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TO GAME MAGAZINE



ISSUE 186

OCTOBER 2008

WORLD EXCLUSIVE

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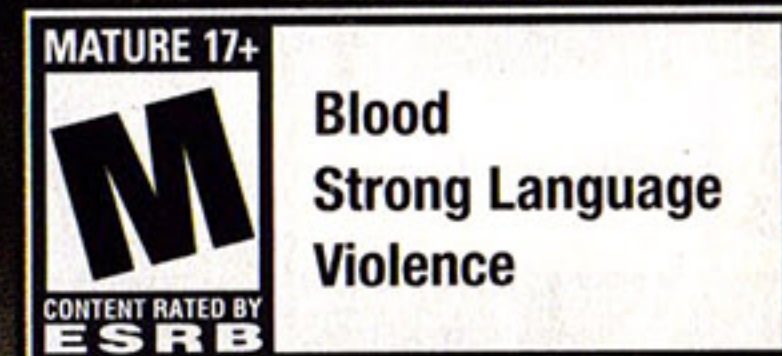
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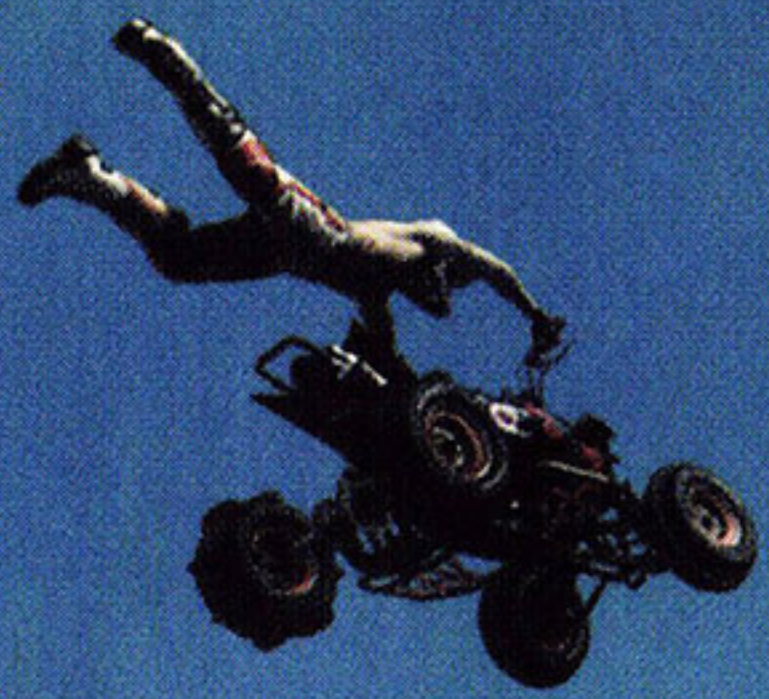
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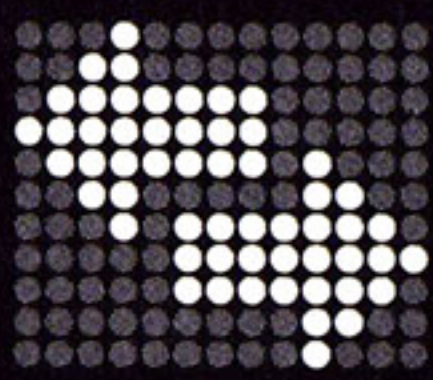


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STAR TREK ONLINE

Taking the Star Trek mythos where no movie or show has ever gone before, Star Trek Online's new incarnation (courtesy of Champions Online developer Cryptic Studios) is beyond ambitious. Players can customize their own ships, of course – but also the very beings that pilot them. We go in-depth on how this massively multiplayer online game puts players in the middle of massive space battles between the Federation and the Klingon Empire in this exclusive story.

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Patrice Desilets, maker of Prince of Persia: Sands of Time and Assassins' Creed, applies his vision to the tactical espionage world of Metal Gear Solid. Hilarity ensues.



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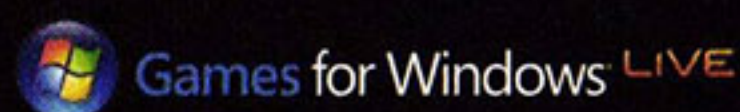
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STAFF

People Who Actually Get Paid To Play Video Games



NOBODY'S PERFECT

ANDY McNAMARA
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

A day doesn't go by that my inbox isn't greeted by an email from a faithful Game Informer reader who feels that Game Informer either a.) hates Nintendo or b.) really hates Nintendo.

My admiration for Nintendo and its rabid fanbase runs deep. In fact, for a big part of my life, I found it very hard to find any fault in anything Nintendo did. Nintendo brought the world groundbreaking software like Mario, Metroid, Smash Bros., and Zelda. What is there not to love about a company that delivers such amazing games?

To this day, Nintendo is still one of the best developers in the world. I don't think anyone can deny that its ability to be successful and innovative (for as long as it has) is something that no other company may ever match.

That said, I am perplexed by how many people are willing to simply ignore some of Nintendo's faults – much like I did for all those years. No video game company is beyond reproach. They are all going to make mistakes. Some bigger than others, but at some point Nintendo's faithful need to realize that we don't point out Nintendo's mistakes out of hate. We do it because that's our job. We love the company just as much as the rabid fans out there; everyone who has ever picked up a controller needs to play Nintendo's long list of greats. Those classics made the video game industry what it is today.

But there is no sin or foul or underhanded dealings going on when it comes to our coverage of Nintendo. You could perhaps argue that we expect more from a company with Nintendo's pedigree. But these aren't expectations we wouldn't put on any other company.

So please, try to remember that we don't hate Nintendo or the Wii. Great games are great regardless of what system we play them on. But Nintendo is going to get called out just like everyone else, so let's stop believing in ghosts that simply don't exist. Just because you look at them doesn't mean they stop in their tracks, and when you look away, they won't creep up behind you. Umm, ok...maybe they do in Super Mario, but this is the real world: nobody's perfect and when we call out Nintendo for its mistakes, it's not out of hate. It's out of respect.

Andy >> andy@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Game Hombre **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Platform, Driving, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** Dexter, USA, Football, Roast Beef **Dislikes:** The Redeem Team (Please Shoot Whoever Came Up With This One), The Industry Not Showing Tim Schafer The Respect He Deserves, The Death Of Flagship Studios **Current Favorite Games:** Mario & Luigi: Partners In Time, World Of Warcraft, Braid, Dead Space, Rock Band 2



Reiner >> reiner@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Raging Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Action, First-Person Shooters, Strategy, Sports, Fighting **Interests:** Beginning The Hunt For 100,000 Gamerscore, Telling Interior Designers To Make My House Look More "Death Star" And Less "Livable," Anything Muse **Dislikes:** The Increasing Price Of Downloadable Games, Screaming At The Top Of My Lungs While Playing Dead Space In Front Of NFL Players (Any Of You Guys Have A Tissue?), Webisodes (I Really Have To Watch A Crappy Feed To Get The Entire Lost/Battlestar Experience?) **Current Favorite Games:** Dead Space, Star Wars: The Force Unleashed, Geometry Wars: Retro Evolved 2, Braid, NHL 09, Rock Band 2



Matt >> matt@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Original Gamer **Expertise:** First-Person Shooters, Action/Platform, Action/Adventure, Action/Sports **Interests:** Nomo – Ghost Rock (Best Live Band I've Seen In Ages), I'm Not There, Infidel By Ayaan Hirsi Ali, My Wife Completing Her First Triathlon (Good Job!) **Dislikes:** Paramore (Kelly Clarkson For People Too Cool To Like Kelly Clarkson, With Worse Songs Than Kelly Clarkson), Forest Fires, Disease, Third World Dictators, Spam (Both Kinds) **Current Favorite Games:** Rock Band 2, De Blob, N+, Tiger Woods PGA Tour 09



Kato >> kato@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Game Katana **Expertise:** Sports, Racing, Action/Adventure, Action/RPG **Interests:** Good Foley Work In Movies, Perth's Tame Impala (Cream, Stoner Rock), The Crown Burger – Grilled Beef Patty Topped With Pastrami W/ Cheddar In The Middle **Dislikes:** ESPN (Irrelevant, Uninformed, And Too Self-Involved), Game Freezes & Bugs That Pop Up In Retail That Aren't In The Review Copy (See Madden) **Current Favorite Games:** NHL 09, Pure, Rock Band 2, Skate 2



Adam >> adam@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Alpha Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Strategy, First-Person Shooters, Fighting **Interests:** The Fact That Blizzard Seems To Finally Understand What To Do With The Mage Class In Lich King (Hint: Make Us Better Than Warlocks At Something), Scrubs, Neal Stephenson's Baroque Cycle **Dislikes:** Making A Decision Between Three Awesome MMOs To Play This Winter, AT&T's Unwillingness To Make More Money Off Of Me Via iPhone (Bite Me, I Won't Be Soaked For Yet Another \$200), Comcast Failing At Cable **Current Favorite Games:** Diablo II, Heroes Of Might & Magic III, Fantastic Contraption, Civilization IV: Colonization



Joe >> joe@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Real American Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Adventure, Action, Strategy, Puzzle **Interests:** Wonderfalls (I Blame Reiner For Not Recommending This Sooner), Dead And Breakfast (David Carradine? Zombies? Sold), Innovating In The Field Of SimHarassment **Dislikes:** The Atomic Bomb Interpretation Of Braid, Surprise Princesses In RPGs (You're Not Fooling Anyone), Tropic Thunder (Probably, I Haven't Seen It, But Ben Stiller Sucks) **Current Favorite Games:** Braid, Star Wars: The Force Unleashed, LittleBigPlanet, Infinite Undiscovery, Castle Crashers, Overlord II



Miller >> miller@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Once And Future Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Adventure, Platform, First-Person Shooters, Music, Puzzle **Interests:** New Nieces (Hi Stella!), Getting Back Into Six Feet Under, Minipop's A New Hope **Dislikes:** An Overabundance Of Camping Trips, Commercialization Of The Olympics (Are Olympians Really Eating McDonald's French Fries?) **Current Favorite Games:** Star Trek Online, Braid, Geometry Wars Retro Evolved 2, Rock Band 2, Galaga Legions



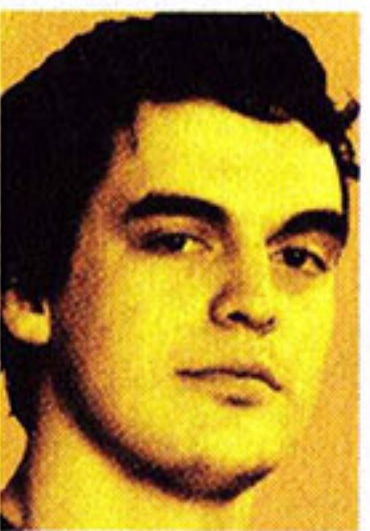
Bertz >> mattbertz@gameinformer.com

Handle: Lord Gamington III **Expertise:** First-Person Shooters, Sports, Action, RPGs, Strategy **Interests:** The Return Of Dexter, Fantasy Football Draft Day, Firewater – The Golden Hour, NFL Opening Kickoff (About Time), The XBLA Content Surge (It's Working!) **Dislikes:** Tarvaris Jackson's China Doll Syndrome, People Who DVR The Olympics Opening Ceremony, Tony Kornheiser's Laughable Comb-Over (Get It Cut Dude!), Shady Auto Dealers Selling Cars They Promised To You (Looking At You, Walser Toyota) **Current Favorite Games:** Rock Band 2, NHL 09, Civilization IV: Colonization, Dead Space, Braid, Bionic Commando Rearmed



Ben >> ben@gameinformer.com

Handle: Your Friendly Neighborhood Gamer **Expertise:** Action/Adventure, Action/RPGs, Platform, Survival Horror, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** Star Trek TNG (Rewatching The Classics), Homemade Beer Party '08 Featuring The Best Tapioca Pretzels Ever Consumed **Dislikes:** How Long It Takes To Write Your Own Comic Book, The Mass Prune Juice Consumption Experiment (It Was A Disaster) **Current Favorite Games:** Braid, N+, Schizoid, Geometry Wars: Retro Evolved 2, Dead Space, Civilization Revolution, Soulcalibur IV



Bryan >> bryan@gameinformer.com

Handle: The Gamer's Advocate **Expertise:** Action/Adventure, RPGs, Survival Horror, First-Person Shooters, Music **Interests:** The Rock Band Super Kit (Some Call It Ion), The Great Game Informer Tour Of Europe, First Time Home Buying **Dislikes:** Schizoid's Second Player AI In The Single Player Campaign (It's Like Teaming Up With Leeroy Jenkins) **Current Favorite Games:** Guitar Hero World Tour, Rock Band 2, N+, Pure, Schizoid

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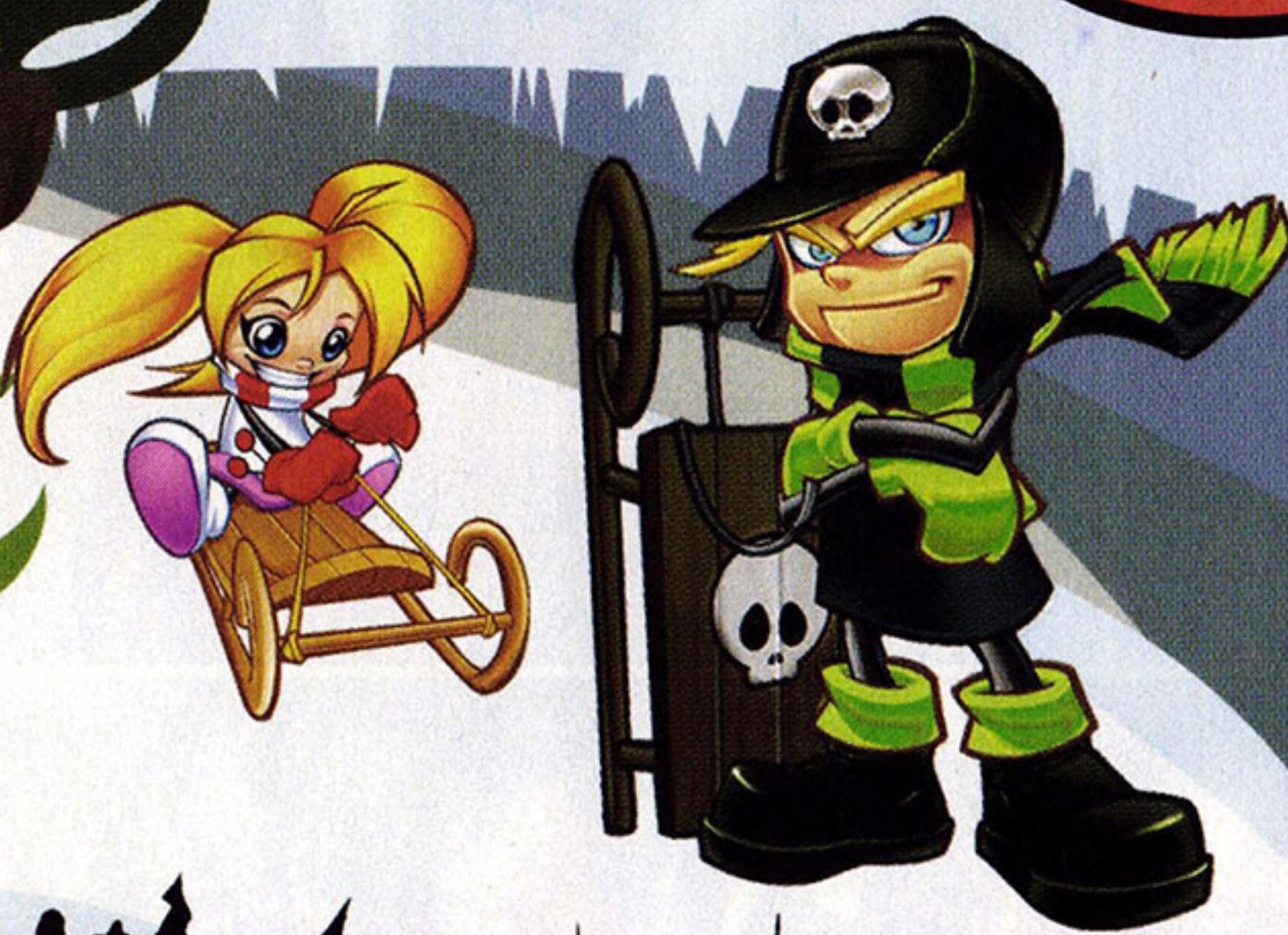
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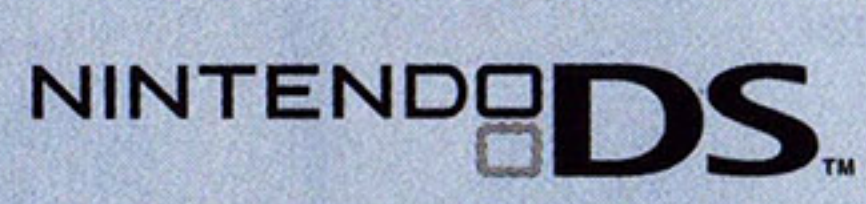
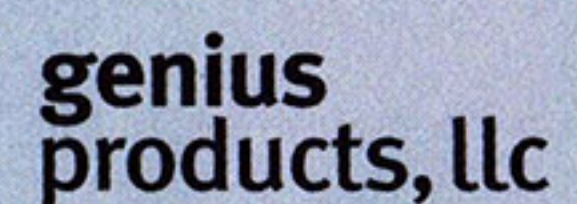
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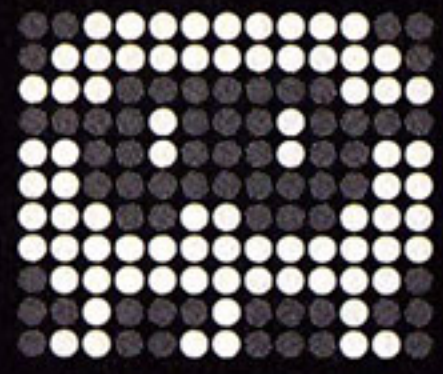
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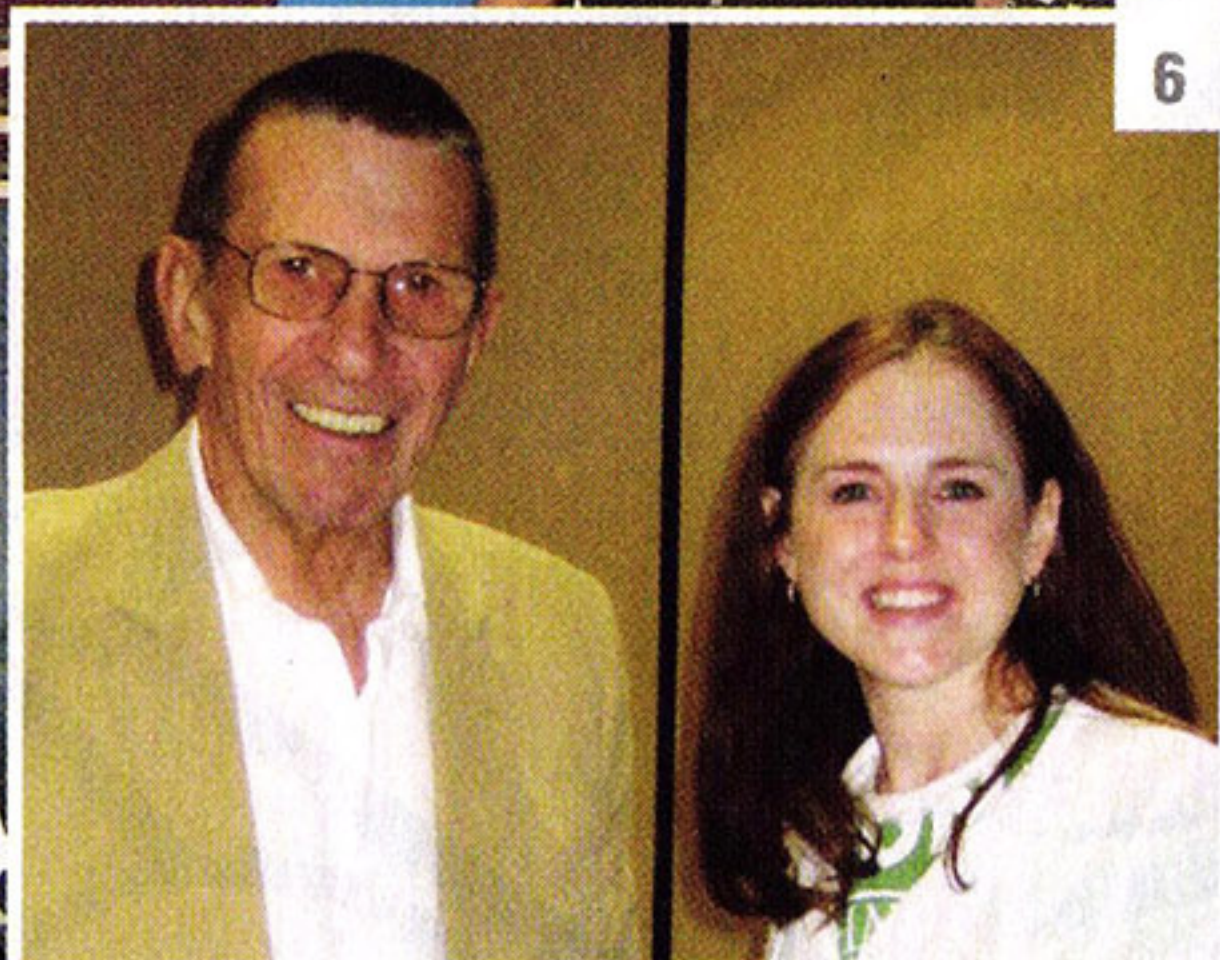
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GISPY

Candid Photos From The Seedy Underbelly Of The Video Game Industry



1 Nick and Joe infiltrated the offices of Sly Cooper and Infamous developer Sucker Punch, until they were apprehended by Brian Fleming and Sony's Jennifer Clark. Guess they weren't so SLY after all! Get it? Sly?? Oh sweet Lord, that is a hoot! 2 2K Games' Anthony DeLuca, Walt Williams, and Charlie Sinhaseni plot with Reiner to steal Miller's enormous Millennium Falcon toy...er...scale model replica 3 Former GI Online editor Chris Cook (now of LucasArts) shows Reiner and Nick the... um...charm...that was his trademark when he was here! 4 Ever wonder who "Arthur" the GI Mascot listed in our masthead is? Well, here he is, posing with his smaller, fuzzier partner, Dutch! Arthur is a true renaissance dog; in addition to being the GI Mascot he serves on the board of directors of several Fortune 500 companies and recently won a Grammy award for his engineering work on the last Foo Fighters album 5 Jawohl! Some German basketball players stopped by the GI offices for an afternoon tour and proved once again that Rock Band and pizza is the universal language of gamers 6 Logically, Reverb Inc.'s Tracie Snitker meets science fiction legend Leonard Nimoy 7 Bryan hangs with the Rocksteady crew, hard at work on last month's cover game, Batman: Arkham Asylum 8 Red Fly Studios' Chad Barron, producer for Gamecock's upcoming Mushroom Men, enjoys Minneapolis' most legendary burger: the Jucy Lucy from Matt's Bar. It was all smiles until Kato told Cowboys fan Barron: "Drew Pearson pushed off!"



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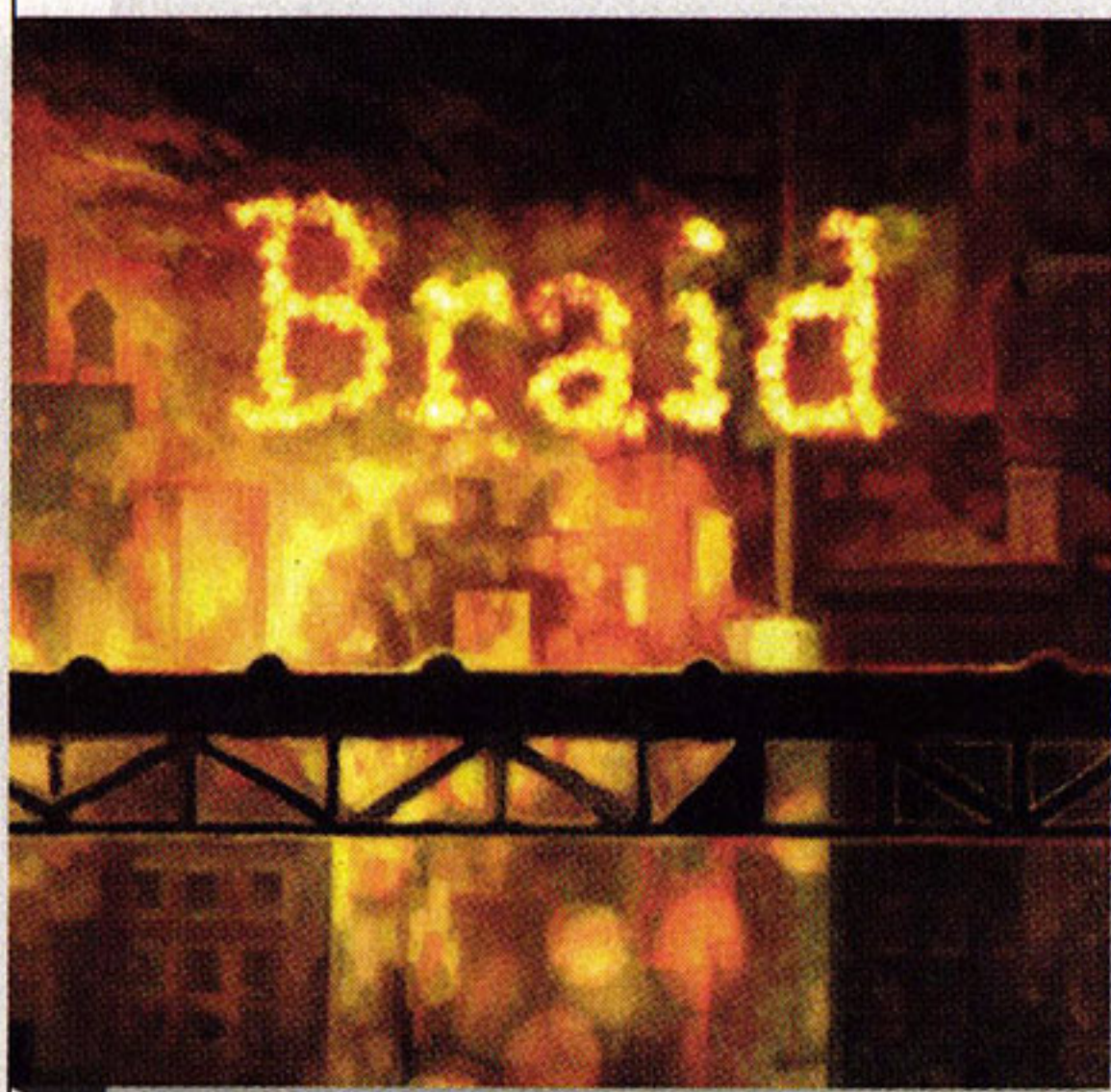
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Just Buy It

Braid was released on Xbox Live Arcade recently, and I want to know what you guys think of the price controversy. I played the demo several times and thought that it was a very good game, but then I saw it would cost me 1,200 Microsoft points. Judging on how well I did on the demo, I don't think this game is challenging or long enough to be worth 1,200 points. It should be just 800 like almost every other game on Arcade.

Tyler Simmons
via email

Braid is unquestionably worth 1,200 points. The only reason there is controversy surrounding the price is because it deviates from the typical 800 points, but Braid isn't the first or the last to break that convention. It's not part of some sinister Microsoft conspiracy to rob you of your money. Deciding to not buy the game out of protest is stupid, since you're only denying yourself a remarkable experience. What you saw in the demo may be representative of the gameplay, but it certainly doesn't give you the perspective to judge the game's overall value. Trust us: Paying only 1,200 points (\$15) for a game as unique, beautiful, and compelling as Braid is an absolute steal.

Cowabunga?

Your Top 10 Comic Book Games article has a severe flaw: How the hell did the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles arcade game NOT make the list? Don't forget that TMNT started as a comic book before it erupted into TV shows, movies, toys, and video games. I personally spent more money playing that game at the arcade as a kid than I spent on my Xbox 360. I suggest you amend your Top 10 to include this important (and awesome) arcade classic. It is clearly better than every other game on the list!

Anonymous
via email

We agree that Konami's TMNT four-player, side-scrolling brawler is an arcade classic. It was practically assured a place on our list, but there was a small problem: Though TMNT started as a comic, the game was based on the animated series. That cartoon was a considerable deviation in tone from the comics, and while many of the characters were present, it would have been a stretch to claim that it was faithful to the original concept. While we're on the topic of four-player, side-scrolling Konami games... Why hasn't The Simpsons brawler been re-released? Someone's really been asleep at the wheel on that one.

Remember Gex?

Have you heard anything about a new Gex game?

Kellen McIntyre
via email

Nope. The developer of the Gex series, Crystal Dynamics, has spent the last few years breathing new life into the Tomb Raider franchise. That's probably a good decision, since the anthropomorphic animal platformer market just isn't as hot as it used to be. It may leave Gex out in the cold, but it also means we don't need to put up with B-list poseurs like Blinx the Time Sweeper anymore. If Crystal Dynamics were to return to one of its old series, we'd be more pumped for a new Legacy of Kain. Here's a little tip you can take all the way to Vegas: If it ever comes down to gecko versus vampire, always bet on vampire.



The Gaming Hierarchy

Who the hell does Vincent Dimitri think he is, referring to Halo players as "sub-normals" (Dear GI, issue 184)? Look, Vinny. I grew up with Zelda, and I play Halo. If the "thinkers" (as you call them) are the ones who enjoy lighting torches, pushing blocks, and chasing monkeys, then I'd rather hang out with the sub-normals who enjoy tactical thinking, tight controls, and characters who actually speak. Vincent, people like you are the reason that Nintendo gets away with telling the same tired story game after game. I'm not telling you what to play, but don't imply that you are somehow better than me because you like Zelda more than Halo.

Alan Bothe
via email

Whoa! Sub-normals can write!? Naw, just kidding, Halo fans. The truth is it's unwise to make assumptions about anyone based on the games they enjoy playing. Personal tastes in video games are just as diverse as those in music, film, and literature. If you think the way your preferences align somehow grant you a measure of superiority, you're just wrong. Unless you're talking to someone who likes Scary

Movie and those god-awful spin-offs. In that case, you are better, but it's still impolite to flaunt it.

Time To Decide

I've always had one simple question I wanted to ask game journalists: Do you buy your multi-platform games on the 360 or PS3, and why?

Matt Sutton
via email

No one on staff chooses one console and sticks with it across the board; we usually take it on a case-by-case basis. Games with major competitive online modes, like Call of Duty 4, tend to find a better home on the 360. On the other hand, Devil May Cry 4 feels more natural on the PS3 because the button layout is identical to previous installments. But there are other things to consider. What if you don't care about Achievements? What if you don't have an Internet connection? What if you hate mandatory installations? Numerous factors can dictate which system is the better choice for a given individual. That probably isn't the clear-cut answer you were looking for, but the question isn't as simple as you'd think.

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

GI COMMUNITY

Game Informer has a thriving online community, and this is where they can sound off about issues facing the gaming industry today

THE QUESTION:
What is the scariest moment in gaming?



The department store level in Condemned as a whole was horrifying. The dilapidated and claustrophobic hallways and rooms were pretty freaky in itself, but throw in the surprise with the mannequins and you have a recipe for soiled pants.

DanteBunny

When I got tackled by a German Shepard in Call Of Duty 4 and I snapped its neck. That freaked me out for a bit. The game wasn't lacking in intensity.

HuBBsDoctor

World 8 of Super Mario Bros. 3 scared me when I was a kid. The atmosphere of the area and the dark music used to give me the willies.

dbull620

Eternal Darkness has plenty of great creepy moments throughout the game, but what actually got to me the most where the "hallucinations" that occur. I swear my heart shank every time the screen would turn off or my saved file was missing.

Super Pat Balls

Shooting the fish from the dock in RE 4 gave me the biggest jolt, but the prison in Silent Hill 2 filled me with genuine terror. That game makes you deal with emotions you never knew you had.

King Süshi

Playing Friday the 13th on the NES in the dark with the volume maximized and having Jason ambush you!

DTJAAAAMJSLM

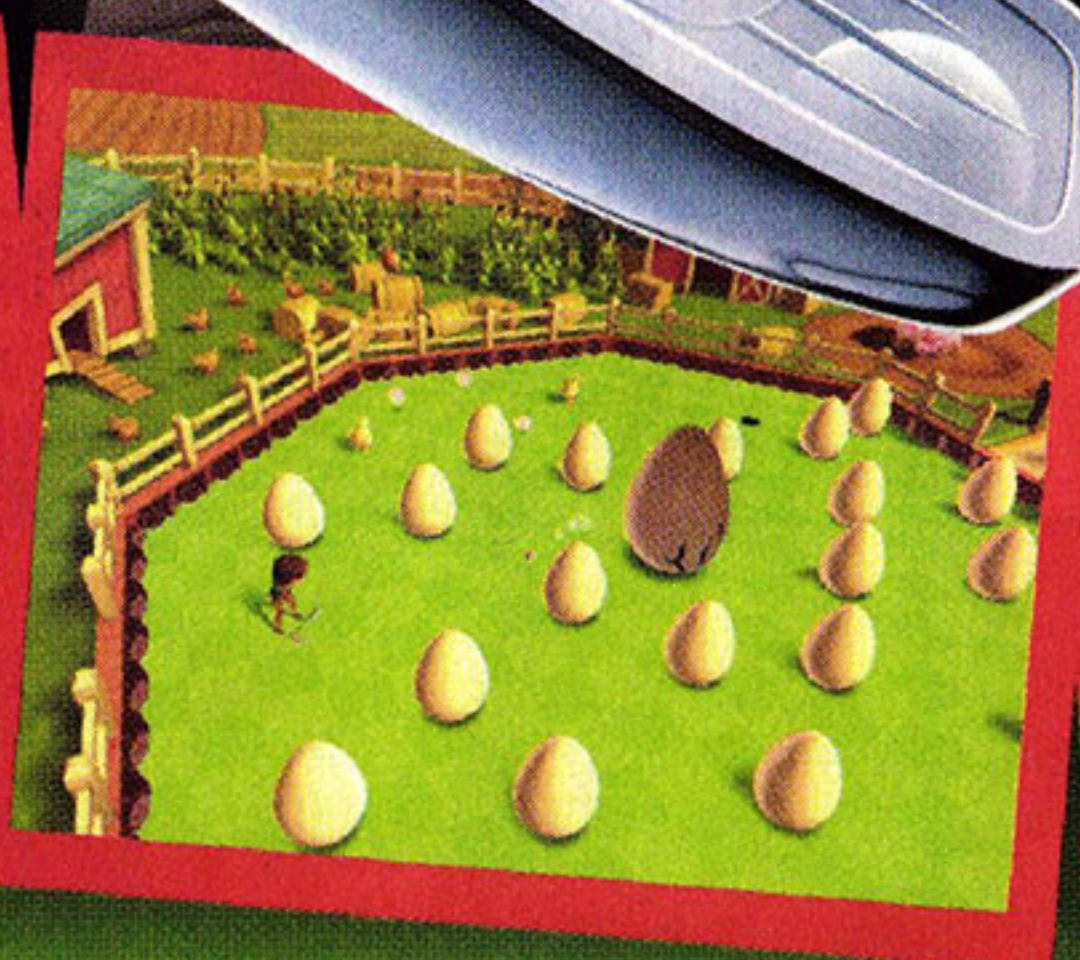
In Fatal Frame 2 I went into a house to search for things. As I walked by a window in the house I heard a noise. I equipped the camera and moved slowly toward the window. All of a sudden a ghost jumped into that window from the other side. I have never jumped that high from a video game before.

supersnake



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Storytime

It's great to see GI spending time with the writers of some of my favorite games, but I keep seeing a sentiment repeated when comparing video games to other entertainment media: video games are active, while others are passive. This is an oversimplification. Each medium tells different kinds of stories using different methods, all with varying strengths and weaknesses. Comparing these media is becoming more and more inappropriate as the artists take full advantage of what their particular medium does well, excelling and diverging down different paths.

Christopher Mehmed
via email

I just read the article "The Art of Writing" in issue 184, and I have a few things to say. I want to become a video game writer once I get out of college, and I agree with some of the things that the writers in the industry had to say, but not all of it. Player-driven storylines are becoming more popular (and better as time passes), but I don't think they can ever match up to a story that is not controlled by the player. Could games like Mass Effect really deliver the same experience if players were actually making significant plot decisions? At what point does it just become like one of those terrible *Choose Your Own Adventure* stories? It is interesting to see the perspectives of professional writers, but I don't know if player-driven narrative is the future.

Colin McCord
via email

We're happy that this feature generated as much response as it did. While not everyone cares about story in games (some even religiously skip cutscenes), many gamers are evaluating the role that writing plays in the experience. The quality of the narratives, as well as the role they should play in the future, is still up for debate. But it's a good sign that it is such a hot topic in the industry. It means people care about it one way or the other.



WINNER

This month's winner receives a copy of Prince of Persia on Xbox 360.

The critically acclaimed Prince of Persia franchise returns for an all new epic journey this holiday.



JONATHAN VALVERDE

Akuma gives Ryu and Ken waving lessons. Ryu's trying, and Ken apparently had to learn the hard way

reader art

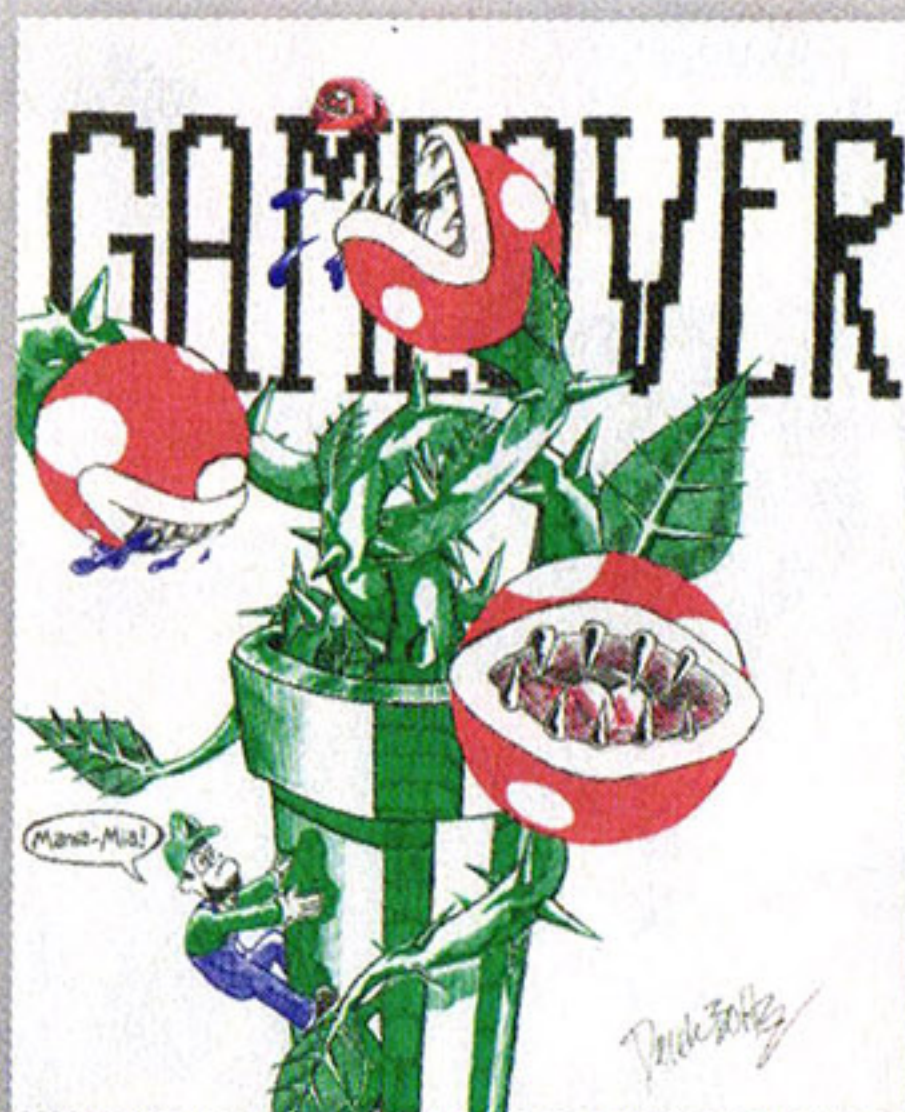
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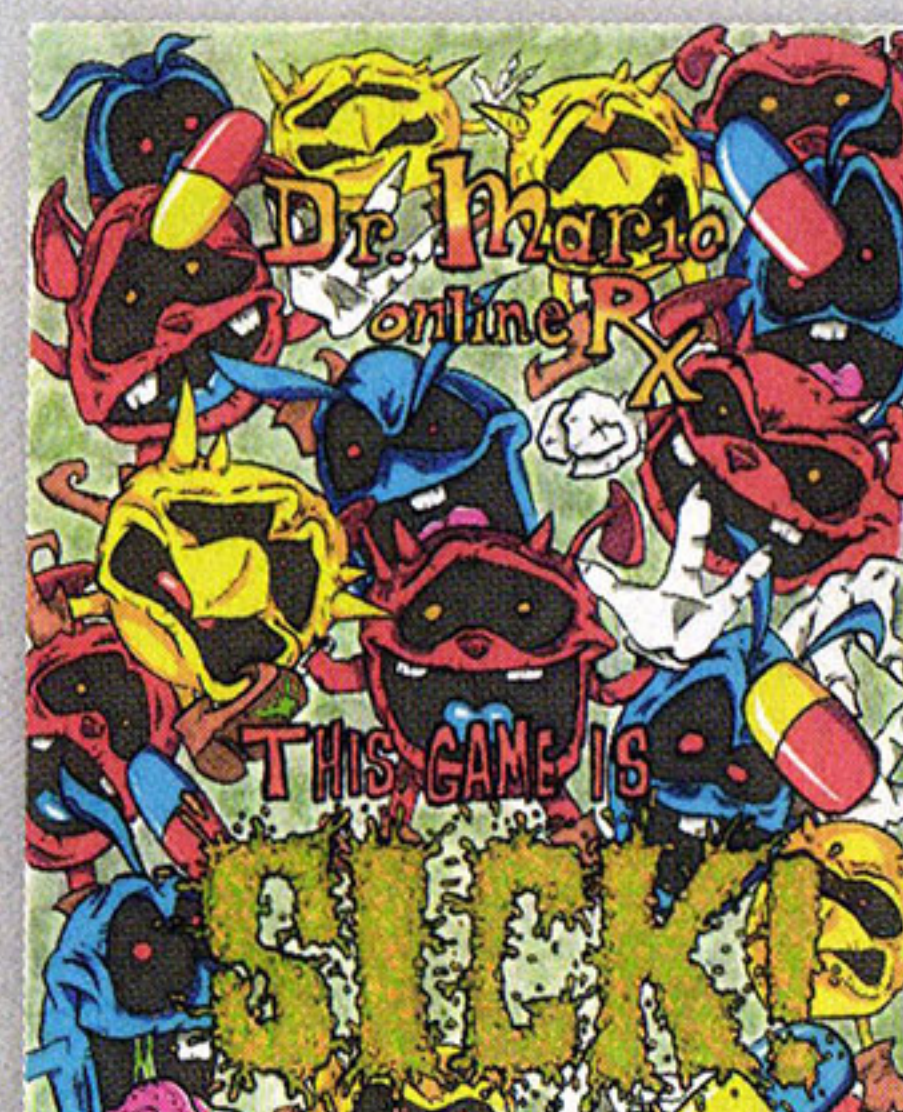
DEREK BORTZ

They may be predictable, but at least Piranha Plants have killed more gamers than Goombas



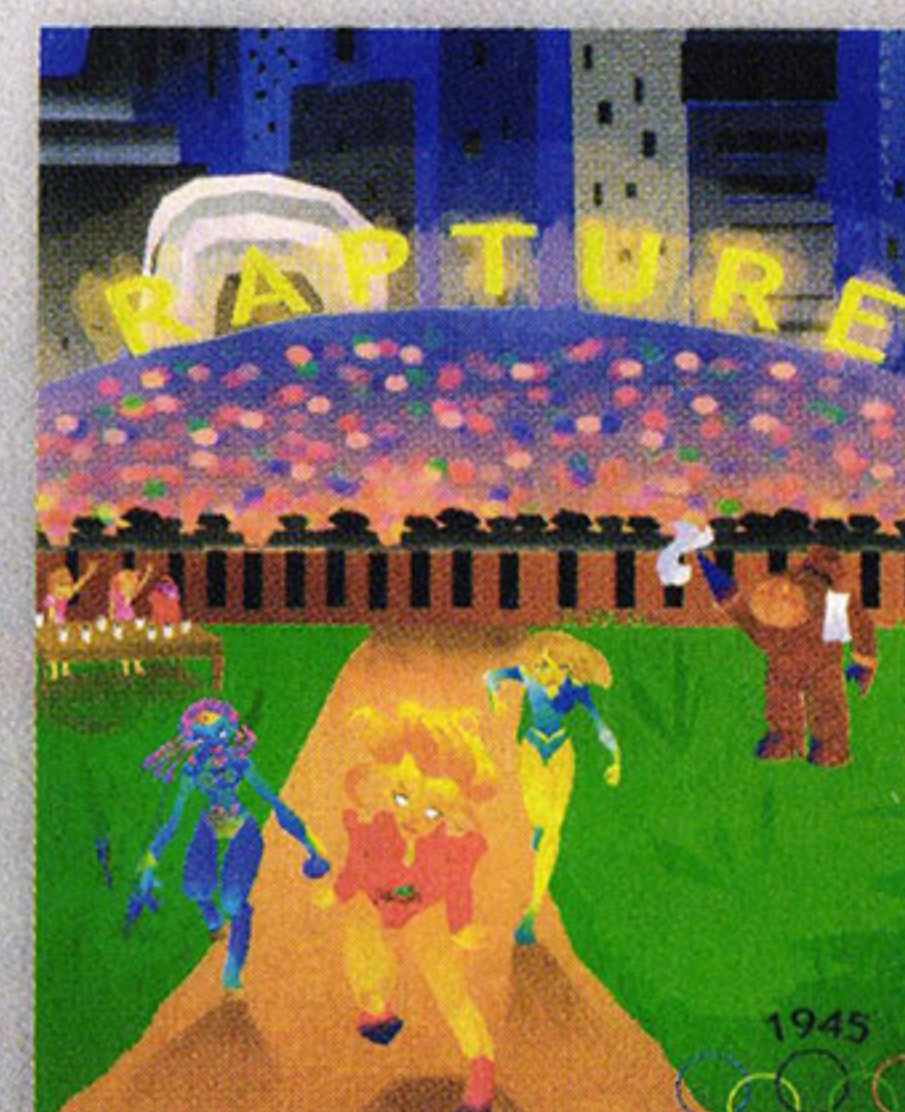
PATRICK DUMAS

Tearing this picture out and eating it will fill you with germs, virtually guaranteeing you a sick (a.k.a. vacation) day



ELISA GARAY

The events at the Rapture Olympics include the Wrench Smash, Telekinetic Discus, and Shock Chumps In The Water



ORION ARATA

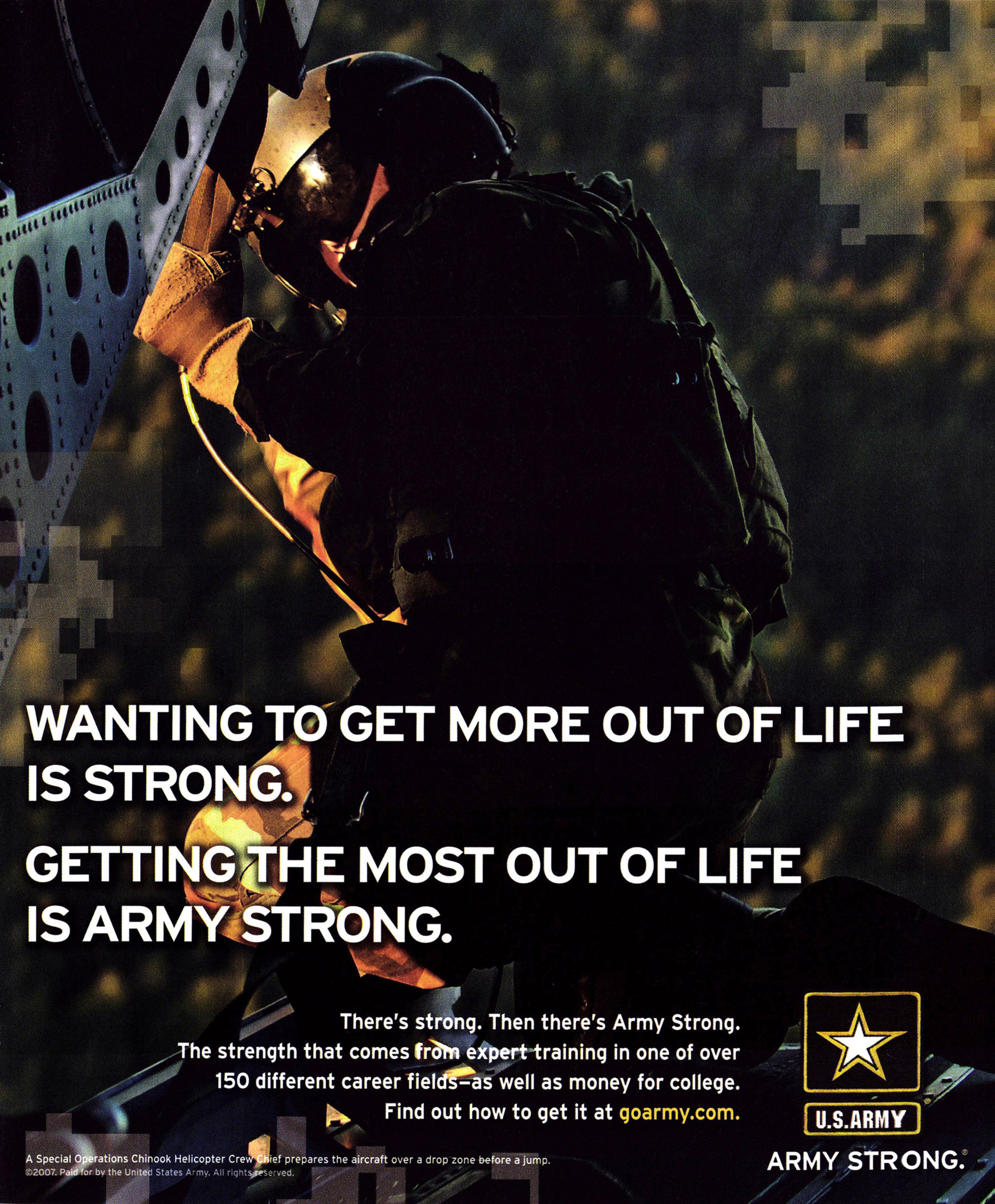
If Big Daddy took off those gloves, maybe he wouldn't still be stuck on Easy



NICHOLAS ALDRIDGE

The cast of Soulcalibur V, in which no original series characters are returning





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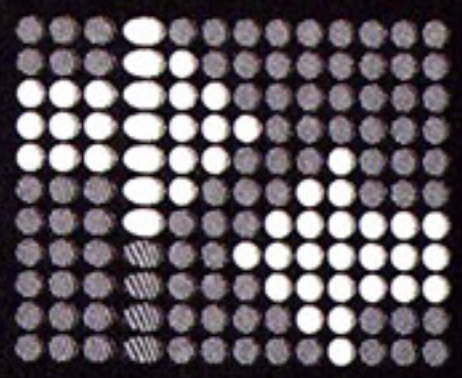
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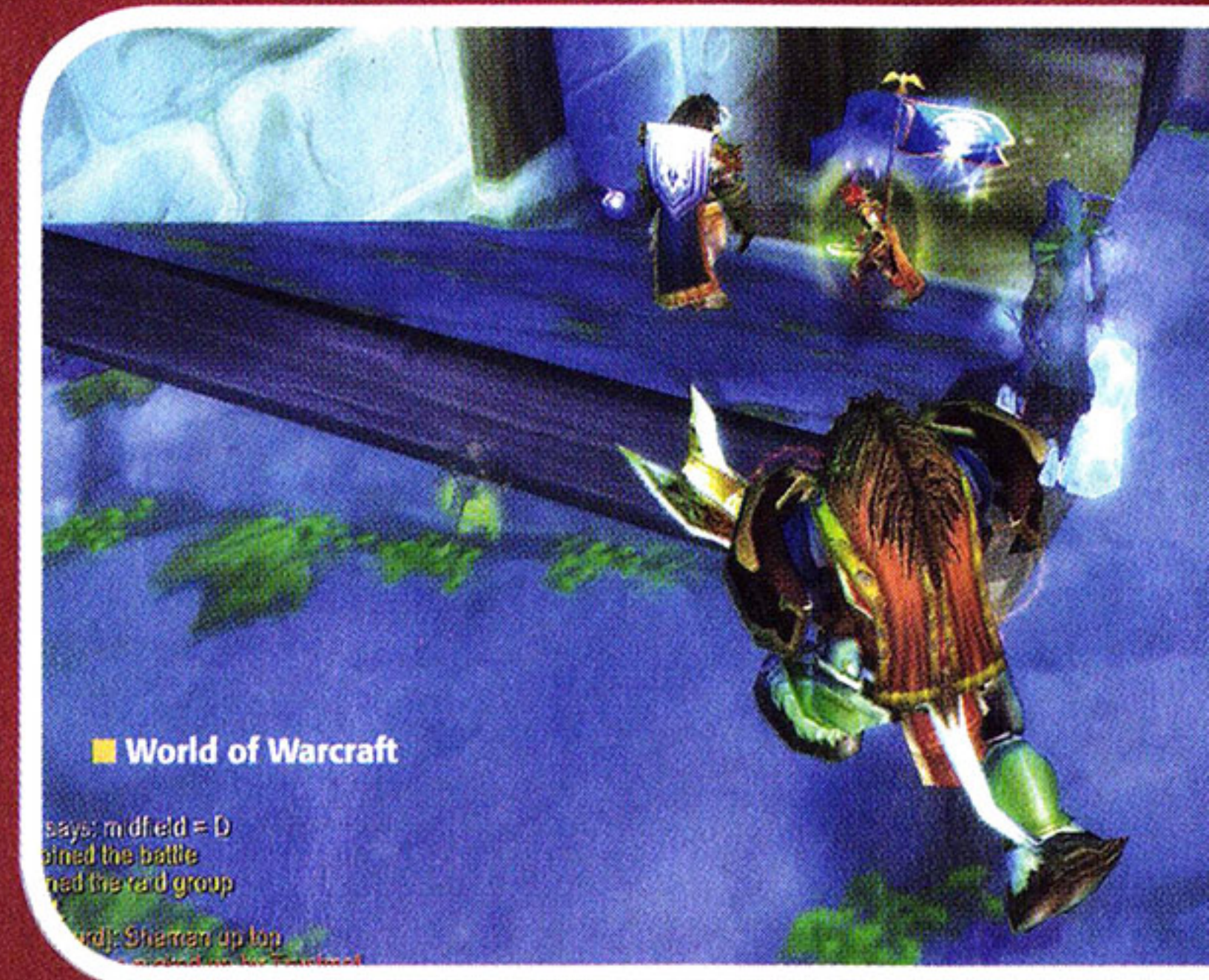
ARMY STRONG.

A Special Operations Chinook Helicopter Crew Chief prepares the aircraft over a drop zone before a jump.
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You No Good Dirty Cheater!

The Scourge Infecting Online Gaming



World of Warcraft

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news

As long as people are playing games, video or otherwise, someone will be cheating to get an advantage and win. It's the nature of the human beast, and something that irks people in multiplayer contests. It's one thing to spoil your own experience by turning on infinite ammo during single-player, but another to kill the fun of those playing by the rules in a multiplayer match.

"All I know is that I didn't cheat. I'm good with that."

STEVEN EASTON

The gamer formerly known as Im Too Godly



“Most of the stuff turns out to be explainable,” says Robert Bowling, the Call of Duty 4 community manager at developer Infinity Ward, when we ask him about the avalanche of reports regarding cheating in the popular game.

Bowling says that most of what people consider cheating in the title is actually “glitching.” This is where a player finds and exploits an aspect of the game unintended by the designer. For

Anything related to modded video game equipment, be it a console or a controller, Infinity Ward considers cheating. Bowling says the latter is a growing problem. Third-party controllers can confer unnatural advantages to players if they enable rapid fire that is faster than is humanly possible, for example. The developer has no way to detect this other than to see a video of the suspected player in action, but Infinity Ward is considering having a set rate of fire for the two weapons which are victims to rapid fire modding, the pistol and the G3.

Lag switches are a console mod by which some people cheat. Lag switches are installed as a block between the console and

the network. When activated, the player’s character appears to be frozen when in actuality they can still move around, grab loot, and position themselves for kills. When the console resynchronizes with the network, the player will appear out of thin

aspect of MMOs whereby the game rewards those who put their time into their characters.

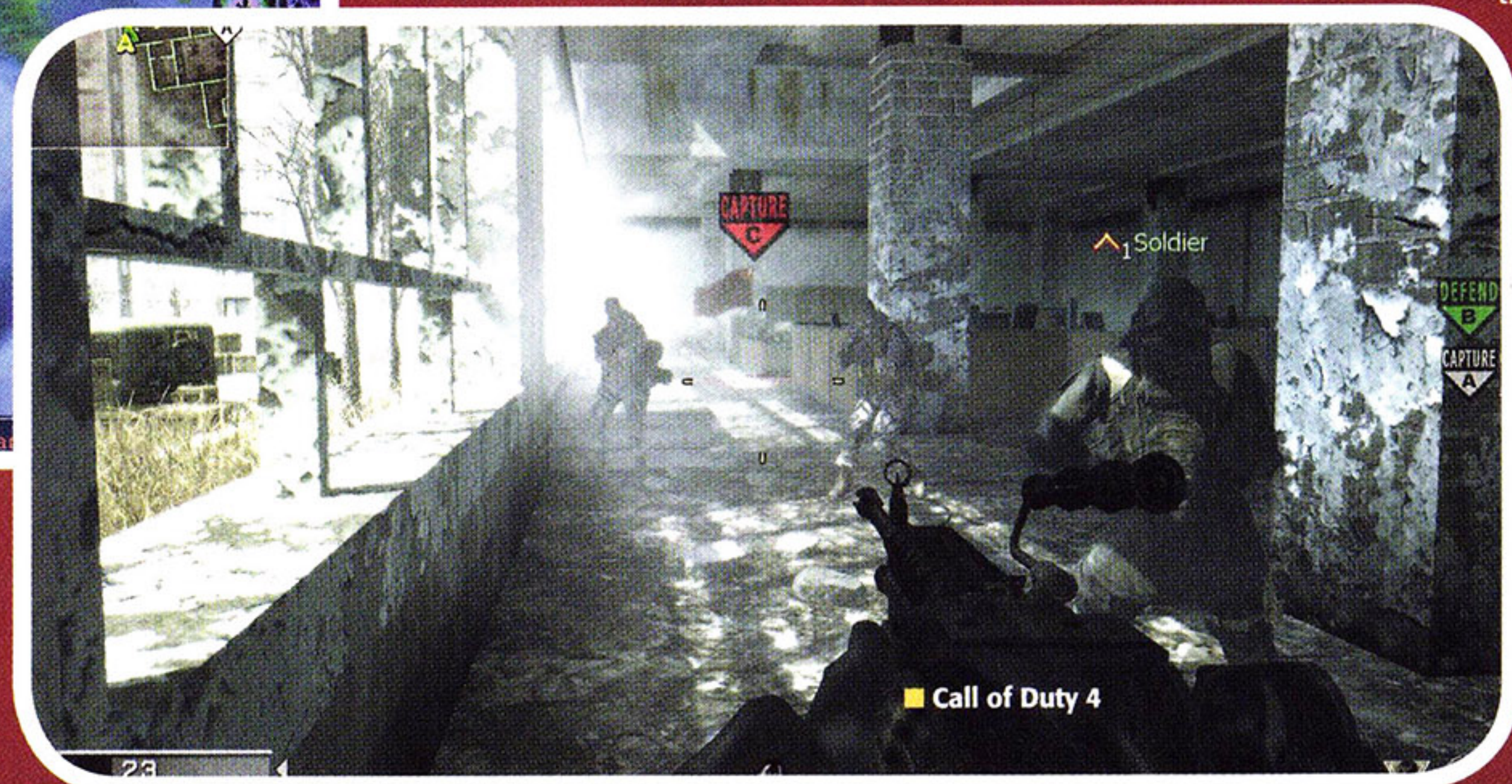
World of Warcraft developer Blizzard has created what it calls Warden – to track if your computer is using any cheating programs. Although Warden does not collect any personal data, its critics accuse it of being spyware and object to it on this basis.

How to handle cheaters is something that players simply have to leave up to the authorities. Xbox Live has an abuse reporting system with bans of varying lengths applied by Microsoft, although the company does not specify how many negative feedback hits a profile will take before being banned. Using hacked or modded equipment, however, will result in an instant ban. Xbox Live also has a review system for specific players you play with that enables you to avoid that player in future matched games.

Infinity Ward’s Robert Bowling says that his team takes a look at all of the cheating reports they get, and the majority of them aren’t actually cheating. He points out one common occurrence where a deceased player’s bad network connection can make their kill cam look weird and thereby show them something that’s not actually happening. For those cases where the developer believes something fishy is going on, the team will jump online and check out the player in question and perhaps turn things over to its testing department to investigate further.

As on top of cheaters as Infinity Ward stays, Bowling admits that in many ways it’s a losing battle. “You always think you’re ahead of the curve, but no matter how much internal testing you do or how much we play the game every day ourselves, your endless community is always going to find things you didn’t see. I’ve never seen a game where they don’t. It’s not about finding everything, it’s about once you do find it, addressing it as quickly and effectively as you can.”

While this game of cat and mouse may seem inevitable and even fun to some, Bowling believes it’s slowly eroding the health of online play. “I’m a big advocate of morally right players. I think it’s the players’ responsibility to keep their community d-----bag free. I feel like we’re losing that, and the more and more multiplayer becomes the focus of games and the more we’re focused on online instead of just single-player, the more our online communities are corrupting, because we’re allowing them to corrupt. I just want to set the tone and state that our communities aren’t going to take it anymore. We want to have fun.” ■■■



instance, Bowling says that there used to be a glitch in COD 4 whereby if you had a P90 and a certain other perk, you also got the extra conditioning perk whether you enabled it or not.

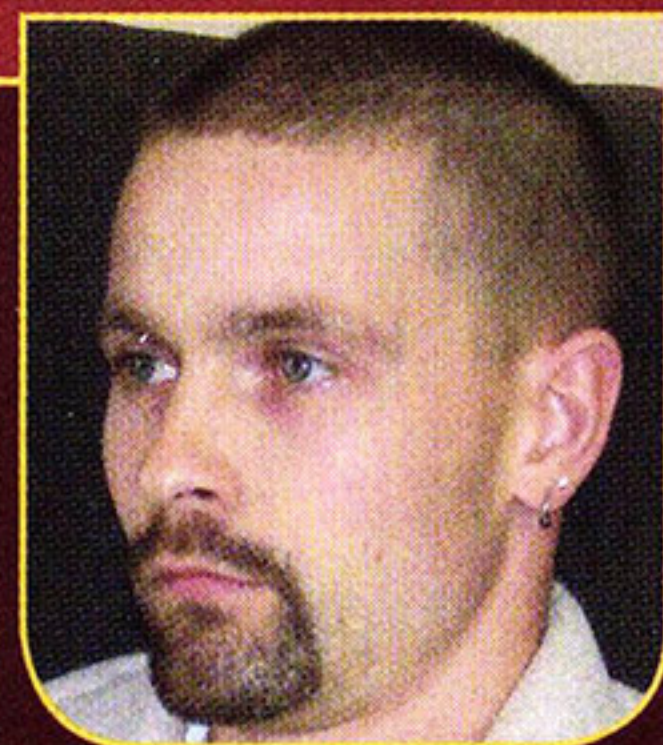
One common exploitable glitch involves areas in the environment where a player can hide due to problems with the game’s collision. Bowling tells us that many of these were addressed early on as fans called them out. Infinity Ward would then institute an automatic death sequence (called a kill switch) for players that got too close to the glitched area or an invisible barrier to prevent access via a patch.

“We consider a glitch spot a cheat when it gives the player inside it an unfair advantage [over] anyone not inside it,” explains Bowling. However, Bowling says that there are definitely spots in the game that some gamers consider glitch spots but are perfectly legal because they are out of the way, such as snipers camping out on top of “grandma’s house” in the Overgrown map.

air in their real position. Bowling says they caught on to this practice and addressed it with a patch by tracking some players who made their way up the leaderboards a little too quickly.

The popular MMO World of Warcraft has a similar lag problem enabled simply by hitting the print screen key on your PC during play. PC titles, with code more easily accessible than console software, are more susceptible to hacking in general. Speed or teleport hacks in WoW enable unnatural movement, and some scripts allow players to teleport to nodes underground and loot resources before anyone else.

MMOs also have their own particular bane – bots. These automated services play people’s characters for them (such as Glider, which openly acknowledges that the service breaks the game’s user agreement), enabling them to level up without playing (for more on power leveling, see our article in issue 158, pages 32 and 33). While the bots themselves may play by the rules, many WoW players see this practice as going against the meritocratic



IM TOO GODLY? THAT’S DEBATABLE

Earlier this year, Game Informer ran profiles on some of the top Call

of Duty 4 online multiplayer gamers. Among them was Hampton Bays’ Steven Easton, who – for a time – ran under the now infamous gamertag Im Too Godly. Easton crossed the three million-point mark before anyone else, but was quickly accused of foul play.

In particular, Easton was accused of using a method known as boosting, whereby player can arrange to kill complicit friends for points and stats. Similar tactics, such as team killing or win trading can be used in a variety of games.

At the time Easton denied the allegations of cheating, and when we caught up with him recently, he stood by his ascension up the Call of Duty 4 leaderboards. “All I know is that I didn’t cheat.” I’m good with that.”

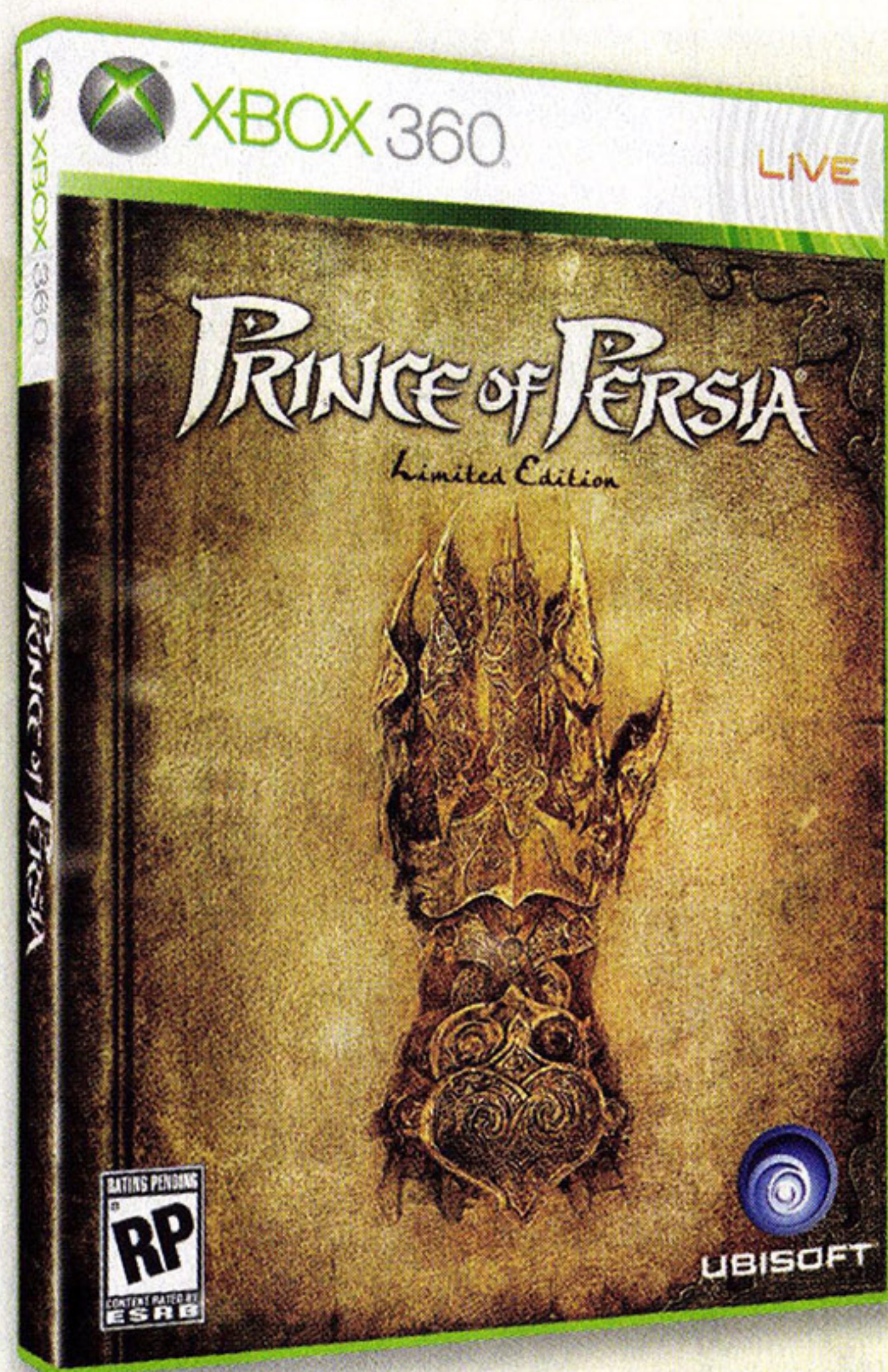
In a strange twist to the Im Too Godly saga, Easton says that before the article even became public, he had already given the name away to a young boy in his clan – although Easton doesn’t believe the kid boosted either. Stranger still, Easton tells us that the kid then had the gamertag hacked and taken by somebody else. “That might have been him,” Easton admits. “That was not me on that account at the time. It might even be the person who took the account. I have no idea.”

So who exactly is Im Too Godly? We may never know. Easton points out that of the many YouTube videos he’s seen purporting to show Im Too Godly boosting, some are simply how-to videos showing the practice and in others it’s hard to make out if the player is indeed Im Too Godly. Easton believes there are myriad ways to spell out the gamertag Im Too Godly simply by substituting “o”s for zeros, for example. “If someone could get a really clear video of it, I would understand,” he told us, “but it’s definitely not me.”

We asked Call of Duty 4 community manager Robert Bowling what he thought of the practice of boosting. He didn’t like it, but acknowledged there was little he could do about it. “I’m

anti-boosting,” he says. “We design our ranking system in a very deliberate way, and that goes down to how fast a player should rank up, and we do that for the enjoyment of the game.” Still, there’s not much the developer can do about it. Bowling ultimately believes it’s a practice that hurts the player themselves and not the experience for others, and that’s why it’s not banned. “We would like the player to experience it the way we designed it and not cheat themselves out of the reward of reaching level 55 on their own at their own pace,” Bowling says. “Because [if they don’t] then they reach level 55 or prestige 10 and they’re like, ‘Now, what do we do?’”

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More News You Can Use

EA CHARGES THE NET

EA Sports is branching out in a new direction with an unnamed tennis franchise that centers on Grand Slam tournament Wimbledon. The 2009 game (being developed by EA Canada) will appear first on the Wii, and it will be the publisher's first title featuring Wii MotionPlus. The game will move to other platforms at a later date.



PRECISION STEEL

Ubisoft's Red Steel (shown) was a game of unmet promises when the sword and gun battler released at the Wii's launch. Now that WiiMotion Plus has been announced, the publisher is confident that Red Steel 2 will feature improved katana combat.



PS3 RED ALERT IN FLAMES

Electronic Arts has cancelled the PS3 version of Command & Conquer: Red Alert 3, saying the system is "very exotic and tough to develop for, and our engine really at the time wasn't designed for PS3."



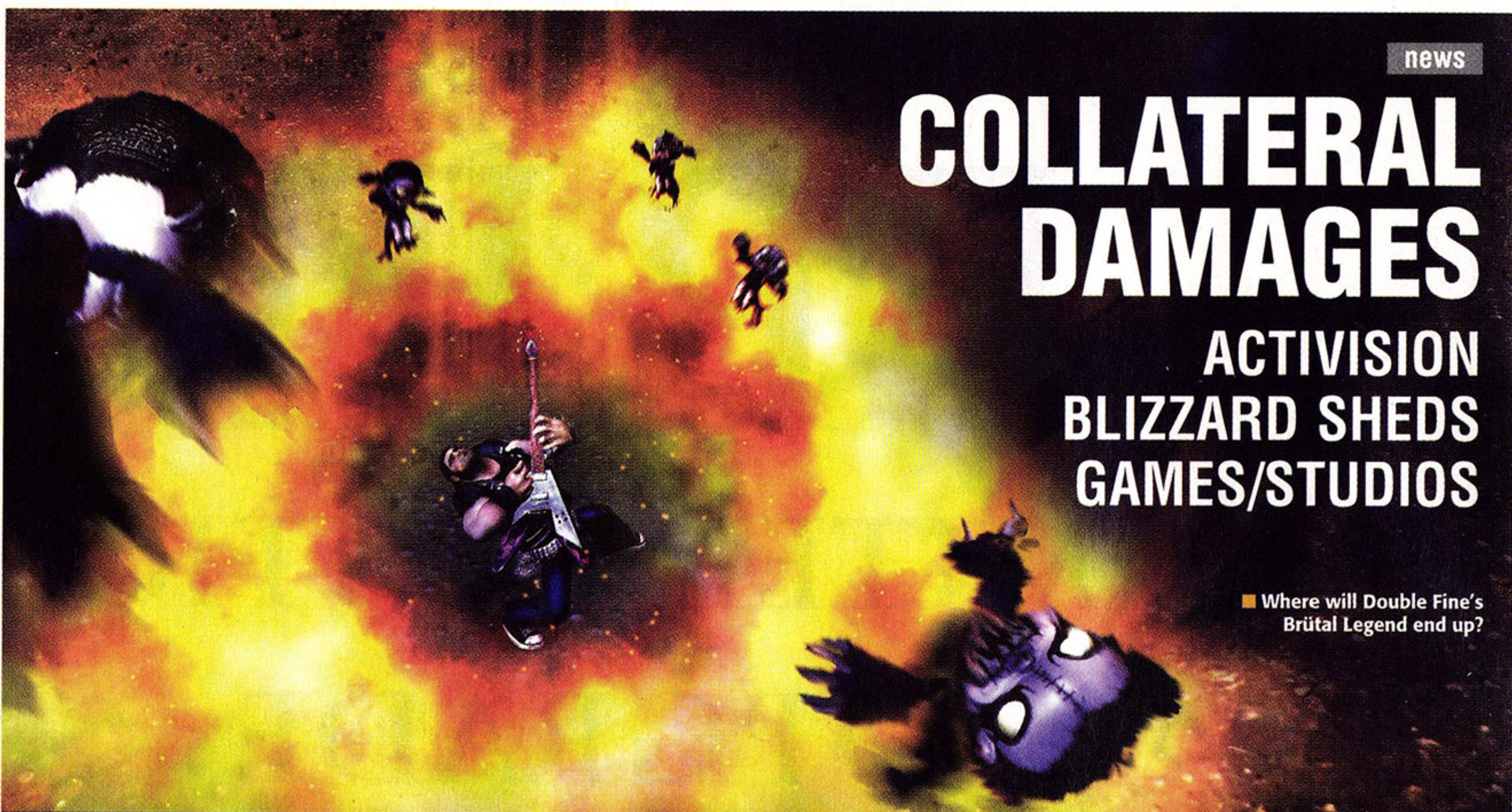
MIDWAY'S AUSTIN STUDIO HIT HARD

Midway recently cancelled an as-yet-announced project at its Austin studio (Area 51, BlackSite: Area 51 [shown]) and laid off around 100 employees a week after reporting a disappointing fiscal quarter. The studio will continue to work on future projects.



TECMO PRESIDENT QUILTS

Hot on the heels of Tomonobu Itagaki's resignation, lawsuits, and employee discord, Tecmo president Yoshimi Yasuda has resigned from the company for "personal reasons." In his resignation statement, Itagaki got personal, saying that Yasuda was "a man who chooses not to honor promises even when he is able to do so."



news

COLLATERAL DAMAGES

ACTIVISION BLIZZARD SHEDS GAMES/STUDIOS

■ Where will Double Fine's Brütal Legend end up?

When Vivendi and Activision announced last year that they were joining forces in a mega-merger to take on Electronic Arts, it seemed to be a good fit. Activision had a number of licensed products and perennially successful franchises, while Vivendi brought World of Warcraft along with a number of smaller studios and new IPs primed for success, like Prototype and Brütal Legend.

However, landscape-changing events don't happen without consequences. Recently Activision announced that it is culling several Vivendi titles, including Tim Schafer's Brütal Legend and Ghostbusters.

"We have conducted a thorough review of Vivendi Games' brand portfolio and are retaining those franchises and titles that are a strong fit with our long-term product strategy," reads a statement from Mike Griffith, Activision publishing CEO. "We are reviewing our options regarding those titles that

we will not be publishing."

Vivendi may own a majority stake in Activision, but as the new company's name implies — Activision Blizzard — Activision is calling the shots over Vivendi's game catalogue. Earlier this year we assumed that games scheduled to come out in 2008 — like Ghostbusters — were safe from being cast off in the reorganization that usually accompanies mergers such as this.

layoffs, while the Massive and Swordfish Studios may be sold off. Activision Blizzard also is investigating the future of Vivendi Games Mobile and the casual arm of Sierra Online.

No one knows what will happen to games like Brütal Legend and Ghostbusters. As of the time of this writing, neither had found a publisher, but the talk was that both would likely see

the light of day at some point. Ghostbusters was at E3 in playable form, and even before Activision Blizzard's roster change-up we'd heard rumors that Brütal Legend creator Tim Schafer was unhappy with his situation with

STAYING

- Crash franchise
- Spyro franchise
- Prototype
- Ice Age franchise
- One unannounced Vivendi project



GOING

- Brütal Legend
- Ghostbusters (shown)
- Wet
- Chronicles of Riddick: Assault on Dark Athena
- World in Conflict: Soviet Assault
- 50 Cent: Blood on the Sand
- Zombie Wranglers
- Leisure Suit Larry: Box Office Bust
- Several Xbox Live Arcade Titles

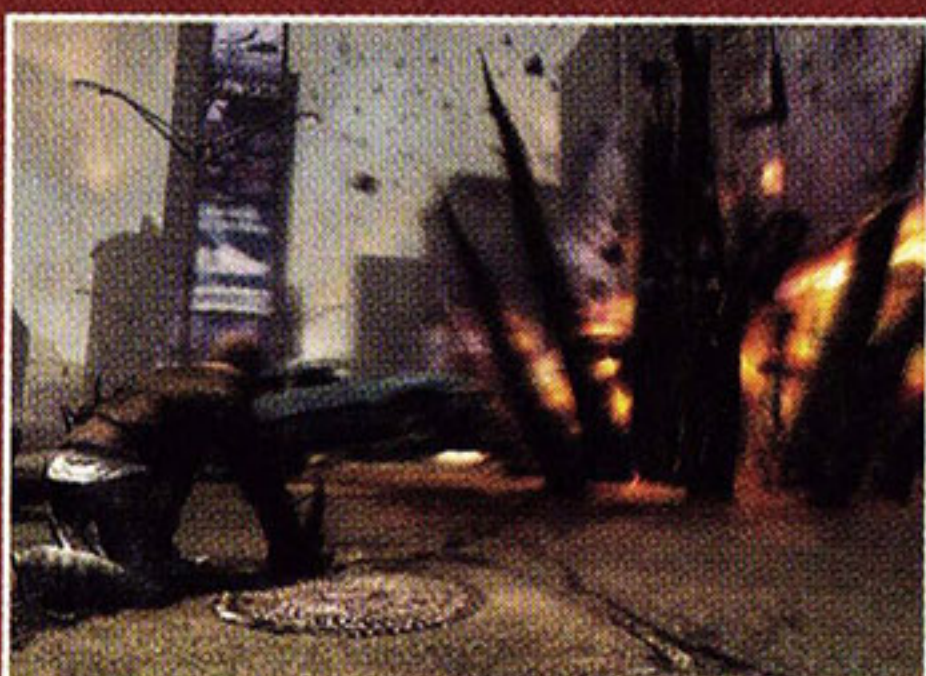
However, Activision is wasting no time trimming projects it sees as extraneous.

The company also changed the studio structure of the developers inherited from Vivendi publisher Sierra. Staffs at Radical Entertainment and High Moon Studios have been realigned, resulting in several

Sierra and was shopping the game elsewhere. Hopefully the game won't follow in the footsteps of Double Fine's previous title, Psychonauts, which bounced from Microsoft and eventually was released by Majesco to tepid sales.

CREATIVE DIFFERENCES

Here's a look at some of the studios being affected by Activision Blizzard's moves.

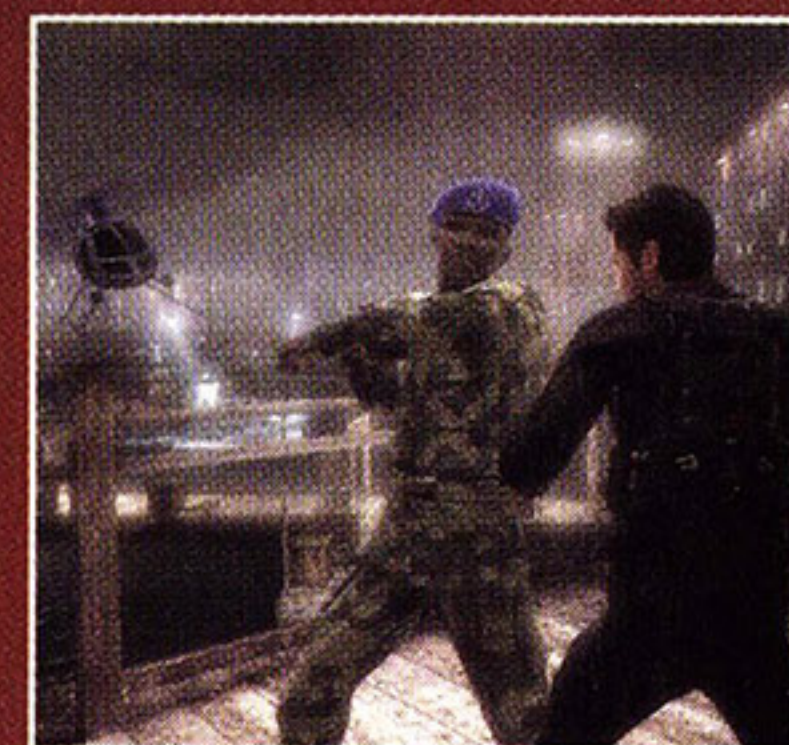


- Radical Entertainment: Prototype (shown), Scarface franchise, Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction, Crash Bandicoot: Mind Over Mutant
- High Moon Studios: Darkwatch, The Bourne Conspiracy
- Massive Entertainment: World in Conflict: Soviet Assault
- Swordfish Studios: 50 Cent: Blood on the Sand

BOURNE AGAIN?

Ludlum Entertainment reacquired the rights to make games based on Robert Ludlum's Bourne series from Activision Blizzard. This year, Vivendi's Sierra publishing arm released The Bourne Conspiracy, developed by Sierra's High Moon Studios.

Ludlum Entertainment publicly expressed satisfaction with Sierra's Bourne game, but says it's currently looking for a publisher and developer who are "capable of fully exploiting the multiplatform potential of the Ludlum content and storylines."



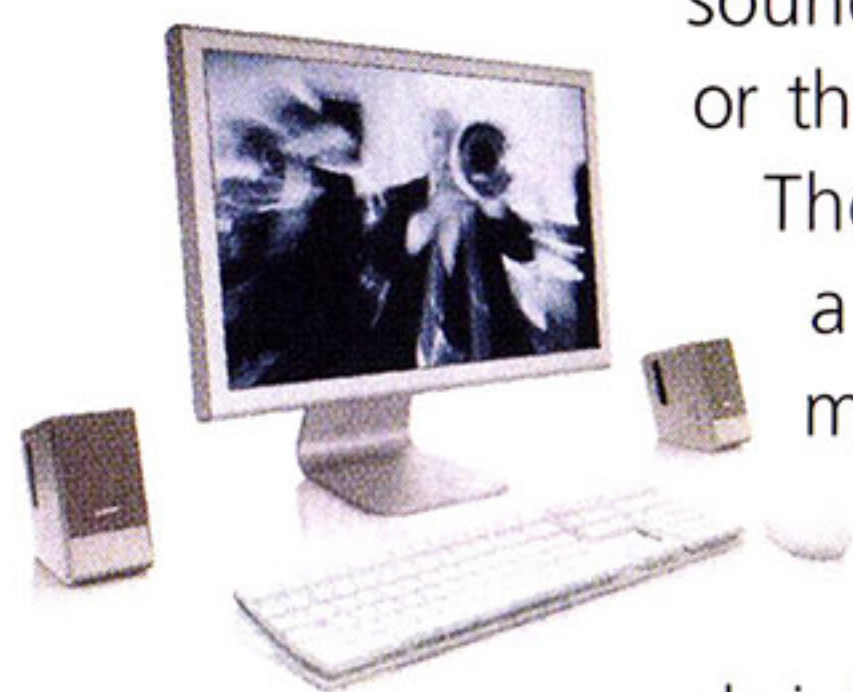
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■ Knight Silvayne and 2008 Pokémon Video Game Showdown (below)

Knight Silvayne The Pokémon Master

Game Informer scours the leaderboards in search of the best of the best, uncovering the person behind the handle, and learning his or her strategies. So, if you get a pesky message over Xbox Live or PlayStation Network from GameInformerMag, please don't delete it. You could be our next featured gamer.



Parents' Perspective

KIT SILVAYNE

Life With Pokémon:
"They love this. A lot of games out there are educational, but with Pokémon they learn math, strategy, good memorization, vocabulary, etc. Since it is one of their favorite things, they do it a lot. It drives my husband crazy sometimes, but they are good at it and they love it."

Gaming Policy:
"I home school, so during the school year they have to get their school work done first. Sometimes they have to get their chores done first, but when we were getting ready for this competition I let the chores and everything else slide so they could get ready, because it's really an educational game. It's like chess. It helps you become logical and think things through."

Time Together:
"I play Pokémon too. We started playing it in 1999, but I started playing it because of them. They wanted to play, but Knight couldn't read yet, because he was only three, so I sat down with my two sons on the couch and helped them out. It encouraged them to read because they wanted to play it so bad. Other people play Monopoly with their kids, I play Pokémon."

Decorating Tips:
"If you could see their room, it's Pokémon everything. I had to get the curtains from Australia, because they didn't make them in the United States."

Accomplishments:
In mid August, more than 400 players representing nearly 30 countries across six continents converged on Orlando, Florida for the Pokémon Diamond and Pearl Video Game Showdown. Knight Silvayne emerge undefeated, beating the top 64 regional champs from both the United States and Japan.

Origin of Skills:
"My mom and my brother were playing it when I was three," said Knight about how he first got interested in playing Pokémon. Knight's uncle had sent his family videos of the Pokémon cartoon when he was young, and that was Knight's first taste of the Pokémon world. It wasn't long afterwards that they discovered the video games and got hooked.

The Key to Victory:
Knight can boil his victory strategy down to one word, "Sandstorm." That's the move he primarily used in order to win the tournament with his team of Hippowdon, Metagross, Garchomp, and Groudon. "We practice the team on Pokémon Battle Revolutions," Knight explains. He practices against his older brother and mom, and spends weeks getting his team ready for matches against other players, sometimes going to bed very late. The day before the tournament Knight stayed up until two in the morning rebreeding one of his Pokémon.

Other Games:
"I play Animal Crossing, Harvest Moon, and Geometry Wars." Knight now has four Wiis after having won two additional consoles at the Pokémon event. When we asked him what he planned to do with all that hardware, he said, "I'm going to put one in my room, one in my brother's room, one in my sister's room, and one in the play room."

Life Outside of Video Games:
"I like to play Pokémon cards and catch bugs," Knight says. His other hobbies include cooking and playing in the garden. He plays outside a lot and likes to play with his cats and his pet rabbit, named Darth Mittens.

Future of Pokémon:
"I would love an evolved form of Purugly that was flying/normal type, and I would like the daycare to ask before they delete a move...using the 'pokétech.'" He also encourages an upgrade to the breeding system that would allow him to set the gender of new Pokémon before they are born.



■ Purugly

- Name:** Knight Silvayne
- Age:** 11
- Hometown:** Chicago, IL
- Favorite Pokémon:** Purugly
- Favorite Attack:** Body Slam
- Longest Pokémon Battle:** 10 minutes
- Practice Time For Tournaments:** 10 hours a day

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Mild Suggestive Themes
Mild Violence
Strong Lyrics
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB



PLAYSTATION 3

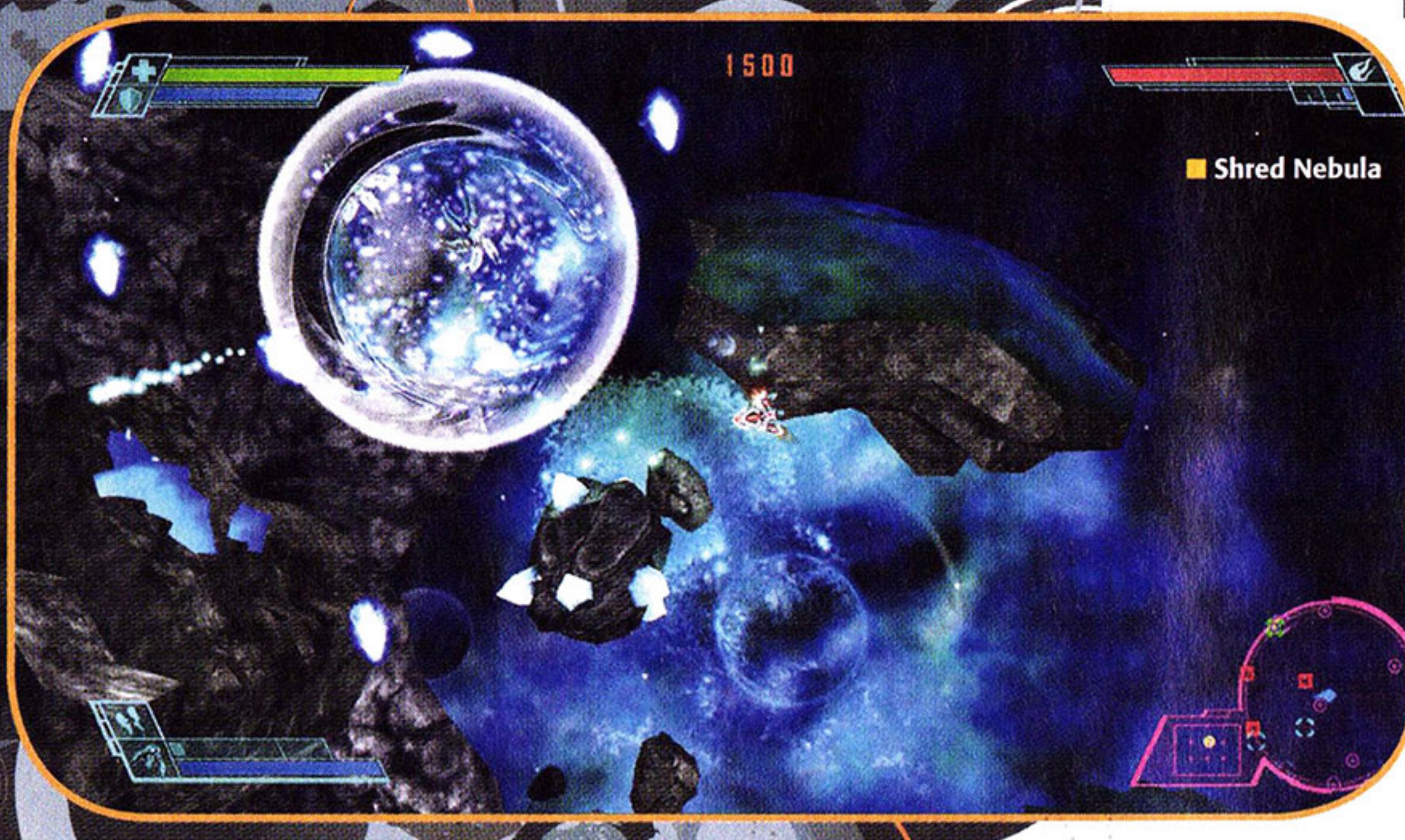
XBOX 360 LIVE



impulse

BY MATT MILLER

Shred Nebula continues the chain of great Live Arcade releases, while a new Tetris game stands out from the crowd.



who want a little physical activity with their puzzle solving.

On the tail end of Xbox Live Arcade's impressive release schedule in August, **Shred Nebula** should release around the time you read this. CrunchTime Games

has crafted a space combat title that feels like the long lost descendent of Asteroids.

Admittedly, the controls take a few minutes to learn. Multiple weapons, deployable shields, and inertia-based thruster movement deliver plenty to keep track of as you zoom your little spacecraft around the gorgeous outer space backdrops searching for a lost expedition. A score attack mode awaits those who want a break from the story, while

online and offline multiplayer

modes allow up to eight players to battle in the empty reaches of space. For those hungering for a little more complexity in their shooter than the "left stick moves, right stick shoots" mechanic, it's definitely worth a look.

Both Live Arcade and PlayStation Network will play host to a bunch of lost sheep if **Flock**

gets herded into the December release corral. During my limited time with the game, it struck me as a title easily comparable to the classic Lemmings. You fly a UFO, guiding farm animals into the mother ship for purposes that thankfully remain largely unexplained.

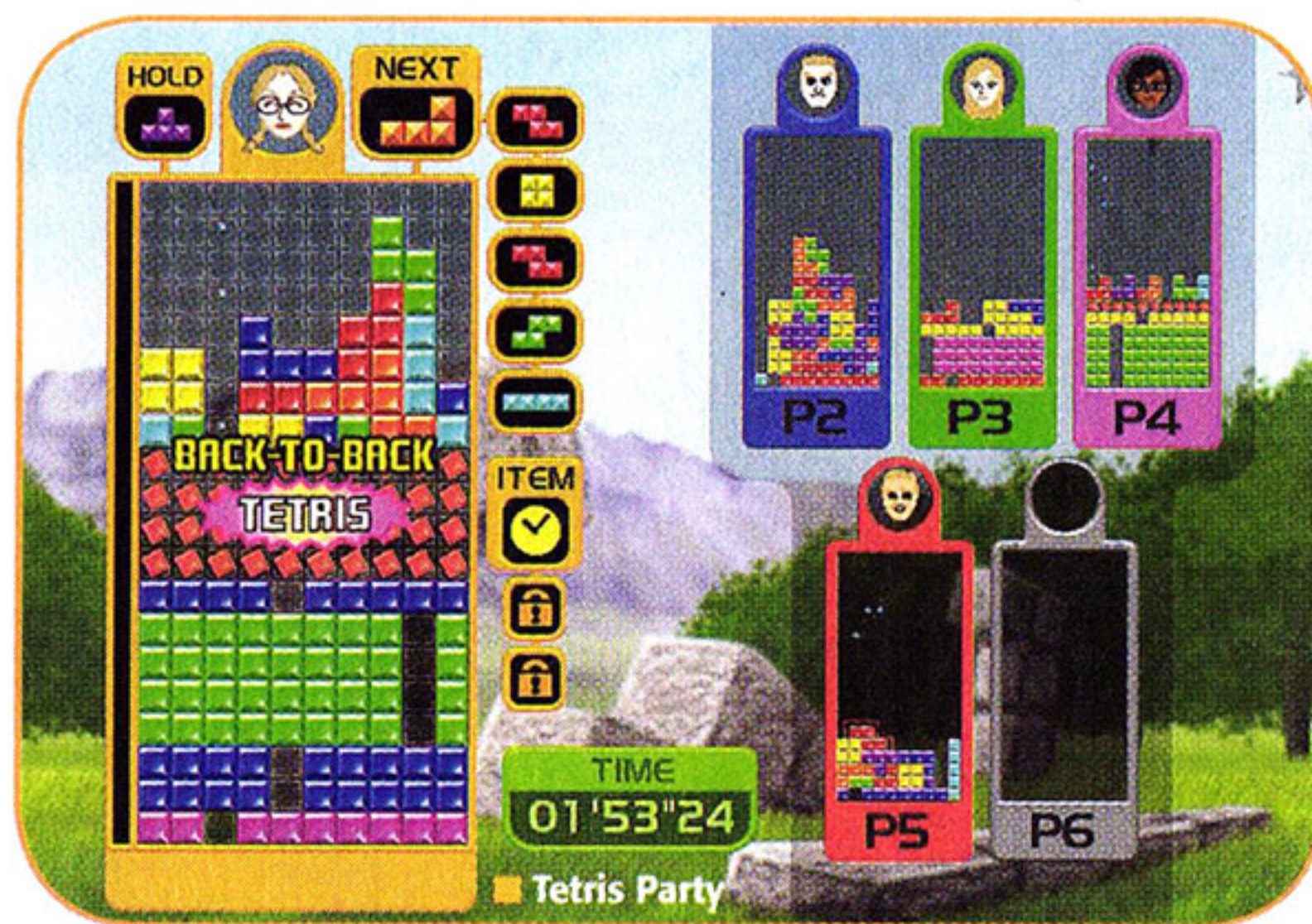


Needless to say, a number of challenges and puzzles block your way. The idea of shepherding squishy stuffed animals through impossibly dangerous obstacle courses is charming, and I'll share my thoughts if I play it again before final release. ■■■

For the first time ever, I played more downloadable games in my free time this month than those on disc. With the wave of big holiday releases on the way, I'm sure that's likely to change. However, it was amazing that so many remarkable titles hit the download scene so close together. Between Braid, Geometry Wars Retro Evolved 2, and PixelJunk Eden, I was hard pressed to find time for much else. This phenomenon could easily expand into seasons other than late summer. The retail publishers still have a hard time taking their big guns out of the holiday time frame. Am I the only one that would welcome more short form downloadable games hitting during some of those other dead times during the year?

With that said, a number of downloadable releases are braving the dangerous waters of the next few months. One of the biggest surprises for me was **Tetris Party**, a WiiWare title that should release before the end of the year. I feared the game would be another clone of something I've played a million times, but I was increasingly impressed the more I heard about it. Standard Tetris options are included, but a heap of cool additions set the game apart. A beginner's mode caters to kids and other new players, where large blocks

and slow speeds ease you into the experience. A clever variation called Field Climber drops a tiny little guy onto your pile of tetriminos, and you must build him a stairway to the top without crushing him. There's even a strange race mode



where you guide a single piece through an obstacle-laden maze by twisting past seemingly impossible corners. Multiplayer modes include both cooperative and competitive options, and up to six players can play online at once. While I've yet to try it, there's even a Wii balance board option for those

S T O R Y L I N E



> **Age of Booty**

Last time I mentioned this cool pirate-themed game it was called Plunder. Suffice to say, it's just as fun with a new name as it was with the old. The race to collect resources and conquer towns via fast-paced grid movement makes this title perfect for frantic multiplayer matches.



> **Castle Crashers**

You're not playing this yet? What's wrong with you? Download this game as soon as possible, get some friends together, and relive the glory days of the side-scrolling brawler with the added option of beating your buddies over the head to get a kiss from the princess.



> **Rag Doll Kung Fu: Fists of Plastic**

Originally a shareware PC title from the co-founder of LittleBigPlanet developer Media Molecule, this expanded release for the PSN includes crazy modes like Capture-the-Fish, where you compete with other players to retrieve slippery seafood and transport it across the screen. The surprisingly fun and exaggerated physics will keep party gamers laughing, and the game has enough features to entertain for a while.



Wallpapers



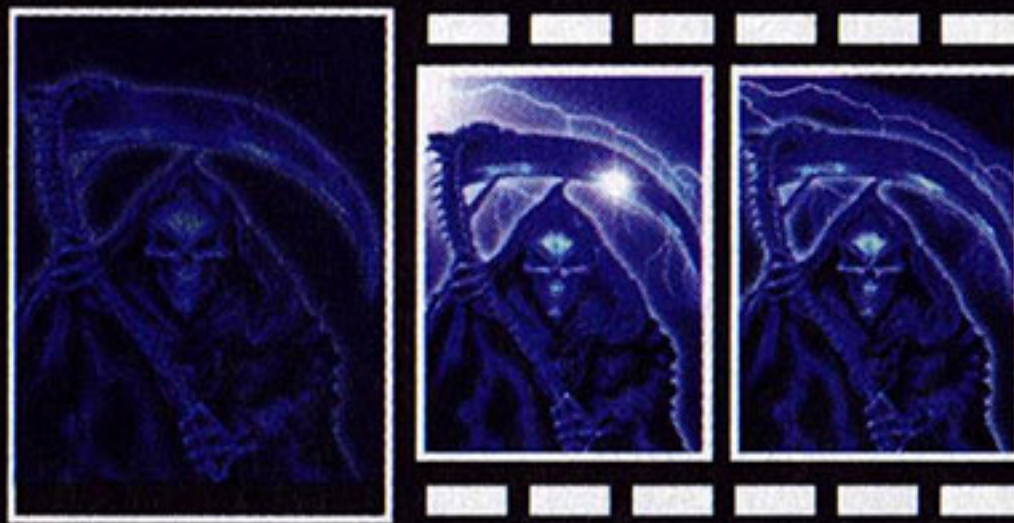
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Themes



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Screensavers



move8430

Games

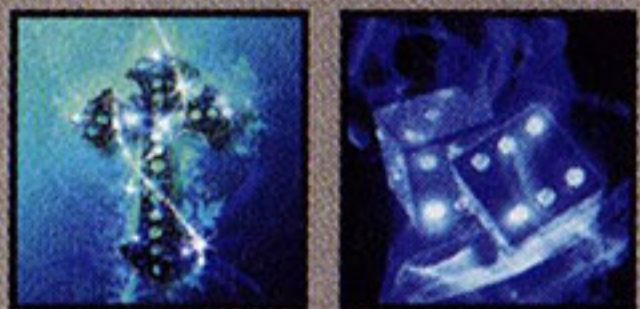


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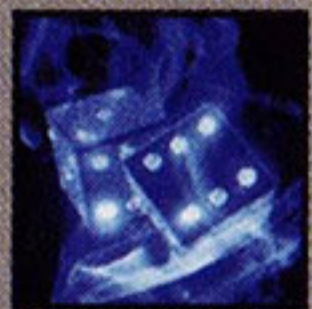
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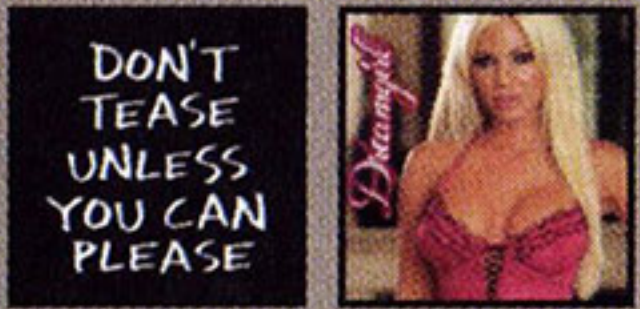
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wall7288



wall7289



wall7290



wall7291



wall7292



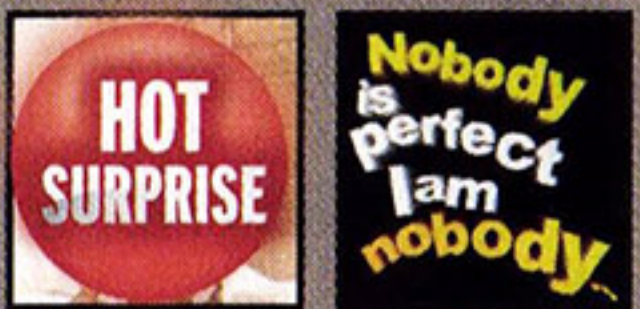
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wall7295



wall7296



wall7297



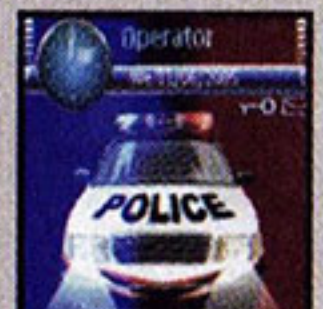
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theme4966



theme4967



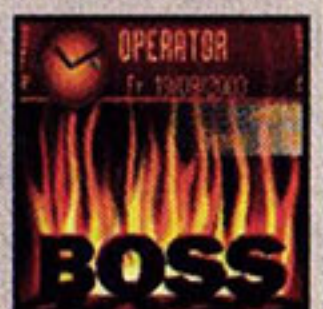
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theme4969



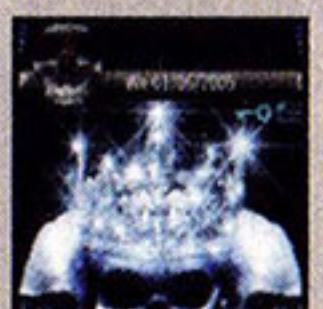
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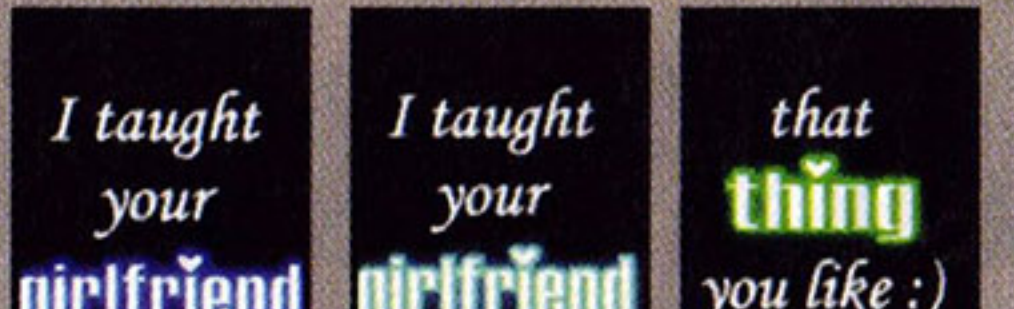
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move8432



move8433



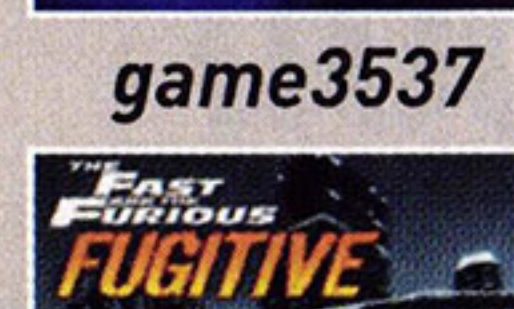
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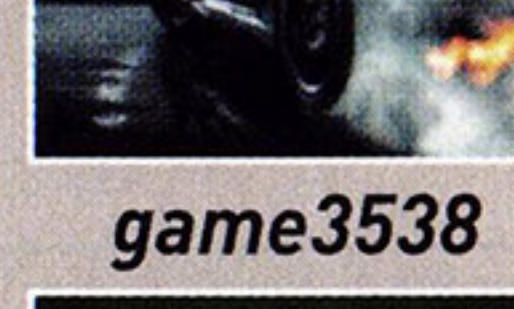
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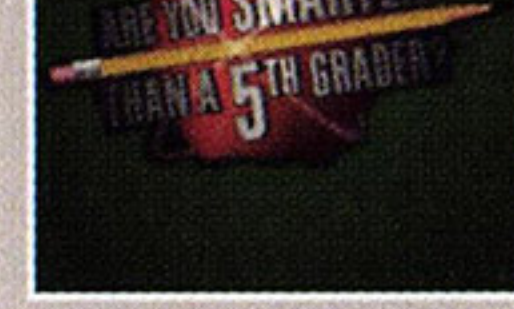
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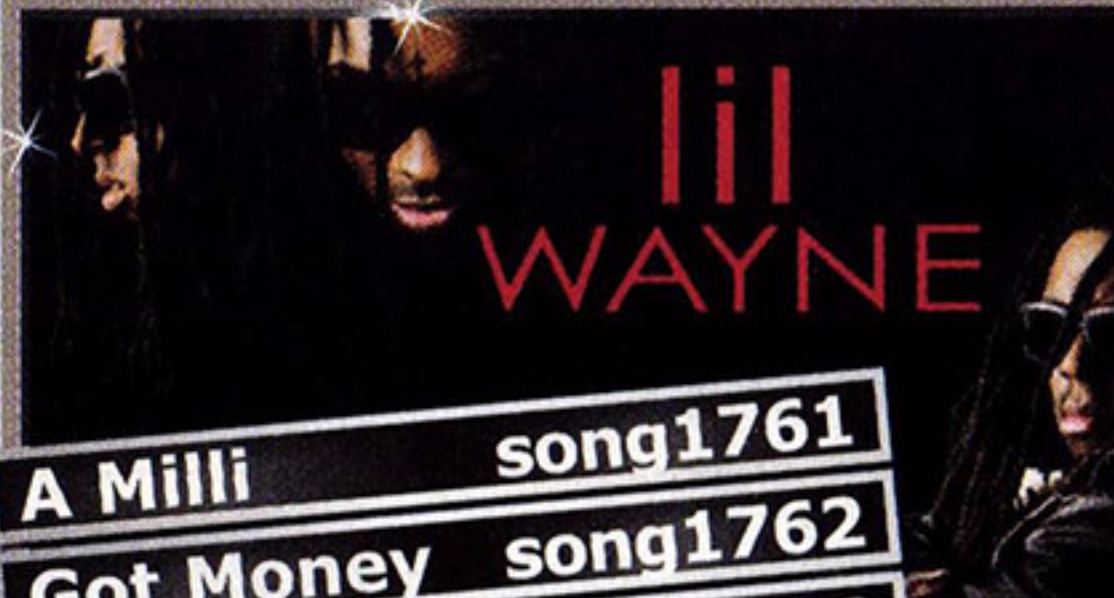


game3539



game3540

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|--|----------|
| 3 Doors Down - It's Not My Time | song1764 |
| Ashanti - Good Good | song1765 |
| Chris Brown - Forever | song1766 |
| David Banner / Chris Brown - Get Like Me | song1767 |
| Jesse McCartney - Leavin' | song1768 |
| Kardinal Offishall / Akon - Dangerous | song1769 |
| Lil Wayne - Lollipop | song1770 |
| Lil Wayne - 3 Peat | song1771 |
| Metro Station - Shake It | song1772 |
| Miley Cyrus - 7 Things | song1773 |
| Nelly - Stepped On My J'z | song1774 |
| Nelly - Body On Me | song1775 |
| Pussycat Dolls - When I Grow Up | song1776 |
| Ray-J / Yung Berg - Sexy Can I | song1777 |
| Rehab - Bartender Song | song1778 |
| Rihanna - Take A Bow | song1779 |
| Rihanna - Disturbia | song1780 |
| Savage / Soulja Boy Tell Em - Swing | song1781 |
| The Dream - I Luv Your Girl | song1782 |
| Three 6 Mafia - Lolli Lolli | song1783 |
| T-Pain - Can't Believe It | song1784 |
| Usher - Moving Mountains | song1785 |
| Yung Berg - The Business | song1786 |



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|------------|----------|
| A Milli | song1761 |
| Got Money | song1762 |
| Mr. Carter | song1763 |

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THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY

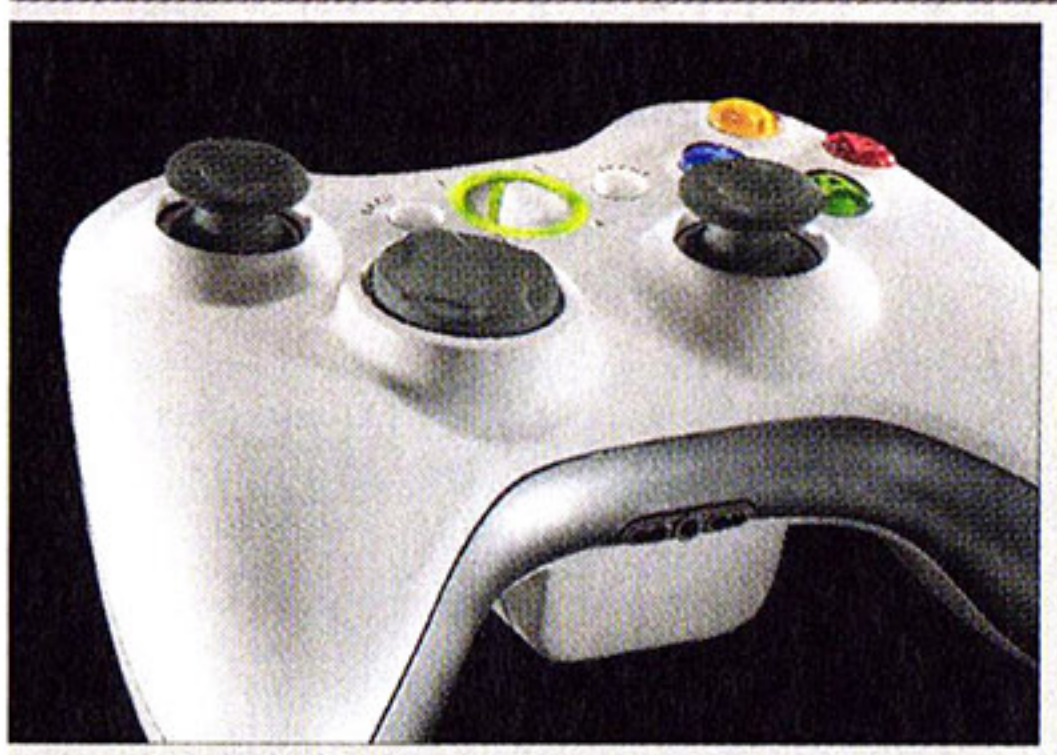
When You Want Your News Categorized With A Sarcastic Editorial Spin

QUOTE

My guess and analysis shows that less than three out of ten games recover their development and marketing costs with boxed goods sales.

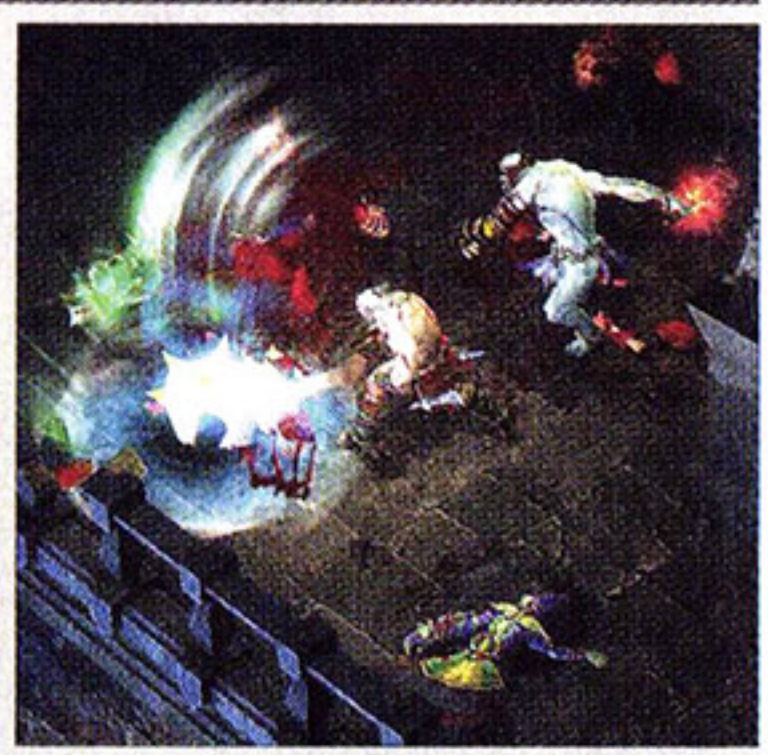


- Edinburgh Interactive Festival chairman and former Sony Europe chairman Chris Deering.



BAD

We've complained about the Xbox 360's stiff and unresponsive d-pad since day one. Now, years after it made its god-forsaken appearance with the original Xbox, Microsoft is finally doing something about it...for everyone not living in America. At Leipzig's Games Convention, the company announced a limited edition green controller with a redesigned d-pad only for Europe, Asia, and Latin America. Predominately d-pad controlling titles such as Pro Evolution Soccer 2009 are believed to be the reason for the move. Finally, this country's shunning of soccer has come back to firmly bite us in the ass.



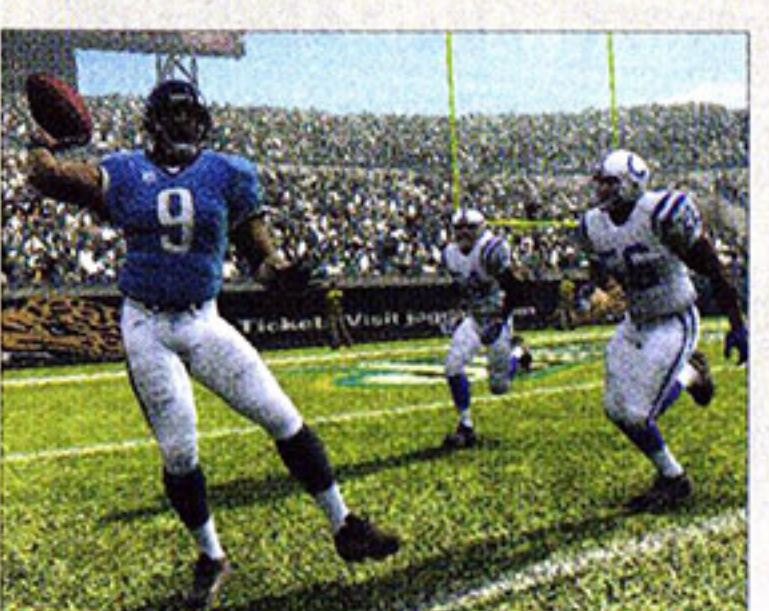
GOOD

Blizzard says the World of Warcraft character score planned for the Wrath of the Lich King expansion will eventually incorporate into an overall Blizzard gamerscore called a Blizzard Level. This will cover your progress and accomplishments in future titles such as Diablo III (shown) and StarCraft II.



GOOD

Both Sony and Microsoft announced that the upcoming instruments for Guitar Hero World Tour and Rock Band 2 (shown) will be compatible with each game. Hell, even Rock Revolution will work, but nobody's gonna play that game anyhow. There has yet to be a deal, however, allowing this compatibility for the older Rock Band and Guitar Hero games. In other news, Rock Band 2 fans may be disappointed to know that it'll cost them a one-time transfer fee of no more than \$5 to move the songs from their Rock Band disc into Rock Band 2 due to licensing issues.



GOOD

EA has announced the opening of a QA (quality assurance) studio in Baton Rouge, Louisiana that will accommodate 20 full-time jobs and draw on 200 LSU students for part-time positions. Thankfully EA says that the studio will work on EA Sports titles. Too bad it can't help this year's Madden, which shipped with a game-freezing bug that we did not encounter while playing the game for our review.



UGLY

Ubisoft is suing the disc manufacturer of the PC edition of Assassin's Creed. The publisher says that Charlotte, North Carolina's Optical Experts Manufacturing didn't abide by security measures that could have prevented the leak and subsequent illegal copying and distribution of Assassin's Creed months before its official release. Ubisoft tracked the pirated copies and discovered they were coming from the home of an OEM employee. As if the sales revenue lost wasn't enough, Ubisoft is claiming damage to its reputation due to the fact that the early players experienced unfinished, buggy gameplay.



news

NUMBER ONE WITH A BULLET

NPD & FRIENDS ANNOUNCE WORLDWIDE SALES DATA

Sales numbers for games can be hard to come by, even with domestic sales firm NPD releasing monthly data. Now, however, The NPD Group, GfK Chart-Track Limited, and Enterbrain have joined forces to combine their sales tracking information into a single report - The Top Global Markets Report. The first of these monthly reports incorporates the point-of-sale data for the U.S., U.K., and Japanese markets (which does not include digital sales), giving us the top five video games in sales for the three largest markets in the world. These reports will surely be helpful to publishers and developers surveying the world market.

Looking at the first report, some interesting info pops out at first glance, including the U.K.'s lack of love for one of Wii's strongest titles, Super Smash Bros. Brawl. This is surprising given the Wii's status as a strong seller in the U.K., accounting for 45 percent of the U.K. console market according to Nintendo as of the beginning of this year. Grabbing three of the top five spots is an impressive achievement for a Nintendo system - something that the Wii's predecessor, the N64, never mustered.

While it's not surprising that Grand Theft Auto IV earned the top spot, it's impressive given that in the report's time span the game was not yet available in Japan. Furthermore, GTA IV had only been out for just over three months in the U.S.

Guitar Hero III's lack of success in Japan, meanwhile, is not a huge shock given that country's love of its native J-pop - a localization consideration which Activision must take into account in the future if sales are to rise.



TOP GLOBAL MARKETS' TOP 5 VIDEO GAME TITLES*

- 1 Grand Theft Auto IV**
Total sales: 6,293,000
• U.S.: 4,711,000
• U.K.: 1,582,000
• JPN: Not released
- 2 Super Smash Bros. Brawl**
Total sales: 5,433,000
• U.S.: 3,539,000
• U.K.: 213,000
• JPN: 1,681,000
- 3 Mario Kart Wii**
Total sales: 4,697,000
• U.S.: 2,409,000
• U.K.: 687,000
• JPN: 1,601,000
- 4 Wii Fit**
Total sales: 3,604,000
• US: 1,433,000
• UK: 624,000
• JPN: 1,547,000
- 5 Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock**
Total sales: 3,475,000
• US: 3,037,000
• UK: 412,000
• JPN: 26,000

*January through July 2008



■ Painkiller developer People Can Fly is developing a new game for Epic and EA

news

EA IN BED WITH EPIC

PLENTY WANT TO PARTNER WITH EA

We all know Electronic Arts for its variety of games, but more and more the large third-party publisher is moving beyond publishing and developing its own titles into helping other highly-anticipated video games hit the shelves. The company announced it is working with Epic on an unannounced game to be developed by Poland's People Can Fly studio – the developer behind Painkiller. The action game will come out for the PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, and PC at an unspecified time.

This collaboration is yet another boon to the EA Partners program, in which EA lends its marketing, distribution, and retail muscle to games for a cut of the profit. This E3, John Carmack announced legendary developer id Software entered into a similar deal with EA for Rage. Likewise, EA also worked with Valve on The Orange Box.

Is Suda 51 Suitable For EA?

Grasshopper Manufacture's Suda 51 (real name, Goichi Suda) is known for creating out-there games such as Killer 7 and No More Heroes (shown). Now, he's teaming up with Resident Evil's Shinji Mikami for a PS3, Xbox 360, Wii, and PC action horror game to be distributed by EA in North America. This title will also feature help from Q Entertainment (Lumines), which further ups the Japanese-developer cred quotient. "They are a great partner," said Suda of EA, "who share our commitment to quality and innovation while respecting our independence as a studio, which is very empowering."



LOOSE TALK

Hot Gaming Gossip



■ Real Time World's Crackdown

CRACKDOWN 2 UPDATE

It was hard not to enjoy the freedom that open world superpower game Crackdown gave to players. But apparently it's hard for the sequel to find a publishing partner. Loose Talk has heard Microsoft has turned down Crackdown 2. The first title was developed by Realtime Worlds, but the company is currently working on APB and not Crackdown 2. The sequel is in production with a different development team. With Microsoft no longer on board, we'll have to wait and see when and how the game comes out.

2K'S NEW STUDIO ON THE BLOCK

It's no accident that 2K Games has handed the PlayStation 3 version of BioShock over to Digital Extremes (Dark Sector). The publisher has big plans for the studio, and it figures to be looking for more projects from the developer. We'll have to wait and see what those future games are and if they build off Digital Extremes' previous work.



TIBERIUM CANCELLED?

A variety of games were missing from this year's E3, but Loose Talk has heard one game's radio silence in particular is a sign of trouble. Electronic Arts' PC/360/PS3 title Tiberium is rumored to be cancelled. An EA rep told us the title was definitely still in development, so we'll have to take this rumor with a grain of salt. It seems, however, at the very least the game does not appear to be hitting its initial 2008 release date.

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

NAME THAT GAME

Test Your Sight

The PC is littered with simulation games, but this month's title put you in the shoes of a dictator of a Caribbean island during the Cold War era. Managing the island's political concerns between the U.S. and U.S.S.R. isn't your only problem, as you must take care of your citizens as well. You affect your population by passing down edicts like controlling the birth population, raising wages for certain professions, and encouraging tourism. You also have to appease the military or you'll have a coup on your hand.

(Answer on page 34)



ACTUALLY,
IT IS ALL
FUN AND GAMES.



 **LittleBigPlanet**TM
Fun shall overcome.

RATING PENDING
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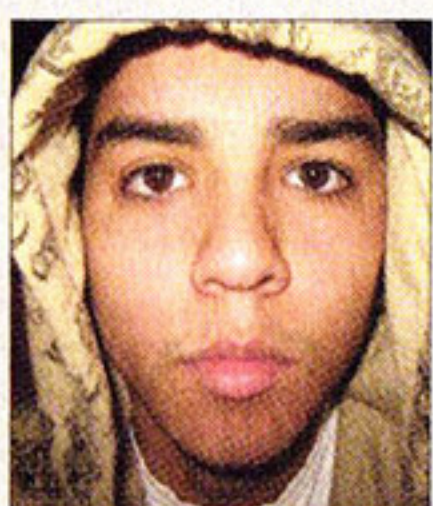
TOP FIVES

Favorites From Industry Pros And GI Readers



DEVELOPER
JAMIE FRISTROM
 Creator, Schizoid

- 1 *Kohan: Immortal Sovereigns* – PC
- 2 *Rock Band* – Xbox 360
- 3 *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* – N64
- 4 *Day of the Tentacle* – PC
- 5 *Magic: The Gathering* – Online – PC



READER
ANDREW VILLARREAL
 Lake Worth, Florida

- 1 *Ratchet & Clank* series – multi
- 2 *Call of Duty* series – multi
- 3 *Grand Theft Auto* series – multi
- 4 *Metal Gear Solid* series – multi
- 5 *Total Annihilation* – PC

Send Top Fives and a photo of yourself to:

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 (attach digital picture)

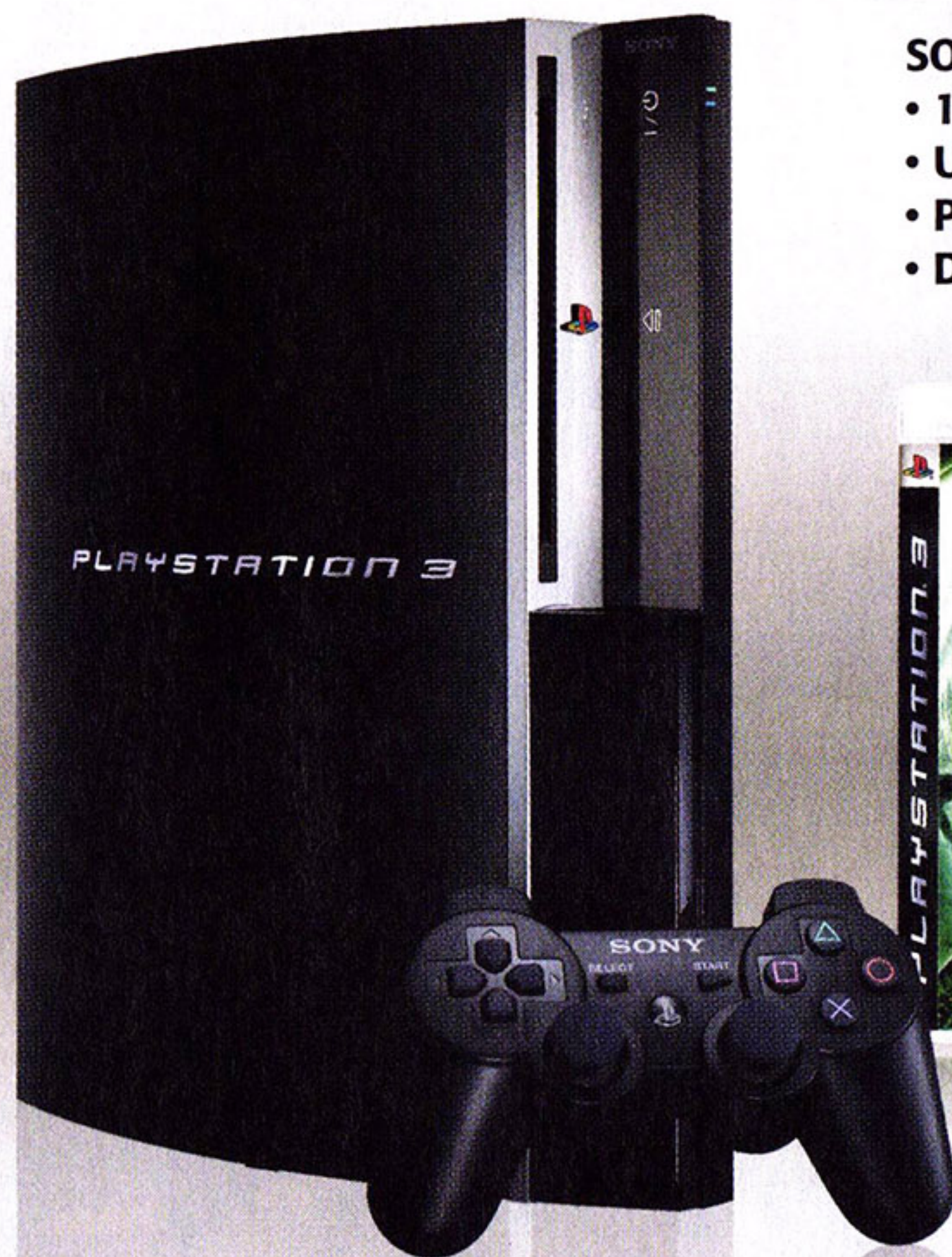
TOP TEN

Lists...Everybody Loves Lists...

Top 10 Songs You Won't Hear In *Rock Band 2*

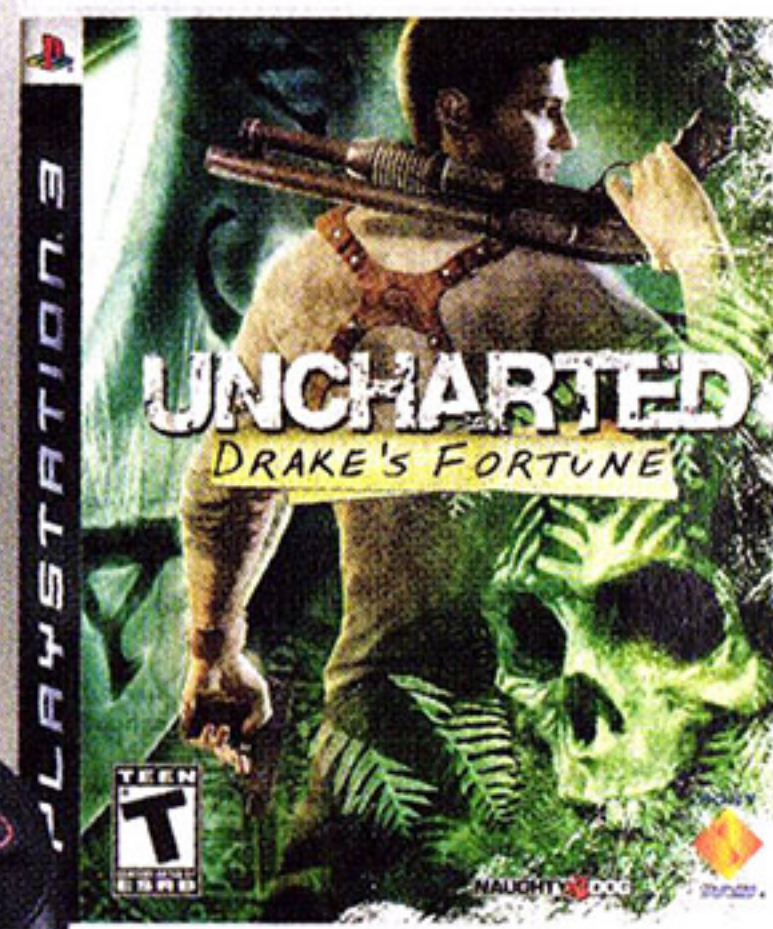
- 10 "Hazard" by Richard Marx
- 9 "There's a Kind of Hush" by Herman's Hermits
- 8 "The Wheels on the Bus (Go Round And Round)" by various artists (may appear in *Wii Music*, though)
- 7 Anything by 2 Live Crew
- 6 "Sailin'" by Christopher Cross
- 5 "5th Symphony" by Ludwig van Beethoven
- 4 "I Whooped Batman's A--" by Wesley Willis
- 3 "I Can Punch Through Walls And Cars – Basement Recording" by Andrew Reiner
- 2 "Achy Breaky Heart" by Miley Cyrus' Dad
- 1 "The Final Countdown" by Europe (for some reason. Get on it, Harmonix!)

Name That Game Answer: *Tropico*



SONY'S NEW \$499 PS3 BUNDLE COMES WITH:

- 160GB PlayStation 3
- *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune*
- Pain PlayStation Network coupon
- Dualshock 3 controller



games

SONY'S BUNDLES OF JOY

NEW 160GB PS3 & MORE

Sony was the only one of the big three console manufacturers to hold a press conference at the Games Convention in Leipzig, Germany. The company used the solo stage to announce several new hardware options. At E3 this past July, Sony announced that its new 80GB PlayStation 3 would be its "primary focus." While it seemed the days of Sony confusing consumers with multiple version of the system were over, the company is jumping back into the fray with a 160GB PS3 bundle this November for \$499. The announcement comes just as rumors that competition Microsoft may lower the price of its 120GB Xbox 360 Elite to \$399 started to circulate. Sony's 160GB PS3 – like the 80GB model – has only two USB inputs and does not support PS2 backwards compatibility.

Just in time for the release of *LittleBigPlanet* and the expanded beta program for Sony's social network, Home, the company also announced a wireless keyboard peripheral that fits over the top of your Sixaxis or Dualshock 3 controller. No price was given for the peripheral, but it will come out in late November. The unit attaches via the controller's USB port and features two shortcut buttons that will let you jump to the Friends and Message Box portions of the PS3's cross media bar during play. It also features a Touch Pad button that turns the entire keypad surface into a touch pad for moving the pointer during web browsing.

The handheld market also received attention, as Sony debuted the newly minted 3000 model PSP. This third version of the PSP features a screen that displays a greater number of colors and in a greater "intensity," and comes with a built-in microphone to improve Skype functionality. The mic may be used in future games as well.

THE NEW(ER) PSP

Players can get their hands on the new model PSP-3000 in three ways. It ships independently, with a 4GB memory stick bundle, and as the centerpiece to the previously announced *PSP Ratchet & Clank: Size Matters* PSP bundle (see last month for more details). The *Ratchet & Clank* bundle goes on sale October 14; otherwise you'll have to wait until November to get your hands on this updated PSP.

PSP-3000 4GB Memory Entertainment Pack (\$199)

- New piano black PSP with improved screen and built-in microphone
- 4GB memory stick
- Everyday Shooter PlayStation Network coupon

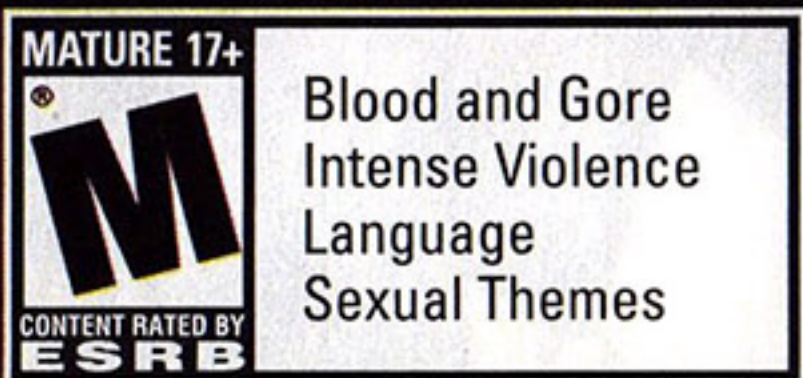
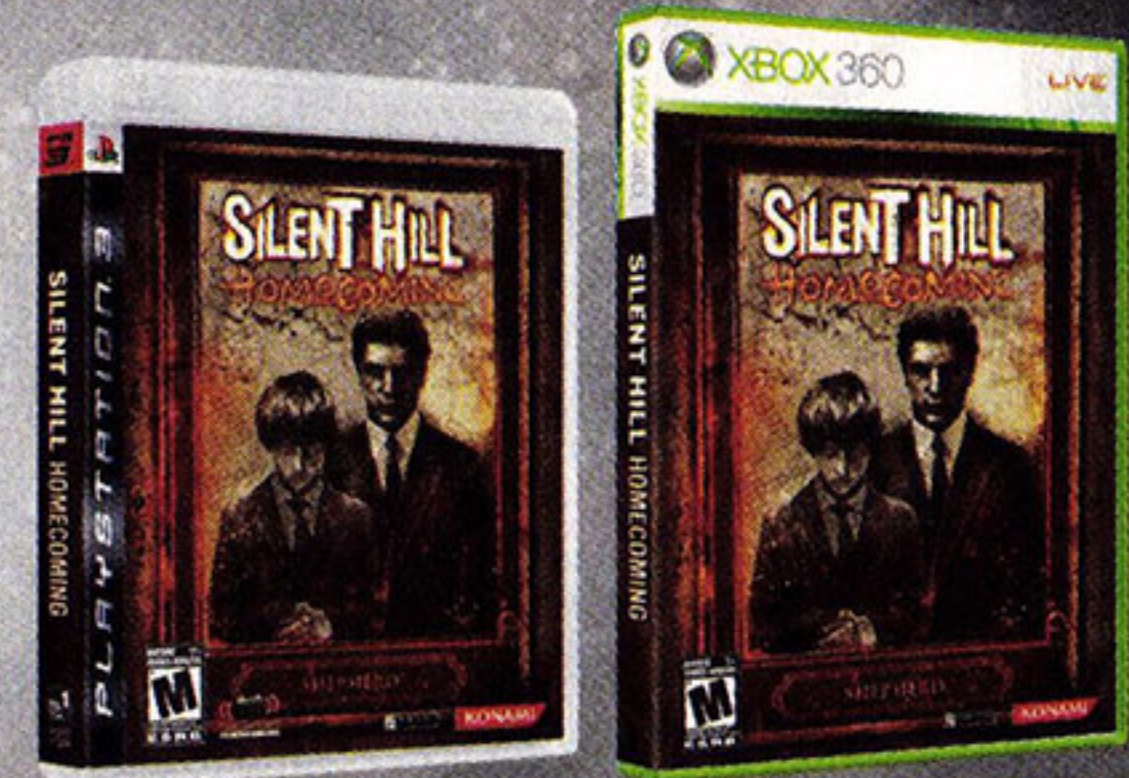


This picture from Japanese magazine *Famitsu* shows a comparison of the new PSP, highlighting less screen glare and better colors



WELCOME HOME.

SILENT HILL HOMECOMING



PLAYSTATION 3



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What if Ubisoft's PATRICE DESILETS Made the Next METAL GEAR SOLID?

■ Desilets was the creative mind behind *Prince of Persia: Sands of Time*, as well as the recent medieval crusade *Assassin's Creed*

DREAM PROJECT

My dream project would be doing the presentation aspect of an NHL game. I've got season tickets to the Montreal Canadiens, I know how a hockey game feels, and I would just love to make the experience of playing NHL hockey more vibrant. I would recreate the overall ambiance of each arena, with their own particularities (the OLE! OLE! OLE! chant here in Montreal for example or the Octopus throwing in Detroit). I would also let players continue playing even when the whistle blows, so we can have melees in front of the net, or have the player go to the bench or face-off circle, so the game never really stops.

➤ If you're anything like us, you've sat around and talked games with friends late into the night, imagining what it would be like if your favorite game creator made a game for your favorite franchise. What if Shigeru Miyamoto made the next *Sonic*? What magic would Will Wright work with *Civilization*? Our 'What If?' feature allows us to explore dream matchups like these by talking straight to the creative voices. Mind you, these comments are purely for fun – this is an exercise in the hypothetical. This month, we talked to Patrice Desilets, one of the minds behind *Assassin's Creed* and *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time*. For anyone who has played either title, his take on Kojima's classic franchise should elicit some smiles. ◀

THE PITCH

Something I like to do when designing a game – to make sure everyone on the team has the same vision – is a hypothetical 60 seconds of gameplay where I describe the experience from the gamers' point of view. I'll try to do it here.

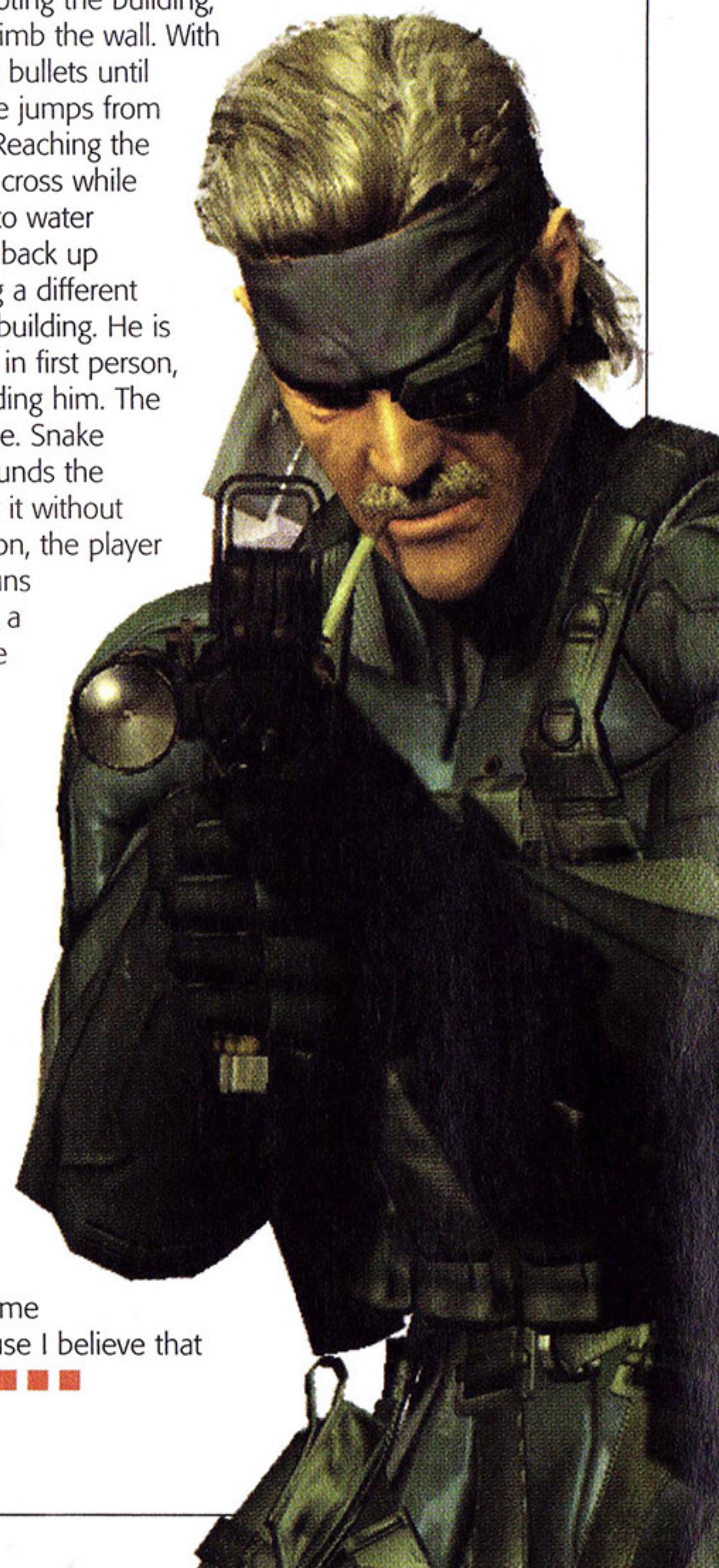
The camera pans down on city skylight, at night. A military helicopter passes by while the camera continues its pan into a dark back alley, placing itself behind Snake (young and athletic, kind of Middle-Eastern looking), in a trench coat. The player takes control, and using his left stick, Snake walks toward the end of the back alley where a crowd of NPCs can be seen, going all in the same direction. When the player enters the streets, it is jam packed, and using his free hands, he maneuvers through it without losing his speed. Through speakers in the street, we can hear: "Please, evacuate the zone..." With a voiceover command, Otacon says, "Snake, your target is located inside the Military HQ, on your left at the next corner street. Try locating him without being detected by the military, and don't shoot any civilians. If you do, your nanomachines will kill you." Snake replies, "Yeah, I know."

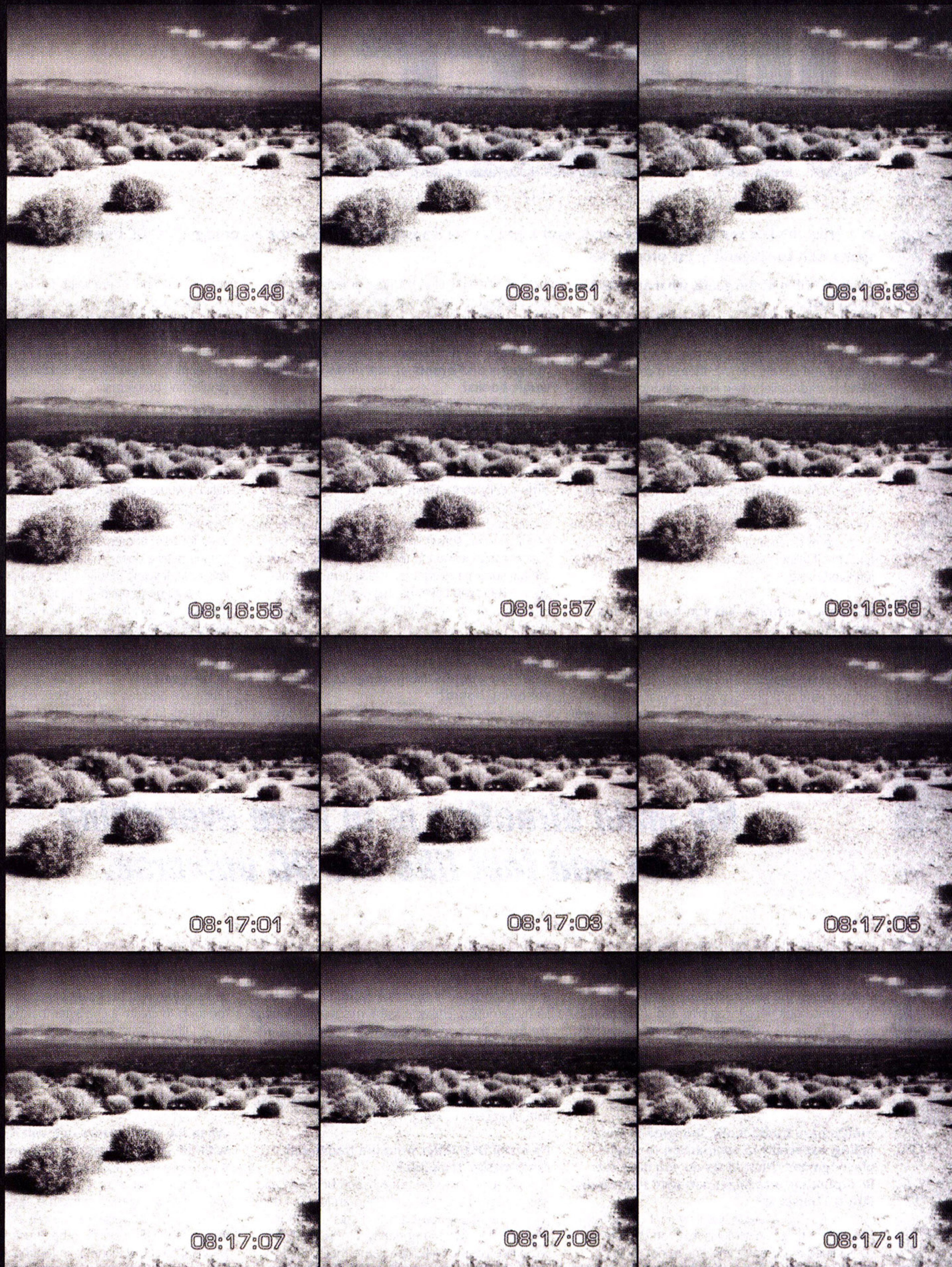
The player reaches a group of four soldiers blocking his path. The soldier says, "Can't go through; you must follow the crowd to the evacuation zone." Player draws a tranquilizer blade and kills the first soldier. They all draw their weapons, but before they can attack, the player, using the slow-motion ability, locks on and kills them all in one circular shot. Things returns to normal speed as the camera cuts to showing Snake finishing his move as they all fall on the ground. The camera goes back behind Snake, and the alarm blows. Two Metal Gear Rays start chasing the player, making the crowd go crazy. Using the right trigger, the player makes Snake run, then he presses and holds the feet button to make him do some free running, leaping over cars, hot dog stands, and objects found in a modern city. The MGR are shooting at Snake, killing civilian NPCs along the way. The player returns to the back alley and leaps off the wall, catching an emergency staircase. The MGR are shooting the building, destroying the staircase that falls. Player uses "grab" to climb the wall. With his nanomachine power-ups, he runs really fast, dodging bullets until he's on top of the building. Using his free run abilities, he jumps from building to building, still being chased by the two MGR. Reaching the end of a building, Snake jumps down with his arms in a cross while birds fly away in slow motion, but he accidentally falls into water and drowns. The player uses his "Rewind" abilities to go back up the building, and restarts before the fatal jump. Choosing a different path, he goes right and uses a rope to rappel down the building. He is right behind the HQ. Finding a trash bin, he hides. While in first person, he can see the two MGR searching the area, without finding him. The MGR says, "He's gone." They leap away, leaving the scene. Snake exits the trash can, rapidly climbs over a fence that surrounds the HQ, and runs towards a military vehicle and slides under it without being detected by patrolling guards. Using his Snake Vision, the player pinpoints the guard locations. At the right moment, he runs toward the door and enters the HQ. Once inside, he's in a large warehouse, full of military equipment. In the middle of the room stands a Metal Gear. Otacon says, "This is your target, Snake. Can you get to it and destroy it?" Snake responds, "I'll see what I can do. But I only have one cigarette left, and my tranquilizer baton...it won't be easy" Otacon encourages him: "You have to, Snake." He replies: "Yeah, I know..."

Before the player can get close to the Metal Gear, it starts to move and shoot at the player...and kills him. "SNAKE! SNAKE! NO... This is not what happened!" Otacon screams.

The game reloads to: Old Snake sitting on a weird machine, with Otacon nearby, working on a computer. Snake: "Damned memories! I'm losing it, Otacon..." Otacon speaks up: "Don't worry, just lie back, and retry."

What I tried to do with this "sixty seconds" is incorporate some elements of my vision of third-person action-adventure game design, mainly a fluid character, short cutscenes, easy-to-use melee combat and some time control elements. I've given a humorous feel to it, because I believe that MGS is perfect the way it is, even with its imperfection. ■ ■ ■





navy.com/seals

do you have what it takes?

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CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

1989 **Big Break**
Lee gets his big break filling in for well known illustrator Marc Silvestri for *Uncanny X-Men* #248

1991 **Uncanny Success**
 Jim Lee experiences his coming out as a major comic book figure with *X-Men* #1, the first of a new mutant series he made with writer Chris Claremont. The issue is a monster hit, selling 8 million copies worldwide

1992 **Going Indie**
 Along with seven other artists, Lee leaves Marvel to form Image Comics. His wing is called Wildstorm and his featured series is *WildC.A.T.s*

1998 **Going Big**
Lee leaves Image Comics in order to concentrate on doing more illustration work. In the process he sells Wildstorm to industry giant DC Comics

2002 **Critical Mass**
 Lee creates his most enduring work with writer Jeph Loeb: a 12 issue run of *Batman: Hush*—one of the greatest Batman stories ever made

2003 **Rookie Game**
 The next year saw Lee involved with his first video game, *Batman: The Rise of Sin Tzu* by Ubisoft. The game is not successful and Lee's contribution is limited to the creation of the title character

2005 **Back to Bat**
Lee takes on another Gotham-based project, *All Star Batman*, with legendary scribe Frank Miller

2008 **A Massive Undertaking**
Sony and DC announce the upcoming MMO DC Universe, which is being guided by Lee

JIM LEE

EXECUTIVE CREATIVE DIRECTOR, DC UNIVERSE

>> Artist Jim Lee is a legend in the comic world, and is now lending his talents to the upcoming MMO DC Universe. We recently spoke with Lee regarding the project. <<

As an avid fan of the genre, what attracts you to MMOs?

I think there's something to be said for playing a game where you're playing against other people. The thing about single-player games is that you feel isolated and cut off. For me, there's a certain suspension of disbelief when you're playing an MMO—you actually feel like you're in that world. I felt like I was leading a group of 30 adventurers against a dragon. You needed to communicate with them and develop strategies and tactics. There's a level of realism and verisimilitude that I felt was amazing. I was actually involved in the game before Sony. DC had wanted to do an MMO game based on their universe for quite some time and they had explored a couple of different avenues. I was always pushing for Sony [Online] because of my experience in playing EverQuest.

What do you think that you bring to this project?

I've been reading comics for almost 40 years. When you create a game like this you want it to be true to the source material. That's not something you can just read and bone up on in a year or two. People that work in comics, for the most part, were fans since they were little kids. You can just feel

that have been written by these amazing authors and we're going to try to adapt as many as we can and get them in there.

Will there be crossovers between events in the game and events or storylines in the DC comic books?

There better be! [Laughs] I would be very disappointed if there weren't. One of the advantages of having me in this position between the world of comics and the world of video games is that we can better coordinate this kind of stuff. I'm in almost daily contact with [DC]. One of the cool things about this game is that we will tie in certain events and storylines that are going on in print. You could even do something as simple as there's a Thanegarian invasion in the comic books, and that's the big summer event that effects ten different core books. Then you have that happen in game, so the missions reflects some of the stories that appear in print.

What's your role in the development process? Are you directing things or more of a sounding board?

I would say it's a mix of both. My main directive is to have everything look and feel like the DC

amount of grind. There will be a lot more flexibility in the types of groups you can create and people will be able to teleport to other parts of the world very quickly. I think in trying to reduce the experience of being a superhero down to its most fun and exciting elements, we're solving a lot of the [traditional] problems.

Character balancing must be difficult in DCU. You have characters like Superman, who is essentially invincible.

That's one of the big challenges of the game, but again, I would point you to the comics. There's that fiction that already exists where Batman takes down Superman. We don't have to make it up. There are ways for normal men that are smart to have the means to take down characters that are seemingly invincible. It won't be difficult to incorporate that into the game through items and countermeasures that you acquire. It's essentially a very complex game of "Rock, Paper, Scissors."

How much can you customize your character in the game?

I think we decided to let players customize their characters to a certain point, [but] we didn't want characters that completely clashed with the heri-

My main directive is to have everything look and feel like the DC universe.

it through the stories they write. They know who these characters are. Hopefully, I bring that type of knowledge and understanding of the DC universe to the game. The goal is to make a game that non-comic book people can play and understand, so we'll focus on Superman, Batman and the characters from the Justice League that people know, but at the same time we'll put in characters like Ambush Bug and Harley Quinn and all these other great tertiary characters.

MMOs have traditionally struggled in storytelling, especially in comparison to single-player games. What ideas do you have for incorporating a stronger narrative framework into DC Universe?

With MMOs, you're really creating a lot of flexibility. Part of the fun of an MMO is that you don't feel constrained to do one thing. You're not on this conveyor belt or rat's maze being forced to go from point A to point B. You have to understand that it's a different medium. But I think the thing about the DC universe is that these characters and storylines have been around for nearly seven decades.... At the end of the day, we have all these great stories

universe. I oversee a team of seven artists here at Wildstorm and we produce all the concept art. Then I work very closely with the 3D modelers at Sony in refining the assets they create based on our art. As far as gameplay, characters, the missions and things like that—that's something where I'm more of a sounding board. Part of what I do is report back to my bosses back in New York City on what the game experience is like. For me to be able to speak to that coherently, I need to know what's going on with all aspects of the game.

How will DCU differ from the traditional MMO design template?

This game is unique as it's a hybrid between and action-packed console game and an MMO. I think having the physics-based action sets it apart from other MMOs. Most importantly, I think the fiction will guide us into making a game that's unique, and hopefully be true to the spirit of superheroes: exciting, fast-paced, and dynamic. Being true to superheroes means doing amazing, fantastic things like running up the side of building, throwing cars half a mile, and defeating aliens on a citywide scale. We really wanted to reduce the

tage of the DC universe. To that end, we established that there are golden age, silver age, and bronze eras of how heroes looked in the DC universe. If they're a big golden age fans, they'll have the tools to create a character that would fit in that time. Other players might want to do something that's more updated and reflective of the characters you see now. You'll have the tools to do that, but not in horrible ways that look like there was no hand guiding the art direction.

When the game comes out, will it be in line with the current comic book continuity?

It would be too difficult logistically to have a game that, when it launches, fits in very tightly and neatly with what's going on in print. The goal is that, when you enter DC Universe, it's the way most people imagine the DC universe to be. Bruce Wayne is Batman; the Daily Planet is in Metropolis; Clark Kent is a reporter. Thereafter, as we tie into things that are going on in the comic books, we can do short-term storylines where we change the status quo for a bit. That makes the game feel like it's alive.

■ In addition to his continuing comic work, Jim Lee is overseeing the design and artwork for Sony Online's epic MMO DC Universe

CRAFTING A UNIVERSE

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Blood and Gore
Intense Violence



PLAYSTATION 3



Games for Windows



XBOX 360 LIVE



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EVERY LEGEND

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EVERY MYTH

Has an end.

LEGENDARY

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is the iPhone the next great handheld gaming device?



MAKING THE CALL

If you don't already have one of Apple's 3G iPhones, we know you want one. This all-in-one phone boasts an amazing interface and more applications than some people's home PCs. But can it game? We ran Apple's sexy black device through a pixelated obstacle course and were pleasantly surprised by how naturally it handles games.

The iPhone's simple but elegant interface doesn't work for every type of game, but it's perfect for puzzle, arcade, or otherwise quirky titles. The system's tilt functionality works surprising well, the touch screen feels responsive and accurate, and the system handles 3D graphics with moderate flair. At times we couldn't help but pine for an analog stick, but, of course, that goes against Apple's overall vision for the device.

Whether or not the iPhone will become a gaming device that rivals the DS or PSP is questionable. The more important issue is whether or not developers will embrace the iPhone as a unique gaming platform. Can they continue to utilize its technological specialties to create inventive and fun gaming experiences? If early attempts are any indication, we are off to a good start.

Pricing starts at \$199.95 (depending on eligibility and contract agreement) • www.apple.com/iphone

iGAME

The iPhone hasn't been out very long, but there is already a sea of games available at the new App Store. We dove in and put several of them through their paces and were immediately impressed by the level of ingenuity developers have put into these mobile games. To make your decision easier, we whittled the list down to 10 games worth downloading while you wait for the bus.



- 1: Aurora Feint: The Beginning • Free**
The solid puzzle RPG gameplay that lets you compete against your friends isn't the only great thing about this game. It's also free.
- 2: Dizzy Bee • \$2.99**
Use the iPhone's tilt sensitivity to help Dizzy collect flowers and save his fruit friends from baddies.
- 3: Trism • \$4.99**
Possibly the best puzzle game on the system, this multi-angle slide and match game has three different modes.
- 4: MotionX Poker • \$4.99**
A solid poker game with a twist. Instead of getting dealt your hand, you get to roll it.
- 5: Critter Crunch • \$7.99**
Think Root Beer Tapper with bugs. This colorful puzzler is one of the most addictive games on the iPhone.
- 6: de Blob • \$7.99**
Guide de Blob around the boring monochromatic world and splash some color on the world with the game's intuitive tilt controls.
- 7: Imangi • \$3.99**
Think Scrabble meets Tetris Attack, as you slide letters across a board to make as many words as possible.
- 8: Galcon • \$9.99**
This pick-up-and-play strategy title has you sending armadas of ships across the galaxy to take over enemy planets.
- 9: Vay • \$4.99**
An update to the classic Sega CD RPG, this version features new widescreen graphics and touch screen controls.
- 10: Tap Tap Revenge • Free**
This rhythm music game has you tapping away to a few free techno tracks, but promises more downloads in the future.

For glory, fight on the front lines.

For victory, fight in the shadows.



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peripherals

ION AUDIO DRUM ROCKER FOR ROCK BAND

GOOD ●●●●●●●●●●

Drum Rocker's high-impact plastic pads sound quieter and feel more like real electronic drums. Probably because they are real electronic drums. By swapping out the games control module with a real drum brain you can start making your own music. But using the kit just to play Rock Band is completely acceptable (and totally awesome) as well. The drum kit took two of our brightest editors an hour to put together, but it offers plenty of flexibility to configure the set the way you want. Our biggest qualm is the kick pedal, which negated the pads' audio softness by being loud enough to annoy our downstairs neighbors.

\$299.99 (Drum Kit) \$49.99 (Cymbal Expansion Pack) • www.drumrocker.com

pc

CREATIVE HS-1200 WIRELESS GAMING HEADSET

OK ●●●●●●●●●●

Gamers are often dubious about wireless headphones, and rightly so. The audio is either not up to the corded quality or you have to worry about interference from other devices. Creative's HS-1200 cans made us forget we were even wearing a wireless set. The speakers performed well, the controls feel solid, and the unit's range extends 40-plus feet, but the mic levels are a little low. The ear cups also may be too small for some people's tastes, but at least the next time you get pwnd in an online match you won't have to worry about yanking your PC off the desk as you throw your headset against a wall.

\$99.99 • us.creative.com



toys

ULTIMATE WALL•E REMOTE-CONTROL ROBOT

Sounds like WALL•E has learned a few new tricks since his summer movie debut. This remote-controlled replica of our new favorite robot is packed with original voice work from the film. It also plays music from any MP3 player, features eyes that light up and blink, and can be programmed to execute more than 1000 different action sequences. With built in motion sensors, WALL•E can dance, follow you around the house, or explore the environment on his own. Start stockpiling your trash now, so he'll have plenty to clean up.

\$259.95 • www.disneyshopping.com

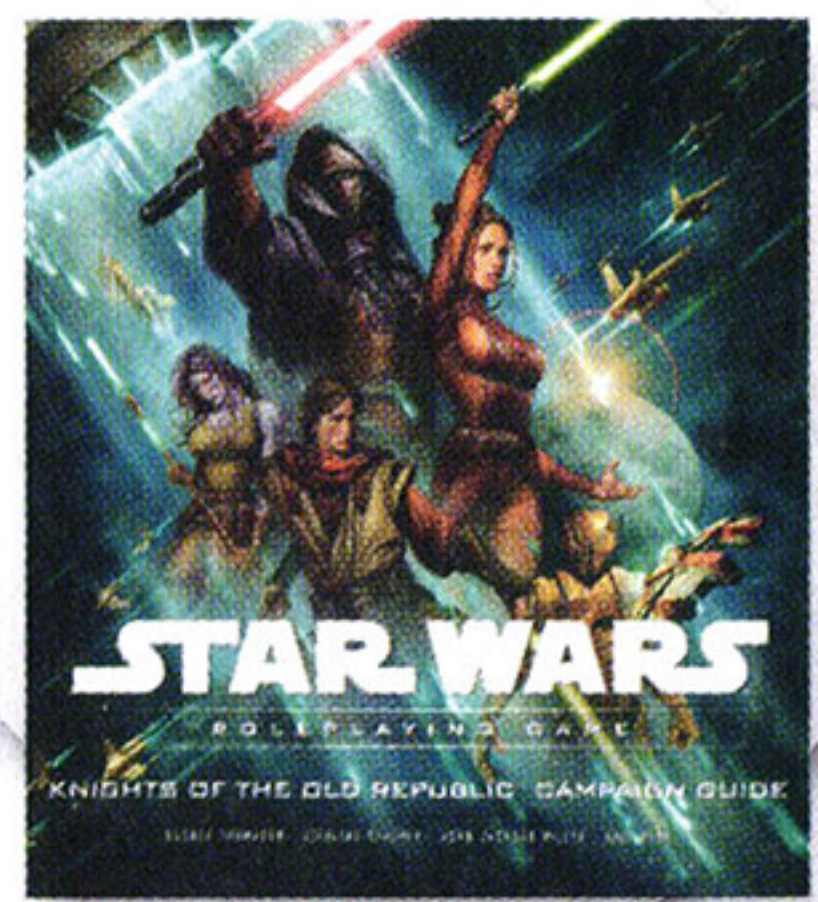


nerd

KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC CAMPAIGN GUIDE

Tabletop gamers who haven't played the new Saga Edition of the Star Wars RPG are missing out. This excellent rule system receives a new expansion with the new Knights of the Old Republic Campaign Guide. This lavishly illustrated volume details all the history, ships, characters, and other details needed to flesh out a campaign set some 4,000 years before the Battle of Yavin. However, the real selling point is the collected info of all the video games, comics, and books set in this era of the galaxy far, far away. As an added bonus, the guide just happens to release around the same time as the Star Wars Miniatures KOTOR boosters.

\$39.95 • www.wizards.com



media shelf



Street Fighter Tribute

This stylish art book featuring work from Adam Hughes, J. Scott Campbell, and Gabe (Mike Krauhlic) from Penny Arcade is already sold out in hardcover, so you better order the paperback soon.

\$39.99 • www.udonentertainment.com



Mass Effect Ascension

This second novel based off the hit BioWare RPG is set two months after the first game and details the events leading up to the sequel.

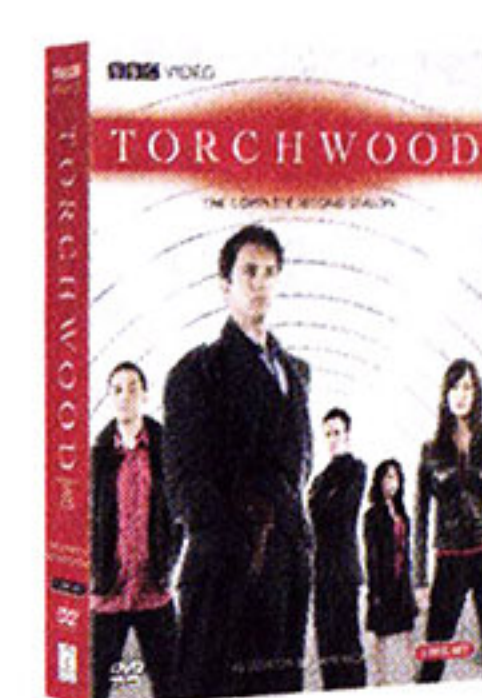
\$7.99 • www.amazon.com



Prince of Persia: The Graphic Novel Collector's Edition

This graphic novel doesn't actually play into the story of any of the games that share its name, but that doesn't mean it's not entertaining for anyone who enjoys comics.

\$29.99 • www.amazon.com



Torchwood Season Two

This Doctor Who spinoff follows the adventures of the Torchwood Institute, a secret organization founded to protect humanity from threats it doesn't even know exist.

\$79.98 • www.bbcshop.com

Terror has a new hat.

Thought orcs were tough? Wait till you meet the business end of a pointy hat. Fight nasty gnomes and fatal flamingoes in zOMG!, the new casual MMO that turns the world of Gaia Online on its head. **Play now for free.**

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zomg.com

CELIA PIERCE
DIRECTOR, EXPERIMENTAL GAME LAB
GEORGIA TECH, FESTIVAL CHAIR, INDIECADE



CONSOLE PUBLISHERS FLOCK TO INDIE DEVELOPERS LIKE BEES TO A FLOWER

The big studios are finally recognizing that indie developers have succeeded where they have failed...

When asked if someone from IndieCade could write an editorial about how the introduction of downloadable console portals would affect the indie games scene, both positively and negatively, I was hard-pressed to think of a downside. I suppose there are many: the potential for indie developers to sell out, the possible exploitation by publishers, and the relatively small sales figures (at least at the moment). All these are, I suppose, cause for concern. But the upsides are far greater. In fact, it's somewhat baffling that the game industry is so late to embrace indie fare.

By way of comparison, the film industry has, for half a century, embraced mainstream studio product and indie fare in its repertoire in a synergistic fashion that has benefited both sides. This "diversification of species" has helped create a more robust ecosystem that is a win for business and consumers alike. Conversely, the video game industry has, up until now, borne a striking resemblance to the film industry of the 1930s and '40s. Under the old studio system, artists – including actors, directors and writers (the latter of whom typically received little or no credit for their work) – were salaried employees of studios, who exercised complete and hegemonic control over creative output. While the fledgling film industry was already better at more diverse fare (and budgets) and at reaching broader audiences than the game industry is today, creative decisions were made in a top-down fashion. Studio executives decided what did and did not get made, how it was made, etc. Sound familiar? This system produced wonderful and artistic products ranging from the spectacle of the Busby Berkeley musical, to the humble but perennial Frank Capra fable, to epic historical masterpieces (also called "costume pictures") like *Gone with the Wind*.

One could argue that at the point film industry got indie religion, it was on the verge of fossilizing into a massive hegemonic dinosaur. Overhead was immense, and the studio culture was one of risk

aversion. But the studio system seized the opportunity presented by indie film and integrated this new generation of creators into its ecosystem, to everyone's benefit.

Case in point, summer 2008. Many of the summer's box office hits have had indie directors at their helms. Consider *The Dark Knight*, a big-budget mainstream film that has been heralded as the most sophisticated and artistic offering in the overwrought Batman franchise. The film's ad campaign could have easily read "From the people who brought you *Memento*." That's right, Christopher Nolan, of time-bending, amnesia-tattooing *Memento* fame, was at the helm of the biggest summer blockbuster of 2008, as well as its predecessor. Film studios have leveraged the potential profitability of low-budget films by managing risk. *Billy Elliot* earned over \$100 million at theaters, but cost only \$5 million to make. *Memento* cost the same and earned nearly \$40 million worldwide. As of this writing, Nolan's decidedly indie-flavored *The Dark Knight* has earned \$800 million worldwide, with production budget of \$150 million.

So the real questions regarding the game industry should be, what took them so long? One possible reason might be the taboo against hard drives and "soft" product, spurred by piracy-anxiety, in spite of the fact that the Internet was breathing new life into the "dying" PC market. Console companies have finally followed in the footsteps of Shockwave and Steam, whose vision was to take Wal-Mart out of the game distribution equation. Downloadable games are the "wave of the present." It's about time the console-makers caught on.

As a game design professor, an indie game festival chair, and a game designer, I find it difficult to see a downside. Sitting in the Game Developers Choice Awards at GDC 2008, I was struck by what, from my albeit biased perspective, appeared to be an "indie invasion." Major awards were carried off by games that got their start on indie festival circuit, including *Portal* and *Flow*, and a nod to *Everyday Shooter*, by one-man indie game jam band Jon Mak. This year,

GDC indie poster boy Jonathan Blow made his console debut with *Braid* on Xbox Live, a genre-bending masterpiece that is one part *Super Mario Bros.*, one part *Einstein's Dreams*, and one part *Memento*.

I suppose one could argue that these indie developers have become sell-outs, but that would only be the case if they compromised their artistic integrity. Instead, what seems to be happening is that, as Raph Koster puts it, citing *Line Rider*, "indie is the new industry." IndieCade's E3 2008 showcase drew publishers like bees to a flower. Companies are still vying for IP ownership, but are willing to give up a great portion of the pie if it's already baked, so to speak.

The big studios are finally recognizing that indie developers have succeeded where they have failed: at innovating, at finding new audiences, and doing it for a fraction of the cost. From scouting for new talent at indie game festivals like the IGF, Slamdance, and IndieCade, to starting divisions devoted to cultivating innovation, the game industry is finally catching on. Slow initial sales should not be a deterrent; they will grow over time. ("The Long Tail" anyone?) Indie games can also be more profitable since they cost so much less to make. Mighty oaks from little acorns grow. Just ask Chris Nolan or the producers of *Billy Elliot*. As to game companies working for "the man," Flow's That Game Company is developing its next anxiously awaited PS3 offering. While Sony is guiding them through the process, the publisher is letting them do their own thing creatively. How else could a game called *Flow* make it onto an adrenaline-infused console platform like the PS3?

Celia Pearce is an Assistant Professor of Digital Media and Director of the Experimental Game Lab at Georgia Tech, and the Festival Chair for IndieCade, which has curated the Indie Games Showcase for the last two E3 Summits and is launching its first juried festival October 10-17 at Open Satellite in Bellevue, Washington. For more info visit www.indiecade.com. ■ ■ ■

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Wii



XBOX 360 LIVE



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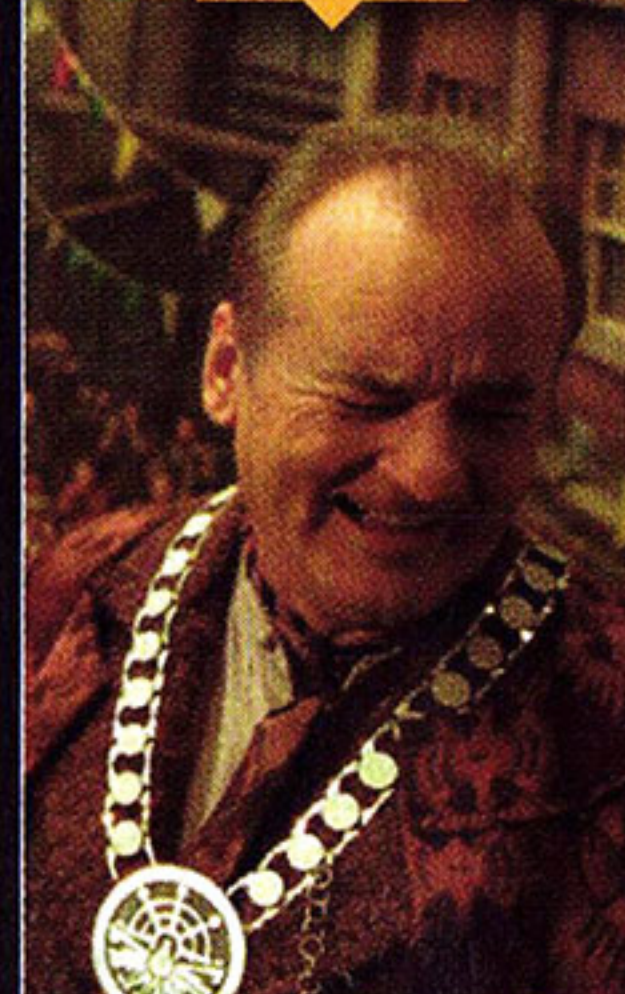
01

MARVEL ZOMBIES 3
If you thought the these Marvel Zombies were crazy the first two times around, wait until you see what happens when they enter the Marvel Universe proper. That's right, this continuity story will change one Marvel character's life forever (or until Marvel decides to change it).



03

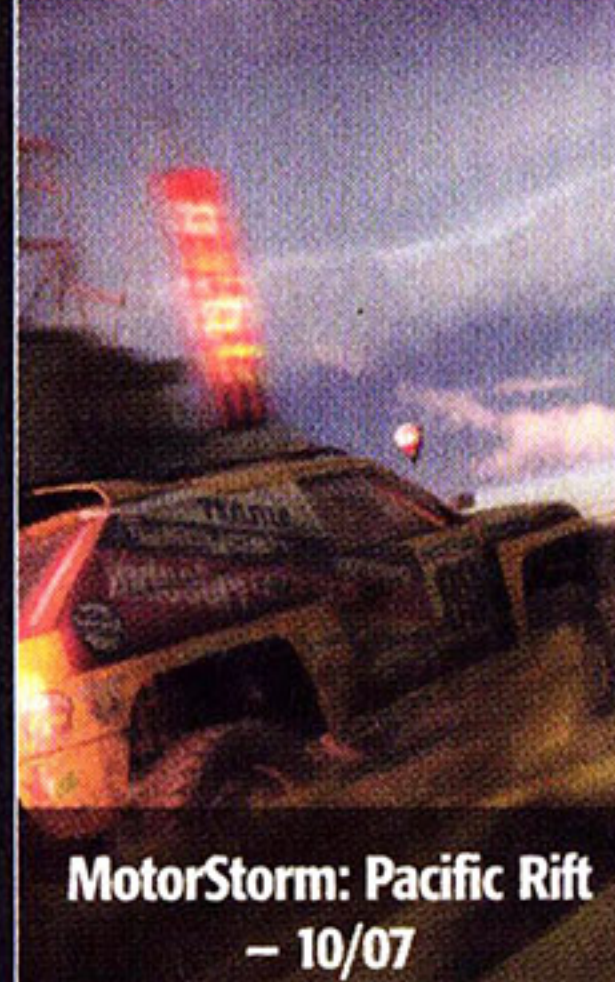
In the '90s, casting Bill Murray and Tim Robbins in the same movie would guarantee success. Today, it's probably best that they stick to art house movies. If you don't believe us, go see *City of Ember* on the 10th. It may be as good as *The Core*... if it's lucky.



07-08

NEW RELEASES

- 30 Rock Season 2 - DVD
- BattleForge - PC
- Bleach: Dark Souls - DS
- Cooking Mama: World Kitchen - Wii
- Crash: Mind Over Mutant - 360, Wii, PS2, DS, PSP
- Everlight - PC
- Exit - DS
- Fallout 3 - PS3, 360, PC
- Fracture - PS3, 360
- Imagine: Babysitters - DS
- Imagine: Fashion Designer New York - DS
- Imagine: Wedding Designer - DS
- Kage Densetsu: The Legend of Kage 2 - DS
- Midnight Club: LA Remix - PSP
- Midnight Club: Los Angeles - PS3, 360
- Monopoly - 360, Wii
- Moto GP '08 - PS3, 360, PC
- MotorStorm: Pacific Rift - PS3
- NBA 09: The Inside - PS3, PS2, PSP
- NBA 2K9 - PS3, 360, PS2
- NBA Live 09 - PS3, 360, Wii, PS2, PSP
- Prey the Stars - DS
- The Simpsons Season 11 - DVD
- Six Flags: Fun Park - Wii, DS

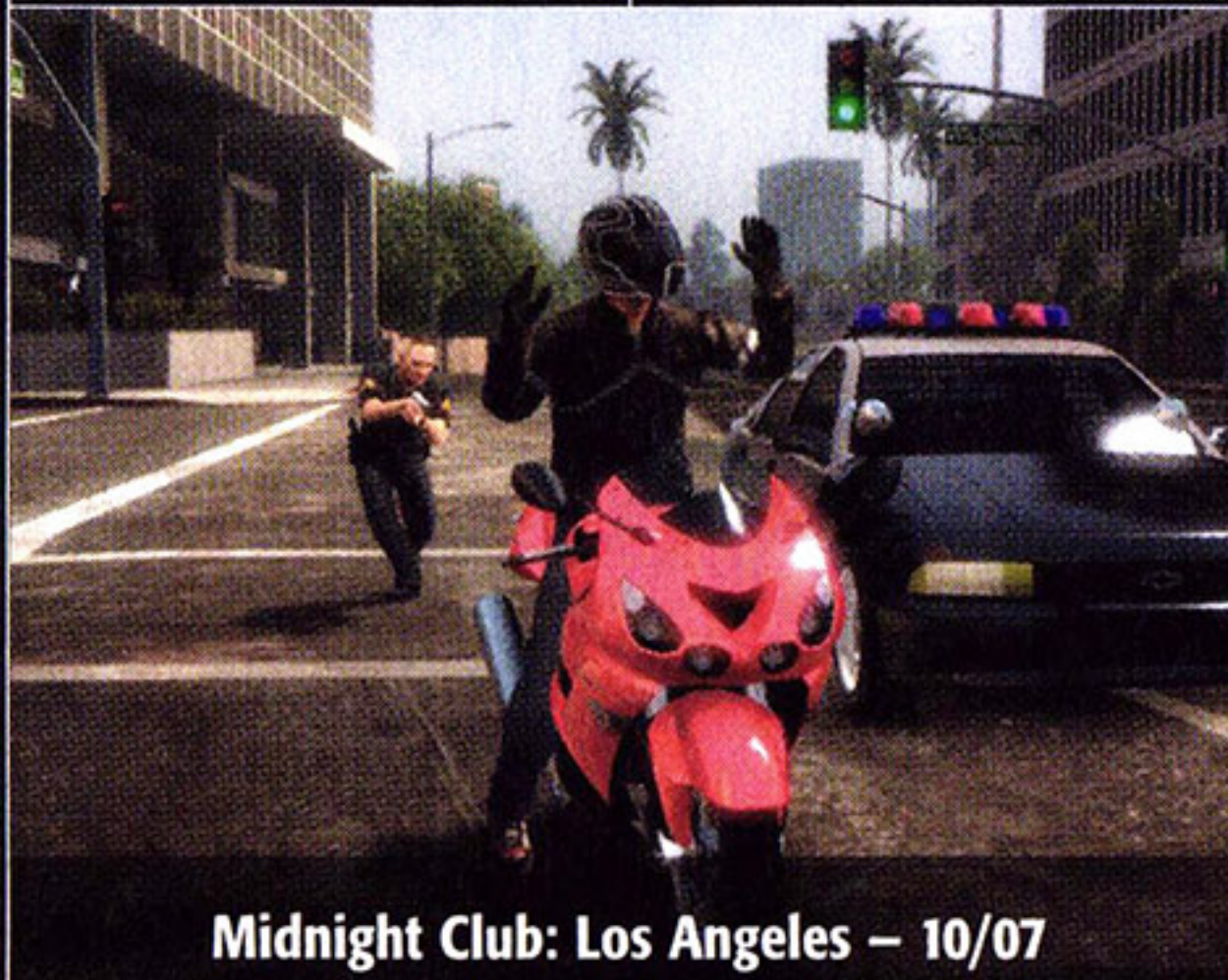


MotorStorm: Pacific Rift - 10/07

10

BLIZZCON 2008

Are you a World of Warcraft addict? Is there a player on your server that you think might be a chick? Are you strangely attracted to her/him? If you answered "Yes" to any of these questions, head to Blizzcon. You may meet this she-man in person! The next step is an in-game wedding. If love isn't what you are after, Blizzard's new games will also show.



Midnight Club: Los Angeles - 10/07



Saints Row 2 - 10/14

NEW RELEASES

- Avatar The Last Airbender: Into the Inferno - PS2, DS
- Baja 1000 - PS3, 360, Wii, PS2
- Blitz: The League II - PS3, 360
- Boogie: Superstar - Wii
- Bratz: Girls Really Rock - Wii, PS2, DS
- Dance Dance Revolution: Universe 3 - 360
- Deer Hunter Tournament - 360, PC
- End War - PS3, 360, PC, DS
- FIFA Soccer 2009 - PS3, 360, PS2, PC, DS, PSP
- Golden Axe: Beast Rider - PS3, 360
- Littlest Pet Shop - Wii, DS, PC
- Mana Khemia - PSP
- Mushroom Men: Rise of the Fungi - DS
- Naked Brothers Band - Wii, DS
- Naruto: Ultimate Ninja Storm - PS3
- Robocalypse - DS
- Rock Revolution - PS3, 360, Wii, DS
- Saints Row 2 - PS3, 360, PC
- Shaun White Snowboarding - PS3, 360, Wii, PS2, PC, DS, PSP
- SOCOM: Confrontation - PS3
- Spectrobes: Beyond the Portals - DS
- Spray - Wii
- Syberia - DS

14-16

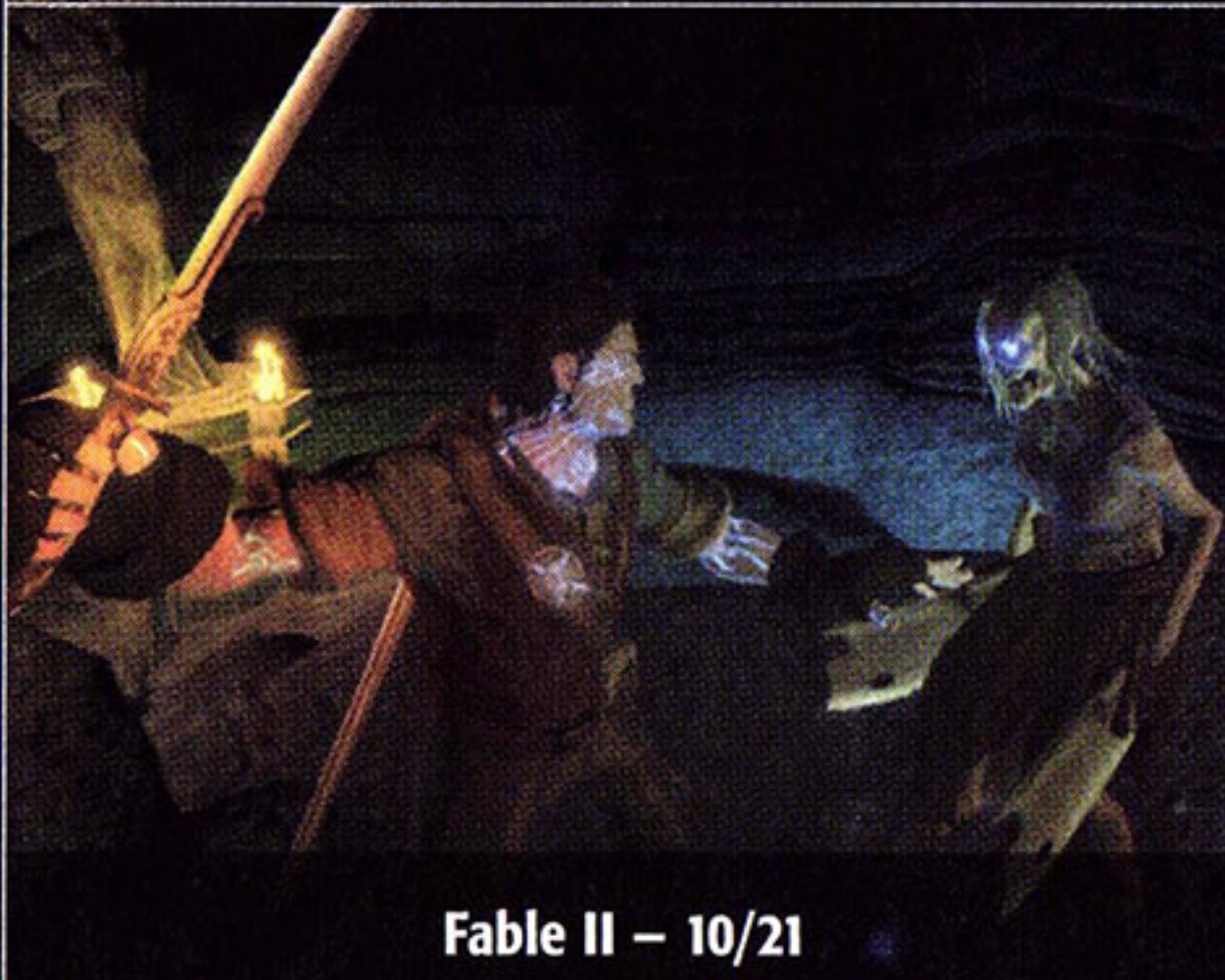
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18

WORLD OF WARCRAFT TCG CHAMPIONSHIP

The search for the nerdy Jesus Ferguson begins! Held in Paris, France, the World of Warcraft TCG Championship spans two days, and will hand out over €200,000 in cash prizes, plus invaluable bear mount loot cards.

Ben Reeves vowed to give his firstborn child an extreme name similar to Max Payne. Right now, if it's a boy: Doug Damage. If it's a girl: (sigh) also Doug Damage. Ah, Ben. Think of this when you go see *Max Payne* today!



Fable II - 10/21

21-22

NEW RELEASES

- All-Star Cheer Squad - Wii, DS
- Castlevania: Order of Ecclesia - DS
- Dead Space - PS3, 360
- Dead Space: Downfall - Blu-Ray, DVD
- Ener-G: Dance Squad - DS
- Fable II - 360
- Family Guy Vol. 6 - DVD
- Game Party II - Wii
- Garfield Gets Real - Wii, DS
- Ghostbusters - PS3, 360, Wii, PC, DS
- LittleBigPlanet - PS3
- Rock Band 2 - PS3
- Rock Band 2 Special Edition (w/ instruments) - PS3, 360
- Spider-Man: Web of Shadows - PS3, 360, Wii, PS2, DS, PSP
- SpongeBob: Gloob of Doom - Wii, DS
- Star Ocean: First Departure - PSP
- Tak: Mojo Mistake - DS
- Think Fast - Wii



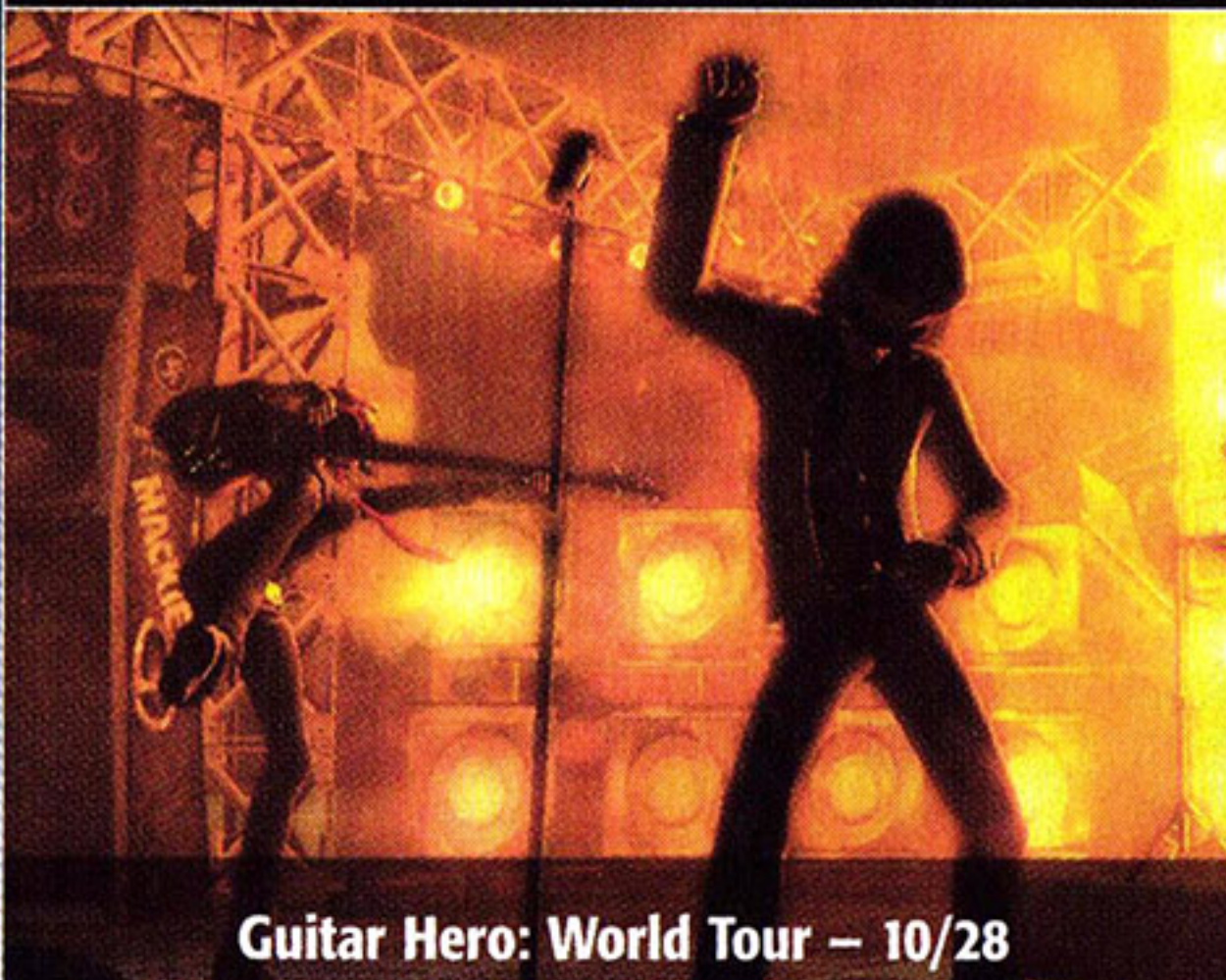
Dead Space: Downfall



25

CUBS WIN WORLD SERIES!!!

Exclusive: Game Informer has learned that the Chicago Cubs will win the final game of the World Series today. Head down to Vegas and put your life savings on Cubs. It's a sure bet. Nothing horrible ever happens to the Cubs.



Guitar Hero: World Tour - 10/28

28-29

NEW RELEASES

- Ben 10: Alien Force - Wii, DS, PSP
- Bigfoot: Collision Course - Wii, DS
- Club Penguin: Elite Penguin Force - DS
- Command & Conquer: Red Alert 3 - 360, PC
- Dancing With the Stars: Get Your Dance On - Wii, DS
- Guitar Hero: World Tour - PS3, 360, Wii, PS2
- Guitar Hero: World Tour Band Kit (w/instruments) - PS3, 360, Wii, PS2
- High School Musical 3: Senior Year - 360, Wii, PS2, DS
- Hunt for Black Beard's Booty - Wii
- Monkey Mischief - Wii
- My Sims Kingdom - Wii, DS
- NHL 09 - PS3, 360, PS2, PC
- Ninja Town - DS
- Safecracker - Wii
- SingStar Country - PS2
- SingStar Legends - PS2
- SingStar Vol. 2 - PS3
- Skate City Heroes - Wii

30

JOKER

While locked away in Arkham Asylum, Gotham City has fallen through the Joker's fingers. What does he do to get it back? He goes to city hall to file rezoning petitions to get territories back. Just kidding! He murders lots of people. This 128-page story features the talents of scribe Brian Azzarello (*100 Bullets*) and Lee Bermejo (*Hellblazer* covers).





Saints Row 2

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The task Cryptic Studios has undertaken is no easy feat. Star Trek

is one of the most familiar and recognized pop culture franchises in the world. Its enthusiasts were holding conventions and quoting scripts years before most other fan communities even sprouted. Needless to say, this group has high expectations about how the object of their affection should be treated. In a second group that only sometimes intersects with the first, sit the MMO players. They devote thousands of hours to their hobby, and any new title attempting to grab their attention amid the myriad options must meet a high quality bar. Finally, sitting apart from the first two groups are the skeptics. Rightfully suspicious of a franchise that has floundered for years, they point to recent movies, TV series, and a disappointing array of video games that have all failed to reignite excitement for the long-lived sci-fi series. To succeed in crafting Star Trek Online, Cryptic must address them all, and somehow emerge with a cohesive and exciting game.

STAR TREK ONLINE

UNLIMITED ENABLED

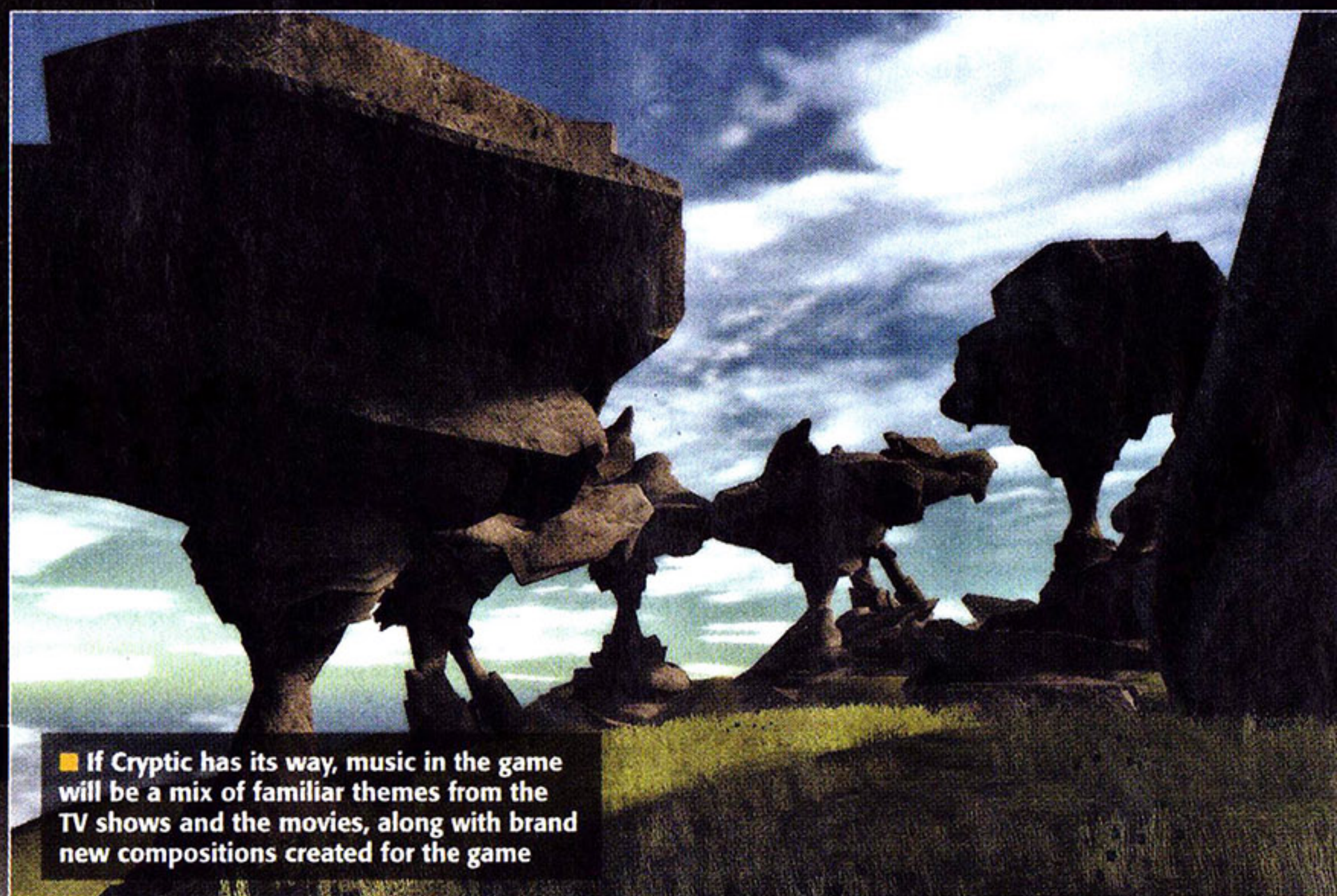
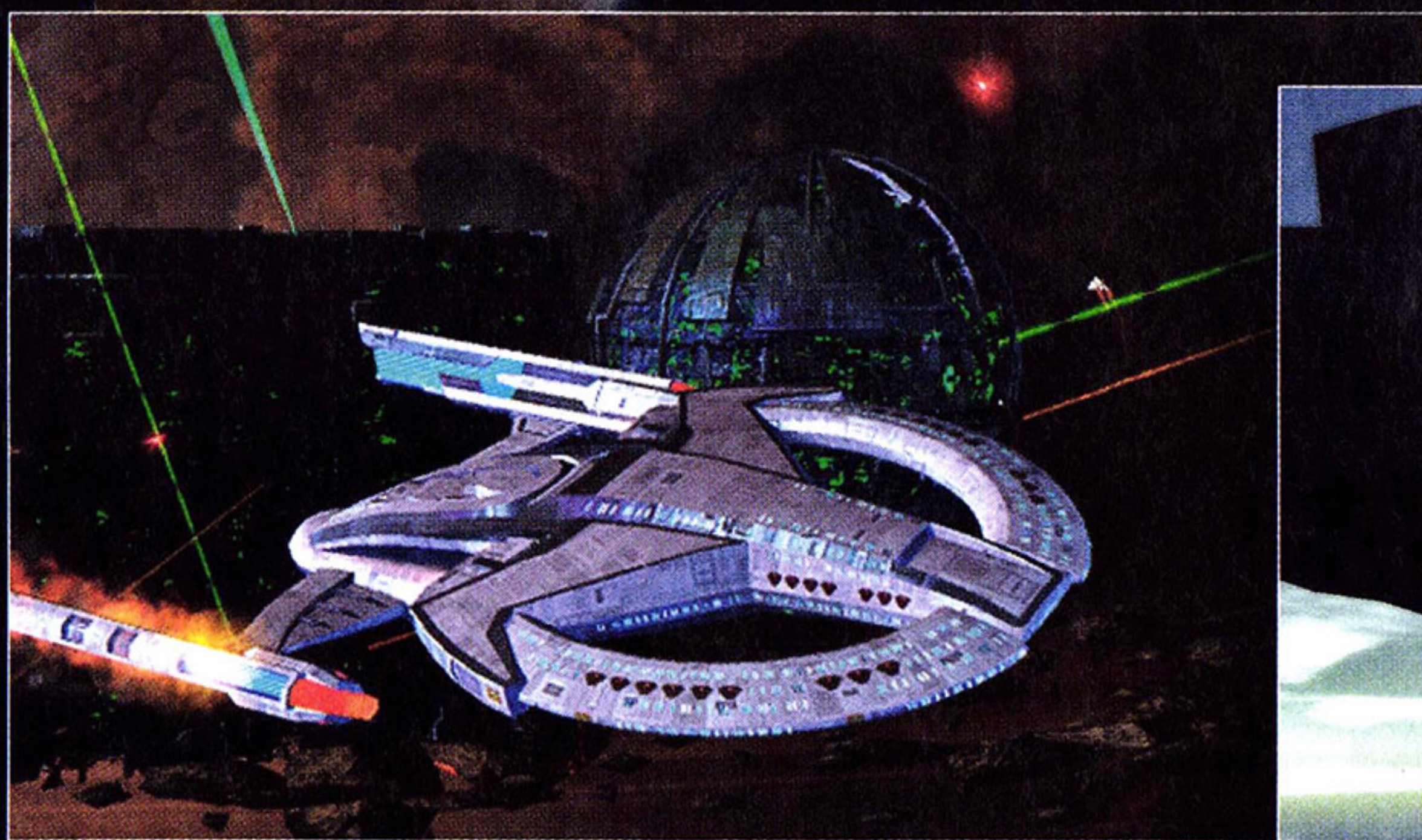
PC | UNANNOUNCED CONSOLES
> **STYLE** MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER
ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING GAME
> **PUBLISHER** CRYPTIC STUDIOS
> **DEVELOPER** CRYPTIC STUDIOS
> **RELEASE** FALL 2009



A NEW ERA



■ Leading up to launch, Cryptic will be updating their website weekly with story developments that occurred during the 30 years between the end of the last movie and the beginning of the game



■ If Cryptic has its way, music in the game will be a mix of familiar themes from the TV shows and the movies, along with brand new compositions created for the game

"It's not about making an MMO that's Star Trek. It's about bringing Star Trek to a massively multiplayer arena,"

explains Craig Zinkievich, executive producer on Star Trek Online. He's eager to talk about this dream project for his team. His enthusiasm is apparent from the moment we sit down at their studio. "We're all passionate about the IP [intellectual property]," says Zinkievich. "We love the IP. Some of us own weapons from the IP. We don't want to focus on making an MMO so much as bringing the Star Trek universe to life."

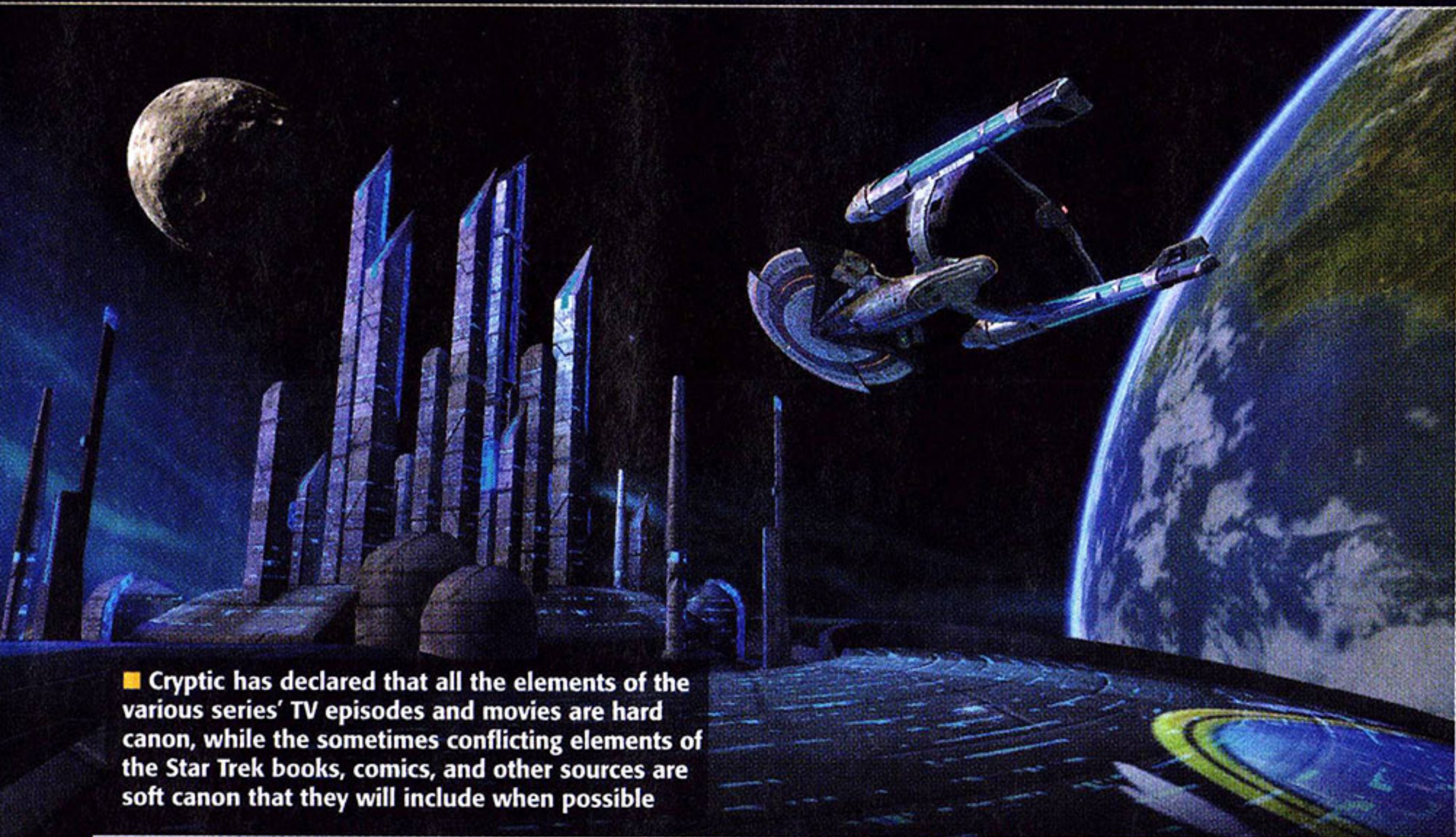
The team at Cryptic has long sought the chance to tackle the expansive Trek fiction, and the opportunity finally arose when the rights passed from Perpetual Entertainment to Cryptic early this year. Without pause,

the Cryptic team dove into content creation.

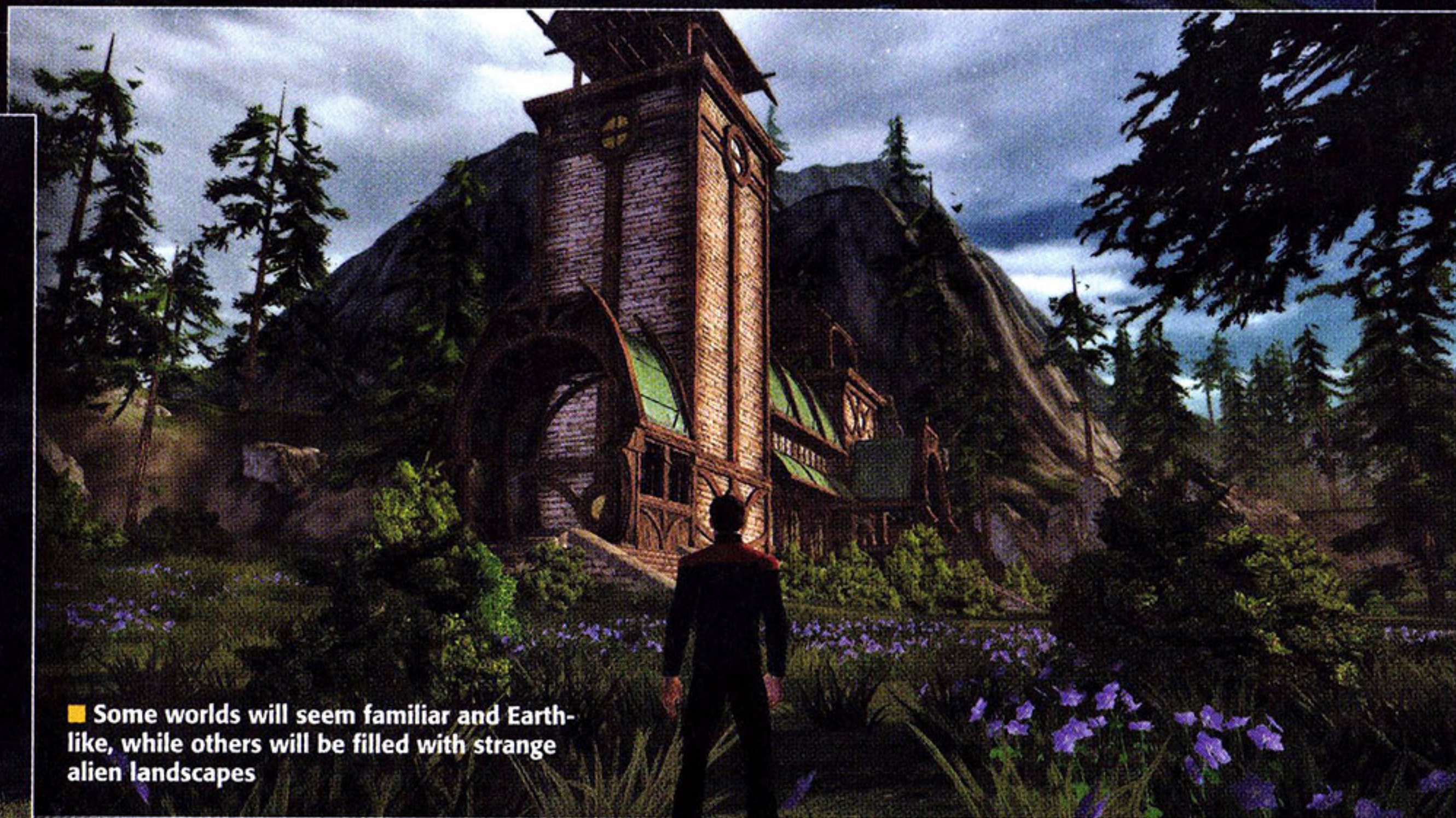
Throughout its existence, a large part of the developer's energy has gone into crafting an engine that can handle any game they throw at it. By allowing designers, artists, and programmers to work inside the game world, the engine can implement new ideas almost instantaneously. Consequently, only weeks after acquiring the license a devoted squad of developers had a prototype version of Star Trek Online up and running. For anyone familiar with next-gen development timetables, this sounds preposterous. The implausible scenario becomes a reality once you see just how far the game has come in these short months. During our visit, a huge number of art assets were already in place. Space combat was up and working. Whole planets and the ability to run through them were on display. The remarkably extensive race

and character creator already produces endless variety.

This accommodating tech gives Cryptic enough confidence to proclaim the game will release before the end of next year on PCs and consoles. Like Champions Online, which Cryptic will release this coming spring, Star Trek Online is built from the ground up as a game that functions as a unified experience across any platform. While approvals from the major console manufacturers are still pending, it is telling that the team demos the game with both keyboard and mouse or an Xbox 360 controller – the same controller players will be using to tackle Champions when it releases on that console next year. "Both Microsoft and Sony want MMOs on their platforms, but they have to figure out how they want to enter that space," Zinkievich tells us.



■ Cryptic has declared that all the elements of the various series' TV episodes and movies are hard canon, while the sometimes conflicting elements of the Star Trek books, comics, and other sources are soft canon that they will include when possible

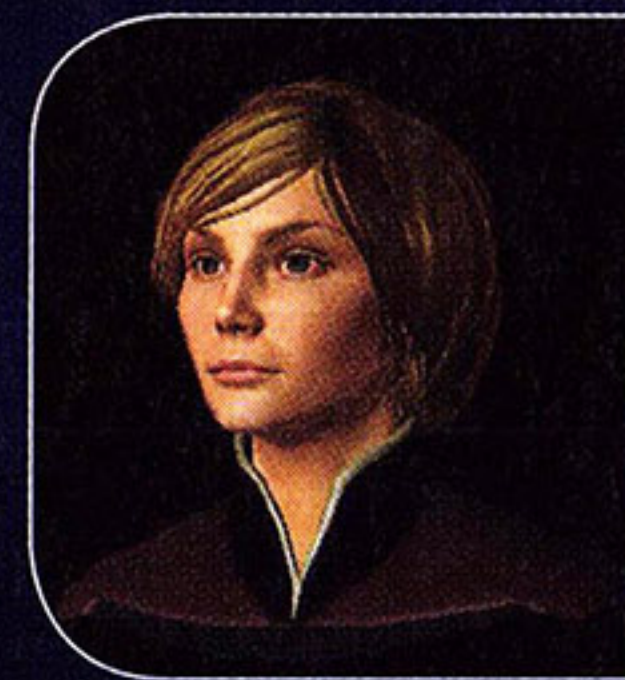


■ Some worlds will seem familiar and Earth-like, while others will be filled with strange alien landscapes

Since it acquired the rights, Cryptic has been busy implementing design ideas and crafting the future of the Star Trek mythos. While the upcoming J.J. Abrams movie will take viewers back to the genesis of Kirk and Spock's time on the Enterprise, Cryptic has been given full reign to dive into the unmapped time period of the much later 25th century. "The universe is a little bit different than when everybody left off with *Nemesis*," explains Zinkievich. "Things have changed. It's more hostile. A lot of the old threats and challenges that the different civilizations have faced have come back to the forefront." STO is set 29 years after the end of *Star Trek Nemesis*, the last of the Next Generation films. In 2409, the Khitomer Accords have broken down, shattering the peace that once kept the Federation and the Klingon Empire as allies. An ancient threat has

subtly emerged, looming over the civilizations of the Alpha Quadrant, but each culture seems to only know bits and pieces of the puzzle that could reveal the danger. The Klingons have absorbed the reptilian Gorn into the Empire, and enacted an alliance with the green-skinned Orions, even while the bellicose Nausicaans are increasingly attracted to the Klingon's aggressive tendencies. Across the Neutral Zone, the Federation continues to expand. Longtime allies like the Vulcans and Andorians continue to explore the stars beside humanity, while both Bajor and the Ferengi have joined the Federation and Star Fleet. The Romulans continue to pick up the pieces from their recent civil war, and the Cardassian and Dominion forces remain an unknown factor in the upcoming struggle. As the game begins, outright war between the Klingons and the Federation seems inevitable, and each

NEW LIFE AND NEW CIVILIZATIONS



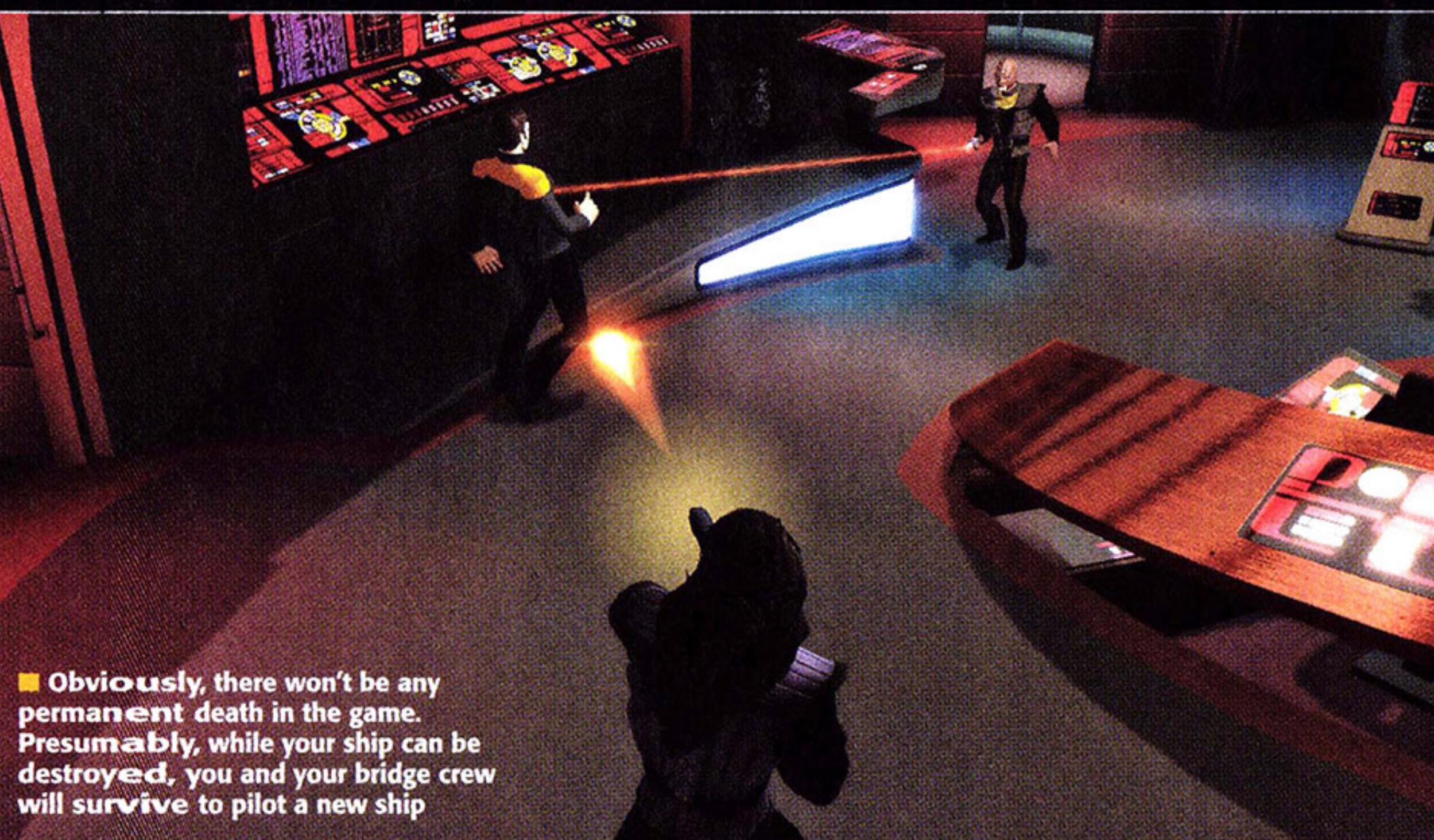
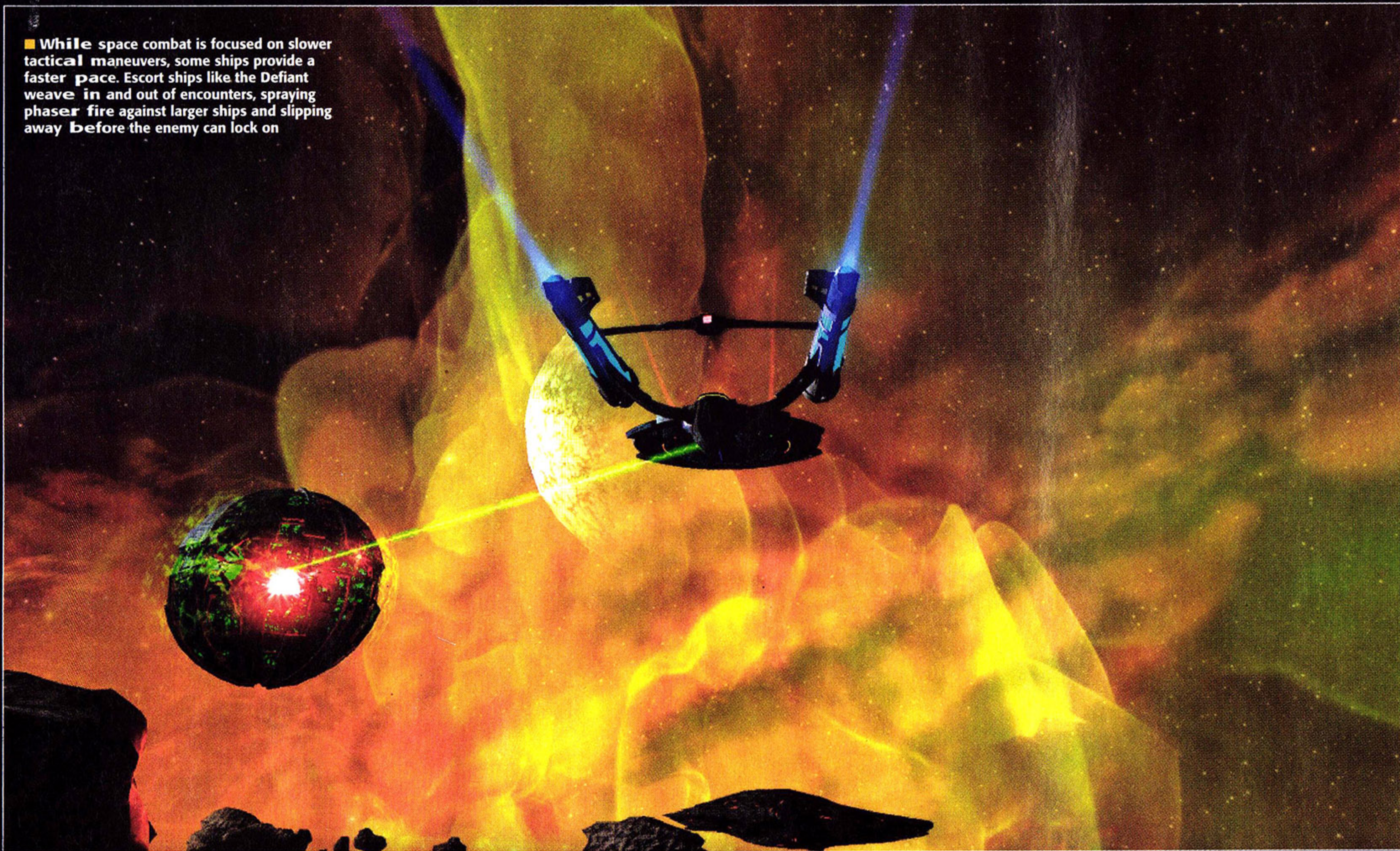
Whether you join the Klingon Empire or put on the Star Fleet insignia, uniforms don't offer many customization options. While you can adjust some features of your dress, Cryptic has concentrated their character creator on body and face adjustments. You start building your main character by selecting an existing race. If you plan on joining Star Fleet, we've been assured that Humans, Vulcans, Bajorans, Andorians, Ferengi, and Tellarites are all featured. Meanwhile, the Klingon Empire has expanded to include the Gorn, Orions, and Nausicaans. Each race features unique stat boosts based on that species' strengths, and you can dramatically alter the body shape and facial structure of your character within the reasonable boundaries established by their species.

New Star Trek episodes rarely passed without the appearance of some new alien species. Because of that, players are allowed to forego the more common races and create their own. Take one of the blue-skinned Andorians, remove his antennae, give him reptile eyes and a Bajoran nose. Add Klingon head ridges and then use a slider to extend the height of his forehead, and suddenly you've crafted an entirely new species. After naming them and distributing their stats, you can jump into the game. Whether you want to craft your own new alien species or emulate one that hasn't yet been put into the game, like the Romulans or Cardassians, the tools are at your disposal. "The idea is to make a game where, if you want to, you can always make and play that one crazy race from some random episode," Zinkievich says.

"We don't want to focus on making an MMO so much as bringing the Star Trek universe to life."

— Craig Zinkievich, executive producer

■ **While** space combat is focused on slower tactical maneuvers, some ships provide a faster pace. Escort ships like the Defiant weave in and out of encounters, spraying phaser fire against larger ships and slipping away before the enemy can lock on



■ **Obviously,** there won't be any permanent death in the game. Presumably, while your ship can be destroyed, you and your bridge crew will survive to pilot a new ship

faction is jockeying for resources and allies, even as skirmishes begin to break out.

Players will fly their starships into this dangerous backdrop when they log into Star Trek Online for the first time. You'll begin by selecting one faction or the other. This choice will determine who you'll be fighting against if you partake in player versus-player combat, what races you can choose from, and what ship designs you can play with. After choosing a race or creating your own (see page 53), you'll proceed to build your first ship (see page 55). Every player in the game will fly their own vessel into battle, maintain a crew, and explore strange new worlds even while playing the game solo. Your primary avatar in the game world is the captain of your ship, though he or she may not hold that esteemed rank as the game begins. Your first ship may be as small as a runabout, but the rank progression will unlock ever more grand ship classes to command.

Each ship has a bridge crew. These unique individuals act like pets in other MMOs. Each one is player-controlled, but AI

SHIPBUILDING 101

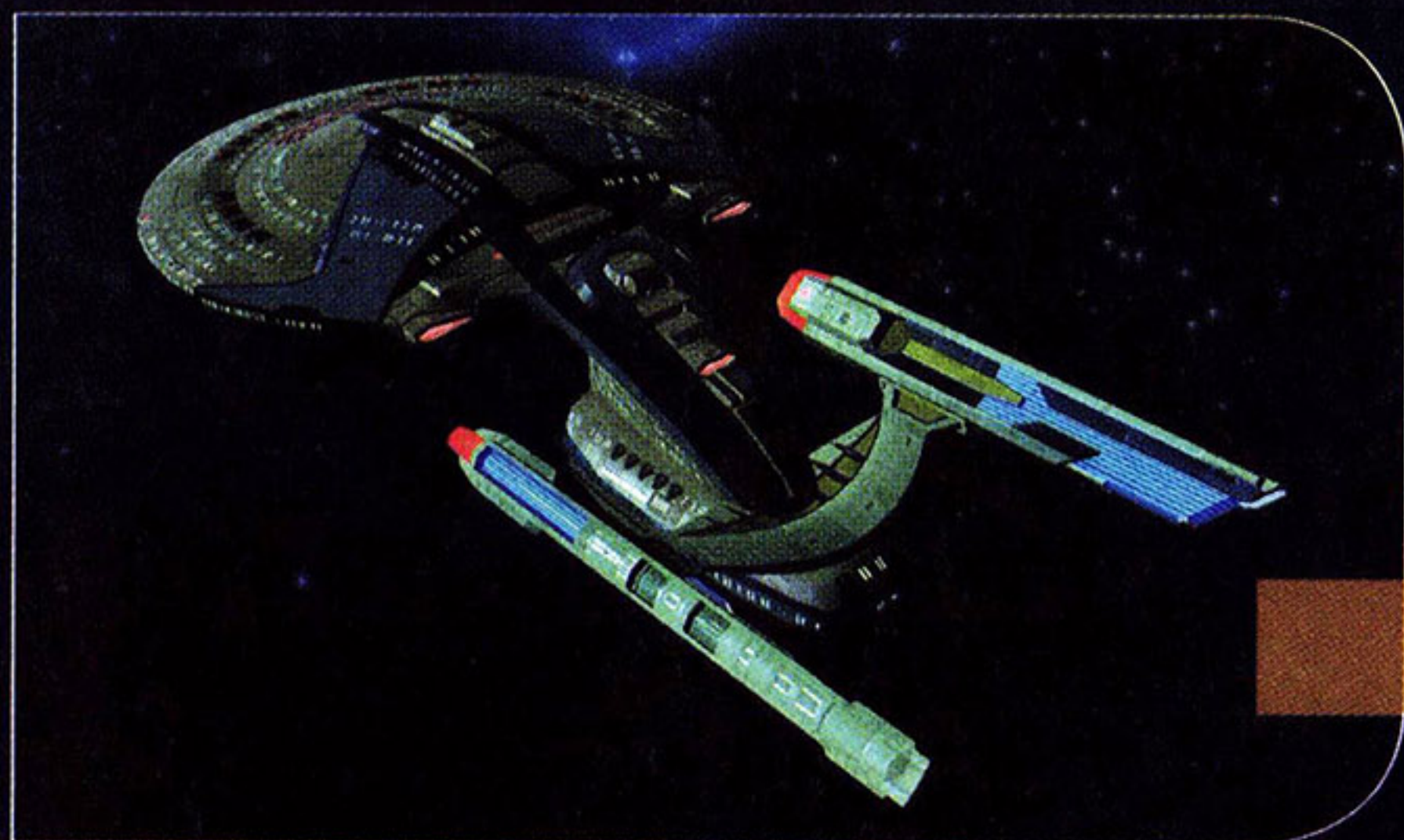
For some fans, the option to create your own ship design may be worth the price of admission to Star Trek Online. Each faction has various ship classes, and you're still bound in general structure and ship size by your rank. In other words, don't expect to start the game in a Galaxy class flagship, like the Enterprise-D of the Next Generation era. Instead, you must work your way up from lesser ships to larger and more powerful ones.

On the Star Fleet side, escort ships like the Akira, Defiant, and Prometheus class are fast, maneuverable, and optimized for combat. Science ships like Voyager have increased scanning capabilities and support characteristics for fights. Exploration vessels like the Sovereign class Enterprise-E are large and powerful, but sometimes less maneuverable.

Side with the Klingon Empire, and you might pursue raider-style ships like the Bird of Prey. These are optimized for fast and deadly strikes, moving in and out of cloak at will. Massive

cruisers can lay down heavy fire to control a battle with sheer might. Finally, carriers are a new class of Klingon ships designed to deliver multiple fighters into the fray. In MMO terms, consider them a mix of a tank/pet class.

Each class of ship across both factions has a huge array of customizable options to make the ship your own. Trade out your saucer section for one of an entirely different design. Choose a different set of nacelles. Adjust the interior of your ship to appear closer to your favorite Trek era. Change the colored markings on your ship to match your fleet. Name your ship, and have its title emblazoned across the hull. Every part of your vessel can be adjusted or replaced. Even with our brief glimpse, there seemed to be endless combinations. Whether individual parts will affect performance remains undecided, but there's no question that designing a ship will be as full featured as any fan could possibly imagine.



driven. Whether science officer or security chief, each character has his or her own unique stats, race, and areas of specialty. A tactical officer may know all about modulating shield harmonics to ward off Borg weapons. Your doctor may be especially experienced at field medicine, and thus a great choice for your away party. This crew will grow alongside you, or can be transferred away as you encounter new officers that better fit your command style. They can be injured in battle and taken to sickbay, but as a rule they won't die as you wander the galaxy together.

Below the bridge officers sit the rest of your general crew. Unnamed but still essential, they offer passive bonuses to your ship as you play. For instance, a good repair team is a necessity if you're planning extensive trips into the dangerous Neutral Zone. These characters can die, and once severely depleted, your ship will be in a sorry state. You'll need to return to a starbase or find

a friendly planet and hope more recruits are willing to join you.

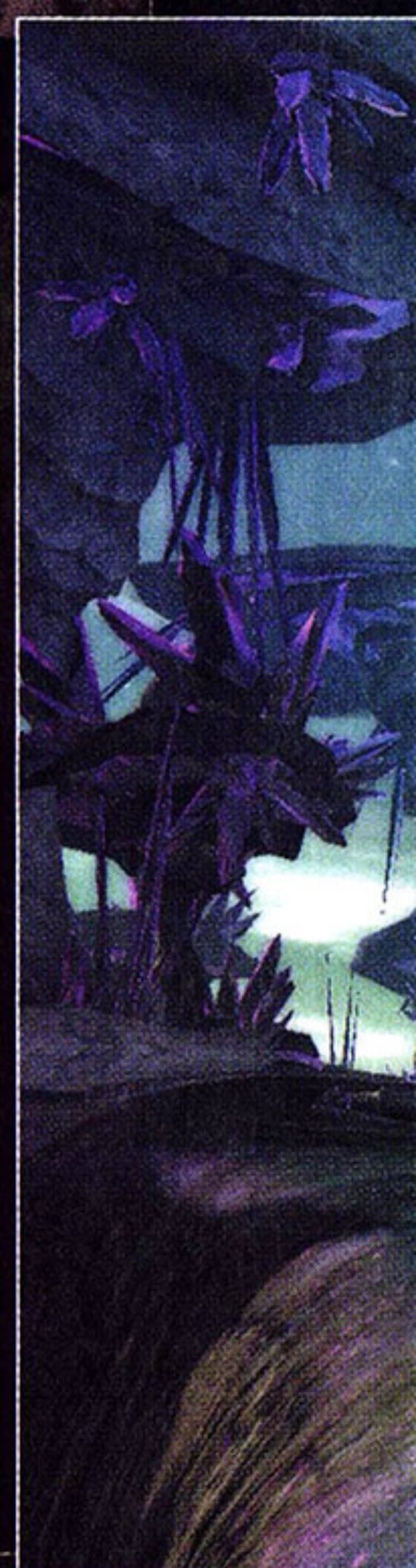
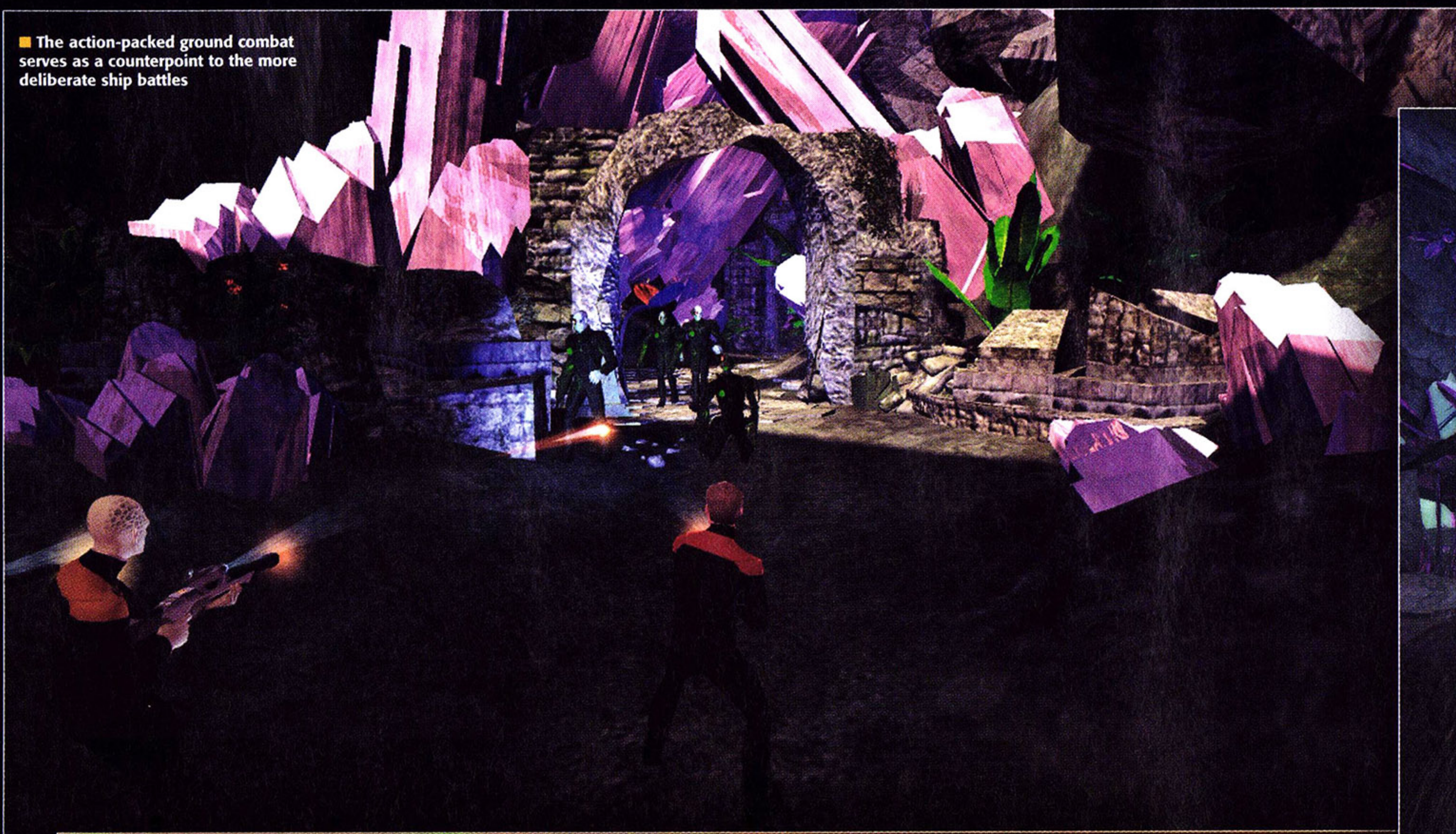
Setting out into the galaxy, players will find an expansive game "world" quite unlike other MMOs. Everything scales to the task at hand. At the top level, a galactic map reveals huge sectors of space to explore. Take your ship into an individual sector, and you'll see a tactical display of systems, the concentration of other ships in the area, and your own ship's place in the mix. "Sector space is like astronavigation," Zinkievich says. "We want sector space to be a place where players cross into each other." The sector display reveals the topography of space, allows repairs and chatting, and serves as a conduit between major points of interest. In sector space you'll navigate to your destination, making choices about whether to pass through an unknown nebula or go around, or how close is too close to that black hole along your path.

The real fun begins when you arrive at your chosen system. At this scale, you now see your ship in three-dimensional space. In a given system, each planet might have its own bubble of space to investigate, filled with moons, starbases, planetary rings, and of course, enemy ships.

Space combat is a focused tactical affair, more akin to pirate sea battles than high-speed dogfights. In one encounter we were shown, the player flew a large Star Fleet ship into battle against two smaller Klingon Birds of Prey. Quick button presses readjusted power between weapons and shields. The tactical officer cued up a photon torpedo spread to hammer an opposing ship, a skill that must recharge after each use. Numerous complex skills also function on the same recharge functionality. Meanwhile, more basic attack and defense

CONTINUED ON PAGE 57 >>

■ The action-packed ground combat serves as a counterpoint to the more deliberate ship battles

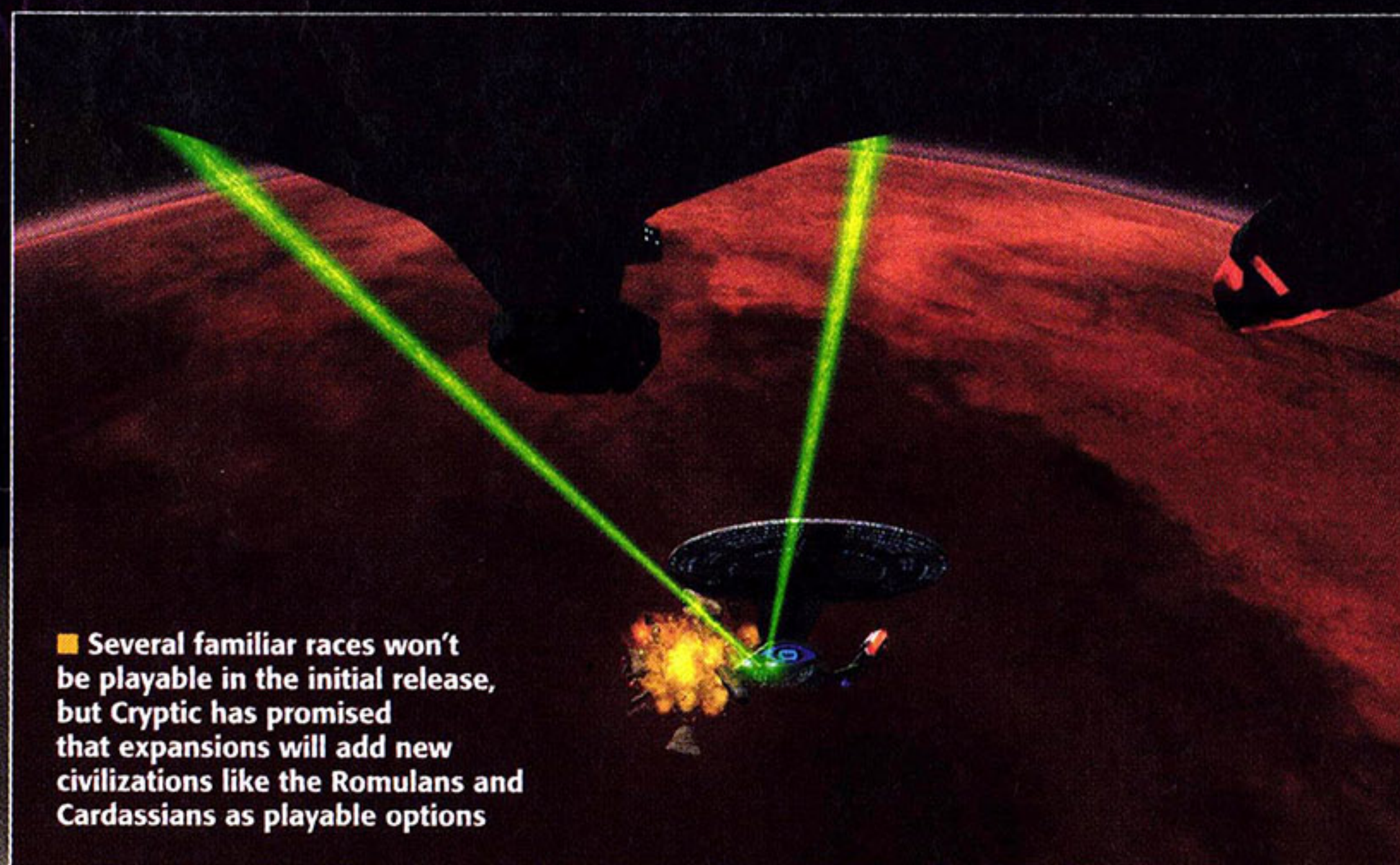


■ The arrival of multiple Borg vessels presents a devastating threat; you'll have to gather together as a fleet to confront these assaults, which will dynamically show up in the public game world





■ The Cryptic Engine can procedurally generate new worlds like this one, so that the universe of Star Trek Online can offer endless variety to explore



■ Several familiar races won't be playable in the initial release, but Cryptic has promised that expansions will add new civilizations like the Romulans and Cardassians as playable options

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 55

features are built around resource management rather than timers. As the Klingon vessel drifted away, badly damaged, its companion ship tried to sneak around to level an attack from behind. Shifting power away from weapons and engines, our demo player boosted the rear shields in time to prevent catastrophic damage during the barrage. Rolling the ship around to starboard, the Star Fleet ship's weapons were brought back up to full and a long blast of phaser fire drained the second Klingon's shields, leaving her incapacitated.

It won't be unusual after a battle to beam down to a nearby planet or across to the other ship to continue a mission. Here players will encounter the final level of scale — one that feels more familiar to MMO players — a traditional third-person view. "When you go on an away mission, you're going to bring four of your bridge crew," Zinkievich relays. "The bridge crew is there to fill in when your friends aren't around." Any number of tasks might be required in this part of the game, from exploring a ruined structure on a planet's surface to retrieving some important vaccine only found in the planet's plant life. Like in space, a lot of the excitement will come from the inevitable conflicts that arise. Avatar combat is an entirely different battle system from the tactical ship battles in space. Focused on fast-paced action, phasers and disrupters are fired using an aiming reticle, and visceral melee combat arises when Klingons bring bladed bat'leths to bear. "The avatar combat is meant to be a complement

to starship combat," Zinkievich says. "We want it to be fast paced. We want it to be a lot more visceral."

Fans will be quick to point out that combat is only one part of the Star Trek universe. To address that point, Cryptic is implementing a number of game mechanics to deepen the gameplay beyond mere battle dynamics. Diplomacy with other races is a core component of that plan, typified by the need to recruit new races into your respective alliance. Crafting, trade, and mining might be on a more grand scale than in many MMOs, but it's there for players who wish to partake in the galactic economy.

Another central tenet of the Star Trek experience is exploration. "We have to make sure that the universe feels vast, along with all the storylines and plots — that there is a place where you can go out into deep space and explore and go where no man has gone before," Zinkievich tells us: While thousands of players may be wandering through the Star Trek Online galaxy, every player can explore strange new worlds untouched by other captains and their crews. Existing worlds (like Vulcan) and popular locations (like Deep Space Nine) are heavily designed and customized by Cryptic, but the thousands of unexplored systems are procedurally generated by the Cryptic Engine, allowing the game space to

endlessly expand in every direction. By creating a multitude of art assets for planetary features, the game engine can create new worlds on the fly, populating them both with creatures and unusual terrains. We were shown one planetary surface covered in huge spires of violet crystals, rising to impossible heights and widening into high, mushroom-like platforms. With a few button presses by an artist, the yellow-tinged sky turned a reddish hue, and the landscape morphed until it was unrecognizable from its previous incarnation. Between the use of tools like this and Cryptic's ability to make structured instanced areas for individual players, the illusion of pioneering deep space exploration emerges.

Even if the combat and exploration turn out to be fun, the game will be in serious trouble if it doesn't deliver meaningful and structured gameplay. Fetch quests to bring back 10 Ferengi ears to a quest giver just don't fit. The solution lies in the roots of the Star Trek franchise — the TV episode framework. Zinkievich elaborates: "We found there is a structure to all the episodes in the way the story unfolds. If you apply this pattern, it fits for 96 percent of the shows. It's almost a subconscious thing.

CREATING A CULTURAL ICON: A CONVERSATION WITH

LEONARD NIMOY

Leonard Nimoy was on hand in Las Vegas this August to help Cryptic announce Star Trek Online, and we were lucky enough to score an extended chat with the man who created and popularized one of the most familiar characters in pop culture.

When you first put on the uniform and ears as Spock, did you have any sense that Star Trek was different from what had come before?

No. I had done a little science fiction before. The very first thing I did in film was a science fiction serial with a really incredible title – it was called *Zombies of the Stratosphere*. Three of us in a space ship that wobbled across the screen amid a cloud of smoke. We were from Mars, we stole a couple of Colt 45 revolvers and a pick up truck, and we were going to take over Earth. It was really something. [laughs] So I'd always been kind of interested in science fiction. But you've got to understand, the most important thing about Star Trek in the early years was that the stories were very relevant. We were in a crucible of experiences, both in our country and in the wider world. It was Martin Luther King, the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War. It was a really turbulent period, and people were looking for something they could be affected by – something that they could get in touch with. I think Star Trek did that.

So what was it about Spock that resonated with people?

I think people can identify with the character. They admire the character. He is reliable. He is intelligent. He is resourceful. He's loyal to his friends – Kirk, the ship, and the crew. He's a terrific person to have around in case of trouble. But I think they also identify with him emotionally because a lot of people recognize the internal struggle that Spock is experiencing. A lot of people are trying to figure out where they fit in the world.

Have you had any conversations with Zachary Quinto, who is playing Spock in the new J.J. Abrams movie?

Zachary Quinto is a very talented and bright young guy, who contacted me as soon as he was cast. We spent a number of times visiting together about the character of Spock. I think his brilliance is demonstrated by the fact that he wouldn't let me go. [laughs] He picked my brain thoroughly. We had some good times together. I really admire him. He has an interior life when he acts, which I also

think is terribly important for the Spock character – that you feel like there is something going on inside this guy. I think he really gets it.

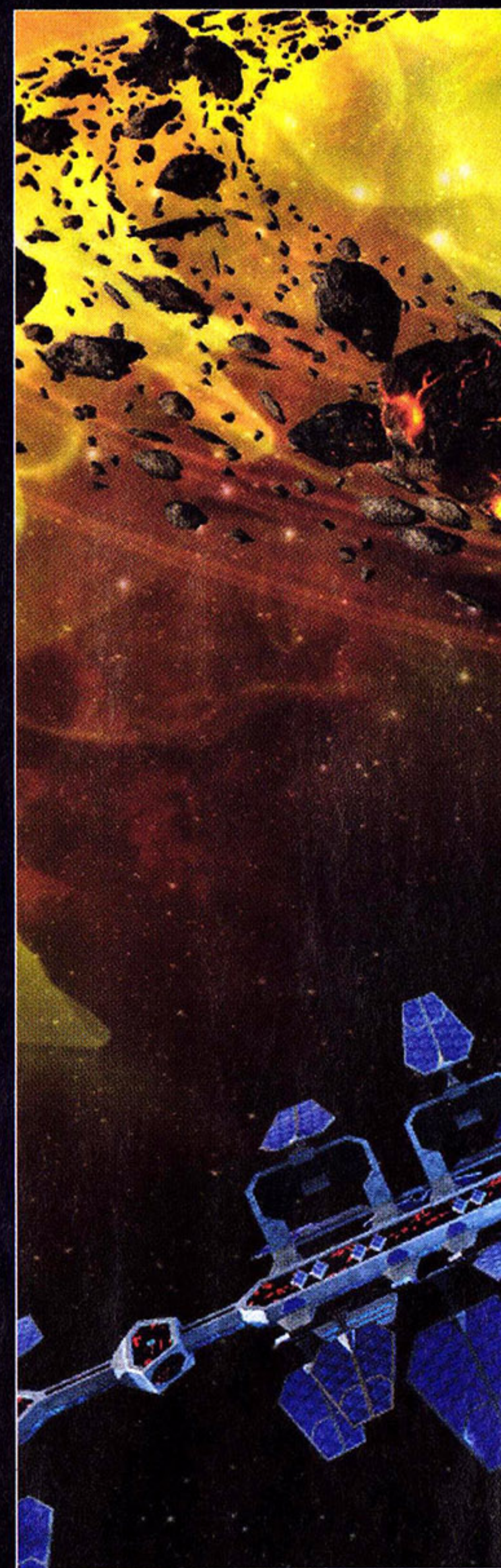
What is it that you think Abrams is doing with the characters and the setting that will make it different and stand out?

The scope and the energy. The scope is bigger than any Star Trek movie that has come before. They spent 150 million dollars on this movie. That's by far much more than has been spent in the past. In 1986, I directed *Star Trek IV* for about 26 million. I don't know what that would translate into today – maybe 75 or 85 million. This picture cost 150. So the scope is certainly gigantic. On the other hand, he's put together a terrific cast of young people, introducing the original characters. And the writers had a wonderful sense of what those characters were about and how they interact with one another. The movie was scheduled to open originally this year, at Christmas time. I think postponing it to next summer is really a vote of confidence. The movie is ready. There's no question that they've got the movie they want and like. And they could open this Christmas. But they decided to hold a very expensive negative because they think they can do much more business with a summer release. J.J. Abrams is a really talented guy. He can do what a lot of directors can't do. He can do the big production stuff as well as the very small intimate moments. Some directors are good at one or the other, but very few are good at both.

Out of curiosity, do you have any sense of how many sets of ears you've gone through over the years?

Well, let's do the math. We did 78 or 79 episodes, and we'd use a new pair of ears every second or third episode. So about 35 pairs of ears there. And then, there were six films each with an average of forty days of work. Maybe 240 days of work on all six films, and a set of ears every day. And about two or three dozen new sets of ears on this new movie. So you add it up.

For our full interview with Nimoy, check out this month's Unlimited content at www.gameinformer.com.



So we're taking that and trying to apply it to the content." Star Trek Online's core mission and story progression will appear as linked episodes – each with their own plot and unique events.

Cryptic demonstrated one episode that gives a glimpse into how this mechanic works. Star Fleet contacts you with a request to deliver a Vulcan ambassador to his race's religious monastery of P'jem. Once there, a small fleet of Klingon ships attacks, warning that P'jem has been infiltrated by Species 8472, the dangerous race first seen in *Star Trek Voyager*. Fearing the threat this race represents, the Klingons intend to cleanse the planet, an action you must now prevent. The initial space battle eventually goes planetside since you must deliver the ambassador to his destination as Klingon forces continue their attack in closer quarters. After a hard fought victory, Star Fleet contacts you to

relay that they've found the actual body of the Vulcan ambassador. Realizing the man you accompanied is an imposter, you track him down and he reveals his identity as a disguised member of Species 8472, then flees to a Klingon ship. You give pursuit, and finally destroy the ship, but as the episode ends a number of curious threads remain unresolved as to how this alien race managed to breach Star Fleet and what their intentions are. Episodes like this will play out over the course of around an hour, and the team's goal is to have each one deliver a satisfying mix of action, exploration, diplomacy, and variety of locales, just like an episode of one of the TV shows.

Apart from the dozens of episodes that provide context and plot, Cryptic is also focusing on the wider multiplayer experience. Players can form fleets that emulate the familiar idea of guilds. "The fleets are able

to build starbases, which are like social hubs," Zinkievich explains. "There are stores for your fleet. They're also a place where the economy can flourish. Fleets will be able to build the top end ships. It's going to be so resource intensive that only fleets will be able to put those ships together." While traveling as a group, whether with members of your fleet or in an improvised task force, the episodes unfold just as they would if you were by yourself. While playing with a group of four other players, your away team will be made up of each commanding officer, with support from bridge crew that remains in orbit. Play with fewer players, and some captains can bring their best officers to fill out the five-person team.

The more focused group content will emerge from dynamic events that occur in different space sectors. For instance, three Borg cubes arriving through a transwarp



conduit represent a threat no captain would tackle alone. These incursions into friendly space will appear on your sector map. "If you want, you can fly over there and jump in with a whole lot of people to these zone-wide events and take them down with your fleet." Other similar dangers include the planet-eating Doomsday Machine from the classic original series episode of the same name, or even the return of V'ger from the first Star Trek movie.

Beyond group encounters exists the unending factional war between the Federation and the Klingons. This conflict will play out both indirectly and during PvP combat. Players who don't want to get involved in the war can help their faction by completing missions for unaligned worlds. "You don't have to actually go and get owned by somebody else in order to enjoy the faction gameplay," Zinkievich says. Convince a civilization

that you can help them, and they'll often side with your faction, delivering bonus technologies, additional resources, special abilities, or recruitable members of the species for your crew. More militant players should head toward the Neutral Zone, a gateway to the heated multiplayer war zone where the war between these two massive powers will play out. "We want to do direct PvP on ships and on ground as well. The results of those battles will determine who owns that system that week, and what resources you win for your faction," Zinkievich relays. Systems will change hands as the war continues, each offering certain strategic advantages that the other faction will desperately try to recover. Battles can be massive affairs, with the sound of phaser fire, the flash of detonating torpedoes, and the sight of massive starships being ripped apart and blossoming into explosions.

The upcoming prequel movie is meant to reinvigorate

Star Trek viewers, and Star Trek Online is clearly meant to do the same for the gaming world. No other Trek game projects are in the works right now, and Star Trek Online represents the most extensive and massive game the Star Trek universe has ever seen. It isn't surprising that Cryptic is hearing demands and expectations from any number of different quarters. In response, it's done the only thing that makes any sense. "We make games that we want to play," Zinkievich proclaims near the end of our day at Cryptic. "There's not a big marketing meeting where we determine who our audience is with a Venn diagram. We're making the game that we're going to find fun. That's really our philosophy across Cryptic Studios." ■■■

THERE GOES THE NEIGHBORHOOD.



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LittleBIGPlanet

PLAYSTATION 3

- > STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (4-PLAYER ONLINE)
- > PUBLISHER SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT
- > DEVELOPER MEDIA MOLECULE
- > RELEASE OCTOBER 21

A Little Big Deal

At some point in their lives, every gamer has stared in total amazement at their screen. Whether it was an awesome boss fight, a devious puzzle, or just a beautiful environment, we've all wondered: "How did they do that?" This October, developer Media Molecule is going to answer that question with LittleBigPlanet, a full-fledged puzzle/platformer that also includes a vast suite of creation tools, pulling aside the curtain on the game's inner workings. Players' ability to design and share their own levels is a huge component of LittleBigPlanet, and is already positioned to attract a community of creative individuals eager to try their hand at game design. We put in some extensive hands-on time with LittleBigPlanet, diving into those features to see how the game's three main tenets - play, create, and share - translate into a cohesive experience.

First Steps

Before you can experiment with the array of tools and community options, you need to learn the basics of *LittleBigPlanet*. When you first boot up the game, only the Play mode (the story campaign) is available. It begins in an area called the Gardens, which functions as a series of tutorial levels that familiarize you with the gameplay vocabulary. Littered with simple objectives and challenges, these areas help you get a feel for how to jump, grab, and activate various objects in the environment (like levers, vehicles, and jetpacks). You'll also learn the importance of collecting orbs, which either contribute to your score or add objects and stickers to your inventory. This introductory section of the game will take less than an hour for most gamers. Upon completing the Gardens, *LittleBigPlanet* expands to its true size, unlocking the Create and Share modes.



The Mascot

Your representative in *LittleBigPlanet*, SackBoy, is one of the most charming and adorable characters to hit gaming in years. Though cute in its default form, the real fun lies in customizing your little burlap avatar with a variety of collected accoutrements. From pirate outfits to pigtails, SackBoy joyously wears any humiliating fashion combination you desire – we stuck ours with a ludicrous ringmaster's moustache and glasses (which ended up looking like Tobias from *Arrested Development*). You can add even more personality by assigning different emotions using the d-pad; express fear, happiness, anger, and fright in varying degrees. This can theoretically be useful for playing online with gamers who don't speak your language, but we found it was mainly just entertaining to run through levels with our SackBoy's face frozen in a mask of sneering disgust.

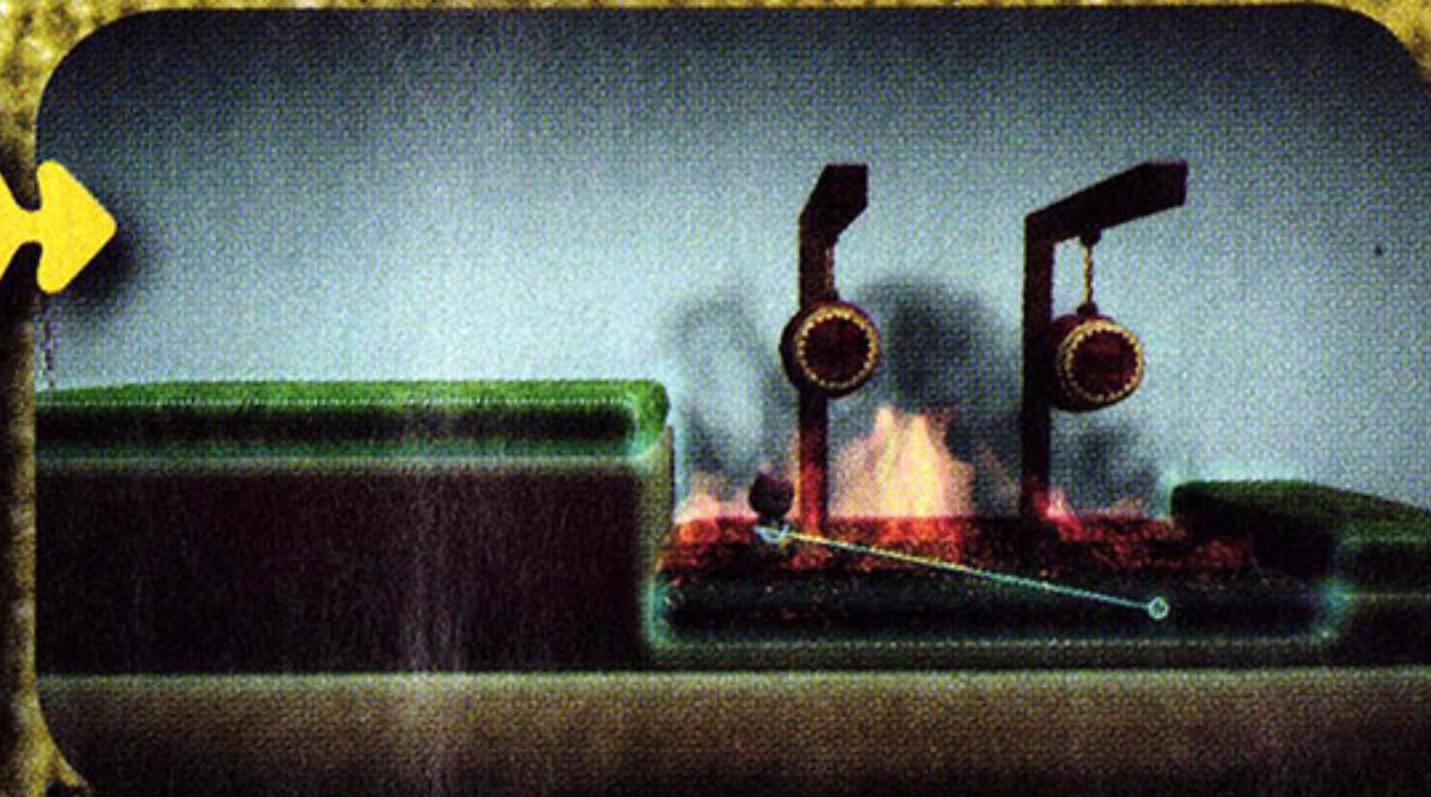
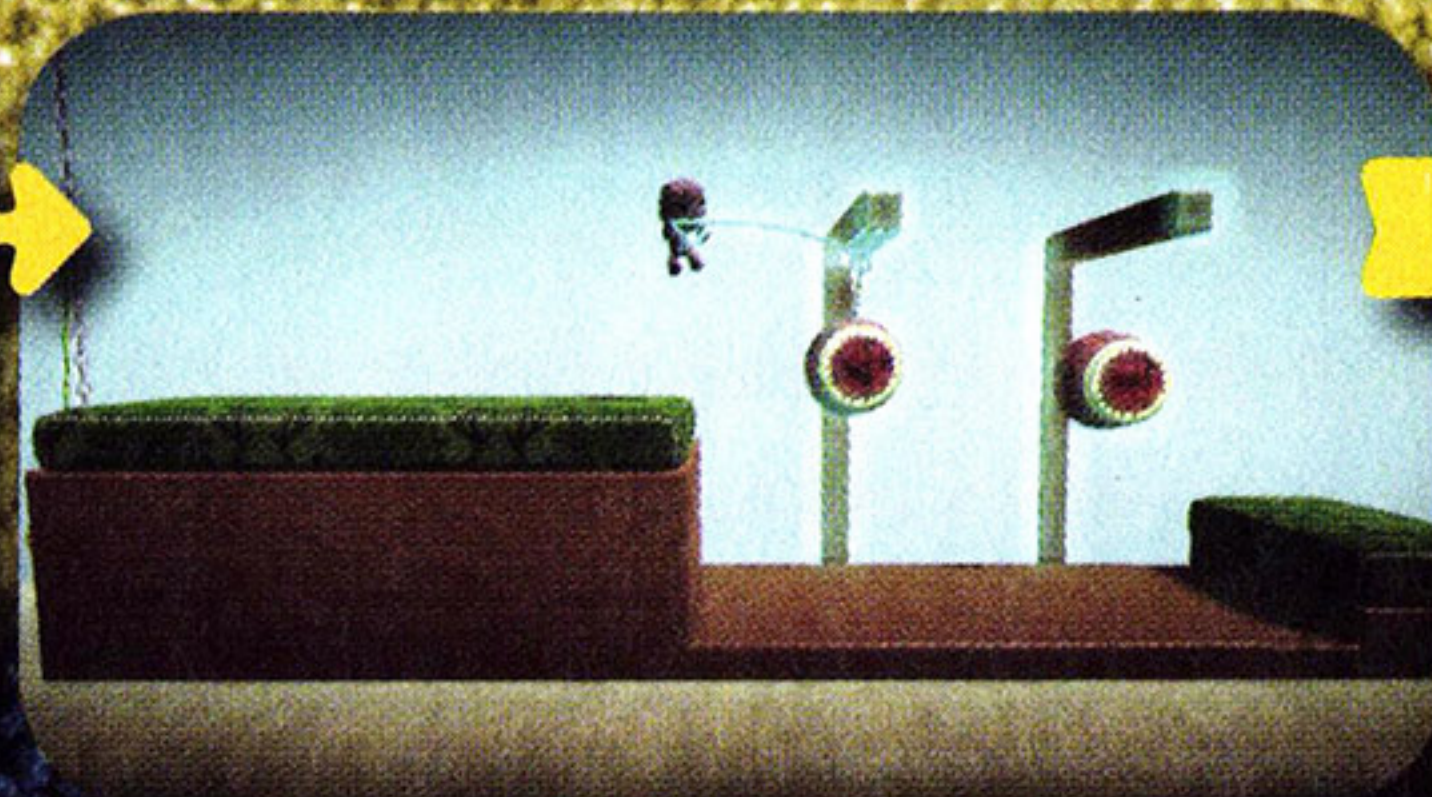


Learning Curve

After completing the Gardens, you'll probably be tempted to start creating your own level. This is a great way to get an even deeper understanding of the mechanics, but be warned that you should set aside a sizeable chunk of time for your first venture into the level editor. Only a small number of tools are available immediately (understandably so, since the alternative would result in an overwhelming number of options), so you must unlock more by doing a series of quick tutorial tasks. Almost every device has one of these designed to teach you the basics of placing and activating it, like "use the motor bolt to fasten this bowtie and make it rotate." They don't last long individually, but completing one usually opens a few more, and it took us about 90 minutes before we felt like we unlocked and had a good grasp of the most crucial building blocks. It isn't difficult, but since LittleBigPlanet offers a lot of complexity, it takes a while to give players the necessary foundation.



Once you're familiar with the mechanics, making contraptions like this is a snap

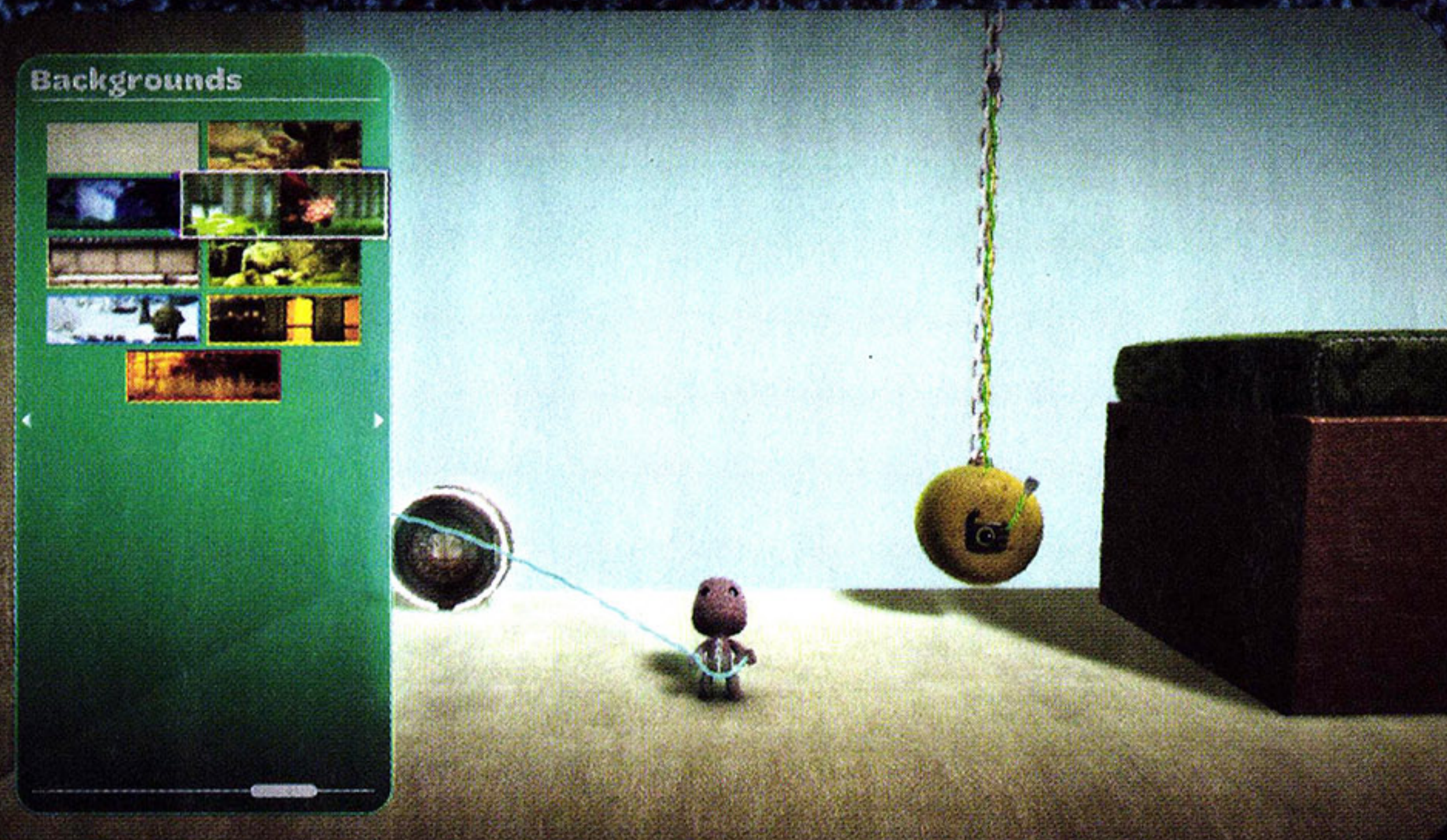


Poppit

When you're just playing LittleBigPlanet, the controls are simple. You can jump, and you can grab. Things get more complicated when you're dealing with creating an entire world and manipulating the environment around you, so Media Molecule has devised an elegant solution. The Poppit is the in-game menu (which SackBoy holds by a neon lasso) allowing you to customize your character, plant stickers, and create levels. It floats unobtrusively, and uses simple graphics to represent your various gadgets. Each top-level option (like goodies bag and stickers) has a few pages to scroll through, but it never got so deep that we felt bogged down. Poppit also comes up when you want to adjust the properties of an object, like the speed at which a wheel turns. It's pretty impressive that a range of tasks so broad can be performed with such a simple interface.

Starting Small

Technically, you have the option to make a full level as soon as Create mode unlocks. However, that's a daunting task when you understand how complex it can be – providing you want to make a level people would actually enjoy playing. Instead of going big, consider starting by making a board solely to experiment with various objects and devices. A lot of the fun in LittleBigPlanet comes from how items and devices interact with each other, so the more you know about those things the better. Trust us, it will be much less frustrating to incorporate a whirling death machine in your level if you've already gone through a few iterations as practice. The knowledge you gain from playing around will make your level better in the end. For example, we created a hideous mutant abomination with twitching limbs that offers players advice; along the way we learned about corner shaping, text bubbles, camera zones, and using wobble bolts. We made the creature in a test stage, which eliminated the possibility of inadvertently messing with the objects and architecture in our main level. If you like what you make, you can always save the object into your global library and use it wherever you want.





SackBoys, Plural

It's possible to play the entire game in single-player if you want to, but *LittleBigPlanet* also supports up to four players online and locally. Not only does it support multiplayer, it even encourages it at certain points. For instance, there may be a puzzle where one player needs to stand on a button as the other swings from a rope in order to reach an item. Others require the cooperation of four SackBoys. These challenges are never required to complete a level, but sometimes the reward is a particularly cool object, sound, or sticker. You can also take advantage of local play in Create mode, where four players can work together to make a level. This may speed up the process, but be sure you trust your friends. The other players have the same ability to erase, move, tweak, and generally muck about as you do, so you may not want to invite them into a level you've already spent hours designing.



More, More, More

Even if you're mainly interested in the level creation and sharing, it is still a good idea to stick with the story campaign after the Gardens. Each developer level features orbs with new stickers and objects that become available for you to use in Create mode once you collect them. If you choose to complete all of Media Molecule's stages (which should take roughly 10 hours), you'll have more options at your fingertips. That doesn't mean the game is incomplete otherwise; much of the design functionality remains identical no matter how far you are. By gathering more objects and materials, you'll have more aesthetic options and a few extra toys to play with. Also, the campaign is a great way to get your imagination started for your own design endeavors. Some of the pre-made objects and monsters (especially bosses) are mind-blowing, and they can really open your eyes to new possibilities.



Trigger Happy

During level creation, it's helpful to think about construction in terms of triggers and events. In addition to simply traversing levels, it's important to consider how the various objects relate to each other, which LittleBigPlanet handles through a variety of trigger switches like buttons and levers. To devise the best solution, think about what you want to happen and how you prefer the player to initiate it. This can be as simple as pressing a switch to open a door, or as complicated as a multi-phase boss fight against a giant attack robot. We created a downhill race that had a proximity trigger at the halfway mark. When the player passed near the switch, it dissolved a barrier up the hill that was blocking the passage of about a dozen flaming logs. With the obstruction gone, they started to tumble down the hill after the player, adding a new dimension of urgency to the race. In the levels we played, these kinds of things are generally more interesting than placing a lot of pits that players need to jump over, though they require a little more work to create.

■ The game includes all of the tools you need to reproduce anything you see in the developer levels, including boss fights





Special Guest Stars

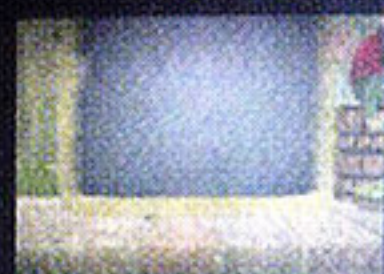
Even though it's fun to customize your own unique SackBoy, you might be happy to know that some familiar options are available. If you pre-order the game, you'll have access to downloadable SackBoy versions of Sony heroes Kratos and Nariko (which one you get depends on the retailer where you pre-order). The first-party cameo isn't a one-way street, though; SackBoy will also be venturing beyond the confines of LittleBigPlanet to make a special appearance as a character in Sony's PSN title Pain.

Sharing Helps Everyone

Let's say that you spend hours crafting the perfect level – what do you do with it? The Share mode lets you publish your creations online for the world to play. Once uploaded, other players can run through it, comment whether they liked it, and select a descriptor (like "brilliant" or "repetitive") to apply so other gamers have an idea what to expect. To begin, you can only publish three levels online, but if they are popular, you may be granted the ability to post more. However, that only applies to levels accessible to the community as a whole; people on your friends list can play as many levels as you can create (even ones that don't adhere to the decency standards). Even if you have no interest in creating content yourself, you can always see what other players are up to, so there will be an ever-expanding bank of user-made levels to enjoy long after you've finished the campaign.

Good Grief!

What seems to be the problem?



Level Content



I'm quite sorry to hear that. Can you please elaborate?



Pornographic
Offensive
Copyright

Obscene
Violence
Terms of Service

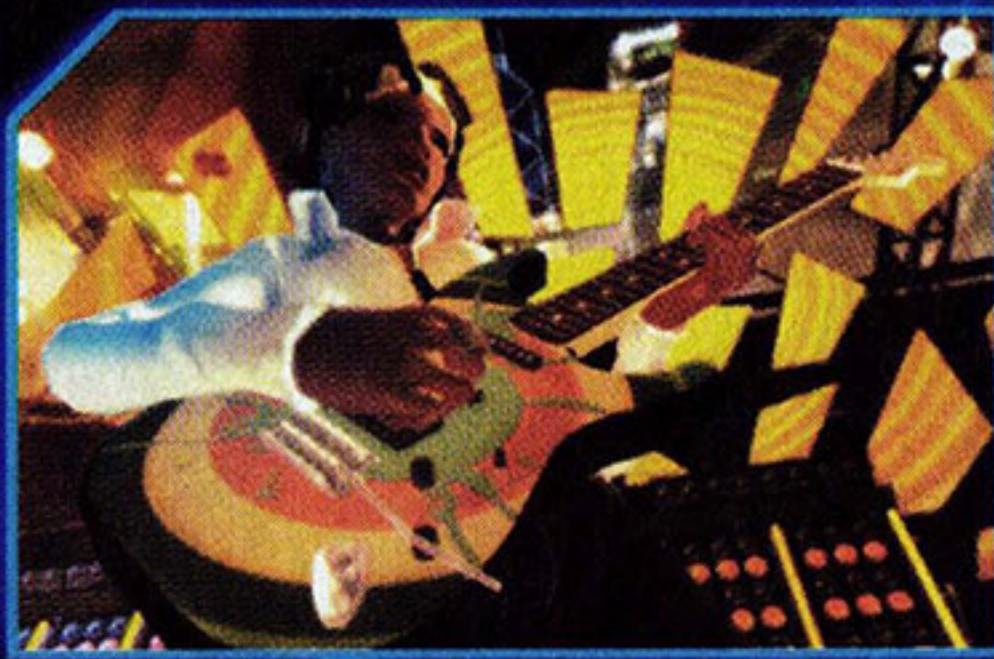
Mature
Illegal Act
Other

What If

There has been so much emphasis on the Create aspect of LittleBigPlanet that some people have dismissed it as more of a digital toy than a game. The most common concern seems to be that the Share mode relies heavily on quality user-created content. If that feature doesn't grow as hoped, it could cripple part of the experience. Ultimately, the issue will be decided by the community when the game releases, but it's difficult for us to imagine that people won't latch onto the kinds of opportunities LittleBigPlanet affords. One look at the fantastic response to software like Spore's Creature Creator demonstrates that gamers can be incredibly creative, motivated, competitive, and enthusiastic. All they need is the tools and the inspiration – both of which will be included with every copy of LittleBigPlanet. ■■■



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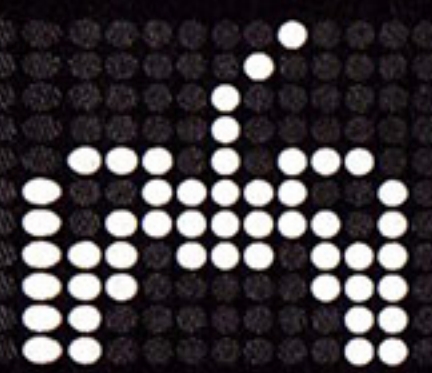
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 **XBOX 360** LIVE



PREVIEWS

A Glimpse Into The Future Of Gaming



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Dead Space

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS
> **DEVELOPER** EA REDWOOD SHORES > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 20

A NEW KIND OF FIGHT

■ "Um. I don't mean to be rude, but there's something on your teeth."

Imagine being so scared that you fear the sound of your own breath. Imagine not being able to trust anything you see within your environment. Imagine every second of your life being subject to unrelenting horror and suspense. *Dead Space* projects this atmosphere and sustains it through every one of its scarcely lit corridors. We recently played a near-complete version of the game, and in addition to developing a Wilhelm-like scream, we found ourselves thoroughly entranced by this edge-of-your-seat science fiction adventure.

What's surprising is how much of the game Electronic Arts has kept under lock and key. We won't reveal everything (although some of you would probably like to know exactly where a necromorph jumps out of a ventilation shaft), but some elements make this game much deeper than previously reported. When you aren't blowing limbs off of the ghoulish beasts in the cosmos, you'll likely be searching the shadows for credits and nodes. The credits are instrumental in upgrading your character. Isaac can use them to purchase new armor upgrades (which are shown cosmetically), weapons, ammo refills, and invaluable circuit nodes. The nodes can be inserted into any weapon to increase its damage, ammo storage, and rate of fire. You can't just pump all of the nodes into damage, however, as each weapon has an ability tree. Inserting each node will bring you down a different

branch. Since unearthing these rarities takes a keen eye, you can always sell weapons to free up more funds for specific ammo types, nodes, or different armaments.

The control schematic is nicely designed, allowing players every action they feel they should have for a particular situation – such as being able to stomp on a fallen enemy's noggin. The over-the-shoulder targeting system provides a nice view of the action with tight, yet quick movement. The plasma cutter is your primary firearm, but it hardly feels underpowered as the game progresses; it can shred flesh and de-limb creatures with ease. It's just a matter of how sure your aim is. If you're a little spastic, you may take a liking to the Ripper (the chainsaw of the future). This weapon spits out a spinning sawblade with each shot, but you can't really call it a projectile, as the blade is sustained in a force field five to ten feet in front of your character. When an enemy approaches (which they never do subtly), you can move the blade to cut the foe down. You can usually cut all of the limbs off of an adversary in a few seconds, which helps for enemies that survive even after being decapitated.

These persistent enemy encounters lend the action a lot of depth. How can you kill an enemy who keeps regenerating body parts? Maybe something in the environment can be of aid? But the game isn't just about straight confrontations.

What would happen if the air on your deck suddenly depressurized? Or what do you do when a large tentacle bursts through the wall, latches onto you, and tries pulling you back to from whence it came? From what we could see in the first five hours of the game, developer EA Redwood Shores makes each encounter feel different, even with the same enemies you've been fighting since the start of the game.

A run button is readily available to use at any time, but unless we were fleeing from something unnaturally large and angry, we played the game as slowly as possible. This is mostly due to the fact that the developers were insistent that players jump out of their seat at least once per minute. Steam pipes burst in front of your face, enemies hide in the shadows, and there's always some kind of ominous noise coming from in front of you.

The story is told in conjunction with the gameplay, either through radio or live video feeds that your character projects as holograms. Like *BioShock*, you are rarely taken out of the action to watch a cutscene. The game seamlessly blends actions, exploration, and cinematic sequences to create a running narrative.

Dead Space can't come soon enough – we loved what we played so far and can't wait to see where it goes next. Unless this game falls apart as it progresses, it deserves serious Game of the Year buzz. ■ ■ ■



■ "Waste collection pouch for the win!"



■ "The wax will cost ya extra."



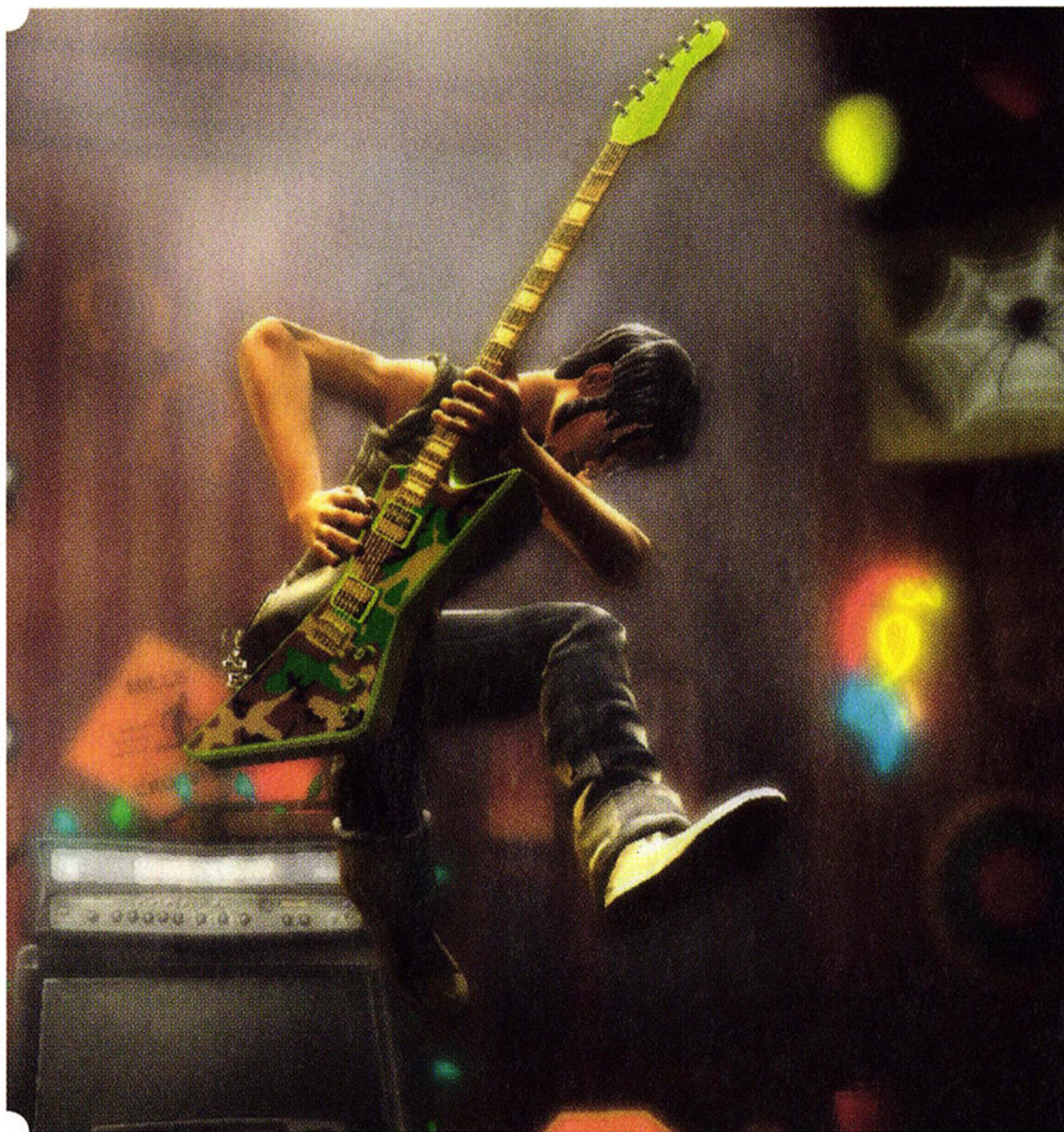
■ You never really know where death is lurking



EXPANDING THE STORY

The beginning of the game is actually the last chapter of the Dead Space story. When players step onto the mining ship, they are seeing the aftermath of a previous battle that humanity obviously lost. The story leading up to these events is detailed within a six-issue comic series (available now), and continued in a feature-length animated film (releasing on October 28 on DVD and Blu-ray). The comic details the activity on Aegis VII, how the planet was cracked, and how the necromorphs spread. The animated film picks up right where the comic leaves off, introducing players to the mining ship and the beginning of the game. It clocks in at 85 minutes and showcases some dazzling, albeit incredibly gory animation from animation studio Film Roman.





PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | Wii | PS2

Guitar Hero World Tour

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER MUSIC (UP TO 8-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION
 > **DEVELOPER** NEVERSOFT (PS3, 360), VICARIOUS VISIONS (WII), BUDCAT (PS2) > **RELEASE** FALL

IN THE STUDIO IS THE PLACE TO BE

We recently rocked out with Guitar Hero World Tour, testing the final functional instruments and dabbling with the new music creator. But first, we hit up some of the new features.

Players can finally earn money for the store in quickplay mode in addition to creating playlists of up to six songs. Call of Duty fans will also recognize World Tour's ranking progression. Instead of tracking multiplayer stats, players gain new icons for career earnings, moving from a little piggy to progressively more badass rock symbols. Rock Band owners will be glad to know that all of their instruments will be fully compatible with the game on all systems except Wii.

The recording studio is surprisingly deep, if not intimidating. You can jam and record with up to four people at the same time, or create tracks yourself and layer them together. Budding composers can select the scale they want the buttons synched to and easily bring the whole band into the same key. The lead guitar track plays single notes, while chords are found in the rhythm guitar section.

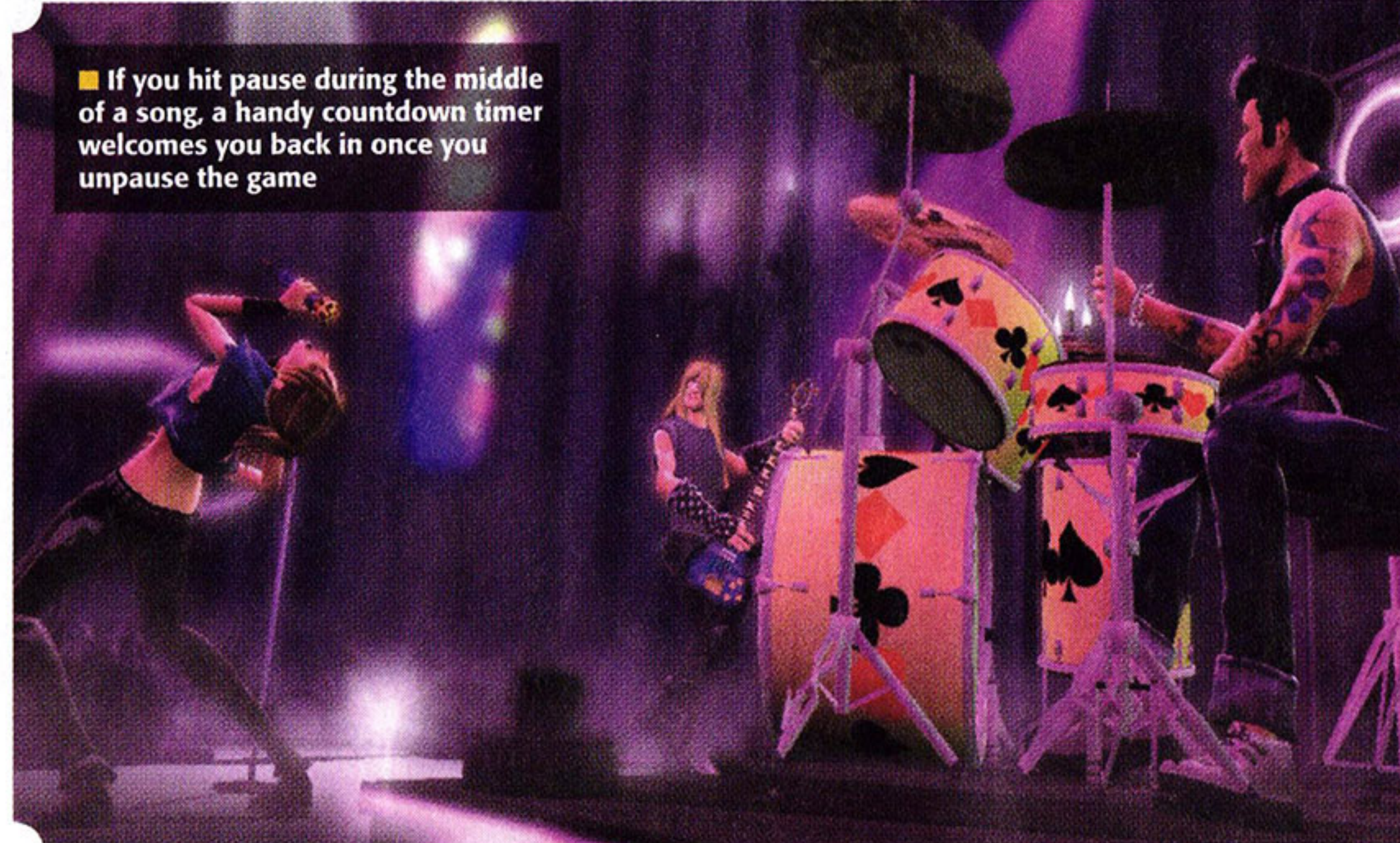
While messing around with drums in the studio, we noticed the many velocity sensitive capabilities. You can build up a roll on the heads from quiet to blasting. If you hit the yellow cymbal softly it'll produce a closed hi-hat sound, while hitting it harder makes a louder open hi-hat noise. Like all the instruments, there are an absurd amount of drum sounds ranging from Foo Fighters rock to

M.I.A. gunshots to Whitney Houston synth. Each of these drum features can be played on guitar as well. You can play one to one notes by tapping the colored buttons or use the drum machine and manipulate pre-made beats with the whammy, tilt, star bar, and touch pad.

Once you're ready to record, just flick the d-pad knob on the guitar and start playing. When you've got something tasty, you can bring it over to GH Mix to copy and paste sections, erase odd notes, and "nudge" notes around if the timing is a little off. When everything is complete it'll translate the song into Guitar Hero language to allow others to play along. It'll even automatically calibrate to all of the various difficulties.

Once you're ready to show your creation to the world you can post it on GH Tunes. At first you only get five slots for uploads, but that number will rise as you contribute more. On the other end, you can search for other's creations using various filters like most recent, most popular, or top artists, and load up your hard drive with up to 100 user-created songs.

At this point it seems like Neversoft has all the bases covered as far as giving players a ton of options in the studio. But we can't help but think that some musicians out there will be frustrated that they just can't plug in their real guitar or keyboard somewhere. The team is far from playing all of their cards at this point, however, so don't count something like this out completely. ■ ■ ■



SOUND CHECK

Game Informer takes the new instruments for a spin.

DRUMS

It takes a couple songs to integrate cymbals into your repertoire, but once you get the hang of it, it feels very natural. The quiet pads have a nice bounce to them, the cymbals are height adjustable, and the pedal offers an adequate amount of resistance. The pedal did slide forward during play since it's not latched on to the rest of the drums, but the final version will include the option of sticky foam pads or velcro (depending on floor surface) to keep it in place. Triggering Star Power on drums can be tricky (hit both cymbals and the kick drum), so you'll get a couple notes of leeway when it's unleashed without losing your multiplier. While we already knew the MIDI jack on the back of the set is compatible with real electronic drum kits, Neversoft hints there are still more surprises in store for that input.

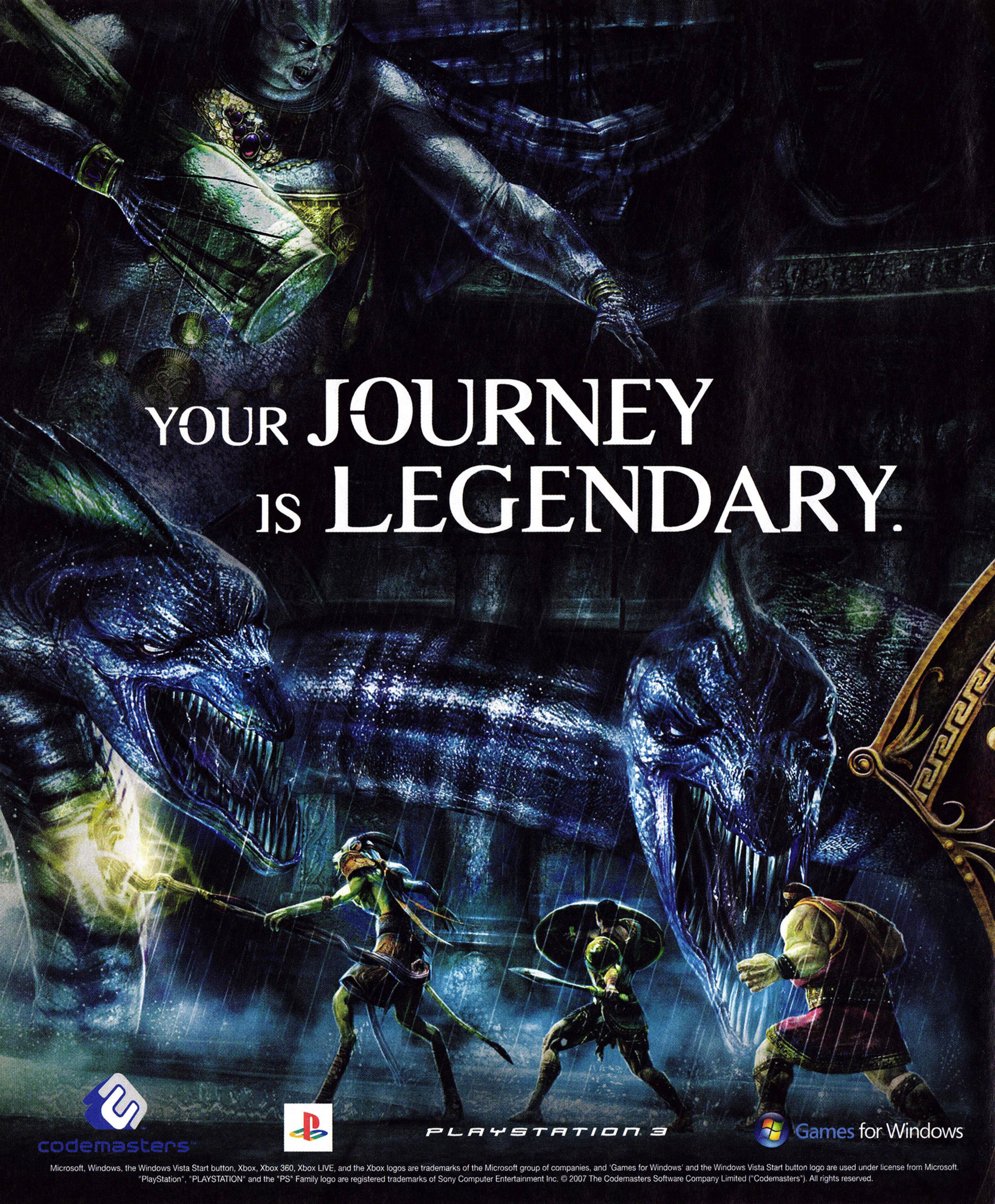
GUITAR

Even though it isn't shaped like a classic Gibson anymore, the new guitar controller has the potential to be the best of the best. The strum bar is now contoured similarly to the Rock Band controller, but the mechanism remains true to Guitar Hero. The new Star Power button is easy to press if you don't like tilting, even though tilts felt spot-on during our playtime. But the coolest addition to the mix is the new touch-sensitive pad on the neck. This can be tapped with your strumming hand as a replacement for the bar and slid back and forth for a whammy effect. If you see a series of clear notes connected by rope you'll be able to slide your finger along with the notes without having to strum. The d-pad now juts out of the controller to resemble a volume knob and is an easy way to record and navigate through tracks in the music creator.

MICROPHONE

This looks almost identical to the Rock Band mic, including the presence of a cord. Neversoft says that the quality of wireless mics isn't up to snuff yet. Hopefully, Microsoft's wireless Lips peripheral will be compatible.



A dramatic scene from the game 'Journey to the West'. At the top, a large, menacing blue dragon with sharp teeth and glowing eyes looms over the scene. Below it, three heroes are engaged in combat. On the left, a character with a long staff and a green and brown outfit. In the center, a character with a large black umbrella and a sword. On the right, a character in a red and gold robe. The background is a dark, atmospheric setting with stone structures and a large golden scroll on the right side.

YOUR JOURNEY
IS LEGENDARY.



PLAYSTATION 3



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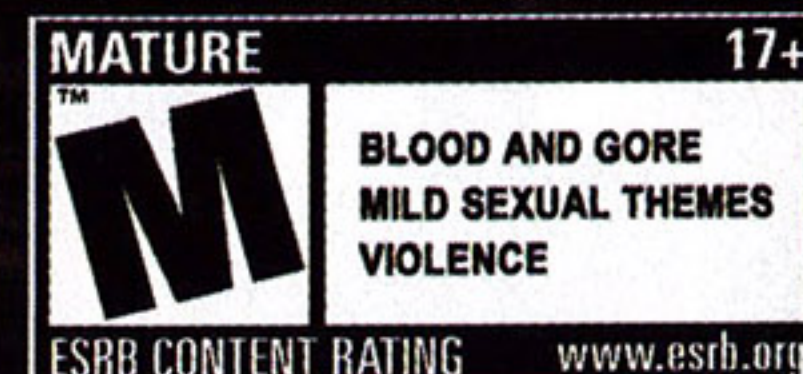


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PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Ghostbusters

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** TBA
 > **DEVELOPER** TERMINAL REALITY > **RELEASE** 2009

SUPERNATURAL SUPERSTARS

Ghostbusters fans are a haunted bunch. No doubt they are hounded by fears that their favorite franchise won't get the video game treatment it deserves. These concerns aren't entirely unreasonable, as the recent Activision/Vivendi merger has left the game on the verge of being canceled. While the game is being sold to a new publisher, developer Terminal Reality is still hard at work on the game, and our hands on time with the newest playable build is proof that the game is shaping up to be quite a crowd pleaser.

Our demo started with a familiar scene: the Ghostbusters climbing the steps of New York's public library. Crowds of people pack the streets cheering them on as they investigate a paranormal disturbance. Suddenly, two ghosts explode out of one of the famous

lion statues that sit in front of the landmark. "Whoa, double full torso animators!" exclaims Ray as the ghosts fly off. The voice work for all the principal actors from the original films is finally in, and the game sounds fantastic.

Inside the library, the chase is on. Your PKE meter, wa it like a metal detector to track down your ghosts.

The game is filled with plenty of great scripted sequences. Exploring the library's basement catacombs keeps us on our toes. Bookshelves slide around to form an ever-evolving labyrinth for us to navigate, books stack themselves in neat piles from floor to ceiling whenever we look away, and ghosts unexpectedly pop out to scare us while we innocently examine the walls.

Upon entering one of the library's open reading rooms, we face our first real chal-

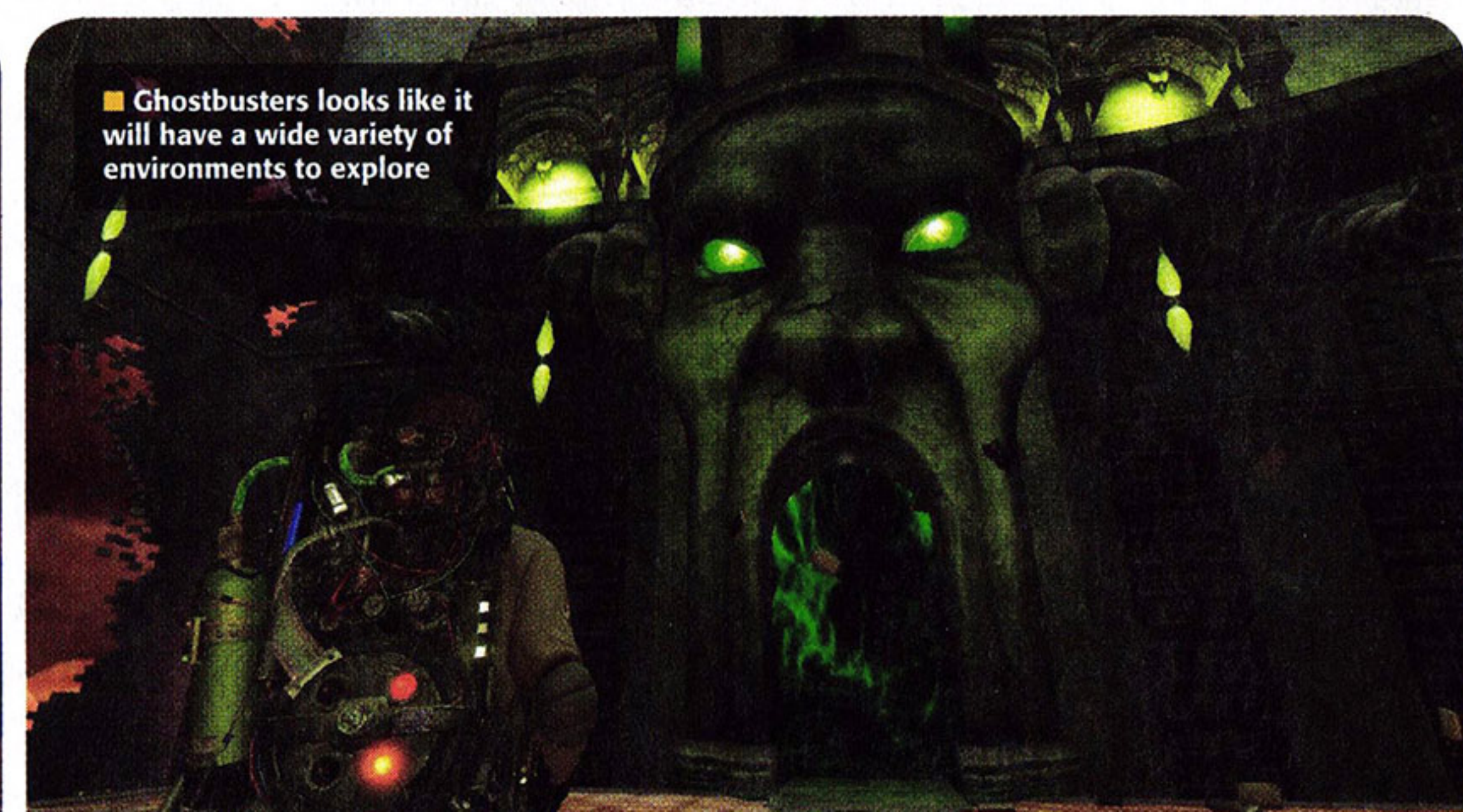
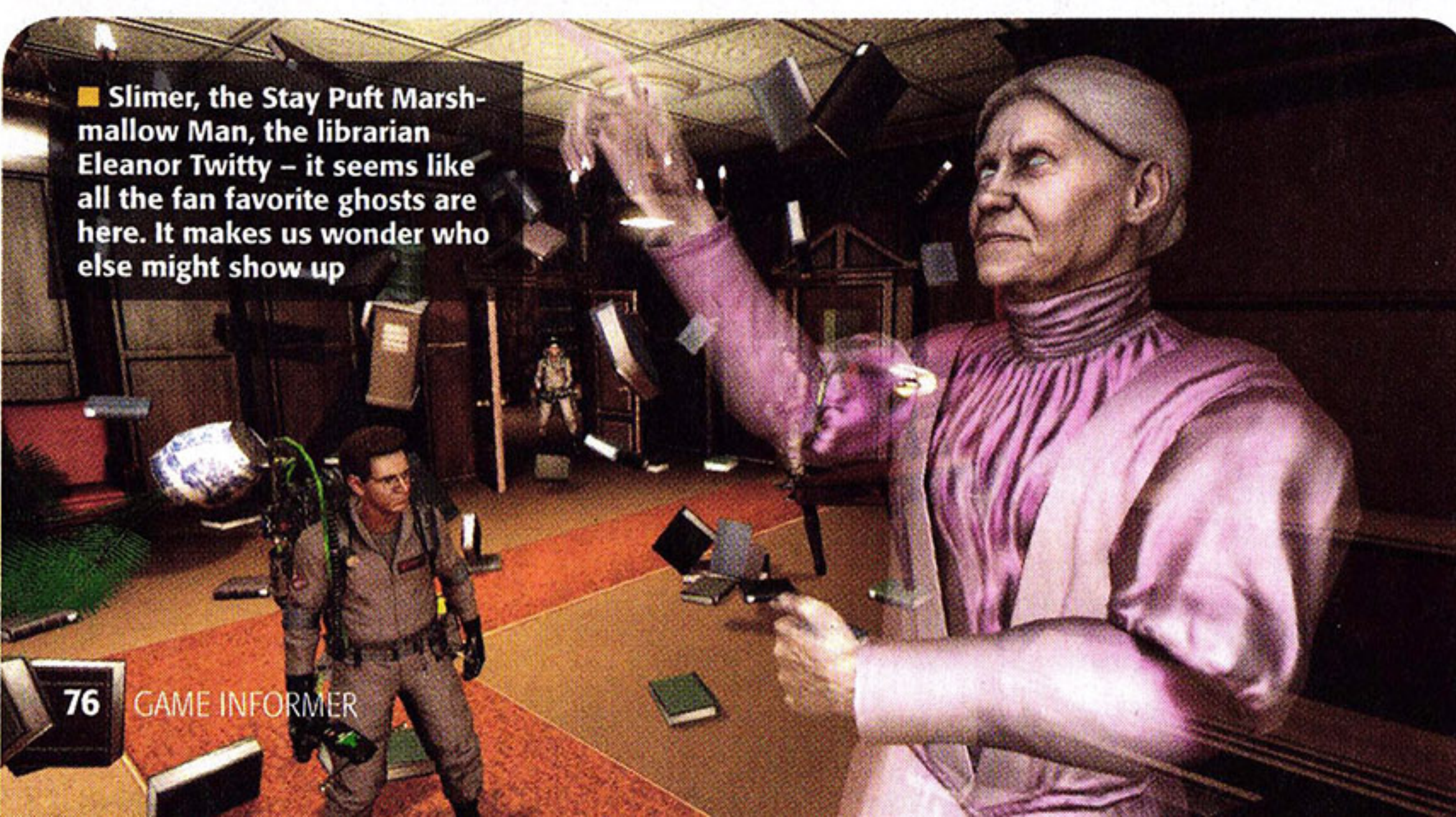
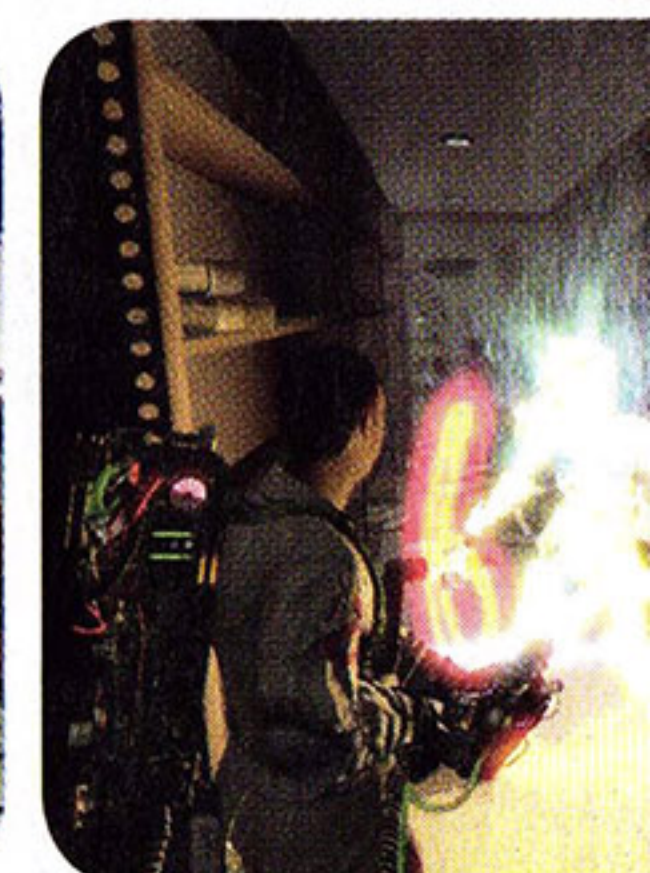
lenge. A level six bi-dimensional Attractor erupts from the floor, cutting a swath through the room of desks and sending piles of paper through the air in its wake. The apparition finally settles in front of us taking the form of a monster constructed from objects found in the environment.

The proton pack's blast stream does a great deal of damage. It leaves scorch marks along walls and destroys statues, chandeliers, and, well, pretty much everything it comes in contact with. A damage total keeps track of how much the city is going to have to pay out due to the Ghostbusters' recklessness. Then again, if these guys don't leave a room trashed, they're probably not doing their job.

After snaring the ghost in our capture beam, trapping it becomes a matter of slamming the apparition against every object in

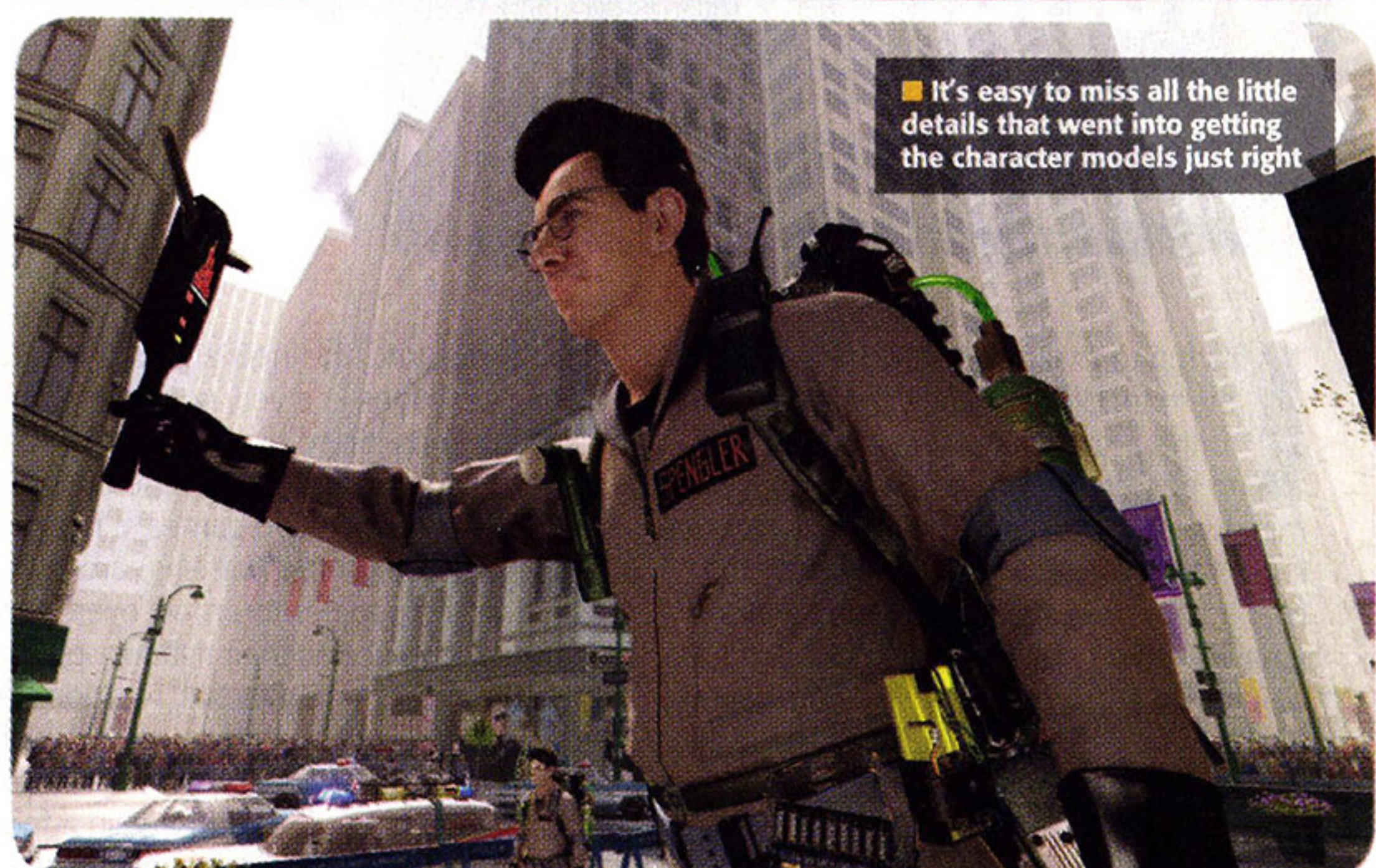
the environment until it's dazed and we can slide a trap under its belly. The mechanics still need a few tweaks, but causing havoc while wrangling the little poltergeist is plenty entertaining regardless.

Fans of the series who haven't been keeping tabs on this game since day one will be happy to know that Dan Aykroyd and Harold Ramis wrote this script as a direct sequel to the last film. The game's music retains the classic Ghostbusters flair, and the character models look like eerie representations of what Aykroyd, Ramis, and Hudson would have looked like in 1991. In short, this game feels like Ghostbusters III. If all goes to plan, when it releases it will feel like that two-decade gap between the game and the movies never existed. ■ ■ ■

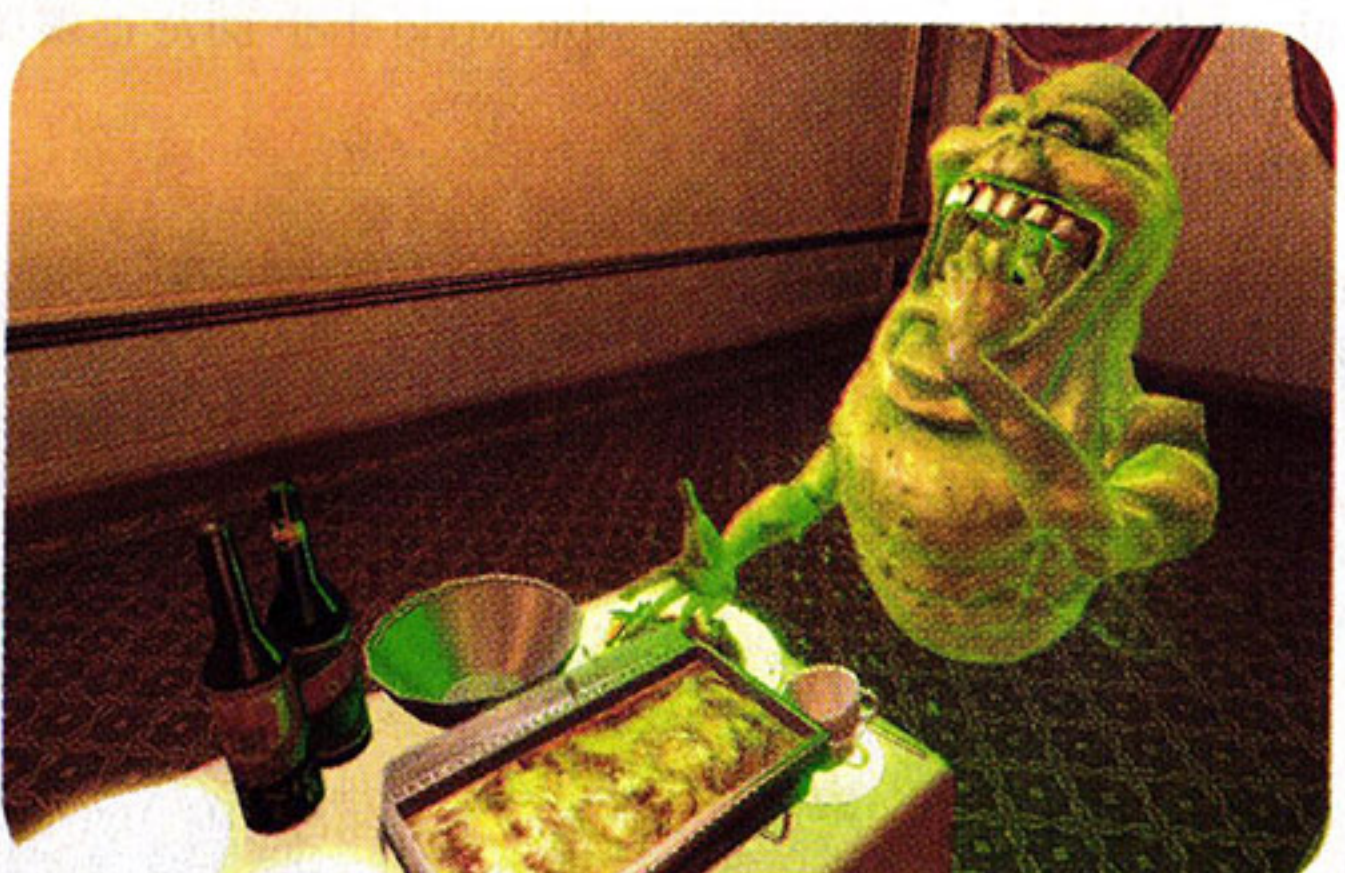




■ Terminal Reality is still promising multiplayer, but has remained tightlipped on specifics



■ It's easy to miss all the little details that went into getting the character models just right



■ The lights on your pack will tell you how close it is to overheating





PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

Overlord II

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > **PUBLISHER** CODEMASTERS
 > **DEVELOPER** TRIUMPH STUDIOS > **RELEASE** SUMMER 2009

SPAWN MORE OVERLORDS

■ Clubbing baby seals: not worth it

It's fun to make people do what you tell them to. Unfortunately, there are limits to the acts people can be convinced to perpetrate, which is why you need minions. If you played *Overlord* last year, you know that minions are joyfully violent and hilariously immoral imps that live to serve your will. If you need a town sacked, or just a pumpkin patch ruined, they'll do whatever it takes. The problem is they need an overlord to command them — and the world of *Overlord II* has been without a supremely evil being for the last 50 years. That's where you come in.

In this sequel you take on the role of a fledgling overlord. The descendent of the

original overlord, this new antihero was rescued by minions at a very young age. These slaving imps raised him to be a fearsome force to be reckoned with. In the time of peace between the two games, a new empire (based on the Romans) arose to rule over the people. You must overthrow it to take your place as their rightful oppressor.

Using a host of new tactics, weapons, and abilities, players must wage a guerilla war against the empire. By taking over camps and assassinating officials, you gain a foothold in the various environments. From tropical locations to frozen northern wastes, the locations are more distinct and less rooted in storybook fantasy. As you tromp

through these regions, you will encounter new battlefield scenarios to test the might of your legion like large-scale battles that involve siege weaponry and naval skirmishes. That's not to say that there won't still be a fair share of defiling and pillaging, but even an overlord needs a break from time to time, right?

Your horde of adoring gremlins has evolved alongside the combat. Minions now can use certain creatures as mounts, such as spiders, wolves, and dragons. This increases their combat effectiveness and provides them with additional bonuses. For instance, wolves can jump over chasms, while spiders can shoot webs. You can

also promote certain minions to battlefield commanders, and you'll even possess your minions and control them directly in some situations. The idea is to avoid the feeling that you can solve any problem by throwing a ton of minions at it; you'll need to evaluate your options and use strategy.

The first *Overlord* was a great concept, and the final product delivered a lot of laughs. If Triumph Studios can iron out that game's control issues in addition to adding all of this content, *Overlord II* should be the ideal outlet for any gamer who would rather raze the world than save it. ■ ■ ■



■ Ants and mosquitos just surrendered the picnic-spoiling trophy



■ Personal safety is not a huge concern for minions

■ Wolves are just one of several mounts in the game



■ Minions will have tons of facial expressions and participate in more hijinks





PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Skate 2

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SPORTS (ONLINE TBA)

> **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS

> **DEVELOPER** EA BLACK BOX > **RELEASE** 2009

KEEP ON ROLLING

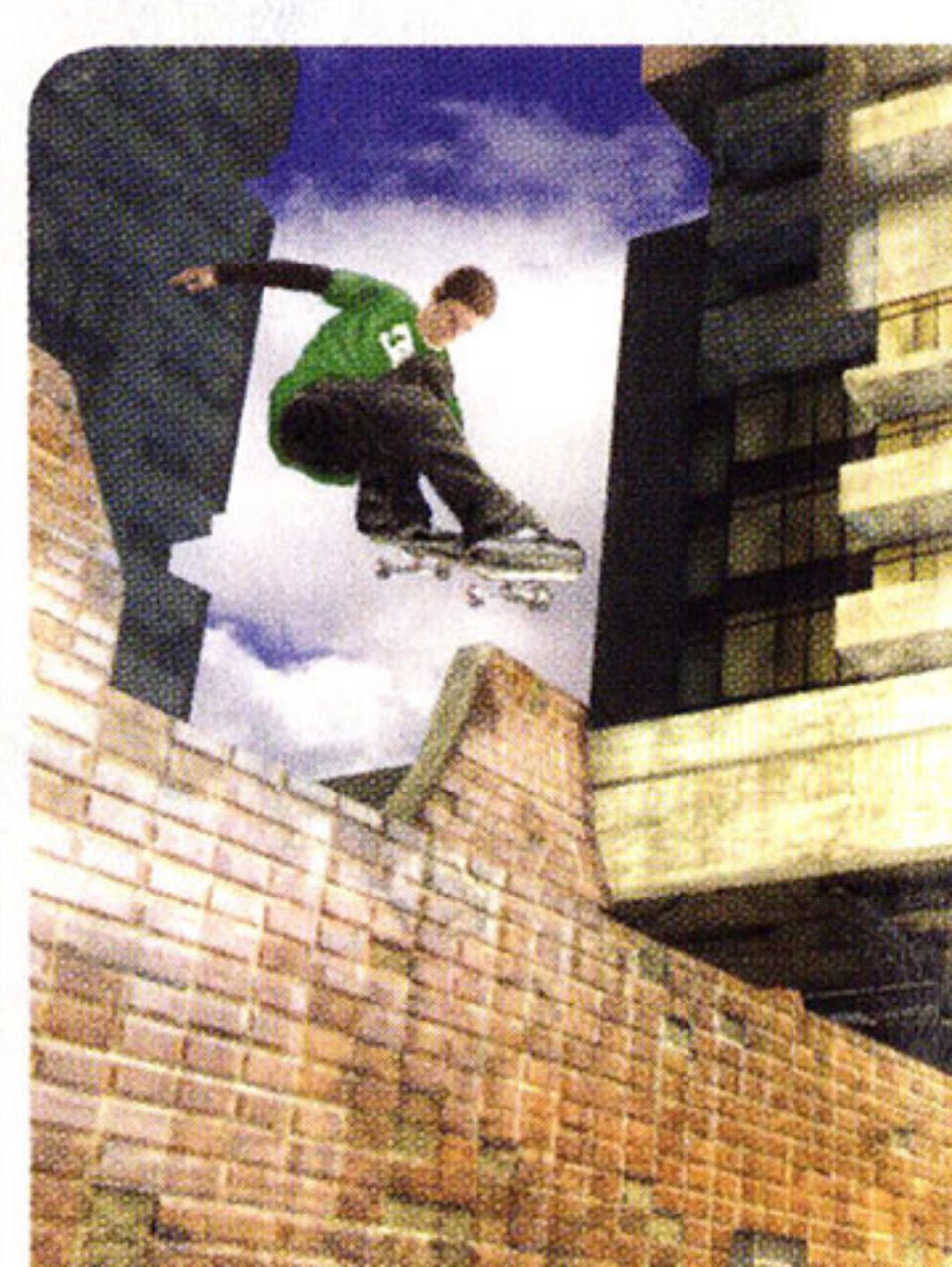
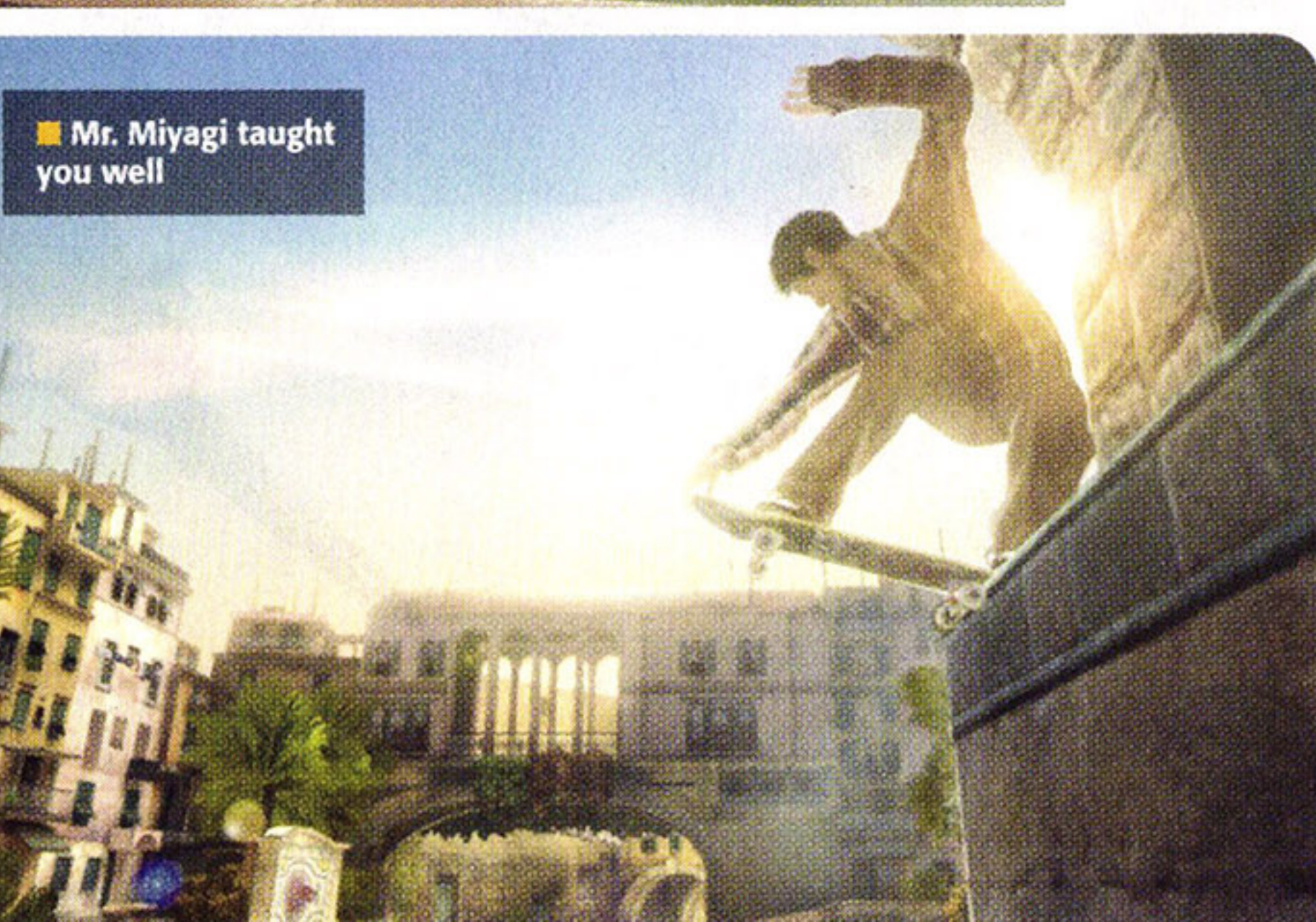
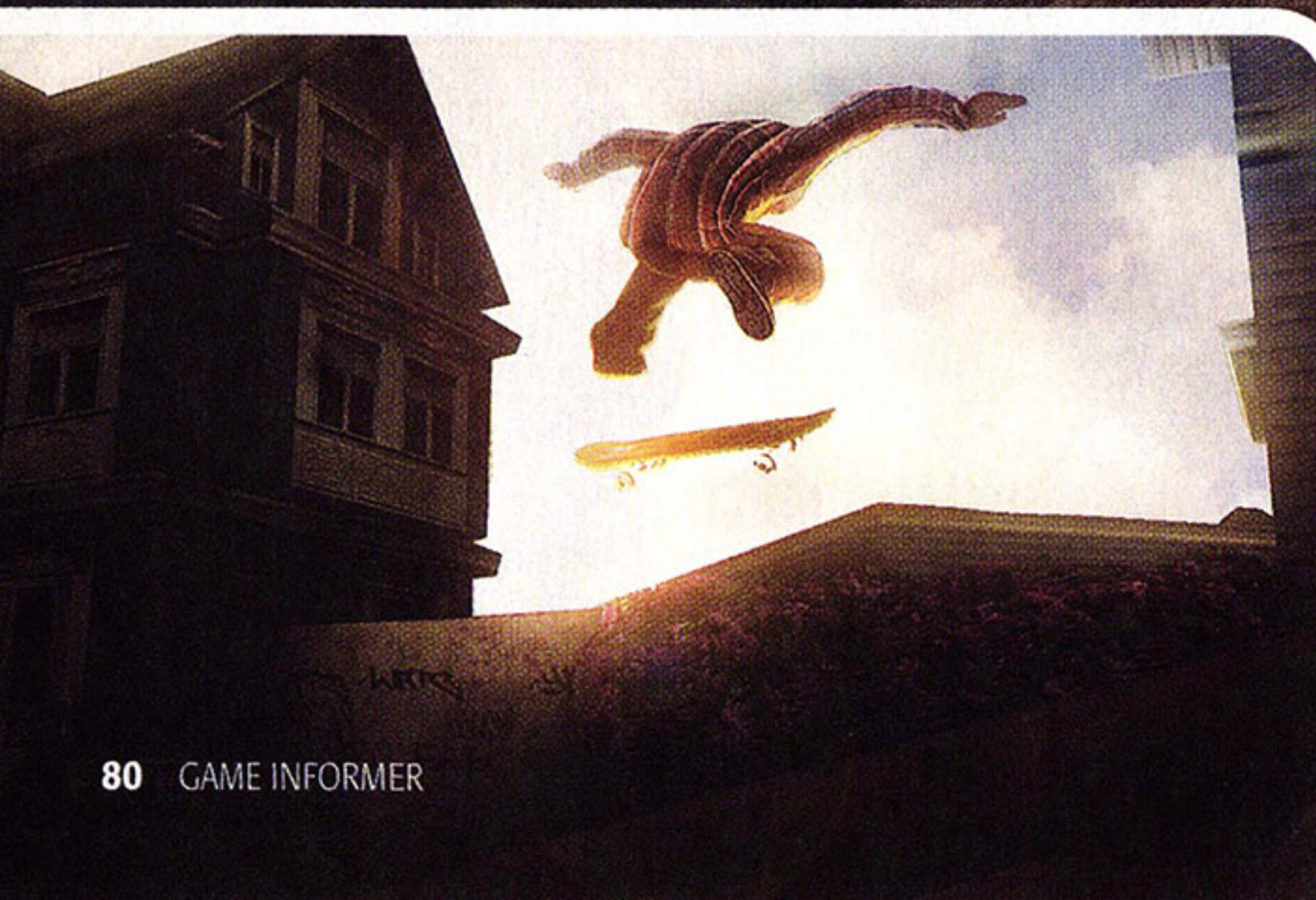
When EA and Black Box released Skate last year, the game attacked a genre dominated by one series for a decade and changed it forever. By moving the concept of skateboarding in a video game to more realistic influences, they took a risk that paid off. Now the team is hard at work on Skate 2. Where do they go from here? Bigger and better.

Due to the disaster sequence in Skate It on the Wii, the fictional city of San Vanelona was destroyed and rebuilt five years later by a large corporation. This allowed the team to start from scratch with the environment. Black Box took note of the small issues players had with the first game, like frustrating citizens and unforgiving cars. Now the people around you are aware you're skateboarding and will jump out of the way. The traffic will also let you just ride.

The team is also improving the all-important control scheme. Skate's deep control system allowed players to execute a full gambit of tricks using the sticks and triggers as if they were their own feet and hands. This system makes a full comeback with twice as many tricks. Tricks like the fingerflip (a kickflip performed by using your finger to flip the board), footplants, hippy ollies, no complies, and one-foots debut within the grabs and flip tricks system you already know. The team has also added a new grab-the-world button that easily lets the character grab the half pipe coping for handplant tricks.

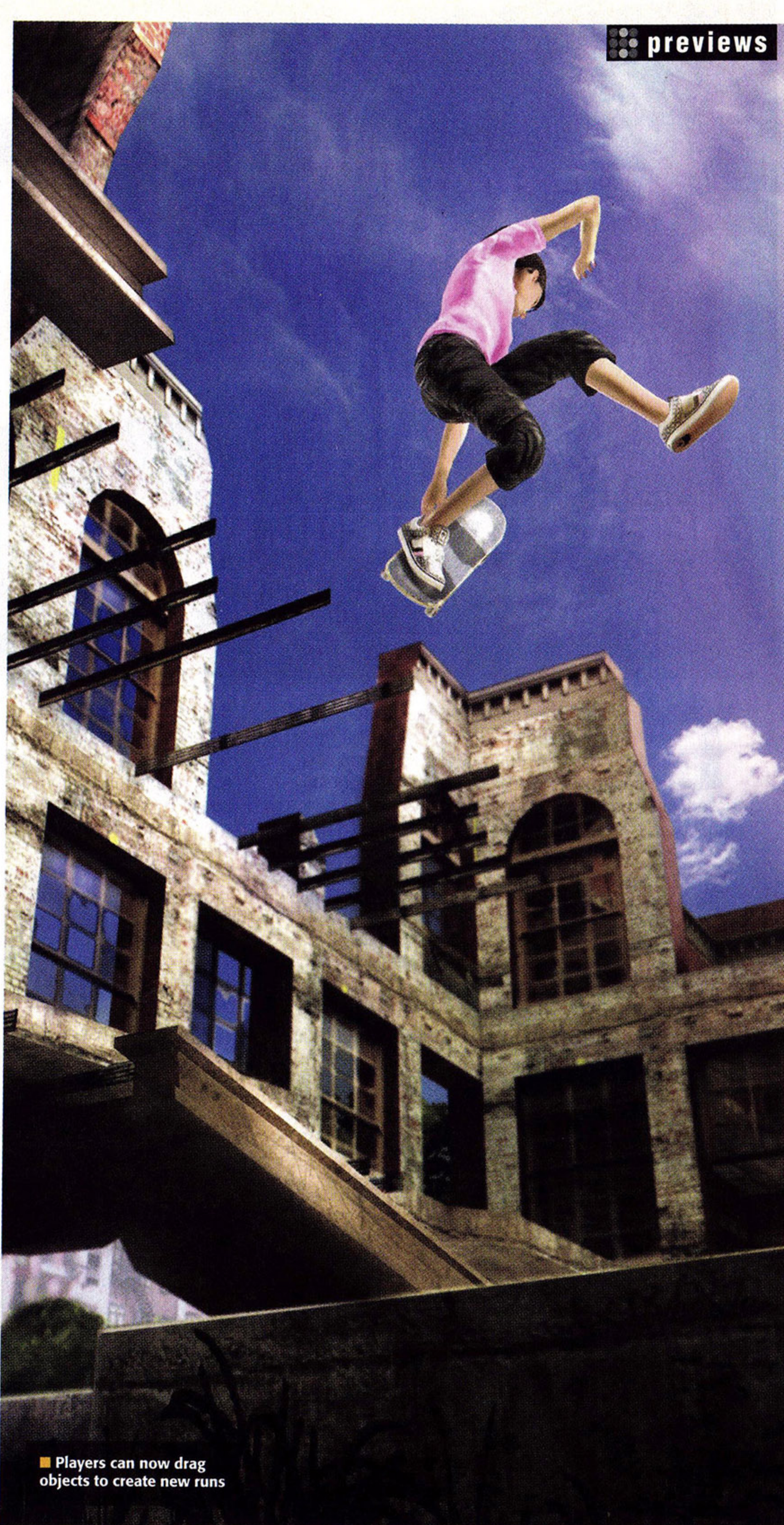
The other big addition to Skate 2 is the ability to get off your board. Many fans wanted this in the first game, and Black Box has upped the ante by allowing the player to drag a ton of rails, tables, benches and more around the city. "You want to go to the top of the mountain because you really like the bench that's up there and drag it all the way down to the water front?" asks gameplay producer Jay Balmer, "It will take you like a half hour, but if you want to do it, go ahead." These pieces won't be on a limiting grid system — we dragged a picnic table up onto a stair set to create a fun session in a place that would have otherwise been unskateable.

Black Boxes plan on revealing even more new features at a later date. Taking the smartest path of "not messing with a good thing" while adding more skateboarding depth, Skate 2 has us thinking that the franchise may be here to stay. ■ ■ ■

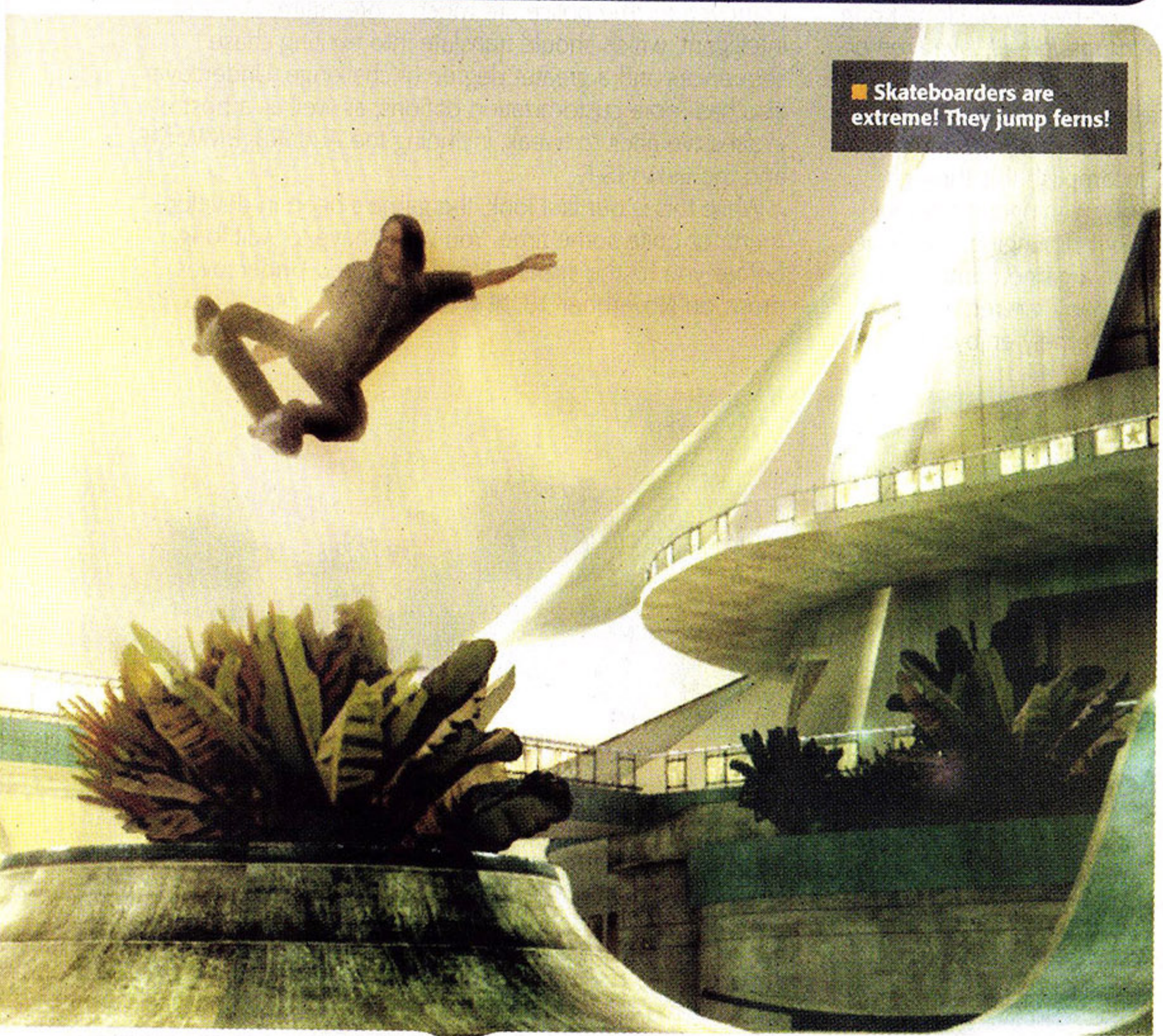




■ "Hi, Mom!"



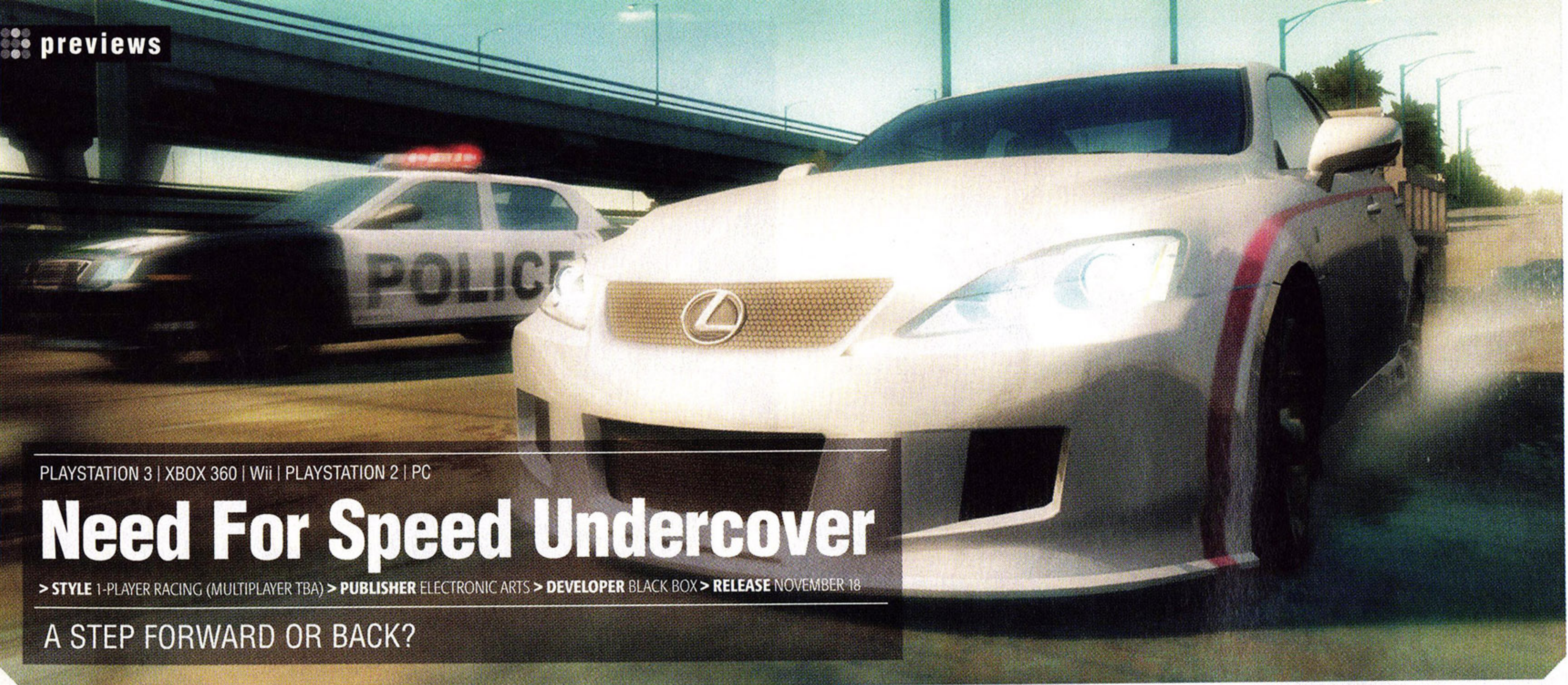
■ Players can now drag objects to create new runs



■ Skateboarders are extreme! They jump ferns!



■ This is where the Allspark is held



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | Wii | PLAYSTATION 2 | PC

Need For Speed Undercover

> STYLE 1-PLAYER RACING (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > PUBLISHER ELECTRONIC ARTS > DEVELOPER BLACK BOX > RELEASE NOVEMBER 18

A STEP FORWARD OR BACK?

The Need for Speed series has been extremely inconsistent over the years. Last year's Pro Street fell squarely in the dud category as its controversial design decisions (most notably a return to closed track courses) led to mixed reviews. The recently announced Need for Speed Undercover looks to restore the brand name's luster with a return to the open-world, over-the-top racing fans have come to expect.

The nods to "realism" are gone in favor of balls-out police chases and highway craziness in an enormous fictional metropolis dubbed the Tri-City Bay Area. Players explore this hair-raising world as an undercover agent who must infiltrate an international crime syndicate by – you guessed it – engaging in races, chasing rivals, evading the police, and generally driving like a maniac. While this sounds like a

thin excuse for a series of blazingly fast races...oh hell, it is just a thin excuse for a series of blazingly fast races. Frankly, that's fine with us. This window dressing plot should at least look pretty, as Undercover stylishly blends video footage with CG and features Hollywood-by-way-of-Hong-Kong movie vixen Maggie Q (*Mission Impossible III*, *Live Free or Die Hard*).

EA touts Undercover as the fastest and most responsive racer in the series' history, with virtual speed reaching 180 miles an hour. The developers accomplish this through what EA (the industry's masters of meaningless nomenclature) has dubbed the "Heroic Driving Engine." We have no idea what that means. However, a game demo at the Games Convention in Leipzig, Germany ran remarkably well – as fast as imaginable and extremely enjoyable to

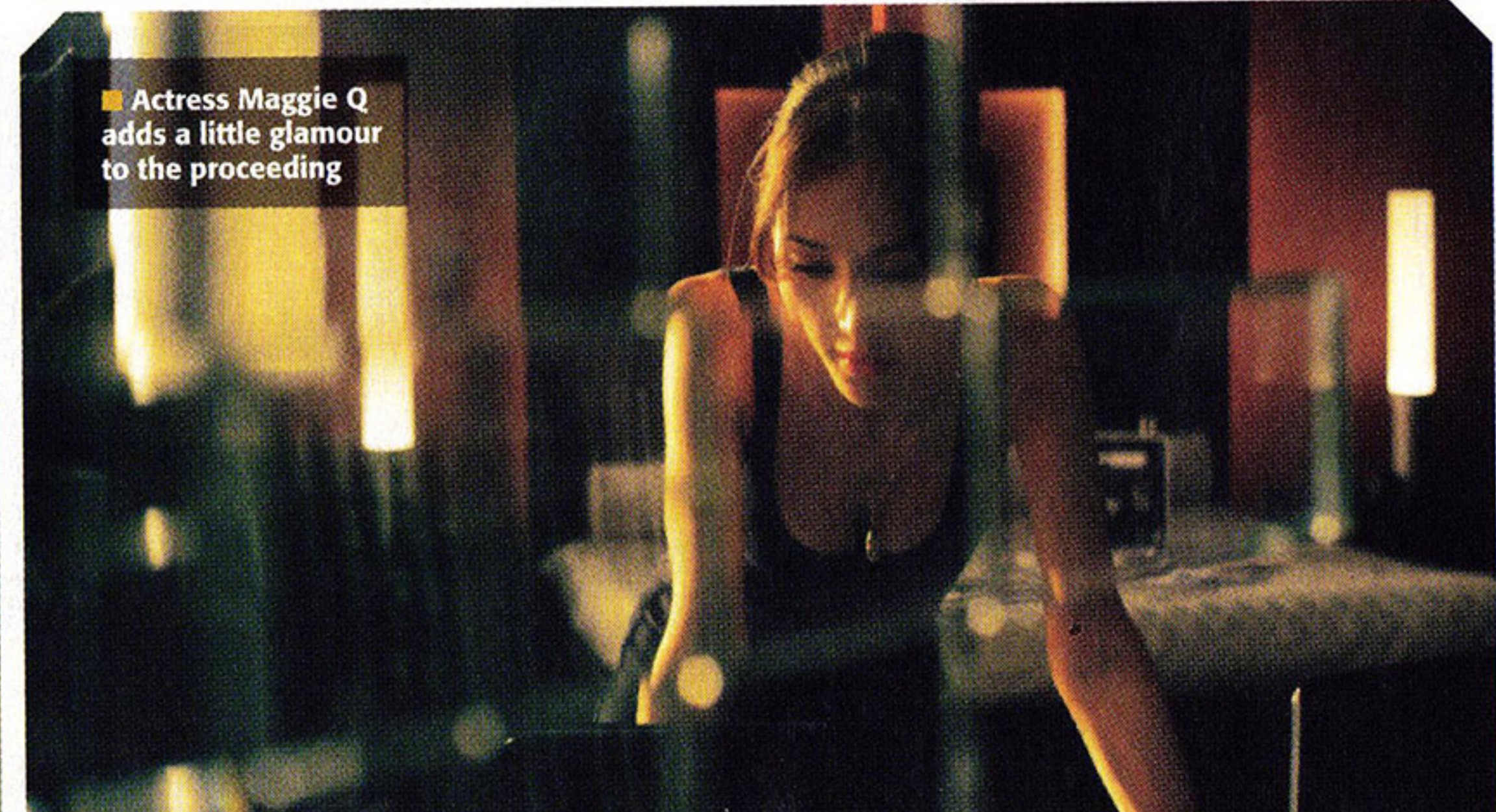
control. Heroic or not, Undercover should continue the series' tradition of delivering high production values. And yes, the realistic damage from ProStreet remains.

The gameplay is also refined, most notably with its improved AI. The police are much more aggressive and intelligent, which should translate into exciting chase sequences and a greater degree of challenge. Undercover also has more customization options, as well as a host of impressive rides to tweak, including the Audi R8, BMW M6, and the Lexus IS-F.

While this is our first look, the game's been in development for quite some time. You won't have to wait long before you hit the streets; Need for Speed Undercover drops on November 18. ■ ■ ■

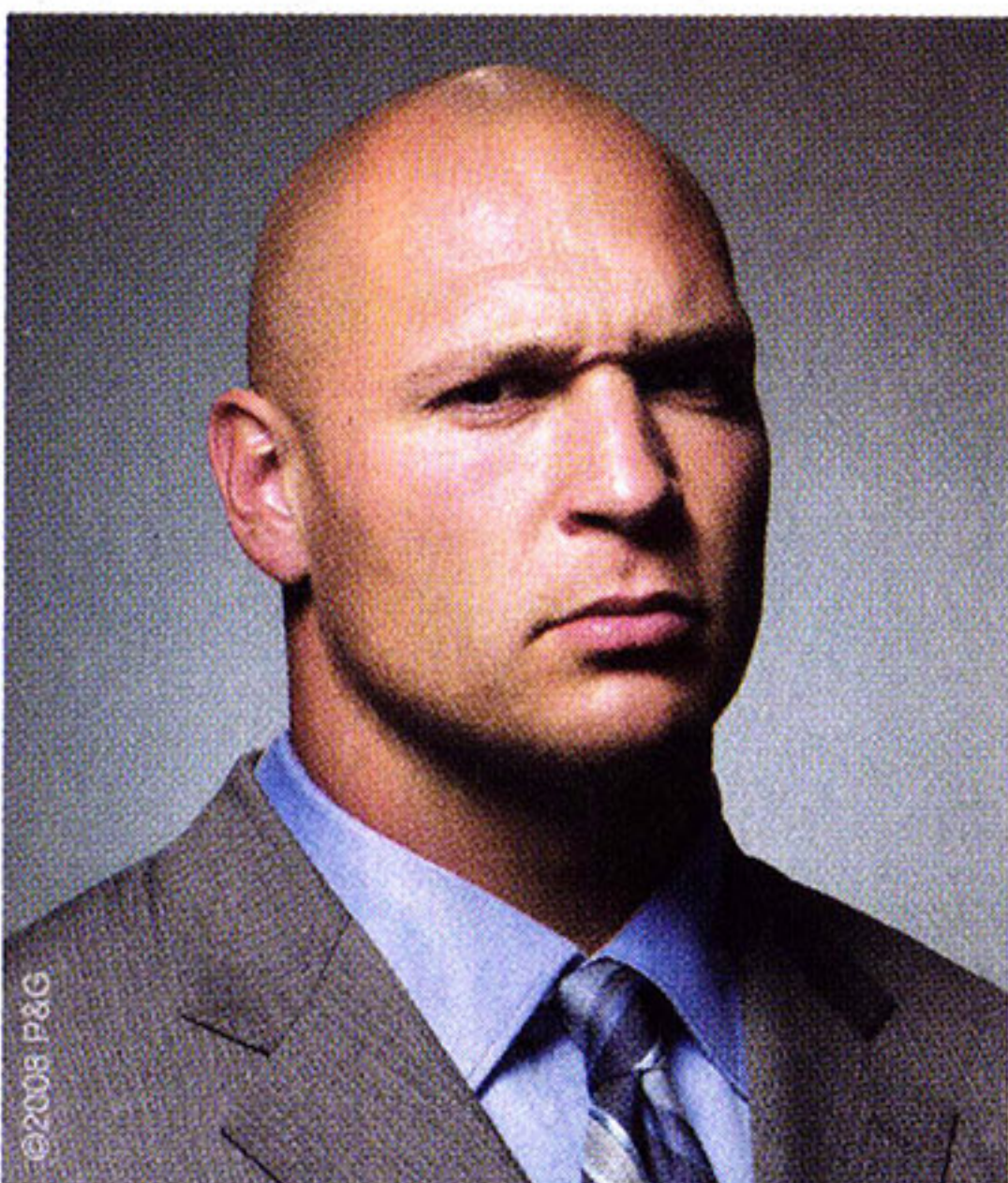


■ As always, Need for Speed looks great and moves fast



■ Actress Maggie Q adds a little glamour to the proceeding

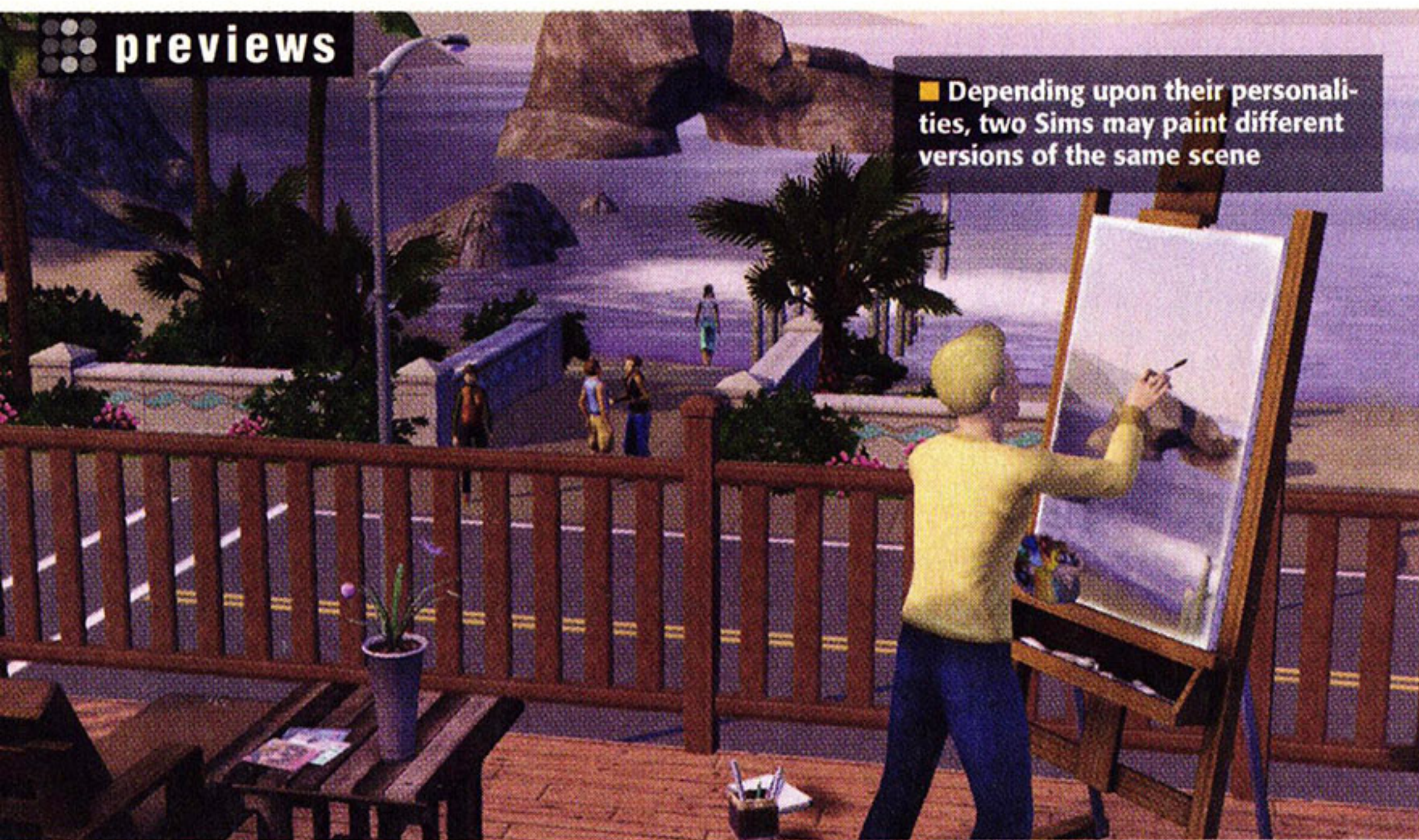
BRIAN URLACHER, BEFORE



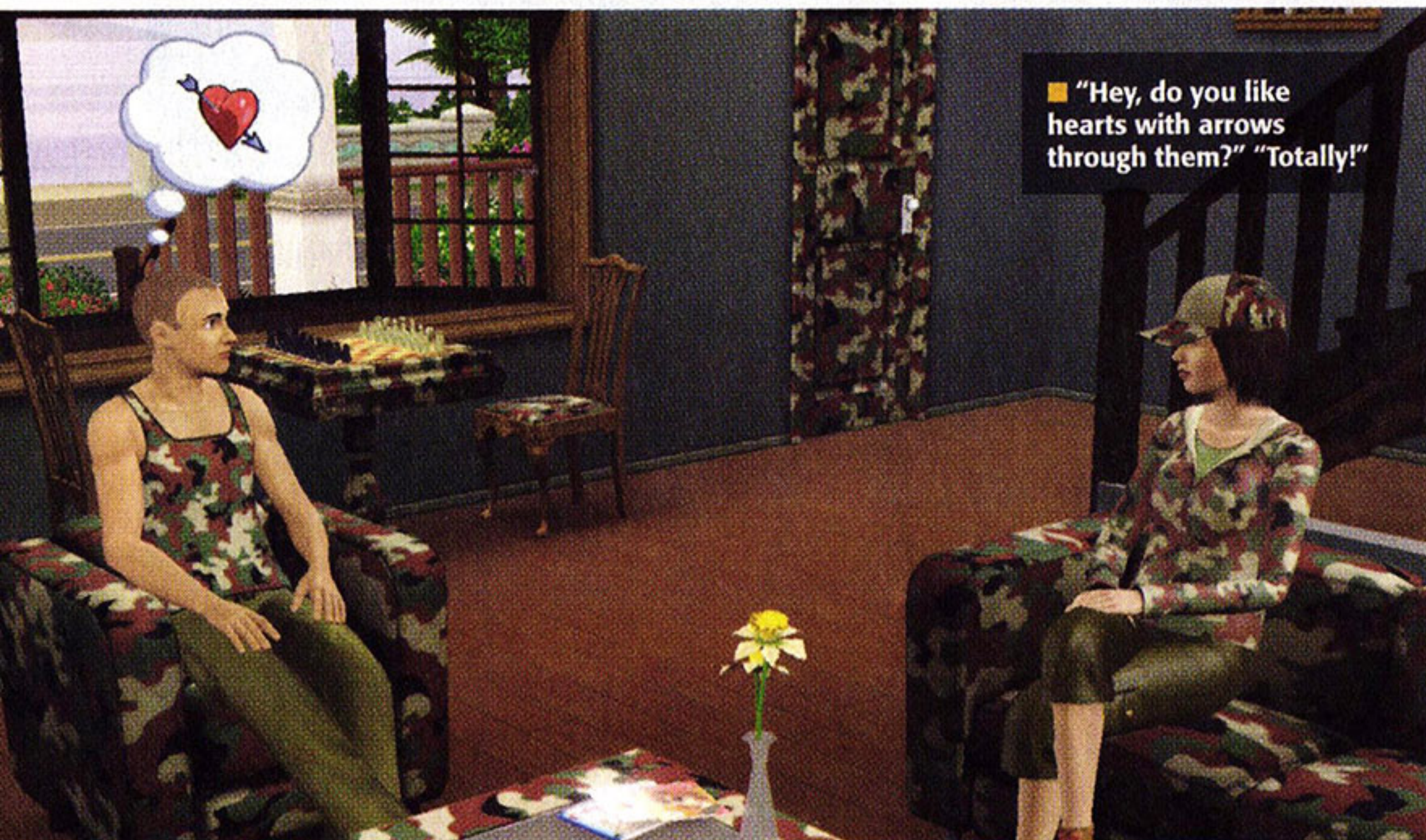
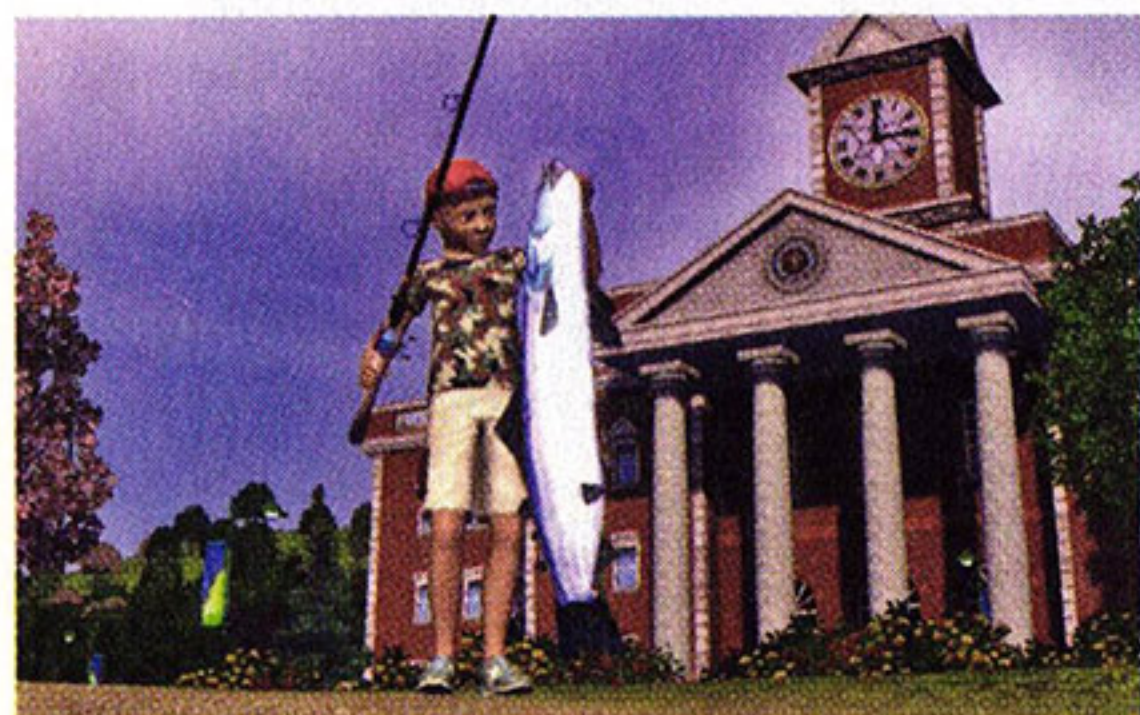
"OLD SPICE SWAGGER TRANSFORMED ME FROM THIS SAD LITTLE NERD PERSON INTO THE COLOSSAL MAN MOUNTAIN OF AWESOMENESS YOU SEE NOW. THANKS, OLD SPICE." -BRIAN URLACHER

Old Spice
Swagger
THE SCENT THAT MAKES A DIFFERENCE!





■ Depending upon their personalities, two Sims may paint different versions of the same scene



■ "Hey, do you like hearts with arrows through them?" "Totally!"

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PC

The Sims 3

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SIMULATION > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **DEVELOPER** EA REDWOOD SHORES
> **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 20

MEET THE NEIGHBORS

Wake up. Use the bathroom. Eat breakfast. Go to work. Whether or not you've played The Sims before, this morning routine is all too familiar. The difference in The Sims is that simple tasks like these take several hours, filling your sim's day and leaving them with less time for fun stuff. Thankfully, that's about to change. The Sims 3 focuses less on the mundane tasks of everyday life, allowing players to shape a story around their sims as they explore their seamless, open neighborhoods.

"Our ambition for the Sims 3 is to make the gameplay quick and rewarding, so every game session you feel like you're getting something big done – like you're moving the story of your character's life forward," explains executive producer Ben Bell. "As a player, you'll be focused on fulfilling your sim's destiny or driving them towards some sort of bigger goal you've chosen. We really want the sims' basic needs to fall into subtext." Your characters still have basic needs, but you'll spend less time keeping all of those balls in the air, and more time working toward larger goals. What exactly those goals are varies depending on the sim, since different personality traits lead to different ambitions. Even better, the game generates smaller aspirations (called wishes) that guide the player down the path of fulfilling a sim's dream.

"In the case of the sim who wants to be an astronaut," Bell elaborates, "he or she is going to want to join the military career and get ahead, and getting ahead means

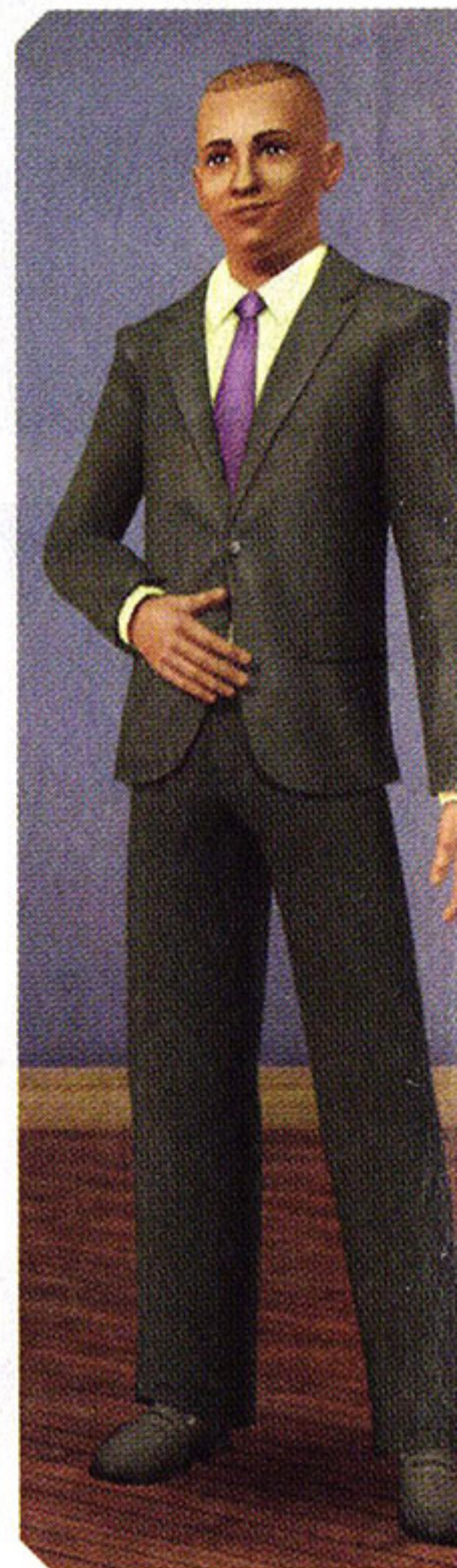
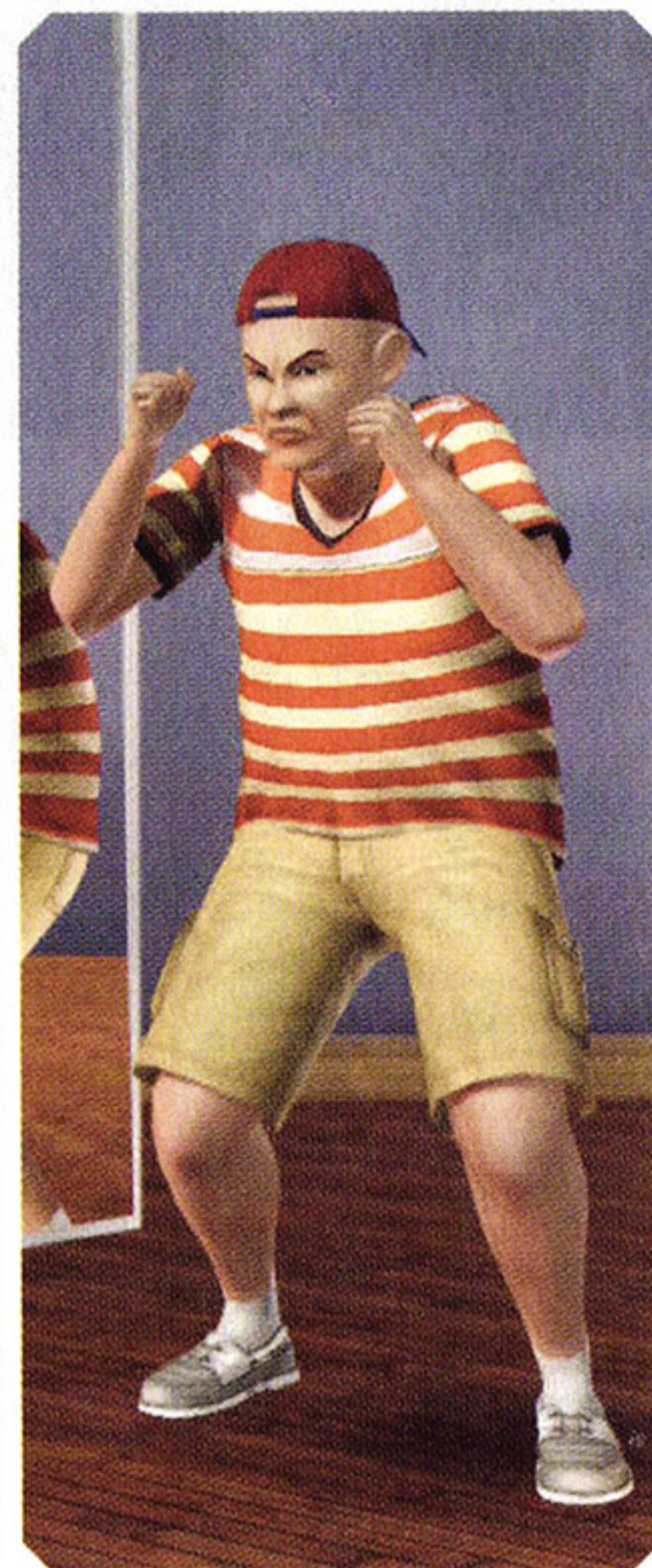
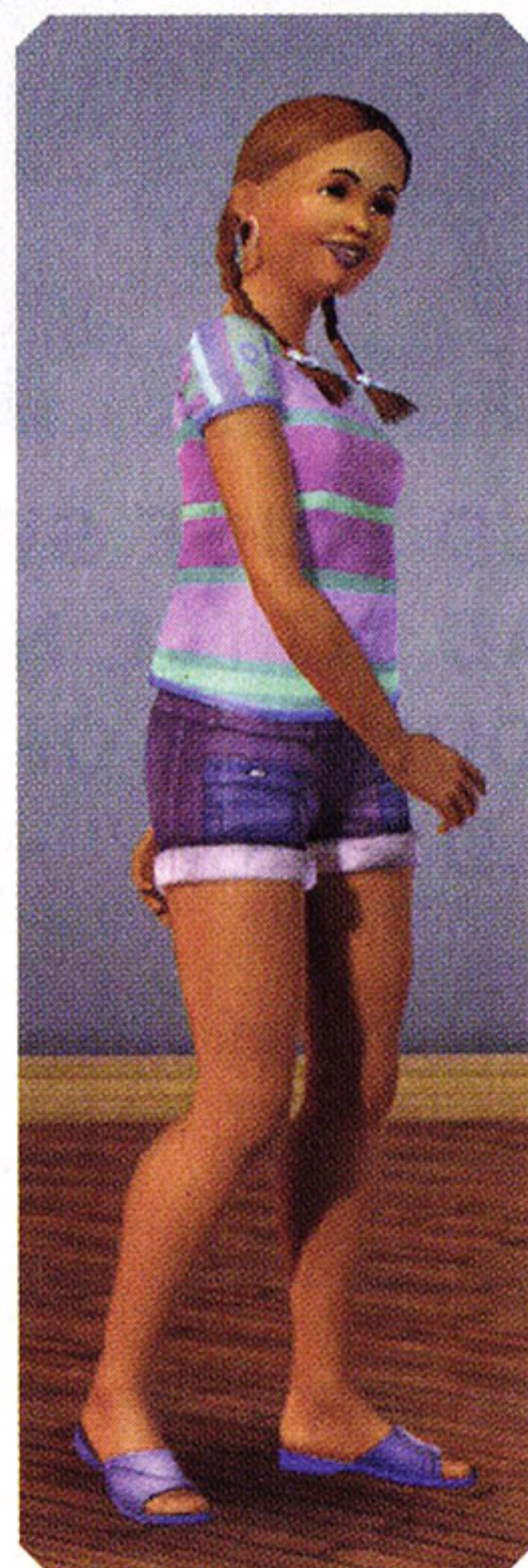
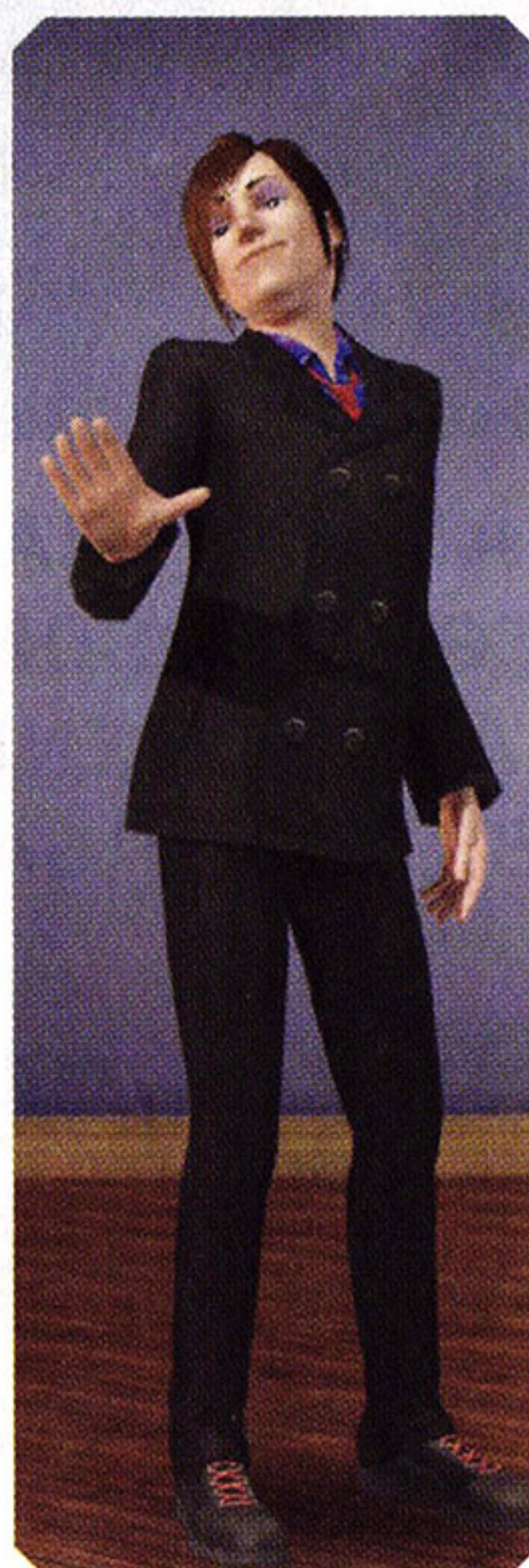
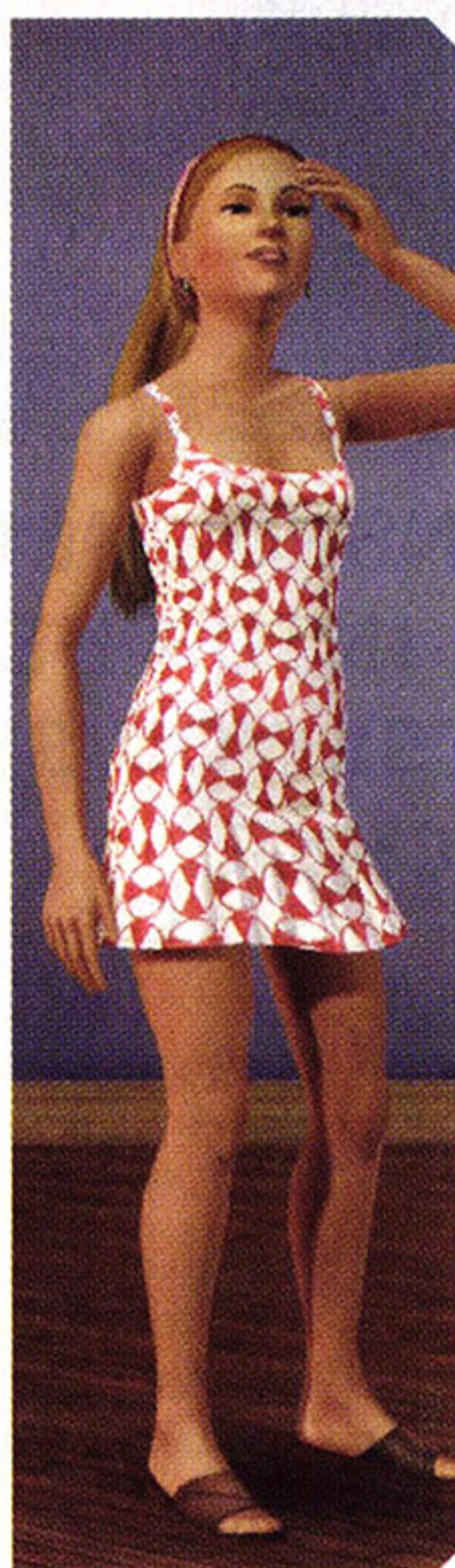
schmoozing it up with people, and also building skills and all those things that are really a key part of the Sims experiences."

With this new structure, getting your sims ahead in their careers isn't just a matter of going to work for eight hours each day. Players are given prompts that inject diversity into the daily grind (like choosing whether or not to work late for a career boost at the price of your energy). Additionally, various things in the world feed into your sim's career. Getting promoted isn't just about building skill points – you need to interact with the world in various ways. "In the previous Sims games, each career progressed in a very similar fashion," says Bell. "Now we really have a lot of unique goals – and they also get you out in that neighborhood where you can meet the people around you." If you progress far enough in your career, you can even attain a certain level of fame. For instance, if your sim is a high-ranking official in the military career, other townspeople may salute you as you walk down the street.

If all goes well, these changes to the core gameplay will eliminate that babysitting feeling some gamers get from monitoring their sims' bladder and hunger. Instead, The Sims 3 focuses on guiding your sims' destinies as they achieve small daily goals and lifelong dreams. The more you imagine the aspirations of an entire community populated by diverse sims – all at your control – the harder it gets to wait for the next entry in this juggernaut franchise. ■ ■ ■

THE VILLAIN NEXT DOOR

This may come as a surprise, but some gamers out there would rather see their sims suffer than succeed. If you happen to be one of these mischievous souls, The Sims 3 should make you smile. "Because of the trait system, you can put sims together who really shouldn't be living in the same household just to see what happens," admits Bell. "You can put a good sim with an evil sim to see how they get along. You can put the kleptomaniac sim in the big household and watch him steal from all his roommates." This kind of psychological strain may seem bizarre, but it's all a part of the goal to let the players tell their own stories. When asked if the development team intentionally creates opportunities to give sims a hard time, Bell responds: "Yes, absolutely."



TOOL VAN HALEN SEX PISTOLS MICHAEL JACKSON
 THE DOORS WINGS BEASTIE BOYS LACUNA COIL
 FLEETWOOD MAC TRIST DINOSAUR JR. COLDPLAY
 THE CULT JOE SATRANI SURVIVOR 311 BILLY IDOL
 JIMI HENDRIX MUSE LOST PROPHETS PAT BENATAR
 DREAM THEATER THE GUESS WHO MARS VOLTA
 BON JOVI LENNY KRAVITZ KORN OASIS METALLICA
 THE STONE ROSES NO DOUBT STEELY DAN KENT
 AT THE DRIVE IN THE WHITE STRIPES RADIO FUTURA
 BOB SEGER SUE BONO THE VIBES AGAINST
 MCGYVER FOOT LOCKER BEATSTEAKS
 THE ENEMY BUCKLE UP AND GO WITH US SHPUPPIES
 BULLET FOR MY VALENTINE OF A DOWN
 SILVERSTEIN THE CLASH THE SOCIETY
 BLACK REBEL MOTO GUITAR CLUB THE EAGLES
 JIMMY EAT WORLD NECHAMAARO SIDEST MOUSE
 CREEDENCE CLEARWATER REVIVAL WILLIE NELSON
 NIRVANA LYNARD SKYNYRD STEVE MILLER BAND
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PC

The Lord of the Rings Online: Mines of Moria

> **STYLE** MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** TURBINE
 > **DEVELOPER** TURBINE > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER 3

YOU MAY NOT WISH TO PASS

When it comes to MMORPGs that largely follow traditional designs, The Lord of the Rings Online is the best one around that isn't named Warcraft. The game's careful digitizing of Tolkien's world and solid mechanics allowed it to carve out a niche for itself in a post-WoW market. This fall, its first retail expansion goes live. Mines of Moria is everything a major add-on should be; it revitalizes the base game with new classes, more levels, and a ton of content to explore.

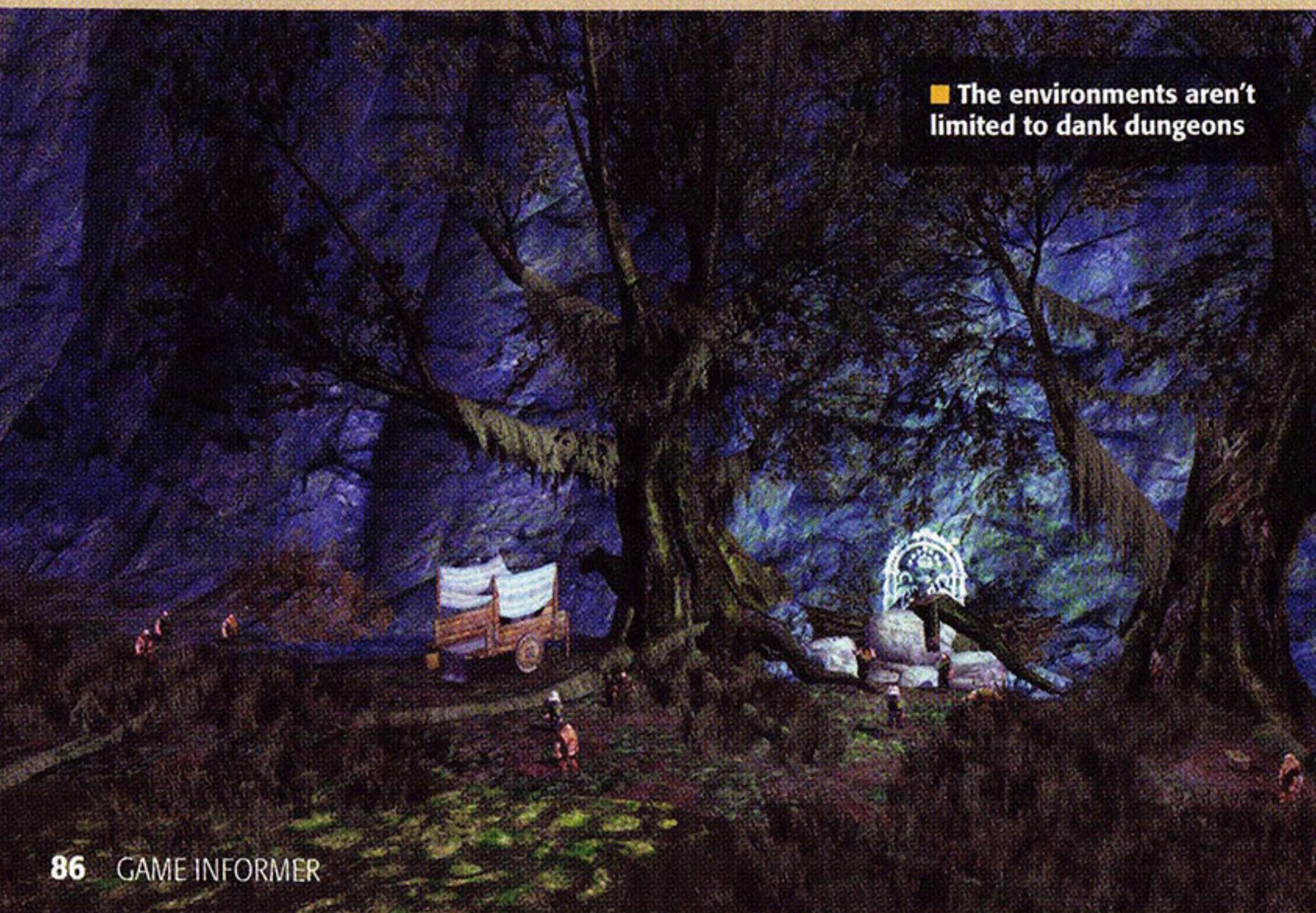
The Fellowship has stirred up holy hell in the ancient dwarven stronghold, and players must haul their heroic butts in there to contain the terrors of the deep trying to get out. From available monsters to ruined underground cities, the depths of Moria are only vaguely alluded to in Tolkien's writings, so the team can get a little more creative.

The new Rune-keeper and Warden

classes – a magic-using nuker and agile tank, respectively – sound cool, and the usual slew of minor improvements across the board are great. But these features take a back seat to Moria's new legendary equipment. These named items, which heroes start finding early on in the expansion's quests, gain experience and grow in power just like a character does. Despite being a central tenet of nearly every RPG, loot is too often a meaningless set of stats. The prospect of having a badass magical sword that grows in power with you and sports unique traits that reflect your hero's investment in it is sweet.

Despite all the buzz around Age of Conan, Warhammer Online, and Wrath of the Lich King, Mines of Moria looks set to deliver plenty of its own brand of MMO entertainment. If Turbine executes well on these new features, LOTRO will live on quite healthily in a crowded market. ■ ■ ■

■ The environments aren't limited to dank dungeons



XBOX 360

Race Pro

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 12-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** ATARI
 > **DEVELOPER** SIMBIN > **RELEASE** NOVEMBER

RACING FOR REALISM

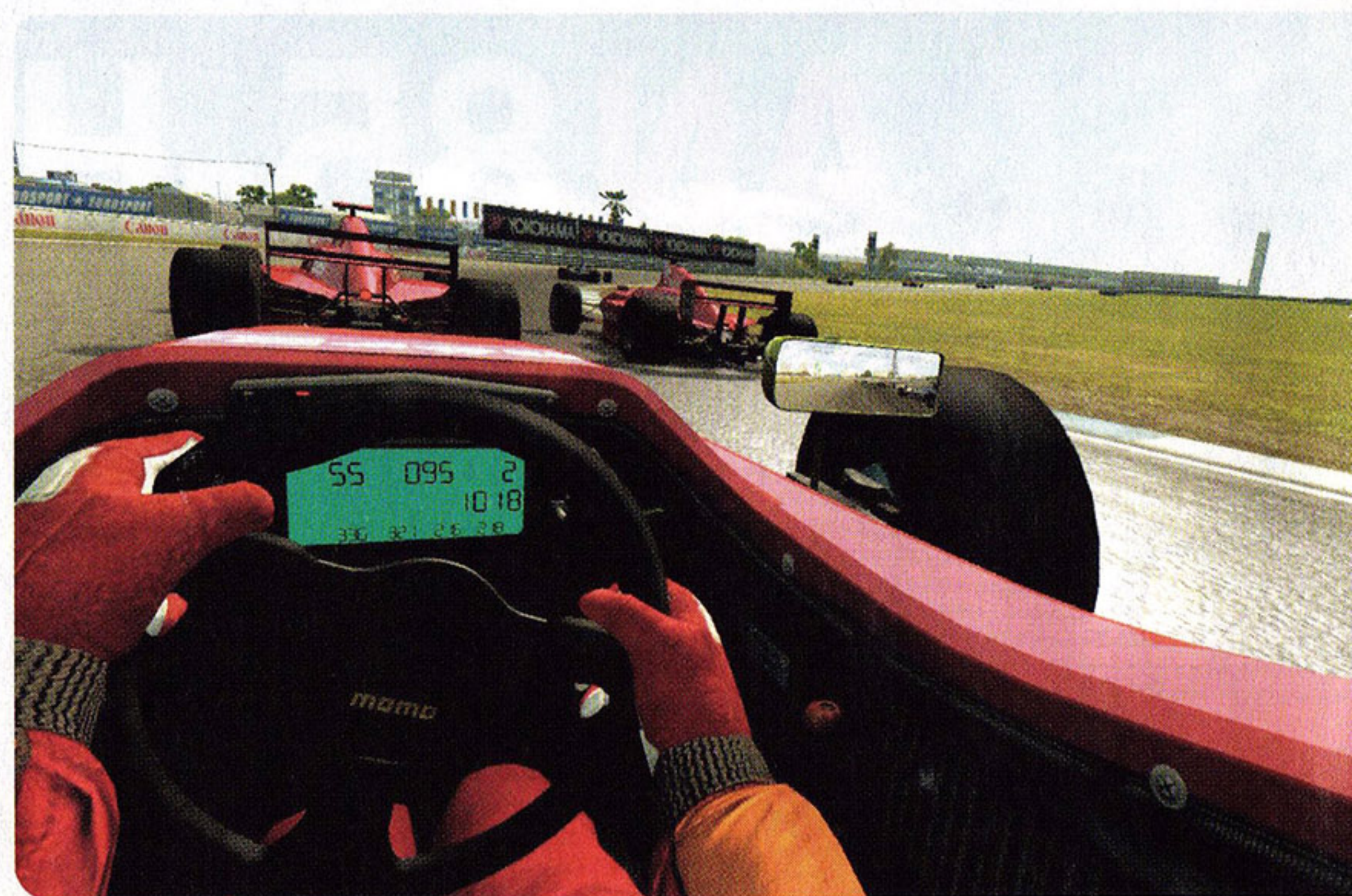
Developer SimBin made a name for itself with PC racing series like GTR and Race. Now it's hoping to dazzle console players with the upcoming Race Pro. The company's proprietary Lizard engine powers this in-depth racing sim. A lengthy career mode begins with Mini Cooper circuits and spans all the way to the World Touring Car Championships, which features 48 different high performance vehicles from manufacturers like Aston Martin, BMW, Honda, and Audi. Players will gain notoriety over time and receive new challenges and offers from sponsors. You'll be faced with choices like racing for BMW or Aston Martin and choosing between formula and touring circuits.

Race Pro focuses heavily on authenticity, with accurate in-cockpit views and engine noise captured from several cars using a specialized 5.1 recording system while they zipped around tracks. Players can tweak a ridiculous amount of options on

their rides like gears, suspension, and tire pressure. Meanwhile, loading screens allow you to navigate an overhead map of the coming course and read up on all of its ins and outs. Expect many real life tracks like Laguna Seca and GP Macau.

Multiplayer supports up to 12 players online, and eight over system link. SimBin is absolutely against splitscreen play due to the limited view, so it came up with a unique solution for local multiplayer. The Hot Seat mode comes in co-op and versus flavors and allows players to pass controllers back and forth and take turns driving the same car. All player-specific control preferences actively switch depending on who's behind the wheel.

While the main game content should keep players busy for quite a while, SimBin is already promising both free and paid downloadable content. Interested racers should look for a demo on Xbox Live sometime in October or November. ■ ■ ■



NEW ROLE. NEW RULES...



Uncover an epic storyline and defeat a mysterious menace.



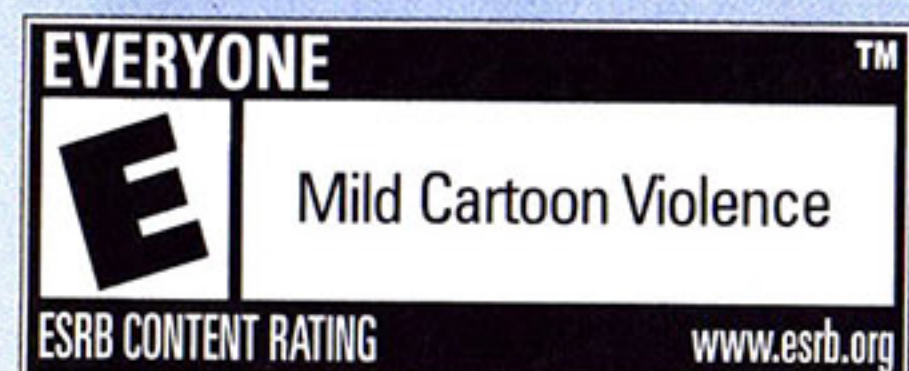
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PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

The Godfather II

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS
> **DEVELOPER** EA REDWOOD SHORES > **RELEASE** FEBRUARY

FEELING COSTA NOSTRA

Who needs a gun when you have a bumper?

Being a crime boss looks easy. Dons like Vito Corleone and Tony Soprano earn their keep by ordering henchmen to risk their lives while sucking down cannolis from the safety of their offices. How else did they get so obese? While EA's version of The Godfather let you manipulate, extort, and swindle your way to the top, you never got to call the shots.

"We felt we did a good job of capturing the 'thug' aspect of the mafia, of being an enforcer, but what always was missing was the sense of feeling like you were a Don," says senior producer Joel Wade. "You were

able to rise up in the ranks, but you were always still the 'lone wolf' attending to all the dirty work yourself." With the Godfather II, it's your turn to be the Don behind the desk.

Like its predecessor, The Godfather II takes liberties with the eponymous film's plot. This tribute to Coppola's opus features key characters like Fredo, Hyman Roth, Frank Pentangeli, and Senator Pat Geary. Unfortunately, the game forgoes the Sicilian flashback scenes that earned Robert De Niro his first Academy Award. Instead, the plot follows the Corleone's criminal activities in 1960s New York, Florida, and Cuba. The

unique character from first game, Aldo, also makes a brief appearance as the boss for the new character, Dominic.

The Godfather II preserves the gunplay, fisticuffs, and torturing (the Mafia prefers to call it "convincing") from the original title, but takes the experience further by allowing you to run and manage the criminal outfit from afar. Players must expand the Corleone family's influence by recruiting new henchmen, upgrading their skills, and promoting promising soldiers to made men. Each crewmember has a specialty, like arsonist or medic. As the Don, you can send henchmen to attack

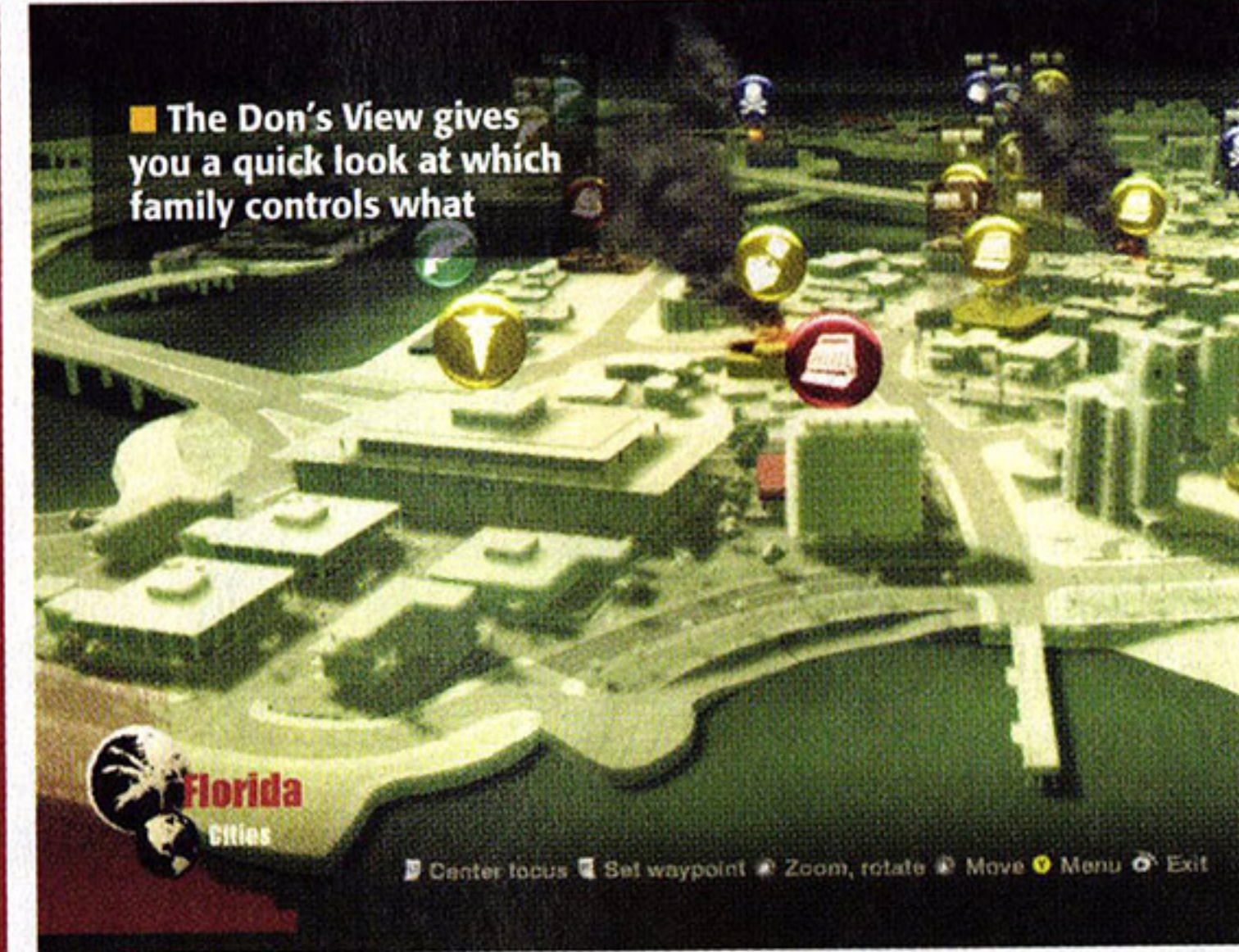
or defend your illegal rackets. More hands-on leaders can also roll with a violent entourage of three stooges.

The new "Don's View" interface reveals a 3D overview that tracks the rackets, businesses, and inter-family battles raging across the city. With five families vying for the same illegal trades, you must decide how to protect your current operations while expanding and monopolizing. The more rackets you control, the more money you generate to hire new thugs, purchase new weapons, and upgrade your family's skills. Expect to build your criminal enterprise in early 2009. ■ ■ ■

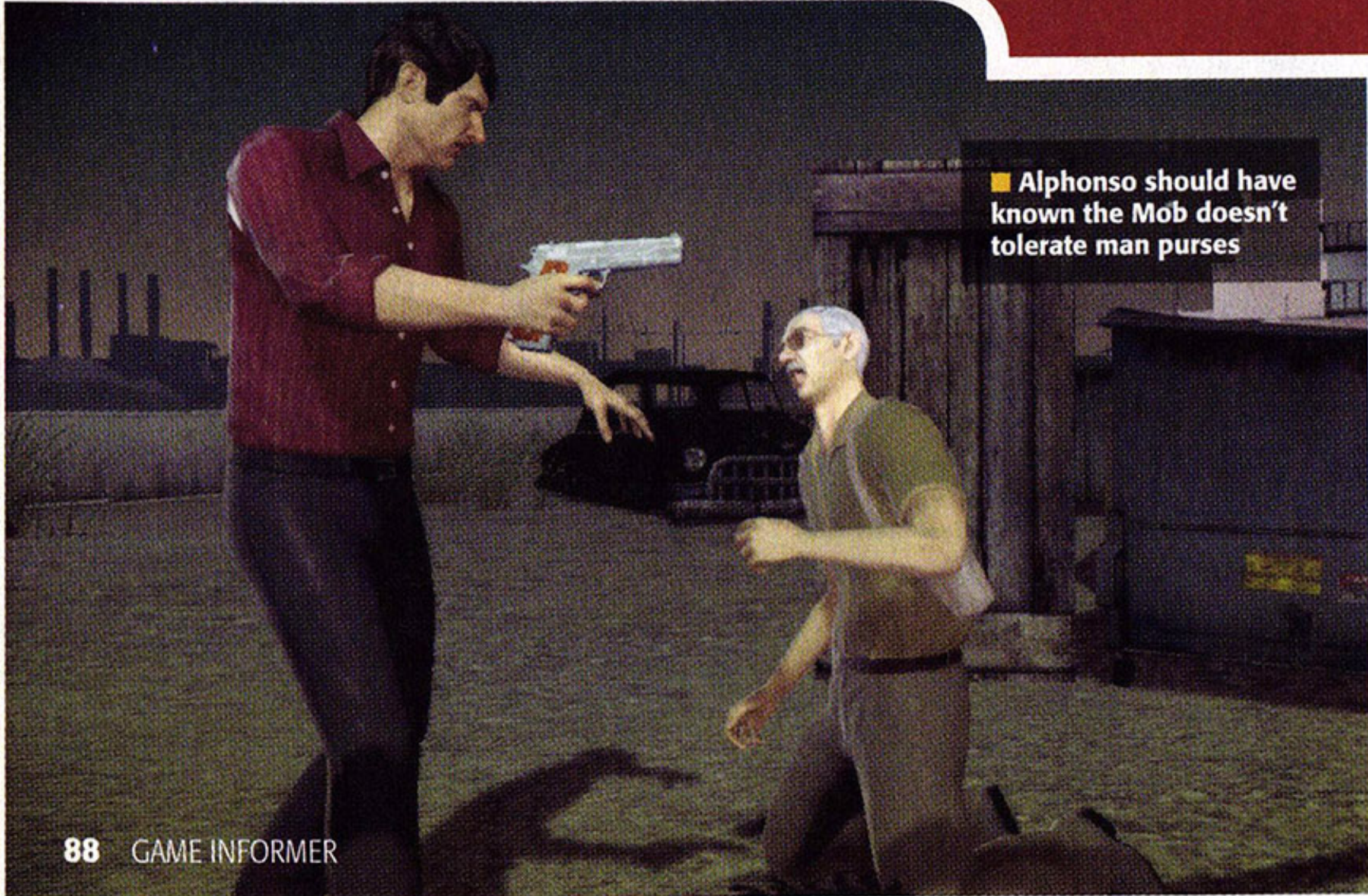


BLACK-HANDED COMPLEMENT

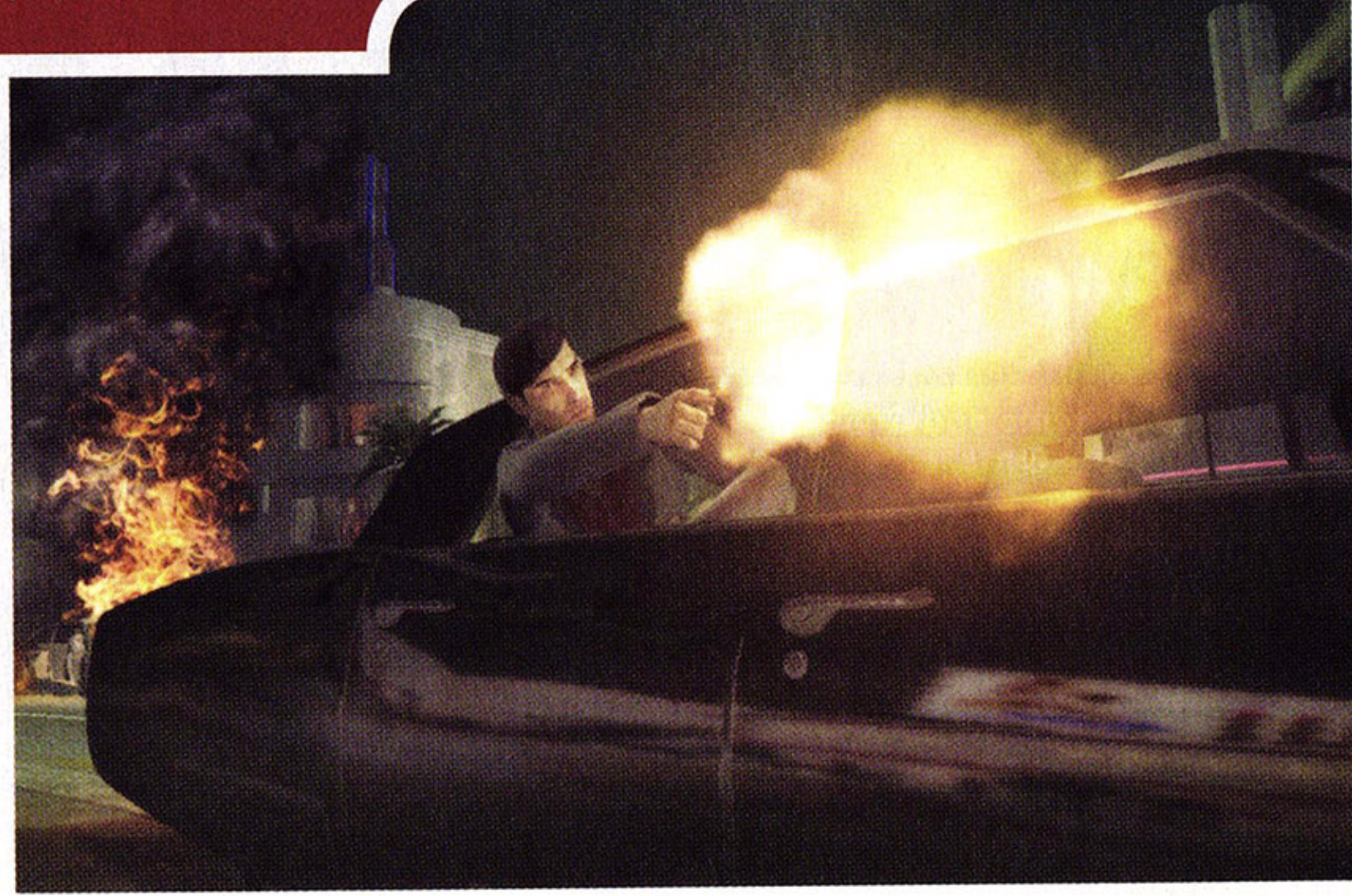
While The Godfather II encourages you to direct your illegal operations from afar, even Dons need to get their hands dirty from time to time. The Black Hand system returns with a new combo system sure to please action fans. While shaking down storeowners, pulling the left and right triggers will unleash left and right combos, respectively. Pressing both triggers initiates a grab. Once you've got a hold of your victim, press the right analog stick to head butt, knee, strangle, or throw the poor sap.



The Don's View gives you a quick look at which family controls what



Alphonso should have known the Mob doesn't tolerate man purses





■ The post-game press conference took an uncomfortable turn when allegations of towel snapping arose

PLAYSTATION 3

NBA 09: The Inside

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA
> **DEVELOPER** SCEA SAN DIEGO STUDIOS > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 7

A RETURN TO ITS ROOTS

In transitioning to next-generation basketball on the PlayStation 3, Sony's NBA franchise ditched what separated it from the other titles: *The Life*. This story-based mode brought a fun context to an otherwise typical season format and presented situational goals that kept the game from feeling like you were simply playing a calendar full of games. Thankfully, this year *The Life* is making a comeback.

The *Life*'s cutscene story development and well-done voice-acted characters return, but now the game lets you experience three distinct stories: a point guard, center, and swing man. You start at the summer developmental league showcase tournament and follow them to NBA superstardom, all the while completing in-game challenges to progress the story. Unlike in previous years on the PS2, *The Life*'s cutscenes seamlessly transition into the gameplay without a load screen. Furthermore, last year's player progression system – where you earn points and gear throughout all modes of the game in order to upgrade your created player – fully integrates into *The Life*.

The Life used to be a substitute for NBA's lack of a traditional franchise mode, but no longer. *NBA 09: The Inside* now features a full franchise mode. While it's not too robust (it lacks a scouting feature), it does feature a training mode that allows you to allocate (or automate) the distribution of 100 points among your players before the season starts in over 10 skill areas. Each player gains different bonuses – or sometimes none at all – depending on their ability.

The real test for *The Inside* will be how it

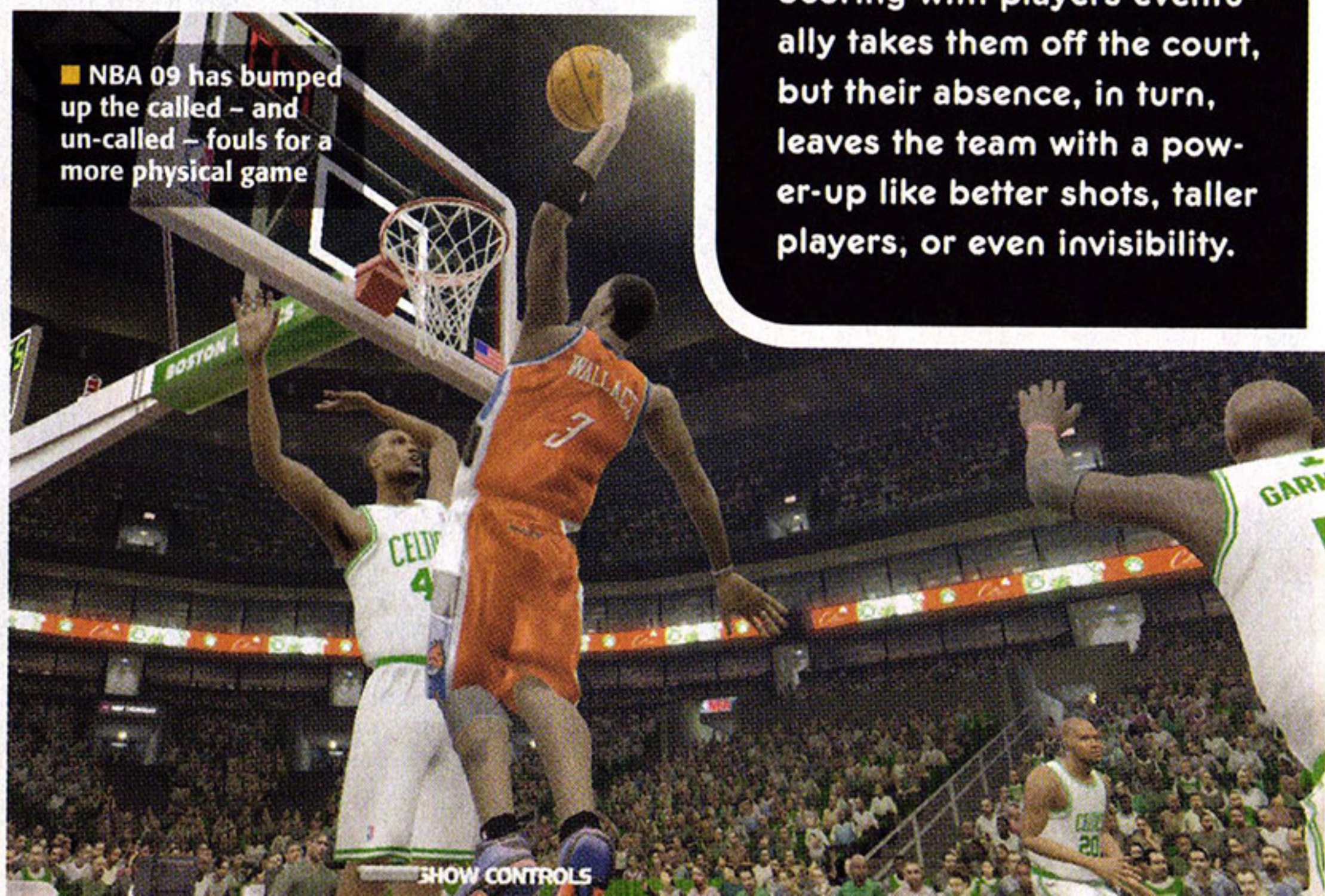
handles on the court, which hasn't been the series' strong suit. During our initial playthrough, the transition game felt more varied and fouls were more prevalent in the past. How well the rest of the gameplay rounds out will be important in determining how far this series has come. ■ ■ ■



THE PSP CONQUEST CONTINUES

Sony's latest PSP NBA title gets a huge lift with two new additions: A full-on franchise mode and the Conquest-like Elimquest mode. The latter has you defeating opponents on a Risk-like map and earning power-ups as you go. Scoring with players eventually takes them off the court, but their absence, in turn, leaves the team with a power-up like better shots, taller players, or even invisibility.

■ NBA 09 has bumped up the called – and un-called – fouls for a more physical game



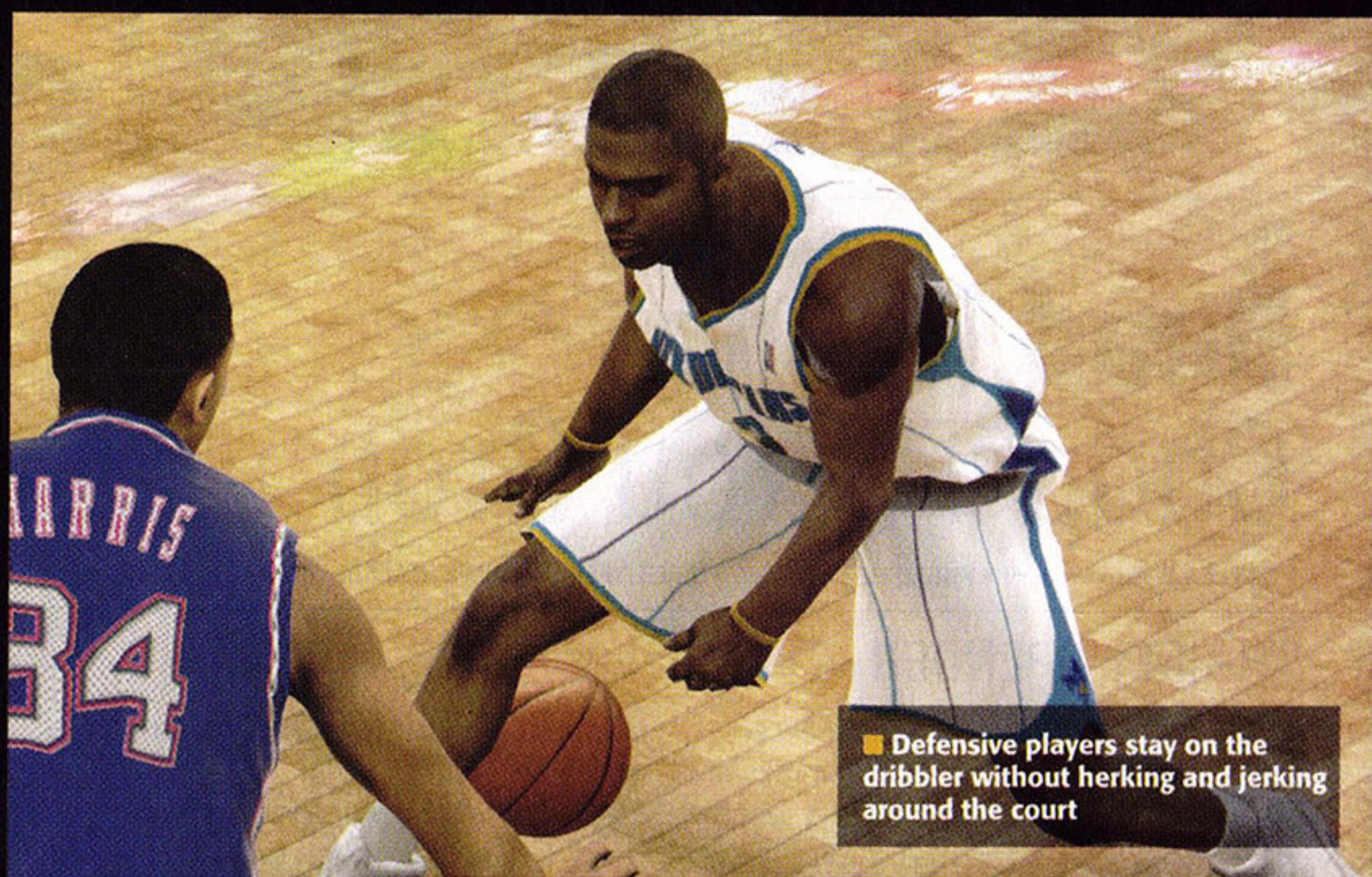
SHOW CONTROLS

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

NBA 2K9

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 10-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** 2K SPORTS
> **DEVELOPER** VISUAL CONCEPTS > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 7

TAKING IT TO THE RIM



■ Defensive players stay on the dribbler without herking and jerking around the court

If you're going to put a warrior like Kevin Garnett on the box, your game better match the intensity and ability *The Big Ticket* brings every time he steps on the court. Judging from our hands-on time with the game, *NBA 2K9* looks ready to meet KG shot for shot.

NBA 2K9's visual makeover is subtle, yet remarkable. The players move fluidly in the open court and around the ball. The new lockdown animations show defenders hustling to keep up with the dribbler, which means no more sliding across the floor to stay in front of the ball handler. The new crowd animations – which actually feature people wearing more than a handful of outfits – bring arenas to life when players hit big shots or go to the charity stripe. Color commentator Clark Kellogg and sideline reporter Cheryl Miller joining play-by-play man Kevin Harlan further improves the presentation.

The Association mode benefits from a new player role feature. Every preseason, you must promise each player a specific role. These decisions are key, because if you promise your talented rookie meaning-

ful minutes as a starter and you put him on the bench he may react negatively, sinking his player attributes and damaging team chemistry. Computer-controlled teams face the same dilemma, and you may be able to pry that brooding star away from a sinking team if his morale is low and they begrudgingly place him on the trading block. Other Association changes include a new NBA.com front-end that displays news around the league and monthly mini-drills that improve player attributes.

On the hardwood, *NBA 2K9*'s stellar gameplay receives a boost with the new adaptive AI. Last year's game was unforgiving; if you didn't instruct your players to execute a play, they would stand around the court and offer little assistance. The new system takes into account your tendencies so teammates react by running screens, cuts, or posting up dynamically depending on what you're doing. The refined shot stick control now allows you to adjust your shot in mid-air, and for the first time players can experience 5-on-5 pickup games online. Look for our review in the November issue. ■ ■ ■





Wii

Dead Rising: Chop Till You Drop

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER CAPCOM > DEVELOPER CAPCOM > RELEASE 2009

THRIFTY SPENDER

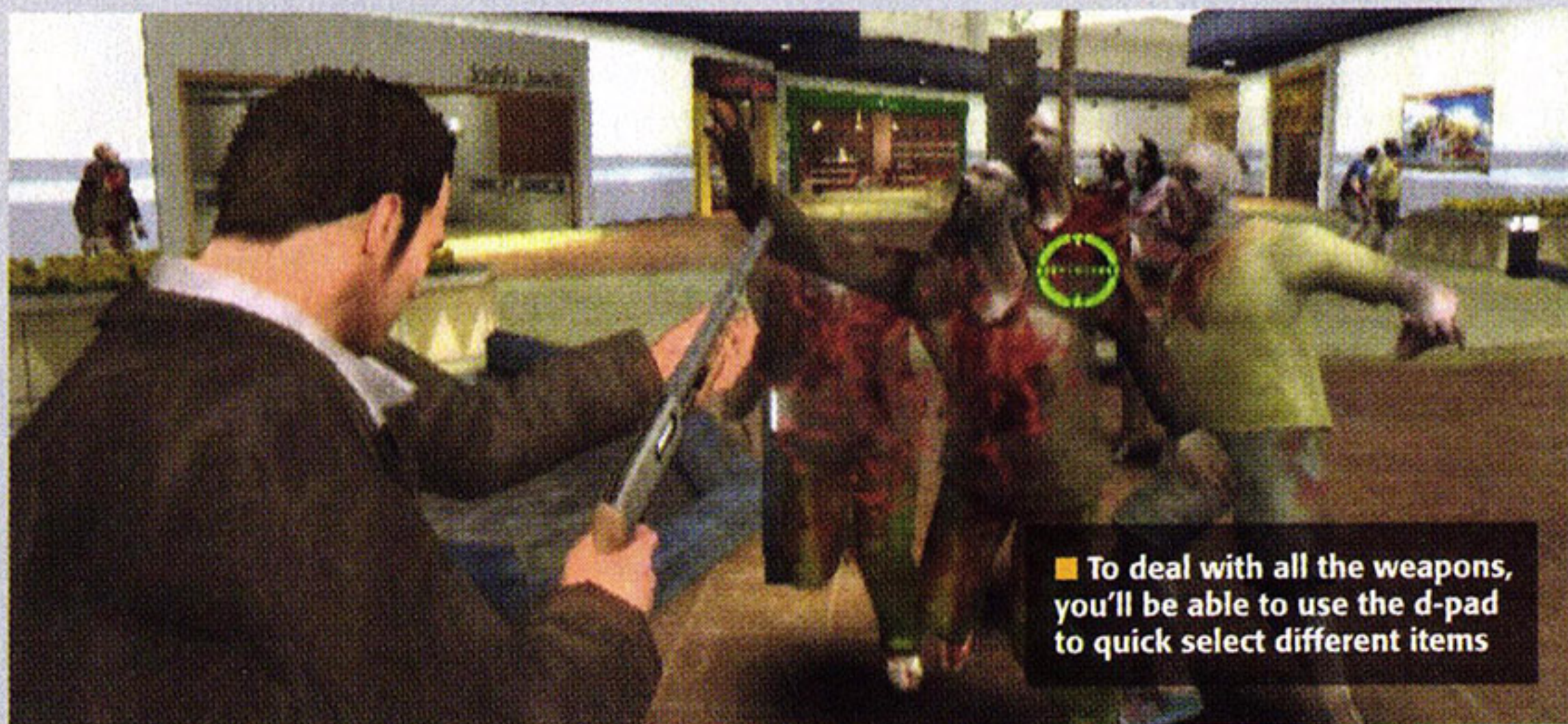
Finally Wii owners will experience the thrill of beating down hordes of zombies with a cash register when Dead Rising, the mall survival game that pleased 360 owners two years ago, appears on the Wii next year. Considering the system's technical limitations, there is some concern the Wii won't generate the same number of zombies the 360 produced. Capcom assures us that it's been pushing Nintendo's system to the limits. Chop Till You Drop will crank out up to 100 shambling corpses at a time, so it should still provide plenty of fodder for you once you get your hands on the excavator.

To those unfamiliar with Dead Rising already, the premise is simple. A zombie outbreak in a small Colorado town leads freelance photographer Frank West out to investigate. Thankfully, the local mall offers a great place to bunker down and comes loaded with an endless supply of creative weapons. To save the remaining survivors of the outbreak, Frank must use whatever

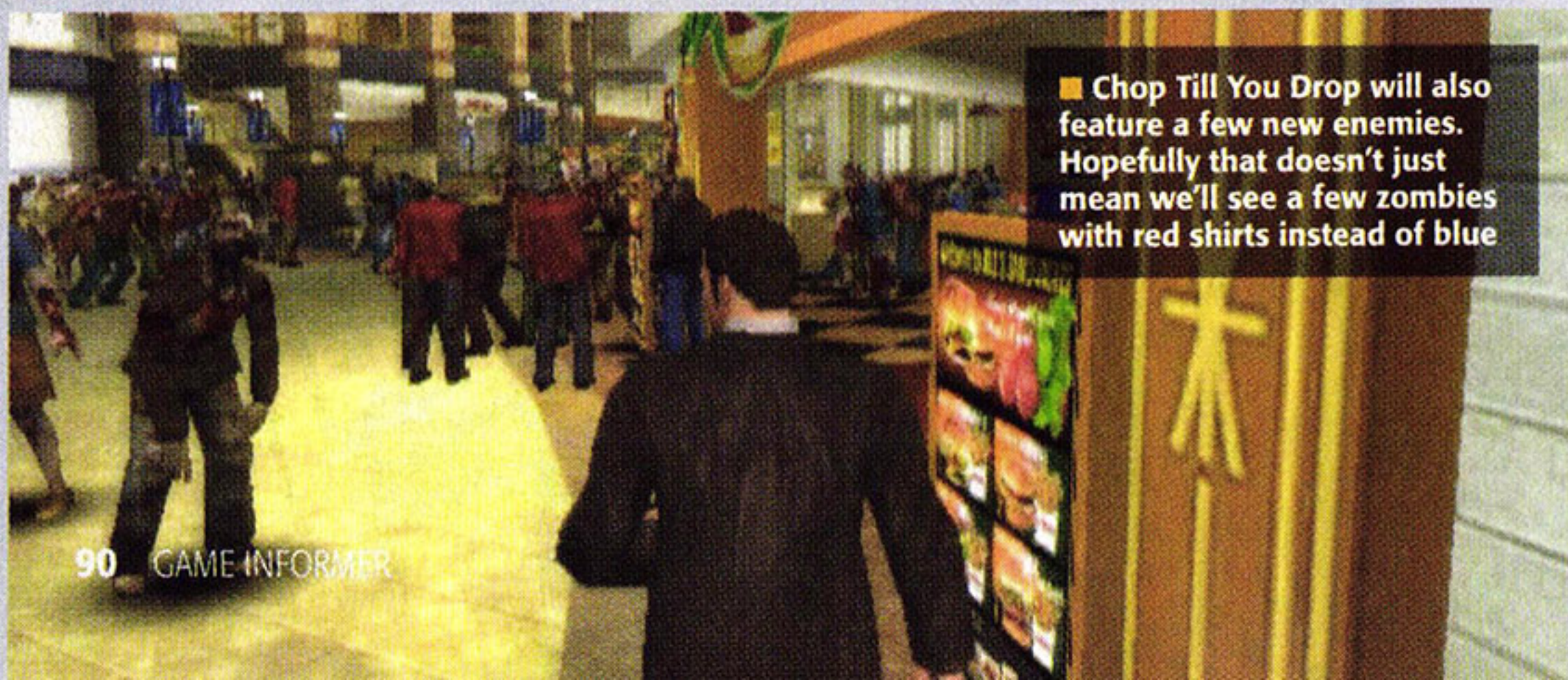
mannequin, shovel, or lawnmower comes in handy.

A few other features compel you to check out the Wii version of this classic stress reliever, the most notably the new save system. Capcom isn't willing to go into details yet, but the game no longer operates under the strict time limits found on the 360 version. Players can take the game at a slower pace, and the story will unfold in a more episodic nature.

Built using the Wii Resident Evil 4 engine, Chop Till You Drop uses the Wii's motion controls for shaking zombies off your back. Players can also aim firearms by pointing their controllers at the screen. Other weapons have special controller functions as well. When using a bat, for example, you can shake the Wii remote to build up extra power and release it all with one super swing guaranteed to knock a few zombie heads out of the park. Okay Capcom, now that you're getting the obligatory port out of the way, start talking sequel. ■ ■ ■



■ To deal with all the weapons, you'll be able to use the d-pad to quick select different items



■ Chop Till You Drop will also feature a few new enemies. Hopefully that doesn't just mean we'll see a few zombies with red shirts instead of blue



Wii

Mushroom Men: The Spore Wars

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER GAMECOCK > DEVELOPER RED FLY STUDIO > RELEASE NOVEMBER

ODD GROWTH

We've always suspected that a secret society of sentient mushroom creatures who worship a mysterious meteor that fell to earth and bestowed them with consciousness hides within every forest. Red Fly Studio has validated our suspicions with Mushroom Men, which revolves around that very premise. The plant world is entangled in a brutal civil war; the edible plants are at odds with the poisonous ones, and one mushroom by the name of Pax must journey through the lines, battling crazed animals and plants to collect the remaining meteor fragments that will help restore peace.

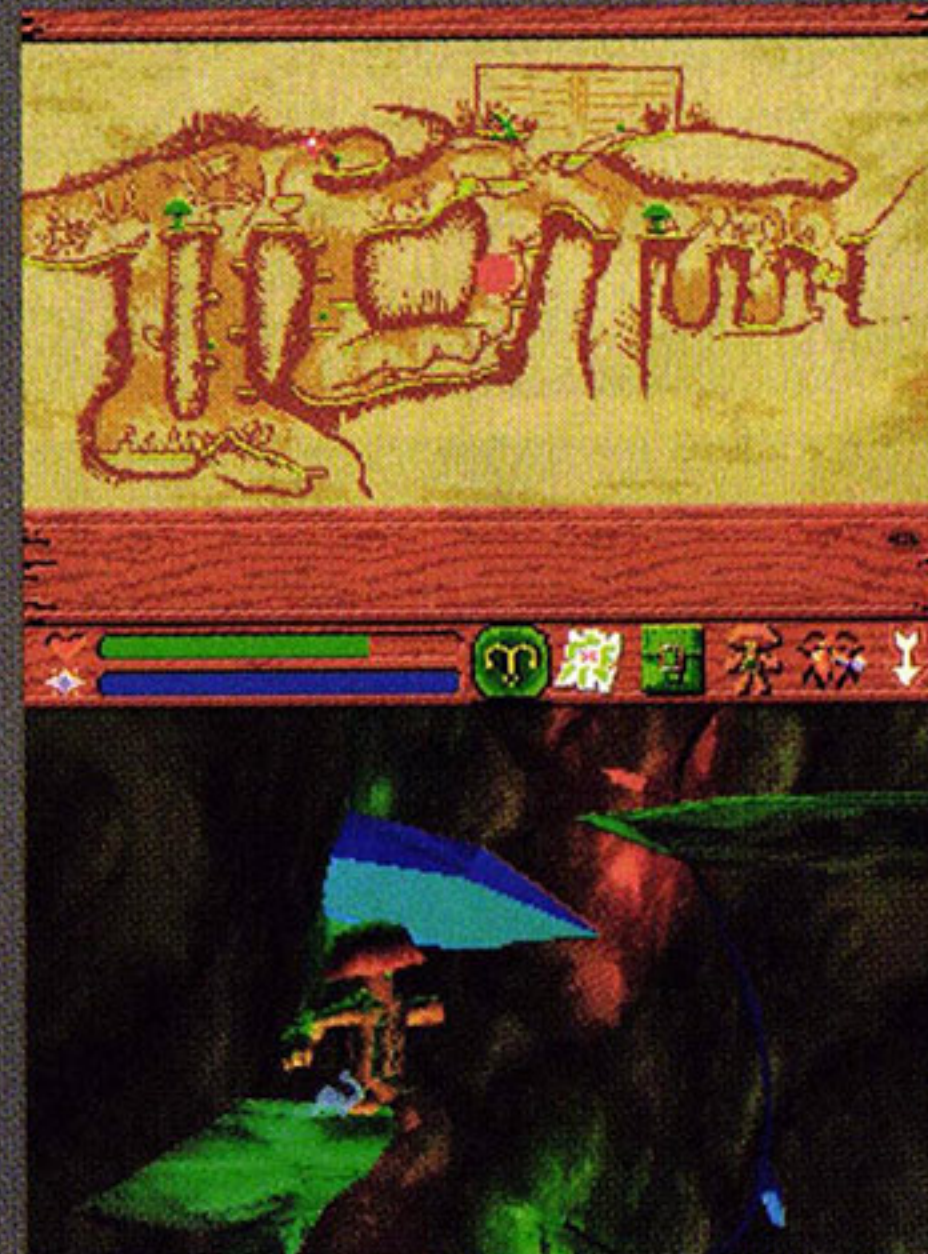
Mushroom Men is primarily a platformer, but given Pax's small stature, negotiating something as simple as a lawn shed can

be like traversing a dangerous cavern. This twisted scale means not everything is as it seems. A stack of dominos becomes a block puzzle that Pax must solve. Similarly, a toy sticky hand can be used as a grappling hook to help Pax climb to higher vantage points. Throughout his journey, Pax must cobble together many everyday items such as razorblades, matchsticks, jacks, staple removers, chewing gum, and rubber bands to make new weapons.

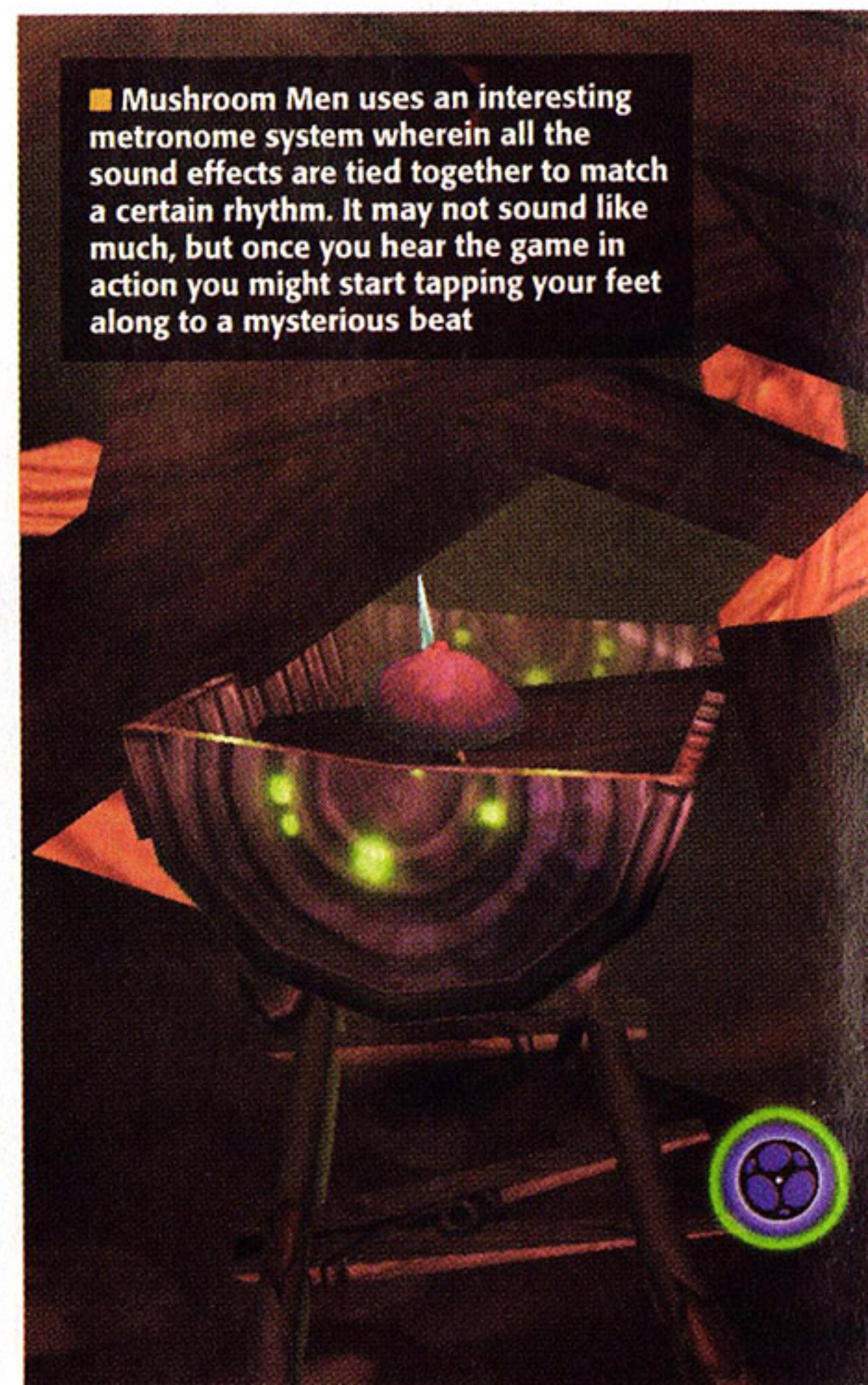
Not all of Pax's tools are physical, however. This little shroom has been granted special telekinetic powers that allow him to manipulate small objects and plants within the environment. Many of the goals require a combination of exploration and exploitation of Pax's abilities. The levels are open-ended, allowing you to complete the objectives in any order you see fit. From the little bit we played, Mushroom Men seems like a very creative adventure. Hopefully it ends up being the clever title the Wii needs to brighten up its otherwise dry holiday lineup. ■ ■ ■

MUSHROOM MEN: RISE OF THE FUNGI

The Wii version won't be the only fungus in town this fall. The DS is receiving its own Mushroom Men treatment due out this October. Rise of the Fungi serves as the prequel to the Wii version, as it comes out a month earlier and the story focuses on all the events leading up to The Spore Wars. Unlike the Wii version, this is more of a side-scrolling adventure. Players also use the DS touch-screen to build many different types of weapons.



■ Mushroom Men uses an interesting metronome system wherein all the sound effects are tied together to match a certain rhythm. It may not sound like much, but once you hear the game in action you might start tapping your feet along to a mysterious beat





DS

Sonic Chronicles: The Dark Brotherhood

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > PUBLISHER SEGA > DEVELOPER BLOWARE > RELEASE SEPTEMBER 30

RECLAIMING GLORY

As Sonic continues to age, his fans only get younger. Older gamers raised on the franchise 15 years ago have abandoned the Blue Blur as Sega focuses on the younger crowd. But if ever there were a company that could bridge that gap and make a Sonic RPG relevant to those lost gamers, it's the creators of KOTOR and Mass Effect, Canadian developer BioWare.

In classic RPG fashion, the game starts off with a flashback. A slick animated comic shows the end of an epic battle between Sonic and Dr. Eggman. As Sonic escapes an exploding flying fortress, Eggman is presumably left to fall out of the burning sky. Fast forward several years later to when one of Sonic's friends get kidnapped. It looks like the good doctor has returned from oblivion and is somehow involved. It's up to Sonic to rally his friends back together and put an end to Eggman's schemes once again.

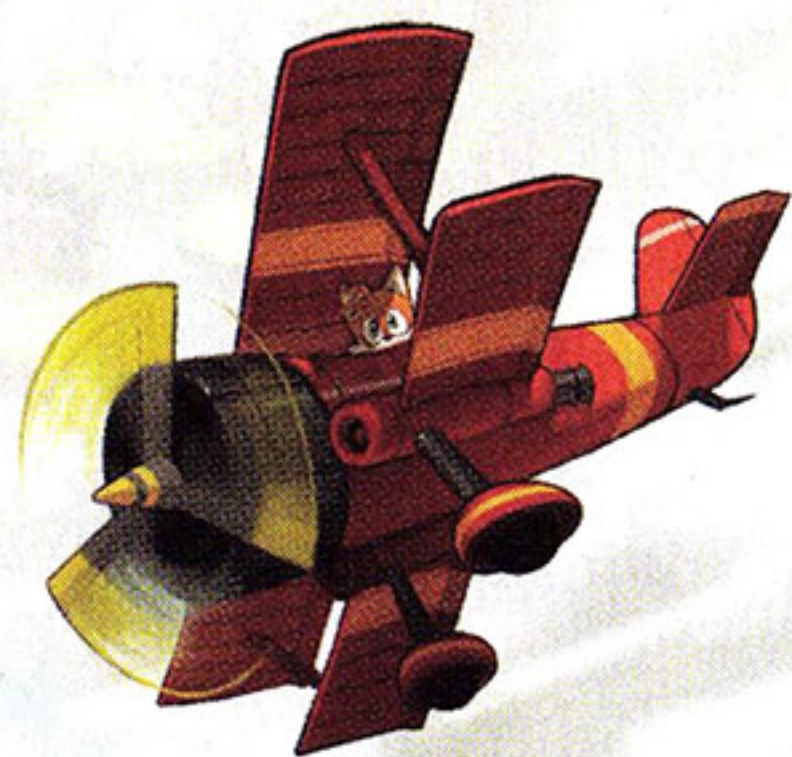
A large portion of the game focuses on exploration. Sonic speeds along familiar locations like Green Hill Zone and Mystic Ruins. By exploring the environments fully we find extra items, new Chao eggs, and encounter NPCs who provide us with side jobs. But Sonic can't get everywhere on his own. We have to switch between the other members of our party to traverse certain obstacles. In signature fashion, Tails flies the group to higher walkways, Knuckles climbs walls, and Amy (when we absolutely have to use her) takes her hammer to any boxes that block our path.

Enemies appear in the environment so you can avoid encounters if you choose. But even if you charge headfirst into battle, there's no guarantee you'll jump right into the fight. Occasionally, enemies try to run from Sonic and the gang. When this happens a minigame launches where you must avoid obstacles and use speed boosts to overtake your prey.

The action itself is turn based. Instead of magic, Sonic and his friends have special POW attacks that do extra damage and have special effects. When using these POW moves you'll be required to complete quick touch-screen minigames. Reminiscent of Elite Beat Agents, special onscreen prompts direct you through a tapping rhythm sequence. Complete the sequence properly and your POW attack will deal maximum damage.

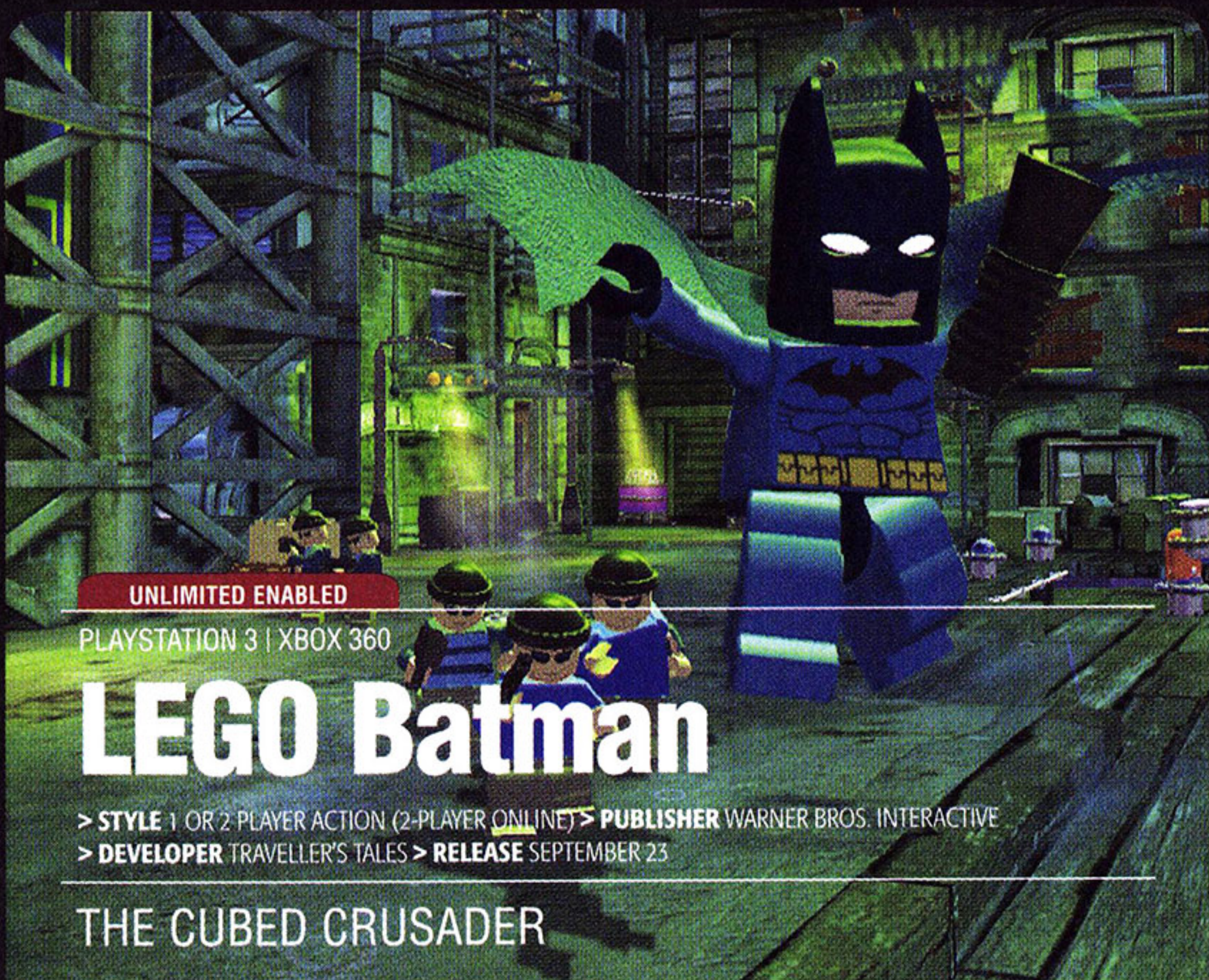
But what would an RPG be without conversations? Thankfully Chronicles navigates the minefield of anthropomorphic animal dialogue with more amusement than annoyance. The fact that there is no stab-yourself-through-the-ears voiceover helps a good deal. Sonic is an impatient hog, and to stay in line with that a dialogue option highlighted with his picture always provides players with the fastest way back to the action. Players interested in learning more about the story also have the freedom to dig deeper into the dialogue trees. There isn't an evil Sonic dialogue option, but there are snarky Sonic responses, which have Sonic delivering his lines with the most 'tude.

Chronicles certainly doesn't look like it's breaking any RPG boundaries, but it looks like solid work from one of gaming's premier developers. We'll reserve final judgment on this one for when it's released, so we won't know if Chronicles is the best thing to happen to Sonic since the Sega CD until the end of September. ■ ■ ■



CHAO GARDEN

Sonic's adorable pets return. There will be 40 different Chaos to find and collect throughout the game. Every Chao has its own special talents, and they can be equipped to your party members to provide them with special bonuses. Some Chao augment a character's attributes, such as attack or defense, while others might make them harder to hit or add elemental damage to their attacks. However you raise your Chao, they are important assets to your team.



CHARACTER GALLERY

Batman has the most eclectic rogues gallery of any superhero in the business, so we can't blame Traveller's Tales for dipping into the pot and using them all. Below is the game's full roster of characters, complete with their unique in-game skills and abilities.

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

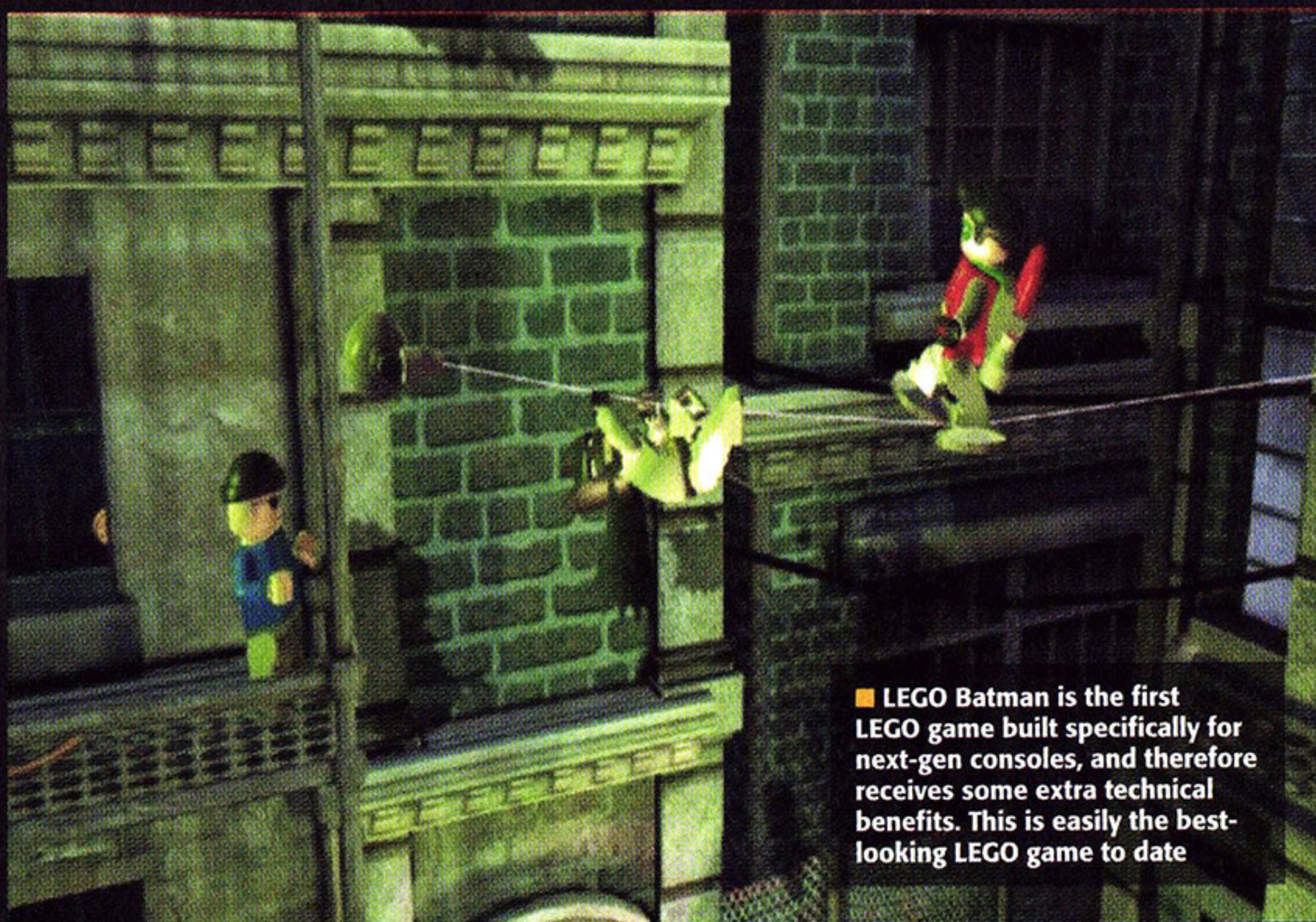
LEGO Batman

> STYLE 1 OR 2 PLAYER ACTION (2-PLAYER ONLINE) > PUBLISHER WARNER BROS. INTERACTIVE
> DEVELOPER TRAVELLER'S TALES > RELEASE SEPTEMBER 23

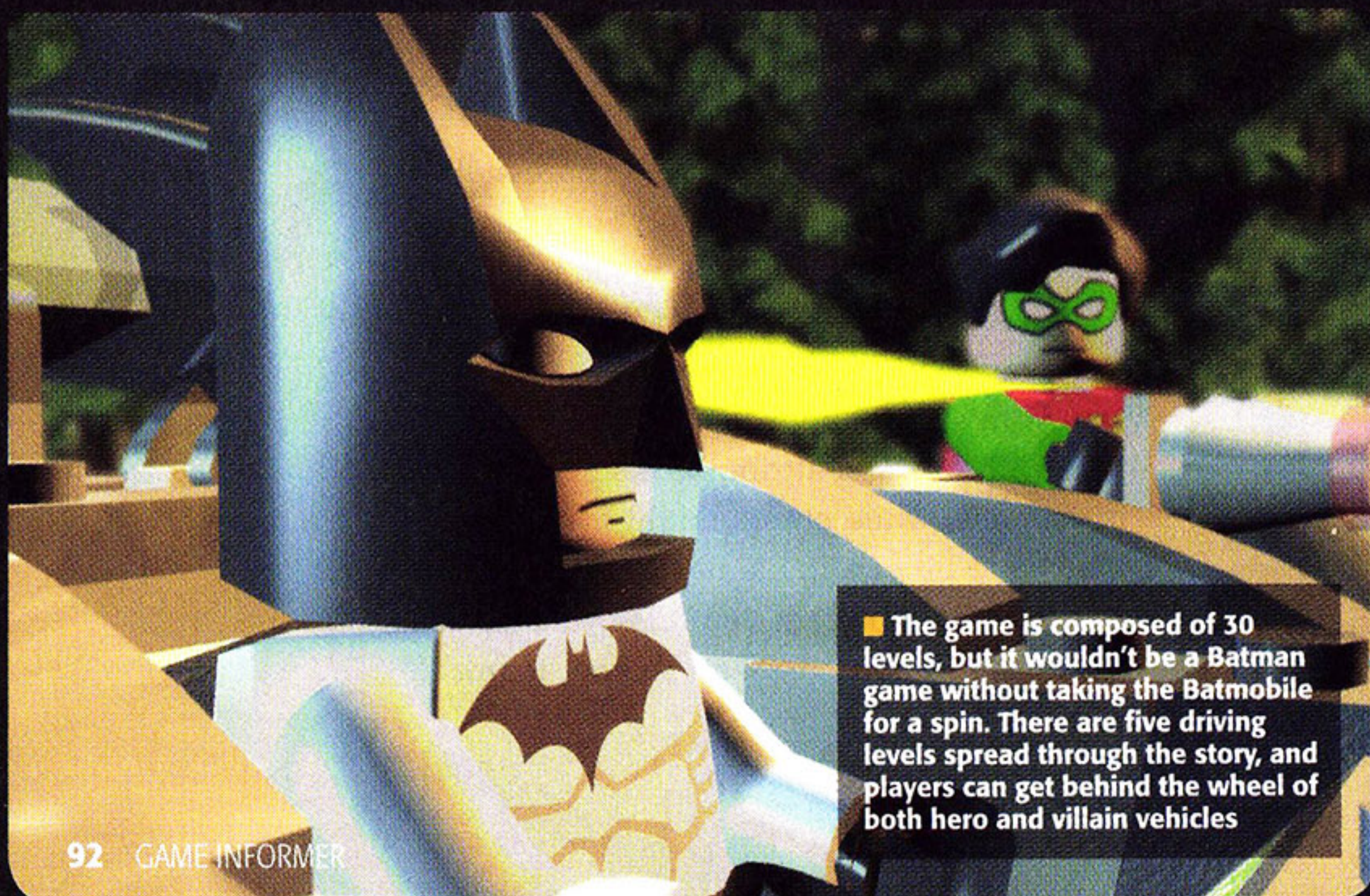
THE CUBED CRUSADER

Traveller's Tales doesn't feel the need to be humble about its current work. "We've really tried to keep the elements that work well in our previous titles," says Jonathan Smith, head of production on LEGO Batman. "But then we went to town making this the best looking, most action-packed, and most

fun LEGO game ever!" Batman isn't the only star this time around, as the game features both Hero and Villain stories. The two modes run parallel to one another, so one level may find you battling to free Commissioner Gordon from the Joker's vile clutches, while another places you in charge of Joker to entrap the poor chap. ■■■



■ LEGO Batman is the first LEGO game built specifically for next-gen consoles, and therefore receives some extra technical benefits. This is easily the best-looking LEGO game to date



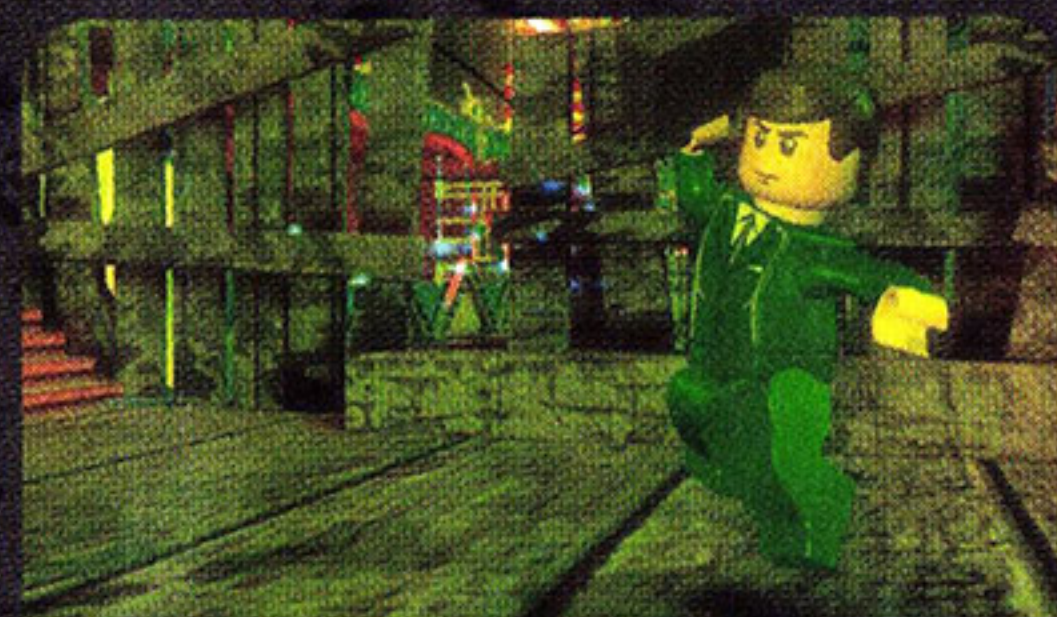
■ The game is composed of 30 levels, but it wouldn't be a Batman game without taking the Batmobile for a spin. There are five driving levels spread through the story, and players can get behind the wheel of both hero and villain vehicles

Heroes



ALFRED PENNYWORTH

Bruce's formidable butler. Alfred is a former espionage agent trained in intelligence and is an expert with most weapons. He's as handy with his teacups and tea trays as he is with his fists.



BRUCE WAYNE A.K.A. BATMAN

Philanthropist and playboy, Bruce is Batman's mask to the word. How he'll play in the game still remains a mystery.



COMMISSIONER GORDON A.K.A. JAMES W. GORDON

Police commissioner of Gotham City, Gordon is as close to a friend as Batman has. He's an expert marksman and proficient in hand-to-hand techniques.



BATGIRL A.K.A. BARBARA GORDON

Commissioner Gordon's daughter, Batgirl has the ability to utilize Batman's technology suits including the glide suit, heat protection suit, sonic suit, and demolition suit.



NIGHTWING A.K.A. DICK GRAYSON

Bruce Wayne's adopted ward, Grayson is a superb gymnast, and just as skilled in criminology and martial arts as Batman. Nightwing can utilize all of Robin's technology suits.



BATMAN A.K.A. BRUCE WAYNE

The world's greatest detective, Batman has dedicated his life to ridding Gotham City of crime. A perfect specimen of human physicality, Batman employs a number of suits, vehicles, and bat gadgets to fight Gotham's villains. The demolition suit drops remote bombs that explode his baddies to pieces. New suit upgrades will be available for purchase throughout the game.



ROBIN A.K.A. TIM DRAKE

A respectable gymnastics and computer expert, Robin is the other half of the Dynamic Duo. Robin has access to a special magnetic suit that grants him Spider-Man-like powers to walk along walls, and a tech-suit that lets him control gadgets like RC cars.

Villains



BANE (REAL NAME UNKNOWN)
Born a prisoner for crimes committed by his father, Bane is a master strategist. He has the ability to pass through toxic gases unharmed as well as super strength, which allows him to carry and throw huge objects.



THE JOKER (REAL NAME UNKNOWN)
We're eager to see the cutesy LEGO interpretation of the Clown Prince of Crime, as he's arguably Batman's deadliest and darkest foe. The Joker uses an electric shock buzzer to electrocute enemies or objects, and like many other Gotham villains has the ability of Hazard Protection, allowing him to pass through toxic gases unscathed.



MAD HATTER A.K.A. JERVIS TETCH
Obsessed from a young age with Lewis Carroll's book *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Jervis has embraced a delusion that he is the incarnation of a character in the story. He's skilled in all forms of hypnotism and mind control, employing technological devices implanted in his hats to direct the wills of others.



RA'S AL GHUL
An immortal whose name means "demon's head," Ra's has a genius intellect and is an expert in the killing arts. Ra's Al Ghul will be armed with swords and a gun to carry out his sinister deeds.



CATWOMAN A.K.A. SELINA KYLE
A beautiful and physically adept woman, Kyle's life of crime has made her into one of the best cat burglars in the world. She can super jump and she can bypass security on special doors armed by guards. We're interested to see how Lego deals with her complicated relationship with Batman.



KILLER CROC A.K.A. WAYLON JONES
A victim of a genetic condition that turned his skin green and scaly, Jones grew up fostering a hatred for humanity. Croc has super strength – nearly every melee attack sends his opponents flying into the air. He's also immune to toxic gases and liquids, and he can build a huge mechanical crocodile out of LEGO blocks.



MR. FREEZE A.K.A. DR. VICTOR FRIES
After a cryogenic accident left Fries unable to survive outside of sub-zero environment, he created a special suit and an arsenal of freeze guns that turned his weakness into a deadly advantage. Freeze has super strength and can use his freeze ray to freeze enemies and turn liquids into solid platforms.



THE RIDDLER A.K.A. EDWARD NIGMA
A criminal genius with an unhealthy obsession for puzzles, Nigma's desire for glory and wealth drove him to match wits with the world's greatest detective. The Riddler can use his cane to control the minds of weak-willed individuals. He can also discharge a beam from his cane that makes enemies dizzy and confused for several seconds.



CLAYFACE A.K.A. BASIL KARLO
Initially an actor in horror films, Karlo can alter his physical form, adopting the appearance of anyone or anything. He has the ability to super jump to heights unattainable by other characters and can even make his body elastic to reach other high points. Clayface has super strength as well.



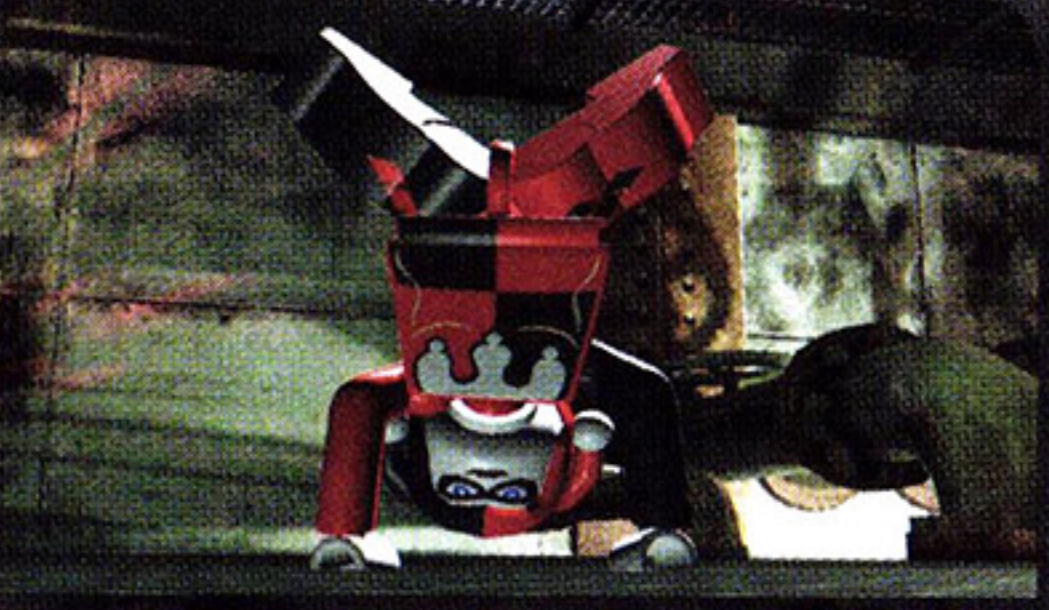
KILLER MOTH A.K.A. DRURY WALKER A.K.A. CAMERON VAN CLEER
Walker was a minor criminal who adopted the identity of Cameron Van Cleer, a master criminal who in turn masqueraded as the costumed supervillain Killer Moth. He can use his wings to glide over large spaces.



THE PENGUIN A.K.A. OSWALD COBBLEPOT
One of Batman's oldest and more peculiar enemies, Cobblepot's has the physical features of a bird and a taste for deadly umbrellas. The Penguin uses his signature umbrella to glide through the air, and he can employ Penguin minions that come armed with a bomb.



SCARECROW A.K.A. JONATHAN CRANE
Crane is a man obsessed with fear, so much so that he sought to tame the emotion through chemistry. Fear-inducing gas is his most dangerous weapon. Scarecrow can employ his scare gas – a substance that temporarily petrifies enemies, causing them to scream and run around in circles.



HARLEY QUINN A.K.A. HARLEEN QUINZEL
The Joker's whipping girl, Quinzel had a promising career as a psychiatrist before she was driven mad by her own client: The Joker. The two might be in love, but the relationship is dysfunctional to say the least. Harley Quinn has the ability to walk a tight rope, perform super jumps, and bypass manned security booths.



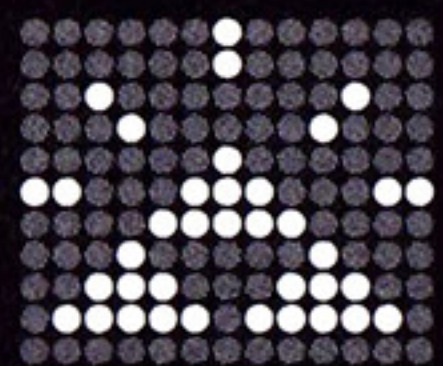
MAN-BAT A.K.A. ROBERT KIRKLAND "KIRK" LANGSTROM
An expert in biology who hoped to cure his growing deafness, Kirk accidentally turned himself into a half-man half-bat monster. Man Bat can use his wings to glide over gaps and has super strength.



POISON IVY A.K.A. PAMELA ISLEY
A master over plant life, Ivy fights humanity on behalf of her beloved plants. She has the special ability to throw seeds into specific plant pots that grow into plant platforms. Poison Ivy also has the ability to blow love dust on security guards who then grant her access.

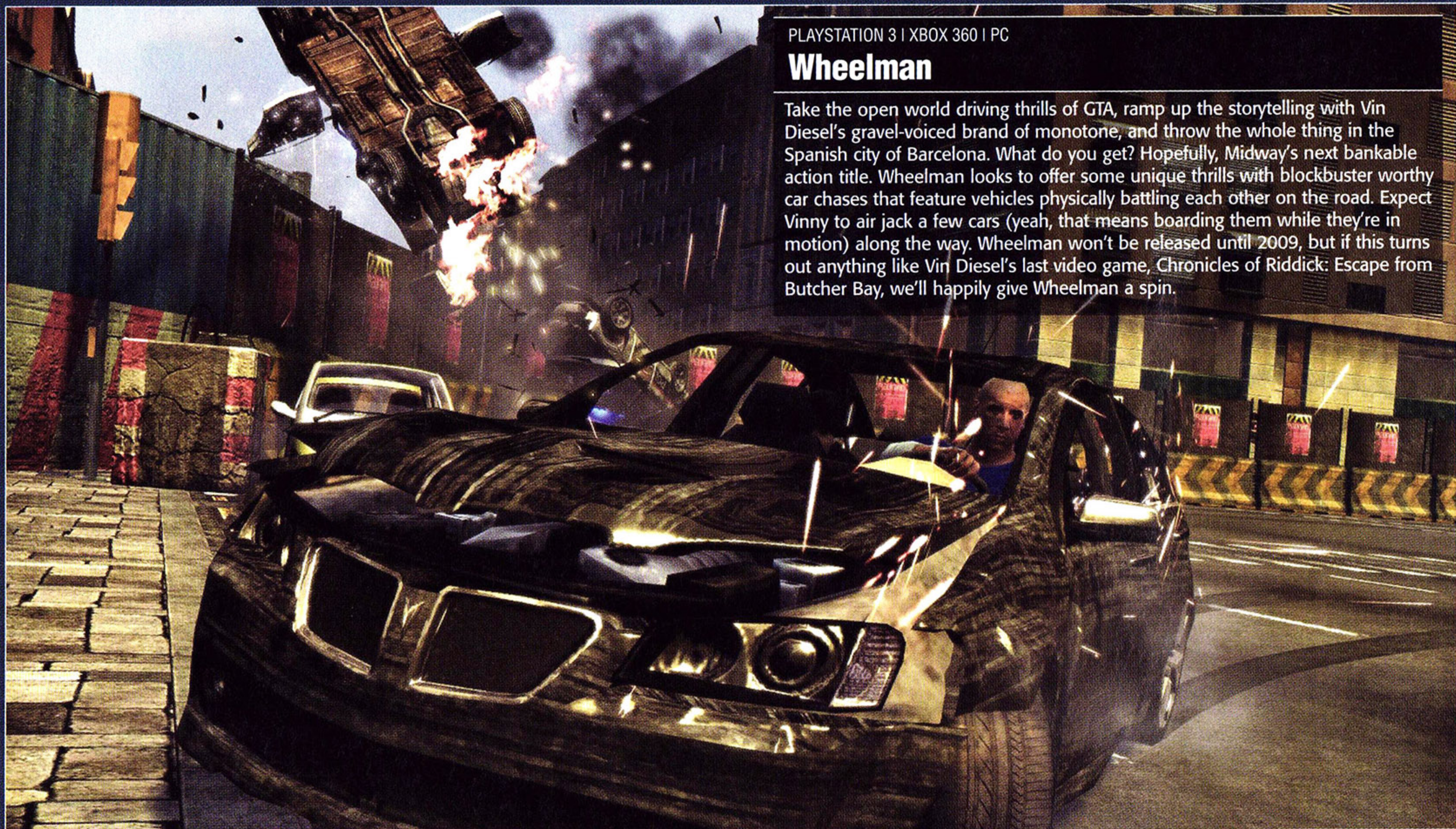


TWO FACE A.K.A. HARVEY DENT
Former friend of Bruce Wayne and ex-prosecuting attorney, Dent became psychopathic when deadly acid scarred half his face. Two-Face has the ability to bypass security on special security doors, pass through toxic gases unharmed, and has his own vehicle.



PHOTOPHILE

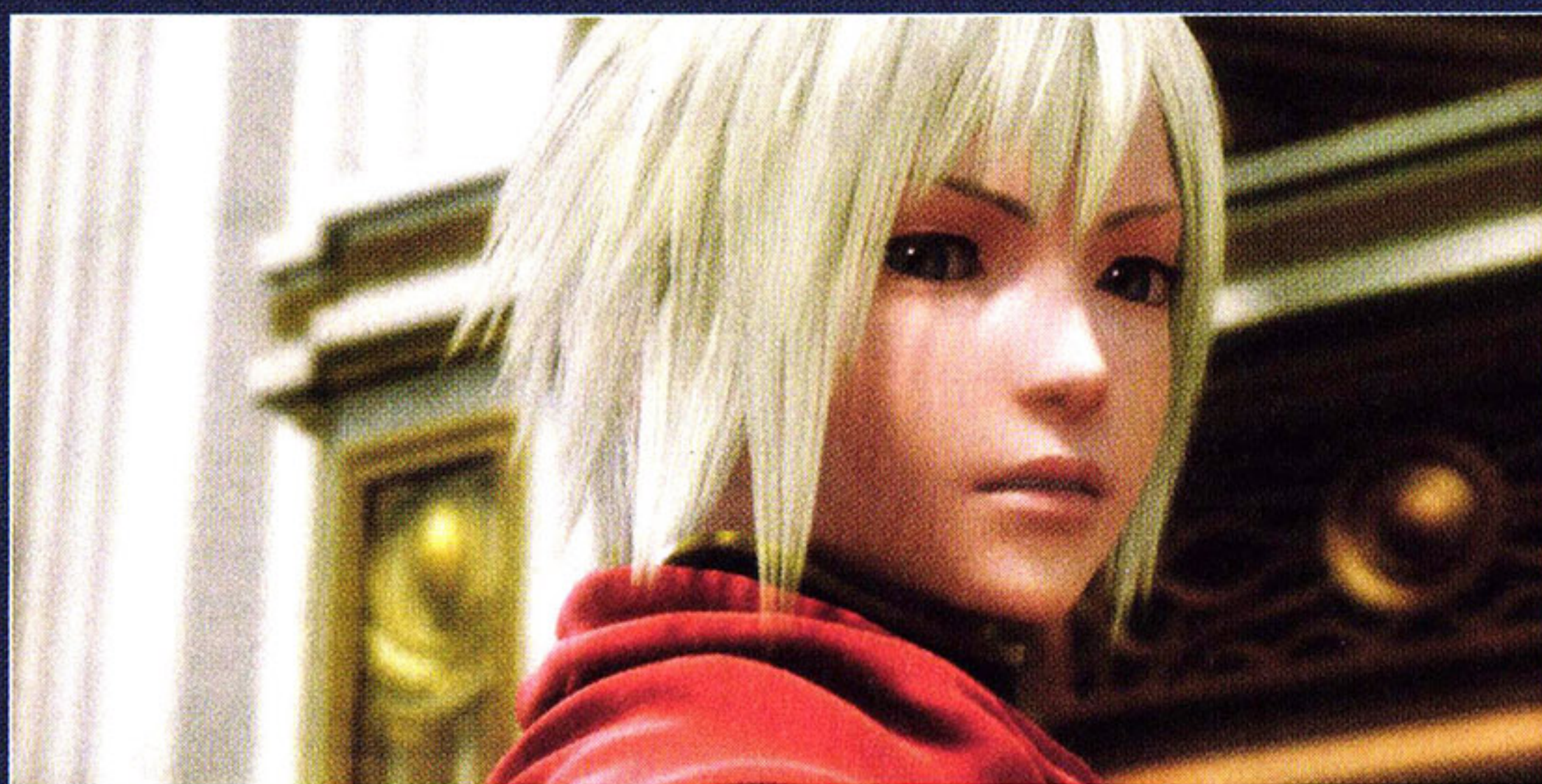
Mini Previews With Big Pictures



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

Wheelman

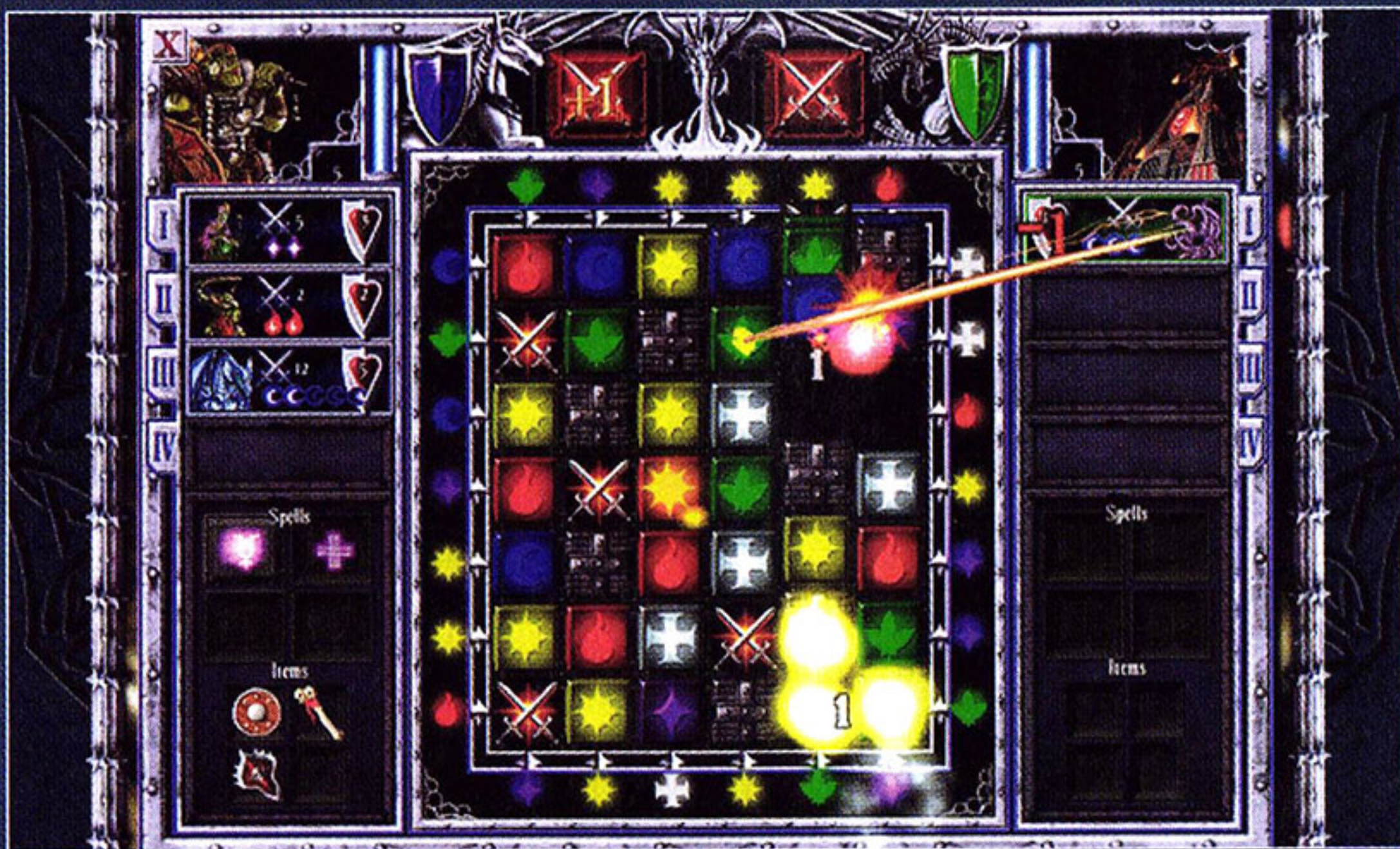
Take the open world driving thrills of GTA, ramp up the storytelling with Vin Diesel's gravel-voiced brand of monotone, and throw the whole thing in the Spanish city of Barcelona. What do you get? Hopefully, Midway's next bankable action title. Wheelman looks to offer some unique thrills with blockbuster worthy car chases that feature vehicles physically battling each other on the road. Expect Vinny to air jack a few cars (yeah, that means boarding them while they're in motion) along the way. Wheelman won't be released until 2009, but if this turns out anything like Vin Diesel's last video game, *Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay*, we'll happily give Wheelman a spin.



PSP

Final Fantasy Agito XIII

The often-forgotten runt of the Final Fantasy XIII litter, Agito was announced alongside the other Fabula Nova Crystalis titles as a mobile phone game, but Square Enix recently announced it's coming to the PSP instead. Initially thought to be a card game, Agito is actually an action game in the vein of *Crisis Core* (though one important character does use tarot cards) that features a party system so you aren't always fighting solo. In fact, you can play multiplayer by forming a group with your friends. Like all of the Final Fantasy XIII projects, no release date for Agito has been announced.



Wii | NINTENDO DS | PC

Puzzle Kingdoms

Excuse us if we're absurdly excited for this upcoming release from Infinite Interactive. Anyone who enjoyed the mix of puzzle and RPG goodness in *Puzzle Quest* will find a lot to like in its effective successor. This time, you'll travel with multiple heroes, all of whom can be utilized in battle to defeat your foes. Instead of flipping blocks around in the Bejeweled tradition, this slightly different mechanic has players pushing entire columns or rows of blocks from the outer edge of the playfield in an attempt to match like-colored blocks. The art style looks gorgeous, and we can't wait to see more of this strange genre mash-up when the game releases, hopefully before the end of the holidays.





Wii

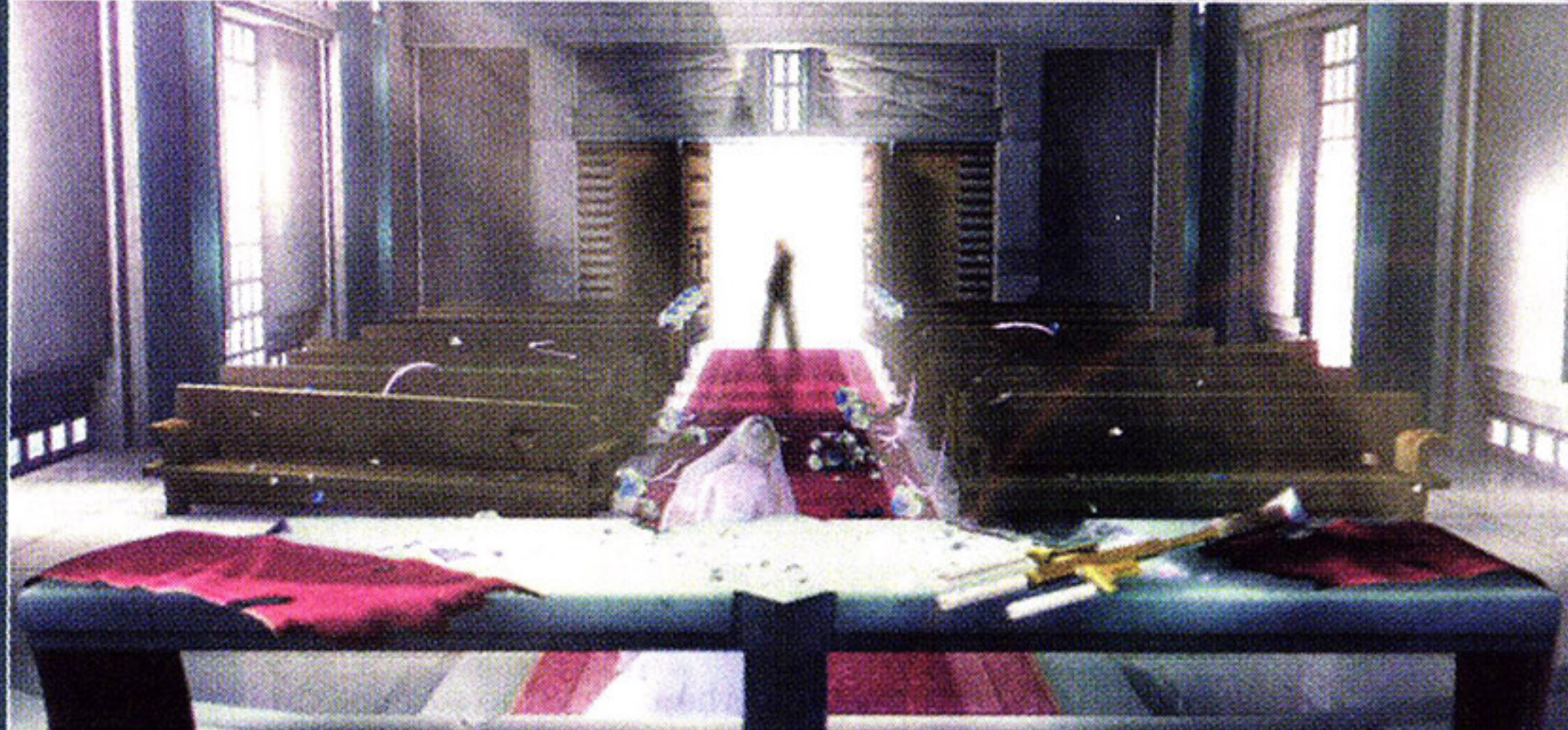
Sonic and the Black Knight

Sonic has ridden through the skies on a surfboard, been sucked into an *Arabian Nights*-style fairy tale, and even been used as a pinball. So is it really all that unusual his next Wii game will have him traveling through time exploring an ancient medieval kingdom? Maybe, but that's still what he'll be doing next spring when this sequel to *Sonic and the Secret Rings* comes out. Armed with a sword, Sonic must travel across an Arthurian-inspired world on a quest to become the ultimate knight and save the day. A Sonic renaissance festival? Sounds as bad to us as Eddie Murphy's last 10 films.

PSP

The 3rd Birthday

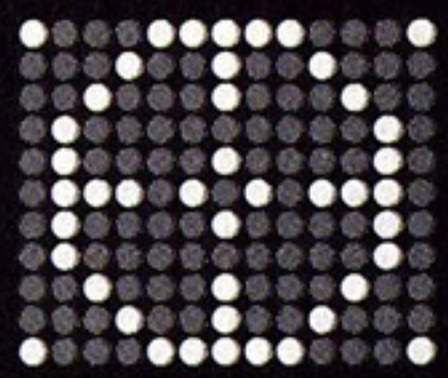
We haven't seen Parasite Eve in a long time. Square Enix's survival horror series last appeared on the PSone, but it is far from dead. The 3rd Birthday is the next installment in the franchise. While it once again stars Aya Brea, it is unlikely that this PSP title will feature the same gameplay Parasite Eve did on PSone. That's probably wise, since those controls haven't aged well. The creepy atmosphere and tension remain intact as Aya fights the game's new menace – maybe another aggressive cellular organelle? You'll have to wait for the game's (eventual and unannounced) release to find out.



PSP

Dissidia: Final Fantasy

You've already seen Cloud versus Sephiroth and Tidus versus Jecht. But what about Sephiroth versus Jecht? *Dissidia* is a *Final Fantasy* fan's dream come true, since it brings together heroes and villains spanning the entire series and pits them against each other in 3D one-on-one combat. The cast promises some awesome clashes, including the likes of Garland, Kefka, Squall, Zidane, and more. A hero from *Final Fantasy VI* is conspicuously absent at this point. . . we just hope it isn't Gau. A North American release of *Dissidia* is likely in 2009, though Square Enix hasn't provided any official confirmation.



REVIEWS

We Play The Crap So You Don't Have To

MULTI



Star Wars: The Force Unleashed

98

Wii



De Blob

105

XBOX 360

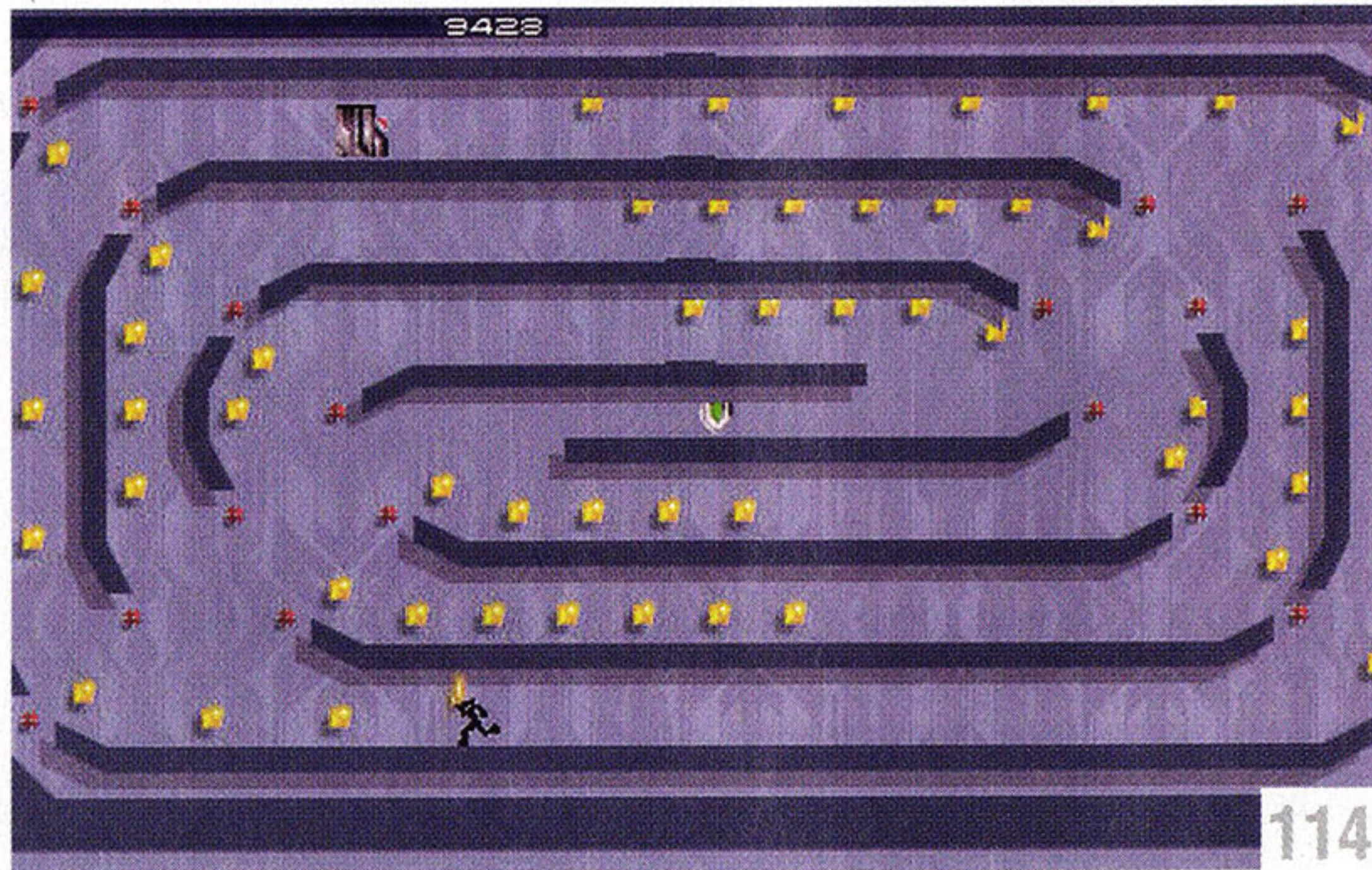


Infinite Undiscovery

108



107



114



Rock Band 2

We don't know many gamers who have yet to succumb to the charms of Harmonix's Rock Band, but just in case a few of you still exist, the company is releasing a brand-new sequel that raises the bar in the music genre once again. For the veterans, there are improved instruments and a revamped career mode. For fledgling rockers, there is a new "No Fail" mode and the most engaging and diverse soundtrack yet. All this adds up to one hell of a good time for everyone, and our coveted Game of the Month award for Harmonix.



N+

N+ has had quite a ride. Starting out as a free, PC-only shareware title, the game became a worldwide cult hit due to its success on the Xbox Live Arcade. Now coming to both DS and PSP, the game should experience another renaissance on handhelds, as its fast-paced and ultra-challenging platforming is perfect for on-the-go gaming. As a single-player game, it's near perfect, and a solid multi-player component comprehensive level creator, and online sharing hub only sweeten the pot.

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** Tribbles. Stupid furry muffins.

- > **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



Space Siege

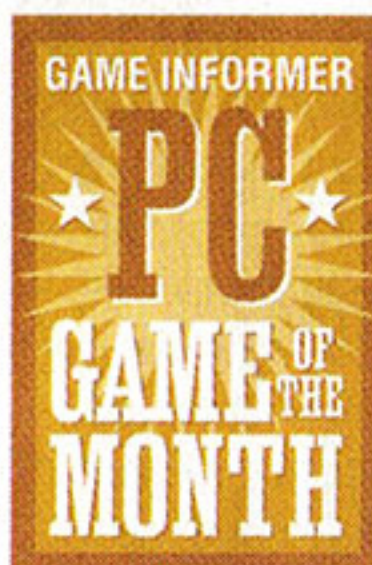
HANDHELD



Dragon Quest IV: Chapters of the Chosen



112



Civilization IV: Colonization

Turning 4X strategy conventions on their ears, this remake of Sid Meier's 1994 classic serves fans and newbies alike. Why conquer the world when merely winning your independence from the greedy King is the lone condition for victory? War takes a back seat to economics and diplomacy in Colonization as players try to build a great New World nation out of the dregs of European society. Nobody does sublimely addictive strategy like Firaxis.

REVIEWS INDEX

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pg. 100

the edge

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.

	Content suitable for persons ages 3 and older.		Content suitable for persons 17 ages and older.
	Content suitable for persons ages 6 and older.		Content suitable only for adults.
	Content suitable for persons ages 13 and older.		Product is awaiting final rating.

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

- 1080i** – A resolution specification used for HDTV. 1080i stands for resolution of 1920x1080 pixels. The “i” means that the video is being interlaced
- 1080p** – Currently the best resolution for gaming on an HDTV. In widescreen, 1080p generates an image at resolution of 1920x1080 in progressive format
- 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 God of War and Devil May Cry
- ad hoc** – A type of wireless connection that connects you with other players in your immediate vicinity
- AI** – Artificial Intelligence. Usually refers to how well the computer reacts to human opponents or works with human allies
- adventure** – A term we use for games like Myst and Escape From Monkey Island
- bloom** – An effect that simulates the soft, blurred glow of bright light reflecting off of surfaces
- board** – A term we use for games like Scene It? and Mario Party
- bored** – A term we use for games like Mario Super Sluggers and Mario Party
- cel shading** – A technique used to create 3D rendered objects that resemble hand-drawn animation cels
- CG** – Computer Generated. Usually refers to cutscenes that don't use in-game graphics
- DLC** – Downloadable content. Usually takes the form of inexpensive or free add-ons to existing games
- E3** – Electronic Entertainment Expo. A gaming convention held every year since 1995. It is one of the largest events in the gaming industry
- first-party** – A game made by a console manufacturer's internal development teams exclusively for its own system
- fighting** – A term we use for games like Mortal Kombat and Dead or Alive
- FPS** – First-Person Shooter. Describes games like Halo, Doom, and Call of Duty. Also used to denote the phrase “frames per second,” or how many animation frames happen in one second
- framerate** – The frames of animation used to generate the appearance of movement
- frontend** – A game's menus and options
- HDTV** – High Definition Television
- HP** – Hit Points. A numerical representation of a character's remaining life. Common in RPGs
- infrastructure** – A type of wireless connection that uses the Internet to connect with other players over long distances
- IP** – Intellectual Property. A single game or franchise encompassing the ideas and characters contained within
- isometric** – Three-quarters top down view, like Warcraft 3 or Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance
- jaggies** – Graphical lines that look 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
- music** – A term we use for games like Guitar Hero and Rock Band
- 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 Ratchet & Clank
- pop-up** – When objects onscreen suddenly appear, typically due to poor draw distance
- PS2** – Sony PlayStation 2
- PS3** – Sony's PlayStation 3 console
- puzzle** – A term we use for games like Tetris and Picross
- racing** – A term we use for games like Gran Turismo and Mario Kart
- RPG** – Role-Playing Game. A term games like Final Fantasy and The Elder Scrolls
- RTS** – Real-Time Strategy. A subgenre of strategy games including titles like StarCraft and Command & Conquer
- shooter** – A term we use for games like Ikaruga and Gradius
- sports** – A term we use for games like Madden NFL and Top Spin
- strategy** – A term we use for games like Disgaea and Fire Emblem
- third-party** – Something made for a console by a company other than the console manufacturer



■ The game concludes in two different ways. One ending is canon, adding a serious twist to the entire saga. The second is incredibly dark, but just a "what if" scenario

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Star Wars: The Force Unleashed

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER LUCASARTS
> DEVELOPER LUCASARTS > RELEASE SEPTEMBER 16 > ESRB T

THE POWER OF THE DARK SIDE

BOTTOM LINE 8.75

- > **Concept:** Tap into the Force with this official entry into the Star Wars canon
- > **Graphics:** Beautifully detailed and so true to the Star Wars legacy that the AT-STs appear to be animated in stop motion
- > **Sound:** Great voice acting accompanies the classic John Williams score
- > **Playability:** The Force flows strong, but other aspects of combat run into problems. And why does it need to load between menus?
- > **Entertainment:** Roughly 10 hours of explosive Force-powered warfare
- > **Replay Value:** Moderately High

In *Episode III: Revenge of the Sith*, we watched Anakin Skywalker fall to the dark side and take his place at the side of Emperor Palpatine as Darth Vader. The prequel trilogy told the origin story of Darth Vader, but it didn't tell us why the galaxy shudders at the mere mention of his name. Star Wars fans have been left wondering, "Is he the 'chosen one' from the Jedi prophecy, or is his legacy that of the Emperor's puppet?"

In *The Force Unleashed*, we finally see Lord Vader in his prime. This game bridges the gap between movie trilogies, and with the blessing and guidance of George Lucas, is an official chapter of the hallowed Star Wars saga. We not only see why Vader is a symbol of the Empire's might, we experience his wrath firsthand. Vader is playable only for the first level, and although our time under the mask is brief, it is a study in Force-powered brutality. Vader is an unstoppable killing machine and his control over the dark side pushes the Force far beyond anything we've seen before. LucasArts did a great job sculpting his move set (he doesn't run, he confidently marches forward), and turning him into badass we always wanted to see.

At the conclusion of this level, control is passed from Vader to his secret apprentice, codenamed Starkiller, a character that falls in line with George

Lucas' lineage of doe-eyed, moderately irritating male protagonists. With Vader as his instructor, Starkiller is a force to be reckoned with on the battlefield. He's agile, amazingly aggressive, and firmly in control of the dark side. Through a beautifully sculpted control scheme that allows the Force to flow smoothly through your fingers, Starkiller is one of the saga's most talented combatants. As the game progresses, his Force powers evolve and give way to an even more impressive move set. Lightsaber and lightning become one, rancors are a minor inconvenience, and star destroyers can be taken down with the wave of a hand.

The gameplay is electric and fun, and the plethora of awesome new enemy types will make Star Wars action figure collectors salivate. You know what a royal guard can do, but what about an Imperial incinerator trooper? Fans will also be pleased to hear that this dark tale takes us to new planets and areas of familiar facilities I never thought I would see. All of the levels are loaded with highly destructible structures and sights you'll take a second to marvel at.

It's an amazing game, but there are disturbances in this Force-powered experience. Targeting difficulties make some battles troublesome, and blocking inconsistencies lead to some absurd deaths. The game offers a generous helping of checkpoints, so

a death won't set you back too far. Still, it's hard to believe that enemies (especially some of the later bosses) can block anything you throw at them, even when you clearly have the jump on them. Some fights, especially on the higher difficulty levels, come down to dumb luck.

The story will also leave Star Wars fans puzzled. I won't spoil the plot's twists and turns, but there are some serious leaps in logic that don't add up. Why am I on this planet? Vader did this why?

The *Force Unleashed* clings to the classic video game design of book-ending gameplay segments with short cutscenes, which doesn't allow the story to grow in the ways it needs to. I'm not saying the game should feature *Metal Gear*-length clips, but more content is needed to tell a cohesive tale. Starkiller ends up being an underdeveloped character; you know his mission, and you periodically see his emotions flare, but you never really get an idea of who he is.

The *Force Unleashed* isn't the ultimate Star Wars game — *KOTOR* is still king in my book. But, as advertised, it amplifies this mystical power in new ways to delivers exciting gameplay and unforgettable Star Wars moments. It'll leave you wanting more, but take my word for it, it's worth playing just to see Vader Force-throw wookiees. —REINER

Second Opinion 8.75

After years of unsuccessfully trying to move things with my mind, I finally know what it feels like to wield the Force. This chapter of the Star Wars saga transforms players into a walking catastrophe, displaying the amazing offensive potential of the dark side as you throw, impale, and generally humiliate legions of foes. No matter how many times I whipped my lightsaber at Ugnaughts or tossed stormtroopers from dizzying heights, I never tired of the explosive action. While using the Force is fluid and intuitive, the rest of the combat system isn't quiet as refined or responsive, mainly due to dodgy targeting and blocking. It's also a pity that the game's awesome premise doesn't have a chance to shine; you only get what you need to justify moving to the next level, and nothing more. On the other hand, true Star Wars fans will appreciate the conceptual groundwork (if not the details) established by game's events. Despite some combat irregularities and plot holes, there is one constant in *The Force Unleashed*: It puts power at your fingertips in a way that no game — Star Wars or otherwise — has ever achieved. This is the first game that gets the Force right. —JOE

Wii DIFFERENCE

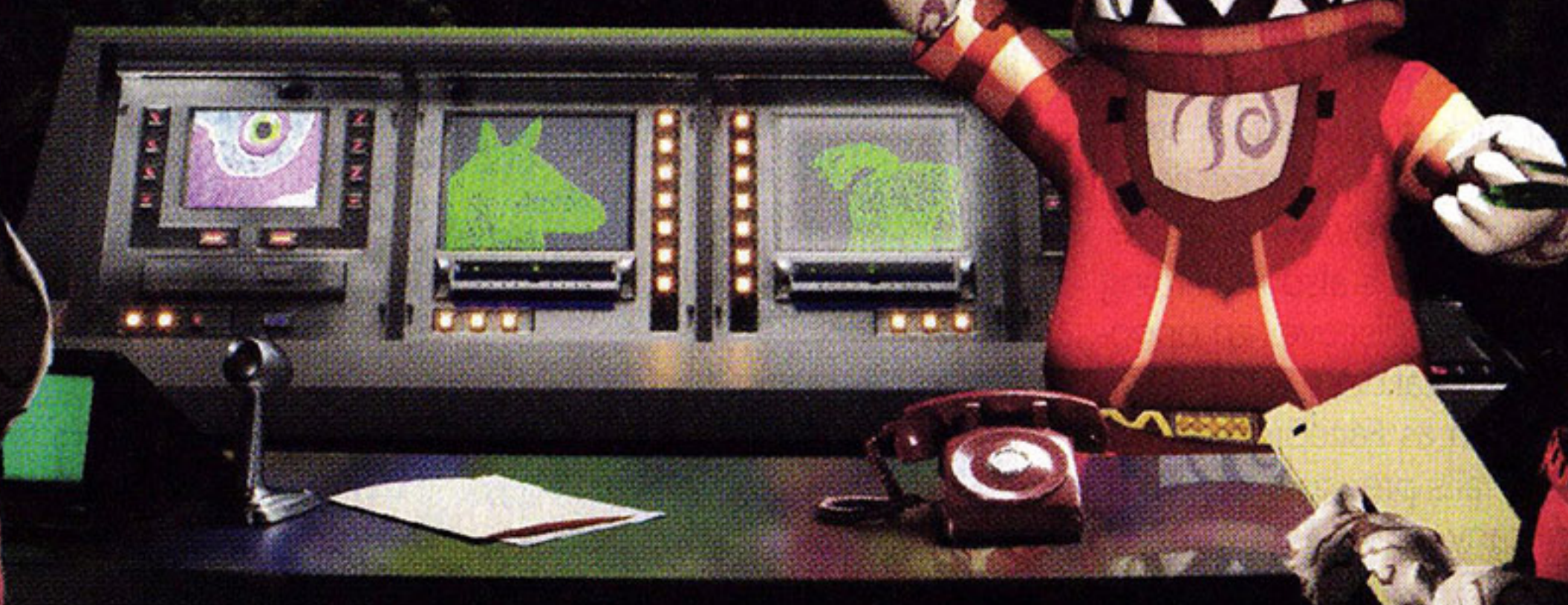
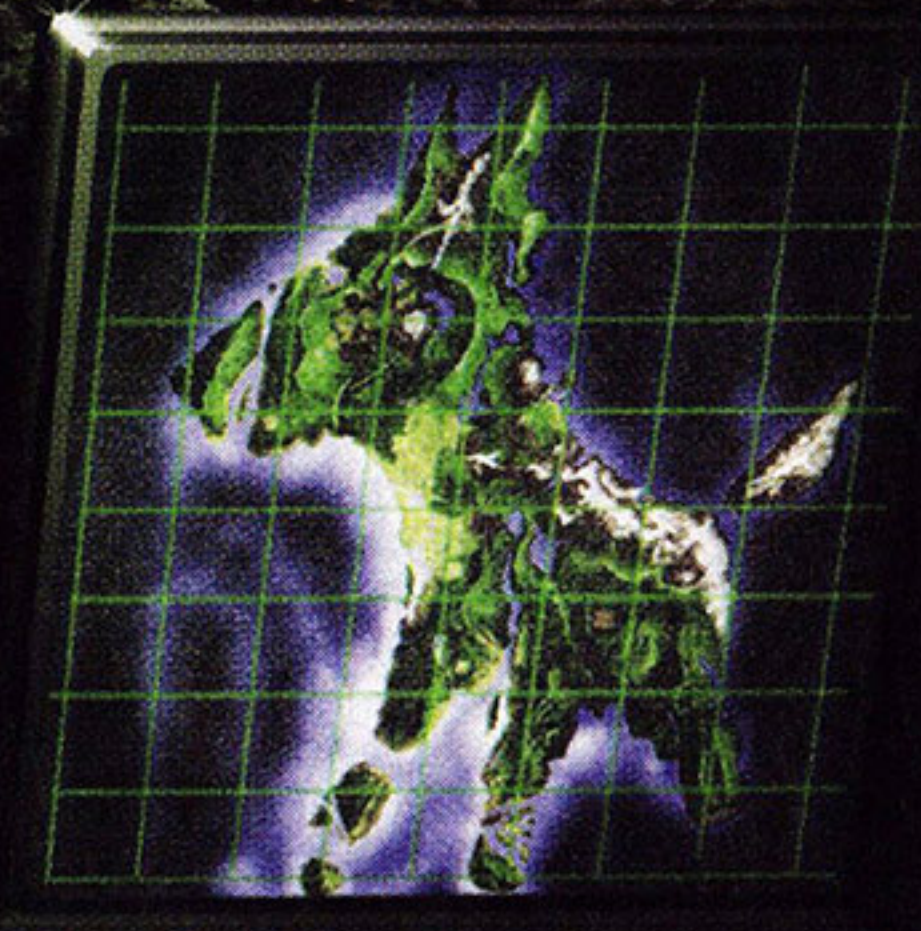
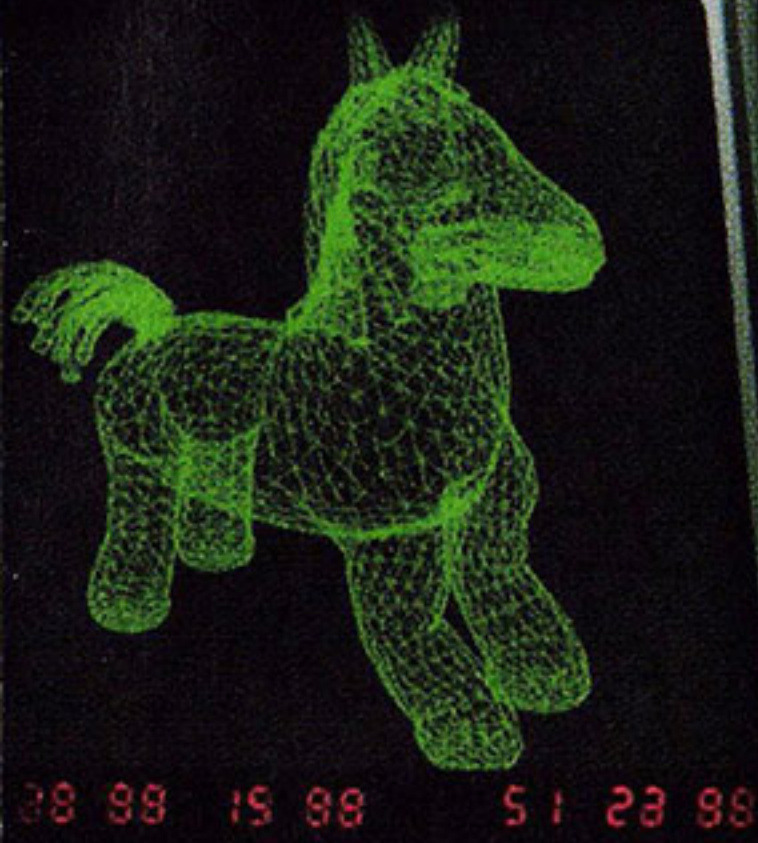
7.75

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION

The Wii version shares the same story and is similar in design to the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 iterations, but is largely a different game. You still start out playing as Darth Vader, but the objectives are altered, and the story sequences play out a little differently. The motion-based controls are precise and easy to pick up, but the action isn't as explosive, and the cutscene details are quite crude by comparison. If you really want to see this game in all its glory, play it on one of the other systems. However, if the Wii is your only system, this version is still worth a look.



■ This droid, named Proxy, is unlike any other in the Star Wars universe. Fans should note that his wiring looks very similar to C-3POs



His list of demands is short and sweet.

The days of peaceful piñata gardens are over. The evil Professor Pester is back and he won't rest until he's got your piñatas and all the candy in 'em. And with dozens of new piñata species and two brand-new environments to take care of, this garden is anything but relaxing.

xbox.com/vivapinata

VIVA
PIÑATA
TROUBLE IN PARADISE

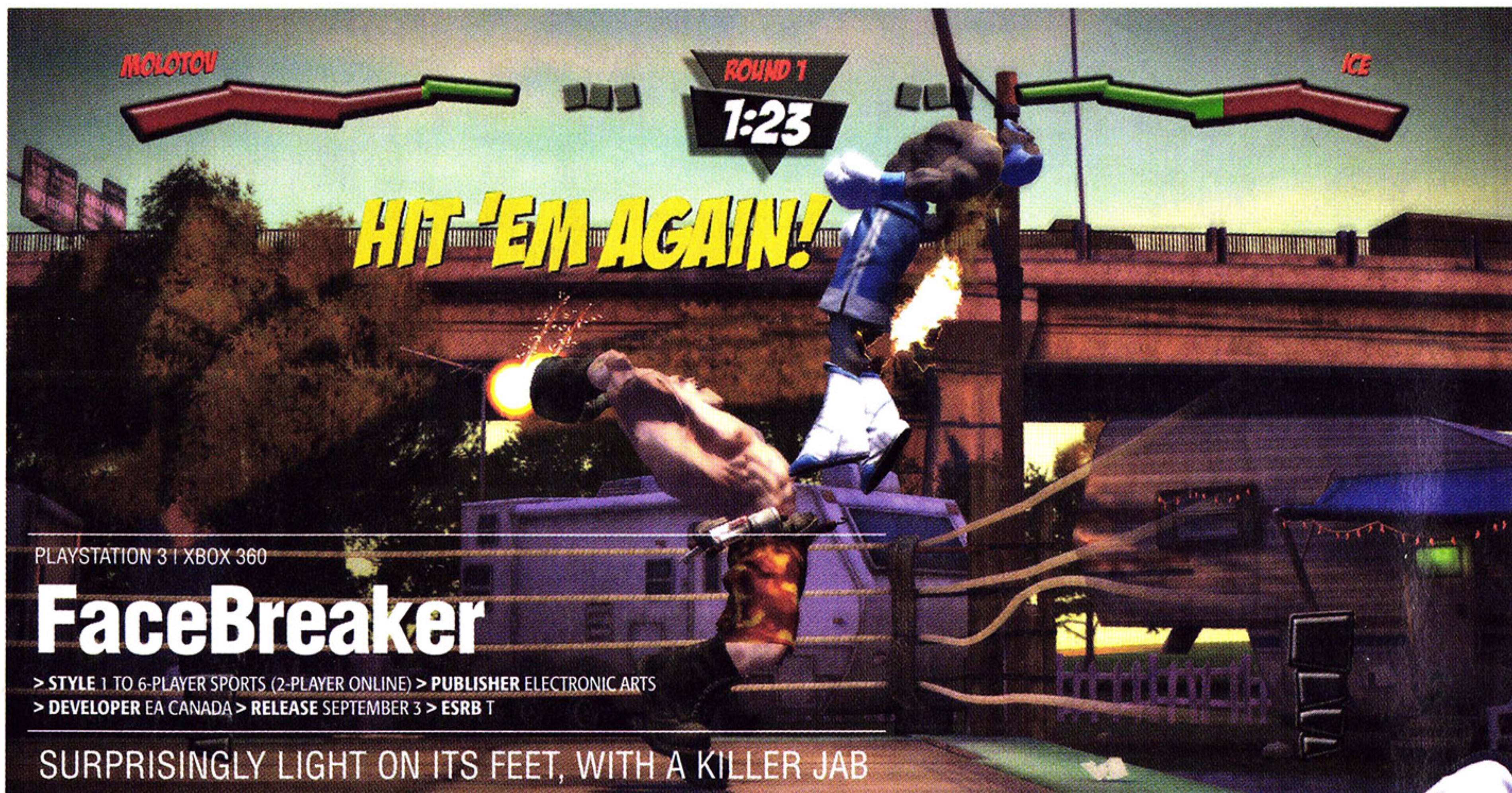
EVERYONE
E™
Comic Mischief
Mild Cartoon Violence
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

Microsoft
game studios

Jump in.

 **XBOX 360** LIVE

BOTTOM LINE **7.75**



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

FaceBreaker

> **STYLE** 1 TO 6-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS
> **DEVELOPER** EA CANADA > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 3 > **ESRB** T

SURPRISINGLY LIGHT ON ITS FEET, WITH A KILLER JAB

It's too predictable to mercilessly pummel FaceBreaker because of its kiddie graphics, stereotypical characters, and for the fact that it's not Fight Night. But every fighter has a few tricks up his or her sleeve, and FaceBreaker is no different. Whatever critical punishment you can level at the game, its gameplay core packs enough punch to survive your flurry.

FaceBreaker is a throwback to the classic button-masher Mike Tyson's Punch-Out. You might think the game's fast pace would upset its balance, but FaceBreaker turns this expected folly into one of its strengths. While hammering on the controller to launch a flurry of punches at your opponent is enjoyable, the fight is all about timing. As fast as your fists of fury may be, if you're not tactful you'll end up on the mat.

My favorite part of the game is its block, dodge, and parry system. Each one has its place depending on the situation or opponent — particularly dodges and parries. Time them correctly as your opponent punches and you'll get in a couple free shots. FaceBreaker's cast of broad caricatures may make you wince, but it's fun to go round-for-round with them exchanging punches and, more importantly,

timing blocks, dodges, and parries effectively to turn the fight in your favor or avoid a beating. Each boxer responds with his or her own counterattack, and many aren't beatable unless you learn to use defensive tactics for offensive payoff.

FaceBreaker features a number of special combo attacks particular to its characters that provide a fun flourish, but none are as deadly as the move the game is named after. Players earn these game-ending punches by building up the multi-tiered combo meter without being interrupted. As dangerous as this sounds, it was pretty rare to earn or be the victim of one. This only highlights how important it is to play defense and stick to your attack strategies. Combos are merciless if you don't know what you're doing, but it's also rewarding when you discover an opponent's weakness.

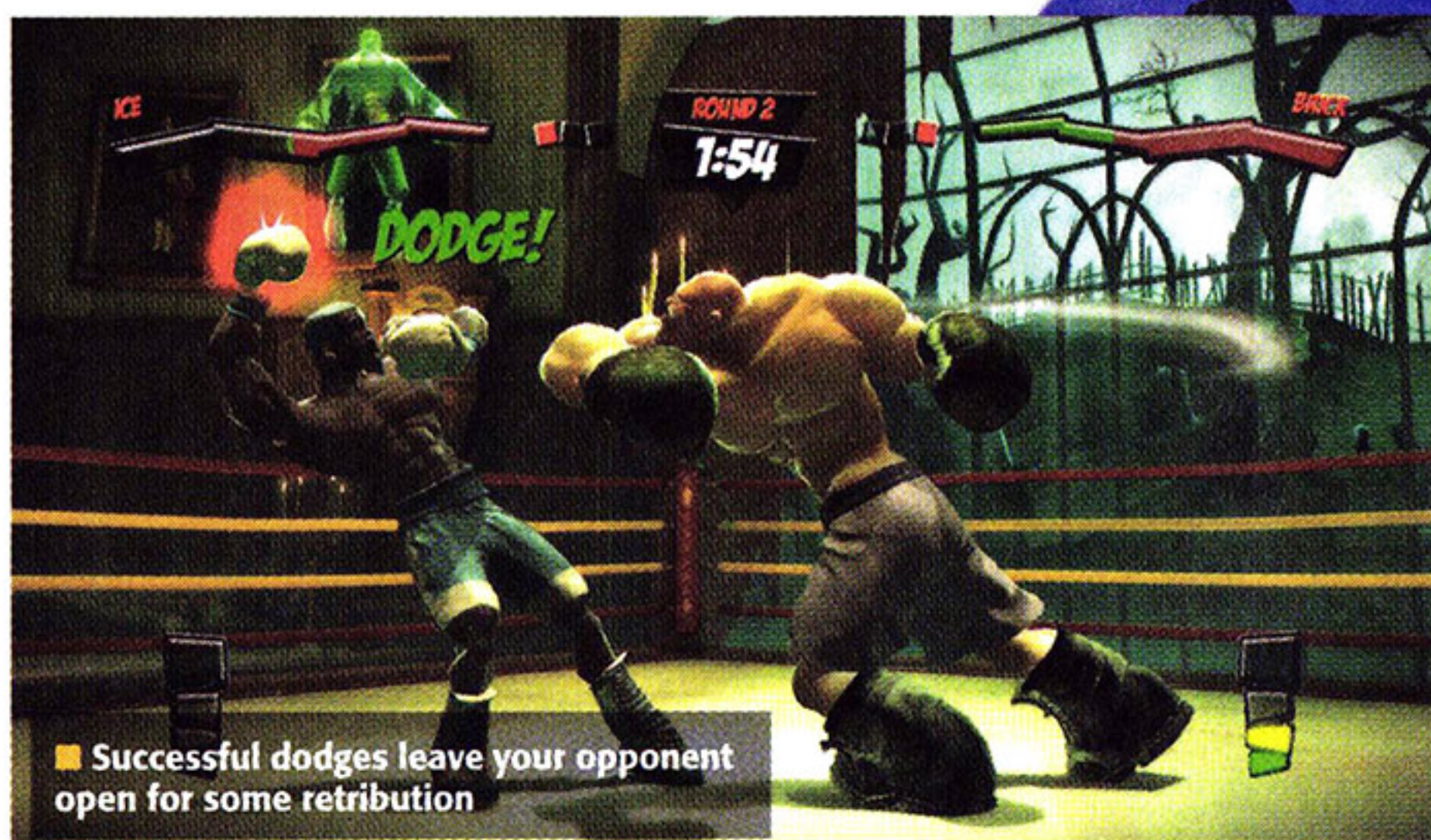
As fun as FaceBreaker can be, it falls prey to a scourge of many new EA titles — this first title in the franchise is shorn of exciting features. The

game's bare-bones structure presumes that you'll take each boxer through the same gauntlet of fights over and over again. Even with the solid gameplay, it doesn't take long before the unadorned nature of the career mode makes you feel brain dead, like you've taken a few too many punches to the noggin. Regardless, I think this game is worth strapping on the gloves. —**KATO**

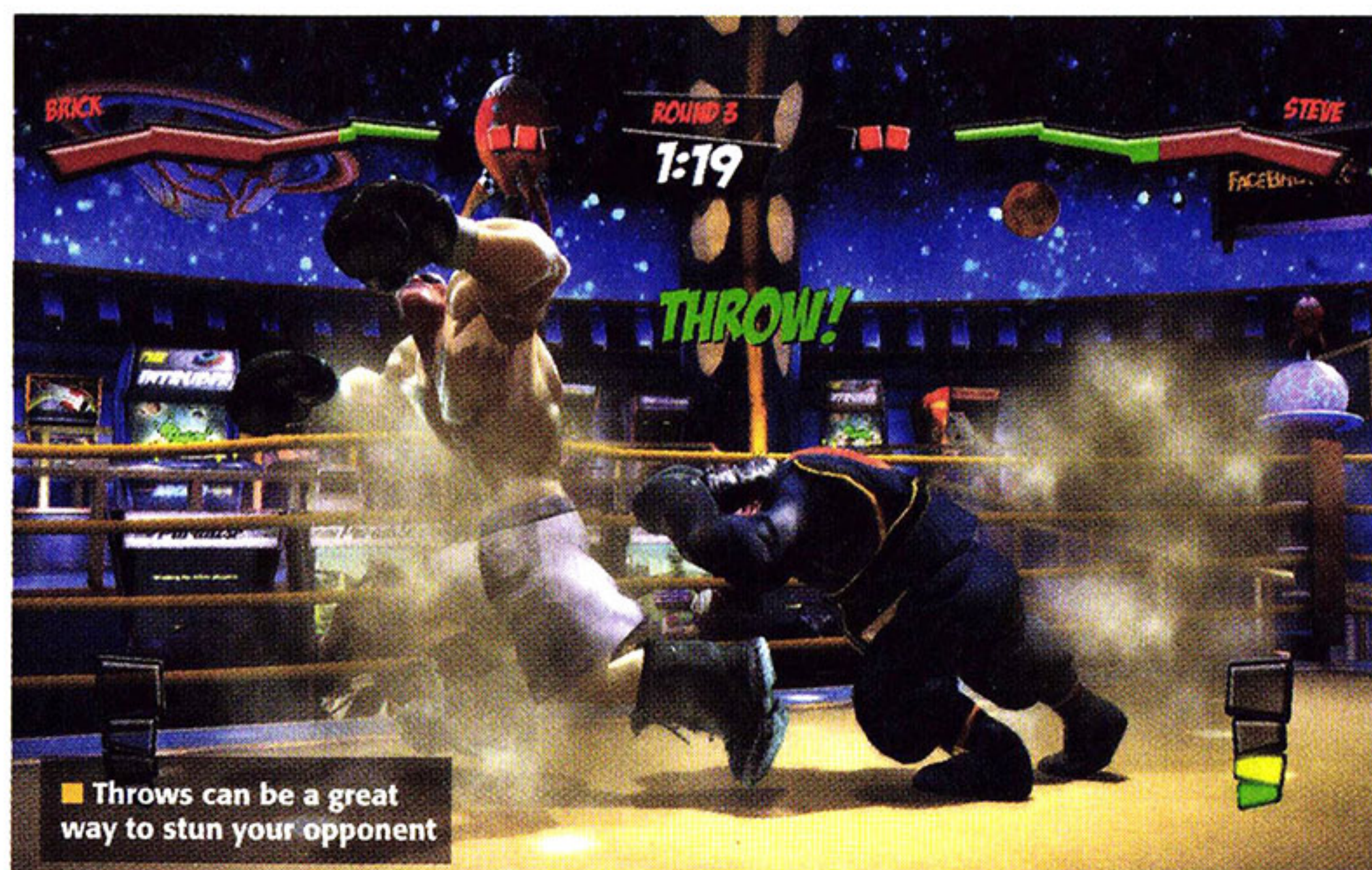


Second Opinion **6.5**

Vivid cartoon graphics and smooth gameplay? Check. Simplistic boxing controls that hark back to the arcade days? Check. Borderline offensive characters quipping groan-inducing one-liners? Check. So why doesn't FaceBreaker feel like a natural evolution of Mike Tyson's Punch-Out? At first glance FaceBreaker seems like a simple button masher, but the combo and counter systems reveal considerable depth that allows skilled players to manhandle newcomers. My problem rests with the mash-heavy control scheme, which puts the dodge controls on the same buttons as the punches. Since the game moves at the speed of an arcade fighter, the bouts generally end in pain as my fingers throb from overusing the three main buttons. The poor player movement also didn't do me any favors; while the dash controls work fine, strafing to reposition your character is an exercise in futility. Beyond the arthritis-inducing gameplay, FaceBreaker offers a creative versus mode that allows you to take your create-a-boxer online to spar with new competition, the prize being the head of the loser. If the game didn't have such a limited single player offering and an unforgiving control scheme, I might have been a golden glove. As is, I feel more like a Golden Girl. —**BERTZ**



Successful dodges leave your opponent open for some retribution



Throws can be a great way to stun your opponent

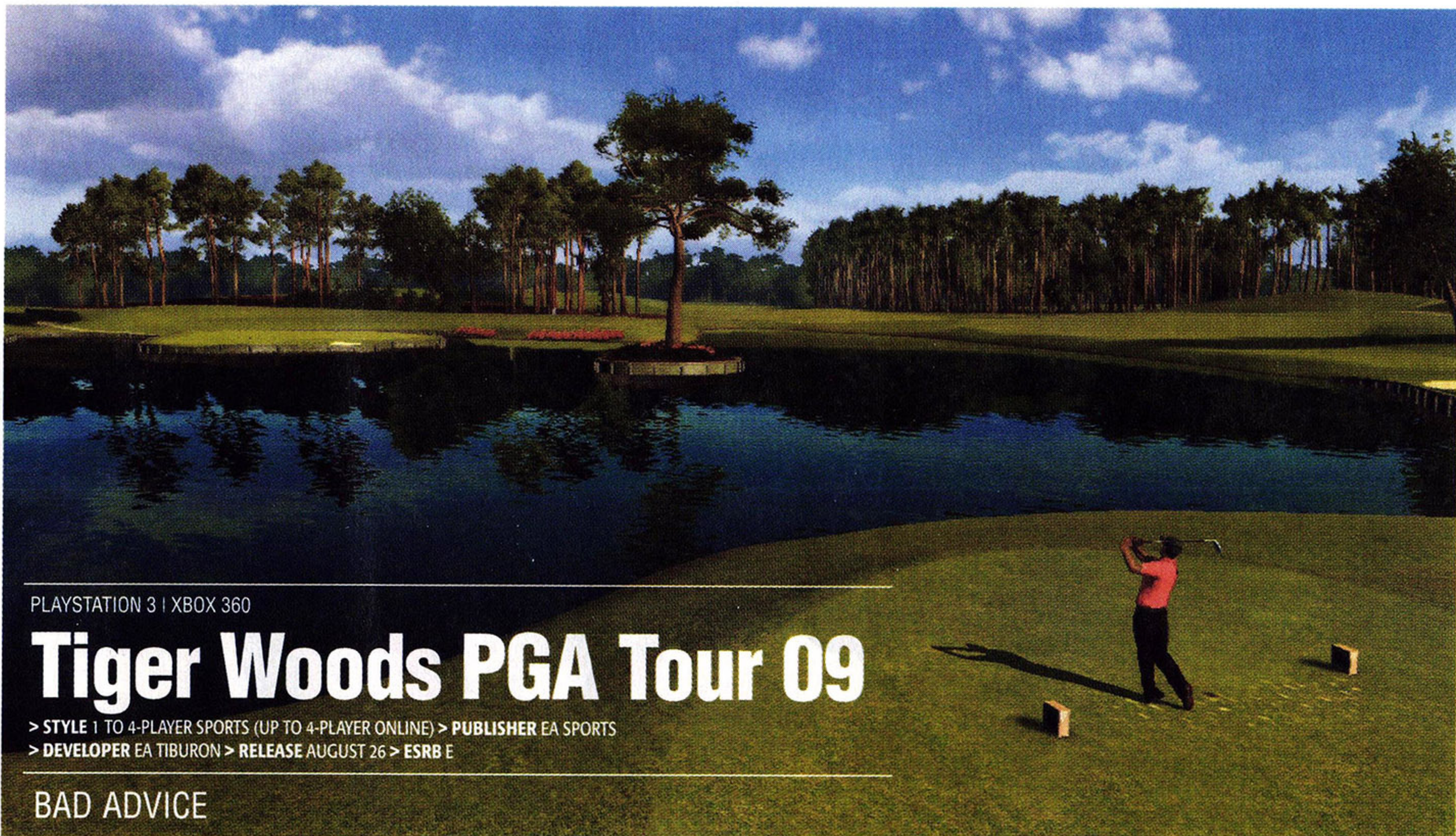


BOTTOM LINE **8.5**

- > **Concept:** Seems like EA changed the game for the sake of change, but at least the gameplay core hasn't been corrupted too much
- > **Graphics:** Pops off the screen with better lighting and attention to detail
- > **Sound:** The unremarkable new announcers ride the same soothing timber of the previous pair
- > **Playability:** The real-time swing meter provides immediate feedback, which can be a big help
- > **Entertainment:** The new career structure takes some of the luster off an otherwise solid title
- > **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion **8.75**

After last year's great Tiger 08, the developers kept pushing forward on multiple fronts, making large changes to the career and training structure. While I appreciate the effort, not all of the new features work as well as they should. The gameplay is still solid (the new club tuner will help many gamers), but the decision to forgo the usual stat points with a "dynamic" system that changes automatically based on your performance is a mistake. Now, poor performances decrease your stats, meaning that when you're struggling the game actually becomes harder. While the new Tiger Challenge structure is easier to understand, the removal of much of the training variety and depth in favor of clichéd "pro tips" from Tiger's coach Hank Haney is ludicrous. He offers nothing insightful, and his training drills are very repetitive. The good news is that things are great on the course. Some of the new courses – particularly Gary Player and Wolf Creek – are among my all-time favorites, and the new Simultaneous Golf online mode is a great addition to an already robust online component. Once again, it's the best golf game on the market. —MATT



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Tiger Woods PGA Tour 09

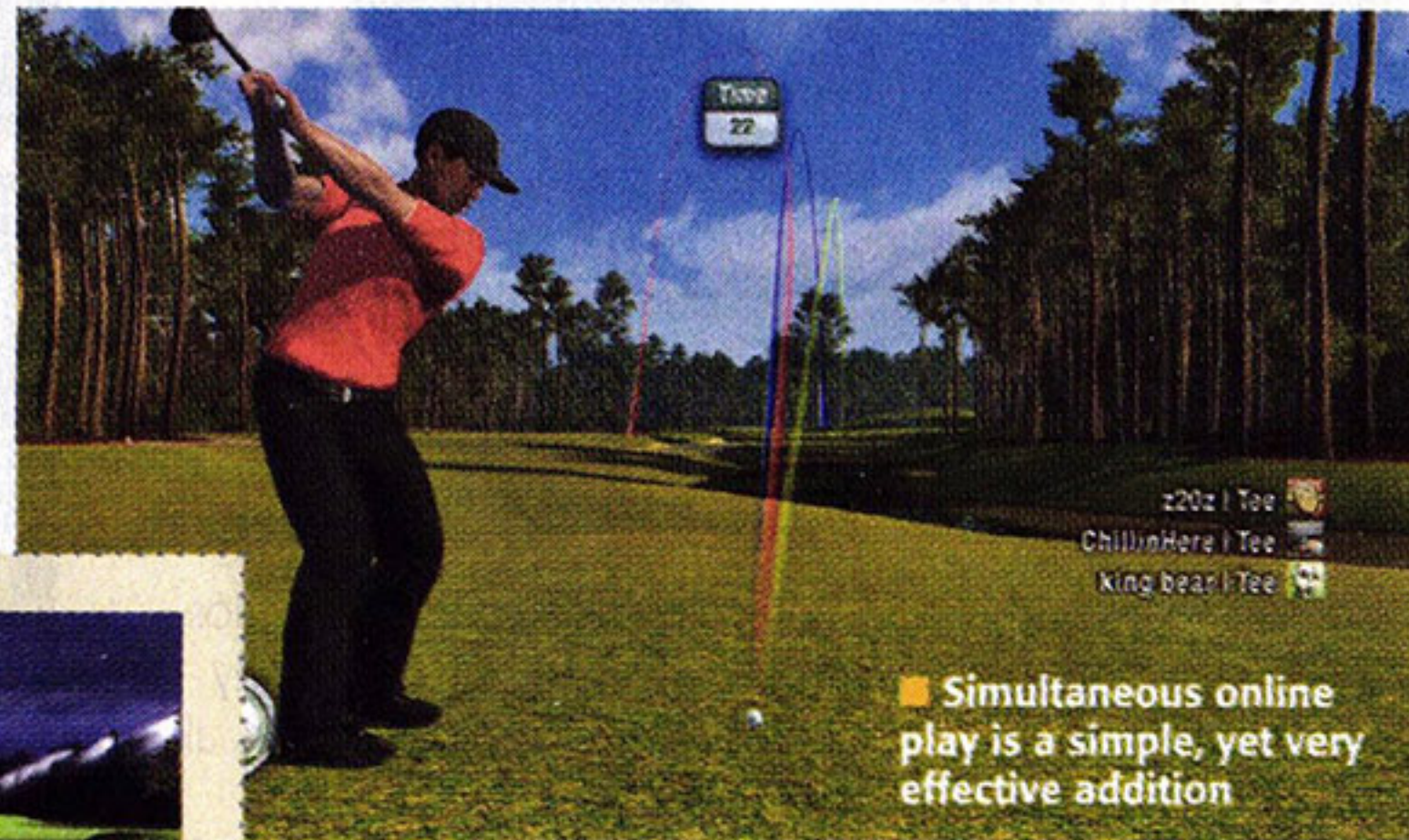
> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 4-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS
 > **DEVELOPER** EA TIBURON > **RELEASE** AUGUST 26 > **ESRB** E

BAD ADVICE

It seems there's always a new golf tip to learn. Just ask Larry David. The problem is that they aren't always good. You try many out, only to find that most of them don't improve your game. EA has made some slight tweaks this year to what I think was the best Tiger ever – Tiger 08 – but, like those golf tips, they don't improve the game. Luckily, this title still knows how to stroke the ball.

My main beef with Tiger 09 is the altered skill system. The four skill categories (Power, Accuracy, Short Game, and Putting) rise and fall automatically according to your performance. While this isn't new for Tiger (see last year's Confidence system), all this happens because of Tiger's coach, Hank Haney. EA incorporated his digital likeness, and while it's great that Hank got paid (I'm sure golf teachers are like real teachers – underpaid), there's no payoff for us players. I miss applying my hard-won attribute points over a large variety of categories, as well as meeting and exceeding my potential by beating Tiger Challenge pros. It's like EA changed it just to call it new, when it's actually pared down and less interesting. What really stinks about this new way of rising through the ranks is that Hank's boring skill drills didn't keep my attention nearly as long as last year's drills, which at least gave you some variety. On a similar note, it seems the importance of your equipment has decreased, which was always one of the more fun things about Tiger.

Despite these changes, Tiger is still a well-made game. The addition of a real-time swing indicator is very helpful. No longer are you simply told you sliced the ball after the fact (no duh, I didn't intend it to veer sharply to the right). Now, you can see your shot is offer center while you practicing your



Simultaneous online play is a simple, yet very effective addition



CLUB TUNING

By balancing a variety of trade-offs, players can tweak clubs to achieve more spin, power, or control. For instance, you can instantly get more power out of your beginning set of clubs, but this will decrease the size of your sweet spot, which makes it harder to get a hold of the ball. One tweak that doesn't have a trade-off, however, is changing your clubs' bias. This allows you to compensate for a slice or hook in your swing.

backswing. In conjunction with club tuning (see sidebar), this mechanic allows you to optimize your swing. EA has also made small but meaningful changes to the career structure, online play (which allows you to see where your opponents' balls are going in real time), and the amazing GamerNet feature. Each refines Tiger in useful ways – unlike Hank.

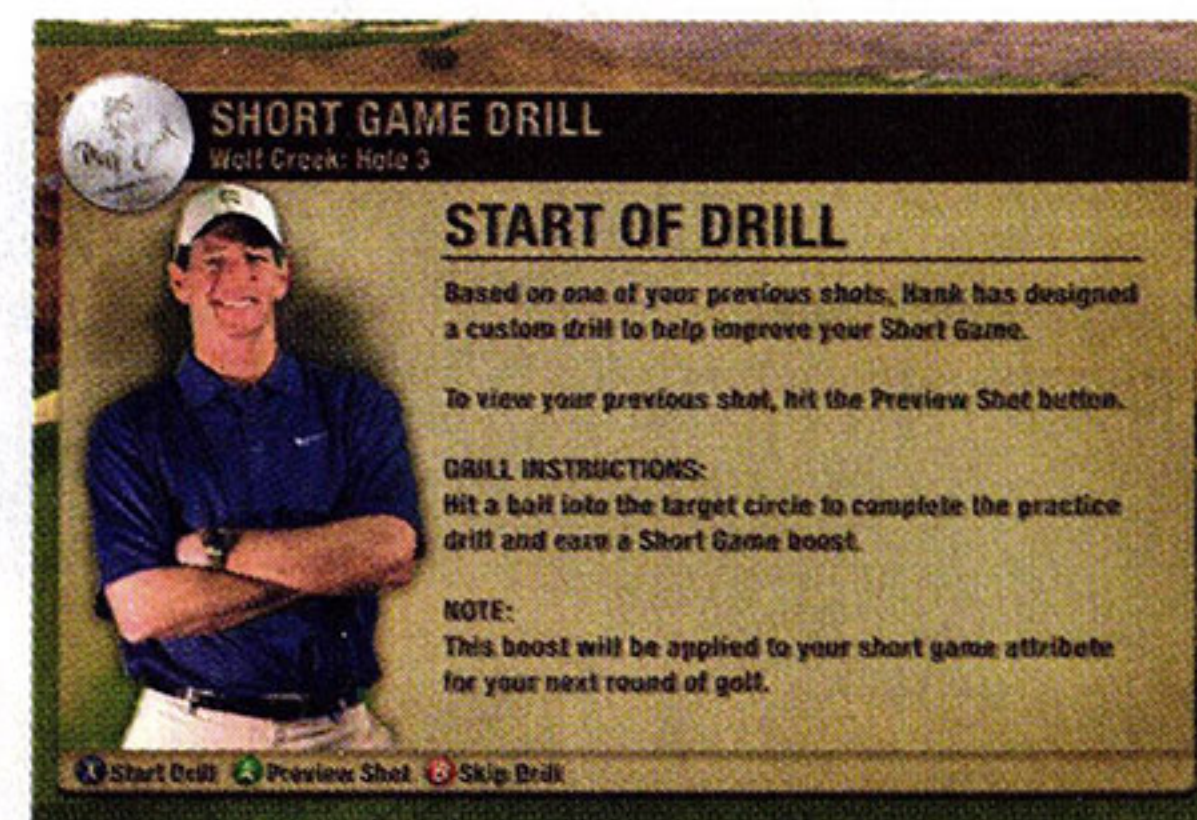
I'm not sure why EA stripped away features that already worked beautifully. I wish this year's five new courses were just the beginning of the additions instead of one of the highlights, but it'll have to do while we wait for a course creator. I guess that's just the way golf is. One day your swing is near perfection – until it isn't. —KATO

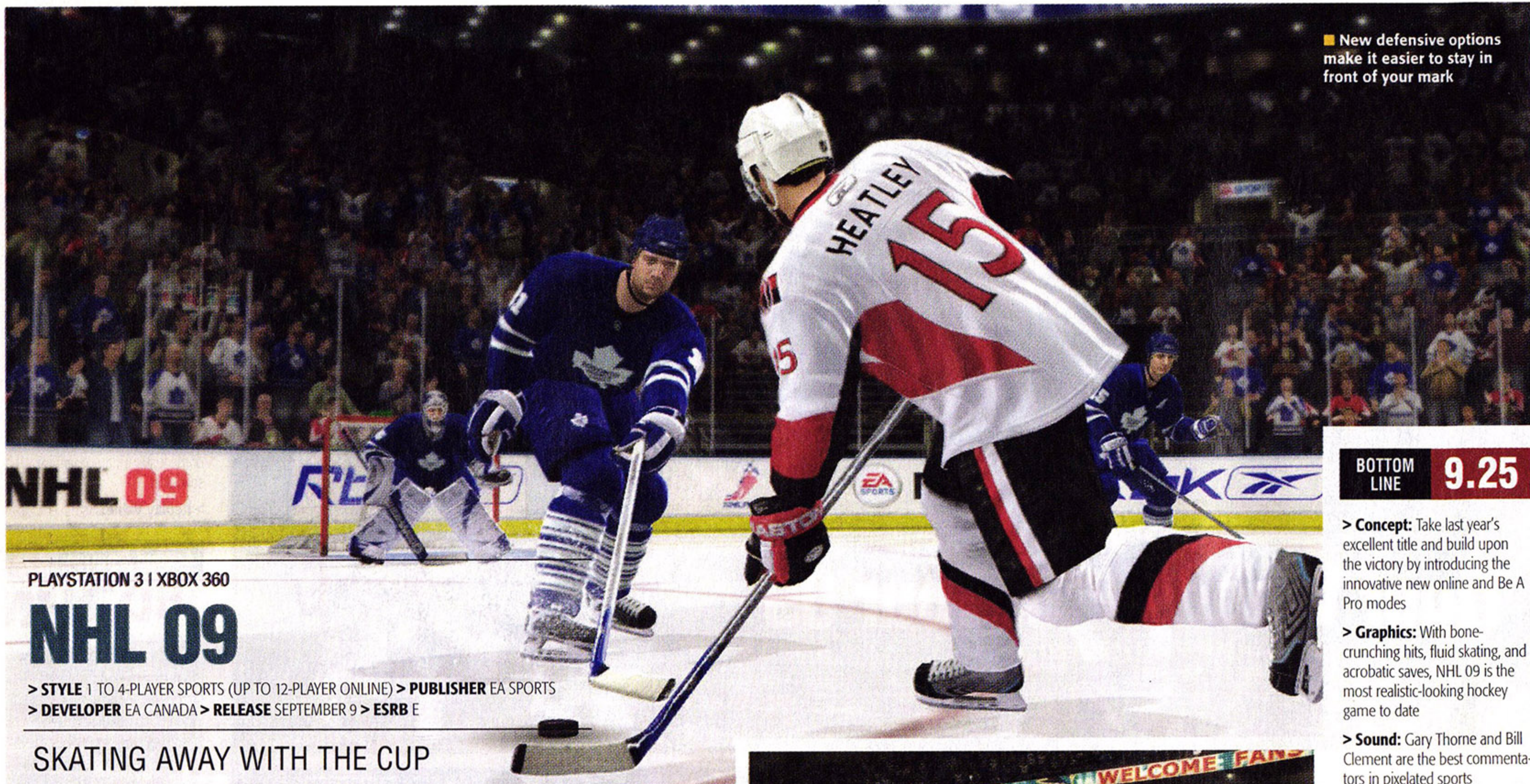
HANK'S WISDOM

No wonder Tiger is the best golfer on the planet. Hank Haney, his real-life coach who appears in the game for the first time, serves no real purpose other than to drop the following life-changing golf advice. Anyone who plays golf will want to jot these down and keep them handy.

- “ The short game is all about recovery. You want to get it on the green and as close to the hole as possible. ”
- “ Putting is very simple: Get the ball in the hole in the least number of attempts when on the green. ”

Thanks for the insightful tips!





■ New defensive options make it easier to stay in front of your mark

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

NHL 09

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 12-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS
> **DEVELOPER** EA CANADA > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 9 > **ESRB** E

SKATING AWAY WITH THE CUP

While Madden treads water and NBA Live struggles to find its shot, NHL has quietly raised the benchmark for sports games. With its unparalleled controls, refined presentation, and unrivaled selection of game modes, NHL 09 is the best hockey game ever created.

Forget the patsy-cake checks of last year's game — NHL 09 dishes seismic hits that leave your opponents a huddled mass of pain and broken bones on the ice. Combine the big checks with the stick lift and improved poke check, and the gameplay finally finds a balance between offensive and defensive abilities. Many games will be won or lost in front of the goalmouth as you disrupt potential one-timers to protect your net or set up deflection scenarios on the attack.

While the action between the boards continues to

improve, the franchise mode lags behind other sports games. Tools like a trade block, refined scouting, midseason contract negotiations, and improved draft tools would go a long way to bringing this experience up to par. The confusing free agency interface and inability to buy out poorly performing players' contracts also stand out as sore thumbs.

This year marks the debut of the Be A Pro mode, which invites gamers to create a skater and guide him from the minor leagues to the hall of fame. Your player must meet a set of goals each year contingent to your playing style and position. As you meet or exceed expectations, the coach rewards you by moving you to more potent lines or calling you up to the NHL. The camera fixates on your player throughout the game and smartly changes perspective to give you the best view of the action. The only times we experienced a poor angle was when the puck got hung up in the corners of our zone.

But it gets better. You can take your player online, join a club with friends, and

participate in 6-on-6 games versus other teams in the hopes of being crowned the champion of the EA Sports Hockey League. Finally, the thrill of working as a cohesive team in a real sport translates effectively to the virtual space. This is the future of sports games. We experienced considerable lag while playtesting this mode, but EA believes this should be fixed before launch. Lag in a fast-paced game like hockey makes or breaks the experience, so we hope it's true.

With the best controls in sports, an addictive Be A Pro mode, and the amazing EA Sports Hockey League, NHL 09 is the pinnacle of contemporary sports games. I hope other sports franchises take note and try to achieve greatness as well. —BERTZ



■ Teamwork and positioning will often overcome individual skill in 6-on-6 games

BOTTOM LINE 9.25

> **Concept:** Take last year's excellent title and build upon the victory by introducing the innovative new online and Be A Pro modes

> **Graphics:** With bone-crunching hits, fluid skating, and acrobatic saves, NHL 09 is the most realistic-looking hockey game to date

> **Sound:** Gary Thorne and Bill Clement are the best commentators in pixelated sports

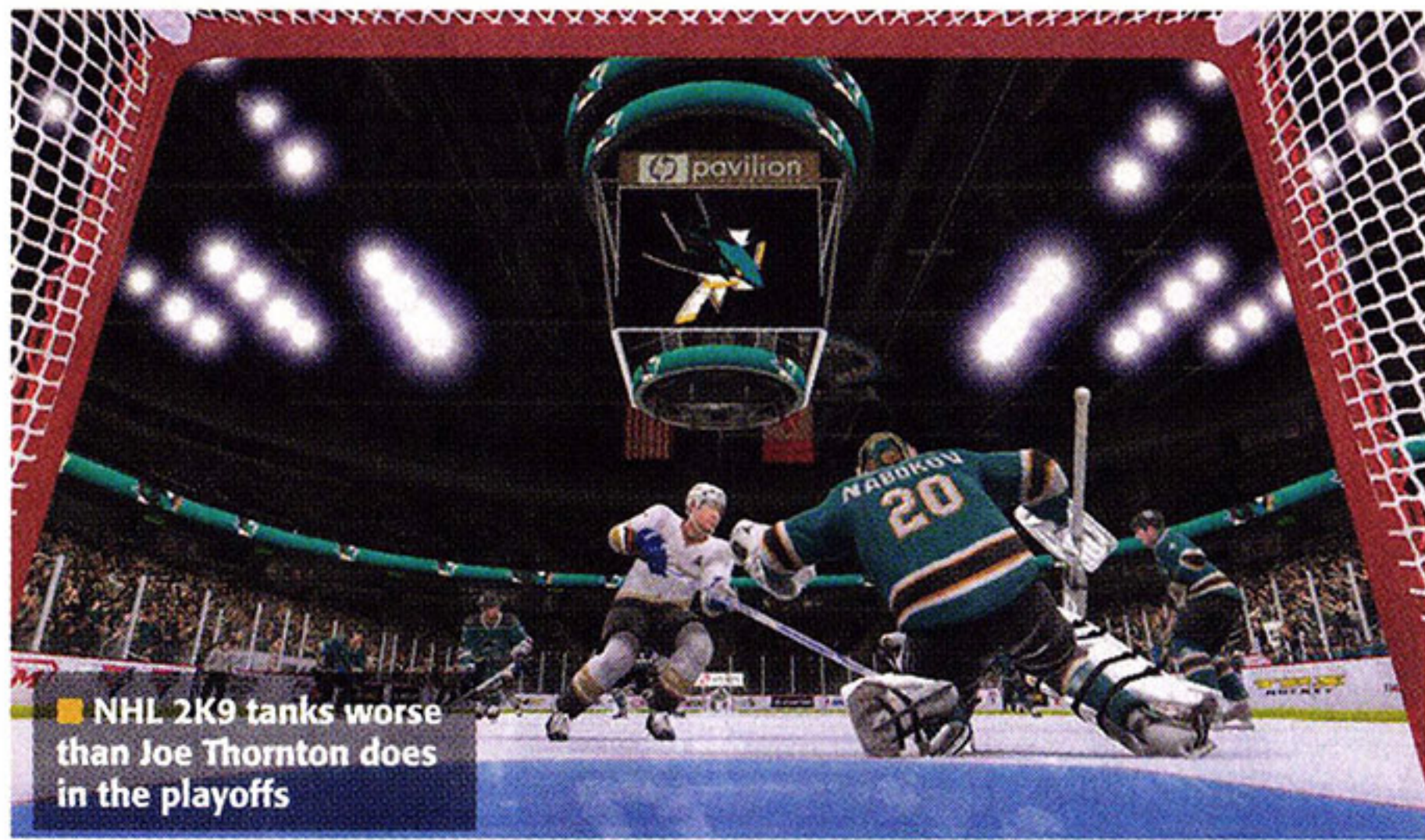
> **Playability:** The skill stick combined with new defensive tools give veteran players more control than ever

> **Entertainment:** With three modes begging to be played in depth, this is the best hockey game to date

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 9

In NHL 09, Be a Pro mode isn't just a curious side mode, it's the only way to play. Unlike Madden's Superstar mode, where your guy tends to be either a superstar or a bit part, in NHL your AI teammates react well to your actions. Take the puck to the net as a defenseman and a winger will cover on D for you. Dance behind the net with the puck and guys fight to get open for a pass. This allows you a good measure of freedom. Add in this year's more physical play, which allows forwards to forecheck and defensemen to rough up skaters in front of the net and in the corners, and NHL 09 nails almost everything in hockey except for the fetid smell of rotten shoulder pads. While small tweaks have been made to the skating, it's still feels a little floaty. Unfortunately, this is most noticeable in the game's otherwise awesome online segment — which is so fun that it outshines the old glory days of multiplayer hockey. This is no small statement. But since this is the best hockey game I've ever played, it's only fitting. —KATO



NHL 2K9 tanks worse than Joe Thornton does in the playoffs

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

NHL 2K9

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** 2K SPORTS > **DEVELOPER** VISUAL CONCEPTS > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 9 > **ESRB** E10+

FACE FIRST INTO THE BOARDS

With Visual Concepts replacing Kush Games as the lead developer of 2K's NHL franchise, I expected a return to the days where the series ruled the ice. What I found instead was a player past his prime facing the waiver wire.

NHL 2K9 fails to impress from the moment the skates hit the ice. The emotionless and repetitive commentary and presentation betray the excitement generated in a hockey arena. The stiff skating makes star players look like unathletic junior varsity kids struggling to make the team, and the goalies stand in the net like Herman Munster. Both control options — the classic face button scheme and the part analog/part face button hybrid — fail to feel as fluid or natural as EA's superior skill stick. The only areas where 2K outshines the competition are in the varied collision animations and the face-off mechanic, which keeps you guessing each time the puck drops.

The franchise mode fares just as bad as the on-ice action. Though the game offers several tantalizing trades throughout the season, there isn't a trading block that lets you see who else is available. There are no scouting options for learning about prospects, you can't buy out player contracts, and free agency is a mess. At the end of our second season, every team's salary cap was so maxed that star players like Henrik Zetterberg, Roberto Luongo, and even the cover boy Rich Nash were sitting the season out because no one could afford them!

Playing a mess like NHL 2K9, it's hard to think that just a few years ago this was the hockey game of choice for serious puckheads. Now it would take several pucks to the head to even make me consider paying money for this experience. —**BERTZ**

BOTTOM LINE 6.75

> **Concept:** Try to keep pace with the vastly superior NHL 09

> **Graphics:** Player animations are more rigid and awkward than a goalie taking a slapshot

> **Sound:** Lifeless commentators and overzealous sound effects like the puck hitting the backboards make this one of the poorer sounding sports titles

> **Playability:** The classic control scheme and hybrid options are serviceable, but pale in comparison to EA's skill stick

> **Entertainment:** Both hardcore and casual hockey fans should stick to NHL 09

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 7

This series needs to sharpen its skates in numerous areas, because it's simply a dull game. Skaters' movements are so floaty that players often drift out of position and defensemen have trouble keeping the puck in the offensive zone. I'm also not a fan of the dekes (even with the new controls), or the franchise mode's lack of depth. Can't skate, low skill set, shallow, but can hit? Why isn't Chris Simon on the cover? —**KATO**



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Pure

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 16-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** DISNEY INTERACTIVE STUDIOS > **DEVELOPER** BLACK ROCK STUDIO > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 16 > **ESRB** E



BOTTOM LINE 8.5

> **Concept:** Why do birds fly? Because they do. Why do ATV riders scream through the sky at blazing speeds popping tricks? Don't ask dumb questions

> **Graphics:** Some slight pop-up is the only price to pay for a fast experience and lush and varied environments

> **Sound:** The game's use of sounds and silence to accompany tricks — particularly the specials — is surprisingly effective

> **Playability:** The racing is smooth and the tricks flow. What else do you want?

> **Entertainment:** Pure is honed to constantly deliver a fast, fun experience

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 8.5

When it comes to polished presentation and over-the-top ATV racing thrills, it doesn't get much better than Pure. Absolutely ridiculous jumps are combined with an intuitive trick system that makes every successful landing extremely satisfying. I love the constant tradeoff between building up to better tricks and hitting the speed boost. New parts and upgrades flow like wine, but only a few of them are useful (there needs to be a better parts comparison system). Even though splitscreen isn't ideal, local multiplayer would have been nice. Online play is a solid, if not straightforward, offering. I'm just curious why you can't create championships that blend different event types (race, freestyle, etc.). —**BRYAN**

DON'T BLINK

When you're tearing through the sky barely holding onto your ATV, tempting fate and dangling your body in a death-defying superman stunt doesn't make much sense — especially when you've got a race to win. But Pure happily endangers more than your limbs with its well-done blend of tricks and racing. This combination rewards your risks every second of the way.

Tricks and ATVs have combined many times before, but Pure pulls away from the pack in both form and function. You want to bust as many tricks as you can to earn boost. Earning your way through the three trick tiers unleashes special tricks, and pulling off one of the four specials automatically earns you a full tank of boost. Boost is valuable for how fast it makes you go, and it's also a scarcity since any trick you pull off drains its supply.

The moves themselves aren't out of the ordinary, but how Black Rock presents them is. The camera contorts to the side, accentuating your tweaked body while sound effects and character voice work punctuate the bigger tricks. Since the courses are designed to maximize your boosts and special tricks, the game

effortlessly delivers a blast of pedal-to-the-metal adrenaline.

Pure's gameplay insulates itself from the boredom that usually creeps into most racing games. Although the tricks eventually become commonplace, I like how my favorite race type — freestyle — gets stronger as the game progresses. Here it's all about combing tricks and pulling them off as often as you can. During the later stages of the game, where the competition becomes more difficult, it's fun to see how adept you are at maximizing tricks, boosting, and finding alternate routes or more efficient runs on the tracks.

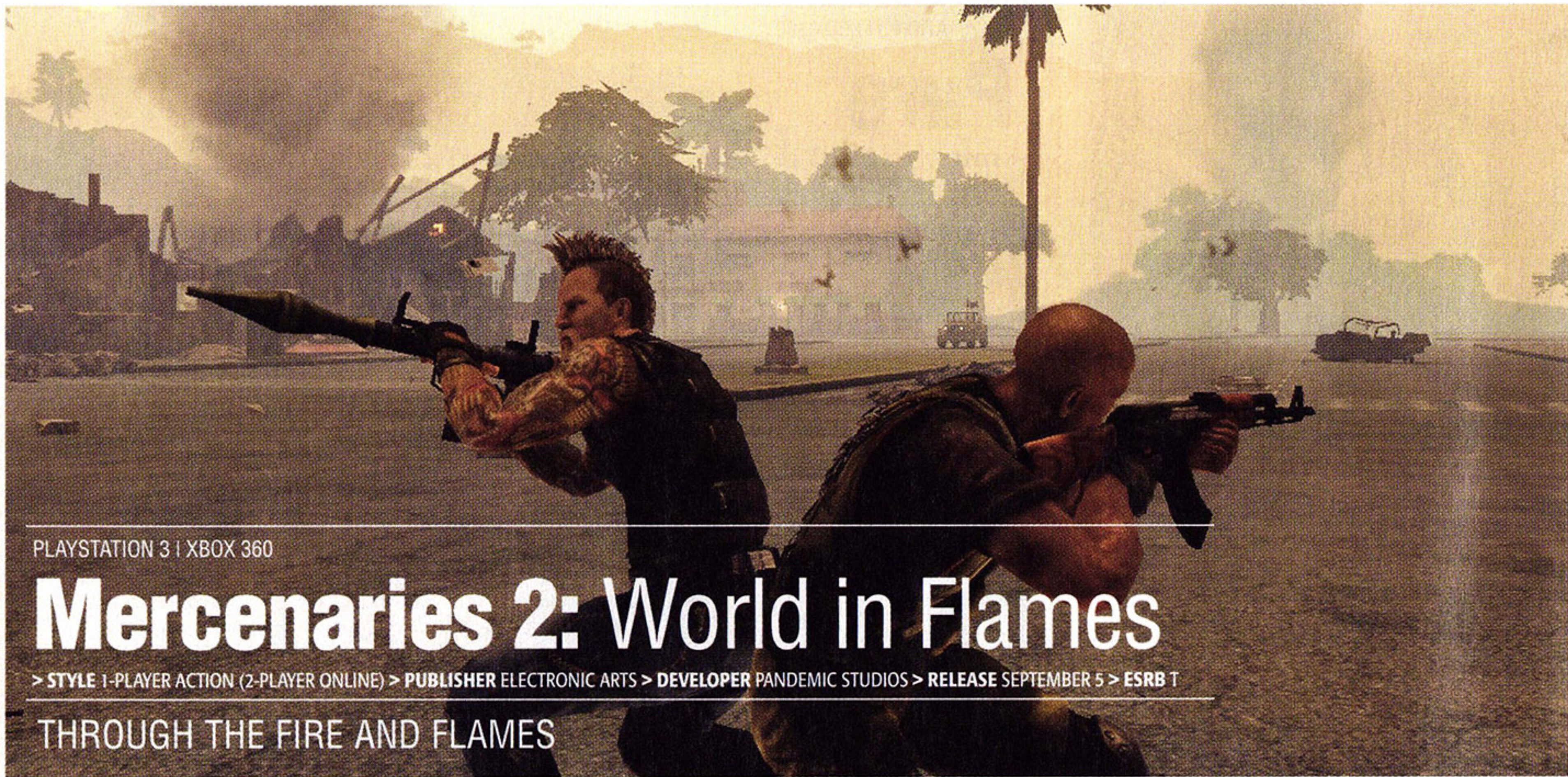
The one wall the game runs into is that the other race types — race and sprint — don't evolve as well as freestyle. Moreover, while there's a plethora of bike parts to earn, the game doesn't clarify how the parts impact performance. Amidst the sea of customizable parts, I was never sure I had the best bike possible — and I found out later there were times when I didn't.

Pure doesn't present the deepest pool out there. But with a game this fun, you should dive in nonetheless. The game achieves its core focus, taking you along for a thrilling ride. —**KATO**



OPEN WORLD ATV-ING?

Pure's online mode features the usual sprint, race, and freestyle game types, but the freeride feature is much cooler. This lets you and your friends race around any of the tracks, free to do what you want. The mode's timer can be set in 10-minute increments for up to a half an hour, and the game tracks who did what in five categories: highest jump, fastest lap, best combo, and high score.



BOTTOM LINE **7.25**

- > **Concept:** Grand Theft Auto with a military arsenal
- > **Graphics:** The attractive environment is compromised by constant pop-up
- > **Sound:** Repetitive lines from your PMC employees will make you wish it were a lone wolf game
- > **Playability:** Simplistic controls get the job done, but could use some fine-tuning
- > **Entertainment:** Turning Venezuela into a smoldering war zone sounds fun, but the vacuous AI spoils the experience
- > **Replay Value:** Moderate

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Mercenaries 2: World in Flames

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (2-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **DEVELOPER** PANDEMIC STUDIOS > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 5 > **ESRB** T

THROUGH THE FIRE AND FLAMES

Pandemic loves controversy. Mercenaries: Playground of Destruction South Korea banned for depicting a war between the country and its closest neighbor, North Korea. Then Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez publicly condemned the sequel, World in Flames, as propaganda created to drum up support for an invasion. All this for a belated playground action game tagged as Grand Theft Auto with bigger guns. So, is Mercs 2 worth the fuss?

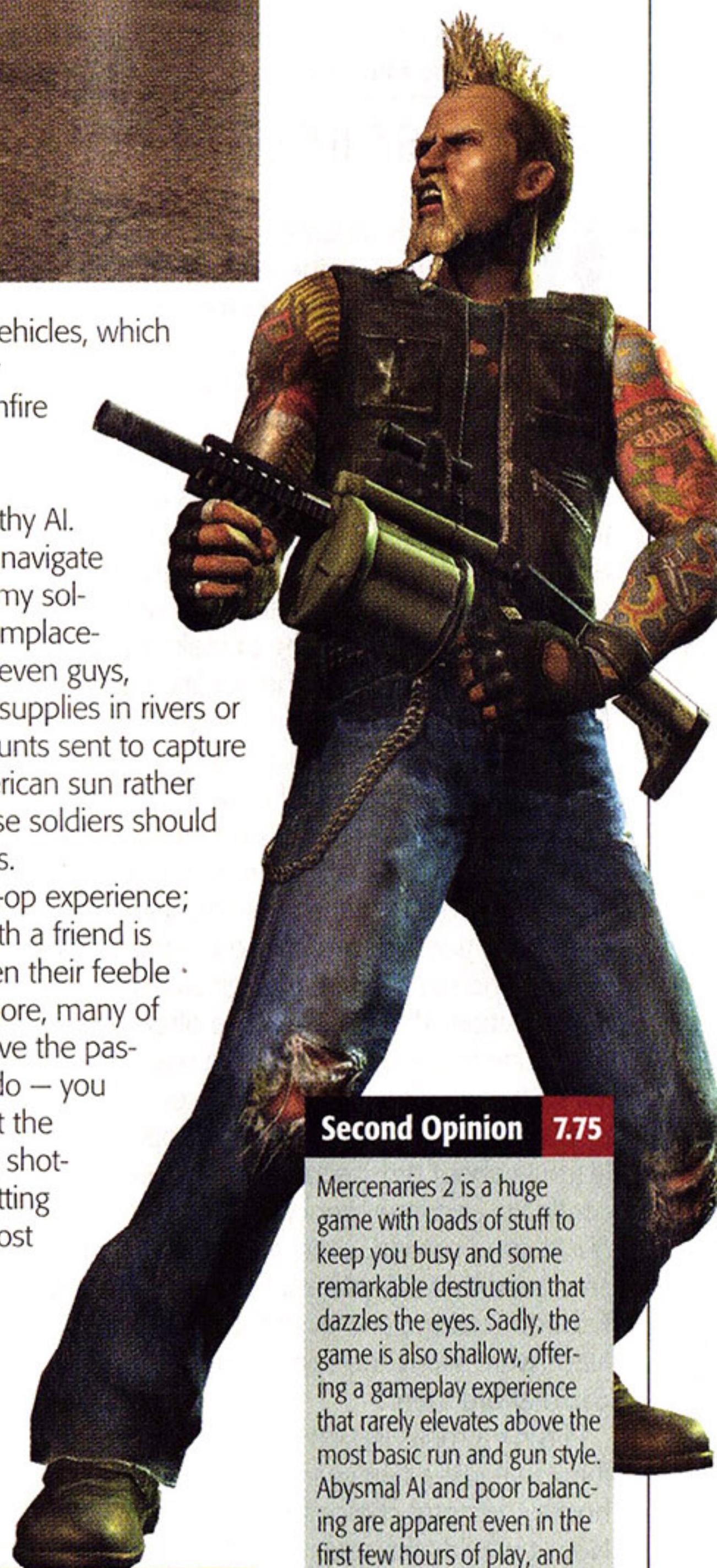
The concept certainly raises some approving eyebrows. As a money-grubbing merc more interested in paydays than politics, you're placed in the middle of a Venezuelan revolution. Your target: a drug lord who seizes power, reneges on a contract, and shoots you in the arse. Your merc must play the local revolutionaries, oil companies, pirates, and meddling nations against one another to gain information and put your revenge plan in motion. While you're on the blood hunt, you must complete fetch quests, races, escort missions, assassinations, abductions, and outpost assaults to earn favor and greenbacks. Your large paydays allow you to purchase any tool of destruction you see fit. Artillery strikes, bunker busters, RPGs, tanks, choppers, assault boats, you name it — if it goes boom you can buy it.

While drowning enemies in rubble with a barrage of chopper missiles is a blast, the action often stumbles on itself. Environmental obstacles impede your movement; forget hiding in the shrubbery, by the time you wiggle yourself free from the entangled branches you'll likely be dead from enemy gunfire. The fast-paced action makes shooting from the hip a necessity, and thankfully your merc fires accurately on the run. So why is it so hard to hit an enemy when you take the time to zoom? The air support system is equally questionable. To call an air strike, you must throw a smoke grenade on the target you want obliterated, then run like hell to get out of the way. Wouldn't it be more effective to use binoculars to paint the targets from a distance so you don't have to dodge your own daisy cutters? Furthermore,

you cannot call air strikes from vehicles, which means you must get out of your armored tank in the midst of gunfire to throw the damn grenade.

The lack of tactical savvy is fitting considering the zombie-worthy AI. Venezuelan civilians can't circumnavigate abandoned vehicles, dense enemy soldiers continually take over gun emplacements where you just smoked seven guys, chopper pilots frequently dump supplies in rivers or on top of buildings, and lowly grunts sent to capture outposts loiter in the South American sun rather than securing the buildings. These soldiers should be nominated for Darwin Awards.

These nitwits ruin even the co-op experience; attacking factions with a friend is underwhelming given their feeble resistance. Furthermore, many of the vehicles don't give the passenger anything to do — you can't even shoot out the window while riding shotgun. I suppose it's fitting that Mercs 2, like most topics bearing the weight of political posturing, is ultimately flaccid. But that doesn't stop me from expecting more. —**BERTZ**



Second Opinion **7.75**

Mercenaries 2 is a huge game with loads of stuff to keep you busy and some remarkable destruction that dazzles the eyes. Sadly, the game is also shallow, offering a gameplay experience that rarely elevates above the most basic run and gun style. Abysmal AI and poor balancing are apparent even in the first few hours of play, and the frequently repetitive mission structure sure doesn't help matters. Luckily, the co-op experience is a blast; the lack of a decent story isn't as bothersome when blowing things up with a friend. In many ways, Mercenaries 2 is a fantastic example of a game that values breadth over depth. There are a huge number of weapons, vehicles, collectibles, missions, and areas to explore. But all that content blurs together when there is so little to distinguish one activity from the other. —**MILLER**



BOTTOM LINE **7.75**

> **Concept:** Bring life back to Chroma city by liberating the citizens with splashes of color in this open-world painting exploration game

> **Graphics:** Watching the world evolve from drab tones of gray to the bright colors of your choosing is a calming experience

> **Sound:** Moody and quirky, de Blob's sound effects and music evolve as you paint

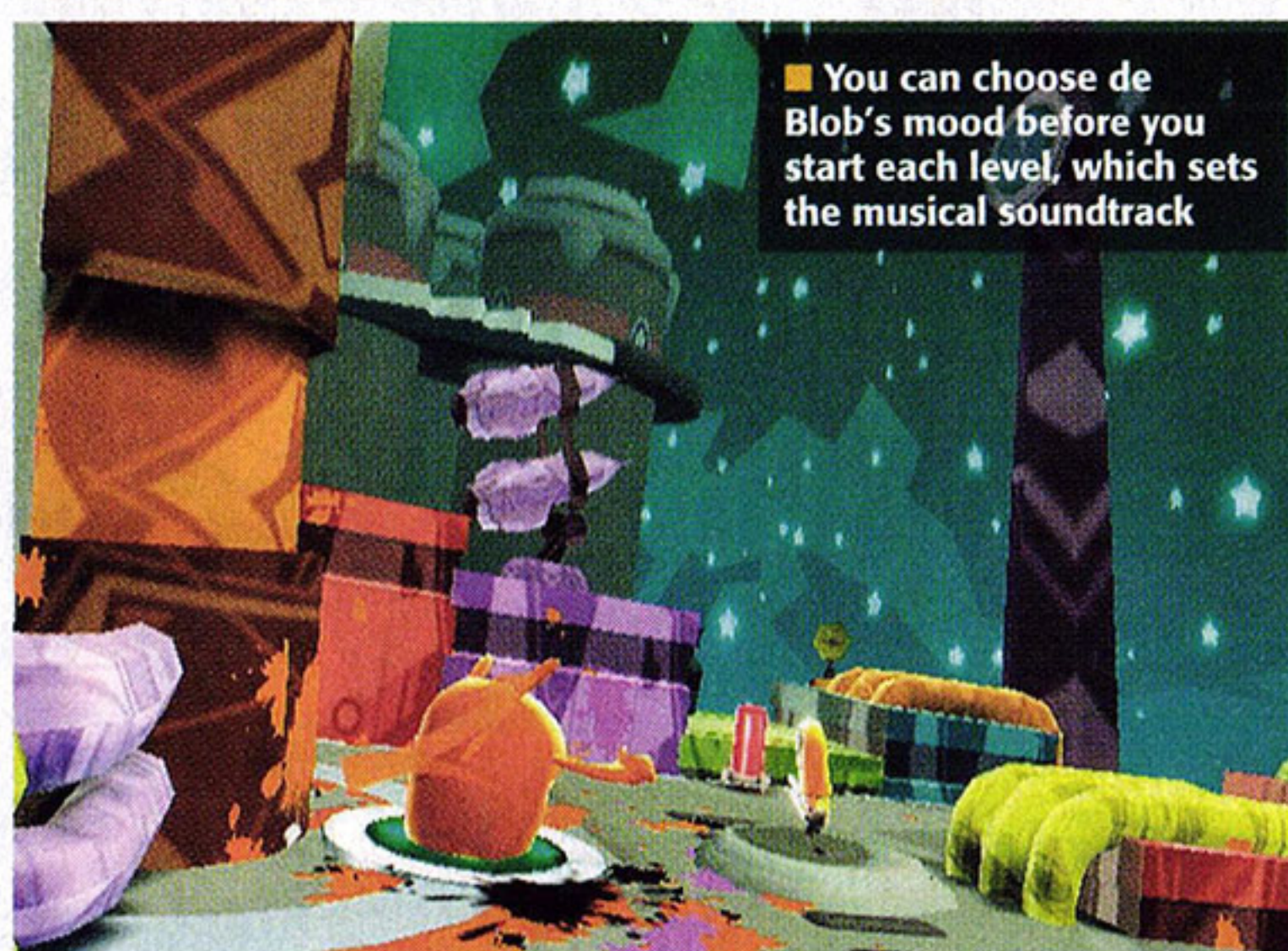
> **Playability:** The camera is annoying at times, and they should have allowed you to switch the jump command over to one of the face buttons

> **Entertainment:** This unorthodox attempt at a game design is at times entertaining

> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

Second Opinion **8**

De Blob taps into that same feeling as Katamari Damacy. At first I thought, "Is this all there is?" Then, I suddenly felt myself becoming addicted to painting every object in sight, completing the little missions, and turning a drab world into a colorful wonderland. What's more – unlike Katamari – the game actually develops over time, adding new elements, goals, and enemies to the mix. While it's certainly a serviceable platformer, the control, level design, and camera aren't going to win any awards. Which brings de Blob's appeal down to that hard-to-define magic that makes some things fun and some things not. It's hypnotic, and as simple as it is, doesn't get old. In the end, I like this for the same reason kids like playing with finger paints – it's fun to mess around with color. While that sounds overly simple, making a game that taps into that basic urge is a very complex task, one that de Blob performs with aplomb. —MATT



■ You can choose de Blob's mood before you start each level, which sets the musical soundtrack

Wii

De Blob

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** THQ > **DEVELOPER** BLUE TONGUE
> **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 22 > **ESRB** E



RELAX, IT'S JUST A GAME

De Blob is clearly a game that struggles with its identity. It's not really a good platformer; shaking the Wii remote to jump makes negotiating the environment too imprecise. It's not really a good action game; the combat mechanics are far too simple. It's not really a good puzzle game; the most difficult thing you'll solve is how to mix the colors together to make brown. I can best describe de Blob as a very chill, open world painting game. Surprisingly, this is more enjoyable than it sounds.

The powerful I.N.K.T. Corporation has created an oppressive 1984-like society where the world is devoid of all color. As the oddball paint creature de Blob, players must liberate the citizens of Chroma City by repainting every building, tree, and vehicle that stands before them. The story isn't particularly moving, but between each level you're treated to a hilarious short involving de Blob and his exploits with the hapless I.N.K.T. police. These movies have a Pixar-style charm to them, but sadly your actions in the game never connect to these story sequences.

Each level is a mini-open world that you are free to explore. Navigating the world is made simple

by the game's circle navigation tool. Holding down A points you to the nearby items of interests. The most rewarding aspect of the game is dipping Blob into the different paint pots and spreading color across the environment. Watching the world brighten up as you paint the city a rainbow hue fills you with an unusual sense of pride. The musical vibe makes this game great. Each color has its own sound effects, and as you restore the world to color you are also creating a musical rhythm. Being in the throes of de Blob's pulsing color and sound is the closest thing to a sensory high I've ever experienced from a game.

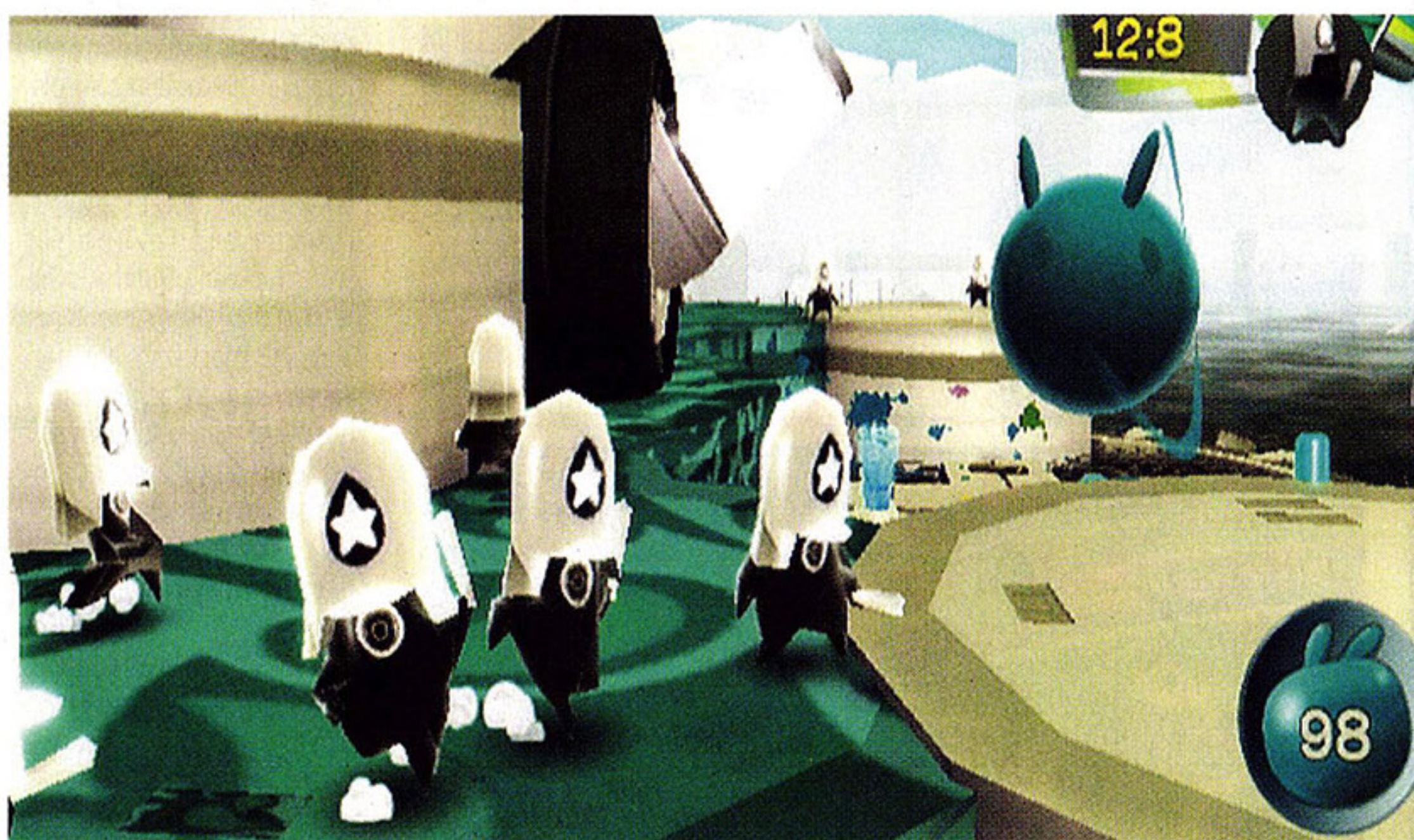
The problem with de Blob is that I'm not sure I was ever having fun. While I enjoyed certain aspects of the game, nothing got me excited to pick up the controller again. The game simply lacks variety. You paint some building yellow, then you'll paint some other buildings red...or blue...or purple. That summarizes 80 percent of the missions. The



■ There aren't many multiplayer options, but those provides some short-lived fun for up to four people

other 20 percent is racing through checkpoints and beating down groups of enemies.

I wish there was more to de Blob. The title has some great ideas and produces a great, relaxed atmosphere. The game is missing the most important element to a game: the gameplay. Perhaps experiencing de Blob in short half-hour chunks is the best way to enjoy this quirky little title. —BEN



98



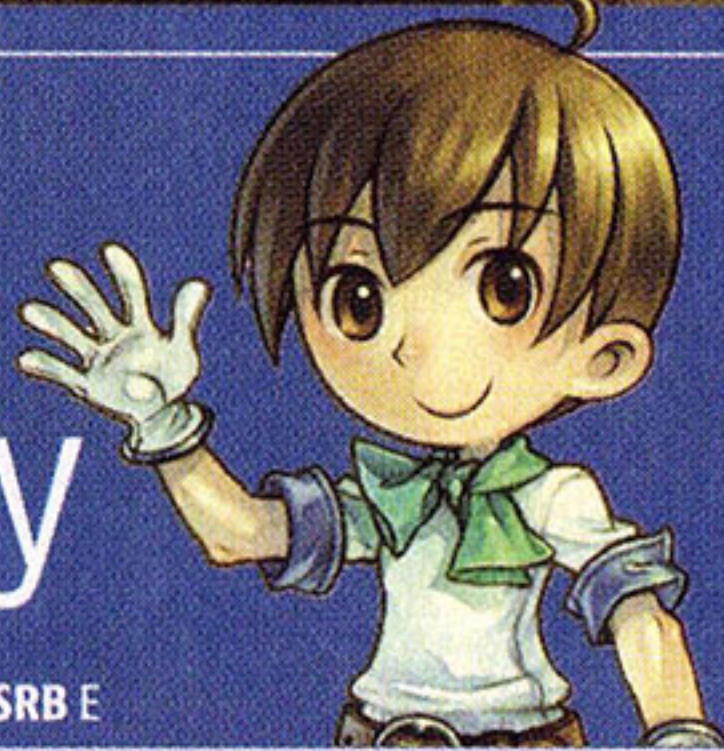
■ The game starts off slow, but the difficulty finally ramps up after the first few hours



Wii

Harvest Moon: Tree of Tranquility

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER SIMULATION > PUBLISHER NATSUME
> DEVELOPER MARVELOUS ENTERTAINMENT > RELEASE SEPTEMBER 16 > ESRB E



GOING IN CROP CIRCLES

After a lengthy run on portable systems, traditional Harvest Moon gameplay finally returns to home consoles. One would think that Marvelous would take this opportunity to bring in some new mechanics and shake things up. Unfortunately, the formula hasn't changed much. Stop me if this sounds familiar: arrive as the new person in town, plant some crops, raise livestock, mack on some ladies (or dudes), help out with some new-age plot to replant the Mother Tree and bring back the Harvest Goddess, blah, blah, blah.

After a mind numbingly long intro in which you're forced to walk around town and meet every person, you eventually buy some land and seeds and get to work. For some reason, the camera is locked in extremely close to the action. Combined with a surprisingly unhelpful map, this makes for a disorienting start. After running back and forth along the same routes day after day, however, you will eventually memorize the layout of the entire island.

Controls are flexible, allowing for both remote and nunchuk and classic controller use. While you can swing your arms to till earth or water crops, simply pressing "A" is still the way to go. Since the motion control can't be switched off, however, it's easy to accidentally cut down your tomato plant while scratching your nose.

An Animal Crossing-style online mode where you visit and help out on a friend's farm would have been great, especially since you can't hire any employees to give you a hand. Instead, multiplayer is limited to a handful of awful minigames, even by Wii standards.

Despite these hang-ups, I still found myself playing late into the night to earn enough cash to buy that coop upgrade or put in another few days until my cow is fully grown. Even though it takes a crazy long time to get there, the ability to start a new game as your kid is a nice touch. Bottom line: if you expect nothing out of Tree of Tranquility except the same old same old, then this will do the trick. —BRYAN

BOTTOM LINE 6.75

> **Concept:** Throw motion control and minigames at the tired farm sim formula

> **Graphics:** Cute design, but the animations are basic and repetitive

> **Sound:** A single guitar riff makes up most of the soundtrack, and the scant voicework sounds like it was recorded in a closet

> **Playability:** Motion controlled farming can, and should, be ignored

> **Entertainment:** The addictive formula's here, but it's getting old

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 7.5

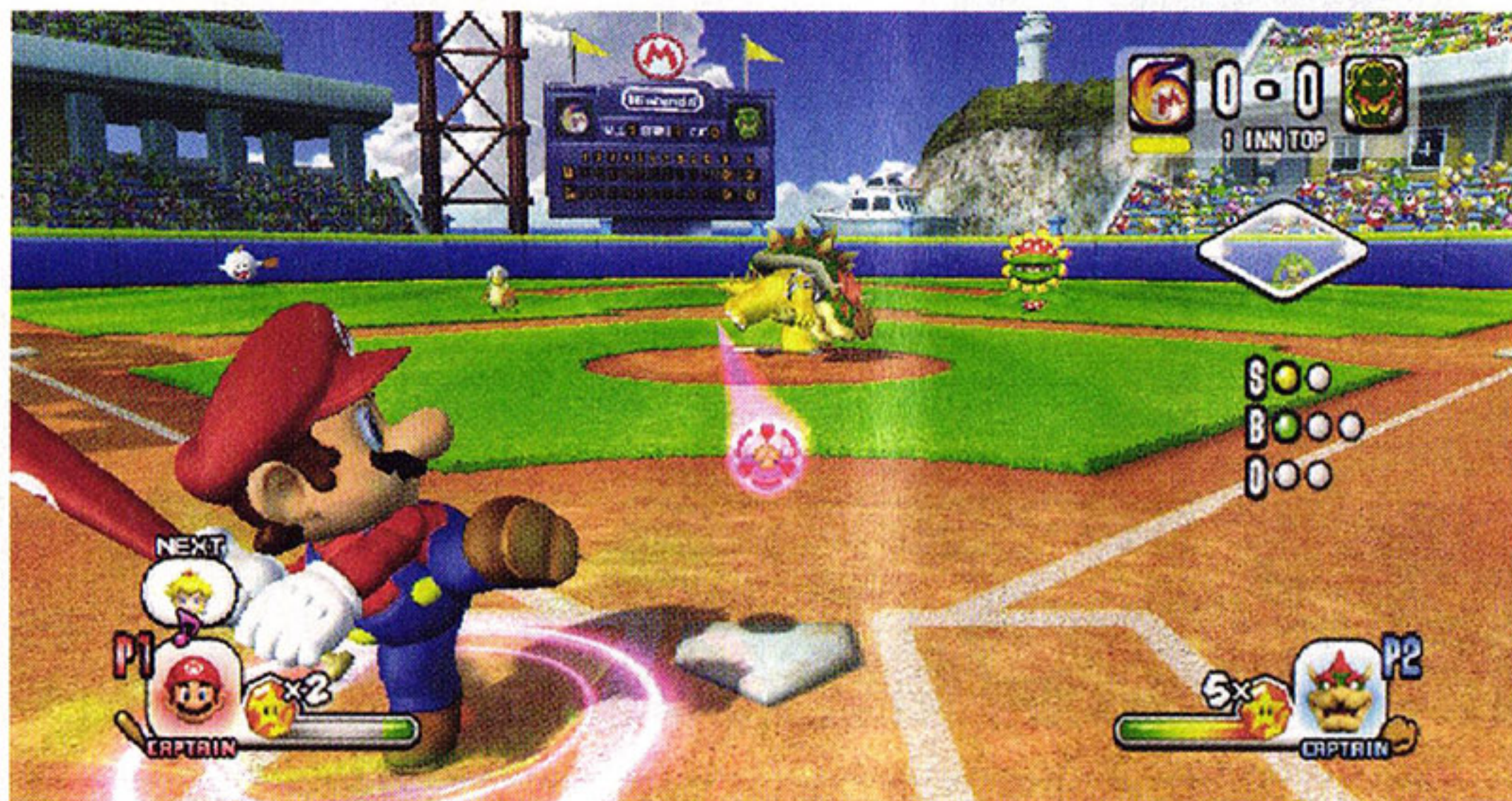
Nothing comes easily or quickly in Harvest Moon: Tree of Tranquility. The introductory hours can be grueling as you save up for basic conveniences like cutting boards and calendars, but once your farm gets off the ground, the initial time investment begins to pay off big time. As I watched my plot of land prosper, I became addicted to the routine of tending crops, maintaining relationships with townsfolk, and upgrading my equipment. Like an MMO, Harvest Moon's small rewards obtained over a long period of time add up to a satisfying sense of accomplishment. The minimal guidance and lackadaisical pacing will frustrate gamers who demand more structure, but as far as laid-back farming simulations go, Tree of Tranquility gets the job done. —JOE



Wii

Mario Super Sluggers

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS > PUBLISHER NINTENDO > DEVELOPER NINTENDO
> RELEASE AUGUST 25 > ESRB E



BELOW THE MENDOZA LINE

Do you like the silly, shallow, pick-up-and-play stylings of Mario Party or Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Games? Congratulations, Nintendo is happy to take another 50 of your dollars in return for another interactive experience that vaguely resembles an actual video game. My apologies for the vitriol, but I prefer games that take more than ten minutes to master.

Like the previous iteration on GameCube, Mario Super Sluggers has about as much to do with the sport of baseball as 52-Card Pickup does with high-stakes Texas Hold 'Em. There are bases, bats, balls, and gloves, but the gameplay is hardly more than a few extremely simple timing minigames. Once you master the pitching and hitting mechanics (i.e. ten minutes after loading up the game), there's nothing left but to repeat them until the random number generator declares a winner.

Using only a remote, the game does everything from run the bases to moving your fielders for you — simply shake the remote to throw the ball when your fielder picks it up. The Wii even picks which base to throw to. With a nunchuk plugged in, you get more direct control, but the shoddy implementation makes the game play worse than it does if you just let your team do its own thing.

Multiplayer is amusing in that hanging out with your friends is fun anyway, but the single-player content is truly terrible. A series of boring one-off challenges punctuated by simplistic exploration and the occasional full game makes up Mario's quest to foil Bowser Jr. via baseball. Yes, it's as insipid as it sounds. Playing non-persistent exhibition games against the CPU is better, but still lame. Go do something fun with your buddies rather than wasting an afternoon with this crap. —ADAM

BOTTOM LINE 5.5

> **Concept:** Add Mario and friends to this bland baseball-like substance in the hopes that someone will care

> **Graphics:** The animations are surprisingly bad for a Nintendo-made game

> **Sound:** Not much to talk about besides the same gibberish from the usual suspects

> **Playability:** Your grandma could probably play this, and she'd probably be just as bored as you are

> **Entertainment:** Half an hour at a time with a couple of buddies over? Sure, but you'll have a better time playing a good game

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 5.5

Mario should have learned from Michael Jordan's mistake: baseball is not for everyone. Even the best can suck it up when they're out of their element. Though this is Mario's second step up to the plate, he's still batting offer-four. The motion controls work well most of the time, but occasionally an unintentional motion sets off your characters and they'll pitch or swing too early. But that's the least of this game's problems. Sluggers' mechanics are too simplified, the stadiums are annoying minefields with all the junk you contend with in the outfield, and the story-lite challenge mode was an obvious rush job. While I'll undoubtedly stand at Mario's side for his next platform outing, I wish he'd stop soiling his name with sports games he clearly doesn't know how to play. —BEN



BOTTOM LINE **9.25**

> **Concept:** The sequel to last year's phenomenal music game offers more great times with some notable improvements

> **Graphics:** Includes new venues, costumes, and background effects, but most players won't notice the difference from the last game

> **Sound:** This is the most varied and surprising music selection in the genre thus far, and the sound mix on a good set of speakers is ideal

> **Playability:** The new No Fail mode makes the game accessible to everyone, while the core challenge is higher than its predecessor.

> **Entertainment:** Together with the ability to access all the songs (both on-disc and downloadable) from the first game, this is a massive game that can deliver fun for months

> **Replay Value:** High



GAME INFORMER
GAME OF THE MONTH

XBOX 360

Rock Band 2

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER MUSIC (UP TO 4-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** MTV GAMES/ELECTRONIC ARTS
> **DEVELOPER** HARMONIX > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 14 > **ESRB** T

TWEAKING THE FORMULA

It's remarkable what a few adjustments can do. From instruments to user interface to gameplay options, one thing after another makes you nod appreciatively and smile while playing Rock Band 2. Rarely are these profound alterations, but taken together Rock Band 2 is now a much more cohesive experience — a fantastic platform all the better for its nearly infinite expansion possibilities.

It's unwise to go into Rock Band 2 expecting some decisively different game from the original. Even a practiced eye might have trouble distinguishing the two. You're really paying for two things. The first is a huge new selection of songs. Over 80 tracks ship on the disc, another 20 will be available for free in the first weeks, and literally hundreds can be purchased online from a library that has been slowly building since the first game's release. Previously downloaded songs seamlessly integrate into Rock Band 2's primary modes, and you can even import all the original Rock Band on-disc songs into the new game. Examining only the songs on the new disc, Harmonix has embraced the philosophy of all-inclusion. There's something here for every-

one, and the music genres represented are all there for a reason — they are almost without exception great song choices.

The other reason to spring for the sequel is the game's tweaked structure. Progression is now united under one big touring experience. You make a band and always play with that group, whether you're going solo or playing with friends (online or in your living room). While out touring, you'll encounter dynamic band battles — multi-day events where your band vies for the top spot, both among your friends and against all the other players — all the multiplayer modes now seamlessly integrate between online and off. Getting into the game and finding the song you want is now easier, thanks to some clever UI reorganization. An increased number of special events and different hired staff options let you customize and hone your band's focus on fans or money. Finally, and perhaps most importantly for parents with young kids, a No Fail mode can be turned on to assure that the fun keeps going, even if every player isn't a rhythmic genius quite yet. The only thing that frustrates is the lack of a more straightforward way to unlock songs — you're now faced with occasional

TIME TO UPGRADE?

If you're happy with your existing instruments, there's little reason to grab the newly enhanced Rock Band 2 peripherals. On the other hand, if you're always complaining about how loud your drum pads are, or how squishy the strum bar on your guitar feels, then you're in luck. Without fundamentally changing the basic design, the new drum kit and guitar address these most common complaints, and both come highly recommended based on our time with them.



song repeats to get to later venues.

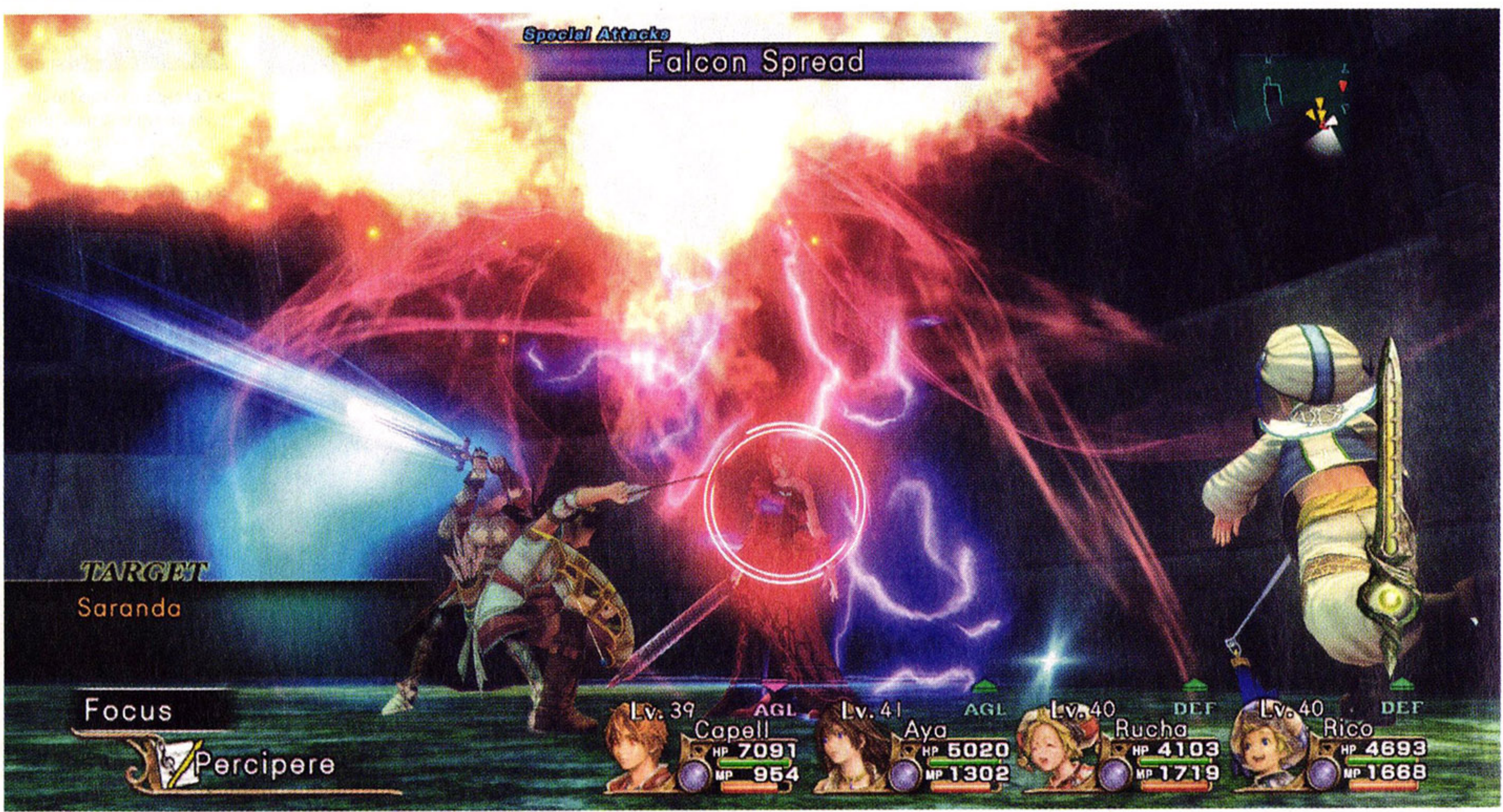
While they may not be game-selling features, a few smart additions further flesh out the package. A challenge mode offers an alternative way to progress through the game. A drum trainer helps you improve your skills on the kit. The freestyle drum mode even allows you to drum along with any music you've downloaded to your console's hard drive.

I can't think of any person to whom I wouldn't recommend Rock Band 2. Playing alone, it offers a suitable challenge for any skill level. Playing with friends and family, it is one of the best social games ever made — a testament to the way games can bring people together to have fun. Sometimes good game design is about dramatic innovation. Sometimes it's about knowing what not to change. Harmonix knows how to do both. —MILLER

Second Opinion 9.25

Rock Band 2 is a sequel in the true sense of the word. It's not a dramatic reinvention, but a collection of small improvements on an already strong game. There are a lot of nice touches, like how Harmonix fixed the problem of newbs always signing out of your four-player sessions by mistake. The new instruments are better, but probably not worth the upgrade if your old ones are still functioning. The real selling point is the new career mode and the epic soundtrack. The gig-based, management-focused Tour mode definitely makes things more interesting and more flexible (I love the special surprise challenges like video shoots), but it also muddies your sense of progression, sometimes leaving you wondering what you have to do to unlock new songs. The songs themselves are breathtaking; it's easily the largest and most diverse soundtrack of any music game to date. Any game that embraces the furious riffing of Metallica, the classic songwriting of Dylan, and the cloudy experimentalism of Sonic Youth gets my vote. —MATT





BOTTOM LINE 8

- > **Concept:** A good game manages to grow from the average story at its roots
- > **Graphics:** The excellent visuals stand in contrast to missteps like poor lip-synching and repetitive dungeon design
- > **Sound:** Some of the voice acting is downright painful, but a nice score evens out the audio
- > **Playability:** The ally AI is more than capable, so you're never babysitting
- > **Entertainment:** Shorter than your average RPG, but it's time well spent
- > **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 8

Infinite Undiscovery has a swagger on the battlefield, but a monotone voice for storytelling. This tale of played-to-death clichés and vanilla dialogue moves slowly, often grinding to a halt for town visits, but quickly becomes an afterthought when combat commences. Each battle is loaded with excitement and deep in strategy, allowing you to dive in headfirst with sword strikes or assign commands to your party members. I especially like how most of the battles are completely menu-free. If you are in danger of dying, just hit a button to yell out for help. If your party members are draining MP too quickly, order them to conserve it. All told, the party AI is quite impressive, and the quick interfacing with them works well. Your focus is always on the heart of the battle. While enemy types are recycled too often (hey, another giant!), the battle scenarios are nicely varied for both single and multi-party formations. Skill progression and item creation also add a ton of depth to the mix. In the end, Infinite Undiscovery is a great game to play. It's just not that much fun to watch. —REINER

XBOX 360

Infinite Undiscovery

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX > **DEVELOPER** TRI-ACE > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 2 > **ESRB** T

FLUTE HERO

Tri-Ace is one of my personal favorite developers. It has made a name for itself by creating intricate role-playing experiences for hardcore RPG fans, utilizing unconventional battle systems and unique stories. Infinite Undiscovery nails the combat, but the story is disappointingly well-worn — especially for the developer behind games like Valkyrie Profile and Radiata Stories. Fortunately, Infinite Undiscovery's inventive mechanics elevate the familiar tale and distinguish it from the rank-and-file of role-playing games.

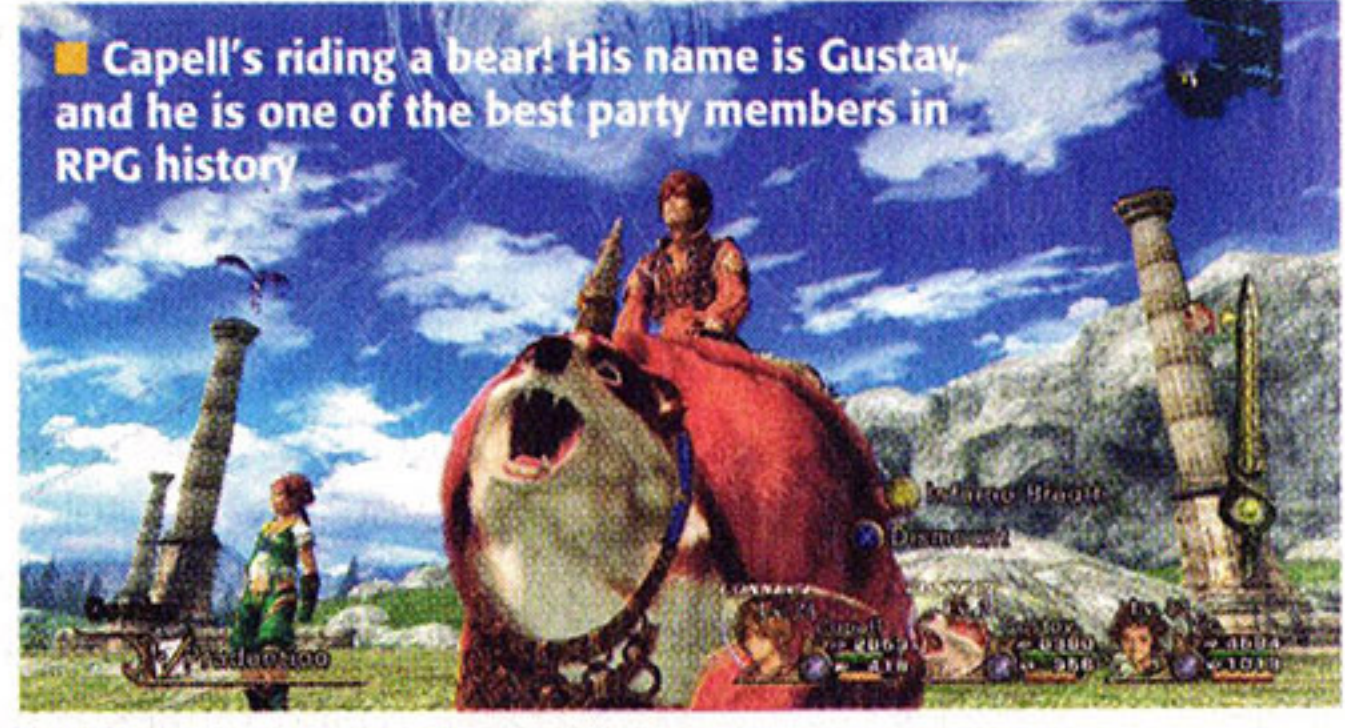
You'll take up the flute of a minstrel named Capell, who happens to look exactly like the world's greatest hero (coincidence, right? Wrong!). Of course, he gets swept up in a quest to save humanity and joins forces with a group of freedom fighters. In the company of these peers, Infinite Undiscovery has its best moments. Your allies are unusually intelligent — or at least competent — in combat, which helps emulate the sensation of fighting alongside capable warriors. Capell is still the driving force of any battle, but I never felt I had to do everything myself. If one of your guys is fighting a group of soldiers, you can count on him to get the job done.

Amid your actions and the flashy moves of your party, battle is a gorgeous sight to behold. Explosions, sword slashes, and various particle effects go off in all directions, but the carnage never extends beyond your control. Even though you primarily use Capell, you can link to your other party members (including a

giant bear!) and direct them to perform certain abilities. They'll use special attacks on their own as well, but you need to monitor them so they don't drain their entire mana pool. This could have been prevented by more ways to adjust ally AI behavior when you aren't linked, but your options are limited.

The depth of combat, along with the character's skill development, mainly drives your progression. In other words, don't count on the plot to keep you enthralled. You could take a checklist of genre clichés and fill it out by the end of the first disc. Surprise princess? Check. Spell-casting children? Check — plus they're twins to boot. There are a few surprises, one of which I had spoiled for me because I paused the game, which displayed the too-revealing title of that chapter. I guess I should be thankful that most events are fairly predictable.

Despite the formulaic plot, some of the characters are endearing (a giant bear!), and several dungeons make excellent use of a multi-party mechanic that lets you put all of your accumulated



■ Capell's riding a bear! His name is Gustav, and he is one of the best party members in RPG history



■ Twins?! Mind = blown

warriors to good use. Along with its thoroughly entertaining combat mechanics, these elements help Infinite Undiscovery recover from its lack of surprises. It may not be the best game on Tri-Ace's resume, but it's still one of the best RPGs available for the 360. —JOE



■ You set which of your allies' skills you can access directly



■ Sigmund is the hero Capell resembles. People in the game get them confused constantly

MULTI QUICKIES

XBOX 360

Guilty Gear 2: Overture

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION/STRATEGY (UP TO 4-PLAYER ONLINE)
 > **PUBLISHER** AKSYS GAMES
 > **DEVELOPER** ARC SYSTEM WORKS
 > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 30 > **ESRB** T



BOTTOM LINE
6.25

After a brief glance at Overture you might mistake it for a Dynasty Warriors clone. You'd be wrong to do so. While Overture is largely a hack and slasher that sends you speeding across large battlefields and slicing through enemies by the dozens, the game also adds RTS elements. While this strategy twist could have made the title shine, it's marred by too many problems. When your units cluster together it is difficult to select specific units. Your troops also don't respond quickly enough, but that doesn't matter since they don't listen to your orders half the time anyway. With crawling load times and a story that reeks of awkward Japanese translation, a glance should be all you give this game. —**BEN**

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Battle Fantasia

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER FIGHTING (2-PLAYER ONLINE)
 > **PUBLISHER** AKSYS GAMES
 > **DEVELOPER** ARC SYSTEM WORKS
 > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 16 > **ESRB** T



BOTTOM LINE
7.5

Considering this game hails from the same company that created the insanity that is Guilty Gear, you might expect Battle Fantasia to play as fast as the Flash with a caffeine buzz. While it offers up a fair amount of craziness, BF turns out to be a slightly slower, more technical fighter. The characters and environments are all 3D, but the action takes place on a 2D plane. Visually, the game is a charmer, with all the vibrancy and artistic style of an anime. Unfortunately, BF doesn't do anything to break the mold in terms of gameplay. While the characters are original (where else can you see a magical rabbit fighting a baby in knight's armor?) their move sets are not. The combat also feels too basic compared to most modern fighters. The long-winded story segments show that BF was trying to do something different and exciting. Too bad it's not enough to carry the title to success. —**BEN**



XBOX 360

Tales of Vesperia

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** NAMCO BANDAI > **DEVELOPER** NAMCO BANDAI > **RELEASE** AUGUST 26 > **ESRB** T

YEP. ANOTHER TALE

Casual observers could be forgiven for looking at a new Tales game and saying, "Didn't one of those games just come out?" The answer, of course, is yes. Many of the familiar staples of storytelling and design from previous Tales games repeat again and again, rarely evolving in any meaningful direction. Depending on your perspective, Vesperia either fails to innovate or willfully embraces a popular tradition. Either way, the game is a solid and straightforward example of a beloved genre.

Visuals and sound highlight the series debut on 360. The graphics are like an anime film brought to life. The sharp, crisp lines, evocative faces, and colorful backgrounds are breathtaking. These visuals are only enhanced by the tremendous amount of spoken dialogue that flows through the game.

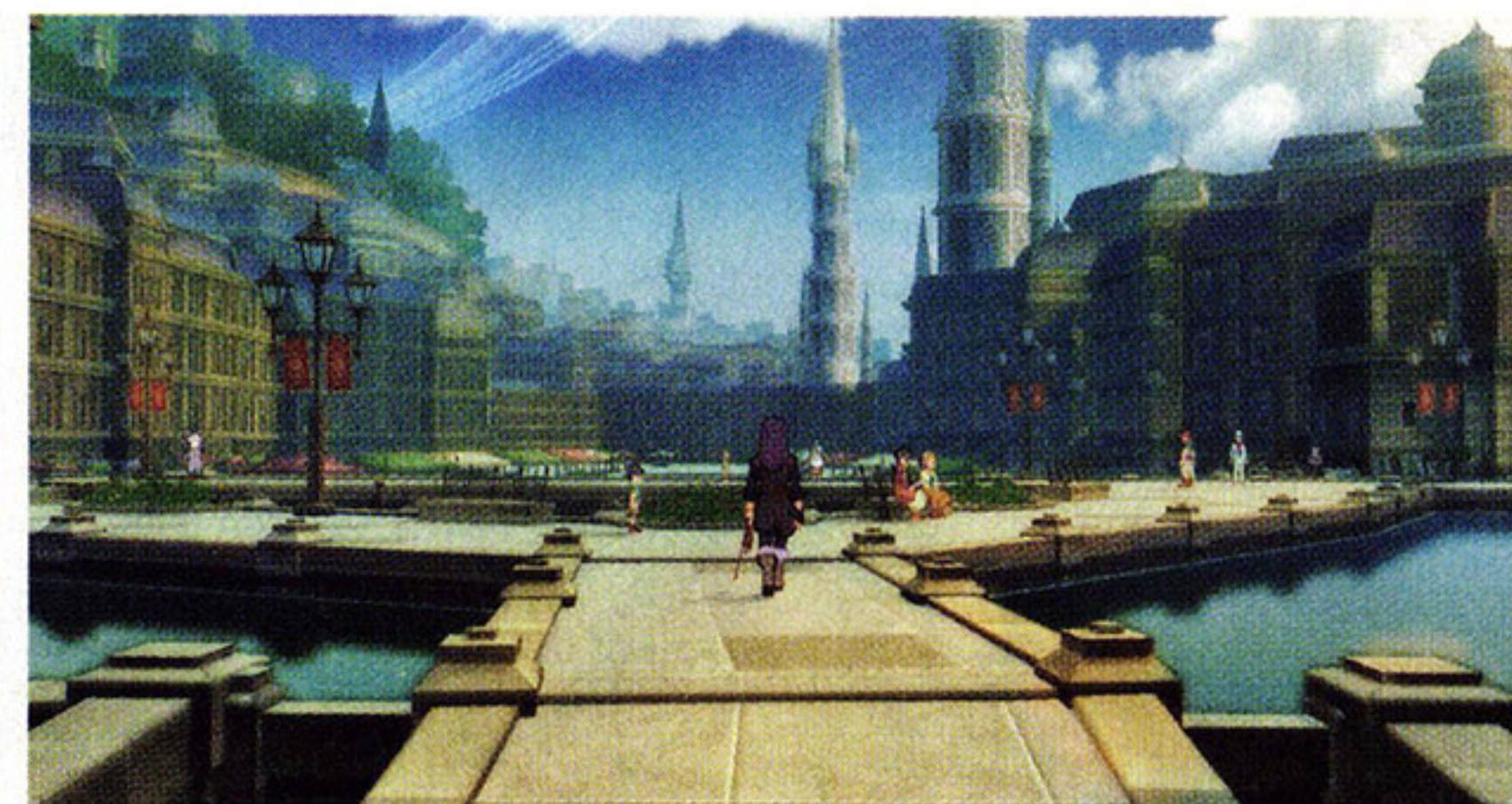
Combat is based strongly on earlier incarnations of the series, with

a focus on simple, quick real-time fights. However, a few features make it stand out. The 3D field of battle encourages at least a modicum of strategy and movement options to avoid the most dangerous areas. The combat system evolves as the game continues, offering new ways to flesh out the action, and you can even play cooperatively with friends once a battle starts. Sadly, these features can't keep the experience from feeling too focused on button mashing. For far too long in the early hours, the combat is easy and uninteresting.

The painfully standard story is the biggest disappointment. Say what you will about keeping or throwing away old gameplay features, but decent narrative, unique characters, and a compelling plot is where RPGs should shine. Tales of Vesperia fails right out of the gate, embracing tired clichés with abandon. I don't want to spoil anything, but if you think someone might be a princess in disguise,

you're probably right. The painfully linear and predictable story progress bogs down in an endless barrage of in-game cutscenes and dialogue exchanges. The end result is a largely forgettable yarn that goes where you expect.

Nothing I've said should discourage players who eagerly await the gorgeous visuals that the 360 provides to Tales. If you're still a fan of the old school approach to storytelling and gameplay, you'll be pleased to know that Vesperia is a tour de force of what you love. For the rest of us, this series meets our modest expectations, albeit with a pretty visual overlay. —**MILLER**



BOTTOM LINE
7.25

> **Concept:** Journey the world in a traditional Japanese RPG with gorgeous anime visuals

> **Graphics:** The highlight of the game is the art style – bright and inviting graphics draw easy comparisons to animated movies

> **Sound:** The well-done voice work fits the tone of the story, but the music doesn't keep pace

> **Playability:** While often too easy for experienced players, the familiar RPG conventions aren't hard to pick up or follow

> **Entertainment:** It may be by the numbers, but the combat system keeps the game afloat

> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

Second Opinion 8

Why do kids and old people in JRPGs always sound more annoying than in real life? Even though Tales of Vesperia falls into this cliché – among others – it overcomes the stereotype and delivers a solid, story-focused adventure. Though the story fits into the classic RPG mold, it's still respectably told and sometimes amusing. Vesperia's most impressive quality is its gorgeous visuals; the cel-shaded style tickles the eyes with its vibrant anime-inspired design. You'll spend a great deal of time in combat, and the fun real-time battles keep the action moving at a nice clip. The battle mechanics take getting used to, but for an RPG they're a nice change of pace and they encourage you to explore new attacks and weapons. Fans of the Tales series will undoubtedly love this one, but anyone who digs a fun adventure should check it out. —**BEN**



BOTTOM LINE 8.25



XBOX 360

Viva Piñata: Trouble in Paradise

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT
> **DEVELOPER** RARE > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 5 > **ESRB** E

SHEPHERD WORK WITH FRIENDS

- > **Concept:** A sequel that addresses the problems in the first game and adds variety to the mix
- > **Graphics:** The graphics are vibrant, the texturing is clean, and the animation is top notch
- > **Sound:** You'll likely enjoy the game more with your own soundtrack or no sound whatsoever
- > **Playability:** The gameplay is deeper and far more intuitive. The multiplayer component makes it even more enjoyable
- > **Entertainment:** The new content helps keep the experience fresh, and the multiplayer pushes its longevity through the roof
- > **Replay Value:** High

Turning a small plot of land into a thriving sanctuary where animals play and procreate may sound like an enterprise better suited for PETA than couch-bound gamers, but you'd be surprised just how addictive this sandbox experience can be. The first Viva Piñata title won me over with its strategy and customization. The challenge of discovering how to lure specific animals to my garden without cluttering my artistic design kept evolving as the game went on. This sequel delivers a deeper and more enjoyable experience, but its biggest draw, surprisingly, is the interaction it allows with fellow gamers.

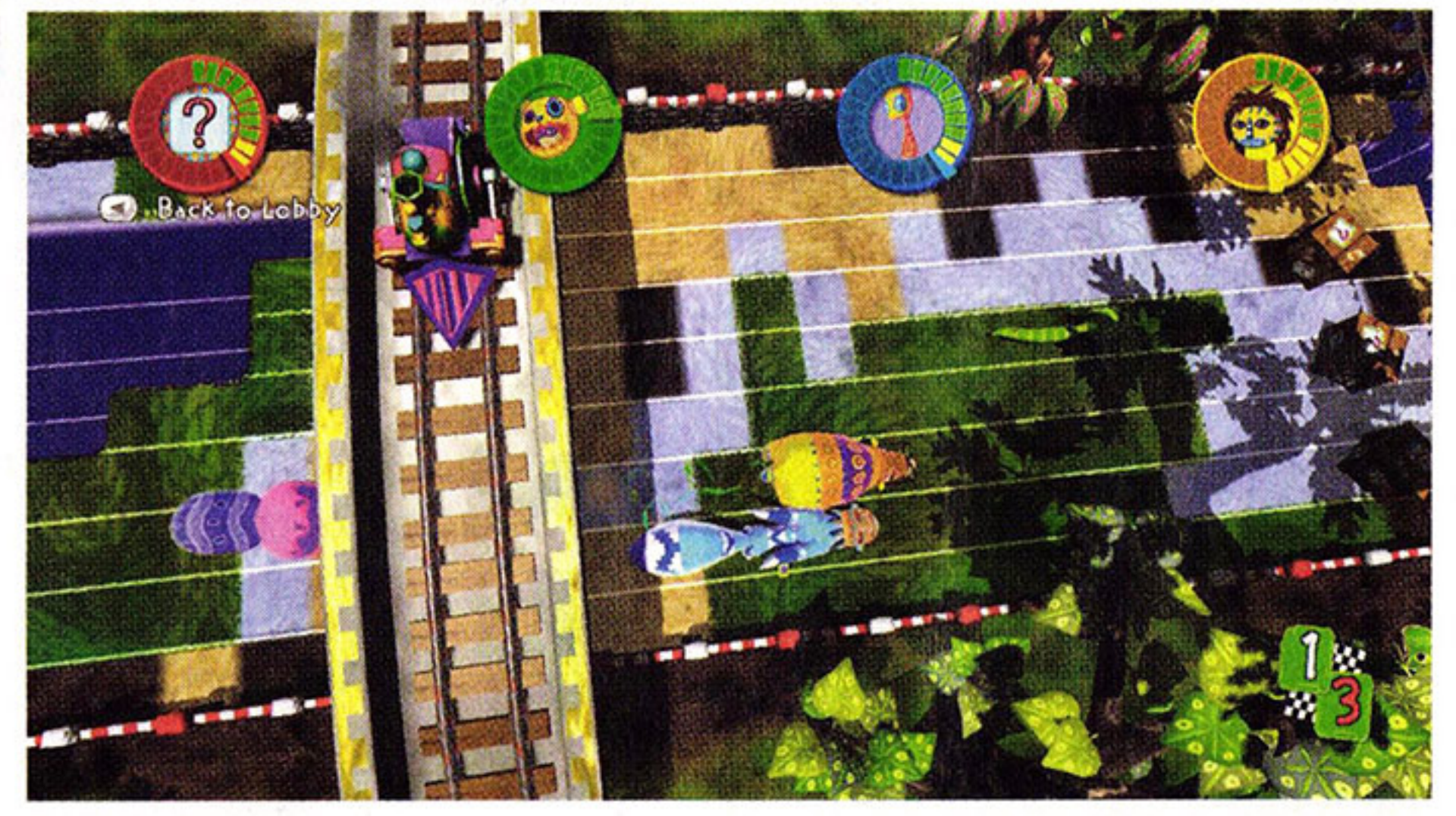
You can now create a garden with three friends over Xbox Live, and depending on how close you are with them, you can limit their interactions or grant them complete control over your garden. If one player treks off to a different zone to catch a new critter, the other players stay in the garden, working on its progress. This is an amazing shared experience that pushes player to coordinate their efforts, and conversely, veer off the beaten path to try a strategy that may have set the garden back in single player.

If your Xbox 360 isn't connected online, cooperative play is still available. Just plug in a second controller and your friend can help you on the same screen. This method is enjoyable, but the rub-

berband effect of keeping players in the same area can lead to some frustration.

If you have no interest in sharing your garden or its contents, the single-player experience is far better than the original game. The streamlined menu management means you'll no longer spend needless amounts of time in the store. Control over the garden is remarkably easy as well. All of your tools can be selected from the directional pad, and you now have the ability to direct piñata to desired locations.

While improved, some elements still underperform. The mating minigame (which bored the life



You may need a specific tree, a percentage of a terrain type, or certain piñata collection to make an animal appear. Above and beyond this, certain species must be trapped in new off-site snow and desert maps. Other piñata types are blocked from entering your garden, which means you will have to spend significant funds to remove the object in their path. These new gameplay avenues create a deeper, more tightly balance game.

On the downside, Rare has added an awful story. While you are forced to sit through some



Cooperative play takes some of the bite out of the garden's chores

out of me in the first game) is slightly different, but still far too repetitive and easy. The game also doesn't know when to let go of your hand. It's great to ease new players in, but it needs a faster ramp up and less tutorial.

Once the game starts moving at a quick pace, the strategies keep expanding. Like the first game, the stars have to align to lure in piñatas.

groan-inducing cutscenes, at least this tale brings a mission structure to the mix. In addition to building the garden of your dreams, you can now find specific piñatas for characters spread across the world. Some are incredibly easy; others require a complete garden redesign. These missions change the way you play and are instrumental in giving the player different gameplay queues to lock down.

Keeping your piñatas happy can still be monotonous in task, but the expanded content and finely made multiplayer relieves some of the repetition that plagued the first game. Viva Piñata retains its child-like charm, but the content is layered with deep strategies and entertaining gameplay that can suck anyone's life away.—REINER

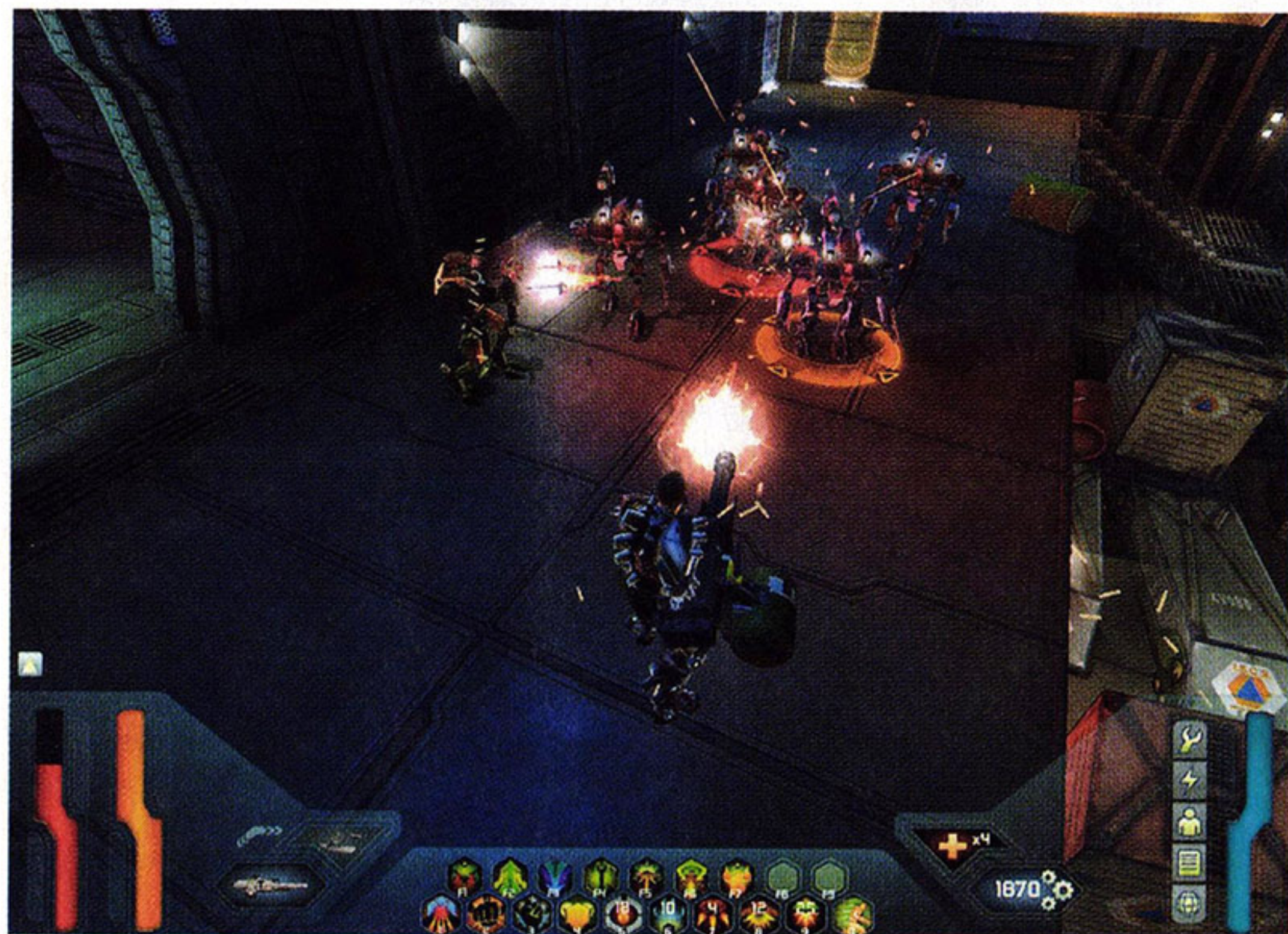
Second Opinion 7.5

Viva Piñata has a great art style and a ton of depth, especially compared to similarly targeted games like Animal Crossing and Harvest Moon. Microsoft added a bunch of new features for this second edition, many of which have a minimal (but positive) impact on the experience. The online co-op is a godsend, as it helps speed up the tedious pace and gives you someone to conspire with during the boring sections (of which there are still more than a few). While the game is better paced and more engaging than its predecessor, it's still hard for me to embrace Viva Piñata the way I did the purposelessness of Animal Crossing or the more complex god game theatrics of Black & White. For some, Viva Piñata might be the perfect mix between aimlessly messing around and high-level strategizing. Personally, my attention starts to wander after a bit. Maybe enticing stuffed animals into having nookie has its limits.—MATT

PC

Space Siege

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG > **PUBLISHER** SEGA > **DEVELOPER** GAS POWERED GAMES
> **RELEASE** AUGUST 12 > **ESRB** T



IN SPACE, NO ONE CAN HEAR YOU GRIND

Bizzard's iconic Diablo series isn't lacking for clones, and Space Siege doesn't offer much to recommend it other than a few thin gameplay innovations. A severe lack of variety in enemies, attacks, and environments fails to keep the action fresh. Between the absence of loot, barebones progression, and execrable story, there's no reason to keep playing after the combat's novelty wears off.

Space Siege's gameplay is classic isometric action/RPG fare, enhanced by the clever additions of a diving dodge move that allows sidestepping enemy fire and environmental kills, which easily integrate into your strategy. Exploding barrels (and oxygen tanks, fuel can-



isters, and more) are liberally scattered around the world to make the physics functional as well as pretty. Sadly, two hours into the quest you'll have seen everything the physics have to offer.

A customizable robot companion tries to make up for

the bland sameness of Space Siege's content, but poor AI and commands for it make it little more than an ambulatory distraction. Two slightly forked skill trees allow you to spend plot-regulated points on such awesome game-changing abilities as "two percent higher critical chance" and "armor increased by 50," whereas junk dropped by fallen enemies can be turned in for similarly unexciting progression. Neither of these elements is engaging in the slightest.

The plot is barely worth mentioning, never going much beyond "there's an alien invasion, you're a dude with some guns and a melee laser sword thing, go beat 'em up." Upon its conclusion (around 15 hours of gameplay at maximum), there are no random levels, noticeably different character builds, or alternate modes to explore.

Space Siege has two good bits – the cool dodge move and lots of explosive environmental elements – wrapped in a thin layer of utterly forgettable content. I'd stay away from it unless the very idea of an isometric hack n' slash in space seems too good to be true.—**ADAM**

BOTTOM LINE **6**

- > **Concept:** Point and click Diablo-style action in space, but without loot or a remotely passable story
- > **Graphics:** The art direction is boring vanilla sci-fi, but when the action heats up it's fun to watch
- > **Sound:** A terrible script exacerbates the phoned-in voiceovers
- > **Playability:** The well-implemented dodge move adds a lot to standard isometric hack n' slash
- > **Entertainment:** For a no-frills, linear, uninspired dungeon crawler, this isn't bad
- > **Replay Value:** Low

Second Opinion **5.5**

With its aged graphics, basic dungeon crawl gameplay, bland level designs, and generic sci-fi world featuring clichéd concepts like insect aliens and cybernetic enhancements, Space Siege should have released several years ago. The unrewarding combat, your standard point and click affair, feels equally outdated. The parts you collect from downed aliens can be used to upgrade the abilities for you and your clueless AI controlled robot companion, but the options are so limited you'd swear they took the design from the current two-party political system. Unless you're hard up for a modest retro gaming fix, don't surrender to this siege.—**BERTZ**



XBOX 360

Zoids Assault

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY/RPG > **PUBLISHER** ATLUS > **DEVELOPER** ATLUS > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 9 > **ESRB** T

WHY BOTHER?

For the life of me, I can't figure out why this game was made. Who thought that building a terrible low-budget strategy/RPG around a toy line that hasn't been relevant for a decade was a good idea?

Zoids Assault is a cheaply done paint-by-numbers job, from the awful presentation to the turgid strategic gameplay and the horribly shallow RPG-lite customization options. Even for die-hard Zoids fans who could put up with the lame gameplay (there's probably one, right?), there's very little content beyond the short plot to play through.

The overwhelming bulk of gameplay is poorly executed

crap that hews tightly to genre conventions, but there is one lone interesting mechanic. The more scanners you have on an enemy unit (more or less meaning how many of your mechs are facing it within weapon range), the more of your units will assist in any attack on that enemy. It's a neat way to push players toward using actual tactics and teamwork rather than simply blasting away with whatever's handy.

I am not exaggerating when I say that any of the many Front Mission games will serve your giant robot strategy/RPG needs far better than Zoids Assault ever could. Don't waste your time here.—**ADAM**

BOTTOM LINE **5**

> **Concept:** Make a me-too giant robot strategy game with a B-list toy license

> **Graphics:** Visuals this weak are an embarrassment to the 360

> **Sound:** Mediocre from start to finish, just like everything else

> **Playability:** No option to speed up and/or skip the boring animations? Fail

> **Entertainment:** Front Mission 4, a PS2 game from 2004, is better than this in every way

> **Replay Value:** Low



Second Opinion **4.5**

There may be a few fans of the Japanese Zoids toys and anime, but I can't imagine either of them actually enjoying this repetitive strategy title. There is nothing original about this game. Upgrading your characters is a chore, the battles feel overly long and drawn out, and you'll constantly rely on the same few attacks. The game's production values are also extremely low; the story might actually be filled with some interesting political intrigue, but it's told with all the art and style of a YouTube video. If you spend five minutes with this game, that's too much.—**BEN**



BOTTOM LINE **9**

> **Concept:** Remake Sid Meier's 1994 classic simulation of the colonization of the New World

> **Graphics:** This runs on the Civilization IV engine, so oddly slow performance mars the otherwise fine presentation

> **Sound:** The score is decent enough for the first few play-throughs, but doesn't hold up past that

> **Playability:** Someone decided to ugly up the Civ IV interface for some reason, but it's functionally similar

> **Entertainment:** A focus on economy and the unique revolution endgame make this a thoroughly amusing change of pace

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion **8.75**

Colonization ditches the world-beating empire formula of Civ in favor of a smaller scenario focused on revolution. As you establish a colony in the New World, turn resources into tradable goods, and manage relationships with the native population, the crown demands increasingly excessive tributes and tax returns. Your colonists eventually reach their boiling point, and once they revolt the game shifts from an economy-focused experience to all-out war heavily tilted in favor of the king's superior army. Colonization's interface is largely accommodating, but managing trade routes is headache if you don't automate the process. The game offers no option to lock a ship in a trade pattern; instead you must reset its course every time you bring over immigrants from Europe. The game could also benefit from expanded trade options with other factions and more varied military units to reflect the different fighting styles of the time period. Regardless, all Civ fans should experience the thrill of discarding the shackles of the monarchy. Powdered wigs and tea parties have never been this fun. —BERTZ

PC

Civilization: Colonization

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 8-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** 2K GAMES
> **DEVELOPER** FIRAXIS GAMES > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 22 > **ESRB** E10+

AN OLD FRIEND COMES HOME

Most 4X games ultimately revolve around setting up your empire to dominate via economy, industry, or technology. While Colonization shares some elements with the rest of the genre, its unique mechanics fundamentally alter the way you approach the game. In this exploration-age simulation, you don't win by conquering the world or eliminating the opposition. Victory is had simply by declaring your fledgling colony independent – and then surviving the massive onslaught your former king sends to slap your rebellion down.

Since Colonization is more of a race against your rival colonies than a strictly adversarial game, the pressures on players are very different than in a standard 4X. You've got to deal with your local natives, either by befriending them via money and religion or taking their land at gunpoint. The King must be appeased, lest he raise your tax rate even faster and demand even more money from your cash-strapped treasury. Founding Fathers (each of whom has awesome global effects, and are the closest thing here to technology) must be recruited before a rival picks them up. Plus, there's the small matter of forging a handful of malcontents fresh off the boat into an industrial power that can stand up to the might of Old Europe.

Like all good strategy games, Colonization's greatest strength is how it forces players to fit a somewhat-random set of pieces into an ever-changing puzzle. Since you need money for everything, setting up your economy is the first order of business. Choosing which resources to harvest, shipping them to a production center staffed by skilled artisans, and then sending them off to Europe for sale sounds simple – and it would be, if you were doing it in a vacuum. Instead, you're balancing it against the needs of self-defense, the King's arbitrary dictates,

the growth of your industrial capacity for the eventual war with the motherland, and expansion of your borders. The game's many mechanics work seamlessly in concert, and adeptly create that "just one more turn" feeling that Sid Meier's games are deservedly famous for.

Colonization's interface rarely gets in the way of implementing your many decisions. Most of the Civ IV scheme is unchanged here, and it still does

an amazing job giving the player most critical information without needing to dig through menus every ten seconds. However, it's difficult to efficiently automate repetitive goods transfer between settlements, and the contents of a city's storage are hidden a level too far. This interface is still one of the best in the genre, but compared to Firaxis' typically high level of polish these flaws are disappointing.

Combat is incredibly simplistic, with only a handful of units on land and sea. During normal gameplay this isn't a problem, as wars are infrequent and generally brief. However, it does make the endgame rebellion less exciting – the AI-controlled royal forces are happy to throw themselves at the nearest few cities no matter how heavily fortified they may be, and you generally know whether you're going to win or not before the war of independence even starts.

These few minor knocks shouldn't dissuade any strategy fan from buying this otherwise excellent title. The random map generator, several unique factions and difficulty levels, and many approaches to the ultimate goal of independence give Colonization as much replay value as any title you care to name. Barring a hate for the 16th and 17th centuries, any gamer should have a blast with Colonization. —ADAM



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HANDHELD QUICKIES

NINTENDO DS

BOTTOM LINE **7**

Mystery Case Files: MillionHeir

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER PUZZLE > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** BIG FISH GAMES/GRIPTONITE GAMES > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 9 > **ESRB** E

Are you a fan of the *Where's Waldo* books? When one of your friends loses a contact lens, do you jump at the opportunity to find it? If you enjoy hunting for well-hidden items, *Mystery Case Files* will put strain into your eyes in a good way. The goal of the game is simple: find a specific number of items within a heavily cluttered painting before time expires. This may sound easy, but you'd be surprised how well a fish can be hidden. To locate some items, you must interact with the painting, such as tapping a clam to reveal a pearl. There isn't much to the game, but with plenty of paintings to scour, it makes for an enjoyable eye exercise. —**REINER**

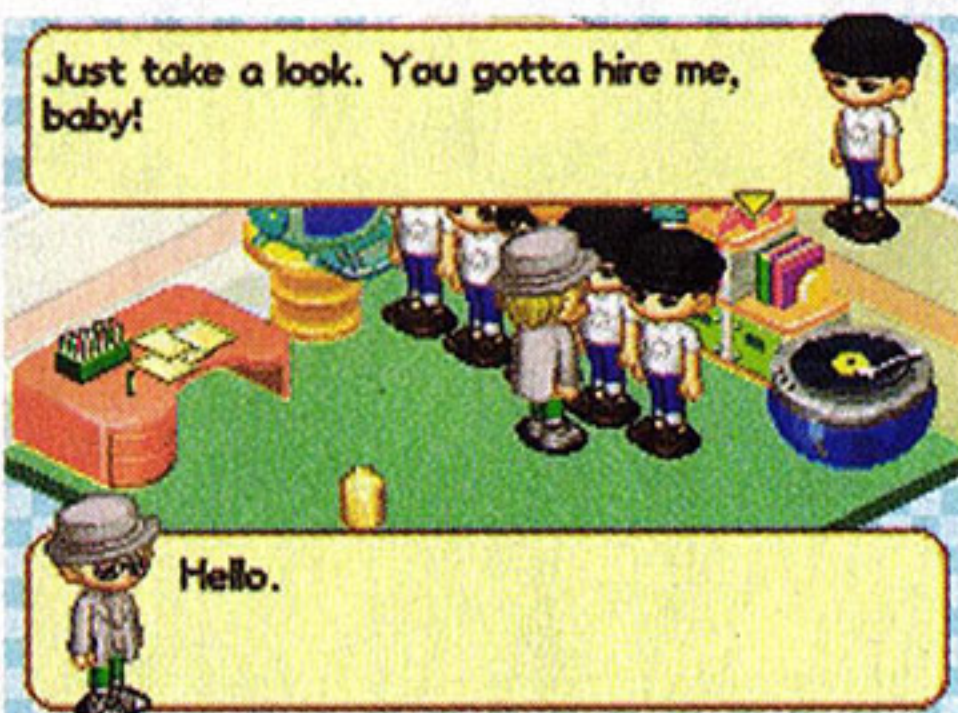


NINTENDO DS

BOTTOM LINE **7.5**

Pop Cutie! Street Fashion Simulation

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SIMULATION (2-PLAYER LOCAL) > **PUBLISHER** KOEI > **DEVELOPER** KOEI > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 30 > **ESRB** E



Pop Cutie is more of a sales simulator than *Project Runway*, but its mix of running a fashion boutique and creating clothes styles makes it more than just a curio. Moving around the world is a pain in the butt, but creating new fashions is as easy as matching keywords you accumulate by talking to people. You can propel

your shop by hiring employees, placing ads, and utilizing models. The fashion shows even add some competition to the mix. These trappings are nice, but aren't very involved; you don't have to be a business wizard to get your shop going. The trade-off, however, is that *Pop Cutie* ultimately settles into a limited, predictable pattern. —**KATO**

NINTENDO DS

BOTTOM LINE **7**

Dragon Quest IV: Chapters of the Chosen

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** SQUARE ENIX > **DEVELOPER** ARTE PIAZZA > **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 15 > **ESRB** E10+

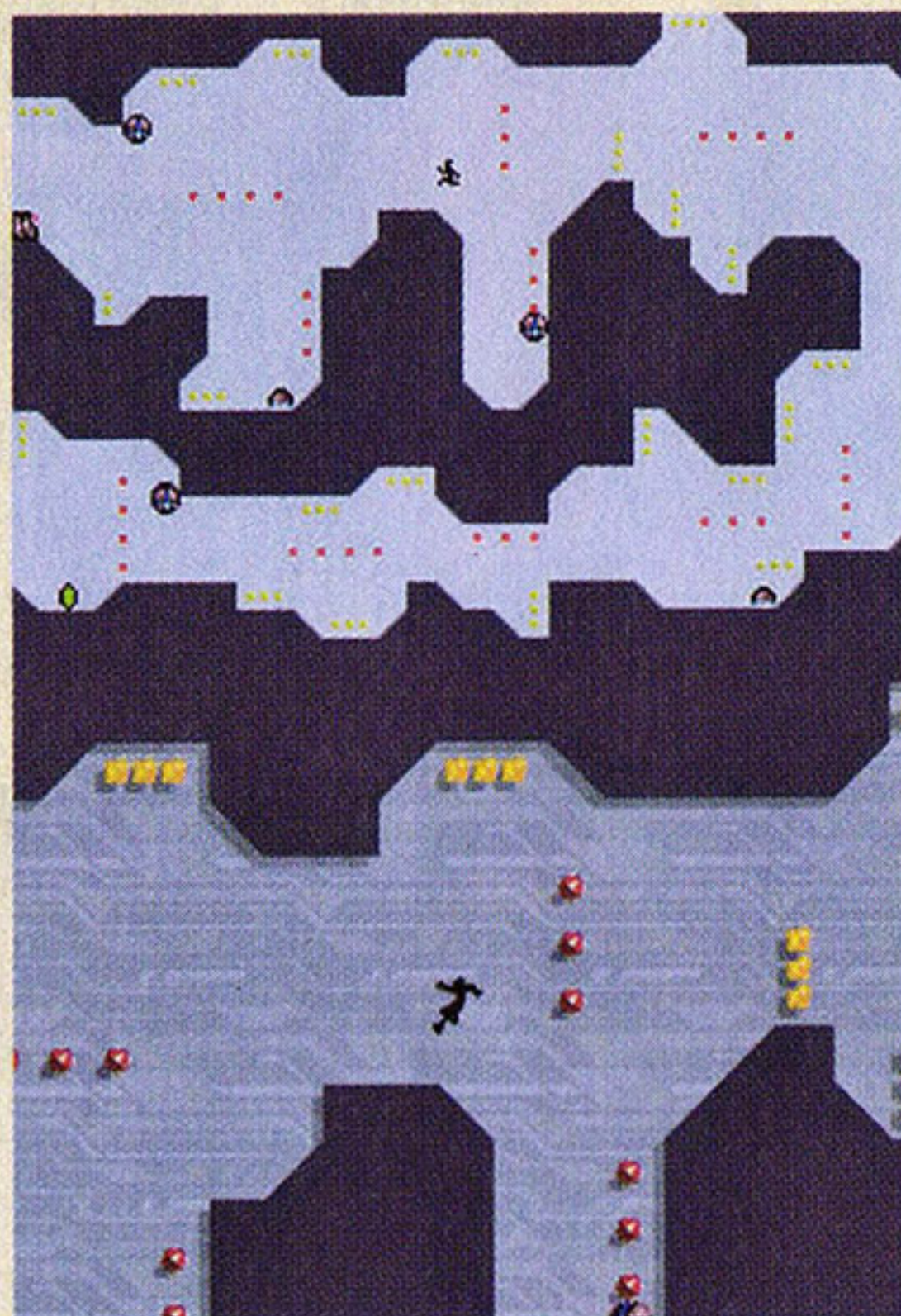
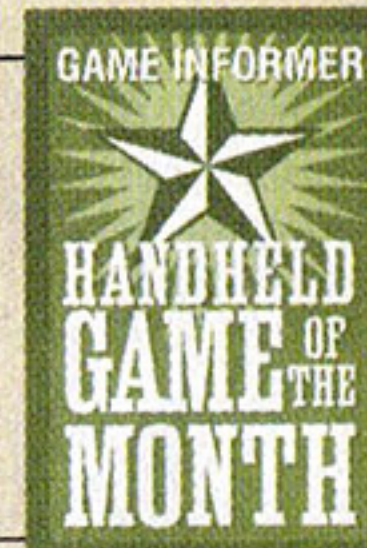
For a gussied-up remake of an NES game, *Dragon Quest IV* features some nice touches. The clever episodic structure puts a twist on the classic "young hero saves the world" formula, and the game adopts several advances from later *DQ* titles to minimize hassle. However, *Dragon Quest IV* is about as traditional as an RPG can get. It isn't deep or complicated, and it relies heavily on grinding. When you need another level or better equipment, your main quest must often be put on hold in favor of wandering around and killing monsters in random encounters. If that doesn't scare you off, *DQ IV*'s gameplay, storytelling, and artwork are rewarding...but rarely surprising. —**JOE**



NINTENDO DS | PSP

N+

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (2-PLAYER LOCAL) > **PUBLISHER** ATARI > **DEVELOPER** SILVERBIRCH STUDIOS > **RELEASE** AUGUST 26 > **ESRB** E



BACK TO BASICS

For the uninitiated, the *N+* series has progressed from a free indie online game to Xbox Live Arcade hit to portable retail game. Hopefully, this will allow a new set of players to experience this simple yet highly addictive game. As a tiny, nimble black ninja, players must navigate endless rooms of hovering bots, lasers, mines, and tracking missiles with nothing but a d-pad and a jump button. It handily awakens gamers' long dormant 2D platforming skills and, over a gradual difficulty curve, pushes them to the ultimate test.

On the other side of the coin, *N+* veterans will love the rock solid controls, hundreds of new levels, and the ability to finally take the game on the road. The game's famously brief stages are perfect for handhelds. Using the sleep mode feature on both PSP and DS, you can take a break from a particularly tough level and come back to it without trudging through the earlier stages in the episode.

The game takes a hit for lacking leaderboards (what good are high scores?), online multiplayer, and Xbox Live's four-player matches. The co-op stages are cool, but you

can only pick five to play in a row. Since the game doesn't keep track of which ones you completed, it's easy to forget where you left off. Versus play includes three decent new modes that have players compete to hit the most switches, play tag, or race to the finish several times on the same stage before moving on to the next one. Once you complete the matches, you're unceremoniously dumped out to the title screen. Where's the victory fanfare or the stats?

Even though multiplayer is offline, thankfully, the entire game doesn't suffer the same fate. Unlike the home console version, players can upload, download, and rate created levels from a central server. Even if you don't care about crafting your own stages, the virtually limitless stream of everyone else's content will keep replay value high long after you've beaten all of the on-disc levels. —**BRYAN**

BOTTOM LINE **8.75**

- > **Concept:** Bring the fast and addicting Xbox Live Arcade title to a fitting portable home
- > **Graphics:** The simple visual style works well on less powerful machines
- > **Sound:** Sparse, yet funky
- > **Playability:** The tight controls of the original translate perfectly
- > **Entertainment:** Equally great for five-minute sessions and multi-episode marathons
- > **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion **8.75**

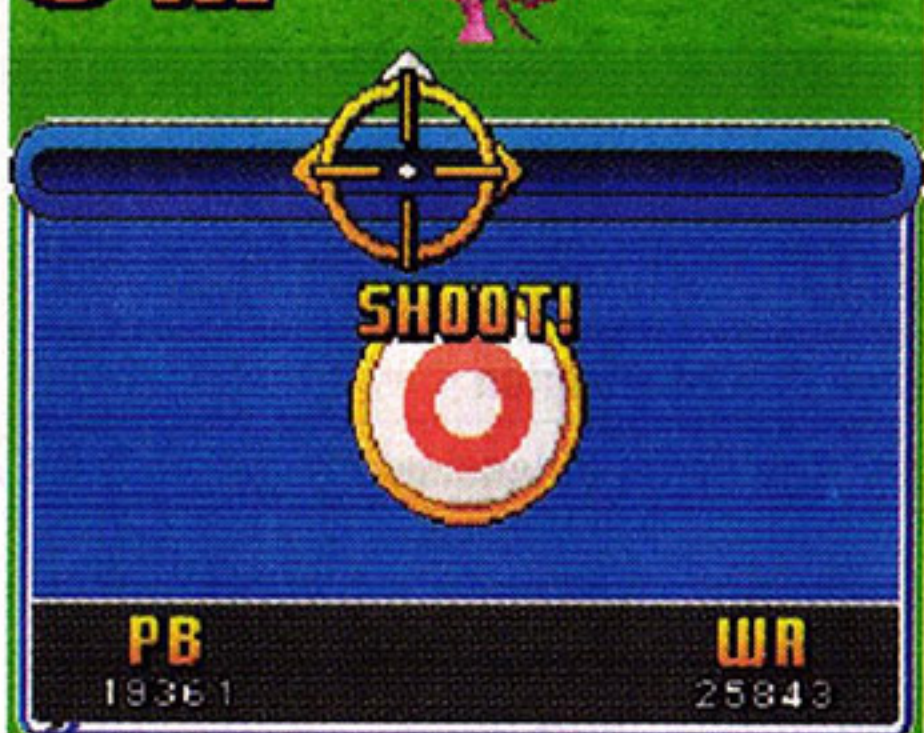
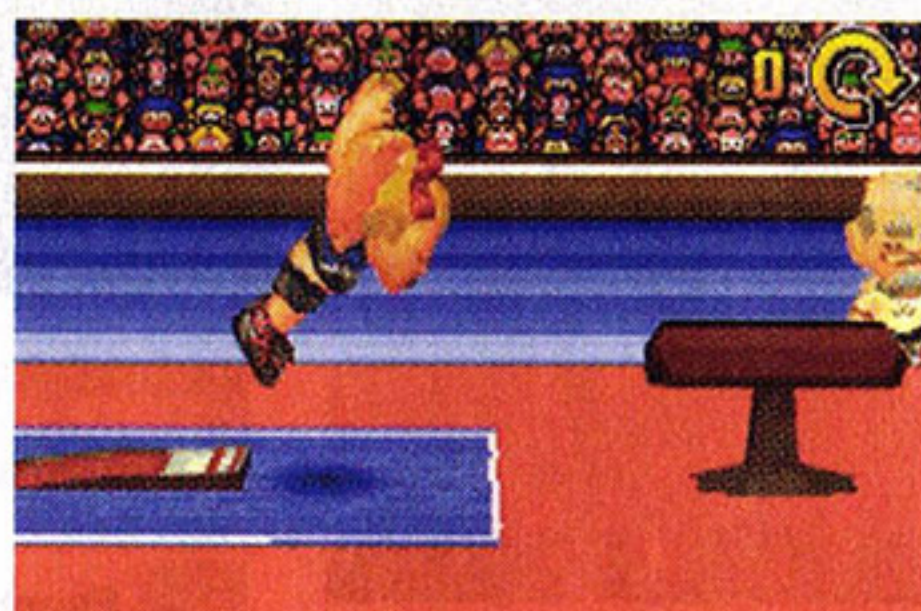
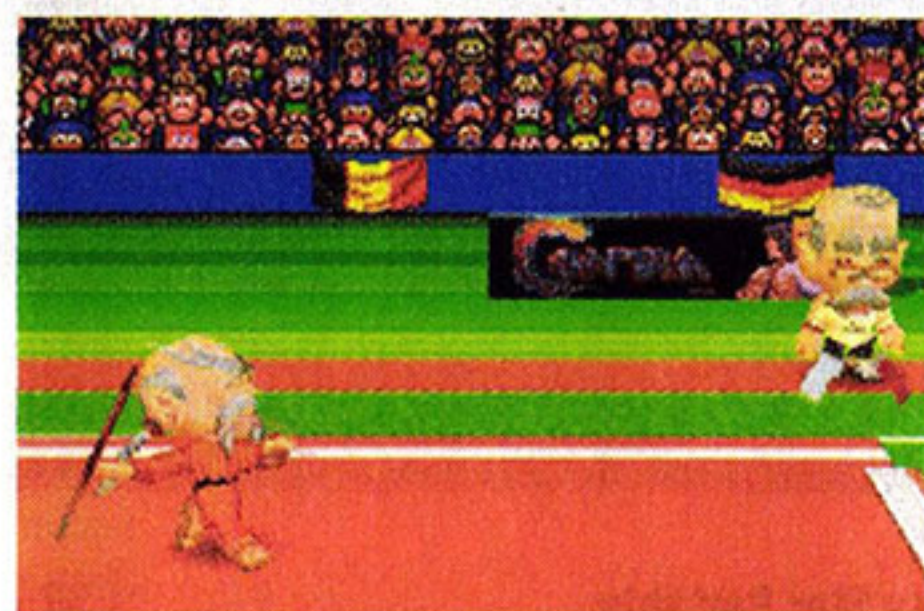
N+ breaks down the platformer to its base elements – running, jumping, collecting widgets, and hitting switches – to create a tour de force of abstract minimalism. It's an amazing game design that creates seemingly endless permutations out of a simple concept. The goal of every level is the same: run to the switch, hit it, and run back to the end icon. As the game proceeds, increasingly difficult obstacles, perilous jumps, bombs, missiles, and much more will litter your path. It's as challenging a game as I've played recently, but you're never betrayed by the extremely accurate controls. Throw in multiplayer and a great level editor, and you have limitless amounts of handheld fun. —**MATT**

the edge

When All Games Aren't Created Equal

The PSP version comes out slightly ahead primarily due to its large display. The small screens on the DS show two alternate views of the action – one feels too zoomed in and the other is too far out. It's more of a slight annoyance than a deal breaker, though. The games each have their own large set of exclusive levels. At \$20 a pop, superfans could pick up both.





NINTENDO DS

New International Track & Field

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 4-PLAYER LOCAL OR ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** KONAMI
> **DEVELOPER** SUMO DIGITAL > **RELEASE** JULY 22 > **ESRB** E10+

RUNNIN' WITH THE DEVIL

When the original Track & Field was released in arcades, the intense button mashing and careful timing was perfect for brief, crazed face-offs. When you stretch this experience out to longer hand-cramping sessions it just becomes painful. Sure, you're burning through a multitude of events like cycling, swimming, and weightlifting, but they're almost all controlled with the same screen rubbing/circling techniques that put your touch screen at risk of being scratched. Don't even think of playing this on a bus or other form of transport – the stability of a desk is a necessity if you want to get decent scores. The classic control scheme is available as well, but you can't really go nuts on those tiny DS niblets like you can on fat arcade buttons.

As you start up every event, the game offers short instructions. While some events are intuitive and easy to pick up, others require many tries just to complete successfully, let alone hit the qualifying mark. A little more clarity in the tutorials could have gone

a long way. I'm sure this will vary for every player, but some events are ridiculously easy while others are crazy hard. This leads to a jagged difficulty curve that spikes and valleys throughout the entire experience.

The one thing that keeps you plowing forward is the truckload of unlockables. Achievement trophies, Konami characters like Solid Snake and Frogger, challenge missions, and outfits pour out in a waterfall of rewards. Multiplayer is extremely flexible, allowing for single card, multi-card, and online play (though single takes forever to load between events). You have to register via Konami's pesky proprietary online system, but it's cool to get constant stat and record updates and to participate in regularly scheduled tournaments.

If you have an affinity for the classic franchise and an interest in proving you're the best in the world at the steeplechase, this game may do it for you. Otherwise, it's not worth the possible risks to your DS and blood pressure. —**BRYAN**

BOTTOM LINE **6.25**

> **Concept:** Replace button tapping with screen scratching and release before the Olympics

> **Graphics:** The big-headed characters are more unsightly than cute

> **Sound:** Nice retro music and effects square off against annoying character voices

> **Playability:** Frustration accompanies both control schemes

> **Entertainment:** Unlocks are great, but the events are just too repetitive

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion **8**

Worthy of the podium, New International Track and Field captures the spirit and sweat-inducing finger athleticism of the beloved NES series. Most of the events push players to swipe or rotate the stylus at breakneck speeds. Some of the events, like the hammer throw, don't leave much margin for error, which can be frustrating until you get the hang of it. But all told, there wasn't an event that I didn't grow to love. They are all fun and extremely well made. The game also offers surprising depth with unlockable costumes, characters, and challenges earned by gaining experience points. It's a great game for short sessions, but even better for bragging rights in multiplayer showdowns. Just don't break your DS playing it. —**REINER**

HANDHELD QUICKIES

NINTENDO DS

Away: Shuffle Dungeon

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG (2-PLAYER LOCAL) > **PUBLISHER** MAJESCO
> **DEVELOPER** MISTWALKER/AQ INTERACTIVE
> **RELEASE** OCTOBER > **ESRB** E10+



BOTTOM LINE **7.5**

I usually find Japanese dungeon games to be Sisyphean exercises in repetition and futility, a pitfall Shuffle Dungeon thankfully avoids. The game doesn't have any harsh penalties for dying or fleeing, and it shuffles the layouts of the top and bottom screens every five or so seconds to keep things fresh. This makes the dungeons play more like rolling puzzles and mad dashes for loot since you have to figure out how to get around the constantly changing layout. Shuffle Dungeon also features a Dark Cloud-esque overworld builder, but just like the combat, it leaves you wanting more. Shuffle Dungeon just doesn't dive deep enough. —**KATO**

NINTENDO DS

From the Abyss

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG (2-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** AKSYS GAMES
> **DEVELOPER** SONIC POWERED GAMES
> **RELEASE** AUGUST 26 > **ESRB** E



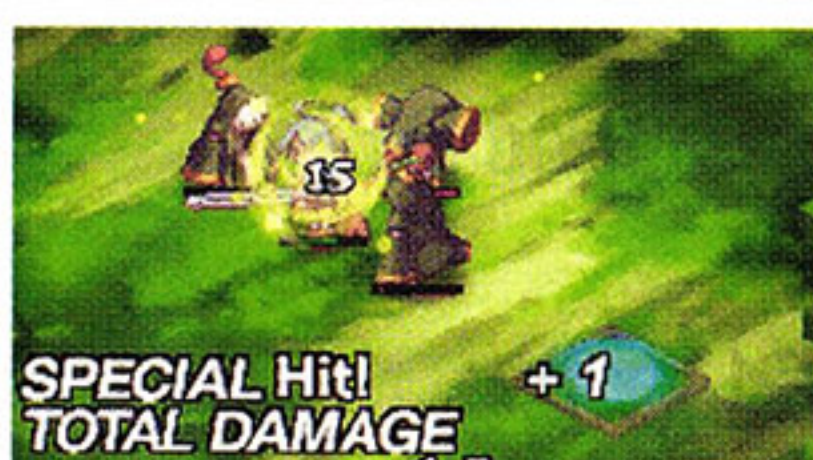
BOTTOM LINE **5**

Considering the refined nature of the action/RPG genre, a game must do something special to be noticed nowadays. Unfortunately, From the Abyss is ultimately a vapid experience. The story is filled with clichéd fantasy archetypes – crystals, mysterious drifters, and portals to dark worlds. The gameplay is worse. There aren't enough carrots dangled under your nose to keep you crawling through the monotony of randomly generated dungeons, and the text-based overworld exploration is so simple it seems copied and pasted from an NES game. The only semi-neat aspect of this game is the local co-op. But considering the experience, this is probably a better way to lose a friend. —**BEN**

NINTENDO DS

Disgaea DS

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY/RPG
> **PUBLISHER** NIPPON ICHI
> **DEVELOPER** NIPPON ICHI
> **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 23 > **ESRB** T



BOTTOM LINE **8**

Like Civilization Revolution, the most noteworthy thing about Disgaea DS is how the developer managed to squeeze all of this content into a DS cartridge. This is a direct port of the excellent PSP remake of the PS2 original, with the cool alternate Etna mode in addition to the outstanding base quest. Unfortunately, it looks noticeably worse (surprise!) and doesn't control as well – the touch screen is useless given the small size of the individual battlefield squares and menu items. Still, the content is amazing and the strategic gameplay is intact. This is a slightly inferior version of an awesome game, which makes it a pretty good offering on Nintendo's handheld. —**ADAM**

NINTENDO DS

Rhapsody: A Musical Adventure

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME
> **PUBLISHER** NIS AMERICA
> **DEVELOPER** NIPPON ICHI SOFTWARE
> **RELEASE** SEPTEMBER 23 > **ESRB** E



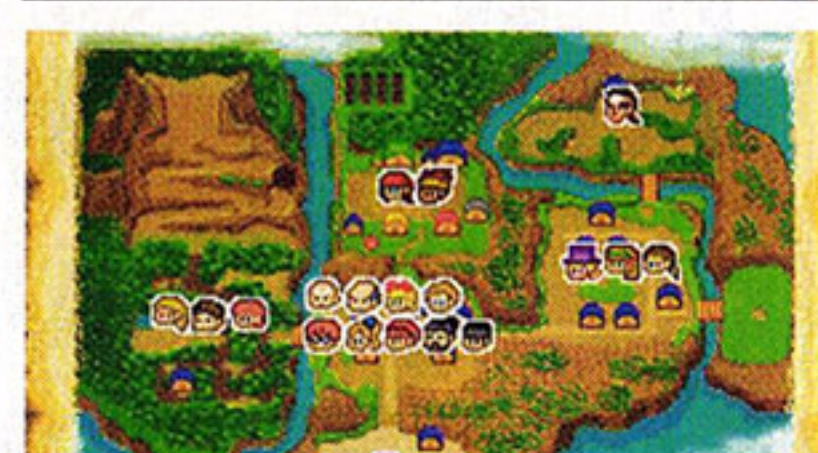
BOTTOM LINE **5.5**

When people ask what you want to be when you grow up, do you reply "a princess?" If not (or if you're too old for people to even ask you that), don't bother with Rhapsody. This quirky RPG port of a PSone title has a reworked turn-based battle system that makes the already simplistic experience mind-numbingly dull. You control Cornet – a country girl with a crush on a prince – and her entourage of talking puppets. Every now and then Cornet breaks into some trite, insipid musical number, and then you regain control so you can complete humiliating goals like "wear a dress that makes you look beautiful." Ugh. —**JOE**

NINTENDO DS

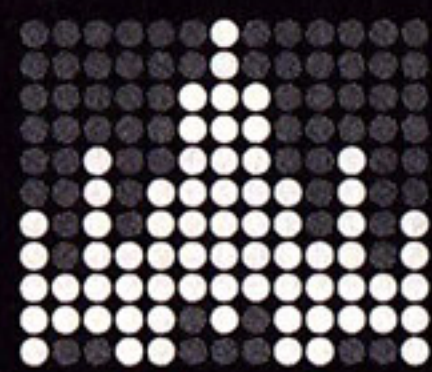
Harvest Moon: Island of Happiness

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SIMULATION
> **PUBLISHER** NATSUME
> **DEVELOPER** MARVELOUS ENTERTAINMENT
> **RELEASE** AUGUST 26 > **ESRB** E



BOTTOM LINE **6.75**

Farming, raising livestock, marrying people – none of this is a big surprise. What's different? I liked the idea of developing and unlocking an entire island in addition to my farm, and online leaderboards add a new element of competition to the franchise. Unfortunately, bad mechanics and ho-hum gameplay progression bring things down. The Zelda-inspired touch-screen control scheme doesn't gel with the precise moves you need to make in the field, and inventory requires constant babysitting due to the lack of automatic item stacking. —**BRYAN**



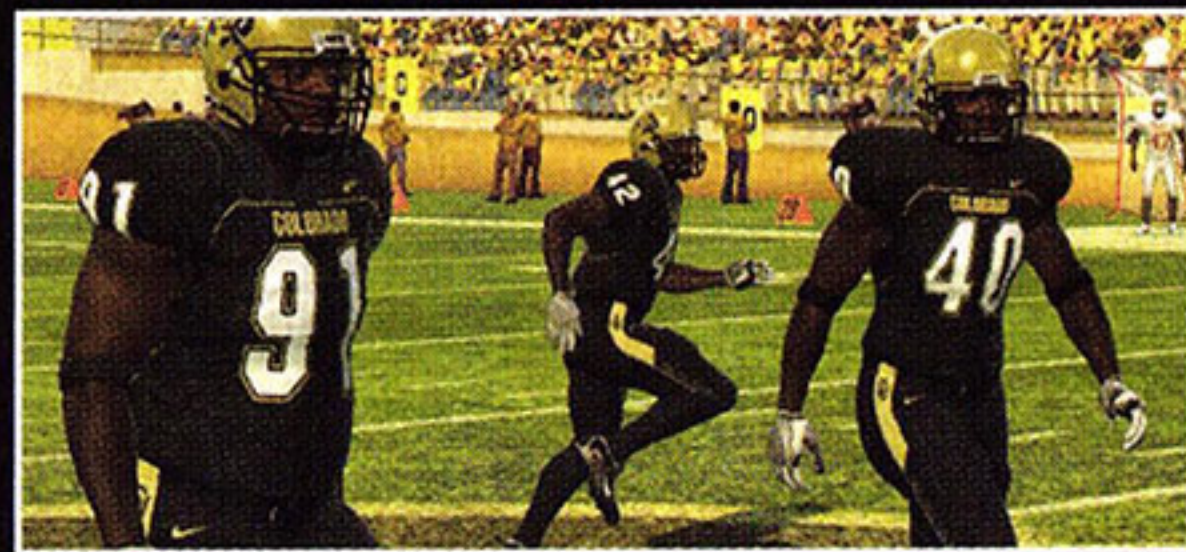
CHARTS

An In-Depth Listing Of The Best Selling Games

TOP 20

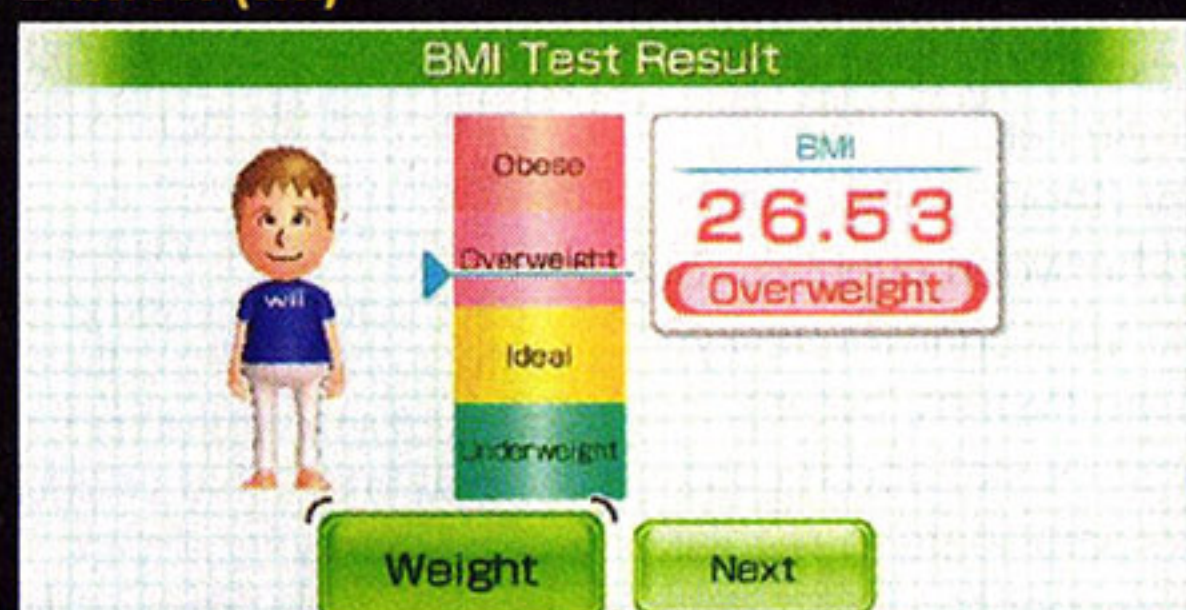
Listings Based Upon NPD Data For July 2008 Based On Units Sold

1 NCAA FOOTBALL 09 (360)



Now that fall is officially here we'd like to reflect on all the good times we had this summer. Sure we had some fun playing football with our college buddies, but the best times were the ones we spent with friends, and the whimsical adventures we shared with our two best buds named Harold and Kumar.

2 Wii FIT (Wii)



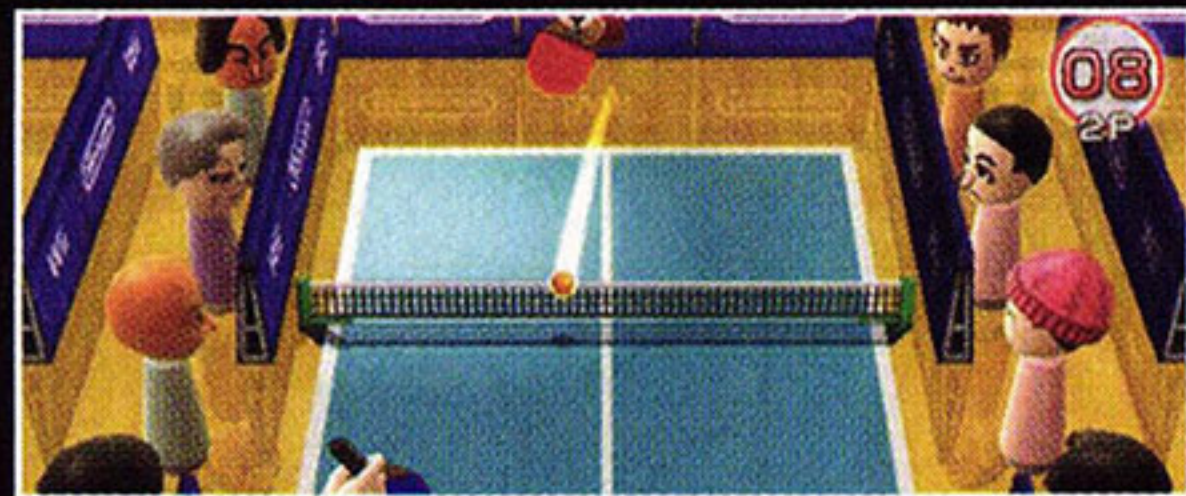
Of course staying in shape this summer was important to us, just as it was important to our friend Harold. Ahh Harold, so straight laced and bottled up. He has trouble talking to girls, but it's that social awkwardness that makes us so fond of him. Harold always seems to be getting himself into some luckless misunderstanding, and we can't help but laugh as he riffs on cultural clashes.

3 GUITAR HERO: ON TOUR (DS)



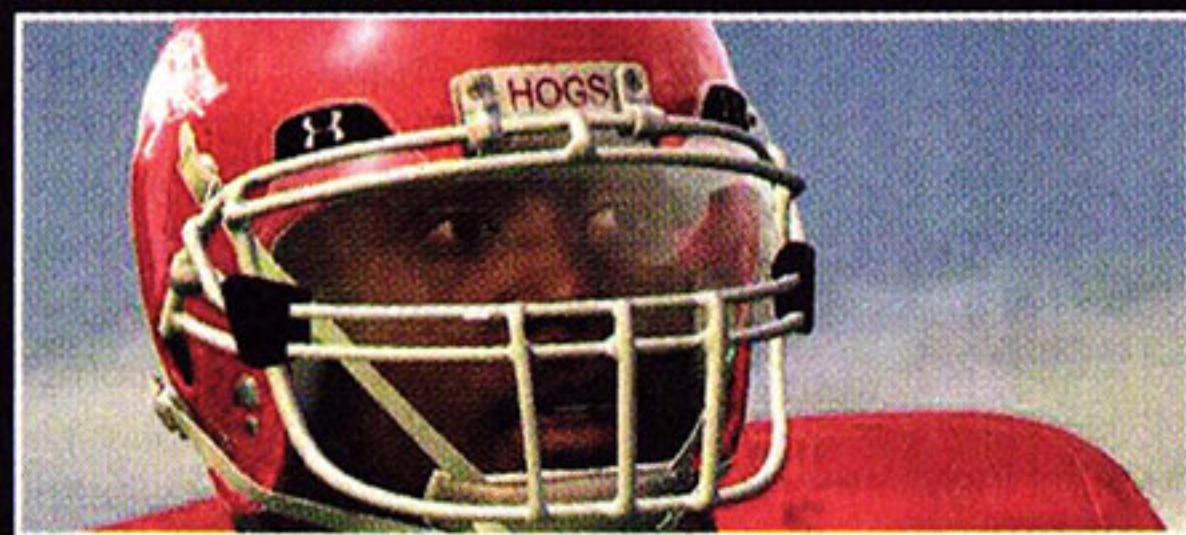
We had a lot of fun times rocking out on tour this year, but most of our party time was spent with Kumar. He's the wild fun one. This one time he tried to smuggle some weed onto a plane, but got arrested because people thought he was a terrorist. But that's Kumar; he's always out to have fun and he thinks the world is his personal amusement park. What a hoot!

4 Wii PLAY (Wii)



Hmm, must be a typo.

5 NCAA FOOTBALL 09 (PS3)



NCAA cover athlete Matt Ryan seems like an okay guy to us, but he's not as cool as our friends Harold and Kumar. No, those two crazy guys had us cracking up all summer with their playful insights into social stereotypes. Their zany misadventures always seem to cross the boundaries of racial insensitivity, which constantly get them into trouble. But then that's just why we love our friends Harold and Kumar so much.

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	System	Score	Release
1	NCAA Football 09	N/A	360	8.25	07-08
2	Wii Fit	4	Wii	8	04-08
3	Guitar Hero: On Tour	2	DS	7	06-08
4	Wii Play	5	Wii	7	02-07
5	NCAA Football 09	N/A	PS3	8.25	07-08
6	Soulcalibur IV	N/A	360	8.75	07-08
7	Mario Kart Wii	7	Wii	8.5	04-08
8	Rock Band	12	Wii	8.25	06-08
9	Soulcalibur IV	N/A	PS3	8.75	07-08
10	Civilization Revolution	N/A	360	9	07-08
11	NCAA Football 09	N/A	PS2	8.25	07-08
12	Battlefield: Bad Company	6	360	9.25	06-08
13	Guitar Hero: Aerosmith	16	360	8	06-08
14	New Super Mario Bros.	18	DS	9.25	05-06
15	Final Fantasy IV	N/A	DS	8.5	07-08
16	Super Smash Bros. Brawl	13	Wii	9.5	03-08
17	Mario Kart DS	N/A	DS	8.5	11-05
18	Unreal Tournament 3	N/A	360	8.5	07-08
19	Guitar Hero: Aerosmith	14	Wii	8	06-08
20	Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots	1	PS3	10	06-08

TOP 10 JAPAN

Rank	Title	System
1	Phantasy Star Portable	PSP
2	Fire Emblem: The Dark Dragon & The Sword of Light	DS
3	Rhythm Heaven Gold	DS
4	Tales of Vesperia	360
5	Dragon Quest V: Hand of the Heavenly Bride	DS
6	The Three Kingdoms War	DS
7	Summon Night 2	DS
8	Wii Fit	Wii
9	Mario Kart Wii	Wii
10	Soulcalibur IV	PS3



TOP 10 GI

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	System
1	NHL 09	N/A	multi
2	Rock Band 2	N/A	multi
3	Civilization IV: Colonization	N/A	PC
4	Star Wars: The Force Unleashed	N/A	multi
5	Pure	N/A	multi
6	N+	N/A	DS
7	Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots	1	PS3
8	Soulcalibur IV	2	multi
9	Tiger Woods PGA Tour 09	N/A	multi
10	Disgaea 3	3	PS3



The Staff's Favorite Picks

TOP 10 PC

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	Price
1	Nancy Drew: The Phantom Of Venice	N/A	\$19
2	The Sims 2 Double Deluxe	3	\$30
3	Spore Creature Creator	1	\$10
4	World Of Warcraft: Battle Chest	4	\$38
5	The Sims 2 IKEA Home Stuff	7	\$19
6	Diablo Battle Chest	12	\$39
7	World Of Warcraft	6	\$20
8	World Of Warcraft: Burning Crusade	9	\$28
9	Sims 2 FreeTime	11	\$30
10	Warcraft III Battle Chest	14	\$40



Based On Monthly Units Sold

REVIEWSARCHIVE

PLAYSTATION 3

Army of Two	7.5	Apr-08
Battlefield: Bad Company	9.25	Jul-08
Bourne Conspiracy, The	6.75	Aug-08
Burnout Paradise	8.5	Feb-08
Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian, The	6.25	Jul-08
Civilization Revolution	9	Jul-08
Club, The	8.75	Mar-08
College Hoops 2K8	7.75	Feb-08
Condemned 2: Bloodshot	8.75	Apr-08
Conflict: Denied Ops	5.75	Apr-08
Dark Sector	7.5	May-08
Devil May Cry 4	9	Mar-08
Disgaea 3: Absence of Justice	8.25	Sep-08
Dynasty Warriors 6	7.25	Mar-08
Enemy Territory: Quake Wars	8	Jul-08
FIFA Street 3	7	Mar-08
Gran Turismo 5: Prologue	7.75	Jun-08
Grand Theft Auto IV	10	Jun-08
Grid	9	Jul-08



Disgaea - PS3 - Sep-08

Guitar Hero: Aerosmith	8	Aug-08
Hail to the Chimp	4	Jul-08
Haze	6.25	Jul-08
Hellboy: The Science of Evil	7	Jul-08
Hot Shots Golf: Out of Bounds	8	May-08
Incredible Hulk, The	6.75	Aug-08
Iron Man	3.75	Jul-08
Kung Fu Panda	8	Aug-08
LEGO Indiana Jones: The Original Adventures	7	Jul-08
Lost Planet: Extreme Condition	8	Mar-08
Lost: Via Domus	6.75	Apr-08
Madden NFL 09	8.25	Sep-08
Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots	10	Jul-08
MLB 08: The Show	8.5	May-08
MLB 2K8	8.5	Apr-08
Monster Madness: Grave Danger	7.25	Aug-08
NASCAR 09	8	Jul-08
NBA Ballers: Chosen One	6.75	Jun-08
NCAA Football 09	8.25	Aug-08
NCAA March Madness 08	7.25	Feb-08
NFL Head Coach 09	6.75	Sep-08
NFL Tour	5	Feb-08
Orange Box, The	9.25	Feb-08
Pro Evolution Soccer 2008	7.75	May-08
Rainbow Six Vegas 2	9.25	Apr-08
Sega Superstars Tennis	7.25	May-08
SingStar	8	Aug-08
Soulcalibur IV	8.75	Sep-08
Top Spin 3	7.75	Aug-08
Turning Point: Fall of Liberty	3	Apr-08
Turok	7	Mar-08
Unreal Tournament 3	8.5	Feb-08
Viking: Battle for Asgard	7.25	May-08
Wall-E	4	Sep-08

XBOX 360

Alone in the Dark	6.5	Aug-08
Army of Two	7.5	Apr-08
Battlefield: Bad Company	9.25	Jul-08
Bourne Conspiracy, The	6.75	Aug-08
Bully: Scholarship Edition	8.5	Apr-08
Burnout Paradise	8.5	Feb-08
Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian, The	6.25	Jul-08
Civilization Revolution	9	Jul-08
Club, The	8.75	Mar-08
College Hoops 2K8	7.75	Feb-08
Command & Conquer 3: Kane's Wrath	7.25	Aug-08
Condemned 2: Bloodshot	8.75	Apr-08
Conflict: Denied Ops	5.75	Apr-08
Culdcept Saga	7	Feb-08
Dark Messiah of Might & Magic: Elements	8	Apr-08
Dark Sector	7.5	May-08



Soulcalibur IV - Xbox 360 - Sep-08

Devil May Cry 4	9	Mar-08
Don King Presents: Prizefighter	7.5	Aug-08
Dynasty Warriors 6	7.25	Mar-08
Enemy Territory: Quake Wars	8	Jul-08
FIFA Street 3	7	Mar-08
Frontlines: Fuel of War	7.25	Apr-08
Grand Theft Auto IV	10	Jun-08
Grid	9	Jul-08
Guitar Hero: Aerosmith	8	Aug-08
Hail to the Chimp	4	Jul-08
Hellboy: The Science of Evil	7	Jul-08
Incredible Hulk, The	6.75	Aug-08
Iron Man	3.75	Jul-08
Jumper: Griffin's Story	1.25	Apr-08
Karaoke Revolution Presents: American Idol Encore	7.5	Apr-08
Kingdom Under Fire: Circle of Doom	5.25	Feb-08
Kung Fu Panda	8	Aug-08
LEGO Indiana Jones: The Original Adventures	7	Jul-08
Lost Odyssey	8.5	Apr-08
Lost Planet: Extreme Condition	8.25	Jun-08
Colonies Edition	6.75	Apr-08
Lost: Via Domus	6.75	Apr-08
Madden NFL 09	8.25	Sep-08
MLB 2K8	8.5	Apr-08
NASCAR 09	8	Jul-08
NBA Ballers: Chosen One	6.75	Jun-08
NCAA Football 09	8.25	Aug-08
NCAA March Madness 08	7.25	Feb-08
NFL Head Coach 09	6.75	Sep-08
NFL Tour	5	Feb-08
Ninja Gaiden II	8.75	Jul-08
Pro Evolution Soccer 2008	7.75	May-08
Rainbow Six Vegas 2	9.25	Apr-08
Sega Superstars Tennis	7.25	May-08
Soldier of Fortune: Payback	4.25	Feb-08
Soulcalibur IV	8.75	Sep-08
Spiderwick Chronicles, The	6.5	Apr-08
Supreme Commander	5.5	Sep-08
Too Human	6.75	Sep-08
Top Spin 3	7.75	Aug-08
Turning Point: Fall of Liberty	3	Apr-08
Turok	7	Mar-08
Universe at War: Earth Assault	5	Jun-08
Unreal Tournament 3	8.5	Aug-08
Viking: Battle for Asgard	7.25	May-08
Wall-E	4	Sep-08

Wii

Battle of the Bands	6	Jun-08
Blast Works: Build Trade Destroy	8	Jul-08
Bombberman Land	6.5	Apr-08
Boom Blox	8.5	Jul-08
Bully: Scholarship Edition	8.5	Apr-08
Castle of Shikigami III	6.5	May-08
Cranium Kabookii	6.75	Feb-08
Death Jr.: Root of Evil	7.25	Jul-08



Sam & Max Season One - Wii - Sep-08

Deca Sports	3	Jul-08
Destroy All Humans: Big Willy Unleashed	5	May-08
Dragon Quest Swords: The Masked Queen and the Tower of Mirrors	7.75	Mar-08
Emergency Mayhem	5.5	Jun-08
Final Fantasy Fables: Chocobo's Dungeon	5.5	Jul-08
Harvey Birdman: Attorney At Law	6	Feb-08
House of the Dead 2 & 3 Return	7.5	Apr-08
Jumper: Griffin's Story	1.25	Apr-08
Karaoke Revolution Presents: American Idol Encore	7.5	Apr-08
Kung Fu Panda	8	Aug-08
LEGO Indiana Jones: The Original Adventures	7	Jul-08
Link's Crossbow Training	6.75	Feb-08
Major League Baseball 2K8	6.75	May-08
Mario Kart Wii	8.5	Jun-08
Nights: Journey of Dreams	6.5	Feb-08
Ninja Reflex	5	Jun-08
Nitrobike	4.25	Mar-08
No More Heroes	6	Mar-08
Obscure: The Aftermath	3	May-08
Okami	9.25	May-08
Opoona	5.5	Apr-08
Order Up	7.75	Sep-08
Pinball Hall of Fame: The Williams Collection	8.5	Apr-08

Pro Evolution Soccer 2008	8	May-08
Rock Band	8.25	Aug-08
Sam & Max Season One	7	Sep-08
Samurai Warriors: Katana	6	Mar-08
Sega Bass Fishing	5	Apr-08
Sega Superstars Tennis	7.5	May-08
Sonic Riders: Zero Gravity	6	Mar-08
Star Trek Conquest	5	Feb-08
Super Smash Bros. Brawl	9.5	Apr-08
Super Swing Golf Season 2	8.5	Feb-08
Target: Terror	4.5	Jul-08
Wall-E	4	Sep-08
We Love Golf	6	Jul-08
We Ski	6.25	Jun-08
Wii Fit	8	Jun-08
Wild Earth: African Safari	5.75	Jul-08
Winter Sports: The Ultimate Challenge	6.5	Mar-08
Worms: A Space Oddity	6.75	May-08

PLAYSTATION 2

Karaoke Revolution Presents: American Idol Encore	7.5	Apr-08
LEGO Indiana Jones: The Original Adventures	7	Jul-08
Mana Khemia: Alchemists of al-Revis	7	May-08
Obscure: The Aftermath	3	May-08
Persona 3: FES	8.25	May-08
Star Trek Conquest	5	Feb-08
Twisted Metal: Head On: Extra Twisted Edition	7.25	Apr-08
Wall-E	4	Sep-08

PC

Age of Conan: Hybriian Adventures	8	Aug-08
Alone in the Dark	6.5	Aug-08
Assassin's Creed: Director's Cut Edition	9	Jun-08
Command & Conquer 3: Kane's Wrath	7.75	May-08
Conflict: Denied Ops	5.75	Apr-08
Frontlines: Fuel of War	7.25	Apr-08
Lost Empire: Immortals	7.25	May-08
Mass Effect	9.5	Jul-08
Obscure: The Aftermath	3	May-08
Seven Kingdoms: Conquest	4	May-08
Sins of a Solar Empire	9	Apr-08
Turning Point: Fall of Liberty	3	Apr-08
Turok	7	Mar-08

NINTENDO DS

Advance Wars: Days of Ruin	8.75	Mar-08
Apollo Justice: Ace Attorney	8	Mar-08
Assassin's Creed: Altair's Chronicles	6	Apr-08
Bangai-O Spirits	7.5	Sep-08
Civilization Revolution	8.5	Aug-08
Draglade	6.75	Feb-08
Drone Tactics	7	Jun-08
Eco-Creatures: Save the Forest	3	Apr-08
Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: Ring of Fates	6	Apr-08
Final Fantasy IV	8.5	Aug-08
Final Fantasy Tactics A2: Grimoire of the Rift	8.75	Jul-08
Guitar Hero: On Tour	7	Sep-08
Insecticide	5.75	May-08
Jake Hunter: Detective Chronicles	6.5	Jun-08
Left Brain, Right Brain	5	Feb-08
LOL	1	Aug-08
Lost in Blue 3	6.25	May-08
Major League Baseball 2K8: Fantasy All-Stars	5.5	Jun-08
Mario Party DS	7	Feb-08
My Word Coach	8	Feb-08
Ninja Gaiden: Dragon Sword	7.75	May-08
Professor Layton and the Curious Village	7.5	Apr-08
Puchi Puchi Virus	7.5	May-08
Space Invaders Extreme	8.25	Jul-08
Summon Night: Twin Age	7	Jun-08
Teenage Zombies: Invasion of the Alien Brain Thingys!	6.75	May-08
Trauma Center: Under the Knife 2	8.25	Aug-08
World Ends With You, The	8.25	May-08

PSP

Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII	7.25	Apr-08
Dungeon Explorer: Warrior of Ancient Arts	6	Apr-08
FlatOut Head On	7.5	May-08
God of War: Chains of Olympus	9	Mar-08
Hot Shots Golf: Open Tee 2	8	Jul-08
Patapon	8.75	Mar-08
Pursuit Force: Extreme Justice	7.25	Feb-08
R-Type Command	7.25	Jul-08
Secret Agent Clank	8.5	Jul-08
Space Invaders Extreme	8.25	Jul-08
Wild Arms XF	7.5	May-08
Wipeout Pulse	7.75	Apr-08

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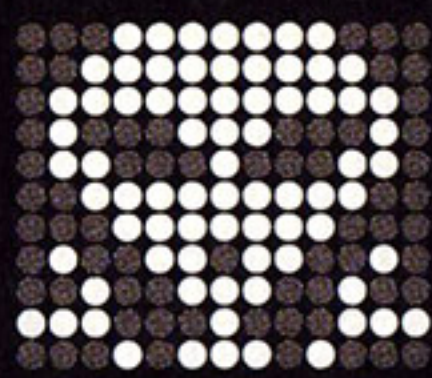
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Civilization Revolution



Multiplayer Strategies For The Masses

By Scott Wittbecker, Quality Assurance Manager, Firaxis



BE PREPARED

Sid Meier's Civilization Revolution multiplayer mode is a much different animal than the single-player component. While the AI in single player can present an aggressive challenge on the higher difficulty levels, it's a completely different experience than the unique and varied strategies you'll encounter when facing human opponents online. As such, the lessons you learn in single player must be carefully considered and carried over to the MP world; you'll have to quickly adapt and improvise to survive as you uncover your opponent's techniques.

KNOW THY ENEMY

Think of the single-player component as training, an opportunity for you to interact with and learn the many unique qualities and bonuses of the 16 different Civilizations. Every Civ has its own distinct units which can change the course of the game as you progress through the eras. For example, the English Longbowman unit has +1 defense at the start of the game, while the Mongolian Keshik Horseman gains +1 movement only after entering the medieval era. Knowing about the strengths and weaknesses of your opponents' Civs will help you adapt and prepare for the battles to come.

In addition to special units, each Civilization can unlock several bonuses that effect growth, research, and military strength. These overall bonuses play an important role in city placement, especially in the long term. Going back to the

English and Mongolian Civs, in the Industrial era the Mongols gain +2 production from mountain tiles, whereas the English gain +1 production from hills. This information is important as it relates to your own development, and it's also critical to know which tiles are most important to your enemy when laying siege to their cities. Careful consideration of city placement leads us into how the exploration component of the game, not only as it relates to you and your opponent's development, but also how it involves some of the natural elements of the maps in Civ Rev.

GET A MOVE ON

In multiplayer especially, it's important to explore early and often. Exploring your surroundings yields a variety of important benefits that can influence the overall outcome of the game. Much like previous incarnations of the series, Civilization Revolution is populated both by friendly villages and hostile Barbarian settlements that can provide useful bonuses to your units. Friendly villages generally provide maps of the surrounding area, free units, technology, or gold. Barbarian camps often provide a bonus if eliminated (typically a spy, galley, caravan, or gold), and fighting them will provide promotions to your units, which can be invaluable down the line.



Another benefit of exploration is naming landmark locations throughout the map. Whenever you discover a geographical landmark, you will be prompted to choose a name for it. You'll also receive a gold reward for your efforts. All of this accumulated wealth adds up quickly as you start to meet economic milestones and gain even greater rewards. Acquiring 100 gold unlocks a free settler, 250 gold yields a free banking or

currency technology, and 500 gold unlocks a free great person, etc.

While exploring the map keep an eye out for any potential chokepoints you encounter. Since Civ Rev doesn't feature the Open Borders option of previous Civ titles, blockaded tiles can become an important aspect of both offense and defense. Getting a head start on exploration can provide benefits across multiple victory conditions, providing a solid basis for players of all types.



WE HAVE THE TECHNOLOGY

If you've played the previous Civilization games, you already know the technology tree is serious business; it dictates the overall civilization development by determining the path to victory you will take, whether it's through unlocking new buildings to generate culture or new military developments to conquer the world.

While in single player you might have some time for experimentation. But in multiplayer you can't afford to haphazardly research techs on a whim; you need to focus on an objective and attain it as quickly as possible. It's easy to develop your own strategies based on key technologies, although some are clearly more critical than others. Being the first to discover important technologies often provides a valuable bonus, as well as the ability to sell off or barter that tech to the other players. Certain techs are extremely valuable when pursuing a particular victory condition regardless of whether you're first or not, such as Feudalism and Combustion for the warmongers out there.

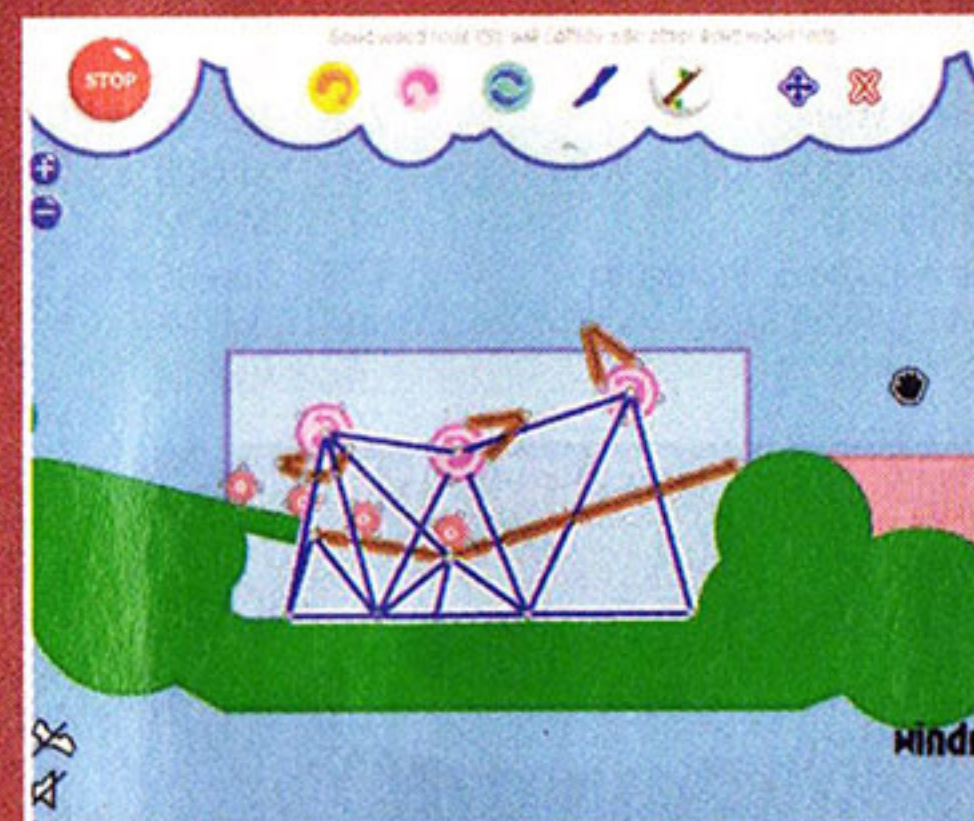


Depending on your play style, you can also use your research capabilities against your enemies. If you see that another player has recently completed a particular wonder, it's possible to make the bonus provided by that wonder obsolete by choosing your tech path carefully.

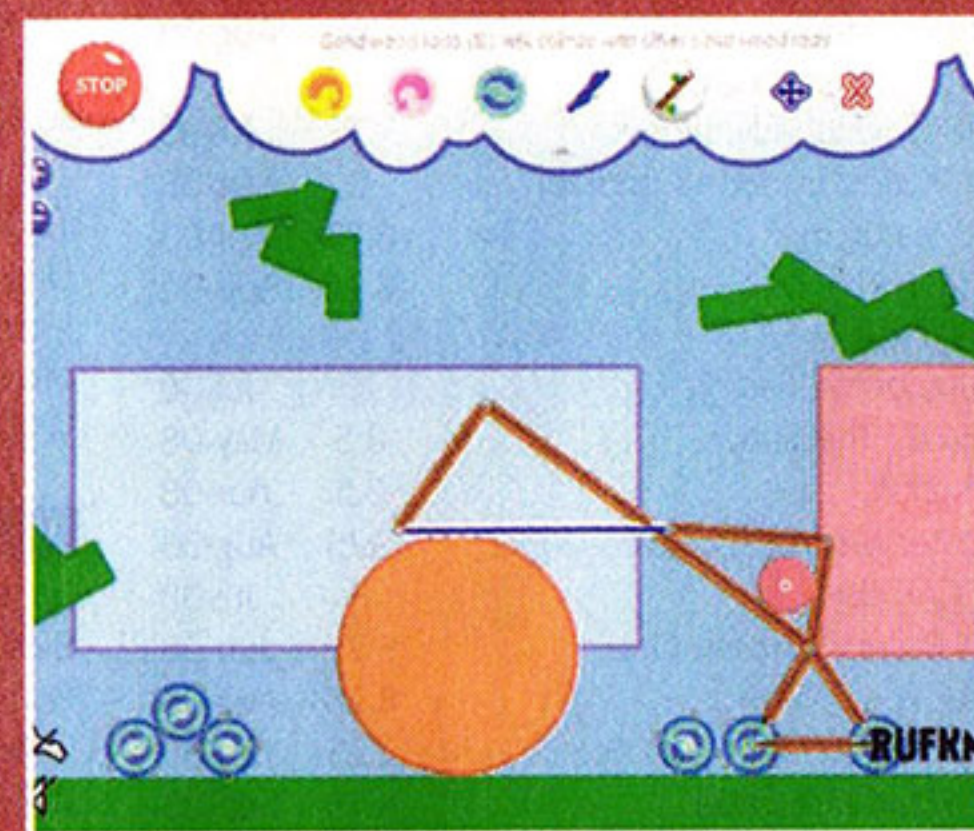


Mod World

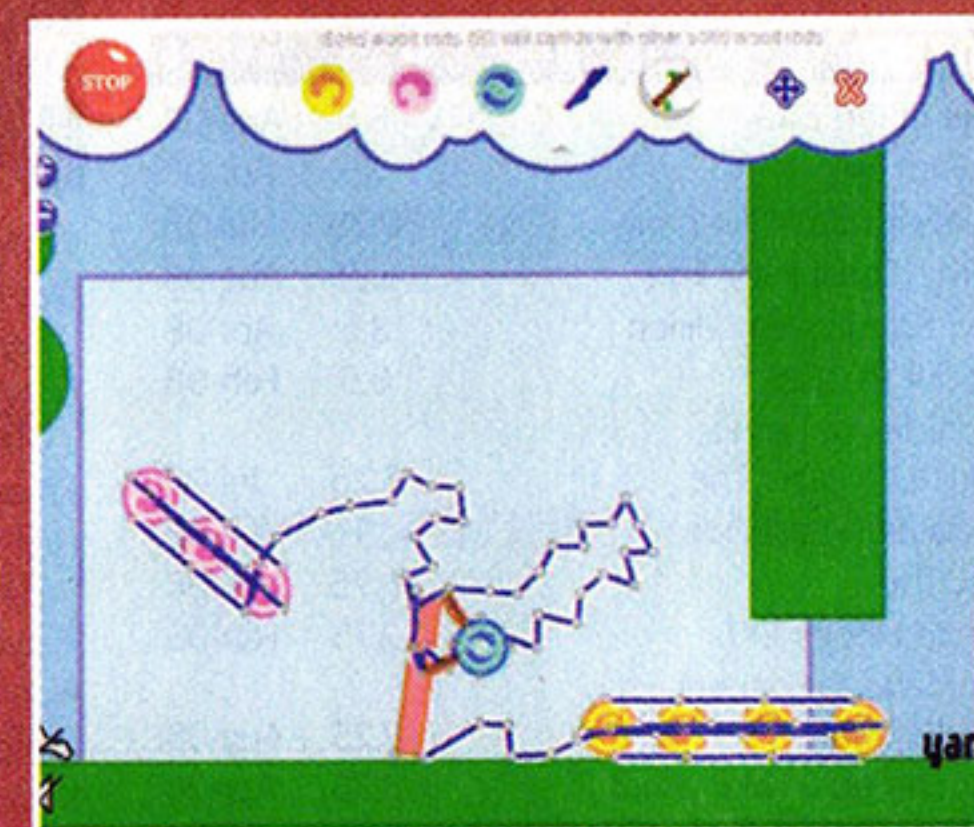
FANTASTIC CONTRAPTION
www.fantasticcontraption.com



Anyone remember physics-based puzzler The Incredible Machine? Of course you do; it was awesome. At the above URL, anyone with a web browser and a reasonably up-to-date Flash installation can relive the glory days of guiding balls into boxes on their parents' 386.



Using any combination of wheels and rods, players' only goal is to move the pink object into the goal area. Some levels are simple, easily completed with a simple car or bridge. Others reward the creation of complex machinery, from tractors to catapults. Fantastic Contraption is more free-form than most puzzle games; a single level might have any number of solutions.



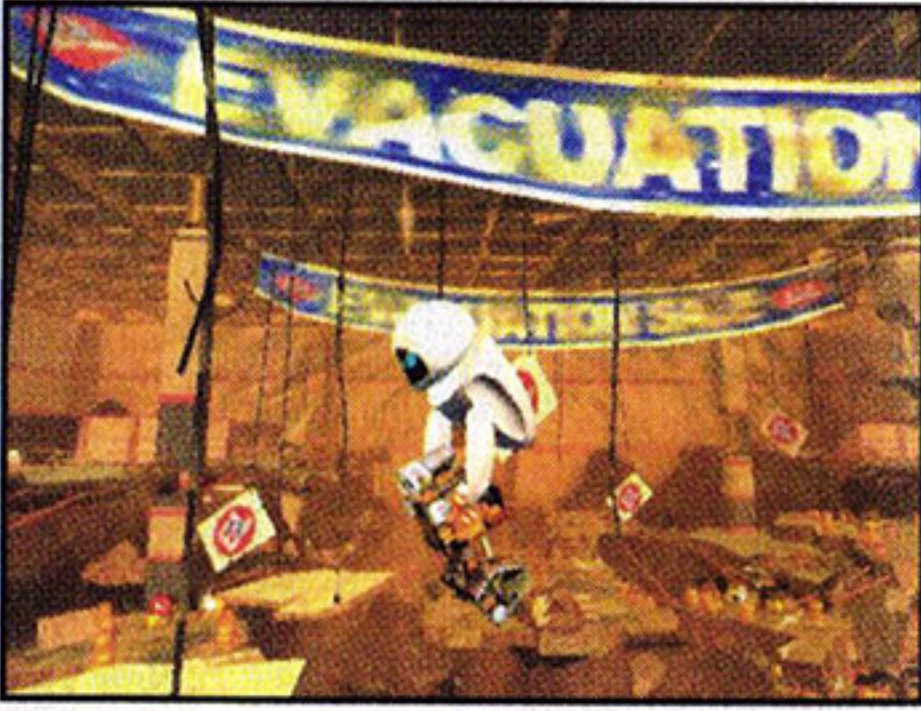
The free part of the game is substantial, with 20 puzzles and the ability to share solutions via web links. For 10 bucks, you get the happy feeling of supporting indie development and access to a whole community of user-created content. Either way, Fantastic Contraption is one of the most purely entertaining games on the web.

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 prize!

MULTI-SYSTEM



Wall-E

> PLAYSTATION 3, XBOX 360

From the main menu go into Bonus Features then select the Cheats option. Match up the order of the characters correctly to unlock the following.

Create A Cube Anywhere – M-O, Security bot, Eve, Eve

Eve Gains Super Laser Upgrade – Eve, Wall-E, Wall-E, Auto

Infinite Health – Wall-E, M-O, Auto, M-O

Unlock All Bonus Features – Wall-E, Auto, Eve, Security bot

Unlock All Game Content – M-O, Auto, Security bot, Eve

Unlock Holiday Costumes – Auto, Auto, Security bot, Security bot

Unlock Multiplayer Costumes – Security bot, Wall-e, M-O, Auto

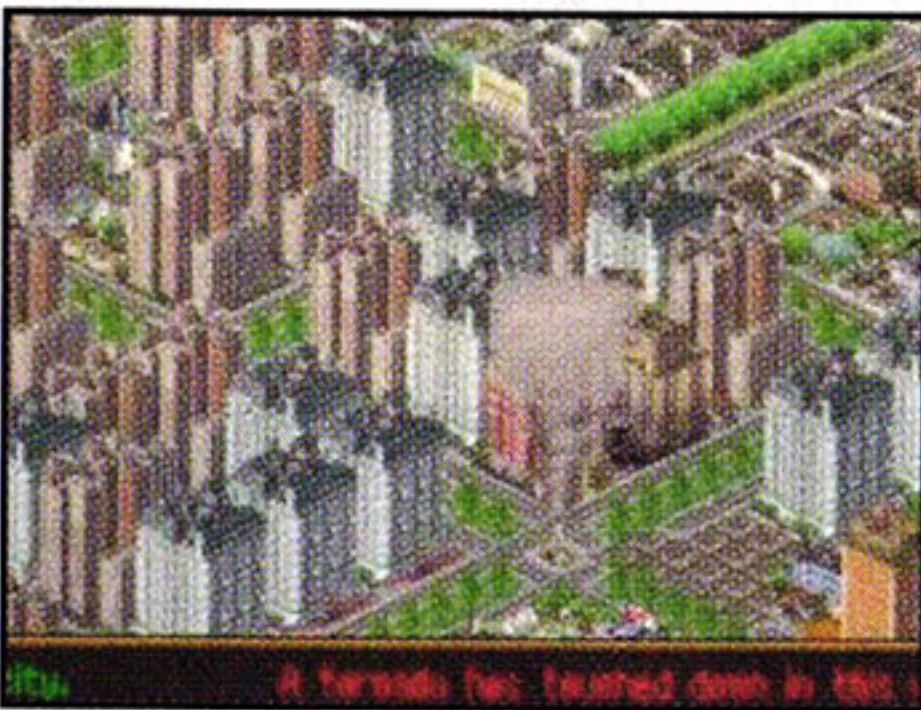
Unlock Multiplayer Maps – Eve, M-O, Wall-E, Auto

Unlock Single Player Levels – Auto, Security bot, M-O, Wall-E

Wall-E Always Has Super Laser – Wall-E, Auto, Eve, M-O

Wall-E & Eve Both Have Laser Guns – Security bot, Eve, M-O, Wall-e

DS



Sim City DS

From the main menu go to the Museum then select Landmark Collection and finally Password then enter these codes to unlock all the landmarks in the game.

Anglican Cathedral (UK) – kipling

Arc de Triomphe (France) – gaugin

Atomic Dome (Japan) – kawabata

Big Ben (UK) – orwell

Bowser Castle (Nintendo) – hanafuda

Brandenburg Gate (Germany) – gropius

Coit Tower (San Francisco) – kerouac

Conciergerie (France) – rodin

Daibutsu (Japan) – mishima

Edo Castle (Japan) – shonagon

Eiffel Tower (France) – camus

Gateway Arch (USA) – twain

Grand Central Station (USA) – f.scott

Great Pyramids (Egypt) – mahfouz

Hagia Sofia (Turkey) – ataturk

Helsinki Cathedral (Finland) – kivi

Himeji Castle (Japan) – hokusai

Holstentor (Germany) – durer

Independence Hall (USA) – mlkingjr

Jefferson Memorial (USA) – thompson

Kokkai (Japan) – soseki

Lincoln Memorial (Washington DC) – melville

Liver Building (UK) – dickens

Melbourne Cricket Ground (Australia) – damemelba

Metropolitan Cathedral (UK) – austen

Moai (Chile) – allende

Mt. Fuji (Japan) – hiroshige

National Museum (Taiwan) – yuantlee

Neuschwanstein Castle (Germany) – beethoven

Notre Dame (France) – hugo

Palace of Fine Arts (USA) – bunche

Palacio Real (Spain) – cervantes

Paris Opera (France) – daumier

Parthenon (Greece) – callas

Pharos of Alexandria (Egypt) – zewail

Rama IX Royal Park (Thailand) – phu

Reichstag (Germany) – goethe

Sagrada Familia (Spain) – dali

Shuri Castle (Japan) – basho

Smithsonian Castle (USA) – pauling

Sphinx (Egypt) – haykal

St Paul's Cathedral (UK) – defoe

St. Basil's Cathedral (Russia) – tolstoy

St. Stephen's Cathedral (Austria) – mozart

Statue of Liberty (USA) – pollack

Stockholm Palace (Sweden) – bergman

Taj Mahal (India) – tagore

Tower of London (UK) – maugham

Trafalgar Square (UK) – joyce

United Nations (UN) – amnesty

United States Capitol – poe

Westminster Abbey (UK) – greene

White House (Washington DC) – steinbeck

"GI Droid"

(location unknown – Last seen ordering a pizza from a bathroom stall)

Code of the Month

Soulcalibur IV



Tired of using Kilik to defeat all your friends in online battles? Just want to try someone new? Here's a list of all the hidden characters in Soulcalibur IV as well as the requirement to unlock them.

Algol – Defeat him while completing the game's Story Mode

Amy – Purchase from Character Creator for 4,000 gold

Angol Fear – Defeat her while completing the game's Story Mode

The Apprentice – Complete Arcade Mode with Darth Vader or Yoda

Ashlotte – Defeat her while completing the game's Story Mode

Cervantes – Purchase from Character Creator for 4,000 gold

Kamikirimisu – Defeat her while completing the game's Story Mode

Lizardman – Purchase from Character Creator for 4,000 gold



Rock – Purchase from Character Creator for 4,000 gold

Scheherazade – Defeat her while completing the game's Story Mode

Seong Mi-na – Purchase from Character Creator for 4,000 gold

Setsuka – Purchase from Character Creator for 4,000 gold

Shura – Defeat him while completing the game's Story Mode

Sophitia – Purchase from Character Creator for 4,000 gold

Talim – Purchase from Character Creator for 4,000 gold

Yoshimitsu – Purchase from Character Creator for 4,000 gold

Yun-seong – Purchase from Character Creator for 4,000 gold

Zasalamel – Purchase from Character Creator for 4,000 gold

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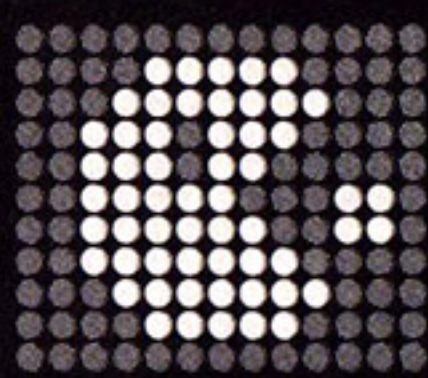
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THE WRONG KIND OF SCARY

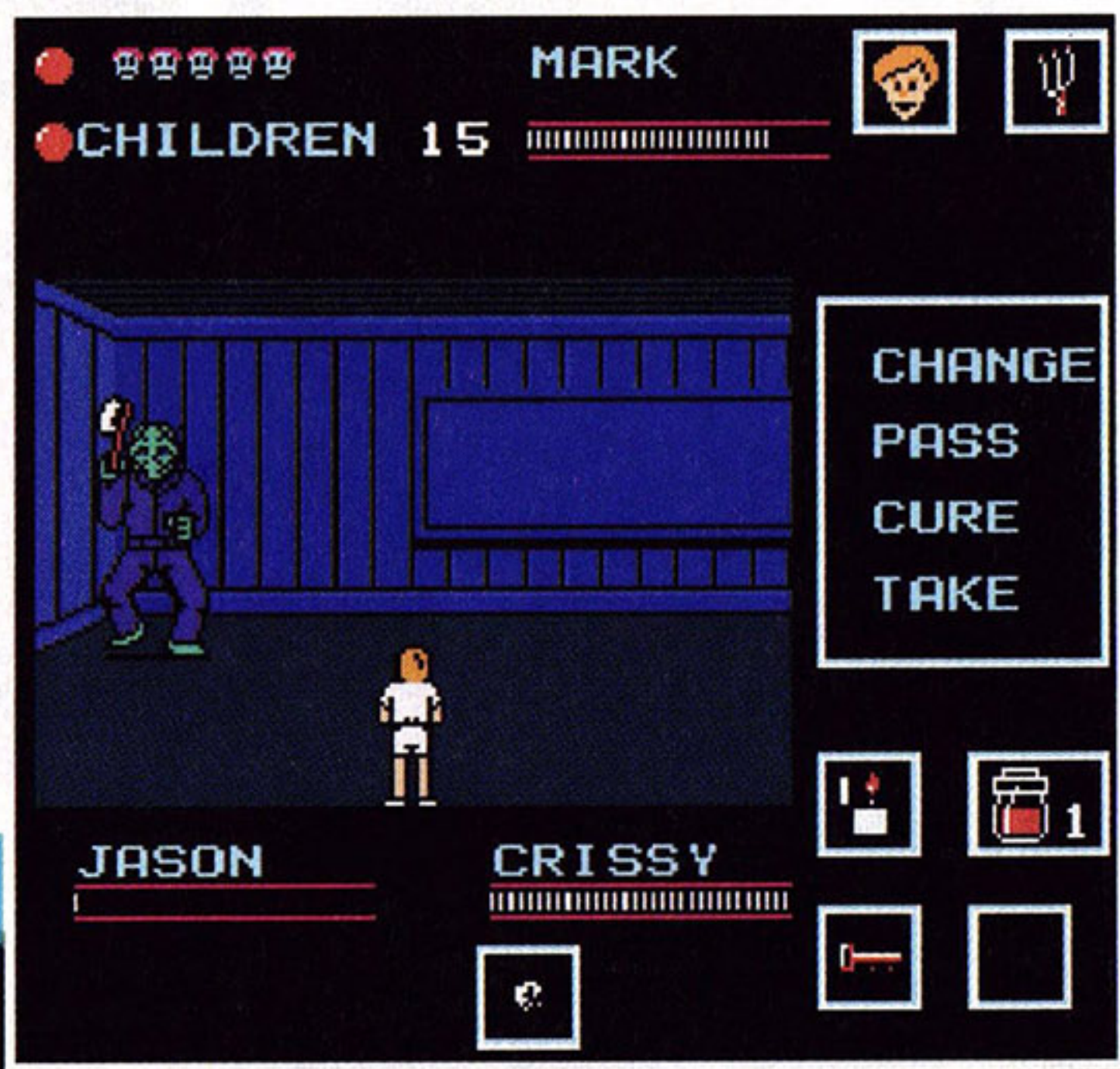
WORST HORROR GAMES EVER

When done right, horror-based video games are just as thrilling as the latest scare-fest in theaters. When they go wrong, they are more laughable and unbearable than a low-budget student horror flick. With terrible pacing, cheesy moments, and lousy mechanics, these titles represent what happens when a game tries to be scary and fails spectacularly. Sure, they may send shivers down your spine or make your heart skip a beat...but for all the wrong reasons.



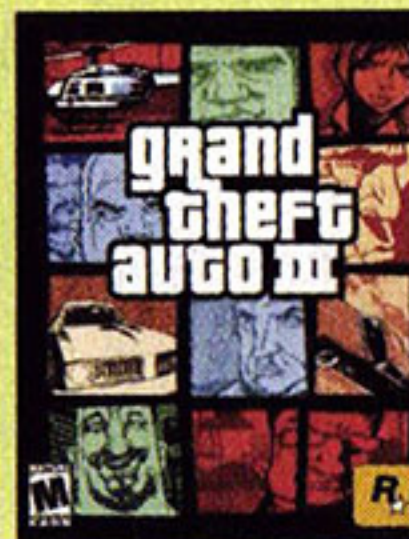
FRIDAY THE 13TH (NES)

Jason Voorhees is one of the most terrifying icons of horror, but even a resurrected walking death machine couldn't inspire nightmares more terrifying than this game. Friday the 13th is ridiculously difficult, even by NES standards. The problem is that it's the broken kind of difficult. Unavoidable hits, stupid weapons, and baffling enemies ensure that your crew of teenagers dies quickly and without ceremony. If they make it through that, Jason will probably appear (as he randomly does) and kill you. In that sense, it's true to the series...but aren't video games supposed to be fun?



This Month In Gaming History

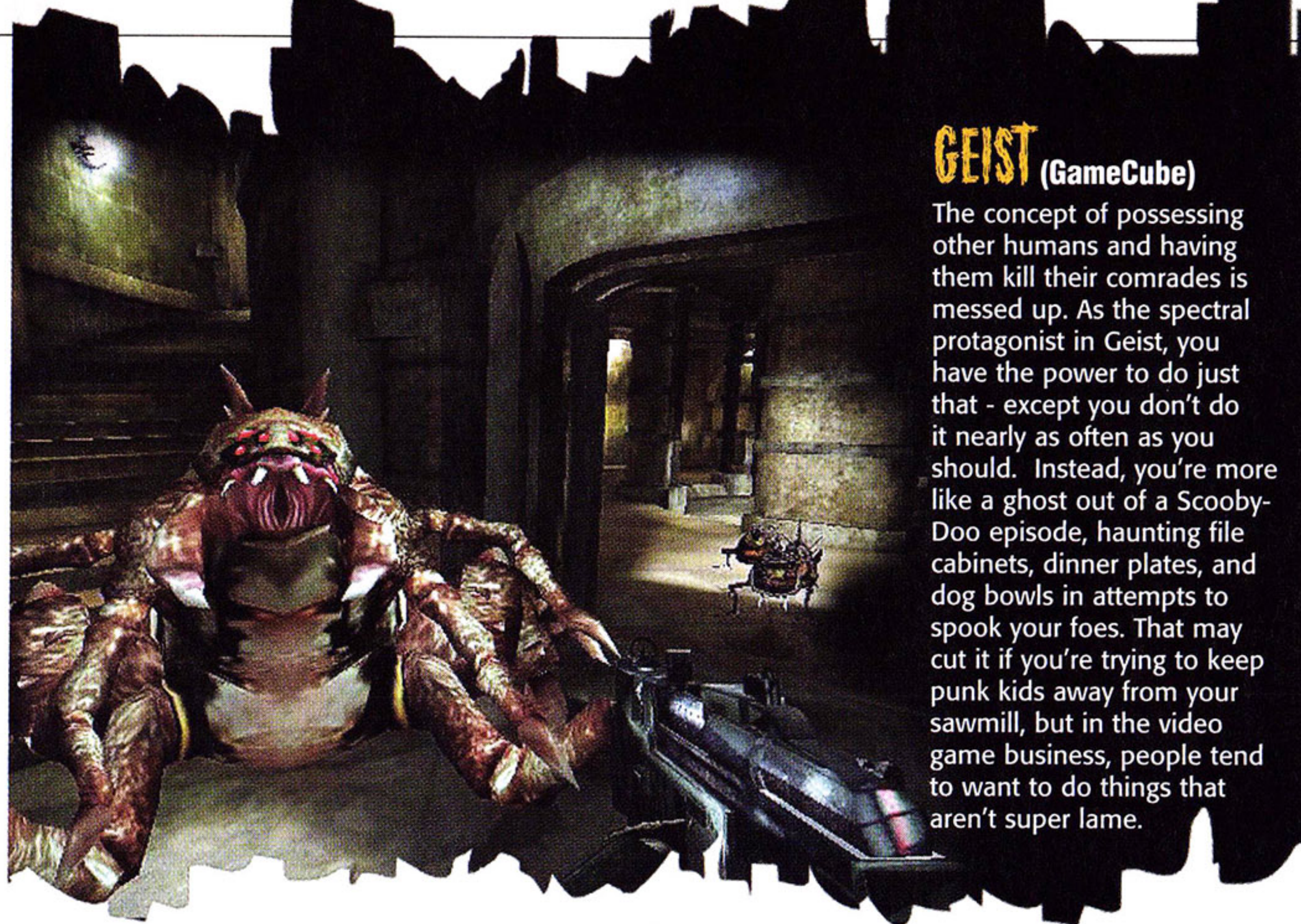
After October 22, 2001, video gaming was never the same. That's the day Grand Theft Auto III released on PS2, and one of the first true blockbuster video game franchises was born. GTA III set the standard for open-world gaming, establishing a rabid fanbase that would only expand with later entries in the series. Since its release, GTA III has sold over 12 million copies.



RESIDENT EVIL: SURVIVOR (PSone)

Considering its role in shaping survival horror, Resident Evil is one of the most trusted names in the genre. Survivor exploits that trust to the fullest degree, giving players a worthless side-story, first-person combat, and exploration. Imagine trying to shoot a horde of zombies while neck-deep in water...that's how it feels to move through this world. The awful mechanics make a little sense when you consider that Resident Evil: Survivor was intended to be played with a light gun, but the U.S. version didn't support any peripheral of the sort. What you get instead is an affront to Resident Evil's good name.





GEIST (GameCube)

The concept of possessing other humans and having them kill their comrades is messed up. As the spectral protagonist in Geist, you have the power to do just that - except you don't do it nearly as often as you should. Instead, you're more like a ghost out of a Scooby-Doo episode, haunting file cabinets, dinner plates, and dog bowls in attempts to spook your foes. That may cut it if you're trying to keep punk kids away from your sawmill, but in the video game business, people tend to want to do things that aren't super lame.

McFARLANE'S EVIL PROPHECY

(PS2)

This mess of a game is a thinly disguised marketing tool intended to sell more McFarlane toys. It kind of works, since you quickly realize you'd be better off buying one of those grotesque figures than this unplayable disaster. Everything anyone could possibly like about video games is absent from Evil Prophecy, including good graphics, creepy atmosphere, and not totally sucking every second you play it. Even the blandest button-masher looks like divine genius next to this tedious, festering pile of necrotic pixels.



NIGHT TRAP

(Sega CD)

This list of bad horror games could have easily been populated solely by garbage full-motion video titles of the '90s. Though Corpse Killer and Ground Zero: Texas get honorable mentions, Night Trap is the ultimate FMV abomination. Despite all of the controversy surrounding the game's content, Night Trap is essentially about watching security camera footage. The whole game is basically just switching cameras to overhear conversations. No nudity. No ridiculous gore. Every now and then you trigger a trap to catch some bumbling "vampires." Boring!



LIFELINE (PS2)

We'll admit it: when Lifeline first released, we were entirely too impressed with its unique voice controls. Innovation is admirable, but a clever control scheme means nothing if it doesn't work, and Lifeline's is completely broken. Players guide a waitress named Rio through a monster-infested space station by speaking various movement and combat commands. The problem? Rio is barely smart enough to breathe, much less follow instructions. Tell her to go to the closet, and she uses a heal capsule. Tell her to dodge, and she goes to the closet. Every now and then she'll randomly do something right - it's like shouting instructions at a disobedient dog. No, wait. That's an insult to dogs.



GRABBED BY THE GHOULIES (Xbox)

Ha ha! "Grabbed by the Ghoulies." Its name alone is one of the most enduring punchlines in the gaming industry. Developer Rare, which at the time had a sterling track record, managed to throw together one of the worst games in Xbox history by combining simplistic controls, repetitive gameplay, and awkward innuendo-laced dialogue that was too mature for kids and too dumb for adults. We heard (read: started) rumors that Microsoft tried to dump and bury excess copies of this game E.T.-style, but no landfill would accept a contaminant so foul.



ILLBLEED (Dreamcast)

Amusement parks! Wait, that doesn't scare you? What about... trap-laden amusement parks! Now we're talking. Illbleed makes players tiptoe around various deadly contraptions in a theme park, using their senses to locate and disarm various hazards. There is no tension, only tedium, as you methodically search each area for devices meant to maim, scare, or kill you. That's easier said than done, since Illbleed's awful controls make even basic movement hopelessly difficult. To be fair, Illbleed doesn't take itself seriously...but maybe someone on the development team should have.



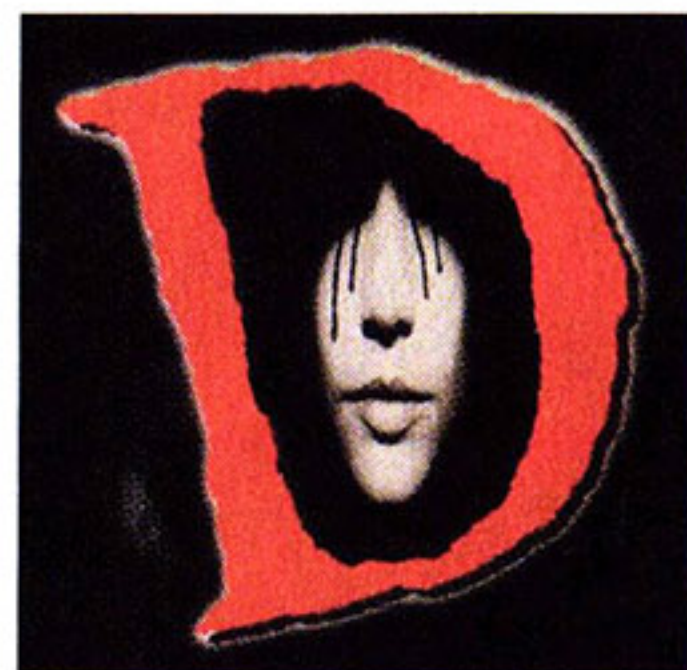
NOSFERATU (SNES)

This martial-artist-fights-vampires game is like Prince of Persia meets some kind of homemade sequel to Van Helsing. It actually looks okay, but once you touch the controller, all optimism is sucked from your veins, leaving only desiccated contempt. The main character moves like he just downed a bottle of elephant tranquilizer, so any button you press is more like a suggestion than a command. Convincing the dope not to get skewered by spikes is bad enough without the addition of sluggish combat. On the plus side, you get to punch werewolves in the face, so it's not all bad.



D (multi)

Cult followings often develop around underappreciated games, but sometimes people are just looking for people to share their pain. The latter must be the case with D, a plodding and frustrating adventure title about a young woman wandering around a corpse-littered hospital. The atmosphere actually succeeds in being creepy, but you won't even notice amid all of the terrible design choices. Players have two real-time hours to solve puzzles and get to the bottom of the mystery, but since there is no save system, the game needs to be beaten in a single sitting. By the way, the "D" stands for "Dracula." There. Now you have no reason to ever waste your time on this one.





SATURN

DRAGON FORCE

> STYLE 1-PLAYER STRATEGY/RPG > PUBLISHER SEGA > DEVELOPER WORKING DESIGNS > RELEASE 1996

In a time when gamers recognize Dragon Force as a speed metal band made famous by Guitar Hero, it's good to think back to one of the Saturn's most endearing titles. This JRPG lets players take on the role of one of eight playable generals, each of whom has a unique story, scenario, and difficulty. The 100-character army battles were unheard of when the game released, and while they might not seem as impressive anymore, the game's rock-paper-scissors strategy still holds up. Fans of empire management games will feel right at home here, since Dragon Force lets you manage the development and placement of your armies and allows you to fortify castles, search the surrounding areas for hidden artifacts, and award soldiers for heroic achievements. Some of your general's special attacks are overpowering to the point that it's easy to exploit the combat, but that's a small complaint in an otherwise classic strategy/RPG.

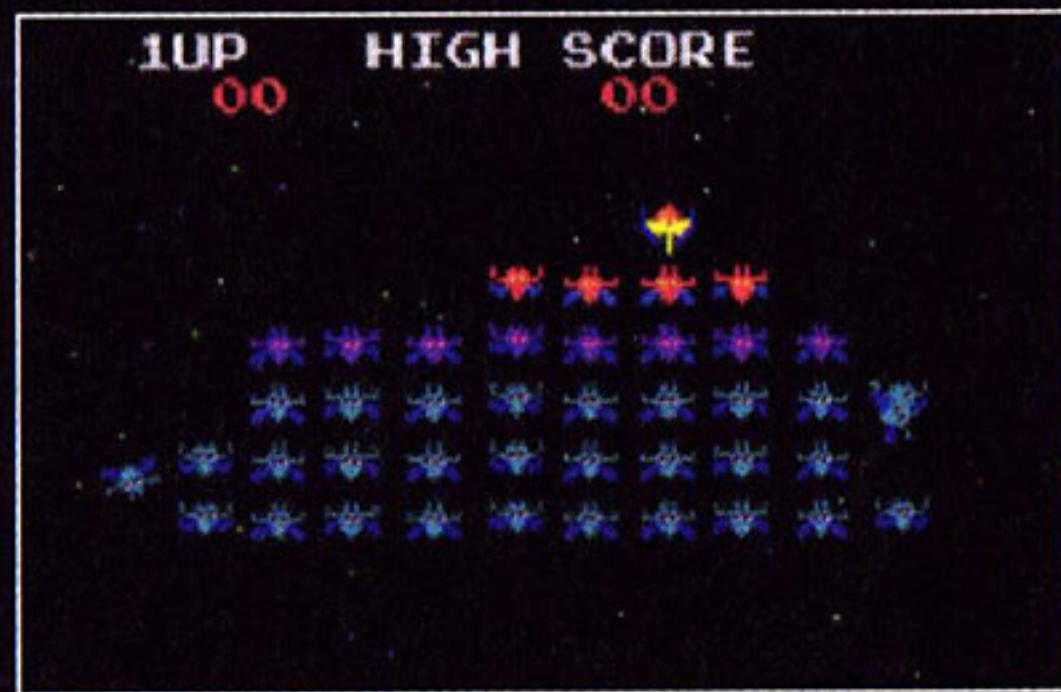


ARCADE

GALAXIAN

> STYLE 1-PLAYER SHOOTER > PUBLISHER NAMCO/MIDWAY > DEVELOPER NAMCO > RELEASE 1979

Poor Galaxian. Like a neglected middle child, Galaxian is stuck between its famous older brother (Space Invaders) and its prodigiously gifted younger sibling (Galaga). As an early example of the top-down space shooter, Galaxian brought a lot to the table back in 1979 – full color graphics, animated sprites, real explosions, and even primitive music – but that didn't save it from living in the shadow of the near-perfect Galaga. Playing it now, we realize that it's second fiddle for a reason. While it's definitely an evolutionary step up from Space Invaders, it has none of the graceful, addictive qualities of Galaga. Its repetitive patterns and lack of depth seem stiff and lifeless. Galaxian can be fun in small doses, but this is one old arcade unit that falls shy of "classic" status. Sorry Galaxian, but for every John Belushi there's a Jim, for every Sylvester Stallone there's a Frank, and for every Mary-Kate there's an Ashley. Maybe you should try out for the cast of *Hairspray*; we hear they are touring the Dakotas this year.



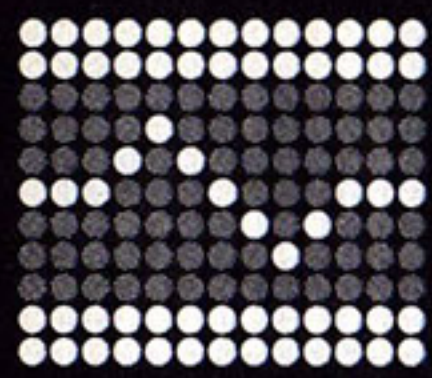
PC

HEROES OF MIGHT & MAGIC III: THE RESTORATION OF ERATHIA

> STYLE 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 8-PLAYER ONLINE) > PUBLISHER 3DO > DEVELOPER NEW WORLD COMPUTING > RELEASE 1999

The third entry in the Heroes of Might & Magic series is still the best. Conquering its huge variety of maps against the AI or other players via hotseat, LAN, or online play hasn't gotten old in the 10 years since its release. The mechanics are as solid as ever, and the simple interface fits the gameplay perfectly. Meshing light RPG elements into streamlined 4X empire building works brilliantly, and the expanded troop and castle lists and the vast amount of content to play through set Heroes III easily above the other entries in the series. Since the colorful hand-drawn 2D graphics have aged more gracefully than contemporary 3D games, it's not even painful to go back and play again. This is a true classic of turn-based strategy gaming, and remains immensely entertaining to this day.

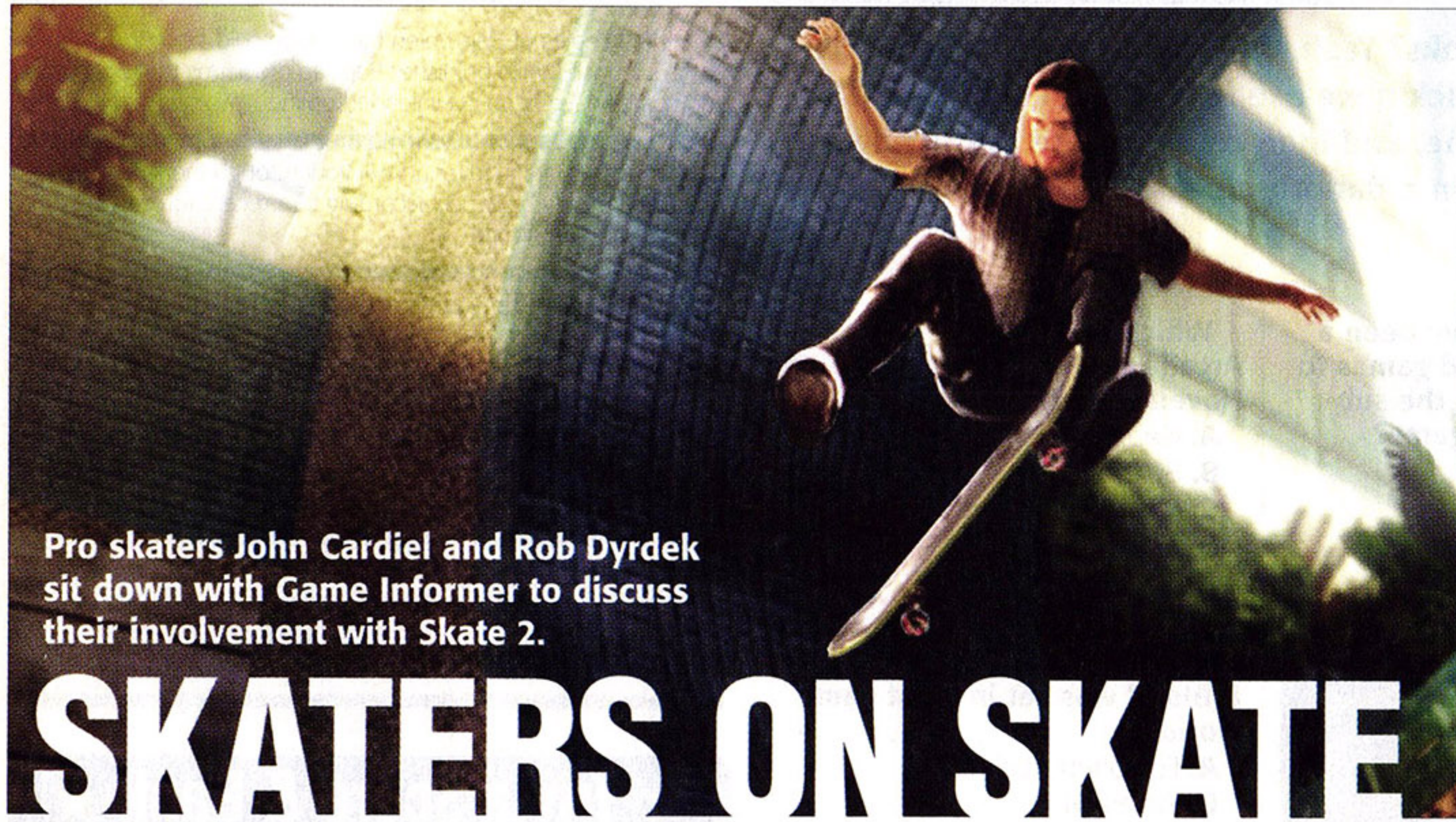




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UNLIMITED LAUNCH: SEP. 15



Pro skaters John Cardiel and Rob Dyrdek sit down with Game Informer to discuss their involvement with Skate 2.

SKATERS ON SKATE



Batman Does Building Blocks

Read more about the caped crusader's LEGO game in our exclusive Q&A with Traveller's Tales head of production Jonathan Smith.



The Sims 3

Executive producer Ben Bell reveals more details about EA's upcoming social simulator.



Also Online This Month:

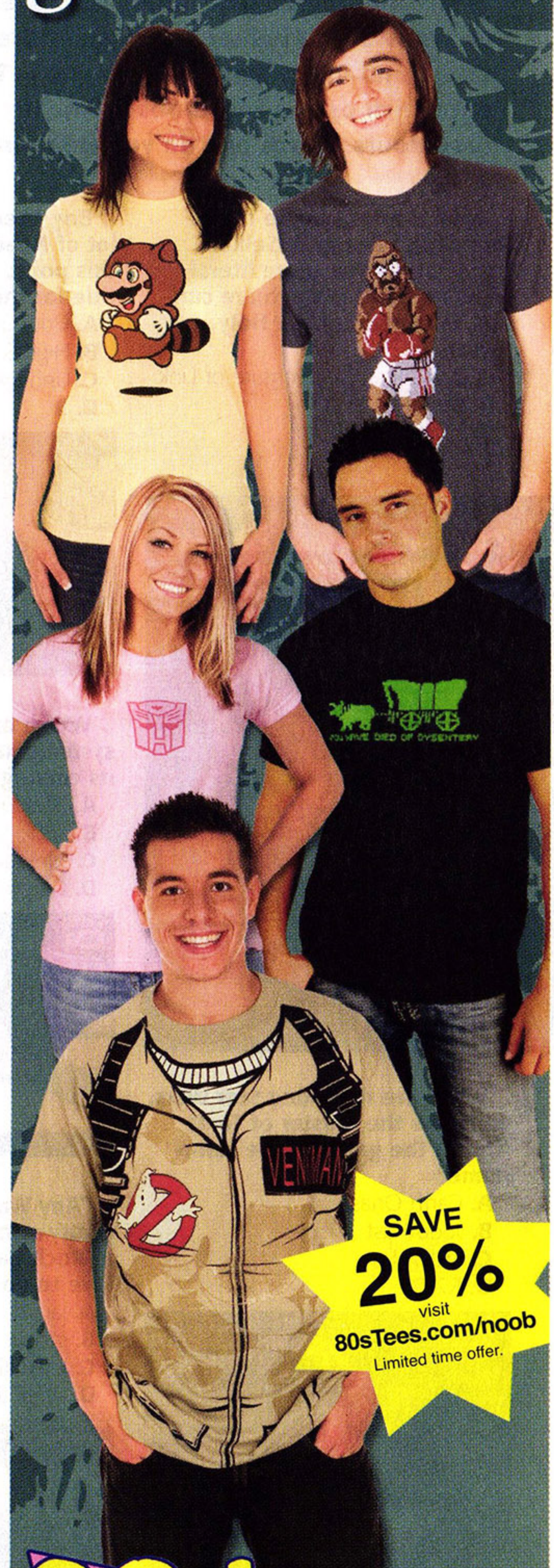
The online staff keeps you up to date on all the latest news as we lead up to the holiday game release bonanza.

Spock Talk

Leonard Nimoy pontificates on Star Trek's lasting legacy, why Spock resonates with so many fans, and what he knows about J.J. Abrams' new film.



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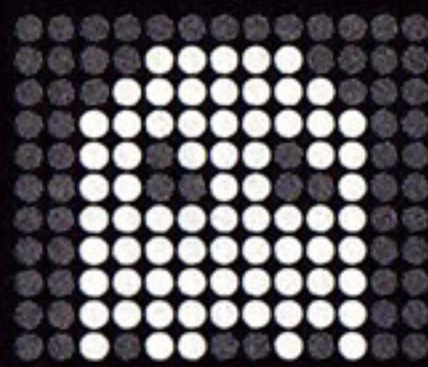


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GAME OVER

To Build A Castle Of Appropriate Size, He Will Need A Great Many Stones. But What He's Got Now, Feels Like An Acceptable Start...

VIDEO GAME TRIVIA

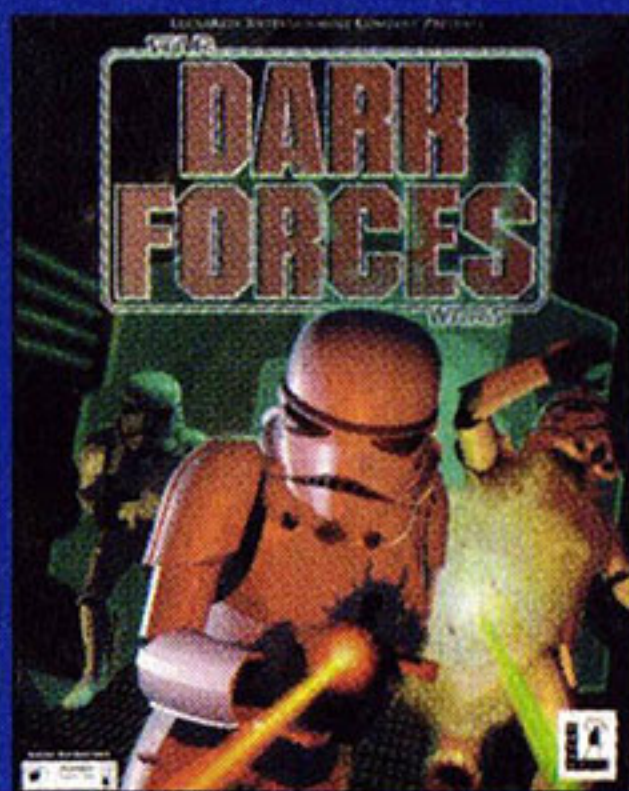
Remember the *Choose Your Own Adventure* books? Yeah, they were pretty sweet. What do you want to bet we can make those come back if we use familiar video game characters and inject them into our story? Try this one, and then complete the quiz to figure out which option you choose. "You're standing in a dark room, and there are five colored doors. Which one do you step through?"

1 What was the name of the American release of *Seiken Densetsu 2*? The more literal translation, in case you're curious, is *Legend of the Holy Sword 2*.

- A. *Zelda II: The Adventure of Link*
- B. *Secret of Mana*
- C. *Spirit of Excalibur*
- D. *Halo*

2 Who was the main character in *Star Wars: Dark Forces*?

- A. Kyle Katarn
- B. Luke Skywalker
- C. Darth Vader
- D. Dash Rendar



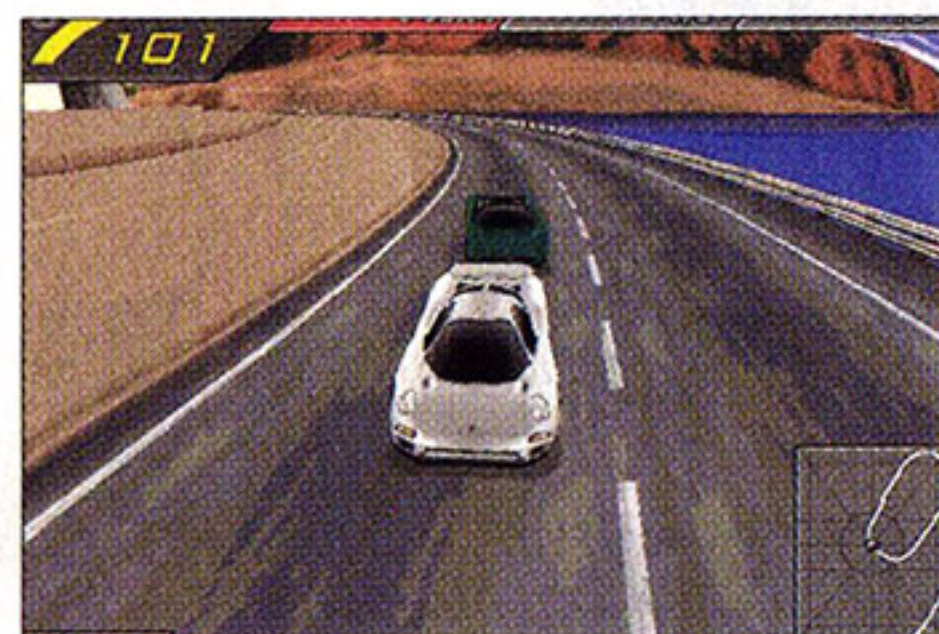
3 While we're talking *Star Wars*, who was the master of Teräs Käsi in the game of the same name?

- A. Carth Onasi
- B. Jodo Kast
- C. Arden Lyn
- D. R2-D2



4 Boy, there sure have been a lot of *Need for Speed* games to this point. What was the subtitle for the second game?

- A. *Hot Pursuit*
- B. *High Stakes*
- C. *Underground*
- D. *II*



5 Which one of these non-Sony systems has a *Wipeout* game in its catalogue?

- A. Dreamcast
- B. Xbox
- C. Nintendo 64
- D. Game Boy Color



6 "Any Way You Want It" is a pretty sweet song you can play in *Rock Band 2*. What does she love to do in that song, again?

- A. laugh
- B. groove
- C. lovin' things
- D. All of the above



7 Which one of these *Live Arcade* games didn't release on November 22, 2005?

- A. *Geometry Wars: Retro Evolved*
- B. *Bejeweled 2*
- C. *Marble Blast Ultra*
- D. *Zuma*

8 The *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* video game called *Iron & Blood* was set in what game world?

- A. *Forgotten Realms*
- B. *Ravenloft*
- C. *Dragonlance*
- D. *Dark Sun*

9 Which place did you not visit in the original *Bloodrayne*?

- A. Louisiana
- B. Germany
- C. Transylvania
- D. Argentina

10 Word is they're going to make a *Castlevania* movie. If we had to guess, it'll probably star Simon Belmont. Which one of these names is an imposter in the esteemed bloodline?

- A. Justin Belmont
- B. Trevor Belmont
- C. Leon Belmont
- D. Sonia Belmont



BREAKDOWN

25 million copies of *Bejeweled* have been sold since the game's launch, while publisher PopCap proclaims that 350 million copies have been downloaded online

63.2 billion dollars in revenue will flow through the video game industry annually by 2013, according to a recent forecast by research firm IBISWorld

100 employees were recently laid off from Radical Entertainment in the wake of the Activision Blizzard merger. Instead of four independent teams working on games, there are now only two

0 sequels are planned for *Braid*, according to the game's maker, Jonathan Blow

2 issues ago, we told you there was some big super secret message hidden in the magazine. That was a total fabrication. But this month there's a code on this page to find which page a real secret message appears

★ Trivia Score & Rank ★

You open the blue door. Solid Snake is standing against the wall, smoking a cigarette. He approaches you, and then punches you in the face. You die. Go back to the beginning.

0-1:

You open the yellow door. Turns out it was the exit from your vault in *Fallout 3*. Broken remains of destroyed buildings scatter the countryside. You are thirsty, and take a drink of water from a nearby water fountain. You get radiation poisoning. You die. Go back to the beginning.

2-3:

You open the red door. You suddenly find yourself on the field of *Madden 2009*. Loud cheers echo from the stadium stands. Several extremely large defensive linemen tackle you. You die. Go back to the beginning.

4-5:

You open the green door. Out of the darkness, you hear: "It's a me, Mario!" You feel an intense pressure as someone's feet land on your head. Your neck is broken. You die. Go back to the beginning.

6-7:

You open the orange door, and arrive in the crowd at a *Guitar Hero* concert. Onstage, Judy Nails and Lars Umlaut are completing their set on *Expert*. They unleash a powerful blast of star power during a wicked solo. You are amazed. Your head explodes. You die. Go back to the beginning.

8-9:

You recognize the danger presented by the doors, and remain in the dark room. Sadly, the zombies from *Resident Evil* that have been chasing you break through the wall and gnaw on your head. You become a zombie. Congratulations! You're alive. Sort of.

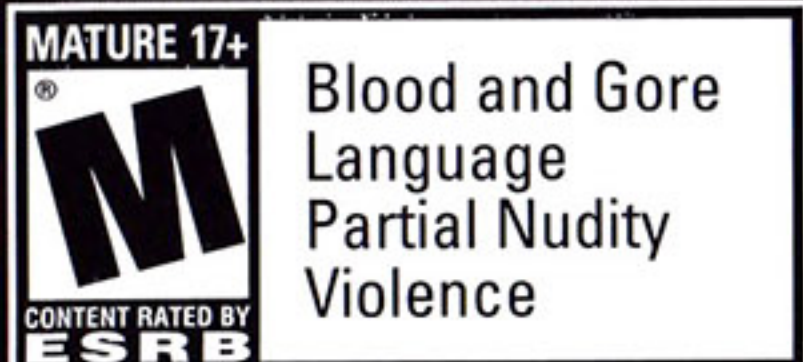
10:

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GEARS OF WAR 2



HOPE RUNS DEEP 11.07.08

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