GIANT E3 BLOWOUT!

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Bullets Rule The West In Neversoft's Open World Epic

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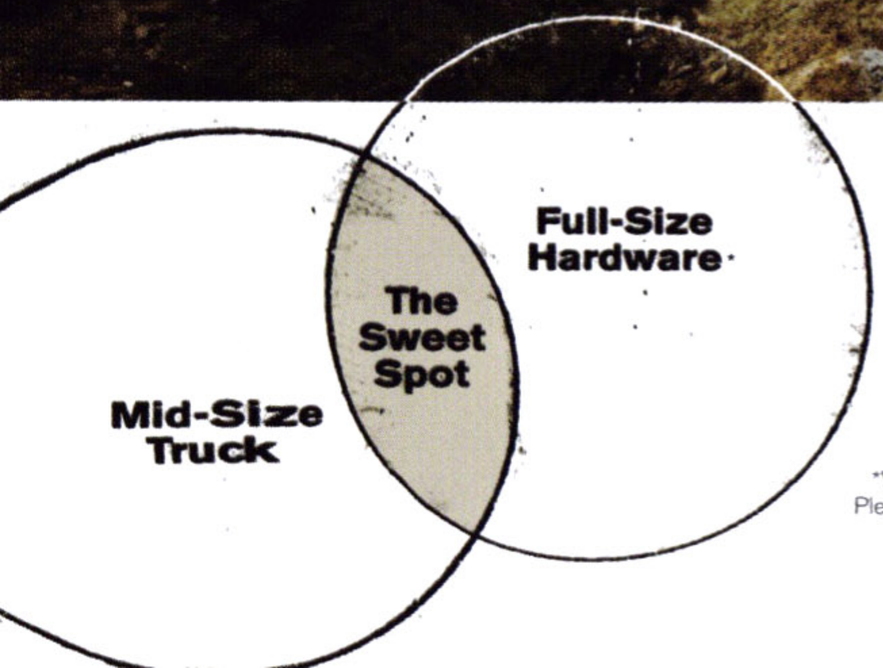
Mountain Goat



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- General Barry McCaffrey, USA (Ret.)

ACT of WAR: DIRECT ACTION™

TEEN
T
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Violence
Language

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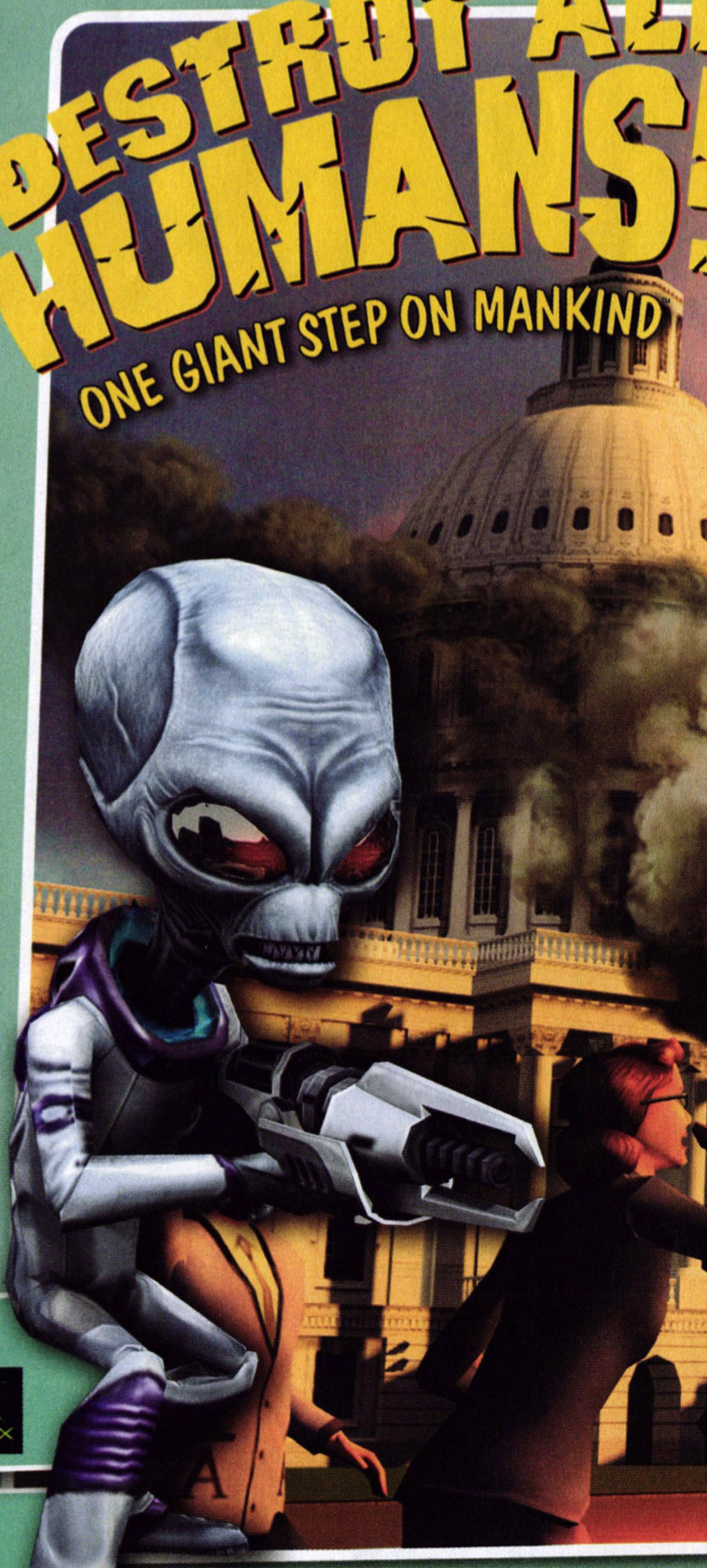

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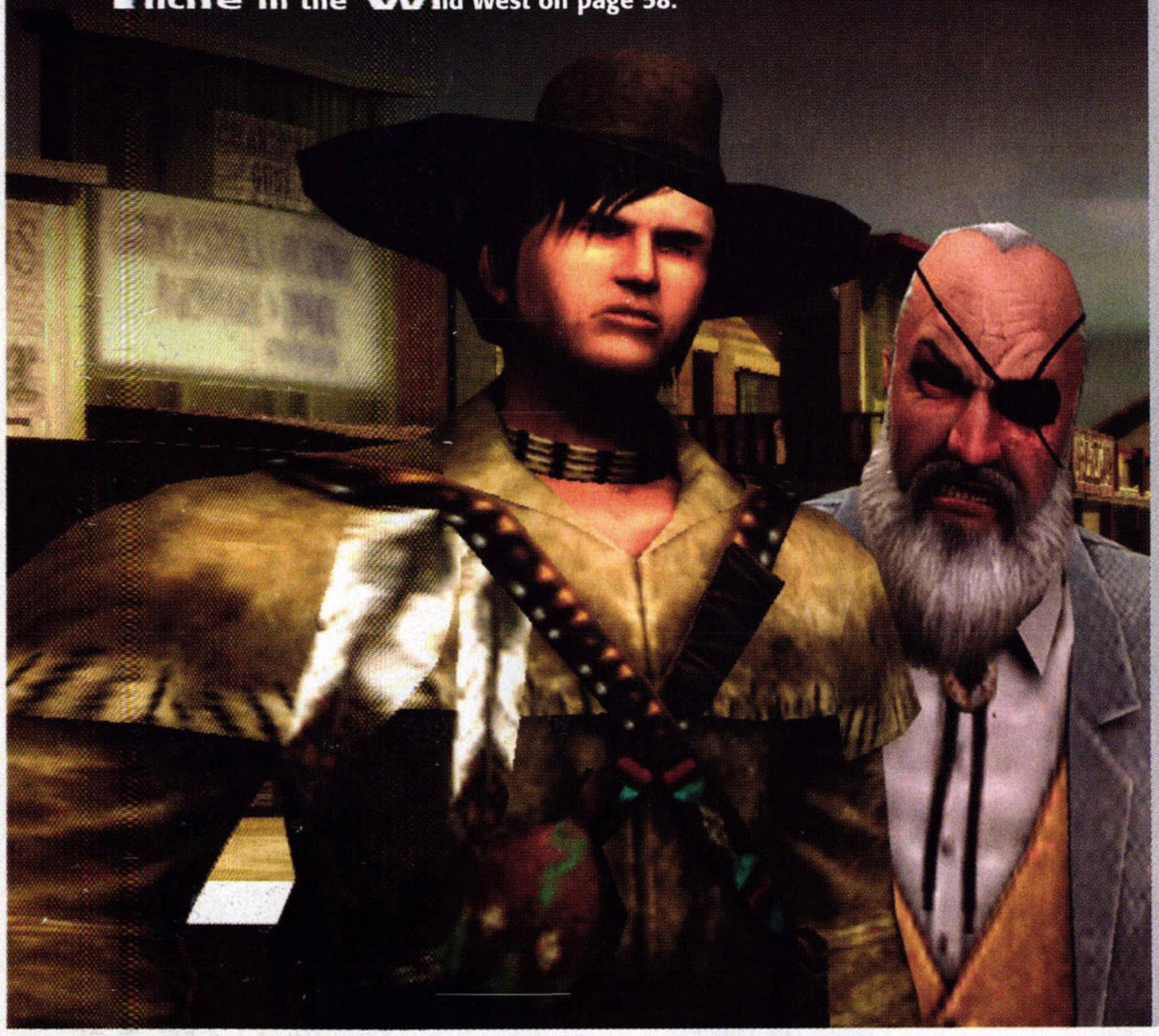
The amazing team at Neversoft lets GI into its hallowed halls to get the scoop on its next- (and current-) gen Western. Whether you're dynamiting a gold mine, gambling the night away, or busting out the shootin' irons in a heated gunfight, Gun lets you put The Duke's legend to shame. Learn all about how you'll be able to carve out your own niche in the Wild West on page 58.



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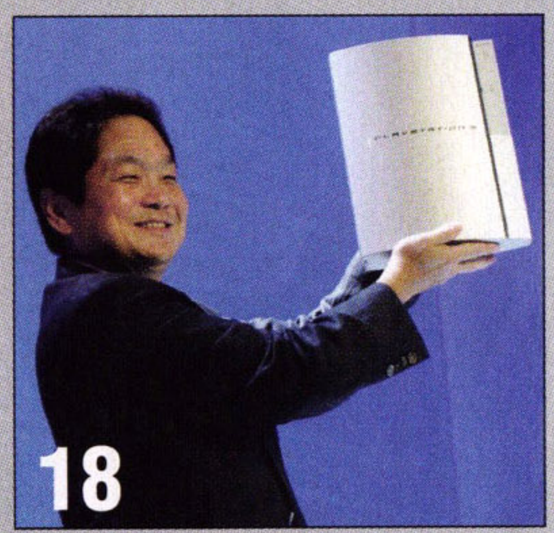

E3 CONNECT FEATURE

GI breaks down the big three hardware manufacturers' announcements from E3 and tears down the smoke and mirrors surrounding Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3.

PRINCE OF PERSIA 3: MAKING THE DEMO

We go in-depth at Ubisoft Montreal to show you the madness and triumphs a developer goes through to get its game ready for public consumption.

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Metroid Prime Pinball
MVP Baseball
NBA Street Showdown
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Pokémon XD: Gale of Darkness
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Rise of Nations: Rise of Legends
Romance of the Three Kingdoms
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Spore
Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of
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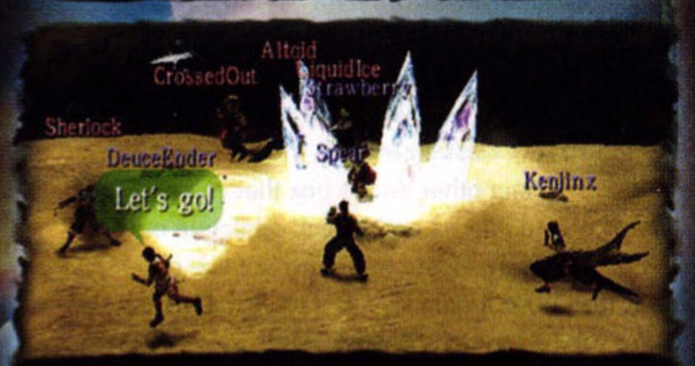

4-On-4 Online Deathmatch

4-Player Online Co-op

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STAFF

People Who Actually Get Paid To Play Video Games

THE WIDE WORLD OF E3

ANDY McNAMARA
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

I know this may sound hard to believe, but it's surprisingly difficult to analyze E3, as the show is an odd mix of reality and pomp and circumstance. Our job is to dig under the surface and see what developers are saying and search our own instincts for what we believe is really there and what is just an illusion.

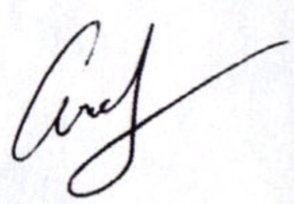
I've been reading plenty of reports that state that this year's E3 was a disappointment. I am not a part of that camp. The difference between this E3 and year's past is that there was no obvious choice. There was no Halo 2 or Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas for analysts and pundits to easily latch onto. You had to pay attention and look at how the industry had a vast number of very good (and great) games that would appeal to a wide range of gamers. Why there is something wrong with that I don't know, but I think the mainstream press is always looking for excuses to discount video games – the greatest of all entertainment mediums.

Of course, the show was made all the more interesting by the next-generation hardware debuts. Sony blew me away with its fantastic press conference that really spoke to me as a gamer with its bigger-than-life presentation that told me why I wanted to be in the next generation and how it was going to get me there.

On the other hand, Microsoft – which I feel showed poorly at its press conference – failed to demonstrate the 360's true value, which I found as I searched the floor and discovered products (most notably from EA, Epic, and Bethesda) that managed to add some emotion to Xbox 360's almost stale world. So my interest in the 360 pulled a 180 in a day's time. Let's hope Microsoft can continue down that path until the launch later this year.

Playing the wild card in the whole battle is Nintendo, who really sang to the classic gamer in me, but failed to show much of anything other than a box that will enable me to download and play its entire back catalogue of products. This is truly awesome in theory, but like everything else at the show, it only reveals part of the picture.

Herein lies the lesson that E3 teaches me every year: It's a show filled with imagery that means something and nothing at the same time. It's a place where companies position themselves for the battle ahead, but in the end, it will mean nothing when the rubber hits the road and the units and software go on sale, letting the consumer decide what to play. I know I can't wait for the next generation, but there are still a lot of great games left to play this year, and you will find many of them in this issue. Enjoy.



Andy >> *andy@gameinformer.com*

Handle: The Game Hombre **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Platform, Driving, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** *Star Wars Episode III: Revenge Of The Sith*, When A Plan Comes Together, New Hardware **Dislikes:** Zelda's New Name (It Might As Well Have Been Tinkerbell Princess), Grande 4 Plex In LA (Worst Theater Ever) **Current Favorite Games:** Tony Hawk's American Wasteland, Gears Of War, Peter Jackson's King Kong, X-Men Legends II: Rise Of Apocalypse, Spore, The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion, The Legend Of Zelda: Twilight Princess, Black, The Warriors

Reiner >> *reiner@gameinformer.com*

Handle: The Raging Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Fighting, Action/Platform, Strategy, Sports **Interests:** The Visuals Of Next Generation Gaming (Killzone Makes The Mona Lisa Look Like A Piece Of Crap), Any Comic Penned By Brian Michael Bendis (*Ultimate Spider-Man*, *Powers*), *Appleseed*, Leeroy Jenkins **Dislikes:** Nintendo Devoting More Time To Nintendogs Than The Revolution, Anyone Who Dislikes The Cubs **Current Favorite Games:** Tony Hawk's American Wasteland, Peter Jackson's King Kong, Spore, The Legend Of Zelda: Twilight Princess, Black, Madden NFL 06

Matt >> *matt@gameinformer.com*

Handle: The Original Gamer **Expertise:** First-Person Shooters, Action/Platform, Action/Adventure, Action/Sports **Interests:** *Dawson's Creek* Reruns (Makes E3 Worth Living For), Sexy PS3 Tech Demos (Yes, It's Rendered And I Don't Care!), Peanuts Con Enchilada, *Revenge Of The Sith* Somewhat Redeeming The Horrible Mess That Lucas Made Of The Star Wars Prequels **Dislikes:** E3 Madness, *Us Weekly's* Extreme Diets Issue **Current Favorite Games:** Spore, Black, Peter Jackson's King Kong, Tony Hawk's American Wasteland, Virtua Tennis: World Tour

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Handle: The Game Katana **Expertise:** Sports, Racing, Action/Adventure, Action/Platform **Interests:** *Revenge Of The Sith*, Kristin Hersh's *Strange Angels*, *Don't Believe The Truth*, The Great Hot Dog/Bun Peace Treaty (Finally They Come In The Same Number) **Dislikes:** Hipness, People Who Start Fights On Buses They Can't Finish **Current Favorite Games:** Spore, Black, Gears Of War, PS3 Games I Haven't Played Yet, Xbox 360 Games I Haven't Played Yet, Gun, Brothers In Arms Earned In Blood

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Handle: The Alpha Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Strategy, First-Person Shooters, Fighting **Interests:** The Etymology Of "Pwned," *Serenity*, Another 10 Months Free Of Insane E3 Predictions, *Revenge Of The Sith*, DS's 2005 Lineup, Leeroy Jenkins **Dislikes:** Alliance Zergs, The Xbox Cheerleading Squad, Moving-Related Insanity, The Inadequacy Of My GBA, Jeremy's Hatred Of *Revenge Of The Sith*, My Defective DSL **Current Favorite Games:** World Of Warcraft, Spore, F.E.A.R., Rise Of Legends, Age Of Empires III, Black, Tabula Rasa, Castlevania: Dawn Of Sorrow

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Miller >> *miller@gameinformer.com*

Handle: The Once And Future Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Adventure, Fighting, Platform, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** Getting A New Dog, How Everyone Is A Nerd About Something, The Heartbreaking End To The Saga (You Know The One), *Appleseed* **Dislikes:** The Taste Of Los Angeles Air, Microsoft's Peanut Gallery, Loud Convention Centers **Current Favorite Games:** Spore, Jade Empire, God Of War, Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction, The Legend Of Zelda: Twilight Princess, Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition, Amplitude

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it's good to play together

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Candid Photos From The Seedy Underbelly Of The Video Game Industry

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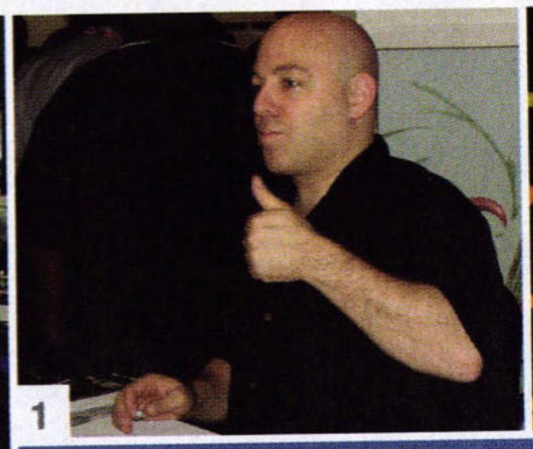

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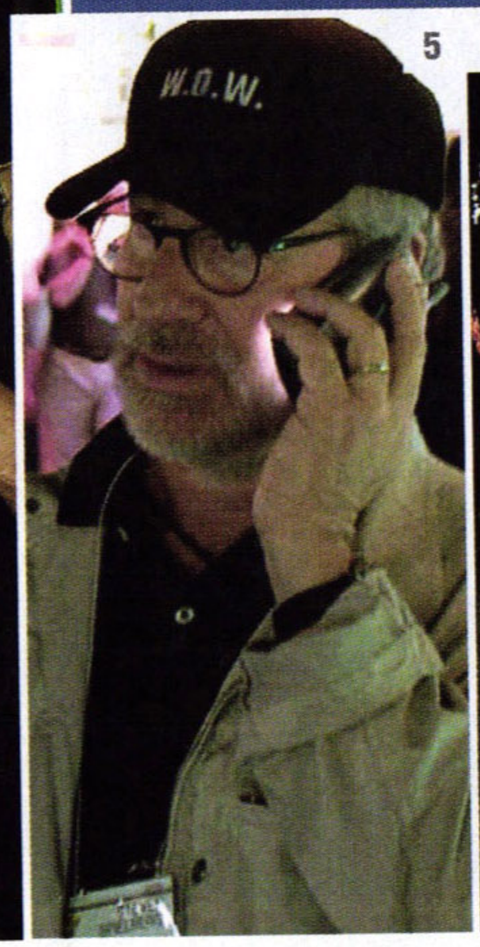

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1 Comic book mastermind Brian Michael Bendis [*Ultimate Spider-Man*, *Powers*] gives GI Spy the thumbs up **2** Neversoft's Joel Jewett encourages Kato to give the next Tony Hawk game a fair and accurate review **3** GI Online's Chris Cook, Mega Man creator Keiji Inafune, GI's Matt Helgeson, Capcom's Ben Judd, and GI Online's Billy Berghammer are ready to party! **4** PSM's Kaiser Hwang, Ubisoft's Carol Quito, and Lisa hang with the "talent" at the Playboy Mansion in Los Angeles. Sadly, there was no Fred Durst sighting that evening. Sigh **5** Legendary director Steven Spielberg was on-hand at E3 to check out the latest in video games. Could this be a sign of a Spielberg video game project in the future? **6** Billy and the one-and-only CliffyB talk Gears of War in the bowels of the Microsoft booth **7** The Wayans brothers (Keenan, Shawn, and Marlon) were on the scene with Bonus Mobile Entertainment's (left to right) Jonathan Fink, Al Lowenheim, William Volk, and Sherri Cuono to promote their new mobile/trading card game, The Dozens **8** NCsoft's booth rocked to the sounds of Mutaytor, who extol the virtues of pyrotechnics, bongo drums, and bond-age wear!

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YOUR DAD!

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PANDORA

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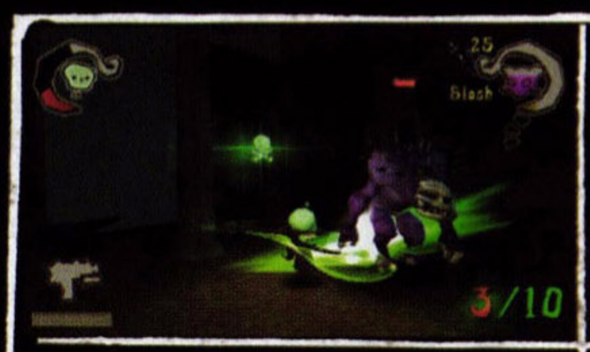
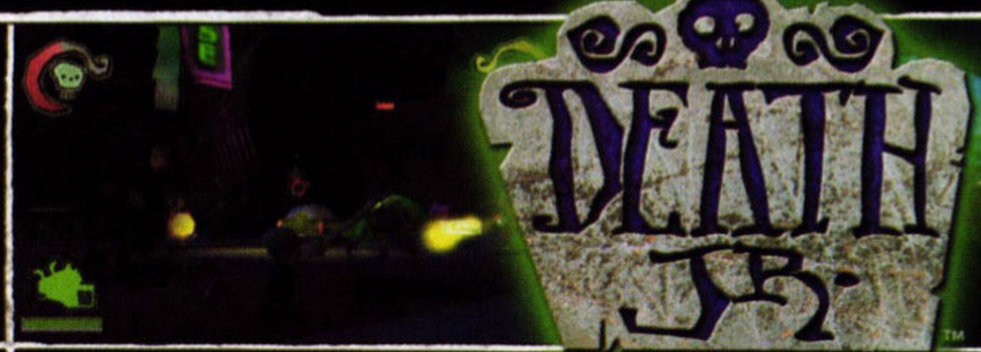


COOL WEAPONS TO CHOOSE FROM.



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DEAR GI

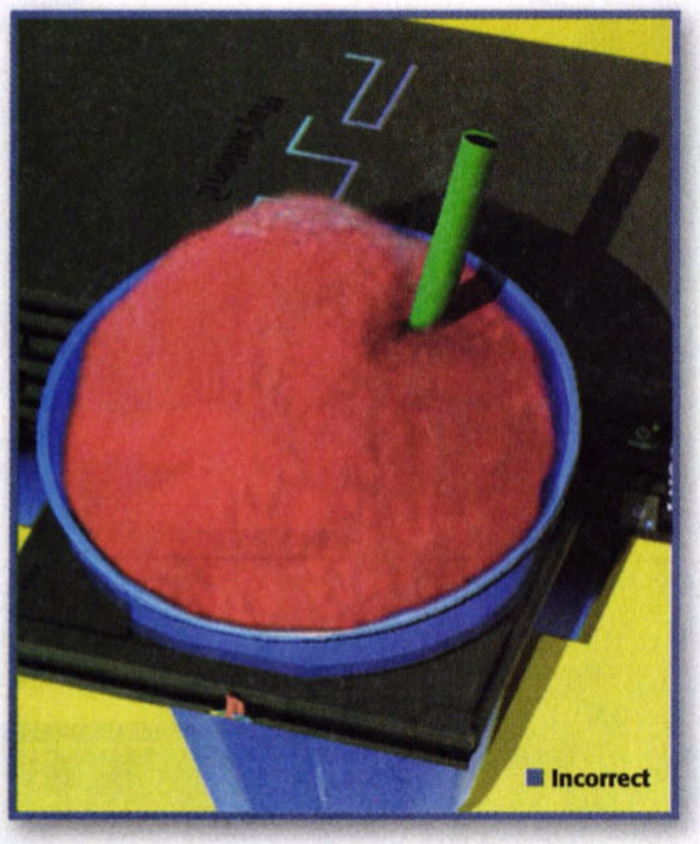
The Readers Strike Back

I, GAMER

I've seen all the new games that are on the horizon. Unfortunately, I can't play them because they're for high-end PCs, Xbox, or GameCube. I have a PS2, but I can't afford to buy every game that comes out for it. I would love to play online, but I can't since I'm on a 56k modem. I don't play RPGs. I haven't even touched Halo 2. I figured I'd ask you: Am I a gamer or a lamer?

Seth Brenes
via aol.com

Let's take a brief look at some other prestigious titles in our society and their duties: A firefighter fights fires, a mailman mans mail, and an undie-stuffer – well, you get the idea. The point is, Seth, that in order to be considered a gamer, you need to play games. We're not saying that you need to be able to discuss the sociopolitical ramifications of Kirby's insatiable desire to open wide, but you need to be familiar with your PS2 as more than a fancy cup-holder (and, by the way, that's the disc tray). So, in the interest of helping people find their identities, we've provided a simple quiz. For every time you answer "yes," give yourself one point.



Incorrect

1. Do you constantly need to look down at the controller to remind yourself which buttons are which?
2. Do you make jumpy motions with your hands to help your character onscreen?
3. Is there a better fish simulator than Odell Lake?
4. Have you ever named any of your characters after reality television personalities?
5. Could Super Bomberman work as a movie starring Jude Law?

If you scored between one and five points, you are a lamer. If you scored zero, you are totally awesome and not a nerd, just like us. What? We make the quiz, we make the rules.

CONTROL FREAK

When I fall in love with a certain series of games, a major part of my love is for the control. For example, Splinter Cell for the PS2. I was anticipating the third installment, but as soon as I got it, the first two enemies killed me immediately because I wasn't used to pushing the square button to pull my weapon out. The Metal Gear Solid and Zelda series' controls remain basically the same, and they're still amazing – why can't everyone else just stick with what works? Will you join me in protesting control scheme switch-ups?

Matt
via aol.com

Guh! No! It's precisely because of these control switches that gameplay is able to evolve. If no one experimented with new ways to manipulate their games, many of the mechanics that define the current generation would never have occurred. Even the games you cite as beacons of stability owe a great deal to these tweaks. Imagine Metal Gear without a first-person fire mode, or Zelda without mapping multiple items to the buttons. These changes came about when one iteration tried something its predecessor didn't. While it may be a minor inconvenience to teach yourself to press a new button to get your sticky shockers ready, it may help to consider yourself part of the majestic march of progress – not to be confused with the majestic march of Protoss, which we learned is a different (and cooler) thing entirely. Our lives for Aiur!

A GALAXY OF HURT

Mark your calendars: April 26, 2005 will be remembered as the day Star Wars Galaxies died. On that day, Sony Online Entertainment decided to launch a combat update in preparation for the new expansion, Rage of the Wookiees. SOE claims the upgrade practically makes SWG a new game, which is correct. However, this "new game" is no longer enjoyable. They've already lost subscribers because of it – they need to address these serious problems caused by the upgrade!

John Naron
via email

Grab on to something, kids, because a harsh wind is a-blowin'. While we understand the pain associated with watching a beloved MMO fall from grace, here's the reality: Sony Online Entertainment is providing a service, and you are paying to use it. It can be rewarding to invest yourself in these games, but it is important to remember that you are essentially paying rent to play in SOE's sandbox – it advertises a game's features, and you pay admission. If you don't like it, stop buying it. You don't walk up to a lemonade stand, give your nickel to an adorable ragamuffin, and then complain loudly that you aren't drinking Ecto Cooler instead (unless you're Jeremy). Give the upgrade some time to sink in, and if you're still convinced it's a twisted machination of the Dark Side, it might be time to lay down your vibroblade for good. After all, we hear Azeroth is beautiful this time of year.

OPEN YOUR EYES AND SEE

As everyone knows, the next-generation consoles will hit in the coming year, and I have no clue as to which one I should get. Right now I have an Xbox and GameCube, and I especially love platformers and RPGs. The Xbox 360 is looking pretty good right now, especially after Sakaguchi committed to making two exclusive RPGs. What advice can you give me?

Sean McGowan
via email

It is still too early to weigh the benefits of the next-gen systems, but through the remarkable mysteries of video game science, we can unerringly determine the platform you should purchase next: PlayStation 2. Seriously. Don't forget that, while the next generation is on the horizon, it isn't here quite yet. You still have plenty of time to enjoy the outstanding games that are right under your nose. In fact, there are some downright stellar PS2-exclusive titles in your favorite genres that it would be a shame to miss (like the Ratchet & Clank and Final

A WINKLE IN TIME

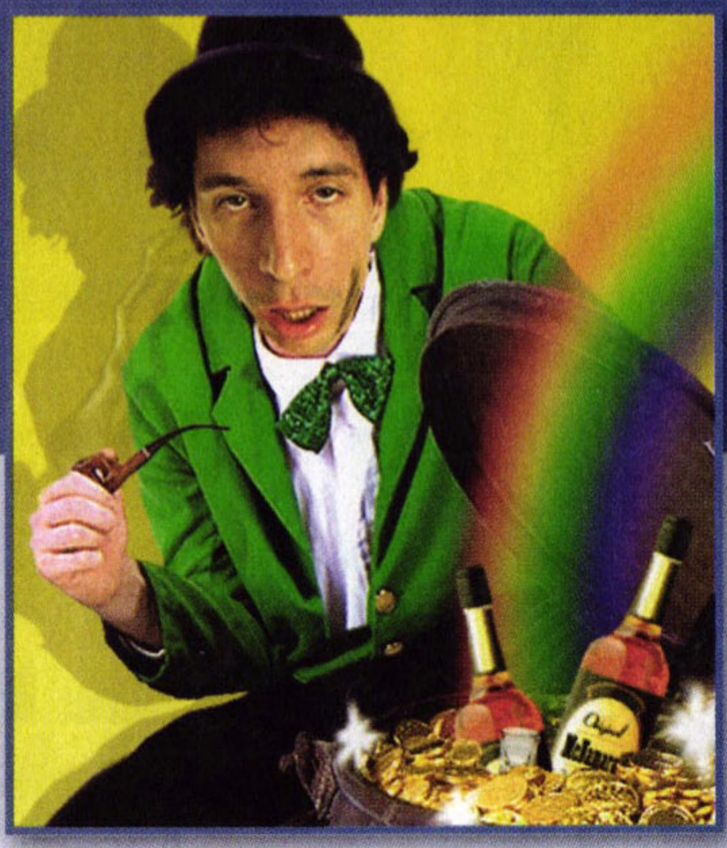
I found Winkles! He's on page 241!

Matthew Inverso
Ewing, NJ

After countless hours of searching through every Game Informer I own, my friend and I have finally found Winkles the magical leprechaun! We'd like our tickets to Bellvue, please.

Ryan Mottl
via yahoo.com

One of these two individuals is lying. Can you guess which one? That's right, it's Ryan! Not only does he not specify Winkles' location, but his transparent attempt to cash in on Bellvue tickets is sickening. He'd be lucky to get Winger tickets! Matthew, on the other hand, clearly demonstrates his steadfast dedication. You see, no regulation-sized Game Informer has ever reached 241 pages; therefore, he must have uncovered the secret invisible half of the magazine located in the astral plane, where Winkles makes his eternal home. If you can't find that section, don't worry – you're not missing anything. We never put any editorial content on those invisible pages anyway. They're mainly just full of Winkles and ads for adult diapers.



Now you see why we keep Winkles hidden

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TEEN T Mild Violence Mild Language

PlayStation 2 ONLINE BROADBAND ONLY XBOX XBOX LIVE

Online play requires Internet Connection, Network Adaptor (for PlayStation 2) and Memory Card (8MB) (for PlayStation 2) (each sold separately).

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Fantasy series). The next few years will undoubtedly bring some amazing developments, but it's rarely a good idea to forsake the present in anticipation of a better future – unless it's a pyramid scheme. Those always seem to work out well for everybody involved.

FAMILY MATTERS

In the the calendar in issue 145, you claim that Joe Estevez is the younger brother of Emilio Estevez. Being a huge Mystery Science Theater 3000 fan, I can say with certainty that while Emilio Estevez is the younger brother of Charlie Sheen, Joe Estevez is the older brother of actor Martin Sheen (and uncle to Emilio and Charlie). Never challenge a diehard MST3K fan on who's who in Hollywood.

Hardy Thorson
via hotmail.com

■ **Chalk one up for the MSTies. We apologize for the mix-up – we apparently have some trouble keeping those Sheen/Estevez boys straight. With all of the shared genetics going on in that family, some sort of time-travel/mating-with-future-selves plot is the only rational explanation. As far as the who's who in Hollywood part, if we ever have questions about the lesser Estevi, Joe Don Baker, or who's directing a *The Pumaman* sequel, we'll let you know.**

CODES AND COPING

There are rumors of a hidden character in Mario Kart 64 by the name of Marty. It's been said that in the Bowser's castle level, if you drive around the statue of Bowser three times, turn around and do the course backwards, then circle the statue three times again, you get this elusive character. Or do you? I need you guys to help confirm this for me.

Richard Zeller
via msn.com

■ **At some point in our lives, we have to come to grips with some sad realities. Aeris is dead. The DOA ladies' bikini tops aren't coming off. There are people who deny these truths, fabricating wild stories and elaborate hoaxes – like Marty – to give others a sense of false hope. If you are having trouble spotting these phony procedures, here's a handy little poem you can recite (taken from *Bonk's Book of Gaming Nursery Rhymes*):**

A young gamer named Alfred Ames
Wanted the most out of his games.
While scouring an online forum
Renowned for lack of decorum,
He read of a method most rare
To leave gaming's secrets laid bare.
This ancient, remarkable cheat
Took Alfred four days to complete.
He rounded a tree once, twice, thrice,
Then pressed some buttons – most precise!
Hold this down, find a hidden glitch,
Wait this long, pause, then hit that switch.
Without a care that it seems cheap,
Alfred prepared the final leap,
and with that culminating jump...
He proved himself a total chump.

CORRECTIONS

Our list of upcoming Nintendo titles on page 28 of last issue includes titles scheduled to release in 2005 as well as 2006. On an unrelated note, Keiji Inafune – not Kenji – is one of the creators of Onimusha, so update your rolodex accordingly. Lastly, back in Issue 145, we mistakenly printed Archer Maclean's first name as Arthur. Sorry, Archer – that Arthur punk meant nothing to us.

ENVELOPE ART

JULY WINNER!

MICHAEL GARCIA
Spartans: For when a princess needs more than a plumber's crack and some cheap-ass daffodils

Send to:
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Envelope Art Contest
724 1st St. N., 4th Floor
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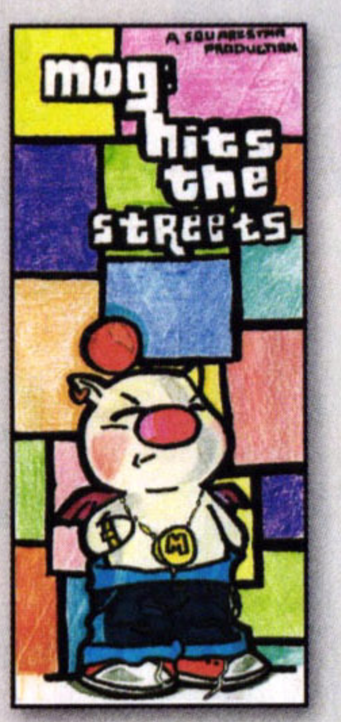
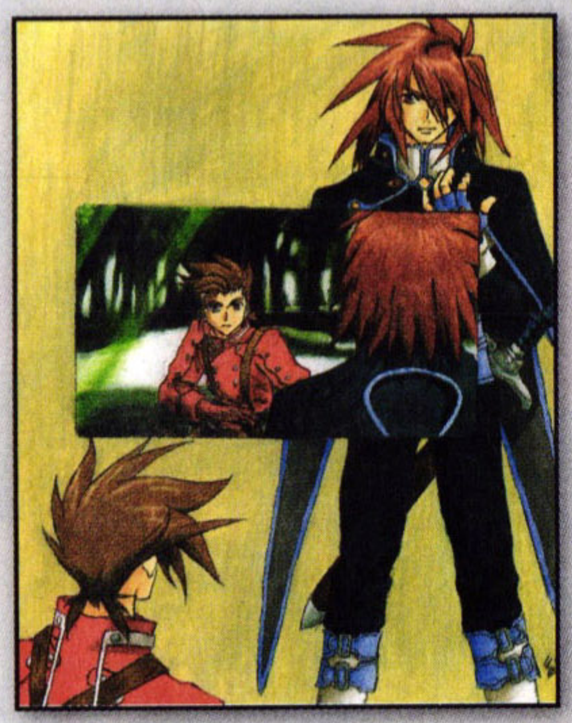
Enter the Game Informer Envelope Art Contest. All you need to do is draw, paint, scratch, spit, or carve the best darn envelope art you can think of and send it to us. Please include your name, phone number, and return address on the back of the envelope. If you're the monthly winner, we'll feature your work in GI and you'll receive a video game prize from the Game Informer vault.



KELLY SZPUNAR
"Go kupo yourself, sucka!"

JOSHUA HOOPER
Rayne and Dante give up fighting evil to become Gorillaz roadies



SHARECE OVERMYER
"Lloyd, will you go to the prom with me?"

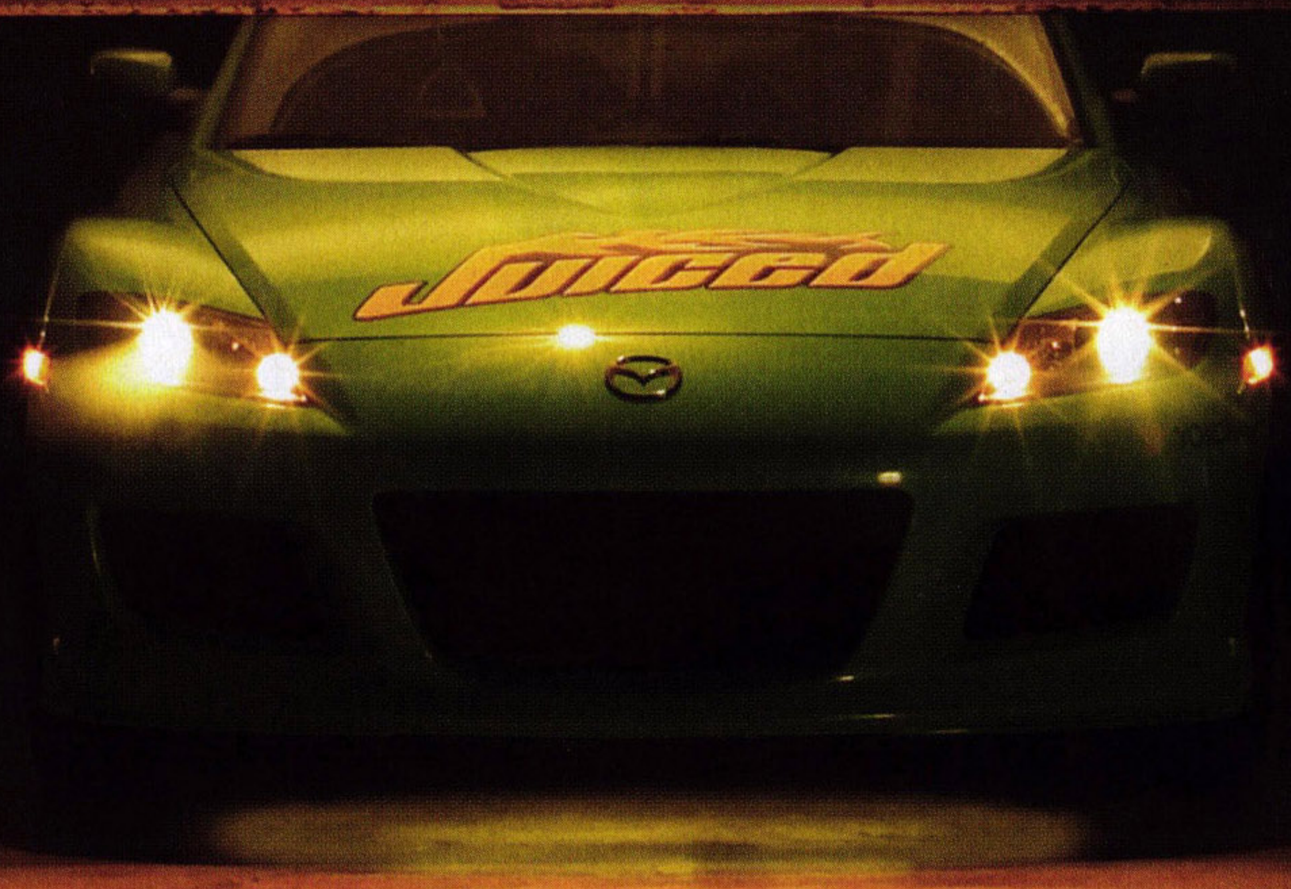
VIRGINA JAMES
Not every hidden item can be power bombs and missile expansions

JONATHAN REYNOLDS
Residents of the Cuddlebug homestead were shocked, appalled, and delicious

THIS IS NOT A CAR.

It's your source of pride.
It's your hard-earned cash.
It's your spare time.
It's your statement.
It's your reputation.

IT'S EVERYTHING.



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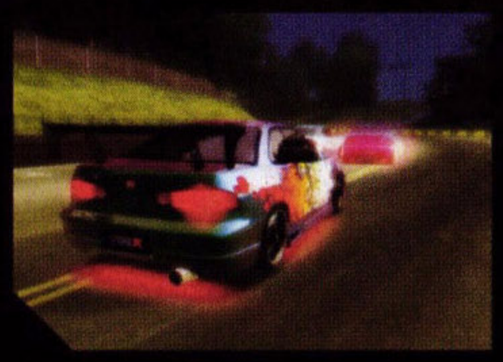

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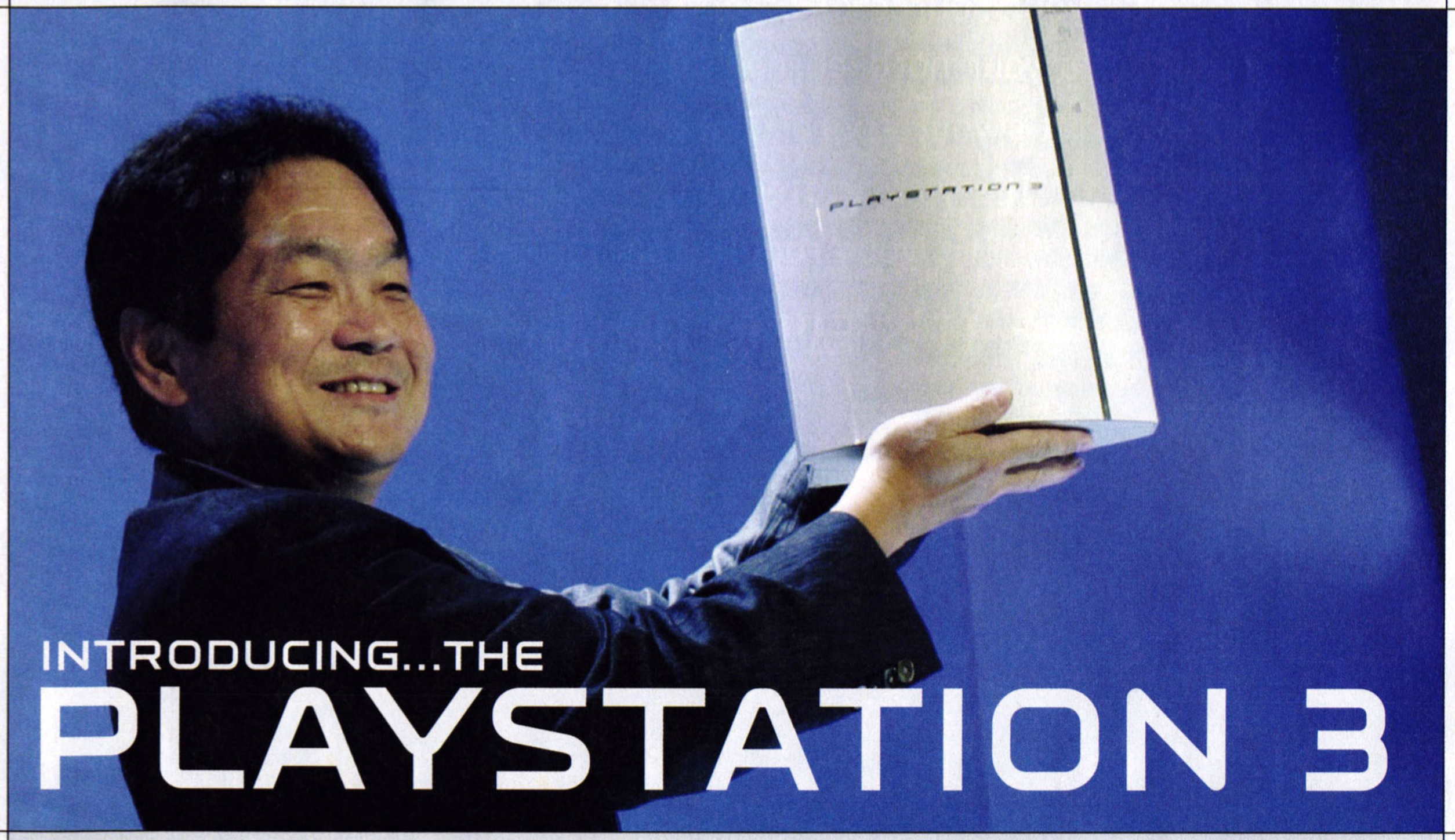


INTRODUCING...THE PLAYSTATION 3

Sony E3 press conferences typically don't receive the outpouring of love from fans that the Nintendo ones do, nor do they have the faux-hip factor of Microsoft. But anyone attending this year's Sony event at Sony Pictures Studios in Culver City walked away more impressed with the company's presentation than they ever had before. Not only did the company unveil a prototype of the PlayStation 3 unit, but it also gave an in-depth presentation on the system's specs and showed demos of some titles in development for it. Sony says the system will come out in spring 2006, but did not specify whether the console would release simultaneously around the world. The company's spring target likely reflects a staggered launch, with Japan probably getting the PS3 first. No price has been announced yet. Rumors in Japan point to the system debuting at the initial price of previous PlayStations: 39,800 yen ($368), but that cannot be confirmed.

The PlayStation 3 will – on paper – be a very powerful next-generation system, something Sony wasted no time pointing out. The unit's Cell processor runs at 3.2GHz and can process 218 GFLOPS of information with its seven cores working simultaneously. In conjunction with NVIDIA's RSX GPU (which is capable of 1080p high-definition resolution), the system will theoretically be capable of pushing two teraflops of information (vs. Xbox 360's one TFLOP) – which will not only aid graphics, but the system's ability to compute physics, support detailed character models, etc. Sony expects the power of the PS3 to drive games that look and play like nothing we've experienced before.

The PS3 isn't simply a more powerful PS2, however. It sports an all-new boomerang controller design (luckily Sony says it's only conceptual at this point), and the system allows for seven of them to hook up to the system via wireless Bluetooth 2.0. It can also play Blu-Ray discs, which are the next generation of DVDs that contain the space necessary to handle large-sized games and high-definition movies. Of course, the platform also supports regular DVDs. The PlayStation 3 also allows for Internet browsing, tele-conferencing, downloads to the detachable hard drive, and Wi-Fi connectivity with the PSP. You can read more on these aspects in the following pages.

The system wasn't just talked about; Sony also showed off what it could do. However, to what extent the game demos and footage by the likes of Epic Games, Rockstar (who showed a brief clip of what looked to be a next-gen iteration of Red Dead Revolver), EA, Sega, Ubisoft, and more were really utilizing the hardware was a matter of debate. At a minimum, however, demos of Epic's Unreal Engine 3 and EA's Fight Night Round 3 were running in real-time. We'll have to wait and see how powerful the system actually is, as games like Guerilla Games' new Killzone title become more of a reality. Indeed, the system's success may ride on just how easy it is to develop for and to what extent and cost studios can manipulate the power of the console. Sony says that software tools for the Cell processor will be made available and should ease studios' fears. Even if developers cannot tap into the full potential of the PS3, however, at the least we can expect games to equal the Xbox 360 – something you can see in the next seven pages of the system's first crop of titles.

So far, developers such as Epic say that it isn't hard to make games on the system. The company has even announced that it will start a license program for its Unreal Engine 3 technology and tools for the platform. Former Nintendo partner and Rogue Squadron developer Factor 5 has actually ditched the Xbox 360 in favor of working exclusively with Sony's upcoming console. Tecmo's Tomonobu Itagaki is sticking with Xbox 360, and his wait-and-see attitude echoed those of other developers we talked to who have yet to get full development kits for the PlayStation 3. "As far as the PS3 is concerned," he said, "I'm not going to make any statements on it until I see the machine. We can only fight with the weapon we have in front of us." Still, the system and its powerful specs certainly have grabbed the attention of the entire gaming world. Perhaps one of the few things that may get in its way is its embarrassing rip-off *Spider-Man* logo.

■ Sony says that both the PS3 unit and controller are prototypes at this time

PLAYSTATION 3 SPECS
- CPU: Cell Processor
- 1 VMX vector unit per core
- 512 KB L2 cache
- 7 x SPE PowerPC-base Core at 3.2GHz (+ 1 for redundancy)
- 7 x 128b 128 SIMD GPRs
- 7 x 256 KB SRAM for SPE
- Total floating point performance: 218 GFLOPS
- GPU: NVIDIA'S RSX at 550MHz
- 1.8 TFLOPS floating point performance
- Full HD (up to 1080p) x 2 channels
- Multi-way programmable parallel floating point shader pipelines

Sound
- Dolby 5.1 channel, DTS, LPCM, etc.

Memory
- 256 MB XDR Main RAM at 3.2GHz
- 256 MB GDDR3 VRAM at 700MHz

System Bandwidth
- Main RAM 25.6 GB/s
- VRAM 22.4 GB/s
- RSX 20 GB/s (write) + 15 GB/s (read)
- SB 2.5 GB/s (write) + 2.5 GB/s (read)

System Floating Point Performance
- 2 TFLOPS

Storage
- Detachable 2.5" HDD

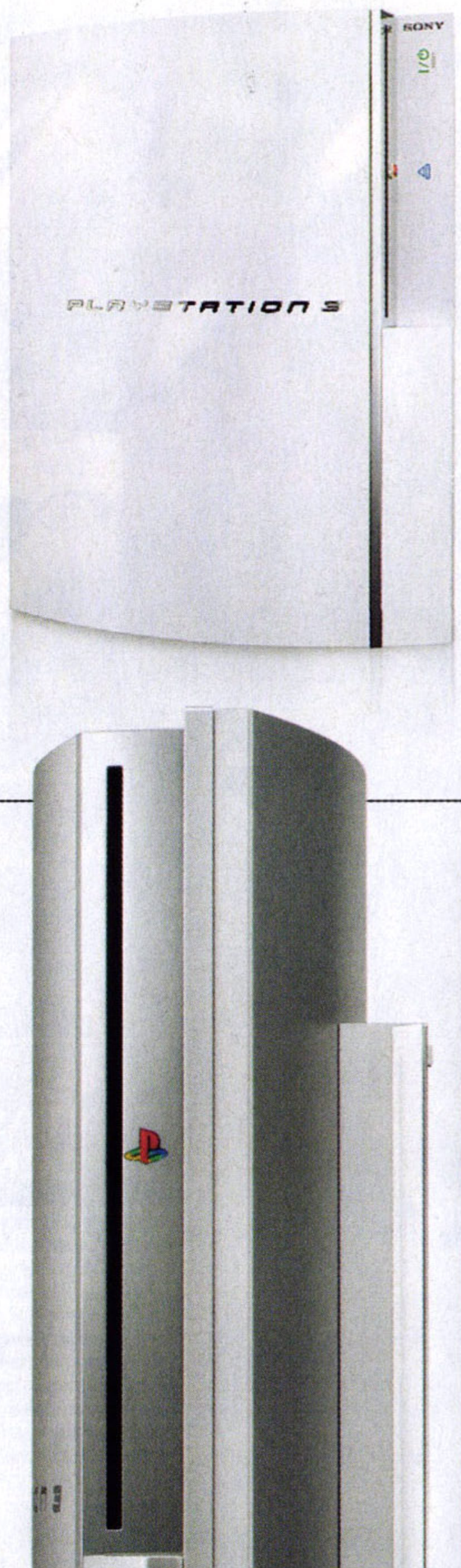
I/O
- USB: Front x 4, Rear x 2 (USB 2.0)
- Memory Stick standard/Duo, PRO
- SD standard/mini
- CompactFlash (Type I, II)

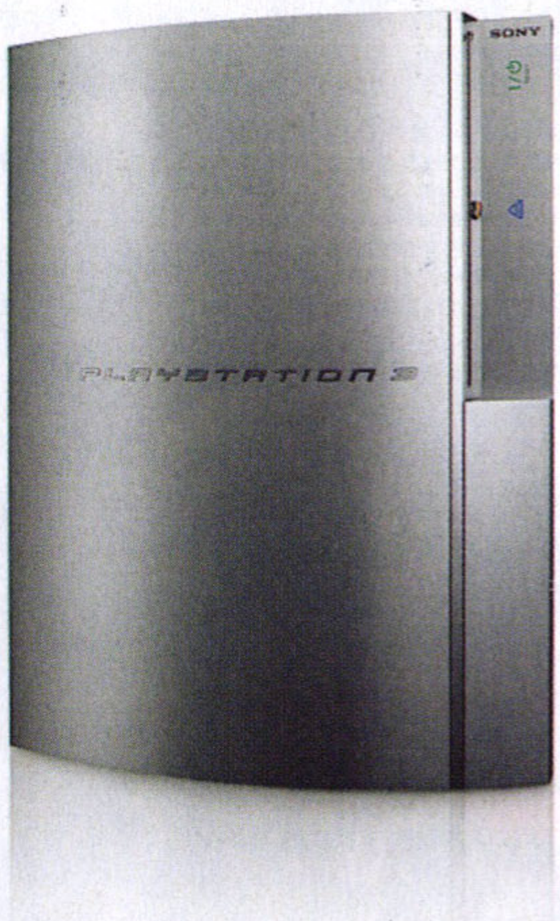
Communication
- Ethernet (10BASE-T, 100BASE-TX, 1000BASE-T) x 3 (input x 1 + output x 2)
- Wi-Fi IEEE 802.11 b/g
- Bluetooth 2.0 (EDR)

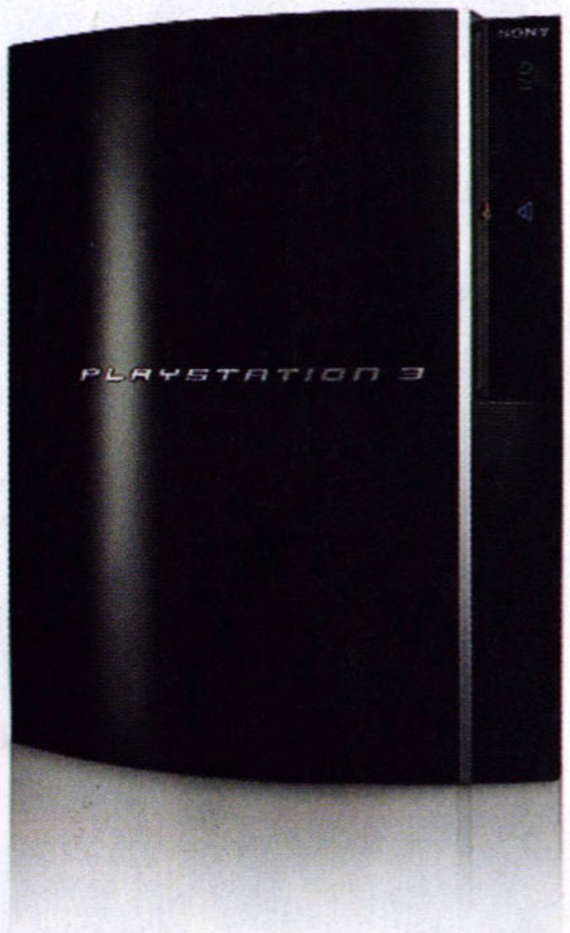
Controllers
- Bluetooth (up to 7)
- USB 2.0 (wired)
- Wi-Fi (PSP)
- Network (over IP)

AV Output
- Screen size: 480i, 480p, 720p, 1080i, 1080p
- HDMI: HDMI out x 2
- Analog: AV multi out
- Digital audio: Digital out (Optical)

Disc Media
- Blu-ray Disc: PlayStation 3 BD-ROM, BD-Video, BD-ROM, BD-R, BD-RE
- DVD: PlayStation 2 DVD-ROM, PlayStation 3 DVD-ROM, DVD-Video, DVD-ROM, DVD-R, DVD-RW, DVD+R, DVD+RW
- CD PlayStation CD-ROM, PlayStation 2 CD-ROM, CD-DA, CD-DA (ROM), CD-R, CD-RW, SACD, SACD Hybrid (CD layer), SACD HD, DualDisc (audio side), DualDisc (DVD side)





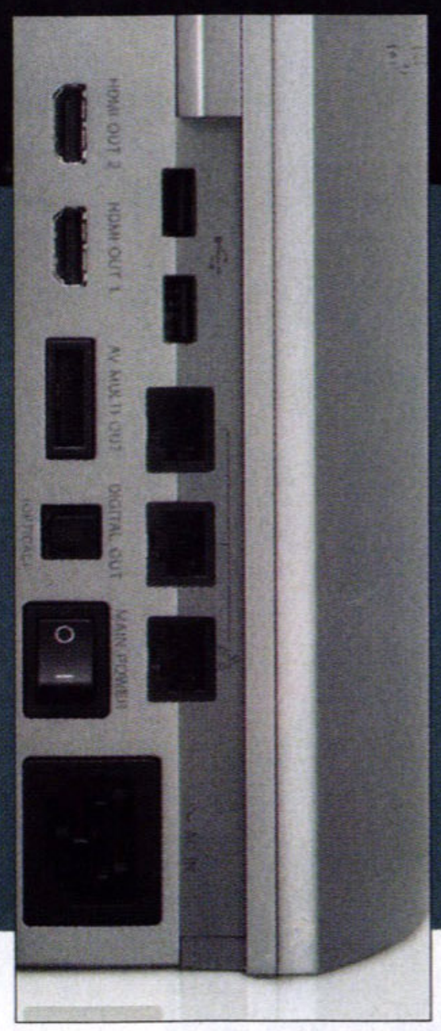


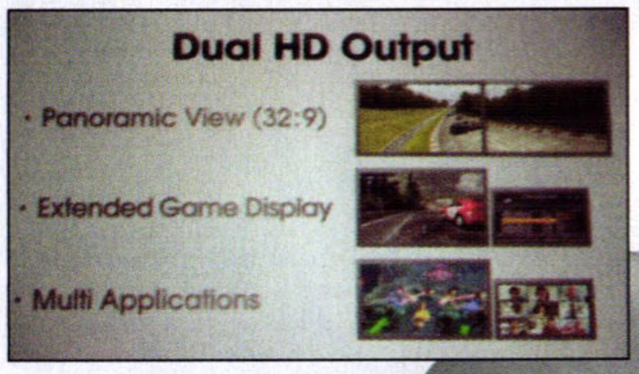
THE INS AND OUTS OF THE PS3

Sony is giving gamers a lot of options with their PS3s. Thankfully, it will support a memory storage device besides Sony's propriety Memory Stick. SD and Flash memory are supported and can be accessed by lifting a hatch next to the PS3's front disc loader.

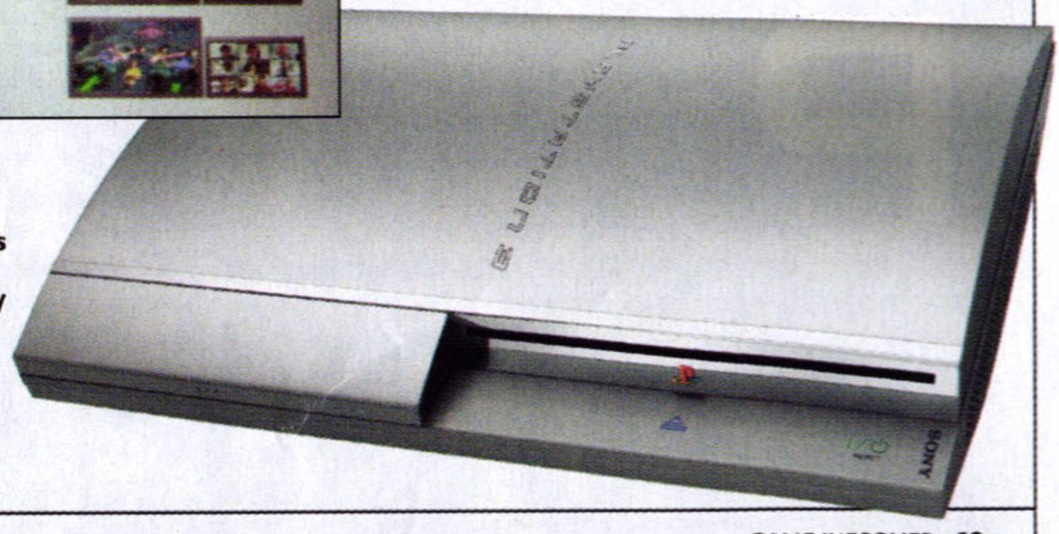
The rear of the machine houses three Ethernet ports (one input and two outputs), including the 1000Base-T Gigabyte port. The system's two USB 2.0 slots also reside here (with four USB ports up front to recharge the wireless controllers), as does the usual AV multi out and digital optical out. On the left side of the PS3 is the 2.5" Hard Drive slot, although the actual storage size of the drive itself has not been announced.

Perhaps the most interesting output aspect of the system is the fact that it has two HDMI outs. This allows you to hook up two high-definition monitors. Developers wishing to use this feature could let players expand the game screen across two HD TVs into a 32:9 aspect ratio, or they could make use of the second screen to display extra game info. Furthermore, Sony says that an extra HD monitor would enable simultaneous functions such as video conferencing or web surfing during gameplay.





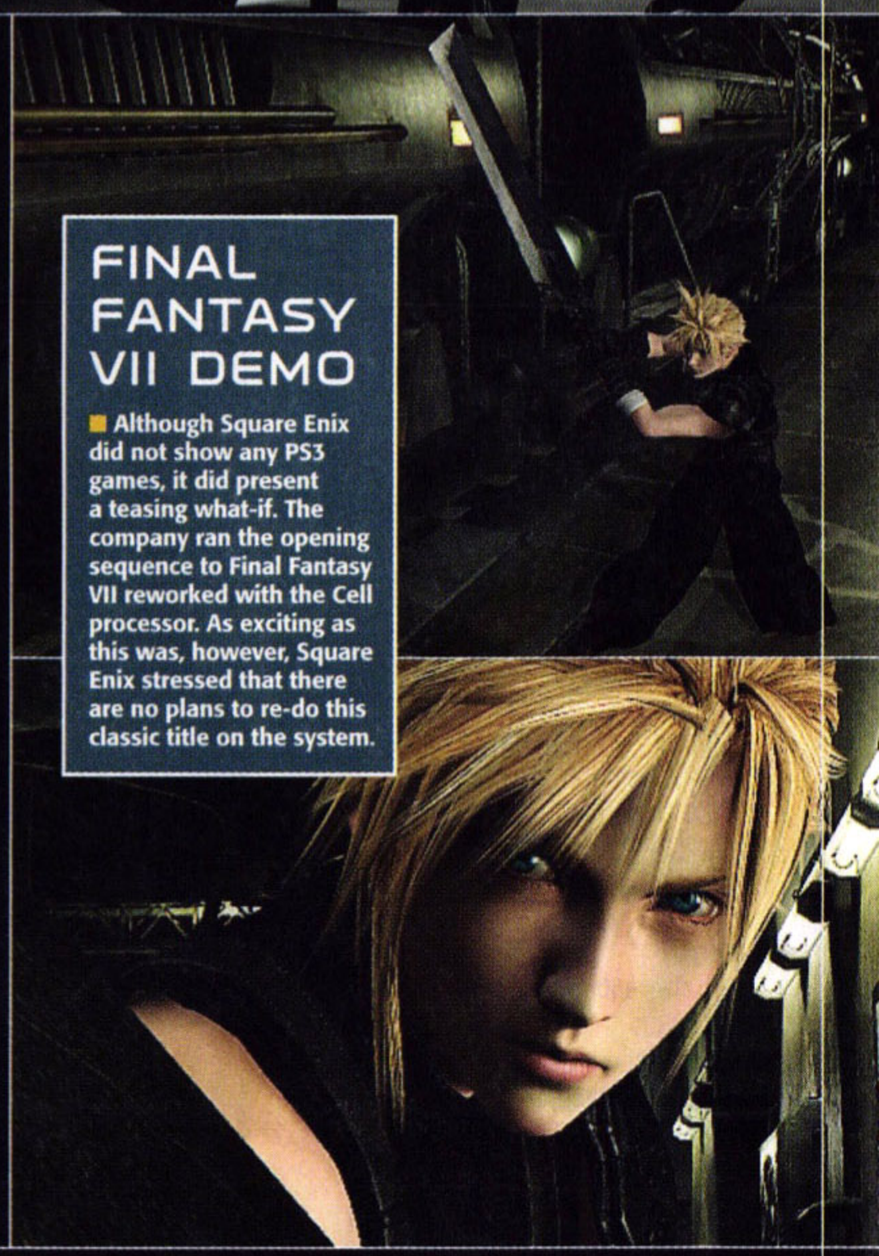
For those lucky enough to have two HD monitors, you can play enabled games in a 32:9 aspect ratio. Otherwise, those with just one HD TV can take advantage of an extended gameplay screen and more



By opening the hatch next to the PS3's disc loader, you can access its memory slots. The unit supports non-proprietary SD and Flash memory cards, as well as Sony's Memory Sticks

VISION GT

■ Given how long it takes for developer Polyphony Digital to come out with a new Gran Turismo, we're glad they're getting a head start with the PS3. The 90-second clip was impressive, but let's face it: Car games always look good on new consoles. Perhaps a more interesting moment was when Sony merged footage from Vision GT's Times Square track with an actual movie clip from *Spider-Man 2*. No, it was just a demo. The two aren't going to be featured in a game!



FINAL FANTASY VII DEMO

■ Although Square Enix did not show any PS3 games, it did present a teasing what-if. The company ran the opening sequence to Final Fantasy VII reworked with the Cell processor. As exciting as this was, however, Square Enix stressed that there are no plans to re-do this classic title on the system.

PlayStation 3's fancy spec numbers mean something to gamers – they represent the possibility for graphics like we've never seen before. NVIDIA has provided the system with the RSX graphics processor. The chip contains 300 million transistors on its 90 nanometer surface. According to NVIDIA, 300 million represents the number you'd get if you added up all the transistors on the GPUs and CPUs of the PlayStation 2, Xbox, and GameCube combined. The RSX is more powerful than two GeForce 6800 Ultras combined, and uses its power for shading that allows for texture maps, normal maps, bump maps, and much more to be calculated per pixel.

NVIDIA co-founder, president, and CEO Jen-Hsun Huang ran through a number of impressive demonstrations showing the use of the system's shaders, and Epic Games CEO and co-founder Tim Sweeney announced the company's support of the system with a real-time demo of the Unreal Engine 3 on the PS3. Sweeney said that they used per pixel lighting and shadowing with shaders that were 200 times more complex than the previous generation. Saying the demo only took two months to produce, he vouched for how easy the platform is to develop for. "This was so fast because we have a lot of experience with PC development and a lot of knowledge was immediately applicable to PS3, which has a very nice development pipeline. It was easy to write for."

Another demonstration not only showed the console's power, but its ability to use existing movie assets to create a more realistic game experience. Using borrowed computer graphics data from *Spider-Man 2*, a face model was created for Doctor Octopus actor Alfred Molina (shown above). The system's shaders were able to react to real-time light sources to create different hues on the virtual Molina's skin, including transparent skin effects for the tips of his ears when the light shone from behind them.

NEW KILLZONE PROJECT

■ The Killzone demo from developer Guerrilla Games for the PlayStation 3 was so good that people assumed it had to be prerendered. We can't confirm or deny that, but we can say that it was probably the most visually impressive demo of the show. There were particle effects everywhere as vehicles blew up and frantic action as flamethrowers torched all those around. Perhaps the most notable aspect of the demo apart from its straight detail was how smooth it all ran.

DEMONSTRATIONS OF POWER

■ Epic Games' PlayStation 3 demo of its Unreal Engine 3 was remarkable not only for its smooth, eye-opening action, but for the fact that it was all in real-time

I-8 [UNOFFICIAL TITLE]

■ Although this first-person shooter is a departure from Isomniac's recent platforming titles, onlookers were excited with what they saw. The movie of the game starts out like any other next-gen military title, complete with numerous troops on screen, chaotic cries from squad members, and impressive smoke and particle effects. When you realize, however, that the enemies you are fighting include giant, mutated spiders and humanoid beings with mouthfuls of fangs, the game takes on a whole new meaning.

AN INTERVIEW WITH SONY'S KAZ HIRAI

Game Informer sat down with president and CEO of Sony Computer Entertainment America, Kaz Hirai

Sony says the PS3 will come out in spring 2006. Does that mean a simultaneous worldwide launch at that time?
We've not yet determined which territory or territories we want to launch in just yet – [who comes] first, [who comes] second, or the variety of combinations I guess you can do.

Will the Xbox 360 siphon away people from Sony who don't want to wait for the PS3?
I'm not too concerned in them getting a "headstart," if you will. Interestingly enough, we've never been first in any generation. So it's kind of in keeping with tradition, I guess. Us being second has never really hindered in any way our ability to garner the market leadership position very quickly and overtake the other consoles that may have launched before us.

Are you worried that game publishers will be giving the Xbox 360 de-facto exclusives because the Xbox 360 is coming out first?
Yes, it could be a de-facto exclusive for whatever that period may be. I don't think, though, that that means that there is no development going on for PlayStation 3 versions of any particular title. Yes, the next generation is coming, but the installed base is not going to be that big, and therefore, most of your business will have to be done in the current generation of product. We are committed to keeping the PlayStation 2 going for at least another five years or so.

Are you asking publishers to wait on the Xbox 360 to support the PS3 instead?
It's really up to the publishers to determine where they want to put their resources, and we're not really going to be in there dictating or asking for them to wait.

What has been the PS3's feedback from developers so far?
Even if they said that it was great to work on, that's not really an indication of the dev kit as it comes out and vice versa. I've gotten some feedback, but it's neither here nor there.

There is the perception among gamers that Microsoft rules online gaming. What can Sony do to win the online space?
There does seem to be that perception, but if you take a look at sheer numbers of online users, the people that are registered users of the PlayStation Network are by far the largest group of users, especially when you look at the U.S. market. Having said that, we have a unique challenge with the PlayStation 3 in that, yes, we want to provide an online structure for the PS3 users. But at the same time, we have this huge base of PS2 online users that we don't want to shut out. In addition to that, you have the PlayStation Portable that has Wi-Fi. That's the challenge for us, not going down the list and saying, "We want chat. Check. Matchmaking? Check." Those things are like fundamentals. Those are very easy to do.

Sony didn't fully support the PS2's hard drive. Can gamers rely on Sony to support the PS3's hard drive?
This time around, broadband is going to be like air-conditioning in your car. It used to be nice to have back in the '60s when I was growing up, but I don't think you have too many cars that come out without air conditioning right now. So, you want to be able to take advantage of that. One aspect of taking advantage of broadband networks is the ability to download content, whether it's games, videos, it doesn't really matter. I think that with the Hard Disk Drive – and we haven't determined whether we want to pack it into the box from day one because it is detachable, or if we want to make it optional – that's something we need to strategize as well. But I think overall, the Hard Disk Drive is going to become even more a part of the PS3 experience in terms of being able to store a variety of content that you can download or bring from other sources.

Will you offer more than one size of hard drive?
It's possible. Sony has a variety of different Memory Stick sizes, so yeah…I wouldn't rule it out completely. I don't know if we'll have five different capacities like the Memory Stick, but we'll see.

What do you think of the fact that in Microsoft's press conference, they said you could download music from your PSP unto an Xbox 360?
Well, I'm flattered that they are referring to our product! I guess it's because they don't have a product of their own. Thank you very much for the promotion! [laughs]

Sony had stated they wanted to have a web-browsing monitor and keyboard setup for the PS2. It never came out. What makes people more apt to want to surf the web with the PS3?
Several things. One is higher penetration of HD-capable monitors, and that will continue to grow. I think that with HD-output, at least the resolution is there to really, clearly view websites – as long as they are text-based. The most importing thing is if the consumer really wants this. If they do, it's just a matter of coming up with the software to do web browsing. If there's a need for it, then great, if not, then there may not be.

Both Microsoft and Nintendo have hardcore fanbases, but Sony doesn't seem to inspire that kind of loyalty. What does Sony have to do to garner that kind of devotion?
I think that that perception exists with some of the other consoles mainly because they don't have anything else. In our case, we obviously have a lot of first-person shooters, we have great titles in action franchises, racing – you name it, we have it.

THE PS3 NETWORK

At last year's E3, Sony's chief technical officer Masa Chitani talked about the theoretical power of the Cell processor. The only problem was, it was hard to understand the concepts he was explaining. This year, however, Chitani took the stage with more concrete, applicable details. Sony sees the PlayStation 3 not only as a gaming station, but a hub for other digital devices and information. Attach a digital camera to it to view photos. Attach your PSP so it can act as either a remote controller or screen. Furthermore, the console will have greater capabilities when hooked up to a broadband connection.

For example, with an HD IP-based camera (meaning that it has its own Internet address), you could stage a sock puppet play for friends in HD as you sit on your couch with a PS3. Meanwhile, they walk down the street watching your antics on a PSP or other online-enabled device. Needless to say, the system will also support online gaming and marketplace downloads of content, music, and more.

After E3, PS3 creator Ken Kutaragi outlined a further network capability of the system. He described what Sony is calling "Cell Storage," where the PS3 would use its network with other Cell processors for shared computing. Kutaragi described a situation where you'd put a DVD file into an online storage server, which would then draw upon your Cell processor and others (when not in use) to "upgrade" the file from standard to high-definition video. Frankly, we're a little unclear about the details of the process, but Kutaragi says that it's a priority. "This Cell Storage is something that we definitely intend to launch."

DEVIL MAY CRY 4

■ The trailer for Capcom's Devil May Cry was very brief, but it did highlight some dynamic cloth movement that will suit Dante's flowing combat style perfectly.

HEAVENLY SWORD

■ The video clip of this Sony Europe-developed title showed a heroine mowing through groups of enemies with her swords as well as a cannon. The game was jokingly dubbed "Goddess of War" due to its surface similarity to Sony's PS2 game God of War.

■ Fifth Phantom Saga – Sega

FIGHT NIGHT ROUND 3 [WORKING TITLE]

■ During the presentation, Fight Night Round 3 producer Kudo Tsunoda came and demonstrated the game in real-time. The detail of the PS3's graphics enabled viewers to see the emotions of the fighters play out on their faces, giving constant clues as to their physical and mental states as the fight wore on.

■ Getaway 3 (working title) – Sony Computer Entertainment Europe London Studio

■ Mobile Suit Gundam – Bandai

■ Tekken (working title) – Namco

■ Ni-Oh – Koei

■ F1 – Sony Computer Entertainment Europe

■ Killing Day – Ubisoft

MOTORSTORM

■ This presentation of Evolution Studios' (WRC: World Rally Championship) upcoming product literally got people's hearts racing. It featured a cross-country all-terrain race between rally cars, buggies, and motorcycles. It was remarkable for its speed, spectacular crashes, and very realistic dirt and mud splatter effects. Watching from the driver's cockpit view, we watched as mud shot up onto the windshield, only to be smeared and spread out by the ineffective windshield wipers.

WARHAWK

■ The original Warhawk debuted with the PlayStation, but this Incognito-developed title is quite different than that old shooter. Not much information was present at the press conference, but it looks like this new Warhawk will mix first- and third-person segments with its traditional fighter combat.

EYETOY INTO 3D

■ Eyedentify – Sony Computer Entertainment Europe

To go along with the digital photo transfer and video conferencing capabilities of the PS3, one of the many devices you can hook up to the system is the EyeToy. A surprising press conference highlight was a demonstration by EyeToy creator Richard Marks. Using the camera peripheral and two cups, Marks showed the audience how PlayStation 3 players can now have 3D interaction with things onscreen. Taking his cups, Marks scooped up two cupfuls of water from a tub. The water sloshed and spilled as he tossed the liquid back and forth between the pair of cups. Although Marks used a standard EyeToy for his demonstration, a new-style unit was seen with the PS3. It is not known when or if this new design of the EyeToy will come out.

Later on, Sony showed off a PS3 EyeToy game in development called Eyedentify. Here you command two deadly secret agents by giving them voice commands. This game mechanic has been done before to horrible results, so we'll have to wait and see how effective Eyedentify actually is when we get our hands on it.

Meanwhile on the PS2, the camera peripheral is pushing forward with some new games such as EyeToy Play 2, EyeToy Kinetic (an exercise program), and EyeToy Chat (which allows you to video, voice, and text chat on a broadband connection).

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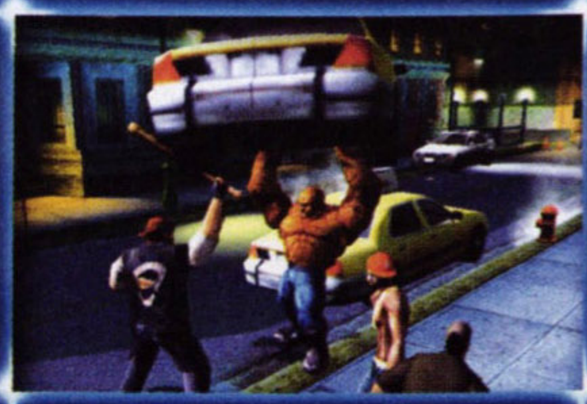

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MICROSOFT KICKS OFF THE XBOX 360 ASSAULT

Microsoft took a different approach to E3 this year. Instead of saving the big "reveal" of its next-gen Xbox 360 console for its annual press conference, gamers the world over had already gotten a first look at the unit on an MTV special that aired the week prior to the show. In addition, several planned or un-planned information leaks (depending on who you ask) meant that the system's technical specifications were already available on Internet message boards the world over.

For this reason, Microsoft's briefing eschewed the detailed technical jargon that made up the bulk of Sony's presentation earlier in the day, instead focusing on its larger plan for Xbox 360 and the next evolution of the Xbox Live online gaming service.

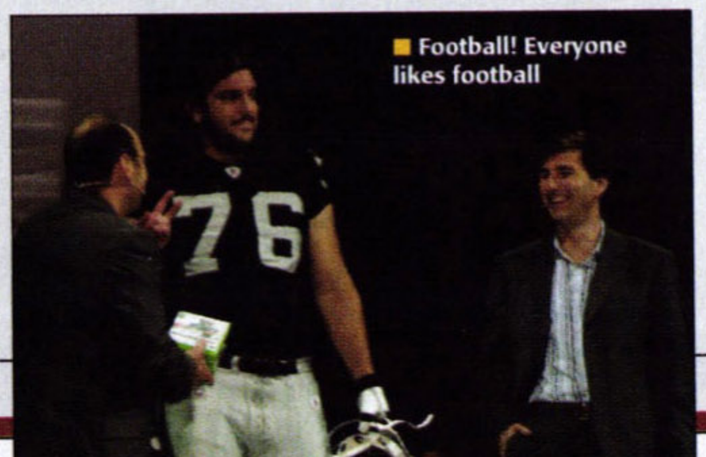
After a 360 unit was brought to the stage by a model who delivered a rather odd sermon about the system, Microsoft's point man Robbie Bach took the stage and announced, "Welcome to the future of gaming." This drew cheers from the portion of the crowd that was sitting behind the presenters onstage, a group of suspiciously good-looking, demographically balanced 20-somethings that were either extremely enthusiastic about Xbox, on mood-altering chemicals, paid to be there, or all of the above.

Touting the company's success with the Xbox, Bach pointed to the over 20 million owners and two million Xbox Live subscribers that Microsoft has garnered in a little over four years in the business. Though it still lags well behind market leader Sony, it's obvious that Microsoft is bringing some serious momentum into the next-generation battle. Bach also stressed that Microsoft is not abandoning the original Xbox, stating, "In 2006, we'll continue to market and sell Xbox." He went on to show several of the hundreds of original Xbox titles still to be released.

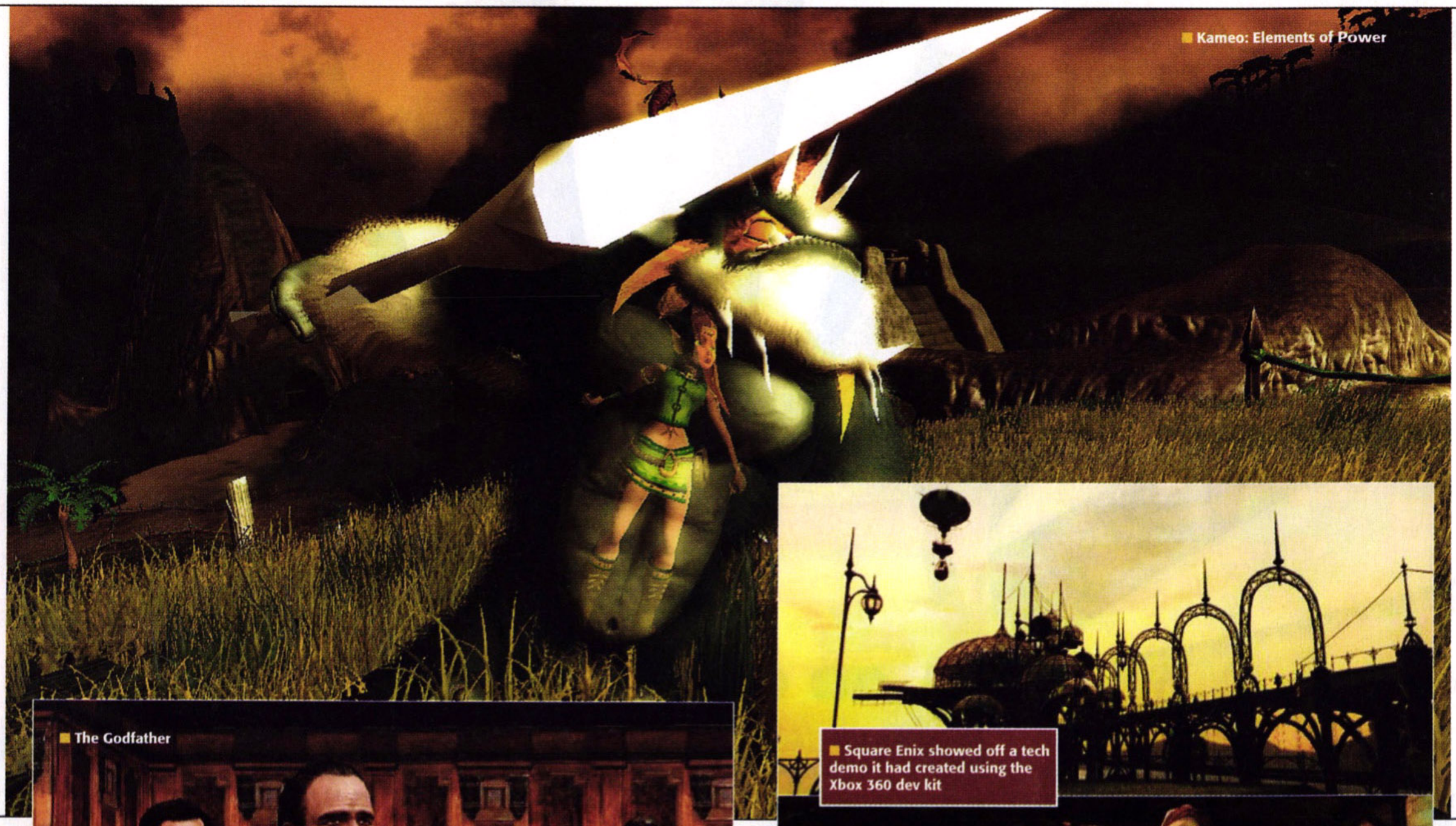
After a brief nod to the past, the conference's focus switched to the Xbox 360. Bach took no time in answering the biggest question most had about the systems – the release schedule.

"Xbox 360 will drive category growth for the entire game industry. Growth that will create increasingly profitable worldwide business for our partners. How will we get there? Well, we'll start this holiday season, when we launch Xbox 360 in North America, Europe, and Japan. That's right – Xbox 360 will hit the stores this year as the industry's first three-region console launch," he announced. Following that was a video of Tecmo's Dead or Alive 4, exclusive to Xbox 360, which showed off impressive backgrounds but character models that looked largely identical to past games in the series. Although no pricing was announced, in the days following the show J Allard told TheStreet.com in an interview that the Xbox 360 would be "in the neighborhood" of $300 at launch.

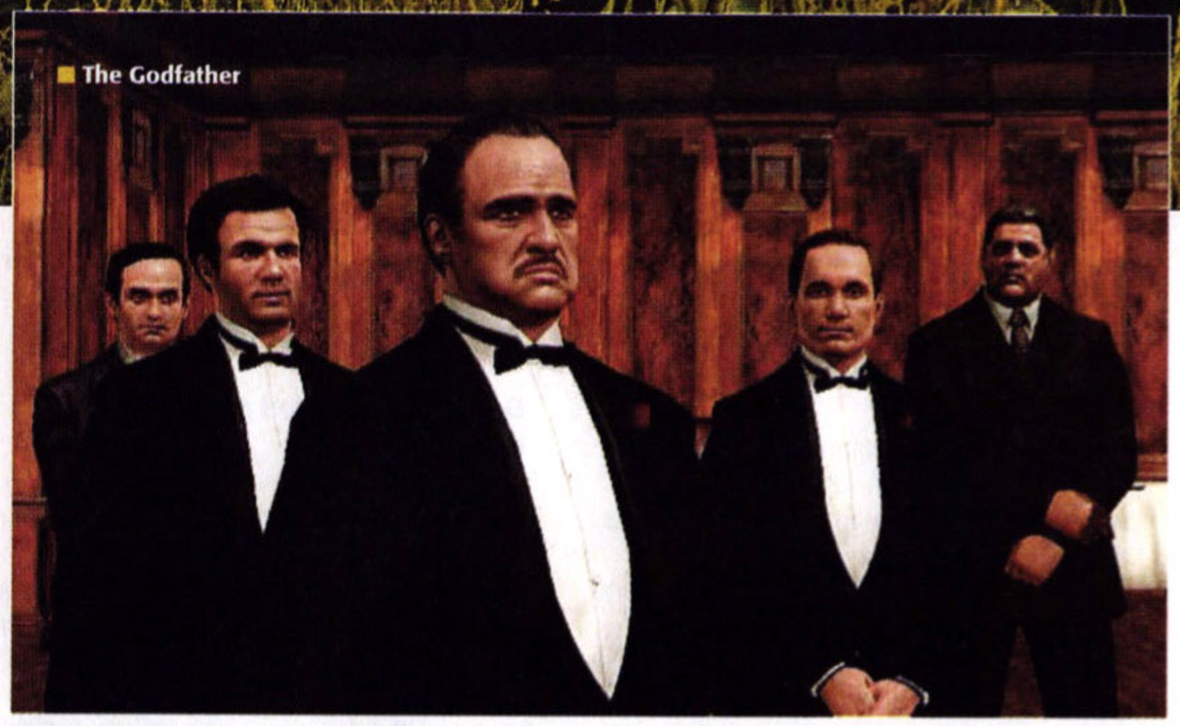
To go along with possibly the most ambitious launch plan in history, Microsoft also has big plans on the online side of the equation. J Allard was on-hand to discuss more details of some of the new Xbox Live features, including the Xbox Live Marketplace (where users can sell created virtual t-shirts and items and buy episodic game content), video chat, and the extensive stat-tracking and matching services made possible by new online user identities called "Gamer Cards." [For more, see issue #146, page 19]. With a Media Center PC, you'll also be able to stream live



■ Football! Everyone likes football

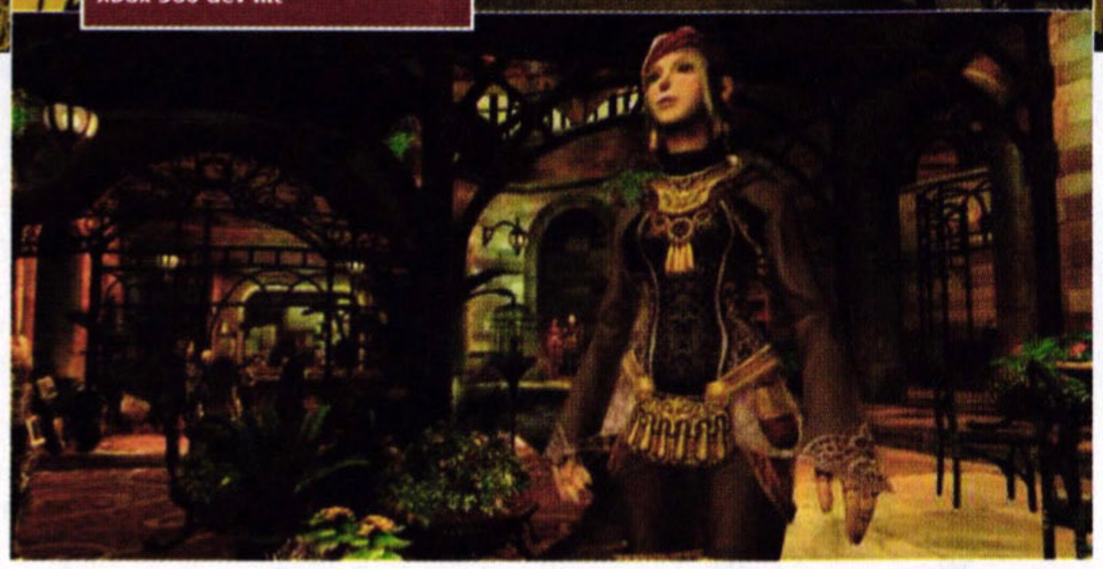


Kameo: Elements of Power



The Godfather

Square Enix showed off a tech demo it had created using the Xbox 360 dev kit



TV, download movies, and use it to play your stored audio files.

All in all, it was impressive. As successful as Xbox Live has been, these new features and services will likely mean that Microsoft continues its role as the leader in online console gaming. Less compelling was the next portion of the presentation, which outlined how Microsoft believes that it can reach out to new types of gamers through the Xbox 360's online and media functions. Allard demonstrated the appeal of 360 with three fictional "gamers" who were created to show the different facets of the console's audience: Striker (a hardcore, competitive gamer), VelocityGirl (a female user who enjoys the community functions and Marketplace), and Beatbuilder (a gadget enthusiast who uses his 360 as a living-room media center). While it did illustrate the versatility of the system, it came off as youth marketing gone awry, and (especially in the case of VelocityGirl) somewhat condescending and overly stereotypical.

Following was a brief but amusing video featuring Microsoft head honchos Bill Gates and (a highly caffeinated) Steve Ballmer arguing whether it was the system's technical specs or outstanding games and services that made Xbox 360 great. Silly? Sure, but it's nice to see two multi-billionaires who aren't afraid to poke a little fun at themselves.

Bringing the conference into the home stretch was marketing guru Peter Moore, who brought us what we were waiting for: the games. First off was a new title by one of the biggest names in Japanese development history, Hironobu Sakaguchi, the creator of Final Fantasy. The crowd was treated to a video showing clips from the legend's new title, Lost Odyssey (see page 43), which looks to be very much in the vein of his past works.

Interestingly, Moore revealed that every Xbox 360 game would have to include 702p HD resolution, 16:9 widescreen aspect ratio, and 5:1 multi-channel sound. Also mandatory will be advanced anti-aliasing, prompting Moore to proclaim "the age of the jaggies is over."

Following this announcement, Moore led the audience through a flurry of footage from some impressive 360 products in development including Project Gotham Racing 3, Ghost Recon 3, NBA 2K6, Call of Duty 2, Gears of War, and Rare's Kameo: Elements of Power (now on its third system!). Although most of the games looked great, there were some promising titles shown only in brief clips, including Sega's Condemned: Criminal Origins and Full Auto, and THQ's Saint's Row. Strangely, the much-hyped Perfect Dark Zero was barely shown; after Moore talked about the game, a video of Kameo was run instead. Another odd oversight was the absence of Quake 4, which looked fantastic on the show floor.

Next up was the obligatory appearance by an EA executive, in this case EA Studios head Don Mattrick. After some awkward repartee between Mattrick, Moore, and special guest Raiders offensive tackle Robert Gallery, Mattrick pledged the company's support for the console with six launch titles: Need for Speed: Most Wanted, The Godfather, FIFA, NBA Live, Tiger Woods PGA Tour, and Madden NFL. In addition, he said there were 25 EA titles in development for the 360.

Capping off the evening was the announcement that Microsoft termed the "final piece in the puzzle." Bringing Square Enix president Yoichi Wada to the stage, it was announced that the venerable Japanese firm was onboard for Xbox 360. The first fruit of the partnership will be the online multiplayer RPG Final Fantasy XI, which will allow Live users to play with people from Square's internal PlayOnline service. Wada also showed a tech demo Square Enix staffers had created using the 360 hardware, which hinted at great things to come for the two companies.

Although the conference came off a bit stilted and self-consciously "hip" at times, no one could argue that Microsoft has come a long way in a little over four years. More importantly, the show itself revealed some strong Xbox 360 titles on display, a good sign for a console that will launch in a few short months.

FACEPLATE MANIA!

One of the novel features of the Xbox 360 is that it allows for gamers to customize their machines with a wide selection of faceplates (or "faces" as Microsoft is calling them), similar to the ones that have been so popular for cell phones. If the frenzy kicked off after Microsoft gave out a special edition E3 faceplate after their press conference is any indication, demand for these accessories looks to be very high. Quickly after the show, E3 faceplates were fetching more than $150 on eBay, as scalpers moved in to make a quick buck. Here's a few of the initial faceplate models released by Microsoft, including the infamous E3 edition.

AN INTERVIEW WITH MICROSOFT'S SHANE KIM

Game Informer sat down with Shane Kim, the general manager of Microsoft Game Studios, to get his thoughts on Xbox 360.

You had a different strategy coming into E3. There were a lot of leaks prior to the show. There was a lot of information about 360 out there on the Internet, and then you had the MTV show. Are you worried that that diminished the "surprise factor" of your E3 press conference?
I think we made a conscious choice that we were going to unveil Xbox 360 before E3. We did reserve some news for the briefing, but we did a good job with the press – not only with the MTV thing but also with the industry press and giving them early looks at what we're doing with Xbox 360. The program is so big with what we're trying to do, a lot of people know a lot of information, so the fact that a lot of information got out early is not surprising to us. I don't think anything diminished the buzz leading into the MTV unveil or the buzz since then.

We noticed a lot of strong 360 titles that weren't shown at the press conference. Why weren't games like Saint's Row and Quake 4 shown?
I can't really speak on behalf of the other publishers. For example, people have asked us why Perfect Dark Zero wasn't shown at the press conference, only behind closed doors here. I think, for us, with Perfect Dark Zero, it's a premiere launch title. For us, the biggest priority is that it's a great game available on day one. So, we've purposely had Rare focusing on that objective, not trying to create something that's a tech demo for E3…because that really does take away from the development cycle. Maybe some of the other publishers have the same approach as well.

Will Perfect Dark be a launch title?
Absolutely. That's our objective.

Rare has a track record of not delivering games on time. Is that a concern for you?
Not at all. We know exactly where Perfect Dark Zero is at. The guys at Rare are focused, they're not confused about what the top priority is. I'm very confident, based on where the game is at, that they're going to be able to deliver a great Xbox 360 game at launch.

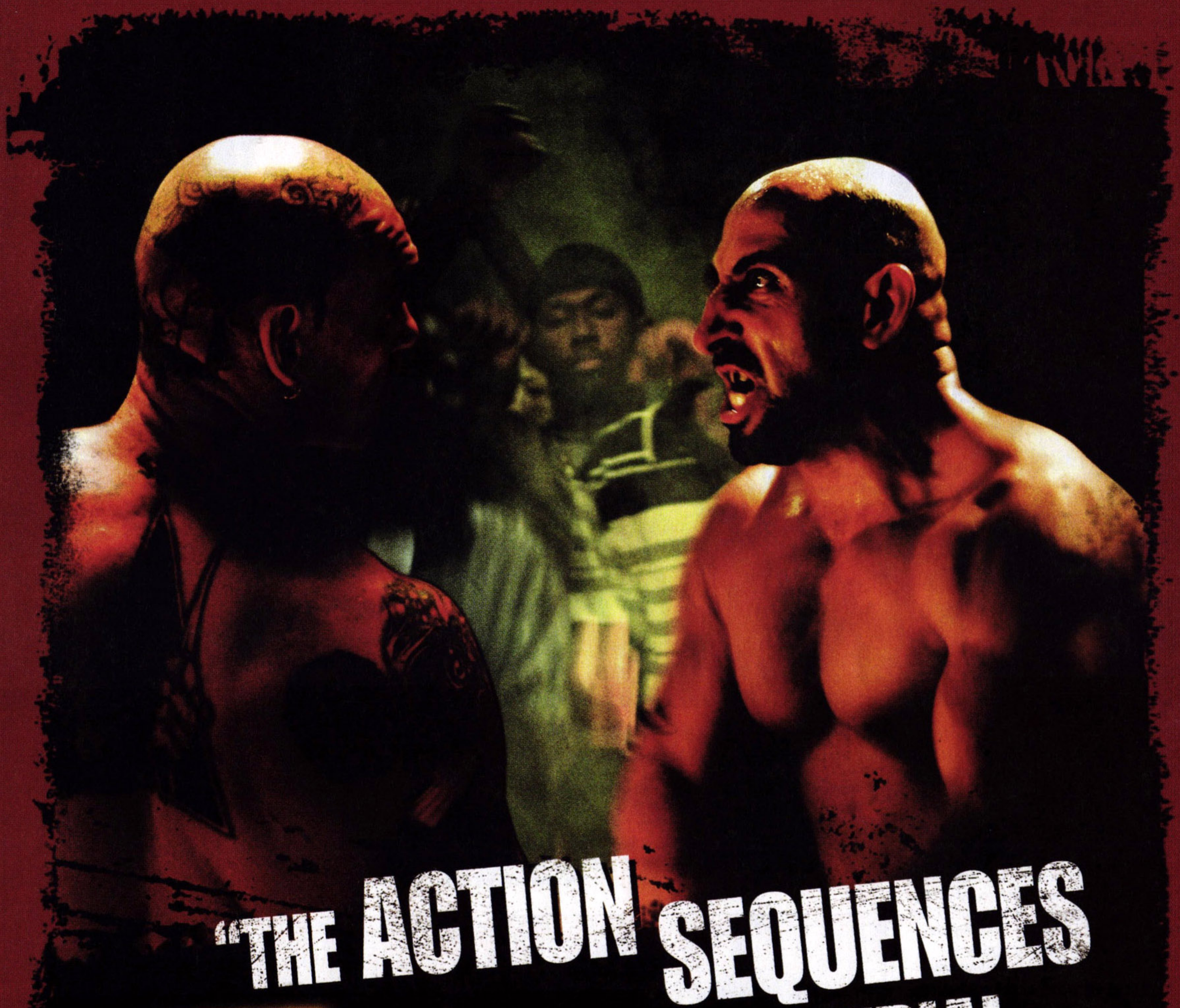
We've talked to some Japanese developers that were very enthusiastic about working with Microsoft, and overall support seems better for 360 in Japan. How well do you think you can do in Japan this time around?
I think we can do great in Japan. One of the lessons we learned in Japan was that we weren't bringing enough of the great content that Japanese customers demand – great Japanese content. That was true in first-party and third-party. So what you see happening in my organization and in Japan is that we're going out and trying to work with some of the best content creators that we can, people like Sakaguchi-san and Mizuguchi-san. Also, we're doing a great job of reaching out to third-parties, whether you're talking about Capcom, Namco, or now Square Enix.

You're coming out first. Sony is obviously trying to create the impression that the PS3 is the true next-gen system, like they did with Dreamcast. Does that worry you?
Not at all. There are significant differences between our situation and Sega's situation when they introduced the Dreamcast. First of all, we have tremendous momentum with Xbox going into the next generation. I don't know that that was necessarily true going into Dreamcast. Secondly, we have a huge flow of titles – 160 already in development. The problem with Dreamcast is that they had an interesting launch and the content flow dropped off. That's not going to be the case for us. We have great first-party titles in development – not just for launch but throughout the lifecycle of Xbox 360.

What was your take on the Sony PS3 videos that were shown at their conference?
They were some interesting tech demos.

Does the purported power of the Cell chip worry you?
Not really. I have tremendous confidence in the Xbox 360 platform. And again, it's not just about the hardware, it's about the software and the services as well. We're going to have the most powerful platform in total when this next holiday season arrives.

We've talked to some developers that have a concern about the DVD storage constraints on Xbox 360 in comparison to Sony's high density Blu-ray disc. Is that an issue? Games like Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas are filling up DVD-9s right now.
As a platform owner and a publisher we're going to have to address that. We're going high-definition, so the volume of content that we have to produce and store is going to increase, there's no doubt about that. That said, I don't think Blu-ray is the answer to that. From a platform standpoint, the team is working hard on some great compression and we're going to continue to look at that. But Blu-ray seems, from our perspective, to be way overkill from a game development standpoint. I would be concerned as a publisher as to what the costs on a Blu-ray disc are going to be for me. I don't know what that number's going to be, but I've heard some pretty big numbers. That would concern me tremendously. That's why we're sticking with the format that we've got.



"THE ACTION SEQUENCES ARE THE MATERIAL OF LEGEND."

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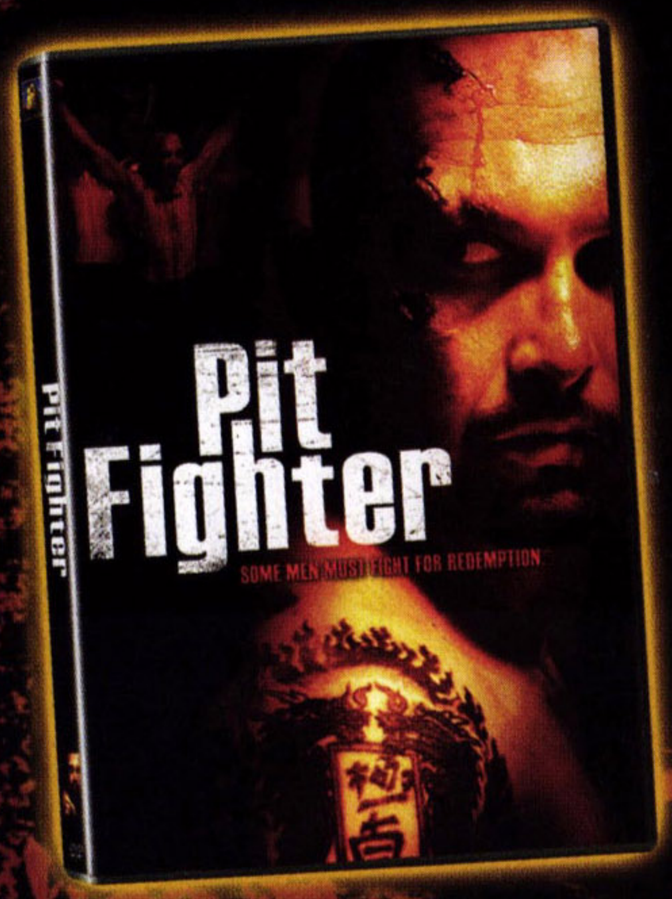

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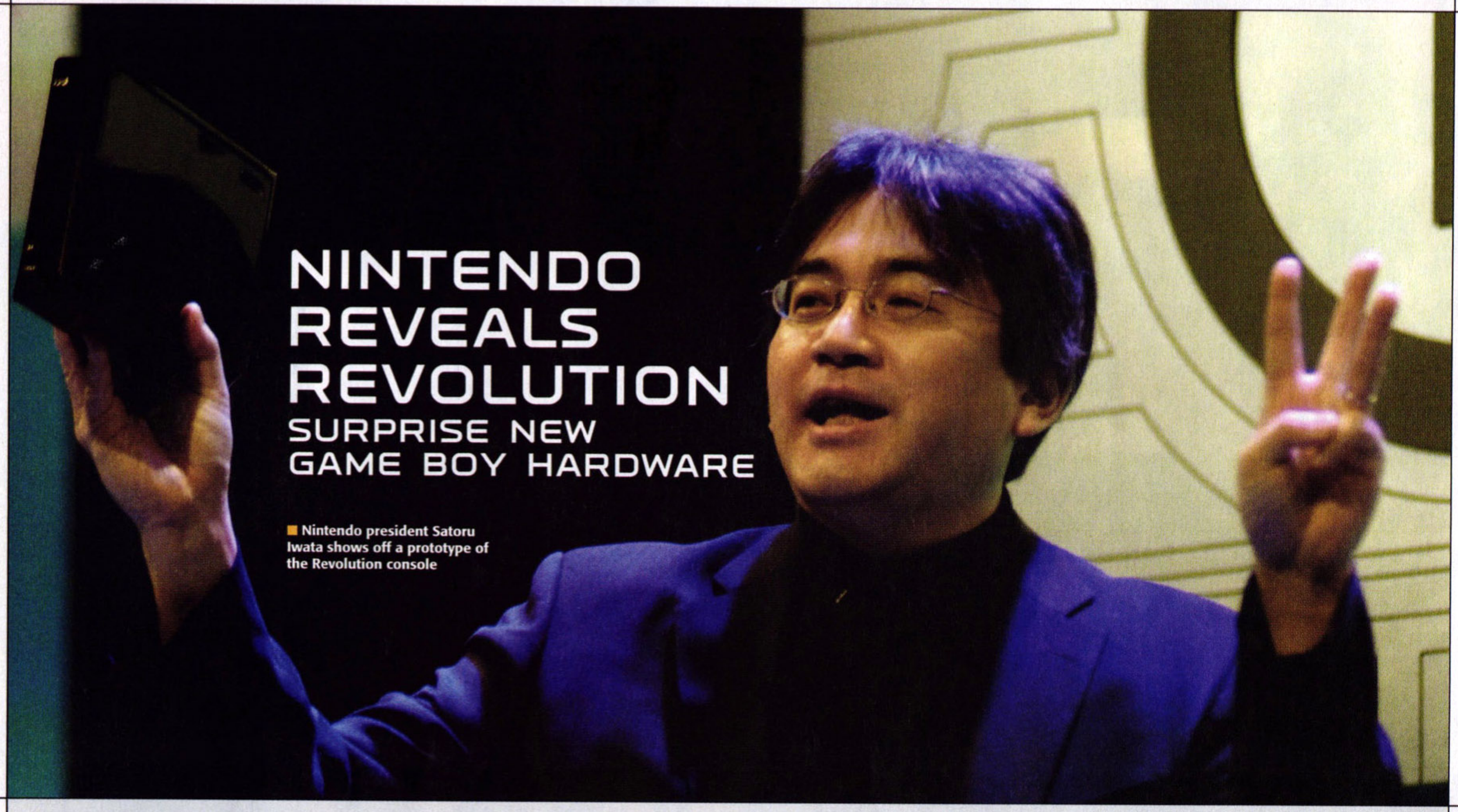


Nintendo president Satoru Iwata shows off a prototype of the Revolution console

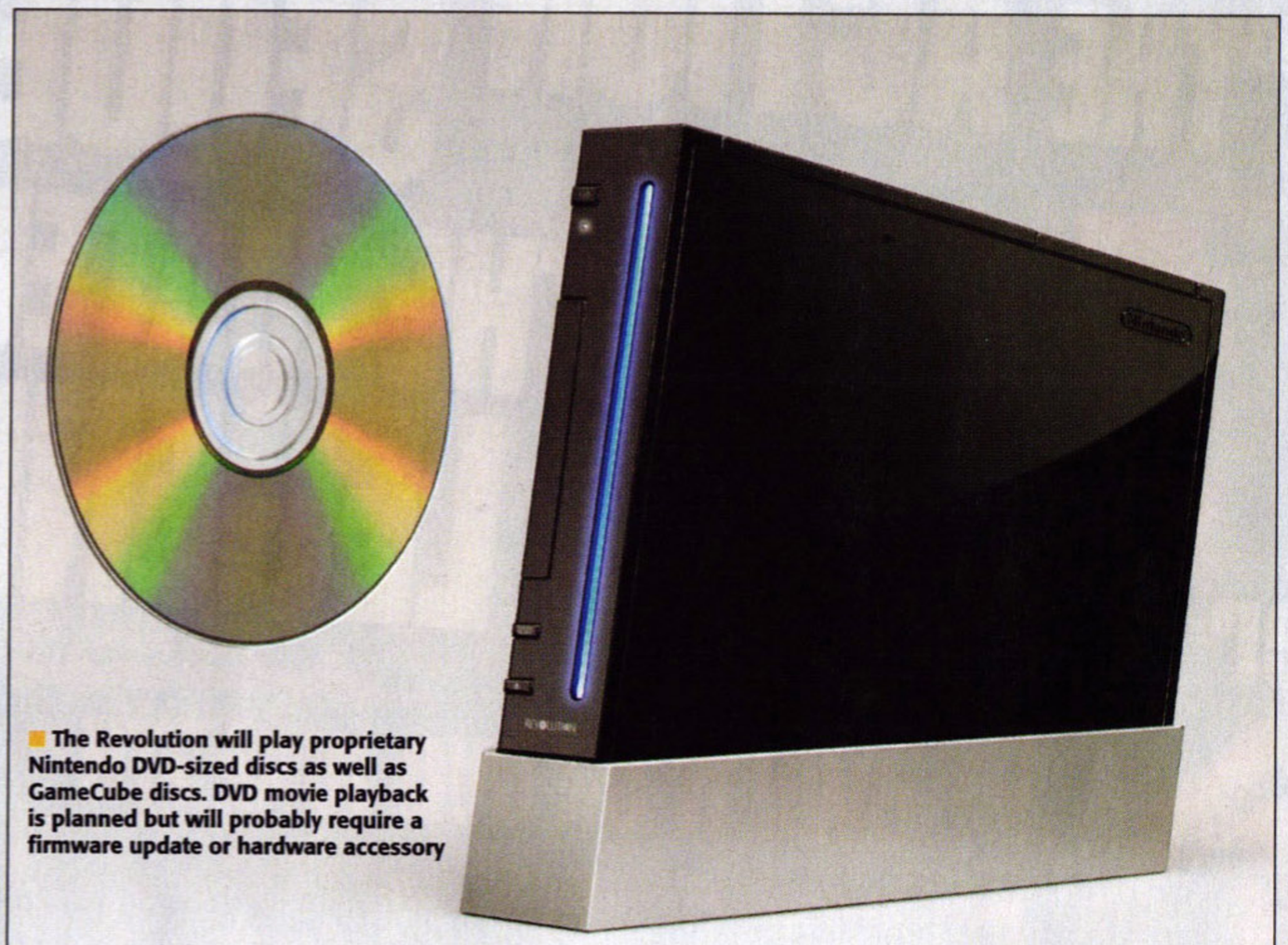
With the Xbox 360 hype machine in full gear and Sony's impressive unveiling of the PlayStation 3 earlier in the week, Nintendo faithful were wondering just what the legendary company was going to show at its E3 press conference. In typical Nintendo fashion, what we got was a distinctive mix of the unusual and the unexpected, along with a healthy dose of the publisher's iconic franchises.

Things started off on a humorous note when Nintendo president Satoru Iwata took to the stage to announce that he had played Super Smash Brothers the night previous, and had "kicked some you-know-what." His opponent? None other than Nintendo's marketing guru Reggie Fils-Aime. Continuing, Iwata said, "As Nintendo president, I'm also all about asking questions. So, Reggie, I have a question for you. Who's your daddy?"

After the brief comedy routine, it was Reggie's turn to set the tone for what would be a surprising briefing. Downplaying Sony's and Microsoft's tech-heavy presentations, Fils-Aime obvserved, "Many of you today walked in with numbers already swimming in your heads – 360, 16 by 9, 1080, 8.2Ghz – well, we'd like to add one more number to the mix. And that number is 2, as in 2 billion games. That's the number of games that Nintendo has sold since we entered this business 20 years ago. Some people might call that a great run. I'm here today to tell you we call it a great beginning."

Fils-Aime went on to detail Nintendo's "unique position" in the game industry, as both the number two game publisher and the number two system manufacturer in the world. Citing the company's strength in the handheld market, he shrugged off Sony's PSP, stating, "The sell-through for DS stands at 5 million, or more than twice the level for the PSP. Now, I know what some of you are thinking, 'Well, the PSP hasn't arrived in Europe yet.' So, we got there when we said we would and they didn't. You know what? That's Sony's issue – not my problem."

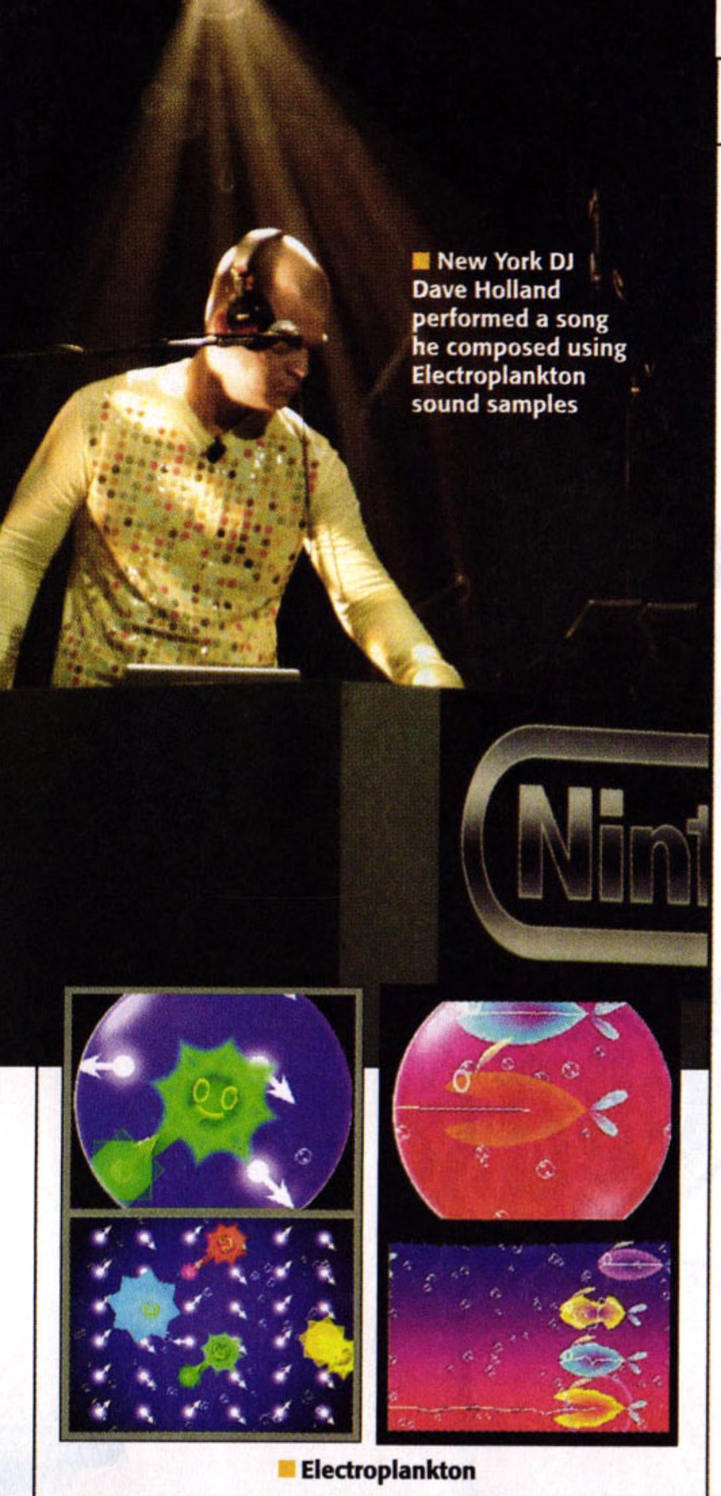
Stressing that "right brain" creativity is also central to Nintendo's philosophy, the next section of the program was devoted to Electroplankton, an odd music-creation title where players make their own tunes by directing the movements of small microscopic creatures. New York DJ Dave Holland then took the stage to perform a song he had constructed using sounds exclusively from Electroplankton. However intriguing, it was odd that so much time was devoted to the title when other potential DS blockbusters like New Super Mario Bros. and Castlevania: Dawn of Sorrow were shown only in brief clips during a montage of DS software.



The Revolution will play proprietary Nintendo DVD-sized discs as well as GameCube discs. DVD movie playback is planned but will probably require a firmware update or hardware accessory

Next up was something that Nintendo fans have been waiting for years to hear: a coherent (if still slightly vague) online strategy. "This is the year that Nintendo players begin connecting with each other in a new way – through Wi-Fi Internet," said Fils-Aime. "We recently announced our first western partner in creating a groundbreaking infrastructure called Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection. That partner is GameSpy, the global leader in connecting online players at a distance."

Aiming to make online "as simple and intuitive as every other aspect of DS play," Nintendo will apparently allow users to effortlessly connect to the network through any Wi-Fi hot spot or through a home wireless router or USB connection. Matching services will make

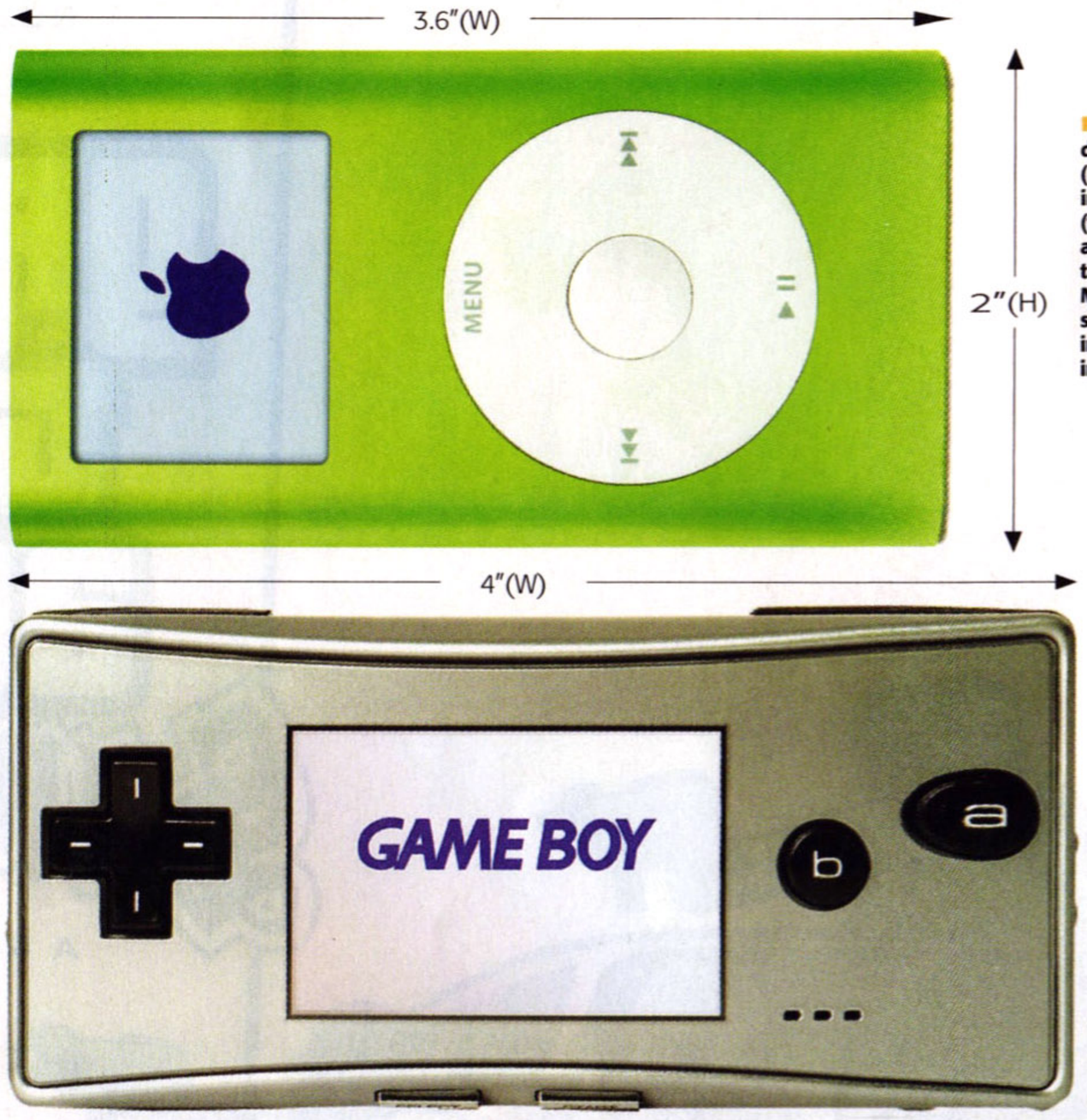


■ New York DJ Dave Holland performed a song he composed using Electroplankton sound samples

■ Electroplankton

A CLOSER LOOK AT MICRO

The Game Boy Micro is far and away the smallest cartridge-based game system ever created. At just 4 inches wide, 2 inches tall, and an amazing 0.7 inches thick, it's a pretty impressive feat of engineering. Size-wise, it's just a little larger than Apple's hugely popular iPod Mini, and at 2.8 ounces it actually weighs a bit less. The design, although fairly simple, is clean and modern, and the custom faceplates will allow for a wide variety of looks. Boasting identical processing power to the GBA SP, the hardware does offer a better (if smaller) screen and a couple of cool additions: adjustable brightness and a standard headphone jack.



■ IPod Mini dimensions (on side) – 3.6 inches wide (the long way) and 2 inches tall. The GBA Micro dimensions – 4 inches wide, 2 inches tall

it easy to find friends or unknown players of a similar skill level anywhere in the world. Happily, Fils-Aime stated that there will be no monthly charges or fees to play first-party Nintendo games online. Through these efforts, he stated that the company feels that participation rates for DS owners can reach "as high as 90 percent."

More importantly, DS online play is coming this year, with Wi-Fi equipped versions of Mario Kart DS and Animal Crossing promised before the end of 2005. Stressing that third-party support for DS Wi-Fi was strong, he claimed over 25 titles currently in development for the network, including a revamped Tony Hawk title from Activision, as well as games from Capcom, Konami, EA, and Ubisoft.

Next up were G4's Tina Wood and Shigeru Miyamoto, to demostrate his new "pet project": Nintendogs. The puppy sim is definitely cute and might well have the makings of a Tamagotchi-esque craze, especially in Japan, where it sold 400,000 copies in a month and won a perfect score from the respected gaming publication *Famitsu*. Unfortunately, what we'll remember most is some ill-advised scripted dialogue in which the fatherly Miyamoto appeared to be hitting on Wood by offering to "show her some new tricks" backstage. That's just wrong.

What followed next was the unveiling of not one, but two, new hardware systems. While we had expected to see some information on the Revolution released, the crowd was surprised when Fils-Aime reached into his pocket and pulled out the Game Boy Micro, a new, smaller version of the world's most popular handheld. Only slightly bigger and lighter than an iPod Mini, Fils-Aime claimed the unit houses the "best and brightest screen we've ever put in a handheld." Taking a cue from the cell phone market, like the Xbox 360, the Micro will allow users to customize their look with detachable faceplates. It's certainly a nicely designed unit, but we do have some concerns about whether the extremely small screen will make long bouts of gaming difficult. Still, one learns not to underestimate the power of the Game Boy brand.

■ Pokémon XD: Gale of Darkness

Finally, it was time for what we'd all been waiting for: the Revolution. Pulling out the hardware onstage, Mr. Iwata said, "Now you say you want a Revolution." The compact, black system (although only a prototype, the final version will be even smaller) appeared clean and modern, winning thunderous applause from the audience. It was also displayed in some test colors on the big screen, and Iwata encouraged Nintendo fans to give their feedback as to which colors they preferred.

■ New Super Mario Bros.

As exciting as it was, there was little in the way of hard facts delivered about the system specs. Iwata did say that the unit would have 512 MB of onboard flash memory, an SD card slot, and wireless controllers (although a picture revealed ports for GameCube memory cards and controllers as well). The unit will use proprietary, DVD sized discs, but will also play smaller GameCube discs. DVD movie playback is planned as well, but will likely not be available out-of-the-box. As of yet, a launch schedule and pricing data has not been revealed.

Probably the most exciting news of the entire conference was Nintendo's online plans for Revolution. Wi-Fi network play similar to that of the DS is planned, and a networked Super Smash Brothers title will be available for launch. Iwata revealed that the company is "redefining the term 'backwards compatibility'" through its "virtual console." This service would allow gamers to download and play almost every title in Nintendo's back catalog, including NES, SNES, and N64 titles. Not surprisingly, this announcement energized the crowd, who were salivating at the prospect of having universal access to what is no doubt the greatest single body of work in the history of the industry.

The end of the program focused on upcoming GameCube software, including an excellent new video of The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess and a very underwhelming Battalion Wars. Closing things off, Fils-Aime stated, "Beyond this year, a revolution awaits." With so many questions left unanswered regarding Nintendo's new console, we can't wait to see what the rest of 2005 brings for Nintendo fans.

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

XBOX

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GAME INFORMER'S E3 TOP 10

1 SPORE

PUBLISHER: ELECTRONIC ARTS • FORMAT: PC

Will Wright, creator of The Sims, showcased his newest brainchild at E3, this time exploring evolution in all its complexity. You'll take a single-celled organism and spend generations growing, altering, and improving it, eventually establishing a civilization and even expanding out to the stars. It's an incredibly complex idea that has been refined into a marvelously simple interaction, making this a title that should appeal to everyone. The massively ambitious scope of this title amazed us, and has the potential to be one of the most flexible and addictive games we've ever seen.

2 GEARS OF WAR

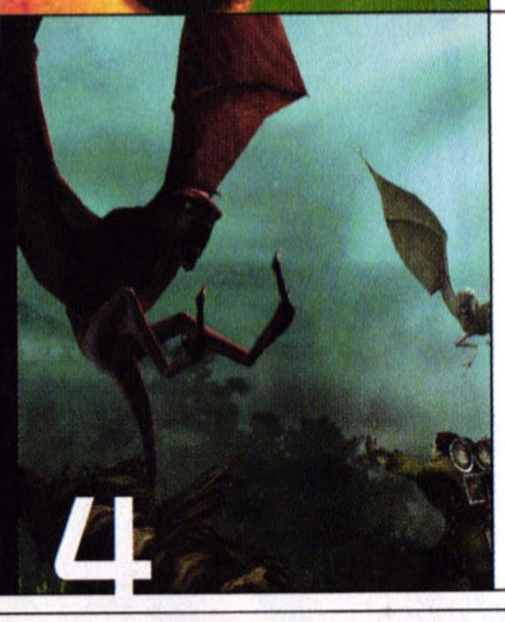
PUBLISHER: MICROSOFT • FORMAT: XBOX 360

Epic Games harnesses the full power of Microsoft's new Xbox 360 with this intense, futuristic thrill ride of a shooter. Mankind is nearly extinct as a deadly threat from beneath the planet threatens to finish the job, and you stand as a last desperate chance against the dark tide. Pushing the boundaries of detail and cinematic action in a game, this is the Xbox 360 game everyone's talking about.

3 THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: TWILIGHT PRINCESS

PUBLISHER: NINTENDO • FORMAT: GAMECUBE

That most beloved of gaming icons returns in an adventure fit to do justice to all the great games that have come before it. The new Zelda will be set in a massive fantasy world and boasts some surprising new twists and dark turns, even while staying true to the formula and style that has made the series the definitive classic that gamers love.



4 PETER JACKSON'S KING KONG

PUBLISHER: UBISOFT • FORMAT: XBOX 360, PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX, GAMECUBE, PC

The acclaimed director hand-picked the development team for this game adaptation, and his attention seems to have paid off. Awe-inspiring visuals reveal a world of giant dinosaurs and ever-present danger. Constant action, fear, and exotic locations await, whether you're playing as hero Jack Driscoll or switching to become Kong himself!

5 BLACK

PUBLISHER: ELECTRONIC ARTS • FORMAT: PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX

Offering blistering combat and some of the most frantic firefights ever put to screen, Black is set to do to the shooting genre what Burnout did for racing games – making it more exciting, action-packed, and incredibly intense. Giant explosions, whizzing bullets, and insanely loud guns are the order of the day, and Black should deliver in spades.

6 CALL OF DUTY 2

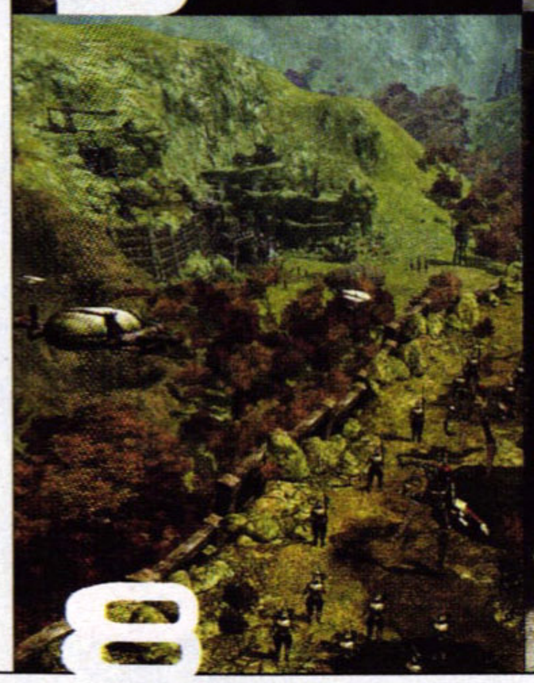
PUBLISHER: ACTIVISION • FORMAT: XBOX 360, PC

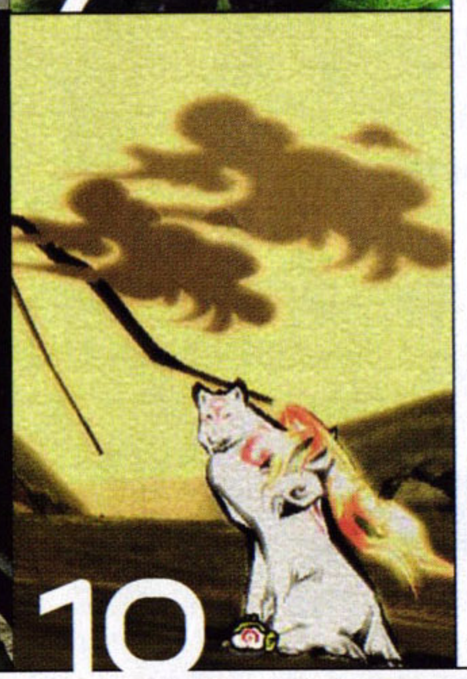
Sequel to the universally lauded World War II game, Call of Duty 2 follows up its own unprecedented success with improved technology and a move over to the Xbox 360, in addition to staying with its PC roots. Despite the glut of WWII titles on the market, this newest entry introduces a whole new level of realism and intensity, and sets a new standard for the genre.

7 ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION

PUBLISHER: BETHESDA SOFTWORKS • FORMAT: XBOX 360, PC

The Xbox 360 allows for some incredible advances in gameplay design, and Bethesda is ready to take advantage of as many of them as it can with a new epic role-playing adventure. Oblivion exhibits a gigantic fantasy world where all the computer-controlled characters are living out their own lives, making independent decisions about their actions as they move through a gorgeously rendered environment. All signs point to a phenomenal experience.





8 RISE OF NATIONS: RISE OF LEGENDS

PUBLISHER: MICROSOFT • FORMAT: PC

This PC real-time strategy game should be the title of choice for those tactical-minded players out there. Following up an impressive first game using real world nations, Rise of Legends branches out into a sci-fi fantasy setting where magic and technology are caught in an endless struggle.

9 F.E.A.R.

PUBLISHER: VIVENDI UNIVERSAL • FORMAT: PC

Mixing the best elements of first-person shooting with the scariest aspects of horror games, this frightening thriller shows tremendous promise with its interactive environments and psychological fear tactics. Cinematic in scope, the game blurs the line between reality and illusion to create one of the spookiest experiences yet seen.

10 OKAMI

PUBLISHER: CAPCOM • FORMAT: PLAYSTATION 2

Once again, Clover Studios (the company behind Viewtiful Joe) is taking games in an artistic new direction. Okami uses a backdrop of ancient Japanese watercolor paintings to tell the tale of a fallen sun god who must bring light and life back into the world. Unique, surprising, and downright breathtaking, Okami is one of the most exciting offerings to come out of this year's show.

"I want your BOD!"

"I want your BOD!"

"I want your BOD!"

"I want your BOD!"

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news

SNAKE SET FOR PS3

AND SO IS RAIDEN...

It wouldn't be E3 without a Metal Gear, and this year Konami's Hideo Kojima kept excitement about the series as high as ever with a brief but hilarious video announcing Metal Gear Solid 4 for the PlayStation 3. The tongue-in-cheek trailer (which makes fun of the MGS series itself, as well as Splinter Cell's Sam Fisher) is set on a bare movie set with a laugh track, and it depicts a battle between Snake and Raiden to see which character will get the starring role in MGS 4. Thankfully, Snake wins and gets to sit in the actor's chair.

But Raiden isn't finished. In fact, he isn't the only old face that we'll see in MGS 4. Set years after MGS 2, this new Kojima-designed and produced title brings back characters such as Meryl, Vamp, Revolver Ocelot, Otacon, and more. The motto of the title is "No place to hide," and Kojima told us that MGS 4 will be more "situational" than previous titles in the series, but we don't exactly know what that means. Metal Gear Solid 4 will come out under the new Kojima Productions banner (formerly Konami Computer Entertainment Japan), and should be unveiled in greater detail next E3.

DATA FILE

More News You Can Use

SILICON KNIGHTS GOES UNREAL

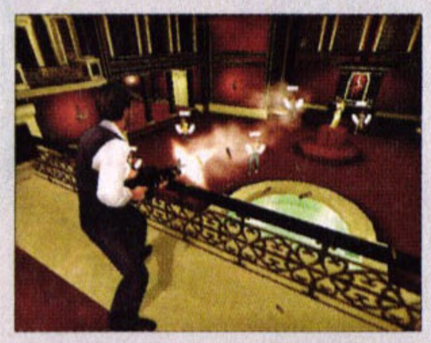
Mere months after hooking up with publisher Sega, Eternal Darkness creator Silicon Knights is once again making waves. The Canadian developer has signed up Epic Games' Unreal Engine 3 for all of its next-generation games.

DARKWATCH WATCH

Capcom will now be the publisher of High Moon Studios' Xbox and PlayStation 2 game Darkwatch, which is due out this fall. The title was formerly being handled by Sammy Studios.

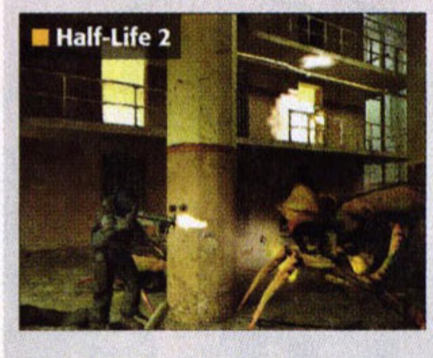
SCARFACE SAYS HELLO TO THE 360

Scarface: The World is Yours has been delayed until an ambiguous date in 2006, and the title will now come out for the Xbox 360 according to Vivendi Universal. It was going to come out for the Xbox, PS2, and PC, but there is no word as to whether Scarface will also jump to the PS3.



VALVE OVER VU

Half-Life 2 and Counter-Strike creator Valve has won its lawsuit against Vivendi Universal, which means that VU cannot manufacture or distribute any of Valve's games as of August 31. However, any of VU's cyber-café agreements involving Valve titles are void immediately. It is believed that Valve wants to avoid physical distribution altogether and sell its games solely through its digital service, Steam.



A.WAKE AND INSANE

Remedy, the people behind Max Payne, have a new game cooking on Xbox 360, PS3, and PC. Titled Alan Wake, the title isn't just some mindless action game – it revolves around the main character's insomnia. As Wake's waking and nightmarish dream states begin to blur, things get more than a little weird for our hero.

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THE SACRED STONES

Evil Lurks in the Shadows

Centuries of peace are eclipsed by war as an age-old trust is betrayed. Uncover the dark secrets that turned allies into enemies as you fight to free your kingdom. Evolve your armies as you plot a master strategy in Fire Emblem™: The Sacred Stones.

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EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB — Fantasy Violence

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FIRE EMBLEM™

THE SACRED STONES

The Story of the Stones

After the power of the five Sacred Stones was used to imprison the Demon King, centuries of peace enveloped the continent of Magvel. The Stones have been passed from generation to generation. Nations have been built around their power and their legend: Frelia, Renais, Grado, Jehanna, and Rausten. Only the mercantile republic of Carcino lacks a stone of its own.

But a new evil is rising in an old ally. Vigarde, leader of the kingdom of Grado, has launched a series of surprise attacks against the kingdom of Renais. As his castle is under siege, Fado, Warrior King of Renais, makes the ultimate sacrifice – sending his daughter, Eirika, to safety while staying behind to meet his doom.

It is now up to Eirika to seek out her twin brother, Ephraim, and unite against the forces of Grado and all who would stand in their way. For if Grado's plans to destroy the Sacred Stones are realized, endless devastation and suffering await the people of Magvel.

New Features

Fire Emblem™: The Sacred Stones is true to the deep, yet intuitive, gameplay cherished by Fire Emblem™ veterans. In fact, with new varying difficulty modes, newbies can learn the ins and outs of combat while experts can head straight into the action.

As either Ephraim or Eirika, players can decide which exciting route they will take in the quest to reclaim Magvel. These two branching and vastly different storylines flesh out the deep plot and provide hours of replay value.

The Fire Emblem™ faithful can also look forward to brand new character classes. It's now possible to actively choose your characters' specialty. Will your Cavalier become a Paladin or a Great Knight? You'll have to decide between mobility and weapon versatility.

The new overworld map allows players total flexibility to choose how they will decimate Grado's forces. Whether it's returning to a village to stock up on weapons or battling an endless hive of monsters in the Tower of Valni to level up, Fire Emblem™: The Sacred Stones allows you to power up your party every step of the way.

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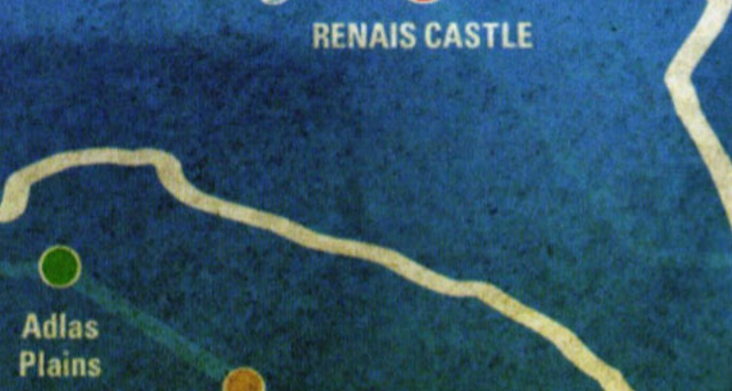

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Border Mulan
Teraz Plateau
CARCINO
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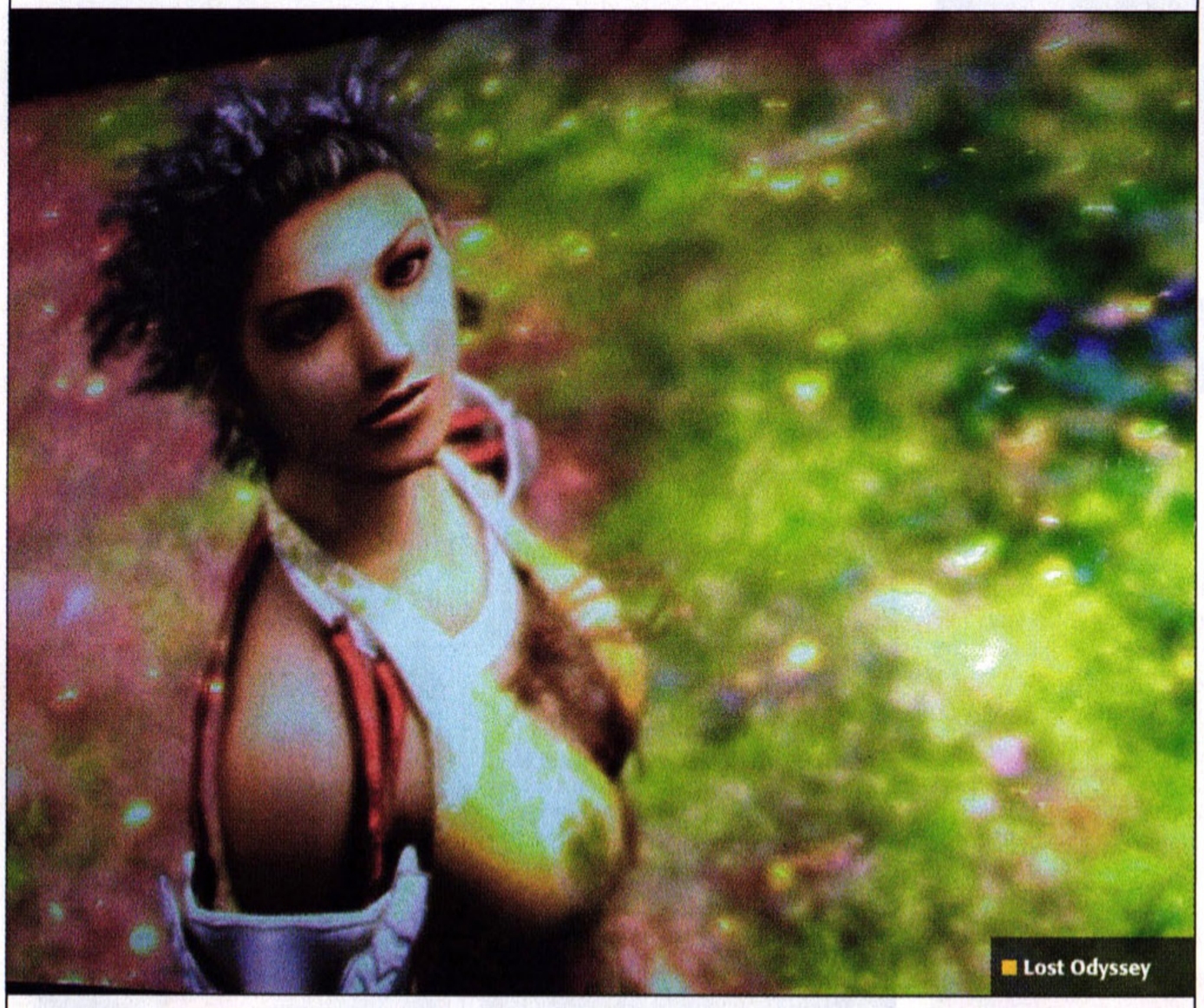
A D V E R T I S E M E N T

games

SAKAGUCHI SHINES ON XBOX 360

FINAL FANTASY CREATOR TO DELIVER TWO RPGS

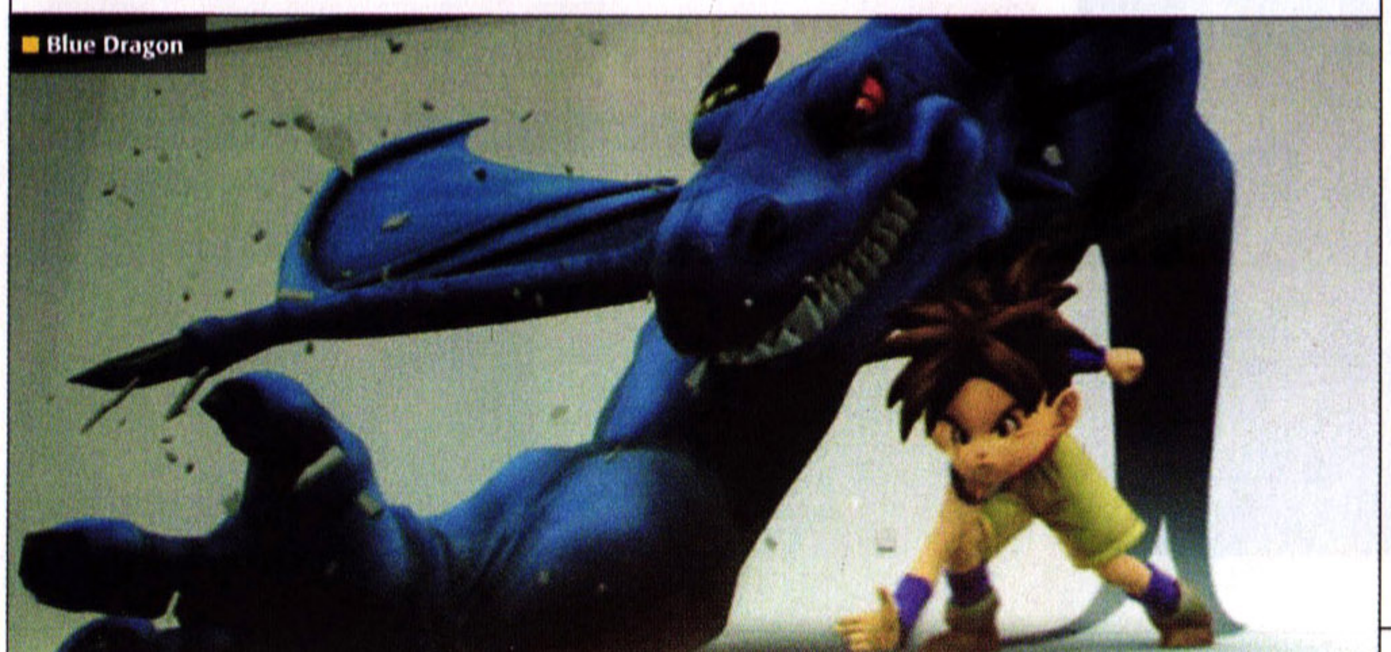


Lost Odyssey

Microsoft made big news at E3 by announcing its partnership with Square Enix (see page 28 for more), but that wasn't all that got RPG fans excited about the Xbox 360. Final Fantasy mastermind Hironobu Sakaguchi was on hand to debut the first two creations of his studio Mistwalker.

Blue Dragon (below) is being developed with the help of Artoon (Blinx), and also boasts the talents of well-known Final Fantasy composer Nobuo Uematsu and Dragon Warrior and Dragon Ball Z artist Akira Toriyama. The turn-based game "started with the idea of shadows," says Sakaguchi, and involves phantoms that inhabit each character and reflect their personalities. The main character is a boy named Shu, and he and his friends can actually switch among 200 different shadows that give them different characteristics. Players can even combine these phantoms for custom attacks.

Meanwhile, Sakaguchi is also hard at work on another Xbox 360 game called Lost Odyssey (above). With a story penned by award-winning author Kiyoshi Shigematsu, Lost Odyssey is about Kaim Argonar, a man who has lived for 1,000 years and who wears upon his face the burden of someone who's seen all his friends and family pass away throughout the years. Kaim will become involved with the power of a magical staff that has gotten out of control. As with Blue Dragon, composer Uematsu is also collaborating. Neither title has a release date as of yet.

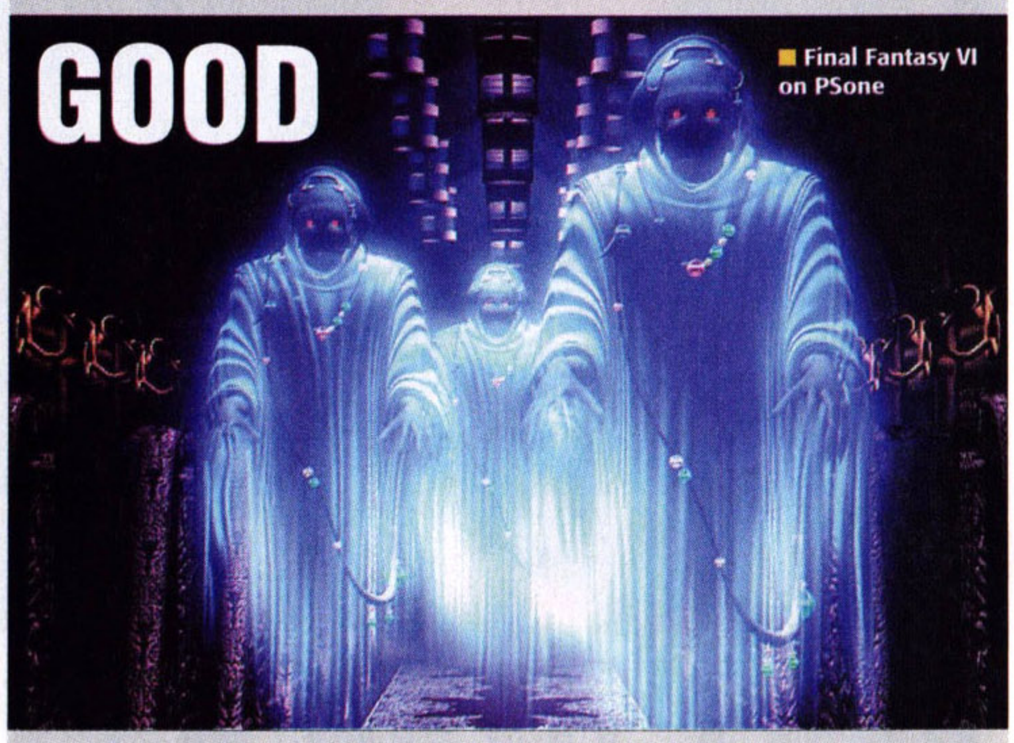


Blue Dragon

THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY

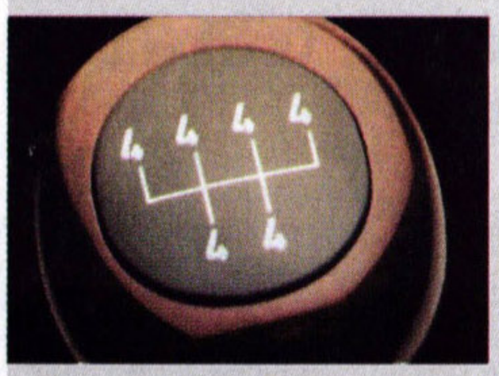
When You Want Your News Categorized With A Sarcastic Editorial Spin

GOOD



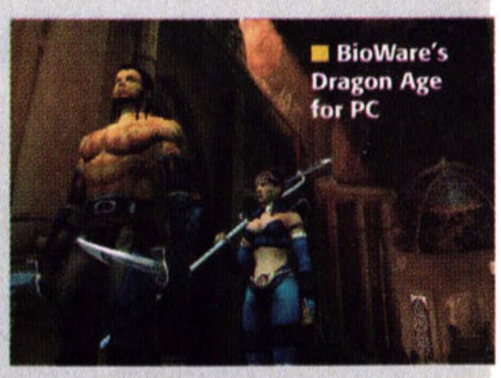
Final Fantasy VI on PSone

Final Fantasy X-2 producer Yoshinori Kitase expects that spin-off titles such as X-2 and Dirge of Cerberus are being looked at for other installments in the Final Fantasy series. In particular, Final Fantasy VI is being considered to receive this special treatment.



GOOD

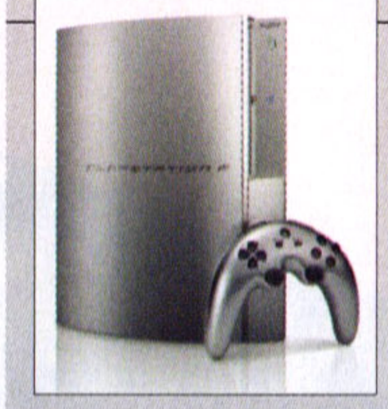
Atari and developer Reflections have already announced the next installment of Driver, which is set to come out for PS2, Xbox, and PC in March 2006. Word is that Reflections wants to return to the series' roots, and it acknowledges that Driv3r failed because it tried too hard to chase the success of the Grand Theft Auto franchise.



BioWare's Dragon Age for PC

GOOD

Jade Empire developer BioWare isn't saying much, but it has acknowledged that it is working on not one, but two Xbox 360 titles – at least one of which should appear in 2006. Despite the company's close relationship with Microsoft, BioWare is also looking at both the PS3 and the Revolution. It's even considering the PSP, which would be a perfect fit with the Baldur's Gate developer's top-down action/RPG pedigree. BioWare is currently working on a PC title called Dragon Age.

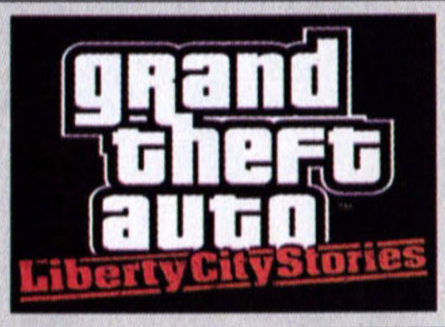


UGLY

With no love lost between Microsoft and Sony already, Bill Gates has officially thrown down the gauntlet. In an interview with Time Magazine, Gates said that Halo 3 is slated to release day and date with the PlayStation 3. "It's perfect. The day Sony launches [the new PlayStation] and they walk right into Halo 3." Curiously, Bungie has denied Big Boss Man Bill's claim. Of course, with PS3's ambiguous "spring 2006" launch, we'll have to wait and see exactly when this showdown occurs.

GOOD

Rockstar's Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories will not only introduce a new character to the series, but the PlayStation Portable game is rumored to feature four-player action. Liberty City Stories, per the title, will be set in the world of GTA III, but it is unknown what relation, if any, it has to the PS2 game.



BAD

If you don't like the Xbox 360 controller, you won't have much of a choice. Microsoft is not opening the third-party licensing for its upcoming wireless controller until holiday 2007. Corded third-party units will be available from multiple manufacturers, though.

games

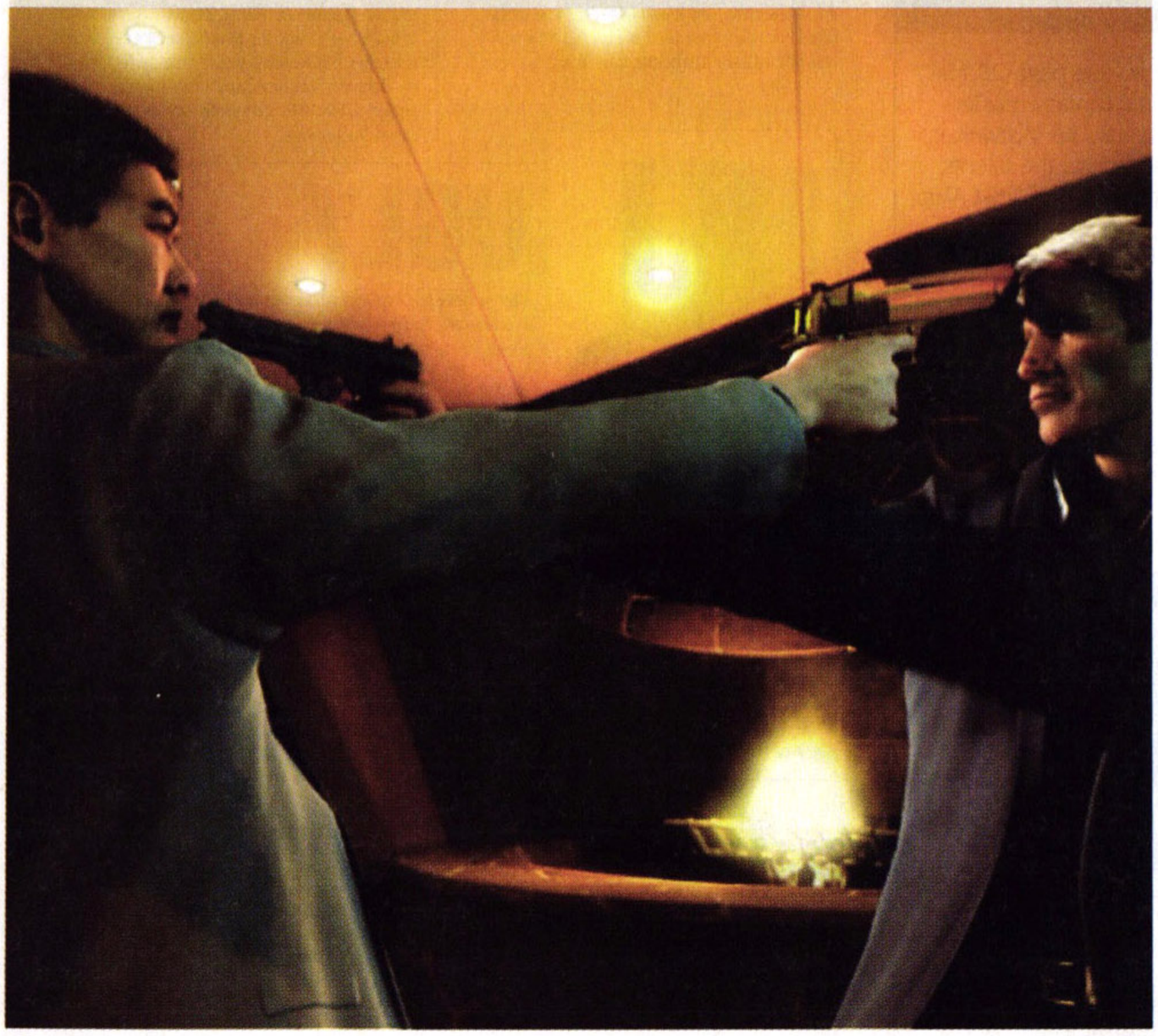
STILL HARD BOILED

WOO AND MIDWAY PRESENT STRANGLEHOLD

With all the dual-wielding going on in video games today, it's about time the master stepped up and showed everybody how it's really done. Movie legend John Woo is teaming up with Midway for Stranglehold – an Xbox 360, PS3, and PC title that is set to come out in fall of 2006. The game is the sequel to Woo's infamous action film *Hard Boiled*, and even features the voice-acting talent of star Chow Yun Fat as he reprises his role as Inspector Tequila. Stranglehold will join Woo's Tiger Hill Games with the Midway team from Chicago that developed the renowned Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy.

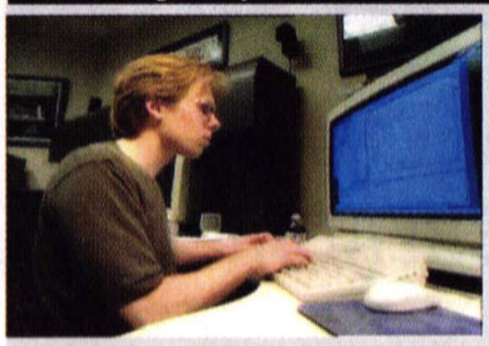
Watching the trailer, you can tell the game has its priorities in place, as it is packed with John Woo moments through and through. Freeze-frame shots, lots of guns, standoffs, and creative camerawork abound.

In other Midway next-gen news, the company has seven Xbox 360 games in development ready to hit between 2006 and 2008, although it will miss the initial launch window of the system.



LOOSE TALK

Hot Gaming Gossip



CARMACK FOR PS3?

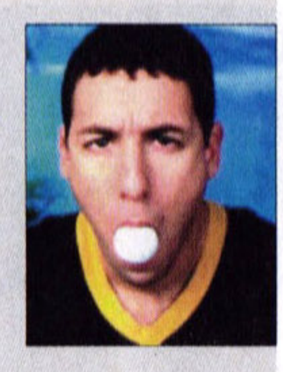
Sony has been stingy with who it has been giving the early PS3 development tools to, and at this year's E3 the big question was who was and wasn't working on a title for the 2006 console. Loose Talk has heard, however, that one of the first developers to get the green light from Sony was id Software – which even beat EA to the punch. Carmack is in love with the system already and is currently busy dreaming up what he can do with the console.

GAME PRICES TO INCREASE

From what we're hearing, it looks like next-generation software will be priced at $60. Companies are trying to keep up with the rising costs of development, and unless a large publisher like Activision or EA says no, we can expect $60 games to be hitting the shelves.

HAPPY GILMORE LOVES VIDEO GAMES

Fratboy sensation Adam Sandler is talking with publisher Majesco about a possible upcoming game that would be tied into a movie. Unfortunately, it's doubtful that it will involve either *Happy Gilmore's* mini-golf, Carl Weathers' prosthetic hand, or dwarfs in furry chaps on tricycles. It will, however, likely involve Sandler acting like a jackass.



MIYAMOTO'S FINALLY GONE BONKERS!

At a Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess roundtable at E3, creator Shigeru Miyamoto let slip about his new idea for an upcoming game. Apparently the title will be quiz-based and is designed to tell the player their mental age.

GBA MICRO THE NEXT IPOD?

Nintendo's new, small GBA Micro was shown at E3, but the company has not yet set a price for the unit. Rumor has it that the GBA Micro will be priced higher than gamers might expect for this third iteration of the system. Loose Talk has heard that the unit will go for $99.

Forgotten Realms: Demon Stone

MILLAR TO STORMFRONT

Forgotten Realms: Demon Stone and The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers developer Stormfront Studios is currently at work on a hush-hush, high-profile licensed title. Meanwhile, the company has hired an influx of talent, including ex-Blizzard/Lionhead vet Chris Millar. Brother Ron Millar remains in England with Lionhead.

Rygar for PS2

RYGAR 2 STILL IN WORKS

Ninja Gaiden creator Tomonobu Itagaki of Tecmo says that he's still working on Rygar 2, the follow-up to the PlayStation 2 remake of the NES classic. Itagaki says that the game is currently in pre-production, and the company is working on its engine. It is not known what system Rygar 2 will appear on, although if Itagaki's involved, we'd assume it's for Xbox 360.

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

NAME THAT GAME

Test Your Sight

This PlayStation RPG wasn't a huge hit, but it was a solid offering from Konami. A turn-based strategy affair similar to Final Fantasy Tactics and Front Mission 3, this title put up a system of advantages and disadvantages among all of its character classes. The bowmen, for instance, are less suited to go against knights than they are the flying characters. Along with the boulders and other objects you can manipulate on the battle grid, there was quite a bit to keep track of. Sound interesting? This series is looking to return on the Nintendo DS sometime in the future.

(Answer on page 46)

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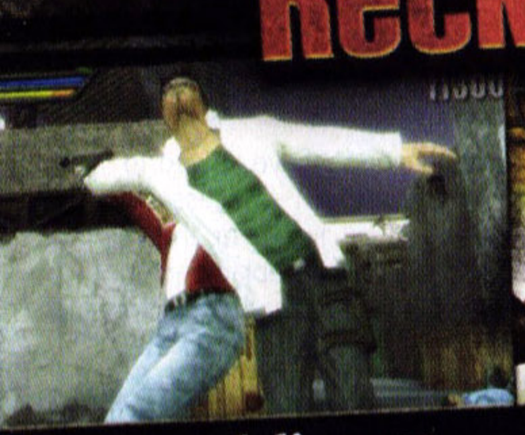
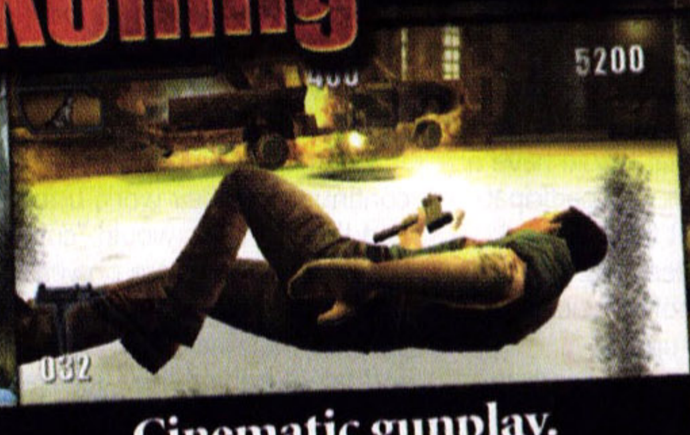
Dead to Rights® Reckoning

Time to take the dog for a walk.



Brutal disarms.



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M
Blood
Intense Violence
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

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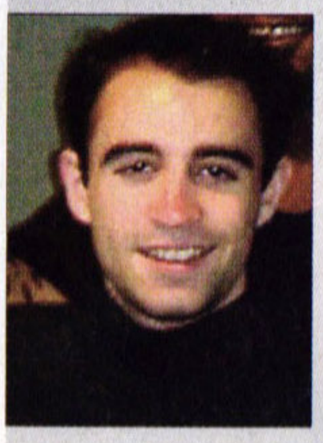
TOP FIVES

Favorites From Industry Pros And GI Readers

DEVELOPER
LOIC GOUNON,
Marketing Coordinator,
Ubisoft's King Kong



1 Xenogears – PSone
2 Fallout – PC
3 Metal Gear Solid – PSone
4 Privateer – PC
5 Final Fantasy VII – PSone

READER
JOHN WEGHORST
La Porte, TX

1 Chrono Trigger – SNES
2 Xenogears – PSone
3 Ikaruga – DC
4 Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty – PS2
5 Super Mario World – SNES

Send Top Fives and a photo of yourself to:

Game Informer Magazine/Top Five
724 N 1st St 4th Fl
Minneapolis, MN 55401-9022
email: topfive@gameinformer.com
(attach digital picture)

TOP TEN

Lists...Everybody Loves Lists...

Top 10 Most Memorable E3 Moments

10 Blocking federal aid to exhausted, malnourished nerds waiting in the Zelda line
9 Seeing longer lines in the food court than the Wayans brothers' autograph table
8 Ogling rendered women who are more realistic than the booth babes
7 Movie theaters that actually smell better when you whiz in the corner
6 Miller competing in Tecmo's bikini contest
5 Miller winning second place in Tecmo's bikini contest
4 Getting bumped from an appointment because of a Hobbit (what have you ever done, Frodo?!)
3 Visiting Infinium Labs' booth in the alley behind the convention center, right next to "Burt's $10 Cars"
2 Will Wright creating the most elaborate and visionary omelette the breakfast world has ever seen
1 Seeing the world's entire collection of Ehrgeiz t-shirts gathered in one place

Name That Game Answer: Vandal Hearts

A Hollywood strike of video game actors could put From Russia With Love developer EA in a bind

news

ACTORS STRIKE THREATENS INDUSTRY

HOLLYWOOD TALENT IN JEOPARDY

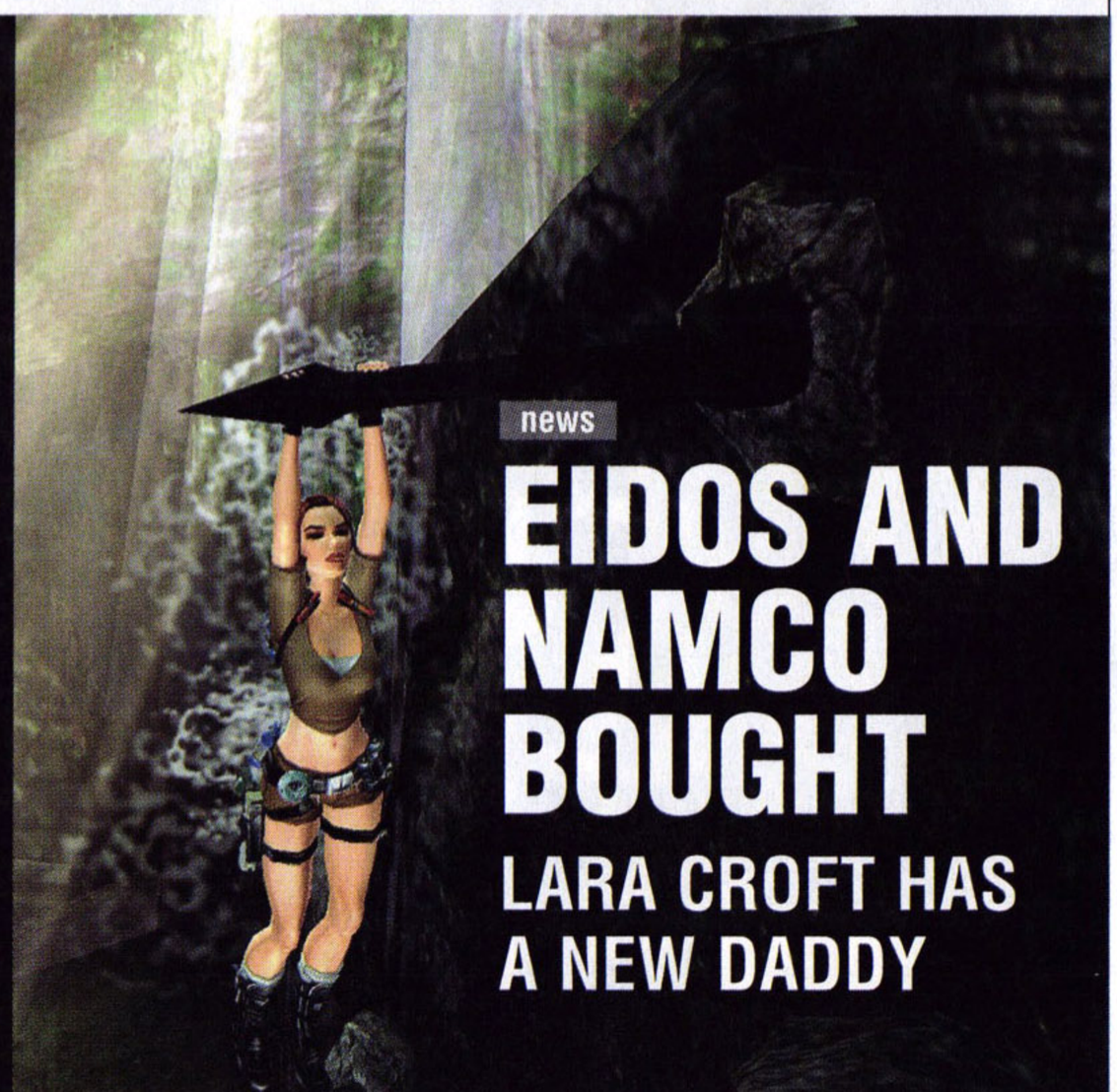
The video game industry could be rocked by a labor dispute with Hollywood actors that would end the use of their voices and likeness in games. Both the Screen Actors Guild and the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (AFTRA) are threatening to strike over royalties from the sale of video games. Currently there are proposals being offered that would give additional payments to an actor if a game featuring them sold more than a certain number of copies, such as 400,000 units. An industry source told Game Informer that the unions are asking for six percent of the profits, something that would have a large effect on the video game economy. As it stands, participating actors receive an up-front, one-time payment for their work.

AFTRA president, John P. Connolly, said, "To deny working class performers their fair share of the tremendous profits their labor helps to generate is illogical, unreasonable, and unjust."

As of the time of this writing, talks were ongoing. The industry has countered the unions' proposal with an offer of a 35 percent wage increase over three-and-a-half year period and better health benefits. However, the unions rebuffed this move and prepared for a strike. At this year's E3, some actors picketed the center where the convention was being held.

The industry's lead negotiator, Howard Fabrick, saw the actors' demands as unreasonable since, "voicework represents a small fraction of a video game's development and consumer enjoyment. The unions' demand for an equity stake is unreasonable and not fair to the hundreds of people who often spend years in developing a game."

Fabrick says that publishers and developers have vowed to continue with their work, using non-union talent if necessary, and that business would "continue as usual." However, the Hollywood unions are powerful, and the use of replacement voice-actors would not solve the problem of using those actors' likeness in games. With more and more publishers using the real talent behind their license titles in an attempt to achieve realism, the looming strike could have a large impact on our video gaming experience.



news

EIDOS AND NAMCO BOUGHT

LARA CROFT HAS A NEW DADDY

Ending a search for a buyer that was desperate at times, English publisher Eidos has been acquired by London-based SCi Games. After contemplating an offer from Elevation Partners, a venture capital group featuring U2 singer Bono and former Electronic Arts head John Riccitiello, Eidos' board of directors decided to accept a buyout offer from the Conflict: Global Terror developer. There is no word yet how this will affect either Eidos' or SCi's upcoming releases.

Meanwhile, Japanese toy maker Bandai is planning to buy Xenosaga publisher Namco for 1.6 billion dollars. Japanese industry analysts see this as a benefit for both companies. Bandai wants to improve its software and online presence, while Namco would profit from a company that reported 270 billion yen in earnings last year. Both publishers had previously sought other mergers, including a partnership with Sega, which has since joined with Sammy.

Nintendo DS™ and Game Boy® Advance Screenshots

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TEEN — Violence — CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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CARL YANKOWSKI

CHAIRMAN/CEO MAJESCO

>> An executive with perhaps one of the most prestigious resumes in all of video games, Carl Yankowski seems to be a perfect fit for Majesco, which has recently transformed itself from a small, budget publisher into the games business's fastest-growing company. We recently spoke with Yankowski to get his views on the future of Majesco and the game industry in general. <<

Recently, Majesco has transitioned from being a strictly bargain game publisher to doing "art house" projects like Advent Rising and Psychonauts. Is that the strategy you want to move forward with?
I think we do. We have always had a strong budget game business – games that retail for $20 and under. We'll continue to have that strong business, because that's a good cash engine for us. Our first premium game was in October of 2002 with BloodRayne. From there, we have had the opportunity for leveraging our deep appreciation of independent, creative developers to work with a number of them to get some great titles under development. That stuff's starting to bear fruit.

Do you look towards a company like Take 2 as a model, which has distribution and budget businesses, but also maintains the Rockstar brand for high-end products?
[There's] going to be a core value business on one end for us and then we'll be increasingly doing the higher end, premium games. But we're not going to formally distinguish that as another division, we think that we're eclectic and creative regardless of whether we do a value game or a $50 frontline game. Phantom Dust is a good example – it wasn't a $50 game, but it was a great game. Because I think most people go out and want to buy a few games at a time, but it's a lot of coin to spring for all premium games. So, they'll get a premium game or two and then a couple good value games. We want to fulfill both market needs.

Recently, it's become common for a publisher to buy a developer that they've had a good track record with. Would you ever look into doing this?
I don't think we'd rule it out. Only if it makes great strategic sense. I don't want that to be the rule. I also want to think that even if we did acquire a developer, we would want to keep the non-bureaucratic aspects of our creativity and our management of the creative process. I was impressed with differentiation in some of the trade mags between us and Electronic Arts. You probably read the same "sweatshop" articles in the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times* in the last couple of months. The point is, I think we're a little more fun to work with and a little less bureaucratic.

What's the future of your Game Boy Advance video line? It's been very successful.
Sure, we're in constant discussions with Nintendo, looking for ways to optimize. First of all, we have silicon that gives us 90-minute capability [on GBA]. I think Nintendo's looking for an optimal strategy for video on DS – right now we focus on the kids' titles with superb content and execution on the SP. There are 50 million SPs out there right now; I can't think of a better installed base to work with for kids. For DS, we're backwards compatible with the current GBA cartridges for video. We do MPEG 2 quality on the Game Boy Advance platform, and, with our codec, are capable of doing MPEG 4, which is basically DVD quality, on the DS.

Games like Advent Rising are more ambitious, but carry with them more risk. What happens if the first Advent doesn't sell? Will you still continue with the trilogy?
Yes, I think so. In fact, the possibility of an annuity type product doing well is always better on the second round, because you're building awareness and once it proves itself and is executed well, people know it. However, we have a unique business model. That is, we don't budget "hit" volumes for any of our premium products. We conservatively budget around 150,000 to 200,000 units per console, per game. Those numbers are pretty easy for us to reach. That conservative budgeting philosophy differentiates us from much of our competition, who, by virtue of the fact that they have to throw a lot of money at marketing and pay for a lot of IP, they have to generate big numbers.

There's been a lot of talk about how development costs are going to skyrocket with the next-gen systems, and that we might be headed for a crisis if the price points on games stays at $50.
Well, anytime that you have new technology, initially it costs a little more. But, you price to cover. Guys like [EA head] Larry Probst have said that the price of a frontline game should go to $60 initially, and I think that's probably right. I would be surprised if it didn't happen. It would be in the best interest of the marketplace to have game manufacturers that are producing at a reasonable profit and consumers who are finding a reasonable value, otherwise it puts the game manufacturers in the position of being a charity, and that's not good business for anybody.

Looking out at the next generation of consoles, how do you see it panning out? Which of the three major players is on track to be the most successful?
Well, they each have their own followings. You have a broader base now with PlayStation 2; more platformer games have been successful on PlayStation 2 than on Xbox. You have more of a hardcore shooter mentality on the Xbox platform. So, it's really going to be a strategic race between the three of them – you have the big two, and then the Nintendo Revolution coming out and supposedly trying to play an online aspect. As to how it shakes out, I will say that I think it's always a timing advantage to be first to market, if you're good.

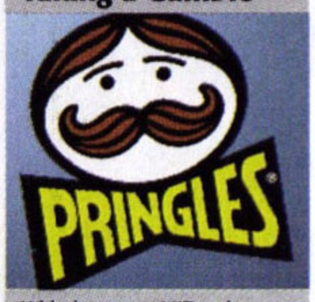
We don't hear a lot of people saying that Microsoft has a legitimate shot at being the number one home console maker. What's your take?
I think that's a big stretch for those guys. They're going to need something terrifically unique, with some unique and powerful consumer benefits and some extraordinary marketing to pull that off. What it would be, I don't know. But I think that would be an amazing feat if they could pull that off.

Nintendo has not had very good relationships with third-party publishers on their last couple of systems. Are they doing enough to mend fences with American publishers?
It's really hard to say. I actually think there are two Nintendos. There's Nintendo U.S., that has its heart in the right place and Nintendo Japan, which in the traditional sense of Japanese companies, is maybe one step more removed from one of its largest marketplaces than would benefit it. I say that having run the largest operating subsidiary of a Japanese company. But, I can remember Akito Morita, when he was gracious enough to hire me at Sony to be the president of the U.S. electronics business, saying that you want to think globally and act locally. I think that Nintendo has to learn to act more locally. Hopefully they're moving in that direction. Reggie Fils-Aime has a good background, with his [brand management] training and experience. The question is: Are they going to take the leash off and let the dog run?

> ***"I think we're a little more fun to work with and a little less bureaucratic."***

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

1971 ▶ Taking a Gamble



With degrees at MIT and Wellesly College under his belt, Yankowski takes an entry-level training position at Proctor and Gamble. Here he works in the packaged goods sector with Pringles and Duncan Hines.

1977 ▶ The Pepsi Challenge

Working as Pepsi's marketing guru, Yankowski led the company through a landmark campaign: the "Pepsi Challenge."

1981 ▶ Bringing Good Things To Life

Aside from developing the General Electric's legendary "We Bring Good Things To Life" ad campaign, Yankowski helped guide the company through a major restructuring.

1993 ▶ Revolutionizing Video Games

After some solid tech industry experience with GE, Yankowski moved into the video game industry as president and COO of Sony Electronics. Sitting on the advisory board for the original PlayStation launch, he helped establish the company as a powerhouse in the industry.

1998 ▶ A Fresh Pair of Reeboks

Yankowski takes a position as CEO of Reebok Brand. There, he rebranded the then-sagging shoe manufacturer.

1999 ▶ In the Palm of His Hand

At 3Com, Yankowski helped build the successful Palm brand, which was spun off into the then-largest IPO offering of all time.

2004 ▶ Back in the Game

Yankowski returns to the video game realm with the up-and-coming New Jersey publishing firm Majesco.

Photo: Art Cantu

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Use of Alcohol and Tobacco
Violence

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PlayStation®2

THE TECH OF E3

We scoured the halls of LA's convention center to find some of the best accessories, cases, peripherals, and gear set to hit shelves in the near future. Here's a sampling of what we discovered.

etc.

CHARGER CASE FOR PSP

Manufacturer: Nyko Technologies
Website: www.nyko.com **List Price:** $69.99

This is the smaller, sleeker version of Nyko's protective charger case line. The other models, like the Theater Experience, offer bigger form factors with the same smoking battery system – five extra hours of playtime for the PSP without having to recharge the case. The cases include one power cable to get juice to both the PSP and holder, and an extension cable so that you can charge the PSP off the unit's battery while still playing the portable. Shown here in brushed black aluminum, the first run will actually be a limited-edition silver color.

Shown with PSP unit, not included

peripherals

ECLIPSE PC KEYBOARD

Manufacturer: Saitek **Website:** www.saitekusa.com **List Price:** $59.99

The latest upgrade to Saitek's Gamer's Keyboard line, the Eclipse, is a better fit for both light and dark situations. The problem with their earlier entry was that, when in a very dark room, the keys' letters were nearly impossible to read. Laser etching allows the labels to be backlit with the previous style's adjustable blue glow. This lighting upgrade is a great compliment to the nice keyfeel and layout of the earlier model.

peripherals

PLAYGEAR POCKET

Manufacturer: Logitech
Website: www.logitech.com
List Price: $19.99

Shown with PSP unit, not included

The crappy Sony-supplied neoprene pouch that came in our PSP Value Packs does the job, but we've been hunting for a new case since before the launch. Enter Logitech's admittedly bulky clamshell super case. The hard-sided unit leaves the shoulder buttons and headphone jack exposed so that you can listen to tunes with ease and the lid is sturdy enough to fashion a handy stand for movie watching. As a bonus, those who hunger to personalize their PSPs can let the creative juices flow by putting a picture between the clear case and the protective rubber insides.

peripherals

FANTASTIC FOUR CONTROLLERS

Manufacturer: Mad Catz **Website:** fantastic4.madcatz.com **List Price:** TBA

Stalwart third-party accessory manufacturer Mad Catz's new push toward licensed accessories is kicking it into high gear with a Fantastic Four line, out July 8th. Controllers for PS2 and Xbox join forces with console skins for the portable units [not shown], each featuring a variety of images from the upcoming movie.

peripherals

2 GB GAMING MEMORY STICK PRO DUO

Manufacturer: SanDisk
Website: www.sandisk.com **List Price:** $349.99

We know that the "gaming" features are just a neon-colored transparent exterior, but the real story is that there's finally a third party 2.0 GB memory stick option for all of us PSP media junkies. We also hear that new production facilities will mean that more sticks should be available this summer, as the market is practically bone dry right now.

etc.

COLECO BRAND ELECTRONIC GAMES

Manufacturer: Techno Source
Website: www.technosourceusa.com
List Price: $4.99 – $19.99

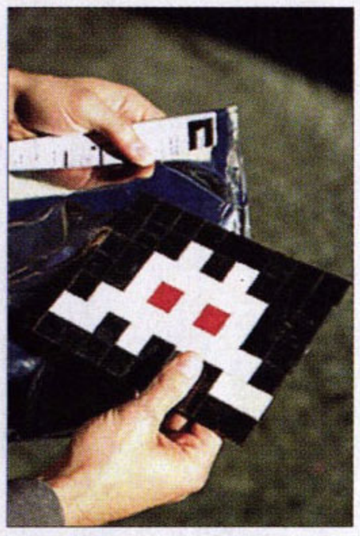
A bounty of good fortune has befallen us all. Techno Source, a company better known for educational toys, is re-releasing a selection of Coleco Handheld games in the next few months for those either nostalgic or curious. Keychain Electronic Quarterback, along with a variety of one or two-player options, fill out the series' starting lineup.

etc.

MEDIA POUCH PORTABLE

Manufacturer: Hori **Website:** www.hori.jp
List Price: $6.99

Our icky UMD storage method of Ziplock bags and round Altoids tins isn't cutting it for a unit this prized. Thankfully, a lot of manufacturers were showing off UMD carrying solutions at E3, and Hori had one of the most user-friendly. The Media Pouch Portable holds six discs and two memory sticks, zips tight, and comes with a carabiner to latch it onto backpacks or bags.



etc.

SUPPORT THE INVASION

Manufacturer: Invader **Website:** www.space-invaders.com
List Price: $12.80 to $140 [all prices include shipping and are listed in EUR on the website]

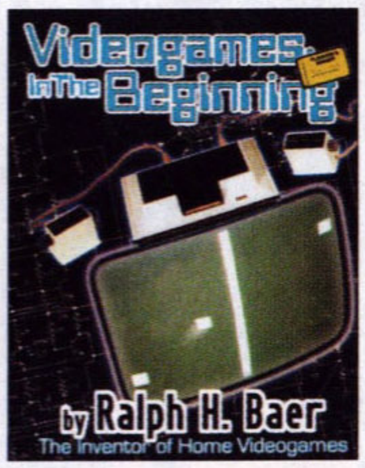
A semi-anonymous Frenchman has been laying down Space Invaders mosaics across the globe – specializing in high-traffic, high profile areas like the D in the Hollywood sign. Now his website is facilitating the Invasion through e-commerce, offering Invasion Starter Kits, maps of invaded cities, books, posters, skateboards, shoes (that leave little Space Invader prints in soft surfaces), and adhesive tape (for those quick and dirty invasions). His minions have been sending photographic proof of their exploits, and he's been nice enough to post the evidence online for all of us to see. Be on the lookout.

etc.

VIDEOGAMES: IN THE BEGINNING

Manufacturer: Rolenta Press **Website:** www.rolentapress.com
List Price: $29.99

From the publishing house that brought us *Phoenix: The Fall & Rise of Videogames* (a worthwhile read for video game history buffs, by the way) comes Ralph H. Baer's final word on how interactive entertainment got its start. Laying out his case to assert himself as the "Father of Videogames" is a collection of sketches, schematics, and photos chronicling the fragile birth of gaming and the struggle for one designer to stake his fair claim.



etc.

ATARI FLASHBACK 2.0

Manufacturer: Atari **Website:** www.atari.com **List Price:** $29.99

Apparently, the 7800-styled Flashback from last year sold around 500,000 units – clearly, retro gaming is hip right now. Flush with this success, Atari has announced the follow-up based on the iconic style of the 2600, wood paneling and all. Timed to celebrate the 30th anniversary of Pong this summer, the unit will offer around 40 games translated exactly from their original forms. Pong, Asteroids, Centipede, Millipede, Lunar Lander, Breakout, Missile Command, and Combat (among others) will appear; but to clear up any confusion, the winners of Retro Redux [see issue 146 for more info] will have their game included in a future release, not Flashback 2.0.

PC GAMING

THE GLOBAL UNDERGROUND AND THE FUTURE OF THE UNIVERSAL PLATFORM

BY ADAM BIESSENER, ASSOCIATE EDITOR, GAME INFORMER

Since the beginning of the current generation of home consoles, many industry pundits have been theorizing the doom of the personal computer as a gaming platform. As the technology and interface gap between consoles and PCs lessens, the enormous installed base advantage of consoles becomes irresistable to publishers and developers alike. After all, why not go for the literally 10 times more users that the PS2 boasts? Consumers themselves are hardly immune to the siren song of a $300 machine that can play more games than a $1,500 cutting-edge PC. These phenomena aren't going away anytime soon; while it's true that PC gaming hardware has gotten significantly cheaper with the advent of inexpensive memory manufacturing, the differences in computing power, graphical prowess, and interface options are smaller than ever. You can already plug a USB keyboard into your PS2 for Final Fantasy XI chatting purposes, after all. And when the Microsoft-proclaimed "HD era" arrives later this year with the launch of the Xbox 360, the PC will face a whole new round of stiff challenges to keep its viability as a game system.

Over the last few years, barring the occasional breakout hits such as World of Warcraft, Half-Life 2, or Rome: Total War, the PC market has been all but in recession in North America. Even great successes like Doom 3 exist in console form as well. Famous development teams are switching over (see last issue's cover story on Gears of War from Epic Games, as well as The Creative Assembly's recent announcement of Spartan: Total Warrior), and sometimes it seems like only the Blizzards and Valves will be left standing. The designers of one of the most successful franchises in history, EverQuest, will likely soon announce their new project Vanguard's additional destination of the Xbox 360. However, this initial look at the state of the PC gaming industry hardly grants a view of the whole picture.

These dire pronouncements all share a common thread: the several advantages of consoles over PCs. There exists a similar list of qualities on the flipside of the coin. Though they may not be as glamorous (or lucrative), the advantages of choosing the PC as a development platform bear noticing, and can offer a good base for predicting what lies in store for my format of choice. The PC is truly the universal platform; the amount of paperwork and approvals necessary to make a title for PCs is literally a drop in the bucket compared to the process console games go through in their quest for approval. Depending on what you want to do, there may be no process at all. No convincing Sony that your game adequately represents the PlayStation brand, no need to request expensive development kits from Microsoft, and none of the legendary headaches of making a third-party title for Nintendo. The bar for entry into the PC arena is immensely lower than that of the console industry, and this will (and already does, in fact) lead to an amazing amount of creativity on the platform.

As PC editor of Game Informer, I'm bombarded every month with more games than we could possibly cover. Many of these are smaller titles, often created by tiny teams of fewer than 10 people, and are frequently available online as free downloads. While there are certainly plenty that barely warrant a first look, much less a second, many of these games exhibit true innovation and creativity. You won't find cutting-edge realistic lighting on Game Gardens (www.gamegardens.com), but you will find several quirky and compelling board game-like diversions. The graphics of Galactic Civilizations (www.galciv.com) are a far cry from Far Cry, but it is lauded by many as one of the best turn-based strategy games ever created. Yohoho Puzzle Pirates began offering its unique style of pirate-branded MMO puzzle entertainment as a download a year or so ago, and recently began being distributed to retail shelves by Ubisoft. How many hours have you spent playing any of the thousands of browser-based games available free online? I firmly believe that this underground community of sorts will only grow as the mainstream console library becomes more and more stratified, and it is largely an untapped resource of absolutely amazing gaming pleasure.

> **"The bar for entry into the PC arena is immensely lower than that of the console industry..."**

People joke that the PC is down to three genres: FPS, RTS, and MMO. But for RTS, even these last bastions of PC gaming are already being consumed by the console juggernaut. And it'll definitely be some time, hopefully never, before the triple-A development houses make the switch or shut their doors. Hope also comes from overseas; due to the lack of console market penetration in their respective territories, Korea, China, and Europe are all home to some very talented developers like GSC Gameworld (S.T.A.L.K.E.R.) and Webzen (Huxley, SUN). Also, console and PC technology have leapfrogged each other since the beginning of videogames, and we're at the point right now that the PC situation is just about the worst it's ever been. Likely there will be another phase of the cycle when the PC format reigns supreme again. We hardcore nerds will certainly never give up our heavily customized and highly tuned gaming rigs which are as much projects of love as pieces of electronics, and our day will come again. Regardless of anything else, though, the wonderful world of small-time innovation which the Internet makes possible will continue to offer the adventurous the time of their lives until we're literally jacking into the Matrix. ■ ■ ■

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july

sun	mon	tue	wed	thur	fri	sat

Top Spin

01

NEW RELEASES
- Top Spin – PS2
- Metal Gear Solid 2 Mini-Figures – Series 1

02

03

NATIONAL MASTER HIGGINS DAY
On this highly celebrated day (second only to Christmas), strip down to nothing, throw on a grass skirt, ride around on a skateboard, and yell "Ooga booga!" Getting arrested is half the fun!

04

INTENSIVE VIDEO GAME CREATION
(July 5-August 5)
If you are over the age of 17 and have always dreamed of creating a video game, you may want to apply for this month-long camp held at NYU. By the end of this class, you will have a firm understanding of game creation

05

NEW RELEASES
- Coded Arms – PSP
- Halo 2 Multiplayer Map Pack – Xbox
- Psychonauts – PS2

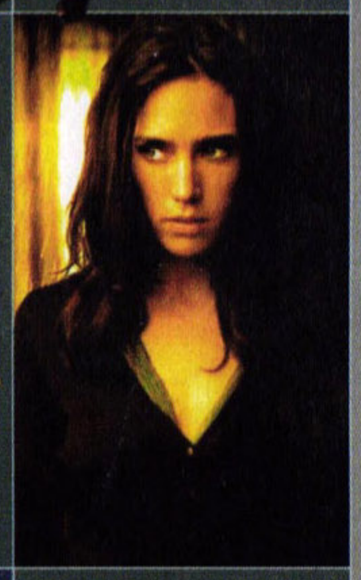
06

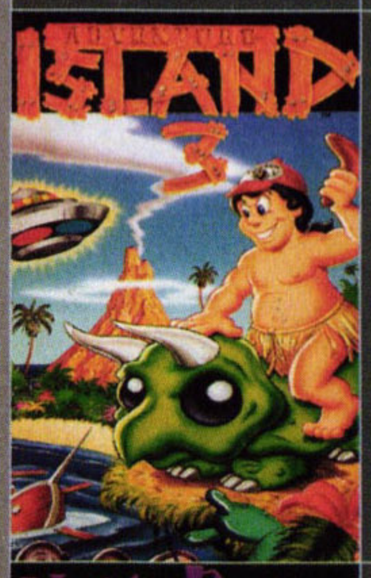
Today 50 Cent turns 29 and celebrates by watching back-to-back episodes of his favorite TV show *Two and a Half Men*, which he has saved on his TiVo

07

08

The Fantastic Four and *Dark Water* open in theaters today. Word on the streets is that Jennifer Connelly thinks that the Thing is a big sissy. The Thing thinks that she is hot





11

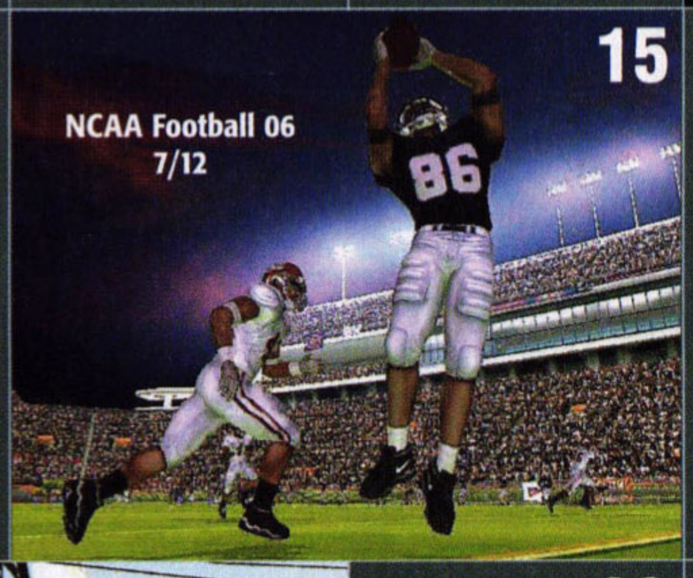
On this day in 1914, Babe Ruth made his Major League debut. In his rookie season he was paid $2,900. Coincidentally, that's exactly what we pay Joe each year

12

NEW RELEASES
- Charlie and the Chocolate Factory – PS2, Xbox, GC
- FlatOut – PS2, Xbox
- Full Metal Alchemist 2 – PS2
- Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex – PSP
- NCAA Football 06 – PS2, Xbox

13

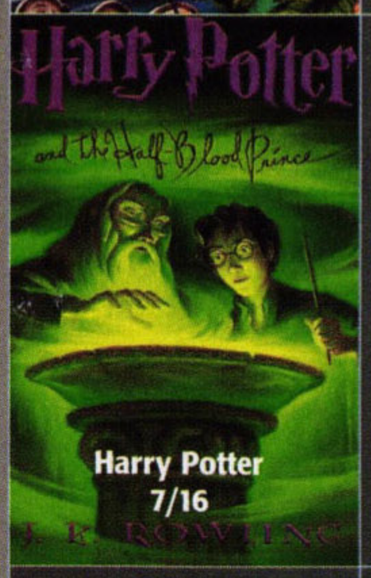
Famed comic creators Frank Miller and Jim Lee usher in a new era for the Dark Knight. *All-Star Batman and Robin, The Boy Wonder #1* hits comic shops today! Don't miss it


NCAA Football 06
7/12

15

16

Muggles flock to bookstores to pick up the newly released *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*. It is revealed that Harry is half blood, half Cheetos

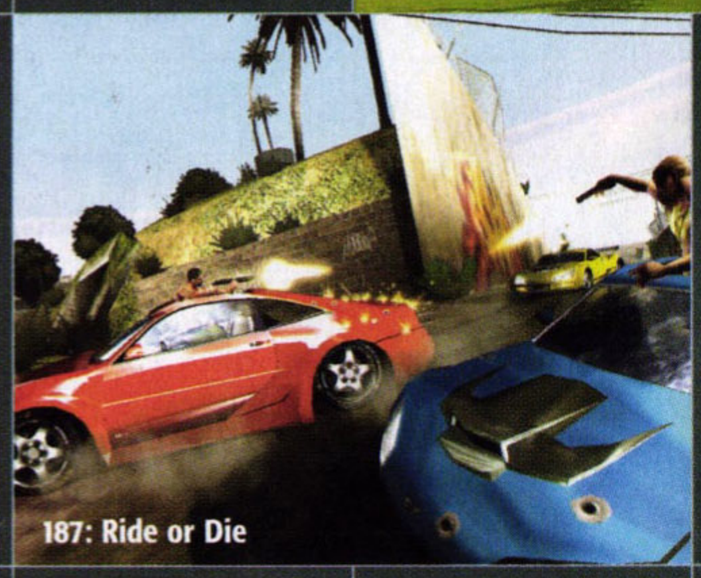


18

Dungeons & Dragons player Vin Diesel turns 38 today. Apparently, he also does some acting

19

NEW RELEASES
- 187: Ride or Die – PS2, Xbox
- Asheron's Call: Throne of Destiny – PC
- Colosseum: Road to Freedom – PS2
- Dragon Ball GT: Transformation – GBA
- Glimmerati – N-Gage
- Nanostray – DS


187: Ride or Die

22

The Devil's Rejects, the sequel to *House of 1,000 Corpses*, opens in theaters. If this film is successful, the follow-up, *Reject Corpses* will begin shooting immediately

23

Cousin It wannabe Slash turns 40 today

24

25

26

NEW RELEASES
- Harvest Moon: Another Wonderful Life – GC
- Harvest Moon: More Friends of Mineral Town – GBA
- Makai Kingdom – PS2
- Namco Museum Battle Collection – PSP
- RPG Maker 3 – PS2
- *Star Trek Enterprise: Season 2* – DVD

27

6TH INTERNATIONAL GAME-ON CONFERENCE
(July 27-30)
Held at the Galt House Hotel in Louisville, KY, Game-On focuses on the advancement of artificial intelligence in video games. Without this conference, the lifelike pups in Nintendogs wouldn't be possible.

28

Makai Kingdom
7/26

31

SIGGRAPH 2005 (July 31-August 4)
The 32nd international conference on computer graphics and interactive techniques kicks off with a bang. George Lucas will deliver a keynote, and pretty much everyone involved with video games will be there

All release dates subject to change. For future release dates, go to www.gameinformer.com

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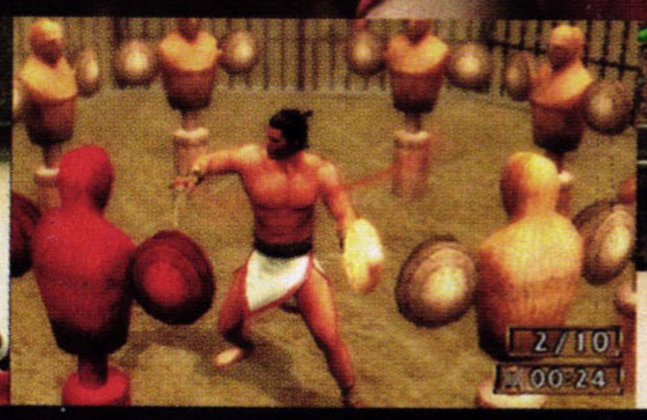

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An Action RPG July 2005

ATURE 17+

M

NTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood Violence

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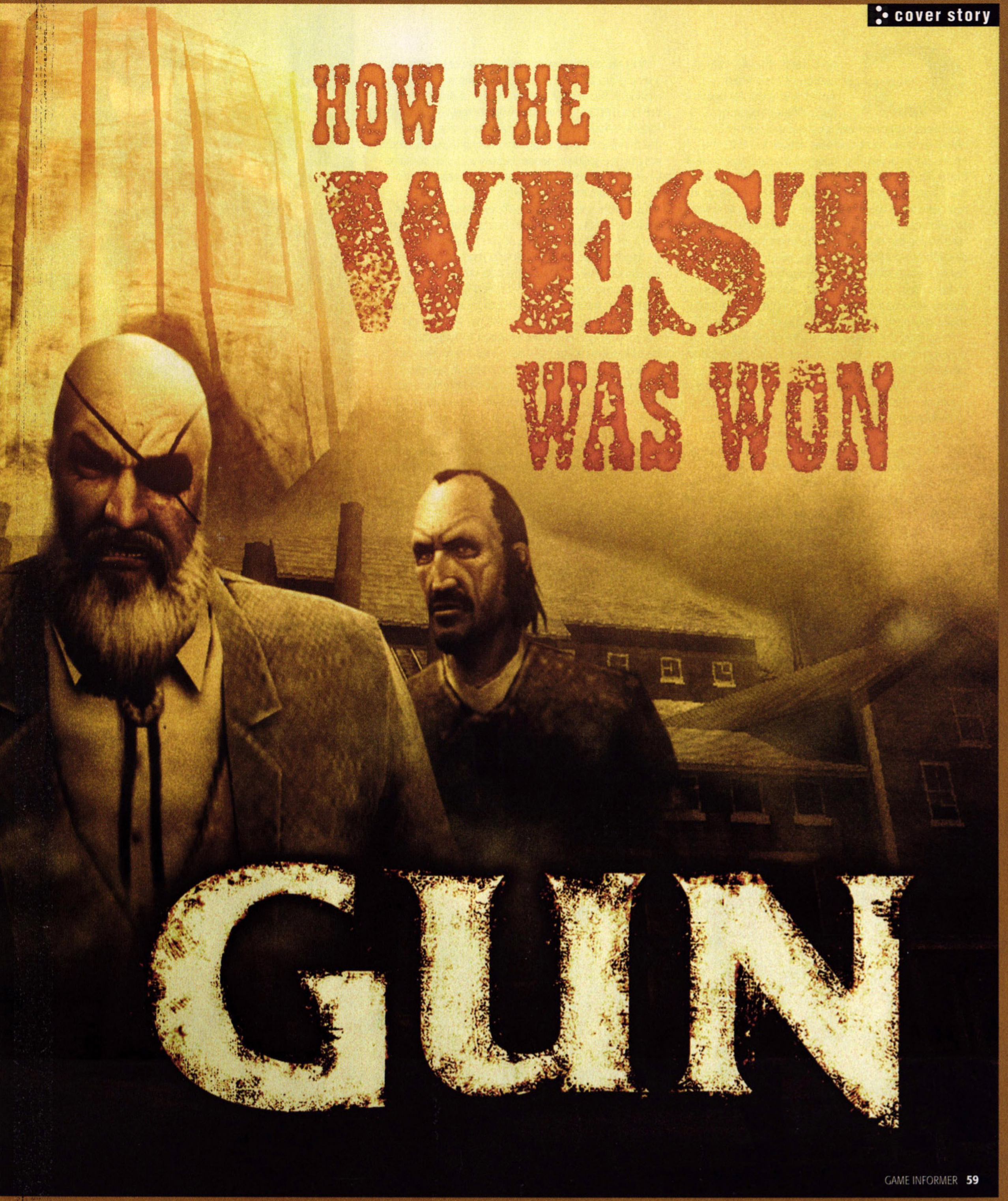
PlayStation.2

XBOX 360 | PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE | PSP
> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION
> **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION
> **DEVELOPER** NEVERSOFT
> **RELEASE** FALL

After making a name for itself over the past five years with the Tony Hawk series and Spider-Man, Activision developer Neversoft is going in a different direction, away from the licensed product that made it famous. This move into the unknown has kept the industry guessing for the better part of a year. At this year's E3 convention, onlookers could only wonder what the game, entitled Gun, had in store for them as quick flashes of bullets, dismembered body parts, and other imagery flashed in quick succession during the game's teaser trailer. Knowing it is neither a superhero nor an extreme sports title still leaves a lot of possibilities. The name Gun sounds more like an inauspicious working title for a fledgling game rather than a triple-A product being published by a company that doesn't like to take chances on the unknown.

Then again, calling this title Gun couldn't be more perfect. It tells you everything about the game, and yet does not pigeonhole it. And being open-ended is exactly what Gun is all about. It is this foundation of freedom that Neversoft found so appealing when deciding on a direction for its new project.

HOW THE WEST WAS WON



GUN

Gun is set in the late 19th century, a time when America was quickly becoming a different country. Westward expansion was pushing the frontier of the newly reunited, post-Civil War nation. In 1869, the tracks of the Union Pacific joined those of the Central Pacific Railroad at The Golden Spike in Utah, forming the transcontinental railroad. Meanwhile, cowboys in northern Texas were leading the first big cattle drives to railheads in Dodge, Kansas, and gold had been consuming the minds of panhandlers further west since the mid-1800s. Of course, all of this expansion led to great conflict with the indigenous American Indian tribes. You stand at this crossroads in American history, one man among many trying to survive and make a living in an ambitious time of uncertainty.

Describing the outlaw era of the game and its decision to make this the basis of its closely watched new title, Neversoft president Joel Jewett puts it succinctly: "Everybody, and I mean everybody, carried a gun and drank whiskey, and all of this on the edge of civilization – hell yeah! You pretty much just have to drop everything and start making a video game." With his scraggly bandit mustache and commanding gaze that brooks no argument, Jewett could easily know a thing or two about carrying a six-shooter. He looks more apt to be involved in a good ol'-fashioned bar fight than Tony Hawk's world of baggy shorts. During our time at the studio, he even showed us his knife-throwing skills – which he honed as a kid in Montana – by hurling a ten-inch blade across the room into the drywall with a resounding thud. Seconds after the dagger was buried inches deep into the wall, Neversoft team members craned their heads and came to see what the commotion was all about – including the unfortunate guy on the other side of the wall that served as Jewett's target practice.

With his knife-throwing skills and mustache in tow, it would not be hard to imagine Jewett scratching out a living in the lawless western lands of America circa the late 1800s. The West is wild, as they say, and your fortune is hard won. When vigilante justice reigns, the thin line between right and wrong is punctuated only by the gallows' noose. However, it also contains boundless opportunities for someone willing to do just about anything to succeed.

Gun casts you as Colton White, son of mountain man Ned White, in Montana near the headwaters of the Missouri River. The two of you have carved out an existence based on your father's years of experience living in the wild. One day he asks you to accompany him to a meeting with an old friend on a steamboat docked on the Missouri River. Before the two of you leave, however, a wild-eyed preacher starts to get violent with her, and after a heated conversation, he brandishes a hatchet and buries it into her neck. With a signal from the preacher, crazy renegade militiamen storm the boat and all hell breaks loose. In the ensuing chaos, your father battles through the horde and finds you, charging you with an important task. Giving you a saloon token, he tells you to find a strumpet named Jenny at the Alhambra Saloon in Dodge City, Kansas. Just before the whole boat goes

CONTINUED ON PAGE 63

Gun isn't just a story of revenge and tumbleweeds; it's a grand adventure set in an environment where a man can shape his destiny with his wits, determination, and favorite firearm.

Your journey will take Colton White through all kinds of adventures and changes. You can even collect scalps

Canoes, horses, coaches, and trains will get you around Gun

Towns like this one will allow all kinds of side missions

Your bow will also be useful for stealth attacks

Feel free to reward poker cheaters with a bullet in the gut

It's important to hone your horse skills through the various side missions

up in a mighty explosion, he throws you overboard with his dying words, "I am not your father."

In your ensuing search for answers, you'll unravel all sorts of surprises, cross paths with deadly enemies, and discover powerful secrets that men have been searching for and spilling blood over for hundreds of years. Gun isn't just a story of revenge and tumbleweeds; it's a grand adventure set in an environment where a man can shape his destiny with his wits, determination, and favorite firearm.

When you arrive in Dodge City after making your way down from up north, Gun really starts to take shape. Although you have to meet Jenny at the Alhambra Saloon, the town and its citizens are yours to play with as you like. Pick a fight with a guy you think is looking at you funny, take sides in a town feud, or help the sheriff with any number of problems that need fixing. "That's one of the beauties of doing a game that's based in the West," Jewett opines. "If you go back, every single person – including the women – most likely had a gun on them somewhere. So, at any given time you can get into it with the ambient life and start a fight." However, this game is more than just a sandbox title filled with the dust of the Wild West.

Gun offers a wealth of side quests to augment its story, joining the two elements into one large world. Neversoft is trying hard to make these extra missions something more integral than diversions or chores. Neversoft calls it "subsistence living." Whether it's panhandling for gold, protecting mustangs from a group of rustlers, gambling, setting up ambushes for bandits, or any of the other numerous activities, the company wants everything you do to feel like you're living the life of a person in the late 1880's, not a mindless errand boy or a killing machine stripped of any character. This greatly helps the game become an actual world, and not just a set of objective points.

One important way that the game makes non-story missions more than boring chores is by tying them to your stats. Colton has five skills: Horse, Health, Gunhandling, Quick Draw, and Melee. By participating in a quest, you'll increase one, some, or all of the appropriate skills. So if your horse riding could use some polishing, you could help out a rancher by corralling a herd of cattle. By making these missions about more than money or a simple sense of accomplishment, players may feel more compelled to go out and explore the many opportunities in the game instead of just burning through the critical path. However, Neversoft wants to tune the game to make sure that players don't run into a wall where they have to go back and participate in missions just to get their stats high enough to beat a boss or get through a level. That would go against the title's organic structure.

Your adventures will take you on both sides of the law, which is something that Neversoft distinctly wanted. They felt it epitomized the opportunistic and uncertain times. When survival is your aim, shades of black and white can blur. This helps set Gun apart from the simple either/or, good versus bad choices some video games make players choose from. Colton will go through many changes as the game progresses, both physically and personally. One moment you might be robbing a bank and killing Indians, the next you may be helping a tribe and acting the role of sheriff's deputy. "Well, it's all about living through the West and experiencing the West," explains project lead Chad Findley. "That's why we're tying [side missions] in to stats. As you do these things, they really do give you more experience and skill at what you would do. They are going to be fun missions that we want to do and fun stories that we want to do that aren't part of the main storyline, but are stories in and of themselves. Every one is a whole different little story."

In your quest to make your way in the frontier and to unravel the questions surrounding your surrogate father's death, you're going to have to twirl a six-shooter or two. In fact, you'll draw faster and shoot straighter than your enemies with the game's Quick Draw mode. When engaged, this mode slows down time for you as if you've got the jump on a guy trying to draw his gun. While activated, the camera zooms in on your target in the first person, letting you take aim and blow guys away like they had arms of lead and hands of stone.

Instead of merely being a gimmick that gives you a momentary advantage, Neversoft wants players to really have fun with Quick Draw and utilize it as often and as long as possible. You could use the mode's slowdown to take aim at an enemy's rifle (shooting it out of his hands), or to blow a stick of dynamite out of the air. The amount of time you can spend in this mode builds as you kill more and more foes, giving you all kinds of room to showboat (Neversoft even says that you'll get a bonus for shooting someone right between the eyes). Sometimes the numbers won't be in your favor, and jumping into Quick Draw will enable you to tag multiple enemies, switching targets with a flick of the left analog stick. You will also bullseye the enemies behind you. Jewett and company foresee gamers stringing together all kinds of devastation once they get in the zone. They joked that it should be called BAMF mode, meaning Bad-Ass Mother…you get the idea.

The fun of Quick Draw mode is heightened when you throw in the game's precise hit detection and physics. Not only can you shoot a gun out of someone's hand, but you can even keep hitting it, skipping it across the room out of the reach of your enemy in sharp-shooting western style. Pinpoint someone's head, leg, or crotch with a shotgun, or take aim at a barrel of gunpowder to blow a group of guys sky high. Despite these larger-than-life antics, studio development director Scott Pease says that the company does want to impart a realistic, semi-sober side to the combat which hails from a time when pulling a gun on somebody wasn't a casual move. It meant that one of you wasn't going to come out of the situation alive. "[Quick Draw mode] allows us to bring the action up close to you. Zoom in on these guys as you concentrate on these enemies and really get you up close with the brutality of those hits, the positional damage to really let you see these guys get torn apart by bullets. That's kind of part of the Western myth."

Since the game moves like an FPS even though it's a third-person title, we wondered if players would choose to simply snipe enemies from afar instead of enjoying Quick Draw's duel-like showdown. Jewett has a firm belief in the allure of the mode. "Someone who gets good at that will wade in deep and be feeling great. Players are going to be incentivized to do that because it feels good. If we make it feel good enough, people are going to want to do it." We asked Jewett specifically whether we'd be able to juggle people in the air like a fighting game. He coyly replies, "I'm thinking there might be a gun that powerful in the game…"

In our hands-on time with the game, we kicked up quite a fuss in Dodge, setting off a full-scale gang war. We ran around scalping fools, throwing dynamite at second story enemies, and had us a good old time. Yes, Quick Draw mode is fun. The game's AI looks for cover, and will do everything from shoot the dynamite you

Colton will go through many changes as the game progresses, both physically and personally. One moment you might be robbing a bank and killing Indians, the next you may be helping a tribe and acting the role of sheriff's deputy.

throw out of the air to look for a gun if theirs has been shot out of their hands. Although it's pretty easy to stir up trouble, you can blow town for a while and when you come back, things will have calmed down.

Apart from your guns you will also have other weapons, such as a bow and arrow you can use for sneaking up on people and picking them off. Of course, getting up close and personal can have its advantages, too. Hostages can be taken and executed, and you can even collect the scalps of fallen foes. At the time of this writing, however, what you would do with your scalps was still to be determined. The team wanted to make sure the payoff was worth it.

Many of the weapons you use will be scavenged off the dead bodies of the bosses you'll encounter. "We're trying to give a real story element to the weapons themselves," explains Pease. "They mean something. They're not just some list of weapons in an armory." Hollister, one particularly nasty boss, shoots at you with an incredible Ferguson .69 caliber repeating rifle that was your father's at the beginning of the game. Hollister pried it from his dead hands, and is now adding insult to injury by using it to blow holes in you. Remarkably, many of the weapons like the Ferguson are actually real firearms that weren't mass-produced, but were prototypes or concoctions of resourceful individuals. These boss battles are a good way to help anchor the gameplay with an old-school style that complements its newer free-roaming format.

Whether you stay indefinitely in Dodge City or press on with your

CONTINUED ON PAGE 66

■ Despite many of its realistic elements, Gun is a game that lets you entertain your wild side. Emplacements like this can be taken over from enemies

Clearing out this opium den is just one of the many jobs given to you as deputy

This Xbox 360 character model shows off some impressive facial detailing

Hunting missions like this will sharpen your shooting skills, as well as bag you some rare quarry

Sometimes you just want to ride into town and set somebody on fire. You can do that in Gun

■ The game's pinpoint accuracy lets you blow this guy's hat off

quest for answers, Gun is an accommodating game. Apart from some areas initially closed to you for plot reasons, the openness of Gun's mission structure goes hand-in-hand with the vistas of its terrain. In our travels throughout Gun's wide-open world we saw canyon depths with overhead passes that left you mighty vulnerable to an ambush. There were New Mexico-style desert bluffs and prosperous new towns flooded with gold money (Gun will feature a full economy). We also saw underground mine labyrinths, frontier forts, wooded mountainsides, and much more.

Despite its extensive experience in streaming worlds from the Tony Hawk series, Neversoft found creating Gun's massive world quite a challenge. "We had to totally re-write an entire new system from scratch for this game," explains Pease. "Not only is it an advanced streaming engine, but we couldn't get away with dividing the world into, lets say, city blocks and using buildings to obstruct [your view]. So it's a more organic, free-flowing world. We did have to very carefully plan out how we could stream the whole thing together."

We saw a design map giving an overview of the entire game that had huge areas brimming with opportunities. Your horse will be the main mode of transportation, but there is also a rail system within the game you'll ride on occasionally, as well as other ways to get around, like canoes. Your trusty steed will not only get you from place to place, but also help out in combat via a charge attack and the ability to rear up and trample foes under its feet. During combat, some sick bastards may take you down by shooting your horse first, but then again you can always steal another mount or do the same to them.

Often times in your travels you'll pass by a ranch or canyon. Some will be useful in the plot later on, others you can go to at any time and pick up a job. Of course, anything can happen while traversing the map, including confrontations with the game's AI wildlife. Bears, wolves, cougars, buffalo, coyotes, and more roam around and are even influenced by the time of day in the game (although game time doesn't pass in real-time). There are some missions in Gun which ask you to bag some elusive quarry, such as a prized big-horned ram or the rare White Wolf.

Although Neversoft lays a world of opportunities at your feet, Gun does not sacrifice any part of its adventure, regardless of which platform it is on. The game is more of a multi-console title than one that is specifically designed to get the most out of the next-generation of gaming. Indeed, we expressed curiosity as to whether gamers would think

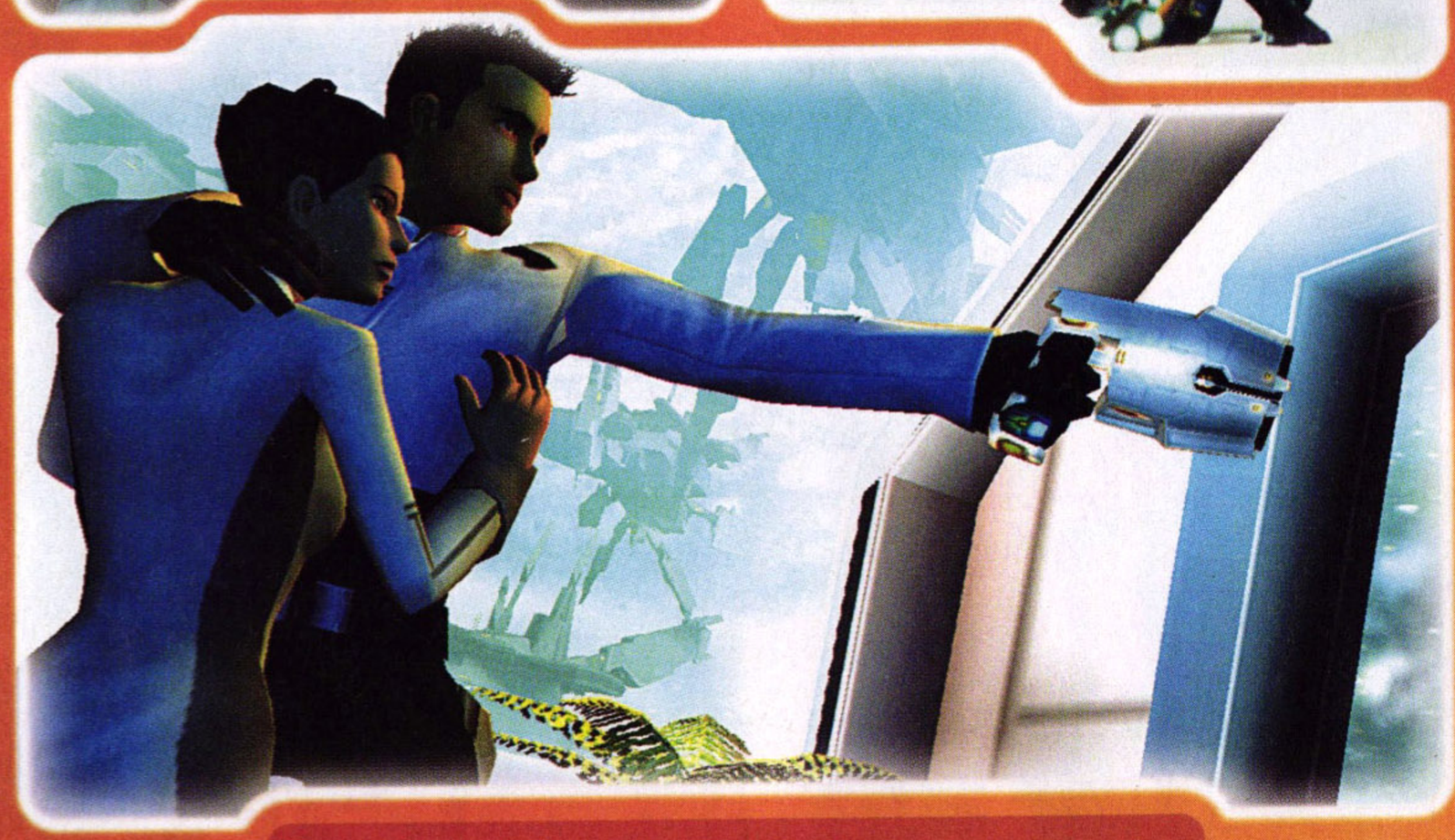
Who says science isn't fun? The game's physics propels dead bodies all over the place

Pease shook off the assumption, pointing out that the guarantee of 720p high definition resolution, dynamic lightning, normal mapping, better facial animations, faster frame rate, and superior character models, among other things, was enough to assure anyone that Neversoft was doing whatever possible to wring the most out of Microsoft's new hardware.

that the Xbox 360 edition was watered down, seeing as how Gun's open world will also be available on current-gen systems. Pease shook off the assumption, pointing out that the guarantee of 720p high definition resolution, dynamic lightning, normal mapping, better facial animations, faster frame rate, and superior character models, among other things, was enough to assure anyone that Neversoft was doing whatever possible to wring the most out of Microsoft's new hardware. "It's going to be a different experience on [Xbox 360]," he explains. "We're looking at trying to do some interesting things with ambient life. One of the things that you are so strapped for on the PS2 is memory. All we do is fight memory every day of our lives. There's only so much we can fit. With the 360, you've got a much bigger playing field for us to work." Still, for those looking to get Gun on the PlayStation 2 or GameCube, Pease told us that the game's promise of no loading and an abundance of things to do remained. There will be no missions or portions of the map cut from these two versions. There is also a PSP edition planned to come out simultaneously with the other versions, but little is known about it at this time.

Far from being a game where you simply wander around on your horse looking for things to do, the story of Gun will always keep you moving forward. Taut with surprises, revelations, and adventure at every turn, the title offers a seamless mix of a focused, linear story with the freedom to take advantage of the many opportunities the world presents. One amazing sequence we witnessed at a fort was nothing but constant action as we ran around the large complex with the fury of battle exploding all around us. Pease says that this is how much of the game operates. "You don't know what kind of gameplay you're going to get, whether it's shooting, horseback riding, escorting, riding on a train, or firing a cannon or Gatling gun. Kind of having a surprise around every corner for the player is very important to us. After you complete a mission, that's your time to take a break."

Who is your real father and how did Ned White come to adopt you as his own? What is this mysterious power that has enflamed desire and caused death for hundreds of years? The answers to these questions are out there somewhere in Gun's world, out in the rocky canyons, the seedy saloons, and the rolling plains. Get on your horse, go west, and see what adventures await. ■■■



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SOMETIMES THE HUMAN RACE HAS TO START OVER...

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SELLING THE VISION:
48 HOURS OF E3 DEMO DEVELOPMENT

"I can't tell you if it's Wednesday or Saturday or Thursday. All I know is that it's 15 days before E3." Programming lead Charles Jacob is looking both ways before crossing the street to get a coffee. The studio kitchen is outfitted with a handful of machines that could produce as much highly caffeinated java as any person would need, but the brisk walk is an opportunity not to be missed. Combining this interview with a cup is the only way to get everything done. With only two weeks left before the last disc must be burned, the team's rush is necessary, but largely unspoken.

For 48 hours, Game Informer is camping out in the second-floor Montreal studio that's home to the Prince of Persia 3 team. These are an important two days for the team – the final E3 demo build is due shortly, the corporate offices want to see substantial progress, and marketing and PR are pushing for a Game of the Show award. Of course, gamers from around the world are finishing up travel arrangements and making up their lists of must-see titles at the industry's biggest gathering. PoP 3 needs to deliver for all of these people – and it needs to get there fast.

"They tell you, 'You will have six minutes to sell your game – now go and do it,'" says art director Olivier Lenoardi. He's talking about the gaming industry's yearly coming out party, the Electronic Entertainment Expo. The pressures of E3 development that Lenoardi alludes to are common across the industry. There will be hundreds of titles vying for attention and acclaim, and reams of marketing research show that each game gets about one tenth of an hour to captivate attendees – just six minutes to sell a product that won't be out until the end of the year.

Be it a trailer, theater display, or on-the-floor demonstration, the presentation should show what is new, what is compelling, and (although fans don't necessarily think about it) what talking points the publishers want viewers to take away. The six minutes of face time are carefully directed to ensure that the most impact – and maybe more importantly, the right impact – is made before a visitor wanders off to the next digital distraction.

Development crunches like this are hard work. Day one starts off with a meeting of team leads. During these deadlines, the department heads will get together a few times a week to watch the demo and make new lists of what needs to be fixed. "For us, here, it looks okay. But there…" says one lead in reference to the notoriously fickle E3 crowd.

As the managers go around the table, the lists grow ever longer. Where are the scripted events in the chariot race? What does the new Dark Prince model look like? Cloth physics need to be added, collision and enemy spawn points aren't polished, some placeholder textures from Sands of Time have made an appearance and need to be replaced. As each item gets added, the person whose team has to make the fix scribbles down notes. Promises of completion by the end of the day are so frequent that finger waves and nodding are adopted as a non-verbal shorthand that looks more like a fine art auction than to-do list management.

With all of this work to get done, there's still a hushed enthusiasm as members are brainstorming additions to the presentation. Many are nixed because of time constraints, but one can't help but be impressed by a group of people, some bleary-eyed from the team party thrown the night before, that are nothing if not passionate about their game – passionate and very, very smart.

Collectively, the 120 members of the Prince of Persia 3 team have shipped dozens of successful titles. Even just listing the team leads' past efforts reveals a pedigree that shows variety, artistry, and innovation. An AI programmer from Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory (Matthew Clarke) is heading up the same department for this third entry, the lead artist from Myst IV (Leonardi) is the art director on the title, and a few members worked on the art in the Alone in the Dark series. In addition, some of the most able designers from the earlier PoP games have been brought over to make what they all hope will be the best of the series.

The PoP 3 E3 demo shows three different areas and the planned talking points expand on a number of the game's new features. A lot of the conversation revolves around the Dark Prince – after showing him to press at an E3 Judge's event, the character's look has been retooled. A new model is promised by the end of the day. The character is interesting because he is actually a spirit inhabiting the Prince's body, adding a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde-style internal struggle to PoP 3.

"We know what people liked and…didn't like about [PoP 2]," says creative director Yannis Mallat. Making a 90-degree angle with his hands, "If this is Sands of Time," he shakes his right hand, "and this is Warrior Within," he shakes his left, "then [our current game] is right here." Mallat's right hand moves to split the difference – everything about this title is a mix of the first and second games in the Prince of Persia's modern renaissance.

Just a glance around the team's wide-open office shows artists working to strike that balance. Alice Bernier, a successful DJ who has worked on a few Ubi games in the past, is ridding the title of nü-metal riffs and replacing them with psychologically evocative themes. The graphics department is merging the color palate of Sands of Time with the crumbling environments created in Warrior Within. From conception to the final crunch, the series' three games are being braided together into something that Mallat calls "the Sands of Time opus."

But grand turns of phrase can't guarantee that the game will leave the E3 show floor with a strong buzz. To get the message out, the game is presented in the same way that hundreds of others are at the show – a member of the development team will play the demo while a host talks about the features and new concepts that are being shown in a particular area. While the cogs of development machinery are working on the second floor, producer Ben Mattes is on his way to a test session for the presentation on the fourth floor. No part of the game's presence on the show floor can be left to chance – from the free promotional items to the words coming from a Ubisoft representative's mouth, everything is planned and tested well in advance. To ensure that the presentation goes over well, Mattes is going to run through the demo for four gamers. They will then fill out surveys to assure everyone that the points are illustrated clearly, that the demo is exciting, and that the all-important six minutes are used effectively. The session goes well enough and Mattes runs upstairs to record a sample of the wording that will be sent out to the hosts so that they can practice at home.

In Ubisoft's on-site recording studio, he goes through descriptions of the game's new speed kill system. This is the stealth element that makes certain fans of the series nervous. What the demo illustrates is that the gameplay offers two branches: the speed kills that are available as long as a player hasn't

■ Executive producer, Yannis Mallat gets cozy with the series' leading man

■ The Montreal office's in-house recording studio is used for many of the company's titles like the Splinter Cell, Prince of Persia, and Far Cry series

alerted his enemy, and the enhanced free-form fighting system used in the first two games. The latter, which will start when a foe has become aware of your presence, is being improved with animations and skill trees that take advantage of the Dark Prince's chain-like weapon.

In the demo runthrough, there are sneaky attacks from above (while sliding head-first down a rope), both Princes launching onto multiple guards with acrobatic brutality, and the light Prince throwing an enemy's own sword to slay his buddy just a bit down the path. The demo flashes from dank alleys to open-air rooftops without changing the message that is dark, its heroes are efficiently brutal, and the gameplay has constant forward momentum.

The second E3 level is an all-new dynamic for the franchise, and has been the most talked-about section at the developers' desks. The idea is vehicle-based insanity – chariot races. These sequences will be used to transition the player between areas of the vast city of Babylon created for the game. The controls, as lead level designer Stéphen Logier tells us, are designed to be simple, and the races are created to be nothing but large-scale adrenaline rushes. While the build being reviewed in the meeting lacks scripted events and finishing touches, it's still an impressive kilometer run at breakneck speed. The team estimates that the chariot race takes about 60 seconds to play on the show floor – and they wanted more.

"When we talked about the game, we didn't know if the engine could do it. But we're happy with how it looks even now," says Logier. He is ushering us between teams, introducing members and describing what each group is responsible for. Two of his charges, Mohamed Gambouz and Louis Lavoie, have been hunched over keyboards, shrouded in the low lighting preferred by computer junkies, for the past few weeks. Each night they are among the last to leave, and are regarded as some of the most enthusiastic members of the team. Pointing to a large stuffed gorilla on the table behind the pair, Logier jokingly tells us that it's there, "to keep them company." Secretly, we suspect that the plush grin of the ape is probably a welcome respite to their computer monitors on these late nights.

Logier shuffles to the other side of the team's large workspace. "There was a wall here on Saturday," marketing coordinator Florence Baccard says, pointing at the unpainted strip where a wall once crossed the room, the only remaining clue of the space's previous dimensions. Without the heads' up, it could never have been guessed that nearly a third of the designers had moved their desks in just the last few days. The animation team (whose area we are heading to) has desks littered with merchandise from *The Incredibles* and maquettes of more exotic characters arranged in clumps that gives the area the appearance of having been settled far longer.

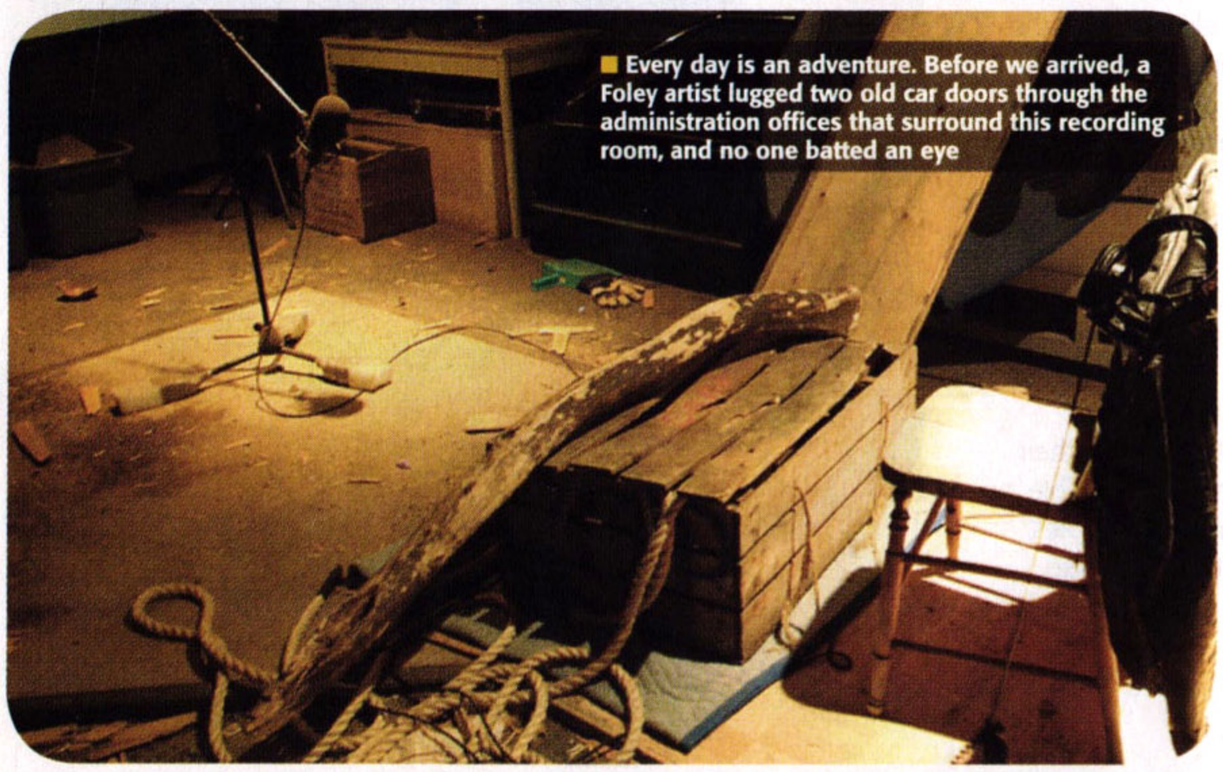
During the meeting earlier in the morning, it was clear that this department has a lot to do before deadline – scripted events, fine-tuning the horse animations during the chariot race, and managing the new platforming moves are all on the to-do list for the build due in Paris on Friday. As we walk by one animator's desk, he talks about finishing the horses' moves, "In theory, it would be good to consult reference footage. But, it would also be good to have the time to do that." The freedom and speed of exploration attempted in the third edition is sold to players through the animation, and the animation team is responsible for making the game's over-the-top acrobatics believable. Perhaps more than in some other types of games, animation is crucial in Prince of Persia titles.

Maintaining the feel of constant forward momentum, both of the playable characters have new ways of getting through the complex environments of Babylon. While running along the steep exteriors of ancient mud-walled buildings, the Dark Prince will be able to swing his chain ahead and extend his reach. To match this increased mobility, the Prince can plant his dagger into the wall to stop at will. Both seemingly minor changes to the PoP formula mean big alterations to the physics engines and level design ideas laid out in earlier titles. Changing the angle of the familiar wall-running-jump-off maneuver from 90 degrees to 45 is another alteration that sounds small, but has almost unending ramifications in the game's design. Although lonely nights at the office and some eyestrain headaches are almost requirements to get these additions into the modified Jade engine the team uses, the changes in gameplay flow are worthwhile to the teams involved.

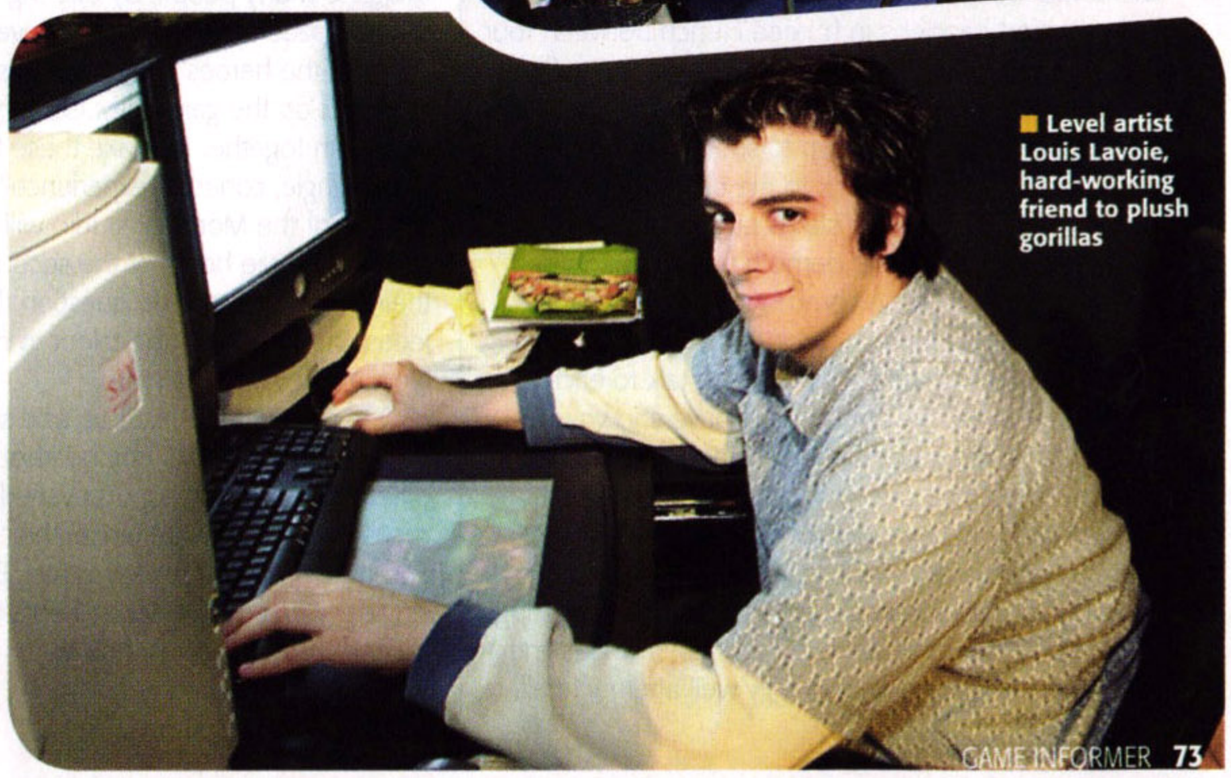
As day one's night turns into day two's early morning, small lights cast circles onto the desks of the most diehard. Some leave at odd hours to use the on-site gym while others almost jump at the opportunity

Prince of Persia 3's team leads: [top row] Gwenael Heliou, Kevin Guillemette, Ben Mattes, Charles Jacob, Yannis Mallat, Olivier Leonardi, Rémi Lacoste, Erwan Davisseau; [middle row] Stéphane Cardin, Jamal Rguigui, Stéphan Logier, Jean-Christophe Guyot; [front row] Hoang Mac Thien Nguyen, Alice Bernier, Eric Visconti

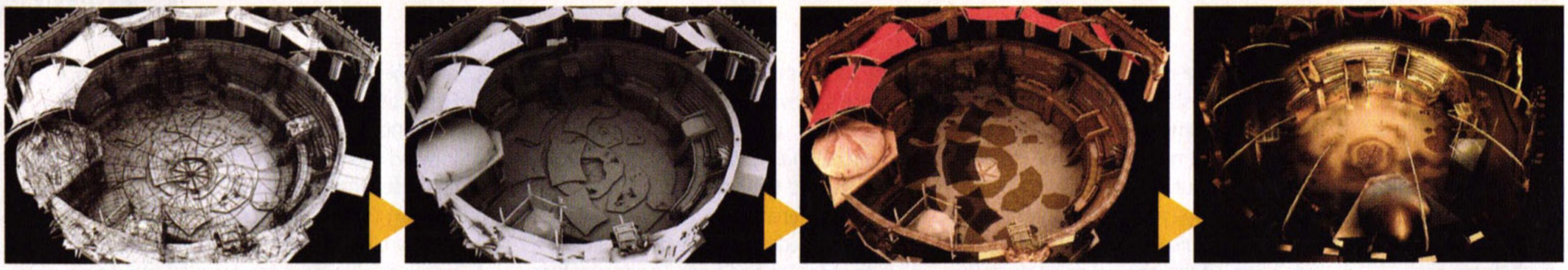
PoP producer Ben Mattes



Every day is an adventure. Before we arrived, a Foley artist lugged two old car doors through the administration offices that surround this recording room, and no one batted an eye



Level artist Louis Lavoie, hard-working friend to plush gorillas



■ The new variety in gameplay is offered through extra combat options, new playable characters, and vehicle sections

(or some would call cheap excuse) to grab a cup of coffee and stand outside for a few minutes. There are clusters of designers around single workstations and debug units, testing the new build and working out how adding a new item broke something else in another area. There is a constant ebb and flow of improvement and setbacks, but the unflinching need to complete tasks never subsides – discussions are held during hurried jaunts up stairwells, while huddled over styrofoam takeout boxes, and as two folks cross paths on the way to the break room. Everything is done at the same time as something else.

Mid-morning of the second day, we follow art director Olivier Leonardi back up to the fourth floor workspace and listen as he discusses the weight of the Dark Prince's chain – he feels that it seems too light in the trailer. This late in the process, there just isn't time to change that for the E3 piece, but in the final game, the links and handle will be redesigned to make the weapon seem more substantial. The entire conversation happens in hurried French between four artists – there is a lot of pointing; gestures of pulling a large, heavy object; and knowing nods. By the end, it seems that everyone is up to speed and all hurry down the stairs to get back to the development teams' room for another status update. It seems that something added to the demo has broken another element in the build. A common sentiment is that one of the hardest parts about managing a team of this size is getting the right people to talk to each other. Thankfully, the right people have shown up quickly to fix the current issue – when asked about it just hours later, no one remembers this small fire.

Even with only two days of observation, it's clear that the group has a rhythm. They assemble in the morning, order food at dusk ("They've been ordering in every night for the last few months," one designer tells us), and leave a little groggy well after nightfall. Still, the mood isn't one of quiet desperation or endless slogging. "The E3 build is important for the show, obviously, but also for the team," Mallat tells us. "It shows them that what they're working on is actually making something."

While game design offers more and more artistic expression, the result is still a product – something that needs to sell, hopefully to the masses. By taking the best parts and ideas from the first two games and weaving them together, PoP 3 could unite the forces of fans from each entry. Squatting in a hallway between meetings, Mattes talks about how the content of the demo is finalized. Everything that goes in is a compromise, decisions are made to both have impact and be efficient. "We want the Dark Prince and we want the roofs of Babylon. It's a no brainer – put them together. [Do] we want the feeling of being hunted? Put in the chariot race," he explains.

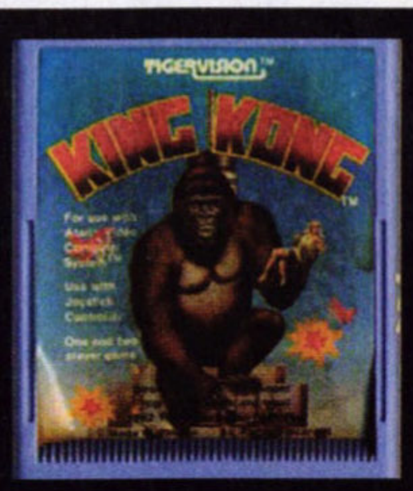
Prince of Persia 3's design explores this idea of being the hunter and the hunted. It tries to be many things to many people by offering multiple combat styles, crazed races over the uneven elevations of the city, and the heroes' dual personas are another way to switch up the gameplay. Can one development team join together to make these fractured ideas gel into a single, cohesive experience? In the end, no one outside of the Montreal studio will know until this fall; but by the wee hours of the second day nestled in their offices, there is no question that they have the ideas, the drive, and the talent to make it happen. Now all they need is time.

Other studios are like this, and some are most definitely not. What is unique about the team is their differences – this is a group varied in every possible measure by their experience, their tastes, their roles, and their methods of expression. But they are also singularly united. The team wants to make a game for all, and for themselves. ■■■

While on the rooftops, the Prince has an advantage over his foes. Down in the alleys, though, it's a totally different ballgame

Still being formally named, the Dark Prince's chain weapon is brutal and beautiful to watch

■ Many elements in the environment are destructible, much to the disappointment of the guy on the bridge



KING VS. DONKEY

Although Peter Jackson's version of the character will redefine how King Kong is seen by the world, everyone knows he's appeared on film many times before. But did you know that the giant gorilla has already starred in his own game? In 1982, Universal Studios allowed Tiger Electronics to make a King Kong game that was a pale imitation of Donkey Kong in order to prove that Nintendo and Coleco had damaged the value of the King Kong property with the Donkey Kong game. However, Universal ended up looking the fool when it was revealed that the movie studio didn't even have the rights to King Kong in the first place – it had waited until the original movie became public domain so it could film its 1976 remake without paying for the rights.

XBOX 360 | PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

Peter Jackson's King Kong

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** UBISOFT **> DEVELOPER** UBISOFT MONTPELLIER **> RELEASE** WINTER

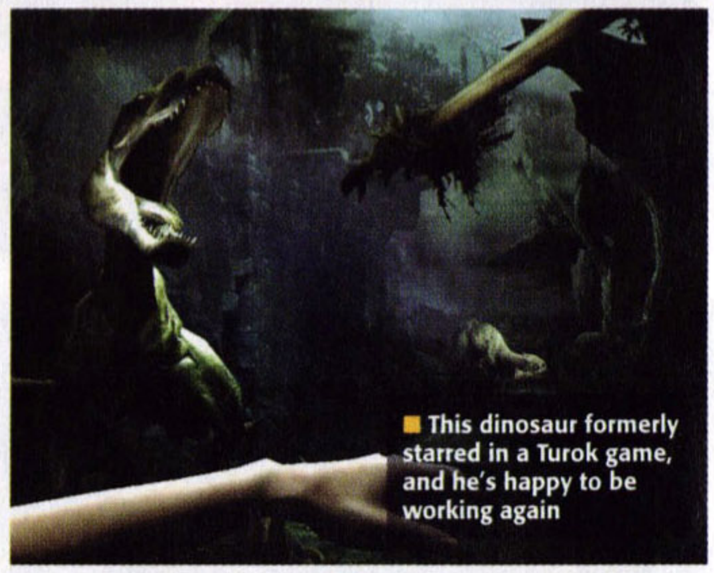
HAIL TO THE KING

Several months ago, Ubisoft announced that it was working with Peter Jackson to create the official video game of his upcoming film, *King Kong*. Jackson handpicked Rayman creator Michel Ancel after playing through his most recent game, Beyond Good & Evil. The collaboration between these two visionary creators was enough to get us excited about the project, but after seeing the game in action at E3, we're downright stunned by how it is coming together.

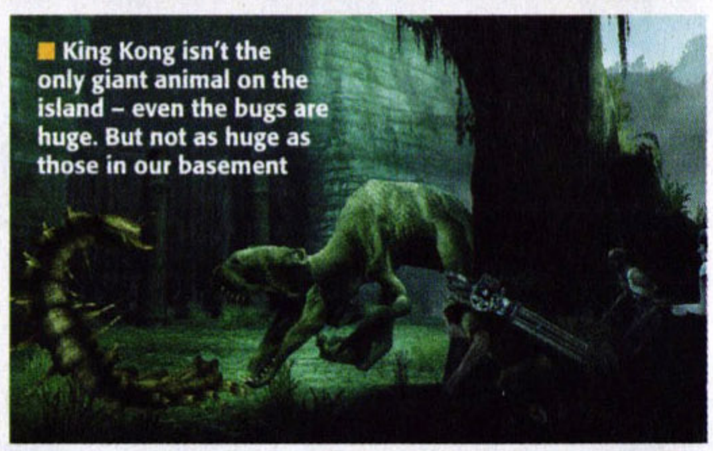
Peter Jackson's King Kong is primarily a first-person shooter starring Jack Driscoll, the character played by Adrien Brody in the film. The E3 demo emphasized cooperation between the player and two AI characters, who would perform actions like opening gates while Jack covered them by throwing spears at angry natives, carrying wounded NPCs to cover, and tossing the player spears during a frantic whitewater river chase. The spears and guns make up Jack's arsenal, and he'll need them; Skull Island is home to dinosaurs and other prehistoric threats. In the aforementioned chase segment, Jack and his friends are pursued down the river by not one, but two hungry Tyrannosaurus Rexes. Shooting the giant dinosaurs slows them down a little, but doesn't appear to truly hurt them. Based on the E3 demo, it seems that the key to gameplay is to use the environment against the creatures hunting you. For example, by shooting a winged creature flying near a T. Rex, the carnivore will stop to eat the wounded animal, buying you precious time to get away. Jack and his friends are basically powerless to stop many of the larger creatures, but fortunately, King Kong can handle them easily.

At the end of the river segment in the demo, the player runs straight into the giant gorilla. At this point, Kong becomes the main character, and gameplay switches to third-person action in which gamers take on the role of Kong and duke it out with the two Rexes in some truly brutal action. Kong has a selection of devastating punches, ground pounds, and grapples, and can even bite into enemies with his massive teeth. He can also grab a dinosaur by the mouth and wrench its jaws apart until they snap.

The combination of Kong's fierce third-person segments and the intense first-person action seems to blend well together for a video game that so far looks like the perfect example of what a title based on a blockbuster movie should be. ■ ■ ■



■ This dinosaur formerly starred in a Turok game, and he's happy to be working again



■ King Kong isn't the only giant animal on the island – even the bugs are huge. But not as huge as those in our basement

■ "Okay, throw! If I catch this in my mouth, you totally owe me ten bucks."

"Okay, Bob, rush 'em! You can totally take this guy! We'll stay here behind the rock."

By shooting the T. Rex, you'll distract it long enough for your friends to open the gate. But this means it will come straight for you...

Jack's crew is on Skull Island to make a documentary about the amazing wildlife that lives there

"Crap! How did Batman find me here?"

■ Link uses his new Heavenly Tush power to stun this foe

■ Midna and wolf Link both possess attacks

GAMECUBE

The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/ADVENTURE **> PUBLISHER** NINTENDO **> DEVELOPER** NINTENDO **> RELEASE** TBA

THE WAIT IS ALMOST OVER

With the next generation of gaming rapidly approaching, the release of The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess will likely represent the GameCube's finest and final hour. Needless to say, it would appear that Nintendo plans to end this era with a bang that will resonate for ages.

Game Informer was granted the rare opportunity to sit down with director Eiji Aonuma and series creator Shigeru Miyamoto to find out exactly what makes this Zelda adventure tick. We also managed to get our hands on the game. Up until now, the buzz surrounding it has been that of "adult Link" and a "next-generation Ocarina of Time." While both of these monikers highlight certain aspects of the game, we are now seeing that Nintendo is greatly expanding upon the series' lore and trying something much different with this game.

The title "Twilight Princess" may not sound like much, but it actually embodies the true essence of the game much like "The Wind Waker" explained that release. As Aonuma pointed out, there are two planes of existence in the game: The normal world of Hyrule and the twilight realm. As the game progresses, we learn that Hyrule is being devoured by the dark dimension. As Aonuma put it, the land is being "twilightified". Princess Zelda mourns the contamination of her world by shrouding her pain with a black cloak that, interestingly, is inspired by garments worn to Japanese funerals.

Link, who has been called in to stop this scourge, cannot survive in the twilight. Somehow, in ways that are out of his control, Link magically transforms into a wolf within the twilight world. In this form, Link can survive in the alternate plane. His senses are also heightened significantly. He can hear things he couldn't before, and will even be able to see elements of the world that were previously hidden. Interestingly, Aonuma hinted at the fact that Princess Zelda is somehow connected to Link's metamorphosis.

Within this dark world, our hero befriends an elegantly garbed resident of the twilight named Midna, who claims to know why Link has transformed. Dangling this knowledge in front of him like a carrot in front of a horse, Midna persuades Link into doing her bidding. Eventually, their two fates become intertwined and they need each other to survive.

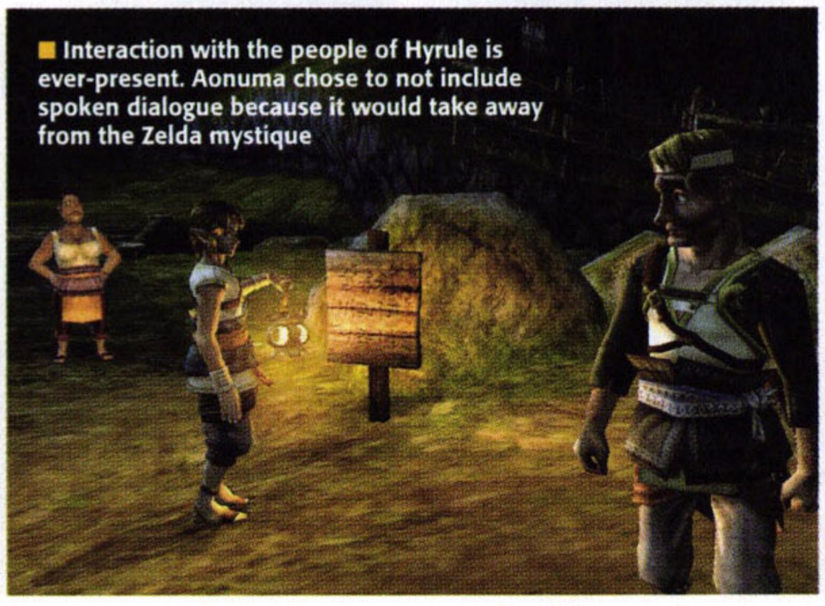
When confronted about gameplay specifics, Nintendo didn't want to divulge too much information, but did give us a taste of what to expect. Rather than just rehashing the same items and weapons from the previous entries in the series, Aonuma hopes to introduce new armaments and overhaul the existing ones. For instance, the Boomerang of old can now produce small whirlwinds and has rightfully been renamed the Gale Boomerang. The best demonstration we saw of this weapon in action was against an enormous plant boss. Link must first lock the Boomerang onto a monkey carrying a bomb, then onto the boss before actually throwing it. By doing this, the Boomerang snatches the bomb from the monkey and propels it at the vulnerable spot on the boss. The plant then lowers its guard, allowing Link the window he needs to unsheathe his sword and go in for the kill.

■ "Feed me, Seymour!"

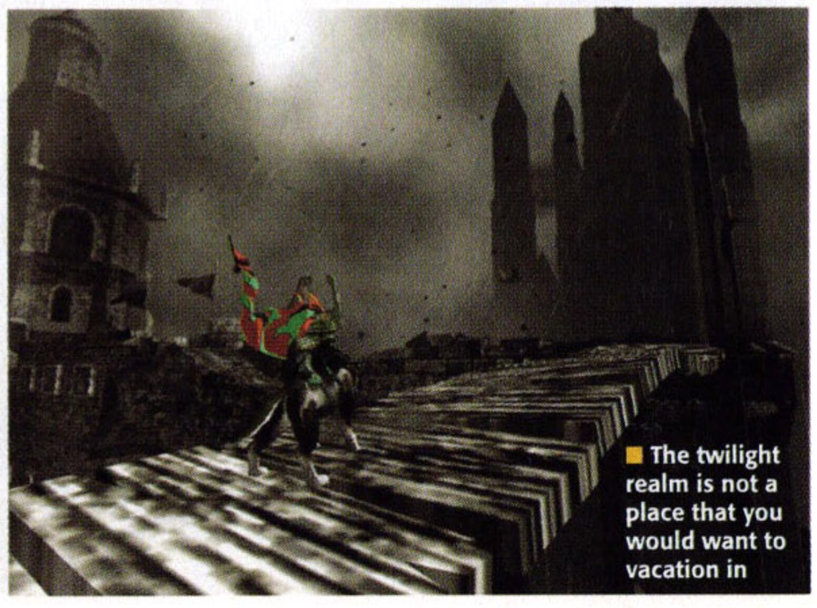
Another area where Aonuma wishes to evolve the series is through the inclusion of Link's trusty stead Epona. When the game begins, Link is working as a ranch hand, and of course, Epona plays a huge role in this. While rounding up cattle seems like fun, the true spirit of this horse is captured in the battles that erupt within the vast expanses of Hyrule. Link and Epona will face off against an army of boar-riding orcs, which ends with a jousting match against the orc general on a bridge.

This is the first Zelda adventure that will feature orchestrated music, and surely the first to be compared to *Teen Wolf*. Aonuma and his team are using a familiar map to bring the series into uncharted territory. This may feel like the Zelda you know and love, but it will most certainly leave you with a fresh set of memories. No release date has been given just yet, but all signs point toward it being on store shelves before year's end. ■■■

■ In this jousting segment, you'll need to swerve out of the way quickly, then apply a timely strike to send the orc general to an early grave



■ Interaction with the people of Hyrule is ever-present. Aonuma chose to not include spoken dialogue because it would take away from the Zelda mystique



■ The twilight realm is not a place that you would want to vacation in

Even blood-hungry monsters think that Link dresses like a freak

"Hey, Link! Me and this hor
are just hanging out. Why can
you hang like this horse?"

The primate in the background isn't shy about showing you his pink butt. Seriously. You'll see more of it than you care to. Disturbing nightmares ahoy!

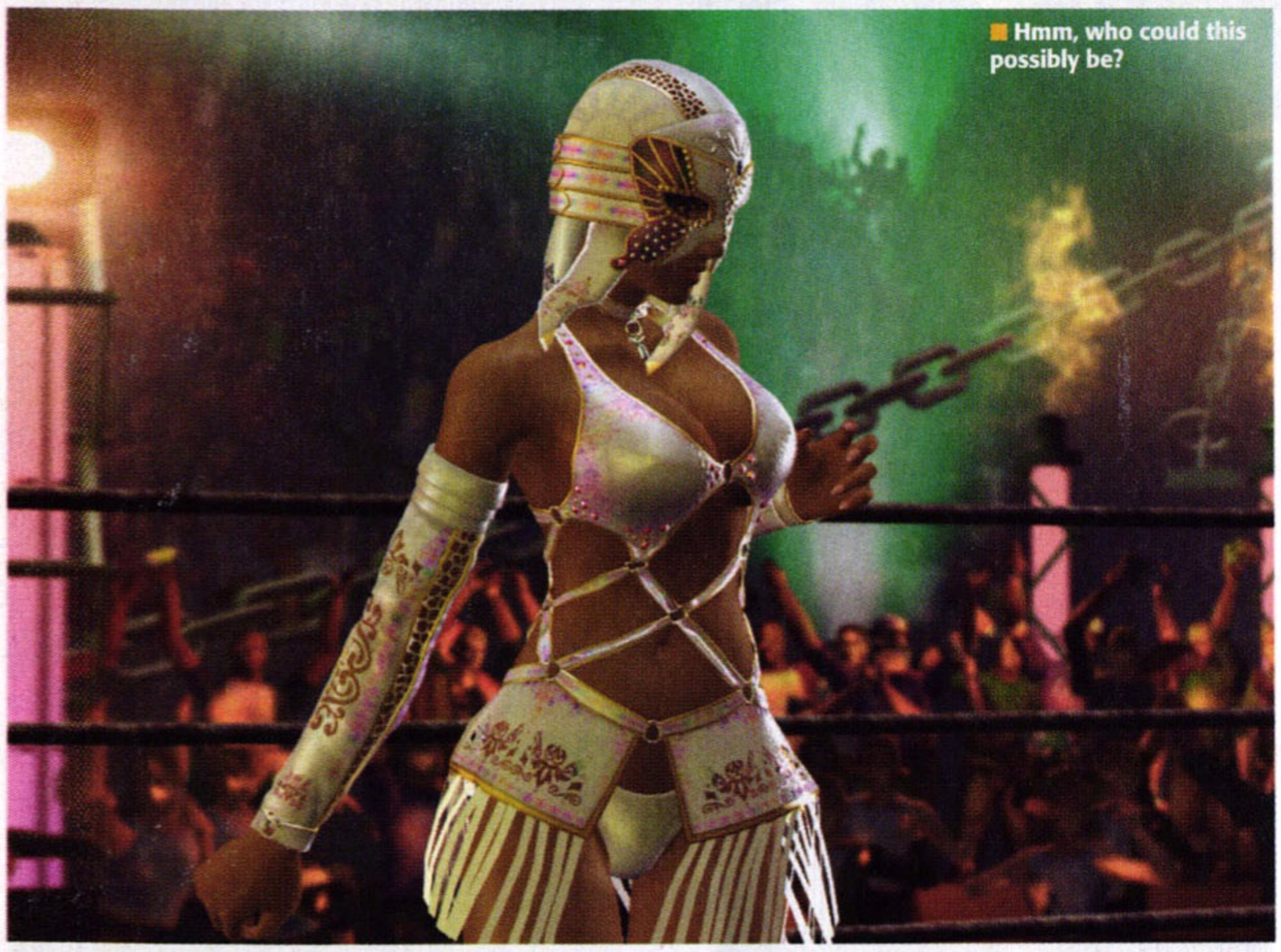
Adult Link or Jonathan Taylor Thomas Link? You be the judge

Princess Zelda is often ridiculed by her people for dressing like a Jawa

"It's all Princess Zelda's fault! She's jealous! She's holding me back!"

In this dungeon, the monkeys will help you reach new areas

"My milkshake brings all the boys to the yard!"



Hmm, who could this possibly be?

XBOX 360

Dead or Alive 4

> STYLE 1-PLAYER FIGHTING (MULTIPLAYER TBA) **> PUBLISHER** TECMO **> DEVELOPER** TEAM NINJA
> RELEASE WINTER 2005

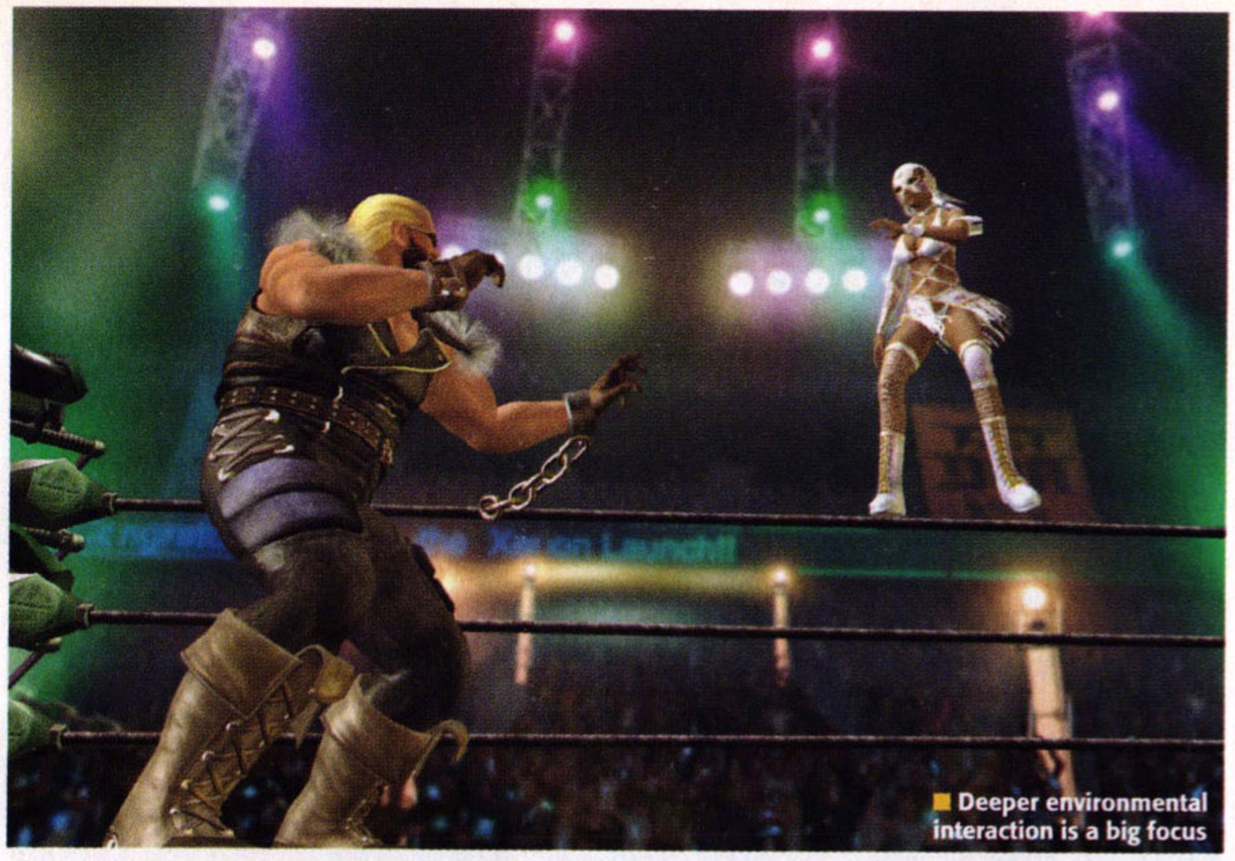
LEADING THE CHARGE

If there's anything that Tomonobu Itagaki and his Team NINJA can be applauded for, it's the drive to constantly be at the forefront of technology and graphics. This latest iteration of DOA is no exception, as the team continues to push the established boundaries of lighting, animation, and dynamic movement beyond anything yet seen.

We sat down with Mr. Itagaki at E3, where he detailed his plans for the new installment. He started by describing some of the technical feats that have been made available due to the tremendous power of the new Xbox. "For DOA 4, I promise your readers that online will be greatly expanded. It's going to be more enjoyable to be with people longer," Itagaki hinted, implying the potential for huge online tournaments and large number of spectators that the new Xbox Live features will allow for. He also detailed his graphical focus for the upcoming title. "I happen to be very much into cameras, myself. So rather than focusing on what color we're going to paint the object or scene with, which is what most people talk about, we're focusing on what camera to use and how." Itagaki also revealed his ambitious plans for physics and movement in the new game. "There are many famous physics engines, but those are primarily for FPS. There are no well-known engines specifically for action/fighting games. So we are making an original one, ourselves.

Hitomi and Christie disagree about who has the more impractical fighting boots

Meet Kokoro, Tecmo's newest heartbreaker



Deeper environmental interaction is a big focus

Kasumi's new chiropractor has questionable methods

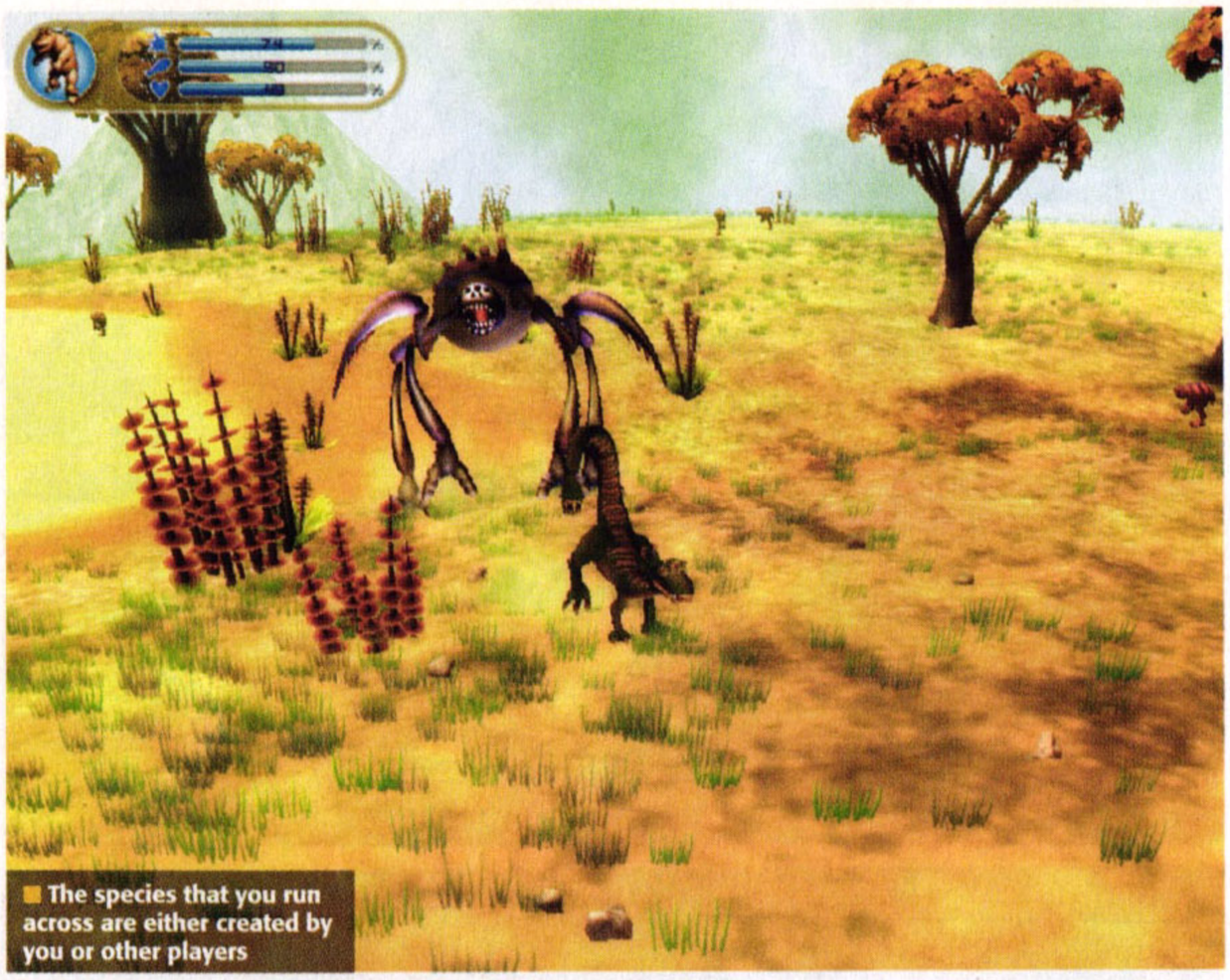
It's very exciting."

We also learned some surprising details about who and what will be included in the team's first Xbox 360 game. "In every installment we focus on one character, and this time it's Helena." Itagaki explained "For some fans, when they saw DOAU movies, it was hard to understand what it all meant, because it was done in a very Japanese style. DOA 4 is going to be done in a very westernized style, so fans will be able to understand easier." Itagaki was hesitant to reveal too many details on the expansive list of new, returning, and hidden characters, but we did learn of at least three. Kokoro is the beautiful new dark-haired fighter revealed at Microsoft's E3 press conference. Eliot is another new face: a young blonde man who utilizes a quick style dominated by open palm strikes. And while Itagaki has been loathe to speak about the true identity of the dark-skinned mystery wrestler, fans should have little trouble guessing the likely identity of the figure as Lisa, heretofore only seen on the beaches of a volleyball court. Plus, we also know some favorites from DOA 3 will be returning, including Christie and Brad Wong.

What we've seen of DOA 4 so far has been nothing if not impressive. While it can be easy to dismiss the graphical upgrades apparent in these screens in comparison with the last title in the series, try to remember two distinct facts. DOA Ultimate was one of the finest-looking titles on the first Xbox. Secondly, it's important to note how little these screens illustrate the incredible artistry of movement that the game exhibits in action. It doesn't take more than a few glimpses of individual hairs moving independently and cloth shifting like it's a living thing to conclude DOA 4 is indeed a tremendous step forward, and a game to watch as the 360 launch window draws ever closer. ■■■

The new reverse gravity mode should be cool. Would we lie to you?

"If I've told you once, I've told you a million times – no bananas for you!"



The species that you run across are either created by you or other players

Every little aspect of the buildings can be altered by the player

PC

Spore

> STYLE 1-PLAYER SIMULATION **> PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS **> DEVELOPER** MAXIS **> RELEASE** FALL 2006

THE HAND OF GOD

From a microcosm to a macrocosm, from a world contained within a single droplet of water to a universe saturated with life on hundreds of thousands of worlds, Spore takes gamers on an intergalactic journey fueled by discovery and creation, and begs the simple question, "Do you have what it takes to play God?" With development spearheaded by the visionary Will Wright, the unpronounced king of the simulation genre and creator of Sim City and The Sims, this ambitious project defies classification and is shaping up to be one of the most unique gaming experiences to date.

Like many of Wright's previous works, Spore's gameplay is endless, making it not just a game, but a potential hobby. You start out controlling a microorganism that resides within a single droplet of water. Inspired by the simple top-down gameplay of Pac-Man, this creature's lot in life is to devour organic blobs. When enough are digested, the creature will eventually lay an egg. Before the offspring is born, the player will have the chance to alter its DNA. Wright demonstrated how easy and effective this aspect of the game is by adding a horn to the head of this life form. This simple transformation completely changed the game. The creature could now attack other living things, thus creating another source of food. As evolution took its course, the creature grew into a multicellular organism that could leave its humble abode and explore the oceans. When this happens, the game transitions to complete 3D. Within the rolling seas, there are new creatures to feed on and new dangers to avoid.

Wright then brought up the customization menu again and started playing around with the skeletal structure of his denizen of the deep. The spine of the fish could be contorted any which way he desired, and he even had the ability to add to its physiology. "It's very much like playing with clay," Wright adds. "You can create anything that you can imagine." With but a click of the button, Wright gave his creature three legs. By dropping it into the world again, his creature began walking on land.

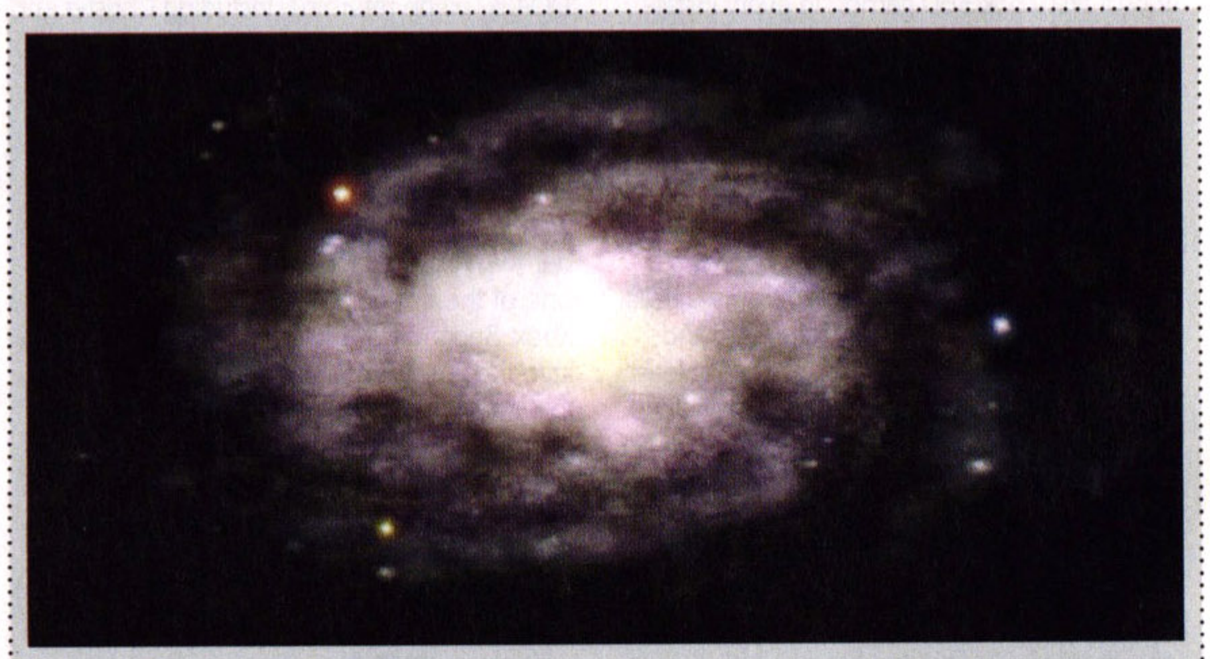
"As time goes on," Wright pointed out, "your creation will learn how to reproduce." By sending out a mating call, his creature made contact with another of its kind. After some hanky panky, another egg was eventually laid. As time went on, a small family grew into an entire society.

Growing more intelligent, this species learned how to build structures, create fire, and even wield weapons. At this point in the game, it becomes more like Populous. Panning the camera away from his tribe to the uncharted distance, Wright stumbled upon another advanced civilization. Before long, the two cultures were locked in war. Through time, the technology for each side grew exponentially better. The war, which humbly began with warriors wielding spears, soon featured tanks and planes.

Moving forward in time even further, Wright then showed off the next step in the game. He created a spacecraft. Abducting a lowly animal from his planet, Wright then rocketed into space. After circling the creature's world, the ship departed into the unexplored deep. The entire solar system lay right before our eyes. Clicking on another planet, Wright zoomed his ship down and dropped the creature onto the surface. Without an atmosphere to support it, the animal promptly exploded. "Maybe we should have terraformed the planet first," Wright mused. And that's just what he did. He created volcanoes that would eventually aid in the formation of an atmosphere and a suitable habitat for the species of his world.

Wright then flew his spacecraft even further into space to show off the galaxy. Amid the blue giants and nebulas, Wright dragged his cursor over the different systems. "Sound is very important out here," he pointed out. As his cursor graced a specific system, radio transmissions from an alien species filled our ears. With haste, Wright maneuvered his craft to the surface. As his saucer hovered above the alien civilization, he made contact through music stylized after *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. When the last note was played, the aliens launched an attack. Wright retreated to space. "Looks like I will have to teach them a lesson," he said. In retaliation, he blew up their planet. "You won't get this power until late into the game," he added. Interestingly, in the wake of the explosion, and as time passed, the debris from the planet formed an asteroid ring around this system's sun.

From primordial ooze to the most advanced technology in the cosmos, Spore allows you to experience everything that life has to offer. In the fall of 2006, hours will quickly disappear as you apply personal touches to your creature designs, days will vanish as you enhance the structures and technology of your civilizations, and weeks and months will fly by as you quest to either explore or conquer the entire galaxy. From what we've seen, Wright has been able to capture the essence of evolution in gameplay that is simple enough for everyone to understand and enjoy. ■■■



OWNING THE GAME

All of the exotic wildlife that you stumble across, and every structure and vehicle that you see in the game is user created. Whenever you go to the customization menu to tweak the appearance of your creations, your design is transmitted and stored within Maxis' servers. It is then copied and channeled to everyone else playing the game. So, if you create a hideous beast with eight legs that is incredibly aggressive and hungry for blood, there's a chance that it may show up in someone else's game and devour their beloved creature. When you make the evolutionary leap to explore the entire universe, you'll have the chance to interact with entire player-created worlds. Not just a few, either – Wright hopes that you'll be able to explore hundreds of thousands of them. "Think of it as a massively multiplayer single player game," Wright jokes. Interestingly, you'll receive reports detailing how other players are interacting with your created content.

■ By combining actions, you'll be able to create new verbs and abilities for your creatures. For instance, if your creature is feasting on a carcass, you can combine walking with this function to create the ability to drag

■ When you gain the ability to travel into space, you can pan out and see the entire world, or better yet, travel to different solar systems

■ The game begins within a droplet of water

Don't mess with Jimmy when he's having a bad day

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Bully

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** ROCKSTAR GAMES **> DEVELOPER** ROCKSTAR VANCOUVER **> RELEASE** OCTOBER

ANOTHER BRICK IN THE WALL

Rockstar is known for following its muse wherever it may lead. In the last few years, the company has explored worlds as diverse as Midnight Club's illegal street racing circuits, the mind of a killer in Manhunt, the drug-fueled 1980s in Vice City, and the ravaged plains of the Wild West in Red Dead Revolver. Now, the most controversial company in video games is preparing to take you back to school.

After releasing a vague announcement of the game prior to the show, Rockstar finally revealed its next major project, and the first title developed by Rockstar Vancouver, Bully. If you've tired of gunning down mobsters or eviscerating aliens, the game will offer you an environment that's been little explored in gaming history.

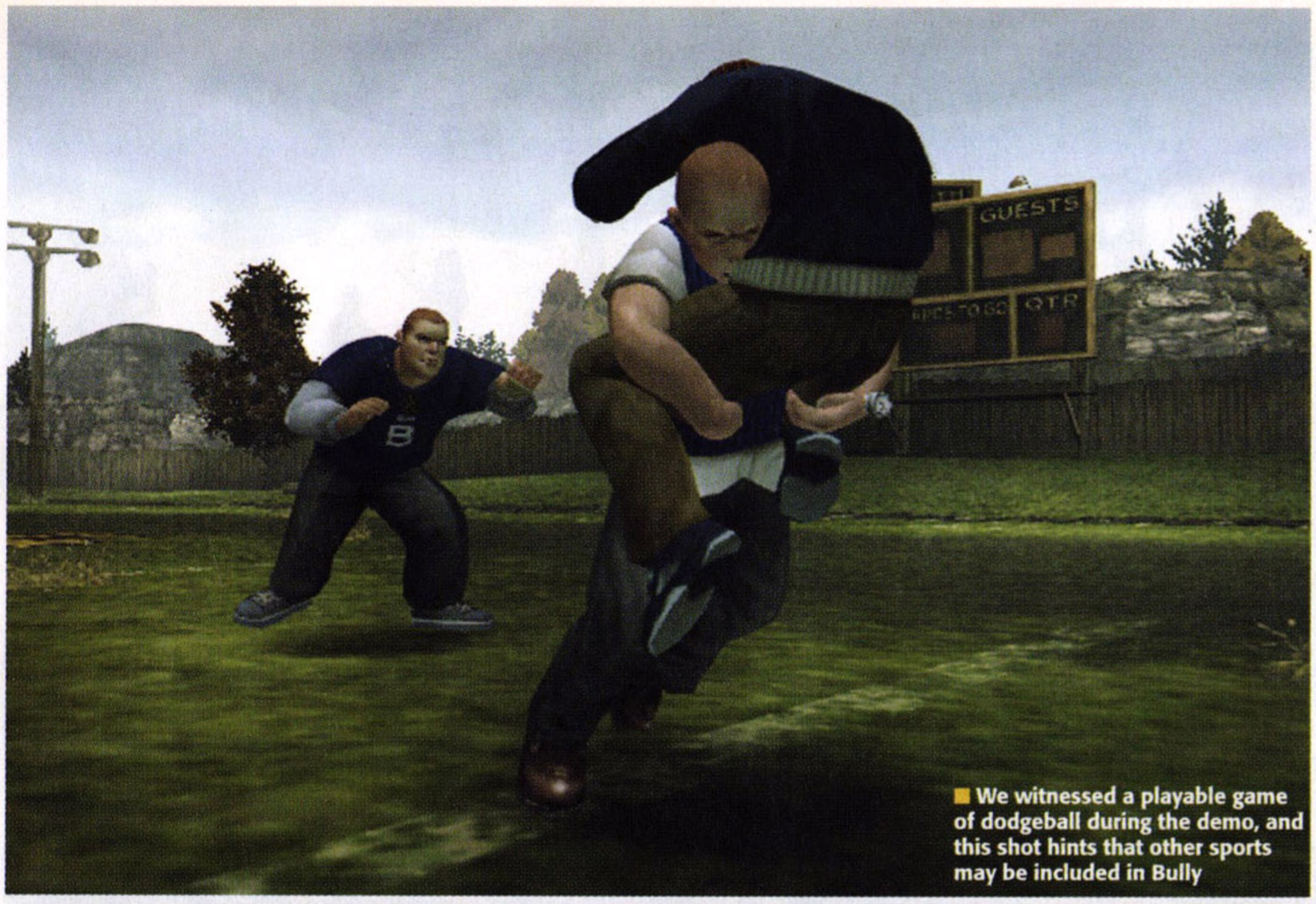
Bully's protagonist is Jimmy Hopkins, a ne'er-do-well 15-year-old who has been kicked out of a string of prestigious prep schools due to his delinquent behavior. At the outset of the game, his negligent mother, who is on her way to her fifth honeymoon, drops Jimmy off at Bullworth Academy. Bullworth represents Jimmy's last chance to make a go of it, and gamers will soon find that negotiating the cliquish social structure of middle school is every bit as difficult as slaying orcs in the halls of Middle-earth.

While intriguing on paper, we were curious to see how a day in the life of Jimmy Hopkins would play out in Bully. Thankfully, we had the good fortune to see a brief demo of the game at E3, which lent some insight into the game's inner workings. We watched Jimmy wake up in a messy dorm room, late for class as usual. From there, he headed straight to the men's room to heed nature's call (for all the bathrooms we've toured in games, this is one of the few times we've actually seen the facilities used). We also saw the common room in the dorm, where students can purchase sodas, watch a working television, and even play darts. There, a prefect (older students who help enforce order) told us to get dressed for class, which was an opportunity to show off the game's extensive apparel customization mode.

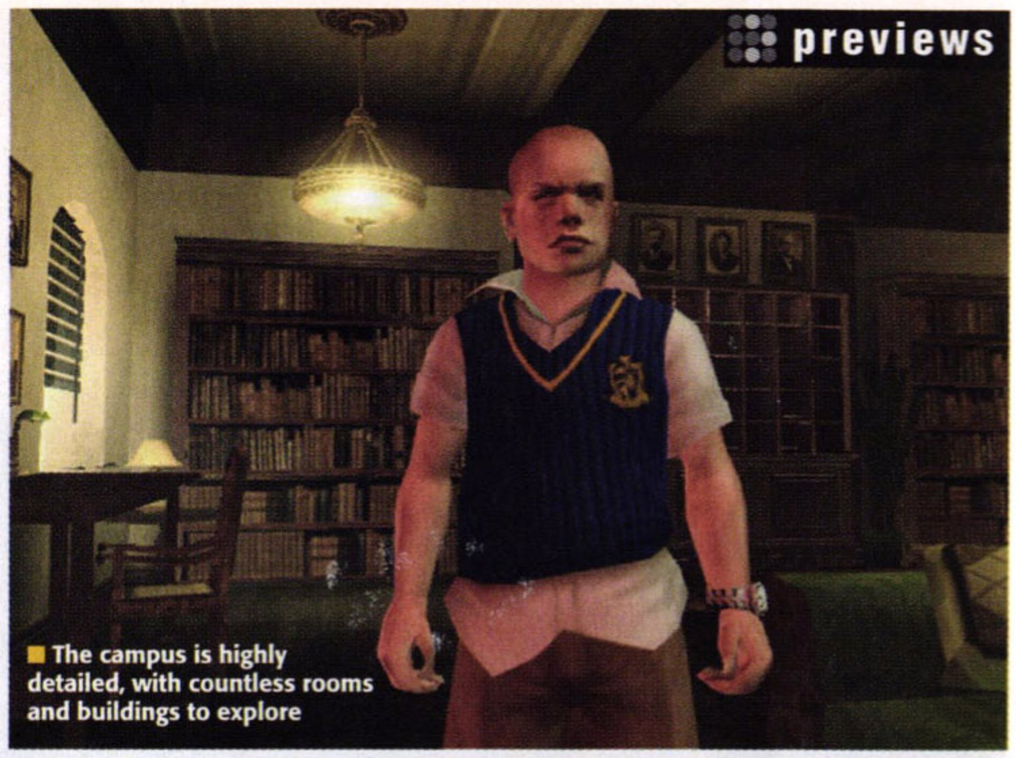
Walking around campus, we were awed by the sheer detail that's gone into creating Bullworth Academy. Various campus buildings and facilities like the gym and football field will all be put to use (of course, dodgeball is fully playable in the game), and roaming bands of jocks, nerds, and preppies, all who will fraternize with or antagonize Jimmy depending on their mood and social status.

Aside from exploring the huge playground that is Bullworth, you'll also be tasked to complete various missions. In the one example we saw, a rather unhinged science teacher was upset that a wealthy student had procured a prize Venus Flytrap plant identical to his own. Of course, there can be only one, so he forces Jimmy to dispose of it. After getting the code to the posh dorm Harrington Hall by administering a swirly to a preppie, he infiltrated the house and dispensed a beatdown of the posh boys with a cricket bat. Following a shootout with our trusty slingshot, the plant was blown to bits with an expertly placed firecracker.

Although Rockstar is known for controversy, Bully is far different in tone than Grand Theft Auto or Manhunt (and will be Teen rated when it launches in October). Jimmy gets in his fair share of trouble, but there is no blood or graphic violence, and the overall tone is one of comic mischief. It's clear that Rockstar intends this as a somewhat nostalgic tribute to school days, one that captures all the confusion and fun of that period in life. It's certainly a departure from the standard video game fare, and it's admirable to see a high profile company taking risks with unproven subject matter. Based on what we saw, it's too early to give Bully a passing grade, but Rockstar promises that the game will be every bit as epic and engrossing as the games that have made the company into an industry powerhouse. It's a fascinating gamble, and we're excited to see how Bully develops. Given Rockstar's stellar track record over the past few years, we expect great things. ■■■



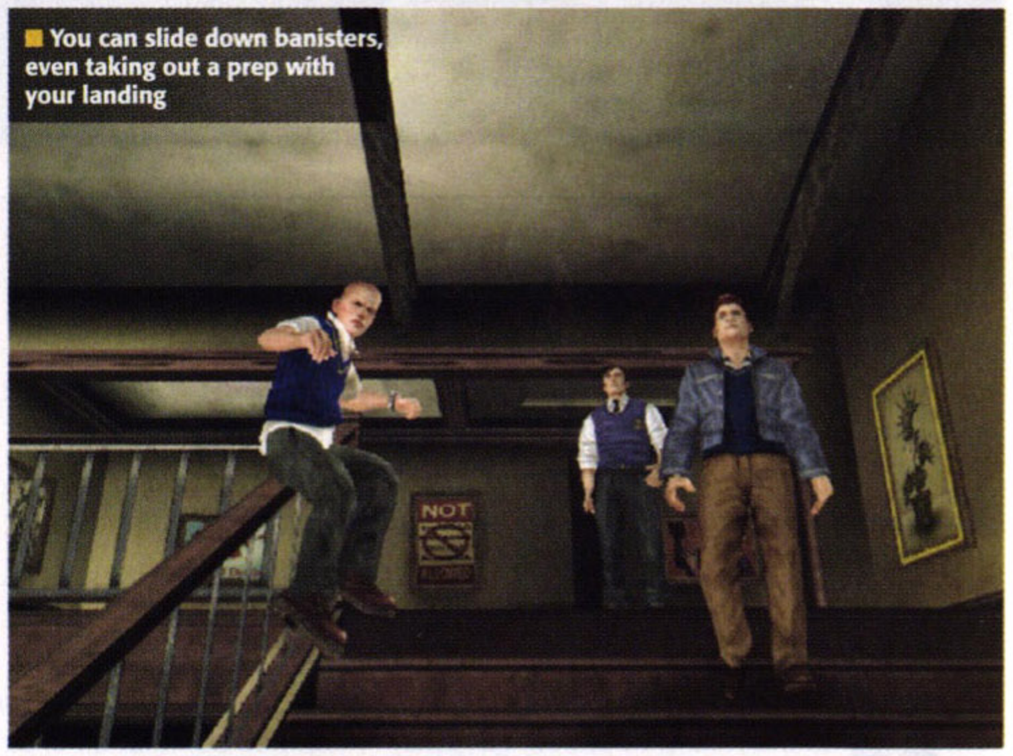
We witnessed a playable game of dodgeball during the demo, and this shot hints that other sports may be included in Bully



The campus is highly detailed, with countless rooms and buildings to explore

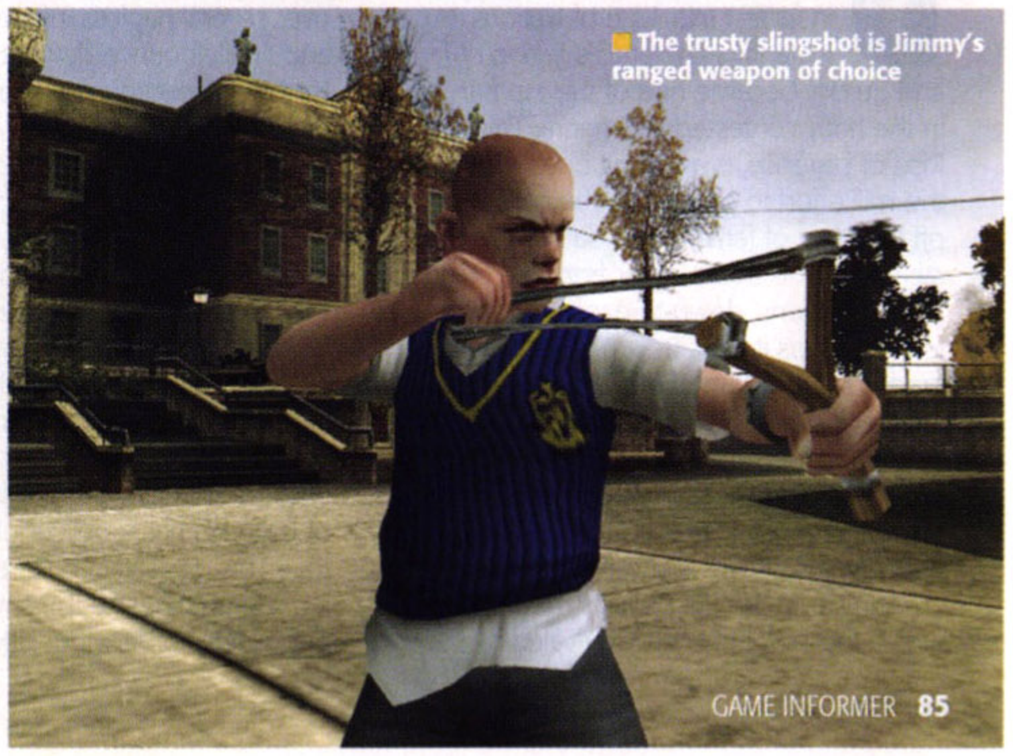
Violating the rules of hacky sack? Is nothing sacred?

The Swirly: Humiliating Nerds Since 1933

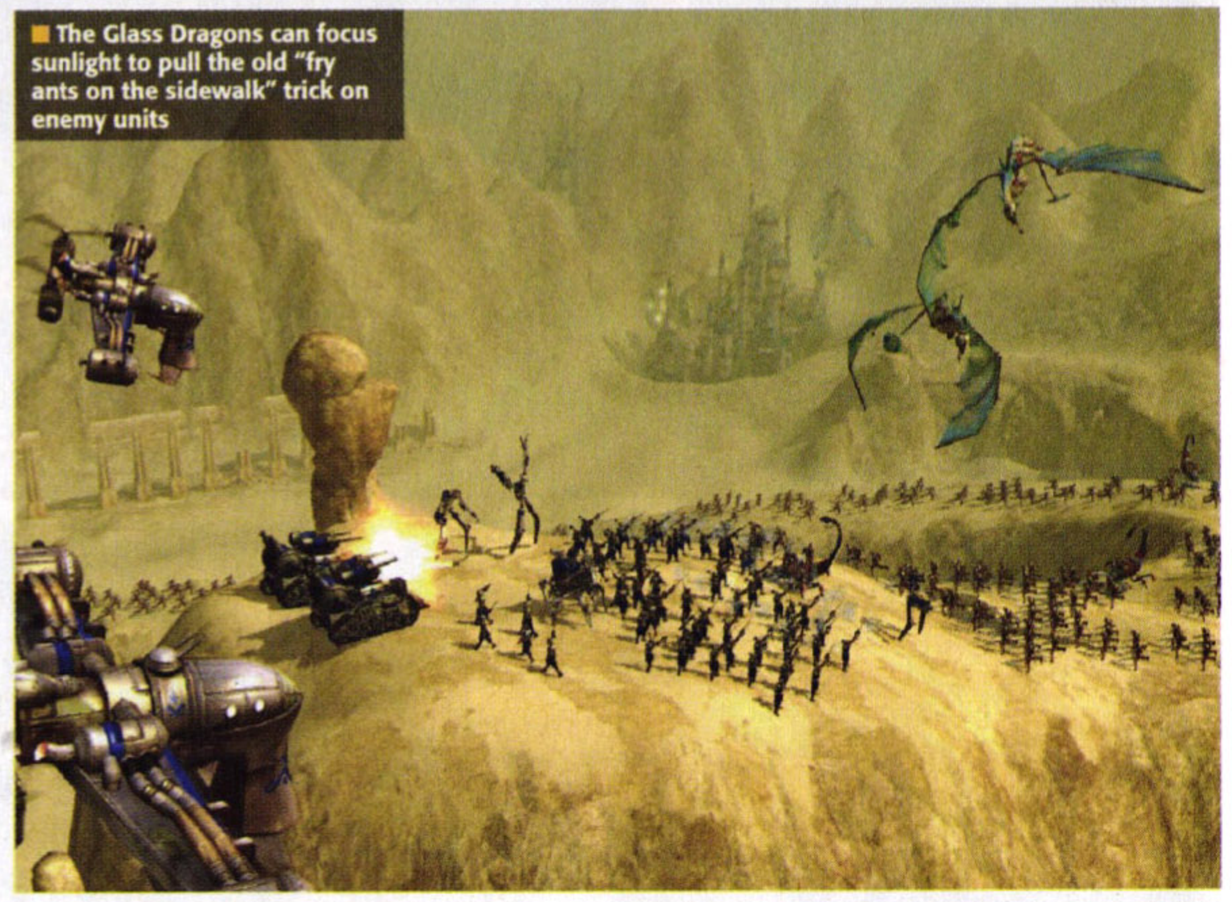


You can slide down banisters, even taking out a prep with your landing

Although the game isn't as violent as many Rockstar games, Jimmy does his fair share of fighting



The trusty slingshot is Jimmy's ranged weapon of choice



■ The Glass Dragons can focus sunlight to pull the old "fry ants on the sidewalk" trick on enemy units

PC

Rise of Nations: Rise of Legends

> STYLE 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (MULTIPLAYER TBA) **> PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS
> DEVELOPER BIG HUGE GAMES **> RELEASE** 2006

FANTASY STEAM PUNK ASCENDANT

Developer Big Huge Games' creative take on real-time strategy gameplay in its first title, Rise of Nations, instantly generated a legion of fans and quickly became one of the top franchises in the hotly contested RTS genre. This sequel, Rise of Legends, is anything but a run-of-the-mill effort to cash in on the name. This off-beat mix of fantasy and da Vinci-esque steam punk is about as far from the original Rise of Nations' down-to-earth historical subject matter as it gets. Beyond the superlative graphics, the fusion of old and new concepts already looks to be making for a heck of a game.

The first and most obvious improvement in Rise of Legends is in the stunning presentation. Overall fidelity and detail are simply amazing, and the full physics modeling creates a feeling of immersion rivaled by very few in the strategy world. We saw a gigantic cannon barrel fall off of an emplacement, roll over several hapless infantry and kill them, and finally bounce down a mountainside. Nothing about this devastation was scripted; thanks to RoL's wonderful engine, this sort of thing happens completely on the fly depending on the situation on the battlefield. It's these kinds of jaw-dropping events, commonplace in Rise of Legends, that really take the visuals to the next level.

The art direction and general ambience help in this as well. From the Vinci nation, which takes its design from the sketches of the legendary inventor, to the Arabian Nights-inspired Alini faction's mythical creatures, Rise of Legends has a delightfully fantastic feeling to it. This is greatly facilitated by your cities looking nothing like the sprawling collections of buildings of previous titles. Every district you construct will connect with its neighbors to form a far more organic-looking base – the several that we saw were all unique and gorgeous in their own way, and seemed to be more works of art than unit factories. And in this era of numbingly generic Lord of the Rings impersonators and World War II games, that's nothing to sneeze at.

So the graphics are great, but what's the point if Rise of Legends merely plays like Derivative RTS Number 403? As anyone who played the first game can tell you, Big Huge Games is anything but a me-too studio, and Rise of Legends bears this out. Though it follows the innovative formula set forth in its predecessor, RoL looks to offer enough novelty to easily satisfy fans and newcomers alike. Each nation in this title has two unique tech tracks to pursue, and the variation between magic- and technology-based civilizations offers a ton of unique content. It's still a year or so from release, but we've already seen enough of Rise of Legends to put it right at the top of our short list of awesome PC titles – and given the Herculean strength of software shown at E3, that's no mean feat. ■■■

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Black

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 6-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR PS2 ONLINE) **> PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS **> DEVELOPER** CRITERION GAMES **> RELEASE** WINTER

TICK, TICK, BOOM

The gloves are off. Masquerading as a standard military shooter, Criterion's Black is set to kill the competition by cranking the volume and explosively demolishing the game world as we know it. With a high-impact E3 demo under its belt, the busy studio responsible for the Burnout series is now steering the hype wagon directly at its sure-to-be hit.

Levels start predictably enough as a team of military men is dumped into an already war-torn urban setting. They fan out, moving from upturned vehicles to half-destroyed concrete walls. Enemies ahead are speckling the safe zones with suppressing fire while bits of debris and puffs of dust waft up. Before the action even heats up, players will need to pinch themselves and remember that this is on current-gen hardware, specifically Xbox and PS2.

We watch as one of the good guys stands up, aims his machine gun at a store's neon sign, unloads a quick burst, and crushes a few opponents underneath. It's at this point that Black's primary mission becomes more clear – every bullet counts. To be more precise, it's not that a lack of ammunition will hinder the game experience, but more that each bullet can unleash ultimate destruction. One small explosion of shells can take an already weakened structure to the ground, pulverizing foes under its weight.

We saw grenades lobbed, not at the feet of enemies to pick them off one by one, but instead into the balconies of floors above them, starting a Mouse Trap-like chain of events, culminating in a smoking pile of rubble. With a real-time physics engine and dynamic deformation of environments, the streets of this wasteland are your playgrounds, and your creativity will reap impressive rewards.

While the graphics and physics engine are great features to trumpet, the sound design of Black is no small sidenote. It's not overstating to say that each pull of a trigger unleashes an aggressive volley of individual explosions, tings as the bullets hit the ground, and mechanical clicks of the chamber reloading. With the volume cranked as high as it was in EA's booth, the combined effect left people reeling.

If the staggering masses exiting Black's demo room every 20 minutes are any indication, players are in for a sensory-overloading treat with Black. Criterion is taking the somewhat tired shooter genre and thankfully turning it on its demolished, ringing ear. ■ ■ ■

■ The graphics are less than half done, and Criterion has a solid track record of making visually great games

■ In this game, the guns are the stars

XBOX 360 | PC

Call of Duty 2

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) **> PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION **> DEVELOPER** INFINITY WARD
> RELEASE FALL

★★★ THE FOG OF WAR ★★★

Call of Duty 2 is sure to lead to some confusion among gamers, as it's not the only CoD title on the way. Call of Duty 2: Big Red One (see issue 145 for more info) is the continuation of the console-exclusive Call of Duty: Finest Hour, and Call of Duty 2 is the sequel to the PC-only original CoD title, although it will also appear on Xbox 360. Got that, soldier?

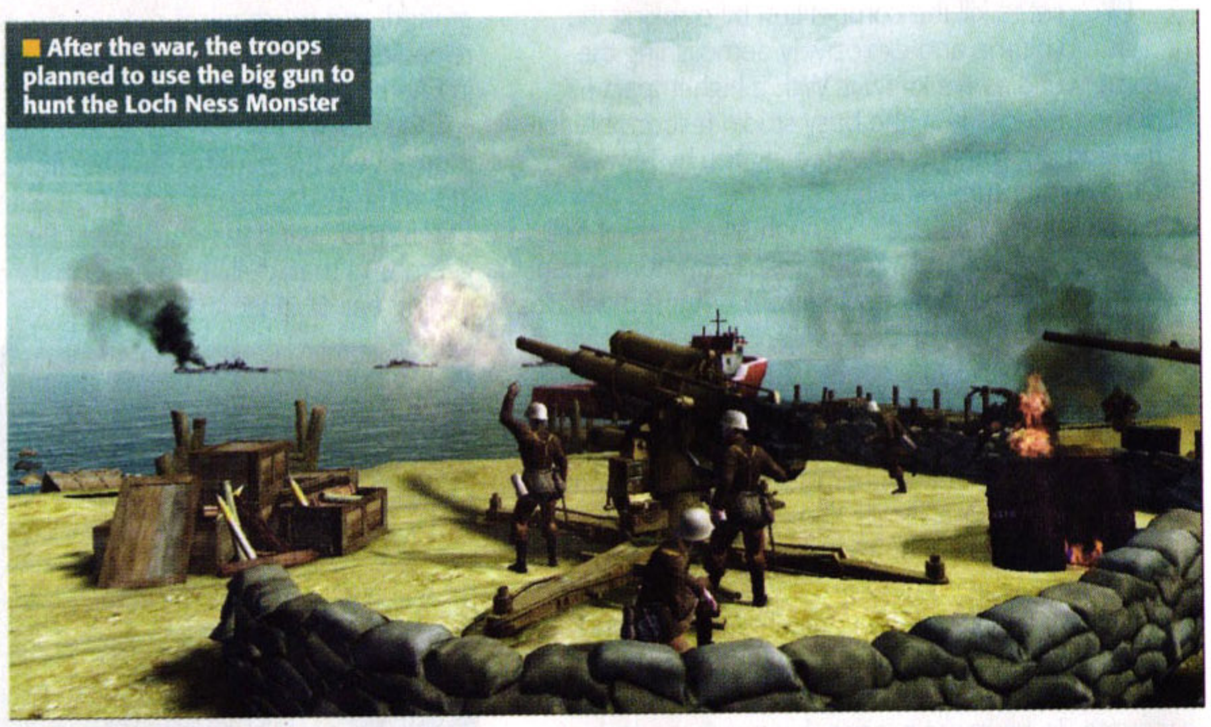
ONCE MORE ONTO THE BEACH

The beach landing at Normandy on D-Day has officially become one of the most widely-used video game environments ever, taking its rightful place alongside such stalwarts as the lava world, the Mushroom Kingdom, and Hoth. However, just because the demo of Call of Duty 2 we saw at this year's E3 began with the familiar event, it doesn't mean that we aren't ridiculously excited about this game. In fact, it's just the opposite. What we saw of Call of Duty 2 was so intense it made us wonder why Microsoft hasn't cast a bigger spotlight on this impressive 360 launch title.

Like the original Call of Duty, the sequel aims to deliver intense WWII action focused on American, British, and Russian troops. But this time around, they have been separated into three campaigns that can be tackled however the player sees fit. You can play through each campaign from start to finish or jump between them. This is just one of the many improvements Infinity Ward has planned to build on the excellent foundation of the first game. Over 20,000 lines of speech have been recorded to make Call of Duty 2 sound as realistic as it looks, which is a pretty tall order considering the visuals of this game. Infinity Ward has dropped the Quake 3 engine for proprietary software that improves on the original's graphics with better light, shadows, and smoke effects.

While the screenshots here look great, they don't do justice to how this game looks in motion. With dozens of soldiers from both sides sharing the screen with incredibly detailed environments, huge explosions, billowing smoke, and rounds ripping through the air, gameplay looks as nerve-wracking as the infamous opening scene in *Saving Private Ryan*. We know that is an overused comparison, but scaling a cliff at Pointe du Hoc on a rope as the bodies of your fallen comrades plummet to the ground around you is an experience matched in intensity only by the best WWII movies.

The Call of Duty franchise, in its short history, has delivered some of the best WWII action around. In many ways, Call of Duty 2 seems like more of the same – which isn't a bad thing. But Infinity Ward claims that there is enough new content in this sequel to raise the bar even higher. The developer has yet to unveil its plans for multiplayer, but states that it has some big surprises in store. While we still have many questions, what we have seen so far leads us to believe that both Xbox 360 and PC gamers will be very, very pleased with Call of Duty 2. ■■■



■ After the war, the troops planned to use the big gun to hunt the Loch Ness Monster

■ The carnage that takes place onscreen is unbelievable

■ Angry at his squadmate for talking smack about Bing Crosby, Sgt. Fred took aim and shot him right in the butt

PLAYSTATION 2

Okami

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** CAPCOM **> DEVELOPER** CLOVER STUDIOS **> RELEASE** 2006

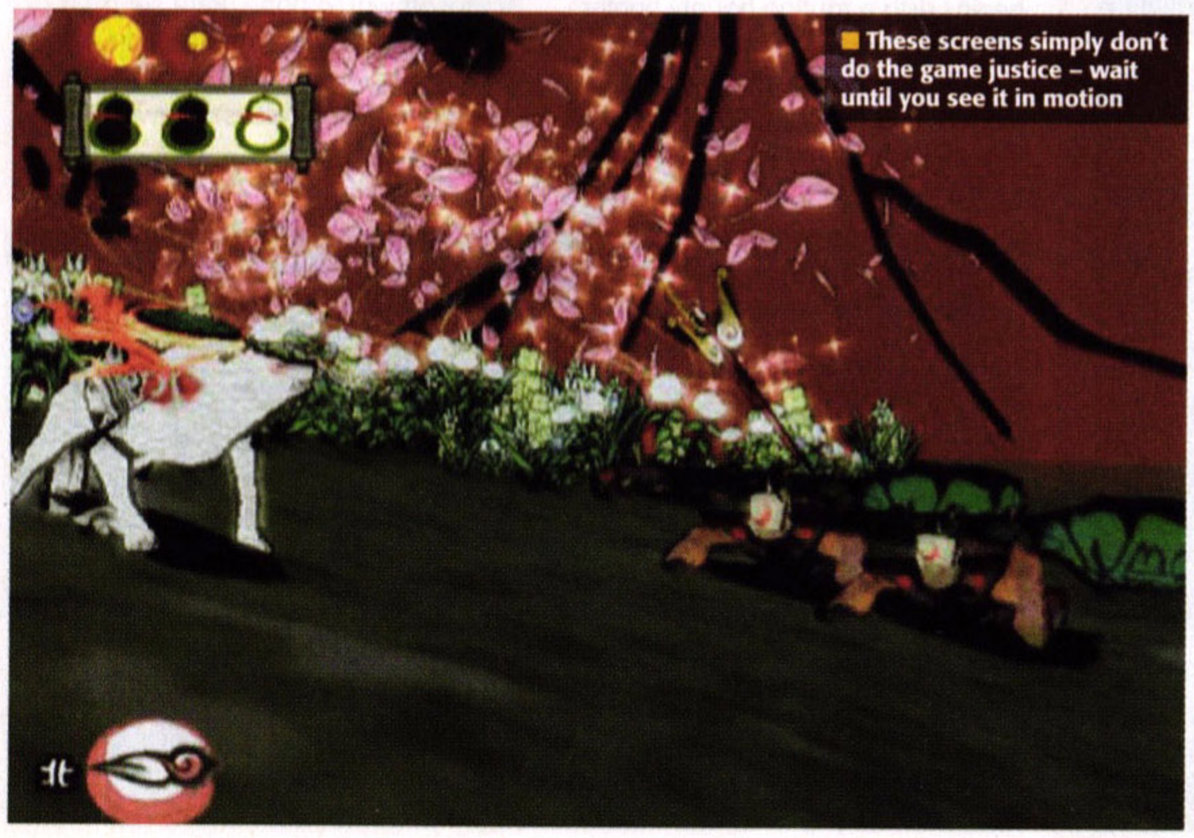
HERE COMES THE SUN

It's hard to tell until you see Okami in action just how beautiful this game promises to be. There's an incredible depth and stark allure to its unique style, which is based on the artwork of ancient Japanese parchment. It's not unlike watching a watercolor painting come alive on the screen.

Okami tells the story of the sun god Amaterasu as she returns to Earth in the form of a white wolf. Due to the actions of the legendary monster Orochi, the world has become bleak and lifeless. As the story unfolds, you are literally bringing life and color back to the world, as flowers sprout on the ground where you pass and the world brightens in your presence. As the sun god's avatar, you'll wander the earth to regain your powers, while simultaneously rebuilding the people's belief in you by answering their prayers, aiding them through their hardships, and amazing them with your miracles.

Thankfully, gameplay appears to be keeping pace with Okami's remarkable artistry. You'll explore a fully 3D world reminiscent of the classic Zelda games. A stable of special powers gives you the power to overcome the monstrous beasts of Japanese folklore. These abilities explore the mythical power of an ancient god, as you replace stars in the sky or strike down your foes with mighty blows. Many of these preternatural abilities are achieved with the celestial brush, an innovative tool for changing the world around you. By holding down a button, a parchment overlay will cover the screen, and a traditional calligraphy paintbrush will appear, with which you may draw images and actions on the screen. Draw a circle in the sky, and the sun will appear. Draw a slash across a monster, and it will be split in two.

Melding together ancient beauty with innovative action, the creators of Viewtiful Joe are exploring a whole new world with Okami. All signs point to this being a breathtaking journey, and we can't wait to play more as its release nears. ■■■



■ These screens simply don't do the game justice – wait until you see it in motion

XBOX 360 | PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE | PC | GAME BOY ADVANCE | DS | PSP

Need for Speed Most Wanted

> STYLE 1-PLAYER RACING (MULTIPLAYER AND ONLINE FOR XBOX 360, XBOX, AND PS2 TBA) **> PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS **> DEVELOPER** EA CANADA **> RELEASE** NOVEMBER

ON THE LAM

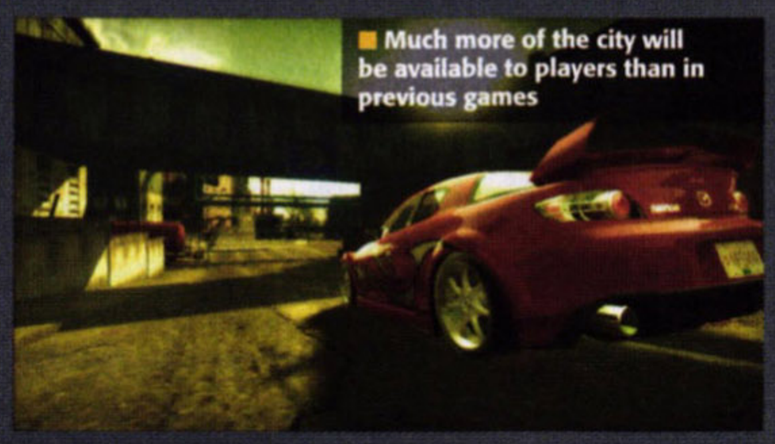
In a private room called the Next Gen Lab, tucked into EA's booth at this year's E3, visitors were shown footage of the newest Need for Speed entry. Where the two Underground titles were beautiful in their excessive, neon, shiny glory, Most Wanted offered the same degree of reflective properties in a much more realistic and jaw-dropping way. The grease of automotive transit, exhaust residue, and your own burned rubber melded together on the roadways to make a glistening, almost sickly urban sheen.

On the gameplay specifics, the megapublisher is keeping pretty mum. We do know that, unlike the Underground entries, Most Wanted goes back to the series' roots of angry cops on the bumpers of crazy racers. In what is consistently becoming the mantra of next-gen development (more, bigger, faster), the completion of an event doesn't stop the game. Instead, results appear onscreen and players will keep right on driving. Why? To get away from the cops, who have become aware of your blistering race through downtown and are none to happy about it.

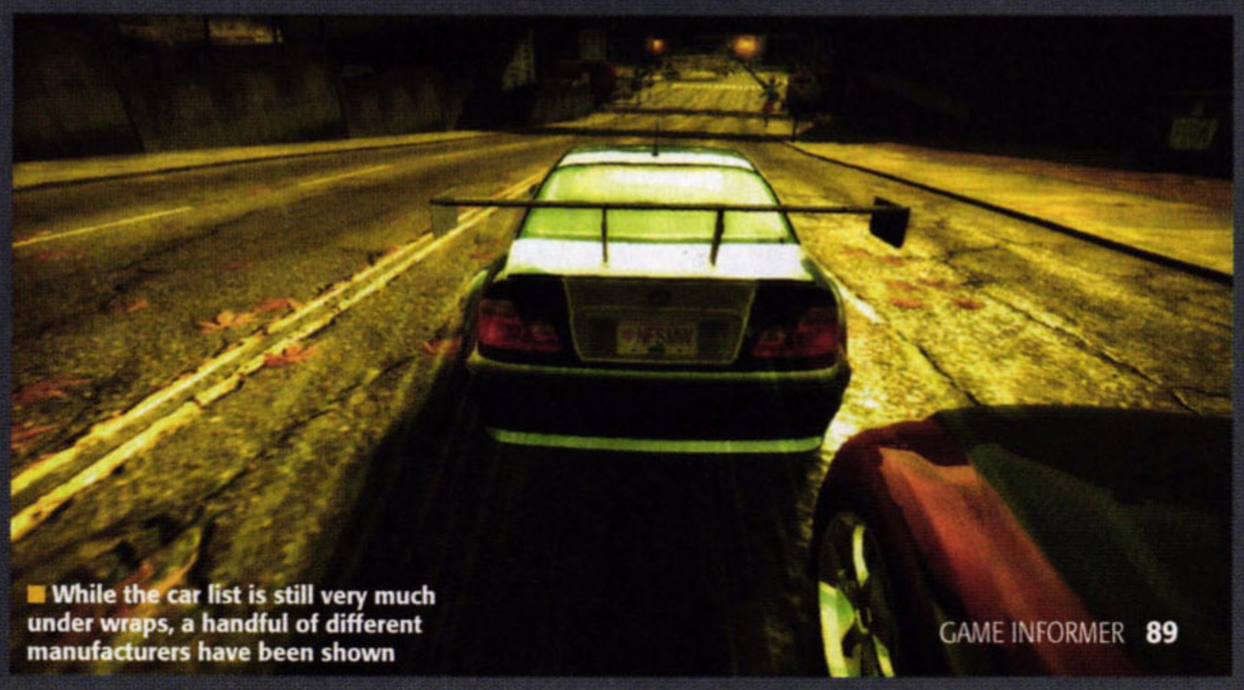
As events are completed, particularly exceptional feats of automotive maneuvering are added to a player's Rap Sheet. This will continue to grow and clue others in on your best exploits, but it's not just racers who will use this information. The police are promised to use an intense AI system that will escalate responses, tactics, and even learn your moves as the game goes on. Keep it varied, or the fuzz will start to preemptively block your favorite escape tactics.

Two things are obvious with Most Wanted – it's unbelievably gorgeous (and even more so in motion – screens aren't quite adequate for this game) and the gameplay updates have us chomping at the bit to rule the streets. ■■■

(Xbox 360 screens shown)



■ Much more of the city will be available to players than in previous games



■ While the car list is still very much under wraps, a handful of different manufacturers have been shown

XBOX 360 | PC

The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG > **PUBLISHER** BETHESDA SOFTWORKS/2K GAMES > **DEVELOPER** BETHESDA GAME STUDIOS
> **RELEASE** WINTER 2005

YOUNGER SCROLLS ARE HOODLUMS

The screenshots that have been trickling out since we unveiled this next-gen RPG in Issue 138 have continually reinforced the assertion that The Elder Scrolls IV is one of the best-looking games on the horizon. While Oblivion's beauty is instantly apparent, the subtle systems that govern the world of Tamriel underneath the surface do just as much to demonstrate the title's place in the next era of gaming.

At E3, executive producer Todd Howard was showcasing the NPC behavior, dubbed "Radiant AI," through a seemingly peaceful scene with a woman and her dog. All residents of Tamriel have their own goals and skills – even the animals. The woman decided to start practicing her archery skills by firing arrows at her bureau. After sticking a few in the wall and knocking over some bottles, she took a potion to improve her results. Just like the player, NPCs will collect items and use them to augment their abilities. As the dog began barking to indicate its hunger, the woman laid out a slab of deer meat, which made her pet more energetic – too energetic, in fact. Annoyed with the incessant barking, the woman used a magic spell to paralyze her pet, and when that didn't quiet the poor canine, the woman hurled a fireball and set the animal ablaze.

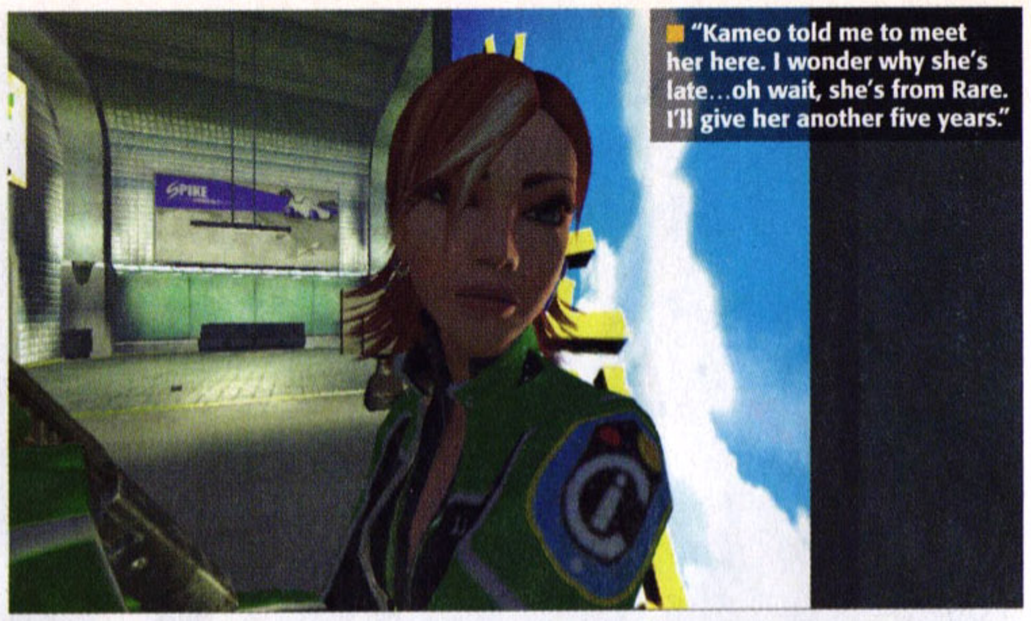
Now imagine interactions like these going on all over the world, all day long (hopefully with less willful cruelty). It takes more than convincing visuals to make a realm come alive; Oblivion's emphasis on creating believable and organic human interactions will immerse players in the lush surroundings, add dimension, and ultimately make it feel like a home away from home – except in Tamriel, you don't wet the bed. ■■■

PROFESSOR X FOR EMPEROR!

Delivering on its goal to provide top-notch talent, Bethesda announced that veteran actor and powerful telepath Patrick Stewart will be the voice of Uriel Septim, the Emperor of Tamriel. We can only hope for more announcements in the months to come, as the game has over 1,000 NPCs and dozens of hours of dialogue.

■ "What? I can make Firestick and Bladey kiss if I want to!"

■ The Surgeon General advises against playing with fire. And not having skin



■ "Kameo told me to meet her here. I wonder why she's late...oh wait, she's from Rare. I'll give her another five years."

UNLIMITED ENABLED

XBOX 360

Perfect Dark Zero

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 50-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT
> **DEVELOPER** RAREWARE > **RELEASE** WINTER 2005

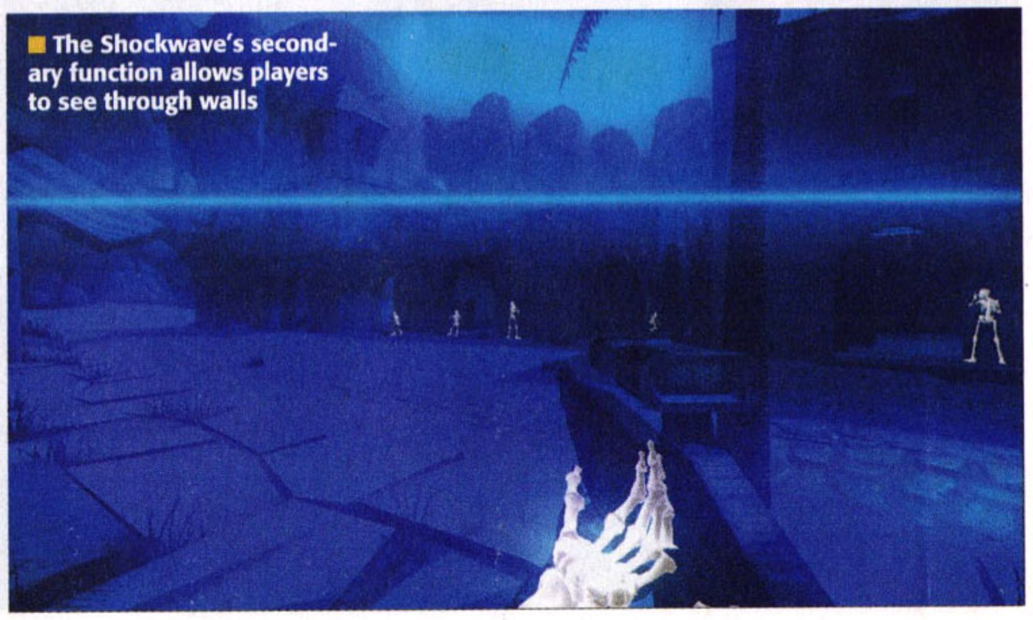
RARE'S TROUBLES CONTINUE

Although the developer can best be summarized as a 375 million dollar investment at this point, Microsoft anticipates that Perfect Dark Zero will be the killer app that puts Rareware back into the minds of gamers and makes Xbox 360 a hot commodity this holiday season. Getting people excited about this title has been a struggle. When the game debuted on MTV's Xbox 360 special, it didn't embody the excitement or next generation qualities that we had hoped, and as a result PDZ has become the game that people love to hate. Going into this year's Electronic Entertainment Expo, Microsoft had the chance to lift Perfect Dark Zero from the bottom of the barrel. To much surprise, however, the company completely ignored the game at its press conference, and showed very little of it on the show floor. The forecast couldn't be more overcast for Perfect Dark Zero, but as huge fans of the original Nintendo 64 title, we are crossing our fingers, holding our breath, and praying that Rare can get its act together.

Set three years prior to Joanna Dark's first adventure, the game begins with a routine bounty hunter assignment uncovering a conspiracy that will surely blanket the entire planet in chaos. The fate of the world lies solely in Joanna's hands. Armed to the teeth, Joanna is certainly up for the mission. In addition to filling foes with lead, she can now perform an evasive roll or cling to the walls and fire shots around a corner. When you tap into either of these actions, the game properly pans out to a third-person perspective.

In addition to the robust single-player campaign, Rareware is striving to deliver a powerful Xbox Live experience. Right now, the company plans to deliver scalable maps that can hold up to 50 players at once. In team games, each side can fight to secure strategic teleport points and can deploy portable turrets and threat sensors on their respective bases. You'll also be able to take to the skies in a jetpack or move quickly on the ground via motorcycles. Another Xbox Live function that has been rumored is the ability for players to suit up as enemies within someone else's single-player game.

As great as it sounds on paper, Rare was hesitant to show off any of the game at E3. We didn't see single-player in action, and the only multiplayer match we witnessed was between two players. While we have suspicions that development may not be going as smoothly as Microsoft would hope, Rare seems confident. We hope that the company simply didn't want to show its hand until the release draws closer. ■■■



■ The Shockwave's secondary function allows players to see through walls

■ Fire effects don't get much better than this

PC

F.E.A.R.

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBD) **> PUBLISHER** VIVENDI UNIVERSAL **> DEVELOPER** MONOLITH PRODUCTIONS
> RELEASE FALL

MAKING ACRONYMS COOL

We've seen a lot of first-person shooters. More than is healthy, most likely – but the point is that it takes quite a lot to impress us with yet another sci-fi FPS. F.E.A.R., seen in playable form at this year's E3, cleared that bar with ease. Gorgeous graphics (which this has in spades) are just about par for the course in the FPS genre, but where F.E.A.R. goes above and beyond the call of duty is in the gameplay and storytelling departments. Though it looks a lot more linear than, say, Deus Ex, the creepiness of the sci-fi/horror tone goes a long way toward getting us pumped up for this title's fall release.

The premise of F.E.A.R. is that the player controls a member of the First Encounter Assault Recon task force: a government-formed super-secret elite squad that deals with paranormal threats to the state of the union. Not the most original setup perhaps, but the execution and presentation of this idea do an outstanding job of selling it to the player. Crazy moments, akin to the better atmospheric bits from Doom 3, abound and create a sense of almost overwhelming weirdness and fright – and this is all just from a ten-minute gameplay demo. Seeing bloody footprints walk down the hallway in front of you followed by a whispering visage of a little girl is pretty much guaranteed to elicit some sort of response from the player.

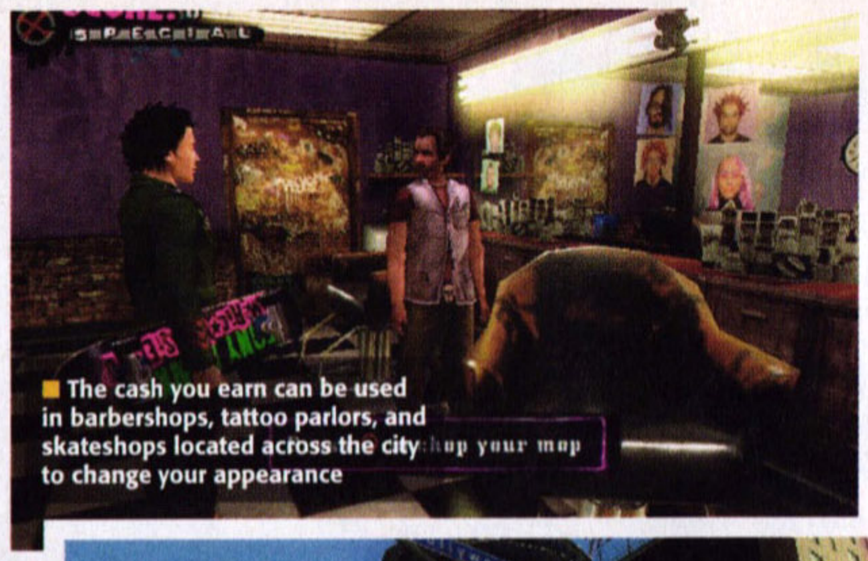
Fortunately, developer Monolith (which also did an excellent job with Tron 2.0 and No One Lives Forever) looks to be taking good advantage of F.E.A.R.'s futuristic setting to do some interesting things with weapons and enemies as well. From cyber-ninja types who ambush you from the ceiling to heavily-armored troops packing ridiculous amounts of firepower, the foes you'll face are anything but boring rifle-toting Nazis. To take them on, you'll have access to serious goodies yourself; the sub-nuclear blaster roasting bad guys where they stand is a sight to see. Additionally, something in the protagonist's past (Vivendi won't say what) has granted him the power to temporarily slow down time around himself, moving at lightning speed to overcome horrific odds. Whether or not further supernatural abilities will be at your disposal is unknown, but it seems a bit of a no-brainer.

From what we've seen, F.E.A.R. is shaping up very well, and is easily near the top of our most wanted 2005 PC titles. Provided the talented folks at Monolith can put it all together, and we're confident they will, we've got something special to look forward to. ■■■

■ "Group hug!"

■ Enemies actually use cover and flanking tactics to take you out

In addition to a hearty online offering (which is finally available for Xbox Live), Classic mode makes a return. Rather than recycling content from Story mode, Classic mode is comprised entirely of updated levels from previous Tony Hawk games



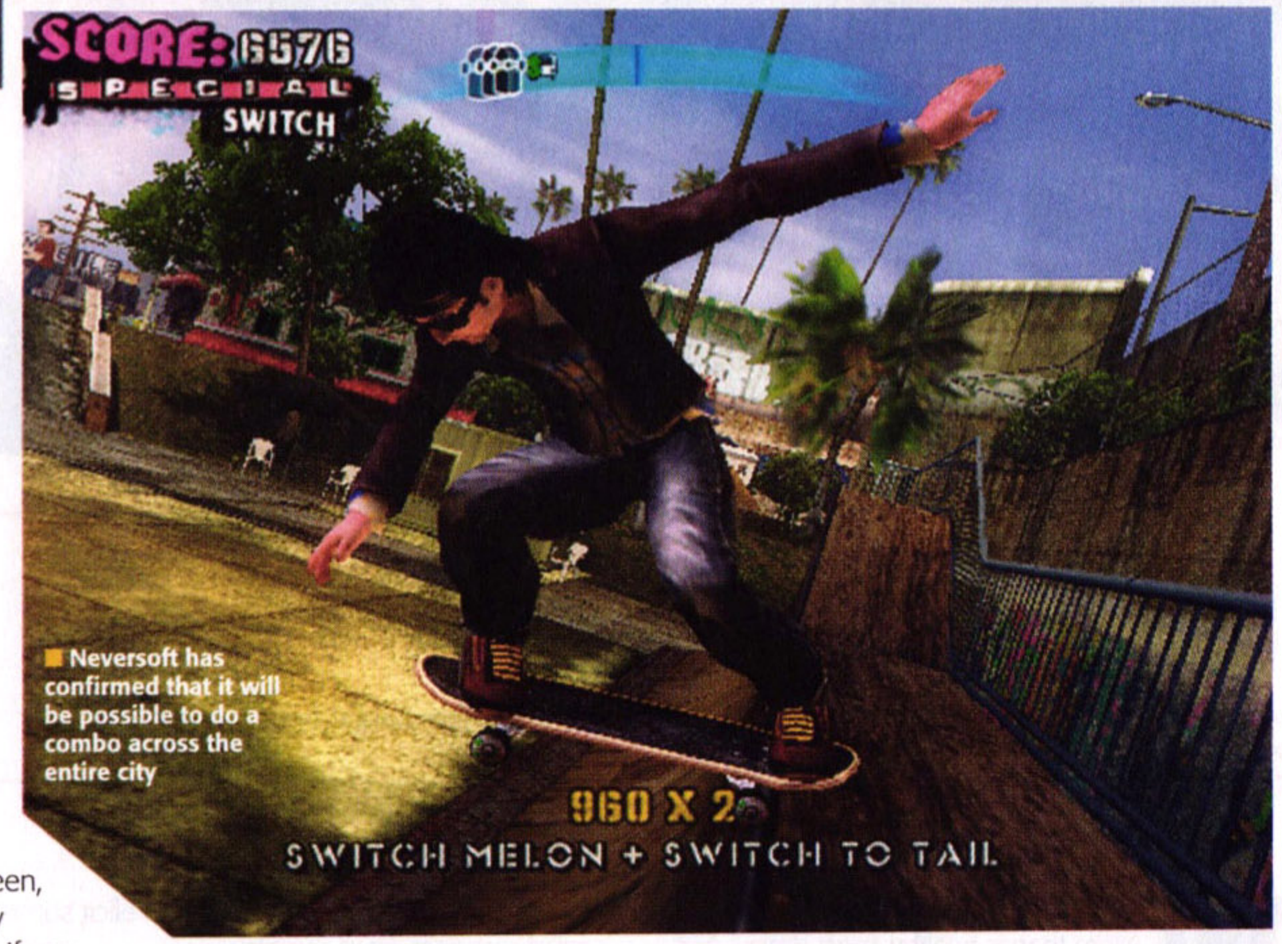
The cash you earn can be used in barbershops, tattoo parlors, and skateshops located across the city. Map your map to change your appearance

The BMX Bike is equipped with a different set of controls. If you hop off of the bike and start skating, you can quickly locate where you left your bike on the map screen

XBOX 360 | PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

Tony Hawk's American Wasteland

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE OR XBOX LIVE)
> PUBLISHER ACTIVISION **> DEVELOPER** NEVERSOFT **> RELEASE** FALL



Neversoft has confirmed that it will be possible to do a combo across the entire city

THRASHING IN THE CITY OF ANGELS

Neversoft may be exploring a new gaming frontier with the spaghetti western Gun, but the company is not forgetting about its loyal fan base. The Tony Hawk team is still together and is currently knee-deep in the development of the series' seventh installment. Most video game franchises that endure this long usually run out of steam, but Neversoft continues to find ways to make each new entry more exciting than the last. American Wasteland is no exception.

In the Tony Hawk series, players have always been restricted to a fairly small space to skate in. While you could physically see objects in the distance, invisible barriers prevented you from actually reaching them. In American Wasteland, Neversoft is removing these barriers. Rather than moving from one level to the next, you'll now spend your entire time soaring within the streets on Los Angeles. Every inch of this massive, sprawling city is open to players from the outset of play.

As you work your way through this expansive environment, soaking in its familiar sights as you go, never once will you see a loading screen, thanks to some handy streaming technology. If you want to get across town quickly, just hop on a bus and pick your location. Some of the people on the streets that you can interact with will give you cash rewards if you complete a simple goal, others demand much bigger things. These missions are tied directly to the story and movies that move the plot along. Interestingly, when you complete these tasks, you'll receive an environmental object as a reward. While a large hunk of metal may seem like a worthless prize, it really couldn't be more exciting. Each object that you win is delivered to a skate ranch in LA. Over time, your efforts will contribute to the construction of the ultimate skating park.

With each new installment, we tell ourselves that Neversoft must have hit its peak in regards to gameplay. Somehow, though, the company has once again found a way to add a handful of new maneuvers to the game. By holding down the right shoulder button while skating on the ground and hitting left or right, players will perform a bert slide (a skater's way of mimicking surfing motions). Its functionality is much like that of a manual, but as you sway back and forth close to the ground, you will gain speed, allowing you to extend combos. Another way to pick up speed is by performing a bank drop move. Much like an acid drop, when you find you are flying over an incline, hit the bank drop and your skater will align with the bank. Conversely, if you feel that you have too much speed, you can now stall at any time during a grind.

Additionally, while on foot you can now run up walls for a few steps and flip backward. For those of you who bottle up stress while playing the game, you at long last have the ability to run up to someone and smack them square in the face with your board. If you are too chicken for that, you can always hurl it at them from a distance. On top of all this, Neversoft has delivered another huge inclusion: a BMX bike. Featuring its own set of controls and the capability of stringing together combos just as impressive as those on the board, the bike adds a whole new layer of gameplay to the experience.

Neversoft hopes to have all three current generation versions out for the holidays, and the Xbox 360 iteration on shelves for the system's launch. ■■■

LIFE IN THE BIG CITY

With trouble brewing amongst his family and friends in the Midwest, your character flees to the smoggy skies of the West Coast with the hope that he can clear his head and put his life into perspective. After his bus drops him off in Hollywood, he's welcomed into the City of Angels with a violent mugging. As a result, all of his possessions are taken. Thankfully, a girl named Mindy quickly comes to your aid. Taking you under her wing, she helps you adjust to life in the big city and gives you the inside skinny on a magazine that she's putting together called American Wasteland. Seeing great stories unfold through your skating, Mindy soon starts cataloguing your experiences within her pages.

■ The ability to walk on walls adds a whole new dimension to gameplay

■ "Smell that? It's why I wear the mask."

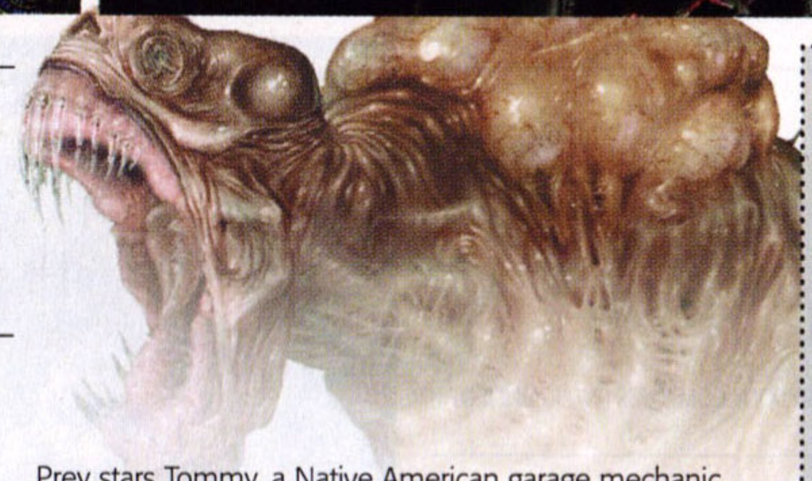
■ They look evil, but they really just want money for the ice cream, man

XBOX 360 | PC

Prey

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) **> PUBLISHER** 2K GAMES
> DEVELOPER HUMAN HEAD STUDIOS **> RELEASE** 2006

SCI-FI SURPRISE



This year's E3 featured few surprises, but one of the titles that managed to catch people off-guard was 2K Games' sci-fi shooter Prey, the PC version of which was shown behind closed doors. Although there were many first-person shooters to be seen, Prey managed to set itself apart. Powered by the Doom 3 engine, the title looks great, but what really separates Prey its gameplay aspects.

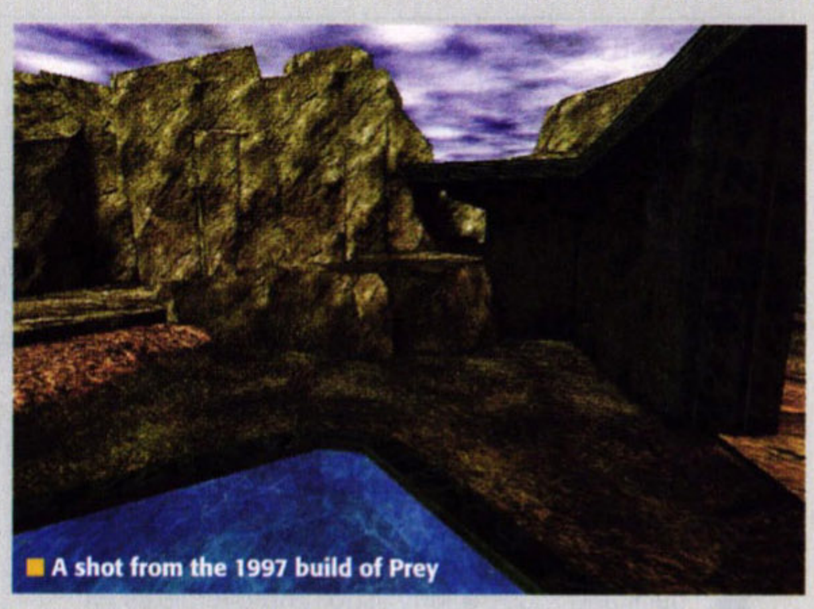
Prey stars Tommy, a Native American garage mechanic who is abducted from his Cherokee reservation by hostile aliens. Brought on board a spaceship that is a living, conscious thing, Tommy discovers long-dormant spiritual powers that he'll need to save his people, as well as the entire world. It is the mixture of spiritual powers and sci-fi elements that make Prey's gameplay so enticing. Tommy can leave his body as a spirit to reach areas he can't get to on foot. He can also use his mystical powers to cheat death itself. When killed, Tommy can battle through entities in the spirit world to re-enter his body and return to life. But the strange living spaceship will throw tons of unique challenges at Tommy. Toying with gravity, players will be able to walk on walls and ceilings in some areas, adding a whole new dimension to level design. In other locations, hitting switches causes gravity to instantly reverse, suddenly turning the world upside-down.

The gravity effects alone would make for a pretty impressive gameplay experience, but they're not even Prey's most interesting characteristic. Both Tommy and his enemies will be able to take advantage of portals – rips in space that bridge different areas. These portals can open up anywhere to allow an enemy to jump out, but players can actually move through them to be instantly transported to another area. However, these portals are far more than simple warp points – you can actually shoot through them and fight enemies located in a completely different part of the ship.

The portals, gravity effects, and Tommy's spirit powers bring a lot of new ideas to the world of sci-fi shooters, and that's not all. Prey also features some interesting biomechanical weaponry, flying segments in a cool exoskeleton, puzzle elements, and more. There is still a lot we don't know about Prey, but the demo at E3 revealed enough to get us insanely anxious to learn more. As one of the most pleasant surprises of the show, we'll certainly be following Prey closely to learn what else it has in store for us. ■■■

PC Screens Shown

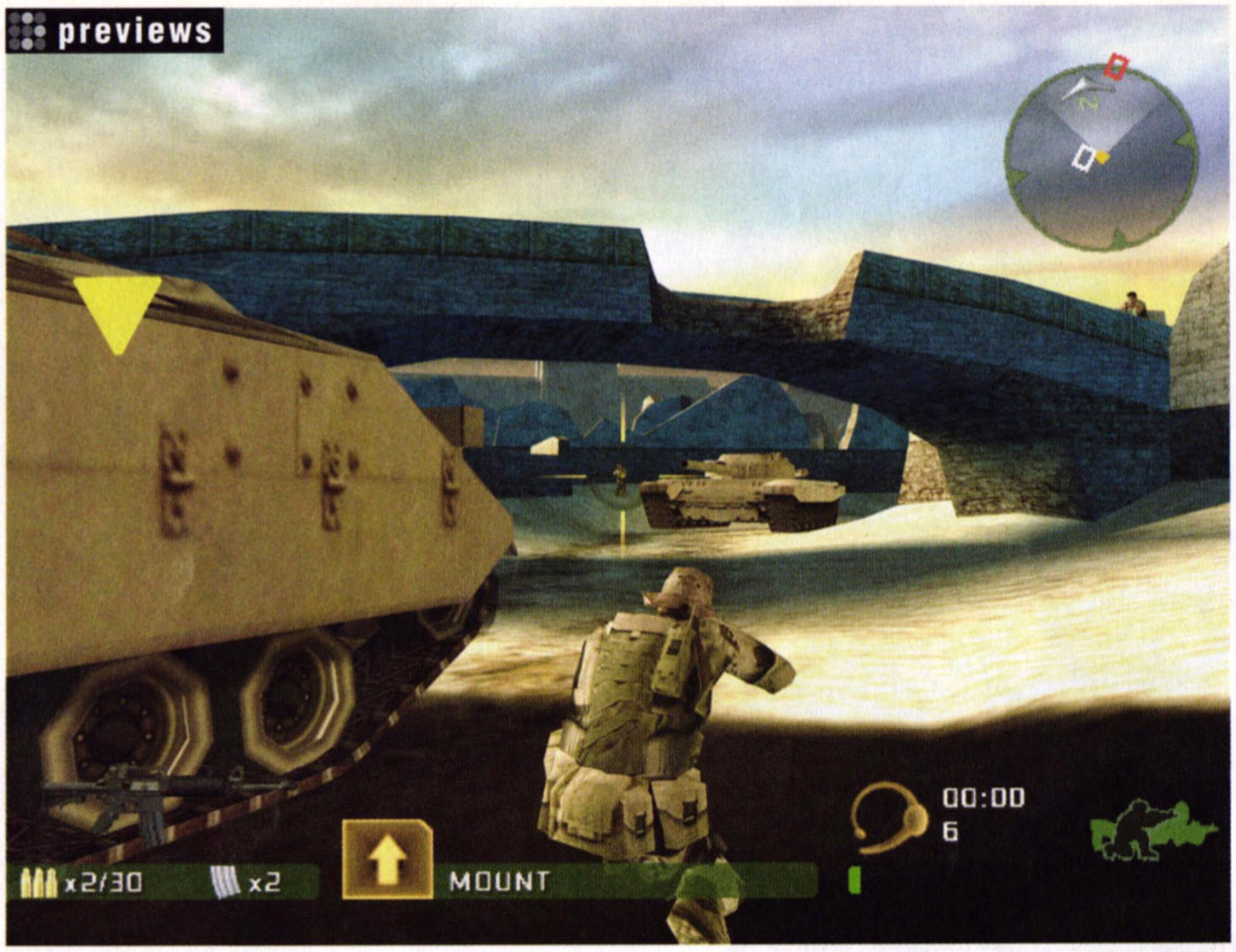
■ Portals allow enemies to instantly travel between different areas to make your life miserable



■ A shot from the 1997 build of Prey

THE PATH OF PREY

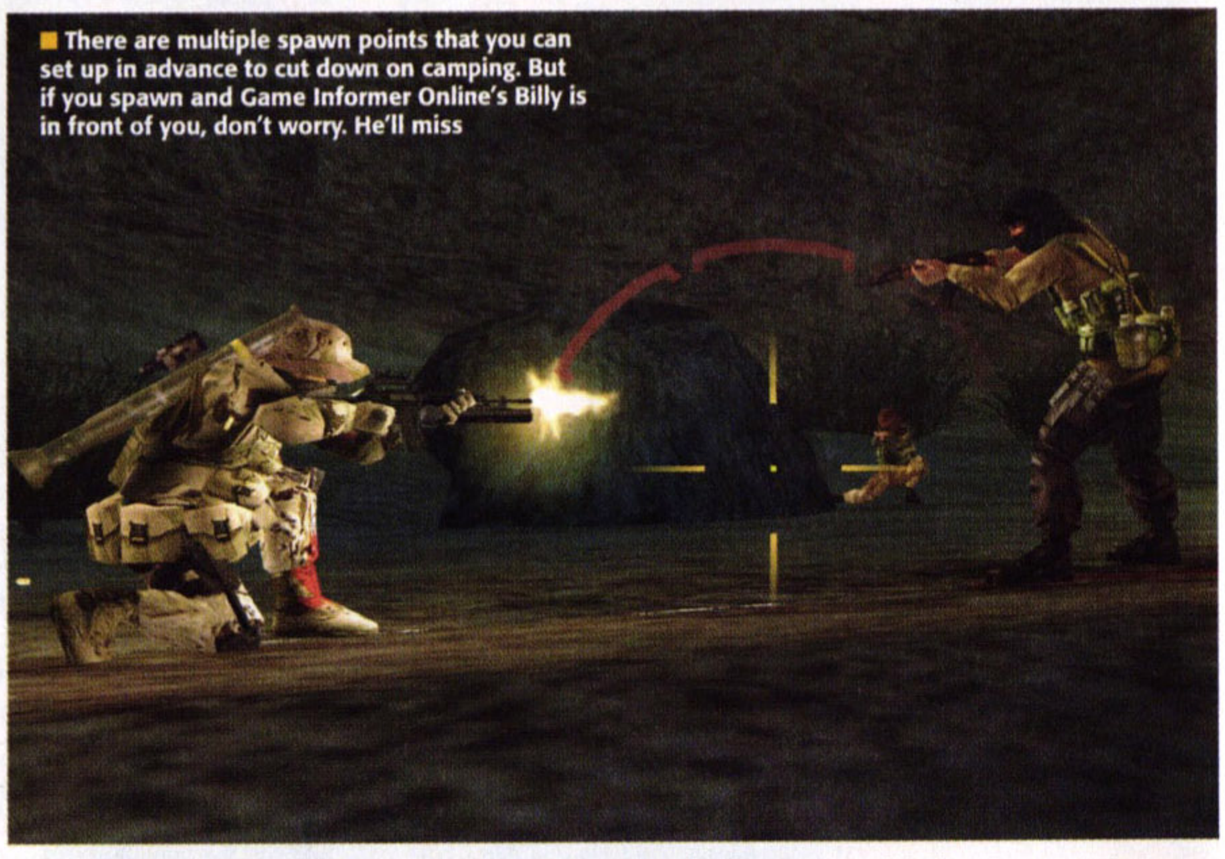
Although Prey is shaping up to be one heck of an impressive shooter, it has taken a long time to get to this point. The game has been in development in one form or another since 1995, when it began life as 3D Realms' answer to Quake. Despite appearing at E3 in 1997 and 1998 (and commissioning industrial band KMFDM to write music for the game), Prey was constantly delayed – largely due to frequent staff changes. In 2001, development was shifted from 3D Realms to Human Head Studios, which is responsible for the stunning version of the game shown at this year's E3.



■ Stupid players who try to hide in front of tanks instead of behind them deserve more than a bullet to the head

■ Even on vehicle maps, you can choose not to play with them. On the other hand, you could set them to constantly respawn. The game also allows for four spectators

■ There are multiple spawn points that you can set up in advance to cut down on camping. But if you spawn and Game Informer Online's Billy is in front of you, don't worry. He'll miss



PLAYSTATION 2

SOCOM 3: U.S. Navy SEALs

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 32-PLAYER VIA PS2 BROADBAND) **> PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT
> DEVELOPER ZIPPER INTERACTIVE **> RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 13

THE NEW SOCOM SOLDIER

Taking extra time with this third installment of its beloved PS2 series, Zipper Interactive took a step back and made a long list of improvements for SOCOM 3. Although this fall title includes some welcome additions to its single-player component (which we outlined for you in our April issue), the series has a rabid multiplayer fanbase that is closely watching what comes next.

SOCOM 3 doubles the number of onscreen soldiers of previous versions to 32 – a fact that should immediately get the blood flowing for any fan of the franchise. This influx of extra players will be spread out over the game's 12 all-new maps (i.e. no repeats from previous SOCOMs), each of which can host multiple mission types. Two new types have been added: Convoy and Control Point. The former asks one side to escort a group of vehicles to and from a supply point (while the other tries to stop them, of course). Meanwhile, Control Point asks two opposing teams to visit five specific locations on the map and mark them with beacons. Since both teams' beacons can exist at a location simultaneously, you're not running back and forth between the same points trying to reclaim old land. The game often comes to a bloody head when everyone collides trying to lay their stake at the final map point.

Seven of the maps contain vehicles, which Zipper says will be meticulously balanced so that a guy on foot isn't SOL against a tank, armored truck, or boat. The developer is also scaling down maps to suit smaller numbers of players if necessary. Don't worry, however – you won't be plopped in some randomly generated wasteland. The developer says that the scaled-down maps will still preserve the important characteristics of the location. Rounding out the slew of multiplayer changes are improvements to everything from chat to stat tracking to clan challenges.

Whereas the first two SOCOMs featured incremental changes and seemed to be a case of both Sony and Zipper finding their way in a sea of newfound online success, SOCOM 3 distinctly feels like a new game. Perhaps it will be one that will embolden the fanbase and help change the image that the Xbox is the only gun worth taking online. ■ ■ ■

■ SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs Fireteam Bravo for PSP

BRAVO, BRAVO

Zipper Interactive is augmenting SOCOM 3 with a cool feature called Crosstalk that joins events of the PS2 title with its PSP comrade, SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs Fireteam Bravo (expected this fall). Completing objectives in one of these two versions of SOCOM will unlock bonuses in the other after you sync up the two systems – and it won't just be new weapons (although you do get those). After you finish a certain map objective in SOCOM 3, like destroying an airbase for example, sync up your PSP to the PS2. Now you'll notice that the enemy on your handheld will be slightly weaker when you reach the location where they were on the PS2 (although both versions feature entirely different maps) because you've already destroyed the airbase in the area.

Multiply how awesome this looks by about a thousand to figure out how sweet it is in action

PC

Unreal Tournament 2007

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) **> PUBLISHER** MIDWAY **> DEVELOPER** EPIC GAMES **> RELEASE** 2006

KEEPING IT UNREAL

By now, you've no doubt seen the screens and heard the buzz about Unreal Engine 3. Gears of War (see last month's cover story), also by Epic Games, is an amazing poster child for the power of the engine and Xbox 360. Sony used footage from Unreal Engine to demonstrate what the PS3 will be capable of. But to PC types, there's nothing like seeing Unreal Tournament play out in these mind-blowing visuals. After sitting down with Epic at E3 and seeing this title in action, there's no doubt that it will be much more than merely a fitting update to one of the most revered franchises in PC gaming.

Neither Epic nor Midway were incredibly forthcoming about where UT is going in its next installment, but from what we saw, the focus was on keeping what makes the series great, while fine-tuning it and selectively adding new content. Little tweaks, like moving the blades on the buggy to a more optimal position for maximum carnage, are certainly appreciated. A new mode, called Conquest, combines the delicious Onslaught and Assault gametypes from 2004 by adding objectives along the path to dominating the opposing team. Completing them will give your squad an advantage, like better spawn points or faster vehicle spawns.

There is also talk of improving bot AI significantly in this release, but that frankly seems like throwing quarters down a well. UT's strength has always been its lightning-quick online fragathons, and bots simply don't enter into the equation. But for those who like a little artificial competition, it certainly can't hurt. And it's not like UT 2007 needs a whole lot of help – as we said, frantic UT gameplay with arguably the best graphics of the next generation of video games speaks for itself. ■■■

CONSOLES AHOY?

At the moment, nobody's talking about the possibility of bringing UT 2007 to Xbox 360 or PlayStation 3, but we've already seen the technology running on both sets of hardware. Doing the math doesn't take a genius. Top tier franchise plus the large installed base of a console equals awesome gaming – and, coincidentally, lots and lots of money for developer and publisher alike.

The character models are simply gorgeous

PSP

The Con

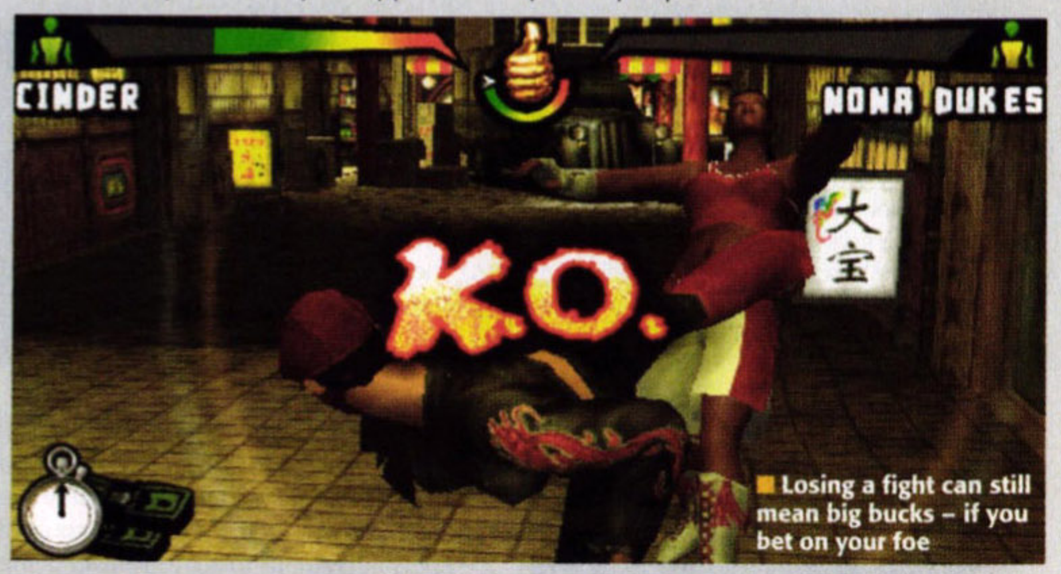
> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (2-PLAYER VIA AD HOC) **> PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA **> DEVELOPER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA SANTA MONICA STUDIOS **> RELEASE** OCTOBER

FLOAT LIKE A BUTTERFLY, CHEAT LIKE A RAT

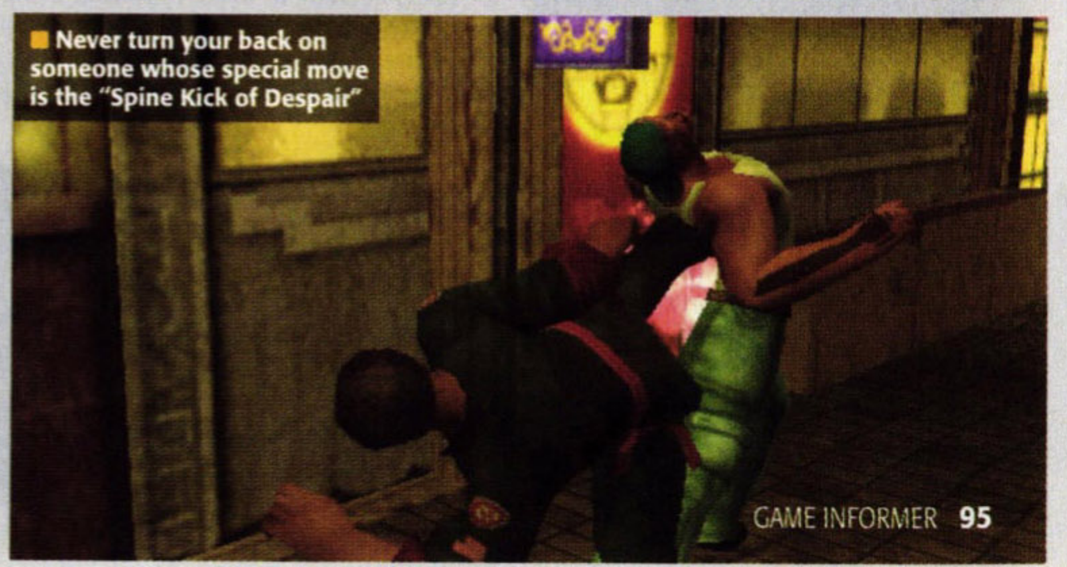
Do you want to make more money? Sure, we all do. Now, thanks to The Con, you can train for a better career in the exciting and rewarding field of face-punching. A brawler with an intense focus on the financial aspects of street fighting, this upcoming PSP title promises to satisfy your need to simultaneously bruise bodies and egos for a tidy profit.

The Con's defining feature is the betting system, which allows you to place a wager for or against yourself, then manipulate the fight to maximize your winnings. Hold down the Con button while taking a hit to exaggerate its impact. Alternately, the Con button can be used to weaken your blows, giving the impression you're trying much harder than you actually are. All of this is done to drive up the worth of your wager, regardless of whether you bet on yourself or your oppenent. The whole show must be made to look believable, though, or else the audience will know its rigged. If you deliver a convincing performance, you'll limp away from the fight with a well-earned stack of cash.

With a gritty tone similar to Def Jam: Fight for NY, The Con features an over-the-shoulder camera and limited mobility reminiscent of Punch-Out. The result is a system that focuses much more on dealing and ducking hits rather than positioning. To round out the experience, a wide array of accessories and character customization (you can even map a picture of your own face to a fighter), will set you apart as you battle through the single-player mode or wirelessly against your friends. Remember, if the powers that be had intended us fight fair, they wouldn't have made it so much fun to sucker-punch people. ■■■



Losing a fight can still mean big bucks – if you bet on your foe



Never turn your back on someone whose special move is the "Spine Kick of Despair"

PLAYSTATION 2

Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE) **> PUBLISHER** KONAMI **> DEVELOPER** KOJIMA PRODUCTIONS **> RELEASE** TBA

BACK TO THE JUNGLE

After VR Missions and Substance, we can't say that we are surprised that the newly-formed Kojima Productions is releasing a director's cut of last year's acclaimed Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater. What is remarkable about the title, however, is the sheer wealth of new content it will be providing in addition to the core game.

Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence will provide new ways to experience the jungle by introducing online play and a new take on the classic (but cumbersome) camera. While they will undoubtedly add a new dimension to MGS 3, we can't help but wonder if these features are mainly serving as testable prototype versions of what we will eventually see in Metal Gear Solid 4.

In addition to the three major attractions (more details below), Subsistence will also have a Duel mode that consists solely of the major boss fights, a Theater where you can watch the cinematics, and all of the Secret Theater movies – parody clips made with the in-game engine that poke fun at some of Snake Eater's memorable moments.

While extreme sports fans may be disappointed by the apparent lack of skateboarding, the game's other substantial offerings should be more than enough to have you stuffing your craw full of flora and fauna all over again. ■■■

■ Because you demanded it: more Snake vs. Monkey

ONLINE: !

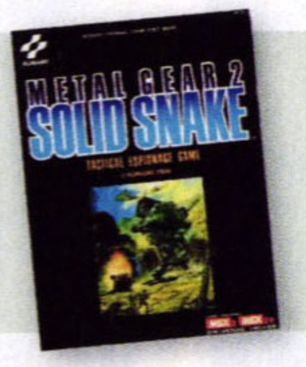
The most surprising element of Subsistence is online battles, which many didn't expect to see implemented until Metal Gear Solid 4. More than just simple deathmatches, the multiplayer options in Subsistence will utilize Snake's unique and stealthy talents. With modes like Team Battle (where everyone controls a generic soldier) and Snake vs. Enemy (where many players try to thwart a single operative's mission), the series' first foray into online promises to retain that unmistakable Metal Gear style.

CAMERA: SNAKE FROM ALL ANGLES

While working through the Virtuous Mission and Operation Snake Eater, players will enjoy an entirely revamped camera system that will allow them to slink through the forest in third-person (with full rotation) instead of the previous fixed angle. Not only does this allow a more intimate view of the action, but it will likely cut down on the amount of time spent switching into first-person perspective just to get your bearings.

OLD SCHOOL: THE GEAR STARTS HERE

In addition to the bounty of extra modes and features, Subsistence will also contain the original MSX computer versions of Metal Gear and Metal Gear 2: Solid Snake. While U.S. gamers eventually got a slightly modified version of Metal Gear for the NES, Subsistence will mark the first time we will actually experience the events of Metal Gear 2 (instead of just reading about them in mission logs). Snake's Revenge surrenders.



■ Snake will have brand new ways to get dolled up

XBOX 360

Project Gotham Racing 3

> STYLE 1-PLAYER RACING (MULTIPLAYER TBA) **> PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT **> DEVELOPER** BIZARRE CREATIONS **> RELEASE** FALL

POLE POSITION

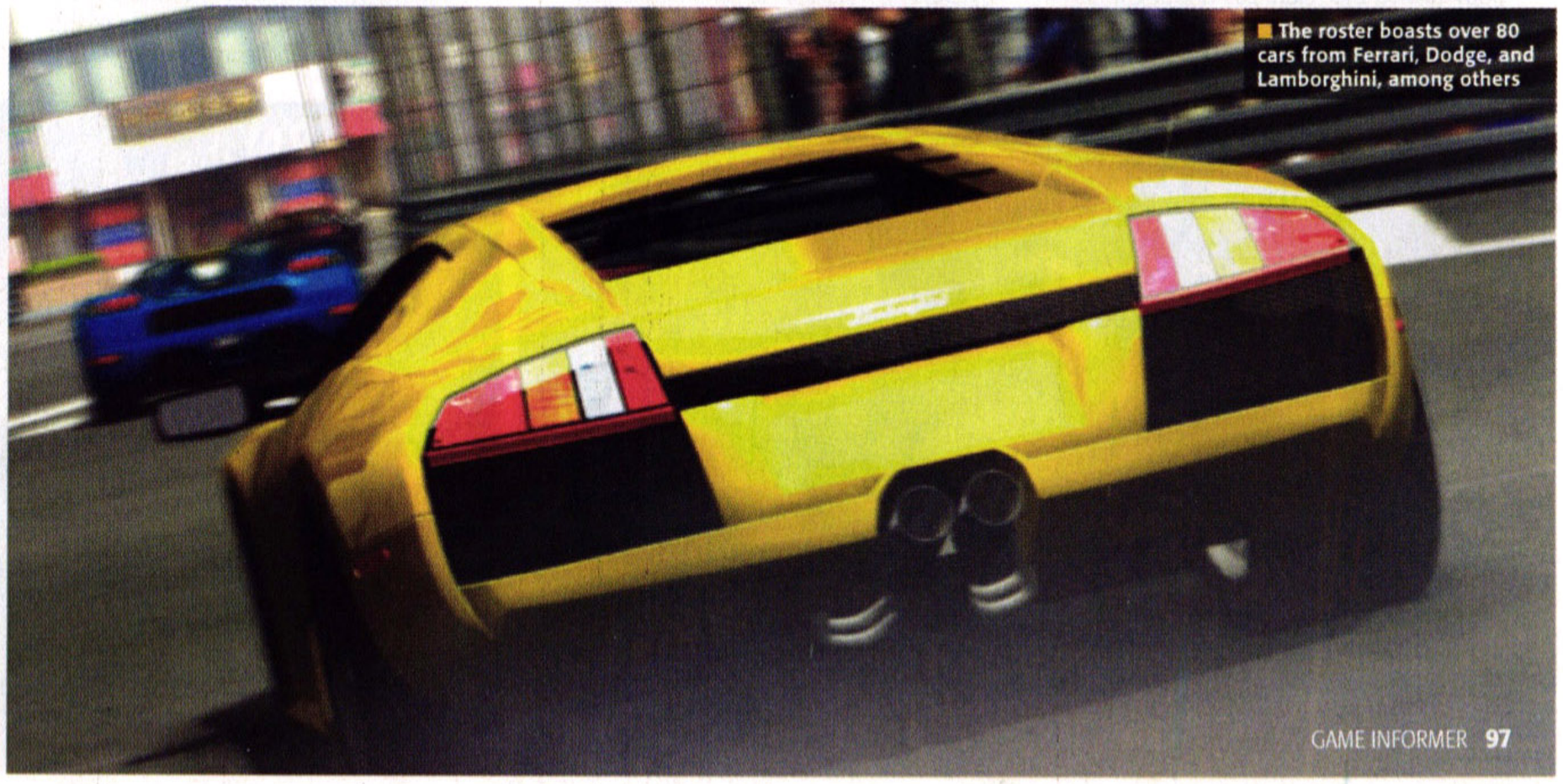
Let's be honest here, the racing market is stacked with a bounty of hard-working, dangerously sexy, and highly entertaining titles. The last season of releases left Project Gotham Racing 2 in the dust, an unfair casualty of a market plump with tight entries in well-established series.

Despite the moderate response to the earlier title, exactly no one was surprised to hear word of a PGR title for Xbox 360. Due for a launch window release, the screens shown so far are blisteringly gorgeous and hopefully representative of what kind of experience we can look forward to.

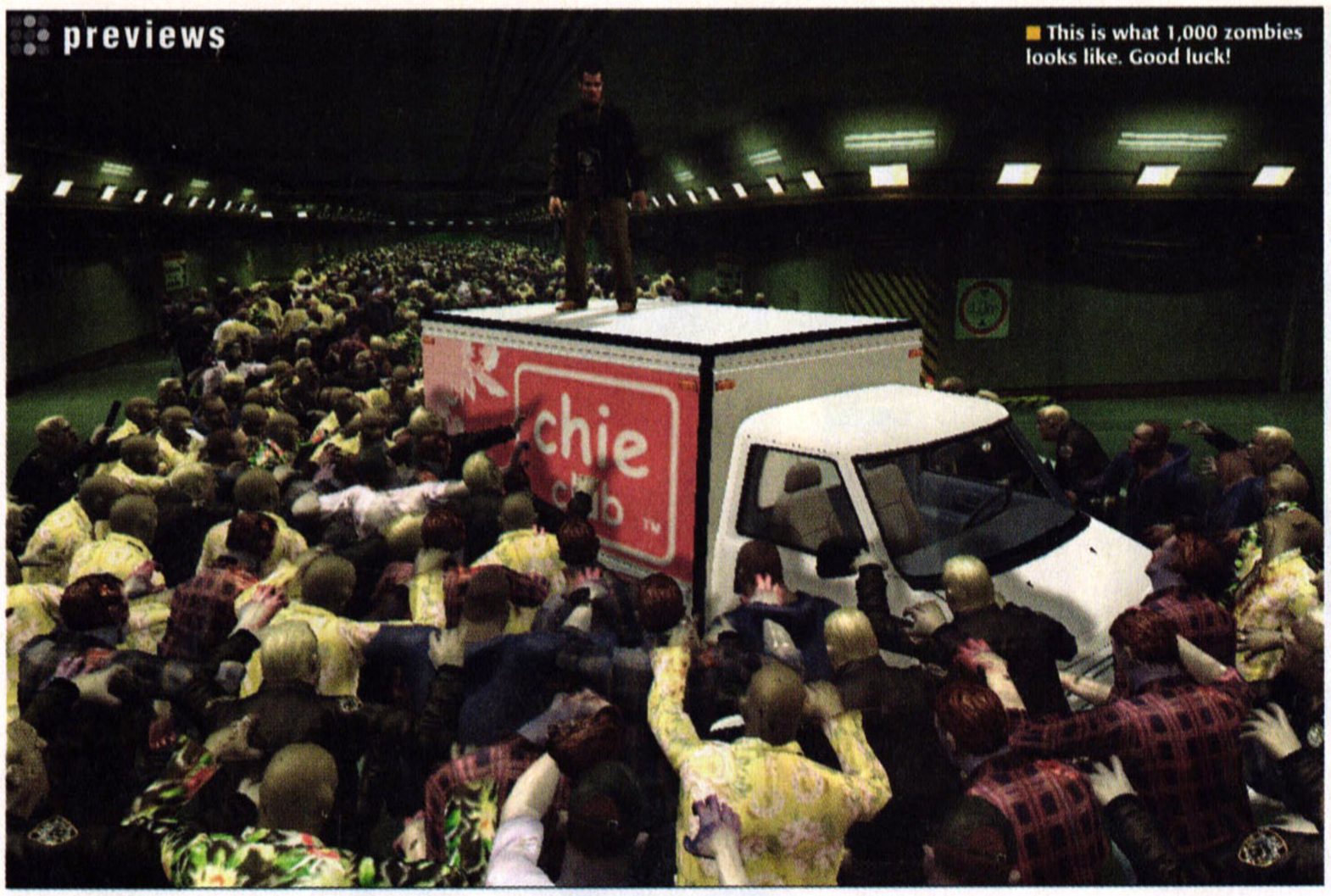
The features we know about so far seem to support the idea. The game promises motion-captured spectators to get rid of the classy cardboard-standee look that most current-gen games offer. The gameplay is also getting some serious tweaks. Specifics of how this will work have yet to be released, but Microsoft and Bizarre Creations are saying that the city and car selections are features that won't be unlocked, but instead will be choices available to the player from the start. A weird idea if taken all the way, but something that really could make PGR 3 stand out from the crowd.

With Xbox 360, the two features that have been trumped over and over are high-definition graphics and the new Xbox Live. Obviously, the title looks to have jaw-dropping visuals on its side, but the Live features hinted at are no slouch either. GothamTV hopes to make the racing game experience more like, in Microsoft's own words, a real sport. Live news feeds will let online players watch other racers and a real-time scroll will show the results and status of those on your Friends List, among other promised features.

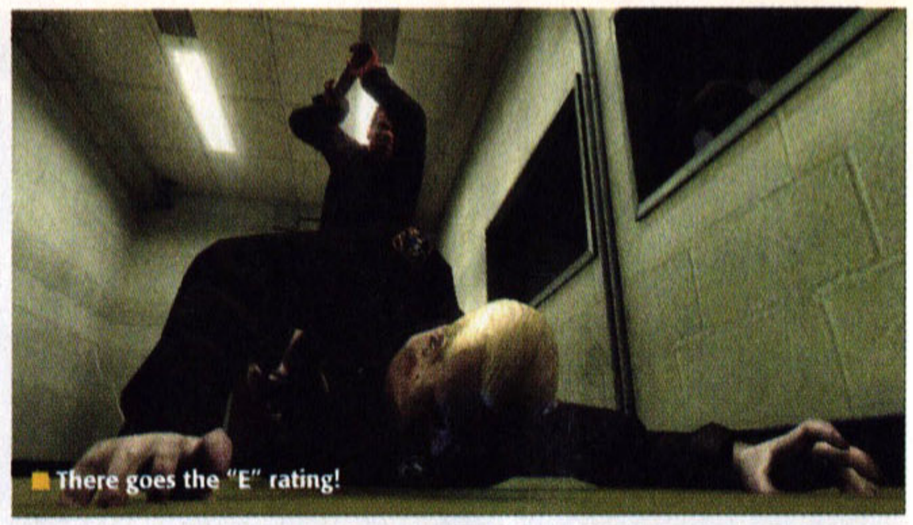
PGR as a series has a lot of competition (the recently-released Forza comes to mind as a racer with great Xbox Live options), but the varied array of features is one sure way to set itself apart. Those amazing graphics won't hurt its position, either. Perhaps the best is yet to come for this aggressive racer. ■■■



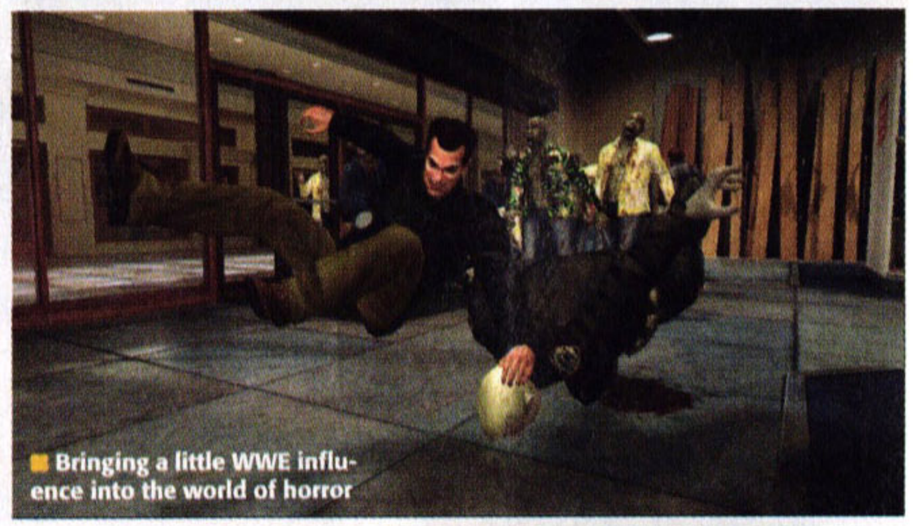
■ The roster boasts over 80 cars from Ferrari, Dodge, and Lamborghini, among others



This is what 1,000 zombies looks like. Good luck!



There goes the "E" rating!

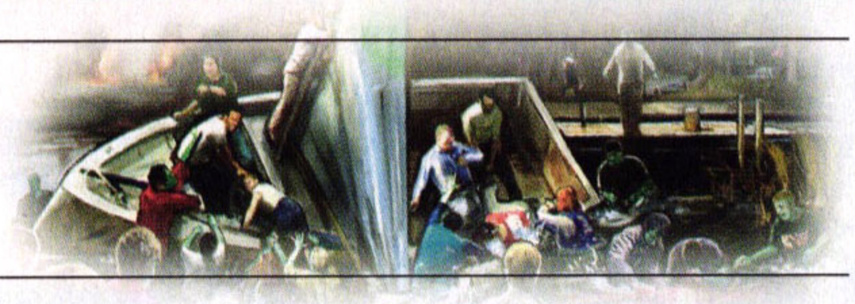


Bringing a little WWE influence into the world of horror

XBOX 360

Dead Rising

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** CAPCOM **> DEVELOPER** CAPCOM PRODUCTION STUDIO 2 **> RELEASE** SPRING 2006



DEATH AT THE SHOPPING MALL

With its landmark Resident Evil series, Capcom turned the zombie from a horror movie reject into a video game icon. Now Keiji Inafune, the man famous for creating the Onimusha and Mega Man series, is crafting an all-new zombie horror title for Microsoft's Xbox 360. Despite some surface similarities, this new franchise seems to be closer in tone to such gonzo horror comedy classics as Sam Raimi's *Evil Dead* and Peter Jackson's *Dead Alive* than the more serious and grim Resident Evil.

The game's concept is deceptively simple: the player is cast as a freelance photojournalist who becomes trapped in a shopping mall overrun by bloodthirsty zombies. Over the course of the next 10 days, he must both survive the relentless onslaught of undead minions and use his trusty camera to get a prize-winning story on the events unfolding around him.

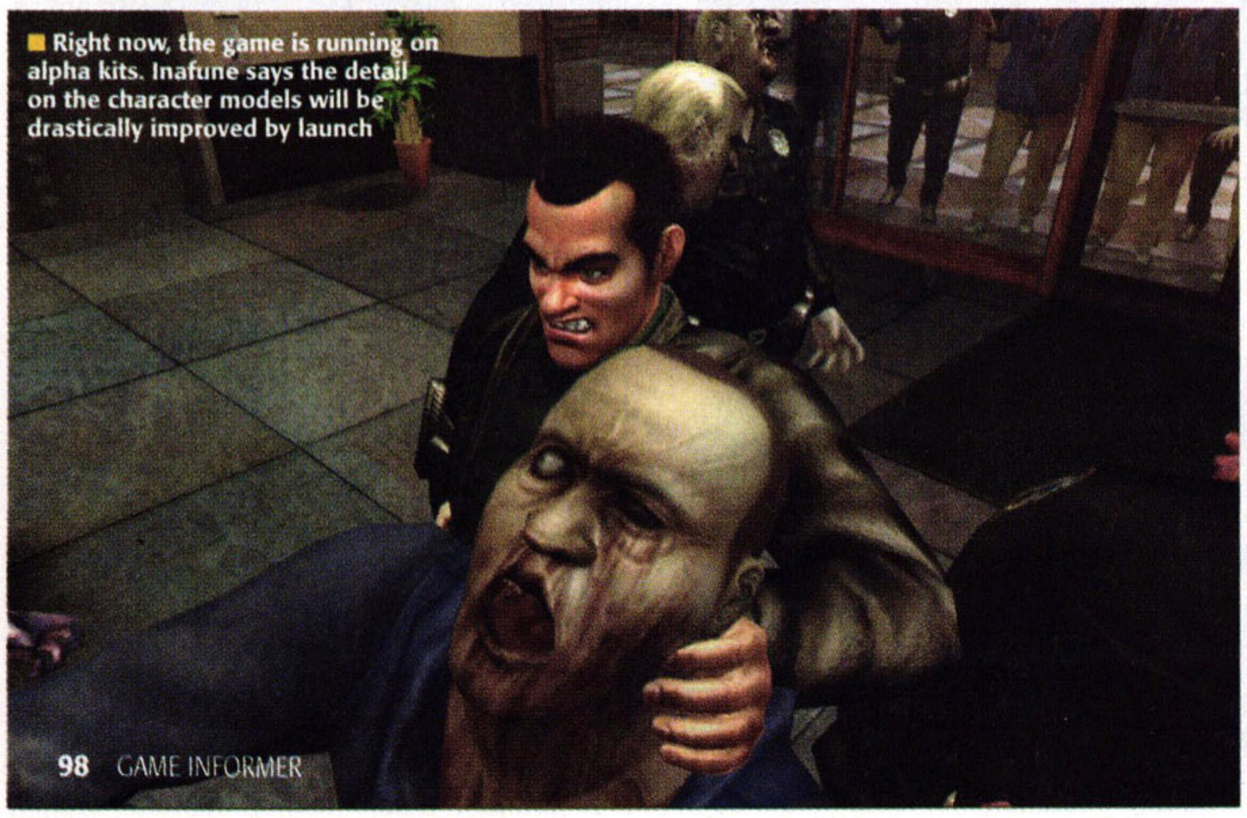
While you won't be forced to take pictures (Inafune said it would be possible to complete the game without snapping a shot), there will be certain "pluses" and extra content that will be unlocked by taking well-composed pictures of the action as it unfolds. Although it hasn't been fully determined yet, the game will grade and evaluate your pictures in some way, bringing greater rewards for better photography. Even more diabolically, malevolent players will be able to engineer events around them to result in more dramatic photos.

"For example, some of you reporter types are low-lifes [laughs]," jokes Inafune. "But that's one way to sell a story. The main character also has the option of getting a scoop by creating a scoop. He can intentionally bring over a friend and they're set up to be killed by a zombie. And then [he can say], 'Oh, I've got a great picture here! Sorry Joe!'"

Of course, photography will eventually take a backseat to the deadly game of survival. As the title has been built from the ground up for the Xbox 360, Inafune and his team are throwing an unprecedented level of zombies onscreen, up to 1,000 at a time. Although there is still a bit of work to be done on the character models and graphics, the sheer number of onscreen enemies is simply jaw-dropping.

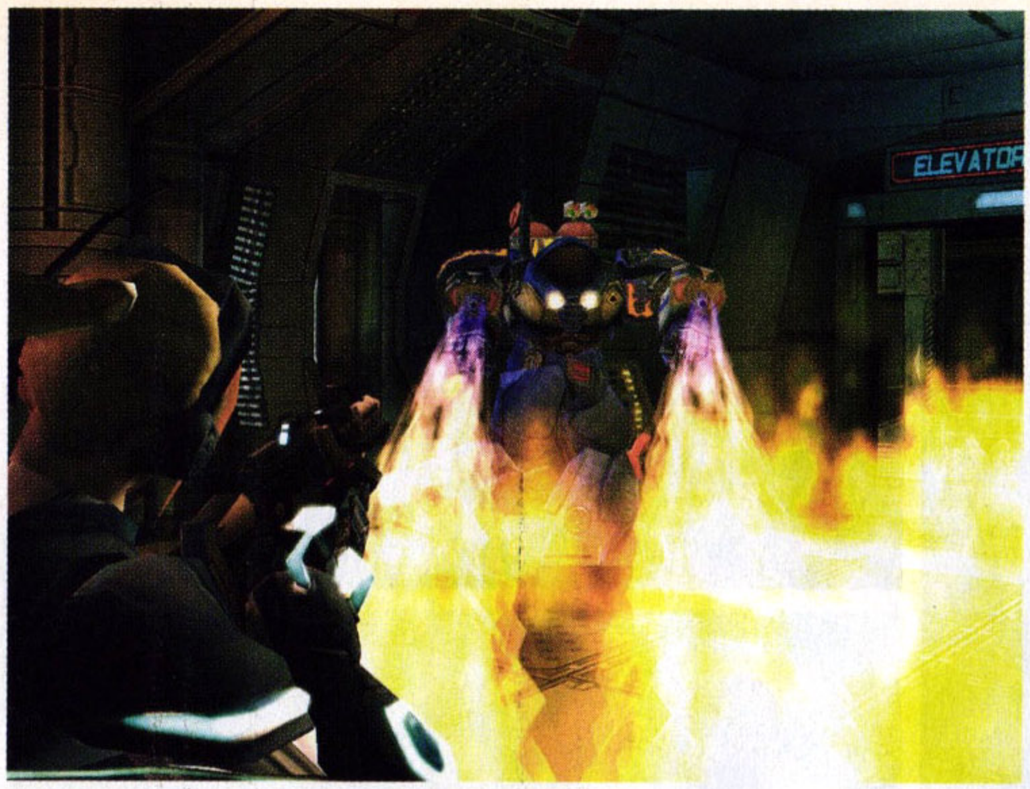
Luckily, you'll have full access to every implement you can tear off the store shelves. All of the shops are open to the player, and in a short video we saw the main character laying waste to zombies with everything from guns to chainsaws to a snowblower. Inafune promises that over 100 items will be available to the player, including clothing options at some of the mall's boutiques and some hidden surprises at the local video games store ("Maybe you'll even be able to play Resident Evil there," teases Inafune). If unarmed, the character also has superlative grappling and melee combat skills, and is able to pick up and throw zombies with ease. However, since you'll frequently be overwhelmed by hundreds of zombies at a time, you'll often have to run, sometimes while helping protect another stranded shopper.

While it certainly looks to be extremely violent, Inafune stresses that the game is intended as a "black comedy". Ironically, he points out, "The scariest thing in the game [is] mankind. With zombies, they're straightforward – they're vegetables that exist to feed. But with people, you don't know whether they're your friend or your enemy. Are they going to betray you? There are so many possibilities." ■■■



Right now, the game is running on alpha kits. Inafune says the detail on the character models will be drastically improved by launch

Almost all of the items in stores will be fully rendered



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

Starcraft: Ghost

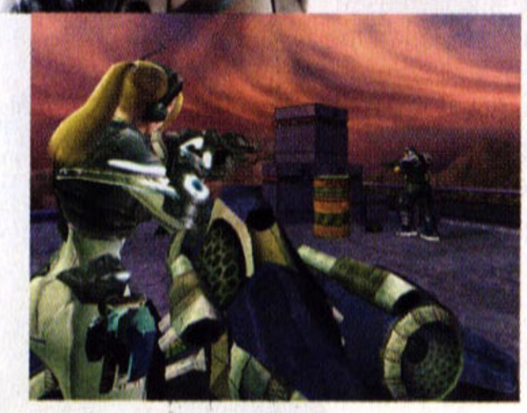
> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) **> PUBLISHER** BLIZZARD **> DEVELOPER** BLIZZARD **> RELEASE** SPRING 2006

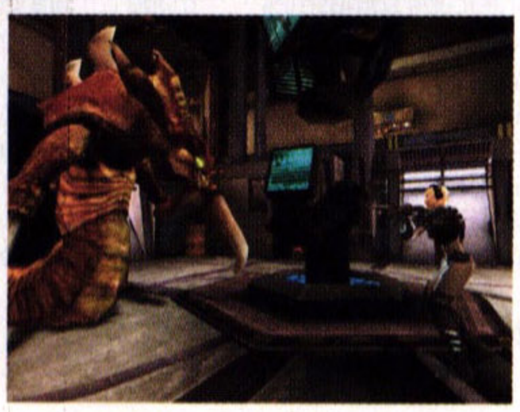
NOVA'S FLARE

Set four years after the end of the devastating Brood War, Starcraft: Ghost opens with the universe in a suitable degree of chaos. The once-human Sarah Kerrigan now rules the Zerg Swarm as a nearly godlike entity, and her nemesis Emperor Arcturus Mengsk leads the forces of the Terran Dominion. Onto this scene enters Nova, an immensely talented Ghost agent trained for the most covert and dangerous missions of the Dominion. However, her loyalty is placed in question as she begins to investigate the mystery of a new Terran research initiative called Project Shadow Blade.

The game plays as a mix between traditional third-person action and a sci-fi take on the stealth/espionage genre. Blizzard's recent acquisition of Swingin' Ape Studios (Metal Arms: Glitch in the System) has found most of that team working to totally redesign the levels of this long-awaited game. We got the chance to play several sections of the new title, and were impressed with the variety of situations that arose. We used Nova's cloaking ability to stealth kill an enemy Marine. Later, we jumped in an unused armor suit to infiltrate a heavily defended base. There was even a nasty boss fight against a ticked-off Zerg Hydralisk.

The extensive new multiplayer component includes a Capture the Base variety, where two teams vie to control a floating Terran military installation. This is accomplished by combining the skills of different team members – you'll play as either a Ghost, Marine, Firebat, or Light Infantry unit. Blizzard's first console foray has been long in coming, but the company's past successes give us good reason to hope that when Ghost finally releases it will be of the same quality that we've come to expect from the acclaimed developer. ■■■





XBOX

Far Cry Instincts

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR SYSTEM LINK) **> PUBLISHER** UBISOFT **> DEVELOPER** UBISOFT MONTREAL **> RELEASE** FALL

FEED THE BEAST

First person shooters need a good shakeup now and then. Last year, Crytek Studios' Far Cry on PC provided just such a surprising new presentation of adrenaline-fueled action. Sometime this fall, console gamers will get the same blistering combat, but with enough tweaks and additions that some of the PC fans might switch sides just to check it out.

Ubisoft's famed Montreal studio has been diligently working on the console follow-up and pumping tons of new features into the series' already great base. While the enemy AI is still brutal, conniving, and strategic, players will now have more command over the environment to slay their foes. The trap system revealed earlier will be one tool in a real-world arsenal that includes stealing weaponry and vehicles from the enemy's stockpile, ducking into the thick jungle underbrush, stealthy kills, and every attack option between sniping and close quarters thumping.

A feature newly discussed at E3 is the set of beast-like skills that Instincts' hero Jack Carver will develop over the course of the game. While the specifics haven't been revealed quite yet, we do know that Jack will get to the point where he can literally sniff out enemies, following their scent trail through the dense vegetation. We've also heard word that your vision, speed, and strength will receive similar boosts as Jack's wild side comes more and more to the forefront.

Online, the game is making huge strides for a current-gen console title. The strategic trap systems will carry over to the multiplayer experience where they can trip up your friends, your enemies, and yourself. In addition, a robust map editor will let couch-based level designers go nuts with an entire island and more customization tools than many similar PC titles. The sweet cherry on top of this jungle carnage is that all custom maps can be uploaded for multiplayer matches. ■■■

■ "Ahh...nothing relaxes me like hunting men for sport."

■ This time buildings are heavily destructible, adding a new layer of strategy to finding cover and sniping points

■ Commandeer enemy emplacements and turn their weapons against them

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | PC

Brothers in Arms Earned in Blood

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (ONLINE MULTIPLAYER TBA)
> PUBLISHER UBISOFT **> DEVELOPER** GEARBOX **> RELEASE** FALL

BACK ON THE LINE

Last year, Road to Hill 30 was a breath of fresh air in the crowded WWII shooting genre, thanks to its minute attention to detail and the excellent squad mechanic that held it together. Unwilling to rest on its laurels, Gearbox Software is hard at work on the next installment of the series, which offers more of what made the first so great while upping the ante with some stellar new additions.

The first game cast you as Sgt. Matt Baker, a conflicted soldier ill-prepared for his role as a leader of men. This time around, the flag has been passed to his right hand man, Sgt. Joe Hartsock. Interestingly, the story will occur in parallel with the missions from the first game, including sections that precede that first tale, others that occur during, and more that act as a follow-up after the original ending.

While Road to Hill 30 exhibited some impressive enemy intelligence, it didn't take too long to figure out its weaknesses and find workarounds. No such luck this time. Earned in Blood boasts a remarkably complex enemy AI. Suppress an enemy squad, and some of them may move to a better vantage and resume shooting. Attempt to flank, and they will move to intercept, sometimes even double flanking you and trapping you in the crossfire. The whole game is set up to offer a completely immersive sense of constant danger and tension. There's also an increased degree of environmental destruction. Try to snipe from a high window, and the enemy artillery may just blow up the whole building. Unlike the occasionally linear path of the first game, many of the new levels are much more open ended, offering a complex tactical problem and leaving it up to the player how they will proceed.

The other big news is the inclusion of cooperative missions. We played one level where each player commanded one team, and together we had to flank several German bunkers before blowing up some anti-aircraft emplacements. You can also play all the cooperative missions online, and each of the levels is playable from either the American or German perspective, effectively doubling the number of available missions.

Overall, Earned in Blood is exactly what we were hoping for in the sequel. Gearbox has taken the baseline formula from the first game and made it more exciting, increased the challenge, and deepened the immersion factor. If it all comes together, the new BIA should definitely give the other big WWII franchises a run for their money when it shows up late this year. ■■■

PSP

Metal Gear Acid 2

> STYLE 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (2-PLAYER VIA AD HOC OR INFRASTRUCTURE) **> PUBLISHER** KONAMI
> DEVELOPER KOJIMA PRODUCTIONS **> RELEASE** TBA

REVENGE OF THE POCKET SNAKE

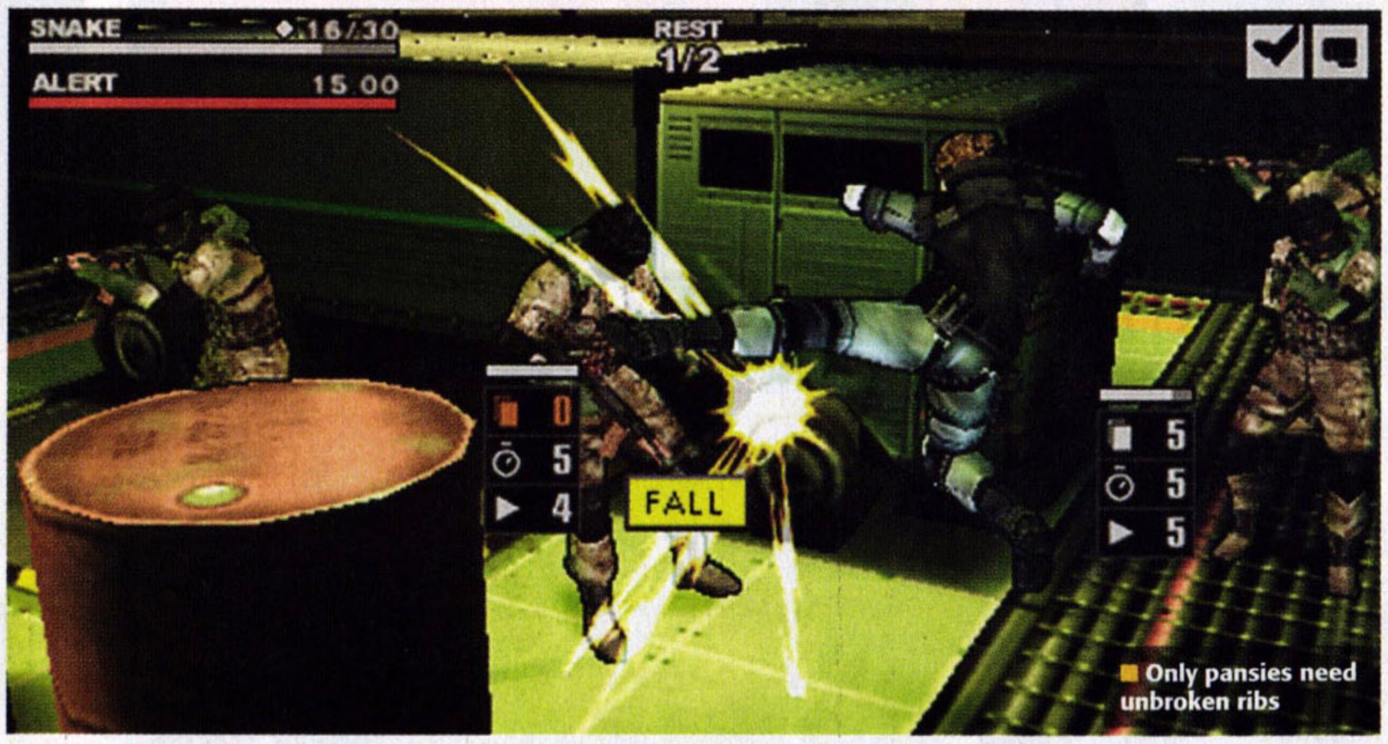
Some may have balked at the idea of a card-based Metal Gear, but Metal Gear Acid set itself apart from its console brothers with strategic gameplay and artistic flair to become one of the most impressive launch titles on PSP. These characteristics will only be amplified in the next iteration (which Konami announced at E3) as Acid continues to carve out its own unique niche in gaming.

"Our boss, Hideo Kojima, told us that for the Acid series, let's do some things we can't do for the Solid series," explains Shinta Nojiri, director of Acid 2. "That's why we took a different approach with the graphics, made it more stylish, and used colors that we couldn't really use with the Solid series." As the screenshots illustrate, the game's cel-shaded, comic book visuals certainly lend a distinctive feel to the action that steps back from the semi-realistic tone of the previous title.

Apart from the graphics, there are other changes in store that will hopefully make the game more accessible to gamers who ran into roadblocks with the first Acid. "We understand that the tutorial was difficult to get through for some users," admits Nojiri. "We're working on making that better." One thing that won't be changing, however, is the star player. While Metal Gear fans have dreaded the Solid Snake Switch-Out since MGS 2, Nojiri assures us that "the characters are going to be quite different, but the main character will still be Snake."

While much of the card-based gameplay will remain the same, there will be tweaks to the system, such as adding cards that make combos possible, in addition to unnamed improvements in the multiplayer battles. While that may seem vague, it's nothing compared to the most mysterious aspect of Acid 2: its connectivity with the PS3's Metal Gear Solid 4. Details on this feature are harder to find than Raiden at a man convention, but Metal Gear fans are used to secrecy by now. If we need to give you more information, we'll contact you by Codec. ■■■

■ "Ah, I haven't seen a Purple Butt Shockwave in years. Good times"



■ Only pansies need unbroken ribs

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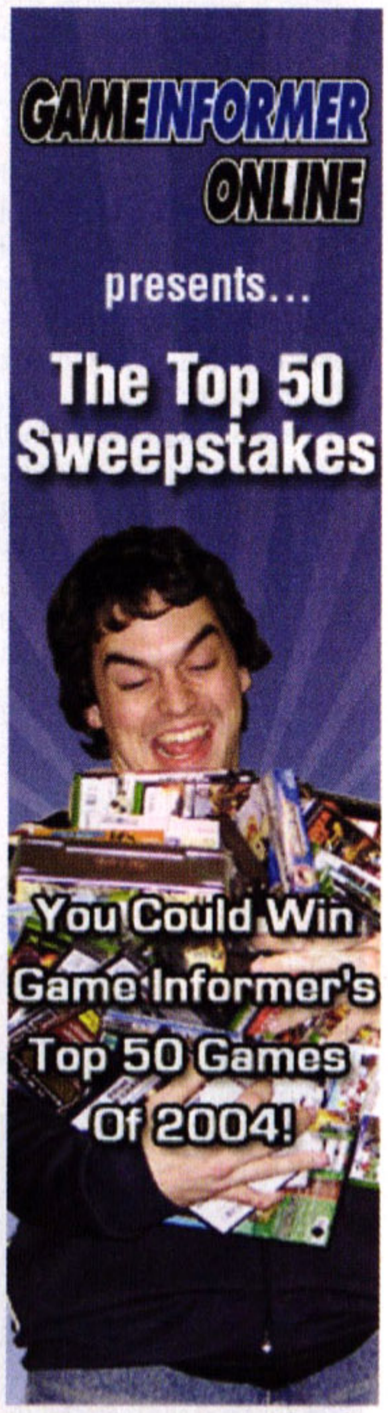
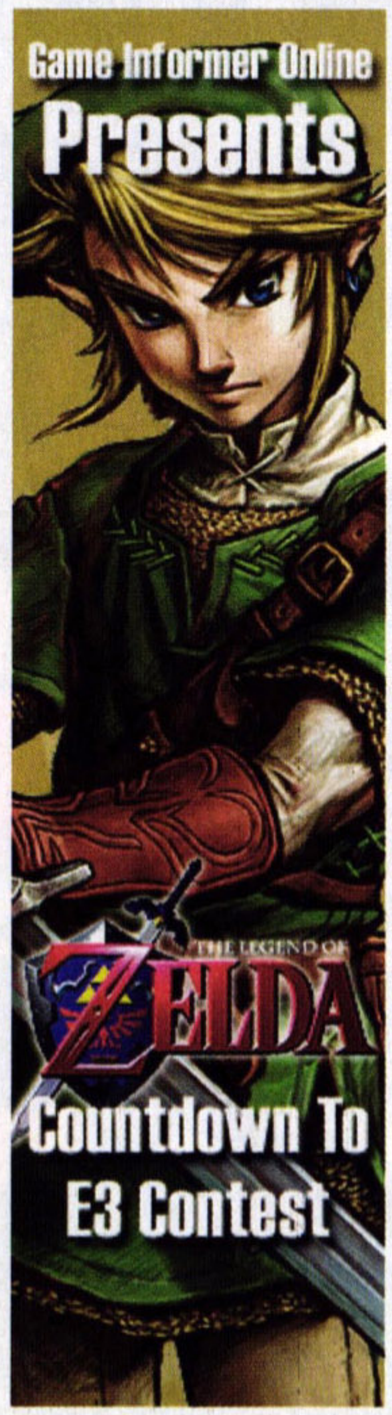




■ This screen shows the baby team on the top and the adult team on the bottom. Players can manage both teams simultaneously

■ Taller enemies change the angles and timing of defensive moves for the team

NINTENDO DS

Mario and Luigi 2 [working title]

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG **> PUBLISHER** NINTENDO **> DEVELOPER** ALPHA DREAM **> RELEASE** WINTER

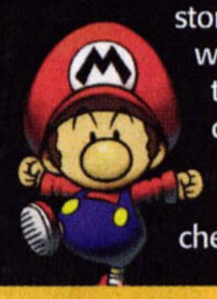
BACK TO THE FUTURE

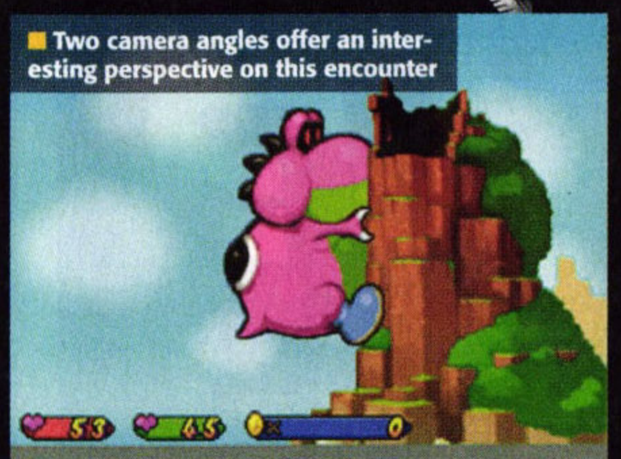
Remembered as one of the most delightful games on the Game Boy Advance, Alpha Dream's Mario and Luigi: Superstar Saga (released in November of 2003) is getting its due sequel later this year. While there's much that seems to be staying the same between the entries, there is even more changing in big ways.

With the advantages of the DS, the plumbing duo is getting more screen space and using the headroom to add substantially better graphics, larger enemies, an overhead map screen, and baby versions of themselves. Wait, baby Mario and Luigi? That's right – according to what Nintendo has let loose on the plot, adult Mario and Luigi go back in time to (drum roll, please) save Princess Peach. In doing so, they meet up with baby versions of themselves, the princess, and Bowser.

These team-ups mean that the two pairs of brothers will travel, fight, and explore as a foursome. Nintendo's latest demo levels of the game played a lot like the earlier entry, with one button for Mario (A) and one for Mr. Green Guy (B). To manage the tykes, X and Y are used. In addition, the babies can ride on the bigger fellows' backs, be thrown projectile style, or split off into their own group to explore other areas.

Surely, puzzle solving and dynamic all-brother combat moves are in store. What we don't know is if show-stealing Fawful will make a return with this time-bending storyline. Either way, the first was such an incredibly good time that the return of the development team and the game's RPG/action combat will be at least worth checking out. ■■■





■ Two camera angles offer an interesting perspective on this encounter

■ The game's often-used map will take up the top screen when all of the plumbers are together

PC

Tabula Rasa

> STYLE MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING GAME **> PUBLISHER** NCSOFT **> DEVELOPER** DESTINATION GAMES **> RELEASE** 2007

A CLEAN SLATE

■ This bad guy can and will set us up the bomb

When we saw Tabula Rasa at 2004's E3, it sounded interesting, if a little weird. However, the team at Destination Games (headed up by Richard Garriott, creator of Ultima) decided they didn't like the way things were progressing, and started over. This year's incarnation of Tabula Rasa looks far better, and the concepts making their way into the game are even more intriguing than before.

At first glance, you might think that TR is an action game, and the fast-paced excitement of that genre is very present in the flow of play. However, everything from hit calculations to damage numbers are based on a vast RPG-style framework. Likewise, the massively multiplayer aspect shows up in the teamwork necessary to tackle the harder challenges presented to you. Tabula Rasa looks to be coming together as a true hybrid title, and we couldn't be more excited.

Another departure from the standard formula is in the structure of the game world. You have the choice of taking on scripted missions for a more typical RPG experience or going out into the public battlefields to defend humanity from the nefarious Bane race. Like an outdoor zone in any MMORPG, these contain hostile NPCs, as well as any players brave enough to venture there. But, rather than static enemy spawns waiting to be killed, real war wages back and forth. Depending on player actions, the state of the battlefield will change: Rolling six deep and stomping on the Bane will grant more territory (and thus easier questing) for the humans, while little or ineffective hero activity will result in the area being crushed under the heels of the enemy. Of course, friendlies will be fighting alongside you, helping assault or defend the various bases and emplaced defenses scattered around the zone.

It's still a long way from release, but Tabula Rasa has the potential to offer a totally new and unique experience to online gamers. Hopefully it doesn't get delayed too many more years. ■■■

■ The foes you'll face are nothing if not impressive

Just because you're in a vehicle doesn't mean you're invincible

PC

Enemy Territory: Quake Wars

> STYLE ONLINE MULTIPLAYER ACTION (NUMBER OF PLAYERS TBA) **> PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION **> DEVELOPER** SPLASH DAMAGE / ID SOFTWARE
> RELEASE 2006

QUAKING THE INTERNET

Though we've seen nothing yet of Quake IV's multiplayer options, Activision showed another title at E3 that filled the void nicely. Enemy Territory: Quake Wars uses much of the same technology of Quake IV, but consists entirely of multiplayer. It also shares the setting of Raven Software's highly anticipated FPS, and as such pits a team of Strogg (evil, cybernetically enhanced humans) against a squad of Earth Defense Force troops in team-oriented, objective-based online combat. From what we've heard, Quake Wars will be similar in concept to Return to Castle Wolfenstein's multiplayer (which was excellent), but with the advantage of a new generation of technology created by coding wizard John Carmack of id Software (see sidebar).

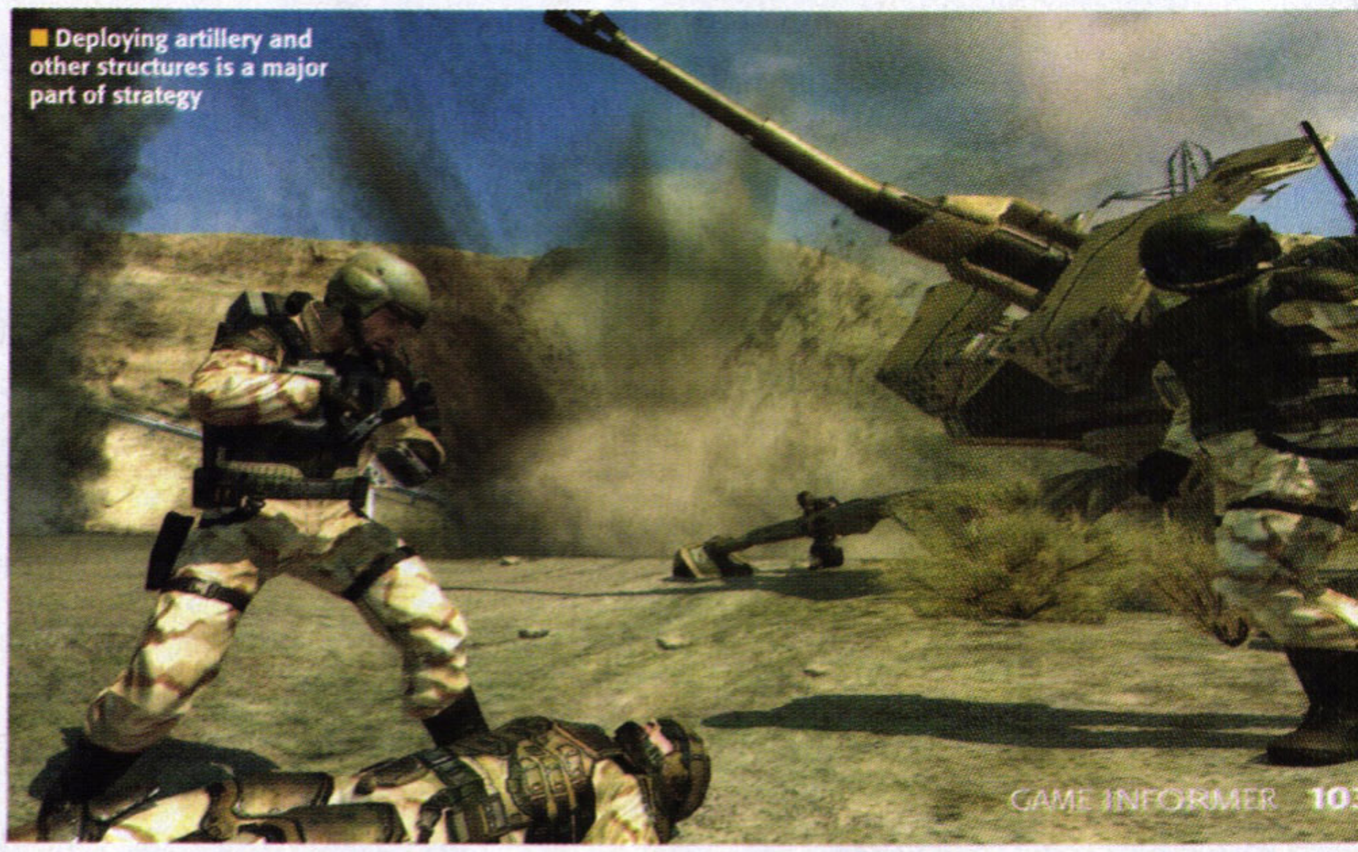
On the technology front, the exciting thing is that the physics system employed by Quake Wars is like nothing we've ever seen, and it's used expertly to enhance gameplay. For instance, each wheel on a vehicle exists as a separate physics object, has its own traction rating depending on the driving surface and torque applied, and can be shot off – which leads to incredibly realistic crashes. Likewise, helicopters and antigrav aircraft have true physics governing their movement (which are obviously made up for non-existent technology), and behave like the real thing. You really have to see it to understand, but take our word that this is the real deal.

On the gameplay side of things, what really gets us going is both the match structure and the differences between the two sides. For instance, an EDF medic can revive unconscious allies, but the Strogg equivalent can "stroggify" a KO'd enemy to turn them into a forward spawn point for his team. The vehicles and weapons also vary wildly between factions, as do the objectives. As for the match structure, think of it like Unreal Tournament's Assault mode on crack. Each team will have several objectives to accomplish simultaneously, and the game will offer you a choice of missions to tackle based on your position, experience, and loadout. No doubt the barrier to entry will be markedly lower due to this advanced form of noob assistance.

These features should create a stunning breadth of options for strategy and tactics, and honestly look to be putting Quake Wars in its own league within the online FPS scene. Blasphemy to the Counter-Strike, Unreal Tournament, and Quake II diehards it may be, but this has the potential to become the best of all the multiplayer shooters. And, given Activision's strong commitment to Xbox 360 (and the fact that Quake IV is seeing a simultaneous release on that platform and PC), we wouldn't be surprised at all to hear about Quake Wars making the console leap as well. ■■■

TECH EXPLAINED

So how could the claustrophobic Doom 3 engine, with its emphasis on lighting and detail, possibly be fit for a game that focuses on large outdoor battles between multiple players? After all, Doom 3 is known to chug when a four-player deathmatch in a tiny, indoor map heats up. The key is a new rendering technique created by Carmack called "megatexture rendering." Basically, this takes one huge texture and lays it over the entire landscape rather than tiling the regular ground textures at various levels of detail. Which, in the end, means that everything both looks better and runs infinitely smoother. So, more or less, you get the advantages of Doom 3's luscious environments and advanced lighting without the former limitations of the engine. As you can assume, Quake Wars looks amazing.



Deploying artillery and other structures is a major part of strategy

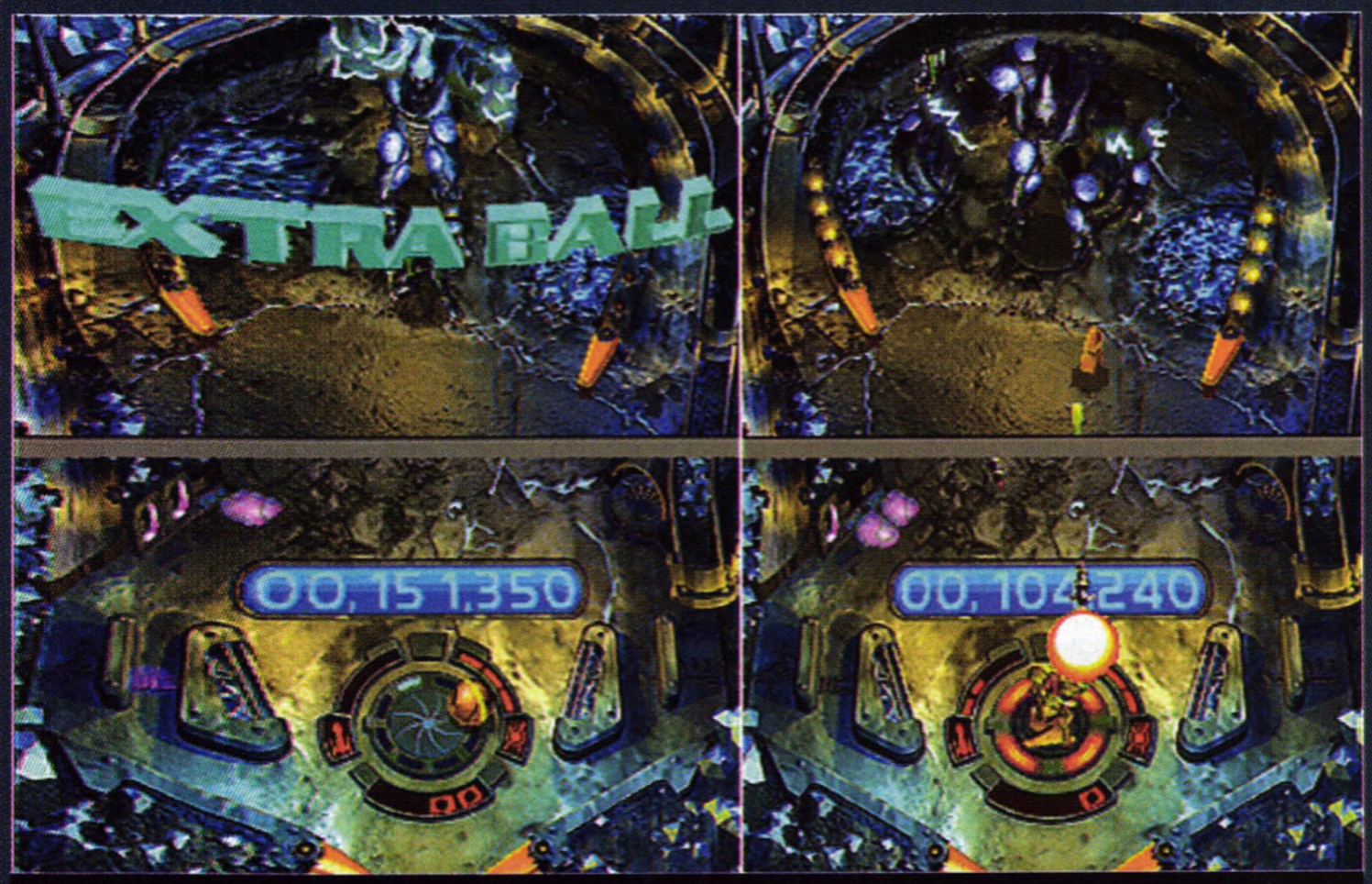
PHOTOPHILE

Mini Previews With Big Pictures

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE | PC

The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe

In addition to inspiring thousands of children to rummage uninvited through their parents' armoires ("Hmm. I've never seen Daddy wear these leather pants before..."), C.S. Lewis' classic series has now given rise to a game based on the upcoming film adaptation. With single-player and co-op modes, the title allows players to switch among the urchins to make use of their unique abilities and perform joint attacks. Buena Vista Games is ensuring that some version of this adventure will appear on practically every available gaming apparatus (including DS, GBA, and PSP) to coincide with the movie's December release.



NINTENDO DS

Metroid Prime Pinball

When the folks at Nintendo first approached Samus about doing a spinoff based around her ability to turn into a ball, they wanted her to star in a soccer game. Samus passed, instead opting to star in Metroid Prime Pinball. Turns out she doesn't like being kicked, but is fine with getting paddled. In this DS game (coming late this year), Samus, in ball form, is bounced around Metroid-themed tables, complete with boss fights, an in-cart rumble feature, and minigames. Metroid Prime Pinball is developed by Fuse Games, creators of Mario Pinball Land, but don't let that scare you. Samus's new pinball adventure should offer a far better balance of classic pinball and sci-fi thrills.

XBOX 360 | PC

Demonik

We've always wondered if Clive Barker's mother ever wishes he'd write about nice things, like duckies and picnics. But no, he's always creating twisted stories about demons, like Demonik. Due out next year, Demonik is coming to 360 and PC courtesy of Majesco, and lets players assume the role of a Demonik, a demon summoned from the underworld. In each mission you'll have to fulfill a goal given by your summoner by possessing humans and using your supernatural powers. You can jump between bodies at any time and can fling people around with the power of your mind. And with a story written by Barker, you can assume there will be all kinds of scary demons, demented humans, and other unpleasant things. But no duckies.

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

Possession

A veritable horde of undead-themed games is on the way soon, but only one puts you in control of a mass of hungry walking dead. Possession, developed by Blitz Games, places gamers in the gooey shoes of The Enslaver, an angry living-impaired chap with the ability to control other zombies. With simple controls based on squad-based shooters like Ghost Recon 2, you'll be able to send groups of zombies to do your bidding. Of course, your bidding mainly involves wiping out every human you see. Blitz claims that you will be able to control hundreds of undead at a time, and can even take direct control of individual zombies. No publisher or release date has yet been announced, but we expect to hear more on this unique next-gen title very soon.

XBOX

Half-Life 2

What is there to say about Half-Life 2 on the Xbox except that we can't wait? Last year, the game proved itself to be not only one of the best games of the year, but one of the finest PC titles in history. Now, Valve has been hard at work to bring the entire uncompromised single-player experience to the Xbox. Even while the graphics may not be up to PC players' high standards, Xbox gamers should have nothing to complain about. The title is looking fantastic on the console, even if it still needs to be smoothed out a little bit. Look for the console release late this summer.

XBOX | PLAYSTATION 2 | PC

Full Spectrum Warrior: Ten Hammers

The first Full Spectrum was a stiff wooden toy soldier compared to this iteration. This new Pandemic-developed THQ title is expected by the end of the year, and it should feel like a whole new game. A third controllable unit will sometimes be in your care in the form of vehicles like tanks and armed HUMVEEs. More importantly, you can now break a four-man squad into two separate two-man groups, which allows more flexibility in how you cover, attack, and move. Further depth is provided by a Combat Effectiveness rating which applies to you and your enemies at all times. This makes combat and whether you are behind cover or not, for instance, much more of a gray area than in FSW. Finally, multiplayer modes that let friends play as the insurgent forces only add to Ten Hammers' new feel.

PLAYSTATION 2

Resident Evil 4

Capcom's survival horror masterpiece received our highest honor when it released on GameCube, and the company has predictably seen fit to widen the title's audience by releasing it on PlayStation 2 towards the end of this year. It is not to be missed. While the footage we saw was brief, it's clear that the graphics are holding up impressively even on the jump to the more jaggy-prone Sony system. In addition, we've heard that some special additions are in store for this version – think Leon, a chainsaw, and some villagers that need to see the front end of a whirring deathblade.

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | PC

Hitman: Blood Money

Late this fall Eidos plans to reinvigorate one of its most popular series with a new adventure for Agent 47. This time out, the cold-blooded assassin is caught in a war between his own contract agency and a dark new organization that is attempting to usurp its power. Beyond the noticeable visual upgrades, 47 now has many more tools that deepen the illusion of being a true assassin. You'll often have to make kills look like accidents by pushing people off a building or setting fire to their homes. You can hang down from the top of an elevator to twist a man's neck, or hide your pistol behind your back like an innocuous bystander. Enemy AI will now follow blood trails when you drag a body, or notice a dropped weapon if you don't hide it. Brutal efficiency is the focus, and Blood Money looks to hit the target with surprising skill.

GAMECUBE

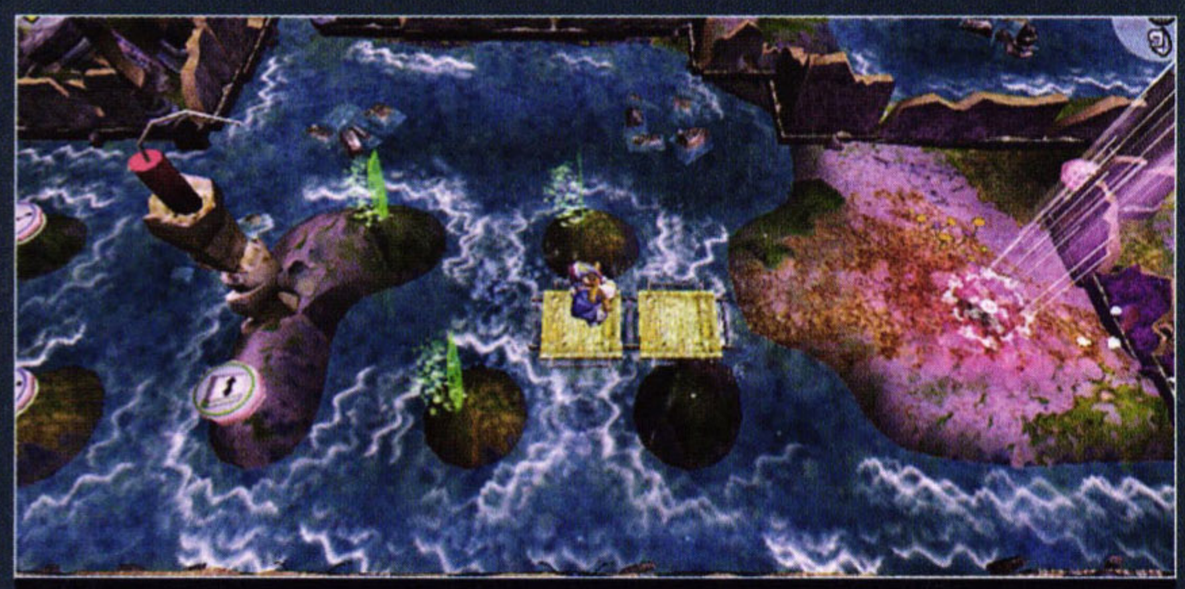
Super Mario Strikers

As Mario continues the slow building of his sports empire, it was only a matter of time before he targeted the world's most popular game. His first venture onto the soccer pitch has a few variations on the traditional rules. Normally, freezing your foes with an ice shell would almost definitely get you a foul, but Mario's refs seem willing to turn a blind eye. And don't worry about any red cards when you release that chain chomp to terrorize your opponents. Combining the constant speed and action of soccer with the frenetic chaos of a Mario Kart game made this one of Nintendo's more exciting offerings at E3. It's a good reason for party game fans to still have hope for their GameCube, even if Nintendo has remained mum on a release date.

NINTENDO DS

A Boy and His Blob

Back in 1990, gamers were treated to an adventure about an unnamed boy who could transform a friendly blob of goo into various items by feeding it jellybeans. This year, the duo's story will continue with A Boy and His Blob for the DS from Majesco. Like in the original game, the blob will transform into different shapes based on the flavor of jellybeans it's fed. The blob can turn into a ladder, a blowtorch, armor, and more. Our favorite flavor of jellybean? Hamburger.



PSP

Frantix

Puzzlers can get a bit formulaic at times – who wants to play another Puyo Pop knockoff? Sony Online Entertainment's Frantix, however, is set to hook PSP owners up with innovative fast-paced puzzling for any and all types of gamer. Each of its more than 150 levels requires its own unique solution, involving any combination of dozens of obstacles, power-ups, hazards, and creatures. The 3D rendered graphics won't make your eyes bleed like the lower class of puzzle game, either. Proud PSP owners can prove to Nintendo and everyone else that intuitive, simple, and fun gameplay is by no means limited to any specific platform this fall, when Frantix hits shelves.

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | PC

Just Cause

One of the big problems with many of the games inspired by Grand Theft Auto is that they simply rehash many of the American, urban themes and settings that have made that series such a success. Open-ended gameplay can incorporate a lot more than that, so it's nice to see Avalanche Studios and Eidos taking the formula south of the border in this fall's Just Cause. The game's protagonist is CIA agent Rico Rodriguez, who must play various criminal and government organizations against each other to bring down a despotic regime in the fictional island of San Esperito. As you might expect, you'll be able to pilot a host of vehicles, boats, and aircraft in the 1,225 square miles of open world the team has created, and even parachute out of planes and off the roofs of moving vehicles. Aside from that, it's all about subterfuge, hot lead, hot babes, and margaritas.

PSP

PoPoLoCrois

Traditional RPG fans have been waiting with bated breath to see just what the PSP is going to do for them. They'll get their first hint late this summer with Agetec's release of PoPoLoCrois, a classic 2D RPG based on a uniquely whimsical Japanese anime. While this is the first time we'll be seeing the series here in the states, gamers in Japan have already gobbled up several titles in the franchise. Consequently, this U.S. release will include a combination of the two first games into one larger one. At least 10 playable characters will accompany you on your journey, while a full hour of anime cutscenes will fill in the story. This could be just the thing to get the RPG ball rolling on PSP.

PSP

Daxter

Next spring, Ready at Dawn Studios will release its first game – a full-featured platformer staring Daxter of Naughty Dog's Jak series. Taking place in the two years before Jak II, when Daxter searches feverishly for his friend, players will get to see Haven City through an animal's eyes. In an interesting twist, this Sony published PSP game will offer connectivity with the upcoming Jak X: Combat Racing through a USB cable (including both drivers and vehicles for the PS2 title and secret, unnamed features in the PSP game). Besides the main story's platforming goodness, there are also levels where players can walk through Daxter's dreams, in which he is the world's ultimate hero.

PSP

GripShift

Some would decry the current PSP library as being a bit port-heavy, lacking the breadth of titles to break Sony's handheld out of a "PS2-lite" image. Compelling original titles like GripShift will help avoid this perception. Sony Online's quirky arcade racer challenges players to navigate over-the-top courses while completing objectives like finding a secret item or collecting coins. The action is fast and fun, and hip to the pick-up-and-play mentality of a portable. Up to four-player wireless play is included as well. You can even make your own levels with the track editor and let your comrades download them – or just satisfy yourself with the more than 100 pre-made tracks. All this and more (a bonus game called Penguin Bowling? Yes!) will be available this fall.

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | PC

The Matrix: Path of Neo

It looks like we might finally be getting the Matrix game fans have been clamoring for since the very start. The Wachowski brothers have helped to retell the story from the constant perspective of Neo, and have even crafted an entirely new end to the final movie. Shiny Entertainment recognizes the problems that plagued Enter the Matrix, and seeks to improve them with a development team three times the size of the earlier game's. Normal mapping is fully utilized, even on the PS2 version, and early experimentation has yielded the ability to show hundreds of characters on screen at once to help emulate scenes like the Neo/Smith fight of the second film. Flying, kung fu, blazing guns, and bullet-time – everything is in place to please the fans, and maybe even bring a few back into the fold when Atari publishes the game late this year.

PLAYSTATION 2

Devil Kings

Hiroyuki Kobayashi, the producer of Resident Evil 4 and the upcoming Devil May Cry 4, has Koei's Dynasty Warriors dead in his sights with Devil Kings. Spill the blood of hundreds, perhaps thousands, as you quest to turn the tides of a war. Giving a nod to Devil May Cry's Dante, one of the six playable characters is equipped with both a sword and a shotgun. When you're not chopping through hordes of troops with lightning quick combos, you can tap into magic, such as the ability to brandish six swords at once, to show your assailants the true meaning of pain. From what we have played thus far, Devil Kings feels like Dynasty Warriors with an attitude. Capcom hopes to have it on retail shelves early in 2006.

GAMECUBE

Dance Dance Revolution: Mario Mix

Mario is a slave 4 U. In Konami's newest variation of its popular dance franchise, players will get down and funky with a wide array of characters like Mario, Princess Peach, and Waluigi, all shaking their groove thang to various beats from the Mushroom Kingdom. There will also be dance pad-controlled minigames, a brand new feature for the series. When Mario Mix releases this fall, you'll finally have an opportunity to ask your childhood idols to dance without fear of rejection or restraining orders! Take that, Soleil Moon Frye!

PSP

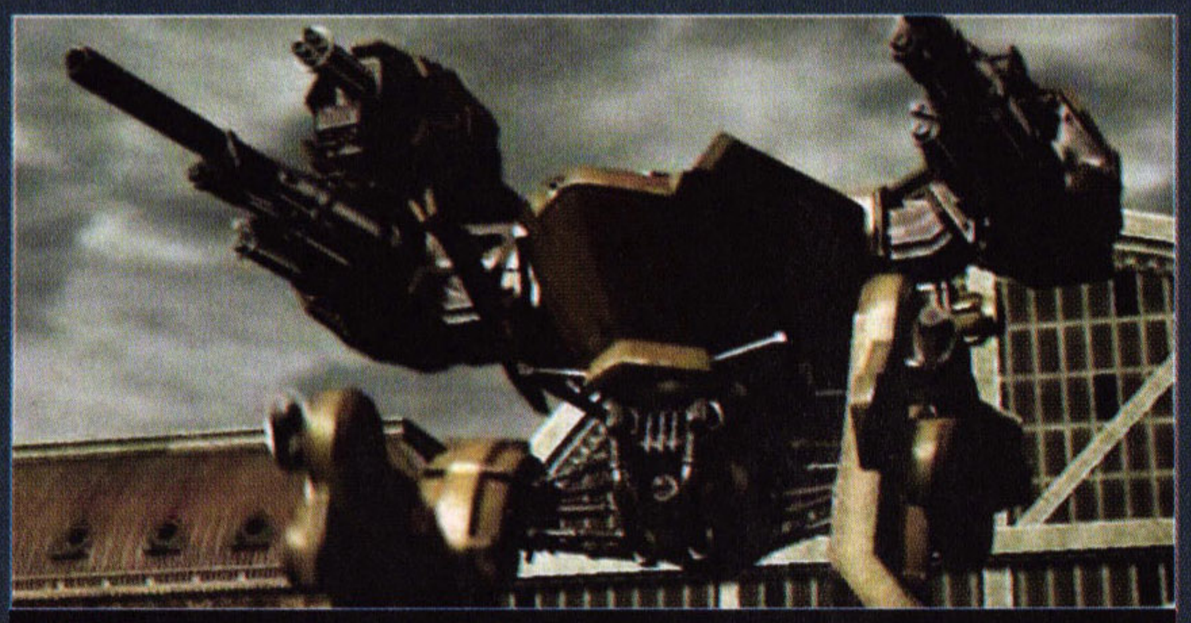
Burnout Legends

EA's Burnout franchise has been spreading its wings this year (the awesome next-gen Burnout 4 was also shown at E3), and the PSP offering looks to be one hot customer. The option to upload a level to a friend's PSP so that two can play a race with one disc, races where you are a cop chasing the nefarious drivers of Burnout's world, and cars that can only be unlocked in two-player ad hoc games are all new features that we're pumped about. Oh, and it's one of the most gorgeous and speedy cruisers we've ever seen. Not bad work from those busy Criterion folks, if we do say so ourselves.

PSP

Virtua Tennis: World Tour

Sega's Virtua Tennis has been absent from the scene since 2002, which is far too long for one of the greatest tennis franchises of all time. Since Hot Shots has shown us just how addictive PSP sports can be, we were pleased to see a very solid playable build of Virtua Tennis at E3. Basically, it's the same in both functionality and depth as any of the console games. Amazingly, the character models and texturing are every bit as detailed as most console tennis sims on the market. So far, developer Sumo Digital (OutRun 2) looks to have a hit on its hands when Virtua Tennis: World Tour launches this summer.



XBOX 360

Chrome Hounds

From Software is well-known for its mech games, such as the Armored Core series, which makes us downright giddy about Chrome Hounds. The Sega title for Xbox 360 was unveiled behind closed doors at E3, and we were assured that the impressive video was entirely in-game footage. Chrome Hounds will focus largely on Xbox Live play, and allow pilots to customize every element of their mechs. No release date was given as the title hasn't been officially announced for U.S. release, but considering Sega's recent drive to come out strong in the next generation, we'd expect to see this title sooner rather than later.

GAMECUBE

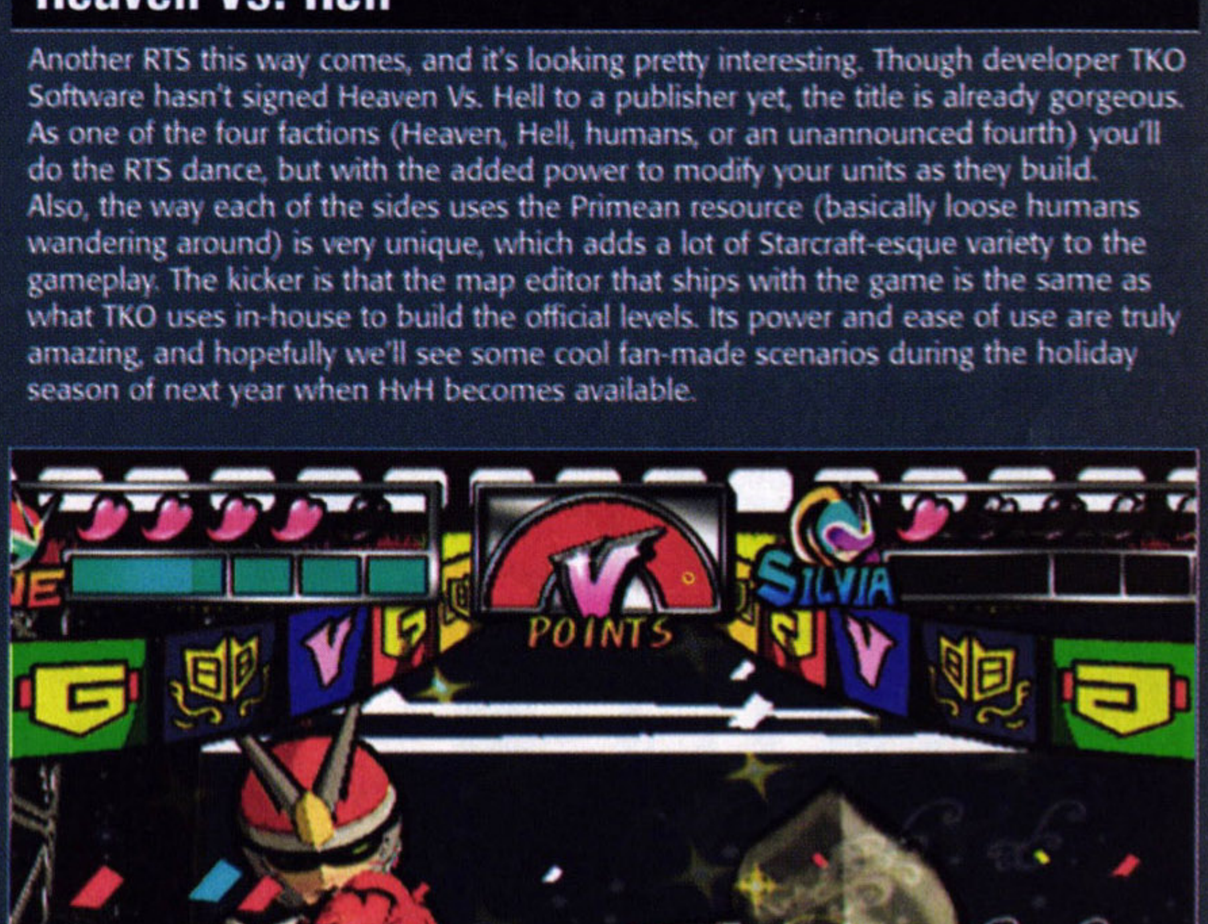
Pokémon XD: Gale of Darkness

What we've wanted for nearly a decade is a full-featured Pokémon RPG on a console. Haters need not apply and the rest of us can admit, shame free, that the "gotta catch 'em all" mentality makes the October release of XD: Gale of Darkness an interesting proposition. Promising connectivity with other Game Boy entries in the series and one, two, or four-player options, the Genius Sonority-developed title's big draw will surely be the full roster of RPG conventions, a large world to explore, and a little more variety in the battle animations. Let's just hope it's better than Pokémon Colosseum.

PSP

MediEvil Resurrection

We saw a flash of Cambridge Studio's new title for Sir Daniel Fortesque at publisher Sony's initial announcement of the PSP in 2004, but more specifics about the game didn't surface until E3 2005. Set 100 years after Sorcerer Zarok was defeated...wait, that wasn't what happened. Although the citizens of Gallowmere were told a heroic tale, the truth is that Fortesque bit the bullet during the archer's first volley. Resurrected during Zarok's epic return, Fortesque can now make one last effort to actually do what everyone thinks he has already achieved. A hundred cutscenes will flesh out characters like the Harbor Master of Scurvey Docks and the Forrest Witch, and gameplay will offer both a robust single-player mission and two-player minigames via ad hoc when it hits store shelves this September.



PC

Heaven Vs. Hell

Another RTS this way comes, and it's looking pretty interesting. Though developer TKO Software hasn't signed Heaven Vs. Hell to a publisher yet, the title is already gorgeous. As one of the four factions (Heaven, Hell, humans, or an unannounced fourth) you'll do the RTS dance, but with the added power to modify your units as they build. Also, the way each of the sides uses the Primean resource (basically loose humans wandering around) is very unique, which adds a lot of Starcraft-esque variety to the gameplay. The kicker is that the map editor that ships with the game is the same as what TKO uses in-house to build the official levels. Its power and ease of use are truly amazing, and hopefully we'll see some cool fan-made scenarios during the holiday season of next year when HvH becomes available.

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Final Fight: Streetwise

Apparently, there was nothing final about the original Final Fight, as it has spawned a hearty amount of sequels. But it has been a while since the last entry in the series, and now it is making the leap from side-scrolling action to a full, free-roaming 3D brawler. Kids these days love those free-roaming worlds. Streetwise stars Kyle Travers, brother of Cody Travers from the original game. It seems that Cody has been kidnapped, and it's up to Kyle to rescue him. By battling his foes well, Kyle earns Respect points, which reward him with new moves and weapons. NPCs will give him missions as he explores the city in his quest to defeat the evil gangs and rescue his brother. Streetwise is scheduled to hit PS2 and Xbox this winter.

GAMECUBE | PSP

Viewtiful Joe: VFX Battle

The only dude who can wear a pink cape and still look cool (sorry, Reiner), Capcom's Viewtiful Joe is taking his unique 2D style into a new arena. In a format similar to Super Smash Brothers, Viewtiful Joe: VFX Battle has players choosing characters from the Viewtiful Joe universe (like Joe, Sylvia, and Alastor) and using VFX powers to stylishly pound each other into submission. The players aren't alone in the arena, however; the environments are littered with enemies that can be pummeled and used in attacks against opponents. In addition to two-player versus, the game will also feature a campaign that can be played cooperatively. The PSP version will feature some exclusive content, but more details on that will have to wait until the game's winter release draws nearer.

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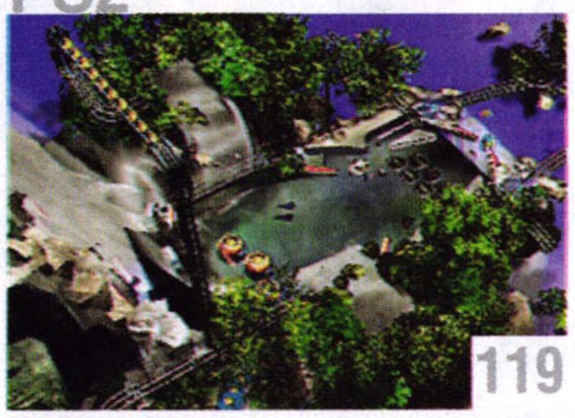

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GAME INFORMER GAME OF THE MONTH

Fire Emblem: The Sacred Stones

The GBA may be overshadowed by newer, flashier handhelds, but that doesn't mean the platform can't still get some great software. This latest offering from Intelligent Systems can easily hang with the best of the strategy/RPG crowd, and does exactly what it needs to to refine the already-excellent Fire Emblem formula. This sequel is still difficult, but not head-explodingly frustrating, and everything that was great about the first title returns. Bonus dungeons, an interesting story, and heroic deeds aplenty await on page 126.

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

THE SCORING SYSTEM

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

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

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

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

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

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

> Replay Value

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

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

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

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

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

PC

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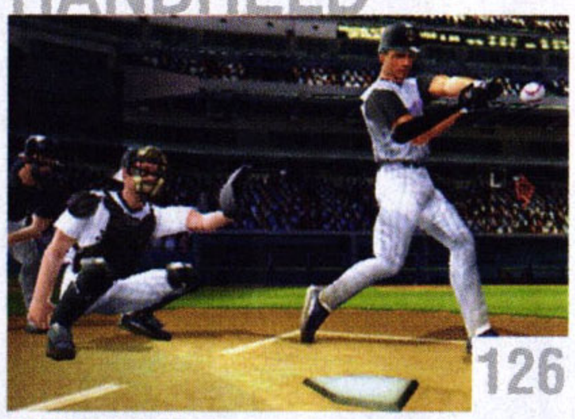
Dungeon Lords

HANDHELD



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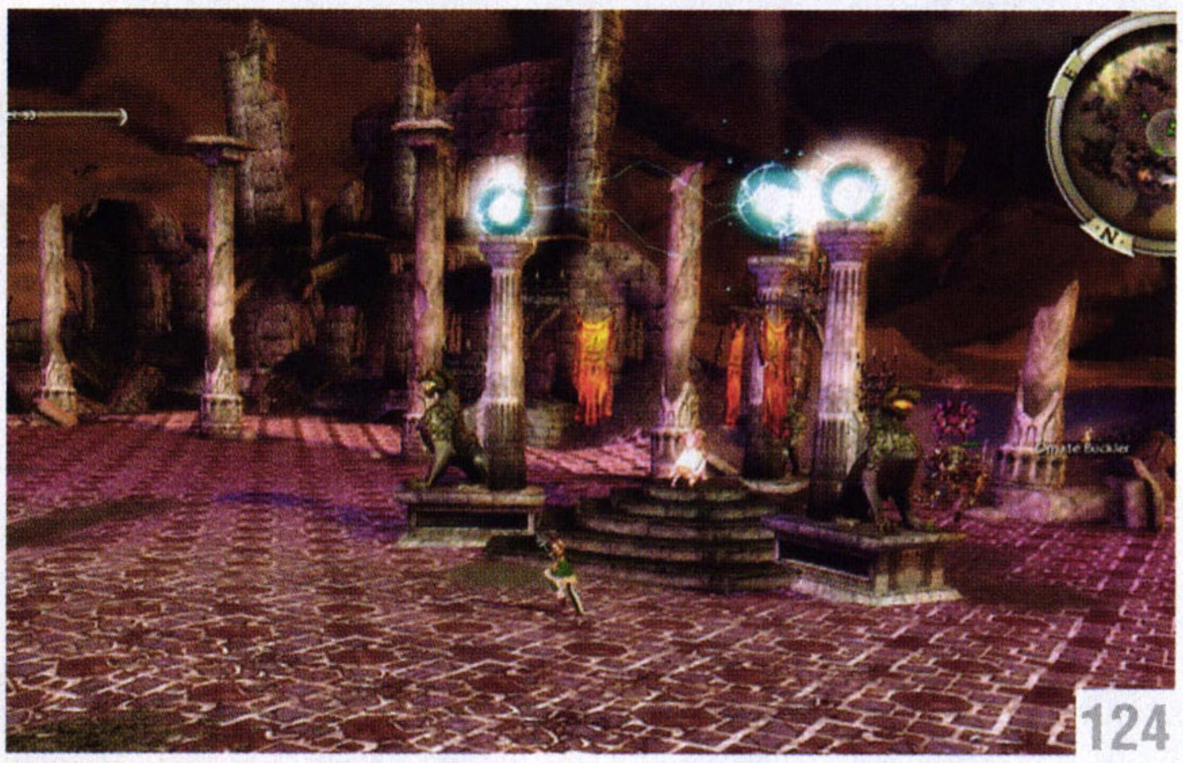
MVP Baseball



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GAME INFORMER PC GAME OF THE MONTH

Guild Wars

The folks at ArenaNet (many of whom hail from the storied Blizzard Entertainment) have seen fit to unleash their first creation upon the gaming world, and this new take on the online RPG has a lot going for it. Little grinding, unique missions, gorgeous visuals, and arguably the best fantasy PvP around are all included out of the box. Oh, and if you hadn't heard, there's no monthly fee. Check out the story on page 124.

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theedge

When All Games Aren't Created Equal

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

EARLY CHILDHOOD eC	Content suitable for persons ages 3 and older.	MATURE M	Content suitable for persons 17 ages and older.
EVERYONE E	Content suitable for persons ages 6 and older.	ADULTS ONLY AO	Content suitable only for adults.
EVERYONE 10+ E10+	Content suitable for persons ages 10 and older.	RATING PENDING RP	Product is awaiting final rating.
TEEN T	Content suitable for persons ages 13 and older.		

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

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

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

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

action – A term we use for games like Devil May Cry and Viewtiful Joe

ad hoc: A type of wireless connection that connects you with other players in your immediate vicinity

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

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

bloom – An effect that simulates the soft, blurred glow of bright light reflecting off of surfaces

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

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

CG – Computer-Generated graphics

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

E3bola – The sickness that erodes your overall health after a week in L.A. Can cause delirium, exhaustion, and toxic body odor

fighting – A term we use for games like Mortal Kombat and Dead or Alive

first-party – A game made by a console manufacturer's internal development teams exclusively for its own system

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

FPS – Frames Per Second. How many animation frames happen in one second. Also used to denote First-Person Shooters like Halo, Doom, and Call of Duty

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

frontend – A game's menus and options

GBA – Game Boy Advance

GC – GameCube

HDTV – High Definition Television

infrastructure – A type of wireless connection that uses the Internet to connect with other players over long distances

isometric – Three-quarters top down view, like StarCraft or Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance

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

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

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

MMO – Massively Multiplayer Online. Usually applied to role-playing titles, we use this term for games with persistent, multi-user online worlds like EverQuest and World of Warcraft

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

normal mapping – A graphical technique in which a hi-res skin containing 3D information, revealed by light reflecting off the surface, is wrapped around a low-res model

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

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

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

pop-up – When objects onscreen suddenly appear, typically due to poor draw distance

PS2 – Sony PlayStation 2

puzzle – A term we use for games like Tetris and Puyo Pop

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

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

shooter – A term we use for games like Ikaruga and Gradius

sports – A term we use for games like Madden NFL

strategy – A term we use for games like La Pucelle and Front Mission

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

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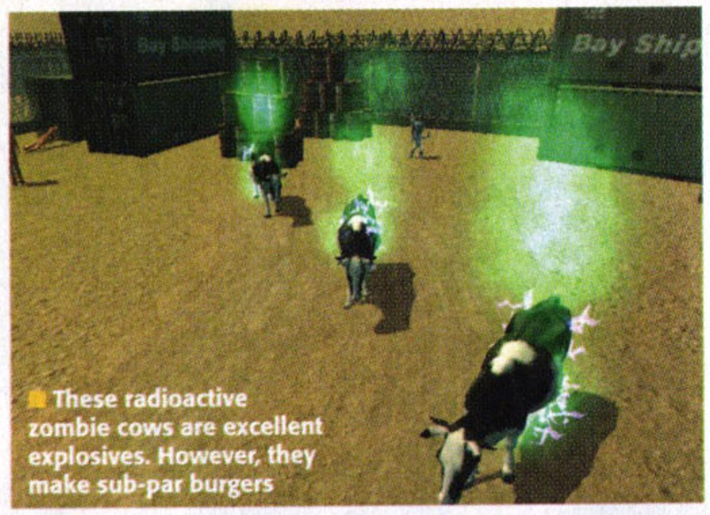
WHERE YOU AT

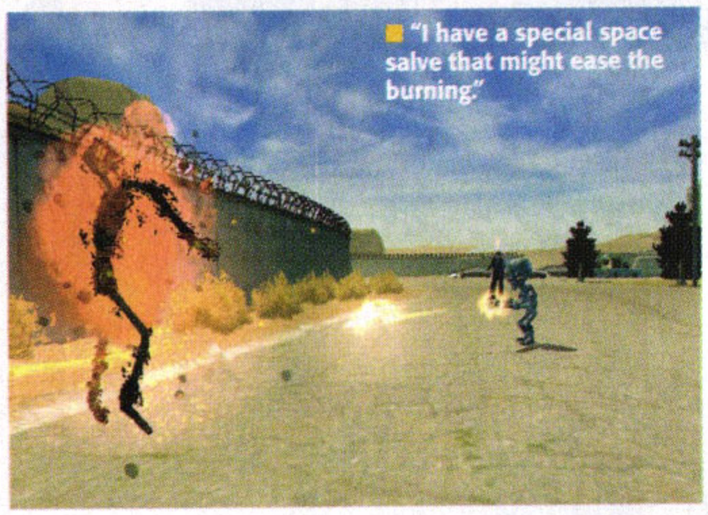
"Where You At?"

boost mobile

Will you electrify your opposition or crush them with your mind? Decisions, decisions



These radioactive zombie cows are excellent explosives. However, they make sub-par burgers



"I have a special space salve that might ease the burning."

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Destroy All Humans

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** THQ **> DEVELOPER** PANDEMIC STUDIOS **> RELEASE** JUNE 21 **> ESRB** M

YOU DESERVE IT

We are taught from an early age to be kind to our fellow humans – to bring enough to share and to lend a helping hand whenever possible. The Furon warrior Cryptosporidium, on the other hand, was taught that humans are nothing but feeble genetic sacks meant to store ancient DNA and it is his mission to retrieve it, vaporizing anything in his path. Destroy All Humans may require a particular sense of humor to appreciate, but if you are the kind of person who would rather extend an Ion Disruptor than an olive branch, it is simply too much fun to resist.

Crypto's rampage is brought to us by Pandemic Studios, the same people responsible for the unbridled mayhem of Mercenaries. Fortunately, DAH delivers where Mercenaries failed by providing a charming and intelligent backdrop for the widespread destruction. With a sardonic spin reminiscent of the often underappreciated *Mars Attacks*, DAH is set in an idyllic 1950s America brimming with brilliant satire. No aspect of life remains unscathed, from sexual repression and homophobia to government conspiracy and rampant paranoia. And it's funny. Very funny.

While the setting is great, Crypto's arsenal and abilities are what make the game so addicting. You truly feel a sense of ruthless superiority as you use telekinesis to fling fleeing pedestrians into buildings, hypnotize them into complacency, or annihilate whole city blocks in your UFO. I can't even count the number of times I ignored my mission objectives entirely in favor of disintegrating farmers or reading the minds of passing discontented housewives. While I can't argue with the entertainment value of these skills, I wish they were easier to use. A frustrating camera and some sluggish controls can make it difficult to reach your maximum genocidal potential.

Though Crypto finds himself taking on the full might of the military, the most significant challenge in DAH comes from battling against design choices that limit the player's ability to explore the world. An overly linear mission structure advances the story, taking the player to several expansive environments ranging from backwoods farms to top-secret government installations. Unfortunately, you often have to choose between improving your skills and proceeding to the next mission, since the DNA that you use to purchase upgrades is also required to unlock your next task. Plus, once your work in each area is done, there is no incentive to stick around apart from some half-baked bonus tasks you can undertake. These chores, while sometimes entertaining, are largely the same from one level to the next; typically they just involve traveling to certain buildings in a set time frame, killing particular citizens, or destroying all structures in a two mile radius. I love the world Pandemic has created, but I desperately wanted more engaging ways to interact with it.

On many levels, Destroy All Humans is pleasantly familiar. You've demolished buildings before. You've assaulted civilians and chased them with flamethrowers. But until you've got your finger on the trigger of Crypto's fatal Anal Probe Gun, you don't know the true meaning of hilarious, captivating carnage.—**JOE**

"...simply too much fun to resist."

Surprisingly, the Death Ray is the least impressive of your craft's weapons

IT'S ALL IN YOUR MIND

Using Crypto's cortex scan, the player is treated to the deepest and darkest musings of the pathetic human race. Here are just a few examples of the pressing concerns lurking underneath the surface idealism of the '50s:

"My mind says Marilyn, but my nightstick says Betty Page."

"Uncertainty principle? Give me a break! Grow some balls, Heisenberg!"

"The sexiest word in the english language? Tupperware!"

"I have to report to Hoover again. Please, God, let him be wearing pants this time!"

"I bet Eisenhower tastes like a cheeseburger."

"Would you get a load of this new brassiere? I could torpedo a U-boat with these things!"

BOTTOM LINE 8

> Concept: As a Furon, our interstellar superiors, you harvest humanity and undermine its key institutions

> Graphics: Crypto looks great, as do his weapon effects, but the human race appears to consist entirely of four people duplicated endlessly amid constant pop-up

> Sound: Whether you're shocking people or vaporizing them, the screams are satisfying, and the soundtrack is straight out of a B-movie

> Playability: Hands-down the best telekinesis outside of Psi-Ops, but the camera work and targeting system make it difficult to use

> Entertainment: From the clever writing to the outrageous action, I was laughing out loud the whole time

> Replay Value: Moderately High

Second Opinion 8.25

Pandemic combines the explosive gameplay of Mercenaries with the Americana styling of Tim Burton's *Mars Attacks* and the sidesplitting hysteria of Matt Groening's *Futurama* to create a high-spirited gaming experience. I laughed out loud each and every time I exacted an anal probe on an unsuspecting citizen. The sad thing is, I performed this sinister attack on well over five hundred people. Terrorizing the world is just flat out fun. Trust me, the dialogue from this game will become a part of your daily conversing, and you'll be popping this disc in for a cheap laugh for years to come. This is the kind of game that just puts you into a good mood. The controls may be a bit clunky and the missions may grow repetitive after a few hours, but the thrills are constant. By all means, if you are just looking for a quirky, fun little game, you can't go wrong with Destroy All Humans.—**REINER**

Once in the first-person view, your movement is limited to turning, but sniper-like skills are required to nail the different hit zones on each enemy type

By hitting an enemy in their weak spot, you will earn blood that can be used to power-up special attacks and heal your wounds

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2 | GAMECUBE

Killer 7

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** CAPCOM **> DEVELOPER** GRASSHOPPER MANUFACTURE **> RELEASE** JUNE 14 **> ESRB** M

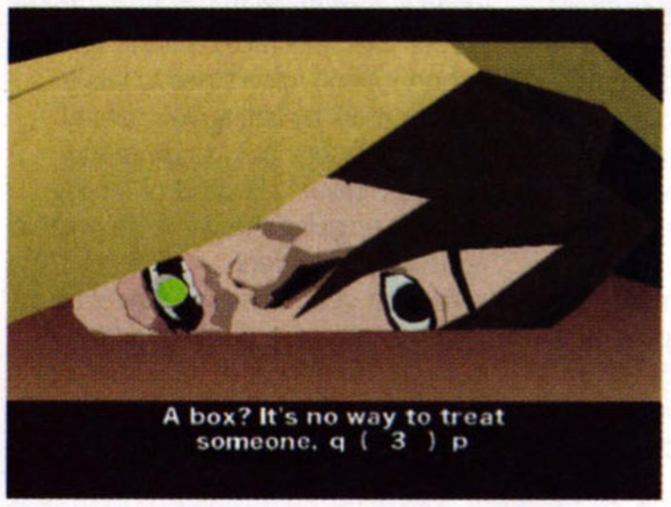
IS IT DIGITAL ART OR AN INTERACTIVE DISASTER?

Unclassifiable, ambiguous, and nothing short of demented, Capcom's Killer 7 completely distances itself from commonplace video game conventions and demands that you surrender any semblance of reality to even begin to understand it. Just when you think that you have this game figured out, you get knocked further down the rabbit hole, tumbling helplessly into a world of confusing riddles, enigmatic half-truths, and implausible machinations. It's a story that even the greatest of cryptologists wouldn't be able to decipher, and a gaming experience so alien that it should make you curl up in a ball and cry your eyes out. So why is it nearly impossible to tear yourself away from it?

From the moment that you boot up Killer 7, you are thrust into a highly stylized world that can best be described as a living comic book. The dark tones, beautiful shading, and cinematic camera angles paint a beautiful picture that leaves you eager to see where the game will take you next. The plot, albeit insane, immediately piques your interest. You are dropped into the consciousness of Harman Smith, a venerable wheelchair-bound man who has the unique and surprising ability of switching between seven different personalities, each a killer. The Killer 7.

Harman taps into these identities with the hope of stopping the Heaven Smile, a terrorist organization that has forced the world into a state of fear through calculated attacks. Adding further confusion to the plausibility of this plot, the Heaven Smile are not exactly human. The leader of this terrorist group, Kun Lan, has a Midas-like touch. When touched by his so called "God Hand," the sanity of an ordinary person is stripped away, their appearance is transformed into that of a monster, and their only goal is to find other humans and kill them.

Interestingly, the Heaven Smile are invisible to the naked eye. Harman's seven must tap into the power of a scanner to make these demonic beings appear in a vulnerable state. Of course, the entire game unfolds around the destruction of these demented beings. While the framework of a typical first-person shooter seems appropriate for the action at hand, it wouldn't fit a game as strange as this. Never once will you get to directly control the movement of any of your characters. You simply hold down a button to make them run along a rail. Tapping another button performs a 180 degree turn, so that you can run back down the rail in the opposite direction. To engage the Smiles in the area, you simply zoom into stationary first-person and fire away. The controls simply baffle the mind,

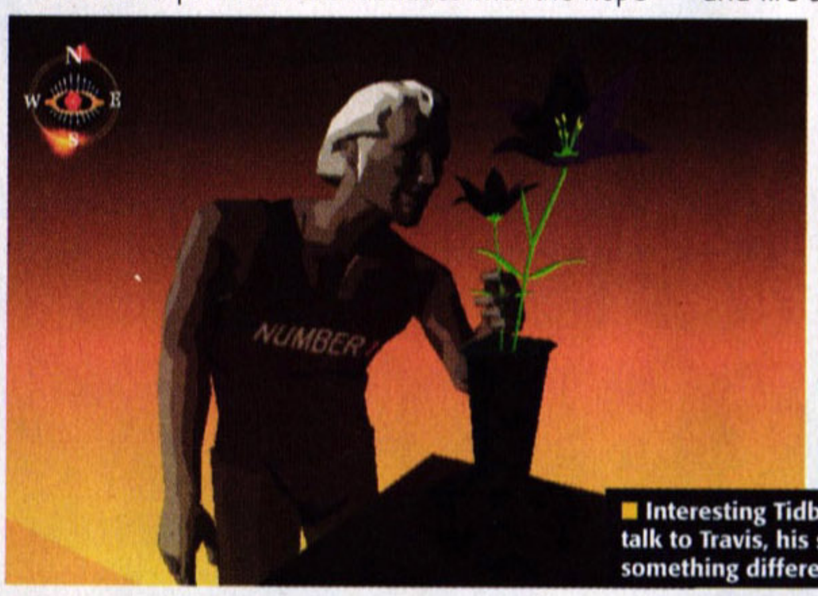


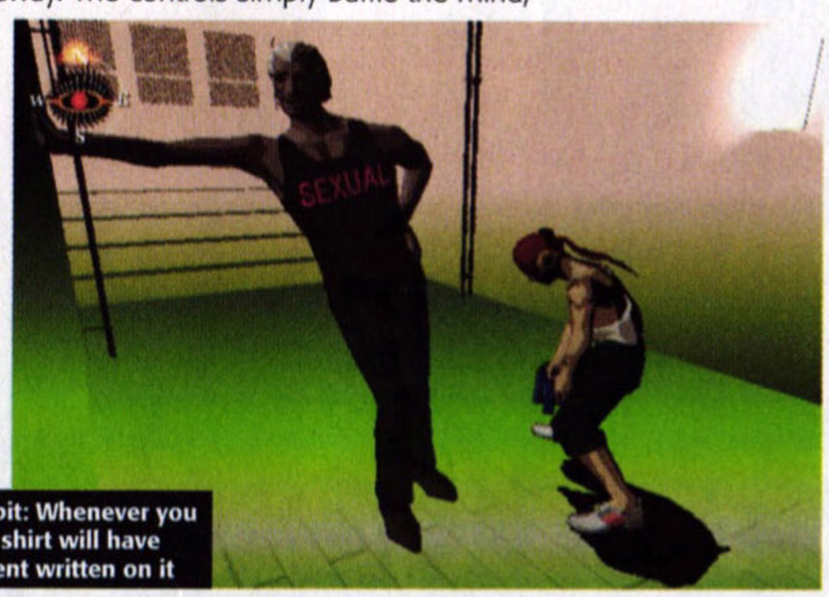
yet couldn't be a better solution for this game.

The functionality may sound overly simplified, but excitement and variety is abundant. Figuring out how to stop the different Smile types is a blast, and the game does a great job of pushing players to hone their firearm accuracy. At the end of a stage, you are also rewarded nicely with a wildly creative boss battle. You'll find yourself sweating bullets in a high noon standoff, laughing hysterically in a comedic battle against a superhero team influenced by the Power Rangers, and learning about physics in an odd fight in a school gymnasium.

It's a unique and enjoyable experience, but it does falter in telling players too much about the puzzles and battle strategies. If you don't learn the solution by communicating with NPCs, you can simply look at your map to see where key items are located, and which character you'll need to switch to get it. The story requires that you wear the detective hat of Sherlock Holmes to figure it out, but sadly, you only need to wear a dunce cap to solve the puzzles.

Continuing the downward spiral, the payoff at the end of this tale will likely leave you more confused than you already were. There is a clever twist near the end that I definitely didn't see coming, but where you expect to see loose ends tied up, further chaos is delivered. At the end of the day, I walked away with a handful of great memories and the satisfaction that I had experienced something so innovative and insane. Unfortunately, I also left Killer 7 with an insatiable hunger for answers and clarity.—**REINER**





Interesting Tidbit: Whenever you talk to Travis, his shirt will have something different written on it

BOTTOM LINE 7.5

> Concept: Steering clear of the gaming mainstream, Killer 7 walks a tightrope and leans more in the direction of being innovative art than a comprehensive game

> Graphics: Every frame harnesses the beauty and complexity of a comic book. The effects and character designs are also quite original

> Sound: Not much in terms of music, but the voice acting is excellent, and the weird robotic voices fit the content perfectly

> Playability: Extremely simple, yet incredibly effective. Variety in enemies keeps things fresh and the boss fights are superb

> Entertainment: You won't get all of the answers you seek, but it is a fun story to follow

> Replay Value: Moderate

Second Opinion 8

"God and the pigeon are one"? What the f%!# does that mean?! This enigmatic phrase and countless others await you as you walk the thin line between artistic expression and pretentious garbage in Killer 7. Still, I couldn't help but appreciate and enjoy Grasshopper's inventive experiment once the disjointed shards came together. The fragmented story and bizarre characters are by far the most compelling parts of the experience, since the gunplay ends up feeling a bit mechanical due to the limited mobility, and the puzzles are usually just a simple matter of switching to the appropriate Smith. Fortunately, the game compensates for these problems with a striking visual style and unforgettable boss battles that will leave you amazed and confused. Killer 7 is undeniably unique, and while it doesn't feel entirely realized as a game, it shines as a piece of interactive art.—**JOE**

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Juiced

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 6-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE/SYSTEM LINK OR PS2 ONLINE)
> **PUBLISHER** THQ > **DEVELOPER** JUICE GAMES > **RELEASE** JUNE 7 > **ESRB** T

DRIVING DOWN THE SAME STREETS

It's hard to imagine that Juiced will stand out to consumers passing by it at the store. That's too bad, because it's definitely a fun game. Acclaim used to own the Juiced property (and we even reviewed it), but because of the company's collapse that version never saw the light of day. Since then, THQ has acquired the title. But the publisher did more than just that. It was wise to sink more time and effort into the game, whipping it into shape. It's gone from being almost totally broken to one that you won't mind investing some hours in. Having said that, Juiced's embracing of street racing is incomplete, keeping it just shy of leaving a permanent mark in your video gaming consciousness.

Juiced certainly has the makings of an average street racer, with lots of customizables and affected street appeal. Apart from the typical, the game does offer some elements to differentiate itself from the pack. The cars' handling is more sim-like than most street racers, and I loved how it blurred this line without sacrificing any of the fun of blowing through corners. I also dug the freedom to pick up races, betting, the respect system, and pink slips. I warn you – racing for these babies is as permanent as it sounds. Whether on- or offline, you better have the balls to back up the bragging or you're walking home. But are custom paint jobs all you need for a street racer? The game's succession of quick tracks makes each race feel like a bite-sized isolated experience, despite the different racing gangs in the game. Midnight Club 3 does a superior job of putting me into a living world – something that makes it more "street" than just races among some import tuners. Juiced tries to leave its own mark by letting you control a crew of racers, but its command-issued AI drivers fall short of feeling sentient or giving the game an organic and/or dynamic feel.

You can get behind the wheel of Juiced and have a pretty good time, but you can only drive so far before you stop wanting to continue driving around in circles.—**KATO**

■ Apart from rain drops sliding down your windshield, rainy weather will also affect your handling

BOTTOM LINE 7.5

> **Concept:** THQ takes over from Acclaim and makes the game playable and then some

> **Graphics:** It's disappointing that the Xbox version doesn't make the most of the system

> **Sound:** The lines for the voice actors get old pretty quick

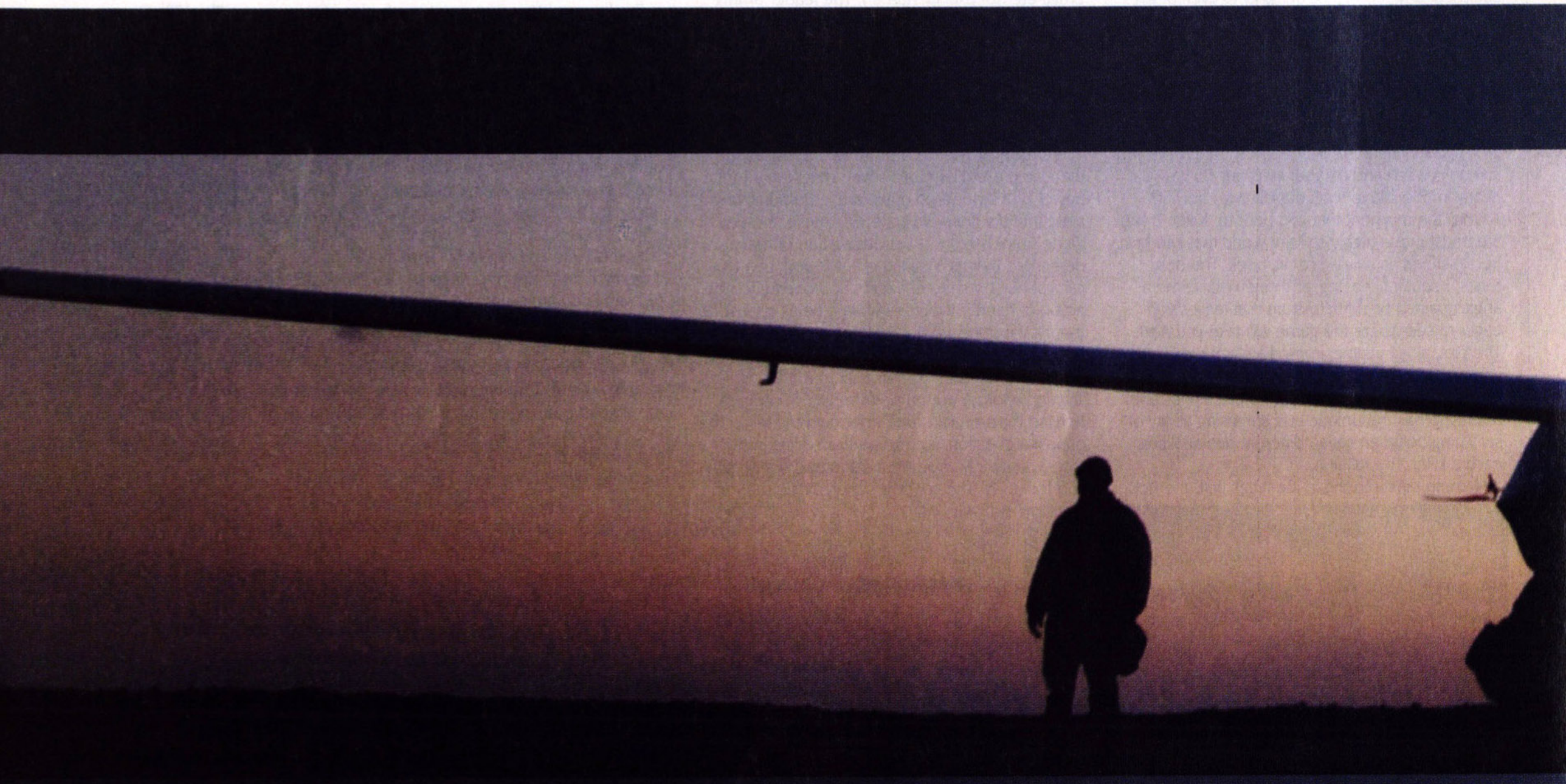
> **Playability:** Handles more like a sim racer than you'd think, which is cool for a street racing game

> **Entertainment:** You don't know what you got 'til it's gone. Losing those pink slip races will break your heart, but they make for some tense excitement

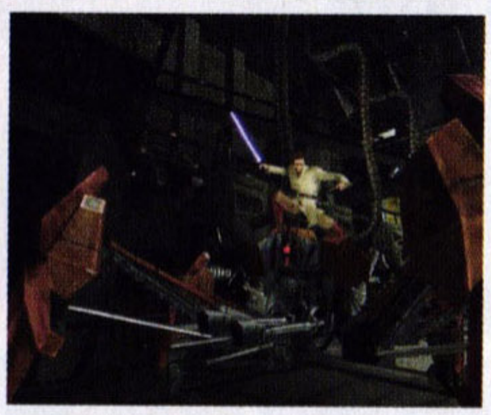
> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 7

Juiced is an exponentially better game than it was when I reviewed it many months ago. Does that mean that it's a super awesome, edge of your seat thrill ride? Not so much, but it does have its charms and is a nicely varied street racer. The sensation of speed is here in spades and the Respect and Crew systems have been overhauled to become features that mean something, are easy to understand, and are part of the game's liberally applied rewards.—**LISA**



To say we have the highest applied technology on the planet is perhaps an understatement of gargantuan proportions. More accurately, we have the highest applied technology on earth, in the air and throughout the solar system. Our manned and unmanned aircraft, spacecraft and satellites work 24/7,



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** LUCASARTS **> DEVELOPER** THE COLLECTIVE
> RELEASE MAY 6 **> ESRB** T

YOU WERE THE CHOSEN ONE!

Harnessing the true power of the dark side, Revenge of the Sith belts out a demented cackle as it unmercifully bastardizes the expectations of fan boys and applies a suffocating Force choke to people seeking a game ripe with respectable lightsaber action. LucasArts has made great strides as of late in diversifying the Star Wars license through different genres (Republic Commando, Knights of the Old Republic), and with this game, it has clearly taken a good hard look at Electronic Arts' successful adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings* films. Sadly, LucasArts couldn't come up with a game that delivered one midi-chlorian's worth of entertainment.

The title isn't timorous in telling gamers that it is barely holding on for life. If you thought that Anakin Skywalker's charred and mangled body from the film was difficult to view, just wait until you get a good look at this gameplay. Although impressive acrobatic maneuvers and glorious flashes of light accompany the sword fighting, the action that unfolds is painfully redundant, consisting of little in terms of strategy other than closing your eyes and blindly flailing. Enemies usually spend most of their time blocking (which gets on your nerves very quickly), and it's difficult to see windows for attack (you can almost hear the anger boiling). All told, the time you spend with the game is overly frustrating and hardly ever eventful.

The mundane gameplay isn't the only offender in this galaxy far, far away. In an unprecedented turn, the game even goes out of its way to alter the brilliant tale that George Lucas has penned. The dialogue exchanged between Anakin and Obi-Wan is abysmal and childish, the new scenes that have been added don't make sense (Anakin versus Mace Windu?), and the entire game can be completed in a measly four to five hours.

Without question, the only suitable home for this game is in a molten river on Mustafar right next to Anakin's legs and arm.—**REINER**

BOTTOM LINE 5.75

> Concept: Build a game around the theatrical release using EA's The Lord of the Rings formula, but neglect to include any form of entertainment

> Graphics: Anakin's model is right on the money. For some reason, though, Obi-Wan resembles a linebacker for the Bears

> Sound: Once again, John Williams can proudly say that he's the best part of a game that he didn't even know he was a part of

> Playability: Embarrassingly painful, much like it would be if you accidentally ignited a saber in your lap

> Entertainment: It's incredibly short, and multiplayer is as dry as Tatooine's terrain

> Replay Value: Moderate

Second Opinion 6.5

Like a poorly-executed Jedi Mind Trick, Episode III tries to distract you from its repetitiveness by drawing attention to a universally frustrating combat system, lousy AI, unpredictable controls, and an overall blandness that makes Masters of Teras Kasi look like a timeless classic. I would rather be a bumbling vice admiral under Darth Vader's command than spend any more time with this bedsore of the Force.—**JOE**

YOU CAN RUN. BUT THAT'S ABOUT IT.

gathering and sending information in real-time situations. That's why there's no place to hide when you're being tracked by the United States Air Force. Bad news for an enemy, good news for a talented young person seeking a career in intelligence gathering. Call 1-800-423-USAF or log on to AIRFORCE.COM.

The opening level may not be a beach landing, but it still has its own thrills

Single-handedly take out an enemy tank

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Medal of Honor: European Assault

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS
> DEVELOPER EALA **> RELEASE** JUNE 6 **> ESRB** T

THE ONE MAN WAR CONTINUES

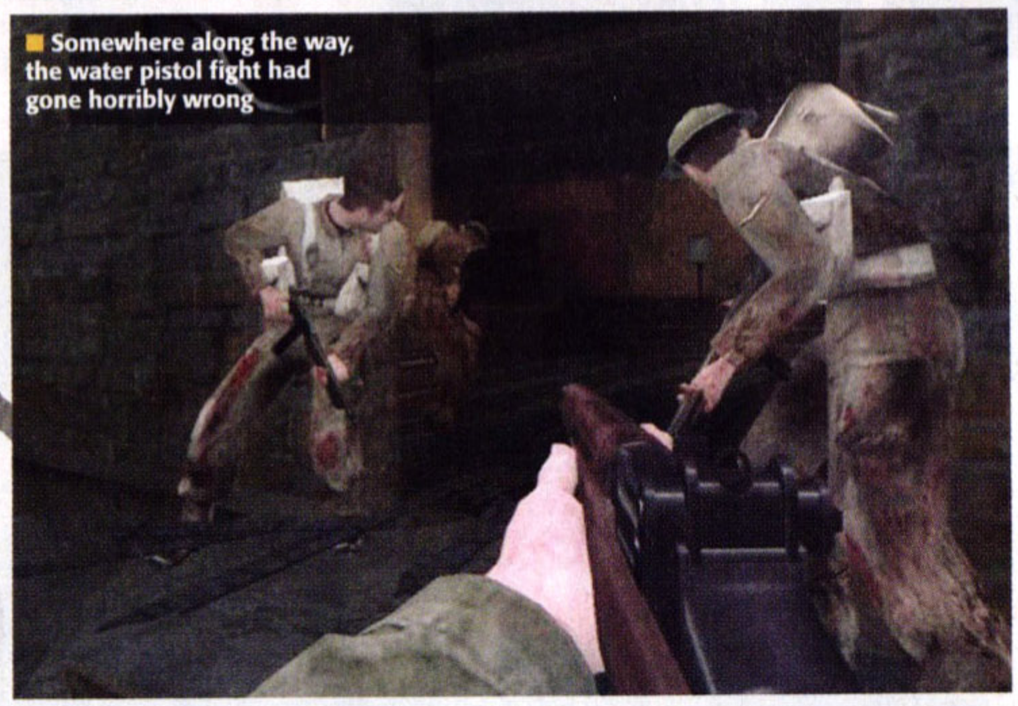
Medal of Honor deserves some credit for having been quick out of the gate on the whole Second World War shooting sim. The early titles really helped establish that compelling mix of researched history with action-heavy fiction. We're several iterations down the line now, and European Assault continues the fine tradition of the games that have come before. Even so, the formula has started to wear a little thin, and the attempt to snatch ideas from some of the other popular WWII titles isn't enough to keep this one top-notch.

If there's a thing I'd like to call attention to with European Assault, it's the soundtrack. It's not often that would be the first thing I'd mention about a game, but in this case it is the shining jewel of the entire title. Kudos to composer Christopher Lennertz on a job exceptionally well done. The score, along with the excellent sound design that accompanies it, really heightens the excitement of the whole experience.

Thankfully, level design has seen a notable improvement in this entry. I consistently followed a clear path of objectives that lay before me, yet I always had at least a couple of ways to approach the problem. In general, missions felt more open and less linear, but I rarely felt lost or confused. I also liked the variety of the levels, as you'd be in a French city one moment, and out in the desert the next.

The taut action of these missions is further enhanced through the visual effect of bullets flying and buildings collapsing almost constantly. Unfortunately, the graphical fidelity just isn't strong enough to put it in the same realm as many other FPS titles. Here, the textures lack detail and death animations are spasmodic and irregular. Meanwhile, the plentiful special effects don't look as good as I would hope. A move has been made to give you an increased degree of control over your NPC allies, but the AI for these fellows simply doesn't hold up, as evidenced by their willingness to stand in front of a stream of machine gun fire or run into a room in which a grenade was just dropped. Consequently, this still feels like it's just you against the whole Nazi regime. On a related note, the enemy AI continues to lack basic sense. To compensate, European Assault throws a seemingly endless stream of Axis soldiers onto your bullets. It sure gives the sense of being the hero of the war, but making you feel like you were really there? That's another story.

While Medal of Honor remains one of the best places to go to get that intense feeling of being in the middle of a great war epic, the gameplay itself isn't quite so satisfying. To become an action hero, this might still be the right choice. To truly come to terms with the plight of a soldier losing friends and risking death in wartime, there are other places you should look first.—**MILLER**



Somewhere along the way, the water pistol fight had gone horribly wrong

MISSING IN ACTION

Due to circumstances beyond our control, we haven't had the chance to see the GameCube version of European Assault. Unless there are major differences that we see in it, consider this our definitive review.

theedge

When All Games Aren't Created Equal

The Xbox should definitely be your machine of choice this time around. The PS2 version looks noticeably worse in almost all respects. The choice is clear.

BOTTOM LINE 7.75

> Concept: Hold the line on several fronts of the European Theater, waging a hero's war against the Nazi party

> Graphics: Pretty disappointing – textures are unimpressive and character models are relatively bland

> Sound: Setting the bar for cinematic musical flair, the orchestral score is sweeping and grand

> Playability: Controls should feel familiar and the mechanism for taking cover and shooting works quite well

> Entertainment: It still has that movie-like flair, but this installment has started to feel more than a little stale.

> Replay Value: Moderate

Second Opinion 7.25

Like a tank that has seen one battle too many, the Medal of Honor series has grown rusty and its technology can best be described as vintage. While EA has addressed many of the qualms that people had with Rising Sun, it has neglected to move the series forward. In many ways, it takes a few giant strides backward. What was once a game that I turned to for stunning imagery now features blocky character models that appear to have been animated with stop-motion cameras. I applaud EA's effort to move away from the track-driven level designs of Rising Sun, but expanding the size of the environments really sucks the life out of the firefights. Medal of Honor has always delivered visceral pockets of action, yet every battle in European Assault is about as exciting as kids running around with cap guns. I get the feeling that EA really didn't know where to take this series next, and just fired blindly. To say the very least, European Assault doesn't come close to hitting the target.—**REINER**

PLAYSTATION 2

Flipnic: Ultimate Pinball

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** CAPCOM **> DEVELOPER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT JAPAN **> RELEASE** JULY 13 **> ESRB** E

PINBORE

Video game pinball is an odd little genre that usually gets relegated to portable systems or no-frills budget titles, so it's nice to see Capcom try to give it some console love with Flipnic: Ultimate Pinball. However, the game takes such a unique slant on pinball that fans might want to stick with their GBA titles. Flipnic doesn't work, in my opinion, specifically because of the new things that it brings to the pinball table.

Flipnic features four tables that are far more complex than could exist in a real arcade. They're huge and sprawling, and have multiple paths and hidden areas. Completing certain goals opens new areas and even changes the layout of the board. It's a cool idea, and discovering new areas is fun at first. But, things get frustrating quickly when it becomes clear that you have to complete certain tasks before you clear the table. One area requires you to ascend to an area by hitting the ball upwards with a series of flippers – basically it's a platforming segment in which you can only move the platforms. Considering the random reaction of the ball, this is a lot easier said than done.

This focus on objectives is my biggest issue with the game – for a title that is purported to be "ultimate" pinball, the pinball aspect seems to be merely a means to complete puzzles, which aren't deep enough to please puzzle fans. There are only four tables to choose from (and only the first table is really cool – the other three pale in comparison) and none of them offer a classic pinball experience. Merging pinball and puzzles isn't a bad idea, but the balance between the two aspects simply feels all wrong.—**JEREMY**

BOTTOM LINE 6

> Concept: Pinball and puzzles collide on four unique tables that would be impossible in the real world

> Graphics: The tables are fairly inventive, but nothing stunning to look at

> Sound: The soundtrack sticks close to real pinball – a few sound effects, some forgettable tunes and little else

> Playability: The simple control scheme replicates real pinball perfectly.

> Entertainment: It's not quite pinball, it's not quite a puzzler, and it's not quite fun

> Replay Value: Moderately Low

Second Opinion 6.5

I was immediately intrigued by the potential of this strange little title, one that can best be described as mission-based pinball. My enthusiasm remained through most of the first stage, which is brilliantly designed through interconnected boards that dynamically change in response to your success. However, the shine wears off abruptly with each of the later levels, which are largely artless and bland. My love of pinball kept me coming back for a while, but the whole thing really ends up feeling more like a novelty than a full fledged game, and a frustrating one at that.—**MILLER**

PLAYSTATION 2

Colosseum: Road to Freedom

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** KOEI **> DEVELOPER** GOSHOW INC. **> RELEASE** JULY 12 **> ESRB** M

ARE YOU NOT ENTERTAINED?

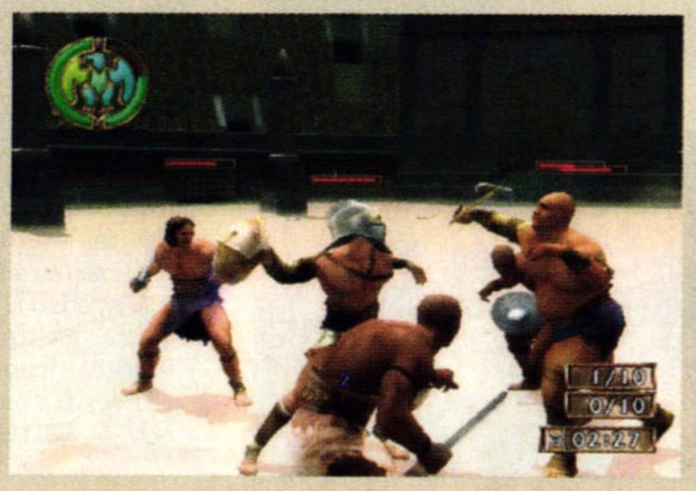
This is one of the most user-unfriendly games I can think of. To breach the armor of this gladiator and find what makes it fun, you have to push past layers of repetitive actions and foolish design decisions. There's incredible potential here, but it just hasn't been fully realized this time around.

You are the unknown slave gladiator in a struggle for survival on the floor of the arena. You'll face other desperate warriors, fierce beasts, and undertake mock historical battles. On days between battles you can train your character, choosing how to designate his abilities and what body parts to bulk up. Win matches in order to purchase more advanced weapons and armor, and ultimately the great prize – your freedom.

All of that is well and good. The trouble is in the implementation. Every day, you spend a chunk of time running through the same uninteresting areas to reach the entrance to one of only a few arenas. Learning the inventory and armament skills is a chore that is never explained, leaving you to figure it out on your own. Meanwhile, the occasional plot events never take off into anything that even remotely resembles a genuine story, while the two-player mode feels cobbled together and shallow.

If there is a shining jewel to the game, it is where it should be – the combat. The visceral thrills of the arena are heightened by the need for a keen observational eye. This is no button-mashing hack and slash system. Battle is simultaneously brutal, intense, and skill-based. Unfortunately, even this highlight has its problems. There is no targeting system, leading to endless wild swings aimed at thin air. The engine seems incapable of handling more than a few figures onscreen before it hits some major slowdown. But my biggest complaint is the difficulty balancing, which makes some of the more interesting bouts so challenging early on that you don't dare attempt them, due to the overwhelming cost in equipment and money if you are defeated.

To sum up, you've got a case here of several awesome features balanced against some utterly frustrating ideas. I'd love to see the combat system tweaked and placed in a more story-driven escapade. In the meantime, even the addictive need to power up my beastly gladiator isn't enough to let me offer more than a lukewarm recommendation.—**MILLER**



BOTTOM LINE 7.25

> Concept: Win your freedom from slavery as a destiny-driven Roman gladiator

> Graphics: No complaints, other than some pretty hefty slowdown from time to time

> Sound: Lackluster sound effects and a paltry sampling of voice clips – unimpressive

> Playability: A prohibitively steep learning curve is worth struggling through for the ultimate reward of getting that monster fighter

> Entertainment: Keeps you coming back for more, even if you never get over the constant problems

> Replay Value: Moderately High

Second Opinion 7.75

Nobody pumps out more action games than Koei, and it's really nice to finally see the company try something different with the genre. Road to Freedom isn't going to win any awards for originality, but it does sport a pretty decent combat engine and loads of satisfyingly brutal action. The character customization made me attached enough to my character that I couldn't put this title down for days, even though it's honestly fairly repetitive. If you're listening, Koei, keep this franchise going. There is certainly room for improvement, but I will already choose Colosseum over a Dynasty Warriors title any day of the week.—**JEREMY**

PLAYSTATION 2

Samurai Western

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** ATLUS
> DEVELOPER SPIKE/ACQUIRE **> RELEASE** JUNE 7 **> ESRB** M

THE SPAGHETTI WESTERN INCIDENT

I enjoy a good Western every now and again, especially those with an interesting twist, which is why I was excited about Samurai Western. Taking on outlaws as a sword-slinging samurai is definitely a cool idea, but this game simply doesn't live up to its potential and falls prey to the problems that dog far too many third-person action titles.

Samurai Western's biggest flaw is its camera, which hangs up on the environment too often and can result in the player getting stuck offscreen for long periods of time. But even if it worked properly, this title would still be little more than a run-of-the-mill button masher – you'll spend the entirety of the game hitting square. The dodge function (which lets you spin out of the way of bullets) adds a bit of identity to the game, but doesn't come close to adding any real depth to the combat.

Samurai Western is an incredibly short game, but still manages to repeat itself constantly over the course of the story. It features only a tiny selection of enemy types, some bosses appear multiple times, and stages are reused over and over. The unlockable rewards for completing the game are far from compelling, and the two-player mode does little except make the camera freak out even more. Sadly, as much as I'd love to get behind this game because of its fun concept, all it makes me want to do is play better Western games like Red Dead Revolver.—**JEREMY**

BOTTOM LINE 6

> Concept: Slice through constantly spawning gunslingers as a samurai in the Old West, yawn, repeat

> Graphics: I know this game is set in the Wild West, but it doesn't have to look like it was made hundreds of years ago

> Sound: The handful of enemy lines are repeated over and over until you wish you were deaf

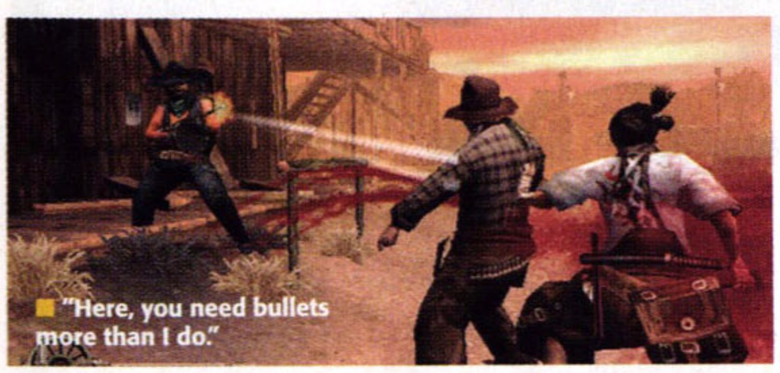
> Playability: Keep pressing that dang square button, and you'll be fine, pardner

> Entertainment: If you want an authentic Western experience, take a horse-shoeing class. It's educational and more fun!

> Replay Value: Moderately Low

Second Opinion 5

I'll say this for Samurai Western: Because of a rather odd feature that lets you resize and place cowboy hats anywhere on your character's person, I was able to invent a new fashion accessory I've named the "crotch hat." That was fun. Sadly, the charms of a genital Stetson only go so far. While I'm certainly amenable to the campy concept of a samurai warrior cutting and slicing his way through the Wild West, Samurai Western displays severe problems in nearly every aspect of gameplay, from the wonky camera to the simplistic-yet-frustrating combat. Repetitive and aggravating every step of the way, I think this game should do the honorable thing and commit seppuku.—**MATT**



"Here, you need bullets more than I do."

PLAYSTATION 2 QUICKIES

PLAYSTATION 2

Romance of the Three Kingdoms X

> STYLE 1-PLAYER STRATEGY
> PUBLISHER KOEI **> DEVELOPER** KOEI
> RELEASE JUNE 14 **> ESRB** T

BOTTOM LINE 7.5

Whether it's putting up with the whining merchants or booking boring face time with the politicians, there's always someone to pucker up to as a bureaucrat. Sometimes this series' minutia can make you feel like you're nothing more than a flea on the ass of Chinese history. However, this game does wake up from its rote sleepwalk with the new debates and Romance 8-style rock, paper, scissors-like officer duels – two elements that provide more depth and excitement than you'd expect at first glance. Combined, they easily make this niche title the best it's ever been.—**KATO**

PLAYSTATION 2

Fullmetal Alchemist 2: Curse of the Crimson Elixir

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG
> PUBLISHER SQUARE ENIX
> DEVELOPER SQUARE ENIX
> RELEASE JULY 12 **> ESRB** T

BOTTOM LINE 6

There's no doubt in my mind that this sequel is a marked step up for the franchise. Most noticeably, fighting is more dynamic, and the dull art style of the first game has been replaced with a relatively pleasing cel-shaded look. Even so, a host of problems still holds the title back from greatness. Battle still feels generally awkward most of the time. Backgrounds are totally bland, and some areas look almost exactly like others you've already moved through. These would be forgivable sins if not for the terrible pacing of the game, which crawls along at a snail's pace due to constantly interrupting dialogue scenes. Do you really need to talk that much about a door? Just go through it, for the love of all that's holy!—**MILLER**

PLAYSTATION 2

Arc the Lad: End of Darkness

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE **> PUBLISHER** NAMCO **> DEVELOPER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT **> RELEASE** JUNE 14 **> ESRB** T

BREAKING WHAT'S FIXED

Fans complain about franchises that maintain the status quo, the ones that pump out sequel after sequel and do little to shake up the gameplay or conventions of their predecessors. Sometimes, I'm one of these fans, but when it comes to experiments in evolution like Arc the Lad: End of Darkness, I will forever plead that the series go back to its roots.

Arc the Lad, as a whole, has usually been very conventional. There is almost always a young man, impatient with his idyllic upbringing, who learns that he is the only one who could save the fantastic world around him. A journey begins. In this regard, End of Darkness keeps pace with the other games. Personally, while I found the story of the last Arc title, Twilight of the Spirits, offered compelling twists to the good vs. evil battle, End of Darkness is trite (where there is plot) and downright boring (where there isn't any story pushing players forward).

Changing the gameplay utterly, Darkness offers hack n' slash battles more in line with Champions of Norrath than Final Fantasy. The idea is that you can grow and customize your characters and join friends for four-player online matches, either to take on cooperative quests or battle amongst yourselves. The rarest cards (which are equipped to enable certain skills) are almost exclusively found in the co-op missions, so there's an effect in your offline game. This would be cool if the rest of the game was more rewarding.

Sadly, it isn't. Combat just plain sucks. Lining up a hit is too strictly along the 2D, eight-direction compass; you can't stop a combo once it's started; and the card system is overly confusing. The list just keeps going on and on. As a whole, End of Darkness is just a shameful mark on the Arc series. —**LISA**

BOTTOM LINE 5.5

> Concept: Bring hack n' slash action to one of the best sleeper RPG series around

> Graphics: Never known as a beauty, but the longer that this continues, the worse it looks in comparison to its peers

> Sound: Grating sound effects and music that repeats too frequently made me want to just throw on a CD

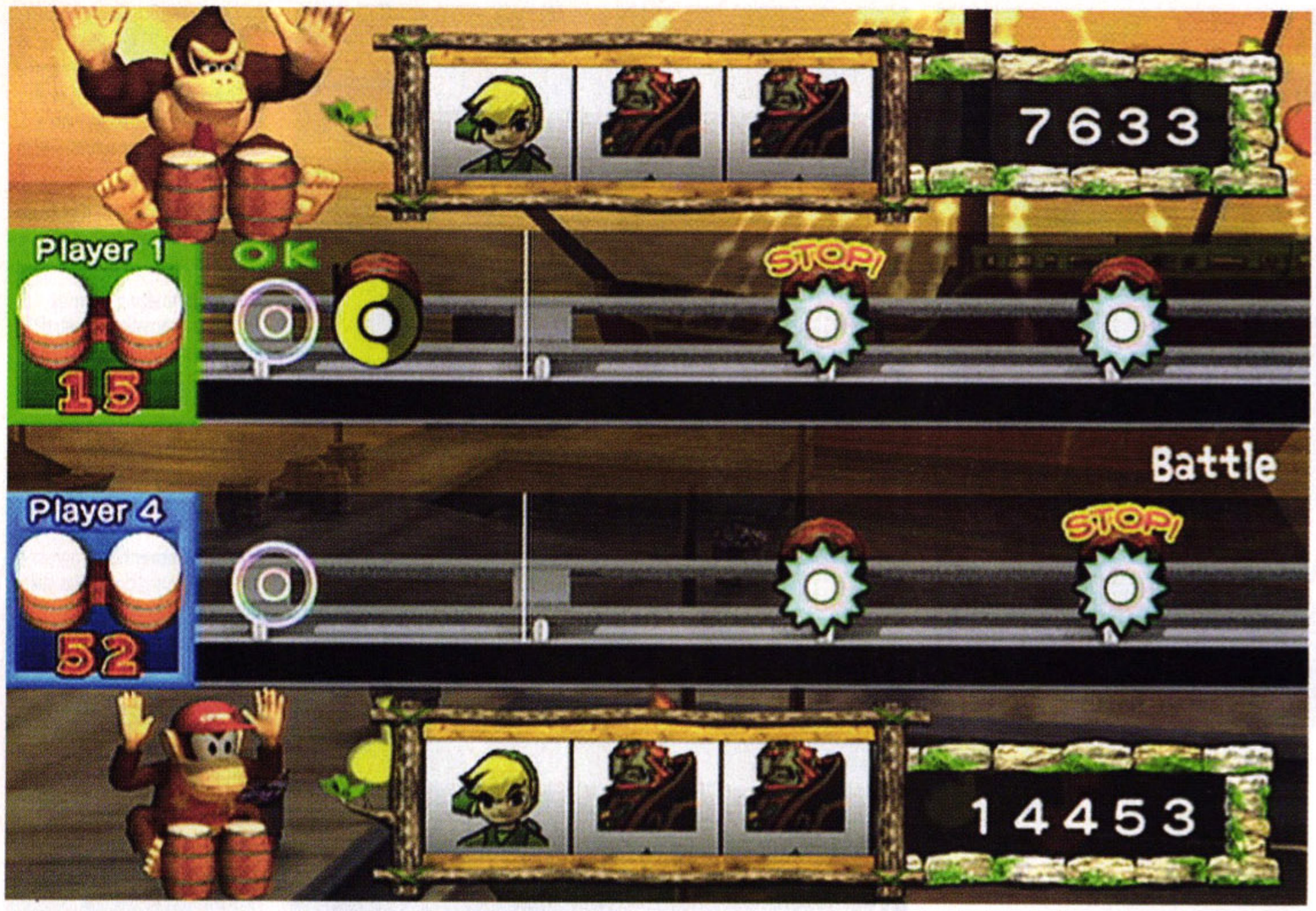
> Playability: The menu structure is odd and the fighting has a whole bag of problems

> Entertainment: I really want to pretend that this entry in the Arc saga never happened

> Replay Value: Low

Second Opinion 5

Arc the Lad: End of Darkness is junk. The action/RPG combat system can be fun, but by the time you've got the characters and items necessary to experience its depth, you've waded through hours of undirected and artless tasks. Don't count on the plot to keep you going, either; only because the story is so predictable and formulaic can you fill in the gaping holes in logic and motivation. Plus, the main character, Edda, was obviously turned down for the role of Tidus for being too much of a toolbox. Like a horribly disfigured mutant reaching out its slimy stump-arms and begging for a hug, End of Darkness requires supreme feats of self-sacrifice to love and embrace.—**JOE**



GAMECUBE

Donkey Konga 2

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** NINTENDO **> DEVELOPER** NAMCO/NINTENDO
> RELEASE MAY 9 **> ESRB** E

BRING THAT BEAT BACK

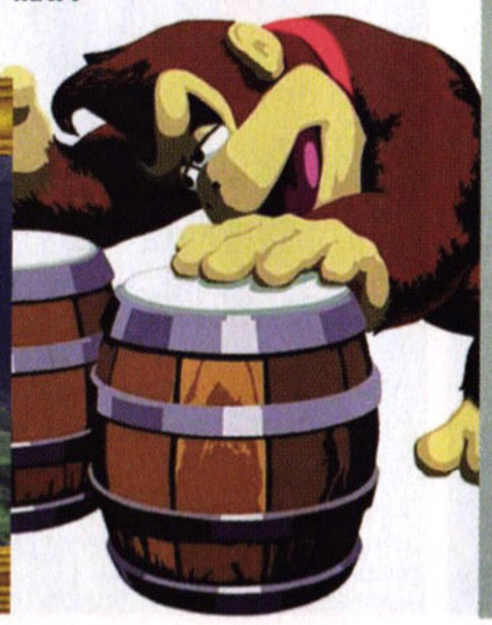
Although I still prefer Namco's own Taiko Drum Master, the original Donkey Konga was a nice little party game. Of course, due to the fact that it was by Nintendo and featured a wacky controller, there were those that convinced themselves that it was some sort of milestone in video game development. Those people would be wrong. Still, the appeal of the game's four-player mode could turn the most sedate gathering into a raging bongo-fest, and this remains true for the sequel.

If you've never played Donkey Konga before, it's essentially the same formula that Konami titles like Dance Dance Revolution pioneered years ago. As symbols for right bongo, left bongo, dual bongos, and clap scroll across the screen, you must perform the appropriate action in time with the music. Of course, as more players are added to the equation, the sound and action quickly turns into hilarious, infectious chaos.

Little has changed; the modes have been slightly tweaked and the minigames are a bit more skill-based (instead of the butchered, action-oriented ones from the first game), but that's about it. You can also collect "badges" by winning a Concentration-style game after completing a song, icons featuring prominent Nintendo characters that you can put next to your scores.

Of course, there is also a new tracklisting, which was probably my biggest complaint. Some complained about the "kiddie" nature of the songs in the last one, but I'll take that lighthearted fare over the generic nü-metal, R&B, and pop punk that populates this game. Even worse, much of it already feels dated (Who's psyched for Blu Cantrell? Chevelle? Anyone?). That said, it's a ball with friends, amusing solo, and a nice purchase for anyone that already owns the bongo controller.—**MATT**

■ The new minigames are much better than in the first



BOTTOM LINE 7

> Concept: Bring out another music title for Nintendo's drum controller, with few changes

> Graphics: Hey, it's colorful and fun, what more do you expect?

> Sound: The re-recordings of the "hits" are a little cheesy, and I'm not crazy about the song selection

> Playability: It seems like it's harder to cheat by hitting both drums at once

> Entertainment: Another fun party game, but no major improvements have been made

> Replay Value: Moderately High

Second Opinion 7

There's nothing quite like beating your bongos with a monkey. The first Donkey Konga is a pretty fun little rhythm game, especially with a group of friends, and the sequel is basically more of the same. It still has the same enjoyable core, but now that there are three drum-based games out there (the two Kongas and Taiko Drum Master), a lot of the novelty has worn off for me. Because they're so similar, I can't really think of any reason to choose the sequel over the original, especially since I didn't really care for any of the songs in Konga 2. But, if you'd prefer to drum along to slightly dated pop songs instead of Nintendo themes and cheesy party favorites, then I guess Donkey Konga 2 is the way to go.—**JEREMY**

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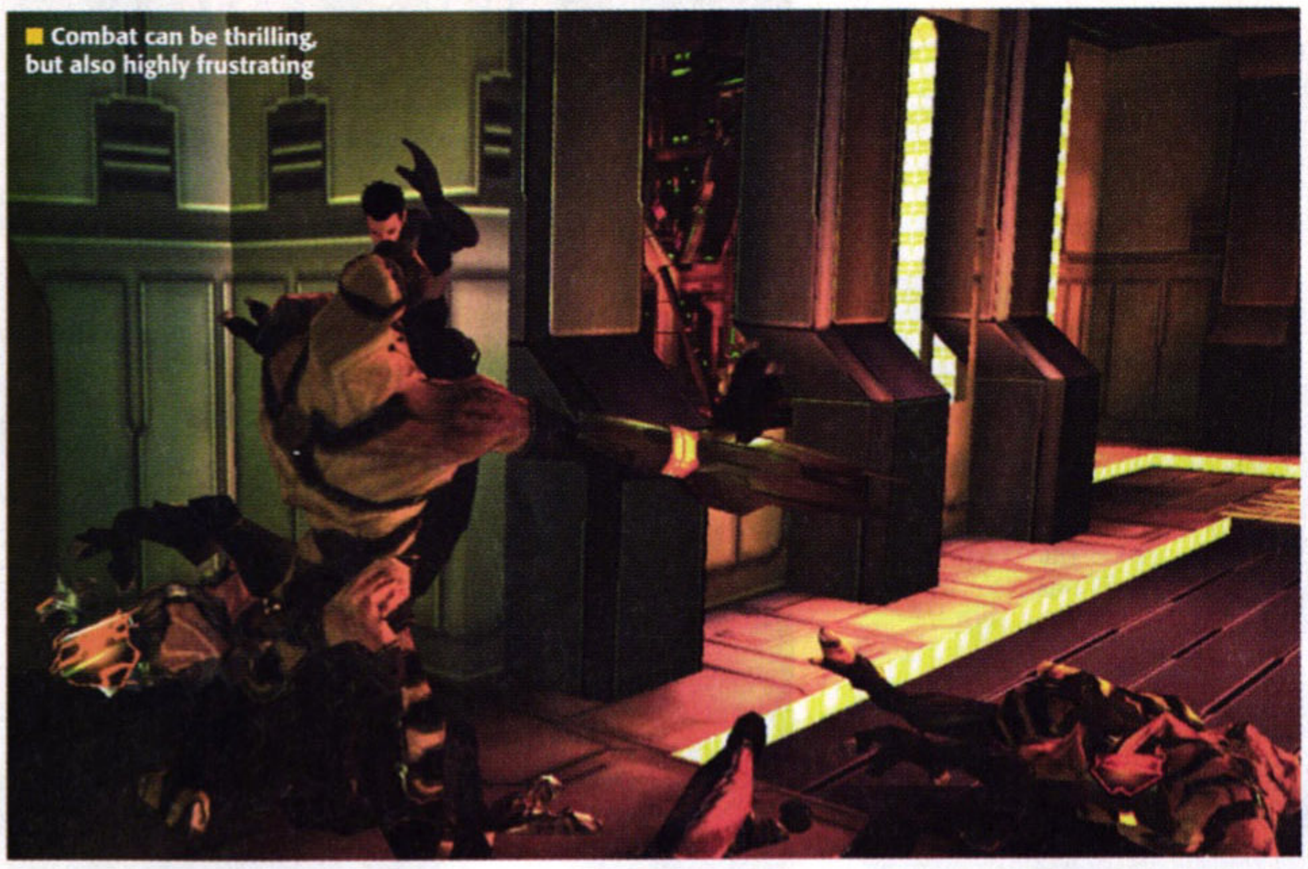

Combat can be thrilling, but also highly frustrating

The weapons are great, but there are serious problems in the targeting system

The vehicles control much like those in the Halo series

XBOX

Advent Rising

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** MAJESCO **> DEVELOPER** GLYPHX GAMES **> RELEASE** MARCH 31 **> ESRB** T

REACH EXCEEDS GRASP

To be honest, this is one of the most difficult reviews I've ever had to write. Even after I'd seen Advent Rising through to its mind-blowing conclusion (Hint: stick around until after the credits), I really didn't know what score I was going to assign to the game. I can say this: rookie developer Glyphx Games has produced one of the most ambitious first games ever. To its credit, the team has come very close to pulling it off.

One of the main reasons that this title has received so much press is the involvement of science fiction legend Orson Scott Card, who helped create the game's story and co-wrote the screenplay. This partnership birthed a truly compelling tale, one that could stand up alongside the best sci-fi novels and films. As Gideon Wyeth, you'll attempt to save the last remnants of humanity from an alien race called the Seekers, who are scouring the galaxies to extinguish your species from existence. After meeting up with a race of kindly aliens called the Aurelians, who have long worshiped humans as gods, you learn that your struggle is part of a much larger conflict that could affect the very fate of the universe. You also begin to discover that you possess a host of superhuman mental abilities.

It's gripping stuff, and the main reason that I will still recommend that you give this game a shot. The cinematics are expertly crafted, and the plot's twists and turns will have you at the edge of your seat. Also, unlike most games, you'll experience a real emotional connection to the action, as you're forced to make heartbreaking choices that lead to the deaths of those closest to you.

The gameplay portion of Advent Rising is equally ambitious, and that ambition may have been its undoing. As Gideon, you'll have a full complement of weapons and a handful of amazing mental abilities like levitation, force shields, and projectile attacks. Also, you can jump and flip in slow motion with the quick-dodge button. It's like someone tried to combine God of War, Star Wars: Jedi Knight, Psi-Ops, and Max Payne. On top of that, there is even a selection of vehicle and flying sequences. If you think that sounds hard to accomplish, you'd be right.

Although advancing Gideon's abilities to god-like status is certainly compelling, the game falters when it comes to delivering a solid play experience. The "flick-targeting" system (which toggles through enemies with the right analog) is very erratic, and, coupled with the twitchy camera, will leave many gamers feeling seasick during hectic battles. Sadly, there's a virtual laundry list of technical failings in Advent Rising: unbalanced gameplay, jerky animation, spotty AI, and characters getting stuck on objects and disappearing through walls. It seems like every time some great sequence had convinced me that this was truly an epic for the ages, a glaring annoyance would rear its head and cause frustration.

So, while there are moments in this game that I'll never forget, I simply can't give it high honors, as there are just too many inconsistencies and problems in the end product. It's a bit like a first album by a band you just know will go on to record a classic. All the elements for success are there – they just need a little polish. Despite its flaws, I'd still recommend giving Advent Rising a chance, if only to get in on the ground floor of a series that has the potential for true greatness. For now, that potential will go unrealized.—**MATT**

BOTTOM LINE 7.75

> Concept: The first part of an epic sci-fi action trilogy, with a story co-written by author Orson Scott Card

> Graphics: At times, it's breath-taking, but serious technical issues abound

> Sound: Amazing. Tommy Tallarico's dramatic orchestral and choral arrangements place this among my favorite game soundtracks ever

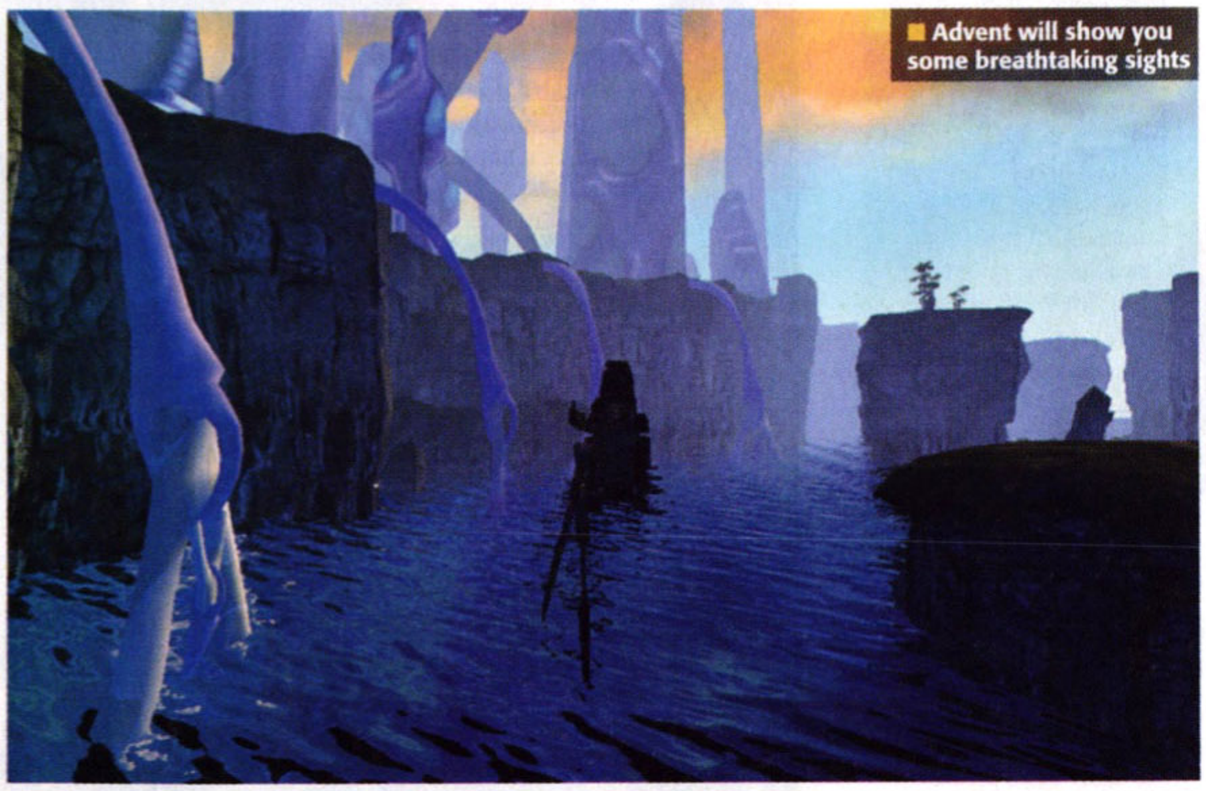
> Playability: Your ability set is awesome. Too bad that gameplay's often a sloppy, erratic mess

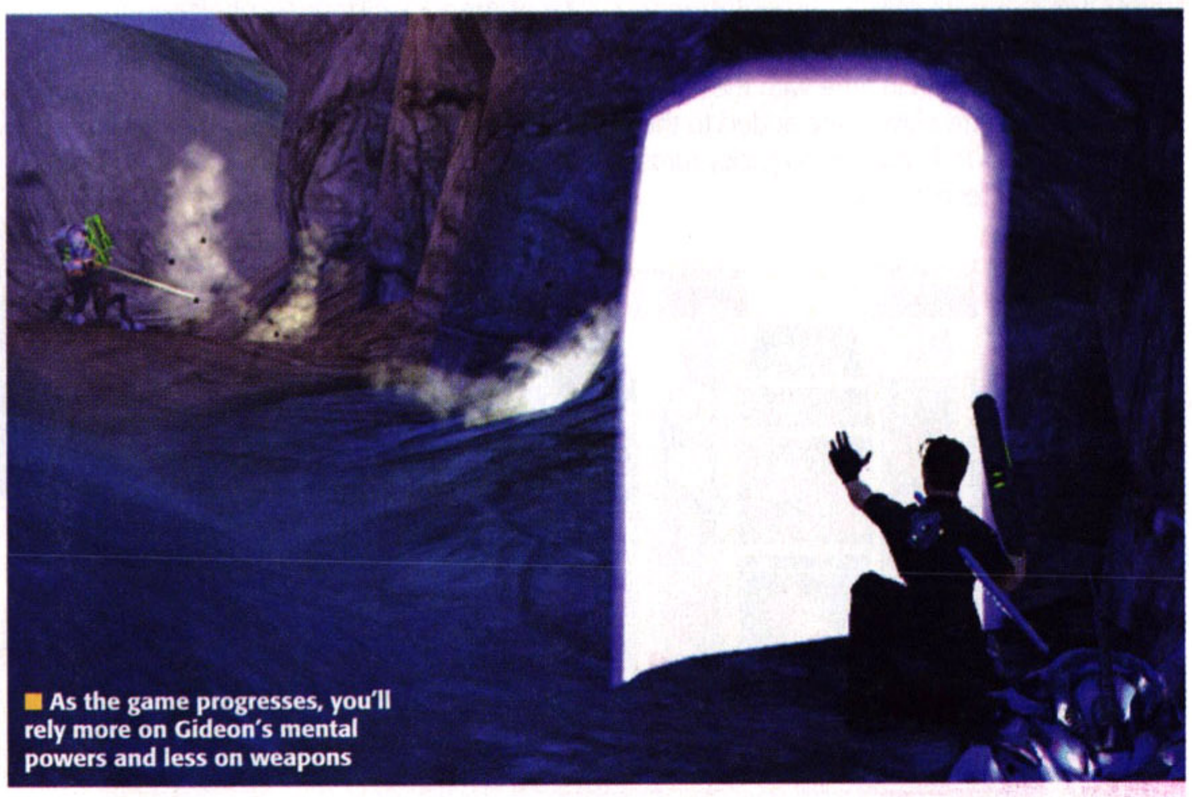
> Entertainment: As engrossing as it is frustrating, I was still riveted by Advent Rising

> Replay Value: Moderately High

Second Opinion 7.5

Audacious, thematically masterful, and nothing short of riveting, Advent Rising lives up to the hype as a science-fiction epic. The expansive universe and vivacious alien societies that developer Glyphx and author Orson Scott Card have conceived are fully realized and fascinating. The tale that unfolds within this engaging setting is concise and saturated with mind-blowing sequences and emotionally stirring events. As a story, it excels. As a movie, it soars. As a game, however, it stumbles. Glyphx's attempt to reinvent third-person action is noble, but also flawed. The unique "flick-targeting" system is touchy and difficult to use successfully. The camera is also prone to jumping out of frame, leaving gamers reeling during intense battles. Enemy and teammate AI is also suspect, and the animations are not as fluid as you would like them to be. Advent Rising has all the makings of a masterpiece, but it's also a huge disappointment.—**REINER**


Advent will show you some breathtaking sights


As the game progresses, you'll rely more on Gideon's mental powers and less on weapons

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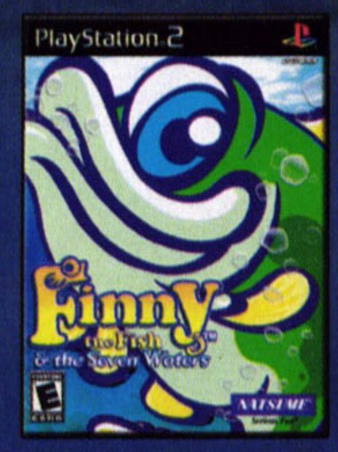

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The environments are nothing short of amazing

Trying to maneuver in combat can be a huge pain

PC

Guild Wars

> **STYLE** MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** NCSOFT
> **DEVELOPER** ARENANET > **RELEASE** APRIL 28 > **ESRB** T

GAME INFORMER PC GAME OF THE MONTH

A MOST APPROPRIATE MONIKER

Saying that Guild Wars is "the next big MMORPG" is a logical fallacy. The relationship between GW and more traditional online RPGs like Everquest II and World of Warcraft is much more akin to that between Midnight Club and Grand Theft Auto. You'd never proclaim Midnight Club 3 to be a "San Andreas killer," would you? Guild Wars does not by any means offer the kind of immersion or character development found in EQ or WoW, but its true focus – skill-based player vs. player combat – is a totally new way to get your heroic fantasy on, and it is crafted with the kind of polish and precision rarely found in any genre.

At any time, you can jump in and create a max-level PvP-only character to duke it out with your fellow players. However, you'll have to make a Role-Playing hero and adventure through GW's storyline in order to unlock better skills to equip in PvP. And this is GW's biggest downfall – the PvE (player vs. environment) stuff simply isn't all that good. In the same way that PvP in GW is awesome in large part because it borrows plenty of concepts from games like Counter-Strike and Unreal Tournament, the PvE is boring just like playing offline in CS or UT is. It's fairly easy to figure out how to exploit the bots' AI, and there just isn't enough variety in loot, quests, monster types, or anything else to make the PvE truly engaging. Barring the occasional unique and exciting mission, after the first five hours of PvE, the only reason I was playing was to gear myself up to get more effective in PvP.

Ah, the PvP. Whether you're competing in the Hall of Heroes to keep the gods' favor for your country (America, Korea, or Europe) or just jumping into the Arena for a quick fix, the competitive play in Guild Wars is a genre unto itself. The matches are fast and fun without being so lightning-quick as to negate skill, and the balancing between character builds is good enough to not present any problems. With several types of matches ranging from simple team deathmatch to complex base assault and defense, there is a ton of room to cook up goofy strategies and builds to try and edge out the other team. Teamwork and effective strategizing win every time, and there's such a diversity in situations and possible compositions of your team that even the sharpest strategic mind will find more than enough to dig into for an awfully long time.

Guild Wars not only offers a totally different style of gaming, it executes on its novel concepts with surprising efficacy. If the prospect of dealing with a bit of mediocre questing isn't a huge turnoff, then you'll no doubt have an amazing time with Guild Wars. Just don't go into it expecting to satisfy your raging leveling and loot addictions.—**ADAM**

A DIFFERENT DESIGN

There are a few ways that Guild Wars does things that are totally different than anything else around. Pay attention, and you'll save yourself an hour of asking noob questions in general chat.

World Instancing
Any time you are in a zone that has bad guys, the server spins off a copy of that zone which is specifically for you and your party. The towns where you see lots of players are little more than glorified chat channels to find a group in.

Skills
Though you can know as many skills as you can find, you can only equip eight at a time. They can be switched out in towns, but not in the field. This is where a ton of strategy enters into the game: Do you take a resurrect spell or another nuke? Regeneration or a life-stealing curse? The possibilities are many and varied.

BOTTOM LINE 8.75

> **Concept:** Combine the best elements of MMORPGs and action/RPGs into a new kind of online experience

> **Graphics:** Approximately as delicious as you could want. Characters all look like clones until higher levels, though

> **Sound:** Swords clang and fireballs explode with the appropriate fanfare

> **Playability:** The occasional pathing problem frustrates, and selecting new targets can be a total pain

> **Entertainment:** Getting through the mediocre questing qualifies you for a whole new world of great PvP action

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 8.5

Expectations and ideas about Guild Wars should pretty much be left at the door. That's because the game really stands apart from other online RPGs, since the only interaction you have with the overall community is in towns, castles, and the like. Outside of these hubs, the role-playing world is absolutely vast, and could be a dream come true for those who don't mind the sometimes-tedious level grind. That same massive world is as gorgeously presented as it is large, with breathtaking vistas and spectacular character designs. Some balance issues are still definitely present, and those who want to solo may wish to adventure elsewhere – I had a lot more fun playing with friends than alone. The separate PvP section of the game further enhances what is already a tremendous undertaking, and helps to make Guild Wars one of those titles you could easily pour weeks and weeks of your life into.—**MILLER**

Awesome PvE missions, like this "defend the base" quest, are few and far between

Using the environment to your advantage can be extremely helpful

Even fighter types can use magic if they want

PC

Dungeon Lords

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN)
> PUBLISHER DREAMCATCHER **> DEVELOPER** HEURISTIC PARK **> RELEASE** MAY 3 **> ESRB** T

GENERIC NAME, GENERIC GAME

Following E3 2004, I was pretty excited for Dungeon Lords. The game looked decent, sounded cool, and was right up my alley with the whole action/RPG schtick. After finally loading it up on my PC, however, it became abundantly clear that Dungeon Lords, frankly, sucks. People can go on about how technology takes a back seat to design when it comes to a game's enjoyability, but when the tech is as bad as it is here, no amount of brilliant design can salvage the game.

The most disappointing part about DL is the fact that the ideas behind it are pretty sound. A skill-based character development system à la Morrowind, third-person action like Morrowind, NPC dialogue just like Morrowind… Well, if it has to be a clone of another title at least it's a good one. Unfortunately, the engine that DL runs on is possibly the worst I've ever seen, with its constant collision problems and unresponsive controls. Adding terrible AI and level design, this is still only the tip of the iceberg. Horribly unbalanced attacks don't help things either (don't get hit by a troll, because you'll be continuously knocked down and unable to get up until you die!). This title feels like it needs another year in development despite its numerous delays.

There's really no way that I can recommend this game to anyone, no matter their tastes or patience for annoying bugs. You can go bargain-bin diving and come up with a better purchase for five dollars than this disaster, so do yourself a favor and take that option.—**ADAM**

BOTTOM LINE 4

> Concept: Rip off Morrowind in as shoddy a manner as possible

> Graphics: Very nice modeling, but numerous glitches and boring environments bring this down

> Sound: So incredibly buggy and bad that you may as well turn it off

> Playability: How in the world can such a simple interface be so frustrating?

> Entertainment: Why pay money for a game that's not even finished, when you could lay down those bones for something that actually works?

> Replay Value: Low

Second Opinion 5

I haven't been sleeping well lately, but fortunately Dungeon Lords cured me of that. Spending a few hours with this bland experience grinder is enough to send even the worst insomniac into a slumber so deep that there will be a new president when you wake up (hopefully Will Smith). The action at its core is simultaneously dull and frustrating, and it's hard to care about a character that moves like he has a dump in his pants. There simply aren't any new ideas in Dungeon Lords, which means there's nothing cool about the story or universe to balance out its dull, problematic gameplay. But then again, with a name like Dungeon Lords, you know to expect a fairly generic fantasy adventure. Heck, you might as well call the game "Troll Killer" or "Magical Sword Warrior."—**JEREMY**

Whatever other faults this title has, the modeling is excellent

Trackmania Sunrise

> STYLE 1 TO 8-PLAYER RACING (MULTIPLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) **> PUBLISHER** ENLIGHT **> DEVELOPER** NADEO
> RELEASE MAY 9 **> ESRB** E

Did I mention that this game is anything but realistic?

TO BE SEVEN YEARS OLD AGAIN

The best way to explain the feel of Trackmania Sunrise is that it reminds me of the good parts of childhood. Specifically, playing this game recalls my early flights of fancy involving "driving" little toy cars around my house, sending them off improbable jumps, and otherwise circumventing the laws of physics. This title moves so fast and sends you flying through the air at such insane speeds that it manages to overcome its somewhat jagged edges.

As entertaining as it is to simply exult in the spirit of speed and haul through some crazy courses, the lack of other cars (you always race against ghosts) hurts Trackmania by keeping a true racing feel from developing. This is only an issue in Race mode, though. Platform mode challenges you to make it through a track in a certain number of lives with no time limit, and really pushes you to explore new driving strategies to attain that goal. Puzzle mode is likewise unconventional and interesting; here you have to use a certain number of pieces in the track editor to make a course raceable, and then actually race it within a time limit. This combines the two main elements of the game into a new experience, and largely succeeds in making it fun.

Unfortunately, Trackmania Sunrise feels in a lot of ways like it just didn't have enough time in development to really fulfill its potential. There are only three vehicles to race with, and two of them aren't particularly awesome. The difficulty is oddly tuned as well – I was able to get a silver medal easily on any given track, but obtaining a gold required well over a hundred attempts. This wouldn't be a problem, but unlocking further courses requires a gold, and it's immensely frustrating to sit at that brick wall for hours on end.

These issues notwithstanding, Trackmania still offers a lot of entertainment. The robust track editor helps the replay value quite a bit as well. I'm honestly very excited to see what this team comes up with next, and hopeful that future title will have a little more polish to it.—**ADAM**

Platform stages are wacky, to say the least

BOTTOM LINE 7.25

> Concept: Race around totally ridiculous tracks faster than you've ever driven before

> Graphics: Pretty nice, though the lack of explosions for crashes is disappointing

> Sound: Vroom! The soundtrack is surprisingly enjoyable, though

> Playability: The difficulty is high enough with a good wheel; don't bother picking this up unless you have one

> Entertainment: This different take on the racing genre offers a fair amount of enjoyment if sim-style games bore you

> Replay Value: Moderately High

Second Opinion 7

You've just got to enjoy a game that's this deliberately simple. How often do you see a racer that's completely based around the idea of being as unrealistic as possible? There's little to Trackmania Sunrise other than its insane speeds and completely ridiculous stunts, but this over-the-top action will certainly have you cackling with delight for at least a few hours. Some of the jumps can be frustrating and it would be nice to see other cars on the track, but any racing game that takes arcade-style action and multiplies it by a thousand is definitely worth taking for a few joyrides.—**JEREMY**

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Fire Emblem: The Sacred Stones

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY/RPG > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS > **RELEASE** MAY 23 > **ESRB** E

ANOTHER GEM

Nintendo first-party developer Intelligent Systems is quickly becoming one of my favorite studios. The company's GBA strategy offerings are uniformly amazing, and Fire Emblem: The Sacred Stones is no exception. Everything that was great about the first GBA Fire Emblem returns – the at-times punishing difficulty, interesting maps and missions, tight strategic gameplay, and the improvements to the basic formula do nothing but enhance this sequel.

The core of Fire Emblem is as strong as ever. Leveling up your characters, choosing who to send into battle, and above all, concocting intricate strategies to conquer each map are all done with true polish and are what make this series great. What sets Fire Emblem apart, though, is the immediacy of combat. One-time opportunities within the missions abound, and if you mess one up or ignore it, it's gone forever. For instance, you might be able to recruit an enemy hero or have the chance to race some bandits to a treasury. These options are never required, and always make the mission harder than simply marching through it (which is by no means ever a cakewalk), but the rewards for taking on the extra challenges is worth it. There's no feeling like finishing a sidequest while in the process of conquering the impossible odds arrayed against you.

GAME INFORMER GAME OF THE MONTH

The improvements in The Sacred Stones are simple, but definitely noticable and welcome. Most units can now choose which class to upgrade to, which gives quite a bit more control over the composition of your forces. Purchasing can be done outside of combat, removing an ever-present headache. There are also two optional multiple-floor dungeons as well as non-story encounters available to build up experience, which takes the edge off of the stiff difficulty of the game. It feels like everything I wanted to improve from the original has been included.

Strategy noobs might find this title a bit too much to digest, as character death is permanent and even normal fights stretch your brain to the limit. Also, the story isn't to the level of a Final Fantasy, but it's leagues beyond the generic tripe we're fed in so many titles. For my money, though, this game is far and away the best GBA release this year – and possibly the best handheld title of 2005 so far.—**ADAM**

BOTTOM LINE 9

> **Concept:** More Fire Emblem from the geniuses at Intelligent Systems, minus some of the annoyances of the first GBA title

> **Graphics:** Exactly the same as before. Animations and portraits are very nice

> **Sound:** Unnecessary. My many hours of playing gave me an excuse to dredge up some buried tracks on my iPod, though

> **Playability:** Being able to buy things out of combat is a godsend

> **Entertainment:** Turn-based strategy really doesn't get a whole lot better than this

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 8

To an industry outsider, the 2D strategy genre must be one of the most baffling. Its adherents don't demand amazing graphics or drastic improvements; it's the little tweaks that make the difference, and that's where Sacred Stones really shines. While largely the same as its predecessor, the new world map, classes, and character progression give the familiar aspects a fresh twist. Surprisingly, the story is also pretty solid – not just an excuse to jump from one battle to another. Other games could learn a lesson from one character in particular who says "what harm could a little reckless besieging cause?" Amen, brother. If only you and Animal Crossing were on the same page.—**JOE**

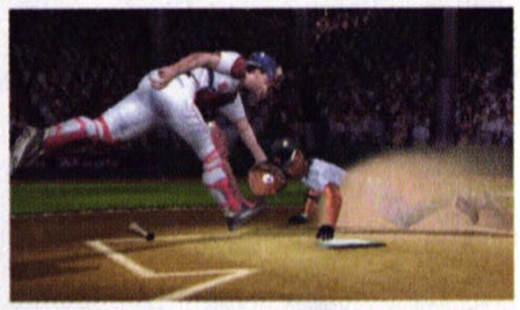
HANDHELD QUICKIES

PSP

MVP Baseball

BOTTOM LINE 7

> **STYLE** 1 TO 3-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER VIA AD HOC) > **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS
> **DEVELOPER** EA CANADA > **RELEASE** MAY 18 > **ESRB** E



Despite this being an EA Sports title, the conversion of MVP to the PSP isn't a simple case of shrinkage. Although this game looks really nice, complete with detailed faces and custom batter animations, it fails to deliver on the hallmarks of the MVP series. Pitching is missing the Perfect Zone and it can be difficult to place pitches around the edges of the plate. Furthermore, the moving pitch mark is hard to see. The diving infield stabs are poorly implemented here, and you can't guess at pitches when you're batting. I also found that coming in and out of cutscenes was slow. This game is more ambitious than Sony's PSP baseball title, but MVP's gameplay hiccups may leave you looking elsewhere.—**KATO**

NINTENDO DS

BOTTOM LINE 4

Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (2-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS) > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT
> **DEVELOPER** UBISOFT > **RELEASE** MAY 3 > **ESRB** E 10+

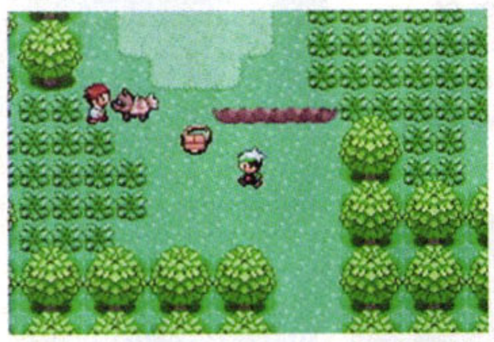
Picture, if you will, that you've been introduced to the most powerful being in the galaxy. As you extend your hand in greeting, he flutters his eyelids longingly and levitates a piece of fruit toward you. It would make for an uncomfortable, soul-shattering experience, much like playing this game is. Even the Jedi's so called "chosen one" cannot escape sloppy and overly repetitive hack n' slash gameplay. Trying to fool players into thinking that they are fighting different adversaries, Ubisoft even sunk to the level of simply changing the color of the battle droids. The only good that can come from this game is sending it as a prank gift to Jake Lloyd with a note reading "You aren't the only one who ruined Star Wars."—**REINER**

GAME BOY ADVANCE

BOTTOM LINE 7.75

Pokémon Emerald

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS ADAPTER OR LINK CABLE)
> **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** GAME FREAK > **RELEASE** MAY 1 > **ESRB** E



As a fan of the franchise and its unquestionably addictive gameplay, I appreciate how Game Freak has upped the difficulty level and cut to the proverbial chase with action that kicks in fast and doesn't let up. But, as is the unfortunate case for every Pokémon game, this is more of the same. There simply aren't any changes that make this a must-buy. The trading options set up in Leaf Green/Fire Red are here, along with a handful of new concepts to tinker with. Planting seeds that have battle-friendly effects, "decorations" for your trainer, and the option to have Pokémon in your party hold things like potions are great ideas, but I can't quite get to the point of calling this entry in the Pokémon saga truly innovative.—**LISA**

PSP

NBA Street Showdown

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA AD HOC) **> PUBLISHER** EA BIG **> DEVELOPER** EA CANADA **> RELEASE** APRIL 25 **> ESRB** E

FLAGRANT FOUL

Much like a player who is coming off of an injury, NBA Street hobbles onto PSP, clearly hampered by the machine's limitations and lacking the grace and high-flying antics of its console brethren. While EA managed to capture the stylish look of the series, concessions run rampant throughout gameplay. The result is an experience that is both fractured and frustrating.

For those of you who have spent time breaking ankles on the console courts, Showdown's trick system will make you feel like you've had a leg amputated. Not only does it deliver a fraction of the moves, the controls are not nearly as responsive as they need to be for the heated 3-on-3 matchups that unfold on the blacktop. It feels like there is a split-second of lag with each button press that you make. Not only does this deliver the sensation that you are a bit out of control, it completely throws off your timing for moves that require you to tap or hold the button. Given how fast the gameplay is (which is impressive), I often found myself performing the wrong move due to the questionable timing.

The gameplay just isn't where it needs to be. This series has always thrived off of player skill, but with Showdown you have to rely heavily on luck. Fearing that the touchy controls would cost me games, I even resorted to scaling back my offensive attacks. In short, this is not how a Street game should be played.

As much as I feel that these faults suck the life out of this game, it's still capable of delivering huge thrills. Soaring over your defender never seems to get old, the Arcade Shootout minigame will put you into a trance, and King of the Courts mode throws a ton of unlockable content your way.

It's a fun play, but being a veteran of the console versions really pulled out this handheld incarnation's glaring flaws.—**REINER**

■ The minigames are fun, yet pointless

BOTTOM LINE 7

> Concept: Street's awe-inspiring dunks are swatted down by the PSP

> Graphics: Beautiful animations, high caliber facial mapping, and gorgeous court detailing

> Sound: The soundtrack boasts 13 respectable hip hop tracks that can be played at any time (think iPod) through EA's Pocket Trax player. As always, the announcer seems to be in the game with the sole intent of annoying players

> Playability: Street's rim-rocking moves are deflated through touchy and unresponsive controls

> Entertainment: Easily the best handheld basketball game, but a faint echo of the console versions

> Replay Value: Moderately High

Second Opinion 6.75

Everything I loved about NBA Street V3 is lost on this handheld edition, such as the tight controls and lightning quick gameplay. Every aspect of the on-the-court action in Showdown feels firmly stuck in the mud. While I could deal with a slower-paced game overall, what I can't forgive is the hiccup that takes place for every move you make. Hit the block button, and by the time your character on screen makes a move, the other team has already rammed it down your throat. Turbo down the court to unleash a monster dunk and it feels like it takes forever for the coup de grâce to be delivered. From dekes to dunks, it's all annoyingly behind and completely counter-intuitive. It's a shame too, as the minigames and soundtrack rock, but I just couldn't get past the lackluster play control.—**ANDY**

PSP

Hot Shots Golf: Open Tee

> STYLE 1-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA AD HOC **> PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA **> DEVELOPER** CLAP HANZ **> RELEASE** MAY 3 **> ESRB** E 10+

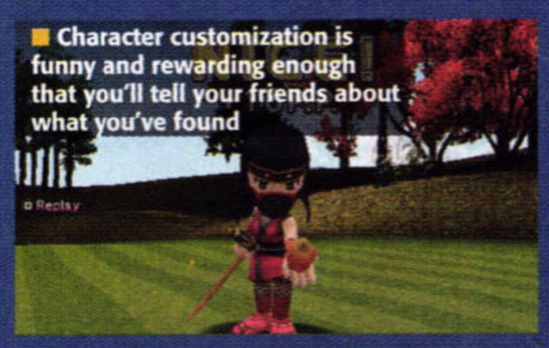
YOUNG AT HEART

I've always been a fan of the Hot Shots brand of golf – big heads, crazy colors, unbelievable courses, and a learning curve so perfect that everyone thinks it was built just for them. Each match requires constant vigilance, but the game is pretty fair overall. The ball physics are (once again) nearly spot on, and the courses feature some of the most insane greens I've ever seen.

The series' trademark art style looks amazing on the portable. Lush colors, cartoony menus, and disproportionate players show up well. In particular, the customizations make big differences in your character's appearance, something that becomes even more important in online matches where your clothes can easily tip players off to your progression in the single-player game.

But so far, it just sounds like a great, regular Hot Shots title – the series is consistently solid, and Open Tee is no exception. Where the entry really shines, though, is multiplayer. Two-person matches, eight-player tournaments, and two-player miniature golf rounds are all seconds away. Each plays fabulously and really uses the PSP hardware well.

There are only a few nit-picky details where the Open Tee makes me cranky. Opponent models are repetitive, it assumes a certain degree of familiarity with the series when explaining special shots (like circle and triangle options), and the rate of unlocking new courses is much slower than before. Even taking these bits into account, there is absolutely no reasonable excuse to miss Open Tee.—**LISA**



■ Character customization is funny and rewarding enough that you'll tell your friends about what you've found

■ The Putting challenges offer a nice change of pace

BOTTOM LINE 9

> Concept: Bring the best entry in the popular golf series to Sony's handheld wonder

> Graphics: Bright colors, crisp style, and more shades of green than a leprechaun with food coloring

> Sound: Perky and, after a four-hour session, a little too much so. But appropriate and cute nonetheless

> Playability: The three-click swing is a great fit and the expanded options are all amazingly easy

> Entertainment: Hyper addictive – bring your charging cable, because the battery won't last as long as you do

> Replay Value: High

Second Opinion 8.5

I never thought that a game could physically hold someone hostage, but for the last two weeks, I have been unable to pull myself away from Open Tee's breathtaking links. Through a hole-in-one effort on Sony's part, the series' trademark three-click swing has transitioned flawlessly to the PSP. After all of these years of waiting, Sony has finally integrated character customization, allowing players to outfit their golfer with items won in challenges. Being able to personalize your characters really adds something to the mix. It does take a good deal of time to unlock new courses, but when the gameplay is this addictive, spending a few extra hours on Open Tee's greens really isn't a problem.—**REINER**

CHARTS

An In-Depth Listing Of The Best Selling Games

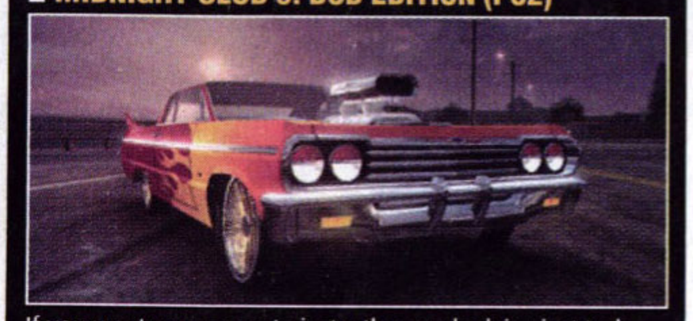
TOP 20

Listings Based Upon NPD Data For April 2005 Based On Units Sold

1 DOOM 3 (XBOX)

With Doom 3's sales soaring, it's obvious that people love to pay money for things that make them scared of the dark. That's why, for a reasonable fee, we'll cram Calista Flockhart under your bed, allowing her to come out at night only to feed. Remember, she subsists solely on fear. Well, fear and low-carb popcorn.

2 MIDNIGHT CLUB 3: DUB EDITION (PS2)



If you want your game to instantly sound edgier, just tack on "DUB Edition" to the title. Metal Gear Solid: DUB Edition. Final Fantasy X-2: DUB Edition. Gallop Racer: DUB Edition. We've always wanted to add rims to Solid Snake and jam exhaust pipes into horses.

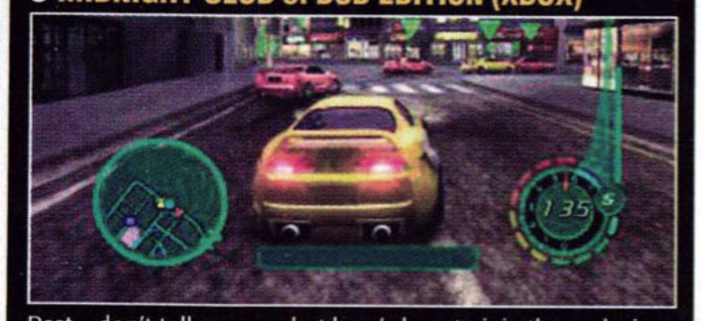
3 GOD OF WAR (PS2)

Kratos could totally beat up your dad. With his own limbs. Unless your dad is Voltron.

4 SPLINTER CELL: CHAOS THEORY (XBOX)

We know Sam's sneaky and everything, but there's no way that guards don't notice those three neon green lights strapped to his melon. Do they just think it is the friendly glow of playful fireflies, flitting about joyfully? "Oh, hello there, fireflies! I sure hope you're not really a spy here to kill me!" <crack><thud>

5 MIDNIGHT CLUB 3: DUB EDITION (XBOX)



Psst... don't tell anyone, but here's how to join the exclusive Midnight Club. First, stay up late watching TBS (otherwise known as The *Bloodsport* Network). Consume an entire jar of Miracle Whip, and wash it down with six bananas. If you survive, you made it in the club! Be sure to tell the ER staff as often as possible.

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	System	Score	Release	Price
1	Doom 3	N/A	XBOX	9.25	04-05	$54
2	Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition	N/A	PS2	9.5	04-05	$50
3	God of War	6	PS2	10	03-05	$50
4	Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory	12	XBOX	9.75	03-05	$49
5	Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition	N/A	XBOX	9.5	04-05	$50
6	MVP Baseball 2005	2	PS2	8.5	02-05	$30
7	LEGO Star Wars	N/A	PS2	7.5	03-05	$40
8	Jade Empire	N/A	XBOX	9.5	04-05	$50
9	WWE Wrestlemania 21	N/A	XBOX	5.75	04-05	$50
10	LEGO Star Wars	N/A	XBOX	7.5	04-05	$40
11	Gran Turismo 4	1	PS2	9.25	02-05	$50
12	Major League Baseball 2K5	8	PS2	8.5	02-05	$19
13	Need for Speed: Underground Rivals	15	PSP	8	03-05	$50
14	LEGO Star Wars	N/A	GBA	N/A	03-05	$29
15	Twisted Metal: Head On	14	PSP	8.75	03-05	$40
16	MX vs. ATV Unleashed	16	PS2	8	03-05	$40
17	Untold Legends: Brotherhood of the Blade	19	PSP	7.75	03-05	$40
18	Mario Party Advance	N/A	GBA	N/A	03-05	$31
19	Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory	N/A	PS2	9.25	03-05	$48
20	MVP Baseball 2005	10	XBOX	8.5	02-05	$30

Source: The NPD Group/NPD Funworld®/TRSTS® • David Riley 516-625-2277

TOP 10 JAPAN

Rank	Title	System
1	Nintendogs	DS
2	Romancing SaGa	PS2
3	Mobile Suit Gundam: The First Year War	PS2
4	Naruto: Saikyou Ninja Daikesshuu 3	DS
5	Baseball Live 2005	PS2
6	Fire Emblem: Path of Radiance	GC
7	Kirby: Canvas Curse	DS
8	Pro Baseball Spirits 2	PS2
9	Bokenno Beat Darkness Century	PS2
10	Mega Man Zero 4	GBA

6

10

Source: Game Japan

TOP 10 GI

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	System
1	Fire Emblem: The Sacred Stones	N/A	GBA
2	Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition	1	Multi
3	Hot Shots Golf: Open Tee	N/A	PSP
4	Guild Wars	N/A	PC
5	Forza Motorsport	3	Xbox
6	Jade Empire	2	Xbox
7	Destroy All Humans	N/A	Multi
8	God of War	4	PS2
9	Killer 7	N/A	Multi
10	Lumines	8	PSP

3

9

The Staff's Favorite Picks

TOP 10 PC

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	Price
1	Guild Wars	N/A	$50
2	World Of Warcraft	2	$50
3	The Sims 2: University	1	$33
4	Doom 3: Resurrection of Evil	N/A	$34
5	The Sims 2	3	$48
6	Stronghold 2	N/A	$39
7	Half-Life 2	5	$52
8	Seaworld Adventure Parks Tycoon	N/A	$15
9	The Sims Deluxe	6	$20
10	Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory	N/A	$42

6

8

Based On Monthly Units Sold

REVIEWSARCHIVE The Really Ugly Page Where You Can See Lots Of Old Review Scores

PLAYSTATION 2

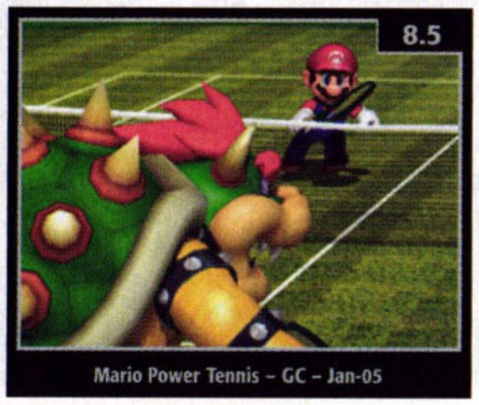
Ace Combat 5: The Unsung War	9	Dec-04
Alien Hominid	8	Dec-04
Ape Escape: Pumped and Primed	5.5	Jan-05
Area 51	8.5	May-05
Atari Anthology!	8.5	Jan-05
Atelier Iris: Eternal Mana	8.25	Jun-05
ATV Offroad Fury 3	7	Jan-05
Backyard Wrestling 2: There Goes The Neighborhood	5.75	Jan-05
Bad Boys: Miami Takedown	5	Dec-04
Bard's Tale, The	8.25	Dec-04
Battle Assault 3 Featuring Gundam Seed	4	Jan-05

Blood Will Tell – PS2 – Nov-04

Blood Will Tell	5	Nov-04
BloodRayne 2	8	Nov-04
Brothers in Arms: Road to Hill 30	8.5	Apr-05
Call of Duty: Finest Hour	8.5	Jan-05
Capcom Fighting Evolution	6	Dec-04
Champions: Return to Arms	8	Mar-05
Cold Fear	6.75	May-05
Cold Winter	8.25	Jun-05
Constantine	6.5	Apr-05
Crash 'n Burn	7	Dec-04
Crash Twinsanity	6	Nov-04
Dead to Rights 2: Hell to Pay	5	Jun-05
Death By Degrees	5.5	Mar-05
Devil May Cry 3: Dante's Awakening	9	Mar-05
Dragon Ball Z Budokai 3	5	Jan-05
Dragon Ball Z: Sagas	5	Jun-05
Drive to Survive	7	May-05
Dynasty Warriors 5	7	May-05
Enthusia: Professional Racing	8	Jun-05
ESPN College Hoops 2K5	9	Dec-04
ESPN NBA 2K5	9	Nov-04
EyeToy: AntiGrav	7	Dec-04
FIFA Soccer 2005	7.75	Nov-04
FIFA Street	6.5	Apr-05
Fight Club	5.5	Jan-05
Fight Night: Round 2	9.25	Mar-05
Final Fantasy XI: Chains of Promathia	7.75	Dec-04
Fullmetal Alchemist and the Broken Angel	4.75	Feb-05
Getaway: Black Monday, The	7	Feb-05
Get On Da Mic	5	Dec-04
Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex	7.25	Dec-04
Ghost Recon 2	6.5	Feb-05
God of War	10	Apr-05
Godzilla: Save the Earth	6	Dec-04
GoldenEye: Rogue Agent	6.75	Jan-05
Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	10	Dec-04
Gran Turismo 4	9.25	Mar-05
Gretzky NHL 2005	6.5	Jan-05
Growlanser: Generations	7.5	Jan-05
Guilty Gear Isuka	6.75	Dec-04
Gungrave: Overdose	4.25	Nov-04
Haunting Ground	4.75	May-05
Hot Wheel Stunt Track Challenge	6.75	Feb-05
Incredibles, The	6.5	Jan-05
Inuyasha: The Secret of the Cursed Mask	4.25	Jan-05
Jak 3	9.25	Nov-04
Karaoke Revolution Volume 3	8.25	Nov-04
Kessen III	7.75	Mar-05
Killzone	7.5	Dec-04
King Arthur	7.25	Nov-04
King of Fighters: Maximum Impact	6.5	Nov-04
Kuon	6	Nov-04
LEGO Star Wars	7.5	May-05
Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude	7.5	Nov-04
Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events	6.25	Jan-05
Lord of the Rings: The Third Age, The	8.5	Dec-04
Major League Baseball 2K5	8.5	Mar-05
Mega Man X8	8.25	Jan-05
Mercenaries	7.5	Feb-05
Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater	9.5	Jan-05
Metal Slug 4 & 5	8	Jun-05
Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition	9.5	May-05
MLB 2006	8.25	Apr-05
Monster Hunter	5	Nov-04
Musashi: Samurai Legend	8.25	Mar-05
MVP Baseball 2005	8.5	Mar-05
MX vs. ATV Unleashed	8	Apr-05
Nano Breaker	5	Mar-05
NARC	4.5	May-05
NBA Live 2005	8.25	Nov-04
NBA Street V3	9	Mar-05
NCAA March Madness 2005	8.25	Dec-04
Need for Speed: Underground 2	8	Dec-04
Neo Contra	7.75	Nov-04
NFL Street 2	7.5	Feb-05
Nightmare of Druaga: Fushigino Dungeon, The	4	Nov-04
Obscure	6	Jun-05
Pinball Hall of Fame: The Gottlieb Collection	6.75	Feb-05
Playboy: The Mansion	6.5	Apr-05
Power Rangers: Dino Thunder	6	Dec-04
Predator: Concrete Jungle	2.75	Jun-05
Prince of Persia: Warrior Within	9.25	Jan-05
Project Snowblind	8.25	Apr-05
Punisher, The	7.5	Feb-05
Rachet and Clank: Up Your Arsenal	10	Nov-04
Red Ninja: End of Honor	3.75	Apr-05
Resident Evil Outbreak File #2	7.5	Apr-05
Rise of the Kasai	7	May-05
Rocky: Legends	6.5	Dec-04
Rumble Roses	7.75	Jan-05
Samurai Warriors Xtreme Legends	6.75	Jan-05
Sega Classics Collection	6.5	Apr-05
Sega Superstars	8	Dec-04
Shadow of Rome	8.5	Feb-05
Shaman King: Power of Spirit	6.5	Jan-05
Shark Tale	6.5	Dec-04
Shining Tears	7.75	Mar-05
Shin Megami Tensei: Digital Devil Saga	7	Apr-05
Shin Megami Tensei: Nocturne	7.5	Nov-04
Sonic Mega Collection Plus	7.5	Dec-04
Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory	9.25	May-05
Spongebob Squarepants: The Movie	6	Dec-04
Spyro: A Hero's Tail	6.5	Nov-04
Stella Deus: The Gate of Eternity	7.5	May-05
Stolen	6.5	Jun-05
Suikoden IV	8.5	Feb-05
Super Monkey Ball Deluxe	8	Apr-05
Taiko Drum Master	7.75	Dec-04
Tak 2: The Staff of Dreams	7.25	Nov-04
Technic Beat	7.5	Nov-04
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 2: Battle Nexus	6	Nov-04
Tekken 5	8.75	Apr-05
Tenchu: Fatal Shadows	7	Mar-05
Test Drive: Eve of Destruction	7.75	Oct-04
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2005	8.5	Oct-04
Time Crisis: Crisis Zone	6.75	Nov-04
TimeSplitters Future Perfect	9	Apr-05
TOCA Race Driver: Ultimate Racing Simulator	7.5	Nov-04
Tony Hawk's Undeground 2	9.75	Nov-04
Ty the Tasmanian Tiger 2: Bush Rescue	6.75	Nov-04
Under the Skin	5	Oct-04
Urbz: Sims in the City, The	7.75	Dec-04
Vietcong: Purple Haze	5	Dec-04
Viewtiful Joe 2	9	Dec-04
Virtua Quest	5.5	Jan-05
Winning Eleven 8	8.75	Mar-05
World Tour Soccer 2006	6	Apr-05
Worms: Forts Under Siege	5.75	Apr-05
WWE Smackdown! Vs. RAW	8.5	Dec-04
X-Men Legends	9	Nov-04
Xenosaga Episode II: Jenseits von Gut und Böse	7.75	Mar-05
Ys: The Ark of Napishtim	7.5	Mar-05
Yu-Gi-Oh! Capsule Monster Coliseum	6	Jan-05
Yu Yu Hakusho: Dark Tournament	3.25	Dec-04

GAMECUBE

Alien Hominid	8	Dec-04
Bad Boys: Miami Takedown	5	Dec-04
Baten Kaitos: Wings of Eternity and the Lost Ocean	8.75	Dec-04
Call of Duty: Finest Hour	8.5	Jan-05
Def Jam: Fight for NY	8.75	Oct-04
Donkey Kong Jungle Beat	7.5	Apr-05
Donkey Konga	7	Nov-04
Dragon Ball Z: Sagas	5	Jun-05
FIFA Soccer 2005	7.75	Nov-04
FIFA Street	6.5	Apr-05
Fight Night: Round 2	9.25	Mar-05
GoldenEye: Rogue Agent	6.75	Jan-05
Incredibles, The	6.5	Jan-05
King Arthur	7.25	Nov-04
Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events	6.25	Jan-05
Lord of the Rings: The Third Age, The	8.5	Dec-04
Mario Party 6	6.25	Feb-05
Mario Power Tennis	8.5	Jan-05
Mega Man X Command Mission	6	Oct-04
Metroid Prime 2: Echoes	9.5	Jan-05
Midway Arcade Treasures 2	9	Oct-04
Mortal Kombat: Deception	8.5	Apr-05
MVP Baseball 2005	8.5	Mar-05
NBA Live 2005	8.25	Nov-04
NBA Street V3	9	Mar-05
Need for Speed: Underground 2	8	Dec-04
NFL Street 2	7.5	Feb-05
Paper Mario 2: The Thousand-Year Door	6.75	Nov-04
Power Rangers: Dino Thunder	6	Dec-04
Prince of Persia: Warrior Within	9.25	Jan-05

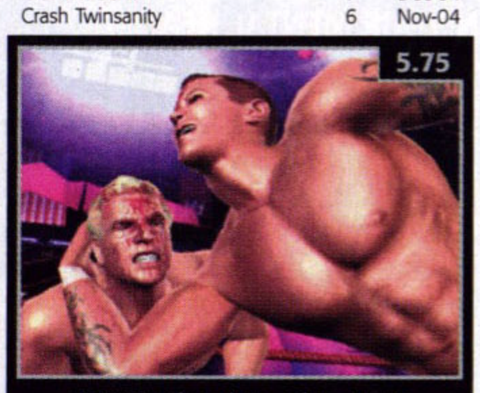


Mario Power Tennis – GC – Jan-05

Resident Evil 4	10	Mar-05
Scaler	4.5	Feb-05
Shark Tale	6.5	Dec-04
Spongebob Squarepants: The Movie	6	Dec-04
Spyro: A Hero's Tail	6.5	Nov-04
Star Fox Assault	7	Apr-05
Street Racing Syndicate	6.75	Oct-04
Tak 2: The Staff of Dreams	7.25	Nov-04
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 2: Battle Nexus	6	Nov-04
Terminator 3: Redemption	8	Oct-04
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2005	8.5	Oct-04
TimeSplitters Future Perfect	9	Apr-05
Tony Hawk's Underground 2	9.75	Nov-04
Ty the Tasmanian Tiger 2: Bush Rescue	6.75	Nov-04
Urbz: Sims in the City, The	7.75	Dec-04
Viewtiful Joe 2	9	Dec-04
Virtua Quest	5.5	Jan-05
WWE Day of Reckoning	8.25	Oct-04
X-Men Legends	9	Nov-04

XBOX

Area 51	8.5	May-05
Army Men: Sarge's War	5	Oct-04
Atari Anthology!	8.5	Jan-05
Backyard Wrestling 2: There Goes The Neighborhood	5.75	Jan-05
Bad Boys: Miami Takedown	5	Dec-04
Bard's Tale, The	8.25	Dec-04
Blinx 2: Masters of Time & Space	7	Jan-05
BloodRayne 2	8	Nov-04
Brothers in Arms: Road to Hill 30	8.5	May-05
Burnout 3: Takedown	9.25	Oct-04
Cabela's Deer Hunt 2005	4	Oct-04
Call of Duty: Finest Hour	8.5	Jan-05
Chicago Enforcer	2	Mar-05
Close Combat: First to Fight	6	May-05
Cold Fear	6.75	May-05
Colin McRae Rally 2005	8.25	Oct-04
Combat - Task Force 121	4	Jun-05
Conflict: Vietnam	7	Oct-04
Constantine	6.5	Apr-05
Crash 'n Burn	7	Dec-04
Crash Twinsanity	6	Nov-04



WWE: Wrestlemania 21 – Xbox – Jun-05

Dai Senryaku VII: Modern Military Tactics	8	Mar-05
Dance Dance Revolution Ultramix 2	7.75	Dec-04
Dead or Alive Ultimate	9	Dec-04
Dead to Rights 2: Hell to Pay	5	
Def Jam: Fight for NY	8.75	Oct-04
Doom 3	9.25	Apr-05
Dragon Ball Z: Sagas	5	Jun-05
Drive to Survive	7	May-05
Dukes of Hazzard: Return of the General Lee	6	Oct-04
ESPN College Hoops 2K5	9	Dec-04
ESPN NBA 2K5	9	Nov-04
Fable	9.5	Oct-04
Fatal Frame II: Crimson Butterfly Director's Cut	9.25	Dec-04
FIFA Soccer 2005	7.75	Nov-04
FIFA Street	6.5	Apr-05
Fight Club	5.5	Jan-05
Fight Night: Round 2	9.25	Mar-05
Forza Motorsport	8.5	Jun-05
Galleon	4.25	Oct-04
Ghost Recon 2	8	Jan-05
Godzilla: Save the Earth	6	Dec-04
GoldenEye: Rogue Agent	6.75	Jan-05
Gungriffon: Allied Strike	6	Feb-05
Guy Game, The	3	Oct-04
Halo 2	10	Dec-04
Hot Wheel Stunt Track Challenge	6.75	Feb-05
Incredibles, The	6.5	Jan-05
Iron Phoenix	4	Jun-05
Jade Empire	9.5	May-05
Karaoke Revolution	7.75	Dec-04
King Arthur	7.25	Nov-04
Kingdom Under Fire: The Crusaders	7.75	Nov-04
LEGO Star Wars	7.5	May-05
Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude	7.5	Nov-04
Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events	6.25	Jan-05
Major League Baseball 2K5	8.5	Mar-05
Mechassault 2: Lone Wolf	9.25	Feb-05
Men of Valor	7.75	Nov-04
Mercenaries	7.5	Feb-05
Metal Slug 4&5	8	Jun-05
Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition	9.5	May-05
Midway Arcade Treasures 2	9	Oct-04
Mortal Kombat: Deception	9.5	Oct-04
MX vs. ATV Unleashed	8	Apr-05
MVP Baseball 2005	8.5	Mar-05
Myst IV: Revelation	4.5	Jun-05
NARC	4.5	May-05
NBA Live 2005	8.25	Nov-04
NBA Street V3	9	Mar-05
NCAA March Madness 2005	8.25	Dec-04
Need for Speed: Underground 2	8	Dec-04
NFL Street 2	7.5	Feb-05
Obscure	6	Jun-05
Oddworld Stranger's Wrath	9	Feb-05
Otogi 2: Immortal Warriors	7	Oct-04
Outlaw Golf 2	7.5	Oct-04
OutRun 2	6.5	Dec-04
Pariah	8.5	Jun-05
Phantom Dust	7	Mar-05
Pinball Hall of Fame: The Gottlieb Collection	6.75	Feb-05
Playboy: The Mansion	6.5	Apr-05
Predator: Concrete Jungle	2.75	Jun-05
Prince of Persia: Warrior Within	9.25	Jan-05
Project Snowblind	8.25	Apr-05
Psychonauts	8.75	May-05
Punisher, The	7.5	Feb-05
Pure Pinball	5.75	Oct-04
Raze's Hell	6	Jun-05
Red Ninja: End of Honor	3.75	Apr-05
Red Star, The	7.5	Oct-04
Robotech: Invasion	6.5	Oct-04
Rocky: Legends	6.5	Dec-04
Scaler	4.5	Feb-05
Scrapland	6.5	Apr-05
Shark Tale	6.5	Dec-04
ShellShock Nam '67	6	Oct-04
Sims 2, The	8.75	Nov-04
Sonic Mega Collection Plus	7.5	Dec-04
Spikeout: Battle Street	6.25	Jun-05
Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory	9.75	Apr-05
Spongebob Squarepants: The Movie	6	Dec-04
Spyro: A Hero's Tail	6.5	Nov-04
Star Wars: Battlefront	8	Oct-04
Star Wars Knights of the Old Republic II: The Sith Lords	9.25	Feb-05
Star Wars: Republic Commando	8.25	Mar-05
Still Life	5.5	Apr-05
Stolen	6.5	Jun-05
Street Racing Syndicate	6.75	Oct-04
Super Monkey Ball Deluxe	8	Apr-05
SVC Chaos: SNK vs. Capcom	6.5	Nov-04
Syberia II	6.25	Nov-04
Tak 2: The Staff of Dreams	7.25	Nov-04
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 2: Battle Nexus	6	Nov-04
Terminator 3: Redemption	8	Oct-04
Test Drive: Eve of Destruction	7.75	Oct-04
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2005	8.5	Oct-04
TimeSplitters Future Perfect	9	Apr-05
Tony Hawk's Undeground 2	9.75	Nov-04
Top Gear RPM Tuning	5	Apr-05
Tork: Prehistoric Punk	6	Mar-05
Tron 2.0 Killer App	7	Jan-05
Ty the Tasmanian Tiger 2: Bush Rescue	6.75	Nov-04
Ultra Bust-A-Move	7	Dec-04
Unreal Championship 2: The Liandri Conflict	9.25	Apr-05
Urbz: Sims in the City, The	7.75	Dec-04
Vietcong: Purple Haze	5	Dec-04
Wings of War	6.5	Nov-04
Winning Eleven 8	8.75	Mar-05
Worms: Forts Under Siege	5.75	Apr-05
WWE: Wrestlemania 21	5.75	Jun-05
X-Men Legends	9	Nov-04
Yager	7	Oct-04

PC

Act of War - Direct Action	8.25	Apr-05
Armies of Exigo	8	Dec-04
Axis & Allies	7.75	Jan-05
Call of Duty: United Offensive	8.75	Nov-04
Chris Sawyer's Locomotion	7	Nov-04
Chronicles of Riddick: Escape From Butcher Bay Developer's Cut, The	9.25	Jan-05
Codename: Panzers	7.75	Dec-04
Combat - Task Force 121	4	Jun-05
Doom 3	9	Oct-04
Doom 3: Resurrection of Evil	9	Jun-05
Empire Earth II	7.5	May-05
EverQuest II	8.5	Feb-05
Evil Genius	8.5	Nov-04
Freedom Force vs. The Third Reich	8.25	Apr-05
Half-Life 2	9.5	Dec-04
Immortal Cities: Children of the Nile	8	Jan-05
Joint Operations: Escalation	8	Jan-05
Kohan II: Kings of War	8	Oct-04
Lord of the Rings: The Battle for Middle-Earth, The	8.5	Jan-05
Matrix Online, The	7.5	Jun-05
Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault	8.5	Jan-05
Myst IV: Revelation	8	Nov-04
Nexus: The Jupiter Incident	8.25	Mar-05
Painkiller: Battle Out of Hell	8	Jan-05
Pariah	8.5	Jun-05
Playboy: The Mansion	6.5	Apr-05
Political Machine, The	7	Nov-04

Doom 3: Resurrection of Evil – PC – Jun-05

RollerCoaster Tycoon 3	8.75	Dec-04
Rome: Total War	7.75	Nov-04
Scrapland	6	Dec-04
Sid Meier's Pirates!	8.5	Jan-05
Sims 2 University, The	9	Apr-05
Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory	9.75	Apr-05
Star Wars Galaxies: Jump to Lightspeed	8	Jan-05
Stronghold 2	6.75	Jun-05
SWAT 4	8.25	May-05
Tribes: Vengeance	8.5	Dec-04
Vampire: The Masquerade – Bloodlines	7.5	Jan-05
Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War	9.25	Nov-04
Will of Steel	2.5	Mar-05
World of Warcraft	9.5	Feb-05

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Advance Guardian Heroes	7	Dec-04
Banjo Pilot	7	Jan-05
Boktai 2: Solar Boy Django	6.25	Dec-04
Donkey Kong Country 2	8.5	Jan-05
Dragon Ball Z: Buu's Fury	4.5	Oct-04
Fear Factor: Unleashed	3	Feb-05
Final Fantasy I & II: Dawn of Souls	9	Jan-05
F-Zero: GP Legend	6.5	Nov-04
Grand Theft Auto Advance	7.5	Jan-05
It's Mr. Pants	8	Jan-05
Kingdom Hearts: Chain of Memories	7.75	Jan-05
Kirby and the Amazing Mirror	7.75	Oct-04
Klonoa 2: Dream Champ Tournament	8.25	Mar-05
Legend of Zelda: The Minish Cap, The	9.5	Feb-05
Lord of the Rings: The Third Age, The	8	Feb-05
Mario Pinball Land	7.5	Oct-04
Mega Man Zero 3	6.75	Oct-04
Metal Slug Advance	7	Dec-04
Need for Speed: Underground 2	3.5	Feb-05
Pan-Man Pinball Advance	7	May-05
Pokémon Fire Red/Leaf Green	8	Oct-04
Power Rangers: Dino Thunder	3.5	Dec-04
Racing Gears Advance	8	Mar-05
Star Wars Trilogy: Apprentice of the Force	6	Oct-04
Super Army War	6	Apr-05
Thunderbirds	5.75	Oct-04
Tron 2.0: Killer App	6.5	Nov-04
Ty the Tasmanian Tiger 2: Bush Rescue	6	Dec-04
Urbz: Sims in the City, The	7.5	Nov-04
WarioWare Twisted	7.75	May-05
WWE Survivor Series	7.5	Jan-05

NINTENDO DS

Atari Retro Classics	8	May-05
Feel the Magic XY/XX	8.5	Jan-05
Madden NFL 2005	6.5	Jan-05
Mr. Driller: Drill Spirits	7	Jan-05
Pac-Pix	7.75	Jun-05
Pokémon Dash	5.5	May-05
Polarium	8.25	Jun-05
Rayman DS	6	May-05
Ridge Racer DS	7	Jan-05
Spider-Man 2	6	Jan-05
Sprung	6	Jan-05
Super Mario 64 DS	8.5	Jan-05
Tiger Woods PGA Tour	4	Feb-05
Urbz: Sims in the City, The	8	Feb-05
WarioWare Touched!	8.25	Apr-05
Yoshi Touch & Go	7.5	May-05
Zoo Keeper	7	Apr-05

PSP

Ape Escape: On the Loose	6.5	Jun-05
Archer Maclean's Mercury	6.75	May-05
ATV Offroad Fury: Blazin' Trails	6.5	Jun-05
Darkstalkers Chronicle: The Chaos Tower	8	May-05

Archer Maclean's Mercury – PSP – May-05

Dynasty Warriors	6	May-05
FIFA Soccer	8.25	May-05
Gretzky NHL	6	May-05
Lumines	9	May-05
Metal Gear Acid	8.25	May-05
MLB	8	Jun-05
NBA	6.25	May-05
Need for Speed: Underground Rivals	8	May-05
NFL Street 2: Unleashed	7	May-05
Rengoku: The Tower of Purgatory	5	Jun-05
Ridge Racer	7.5	May-05
Smart Bomb	6	Jun-05
Spider-Man 2	7.25	May-05
Tiger Woods PGA Tour	8	May-05
Tony Hawk's Underground 2 Remix	9.25	May-05
Twisted Metal: Head-On	8.75	May-05
Untold Legends: Brotherhood of the Blade	7.75	May-05
Wipeout Pure	8.75	May-05
World Tour Soccer	6.25	May-05

Psychonauts

The Developers Clue You In On How To Navigate Their Twisted Mental Mindscape

Welcome to Whispering Rock Psychic Summer Camp, where young PSI cadets are trained to strengthen their innate psychic abilities. Players will take on the role of a 10-year old circus runaway named Razputin who is on a personal quest to master his psychic powers and ultimately become a Psychonaut. But throughout his adventures in both the mental world and the real world, he encounters many difficulties, puzzles, and enemies. Here are some hints and tips that should help a player aid our hero in achieving his goal, and somewhere along the way, saving the day.

GRAB EVERYTHING IN SIGHT

Throughout the camp and mental worlds there are items scattered that a PSI cadet must collect to advance in rank and learn new abilities. Figments, memory vaults, and cobwebs are often found in strategic places amongst the mental worlds, so check everywhere! If you find a tag for emotional baggage, look around for the bag that matches it. Sometimes you'll hear it crying but you might not see it right away. Use first-person view to get a better look at the area you are in. Around the camp are hidden PSI cards and PSI challenge markers. The loose PSI cards will need to be put back together with a PSI core that can be purchased at the camp store. Don't forget to look for scavenger hunt items. You'll need to use PSI powers in order to get some of them, so it may be best to just keep in mind where you saw the item and come back later when you earn your Merit Badge. It's also good to pick up every arrowhead that you see, because you never know when you're going to need them to pay for items at the camp store.

READ THE JOURNAL

The journal is a very useful tool in helping you keep track of your progress. If you ever get lost you can always check the map located in the back of the journal to see your current location. You'll never forget what your next objective is if you check the "to-do" list often enough. There's also a useful page of information that shows you what you've collected so far in the area you are currently in. The list of scavenger hunt items, your current rank, your total arrowheads collected, and other global stats are shown on the third page of the journal.

MAINTAIN YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

Whenever Raz encounters enemies, they often give chase once they catch sight of him. If he takes damage during the fight, it's always a good idea to use the PSI punch to break nearby objects. By doing this you can obtain positive mental health orbs to regain your health. You'll also get raw aggression orbs for PSI blasting opponents, psychic arrowheads, and in later stages, confusion grenades. Use your psychic fist everywhere.

PAY A VISIT TO THE CAMP STORE

At the camp store located in the main lodge, you can use the arrowheads you've collected to purchase important and useful items. Dream Fluffs are good for maintaining positive mental health. They activate for you if your mental health gets too low, so it's always a good idea to keep a few of these in your backpack. The dowsing rod can be used everywhere around the camp to dig up the deeper and more valuable arrowheads, which you can use to purchase the more expensive items at the store.

ASK YOUR MENTOR

If you are ever in doubt of what to do next and you find yourself confused in a situation, Raz's mentor Ford Cruller is always available to give advice. You can summon him using a piece of bacon, his favorite food, and ask him for advice on the current situation. He even gives hints on how to defeat the enemies you encounter. If you purchase the PSI colorizer at the camp store, you can ask him to change the color of your Levitation Ball too. Also, you can have him teleport you back to his sanctuary if you need to get out of a tight spot. Don't forget that in Ford's Sanctuary, you can redeem cobwebs and PSI cards for rank increases.

DON'T BE SHY

Whenever you complete a stage, you should always walk around the camp and talk to people. Show off your new powers or items you've found to your fellow campmates, who will often reveal inside humor or just a little more about themselves for your trouble. If you show them items they can give you hints to help you find your way.

USE YOUR ABILITIES

As Raz gains ranks and advances through the game, he will earn new psychic abilities. You can get through any situation by using a variety of PSI powers. Lock your mental focus on enemies and PSI blast them or tumble sideways to avoid them. Bounce on the Levitation Ball to get a higher boost and use your psychic fist to palm bomb them into the ground. Set those pesky censors on fire or just use invisibility to sneak past them. Use your clairvoyance ability to gain insight into Raz's surroundings and discover the locations of hidden items. As you rank up, you will earn powerful upgrades to your abilities, like extending your reach with telekinesis or causing a massive explosion of fire. Experiment with using your favorite powers or the ones you are most comfortable with for different effects.

IT'S OKAY TO LEAVE IT BEHIND

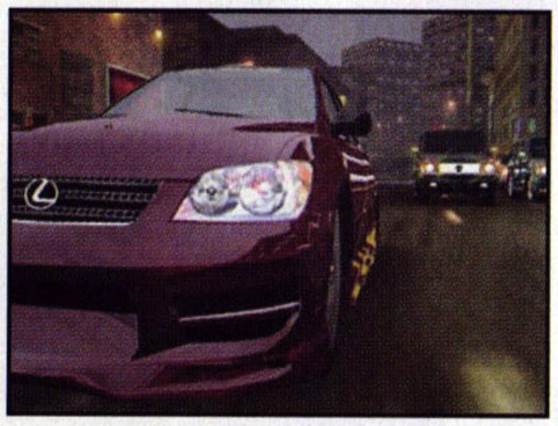
Sometimes there will be an item or a figment that may be behind something you can't move or is just beyond your reach. Don't sweat it. You'll have your chance to come back later when you rank up and have the ability to get them. Through the collective unconscious, you can re-enter any mental world you've already visited. It's faster to travel around the camp using the underground rapid transit system. Collect everything in the game and obtain rank 100 to get a secret bonus!

Attention All Cheaters!

Cheat codes, by their very nature, are in many cases buggier than Virginia in August. So, unless you don't mind re-doing those 70 hours you put into the latest game, do yourself a favor and back up your save before using any codes.

On a lighter note, you can send your codes to secretaccess@gameinformer.com for a chance to be featured here and win a very special prize!

MULTI-SYSTEM



Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition

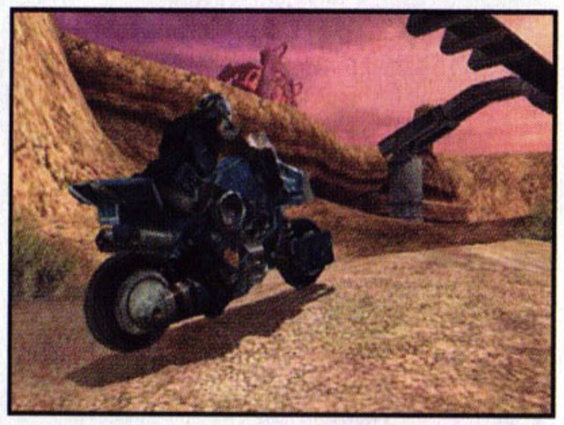
> PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX

Check out the "Options" menu and then go into "Cheat Codes" to enter your code of choice. Make sure you use lower case on most of the codes – only one starts with a capital letter.

Add $1 To Career Money	kubmir
AGRO Special Move	dfens
All Cities In Arcade Mode	roadtrip
Bunny Ears	getheadl
Chrome Head	haveyouseenthisboy
Faster Pedestrians	urbansprawl
Flaming Head	trythisathome
No Damage	ontheroad
Pumpkin Head	getheadk
Roar Special Move (note the capital R)	Rjnr
Snowman Head	getheadm
Yellow Smile Head	getheadj
Zone Special Move	allin

"GI Droid"

(location unknown – last seen practicing his light-saber skills to deal with those meddling Jedi)



Robotech Invasion

> PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX

Go into "Options", select "Extras" and type in the codes there. Make sure to use upper case letters.

Single Player All Levels Unlocked	RECLAMATION
Single Player Invincibility	SUPERCYC
Single Player One Hit Kills	DUSTYAYRES
Single Player Unlimited Ammo	TRGRHPY
Unlock Lancer's Multiplayer Skin	YLLWFLLW
Unlock Rand's Multiplayer Skin	KIDGLOVES
Unlock Rook's Multiplayer Skin	BLUEANGLS
Unlock Scott's Multiplayer Skin	LTNTCMDR

PLAYSTATION 2

GoldenEye: Rogue Agent

None of the following give any indication that they've been activated, but trust us, they work.

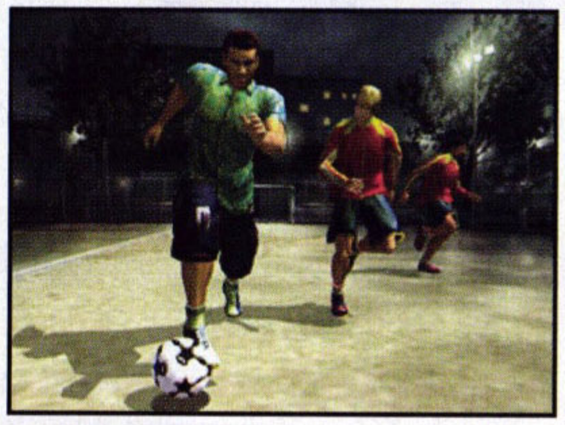
Full Eye Power – Pause the game during gameplay and enter L1, R1, L1, L2 (x2), R2, R1, L2

Full Health and Armor Restored – Pause the game during gameplay and enter R1 (x2), R2, L2, R2, R1, L1, R2

Unlock All Eye Powers – Pause the game during gameplay and enter L1 (x2), R2 (x2), R1, R2, L1, L2

Unlock All Single and Multiplayer Levels – From the main menu, go into "Extras", then enter Down, Right, Down, Right, Up, Down, Up, Left

XBOX



FIFA Street

All Clothes Kits – At the main menu, hold down L and Y, then enter Right (x2), Left, Up (x3), Down, Left. You won't hear any confirmation noise, but when you create a player you'll have the full selection of outfits.

Mini Players – Pause the action mid-game. Hold down L and Y, then enter Up, Left, Down (x2), Right, Down, Up, Left

Normal Size Players – To return players to regular size, pause the action mid-game. Hold down L and Y, then enter Right (x2), Up, Down (x2), Left, Right, Left

PSP

Twisted Metal: Head-On

Input the following codes during gameplay, without pausing.

Infinite Ammo – Enter △ (x2), Down (x2), then L and R together

Infinite Weapons – Hold L and R, then enter △ (x2), Down (x2)

Invulnerable – Enter Right, Left, Down, Up, then L and R together

Killer Weapons – Enter ✕ (x2), Up (x2), then L and R together

Mega Guns – Hold L and R, then enter ✕, △, ✕, △

Recharge Health – Hold L and R, then enter △, ✕, □, ○

Mod World

STAR WARS KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC II: THE SITH LORDS

Restoration Project

http://Magestrix.com/K2End/

Blame lofty development goals or a tight release schedule, but as any aficianado of Obsidian Entertainment's inaugural project knows, there is a fair amount of content in KOTOR II which is unfinished and inaccessible to players. In some cases, like the HK Droid Factory, it's even referenced in the script of the game, but impossible to get to. Frustrating, to say the least – especially given that the content you can get to is so darn good.

One group of dedicated gamers has committed themselves to restoring and completing this content, so that everybody can experience The Sith Lords as it was meant to be. Everybody meaning PC gamers in this case, since it's not practical to get user-created content approved for Xbox Live download from Microsoft. The mod isn't done yet, but it's exciting enough to be worth your attention. Keep an eye on the website mentioned above to track the project.

CALL OF DUTY

Revolt

http://lanclan.com/codmod/

After slogging its way through development hell more or less since Call of Duty was released, this full conversion modern warfare mod for Call of Duty is finished and ready for download. Though only four staffers are credited on the above website as having worked on Revolt, it's got quite a bit to offer for FPS fans looking for something new. It boasts three fairly standard gametypes, 12 weapons, and 17 maps (as well as supporting all of the normal CoD maps for Revolt gametypes) for your fragging pleasure. Also, besides the obvious difference of being in a modern setting, Revolt's weapons handle very differently than in most FPSs. Of course, it's free, so why not pop on over to the website and give it a shot?

Code of the Month

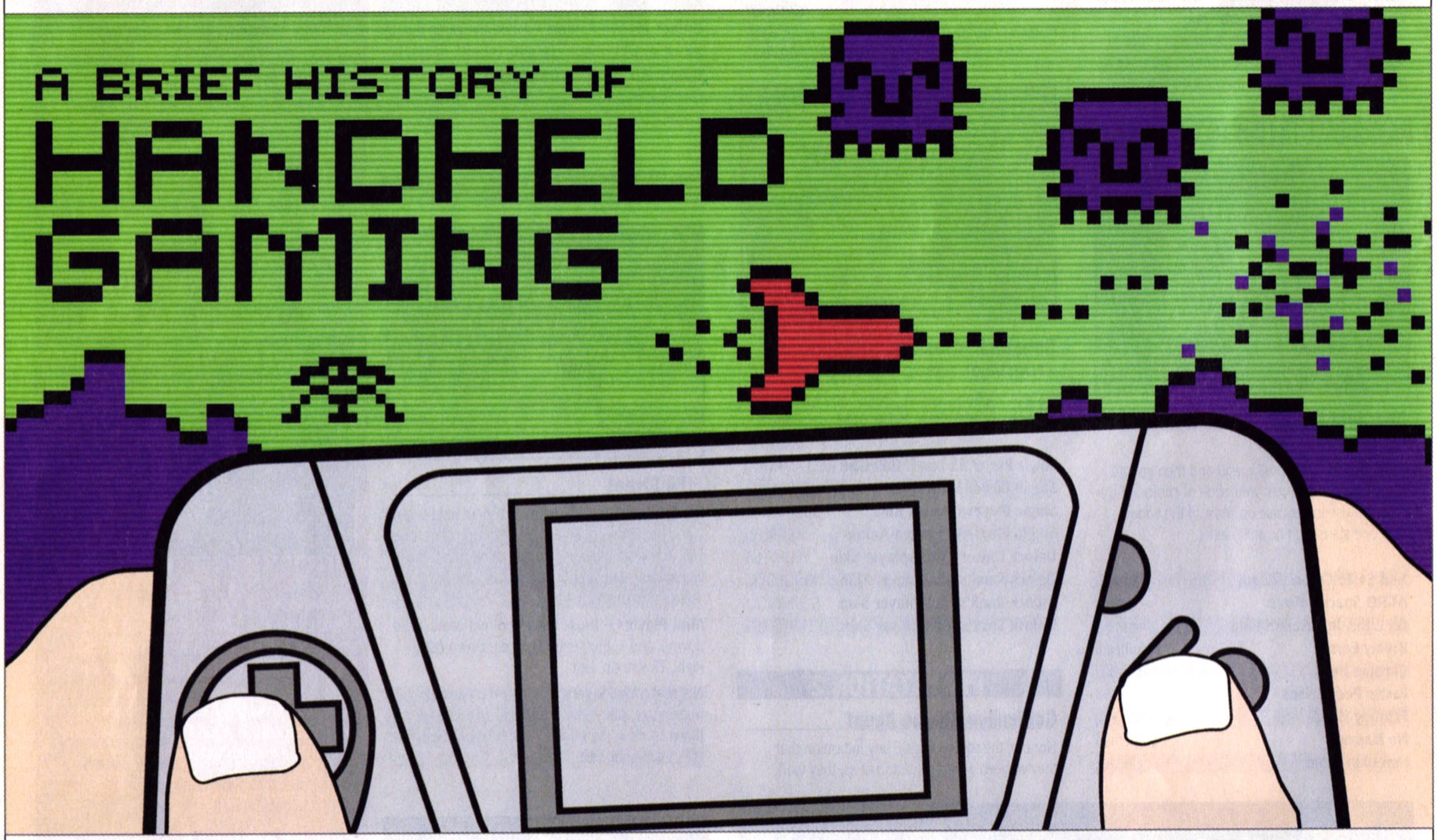
Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith

If you're having trouble feeling the Force, take the path to the dark side with these quick and easy paths to power. At the main menu, you'll want to select "Settings" and then "Codes" before entering your desired cheat code.

Unlock All Arenas – TANTIVEIV
Unlock All Bonus Stages – NARSHADDAA
Unlock All Concept Art – AAYLASECURA
Unlock All Duel Characters – ZABRAK
Unlock All Movies – COMLINK
Unlock All Powers and Moves – JAINA
Unlock All Story Levels – KORRIBAN
Unlock Fast Health and Force Regeneration – BELSAVIS
Unlock Infinite Force Energy – KAIBURR
Unlock Infinite Health – XUCPHRA
Unlock Super Saber Mode – SUPERSABERS
Unlock Tiny Droid Mode – 071779

Lee Martina
Gainesville, FL

A BRIEF HISTORY OF HANDHELD GAMING



Thanks to the excitement generated by the Nintendo DS and Sony's PSP, handheld gaming has become one of the most excitedly debated and fervently covered aspects of the video game industry. While these two systems have garnered huge amounts of media attention, portable game systems have historically been treated like an afterthought compared to their console brethren. But that doesn't mean that many companies haven't tried their hand at breaking into the world of handheld gaming. Until recently, there has been only one name in portable gaming: Game Boy. Nintendo's pocket system has dominated mobile gaming since its U.S. release in 1989, and many have tried to take its place. While several were superior to the Game Boy in many ways, none achieved the same levels of success as Nintendo's portable juggernaut.

Preceeding the Game Boy by many years, the first handheld system was Milton Bradley's Microvision, released in 1979. Featuring a small LCD screen capable of rudimentary block graphics, the system's games were cartridges that added an overlay to the screen to add context, similar to the Vectrex home system that would launch two years later (both units were designed by the same man, Jay Smith). Despite pioneering handheld gaming, the Microvision was delicate, prone to technical problems, and had only a small selection of games. The system died a quiet death by 1982.

The next evolution in handheld gaming came from the individual who would go on to create the Game Boy – Gunpei Yokoi, the man behind of some of Nintendo's earliest video games. Yokoi created the Game & Watch series, a collection of small handhelds with a LCD screen. Each

The Atari Lynx was redesigned (right) to address many of the problems of the original unit (below)

Nintendo's Game & Watch series was not only the company's first foray into handheld gaming, but also laid the groundwork for the original Nintendo Entertainment System. The four directional keys would eventually evolve into the d-pad of the NES controller

Shown here are some of the different designs released for the Neo Geo Pocket Color. The various releases are an obvious nod to the success Nintendo had with releasing the Game Boy in different colors. However, the ploy wasn't as successful for the NGPC, and the system failed to find much of a market in the U.S.

The Milton Bradley Microvision was the first-ever handheld gaming system, with plastic overlays that snapped onto the unit. Due to various technical issues with the Microvision, it failed to develop a large following and was quickly forgotten

Game & Watch played a dedicated game, such as simple titles like Parachute and Fire Attack. But as the series continued the games became more complicated, and some (such as Donkey Kong and Mario Bros.) even had two screens and a surprisingly similar design to the Nintendo DS.

The Game & Watch titles laid the groundwork for Nintendo's later handheld success, and even its console design (the directional buttons on the Game & Watch units are considered a precursor to the d-pad first seen on the Nintendo Entertainment System). The original Game Boy launched in 1989, and the evolution of the system could fill up several pages on its own. But another portable system released that same year, and had a much different fate. The Atari Lynx was the world's first color portable gaming system, and was far more advanced than the Game Boy in nearly every way, but it also featured many drawbacks.

The Lynx was developed by the small game developer Epyx and was originally referred to as the "Handy." Atari bought the Handy in 1987 from the struggling company and, for some reason, held off on releasing it until 1989. Although Atari could have beat the Game Boy to the market, it instead launched around the same time for a much higher price (nearly $200). Although the Lynx featured both a 16-bit and 8-bit processor, could be flipped to play right or left-handed, and was designed with multiplayer support in mind, technical shortcomings hurt the Lynx. As a cost-saving device, the gray unit was cast in clear plastic and painted, as it was cheaper than using gray plastic. Paint had a tendency to rub off of the expensive unit.

A new version of the Lynx was released in 1991, featuring a more compact design, sleek black look, and a lower price. However, the unit was still dogged by technical problems, such as an unimpressive speaker system and power plugs that would wiggle loose. By the time that Lynx II (the unofficial nickname for the second version) launched, the Sega Game Gear and TurboGrafx-16 TurboExpress had both launched, and the handheld wars grew fierce. Atari shifted its marketing focus to the Jaguar home console, and the Lynx was officially dead by 1995.

The Microvision unit, shown here with no game overlay attached

Sega's entry in the handheld wars fared much better than the Lynx, but was still eventually slain by Nintendo's flagship handheld. The Sega Game Gear was, until the release of the Game Boy Color, the most popular color handheld in gaming history. Featuring the same processor as the Sega Master System, the Game Gear looked much better than the Game Boy and featured a decent roster of games. Unfortunately, the unit required 6 AA batteries, which would only power the unit for roughly six hours. The Game Boy, on the other hand, could be played for 35 hours on 4 AA batteries.

Sega offered several different chargers to keep the unit from eating through batteries so quickly, but these all added to the unit's already-impressive size or tethered the player to a power outlet. While the Game Gear sold well initially, the unit's shortcomings kept it from becoming a phenomenon like the Game Boy. By the mid-'90s, Sega had also released the Sega 32X, Sega CD, and the Sega Saturn, and the Game Gear got somewhat lost in the shuffle. The company had several products to spend advertising money on, and the consumer had several Sega products to choose from, which didn't help the Game Gear stand out in an increasingly crowded market.

The final color handheld released in the early 1990s was the TurboGrafx-16 TurboExpress. The TurboExpress was far and away the most powerful handheld on the market, and had a feature that none of its competitors could boast. It played the same games as the TurboGrafx-16 home console. However, it had several strikes against it right off the bat. At $300 dollars, it was easily the most expensive handheld, and it didn't include a game like all the others. Third-party support was incredibly weak, and although it could play TurboGrafx-16 games, the console was a distant third behind Nintendo and Sega. Finally, the TurboExpress was available in far fewer stores than its competitors, and as a result, the TurboExpress amounted to little more than a footnote in video game history.

The TurboExpress was the first portable to play the same games as a console, but it was not the last. In 1995, Sega again tried to make inroads into the portable gaming market with the Sega Nomad, which was essentially a handheld version of the Sega Genesis. It played all the same games, and could even be hooked up to a television so that one player could play on the unit and another on the TV (a Genesis controller could be plugged into the Nomad for two-player games). But by the time the Nomad was introduced, the Genesis (and thus its library of games) was on the way out. The Nomad was incompatible with the Sega CD and the Sega 32X, and ate through batteries even faster than the Game Gear. Again, power plugs were available, but those from previous Sega consoles wouldn't work with the unit,

"Without guys like me, you'd still be playing Pong."

—Mark Hartlieb
B.A. in Game Design
Class of 2004

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MULTIMEDIA	TECHNOLOGY MANAGEMENT
WEB DESIGN	GAME PROGRAMMING

Despite its low price and ability to connect to the internet, the Game.com could not break the Game Boy's vice grip on the handheld market. The unit was redesigned to make it sleeker and smaller (above left), but the changes did little to improve the Tiger Electronics portable's market share

Sega's Game Gear gave the Game Boy its toughest competiton, but ultimately was done in by its higher price and short battery life

meaning Nomad owners would have to buy separate chargers. Considering that the unit originally retailed for $180, consumers were not in a hurry to go out and spend more money on the Nomad.

The Nomad ultimately failed to find an audience, and like all of the Game Boy's other challengers, it died a quick and quiet death. But that didn't stop the other companies from trying to break Nintendo's stranglehold on the portable gaming market. In 1997, Tiger Electronics (makers of the popular Furby toy) released the Game.com, a black and white portable with a touch screen. The Game.com had some interesting features, such as two game slots, synthesized speech, and the ability to access text-only webpages via the Internet Cartridge peripheral. Tiger originally released the Game.com for $70, and unveiled a smaller version of the unit (with only one game slot) in 1998 for only $50. Despite ports of hit games like Resident Evil 2 and Sonic the Hedgehog, the Game.com faced stiff competition when Nintendo finally released a color version of the Game Boy in 1998. The Game.com's online abilities were simply no match for newly colorized Game Boy and its huge library of games.

The obscure Gamepark GP32 handheld never even saw release in the U.S.

The Sega Nomad was Sega's final attempt to compete in the handheld wars. Although it played standard Genesis titles, Nintendo's domination of the handheld market doomed the Nomad from the start

The Game Boy saw its last serious challenger in 1999 when the Neo Geo Pocket Color released stateside. A black and white version of the unit was available in Japan the year before, but did not make it to the U.S. The Neo Geo Pocket Color featured a great thumbstick and a nice screen, but the system's library of 32 games was no match for the Game Boy Color and its ultra-popular Pokémon titles. Today the system is a sought-after collectable, with boxed copies of many games selling for over $100 online.

Over the years since the Game Boy was launched, several portable gaming systems have tried and failed to usurp its position. Some of them were so unsuccessful that few gamers have even heard of them, such as the Supervision from Watara Industries. Designed as a low-cost alternative to the Game Boy, the Supervision cost only $50 and came bundled with a game called Crystball. While over 60 games were eventually released (and priced between $8.95 and $14.95), the system never gained much notice in the United States.

Other handhelds never even managed to get a U.S. release, such as the Wonderswan from Bandai and the obscure GamePark GP32, which is testament to the power of the Game Boy line. In some form, the Game Boy has dominated the handheld gaming market since its launch. The recent launches of the Nintendo DS and Sony PSP will certainly have a huge affect on its position, but the Game Boy will likely still hold strong. But now that handheld gaming is coming to the forefront, it is unlikely that other companies will refrain from attempting to unleash their own portables. Already lower-profile next-gen handhelds like the Gizmondo are priming to launch. Based on the history of handheld gaming systems, another round of brutal competition could be quite dramatic and interesting indeed.

Name	Company	Release (US)	Original Cost (US)
Microvision	Milton Bradley	1979	100
Game Boy	Nintendo	1989	109
Lynx	Atari	1989	199
TurboGrafx TurboExpress	NEC	1990	300
Lynx II	Atari	1991	99
Game Gear	Sega	1991	150
Nomad	Sega	1995	180
Game Boy Pocket	Nintendo	1996	60
Game.com	Tiger Electronics	1997	70
Neo Geo Pocket	SNK	1998	(Japan Only) 68
Game Boy Color	Nintendo	1998	80
Neo Geo Pocket Color	SNK	1999	90
Game Boy Advance	Nintendo	2001	90
Game Boy Advance SP	Nintendo	2003	100

GREATEST GAME OF ALL TIME

By Jay "Gonzo" Fitzloff

RISING ZAN: THE SAMURAI GUNMAN

> **FORMAT** PSONE
> **PUBLISHER** AGETEC

"Once upon a time, a blue eyed boy from the old west learned one of life's cruelest lessons – that evil was bigger than his gun." So opens Rising Zan: The Samurai Gunman, the greatest game of all time.

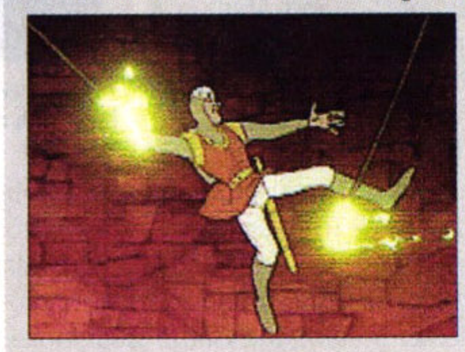
What? You don't remember this game? You don't recall its amazing graphics, unbelievable sound effects, insanely deep story, revolutionary controls, or tight gameplay? Good, then your memory is functioning correctly because Rising Zan had none of this. It looked sub-par at best, had repetitive audio, made no sense whatsoever, and could probably be beaten by a suckling pig in a few hours. Yet, what it lacked in all those areas it more than made up for in personality.

The best of the East and West, Zan is a gunman trained in the samurai arts who totes a katana in one hand and a six shooter in the other. His hobbies include killing straw monsters and gibberish-speaking ninjas while rescuing kidnapped cowboys in their underwear – and looking sexy when he does it! You see, just killing things won't earn you the top rating of Super Ultra Sexy Hero. Oh no. You have to use special moves to keep Zan's sword growing or else you won't be able to make the entire game move in fast motion. If you can't do that, then there's no way you'll get to play sword baseball or get to jam out on the controller after a boss battle simply for the joy of slaying them in an extra fancy fashion. All you'll ever get to do is see the greatest video game opening movie of all time set to the greatest video game theme song of all time. I'm of course talking about that guaranteed to get stuck in your head tune, "Johnny No More," sung in an eerie Bon Jovi gone solo style.

Confused, but smiling? Then you're starting to feel the vibe of Rising Zan. Just for the sheer joy of seeing what the hell could possibly happen next, you will keep playing it through to the end – and then you'll play it again with the hidden characters. It is pure stupid fun the entire way through. It is the kind of title that video game snobs roll their eyes at, but those of us with a sense of humor adore. It is the greatest game that ever was.

THIS MONTH IN GAMING HISTORY

On July 1st, 1983, video games made their first foray into the optical media era. Dragon's Lair was launched in arcades, and was the first commercial game to feature laser-disc technology. Though the gameplay itself was limited and sub-par, the fidelity with which Dragon's Lair's hand-drawn images were displayed was unprecedented at the time – leading to more than 32 million dollars in revenues in its first eight months. It also paved the way for years of pundits saying that better graphics don't make a game great, while consumers happily pour their money into the hottest-looking title around.



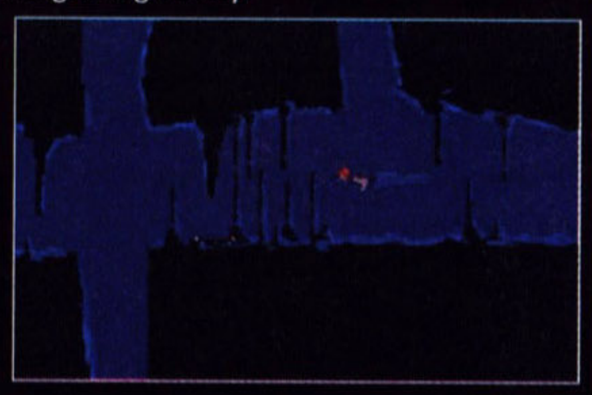
SNES

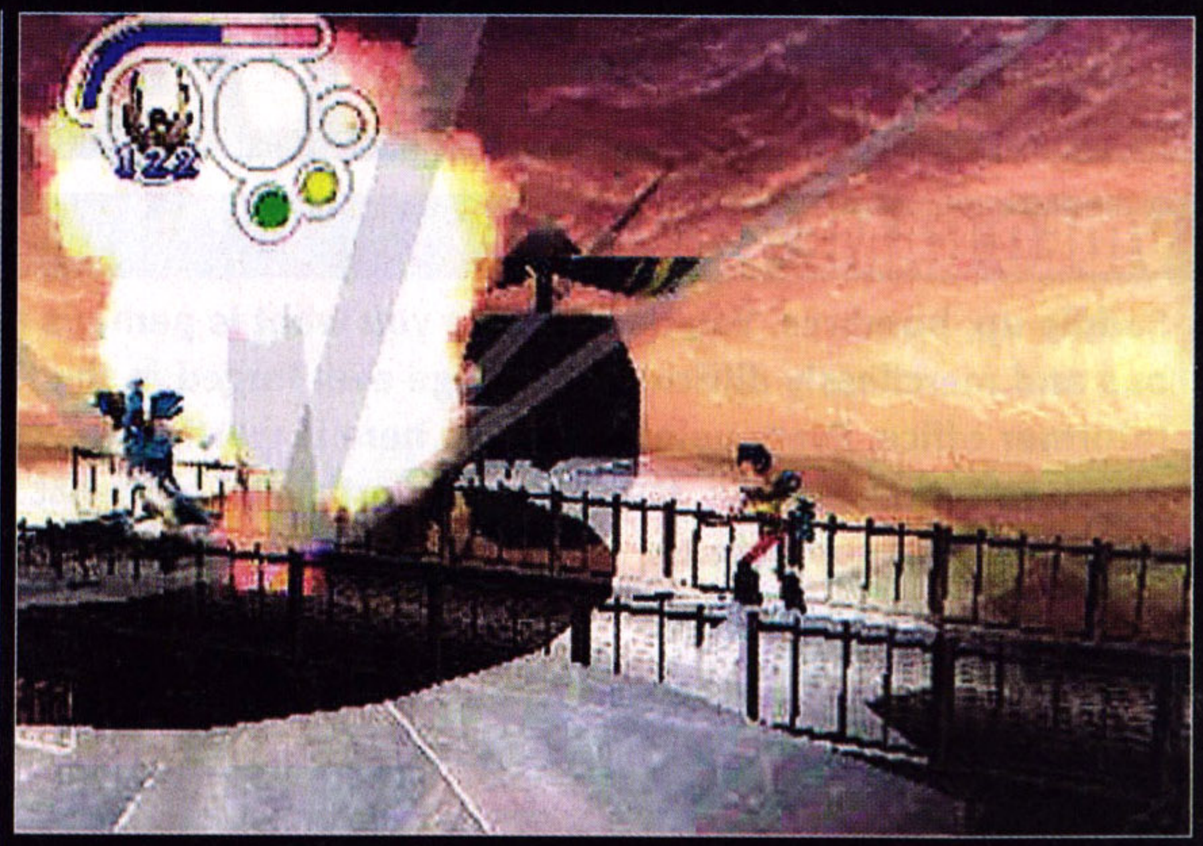
OUT OF THIS WORLD

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** INTERPLAY **> DEVELOPER** DELPHINE SOFTWARE INTERNATIONAL **> RELEASE** 1993

RETRO RATING
NOW 8
THEN N/A

Although it looks incredibly primitive these days, many gamers have fond memories of Out of This World, a cinematic adventure that puts players in the role of Lester, a scientist transported to a strange alien world. In this side-scrolling adventure, Lester will kick, jump, climb, swim, and shoot his way through a puzzle-filled world as he attempts to escape his alien captors. Through solid action, stirring animation, and rudimentary cutscenes, Out of This World manages to be surprisingly involving despite its lack of voice acting or even decent graphics. The player really cares about the plight of Lester and his only friend, an alien enslaved by his own race. Sadly, the gameplay hasn't aged as well as the story. Trial and error is the key to advancement, and checkpoints are scarce. Those working their way through Out of This World should be prepared to repeat sections of the game dozens of times. The loose controls are no help in action scenes, and can also make platforming sections difficult. Still, Out of This World remains one of the most emotionally charged games of the 16-bit era and an important part of gaming history.





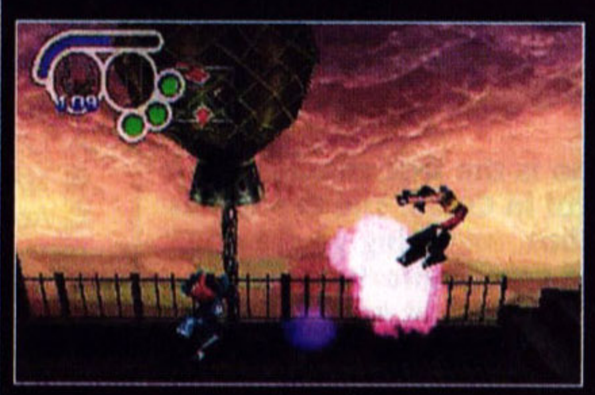
PSONE

WILD 9

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION **> PUBLISHER** INTERPLAY **> DEVELOPER** SHINY ENTERTAINMENT **> RELEASE** 1998

RETRO RATING
NOW 7.5
THEN* 6.25

It's amazing how a game that totally amazed you back in the day can look so awful in the light of modern tech. It wasn't so many years ago that Wild 9's side-scrolling stages were the height of gameplay innovation and graphics. Numerous elements haven't weathered well the storm of time, as frustrating platforming and blurry visuals attest to. However, underneath the dirt of its age, there remains a starkly original title injected with the same grotesque humor and violence as the classic Earthworm Jim games. Your stalwart hero hauls around a "rig," which fires a beam that will grapple objects or enemies at will, letting you inflict all sorts of devious torture on your monster foes. Several levels feature some extremely clever gameplay devices, like the memorable free fall section or an occasional space combat level. The game itself may not have held up as well as it could have, but there are a lot of ideas here that other developers have since co-opted into even their most recent titles.



NES

STARTROPICS

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG **> PUBLISHER** NINTENDO
> DEVELOPER NINTENDO **> RELEASE** 1990

RETRO RATING
NOW 7.75
THEN N/A

No island vacation is complete without robot-driven submarines, walking skull-ostriches, and alien abductions. Startropics features all these things and more in an adventure that mixes the exploration of an RPG with overhead action similar to the Zelda games. While there is a definite nostalgic charm about the whole affair, it is tempered by some unfortunate flaws in the gameplay. The dungeons typically involve a level of dexterity and precognition no mortal can attain, and the player's slow, stilted movements are no match for the frenzied pursuit of most foes. Startropics is also infamous for a puzzle that required input of a code from the manual, confounding many gamers who had the cartridge but no instruction book (the answer is 747MHz, for those still stumped). Thankfully, none of these problems totally cripple the game, and it remains the most inventive and enjoyable experience out there featuring a boy with a yo-yo dangling from his britches, though it may have one too many shirtless island chiefs.

*Score given to the game when it first appeared in Game Informer. Wild 9 (GI #68 12/98)

GAMEOVER

Your Password Is: KRT18E

VIDEO GAME TRIVIA

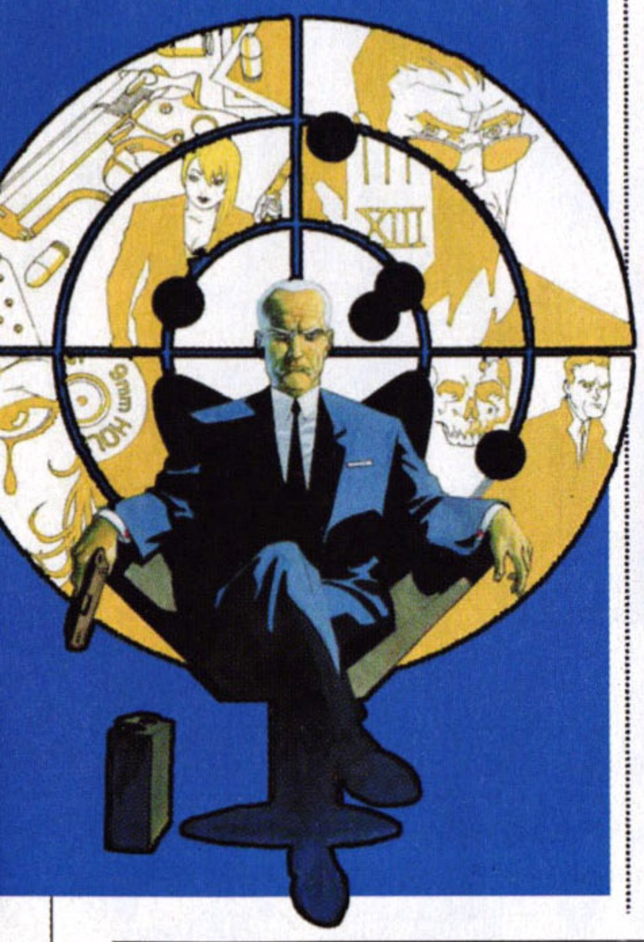
Saddle up, hombres. You have before you what is perhaps the most devious and mercilessly difficult trivia page ever forged in the fires of the Game Informer office. Every point you score here is worth, like, 20 normal points. So wrack your feeble brain, tally up your worth, and see what totally awesome thing you best compare to.

1 Life Force (also known as Salamander) is a spin-off of what popular 2D shooter?

- **A.** Gradius
- **B.** R-Type
- **C.** Xevious
- **D.** Darius

2 Which of these unreleased Acclaim titles was reviewed by Game Informer before the company went out of business?

- **A.** Emergency Mayhem
- **B.** Interview With A Made Man
- **C.** Combat Elite: WWII Paratroopers
- **D.** 100 Bullets



3 Which two Dreamcast titles were released as limited editions?

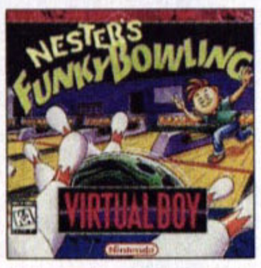
- **A.** Skies of Arcadia and Space Channel 5
- **B.** Seaman and Shenmue
- **C.** Shenmue and Sonic Adventure
- **D.** Power Stone and Dynamite Cop

4 What was the codename for the Atari 2600?

- **A.** Dolphin
- **B.** Tom and Jerry
- **C.** Pam
- **D.** Stella

5 The Virtual Boy's library wasn't exactly expansive or impressive – the system saw its last new game in March 1996, after only seven months on the market. What was that game?

- **A.** 3D Tetris
- **B.** Nester's Funky Bowling
- **C.** Teleroboxer
- **D.** Waterworld



6 Who is the first character you control in Curse: The Eye of Isis for Xbox, assuming you're one of the seven unfortunate people who played that game?

- **A.** Victoria
- **B.** Darien
- **C.** Darren
- **D.** Dokken

7 What was the title for Out of this World's similarly-rotoscoped sequel?

- A. Another World
- B. Flashback
- C. Heart of the Alien
- D. Flashdance

8 This screenshot is taken from which anime-inspired RPG?

- **A.** Lunar: The Silver Star
- **B.** Magic Knight Rayearth
- **C.** Arc the Lad
- **D.** Ranma 1/2

9 In 1981, a man died while playing Berzerk, logging the first ever video game-related death. What was the cause?

- **A.** Heart attack
- **B.** Epileptic seizure
- **C.** Acute Dorkitis
- **D.** Dehydration

10 Which of the following games was not released for the Texas Instruments TI-99 console?

- **A.** Hunt the Wumpus
- **B.** Joust
- **C.** Parsec
- **D.** Miner 2049er

BREAKDOWN

90% of the sentences that come out of Billy's mouth contain the word "Nintendogs"

10% of Nintendo stock will still be owned by Hiroshi Yamauchi after his retirement

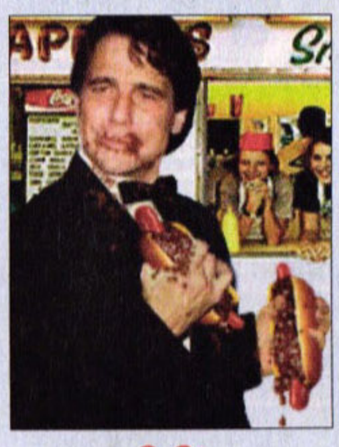
.01% of MMO players do not constantly whine about their classes being "nerfed"

5 The number of consecutive months that Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas was among the top five best-selling games in the nation

100% of Hideo Kojimas do not return our calls. C'mon, man! We'll hang out!

★ Trivia Score & Rank ★

0-1:
Tidus' Pants



2-3:
Tony Danza Dual-Wielding Chilidogs

4-5:
Throwing Fireballs

6-7:
Airwolf

8-9:
The Cookie Mines of Kuala Lumpur

10:
Darth Vader is your father

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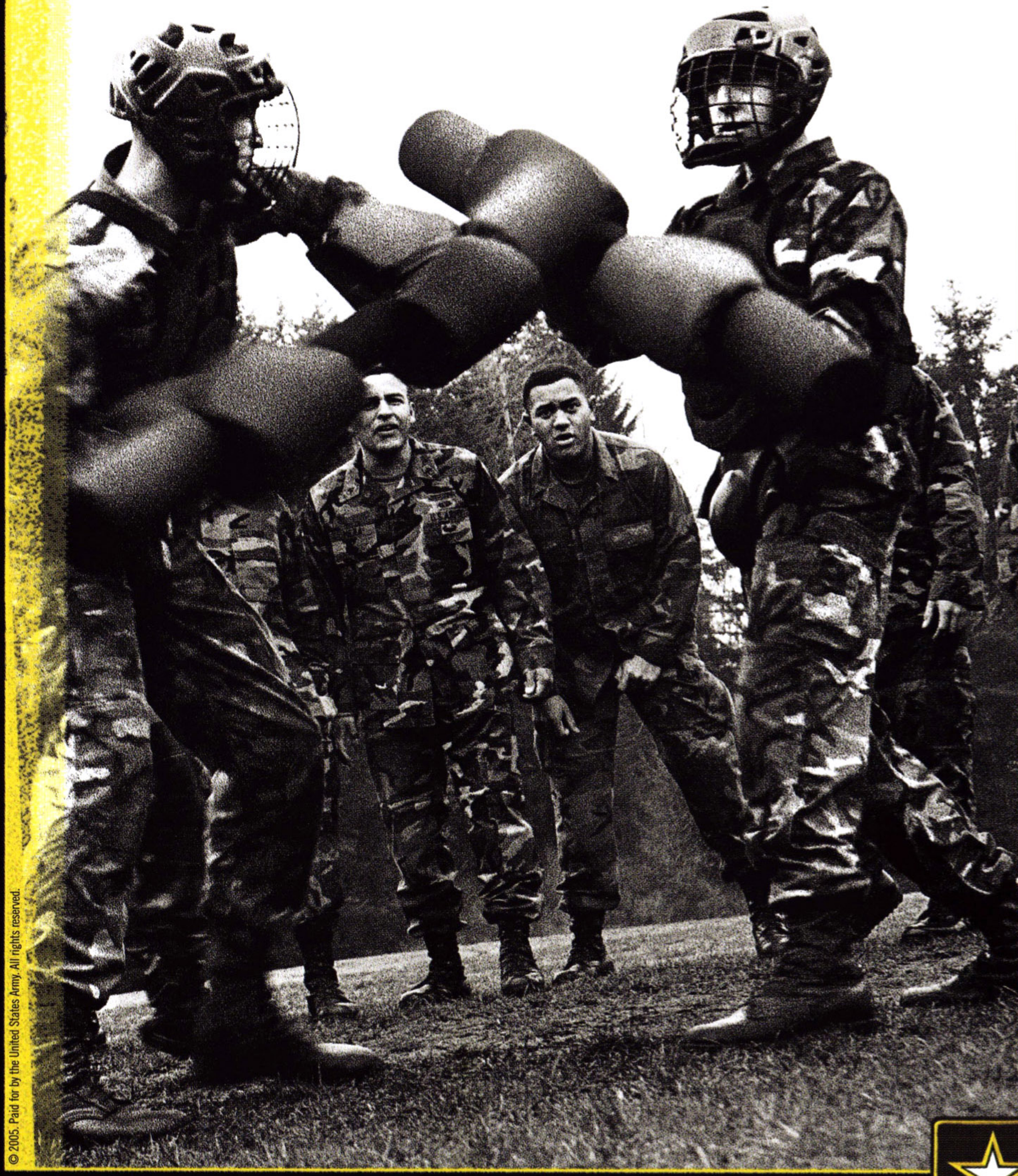
Video Game Trivia Answers: 1. A 2. C 3. C 4. D 5. A 6. B 7. C 8. B 9. A 10. B

Sergeant **Derek Brame.** 11B Infantry.

IT'S NOT ABOUT MAKING THE TEAM. IT'S ABOUT MAKING THE TEAM STRONGER.



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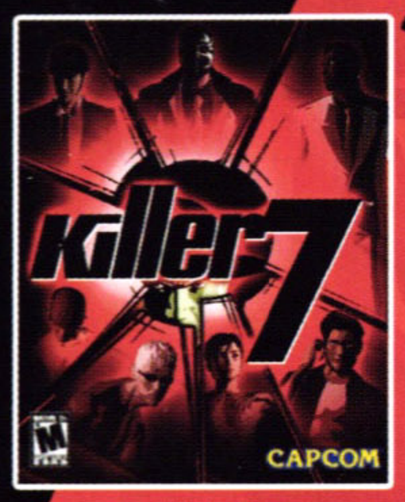

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Sexual Themes
Strong Language

7 PERSONAS
1 DEADLY CRIME SYNDICATE

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NINTENDO GAMECUBE

PlayStation.2

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