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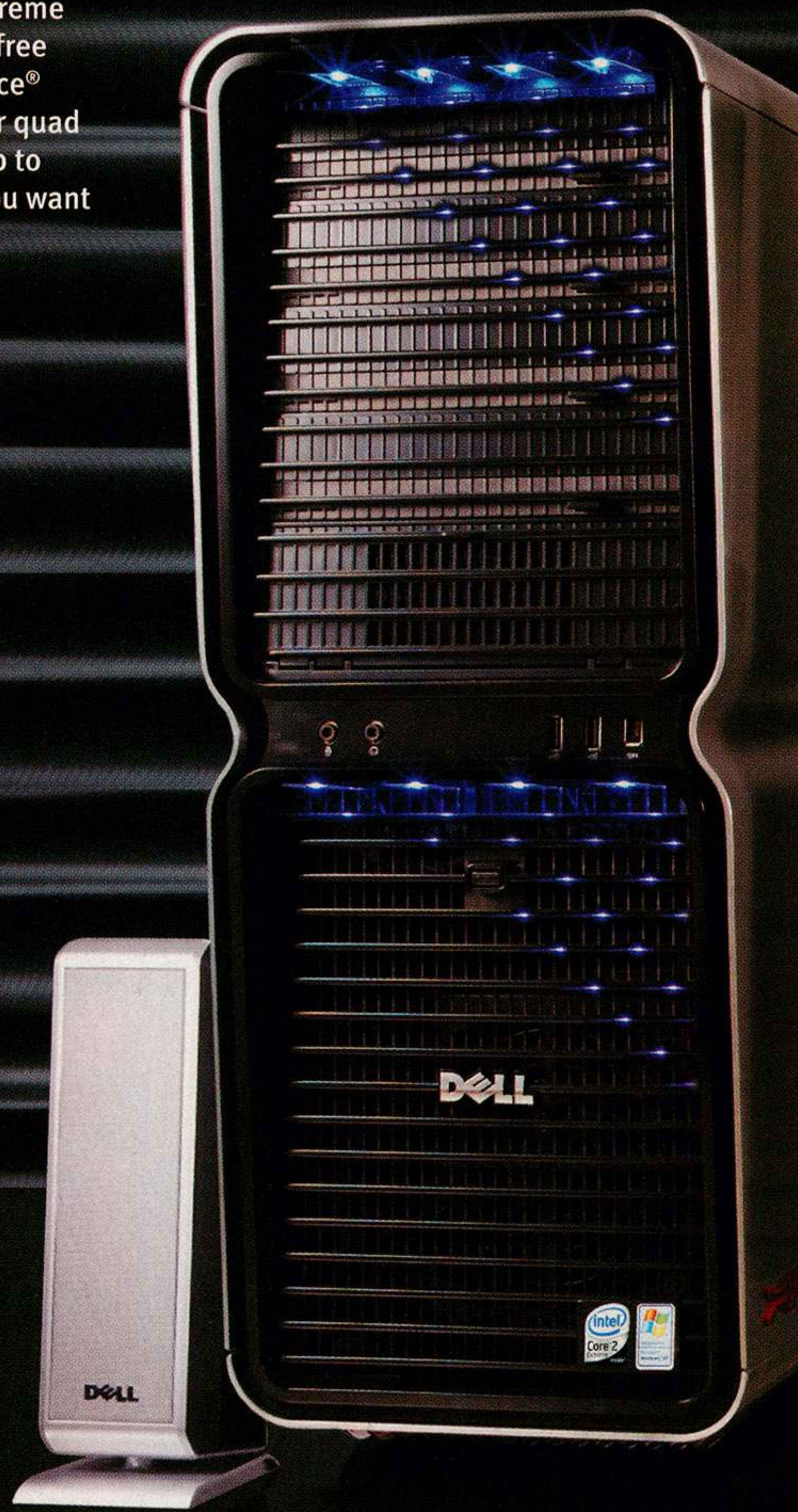
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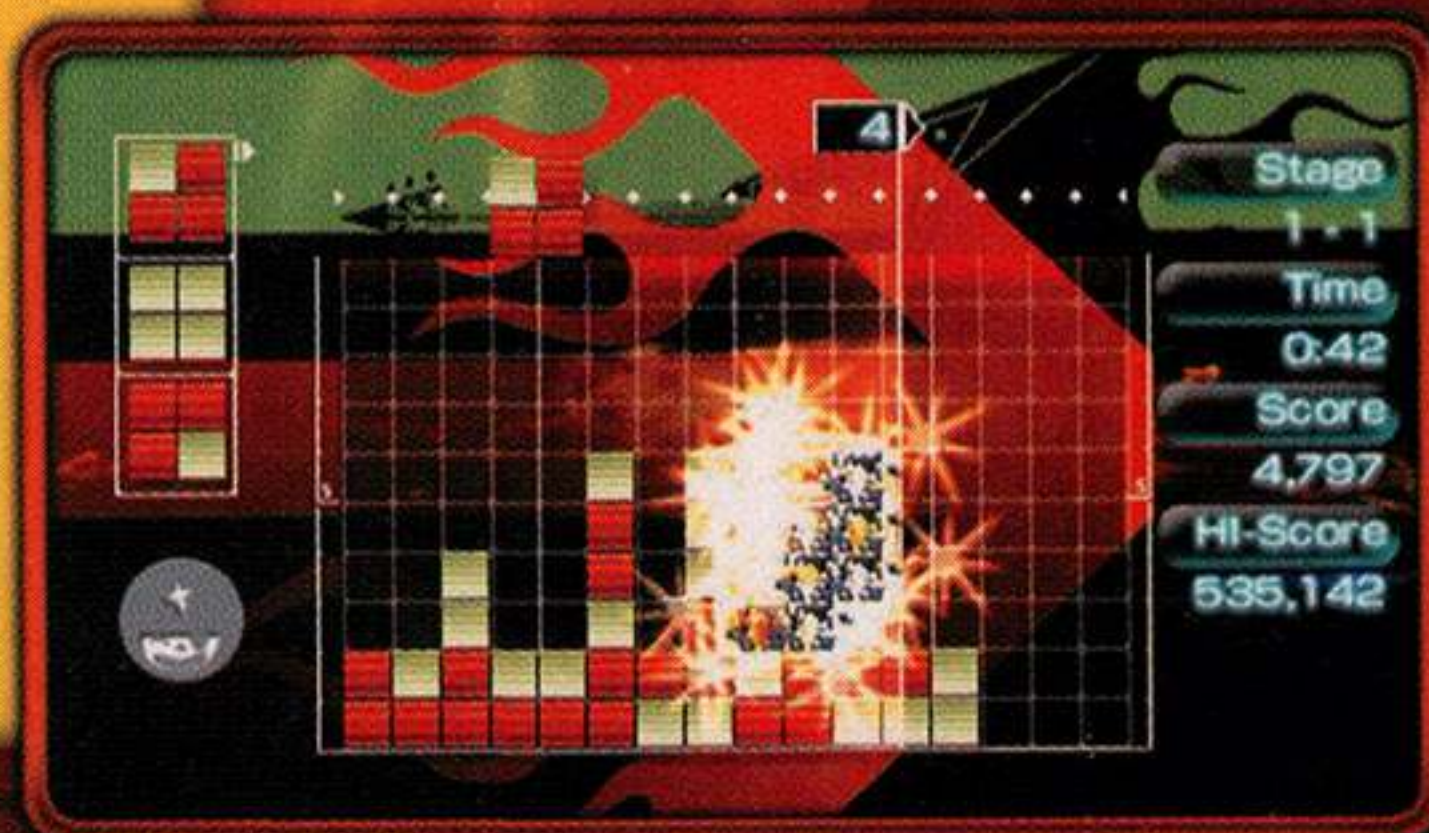
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GAMEPRO

FEBRUARY 2007

ISSUE #221

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FEATURES



ON THE COVER

30 | Mario: Man of the Year!

In this compilation of Nintendo games, we take a look at what Mario and his friends will be doing in 2007. Also starring Samus Aran, Link, Luigi, and other FOM (friends of Mario).

Cover art: Nintendo



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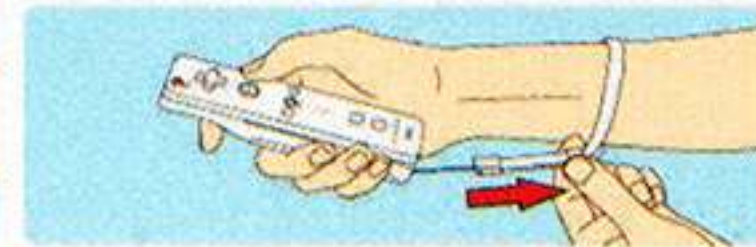
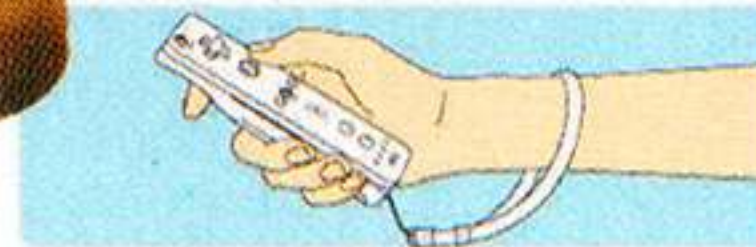
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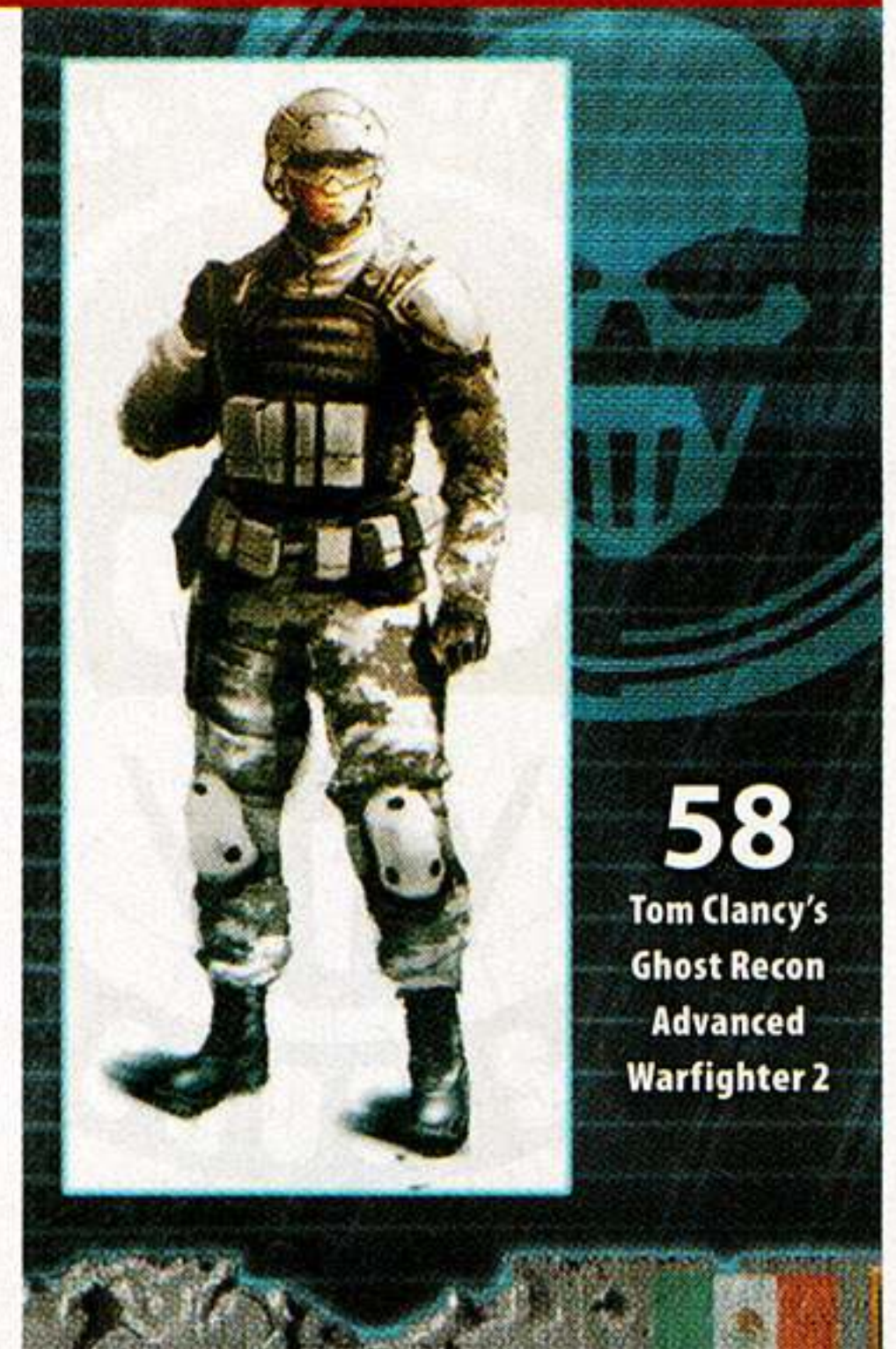
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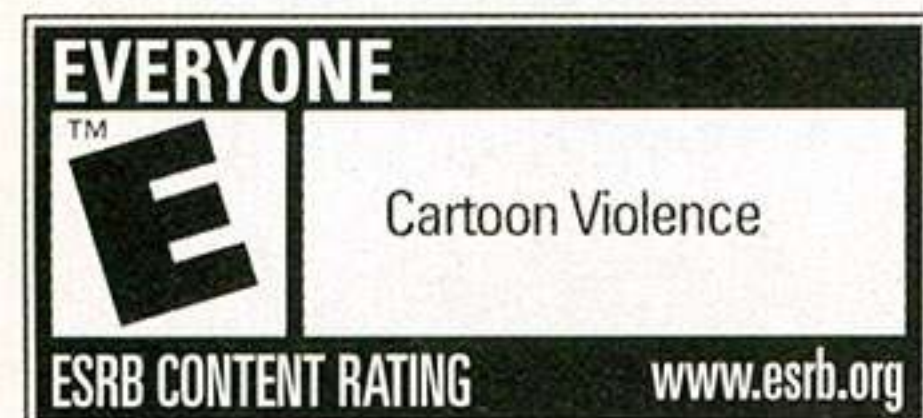


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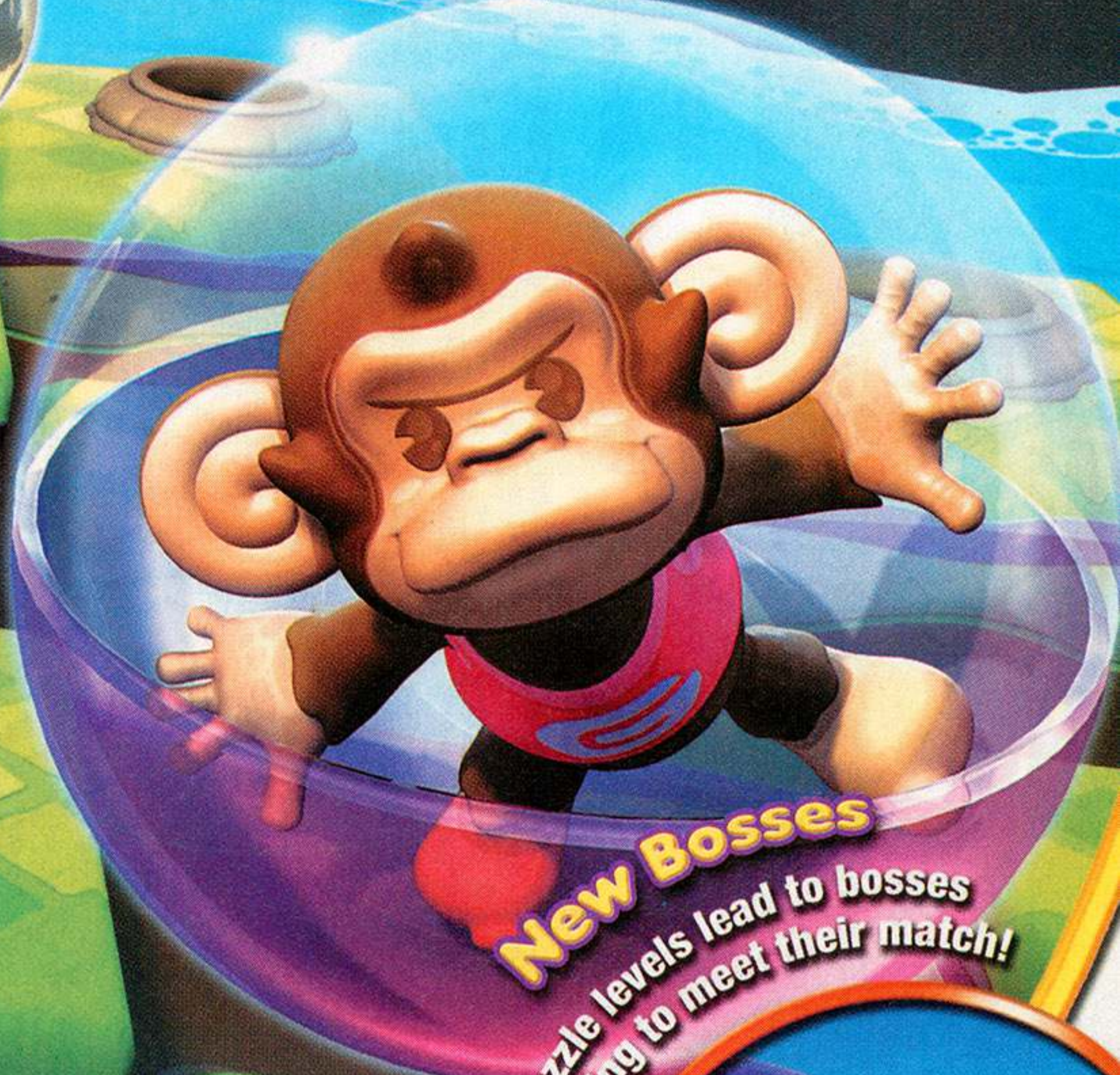


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HEAD 2 HEAD

Super Mario Returns

If there's any one video game personality who stands the test of time, "it's-a" Mario. So by (near) unanimous decision this issue the GamePros declare Mario—Man of the Year!

With games like Super Mario Galaxy and Super Smash Bros. Brawl on the horizon, Mario is preparing to have a big year. But it's also appropriate to acknowledge that for nearly 20 years the plucky Italian plumber has served as the happy-go-lucky front man for the prodigious video game minds at Nintendo.

It doesn't matter whether you bleed Xbox green or PlayStation "Blu," the fact of the matter is none of us would be around if it weren't for the Nintendo Entertainment System, which made the scene circa 1989. And even back then it is as with this new generation of consoles, it's the software that drives the hardware and Mario's always been in Nintendo's driver's seat.

Maybe the analysts, media pundits, and other assorted bean counters have Nintendo written down as "Number Three," but it took everything two mammoth electronics and computer conglomerates could muster and almost ten years to muscle their way into the fray against a company that just prides itself on making video games for people who enjoy playing video games. Nintendo and Mario have been holding their own with the little 8-bit Game Boy handheld for years, and now the DS and most recently the Wii are changing the way we play games with technology that's arguably just a step away from the GameCube.

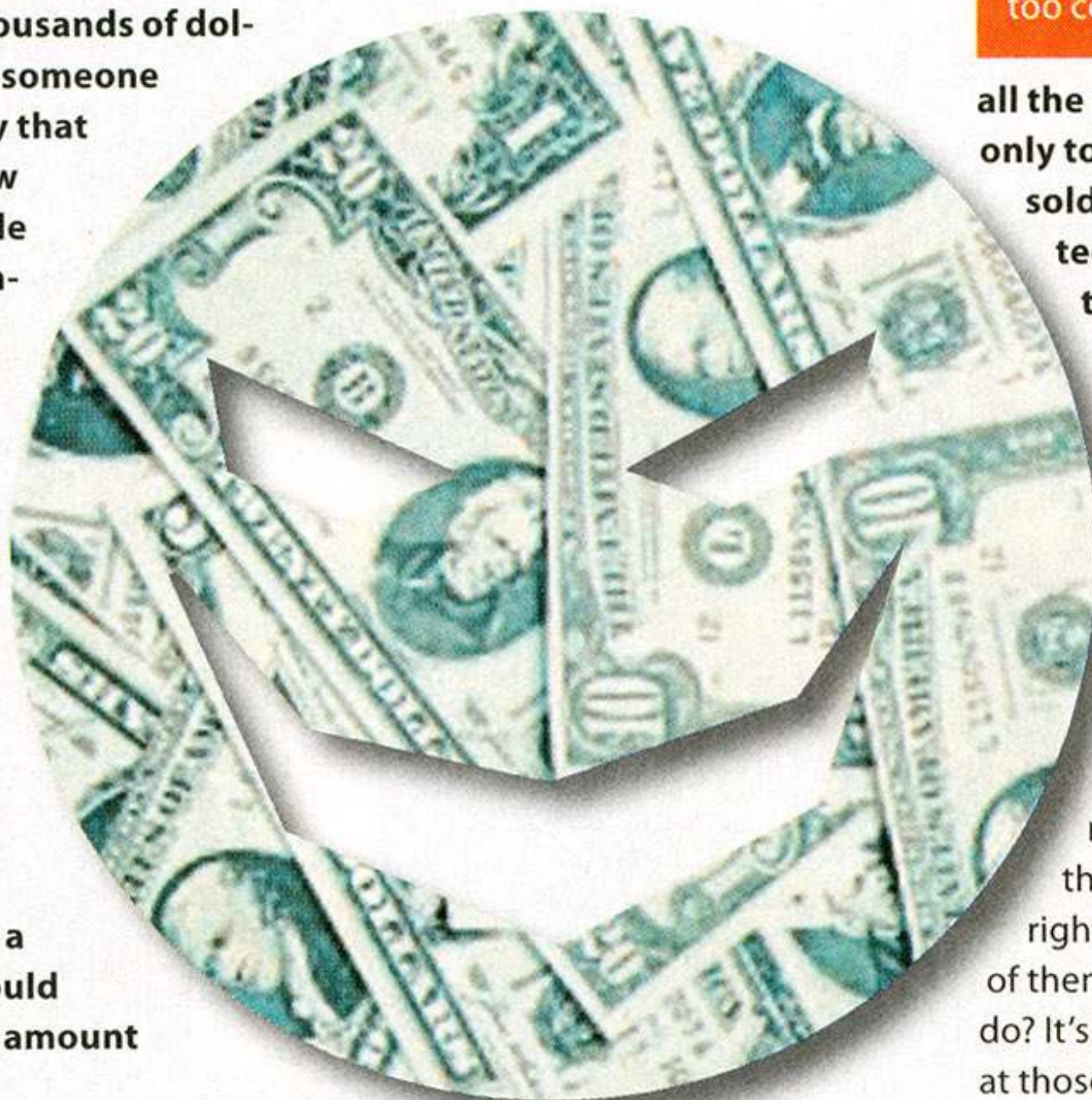
So our red caps are off to you, little funny-talking fix-it dude. Who would have thought that Nintendo could turn an Italian caricature into one of the most beloved video game characters in America. Have you ever tasted Japanese-style spaghetti or pizza? Yet, they obviously knew something about plumbing and making games.

The GamePros
San Francisco, CA

eBay, No Way

In the aftermath of the PS3 launch, I must say I wasn't surprised to see countless auctions of the new system on eBay. I was surprised, however, to see that prices were running past the thousands and into the tens of thousands of dollars. To think that someone would actually pay that much just for a new video game console is truly insane. I understand it's a hot new item, but at those prices most people would have had to mortgage their houses just to pay for the system. Why would someone actually go through all of the trouble to acquire a PS3 just so they could resell it for a huge amount

of money online? What do they plan to do with all that money? Go out and buy another PS3 to sell again? Simply put, this whole business of buying consoles just to resell them for very high prices is not only immoral, but also unfair to



all the people who wait to get one only to find the systems have been sold already to greedy profiteers. That means they have to wait even longer to get a PS3 because someone wanted to make a huge buck or two. Game consoles aren't for making money; they're for playing games!

► Rob Adair—Via Internet

Spoken like a true gamer but you should never underestimate the enterprising spirit of the American entrepreneur...alright—they're greedy buzzards all of them but what are you going to do? It's the people who buy systems at those outrageous prices to create a

demand in the first place who should be publicly flogged.

Bring Back the Bits

I'm 27-years-old and a diehard gamer; been one for quite some time. I was a gamer back when it was all about the "bits." You guys remember them? So, what "bit" era are we in now? Atari had 4 bits, followed by the NES with 8 bits. Then the infamous 16-bit wars—SNES versus Genesis—and then the 32/64-bit battles—PlayStation versus Saturn versus N64. Those battles of the "bits" were so fun to read about and they got me excited to buy a new system. The first time I played Battle Arena Toshinden, the first glimpse of

WIN A
PS3!



The writer of the most thought-provoking, enticing, interesting, amusing, or infuriating letter in the month of January will be chosen to win a PS3 game system! Winning letter will appear in the APRIL 07 issue. Good Luck!



By now everyone realizes that you're going to war, you'd better put some thought into what you're doing. Tim Pryce puts a historical perspective onto the imminent battle among next generation console systems for which he wins a GamePro Grab Bag of games and goodies.

In the Next-Gen War, Everybody Wins

PS3, Xbox360, or Wii? What about PS3, Xbox 360, and Wii? Having managed a video game store, I've witnessed heated discussions about console wars, and I've been asked which machine is the best many times. Usually, I'd answer: "They're all the best; now what are you buying?" Think about this: how many of you out there do not own an Xbox, a PS2, and a GameCube, or haven't at some point? Who cares which console is best? When Halo 2 came out, I'd have torched my other consoles to play it. I would have forsaken all but my PS2 for God of War. And I sold countless GameCubes to people who just had to play Resident Evil 4. So let's just admit it, we'll most likely get all three new machines eventually. The real question, however, isn't which console you will get, but which version of the game you'll buy if it isn't an exclusive.

► Tim Pryce—Via Internet

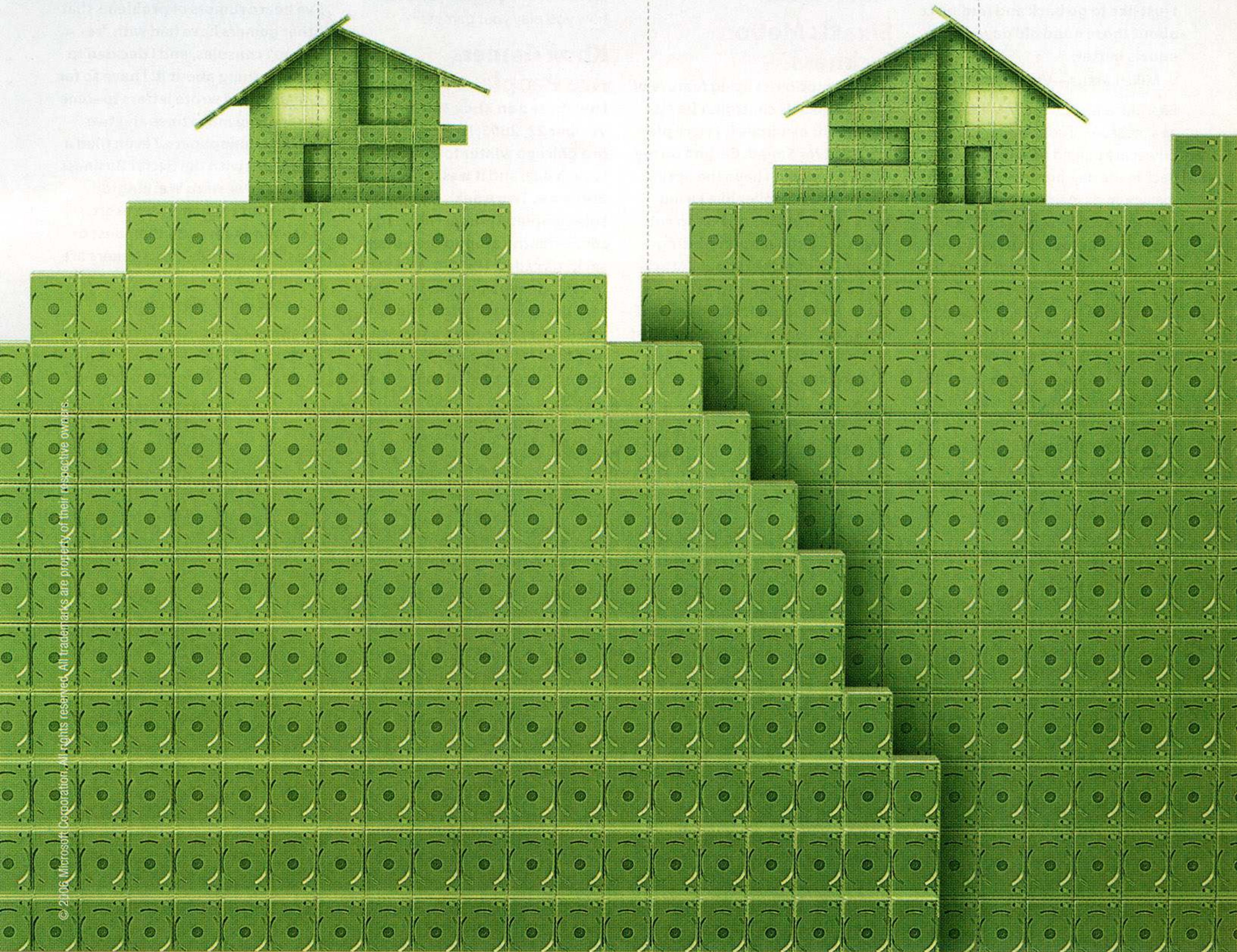
You have a point, Tim. A lot of us gamers do end up buying most, if not all, the major consoles out there. We may only own one console for a few years before breaking down and buying its competitor once that killer app is released. But don't expect these console wars to become a thing of the past. The allure of writing "Sony is the SUX!", "Nintendo is the Kiddie!", or "Micro\$oft will lose!" on the GamePro.com message boards is simply too compelling to ignore.

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Jump in.

 **XBOX 360™**

Mario 64, the first touchdown on NFL 2K; those moments will be remembered forever. Those breathtaking moments just weren't there for me between Xbox and Xbox 360 systems! So, are we still in the 128-bit era, or is it 256? I'm pretty sure that Sega's Dreamcast started the 128-bit machine craze, followed by the PlayStation 2, Xbox, and GameCube. Or am I wrong? Did the "bit" count stop there? Is the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 256 bit or what? Or does this not really matter anymore considering all that's in these new-gen powerhouses? What's the scoop on this? I'm very interested to know; I loved that era in gaming, and now it's gotten so complex and crazy that I just like to go back and reminisce about those good old days of bit equals better!

► Mike Lassus—Via Internet

Bits...how quaint. Sorry, Mike, bits as a measure of console computing power are indeed a thing of the past. Back in the day, bit size indicated the maximum base size of a single unit of data (called a "word") that a central processor could handle. However, after 64-bits the number of bits in a word had less impact on power. Factors as memory size, bandwidth, and clock speed affect processing much more significantly. Now all the next generation systems use parallel processing, and the PS3 even brings additional co-processors into the picture. The bit era was truly a blast and a time when game systems made evolutionary leaps forward, but it's time to move on.

A Shot(gun) in the Dark

Hey, GamePro, I've always loved the magazine, but I believe I found a misprint in one of your articles, specifically in issue # 218 November, 2006, on page 86, the preview about Kane & Lynch: Dead Men. In the screenshot of the game there is a male holding a gun. The quote says "...there's nothing like the cold steel of a double-barreled shotgun". Now, the gun in the picture is a SPAS 12, also known as a Special Purpose Automatic Shotgun. This shotgun was made back in 1979, and it's been in almost every video game including Halo, Halo 2, GTA, Hitman, etc. The rea-

son why the gun may look like a "double-barreled" shotgun is because of the 8-chamber cylinder under the barrel. The funny thing about the SPAS 12 in all the movies and games is that the guns fires in both single and semi-auto, but everyone pumps the gun. Just thought you'd like to know

► Anthony—Via Internet

Yes, but can you hunt ducks with it? Thanks for the correction, Anthony. Even after having played all those games here at GamePro HQ, we still couldn't make the distinction between the SPAS and a double-barreled shotgun. For that reason, we appreciate the info and applaud your knowledge of firearms, albeit from a nice, safe distance.

Sixaxis Motion Sickness

Will the motion-sensing feature of the PS3 Sixaxis controller be optional? For example, if I were playing Need for Speed: Carbon on my new PS3, would I have the option to use the controller like I used to use the DualShock 2 or do you have to use the motion sensing feature to play the game? I'm asking because the only time I really get to play games is when I get off work, and I enjoy the luxury of just being able to play some Madden '07 for a couple hours and rest. The

last thing I want is to have to pick up a controller and wiggle my arms and wrists for an extended period of time just to play a game. Please tell me that PS3 games will have an option to turn off the motion sensors, so I can just play games like I've always played them.

► Adam Murphy—Via Internet

There's no hard and fast answer to this one, Adam. It's up to developers to make the Sixaxis feature optional. However, every game that features motion-sensing controls, from Blazing Angels to NHL 2K7, can just as easily be played without the motion. Undoubtedly, Sony doesn't want to alienate traditional gamers, so it stands to reason that any game using motion sensing will let you decide how you play your games.

Xbox Gamers Are People

I purchased an Xbox 360 on November 22, 2005. I waited 14 hours in a Chicago winter to buy one on launch day, and it was worth it up until now. Two week's ago my console completely died. I noticed some melting around the power socket. I called 1-800-4MY-XBOX to arrange repair of the 360. They sent me a shipping box, and two weeks later I received a replacement console that was filthy and had no power cords. I called Micro-

soft again to ask where the cords were and the service rep said there was a mistake and that the cords were on their way. So, I borrowed my brother's cord to make sure the console worked, and guess what, it didn't. I called Microsoft yet again to ask what was going on, this time another guy told me that there was an internal memory failure and that the console needed repair. The service rep offered me a free copy of Kameo for my trouble, which I declined. I said, "Look, man, all I want is for my console to work." So he arranged for another shipping box to be sent to try this whole thing again; that was five days ago. I've called a dozen times since then and no one will help me. I've heard rumors of problems that other gamers have had with "repaired" consoles, and I decided to do something about it. I have so far e-mailed and wrote letters to some other game magazines and two Chicago newspapers. I even filed a complaint with the Better Business Bureau in western Washington. I'm not out to shame Microsoft, I just want them to do their best to quash these problems. Gamers are people, too!

► James Gall—Via Internet

It's always unfortunate when you get the short end of the stick with a game console. Microsoft had plenty

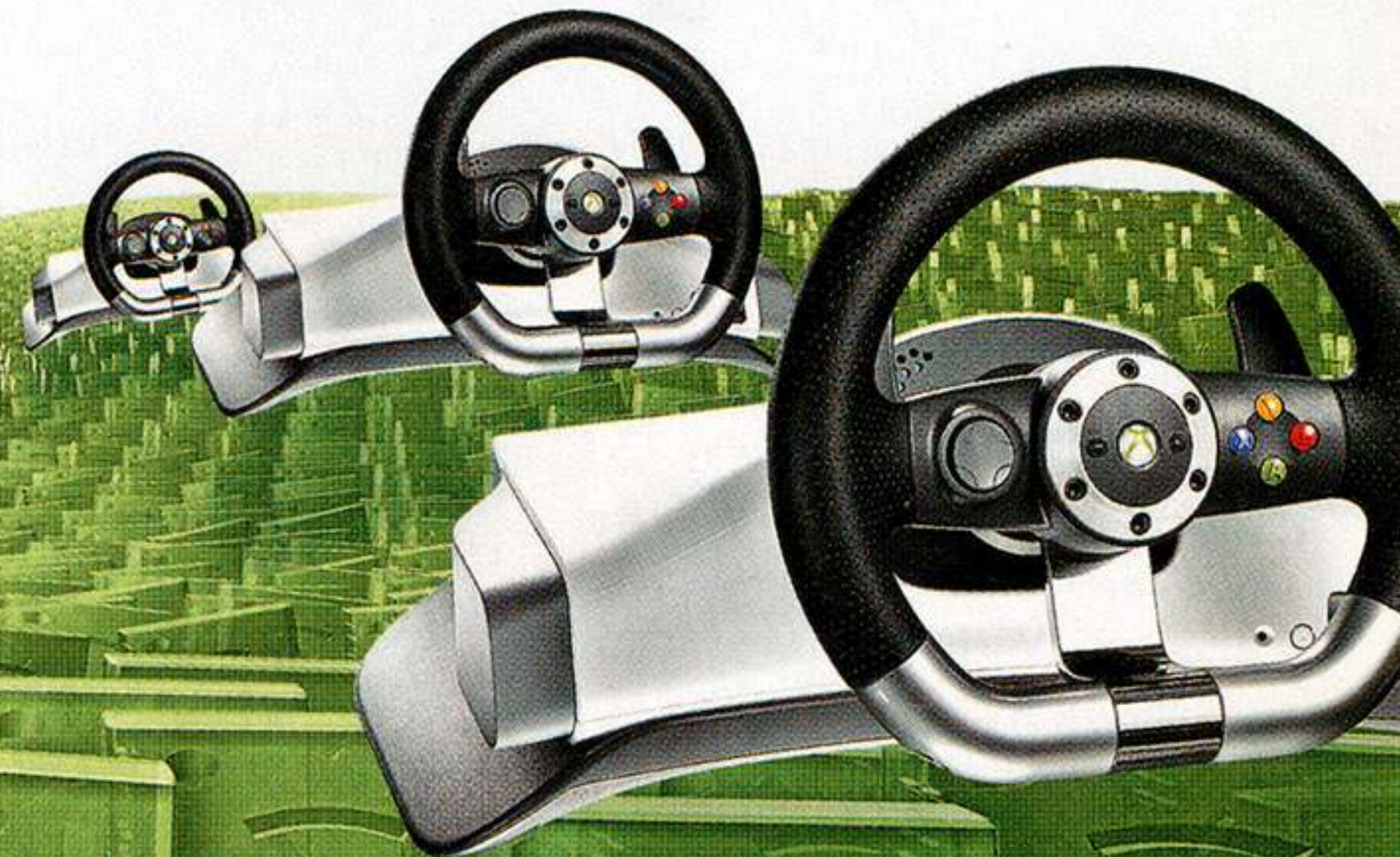




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 XBOX 360™

HEAD 2 HEAD

of trouble with its initial batch of consoles back in November of 2005 and was somewhat slow to respond to the rather uncommon problems then, too. Still, it seems to be the fact with almost all console launches, and we'd eat all of the stray N-Gages around in our office if Sony, and to a much lesser extent Nintendo, didn't face similar problems in the coming months.

A Simple Request

Final Fantasy VII was and still is one of my favorite games. I was excited when they came out with the movie and even more excited when they came out with Dirge of Cerberus for the PlayStation 2. This got me thinking, Square Enix should remake the original Final Fantasy VII. It was such an awesome game that they won't need

to change it much, except for the graphics and maybe add some voice-overs. Will Square Enix make my dream come true?

► Chayce Ybarrondo—Via Internet

You're certainly not the only one, Chayce. Plenty of people are chomping at the bit for a remake of what is easily considered the most popular Final Fantasy in the franchise. Of course, Square Enix did no one any favors when they released a remake of the introduction to Final Fantasy VII with PlayStation 3-level graphics, stating that it was purely a demonstration and not intended to mean they were remaking the game. But honestly, Square Enix isn't fooling anyone. Remaking a game with such a large and rabidly obsessed fanbase with vastly improved graphics is money in the bank.

FINAL FANTASY VII™

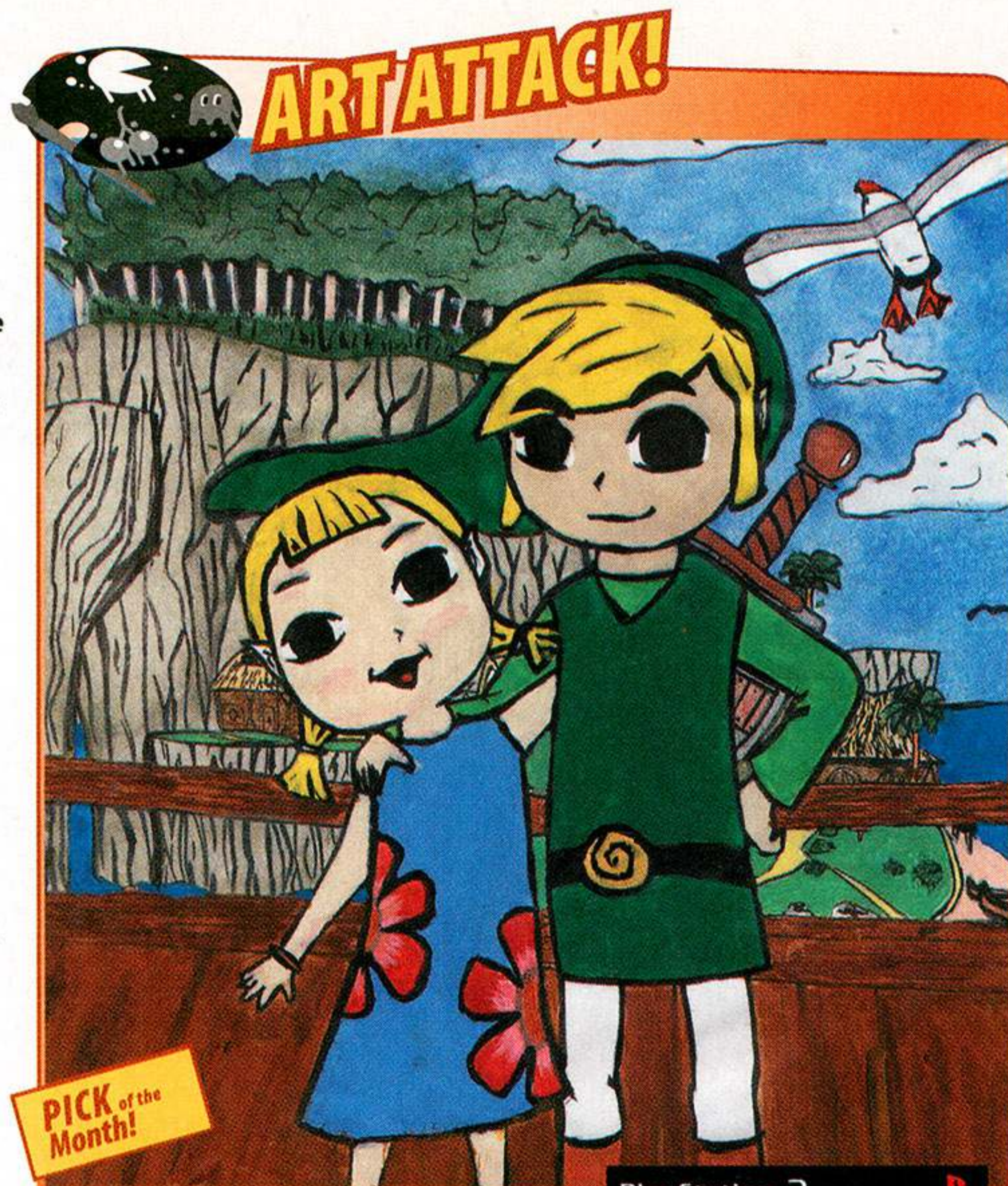


Freebird Rocks!

I found a mistake in the December 2006 issue preview of Guitar Hero II. It says "Freebird" by "Lynard Skynard." The band's name is actually "Lynyrd Skynyrd." Now, where's my money?

► Bmxrlou—Via Internet

Your money is in your pants, just dig deep. Jeez, you old school Southern rockers take your music seriously. You get no cash, but we'll give you a big fat No Prize if you know why the band called itself "Lynyrd Skynyrd" in the first place.



Maribel E. Rivera—Tampa, FL

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Ask the Pros

You ask, we answer. Maybe 2D games can make a comeback, but here's something to consider about HDTVs.



Mr. Marbles
Sony



Ahoy_and_Avast
Microsoft



Rice Burner
Nintendo



Vicious Sid
PC



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Major Mike
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Question of the Month

Is HDTV for Me?

Q: Should I buy an Xbox 360 if I don't have an HDTV?—*Sinaguapride*

A: While any game benefits from a big screen and high resolution, only a few titles are really the worse for being played on a standard-definition TV. Dead Rising's text is notoriously small, for example. Thankfully, you can usually download a demo of a 360 game from Xbox Live before you decide if you want it—and you can rent the games that don't have demos. If you do decide to get an HDTV, be on the lookout for one that supports 1080p via component cables. Not many of them do, but it's the only way you'll get the best possible screen resolution with the Xbox 360, since it doesn't support HDMI like the PS3. 1080p is also very nice to have if you later decide to get the HD DVD player.—*TMac*

But as far as gameplay goes, I would say that Resistance's multiplayer mode has more of a TimeSplitters feel, simply because of the way the game is designed. TimeSplitters and Resistance are both big on imaginative weaponry and the levels are laid out in similar fashion. Halo has creative weapons, but it's more of a straightforward deathmatch-style game.

That said, it's still hard to really compare Resistance to either of these two games, as you'll surely find—if you can get your hands on a PS3—that it's like nothing you've ever played.—*Mr. Marbles*

Will Wii Graphics Compete?

Q: Will the Wii's graphics be comparable to the PS3 and Xbox 360's or are they inferior? I want a Wii, but I also want good graphics. Can I get both?—*Baseballer 09*

A: Nintendo has said all along that cutting-edge graphics and bleeding-edge CPU power isn't the focus with the Wii, and from what we've seen so far, they're right. Twilight Princess is the lone exception but Excite Truck, Wii Sports, Tony Hawk's Downhill Jam, and Call of Duty 3 aren't exactly going to make the PS3 and Xbox 360 cower with fear. Twilight Princess looks amazing because of its stellar art direction and design. But compare that to Call of Duty 3 with its gritty, realistic visual style, which is probably more impressive on the Xbox 360 and the PS3.

Still, the Wii's strengths lie in its innovative control scheme, and anyone who's actually spent quality time with the Wii will agree that, while the graphics won't blow you away, you'll be too busy having fun to really notice. Unless you're a tech-snob, you'll probably be okay with what the Wii can produce visually. It doesn't compete with the PS3 and Xbox 360 on a hardware power level, but it will still have great-looking games.—*Ahoy_and_Avast*



Waiting for the Real Samus

Q: Does Nintendo have any plans to make a real Metroid game in the near future? Don't get me wrong, I like the Metroid Prime games, but I want a return to the classic Metroid style. I hate to say it, but if Nintendo doesn't do something soon I'm going to lose interest and move on to other games.

—*PhaStaPlayer*

A: It's a shame, isn't it, PhaStaPlayer? I'm right there with you in wanting a return to the old school 2D side-scrolling action of the original Metroid and the fantastic Super Metroid on the SNES.

You know what other game franchise needs to go back to 2D? Castlevania. Symphony of the Night, which is coming to Xbox Live Arcade soon, was one of the greatest games ever made for any console. Period.

So how did Konami follow it up? By releasing some craptastic 3D games like Curse of Darkness. Sure, games like Portrait of Ruin are keeping the 2D vampire busting action going on the DS but I want, nay, I demand a full-fledged sequel to Symphony on the PS2 or

PS3 now! Heck, I'd even take one on the PSP, if I could.

The same goes for Metroid. The DS games are great but the Prime games, not so much. I know that'll probably make me unpopular with the Nintendo fanboys but I just didn't care for the Prime series.

I don't know why developers aren't making more 2D games, PhaStaPlayer. Part of the reason, I guess, is that gamers demand cutting edge products and the unfortunate perception is that 2D is yesterday's news. Also, production costs may play a role. I'm guessing economics (as related to actually creating a 2D game versus a 3D game) is partly responsible for it as well.

It's a sad situation but companies will always follow the money, so here's to hoping that the success of Symphony on Xbox Live Arcade along with the success of the old-school Metroid games on Wii Virtual Console will convince some developers to go back to their 2D ways.—*Ahoy_and_Avast*

Resistance: Fall of Bots?

Q: Does Resistance utilize bots in its online and offline multiplayer modes? I mean, will it be more like TimeSplitters or Halo?—*Comatanilla*

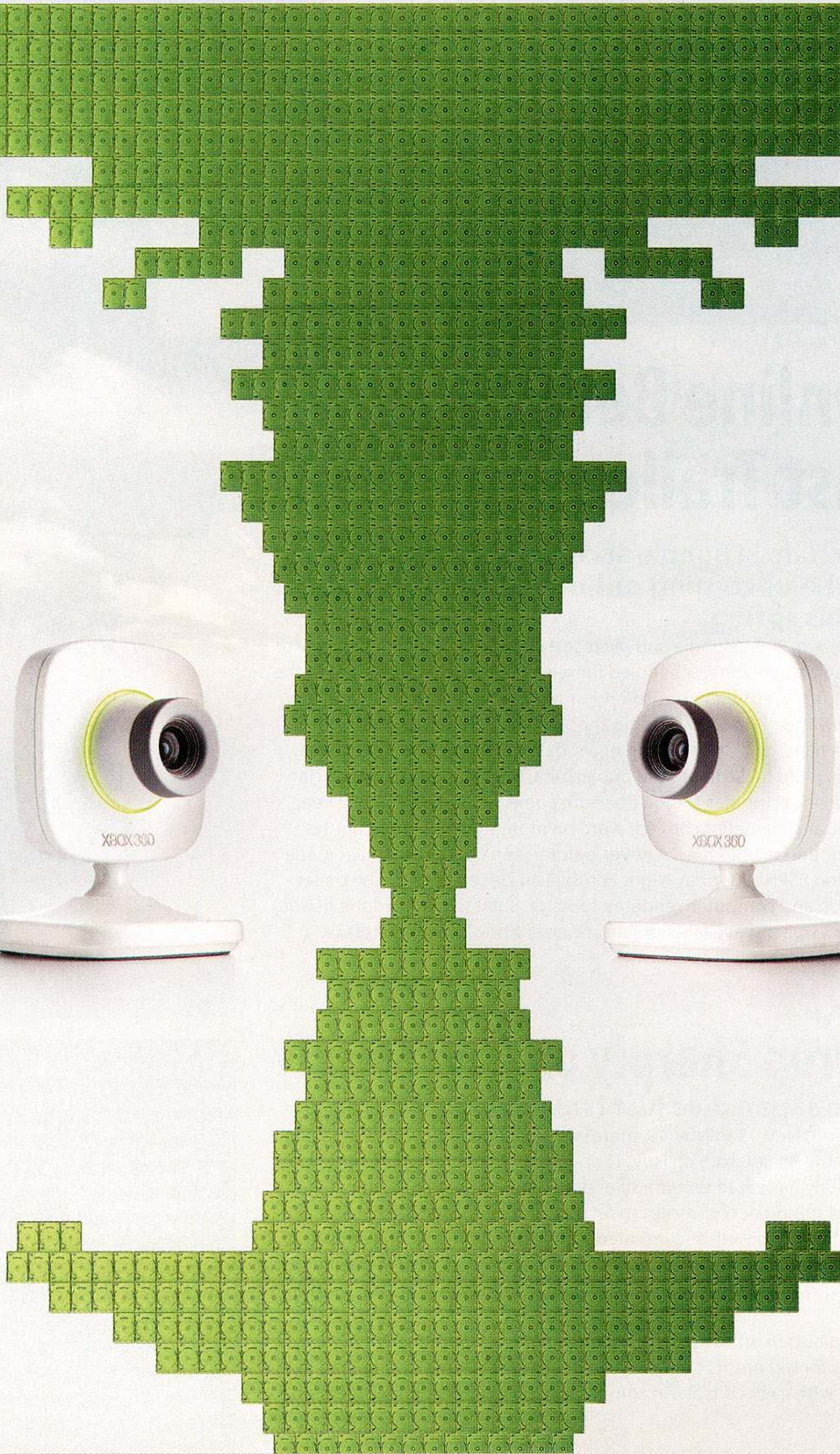
A: No, there are no bots in Resistance: Fall of Man, and for good reason. The game supports a whopping 40-players online, and even Vicious Sid is raving about how buttery smooth online play runs. Of course, because all players are real humans, there is no need for bots. The same goes for offline mode, but the games are much smaller. Because offline multiplayer runs via split-screen, the games get scaled down for four or fewer players.



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Master Chief struts his stuff on national TV.

Halo 3 Online Beta, Broadcast Trailer

Be the first to play Halo 3! Bungie and Microsoft have opened registration for the upcoming online multiplayer beta of Halo 3, due out this spring.

Beginning December 4th, 2006, Bungie and Microsoft opened up the first signups for the Halo 3 public multiplayer beta, scheduled for release this spring. Halo fans in the U.S. and Europe got first stab at an opportunity to sign up for the free online stress test of the eagerly awaited Xbox 360 flagship shooter. The bad news: not surprisingly, available slots filled up fast. The good news: despite Microsoft's statements that only "select members" would make it into the public beta, the company has since clarified that there will be more opportunities to sign up yet to come. Cross your fingers! Keep your peepers on Halo3.com, and GamePro.com, for word on more sign-up opportunities.

But there's more news for thirsty Halo fans. A never-before-seen 60-second trailer made its broadcast premiere during ESPN's Monday Night Football on December 4th. The trailer contained a mix of live action and computer-rendered footage. But if you missed the debut, don't stress—the new Halo 3 trailer is available online and over Xbox Live Marketplace.



PS3 Sales Drop Sharply on Low Supply

Sales of the PS3 in Japan dive just two days after launch.

During the seven days from Nov. 13 to Nov. 19, there were just under 45,000 PS3s sold in Japan, compared with the 88,000 sold on Nov. 11 and Nov. 12, according to figures published by Enterbrain. Sony has yet to provide sales estimates for the PlayStation 3, but said that it is continuously shipping new consoles to retailers in Japan and the US.

This sales plunge is mostly due to well-documented supply problems that have strained Sony's ability to manufacture the high-tech next-gen console. Shortages of blue-laser diodes, a critical part of the PS3's Blu-ray drive, ultimately forced Sony to radically scale back its PS3 launch plans.

PS3 game sales have also gotten off to a slow start, too, in part because many early buyers simply resold their consoles for big profits online. In the U.S., retailer GameStop said an average of 1.5 games were sold with each console. In comparison, nearly three games were sold with every Nintendo Wii.



Violence, Exploitation Mar PS3 U.S. Launch

As hardcore gamers struggled to find scarce PlayStation 3s in U.S. retail stores, reports of sporadic violence broke out across the U.S. and Canada. Some "highlights:"

- A Putnam, Connecticut man was shot after confronting two armed men who were trying to rob those in line.
 - Security guards lost control of nearly 400 people waiting for the PS3 at Boston's Copley Place Mall.
 - An 18-year old North Carolina college student, suspected of stealing two new PS3s, was shot and killed by police who had attempted to apprehend him.
- Further details were unavailable at press time; see GamePro.com for more coverage.



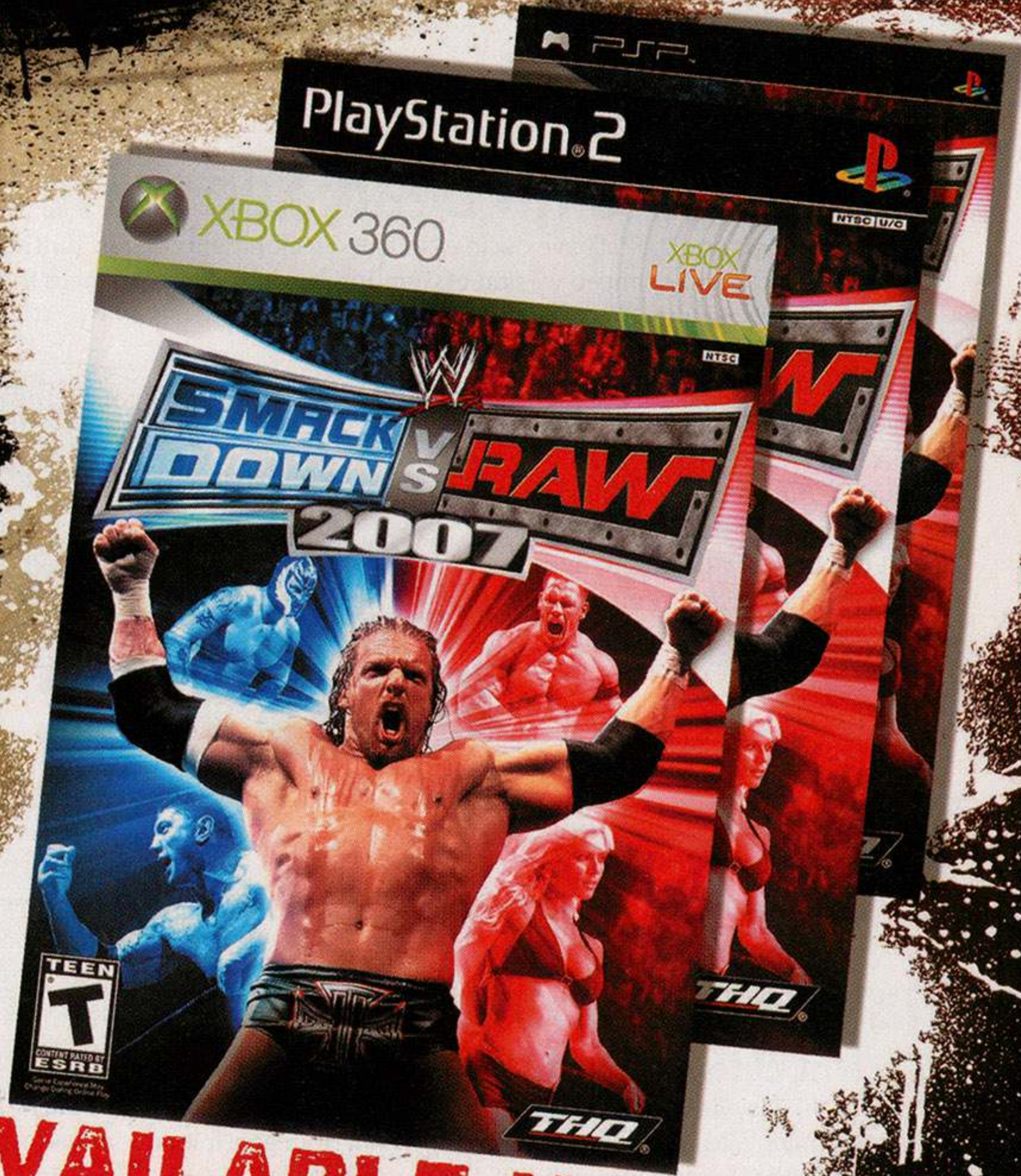
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Nintendo Urges Safety in Response to Wii Accidents

A group of frustrated Wii customers set up a site, WiiHaveAProblem.com, to document damage caused by rogue Wii controllers flying through the air. The site contains testimonials and quite a few pictures of shattered windows and smashed plasma TVs. The majority of the complaints revolve around the Wii Remote's safety strap, which is designed to keep the controller safely in a player's grasp. In some well-documented cases, that strap has broken following vigorous movement.

In response to the complaints, Nintendo of America updated their customer service site, urging customers to "take a few minutes to review some important safety information." The illustrated guide reiterates the warnings shown in the manual: wear the safety strap, hold the Remote firmly, and give yourself plenty of space.

On the issue of defective Remote cords, Nintendo has yet to issue any word of a recall or replacement program.



Gran Turismo HD Dead; Long Live GT5

Sony and Polyphony Digital have decided to halt development of Gran Turismo HD, the heavily updated 1080p-enhanced version of Gran Turismo 4, and instead focus their attention on a true sequel of the franchise in Gran Turismo 5.

Though Polyphony Digital has set development aside for GT HD, a "concept demo" will be available for download on the 24th of December that will allow gamers to try out ten cars and a single track of the game. Future downloadable demos are also a possibility. There's still no news, however, on the heavily delayed PSP installment of Gran Turismo.



PLAYSTATION® 4

PlayStation 4: Sooner Than You Think?

PS4? Not at least until 2010, says Sony.

Though the PlayStation 3 has barely launched, there's already talk of a PlayStation 4, according to Sony's Vice President of Technology, Paul Holman. Holman clarified with SmartHouse of Sydney that Sony will launch a PS4, but no sooner than 2010. "To say that there will be no PS4 because of [recent management changes within SCEI] is a bit far fetched," said Holman.

According to Holman, it's too soon to be speaking of the PS4 as game developers are just discovering that the PS3 has "more processing headroom than they initially anticipated." Holman also said that Sony plans to release a series of firmware upgrades, similar to the PSP, that will enable the PS3 to become more media-center oriented and allow for third-party applications and hardware "such as interactive controllers" like the Nintendo Wii Remote.

PS3 Development Costs Pinch Profits

Namco Bandai's President, Takeo Takasu, told Bloomberg that it must sell at least 500,000 copies in order to recoup its development losses. He went on to say that Namco's PS3 launch games Ridge Racer 7 and Mobile Suit Gundam: Crossfire are "selling well," though actual figures are conspicuously absent from the report.

Gears of War Sells 1 Million Copies

Just three weeks after launch, Xbox 360 marquee shooter Gears of War crosses the crucial one-million unit mark worldwide.

Other key facts:

- 850,000 players logged by Xbox Live
- 10 million gameplay sessions
- 7 million achievement points unlocked
- Xbox Live Gold subscriptions up by 50 percent



Marcus Fenix and the gang enjoy some well-deserved R-and-R.

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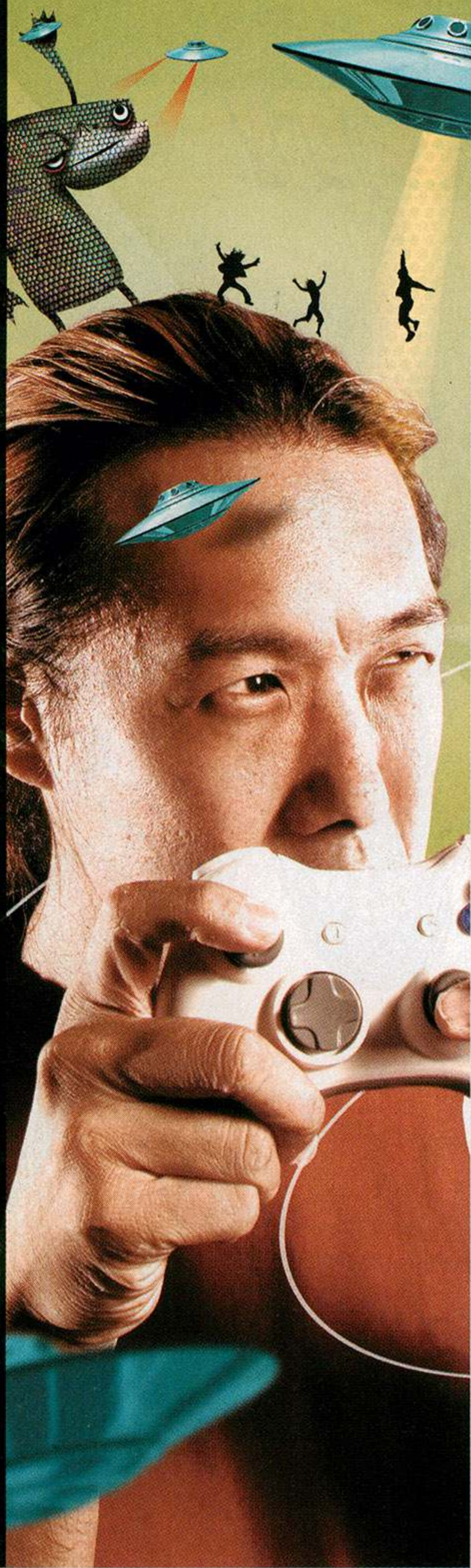


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LOADING

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Release Date
Up in the Air

Nintendo of America President Reggie Fils-Aime told an MTV reporter to expect Super Mario Galaxy sometime between March of 2007 and Christmas of 2007. Though this technically doesn't represent a delay (Mario Galaxy never had an official release date), this new could throw a screwball at Nintendo's early success with the Wii. Traditionally, Nintendo has lived and died on their first-party games, but with Metroid Prime 3: Corruption and Mario Galaxy over the horizon in 2007, the company will have to rely almost solely on The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess to quench the thirst of devoted N-heads.

Fils-Aime also mentioned the Wii's strong sales: 600,000 units in just eight days in the US. The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess also sold phenomenally well with 450,000 units, nearly one for every console sold. Other top sellers are Madden NFL 07, Rayman: Raving Rabbids, Trauma Center: Second Opinion, and Red Steel.



PRONEWS

Mobile Games That Don't Suck

It seems like there are hundreds of mobile games released every month, but only a few of them are great. So how do you separate the bad from the good? Enter GamePro Mobile. Each month, our expert mobile gamer—Justin Davis, the Editor in Chief of mobile gaming site Modojo.com—will select the Top 10 titles of the month. Enjoy!

1) Super KO Boxing (Glu Mobile)

Punch your way through over 12 over-the-top opponents as you pick apart their attack patterns and counter-attack in this Punch-Out homage.

2) NOM (Gamevil)

Flip your phone sideways or even upside down as Nom runs up the walls and ceiling, avoiding pits and other obstacles. Watch out—it's more addictive than it appears.

3) Traffic Mayhem (Gamevil)

Controlling traffic has never been more fun. As a traffic cop, keep your four-way intersection clear and accident-free by controlling who goes and who sits.

4) Sudden Strike (Living Mobile)

Who knew that the real time strategy genre could work so well on cellphones? Living Mobile's control innovations make this one a winner.

5) Extreme Hangman (SkyZone)

This animated stick figure avoids more than the

noose, including zombie invasions and other "extreme" situations. Word categories like Comics and Movies keep things fun.

6) Super Pac-Man (Namco)

Super Pac Man is far from a lazy retro port. Super Pac Man scores bonus points for including new mazes, new power-ups, and new modes for the Pac-elite to explore.

7) Pirates of the Caribbean
Multiplayer (mDisney)

16-player ship-to-ship multiplayer battles available in our pockets at all times? Who could say no? This one has been a major productivity-killer around the office.

8) ATV Offroad Fury (Glu Mobile)

ATV shares more in common with Nintendo's classic Excitebike than the console & PSP ATV Offroad titles. For mobile phones, this is a good thing.

9) Rollercoaster Rush
(Digital Chocolate)

As a rollercoaster brakeman, it's your job to give riders the thrill of their life, while avoiding all the pesky death and destruction that comes with riding *too* fast.

10) Galaxy on Fire (Fishlabs)

A space shooter nearly without equal, Galaxy on Fire features fluid animation, intuitive controls, an impressive amount of detail, and excellent longevity.

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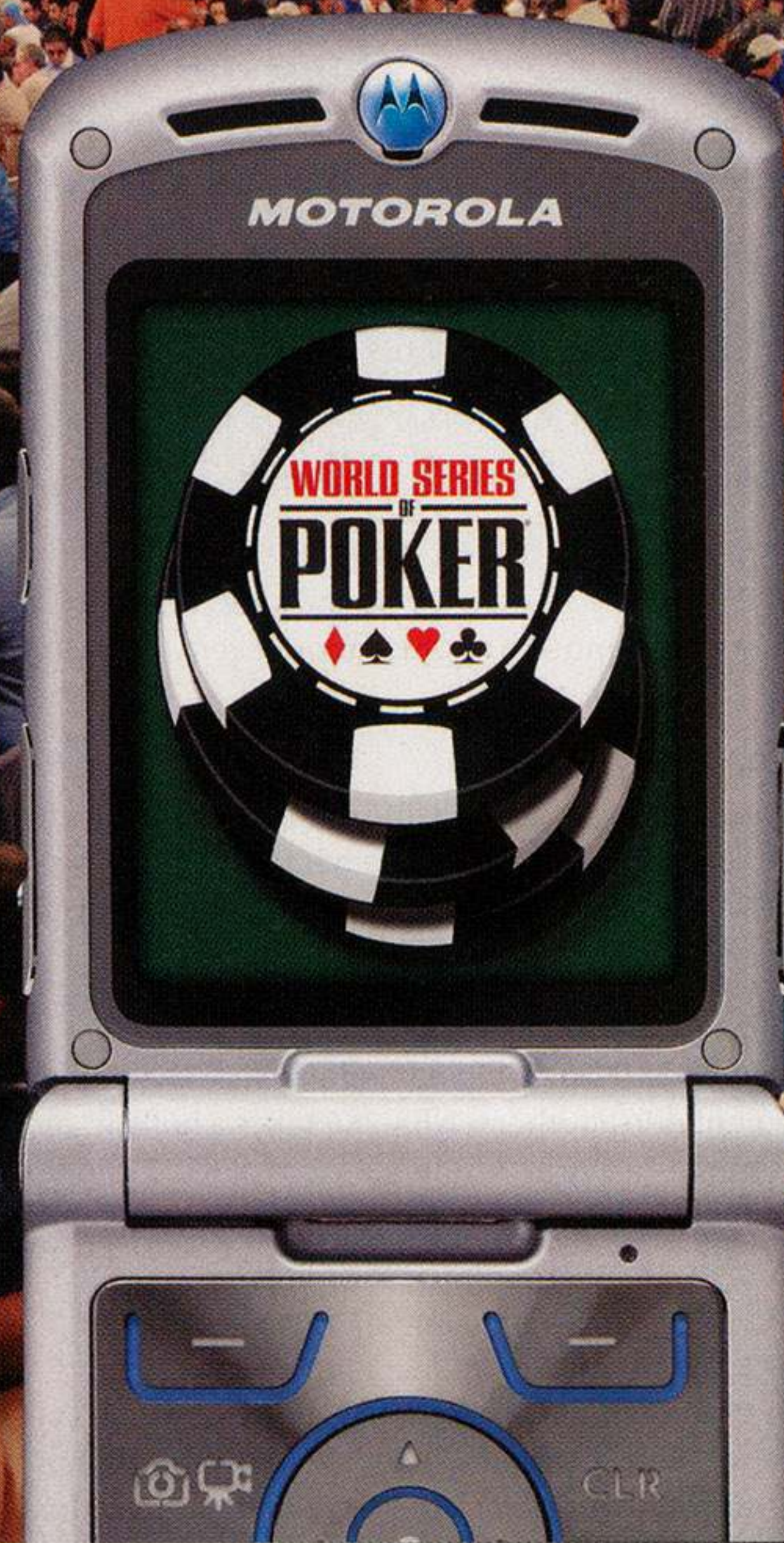
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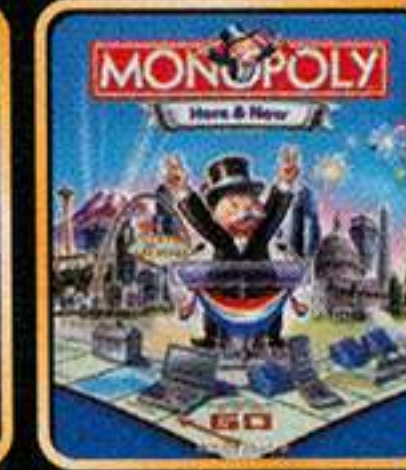
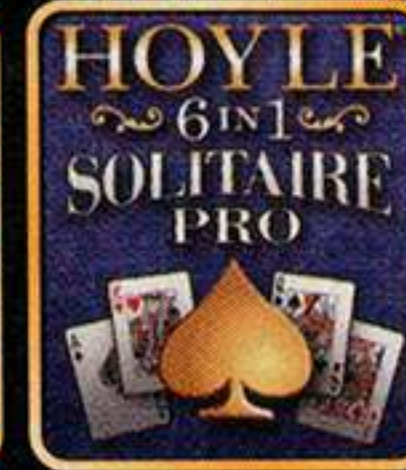
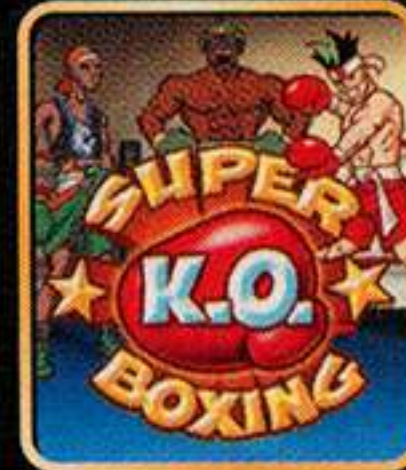
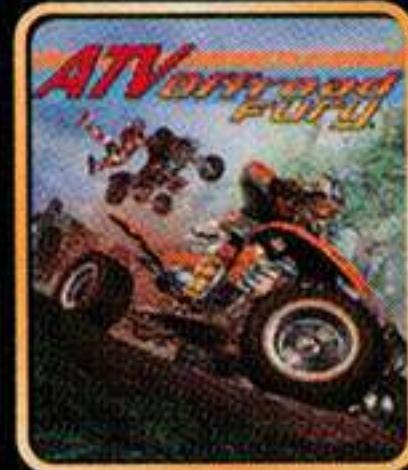
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The 10 Best Hip-Hop Game Soundtracks

While the film and game industries have been attempting to mate for a while, the music biz has largely stayed within its historical confines. Here is a choice selection of the best hip-hop music in video games yet.

10) Scarface: The World Is Yours (PlayStation 2)

We have a thick review guide from the publisher that lists every single track and performer, and we can tell you that it is just the tip of the iceberg. In the game, you'll be able to choose mix tapes that corral everything into the 1983 film's soundtrack, genre playlists, or custom goodness.

9) Def Jam Fight for NY (Xbox)

Not only is FFNY a who's-who on the soundtrack, but these loc'd out luminaries are characters in the game. The sequel to Vendetta has just about every name that someone like Russell Simmons could call on for a favor.

8) Saints Row (Xbox 360)

Over 40 hip-hop tracks are packed into Saint's Row, not including unlockables—and that's just a slice of the action. You could play the whole game and never get tired of this heaping plate of rhythmic goodness. And unlike the GTA games, the music keeps going when you're outside a vehicle, so your thug life never loses steam.

7) NBA 2K6 (Xbox)

While other soundtracks pick big names and stick them on the same disc—no matter how little they may complement one another—NBA 2K6 takes a holistic and aggressively underground tack. There's the moody, sample-heavy instrumental work of RJD2 and the genre blending of Blackalicious to help this one from looking like "just another rap album."

6) Marc Ecko's Getting Up: Contents Under Pressure (PlayStation 2)

Rhymefest might not ring a bell, but he was the guy who collaborated with Kanye West for "Jesus Walks," one of those radio songs you'll recognize within moments (he also won a Grammy for it); then he put out his first album. Meanwhile, his fellow hip-hoppers are wrecking the mic and dropping knowledge in equal measure.



5) NBA Live 2003 (Xbox)

This is the game soundtrack that went platinum. And when you see the talent on board, that's not a surprise. It's also quite a trip to hear Snoop Dogg speaking directly to the game, instead of spitting game. Fabolous already had one major-label album under his belt, but Live 2003 helped prove he wasn't just a 15-minute sensation.

4) Madden NFL 2004 (PlayStation 2)

EA Sports has done well with capturing a cross-section of popular music. The cover of the box might be cursed, but almost all the artists on the soundtrack have gotten a boost from Madden NFL. OutKast in particular has blown up, and others offered custom remixes of previous work. It's a much stronger mix than Madden NFL 2003 and stands up to repeated listenings.

3) Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas (PlayStation 2)

By this time, Rockstar had gotten their soundtracks down to a science. With GTAIII, they didn't have the clout or resources to get big names, but the left-field blockbuster changed everything. San Andreas graces gamers with both East Coast and West Coast selections, with plenty of funk, dance hall, and other sounds in the mix.

2) True Crime: New York City (PlayStation 2)

With about 80 tracks at its disposal, TC NYC mixes things up a little, with punk and some retro garage rock, but the heart of it is pure hip-hop. Not only that, but it's a surprising trip down memory lane—you're bound to hear something you remember listening to on the radio back in the day. From Bob Dylan to Blacksheep, there's something here for everyone.

1) Fight Night 2004 (Xbox)

When people think of music in boxing, the first thing to come to mind is probably "Eye of the Tiger." But EA Sports went almost entirely with gritty hip-hop for Fight Night, a move that mixes well with the tough personalities of the sport and is a departure from EA's typically eclectic but mainstream-ish fare.



Agree...Disagree... What's Your Net Ten?

We posed the question, "What's your favorite hip-hop video game soundtrack?" to the online community in our forums at Games.net and GamePro.com. Keep checking the forums for more on-line posts!



"ToeJam & Earl always had awesome soundtracks."—beatmania

"Remember Three Dirty Dwarves for the Sega Saturn?"—RetroMan02

"As far as I'm concerned, any Grand Theft Auto Game has the best hip-hop music score!"—GTAMAN069

"Although the game sucked, Crime Life: Gang Wars had pretty good tunes" —musicman09

"Some of the DDR games have decent tunes" —manoplenty3



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Mario:





Man of the Year!

Everybody knows Mario. The lovable caricature of an Italian plumber is without doubt one of the most recognizable animated faces in the world. Mario is the iconic avatar of gaming culture: a depiction of fun, adventure, and ingenuity that has always been symbolic of console entertainment and synonymous with Nintendo. With his formidable legacy is carrying on with the Wii, we salute Mario for achievements in gaming this year with a special look at the adventures and fun times the plucky plumber and his Nintendo friends are bringing to us this year.

By Daphinicus and ifeelthecosmos

CONTINUED ►





A Smash Hit

Super Smash Bros. Brawl is preparing about to transform the Wii remote into everybody's weapon of choice.

By Daphnicus

When talking about the games due out for the Wii in 2007, there can be no equivocation of at least one fact: Super Smash Bros. Brawl is going to be very, very big.

When the Nintendo 64 title Super Smash Bros. was released exclusively in Japan in 1999, it sold over 1 million copies. Its GameCube sequel, Super Smash Bros. Melee, became the console's best-selling title: Over 7 million copies have sold worldwide since its 2001 release. The franchise has become a Nintendo staple after only two iterations, with gameplay both peculiarly familiar and undeniably unique. A four-player versus fighting game had never made it off the ground before Smash Bros.; today, Nintendo is betting the fan base will shrug off the six years it waited and turn Brawl into a smash hit overnight.

And yet, when questions are raised about the features Smash Bros. Brawl will present, Nintendo keeps rigidly tight-lipped. The company has let only a few bits of information trickle out from its sealed jaws, but we know more than enough to thoroughly whet our appetites.

Smash Basics

If you've never, at the very least, seen footage of a game of Smash Bros. being played, much less played several rounds of it yourself, you should feel ashamed, but worry not—we'll explain the game, and we won't tell anyone you didn't know.

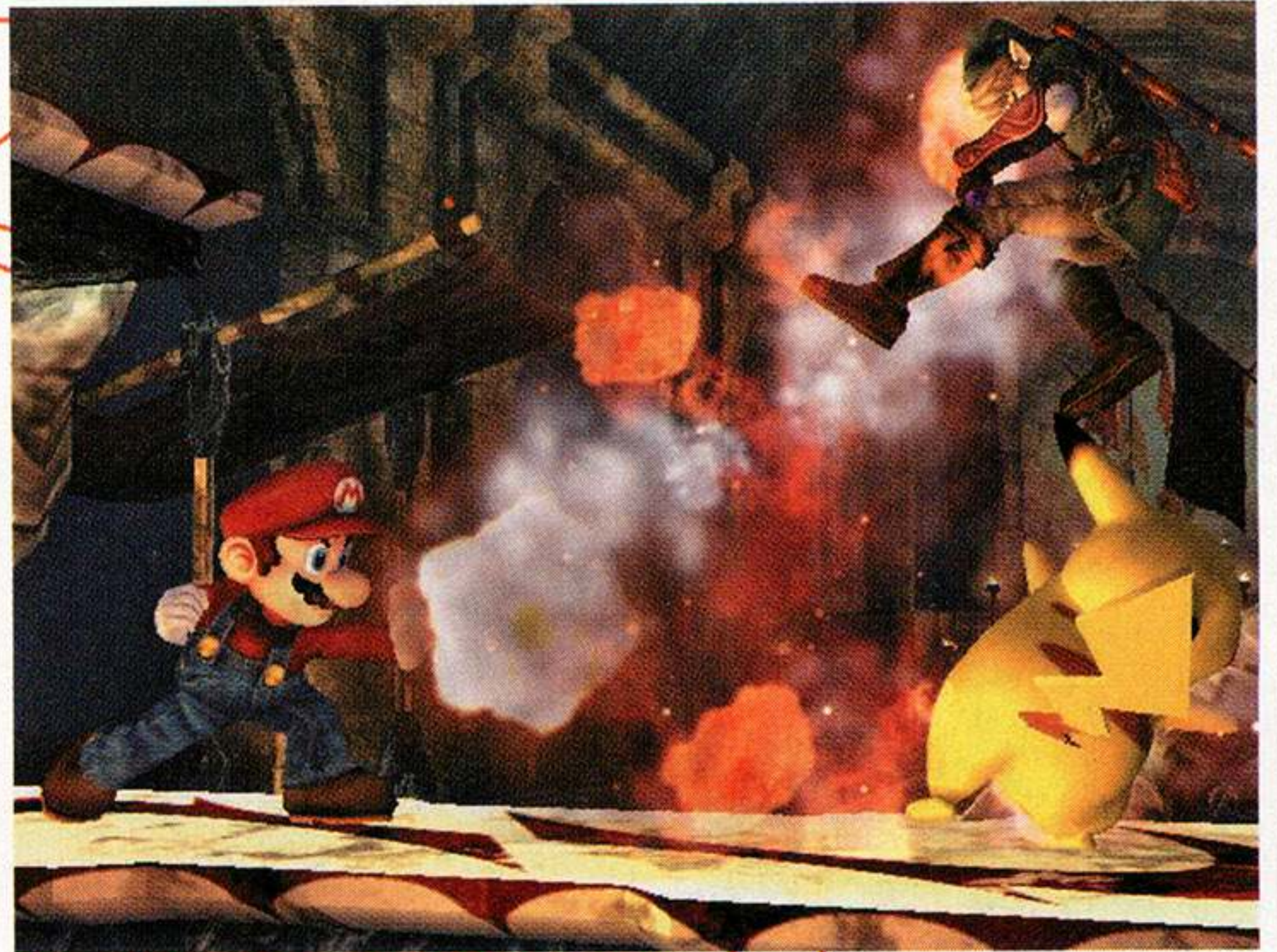
The basics of the series are actually quite simple. Each of up to four players selects a character from one of the many Nintendo franchises to play as (characters like Mario, Kirby, Link, Samus Aran, Donkey Kong, and the like). A free-for-all battle then ensues on one of the game's levels, all of which are two-dimensional and made up of a set of linear platforms that players can jump between. Attacks are unique to individual characters, much like in fighting games, but instead of health bars designating remaining life, each player has a set number of lives to start with. They lose those lives one-by-one if they fall off the bottom of the screen.

Smash Bros. Brawl won't be changing its predecessor's admittedly simple (but very successful) formula: Battles will still take place in only two dimensions, and the controls aren't



Mario and the Nintendo crew are prepared to Brawl.





This time Mario even has dirty Wii tricks up his sleeve.



Pit from Kid Icarus makes a comeback.



Samus will see plenty of action in her Zero suit.

going to be radically changed with the transfer to the Wii. Support for the classic GameCube controller will be fully integrated, and its use is actually recommended by Nintendo.

Of course, as Brawl will be a Wii title, it will incorporate online multiplayer games, and will look a lot better than Melee ever did. Animations and attack sequences will be more beautiful than ever, and all characters that are sticking around from previous games are getting spiffy textural facelifts. The question of exactly which characters will return in Brawl and what new faces will show up has yet to be fully answered, of course, but we do have a few select confirmations.

In This Corner...

There are ten confirmed characters playable in the final version of Smash Bros. Brawl. They were, for the most part, obvious and expected returning champions from previous games: Mario, Nintendo's iconic avatar and superstar; Link, from the Legend of Zelda series; Pikachu, of Pokémon fame; Kirby, from the Kirby game series; Fox McCloud, of Star Fox notoriety; and Samus Aran, from the Metroid franchise, playable both in her Varia power suit and in her Zero suit (the latter a skin-tight blue getup without headgear).

In addition to the above six, four other characters were also confirmed as newcomers to the Smash Bros. Brawl fighter complement. Wario, the antithesis of Mario and the star of the WarioWare games, will finally make his first Smash Bros. appearance, joined by Meta Knight, the lead antagonist opposite Kirby in the latter character's own franchise, and Pit, hero of the old Kid Icarus NES game.

The most unexpected and eagerly anticipated new addition to the Smash Bros. cast is, without a doubt, Solid Snake, from the Metal Gear series. Being from a franchise neither owned nor employed by Nintendo for any of its recent systems, Snake's incorporation into Brawl's roster is a welcome surprise, and raises hopes for other possible additions (we can dream about Sonic the Hedgehog, can't we?).

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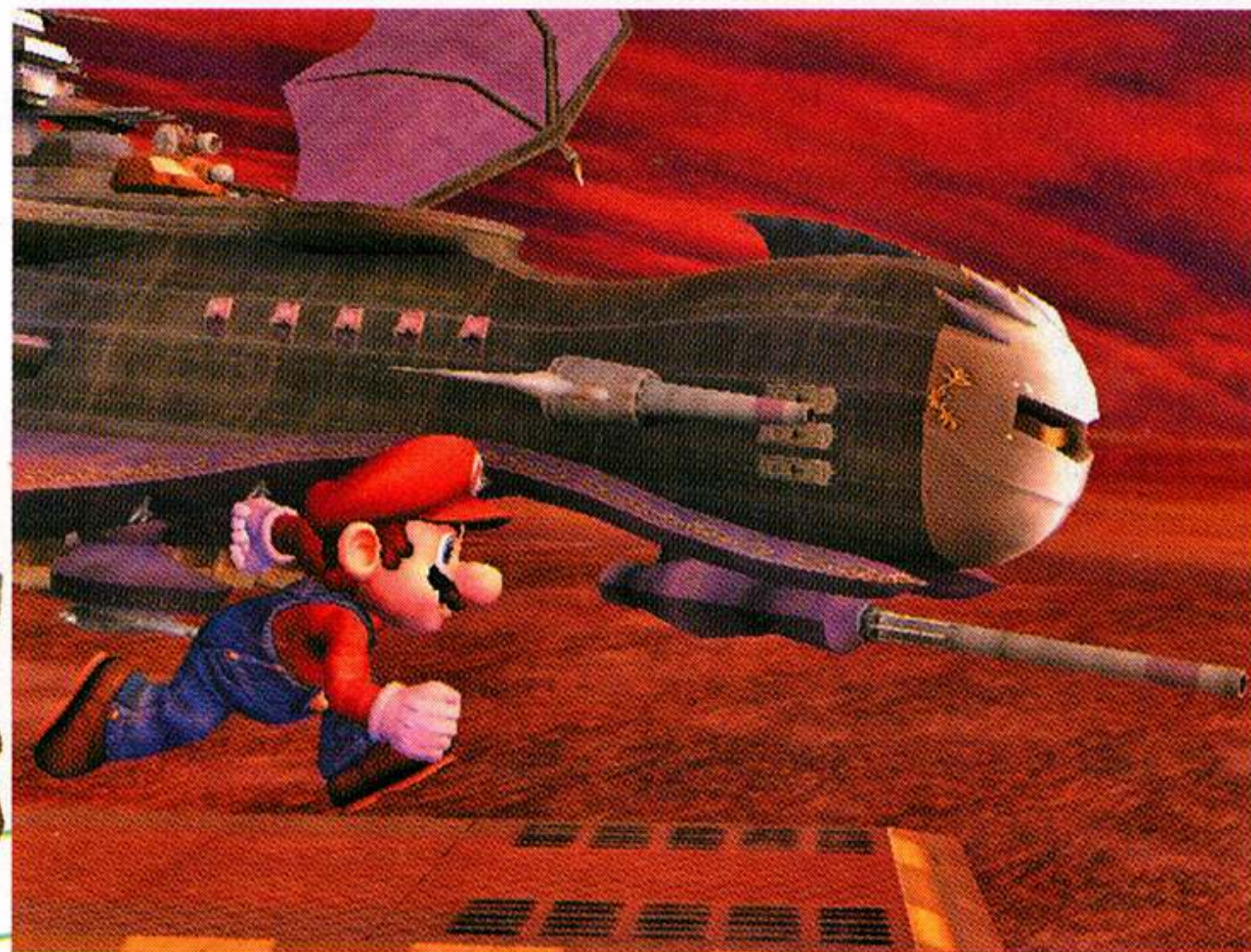
Nice Moves

While most of the mechanics of *Smash Bros. Brawl* are virtually identical to the previous games in the series, there will be a new addition to the repertoire of moves and abilities each character has at his or her disposal. Each will continue to showcase unique fighting moves and styles—Solid Snake will fight in hand-to-hand combat and use explosives; Mario will bounce, kick, and hurl fireballs; Link will swing his Master Sword; and so on. However, in addition to those moves, upon retrieving an as-yet unnamed powerup, characters will be able to unleash special, super attacks on their opponents. Only a few of these attacks have been confirmed, but those that have look positively awesome.

Upon snatching the powerup, Mario will, for instance, be able to unleash a massive torrent of fire that stretches clear across a given stage. Link will be able to trap enemies between twin Triforce emblems and pound away mercilessly without worry of reprisal. Kirby will be able to summon a boiling cauldron and trap enemies inside, while Wario will be able to blow his “Wario Waft” from out his backside—the effects of which may be too terrible to contemplate.

Ready for Action

Although at this point the amount of information we don't have on *Smash Bros. Brawl* dwarfs the amount we do, the game already sounds like a bonafide hit. Questions on what stages will find their way into *Brawl*, what characters (if any) will be unlockable, and more all remain tantalizingly hidden. What we can say we're sure of is this: rev up your hopes to full power! The *Smash Bros.* are going to deliver something special this year; let the Brawling begin.



Pairing up the right teammates, like Mario and Meta Knight, can make the difference between victory and defeat.



Mario's new super moves mean he takes no prisoners in this Brawl.



Link wields Triforce powers that you've never seen before.



More Mario

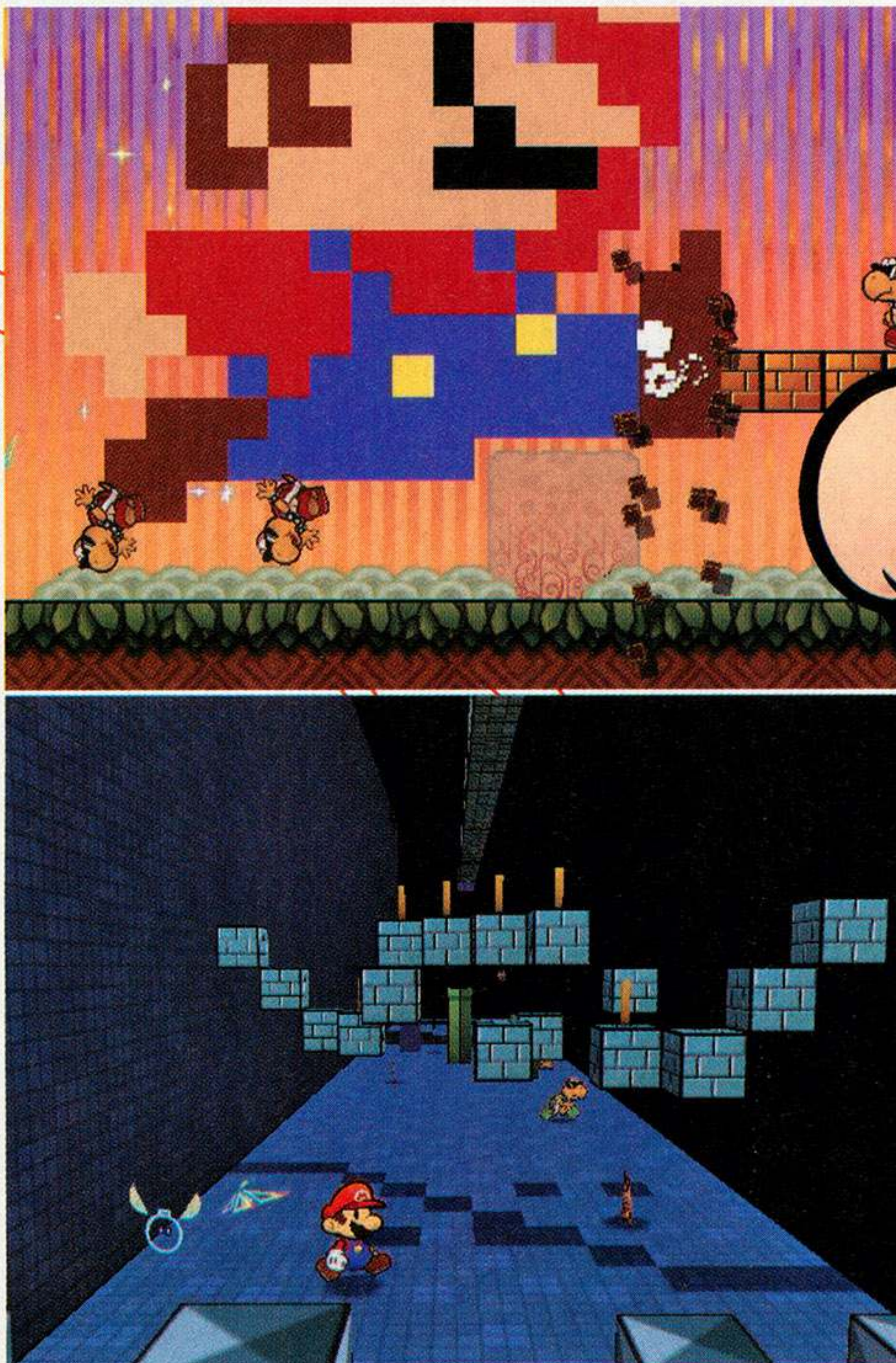
Nintendo knows when it's got a good thing going, and Mario's reach extends into video games in imaginative and diverse ways. Here are two more games that will be ready for prime time in 2007.

Mario Strikers Charged (Wii)

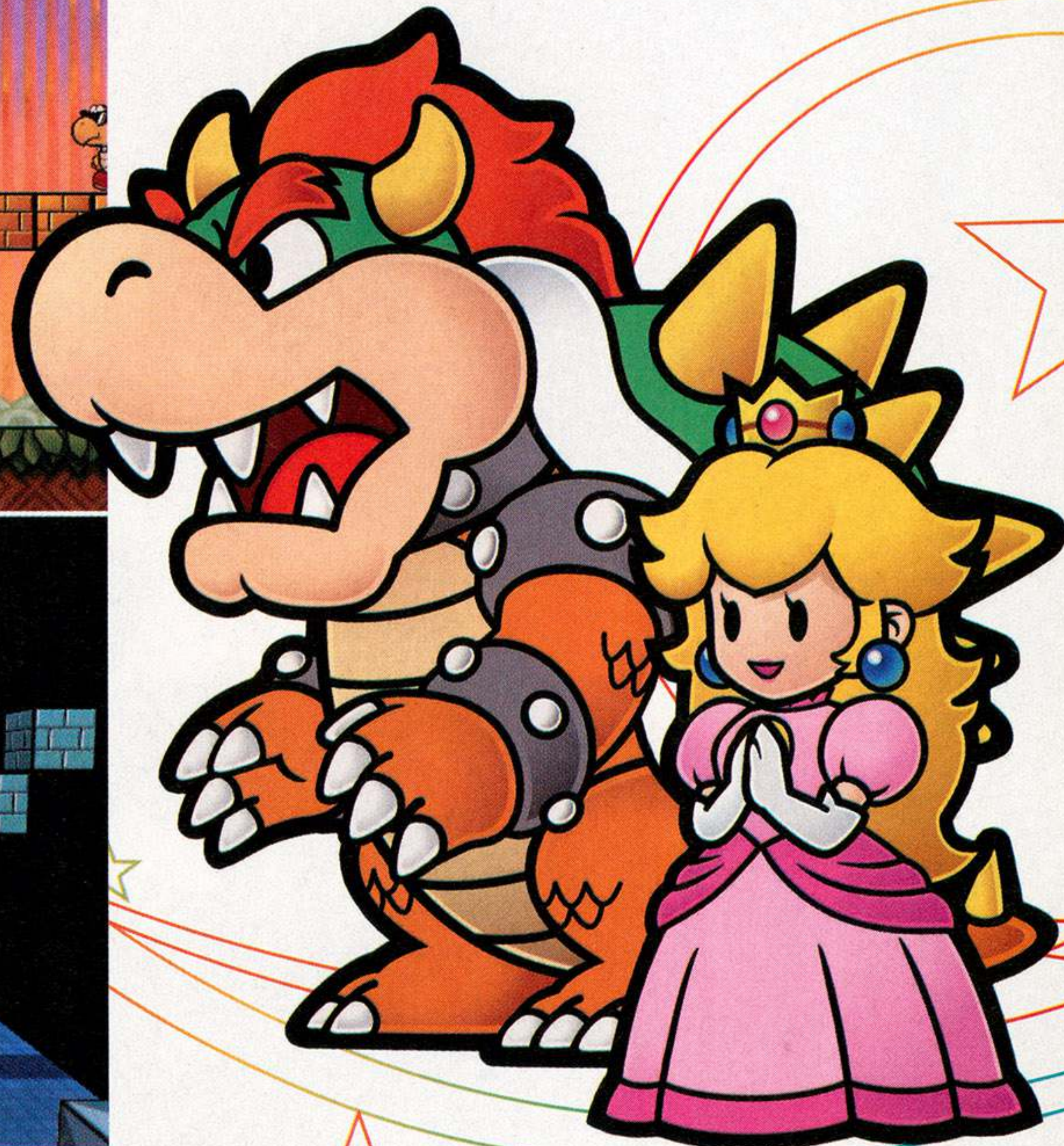


Twelve Mario co-captains are on hand for the best don't-call-it-football game ever, which toughens up for the Wii console with Bob-omb bursts, freeze attacks, and flat-out red-flag fouls when you swing the Wii Remote.

Super Paper Mario (GameCube)



One of the weirdest and most creative Mario universes retains its remarkable 2D presentation; but this time you can switch to 3D view to solve puzzles, too.



CONTINUED ►



A Galaxy of Possibilities

In search of new worlds to conquer—and to rescue Princess Peach, of course—Mario is blasting off for a galactic adventure in *Super Mario Galaxy*.

By Daphnicus

For many gamers, the success or failure of Nintendo's consoles has been defined by the quality of their given system's Mario title. It goes without saying that the Wii will need a flagship Mario game to steer the system towards profitable seas.

It is, then, of little surprise that the upcoming Nintendo Wii will host Mario's newest adventure, but what *is* surprising—and very welcome—is the return of ingenuity to the franchise. The GameCube's *Super Mario Sunshine* was certainly a fun game, but it was little more than a glorified sequel to *Super Mario 64*. While few innovations could hope to approach the scope of *Mario 64*'s magnificent transition into three dimensions, *Sunshine* offered none at all. There were modifications to gameplay, to be sure (the return of Yoshi and the addition of a jetpack could not be ignored), but it is difficult to classify those additions as anything more than cheap parlor tricks when compared with *Mario 64*'s rich overhaul.

Not so with *Super Mario Galaxy*. While the specific details of Mario's latest adventure remain somewhat cloudy, here's a run-down of everything we know thus far about Mario's upcoming galactic romp.

The None Story Story

At first glance, it would seem that little is known about *Galaxy*'s plotline other than the fact that A) Princess Peach has been captured, and B) she's in space. After a small amount of consideration, however, it becomes apparent that there probably isn't much more to know anyway. *Galaxy* is a Mario game—thus, like all its predecessors, it's a platformer with almost no semblance of story other than the desperate need of a crimson-clothed plumber to chase after some mutated animal (usually a turtle) and rescue a

princess from certain doom. We don't complain about the story's threadbare nature simply because we've come to expect it.

That *Galaxy*'s storyline isn't evolved is acceptable on the condition that the gameplay more than compensates. The best way for the game to do that is to take the next logical evolutionary step for the franchise. Two marked alterations to *Galaxy*'s mechanics embody that step: the reorientation of gravity and the rethinking of controls.

Spaceways

Mario doesn't have much of a choice: If he wants to save Princess Peach, he needs to head for the stars. And once he gets there, life becomes very, very different. The environments in *Super Mario Galaxy* appear to be based almost entirely (if not exclusively) on small spheroids or moderately-sized islands floating in the void. What's very cool is that those spheroids and islands will be traversable on *all* axes.

Run all the way around moons; hop along platforms at right-angles to each other; slip over the sides of vertical cliffs to run along their sheer walls; follow pathways that reverse their orientations—in *Super Mario Galaxy*, gravity is no longer an overarching constant, but is rather a dynamic factor in gameplay. The results are spectacular: Puzzles twist in multiple dimensions, pathways fork around planetoids, and Mario rides the sky, shot from island to island by star-shaped catapults that propel him where he has never gone before. By integrating the ability to roam freely around space into the game, Nintendo has done away with the soon-to-be-archaic concept of planar gameplay. All that remains is potential: the potential for twisted puzzles, inventive environments, and engaging battles.

Controlling Gravity

But by enabling Mario to walk on walls and ceilings and reorient himself to his environment on a whim, Nintendo has created a dilemma: How is it possible for players to quickly, effortlessly, and intuitively navigate around this metaphorical world, while at the same time interacting with it on a level that might be expected from a next generation Mario game? The solution, of course, was already in place: the Wii Remote provides precisely the means of intense interaction that's needed.

Nintendo's inventive control scheme for the Wii—the combination of the Wii remote and the nunchuk attachment—is perfectly suited to guiding Mario through his zero gravity locales. The analog control stick on the Nunchuk moves Mario in the same fashion it always has. However, with the addition of the Wii Remote, players can now control a second icon on the screen: a star-shaped cursor, which can directly manipulate objects in the game world.

Slash the cursor by a trio of bells and they move and ring. Hold the cursor over an enemy creature and it will pin the monster in place. Spin the cursor around Mario and he will spin in-game, to block and reflect attacks. Pass the cursor over items close to him and they gravitate to him as he's passing by. The cursor is more than a way of controlling Mario or interacting with the game—it is a helping hand, enabling you to reach into the game world and clear a path while directly guiding the squat plumber at the same time.

It might sound a bit cumbersome, but in reality it's an incredibly easy control scheme to master, and it opens up brand-new mechanical possibilities. You can have Mario leap into a tree (he retains all his classic moves), then use the cursor to pull the tree back and slingshot him clear across planetoids. You can use the cursor to encase Mario in bubbles void of gravity and steer him through space with the help of hovering star markers. You can do any number of things, and there's no telling what the final version will incorporate.

A Galaxy of Expectations

For a game that doesn't even have an exact release date except the "fall of 2007," *Super Mario Galaxy* is already sparking imaginations. While it certainly won't be out soon enough to be a heavy-duty system-seller, it nevertheless promises to be one of the Wii's must-have games next year. That Nintendo is taking its in releasing the game is positive—as much as we may all want to play *Galaxy* right now, at least we know that it will be well worth the wait.



CONTINUED ►

MARIO: MAN OF THE YEAR!

Mario Friends

Nintendo is also beholden to Mario's crew for much of its success. Donkey Kong, Wario, Princess Peach, and friends have built up their own fanbase, but they always have Mario's back.

DK Bongo Blast (GameCube)



DK Bongo Blast (GameCube) Beating on bongo controllers makes Donkey Kong's Barrel Jets blast off as DK goes in a battle versus the nasty Kremplings.

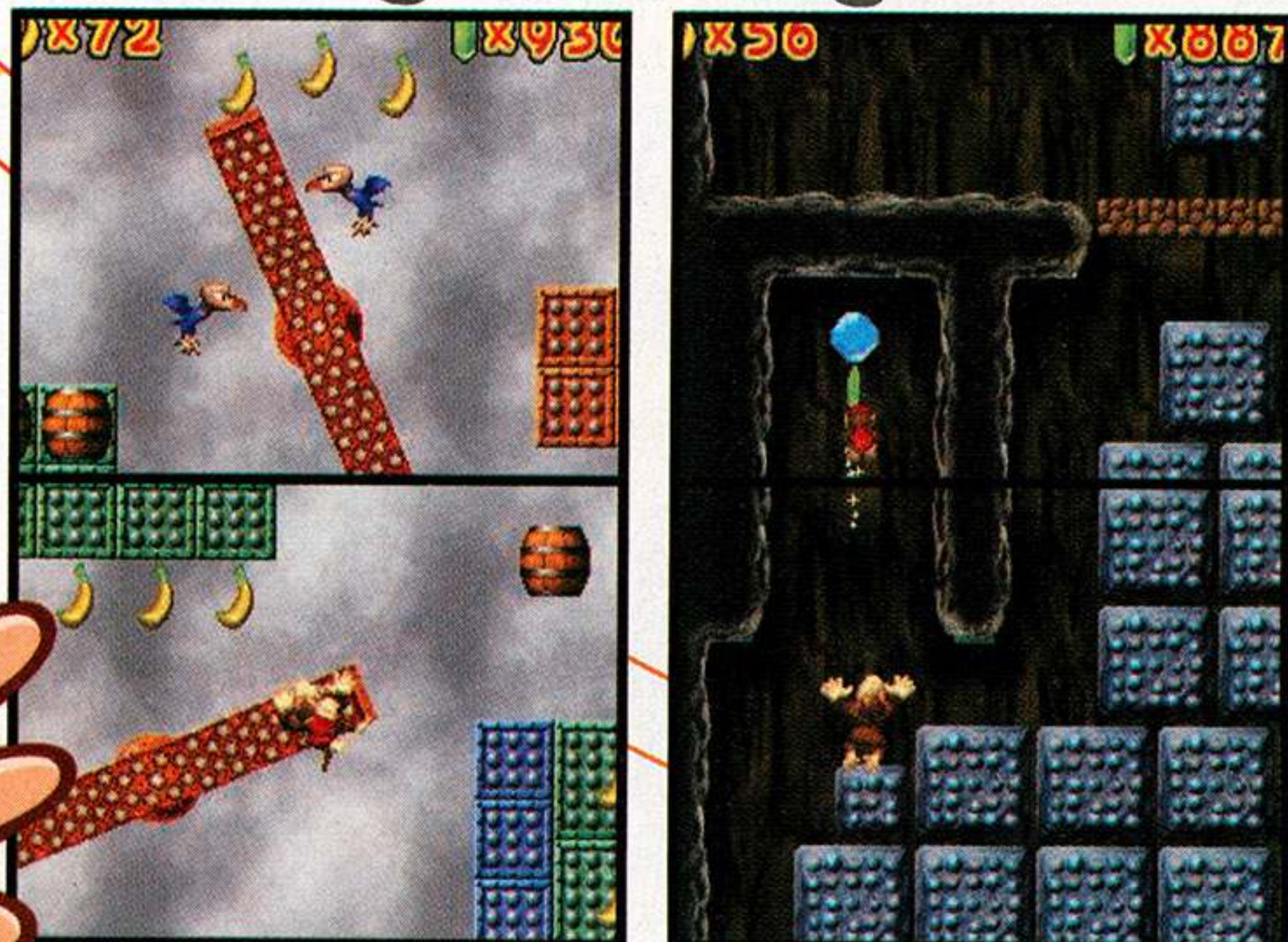


WarioWare: Smooth Moves (Wii)



Mario's evil cousin has found the perfect home in the Wii for his 200 wacky puzzles and nutty mini-games to give Nunchuk, Wii Remote, and you a hilarious workout.

DK: King of Swing (DS)



Mario made his world debut with the classic Donkey Kong, now Donkey, Diddy, Dixie, and Funky Kong challenge you to take up the stylus to swing and climb through a banana-bruising bunch of mini-games in DK: King of Swing (DS).



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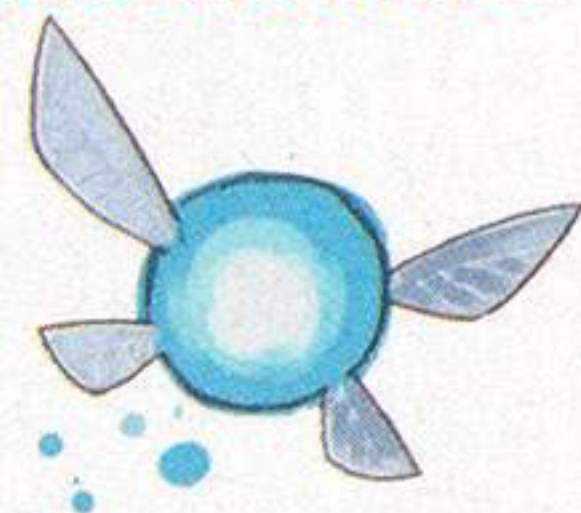
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The Legend of Zelda Continues



If Mario is Nintendo's heart, Link is its soul. But while Mario has lent his talents and personality to a variety of games; save for a workout in *Super Smash Bros.*, Link remains true to Hyrule. He's made a huge splash with *The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess* for the Wii (see "ProReviews," this issue), and here are two more Zelda games to help make 2007 a legendary year.

The Legend of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass (DS)



Maybe this game is more aptly called the Legend of Wind Waker. *Phantom Hourglass* continues the story and visual style from *The Legend of Zelda: Wind Waker* as our youthful, green-clad hero must again save his damsel in distress. This time trouble begins when Link falls unconscious while trying to save Tetra from danger and finds himself lost on an unknown island. The clock is ticking as he races to not only rescue Tetra but to find his way back to familiar lands. Only the Phantom Hourglass can give Link the precious time he needs.

Introducing a ton of nifty features made possible by the intuitive DS touch-screen controls, *Phantom Hourglass* is a welcome addition to the handheld Zelda series. Action and puzzle-solving primarily progress through use of the touch screen. Tapping on the display enables Link to move and to speak with other characters, while sweeping the stylus across the screen initiates spin-attacks and sword-swinging. You can also write handy notes on an interactive map and recall them whenever you need a helpful hint or two. Use the stylus to also draw paths for Link's boomerang, and set your ships on course for combat. Not too shabby

Overall, *Phantom Hourglass* should be an enjoyable play for both fans and newcomers alike. New challenges will serve to keep Zelda experts entertained while the innovative and fun gameplay will please even those few stragglers who have never been exposed to the series.—*ifeelthecosmos*



The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess (GameCube)

It's no secret that Link returns to his normal left-handedness in *Twilight Princess* for GameCube. This is the classic stance that all fans recognize as just the way Zelda ought to be.

Originally, the switch was made to support expectations that the Wii will introduce *The Legend of Zelda* to a brave new world of videogaming dominated by newbies and righties. Holding the Nunchuk in your left hand and Wii Remote your right seems much more natural to the masses. But just because you may have (finally) cracked the Twilight realm with Nunchuk and Wii Remote, that doesn't mean you can forego the left-handed foray.

The story about the encroaching Twilight realm which threatens Hyrule is the same, but the entire orientation of the GameCube world is from a left-handed perspective. If you've played through the right-hand oriented Wii version, everything is flipped, even your pathway through the world. Add in the fact that playing with a GameCube controller is so radically different than using Nunchuk and Wii Remote, this feels like an entirely different game.—*Brother Buzz*



CONTINUED ▶

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Primed and Ready

Mario and Link don't get to have all the fun this year—not if Samus Aran has anything to say about it, and *Metroid Prime 3: Corruption* speaks volumes about the future of first person shooters.

By Daphnicus

There are plenty of fine contenders for strong female protagonists in games. Of all the numerous staples of the pastime, however, one of the most famous is certainly Samus Aran: the futuristic bounty hunter and playable star of the *Metroid* game series. 2007 will see Samus returning in the final chapter of her console-based trilogy with *Metroid Prime 3: Corruption*. Retro Studios is giving the upcoming Wii title a huge graphical overhaul from its predecessors, and has redesigned the game's control scheme to work perfectly with the new console's Remote and Nunchuck controllers. The resulting play experience is on course to change the way we look at console shooters forever.

Life of a Bounty Hunter

The general storyline of the trilogy's conclusion involves Aran's attempts to negate the actions of her evil twin. Dark Samus, the main villain of *Metroid Prime 3*, has begun to seed planets with Phazon energy—a potent and unstable material upon which her entire existence is dependant. As a war rages on between the Galactic Federation and the Space Pirates, Aran must track down and destroy the Phazon seeds, while confronting the animalistic brutality of her dark twin.

Unfortunately, Aran's efforts will find her own body infected by the Phazon energy, that engenders one of *Corruption's* noticeable gameplay alterations: using the Phazon energy, players will be able to shift Aran into a hyper-mode. Her

abilities are greatly improved, but at a severe cost: With hyper-mode comes a greater corruption of Aran's power suit, and once that darkening is complete, Aran will die.

A Question of Control

Metroid Prime 3's gameplay may very well transform what it means to play a first-person shooter on a console system. The Wii Remote acts as a constant on-screen reticule, towards which Aran's weapon arm points and shoots at all times. At the center of the screen is an invisible tracking box: When the reticule is inside that box, Aran's perspective remains stationary; once it moves beyond the box's boundaries, though, her view shifts (after a short pause) in the indicated direction, stopping only once the reticule is moved back within the tracking area.

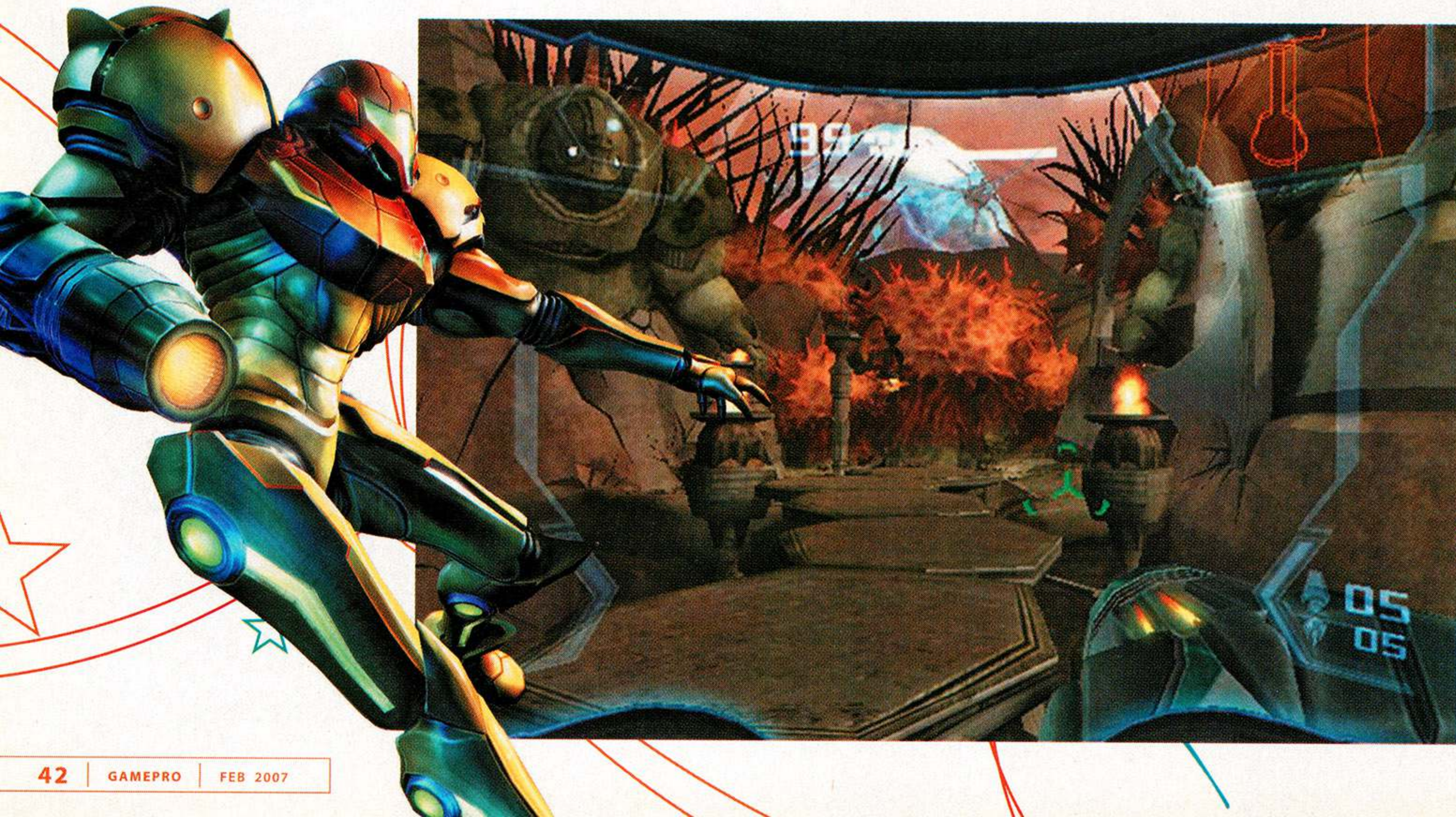
Certainly, players uncomfortable with the Wii Remote's sensitivity may find the controls a bit confusing, so Retro incorporated three levels of control into the game. In normal mode, the aforementioned tracking box fills much of the center of the screen, and the pause between the moment when the reticule leaves the box and when the perspective begins to shift is long enough to be noticeable—the effect being that accidental flailing of the Wiimote shouldn't have too much of a negative effect. In the advanced control mode, though, the tracking box is much smaller, and the reaction pause much shorter, allowing more seasoned players quicker response times.

For those gamers who yearn for an experience that approximates the PC's mouse, there is an expert control mode. Under expert mode, the tracking box and reaction pauses are almost nonexistent, and it's this mode that looks to redefine console first-person shooters. The ability to easily and accurately curve through bends, whip around corners, and aim and fire in any direction all adds up to a control experience unique to the Wii that other consoles can't come close to matching.

Retro is going to make sure gamers use the new control scheme to its fullest, too. Many enemies in *Corruption* will actively work to break locks or block them with shields, while others will simply be immune to the locking ability altogether. And oh, what fun it will be.

Going Out with a Bang

Hands down, *Metroid Prime 3: Corruption* is going to be a wild ride. Whether or not the gaming community accepts or rejects Retro Studios' new take on shooter controls is unknown, but we can say that we're rubbing our hands together just imagining the experience. Updated graphics, updated controls, same great Samus—sounds like a fine conclusion to the truly superb trilogy that is *Metroid Prime*.



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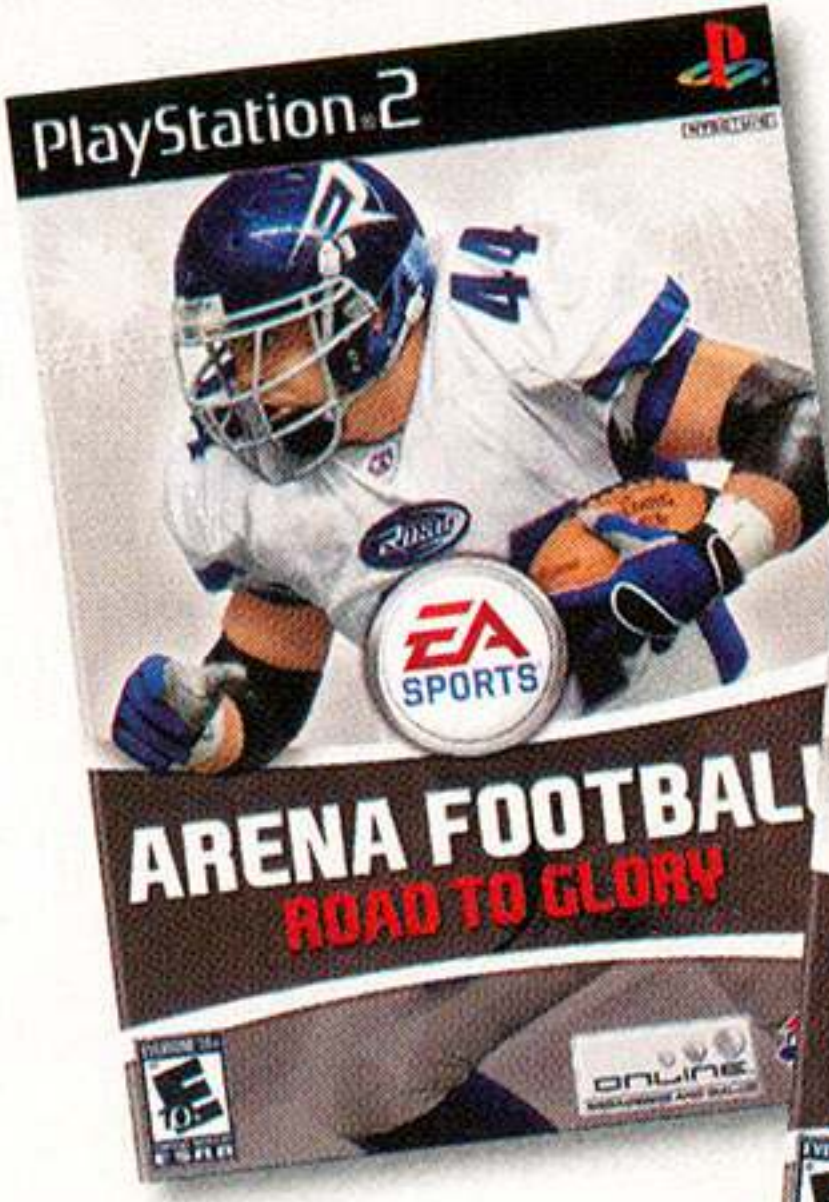
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Enemy Territory: Quake Wars is the ultimate online strategic shooter with objective-driven, class-based first person warfare set in the Quake universe. Coming soon in March 07!



SPRING SPORTS GAMES

Sports remain one of the top reasons people enjoy video gaming bringing out the best in competition amongst friends as well as challenging the best in the world online. This spring delivers the latest editions of several top sports franchises whether you prefer basketball, baseball or indoor football. Lace up your controllers and strap yourselves in for another champion season on your favorite console. It's GAME TIME!



PLUS!

- NBA Street Home Court
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- MLB 08

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Top 20 Greatest Moments in Grand Theft Auto

Whether you get off on turning those who betray you into bloody Swiss cheese, or just fancy your ill-gotten gains in peace, there are too many "good bits" in the GTA Universe to count. *By Ouroboros*

All players possess unique memories of the feats they've performed in this series, usually revolving around some particularly insane bit of stunt work, but the high points we can all share came from the cheerfully overblown story missions, drenched in betrayal and retribution. Here's our pick of the 20 most memorable moments in the history of GTA.

Tearing into Lance Vance [GTA: Vice City]



20 Your none-too-bright partner in crime gets impatient and tries to take down Diaz on his own, and, predictably enough, gets kidnapped in the process. Tommy rescues him, and the two go on to send Diaz to a well-deserved grave, but as much of a blast as it is taking down dozens of foot soldiers and then icing the big man himself, the high point of the whole debacle is actually listening to Tommy tear Lance a new one. "There goes my careful planning, blown to s***! Thanks to you! You screwed up real good, Lance!" Of course, Ray Liotta could make the dramatic reading of a fast food menu riveting, and though the dialogue as written isn't always so hot, the Emmy Award winner sells it beautifully. Every swear word comes off like grimy modern underground Shakespeare.

Bomb Da Base: Act II [GTAVIII]



19 Take one docks district, add a bunch of explosive barrels on a boat, and put our hero on the scene with a sniper rifle, and you've got the makings of an awesome sequence, even if it does require a hundred thousand dollar entrance fee. You can certainly put a round through the skull of every goon milling around on deck, but why rely on grotesque brain injury when you can just as easily target the oil barrels, and send guards flying to fiery deaths? After waxing them all, you're treated to a cut-scene worthy of any action movie as 8-Ball outruns the concussive camera-shaking explosions and tears down the gang-plank just in time to watch the whole vessel drown in the harbor. The \$150,000 reward might be sweet, but seriously, how often to you get the chance to actually sink a cargo ship and get away with it?

Peyote Safari Aftermath [GTA: San Andreas]

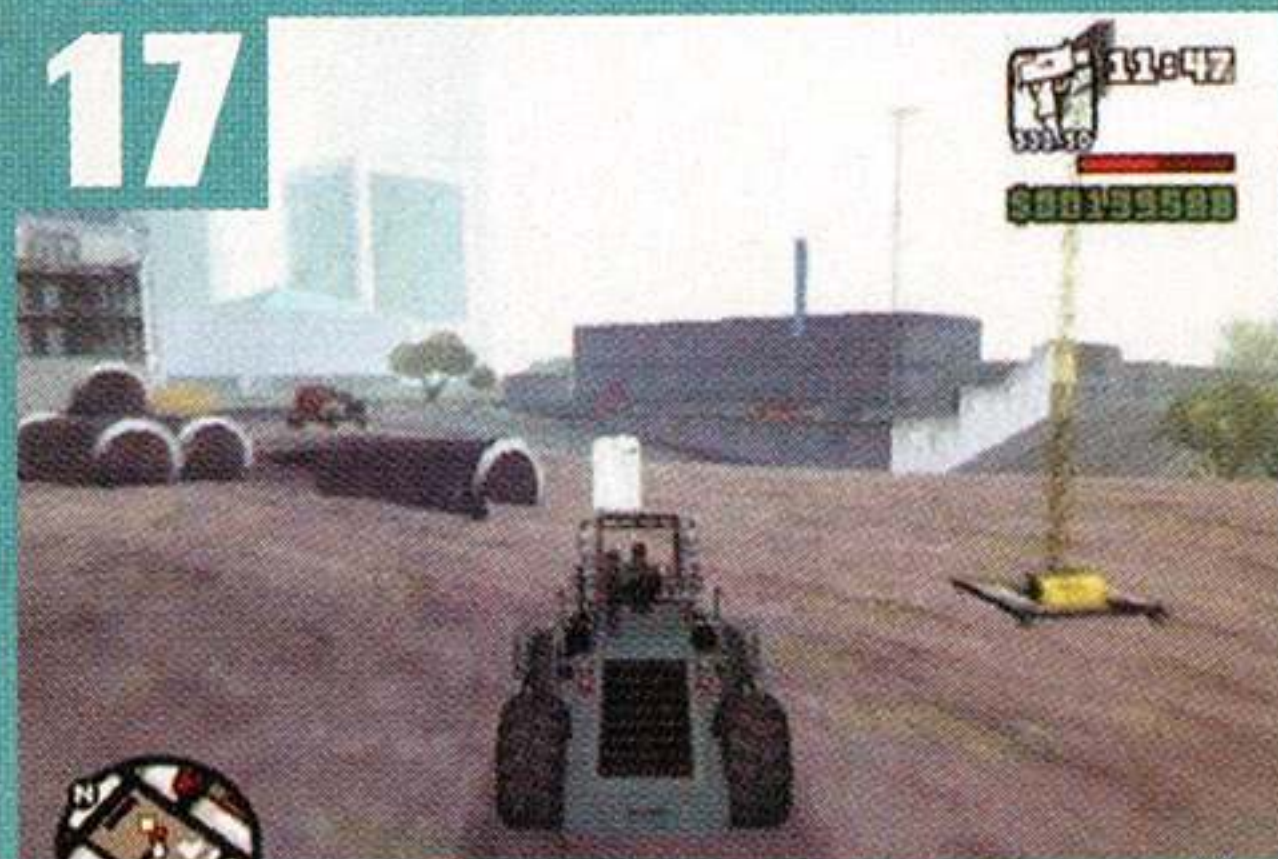


18 After taking some "fellow travelers" on a hallucinogenic bender, Truth calls you to track down his friends in the desert. Listening to these British band mates, one of whom initially believes himself to be a raspberry, groan and curse in their signature cockney accents all the way back to the city put us in hysterics, despite the road-side stop for stomach evacuation. Better yet, their pal "Rosey" turns out to be none other than the smarmy manic lawyer from GTAVIII, Ken Rosenberg. William Fichtner is a highly respected veteran character actor, and he doesn't seem to get much call to bring the funny elsewhere, but listening to him bemoan Ken's life in Caligula's Casino puts the blast-from-the-past cherry on a tasty comic relief sundae. "I pray that one day I can escape my perpetual torment, and retire in peace and comfort a million miles away from anyone I've ever f***** known, and instead, I get this!"

Concrete Chemical Toilet

[GTA: San Andreas]

17

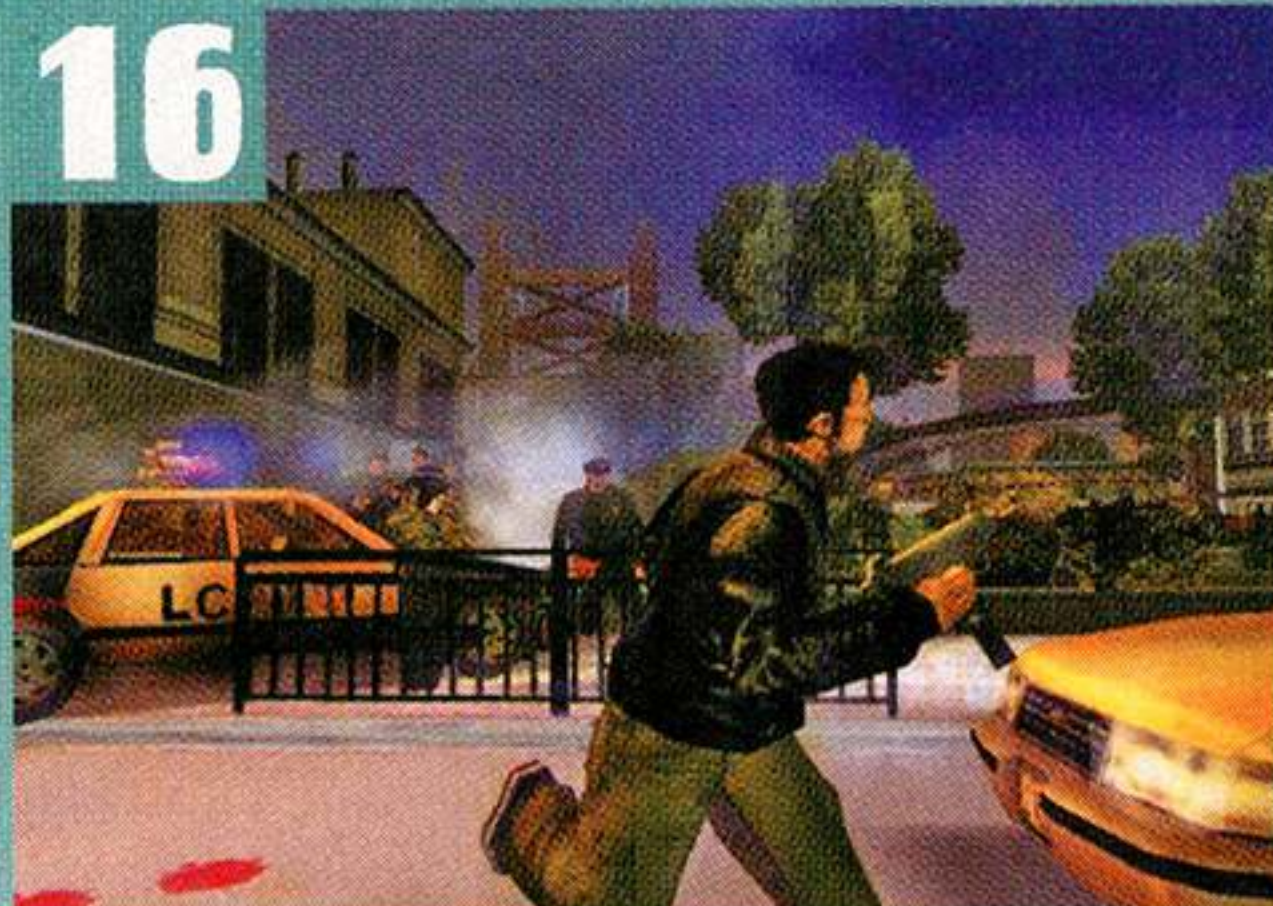


Kendl isn't a fan of how the nearby construction workers treat her, with their banal cat-calls and lewd suggestions, and her boyfriend Cesar is ready to go ballistic, but CJ takes control and decides to teach the hard-hats a lesson in respect they'll never forget. Most rational people wouldn't set a foot near those stinking boxes that masquerade as portable toilets unless absolutely necessary, but Carl isn't your average thug. How you do away with most of these filth tanks is up to you—blow them up with nearby explosive barrels, ram into them, or even use the construction site's crane—but using their own heavy machinery against them seems like poetic justice. For the grand finale, you get to bulldoze the loudmouth foreman's occupied portable toilet into a conveniently dug hole, and fill it with concrete, burying him alive in what must surely come to be his own reeking personal hell.

Opening Sequence

[GTAIII]

16



The opening moments of GTAIII amount to one of the most memorable video game introductions of all time. While the models, textures, and effects are primitive by today's standards, the narrative flourishes of this cinematic setup show a creative manipulation of time that most filmmakers don't have the acumen for. After getting shot down by his girlfriend accomplice at the tail end of a robbery, the protagonist is on his way to prison. As the camera tracks his progress up to and nearly across a doomed bridge, the soundtrack leaps to the future with a radio report on the day's events. Somehow, telling you what you're about to see actually amps up the tension instead of dissipating it, so that when the bomb finally blows you're already keyed up for the excitement that lies ahead. Every other opening sequence in the Grand Theft Auto series simply pales in comparison.

Ryder's Last Ride

[GTA: San Andreas]

15



Woozie's men show up at precisely the wrong moment down at Pier 69, and Cesar and CJ realize they have to take out guards before the whole place drowns in bullets. Chasing down and hammering T-Bone with automatic gunfire till he tumbles over the rails is a satisfying assassination, but it's the crazed boat chase to take down your former Green Street buddy Ryder that steals the show. Tearing across the open water in a high-powered boat to pound that double-crossing shermhead's hull till it blows sky high is just one in the series of highly anticipated moments of pure vengeance. Finding out who your real friends are is just as challenging in GTA as it is in the real world, though hopefully you'll not need quite so much ammunition on this side of the great video game divide.

The DA Goes Away

[GTA: San Andreas]

14



Tenpenny and Polaski find themselves under the blackmailing thumb of a corrupt District Attorney, and you know what happens when someone leans on the cops: the cops lean on you. The "555 WE TIP" mission has you axing a valet parking attendant for his uniform—it's not like he's the first innocent victim you've corpsified—grabbing the correct car, then taking off on a mad race to get to your garage, put a giant brick of ganja in the trunk, and hightail it back in time, all without damaging the lawyer's whip. All that's left then is to drop the dime, tip off the authorities, and watch the D.A. get ganked by the fuzz. This mission can be pretty challenging, but how can you not pop a grin watching this smug and corrupt lawyer scumbag get his comeuppance, even if it is at the service of two other crooked bastards?

Celebrity Stalker

[GTA: Liberty City Stories]

13



Some celebrities go about the business of doing the work that made them famous, and others insist on making such a nuisance of themselves, whether it's a drunken anti-Semitic tirade, or forcing their own twisted religious agenda on everyone around them, that one wonders why a lone gunman doesn't put them out of their misery. In the "False Idols" mission, a Priest of all people wants you to take care of three thorns in his side, one each by boat, helicopter, and bullet-proof limousine, and sends you out to do the good Lord's work with a rocket launcher. (Whether it's been blessed or not is left to the imagination.) Dispatching each of these Hollywood tools with extreme prejudice might make baby Jesus cry, but it always gets a giggle, even if the subsequent revelation that the Priest isn't really a man of the cloth comes as a shock to pretty much no one.

Scare Tactics

[GTA: San Andreas]

12



"Fender Ketchup" couldn't be any more aptly named. Some thugs try to smash one of the casino's deliveries, and Woozie's gang captures one of them. The blind leader orders him iced, but CJ has a better idea: sweat the name of his employer out of him by any means necessary. Well, okay, strictly speaking, tying the guy face down on the hood of a car isn't necessary as such, but driving like an absolute lunatic to scare the tough guy bravado off his arrogant puss is hysterical fun. What starts off as insults and demands quickly turn to begging and pleading as you side-swipe and near-miss everything in town at high speed. Assuming you can keep from turning the guy into road burger, Johnny Sindacco will spill the beans before you know it, though you'll wish it lasted a whole lot longer.

Courting Catalina

[GTA: San Andreas]

11

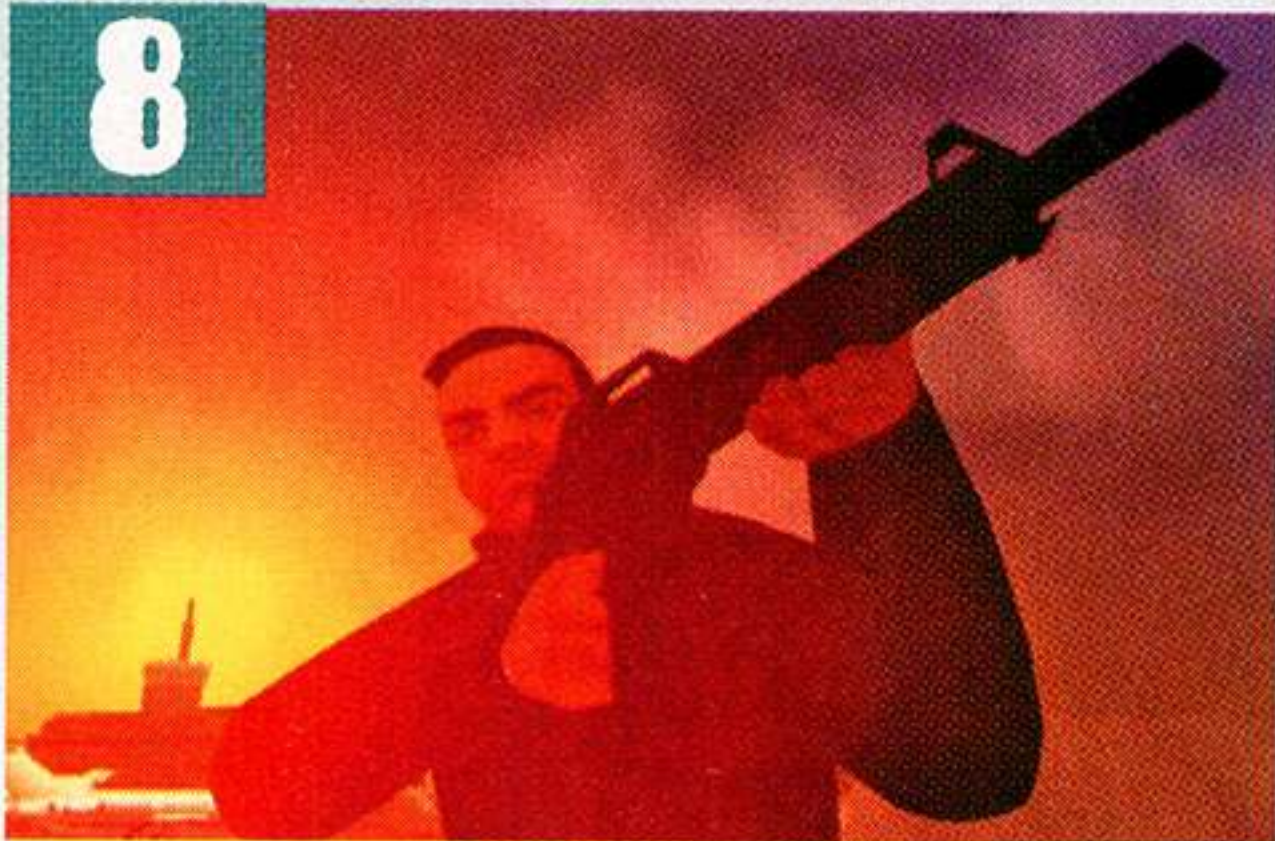


"First Date" introduces CJ to the pinnacle of feminine insanity in the form of Cesar's loco cousin Catalina, another GTAIII veteran. So much for keeping a low profile: this sadistic witch's idea of a first date is robbing a liquor store, bank, gas station, and betting shop all in one ultra-violent stroke. At least you get to pick the order, even if it does mean driving all over the back of beyond with her constantly nagging your ear off. This is just the beginning of the sadistic madness Catalina subjects CJ to—hijacking tanker trucks and gunplay as foreplay aren't exactly his first choice of entertainment—and he's pretty much stuck with her hair trigger and rapid mood swings until she decides to leave town. Catalina is the worst girlfriend a sane man could ever have, but she's still entertaining as hell, just as long as you're out of firing range.

Fort Staunton Gets "Decommissioned"

[GTA: Liberty City Stories]

8



Years before he'd meet up with a nameless psychopath punk in GTAIII, 8-Ball helps Toni perform a little ad hoc urban renewal on Fort Staunton. Driving a van packed with powerful explosives isn't for the faint of heart, and all it takes is one ding too many to the body work for the whole thing to go kablooeey. When members of the Forelli gang start harassing you, you can always hop out of the van and bust caps till they're draining in the gutter, but the real challenge is getting across the Cochrane Dam and into the Porter Tunnel without resorting to picking off opponents one by one. Plant three sets of explosives, and get the heck out of there to watch the fireworks and make sure the Fort won't be around come 2001.

Remote Control Destruction Derby

[GTA: Liberty City Stories]

10



Salvatore's got an awesome trick up his sleeve this time. The Leone family has rigged Paulie Sindacco's car for you to drive remotely, and you get a solid five minutes with which to wreck unholy hell before the vehicle's occupant finds the control mechanism. His car may not be able to take a whole lot of damage, but you can steer the sled right over all his goomba buddies, albeit with a maddening satellite delay. There's something so sweet about ramming through mobsters with one of their own cars. Sure, you probably could've just as easily tracked each and every pinkie-ring aficionado down and put one between his eyes, but that wouldn't have been nearly as entertaining, would it? Why do the movies always resort to boring old car bombs and shovels to the face when they could send radio-controlled Cadillacs careening all over Brooklyn? Get on that, would you Scorsese?

The Boating Life

[GTA: Vice City]

7

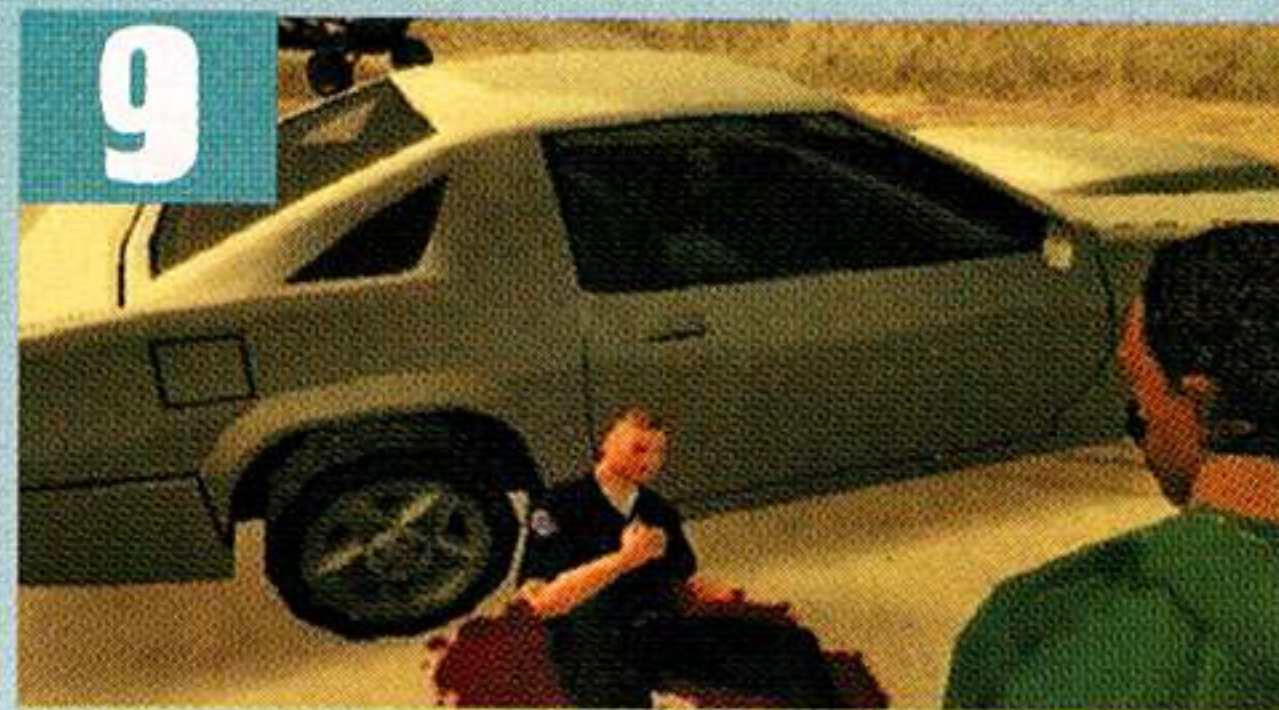


Ricardo Diaz is a scumbag, and completely untrustworthy, but Tommy's a pragmatic guy with his eyes on the future, and this is just a step on the road to owning this town. The minute you bust into the boathouse and lower the ship from its suspended perch, you'll have three stars riding on your head, assuring that you won't get away without shedding your body weight in ammunition. "The Fastest Boat" is far from the hardest mission in Vice City, but taking on police boats and helicopters with a high-speed powerhouse that puts most land vehicles to shame is such an awesome slice of *Miami Vice*-inspired flavor that what it lacks in length it makes up for in style. You even get Philip Michael Thomas of all people voicing Lance Vance, for crying out loud. If only the actual *Miami Vice* movie were this exciting! And don't worry: you get to blow Diaz and his lieutenants to kingdom come soon enough.

Roamin' Polaski

[GTA: San Andreas]

9



Eddie Polaski doesn't seem to understand that Officer Tenpenny's loyalty is to no one but himself, but CJ catches a lucky break and gets the jump on the late Chris Penn's corrupt street cop. What follows is a high-intensity chase across San Andreas in a dune buggy, ramming against and pouring bullets into his car until he finally takes off on foot in desperation. After having this punk ride your back porch for the entire game, blackmailing you into all manner of nefarious deeds, dropping him like a sack of potatoes and stomping his head into the side of a car is deeply satisfying retribution. No more PBA barbecues or undeserved commendations for this pig.

Spy Society

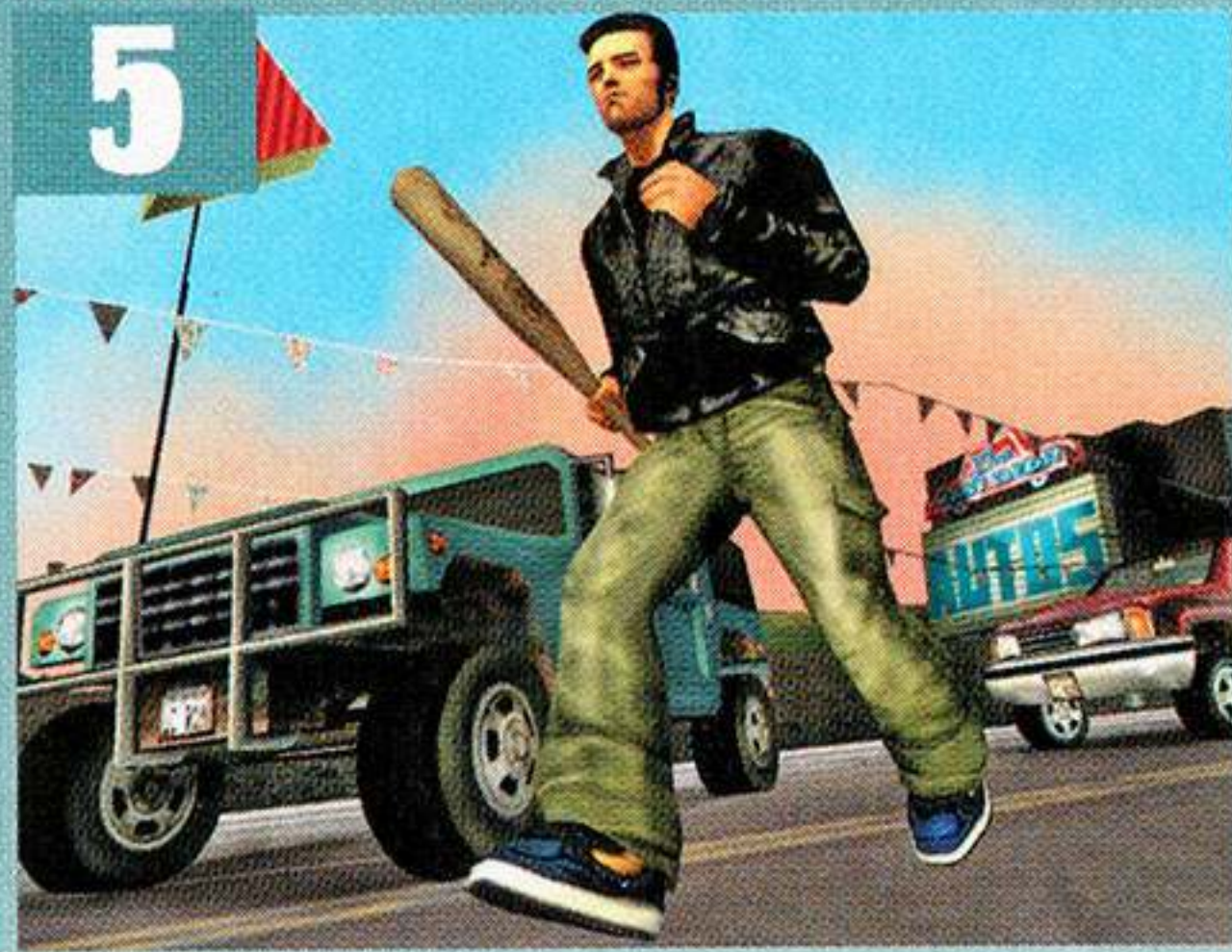
[GTA: San Andreas]

6



Voiced by the incomparable James Woods, Mike Toreno brings any cut-scene he's in to life with his labyrinthine politics and endlessly contorting plastic morality. It may seem like cheating to lump all of his improbable missions together, but they congeal into a sort of James Bond second life for Carl Johnson. Whether you're stealing onto a plane as it takes off, blowing up black government helicopters, or making off with millions of dollars in unwieldy jump jet technology, by the time Toreno's done with you you're closer to a super spy than the thug life. You thought you were just going to learn to fly, right? As if all that weren't enough, Toreno's one of the few people that doesn't eventually turn on you, and just getting to hear James Woods chew the scenery with unchained, swaggering bravado is aurally arresting.

How to Solve a Problem Like Maria [GTAIII]



Throughout GTAIII, Maria is a total pain in the neck, jabbering endlessly about nothing in particular, and generally making your life much more difficult than it needs to be. Finally, after all the bloodshed and gunplay, after surviving Catalina's treachery and rescuing the wench, this dim bulb's still going on and on about her broken nail and her ruined hair and how much it's going to cost her and, well, our nameless, speechless hero does what anyone in his video game shoes would do: he blows what passes for her brains all over the sidewalk, to the deafening roar of cheers from gamers all over the world. If only we'd had control over waxing the chatterbox ourselves. Yet even as he walks alone to whatever awaits him, our enigmatic hero maintains his monastic silence.

Green Street Hooligans [GTA: San Andreas]



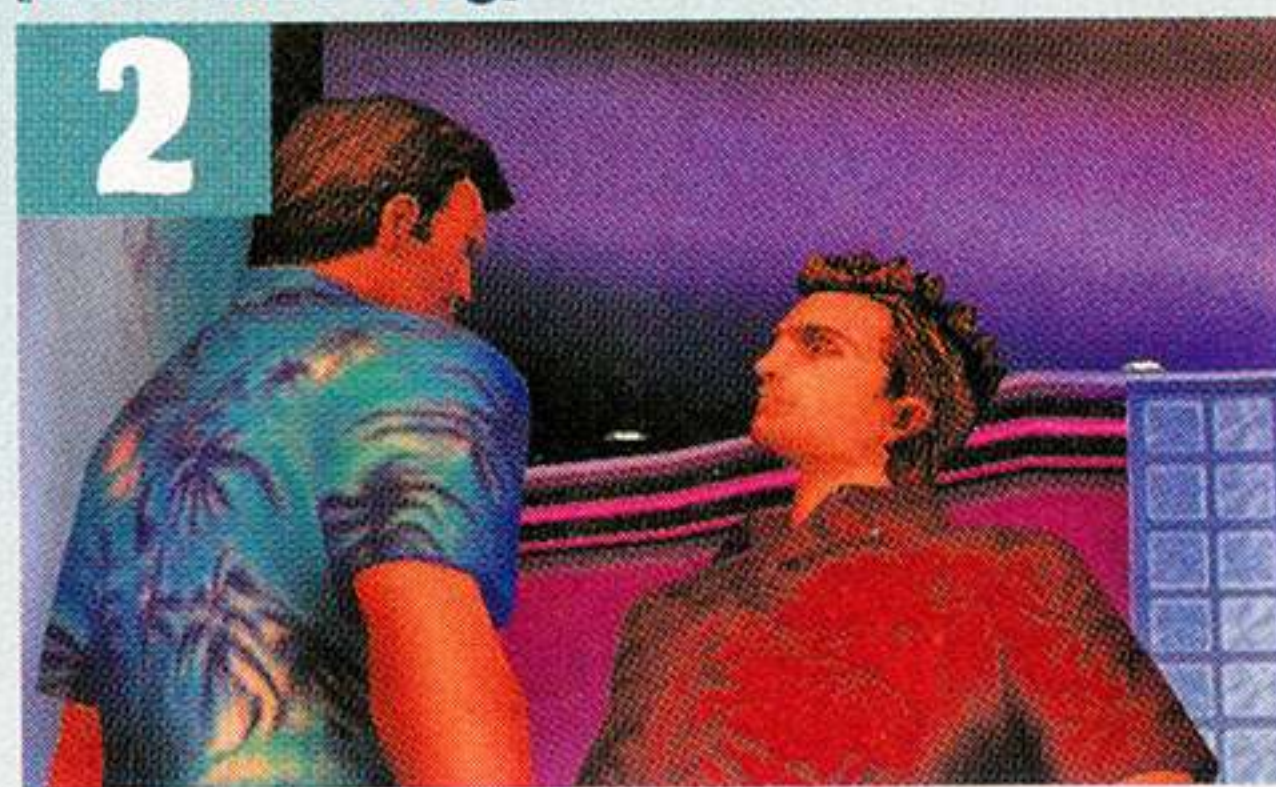
A surprise lurks in the first act of the San Andreas saga. No sooner have you made friends with your sister's boyfriend Cesar than he calls you over to have a look at something he won't talk about on the phone. While you're camped out in a car, you see some members of the rival Ballas gang come out of a crack den in their signature purple duds...followed by Ryder and Big Smoke. Worse yet, they open the garage to reveal the green Sabre that was spotted at your Mother's murder! To top it all off, Sweet gets ambushed and sent to the pen, and you get dropped off in the tail end of nowhere by Tenpenny and Polaski, losing all the territory you gained for the Green Street posse in the process. In all of GTA history, nobody's life sucks worse than CJ's at this particular moment.

Project Mayhem [GTA: Vice City]



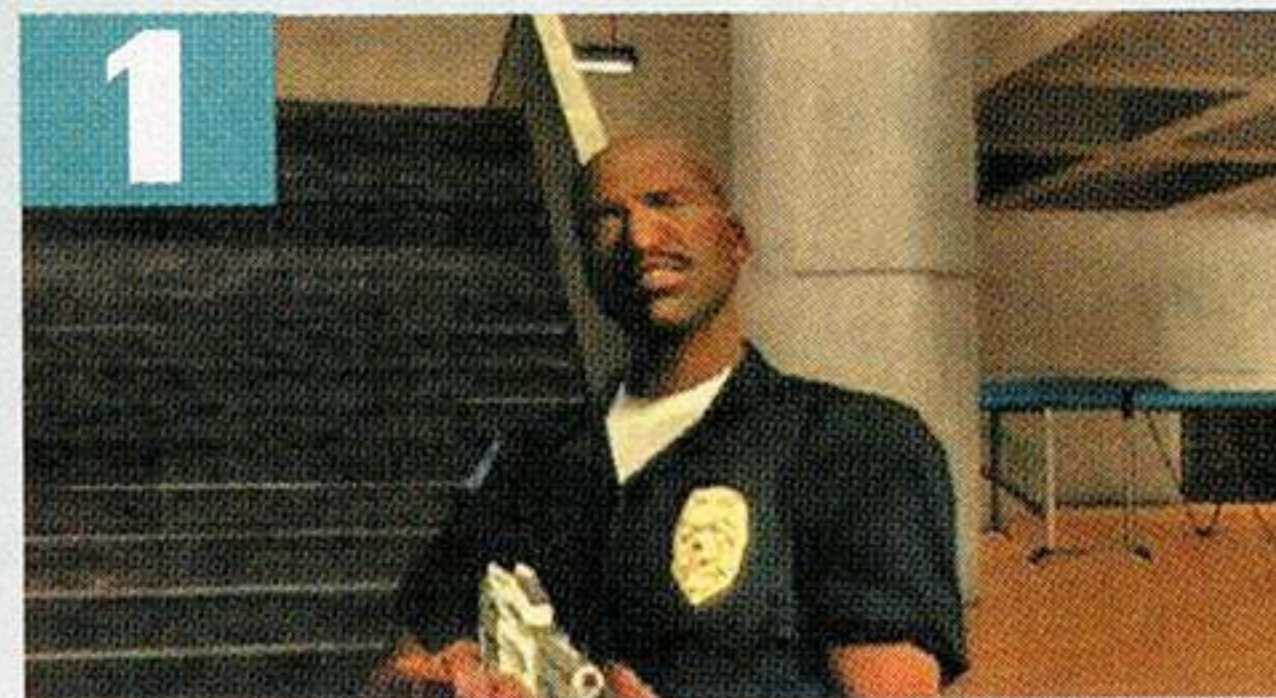
"G-Spotlight" is probably the most fun mission in Vice City, and the goal is to light up a building with a promotion for Candy Suxxx the, um, "actress." Getting to the spotlight requires successfully completing a series of motorcycle jumps from one building to another inside of seven minutes. Breaking through plate glass, surviving countless near misses, and generally performing the most outlandishly reckless motorcycle stunts ever conceived, is just pure fun. You'll probably plant face to roofing tar more than a couple times, but it's nothing Tommy can't shrug off. Even the time limit isn't much of a hassle, as long as you give yourself enough runway to build up speed, and who could ask for a better payoff than an advertisement for porn draped across a skyscraper?

Taking Out the Trash [GTA: Vice City]



The powers up North head South to confront Tommy, and they've got an ace up their sleeve, with Lance turning traitor and jumping sides. Birds of a treacherous idiotic feather tend to flock together, even in Vice City. After all his whining and screw-ups, it's really for the best that the unfortunately named Lance Vance go underground for good. The final confrontation with Sonny is as intense for its spoken words as for its action, with your former boss having the cajones to tell you that the 15 years you spent in prison were "his to spend." If you're lucky, you had a rocket launcher on hand to spread Sonny up and down the street like so much strawberry jam. The final scene with Ken Rosenberg is inspirational in classic GTA style. "You know, Ken, I think this could be the beginning of a beautiful business relationship. After all, you're a conniving back-stabbing two-bit thief...and I'm a convicted psychotic killer and drug-dealer!"

Tenpenny Street Opera [GTA: San Andreas]

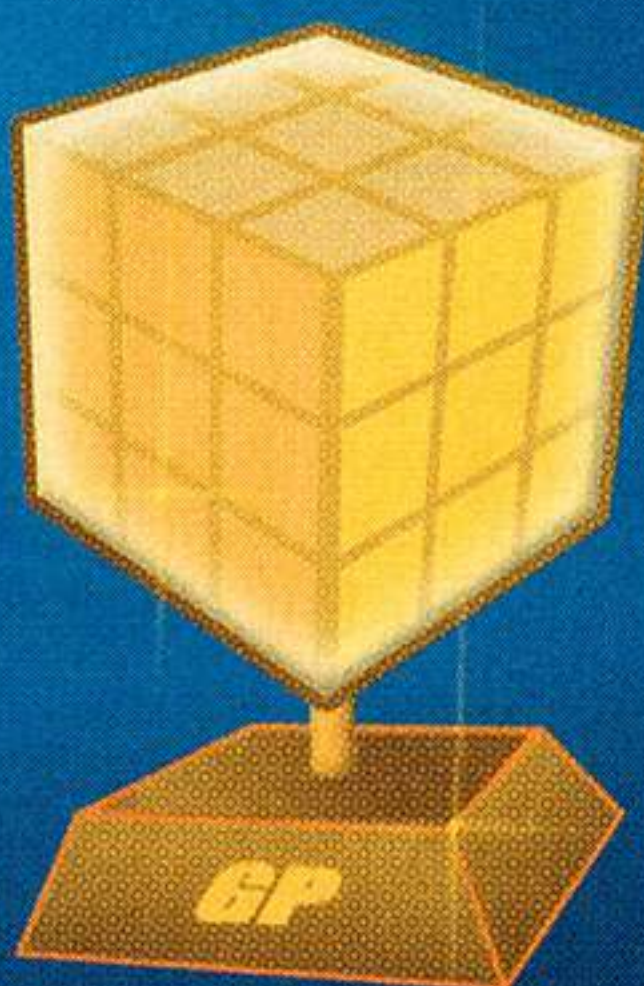


Tenpenny conveniently shows up the minute you put Big Smoke out of his bloated misery, has him load up a suitcase with cash from the nearby safe, and then triggers a massive explosion. Officer Pothead heads off on a fire truck, and Sweet makes an ill-advised grab for the trailing ladder at the last minute. From that point on, it's an all-out chase across city highways, side streets, and parking lots. Save Sweet's life, drive away the never-ending supply of cops that give chase, and force Tenpenny off an overpass to his death, and you'll get to take a nice close look at the officer's dead-as-dead-gets corpse. Sure, the whole spectacle takes place along a fixed route, but it's still the most exciting ending yet to a GTA game.



GamePro Readers' Choice Awards 2006

Make your voice heard! Go to GamePro.com/rca/ and tell us your favorite games of 2006—you might even win a Samsung HDTV.



Best Brain/Reflex

- **Beatmania** (PS2)
- **Big Brain Academy** (DS)
- **CMT Presents: Karaoke Revolution Country** (PS2)
- **Dance Dance Revolution SuperNOVA** (PS2)
- **Elite Beat Agents** (DS)
- **Guitar Hero II** (PS2)
- **Pokemon Trozei** (DS)
- **The Rub Rabbits** (DS)
- **Tetris DS** (DS)
- **Viva Piñata** (Xbox 360)

Best Driving/Racing

- **ATV Offroad Fury 4** (PS2)
- **Excite Truck** (Wii)
- **Full Auto** (Xbox 360)
- **NASCAR 07** (PS2, Xbox)
- **Need for Speed: Carbon** (PS3, PS2, Xbox360, Xbox, GameCube)
- **OutRun 2006: Coast 2 Coast** (Xbox)
- **Pursuit Force** (PSP)
- **Ridge Racer 7** (PS3)
- **Sonic Riders** (PS2, Xbox)
- **Street Supremacy** (PSP)
- **Test Drive Unlimited** (Xbox 360)
- **ToCA Race Driver 3** (PS2, Xbox)
- **Tourist Trophy** (PS2)
- **WRC: FIA World Championship** (PSP)

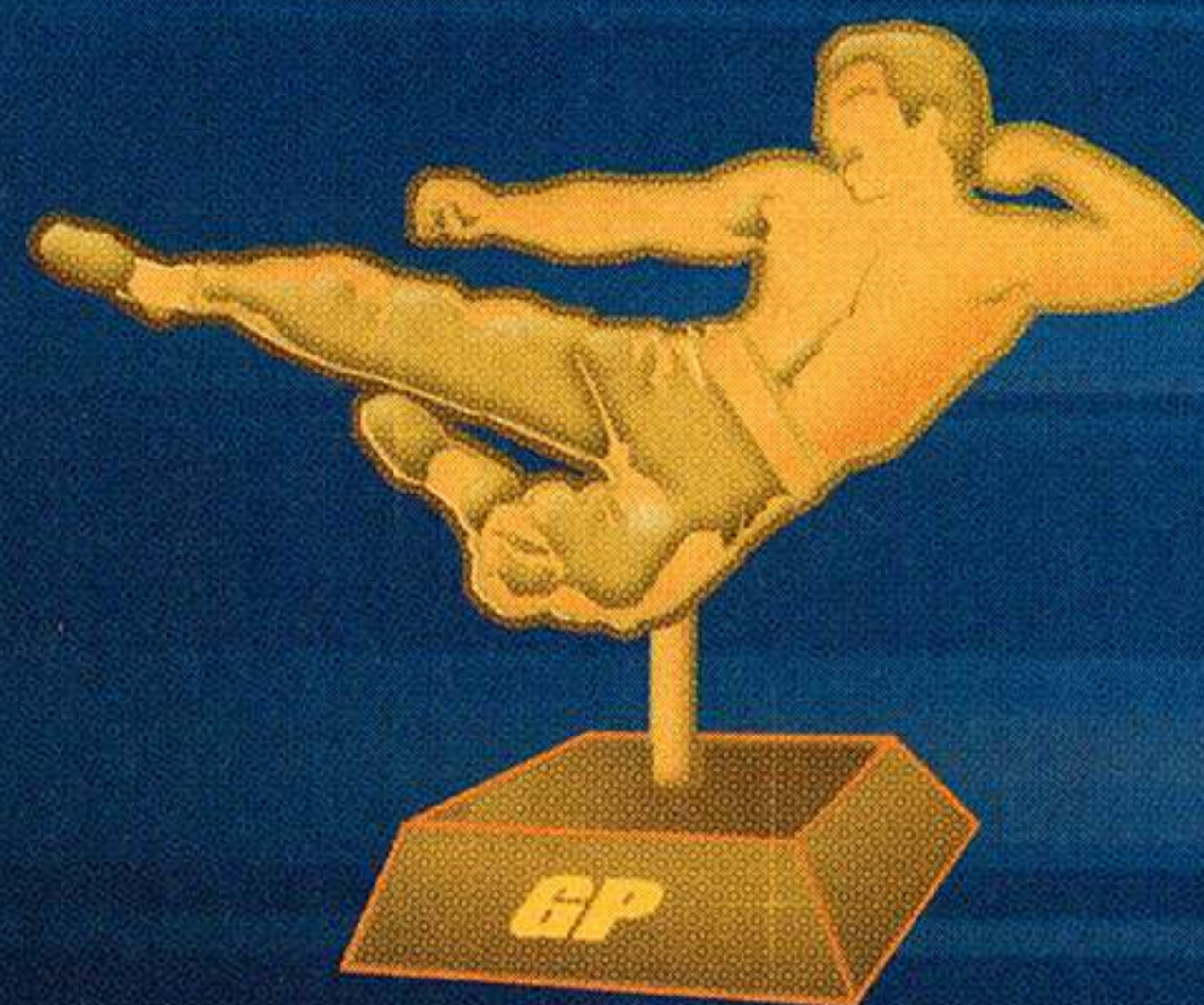
Best Action/Adventure

- **Bully** (PS2)
- **Castlevania: Portrait of Ruin** (DS)
- **Dead Rising** (Xbox 360)
- **Destroy All Humans! 2** (PS2, Xbox)
- **Exit** (PSP)
- **The Godfather** (PS2, Xbox 360, Xbox)
- **Grand Theft Auto: Vice City Stories** (PSP)
- **Hitman: Blood Money** (PS2, Xbox 360, Xbox)
- **Just Cause** (Xbox 360)
- **Lara Croft Tomb Raider: Legend** (PS2, Xbox)
- **The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess** (Wii, GameCube)
- **LEGO Star Wars II: The Original Trilogy** (PS2, Xbox 360, Xbox, GameCube)
- **New Super Mario Bros.** (DS)
- **Onimusha: Dawn of Dreams** (PS2)
- **Okami** (PS2)
- **The Outfit** (Xbox 360)
- **Saints Row** (Xbox 360)
- **Scarface: The World Is Yours** (PS2, Xbox)
- **Sonic the Hedgehog** (PS3, Xbox 360)
- **Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell: Double Agent** (PS2, Xbox 360, Xbox, GameCube)
- **Yoshi's Island DS** (DS)



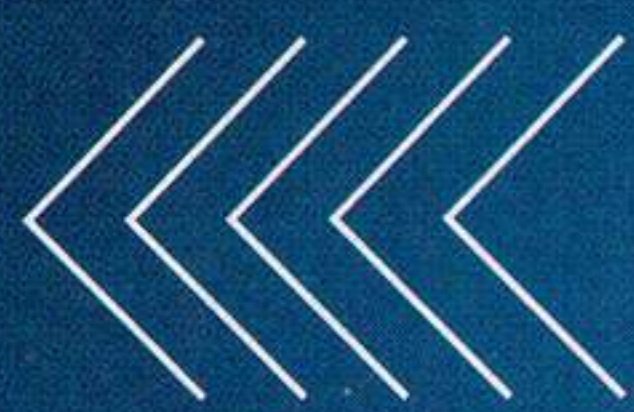
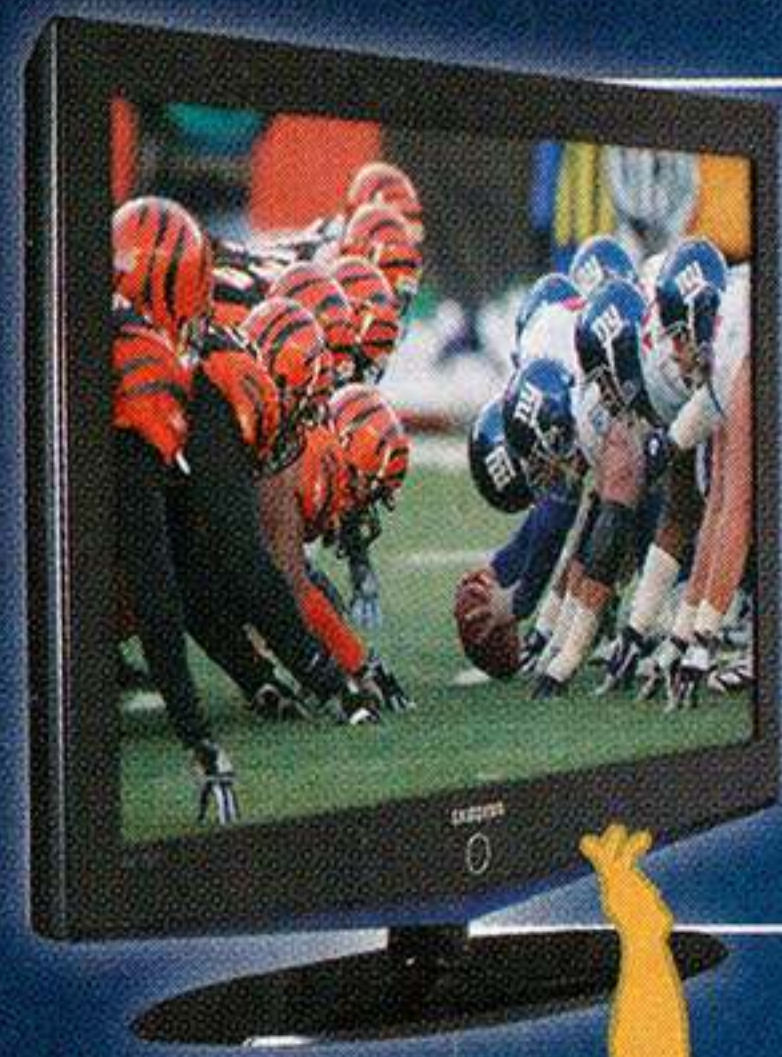
Best Combat/Shooting

- **Battlefield 2: Modern Combat** (Xbox 360)
- **Black** (PS2, Xbox)
- **Call of Duty 3** (PS3, PS2, Xbox 360, Xbox, Wii)
- **F.E.A.R.** (PS3, Xbox 360)
- **Full Spectrum Warrior: Ten Hammers** (PS2, Xbox)
- **Gears of War** (Xbox360)
- **Killzone: Liberation** (PSP)
- **Metroid Prime Hunters** (DS)
- **The Outfit** (Xbox 360)
- **Painkiller: Hell Wars** (Xbox)
- **Prey** (Xbox 360)
- **Resistance: Fall of Man** (PS3)
- **SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs Combined Assault** (PS2)
- **Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter** (Xbox 360)
- **Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six Vegas** (Xbox 360)



Best Fighting

- **Mortal Kombat: Armageddon** (PS2, Xbox)
- **Naruto: Clash of Ninja** (GameCube)
- **Street Fighter Alpha Anthology** (PS2)
- **Super Dragon Ball Z** (PS2)
- **Tekken: Dark Resurrection** (PSP)
- **WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2007** (Xbox 360)



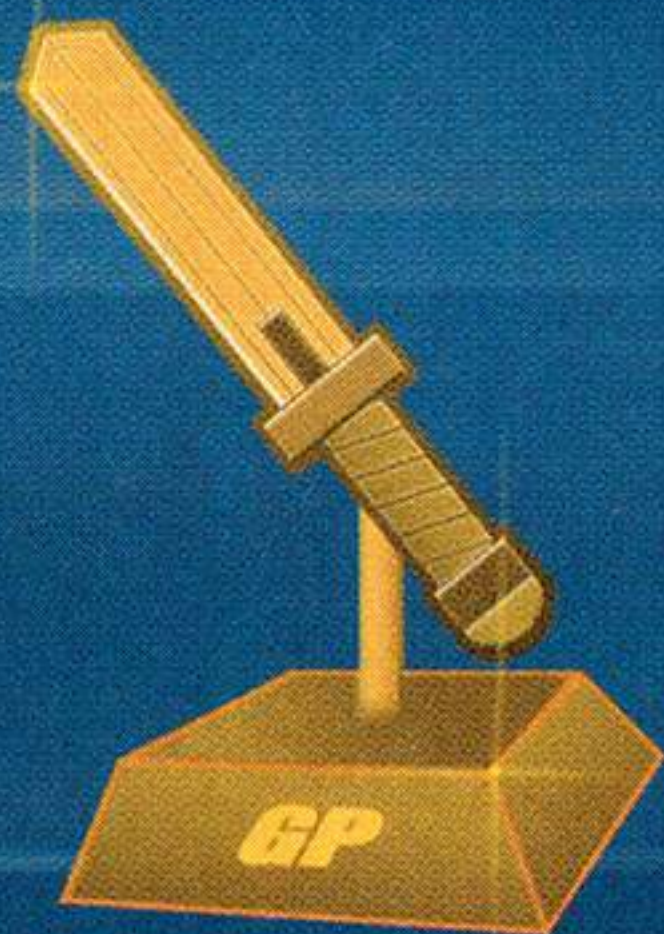
Win!

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Best Extreme Sports

- **Crusty Demons: Freestyle Moto-X** (PS2, Xbox)
- **Dead or Alive: Xtreme 2** (Xbox 360)
- **Mario Hoops 3-on-3** (DS)
- **Tony Hawk's Downhill Jam** (Wii)
- **Tony Hawk's Project 8** (PS3, PS2, Xbox 360, Xbox)



Best Role-Playing

- **The Dirge of Cerberus: Final Fantasy VII** (PS2)
- **Disgaea 2: Cursed Memories** (PS2)
- **Drakengard 2** (PS2)
- **The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion** (Xbox 360)
- **Final Fantasy III** (DS)
- **Final Fantasy IV Advance** (DS)
- **Final Fantasy XII** (PS2)
- **Grandia III** (PS2)
- **Kingdom Hearts II** (PS2)
- **Marvel: Ultimate Alliance** (PS3, PS2, Xbox360, Xbox, Wii)
- **Phantasy Star Universe** (PS2, Xbox 360, Xbox)
- **Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Blue/Red Rescue Team** (DS)
- **Shadow Hearts: From the New World** (PS2)
- **Steambot Chronicles** (PS2)
- **Tales of Legendia** (PS2)
- **Valkyrie Profile 2: Silmeria** (PS2)
- **Xenosaga Episode III: Also Sprach Zarathustra** (PS2)



Best Sports

- **2006 FIFA World Cup** (PS2, Xbox 360, Xbox, GameCube)
- **And 1 Streetball** (PS2, Xbox)
- **Arena Football** (PS2, Xbox)
- **College Hoops 2K7** (PS2, Xbox 360, Xbox)
- **FIFA 07** (PS2, Xbox)
- **Madden NFL 07** (PS3, PS2, Xbox 360, Xbox, Wii)
- **Major League Baseball 2K6** (PS2, Xbox 360, Xbox, GameCube)
- **MLB '06: The Show** (PS2)
- **NBA 2K7** (PS2, Xbox 360, Xbox)
- **NBA Ballers: Phenom** (PS2, Xbox)
- **NBA Featuring the Life, Vol. 2** (PS2)
- **NBA Live 07** (PS2, Xbox 360, Xbox)
- **NCAA Football 07** (PS2, Xbox 360, Xbox)
- **NFL Head Coach** (PS2, Xbox)
- **NFL Street 3** (PS2)
- **NHL 07** (PS2, Xbox360, Xbox)
- **NHL 2K7** (PS2, Xbox 360, Xbox)
- **Table Tennis** (Xbox 360)
- **Top Spin 2** (Xbox 360)
- **Tiger Woods PGA Tour 07** (PS3, PS2, Xbox 360, Xbox)
- **True Swing Golf** (DS)
- **World Soccer Winning Eleven 9 International** (PS2)



Game of the Year

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

- **The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion** (Xbox 360)
- **Final Fantasy XII** (PS2)
- **Gears of War** (Xbox 360)
- **Grand Theft Auto: Vice City Stories** (PSP)
- **Guitar Hero II** (PS2)
- **Okami** (PS2)
- **Kingdom Hearts II** (PS2)
- **Lara Croft Tomb Raider: Legend** (PS2, Xbox 360, Xbox)
- **The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess** (Wii, GameCube)
- **Madden NFL 07** (PS3, PS2, Xbox 360, Xbox, Wii)
- **Need for Speed: Carbon** (PS3, PS2, Xbox 360, Xbox, GameCube)
- **New Super Mario Bros.** (DS)
- **Saints Row** (Xbox 360)
- **Scarface: The World Is Yours** (PS2, Xbox)
- **Super Dragon Ball Z** (PS2)
- **Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell: Double Agent** (PS2, Xbox 360, Xbox, GameCube)
- **WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2007** (Xbox 360)



Worst Game of the Year

Write your choice for Worst Game of the Year: Which game of 2006 made you most miserable?

Results will appear in the May 2007 issue of GamePro magazine and on GamePro.com. The winner will be selected at random from completed online ballots received by the deadline. No purchase necessary. Void where prohibited. Must be age 13+ to enter. Go to www.GamePro.com/RCA/ to enter and to review the Official Rules.

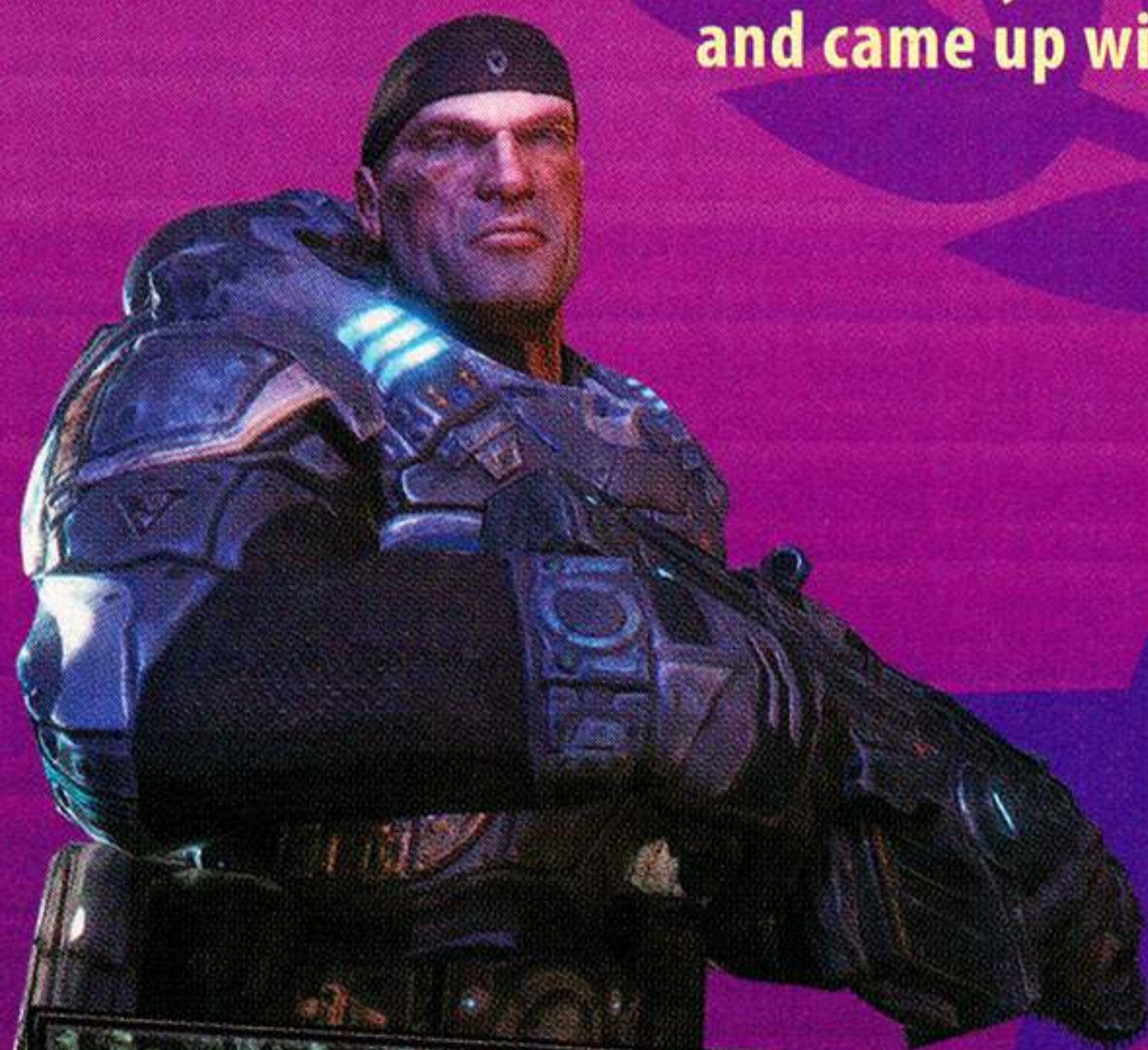
GamePro

★ Best of ★

2006

Editors' Choice

It's that time of year! The *GamePro* editors put their heads together and came up with these top games of 2006. *By The GamePros*



Best Game of the Year

Gears of War

Developed by **Epic Games** Published by **Microsoft** (Xbox 360)

What grants *Gears of War* on the Xbox 360 the Game of the Year award? Originality? Check. Skillful implementation of concept and design? Check. The most exhilarating single, coop, and multiplayer experience since *Halo 2*? Check. *Gears of War* is drenched in blood and we can't get enough of it. As one of the most highly anticipated, and hyped, games of the year, Cliffy B. and Epic have struck a chord throughout the gaming industry with *Gears of War*. As the first game to incorporate co-op over Xbox Live, *Gears of War* is a hard-hitting, squad-based action shooter with enough momentum to derail a train. At this very moment, copies of the game are still selling out in stores and it's the number one game played on Xbox Live. If you haven't played *Gears of War*, you're missing out on one of the most phenomenal, thrilling, and heart-pounding games ever made, visually exploding with graphical goodness.

Runner-Up: **Guitar Hero II**

Developed by **Harmonix** Published by **RedOctane** (PS2)

Action/Adventure

Okami

Developed by **Clover Studios** Published by **Capcom** (PS2)

Okami is the story of the Shinto sun god returning to Earth in the form of a white wolf, out to restore landscapes beset by a particularly grubby evil with ethereal brush strokes, claw swipes, and the help of a strange little bouncing bug. Sure, it's precisely the sort of oddity that could only have originated in Japan, but it's more than that. A lot more. To call Okami's elegant visuals "cel-shaded" is to drastically understate their impact. Mimicking the aesthetics of a particular style of Japanese watercolor painting, and accompanied by traditional music, the appearance of this magically saturated world is tied closely to the gameplay. As the wolf, you may pause at any time by holding a button, and drag the "celestial brush" across the scene to paint missing objects into existence, turn night into day, complete star constellations, cut through monsters and obstacles with an inky sword slash, and much more. But more than just innovative play mechanics, Okami's beautifully constructed, epic adventure (that's loaded with side quests) will keep you enthralled for days.



Runner-Up: Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell: Double Agent

Developed by **Ubisoft Shanghai** Published by **Ubisoft** (PS2, Xbox 360, Xbox, GameCube)

Combat/Shooting

Gears of War

Developed by **Epic Games** Published by **Microsoft** (Xbox 360)

Gears of War isn't quite a full-tilt shooter. It walks a tightrope between games like Resident Evil 4 (the over-the-shoulder precision aiming) and Metal Gear Solid (the stealth and cover dynamic). The resulting witches' brew is hard to label, but for us, Gears is the best thing to happen to the shooter genre since Half-Life. The chief accomplishment is a sleeker, more authentic approach to firefights that force you to stake out strategic squat-and-pop cover positions. Each battlefield plays a bit like an organic puzzle, adding considerable strategy and immense replayability. It's no longer about running through corridors, gunning down waves of faceless goons in search of a bigger rocket launcher. In Gears, enemies are out to get you, and you've got to think quickly or pay the consequences. It's an electric experience that makes games like Quake 4 or F.E.A.R. feel like they're from another era of gaming entirely. It's fresh, it's thrilling, and it works.

Runner-Up: F.E.A.R.

Developed by **Day One Studios**
Published by **Vivendi Universal Games** (PS3, Xbox 360)

Brain/Reflex

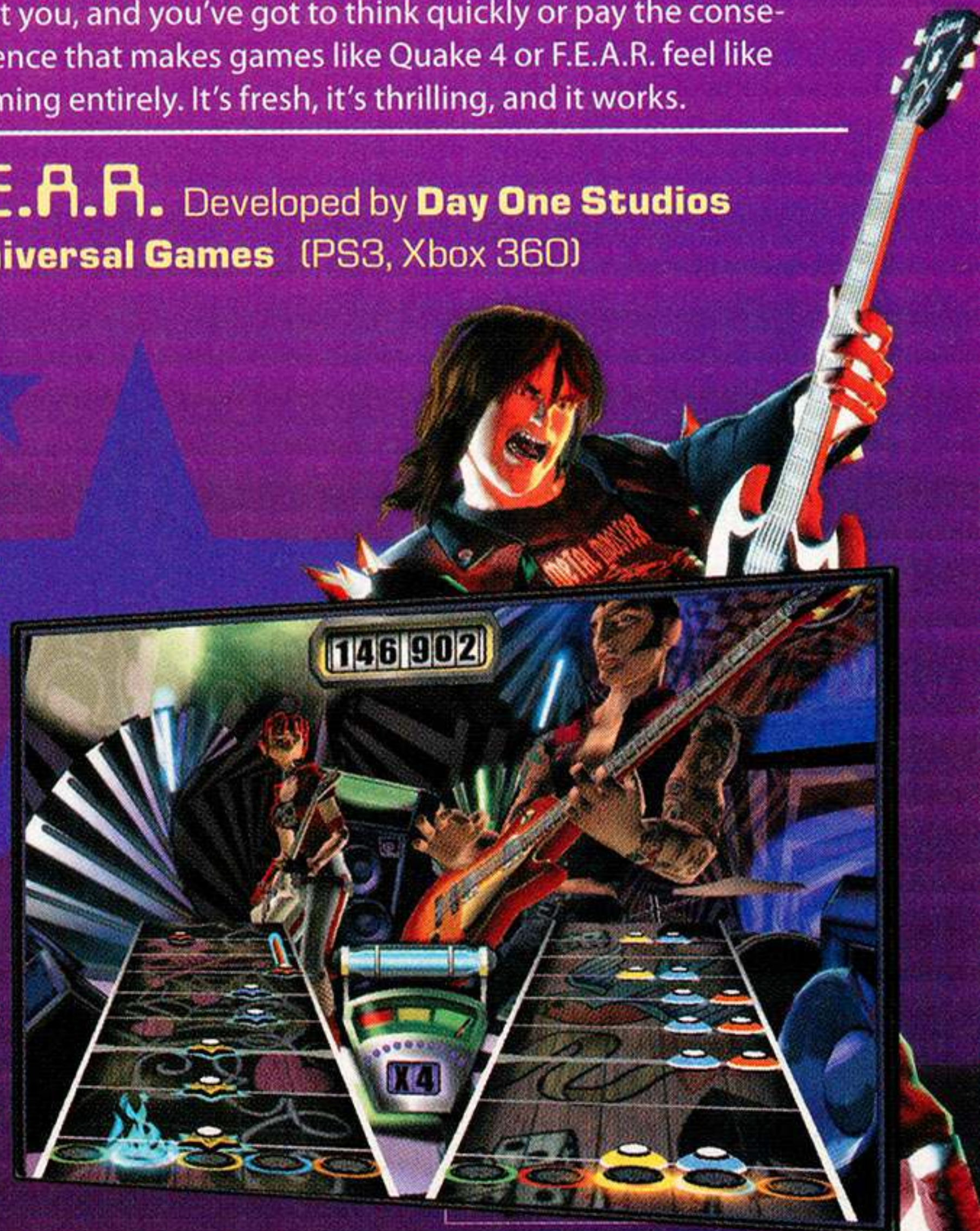
Guitar Hero II

Developed by **Harmonix** Published by **RedOctane** (PS2)

Games like Dance Dance Revolution and BeatMania opened the door for interactive music simulators, but RedOctane took things to the next level, with titles that use an actual guitar peripheral. Ever since it was launched in 2005, Guitar Hero developed a loyal following, which is understandable considering the game's clever guitar-simulation play mechanics that could make amateur air players arena-rock gods. Guitar Hero II took the series to "eleven" with 66 tracks spread out over 40 licensed songs, plus 26 additional tunes, a ramped-up difficulty, and plethora of clever multiplayer modes that are ripe for expansion in successive Guitar Hero sequels. Rock on!

Runner-Up: Big Brain Academy

Developed by **Nintendo** Published by **Nintendo** (DS)



Driving/Racing

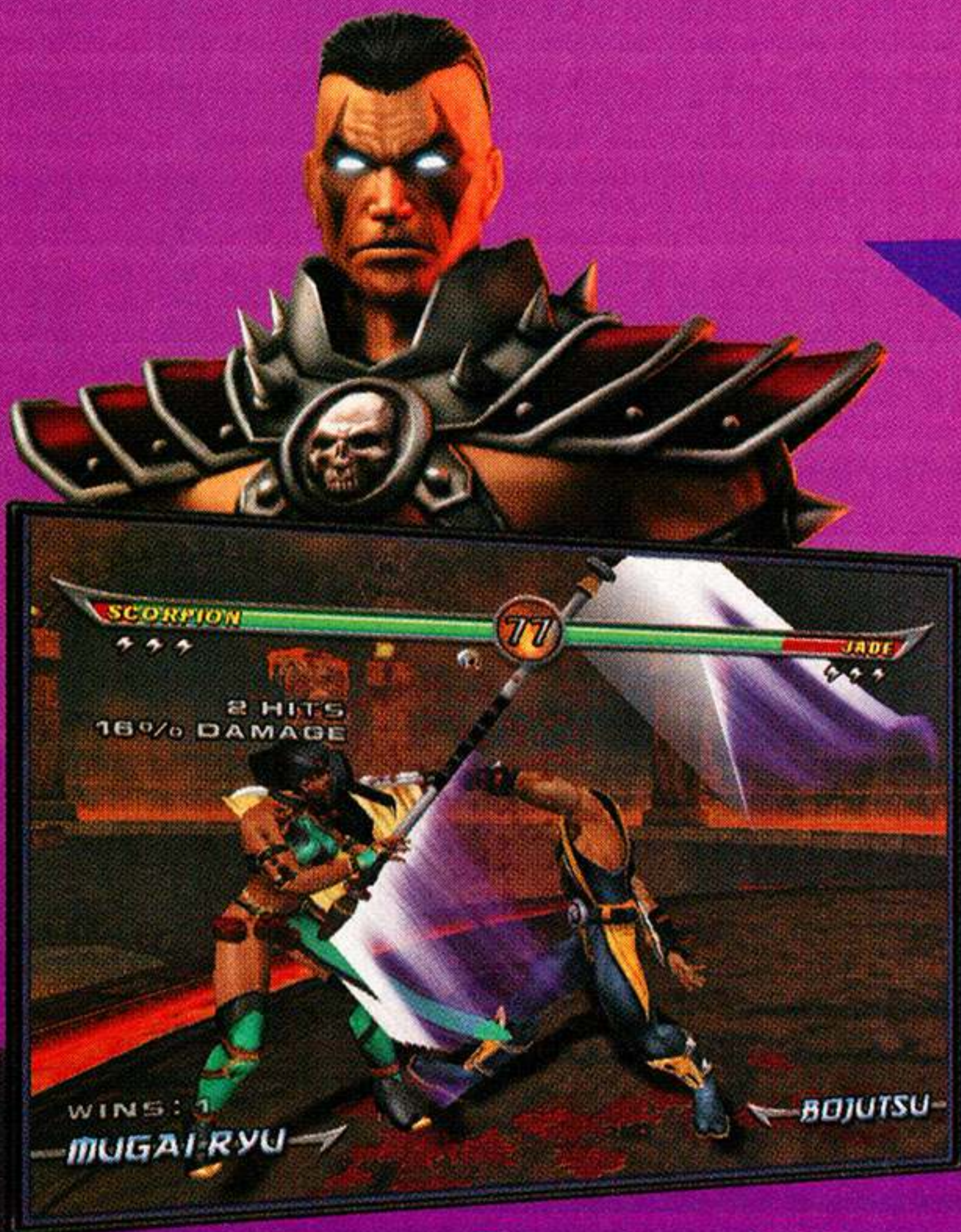
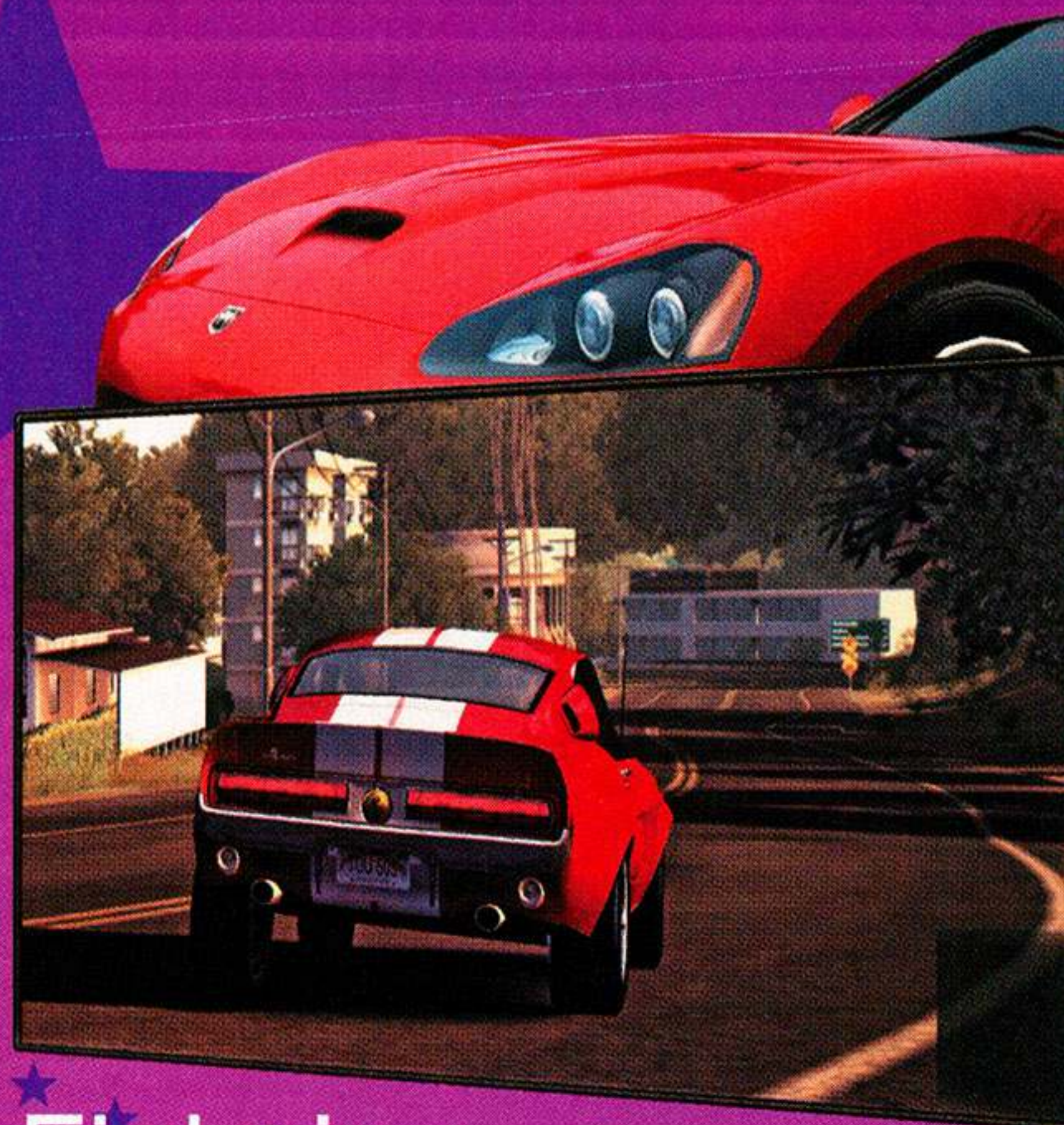
Test Drive Unlimited

Developed by **Eden Studios** Published by **Atari** (Xbox 360)

You can't get any closer in a race to the checkered flag than the fender-banging contest between Test Drive Unlimited and Need for Speed: Carbon, but Test Drive won by about the length of the gleam from the fender of an Aston Martin DB4 Zagato. Whether it's the awesome online racing and the opportunity to form auto clubs via Xbox Live or that free trip to the Hawaiian island of Oahu (recreated in amazing detail), the venerable Test Drive franchise has kicked it into overdrive for the next generation. It could have been motorcycle fans who were the deciding factor, too, since bikers finally get the chance to go head-to-head versus drivers. With all of that and more going for it, Test Drive Unlimited and Atari earn a victory lap in the island sun as Driving Game of the Year.

Runner-Up: Need for Speed: Carbon

Developed by **EA Black Box** Published by **EA Games**
(PS2, Xbox 360, Xbox, GameCube)



Fighting

Mortal Kombat: Armageddon

Developed by **Midway** Published by **Midway** (PS2, Xbox)

The seventh incarnation of Midway's one-on-one bloodbath, Mortal Kombat: Armageddon, came to the PlayStation 2 and Xbox with a roster of over 60 playable kombatants, a profusion of extra modes, and enough intestinal shrapnel to make any Mortal Kombat maniac happy. Armageddon isn't merely a victory for the series—it's the best MK game since Mortal Kombat II. The play engine is faster, controls more responsive, and the insane degree of customization (including create-your-own Fatalities) all make for an incredibly well-rounded fighter. Add in Motor Kombat (think of an evil Mario Kart) and Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3, and you have a game that's more than worth \$40, and our choice for Best Fighting Game.

Runner-Up: WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2007

Developed by **Yuke's** Published by **THQ**
(Xbox 360)

Role-Playing

Final Fantasy XII

Developed by **Square Enix** Published by **Square Enix** (PS2)

It had been almost five years since the last "true" Final Fantasy game. The online-only FFXI and underwhelming FFX-2 both strayed off the tried and true Fantasy path that VII so bravely forged and this left fans yearning for a return to the classic formula. The wait is over as Final Fantasy XII re-established the series dominance as the king of console RPGs. It is a rare gem of a game that simply radiates excellence, quality, and has a shot at becoming the best Final Fantasy title to date. Produced by the same creative team behind two of Square's cult hits, Final Fantasy Tactics and Vagrant Story, Final Fantasy XII's outstanding character design, stellar art direction, and soaring musical score are but a few of the treasures of this epic adventure.

Runner-Up: Kingdom Hearts II

Developed by **Square Enix** Published by **Square Enix** (PS2)

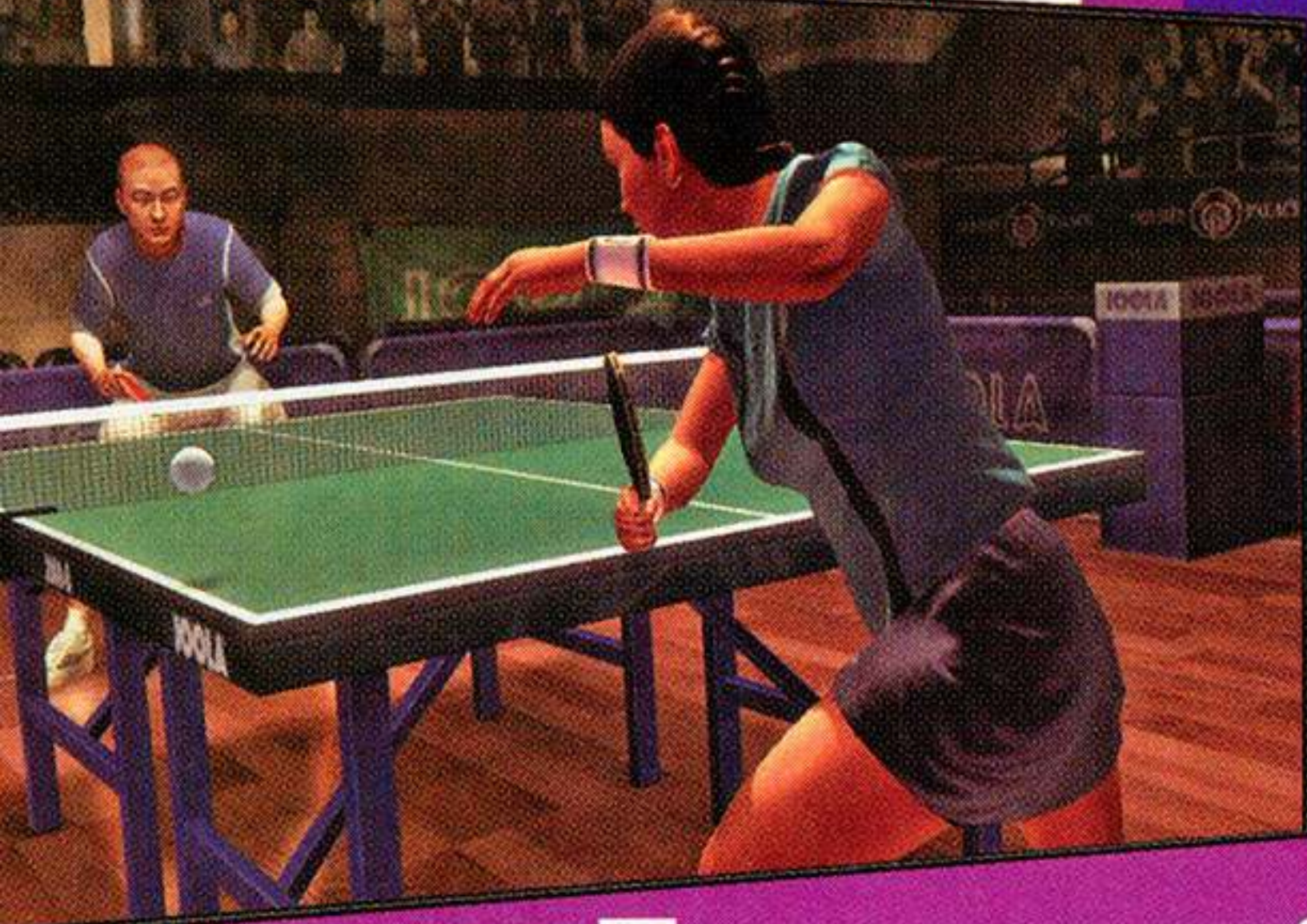




Sports

Table Tennis

Developed by **Rockstar San Diego** Published by **Rockstar Games** (Xbox 360)



Madden, for a change, didn't win this category. The world was surprised when Rockstar Games announced that their first Xbox 360 game would be (drum roll)...Table Tennis. However the company's first foray into Microsoft's next-gen machine turned out to be an unexpected treat. The initial gameplay mechanics are simple enough, letting newbies pick up the controls rather easily, but to truly master the game you need to learn the slight nuances and subtleties of the sport. Thankfully, you get those in spin shots, trick serves, and lightning-fast rallies. Multiplayer only adds more fun to this already impressive experience.

Runner-Up: **Madden NFL 07**

Developed by **EA Tiburon** Published by **EA Sports** (PS3, PS2, Xbox 360, Wii)

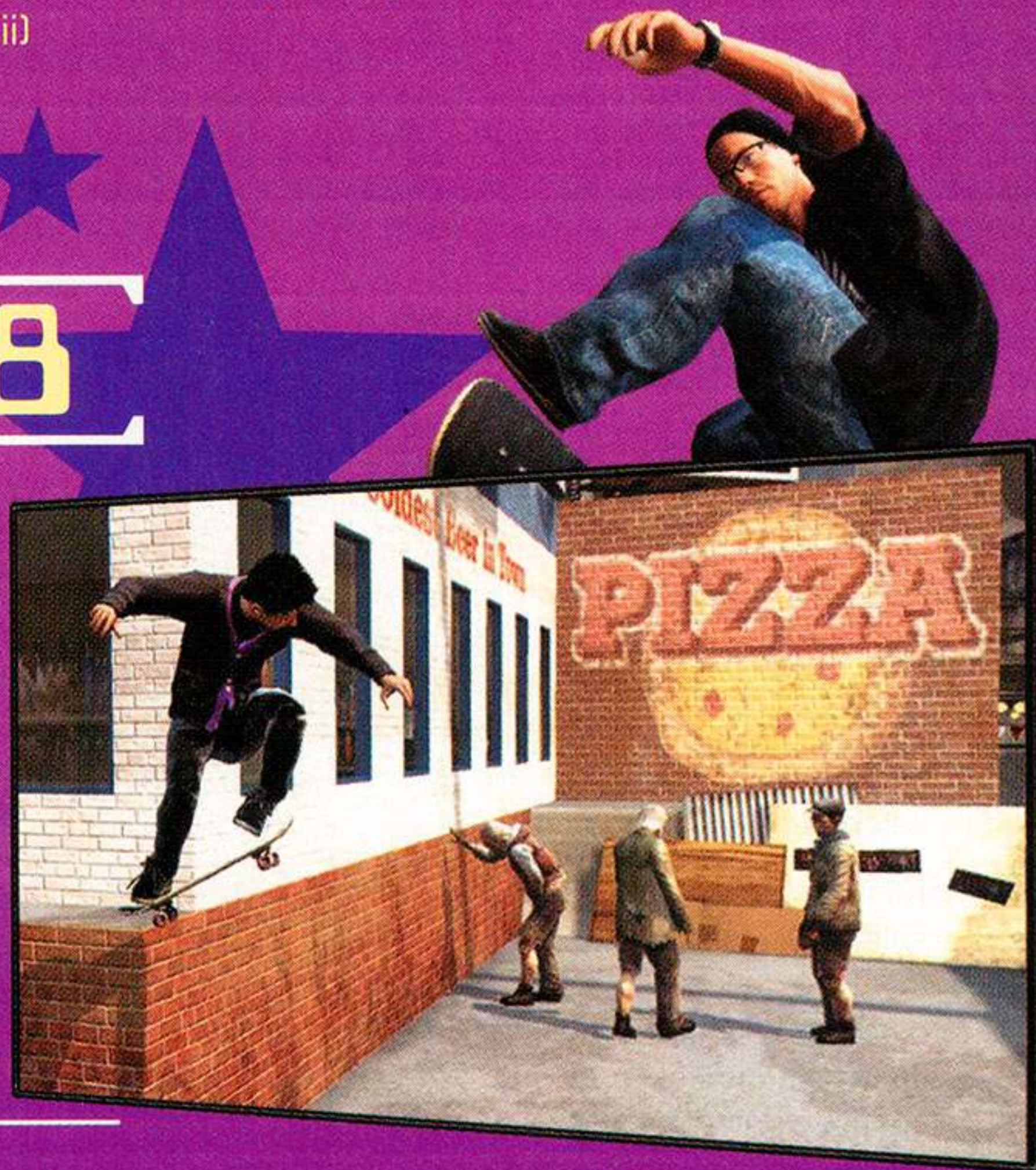
Extreme Sports

Tony Hawk's Project 8

Developed by **Neversoft** Published by **Activision**

(PS3, PS2, Xbox 360, Xbox)

For the eighth time the Birdman cometh. Tony Hawk's Project 8 returns to everything that was incredibly addictive from the first two THPS games into a beautiful package. How'd they do it? For starters, developer Neversoft stripped gaming's top skateboarding franchise back to its roots, focusing more on the actual act of skating in impressive, interweaving environments and less on throwaway stories involving obnoxious costars like Bam Margera. Project 8 give gamers the whole shebang right from the start, opening up every skate-able area in the game from the moment your customized skater steps onto his/her board. But the Nail the Trick mode—the equivalent of bullet time on a skateboard—is what really sucks you in. Imagine linking together a high-multiplayer combo, connected by a slow motion shove-it where your character's feet are controlled by each corresponding analog stick. It's even better than it sounds.



Runner-Up: **Tony Hawk's Downhill Jam**

Developed by **Toys for Bob** Published by **Activision** (Wii)

Worst Game of the Year

Mobile Suit Gundam: Crossfire

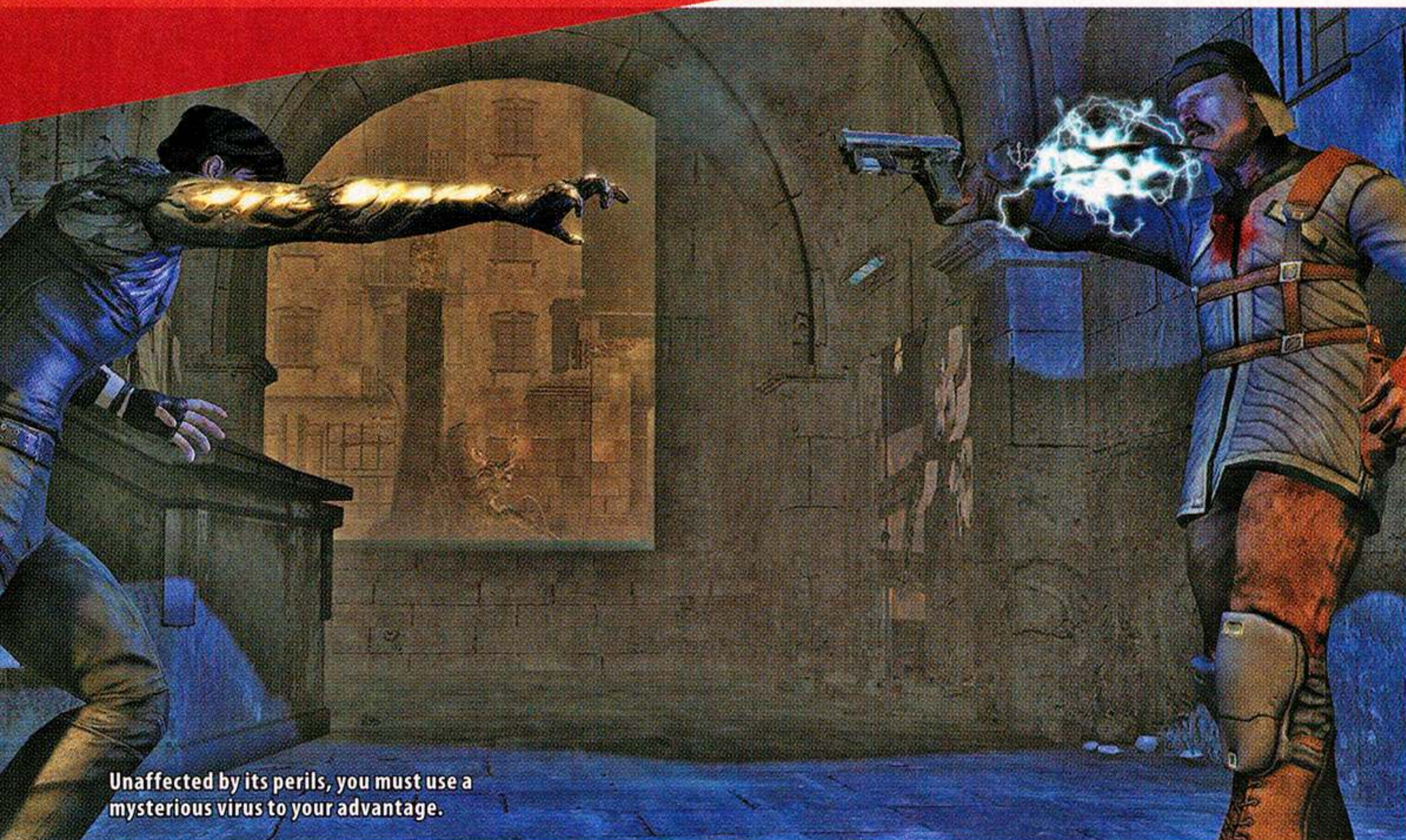


Developed by **Namco Bandai Games** Published by **Namco Bandai Games** (PS3)

When it came down to the worst of the worst, there was strong competition, but in the end, Mobile Suit Gundam: Crossfire came out on top (or, in this case, out the bottom). For every console launch, there's a loser launch title, and Gundam on the PlayStation 3 became the game *not* to get with its boring gameplay, unintuitive controls, and uninspired visuals that look as if they were done on the PlayStation 2. Add in an inexplicably absent online multiplayer feature, and you have a game that our reviewer referred to as "a pretty nice \$60 drink coaster," that even 50 Cent couldn't out awful.

Runner-Up: **50 Cent: Bulletproof**

Developed by **High Voltage Software** Published by **Vivendi Universal Games** (PS2, Xbox)



Unaffected by its perils, you must use a mysterious virus to your advantage.



Dark Sector

Feel no pain

PS3

Xbox 360

Code name for a dormant Soviet bioengineering experiment housed in Lasria during the 1950s, production is back into full swing on the Dark Sector project. But after a bizarre breakout of a techno-organic virus, scientists flee the Lotus Complex leaving the infected humans and animals of Lasria behind.

No Pain, Some Gain

That's where you come in. You are Hayden Tenno, incapable of feeling pain due to a disease you've had since childhood; *Familial dysautonomia*. As an elite member of a secret U.S. government agency, your job is to inspect and investigate the strange happenings at the Lotus Complex. Driving the infected insane from the pain, you come to find that this virus has turned the inhabitants of Lasria into half-beast, half-metallic life forms, and the twist of Dark Sector is that you

yourself become infected by this odd viral strand. But, due to your specific sensory deprivation, the pain and insanity are not an issue. You learn to cope and even use the virus to your advantage, and this is where combat becomes crucial in Dark Sector.

As with many third-person shooters, you can snag the standard weapons of any soldier you slay, and Dark Sector will display these weapons on Hayden when active or inactive. But the real fun starts with Hayden's infected arm. As part of the techno-metallic aspect of the virus, Hayden now houses a large triadic blade within his forearm, and the blade can either be used for close or long-range combat. Unlike any other blade or melee device we've seen, this weapon has many uses. It can be stuck to any surface to set traps; a basic concept, but it has an interesting ability to

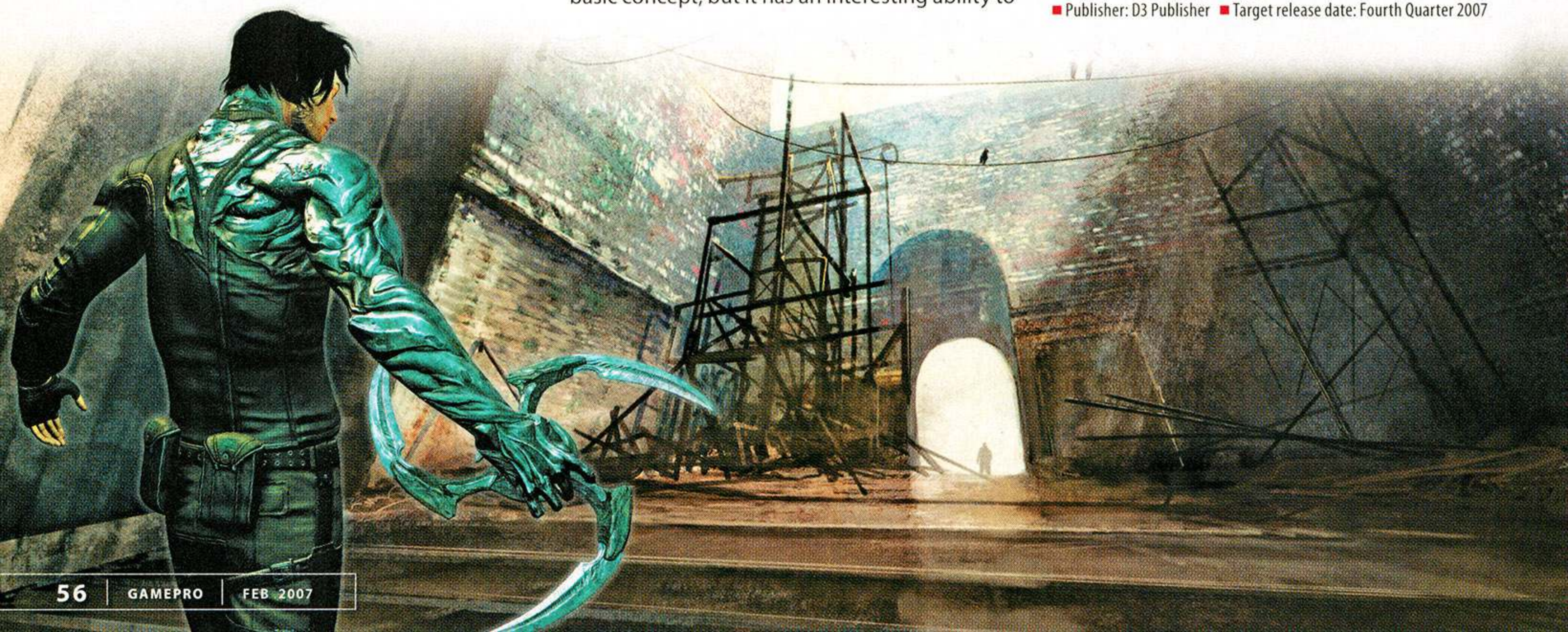


borrow the properties of fire, ice, and even the antidote to the virus, which in turn could be used to transmit the virus to enemies. The blade is one of many new powers gifted to Hayden by the virus, and there are indeed more to come.

Darkness, Reborn

And this is a new Dark Sector than the one revealed two years ago at E3. Once a sci-fi Metal Gear rip-off, Dark Sector has come into its own with plenty of potential.—*Tenacious Moses*

■ **First Look** ■ Developer: Digital Extremes
 ■ Publisher: D3 Publisher ■ Target release date: Fourth Quarter 2007





With polish, open-endedness, and literally explosive gameplay, GTA fans should keep Crackdown on their radar for 2007.



Crackdown

GTA alums have a hip new action game

Since Grand Theft Auto creator David Jones split off from Rockstar to found Real Time Worlds, we haven't heard much from him. That's all about to change.

At first glance, Crackdown looks like GTA. It is, after all, the product of a few former Rockstar employees. You have free-roaming urban landscapes, explosive altercations, and an emphasis on gritty crime. This time, however, there is one important twist: the game looks hot, and that's with several months to go. In the meantime, here's how Pacific City gets down.

You Are the Good Guy

You want to be a gangster? That's so 2005. As the po-po, you get better access to weapons and vehicles right off the bat. Plus, no matter what kind of havoc you wreak, no one will arrest you. And as your character evolves, the Pacific City Police Department will hook you up with increasingly hot rides. You don't have to fight

for territory, store fronts, or hoes. You fight for justice, which is much more rewarding.

You Will Pwn Their Faces

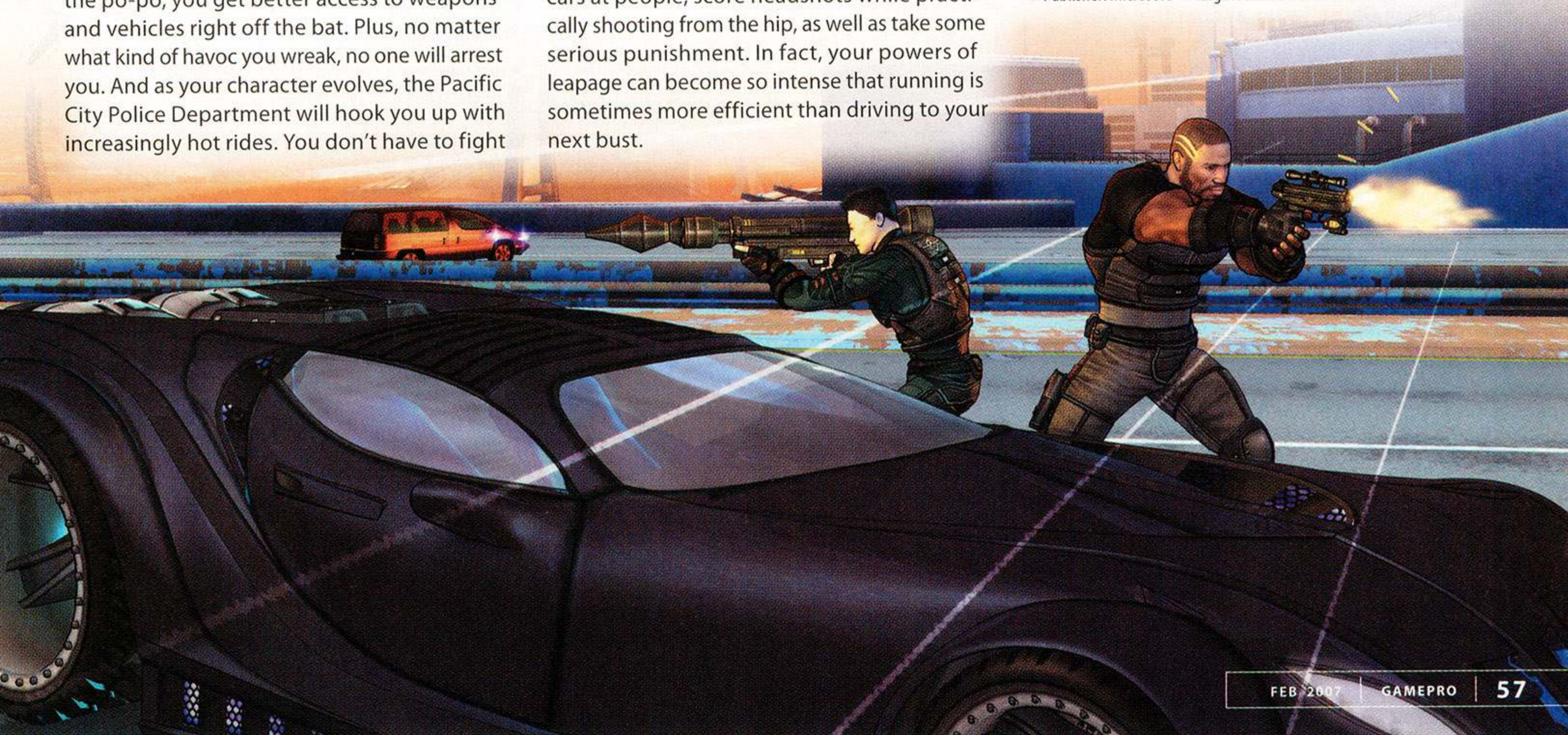
Crackdown is an RPG-lite, meaning it has skill-based stats. How well you shoot, how far and high you jump, what you can pick up and throw at people, and how much damage you can take are all determined purely by how much you use those abilities. And you can max them out without having to do a single story mission. And because your player has been genetically enhanced (in the interest of crime-fighting), he will eventually develop specific super-human abilities. You'll be able to leap several stories, throw cars at people, score headshots while practically shooting from the hip, as well as take some serious punishment. In fact, your powers of leaping can become so intense that running is sometimes more efficient than driving to your next bust.

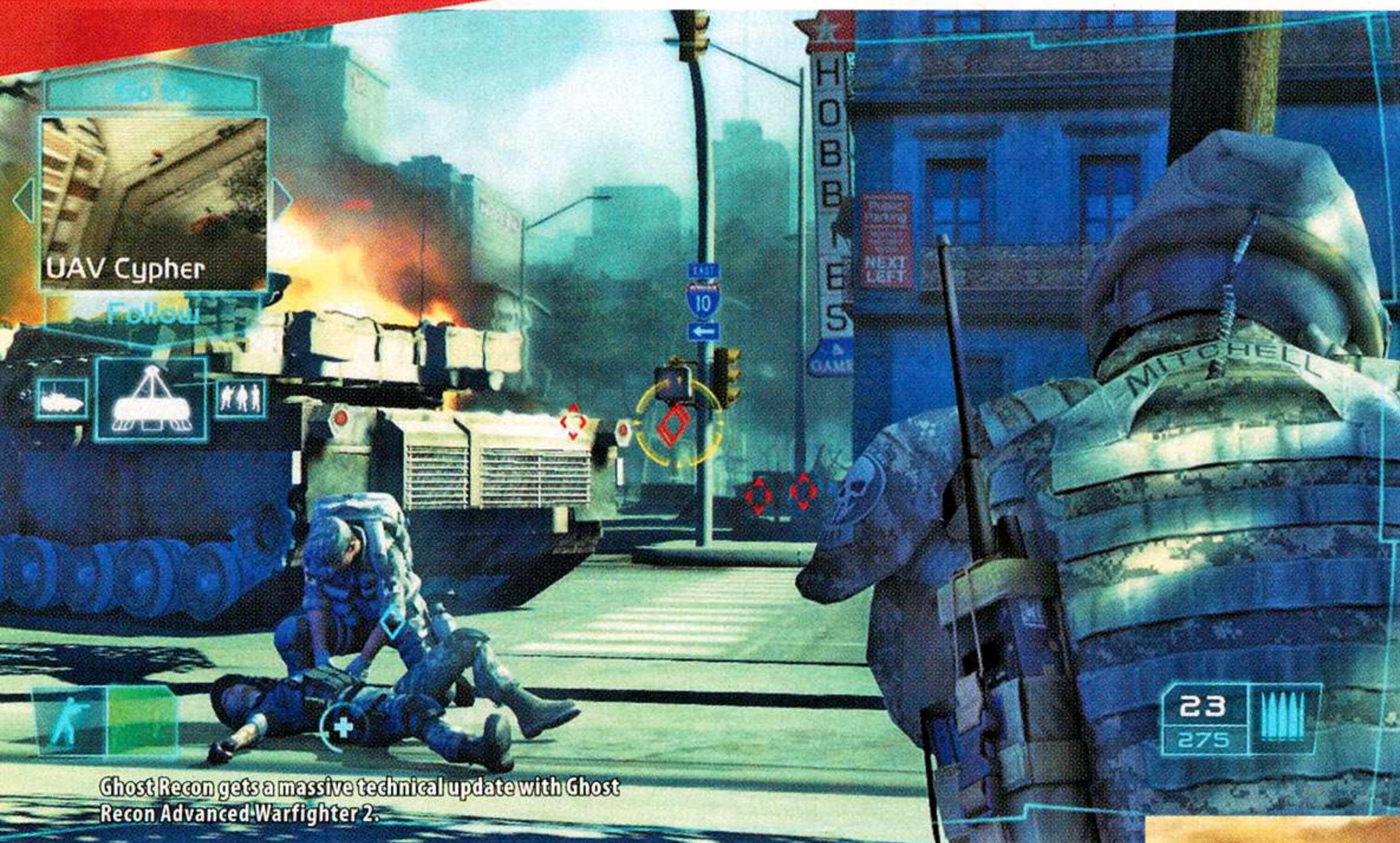


It's Not Cel-Shaded

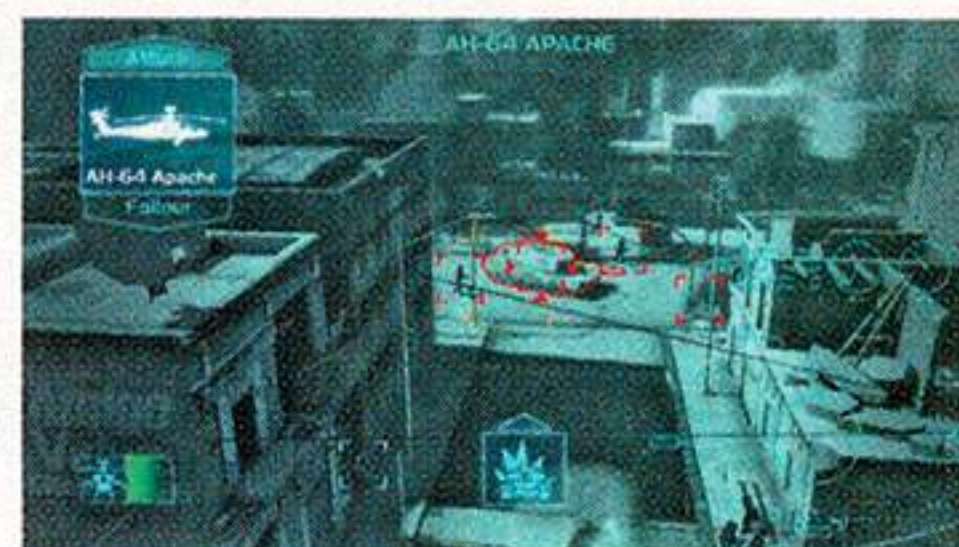
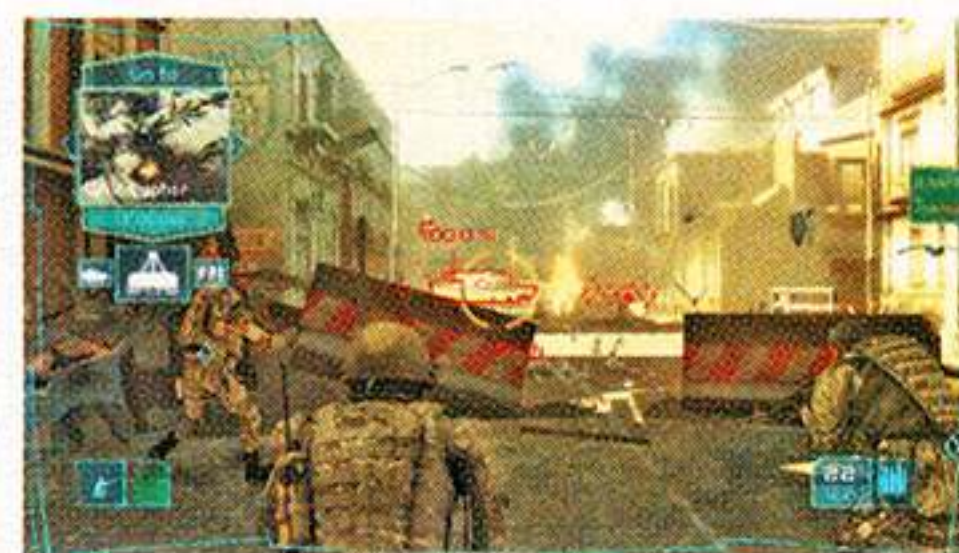
The art team worked very carefully to incorporate what development calls a "graphic novel" look. And it's very eye-catching. But don't call it cel-shading; they don't like that. The heavy black outlines on the character models are inky, the characters themselves are highly stylized, but there's no actual cel-shading going on.—T-Mac

■ **Hands-On** ■ Developer: Real Time Worlds
 ■ Publisher: Microsoft ■ Target release date: Winter 2007





Ghost Recon gets a massive technical update with Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter 2.



Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter 2

War fighting gets another advancement

PS3

Xbox 360

Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter (GRAW) was the first true next-generation game. Released nearly five months after the launch of the Xbox 360, it was one of the few games within the console's first year on the market that really showed a remarkable shift in graphical presentation. But GRAW's prowess as an overachiever was more than just visual; its futuristic war-themed gameplay was a shining example of what to expect from action games in the new generation of console games.

Advancing War Fighting

Ubisoft again looks to stun gamers with a new iteration of Ghost Recon, a series that could have easily been written off after the franchise's first two offerings. But GRAW reinvigorated the squad combat series, paving the way for continuation, and with GRAW2, the story continues in linear fashion as the Mexican rebels threaten U.S. soil this time. The fight now revolves around the area surrounding the U.S./Mexican border. Like in the original GRAW, the game will be played in one giant area (meaning no loading) and players will hop around different environments, both urban and rural, within the bigger setting.

For round two, GRAW is getting a dynamic boost in visual presentation as the war zone becomes even more realistic. The world will be more believable, immersive, and photorealistic than before.

But according to lead engineer at Ubisoft Paris David Reizer, the technological improvements are not just about what you see. "The combination of new and advanced technologies is not just for visual enhancement; they also have a consistent affect on gameplay," says Reizer, who explains how artistic and gameplay improvements will both evolve from new development technology.

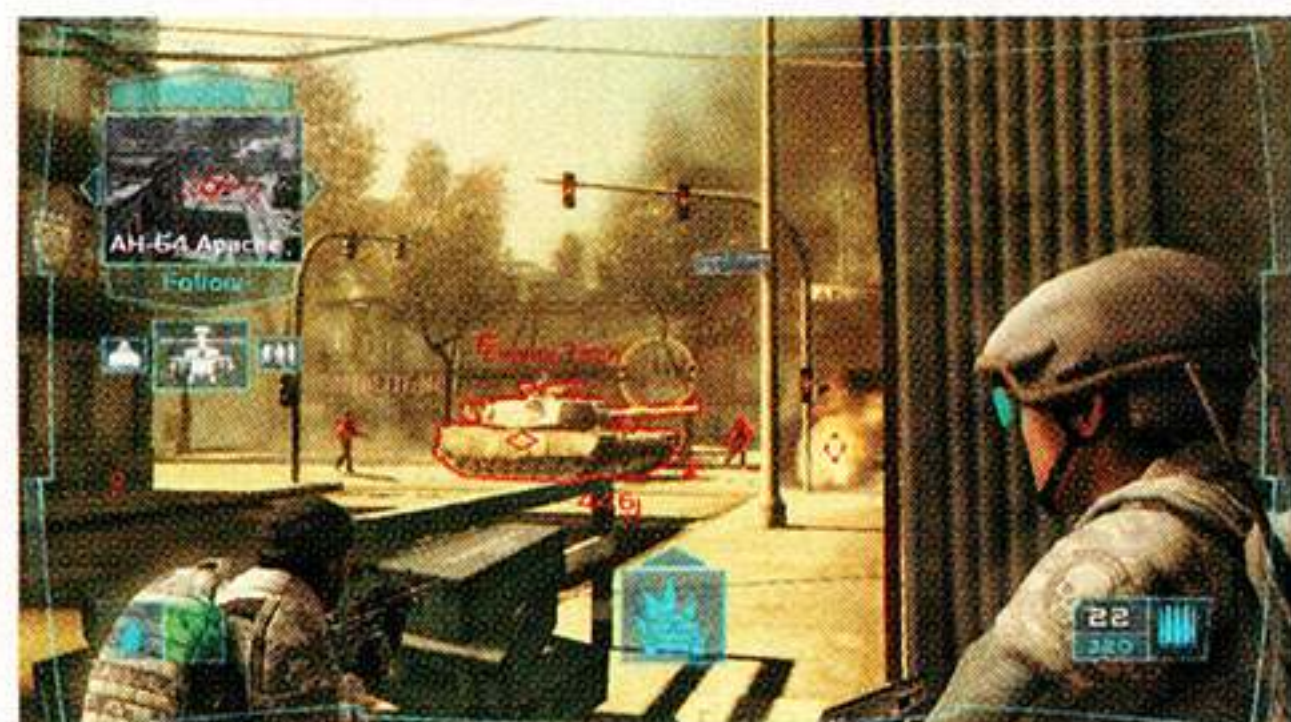
Another Coat of Shine

Enemy A.I. will also become smarter and different types of enemies will execute tactics spe-

cific to their ranks. For example, elite Mexican rebels will have access to weapons similar to the Ghosts, so diversity in the field can be expected. But the *real* power of the Ghosts lies in the Cross-Com, now version 2.0, where a new full-screen view gives better access to various on-the-fly decisions.

New characters and a newfangled multiplayer mode developed exclusively by Red Storm should make Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter 2 the must-have action game for Xbox 360 and PS3 this March.—*Mr. Marbles*

■ **First Look** ■ Developer: Ubisoft Paris/Tiwak/Red Storm
 ■ Publisher: Ubisoft ■ Target release date: March



Cipher Complex

The new generation of stealth is a complex thing

PS3

Xbox 360

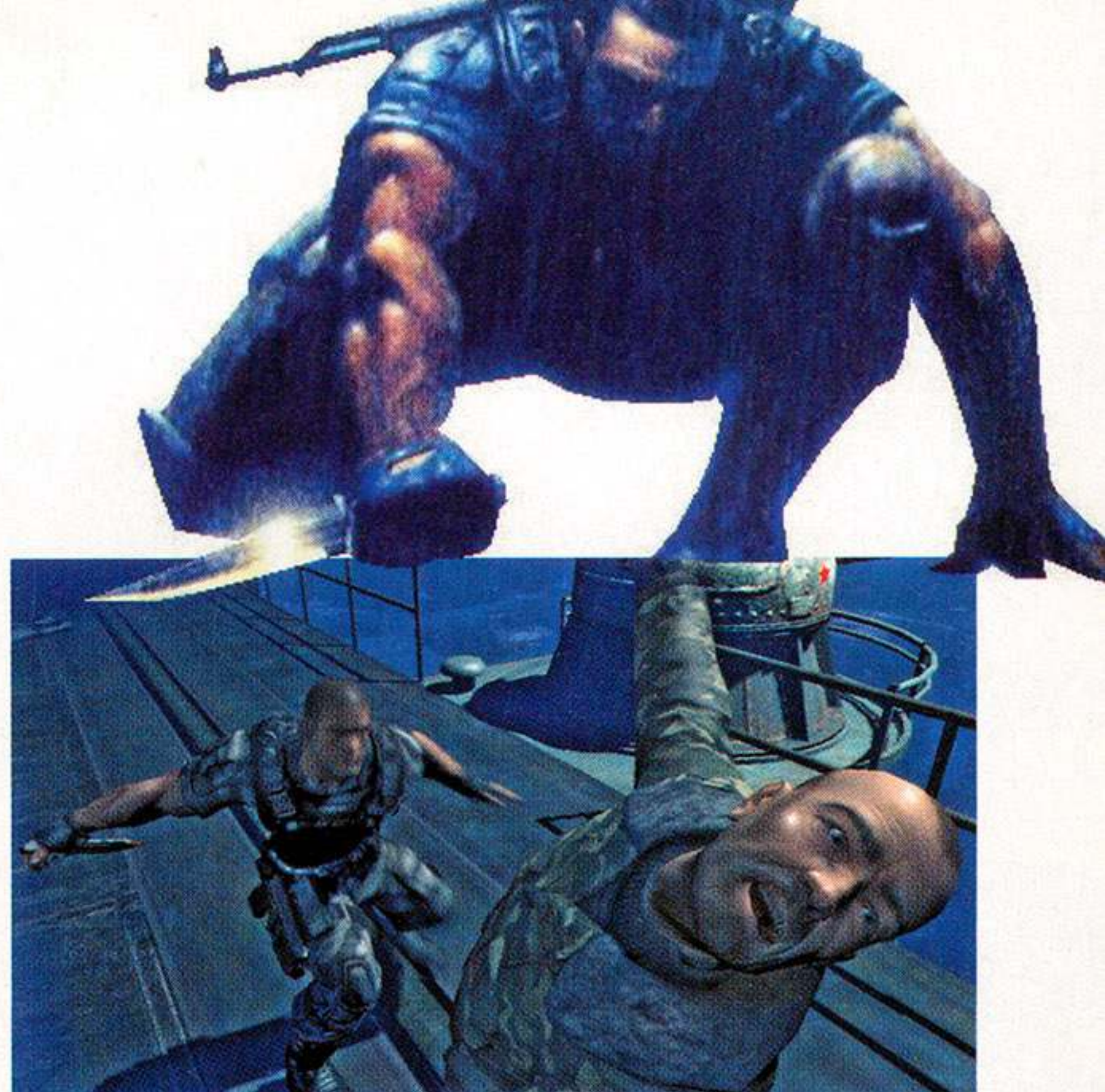
The sluggish stealth days of Sam Fisher could be coming to an end. In *Cipher Complex*, a new breed of military stealth combat arises and the brutality of murderous tension is at the forefront of this new-generation action game. Here, players take control of time, manipulating instances and moving so fast that time itself stands still. Known simply as Cipher, Lt. Col. John Sullivan has one goal: find out how the heck a decommissioned Soviet defense station got its hands on a nuclear warhead.

Trained to use quick dashing techniques, Cipher's attacks occur in the blink of an eye, to his enemies at least, who face the unfortunate side of his trusty combat knife. In contrast

the latest *Splinter Cell* where Sam is rewarded heavily for peaceful resolutions, *Cipher Complex* is all about aggressive infiltration where high-intensity assassinations and fighting techniques take the front seat.

But gameplay can only take you so far, and Edge of Reality artists are working diligently to take *Cipher Complex* to the most competitive level of art and level design for this new generation of consoles. And to this point *Cipher* is looking like one of the most creative new games, with a uniquely dark blend of graphical reality, headed for PS3 and Xbox 360 this year.—*Mr. Marbles*

■ **First Look** ■ Developer: Edge of Reality
 ■ Publisher: TBA ■ Target release date: Holiday 2007



Far Cry Vengeance

The Wii gets a good FPS

Wii

Not entirely a new game in the series, *Far Cry Vengeance* is essentially the *Far Cry Instincts Predator* that was made for the Xbox 360, but with three new levels thrown into the mix. For the Wii, *Vengeance* adds a handful of new vehicles and plenty of arsenal additions available at your disposal.

Although *Far Cry Vengeance* is an adventure we've already experienced, the Wii Remote, however, makes it an entirely new game. Compared to other first-person shooters on the Wii, *Vengeance* is by far the smoothest and most intuitive. The analog stick on the Nunchuk moves you around the luscious environments and jerking the Nunchuk upwards will initiate a jump. Slightly awkward, yet manageable, the directional pad on the Wii Remote handles crouching by pressing down and weapon selection by pressing Left/Right on the directional pad. Even more in-depth Wii Remote functionality comes into play when zooming ranged weapons, performed by moving the Wii Remote forward or backwards in relation to the sensor, and executing melee attacks

by slashing the remote in any direction.

Our favorite feature in *Vengeance* is dual-wielding, for which you can carry two pistols, machine guns, or shotguns. The trigger buttons on both the Nunchuk and Wii Remote will fire each weapon individually, but sadly, both weapons aim at one reticule controlled by the Wii Remote.

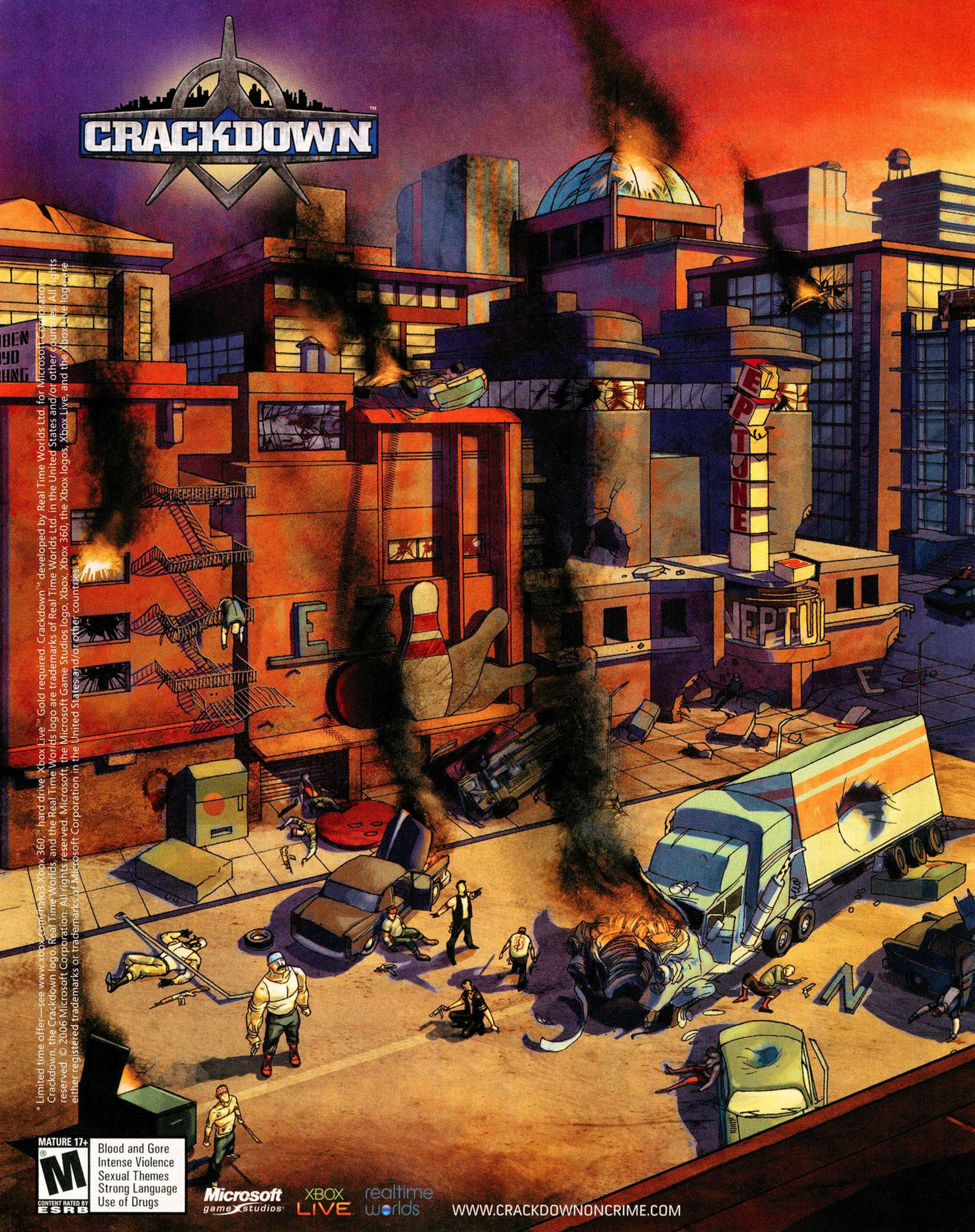
Graphically, *Vengeance* looks almost identical to *Far Cry Instincts Predator* on the 360, so don't expect any surprises in that department.—*Tenacious Moses*

■ **First Look** ■ Developer: Ubisoft Montreal
 ■ Publisher: Ubisoft ■ Target release date: Available now



CRACKDOWN

* Limited time offer—see www.xbox.com/halo3. Xbox 360™ hard drive, Xbox Live™ Gold required. Crackdown™ developed by Real Time Worlds Ltd. for Microsoft Corporation. Crackdown, the Crackdown logo, Real Time Worlds, and the Real Time Worlds logo are trademarks of Real Time Worlds Ltd. in the United States and/or other countries. All rights reserved. © 2006 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved. Microsoft, the Microsoft Game Studios logo, Xbox, Xbox 360, the Xbox logos, Xbox Live, and the Xbox Live logo are either registered trademarks or trademarks of Microsoft Corporation in the United States and/or other countries.



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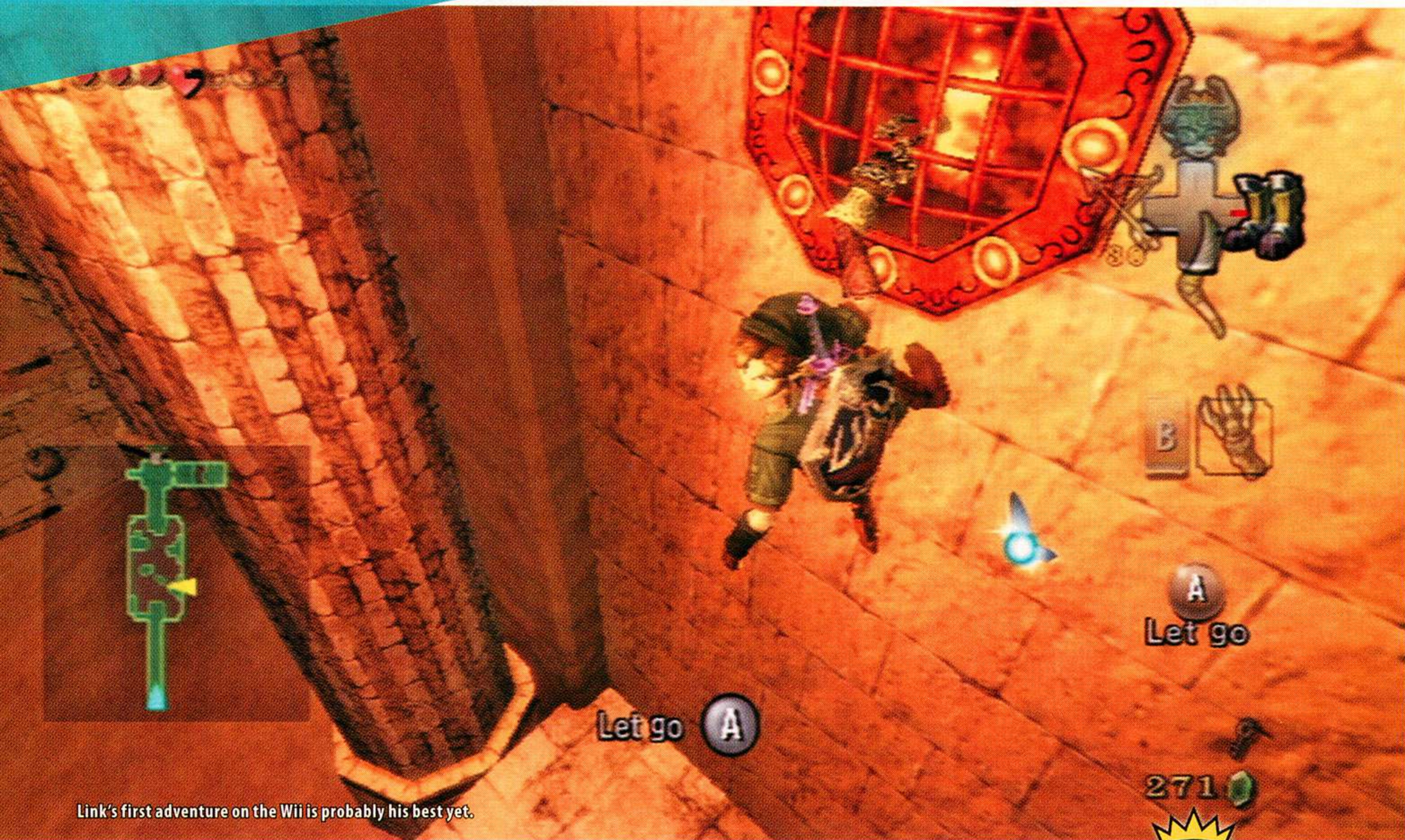
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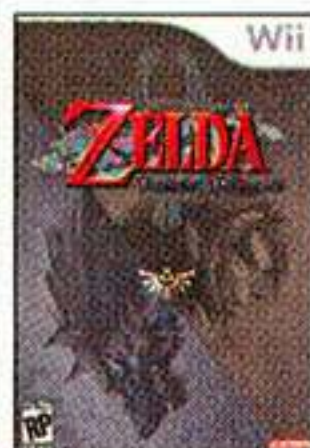
Link's first adventure on the Wii is probably his best yet.

The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess

You probably already know this but we'll say it anyway: this is the best Zelda game ever.

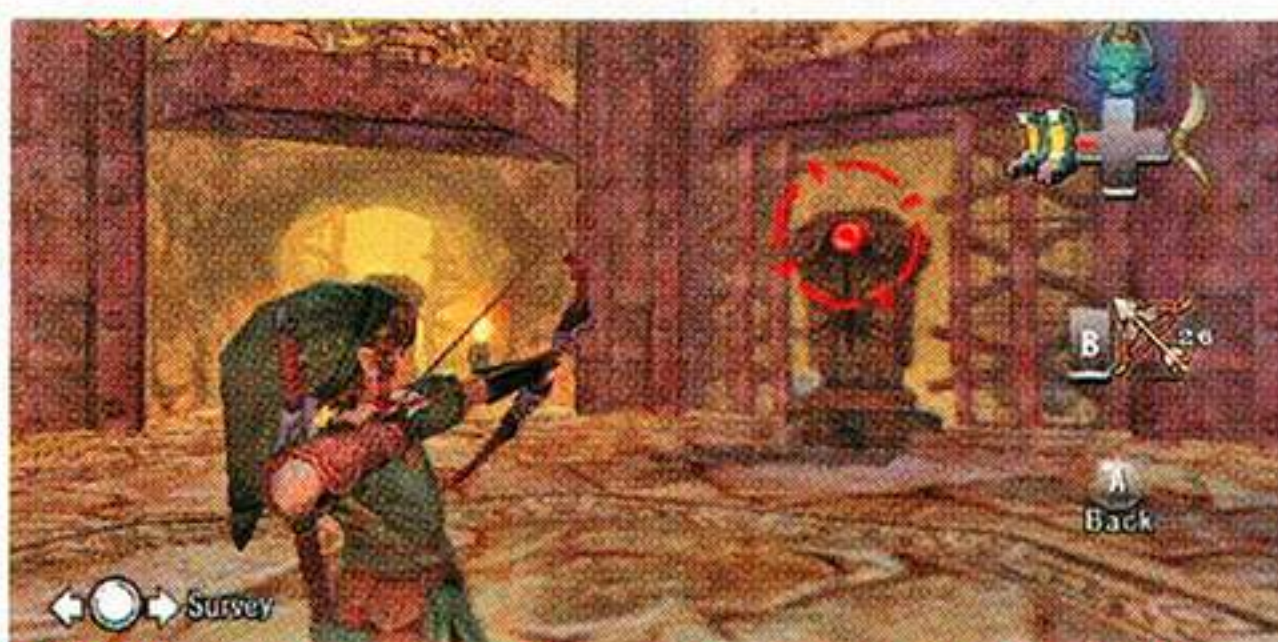


Wii



First off, let us to begin by stating that after 20-plus hours of playing The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess on the Wii, we haven't beaten the game. In fact, we're going to guesstimate we have another 10 to 20 hours of the main story and countless hours of side quests left. Why the broad range? Well, as we all know, the Zelda series is well-known for its unexpected plot twists and unfolding story arcs, which, at any time, may send you on a wild goose chase from the shores of Lake Hylia to the distant planes of the Geruda Desert.

It's important to note that Twilight Princess is bigger than Wind Waker. From the start of Link's epic adventure in Faron Forest to the highest peaks of Death Mountain where the Gorons dwell, the legend never seems to end. And that's a good thing because this is one Zelda game you'll wish could go on forever.



PROTIP: With the bow and arrow equipped, hold the B button to aim and fire. Once bombs are acquired, combine the two for an arrow of doom.

Second Guessing

Despite the Zelda pedigree, we had some initial misgivings about the game. We'd read the hype, seen the screens and footage, even took it for a quick spin at E3 but still, the doubt persisted: was this just Wind Waker with fancier graphics and a kooky control scheme? And when you come down to it, the answer is...well, yes. At its core, Twilight Princess isn't anything new. We've all seen the grassy fields of Hyrule and experienced the somewhat frustrating dungeon filled puzzles before. But, there is something that sets Twilight Princess apart from the other Zelda game. Something sincere. Something different. It's hard to put into words, so why try? You'll see what we're talking about once you start to play.

The story, like most Zelda games, involves the land of Hyrule, which is on the brink of chaos. A darkness known as the Twilight has begun





PRO TIP: The iron boots have many uses. They allow you to walk on walls or ceiling via magnets or sink to the bottom of the deepest lake in Hyrule.



PRO TIP: Boss battles are epic in Twilight Princess and make full use of the items acquired in said dungeon.

to creep over the land, turning the people of Hyrule into spirits and it's your job to help series stalwart Link restore light to the land.

As series vets can expect, the game starts off slowly, introducing characters, familiarizing you with the core gameplay mechanics, and on the Wii, learning the new control scheme. Expect at least an hour or more before you'll be completely comfortable with the controls. Compared with more responsive Wii games, such as *Wii Sports*, the Wii remote functionality in *Twilight Princess* feels slapped on and somewhat flawed, but eventually, the freedom of having the nunchuk in one hand and the Wii remote in the other will feel like second nature.

Here's a quick and dirty primer on the controls: the Nunchuk's analog stick moves Link around, the Z button auto-locks onto enemies or targets and the C button lets you free look around. Shaking the attachment also executes Link's spin attacks. The Wii Remote is used for item selection, menu navigation, and weapon aiming. It also controls Link's sword: you equip it by swiping the Wii-mote, then slash away.

The Best-Looking Zelda Game Ever

From an artistic standpoint, the graphics in *Twilight Princess* are the best we've seen from any *Zelda* adventure. Similar to *The Matrix*, the realms of light and Twilight are clearly distinguished by drastic color changes, which perfectly sets the overall mood. And as to be expected from a *Zelda* game, the character design



With a new control scheme comes unique onscreen instructions. Although the Wii Remote diagrams look foreign, they're quite clear and precise in *Twilight Princess*.

is superb. Link is appropriately heroic and the familiar green tunic and cap will instantly transport gamers back in time to the days of the original NES game. The supporting cast is fleshed out by some truly memorable characters, including, of all things, a tribe of monkeys who lend Link a helping hand...or is that paw?

But the real surprise is Princess Zelda, who is portrayed in a brand new and wholly unexpected light. No longer is she the damsel in distress—much like the series itself, she's matured and grown up. The visuals are, sadly, nothing compared to some of the titles emerging on the Xbox 360 or PS3, and if you're playing on a high-definition wide-screen display, the component cables are a must, but regardless, the visual style and artistic direction is top notch.

Not much has changed in the sound department, however. The haunting score and useful audio cues are all familiar stuff. The only difference is the integration of the speaker on the Wii-mote. It'll act as a secondary sound source that aurally adds to your experience. It's somewhat gimmicky and the sound quality is horrible, but its fun nonetheless.

Take Me Back to the Good Old Days

But enough about the controls and how it looks: at the end of the day, what matters most is that *Twilight Princess* is still a *Zelda* title, through and through. The most amazing thing about the *Zelda* series is that, while they all share a core foundation of gameplay mechanics and design sensibilities, each proceeding title has added something new that makes it unique and compelling. *Twilight Princess* retains the trademark *Zelda* touches: hidden secrets to uncover, rupees to collect, and



PRO TIP: When in wolf form, hold the B button on the back of the Wii Remote for a devastating one-hit area-of-effect (AOE) maneuver.

chickens to harass. Also present is the delightful sense of humor, the epic feel of adventure, and the deep and engaging storytelling that brings to mind the genius of Hayao Miyazaki and heyday Disney. But *Twilight Princess* is its own game, easily stepping out of the large and imposing shadow thrown by the previous pinnacle of *Zelda*-dom, *The Ocarina of Time*. The unique controls have much to do with this but even without it, the game would stand out for its seamless blend of action and storytelling. It's a potent brew, crafted from a formula that Nintendo has been perfecting for years, and while the flavor is familiar, it somehow manages to feel new and refreshing at the same time.

Undeniably an Epic Adventure

From start to finish, *The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess* is an extraordinary addition to the legendary series. The key to *Twilight Princess*' genius lies in its ability to evoke, and fulfill, a feeling of nostalgia, to return you to the bygone days when you first played a *Zelda* game. Whether it was the classic 2D overhead adventures, or the later forays into the brave new world of 3D that first got you hooked, *Twilight Princess* brings back all those fond memories, then creates some of its own. If there is one Wii game to own at launch, this is it, but we're guessing we didn't need to tell you that.

—Tenacious Moses



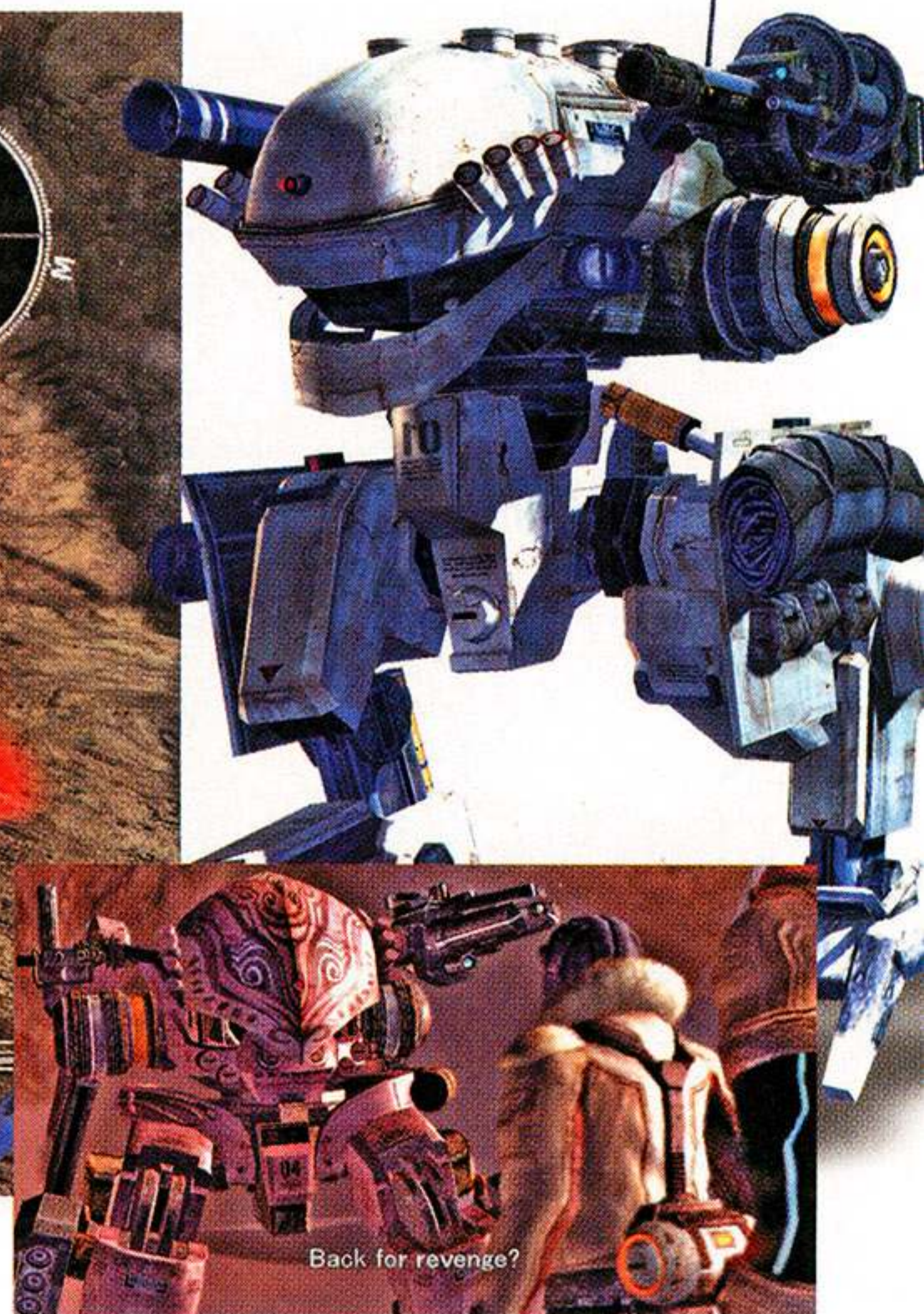
PRO TIP: When you're in a pickle, press up on the directional pad to bring forth the advice of Minna, the twilight dweller.

Wii	GRAPHICS 4.0	EDITORS' CHOICE	FUN FACTOR 5.0
	SOUND 4.75		
	CONTROL 4.25		

Developer and publisher: Nintendo ■ \$49.99 ■ Available now
Action/adventure ■ 1 player ■ ESRB: T ■ Also on the GameCube



Those glowing orange blobs are the vital lifeblood that keeps you going. Too bad you'll have to manually collect every little bit of it.



The cinematics, and practically every other visual aspect of the game, is awesome and live up to the very high Capcom standards.

Lost Planet: Extreme Condition

The frozen landscape of Lost Planet is devoid of heat...and fun.

Xbox 360



Lost Planet could have, would have, and should have been a game of the year contender. The visuals are amazing; the action is fast and furious and has that slick next-gen sheen everyone is clamoring for.

We didn't even mind the nonsensical sci-fi back story, that involves a frozen planet, aliens that bleed valuable thermal goo, and a shadowy organization that's up to no good. Why? Because the cinematics are done so well.

But ultimately, it falls oh so short. Over time, the gorgeous graphics and interesting gameplay concepts give way to some frustrating quirks that seriously bend, and will occasionally break your patience.

Cold As Ice

Lost Planet offers a schizophrenically uneven gaming experience. It's a frustrating balancing act as expansive levels require you to be patient and methodical in your approach, but a ticking energy meter forces you to stay constantly on the move. It was only during certain, all-too-rare moments when abundant energy levels and a manageable number of enemies allowed us to enjoy Lost Planet's unique flavor of action.

The game isn't challenging, it's just plain hard. We don't mind a challenge, but we do mind a game where you have to repeatedly fight the same boss over and over again because of unfair deaths due to limited weapon stock and ridiculously difficult (and annoying) environmental hazards.

There's also the aforementioned energy meter. Your health is sustained by a special suit powered by special thermal goo dropped by fallen enemies. The game's emphasis on running around in a desperate attempt to pick up every little droplet of goo the aliens spill is frustrating and should have been handled with an auto-collection option.

Happiness Is A Warm Gun

Throughout the game, the gunplay is fast-paced, satisfying, and ammo is plentiful. Ironically, Lost Planet has a decidedly futuristic sci-fi flavor but the game's arsenal is mostly composed of standard armaments. In short: Humanity has conquered the stars, but isn't able to design a weapon more advanced than a shotgun? To be fair, though, one of the coolest play elements is that you can hop into a variety of big mech suits and get your gun on.



Now that's an explosion to be proud of. Sure it obscures your vision far too much but Hollywood, eat your heart out!

Then there are the explosions. While they're incredibly impressive visually, the explosions kick up a crapload of smoke, which looks great, but ends up obscuring your vision during the heat of battle. Regardless, when you see that orange plume of fire blossom in front of your eyes, you can't help but smile.

Coming In From The Cold

At the end of the day, playing Lost Planet is like dating a supermodel with personality problems: it's great looking and has the potential for good times, but ultimately, it's just not worth the trouble. Hardcore gamers will be able to test their uber-133t skills against the game's difficult enemies, but we play games to have fun and though there are some good moments in the game, but they're too few and far between.

—Three Ring Circus




PROTIP: This is just one of the many mech suits that you'll get access to in the game. They're not all built equally though: this one's fast but it's sort of wimpy.



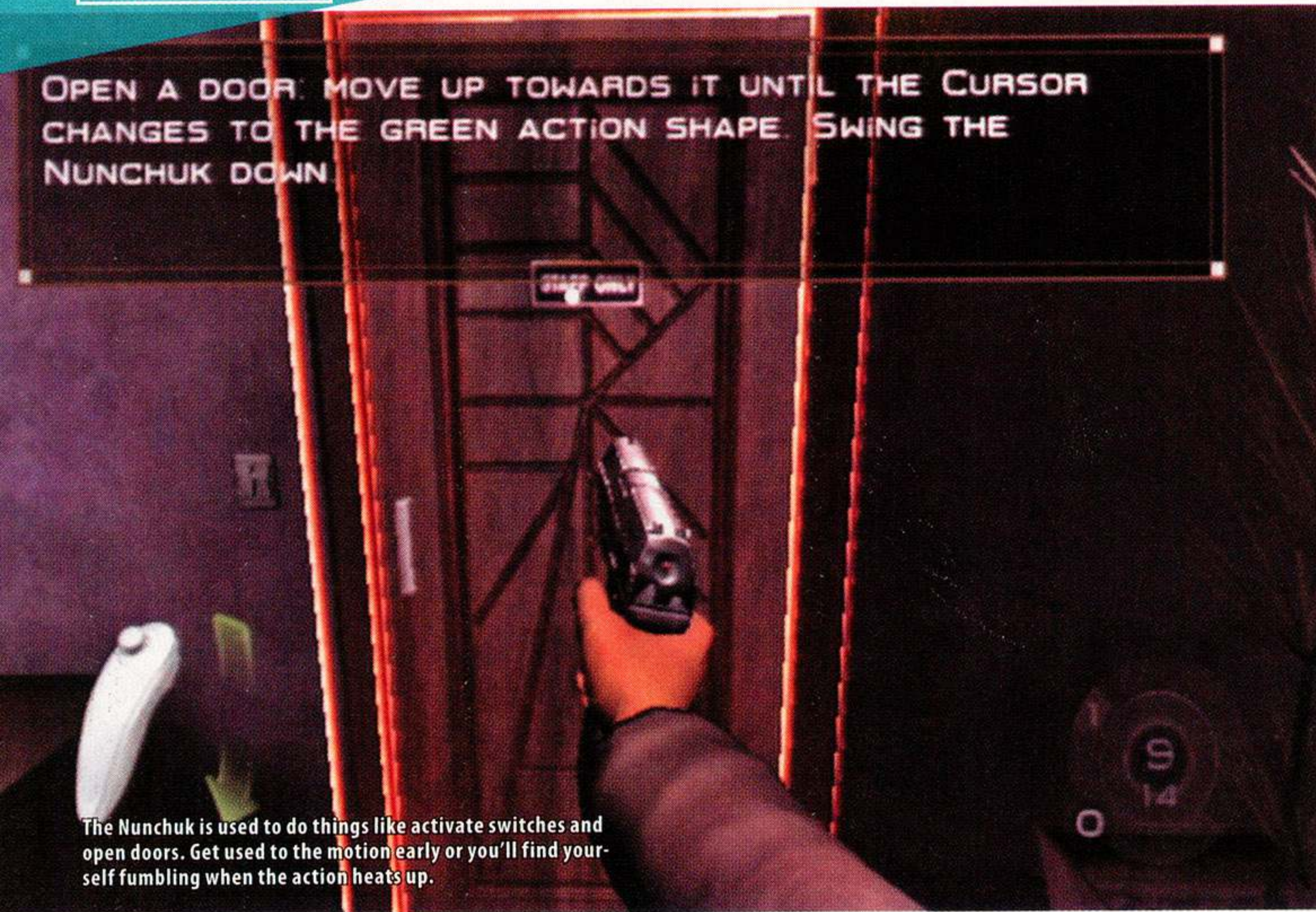
Get used to seeing the game over screen, especially after boss battles, which are grueling and tough.


ONLINE GAMEPRO.COM FOR A REVIEW OF LOST PLANET'S MULTIPLAYER!


GRAPHICS 4.5
SOUND 3.75
CONTROL 3.75
FUN FACTOR
3.0

■ Developer and publisher: Capcom ■ \$59.99; \$69.99 (Collector's Edition)
 ■ Available January ■ Action ■ 1 player; 16 online ■ ESRB: T

OPEN A DOOR. MOVE UP TOWARDS IT UNTIL THE CURSOR CHANGES TO THE GREEN ACTION SHAPE. SWING THE NUNCHUK DOWN.



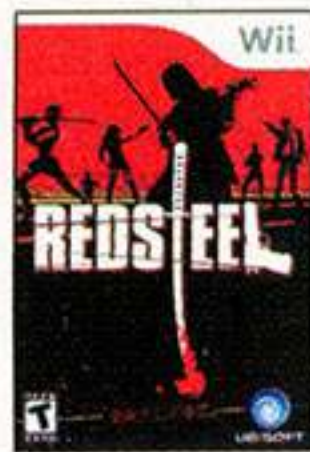
The Nunchuk is used to do things like activate switches and open doors. Get used to the motion early or you'll find yourself fumbling when the action heats up.



Red Steel

Looking for a good sword-and-gun wielding time? You won't find it here.

Wii



Red Steel was one of the most highly anticipated games for the Wii. The mix of guns and swordplay coupled with the Wii Remote promised to be both a novel and exciting idea. Unfortunately, the game suffers from poor execution and a number of style issues that severely hamper what could have been a great title.

Part-time Samurai

The first indication that something was amiss with Red Steel was the incongruence between the game's title and the game's rating. Something titled "Red Steel" promises plenty of action and blood; even the box art evokes memories of the splatter-fest movie *Kill Bill*. But the game is stuck with a "T for Teen" rating, so you know right off the bat that the action is going to be decidedly PG-13. Which is fine, but we would have preferred a more "adult" experience that didn't shy away from the gore and blood.

So, the game isn't as gory as we would have liked. At least it's fun, right? Not so fast. First, the much anticipated control scheme doesn't work so well. It makes a good attempt at taking

advantage of the Wii Remote's capabilities but it's implemented unevenly. You move with the Nunchuk's analog control stick, aim with the Wii Remote, and shoot with the B button. Actions like reloading, opening doors and hitting switches are down by moving the Nunchuk attachment around.

It's a good idea, and will probably work well in further implementations but the default sensitivity is set way too low in Red Steel. Going into the options menu and tweaking it makes things marginally better but we're unimpressed with this first stab at free-form aiming.

As Sharp As A Ginsu

And what of the other big novelty draw of Red Steel, the sword fights? Surely that lives up to expectations, right? Sadly, no. The entire thing feels like a slapped together affair. Every time a gangster with a sword appears and you draw your sword, you can't help but ask yourself, "Wouldn't it be easier to just blow him away with my shotgun like I did to the last thirty of his friends?" Yes, but we suppose it's dishonorable or something like that.

There isn't a lot of depth to attacking as you can only swing horizontally and vertically, and defense is done with the Nunchuk, which takes getting used to. Despite all this, we still found ourselves enjoying the katana battles—at least until we reached



The good thing is, bottles don't fire back, so practice on them if the need arises.



Red Steel's menu screen is stylishly rendered but it's a little hard to navigate.

a level of difficulty that is sure to drive anyone up the wall.

Red Steel sounds great in theory, but the execution leaves something to be desired. It's buggy and unevenly presented, which spoils what fun there is to be had. However, it did give us a taste of how FPS games can and will change on the Wii, and we're looking forward to seeing how the genre will play out in the future.—T3hPanda



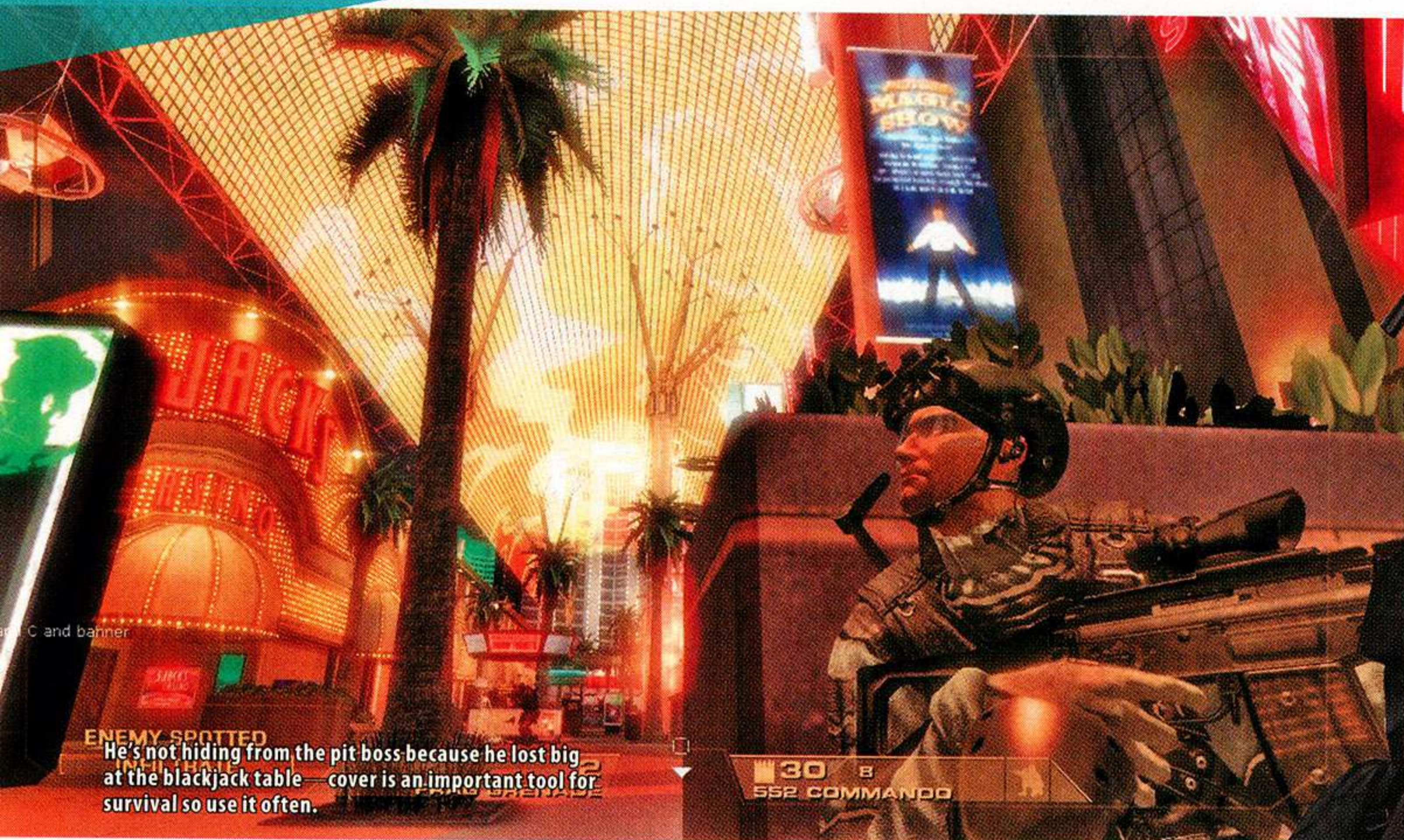
Red Steel's controls take some getting used to but the game's clever tutorial will get you started off on the right foot.



PROTIP: Do like the in-game hint says and find a safe place to rest if you get hurt.

Wii	GRAPHICS	3.5
	SOUND	4.25
	CONTROL	3.75
		FUN FACTOR
		3.25

Developer: Ubisoft Paris Publisher: Ubisoft \$49.99 Available Now Action 4 players ESRB: T



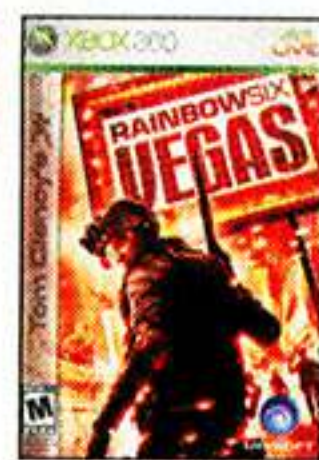
ENEMY SPOTTED
He's not hiding from the pit boss because he lost big at the blackjack table—cover is an important tool for survival so use it often.



Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six: Vegas

Glitz, glamour, and guns—what else do you need?

Xbox 360



Just when you'd written Rainbow Six off as a stale, by-the-numbers franchise in need of being decommissioned, Ubisoft Montreal has to go and release Vegas. Not only does it make up for the craptastic Lockdown, but it's good enough that it's easily one of the most enjoyable games you'll play this year. In fact, we'll take it one step further: Best. Rainbow Six. Ever.

Pretty as Sin

It all starts with the graphics on this one. The first thing that draws your eye will be just how good this game looks. Much like Indiana Jones at the end of Quest for the Holy Grail, Ubisoft Montreal chose wisely when they decided on the Unreal 3 engine. It's a beast and it makes everything look fantastic.

The bright neon lights, the mesmerizing slot machines, the outrageous restaurants—they're all here and rendered in painstaking detail. One particularly impressive stretch of gameplay takes place on Fremont Street, that is, by far, one of the most visually arresting scenes that ever in a video game.



PRO TIP: Blind fire may seem useless, but it looks cool and has its uses. **The Rules of the Game**

But even once you get past the drool-worthy visuals, Rainbow Six: Vegas delivers the goods when it comes to actual gameplay. The strategic element that's been a series hallmark is still present here, but the pace of the action has been ratcheted up considerably. But it's the new cover mechanic that really sets the game apart from its predecessors.

Plenty of games have tried to implement a cover system only to fail miserably or end up with mediocre results. In Vegas, cover is not only instrumental to your survival, it's also a total blast to use. Simply by holding down the left trigger button you switch out of the standard first-person view and move to a third-person camera position that allows you to peek and shoot over and around your cover. It's a relatively simple mechanic that works wonders in recreating awesome gunfights, especially when shooting blindly around corners.

Team Up!

But this greatness isn't reserved strictly for the single-player portion; the multiplayer aspect is equally as outstanding. It offers co-op through Xbox Live or system link as well as standard deathmatch and objectives-based missions. Throw in the in-depth customizations of your online avatars, the huge selection of unlockable weapons and armor as well as Xbox Vision support, and this is some of the best multiplayer gameplay currently available on Xbox Live.

Even a perfect diamond isn't flawless, and that's certainly the case with Vegas. But it's easy to

overlook such issues as wonky A.I., a checkpoint save system, and some rare textural abnormalities in single-player when everything else is so flawless. Rainbow Six: Vegas's gorgeous graphics, professional presentation, well-executed cover mechanic, and highly customizable multiplayer make it one of the best first-person shooters on the Xbox 360. This is one of the best games of 2006.—*The Watcher*



PRO TIP: In multiplayer, choose your armor first in terms of function, then form.



PRO TIP: Pre-selecting targets before entry makes clearing a room easier for your teammates.



GRAPHICS 4.75
SOUND 4.75
CONTROL 4.75



FUN FACTOR
4.75

Developer: Ubisoft Montreal Publisher: Ubisoft \$59.99
Available now Action 1 player; 16 online ESRB: M



PROTIP: The syringe is your best friend; keep an eye on your vitals and as soon as they drop significantly, start pumping your patient full of the miracle drugs.



PROTIP: Suturing can be passed off even if it's done quickly with ugly, uneven stitches as long as you span the majority of the wound.



PROTIP: If you're running out of time, you don't actually have to use an antibiotic before you put on the bandage. It'll hurt your score but your patient will live.



PROTIP: If you leave an open wound unattended, pools of blood will form, or other fluids will build up, adding an extra step to your treatment and wasting precious time.

Trauma Center: Second Opinion

You may not be a doctor but you can play one on TV!



Wii Trauma Center: Second Opinion sounds like a sequel to the oddball hit DS game Trauma Center: Under the Knife, right? Well, those craving more of the *guilt*-ridden, life-saving drama that filled the original Trauma Center are in for both equal doses of disappointment and surprise: Second Opinion is actually a remake of Under the Knife, but with key changes and additions made to fit the Wii's always unique control scheme.

Same Premise, Different Feel

Although the storyline in Second Opinion is long and well-constructed, the heart of the game is definitely in the surgeries. However, the operations are exactly the same as in Under the Knife, with identical titles and, for the most part, the same procedures. Those who already mastered the original game will find little to be excited about, except for one key thing: the controls.

While Under the Knife was a flurry of quick, messy stylus strokes, Second Opinion requires the precision coordination of both hands to be success-

ful. You use the Nunchuck to quickly choose your implements, then use the Wii Remote to perform the actions. Although initially it's difficult to remember where each implement is placed on the Nunchuck and actually select the implement without overshooting your mark, it only takes a few surgeries before the location of each implement quickly becomes second nature to you.

And the results are great: it feels like you're actually picking out shards of glass with your forceps as you pinch down the A button and B trigger. You also can't help but feel amazed at how specific the game is; you can't just haphazardly drag that shard of glass out of a wound, you have to lift in the correct direction.

I Can't Sew, But I Can Suture!

Also new and most notable to Second Opinion is the introduction of difficulty settings. Under the Knife was notoriously hard, with many surgeries halting players for hours as they slave away or until they gave up in frustration after killing one patient too many. Second Opinion's Easy mode will allow the casual player to breeze through the game with an ease that will make you wonder why you're not already slicing into people in an actual O.R. Normal mode still doesn't reach the difficulty level of the DS but is decently balanced, while hard mode requires the quickest eye and the steadiest hand.



PROTIP: If you don't hit a tumor directly with the ultrasound, the image won't stick, but if you got a good look at where it was, just cut the area to save time.

Fans will love the new feel of Trauma Center, but we're not sure the handful of added surgeries and new ending are enough to convince those who have already played the DS version that it's worth the purchase. Those who loved the original should at least try the game to experience how having the Wii Remote has changed the feel of the operations.—T3hPanda



Wii	GRAPHICS	4.5	EDITORS' CHOICE	FUN FACTOR 4.5
	SOUND	4.5		
	CONTROL	4.75		

Developer and publisher: Atlus ■ \$49.99 ■ Available: Now
 Medical Simulation ■ 1 player ■ ESRB: T



PROTIP: To defeat Silver the Hedgehog, do a jumping attack once Silver starts using telekinesis to pick up items on the stage. Once he falls, run away or he'll grab you when he gets up.



PROTIP: Some boss stages only have a few rings lying about. The best strategy is to only keep two or three at a time in order to maximize the amount of damage you can take from the boss.



PROTIP: Tails' ring bomb attacks can lead to confusion. The fake rings left in the explosions leave shadows, while the real ones don't.

Sonic the Hedgehog

Sonic hits a speed bump in yet another flat 3D adventure.

Xbox 360



Some have argued that Sonic the Hedgehog never found a proper footing in the third dimension. Whereas his 2D adventures were fast and fluid, the 3D games have been marred by cheap deaths, camera problems, and a cavalcade of ancillary characters that no one cares about—I'm looking at you, Big the Cat. With a new generation of consoles and a focused title, has Sega finally gotten the formula right with Sonic the Hedgehog on the Xbox 360?

Sonic In The City

Perhaps in a direct nod to the Mario series, Sonic the Hedgehog's narrative centers around a kid-

napped princess. Princess Elise of Soleanna has been kidnapped by Dr. Eggman (how many times does Sonic have to beat this guy, anyway?) who plans to use her Chaos Emerald and latent special powers to rule the world. The story itself is fine but the presentation is pretty uneven—the CG sequences are beautiful and epic, but the in-game cinematics are awful and basic. A word to those who find inter-species relations gross: the romantic tension between Sonic and Elise is really creepy, in a Tom Cruise and Katie Holmes sort of way.

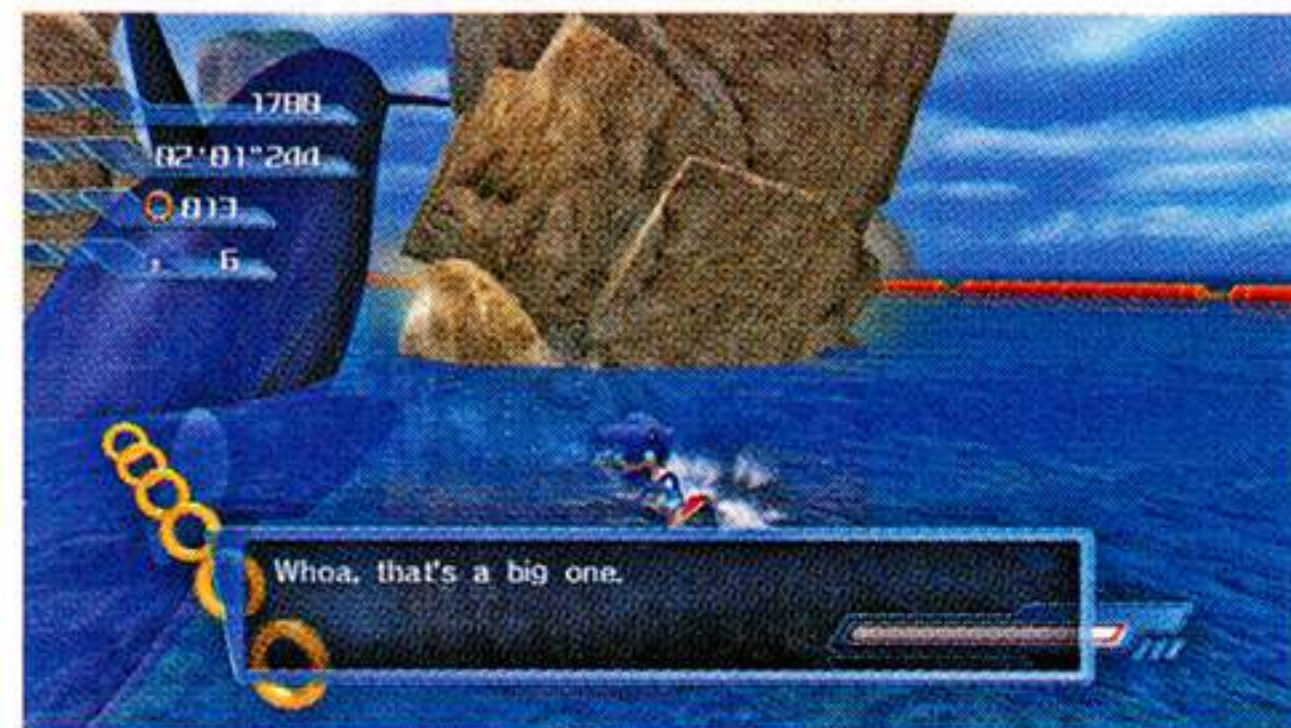
Speaking of creepy, Sonic still looks atrocious. While the character models are a little smoother, they're still animated awfully and the stages, while expansive, still suffer from the lack of detail. And unlike previous titles in the series, Sonic the Hedgehog takes on more adventure-based elements—the blue guy now spends time in the city of Soleanna, taking side-missions and purchasing new abilities. It's an interesting wrinkle but if there's any game that doesn't need this kind of added padding, it's this one: Sonic's just too darn fast to be restrained by city walls.

Still A Rodent Without A Home

Outside of the city, Sonic suffers from the same old problems. While the stages are brimming with speed and secret pathways, you'll still find that most deaths are the fault of glitches and camera problems and not of your own mistakes. This problem is especially magnified when you play a speed stage, in which you basically aim Sonic down a ramp and occasionally steer him towards rings and away from danger.



PROTIP: The quickest way to get out of the towns is by seeking out townspeople with blue or orange exclamation points above their heads. They'll offer you instructions or side missions that will get you to the next stage.



PROTIP: When sliding on the water, don't touch the controller—steering Sonic on water may net you a few extra coins, but you'll often collide with platforms and drown.

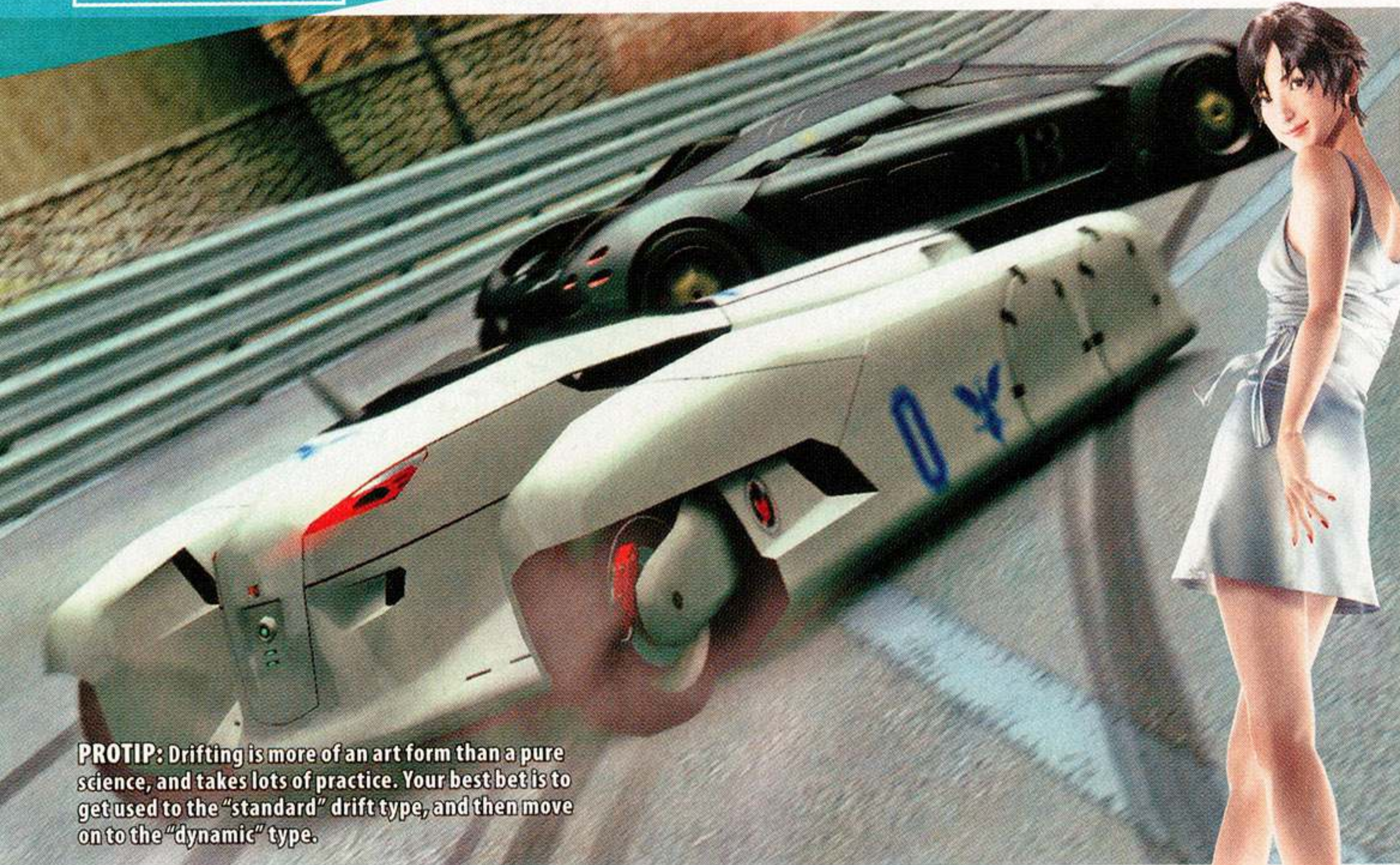
With a title highlighting the main character, you'd expect a more Sonic-centered game, but Sonic the Hedgehog still puts you in the shoes of secondary characters far too often. While there is a greater emphasis on speed, you'll still have to take control of some slower characters like Silver and Tails, who now has one of the most frustratingly awful attack movesets of all time.

Back in the day of the Dreamcast, the excuse that the gameplay was just going through growing pains held water, but frankly, Sonic's time has run out. We're holding out hope that the Sixaxis control for the PS3 version will shake some life out of this franchise, but so far the prospects are bleak.—*DaveMayCry*



	GRAPHICS	3.0	FUN FACTOR 2.75
	SOUND	2.5	
	CONTROL	2.5	

Developer and publisher: Sega ■ \$59.99 ■ Available Now
 Action ■ 2 players ■ ESRB: E10+



PROTIP: Drifting is more of an art form than a pure science, and takes lots of practice. Your best bet is to get used to the "standard" drift type, and then move on to the "dynamic" type.

Ridge Racer 7

Pure arcade-style next-gen thrill ride.

PS3



It just wouldn't be a Sony console launch without a new Ridge Racer game, and although the latest installment in the popular racing series doesn't quite set the world on fire, it proves that the number seven is pretty lucky after all.

Racing S(t)imulation

The name of the game in Ridge Racer 7 is drifting, and you won't get very far if you resist, since getting around hairpin turns and right-angle corners demands that you let up on the gas long enough for your back end to swing out in a display of raw power and abused rubber. It's also important because drifting fills your nitrous tanks which you can inject into your fuel line one, two, or three tanks at a time.

This latest installment also features some new elements that will keep things interesting for series vets. Slipstreaming, for instance, lets you hide behind an unsuspecting rival and use them to slingshot away out in a surge of acceleration that would otherwise be impossible. There's also a pseudo-RPG quality in the car purchasing and modification system. Machines can only be

bought after establishing a relationship with the manufacturer, which requires you to win an introductory race.

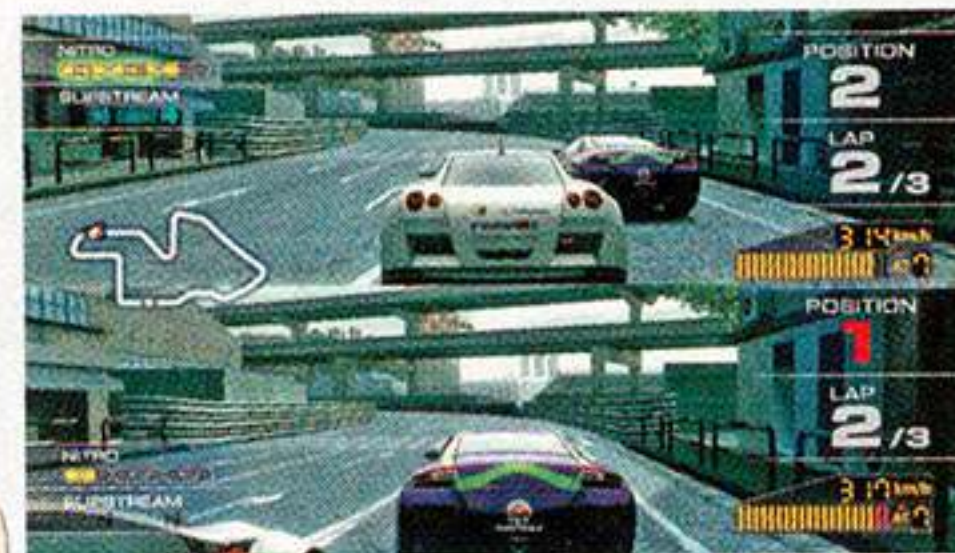
The cars you drive, and the variety of tuning and cosmetic parts you have equipped on them, earn you points with the different parts companies, even if they don't always seem to have a big impact on performance.

You Against the World

Also, unlike most of the competition, Ridge Racer 7's online races are surprisingly smooth, even with a full field of 14 sharing the pavement. You won't see cars jumping all over the track in an irritating display of Internet lag and shoddy network programming, and every race you place in earns you credits to spend in the single-player game. A team battle mode injects some unique mechanics to boot, like a shared nitrous tank, and the demand that you race with your partners as much as possible.

Shiny New Paint Job

You could certainly complain about the fact that most of the tracks on hand are ported directly from Ridge Racer 6, but the cascading waterfalls and towering office buildings never looked this nice, even on the Xbox 360. Engine sounds



PROTIP: Don't be shy about using your nitrous tanks, but remember that using two or three at once will yield a greater speed boost, and last significantly longer.



PROTIP: Though slipstreaming will give you a boost when you decide to peel out from behind a rival, be careful how you time your big moves.



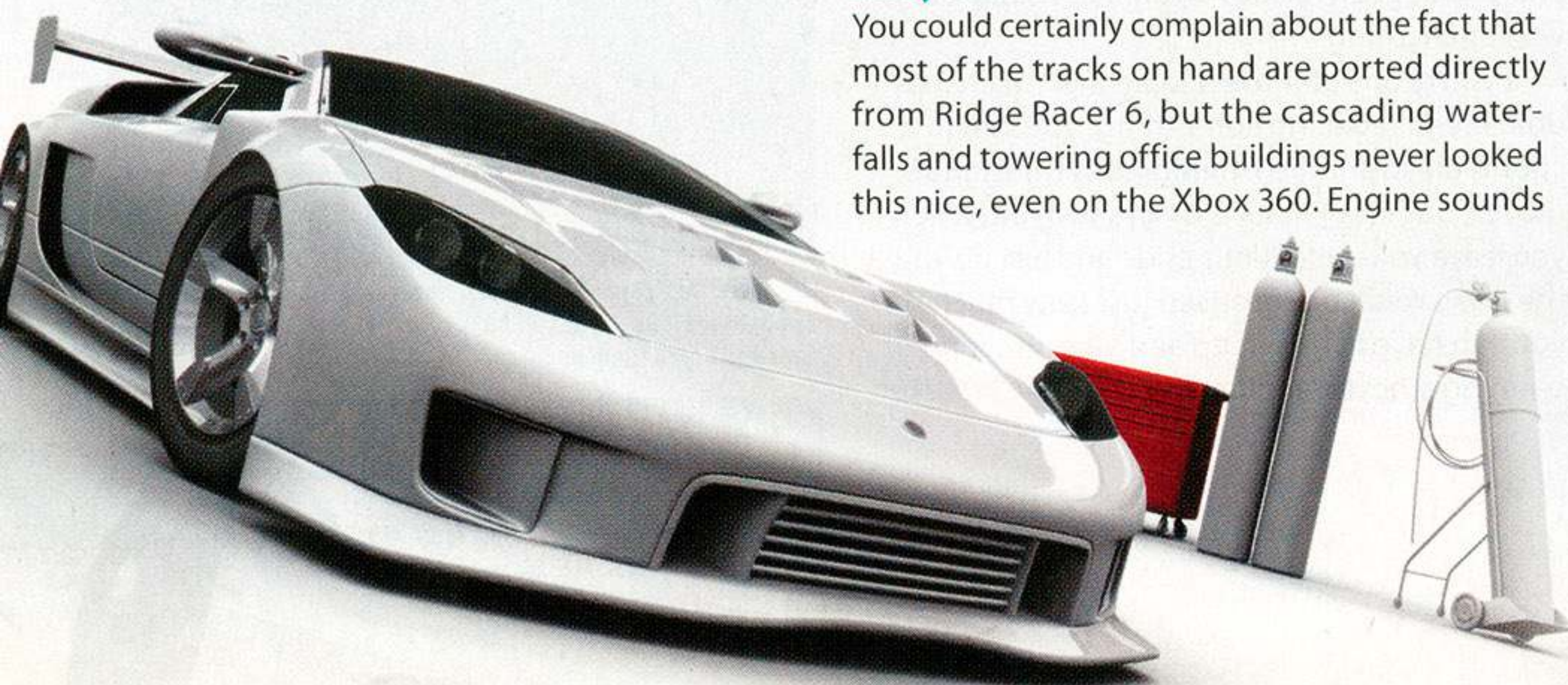
PROTIP: Drifts taken while discharging nitrous will have no effect on your nitrous meter, so do not waste your precious juice when you're heading into turns unless you're on the final stretch of a race.



PROTIP: Slipstreaming is critical to winning the harder races, so if you find yourself behind a few cars at once, stay as close as possible to their backsides until a hole opens up for you to squeeze through.

drone without much interactivity, there's no damage modeling at all, and collision physics sometimes make it seem as if you're driving bumper cars, but the ultimate effect is like playing with absurdly fast matchbox cars, and it's a lot of fun.

The Ridge Racer series has always seemed to provide games more suited to the casual arcade crowd than serious racing devotees, and despite its jump in graphics quality and new twists, this latest installment isn't likely to convert many to its streamlined feel. As long as realism isn't tops on your list of demands, Ridge Racer 7 is a great first foray into the next generation of racing.—Ouroboros



PS3	GRAPHICS	4.0	FUN FACTOR 4.0
	SOUND	4.5	
	CONTROL	4.0	

Developer and publisher: Namco Bandai Games ■ \$59.99
Available now ■ Racing ■ 2 players; 14 online ■ ESRB: E



PROTIP: If you find that tending to your garden is becoming overwhelming, hire helpers from the village to take care of particular tasks.



Viva Piñata

Cute, cuddly, and enormously entertaining.

Xbox 360



Don't let its bright colors and cute, fuzzy animals fool you: Viva Piñata isn't some kiddie-game that's being targeted at elementary school tykes. It certainly will appeal to that demographic but it has enough going for it that even hardcore gamers should give it a whack.

Paradise Regained

The fantasy island of sentient piñatas has fallen into disrepair, with once-luxurious gardens of rich greenery now caked in hard soil, and you've just been given a slice of it to cultivate back to its former glory.

Using a set of tools—you start off with a shovel and a bag of seeds but you can get more—you tend to your patch of land, which in turn attracts two ridiculously cute piñatas to your garden. Build them a habitat, let nature take its course and you'll soon find yourself with a few more piñatas to care for.

Home on the Range

But it's not all Garden of Eden bliss: with each level of experience you gain, life becomes just



PROTIP: They make look adorable sleeping outdoors but it's much safer for your piñatas if they spend the night inside. A house also gives loving pairs of animals a private place to get freaky in private.

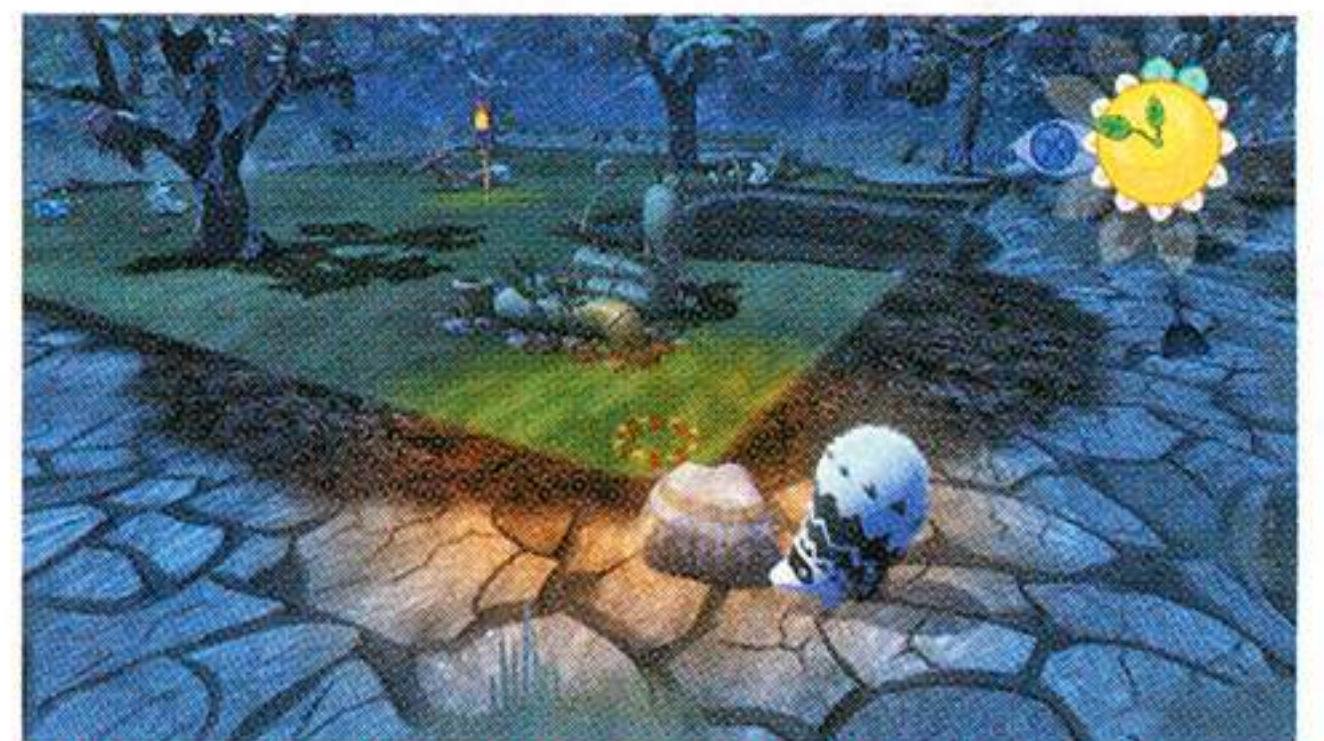
a little more complicated. Sour piñatas swoop in and drop sour candies that make your piñatas sick. Fail to call in the village doctor quickly enough and the evil Dastardos will invade and crack the poor guy open, spilling his candy all over the place. Hell, even your own normally good-natured pets will sometimes find another resident intolerable, and get into tear-jerking little fights and brawls.

Once you've gotten a glimpse at everything the game has to offer, you start to see how all the little elements come together to form a surprisingly complex "doughnut of life." Nearly every animal eats, or is eaten by, another member of the ecosystem, and who you attract to your garden is a direct result of those relationships. Helping a couple of worms raise a child only to have him be eaten by a sparrow neighbor is simultaneously fulfilling and heartbreaking.

Party Animals

Add in the eye-catching, and retina burning, graphics, the clever use of audio cues to alert you to events and problems, the elegant control and menu interface and a design philosophy that doesn't unfairly penalize you for mistakes, and you've got a recipe for fun that's simple and very enchanting.

If you're one of those people that isn't happy unless you're killing something, you can just spend all your time braining anything that moves, but Viva Piñata is most satisfying when you leave your inhibitions aside and just go with the flow. You'll be surprised just how much fun you can have in this deep and vibrant world of seemingly never-ending surprises.—*Ouroboros*



PROTIP: You can lure wild piñatas, like this fudgehog, into your garden. Different things attract different animals, so experiment with plants, landscaping, and living arrangements



PROTIP: You can call on the monkey doctor to pay a visit and spray medicine about. Just make sure you've always got a little extra scratch available to pay the bill.



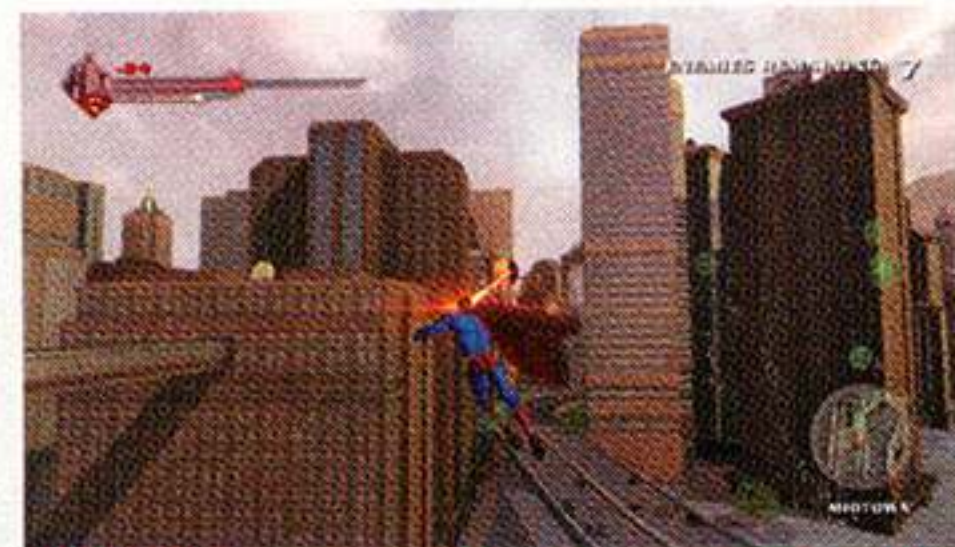
PROTIP: Take care of your sick piñatas as quickly as possible, or opportunistic Dastardos will pay your plot a most unwelcome visit and break them open.

	GRAPHICS 4.5		FUN FACTOR 4.5/5
	SOUND 4.5		
	CONTROL 4.5		

Developer: Rare Publisher: Microsoft \$49.99 Available now Strategy 1 player ESRB: E



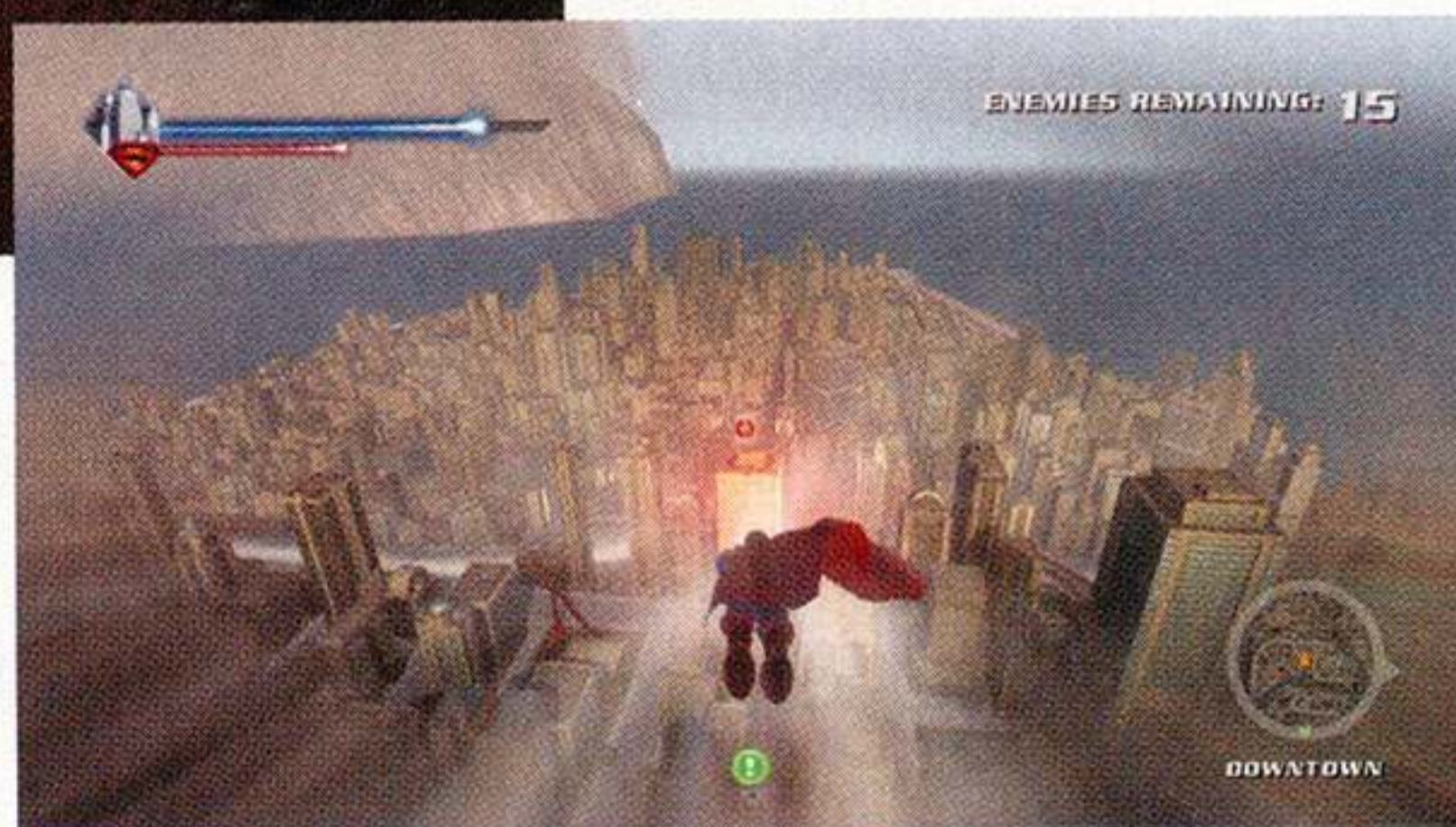
PROTIP: To recharge his powers, Superman just needs to stand still.



PROTIP: Once you've fought an enemy for the first time, you shouldn't have a problem fighting them a thousand more times throughout the rest of the game.



Think it's exciting to carry and throw big objects? Yes, we did too. However, in this game, it's not.



PROTIP: The faster superman flies the less maneuverable he becomes.

Superman Returns

Superman Returns, but he shouldn't have bothered.



What is it with Superman and video games? Did he make a pact with the devil that granted him box office success in exchange for absolutely craptacular video games? Could it be that a good Superman game will never be made?

There was hope that with Sup's appearance in the well-received Superman Returns that we would see a suitable adaptation from EA in video game form. Well, that hope can be quickly squashed, as Superman: Returns is not only a poor reimagining of the movie, but a bad game in general.

It Can Be a Good Game, Kal-El, If It Wants to Be

Should you really be surprised that another Superman game is bad, though? Back when EA was first showing it off there looked to be a small glimmer of hope that it wouldn't end up a steaming pile like every other Superman game, even if it was being developed by EA. The graphics looked promising and the expansive, free-roaming city was a unique idea that, if properly executed, would be a big plus. Overall, it felt like the closest a Superman game had ever gotten to feeling like you were playing as the Man of Steel.

And then that horrible thing called reality set in. The game got closer to release and it was looking less and less like the epic game we

were hoping for. As it turns out the graphics and the story were one of the few things the team at EA got relatively right. The city is breathtaking to fly around and explore for the first hour or so, but the excitement wears off rather quickly. And though explosions, buildings, and breaking the sound barrier as you fly around the city are all visually pleasing, the overall graphical package leaves something to be desired.

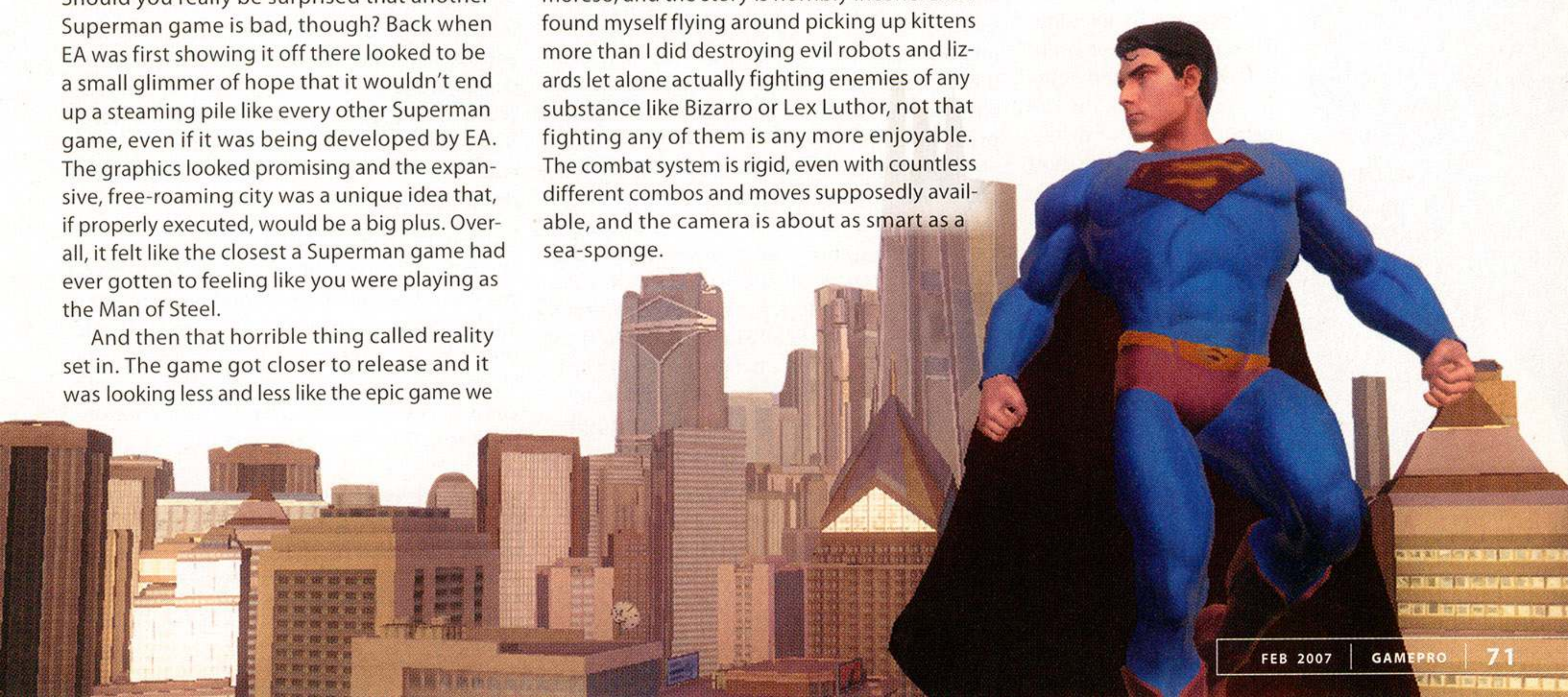
Faster Than a Speeding Bullet, Less Exciting Than Gonorrhea

The graphics would be more acceptable if it was apparent that Metropolis was an expansive, adventure-filled city; unfortunately, it's anything but. Missions are repetitive, enemies even moreso, and the story is horribly incoherent. I found myself flying around picking up kittens more than I did destroying evil robots and lizards let alone actually fighting enemies of any substance like Bizarro or Lex Luthor, not that fighting any of them is any more enjoyable. The combat system is rigid, even with countless different combos and moves supposedly available, and the camera is about as smart as a sea-sponge.

When you come down to it, Superman Returns feels more like a botched sandbox-styled game but with very little to do, and whatever there is to do is both poorly implemented and boring. It may be the best Superman game so far, but that's not saying much.—*The Watcher*

	GRAPHICS	3.0	FUN FACTOR 2.5 ₅
	SOUND	3.0	
	CONTROL	2.5	

- Developer: EA Tiburon ■ Publisher: EA Games ■ \$59.99
- Available now ■ Action ■ 1 player ■ ESRB: T
- Also on the PlayStation 2 and Xbox





PROTIP: Taking cover is vitally important in Call of Duty 3. Press the **○** button to crouch and press it again to lay prone. To get back on your feet and move around faster, press **×**.



PROTIP: There are all sorts of cover options available in Call of Duty 3, so always keep your head low and out of the line of fire.



PROTIP: Jab the Sixaxis controller forward to perform a melee attack. Just make sure you're not sitting next to anything valuable.

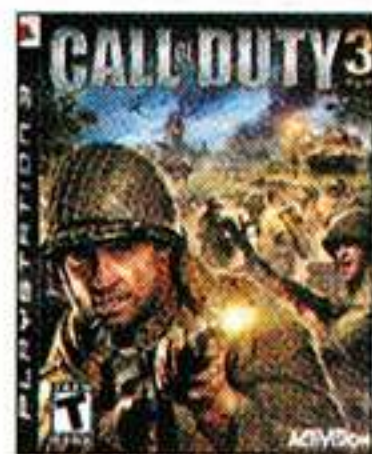
Call of Duty 3

Does the PS3 version of Call of Duty 3 have what it takes to attract recruits away from the Xbox 360?



PROTIP: Sniping can be slightly tedious with the PS3's Sixaxis controller. There's no beating the offset thumbsticks of the Xbox 360.

PS3



We won't waste your time here by rehashing any details about Call of Duty 3's (CoD3) storyline or core game mechanics. That's ground we already covered before in our review of the Xbox 360 version and the PS3 version is identical when it comes to those aspects. You still jump into the boots of a greenhorn Army grunt and fight wave after evil wave of Nazis through a battle-scarred European countryside.

So what we're going to do instead is to delve into the differences between the two versions and detail the ways in which the PS3 version is better or worse than its 360 sibling. The short answer? Much to our chagrin, it's mostly worse.



Sixaxis of Kicksaxis

What sets the PS3 version of CoD3 apart the most from the Xbox 360 version is the implementation of the Sixaxis controller. Much like the Nintendo Wii Remote, the Sixaxis has motion sensing capabilities which come into play in moderately interesting ways. For instance, during close-quarters combat, flicking the Sixaxis controller forward will perform a melee attack. It was fun and interesting at first, but it quickly became tiresome and awkward—trying to aim and land a successful strike in the heat of battle isn't easy.

Thankfully, the other main use of the Sixaxis controls is implemented much more seamlessly. Battle Actions are a cool, new feature in CoD3 where, every so often you will be thrown into a situation where you have to manipulate the controller to dodge a potentially dangerous situation; it works similarly to the button-pressing sequences in Resident Evil 4.

For instance, during the course of the game, you'll find yourself in a wrestling match with a Nazi soldier. On the Xbox 360 version, you'd rapidly press the two trigger buttons in an alternating rhythm. But on the PS3, you shake the controller frantically in an effort to fight him off. It's exhausting work but it's slightly more satisfying to physically act out the struggle than to just mash buttons.

This Bullet's For You

One last point of comparison that we would like to make between the PS3 and Xbox 360 versions:

the graphics are better on the 360. It's shocking but true. Although the PS3 is a beastly machine, the 360 runs the game much smoother, and zooming in on any weapon in the game reveals that the 360 version has far better texture quality.

But aside from that, the gameplay is pretty much the same on both versions. It's also pretty much what you'd expect from a Call of Duty game. It's extremely addictive and fast paced, so much so that you can easily play through it in one sitting. Yes, it's short but it's oh so sweet. Add in the multiplayer modes—including individual classes that have their own attributes and abilities—and you have one action-packed package. But anyone who's grown tired of the WWII formula will be disappointed, as it's more of the same old, same old. Also, you can't skip cutscenes, a minor but wholly unforgivable design choice.

Xbox 360 Wins This Battle

Overall, CoD3 succeeds in surpassing the two previous titles on all fronts and if you're looking for a straight answer as to which version is better, here it is: the PS3 version's weaker graphics and moderately interesting Sixaxis controls come in second to the overall experience on the Xbox 360.—*Tenacious Moses*



PROTIP: Pay close attention to your minimap, as it will mark your next objective with a gold star and your fellow comrades with green arrows.

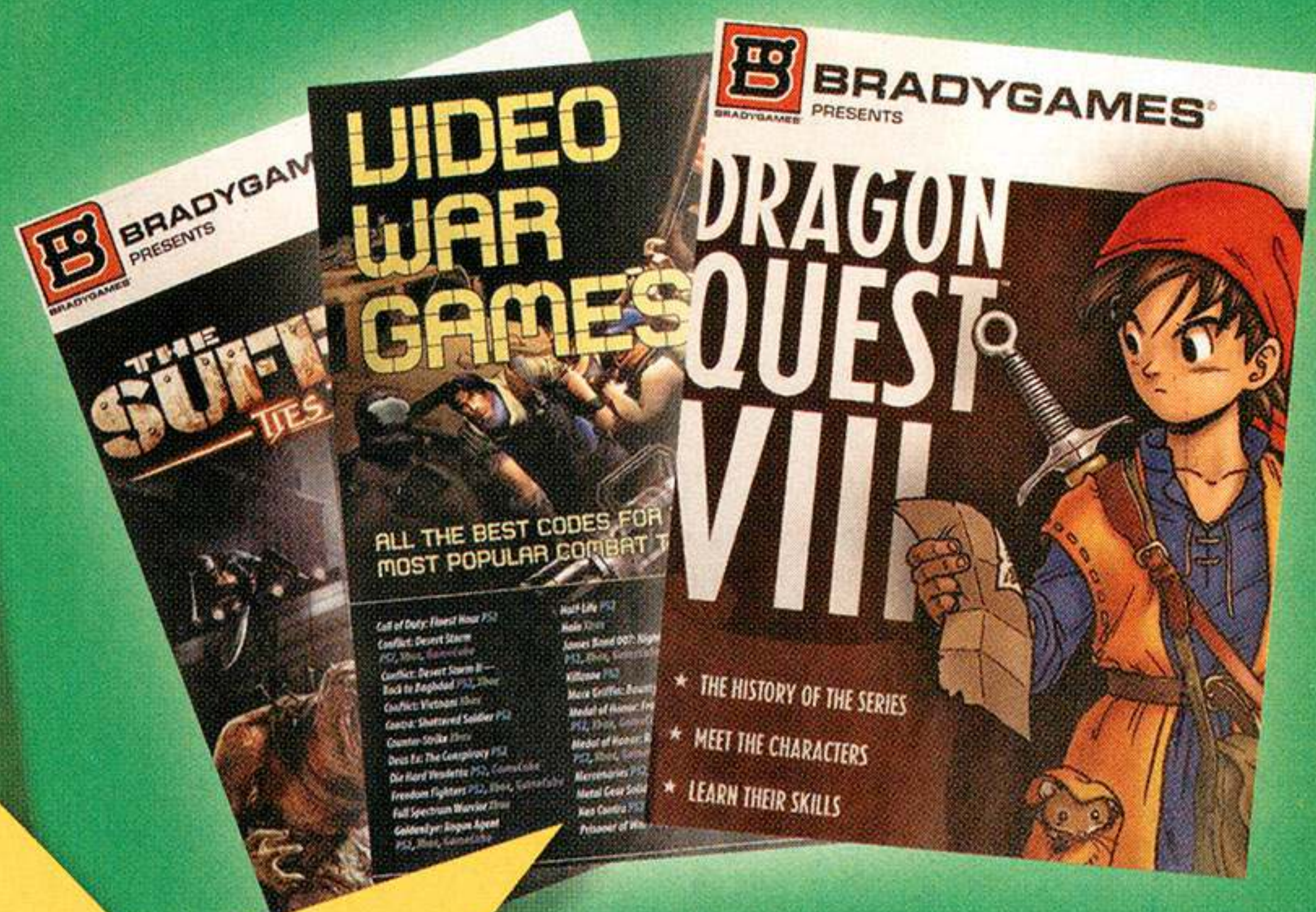
PS3	GRAPHICS	4.25	FUN FACTOR	4.0
	SOUND	4.5		
	CONTROL	3.75		

Developer: Treyarch ■ Publisher: Activision ■ \$59.99
 Available now ■ Shooting ■ 1 player; 16 online ■ ESRB: Teen
 Also on the PlayStation 2, Xbox 360, Xbox, and Wii

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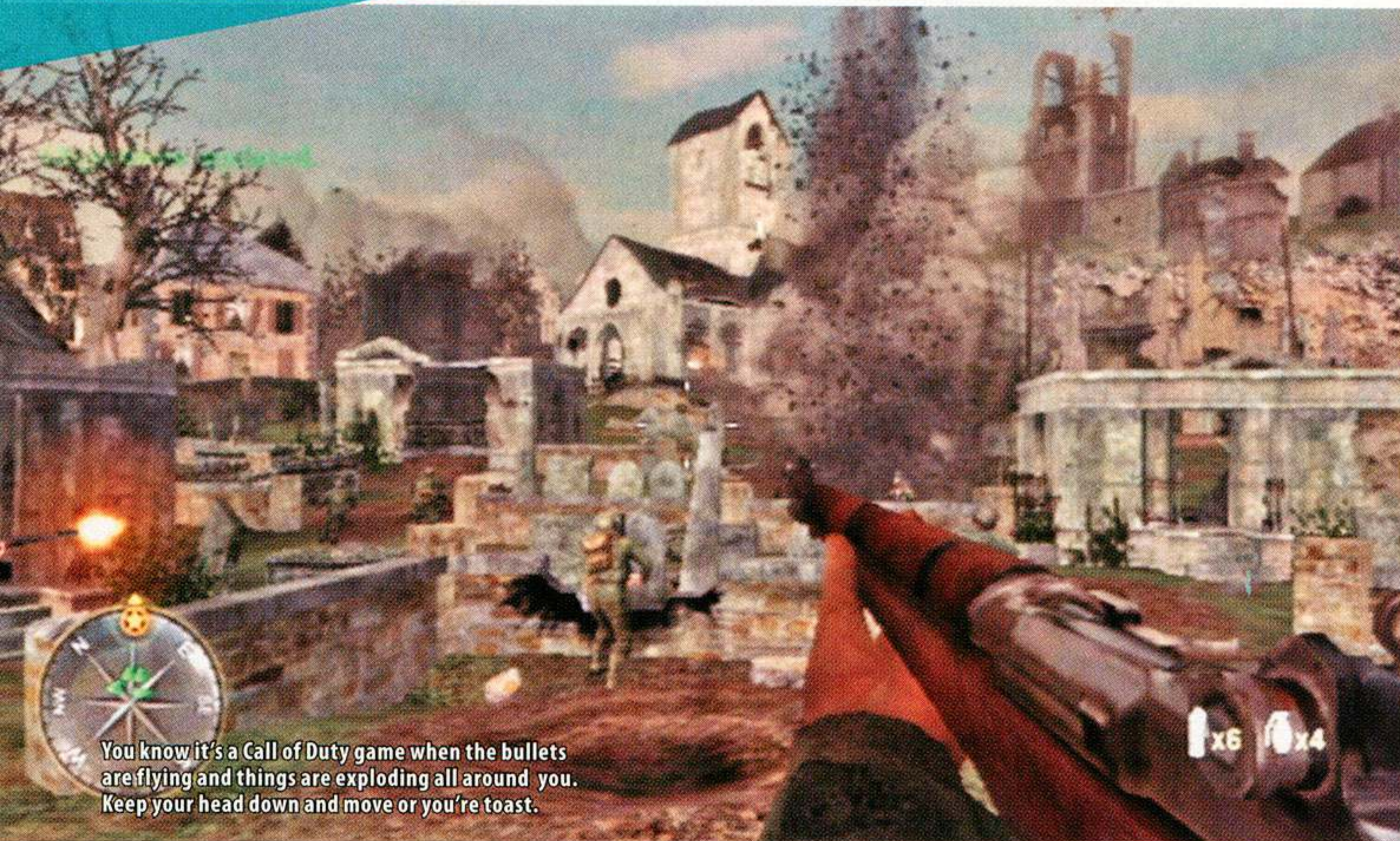
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You know it's a Call of Duty game when the bullets are flying and things are exploding all around you. Keep your head down and move or you're toast.



PROTIP: The familiar radar can be a lifesaver, especially on a smoke-filled battlefield.



Don't forget to check out the bonus materials. You'll have to unlock a lot of the content but it's a nice extra feature.



Call of Duty 3's story is told through historical footage and a voice-over narrative, which gives it a documentary feel.

Call of Duty 3

It's the Wii's debut point-and-click shooter, but is it really better than analog-control-stick-and-trigger?

Wii



Your arm hovers at your side, clutching your Wii Remote like a geeky gunslinger. You flick your wrist and your battlefield view whips around, sighting the just-visible helmet of a Nazi grunt hunkered behind a headstone. You bring your arm up, aim and carefully draw a bead. Your finger tenses on the trigger button and when the time is right, you shoot. But instead of a certified kill, your M1's cross hair suddenly jukes and jives, and the bullet goes flying harmlessly past your enemy's head. But why?

Ally Ally Nazi Free

Simple: it's because the Wii version of Call of Duty 3 features an aiming mechanism that has no physical point of reference. For example: real riflemen use two hands to shoot—one to trigger, one to aim and steady. Even pistols require two hands, regardless of what Hollywood would have you believe. In PC first-person shooters, your pivoting wrist is buoyed by the flat plane of the desk. But with the Wii Remote, your trigger-arm floats in space, and whenever you thumb the directional pad to lob a grenade, hit the A button to sight, or click the B button to fire, your wrist invariably wobbles just enough to throw your aim fatally off; and that's *with* lots of practice.

It's worth noting, though, that the Wii Remote is vastly superior to an analog stick when it comes to turning your head quickly and accurately. You can also pump the Wii Remote and Nunchuck rapidly to throw off melee grapples, or loop it in circles to screw-in charge pins. For vehicles, you simply hold the controllers up like two-hands gripping and turning a wheel. Once

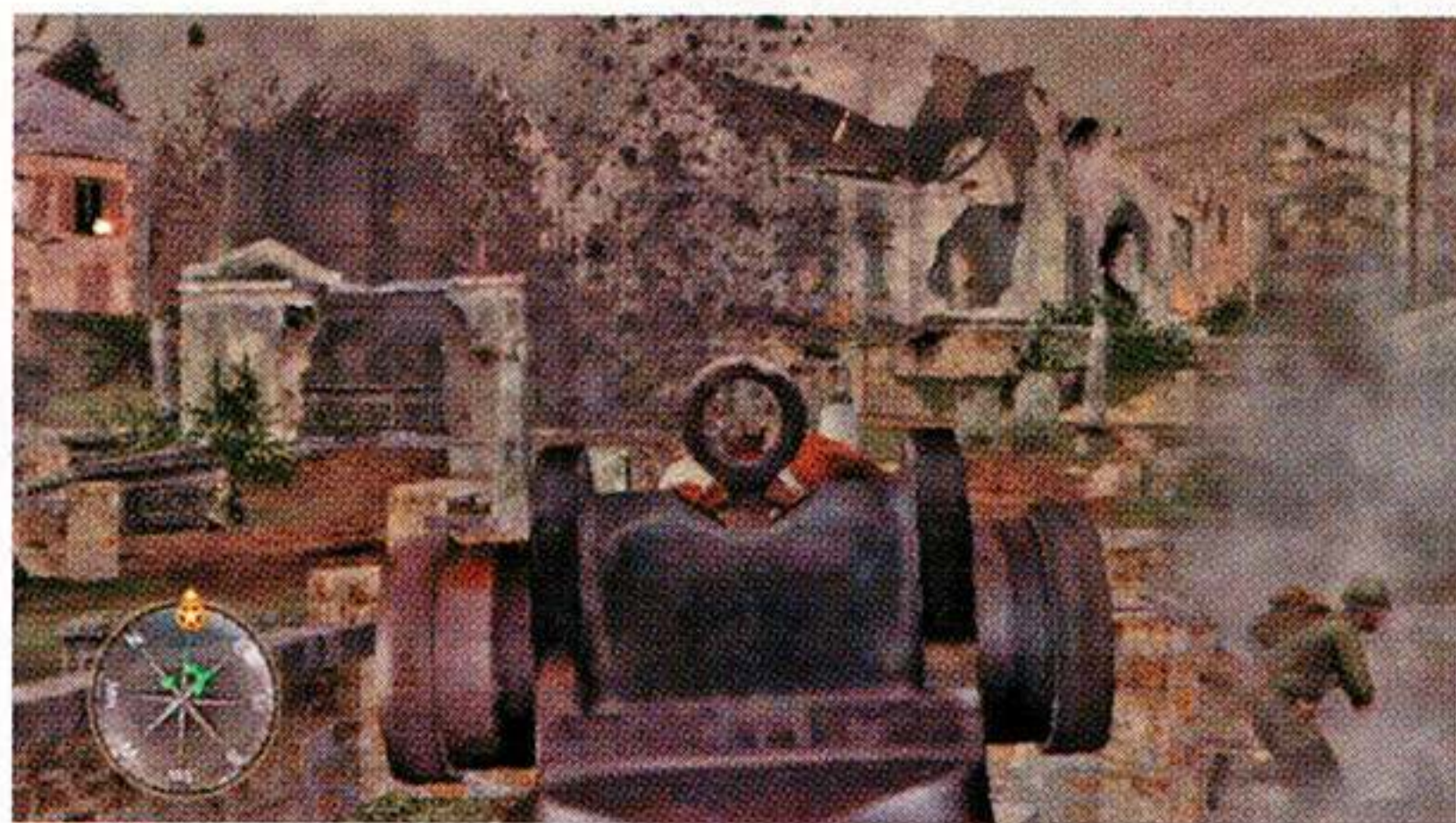
you get the hang of driving, it's so natural that going back to an analog stick feels twitchy and sloppy.

It's also no surprise that the low-res Wii version of CoD3 suffers from a lack of visual oomph, which is sorely missed when trying to spot enemies "peeking" at long range. Otherwise, the majority of the game plays like its other console peers but without multiplayer as it trades multi-front mini-campaigns for a single cinematic bocage-to-urban-center slog through Western Europe. Along the way, you'll scurry between crater holes and splintered buildings to assault enemy strongholds and pinning sticky grenades on Tigers.

A for Effort

While the mini-games are cool, you will sadly spend most of your time fighting to control your drunken gun sight, and practice only yields marginal improvements. You have to hand it to Treyarch for having the guts to take chances, but as far as CoD3 goes, this isn't the version to play unless you're flying Wii-only, and even then, it's only worth it to get a glimpse of what the future might hold.

—Matt Peckham



PROTIP: Aim down your gun's sights for greater accuracy but when the heat's on, it might be easier to just spray and pray.



Wii GRAPHICS 2.0
SOUND 3.0
CONTROL 2.5

FUN FACTOR
2.5

Developer: Treyarch Publisher: Activision \$49.99
Available now Action 1 player ESRB: T

Tony Hawk's Project 8

The Birdman hits the PS3 but this is one trick we've already seen before.



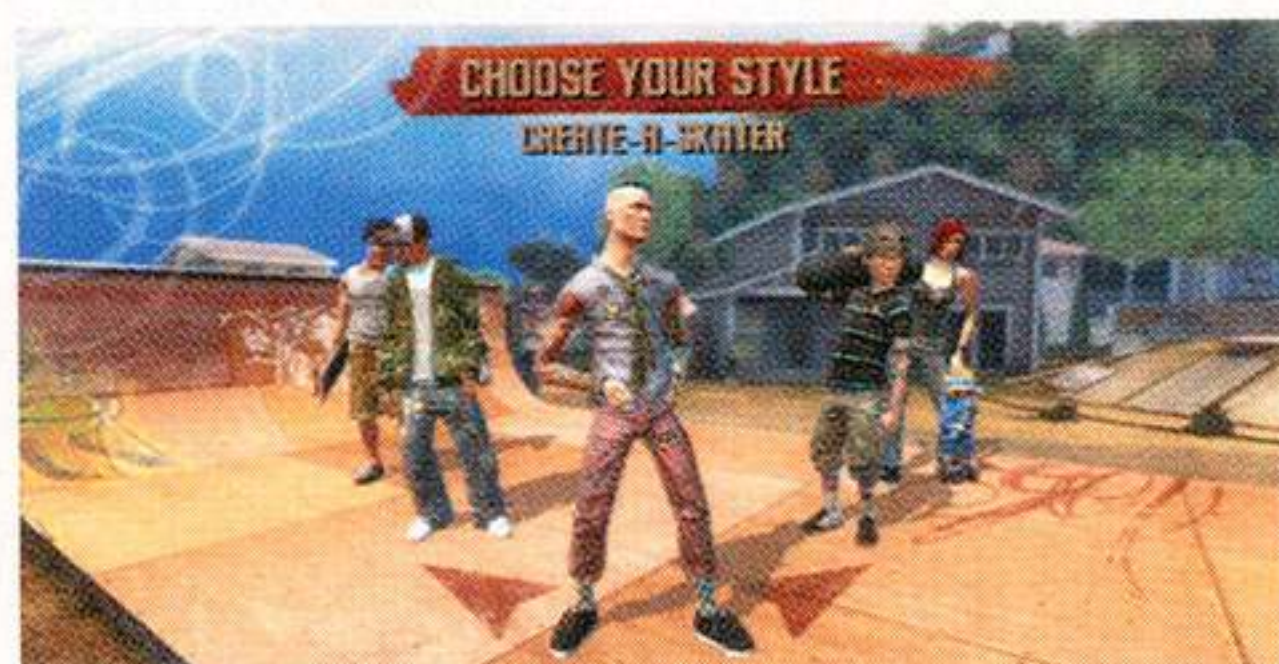
nature that made the first two games in the series so much fun. I've read and heard claims of others knocking the game for occasional glitchiness and slowdown, but rest assured that these problems are few and far between and usually don't alter gameplay.

Maintaining Balance

As mentioned earlier, the only "exclusive" feature of Project 8 on the PS3 is the option to use the Sixaxis tilt functionality for specific in-game controls. The tilt function is turned off by default when the game begins, by the way, but that can be changed at any time through the settings menu. You can turn it on to individually control balance, tricks, and steering, or for any combination of the three. But, as you'll quickly discover, using tilt is unbelievably awkward. It's hard enough to land high-point combos in Project 8 that require the utmost concentration, let alone have to do it by jerking the Sixaxis controller like an idiot to land the simplest of grinds. It's very hard to get used to and, even with a lot of practice, there's still an invisible skill barrier that won't allow you to skate as well as with the standard controls.

Thank the powers that be that they didn't make it a mandatory part of the game. Strip away the Sixaxis flub and Project 8 is still the great skate game that I've come to love. Only difference is, it's on the PS3.

—Mr. Marbles



One of the few gripes we had is the limited character customization options in the game.



At the risk of sounding like a broken record, let me say the PS3 version of Tony Hawk's Project 8 is—you guessed it—exactly the same as the excellent Xbox 360 version. There's a twist, though, thanks to the Sixaxis tilt-specific control options, but that's hardly any reason to get yourself excited.

Eighth Times A Charm?

Appropriately named, Project 8 is the Birdman's eighth console appearance and it wouldn't be a stretch to be sick of Tony and his crew at this point. I haven't been addicted to a Tony Hawk game since THPS2, and the five games that followed were mere write-offs.

But with the new slow-motion Nail the Trick mode and a back-to-basics approach to the level design and the story, Project 8 has that addictive



Ah, Nail The Trick mode, how we love thee; it's a ton of fun and is almost a game in and of itself.

PS3	GRAPHICS	4.25	EDITORS' CHOICE	FUN FACTOR 4.5
	SOUND	4.0		
	CONTROL	3.5		

- Developer: Neversoft
- Publisher: Activision
- \$59.99
- Available now
- Skateboarding
- 4 players
- ESRB: T
- Also on the PlayStation 2, Xbox 360, and Xbox

Need for Speed: Carbon

The best racing game on the PS3. For now, at least.



For me, choosing between EA's top two racing franchises, Need for Speed and Burnout, has always been easy. Burnout hits me like no other racing game and the reason is two-fold. First, the folks at Criterion are developmental wizards of console technology, and second, Burnout plays more like an action game than a racing one, fueling competitive nature on par with multiplayer matches of Halo 2.

Speed Kills

But while the Need for Speed series and its latest installment Carbon shares the same speed-infused pedigree, it never grabbed me in the same visceral way that Burnout did. I guess I just prefer the balls-to-wall action and slick crashes of the Burnout series more than I liked the silky yet not as satisfying flavor of NFS. I'll just leave it up to my therapist to sort it all out. Carbon still has a lot to offer racing fans, though, and it's a nice mix of fantasy and reality that will probably fulfill your need for, uh, um, speed.

Now comes the part when I wish I had a dollar for every time I had to write that the PS3 version of a game is the same as the Xbox 360's, because, guess what?



There goes my insurance premium!

The PS3 version of Carbon is blah, blah, blah. I did notice that the 360 version looked noticeably better in terms of graphics. When Carbon on PS3 was first shown running on the PS3 last

summer at EA Studios in Redwood City, jaws dropped...in horror. It looked like a late-generation PS2 game, at best. Thankfully, things were tightened up before launch, but Carbon on the PS3 doesn't quite meet the technical standards of the superior Xbox 360 version.

Letting Go Of The Wheel

And once again, the Sixaxis-specific control additions are laughable. Rather than remap the game to be able to drive with the tilt-sensing controller, EA uses it as a turning enhancer that, when the control is jerked to one side during a turn, gives the car an extra little bit of turn juice. The only other difference is the lack of the Xbox 360's photo mode.

If you have a Xbox 360 console, stick to that version of Carbon. But if you were somehow lucky enough to get a PS3 and you need a speed kick, Need for Speed: Carbon is a worthwhile investment.

—Mr. Marbles



Regardless of how you feel about the racing, the game looks good. I can almost smell the new-car scent.

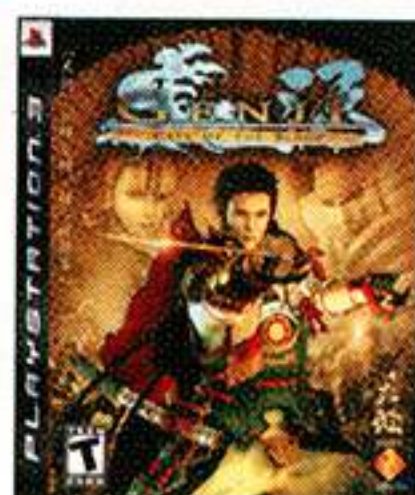
PS3	GRAPHICS	4.0	FUN FACTOR 4.25
	SOUND	4.0	
	CONTROL	4.25	

- Developer: EA Canada
- Publisher: EA Games
- \$59.99
- Available now
- Racing
- 2 players; 8 online
- ESRB: E 10+
- Also on the PlayStation 2, Xbox 360, Xbox, and GameCube

Genji: Days of the Blade

This hack-and-slasher offers days of mediocre fun.

PS3



In our humble opinion, Genji: Days of the Blade is one of, if not the, best looking launch game for the PS3. The details, designs and colors all create an immersive and cohesive environment that is pure eye candy. Too bad it sticks to the basic hack-n-slash, one-against-hundreds conventions that both the Onimusha and Dynasty Warriors franchises have already played out.

Feudal Japan Never Looked So Good

As we said, Days is awesome to look at. The combat animations are superb and the character movements are fast and fluid. Speaking of which, there are four different warriors to play as: series vets Yoshitsune and Benkei are joined by newcomers Shizuka and Buson. Each character fills a different stereotypical niche during battle: Yoshitsune, for example, is the well-balanced one, Benkei is the basic tank with enormous power and slow speed, Shizuka is the weak but effective ranged fighter, and Buson is the turtle-like defensive character. During gameplay, you may swap characters at will, which is important because the game requires you to use each character's skills to progress through a level.

Particular About The Particulars

It all sounds decent enough but then you run into a pretty big problem: the camera, which was, and still remains, the biggest technical complaint about the Genji series. Yes, the graphics in Days are beautiful, but when you're being picked off by off-screen enemies because the camera is fixed at a skewed angle to show off some interesting scenery, it's hard to appreciate the view. Another big gripe: the voice acting. As is usually the case, the English language track is absolutely horrendous and should be avoided at all costs. Do yourself a favor and turn on the vastly superior Japanese language track with English subtitles.

While the game isn't principally *bad*, it doesn't take a step out of the conventional box or do anything out of the ordinary. Because it's a launch title, we expected to catch a glimpse of the face of next-gen gaming. Graphically, it's almost there but the gameplay felt like something we'd seen from multiple PS2 games in the past.—T3hPanda



PROTIP: If you're surrounded with enemies, press the L1 button to trigger your Kamui, and take them down with flair.

PS3	GRAPHICS	4.75	FUN FACTOR	3.25 _s
	SOUND	4.0		
	CONTROL	3.75		
■ Developer: Game Republic ■ Publisher: Sony ■ \$59.99 ■ Available now ■ Action ■ 1 player ■ ESRB: T				

Mobile Suit Gundam: Crossfire

The worst use of giant robots since...well, ever.

PS3



Huge robots with guns might seem like a no-brainer recipe for showing off your next-gen console's prowess, but immediately after firing up Crossfire you'll see that something's gone horribly awry. It's hard to believe that Sony would launch the PS3 with a game this bad. Talk about getting off to a bad start! This is like introducing yourself to an attractive girl at a party by vomiting on her shoes.

Robot Rebellion

First off, the graphics have a decidedly PlayStation 2 feel to them. Everything, from the bland wastes you stomp across to the underwhelming explosion effects, screams mediocrity. Even the basic walking animations of your robots are twitchy and spastic.

Amazingly, despite its simplistic renderings, the frame rate of Crossfire still manages to be abysmal. Though it technically supports 720p and 1080i, you'll need to manually reconfigure your PS3 console to a maximum resolution of 480p just to make this thing remotely playable.

Nuke by Numbers

The lackluster graphics might be forgivable if the gameplay was any good, but Crossfire misses the mark again and again. Missions feature brain-dead enemies and require very little strategy. To make matters worse, you're saddled with two equally poor view-points on the action—imagine driving a car from the back seat and you've got the basic gist. There's also no targeting reticule, so your only choice is to constantly cycle through auto-targeting options, and let the bullets fly until the opposition disappears in a puff of disappointment.

There isn't even a face-saving multiplayer experience. Indeed, there's no online component whatsoever, and splitting the screen for local one-on-one match-ups just exacerbates the already intolerable frame-rate woes. The sad truth is that even the most hardcore robot battle junkie will feel ripped off by this mess. Mobile Suit Gundam: Crossfire might make a pretty nice \$60 drink coaster for your coffee table, but it certainly doesn't fare well as entertainment.—Ouroboros

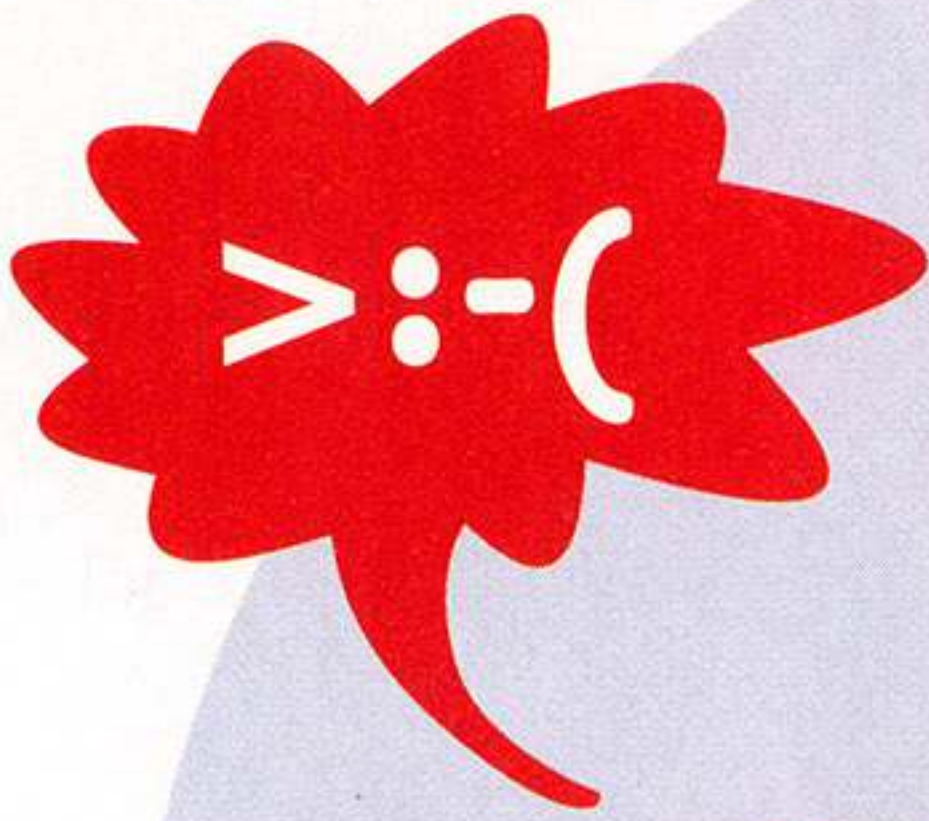


PROTIP: Get up nice and close, pull out your powerful energy sword, and carve a slice off your opponent.



PROTIP: Surviving some of the more difficult encounters absolutely demands staying light on your feet.

PS3	GRAPHICS	1.5	FUN FACTOR	1.0 _s
	SOUND	1.5		
	CONTROL	1.5		
■ Developer: BEC ■ Publisher: Namco Bandai Games ■ \$59.99 ■ Available now ■ Action ■ 2 players ■ ESRB: T				



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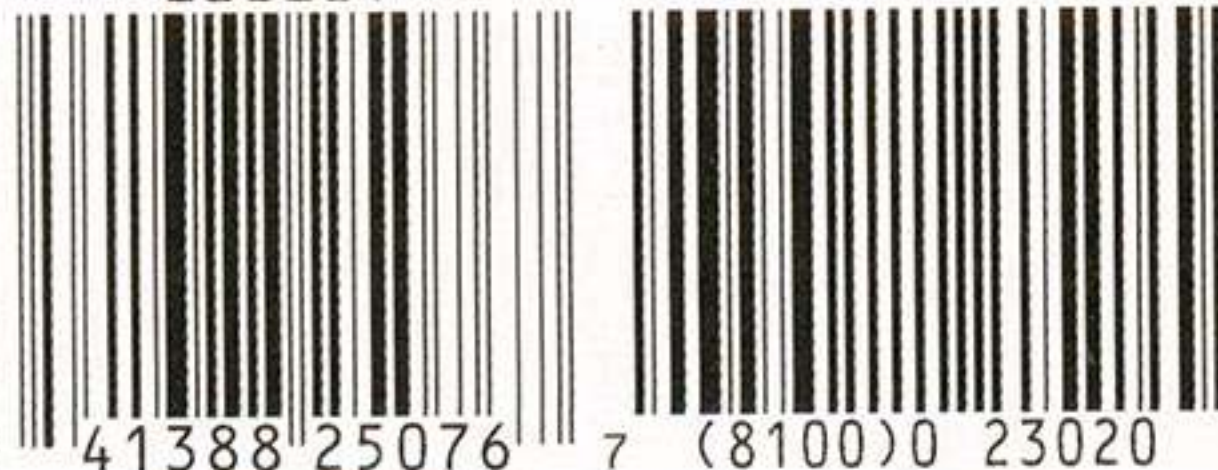
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Excite Truck

Like a trip to In-N-Out, Excite Truck is worth the drive

Wii



Conceptually speaking, we're sold on the Wii and its unique control scheme. Anything that moves us away from robotically stabbing at buttons with our simian appendages is definitely a good thing, and Excite Truck, which utilizes the Wii's motion-sensitive controls, is a step in the right direction. To top it off, it's pretty damn fun to boot.

Life In The Fast (and Furious) Lane

Because it's modeled after crash-and-burn arcade racers like Hydro Thunder and Burnout 4: Takedown, Excite Truck doesn't have a lot of room for subtlety. It's a blunt instrument compared to the surgical precision of other, more sophisticated racers. But that doesn't mean it isn't a whole lot of fun. First, let's talk about the

controls: you hold the Wii Remote in a horizontal position, like an NES directional pad, and "steer" it by tilting the controller left and right and front and back. The 2 button controls the gas, the 1 button controls the brakes (not you ever need to use it), and pressing the directional pad activates a turbo boost. The controls work well overall, but require a sensitive touch. The learning curve is also a little steep—you'll probably careen wildly around for the first few minutes—but once you get the hang of it, you'll be drifting and jumping like a pro.

Watching The Scenery Go By

If there's one thing that Excite Truck demonstrates, it's that the Wii just can't hang with the big boys in the graphics department. The sprawling, hilly terrains look okay, if you're going by



yesterday's standards, but the Xbox 360 has (and the PS3 will) push the graphics bar far out of the Wii's reach. It is nice to see the frame rate stay rock solid, even during the split-screen modes but you won't find any HD resolutions here; connecting component cords and playing in 480p does sharpen some of the rough edges, though.

What works about Excite Truck? Simply put, its use of the Wii Remote provides a more tactile feel to an otherwise straightforward destruction derby racer. Without the Wii's controller, Excite Truck would barely be worth a glance, but as it stands, it's a great way to burn a few hours.

—Vicious Sid



PROTIP: Drive through a stand of trees without crashing long enough and you'll earn yourself a "Super Tree Run."



PROTIP: The "POW" power-up makes you invulnerable and gives you a burst of speed, so don't let something silly like a bunch of trees slow you down.

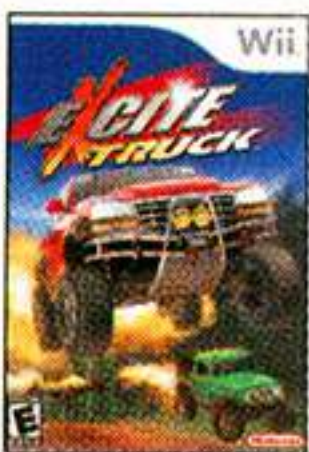
Wii	GRAPHICS	3.75	FUN FACTOR	3.75
	SOUND	2.5		
	CONTROL	4.0		

Developer: Monster Games Publisher: Nintendo \$49.99 Available now Racing 2 players ESRB: E

Elebits

Katamari + Pikmin + Gravity Gun = Elebits

Wii



Silly Elebits. Those rotund little creatures of electric energy are such a nuisance, making messes of peoples homes and causing a general ruckus, and yet their undeniable cuteness makes it hard not to like them. Much like the creatures themselves, Elebits the game is a cute creation that, for all its minor annoyances, is hard not to like.

Clean House!

The premise is simple enough: Elebits—tiny sentient beings full of energy—have been released upon the world and are causing trouble for humans by knocking out power everywhere.



PROTIP: Elebits can be found in very unlikely places; always turn on water faucets to find at least a few.



PROTIP: Some missions require you to collect Elebits silently, so avoid jerky movements when moving objects.

You, the son of famous scientists who work with Elebits, are left home alone during the incident and take it upon yourself, with the help of your father's energy gun, to remove the Elebit infestation. The story itself is rather inconsequential, though the occasional storybook-styled cutscenes that accompany the game are beautifully done and make up for an otherwise simple presentation.

The real appeal is in finding and interacting with these little energetic Pikmin relatives. Because they're rather shy, you're forced to find the Elebits by moving objects in and around the house with your energy gun. You'll only be able to lift and move lightweight objects at first, but as you accumulate Elebits, you'll soon find yourself flinging around refrigerators and other household objects with reckless abandon.

Power Overload

The Wii's control scheme along with cute central characters and an equally charming soundtrack take a relatively simple idea and endow it with a sense of depth and tactile interaction. The environments are varied, with over 25 missions, and once you've completed the story-mode, you'll still have plenty of fresh gameplay in multiplayer and edit mode, where you can create and control your own scenes to interact in.

Elebits is also the first Wii game to utilize the WiiConnect24 feature of Nintendo's console, which allow you to upload and trade your created scenes with others.

The game can be annoying at times—opening doors is almost always a hassle, for example—and the limited time you have to find the Elebits makes things a little hairier than necessary but this is still one of the more original and fun titles available for the Wii.

—The Watcher

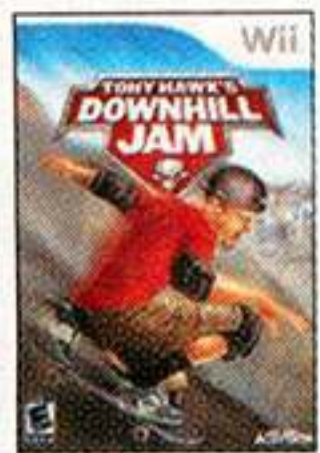


Wii	GRAPHICS	4.0	FUN FACTOR	4.0
	SOUND	4.0		
	CONTROL	4.25		

Developer and publisher: Konami \$49.99 Available now Action 4 players ESRB: E

Tony Hawk's Downhill Jam

Downhill is exactly where this title is headed



If you own a Wii, you should be rubbing the side of your cheek right about now: you've just been slapped in the face. While Xbox 360 and PS3 owners get to play the amazing Project 8, you're stuck with Downhill Jam. It's like waking up on Christmas morning to discover that your brothers both got the coolest new toys while you got an ugly sweater and socks.

To The Extreme!

To be fair, Downhill Jam isn't a terrible game, but we expected better considering its pedigree. At least the game controls well; you hold the Wii Remote sideways and tilt it to turn, while the buttons and directional pad control tricks, combat and more. Tony Hawk vets will pick it up quickly,



PRO TIP: Shake the controller rapidly to recover from a fall. Don't stop until you're back on your feet or the meter will reset.

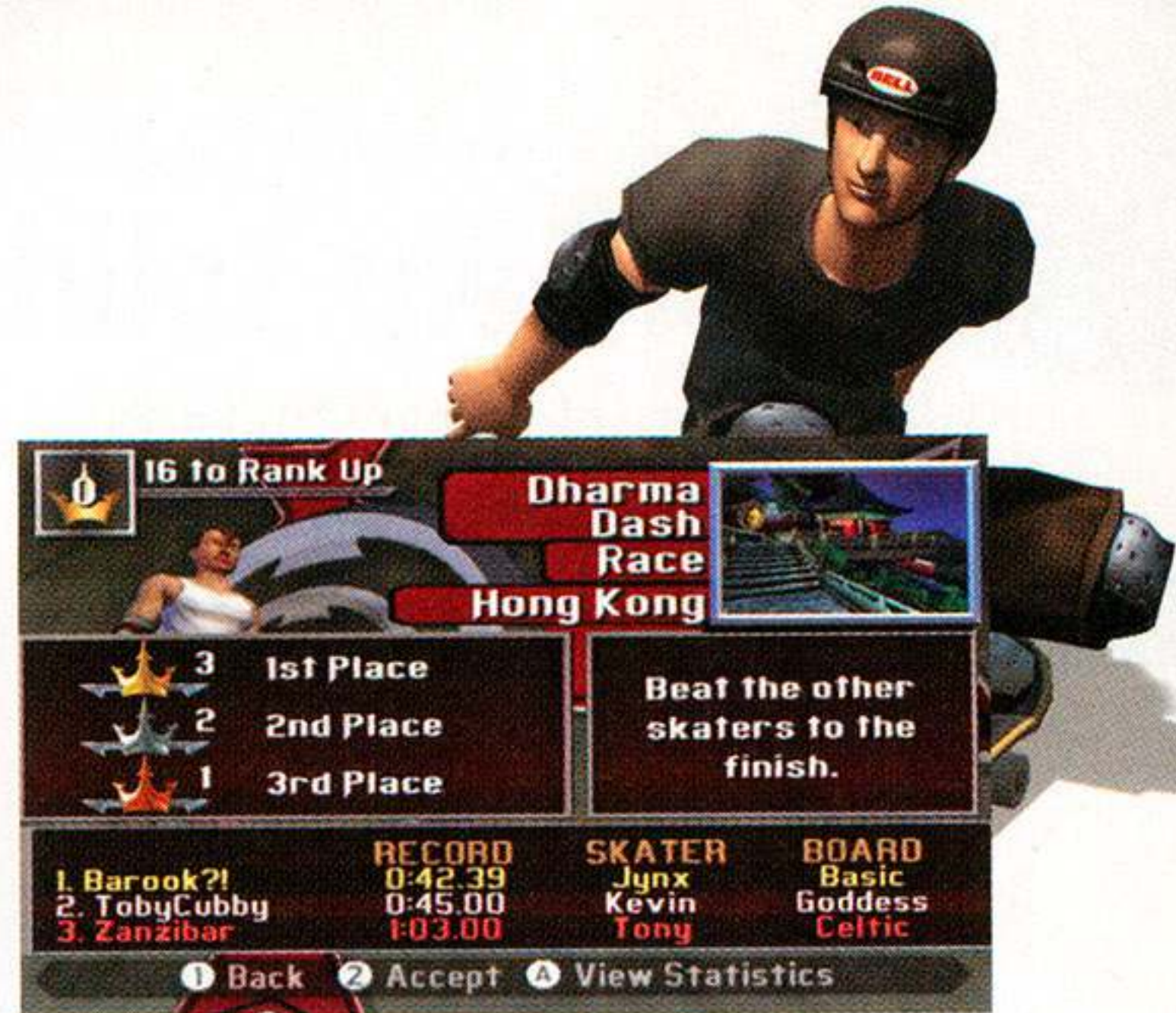
and we actually prefer the way balance is handled in this game as compared with Project 8. Tilting the Wii Remote feels much more natural than using the analog stick to keep your balance.

Road Rash

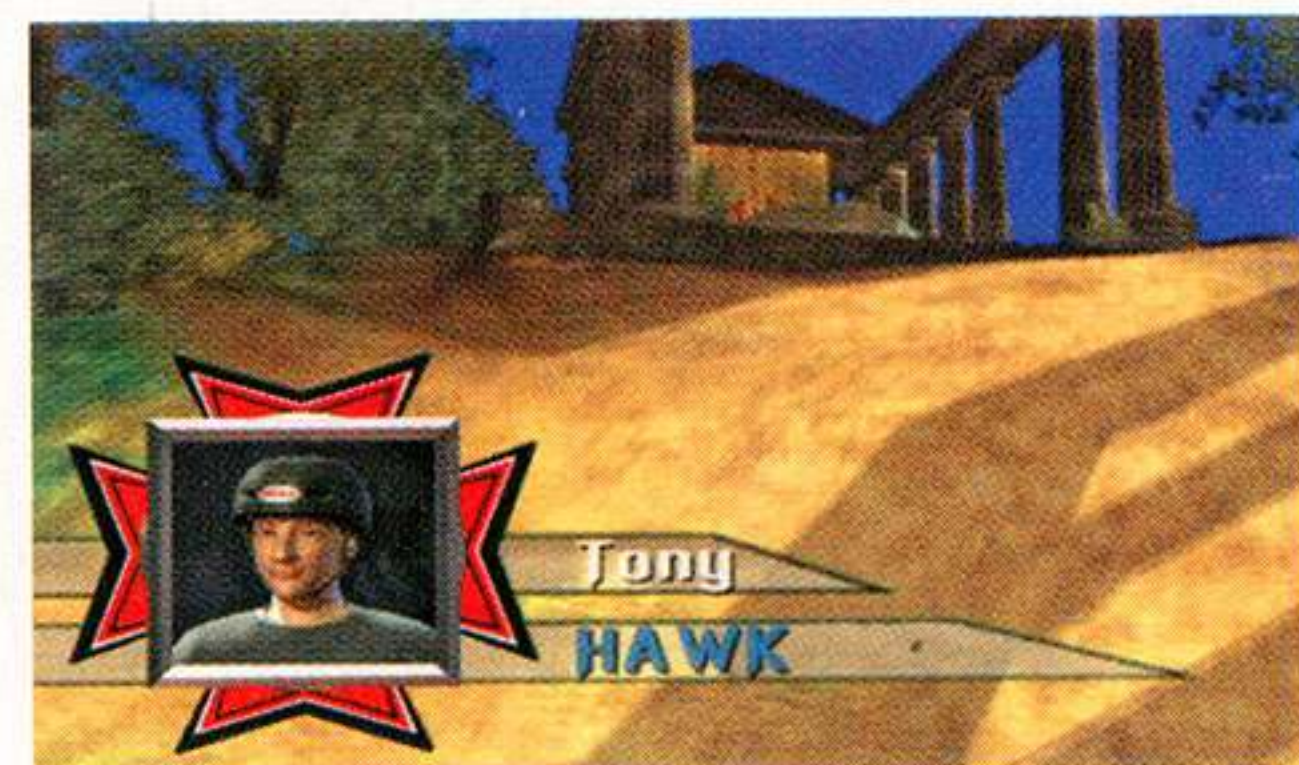
Aside from the interesting control scheme, Downhill Jam has very little going for it. It's a generic downhill racer with middling graphics and a handful of mildly interesting modes. As you complete levels in the straight race, trick mode, slalom and pedestrian assault modes, you'll move up the ranks and unlock new items.

There's little strategy outside of maneuvering for occasional shortcuts or discovering an unexplored path, and the trick system is pointless since it's better to concentrate on getting to the finish line. Skater customization is likewise shallow with little to change about your character. We're also obligated to mention that you can play Downhill Jam with four players, but splitting the screen makes the game more difficult and cramped by robbing you of valuable visual real estate.

In the end, Downhill Jam is just okay. It's like watching an infomercial at three in the morning: it's sort of amusing and it passes the time, but you're not enthralled by what's going on, either.—*The Grim Wiper*



You earn points towards your career depending on how you place at the end of the race but you don't necessarily have to finish first all the time to advance.



PRO TIP: Press the minus buttons to skip the annoying and unnecessary pre-start commentary. Sorry Tony, we're just not interested.

Wii	GRAPHICS	3.0	FUN FACTOR	3.25 ₅
	SOUND	3.25		
	CONTROL	3.75		

Developer: Toys for Bob Publisher: Activision \$49.99
Available now Action 4 players ESRB: E10+

Super Monkey Ball: Banana Blitz

Don't trip over this stale banana.



Monkeys running around in clear plastic balls: sounds like the recipe for a good time, doesn't it? And it was—five years ago. But even the most wonderful ideas can be beaten like a dead horse, and Super Monkey Ball: Banana Blitz is starting to look like a pony that's gone ten rounds with Mike Tyson in his prime.

Death of a Monkey

Banana Blitz has eight known worlds that consist of eight stages each. Two new characters, Yan-Yan and Doctor, join the returning characters AiAi, MeeMee, GonGon, and Baby. Each character has unique stat abilities that are categorized by Acceleration, Speed, Jump, Weight, and Size of Ball.

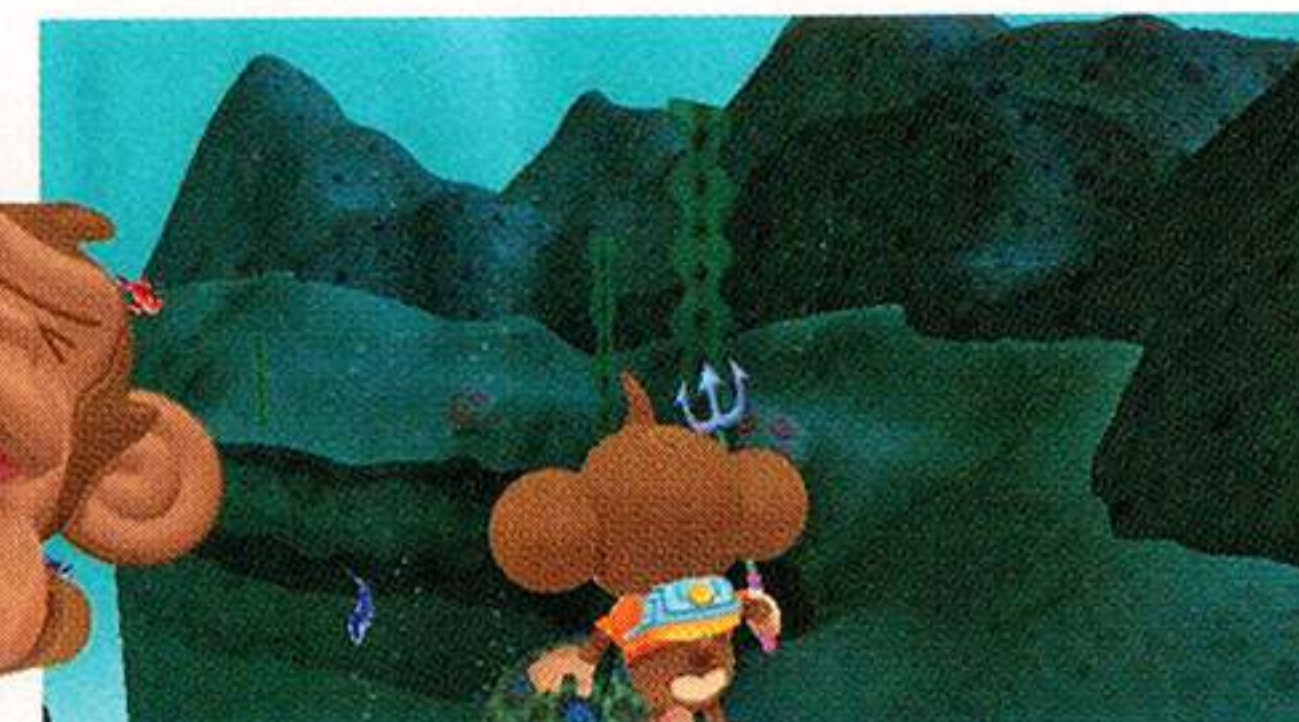


PRO TIP: Accumulate enough bananas and you'll gain an extra life, which allows you to restart the stage from checkpoints.

Beyond that, the game is pretty much the same: you maneuver a monkey ball around various stages and collect bananas as you go along. The only difference is that the entire ordeal is now controlled by the Wii Remote. Your monkey responds to the tilt of your controller. For example, the degree of forward tilt influences forward acceleration, while backward tilt decelerates the ball. But unlike other games that use the control scheme effectively, Banana Blitz is an exercise in frustration. One wrong flick of the wrist you're your monkey is sent plummeting to its death, and after a while, I had to ask myself if it was worth putting up with the frustration just to earn some bananas.

Monkeying Around

Honestly, the only thing worthwhile about Banana Blitz is its 50 mini-games, which are a blast, provided you have the friends and the extra controllers to take advantage of them. It's a good thing Banana Blitz is a launch title because the novelty of the Wii controls should help convince gamers to pick it up. But Sega should seriously consider monkeying around with the formula because it's starting to feel incredibly stale.—*ifeelthecosmos*



PRO TIP: Just like in real-life fish spearing, speed and accuracy matter in the mini-game "Fish Catcher," so jab quickly and precisely when you have a target lined up.



PRO TIP: When you see one of these rainbow portals, roll your monkey through to finish the stage.

Wii	GRAPHICS	3.0	FUN FACTOR	2.75 ₅
	SOUND	2.5		
	CONTROL	2.75		

Developer and publisher: Sega \$49.99 Available now
Action 4 players ESRB: E

Metal Gear Solid: Portable Ops

A Metal Gear Solid game that strays from the expected formula might be considered heresy by many, but it's also lots of fun.

PSP



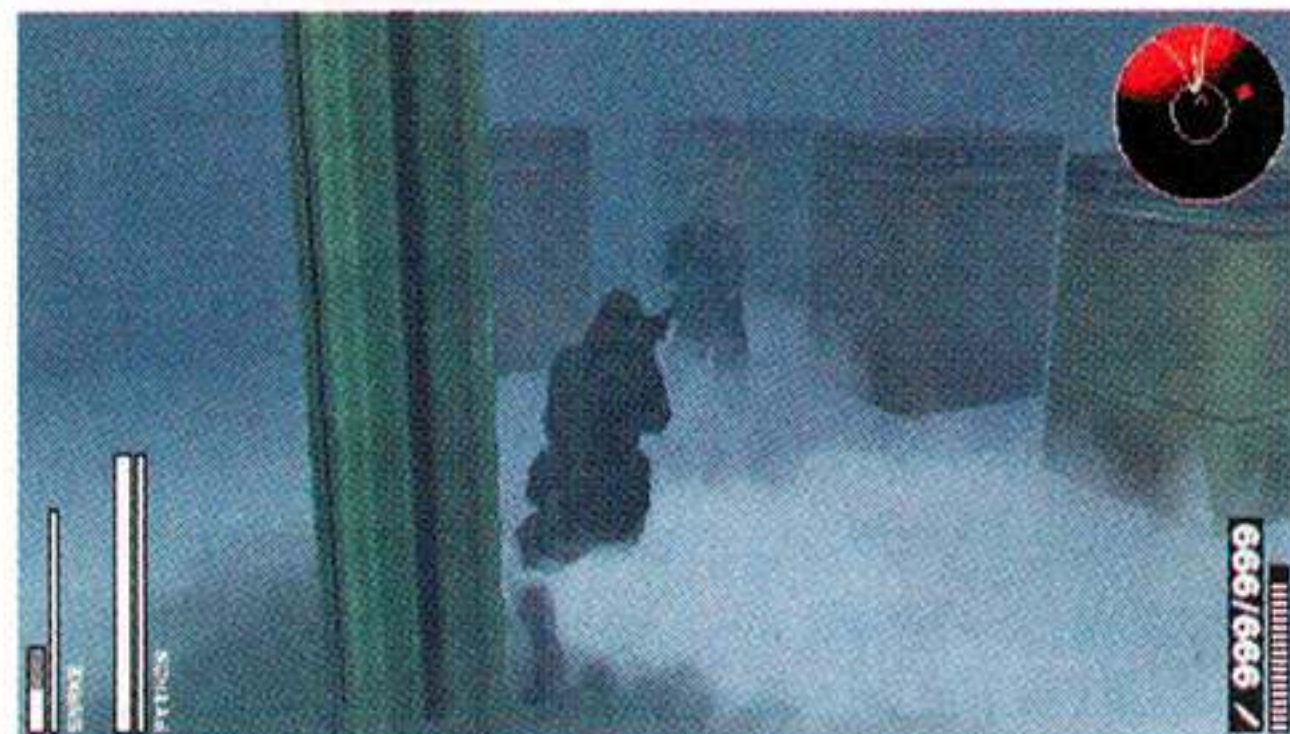
The Metal Gear franchise is no stranger to criticism, but what's most interesting is the way its defenders—including the occasional member of the development team—respond to the naysayers. Their way of excusing the series' inherent flaws involves an argument that basically boils down to a shrug and the phrase, "That's just how Metal Gear is."

The confusing camera system? That's just how Metal Gear is. Clumsy combat controls? That's just how Metal Gear is. Talking heads cutting in to discuss politics for half an hour when all you really want is to go back to playing the game? Dude, that's just how Metal Gear is.

The secret to Portable Ops' success, then, is that this catch-all excuse simply doesn't apply. In fact, it succeeds because it boldly strays away from the familiar path that was forged by its big console brethren. It's a risky strategy that ultimately pays off, and it's proof that being the black sheep of the family isn't such a bad thing after all.

Break With Tradition

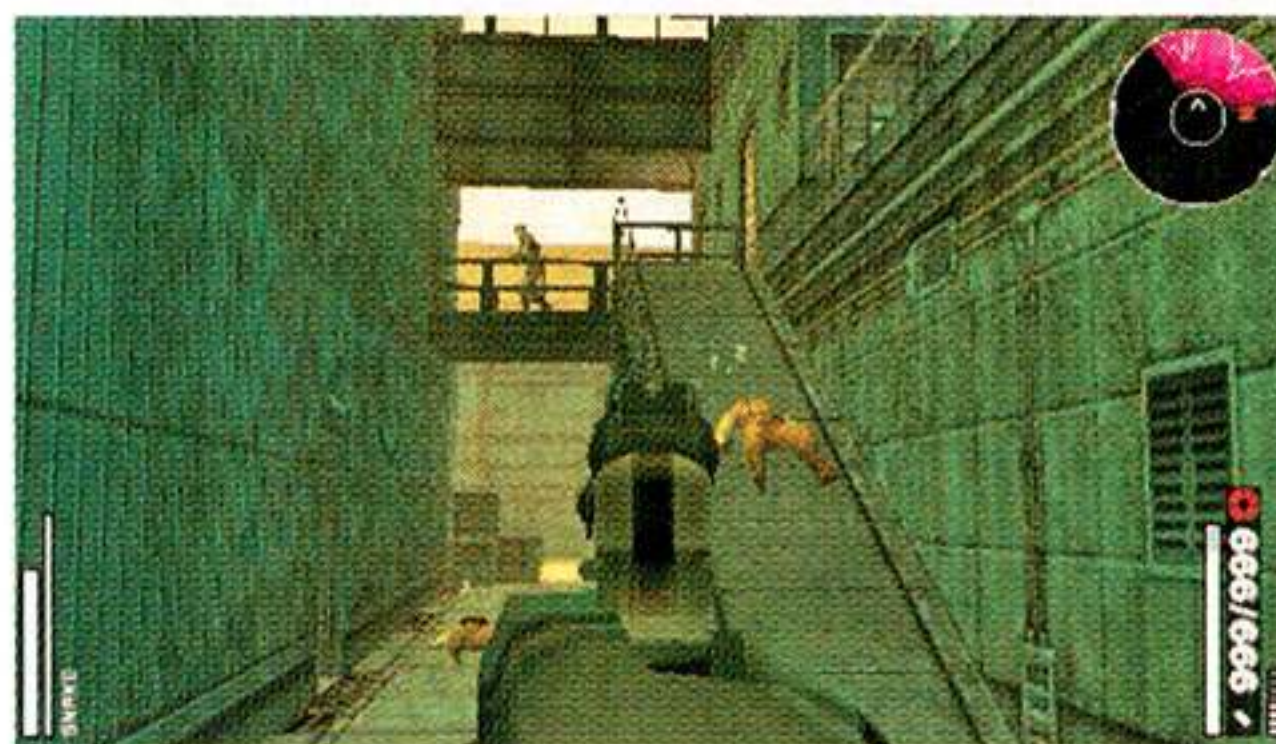
The story in Portable Ops covers a nifty corner of the Metal Gear timeline, taking place in the early '70s, after the conclusion of Metal Gear



PRO TIP: Python, the first boss, can be brutally frustrating but the Thermal Goggles will let you see him through his liquid nitrogen fog. Tranquilize him from long range and snag him as an ally for one of your sneaking squads.



PRO TIP: When you're fighting Null, the trick is to listen, not look: he usually empties his machine pistol in three long bursts. When he's reloading, you'll have a chance to jump out and stick him.



PRO TIP: The Surround Detector isn't quite as precise as the old MGS radar but it can be almost as useful. If it's halfway up the graph and in the red, back off.

Solid 3. It chronicles how Big Boss became the leader of Fox Hound and while it demands some familiarity with Snake Eater, it manages to keep itself on an even keel. Most of the twists are easy enough to follow, and the themes involved are a comfortable mix of the bizarre and the believable. There's also a couple of in-jokes that long-time fans will find richly entertaining.

We're also wild about the new recruitment system. Rather than force Big Boss to fight by his lonesome, like all the other Metal Gear titles, Portable Ops lets you gather allies to your side. As per standard Metal Gear procedure, you can take out enemies non-lethally, using tranquilizer darts or the good old one-two punch. But instead of taking a snooze on the ground, you can now convince them to join you. After they sign onto your cause, they become part of four-man sneaking squads or work from the sidelines as part of the supporting cast. This adds a huge new layer of strategy to the game. Technically-inclined allies provide an edge with new equipment, while spy teams dig up detailed maps of each level and provide extra info about secondary objectives.

The standard stealthy gameplay gets an overhaul here too. Portable Ops uses a behind-the-back viewpoint with manual camera controls, much like Splinter Cell. Combined with some



PRO TIP: Portable Ops has a variable day-night cycle, so if you can, spend a wait action to enter at night. The guards won't see quite as far in the darkness, and if you've got night-vision goggles, you'll get a crucial edge.

traditional Metal Gear moves, like flattening against walls to peer around corners, it makes for a big improvement on the old top-down camera. It takes a bit more work to see what's happening behind you, but it's much, much easier to figure out what's coming up ahead.

Meet The New Boss

But for all its willingness to be different, Portable Ops still suffers from some of the familial defects. Take the clumsy combat controls, for example. Fighting at close range has never been fun in past Metal Gear titles, and to a degree that's intentional—you're meant to be a sneaky spy, not a mad-dog killing machine. However, combat in Portable Ops is so frustrating—thanks to the poor handling of the PSP's analog nub—that engaging a group of more than one enemy is almost never worth the effort. If you're spotted by the guards, the temptation to just restart the level is pretty strong. By the same token, the combat-oriented multiplayer games are awfully hard to enjoy.

With luck, the controls will get a good, solid going-over for the next title. Meanwhile, there's enough new stuff here that hardcore fans and the casually curious alike should take a look. Portable Ops still has a way to go—it still sucks being gang-stomped for the tiniest of sneaking missteps—but it's great to see Konami taking the franchise somewhere new. With luck, they'll take things even further in the future.—DFS

PSP	GRAPHICS	4.0	FUN FACTOR	4.0/5
	SOUND	4.25		
	CONTROL	3.75		

Developer: Kojima Productions Publisher: Konami \$39.99
Available now 6 players Action ESRB: M



SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs Fireteam Bravo 2

This mission is a go!



The PSP SOCOM offshoot Fireteam Bravo 2 boosts the flagging franchise's fortunes with a solid single-player campaign, and its action-packed multiplayer mobile ops.

Back Seat Driver

While Fireteam Bravo 2 doesn't boast the cooperative play of its PS2 sibling, Combined Assault, its main campaign still manages to be considerably more fun, thanks to its refined controls and a teammate that actually does what you ask of him without stumbling over the furniture. It may not look quite as nice, but it definitely handles much better. Usually it's the portable version of military mainstays that feel like an afterthought, but that stereotype gets turned on its head here.

Fans will also love the larger, more detailed maps, the increased number of things to do in every locale, and the never-ending supply of optional and tangential dynamic missions that challenge you to capture high-profile targets, gather intelligence, and blow stuff up in nearby areas. Even the enemy A.I. seems improved, even if it's still a bit slow on the draw.

One Man Army

When you're done carving through terrorists on your own, you can jump into multiplayer match-ups with up to 15 other people, either locally via an ad hoc connection, or online in the excellent Infrastructure mode. Just like the first Fireteam Bravo, multiplayer games tend to be fast and loose when compared to the tactics and stealth of SOCOM's home versions, but they're also tailored for short and sweet gunning on the run.

One could gripe about the control scheme not being as robust as what DualShock wielders enjoy, but it's just about as good as it could be without a second analog stick. The sometimes simplistic graphics could still use another boost, and enemy taunts and anguished cries can grate on the ears in their repetition, but Fireteam Bravo 2 is too much fun for such irritations to scrub the mission. SOCOM may be stumbling on its console home, but it's standing tall at its portable post.—*Ouroboros*



PROTIP: You'll have better success with long range shots if you switch to single fire mode.



PROTIP: Hold down the right shoulder button any time an enemy is on-screen so that your targeting locks on. You won't score many headshots, but you'll stay alive a whole lot longer.

PSP	GRAPHICS	4.0	FUN FACTOR	4.25
	SOUND	3.5		
	CONTROL	4.0		

Developer: Zipper Interactive | Publisher: Sony | \$39.99
Available now | Shooting | 16 players | ESRB: T

Gitaroo Man Lives!



Button-jam to some sweet, sweet music!



We all know music is powerful, but in Gitaroo Man Lives! (GML), it's also lethal. You play as U-1, a poor loser who is also the legendary super hero Gitaroo Man with a whole lot of universe-saving weight on his shoulders. Guided by his trusty talking dog, Puma, U-1 saves his planet from zany enemies with his electric-beam shooting guitar and transforms from major nobody into an awesome guitar legend that chicks dig.

Music Wars

Gameplay in GML is spectacular and addictive. Like other rhythm games, it requires timed button presses and holds that coincide with the beat of the music but it throws in the added complexity of a trace line that snakes across the screen, requiring you to move the analog nub in appropriate direction. Depending on the mode, pressing and holding the button in sync with the nub will either charge your Gitaroo and increase your life gauge or send out a musical attack beam to damage the en-

emy. When enemy health becomes low enough, the final mode is activated, and you knock out your enemy with an intense solo of musical death.

It may sound easy enough but the game is actually very challenging. Furious button mashing is a must for all ten stages and after the tutorial stage, GML gets serious fast. Never take a momentary slow point in the song as a cue to relax, since you never know what crazy sequence of rhythm play might be thrown at you next.

Rock On!

But the game sports such a diverse range of music styles—they range from rock, orchestral, reggae, Latin and Eurobeat—and a vivid Japanese pop-art style that definitely shines on the PSP's gorgeous screen. I hated the over-exaggerated and unprofessional voice acting, as it sounds like the usual crappy dubs you find on most Americanized anime. Also, the load times are ridiculous. But in the end, Gitaroo Man Lives! is

a great chance to revisit an under-appreciated PS2 gem; just be prepared to rock out from sunrise to sunset.—*ifelthecosmos*



PROTIP: In multiplayer mode, the character Kirah is available, and you can either team up or compete to see who has the best Gitaroo skills!



PROTIP: During charge mode, hold the button for the length of the phrase bar to increase health.

PSP	GRAPHICS	4.5	FUN FACTOR	4.5
	SOUND	5.0		
	CONTROL	4.0		

Developer and publisher: Koei | \$39.99 | Available now
Action | 2 players | ESRB: E

Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney—Justice For All

Proof that the term “more of the same” can be both good and bad

DS



Phoenix Wright, the titular star of the cult hit DS game released in 2005, is back for yet another dose of quirky courtroom antics and he's as naïve and bumbling as ever. But is there enough new content to keep fans of the original courtroom drama entertained?

Court Is In Session

The answer is both yes and no. The game will definitely leave gamers with a sense of déjà-vu as visually, it's a direct carbon copy of the first title. Everything looks and feels like it was directly ripped from the last game. This gives Justice For All an expansion pack feel but that's not necessarily a bad thing as the earlier installment was good enough that gamers will be hungry for more.



It doesn't take a genius to see that this shady character is up to no good. Good thing you'll eventually put him in his place!



PROTIP: Remember that you can now present profiles as evidence during the course of a trial.

There are a few subtle changes that spice up the gameplay—there is now an energy meter instead of the five exclamation points and a spiritual object called the Magatama allows you to interrogate people outside of the courtroom—but it's essentially the same game. Cases still start off in the typical Scooby-Doo fashion and players must do a little detective work before heading into the court room to press witness and present evidence to the judge.

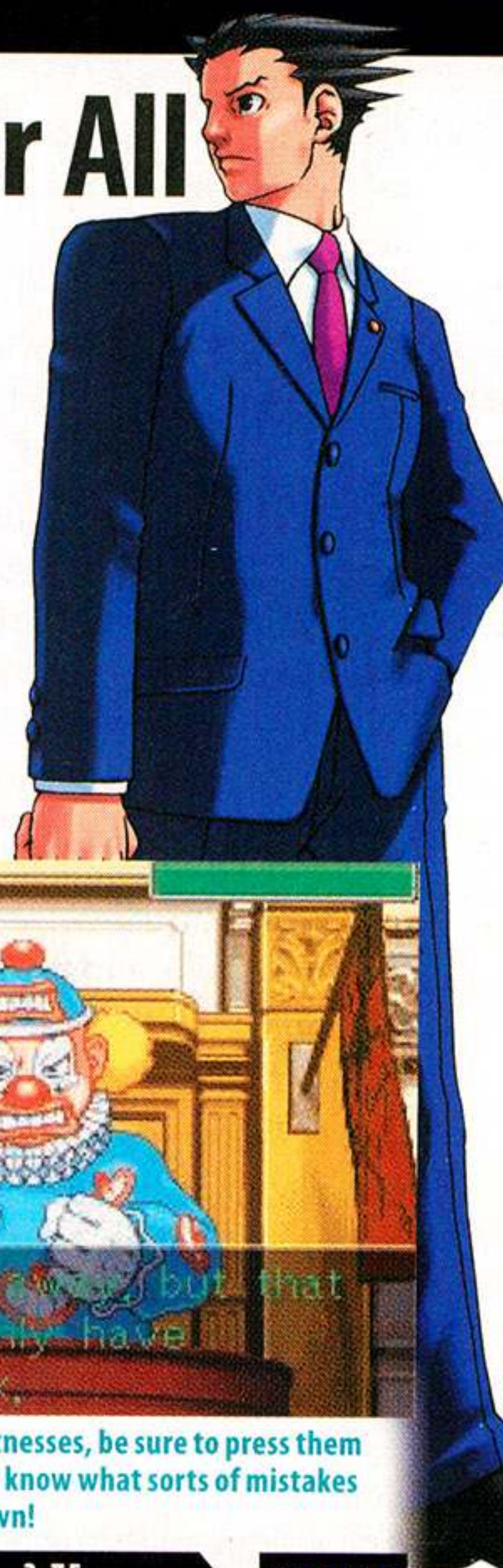
Court Is Adjourned

But just as the game retains the humor and weirdness of the original, it also holds onto all the bad habits of its older sibling. There are still a ton of text boxes to read through and certain puzzles are better solved through random guessing than actual detective work. Also, the plot is over the top and not always in a good way; the word “illogical” barely begins to describe some of the things that occur before your eyes.

Still, Justice For All demonstrates enough of the plucky spirit that made the first

game so memorable. Fans and newcomers alike should look into this title but we're going to keep our fingers crossed that the developers come up with something new for future titles.

—Ahoy_and_Avast



PROTIP: When questioning witnesses, be sure to press them at every opportunity. You never know what sorts of mistakes they'll make. Take that, Mr. Clown!

DS	GRAPHICS	3.75	FUN FACTOR	4.0 ₅
	SOUND	3.5		
	CONTROL	3.75		

■ Developer and publisher: Capcom ■ \$29.99 ■ Available January
■ 1 player ■ ESRB: T

Kirby: Squeak Squad

Gluttonous glob gobbles with gusto

DS



Mention the words “2D platformer” and most gamers will immediately think of Mario and Sonic the Hedgehog. But what about Kirby? In our humble opinion, the bubble gum pink puff ball deserves an equal share of the spotlight. You might scoff but Kirby's been holding his own for years and his latest title, Squeak Squad, just cements his status as one of the best ever to grace the second dimension.

Feed me!

Anyone who's stepped into the soft gummy shoes of Kirby will be instantly familiar with what Squeak Squad has to offer. The core game concepts are the same: Kirby walks around, swallows up enemies, assimilates their powers and eats lots of foods. But what's so com-

elling about the experience is how it's packaged together. The most amazing thing is the sheer number

of powers that Kirby can gain. They range from the expected—the ability to breathe fire and ice—to the more esoteric powers like a magic top hat that releases three deadly pigeons.

The levels themselves are cleverly designed and there are plenty of opportunities to use your newfound powers on the playing field. Soft patches of earth can be dug away with your animal claws and cannon fuses can be lit with fire, for example. Add in the huge amount of unlockable content and the signature Kirby style and you have the makings for a great DS title.

Stuffed To The Gills

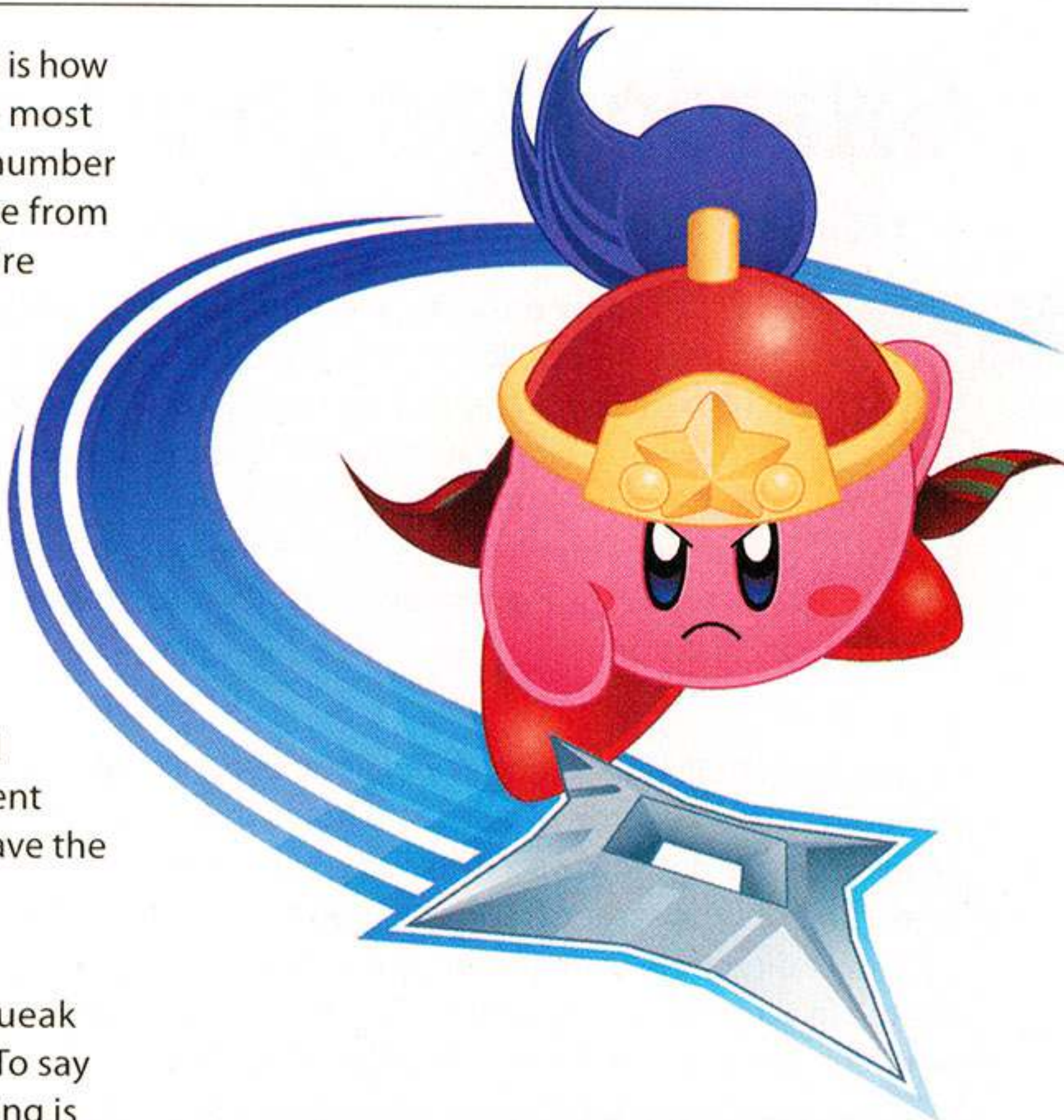
The only thing we didn't like about Squeak Squad is that it's a tad on the easy side. To say that it's forgiving is an understatement. Food, which replenishes your health, is readily available and the bosses don't put up much of a challenge. Also, the cartoonish visual style might turn off more mature gamers who



PROTIP: One of Kirby's new abilities lets him sprout wings and shoot arrows. But unlike Cupid's arrows, Kirby's only brings pain.



PROTIP: The bottom DS screen contains your reserve powerups. Just make sure you always keep a spot open for treasure chests.



like their games to have a little hair on their chests. But there is no denying the ineffable charm of this title and gamers looking to give their DS a workout should gobble this one up like it was made of sweet, sweet candy.

—DeuceMagnum

DS	GRAPHICS	3.75	FUN FACTOR	4.0 ₅
	SOUND	3.25		
	CONTROL	3.5		

■ Developer: HAL/Flagship ■ Publisher: Nintendo ■ \$34.99
■ Available now ■ 1 player ■ ESRB: E



Forget Wii Sports Golf, Super Swing is the complete Wii golf experience.

Super Swing Golf

Wii let the big dog eat.

A Hot Shots-like golf game that mixes realistic golf mechanics with over-the-top goofy characters, Super Swing Golf is one of the first full-featured sports games for the Wii. It offers more than 10 courses, but each course has 5 levels of difficulty for a great deal of replay value. With zany golfers and caddies à la Hot Shots Golf, Super Swing triumphs ultra-realistic games like Tiger Woods on the personal side.

Super Swinging

Like Wii Sports golf, Super Swing supports four players and is playable with four Wii Remotes or just one that can be passed around from person to person. The swing mechanic is simple; lift the controller overhead to the peak of your swing, and when ready, press and hold the A button while taking your downswing. The Wii sensor recognizes tilts right or left in your swing, so slices and fades will result accordingly; it's a must to keep the remote facing up or you'll end up in heaps of trouble. The swing mechanic also recognizes how far up you take a club into your backswing, which then affects powers.

So if your 8 iron averages 150 yards, but you only have a 120-yard chip to the pin, you'd only want to take the remote up to about the 80% range of your swing. Thankfully, this can be done slowly so as not to infuriate gamers with taking a perfectly smooth golf swing.

The career mode is where the vast majority of gameplay lies, functioning as a story mode with every character having different paths leading to the end of the game. Each character starts on a different course, and you'll compete in face-off-like versus matches to advance to the next round. But the story will change depending on if you win or lose the match, meaning endings will change accordingly.

Grabbed by the Goodies

As you might expect, Tecmo hasn't skimped on the goodies either, as a ton of extra content including skins for some, ahem, very familiar Tecmo characters that can be unlocked in the shop through the game's Pang Points currency system. There are also mini-games and barrels of accessories and equipment, to boot, including crazy club sets like canes, household items, and even medieval weaponry!

—Mr. Marbles

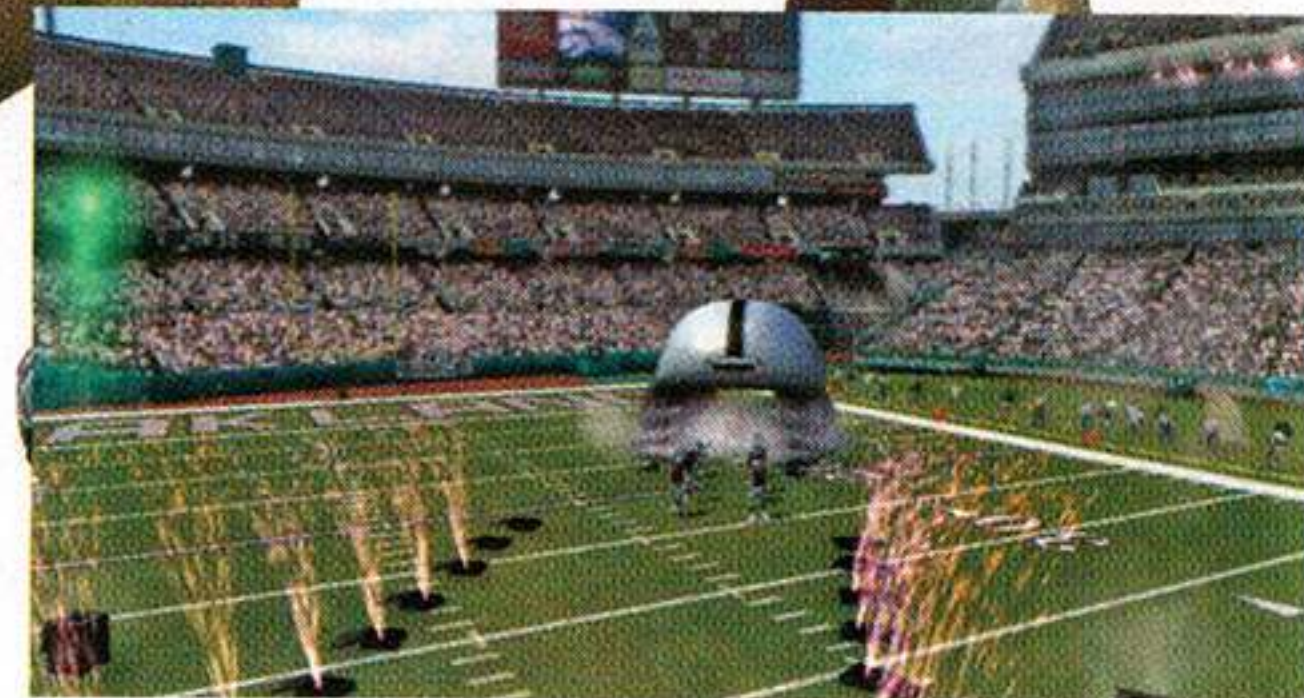
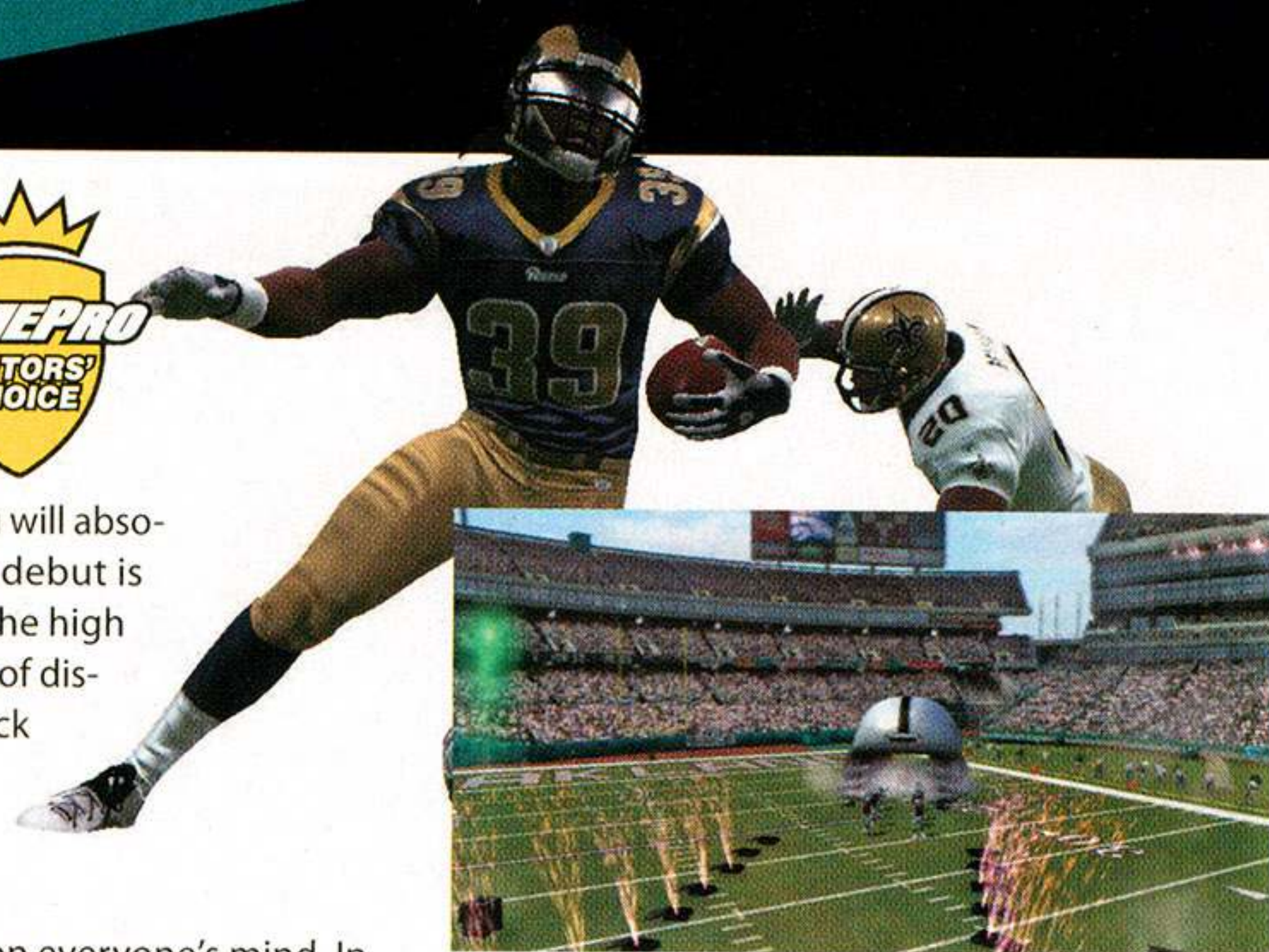
■ **Hands-On** ■ Developer and publisher: Tecmo
■ Target Release Date: Available now





Madden NFL 07

BOOM! Madden debuts on Sony's shiny new console. But how does it compare to the Xbox 360 version?



The pomp, the circumstance: there's nothing like a pre-game ceremony to get your juices flowing and Madden 07 does a good job of that.

PS3



If you love playing Madden—and millions of gamers do—you will absolutely love this version. Making the call on Madden's PS3 debut is extremely easy this year; it is highly playable and is one of the high points in the franchise's history. In fact, the only real sources of disappointment are a minor concern around anti-aliasing, a lack of innovation around the Sixaxis controls, and the absence of fantasy draft modes.

PS3 vs. Xbox 360

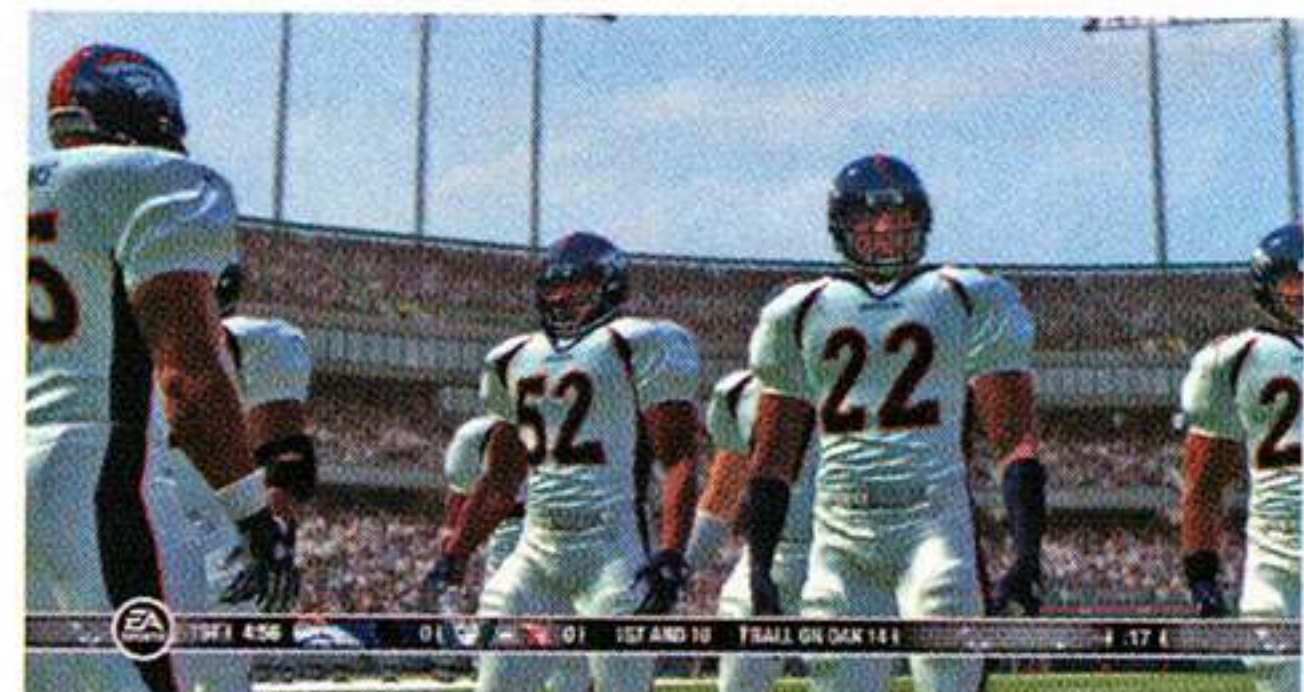
"How does it compare to the Xbox 360 version?" is probably the question on everyone's mind. In terms of feature set, controls, mood, and soundtrack, the PS3 version is exactly the same as the Xbox 360 version. In all versions, action on the field is standard Madden fare, with a few new additions such as the ability to shift control to a lead blocker on running plays and the re-engineered Highlight stick.

Madden 07 PS3 is lightning-fast and silkily fluid. In fact, after playing the two versions back-to-back, we're inclined to say that the PS3 version feels a smidge faster and more responsive than its Xbox 360 counterpart. Visually, however, we noticed that the PS3 edition exhibits small jaggies around fine-line details that were much less apparent on the Xbox 360 version.

Disappointing Standard Controls

We were sadly disappointed by the unimaginative Sixaxis controller options. You can use the Sixaxis controller to control your player's motions: tilting it right causes your player to move right and slamming it down before the snap will make your defensive line attempt to jump the snap. However, these are all basic controls, and it's surprising that EA didn't attempt any level of innovation here. Too bad.

It's easy to spend paragraph after paragraph detailing what's wrong with Madden, but the reality is that these are all micro quibbles and in no way detract from Madden 2007's playability. It has a really high Fun Factor and will appeal highly to Madden fans.—*Lunchbox*



As expected, the graphics are awesome, but the PS3 version lags just a tad behind the Xbox 360's.

PS3	GRAPHICS	4.5	EDITORS' CHOICE	FUN FACTOR 4.5
	SOUND	4.0		
	CONTROL	4.25		

- Developer: EA Tiburon
- Publisher: EA Sports
- \$59.99
- Available now
- Football
- 2 players
- ESRB: E
- Also on the PlayStation 2, Xbox 360, Xbox, Wii, and GameCube

Tiger Woods PGA Tour 07

Tiger Woods needs a makeover. In fact, he needs cosmetic surgery.

PS3



If you're looking for *the* golf game of the new generation of console games, Tiger Woods PGA Tour 07 isn't it. But it's still the most realistic golf experience you can get as Tiger 07 doubles the amount of courses from 06, which was perhaps the weakest game in the Tiger Woods PGA Tour series. And until someone gives us that realistic RPG golf experience us golf geeks has been waiting for, we'll have to settle with Tiger...again.

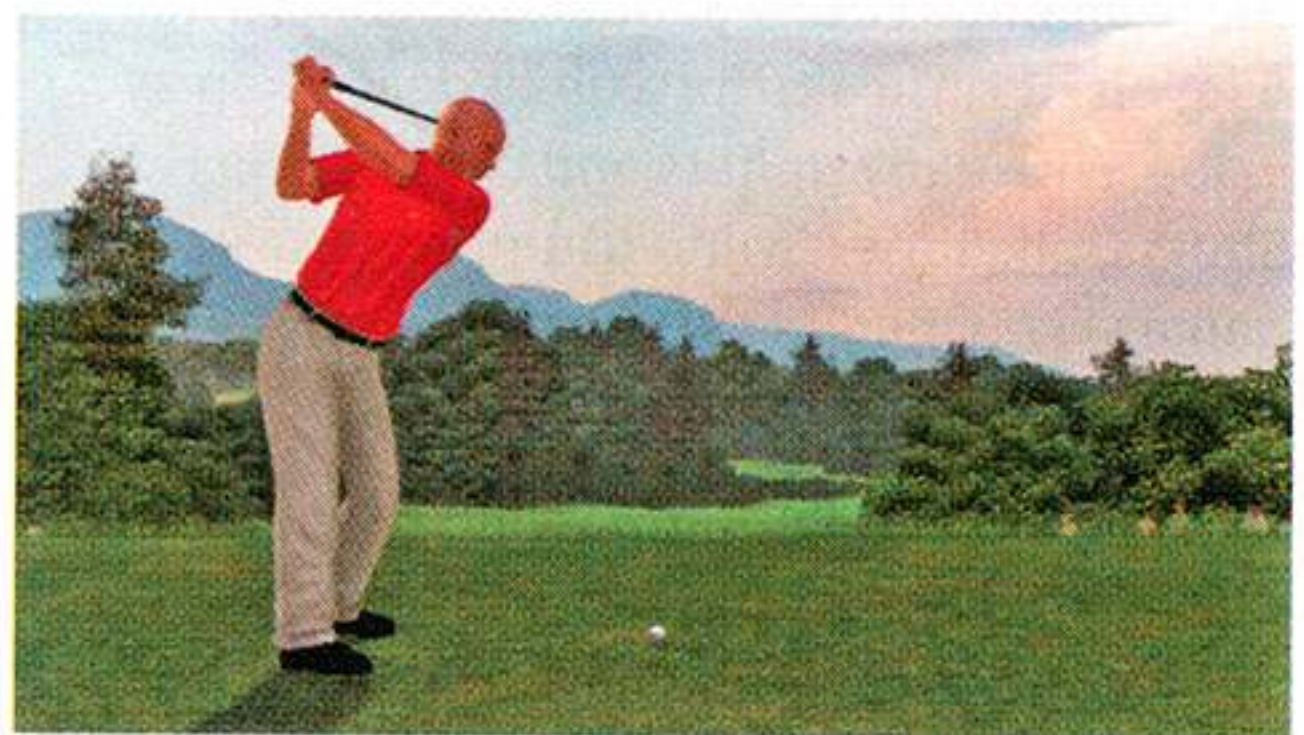
Happy Gilmore

We broke down Tiger 07 on Xbox 360, and the PS3 version is, like most PS3 launch games, its identical twin. All the features and gameplay modes that can be found on the Xbox 360 version also exist on the PS3. Graphically, it's difficult to find any real differences between the two versions—in other words, they both look pretty good—but overall, we'd have to give the win to the Xbox 360, which comes out slightly on top with visuals that are a wee bit crisper.

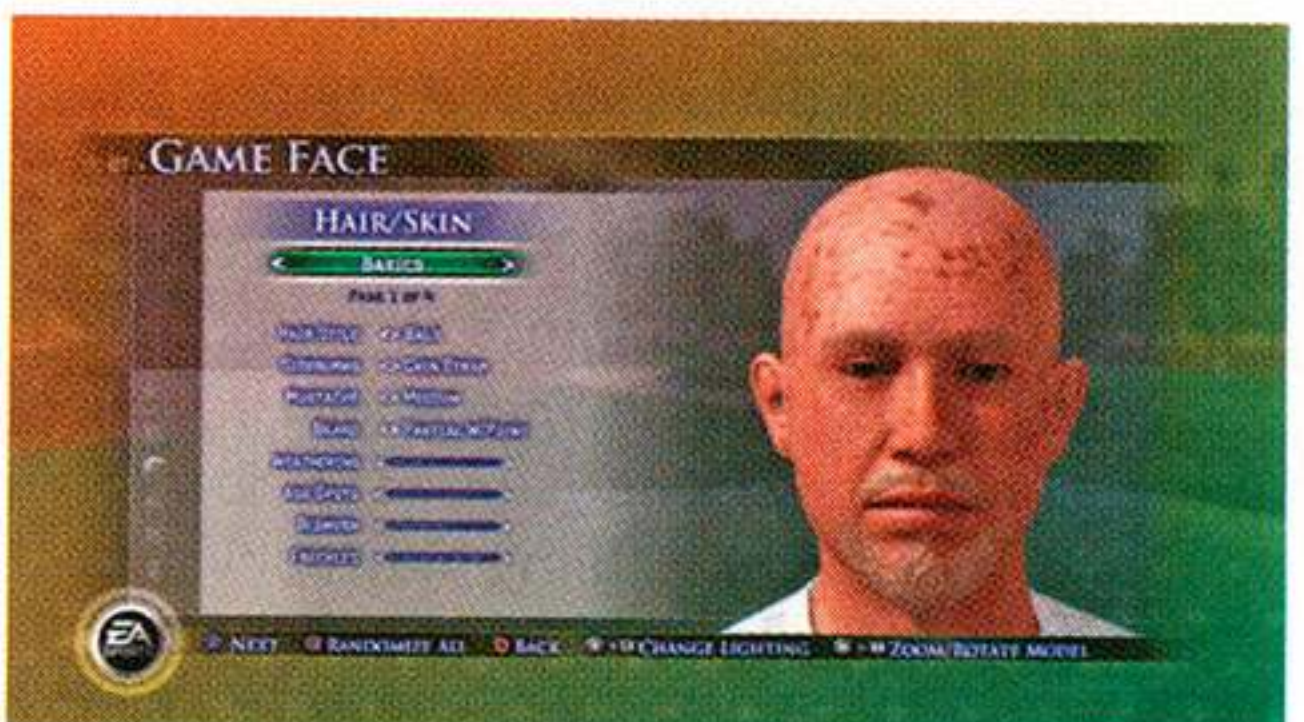
An Ace In The Hole

Aside from that, the only real difference between the two versions is the inclusion of the Sixaxis motion sensing capabilities of the new PS3 controller. In Tiger 07, tilt can be used to replace the standard in-air spin control, if desired. When enabled, instead of mashing the shoulder button to generate more spin, you can use the Sixaxis controller to control the intensity and direction of spin by tilting it in the desired direction. It's not a bad idea, per se, but it just doesn't work as well as the regular way. At best, it's a passable feature, and one that you can easily live without. We'd give it a whirl, just to try it out, but wouldn't make a habit out of using it.

It seems that with most launch PS3 games, the Sixaxis specific controls have been last minute add-ons, and we've yet to see a game that utilizes the controller to its full capacity. Perhaps the second round of titles will make better use of tilt controls, such as Lair, which uses Sixaxis to guide the flight of a fire-spewing dragon.—*Mr. Marbles*



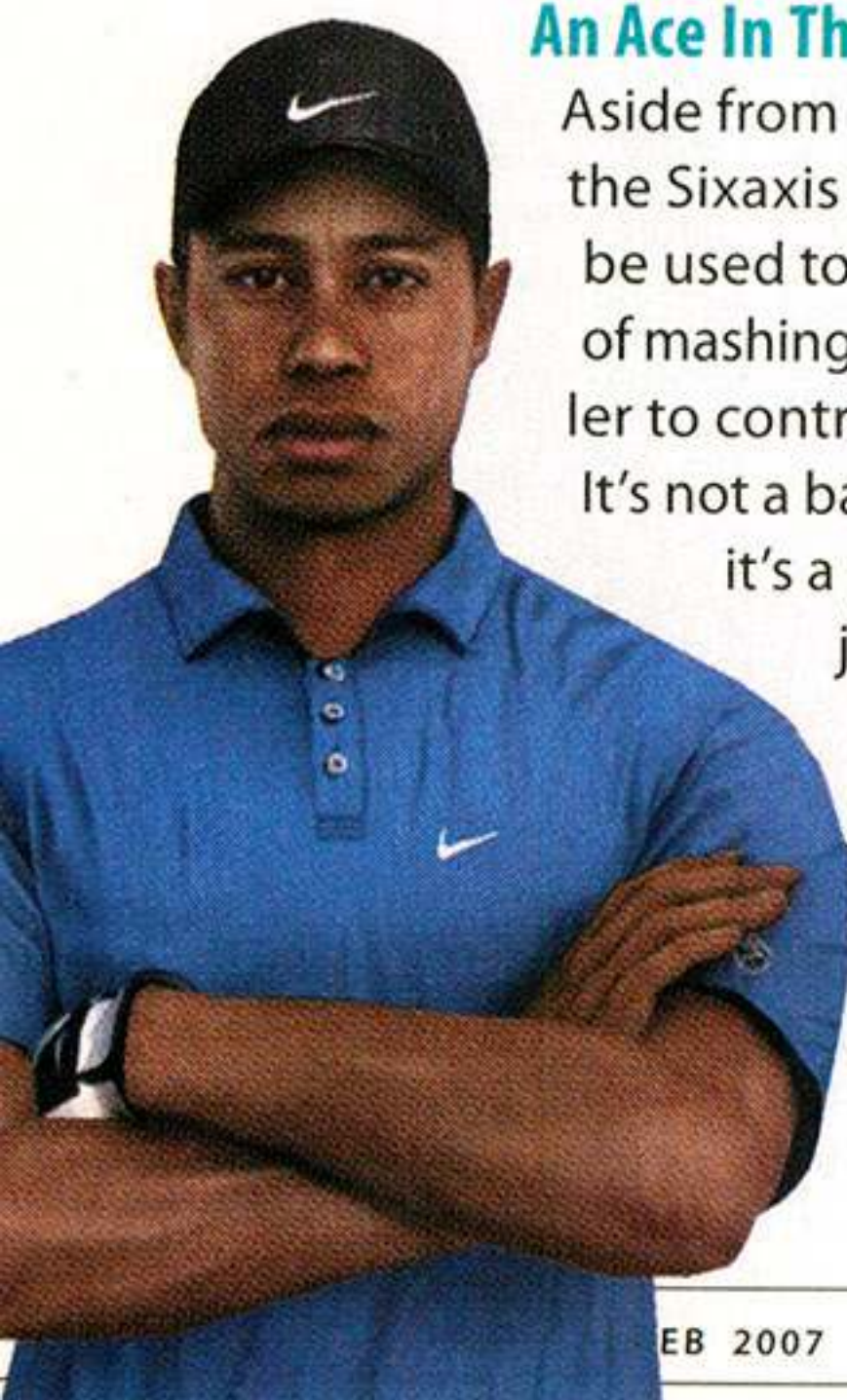
There's nothing like rearing back for a long drive off the tee. Slam it home and make Tiger proud.

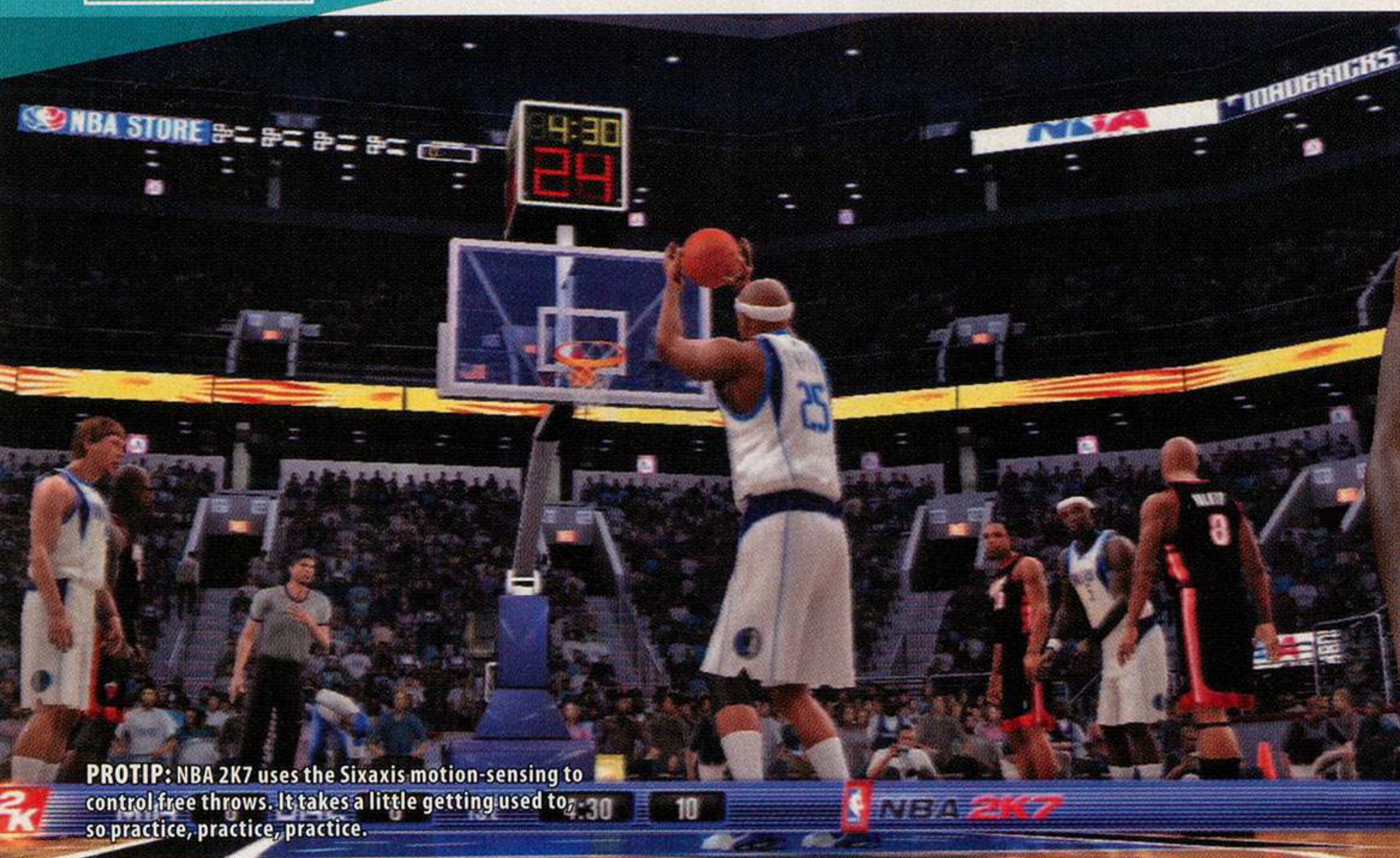


The character customization options are varied and pretty cool. Check out the liver spots on this virtual duffer!

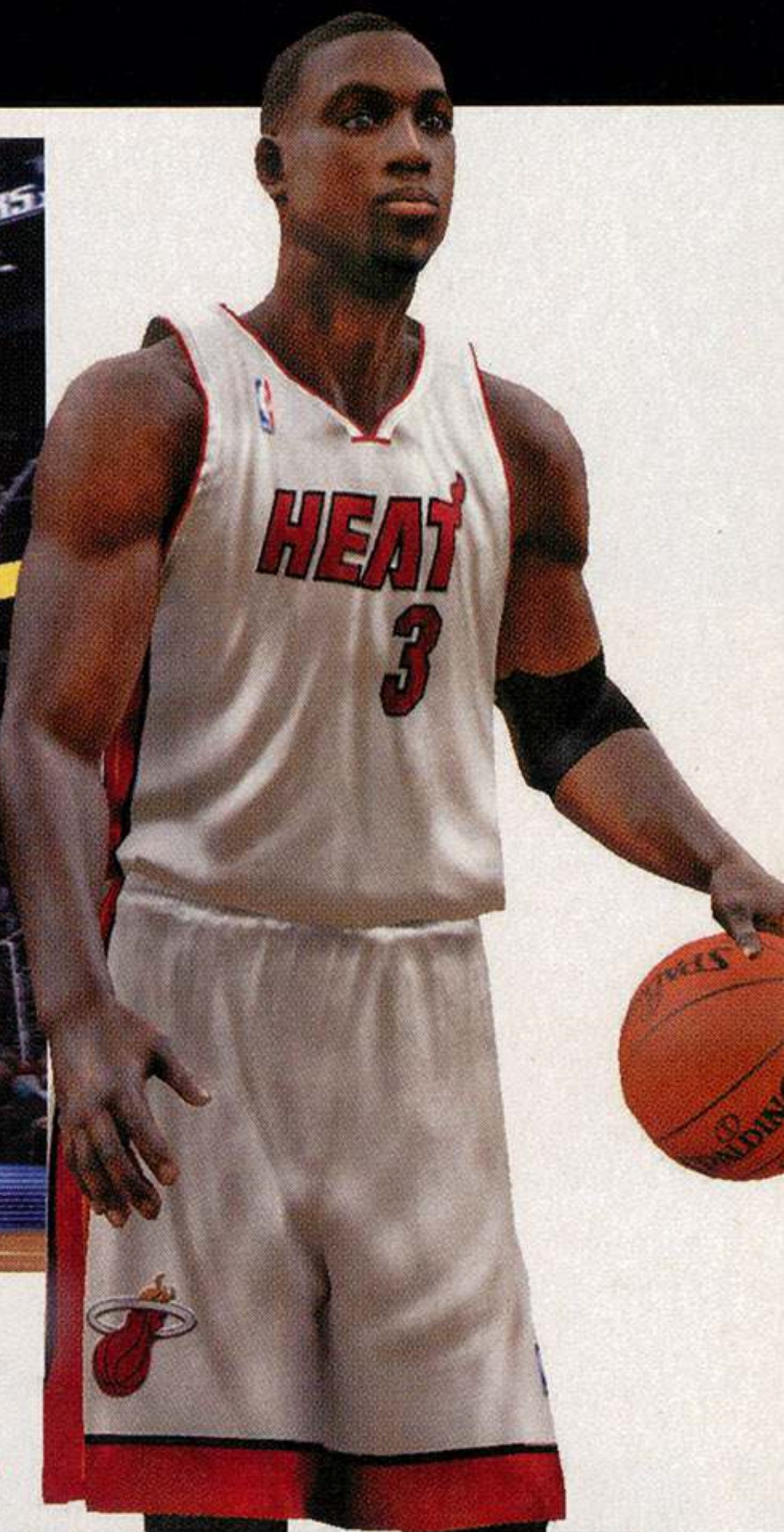
PS3	GRAPHICS	3.75	FUN FACTOR 3.75
	SOUND	2.5	
	CONTROL	3.75	

- Developer: EA Redwood Shores
- Publisher: EA Sports
- \$59.99
- Available now
- Golf
- 4 players
- ESRB: E
- Also on the PlayStation 2, Xbox 360, and Xbox





PRO TIP: NBA 2K7 uses the Sixaxis motion-sensing to control free throws. It takes a little getting used to, so practice, practice, practice.



NBA Showdown: NBA 07 vs. NBA 2K7

The PlayStation 3 basketball throne is up for grabs. Who will rise to the challenge?

PS3



PlayStation 3 ballers have two next-gen choices: Sony's NBA 07 or 2K Sports' NBA 2K7. Which one reigns supreme? Read on and find out!



Cleaning Up the Glass

Both games support "true HD" 1080p for almost frightening player detail. NBA 07 shoots for a simpler, cleaner look, and die-hards will spot some familiar faces: Lamar looks long and lean, Boykin is smaller than a baby pigmy, and Scalabrine's soft and overpaid (as usual). NBA 2K7, meanwhile, looks darker and deeper, a visual style that meshes well with its more nuanced gameplay. Sadly, arena floors and players look like they've been dipped in motor oil, taking away from the flash of player moves and dunks. Both titles look sharp, but neither does much to advance a more realistic graphic representation of a true-life NBA game.

Shoot the J

The games vary greatly in their approach to player control. NBA 07 adopts a looser, arcade-y play style, but don't let that fool you—this is no animated circus of blocks, steals, and dunks. Alley-oops and no-looks depend on practiced timing,

though the post offense/defense is still in the developmental league. The Showtime meter grants a speed bonus to on-fire players, but it's borderline gimmicky.

NBA 2K7, meanwhile, has a slower, more deliberate flow. The pace is dictated by a complex system of in-game play calling and a reliance on precision passing. 2K7's dunks and oops are tougher to master, but the in-game coaching is much more effective. Defensive shifts and assignments often make the difference in 2K7.

Alley-Oop

The 2K series has long been the standard for virtual NBA GMs, and front office geeks will be jazzed to find that all of the familiar aspects of the series' franchise mode have made the jump, from draft development to salary cap management. Newbies might be overwhelmed by the franchise mode's detailed menu screens, but it's a mode well worth mastering.

NBA 07, meanwhile, is a stripped-down version of NBA 07 "The Life" on the PS2. But The Life, it seems, is dead. In its place are a handful of lame mini-games—as if three-point contests weren't boring enough in real life. However, NBA replay online content



Oh Marbury, will you ever fully live up to your potential? At least his NBA 07 counterpart has some handles.

does have some interesting prospects, with the top five real-life NBA games from the past week set to be recreated in NBA 07 as part of an on-line multiplayer competition. Good hustle.

Fantasy B-Ball

Which game to choose? Though both games bring some of the most realistic gameplay of any NBA game to date, they're mostly just shinier, glossier versions of their prior releases. Still, we give the nod to NBA 2K7 for its superior in-game management and franchise development mode.—House of Usher



PRO TIP: As with real basketball, a skilled big man who can play with his back to the basket is a valuable asset. Amare Stoudemire demonstrates this fact in NBA 07.



We liked NBA 2K7's darker visual style. The 1080p support doesn't hurt, either.

NBA 07

PS3	GRAPHICS	3.0	FUN FACTOR 3.25 _S
	SOUND	3.0	
	CONTROL	3.5	

Developer and publisher: Sony ■ \$59.99 ■ Available now
Basketball ■ 2 players ■ ESRB: E

NBA 2K7

PS3	GRAPHICS	3.0	FUN FACTOR 3.5 _S
	SOUND	3.0	
	CONTROL	4.0	

Developer: Visual Concepts ■ Publisher: 2K Sports ■ \$59.99
Available now ■ Basketball ■ 7 players; 10 online ■ ESRB: E



PRO TIP: College Hoops will try to cross you up by mixing zone defenses. Quickly pass the ball around the perimeter until someone pops open.



PRO TIP: When you snag a rebound, look to the wings. You might find open men running up the court for any easy pass and layup.



PRO TIP: Winning jump balls are about rapid X-button mashing, but don't start until the ref releases the ball.



PRO TIP: On defense think about double-teaming the point guard occasionally. You might make a steal or force a bad pass. Just be ready to drop back on the open man.

College Hoops 2K7



If you're looking to school somebody in hoops, this is the way to do it.

Xbox 360



No fair! College basketball video games always seem to get the advantage of the NBA games because they use the same game engines and they come out later, which gives developers more time to improve them. But if you're a video game basketball fan who's contemplating leaving the NBA and going back to school, this is the year to do it. College Hoops 2K7 jumps on the NBA 2K7 game engine and takes it a hop step further to emphasize the unique strategy and energy of college hoops.

College Credit

Right from the jump, there are 2000 new animations painted into the game, which unleash a bus load of new moves. At the team level the singular, traditional play styles of all the popular powerhouses come to life. In particular versus the CPU you'll run into a wide variety of spirited and nicely coordinated zone defenses. There are 325 NCAA Division 1 teams ready to play including this season's newcomers like Central Arkansas and the New Jersey Institute of Technology. When the ball's in your hands, you still get

all the slick moves that have become a 2K tradition. This year, however, some Isomotion moves have been mapped to action buttons rather than the analog stick to make them easier for newbies to use. This probably makes cross-over dribbles a little too prevalent because the single button press makes them a snap to execute. You can also shoot by pressing a button, but 2K's silky smooth analog stick shooting technique is still the best.

Go, Team!

The new Team Unity factor makes the most impact on the game and is the single largest way this game differentiates college ball from the pro game. Basically, Hoops takes a complex array of individual and team factors into account to regulate team chemistry and affect overall team play. For instance, if your ballhandlers commit too many turnovers or you star scorers blow some



PRO TIP: Watch out for screens and picks by this sneaky A.I.

layups, your team loses confidence. This can show up in a number of ways including poor team defense and more bad passes. Alternatively, if your overall game is sharp your team flows.

Team Unity affects every game mode and carries over from game to game. It really manifests itself in Legacy mode when you're trying to lead your team to a winning season. You've got to pull out all your coaching skills, and whether you win or lose you must take the Team Unity factor into account as you prepare for the next game on your schedule.

All the Rah-Rah

Of course, where would college basketball be without chants and fight songs? 2K7 has 200 fight songs, 15 selectable drum beats, and a dizzying number of chants. But more impressive is the create-a-chant feature that enables you to "voice" your own yells and even add a custom drum line behind them. We know what you're thinking; and, no, you can't say that! Still college is all about learning to be creative, and College Hoops 2K7 opens up a world possibilities both on and off the court.—Atomic Dawg

	GRAPHICS 4.0		FUN FACTOR 4.5
	SOUND 4.25		
	CONTROL 4.25		

Developer: Visual Concepts Publisher: 2K Sports \$59.99
Available now Basketball 4 players; 8 online ESRB: E
Also on the PlayStation 3, PlayStation 2, and Xbox



PROTIP: Does your ball keep curving into the gutter when you bowl? Reposition your character to compensate.



PROTIP: Wii Golf may seem simple but putting still requires you to read the layout of the greens. Don't just smack it towards the hole!



PROTIP: Don't swing at every pitch that comes your way in Wii Baseball. Patience and a good follow-through is the key to a long homerun.

Wii Sports

It's a homerun, knockout, strike, smash, and hole-in-one!

Wii



On the day our precious Wii consoles arrived here at GamePro, the other editors ripped into Zelda like ravenous, toothless maniacs. But I went a different route. Unable to ignore my inner-jock, I booted up our second Wii and launched Wii Sports. Instead of swinging Link's sword around, I jumped right into baseball and started swinging for the fences.

And man was it fun. The controls were very responsive, and for the first time in quite a while, I felt as if I was having an inherently fun gaming experience. There were no lengthy tutorials to watch, no boring cinemas to wait out, and certainly no out of place rap music booming in the background.

Simple and Effective

But wait, you say. Won't the instant gratification of Wii Sports' simple graphics and minimalist gameplay wear off quickly? Not exactly. It's hard to discount a free game based on its replay value because, well, it's free. Wii Sports is a great example of what the Wii can do and how Nintendo first-party development can package a great deal of gameplay into an unassuming package.

But alas, the avid sports gamer will probably

view Wii Sports as a shallow imitator that offers much less depth than a full-fledged sports game. The difference is similar to the one that exists between, say, an organized basketball league and a pick-up game down at the local park.

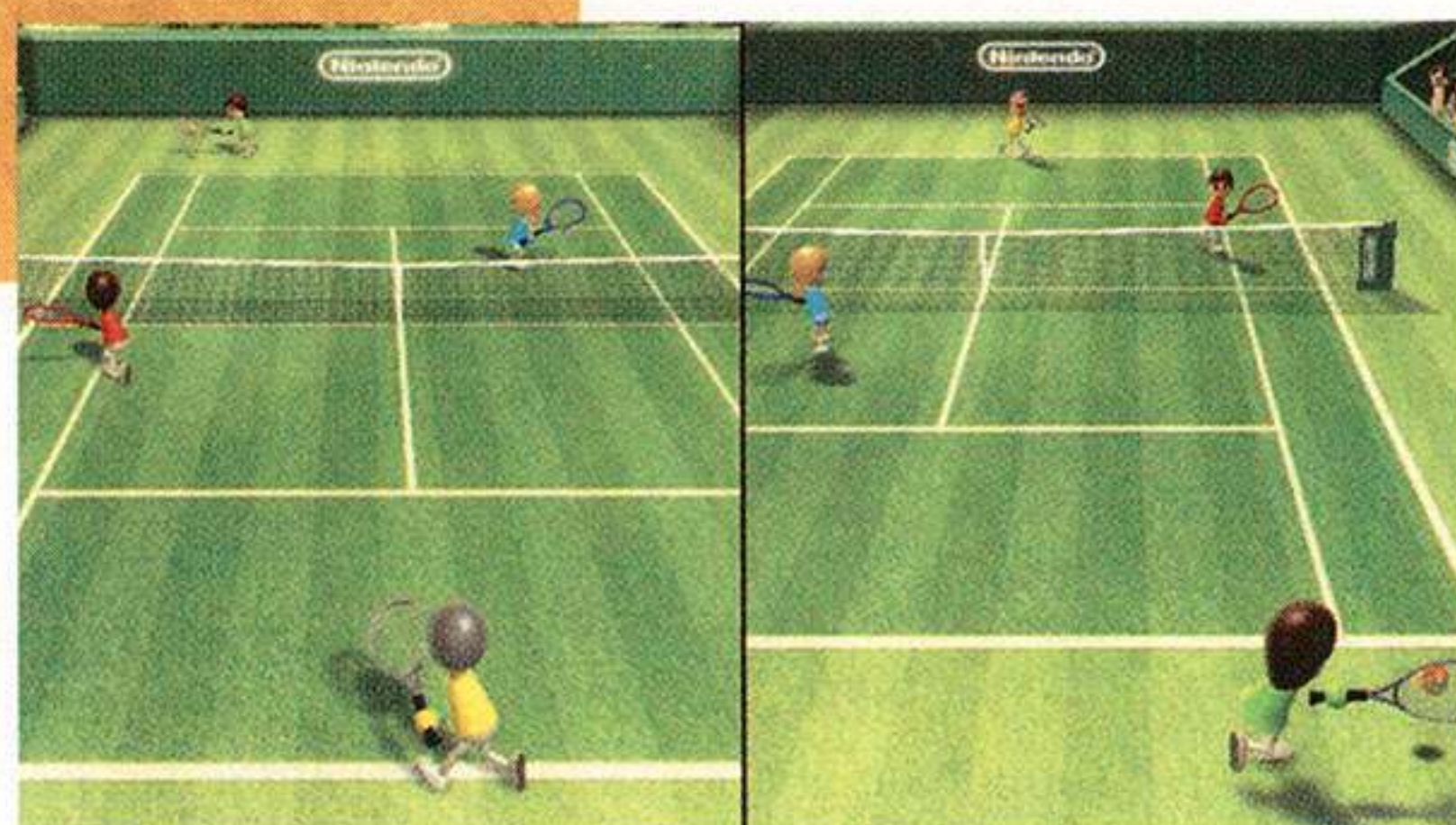
The Lineup

But it's Wii Sports' simplicity and ease of use that will ultimately be its greatest feature. There is no setup or calibration involved and once you load up the game, you can pretty much jump right into the action. There are five sports available: baseball, which I found to be the most entertaining, along with tennis, golf, bowling, and boxing. Each game has a short tutorial that plays when it starts, showing you the basic actions required to play. Most of the actions are obvious and straightforward, while some are a little more complicated. But the learning curve is pretty much nil; even your grandmother will have no problem picking up the basics, provided she's fit enough to play.

Aside from the basic games, there is also a training mode (three objective-based events per sport) and Wii Fitness, a Brain Age-esque mode that rates your performance in three daily activities. These add a little extra incentive to keep at Wii Sports, because with no career mode to track ongoing progress, this is about all there is. On the flipside, Wii Sports does track your performance level, so gameplay will get more difficult as your experience increases.

Final Score

I'm not going to give Wii Sports too much leeway just because it's free—the graphics don't exactly scream "next-gen," for example—but I can't overlook the fact that you're getting a

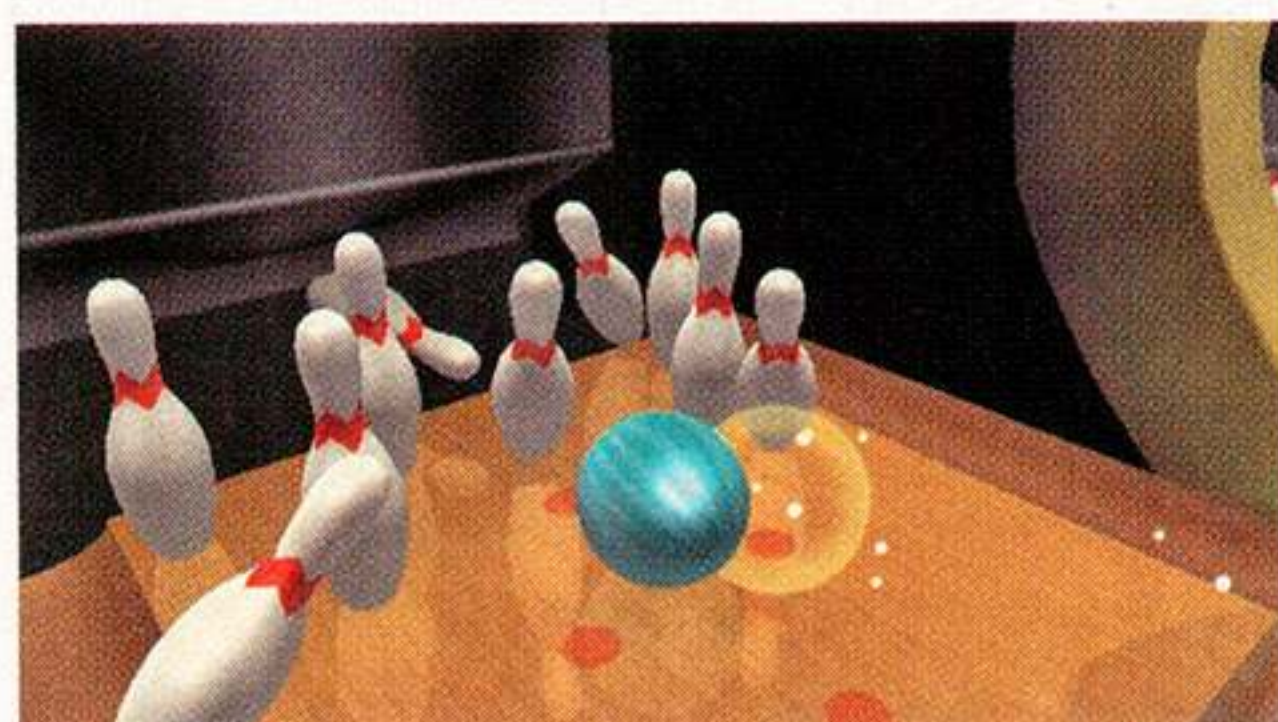


When playing tennis with four people, make sure you all have room to swing freely or someone is going to get hurt.

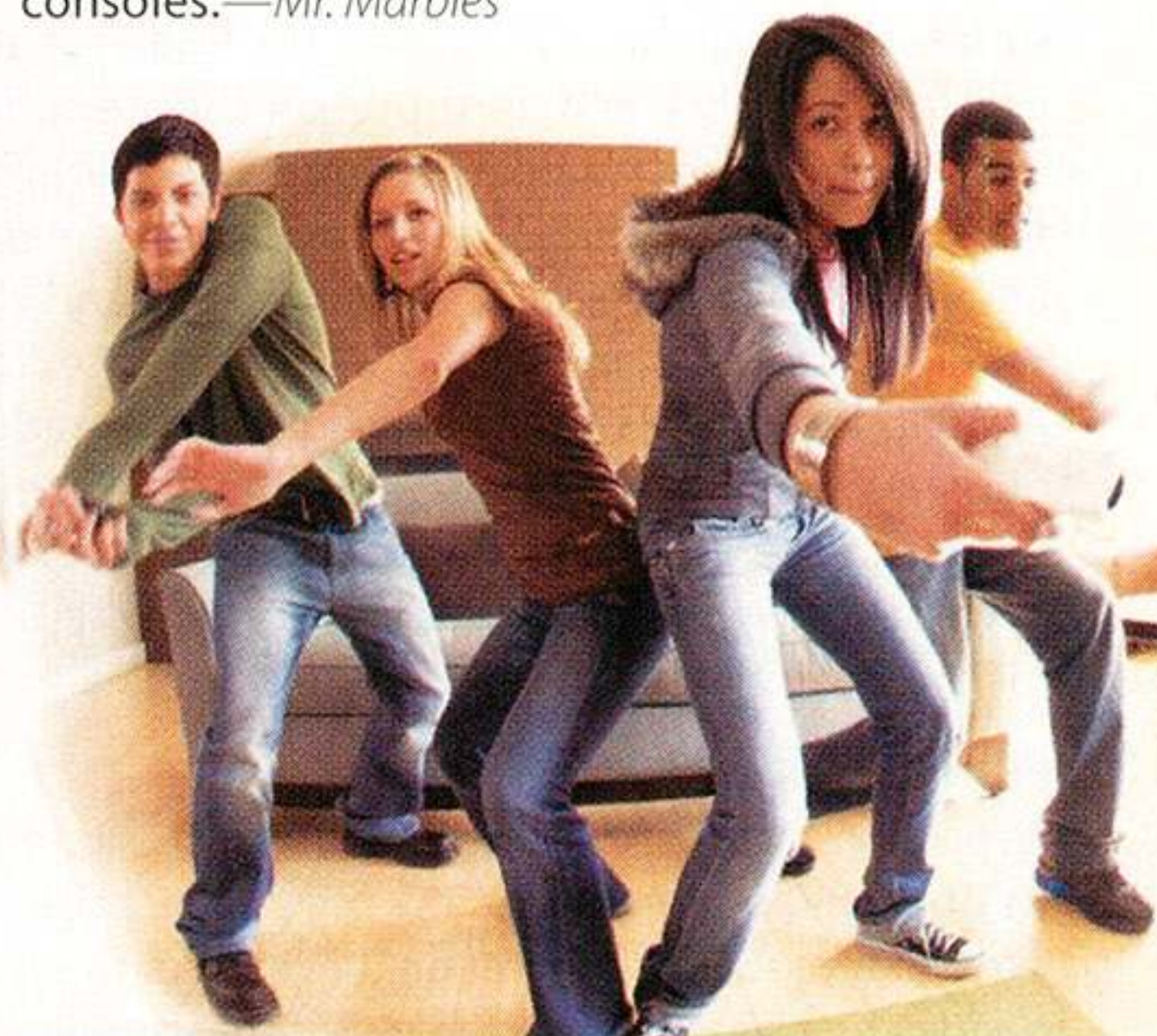


PROTIP: When playing Tennis alone, remember that you control the swings of both characters, so swing early if you want the player at the net to hit it.

solid gaming experience for nothing, which is more than I can say about the other next-gen consoles.—Mr. Marbles



Nothing beats the sound of a bowling ball crashing into the pins. And best of all, with Wii Sports, you don't have to wear those gross shoes!



Wii	GRAPHICS	5.0	FUN FACTOR	4.0
	SOUND	4.5		
	CONTROL	5.0		

Developer and publisher: Nintendo ■ Included with Wii console
Available now ■ 4 players ■ Sports ■ ESRB: E



Madden NFL 07

Forget backyard football: this is where the real action is!

Wii



Realizing that the Wii's unique motion-based controls are a fitting match for sports games, Nintendo bundled all Wii consoles with the simple yet effective Wii Sports. But there was a surprising lack of America's most popular team sport, football. Perhaps the big N realized EA, the king of digital pigskin, would probably outshine its efforts, and they were right, because the Wii version of Madden is by far the most fun I've ever had with a football video game.

Sizing Up The Opponent

Sure, Madden for the Wii doesn't reinvent the football wheel but it does have a distinctly unique feel that doesn't play like every other console version out there. So even though it does retain most of the same modes and feature, it feels completely different. The motion-sensing controls of the Wii Remote help Madden stand out on the Wii and while it's not perfect, it does a great job of emulating the basic physical movements of football.

There is a moderate learning curve with the controls, but the basics are easy to grasp. What's nice is that you don't have to go into a tutorial mode: During the game, on-screen icons will direct you to short tutorials that will help you master (or at least cope with) the controls.

I won't go through every single move but you basically swing, slide, and flick the Wii Remote and Nunchuk around to accomplish various things. For example, hiking the ball is performed by moving the Wii Remote in an upward swoop, simulating a quarterback receiving a hike. Similarly, passing is carried out with a forward swoop or tossing motion in combination with holding the appropriate face button to designate a receiver.

Lasting Appeal

It's a ton of fun, especially if a friend gets involved. The motion controls really add to the competitive experience of the game and should lead to some intense living room battles. But the game itself has a distinctive retro feel, with its lackluster graphics and presentation.

Still, there's something about acting out the motions that makes the Wii version so much fun. It's a great new direction for the venerated franchise and I'd take it over the analog-stick Madden games any day of the week.—*Mr. Marbles*



PRO TIP: Hold down the Z button to get a wide-angle view of your receivers' routes before the snap.



PRO TIP: In multiplayer, push the B button to secretly choose a play, then press A when the cursor is over another to fake out your opponent.

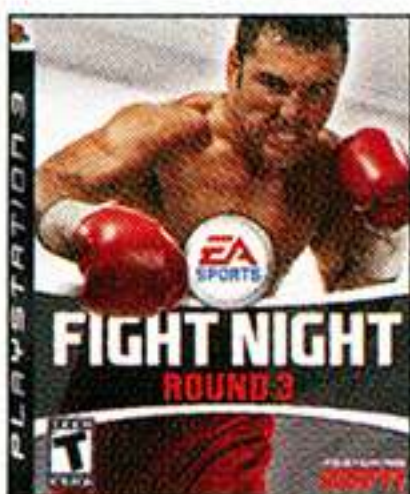
PS3	GRAPHICS	2.75	FUN FACTOR	4.25 ₅
	SOUND	3.25		
	CONTROL	4.5		

Developer: EA Tiburon ■ Publisher: EA Sports ■ \$49.99
Available now ■ Football ■ 4 players ■ ESRB: E

Fight Night Round 3

It's a little late to the game but Fight Night 3 on the PS3 is a winner.

PS3



A year after appearing on the Xbox 360 as a launch window title, EA Sports' marquee boxing title slams on to the PlayStation 3 with authority. Though it sports an extra coat of next-gen polish, it's essentially the exact same game you remember from last year. That's not necessarily a bad thing, as Fight Night Round 3 is easily one of the top boxing games ever released.

Shot To 'da Kidney

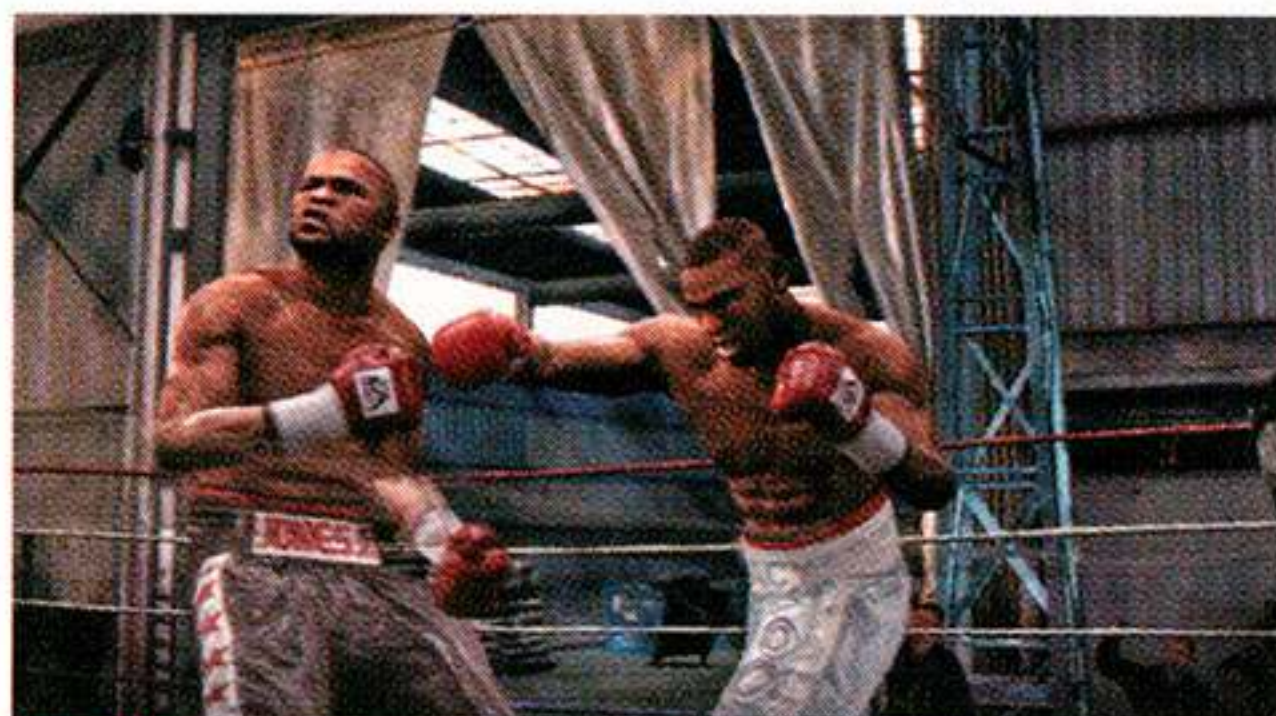
As in the other console versions, the best way to play Fight Night Round 3 is to dodge, block, and throw punches using the PS3 analog sticks; tap the stick up to throw a jab, circle it around to swing an uppercut, and so on. It's a remarkably immersive system, but in an odd twist, the PlayStation 3's Sixaxis controller suffers slightly in this style of play. The Sixaxis analog sticks have a slightly looser, smoother feel, which works well for many first- and third-person shooters, but for Fight Night, I prefer a slightly stiffer feel.

The only other gameplay change worth noting is the new Get in the Ring mode, which plants you in a first-person perspective. Though the core gameplay remains the same, Get in the Ring offers a much more immersive presentation. It's more chaotic and visceral. You'll begin to rely more heavily on quick jabs in order to "feel out" your opponent's distance from you in preparation for a haymaker or combo. Another key change is that your fighter will gradually lose his vision and hearing after taking big punches, making dodging and blocking even more tactically important. Get in the Ring is the single biggest argument for buying the PS3 version of Fight Night Round 3, and though it's not necessarily revolutionary, it's an excellent step for the boxing genre as a whole.

Sting Like a PS3

As a whole, this PS3 port doesn't quite live up to its Xbox 360 predecessor. Tiny physical details, like beads of sparkling sweat on the fighters' foreheads and chest, look absolutely sensational, though the 3D environments and crowds lack the detail and clarity of the Xbox 360 version.

—*Vicious Sid*



PRO TIP: Use Frazier's high and low haymakers (press X) to crush cocky Mohammed Ali showboaters.



PRO TIP: Warm up your opponent with jabs in the Get in the Ring mode. If you're lucky, you might even open up a cut.

PS3	GRAPHICS	4.0	FUN FACTOR	4.25 ₅
	SOUND	4.25		
	CONTROL	4.25		

Developer: EA Chicago ■ Publisher: EA Sports ■ \$59.99
Available now ■ Boxing ■ 2 players ■ ESRB: T



The PS3's first mindless hack-n-slash is here, and it's a notch prettier than its predecessors.



PRO TIP: The Wizard is most powerful at distance-ranged combat. Hammer enemies with magic, such as Fireball (press and hold L1 and then tap X).



Dark Kingdom is both a departure and a retreat of its handheld PSP predecessors.



Like Dark Kingdom? You'll like God of War and Devil May Cry much, much better.

Untold Legends: Dark Kingdom

The boring PSP franchise is now boring on the PS3. Hurray.

PS3



It's a blessing in disguise that Dark Kingdom is a PS3 launch game, because, on the PS2, it wouldn't warrant a second glance. The generic hack-and-slash formula has been done to death on that console, and Dark Kingdom would have gotten the lukewarm reception it deserved. But because it's on Sony's shiny new PS3, it'll probably sell a decent number of copies. It'll also leave a decent number of PS3 owners disappointed. Oh well.

Alone In The Dark

Still, Dark Kingdom fares pretty well in that, if you put the disc in the system, it loads up. It's all downhill from there, however. The game feels as if it was slapped together minutes before the gold masters went off to the production facility. That's probably due to the grueling demands of meeting the launch timetable, and while I'm willing to overlook the occasional blemish, elements of Dark Kingdom look so hastily produced, that it's hard to turn a blind eye to them. Case in point: you'll frequently see enemies "drop" into existence over the horizon ahead of

you. The handiwork of a higher being or the product of poor design and coding? You be the judge.

All in all, the game basically degenerates into a cannonball run through an endless maze populated by random action beasts and brutes—a barbarian here, a bat-creature there. They're fun to smash through, but what's next? More barbarians and bat creatures? Hurray.

This wouldn't be so bad if the game's story was compelling but it's fairly generic stuff. The setup involves an evil possessed king and three heroes that...well, you get the picture. You can choose from a Scout, a Warrior, and a Wizard and take on quests that will have you running around various mazes and killing lots of enemies. Too bad most battles can be won simply by resting your thumb between the □ and × buttons and rocking it rapidly back and forth. Higher difficulty levels require more strategic use of magic from the player, but only the most zealous hack-n-slash devotees are going to have the patience to see it through.

Hacked To Death

But you know what? The graphics are actually sort of excellent, in a hardcore, technical kind of way. Water sloshes around realistically, clouds of sparkly dust are kicked up during battle, and capes and tassels flutter and fold like the real deal. The visual style is so mechanical, though, that there's no reason to be invested in the action—the characters all just look like a group of multicolored action figures.

At the end of the day, Dark Kingdom is a shallow and simple-

minded title that holds a faint glimmer of fun. There's nothing here that you'd want to play for more than a few minutes, but ironically enough, that qualifies Dark Kingdom as one of the more tolerable PS3 launch games.—Vicious Sid



PRO TIP: The Scout excels at hit-and-run melee tactics. Don't linger close to enemies, or she'll get crushed.



PS3

GRAPHICS 4.25
SOUND 3.0
CONTROL 3.75

FUN FACTOR
3.0

Developer: Sony Online Entertainment Publisher: Sony \$59.99
Available now RPG 2 players; 4 online ESRB: T

CODE VAULT

Submit your hottest **Code Vault** tips! In March's issue, the reader with the winning tip will receive a **Halo 2** Action Figure courtesy of JoyRide Studios!

Runners-up receive a **GamePro T-shirt!**



READER TIP OF THE MONTH

PSP

PSP

GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY STORIES

Cheats: During gameplay, and not while the game is pause, enter the following codes to unlock the corresponding cheats. If you entered a code correctly, you'll see a confirming message onscreen.

- \$250,000:** Press Up, Down, Left, Right, X, X, L, R.
- 25% of MP Content:** Press Up, Up, Up, □, □, △, R, L.
- 50% of MP Content:** Press Up, Up, Up, ○, ○, X, L, R.
- 75% of MP Content:** Press Up, Up, Up, X, X, □, R, L.
- 100% of MP Content:** Press Up, Up, Up, △, △, ○, L, R.
- Black Cars:** Press L, R, L, R, Left, ○, Up, X.
- Cars Avoid You:** Press Up, Up, Right, Left, △, ○, ○, □.
- Chrome Cars:** Press Right, Up, Left, Down, △, △, L, R.
- Clear Weather:** Press Left, Down, R, L, Right, Up, Left, X.
- Commit Suicide:** Press Right, Right, ○, ○, L, R, Down, X.
- Destroy All Cars:** Press L, R, R, Left, Right, □, Down, R1.
- Faster Clock:** Press R, L, L, Down, Up, X, Down, L.
- Faster Gameplay:** Press Left, Left, R, R, Up, △, Down, X.
- Foggy Weather:** Press Left, Down, △, X, Right, Up, Left, L.
- Full Armor:** Press Up, Down, Left, Right, □, □, L, R.
- Full Health:** Press Up, Down, Left, Right, ○, ○, L, R.
- Overcast Weather:** Press Left, Down, L, R, Right, Up, Left, □.
- Pedestrians Attack You:** Press Down, △, Up, X, L, R, L, R.
- Pedestrians Follow You:** Press Right, L, Down, L, ○, Up, L, □.
- Pedestrians Have Weapons:** Press Up, L, Down, R, Left, ○, Right, △.
- Pedestrians Riot:** Press R, L, L, Down, Left, ○, Down, L.
- Rainy Weather:** Press Left, Down, L, R, Right, Up, Left, △.
- Raise Wanted Level:** Press Up, Right, □, □, Down, Left, ○, ○.
- Slower Gameplay:** Press Left, Left, ○, ○, Down, Up, △, X.
- Spawn Rhino Tank:** Press Up, L, Down, R, Left, L, Right, R.
- Spawn Trashmaster:** Press Down, Up, Right, △, L, △, L, △.
- Sunny Weather:** Press Left, Down, R, L, Right, Up, Left, ○.
- The Amazing Jumping Car:** Press Down, Left, Up, L, R, △, ○, X.
- Upside Down Mode:** Press □, □, □, L, L, R, Left, Right.
- Upside Down Mode 2:** Press Left, Left, Left, R, R, L, Right, Left.
- Weapon Set 1:** Press Left, Right, X, Up, Down, □, Left, Right.
- Weapon Set 2:** Press Left, Right, □, Up, Down, △, Left, Right.
- Weapon Set 3:** Press Left, Right, △, Up, Down, ○, Left, Right.

Richard Tomash—Boise, ID

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XBOX 360

SAINTS ROW



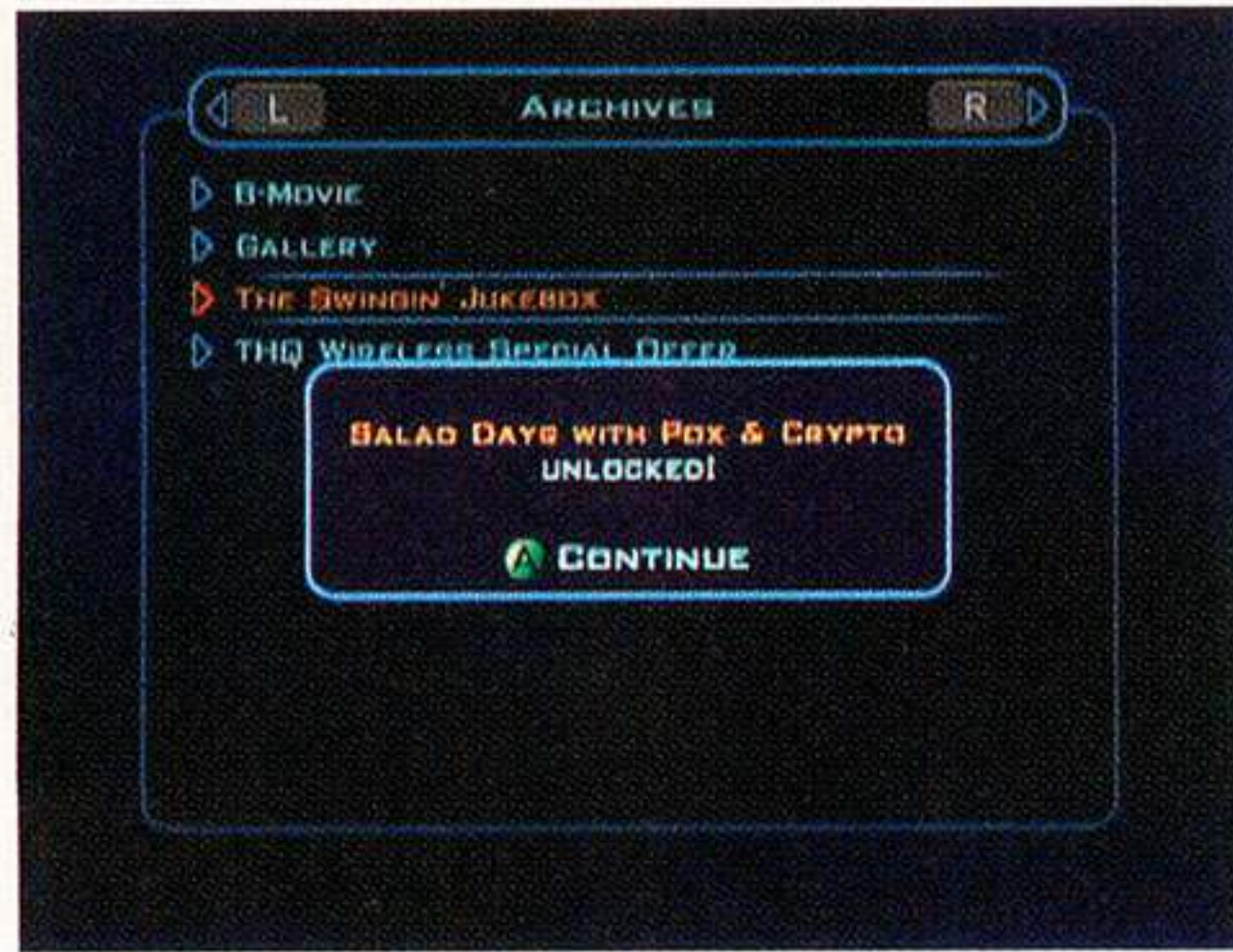
Passwords: During gameplay, pause the game, **press Left Trigger or Right Trigger** until you reach the Phone menu, select Dial, and then enter the following passwords to unlock the corresponding cheats. If you entered the password correctly, you'll see a confirming message onscreen.

- .44 Shepherd** #74374373
- 12 Gauge:** #1242843
- Ambulance:** #262852623
- Ant:** #268
- Aqua:** #2782
- Ar-40 Xtnd Rifle:** #27409863
- AS12 Riot:** #27127468
- Baron:** #22766
- Baseball Bat:** #22732255
- Betsy:** #23879
- Bulldog:** #2855364
- Call Ambulance:** 911
- Call Big Willy's Cab:** 5558198415
- Call Brown Baggers:** 5553765
- Call Chicken Ned:** 5552445
- Call Crash Landing:** 5556278
- Call EagleLine Yellow:** 5550180174
- Call Eye for an Eye:** 5555966
- Call Grounds for Divorce:** 5559473
- Call Legal Lee's:** 5559467
- Call Lik-a-Chick:** 5553863
- Call On the Fence:** 5557296
- Call On the Rag:** 5555926
- Call On Thin Ice:** 5552564
- Call Rim Jobs:** 5553493
- Call Stocks:** 5552626
- Call Suicide Hotline:** 15554876837
- Call The Dead Cow:** 5556238

- Call TNA Taxi:** 5554558008
- Cavallaro:** #228255276
- Clear Skies:** #78669
- Cosmos:** #267667
- Destiny:** #3378469
- FBI:** #324
- Fer De Lance:** #3373352623
- Full Health:** #3855432584
- GameStop T-Shirt:** #42637867
- GDHC .50:** #434250
- God's Wrath:** #10
- Halberd:** #4252373
- Hand Grenades:** #4736233
- Hollywood:** #465599663
- Infinite Ammo:** #2666
- Infinite Sprint:** #777468
- Justice:** #5878423
- K6Krukov:** #56578568
- Keystone:** #53978663
- Knife:** #56433
- Komodo:** #566636
- McManus Sniper Rifle:** #62262687
- Molotov Cocktails:** #6656868
- Money:** #66639
- Nightstick:** #6444878425
- No Cop Notoriety:** #662677
- No Gang Notoriety:** #6642647
- Nordberg:** #66732374
- NR4:** #674
- Pimp Cane Shotgun:** #74672263
- Quota:** #78682
- Pipe Bombs:** #74732662
- Rattler:** #7288537
- Reaper:** #732737
- Rocket Launcher:** #762538
- Shogun:** #746486
- T3K Urban:** #83587226
- Taxi:** #8294
- The Job:** #843562
- Tombstone:** #866278663
- TraxxMaster:** #87299627837
- Vice 9:** #84239
- Vortex:** #867839
- Zenith:** #936484

XBOX

DESTROY ALL HUMANS! 2



Salad Days Movie: During gameplay, pause the game, go to Archives, **press and hold down the left analog stick**, and then **press A, X, Y, B, X, B, Y, A, A** to unlock the Salad Days movie. If you entered the coded correctly, you'll see a confirming message onscreen.

MULTIPLATFORM



AVATAR: THE LAST AIRBENDER



Passwords: At the Game Menu, select Extras, select Code Entry to enter the password input screen, and then enter the following passwords to unlock the corresponding cheats. If you entered a password correctly, you'll see a confirming message onscreen.

Passwords are not case-sensitive.

1-Hit Dishonor:	54641
Character Concept Art:	97831
Double Damage:	34743
Never Ending Stealth:	53467
Unlimited Copper:	23637
Unlimited Chi:	24463
Unlimited Health:	94677
Unlock Treasure Maps:	37437



LEGO STAR WARS II: THE ORIGINAL TRILOGY



Passwords: At the Mos Eisley Cantina, select Enter Code, and then enter the following passwords to unlock the corresponding cheats. If you entered a password correctly, you'll see a confirming message onscreen.

Passwords are not case-sensitive.

Beach Trooper:	UCK868
Ben Kenobi:	BEN917
Bespin Guard:	VHY832
Bib Fortuna:	WTY721
Boba Fett:	HLP221
Death Star Trooper:	BNC332
Ewok:	TTT289
Gamorean Guard:	YZF999
Gonk Droid:	NFX582
Grand Moff Tarkin:	SMG219
Greedo:	NAH118
Han Solo:	YWM840
IG-88:	NXL973
Imperial Guard:	MMM111
Imperial Officer:	BBV889
Imperial Shuttle Pilot:	VAP664
Imperial Spy:	CVT125
Jawa:	JAW499
Lobot:	UUB319
Palace Guard:	SGE549
Rebel Pilot:	CYG336
Rebel Trooper:	EKU849
Sandtrooper:	YDV451
Skiff Guard:	GBU888
Snowtrooper:	NYU989
Stormtrooper:	PTR345
The Emperor:	HHY382
TIE Fighter:	HDY739
TIE Fighter Pilot:	NNZ316
TIE Interceptor:	QYA828
Tusken Raider:	PEJ821
Ugnaught:	UGN694



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GAMEPRO's BIG LIST

Here's a thumbnail guide to today's hottest games as reviewed by GamePro magazine. For full-length reviews, check out GamePro.com. Games highlighted in yellow represent a GamePro Editors' Choice title.

NAME OF GAME	SYSTEM(S)	PUBLISHER	FUN FACTOR	ESRB	ISSUE REVIEWED
.hack//G.U. Vol. 1: Rebirth	PS2	Namco Bandai	4.0	T	1/07
Avatar: The Last Airbender	DS	THQ	3.0	E	1/07
Bully	PS2	Rockstar Games	4.5	T	12/06
Call of Duty 3	Xbox 360	Activision	4.25	T	1/07
Castlevania: Portrait of Ruin	DS	Konami	4.5	T	1/07
Death, Jr. 2: Root of Evil	PSP	Konami	4.0	T	12/06
Destroy All Humans! 2	PS2, Xbox	THQ	4.5	T	12/06
DDR SuperNOVA	PS2	Konami	4.25	E10+	12/06
Dragon Ball Z: Budokai Tenkaichi 2	Wii	Atari	4.5	T	12/06
Elite Beat Agents	DS	Nintendo	4.25	E10+	1/07
F.E.A.R.	Xbox 360	Vivendi Universal	4.0	M	1/07
FIFA 07	PS2	EA Sports	4.5	E	12/06
Final Fantasy III	DS	Square Enix	4.0	E10+	1/07
Final Fantasy XII	PS2	Square Enix	5.0	T	12/06
Gears of War	Xbox 360	Microsoft	4.75	M	1/07
Grand Theft Auto: Vice City Stories	PSP	Rockstar Games	3.75	M	1/07
Guitar Hero II	PS2	RedOctane	4.5	T	1/07
Justice League Heroes	PS2, Xbox	Warner Bros. Interactive	4.0	T	12/06
Killzone: Liberation	PSP	Sony	3.75	T	12/06
Mario Hoops 3-on-3	DS	Nintendo	4.0	E	11/06
Mario vs. Donkey Kong 2: March of the Minis	DS	Nintendo	4.25	E	11/06
Marvel: Ultimate Alliance	Xbox 360	Activision	4.5	T	1/07

NAME OF GAME	SYSTEM(S)	PUBLISHER	FUN FACTOR	ESRB	ISSUE REVIEWED
Medal of Honor: Heroes	PSP	EA Games	3.25	T	1/07
Mortal Kombat: Armageddon	PS2, Xbox	Midway	4.5	M	12/06
Naruto: Ultimate Ninja	PS2	Namco Bandai Games	4.0	T	12/06
NBA '07 Featuring the Life, Vol. 2	PS2	Sony	3.5	E	12/06
NBA 2K7	Xbox 360	2K Sports	4.5	E	12/06
NBA Live 07	Xbox 360	EA Sports	4.0	E	12/06
Need for Speed: Carbon	Xbox 360	EA Games	4.75	E10+	12/06
NFL Street 3	PS2	EA Sports Big	3.25	E	1/07
NHL 2K7	Xbox 360	2K Sports	4.0	E10+	12/06
Power Stone Collection	PSP	Capcom	4.0	T	12/06
Resistance: Fall of Man	PS3	Sony	4.5	M	1/07
Saints Row	Xbox 360	THQ	4.75	M	10/06
Scarface: The World Is Yours	Xbox	Vivendi Universal	3.75	M	11/06
Sonic Rivals	PSP	Sega	3.25	E	1/07
SpongeBob SquarePants: Creature From the Krusty Krab	DS	THQ	3.5	E	1/07
Tales of the Abyss	DS	Namco Bandai	4.25	T	1/07
Thrillville	Xbox	LucasArts	2.0	E10+	1/07
Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell: Double Agent	Xbox 360	Ubisoft	4.25	M	1/07
Tony Hawk's Project 8	Xbox 360	Activision	4.5	T	1/07
Touch Detective	DS	Atlus	3.5	E10+	12/06
Work Time Fun	PSP	D3 Publisher	3.75	T	12/06
WWE SmackDown vs. Raw	Xbox 360	THQ	4.25	T	1/07
Yoshi's Island DS	DS	Nintendo	4.25	E	1/07

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HyperCritical

Now that you've read the best, check out all the rest. Here's how the "other guys" rated your favorite games.

	GamePro	EGM	Game Informer	GameSpot	IGN	Nintendo Power	Official Xbox Magazine	PlayStation Magazine (PSM)	Average
Bully (PS2) Rockstar Games	4.5/5		8.83/10	8.5/10	8.7/10	8.9/10	N/A	N/A	8.5/10
Call of Duty 3 (Xbox 360) Activision	4.25/5		N/A	8.5/10	8.8/10	8.8/10	N/A	8/10	N/A
Castlevania: Portrait of Ruin (DS) Konami	4.5/5		N/A	9/10	8.3/10	8.9/10	9/10	N/A	N/A
.hack//G.U. Vol. 1: Rebirth (PS2) Namco Bandai Games	4/5		6.5/10	5.75/10	6.3/10	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Elite Beat Agents (DS) Nintendo	4.25/5		8.83/10	6.75/10	8.9/10	9.5/10	N/A	N/A	N/A
F.E.A.R. (Xbox 360) Vivendi Universal Games	4/5		N/A	8.5/10	8.6/10	9.1/10	N/A	8.5/10	N/A
Gears of War (Xbox 360) Microsoft	4.75/5		N/A	9.5/10	9.6/10	9.4/10	N/A	10/10	N/A
Grand Theft Auto: Vice City Stories (PSP) Rockstar Games	3.75/5		N/A	8.5/10	8.4/10	9/10	N/A	N/A	9.5/10
Guitar Hero II (PS2) RedOctane	4.5/5		8.83/10	9/10	8.7/10	9.5/10	N/A	N/A	9.5/10
Final Fantasy III (DS) Square Enix	4/5		7.83/10	8/10	7.9/10	7.8/10	N/A	N/A	N/A
Final Fantasy XII (PS2) Square Enix	5/5		9/10	9.25/10	9/10	9.5/10	N/A	N/A	9.5/10
Just Cause (Xbox 360) Eidos Interactive	4.25/5		6.67/10	7.25/10	7.2/10	6.8/10	N/A	8.5/10	N/A
Justice League Heroes (PS2, Xbox) Warner Bros. Interactive	4/5		6.17/10	7.25/10	7.6/10	6.4/10	N/A	6/10	7.5/10
The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess (Wii) Nintendo	5/5		N/A	10/10	8.8/10	9.5/10	N/A	N/A	N/A
LEGO Star Wars II: The Original Trilogy (PS2, Xbox, GameCube) LucasArts	4.5/5		7.33/10	8/10	7.7/10	8.4/10	7.5/10	8.5/10	8/10
Marvel: Ultimate Alliance (Xbox 360) Activision	4.5/5		N/A	9.25/10	8.3/10	8.2/10	N/A	8.5/10	N/A
Medal of Honor: Heroes (PSP) EA Games	3.25/5		N/A	6.75/10	7.3/10	8.4/10	N/A	N/A	7/10
Mortal Kombat: Armageddon (PS2, Xbox) Midway	4.5/5		5.67/10	8.25/10	7/10	8.5/10	N/A	9/10	8/10
NFL Street 3 (PS2) EA Sports Big	3.5/5		6.67/10	N/A	6.9/10	8/10	N/A	N/A	8/10
Okami (PS2) Capcom	5/5		9.17/10	9.5/10	9/10	9.1/10	N/A	N/A	9.5/10
Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Blue Rescue Team (DS) Nintendo	2.5/5		7.16/10	3/10	5.2/10	6.5/10	N/A	N/A	N/A
Prey (Xbox 360) 2K Games	4.75/5		7.17/10	9.5/10	7.5/10	9/10	N/A	9/10	N/A
Resistance: Fall of Man (PS3) Sony	4.5/5		N/A	9.5/10	8.6/10	9.1/10	N/A	N/A	N/A
Scarface: The World Is Yours (PS2, Xbox) Vivendi Universal Games	3.75/5		6.5/10	8.5/10	6.4/10	8.7/10	N/A	4.5/10	5/10
Sonic Rivals (PSP) Sega	3.25/5		N/A	N/A	N/A	7.4/10	N/A	N/A	N/A
SpongeBob SquarePants: Creature from the Krusty Krab (DS) THQ	3.5/5		N/A	N/A	N/A	5.5/10	N/A	N/A	N/A
Super Dragon Ball Z (PS2) Atari	4.5/5		N/A	6/10	7.3/10	7.4/10	N/A	N/A	8.5/10
Tales of the Abyss (PS2) Namco Bandai Games	4.25/5		7.33/10	7.25/10	7.9/10	8.3/10	N/A	N/A	6.5/10
Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell: Double Agent (Xbox 360) Ubisoft	4.25/5		8.33/10	9/10	8.5/10	9/10	N/A	9/10	N/A
Tony Hawk's Project 8 (Xbox 360) Activision	4.5/5		N/A	9/10	7.9/10	7.8/10	N/A	N/A	N/A
Thrillville (Xbox) LucasArts	2/5		N/A	7.75/10	7.7/10	7.5/10	N/A	N/A	N/A
WWE SmackDown vs. Raw (Xbox 360) THQ	4.25/5		7.5/10	8.75/10	8.1/10	8/10	N/A	8.5/10	N/A
Yoshi's Island DS (DS) Nintendo	4.25/5		6.83/10	8.25/10	9.1/10	8/10	N/A	N/A	N/A

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Number crunching was never our strong suit, but then that's why we partnered with the most reputable data company around. The NPD Group provides us with innumerable video-game tidbits, giving you insight into the trends of the gaming industry.

Top 10 Best-Selling Console Video-Game Titles October 2006

TITLE	PLATFORM	LAST MONTH
1. Scarface: The World Is Yours Vivendi Universal Games	PS2	NEW
2. Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell: Double Agent Ubisoft	Xbox 360	NEW
3. Madden NFL 07* EA Sports	PS2	1 ▼
4. Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Red Rescue Team Nintendo	DS	6 ▲
5. Mortal Kombat: Armageddon Midway	PS2	NEW
6. Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Blue Rescue Team Nintendo	DS	4 ▼
7. NBA Live 07 EA Sports	PS2	11 ▲
8. FIFA Soccer 07 EA Sports	PS2	NEW
9. Bully Rockstar Games	PS2	NEW
10. Tiger Woods PGA Tour 07 EA Sports	PS2	NEW

*Includes Hall of Fame Edition
Source: The NPD Group/Point-of-Sale

The Top-Selling Video Games 11-20

11. Scarface: The World Is Yours (Vivendi Universal Games/Xbox)
12. LEGO Star Wars II: The Original Trilogy (LucasArts/PS2)
13. Tiger Woods PGA Tour 07 (EA Sports/Xbox 360)
14. Marvel: Ultimate Alliance (Activision/Xbox 360)
15. Mario vs. Donkey Kong: March of the Minis (Nintendo/DS)
16. New Super Mario Bros. (Nintendo/DS)
17. Mario Hoops 3-on-3 (Nintendo/DS)
18. Naruto: Clash of Ninja 2 (D3 Publisher/GameCube)
19. Madden NFL 07* (EA Sports/Xbox 360)
20. Mortal Kombat: Armageddon (Midway/Xbox)

*Includes Hall of Fame Edition
Source: The NPD Group/Point-of-Sale

Scarface: The World Is Yours



Scarface: The World Is Yours continues where the cult-classic film left off and, instead of meeting his just deserts in the infamous mansion shootout, Tony Montana lives to fight another day. The player is then charged with the task of taking Tony from the bottom of the heap back to the top of the mountain.

2



The Splinter Cell series has been thrilling gamers with its potent mix of stealth and action for a while now and the latest installment in the franchise, Double Agent, proves that even the oldest dog can learn the newest trick. When you put it all together, Double Agent is an impressive next-gen debut and re-establishes Sam Fisher's place among the spy elite. The game stands with Chaos Theory as one of the best titles in the franchise and it's a must have for Xbox 360 owners everywhere.

5



The seventh incarnation of Midway's one-on-one bloodbath, Mortal Kombat: Armageddon, comes to consoles with a roster of over 60 playable kombatants, a profusion of extra modes, and enough intestinal shrapnel to make any Mortal Kombat maniac happy. Armageddon isn't merely a victory for the series; it's the best MK game since Mortal Kombat II. Take that, Jade!

Ten Best-Selling Games for the GameCube

1. Naruto: Clash of Ninja 2 (D3 Publisher)
2. LEGO Star Wars II: The Original Trilogy (LucasArts)
3. LEGO Star Wars (Eidos Interactive)
4. Madden NFL 07 (EA Sports)
5. Avatar: The Last Airbender (THQ)
6. Paper Mario: The Thousand-Year Door (Nintendo)
7. Super Mario Strikers (Nintendo)
8. Mario Kart: Double Dash!! (Nintendo)
9. Open Season (Ubisoft)
10. Super Smash Bros. Melee (Nintendo)

Source: The NPD Group/Point-of-Sale



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