefield. You can traverse the entire fortress on foot

**BOTTOM LINE 8.5**

> **Concept:** Become the janitors of Middle-earth and clean up the messes left by the Fellowship

> **Graphics:** EA provides some stunning character models, and every blade, shield, and helm is brimming with detail

> **Sound:** Amazing music, impressive sound effects, and a boat-load of new dialogue recorded by Ian McKellen as Gandalf

> **Playability:** The game's overall simplicity hides its true depth

> **Entertainment:** Ignore the cheesy story and you'll be rewarded handsomely

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

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PLAYSTATION 2 I GAMECUBE

# The Lord of the Rings: The Third Age

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **DEVELOPER** EA REDWOOD SHORES > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 2 > **ESRB** T

## A FELLOWSHIP OF ANOTHER KIND

The Third Age puts you in the regrettable position of being known as Gandalf's "not-so-cool" friends, always waiting around on a Friday night hoping he'll call to go hang out at Weathertop (the Hobbits love to huff it up there). Where were you during the Council of Elrond, when the fate of Middle-earth was being entrusted to his more important and famous friends? At the kiddie table, getting crumbs of Lembas Bread all over the place like a total nerd. Still, Gandalf was cool enough to call you to pick up the sloppy seconds of the Fellowship. Between this laughable story premise and the fact that the RPG combat system isn't revolutionary by any means, The Third Age was nearly dead to me before I even turned it on. However, almost five days later, and after hordes of slain orcs, many party buffs, and several exhilarating moments, I'm still going strong.

Even though EA tried to offer a new storyline to avoid having to dip into the films' plot once again, that's exactly what happens. You basically follow the movements of the Fellowship (with some twists thrown in), only with characters who aren't nearly as cool. I was so unimpressed with them that I took to calling Berethor (the Gondorian guard) "BORE-e-thor." Moreover, the game uses over a hundred movie clips, but they often pop up out of order, and even though they present some interesting background info, they can be distracting. I was disappointed to no end with The Third Age until about halfway through Moria, when the gameplay stiffened and I was able to get to the real meat of the title.

As things get more difficult in the game and you have to develop battle tactics, it comes alive and exposes a good amount of depth. I learned to buff my party and debuff my enemy. I paid attention to the affinities (such as shadow, fire, etc.) of weapons, spells, equipment, and foes. I used the action queue on the upper right of the screen to plan when I was going to do what and to whom. I also fell in love with the skill system. To learn new spells and special attacks (which are generically called skills), you have to use the ones you already have to earn enough points to get the next one. Of course, each character has an extensive skill tree to develop. In sum, The Third Age offers few surprises, but instead gives you a hearty mix of RPG conventions that provide an extremely strong foundation for the game.

The title sounds solid but unremarkable so far, but it simply knocks you out with its production values. Battles aren't just everyone taking turns running at each other. They are epic affairs filled with awe-inspiring summon attacks and stunning blows that will have you fearing the might unleashed by Sauron and Saruman. EA wisely made skills easy to unleash because Action Points aren't scarce, so you'll have lots of fun casting a party buff like Company Valor or landing Ecthelion Wrath on the head of a foe. Battles are also exciting because the character models are large, the camera angles switch around, and there is a good amount of detail in your constantly changing armor and arms. I was often spurred on more by getting my hands on all the cool equipment (and how sweet it all looked) in the game than I was the story itself.

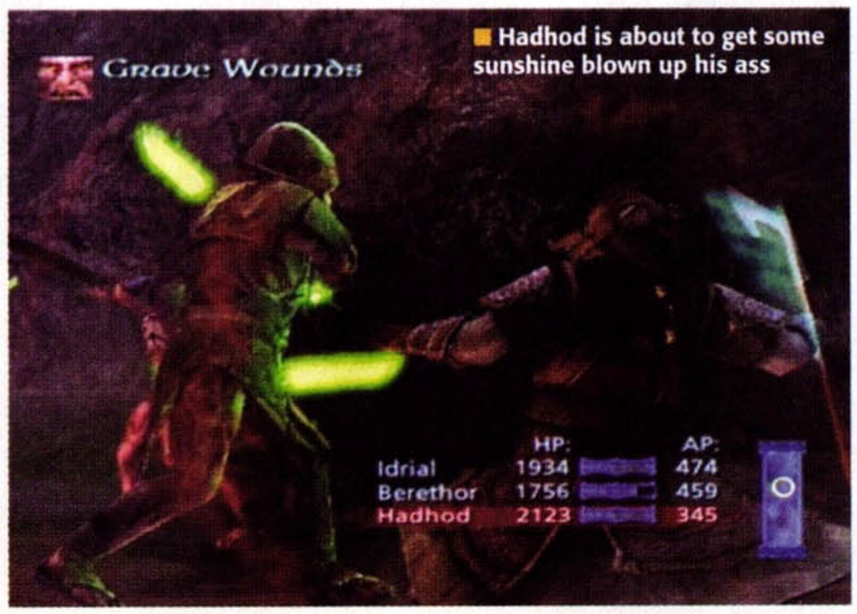
As my time with the game ended, I realized that as much as I think EA dropped the ball with the story, I had in fact been on my own quest, and it wasn't just a shadow of the Fellowship's. It was one filled with amazing battles and worthy strategy, and anchored by strong gameplay. It was an adventure provided – not by the movies – but by a well-built RPG. This was a chance for EA to show its quality, and it succeeded.—**KATO**

### WHAT ABOUT THE XBOX?

**The Lord of the Rings: The Third Age does appear on the Xbox, but due to circumstances beyond our control, we were regretfully unable to review the Xbox edition of the game. Going forward, we will analyze it, and if there are any notable differences, we will follow up with a separate review next month. If there aren't major differences, please take this as our definitive review.**

### Second Opinion 8.75

After a few hours, I came to terms with the fact that the story in The Third Age is a feeble excuse to tread the path of the Fellowship without actually being the Fellowship. The sooner you get over that hurdle, the sooner you can see this title for the remarkable game that it is. Apart from looking wonderful, it also sports an involved battle system, extensive weaponry, and fearsome foes all intricately tied to Tolkien's classic mythology. Despite these merits, the game's choppy pacing holds it back; I found myself entering and exiting menus with aggravating frequency, whether it was to heal after a rough fight, distribute ability scores, or watch expository movie clips. Individually these things add to the game's depth, but when combined they constantly remove you from the flow of the narrative, leaving most of the action as bite-sized chunks nestled in arduous menu navigation. Still, I can't shake the idea that if it had felt less fragmented, The Third Age could have been one of my favorite games this year.—**JOE**



Hadhod is about to get some sunshine blown up his ass

Idrial puts up some wallpaper as part of a distraction spell

**theedge**

*When All Games Aren't Created Equal*

The two versions are similar, the only problem is that the GameCube edition uses two discs.

PLAYSTATION 2 I XBOX I GAMECUBE

BOTTOM LINE 6

## SpongeBob Squarepants: The Movie

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** THQ > **DEVELOPER** HEAVY IRON STUDIOS
> **RELEASE** OCTOBER 27 > **ESRB** E

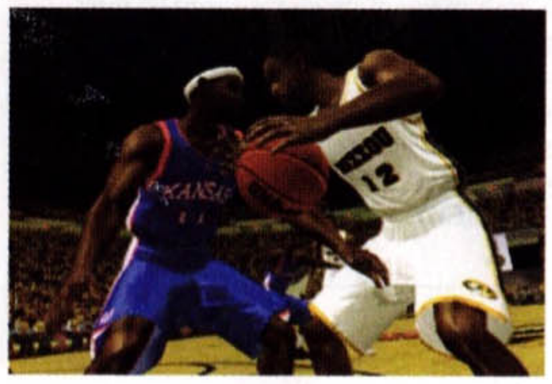
Who lives in a pineapple under the sea? SpongeBob Squarepants! Whose latest game defines mediocrity? Spongebob Squarepants! While the little yellow guy may be one of the best things on TV, his games just don't cut it. Yes, there are a few charming SpongeBob moments, but the collect-a-thon gameplay is as stale as can be. Heavy Iron has attempted a few things to keep the action fresh, such as driving levels and upgradeable moves for SpongeBob and Patrick, but it doesn't change the fact that the core gameplay is simply tired. Jumping around collecting random doodads is just old – it's time to move on to new objectives in platformers. SpongeBob is popular because his show is original; his game should be, too.—**JEREMY**

PLAYSTATION 2 I XBOX

BOTTOM LINE 9

## ESPN College Hoops 2K5

> **STYLE** 1 TO 8-PLAYER SPORTS (PS2), 1 TO 4-PLAYER (XBOX) (UP TO 10-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE, UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** ESPN VIDEOGAMES > **DEVELOPER** VISUAL CONCEPTS
> **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 15 > **ESRB** E



ESPN's collegiate game is every bit as impressive as the company's flagship NBA title. In fact, I'd say that it even plays a hair better. It utilizes the same technology present in the NBA title, Visual Concepts just tuned the heck out of it to make it tighter and more appropriate for the college atmosphere. Having a button denoted specifically for lead passes is a nice touch. I also like how a modifier button calls out big plays (like alley-oops). After years of complaining, Visual Concepts has also implemented a new free throw mechanic that is much easier to use. Fouls are in higher frequency (as they should be), and the new stadium and player details are amazing. Franchise-wise, Legacy mode is deeper than you could possibly imagine, and goes into every little detail regarding coaching and scouting. The assortment of unlockables is quite impressive as well. Simply put, there's little that this game doesn't do.—**REINER**

PLAYSTATION 2 I GAMECUBE

BOTTOM LINE 6

## Power Rangers: Dino Thunder

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** THQ > **DEVELOPER** PACIFIC COAST POWER & LIGHT
> **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 14 > **ESRB** E

I'll say this: Dino Thunder is one Power Rangers title that at least has a somewhat interesting conceptual hook to hang its hat…err…*weird helmet*… on. It's actually pretty cool that you can collect and morph between a selection of robotic dinosaur forms on the fly; I just wish that the level structure and missions were a bit more interesting. Nearly every mission is along the lines of "go destroy these power generators" or "collect the five bits of dino DNA." These fetch quests really started to wear on me, although I suspect that this simplicity is at least in part a nod to the franchise's young audience. Although there's really nothing outrageously bad about Dino Thunder, I often found myself a little bored with being a giant robotic dinosaur, which just shouldn't happen. However, if you're a parent looking for something for an under-10 gamer, raise this score by a point.—**MATT**

PLAYSTATION 2 I XBOX

# The Bard's Tale

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG > **PUBLISHER** INXILE ENTERTAINMENT/VIVENDI UNIVERSAL > **DEVELOPER** INXILE ENTERTAINMENT
> **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 2 > **ESRB** T

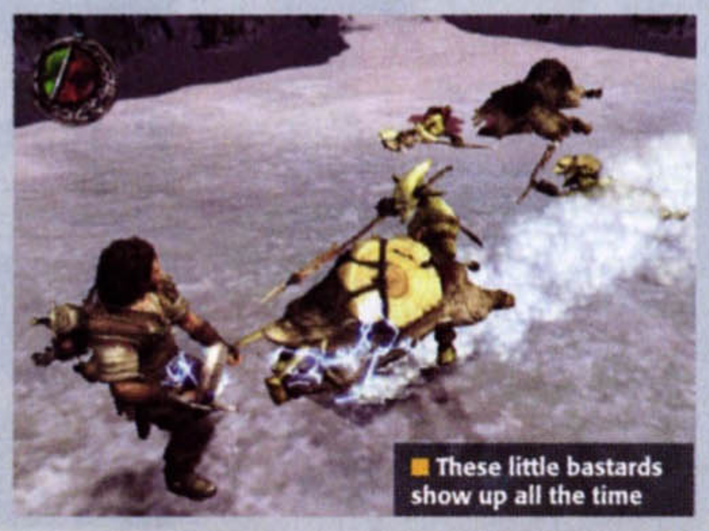
## RETELLING THE CLASSIC

Remaking an old-school hardcore RPG on the Snowblind engine (used in Champions of Norrath and Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance) seems like a bit of an odd choice – but then again, The Bard's Tale is a bit of an odd duck. Though it's technically an action/RPG, the most fun this title has to offer is in its clever dialogue and seemingly never-ending plot variations. After all, with a narrator that says, "Where was I? Oh yes, the Bard was making an ass of himself," when you load up your save, how could you go wrong?

You'd think that running on the same core technology as some of the better recent hack n' slash games would make the action an easy sell in The Bard's Tale. Unfortunately, the way animations are keyed to timing is difficult to get used to. It's tough to minimize your vulnerable periods between attacks or blocks, and the Bard has one hell of a backswing. Also, when facing more than one enemy, you really have to be on the ball, since it can be excessively hard to get an attack off without getting pounded to bits. Even with a decent vitality and the best armor available, I still found myself dying in eight to 10 hits – which can pile up in short order. Combat is helped somewhat by the many summoned allies you earn access to, but the rough gameplay makes it easier to die then it should be.

Now you're thinking, "Well, if the action is mediocre, how does this game earn this score?" The answer is twofold. One, fighting doesn't really blow that hard, and furthermore, everything that's not fighting ranges from awesome to gut-bustingly hilarious. Cary Elwes' voiceovers for the Bard are sheer genius, Tony Jay is brilliant as the Narrator, and even the minor characters are expertly voiced. Finally, the script is some of the best writing I've ever seen in a video game, and the player has exceptional control over how the plot progresses. Also, I dare you not to laugh when the Kuo-trow (little leprechauny creatures) show up and belt out a song about how the Bard is a terrible person.

Though sub-par action and cheap deaths are endemic to the Bard's quest, this title made me feel like I was taking part in a real fantasy adventure the way few others have over the years. I have no qualms about recommending this to anyone with any appreciation for satirical, sarcastic humor.—**ADAM**



These little bastards show up all the time

BOTTOM LINE 8.25

> **Concept:** Reinvent the classic franchise with more adventure than ever

> **Graphics:** A bit of a mixed bag – sometimes repetitive, but with lots of beautiful models

> **Sound:** This may be the best voicework ever in a video game. The sing-along songs are hilarious, too

> **Playability:** The controls may seem wonky and convoluted, but they're just fine once you're used to them

> **Entertainment:** Witty banter and sarcastic rejoinders abound, though the combat isn't the greatest

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

**Second Opinion** 8

The hack n' slash genre is simplistically enjoyable enough that innovation isn't really required to make a solid game. Let's face it, busting up hordes of enemies is inherently satisfying. The Bard's Tale doesn't move far beyond the bloodlust at the core of the genre, but still manages a couple of nice features to differentiate itself. The humor injected into this title is funny, and the summoning ability adds unexpected depth. Sure, it could be a prettier game, and the combat is a bit sluggish, but The Bard's Tale still emerges as one of those likable titles that overcomes its shortcomings with sheer personality. Fans of the original games and the brawler genre in general will certainly get a kick out of this one.—**JEREMY**

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

## Crash 'n' Burn

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 16-PLAYERS VIA XBOX LIVE OR PS2 BROADBAND) > **PUBLISHER** EIDOS > **DEVELOPER** CLIMAX > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 16 > **ESRB** T

### THE MEAN STREETS

Crash 'n' Burn, much like the recently released Test Drive: Driven to Destruction, eschews the current fad of street racing in favor of a balls-to-the-wall experience inspired by games like Destruction Derby. In addition to a fairly typical championship career mode, there are other games like Kamikaze (where half the cars run one direction and the other half the opposite), Last Man Standing (a demo derby of sorts), Bomb Tag, and the like. The selection of cars is pretty slim, but there are a good variety of kits, decals, and other cosmetic and performance options you can purchase with your winnings.

Whatever the contest at hand, Crash 'n' Burn does a good job of delivering one thing: chaos. In one-player, your opponents are obviously hopped up on goofballs, committing automotive hara-kiri seemingly at random. Wrecked cars and debris (as well as oil slicks and fire) stay on the track, quickly turning the courses into something that approximates what a Grand Prix event would be like if it was held in Fallujah. The 16-player online mode only increases the vehicular carnage.

The cars handle solidly, but don't really provide much in terms of feel. You're pretty much either in a powerslide or not – similar to the "on/off" feel of Auto Modellista. However, it's probably good the physics aren't too accurate, as most of the challenge comes in avoiding crashes and totaling out your car. If anything, my largest complaint about this game comes from the fact that the number of wrecks onscreen sometimes means that winning a race has as much to do with good luck as skill. While I can't say that this is going to win any awards, I do enjoy Crash 'n' Burn's single-minded approach to racing.—**MATT**

**BOTTOM LINE 7**

> **Concept:** A wild n' crazy racer featuring tons of wrecks, fires, and some unique modes

> **Graphics:** It's not on the level of a NFS: Underground, but this is a fairly attractive title

> **Sound:** Nice selection of underground garage, stoner, and sundry '70s-influenced guitar rock

> **Playability:** There's not much subtlety in the feel of the controls, but this game isn't really about subtlety

> **Entertainment:** Not brilliant, but at least it's not another generic "street racing" clone

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

**Second Opinion 7**

If Crash 'n' Burn were in a boy band with Test Drive: Driven to Destruction and Burnout 3, it would be the cute, fun-loving member – not as deep as Test Drive or as "in your face" as Burnout 3 (like Matt's favorite – AJ from the Backstreet Boys). I like this game's course layouts (Xbox has more consistant debris), and the large number of other cars wreaks havoc in races, but it does get old. Unlike Matt's love for AJ, this game won't last forever.—**KATO**

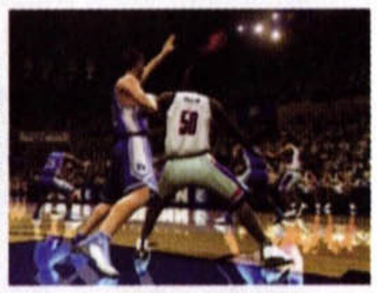
# MULTI-PLATFORM QUICKIES

## NCAA March Madness 2005

**BOTTOM LINE 8.25**

> **STYLE** 1 TO 8-PLAYER SPORTS (PS2) 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (XBOX) (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE, UP TO 2-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS > **DEVELOPER** EA CANADA > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 15 > **ESRB** E

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX



Although sharing many traits with EA's Live series, this year's March Madness makes its mark with features not found in the NBA. For instance, the new Floor General play calling system fits the collegiate mentality perfectly, and is incredibly effective for both offense and defense. Another nice touch is how the screen shakes for away teams at the foul line. When a game is on the line, this little effect will have you sweating bullets. The gameplay is just as swift as Live, and the AI's decision making for clock management and help side defense are very impressive. Off of the court, March Madness' Dynasty mode is shallow and doesn't stack up well against ESPN's robust Legacy mode. In the end, March Madness performs admirably on the court, but ESPN is the complete package.—**REINER**

## Bad Boys: Miami Takedown

**BOTTOM LINE 5**

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** CRAVE ENTERTAINMENT > **DEVELOPER** BLITZ GAMES/EMPIRE INTERACTIVE > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 16 (PS2, XBOX), SEPTEMBER 28 (GC) > **ESRB** T

PS 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

Let's play a game of "Imagine." I'll start! Imagine someone made a game based on the horrid buddy cop movie *Bad Boys II*. But, imagine they did it without the likeness or voice of either Martin Lawrence or Will Smith. Then imagine they made a game that basically played like the Driv3r (which wasn't great to begin with), minus the vehicles, variety, open environments, and visual polish. If you imagine that this game would suck, well I imagine that you're right. Bad Boys plays like Max Payne, merging a third-person display and an FPS control scheme. The levels are linear and dull, and for some reason you can only take cover in specified circles in the environment, which takes away any sense of reality or spontaneity. The targeting, unsurprisingly, is pretty erratic, and on the PS2 your field of view moves far too slowly.—**MATT**

## Sonic Mega Collection Plus

**BOTTOM LINE 7.5**

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION/PUZZLE > **PUBLISHER** SEGA > **DEVELOPER** SEGA > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 2 > **ESRB** E

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Whether you love Sonic or hate him, it's hard to deny that this is one great collection. Twenty games for a budget price is hard to resist, and many of them are simply classic. Many others, however, are flat-out crap. It's fun to see the old Sonic Game Gear titles, but looking at them on a big screen made my eyes catch fire, and Sonic 3D Blast is about as much fun as taking a swim in a chemical treatment vat. Still, despite the presence of some really questionable games, this is the best disc a Sonic the Hedgehog fan can ever invest in. If you grew up with these games, they're still a joy to play. New converts to the Sonic fold will get a great introduction to the 'hog's history.—**JEREMY**

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## Alien Hominid

**BOTTOM LINE 8**

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** 0-3 ENTERTAINMENT > **DEVELOPER** THE BEHEMOTH > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 19 > **ESRB** T

PLAYSTATION 2 | GAMECUBE

Hands down, this is one of my favorite games of the year. It's not the most polished game out there by any means, but it makes up for its lack of finesse with sheer style and quirkiness. The old-school shooter vibe will feel instantly familiar to those who enjoy hardcore titles like Metal Slug or Gradius, but the mood is far more reminiscent of Homestar Runner than Contra. The hand-drawn visuals look great, the bosses are unique and huge, the difficulty is blistering, and the Alien Hominid character is endearing. He may have began his life on the web, but he's ready for cult status with shooter fans. If you're looking for something fun, funny, and challenging, this is the title for you.—**JEREMY**

## Shark Tale

**BOTTOM LINE 6.5**

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION > **DEVELOPER** EDGE OF REALITY > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 27 > **ESRB** E

PS 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

On the scale of licensed, kid-friendly fare, Shark Tale is a generally well-constructed game that makes great use of its license. Based on the Dreamworks animated feature, it plays through the story of the flick by having little cinema sequences set up one of four minigames. Historically, these collections of short gameplay vignettes are bland, repetitive, and unquestionably derivative. While the minigames do fall into the camps listed above (dancing, button-pressing rhythm game? I've never seen that!), the presentation makes up a bit for the game's shortcomings. Graphics (especially on Xbox) are sharp and colorful, the characters and areas from the movie are represented well, and the licensed songs are far more impressive than most similar fare.—**LISA**

## Vietcong: Purple Haze

**BOTTOM LINE 5**

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 10-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** GATHERING > **DEVELOPER** COYOTE > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 15 > **ESRB** E

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Vietcong's squad gameplay is kind of cool because it offers something different. For example, you have to actually talk to your medic before he'll heal you. However, this aspect of the game simply isn't good – and neither is the rest of it. Making your guys follow you is a chore, and the frustration you'll feel when your geographically challenged pointman leads you through a mission will have you jumping into the nearest spike pit. Once you realize the futility of the squad mechanic, the rest only gets worse. The game looks okay, but combat is dull and it doesn't compare to its PC counterpart.—**KATO**

**theedge**

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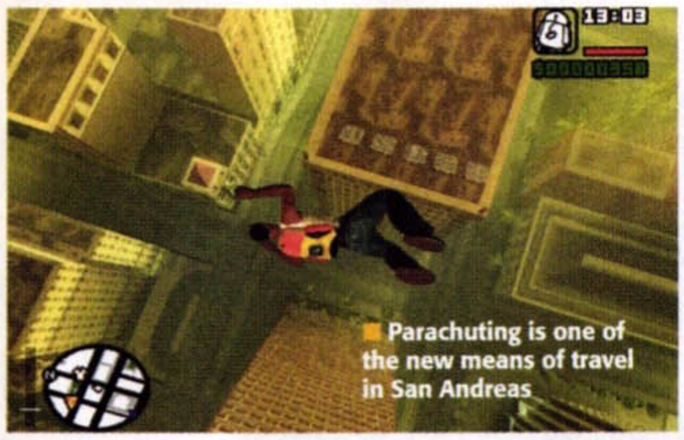
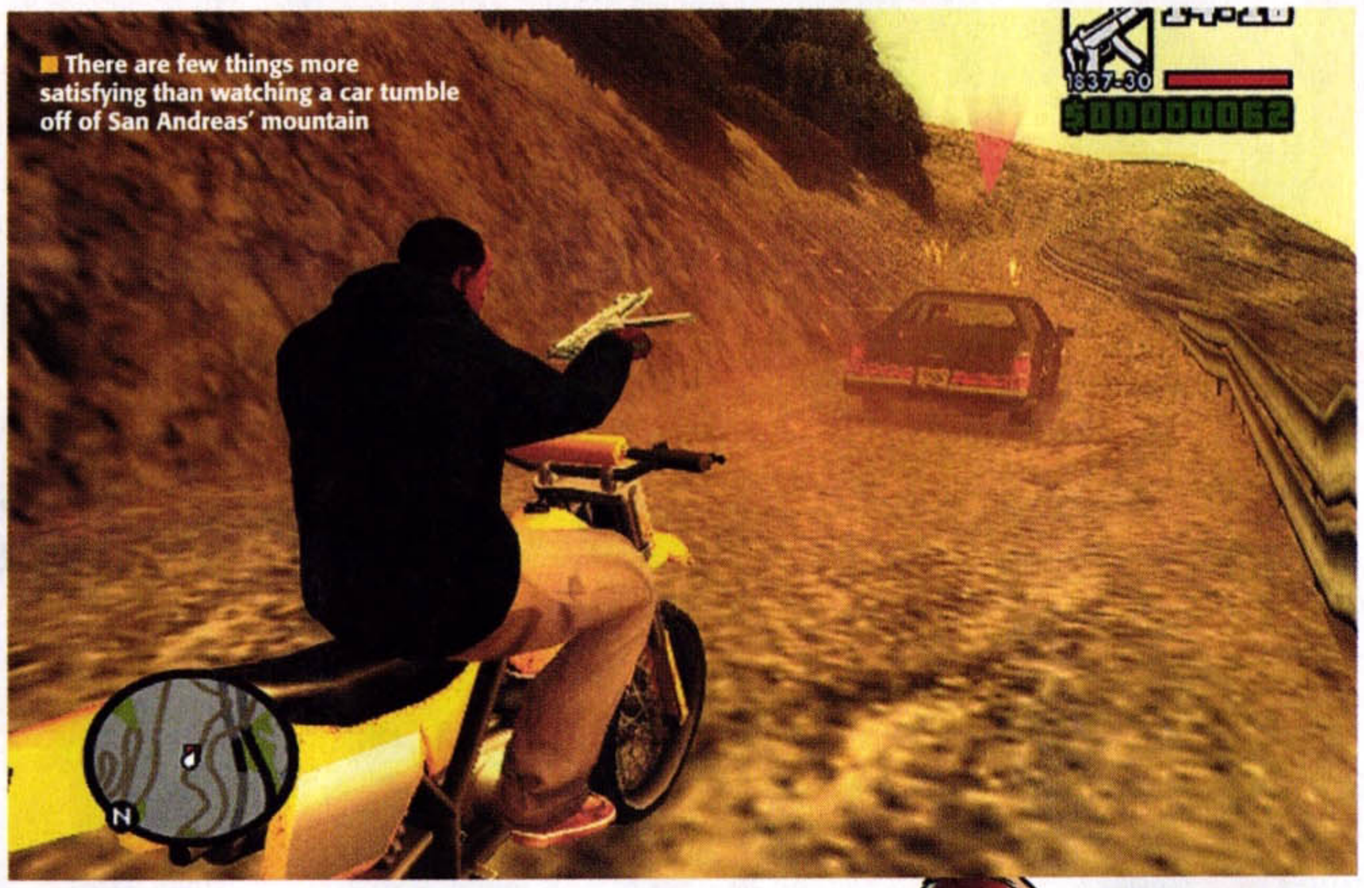

Parachuting is one of the new means of travel in San Andreas

Those who are fit can enter triathalons


There are few things more satisfying than watching a car tumble off of San Andreas' mountain

PLAYSTATION 2

# Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas

**> STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** ROCKSTAR **> DEVELOPER** ROCKSTAR NORTH **> RELEASE** OCTOBER 26 **> ESRB** M

GAME INFORMER GAME OF THE MONTH

## MORE THAN A GAME

"Every day you make progress. Every step may be fruitful. Yet, there will stretch out before you an ever-lengthening, ever-ascending, ever-improving path. You know you will never get to the end of the journey. But this, so far from discouraging, only adds to the joy and glory of the climb." When the words of the late Sir Winston Churchill perfectly depict the vivacity of your digital persona in a video game, you know that you've stumbled upon something extraordinary – something that I believe will define a generation and will forever change the way that we look at video games. Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas is easily one of the greatest games that I have ever played.

From your violent first steps in Los Santos to your high-rolling affairs in Las Venturas, Rockstar punctuates this statement with a triumphant excalmation point. Dwarfing the company's previous efforts by a frightening degree, San Andreas is roughly five times larger than Vice City. It is so expansive, in fact, that the feeling of "I haven't seen anything yet" is constantly with you…even if you've spent every waking moment for weeks on end playing the game. This impressive scale not only brings about an amazing sense of realism, it opens the door for Rockstar to explore new gameplay possibilities. In my opinion, this is really where the game shines the most.

Whether you are playing the role of a wheelman in a good old-fashioned heist or find yourself making like James Bond as you leap from an airplane with a parachute fastened to your back, no two missions are truly alike. As the game unfolds, you'll mow down a rival gang on the top of a speeding train, use a flamethrower to torch illegal contraband in the countryside, and barrel through oncoming traffic with a stoolie strapped to your hood. Every little step that you make is accented by something that you haven't done before.

There are objectives that are so diverse or complicated that they almost feel like they are a part of a different game altogether. With this said, it is no longer bound to fast cars and guns. It has moved into the territory where anything can happen at any given time. The series has always celebrated freedom of movement, but now it also embraces freedom of choice. The means to which city you travel, the weapons that you wield, and the decisions that you make are expansive. Do you drive to your next objective or take a commercial flight? Should you cut through the desert on a dune buggy or steal a speedster and hit the highway? It's up to the player, not the game, to determine the best method to success.

Customizing your experience doesn't end with the vehicles. You can also sculpt your character to your liking. Lift weights to get ripped, exercise to improve stamina, wear different clothing to raise your sex appeal. Furthermore, if you spend a lot of time in cars, you'll notice that your driving skill is improving. If you dive under water, your lung capacity will increase. Every little action that you make is gauged in some way, but it's done in a manner that is hardly noticeable. You can still play the game the way you want without worrying about the little things.

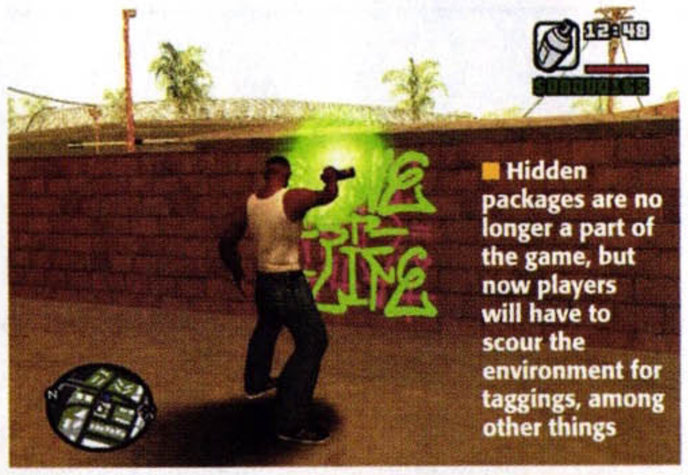
Rockstar also went to great lengths to improve the gameplay fundamentals. A new targeting system makes weapon-play a breeze, and stealth tactics allow players to explore missions in a less confrontational fashion. Navigating your surroundings is no longer limited to running and jumping, either, as you can climb over fences and pull yourself up onto ledges. All told, the gameplay has improved dramatically. Perhaps hinting at things to come in future GTA titles, San Andreas offers cooperative play for two players. You can't go through the main missions this way, but it is a nice bonus that is every bit as entertaining as you would hope.

Storytelling is another area in which San Andreas excels. The script is ripe with pop culture playfulness, yet also has a serious tone. Given just how large this game is, it's amazing how well this plot flows from mission to mission. Young Maylay, who voices main character Carl Johnson, delivers an outstanding performance, and couldn't have done a better job in bringing his character to life. This is also Samuel L. Jackson's most memorable roll since *Pulp Fiction*. Like a great movie, you'll be quoting the dialogue from this game for years to come. The soundtrack, which boasts over 150 songs, is also quite infectious.

San Andreas breaks the video game mold and emerges as something far greater. This is more than a game. This is entertainment at its best.—**REINER**

In co-op, one person pilots the chopper while the other controls a targeting reticle

"Don't worry, when we're done, there won't be any weed left."


Hidden packages are no longer a part of the game, but now players will have to scour the environment for taggings, among other things

**BOTTOM LINE 10**

**> Concept:** Throw more at gamers than they ever dreamed they could handle

**> Graphics:** There's still a bit of background draw in and texture popping, but the character models look better than before, and the new lighting techniques are very impressive

**> Sound:** Over 150 licensed tracks, great talk radio shows, hilarious banter on the streets, and Oscar-worthy voice acting

**> Playability:** The gameplay has improved significantly. Targeting is easier to utilize, and new actions allow greater environmental interaction

**> Entertainment:** Once you step into San Andreas, you won't want to leave

**> Replay Value:** High

**Second Opinion 10**

A darkly bitter and unapologetic satire of modern society, San Andreas succeeds at nearly everything it tries to do with a breadth and enormity that no other game has even begun to touch. Irreverent in the extreme, GTA brilliantly ridicules the hypocrisies of our culture through heavy-handed shock value and subtle language choice. The amusing tone extends to the phenomenally diverse musical soundtrack, where even the song choice seems to poke fun at the political correctness that binds most popular media these days. Every moment of the game has players trying something new, so you're constantly engaged in both the story and gameplay. The outrageous criminal actions you commit will undoubtedly spark the controversy: "How can they make a game that lets you do this?" Meanwhile, the game itself asks a more complicated question of its players: "How did we end up with a society that allows these things to be satirized in the first place?" Sometimes, titles with this level of hype are pretenders to the throne. Other times, like this, a piece of entertainment shows just why it deserves its place as the king of the medium. —**MILLER**

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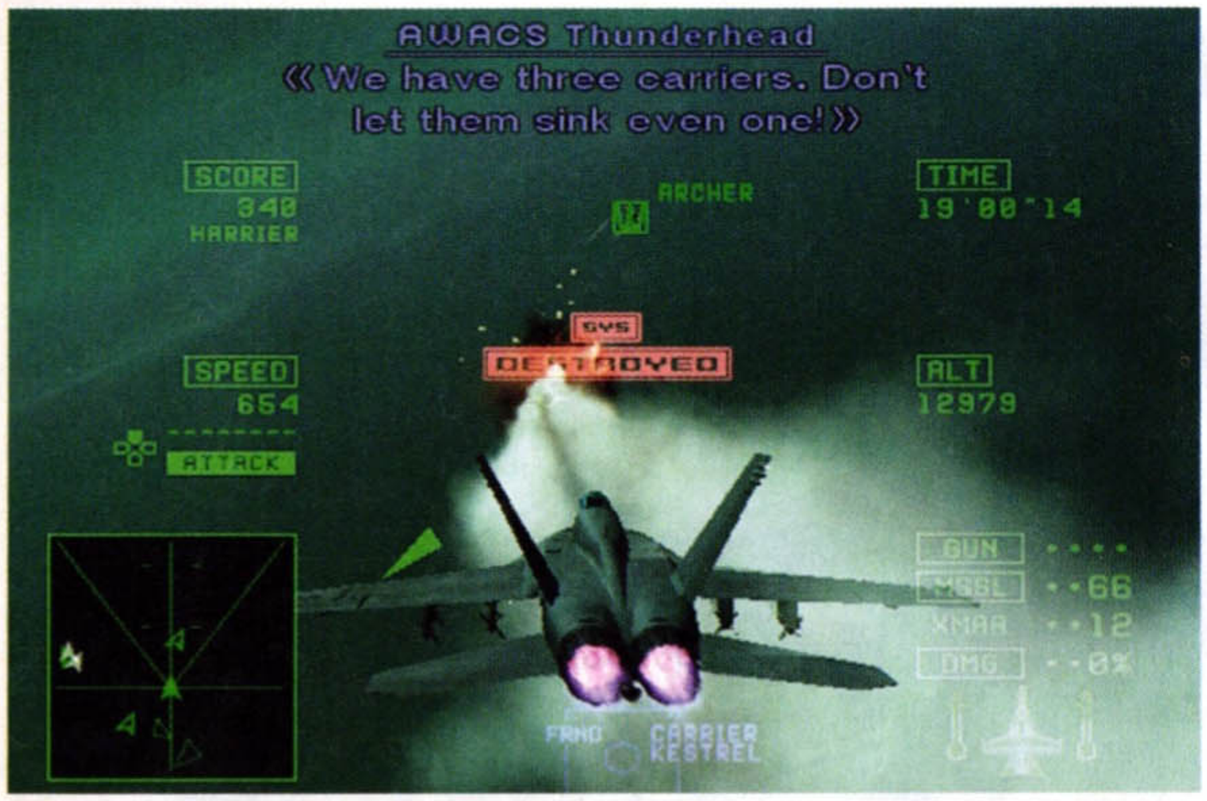
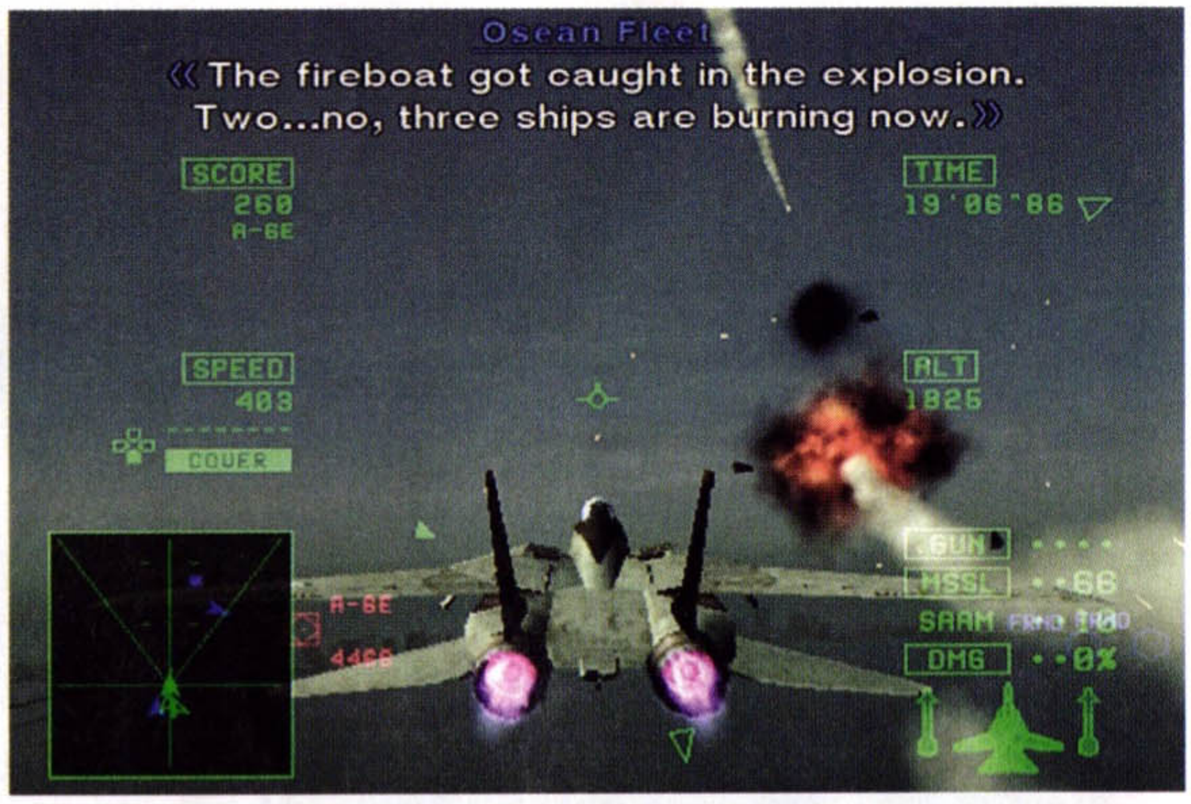
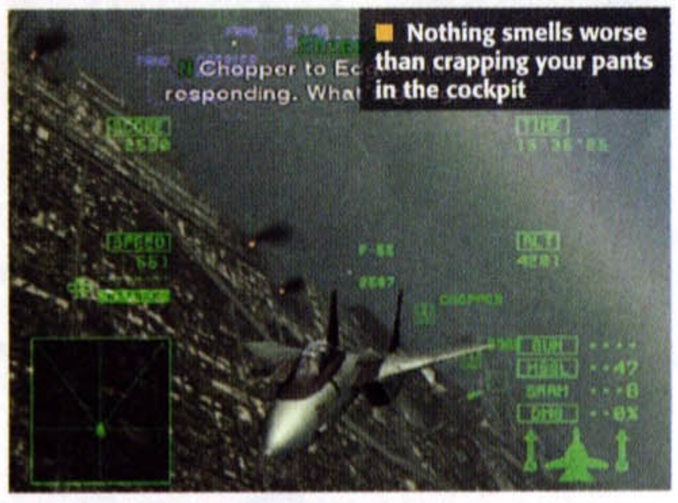


An armed escort ensures the safe delivery of Game Informer magazine via airdrop

Highway to the danger zone – speed limit: mach 4


Nothing smells worse than crapping your pants in the cockpit

Players can unlock over 50 licensed planes

Wingmen banter accompanies almost every second of play

PLAYSTATION 2

# Ace Combat 5: The Unsung War

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** NAMCO > **DEVELOPER** NAMCO LIMITED > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 25 > **ESRB** T

## THE POWER OF VOICE

Within every second of play, it feels like gallons of adrenaline are being pumped into your body as two people stand beside you and criticize your piloting skills with angst-filled screams. As you can probably imagine, this is an absolutely terrifying experience. Few things in this world have preyed on my emotions and senses to the degree that this game does. It may fry your nerves to the end, and stress you out to the point that it seems unbearable, but the second that you put the controller down, you realize that you've just been subject to the ultimate rush. Through relentless intensity and hair-raising gameplay, Ace Combat 5 electrifies the digital skies and soars as one of the most exhilarating experiences in all of gaming.

The methods with which Namco established such a fierce environment are innovative and a bit uncharacteristic. Whether you found yourself panicking as the melody in Super Mario Bros. sped up, or using the soundtrack in Tony Hawk's Pro Skater to get into the zone, sound has always played a large role in gaming. In this release, Namco uses the human voice to dictate the level of tension at any given time. Throughout each mission, and nearly every second that you are in the sky, your wingmen banter constantly. Since the missions are timed, dialogue is scripted to fit into the duration, and you will rarely, if ever, hear comments repeated. The tone of the conversations and comments that your comrades make sets the mood for the action at hand. There are moments of complete tranquillity that quickly become uneasy simply because your wingmen sense something isn't right. You actually find yourself getting a bit nervous. Your wingmen will even speak directly to you, and yes, the game allows you to answer with a yes or no command. When you have a rocket on your afterburner, simply clicking yes or no is one of the hardest things that you'll do, and not responding or making the wrong choice could lead to a botched mission. This is a brilliant way to create atmosphere, and something I never really expected flight games to do.

Namco also did a phenomenal job with the missions. Not only do they seamlessly tie together the story (which is illustrated through fantastic CG movies and spoken dialogue), but they are wildly diverse and always engaging. A great example is a CG clip of two pilots conversing in their quarters about the events of the last mission. As the conversation goes on, an alarm sounds, warning everyone that there's a raid on the base. As the pilots run out of their quarters, you transition to gameplay, where you see the pilots jumping into their planes. As bombs fall and explosions rock the runway, you have to wait for their planes to take off before you can get airborne.

Gameplay wise, little has changed. The controls are still easy to pick up and master. While you'll find yourself shooting down most of the enemy bogeys, your wingmen are respectable fighters that will lend a hand and not just sit back and watch. The difficulty level is balanced nicely, and each of the 50-plus licensed planes feature different payloads and handling. I always felt that Ace Combat had a better grasp of dog fighting than any other title out there, and this remains true through this release. It's also an incredibly gorgeous game that showcases amazing vehicular detailing and vibrant effects.

I've always enjoyed this series, but this entry soars high above Namco's previous efforts. It's a thrill ride like you've never experienced.—**REINER**

**BOTTOM LINE 9**

> **Concept:** Innovative sound techniques blend seamlessly with explosive gameplay to create a sequel that flies high

> **Graphics:** The contrail effects, environmental lighting, and detailing on the craft are outstanding. On the other hand, explosions fail to impress

> **Sound:** The voices of your wingmen are used to foster an extraordinarily emotional climate and create a real sense of intensity

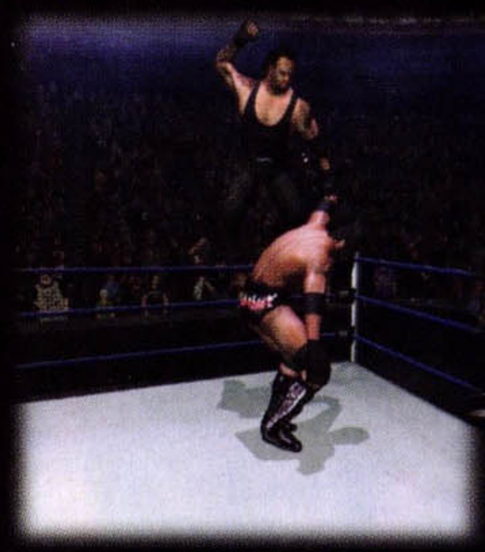
> **Playability:** Identical to previous editions, but the selection of craft offers a greater variety

> **Entertainment:** Easily one of the most intense games to date

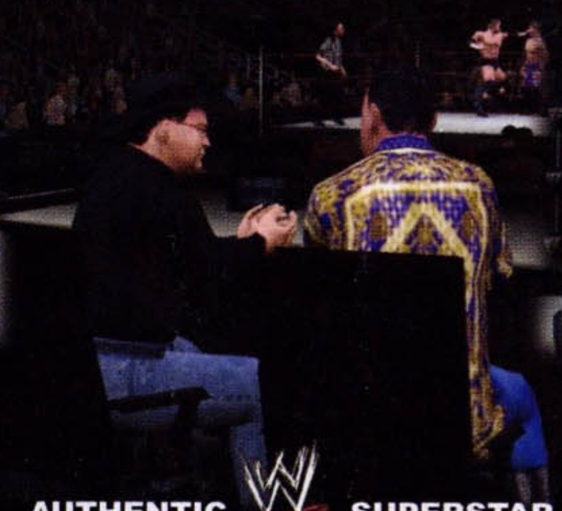
> **Replay Value:** Moderate

**Second Opinion 8.75**

Wow. I really love this game. I'm actually a little surprised. There were enough little things in earlier versions of the series that irked me so that I never really became a huge fan. But this one has made a convert of me. Flight control and combat not only has that satisfying touch of realism, but the game is consistently fierce, challenging, and fun. I was continually impressed as I progressed through the campaign with the variety and uniqueness of the missions, both in terms of environments and creative objectives. The substantially lengthy story is a powerful and evocative tale dealing with the complex dilemmas inherent to modern warfare, couched in a backdrop of mythology and human drama. Plus, if you've got the cash for it, the new PS2 flight stick totally rules.—**MILLER**



PLAY ONLINE

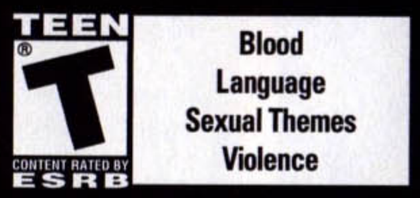


AUTHENTIC SUPERSTAR AND ANNOUNCER VOICE OVER

CHOOSE TO FIGHT DIRTY OR CLEAN

NEW LEGENDS

# TWO WORLDS COLLIDE.



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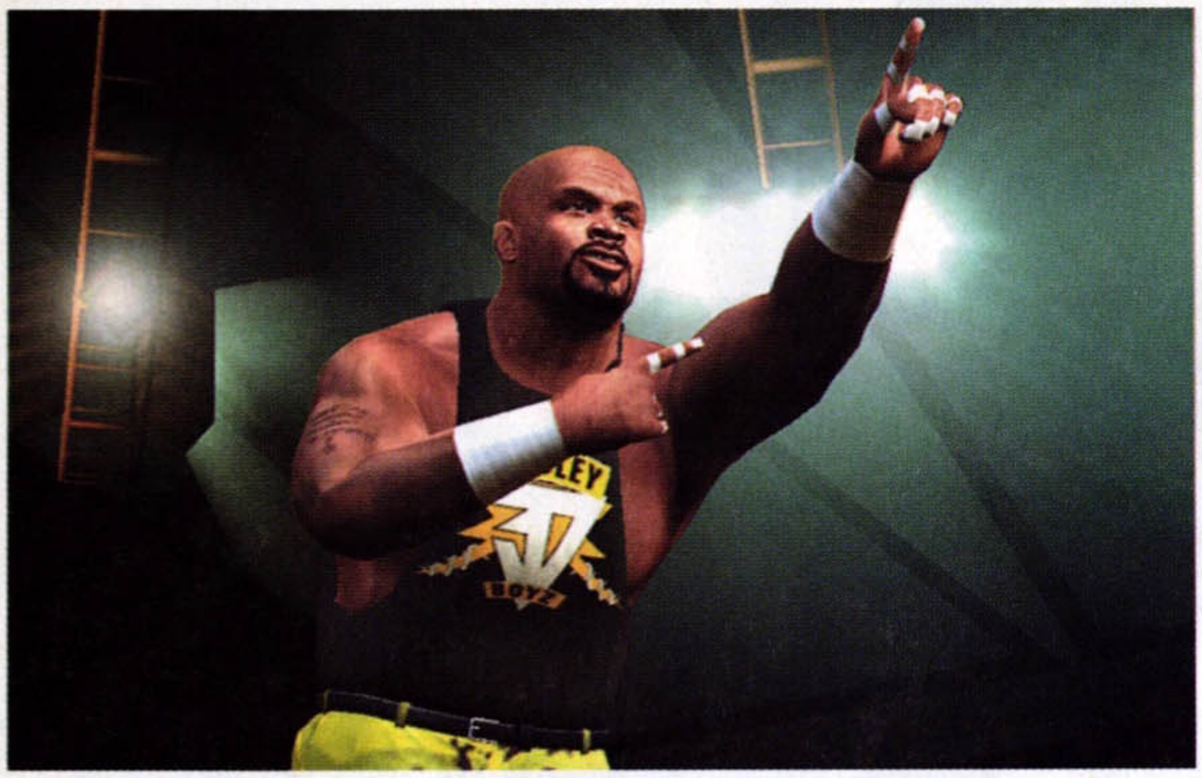


UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2

# WWE Smackdown! Vs. RAW

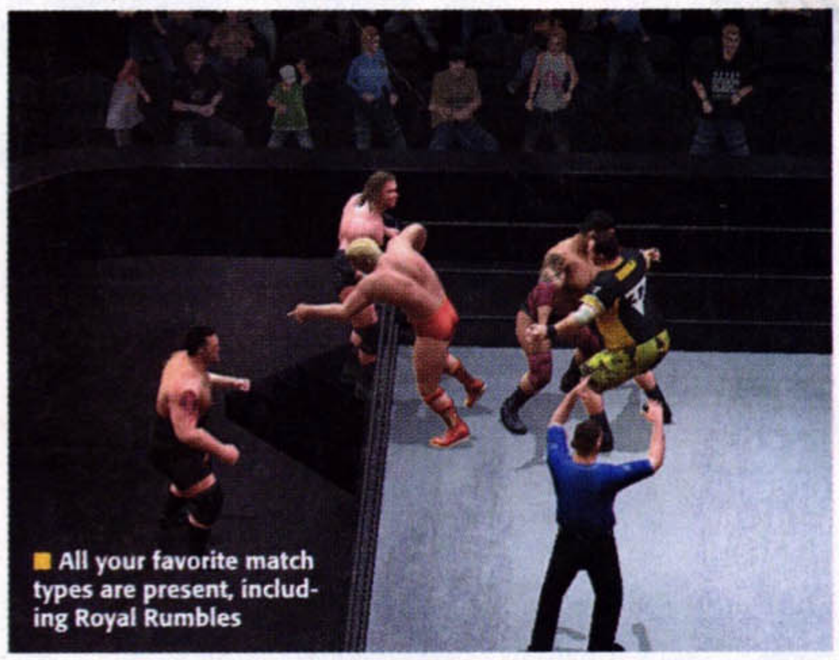
**> STYLE** 1 TO 6-PLAYER FIGHTING (2-PLAYER VIA ONLINE) **> PUBLISHER** THQ **> DEVELOPER** YUKE'S **> RELEASE** NOVEMBER 2 **> ESRB** T

## THE MAKINGS OF A CHAMPION

The first thing that I always look for in a wrestling game is a create-a-character mode that allows me to concoct hideous mutant fighters that make those around me question what goes on in the darker recesses of my brain. Fortunately, Smackdown Vs. Raw offers just that, and soon I was beginning my career as a mountainous man who looked like an evil bondage teddy bear.

In season mode, I took my grotesque wrestler from the bottom of the WWE ranks to the champion belt of both the Smackdown! and Raw brands by beating the Undertaker in a Three Stages of Hell match for possession of both heavyweight titles. Throughout the season, I earned experience points to increase my stats, as well as money to unlock goodies like new move sets, legends like the Road Warriors, Mankind, and Bret Hart, and plenty of Diva goodness like sexy loading screens and alternate costumes for the super-classy Bra and Panties matches.

As much fun as it is to pump up my wrestler into an unstoppable monster, the thing I appreciated most about Season mode is how it took me through all the match types available in Exhibition mode and taught me how to play them. With a bevy of gimmick matches, there are plenty of game mechanics to learn, but the streamlined control scheme offers tons of options with little confusion. Smackdown Vs. Raw uses the familiar scheme in which pressing a direction on the d-pad while hitting the strike or grapple button triggers a different move. This is the core of gameplay, but counters, finishing moves, running, and all other familiar wrestling moves are implemented with similar ease.

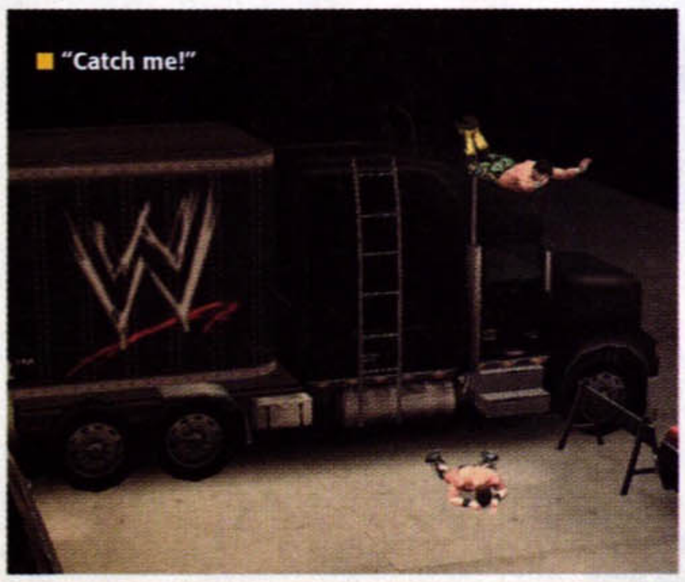


All your favorite match types are present, including Royal Rumbles

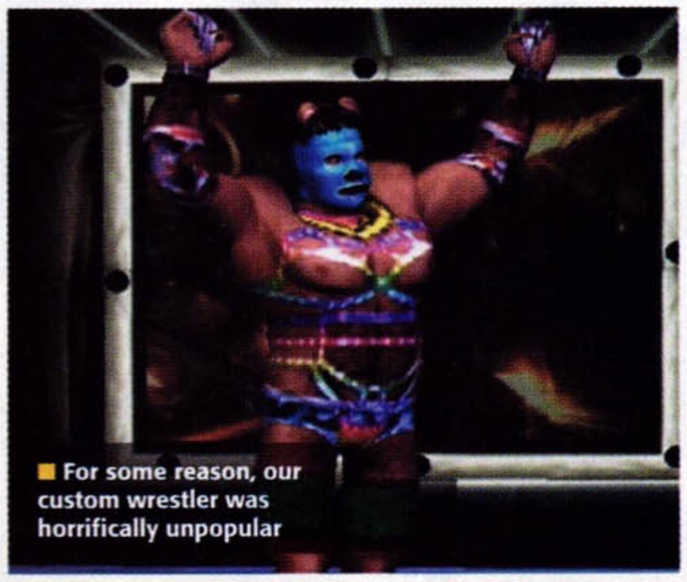
While the basic gameplay is in keeping with most wrestling games, several new features take things to the next level. While it sounds odd, minigames have been added – some matches start with a simple staredown or shoving minigame to determine who gets the upper hand, and submission moves can trigger a minigame in which you attempt to stop a moving ball in the center of the meter to escape. These and other minigames are completely unobtrusive, and offer a nice way to handle certain actions without resorting to button-mashing. There's even a spanking game in the Bra and Panties matches that offers a spicy little reward if completed.

Other new additions are the Clean and Dirty meters, which fill up when your wrestler performs certain actions. Since I wrestled as a heel, my Dirty meter filled up by using weapons, holding submissions after a rope break was called, removing the padding from turnbuckles, and other dirty tricks. When filled, the Dirty meter rewarded me with a low blow that devastated my opponent. The Clean meter rewards crowd-pleasing actions, and gives the player a Hulk Hogan-style burst of adrenaline, but who wants to play nice?

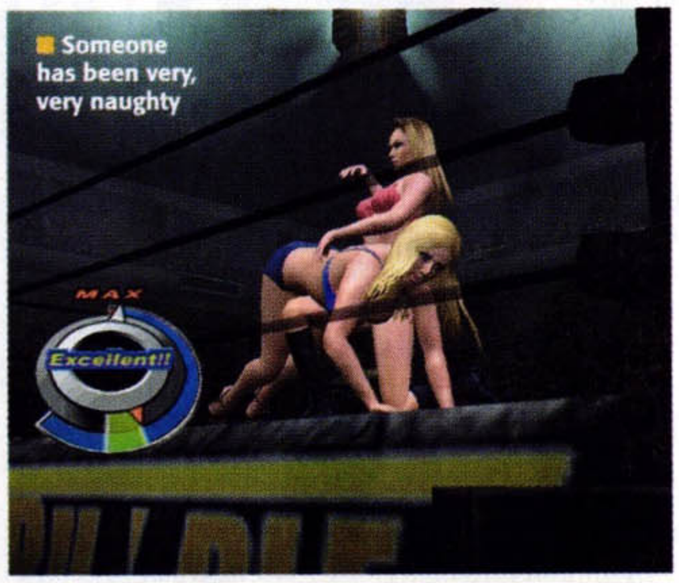
These new additions, plus fun match types like Parking Lot Brawls, online play, and superstar voiceovers really sucked me into this game and provided a wrestling experience that is a heck of a lot of fun and very faithful to the WWE experience. I would have liked more variety in the announcer's dialogue and the music, but those are minor complaints about what is otherwise a damn fine wrestling game. I'd even go as far as to name Smackdown Vs. Raw the new champion.—**JEREMY**



"Catch me!"



For some reason, our custom wrestler was horrifically unpopular




Someone has been very, very naughty

**BOTTOM LINE 8.5**

**> Concept:** The WWE goes into daring new territory – space combat! Just kidding, it's still all about wrestling

**> Graphics:** Wrestler models are nice, and the TV-style presentation does a great job of recreating the feel of the shows

**> Sound:** The superstar voices are great to finally have, but I wish the commentators had more lines

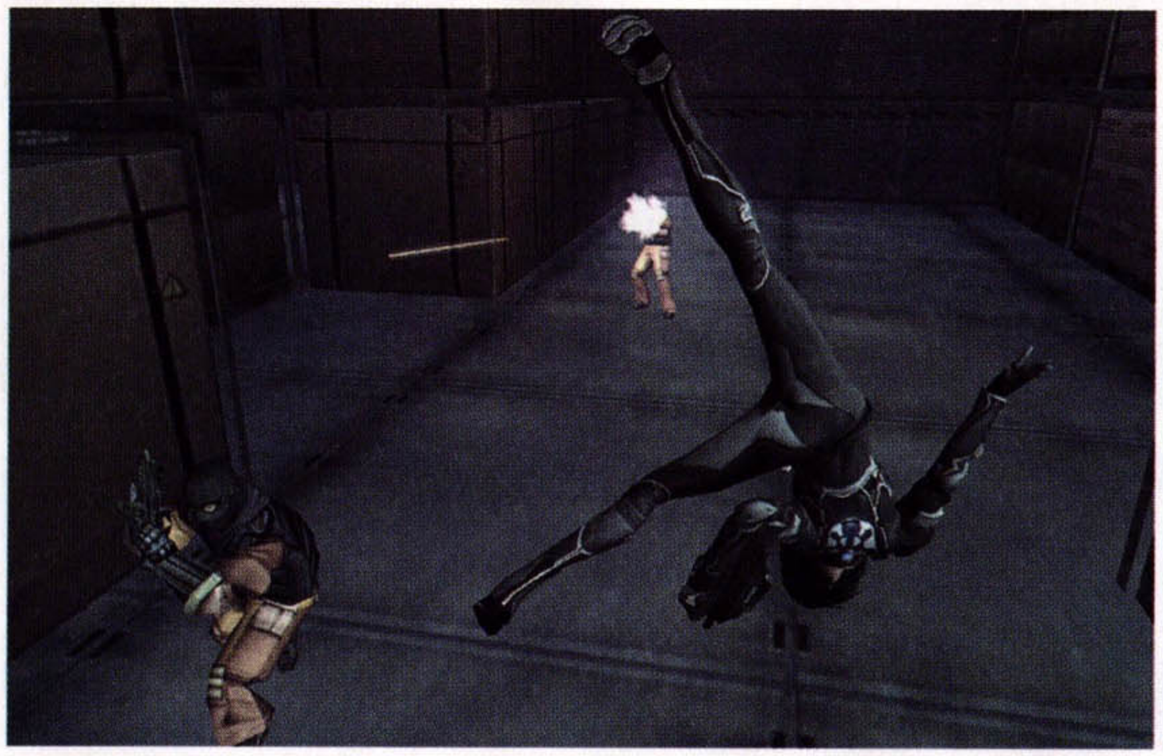
**> Playability:** The control scheme is simple, but still offers all the moves of the real wrestlers

**> Entertainment:** Solid wrestling mechanics, an engaging career mode, and a solid presentation make for one of the most satisfying wrestling titles to date

**> Replay Value:** Moderately High

**Second Opinion 8.75**

Like a chair to the face, the new content in this year's SmackDown will knock you out. Not only is it nice to see the WWE superstars lending their voices to the game for the story breaks, you can now create your very own belts and pay-per-view shows. Gameplay continues to improve with each passing installment. I do feel that the game leans a little too heavily on submission moves, and finishers are still way too weak. Thankfully, new meter-based moves force players to be skillful in a different way. Additionally, doing things like ignoring rope breaks allows you to fight dirty. Overall, the play is tighter, and Season mode progresses nicely. It absolutely nails the WWE presentation. Visually, the detail of the characters is outstanding (especially in the faces), and you won't see a better crowd in any game, period. Six-man tags make a triumphant return and are joined by the WWE's first online experience. The only thing missing is custom entrances for created characters. —**REINER**



PLAYSTATION 2

# Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex

**> STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** BANDAI **> DEVELOPER** CAVIA
**> RELEASE** NOVEMBER 9 **> ESRB** M

## MAJOR MAJOR

Playing Stand Alone Complex is like watching an Olympic pole-vaulter go for the world record, only to end up with a crotchful of the bar. There were so many aspects of this game that showed promise, but I winced in pain as I watched each one fail to attain noteworthy heights. With the thoughtful action of the *Ghost in the Shell* anime, this game had the potential to blend *The Matrix* with Metal Gear in a philosophically stylish stealth bonanza. Instead, it mixes *Under Siege 2* with Oni, resulting in an entirely average gunfest with a few remarkable moments.

The most aggravating aspect of Stand Alone Complex is when you see it come within inches of being awesome, only to slump into a heap before reaching its goal. The sweet martial arts melee attacks and evasive acrobatic flips had me more excited to go kick some ass than any other game in recent memory. However, I was soon disappointed to learn that even with the vast array of slick maneuvers each of the three playable characters possess, progressing through levels relies on only the most standard run-and-gun and platforming techniques. In fact, if you try to use your kung-fu, odds are good that you'll be riddled with bullets before you can even see the stylish slow motion finishing blow.

I want to be clear that there really isn't anything bad or broken about Stand Alone Complex. It looks amazing, and succeeds in providing a ton of action, especially with expanded options like the four-player battle mode. But for every one moment I found myself doing something really cool, there were five others that stood out as missed opportunities. Fans of action games and anime will certainly find this title worth a look, but it just doesn't crest high enough over average to make it stand out.—**JOE**

**BOTTOM LINE 7.25**

**> Concept:** Another weapon in the recent Ghost in the Shell marketing assault

**> Graphics:** The one area where this game delivers in full. The CG scenes are gorgeous, and everything in-game (save for some generic environments) looks great

**> Sound:** The voicework is surprisingly passable, but the music does nothing to create any atmosphere except "rock out and shoot stuff"

**> Playability:** Falls prey to the blunder of having buttons do multiple things depending on context, resulting in imprecision and frustration

**> Entertainment:** It is actually fun, but the kind of fun you can find in hundreds of places

**> Replay Value:** Moderate

**Second Opinion 6.5**

This is far from the worst anime-inspired video game ever, but that still doesn't make it good – several flaws rear their ugly heads throughout the game. The worst offender is that the environments are designed in such a way that they don't seem to be part of a world as much as they are simply video game levels. It sounds like a trivial complaint, but this really goes a long way towards breaking the immersion. This title does shine at moments, but still feels like an overall rough and unfinished package. —**ADAM**

PLAYSTATION 2

# Capcom Fighting Evolution

**> STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER FIGHTING **> PUBLISHER** CAPCOM **> DEVELOPER** CAPCOM PRODUCTION STUDIO 2
**> RELEASE** NOVEMBER 16 **> ESRB** T

## DARWIN WEEPS

For a game with the word "evolution" in its name, it's interesting that this title is so lackluster that it pushes the boundaries of ironic humor. Normally I enjoy 2D fighters, but there have just been some pathetic entries in the past few months, and Fighting Evolution fits in perfectly among their sorry ranks.

The only thing this title really has going for it is the way it integrates characters from five of Capcom's fighting games: Street Fighter II, Street Fighter III, Darkstalkers, Red Earth, and Street Fighter Alpha. It's cool to see the creatures from Red Earth again, but – like that weird guy who hangs around his high school after he graduates – the reappearance of the other familiar characters is hardly worth a second look anymore. However, despite the tired cast, I do want to say that it is cool that the characters all retain the moves and fighting styles unique to their respective titles.

Fighting Evolution takes its biggest blow in the visual department. Either the characters were drawn in MS Paint, or this game got a severe beating with the pixilated ugly stick. It has none of the clean graphics or smooth animations of similar titles like Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike, and the game's meager three modes and bare-bones approach to team fighting do little to make up for the lost ground.

Like that fourth helping of stuffing at Thanksgiving dinner, Fighting Evolution is unnecessary and difficult to savor in light of what came before it. You might be willing to pack it down, but you'll be sorry later.—**JOE**

**BOTTOM LINE 6**

**> Concept:** Cram another jalopy into the recent fighter traffic jam

**> Graphics:** There is absolutely no reason a 2D fighter should look this bad in this day and age. For shame

**> Sound:** The highlight is the announcer's dejected, hopeless tone when the Continue Timer hits zero. Sorry, man. I'm done

**> Playability:** Versus is as fun as ever, but the rest is pasty and lifeless

**> Entertainment:** As fun as Carrot Top is attractive

**> Replay Value:** Moderate

**Second Opinion 7**

Have you ever picked up one of those "greatest hits" albums? You know the type. They're usually pretty cool, with a bunch of nostalgic old songs. The problem is it never really feels like a real, honest-to-goodness cohesive album. That's the dilemma here. There's certainly some classic 2D fighting goodness to be had. But given that they're pulling from so many games, it's surprising that there aren't more playable characters. As it is, even the ones that are present aren't particularly well-balanced in fights against each other, and the old school graphics are more pixilated than they need to be. There's nothing terribly wrong here. But there's little that can be argued to make it more than plain average.—**MILLER**

Walk into the light, fellas

You'll often have the opportunity to man mounted guns

Lugar has a heat scope, but there is little that differentiates the characters' skill sets

The game's constant clamor of war is amazing

PLAYSTATION 2

# Killzone

**> STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA PS2 BROADBAND) **> PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA
**> DEVELOPER** GUERILLA **> RELEASE** NOVEMBER 2 **> ESRB** M

## CAUGHT IN THE CROSSFIRE

In many ways, Killzone has invented its own mystique. From seemingly out of the ether, the title was branded a "Halo killer" from day one. Maybe that moniker came from developer Guerilla itself or perhaps some overzealous fans who'd fallen in love with a couple of early screens. Now that the game has been released, it has nothing but its merits to stand on – and there is enough here to garner the title some deserved attention. However, it does not stand up to the pressure of its own mythology (both in terms of its pre-release hype and the moments of drama in the game's plot). You can blame the imperfections in gameplay or the less-than-epic story, but whatever the reason, Killzone falls short.

The game's strength lies in its near-future setting. By using urban environments and familiar locations such as parks or shopping malls, you get the strong feeling that this war has totally up-ended normal life. Furthermore, it does this without being generic or drab. It's like a backstory is virtually invented out of thin air, making you wonder what happened to the millions of civilian lives which have been torn apart by your war with the Helghast invaders. Unfortunately, in an instance where Killzone's reality doesn't live up to the PR, this setting for a fertile imagination is ruined by a story replete with stereotypical characters and situations which fail to inspire. I actually wanted to know more about the Helghast, who are humanoids with their own motivation (which is so much cooler than having generic aliens), but instead spent most of the time exploring shallow characters I cared nothing about. I winced whenever the game tried to force a ham-fisted moment of sexual tension down my throat. Graphically, a similar trick is played. The game utilizes a grainy camera filter and a muted color palette that, far from being drab, gives everything a stylized look. However, just as you get immersed in the visual aspect of Killzone, it switches to more open outdoor levels where pop-up and heavy background fogging rear their ugly heads to destroy your appreciation.

There are some moments of gripping brilliance, when Helghast are pouring from troop carriers or sliding down rappel lines from helicopters, and you are laying on the trigger for dear life. I appreciated how each weapon's recoil had to be factored into your aim. However, I felt that Killzone didn't do a good job with its hit detection. Although I realize that both weapons and enemies have different strengths, there were way too many times when I'd empty a clip straight into a guy, only to have him still standing. Since when is a headshot not a headshot? Furthermore, some objects like trees had a collision field that extended beyond the object itself. This meant that you sometimes had to peek out pretty far from behind cover to fire – and since the controls don't let you lean out from behind objects, you could leave yourself exposed too easily. I appreciated the multiplayer maps, but was frustrated by the hit detection mentioned above.

To compound matters, Killzone purports to excite you with four selectable characters, depending on which level you're on. Even though your route through a mission may change if you play as stealth special agent Lugar, for example, whom you chose doesn't really matter. I realized this when I was playing her, and even though I was the stealthly character without the firepower, the AI controlling Rico (heavy weapons guy) and Templar (normal soldier dude) made me lead. Why on Earth should I be out front with a sniper pistol when a guy with a gun the size of a Buick is cowering behind the corner in the rear not shooting anyone? Worse yet, when I did try and sneak around and flank someone, those two boobs (and you get a third one later in the game) would follow me around like a mama duck. The result? Cover blown and enemy alerted. Part of me thinks having squad controls would have helped me keep on top of things, but that might have only complicated matters.

After all I've said, a 7.5 may not seem like the right score, but once you accept that Killzone is a mere mortal and not the legend it made itself out to be, you can enjoy this title for the above-average FPS that it is.—**KATO**

**BOTTOM LINE 7.5**

**> Concept:** Killzone captures what's good about an FPS, but falters a few steps from being great

**> Graphics:** This could look amazing on Xbox, but a pretty good job is done with the PS2

**> Sound:** There are so many great ambient sounds going on that when there is silence, it's deafening

**> Playability:** Control-wise, I would have liked to be able to lean around objects, but otherwise it's fine

**> Entertainment:** This game is a lot of fun despite the stumbles that keep it from being empirically better

**> Replay Value:** Moderate

**Second Opinion 7**

After being ballyhooed unfairly as Sony's big "Halo killer," Killzone finds itself in the unenviable position of trying to attain the unattainable. In a nutshell, Killzone is not a Halo killer, but that doesn't stop the game from delivering a solid experience. Graphically, the game does some great things. The models look fantastic and the environments aren't too bad, either. But where Killzone suffers in my book is in its playability. It seems that all the ingredients are here, including multiplayer and a gripping single-player experience, but everything always seems to be just a little off. Every time I pick up the controller, it moves just a little too slowly for my tastes or doesn't react instinctively to my commands. As I've said in the past, the PS2 is simply a sub-par FPS machine, and Killzone is just another example of how even a well-thought out attempt ends up missing a beat or two and ending up average.—**ANDY**

# PLAYSTATION 2 QUICKIES

## Final Fantasy XI: Chains of Promathia

BOTTOM LINE **7.75**

> **STYLE** MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX
> **DEVELOPER** SQUARE ENIX > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 21 > **ESRB** T

I have been playing Final Fantasy XI religiously on my PlayStation 2 since the day it hit retail shelves. Although I've invested over nine months into the game, I still have a long way to go before I see everything. Massive doesn't even begin to describe it. Chains of Promathia simply puts my aspirations of taking in every sight and sound well out of reach. Rather than introducing new races, classes, and spells, Square Enix expanded the size of the world considerably, giving players different zones to level-up in and missions to undertake. Seeing how much the game relies on players changing jobs, I find it odd that Square didn't implement additional zones for lower levels. Basically, if you are level 30 and up, this expansion throws a ton of new content your way.—**REINER**

## EyeToy: AntiGrav

BOTTOM LINE **7**

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER RACING > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA
> **DEVELOPER** HARMONIX MUSIC SYSTEMS > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 9 > **ESRB** E

Let me go on the record as saying that I think this is a great idea. Too bad there are so many stumbles in the implementation. It's exciting to see my character on-screen reacting marionette-like to my movements as I lean side to side. Several of the futuristic course designs are cool – with branching paths and shifting backgrounds. Unfortunately, there are only five actual tracks, and opening each of them up is a grueling, repetitive ordeal. The sense of speed is rarely heart-pounding, and you'll frequently anger yourself by getting snagged on some piece of the environment. Add in some frustrating reaction delay when you move, and you realize that several more things need to happen before EyeToy has the revolution it wants with this one.—**MILLER**

## Guilty Gear Isuka

BOTTOM LINE **6.75**

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER FIGHTING > **PUBLISHER** SAMMY STUDIOS > **DEVELOPER** ARC SYSTEM WORKS
> **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 9 > **ESRB** T

With its unconventional characters and quirky brand of action, playing Guilty Gear has always been similar to Alice stumbling through Wonderland – the more strange things you uncover, the more engrossed you become. Unfortunately, this magic is lost in the series' latest iteration, Guilty Gear Isuka. Even with the inclusion of four-player fights, a side-scrolling brawler mode, and Robo Ky II (a new character with a customizable moveset), the omission of the "auto-face" feature leaves you struggling just to look your opponent in the eyes. Add to that the lack of a traditional arcade mode, and this title simply has no legs to stand on. Instead of a fantastical jaunt down a rabbit hole, Isuka is more similar to being unceremoniously stuffed into a dingy crawl space.—**JOE**

## Yu Yu Hakusho: Dark Tournament

BOTTOM LINE **3.25**

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER FIGHTING > **PUBLISHER** ATARI > **DEVELOPER** DIGITAL FICTION > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 21 > **ESRB** T

Given just how unresponsive and sticky the gameplay is, a strong case can be made that a turd in a toilet has far greater functionality than the controls in this game. Just trying to get your character to perform the move you desire is analogous to steering the Titanic. Swirling further down the drain, none of the characters really generate excitement. I found myself making difficult decisions like: Should I play as the kid with a yo-yo, the clown with a heart over his eye, or the businessman in the blue suit? I usually find video games to be far more compelling than most things in this world, but this fighting monstrosity crushed me to the point that I would rather play with a brick or stare blankly at a wall. Without question, Yu Yu is poo poo.—**REINER**

## Get On Da Mic

BOTTOM LINE **5**

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER SIMULATION > **PUBLISHER** EIDOS > **DEVELOPER** A2M > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 5 > **ESRB** T

I was pretty hyped for a raparoke game, but sadly a poor delivery and shoddy production values ruin Get On Da Mic. For one, it only gives you two lines of lyrics at a time, which makes a song with fast cadences nearly impossible if you don't know it by heart – just try to tackle Talib Kweli, I dare you! However, I soon found out it didn't matter what I did, as the game graded me just as high when I was spouting complete gibberish as when I was nailing the lyrics. Seriously, I got high marks on "The Humpty Dance" by reciting nonsense about former Surgeon General C. Everett Koop and singing "You Are My Sunshine"! Weak. I'm not sure what (if any) voice recognition code went into this game, but it sure isn't working. Nice track listing, though, and some fans might dig the mode where you can freestyle over a selection of today's and yesterday's hottest beats.—**MATT**

## Taiko Drum Master

BOTTOM LINE **7.75**

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER SIMULATION > **PUBLISHER** NAMCO > **DEVELOPER** NAMCO > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 26 > **ESRB** E

Namco just ported two drumming games (this title and Nintendo's Donkey Konga) over to America, and apparently kept the better one for itself. Based on a popular Japanese arcade unit, Taiko Drum Master lets you get busy with two large drumsticks on a plastic cylinder modeled after the traditional instrument. Overall, I like the fact that (unlike Donkey Konga) there are separate sensors for both the main drum and the rim, which adds a lot of challenge to the gameplay while at the same time allowing you to develop your own style. Typically, the minigames aren't very fun and I wish it had a few more gameplay modes (especially four-player). However, this has a great song list and gives you what good a music title should: a taste of what it's like to play the instrument in real life.—**MATT**

PLAYSTATION 2

## Sega Superstars

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** SEGA
> **DEVELOPER** SONIC TEAM > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 3 > **ESRB** E

### OLD BECOMES NEW

BOTTOM LINE **8**

> **Concept:** A dozen short games for the EyeToy, each one modeled after one of Sega's iconic titles

> **Graphics:** Sega's bright and colorful visuals are superimposed onto a transparent image of your body in the background. It looks plenty cool

> **Sound:** Nostalgic music and effects take you back to when you first played these games

> **Playability:** The most responsive EyeToy game yet released, but it still has some movement detection issues

> **Entertainment:** The best EyeToy game so far

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

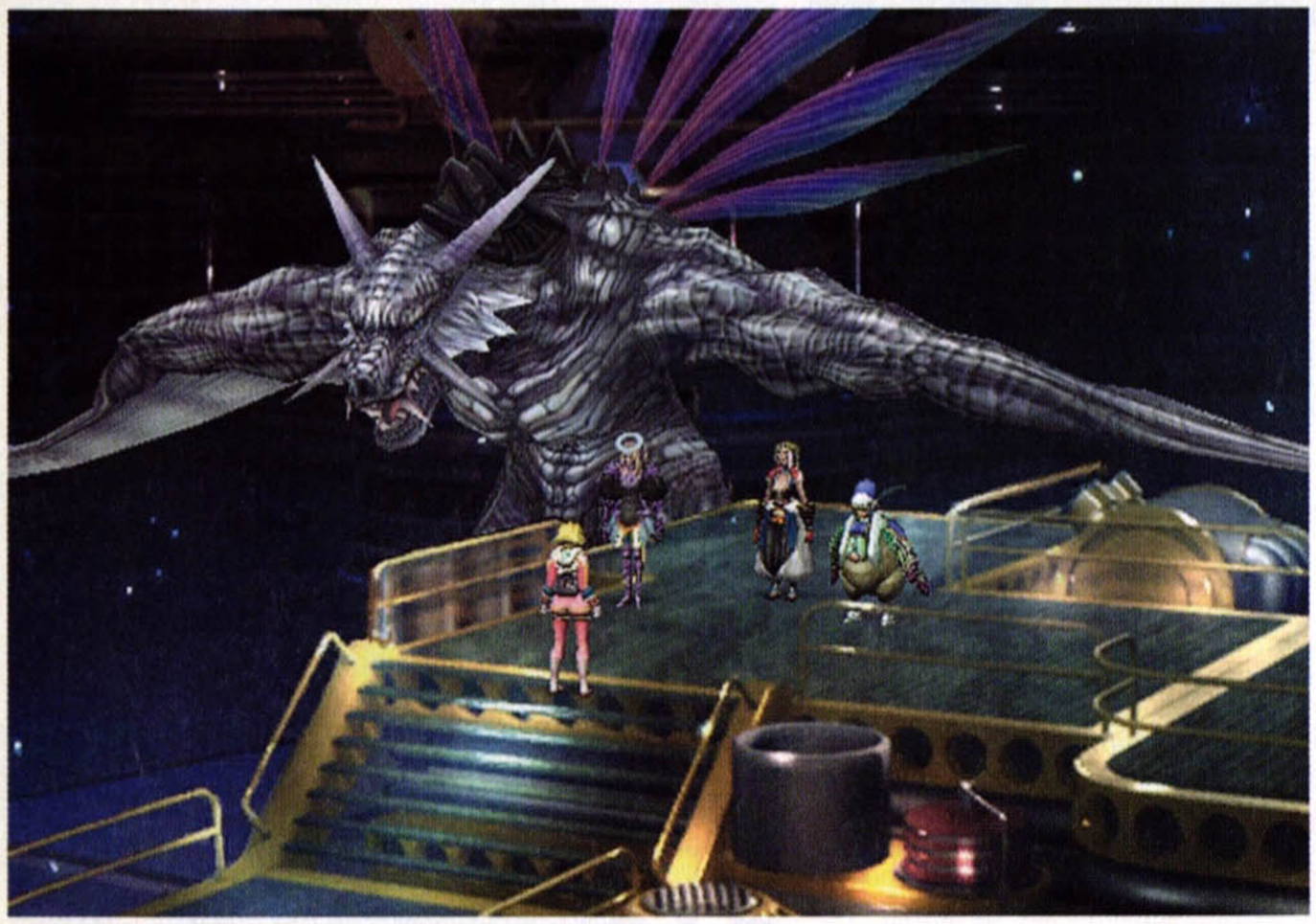
Combining the best of the ideas first seen in EyeToy: Play with the recognizable gloss and fun factor of Sega's hallmark games has resulted in the most enjoyable experience to yet hit the little USB camera. Now, don't get too excited. If you didn't like the original Play, nothing here is going to change your mind. But all of Play's ideas are implemented better here, and the addition of familiar characters and settings adds tremendously to the fun.

Appropriately, the mini-version of Sonic is insanely fast, as you use your hand to navigate the blue hedgehog through a brightly flashing tunnel on his never-ending search for rings. Super Monkey Ball plays just like the original, except the angle of your arms determines the slope and slant of the board. Nights Into Dreams uses a similar mechanic – your outstretched arms are used to literally fly through the 3D board (fans of the series, this may be as close to a sequel to Nights that you ever get, so you better snatch it up). Space Channel 5 and Samba de Amigo should more than please gamers fond of those cult rhythm classics. Virtua Fighter lets you actually fight as yourself against your favorite Virtua characters. And you have to see the chaos of Puyo Pop to believe it – here's a hint: It's not a puzzle game.

The first EyeToy game scored well because of its innovative new control dynamic. That novelty has now worn off, forcing the games themselves to actually be fun in and of themselves. Superstars does just that. While there's not much new, it takes something old and makes it seem fresh. And where gaming fun is concerned, that's worth a lot.—**MILLER**

**Second Opinion** 7.75

This title made me swing my arms around like a retarded chimp having a seizure, and I loved it. This is easily the best game yet for the EyeToy, although it also clearly demonstrates that we need some new uses for this little doodad. Some of the games are fun, some are terrible (Crazy Taxi, I'm talking about you!), but none are really groundbreaking. Still, if you don't enjoy playing this, you've clearly had your fun glands removed.—**JEREMY**



Each character has unique wings and a specialized weapon

During the enemy turns, you need to quickly play your defensive magna

The varsity cheerleading squad fails to form a passable "Z"

UNLIMITED ENABLED

GAMECUBE

# Baten Kaitos: Wings of Eternity and the Lost Ocean

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** NAMCO > **DEVELOPER** MONOLITH SOFT > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 16 > **ESRB** T

## WIND BENEATH YOUR WINGS

There have been some stupid and terrible games with cards as the core mechanic. They are usually either interactive commercials for collectible toys or aggravating collect-a-thons. So, when gamers found out that the next project from Monolith Soft (best known for Xenosaga) would feature a card-based combat system, they were a little bit wary. Let me calm your raging doubts right now: Baten Kaitos is awesome.

I was most surprised by how quickly this game drew me in, and it wasn't even the story that captured my interest – it was the setting. From the first scenes in a rural farming village, the world feels alive. The colorful graphics depict storybook settings teeming with movement, complete with swaying leaves and moving clouds. I felt like a child with a picture book, all of the substance and subtlety falling by the wayside in the face of breathtaking environments, slick character designs, and terrifying creatures.

Of course, as Billy Dee Williams can testify, good looks can only take you so far before you need to bring something else to the table. Initially enticing you with beauty, Baten Kaitos holds your attention by being downright fun to play. The battle system is indeed card-based, but it is far deeper than most of the menu-based combat mechanics out there. The cards are called Magna, and they are more conceptually similar to the Elements in Chrono Cross than the monsters in Yu-Gi-Oh. Each one represents a weapon, a piece of armor, or magic spell, and the ones you select determine your actions. Depending on your level, you can also string together huge combos, potentially using every offensive Magnus in your hand to deal out major damage. Plus, because many cards are class-specific, you are able to tweak each character's versatile deck to an even greater degree than is usually allowed by simple equipment optimization screens.

Above all else, an RPG needs to immerse the player in its universe in order to be successful. Though this can be done in many ways, the most common is to create a compelling story. Strangely, Baten Kaitos does not follow this tradition; the events and characters of this game are not particularly interesting or engaging. However, every other aspect of the game, from the visuals to the music to the battles, kicks into overdrive to create a vibrant fantasy setting. For those gamers lamenting the discontinuation of the Chrono games, Baten Kaitos is the closest thing I've seen to a successor, though its wings don't quite soar to those titles' lofty heights.—**JOE**

**BOTTOM LINE 8.75**

> **Concept:** People have wings, whales are holy, and the ever-present evil empire threatens the safety of the world

> **Graphics:** I'd marry this game, but I have concerns about being wed to a spouse whose ethereal beauty is guaranteed to outshine me at every social gathering

> **Sound:** The strained voice work is like getting your ears boxed, but the pain is quickly soothed by the amazing folksy/tropical soundtrack

> **Playability:** Though turn-based, the battles are frenzied and keep you on your toes

> **Entertainment:** A weak story and lack of cinematics are balanced by outstanding combat and fun gameplay

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

**Second Opinion 8.5**

There are two things that I usually look for in a role-playing game: storytelling and gameplay. While there are a number of interesting hooks in Baten Kaitos' plot, the conflict at hand is far from compelling. Even the characters, most of whom have personalities that resemble walking corpses, seem bored by the events at hand. The miserable spoken dialogue (which sounds like it was recorded in a tin can) comes dangerously close to turning solemn moments into laugh out loud riots. While it's difficult to attach yourself to this world, the unique card-based combat system is reason alone to see this adventure through to the end. I really like how the game forces players to string together cards into combos, build class-specific decks, and study the elemental bases of their adversaries. Baten Kaitos is also incredibly gorgeous (the realism of the environments reaches a level of visual efflorescence), and the soundtrack is a masterpiece. The story may be forgettable, but you'll be hard-pressed to find an RPG with gameplay as enjoyable. —**REINER**

### DOUBLE DOWN!

In addition to determining your actions, the numbers in the corner of each Magnus can also be used to add significant bonuses to your attacks. By forming ascending or descending sequences, you can add a certain percentage to your total damage (the exact number depends on how long the straight is). You can also gain a smaller boost by laying down pairs. It sounds deceptively simple, but negotiating the numbers takes an amazing level of skill considering that while you're trying to line them up, you are also scrambling to keep track of enemy weaknesses, and making sure you aren't using Magna that will restore your opponent's HP.

# L2, R2, L1, R1, L2, R2, TRIANGLE, SQUARE, CIRCLE, TRIANGLE, L2, L1, BLACK, L, R, WHITE, BLACK, Y, X, B, Y

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PRIMA GAMES

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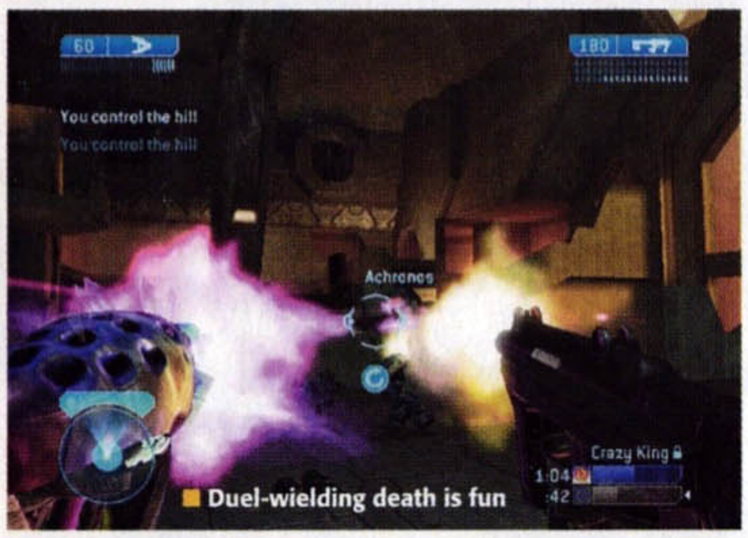
From start to finish, Halo's single player offers a battle of epic proportions

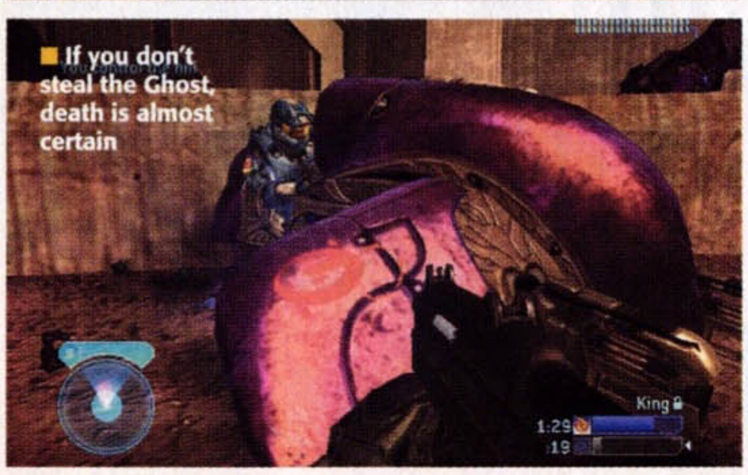
Boarding larger vehicles like this Wraith requires you to punch the driver a couple of times with the B button, then drop a grenade in for good measure

All aboard!



Duel-wielding death is fun

Co-op is only available through split-screen



If you don't steal the Ghost, death is almost certain

XBOX

# Halo 2

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR SYSTEM LINK)
> **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS > **DEVELOPER** BUNGIE > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 9 > **ESRB** M

GAME INFORMER GAME OF THE MONTH

## HAIL TO THE CHIEF

Simply put, Halo 2 is by far the greatest first-person shooter the console world has seen to date. From the monster multiplayer (both off- and online) to the perfectly constructed single-player campaign, this game never lets up for a second.

If you have been following the Halo phenomenon, you already know that this sequel has introduced dual wielding, vehicle boarding, and a host of Xbox Live options including clans and the ability for four players on a single split-screened TV to all be online.

But that's just the beginning. The multiplayer options are just too numerous to list. You can turn vehicles off and on, customize your avatar's color scheme and logo, and play as a Spartan or an Elite. In other words, if you want to customize it, you more than likely can.

In total, there are seven different games to play across 12 different multiplayer maps, including Capture the Flag, King of the Hill, Oddball, Assault, and Territories. All of these have many variations to play and explore. Game Informer has even learned that Bungie will deliver more maps through Xbox Live at a later date (probably sooner than you think).

So no matter how you slice it, multiplayer kicks complete and utter ass.

Concerning the long-awaited single-player campaign, all I can say is it will blow your mind. Long before I got a chance to review this game, I (like you) was getting a little frustrated by Bungie's stance to keep quiet on the particulars.

After playing through the game myself, I can see why the company was so tightlipped. It's anything and everything you could have asked for, and revealing the many surprises found throughout the single-player campaign would be wrong on so many levels.

What I can say is that the plot twists in this monster release will absolutely floor you. The biggest, which happens fairly early in the campaign, is something few will see coming, and is easily the greatest surprise this year. And that's just the beginning – it seems that around every corner Halo 2 throws something new at you, be it weapons, vehicles, or enemies to destroy.

Nothing I say can prepare you for this game. During my playthrough of the single-player campaign, I was constantly amazed by its intense pace. It never once falls from glory. There is no loading screen after the initial start-up. You begin this roller-coaster ride, and you just want to keep playing till you reach the end (and even then I instantly restarted the game on its Heroic and Legendary levels – which offer a whole new level of death and destruction). The dual-wielding obliteration of your enemies is priceless. The vehicle boarding creates situations where I was literally sitting on the edge of my chair simultaneously laughing and swearing as I crowned myself the greatest gamer in the world. Every situation, every fight, can be different depending on how you decide you want to handle it. This, my friends, is a sign of perfection. This is Halo 2. —**ANDY**

The Brute Shot is Halo 2's answer to the grenade launcher – only with a giant blade for melee

**BOTTOM LINE 10**

> **Concept:** Take Halo, then add a "2" and a whole lot of kick-ass

> **Graphics:** It may not be the best-looking console game ever made, but it is close

> **Sound:** From Steve Vai's guitar heroics to the classic Halo chant, this soundtrack rocks

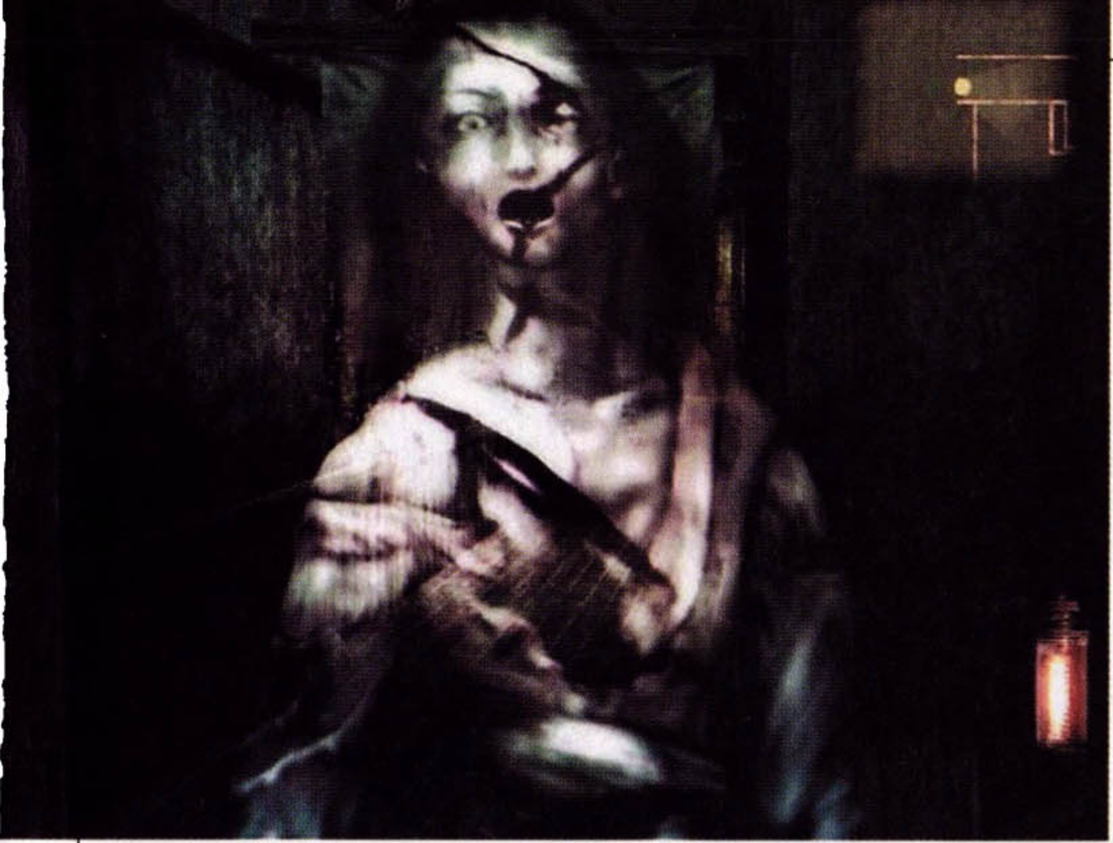
> **Playability:** Silky smooth play control

> **Entertainment:** To date, Halo 2 is the greatest console FPS made – hands down

> **Replay Value:** High

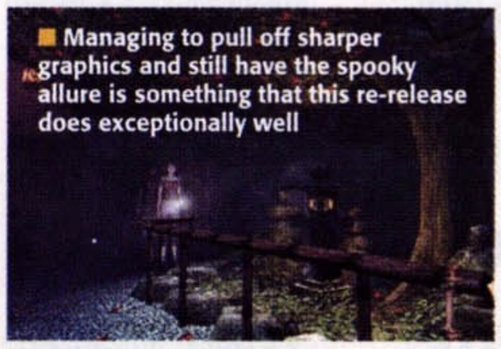
**Second Opinion 10**

It's well known that I'm a PC guy, especially when it comes to first-person shooters. I bring this up because Halo 2 is so incredibly slam-dunk awesome that after an hour playing it, I had forgotten how much I prefer the mouse and keyboard. From the opening cinema to the final credits, Halo 2 rocks like no other. Never have I felt like such a bad mother as when I'm holding two plasma rifles and daring the Covenant to bring it. Furthermore, every single little problem I had with the original is gone. There's no more driving forever to get where you're going, levels don't get repeated, and it's Live-enabled. Also, all of the new elements in the sequel integrate perfectly into the Halo formula, and do nothing but add to the strategy and entertainment – especially when you get to multiplayer. Once you jack your first Ghost from the enemy and dominate them with their own cannon, there is no looking back. To my mind, there is no question that this has the hands-down best multiplayer on console – on top of a highly replayable single-player campaign that's nothing short of amazing. In any light, Halo 2 absolutely deserves video games' highest honors.—**ADAM**

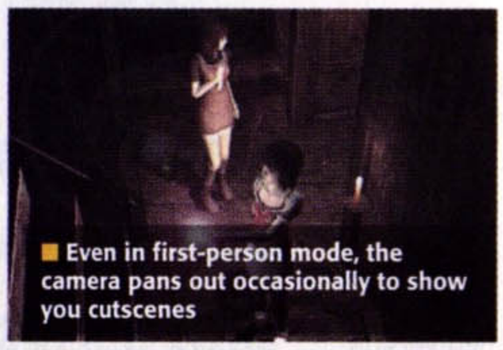


If twins and a creepy sacrifice don't do it for you, we just don't know what will scare you

Alternate costumes are available, but I still generally prefer the original gear



Managing to pull off sharper graphics and still have the spooky allure is something that this re-release does exceptionally well



Even in first-person mode, the camera pans out occasionally to show you cutscenes

XBOX

# Fatal Frame II: Crimson Butterfly Director's Cut

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** TECMO > **DEVELOPER** TECMO
> **RELEASE** OCTOBER 26 > **ESRB** M

## BLEEDING EDGE

There are few things in the video gaming world that keep me more hooked than a good scare. Other games have done it, but nothing makes me truly squirm like the Fatal Frame series. Like the first entry, Tecmo is releasing an updated version several months later on the Xbox, which gets the Director's Cut treatment.

The changes, for those who have already played the game, are compelling enough to seriously make one consider buying it for a second time. From the start, players are now prompted with a point of view choice. I can't get over how much the FPS perspective switch (along with the nicely tuned sound effects and a HUD map – thank you Tecmo) changes the entire feel of the game. When in this mode, the occasional awkwardness of switching to and from the camera view is gone – action is more fast-paced, the entire experience feels more personal, and the sense of urgency is heightened. Essentially, it really feels like you're there.

Astute players will also notice a broader variety of ghost types and a general sharpening of the game's visuals. There is also an alternate ending that we just don't want to talk about (both to save the surprise and because, well, it's just too freaky).

After beating the game, Director's Cut offers more than earlier showings in the franchise. A shopping option lets you spend points earned by killing ghosts on things like extra costumes (this is Tecmo, so bikinis are involved to some extent), items like sacred water and healing herbs, and new modes. Survival mode, for example, puts you in a one-hit-kill situation with more aggressive ghosts. It's craziness incarnate.

Crimson Butterfly is one of the best survival horror games to come out in ages, and even though I've already played it a few times, popping in this Xbox disc scared me again. That, dear gamers, is something that doesn't happen very often, and you'd be remiss to not check it out.—**LISA**

**BOTTOM LINE 9.25**

> **Concept:** Take last year's cult favorite horror game and make it even scarier for the 'box

> **Graphics:** Updated from the earlier version with better draw distance and a generally sharper appearance

> **Sound:** Sound effects are almost never this perfect. It's genius

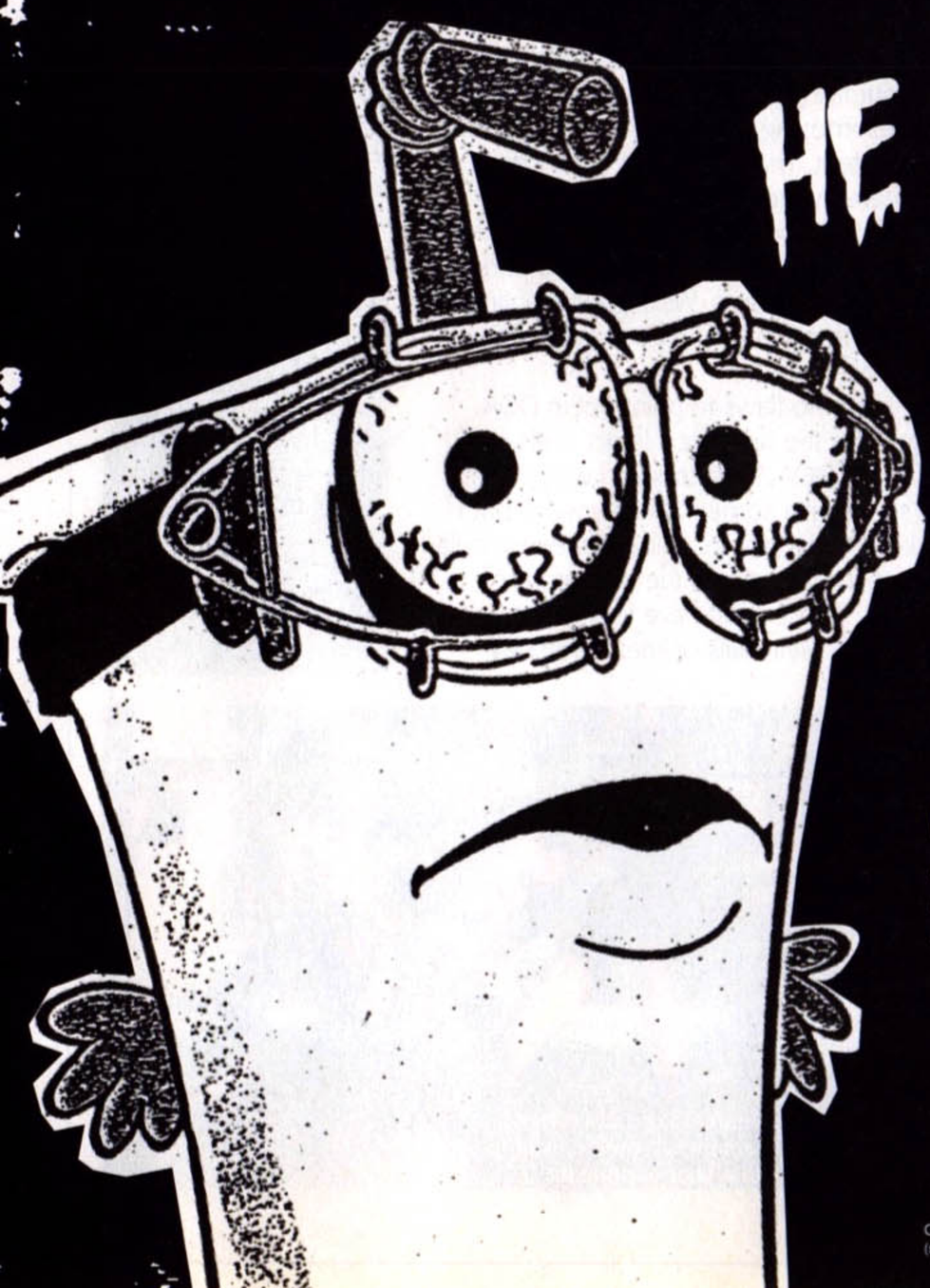
> **Playability:** FPS mode totally changes the game and the traditional third-person perspective seems a tad more responsive

> **Entertainment:** Scary as hell and brilliantly unnerving

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

**Second Opinion 8.5**

If games were scored solely on plot, atmosphere, and graphical style, I would be handing out a perfect 10 to Fatal Frame II. I don't think another game delivers subtle, haunting horror in the manner of this title. However, I'm still not taken with the slow-paced camera combat, and the survival horror genre as a whole needs to start evolving past staid "door puzzle" level designs and clunky character control (although it's much more manageable in the great new FPS mode). This is still the same basic format pioneered years ago by Resident Evil, but it's a great game for fans of the genre. —**MATT**

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XBOX

# Dead or Alive Ultimate

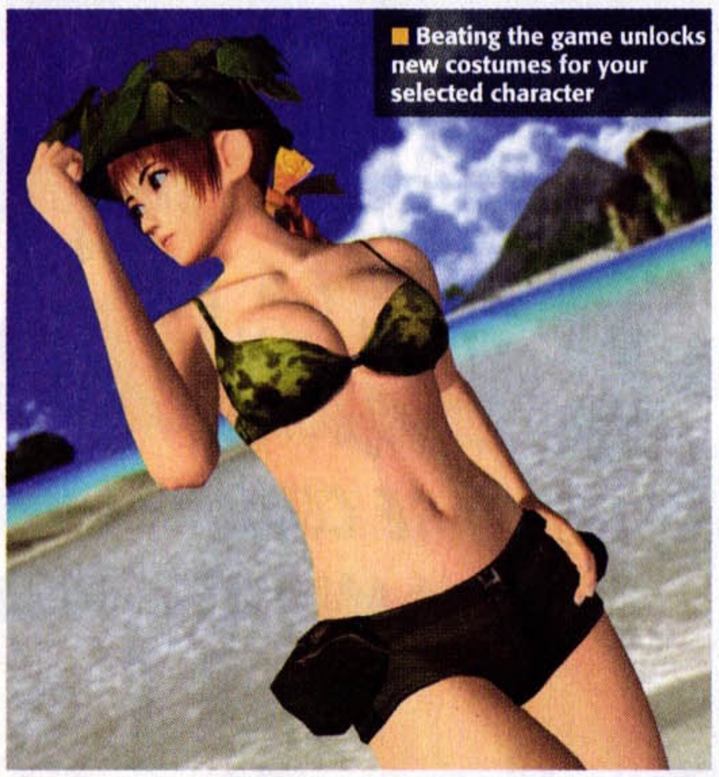
> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER FIGHTING (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** TECMO > **DEVELOPER** TEAM NINJA > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 19 > **ESRB** T

## ULTIMATE FIGHTING

Fighting games are all about the spirit of competition. Sure, playing through the single-player mode is usually fun, but let's face it: this genre is all about gathering your closest and dearest friends together for a nice evening, and then schooling them hardcore with your mad skills. This holiday season, two long-running fighting franchises have gone online: Mortal Kombat and Dead or Alive. The great news for fighting fans is that both games are awesome and have different enough feels that both are worth picking up.

Dead or Alive Ultimate offers faster, more flowing battles than Mortal Kombat: Deception, and, in keeping with the tradition of the series, focuses largely on countering. Pulling off a successful counter is trickier than ever before, as gameplay is even faster than it was in DOA 3. Since punches and kicks fly at you so quickly, perfecting the timing of your counterattacks is a tougher chore than it was in previous entries. Luck will seldom help you reverse an attack, so mastering the countering system and learning the combos of your opponents is essential to survival.

Other than the slightly faster feel of DOA Ultimate, little has changed gameplay-wise from Dead or Alive 2. The graphics have been rebuilt and surpass even the stunning visuals seen in DOA 3. Without a doubt, this is one of the best-looking games on the market right now. If you are a fan of the famously sexy DOA girls, you won't find better-looking versions of them than this. The original DOA is even included (with added online play) so you can see how far they've come. It's nice to finally have a U.S. release for this classic title (it is the original Japanese title, not the modified version American gamers got), but is clearly not the main draw. It's also great to finally have all three DOA games on one console, but the biggest feature of this release is the online play for DOA 2.


Beating the game unlocks new costumes for your selected character

On Xbox Live, the DOA Ultimate experience is every bit as smooth as it is when playing against a friend in your living room. The online framerate is simply awesome; lag and dropped frames were nearly non-existent. The only minor instances of lag I encountered were so small and infrequent that they are hardly worth mentioning. The bevy of online options offer several ways to play that replicate the feel of the arcade. Waxing fools online is every bit as satisfying as it is when they're sitting right next to you.

There are really no flaws to point out in DOA Ultimate, save for the fact that it looks, feels, and plays similarly to DOA 3. Personally, I would like to see the series take some strides forward, but I can't fault it for sticking to its well-polished formula. Like the name implies, this is the ultimate entry in the DOA series, and a must-have for fighting game fans ready to test their skills online.—**JEREMY**

**"...the ultimate entry in the DOA series..."**

**BOTTOM LINE 9**

> **Concept:** Everyone's favorite jigglelicious fighter goes online with a rebuilt version of the classic title Dead or Alive 2

> **Graphics:** In true Team Ninja style, DOA Ultimate is one of the best-looking games around, and there are plenty of beautiful sights to see

> **Sound:** Basically unchanged from DOA 3, the music and effects are fitting but forgettable

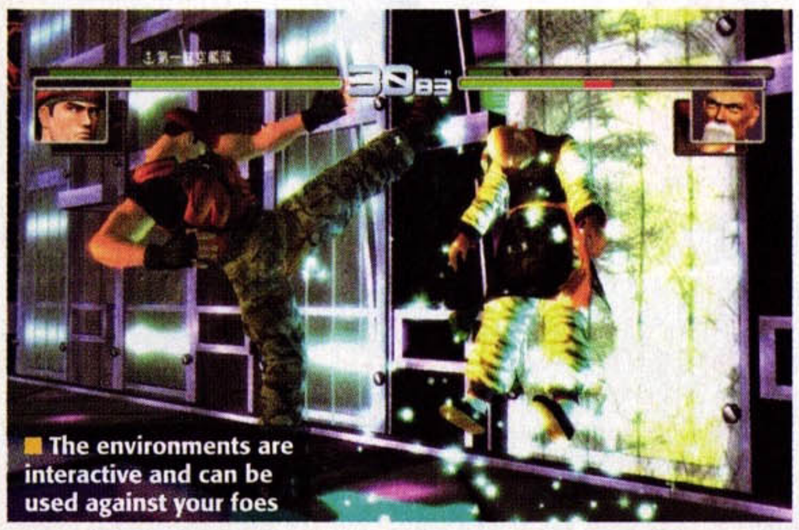
> **Playability:** The newly tweaked countering mechanic adds even more strategy to the familiar buttery-smooth control scheme

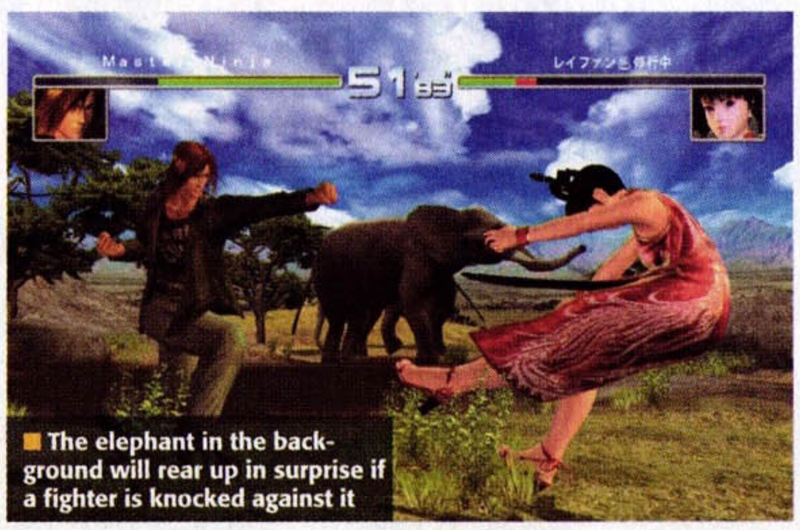
> **Entertainment:** Not surprisingly, online hot girls are tons of fun and hard to put down

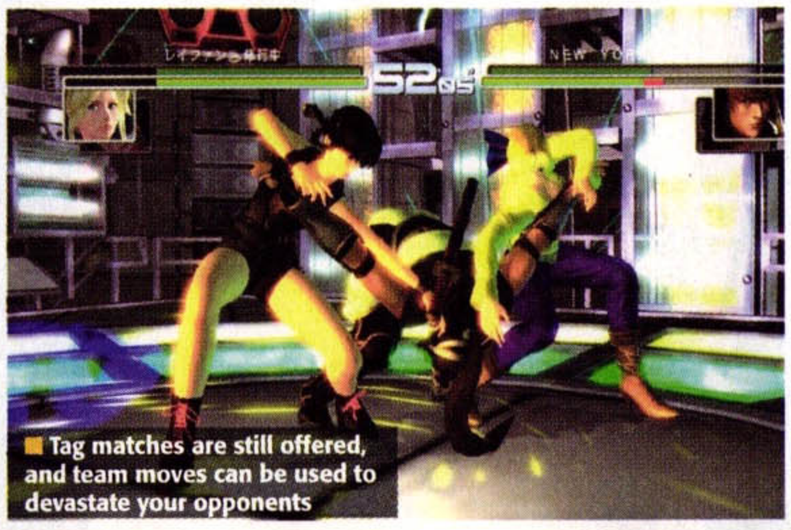
> **Replay Value:** High

**Second Opinion 9**

It's hard to describe the lush and vivid beauty of Team Ninja's reworked masterpiece. Screenshots don't do justice to the dynamic perfection of movement present in the animation of characters and backgrounds. This precision fully extends into the realm of gameplay, where the fighting engine is one of the tightest and most refined I have yet encountered. The online features are certainly a highlight, and Xbox Live battles run with surprising smoothness. The inclusion of the first Dead or Alive is nice, but ends up being mostly for nostalgia value when placed against the newly remodeled version of DOA 2. Nearly constant unlockables for the first dozen hours of play should keep you coming back even if the challenging and gorgeous fights wouldn't already. I'm disappointed that we still don't have the option of English voice actors, and was surprised to not see more CG cutscenes beyond the extraordinary opening cinema. Meanwhile, the various interpersonal character stories remain too convoluted to add much to the mix. This girl is blazingly hot online, but underneath all her new clothes, you've seen what she has to offer before.—**MILLER**


The environments are interactive and can be used against your foes


The elephant in the background will rear up in surprise if a fighter is knocked against it


Tag matches are still offered, and team moves can be used to devastate your opponents

## Karaoke Revolution

BOTTOM LINE **7.75**

> **STYLE** 1 TO 8-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** KONAMI > **DEVELOPER** HARMONIX
> **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 9 > **ESRB** E

In most ways a duplicate of the first Karaoke game that appeared on PS2, I was disappointed to see so little new content in the transition to the Xbox. Nonetheless, the fun songs and play mechanic make for a great time even if the five new Motown songs don't warrant a purchase by fans that have already played the original. The potential for downloading new songs via Xbox Live will be fantastic if they follow through on the promise. But there's no reason that this first Xbox title couldn't have incorporated the admirable Duet Mode seen in the most recent PS2 outing. I just feel it's unfortunate that this excellent series has started to become complacent and willing to rest on its laurels.—**MILLER**

## Ultra Bust-A-Move

BOTTOM LINE **7**

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER PUZZLE (2-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** MAJESCO
> **DEVELOPER** TAITO > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 19 > **ESRB** E

I'm so excited! You see, Bust-A-Move is this game where you shoot little colored bubbles at other little colored bubbles and make them match and then…Wait. You know this already? There are essentially eight hundred versions of this game out in the marketplace right now? Oh my, and me without anything terribly revolutionary to talk about. Well, the biggest addition in the Xbox-exclusive title Ultra Bust-a-Move (I have to wonder what comes next…Super Mega Deluxe Really Good?) is full Xbox Live support of head-to-head play with global rankings. So, go talk about colored bubbles with your online friends, because we've all played this game already – we too know that it really is a simple pleasure, even if they've released too many versions of it.—**LISA**

## Dance Dance Revolution Ultramix 2

BOTTOM LINE **7.75**

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** KONAMI > **DEVELOPER** BEMANI
> **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 16 > **ESRB** E

If it ain't broke, don't fix it. I can almost hear the development team whispering this mantra to themselves as they put this new installment of DDR together. It is simultaneously the greatest strength and weakness facing the series. I'm certainly not going to complain to you about the addictive gameplay, numerous modes, or extensive song list present in Ultramix 2. It's just that I've seen so little fundamental change in the overall experience over the years. Like its karaoke counterpart, Xbox Live song downloads are a step in the right direction. But more musical genres, better graphics, and less annoying announcers would be an even more important move. If you've been in a dark mountain cave for the last few years and haven't yet tried DDR, there's no reason why this version wouldn't be a good place to start. For the rest of us, while it's still fun, this is really just more of the same.—**MILLER**



XBOX

# OutRun 2

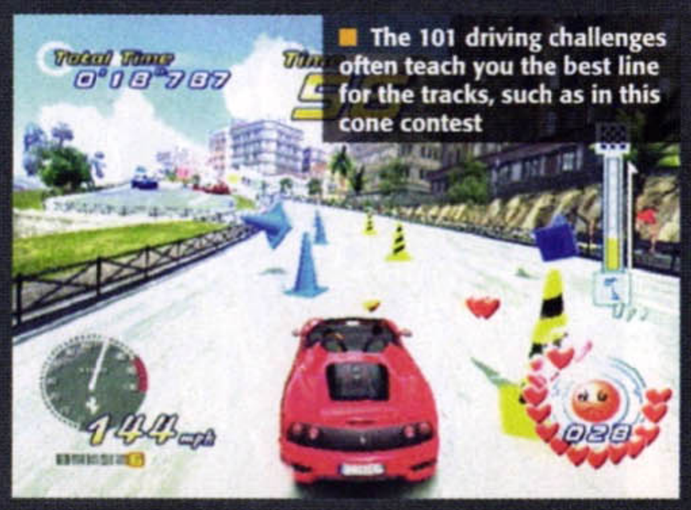
> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA LAN/SYSTEM LINK) > **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS > **DEVELOPER** SEGA-AM2 > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 26 > **ESRB** E

## A DEPRESSING MID-LIFE CRISIS

The one thing that this game can't outrun is the past. When we last left our hero in the arcades way back in 1986, he was cruising down the highway with arm candy in the passenger seat and the sun in his hair. Now it's 2004 and there is very little that's different. In some ways, that's a good thing. OutRun 2 is a fast-paced game that confuses no one. Put your hands on the steering wheel and mash the gas. But instead of feeling exhilarating, this title is like an old man cruising around in a convertible with some bimbo in the front seat. And while OutRun 2 has some moments (when the Viagra takes hold) where it's "still got it," the game is pretty much past its prime.

OutRun 2 is based off the arcade cabinet of the same name, and it keeps the branching paths of the first. Making your way to each of the five different endings of the game won't take you long, and this basic structure, while a nice homage to the original OutRun, isn't enough to prop the title up to greatness or even "pretty goodness." Instead, the core of this title is its speed. It's not as rip-roaring as Burnout 3, but OutRun 2 contains some excellent camera work that helps to amplify your sense of speed. For instance, it'll pan back when you're going down a hill to give the feeling that you're really bombing the sucker at a devilish pace. You'll also enjoy drifting through corners, a technique that is absolutely necessary in later stages of the tracks.

Outside of the main arcade mode, the game asks you to perform 101 various feats for the approval of the demanding honey in the passenger seat. Far from adding depth, this gets old because you're racing the same sections of track that you just beat in the main game. There's even room enough for the original OutRun, but by this time you've already lost interest and are ready to move on to a more demanding and engaging title altogether. In all honesty, you don't want to play the original, as it'll only remind you how little was done with this sequel, even though it has the advantage of having 18 years to come up with at least one original idea – which it doesn't.—**KATO**




**The 101 driving challenges often teach you the best line for the tracks, such as in this cone contest**

BOTTOM LINE **6.5**

> **Concept:** The only racing game where you get hen-pecked into doing well

> **Graphics:** Delivers a good sensation of speed and is solid looking

> **Sound:** Even with seven selectable songs (including those from the original game), your ears will shrivel in on themselves rather than withstand the abuse

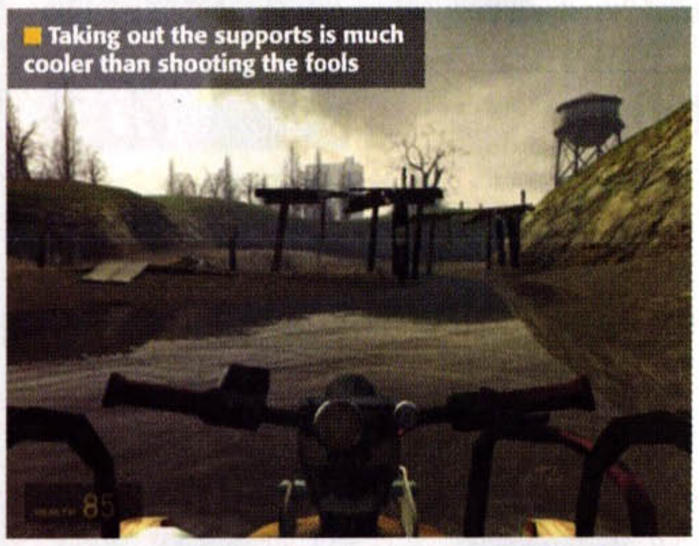
> **Playability:** Drifting using the triggers feels super smooth and is absolutely essential to winning

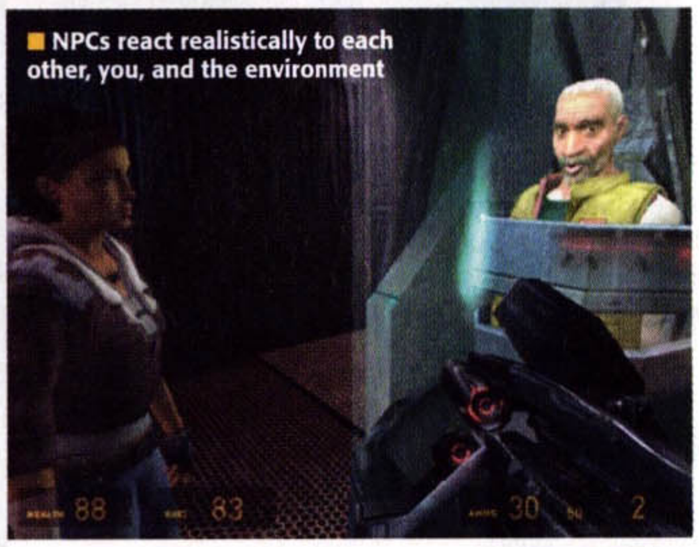
> **Entertainment:** The arcade premise is what makes it fun, but it also holds this title back

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

**Second Opinion** 6.5

It's been an outrageously long time since this franchise made an appearance on home consoles. Long enough, in fact, that OutRun 2 benefits from the nostalgia factor that all of us feel toward the experience. I swear, those ready-set-go beeps instigate a Pavlovian response deep within my soul to bash the pedal to the floor in the name of love. There are other arcade-styled racers out there that trump this game in graphics, soundtrack and physics; and for those reasons, this is a title living on nostalgia factor alone. I still really dig the flashback – but only for a few minutes.—**LISA**


Taking out the supports is much cooler than shooting the fools


NPCs react realistically to each other, you, and the environment

PC

# Half-Life 2

**> STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 40-PLAYER VIA ONLINE OR LAN) **> PUBLISHER** VIVENDI UNIVERSAL
**> DEVELOPER** VALVE SOFTWARE **> RELEASE** NOVEMBER 19 **> ESRB** M

GAME INFORMER PC GAME OF THE MONTH

## WORTH THE WAIT

Any PC dork worth his CPU has been following this title for longer than I care to contemplate. Expectations are through the roof, but Valve Software has created an experience that should please even the most cynical of gamers. The odd rough spot here and there prevents me from bestowing a perfect score to Half-Life 2, but it will no doubt stand as a landmark in gaming for years to come. In short, it really is as good as we all wanted it to be.

The screenshots of HL 2 are gorgeous, but you really don't know the half of it until you've seen the game in action. For example, the facial animations are the best to ever appear in video games – but the real genius is in the way that Valve uses them to bring the characters to life. Technical wizardry is married to artistic brilliance throughout the presentation, from the oddly beautiful vistas of a post-apocalyptic Earth to the creepy alien Citadel. Impressive little details also abound, such as a barrel's surface getting deformed by bullet impacts. Make no bones about it, Half-Life 2 is an immersive visual experience rivaled by very few others, and in my opinion, surpassed by none.

However, graphical prowess does not an excellent game make. Gameplay does that – which is exactly where Half-Life 2 delivers in spades. True, it's very linear, and most of the time there is a "correct" or "best" way to defeat the challenge at hand. What Valve has somehow accomplished is making the player feel smart for figuring it out. Most of these puzzle-type elements have to do with HL 2's masterful implementation of physics, like pushing air-filled buoys under a platform to raise a jump for the hovercraft. Some of the awesome things you can do simply make it easier on yourself; dropping a car on a bunch of zombies is both satisfying and practical.

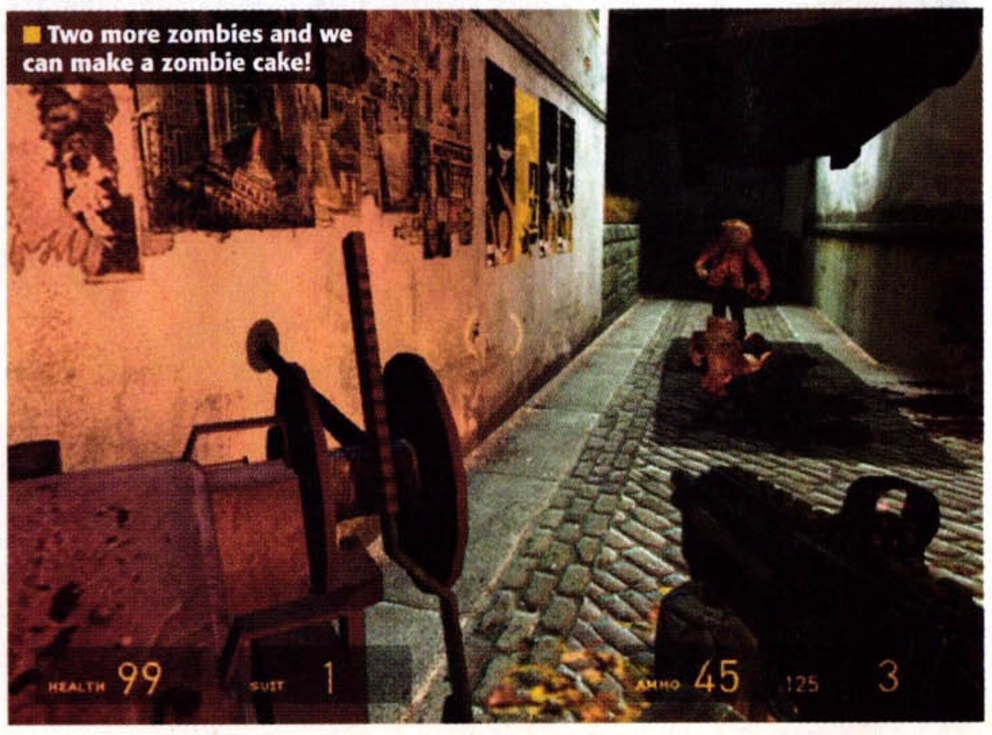
Making tactical use of the tools at hand in combat also goes a long way toward giving HL 2 that elusive fun factor. Like Far Cry, this sort of thing never feels artificial or forced in HL 2. The excellent AI for the bad guys helps a lot here, too. They'll grenade you from under cover, flank you while you're pinned, and otherwise make you use your noodle to prevail. Of course, having the skills to overcome daunting odds through sheer run-and-gun mayhem will get the job done, too.

The flaws in HL 2 are minor, but bear mentioning. The vehicles are a nice change of pace, but controlling them is a bit awkward, and the sections of the game that you spend on them are way too long. Also, once you've seen the (admittedly awesome) ending and know how to get through the tough parts, there's not a whole lot left to do. Of course, one of the best multiplayer games ever, Counter-Strike, is included, and has been re-done with the new engine for endless hours of entertainment.

However you feel about first-person shooters, Half-Life 2 is one of those titles that simply cannot be missed. I strongly suggest that you do everything in your power to experience it, even if it's just watching over friends' shoulders as they play. This will be remembered as a historic occasion in gaming, and there's nothing better than participating in history as it's being made. Yes, Half-Life 2 really is that good.—**ADAM**

**"Technical wizardry is married to artistic brilliance..."**

No, you don't defeat the aliens with the flu virus



Two more zombies and we can make a zombie cake!

**BOTTOM LINE 9.5**

**> Concept:** Make the definitive PC first-person shooter, even if it took more than five years

**> Graphics:** This is a very strong contender for best-looking game to date – HL 2 is more fun to watch than a lot of movies

**> Sound:** NPCs are well-voiced, and the sound of a Strider firing will make you know fear

**> Playability:** Even Isaac Newton would be amazed at the things this does with physics, but the vehicles are often a pain to drive

**> Entertainment:** This does little to disappoint the freakishly high expectations of its audience

**> Replay Value:** High

**Second Opinion 9.5**

I can't even begin to count the number of times I cackled with glee or sat, open-mouthed, staring in wonderment at the brilliance that is Half-Life 2. The game is literally a playground where you constantly look for new ways to experiment with its impressive, physics-intensive level designs. Sure, I could shoot the bad guys with any one of the game's amazing weapons, but looking for alternate solutions or simply manipulating the environment with the gravity gun is a joy unlike any other. To top it all off, Half-Life 2 is perhaps the most gorgeous game I have ever had the pleasure to play, and the story is simply top-notch. However, the game isn't without its faults. The pacing is often uneven (the buggy level in particular comes to mind), and there were times when I grew bored with some of the overly long missions. That said, Half-Life 2 is indeed amazing. If you have a computer that can handle it, Half-Life 2 is a singular experience for FPS fans.—**ANDY**

PC

# Tribes: Vengeance

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 32-PLAYER VIA ONLINE OR LAN) > **PUBLISHER** VIVENDI UNIVERSAL
> **DEVELOPER** IRRATIONAL GAMES > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 12 > **ESRB** T

## A NEW DIMENSION

The first two Tribes games built their following on three things: speed, flight, and teamwork. Tribes: Vengeance, though it was created by a different developer, does indeed keep these elements intact, and in a tasty Unreal-powered shell. On the other hand, the first-person shooter genre has recently been blessed with lots of excellent titles, and Vengeance doesn't quite do enough to push it to the top. Especially since the single-player campaign is, in a word, mediocre. The story is cool, but the levels aren't designed particularly well, the enemy bots vary from blind to godlike, and it's just not any fun. But who plays Tribes for the single-player anyway?

For those who are unfamiliar with the series, Tribes is the fastest, most vertically dynamic FPS around. Players haul all around the map in jetpack-equipped powered armor (or vehicles), on top of which there's the element of skiing to adapt to. Skiing allows players to conserve their momentum while sliding around the geometry, and if used properly can get your speed up to unparalleled levels. Combined with the jetpacks, skiing creates the mobility that sets Vengeance apart from the FPS pack. Thankfully, Vengeance clearly has its maps designed with skiing in mind.

Team-based online action is what this title is all about, and for the most part it delivers. Most of the gametypes revolve around making use of Tribes' unmatched mobility, and as a result, play out quite differently than a typical deathmatch or capture-the-flag. One thing to note about Vengeance multiplayer, though, is that it's possibly the least newbie-friendly of any online FPS I've played. Not that this is a bad thing; in fact, I think that Vengeance will eventually feature some of the deepest strategy of any FPS around. It's just that it can be a lot to try to wrap your head around when you're in the thick of an intense match.

My biggest gripe with this game, though, is that I simply don't like the weapons very much. They feel largely like crappy versions of the staple FPS arsenal, except not really adjusted for the high speed of Vengeance. Chainguns are all fine and good, but when you triple the average speed of your own and your enemies' movement, they're not as good as you're used to. In my opinion, Tribes: Vengeance has hands-down the worst weapon selection in the genre. Needless to say, this has a rather detrimental impact on the enjoyability of shooting someone.

Admittedly, I didn't have as much fun with Vengeance as I have with a lot of other great FPSs. However, the possible excellence is easy to see. With the different types of armor you can choose, 10 unique weapons (even if I hate them all, there's a good number of them), and plenty of variation between maps and gametypes, I feel like there's a lot to dig into here. For the hardcore types, Vengeance will no doubt satisfy the need for tactically deep shooting action. But for casuals and people with limited game budgets, Vengeance doesn't quite make the A-list for FPSs in 2004.—**ADAM**

**"For the hardcore types, Vengeance will no doubt satisfy the need for tactically deep shooting action."**

The story itself is interesting; it's just that playing through it sucks

The maps take great advantage of the jetpacks

What's better than a tank? A space tank

**BOTTOM LINE 8.5**

> **Concept:** Reinvent the Tribes franchise while keeping everything fans liked about the originals

> **Graphics:** You can't go wrong with the Unreal engine, though the HUD isn't my favorite

> **Sound:** Explosions and screams. Nothing to write home about

> **Playability:** Once you get used to skiing, it's just another FPS – not that that's a problem

> **Entertainment:** If you like the third dimension to matter more than it typically does in an FPS, you'll be right at home here

> **Replay Value:** High

**Second Opinion 8.5**

This series has always had a place in my heart, as a lot of the multiplayer elements we find throughout many of today's PC and console titles found their start here. While Vengeance isn't as innovative as the original, it manages to give fans everything they could want from a follow-up, including a great graphics package and an interesting (if uneventful) single-player experience. As you would expect, the game really moves out, and multiplayer is quite addictive once you start to master its skiing and anti-gravity jet pack techniques. If I had to knock the game for anything, it would be for its rather unexciting weapons selection. Namely, the chaingun is about as dull as it could be, especially when compared to Tribe's signature Spinfuser Disc Launcher – which I absolutely love. Vengeance isn't the greatest FPS ever made, but it does deliver a lot of entertainment for the price of admission.—**ANDY**

# Escape from the Ordinary

"Riddick is a must-see, must-play, must-buy Xbox classic."

Electronic Gaming Monthly

## Available on PC December 2004

MATURE 17+ M CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Strong Language

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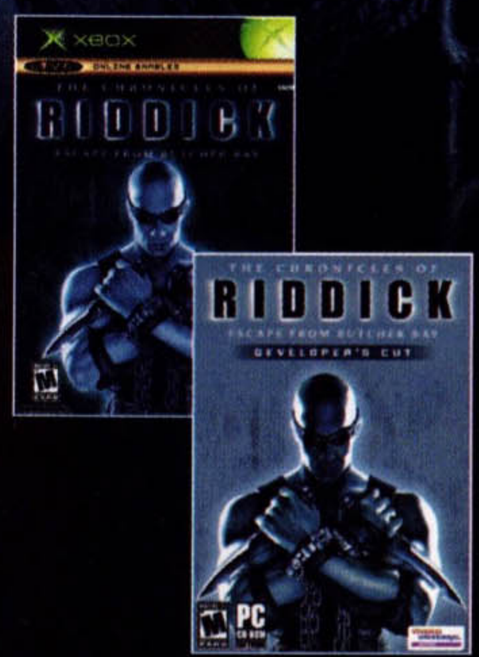


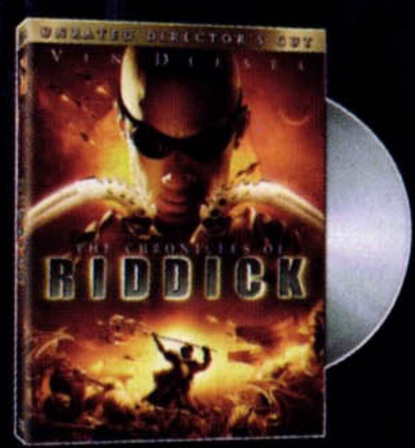


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PC

# RollerCoaster Tycoon 3

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SIMULATION > **PUBLISHER** ATARI > **DEVELOPER** FRONTIER > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 26 > **ESRB** E

## YOU MUST BE AT LEAST THIS AWESOME TO RIDE

Theme parks offer many things that are difficult to get elsewhere: cheese-on-a-stick, funnel cakes, and enormous stuffed facsimiles of the long-forgotten Noid. However, one thing they don't usually present is an incredible depth of experience. In this respect, Atari's newest installment in the RollerCoaster Tycoon series actually trumps the industry it replicates. In RCT 3, you can spend days designing the ultimate roller coaster, optimizing your park's economics, or assembling a dazzling fireworks display. You will find yourself delving deeper into the seedy underbelly of amusement than you ever thought possible.

Apart from several features that come standard with the move to 3D (like full camera control), the new additions that stand out most are the ones that make your park feel like a living, breathing place. The new Coaster Cam allows you to personally ride any attraction in first-person (even custom coasters you can import from previous titles), which is an absolute blast. It is strangely gratifying to hear the screams of your Peeps (your patrons, not the horrific candy abomination) as they ride beside you. Fortunately, the Peeps can do much more than wail in terror; there is now a wider variety of characters roaming your paths, displaying more detailed (though still fairly simple) interactions with each other. Some of them are visiting your fine establishment with a group of thrill-seeking friends, while others are looking for a wholesome family day out.

Frankly, the things that impressed me the most about RCT 3 are the little details that most decent, ethically stable gamers will never see: the excellent physics displayed by the roller coaster cars as they careen off of hotdog huts, the sobs of children as I use the cursor to pop their balloons, and water rafts that burst into flames upon crashing. Even more than the transition to 3D, it is the special touches like these that make this title feel like a true leap forward for the series rather than another lateral step.—**JOE**

**BOTTOM LINE 8.75**

> **Concept:** Deliver the full simulation package, complete with vomit on the footpaths

> **Graphics:** The animations are smooth, but your patrons aren't winning any beauty contests – except maybe in Homelyville

> **Sound:** The sound effects and screams while in Coaster Cam are right on, and you can import your favorite songs for use on the rides

> **Playability:** Menus are overcrowded with important info, making them very useful but also difficult to navigate

> **Entertainment:** Whether you run your park like a tycoon or a tyrant, there is plenty here to enjoy

> **Replay Value:** High

**Second Opinion 8.5**

You'd think a game about building a profitable theme park would have a somewhat limited scope. In this case, you couldn't be more wrong. Think of it like this: It's deep like Civilization, cute like Animal Crossing, and logical like Myst. Also, the graphics are a treat rather than a detriment – seeing your creation in 3D is more satisfying than you'd think. RCT 3 has something for everyone. Sadistic villians (Joe, you're a sick man) can go bowling for people with runaway 'coasters, casual types can just jump in and build a park, and hardcores have the option to dig as deep into micromanagement as they like. For economic simulations, you really need look no farther than this title.—**ADAM**

# PC QUICKIES

## Scrapland

**BOTTOM LINE 6**

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN)
> **PUBLISHER** ENLIGHT > **DEVELOPER** REMEDY > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 15 > **ESRB** E

Now, there's nothing wrong with the concept of a space-based GTA knockoff with robots instead of people, along with simplistic on-foot portions. There are, however, many things very wrong with Scrapland. I really have a hard time deciding what I hate more about this game: Is it the horribly grating characters and voices, the lame setting, or the incredibly sticky flight controls? Well, now that I think about it, it's the flying – ships move exactly like avatars in an FPS. There's no momentum, sense of speed, or much of anything that made me feel like I was piloting a space bike. The strengths of this sleep-inducing title are that the world itself is gorgeous and there are a lot of things to do, but I'll be buggered if I'm going to put up with these characters to do them.—**ADAM**

## Codename: Panzers

**BOTTOM LINE 7.75**

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA ONLINE OR LAN)
> **PUBLISHER** CDV GAMES > **DEVELOPER** STORMREGION > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 28 > **ESRB** T

As crowded as the RTS genre is, Codename: Panzers manages to carve out its own niche. It does perhaps the best job I've seen of being realistic and true to its World War II subject matter, while keeping the gameplay fast and accessible – a thin line which is not easily straddled. However, this title just didn't quite do enough in any area to really blow me away. The single-player, though decently long, is plagued by sub-par storytelling and presentation, while the GameSpy-powered multiplayer doesn't have enough legs to entice players away from the more well-known RTSs. On the other hand, if you really need a WW II RTS game, this is probably the best of the bunch.—**ADAM**

## Armies of Exigo

**BOTTOM LINE 8**

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA ONLINE OR LAN)
> **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **DEVELOPER** BLACK HOLE GAMES
> **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 30 > **ESRB** T

I weep for this game. I feel that it really had some potential at one point, lived up to a decent amount of it, and is going to be buried under the sea of awesome titles this holiday season. Armies presents some really nice interface options, good unit diversity, and interesting single-player missions. The balancing seems a little wonkier than I'd like it to be, and the voice acting is questionable at best, but this is definitely a solid, fun RTS title. Even if this sinks into obscurity, though, I sincerely hope that other developers take note of the spots of brilliance in this design – the super-group function and solo campaign level designs are particularly awesome.—**ADAM**

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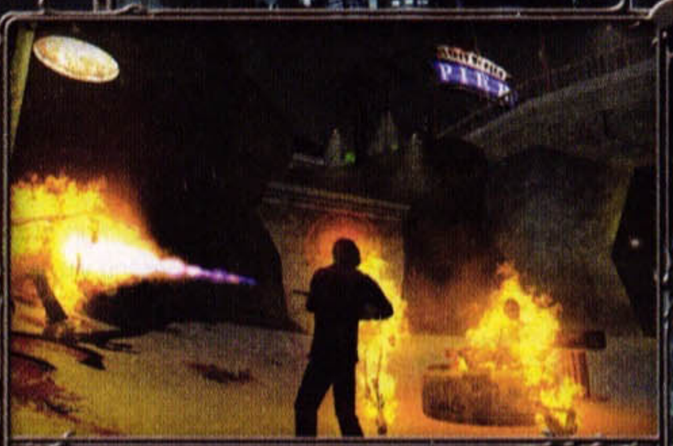

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GAME BOY ADVANCE

# Metal Slug Advance

**> STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** SNK **> DEVELOPER** SNK **> RELEASE** NOVEMBER 16 **> ESRB** T

## LITTLE SLUGGER

Metal Slug is a series that should never stray far from its roots. It does side-scrolling shooter action better than most any other series out there, and its basic yet gratifying gameplay makes perfect sense on the GBA. Although Metal Slug Advance stays true to the spirit of the series, it falls short of what it could have been.

While there are no radical departures in the gameplay, there are two main issues that hurt my enjoyment of this title. First, your character now has a life bar. Rather than getting killed in one hit, you can now take three or four. But once your life bar is depleted, the game is over. Your life bar basically functions as multiple lives, but with a few key differences. Certain enemy attacks momentarily stun you, leaving you open to a second hit. When you only have one life, every hit really counts. But what makes things worse are pits. In classic Metal Slug, if you fall in a pit you lose a life. In Metal Slug Advance, falling in a pit means you lose the game.

The other issue that bothers me is enemy respawning. Once you scroll past a location, the enemies that were there will reappear if you ever return. If sounds like a minor deal, but there were times it made a huge difference. I would kill a few troops, head forward, encounter a tank, jump backwards to avoid cannon fire, only to find those previously slain troops waiting for me. This obviously adds to the difficulty, which is a hallmark of the series, but it doesn't feel as "fair" in its challenge as the console or arcade versions.

These complaints aside, Metal Slug Advance retains the basic feel and challenge of the series. It still offers frantic side-scrolling action, but doesn't live up to the glorious old-school fragfests of recent titles like Metal Slug 3. If you love Metal Slug and want to take it on the road, this is a good option, but I was left longing for a more classic addition to the series.—**JEREMY**

**BOTTOM LINE 7**

**> Concept:** The non-stop chaos and carnage of classic Metal Slug – now in convenient travel size

**> Graphics:** The look and character design of the series is still certainly there, but the animations have been pared down a bit

**> Sound:** The GBA sound is nearly identical to its bigger console brothers

**> Playability:** Side-scrolling action is simply what the GBA was made for, but controls could be tighter and the hit detection feels sloppy

**> Entertainment:** True to the series' form, the amount of enjoyment you get out of this title is directly proportional to how much you enjoy a challenge

**> Replay Value:** Moderate

**Second Opinion 7**

Oozing classic appeal, this game is buoyed by the series' trademarks and pulled down by the franchise's usual downfalls. On the good side, the graphics are crisp, the enemies are frequently bizarre, and the gameplay is constantly challenging. I love how incredibly weird this series can get. But, on the flip side, it's really short (even with the collectable cards that change character's attributes, which is a new feature to enhance replay) and almost prohibitively difficult at times. In addition, the co-op mode offered in the Xbox version isn't here, which is what I've always had the most fun doing in these games. Fun if you're gamer enough to handle its difficulty, but something that will be put away quite quickly if you're not (or don't have much nostalgia for the series). —**LISA**

# GAME BOY ADVANCE QUICKIES

## Power Rangers: Dino Thunder

**BOTTOM LINE 3.5**

**> STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** THQ **> DEVELOPER** NATSUME **> RELEASE** AUGUST 30 **> ESRB** E

Okay, enough already. These guys need to scamper back to the flaming pit of Tartarus from which they came. Power Rangers should have been buried years ago, but they keep popping back up to entice another generation of kiddies. This game is fully in line with the derivative, marketing scam that is the rest of the Power Rangers empire – chock full of terrible level design, unclear objectives, and yawn-inducing gameplay. If you're over 12 you shouldn't even touch this box in the store. And if you're a discriminating parent trying to pick a game for your littlun', then this one isn't the right choice. It's frustrating and repetitive to the extreme. You owe the fruit of your loins something better.—**MILLER**

## Ty the Tasmanian Tiger 2: Bush Rescue

**BOTTOM LINE 6**

**> STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM **> PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS **> DEVELOPER** KROME STUDIOS/HALF BRICK STUDIOS **> RELEASE** OCTOBER 26 **> ESRB** E

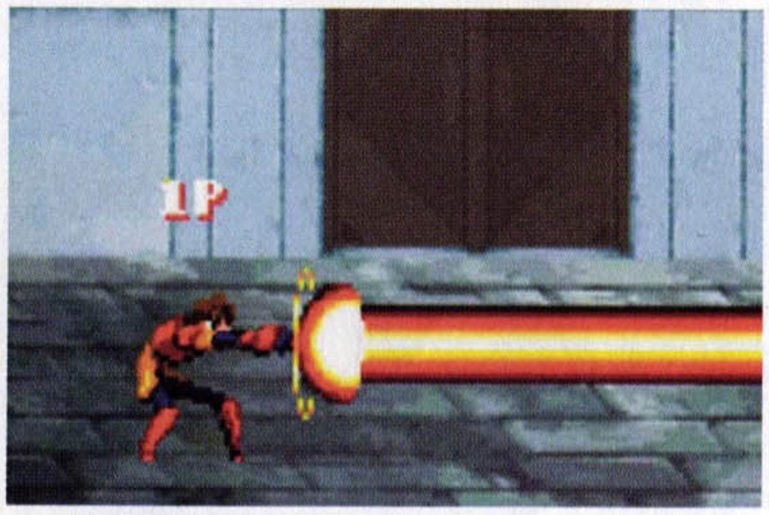
Ty 2 on GBA, much like the recently released console versions, seems to have all the ingredients for success. You've got a selection of different boomerang weapons, each with their own unique functions that open up new possibilities during gameplay, some cool "Bunyips" (robotic suits that grant you superpowers), and even a Mario-style overland map complete with random encounters that play out as brief driving sequences. However, there seems to be something inherently mediocre about this series, and no Ty title to date has really been able to deliver gameplay that offers anything more than standard-issue platforming. It's not bad, per sé, but the level designs and basic gameplay are just too uninspired to warrant a look from any but the most ardent fans of the genre.—**MATT**

## Boktai 2: Solar Boy Django

**BOTTOM LINE 6.25**

**> STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA LINK) **> PUBLISHER** KONAMI **> DEVELOPER** KONAMI JAPAN **> RELEASE** OCTOBER 19 **> ESRB** E

I appreciate the interesting way this series forces players into certain situations to play the game. I also thought that the story and dungeon crawling/stealth/brawler concept in the first installment was engaging. The problem is that I am just not nearly as charmed by Django's adventure this time around. New features have been added (weapon forging and a four-player combat mode where you win energy), but the gameplay, controls (which are clunky), and story aren't as strong as the first outing. To balance the sunlight requirement issue there are far more items that make up for lack of rays, but today in Minneapolis the high is 45 degrees. It will be windy, cloudy, and all kinds of miserable. I'm at the point that I need the sun, and I'm not going out in this weather, making Boktai a hard sell whose gimmick doesn't overcome its bland gameplay.—**LISA**



GAME BOY ADVANCE

# Advance Guardian Heroes

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA GBA LINK CABLE) > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT
> **DEVELOPER** TREASURE > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 15 > **ESRB** E

## TOO SLOW TO TAKE OFF

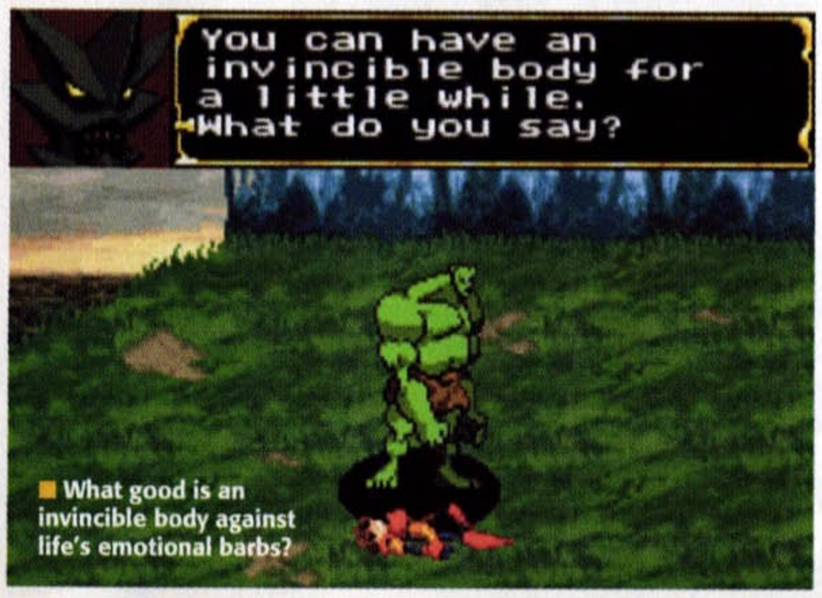
There's a tension of opposites in this game. At the far extreme, it is one of the finest brawler fighting engines I've encountered set amidst an imaginatively designed world of intense battles and impressive graphics. And on the other side is the game equivalent of suicide – slowdown on an unheard of level, completely destroying the game's potential to shine at anywhere near the brilliance that it might have otherwise.

Treasure is known for its addictive and challenging gameplay, and this is no exception. Multiple playable characters each have their own special moves, and the basic combat system is phenomenal. Strongly built on timing and counterattacks, you are doomed to an early game over if you mash buttons on anything but the lowest difficulty setting. Normal or greater difficulty is downright brutal. It's debatable whether this is a good or a bad point for the game, depending on your preference. All I can say is that even hardcore gamers are looking at repeating some boss battles literally dozens of times before beating them. Think I'm lying? It's your funeral.

While this new Guardian Heroes game pretends to have RPG story elements, don't be fooled. Something went horribly, horribly wrong in the localization and translation process. This has resulted in one of the most ludicrous attempts at a tale you could imagine, with a script of epic missteps approaching the level seen in the infamous Zero Wing (of "All your base are belong to us" renown). In short, it's pretty hilarious, even if it is basically a defective aspect of the game.

Unfortunately, I'm forced to return to the true and central fault of the title. There is consistently way more stuff happening onscreen than the GBA can hope to handle, particularly in two-player, and more than half of the game plays at a snail's pace. The critical timing required for the complex fighting method is utterly destroyed by the slowdown, while the inevitable repeated levels (due to your frequent deaths) are agonizing.

I love the constant action and surprisingly deep gameplay that Heroes has to offer, and I'd love to see a similar style implemented in a future game. It pains me to score such a uniquely designed game as low as this, but despite its strengths, the insane difficulty becomes truly not fun when combined with the horrendous speed at which the game runs – rendering it at points almost unplayable.—**MILLER**




What good is an invincible body against life's emotional barbs?

**BOTTOM LINE 7**

> **Concept:** A grand brawler in the old style with what could have been a fantastic combat engine

> **Graphics:** The developer pushed the GBA hardware to the limit – and then unfortunately moved past it

> **Sound:** Old school style gaming tunes are pleasant but forgettable

> **Playability:** The ridiculous level of difficulty is made almost impossible by the worst onscreen slowdown I've ever encountered

> **Entertainment:** Gaming brilliance is very nearly reached, but shattered due to some basically broken elements and short overall length

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

**Second Opinion 8**

If you're familiar with either Guardian Heroes or its developer, Treasure, you know what to expect: extremely frantic action. However, this is far from the typical, shallow handheld hack n' slasher. While the basic moveset is comprised of hand-to-hand maneuvers, the real thrill of this game comes from improving your attributes in the RPG-style character development screen and utilizing your wicked arsenal of special attacks. Also, in Treasure fashion, it's punishingly difficult even on Normal mode. It is a bit short (although there are multiple endings), and the awesome two-player mode is hampered by some serious slowdown, but despite its flaws, this is definitely well above average for GBA action games.—**MATT**

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# CHARTS

An In-Depth Listing Of The Best Selling Games

## TOP 20

Listings Based Upon NPD Data For September 2004 Based On Units Sold

### 1 POKÉMON FIRE RED (GBA)

If video games were coffee, Pokémon would be Starbucks. Everybody claims to hate both Starbucks and Pokémon, but then every time a new location opens (Starbucks) or a new game comes out (Pokémon), the damn things make billions of dollars! Looks like a lot of people are hypocrites. Especially those people with anti-oil bumper stickers on their cars! Um...your Civic doesn't run on Kool-Aid, hippie!

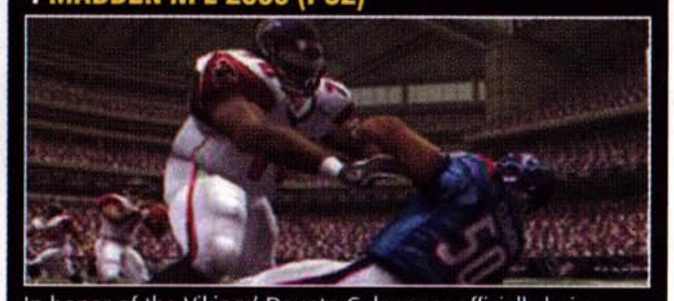
### 2 FABLE (XBOX)

Yeah, yeah, there were some features that were taken out of Fable, but this is still a pretty damn memorable gaming experience. It's obviously pretty successful as well, as this title is quickly racking up Xbox sales records (soon to be broken by Halo 2). Score one more for Molyneux. It should be interesting to see how Fable's sales hold up in the coming months.

### 3 POKÉMON LEAF GREEN (GBA)

You know another weird thing about Pokémon? Although they're released in pairs, one title ALWAYS consistently outsells the other! Weird. In this case, there's no mystery, however. Which would you rather play with – a gross wet leaf or some awesome burny fire? We think the answer is clear – and this month's charts agrees with us! IN YOUR FACE, WORLD!!

### 4 MADDEN NFL 2005 (PS2)



In honor of the Vikings' Daunte Culpepper officially being named the "The Bestest, Cutest Quarterback, Like, Ever In the World," thousands of gamers snapped up copies of Madden NFL 2005 in September. Okay, that's probably not totally true. They might have just wanted to play a football game. But Daunte's still cute. And don't get any ideas! He's all ours, baby!

### 5 STAR WARS: BATTLEFRONT (XBOX)

In a smart move, LucasArts dropped its latest Star Wars game on store shelves just as the hype surrounding the new special edition Star Wars Trilogy box set was reaching its peak. The result? A solid top-five debut for the game. We expect to see this one hang on the charts for awhile, due to positive word of mouth about the Battlefront online experience.

| Rank | Title | L. Mo. | System | Score | Release | Price |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Pokémon Fire Red | N/A | GBA | 8 | 09/04 | $31 |
| 2 | Fable | N/A | XBOX | 9.5 | 09/04 | $50 |
| 3 | Pokémon Leaf Green | N/A | GBA | 8 | 09/04 | $31 |
| 4 | Madden NFL 2005 | 1 | PS2 | 8.75 | 08/04 | $49 |
| 5 | Star Wars: Battlefront | N/A | XBOX | 8 | 09/04 | $49 |
| 6 | Star Wars: Battlefront | N/A | PS2 | 8 | 09/04 | $48 |
| 7 | Star Ocean: Till the End of Time | N/A | PS2 | 8.25 | 09/04 | $50 |
| 8 | NBA Live 2005 | N/A | PS2 | 8.25 | 09/04 | $40 |
| 9 | ESPN NFL 2K5 | 3 | PS2 | 9.5 | 07/04 | $19 |
| 10 | Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2005 | N/A | PS2 | 8.5 | 09/04 | $49 |
| 11 | NASCAR 2005: Chase for the Cup | N/A | PS2 | 8.75 | 09/04 | $50 |
| 12 | Pikmin 2 | N/A | GC | 8.75 | 09/04 | $50 |
| 13 | ESPN NFL 2K5 | 5 | XBOX | 9.5 | 07/04 | $19 |
| 14 | Burnout 3: Takedown | N/A | XBOX | 9.5 | 09/04 | $50 |
| 15 | WWE: Day of Reckoning | N/A | GC | 8.25 | 09/04 | $50 |
| 16 | Sly 2: Band of Theives | N/A | PS2 | 8.75 | 09/04 | $40 |
| 17 | Def Jam: Fight for NY | N/A | PS2 | 8.75 | 09/04 | $49 |
| 18 | Street Fighter Anniversary Collection | N/A | PS2 | 8 | 09/04 | $30 |
| 19 | Burnout 3: Takedown | N/A | PS2 | 9.5 | 09/04 | $50 |
| 20 | Madden NFL 2005 | 2 | XBOX | 8.75 | 08/04 | $49 |

Source: The NPD Group/NPD Funworld®/TRSTS® • David Riley 516-625-2277

## TOP 10 JAPAN

| Rank | Title | L. Mo. | System |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Tales of Symphonia | N/A | PS2 |
| 2 | Pokémon Emerald | N/A | GBA |
| 3 | Kengo 3 | N/A | PS2 |
| 4 | Steel Alchemy Master 2 | N/A | PS2 |
| 5 | Sengoku Muso Moshoten | N/A | PS2 |
| 6 | Sakura Taisen: Episode 0 | N/A | PS2 |
| 7 | Famicom Mini: Super Mario Bros. 2 | 4 | GBA |
| 8 | Formula One 2004 | N/A | PS2 |
| 9 | Final Fantasy XI: Chains of Promathia | N/A | PS2 |
| 10 | Resident Evil Outbreak File #2 | N/A | PS2 |

6

10

Source: Game Japan Based On Monthly Units Sold

## TOP 10 GI

| Rank | Title | L. Mo. | System |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas/ Halo 2 [tie] | N/A | PS2/ Xbox |
| 2 | Half-Life 2 | N/A | PC |
| 3 | Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal | 1 | PS2 |
| 4 | Tony Hawk's Underground 2 | 2 | Multi |
| 5 | Fable | 3 | Xbox |
| 6 | Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War | 6 | PC |
| 7 | Viewtiful Joe 2 | N/A | Multi |
| 8 | Ace Combat 5: The Unsung War | N/A | PS2 |
| 9 | Baten Kaitos: Eternal Wings the Lost Ocean | N/A | GC |
| 10 | Final Fantasy I & II: Dawn of Souls | N/A | GBA |

2

4

The Staff's Favorite Picks

## TOP 10 PC

| Rank | Title | L. Mo. | Price |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | The Sims 2 | N/A | $47 |
| 2 | The Sims 2 Special Edition | N/A | $50 |
| 3 | Rome: Total War | N/A | $41 |
| 4 | Star Wars: Battlefront | N/A | $49 |
| 5 | Call Of Duty: United Offensive | N/A | $27 |
| 6 | Warhammer 40,000: Dawn Of War | N/A | $47 |
| 7 | Final Fantasy XI: Chains Of Promathia | N/A | $29 |
| 8 | The Sims Deluxe | 2 | $20 |
| 9 | Doom 3 | 1 | $53 |
| 10 | Call Of Duty | N/A | $30 |

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Based On Monthly Units Sold

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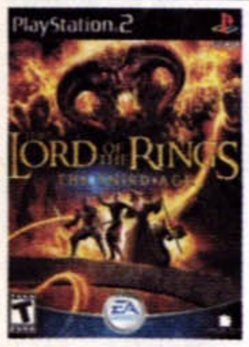

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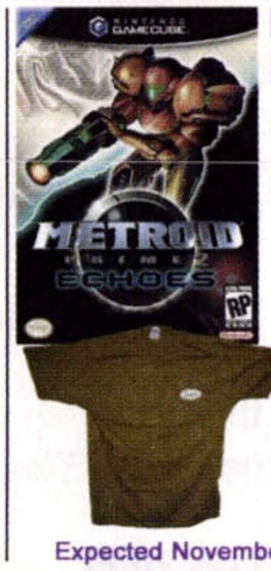

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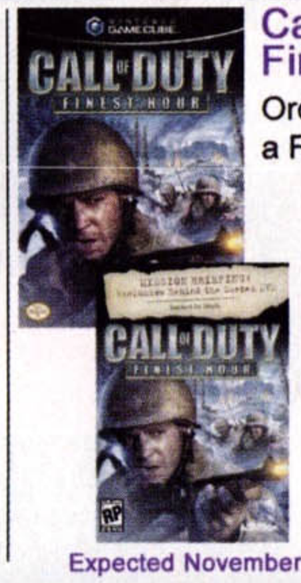

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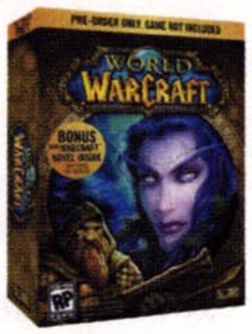

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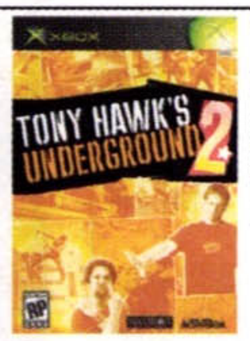

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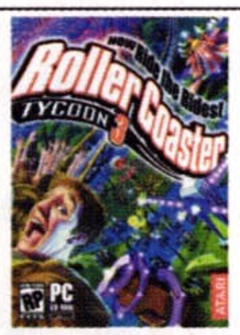

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Forgotten Realms: Demon Stone – PS2 – Oct-04

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| Samurai Jack: The Shadow of Aku | 6 | May-04 |
| Samurai Warriors | 7.5 | May-04 |
| Scooby Doo!: Mystery Mayhem | 4 | May-04 |
| Second Sight | 8.5 | Sep-04 |
| Serious Sam: The Next Encounter | 7.75 | May-04 |
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| Terminator 3: Redemption | 8 | Oct-04 |
| Tak 2: The Staff of Dreams | 7.25 | Nov-04 |
| Technic Beat | 7.5 | Nov-04 |
| Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 2: Battle Nexus | 6 | Nov-04 |
| Test Drive: Eve of Destruction | 7.75 | Oct-04 |
| Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2005 | 8.5 | Oct-04 |
| Time Crisis: Crisis Zone | 6.75 | Nov-04 |
| TOCA Race Driver: Ultimate Racing Simulator | 7.5 | Nov-04 |
| Tony Hawk's Undeground 2 | 9.75 | Nov-04 |
| Transformers | 7 | Jun-04 |
| Trivial Pursuit Unhinged | 5 | Aug-04 |
| Ty the Tasmanian Tiger 2: Bush Rescue | 6.75 | Nov-04 |
| UEFA Euro 2004 Portugal | 7.25 | Jul-04 |
| UFC Sudden Impact | 6.5 | Jul-04 |
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| Winning Eleven 7 | 9.25 | Feb-04 |
| World Tour Soccer 2005 | 6.5 | May-04 |
| Worms 3D | 8 | Mar-04 |
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| X-Files: Resist Or Serve | 6.5 | May-04 |
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## GAMECUBE

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| Catwoman | 4.75 | Sep-04 |
| Custom Robo | 5.75 | Apr-04 |
| Def Jam: Fight for NY | 8.75 | Oct-04 |

Ribbit King – GC – Jun-04

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| Donkey Konga | 7 | Nov-04 |
| FIFA Soccer 2005 | 7.75 | Nov-04 |
| Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles | 7 | Feb-04 |
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| Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life | 8 | Apr-04 |
| James Bond 007: Everything or Nothing | 8.5 | Mar-04 |
| King Arthur | 7.25 | Nov-04 |
| Legend of Zelda: Four Swords Adventures, The | 8 | Jun-04 |
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| MVP Baseball 2004 | 9.25 | Apr-04 |
| NASCAR 2005: Chase for the Cup | 8.75 | Sep-04 |
| NBA Live 2005 | 8.25 | Nov-04 |
| NCAA Football 2005 | 9.25 | Jul-04 |
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| Paper Mario 2: The Thousand-Year Door | 6.75 | Nov-04 |
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| Spyro: A Hero's Tail | 6.5 | Nov-04 |
| Street Racing Syndicate | 6.75 | Oct-04 |
| Tak 2: The Staff of Dreams | 7.25 | Nov-04 |
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| Terminator 3: Redemption | 8 | Oct-04 |
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| Tony Hawk's Underground | 8.75 | Feb-04 |
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| Ty the Tasmanian Tiger 2: Bush Rescue | 6.75 | Nov-04 |
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## XBOX

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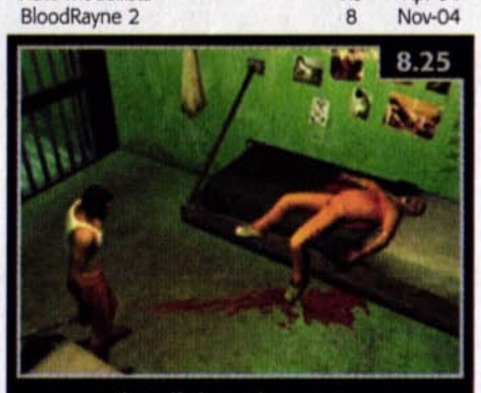
| Army Men: Sarge's War | 5 | Oct-04 |
| Auto Modellista | 7.5 | Apr-04 |
| BloodRayne 2 | 8 | Nov-04 |



The Suffering – Xbox – Apr-04

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Blowout | 6.5 | Feb-04 |
| Breakdown | 7.5 | Apr-04 |
| Burnout 3: Takedown | 9.25 | Oct-04 |
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| IndyCar Series 2005 | 6.5 | Aug-04 |
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| Juiced | 5.75 | Oct-04 |
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| Kingdom Under Fire: The Crusaders | 7.75 | Nov-04 |
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| Men of Valor | 7.75 | Nov-04 |
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| Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow | 9.5 | May-04 |
| Spy Hunter 2 | 6 | Feb-04 |
| Spyro: A Hero's Tail | 6.5 | Nov-04 |
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| Steel Battalion: Line of Contact | 7.5 | May-04 |
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| Sudeki | 7.75 | Sep-04 |
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| Tenchu: Return From Darkness | 7.25 | Apr-04 |
| Terminator 3: Redemption | 8 | Oct-04 |
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| Thief: Deadly Shadows | 7.25 | Jul-04 |
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## PC

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| Battlefield Vietnam | 8 | May-04 |
| Besieger | 6 | Aug-04 |
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Myst IV: Revelation – PC – Nov-04

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| Ground Control II: Operation Exodus | 8.5 | Aug-04 |
| Horizons: Empire of Istaria | 7 | Feb-04 |
| Joint Operations: Typhoon Rising | 8.5 | Aug-04 |
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| Lineage II: The Chaotic Chronicle | 7.25 | Jul-04 |
| Lords of EverQuest | 7.5 | Feb-04 |
| Missing: Since January | 6.5 | Sep-04 |
| Myst IV: Revelation | 8 | Nov-04 |
| Nemesis of the Roman Empire | 7.75 | Jun-04 |
| Neverwinter Nights: Hordes of the Underdark | 8.5 | Feb-04 |
| Northland | 8 | Mar-04 |
| One Must Fall: Battlegrounds | 8 | Feb-04 |
| Painkiller | 8.5 | Jun-04 |
| Perimeter | 7.75 | Jul-04 |
| Political Machine, The | 7 | Nov-04 |
| Rise of Nations: Thrones and Patriots | 9 | Jul-04 |
| Rome: Total War | 7.75 | Nov-04 |
| Sacred | 7.75 | Jun-04 |
| Silent Storm | 7.75 | Feb-04 |
| Singles: Flirt Up Your Life | 7 | Aug-04 |
| Soldiers: Heroes of World War II | 5 | Aug-04 |
| SpellForce: The Order of Dawn | 7.75 | Mar-04 |
| Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic | 9.5 | Feb-04 |
| Syberia II | 6.75 | Apr-04 |
| Thief: Deadly Shadows | 7.25 | Jul-04 |
| Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six 3: Athena Sword | 7.25 | May-04 |
| Unreal Tournament 2004 | 9.5 | May-04 |
| Uru: The Path of the Shell | 8.25 | Sep-04 |
| Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War | 9.25 | Nov-04 |
| Warlords Battlecry III | 7.75 | Aug-04 |
| Wars and Warriors: Joan of Arc | 7.5 | Apr-04 |
| Worms 3D | 8 | Mar-04 |
| X2: The Threat | 7 | Feb-04 |

## GAME BOY ADVANCE

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|---|---|---|
| Astro Boy: Omega Factor | 8.5 | Aug-04 |
| Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance | 8.25 | Feb-04 |
| Batman: The Rise of Sin Tzu | 7 | Mar-04 |
| Catwoman | 6.5 | Sep-04 |
| Crash Bandicoot Purple: Ripto's Rage | 5.75 | Jun-04 |
| Donkey Kong | 8 | Jun-04 |
| Dragon Ball Z: Buu's Fury | 4.5 | Oct-04 |
| Dragon Ball Z: Supersonic Warriors | 5.5 | Sep-04 |
| Duel Masters: Sempai Legends | 7.5 | Aug-04 |
| F-Zero: GP Legend | 6.5 | Nov-04 |
| Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban | 8 | Jul-04 |
| Ice Nine | 3.75 | Apr-04 |

Sabrewulf – GBA – Aug-04

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| James Bond 007: Everything or Nothing | 6.25 | Feb-04 |
| King of Fighters EX2: Howling Blood, The | 7.75 | Mar-04 |
| Kirby and the Amazing Mirror | 7.75 | Oct-04 |
| Madden NFL 2005 | 7 | Sep-04 |
| Mario Golf: Advance Tour | 8 | Jun-04 |
| Mario Pinball Land | 7.5 | Oct-04 |
| Mario vs. Donkey Kong | 7.5 | Jun-04 |
| Mega Man Battle Chip Challenge | 6 | Mar-04 |
| Mega Man Battle Network 4: Red Sun/Blue Moon | 7 | Jun-04 |
| Mega Man Zero 3 | 6.75 | Oct-04 |
| Metroid Zero Mission | 9.5 | Feb-04 |
| Mighty Beanz Pocket Puzzles | 6 | Sep-04 |
| Mission Impossible: Operation Surma | 6.25 | Mar-04 |
| Pitfall: The Lost Expedition | 6 | Apr-04 |
| Pokémon Fire Red/Leaf Green | 8 | Oct-04 |
| River City Ransom EX | 8 | Jun-04 |
| R-Type III: The Third Lightning | 6.25 | May-04 |
| Sabrewulf | 6.5 | Aug-04 |
| Shining Force: Resurrection of the Dark Dragon | 7.5 | Jun-04 |
| Shining Soul II | 7.5 | Feb-04 |
| Sonic Advance 3 | 6.75 | Jul-04 |
| Sonic Battle | 6 | Apr-04 |
| Sound of Thunder, A | 4.5 | Apr-04 |
| Spider-Man 2 | 7 | Aug-04 |
| Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow | 8 | May-04 |
| Spyro Orange: The Cortex Conspiracy | 5.75 | Jun-04 |
| Star Wars Trilogy: Apprentice of the Force | 6 | Oct-04 |
| Super Mario Bros. | 9 | Jun-04 |
| Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines | 7.5 | Feb-04 |
| Thunderbirds | 5.75 | Oct-04 |
| Tron 2.0: Killer App | 6.5 | Nov-04 |
| Ultimate Card Games | 7 | Sep-04 |
| Urbz: Sims in the City, The | 7.5 | Nov-04 |
| Wade Hixton's Counter Punch | 7.5 | May-04 |
| Yu-Gi-Oh!: Reshef of Destruction | 4.5 | Sep-04 |
| Yu-Gi-Oh!: The Sacred Cards | 7.5 | Feb-04 |
| Yu-Gi-Oh! World Championship 2004 | 6.5 | May-04 |

# Spy Fiction

## Get The Alternate Ending

## Justin Wood, Project Lead QA at Sammy Studios

Spy Fiction is full of twists and turns, and the biggest surprise is revealed only when you unlock the alternate ending. This is revealed in two ways:

1) After completing the game, you will receive a message during the ending credits hinting that the "Case 10: The Final Mission" and alternate ending are unlocked by completing the game a second time.

2) Better yet, the game provides a 'cheat' to get to Case 10. Capture a 3DA camera image of Nicklaus during every possible stage of the game. These include the prologue level as well as levels 3, 4, 6, and 9. You will gain automatic access to Case 10, and by completing it you unlock the alternate ending and unravel the true story behind the tangled web of characters and false identities encountered throughout the game.

### CASE 10 – CASE CLOSED: THE FINAL MISSION

To see the alternate ending, you need to complete the unlocked mission called "Case 10: The Final Mission." Here is how to do it:

Escape the hangar and access the

runway, where you will try to stop the enemy's plane from flying away. At the beginning of the level, you will need to jump onto the green shipping container to your right. From there, jump onto the crates on the right side. Turn around and grab the pipe directly above you, then travel across the pipe until you come to a platform. Drop down and break the boxes directly in front of you to reveal a door.

Move forward to the door and shoot off the lock to enter the room. After entering, drop down to the floor below you on the right side, then climb on top of the blue shipping containers in front of you. At the top, break the crates and you will see a white tank near the crates on the opposite side of the gap.

Go into first-person mode and shoot

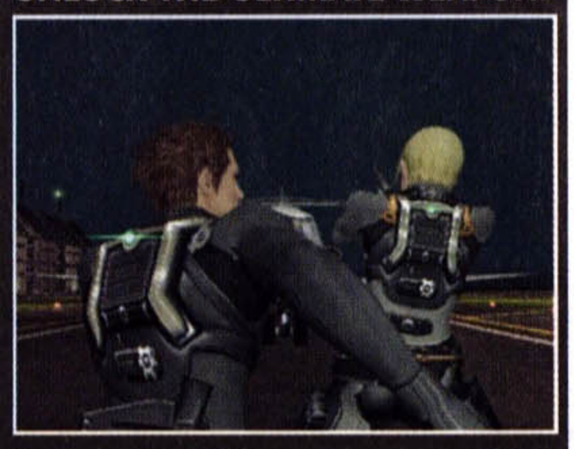
the white tank to blow it up. From there you will need to sneak along the ledge to the other side of the gap. Once on the other side, run to the top

of the red shipping crate and drop down to the right.

From here, you will enter a cutscene where you are confronted by the true foe. The cinematic ends with the enemy escaping in an airplane. Your goal is to stop the plane by shooting its engines before it takes off from the runway. To do this, you will need to use

the zoom lens on your 3DA camera and connect with several long-distance shots before the plane approaches you (the game allows you to use the 3DA camera as a zoom device for any equipped weapon). As the plane approaches, you will need to continue shooting at the designated targets. Once the plane is disabled, the game's alternate ending is revealed.

### UNLOCK THE ULTIMATE WEAPON:



### THE GOLDEN BUTTERFLY

One of your toughest opponents in the game, Colonel Lysander, brandishes a powerful set of shotguns called the Golden Butterfly. These weapons are among the most lethal in the game and will allow Bishop or Sheila to dole out

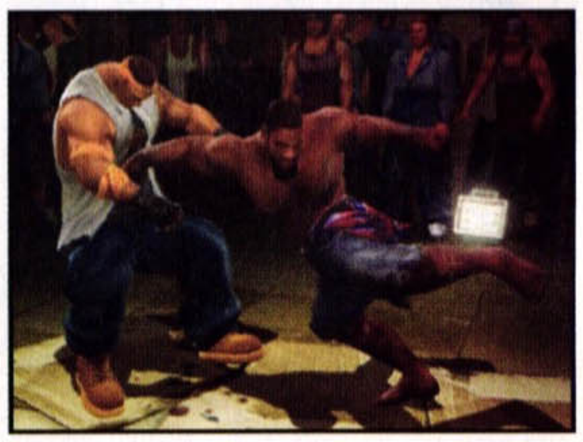
some serious punishment. To obtain these weapons, you must use the 3DA camera to capture images of Lysander's face and body in Case 5 (across the bridge) and in Case 6 (when he is patrolling the corridor). After completing the game, load the final save data and begin a new game. Lysander's Golden Butterfly will be part of your arsenal.

**Attention All Cheaters!**

*Cheat codes, by their very nature, are in many cases buggier than Virginia in August. So, unless you don't mind re-doing those 70 hours you put into the latest game, do yourself a favor and back up your save before using any codes.*

*On a lighter note, you can send your codes to secretaccess@gameinformer.com for a chance to be featured here and win a very special prize!*

## MULTI-SYSTEM



### Def Jam: Fight for NY

> PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX, GAMECUBE

From the main menu, select Extras, then Cheats. Enter these codes on that screen. The Reward Points codes can be entered once each, for a total of 500.

**100 Reward Points** – CROOKLYN
**100 Reward Points** – DUCKETS
**100 Reward Points** – GETSTUFF
**100 Reward Points** – NEWJACK
**100 Reward Points** – THESOURCE

**UNLOCKABLE SONGS**

**"Afterhours" by Nyne** – LOYALTY
**"Anything Goes" by C-N-N** – MILITAIN
**"Blindside" by Baxter** – CHOPPER
**"Bust" by OutKast** – BIGBOI
**"Comp" by Comp** – CHOCOCITY
**"Dragon House" by Chiang** – AKIRA
**"Get It Now" by Bless** – PLATINUMB
**"Koto" by Chiang** – GHOSTSHELL
**"Lil' Bro" by Ric-A-Che** – GONBETRUBL
**"Man Up" by Sticky Fingaz** – KIRKJONES
**"Move!" by Public Enemy** – RESPECT
**"O.G. Original Gangster" by Ice T** – POWER
**"Poppa Large" by Ultramagnetic MCs** – ULTRAMAG
**"Sieze The Day" by Bless** – SIEZE
**"Take A Look At My Life" by Fat Joe** – CARTAGENA
**"Walk With Me" by Joe Budden** – PUMP

### ESPN NFL Football 2k5

> PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX

Enter the following as your VIP name to enable the corresponding cheat.

**1,000,000 Crib Points –** PhatBank
**All Crib Items –** CribMax
**All Milestones Complete –** MadSkilz

## NASCAR 2005: Chase for the Cup

> **PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX, GAMECUBE**

Enter these as your driver's name in Fight to the Top mode. The first word should be his first name, and the second word his last. Also, be aware that these are case-sensitive.

**2,000,000 Prestige Points –** You TheMan
**Event Thunder Plates –** Dodge Stadium
**Unlock Mr. Clean Pit Crew –** Clean Crew

## Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2005

> **PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX, GAMECUBE**

From the main menu, go to EA Sports Options & Extras, then select Password. Enter the cheats there.

**Unlock All Golfers & Courses –** THEGIANTOYSTER

## X-Men Legends

> **PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX, GAMECUBE**

At the main menu, enter this code. A message will let you know that it worked. You'll then be able to select different costumes for several X-Men at the start of a mission or Danger Room scenario by pressing X.

**Unlock Extreme Gear –** Up (x2), Right, Left, Down (x2), Start

# PLAYSTATION 2

## Sly 2: Band of Thieves

Pause gameplay by pressing Start, then enter the codes to unlock these gadgets (accessible through the Gadget Grid).

**Time Rush** – Down (x2), Up, Down, Right, Left
**TOM –** Left (x2), Down, Right, Left, Right

## Star Wars: Battlefront

Select a single-player historical campaign, so that you're on the planet selection screen. Then enter this code.

**Unlock All Planets –** □, ○, □, ○

# XBOX

## Star Wars: Battlefront

Select a single-player historical campaign, so that you're on the planet selection screen. Then enter this code.

**Unlock All Planets –** X, B, X, B

*"GI Droid"*
*(location unknown – last seen eating Paris Hilton's dog)*

# PC

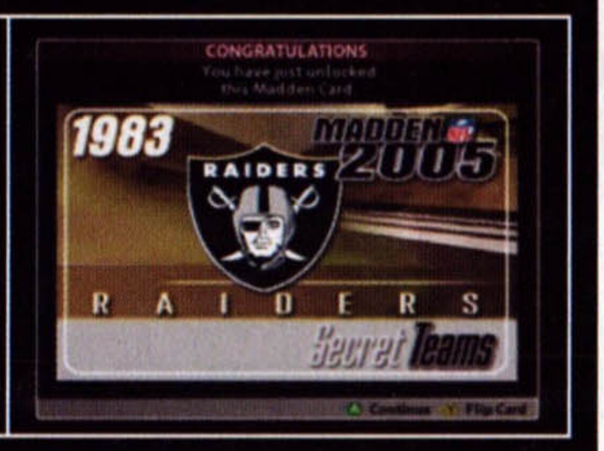
## Rome: Total War

Press the tilde key (~) to drop the console, then enter these cheats there. The "Add Money" cheat will only work once per campaign. For parts of the codes in brackets, use any value – a number for money, or the word "attacker" or "defender" for the auto-win code (and don't actually type the brackets).

**Add Money –** add_money [number]
**Skew Next Autoresolve Battle –** auto_win [attacker or defender]
**Toggle Fog of War –** toggle_fow

## Code of the Month

# Madden 2005




From the main menu, select My Madden, then Madden Cards, then Madden Codes. Enter these cheats there to unlock the associated Madden Card; note that all of the letters must be uppercase.

**1st & 15 –** V65J8P
**1st & 5 –** O72E9B
**3rd Down –** Z28X8K
**5th Down –** P66C4L
**Aloha Stadium –** G67F5X
**Bingo! –** J33I8F
**Da BOMB –** B61A8M
**Da BOOT –** I76X3T
**Extra Credit –** M89S8G
**Fumbilitis –** R14B8Z
**Human Plow –** L96J7P
**Lame Duck –** D57R5S
**Mistake Free –** X78P9Z
**Mr. Mobility –** Y59R8R
**SuperDive –** D59K3Y
**Tight Fit –** V34L6D
**T.J. Duckett Gold Card –** P67E1I
**Unforced Errors –** L48G1E

**STADIUMS**
**Super Bowl XL –** O85P6I
**Super Bowl XLI –** P48Z4D
**Super Bowl XLII –** T67R1O
**Super Bowl XXIX –** D58F1B

**CLASSIC TEAMS**
**1958 Colts –** P74X8J
**1966 Packers –** G49P7W
**1968 Jets –** C24W2A
**1970 Browns –** G12N1I
**1972 Dolphins –** R79W6W
**1974 Steelers –** R12D9B
**1976 Raiders –** P96Q8M
**1977 Broncos –** O18T2A
**1978 Dolphins –** G97U5X
**1980 Raiders –** K71K4E
**1981 Chargers –** Y27N9A
**1982 Redskins –** F56D6V
**1983 Raiders –** D23T8S
**1984 Dolphins –** X23Z8H
**1985 Bears –** F92M8M
**1986 Giants –** K44F2Y
**1988 49ers –** F77R8H
**1990 Eagles –** G95F2Q
**1991 Lions –** I89F4I
**1992 Cowboys –** I44A1O
**1993 Bills –** Y66K3O

*Joe Dongle*
*Tuskaloosa, OK*

# Mod World

## KINGDOM OF LOATHING

**www.kingdomofloathing.com**

Sometimes, working your way up to the innermost mysteries of the arcane to obtain the power you need to save the world from ultimate evil for the sixteenth game in a row is a little too serious for even the hardest-core RPGer. To combat the onset of boredom that this sort of thing can bring on, the geniuses over at Asymmetric Publications crafted Kingdom of Loathing, possibly the least serious online RPG ever made. KoL feels a lot like an old-school text-only multi-user dungeon, except that it's approximately a bajillion times easier to pick up and play – and hilarious to boot. The tagline, "An Adventurer Is You," says it all.

KoL is free (it does require a valid email address however), but it's not a download. It's played from your browser of choice through a extremely intuitive hypertext interface. Upon creation of your account, you'll be tasked with choosing your hero's class. Sounds standard enough, until you see that your choices range from Seal Clubber to Disco Bandit and Pastamancer. And it keeps getting sillier from there on in. Whether it's adventuring on the Wrong Side Of The Tracks, searching for treasure on Degrassi Knoll, or checking out the aptly-named Dungeon of Haiku, there is an abundance of things to do (and laugh at) in the Kingdom of Loathing.

While its main draw is its wacky Monty Python-esque sense of humor, KoL does feature the kinds of RPG goodness you'd hope it would. Stats, levels, and community-building functions are all present, and surprisingly easy to access and use through the mostly text interface. It may not be the deepest RPG around, but it's definitely worth checking out. Even if you only play it for a single afternoon, you should get some good laughs out of it.

# Jak 3

## The 10 Most Difficult Moments in Jak 3

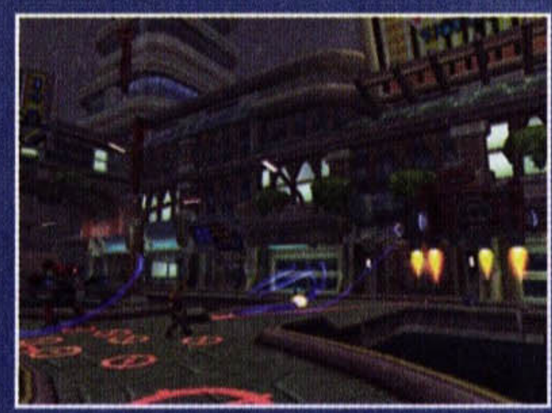
*In order of appearance, as told by Charles Delay, Test Manager/IT, Naughty Dog*

**1. Defend Ashelin at the Oasis**
One way to make this easier on yourself is to stay close to Ashelin, and use your Scatter Gun and Blaster to hold at bay the hordes of Marauders attacking both you and her. Use your Vulcan Fury to take out the vehicles. The Dark Bomb can also be useful for clearing away enemies when you run out of ammo. The second strategy is to let Ashelin fend for herself. Immediately run for cover behind the HellCat Fighter. You can then blast away at the marauders, picking up some of the choice goodies as they get dropped.

**2. Hijack Eco Vehicle**
In the first part of this mission, pay close attention to the radar to help guide you towards the Port. Also be sure to keep your speed up to stay ahead of the heat seeking missiles that are tracking you down. In the second part, there are decoys scattered around the Port; use them to lure the missiles off your tail. Because of the time it takes for the decoy to deploy once shot, the best choices to activate them at a distance are the Blaster and the Beam Reflexor. Remember to use the large, open areas of the Port to your advantage; if you don't have a good angle on shooting a decoy, fly around and try again from a little further away.

**3. Break Barrier with Blast Bots**
The most difficult part of this mission is getting by the enemy blast bots. There is no way to regenerate health, so avoiding taking damage is critical. The easiest way through this area is to avoid the blast bots entirely by taking the "high road" on the upper platforms. Alternatively, to best destroy the enemy blast bots, strafe around them while keeping a steady rate of fire in their direction. When their targeting laser turns red, move in the opposite direction to avoid their blasts.

**4. Defend HQ from Attack**
It's time to bring out the big guns! Keep your firepower on the Krimson Guard Transport, concentrating on the corners of the transport where the cells are. Avoid the missiles by jumping, or if in the water, you can dive underneath the explosions. The Needle Lazer and Gyro Burster



automatically target the transport, so use them as much as possible. Use melee attacks against the enemies that the transport drops off to avoid wasting ammunition.

**5. Take Out Marauder Stronghold**
In the first part of this mission, use all the weapons at your disposal to take care of your enemies, and pick up additional ammo as necessary. Also, use the fact that the area where a fireball is about to hit starts glowing a few moments before it lands to your advantage and avoid them. The most direct way to approach the second part of this mission is to destroy the incoming vehicles as they approach, and use the Turbo Boost they drop to help close in faster on your actual target. The other, more challenging way is to use your Turbo Boosts in combination with the Dune Hopper's Charge Jump ability to catch up more quickly with the fleeing Marauders. To pull off this tactic you must have precise control of the Dune Hopper in the air as you are boosting, or it can backfire on you and you'll end up crashing into the surroundings or landing in the wrong direction.

**6. Beat Cyber-Errol Boss**
First off, keep track of where Cyber-Errol is standing when he starts attacking you. Each of the Circular enemy deployment tubes has a different color ring around it, which should make it easier to remember where Cyber-Errol is when it's time to project his nasty bomb back at him. When he starts the first part of any of his attack phases, your best bet is to keep on the move and jump right after his target reticle turns red to avoid being hit by the seismic wave that may occur after impact. If you see a volley of multiple projectiles, then they are going to destroy areas of the floor underneath you, so be careful not to jump right into one of those holes. The waves of KG robots can be taken out with the a Blaster Mod or Vulcan Fury, but the Peacemaker is a better weapon to use against more formidable opponents like the Dark Precursors in the latter attack waves. Keep track of your ammo usage and make sure to pick up the dropped items as much as possible, but don't risk taking damage for extra ammo.

**7. Activate Astro Viewer in Haven Forest**
The best tactic to remove any Dark Precursors who are controlling a nearby turret is to stand behind a tree or boulder and fire the Needle Lazer around a corner towards the Precursor, knocking him off. You can also use the Gyro Burster in the same fashion to clear out multiple enemies more quickly. Once you're in a turret, shoot at the Dark Flowers until the amount of enemies around you becomes excessive, then jump out of the turret and quickly fire the Mass Inverter and jump back into the turret immediately. This tactic will give you more time to destroy Dark Flowers without having enemies shoot at you for a short amount of time. You can also use the Gyro Burster with this tactic if you are running low on Purple ammunition.

**8. Blow Open Tower Door**
The key to this mission is to always keep firing. Furthermore, defending Torn is a priority, since his health is much lower than yours. The enemies that take the most health are the metal-head grunts that jump at you. Try to destroy them from the ground or in the air, since they instantly do damage to your cruiser. If going under a bridge or in an area with many

overhead obstacles, keep an eye out for the grunts jumping from roofs or off the bridges. Once into the port, attack as many enemies as possible from as far away as possible. Also, destroy the barrels quickly, since they take out multiple enemies at once.

**9. Destroy Final Boss – Taking Out the Legs**
The most difficult part of this mission is actually getting in position to shoot out the targets. Usually when you drive up, you are able to get some of the targets facing forward while charging head on. After that, you can usually pick off a couple of targets in the middle, and finally as the walker passes you, pick off some of the targets on the back. At this point, cut across the desert and try to intercept the walker head on, like you did when the mission began. This will set you up with a much easier path to hit the remaining targets on the front and in the middle you missed previously. Ideally, on your initial run, try to hit all the targets on a side (all the targets facing spargas, or facing the center). That will make it easier for you on your clean up run.

**10. Spargus Timer Challenge**
The most difficult part of this side challenge is not running out of time when the time tokens are sparse. Your best bet is to get a leaper lizard before hitting the blue sphere and activating the challenge. Follow the path, making sure to watch for the red and yellow time tokens. Don't stray too far from the path though, and make sure to still pick up the blue tokens as well, or you will run out of time. The leaper is much faster than the Jet Board, and will definitely help you get through the areas where tokens are sparser a little bit faster. One last note: Although the red time tokens put the most time on the clock, sometimes they are not the best choice, as they may lead you off the path, losing time instead of gaining it.

# Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal

## Insomniac Insiders' Illuminating Tips

*The team behind the extraordinary third title in the Ratchet & Clank saga took a little time to share some of their favorite tricks for Up Your Arsenal. Check them out.*

I recommend playing in lock-strafe mode, one of our three camera control options. It gives you very precise control over your shots and lets you fire and jump without taking your hands off the sticks. It's good to master the lock-strafe controls in single-player because they're absolutely essential if you want to be competitive online. – Brian Hastings, VP Gameplay

Placing mines in a multiplayer game behind a Holoshield will prevent other players from shooting them until they are close enough for the mines to track. – Johnny Byrnes, Tools Tester

Practice taking Nodes online as a team, and you will be able to capture them much faster. If you have a buddy attract the turret fire, then another person can crank the bolt without even killing the turrets. – Sam Christiansen, Online Programmer

Weapons like the Shock Blaster and the Spitting Hydra can be charged up by holding down the fire button. In doing

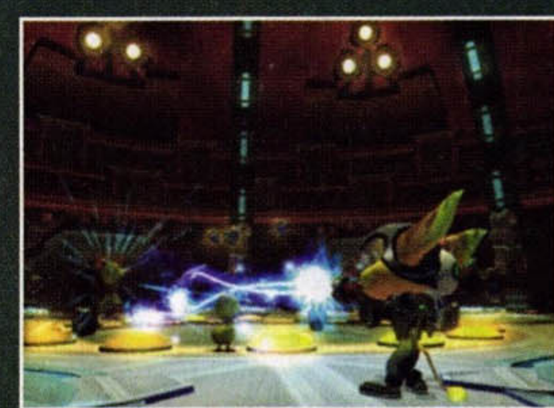
so, you convert an already powerful blast into a soul-shattering, planet-rending, ninja-annihilating wave of mutilation. – Peter Hastings, Gameplay Programmer

In multiplayer gameplay, allied drones don't have to be used exclusively for offense; well-placed drones can provide a valuable defense for your base while you are away. – Giacomino Veltri, Tools Programmer

Don't bother hunting down all the sewer crystals in Aquatos until you've obtained the Gravity Boots by completing the battlefield missions in Blackwater City, and have also obtained the Map-O-Matic by completing the battlefield missions in Aridia. Once you've obtained those two items, go back to the sewers and the crystal hunt will be a breeze. There are also a few places in the sewer that cannot be reached without the Gravity Boots, so you cannot get all the crystals without them. – Carl Glave, Gameplay Programmer

Some of the best multiplayer game modes are the ones that you create yourself. Try playing deathmatch games with only a single weapon available. This can lead to some hilarious

situations. Two of our favorites: Mines only and Sheepinators only. – Tyler Moore, Tester



When ammo runs out in arena battles or in the sewers, become one with the Qwack-o-Ray. Ridiculous as the weapon may seem, don't underestimate the power of a fully upgraded Qwack-o-Ray. Besides, who doesn't love an angry red, flaming, flying duck?! – Brian Trinidad, Tester

In multiplayer gameplay, charge booting from a high location can help you access parts of the map quicker than normal, especially using this in conjunction with the Hypershot or a wrench slam. Try charge-booting from the sniper cliffs in Aridia to the Hypershot balls on either side of the platform in the middle with the player turret – you can get across the river in the middle of the map in just a second or two. – William Powers, Tester

When using the Holoshield, remember that it can sap nanotech from your enemies and transfer them to you. Just throw a shield close enough to the enemies and watch the shield suck the enemies dry while healing you. – Keith Lee, Gameplay Programmer

# CATCHING UP WITH TECMO'S PRINCE OF DARKNESS:

## CLASSIC GI INTERVIEWS DOA CREATOR TOMONOBU ITAGAKI

*Tomonobu Itagaki is one of gaming's most intriguing characters. With his long hair, wardrobe of leather jackets, and ever-present dark sunglasses, Itagaki's public persona is more akin to that of a rock star than the typical Japanese game developer. His laconic nature and confidence in his abilities have led many to assume that he is perhaps a bit arrogant and aloof. While his abilities as a game creator have never been in question due to his amazing track record with the Dead or Alive series and the recent Ninja Gaiden, his preference for letting his work speak for itself has resulted in him becoming perhaps the most misunderstood of the industry's A-list talents.*

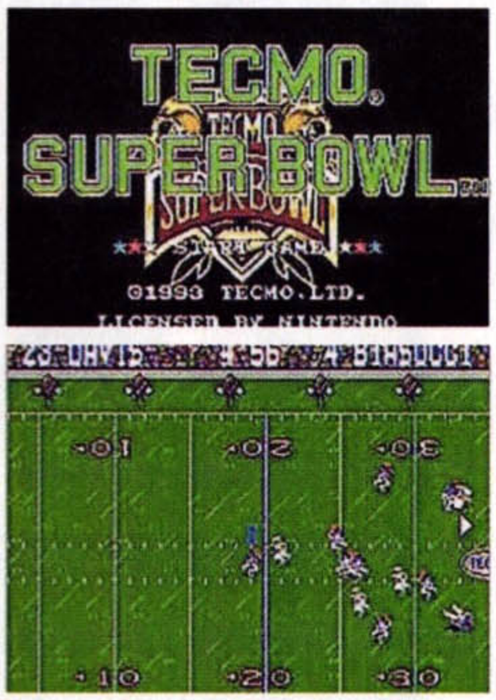
*For someone with such a high profile in the game development community, we know very little about his background, motivations, or influences as a designer. Recently, Itagaki visited our offices to demonstrate Dead or Alive Ultimate, and we had the opportunity to sit down for a rare one-on-one interview about his history. Rather than aloof, we found him to be exceedingly polite, thoughtful, and sincere, offering up many poignant insights to his own career and the industry in general. Hopefully, this interview will give readers a different view of a man whose image is often in conflict with reality.*

**Do you remember the first game that really got you hooked on video gaming?**
Wizardry, an American role-playing game.

**As a child did you have a lot of interest in computers and programming? Was that one of your hobbies?**
Yes.

**What was the computer you were using back then?**
A Sord [an early Japanese PC manufacturer] computer. My father was an engineer, so I was lucky to have access to a computer that was very expensive. In today's money, it would be about $50,000.

**Wow. Later on, did you go to schooling for computer science or programming? Or were you self-taught?**
The summer when I was in eighth grade, during summer vacation, I spent 15 hours a day playing with the computer and ended up programming a game. My father took the computer and, of course, the game that I programmed back to his company. Everyone was playing it in his office. After that summer, I had to start preparing for the high school and college entrance exams. I didn't touch a computer until I was in the fifth year in my college. So I actually majored in legal studies.




One of Itagaki's first projects at Tecmo was programming the classic Tecmo Super Bowl for the Super NES

**What type of game was your first game on the Sord computer?**
It was a shooting game – versus.

**When did you decide that video games were a career that you wanted to pursue for your life's work?**
My seventh year in college. That's when I decided.

**Did you work in games before you became an employee at Tecmo?**
No, Tecmo was the first.

**What were some of the projects that you worked on and some of the duties you had in your very early days at Tecmo?**
When I joined Tecmo, it was about the time when Super Famicom was coming to an end. I realized that – at Tecmo – we weren't fully utilizing the capacity of Super Famicom and people were being very discouraged by it, disappointed by it. What made that system interesting was that the background rotated and also fluctuated in size going from large to small.

**Mode 7 graphics.**
Yes. But no one knew how to utilize the features. So my first responsibility was to work on those areas, and they hired me as a programmer.

**What titles did you program early on?**
I worked on Tecmo Super Bowl for Super Famicom [SNES]. If you clear the game, you might see my name on the credits. It doesn't say "Itagaki." It says "Gaki Ita." [Laughs] They flipped the name around.

**We read in an interview that you did a long time ago that you had actually been working on a football title that stretched the boundaries of the genre and incorporated some fighting game elements. Could you talk about that project a little bit?**
Well, it was definitely a football game, but it also [had] punch and kick buttons. I think, now that I look back, one of the reasons for [its] failure to be accepted by American consumers was that I didn't understand the rules of football. I didn't understand the mentality of the football fans. And, consequentially, no one cared about it. It got a lot of criticism. When the running back gains 50 yards, let's say, people expect to keep the yardage. But I had the player engage in a fight. As the fight progressed, he got pushed back. The final yardage was based on where you kind of ended your fight. People didn't like that very much.

**Was it ever released?**
It was banished. [Laughs]

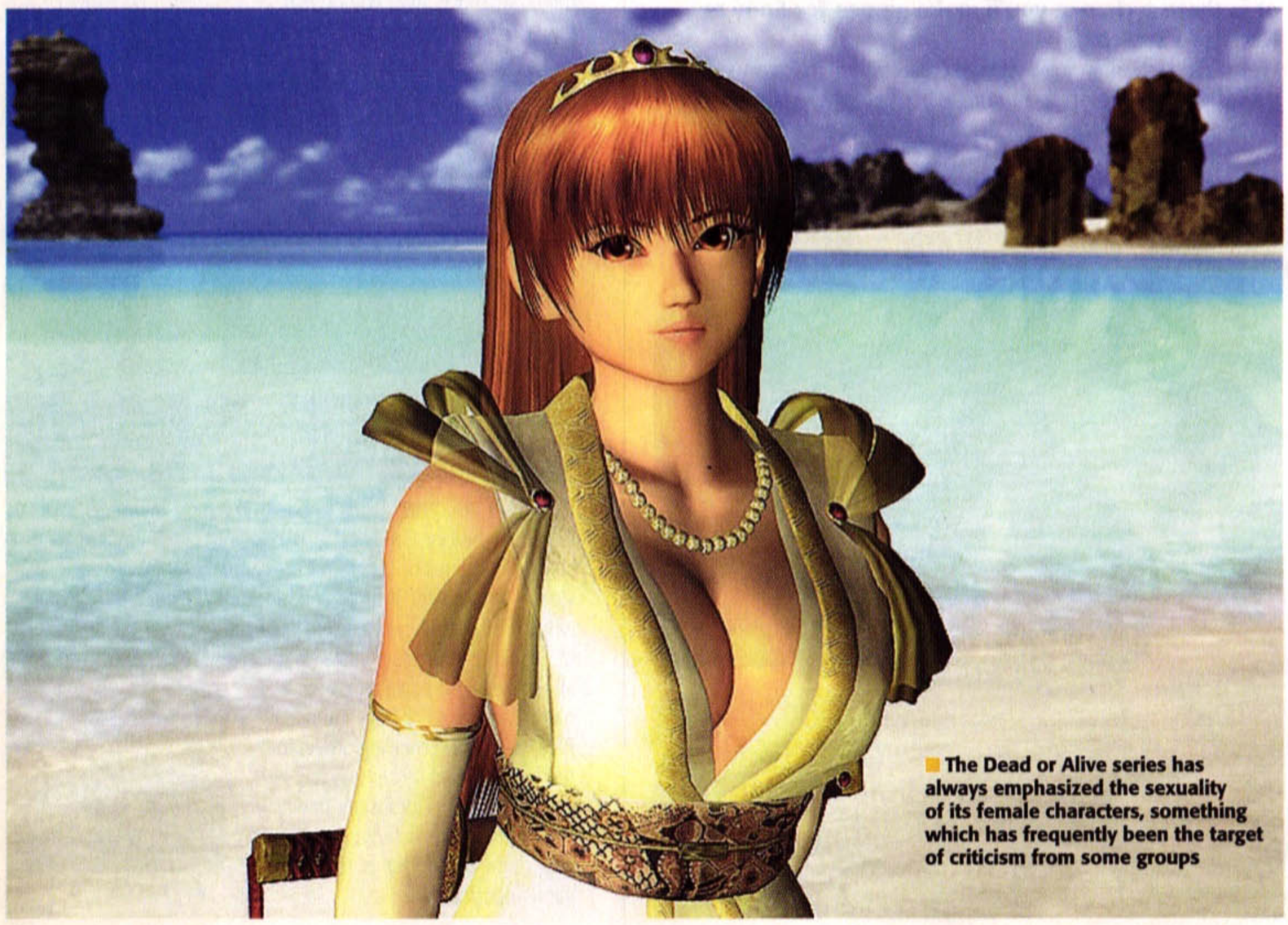
Itagaki cites Midway's Mortal Kombat and SNK's Fatal Fury (known as Garou Densetsu in Japan) as two games that influenced his work on the Dead or Alive franchise

**Have you seen the EA game that came out recently, NFL Street, which incorporated some over-the-top elements into traditional football? Did that make you think that your game could have been successful?**
Well, having said what I said, even if I didn't fully understand the rules of football, I think – if I made other elements of the game better – maybe then the concept of the game would have been accepted. To see EA Sports come up with such a concept basically backs that idea.

**You're most known for your work on Dead or Alive. What were some of your inspirations for DOA? Were you a fan of the Street Fighter series?**
I wanted to do something that would attract people's attention as I worked on the DOA game. Of course, DOA is known for its bouncing breasts. Well, I didn't come up with that concept originally. I actually got the idea from one of SNK's 2D fighting games called Garou Densetsu [Fatal Fury in the U.S. – ed.]. Of course, when I applied it to a 3D game, it was almost too much for some people. And, of course, it hurts to fall off from high places in DOA, but the idea came from Mortal Kombat. In the case of Mortal Kombat, the 2D fighter, when the character falls off he simply dies. That ends the game. That's it. But we figured that it would be more interesting to have the character continue to fight after the fall. And that's what we did. It's kind of ironic that I got the idea from their Mortal Kombat 2D fighter and implemented the improved version of that into my 3D game and now Mortal Kombat appears to be learning and copying what I'm doing in 3D. I think the Mortal Kombat guys might have noticed this already, but to do what we do it requires you to build a massive stage. Most of them will literally die from the work. [Laughs] They must be wondering how we do it.

**Dead or Alive first came to home consoles on the Sega Saturn. What was your opinion of that system? Was that a good machine that was unjustly ignored?**
Saturn was a great machine, great system. If someone were to ask me if I want to make a game for PSone or Saturn I would – 100 percent of the time – make games for Saturn.

**What, in your view, are some of Dead or Alive's major contributions to the fighting genre? How would you like video game historians to look back on the series?**
To answer your latter question about how I want DOA to be remembered, I want people to remember DOA as a game that was very aggressive and combative. As to the first question – how it is contributing to the fighting genre – I look at it as something similar to how sushi was introduced in


The Dead or Alive series has always emphasized the sexuality of its female characters, something which has frequently been the target of criticism from some groups


**"You take audio and video and jam 'em together 'til they rock."**

—Stephanie Heer
*B.A. in Multimedia*
*Class of 2004*

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this country and became mainstream. You know, like, some people like graphics, some people like animation, some people like flashy character design and so forth. Through DOA, we want to reach out to those people and become somewhat of a mainstream game.

**As the video game home consoles have grown more and more powerful, it's really had a negative impact on the arcades, especially in the United States. Do you miss the heyday of the arcades and is DOA Ultimate an attempt to recreate that experience in a new setting on Xbox Live?**

First of all, I don't feel saddened by the demise of the arcade business at all. I don't believe in trying to preserve a fire that is diminishing in size by putting hands over it until it completely goes away. That's not how I like to live. I would rather start a new fire to fulfill the needs of people who used to go to the arcade. Now, they're looking for a place to go and I see online gaming as [the answer].

Dead or Alive, released in the arcade in 1996, is the game that put Itagaki on the map

**Do you feel that there is too much nostalgia for the old days of video games? Many people feel that the games of the 8- and 16-bit eras had more "heart and soul" than the big-budget, graphic-intensive title of today.**

I [understand] those people who talk about those nostalgic games having heart and soul. That is true because, back in the old days, five or six guys would make a game. Because of that, each person's personality was reflected in the end product. And perhaps that is what people are feeling. Even a s*** game had its own flavor and taste. Now, the bigger projects need 300-person teams to create a game, and when you have that many people, one person's idea is not going to come through. For that reason, unless a game is made by someone like me or Peter Molyneux, people like us who are very stubborn, someone with a very strong personality – so much so that people are scared of us – [it won't have personality]. [You need] authority, money, and respect. Only then are you able to make games with personality. Most other games are just made very commercially, so to speak. For instance, I don't know how many people can name the guys who created Grand Theft Auto. I think there are very few who can.

**You've been involved recently with Ninja Gaiden, which was very successful, and did a very good job of bringing back an old 8-bit character and bringing it to a new generation. How do you approach a project like that?**

Well the only commonality between the original, the old Ninja Gaiden, and the newly created Ninja Gaiden is that back in those days Ninja Gaiden was a number-one action game. Today, I believe Ninja Gaiden is a number-one action game. And when I approached this project I just wanted to make another [great] action game. I did not go and dissect the old Ninja Gaiden to see what made it a success. We approached it as a new game, and did everything that we knew how to do. I think that's the reason it became as successful.

**Looking back, can you name any game creators that have been the biggest influence on you?**

I don't have any. I'm not trying to be arrogant, and there are people who did a great job in other types of games, but I really don't think there's anyone out there who's figured out how to make video games. Just like I have flaws as a producer, in everybody else, I see the same thing. I see a lot of problems.

**Now we're starting to gear up for the next generation of gaming, people are starting to talk about PlayStation 3 and Microsoft's Xenon. What do you anticipate in the future for the next generation systems?**

Power is all I'm expecting. That's it.

**Do you see yourself continuing to work with Microsoft or is there a chance you'll make games for Sony or Nintendo systems?**

Well, I did not fall in love with Microsoft. I fell in love with the power of Xbox. So, in the future, of course there is a chance that I might fall in love with another system with power.

DOA Ultimate looks to sum up the progress of the series, at the same time helping to recreate the combative arcade experience through Xbox Live

## GREATEST GAME OF ALL TIME

By Matt Olsen

### EARTHBOUND

> **FORMAT** SNES
> **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO

EarthBound for the SNES is by far my favorite game of all time. The game starts out when a meteorite crash lands on a hill nearby the peaceful town of Onett. The crash awakens our young hero, Ness. He goes to investigate and encounters a bee named Buzz Buzz, who claims to be from the future. Buzz tells Ness that he, along with a two other boys and a girl, must save the world from the universal terror Giygas.

Obviously, this game is different. It takes place in a unique setting, rather than the common medieval or sci-fi settings that most RPGs tend to have. EarthBound takes place in a more modern era. You'll travel through busy towns and cities with cars and office buildings.

The battles also make this game unique. Instead of fighting the generic dragon or goblin enemies, you'll fight a host of bizarre enemies that vary from runaway house pets to neighborhood gang members. Other foes include piles of puke and new-age hippies. But, in order to fight these baddies, you must have weapons. The battles are not your average sword-and-shield fights. Instead, you'll use baseball bats, yo-yos, and frying pans. The healing items are more modern, too, utilizing hamburgers and croissants to recover your health.

Your party includes Ness, of course, and Paula, the girl whose PSI attacks are second to none. PSI is a type of psychic power that you can think of as the "magic moves" of EarthBound. The third member is Jeff, the group nerd. He can't use PSI, but he can use bottle rockets and his high intelligence allows him to repair broken items that can be used as powerful weapons or tools. The final member of the group, with the funny name of Poo, comes from a far away place to the east. He learns some really cool PSI techniques, and he can only use certain equipment, all with name "of Kings." (for example, the Cloak of Kings).

What I really like about EarthBound is how funny the game is. Aside from the enemies, the dialogue is hilarious. This is one of those few games where you want to make sure you talk to every single NPC or townsperson just to hear what they say. A lot of times, they say some of the funniest things. For example, in the town of Threed, you must use Zombie Paper, which attracts Zombies and will stick them to where you placed it, and they can't move. After you do that, an NPC says, "I wonder if they make something like this called Pretty Girl Paper."

In closing, any game that involves bubblegum-blowing monkeys and stopping an evil paint cult should not be missed, especially if that game's name is EarthBound.

## THIS MONTH IN GAMING HISTORY

December 7th, 1982 stands as one of the most infamous days in gaming history. On that day in 1982, Atari CEO Ray Kassar sold 5,000 shares of (Atari's parent company) Warner Bros. stock. Minutes later, Warner announced that its quarterly profits would be lower than projected, largely due to vast quantities of unsold Atari products. Later in the month, Warner actually posted a 56 percent loss for the period, and its stock began a freefall. Retailers began canceling orders for Atari games, and Kassar was investigated by the SEC for insider trading. This event is often cited as the beginning of the great crash of the video game industry.

Ray Kassar

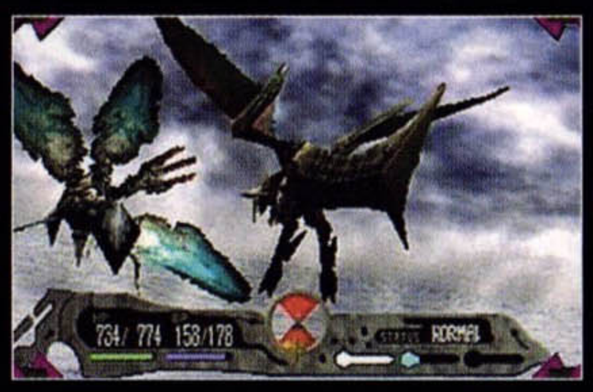
SEGA SATURN

## PANZER DRAGOON SAGA

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** SEGA > **DEVELOPER** TEAM ANDROMEDA > **RELEASE** 1998

RETRO RATING
NOW 8.5
THEN* 9

Less than 10,000 copies of this third Panzer Dragoon game ever made it Stateside, as Sega had already started to shift gears away from the Saturn in preparation for what would become the Dreamcast. Regardless, the Panzer RPG was one of the finest of its era – pushing the hardware to its limit with graphics and cinematics that were quite simply amazing. Unfortunately, those 32-bit visuals seem borderline ugly when compared with the artistic masterpieces that are possible with today's hardware. But, if you're willing to see past the dated look, you'll discover a tale of remarkable depth and emotion, with a script of stunning clarity, insight, and symbolism. The post-apocalyptic fantasy world is believably harsh, and the heavy weight of the land's history is continually apparent in every aspect of the game. Add in a flexible and challenging combat system (which occurs while on dragonback, no less) and you'll start to see why this is one of the most sought after RPGs for collectors. It's hard to track down, but it's worth it. This might be the greatest RPG you've never played.



SNES

## THE TICK

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** FOX INTERACTIVE > **DEVELOPER** PROBE SOFTWARE > **RELEASE** 1994

RETRO RATING
NOW 5
THEN* 5

The passage of time has been kind to The Tick. Whereas most games decay over the years, becoming less enjoyable with each passing console generation, The Tick has remained just as stupid and boring as it was when it first released. In its heyday, *The Tick* cartoon provided a zany, bizarre alternative to the usual animated fare. Unsurprisingly, the show's unique humor translated very poorly into the 2D brawler format. The game features glaring flaws more noticeable than laser-carved initials on the moon's surface. Though the title of the first chapter, "Night of a Million Zillion Ninjas" may seem funny at first, it becomes depressing when you realize that isn't hyperbole. If you think that it is impossible to get sick of ninjas, The Tick can prove you wrong. Though it does retain some of the show's flavor with cameo appearances by American Maid and Die Fledermaus, the limited enemy types, restrictive moveset, and overall dullness of this title are an affront to all who have bellowed the hallowed battle cry "Spoon!"

SEGA GENESIS

## ALTERED BEAST

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** SEGA > **DEVELOPER** SEGA > **RELEASE** 1989

RETRO RATING
NOW 7.5
THEN N/A

Many gamers have fond memories of this one. And for good reason – there are some enormously fun ideas here. You are summoned by an ancient god to "Rise From Your Grave!" in order to rescue his fair maiden of a daughter. Your character can power-up into numerous incredible creatures, each with different abilities and attacks. When you transform, you're treated to a sweet cut away image of your buff warrior transfiguring into his beastly form. Levels are varied while the monsters you face are particularly imaginative, especially the huge bosses at the end of each stage. Perhaps most significantly for the overall value, you've got some great two-player co-op. Alas, if you're good, whether you're playing by yourself or with a buddy, you can beat the whole game in under an hour. While additional difficulty levels add a little replay value, it's hard to imagine anyone investing more than an afternoon to master the whole shebang. All told, it's a short-lived trip down memory lane, but a good one.

*Score given to the game when it first appeared in Game Informer. Panzer Dragoon Saga (GI #61 5/98), The Tick (GI #21 1/95)

# GAMEOVER

No Animals Were Harmed During The Making Of This Issue

## VIDEO GAME TRIVIA

**The effects of video gaming have been widely debated. Some claim games make people violent, others claim that they numb the minds of the young and stifle creativity. We're no scienticians, but we do know that gaming has plenty of positive side effects. Take our trivia quiz to see what side effect your devoted gaming has earned you.**

**1. Many quality titles were released near the end of the N64's lifecycle. What was the last N64 title to be released in the United States?**

**A.** Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3
**B.** Paper Mario
**C.** Conker's Bad Fur Day
**D.** Mario Party 3

**2. *Tron* is undoubtedly the *Citizen Kane* of video game-related movies. Orson Welles even played the Master Control Program...or not. Who played Flynn in the film?**

**A.** Bruce Boxleitner
**B.** Jeff Bridges
**C.** David Warner
**D.** Sir Ben Kingsley

**3. What was the first Castlevania game that didn't feature a member of the Belmont family?**

**A.** Castlevania: Dracula X
**B.** Castlevania III: Dracula's Curse
**C.** Castlevania: Bloodlines
**D.** Castlevania: Circle of the Moon

**4. Spider-Man loves his Xbox! What Spidey villain exclusively appeared in the Xbox version of the Spider-Man: The Movie game?**

**A.** Mysterio
**B.** The Sandman
**C.** Paste-Pot Pete
**D.** Kraven the Hunter

**5. In Donkey Kong County, which character is said to be the "real" Donkey Kong from the original game?**

**A.** Diddy Kong
**B.** Cranky Kong
**C.** Donkey Kong
**D.** Funky Kong

**6. In what state is Resident Evil's Raccoon City reportedly located? We're not talking about the movie version, which we all know takes place in a state called "Crapland."**

**A.** Colorado
**B.** Wyoming
**C.** Utah
**D.** Maryland

**7. Which of these washed-up bands has never contributed their music, likeness, or mascot to a sub-par video game?**

**A.** KISS
**B.** Iron Maiden
**C.** Van Halen
**D.** Motley Crüe

**8. In the cult favorite PlayStation 2 game ICO, what is the name of the mute girl that players lead around by the hand?**

**A.** Her name is never stated
**B.** Ico
**C.** Claire
**D.** Yorda

**9. The streets in the picturesque town of Silent Hill are named after what?**

**A.** Horror writers
**B.** Game programmers
**C.** Mythical creatures
**D.** Horror movie directors

**10. On which holiday was geek sex symbol Lara Croft born?**

**A.** Christmas
**B.** Halloween
**C.** Valentine's Day
**D.** Franchises That Should Have Died Long Ago Day

## BREAKDOWN

**0%** of the Game Informer editors' family and friends will receive presents this year. We're going to be spending all our money on games for ourselves

**60%** of the American population will play some form of video game this year, according to industry polls. We expect this number to increase to 102.5% in the next five years. How is that possible? Siamese twins

**75%** of the pages in this issue are "Refreshing Extreme Spearmint" flavor. The remaining pages are "Delicious Paper" flavor. Taste yours now to discover which is which

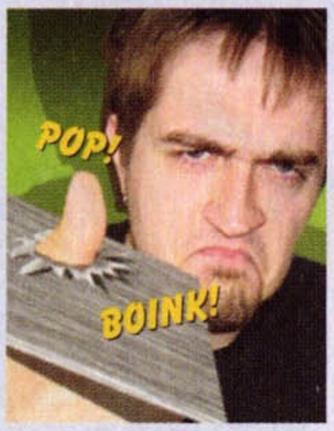
**10%** of game developers (approximately) are female. The other 90% desperately want to date them

**36%** The efficiency of Matt's rapping skills. His official MC ranking is "wack"

## ★ Trivia Score & Rank ★

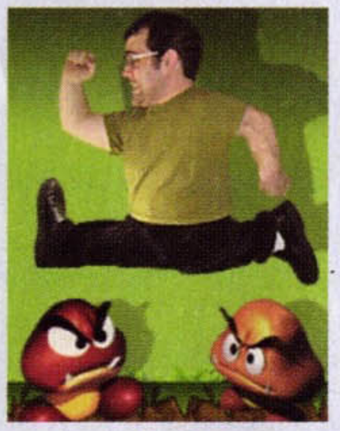
**0-1**
**The ability to go days without blinking**

**2-3**
**The compulsion to collect coins**




**4-5**
**Thumbs that can puncture sheet metal**

**6-7**
**Enhanced Nerf sniping skills**



**8-9**
**The realization that all of life's obstacles can be overcome by jumping**

**10**
**The ability to continue after dying**

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**Video Game Trivia Answers:** 1.A 2.B 3.C 4.D 5.B 6.A 7.C 8.D 9.A 10.C

# Light up your Holidays

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