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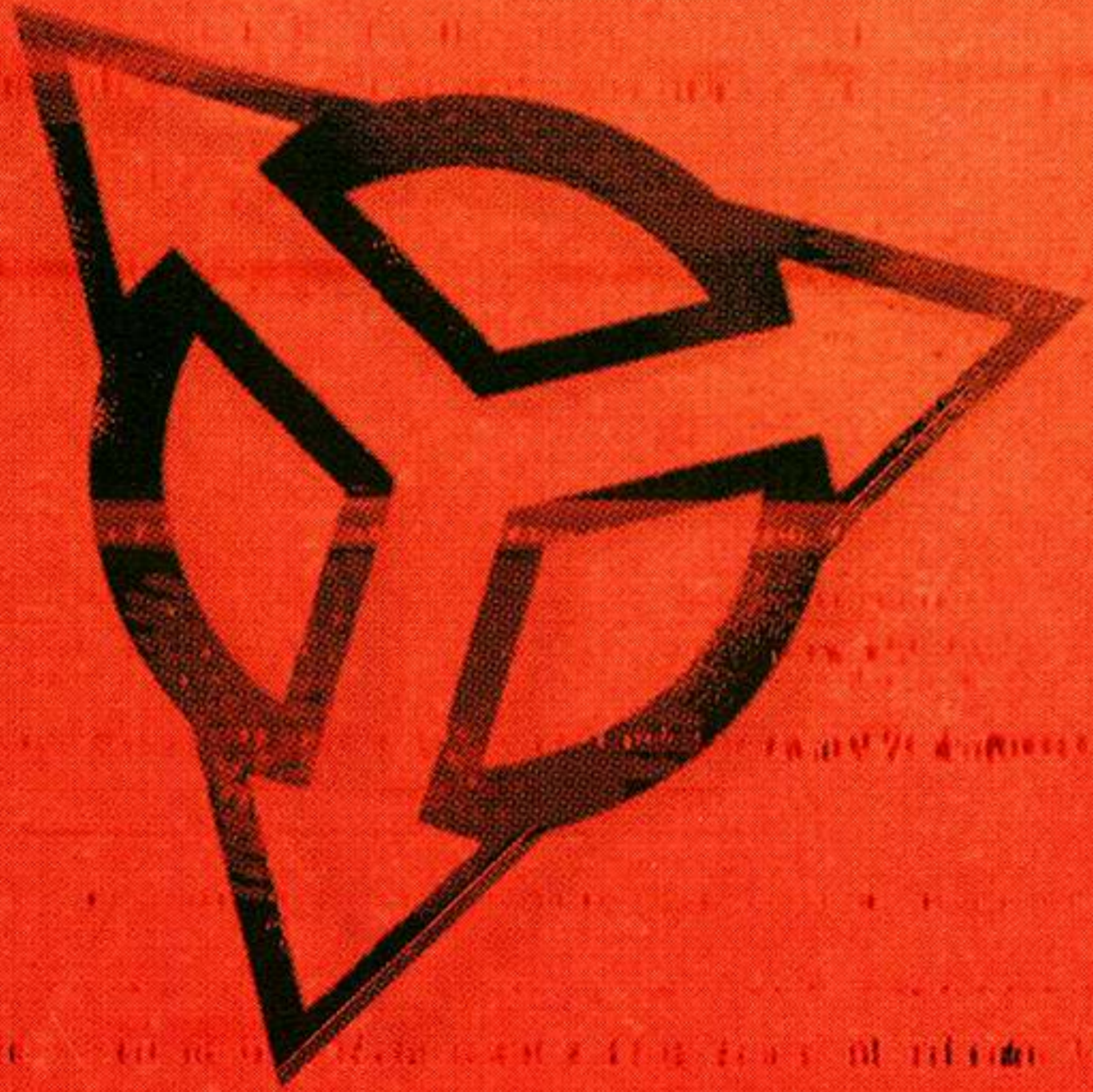
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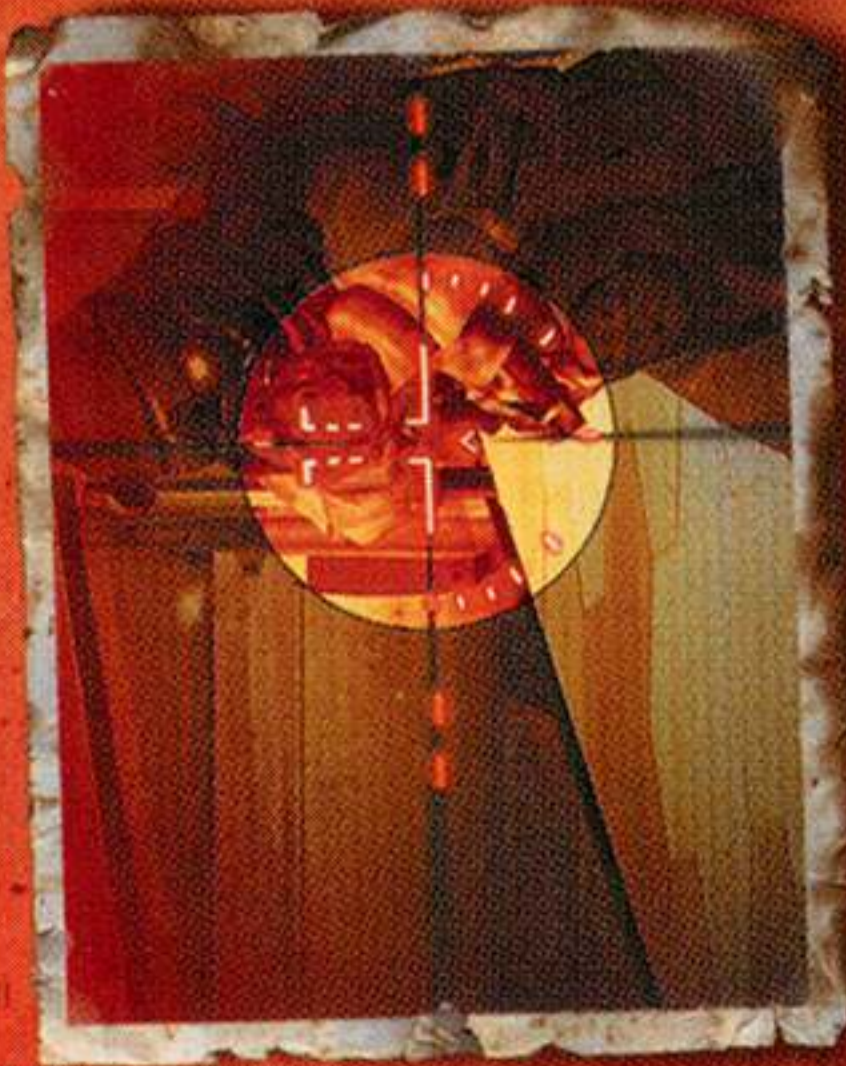


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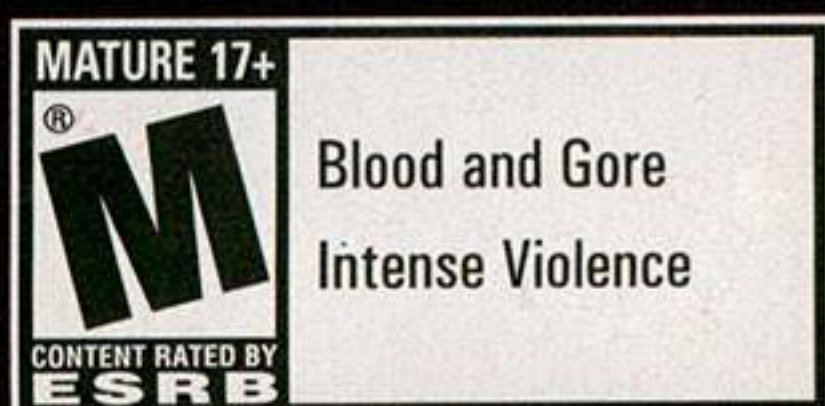
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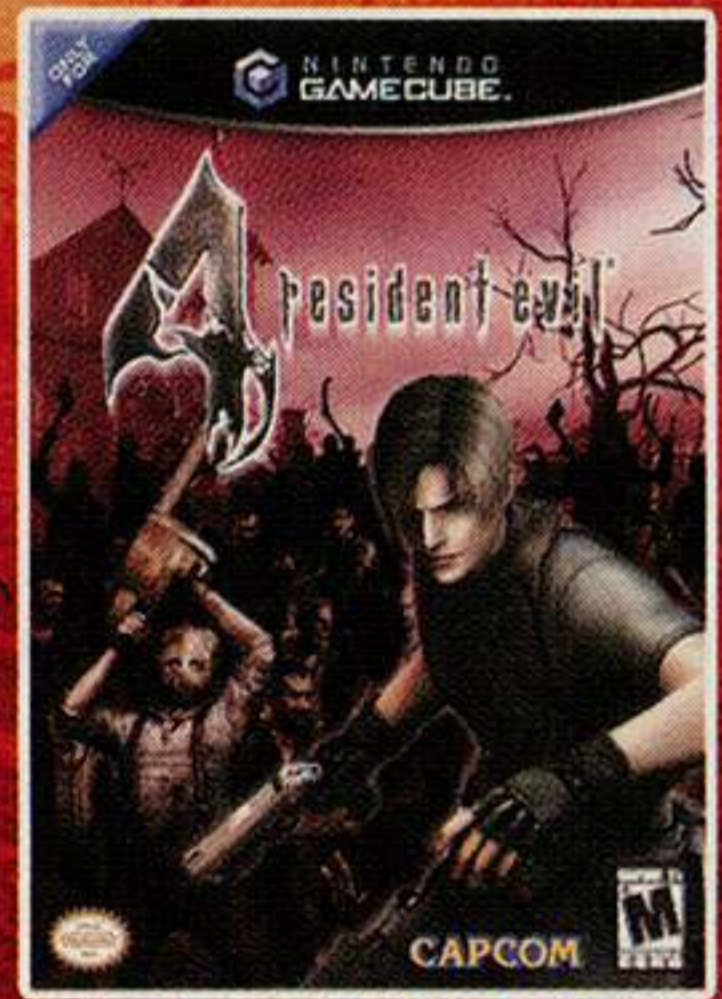
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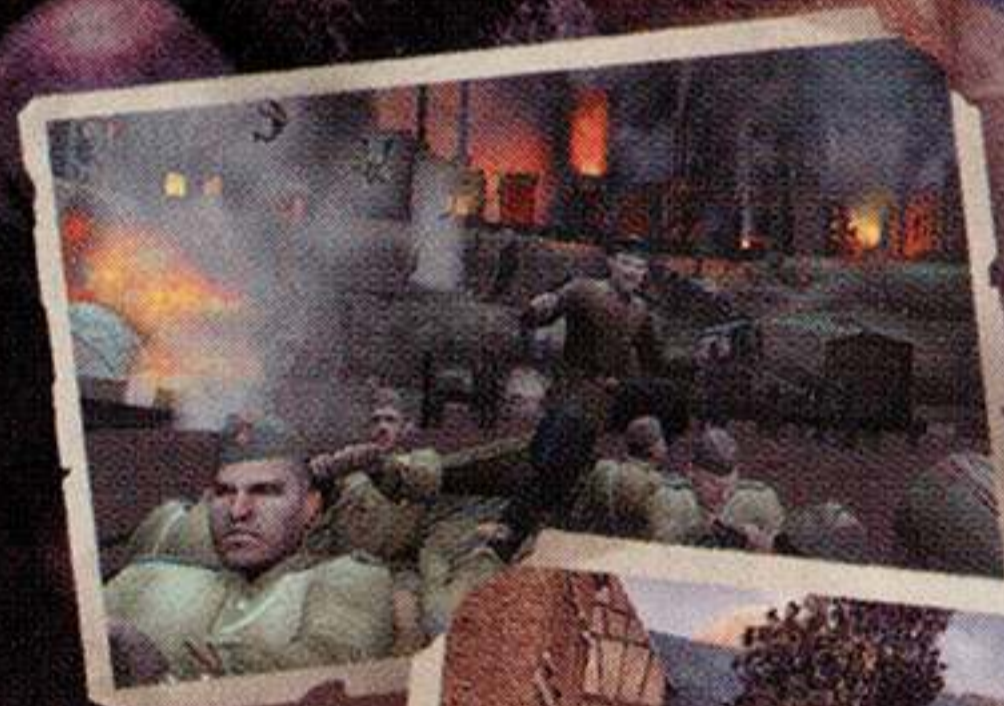


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PlayStation 2



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FEATURES



ON THE COVER 36 | The Year of the RPG

There's a role-playing-game revolution going on this year. Here's the lowdown on *Knights of the Old Republic II* and *Vampire: The Masquerade-Bloodlines*. Plus, get an advanced look at *Final Fantasy XII*, *Kingdom Hearts: Chain of Memories*, *Musashi: Samurai Legend*, and more.



46 The GamePro Editors' Choice Awards for 2004

2004 was an amazing year for kick-ass games. *Metal Gear Solid 3*, *Halo 2*, *Mortal Kombat: Deception*...find out which ones were selected as the best of the best by the editors of *GamePro*.



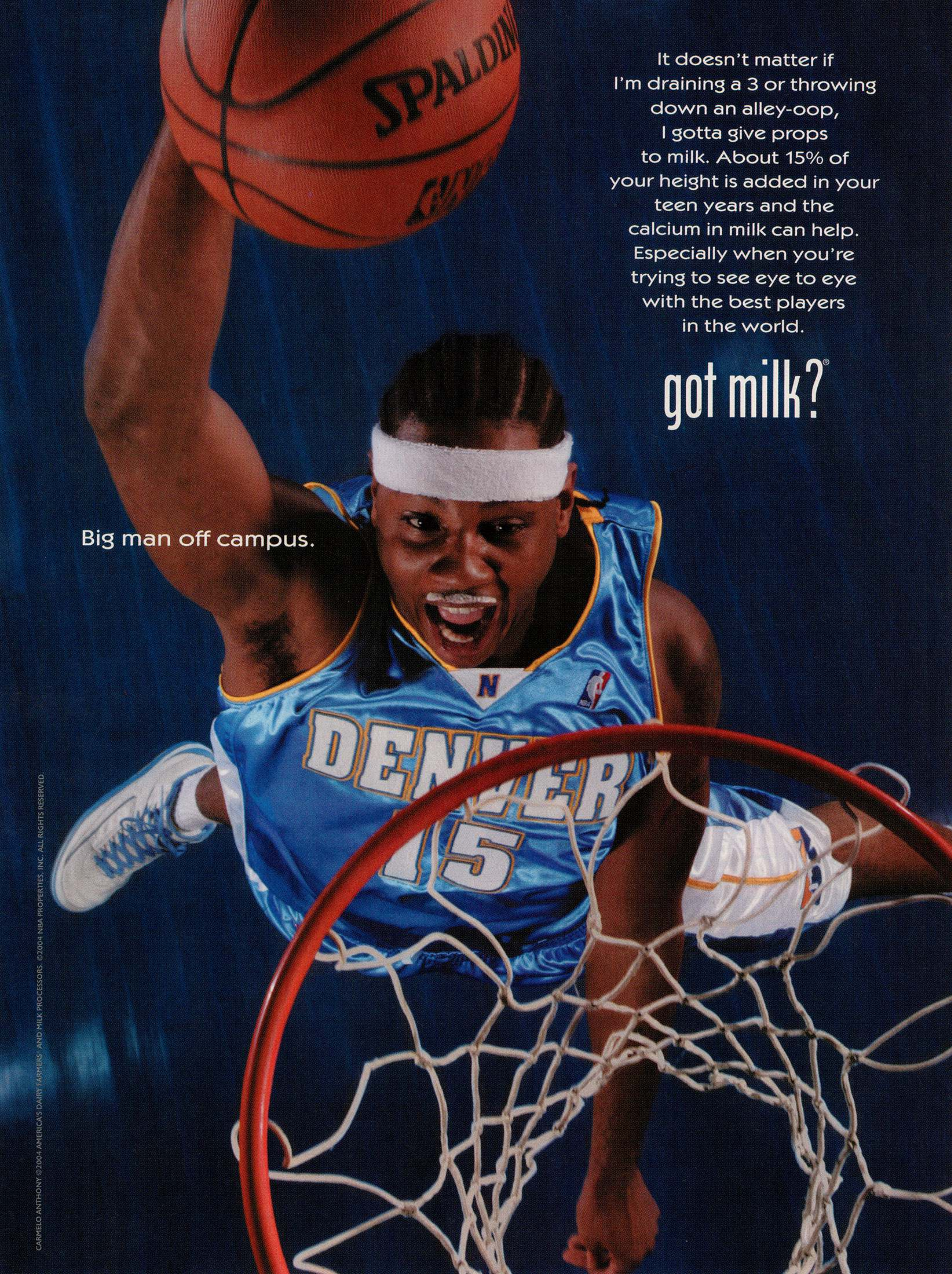
54 The GamePro Readers' Choice Awards Ballot

Now that you know our picks for the best games of the year, we want to know your favorites, too.



56 Halo 2 Multiplayer Strategies

Halo 2's single-player Campaign mode was no problemo, right? Now, get ready for a serious challenge with these tactics and tips for multiplayer online games.



It doesn't matter if
I'm draining a 3 or throwing
down an alley-oop,
I gotta give props
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teen years and the
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trying to see eye to eye
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Big man off campus.

LOADING

24 Halo 2 and Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas Make Their Pay Day

After all the receipts were tallied, Halo 2 and Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas turned out to be the big winners over the holidays to no one's surprise.

30 Grand Theftendo

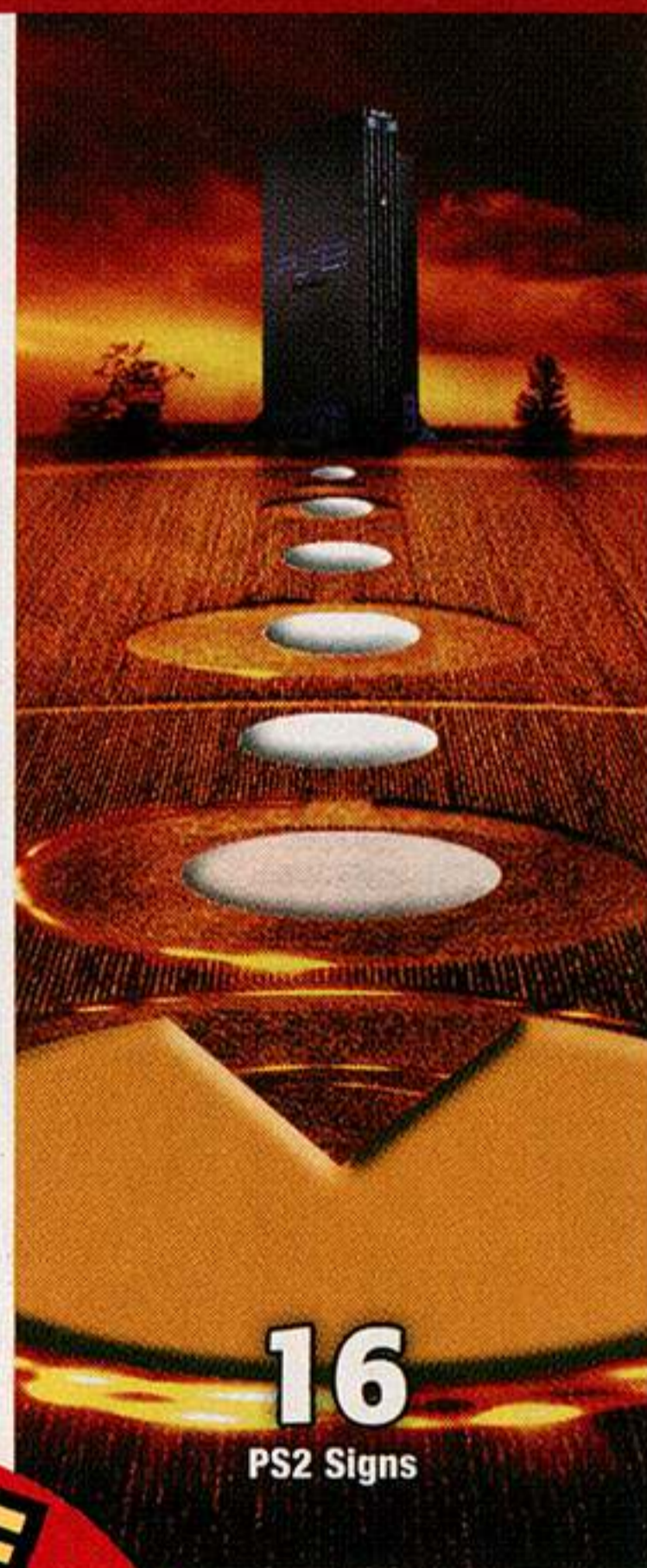
Do you love Grand Theft Auto enough to play it on the NES? Here's how mastermind Brian Provinciano transformed GTAIII into an 8-bit caper.

...And more!



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ZOMBIES

Resident Evil 4 is finally here. Was it worth the wait, or is this one scare that just isn't?

ZELDA

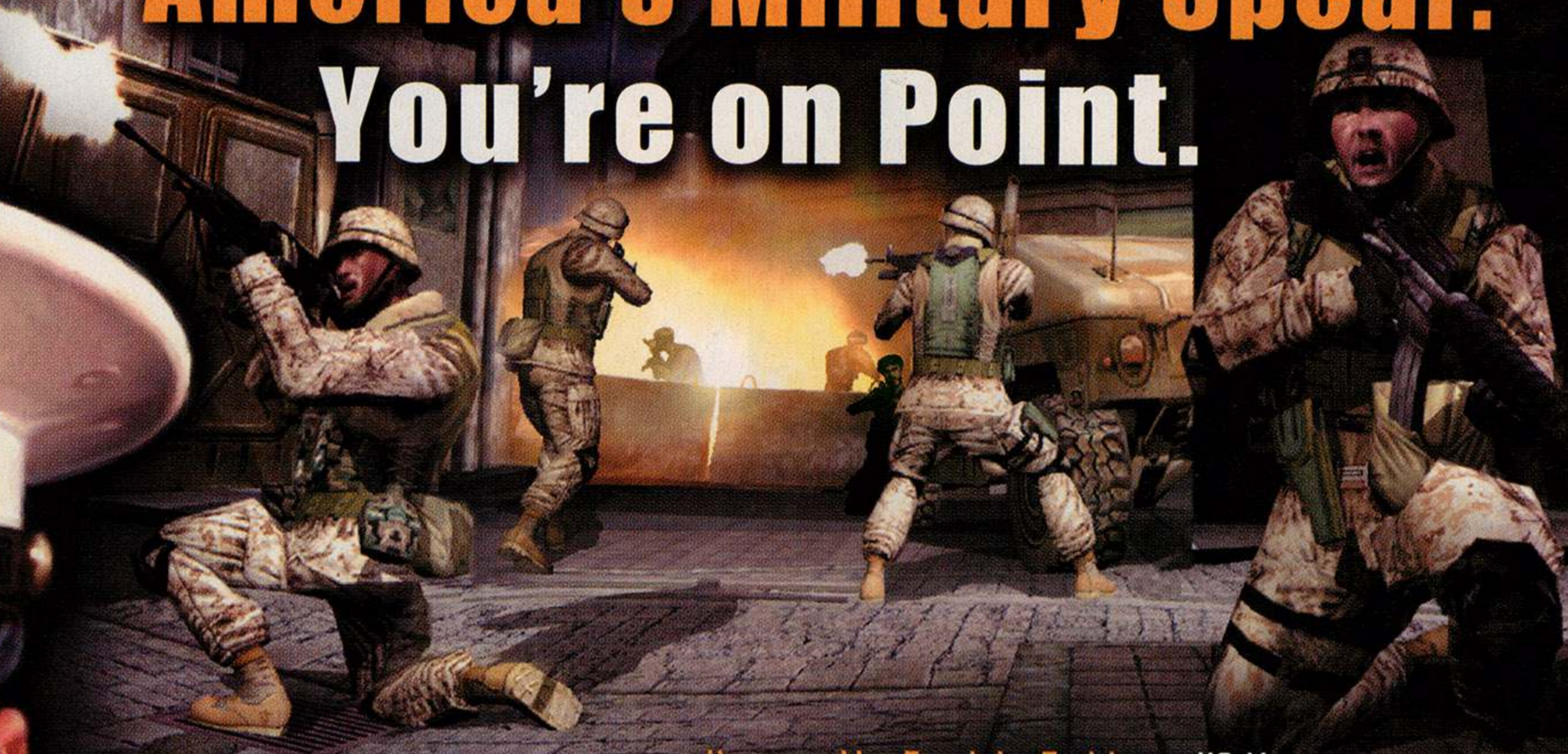
How does *The Legend of Zelda: The Minish Cap* compare to Link's previous adventures? We put on our thinking caps and spill all online.

ZODIAC

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A Boy and His Blog

The classic take on editors' letters is that no one reads them. But put them online and call them blogs, and you become part of one of the major trends in online journalism in about the last five years.

Cool.

Blogs are good. Blogs are everywhere. Blogs are here. The beauty of the blog is that all restrictions are down. Sure, video games are the hook, but now you can find out what's really lurking in the minds (and on the screens) of *GamePro* and *Gamestar* editors, and just about anyone else who's connected to our network. Are you ready for that?

Log on to the blogs below, and you'll see what we're talking about.

bikinigamer.com: Games plus bikinis—now that's a winning combo.

normalmode.com: Here's a take on video games and life that's anything but normal.

sofasonic.com: Abandon hope all ye who enter here.

brobuzz.com: No more Mr. Nice Guy.

gpmajormike.com: Be afraid, be very afraid.

gamedrool.com: A day in the life of a video-game journalist.

drzombie.com: All things zombie... 'nuff said.

Find out what video-game editors really think about the games they're playing right now. Get a no-holds-barred alternative look at current news in the game biz and the world. Go behind the screens. Take a ride to little-known corners of the web. The editors of *GamePro* (and *Gamestar*) are prepared to bare all. So go...go now, and you may not look at video games—or anything else—the same way again.

The GamePros
Oakland, CA
letters@gamepro.com



For courageously expressing his convictions, Chris will receive a Logitech Cordless Action Controller.



We, the Gamers

We the gamers of the United States of America are entitled to play any game—violent or not—when and where we want. We shouldn't have to deal with people who say games should be banned because they are too violent. We are Americans; we have freedom of choice.

A question I am often asked is: "What do you get out of playing games?" Well I plan to go to a computer arts college to learn how to design games. So the answer to that question is: "I play games to learn about them because my dream career is to make games and to start my own game company." People say I can't do it, so I'm going to prove them all wrong. I will go to college, I will make games, and I'll fight for the right to play the games I like every step of the way.

► **Chris "psx" Nelson—Via Internet**

Your convictions and goals are admirable. Maybe gamers shouldn't have to deal with people who want to ban games, but such debate is also an essential part of our cultural and political forum. Always strive to do the right thing and stand up for what you believe in. Also, let us know when you produce your first game—we wouldn't want to get on your bad side.

Ziggy Stardust in Kingdom Hearts?

I've been looking forward to the next *Kingdom Hearts* for a while now, but the other day I started thinking (which I usually do only on special occasions), doesn't Disney own Jim Henson studios? I'm a big fan of *Labyrinth*, so you can probably see where I'm heading with this. I think that I'd be one step closer to being able to die happy if the next *Kingdom Hearts* had a level based on that classic film. I wouldn't even complain about David Bowie in the tights (as long as the bulge is downplayed).

► **Tony Sipe—Via Internet**

Actually, Disney doesn't exactly own Jim Henson studios; it just owns its soul. The Jim Henson Company, which is comprised of several units, sold the rights to the Muppets and the Bear in the Big Blue House to the House of Mouse in 2003. But what's more disturbing than that is the image you paint of the 1980s Bowie in tights (with bulge) and the fact that you're a die-hard fan of *Labyrinth* (a true cheese-burner of a movie). You can read all about the new *Kingdom Hearts* in the RPG roundup in this issue. However, you won't be reading about *Labyrinth*.

History, Not a Mystery

I do not really like seeing Ben Franklin in *Tony Hawk's Underground 2*. It reminds me of when they use dead people in commercials like that dude dancing with a vacuum cleaner. Maybe it will help the brain-dead MTV watchers learn a little about one of the greatest Americans in the end, but I doubt it.

► **Jared Thorbahn—Newark, OH**

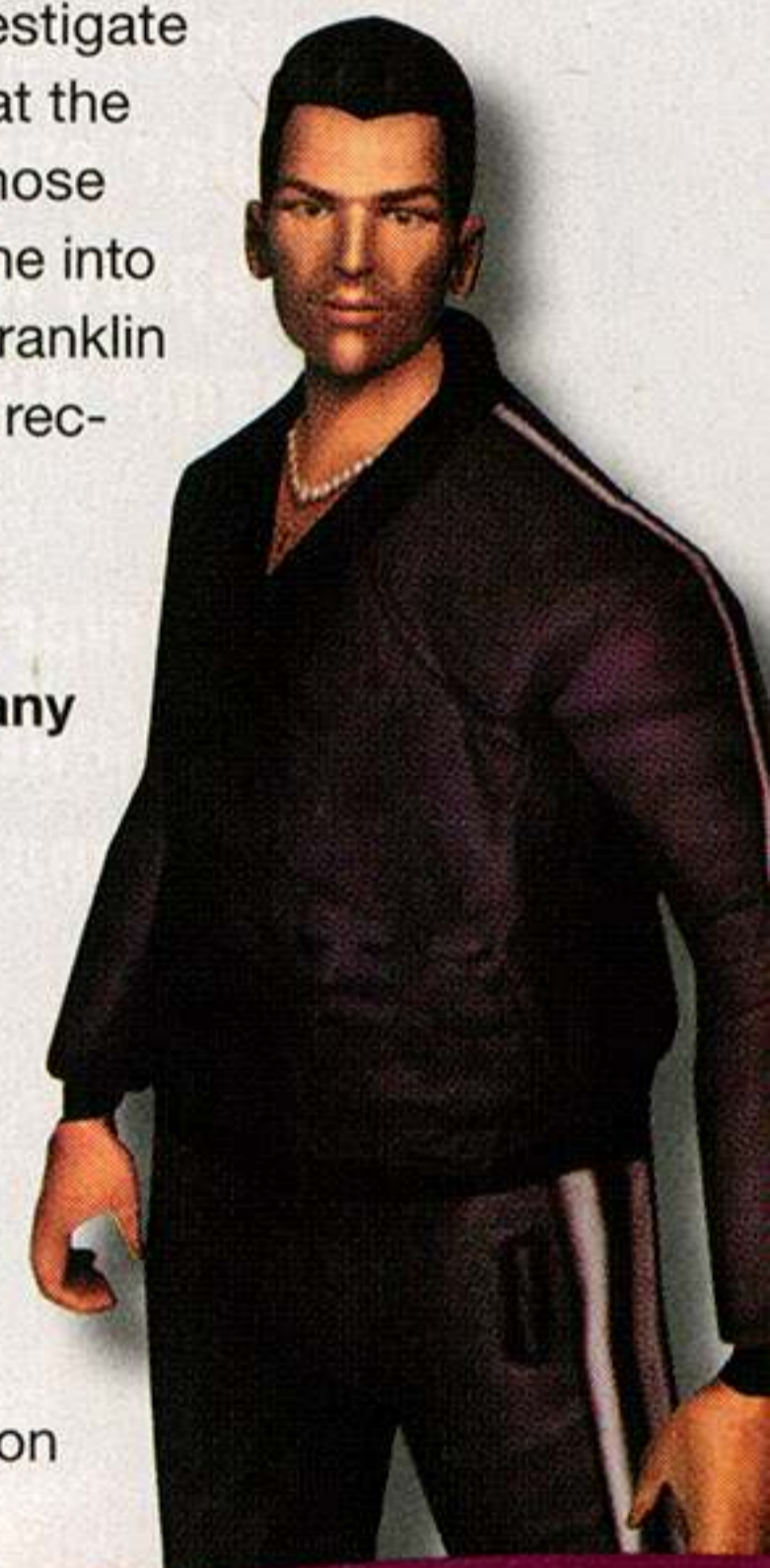
A cynic would say that it's entirely possible that the venerable Benjamin Franklin will one day be known only as "the dude busting fakies in THUG2." A romantic would declare that there might not be video gaming in America if Ben had not flown his kite one stormy day to investigate electric current. And a movie fan would point out that the "vacuum cleaner dancing dude" is Fred Astaire, whose amazing style and skill could turn anything and anyone into a great dance partner. The GamePros say that Mr. Franklin and Mr. Astaire are famous Americans who deserve recognition by any means possible.

Respect the Yoshi

I am a hardcore Yoshi fan, and I have yet to see any 3D console Yoshi games. Now being a Yoshi fan and all, I thought there should be one. So I was wondering if you guys at *GamePro* could send my letter to Nintendo. Please help me achieve my goal of experiencing the ultimate Yoshi gaming experience. Thank you.

► **Shugo Chan—Via Internet**

Yoshi fans are coming out of the woodwork. At first it was easy to dismiss Yoshi-yearning as an aberration related to terminal cuteness and tongue-fetishism, but judging from the number of Yoshi loyalists who send in letters, it appears Yoshi is for real. Nintendo will get your letter.



Poll Vault

Should Rockstar have censored *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* to avoid offending people?

Yes: 10%

No: 90%

Results courtesy of GamePro.com—log on and be heard!

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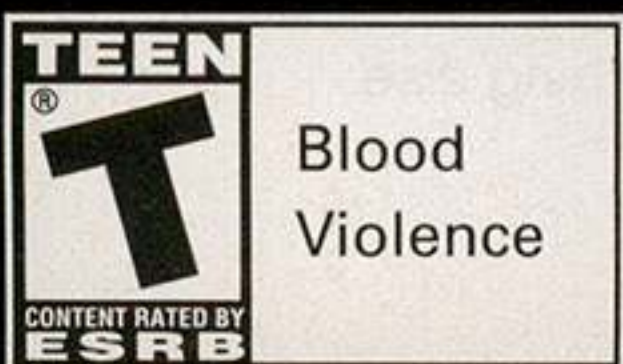


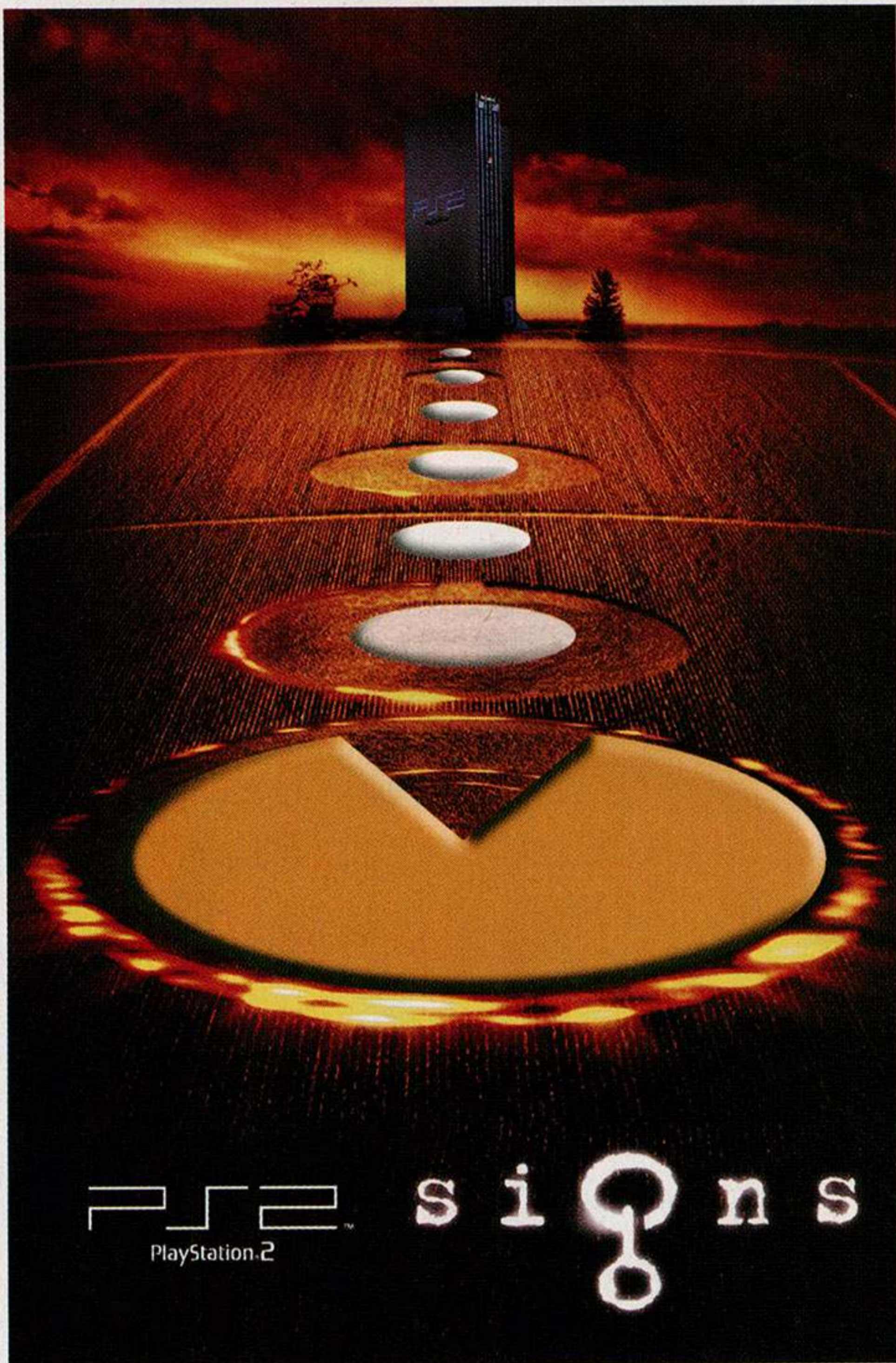
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The Flicker

Hey, great mag, but anyway, the other day I was watching TV and I accidentally kicked my PS2 with my foot. I saw a little light flicker on and off from inside. Is there like a little person inside my PS2 or something?

► Tom B.—Via Internet

Sorry, we promised M. Night Shyamalan that after *Signs* and *The Village* we wouldn't give away the premise for his next movie.

Dragon Ball Z Greatness

I eagerly anticipate playing *Dragon Ball Z: Budokai 3*, but here's something I want to get off my chest first: the Budokai fan base is a bunch of whiners. I am only 16, but I've played my share of games like *Hyper Dimension* and *Super Butoden*, and I think Budokai is a wonderful addition to the massive selection of Dragon Ball Z video games. Sure, Budokai 2 was lacking the amazing cut-scenes we saw in the first game, but think of what was improved. We the Budokai fan base complained that there wasn't enough variety in the character moves. Then "Master Fu" gave us a huge array of moves for the characters of Budokai 2, including Fusion! I mean come on people, we got Fusion and then it was taken a step further with new moves for each Fusion character. So it seems that we as Budokai fans in this age of spoiled gamers never seem to be happy even when we receive what we want. I want to congratulate Fujio Fujimoto for the excellent work he and his design team did on the Next Generation wave of Dragon Ball Z games!

► Avid Reader—Austin, WA

Mad About Saves

As much as I enjoy your lovely prose and delight in the plentiful bon mots and witticisms, I also read the *GamePro* reviews seeking knowledge. That is, I want to know if a game will become a much treasured and often played gem or a dust-gatherer better left on the store shelf. And you aren't giving me the single most important, I would say essential, determinant. Your reviews seldom reveal, discuss, or even mention the save system.

I'll admit that I may be a bit far out on the low side of the patience curve. I really hate repeating long stretches of gameplay. Games that don't allow me to save where I want, or at least offer frequent, savable check points, are always more frustrating than fun. It's even worse when I have to sit through a long mission monologue each time at the beginning of a level. I also have a life—that means I can't always count on having a full hour or more without interruption when playing a game. I especially enjoy playing games with a friend in split-screen co-operative mode. But even the games that offer this mode seldom allow those games to be saved. If I'm starting to rant, I apologize.

Personally, I would like for you to smack down the games with player-unfriendly save policies with low scores. But that may be asking too much. A description of the save system would do fine. It would make a very nice addition to your "Graphics, Sound, and Control" box. Really, isn't the save policy just as important?

► Larry Weinstein—Tallahassee, FL

Save-game systems can be irritating, and you bring up a very good point that to a degree they can intrude on the enjoyment and Fun Factor of a game. The consensus with the GamePros is save-game techniques for the most part hover under the critics' radar, where so many other evaluation criteria (control, graphics, etc.) tell the tale of a game's quality before the save-game features become a factor. However, if you readers feel this is an important evaluation criterion...speak out! We are continually looking at better ways to deliver what you want to know about your games. Send your feedback about save-game systems to letters@gamepro.com. We'll go with the popular vote.

On Grading Graphics

This is the best time to be a gamer since we have so many games to choose from, so many systems to play (past and present), and new systems being developed for the future. It really is amazing...there's just one little thing that bothers me, though. Many game reviewers and gaming magazines consider today's graphics truly great...well, no, I don't think so. In order to be considered great, game graphics should match those of the top computer-generated movies like *Shrek 2*, *Finding Nemo*, or *Toy Story*. Don't get me wrong, though, today's games are great, but they lack excellent graphics, at least for now. What do you think about that?

► Micky—Via Internet

Think you should lighten up, Mick. You're comparing apples to oranges, that is, two different entertainment mediums. Computer-generated (CG) graphics in cinema are awesome, however, the movies remain passive entertainment. Two basic things prevent movie-like CG imagery from being fully implemented in interactive entertainment like a video game. Current disc media, even DVDs, don't have the capacity to contain all the visual data necessary to support the interactive, CG-quality visuals that you see in a movie like *The Incredibles*, for example, in addition to such essential gameplaying elements as branching logic structures, artificial intelligence, audio, etc. As technology advances, you'll get your cinema-quality CG in games...but then some young blood will no doubt be pushing for something else.



You're racing against time.

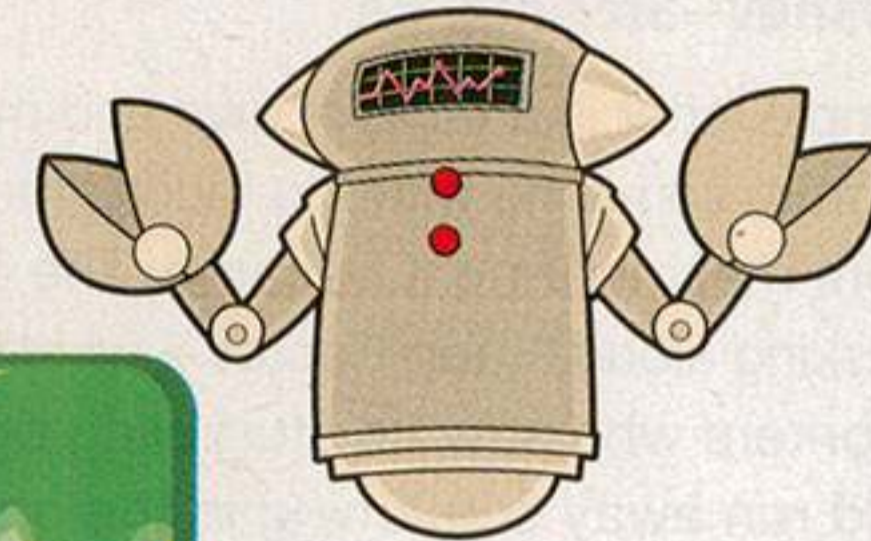


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READER REVIEW

Katamari Damacy

PS2 Not since Intelligent Qube has there been a niche game that's been this much fun! The premise is surprisingly simple: Accidentally, the King of all the Cosmos knocked all the stars out of the sky one night—although from the opening movie it seems he may have tipped the bottle a bit. Now, he has decided to put the burden of fixing that situation on your little green shoulders.

You start with a Katamari (think of it as an advanced wad of gum) that picks up items its size or smaller but grows increasingly larger in the process. The goal is to make a sphere of a certain size to replace one of the stars in the sky. The king sends you to Earth on the Rainbow Road (which comes out of his mouth no less). Once you're done, he licks you back up the road and then rates your progress according to how big the Katamari is. If it's large enough, he lets it go back up into the sky to become a star (or a shooting star, stardust, or even whole constellations); if it's not, then prepare for the weirdest tongue-lashing of your little green life! What's more, when you're being admonished, the king sounds like a DJ doing a scratch number (but it's the only time he doesn't sound like he's drifting off into la-la land).

Katamari's graphics don't really push any envelopes, but then they don't really have to. The game focuses more on content and gameplay rather than glitzy visuals, which makes the entire experience so much smoother as you progress from one stage to the next. The "cute" personality of this game is a welcome relief from all the fighting,



sporting, and shooting games out there today. All in all, Katamari Damacy is a refreshing break from the ordinary and one big sticky ball of fun!
—ShockQueen

FUN FACTOR
5.0₅

Agree? Disagree? Or just think you can do better? Write your own user reviews at GamePro.com, and maybe you'll see your opinions here next.

Above Top Secret

I have always wondered why in video games and in real life (supposedly) the Army, the F.B.I., and the C.I.A. always label mail "Top Secret?" All that does is make people curious enough to want to open it. What's the point?

► Daniel Kharmyshev—Sterling, VA

Your seemingly simple letter is a thing of awe and mystery. At first it was easy to dismiss as a trivial thought from someone with too much time on his hands, but the more one read your letter the more mesmerizing it became. The question you pose just wouldn't go away. We began asking aloud " 'Top Secret'—what's the point? 'Top Secret'—what's the point?" until coworkers who saw us stumbling down the hallway with your letter in hand would run away screaming in the opposite direction. The first editor to read your letter has since left the staff. You're likely a person who goes "in"

through the exit and "out" through the entrance, who opens his presents before Christmas, and who tries to buy Mature-rated video games even though he's under 17 years old. The point is when something says "Top Secret," you just don't open it. Your letter has since been labeled "Top Secret," a copy has been sent to the National Security Agency care of Area 51, and the original has been locked away in GamePro's Vault of Secret Weapons and Things That Make You Crazy.

TOP SECRET

For more letters, go to GamePro.com!

Art Attack!



T. Mandzik—St. Petersburg, FL

Pick of the Month!

Got a strange urge to communicate with the *GamePro* editors? E-mail them at "editor's name"[@gamepro.com](mailto:gamepro.com)!

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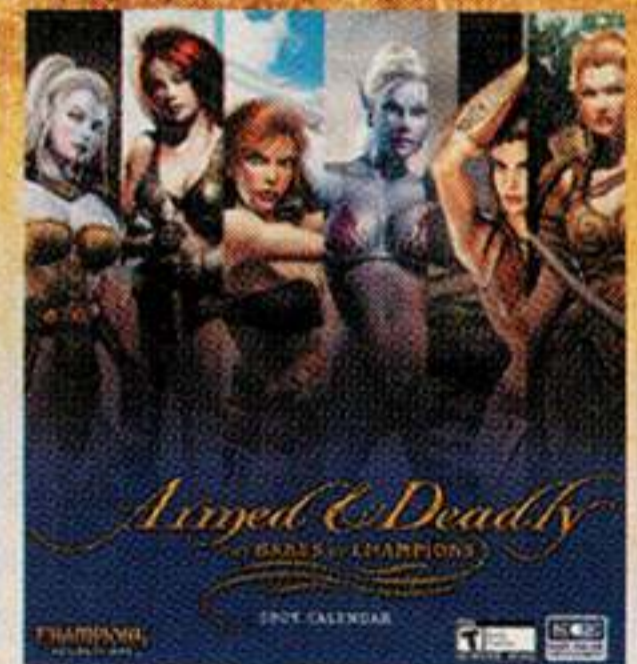


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TEEN
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 Game experience may change during online play.



PlayStation 2



developed by
snowblind
studios



The best-selling game hits retailers, and you rush to the store with thoughts of new maps, better graphics, more weapons, and online play swirling in your head. Returning home, you gleefully rip off the shrink-wrap and feel like it's the holidays again. Then, you turn on your Xbox and bam—crippling bugs. The Watch Dog hopes to make the new year a little more joyous by tackling the various Halo 2 woes.

The Flood...of Loading Failures

Help! I just bought a copy of Halo 2, and when I tried to play online with some friends, I received an error while loading—I can play only a couple of maps, and the rest keep giving me the same error. Is this a network problem or one of those dirty disc errors? I really bought this game only for the online play, and I'm frustrated that it's working so poorly.

► Anonymous—Via Internet

When people on various Halo 2 forums aren't griping about the nerfed pistol, they're usually talking about the loading problems. Unfortunately, in what usually amounts to corporate self-preservation, neither Bungie nor Microsoft has offered a definitive answer. Bungie's official word is as follows:

"Failed to Load Map errors: This message occurs when Halo 2 fails to load a multiplayer map. This is usually due to either a dirty disc (scratched, smudges, etc.) or, in some cases, could be the result of a problem with your Xbox (more likely in older units). In most cases, if you reset your box, there's a chance the map will load properly next time. While we can't create a fix that will alleviate what might ultimately be a hardware-related problem, we can hopefully make it so you won't have to reboot upon a map failure before you play another game. This issue is being investigated."

There are a couple of potentially expensive misconceptions that need to be addressed in tackling the issue. So take note before your Master Chief zeal moves you to needlessly spend hard-earned cash:

- 1) "It's because I have a Thompson." Although some dirty-disc errors from other games can be attributed to old DVD drives (as opposed to the newer, supposedly more reliable Phillips and Samsung drives), the problem

has been affecting all Xboxes, old and new—so don't drop \$60–80 to trade in your old Xbox just yet. Plus, tweaking the laser reader won't do much, either.

2) "It's because I have a special edition." People have been reporting that both the standard and collector's edition are prone to these errors.

3) "Something's wrong with the network." The problems arise not only over Xbox Live but also during split-screen multiplayer, indicating that it's not an online-specific problem. If other games worked fine online, your network and ISP should be okay.

So what gives? The needler is that it could be a combination of both software and hardware issues. On the software side, the disc may be defective, so the first course of action would be to exchange the disc to see if that fixes the problem. On the hardware side, there may be a flaw that prevents transferring the massive amount of memory and data properly (because the graphics do push the console harder than most games). Here are other makeshift solutions that worked for some:

1) Mysteriously Magical Reboot: Turn off the Xbox and unplug the Ethernet wire. Then, turn the Xbox back on and wait for one minute at the Xbox dashboard (giving it enough time to detect the lack of an IP address). Turn off the Xbox, plug the Ethernet wire back in, and see if the game runs. Simply rebooting has worked once in awhile as well.

2) Tabula Rasa: Delete all files from your Xbox excluding your Gamertag and then create a new profile. If you're in the middle of trying to finish Legendary mode, transfer your saved game to a memory card.

3) Old-School Fix: It seems to have worked for a sliver of a minority, but you could try to clean the Xbox with a DVD cleaner—if you haven't already tried this for the umpteenth time.

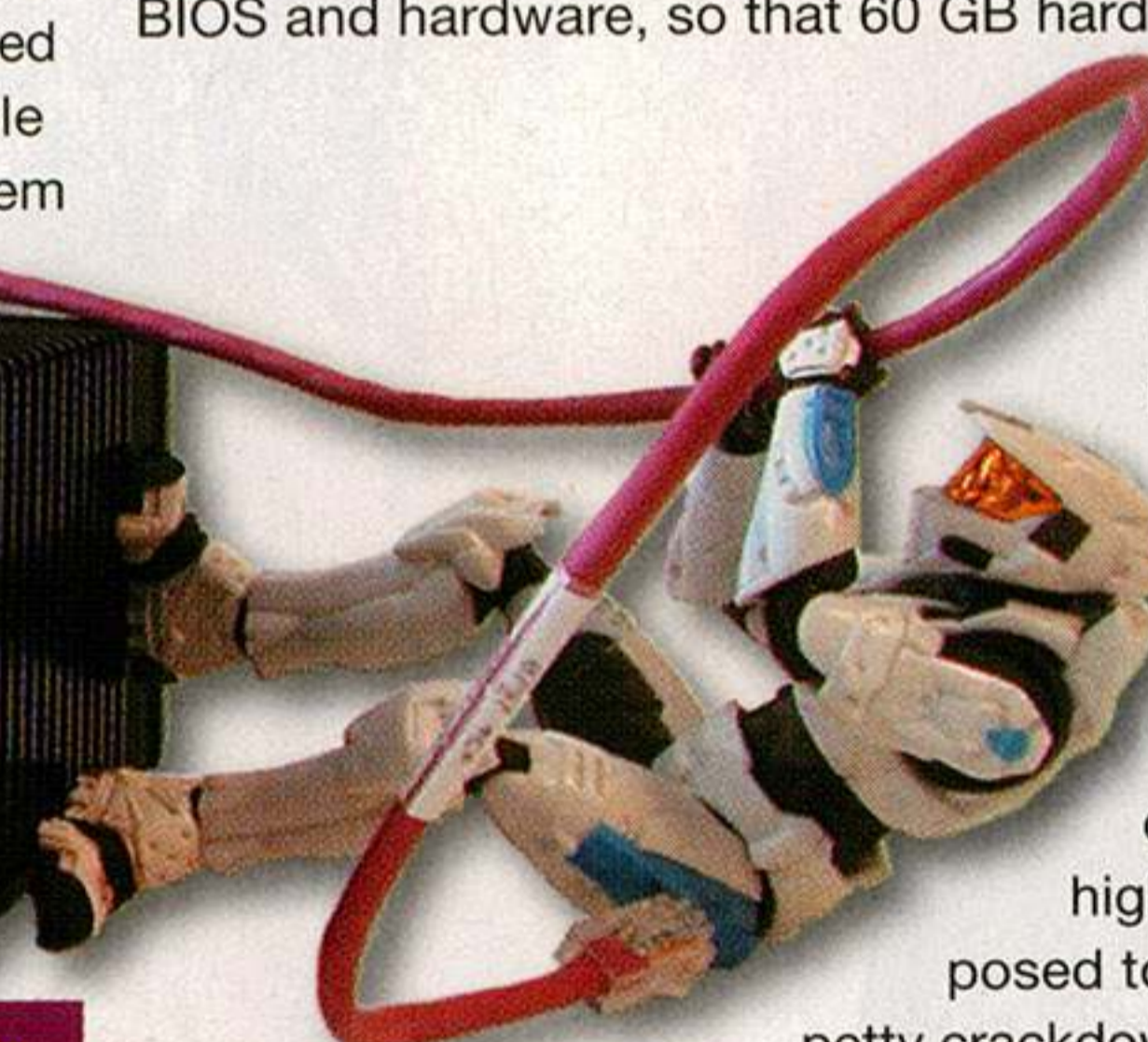
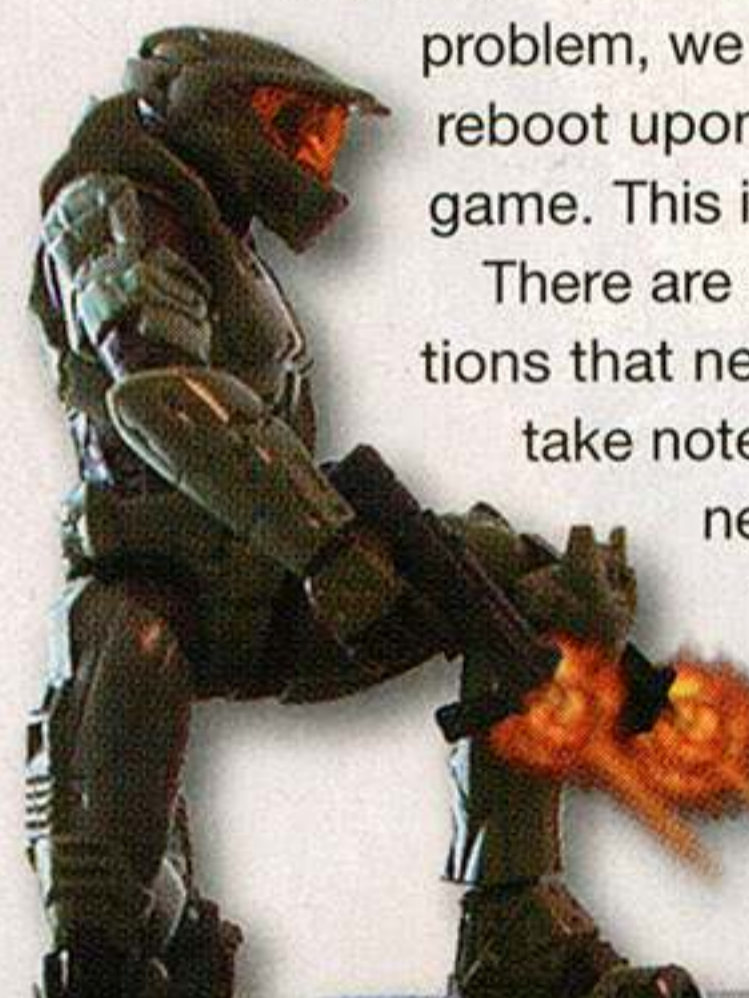
Hacked and Slashed

I've made some...uhh...changes to my Xbox that didn't affect games I've played before, but now it says I'm banned from Xbox Live! What can be done to get around this?

► Anonymous—Via Internet

As brutal chastisement to those who modded their Xboxes, Microsoft locked out those who connected to Xbox Live with machines tricked out with gray-market goods. Although some mods, such as DVD-territory changers, can be flipped off, Microsoft also seems to be scanning the BIOS and hardware, so that 60 GB hard drive's gotta go if you want a

piece of the Covenant (though rest assured that modders will tirelessly search for ways around this). Supposedly, the purpose is to prevent users from cheating in games—but the more likely reason is that the company cleverly figured out that it's cheaper and more effective to discourage modding by depriving modders of a highly anticipated game—as opposed to going through the hassle of petty crackdowns and legal acrobatics.



SCEA Holiday 2004 Demo Disc

PlayStation 2


Published by Sony

Sony confirmed reports of its demo disc wiping out memory cards, saying, "It has just been brought to our attention that there is a glitch in this demo that will erase all of your saved files from your memory card. If you have not yet played the Viewtiful Joe 2 demo, please remove your memory card(s) from your PlayStation 2 before you load the Holiday 2004 Demo Disc."


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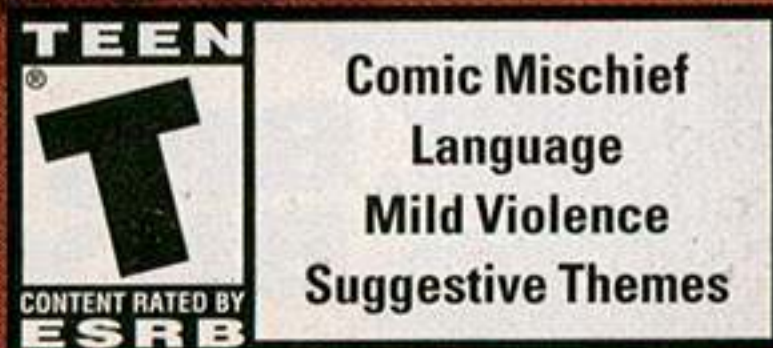
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TO ITS DRAMATIC CONCLUSION.



The conclusion,
the answers,
the end of the epic.



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PLAY IN OURS.



Big Sales for Halo 2 And Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas

After months of eager anticipation, **Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas** and **Halo 2** finally hit store shelves, enjoying the expected high sales and strong consumer demand.

Grand Theft, Indeed

As expected, *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* raced to the top of the sales chart—past *Mortal Kombat: Deception* and *Tony Hawk's Underground 2*—after its release on October 26, 2004. Analysts estimated the game sold 4.5 million units worldwide in the first week with total sales expected to reach 13–15 million units (*San Andreas's* predecessor, *Vice City*, totaled in at 12 million units). *San Andreas* also saw excellent results in the U.K. as the game sold more than 1 million copies in nine days and easily became the fastest-selling video game of all time.



Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas



Halo 2

Make Way for Halo 2

In its first 24 hours of release, *Halo 2* made entertainment retail history with \$125 million in sales as 2.4 million units sold through in the United States and Canada (for perspective, the box-office smash *The Incredibles* grossed \$70.5 million in its first three days). Fans of the first-person-shooter series stood in line for hours across the country as several retailers began selling the game at midnight on the day of *Halo 2's* release. *Halo 2* also saw strong sales in the U.K. as the game sold over 260,000 units in the first week—a feat that made the game the third fastest-selling title of all time. *Halo 2* was released in two versions: a single-disc standard and a two-disc Collector's Edition with an extra disc of content, including documentaries, behind-the-scenes footage, and more. *Halo 2* may be the last game in the prized franchise to appear on the Xbox as Bill Gates is expected to announce Microsoft's next-generation gaming console in early January at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas.



Sounds of San Andreas

As was the case with *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*, *San Andreas* has its own compilation of music featured in the game. The *San Andreas* soundtrack comes in two versions: an eight-disc boxed version and a two-disc CD edition that's packaged with a bonus DVD containing

The Introduction, a cinematic prologue to the game that runs approximately 25 minutes.



Resident Evil 4... On the PlayStation 2



Once a GameCube-exclusive title, *Resident Evil 4* will also be released for the PlayStation 2 in late 2005. The GameCube version of *RE4* is set for a January 11 release, giving Nintendo followers plenty of bragging time before the game hits the PS2.



DELAY OF GAME

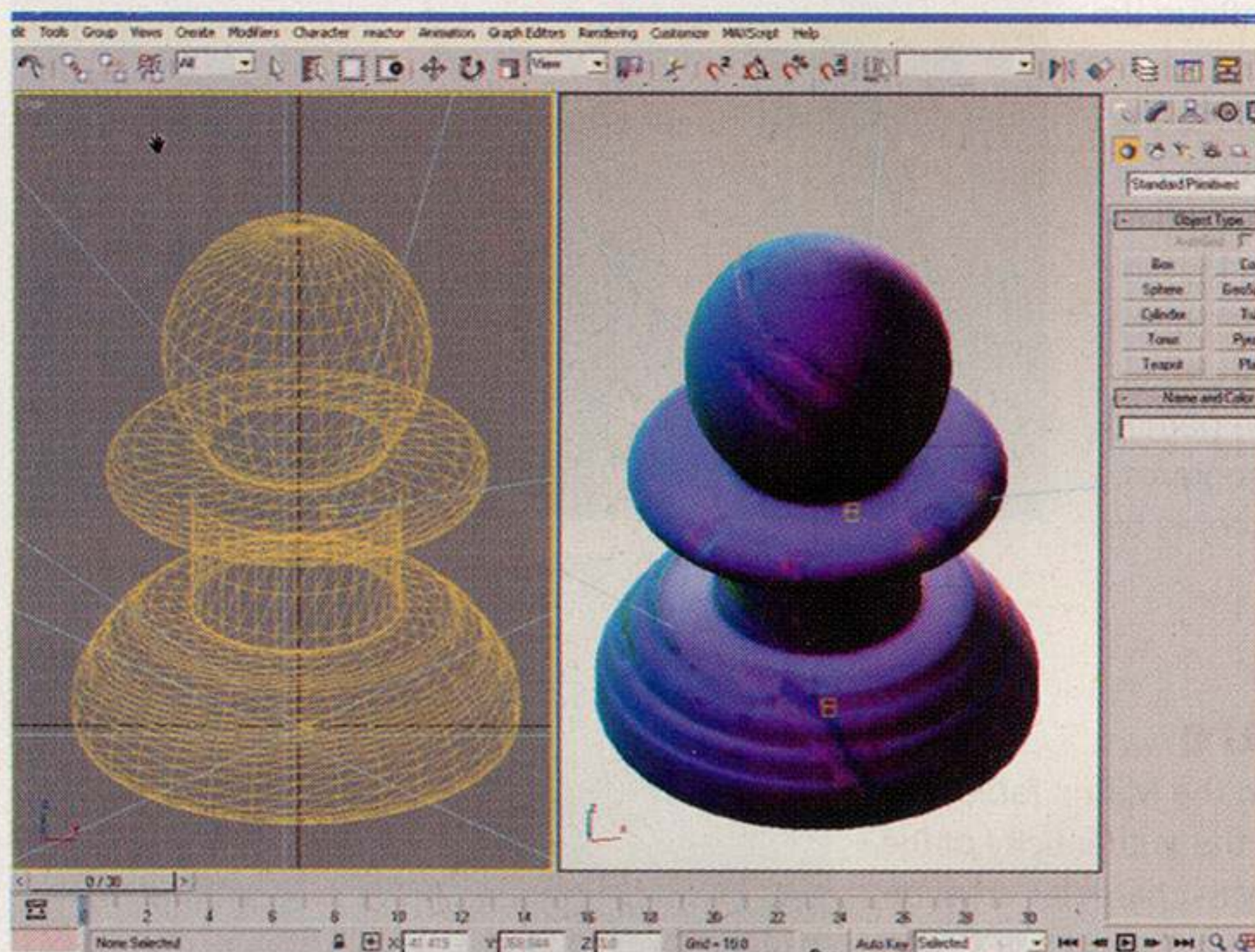
"Time Is on My Side..." No, It Isn't.

It looks like 36 million gamers will have to wait a little longer: Once slated for a December 14, 2004 release in North America, **Gran Turismo 4** has been pushed into the first quarter of 2005. According to Sony, the delay is due to localization issues and finalizing all of the game's key features. *GT4* suffered a setback earlier when it was announced that the online racing component would not be in the final product.




THE CUTTING EDGE

Discreet Brings Doom 3 Development Technology to PCs Everywhere

About a year ago, *GamePro* reported on the latest release (at the time) of Discreet's powerful 3D-rendering software, 3ds max, a program utilized in over 80 percent of the top-rated games in the world. Now, the company's latest installment of its 3D-animation software smashes technological barriers to bring this powerful technology to desktop PCs across the globe.

Sensation Sweeps Gaming Industry...Several Years Ago

3ds max is one of the most utilized software packages in the gaming industry. Most likely, you have already seen numerous examples of this powerful program's output—have you played *Halo 2*, *Prince of Persia*, *Splinter Cell* (pick a number), *Metal Gear Solid*, *Fable*, or *Armored Core* (again, pick one)? All of these games make use of 3ds max to produce brilliant CG cut-scenes, in-game characters, environment models, or some combination thereof.

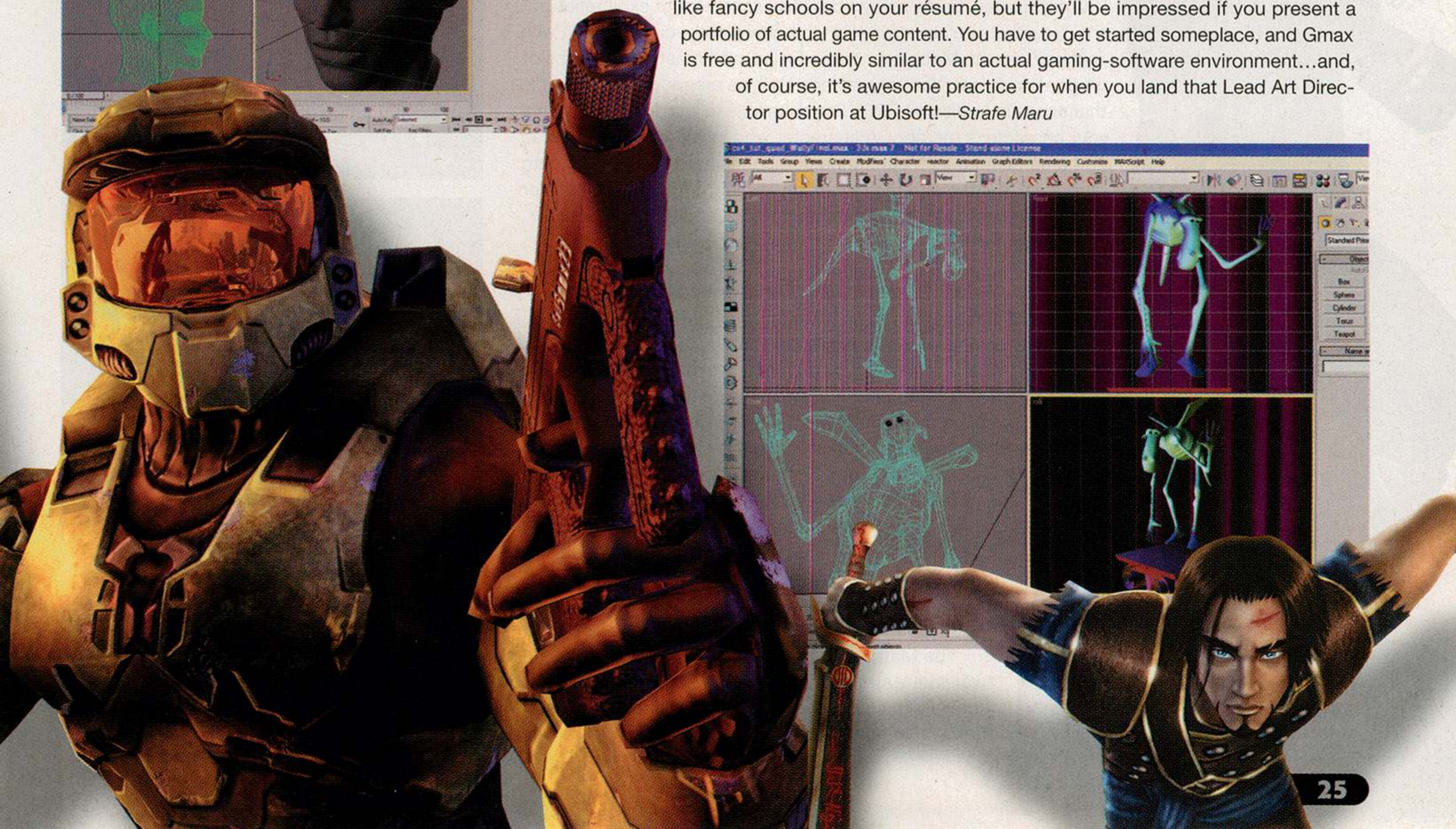
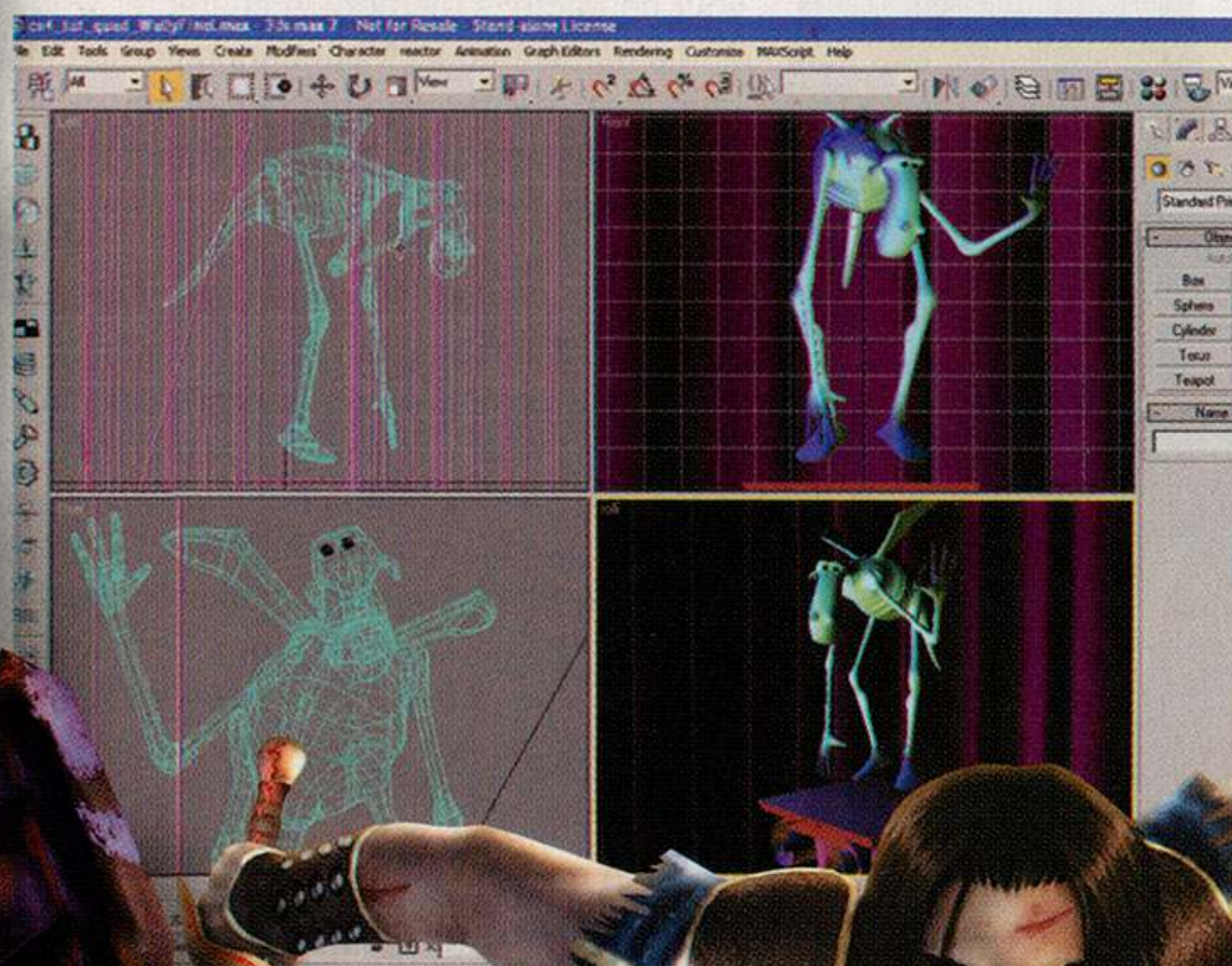
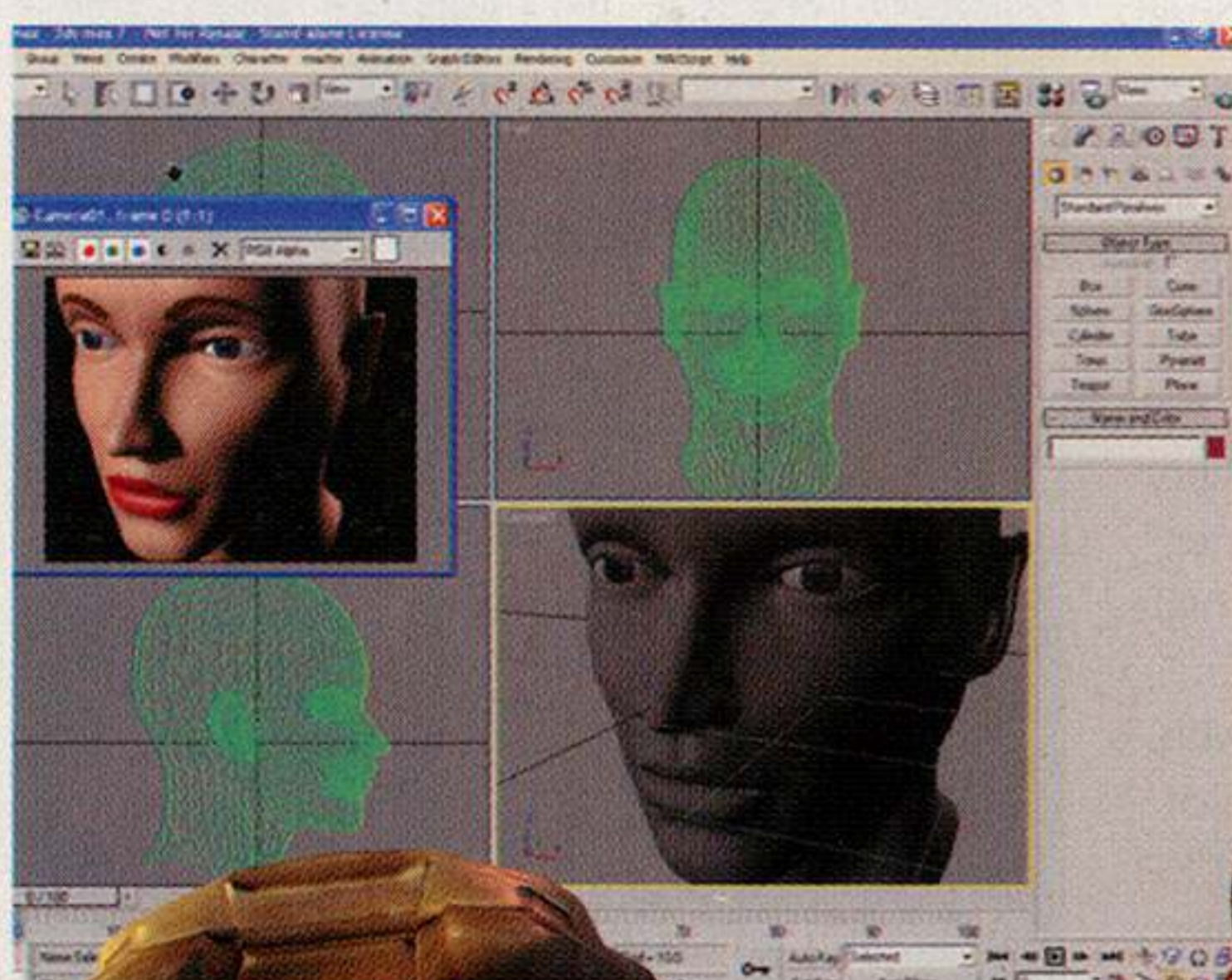
Getting to the Point

This program is breathtaking, but it also costs upwards of \$5000, which puts it out of most of our readers' price range. So why should you be

interested? Because all gamers have wanted to make games at some point. Well, guess what? Discreet's web site (www4.discreet.com/3dsmax) offers a free 30-day trial of 3ds max. Plus, you can find a totally free 3D-modeling package called Gmax that is designed specifically for modding existing games (like *Half-Life 2!*). Gmax is based on 3ds max, and you can download Gmax from TurboSquid (turbosquid.com/gmax) and get started on designing your own characters and environments right this second.

The Proof Is in the Pudding

We hear from readers all the time asking us how they can break into the gaming industry, and one thing is clear for any career in making games: You had better come correct. Employers like fancy schools on your résumé, but they'll be impressed if you present a portfolio of actual game content. You have to get started someplace, and Gmax is free and incredibly similar to an actual gaming-software environment...and, of course, it's awesome practice for when you land that Lead Art Director position at Ubisoft!—*Strafe Maru*





The Matrix Online

“Everything that has a beginning must have an end.”

If what the Oracle said in *Revolutions* is true, “Everything that has a beginning must have an end,” then that time has obviously not yet come because in collaboration with the Wachowski brothers, Monolith Productions offers you the chance to continue the Matrix story, starting where the last movie ended.

With its powerful parents and Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment overseeing the development process, The Matrix Online has been through a divorce with Ubisoft, a recent marriage with Sega, a tight-lipped beta program, and a slipped launch date in its journey to store shelves. So what can you expect now that the game arrives in mid January? The Matrix Online is truly an MMO in every sense of the word in that what developer Monolith is attempting makes the word “massive” seem small. In one game, Monolith creates one of the largest nonloading worlds yet seen in an online game, redefines the traditional classes and abilities seen in other RPGs with loadable programs, and breaks new ground in online combat. The burning question, though, seems to be this: Has The Matrix Online bit off more than it can chew?

It's Not Just Who You Are and Where You Are...

If a persistent world was to carry on the Matrix fable, the game creators knew how important the authenticity of the experience would be. This begins with character creation, where even a superhottie avatar with a shaved head, face piercing, and chest tattoos that's dressed up in a cropped leather tank and low-rider cargo pants can be produced. Once you finally jack into the Matrix, the green lines of code eventually melt into Matrix MegaCity, an amazingly detailed urban sprawl that was created using “Rich World” technology, where the environment will supposedly adjust to your system requirements. There is, however, no instancing in this city. While the game boasts that “every room of every floor of every building is accessible to the gamer,” you will find many buildings with the same exact floor plan, which unfortunately takes away from the excitement of exploration.

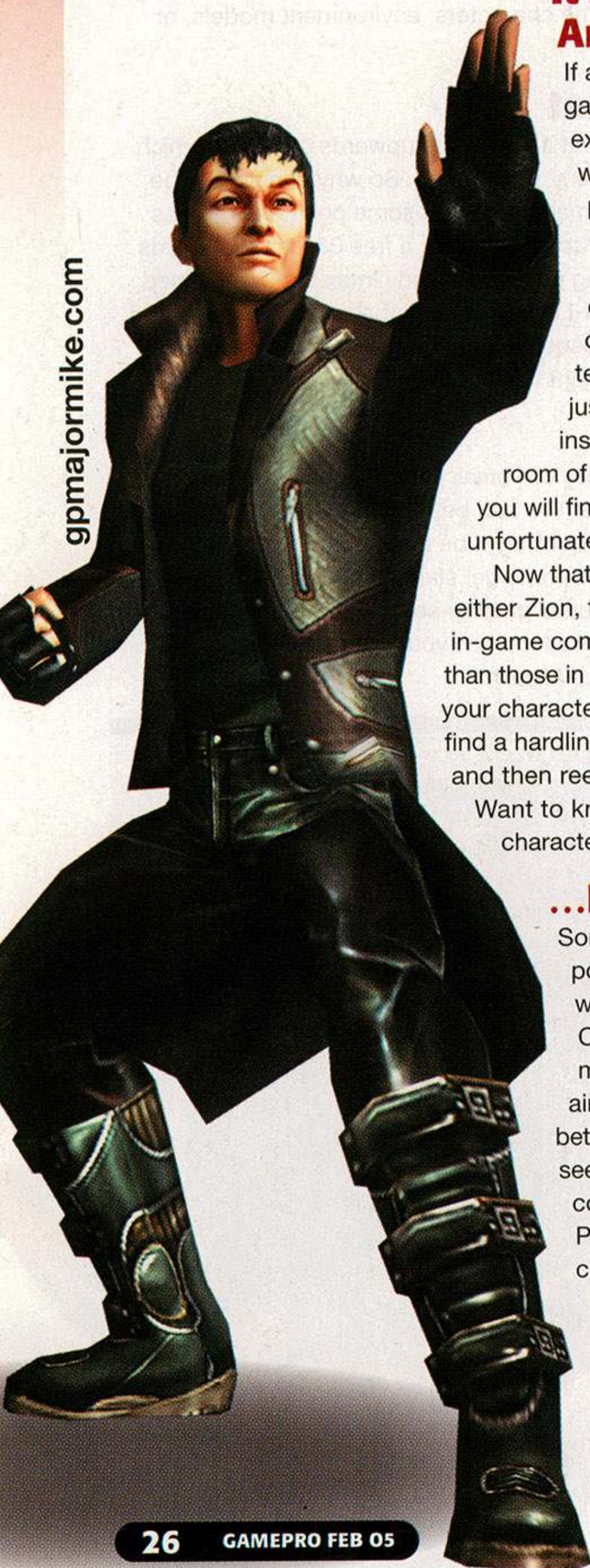
Now that you are a red pill in this new place, you must align with either Zion, the Machines, or the Exiles, and master the basics of in-game combat. Your character's abilities are much more flexible than those in traditional RPGs as you're able to install programs into your character's memory. A character who was a healer before can find a hardline to jack out during combat, install a hacker program, and then reenter with the necessary skills for the current mission.

Want to know karate? Find the program and upload it to your character. Now you are smoother than Bruce Lee.

...But It's How You Do It

Someone had to do it eventually, right? That is, to create point-and-click-combat animations that actually simulate what a real fight would be like. We're not asking for *Soul Calibur* here, but it would be nice for once to click the mouse on the Attack hot key and see the avatar at least aim in the general direction of the big bad NPC. From the beta build we previewed, this was done—Monolith's energy seems to be focused on bringing the Matrix-style “Wire Fu” combat along with various styles of Asian fighting to the PC. Call it MMO combat 1.1. But is this why people really play MMORPGs? Unfortunately, this attention to combat animations seems to have been at the cost of developing actual interesting gameplay. Monolith has a chance to redeem this if the promise of a gamer-driven story line with frequent updates is as captivating as the creators seem to think it will be.

The Matrix Online takes traditional RPG rules and attempts to redefine them, breaking the fourth wall in a way only the story of the Matrix would allow. The concepts are easily digestible given the well-known plot line of the movie trilogy, and there is plenty of potential here for both a real snoozer or an immersive continuing story line. We'll have to wait and see.—Kathunter





The Halo 2 Hype Machine

Media gawking that'd make Paris Hilton jealous.

Prior to the November 9 launch of Halo 2, many media outlets were calling it "the most highly anticipated shooter of all time." I'd venture to say it's the most overhyped shooter of all time—a fun shooter that breaks as many boundaries as Michael Bay and Jerry Bruckheimer do for films.

A Poor Man's PC Shooter

The shooter only garners so much praise because it works extremely well for a console—testament more to the Xbox's excellent controller than the game itself. The PlayStation 2 seems to have an irritating dead zone that has you either swinging your gun wildly in the air or not budging at all (a shame because Killzone had potential). The GameCube controller doesn't fare much better for FPS offerings on that platform.

Look at the first Halo, which also received a shower of praise and accolades that PR departments dream of—but when it was released on the PC, what happened? Paradigms didn't shift, Earth didn't change its axis of rotation: Instead, one-handed applause erupted across the PC industry.

It did have niggling bugs and was prone to bad frame rates on midrange rigs, but its introduction to real competition on the PC revealed its true issues—a single-player game that was masochistically monotonous and a multiplayer option that offered only a standard array of modes. Losing the competitive edge of having the only FPS-friendly controller, Halo was scrutinized for being the unremarkable game that it is.



Whattaya mean we went down this corridor before? It's a new room cuz there are two crates on the floor instead of one—eat lead for your insolence!

Has Issues...but the Greatest Game Ever

Halo 2 is an improvement, but it still has a repetitive single-player campaign, periodically shady team A.I., and a story straight out of a sci-fi B-movie script. Multiplayer is addictively fun, but it badly needs online co-op. Weapons have been tweaked and balanced well, but the Needler could still use some beefing up.

For many, I've trod on holy ground—like criticizing some of Tarantino's more uninspired flicks. But Halo 2 simply doesn't do anything better than what's already been around—if you have a PC, pick up System Shock 2 for a great story; Half-Life for great levels and A.I.; Deus Ex for "emergent" gameplay; Team Fortress and Return to Castle Wolfenstein for multiplayer. For consoles, pick up GoldenEye 007 on the N64—a great single-player experience. There are simply better games out there, and Halo 2 is just not worthy of the hype.

What would I give Halo 2? A high score—but not perfect. 4.5 just for the sheer joy of multiplayer, possibly downgraded to a 4.0 over time as the game might not age very well—not to mention being overshadowed by Half-Life 2.—*Funky Zealot*



Reader Rage

Positive or negative, I struck a nerve—I received more mail on this piece, which can be read in its entirety at GamePro.com, than all of my other e-mails combined for a year. Toward the end, the ratio neared 1:1 for love and hate with hate getting an edge. Go haters.

Love:

"Being completely honest, *GamePro* is the last magazine on Earth that I would have seen printing something like this. That it happens to be about Halo 2? Hold on a sec, I just need to go make sure there's not a winged, time-traveling pig at my door."

"Finally, someone who didn't fall into the sea of hype like the other 99 percent of the gaming community."

"The only reason people think it is so great is it is one of the few good, not great, Xbox games."

"You, my good sir, have shown many people the light."

"Wow. Somebody actually got it and wasn't afraid to say it. I thank you for boldly sticking your face out to get severely slapped by right wing Halo fanatics."

Hate:

"Idiot."

"You sound like a PC snob."

"Dude, get a new job. Halo 2 is awesome. Deus Ex was probably the most overhyped game of all time. Seriously, GamePro should consider firing you."

"No other action game has come close to the vehicles in Halo/Halo 2. After all, another great FPS (Half-Life) copied Halo by adding vehicles to its sequel!"

"You are the type who would be on a date with a supermodel and talk about how she had an ugly toe."

In closing, I'm not one of those PC prudes that say, "PC FPSes are better because of a mouse and keyboard"—Halo and Halo 2 have great controls. And I'd fully recommend any Xbox owner to buy Halo 2—but having an epileptic seizure of excitement every time a new screen shot or minute tidbit is unveiled on Bungie.net's weekly update? There are better things to be passionate about.



DOOM 3 WATCH

Continue To Be Doomed

The fantastic nightmare continues on the Xbox and PC—just be sure to change your sheets when you wake up.

Some said the game was too short. Others said it had no gameplay innovation, just beautiful visuals. Whatever the criticism, there's no denying that Doom 3 has made its mark as one of the best first-person shooters to date. Its longevity will soon be extended with an expansion pack and a port to the Xbox—both to be released sometime this spring.

The Xbox version of Doom 3 has been incognito since its modest first showing at the last E3. But since the release of the PC version, developer id Software can now concentrate on casting Mars-loving demons and one badass Marine onto the Xbox. Sans some minor level designs, Doom 3 will retain all of the fantastic visuals and creepy elements that have already made its PC counterpart a classic. Even the four-player deathmatch and two-player co-op mode will remain intact.

Resurrection of Evil is the expansion pack for the PC. In it, you take control of a different Marine two years after the story ended in Doom 3. You're basically sent to investigate Site 1, the original archeological area on Mars where the demonic ruins were first found. You'll have access to new weaponry, such as a double-barrel shotgun and an Ionized Plasma Gravitator, nicknamed Grabber, that lets you clutch then throw objects and projectiles. You'll also have an "evil" artifact, which when fully powered enables you to slow down time, go berserk, and be invincible for a limited time. The expansion pack will feature at least four new multiplayer maps, and up to eight Marines at a time can participate in a deathmatch against one another. According to id Revelation Q1: 05, you're soon to be doomed.—Four-Eyed Dragon



10 YEARS AGO

Retro Corner
10 Years Ago (February 1995)...

...In GamePro

Namco's weapons-based fighter, **WeaponLord** (SNES, Genesis), developed by fighting-fanatic game designers Dave Winstead and James Goddard, was the main image of our 170-page, saddle-stitched issue.

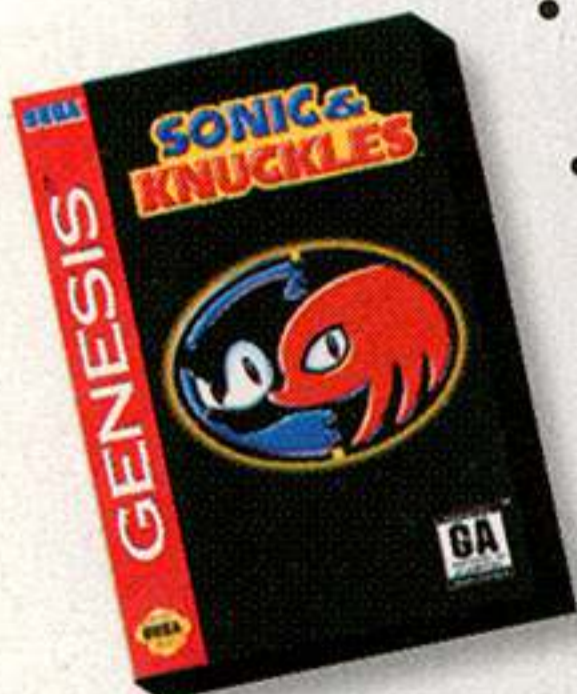
• **X-Men: Children of the Atom** and **Killer Instinct** were hot at the arcades.

• In his ProReview of **Samurai Shodown II** (Neo•Geo), Slasher Quan stated that the game "has the best graphics ever seen in a hand-drawn animated fighting game."

• The highest-rated game in the issue was **Samurai Shodown II** with 5.0s in every category except Sound and Control (each got a 4.5 score).

• **Sonic & Knuckles** (Genesis) had complaints from readers in the Buyer's Beware section. One was the new cardboard packaging instead of the usual plastic shell. According to Sega, "The company worked with an environmental consultant to come up with the new packaging that actually costs more than plastic."

• More 32X titles were reviewed, including **Doom** and **Cosmic Carnage**. However, the system had sluggish sales, and third-party developers, such as Capcom and Konami, killed their 32X developments in favor of Sega's upcoming Saturn system.



...In Sales

Here are the top-five-selling games of February 1995:

1. Donkey Kong Country (Nintendo/SNES)
2. NBA Jam: Tournament Edition (Acclaim/Genesis)
3. NBA Jam: Tournament Edition (Acclaim/SNES)
4. NBA Live '95 (EA Sports/Genesis)
5. Mortal Kombat II (Acclaim/Genesis)

Source: The NPD Group/NPD Funworld/Point-of-Sale



1 Donkey Kong Country



2 NBA Jam: Tournament Edition



3 NBA Jam: Tournament Edition

Trip of the Brain

Recently acquired by Majesco, Double Fine Productions' ambitious *Psychonauts* will finally be released for the Xbox early this year.



Recently saved from publishing limbo by Majesco, Double Fine Productions' upcoming *Psychonauts* uses cognitive concepts like dreams, repressed memories, and harmful thought censors to weave one of the most compelling titles we've seen in a while. The story goes something like this: You're Raz, a young boy with nascent psychic powers sent to a sort of psionic summer camp in the woods where you and other telepathic tots learn to access and control your mental abilities. When a giant lungfish kidnaps your fellow spoonbenders and extracts their brains to power-heavy artillery death machines, you have to embark on a psychic journey to save them.

Freudian Meat Circus



The adventure will thrust you inside the minds of various crackpots and creatures, where you use psychic powers against hybrid father-figure boss monsters while freeing up emotional baggage, unlocking repressed memories, and collecting figments of imagination to earn psychic merit badges that open new powers.

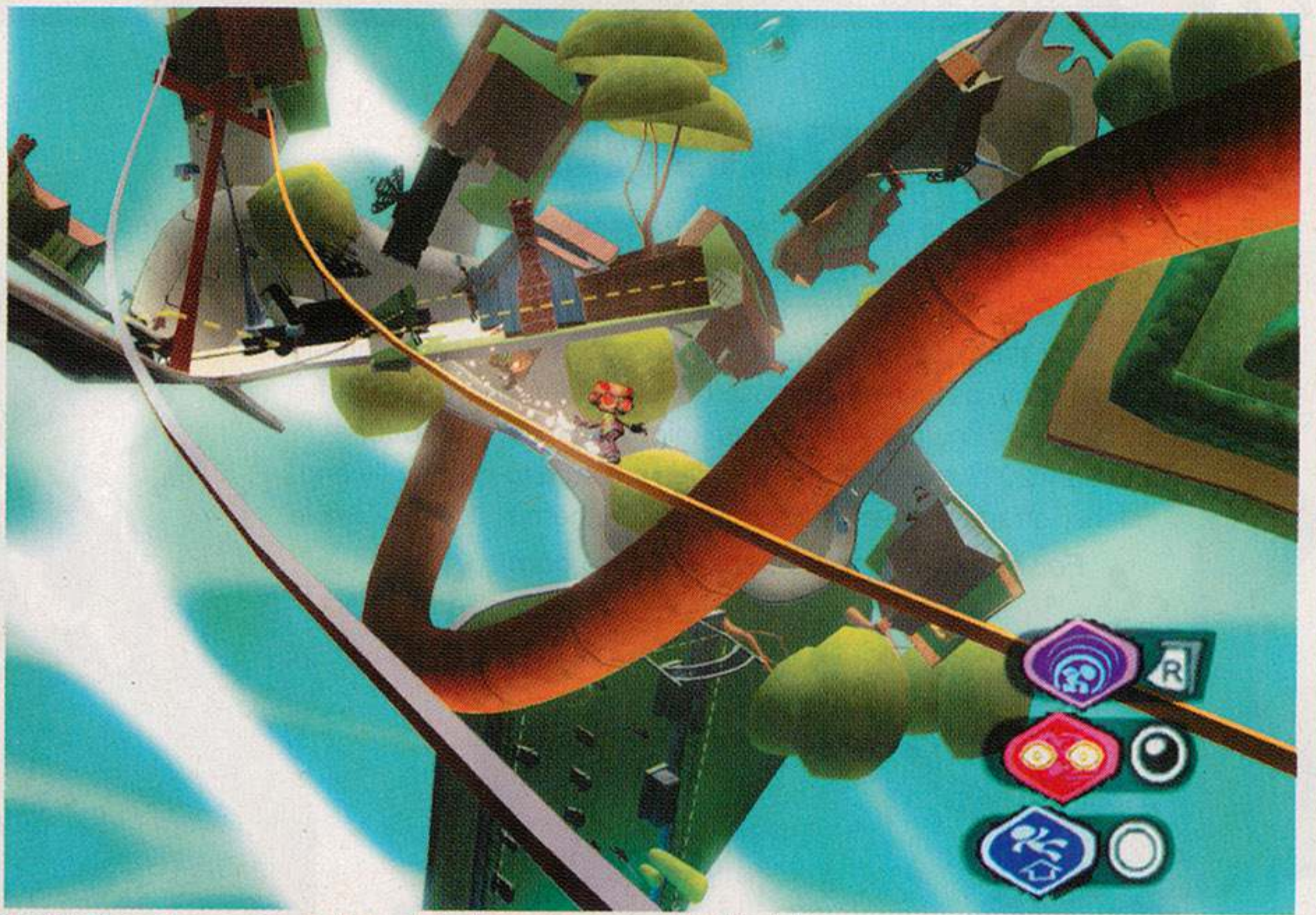
What's most impressive is how the inner brain workings, most of which can be found in a Psychology textbook, are extrapolated and anthropomorphized into gameplay elements, challenges, and characters.



These corporate stiff's don't belong here.



If only Freud knew what really went on inside your head....



Surfing through someone else's brain isn't as easy as you think it might be...and yet, sometimes it's more fun than surfing through your own.

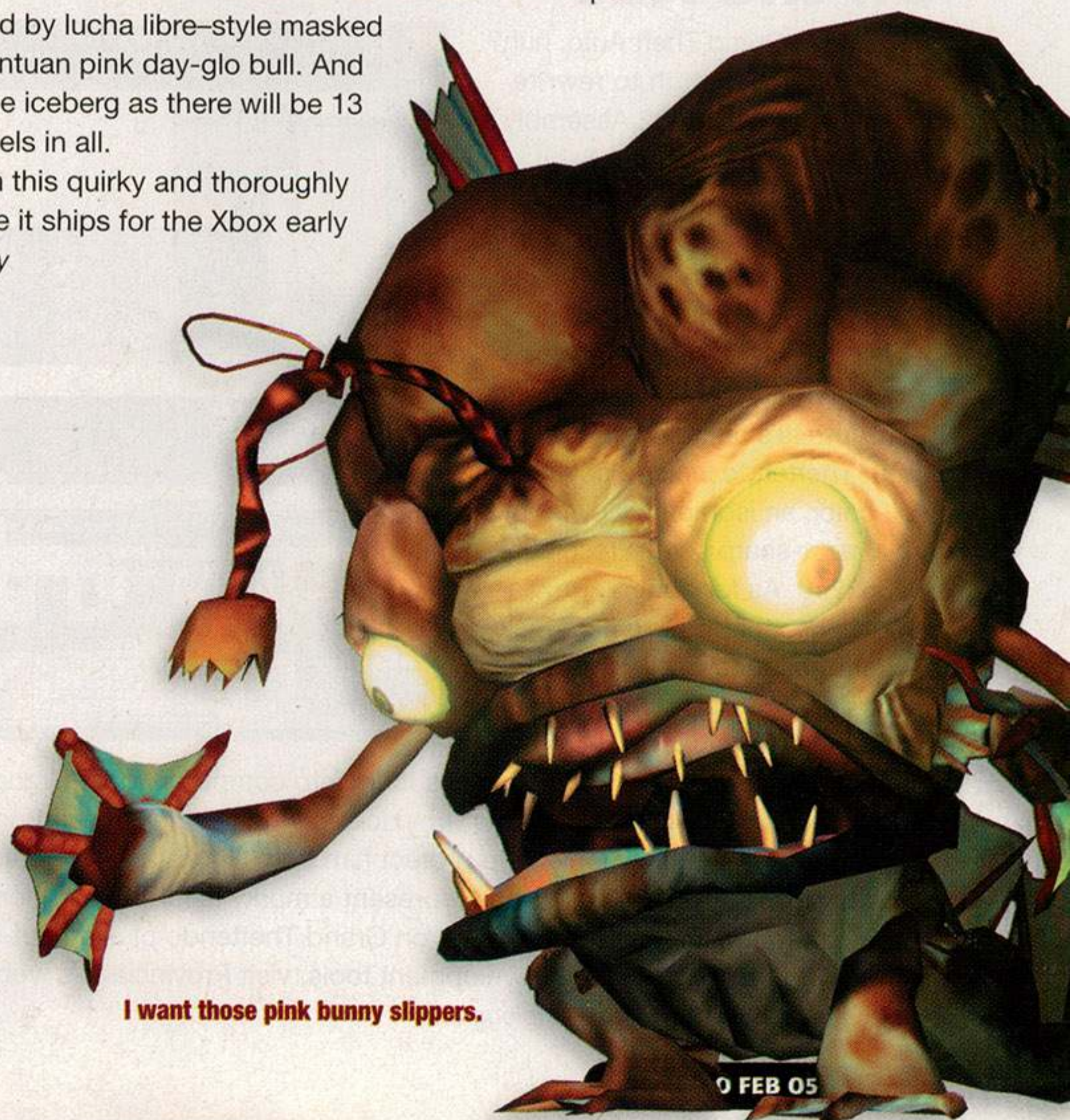
Powerful unconscious mental barriers that prevent us from thinking about harmful thoughts, referred to by Freud as "censors," take the form of enemy agents who try to stamp Raz out of people's psyches. Figments will give you clues to the psychic makeup of characters as well. For instance, one character's mental level is rife with images of dancing beef and bouncing meat cleavers—pretty bizarre stuff until you discover that said character's father was a butcher. Clever is the first word that comes to mind, maybe brilliant says it better.



A Mental Dental Office

A beautiful blend of fine art aesthetic and manic hand-drawn doodling permeates the whole project, and because every level takes place inside a character's subconscious, each one is realized in a completely different visual style. At the beginning of the game, Raz goes inside the brain of a hawkish psychic coach to go through boot camp training that takes place at chaotic warzones. When he leaps inside the skull of a delusional painter named Edgar, he finds himself running amok inside a three-dimensional black velvet painting while being chased by lucha libre-style masked wrestlers and a gargantuan pink day-glo bull. And that's just the tip of the iceberg as there will be 13 uniquely designed levels in all.

We'll have more on this quirky and thoroughly intriguing game before it ships for the Xbox early this year.—Iron Monkey



I want those pink bunny slippers.



PLASTIC FANTASTIC

Dragon-Spawned

McFarlane Toys has conquered almost every major category in action-figure collectibles, from comics to sports to movies. Now, McFarlane's master sculptors deliver an original line of the most incredible-looking dragons ever cast in plastic. McFarlane's Dragons: Quest for the Lost King features five dragons, each representing a separate Dragon Clan, as well as a deluxe boxed set featuring a Berserker Clan Dragon facing off against an armored knight attacker. Slated for a January 2005 release, these reptiles are sure to quickly fly and slither off the shelves if you don't catch them first!—*Dr. Zombie*

For more information, visit spawn.com



THE CUTTING EDGE

Doing Time On the NES

So you love Grand Theft Auto, huh? Do you love it enough to rewrite the entire game in 6502 Assembly Language for play on the 8-bit NES? Didn't think so. But thanks to whiz kid Brian Provinciano and his irrepressible enthusiasm for all things GTA, Internet users will soon see the release of Grand Theftendo, an original 2D re-creation of Grand Theft Auto III's first city. Specs for Grand Theftendo include sparkling 2-bit color, an isometric viewpoint, and a razor-sharp screen resolution of 256x240. As for control, Provinciano claims that driving cars feels tight and responsive. To create the 2D version of Portland, Provinciano meticulously transferred the game maps onto graph paper, then converted them into computer code. Grand Theftendo is freeware, which means Provinciano won't see any cash from its release. Though this should help protect him from Rockstar's lawyers, home-brew projects like these often represent a murky legal situation for game publishers. For more information on Grand Theftendo plus an outrageously detailed look at the development tools, visit Provinciano's web site at grandtheftendo.com—*Vicious Sid*



OP-ED

Is It "Game Over" For Game Cinemas?

Why do games like Halo 2 and Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas flaunt long-winded cinema cut-scenes at every opportunity? With few exceptions, these cinematics only serve to interrupt the hypnotic gameplay experience. Would you rather watch passively while Master Chief guides a massive bomb to a Covenant spaceship or step into his armored boots and plant that bomb yourself? The choice should be obvious. Another problem with cinematic intermissions is that they highlight the dreadful writing and embarrassing voice acting routinely found in video games (even "cinematic" titles like San Andreas). Worse, cinematics often shoot development costs through the roof. That's money that would be better spent on the gameplay instead of more useless video clips.

Luckily, titles like Half-Life 2 offer a vision of hope. During Half-Life 2's cinemas, you retain full control of your character; you can walk and look where you like as the drama unfolds around you. And because they harness in-game graphics, Half-Life 2's cinemas are much cheaper to produce overall. It's the best of both worlds. Here's hoping other developers quickly follow suit.—*Vicious Sid*



Should game designers put less emphasis on flashy in-game cinemas and focus instead on creating better games?

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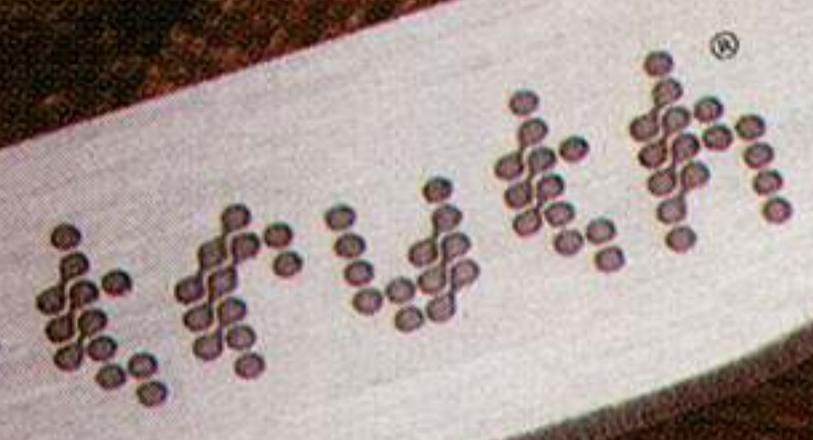


it's good to play together





seek



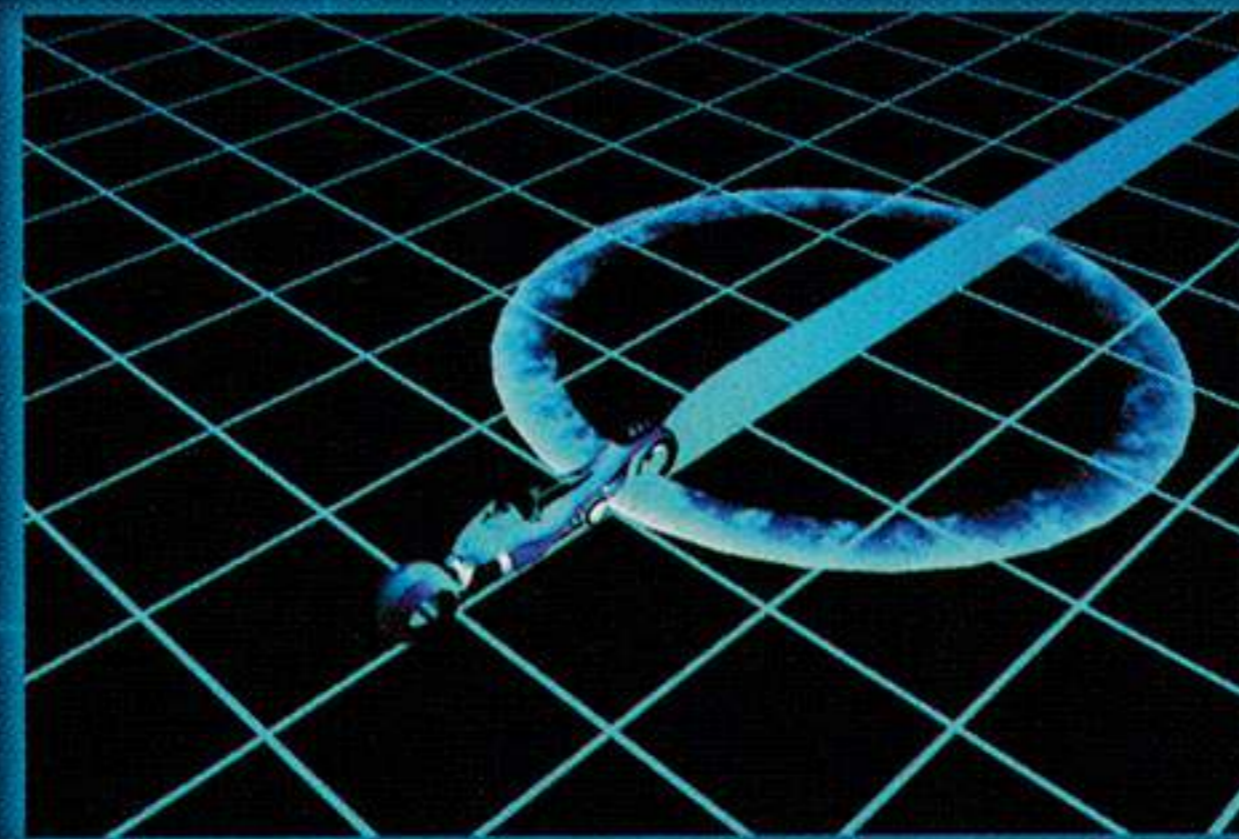




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– Gamespy.com

"The arcade ports rock the house"
– Gamespot.com

"The combat is genuinely exciting"
– Gamespy.com

"Tron 2.0 blasts ahead of the pack..."
– Gamespot.com

"Discs of Tron... that game is awesome."
– 1up.com

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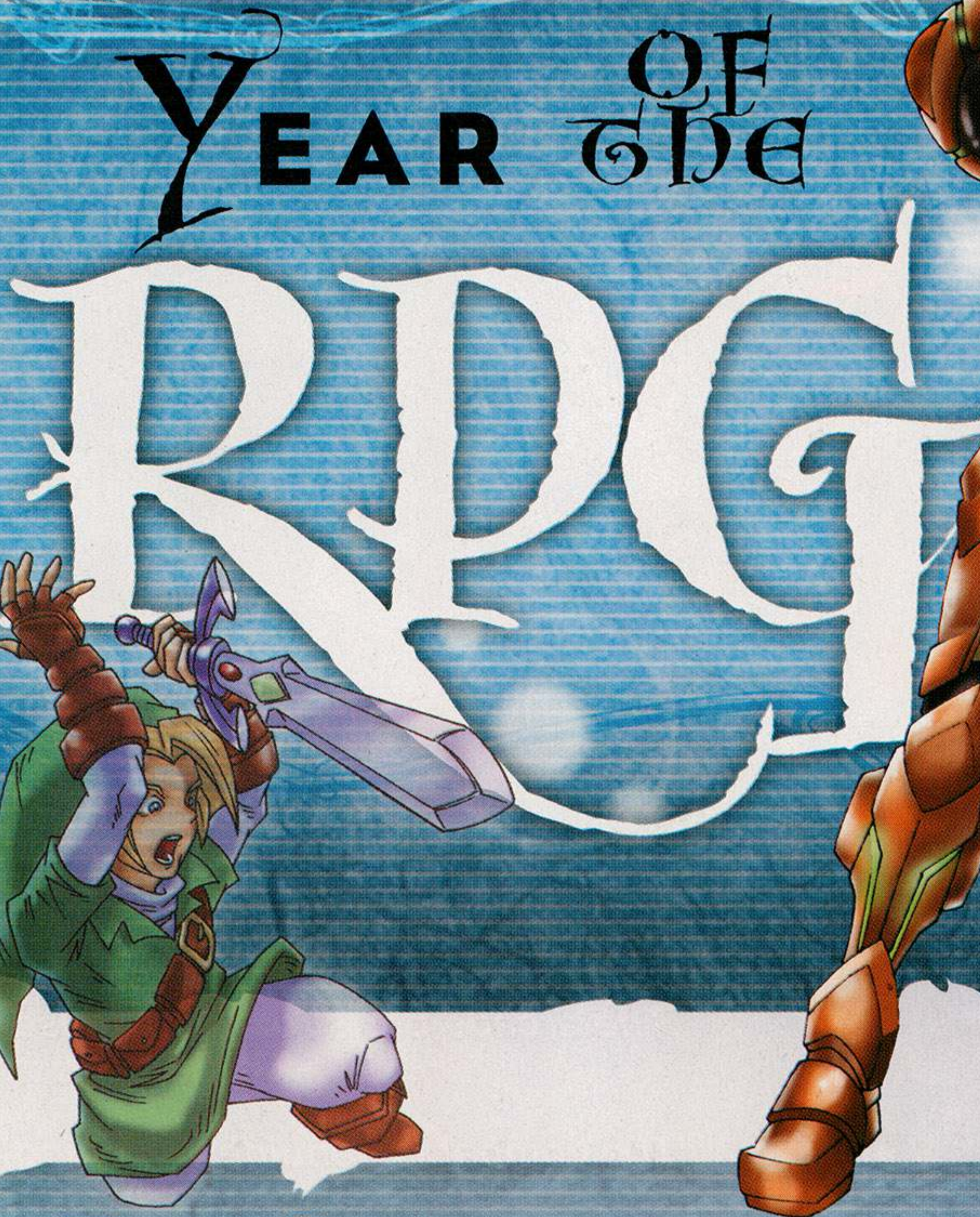
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Fantasy Violence



TRON 2.0 KILLER APP



THE CHANGING FACE OF THE RPG

As a genre, role-playing games have survived the rise of Nintendo and the fall of cartridge-based home consoles; they've outlived the fighting game boom and weathered the arcade bust. But as competition increases and more and more games integrate elements once exclusively found in RPGs, the real question is: Can the RPG survive itself? *By The GamePros*

What makes a role-playing game a role-playing game? Is it the character-building, the intricate story line? Likeable characters? Or some mix of the above? It's interesting that such a seemingly narrow genre definition, role-playing, can be used so effortlessly to describe games as wildly dissimilar as *Diablo II* and *Final Fantasy X*.

Roots of Role-Playing

Character-based RPGs (which include titles like *Final Fantasy*) often feature intricate plots and character interactions, but the story line complexity usually means that players can't diverge far from the set path. MMORPGs (Massively Multiplayer Online RPGs), on the other hand, dump players into an ever-changing, organic

environment that responds to each player's unique influence. In *EverQuest*, for instance, players can slay monsters, master artisan crafts, or even venture into real estate. Action/RPGs like *Diablo II* and *Champions of Norrath* frequently focus on "stat-pumping" and defeating swarms of enemies.

But it's the new breed of hybrid titles, which include games like *Deus Ex: Invisible War* and *Metroid Prime 2: Echoes*, that are truly blurring the genre lines. Even fighting games have caught the RPG bug with new titles like *Mortal Kombat: Deception* introducing lengthy quest modes. These cutting-edge games combine gameplay elements from every type of RPG, merging complex environments and detailed story lines with pulse-pounding action and character building.



Mortal Kombat: Deception

Imitation or Inspiration?

The ability to improve your skill level, in one way or another, is probably the foundation for the entire RPG genre, and for good reason—it simulates learning, which is an innately human experience. And increasingly, game designers are putting that connection to good use. The experience point system, in particular, lends itself well to the stagnating action genre; *Fable*, for instance, lets you cash in experience points to upgrade your attack abilities. Upcoming titles like Sony's action-packed *God of War* stretch the experience system further than ever, enabling players

RPG: The Next Generation

Keep an eye on these killer-looking games—they may well represent the future of the RPG genre.

BioShock

This FPS/RPG hybrid is creating massive buzz, and for good reason, as it's being developed by the folks behind the PC horror masterpiece System Shock 2. Though not a true sequel, BioShock promises to expand upon SS2's groundbreaking mix of RPG character building and FPS survival/horror with highly expandable weapons and character skills. BioShock is ditching SS2's technology-based themes, instead setting its sights

on genetic manipulation. Expect to clash with foul man-made organisms boasting advanced dynamic A.I.

- PC ■ Developed by Irrational Games
- No publisher announced
- Target release date: 2006



The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion

Bethesda's next-generation sequel to the smash-hit Morrowind features an absolutely stunning new graphics engine. Better yet, the combat's also been radically overhauled so fighter characters can learn to disarm or knock back opponents. Other promising features, such as the new class guilds and the PC version's user-modifiable content, are also guaranteed to steal the spotlight.

- PC ■ Developed by Zenimax
- Published by Bethesda Softworks
- Target release date: 2006



Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas

Rebirth of the RPG

Correctly implemented, RPG elements can clearly add spice to many game types. But when thrown in recklessly, as with GTA: San Andreas, those same elements just get in the way of the experience. Luckily, there are signs that some savvy designers are mastering the mix; games like BioWare's upcoming Jade Empire promise to combine RPG and action gameplay in an even more elegant form. So is this the death of the RPG or the dawn of a whole new role-playing era? Only time—and game sales—will tell.

CONTINUED ►



Metroid Prime 2: Echoes

to skillfully "milk" foes for extra experience before delivering the coup de grace. These games advance action-based gameplay because they create a reflexive environment where the player's technique influences his character's ability set.

But when designers shoehorn RPG mechanics into an unnatural setting, the results aren't always desirable. Titles like Tony Hawk's Underground 2 have started to strain under the weight of the new questing and exploring elements, primarily because this game was built on the foundation of a simple,

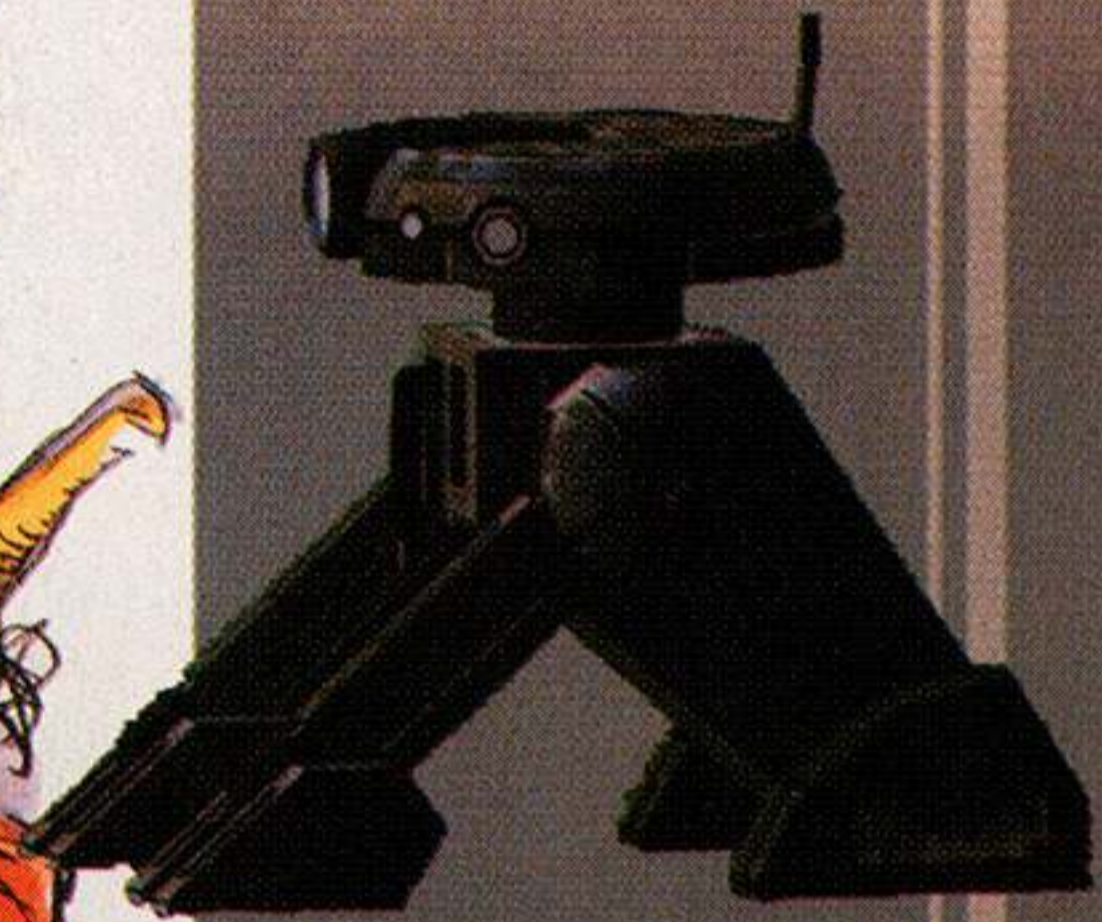
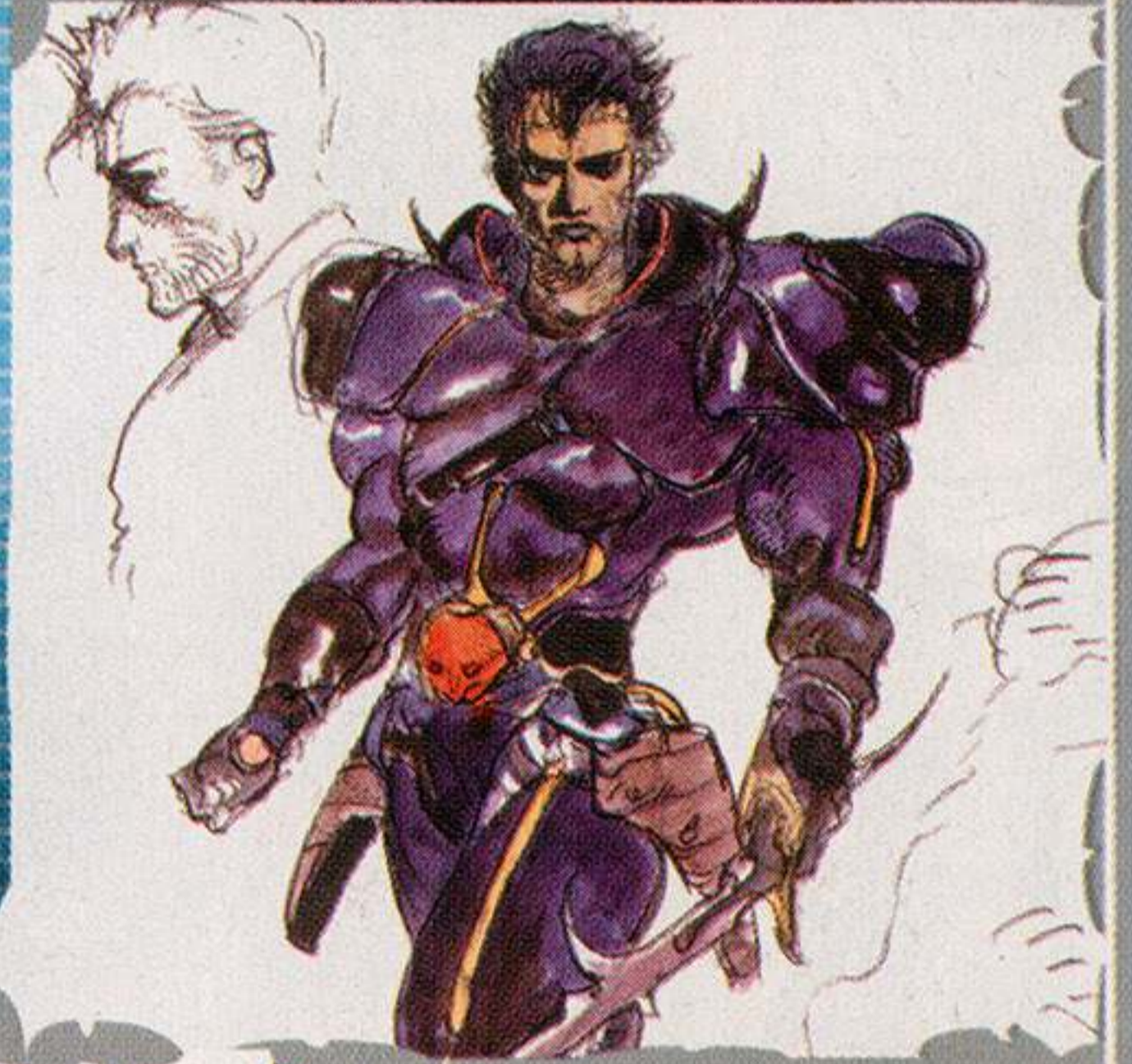
physical activity—in this case, skateboarding. Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas is another recent sequel that has added new RPG elements but with mixed results. In San Andreas, players are able to exercise to enhance their skills in everything from shooting to swimming. San Andreas's RPG additions may be more realistic, but are they any fun? Not particularly as activities like exercising and eating simply aren't much fun in the digital world. What's next—dusting?



Dusting, the next frontier in RPG mechanics?

REVENGE OF THE RPG

2005 will present a wider selection of RPG titles than ever seen before, from old-school updates to stellar-looking sequels. But when you're investing 40-plus hours in a time-sucking RPG title, it pays to stay informed. Fret not—*GamePro's* here to dish out the dirt on the upcoming crop of titles, separating the RPG royalty from the rejects.



Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic II—The Sith Lords

Grab your vibroblade and quit tipping the Twi'lek dancers—the best RPG on the Xbox is back, and now there's even more of it.

Released about a year and a half ago, the first Knights of the Old Republic wasn't all that revolutionary of a game—as any hardcore PC dork will tell you, KOTOR's emphasis on long conversations and meandering sub-quests is standard issue on computer role-playing games. No, KOTOR was different because it took this time-consuming experience and made it palatable, even engaging, to console audiences—and KOTOR II keeps the tradition going by not fixing what ain't broke.

The Real Revenge of the Sith

Storywise, The Sith Lords is a step up from the original, whose random ramblings covered up a remarkably standard plot. You are the last Jedi alive (the last one not accounted for by the evil Sith, anyway), and as the game begins, you're trying to rediscover your dormant Jedi skills while running from the long arm of the Sith.



PRO TIP: Mines are everywhere in this game. Have someone in your party who's skilled in explosives, and he'll be able to recover them for your own use.



Sloop racing makes a return trip in Knights of the Old Republic II, as does the strangely addictive Pazaak card game.

Every planet you land on is chock full of interesting story, either spread before you from the get-go or doled out in a number of smaller sub-quests. Nearly all of them are fun to trace through (even the rather non-Jedi-like ones, including returning a slave dancer to her two-timin' boyfriend), and the enjoyable voice acting means you won't be skipping through any of the countless conversations.

Not Near but Far Wars

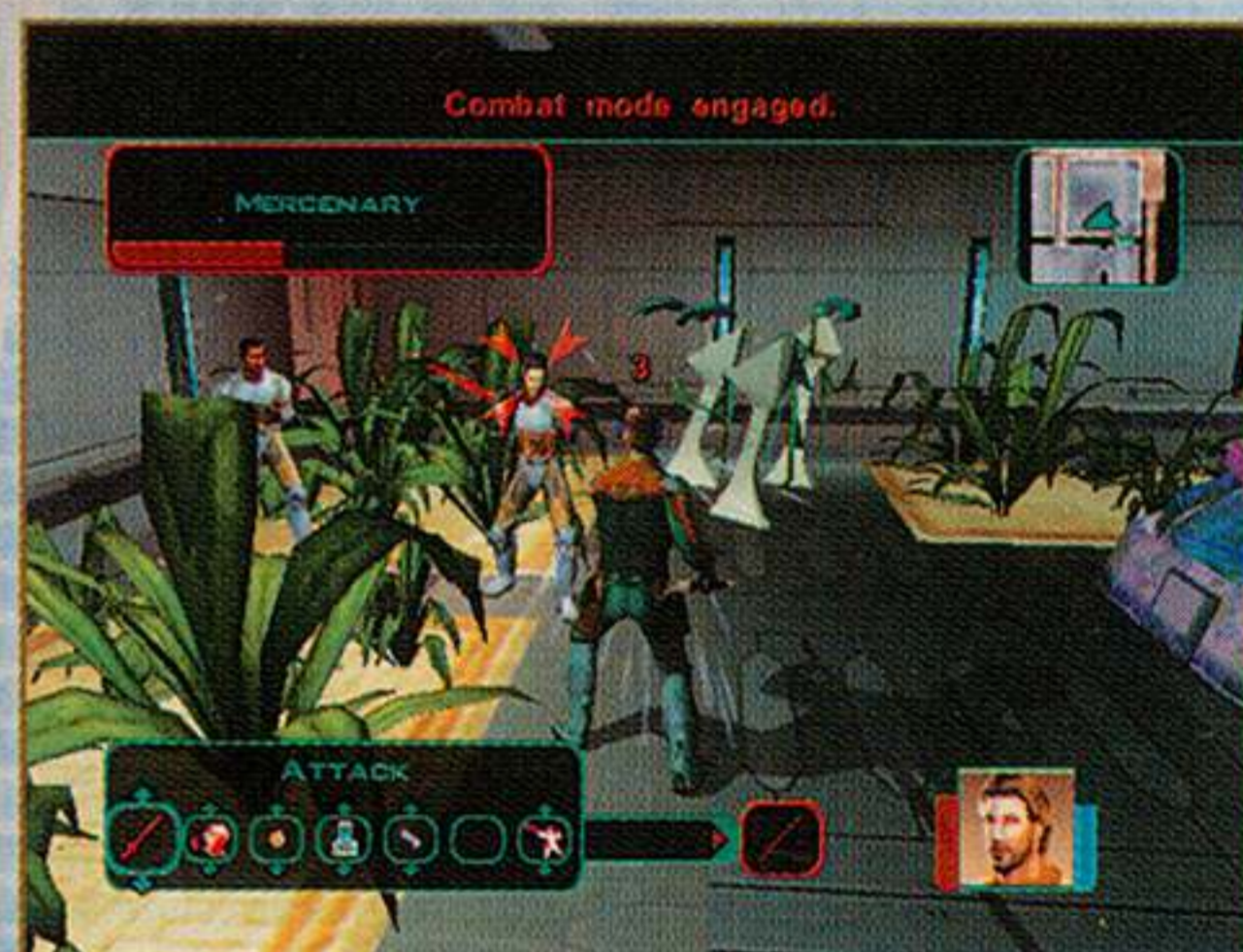
This story emphasis is the reason why KOTOR (and, yes, its sequel) still seems so original in the console landscape. Too many Japanese RPGs include tons of fighting at the expense of a believable plot and characters. KOTOR II bucks the trend by making every battle a natural progression of an engaging story—and just like the first game, it's a story you'll want to play twice, just to see how much insidious fun being a Dark Jedi can be. Even if you missed the first game, give this one a shot—it's a totally refreshing RPG experience.

T ■ Xbox ■ Developed by Obsidian Entertainment
 ■ Published by LucasArts ■ \$49.99 ■ Available now ■ RPG ■ 1 player

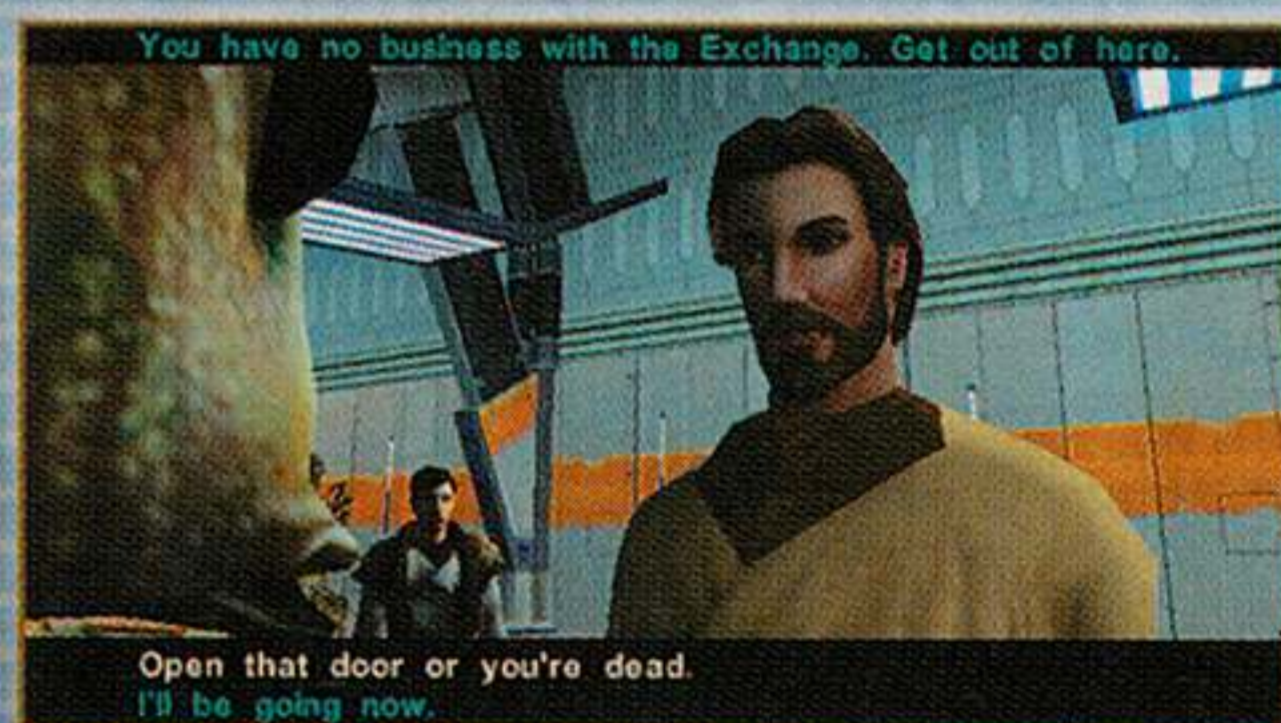
CONTINUED ►



PRO TIP: The main character, being a Jedi and all, can learn up to seven different Forms, or lightsaber techniques. You'll need to switch between them often depending on the type of enemy you're facing.



PRO TIP: Generally speaking, guns and rifles put you at a disadvantage in close-range combat. You can fix this to some extent, however, by earning certain skills.



PRO TIP: As before, your conversation choices can and will affect your Jedi alignment. If you aren't sure how a response will affect you, save first.



You'll interact with the best and brightest the galaxy has to offer in The Sith Lords... and this guy, too.

GAMEPRO EDITORS' CHOICE

X	GRAPHICS	3.5	FUN FACTOR	4.5
	SOUND	4.0		
	CONTROL	3.5		

GET MORE
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VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE—BLOODLINES

Tapping into B-movie essentials, the vampires in Troika's latest RPG have all the stereotypical trappings—a penchant for melancholic rock and electronica, black nail polish, and senseless cleavage bursting out from buttoned-down shirts. It's still nichey like the first game but provides a memorable, if not haunting, experience.

REALITY BITES

Set in "Los Angeles," the environment is saturated with a sense of dread and foreboding darkness—and resembles nothing like the moving parking lot called the City of Angels. A vampire who must prove him/herself worthy to, er, live, you are caught between the subterfuge of different clans, who each try to spin their own ambitions as being the most altruistic. The slick script is one of the most well written in any RPG, forcing the player to read between the lines of poison-laced flattery to survive. Though linear, Bloodlines nevertheless has compelling quests that reward investigative digging.

The Diablo-esque click-fighting gets the job done but tends to be tedious, especially when you know there's nothing to be gained from killing most enemies. Guns are woefully weak and unbalanced compared to melee, but stealth adds an interesting Deus Ex dimension to the gameplay, enabling players to shoot security cameras or shut them off via computers.

SOURCE TRANSFUSION

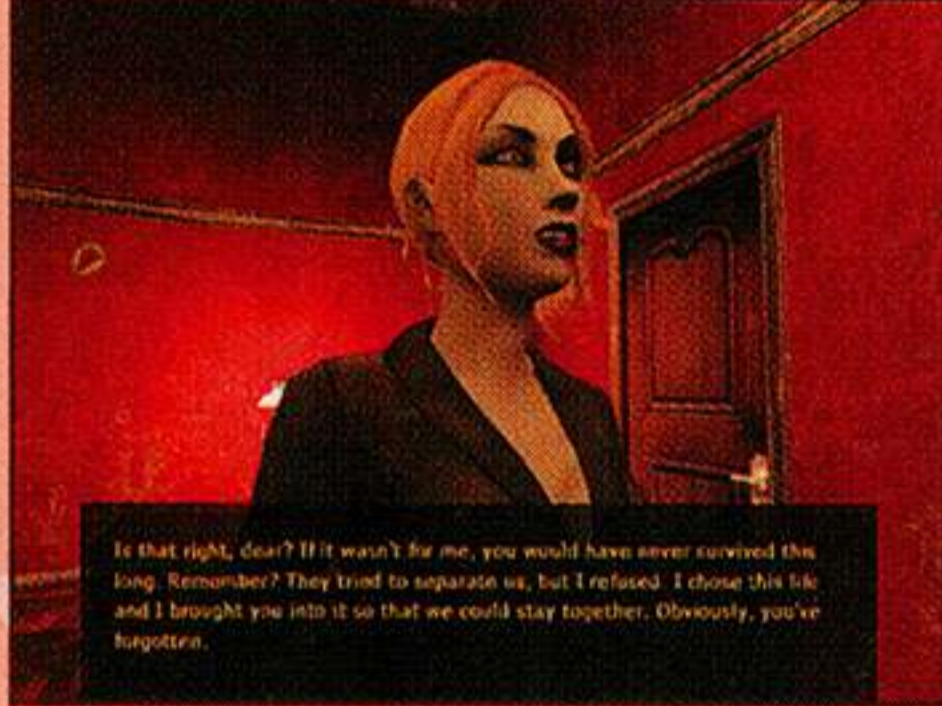
Bloodlines' Source engine visuals are beautiful, but the drab environments fall short. And unlike in Half-Life 2, the physics don't add much to the gameplay—throwing boxes together to climb up a wall is about as intuitive as it gets. Voice acting is topnotch, but environmental sounds fail to give a 5.1 setup your money's worth.

While having its quirks and love-it-or-hate-it clichéd nihilism, it's a game well worth checking out, especially for anyone who sucks up Vampire action movie flicks.

M ■ PC ■ Developed by Troika Games ■ Published by Activision ■ \$49.99 ■ Available now ■ RPG ■ 1 player



PROTIP: If you ever stumble upon anybody who recognizes you from your former human life, deny everything and shun them.



PROTIP: Powerful vampires tend to be pathological liars.

PC	GRAPHICS	4.5	FUN FACTOR 4.0
	SOUND	4.5	
	CONTROL	4.0	
Recommended System Specifications			
■ Windows 98/ME/2000/XP ■ Pentium 4 2.4 GHz			
■ 512 MB RAM ■ 3.3 GB on HD ■ 128 MB video card			

RPG Quick Hits

Worthy or not worthy?

Star Wars Galaxies: Jump to Lightspeed



While Jump to Lightspeed has been marketed as a large-scale X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter twitch-action MMO sim, the hardcore populace has been clamoring for changes to make the expansion less PvP-oriented and more RPG-like, which has amputated much of the joy of combat. SWG fans waiting for that magical revamp should wait a little longer.

■ PC ■ Developed by Sony Online Entertainment ■ Published by LucasArts ■ Available now

Final Fantasy I & II: Dawn of Souls



Dawn of Souls is a reissue of the first two Final Fantasy titles with graphical improvements and additional exclusive material. Final Fantasy I features four new dungeons to explore, while Final Fantasy II sports a new plot path where all defeated party members must beat the emperor of Pandaemonium to escape purgatory. Worth checking out and not just for nostalgia's sake.

■ GBA ■ Developed by Square Enix ■ Published by Nintendo ■ Available now

The Nightmare of Druaga Fushigino Dungeon



While promising conceptually, Fushigino Dungeon is a nightmare all right—a gamer's nightmare. The monotonous turn-based battle engine and horribly complicated save system create an irritating experience.

■ PS2 ■ Developed by Arika ■ Published by Namco ■ Available now

KINGDOM HEARTS: CHAIN OF MEMORIES

Bridging the gap between the original Kingdom Hearts and its sequel, Kingdom Hearts: Chain of Memories continues Sora and party's quest to find King Mickey. The strange inhabitants of Castle Oblivion trap our heroes, convert Donald and Goofy into battle cards, and force Sora to face his subconscious thoughts and fears.

DEALING WITH DONALD

Chain of Memories is a card-based action/RPG with encounter-based battles. Sora can still run around and platform about, but when he encounters an enemy, he enters a separate battle screen where he has to face his adversary's party alone.

The battle engine focuses on card-based attacks—Sora utilizes a deck of cards to choose his attacks. His battle deck consists of three categories: attack, magic, and character-summoning cards, which are used in battle. Character summoning will call a friendly character to aid you with their special attack. In addition to using single battle cards, Sora can also store three cards in a card bank, which allows him to launch a chained attack or convert the cards into a special attack.

THE HAND YOU'RE DEALT

The card-based battle engine takes some time getting used to. It's difficult to plan your attack by scrolling through your deck while multiple enemies are pummeling you. Enemies tend to crowd you into corners where they negate your attacks, wear down your deck, and eventually destroy you. Also, the graphics suffer from low contrast, and the effects are particularly pixilated.

Conceptually, Chain of Memories boasts some good ideas, but the hybrid gameplay is perplexingly awkward.

T ■ GBA ■ Developed and published by Square Enix ■ \$39.99 ■ Available now ■ Action/RPG ■ 1 player



PROTIP: Use character cards to summon friends into battle.



PROTIP: Simultaneously press L and R to store a card in your card bank.

GBA	GRAPHICS	3.5	FUN FACTOR 3.5
	SOUND	3.0	
	CONTROL	4.0	



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RPG RENAISSANCE

You don't have to be a Final Fantasy fanatic or a Disney diehard to appreciate the slate of RPG titles scheduled to hit consoles and PCs this year. Whether you're a fan of stat-pumping exercises or cinematic, character-driven epics, 2005 is truly shaping up to be The Year of the RPG.



Square Deal

Final Fantasy fans will have plenty to celebrate this year, but Square Enix remains as tight-lipped as ever about its most anticipated projects. Here's the latest!

Final Fantasy XII

While details are still frustratingly scarce, advance information suggests that Final Fantasy XII is dead set on reinvigorating the classic but slightly dusty RPG series. Set in the world of Ivalice, FFXII's three lead characters find themselves wedged between two warring continents—the Archadian Empire and the Empire of Rozarria. Amidst the climate of global war, the party embarks on an epic quest to end the siege and recover the usurped throne of Dalmasca. Gameplay details are somewhat murky, but the quest will supposedly boast nonlinear elements, which may boost the replay value. The new camera controls sound like another interesting addition and will enable players to switch between first- and third-person views.

On the combat front, Final Fantasy XII will include several fresh tactical twists, and for good reason; FFXII is being directed by the creator of the well-received Final Fantasy Tactics series. Thanks to the new Active Dimension Battle system, random battle encounters are a distant memory. Players can spot roaming foes on the map well before combat, which opens up options ranging from fleeing to launching pre-emptive attacks. And because the battle map and field map are one and the same, players will have to master rough terrain and other environmental obstacles—even other roving creatures!—during combat. Characters can learn tag-team tactics, combining their attacks on one target to create devastating combos. Players are even able to assign specific combat roles to each party member, from offensive (like mirroring another character's attacks) to supportive (healing the lead character). Enemies have received a sizeable A.I. boost, too, which should end the days of back-and-forth, button-mashing battles. It all sounds promising—here's hoping this Fantasy isn't Final.



■ PS2 ■ Target release date: Winter 2005

Dragon Quest VIII

Better known to stateside fans as Dragon Warrior, this overseas series has rocked Japanese sales charts for years. Thanks to the visual horsepower of the PS2, the long-awaited Dragon Quest VIII is getting a massive visual overhaul, complete with crisp cel-shaded characters and bold environments. Gameplay additions include a new Tension meter for delivering successfully more destructive attacks and even a monster-recruitment ability. But the new Alchemy Pot sounds like the most interesting addition as it transmogrifies common items into potent weapons (combining a sword and staff, for instance, creates a steel spear). There's no announced plan for a U.S. release, but considering Square Enix's international clout, it seems likely. Stay tuned!

■ PS2 ■ Target release date: To be determined



Top 10 Final Fantasy Game Sales to Date

Because Final Fantasy fans need to know

1. Final Fantasy VII PlayStation
2. Final Fantasy X PS2
3. Final Fantasy VIII PlayStation
4. Final Fantasy IX PlayStation
5. Final Fantasy X-2 PS2
6. Final Fantasy Tactics PlayStation
7. Final Fantasy Tactics GBA
8. Final Fantasy Anthology PlayStation
9. Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles GameCube
10. Final Fantasy Chronicles PlayStation

Source: The NPD Group/NPD Funworld/Point-of-Sale

Kingdom Hearts II

Set two years after the first Kingdom Hearts, this slick sequel looks to improve upon the already awesome Square-meets-Disney premise while adding some worthwhile gameplay twists. Sora's back in the driver's seat, while Donald and Goofy provide comic relief and combat support, in that order. Also look for Final Fantasy X's Auron (the swordfighter), plus the Heartless and Hades. During combat, it should be much easier to summon allies and control the camera angles, but otherwise, you can expect a revised version of the hack-n-slash action that propelled the first Kingdom Hearts to enormous success. Best of all, the lush 'toon visuals look more sensational than ever, reinforcing the idea that Square Enix's Heart is definitely in the right place.

■ PS2 ■ Target release date: Winter 2005



MUSASHI: SAMURAI LEGEND

Musashi has a soft spot for two things: girls and sword fighting. What luck, then, when the brave Musashi is summoned to another world by a beautiful princess who requires only the best swordsman to save her. Take a step back from the serious antics of Square Enix's other fantasy games and experience the lightheartedness of role-playing with this second showing of this Samurai Legend.

Alas, the people of the Mystics are convinced that the Vespire land is out to get them. You see, a big corporate power named

Gandrake rules over Vespire and has developed the Nebullum Engine, a device that produces nebulite, the world's energy source. This Gandrake is using its newfound engine power to muscle in on the gentle, magic-loving Mystics. Musashi is called upon by the Mystics' princess to help her cause, and thus the fight begins.

New in Musashi's repertoire is his duplication technique. He can now literally copy any of his opponent's attacks with one press of a button. Master M. also has the ability to carry his friends to safety during battles. Of course, Musashi's sword technique is what makes him stand out—and he again shows off his trademark dual-blade slashing skills to ward off that evil corporate giant.

■ PS2 ■ Developed and published by Square Enix ■ Target release date: March



SHINING TEARS

Back in the day, when Sega was a powerhouse publisher and hardware manufacturer, there existed an RPG trilogy of true reverence that helped the Genesis and Saturn console systems...er, shine. We're of course referring to the Shining Force games that will forever hold a permanent place in the hall of role-playing classics.

Today, as Sega is pushing to become once again that same powerhouse, it's about to release the next Shining game, Shining Tears. In this action/RPG, you follow the tale of a young man who mysteriously lost his memory and is suddenly thrust in a war he can't fully comprehend. Along the way, he'll discover that his world is a scary one indeed, and the only thing protecting him are two magical rings in his possession.

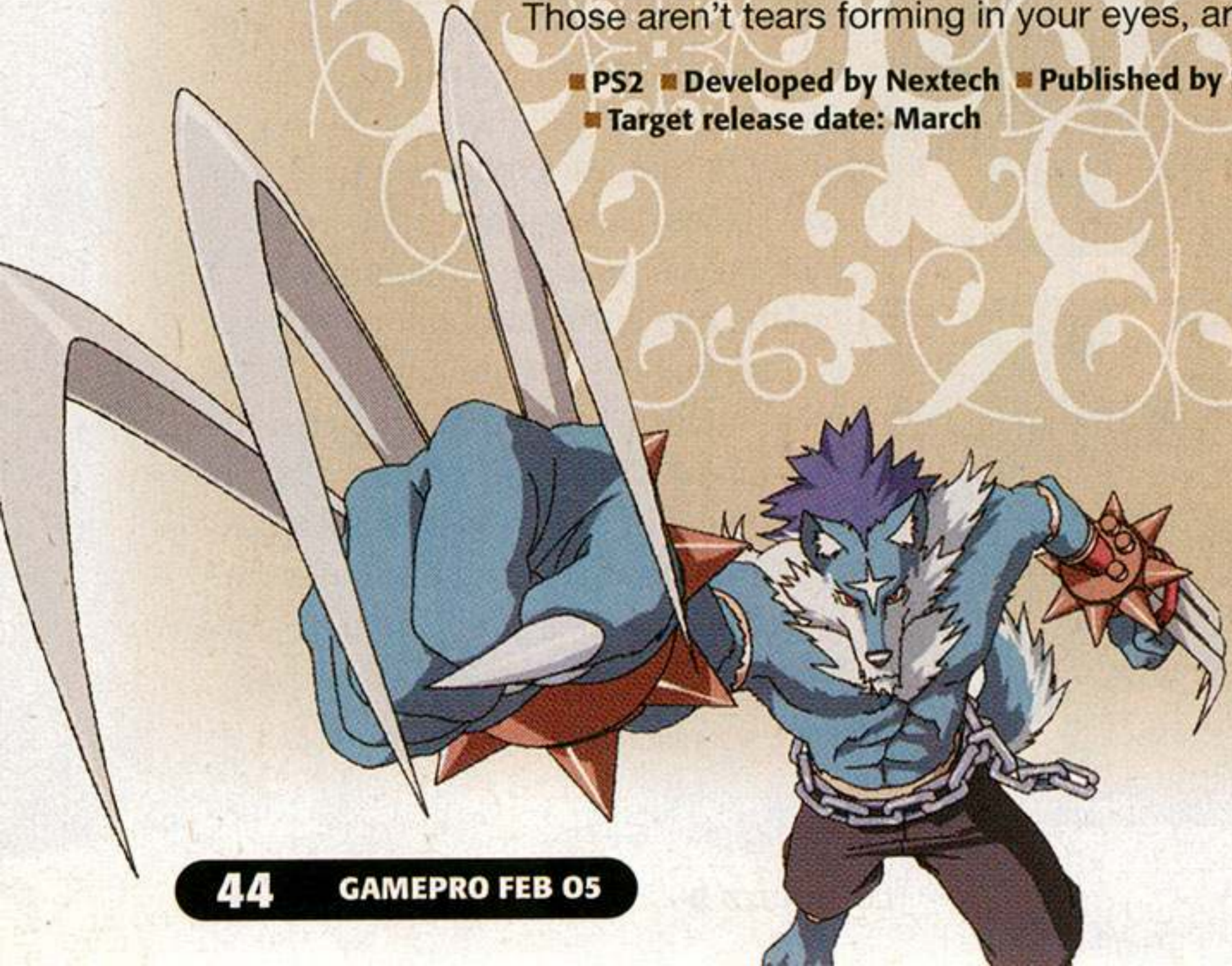
Unique to this adventure is that you must control two characters simultaneously during real-time battles. It sounds like a daunting task, but the intuitive control system lets you lead both fighters into a challenging dual against multiple enemies at once. And if battles become too frustrating, a friend can join in for a round of co-op play.

Those aren't tears forming in your eyes, are they?

■ PS2 ■ Developed by Nextech ■ Published by Sega
■ Target release date: March



No way!
Volg, I had no idea you were so...
so renowned!



Xenosaga Episode II: Jenseits von Gut und Böse

The first Xenosaga encapsulated a deep and complex story that could rival any modern-day existentialist idea told by hours upon hours of gorgeously done cinematics. And the gameplay was just as multifaceted, requiring even more hours to master the many nuances.

It's still thousands of years in the future (or in this case, right after the first Xenosaga ended), and humanity is still not in very good shape. The Holy Grail is the prize this time around as you lead a familiar but more mature cast of characters like Shion and KOS-MOS in an attempt to control the original Zohar and finally end the Gnosis threat. You'll be welcomed to Xenosaga II's new intricate turn-based

battle system, which includes double-team attacks, air juggling, and new zone attack and zone break techniques. You can now customize characters with more than 100 different skills and abilities, too.

How the story is told, however, will be this sequel's centerpiece. Shown once again through hours of striking cinematic cut-scenes, this elaborate tale also includes life themes from Nietzsche's book *Beyond Good and Evil*, which offers additional depth to the already compelling tale of humanity.

■ PS2 ■ Developed by Monolith ■ Published by Namco
 ■ Target release date: February



The Class of 2005

The role-playing world doesn't revolve exclusively around Square Enix—only a fool would write off these hot upcoming RPGs.

Fire Emblem

Another mammoth Japanese series that may finally see success in the States, Fire Emblem returns to home consoles after an extended stay on the GBA. The game brings lush new 3D visuals and a grid-based strategic fighting system



that is best compared to Rock/Paper/Scissors, only with axes/lances/swords. Nintendo is also promising that players will get attached to individual characters, so it won't pay to send them on reckless suicide missions.

■ GameCube ■ Developed by Intelligent Systems
 ■ Published by Nintendo
 ■ Target release date: February (Japan)

Digital Devil Saga: Avatar Tuner



Atlus is promising a darker and grittier RPG experience with Digital Devil Saga: Avatar Tuner. The story is set in a post-apocalyptic urban setting called Junkyard, where warring factions battle for the right to relocate to trouble-free Nirvana. Problems begin when an arcane artifact crash-lands, triggering a kind of demonic insanity in nearby gangs. Gameplay-wise, Avatar Tuner features traditional turn-based combat but

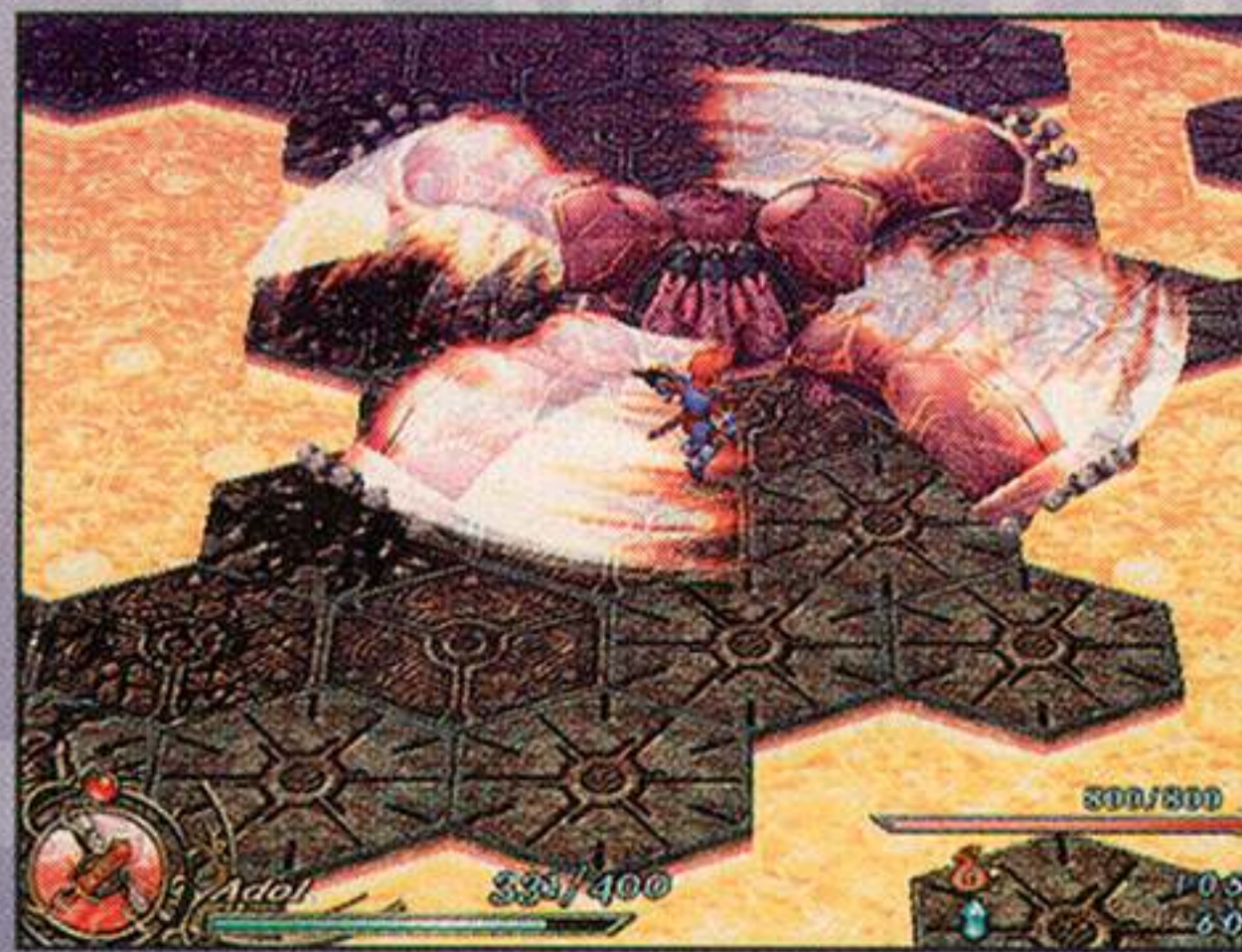
with a Mantra skill system (similar to FFX-2's Sphere system) that gives players the ability to customize their inner demons. Sounds sweet!

■ PS2 ■ Developed and published by Atlus
 ■ Target release date: February

Ys: The Ark of Napishtim

The Japanese already love this long-running action/RPG series, and with Ys: The Ark of Napishtim, Konami's betting that American RPG fans will, too. In combat, players can link combos together using three elemental swords; the swords will, in turn, absorb experience points that can be cashed in for bigger, badder attacks. Konami is busy polishing the gorgeous 3D environments and adding a grander soundtrack in preparation for the game's release.

■ PS2, PSP ■ Developed by Falcom
 ■ Published by Konami ■ Target release date: February



GAMEPRO BEST OF 2004

EDITORS' CHOICE

Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater

By Konami



The staff was very divided in this category, but Metal Gear Solid 3's engaging story, unique play facets, and epic narrative carried the game to top choice. Set during the Cold War, MGS3 brilliantly uses its jungle setting in concert with a new camouflage scheme and a survival theme. The story is much more coherent than Sons of Liberty's (let's just forget that ever happened), and new play techniques, such as close-quarters combat, are excellent additions to the game's stealth-is-best philosophy. The game occasionally gets carried away with its own soapbox speeches, but these are thankfully kept to a minimum.

Runner-Up: **Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas** PS2

Adventure

The editors of *GamePro* magazine voted on their choices for the top games of the year in a variety of genres—from Adventure to Sports. Here are the results.

By The GamePros

Action

Spider-Man 2

By Activision

PS2, Xbox, GameCube



Forget Catwoman and The Incredibles: Spider-Man 2 is one of the rare instances where the game is on par with the movie upon which it's based. But Spidey 2 differs from its predecessor in several key ways—the most important of which is the open-ended, free-roaming city similar to those in the Grand Theft Auto series (no loading times, no boundaries). The result is the best Spidey game yet. From the rich combat system to the simple, inexhaustible joys of swinging through the city, Spider-Man 2 delivers the experience web-slinger fans have been waiting for.

Runner-Up: **Viewtiful Joe 2** PS2, GameCube

Brain/Reflex

Pikmin 2

By Nintendo

GameCube



The original Pikmin was an oddity. As an astronaut who lands on a mysterious planet, you control a horde of thinking, blinking, color-coded carrots called Pikmin. As if the first game wasn't engaging enough, this sequel makes the dungeons more varied (the subterranean mazes are a huge plus) and adds two-player modes that pit two Pikmin armies against each other. At times, Pikmin 2 may be more of an expansion pack than a sequel, but it's funny, fun, brilliant, and more daringly weird than what comes out of 95 percent of most major game studios. It's two of a kind.



Runner-Up: **Dance Dance Revolution Extreme** PS2

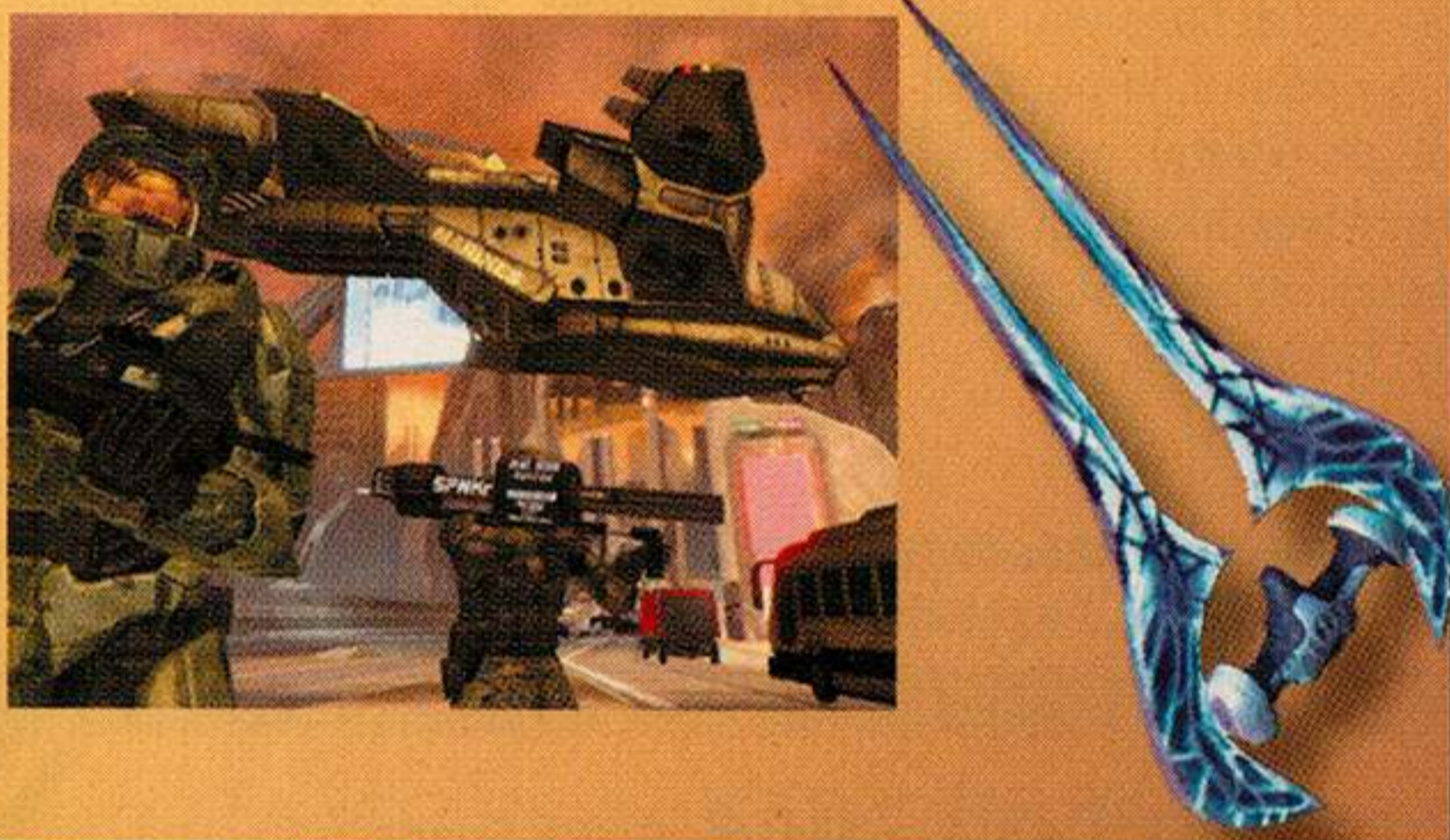
★ Combat/Shooting ★

Halo 2 By Microsoft

Xbox



Absolutely no surprise here: Halo 2 delivered everything it promised after three years in the making. The game delivers an engrossing one-player experience—with a host of very cool twists—complete with a ton of new weapons and upgraded vehicles. Throw in very effective Dolby 5.1 surround sound and stunning visuals, and you have a truly immersive game. Xbox Live support has finally been implemented, so up to 16 warriors can battle it out via deathmatch, capture the flag, and other modes that are just as fun as, say, Counter-Strike. Halo 2 is also available in a two-disc Collector's Edition.



Runners-Up: **Metroid Prime 2: Echoes** GameCube and **Full Spectrum Warrior** Xbox

Metroid: Zero Mission By Nintendo

GBA

★ Handheld ★



Metroid: Zero Mission brilliantly retells the story of bounty hunter Samus Aran's first visit to planet Zebes and her initial encounter with the Metroids. All the usual classic Metroid gameplay is here: tons of secret areas to find with a control scheme and feel that still have yet to be accurately cloned. It's compelling and fun—a carefully crafted example of what cleverly placed enemies, intelligently placed floating blocks, and a whole mess of secrets can get you. Rarely does a game—especially a GBA one—keep the player so constantly surprised. Bring on more, more, more.

Runner-Up: **The Legend of Zelda: Four Swords Adventure** GBA

★ Fighting ★

Mortal Kombat: Deception By Midway

PS2, Xbox



The arcade game your parents warned you about resurfaced on next-gen consoles two years ago as *Deadly Alliance*, which featured a brand-new 3D play and graphics engine. *Deception* builds on the success of that game but adds a host of new, diverse play modes, including puzzle and chess games, along with an RPGish *Konquest* mode that follows a teenager contestant through adulthood in the MK tournament. The fighting is more intense this time as each character now has two fatalities and a suicide move, and the multitiered combat arenas are filled with ring-out hazards, such as spikes and hydraulic presses.

Runners-Up: **Dead or Alive Ultimate** Xbox and **Street Fighter Anniversary Collection** PS2, Xbox

Half-Life 2 By Vivendi Universal Games

PC



Half-Life 2 was another eagerly awaited sequel that met expectations. This FPS puts you in the shoes of Gordon Freeman, science geek turned savior, who's more than happy to ditch the lab coat and lodge a crowbar (among other weapons) into whatever deserves it. Among all the weapons at your disposal is the gravity gun, which is able to lift and launch whatever you like, turning debris into lethal weapons and the shooter status quo upside down...and that's just the beginning. Everything about Half-Life 2 is remarkable—from the sounds to the graphics to the level design.



Runner-Up: **Doom 3**

CONTINUED ►

GAMEPRO
BEST OF 2004
 EDITORS' CHOICE

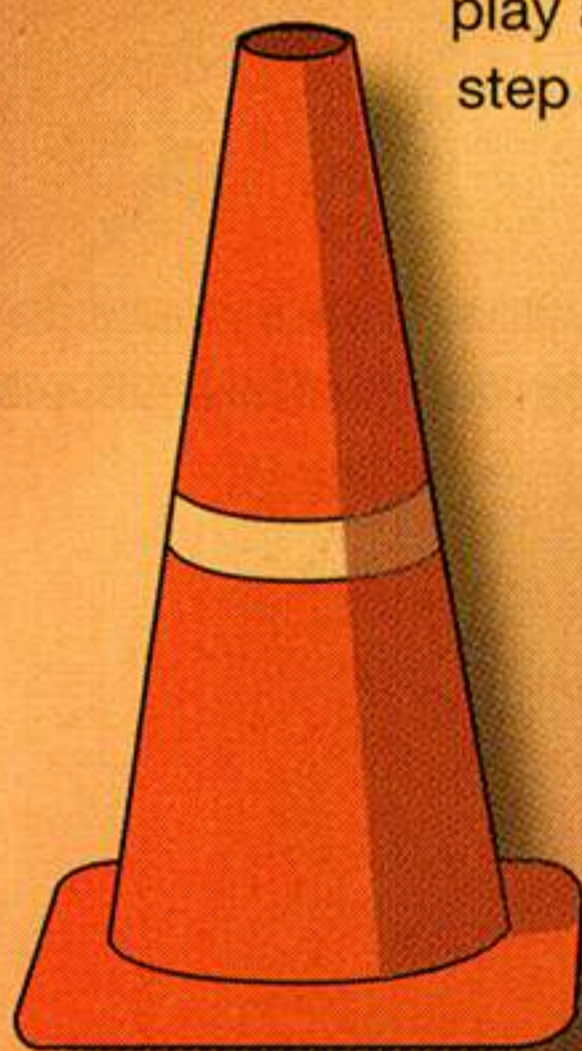
Burnout 3: Takedown By EA Games

PS2, Xbox

★ **Racing** ★



For adrenaline-based thrills, no other racing game captures the pure rush of high-speed racing the way Burnout 3 does. Burnout 2 was one of the sleeper hits of its year, but Takedown easily leaves it in the dust with a host of clever play modes, blazing graphics, and some of the most jarring car crashes in recent memory. One of the game's biggest strengths is Crash mode, where you inflict as much monetary damage as possible by starting chain-reaction pileups. If you want an intense, no-frills, arcade-racing game that's a cinch to pick up and play and keeps you hooked every step of the way, Burnout 3 is it.



Runner-Up: **Need for Speed Underground 2** PS2, Xbox, GameCube

★ **Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal** By Sony



★ **Platform** ★



Up Your Arsenal is bigger and badder than the previous two Ratchet & Clank installments in many ways: The game covers mucho territory across 18 worlds and features 29 single-player missions. The online game is new territory for R&C, and up to eight players can compete at a time in 10 maps and three types of games—deathmatch, capture the flag, and siege (you try to overrun an opponent's fortress). Overall, Up Your Arsenal is a glorious blastfest that asks you only to loosen up your thumbs, put your mind in park, and have a good time. Based on the editors' votes, they apparently did.

Runner-Up: **Jak 3** PS2

Fable By Microsoft

Xbox

★ **Role-Playing** ★



With no real Final Fantasy game to take the crown this year, the editors were at a loss...until Fable appeared. Fable's epic narrative and micromanaging play aspects bring it above the traditional RPG: You can write your own adventure depending upon how you interact with others. As time passes, your character ages, scars, marries, and buys a home. Your physical characteristics also change in accordance with your alignment and the good or bad actions you may make during the game. Add in a robust combat system, visual masterworks, and magical orchestrations, and you have an RPG for the ages.

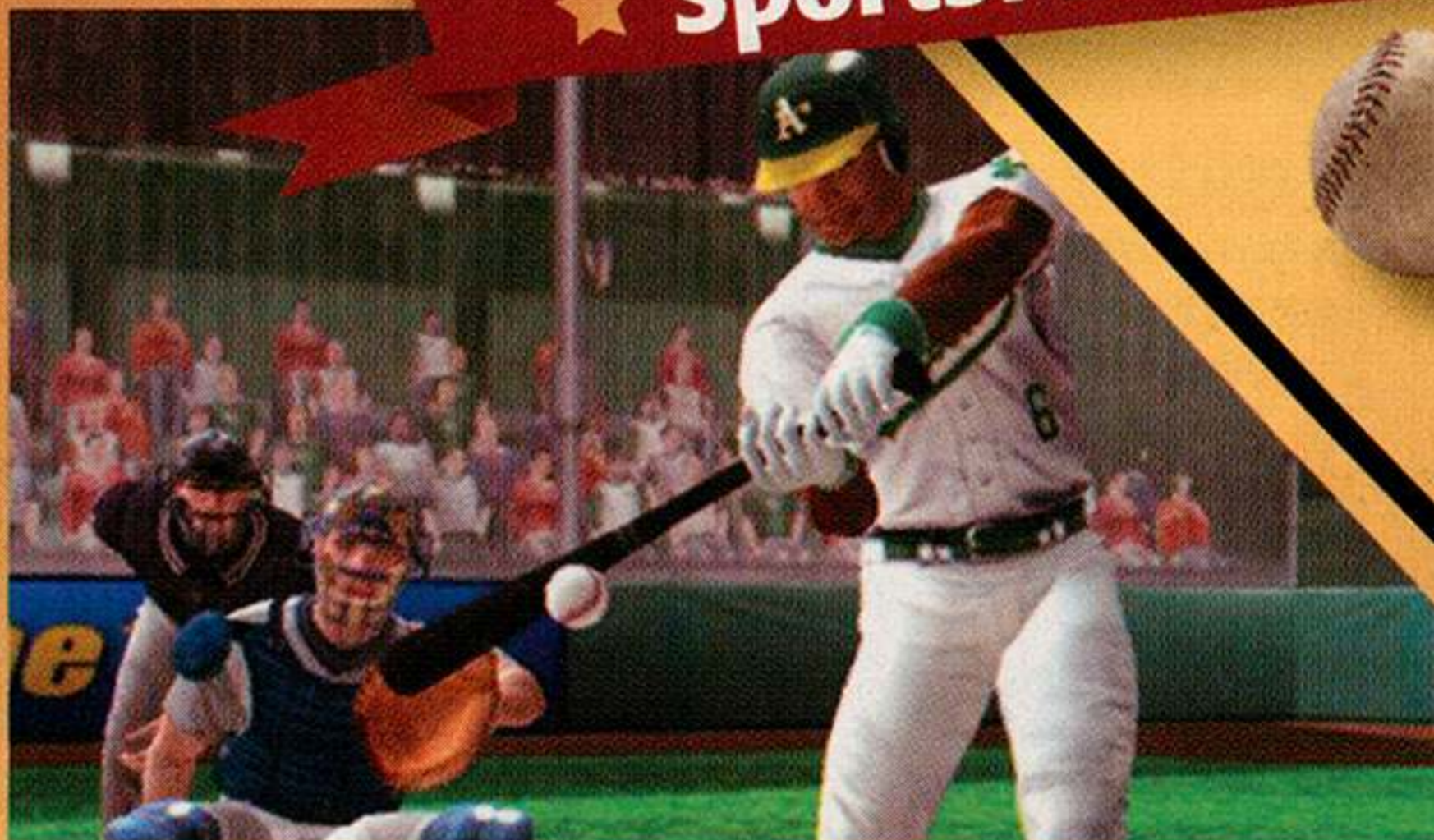


Runner-Up: **X-Men Legends** PS2, Xbox, GameCube

MVP Baseball 2004 By EA Sports

PS2, Xbox, GameCube

★ **Sports: Baseball** ★



MVP Baseball 2004 makes its case on the field. Topnotch controls place you in command of all defensive plays whether you're on the mound or out in center field. The pitching controls are the best in video-game baseball, but they make you the master of your fate by enabling you to either throw your best stuff or sail one wide of the strike zone. Additionally, you can make every defensive maneuver with either your legs or arms, including jumping up high or diving down low for the ball and charging up to make a throw. With its fine performance during the season, MVP Baseball certainly turned out to be the MVP for 2004.

Runner-Up: **ESPN Major League Baseball 2K4** PS2, Xbox

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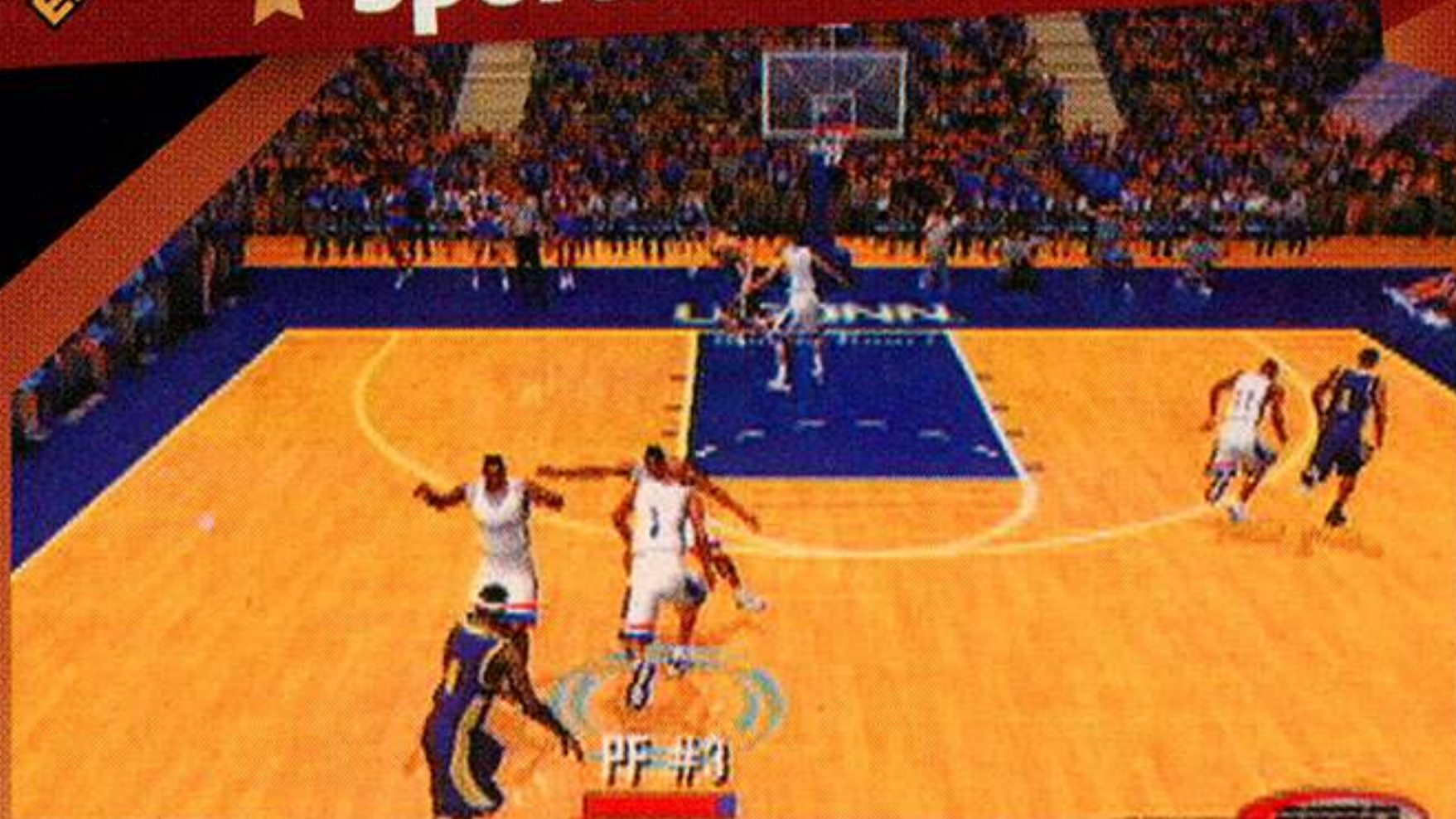


ESPN College Hoops 2K5

By Sega/Global Star

PS2, Xbox

Sports: Basketball



Whether you want to build your program from the ground up or actually bring the ball up the court in a big game, College Hoops 2K5 does a fantastic job of re-creating the atmosphere of college basketball. On-the-money individual-player controls enable you to excel on offense and defense both individually and as a team. The game's easy-to-use Legacy mode enables you to call the shots by hiring assistant coaches, scouting and recruiting high school talent, and preparing strategy for the next game. Unlike in pro basketball games, college ball is all about teamwork and coaching. ESPN College Hoops 2K5 puts it all together in fine championship form.

Runner-Up: **NBA Live 2005** PS2, Xbox, GameCube

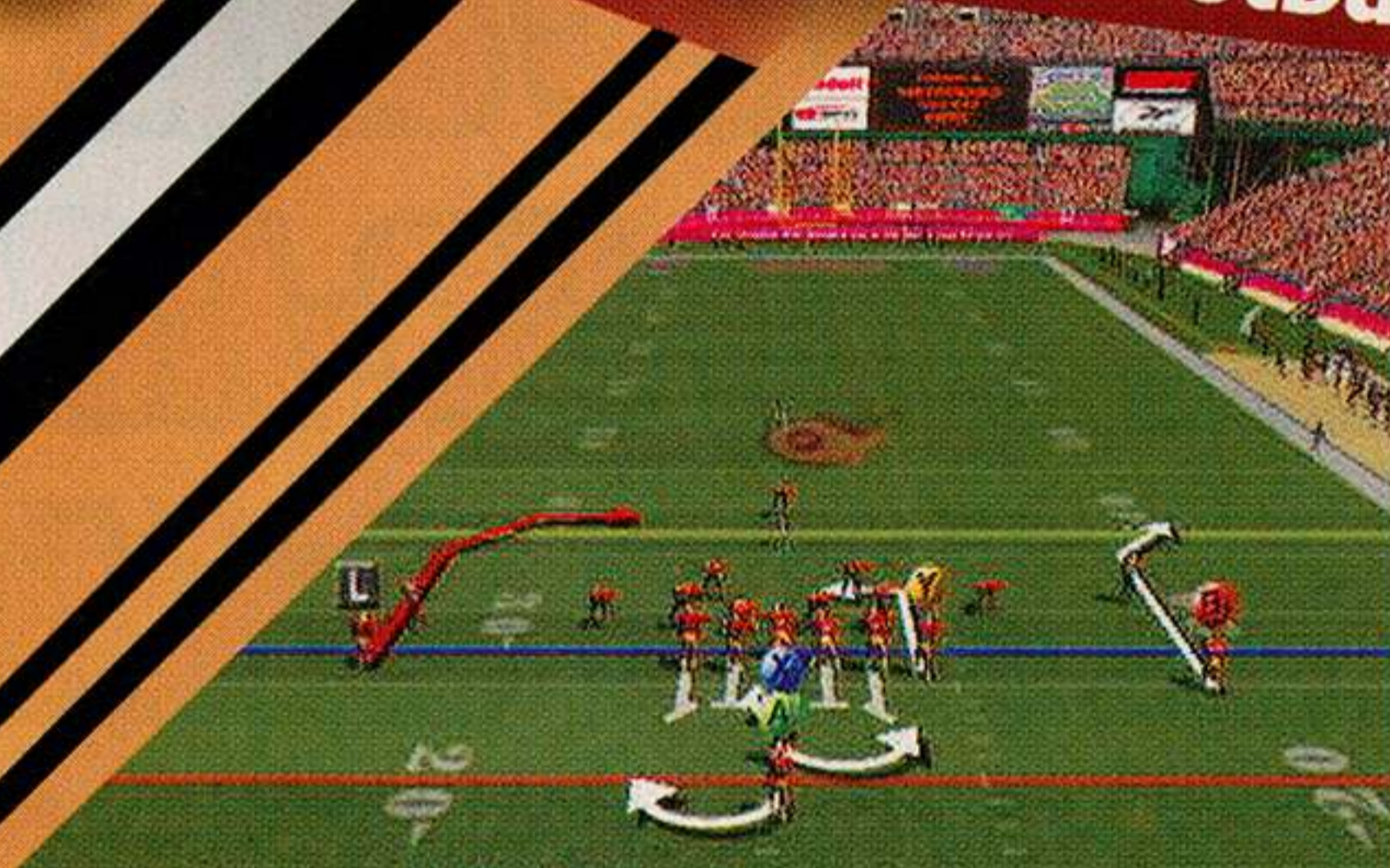
ESPN NFL 2K5

By Sega/Global Star

PS2, Xbox



Sports: Football



ESPN NFL 2K5 does an excellent job of placing the Xs and Os at your fingertips. It offers deep playbooks for offense and defense, and a smooth, intuitive play-calling interface. But 2K5 also gives you great control over your ballcarriers on the field. You can put together moves like shoulder charges and speed bursts, which make you feel like you affect the outcome of the game with that one great individual effort. There's plenty of fun stuff, too, including first-person football, celebrity challenge games, and just kicking back at your crib. 2K5 puts together a complete NFL football package and plays like a pro, too.

Runner-Up: **Madden NFL 2005** PS2, Xbox, GameCube

Hot Shots Golf Fore!

By Sony

PS2

Sports: Other



In real life, whacking a little, white ball into a tiny hole a couple hundred yards away may be the most challenging sport ever, but as a video game, it just sounds uninspiring. But since the introduction of the Hot Shots Golf series, virtual golf has been stroking with excitement. In all seriousness, the Hot Shots games have never been about serious golfing. Rather, the wackiness of its characters, its cartoony look, and its uncomplicated controls bring out the fun of trying to make par. Fore also continues the series' legacy of wonderful pick-up-and-play mechanics, which gives the game a wider accessibility than its competitors. On the green, Hot Shots Golf Fore putts with natural grace.

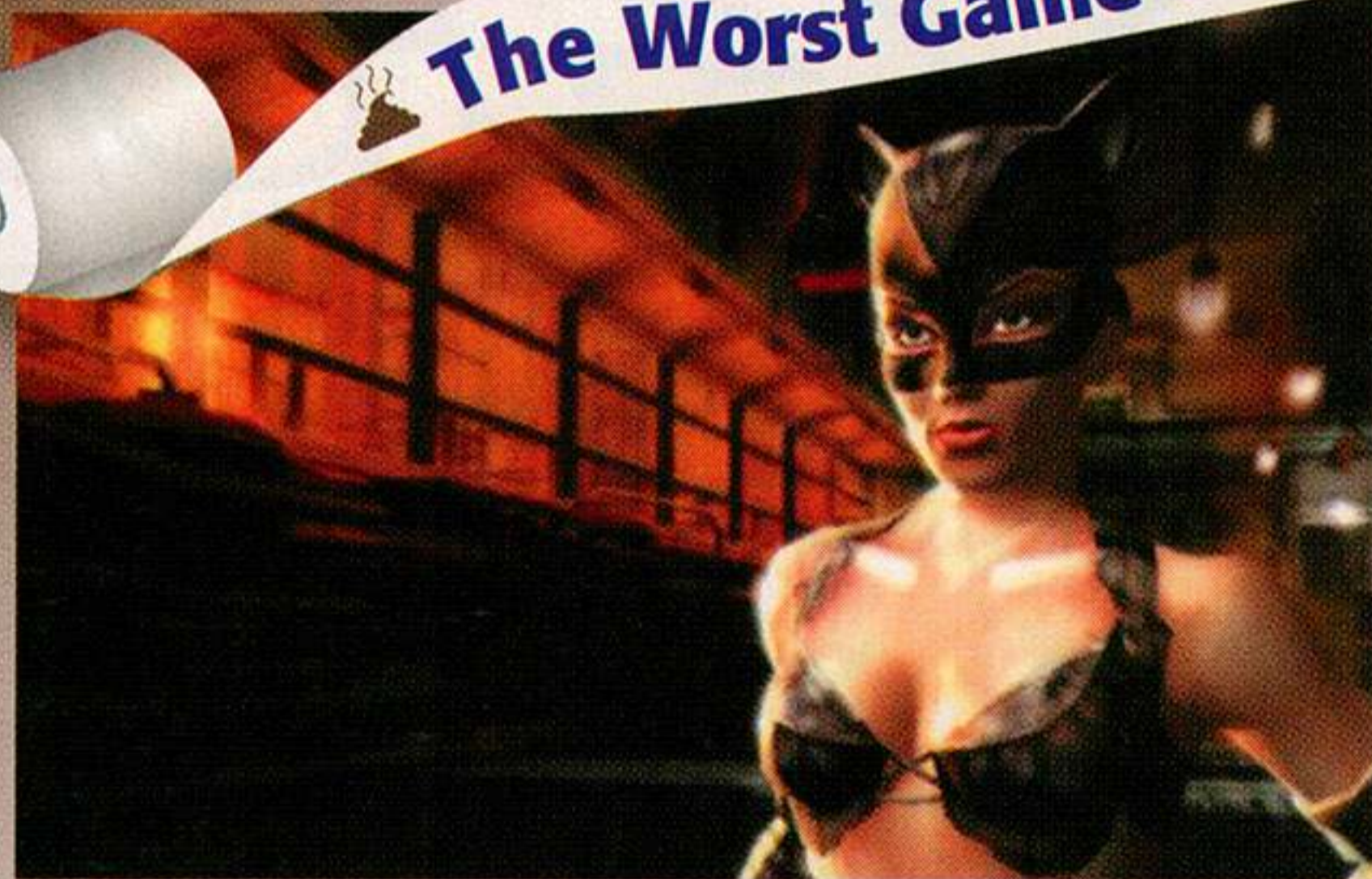
Runner-Up: **Tony Hawk's Underground 2** PS2, Xbox

Catwoman

By EA Games

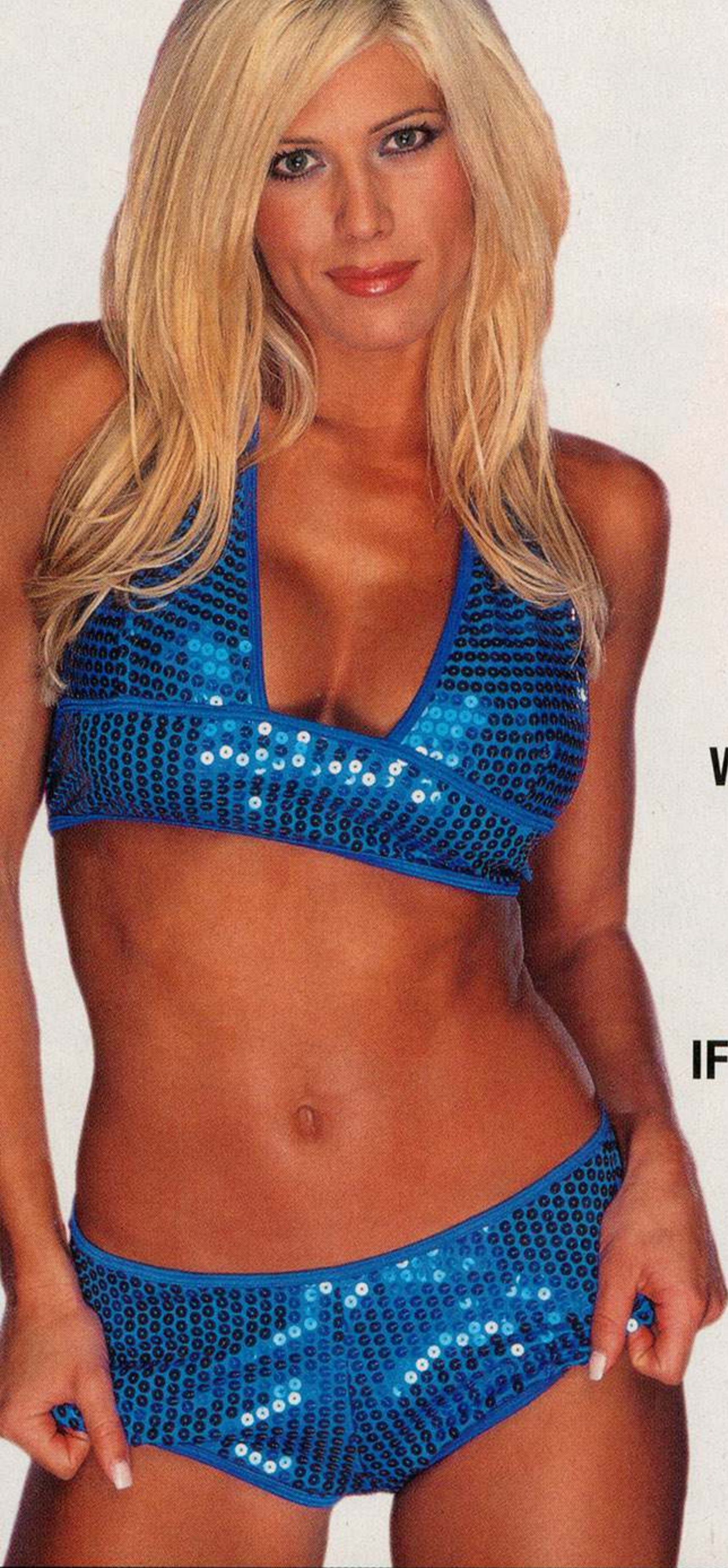
PS2, Xbox, GameCube

The Worst Game of 2004

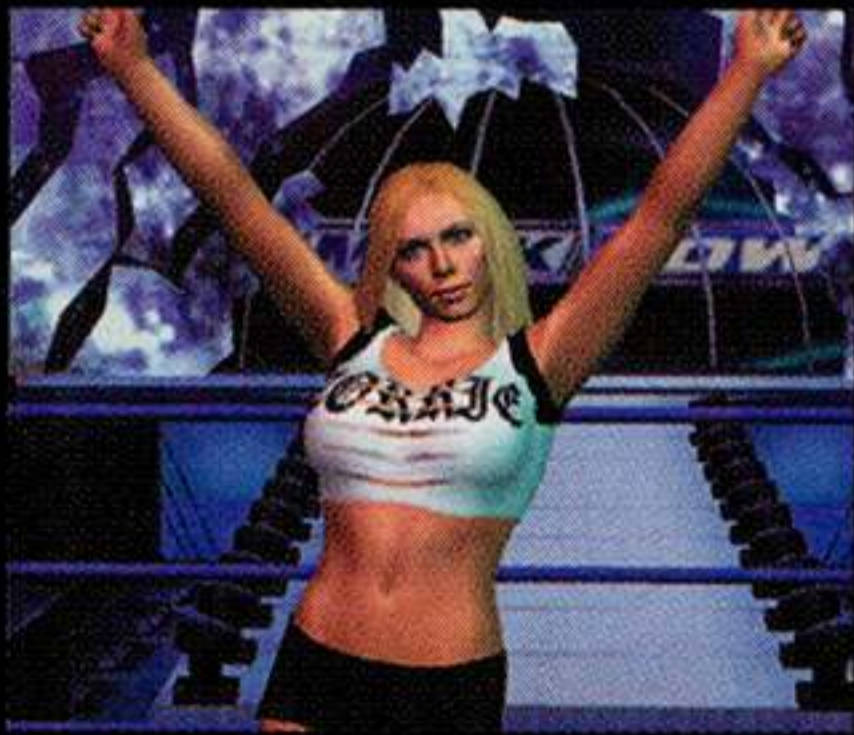


The previous games represent the best the industry had to offer and gave us hours of fun, but we couldn't let 2004 go by without voting on the worst the industry had to offer. That's where Catwoman comes in. Based on the flop movie, Catwoman committed every gaming sin known to man: awful camera angles, a lame control scheme, incoherent level designs and architecture, and an incomprehensible "battle system." Plus, it isn't any fun. The only thing more perplexing than this game originating from EA is that it hit for all major consoles.

Runner-Up: **Seven Samurai 20XX** PS2



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Blood
Language
Sexual Themes
Violence



PlayStation 2



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GAMEPRO 2004 Readers' Choice

We've made our cases—now make yours. Go to gamepro.com/rca and tell us your favorite games of the year for fun and to win prizes.

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Best Action Game

- James Bond 007: Everything or Nothing **PS2, Xbox, GameCube**
- Maximo vs. Army of Zin **PS2**
- Prince of Persia: Warrior Within **PS2**
- Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy **Xbox**
- Red Dead Revolver **PS2, Xbox**
- Spider-Man 2 **PS2, Xbox, GameCube**
- Viewtiful Joe 2 **PS2, GameCube**

Best Fighting Game

- Dead or Alive Ultimate **Xbox**
- Def Jam: Fight For NY **PS2, Xbox**
- Dragon Ball Z: Budokai 3 **PS2**
- Guilty Gear Isuka **PS2**
- Mortal Kombat: Deception **PS2, Xbox**
- Onimusha Blade Warriors **PS2**
- Rumble Roses **PS2**
- Showdown: Legends of Wrestling **PS2, Xbox**
- Street Fighter Anniversary Collection **PS2, Xbox**
- WWE Day of Reckoning **GameCube**

Best Adventure Game

- Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas **PS2**
- Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater **PS2**
- Ninja Gaiden **Xbox**
- Onimusha 3: Demon Siege **PS2**
- Silent Hill 4: The Room **PS2, Xbox**
- The Suffering **PS2, Xbox**
- Thief: Deadly Shadows **Xbox**
- Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell Pandora Tomorrow **PS2, Xbox, GameCube**

Best Handheld Game

- Astro Boy: Omega Factor **GBA**
- Boktai 2: Solar Boy Django **GBA**
- F-Zero: GP Legend **GBA**
- Hamtaro: Ham-Ham Games **GBA**
- The Legend of Zelda: Four Swords Adventure **GBA**
- Mario Golf: Advance Tour **GBA**
- Mario Pinball Land **GBA**
- Mario vs. Donkey Kong **GBA**
- Metal Slug 3 **GBA**
- Metroid: Zero Mission **GBA**
- Pokémon FireRed/LeafGreen **GBA**

Best Brain/Reflex Game

- Bomberman Jetters **GameCube**
- Dance Dance Revolution Extreme **PS2**
- EyeToy: Groove **PS2**
- Karaoke Revolution Volume 3 **PS2**
- Pikmin 2 **GameCube**
- Puyo Pop Fever **GameCube**
- The Urbz: Sims in the City **PS2, Xbox, GameCube**

Best PC Game

- Armies of Exigo
- Battlefield Vietnam
- Call of Duty: United Offensive
- City of Heroes
- Doom 3
- Far Cry
- Half-Life 2
- Joint Operations: Typhoon Rising
- The Sims 2
- Unreal Tournament 2004
- Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War

Best Combat/Shooting Game

- Ace Combat 5: The Unsung War **PS2**
- Dead Man's Hand **Xbox**
- Full Spectrum Warrior **Xbox**
- Gadius V **PS2**
- Halo 2 **Xbox**
- Killzone **PS2**
- Metroid Prime 2: Echoes **GameCube**
- Neo Contra **PS2**
- R-Type Final **PS2**
- Silent Scope Complete **Xbox**
- Star Wars Battlefront **PS2, Xbox**
- Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six 3: Black Arrow **Xbox**

Best Platform Game

- Blinx 2: Masters of Time & Space **Xbox**
- Jak 3 **PS2**
- Pitfall: The Lost Expedition **PS2, Xbox, GameCube**
- Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal **PS2**
- Sly 2: Band of Thieves **PS2**

Best Racing Game

- Burnout 3: Takedown **PS2, Xbox**
- Colin McRae Rally 2005 **Xbox**
- NASCAR 2005: Chase for the Cup **PS2, Xbox, GameCube**
- Need for Speed Underground 2 **PS2, Xbox, GameCube**
- Test Drive: Eve of Destruction **PS2**

Best Role-Playing Game

- The Bard's Tale **PS2**
- Champions of Norrath **PS2**
- EverQuest Online Adventures: Frontiers **PS2**
- Fable **Xbox**
- Final Fantasy XI **PS2**
- Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles **GameCube**
- Front Mission 4 **PS2**
- Star Ocean: Till the End of Time **PS2**
- Sudeki **Xbox**
- Tales of Symphonia **GameCube**
- X-Men Legends **PS2, Xbox, GameCube**

Best Sports Game: Baseball

- All-Star Baseball 2005 **Xbox**
- ESPN Major League Baseball 2K4 **PS2, Xbox**
- MLB 2005 **PS2**
- MVP Baseball 2004 **PS2, Xbox, GameCube**

Best Sports Game: Basketball

- ESPN College Hoops 2K5 **PS2, Xbox**
- ESPN NBA 2K5 **PS2, Xbox**
- NBA Ballers **PS2, Xbox**
- NBA Live 2005 **PS2, Xbox, GameCube**
- NCAA March Madness 2005 **PS2, Xbox**

Best Sports Game: Football

- ESPN NFL 2K5 **PS2, Xbox**
- Madden NFL 2005 **PS2, Xbox, GameCube**
- NCAA Football 2005 **PS2, Xbox, GameCube**
- NFL Street **PS2, Xbox, GameCube**

Best Sports Game: Other

- ESPN NHL 2K5 **PS2, Xbox**
- FIFA 2005 **PS2, Xbox**
- Fight Night 2004 **PS2, Xbox**
- Hot Shots Golf Fore! **PS2**
- Mario Power Tennis **GameCube**
- NHL 2005 **PS2, Xbox**
- Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2005 **PS2, Xbox**
- Tony Hawk's Underground 2 **PS2, Xbox**
- World Soccer Winning Eleven 7 International **PS2**

Game of the Year

Across all platforms, throughout the whole year of 2004, which game was the absolute best?

- Doom 3 **PC**
- ESPN NFL 2K5 **PS2, Xbox**
- Fable **Xbox**
- Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas **PS2**
- Half-Life 2 **PC**
- Halo 2 **Xbox**
- Madden NFL 2005 **PS2, Xbox, GameCube**
- Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater **PS2**
- Metroid Prime 2: Echoes **PS2**
- Mortal Kombat: Deception **PS2, Xbox**
- Pokémon FireRed/LeafGreen **GBA**
- Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal **PS2**
- The Sims 2 **PC**
- Spider-Man 2 **PS2, Xbox, GameCube**

The Polling Booth

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Only one ballot per person will be accepted. We must have your completed ballot and your full name, address, and telephone number so we may reach you for notification of your prize. Please vote for only one game in each category, or your ballot will be disqualified!

Results will appear in the May 2005 issue. All winners will be selected at random from completed ballots received by the deadline through the mail or online.

No purchase necessary. Void where prohibited. Contest ends **February 13, 2005**. See page 94 for *GamePro's* Readers' Choice 2004 Official Rules.



HALO 2

GOT THE ENERGY SWORD BLUES? TAKEN ONE TOO MANY POINT-BLANK SHOTGUN BLASTS ON XBOX LIVE? THEN BELLY UP TO THE BAR, SOLDIER, AND ROCK ON WITH THESE BITCHIN' HALO 2 MULTIPLAYER STRATEGIES.

BY VICIOUS SID



DOUBLE YOUR PLEASURE

Plasma Pistol and SMG



Simply devastating. When fully charged, the Plasma Pistol's energy blast will completely strip your opponent's shields. Better yet, it will home in on enemy positions, albeit slowly. Once the brunt of the Plasma damage is dealt, a quick spray from the SMG will instantly flatten your foe. This combo works best with the SMG gripped in your dominant hand (usually right) and the Plasma Pistol in your weaker hand (usually left).

SMG and Magnum

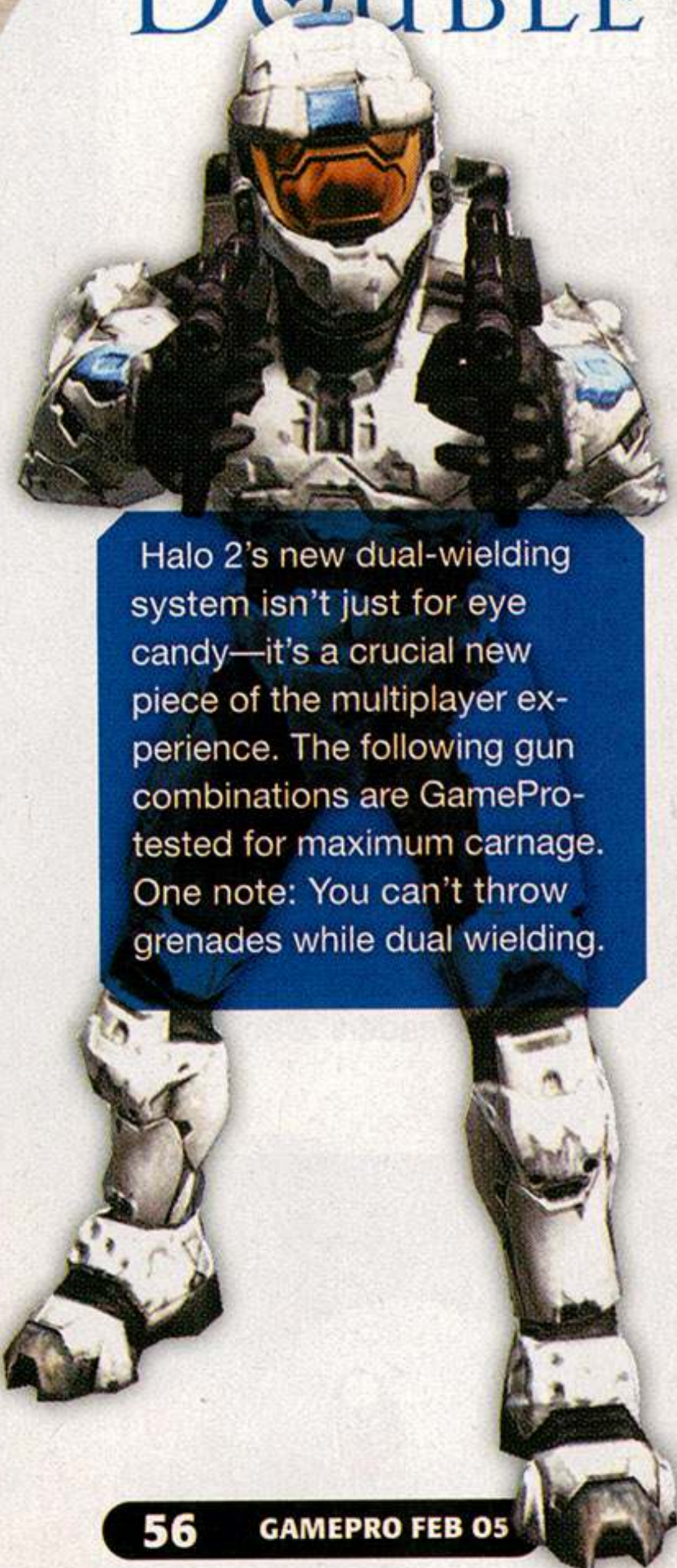


Compared to the first Halo's Pistol, the Magnum inflicts less damage and lacks the zoom scope. Luckily, it still rocks for dealing out high-damage head shots. The strategy here differs from that of the Plasma Pistol/SMG combo. You'll have better luck if you hold the Magnum in your dominant hand (right) and the SMG in the weaker hand (left). This will help you score more hits with the super-accurate Magnum as accuracy isn't crucial with the SMG.

Dual Needlers

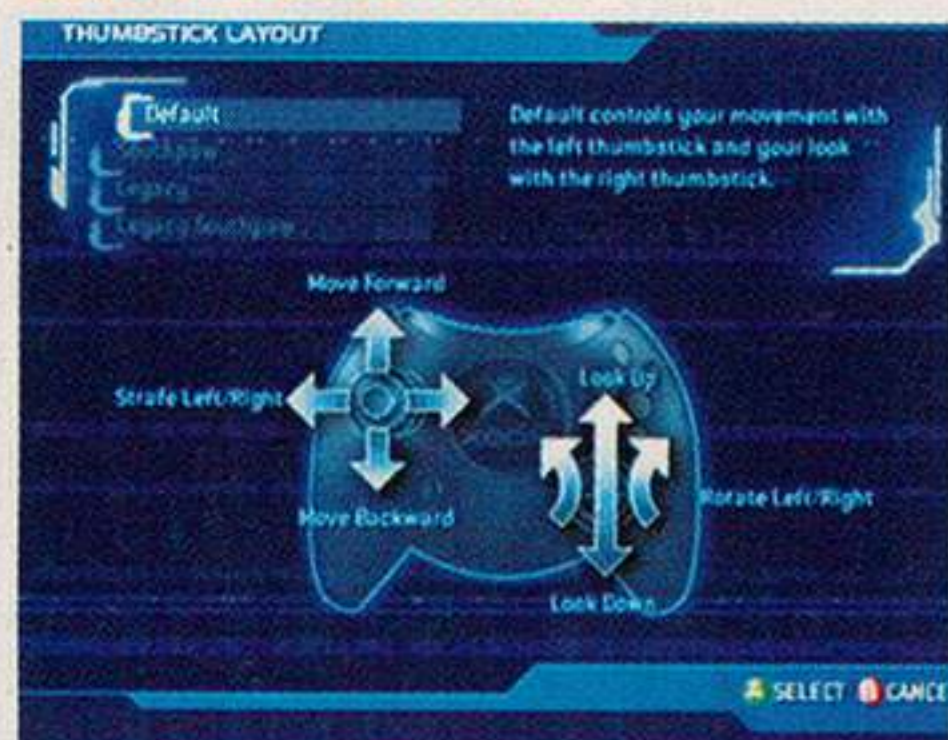


Though feeble on its own, Needlers are definitely a force to be reckoned with when they work together. Their strength lies in the double-damage nature of the needle projectiles; enemies receive damage when the needle impacts, then take additional damage when it explodes. The trick is to shoot slightly ahead of moving opponents, giving the slow-moving, heat-seeking needles more time to plunge deep into soft, exposed flesh. Booyah!



Halo 2's new dual-wielding system isn't just for eye candy—it's a crucial new piece of the multiplayer experience. The following gun combinations are GamePro-tested for maximum carnage. One note: You can't throw grenades while dual wielding.

Control Freak



Take the time to customize your control scheme as many players find that switching up the placement of hard-to-reach functions (like melee attacks or grenade switching) makes combat easier. Feel free to play around with analog stick sensitivity, though the default setting is perfect for most players. Also, experiment with inverting your analog stick movements.

Know Thy Circle-Strafe



Two words: absolutely critical. Though many console FPS fans may be unfamiliar with this tactic, circle strafing is well known to many hardcore PC shooter fans. The idea is to move around your target while shooting, which makes you a tough-to-hit moving target while keeping him pinned in the center of your destructive perimeter. Does it work? Yes—yes, it does.

Jumping the Gun



Jumping can help you dodge enemy fire, but it also makes you an easy target. Halo 2's huge, floaty space jumps often leave you in a compromising mid-air position. Because it's easy for enemy snipers to predict your arc and cap you at the apex, it's best to jump as infrequently as possible. If you feel you must jump while entangled in a heated brawl, try jumping over an opponent's head; it will confuse him and buy you a few more precious seconds.

fact you can exploit with crouch walking. When crouch walking, you can often creep past foes then spear them with the Energy Sword. Crouch jumping is another useful tactic; when you crouch at the apex of your jump, it gives you a slight boost. Many of the multiplayer Halo 2 levels feature small nooks and secret sniping perches, all inaccessible without crouch jumping.

Halo: Reloaded



Here's another area where console players lag behind the hardcore PC veterans. Keeping your weapon fully loaded should be a constant consideration. Does it make much sense to walk around with just two bullets loaded? Of course not, so be aware of your weapon's ammo level, and if you see a moment to reload, take it, even if you're only adding a few extra shots. You might not get another chance later.

The Art of Concealment



Crouching makes you a smaller target, but it also removes you from enemy motion sensors, a

CONTINUED ►

WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

What's work without a few thousand kills? The *GamePro* editors took a few minutes away from the screaming and bloodshed to share their favorite Halo 2 multiplayer secrets.

The Enforcer

There are a couple of tactics I like to use when heading into a room full of gung-ho shooters. One is to double up my arsenal and wield two weapons with my personal preferences being the Needler and the standard-issue SMG. As you quickly learn, however, brandishing dual guns makes it impossible to use grenades, which can be a huge drawback. When I'm feeling a bit frisky, I like to get up-close and personal with the Shotgun: it's an impressively effective weapon that will usually drop an opponent with a single blast.



Fart of War

The Plasma Pistol/SMG is perhaps the most lethal dual-wield combo, but don't overlook the Magnum/SMG because it boasts much greater accuracy and range. When playing in team-based games, it's important for teammates to move in packs. If you run into a Magnum/SMG user alone, you're as good as dead. But if you're with three teammates sporting one lowly SMG apiece, you can easily defeat a single skilled enemy. Sniping from perches only accessible by Banshee is another great way to rack up kills—Ascension and Waterworks have such spots with solid cover from which a sharpshooter should score a kill for every round in his magazine.



DJ Dinobot

Though the Energy Sword is carving out quite a name for itself as the arme du jour, I'd like to call attention to one of Halo 2's unsung heroes: the Covenant Carbine. In many ways it feels similar to the old-school Pistol. Though the Magnum does a bit more damage up close, the Carbine has better range (plus a scope), no recoil, and a deeper clip. It won't overheat at critical moments like the other Covenant weapons. Plus, it's advantageous to have a hand free for grenades. For sheer carnage, go with the Dinobot Special: Use the Carbine to peck at your enemies; if a fool gets close, roll a grenade, switch to the Energy Sword, and swoop on the beotch.



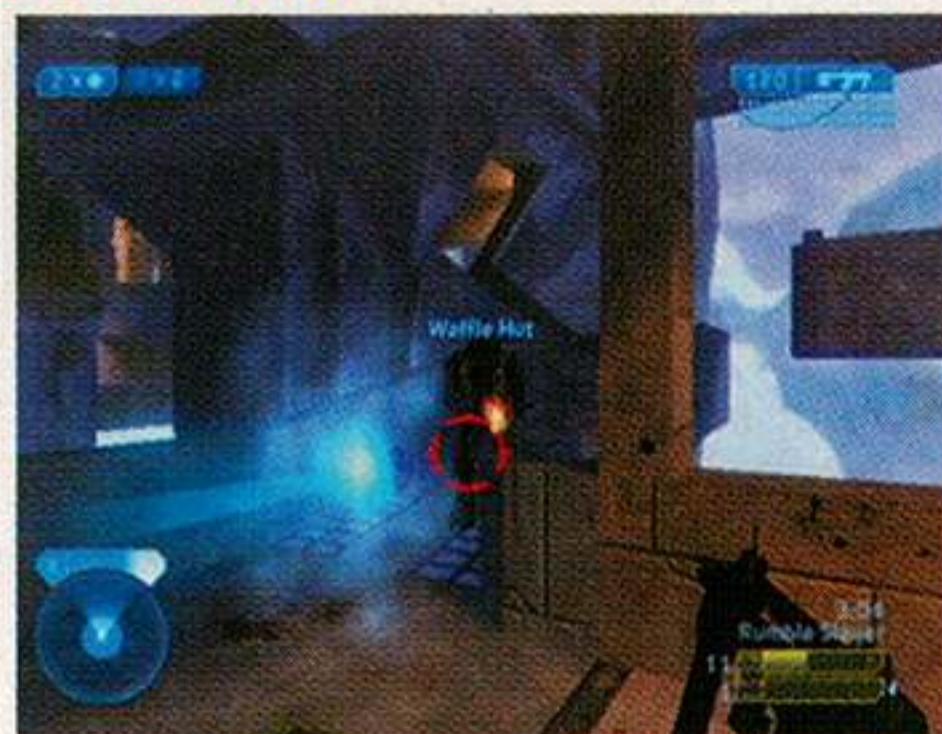
Dr. Zombie

First and foremost: Don't stand still! Linger too long, especially in open spaces, makes you a perfect target for any snipers. Speaking of snipers, low overhangs and corridors are the best way to stay out of the enemy scope. If you're caught in cross-fire, kick into reverse and blast away to take out anyone who may pursue you. Try jumping as you reverse, too; it may look silly, but it makes you an even more difficult target. Always keep an escape route in mind, and don't forget to duck!



CONTINUED ►

Da Bomb



Grenades come in two flavors: Fragmentation and Plasma. Though easy to find, Fragmentation grenades suffer a bit in the damage department; Plasma grenades, on the other hand, inflict crippling damage. Better yet, Plasma grenades can stick to enemies and vehicles for an easy one-hit kill. But unlike the stealthier Fragmentation grenades, glowing Plasma grenades are impossible to miss.

Live by the Sword...



Frankly, the Energy Sword is overpowered for most multiplayer matches. What other weapon in Halo 2 can inflict such tremendous damage with so little effort? The secret is to lock on (target an enemy and wait for the reticle to turn red) before attacking. Done properly, the Master Chief will launch at the target and impale him. This attack will kill in one hit and is tough to defend against.

...Die by the Sword



Win by exploiting your biggest asset—brains. No-talent Energy Sword hacks love to wait in corners (making them invisible to motion sensors) then spear opponents as they walk by. Cheap! Try waiting patiently in a corner of your own; the Sword-wielder is sure to get restless and come looking for you, making him Shotgun-fodder. Also try sticking a Plasma Grenade to Sword-wielders as they approach.

Problems with Plasma



It's easy to belittle the Covenant Plasma weapons, particularly the newly nerfed Plasma Rifle. But with the proper approach, these energy weapons can be extremely powerful. One big plus is that you don't have to reload these guns or keep track of ammo, at least not in the traditional sense. But you will have to deal with overheating. The secret is to fire in controlled bursts; if the gun completely overheats, you'll be left temporarily defenseless.

Grand Theft Halo



It's entirely possible to hijack an enemy's Ghosts and Banshees; press and hold X when near an enemy vehicle. Sneaky players will bait you into hijacking their vehicle and then immediately bail out as you board the craft. This opens you up to a devastating counterattack from your intended prey, who can now blast you while you struggle to gain control of the vehicle. This bait-and-switch tactic works especially well with the Wraith and Scorpion tanks.

THE BIG GUNS

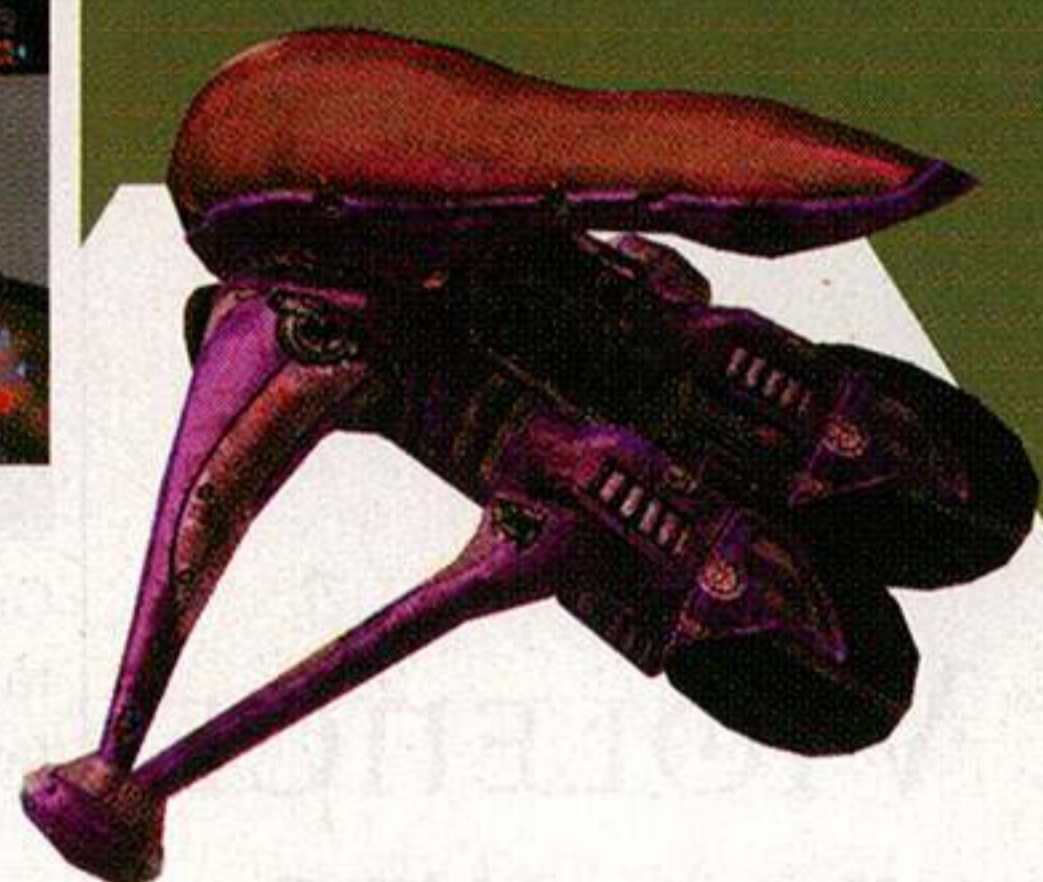


Two guns aren't necessarily better than one. Larger two-handed weapons can inflict massive damage and often sport features like zoom scopes. Best of all, they give you the freedom to throw grenades.

Battle Rifle Spectacular



The Battle Rifle may be an acquired taste, but once you figure out its tactical place, it's an essential weapon. Basically, the Battle Rifle is the love child of the Sniper Rifle and the SMG. Its three-round bursts aren't hugely damaging, but you get 12 bursts per clip. Better yet, it sports potent zooming abilities, which makes it ideal for medium- to long-range fights. It's also perfect for chipping away at enemy vehicles.



Melee Madness

In Slayer games, it's not always best to blindly shoot any enemy you see. If you think your opponent is unaware of your presence, try trailing him until he stops moving and then sneak up and deliver a one-hit-kill melee attack. It's oh-so satisfying!

Rocket to Russia



Halo 2's potent Rocket Launcher returns with a zippier firing rate and a vehicle-seeking mode (press and hold R Trigger). When fighting infantry, aim for their feet and let the splash damage do the work—don't try to hit them dead-on, or you'll just waste precious ammunition.

Shotgun Wedding



Simply put, the Shotgun destroys. What it lacks in range and firing rate, it makes up for with brute force. If you fire from point-blank range, the Shotgun will crush a fully armored opponent instantly. Try to land head shots to inflict extra damage, and be sure to keep it fully loaded at all times!



WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

Strafe Maru

First, let's be totally honest—for the most part, I get served in Halo 2. The only exception is when I drive the Banshee, which is an incredibly awesome vehicle and is nearly unstoppable once you master the evasion tactics. I am also not above leaning over to see if one of my enemies has found the dreaded Rocket Launcher! The only other time I can consistently put kills on the board is if I can find the Energy Sword. The best way to use this weapon is to wait in a room with two exits. This supplies you with a steady stream of victims.



Tokyo Drifter

It's easy to forget to check the radar in the heat of battle, but you do so at your own peril. While opponents can crouch to avoid detection, they usually won't bother to do so during a frenzied match. Psychological warfare can also work to your advantage; you can sometimes confuse opponents by yelling things like, "What are you doing?" when they shoot you. If they fall for your ruse, remember to act cool and hold your fire. But that's just so you can get close enough to land a fatal melee hit!



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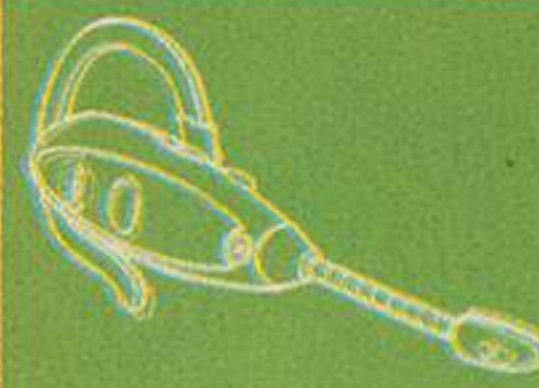
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God Of War

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PS2 Sony recently revealed more of its upcoming moody and atmospheric action/adventure epic, *God of War*, which is still on track for an early 2005 release. In telling the dark tale of the Spartan warrior Kratos, *God of War* is a bloody and ominous story of revenge set against a Greek mythology backdrop.

Clash of the Titans

Kratos's quest begins when he is given a mission to destroy the titular Ares, who is driving Kratos insane. The only thing that can kill this god is Pandora's Box, which is located in a sacred temple that's guarded



by traps, puzzles, and other hazards. Kratos is more than up to the challenges—he has two blades that are fastened to chains on each arm, giving him excellent range. A robust combo system with plenty of air juggles and other multihit techniques similar to those in *Devil May Cry* has been implemented. Kratos can also learn assorted magic spells, such as the one that causes lightning to fry anything standing within a certain range. Another key play technique is “contact sensitive moves.” When fighting a monster, for instance, a button will appear onscreen. If you quickly press that button, Kratos can execute a special move or combo (such as holding a monster's mouth open as shown in the screen shot below).



By the Gods

God of War is a brutal game, and it's definitely geared toward a more mature audience due to its hefty amount of bloodletting, dismemberment, and other gory acts. The bosses are gigantic and menacing. One epic battle is against the multiheaded Hydra on a coast, which echoes such classic “Greek God” films as *Clash of the Titans* and *Jason and the Argonauts*. Taking on three giant monster heads at once, Kratos has to first defeat the two smaller heads flanking the larger, more powerful one. Once the two small ones are dispatched, Kratos can defeat the larger one only by impaling its head on the ship's main sail mast. *God of War* was one of the most impressive-looking games at last year's Electronic Entertainment Expo, and so far, it looks like it could be one of the top offerings this year.—Major Mike

■ Update ■ Developed by SCEA Santa Monica
■ Published by Sony ■ Target release date:
First Quarter 2005



Oddworld Stranger Wrath

X Strangers are always those odd fellows who just seem to stand out all the time. The attention is warranted here as the latest Oddworld game is poised to make a popular stranger out of everyone who plays it.

Stranger Than Life

Although the game is set in the Oddworld universe, Stranger Wrath involves a completely different cast and takes place in a totally distinct... er, odd world. In this action/shooter game, you play the role of the Stranger, an enigmatic bounty hunter whose methods in hunting dangerous outlaws is as unique as his personality. The Stranger doesn't like using guns; instead, he's armed with a double-barrel crossbow that uses "live" ammo. The ammunition is essentially the everyday bug and rodent that can be collected on the ground at will. Each living ammo has its own ability, such as temporarily immobilizing a bad guy by quickly spinning a web around him or making your targets throw up by excreting a wretched smell. In the most up-to-date build, shooting these ingenious rambunctious rounds at unsuspecting enemies proved that this Oddworld is on the right track to creative enlightenment. There's

something disturbingly fun about shooting off a loud-mouthed, annoying creature in order to lure a baddie toward a pile of stinging critters that have a deadly bite.

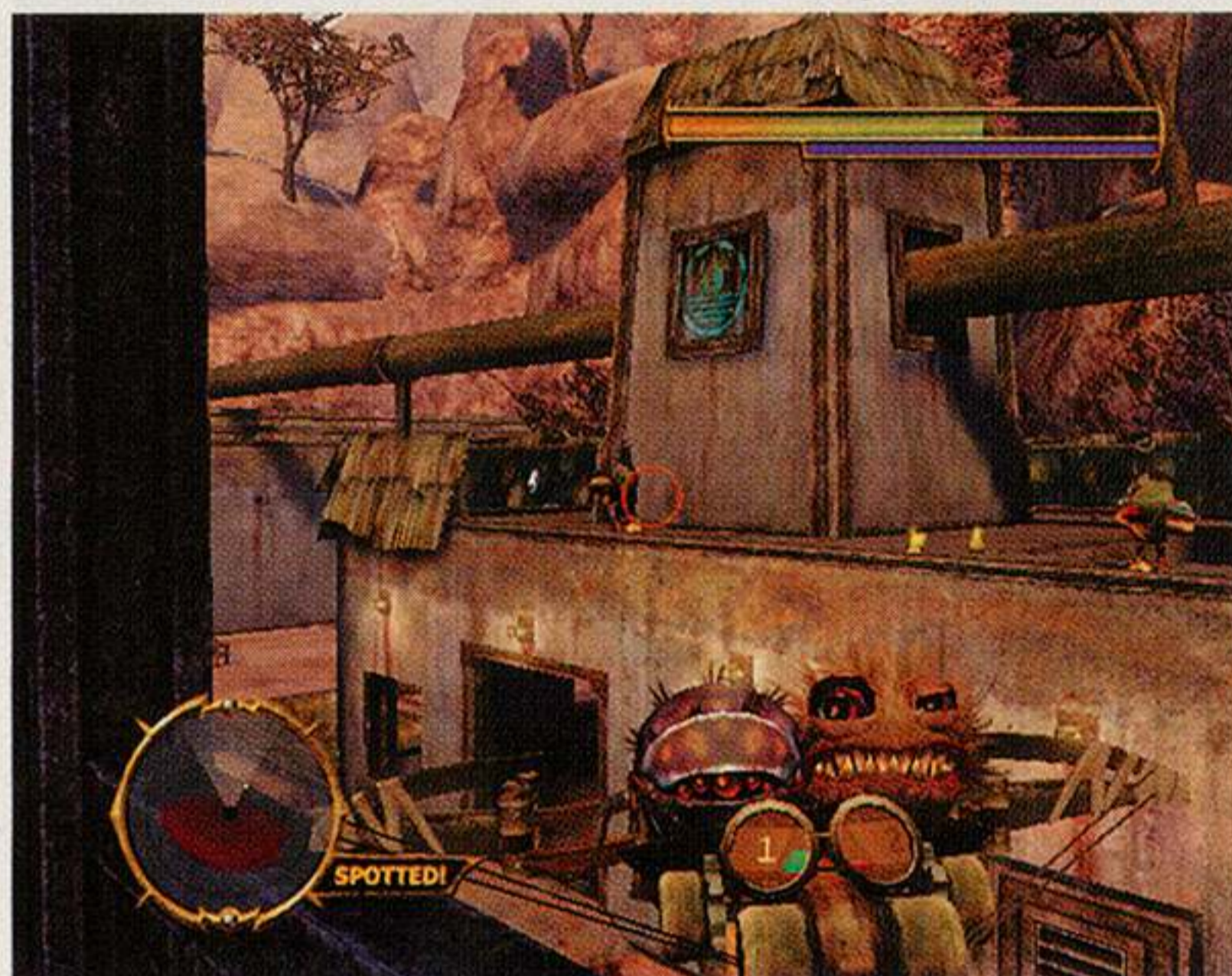
Against All Odds

There's more to firing off nonlethal creatures than just getting a good laugh. The game features a lot of strategy when using two ammunition loadouts together, and more importantly, the emphasis is to collect the bounty alive rather than dead. Your colorful ammo will enable you to get up close and personal with your aggressors, where you can beat them with your fists until they're dazed and then take them into custody for your moolah (cash) reward.

The Stranger's world already looks absolutely amazing. Its old-Western environments are lush with detail and populated with some of the funniest characters in a game. They talk back with attitude, make hilarious comments, and speak with quirky accents. In essence, there's a lot to see and do inside and outside of this unique town.

If developer Oddworld Inhabitants continues what it's doing now, you can guarantee that this Oddworld game won't be a stranger to any of you.—*Four-Eyed Dragon*

■ Hands-On ■ Developed by Oddworld Inhabitants
■ Published by EA Games ■ Target release date: January



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The Getaway: Black Monday

PS2 Sure, the gameplay felt familiar, but that didn't stop *The Getaway* from being a popular free-roaming, carjacking, criminally inspired game full of violent undertones two years ago. This year, you can guarantee that same familiar feeling in the sequel.

English Accent

Black Monday continues the original's take on the gritty modern-day London underworld. In the game's 22 missions, you take control of three characters, who are all tied to a small-time bank job that went awry. But this isn't just another game where you can play with multiple viewpoints. The choices you make in each mission actually influence the outcome of the entire game, which means there's more than one conclusion to the story.

The story itself is told much like a gangland film. As in the first *Getaway*, your actions require a lot of shooting. In fact, the first few levels in an early build of the game required you, playing as a cop, to clear rooms full of bad guys using any means necessary, which included smearing multiple fellows with lead, pistol-whipping foes, and, if you felt nice, 'cuffing and then butting a suspect. You could also pop perpetrators while you're behind the wheel.



Oy, You Got A Problem?

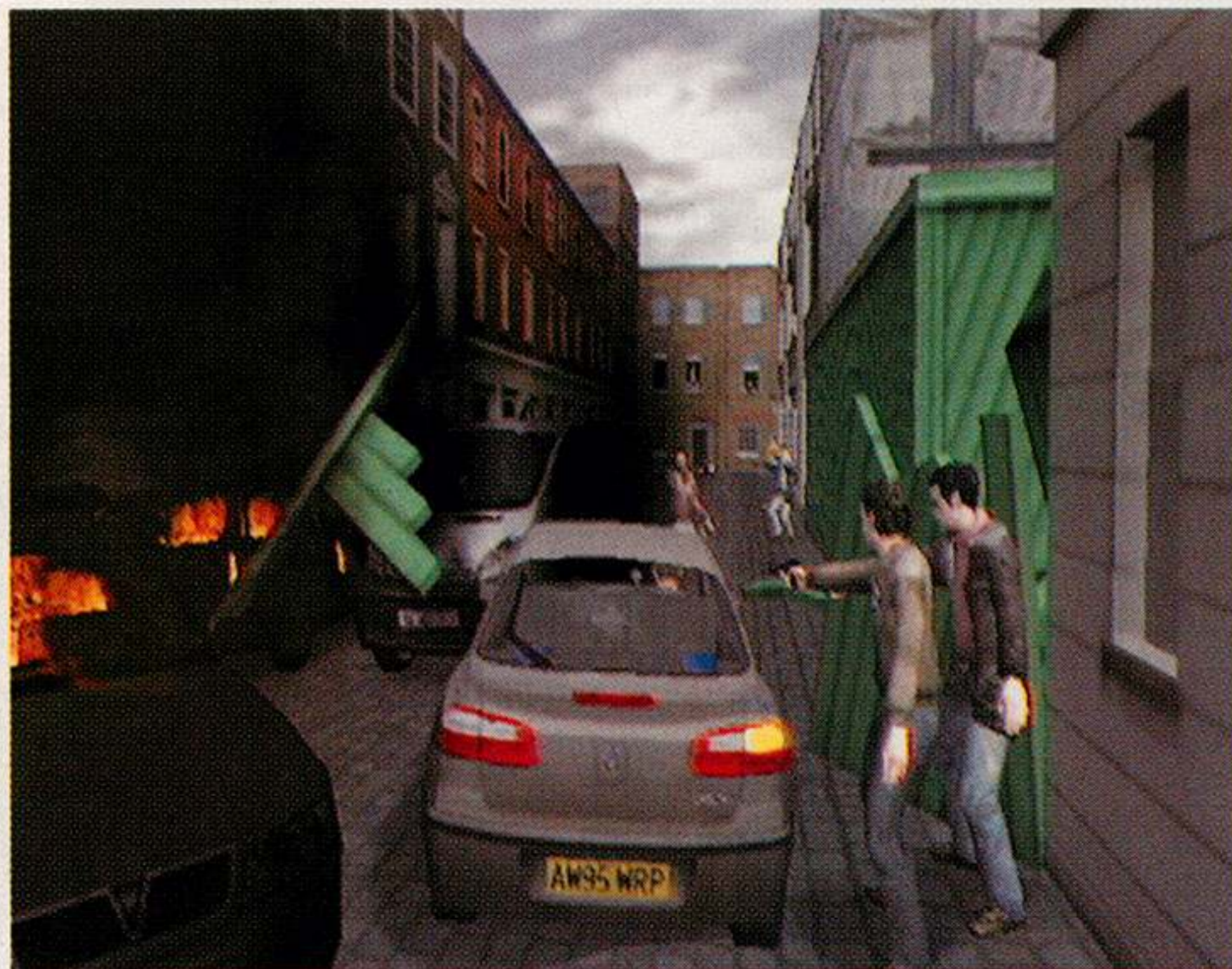
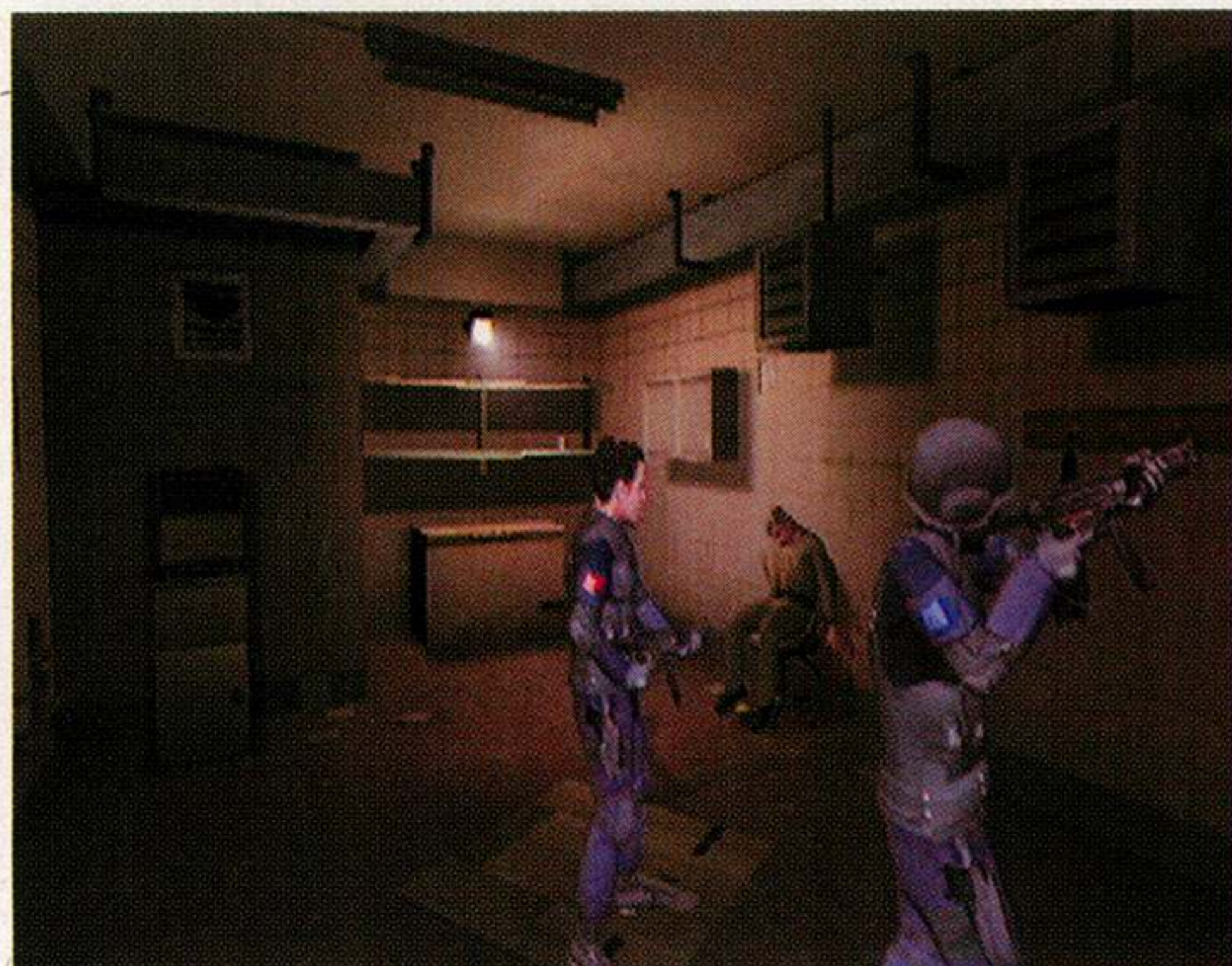
Performing a drive-by isn't the only thing you can do in the streets of London. In fact, you have "access" (read: carjack) to more vehicles, including motorcycles. Each ride has bigger damage zones, too, which means more realistic road carnage as you race from one destination to another. The city of London has also received a facelift. Besides an increase in recognizable locations, the Underground subway system and the River Thames can be visited as well.



The early build, however, looked and played much like the original—which, in today's standards, doesn't bode well. Yes, most of London had been accurately re-created, but a fare amount of in-game pop-up didn't look good. London never has that much fog. Plus, the controls were unforgiving. It was difficult to remember all of the button combinations, especially while in a heated gun battle. Still, with some time left until the game's release, Sony can easily fix these hindrances and get away with a solid *Getaway*.—*Four-Eyed Dragon*



■ Hands-On ■ Developed by Team Soho ■ Published by Sony ■ Target release date: January



Devil May Cry 3

PS2 He may not have impressed everyone in his last outing, but Dante the demon slayer is still popular enough to warrant a third coming. This time, he goes back to his roots on several different levels.

Sibling Rivalry

Devil May Cry 3's story takes place before that of the first game. You take control of a younger-looking—but still deadly—Dante in a fight against his twin brother, who is consumed with dark power and believes in upholding the sinister way of life. Of course, any Devil May Cry fan knows that the story in this action slasher doesn't really mean anything. It's the barrage of sword-cutting



gameplay that makes it worthwhile. Indeed, the action never stopped in a nearly finished version of the game. The wildly deformed creatures were unrelenting and fiercely challenging—a nod to the original Devil May Cry and a feature that was sorely lacking in the sequel. Other familiar sequences included sporadic puzzle solving, some platform jumping, and lots and lots of orb collecting to buy upgrades and new weapons.



Devils Have Style, Too

To reflect his youthful demeanor, young Dante now moves with style. The new "style" system enables you to choose from several fighting types at any time. You'll have more agility and finesse with the evasive style; be in the face of every opponent with the close-range technique; eliminate the threats with the long-range method; and make defense your priority using the counterattack and guard style. Dante's weapon loadout is just as varied. Up to four handguns, shotguns, and other fine weaponry can be equipped at one time, making you a very powerful adversary. Whatever combination you choose, you can count on some really nifty moves to punish those pesky demons.



Besides some awkward camera angles that should be fixed for its release, Devil May Cry 3 is certainly poised to make a successful comeback. You may now commence crying for the devil.—*Four-Eyed Dragon*

- Hands-On ■ Developed and published by Capcom
- Target release date: March



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Project: Snowblind

PS2 X Originally conceived as a spinoff of the Deus Ex series, Project: Snowblind is Crystal Dynamics' (the Legacy of Kain series) first foray into the first-person-shooter playing field. Since development began, Snowblind's connection to Deus Ex has been severed, leaving the game to stand on its own merits rather than rely on the franchise's name to carry it. Luckily, it's shaping up to be a killer offering that's most

notable for its tasty assortment of unique weapons, multipath and destructible urban environments, and nano-enhanced super powers.

My Eyes Are Blind, But I Can See

Struggling alongside freedom-fighting NPCs against oppressive Republic forces in a near-future Hong Kong, you play as a soldier who has undergone a series of biological augmentations that have essentially turned you into a one-man army. Of course, you're armed with a cornucopia of deadly weapons, all of which have the genre-requisite primary and secondary fire. Shotguns also fire sticky bombs, assault rifles let loose bouncing grenade volleys, and fléchette rifles unleash swarms of tiny drones that chase enemies up stairs and around corners.

You also have a slew of paranormal abilities—courtesy of nano-engineering—that enable you to recover from incapacitation, toss force fields around your body, see through solid matter, and even slow down time enough to sidestep in-rushing bullets. In the game, you can also pilot a variety of vehicles and hack into security systems to dismantle automatic turrets and cameras.

The Sun No Longer Sets Me Free

For the most part, Snowblind is graphically slick, though some of the texturing and animation could use some fine-tuning. The environments offer many paths, enabling you to find advantageous sniping positions, escape routes, or ways to sneak up on foes. Objects can be picked up and moved, which comes in handy if you want to block doorways with metal storage crates or hurl combustible tanks near enemies then pump the tank full of lead until it blows them to kingdom come. Unfortunately, multiplayer wasn't available in the preview build, but at the game's release, up to 16 players will be able to have a shootout at once.—*Child of Chaka*

- Hands-On
- Developed by Crystal Dynamics
- Published by Eidos
- Target release date: February

All screens shown here are from the Xbox version.



Star Wars Republic Commando

XThe Clone Wars began with an epic confrontation between the Republic and the Separatists on the scorched plains of Geonosis, and the battles continue in *Star Wars Republic Commando*, the latest first-person shooter from LucasArts. This time around, the gameplay doesn't involve commanding the Force or wielding a lightsaber—it's a full on fragfest that drops you into the boots of an elite military trooper leading a squad of highly trained war machines.

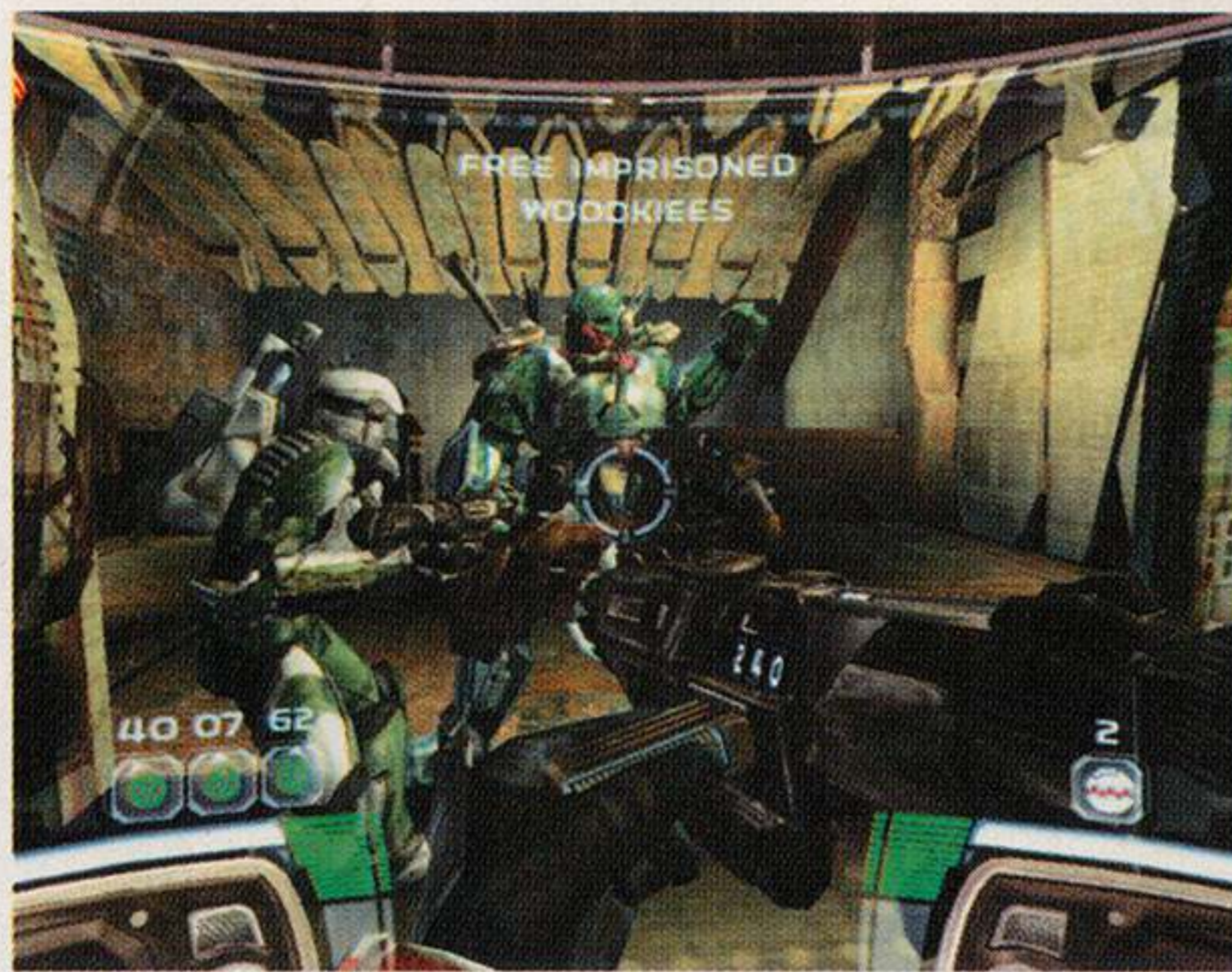
The action is centered on events leading up to *Revenge of the Sith*, throwing you into a host of environments, such as the aforementioned Geonosis, the interior of a Separatist Core Ship, and the jungles of Kashyyyk, the Wookiee home world. The game will feature eight in all and more than 14 levels with single-player missions that include hostage rescue and reconnaissance assignments, and multiplayer action featuring deathmatch and capture the flag.

As you would expect, there are countless enemies, such as Super Battle Droids, Droidekas, and Geonosian Drones, to mow down and plenty of armament at your disposal, including the standard-issue interchangeable DC-17m and enemy weapons like the Trandoshan Slaver ACP blaster. As deadly as your weapons are, though, your most important one is your squad—each member instinctively reacts to the situation, so it isn't necessary to plot their every move. Furthermore, *Republic Commando* forgoes complex squad setup and enables you to give orders at the touch of a button.

In its current state, the preview build played and looked great, providing the right amount of Star Wars atmosphere. The easy-to-use command interface was a welcome addition to the genre, but more experienced FPS vets may find it a bit too simplistic. That aside, *Republic Commando* is shaping up to be a fun title that fans and gamers alike are sure to enjoy.

—The Enforcer

■ Hands-On ■ Developed and published by LucasArts
■ Target release date: March



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Unreal Championship 2: The Liandri Conflict

X The Unreal franchise has been around for a while—since its successful launch in the post-Quake era. The series has been through a couple of console iterations, but the latest, Unreal Championship 2: The Liandri Conflict, could be the most robust Live experience yet.

Weapons Galore

Seven characters fill the initial lineup, and seven more can be unlocked—one from the latter group is Raiden from Midway's *Mortal Kombat* series. Raiden retains his trademark MK moves, including his human torpedo, teleportation, and lightning bolts.

No shooter is complete without weapons, and Unreal Championship 2 serves up a lethal arsenal of firearms and handheld accessories. A few notables include bouncing goo and a poison cloud that's ideal for firing into crowds, and all weapons can be used for combo attacks. The game's battles play out in several diverse arenas that are full of color and detail with a few "classic" Unreal battlefields thrown in for nostalgic fans.

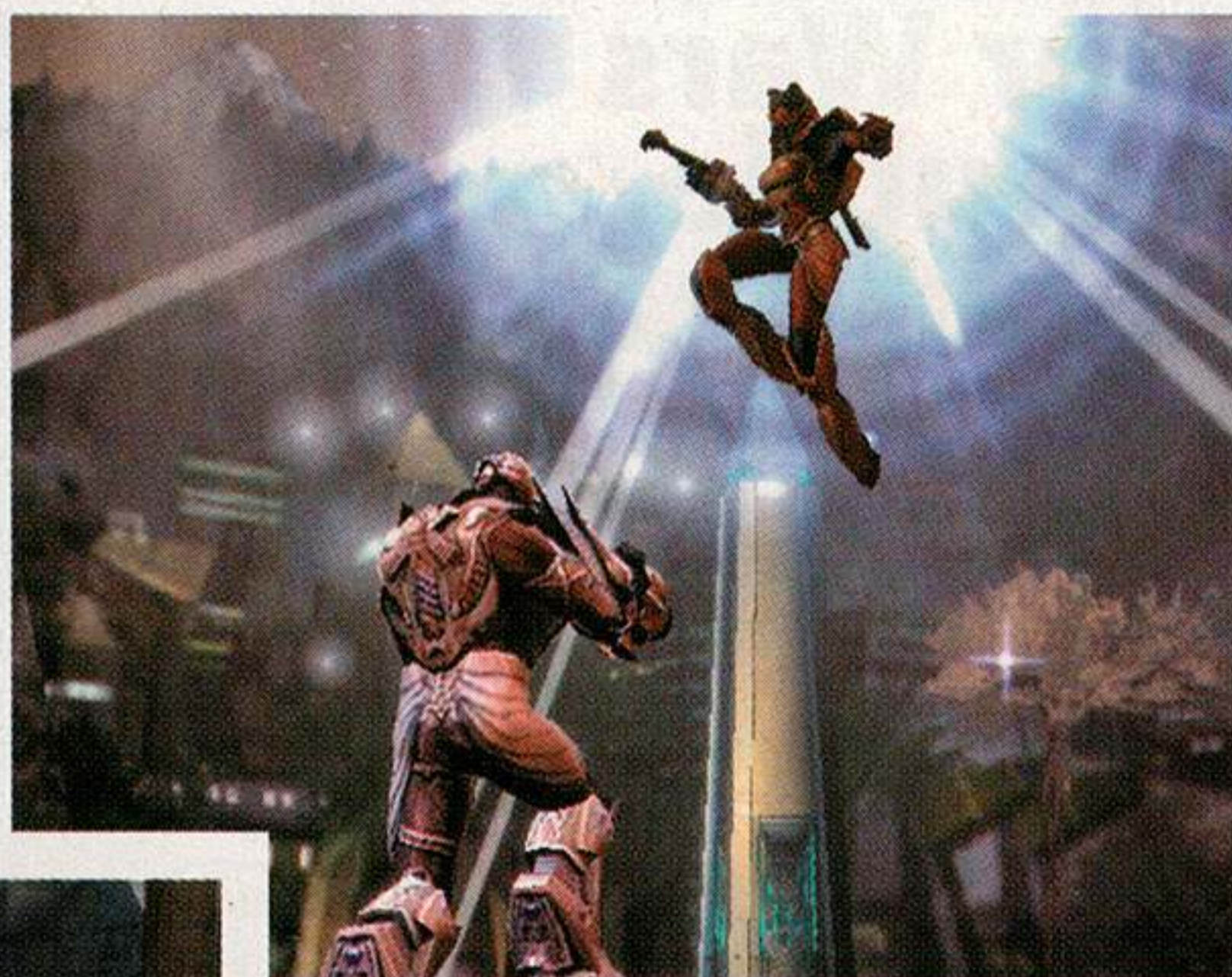
The first-person-shooter mechanics have already been proven in the Unreal universe, but the real hook here is melee combat and the ability to switch to third-person mode on the fly. Playing a traditional FPS via third person may sound sacrilegious, but it works surprisingly well here, especially when using handheld melee weapons. In fact, playing the game in melee mode is even more exciting than playing it as a standard FPS. Characters can perform acrobatic moves, bounce off walls to reach otherwise inaccessible areas, and charge up their powers for devastating lunging attacks. In melee mode, you can also deflect incoming projectiles with the proper timing.

The Next Step

Unreal Championship 2 will support eight players on Xbox Live, and the game also features a two-player split-screen offline mode. FPS fans who are getting tired of Halo's multiplayer online battles may find Unreal Championship 2 to be their next worthy battle.

—Major Mike

- Update ■ Developed by Epic
- Published by Midway
- Target release date: March



Star Wars: Episode III Revenge of the Sith

PS2 **X** All things must come to an end, and the release of *Star Wars: Episode III Revenge of the Sith* will mark the last step in a long journey that began almost 30 years ago. Fan opinions may be divided on the direction George Lucas took with the film prequels, but judging from the trailer that hit theaters in November, one thing's for sure: *Revenge of the Sith* should be the darkest and most tragic of the series. The Episode III-based game will follow the events of the film, right up to the climactic lightsaber duel between Obi Wan Kenobi and his one-time friend turned Lord of the Sith, Anakin Skywalker (which, clocking in at a whopping 12 minutes, is the longest duel in any *Star Wars* film).



Players will take control of Obi Wan or Anakin throughout the game. As Anakin, you'll be seduced by power and turn to the dark side of the Force, while as Obi Wan, you'll have to use the Force as an ally to stop your former student from turning the galaxy into an abattoir. Celluloid fight coordinator Nick Gillard is choreographing the game's robust combat system and even creating new lightsaber techniques exclusively for the title. The *Revenge of the Sith* game will give fans a taste of the final *Star Wars* film when it ships in early May.—*Iron Monkey*

■ **First Look** ■ **Developed by The Collective** ■ **Published by LucasArts** ■ **Target release date: May**



Mercenaries

PS2 **X** When we last visited *Mercenaries*, the game was shaping up to be an innovative take on *Grand Theft Auto*. With more development time and some impressive changes, the game is becoming far more than a wartime *GTA* clone.

What's so great about *Mercenaries* is its ability to blend a certain level of realism with just the right amount of arcade-style gameplay. Missions are easily available and varied—you can choose from four factions, each with their own agendas—and they're just the right length, so little down time exists during play.

Of course, the requisite feature of any free-roaming game is your ability to interact with the environment. Here, *Mercenaries* comes through in spades. You can hijack every vehicle in the game, and the physics, crashes, explosions, and general destruction abilities add a level of immersion that *GTA* has yet to find. Bodies fly from grenade detonations (and land realistically), cars become flaming projectiles when launched into the air by a rocket-propelled grenade, and perhaps most impressive, buildings collapse à la *MechWarrior* when hit by always-present missile strikes. And as a battle-hardened merc, you can purchase missiles for your own attacks along with vehicles, weapons, and anything else you might need.

Still, the preview build had a few issues with unresponsive A.I. (particularly friendly soldiers walking into your line of fire) and some occasionally stiff controls. However, LucasArts and Pandemic could certainly fix these issues before *Mercenaries*' release and eventually offer a game that would add upon, if not finally break, the *GTA* mold.—*Esquire*

■ **Update** ■ **Developed by Pandemic Studios**
■ **Published by LucasArts** ■ **Target release date: January**

All screens shown here are from the Xbox version.



MechAssault 2: Lone Wolf

X Let's face it: By the time MechAssault 2 is released in December, you'll still be deeply hooked on another Microsoft sequel. So how does Microsoft hope to bring attention to what already looks to be a solid mech experience on the Xbox? Simple: Take a break from Halo 2 and blow up giant robots instead. Lone Wolf continues the big explosions and fancy mechanized maneuvering in this follow-up to the critically acclaimed original MechAssault.



An early build of the game already exhibited some really awesome visual effects—namely, big, colorful explosions. Aside from the graphic destruction, the single-player campaign played like a good mech game should—the simple gameplay and uncomplicated controls allowed for a complete focus on the action. There are some new creative features in this sequel, too, such as the ability to “jack” other mechs and use them as your own. Online, the all new



Conquest mode will be pushed hard. In this mode, there's a persistent universe where planets are continuously up for grabs. You and your clan must join one of five houses that remain permanent in the universe, and then try to conquer the entire universe using lots of teamwork and, of course, some major firepower.

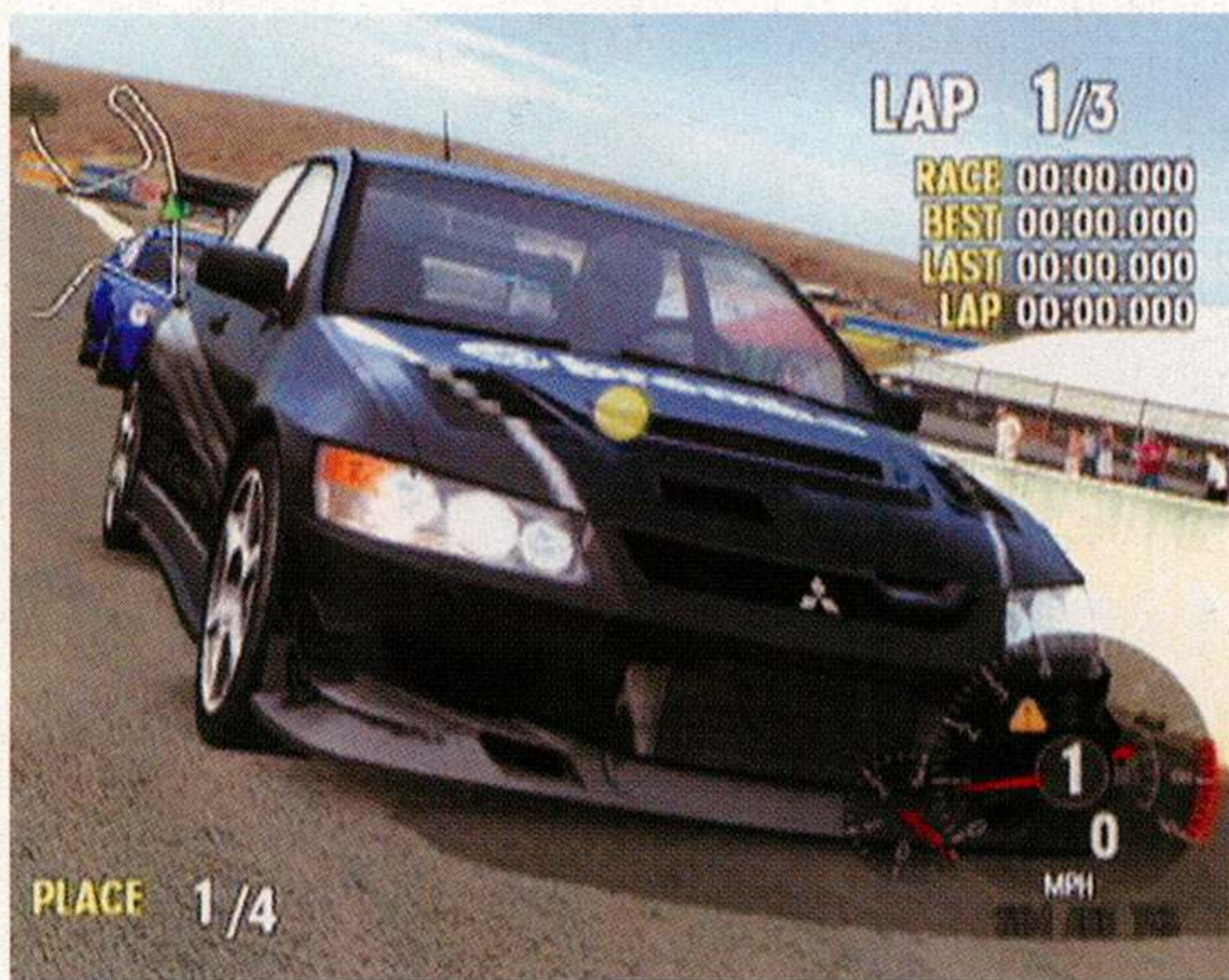
Despite the enormous online universe, MechAssault 2 is certainly coming in under the radar, especially with big-name games slated for release at around the same time. If you're a mech fan and enjoyed the first one, then you may want to save up for this giant-sized shooter.

—Four-Eyed Dragon

■ Hands-On ■ Developed by Day 1 Studios
 ■ Published by Microsoft ■ Target release date: December



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Forza Motorsports

X Even as the traffic jam of PS2 drivers awaiting Gran Turismo 4 begins to form, Forza Motorsports is jockeying into pole position for the Xbox. As Forza nears its launch date, it's already clear that its mechanics have been working overtime to shed the game's GT-wannabe label.

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By now, everyone and their mother knows that Microsoft has signed over 40 auto manufacturers that agreed to allow their precious metal to be damaged. You can own 200 models from Ferrari, Porsche, Honda, Nissan, and even Chevrolet. On the track, it's pretty tough for the untrained driver to say how close the preview cars handled to their real-life counterparts, but it feels like road racing and Microsoft's plan sounds grand. Experienced racers may be in for a real surprise.

Also, just as you can wreck your vehicles, you can also build them up and tune them to near insane levels. Naturally, you'll get all the licensed parts and gear, but on the road, you can switch on telemetric data that tells how all that stuff is performing right down to the weight distribution on each of your tires. Swap out the engine and add a turbocharger and



an intercooler, too. Then, you can cover it all up with a custom paint job, a feature that enables you to work with 100 layers of color and decals.

Of course, Forza will distance itself from GT4 via Xbox Live, too. Promised Live support includes eight-car racing, buying and selling autos online, downloadable ghost cars, voice support, online club memberships, and other goodies. Forza Motorsports looks like it's going to be a driving force to be reckoned with both on the road and off.—The Man in Black

■ Hands-On ■ Developed and published by Microsoft
 ■ Target release date: February

Tenchu: Fatal Shadows



PS2 The long-standing Tenchu series has had its ups and downs over the years. It debuted on the PlayStation and gained a strong following for—at the time—its creative use of stealth action, but the last foray on the PS2 was largely considered a mediocre addition to the series.

Now, under new publisher Sega, Tenchu: Fatal Shadows is trying to meld the good from both Wrath of Heaven and the earlier incarnations on the original PlayStation. Ironically, the gameplay isn't the only thing being blended in from the previous two installments. The story takes place between Tenchu 2 and Wrath of Heaven, so Rikimaru is still missing and his ninja companion, Ayame, is still searching for him. During her search, however, she meets up with Rin, the lone survivor of a village devastated by bandits. Rin calls upon Ayame's aid, and the two head out to avenge the villagers' deaths.

Graphically, the game retains the same look that it had in Wrath of Heaven. Gameplay wise, Fatal Shadows will be easier to approach than previous versions, and the controls in a preview build felt stable, though the camera needed work to better aid in stealthy maneuvers. Body dragging returns in Fatal Shadows, along with the ability to breathe underwater using hollowed-out reeds. Also, stealth kills have been improved with new—and even flashier—moves.

Overall, Sega seems intent on continuing with a strong formula for the Tenchu series, and so long as the weak camera system and spotty A.I. can be resolved, Fatal Shadows looks well on its way to being a part of that formula.—*Esquire*

■ Hands-On ■ Developed by From Software
■ Published by Sega ■ Target release date: February



TimeSplitters Future Perfect

PS2 X360 The publisher may be different, but the same team that developed the first two TimeSplitters games remains the same. That spells out good news as developer Free Radical Design is focusing on Future Perfect, the third addition to this classic first-person series.



The one thing that previous TimeSplitters games lacked was a good, compelling story. That's addressed in Future Perfect, where the story takes center stage. You once again play as the fearless hero Cortez, who must save humanity by tracing the origins of the malicious TimeSplitters across several time periods. An intriguing part of the tale is that as you race between the years 1914 and 2401, you'll have the chance to correct mistakes made in the past and fight alongside future selves in major battles.

Even with an improved story, don't discount the rest of Future Perfect's offerings. What made the game's predecessors so successful were its other game modes, which this time around, could be just as engaging. The Arcade mode again features fast shooting gameplay with tons of bonus content to unlock. Online, up to 16 people can participate in a deathmatch at once, or two players can opt for a co-op game. And the Mapmaker mode has been improved upon with a more accessible interface that makes it easier to create and edit multiplayer maps. The makings of what can be a perfect future await.

—*Four-Eyed Dragon*

■ Update ■ Developed by Free Radical Design
■ Published by EA Games ■ Target release date: March

These concept screens are from the development system and don't represent a specific platform.



Dragon Ball Z: Budokai 3

Atari comes out with a DBZ game that couldn't be closer to the original anime...and yes, that's a good thing.

PS2 Have you ever wondered what, exactly, millions of fans see in the *Dragon Ball Z* cartoon? To outsiders, it's all a bunch of grunting, name-calling, and "powering up" for half an hour every day with maybe the occasional punch thrown on the first and third Thursdays of the month. It's just this sort of outsider who should try out *Budokai 3*, though—not only is it a fun, accessible fighting game, but it's also the first DBZ game to completely capture the feel of the TV show.

Feel the Power

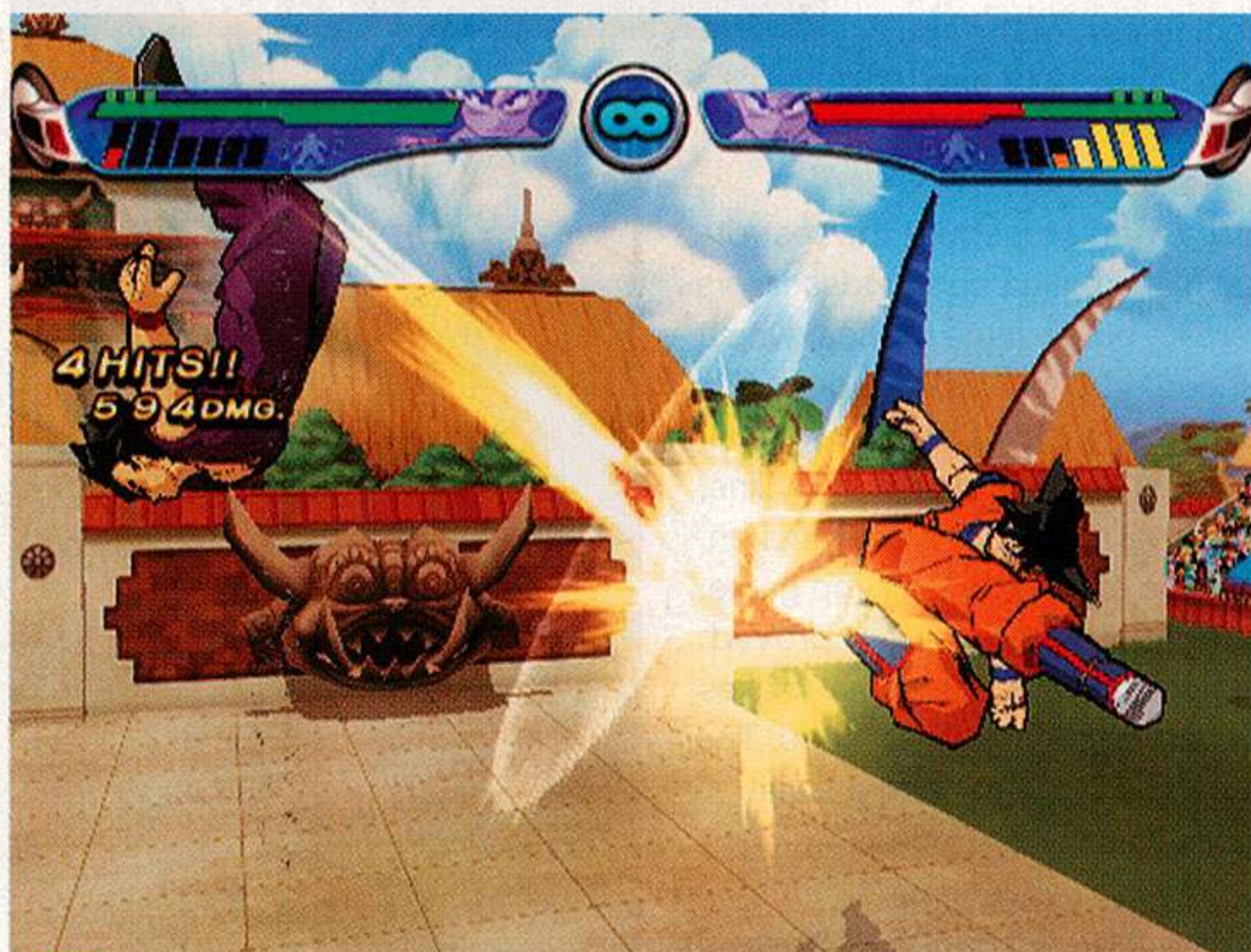
The developers at Dimps have obviously spent lots of time polishing up *Budokai 3*'s fighting engine, which is now closer to the anime's feel than ever before. As in previous games, every character has a basic set of abilities to work with—the typical punch, kick, guard, and ki blast—which can be fur-



The developers put a ridiculous amount of detail into the backdrops this time around... and yes, they're still fully destroyable.



PROTIP: Being in Hyper mode lets you unleash Dragon Rush, an anime-like sequence where you try to keep a combo going as long as possible with a rock-paper-scissors-like button scheme.



PROTIP: Saiyan mode? Pah! The real action (and a wealth of exclusive modes) is in Hyper mode, which you can enter by pressing all four face buttons at once—if you have enough ki, that is.

ther modified with skill capsules. Once you put a few hours into the single-player Story mode and score a decent enough skill set, you'll be able to unleash all manner of special moves in the classic dial-a-combo tradition.

In *Budokai 3*, however, there's an entirely different and far deeper approach to defense. There are real counters now. For example, if you press the guard button and a direction at the right moment against an oncoming attack, your character will teleport out of harm's way (usually to the side of his opponent) and get a free crack at starting some offense of his own. This opens up an array

of strategic possibilities in every match—teleportation takes up ki power, so you can't rely on it all the time, but countering is also one of the easiest ways to turn the tide of a particularly nasty combo.

This counter system also comes into play during "beam struggles"—if two opponents fire off beams at once, they'll lock in midair and you'll have to overpower your enemy's blast by bashing the buttons. The result is a much more balanced fighting mechanic, which serves both *DBZ* fans and gamers simply interested in a fighter that feels good to play.

I Can't Believe He's So Powerful

Of course, this isn't what makes *Budokai 3* special. After all, there are dozens of other well-implemented fighting games out there already. This game doesn't really shine until you check out the presentation—the toon shading looks better than ever, and the special moves, while not exactly the sort of thing you'll find in a "serious" fighter, look and feel like they're straight out of the TV show. It's a shame, though, that the Story mode still seems a bit unfinished: Although you have more freedom to explore the

world and find hidden items, the story scenes look rushed and jump around without much explanation, making things confusing even for *DBZ* maniacs.

Aiyaaaaaaahhhh

Still, the weak Story mode is the only blemish on what's otherwise the best *DBZ* game yet. If you think you could produce a better *DBZ* show than Funimation, now's your chance—nothing comes closer to the feel of the original anime than this game.—*Clockwork Crow*



The Story mode is told in plain still scenes like this one. Whatever happened to the original *Budokai 3*'s 3D cut-scenes?

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PROTIP: Flying around the world is fun, yes, but it pays to search for hidden capsules that appear whenever you're near one.



PROTIP: Whenever you're in close melee combat, don't forget to press a directional key when guarding—you'll teleport behind your wide-open opponent.

- T** ■ Developed by Dimps
- Published by Atari
- \$49.99 ■ Available now
- Fighting ■ 2 players

GAMEPRO EDITORS' CHOICE

PS2	GRAPHICS	4.5	FUN FACTOR	4.5
	SOUND	4.5		
	CONTROL	4.0		

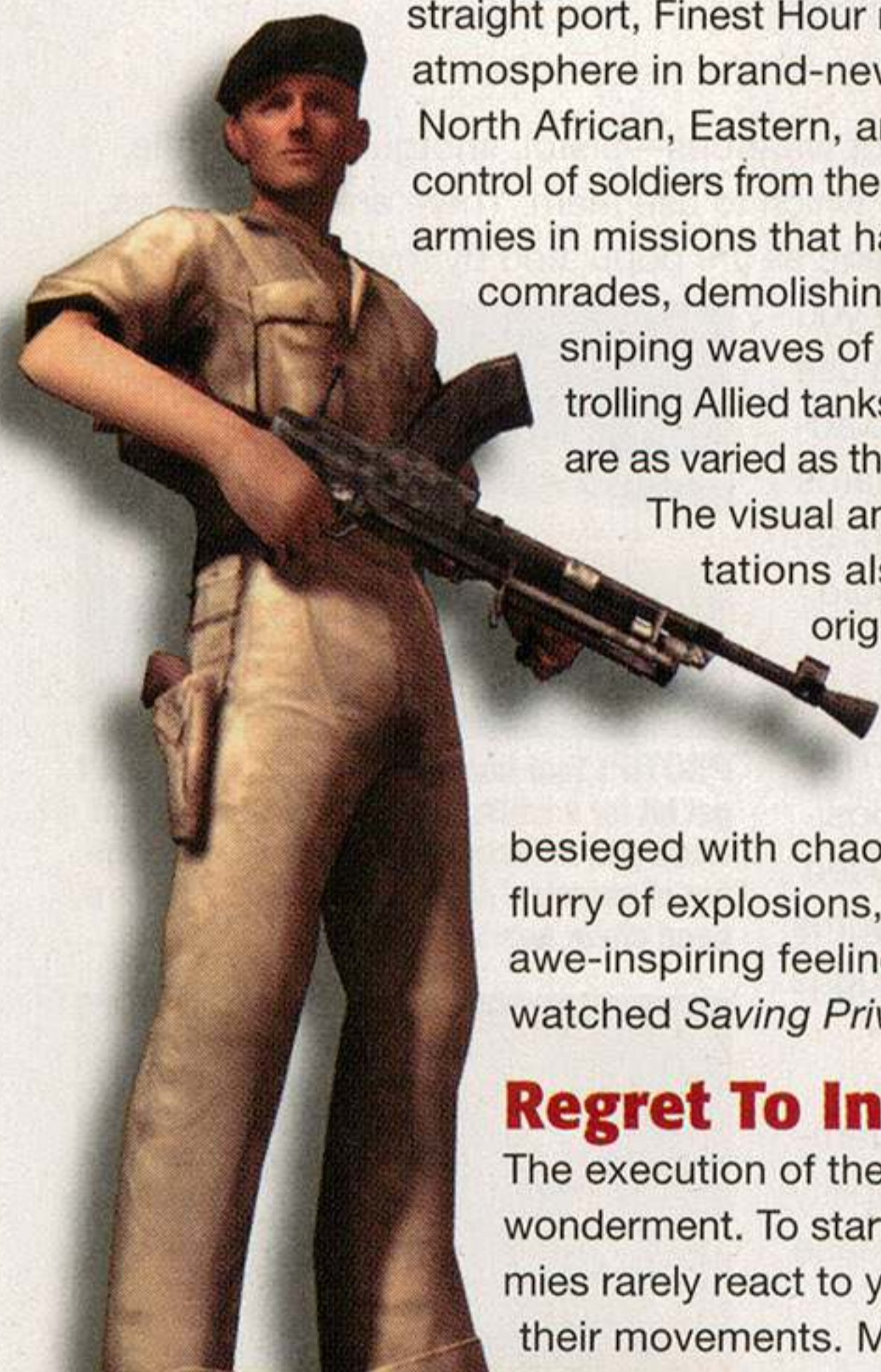
Call of Duty: Finest Hour

Although the PC game exudes innovation, it's not the finest hour for this Call of Duty.

PS2 **X** **G** Let's face it: World War II first-person shooters went into stale, done-that overdrive until Call of Duty came along. The creativity put into that PC game set the standard for all other WWII shooters. It's too bad the console versions of Call of Duty gravely tarnish that benchmark.

Duty Calls

Developer Spark's intentions are admirable considering the shoes it had to fill after the success of Call of Duty on the PC. Not to be mistaken as a straight port, Finest Hour re-creates the frenetic WWII atmosphere in brand-new campaigns that span the North African, Eastern, and Western fronts. You take control of soldiers from the Russian, British, and American armies in missions that have you rescuing comrades, demolishing encampments,



sniping waves of Nazis, and controlling Allied tanks. Truly, the goals are as varied as those in the original.

The visual and sound presentations also follow in the original game's footsteps. Pretty outdoor scenery is constantly besieged with chaotic firepower, a flurry of explosions, and fellow grunts yelling at you. It evokes the same awe-inspiring feeling as when you first played Call of Duty on the PC or watched *Saving Private Ryan*.

Regret To Inform

The execution of the gameplay, however, sorely lacks the same aesthetic wonderment. To start, the enemy A.I. is entirely scripted, which means enemies rarely react to you until they reach a specific spot, and you can predict their movements. Moreover, if you wander off your mission or skip an objective, your enemies—as well as your fellow soldiers—won't know what to do next. Your allies are also dumb: Their aim is horrible, even at close range, and they get stuck behind the smallest of obstacles—in doorways and around corners. Additionally, save points are far and few between in the game, which only increases the frustration level. And should you need to restart at the last save point, the weapons you were previously carrying disappear and are automatically replaced by what you started with at the very beginning of the mission. How stupid is that?

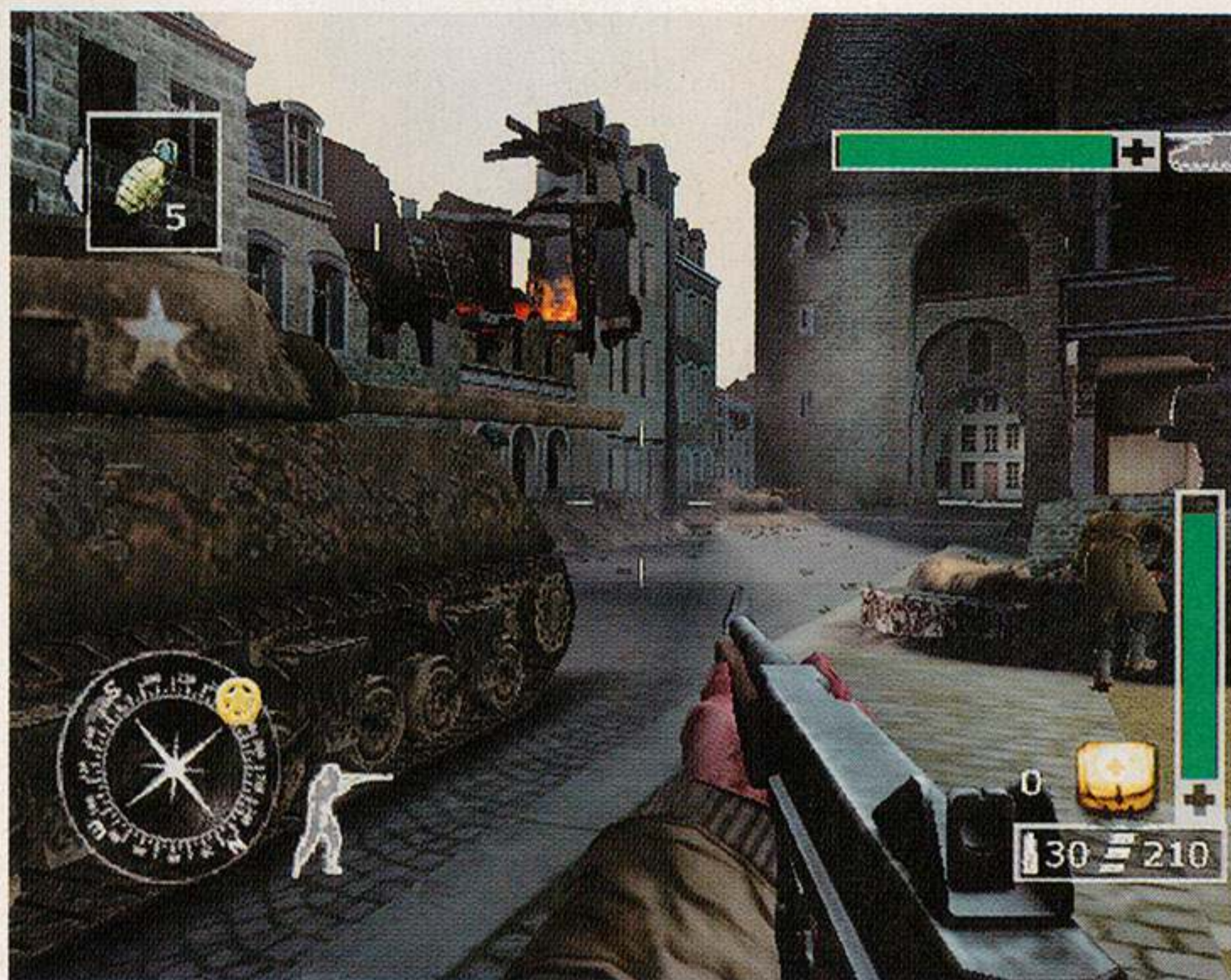
Online, Finest Hour is a huge disappointment. Again, there's a lot to be expected because the PC version of Call of Duty impressed online players. But playing this game live on the console systems (except for the GameCube) lacks the finesse and speed to which you're accustomed. Lag is apparent everywhere, from watching other players float across the ground to emptying an entire magazine into a foe at close range with no effect.

Not Their Finest Hour

With so many inconsistencies, Call of Duty: Finest Hour just doesn't live up to its PC forefather. Alone on the consoles, this is one World War II moment that's better rented than bought.

—Four-Eyed Dragon

T ■ Developed by Spark ■ Published by Activision
 ■ \$49.99 ■ Available now ■ Shooting ■ 1 player; 16 online



PROTIP: Be patient and wait until your tanks remove snipers from buildings, then run in front of the armored column and do away with the foot soldiers.



Fight side by side with your friends in a frenzied kill-or-be-killed environment.



PROTIP: Don't be afraid to look for alternate routes, such as strolling up the road to the left of the village in your first North African mission. You'll be rewarded with a nice flanking spot and a powerful gun.



PROTIP: Press and hold the Left trigger button as you enter rooms—that way, you'll be able to fire off an accurate round before your enemies have time to react.



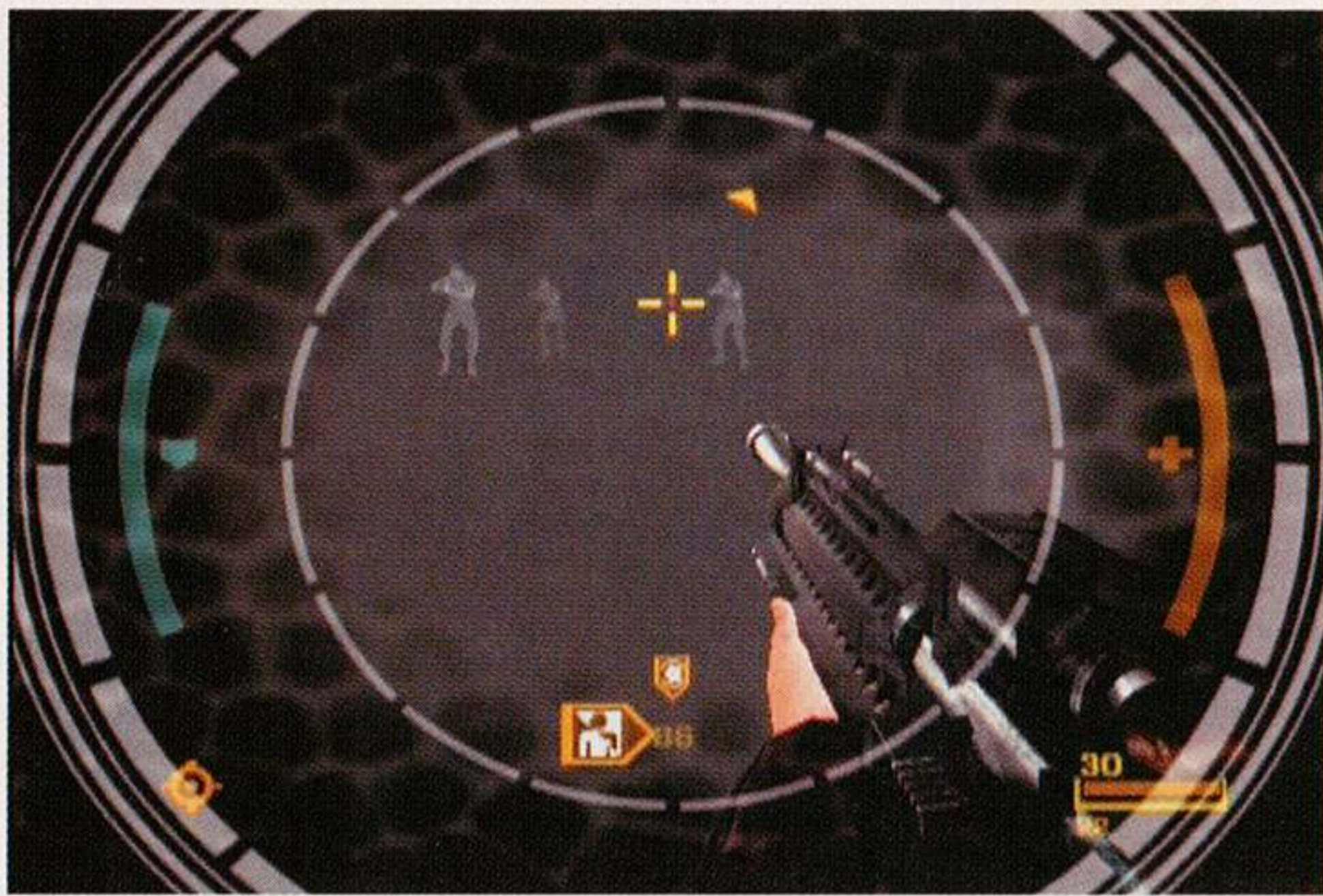
PROTIP: They're not very good fighters, so help your comrades out if they're engaged in hand-to-hand combat.



Rest your sights on fighting that horrid Nazi scum.

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PS2	GRAPHICS	4.0	FUN FACTOR 3.0
	SOUND	4.5	
	CONTROL	4.5	
X	GRAPHICS	4.0	FUN FACTOR 3.0
	SOUND	4.5	
	CONTROL	4.5	
G	GRAPHICS	4.0	FUN FACTOR 3.0
	SOUND	4.5	
	CONTROL	4.0	



PRO TIP: Don't just run and gun it. Use your GoldenEye powers to see enemies behind walls and objects, stun them, hack objects, and shield yourself.



PRO TIP: The MagRail gun is a great weapon because it can shoot through cover, but it takes a little time to fire. Plan for that when you pull the trigger.

caution and draw their weapons. If their cover is blown away, they'll retreat to better hiding places. This ensures that the competition in single-player is strong and you don't get the exact same behavior in repeat playthroughs.

Optical Illusions

As you play, you'll earn GoldenEye powers, which are special functions installed in place of your agent's damaged eye. Push the directional pad in one of four directions and then hit the trigger button to activate the ability to see through walls, disrupt an enemy's weapon, or give yourself added shielding. These substantially increase the strategy you use throughout the game.

Bonds Meant To Be Broken

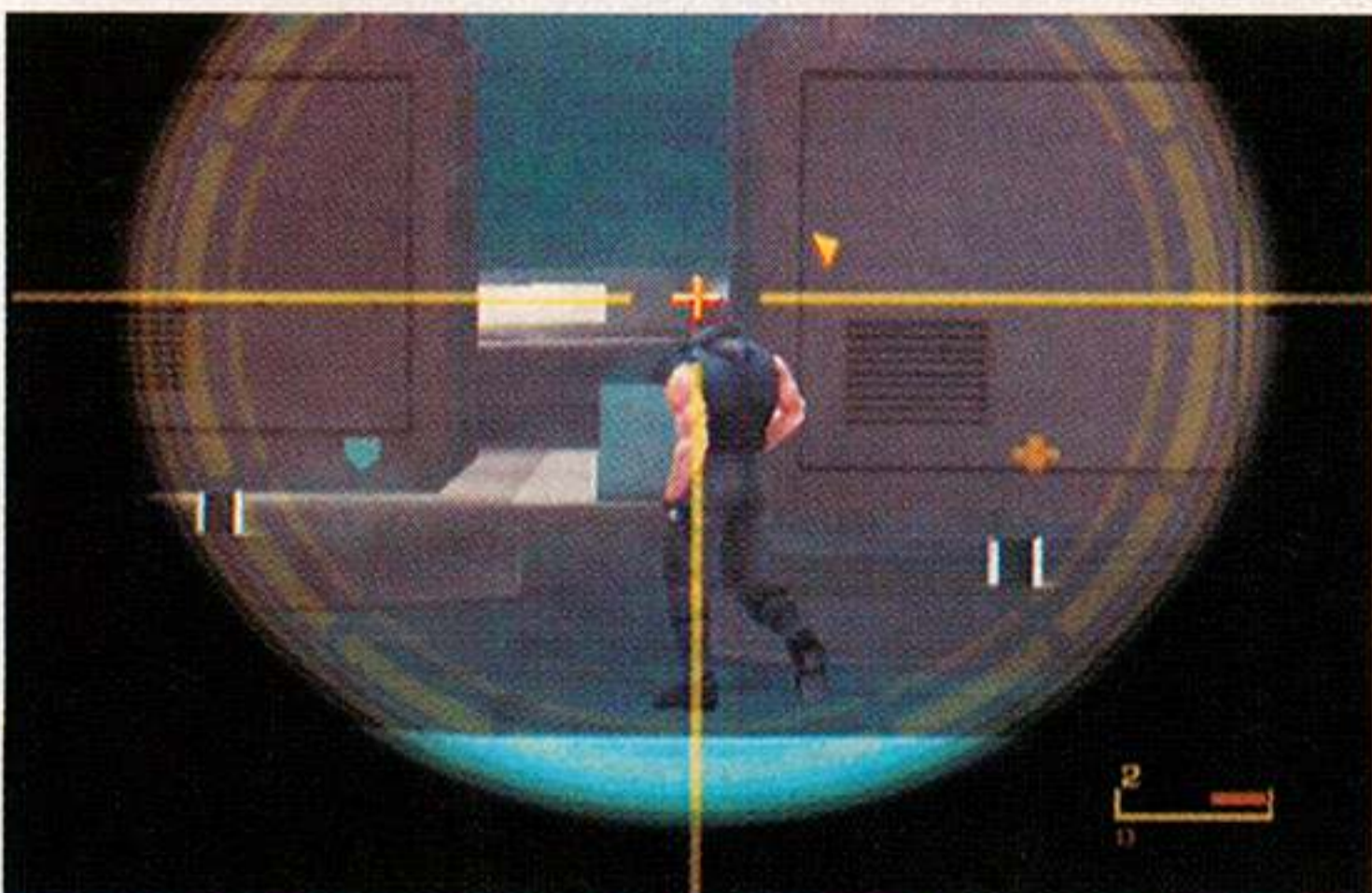
Perhaps the best feature, though, is online multiplayer—at least for PS2 and Xbox owners. The game's intensity is upped by the human competition and the standard selection of gameplay modes (such as deathmatch-style Showdown, Team Showdown, and Domination). Each of the 20 maps has a designated player count to be sure the action stays tight; for those wanting to take on friends on a single console, Rogue Agent also offers split-screen action.

Add to that simple, intuitive controls, a driving soundtrack courtesy of Paul Oakenfold, and sharp animation for the characters, and you end up with a Bond game that does the job. Rogue Agent will leave you shaken and stirred.

—Manny LaMancha

T ■ Developed by EA LA ■ Published by EA Games ■ \$49.95 ■ Available now ■ Shooting ■ 4 players; 8 online

All screens shown here are from the Xbox version.



PRO TIP: Before taking the zip line to the next building in Hong Kong, grab the AR4 (for the closer foes) and the Longbow (for more distant shots), and snipe some enemies on the other side.



PRO TIP: If you have a full pack of grenades and you find one lying on the floor, find the next batch of baddies and toss one their way. You can then pick up the one you found to fill up again.

GoldenEye: Rogue Agent



You play as the bad guy in this Bond-franchise spinoff, but it still has all the intensity of the movies and games that came before it.

PS2 **X** **G** With its latest use of the James Bond franchise, EA Games is taking a bold chance: The company is making you the bad guy. And what a bad guy you are: As a disfigured (having lost an eye) and now disgraced 00 agent who didn't make the grade—certainly not James Bond—you flip and join the dark side under an organization headed by classic baddie Goldfinger. Along the way, you also cross paths with other Bond-film villains, including Dr. No, Scaramanga (the man with the Golden Gun), and Oddjob.

Gunning for the Top

Rogue Agent is a hard-core FPS with a full slate of weapons—pistol, shotgun, sniper rifle, grenades, and more—and a wonderful playfield in which to use them. There are bathhouses, rooftops, all sorts of laboratories, and buildings—and all are populated by myriad bad guys.

You can trade gunfire stealthily—or not, seeing that you can dual wield—or pop a foe melee style and then use him as a human shield. It's also rewarding to take advantage of the selection of machines and other hazards that can be used to dispatch your adversaries, such as test firing a rocket or dumping a load of molten gold onto a catwalk.

The enemy A.I.—dubbed E.V.I.L. for Emotion-based, Visceral, Intelligent, and Learning—is well done. The bad guys force you to use stealth and tactical positioning. If you fire near foes, they'll react with increased



PRO TIP: Your health rejuvenates if you don't get hit for a while, so take advantage of that when you're facing off against a large number of enemies. Always know where there's good cover nearby.



PRO TIP: Okay, so there are some times when you should run and gun—like when you're out of grenades. Look around for weapons and take action like dual wielding a couple of Jackels for good firepower.



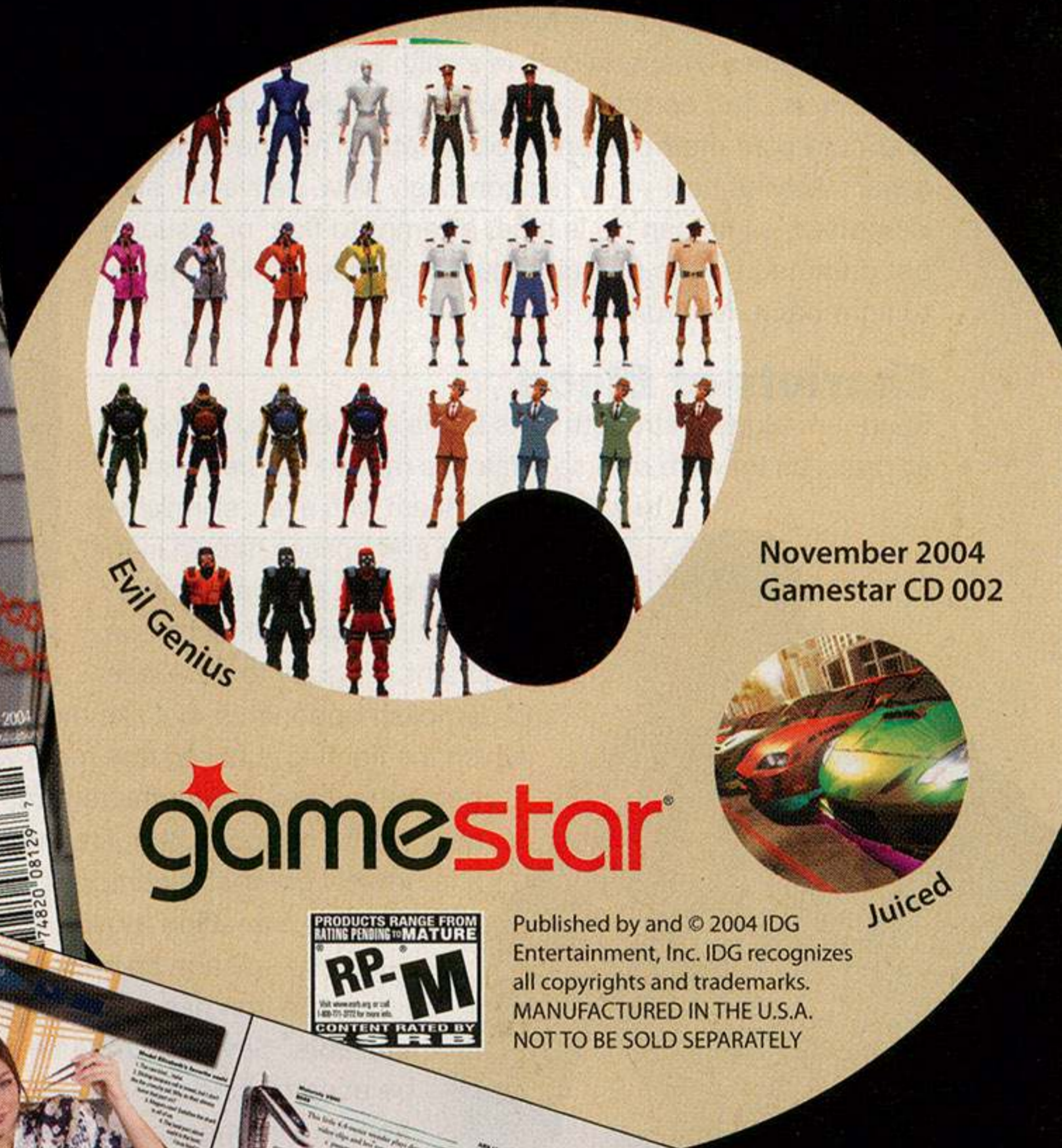
You earn badges for particularly good work, such as precision firing and blowing enemies up with grenades. They help your bonuses at the end of the level.

PS2	GRAPHICS	4.0	FUN FACTOR	4.0
	SOUND	4.0		
	CONTROL	4.5		
X	GRAPHICS	4.0	FUN FACTOR	4.0
	SOUND	4.0		
	CONTROL	4.5		
G	GRAPHICS	4.0	FUN FACTOR	4.0
	SOUND	4.0		
	CONTROL	4.5		

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Shadow of Rome

Shadow of Rome is enthralling when you're in the arena, but the game's stealth sequences dampen the fun.

PS2 Shadow of Rome is a maddening game to play in that it's almost assassinated by its own good intentions. On one hand, the arena combat scenes are exciting and thrilling to play, but Metal Gear Solid-knockoff stealth stages break up those sequences and bring the momentum to a grinding halt.

Noble Romans

Shadow of Rome borrows its theme from any popular Roman sword-and-adventure epic. You play as two characters: Agrippa, a soldier who takes on gladiator status to save his father, and Octavianus, who functions behind the scenes by specializing in stealth and sabotage. Clues are revealed in the arena and corridors of powers, and that's where the game's hot-and-cold play methods are problematic. The sneaking scenes are the game's Achilles heel—they're agonizingly slow, derivative, and if Octavianus is spotted, all he can do is hide, attempt to flee, or (usually) get creamed by the pursuing guards because he's unable to fight back. Not fun.

Chariots of Blood

Shadow's biggest strength is its battle sequences, which are as brutal as they are diverse. Matches range from free for alls to working as a team with a few skirmishes against tigers and bosses thrown in for good measure. But the carnage requires a certain amount of technique and restraint. It's easy to cut loose

and demolish opponents, but like the historical gladiator matches upon which the fighting is based, the more you excite the crowd and put on a good show, the greater the rewards are, such as health power-ups or powerful weapons, that are thrown into the arena.

Several combat techniques, such as stealing weapons from opponents, wrestling moves, and a variety of hacks and slices to—literally—disarm an opponent, have been implemented. But man-made iron has durability limits and isn't the only weapon available. Severed limbs and even decapitated heads can be used to bludgeon opponents when there's nothing else handy. Matches later expand to chariot races, where you must simultaneously drive a team of horses and do battle. Be warned: These scenes are as graphic as they sound, and this is definitely not for the faint of heart. The various play mechanics may sound initially daunting, but the simple controls are responsive and easy to master.

The Fall of the Roman Empire

Aesthetically, there's a lot to be said for Shadow as vivid visuals bring the ancient architecture to life. There's no shortage of gore, either, as blood splashes across the screen when gladiators are deprived of their limbs, accompanied by piercing screams, spurt-ing blood, and other poignant sounds.

Shadow of Rome is an excellent game that almost achieves greatness, and there are a ton of clever secrets and unlockable features that make for decent replay value. The

combat sequences are the undisputed highlight, and much of the game puts on a great show...just be prepared for stretches of frustration while sneaking around.—Major Mike

M ■ Developed and published by Capcom ■ \$49.99
 ■ Available February ■ Action/adventure ■ 1 player

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There's plenty of this in Shadow of Rome, a frustrating mix of stealth and action that's definitely not for the faint of heart.



PRO TIP: Any enemy that slowly approaches you is a prime target for an oil barrel.



PRO TIP: If you want to save a two-handed weapon for later use, make sure your opponents have been relieved of an arm. That way, they can't pick up the weapon and use it against you.



PRO TIP: Rotating blades are a real pain, but you can destroy them with two direct boulder hits.



PRO TIP: A key plan to thwart an attacking tiger is to throw an object or weapon at it when it lunges at you.



PRO TIP: If you dizzy an opponent near a spiked pit, stand behind him, press and hold , and then position him so when you perform a Suplex, he goes right into the bed of nails.

PS2	GRAPHICS	4.5	FUN FACTOR	4.0
	SOUND	4.5		
	CONTROL	4.5		

Blinx 2: Masters Of Time & Space

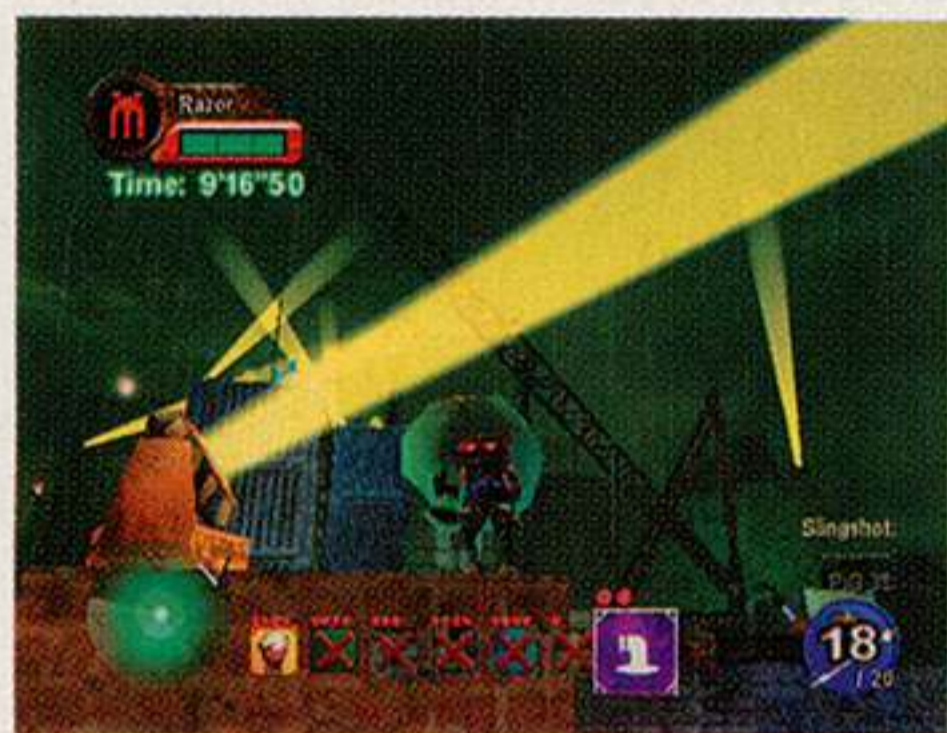


X Recovering from Blinx's abysmal premier outing, developer Artoon has regrouped and sent Blinx back out of his corner swinging in Masters of Time & Space.

Kittens with Vacuum Cleaners and Pig Robbers

Blinx 2: Masters of Time & Space has nearly nothing to do with the game's titular hero. Instead, this adventure presents you with the opportunity to lead a team of fully customizable Time Sweeper cats or Tom Tom pig gang members in a quest to piece together fragments of a giant crystal, which holds the fabric of time and space together.

Blinx 2 features a host of improvements and additions. Along with a Story mode, the sequel also has a two-player co-op and versus modes, where players can pit their customized teams against each other in a team deathmatch. The game also sports a ton of bonus mini-games and unlockable accessories to customize your chosen animals.



A mug only a mother could love

The controls have been improved—players can now utilize a time-crystal bank to store their unused time crystals—meaning no more bad crystal combos. Time Sweepers can also equip themselves with multiple Sweepers' weapons and upgrade them for more firepower.

Sounds Like You Ate a Mushroom from Your Backyard

While the Time Sweeper-platformer aspect of the game is tight, the Tom Tom pig gameplay is where Masters of Time & Space really shines. You can assume the role of members of the notorious antagonists from the first Blinx in stealth and action missions, and the gameplay in these missions is comparable to that in the Metal Gear and Splinter Cell games. The pigs have a variety of high- and low-tech weapons at their disposal, including firearms, bananas, baseball bats, sling shots, subspace grenades, and even a tank.

While Blinx 2 outshines its predecessor in every category, several caveats do arise. The game difficulty borders on preteen. Seasoned platform/stealth gamers will breeze through the entire Story mode in under six hours. The game also provides helpful guidance at every puzzle—lessening the challenge and eventually annoying the heck out of you. Even with these factors, Blinx 2 brings a refreshing change of pace to the Xbox's action-oriented lineup and is visually and cerebrally addictive.—*Rice Burner*

E ■ Developed by Artoon ■ Published by Microsoft ■ \$39.99 ■ Available now ■ Adventure ■ 2 players



PROTIP: Early on in the game, the rewind ability will be a Time Sweepers best weapon.

GAMEPRO EDITORS' CHOICE

X	GRAPHICS	4.5	4.5 ₅
	SOUND	4.0	
	CONTROL	4.5	

Backyard Wrestling 2: There Goes the Neighborhood

PS2 X With cobbling unorthodox wrestling stunts, over 20 licensed wrestler personalities—including a few female porn stars—and a vast array of options in the create-a-wrestler mode, Backyard Wrestling 2 gives the fighting genre a taste of horribly flawed hardcore wrestling.

Mmmm...Tera Patrick

Backyard Wrestling 2 improves on its predecessor by instituting a number of additional abilities and amping up the testosterone level a few notches. The gameplay now includes the ability to block, guard break, pin, and enact submission moves. Also new to the Backyard Wrestling franchise are the Environmental throws. Every stage has a few of these throws, which can be activated by grabbing your opponent in a front grapple when you are near a certain location (an icon appears to let you know where to do them). These range from repeatedly slamming an opponent's head into a car trunk to dunking your victim's head in a deep fryer.

While the newest improvements to the game are cool, Backyard Wrestling 2 is a fundamentally flawed game. The gameplay is wrought with glitches—saying it's a chore to play is an understatement. You can expect bad collision, horrible hit detection, and a list of clipping issues longer than it's worth describing.

Whose Neighborhood Are We In Again?

What's even worse is that Backyard Wrestling 2 actually expects you to go through several hours of challenge and mission matches before you can even play Career mode. These prerequisite matches consist of enacting a specific type of move repeatedly or facing lower-tiered licensed wrestlers. While it's nice to have a tutorial about the game engine, this system is counterintuitive and saps all the fun out of the game—once you're actually allowed to enter a tournament, you won't care anymore.

With sloppy production values, insane load times, subpar graphics and sound, and gameplay that irrevocably evolves into grapple, counter, super, grapple, counter, super, Backyard Wrestling 2: There Goes the Neighborhood isn't even worth the rental fee.—*Rice Burner*

M ■ Developed by Paradox ■ Published by Eidos Interactive ■ \$49.99 ■ Available now ■ Wrestling ■ 2 players

All screens shown here are from the PlayStation 2 version.



PROTIP: Execute a forward grapple, drag your opponent to a location where you see this icon, and then press Attack for an Enviro-Mental Throw.



The smut must live!

PS2	GRAPHICS	1.5	1.5 ₅
	SOUND	1.0	
	CONTROL	1.5	

X	GRAPHICS	2.5	1.5 ₅
	SOUND	1.0	
	CONTROL	2.0	

Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault

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Though it may lack the grandiose fanfare and inflated hype of other FPS titles, *Pacific Assault* is a stellar shooter worthy of distinction amid a seemingly endless deluge of historic combat titles.

PC Like most long-running video-game series, the Medal of Honor franchise has had its share of high and low points, having gone from creating superb late-1990s console heavyweights to subpar shooters like last year's *Rising Sun*. Fortunately, *Pacific Assault* serves as a powerful reaffirmation of the outstanding action and high drama associated with the Medal of Honor name.

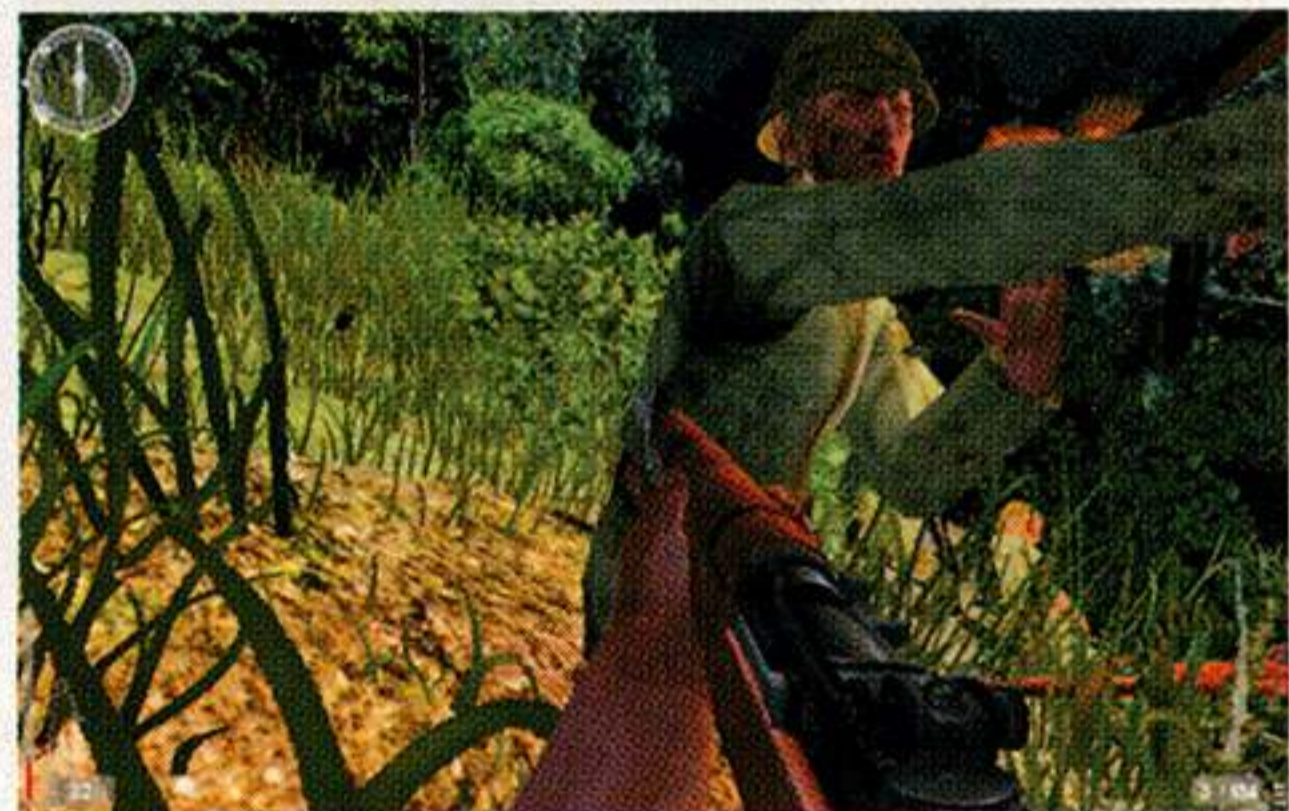
Fighting the Good Fight

With 31 levels spread across five historic missions ranging from the early morning attack on Pearl Harbor to the bloody island-hopping battles of Guadalcanal and Makin Atoll, *Pacific Assault* offers a hefty load of historically accurate adventure intertwined with an engagingly original and highly cinematic story. As greenhorn United States Marine PFC Tommy Conlin, you fight your way through the deadliest conflicts in the Pacific Theater with the help of your three best friends, whom you meet in boot camp. Unlike most shooters, *Pacific Assault* is high on characterization with each of your three fellow squad members having very distinct and believable personalities that change and develop as the game progresses. The story itself has a decidedly Spielberg-ish feeling as many of the gripping scenarios resemble those from films like *Saving Private Ryan* and the award-winning *Band of Brothers* miniseries (which is a very, very good thing). As a result, your investment in the gripping narrative is far greater than you might expect from a FPS game, and it's from this movie-like appeal (saturated with 1940s nostalgia) that *Pacific Assault* draws much of its strength.

Trigger Happy

Aesthetically, *Pacific Assault* is a masterpiece. The visuals are simply astounding with huge battles between Allied and Japanese forces taking place on the ground while massive dogfights swirl overhead and mortar shells and dive bombers pummel the ground around you in sharp, crisp detail (though such beautifully busy scenes will tax even the fastest computers with a few nasty bouts of slowdown). And, in typical Medal of Honor fashion, the audio presentation is second to none with great voice acting, a cool orchestral soundtrack, and outstanding sound effects that deserve to be heard in surround sound with the volume up high.

Pacific Assault also adds a few new gameplay elements to the tried and true Medal of Honor formula in a successful attempt to breathe new life into the series. Gone are the arcade-style health pack pickups that lay



PROTIP: When engaging an enemy in close quarters, save your ammo by delivering a powerful melee attack before your enemy skewers you.



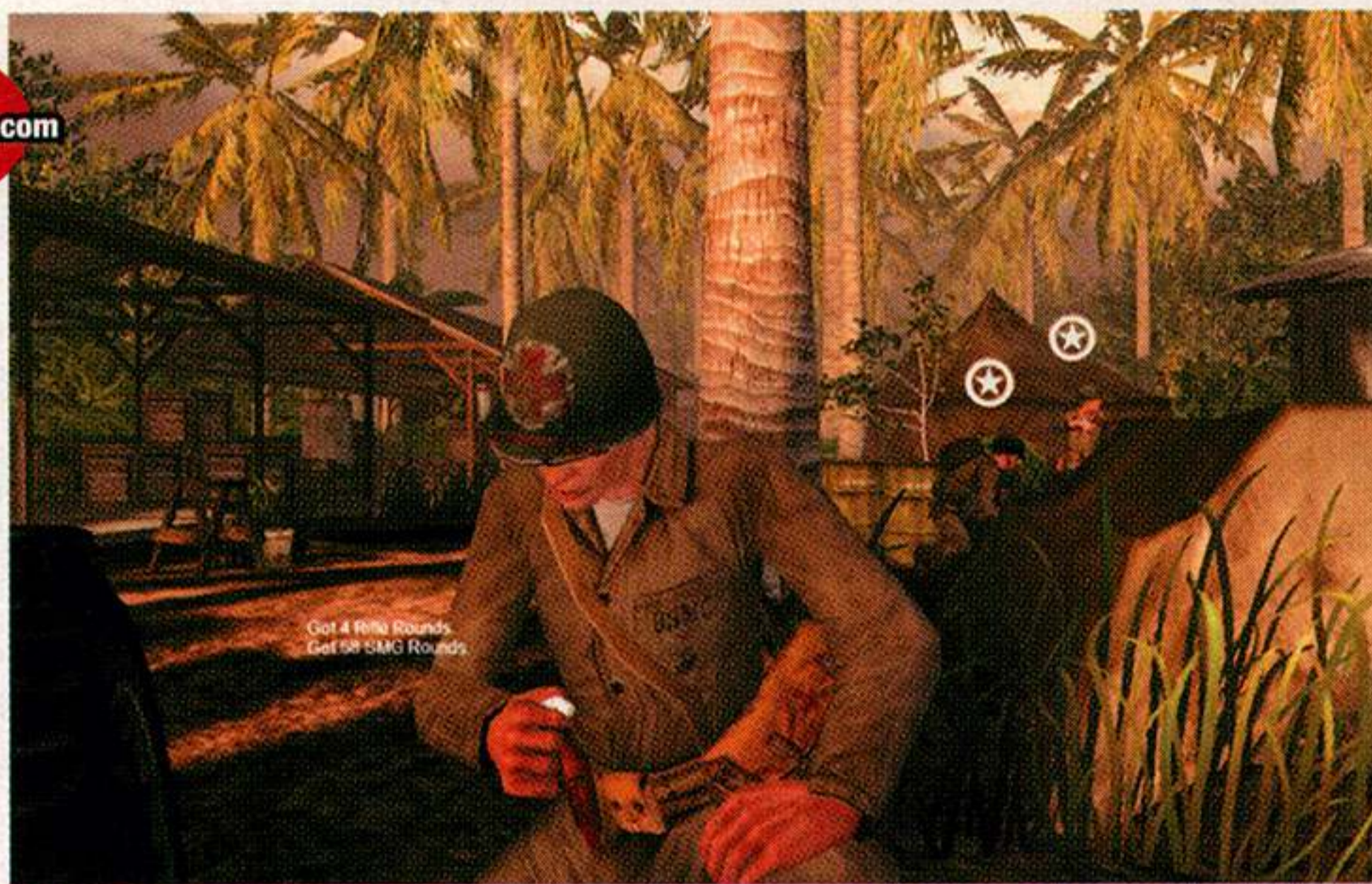
PROTIP: When defending Henderson Airfield against the attacking Zeros, remember to aim with the outside of the targeting reticule in order to lead them enough to score a direct hit.

strewn about in the previous games. You must now call upon Jimmy, your squad's medic, to heal you in the heat of battle. This means that healing yourself is now as much a matter of strategy as it is a necessity because being patched up in an open firefight will leave your medic exposed and makes easy targets of both of you. The new "Verge of Death" feature also adds an element of suspense to your untimely (but eventual) demise on the battlefield as you collapse and lose control of your character until you are either finished off by an enemy, left to expire, or rescued in the nick of time by your medic. Plus, MOHPA also boasts a simplistic but highly functional squad control feature that enables you to issue basic commands to your already competent teammates, thereby letting you choose between a team-oriented style or a more maverick approach.

Tokyo or Bust

Though *Pacific Assault* shines throughout, there are a few dodgy spots that could have used some shoring up. At times, the enemy forces can be rather crushingly difficult, and you will certainly die often—a fact that becomes horribly annoying thanks to the terribly long load times between respawns. Also, the environments aren't very destructible, and there are a few buggy moments throughout, especially regarding the collision detection. But patient and persistent gamers who aren't afraid of facing death often (and whose PCs are up to the task) would be remiss in letting this one sneak by. What this FPS game lacks in antagonistic aliens and demons from hell it more than makes up for with good old-fashioned gunplay and an unbeatable theatrical presentation.—*Bones-in-Britain*

T ■ Developed by EA LA ■ Published by EA Games
■ \$49.99 (\$59.99 for Director's Edition) ■ Available now
■ First-person shooter ■ 1 player; 32 online



PROTIP: Be very careful when calling for a Corpsman to patch you up—he'll heal you exactly where you call him, potentially endangering both of you.



Unlike in previous MOH games, you now fight alongside an intelligent and commandable squad of fellow Marines.



PROTIP: Always know where your teammates are on the battlefield as breaking formation can leave you without any supporting fire and open to enemy attacks.

GAMEPRO EDITORS' CHOICE

PC	GRAPHICS	5.0	4.5
	SOUND	5.0	
	CONTROL	5.0	

Recommended System Specifications
■ Windows 2000/XP ■ Pentium 4 or Athlon 2.0+ GHz
■ 512 MB RAM ■ 4.5 GB on HD ■ 128 MB video card

Sid Meier's Pirates!

PIn the age where mediocre games with movie-sized blistering budgets and high-profile voice acting have become standard, Sid Meier's Pirates goes in the other direction, focusing on the basics of what makes games great.



Arrrr...Arrrr

The first thing that strikes you when loading up the game is that there's no voiced narration. No Patrick Stewart to offer crisp Shakespearean eloquence about the perils of the sea here. Instead, the characters speak in nondescript Simlish (and maybe a bit of German), which initially seems lacking but actually gives the game a sense of warmth and charm.

That homey vibe permeates into the core gameplay as well. Refusing to be pigeonholed into one genre, Pirates combines various elements that are entertaining enough to not be dreadfully labeled as "mini-games." Traveling around the world map, players need to be mindful of wind, shallows, and food. Getting close up, the ship battles become more action-oriented as you try to maneuver your customized (likely stolen) ship to fire broadsides. Clash into an enemy ship, and Disney-like swashbuckling duels ensue, where players dodge and attack using the numeric keypad. Plus, you'll have to woo and win the heart of a Governor's daughter by dancing to her moves, which mildly resembles the gameplay in Beat Mania or DDR but less shameful. Pirates wouldn't be pirates without plundering, so the game turns into a simple but effective turn-based strategy when you're attacking towns. Each gameplay aspect has its own place, joyously gelling together to create a diverse but pleasant experience.

Ye Land Lubber

The downside to living the life of a pirate is that there's no higher calling, no goal to achieve other than hoarding as much money as you can. The quests to rescue your family and get revenge are a nice diversion but don't offer enough to carry the game. And having to periodically split your plunder (meaning disbanding crew, splitting money, and selling off other ships) detracts from the pacing of the game. Also, the lack of retaliation for plundering is disappointing: You take down a bustling Spanish town and get only one Pirate Raider on your tail? It would've been exciting to pit your ship against a whole Spanish Armada (fondly recall taking on hordes of pirates in Apple II's Taipei).

However, for the first 15 hours or so, it's difficult for such cynicism to creep in. Sid Meier's Pirates may not have all the frills, but it's got plenty of thrills.—Funky Zealot

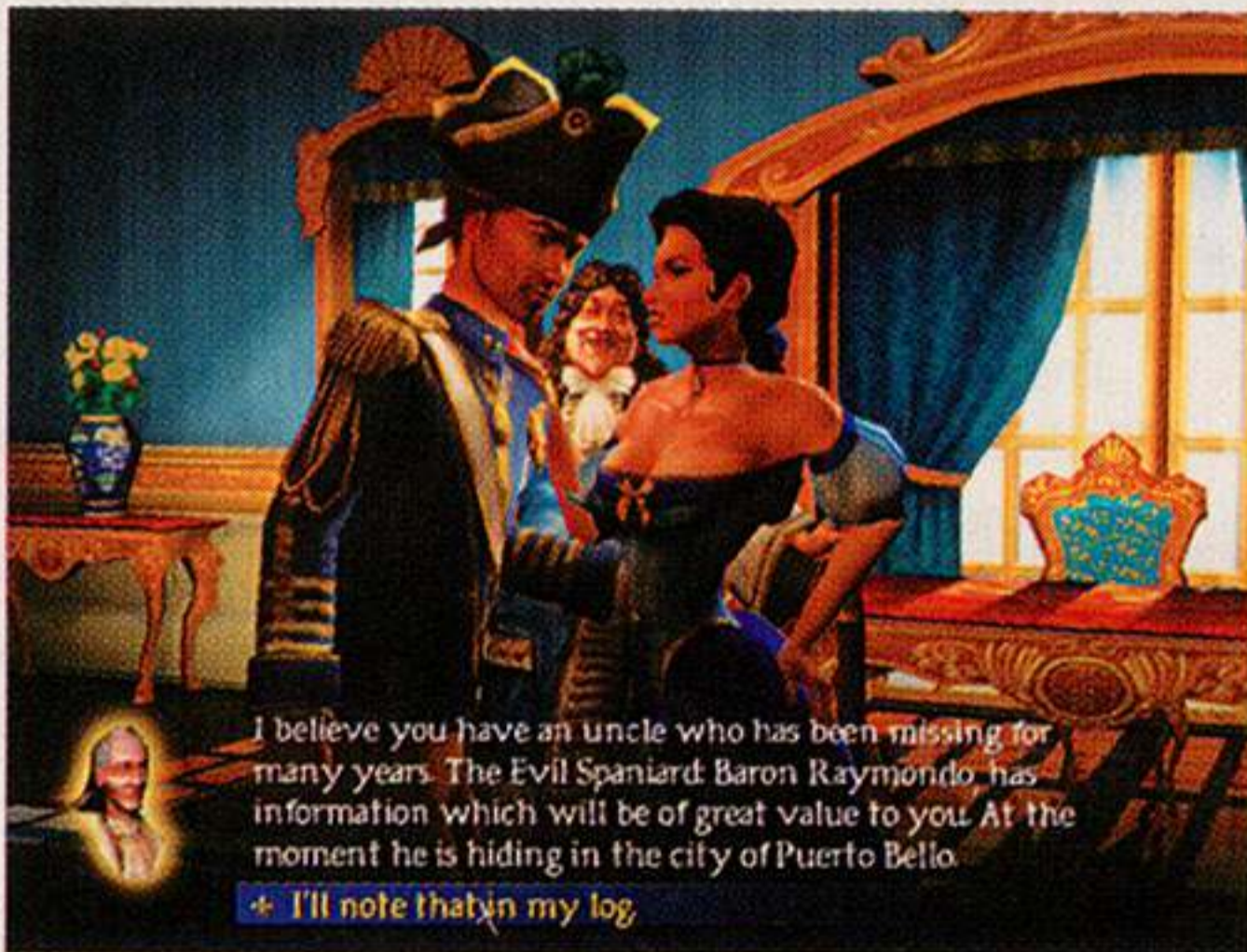
E ■ Developed by Firaxis Games ■ Published by Atari
■ \$49.99 ■ Available now ■ Strategy ■ 1 player



PRO TIP: The best large-sized ships are Frigates—capture one early on in the game. Speed and maneuverability are more important than guns.



PRO TIP: If you want to get an extra boost of speed when sailing, move into storm clouds.



PRO TIP: Potential trophy wives are harder to impress as they require someone with a high rank and a lot of dancing skills. Dance shoes are a big help.

GAMEPRO EDITORS' CHOICE

PC	GRAPHICS	4.5	4.5 FUN FACTOR
	SOUND	4.0	
	CONTROL	5.0	

Recommended System Specifications

- Windows 2000/XP ■ Pentium 4 2.0 GHz or Athlon
- 512 MB RAM ■ 1.6 GB on HD ■ DirectX 9 video card

"You take audio and video and jam 'em together 'til they rock."

—Stephanie Heer
B.A. in Multimedia
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The Lord of the Rings: The Battle for Middle-Earth

It's lighter than most RTS games, but *The Battle for Middle-Earth* features groundbreaking visuals and gameplay that sets new standards for the genre.

PC Blizzard set the precedent for real-time-strategy games with *Warcraft*, and since then games have spiraled toward ever-increasing complexity, making players manage complex, labyrinthine upgrade trees and a frivolous number of resources. In a refreshing change, EA has stripped away the mundane chores, focusing instead on creating grand battles that faithfully reflect Peter Jackson's ambitious vision of *The Lord of the Rings*.

Not a Conjuror of Cheap Tricks

Despite advances in graphics and technology, most strategy games have flat and uninspiring combat—enemies just move until they're within attacking distance and then mindlessly whack each other until the stronger side wins. With *Battle for Middle-Earth*, however, fights feel like scenes straight out of the movies. Flying chunks of rocks from trebuchets chip away at walls and smash warriors into the ground, pounding cavalry charges flatten orc conscripts, and massive trolls wave tree trunks of death, swatting away the unlucky sods nearby. The masterful immersion and seamless interaction between the objects and the world blurs the lines between cinematic storytelling and gameplay. You can order Ents to



PROTIP: Save Boromir by ignoring all regular enemies and rushing toward Lurtz, who is shooting arrows from the right.



PROTIP: Upgrade all units before finishing off the level in a campaign—upgrades carry over.



PROTIP: The undead horde aids you in the latter part of the Minas Tirith level. Keep the Mordor army at bay with Tower Guards and Archers.

pick up boulders and throw them on orc companies, or have Nazguls grab cowering swordsmen and throw them down—it's as though the player is creating his own take on the movie scenes of Isengard or Minas Tirith. EA has clearly raised the bar with *Battle for Middle-Earth*, and future RTS games will be undoubtedly judged against it.

Base building and resource management, the bane for the nonhardcore, has been toned down, enabling players to concentrate more on the fighting, which is critical as a mountain troll can instantly flatten an army. Instead of being able to build anywhere, you construct outposts in set locations, which is nice for its simplicity but makes base strategizing slightly more dull. The game has only one resource type to worry about (basically gold), which is a pleasant change of pace and surprisingly still has depth and requires skill to manage. In addition to heroes, units continually gain in experience and skill, making retreats an invaluable tactic.

The interface is the biggest downside—it's a tad too simplified, lacking some important information, such as base-armor rating, that makes the organization of your forces a needlessly cumbersome affair. Also, the units don't naturally align themselves correctly in large groups—for example, archers automatically marching behind swordsmen as seen in *Warcraft III*. However, micromanaging battles is a genuine joy (and nearly essential), so it only becomes a minor annoyance.

There's Room for a Little More

Simplicity works both for and against *The Battle for Middle-Earth*: On one hand, it's appealing to the less hardcore; on the other, it may leave those who enjoyed more complex games like *Kohan II* yearning for a bit more. The diversity of units is limited, which is partially due to the game's restriction of using only what was seen in the movies. Its RTS-lite approach may not garner as devoted a following as a game like *StarCraft*, but the overwhelming majority who has any interest in both RTS games and *The Lord of the Rings* won't be disappointed.

—Funky Zealot

T ■ Developed by EA LA ■ Published by EA Games
 ■ \$49.99 ■ Available now ■ Real-time strategy ■ 8 players



PROTIP: Trebuchets can hurt you just as much as the enemy. It's a good idea to turn off auto aim when your troops engage the enemy.



PROTIP: Mumakil and Trolls lay waste to infantry but are fodder when facing a large group of Archers.



PROTIP: Upgrade armor for Rohan Horsemen quickly—while powerful when fully upgraded, they get massacred by Pikemen when they're fresh out of the stables.



GAMEPRO EDITORS' CHOICE

PC	GRAPHICS	5.0	4.5
	SOUND	5.0	
	CONTROL	3.5	

Recommended System Specifications
 ■ Windows 2000/XP ■ Pentium 4 or Athlon 1.8 GHz
 ■ 512 MB RAM ■ 2.7 GB on HD ■ DirectX 9 video card

Men of Valor

PC With such an abundance of historical first-person-shooters flooding the market, attracting the loyalty—and cash—of picky gamers means today's titles must offer players an exciting, unique experience superior to that of competing genre entries. Men of Valor does many things right in creating fast-paced, frantic-combat scenarios and providing a story saturated with historical information and an authentic, hardboiled wartime atmosphere. However, the edgy themes and frenzied

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PRO TIP: Be very careful when your air support is dumping artillery on the enemy as sloppy friendly fire can often leave you on the verge of death.

battles are muddled by restrictive, linear levels and lackluster gameplay that fail to push Men of Valor over the top of the cluttered heap of mediocre military shooters.

"American G.I. Number One, Beaucoup!"

Developer 2015 (makers of Medal of Honor: Allied Assault) has obviously taken great care to recreate the experience of American combat in Vietnam by faithfully representing the racial, ethical, and political dilemmas that shaped that era in gritty, unflinching detail. Unfortunately, much of the dramatic tension that could have been elicited from such a historically accurate approach falls flat because of sadly uninspired dialogue, awkward cut-scene animations, and (for the most part) down right cheesy voice acting. In fact, the high cheese factor is so prevalent in MOV that it spills into other areas of the game. For instance, the "Hogan's Alley" style A.I.



PRO TIP: Although your allies will pitch in a hand from time to time, don't expect them to be of much help—you're much better off taking out all hostiles than waiting for support.

employed by the NVA and Viet Cong soldiers is almost as frustratingly simple as the woefully ineffective support provided by your noncontrollable (and apparently untrained) fellow squad members. There's also no worry about becoming lost in the jungle environments as each level has annoyingly tight and straightforward boundaries, thereby dramatically limiting your attack and defense options.

"Now Dig This, Sucka!"

Graphically, Men of Valor looks great and is well detailed, and the music and sound effects are (as expected) also top-shelf quality. The control is excellent for the most part, but trying to bandage yourself while walking is quite clumsy on the keyboard. Overall, Men of Valor is an adequate entry into the emerging Vietnam subgenre that offers plenty of simplistic shooting fun but fails to capture the depth and grandeur of similar titles like Battlefield Vietnam or even Call of Duty despite the obvious inclusion of so much historical information.—Bones-in-Britain



PRO TIP: Be extra wary of flanking enemies, especially in embankments where you're exposed on lower ground.

M ■ Developed by 2015
 ■ Published by Vivendi Universal Games
 ■ \$39.99 ■ Available now
 ■ Shooting ■ 1 player; 24 online

PC	GRAPHICS	4.0	FUN FACTOR 3.5
	SOUND	4.0	
	CONTROL	4.5	

Recommended System Specifications
 ■ Windows 98/ME/2000/XP ■ Pentium 4 2.8 GHz
 ■ 512 MB RAM ■ 2.6 GB on HD ■ 128 MB video card

Vietnam Virtuoso

Battlefield Vietnam
 Men of Valor may be the newest recruit, but grizzled veteran Battlefield Vietnam retains the highest honors.



Not only does Battlefield Vietnam make drastic improvements to its hugely popular predecessor, the WWII-themed Battlefield 1942, but it also sets a lofty new standard for all online PC warfare. Battlefield Vietnam's new offline practice mode is a nice addition (hindered only by dumb combatants), but the online mode remains the main attraction. Online matches support up to 64 players, a big advantage over Men of Valor's smaller, more restrictive online battles.

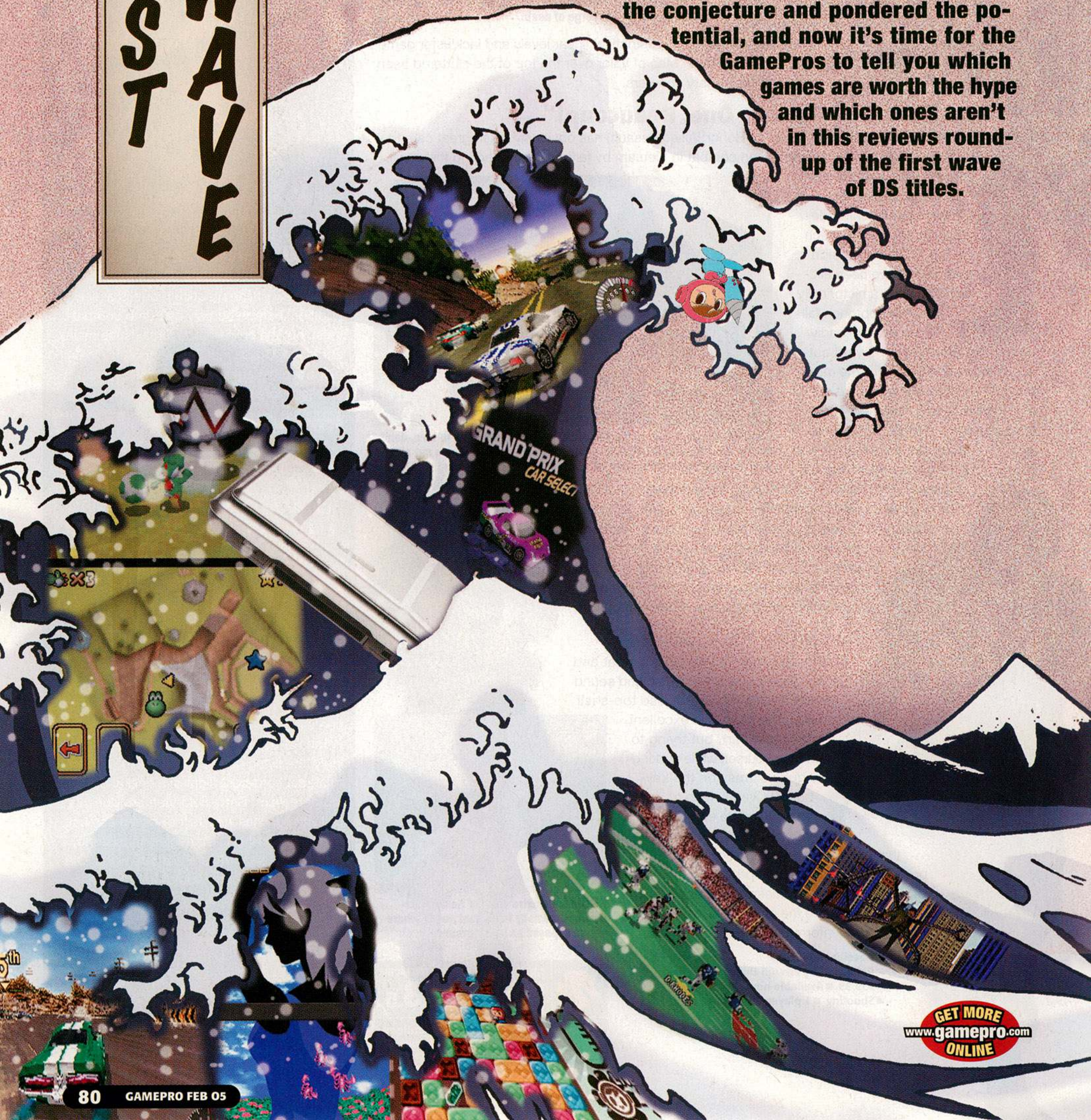


Another feather in Battlefield's cap is the series-trademark vehicle authenticity, and in this respect, Battlefield Vietnam still stands out. Depending on their allegiance, players can pilot everything from NVA scooters to firebomb-belching Phantoms. And amazingly, the flying controls are realistic enough to attract hard-core flight-sim geeks. Speaking of realism, Battlefield Vietnam doesn't pull any punches with its foot-based combat, either; run-and-gun strategies consistently take a back seat to careful strategizing. Die-hard online warriors wouldn't have it any other way.—Vicious Sid

THE FIRST WAVE

THE NINTENDO DS LAUNCH GAMES REVIEWED!

Nintendo's next-generation handheld has finally arrived with a slew of launch titles. You've heard the conjecture and pondered the potential, and now it's time for the GamePros to tell you which games are worth the hype and which ones aren't in this reviews round-up of the first wave of DS titles.



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SUPER MARIO 64 DS

Revisiting Super Mario 64 is about as good a reason as any to pick up a DS. It's not quite a port of the original, but the DS version does feature all the essential elements. You get to return to Princess Peach's Mushroom castle with all of its transdimensional wall paintings and secret, locked doors. The 3D gameplay, level challenges, and secondary Mario-world characters all return intact.

But there's abundant DS freshness, too. This time, Wario and Luigi join the...er, Mario party, and Yoshi carries the ball on a quest to track them down inside the magical castle paintings. The classic visuals are impressive, having been touched up for DS duty. The sounds are superb and classic Mario. They're particularly sweet in surround mode with a set of headphones.

Thumb Sprints

Your goal in the single-player Adventure mode is 150 stars this time, and you're going to have to work to get them. It's not so much the challenge of the game's puzzles as it is getting used to the controls. Three control settings use the touch screen and stylus, the touch screen and your thumb, or a more traditional keypad layout. With the touch screen, there's a fine art to mastering

precise movements, running fast and slow, and steering your direction as the game cam flies around the 3D space. There's nothing wrong with the touch screen that a few hours of practice won't alleviate, but true to the game's console roots, you yearn for a control pad throughout.

The Touchy Feelies

The mini-games in Rec Room mode feel much more intuitive, having been designed with the touch screen and stylus in mind. You get eight to start with, and you unlock more in Adventure mode. They're simple but compelling puzzle challenges that will improve your dexterity with the stylus.



PROTIP: Make Yoshi eat enemies and turn them into eggs. You need to learn to throw them precisely to defeat certain creatures.



PROTIP: You need to master Yoshi's three run-and-jump styles to make it to Mario.

The wireless multiplayer VS mode is a nifty diversion and a way to get some DS action with friends. You need only one Super Mario 64 game card to enter a Mario-style shoving match to beat the stars out of your buddies.

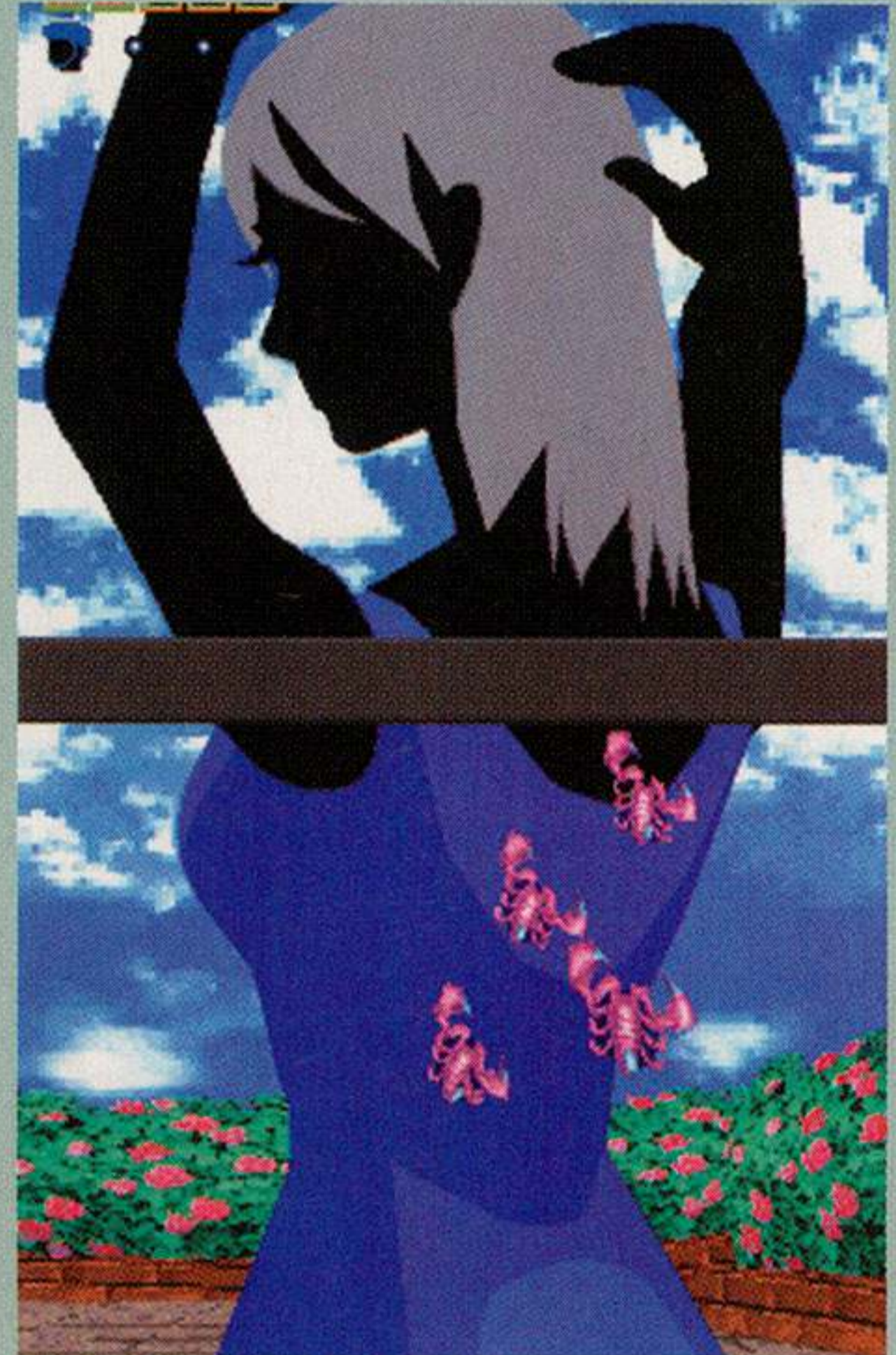
You can never get enough of a classic. Super Mario 64 is essentially here with enough DS goodies to make a compelling dual-screen package. Nintendo has a Mario Bros. game designed for DS brewing, and after playing Mario 64 DS, that sounds-a-like-a good idea.—*Brother Buzz*

E ■ Developed and published by Nintendo
 ■ \$29.99 ■ Available now
 ■ Action/adventure ■ 4 players

DS	GRAPHICS	4.5	FUN FACTOR	4.0
	SOUND	5.0		
	CONTROL	4.0		

FEEL THE MAGIC: XY/XX

Boy meets girl, boy gets smitten, boy swims through snake intestines, shoots phantasmagorical bulls, fights punk rock giant robots, and helps a buddy puke goldfish to win her heart in this deliriously inventive offering from Sega. More than any other launch title, *Feel the Magic: XY/XX* was conceived and constructed to fully express the unique technological potential of the DS, and its Wario-inspired mini-games require quick reflexes, pinpoint accuracy, a steady hand, strong lungs, and a healthy sense of the absurd to successfully complete.

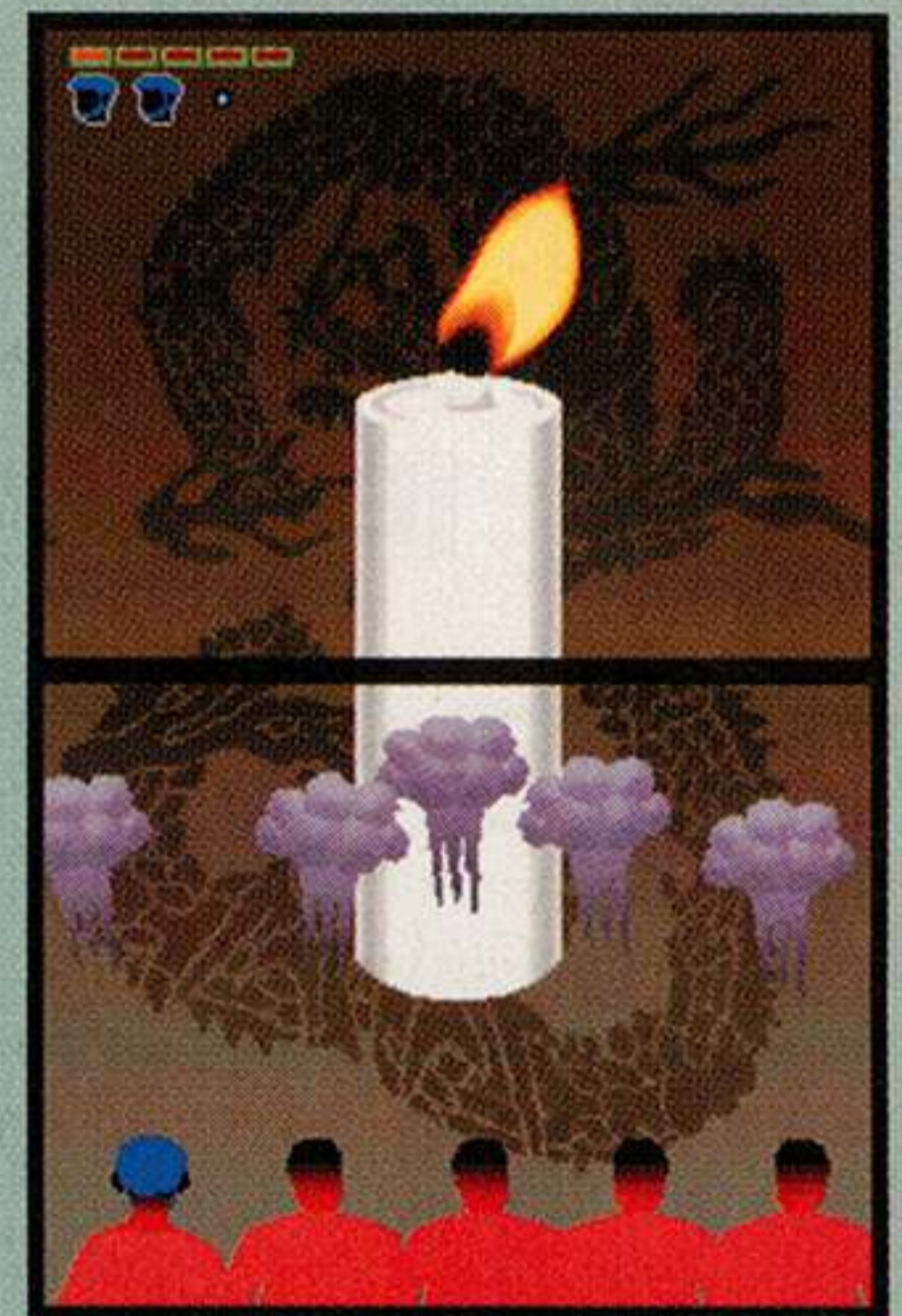


PROTIP: Don't stab the object of your crush trying to get at the scorpions or you won't be getting any love.

Rubbing The Wrong Way

The plot, which can be surprisingly touching and sometimes tragic, and is told completely

in dialogue-free visual tableaux, fuels blazing mini-game blitzkriegs that make full and clever use of the DS's dual screens, touch sensitivity, and voice-recognition functions (sadly, there's no multiplayer games, so wireless connectivity is the only feature of the DS not present and accounted for). Rubbing and tapping the screen in the right areas when prompted zaps flesh-crawling scorpions, navigates unicycles across treacherous bridges, clears debris from the path of oncoming shopping carts, and pops the buttons off your gal's dress. Other challenges include frenzied inputting of number sequences to open the parachutes of falling skydivers, Space Channel 5-type mimic dancing, tricky flip-image puzzles, and stealth sequences that would rattle Solid Snake's nerves. In the boss battles, you have to drive a truck, hit pedestrians, and use them as projectile weapons by hurling them at enemy cars.



PROTIP: If your characters run out of breath before extinguishing the candle, rubbing upwards can help do it.

Magical Mystery Tour

Feel the Magic is also the first game to use the DS's voice recognition as some games require you to blow into the microphone to put out candles and propel a yacht across shark-infested waters, or yell into it to profess your love loud enough to be heard over cantankerous street musicians. The only complaints one could level at *Feel the Magic* is its short duration, but the good far outweighs the bad here, partners, and this is one wild and creative surprise.

—*Child of Chaka*

T ■ Developed and published by Sega
 ■ \$29.99 ■ Available now
 ■ Action ■ 1 player

GAMEPRO EDITORS' CHOICE

DS	GRAPHICS	4.0	FUN FACTOR	4.5
	SOUND	4.0		
	CONTROL	4.5		

RIDGE RACER DS

Of the several driving games already available for the DS, Ridge Racer certainly takes the lead... but that doesn't mean it grabs the checkered flag.

The Ridge Racer series has always been known to showcase unique driving controls. But whereas drifting around corners in previous games is an all-time high, taking turns on this DS version is an all-time low. The game offers two ways to steer the car. Flashing back to the old PlayStation days (on which Ridge Racer first appeared), you can opt for digital-pad memories, which results in twitchy thumb movements. Or, you can use the bottom touch screen, where you rub the stylus or thumb protector against a virtual steering wheel. The outcome for this option: a lesson in how not to use the touch screen in games. You'll immediately feel like you're in a round of bumper cars as you automatically swerve from side to side. You literally have no control in this manner.

Despite the whacked-out controls, Ridge Racer does feature some cool visuals. The game moves at a blistering-fast frame rate, and the cars and tracks are colorfully detailed. There are also plenty of game modes that let you unlock tons of new cars and extra tracks. Still, with a frustrating control scheme, Ridge Racer stays only in low gear. It's lucky that this driver is one of the first out of the DS gates or else it wouldn't have stood a chance.—*Four-Eyed Dragon*

E ■ Developed and published by Namco ■ \$29.99 ■ Available now ■ Racing ■ 2 players



PROTIP: Braking is for amateurs; slide through turns instead. Lay off the gas as you corner, and while in the middle of a turn, jam on the accelerator and counter steer until you straighten out.



PROTIP: Choose handling and grip over everything else when selecting a speedster.

DS	GRAPHICS	4.0	FUN FACTOR 3.0 ₅
	SOUND	3.5	
	CONTROL	2.0	



PROTIP: Drill into the side for a quick escape from falling dirt above.

MR. DRILLER: DRILL SPIRITS

In the absence of the standard puzzle game for a Nintendo hardware launch (i.e. Tetris), Mr. Driller does a good job with entertaining the brain.

"Mister who?" you ask? It's Namco's cutesy drill guy whose sole objective is to dig way down beneath the earth. There's not much to it: Just point in the direction that you want to drill and that's it. It may sound simple, but then you need to consider all of the colorful blocks that can fall on top of you as you go deeper. Plus, you'll need to constantly resupply yourself with oxygen, which can be done only by reaching the few air icons spread out underground. Playing Mr. Driller takes a lot of practice.

Newcomers will want to speed all the way down without stopping while trying to beat the falling debris above. But as you play more, you'll realize that it takes a certain amount of strategy to successfully drill downward. If done right, you can have same-colored rocks fall onto one other, which causes a long chain reaction and in turn makes it easier to reach your final destination.

Like the gameplay, Mr. Driller's presentation is simple. A colorful display of solid rocks, a little man holding a drill, and a few oddly shaped boulders make up the entire game. If you like to think just a bit more and still have a good time, then dig yourself a hole with Mr. Driller.—*Four-Eyed Dragon*

E ■ Developed and published by Namco ■ \$29.99 ■ Available now ■ Puzzle ■ 5 players



PROTIP: It's not worth drilling through hard rock to get air. Just continue downward at a faster pace until you see oxygen that's more accessible.

DS	GRAPHICS	3.5	FUN FACTOR 3.5 ₅
	SOUND	3.0	
	CONTROL	4.0	

ASPHALT URBAN GT

Asphalt Urban GT is one of those racers that could have taken the pole but instead falls behind the pack with lackluster gameplay.

Gameloft, whose parent company is Ubisoft, attempts to bring arcade racing to the DS. On the outside, the options look exceptional. Your vehicle selection is made up from a large list of real and fantasized vehicles that range from supersporty to clunky off-roaders, and the tracks are just as diverse. The urban raceways are surprisingly detailed and feature a fair amount of attractive colors, plus the game even has moving traffic, which keeps the streets interesting as you race along them.

Asphalt's downfall is its off-balance racing. The addition of turbo boosts just doesn't make sense in this particular racer. The game features too many turns to really engage your limited turbos, and if you do use them, you constantly need to prepare to brake hard on an impending curve, which makes for frustrating controls. Bumping into speed limit-conscious drivers is a hassle, too. Most of the time, your car comes to a complete stop if you crash into another vehicle—even if you're driving a monster Hummer and you bump into a tiny sedan.

A good amount of game modes still doesn't help Asphalt Urban GT's swerving driving style. At the end, this is one racer that looks good, but its performance under the hood rumbles with little fanfare.—*Four-Eyed Dragon*

E ■ Developed and published by Gameloft ■ \$29.99 ■ Available now ■ Racing ■ 4 players



PROTIP: Use your turbo to accelerate faster after you've just crashed.

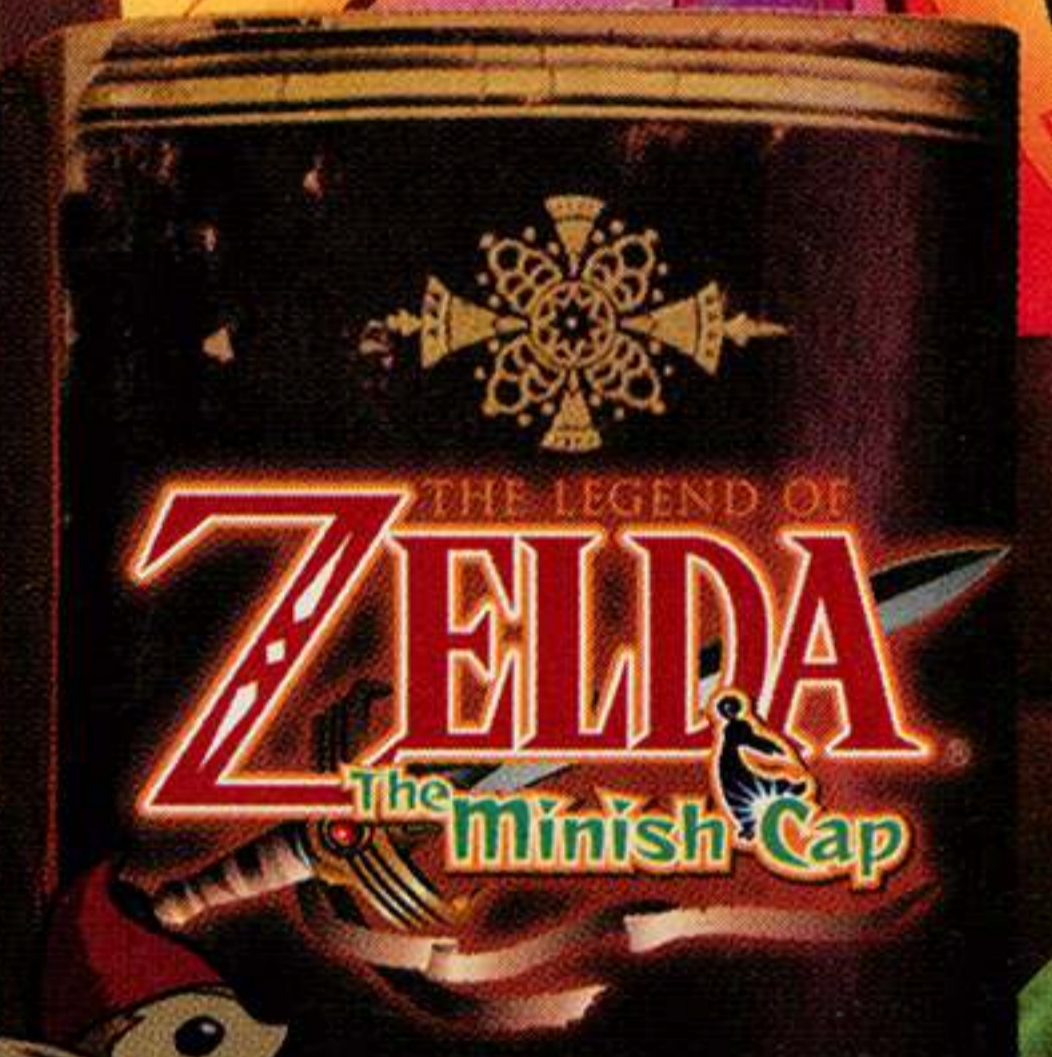


PROTIP: You're safer avoiding the moving ramp when you're fighting through traffic to get to it.

DS	GRAPHICS	4.0	FUN FACTOR 3.0 ₅
	SOUND	3.0	
	CONTROL	3.5	

CONTINUED ▶

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MADDEN NFL 2005

EA is smart to bring its Madden NFL franchise to the DS. The name alone should make any football fan scream with glee, but beyond the big name, this pigskin sports the right moves for a good time on the DS.

The usual Madden setup is entirely here. From the get go, you'll notice the visuals have been spruced up from those in past Madden GBA games—they're closer in appearance to an old PlayStation game. Portraits of players pop up after each play, and character models look decently good. There is, though, one major component missing: the energetic commentary. Instead, the sounds consist of, at most, three lines from Madden's mouth coupled with lots of stadium cheers.



PRO TIP: Even if the opponent is in your face after a punt, don't call a fair catch. Instead, run the ball, and you'll still gain at least a few yards.

The use of the touch screen seems a bit out of place for Madden. Fundamentally, it makes sense to use the lower screen to select plays and quickly call audibles. On the flip side, however, you can still do those things on a single screen as you have in the past. And to have the ability to see all 22 players on the field at one time as well as have the kick meter visible on the lower screen is more of a novelty than a practicality.

Still, with a wide selection of offensive and defensive plays available, several game modes, and the option to play wireless with someone else should appeal to any football fan craving a portable play action.

—Four-Eyed Dragon



PRO TIP: Line shift your defense at the last second to confuse the offense.

E ■ Developed and published by EA Sports
 ■ \$39.99 ■ Available now ■ Football ■ 2 players

DS	GRAPHICS	4.0	FUN FACTOR 4.0 ₅
	SOUND	2.0	
	CONTROL	4.0	



PRO TIP: Don't forget to mix up your special powers when fighting adversaries.

SPIDER-MAN 2

By essentially recycling the Spider-Man 2 game that came out for the Game Boy Advance with seemingly tossed-in touch commands, the decision to release Spider-Man 2 on the DS reeks like a half-hearted attempt to cash in on the looming DVD release of the film.

Despite some cool quasi-3D camera panning and tight animation, the core 2D side-scrolling platform gameplay is left virtually unchanged from that in previous Spider-Man games as are some of those titles' most glaring flaws. For the most part, you use the touch screen to toggle your web abilities on the fly, while other uses include navigating control switches across electrified grids and neutralizing boss attacks.

The most prominent problem Spider-Man 2 suffers from is its convoluted indoor levels. Oftentimes, you need to search areas for a set number of criminals to bop or hostages to free. But without a map to consult, too much time is spent frustratingly backtracking and combing through every nook and cranny you've already visited, hoping to stumble across something you missed the first time out. It gets boring. Fast. The second biggest problem is the sticky controls (no pun intended). Too often, you'll get stuck on walls and ceilings, while the sluggish melee combat leads to many, many unnecessary deaths. Luckily, you can input most of the touch screen commands with your thumb as trying to use the directional pad, stylus, and hit buttons would've been impossible. The verdict: skip it.—Iron Monkey

E ■ Developed by Vicarious Visions ■ Published by Activision
 ■ \$39.99 ■ Available now ■ Action ■ 1 player

DS	GRAPHICS	4.0	FUN FACTOR 2.0 ₅
	SOUND	4.0	
	CONTROL	2.0	

Preview

METROID PRIME HUNTERS: FIRST HUNT

The Nintendo DS comes packed with a demo of Metroid Prime Hunters: First Hunt that has two modes of play—Training and Multiplayer. Training lets you hone your skills in combat training, shooting, and maneuvering Samus when she's in Morphball status. Multiplayer enables up to four wannabe bounty hunters to battle it out head to head deathmatch style in three arenas.

So how does Metroid play? Fine—albeit with a slight learning curve.

The first thing you'll notice is how off balance the game makes you feel—using the directional pad to strafe and the stylus on the lower screen to move, it takes a couple of minutes to figure things out. It's similar to playing Metroid with a keyboard-and-mouse combo with the stylus as the mouse. The biggest problem with Metroid is trying to cradle the system in one hand and use the stylus with the other—if it's on a flat surface, the system must be held at a slight angle (plus, the fire buttons are the L and R buttons). The upside is that the functions's location on the lower screen makes for easy access. The Touch Shot configuration moves the action to the lower screen and combines shooting and moving, and is a bit easier to control.

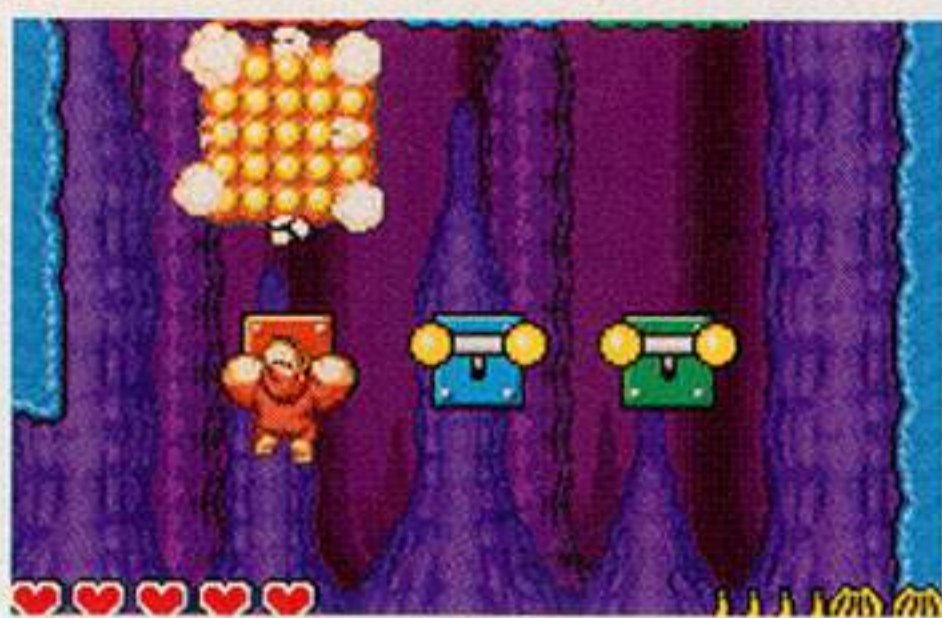
Metroid Prime Hunters: First Hunt is an example of an intriguing way of coupling the franchise's play physics with the DS's hardware. It should be interesting to see what the full version of the game has to offer.—Major Mike

■ Hands-On ■ Developed and published by Nintendo ■ Target release date: May



In multiplayer mode, up to four Samuses can battle it out head to head.

DK: King of Swing

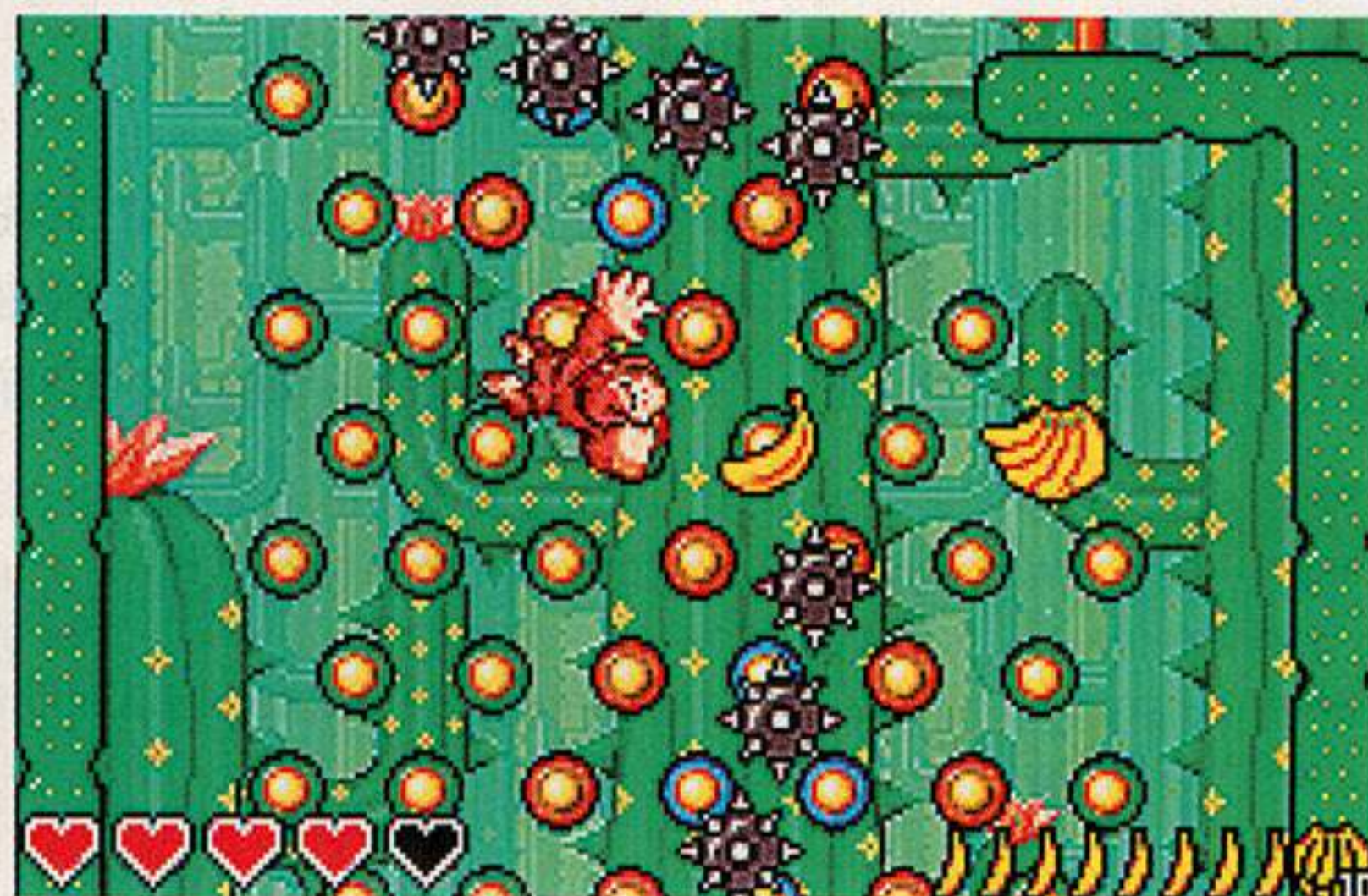


Plans to nominate a new king of the jungle go horribly awry when resident fool King K. Rool steals the special medallion that's meant to be worn by the winner. Enter the Donkey Kong family, part-time adventurers, full-time friends of all animals, who want to put the kibosh on Rool's plans and return the medal to its rightful owner.

It's nice to see how far the surly simian has come from kidnapping carpenters' girlfriends to risking life and limb for the benefit of the jungle community.



DK: King of Swing will introduce an innovative system for swinging, launching, and spinning that uses your hands as your primary method of locomotion. The L and R shoulder buttons will correspond to each of Donkey Kong's hands, and by alternately pressing them, you can swing from branch to branch. The puzzle-like levels, which range from jungles to deserts to cave interiors, will be designed in such a way that you'll have to skillfully grab onto gears and then spin around to open doors, build enough momentum



to launch yourself into inaccessible areas, or execute charged tackles to attack enemies. Multiplayer link play will round off what should be a wild single-player experience.

—Iron Monkey

■ First Look ■ Developed by PAON
■ Published by Nintendo ■ Target release date: 2005



Mario Party Advance

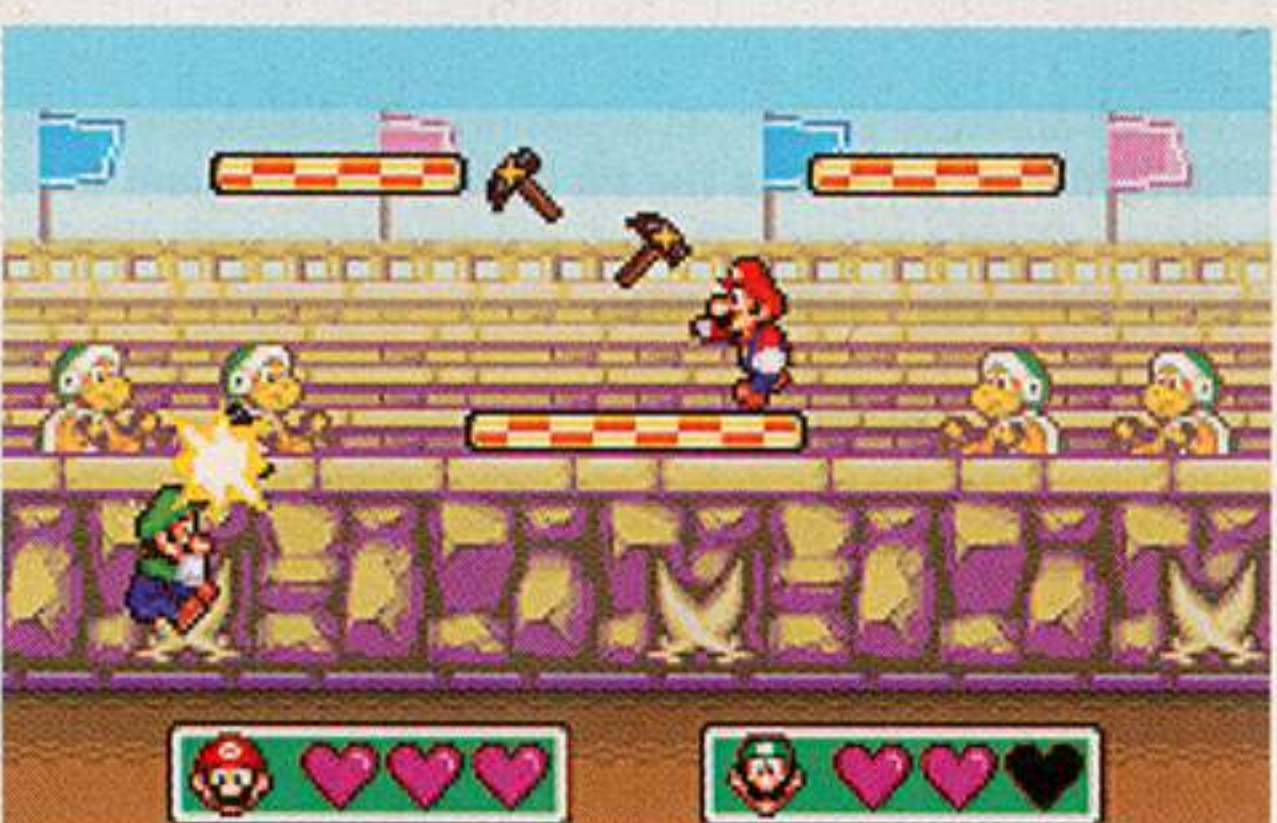
Mario, commonly regarded as Nintendo's resident proprietor of a good time for all, is hosting a porta party (Hah! Get it? Porta party! Yeah...umm...sorry). Mario Party Advance boldly promises to provide as many thrills as the console version with over 60 single-player mini-games, which, judging from these screen shots, include gathering drowning monkeys, dodging hammers thrown by turtles, and popping humongous bubbles. When said mini-games are completed, you'll unlock coins, trinkets, and Professor E. Gadd's fascinating "Gadgets."

These Gadgets include the finger X-Ray, which lets you see what's inside your finger, the Compatibility Meter, which tells you how well you and your friends match up, and Lip Disguise-o-matic, the purpose of which only Nintendo knows.

In addition to the single-player adventure, you can go up against the Koopa Kids or link up with a friend to trade Gadgets, mini-games, and coins. You can also pit your skills against a

friend's in a cornucopia of head-to-head battles and mini-games. A friend. Singular. Hmm...is it me, or do two people not make a party? Regardless, it's Nintendo, it's Mario, it's got "Party" in the title—we want it.—Iron Monkey

■ First Look ■ Developed by Hudson Soft
■ Published by Nintendo ■ Target release date: February



NFL Street 2

With brand-new vertical moves on offense and defense that are literally off the wall, NFL Street 2 is on the rise in more ways than one.

PS2 **X** The NFL season is history, so when you need to take a break from playing your favorite football game, there's nothing like a good game of...football? How about footbrawl, NFL Street style? NFL Street 2 carries on in the name of in-your-grill football substitutes but with face-lifts all over the place.

Off the Wall

One of Street 2's key improvements is also the most noticeable: This season, Street hits the wall. As if the crazy passes and maniac catches weren't enough, now you can launch yourself off a wall and into the air to make them. This technique takes a little getting used to as you have to fight your way through traffic toward a wall to use it, but once you master it, it's a very useful weapon. Of course, on defense you can use a wall move to stop another wall move in an aerial confrontation not unlike a scene from some kung fu movie, but that takes even more timing, skill, and practice.

Aside from the airborne antics, dedicated Street players will appreciate improvements to the GameBreaker system. The GameBreakers are still formidable, but they aren't as completely cheap as those in the first NFL Street. You can use a GameBreaker to stop a GameBreaker, and you can build up a GameBreaker meter that can carry over from offense to defense and vice versa.

Street 2 also extends the gameplay and adds more long-term strategy to the game. The new Own the City mode is a sort of turf war where you try to win games and take



PRO TIP: When you're selecting players for a team, always pick go-to receivers with high ratings in speed and catching ability.



PRO TIP: The most effective pass plays contain slants or crossing patterns.



PRO TIP: Don't even think about passing into double coverage; it almost never succeeds.

over fields in 10 environments. Here, you can create a player and recruit teammates as you pummel other teams into submission. Moreover, with four-person multiplayer gameplay available both off- and online, Street 2 remains one of the best party games around.

Overall, the game's controls do a workman-like job of manhandling all this gridiron madness into a controllable package. The button scheme is pretty simple: The more complex moves like juking and jumping are reliant on timed button presses, and the wall moves are all based on proximity to said surface structure.

Street Style

Street 2 is looking good, too. The graphics received a paint job, which make the generally harsh urban environments look much more lush and expansive. You can also see much more detail in the player models, whether in oversized brutes or more streamlined dudes. You can add your talents to the visuals, too, with the aforementioned create-a-player feature, which submits an impressive list of facial characteristics, hairstyles, body types, and gear for your creative expression.

The sounds continue to be dominated by a cool, diverse soundtrack with showcased tunes featuring such performers as Green Day, P. Diddy, Nas, Sum 41, DMX, and Xzibit (who also stars in the game with Jeremy Shockey of the New York Giants). The character voices give a lot of attitude, but noticeably looping dialogue detracts from the entertainment value.

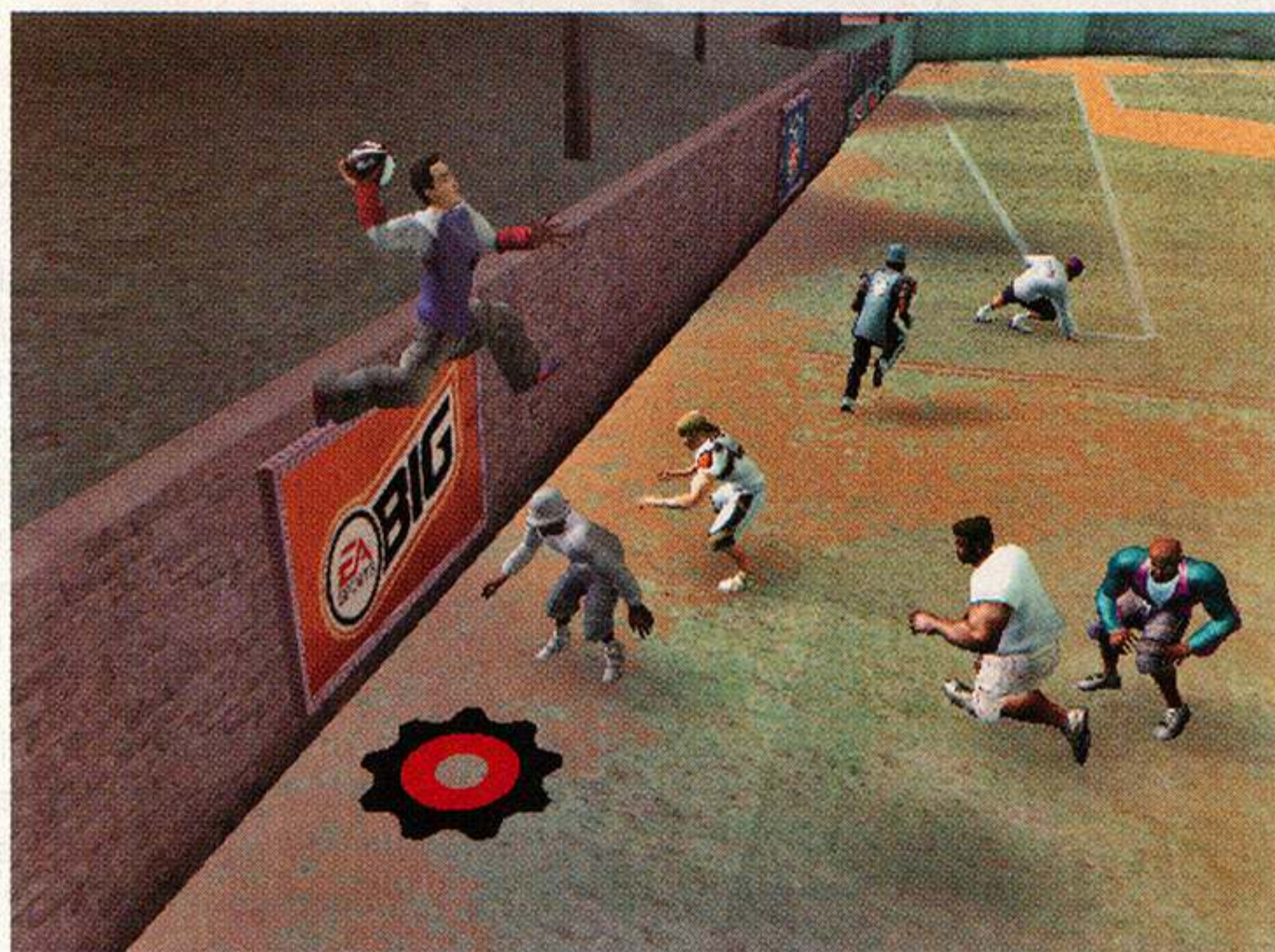
This Is Football?

NFL Street 2 remains a ton of fun. It lays out more features, more gameplay, and more outrageousness than any other freaky football variation ever, and if it's not careful, it might become as complex as a real football game.—Atomic Dawg

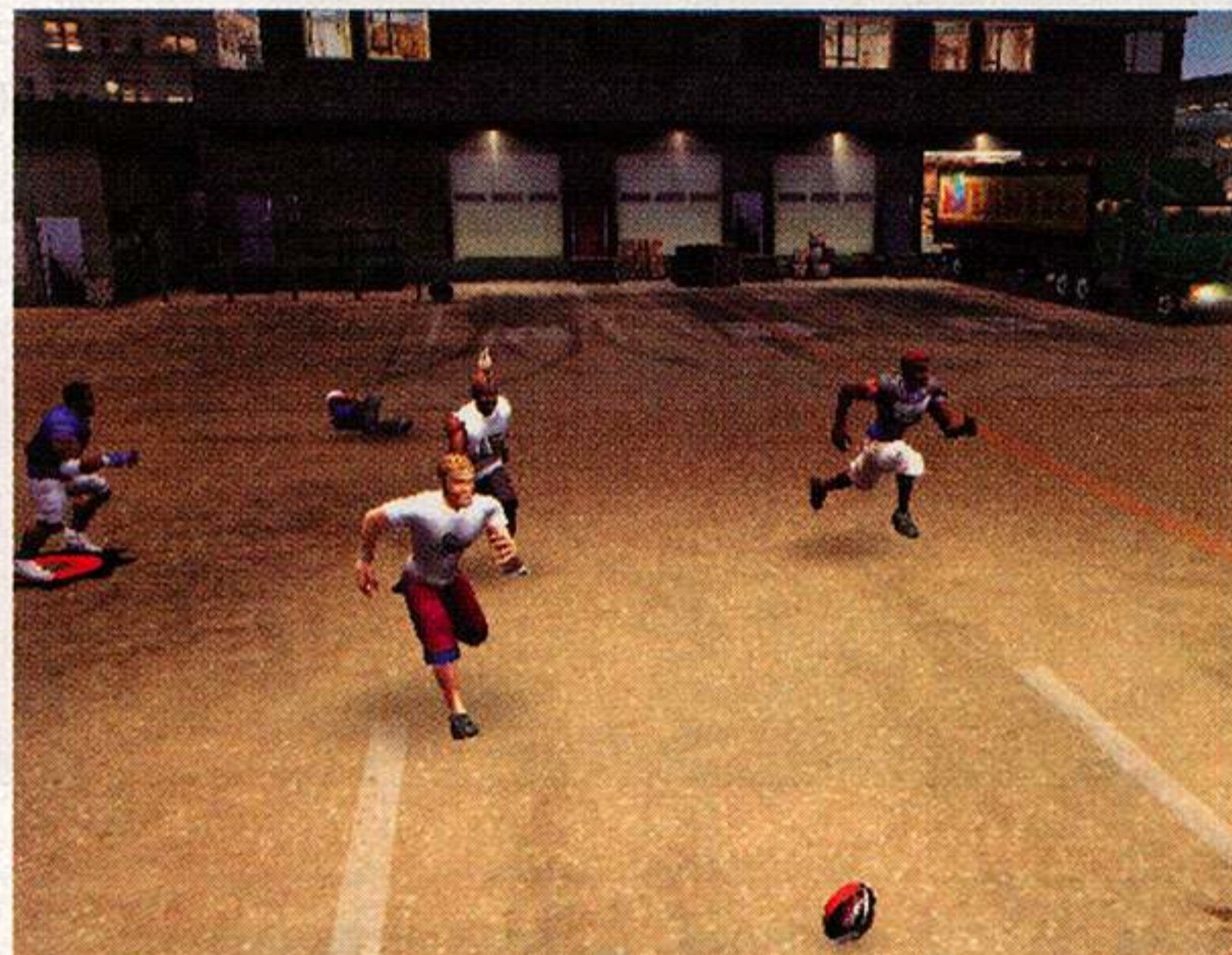
Also on the GameCube

E ■ Developed by EA Tiburon ■ Published by EA Sports Big
■ \$49.99 ■ Available now ■ Football ■ 4 players

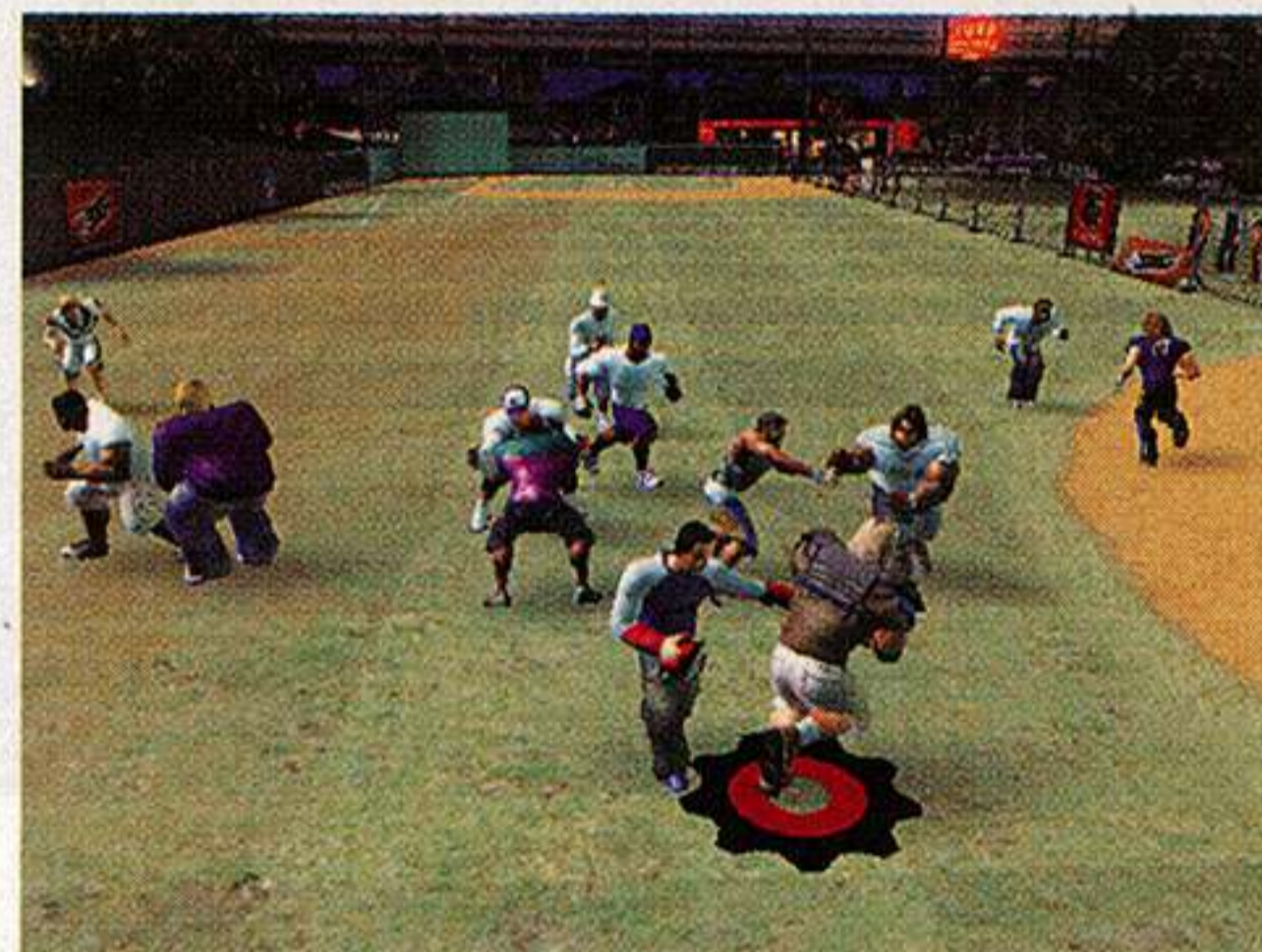
All screens shown here are from the Xbox version.



PRO TIP: Off-the-wall passes are a great way to beat defensive pressure.



PRO TIP: Don't give up on a play until the action stops. There are plenty of fumbles and tipped passes to recover with a second effort.



PRO TIP: Trick plays like the PA Fade pass are good to build an offense around. The A.I. defense especially tends to bite at the play-action move.

PS2	GRAPHICS	4.5	FUN FACTOR 4.0
	SOUND	4.0	
	CONTROL	4.0	
X	GRAPHICS	4.5	FUN FACTOR 4.0
	SOUND	4.0	
	CONTROL	4.0	

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CATCHERS AND PITCHERS, REPORT

Opening Day Lineups

MVP Baseball 2005

Developed by EA Canada
Published by EA Sports
Target release date: Spring 2005
Systems: PS2, Xbox, GameCube
The Buzz: The intricate controls are championship caliber for hardcore players, but will they be deal-breakers for casual fans?

MLB 2006

Developed by 989 Sports
Published by Sony
Target release date: Spring 2005
System: PS2
The Buzz: The Franchise mode is a baseball fan's delight. The question marks remaining from last year's version, though, are the visuals.

ESPN Major League Baseball 2K5

Developed by Visual Concepts
Published by Sega/Global Star
Target release date: Spring 2005
Systems: PS2, Xbox
The Buzz: It sounds like some radical work is going on with this team, but Visual Concepts is the outfit to pull it off.

tum of the player in the field. Additionally, actual MLB player attributes will be tied to your playing skill as you try to make a play or a pitch. A new Fielding Zone Marker will grow or shrink according to that combination to affect your ability to make a play.

The already deep Franchise mode will get even deeper with a new Player Morale System that allows morale to affect player performance. Depending on factors like salary, playing time, lineup position, team performance, coaching quality, and more, your

Football's in the can, basketball's in mid-season, and hockey's in the dumper. At last—let's get ready to play some baseball!

While the other major video-game sports may be relegated to two-horse races, baseball at least has a respectable trifecta going for it. That's due in large part to Sony's MLB 2005, which made an impressive (some would say "uncanny") run last season to challenge EA Sports and Sega for the league title (see Sports Pages, page 88, May 2004). Here's how baseball is shaping up for the coming season.

MVP Calibur

At this point in the preseason, MVP Baseball 2005 appears to be shoring up its strengths, which include the variety of actual ball games you can play and the on-the-field controls. In particular, the Gold Glove controls featured in the 2004's version look to push the envelope. Most intriguing is the Hitter's Eye feature, which purports to enable a batter to pick up a pitch as it leaves the pitcher's hand. Hitter's Eye replay even enables you to analyze your swing versus the pitch. This sounds like every hardcore player's dream, and you have to admire the confidence of EA Sports in opening itself up to all sorts of controversy about pitch rotation, hit contact points, bat speed versus hit ball trajectory, and other minutiae that baseball purists live for.

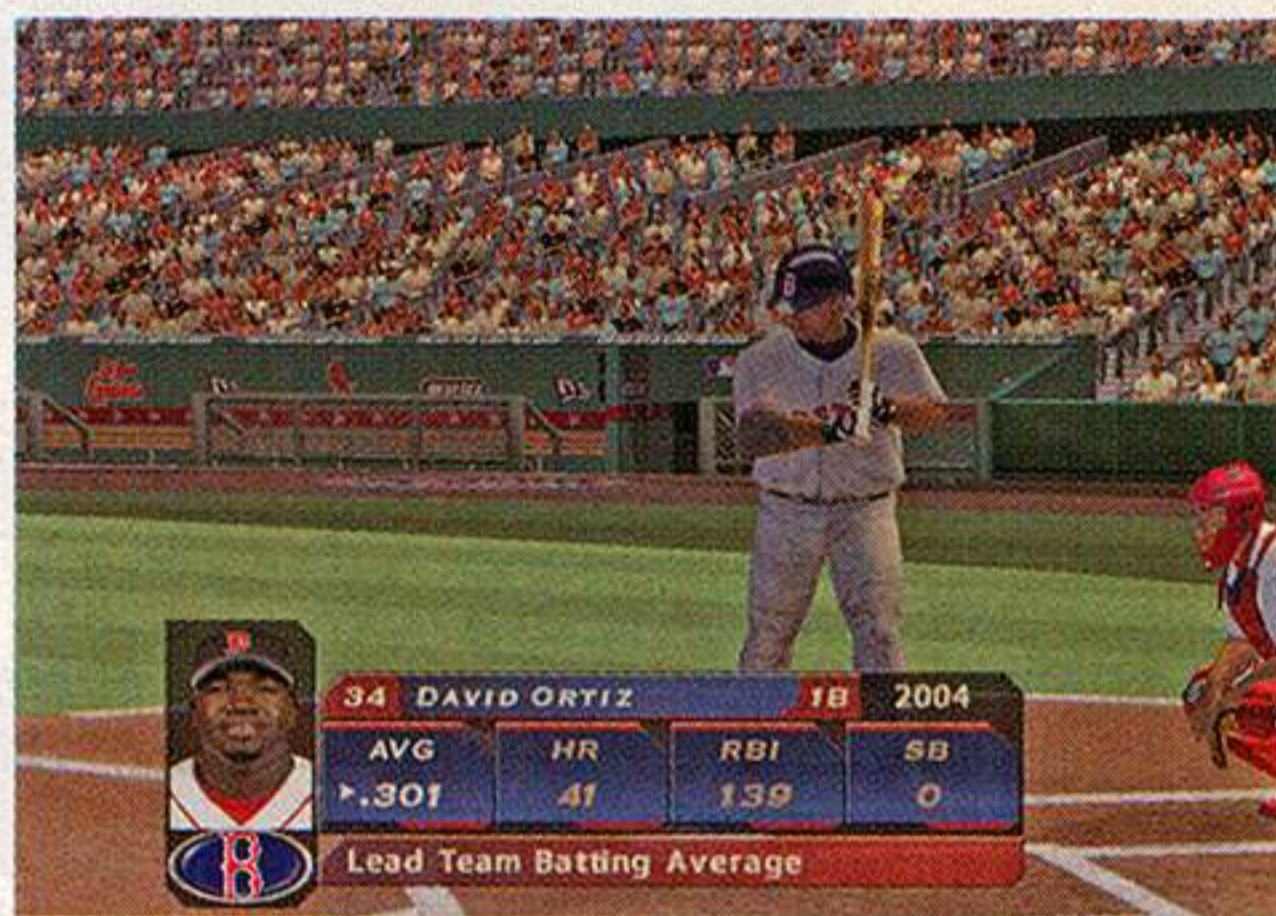
Another MVP strength from last year was being able to play for the AA and AAA affiliates of the major league teams. This year, you additionally get select single A squads as well as spring training exhibitions, where you can try out rookies and other hopefuls.

MLB Moves

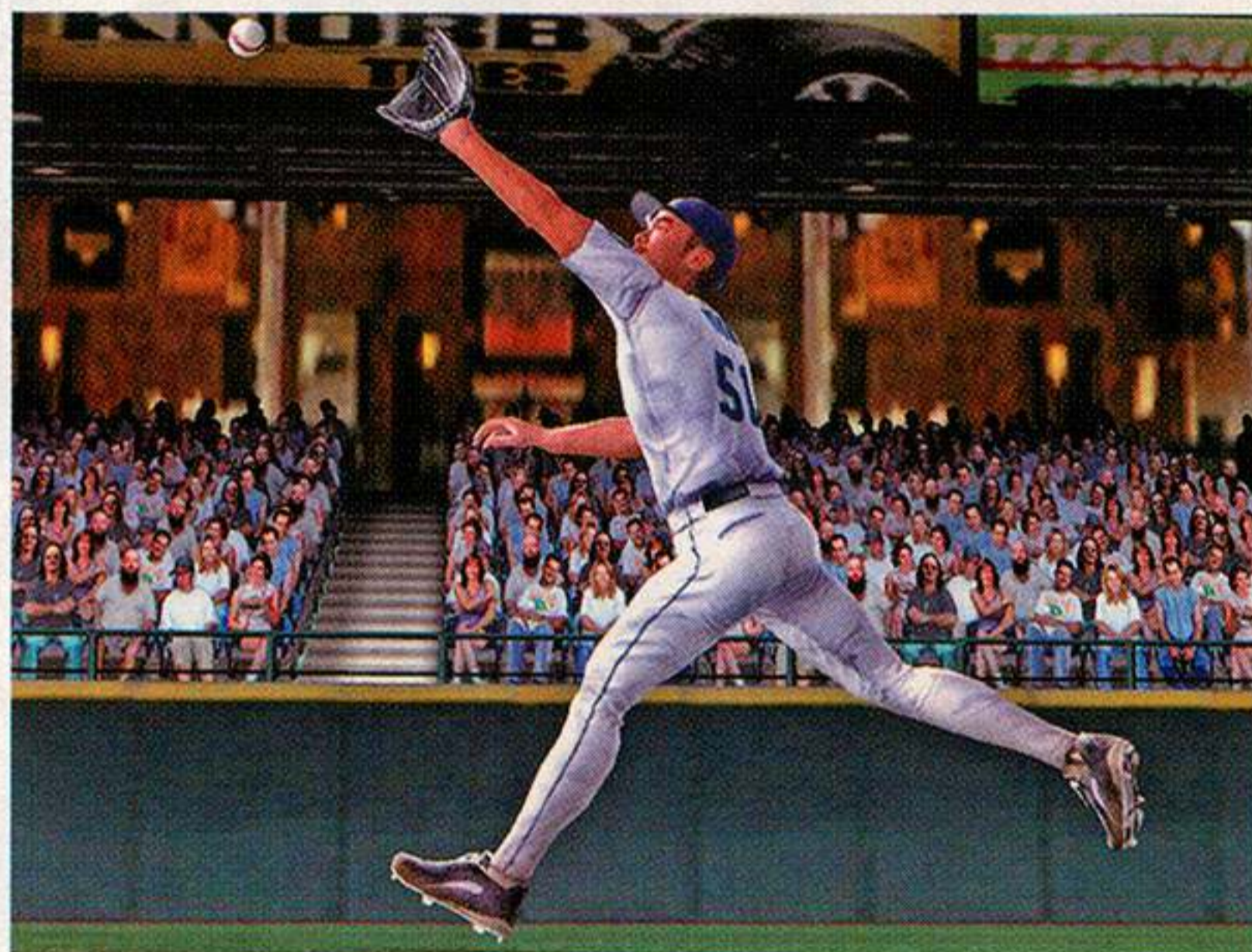
After hitting a home run last season, Sony's MLB 2006 steps up to the plate with a noticeable swagger and the bases loaded with improvements. Even though last year's game featured outstanding, realistic controls and a cavernous Franchise mode, developer 989 Studios still did some tinkering under the hood. The preseason hype touts Branch Point Technology, which essentially smooths out the animations by preloading them based on the position and momentum of the player in the field.



MVP 2005: The new Hitter's Eye indicator will enable you to pick up the rotation of the pitch as it leaves the pitcher's hand and analyze your swing.



MLB 2006: Improving player graphics from those in the 2005 version was on the shopping list this year.



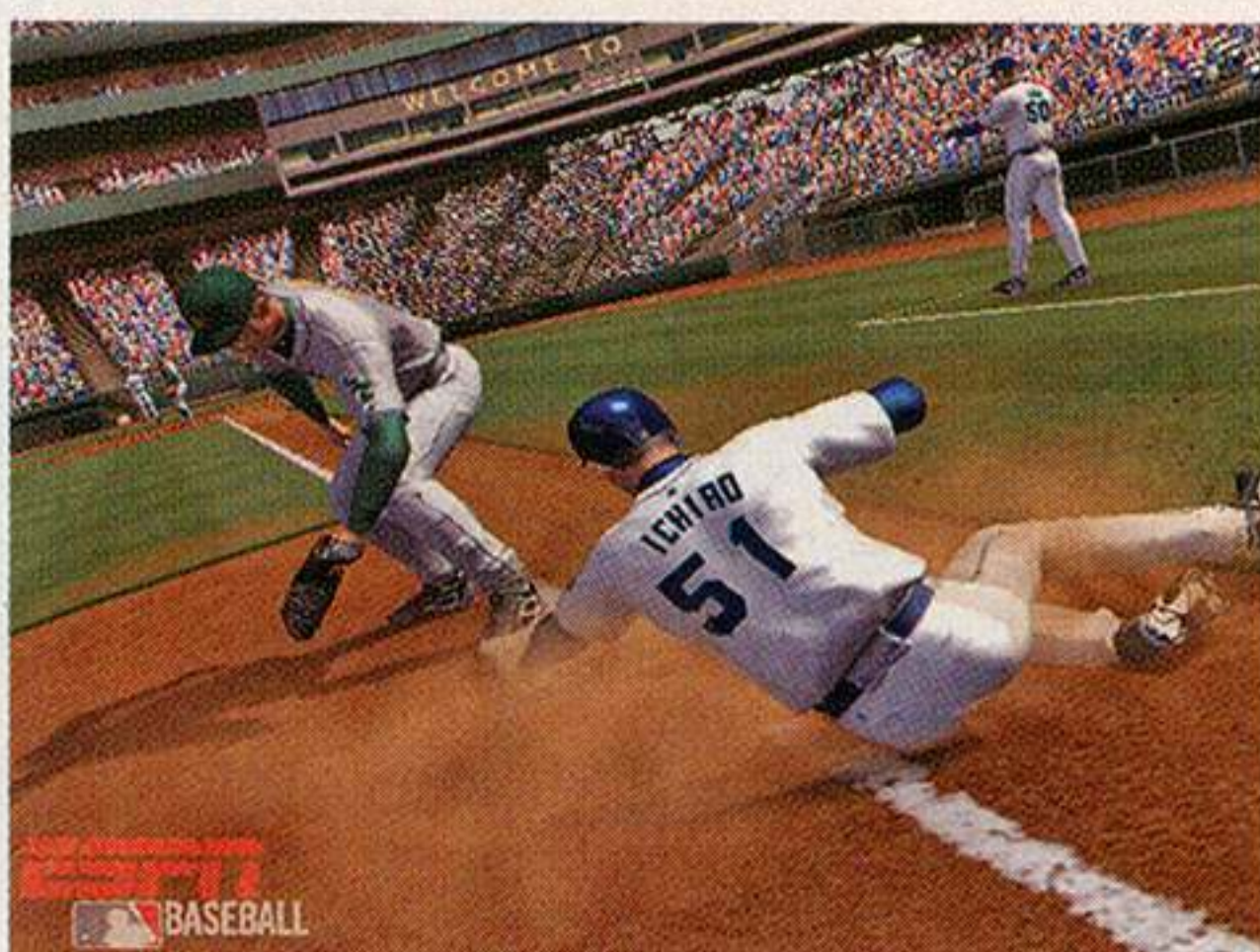
MVP 2005: The top-rated graphics should be even better.



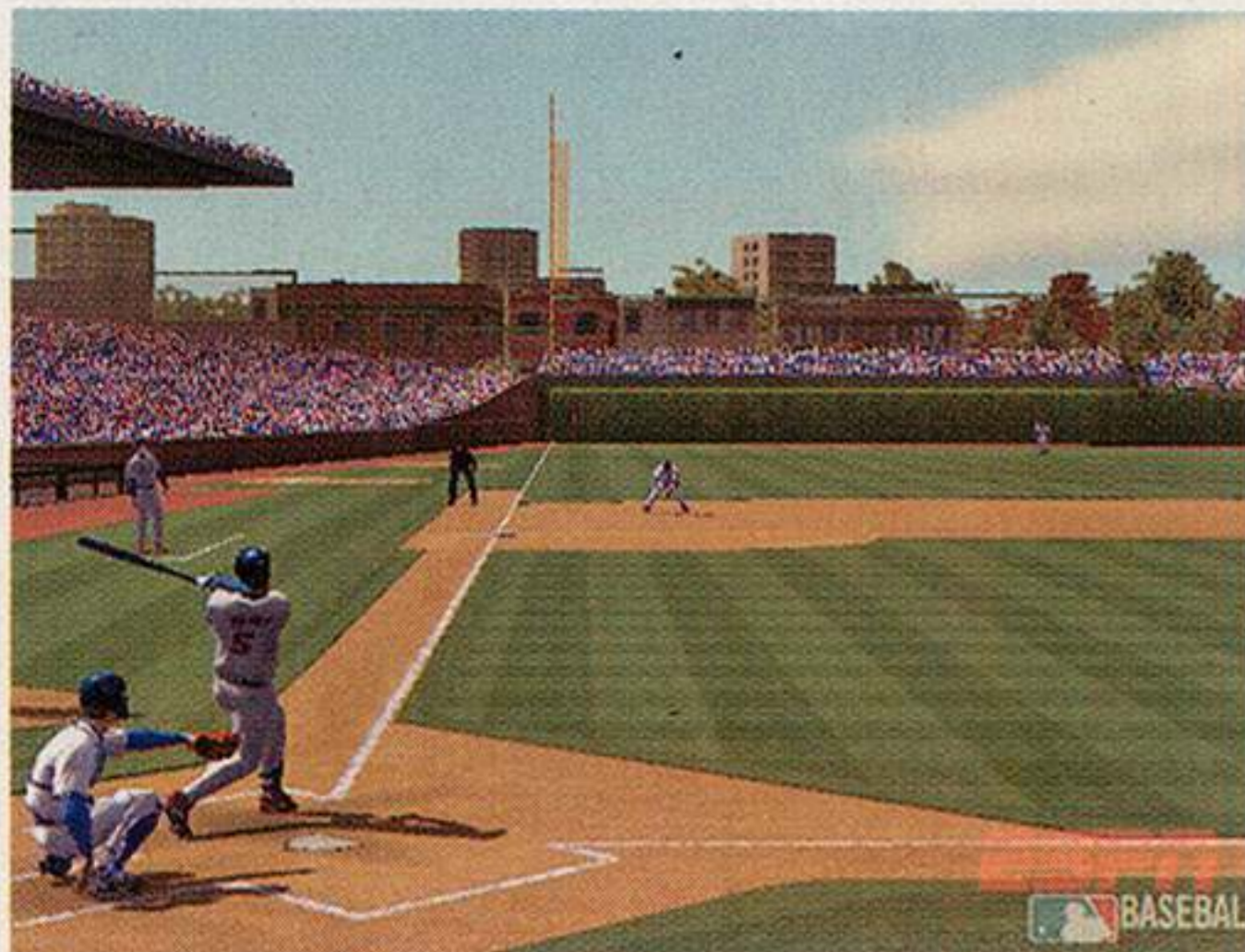
MVP 2005: Defensive stops will come in all shapes and sizes, including dives and stretches.



ESPN 2K5: The picture-in-picture base-running interface lets you watch the runners on offense or defense.



ESPN 2K5: On-Command Base Running enables you to control the hitter from the bases.



ESPN 2K5: Gameplay controls will swing for the fences.

players may become All-Star candidates or trading-block fodder. Career mode sports even more details, enabling you to interact with your manager and teammates for such things as raising concerns about playing or demanding a trade. You can even call a press conference to negotiate via the airwaves.

Major League Potential

ESPN Major League Baseball 2K5 is seeking to move up in the standings this season. Most notably, developer Visual Concepts has recruited Kush Games (of ESPN Hockey 2K5 fame) to work on Baseball 2K5.

Like all the ESPN offerings, MLB 2K5 is preparing to put on a dramatically revamped show. John Miller and Joe Morgan, ESPN baseball's commentators, will come up to bat as commentators with Karl Ravech in the studio. Taking its cue from ESPN NFL 2K5, the presentation will mimic ESPN's television look right down to the K-Zone, the tickers, and possibly replays based on your actual in-game moves.

Gameplay controls are receiving some interesting retooling. In the field, the game maintains its Turbo system for running and throwing to make a play, but now you can dive or leap by pressing the right analog stick toward the trajectory of the hit ball. On the mound, there's a new pitching meter, which utilizes horizontally and vertically moving T-bars that you have to line up to place your pitch. Changing the pitching mechanic is always a dicey proposition, but it addresses a need in last year's game. On the bases, On-Command Base Running will enable you to switch the gameplay perspective to that of the base runner. From a behind-the-runner view, you can make the batter either swing, bunt, or take a pitch depending on the situation and your strategy.



MLB 2006: The Fielding Zone Marker will determine the size of the defensive action zone that surrounds the landing place of the ball as determined by player attributes.



MLB 2006: The batting controls will likely retain the three ability levels from last year's game.

It's a Baseball!

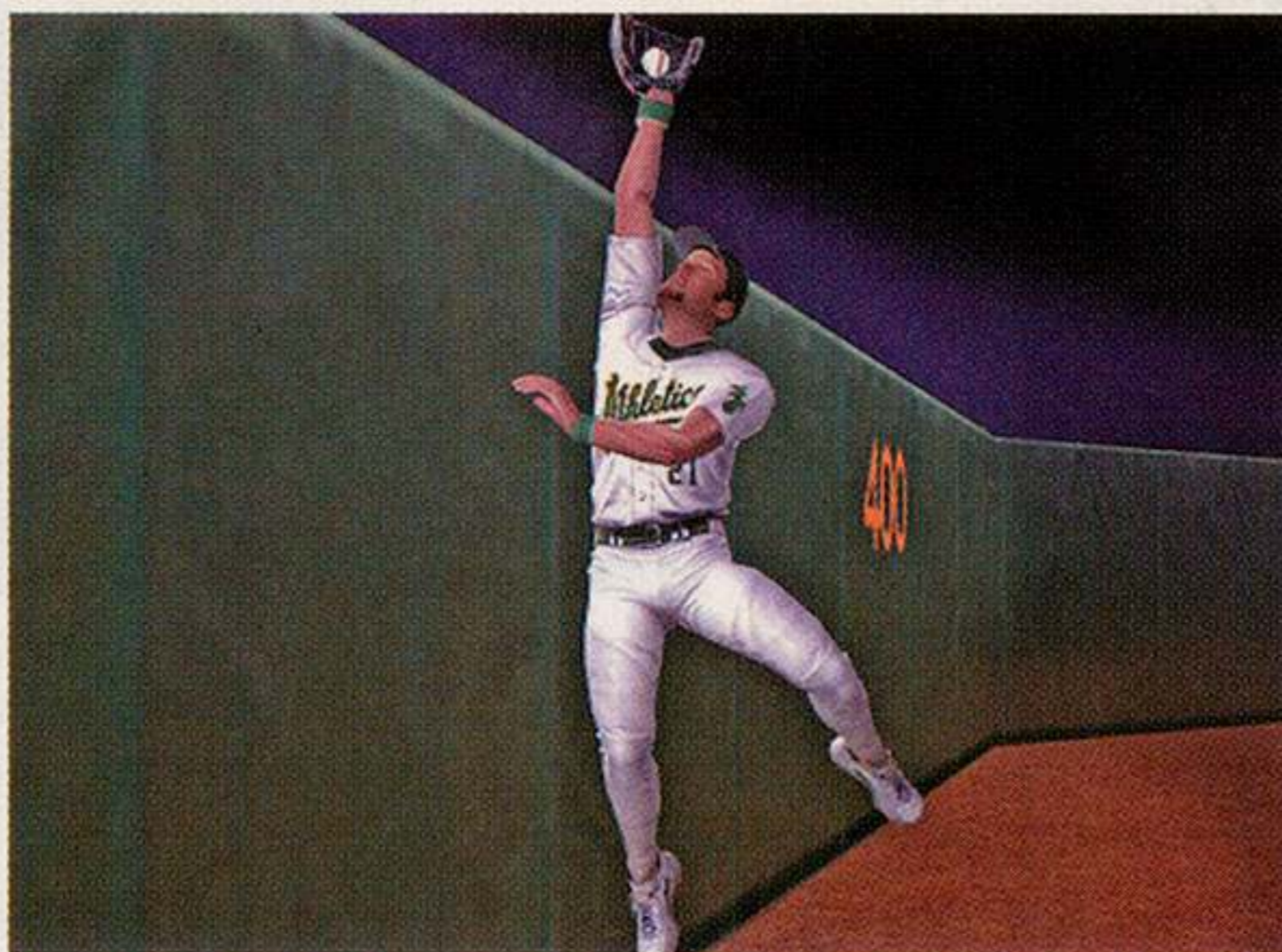


Nintendo is making a move on baseball, too. Under development at NCL in Japan, Mario Baseball looks to follow in the footsteps of its teammates, Mario Tennis and Mario Golf. It's pretty certain that the usual Mario suspects will take the field on opposing teams. What's not known at the moment is who will make up the rest of league. You can expect to play with a solid baseball engine and be surrounded by enough wacky, insane pyrotechnics to make the game almost unrecognizable.

Of course, this wouldn't be a Sega sports game without some sort of party. A new skybox feature will mimic the one in NFL 2K5's Crib. You can earn access to five customizable skyboxes—some have two stories.

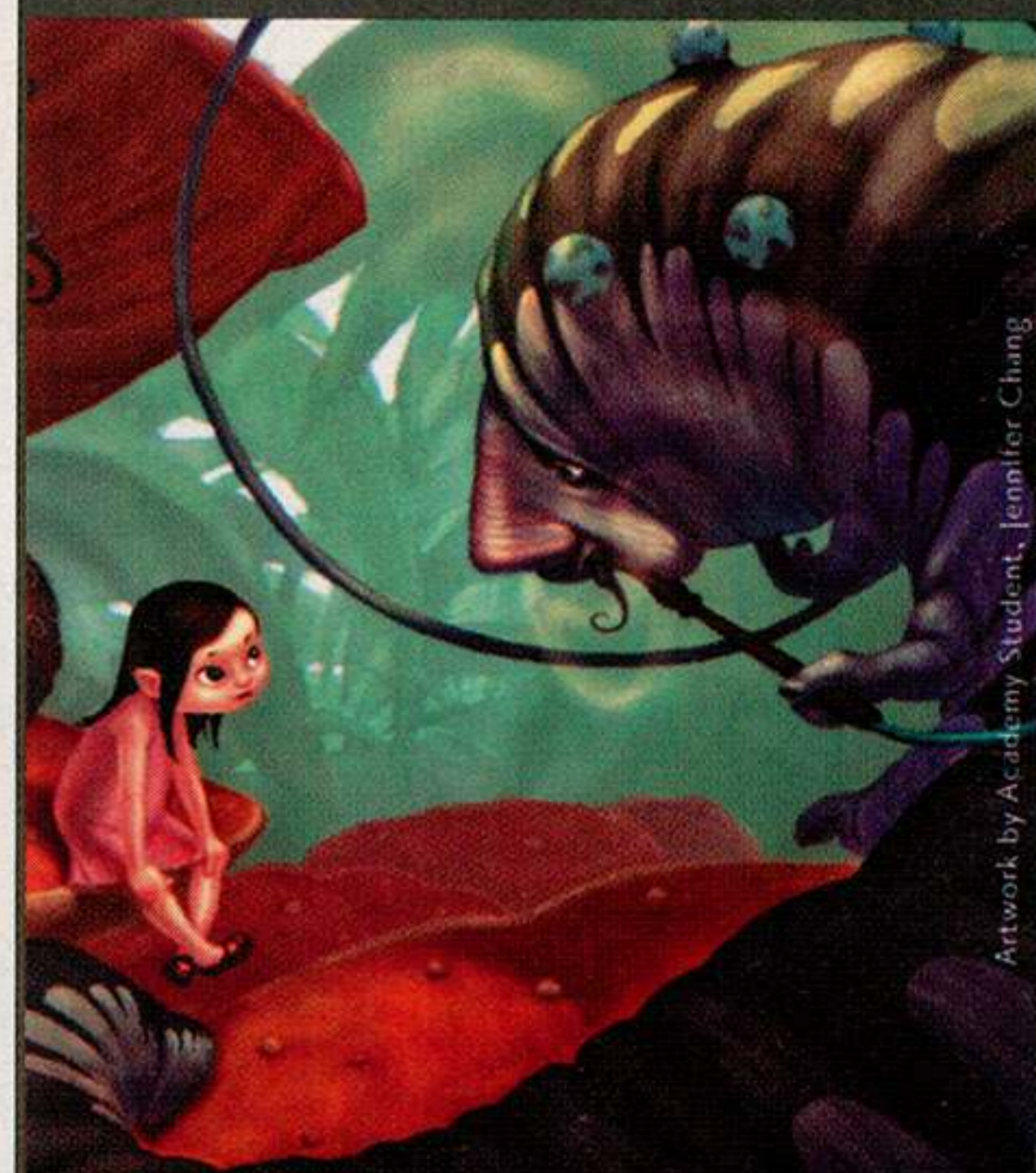
Let's Play Three!

MVP Baseball 2005, MLB 2006, and ESPN Major League Baseball 2K5 are all looking like heavy hitters again this year. Of the three, 2K5 looks like it is undergoing the most work in the off-season, and it probably has the most to prove. Baseball has clearly become the most heated and most creative rivalry in all of video-game sports.—*Undercover Lover*



MVP 2005: The right analog stick continues to control diving and leaping.

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Outlaw Tennis

PS2 **X** Sure, the short-cut skirts worn on the tennis court these days may seem a bit liberal, but in the Outlaw universe, they're just plain conservative. Welcome to the world of goofy sports where a charismatic personality is paired up with a player's colorful and often revealing threads, which certainly makes for an entertaining time.

Outlaw Tennis will have a familiar tennis setup. You'll have your pickings from 16 varied players and the choice to play on 12 different court types that range from concrete and hardwood to carpet and marble. Modes like Exhibition, Tour, and Training are all here, along with singles, doubles, and Canadian (doubles vs. single player) matches. There's also an online mode for up to four players.

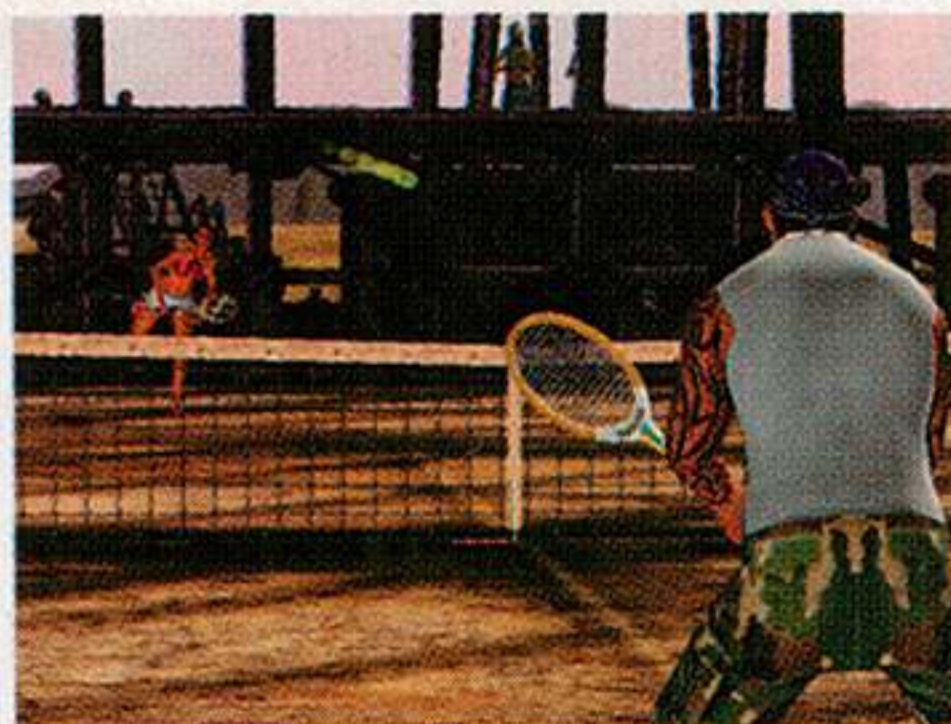
Much like its golf cousin, in this Outlaw take, a whole lot of attitude serves the premise in a wacky match of tennis complete with outlandish shots and on-the-court antics you'd expect only



in this type of showing. Highlighting this absurdity is a player's momentum meter. With every winning shot, your momentum rises, and once you have enough juice, you can perform turbo strokes and signature swings.

Of course, what would an Outlaw game be without the fighting and composure system? After subsequent wins or losses, you can sit back and watch players grumble or act out crazy stunts to each other in short cinematic cut-scenes. The seriousness of tennis is about to be thrown off the court and replaced by the outlaws in gaming sports.—*Four-Eyed Dragon*

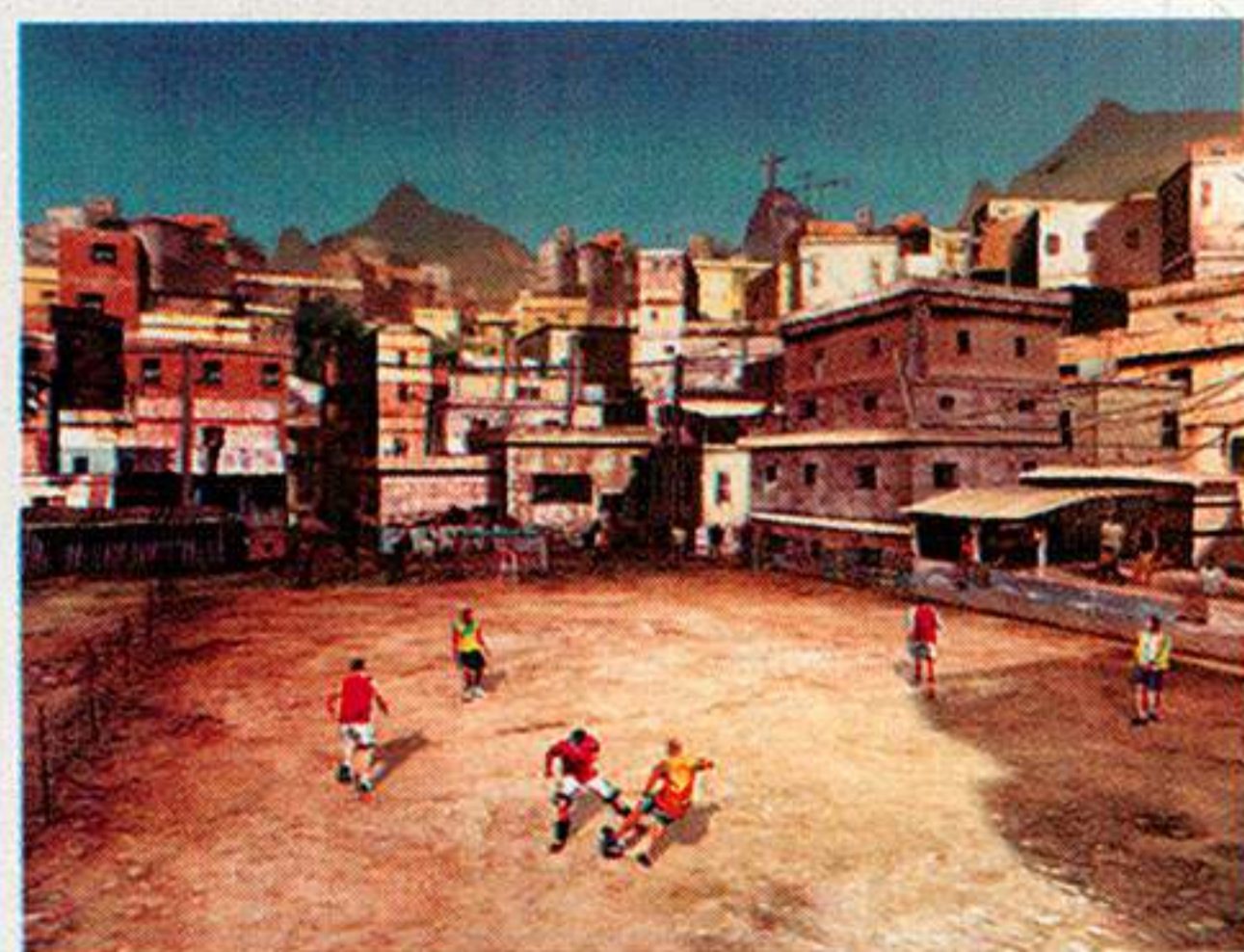
■ **First Look** ■ **Developed by Hypnotix**
 ■ **Published by Global Star** ■ **Target release date: April**



FIFA Street

PS2 **X** **360** The best way to describe EA's Street series is freestylin' sports play. Street removes all of the unnecessary simulated rules and reveals the core and heart of a game—in this case, the exciting footwork of soccer.

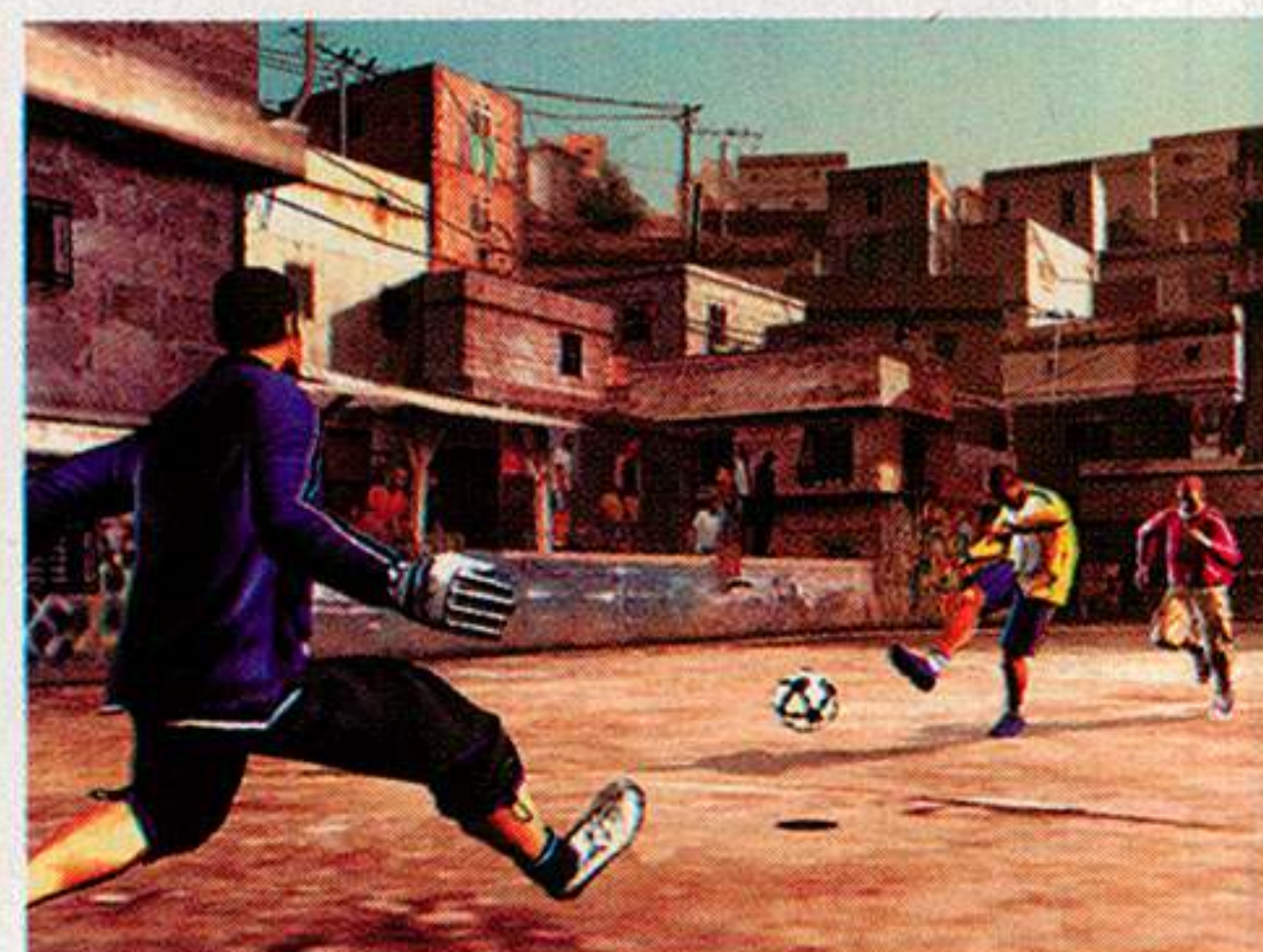
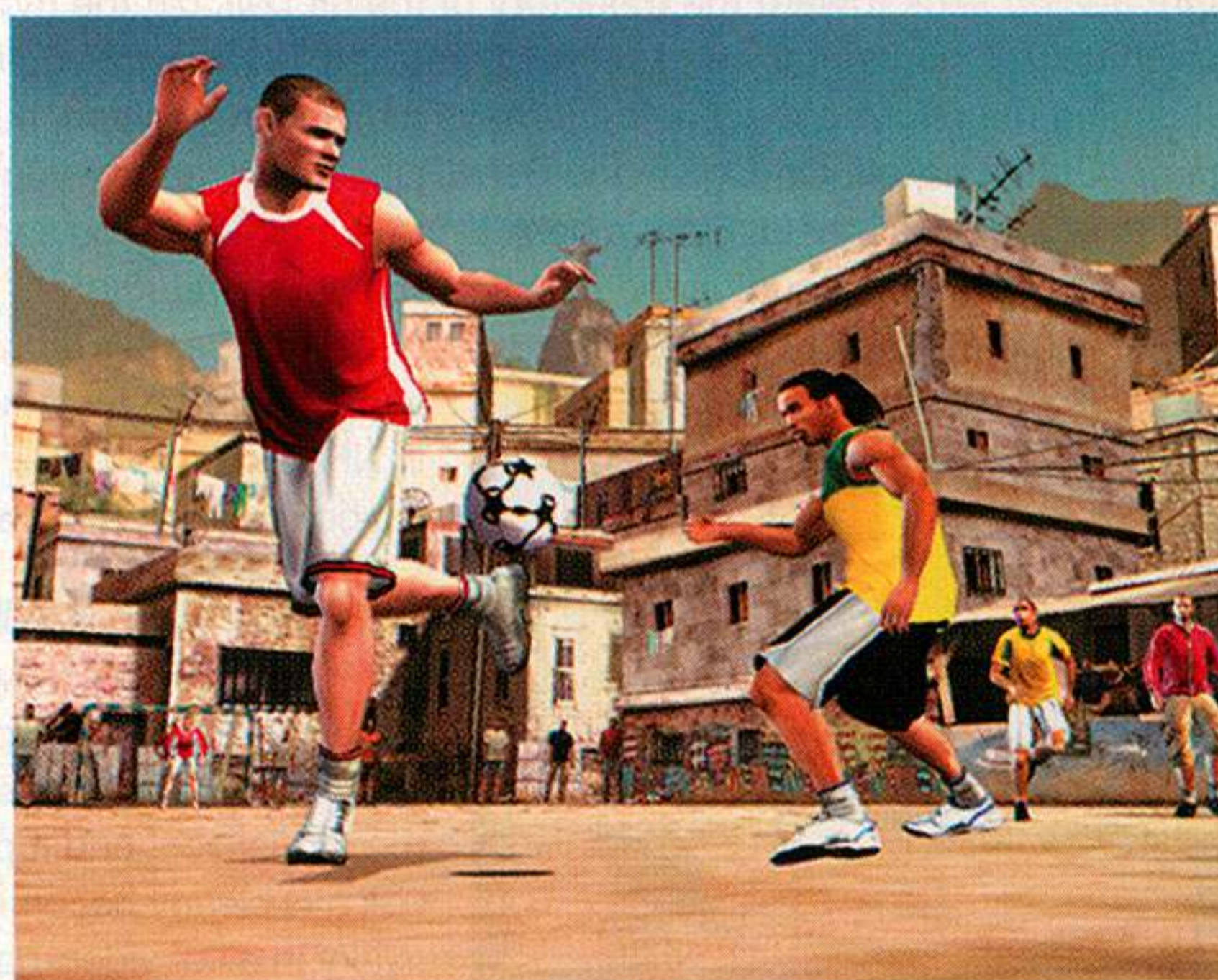
Instead of controlling an entire team, you participate in four-on-four matchups, using, of course, only the superstars of soccer. Being a part of a smaller team enables



you to show off more flare as you try to perfect the many juggling moves, step-overs, and pannas. And rather than enormous stadiums, your fancy foot dribbling takes place on the street with people jeering you on the sidelines. You can also use the walls on either side, much like NFL Street, as an extension to your offense by creating dynamic plays and performing potent passes. In total, there are 10 unique street locales in which you can kick the ball.

The single-player mode will offer a great challenge. You must create and customize a character, and then build their skills up in order to unlock rewards and steal players from opposing teams. This is certainly not the FIFA you've been playing. If you want a change of pace from the tactical, slow, and traditional soccer pace, then FIFA Street just might appeal to you.—*Four-Eyed Dragon*

■ **First Look** ■ **Developed by EA Canada** ■ **Published by EA Sports Big** ■ **Target release date: Spring 2005**



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READER OF THE MONTH TIP

PLAYSTATION 2



GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS



Enter the following codes during gameplay and not while the game is paused. When a code is entered correctly, you'll see a confirming message onscreen.

\$250,000, Full Health, and Full Armor: Press R1, R2, L1, ×, Left, Down, Right, Up, Left, Down, Right, Up.

Aggressive Traffic: Press R2, ○, R1, L2, Left, R1, L1, R2, L2.

All Cars Float: Press Right, R2, ○, R1, L2, □, R1, R2.

Black Traffic: Press ○, L2, Up, R1, Left, ×, R1, L1, Left, ○.

Bloodring Banger: Press Down, R1, ○, L2, L2, ×, R1, L1, Left, Left.

Caddy: Press ○, L1, Up, R1, L2, ×, R1, L1, ○, ×.

Commit Suicide: Press Right, L2, Down, R1, Left, Left, R1, L1, L2, L1.

Destroy All Cars: Press R2, L2, R1, L1, L2, R2, □, △, ○, △, L2, L1.

Faster Cars: Press Right, R1, Up, L2, L2, Left, R1, L1, R1, R1.

Faster Clock: Press ○, ○, L1, □, L1, □, □, L1, △, ○, △.

Faster Gameplay: Press △, Up, Right, Down, L2, L1, □.

Flying Boats: Press R2, ○, Up, L1, Right, R1, Right, Up, □, △.

Foggy Weather: Press R2, ×, L1, L1, L2, L2, L2, ×.

Hotring Racer: Press R2, L1, ○, Right, Up, ○, R2.

Hotring Racer #101: Press R1, ○, R2, Right, L1, L2, ×, ×, □, R1.

Invisible Traffic: Press △, L1, △, R2, □, L1, L1.

Lower Wanted Level: Press R1, R1, ○, R2, Up, Down, Up, Down, Up, Down.

Overcast Weather: Press R2, ×, L1, L1, L2, L2, L2, □.

Pedestrians Attack: Press Down, Up, Up, Up, ×, R2, R1, L2, L2.

Pedestrians Have Weapons: Press R2, R1, ×, △, ×, △, Up, Down.

Pedestrian Riot: Press Down, Left, Up, Left, ×, R2, R1, L2, L1.

Perfect Handling: Press △, R1, R1, Left, R1, L1, R2, L1.

Pink Traffic: Press ○, L1, Down, L2, Left, ×, R1, L1, Right, ○.

Rainy Weather: Press R2, ×, L1, L1, L2, L2, L2, ○.

Raise Wanted Level: Press R1, R1, ○, R2, Right, Left, Right, Left, Right, Left.

Rancher: Press Up, Right, Right, L1, Right, Up, □, L2.

PLAYSTATION 2



FREAKY FLYERS



Unlock Everything: At the Profile Select screen, select New and then create a new profile with the name ZENBU. If you entered the cheat correctly, everything will be unlocked.

NEO CONTRA



19 Lives: At the title screen, press Up, Up, Down, Down, L1, R1, L2, R2, L3, R3. If you entered the code correctly, you'll start the game with 19 lives.

RATCHET & CLANK: UP YOUR ARSENAL



Double Bladed Laser Sword: During gameplay, press Start, and at the pause menu, press ○, □, ○, □, Up, Down, Left, Left. If you entered the code correctly, the game will unpause and you'll have the double bladed sword in your inventory.

Unlock Sly 2: Band of Thieves Demo: At the title screen, simultaneously press and hold L1, L2, R1, and R2. If you entered the cheat correctly, you'll see a confirming message and the demo will load up.





STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT



Ewok Size Characters: At the Pick A Profile screen, create a new profile with the name `Jub_Jub` (a “_” designates a space). If you entered the cheat correctly, all characters in the game will be Ewok size.

XBOX OUTLAW GOLF 2



Big Breast Mode: During gameplay, hold **L** and then press **B, Up, Up, B, Y, Up**. If you entered the cheat correctly, all female characters in the game will have big breasts.

Big Head Mode: During gameplay, hold **L** and then press **B, A, B, Y, Black**. If you entered the cheat correctly, all characters in the game will have big heads.



Unlock Everything: At the Select Game screen, choose Create, and at the Create Game screen, enter `I_Have_No_Time` (the password is

case-sensitive, and a “_” designates a space). If done correctly, all golfers, courses, and clubs will be available.

OUT RUN 2



At the main menu, select Out Run Challenge and then press **X** to access the Gallery. At the Gallery screen, enter the following codes to unlock the corresponding cheats. If you entered the password correctly, you'll see a confirming message.

- All Bonus Tracks: **TIMELESS**
- All Cars: **DREAMING**
- All Mission Stages: **THEJOURNEY**
- All Music: **RADIOSEGA**
- All Reversed Tracks: **DESREVER**
- Original Out Run: **NINETEEN86**

ROBOTECH: INVASION

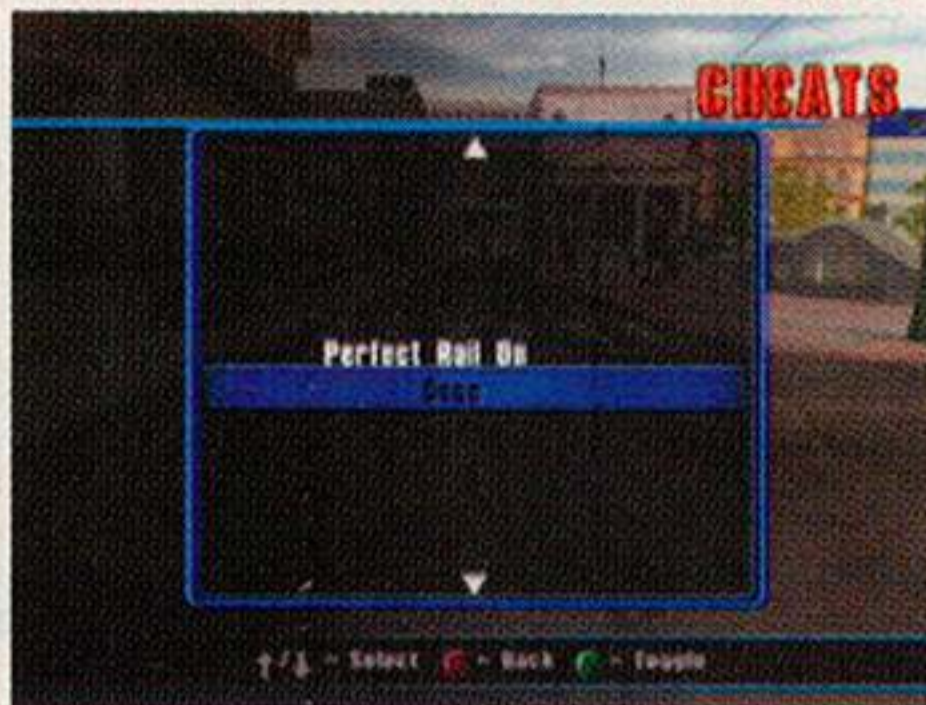


At the main menu, select Options and then select Extras. At the Extras screen, press **X** and then enter the following codes to unlock the corresponding cheats. If you entered the password correctly, you'll see a confirming message.

- 1 Hit Kill: **DUSTYAYRES**
- All Levels: **RECLAMATION**
- Invincibility: **SUPERCYC**
- Lancer's Multiplayer Skin: **YLLWFLW**
- Rand's Multiplayer Skin: **KIDGLOVES**

- Rook's Multiplayer Skin: **BLUEANGLS**
- Scott Bernard's Multiplayer Skin: **LTNTCMDR**
- Unlimited Ammo: **TRGRHPY**

TONY HAWK'S UNDERGROUND



Perfect Rails: At the main menu, select Game Options and then select Cheat Codes. At the Cheat Codes screen, enter `straightedge` (case-sensitive). If you entered the password correctly, Perfect Rails will be selectable at the Cheats screen.

MULTIPLATFORM PS2 XBOX360 TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES 2: BATTLE NEXUS



At the main menu, select Options and then select Passwords. At the Passwords screen, enter the following codes to unlock the corresponding cheat. If you entered the password correctly, you'll see a confirming message onscreen.

- Abyss: **SDSDRLD**
- Fatal Blow: **LRSRDRD**
- Lose Shrunk: **RLMRDSL**
- Nightmare: **SLSDRDL**
- Pizza Paradise: **MRLMRM**
- Poison: **DRSLLSR**
- Self-Recovery: **DRMSRLR**
- Squeaking: **MLDSRDM**
- Super Defense Power: **LDRMRLM**
- Super Offense: **SDLSRL**
- Super Tough: **RDSRML**
- Toddlng: **SSSMRDD**

GAME BOY ADVANCE GRAND THEFT AUTO ADVANCE



Cheat Mode: During gameplay, simultaneously press and hold **A, B, and Start**. If you entered the cheat correctly, you'll see a confirming message onscreen.

ROBOTECH: THE MACROSS SAGA

At the title screen, enter the following codes to unlock the corresponding cheats. If you entered the code correctly, you'll hear a confirming sound.

All Characters: Press **Down, Down, Down, Down, Down, R, R**.

All Levels: Press **Up, Down, Up, Down, L, R, L, R**.

All Upgrades: Press **Up, Right, Down, Left, R, L, L, L**.

Infinite Lives: Press **Right, Right, Right, Up, Up, L, L**.

ROCKET POWER: ZERO GRAVITY ZONE

All Levels and Full Stats: At the main menu, select Career and then press **Select** to access the Password screen. At the Password screen, enter `$$$10B` as a password. If you entered the password correctly, you'll see a confirming message.

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES 2: BATTLE NEXUS



Unlock Bonus Courses: At the Mode Selection screen, select Input Password and then enter the following codes to unlock the corresponding courses. If you entered the cheat correctly, you'll automatically go to the Course Selection screen.

- Course 16 (Battle Mode): **DDRSMSR**
- Course 16 (Race Mode): **RDLDSMD**
- Course 17 (Battle Mode): **SMRDLML**
- Course 17 (Race Mode): **MDSMSDM**
- Course 18 (Battle Mode): **LMSLRSR**
- Course 18 (Race Mode): **SRMLDDR**

YU-GI-OH! DESTINY BOARD TRAVELER



Unlock Characters: At the title screen, enter the following codes to unlock the corresponding characters. If you entered the cheat correctly, the screen will flash.

Kaibaman: Press **Down, B, Left, Right, Right, R**, simultaneously press **Up** and **R**, and then press **A**.

Yami Bakura: Press **L, Down, Right**, simultaneously press **Left** and **B**, and then press **R, Down, Down, A**.

Yami Yugi: Press **R, Left, B, Right**, simultaneously press **Up** and **R**, and then press **Right, Down, A**.

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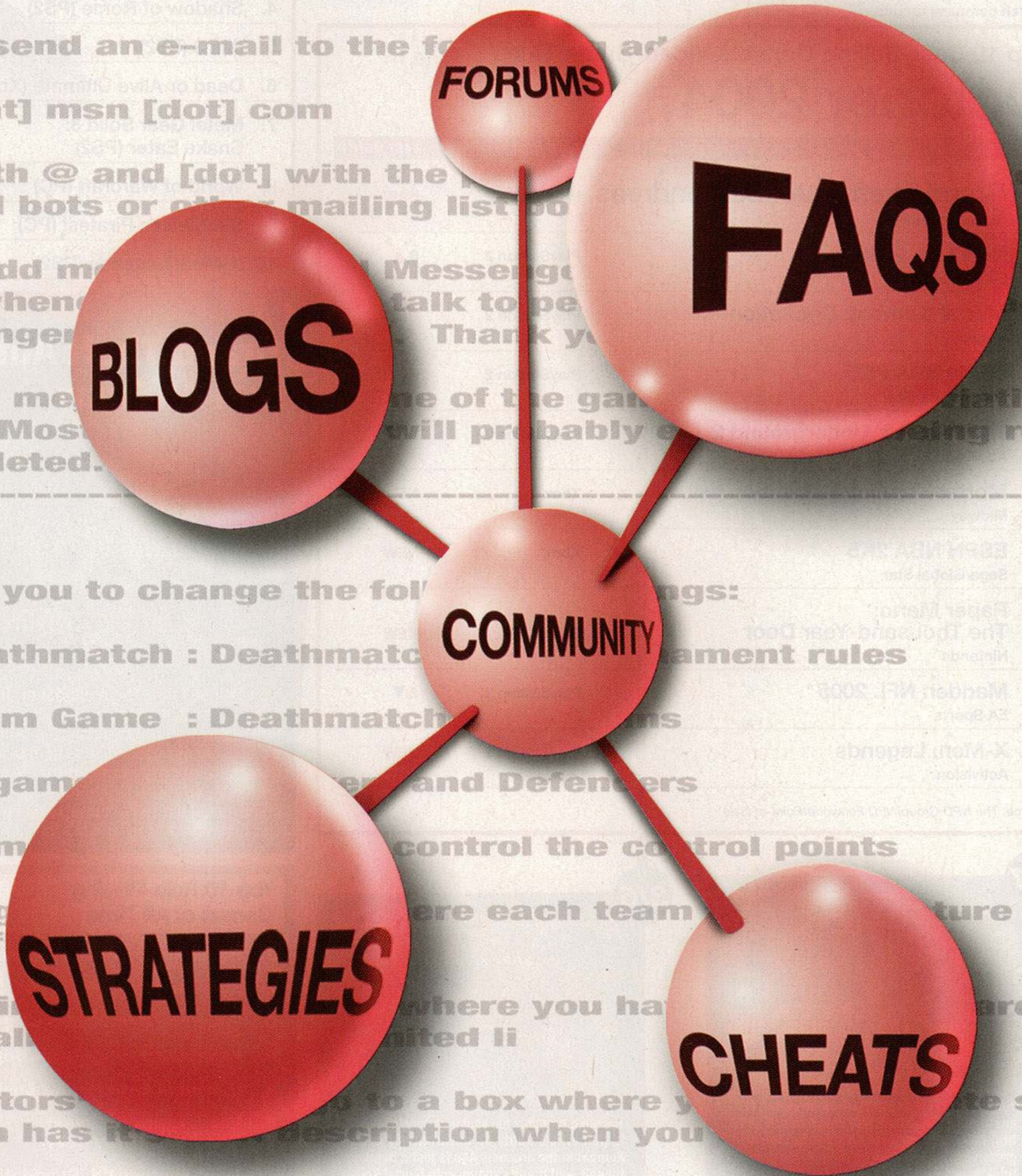
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CHARTBUSTERS

By now, you should have noticed throughout the entire magazine that the NPD Group provides us with all sorts of cool video-game tidbits. Why, you ask? Because this smart partnership between us only enhances your gaming experience, especially when the listed data comes from the most reputable research company around.

Why GP Editors Didn't Make It to a New Year's Eve Party

1. Halo 2 (Xbox) >>
2. Half-Life 2 (PC)
3. The Lord of the Rings: The Battle for Middle-Earth (PC)
4. Shadow of Rome (PS2)
5. Jak 3 (PS2)
6. Dead or Alive Ultimate (Xbox)
7. Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater (PS2)
8. World of Warcraft (PC)
9. Sid Meier's Pirates! (PC)
10. X-Men: Legends (PS2)

Top 10 Best-Selling Console Video-Game Titles October 2004

TITLE	PLATFORM	LAST MONTH
1. Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas Rockstar Games	PlayStation 2	NEW
2. NBA Live 2005 EA Sports	PlayStation 2	6 ▲
3. Mortal Kombat: Deception Midway	PlayStation 2	NEW
4. ESPN NBA 2K5 Sega/Global Star	PlayStation 2	NEW
5. Tony Hawk's Underground 2 Activision	PlayStation 2	NEW
6. Mortal Kombat: Deception Midway	Xbox	NEW
7. ESPN NBA 2K5 Sega/Global Star	Xbox	NEW
8. Paper Mario: The Thousand-Year Door Nintendo	GameCube	NEW
9. Madden NFL 2005 EA Sports	PlayStation 2	2 ▼
10. X-Men: Legends Activision	PlayStation 2	NEW

Source: The NPD Group/NPD Funworld/Point-of-Sale

1

Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas



No surprise here. The anticipation for this Grand Theft Auto game was built up a long time ago—and rightfully so. San Andreas expands, improves, and adds from past GTA games to make it an unforgettable crime-ridden adventure. So what if Rockstar is churning out the same formulaic game time and time again—the fans still love it.

4/7



You just can't beat the \$19.99 price tag for any of the ESPN games. And in this case, ESPN NBA 2K5 dunks on both systems. But the aggressive pricing is just frosting on what we think is one of this season's best basketball games on any platform.

3/6



You were probably too young to remember how to pull off a Fatality on the original Mortal Kombat in the arcades. Age is just a number, though, and it aptly shows with Mortal Kombat: Deception ranking in the top 10. No one is too young or too old to enjoy this finely crafted, albeit mature, fighter.

Top 10 Role-Playing Games of All Time

1. Pokémon Yellow (Game Boy)
2. Pokémon Blue (Game Boy)
3. Pokémon Red (Game Boy)
4. Pokémon Silver (Game Boy)
5. Pokémon Gold (Game Boy)
6. The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time (N64)
7. Final Fantasy VII (PlayStation)
8. Pokémon Ruby (Game Boy)
9. Final Fantasy X (PS2)
10. Kingdom Hearts (PS2)

Source: The NPD Group/NPD Funworld/Point-of-Sale



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