

Madden NFL, Need For Speed, And More!
EA's Next-Gen War Plan (PG. 58)

Exclusive First Look:
Saint's Row (PG. 68)

Unveiled At Last!
Xbox 360 (PG. 18)



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GEARS OF WAR

*The Creators Of Unreal Unleash
The True Power Of Xbox 360*

www.gameinformer.com ISSUE 146

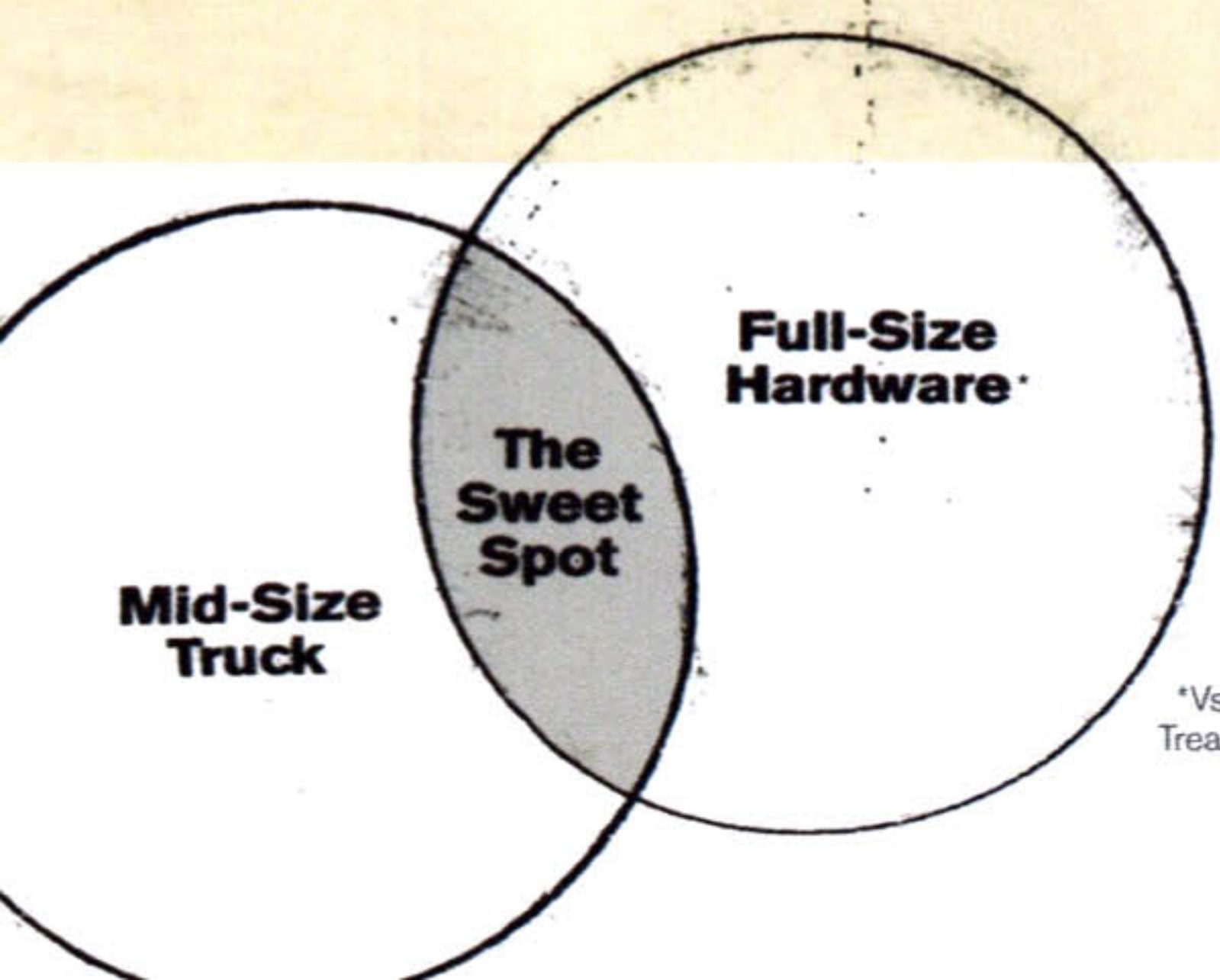
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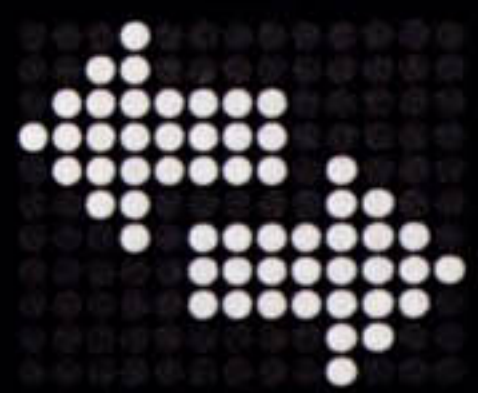


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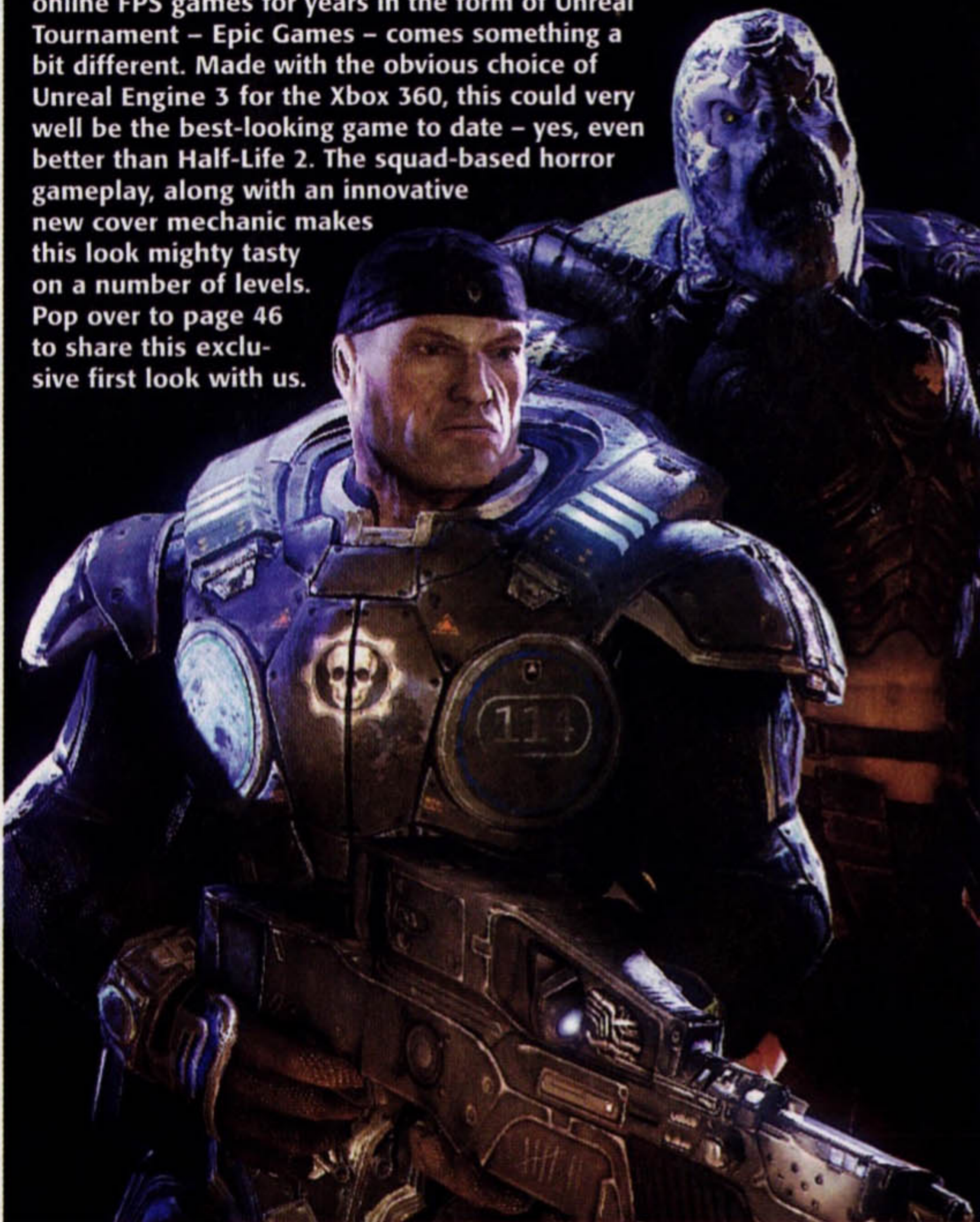
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From the team that has brought us outstanding online FPS games for years in the form of Unreal Tournament – Epic Games – comes something a bit different. Made with the obvious choice of Unreal Engine 3 for the Xbox 360, this could very well be the best-looking game to date – yes, even better than Half-Life 2. The squad-based horror gameplay, along with an innovative new cover mechanic makes this look mighty tasty on a number of levels. Pop over to page 46 to share this exclusive first look with us.



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On the off chance that anyone's interested, we've got the first official shots and low-down on Microsoft's upcoming Xbox 360. See the real, actual, final unit! Rejoice!



58 EA NEXT GEN

The world's biggest videogame publisher opens up to GI about its plans for the next-generation console wars.



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THQ is taking sandbox gaming to the next level in this Xbox 360 title. Peep our exclusive scoop on created characters, online multiplayer, and much more.

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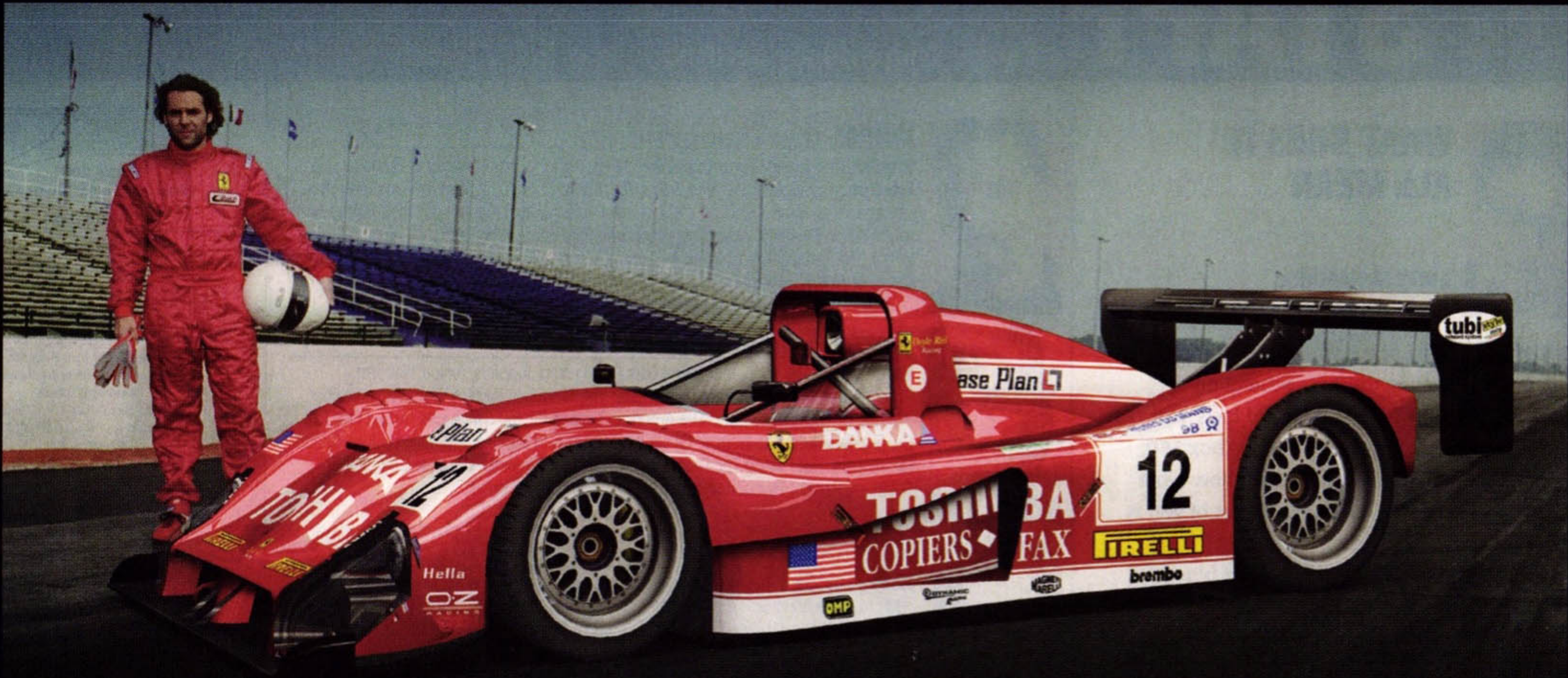
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The end...or is it?

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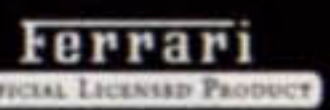
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WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN

ANDY McNAMARA
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Over the last couple of months, Game Informer has been investigating the next generation systems, and we finally have some hard facts. Not only do we have a look at Microsoft's Xbox 360, we also have a variety of games that show what the hardware is capable of doing (Gears of War is just too gorgeous for words).

Microsoft, as they say, has drawn first blood, but it seems there are still a lot of questions and speculation bouncing about the industry as to how the company's strategy will play out. For one, Sony Computer Entertainment has gotten development kits out to its most prized game designers' hands, and our sources clearly state that at this year's E3 we will see a number of PS3 games on display (though most likely in video form).

This raises some interesting questions regarding Microsoft's 360 strategy. Its plan of having a legitimate head start on Sony is slightly negated by the fact that Sony has kits out there, plus there are many rumors circulating stating that Sony's PS3 launch might not be as far out there as some may think. We've heard it may hit as early as March of next year.

Of course, all this could be Sony's high-powered marketing trying to squash 360's momentum. I'm sure this is the case, but there is always a sliver of truth in any rumor, and we can't help but think that Microsoft never expected Sony to put such pressure on its new 360 so soon.

In the end, the ball is in Microsoft's court. If Xbox 360 can capture the exclusives that gamers want to play, it will most certainly be a huge success; but if Microsoft lets Sony get a foothold in consumers' minds before the game even starts, it may be over before it begins.

I know I'm looking forward to a fierce competition where these two companies are neck and neck at every turn, but this may be more of a dream than a reality.

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Handle: The Game Hombre **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Platform, Driving, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** *Arrested Development*, Ron Mexico, Quizno's Subs, PSP, Death Cab For Cutie, Queens Of The Stone Age, Mars Volta **Dislikes:** The Insanity That Is E3, High-Priced UMD Movies, Information Leaks **Current Favorite Games:** God Of War, World Of Warcraft, Tony Hawk's Underground 2 Remix, Gears Of War, Full Auto



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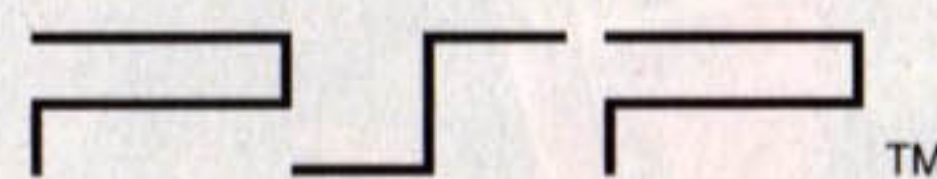
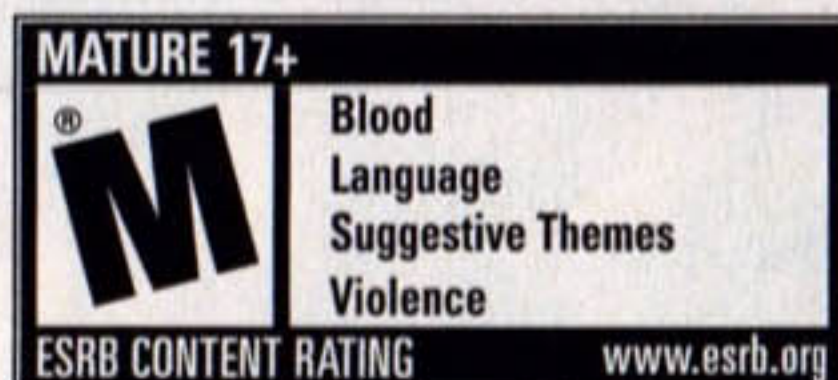


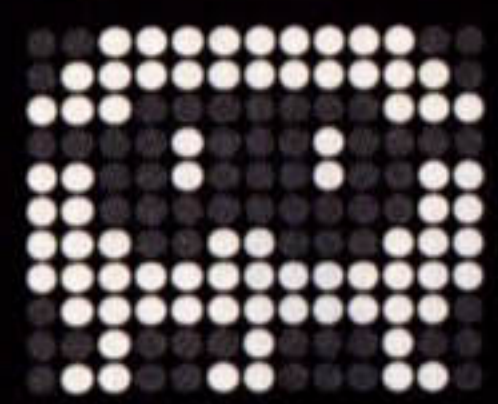
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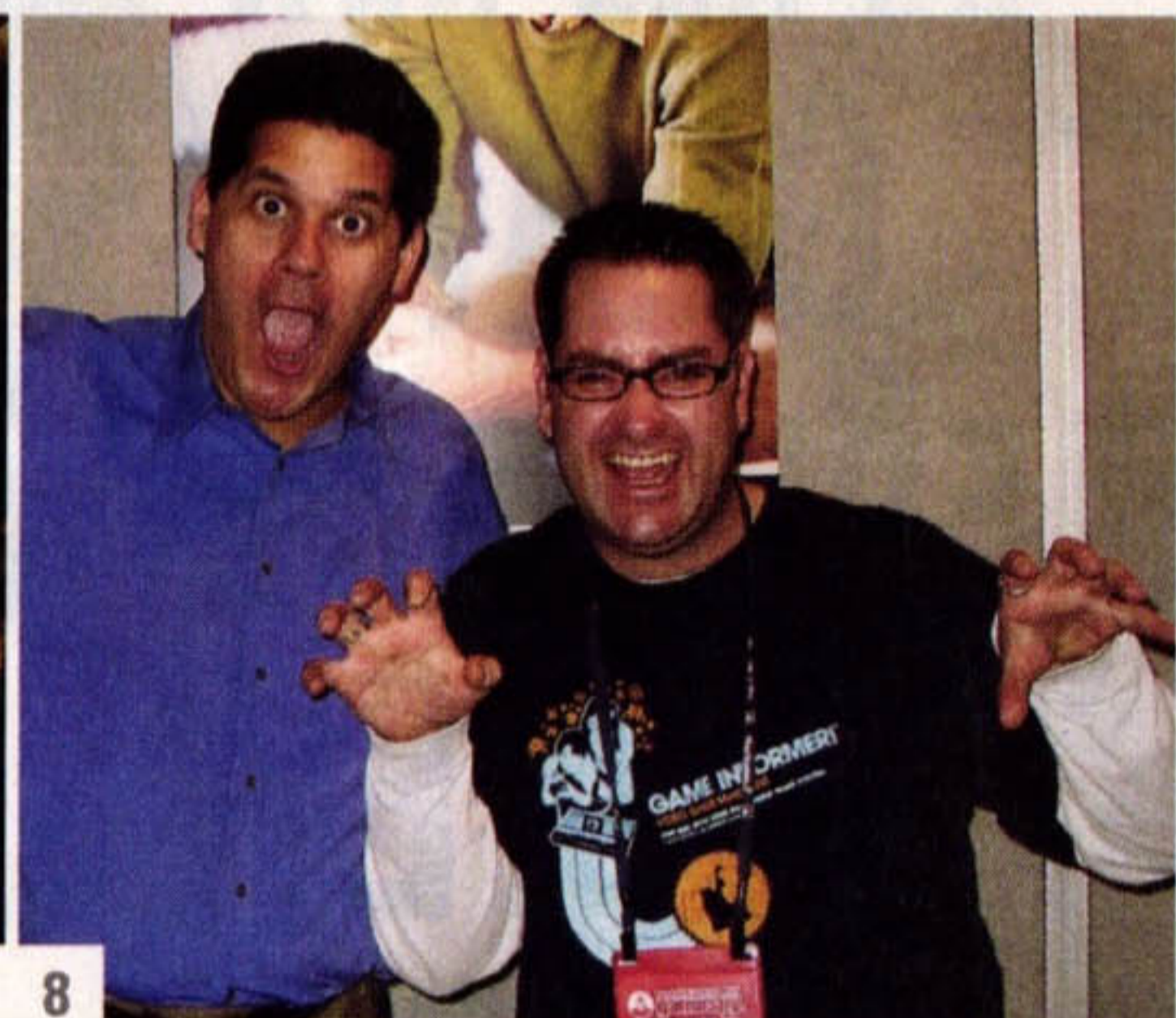


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Candid Photos From The Seedy Underbelly Of The Video Game Industry



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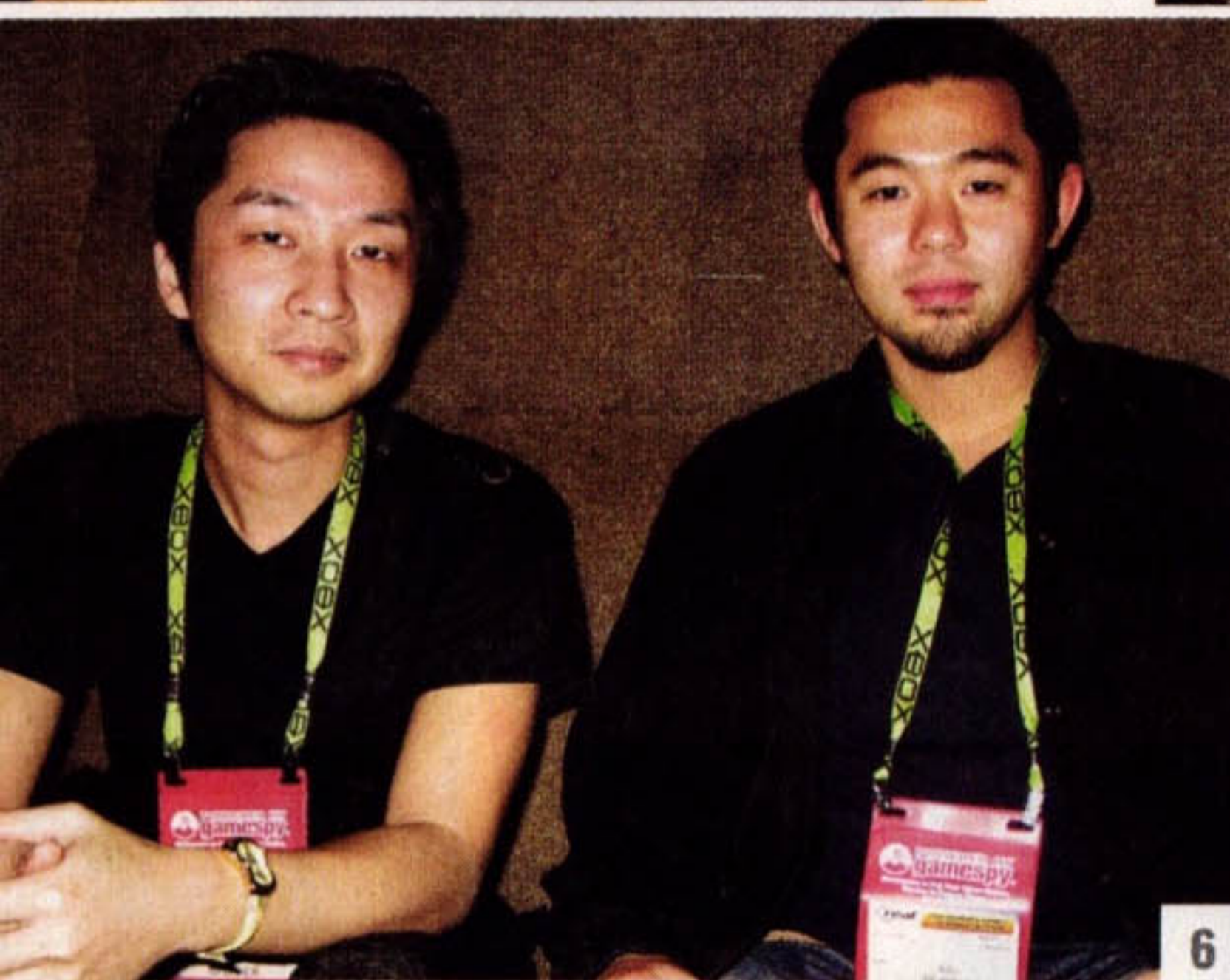


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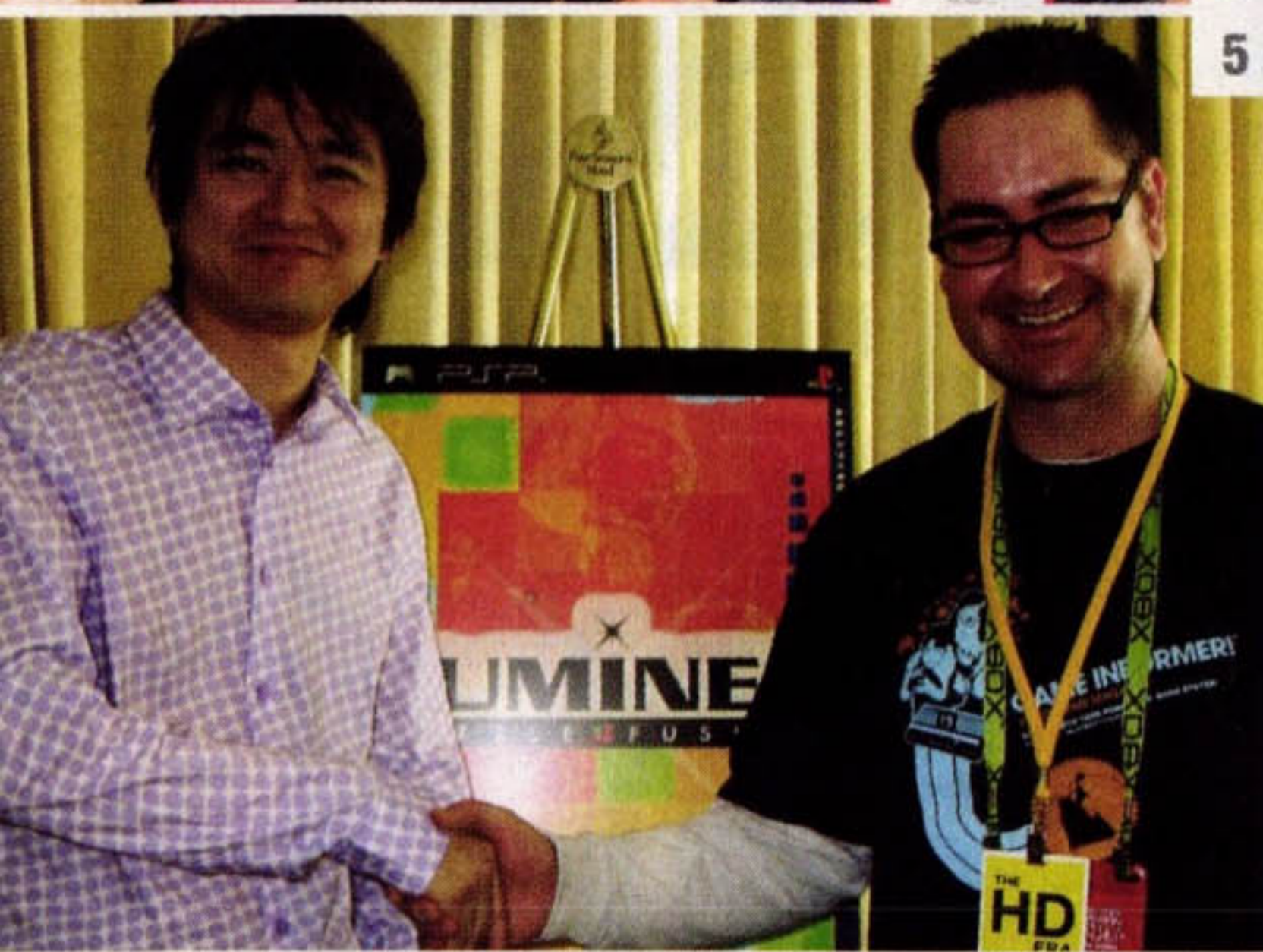


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6



5

1 A posse of gaming's Who's Who convenes at a recent Nintendo event. From left to right: Nintendo's Anka Dolecki, Nintendo's Cory Lewis, ign.com's Fran Mirabella III, Golin-Harris' Julia Roether, ign.com's Matt Cassamasina, Nintendo's Tom Harlin, and our very own Andy Mac

2 Rockstar's Laura Paterson, Bill Woods, and Chris Carro, hanging out on Coney Island

3 Atari stopped by for a visit, and we have the pictures to prove it! From left to right: Stacy Clement, half of Jeremy Zoss's head, and Barry Caudill of Firaxis

4 Reiner and Jeremy give Midway's Tim Da Rosa, Shaun Himmerick, and Mortal Kombat creator Ed Boon a tour of the legendary Game Informer vault

5 "So, Lumines creator Tetsuya Mizuguchi, you've just reinvented the puzzle genre. What are you going to do now?" "I'm taking Billy to Disneyworld!"

6 Konami's Silent Hill svengali Akira Yamayoka and producer Kei Hiroki are all business as the GI Spy camera snaps

7 Ubisoft's Michael Beadle and GI's Lisa Mason celebrate their undeniable sexiness at the mall!

8 Nintendo's Reggie Fils-Aime and GI Online's Billy Berghammer, seen here auditioning for roles in Resident Evil 5



3



4



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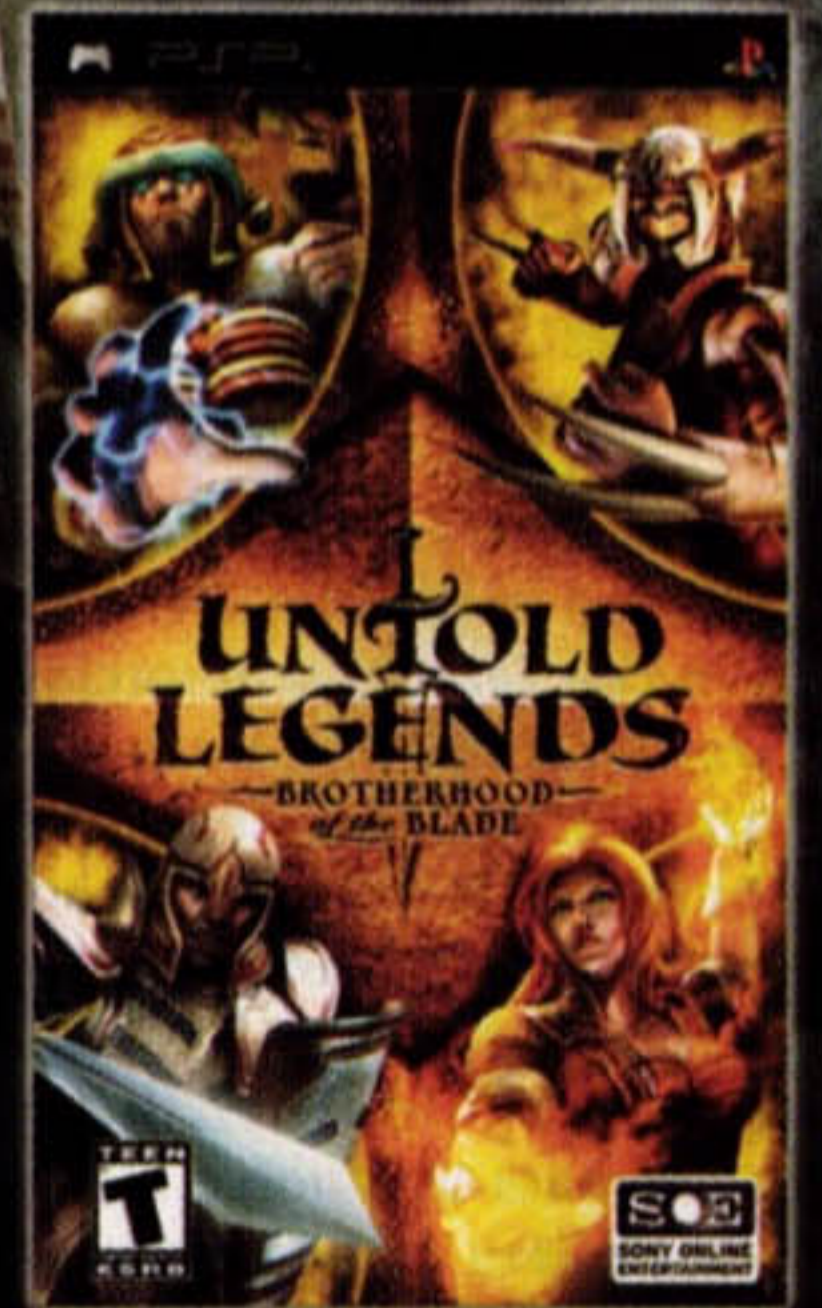
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FROM HOTMAIL WITH MATH

In your story on EA's *From Russia With Love*, you stated that there are 20 Bond movies. Actually, there are 21. *Never Say Never Again* is the only one not on DVD. That's just basic math.

William Gulfo Jr.
via hotmail.com

■ **Basic math, eh? If only! Algebra would be so much cooler if it had Bond-centered equations instead of all that "imaginary numbers" garbage. Check it out: "007 = PPK + x(shaken not stirred). Solve for x." Sweet. Anyway, the James Bond canon isn't quite as simple as you think it is. While *Never Say Never Again* did indeed star Sean Connery as James Bond, it isn't actually considered an official entry in the series. First of all, it wasn't made by Albert Broccoli's EON Productions, which produced every other film in the franchise. Second, it was basically the exact same story as *Thunderball* (it had to be for legal reasons), but without any other returning cast members. Third, it actually released at about the same time as *Octopussy*, effectively trying to siphon away the audience from the real McCoy. So, while it is technically a movie featuring James Bond, it really isn't a "Bond movie" in the traditional sense.**



less fudging they'll put up with. Hopefully, as our hobby becomes mainstream, more gamers like you will start crying foul at these glaring oversights and inspire change.

PSPHILANTHROPY

I would like to implore you to consider giving me a free PSP. I assume you get them at a discount or something, so please help a fellow gamer out.

Andrew Payne
via aol.com

■ **You make a compelling argument, Andrew. However, we were in the lines at midnight just like everybody else, laying down grandma's medicine money to buy Sony's new handheld. If we had to buy one for you too we couldn't afford our pets' monthly massage – and that's not a sacrifice we're willing to make.**

GAMES GO BOSSA NOVA

When will we finally have a game where you can make your own music? Yeah, there's stuff like PaRappa the Rapper, Get On Da Mic, and American Idol, but I want a real one. You could choose from instruments like electric guitars and beats

like hip hop, then mix it all up. The coolest part would be taking your own songs and then burning them on to a blank disc from your console!

Elias Witherow
via yahoo.com

■ **We don't mean to burst your bubble, but the process you describe can currently be done on a wide variety of sound-mixing software readily available for standard computers. That's a pretty good home for them, since computers actually possess disc-burning capabilities, unlike current gaming machines. Even though the next generation of systems are incorporating more and more media technology, you should probably look into applications like Garage Band (Mac) or Acid (PC). Another option is to check out MTV Music Generator, a console title that has some (but not all) of the features you describe. Or, you could be like that guy behind us in line at the hot dog stand, beatboxing constantly, spitting everywhere, and wallowing in your own horrifying music. These are all excellent avenues to explore the artist currently known as you.**

REALITY CHECK

I was reading your Generation Next article in issue 144, and I think you're wrong about it taking five years to create virtual reality gaming. All it would take is an agreement between Sony and Nintendo. The PS2's Eye Toy could allow you to see and enter a virtual space, while the Nintendo DS's touch screen would enable to interact with everything in that world. Then use the GameCube's mic to talk to other users. See? Sony and Nintendo could pretty much create a virtual reality console with modern technology.

Jacob Hatch
via aol.com

■ **As appealing as they idea may sound, cobbling a bunch of peripherals together does not necessarily make for a viable gaming platform. Believe us – our homemade "GameStation One Million" wouldn't even play the cartridges we jammed in its disc tray, no matter how many Virtual Boys we soldered to the motherboard. The clerk at our local game store said it was the first time he'd seen a system that was both a fire hazard and a biohazard! Anyway, the point is that virtual reality would be a drastic shift in the way we interact with our games, not to**

THE AGONY OF INACCURACY

I am really bothered by the way video games are used as props in television and movies. The way people "play" the games is appalling; a real gamer would instantly die using such exaggerated and ridiculous movements. The actors are often sitting far beyond the controller's reach, and sometimes they are using the entirely wrong controllers for the system – not to mention the primitive noises that are coming from these supposedly "modern" games. If Hollywood wants to make its characters seem edgy or cool by playing games, it should do its research first.

Tom Curtis
via aol.com

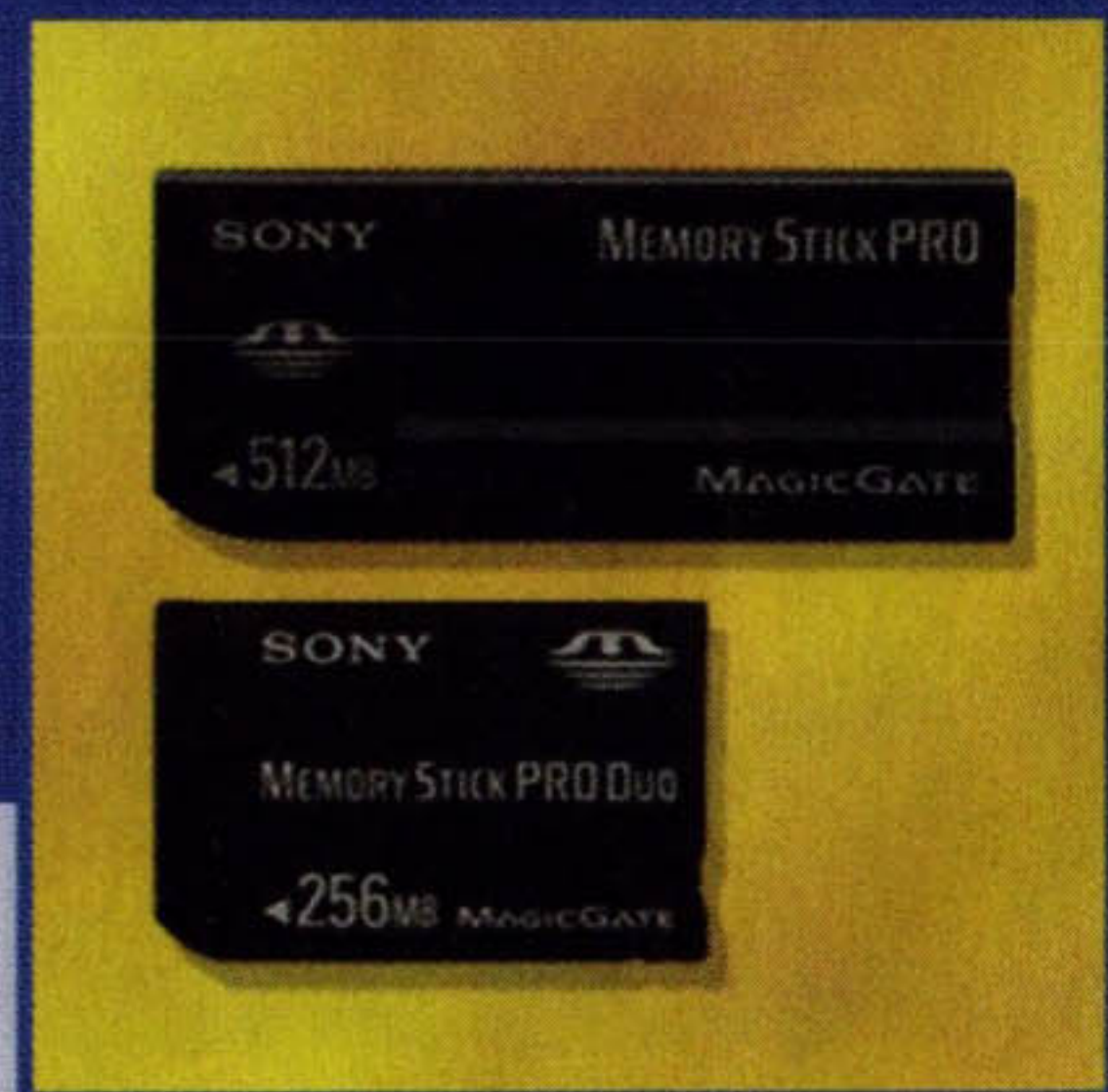
■ **Ah, who could forget the two-player Final Fantasy VIII depicted in *Charlie's Angels*, or watching those dopes in the Target commercial mercilessly jack the shoulder buttons? The truth is, some companies are very conscious of the issues you raise, and will even hire special consultants to teach actors how to hold and use controllers properly, kind of like how military experts are brought in to ensure authenticity for war movies. However, the prevailing approach simply appears to involve throwing in a few arbitrary controllers and Pac-Man noises – just enough to make the activity generally recognizable as "gaming". Fortunately, we might not have to put up with this heresy much longer. The video game industry continues to grow at a remarkable rate, and the more familiar people become with video games, the**

STICK IT TO THE MAN

I've been reading everywhere that you MUST use a Memory Stick Pro Duo for the PSP, and other memory sticks will not work. When I got a chance to look at and use the PSP, however, I noticed that all the memory stick slot does is reveal a small opening. When you put a Memory Stick Pro Duo in there, I assume that it closes around it. But couldn't you just use a regular sized Memory Stick and let it stick out of the PSP instead of being completely inside it?

Bryan Leones
via email

■ **Unfortunately, no. First of all, the likelihood of you fitting a Memory Stick Pro in the PSP's port is questionable. Not only are the Pro sticks longer, but they're also about 1.5 millimeters wider than the Duos, meaning they're just generally too big for the PSP's britches. Plus, even if you manage to wedge a Pro stick in there, it won't necessarily do you any good. Just because Miller can fit a horseshoe in his mouth doesn't mean it belongs there. Similarly, the PSP will only read Duo and Pro Duo formats, regardless of what you cram into the slot. Still, if you wish to take advantage of the larger storage capacity of the Memory Stick Pro (some hold as much as 4 GB), there are solutions; certain adapters available online can act as a bridge between the two formats. Though they aren't the prettiest or most portable of contraptions, they will let you have a wider array of *One Tree Hill* episodes at your fingertips.**



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FIREFLY

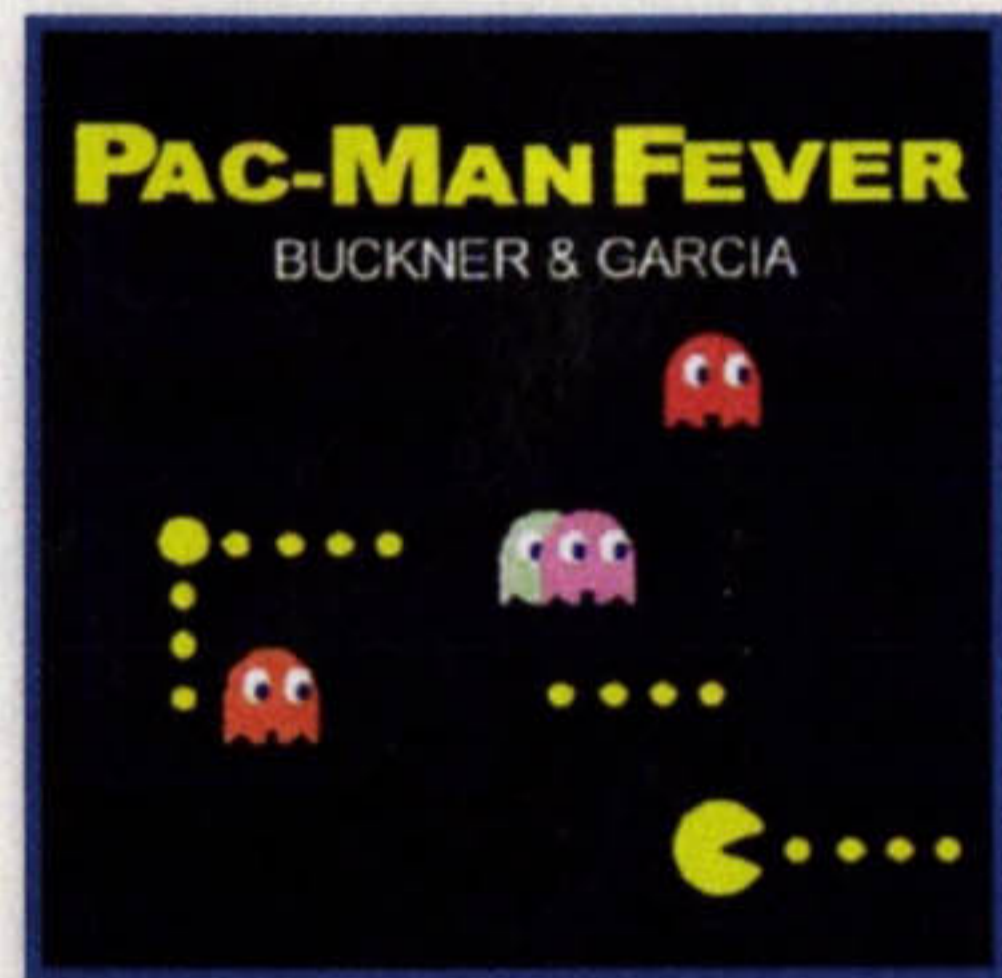
2K
GAMES

mention the way developers create them. It will take far more than combining a few isolated gadgets to facilitate change on such large scale; new strategies and approaches will have to be formulated – assuming that virtual reality is even the next logical step. Games are certainly becoming more immersive, but there are other techniques that expand on the experience without literally placing the player in the midst of it.

SERIOUS DISCOURSE

I enjoyed reading your editorial, "Taking Games Seriously," in issue 143. It's always heartening to hear a voice advocating a more mature games industry. I wonder, however, whether games are really "the emerging dominant form of entertainment," and whether they're really "eclipsing" other forms of art and entertainment. What's great about gaming in 2005 is not that it has grown to become "dominant" over other popular media, but that it has grown to become integrated with those media. Mixing *Evanescence* and *BloodRayne* may result in a poor video, but I don't see that as a sign of condescension on the part of other media, I see it as a sign of a bad band mixed with a bad game. I also see it as a recognition of the power of the games and game art to get people's heads bobbing, bodies moving, and yes, to get them buying CDs and games. *Video Mods* may be a bad show, but in my eyes, it's a good sign. Or it may just be "Pac-Man Fever" all over again. Hard to say.

Josh Lee
via email



■ Thanks for this articulate and interesting response, Josh. While we disagree with parts of your argument, it is encouraging to see our opinion page inspiring such thoughtful analysis of the industry. The

guest writers of this column may not always present the most popular views, but it is our hope that they will at least provoke our readers to evaluate the current state of gaming, as well as the direction it is heading. Originally we were going to do this by devoting an entire page of every issue to a giant picture of Miyamoto dropkicking various celebrities, but in retrospect, an opinion page was the better choice.

COUNTING CHOCOBOS BEFORE THEY HATCH

I just have to tell you how excited I was to hear about Mistwalker's plans to make games for the Xbox 360. Apart from *KOTOR* and *Fable*, Xbox RPGs have been totally lame. If the 360 can fix that problem, there won't be any reason to pay attention to the PS3 or Revolution at all.

Elizabeth Favero
Seattle, WA

■ Mistwalker founder Hironobu Sakaguchi certainly has one of the most distinguished careers in the industry, and his experience will undoubtedly help bolster Microsoft's weakness in the RPG department. However, while Sakaguchi's track record has been proven, we haven't actually seen a game come out of Mistwalker yet, so it may be a jumping the gun to use the developer as the critical linchpin in an argument declaring Microsoft the king of the next generation. E3 will undoubtedly give us a better idea of where other developer alliances will lie, so be sure to check out our next issue for all the details.

ENVELOPE ART

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

Send to:
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724 1st St. N., 4th Floor
Mpls, MN 55401

JUNE WINNER!

ORION ARATA
"When do I get to see that Screw Attack, sweet thing?"



NATHANIEL KOLASA ▲
Why isn't Captain N popular anymore? Oh, right. The jacket and zapper thing.

KEVIN GRITZKE ▲
Banking on shoddy marksmanship, Snake disguises himself as the broad side of a barn



RYAN TONNER
"Oh yeah? I've never heard of you, either! Eat laser!"



JOHN MUNGIELLO
"Seriously, guys. That 'Super Xbox Party Melee' joke in Game Infarcer sucked."



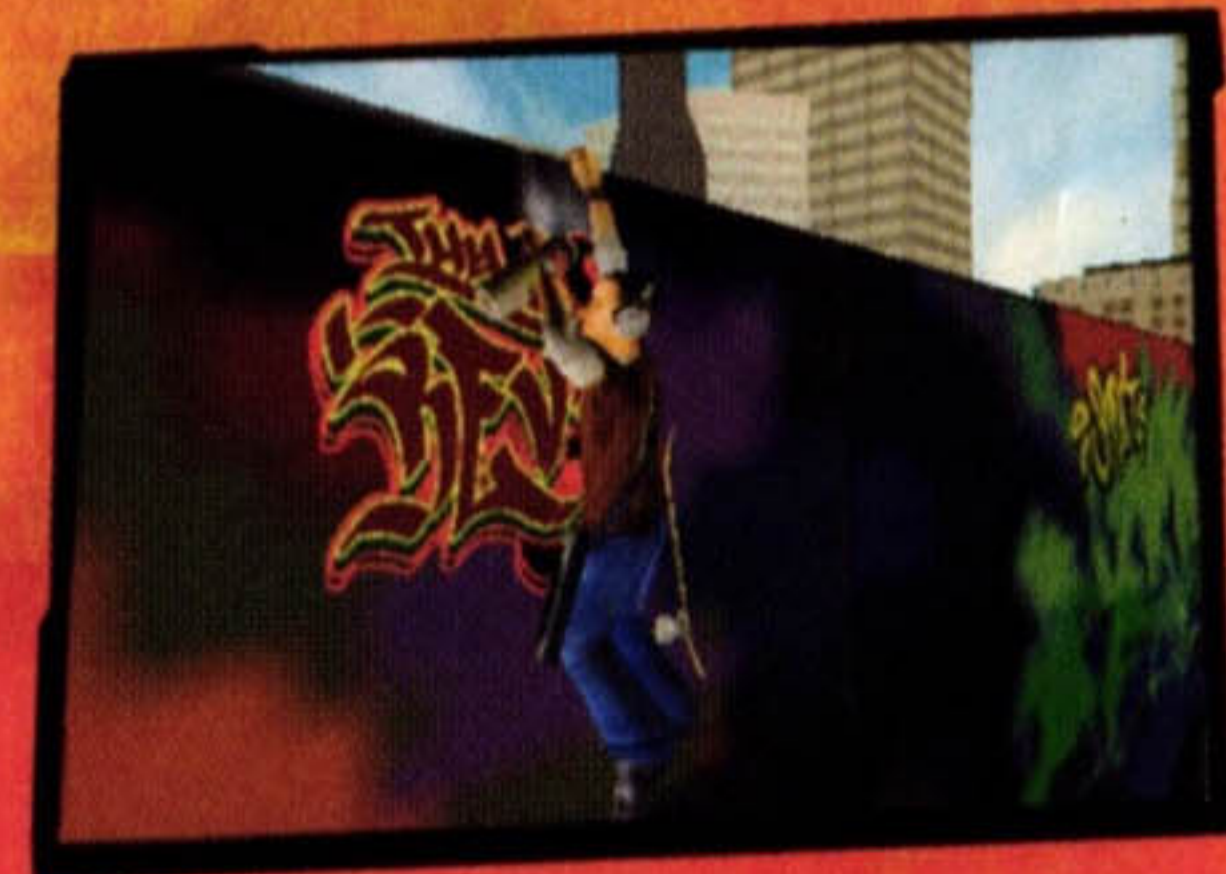
ANDREA VONDERLINDEN
Renaissance Fair portraiture almost makes Zelda look like royalty. Wait a second...

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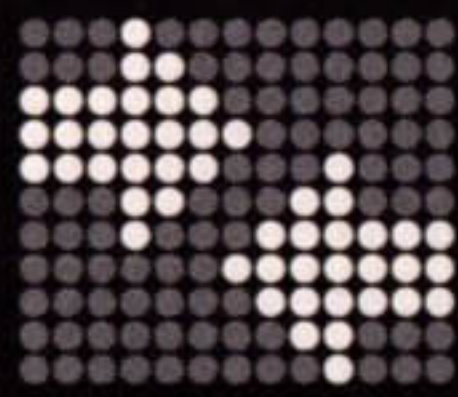
T

Blood
Crude Humor
Language
Suggestive Themes
Use of Alcohol
Violence

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CONNECT

Breaking News, Views, And Technology From
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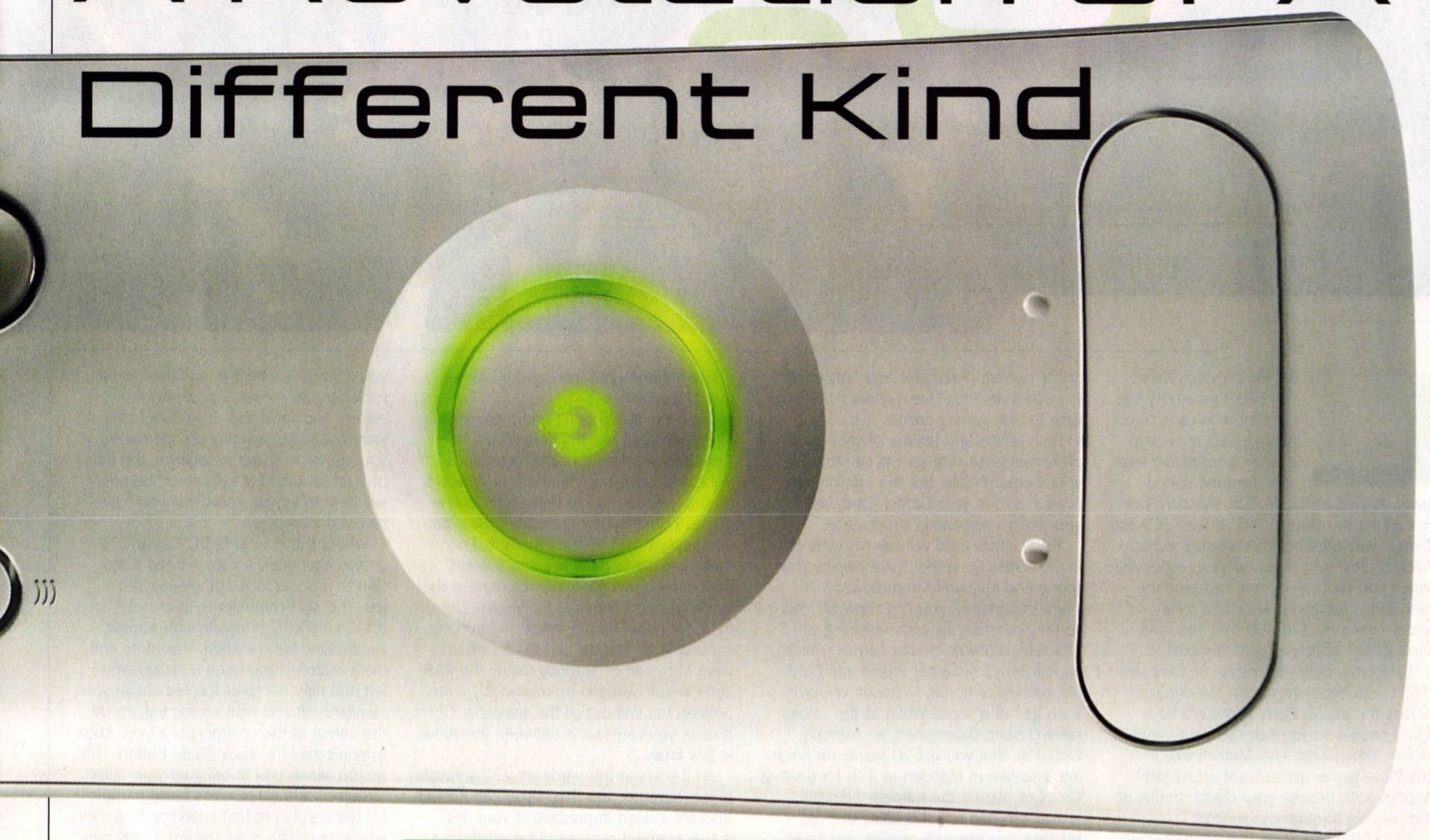
XBOX 360

Memory Unit A

Memory Unit B

xbox 360

A Revolution Of A Different Kind



Robbie Bach, chief Xbox officer at Microsoft, puts it simply: "We have the most powerful next-generation platform." Bold words, especially when you consider that rivals Sony Computer Entertainment and Nintendo have yet to show their hands in the next generation war. But bold and brazen is the path that Microsoft has taken with its next-generation hardware christened Xbox 360.

Sporting a custom IBM PowerPC-based CPU with three symmetrical cores running at 3.2GHz, 512 MB of 700MHz DDR RAM, a 20 GB detachable hard drive, and a custom ATI graphics processor running at 500MHz, the power that Xbox 360 is delivering is indeed vast.

Sticking to the message, Bach gleefully

exclaims, "We have a teraflop of processing power." This is a giant leap in processing power when compared to consoles out in the market today. However, since Microsoft plans to release the 360 this holiday season, how it stacks up against its competition remains unclear.

Regardless, Microsoft is confident that by making the first move in the race, it can set the standard for the next evolution in gaming that Microsoft sees as the "HD era."

Bach confidently proclaims that Xbox 360 will become the "killer app for HDTV." To make this plan a reality, Microsoft has required that every game for 360 must support 720p output at a 16:9 aspect ratio as a minimum, leaving it up to the developer if they wish to output graphics at higher resolutions.

Processing power and high definition graphics are one thing, but the true value of

any system is found in the software it runs. It's the proof in the pudding. But the 360 namesake is more than a marketing effort to make sure that Xbox 2 isn't perceived as less powerful than PlayStation 3. It's there to show that the system is much more than a game machine that runs game software. It's a seamless experience that ties in many forms of media into an all-encompassing box.

At first glance, the system doesn't even look like a game machine, though its small size is a pleasant change from the super-sized Xbox. Its ivory color and sleek design hide a system that at its core was designed to bring gaming to the masses. The system, which can be laid flat like a home electronics device or upright like a PC tower, sports a number of welcome innovations behind its flashy exterior. Some, like the wireless controllers, are obvious, while others are much more subtle.

The bay at the base of the system hides two USB 2.0 inputs (there is also a third USB 2.0 input in the back of the system). You can use these to connect your controllers to recharge the battery life or simply play wired if you so choose. However, these are also the gateway for you to connect any personal MP3 player to stream music into any game, or connect any digital camera to upload or simply display your photos.

To expand the experience even further, if you have a Windows XP Home Media Center PC you can use your 360 to stream any and all of your digital files, including TV shows and movies. It's a list of expandable options that begins to sound like a TV infomercial where, just when you think it can't get any better, the man on the screen says, "But wait, there's more!"



■ Project Gotham Racing 3 (left) from Bizarre Creations is one of the planned launch window games, as is Rare's Kameo (right)

Like the previous Xbox, the 360, through its 12x DVD drive, is capable of playing DVD movies in all their progressive scan and surround sound glory, as well as music CDs. Standard fare. But when you start to look at how all these things work together, the practical applications of 360 start to come alive, especially when you factor in all that can be done with 360's improved Xbox Live experience – an aspect of 360 that Microsoft feels is one of its greatest strengths.

Unlike the current iteration of Xbox Live, 360's experience has been standardized across the board. Every game will be Live Enabled so you can see your friends online, browse the Live Marketplace to purchase game content, set up custom soundtracks, browse your digital media, or simply chat through the service.

Out of the box, if you have an Internet connection you can take advantage of almost all the Xbox Live services, including video chat if you have purchased the

360's camera peripheral. You only need to pay for an Xbox Live subscription if you wish to play games online.

Both online and offline, all your accomplishments and settings will be stored in your Gamer Profile. But this information is also used in your Gamer Card, which is your online persona in cyberspace.

Your Gamer Card will say who you are in the Xbox Live world. It will display your motto and real-world hometown; but more importantly, you can show off your gaming prowess. By accomplishing various achievements in your games, which appear on your Gamer Profile and Card like badges of honor, Microsoft will give each gamer a score. While all the values haven't been determined, an example would be that you get 20 points for finishing a season in Madden or 100 for beating Gears of War on the hardest difficulty.

You can also use this utility to cross reference games with people you meet online, so you can talk about games you've defeated or what you are currently playing. Basically, it's making the Live experience

a game unto itself and a tool for meeting people.

The innovations don't end there, either. Since everyone has a different idea of what they want their online experience to be, Microsoft has created four different modes you can use to browse for online games called Gamer Zones. For the ultra competitive there is the Pro Zone. For those looking to trash talk and subvert the overall gaming experience there is the Underground Zone. The Family Zone is there for people more interested in hanging with their friends, and the fourth is what Microsoft is currently calling the R&R Zone where you can be reasonably competitive, but without all the swearing. Of course, you can switch between the zones at any time.

So if you put the hardware and software pieces together, the things you can do with 360 are indeed impressive. If your 360 is Live enabled, you could be watching a movie and receive messages from your friends letting you know that a game of Ghost Recon 3 is going on and they want

you to join. Pause, chat, and then jump back into the movie once a new time is set up. And since you don't necessarily want messages popping up and ruining your movie or game experience, the Ring of Light towards the bottom of the unit will flash to let you know that you have received a message.

What's the Ring of Light, you say? To answer that question we will first need to take a closer look at the controller. The 360 controller is, at its heart, the Controller-S complete with rumble capabilities, but modified. The white and black buttons have been replaced with left and right bumpers located above your standard left and right analog triggers. At the center of the controller is a large Xbox button called the Xbox Guide Button. This button allows you to bring up your Xbox System Guide (Microsoft's fancy name for the dashboard that superimposes over whatever media is on screen) at any time and access all the Xbox Live and home media features, or simply turn the system on and off.

(continued on page 22)



■ The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion shows off what Xbox 360 can do graphically



■ Atari's Test Drive Unlimited (above) features some impressive car models. Scheduled for release in Japan, Mizuguchi-san's next-generation Xbox game Ninety-Nine Nights (below) is one of many games Microsoft has secured to help strengthen its presence overseas



XBOX 360 SYSTEM PERFORMANCE – DRAFT

CUSTOM IBM POWERPC-BASED CPU

- 3 symmetrical cores running at 3.2GHz each
- 2 hardware threads per core; 6 hardware threads total
- 1 VMX-128 vector unit per core; 3 total
- 128 VMX-128 registers per hardware thread
- 1 MB L2 cache

CPU GAME MATH PERFORMANCE

- 9 billion dot product operations per second

CUSTOM ATI GRAPHICS PROCESSOR

- 500MHz
- 10 MB embedded DRAM
- 48-way parallel floating-point dynamically-scheduled shader pipelines
- Unified shader architecture

POLYGON PERFORMANCE

- 500 million triangles per second

PIXEL FILL RATE

- 16 gigasamples per second fillrate using 4X MSAA

SHADER PERFORMANCE

- 48 billion shader operations per second

MEMORY

- 512 MB GDDR3 RAM
- 700MHz DDR
- Unified memory architecture

MEMORY BANDWIDTH

- 22.4 MB/s memory interface bus bandwidth
- 256 GB/s memory bandwidth to EDRAM
- 21.6 GB/s front-side bus

OVERALL SYSTEM FLOATING-POINT PERFORMANCE

- 1 teraflop

STORAGE

- Detachable and upgradeable 20 GB hard drive

- 12X dual-layer DVD-ROM
- Memory unit support starting at 64 MB

I/O

- Support for up to 4 wireless game controllers
- 3 USB 2.0 ports
- 2 memory unit slots

OPTIMIZED FOR ONLINE

- Xbox Live features, including Xbox Live Marketplace for downloadable content, and Gamer Profile for digital identity and voice chat
- Built-in Ethernet Port
- Wi-Fi Ready: 802.11 A, B and G
- Video Camera Ready

DIGITAL MEDIA SUPPORT

- Support for DVD-Video, DVD-ROM, DVD-R/RW, DVD+R/RW, CD-DA, CD-ROM, CD-R, CD-RW, WMA CD, MP3 CD, JPEG Photo CD
- Stream media from portable music devices, digital cameras, Windows PCs
- Rip music to Xbox 360 hard drive
- Custom playlists in every game
- Windows Media Center Extender built in
- Interactive, full screen 3D visualizers

HD GAME SUPPORT

- All games supported at 16:9, 720p and 1080i, anti-aliasing
- Standard-definition and high-definition video output supported

AUDIO

- Multichannel surround sound output
- Supports 48KHz 16-bit audio
- 320 independent decompression channels
- 32-bit audio processing
- Over 256 audio channels

SYSTEM ORIENTATION

- Stands vertically or horizontally

CUSTOMIZABLE FACE PLATES

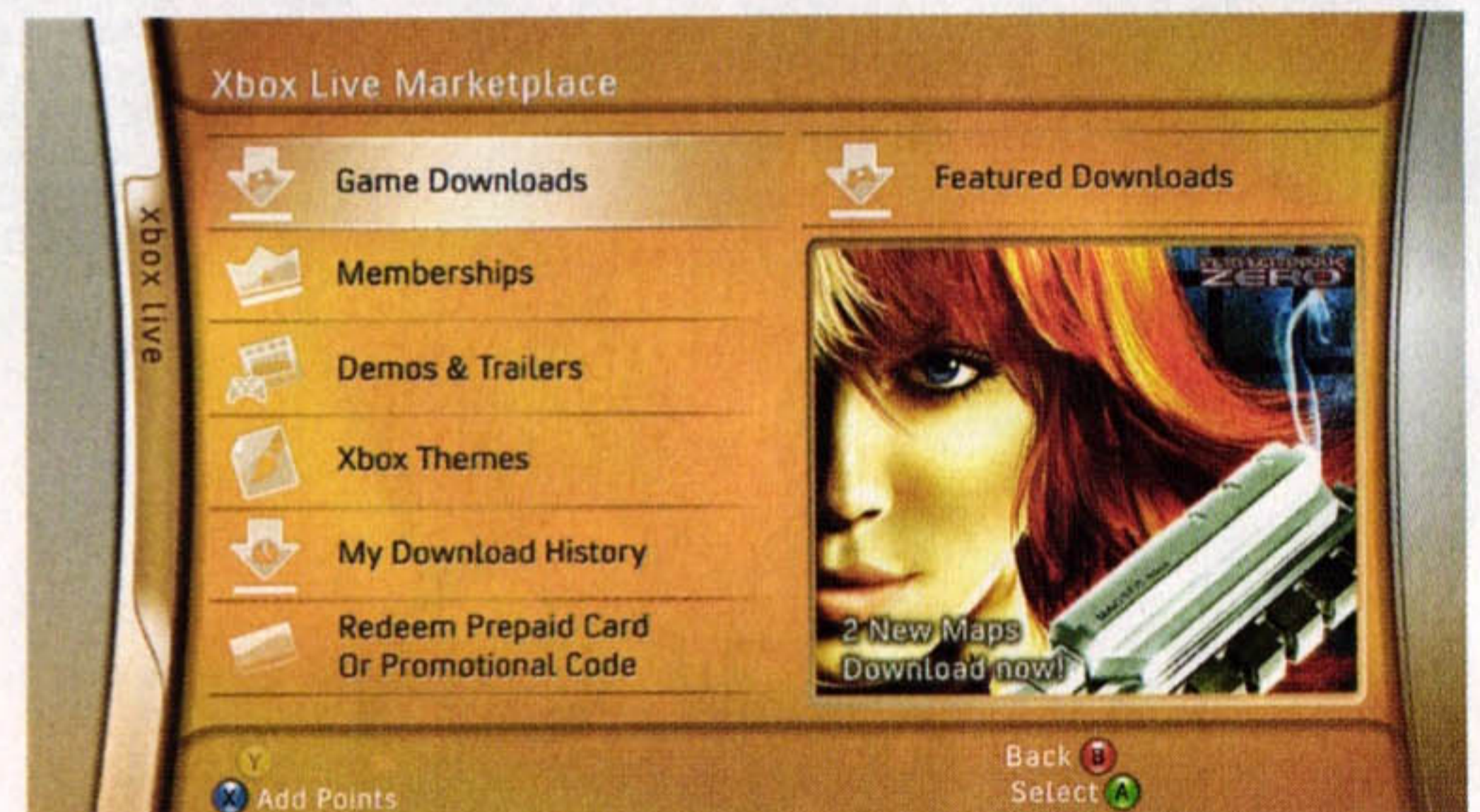
- Interchangeable to personalize the console



Microsoft is hoping to reach a broader range of gamers by offering various parlor games that also work with video chat through Xbox Live



You will notice that the Xbox System Guide also follows 360's concave look and easily lets you flip from games to media



The Xbox Live Marketplace will feature a wide variety of things for you to download for your 360

To make using wireless controllers and filtering all this information more clear, the 360 utilizes what Microsoft has dubbed the "Ring of Light." You will find this interface on both the front of the console itself and also on your controller (with each quadrant presenting a quarter of the circle). Player one, for example, is in the upper left hand corner.

When you sync your wireless controller with a 360 console (by pressing the small button next to the Memory Unit bays) your quadrant lights up to show you which player you are or where your orientation will be onscreen if you were playing a 4-player split-screen game. This not only makes it easy for the players to tell which controller is which, this also enables the system to deliver infor-

mation to each individual player.

For example, your corresponding quadrant will blink on both the unit and controller to show that you have incoming message from Xbox Live. But the uses for the Ring of Light are endless. Developers could use it to show player health (the lights can change between green, orange, and red), or perhaps inform you when a player goes link-dead, or simply needed to pause to answer a message from a friend. It's all up to the development community how they want to use this feature.

The final piece to the Xbox 360 puzzle is customization. Taking a cue from the ring tone business that has been so successful in the cell phone market, Microsoft plans to offer a ton of unique items through its Live Marketplace. Purchase different themes for your dashboard or perhaps buy custom rims for your car in a racing game. Microsoft is

going to let gamers make the 360 and its games into whatever the player wants them to be. In fact, the faceplate on the front of the system is removable so players can purchase different graphics for their console. Don't want a white Xbox 360? Simply snap the faceplate off the unit and replace it with any of a wide variety of fronts. Or perhaps the 20 gigabyte hard drive the unit comes with isn't enough for all your downloaded music. Simply press the button at the top of the unit and snap a different drive into place. Sold separately, of course.

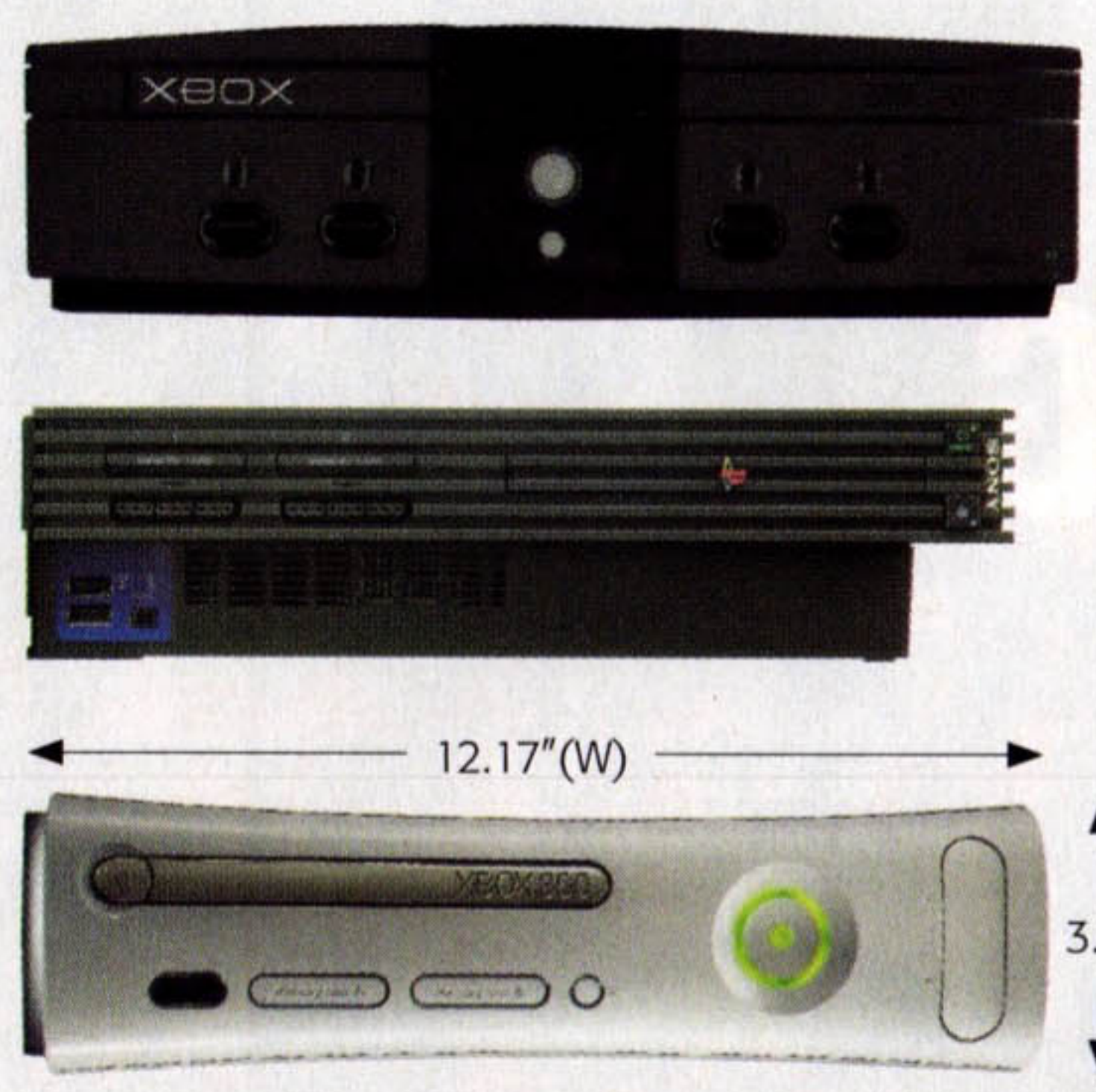
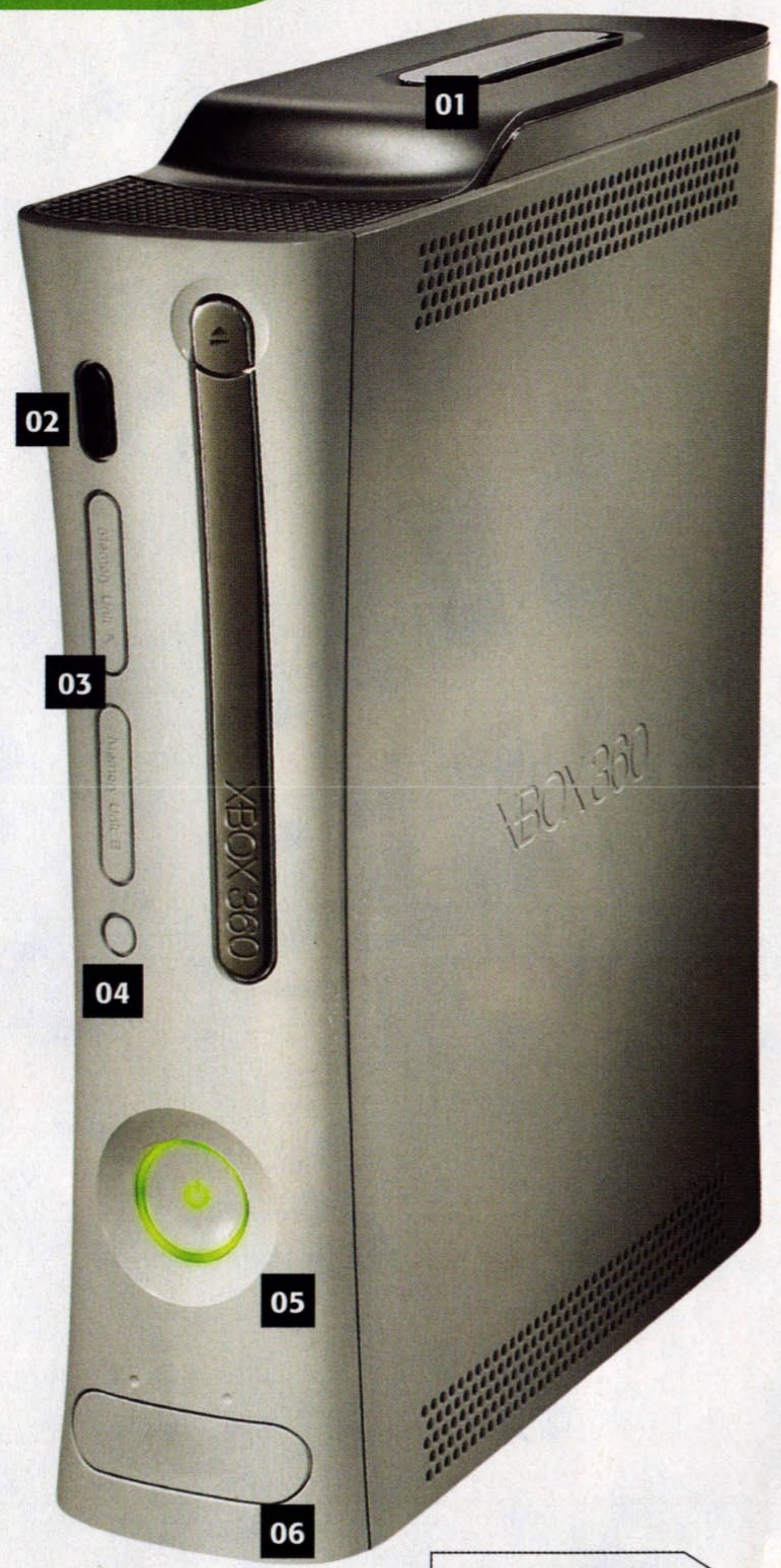
At press time, Microsoft hadn't determined a price point for the system. Microsoft did inform us that the base set-up will be the unit, a wireless controller, and the cables you need to plug it in – it was undetermined however if those cables would be standard NTSC fare or HD ready. Luckily, the 360 uses the same AV cables as the

current Xbox, so any investments you made into cables will work with 360. Backward compatibility is also undetermined, though reports point to most, but not all games being backwards compatible.

Of course, a system is only as impressive as the games it plays. Project Gotham Racing 3, Perfect Dark Zero, Call of Duty 2, and Gears of War are just a few of the titles you can expect to see on 360 in the year that follows its holiday launch. By getting to market first, Microsoft hopes to set a torrid pace for any platform appearing in its wake. In fact, it believes that it will be well into its second generation of games before its competition can bring a unit to market. Which only leaves the question, will 360 be a Dreamcast that came first and fizzled out, or will it usher in the HD era and find itself on the top of the console hardware charts? Only time will tell. ■■■

XBOX 360 SOFTWARE AND SERVICES FEATURES

OFFLINE 360 EXPERIENCES	FREE-OF-CHARGE XBOX LIVE FEATURES	XBOX LIVE SUBSCRIPTION BENEFITS
Online gameplay		X
Xbox 360 Guide that provides a consistent interface across all experiences	X	X
Xbox 360 Button for fast access to the Guide and online features	X	X
Personalized gameplay settings	X	X
Seamless transition of Xbox Live account from Xbox to Xbox 360		X
Access to MMOs (additional fees may apply)		X
Free Xbox Live weekends		X
Xbox Live Gamer Profile, including Gamertag, Gamertile, Motto, personalized dashboard look, Achievements, and access to other Gamer's Profiles via Xbox Live. Also includes Gamer Score, Gamer Zone (preferred style of gaming), Language/Location, Reputation, and matchmaking	X	X
Friends List, Recent Players List		X
Ubiquitous voice chat in and out of game		X
Credit card no longer required for Xbox Live access	X	X
Free and premium downloadable game content, movies, music, trailers/demos, and TV		X
Microtransactions		X
Game Invites/Friend Invites		X
Text, Voice Service/System Messages		X
Custom playlists in every game	X	X
Play music from portable music devices	X	X
View pictures from digital cameras	X	X
Stream Media from connected Windows Media Center PC	X	X
Windows Media Center Extender built in	X	X
Interactive, full-screen 3D visualizers	X	X
Retrieve Track Info for CDs		X
Parental Controls	X	X



- 01 Detachable 20 GB hard drive
- 02 Infrared sensor
- 03 The two memory unit slots
- 04 The sync button that establishes the wireless link between your controllers and the unit
- 05 Power button and circle of light
- 06 Front bay that houses two of the three USB 2.0 inputs
- 07 Xbox guide button
- 08 The audio jack for a headset is integrated with an expansion jack for other peripherals on the bottom of the controller



games

AFTER THE BIG BANG

EXPANSION PACK PICKS UP HALF-LIFE 2 STORY

Valve's fun with physics continues this summer in *Half-Life 2: Aftermath* for PC, an expansion pack to last year's hit title. This new adventure will only be available through Valve's download service Steam. At the time of this writing no retail copy was planned.

Aftermath naturally picks up where *Half-Life 2* left off, delving into what happens

after the destruction of Dr. Breen's reactor. Valve says it intends for Alyx to be more involved with the story, although you will still play as Gordon Freeman. *Aftermath* will reportedly be about one third as long as *Half-Life 2*'s campaign. Expect to hear more about this expansion pack after E3.

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Kelly Clarkson: Breakaway (RCA) 60388



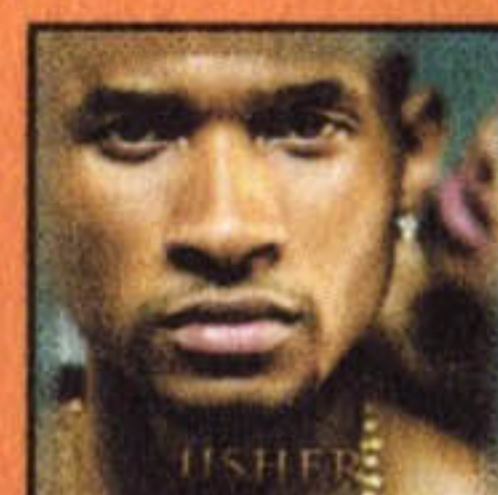
Good Charlotte: The Chronicles Of Life And Death (Life Version) (Epic) 60172



Sum 41: Chuck (Island) 60179



Kanye West: The College Dropout (Roc-A-Fella) 52098



Usher: Confessions (Special Edition) (LaFace (Zomba)) 60129



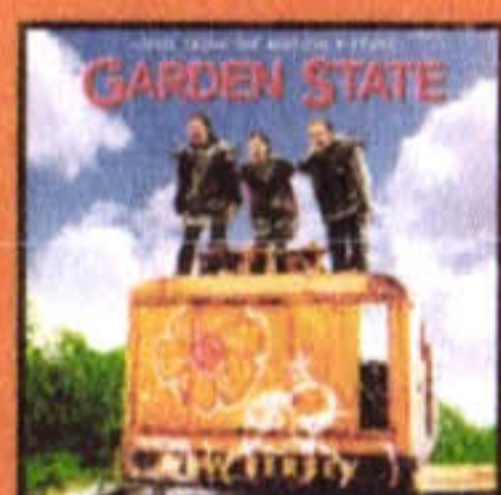
Velvet Revolver: Contraband (RCA) 53163



The Black Eyed Peas: Elephunk (w/bonus track) (A&M) 54073



Franz Ferdinand (Epic) 52786



Garden State/Sdtrk. (Epic) 53909



Modest Mouse: Good News For People Who Love Bad News (Epic) 52711



Korn: Greatest Hits, Vol. 1 (Epic) 60176



Gretchen Wilson: Here For The Party (Epic) 52840



The Killers: Hot Fuss (Island) 53027



Marilyn Manson: Lest We Forget--The Best Of (Interscope) 58992

- | | | | | |
|---|---|--|---|---|
| Loretta Lynn: Van Lear Rose (Interscope) 52694 | Crossfade (Columbia) 60551 | Clara: Goodies (LaFace (Zomba)) 54266 | Lamb Of God: Ashes Of The Wake (Epic) 54419 | Ludacris: Chicken-N-Beer (Def Jam South) 51166 |
| Disturbed: Believe (Reprise) 45562 | Pillar: Where Dr We Go From Here (Flicker) 52960 | Twista: Kamikaze (Re-Issue) (Atlantic) 60051 | Future Leaders Of The World: LVL IV (Epic) 60171 | Fabulous: Real Talk (Atlantic) 60354 |
| Run-DMC: Greatest Hits (Arista/BMG Heritage) 45587 | The Very Best Of Eagles (Rhino) 51578 | John Legend: Get Lifted (Columbia) 60062 | Good Charlotte: The Chronicles Of Life And Death (Death Version) (Epic) 60173 | Nonpoint: Recoil (Lava) 53790 |
| Basement Jaxx: Kish Kash (Astralwerks) 52214 | 50 Cent: Get Rich Or Die Tryin' (Shady/Interscope) 46446 | Terror Squad: True Story (Universal) 53502 | Willie Nelson: It Always Will Be (Lost Highway) 60276 | Train: Alive At Last (Columbia) 60361 |
| Staple (Flicker) 52222 | Sonic Youth: Sonic Nurse (Geffen) 53024 | Juanes: Mi Sangre (Universal Music Latino) 60096 | The Best Of Wes Montgomery (Riverside / Fantasy) 60298 | Skindred: Babylon (Lava) 53791 |
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| Radio 4: Stealing Of A Nation (Astralwerks) 58939 | Lynyrd Skynyrd: All-Time Greatest Hits (MCA) 33339 | Vanessa Carlton: Harmonium (A&M) 60166 | P.O.D.: Payable On Death (Atlantic) 60331 | Beyond The Sea/Sdtrk. Spacey sings Darin. (Rhino) 60396 |
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| Slipknot: Vol. 3 (The Subliminal Verses) (Roadrunner) 52925 | | | | |

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Akon: Trouble (Universal) 51666
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The Best Of Ray Charles: The Atlantic Years (Rhino) 05755
Joss Stone: The Soul Sessions (S-Curve) 50990

Incubus: A Crow Left Of The Murder (Epic) 52070
Johnny Cash: The Sun Years (Rhino) 64181
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The Diary Of Alicia Keys (J Records) 51850
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Barry White: All-Time Greatest Hits (Mercury) 05866
Damageplan: New Found Power (Elektra) 51982
Norah Jones: Feels Like Home (Blue Note) 52028
Kenny Chesney: When The Sun Goes Down (BNA) 52052
Dr. Dre: The Chronic (Death Row) 45517
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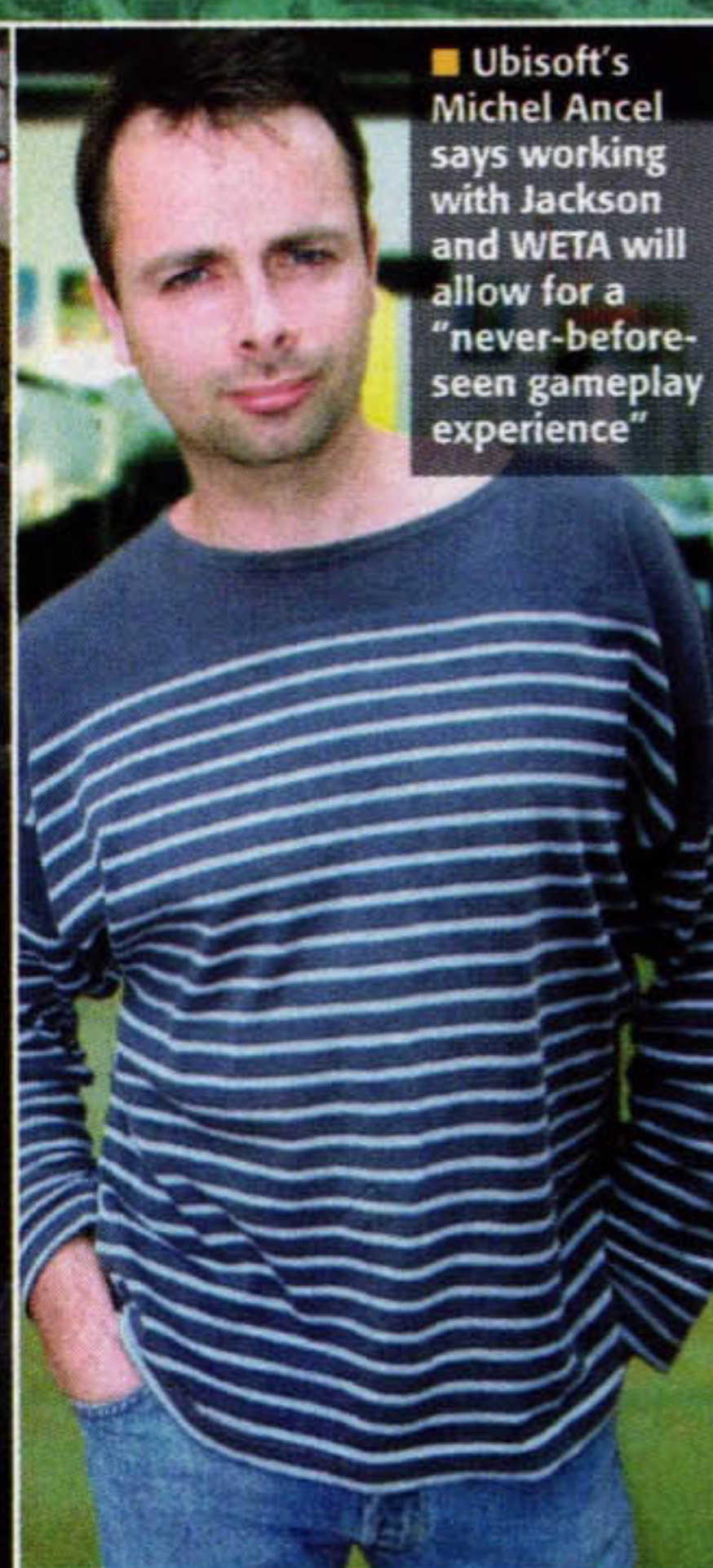
KING KONG IS COMING!

PETER JACKSON & UBISOFT TEAM UP

■ Concept art from Ubisoft's King Kong



■ King Kong's cast, dreaming of Oscar day. From left to right: Naomi Watts, Adrien Brody, director Peter Jackson, and Jack Black



■ Ubisoft's Michel Ancel says working with Jackson and WETA will allow for a "never-before-seen gameplay experience"

The world is anxiously awaiting Peter Jackson's next masterpiece, *King Kong*, which is expected to hit theaters before the end of the year. We are equally excited to see how Ubisoft and Rayman creator Michel Ancel bring Jackson's vision to the world of video games. King Kong is slated for both current and next-gen platforms to coincide with the film.

Jackson actually approached Ubisoft and Ancel after playing through his title *Beyond Good & Evil*. "Michel Ancel has a great storytelling skill in making you so involved in the game as a player that you actually become emotionally attached to the characters that you're playing," enthused Jackson. "If somebody this imaginative can take that story and actually get me so involved in it, this is the sort of person I'd love to work with on King Kong"

The pair are collaborating to make the title more than just a video game with a movie license tacked on. Ubisoft says that Ancel and his team in Montpellier, France are trying to recreate the tension and emotion inherent in the film and imbuing that into the game, while also letting players make decisions for themselves at key points. Of course, King Kong will also boast character likeness and voices, and the support of Jackson's renowned WETA production workshop. "Close collaboration has been really important from day one. We've given Ubisoft absolutely unlimited access to every creative aspect of our film production. We really want the game to be a close brother or sister to the film – like they belong to the same universe." Stay tuned for more on King Kong in the future.

news

TURNER NETWORK TAPS INTO GAMING

GAMETAP SERVICE OFFERS GAMES VIA BROADBAND

Turner Broadcasting (parent company to such cable stations as Cartoon Network, TBS, and Turner Classic Movies) is moving into video games through its GameTap service, which will offer games on demand to broadband PCs for a monthly fee estimated to be between \$10 and \$20. Although the company could not divulge a list of all its publishers and games at the time of this writing, it would tell us that it expects to have 21 publishers and over 1,100 classic arcade, PC, and console titles by the fourth quarter of this year. Current and next-gen titles are not offered by GameTap at this time. 300 titles are expected to be available when the service launches this fall.

GameTap can be accessed via download from the services' website (www.gametap.com) or

through free software. Once it's started, GameTap will show Game Cards for all the titles available, offering a description and footage of the title. Turner says that it will also provide MediaPlex content for the service, which will be videos and commentary talking about new and upcoming games and services.

Download times will vary, of course, and users won't actually own the titles. However, active subscribers can play any game as much as they want, whenever they want. GameTap offers no ESRB

Mature-rated titles, although parental controls can be used and sub-accounts can be created for up to four different users. Turner says that the games will be unedited, and will almost always accommodate the original easter eggs and cheat codes.



IT WAS



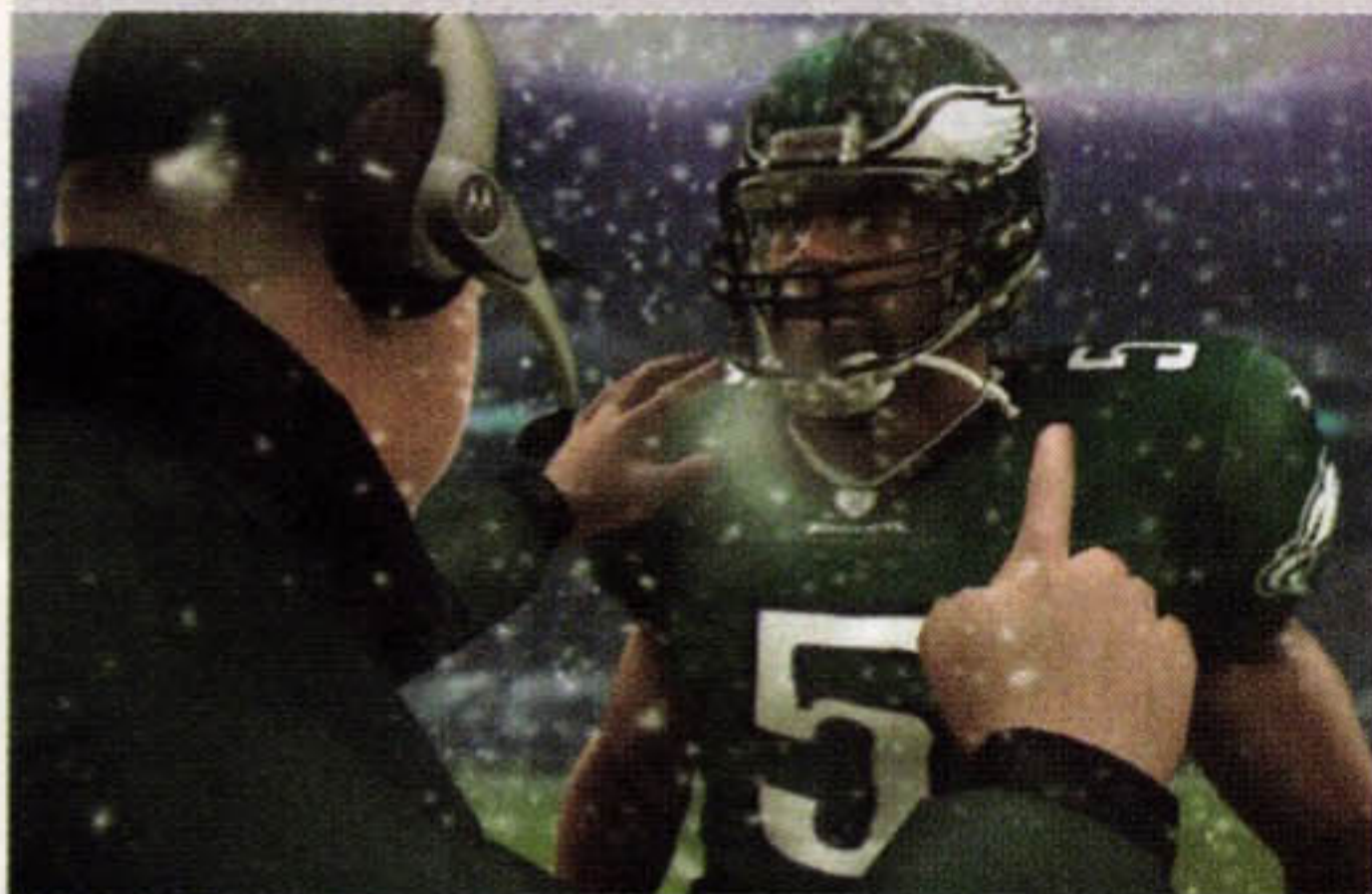


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LOOSE TALK

Hot Gaming Gossip



MCNABB ON MADDEN 2006 COVER

It looks like Philadelphia Eagles QB Donovan McNabb will be the coverboy for the upcoming Madden NFL title. Well, he won't have to worry about the Madden curse, because after losing three NFC championship games and running out of gas in the Super Bowl, what else has he got to lose?

NEXT-GEN DEV TIDBITS

Work has begun on titles for the next-generation PlayStation, with Loose Talk hearing that the development kits are about four times the size of an Apple G5 and are encased in steel cages. Expect to see video of some of these games on the show floor at E3. Meanwhile, some studios are having trouble with their Xbox 360 development kits. The trouble lies in the fact that games aren't running well on the new, second stage Alpha development kits. No word when companies can expect to see Beta kits, but hopefully things will run more smoothly as development continues.



HELLBOY FOR KONAMI?

Hellboy director Guillermo Del Toro has divulged that he is involved with a video game based on the movie, which would contain new monsters, villains, and storyline. Konami is rumored to be behind both the publishing and developing, but the company hasn't confirmed anything just yet.



SNOOP ON ICE

Despite our sweet cover story last year, Loose Talk has heard rumblings that John Singleton's Fear & Respect game has run into some trouble. Midway is contemplating moving back the game's release date into 2006. The game was tagged for the PlayStation 2 and Xbox, but it is unknown if it will step up to the next generation with this delay.



INDY'S NEXT-GEN ADVENTURE

Episode III is in theaters now, but publisher/developer LucasArts has plenty of non-Star Wars titles in the mix. The company is working on continuing the anarchy of the Mercenaries series and is planning a next-gen edition of Indiana Jones. We imagine that the game will coincide with the move that director Steven Spielberg and Harrison Ford have in the pipeline.

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

NAME THAT GAME

Test Your Sight

Long before Geico made amphibians cool, this PSone character (also appearing on the 3DO and Saturn for a time) was doing the same for then-publisher Crystal Dynamics. Our hero's first exploits were in side scrolling 2D, but he soon went totally 3D for his next two installments - which were his last. As the series' protagonist was TV-obsessed, levels often took after television shows, and the franchise had frequent references to the small and big screen courtesy of voice actor and comedian Dana Gould.

(Answer on page 32)



■ The newly renamed Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess for GameCube

NEWS

NINTENDO ADDS TO '06 LINEUP

ZELDA FOR DS ALSO IN WORKS

Despite the fact that the next-generation of gaming staring us in the face, Nintendo hasn't forgotten about its current platforms. The company has announced its lineup for the year, including a slew of Metroid titles and other interesting games that have been added to the roster.

Conspicuously absent from this list is the Legend of Zelda adventure for DS, which producer Eiji Aonuma recently announced. The title will be similar to Four Swords Adventures because it will connect multiple players (likely through the DS's Wi-Fi feature). The title will also utilize the system's dual screens and touch capability.

HERE IS A PARTIAL LIST OF NINTENDO'S 2006 LINEUP

GAMECUBE

- Battalion Wars
- Dance Dance Revolution Mario Mix
- Donkey Konga 2
- Mario Party 7
- Pokémon XD (a full-fledged Pokémon RPG)
- Super Mario Strikers (soccer title)
- The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess (formerly The Legend of Zelda)

NINTENDO DS

- Advance Wars
- Animal Crossing
- Mario and Luigi 2
- Mario Kart DS
- Metroid Dread (a 2D Metroid adventure)
- Metroid Prime Pinball
- Nintendo Tetris
- Touch Golf

GAMEBOY ADVANCE

- Donkey Kong Country 3
- Fire Emblem: The Sacred Stones
- Mario Tennis Advance

games

NINJAS WEAR BLACK
NEW NINJA GAIDEN FOR FALL

Say you're going to buy Ninja Gaiden: Black (it's basically an expansion pack for the original Xbox title) because it's got new enemies and weapons. Say you think that a Mission mode consisting of 100 wide-ranging missions to complete (including boss battles, time challenges, and more) sounds like a cool thing. Whatever you do, though, don't tell people you're going to buy Ninja Gaiden: Black because it has an Easy mode.

Beyond these features, this September title will also include new real-time movies, extra costumes when you beat the game, and the ability to upload your Karma scores to the Xbox Live leaderboards. Black essentially gives retail gamers the online Hurricane Packs, as well as some additional content.





Stalingrad - November 1942



THE NAZI WAR MACHINE RAGES ACROSS A DEVASTATED EUROPEAN LANDSCAPE.

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PlayStation 2

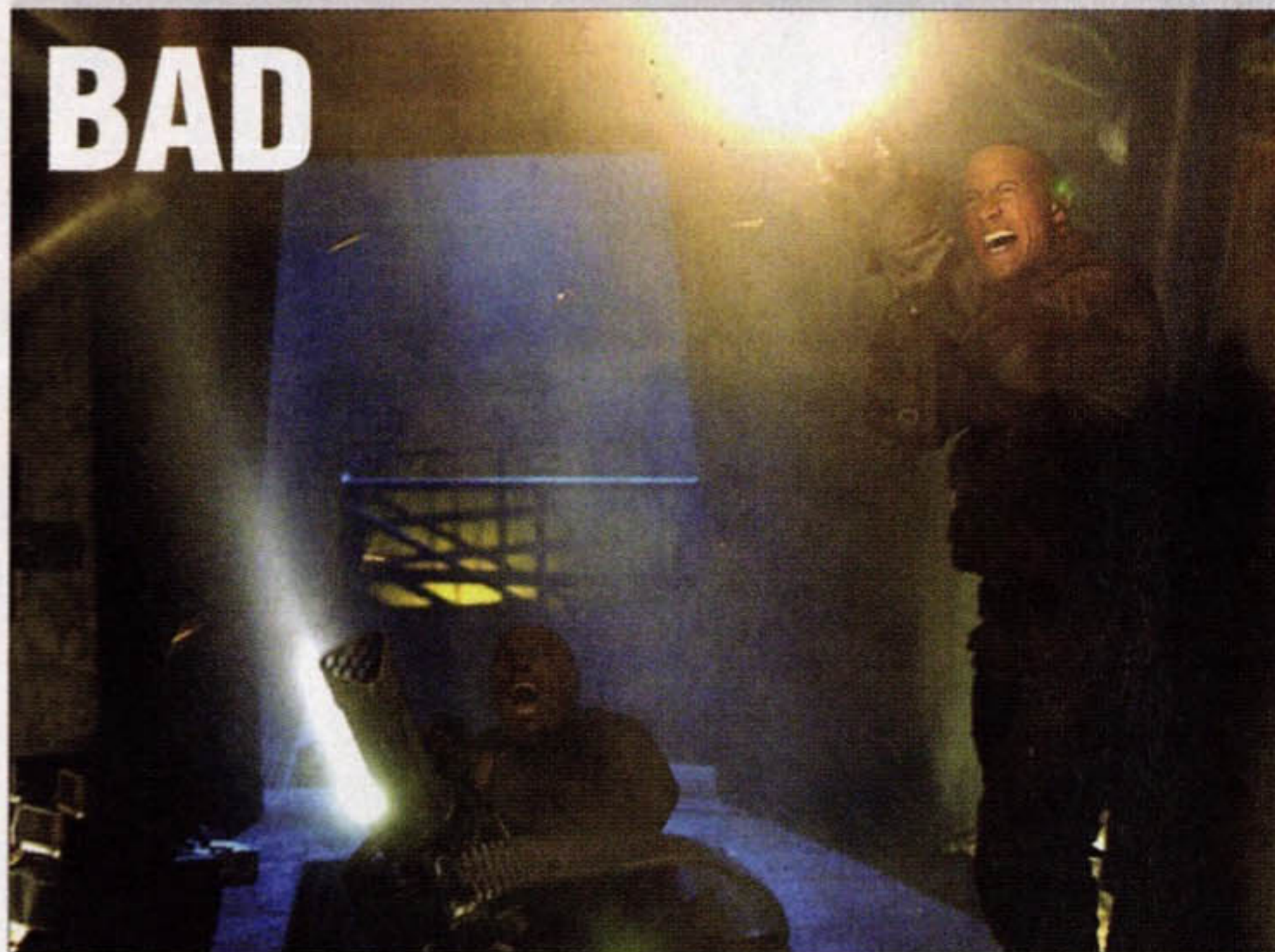


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THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY

When You Want Your News Categorized With A Sarcastic Editorial Spin

BAD



Here's one of the first shots of The Rock in the *Doom* movie, which has been delayed until October 21. Shooting guns, huh? Well, at least the film seems to capture the feel of the game.



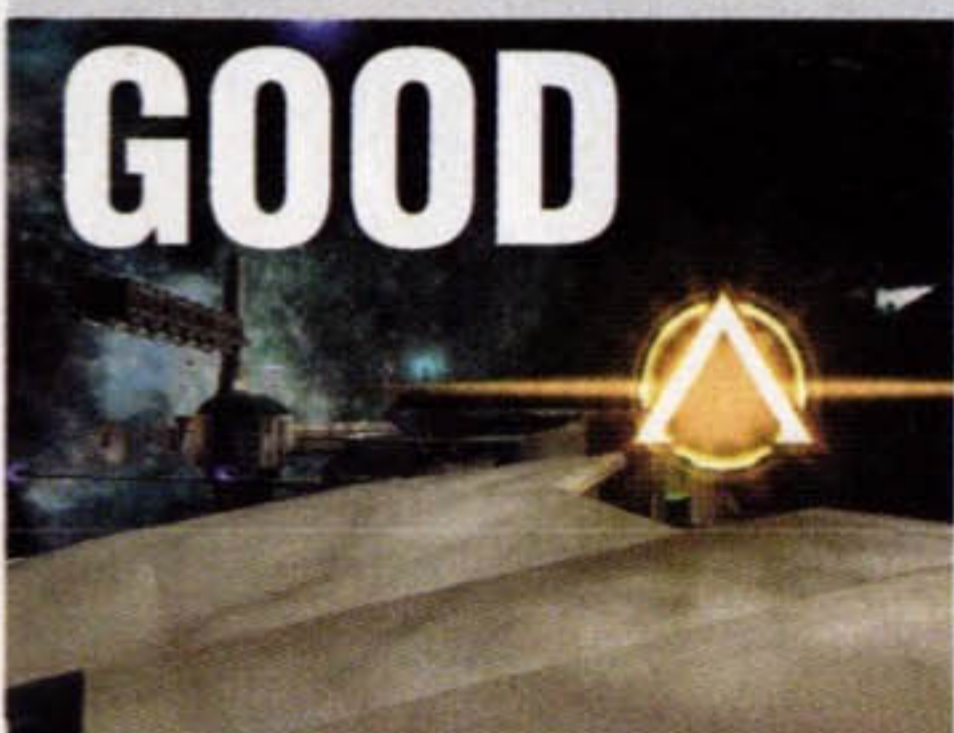
UGLY

Never go against the family. Electronic Arts' *Godfather* game is being made against the wishes of the director of the film trilogy, Francis Ford Coppola. Coppola says, "I had absolutely nothing to do with the game and I disapprove." Interestingly, EA officials say that the director was involved enough to okay the project and sit down and discuss it with them.

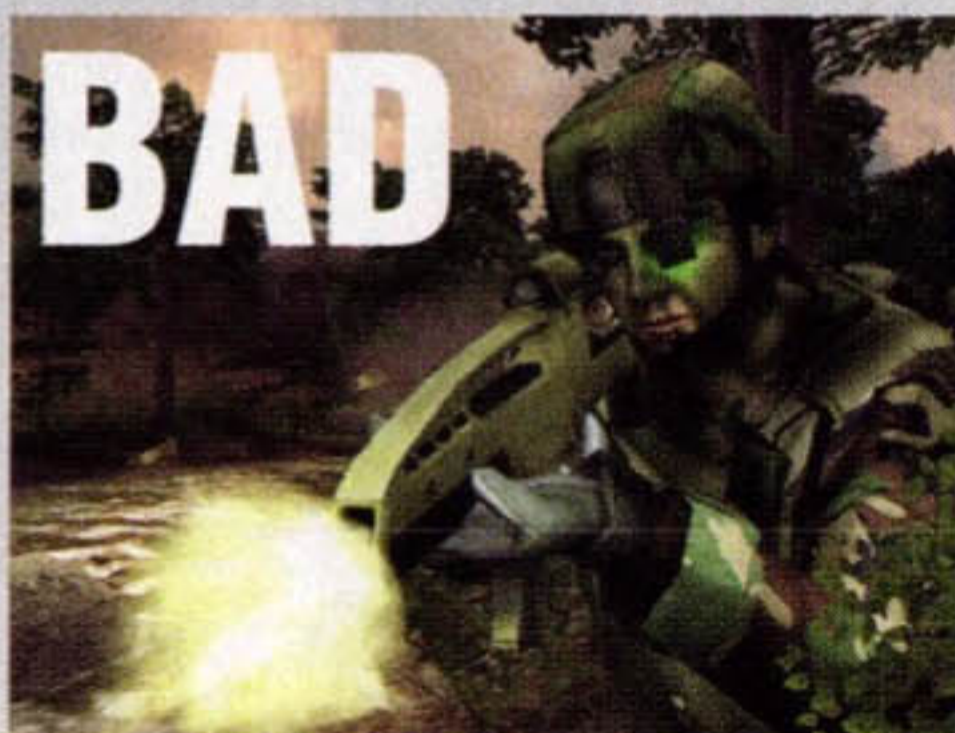


BAD

Just months after we broke the news that publisher Majesco was putting out *Oddworld Inhabitants'* follow-up to *Stranger's Wrath* entitled *Fangus*, we've learned that Majesco has bowed out of the project for unknown reasons. We expect to hear of a new publisher shortly.



Starting with its release on May 31, *Advent Rising* gamers can search for a million dollars and hundreds of prizes on Xbox Live. Once a week for six weeks, an icon like the one shown will be hidden in a level. The first to find it and punch in the code given on xbox.com will be that week's winner, with the ultimate prize being a million dollars.



The PC edition of *Ghost Recon 2* has been cancelled by Ubisoft. Originally intended to be rather different from its console brethren, Ubisoft says that the game wasn't turning out as planned, and that its development was starting to impinge on *Ghost Recon 3* (which will be out this winter).



GOOD

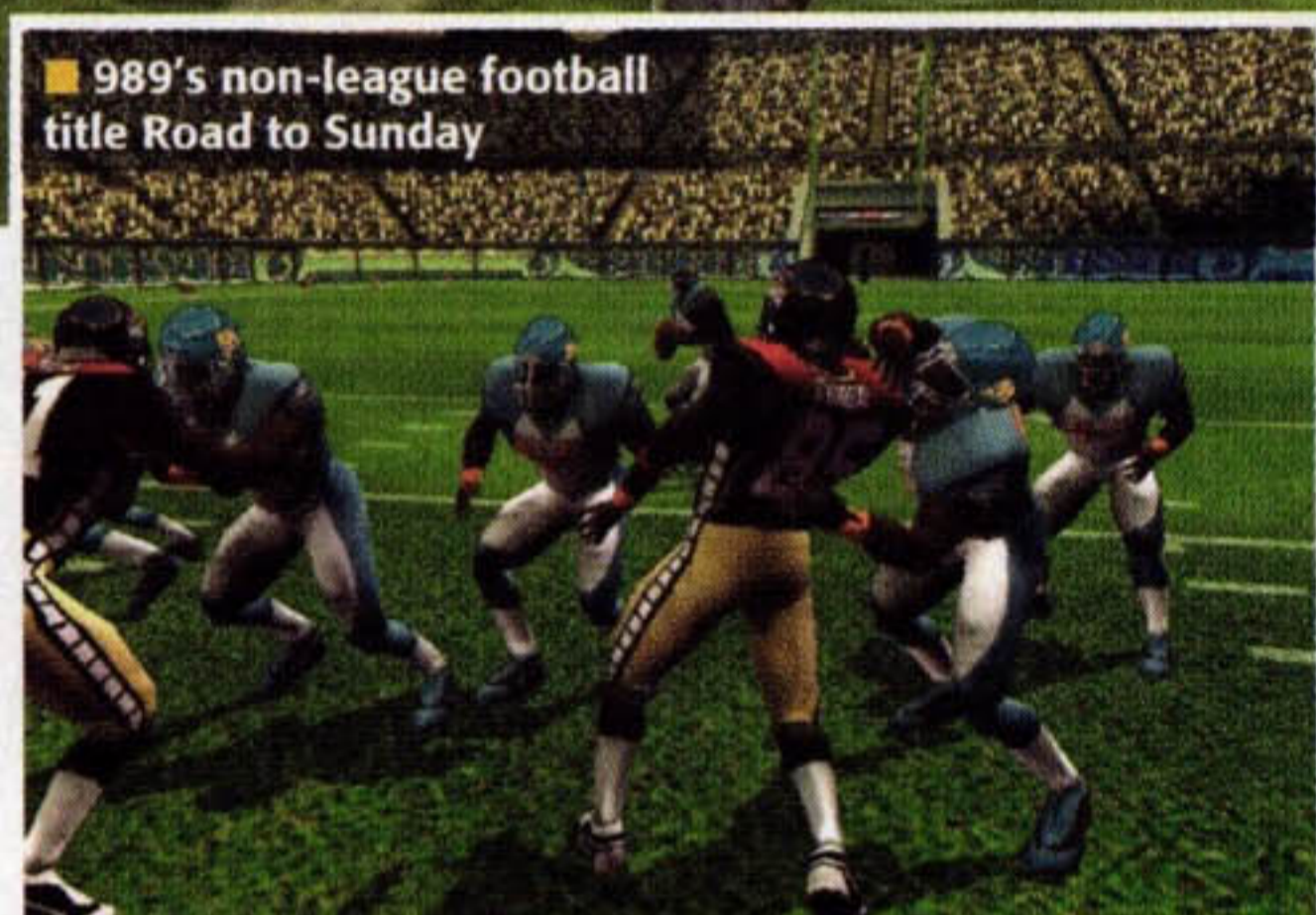
Horror master Clive Barker is teaming up with Majesco for the next-generation title *Demonik* (slated for release next year), which is also planned to be a film. Barker will oversee the story, character design and voices, and the game's cinematics. *Demonik* will be developed by Terminal Reality, the creators of *BloodRayne*.

news

EA GETS NCAA OTHER COLLEGIATE TITLES IN WORKS



■ 1989's non-league football title *Road to Sunday*



Electronic Arts increased its stranglehold on video game football recently with a deal with The Collegiate Licensing Company (representing the NCAA), giving the publisher the exclusive rights to college football teams, stadiums, and schools for the next six years – starting with this year's *NCAA Football 2006* (for PS2 and Xbox). This deal should expire one year after the company's exclusive contract with the NFL.

Game Informer talked to a spokesperson for EA, who told us that the parameters of the deal are very similar to the ones that the publisher has used in the past. In other words, you can expect the football franchise to feature the same divisions, schools, and teams that it always has – including deals with individual schools such as Notre Dame. Unfortunately, due to specific NCAA rules, there is no way to include real players' names.

As EA Sports' *NCAA Football 2006* was the only college football game on the market last year, this exclusive isn't as damaging to its competitors as when the company obtained the NFL license. It is this vacuum that actually led the NCAA to EA's door. We contacted The Collegiate Licensing Company's CEO, Pat Battle, who told us that EA's commitment to college football made the decision easy. "We went to EA and said, 'Look, you guys have done a great job in building *NCAA Football* into one of the top sports titles in the country, and we want to make sure that you are committed to continuing to build and invest in this being one of the best games in North America.'" From here, the NCAA began talking exclusivity.

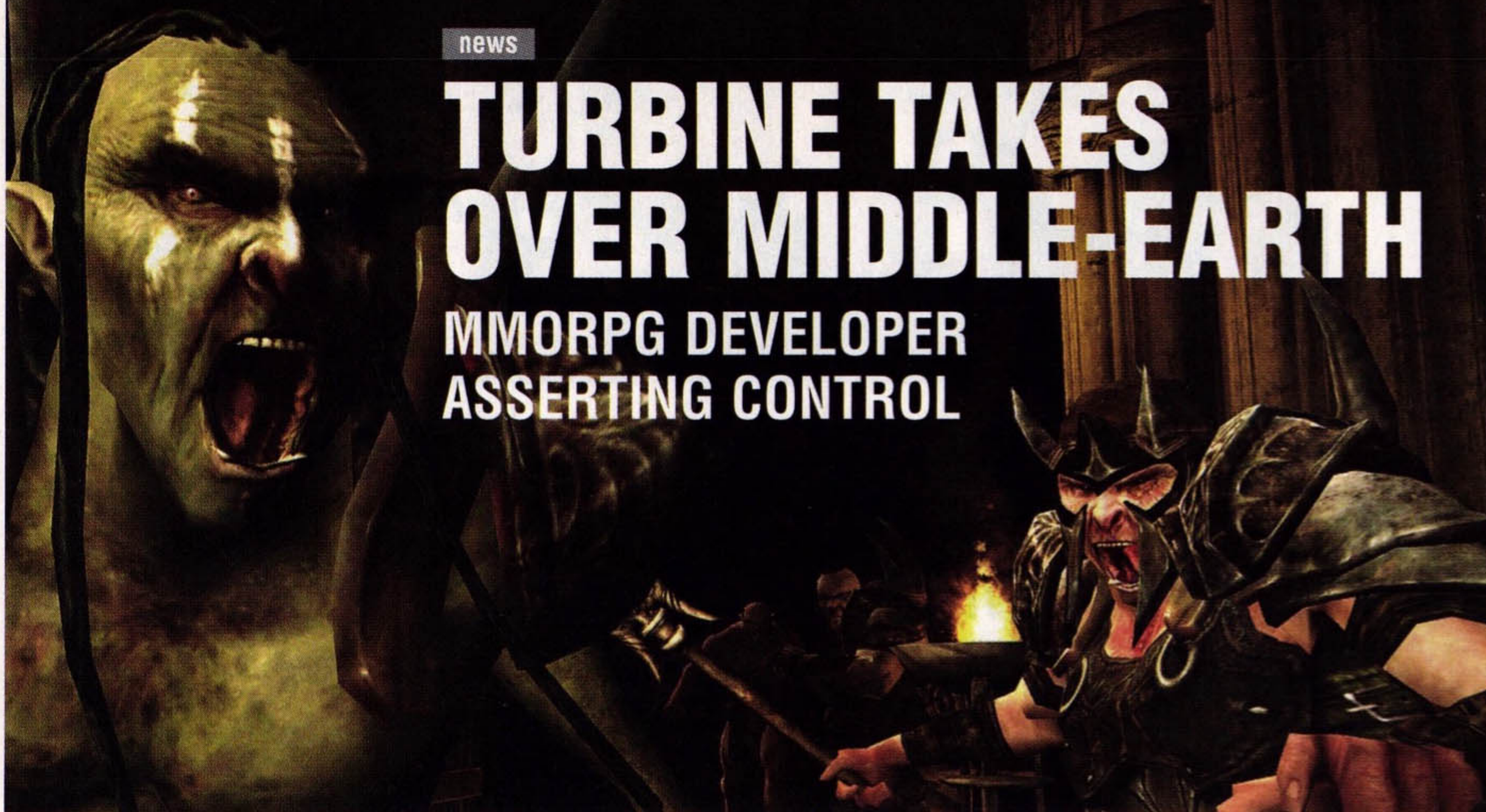
Interestingly, Battle said that other companies were marginally involved in the decision. "One of the companies said, 'We don't know,' and the other company said, 'We plan to get back into it, but it'll be at least '07 until we have a college football game.' Once we heard that, we didn't engage them in conversations on an exclusive, because they had not been committed enough to warrant that discussion." This revelation brings up the question: Who was planning on re-entering the college football market in 2007? Game Informer contacted EA Sports competitors Visual Concepts, Sony, and Ubisoft, but none of the companies would discuss the matter. However, a source told us that it was likely that Visual Concepts was the company Battle described as unsure of their plans, while Sony was working on a return to college football in 2007. Perhaps it was eyeing 2007 to coincide with the PlayStation 3. This is moot, however, as Sony has announced its return to football with a non-licensed, fictional pigskin product entitled *Road to Sunday* (pictured, inset).

Is college hoops going exclusive? We asked CLC CEO Battle, but he didn't think so. "My sense at this time is that that won't be exclusive." However, Battle did reveal that other collegiate sports are now being eyed by unnamed companies. "We are in active discussions with several companies about three different sports. We're talking about baseball – we're pretty far along in those discussions and we're excited about that. And also lacrosse and hockey. Based on the nature of the discussions so far, I expect that we would be announcing something fairly shortly on that."

news

TURBINE TAKES OVER MIDDLE-EARTH

MMORPG DEVELOPER ASSERTING CONTROL



Asheron's Call developer Turbine got attention when it announced that it was self-funding MMORPG Dungeons & Dragons Online and when the company acquired the Asheron's Call property from Microsoft. Now the streak of independence continues. The company announced that it has secured the license for all MMORPGs based on J.R.R. Tolkien's Lord of the Rings literary trilogy. Vivendi Universal Games still has the right to make titles based on the books (even if they include online components), but this deal was orchestrated by Turbine exclusively for the developer's bread and butter — MMORPGs. Turbine had already started work on The Lord of the Rings Online (formerly known as Middle-Earth Online), but is looking at making some changes due to the new deal. Therefore, the PC title won't ship until sometime until 2006.

Turbine's moves are towards self-reliance and more control over its products. In fact, the company is self-publishing two upcoming Asheron's Call expansion packs, Throne of Destiny (coming in mid-

summer) and Asheron's Call 2: Legions (out now). Turbine's director of corporate communication, Jason Wonacott, told us that the move to self-publishing is aimed at the fans. "Principally, when you are working as a developer for a large company who is running the service, their customer service people don't report to you or work for you. So if there are problems your fans are having, they are communicating not with your company, but with another one. We prefer to have a more direct pipeline to the customers themselves."

As far as the changes to The Lord of the Rings Online, Wonacott says that everything is being looked at. "Our previous relationship with Vivendi put us in a contract position, where they were contracting us to make Vivendi's game. Now that it's Turbine's game, we're critically looking at the game features, the style of gameplay, [and] what it actually means to re-create Tolkien's world and what it's going to mean to gamers to immerse themselves in this experience."

news

EVERQUEST II UP FOR SALE

SONY STARTS MARKETPLACE FOR EQ II GOODS



In a controversial move, Sony Online will inaugurate its own sanctioned marketplace called Station Exchange in late June. There, EverQuest II players can sell virtual characters, items, and coin for real-life money.

Sony made the move to quell complaints from players that they'd gotten ripped off by sellers on auction sites such as eBay. Although some players are angry that lazy gamers will now be able to buy characters or items that they haven't earned through hours and hours of playing time, and they don't want to play with inexperienced gamers posing as high-level characters, Sony sees an upside to the move. The company hopes that players will be able to experience more of the game, as well as multiple character types, without having to spend enormous amounts of time to do so.

Still, Sony is setting up servers that are separate from the regular ones for those who want to buy auctioned items from the Exchange. For a limited 30-day period, players can move pre-existing characters to the Exchange servers, but movement back to non-auction servers will not be allowed.

DATA FILE

More News You Can Use

NICE BRIEFS

Capcom's Nintendo DS lawyer simulator formerly known as Gyakuten Saiben has now been changed to Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney. Don't worry, he'll still do bankruptcies for \$50.



Your statement directly contradicts the autopsy report.

GI GOES TO THE MOVIES

Game Informer is making a small cameo in the 2006 film *Stay Alive*, starring Steve Zahn and Frankie Muniz. The movie is about an online horror game that kills its players in real life. We didn't know Mario Party was going online.

FATAL FRAME FOREVER

No, it's never safe to go into the dark. At least not as long as Tecmo keeps scaring the bejesus out of us with its Fatal Frame series. A third installment of the horror franchise is on the way featuring a new protagonist, 23 year-old Rei Kurosawa. However, Tecmo states that we will see some friends from previous Fatal Frames make important cameos.



ANGRY TRIBES UNITE

The Tribes: Vengeance community is in an uproar about a cancelled patch for the PC game. Publisher VU Games won't comment on the matter, but says that traditional customer support, etc. still remain for the title, but no patches can be expected anytime soon.



SONY OWNS YOUR BRAIN

This won't hurt a bit. Sony has patented technology that would beam sensory info such as smells, tastes, and images straight to the brain. Promising it wouldn't require surgery, this future technology could help blind people see and change the way we play games. Hopefully Sony will fix their disc reading problems before then.

RELIC'S COMPANY OF HEROES

THQ and Relic (Homeworld and Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War) are paying homage to WWII's Able company in Company of Heroes, a PC RTS utilizing Relic's Essence engine. The game will follow the story of Able company from D-Day through their legendary fight through Europe.



TOP FIVES

Favorites From Industry Pros And GI Readers

DEVELOPER
ANGELIC
QUINTANAAssociate Producer,
Incognito EntertainmentREADER
CHRISTIAN
HAGEN

Coon Rapids, MN



1 Hot Shots Golf

Fore! - PS2

2 The Sims - PC

Crash Bandicoot:

Warped - PSone

4 Namco Museum/Spy

Hunter - PS2/Arcade

5 God of War - PS2

1 Metal Gear

Solid - PSone

2 NBA Street

Vol. 2 - PS2

3 Unreal

Tournament - PC

4 Guilty Gear X2 - PS2

5 Golden Sun - GBA

Send Top Fives and a photo of yourself to:

Game Informer Magazine/Top Five

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Minneapolis, MN 55401-9022

email: topfive@gameinformer.com

(attach digital picture)

TOP TEN

Lists...Everybody Loves Lists...

Top Ten Rejected
Features of the
Xbox 36010 The ability to feel love, like Haley Joel Osment
in *A.I.*

8 Minesweeper and Solitaire

8 Having the entire run of *Small Wonder* preloaded
on the hard drive

7 Deep fryer

6 Turns into a robotic Bill Gates that destroys
all Sony products in your home (this feature will
be enabled later, through a mandatory Xbox Live
download with a one-time fee of \$49.95)

5 A plush Bloodwake boat in every box

4 Turntable, 8-Track, and cassette deck

3 Ads for Windows Longhorn beamed directly into
your brain via a fairly painful microchip implant2 Mating with your TV to spawn baby 360s while
you're sleeping

1 Racing stripes and mudflaps with girls on 'em

Name That Game Answer: Gex

Ubisoft expects its Shanghai office
(shown here and below) to grow to
1,000 people by 2006

news

WEST MEETS EAST

WESTERN DEVELOPMENT HEADS TO CHINA

In the video game industry, piracy is often the first thing that comes to mind when thinking of China, but companies such as Ubisoft, Electronic Arts, and Sega are starting to work within the country to transform it into an asset to the industry.

There are many things that make China attractive to publishers looking to grow, and it all comes down to one of the country's richest assets - its people. "As someone who's managed studios in America and Canada," explained Paul Meegan, executive vice president of production for Ubisoft Shanghai, "I can tell you that a lot of the guys here are among the best I've ever worked with." Since its opening in 1997, the number of employees at Ubisoft Shanghai has swelled to 400 people, and Meegan told us that more than 1,000 will work there by 2006. He credits the universities in the area as a big help in their recruitment of native talent, as well as the Ubisoft employees brought in from other countries.

Although Meegan admits that low wages is an attractive asset of working in China, the reason behind the studio isn't simply for the outsourcing of development jobs and to create ports of titles. In fact, the larger motive of publishers establishing a presence in Shanghai is not to exploit its population, but to serve them. Although Ubisoft Shanghai has historically lent a hand in developing for the worldwide market, the French company plans for the studio to create content specifically for the Chinese market, starting with an MMO adaptation of the Chinese film *The Promise*. Tapping this waiting populace is what other companies such as Electronic Arts and Sega are also attempting. Tomoaki Takayanagi, technical director of Sega of China, says that location is everything. Having a presence in the country is invaluable. "Being located in China helps us to understand the needs of the market, and respond to the market trends in a much more timely manner." For its part, Electronic Arts expects its Chinese studio to open its doors this year, and anticipates over 500 engineers, designers, and artists to be employed by the location before the end of the decade.

Due to rampant piracy within the country, these companies know that the traditional retail method of selling games is impos-

sible, making server-based PC MMORPGs the way to go. Switching their console focus to the PC (Sony first started selling the PS2 in mainland China in 2004) is something that these traditionally console-heavy companies are still investigating. Meegan told us that planting roots and hiring Chinese staff is just the tip of the iceberg of making games for the Chinese market. "I think anybody can come in here with a big bag of money and they can make every effort to build a studio in China, but I think they are going to have to realize that it takes time, and it takes patience and dedication to make something work."

Capturing the imagination of and understanding how the estimated 26 million Chinese online players like to play games

is something that all the companies are investigating. "People [here] like to play with their friends; they like to play online, in Internet cafés," explained Megan. "So I wouldn't say there's a difference in game design that really differentiates games in this market. I think it's really much more a matter of cultural context." Companies such as Sony Online have found out in the past that simply translating text into Chinese isn't the answer. For the *EverQuest II* release in China, Sony Online is teaming with Taiwanese online publisher Gamania for guidance.

Western publishers feeding the Chinese MMORPG market isn't the only future for the country. The logical conclusion for the burgeoning population of Chinese development talent is to not only feed their countryman's own appetite for video games (according to the Chinese government, indigenous developers account for only 10 percent of the product in the country), but someday bring their wares to Western audiences, similar to Korea's NCsoft striking gold with *City of Heroes*. EA's president

and managing director of Electronic Arts Asia, Jon Niemann, sees China as poised to be a leader in video game development. "Japan and the U.S. are the traditional leaders in creating lifelike game experiences via cutting edge 3D animation. The quality of 3D animation and game production in China is improving at the speed of light and we expect a revolution in futuristic video game animation style that draws from China's rich cultural heritage."

MADE IN CHINA
Here is a list of some of the titles being developed in China

SEGA

• Shenmue Online

The game is being co-developed by Korean online studio JC Entertainment, and is scheduled to only come out in China for the PC.

• Phantasy Star Online: Blue Burst

This is the PC compilation of the first two PSO episodes, including a few upgrades.

MIDWAY

• Psi-Ops

The PC edition of this title was made in China, although Midway does not have an office in the country.

UBISOFT

Ubisoft Shanghai, by far, has worked on more Western titles than any other of the publishers, including *Brothers in Arms: Road to Hill 30* (PS2), *Rayman 2* and *3*, *Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow* (Xbox), and more.

Shenmue Online





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CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

Ivy League

Hirschhorn graduates the prestigious Harvard University and begins on the path towards G4.

Patron of the Arts

Serves as an Arts Management Fellow for the National Endowment for the Arts, Jessie Helm's favorite pet project.

Tonight on Fox



After cultivating a highbrow background with the NEA, Hirschhorn takes the next logical step: a job as VP of development for Fox. At Fox, he helps guide projects such as *In Living Color*.

Movie Time



While at Fox, Hirschhorn produces two excellent and successful films in one year: *Bull Durham* and *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*, ensuring that a whole generation believes in the hanging curveball, the small of a woman's back, and giggles at the mention of "genital cuffs."

The Magic Kingdom



Hirschhorn leaves Fox for the greener pastures of Disney. There he helps relaunch *The Wonderful World of Disney* for television, and oversees many new animated series.

Oscar Night



His career in movies hits a peak with Robert Redford's gripping drama *Quiz Show*, which Hirschhorn helped develop during his tenure at Disney. The movie wins several Oscar nominations, including Best Director and Best Picture.

Gaming Television

Hirschhorn, a lifelong fan of gaming and television, combines his two interests into G4 Television, which goes on the air for the first time in 2002.



CHARLES HIRSCHHORN

FOUNDER/CEO G4 TELEVISION

>> Charles Hirschhorn has taken his extensive background in television and created G4, the world's first cable channel devoted entirely to video games. We recently sat down with Hirschhorn and asked him about the network's acquisition of Tech TV, future G4 programming, and the company's plans for a broadband gaming service. <<

In coming up with the concept for G4, you must have thought that there was a hole in the marketplace for gamers. What did you think G4 was going to bring to the table things that like Tech TV and Electric Playground didn't?

Well, I think video games are this generation's rock n' roll; they're this generation's lifestyle interest. They're culturally relevant, but they're not really understood by their parents, their teachers, [or] their congressmen. They're a new popular cultural forum for this generation. It seemed like there was a big opportunity to create a channel that speaks to this generation that's interested in video games and interested in the lifestyle that surrounds video games.

Conceptually, was MTV in the 1980s the model for G4? Do you see this becoming what MTV was to that decade?

Well, if we achieve one-tenth of what MTV has achieved we'll all be very happy... I do think your analogy to MTV is a good one in the sense that most of MTV's programming came out of the music

TV, you can't be watching TV at the same time. You have only one screen. We sort of approach that challenge in two ways. One, we try to create compelling content. So, when you're not playing you want to watch it or, if you're playing on your PC or have two television screens, you can watch it simultaneously. The other way is we are working with some of the game companies to create a gaming platform that will be a high speed, broadband gaming platform. So, if you're interested in interacting with G4 to game or while you're gaming, we'll be part of providing that service, not just a linear television service.

How would that work? Would you be able to download demos through G4?

I can't talk about it at great length but only to say that we're developing what we think is a robust gaming tier with game companies, ourselves, and our cable and satellite partners.

What prompted the decision to acquire TechTV? What were the benefits for G4?

Well, there were two real motivations. One was distribution. With the acquisition of Tech TV we were able to grow G4 from 12 million homes to over 50 million homes. And the second was, they had some programming expertise, in particular *X-Play*, but also some online and live programming expertise that were very beneficial to acquire... For example, *X-Play*, the highest rated show on Tech TV, is currently the highest-rated show on G4.

We found a lot of talk on blogs and message boards from TechTV fans that were pretty displeased with the acquisitions and changes that were made following the merger. How would you address those criticisms?

Well, I have a great deal of empathy for the former Tech TV viewers, because it's tough. The channel was sold. The owner had lost interest in the channel. What we're trying to do is video game television that is much more video game-centric for a 12- to 34-year-old audience. Their audience was much more tech-centric, for an older audience. A lot of programming that used to exist on Tech TV doesn't exist anymore. So, I understand their frustration. We still try to provide some tech programming inside *Attack of the Show* and *Filter*, and we're hoping to do more in the future. So, my hope is that they'll give us a chance and we'll win them back.

Some of your new programming, like the automotive-centric *The Whip Set*, seem to be branching out of the traditional gaming realm to more lifestyle-oriented material. Are you going to go in the direction of VH1 and MTV, where music is only a smaller portion of the total lifestyle package?

Our goal is to remain video game television. Video games are the sun that all our programming planets revolve around. But certainly, we want to take one step with some of our programming out of center. So, *The Whip Set* is a good example. Drifting is a Japanese motorsport that was imported to this country via video games. So, it owes its roots to Japan and video games, and we think it's totally appropriate to our audience. Clearly, they're interested in it. EA and *Need for Speed: Underground* are part of the programming, so it still has one foot in video games. We're also looking at video game-based animation as something [that] can add more traditional entertainment.

Video games are the sun that all our programming planets revolve around.

industry, which was generating music and music clips at the time. As opposed to the traditional television industry, which ultimately grew out of radio, in terms of producing soap operas and dramas and comedies and news. I do think we're more on the MTV paradigm in the sense that we turn to the video game industry to produce content, whether that's gameplay or cinematics or original programming.

There's been some data in recent years that the 18- to 34-year old male demographic isn't watching as much television as they used to. Is G4 an attempt to lure them back?

Well, we hope so. Basically, there's lots of media and entertainment options for everyone. Men 18 to 34 in particular are aggressive consumers of media. But, so far, we're the highest concentration of men 12 to 34 anywhere on television. So we're happy that we've been able to attract that audience and we're investing heavily in programming and marketing to attract more of them.

Is there a concern – because you are focused on video games – that a big portion of your target audience spending their time playing games and not watching television?

Yes, I think that's a unique challenge for us. As you point out, obviously if you're playing games on your

We read an article in which Larry Gerbrandt, a television analyst, said that the network still lacks a breakout hit, a "must-watch" show like *Queer Eye* or *Monster Garage*. Do you think that's true, and what do you think that show would be for your network of your upcoming new shows?

Well, I would agree that you need a "must-watch" show to take any network to the next level. Clearly, what *The Simpsons* did for Fox or *South Park* did for Comedy Central. Nothing replaces the halo effect of a hit show. We're not only looking to improve our existing shows, but we're constantly adding new shows. In March, we premiered *Attack of the Show*, which is our daily live show, and in April we premiered *The Whip Set*. You only know in hindsight when you've created a hit, but we're obviously trying to create those opportunities.

What are your goals for G4? Where do you see the network in five years?

There are two goals. One, I want G4 to really be the focus of video game enthusiast's television interests. At the same time, I want G4 to be accessible to video game enthusiasts through all forms of media, whether it's through video gameplay, or broadband Internet, or television, or wireless. I want people to have universal access to G4 content.



THE
REVOLUTION
WILL BE
TELEVISED

■ Charles Hirschhorn wants G4 to be the channel of choice for the gaming generation

**HARNESS THE POWER OF FOUR
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GAME BOY ADVANCE

PlayStation 2



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ACTIVISION

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tech

GIZMONDO

Manufacturer: Tiger Telematics

Website: www.gizmondo.com

List Price: TBA



The handheld market is already crowded with sexy devices vying for our gaming dollars, and after a recent British launch, newcomer Gizmondo will be jumping into the ring as well. Differentiating itself by running Microsoft Windows CE, the initial feature set is more robust than current offerings and features multimedia messaging on top of integrated MP3 and MPEG 4 video support. In addition, GPS, a digital camera, and Bluetooth are more phone-like features that the company promises to take advantage of in the games. Memory is handled through removable SD cards (which are generally more affordable than Sony's Memory Stick format used in the PSP), and the 2.8-inch TFT color screen displays graphics produced through the ARM 9 400Mhz processor and GoForce 3D 4500 Nvidia graphics accelerator.

THE BRITISH LAUNCH

While a stateside debut isn't scheduled until fall of this year, the UK launch scheme is going to be followed on this side of the pond. Here's what to expect:

► Smart Ads that use the GPS to provide location-specific advertising (think coupons for nearby stores or movie times for a close theater) will start up around launch. The company promises that no more than three ads will be delivered per day

► Initial prices fall into three categories: around \$400 for the basic launch unit that won't receive ads by default; about \$245 for the Smart Ads-enabled version; and around \$375 for the Smart Ads Value pack that bundles in hi-fi headphones, a 128 MB recordable SD card preloaded with demos, a copy of the game Trailblazer, and a voucher for the upcoming Colors game

► So far, the company has announced 89 games planned for the unit including titles like Age of Empires, MechAssault, Conflict: Vietnam, Worms World Party, Alien Hominid, and Colors (which uses the GPS to organize the game's territory-focused gameplay)



■ Colors



■ Richard Burns Rally



■ Trailblazer



■ Worms World Party

■ Using the existing GPRS network (it's probably how your cell phone gets to the Internet), Gizmondo will offer wide-area network gaming. This, coupled with the built-in GPS, allows developers to make games that know where players are in relation to each other

home entertainment

L1980Q

Manufacturer: LG Electronics

Website: www.us.lge.com

List Price: \$795.00 (19-inch model)

LG is trumpeting their f-Engine technology in this flat-screen line (also available in a 17-inch model with more possibly on the way), which is supposed to enhance colors, contrast, and image quality. The monitor's 8ms response time and the lush visuals it produces are truly stunning. Another interesting point is that the screen flips totally backwards, ostensibly so that you can show the person on the other side of your desk that sweet wallpaper you just downloaded.



peripherals

MX 518 GAMING-GRADE OPTICAL MOUSE

Manufacturer: Logitech

Website: www.logitech.com

List Price: \$49.99

There's some cool stuff going on with this newest entry in Logitech's excellent gaming-peripheral lineup. The MX 518's 1,600-dpi resolution optical engine matches their other high-end offerings, but the coolest gaming-related feature is the sensitivity adjustment. Available anytime (even if you haven't installed the drivers), the feature lets players switch from per-pixel precision to easy, sweeping moves at will.



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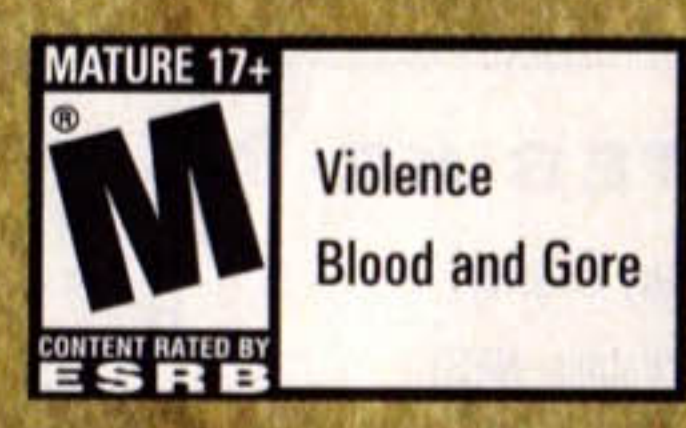
JadeEmpire.xbox.com

Microsoft
game studios

BIOWARE™



it's good to play together





pc

AURORA: STAR WARS EDITION

Manufacturer: Alienware
Website: www.alienware.com
List Price: TBA

Since the Star Wars franchise is frantically burning with the heat of a thousand pulsars, Alienware has come to the rescue of potential computer owners just in time for the final movie. The first (and only) officially licensed Star Wars PC comes in Light and Dark Side flavors and offers impressive innards from the company's Aurora line.

tech

S710A

Manufacturer: Sony Ericsson
Website: www.sonyericsson.com
List Price: \$449.99

Limiting the number of gadgets one has to carry at all times is a great trend in technology design, and Sony Ericsson's S710a cameraphone (currently available through Cingular in the States) ably merges a decent digital camera with high-end cell phone features. The unit offers a 1.3 megapixel camera (with a flash) on one side, and a beautiful 2.3" screen on the other. While making calls, managing contacts, and taking pictures can be handled with the phone closed, the screen easily swings out to reveal a standard phone keypad for text messaging and dialing numbers that aren't already in your directory. Sony Ericsson also packed in EDGE technology (for faster online access and downloads) and Bluetooth, which opens up the accessory possibilities to include wireless headsets and hands-free car setups.



etc.

I AM 8-BIT

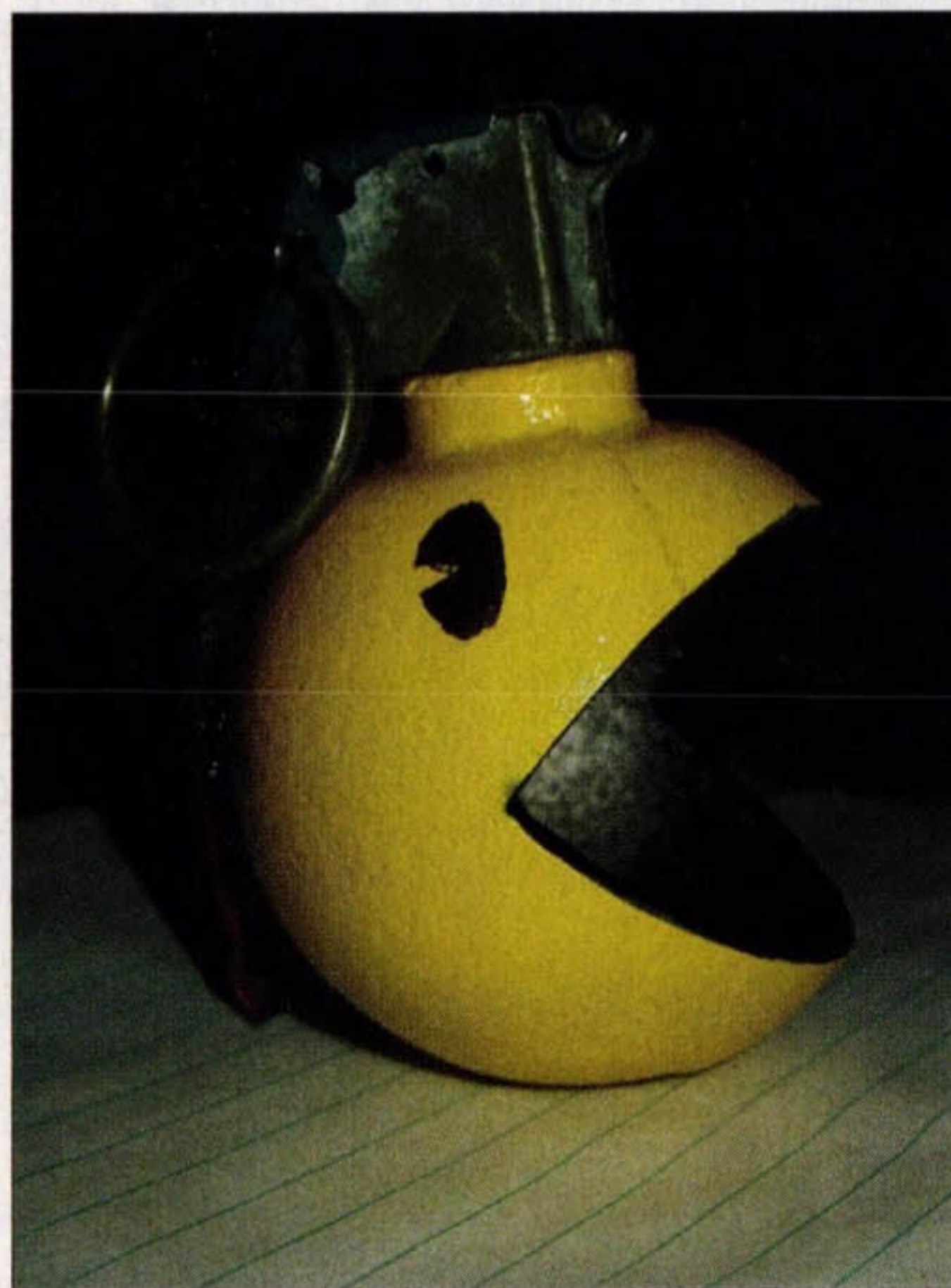
Manufacturer: Various Artists
Website: www.iam8bit.net
List Price: TBD

The I Am 8-Bit art show in Los Angeles closes on the first day of E3, but the online store and artists will thankfully live on. Check out the website for limited edition prints and t-shirts from the show's artists, as well as game-inspired plush figures from Anna Chambers. Those who make it to the show can pick up the originals on a first-come, first-served basis. All cool, but consider yourself forewarned that some pieces aren't for the kiddies.



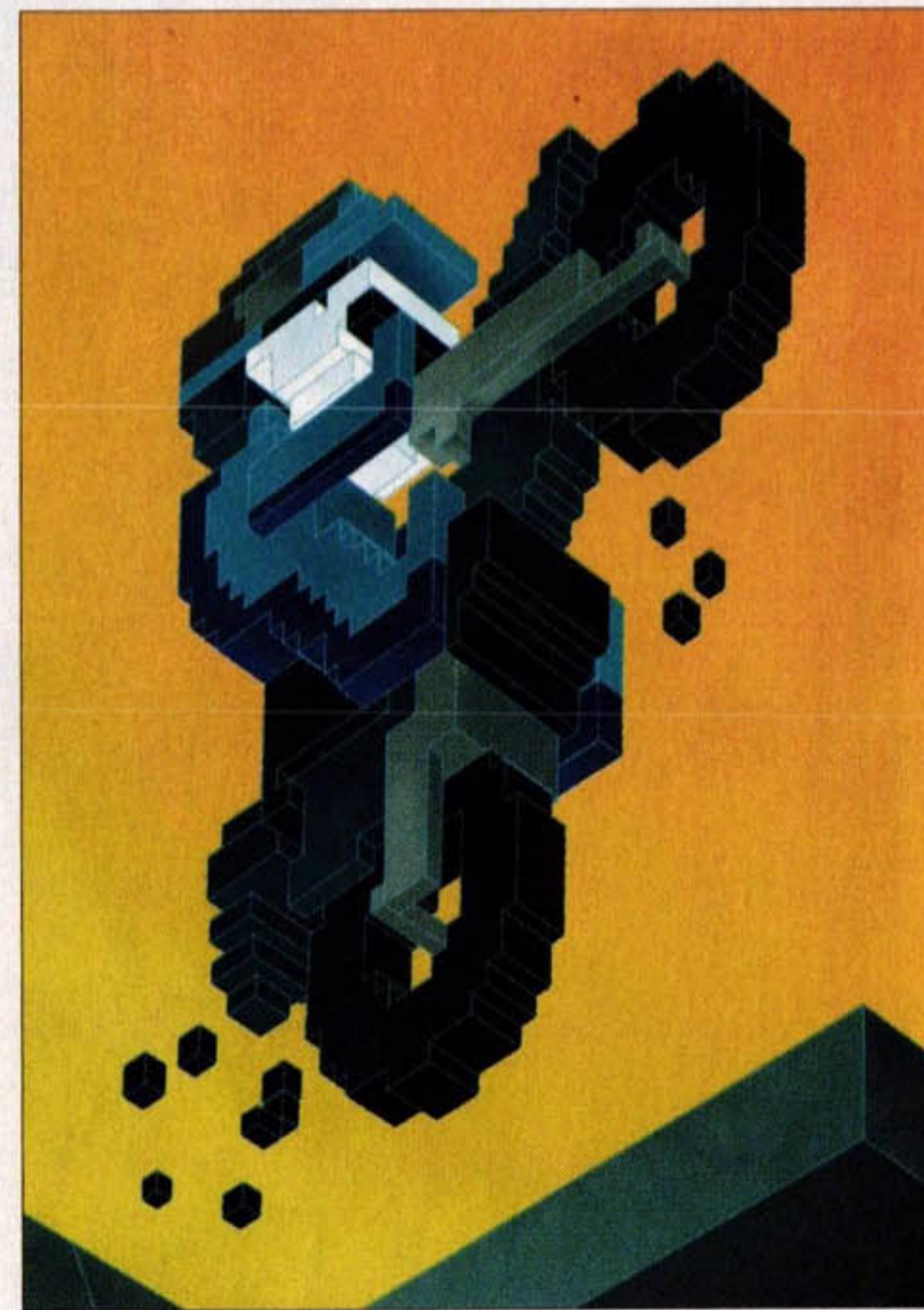
KIRBY, TAKE ME AWAY!

By Sandra Equihua
(from Kirby, NES)
acrylic on illustration board, 6x15



PAC-MAN

By Peter Gronquist
(from Pac-Man, arcade)
grenade



EXCITEBIKE

By Sean Clarity
(from Excitebike, NES)
illustrator, acrylics and orystrmacolor
pencil on canvas, 11x17



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- 4) My Boo poly3153
- 5) James Bond poly3154
- 6) Because I Got High poly3155
- 7) Tubular Bells (Exorcist Theme) poly3156
- 8) Boulevard Of Broken Dreams poly3157
- 9) Let's Get Blown poly3158
- 10) Milkshake poly3159

All Time Favorites 1

99 Red Balloons	poly3160
Another Brick In The Wall	poly3161
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Batman (TV Theme)	poly3163
Cotton Eye Joe	poly3164
Dueling Banjos	poly3165
Flintstones	poly3166
I Don't Want To Be	poly3167
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Knight Rider	poly3169
Low Rider	poly3170
My Prerogative	poly3171
Push It	poly3172
Rock Your Body	poly3173
Rocky	poly3174
Saved By The Bell	poly3175
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Stand Up	poly3178
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We Like To Party	poly3181
Welcome To My Life	poly3182
When I Think About Cheatin'	poly3183

Top Sound FX 4

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BlingBling - Textmessage	fun2081
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Karate-Girl	fun2088
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The Crazy Frog Goes To Mexico	fun2099

Realsounds 6

All That I've Got - The Used	real1460
American Idiot - Green Day	real1461
Boulevard Of Broken Dreams - Green Day	real1462
Breathe - Fabolous	real1463
Bring Em Out - T.I.	real1464
Get Some Crunk In Yo System - Trillville	real1465
I Wanna Be Sedated - The Ramones	real1466
I'm Not OK - My Chemical Romance	real1467
Knuck If You Buck - Crime Mob	real1468
Let's Go - Trick Daddy	real1469
No Problem - Lil Scrappy	real1470
Overnight Celebrity - Twista	real1471
Rock N Roll High School - The Ramones	real1472
Save A Horse Ride A Cowboy - Big And Rich	real1473
Sheena Is A Punk Rocker - The Ramones	real1474
So Much More - Fat Joe	real1475
So Sexy (Clean Edit) - Twista	real1476
Sponge Bob Movie Theme	real1477
Still Tippin' - Mike Jones	real1478
Welcome To My Life - Simple Plan	real1479

Hip Hop & Soul 1

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Billie Jean	poly3186
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Dirt Off Your Shoulder	poly3189
Encore	poly3190
Flap Your Wings	poly3191
Get Right	poly3192
Gin And Juice	poly3193
Grindin	poly3194
Ho	poly3195
I Ain't Mad At Cha	poly3196
If I Ain't Got You	poly3197
Jigga My Nigga	poly3198
Keepin It Gangsta	poly3199
Nuthin' But A "G" Thang	poly3200
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Stunt 101	poly3203

Cool Wallpapers 3



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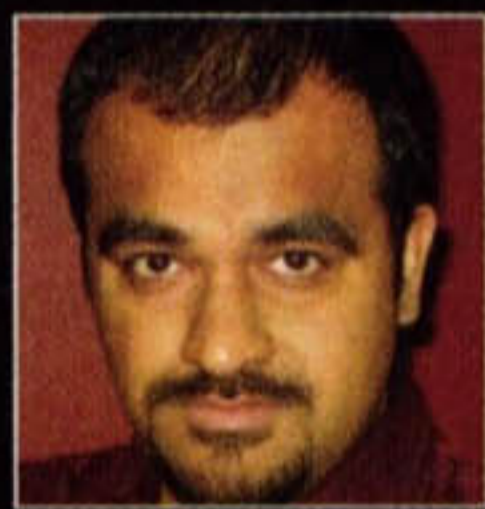
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Realsounds: LG G4015, C1300, G4020, L1150, L1400, MOTOROLA V300, V220, V551, V400, V600, V180, V505; SAMSUNG X426, X427, X427M, D415; NOKIA 6600, 6230, 3650, N-Gage QD, 3200

Animated Screensavers 5

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GETTING OUR UNIQUE STORY STRAIGHT



BY JAMIL MOLEDINA, DIRECTOR,
GAME DEVELOPERS CONFERENCE

Humans love analogies. They help us make sense of the world, and inversely, they help us explain ideas to others. In communicating games and game creation to the media, to politicians, other industries, and the public at large, the most irresistible analogy has to be the film industry. After all, game development is like filmmaking, in that both industries labor to produce a vicarious entertainment experience that is half art, half product. The special effects tools and studio management philosophies used by the two industries are merging. Game revenue rivals that of film revenue. These are the mantras we proudly trot out to beguile game industry n00bs when we are confronted with large-scale ignorance about games. But it doesn't help when our attempt to remedy that ignorance serves to compound it with concepts that are at best misleading.

We need to present an accurate image of the uniqueness of the game industry to the mainstream population. To the outside world, the Grand Theft Auto series is famous for its mature content, and not for championing the revolutionary experience of the sandbox game. Politicians looking out for the welfare of their constituents launch into diatribes based on incomplete information. As an industry, we need to have a consistent education campaign on what games are about, and what they are not about, in order for us to break out of the misperception ghetto. Saying we are like the film industry is a helpful crutch in getting the point across, but it can get us in trouble if the uniqueness of interactive entertainment loses some of its luster behind the giant celluloid shadow of film.

First, let's look at the business side of the analogy. Right off the bat, the numbers don't add up. While the combined revenue of game software and hardware can be shown to edge out box office revenue, this is a really just a shell game since DVD sales grossly overshadow both sets of numbers. Furthermore, film is an impulse buy entertainment product. Like books and CDs, film entertainment, both the theatrical and DVD varieties, on average costs between \$10 and \$30. You can take a date to a movie or buy a DVD on a whim. However, most

games are priced like software, at the \$50 price point. This is a more considered decision for most people, and as a result, fewer games than movies are purchased for the same dollars. There are lessons to be learned from older entertainment industries in offering entertainment products to the public, but that doesn't necessarily mean that every choice made by the film industry is the right one for the game industry.

From the content side, we frequently criticize our own game developers for their alleged lack of creativity, or the publishers who allegedly force the creativity out of developers. While there are institutional pressures pushing publishers toward the sure-fire hit, simply saying that sequels represent a lack of creativity is another example of the film analogy misfiring. In film, a sequel is typically a poor imitation of the original. In games, a sequel is often an improvement, a revised iteration of a successful program. In that way, games share more in common with their evolutionary cousins, application software such as Quicken, iTunes, and Office (yes, I admit I'm an analogy addict too). Similarly, game developers draw from their software development heritage when it comes to credit for their work. While Jason Rubin, co-founder of Naughty Dog, has been rallying for years for individual developer recognition, reasoning that making Spielbergs out of developers will make *Raiders of the Lost Arks* out of their games, many developers continue to consider themselves part of a developer team, not individual auteurs.

In addition, it seems that game publishers often get a bad rap, even though they are the only investors out there wacky enough to put real money into game ideas. Even venture capitalists will wait around for a proven prototype and a guaranteed return before opening their wallets. And despite the range of iterations and licenses, publishers do consistently support getting highly original and creative ideas themselves into the world.

For example, at the DICE Summit this year, Sony Computer Entertainment America's Richard Marks demonstrated some of the EyeToy research and development his team is working on, involving depth perception. At the Game Developers Choice Awards,

“

...we are

confronted

with large-

scale

ignorance

about

games.”

”

I Love Bees (created by 4orty 2wo Entertainment for Microsoft) and Katamari Damacy (developed and published by Namco) deservedly received commendations for original thinking. Those who attended Satoru Iwata's GDC keynote demo of Nintendogs and Electroplankton (both developed and published by Nintendo) were impressed to find the very definition of the term "game" evolve before their eyes. And anyone who saw Will Wright's GDC presentation of his new game Spore (developed by Maxis, published by EA) can attest to the jaw-dropping impact that his procedurally-driven multi-genre game had on a packed room full of jaded developers.

In short, we need examples like these to propagate through the mainstream to help define us — not just the bestsellers, the fixations of politicians, and our own use of the film analogy. We cannot sacrifice the uniqueness of our medium out of an attempt to explain who we are or to assuage some sort of an inferiority complex. Even though there is widespread collaboration across industries, with Hollywood art directors, science fiction novelists, and alternative musicians all working on games, and while the iTunes business model shines tantalizingly in front of Valve's Gabe Newell and others experimenting with online distribution, at the end of the day videogames stand alone. Our art form is the only one in which the person experiencing the entertainment determines the outcome. You're not passively watching, reading, or listening, you are controlling, adventuring, and achieving. We are something new.

Of course, being new comes with some baggage. The industry is certainly going through its growing pains as it wrestles with the quality of life for its developers, being blamed for society's violence, and the stereotyping of games and game developers as toys and geeks. On that last point, Shigeru Miyamoto considers it a waiting game, in that we just need to wait until the entrenched mainstream influencers are replaced by the Mario generation. But until then, we can at least get on the same page with an accurate and self-sustaining message. ■ ■ ■

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

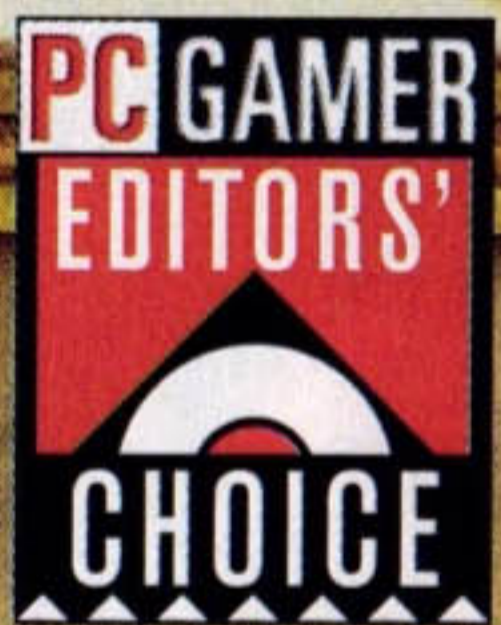
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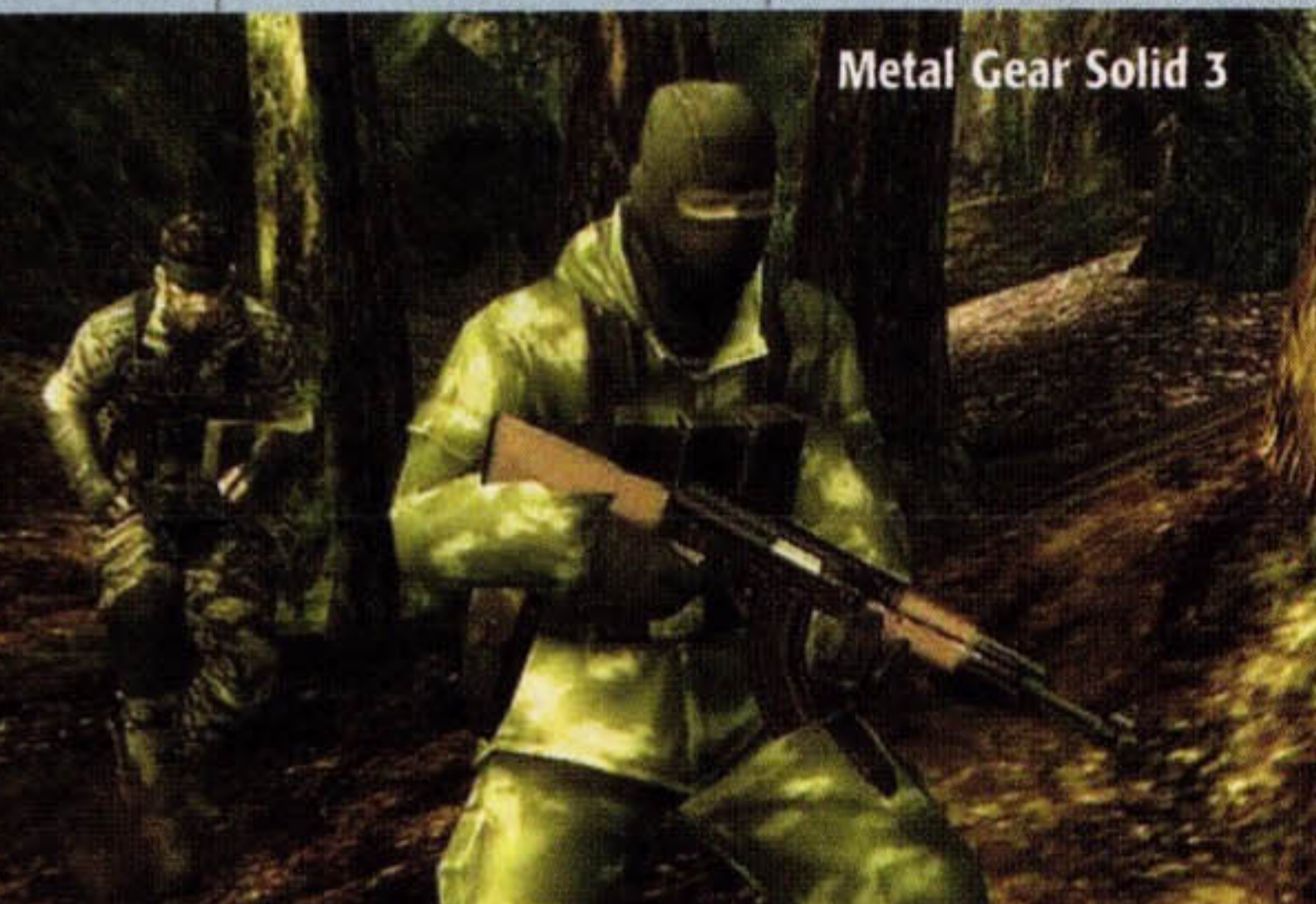
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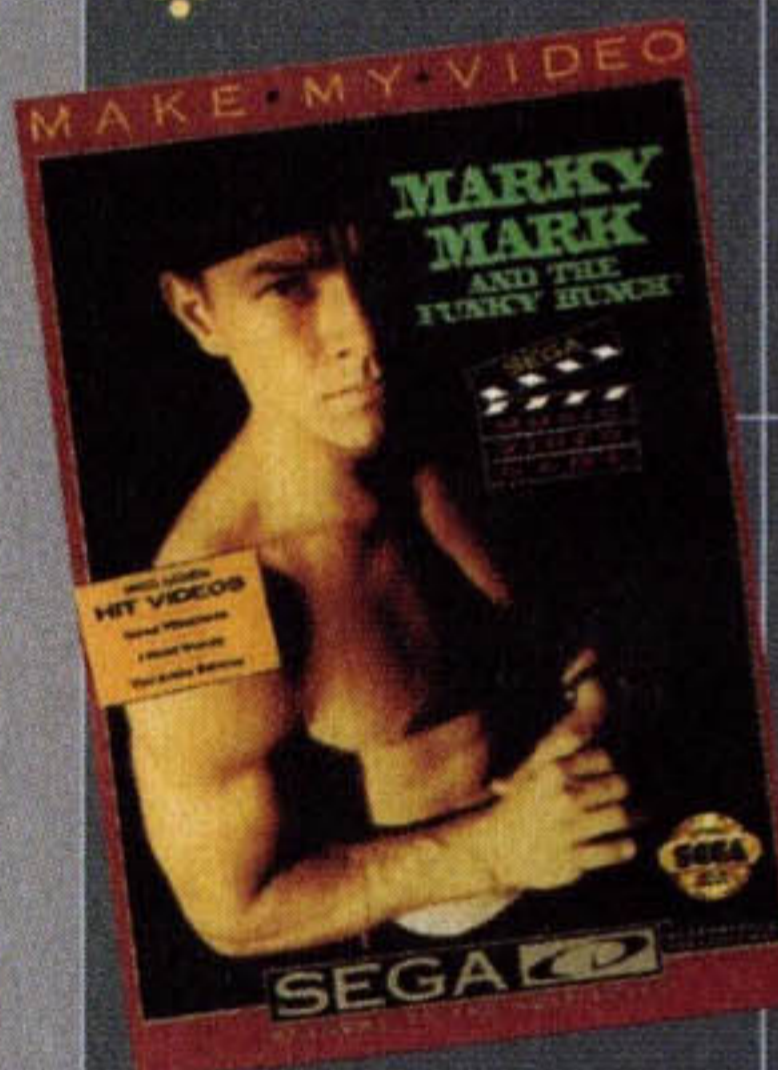
01
 JUNE 1-3 AIIDE CONFERENCE (Artificial Intelligence and Interactive Digital Entertainment) Game developers and professional AI researchers convene in Marina del Rey, CA to make your digital foes even more brutally intelligent. By 2006, they hope to have enemies smarter than Fred Durst. They are currently ahead of schedule.



Metal Gear Solid 3

05

Marky Mark Wahlberg turns 34 today. For the last time, we don't want to make your video. Now get off our porch!



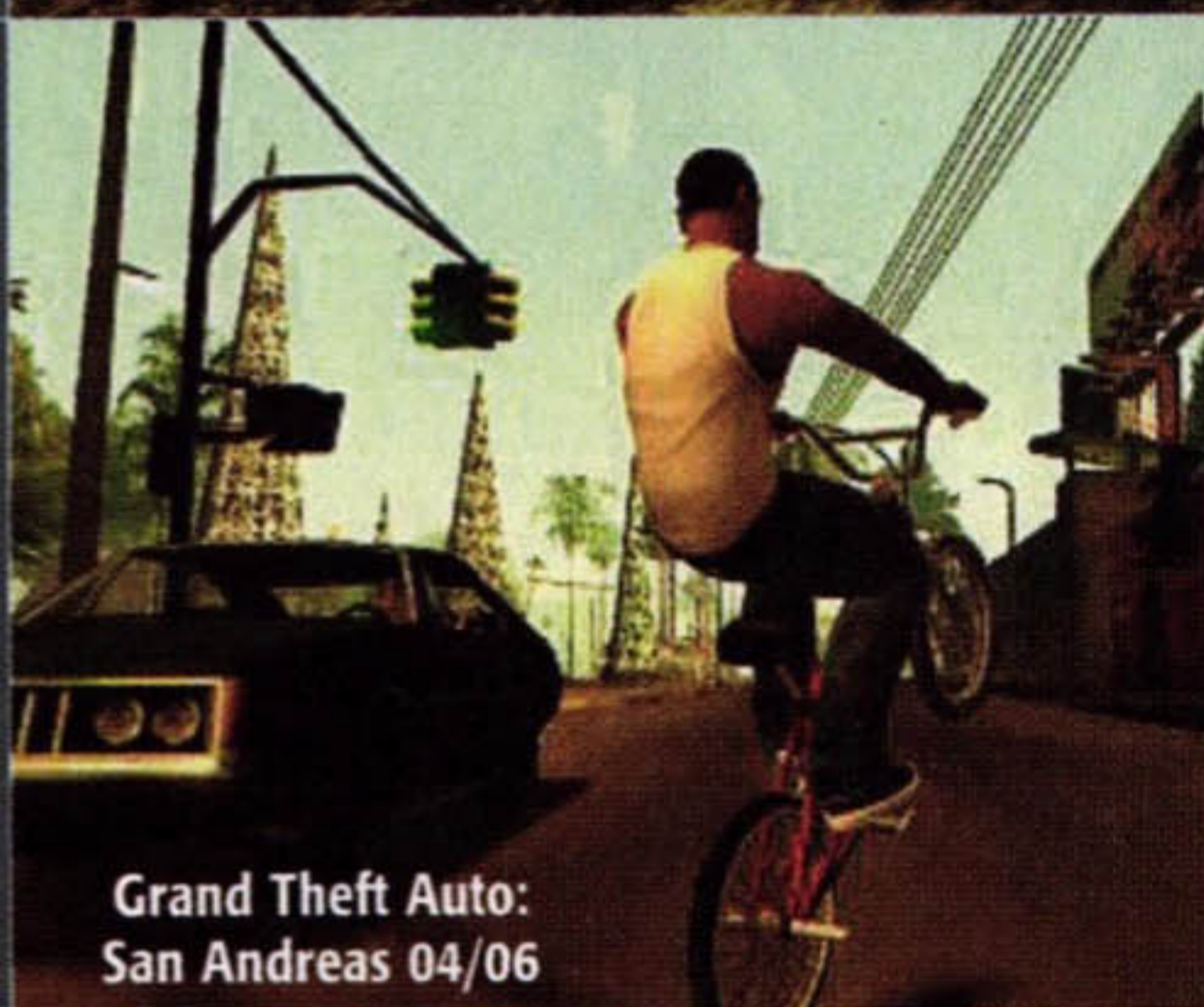
NEW RELEASES

- Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas - Xbox, PC
- Medal of Honor: European Assault - PS2, Xbox, GC
- FEAR - PC
- Arc the Lad: Generation - PS2
- Juiced - PS2, Xbox
- Killer 7 - GC
- Rainbow Six: Lockdown - PS2, Xbox, GC
- Samurai Western - PS2

06

You can say you bought it for Lumines and Ridge Racer, but we all know that you purchased a PSP to watch *Van Wilder* on UMD. Well, it's in stores today, along with other Tara Reid-less (and therefore infinitely better) movies like *Saw*, *Terminator 2*, *The Punisher*, and *Open Water*.

07



Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas 04/06

10

To be known forevermore as "the movie that sold a thousand tabloids," *Mr. and Mrs. Smith* opens in theaters. Apparently it's about Lara Croft marrying that guy from *Twelve Monkeys*.



13

NEW RELEASES

- Batman Begins - PS2, Xbox, GC, GBA
- Kirby: Canvas Curse - DS
- Yoshi Topsy-Turvy - GBA
- Nintendo Pennant Chase Baseball - GC
- GoldenEye: Rogue Agent - DS

14

NEW RELEASES

- Delta Force: Black Hawk Down - PS2
- Dragonshard - PC
- FlatOut - PS2, Xbox, PC
- Romance of the Three Kingdoms X - PS2
- The Mummy - Xbox, PS2
- Xanadu Next - N-Gage
- Jaws 30th Anniversary Edition - DVD
- Man-Thing - DVD



15



Tara-fying your PSP on 04/07

17

Batman emerges from the shadows once again, minus the molded plastic nipples. Despite much outcry from bat fetishists, everyone else is happy to partake of *Batman Begins* today.

Geist 04/27



21

NEW RELEASES

- Fantastic Four - PS2, Xbox, GC, GBA
- Alien Hominid - Xbox
- Bomberman - DS
- Destroy All Humans - PS2, Xbox

22

Today is National Chocolate Eclair Day, the second most delicious June holiday - right next to sweet, savory Flag Day.



23

24

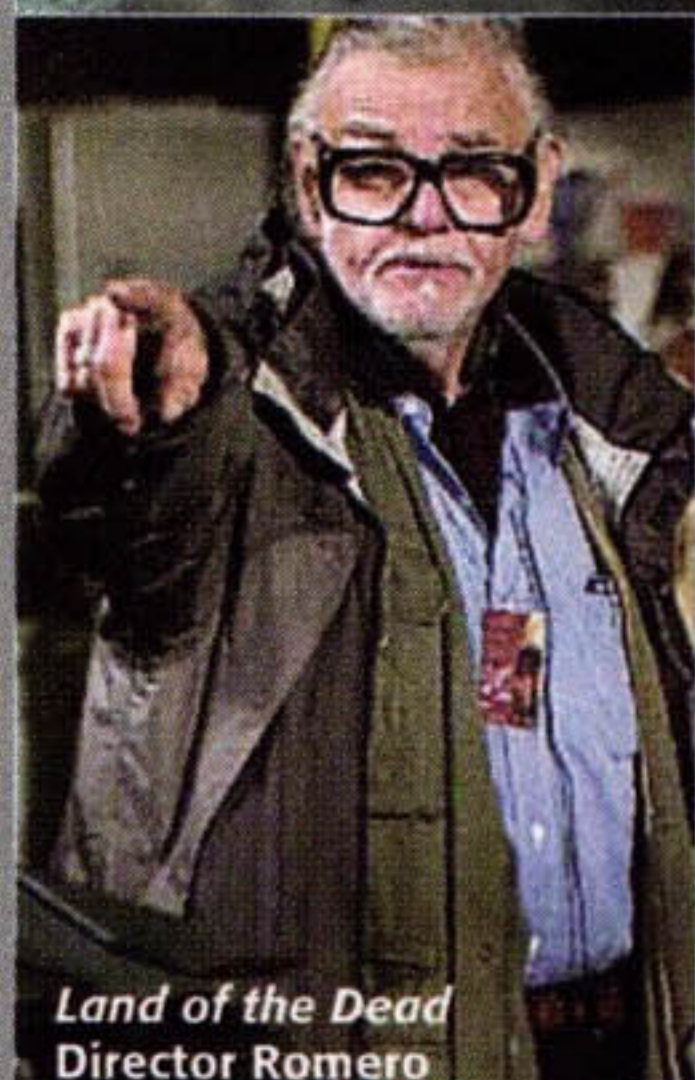
The dead walk the Earth today. Either there's no more room in hell, or George A. Romero's *Land of the Dead* hits theaters.

25

27

NEW RELEASES

- Geist - GC
- Meteos - DS
- Riviera - GBA



Land of the Dead Director Romero

28

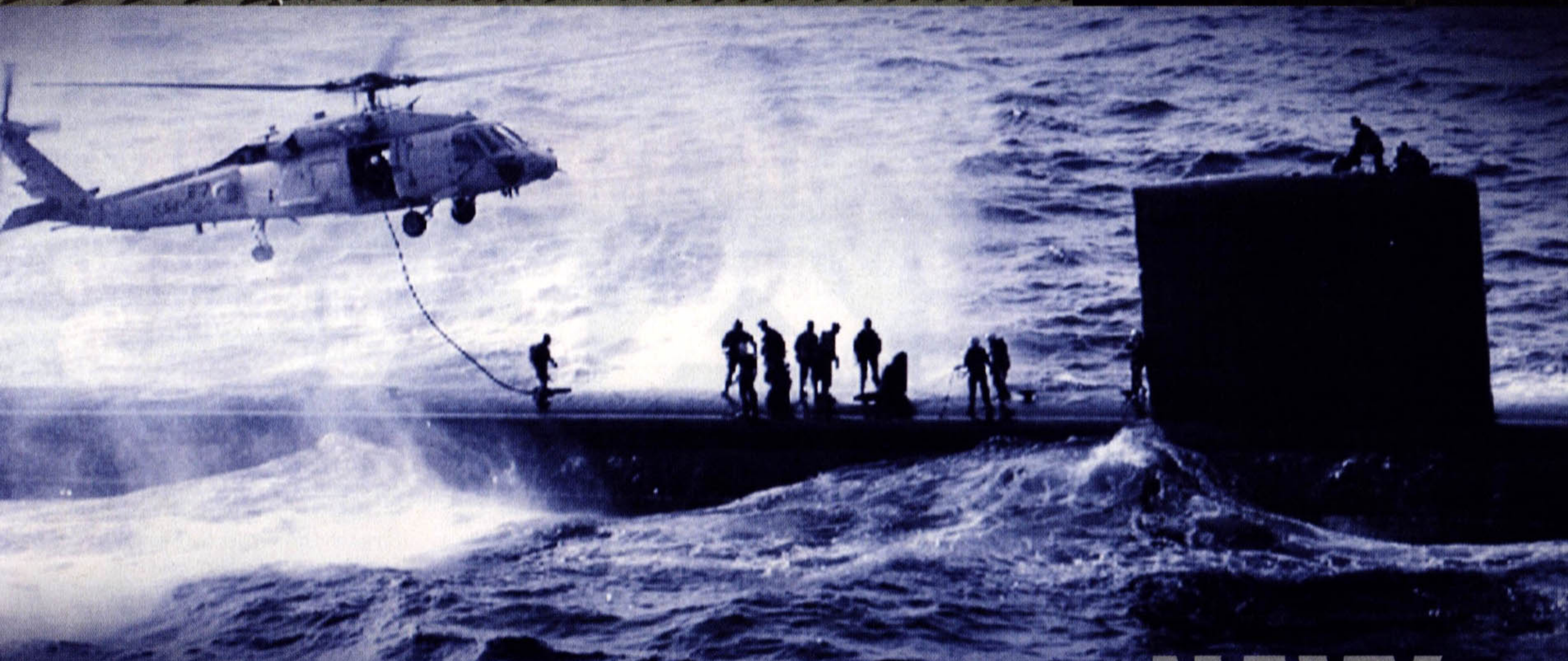
Master Chiefs worldwide explore new territory when the Halo 2 multiplayer map pack lands in stores. Don't forget that you can also download the new arenas over Xbox Live.

Fantastic Four 04/21





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> **RELEASE** MARCH 2006



THE AGE OF MAN IS COMING TO AN END.
THERE IS A NEW WAR UPON US, ONE FAR
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THE BEAUTY OF MAN'S CREATIONS AND TRIUMPHS
WILL BE DESTROYED AS THE CONFLICT SPREADS
ACROSS THE GLOBE LIKE A PLAGUE. THIS WAR
WILL NOT BE A CONFLICT BETWEEN TWO HUMAN
NATIONS, BUT RATHER BETWEEN MANKIND AND A

THE RAVAGES OF WAR

GEARS OF WAR

NEW DEADLY FOE, ONE MORE DANGEROUS THAN
ANYONE OUR RACE HAS EVER ENCOUNTERED. THE
HUMAN WAR MACHINE WILL MAKE A DESPERATE
LAST STAND AGAINST THIS NEW ENEMY, FIGHTING
FOR FREEDOM IN THE REMNANTS OF ONCE-GREAT
CIVILIZATIONS. THE MACHINE OF WAR RUNS ON
BLOOD, AND ORDINARY SOLDIERS WILL RISE TO
THE RANKS OF HEROES IN THIS CONFLICT. THESE
MEN AND WOMEN, THESE WARRIORS, ARE THE
GEARS OF WAR.

The chief architect behind this war is Cliff Bleszinski, best known for his work on the Unreal franchise. As Epic Games' lead designer, Bleszinski, better known as CliffyB, is one of the most recognizable game creators in the industry. Starting in the industry as a teenager, most of his professional work has revolved around Unreal since its debut in 1998. Ever since then, Bleszinski has yearned to create another universe, one more cohesive and dark than the over-the-top sci-fi of the Unreal games. With the launch of a new console generation and backed by the powerful Unreal Engine 3, the time is right for Bleszinski's new venture. This new game is Gears of War, and it will both please fans of Epic's core work and defy their expectations. A rich, complex universe has been created, and it will unfold before players' eyes thanks to Epic Games, its publishing partner Microsoft, and that company's new video game console, the Xbox 360.

The ideas behind Gears of War evolved out of Bleszinski's love for military shooters like Call of Duty and Medal of Honor and horror titles like Silent Hill, Fatal Frame, and Resident Evil 4. He also cites films like *Enemy At the Gates* and *Saving Private Ryan* as inspiration, as well as horror movies like *Ringu* and *The Eye*. The goal with Gears of War, he explains, is to create a game with the intense action of a military shooter, as well as the emotional power of a horror game. Many games replicate the events of war movies, but few manage to create a tangible aura of dread while doing it. By slowing down the pace of the game, suspense is heightened, making the player more emotionally involved. But to truly get the player invested in the story, a game needs characters and a world the player can believe in. Creating such a believable environment has been made exponentially easier, thanks to the next-generation technology powering



OF WIAAR

this title. Created for the Xbox 360 from the ground up, Gears of War is likely to become the premiere action franchise on Microsoft's next platform.

With more raw power than any video game console to come before, the 360 and Unreal Engine 3 allows Epic to create a world more real and expansive than anything yet seen in gaming. Epic has long been known as one of the industry's top middleware companies, licensing its Unreal Engine out to countless other game developers. Microsoft has chosen the latest version of the technology as its official engine for next-gen Xbox games, and the reason why is obvious when you take a look at what it can be used to create. Early shots of Unreal Engine 3's abilities stunned the gaming world when they were first released, thanks to their staggering detail and unprecedented realism. Of course, these demo shots all turned out to be early art assets for Gears of War.

Although many companies will use Unreal Engine 3 to create amazing games, no one understands the true power of the technology like Epic itself. The creators know how to use it with startling proficiency, and their expertise is obvious. Even a quick glance at the screenshots of Gears of War makes one thing clear: This is the most gorgeous video game yet. Epic's vice president Mark Rein puts it bluntly when he exclaims, "We are and will be the best-looking game on the 360." But the company isn't creating a game simply based around good looks — they're using the incredible capabilities of the Xbox 360 to create a real world, one as complex and defined as those in the Star Wars movies or *Blade Runner*.

Gears of War takes place on Sera, a planet much like Earth. Although it is a different world, it is one that is not so different from our own. Humans cover its surface, and they have not yet mastered

interstellar travel. Confined to their own world, the inhabitants of Sera have created stunning civilizations that recall the splendid architecture of European cities like London or Prague. Unlike other games with a science fiction theme, there are no cold modernist bunkers or flashing neon discos. This is a real world, one with cities built for people of culture and distinction. This is a world that has experienced a renaissance, a time of cultural growth and enlightenment. Unfortunately, it is also a world that has lived to see its achievements destroyed and its beautiful cities laid to waste.

The conflict for the people of Sera begins when a new energy source is discovered, one that can be used to power any of Sera's machines with frightening efficiency. Called imulsion, this energy source becomes so desired by all the governments of the planet that the entire world is plunged into war. The tide of battle shifts so frequently from one army



Every screen on these pages is taken from actual gameplay, and is representative of what Gears of War honestly looks like. Yes, the game is actually this gorgeous

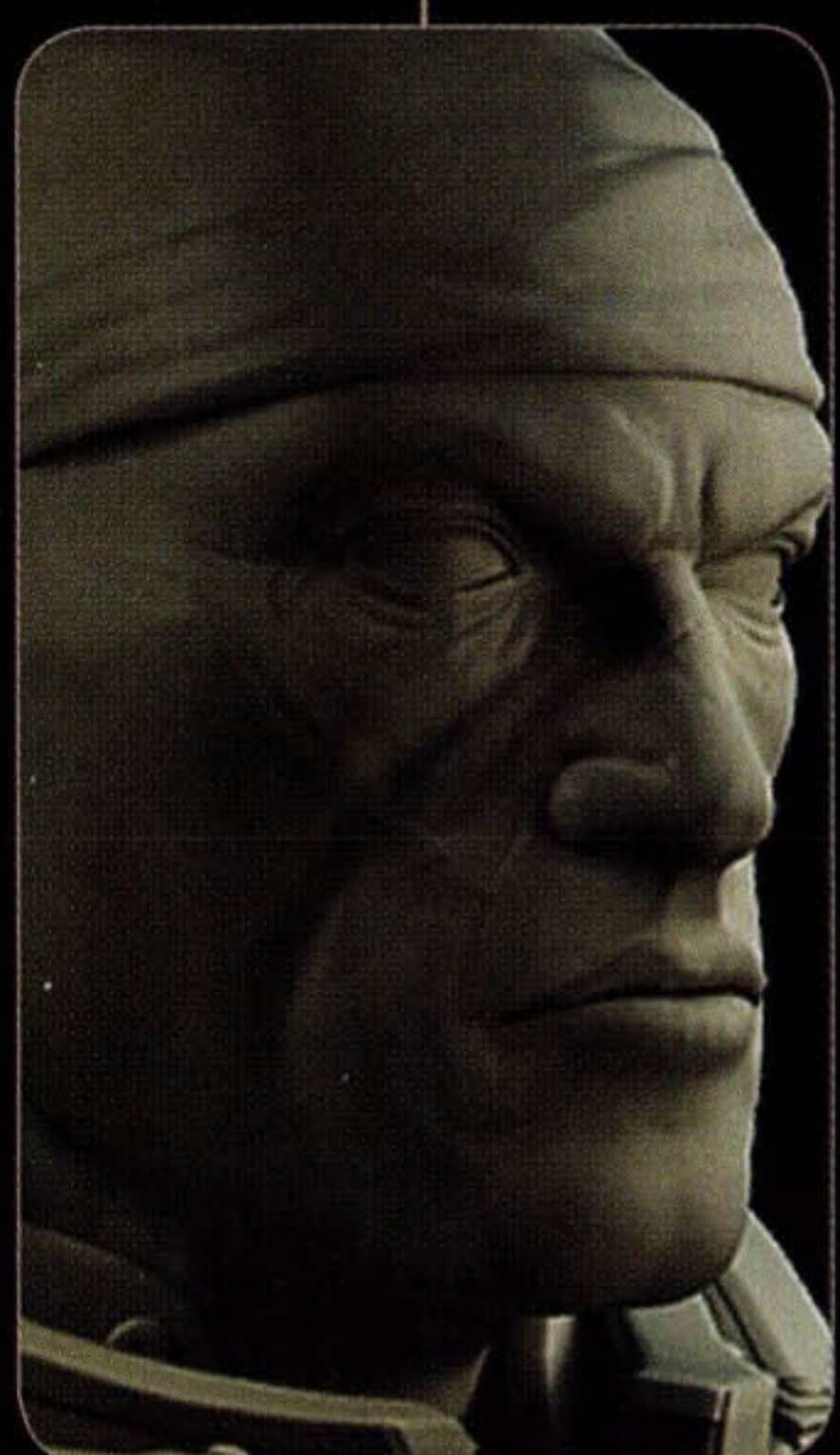
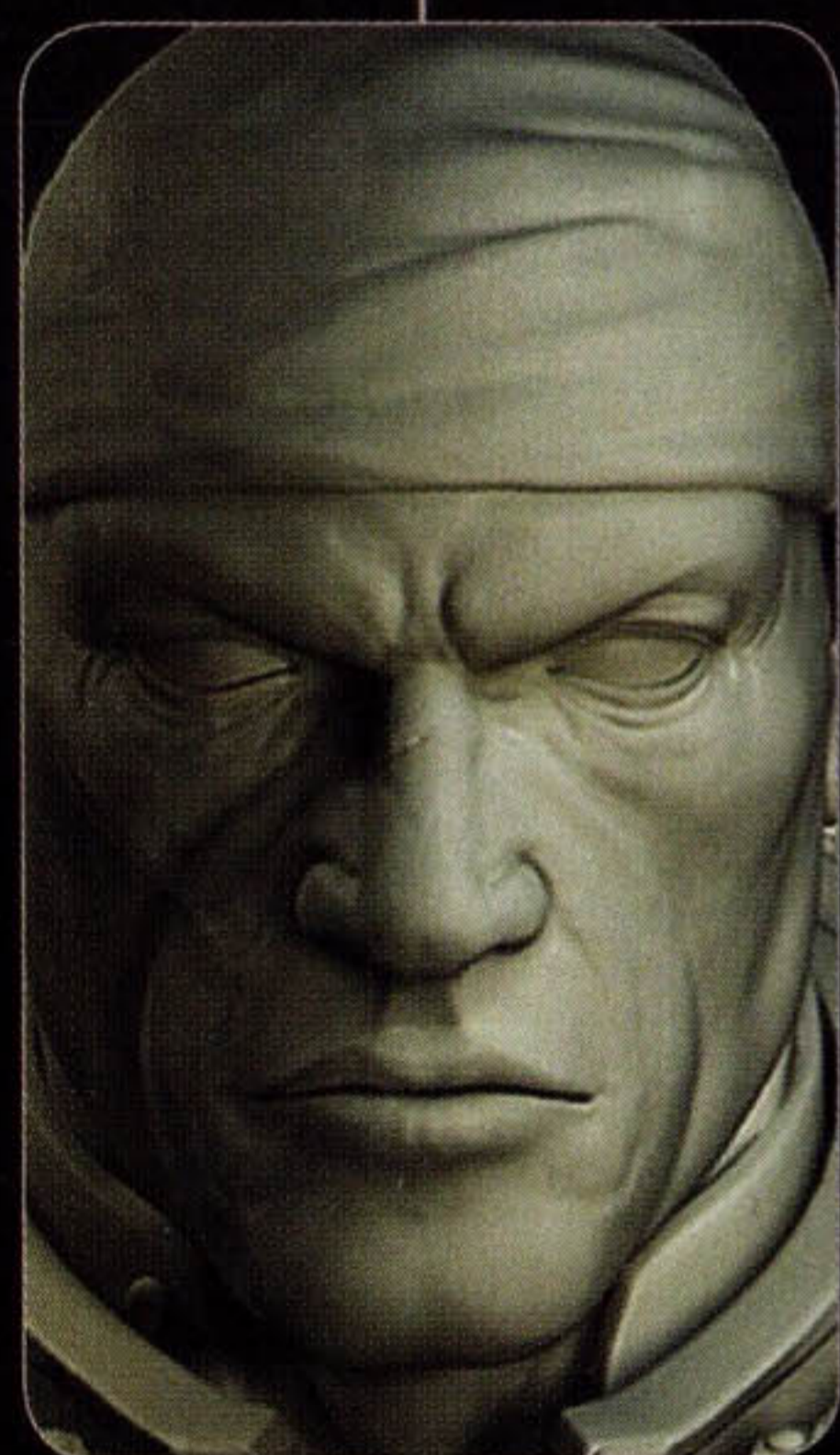
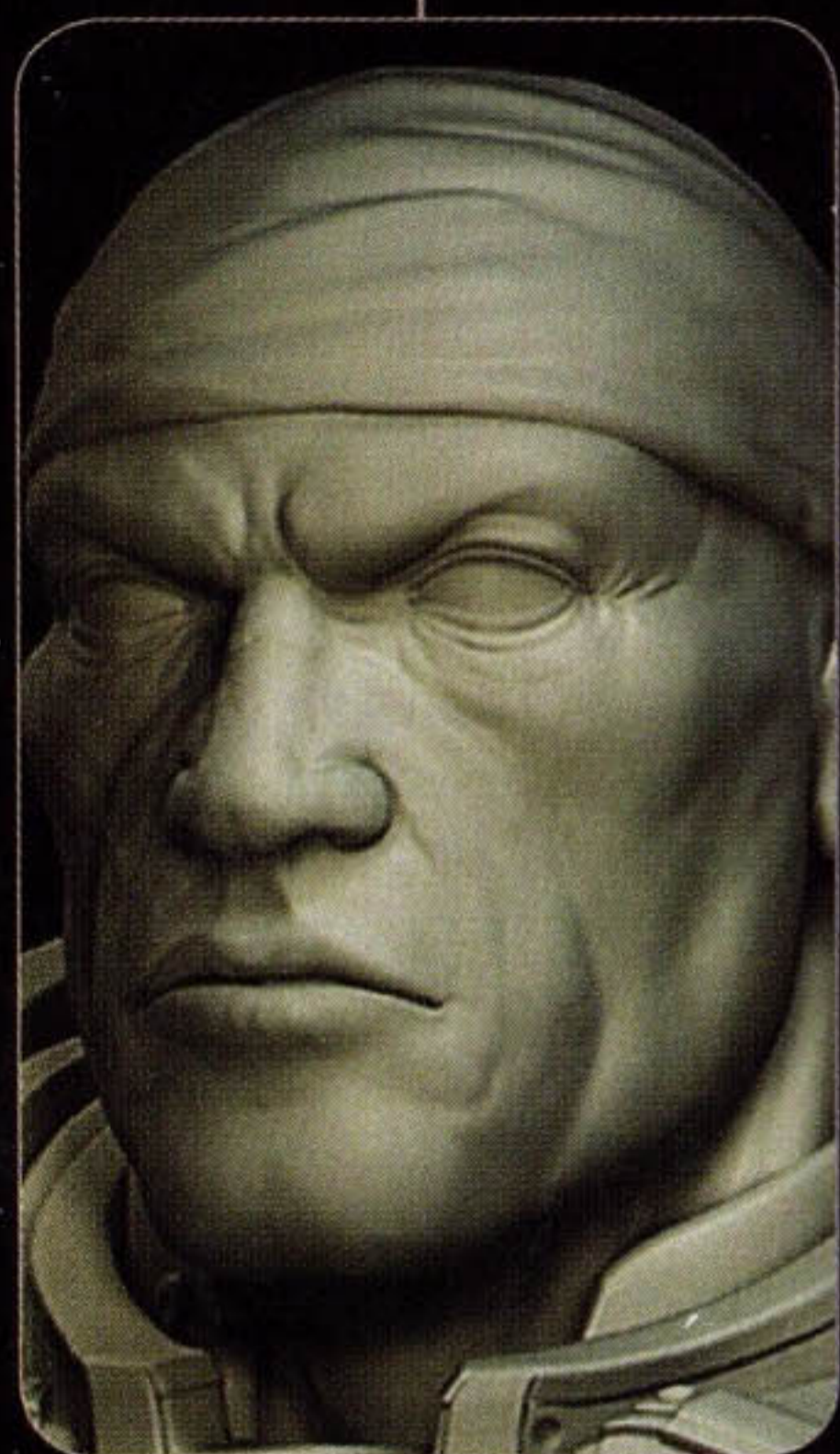


to the next that the conflict becomes known as the Pendulum Wars. As the Pendulum Wars rage on, Sera is torn apart, and it looks as if the victor will only rule over a wasteland. But then, just as the battles reach their fevered pitch, things get even worse.

Without any warning or explanation, a new army bursts forth from the center of the planet, a coalition of nightmarish beings bent on the destruction of all humanity. This army is the Locust Horde, a group of creatures that live in Sera's crust. These subterranean monsters can emerge from the ground at any point on the planet, and the various civilizations are quickly overpowered. The Locust attacks with such ferocity that humanity is pushed back to a single plateau on the planet's surface. The first day of their attack is so swift and brutal that it is recorded in history as E-Day,

Emergence Day – the day which changed the course of Sera's existence forever. But the people of Sera won't simply surrender to their hideous new enemy: From Jacinto, the one place on the surface thick enough that the horde can't burst through from underneath, mankind launches its final offensive.

"Nothing unites like a common enemy," says Bleszinski, explaining how humanity responds to this new threat. Banding together against their common enemy, the Coalition of Ordered Governments is formed, and its armies fan out from Jacinto to tackle the Locust invaders. Players will step into the role of Marcus Fenix, a disgraced soldier who was released from military prison in order to assist with the war effort. As the leader of Delta Company, a cut-rate COG military squad, Marcus' teammates include Dominic, the joker of the team; the dispatcher Anya; and the squad's robotic backup Jack. Jack is a builderbot, capable



■ As Marcus Fenix, players will lead Delta Company into battle against the Locust Horde, and can issue simple squad commands



of hacking computers, cutting through locks, reviving fallen soldiers, and more. Together with the other members of Delta Company, Marcus, Dom, Anya, and Jack are the emotional core of Gears of War's story.

COG soldiers carry the best weaponry available, and the human forces have a heavy reliance on technology. Along with builderbots, COG military squads are outfitted with the most advanced armaments and vehicles, and the soldiers themselves are even referred to as the gears. On the other hand, the Locust Horde battles with far less advanced means. Although the Locust troops carry guns, their tactics are far more organic, using gigantic monsters as weapons rather than vehicles. As such, Gears of War is a game of technology versus

nature, military against monsters. The COG has a distinct advantage during the day and in air combat, while the Locust have the edge during the night and on the ground.

Over the course of our time at Epic's headquarters in North Carolina, Bleszinski mentions several themes that permeate the story of Gears of War. Not only does the concept of technology versus organics carry through the story, but so does the idea of destroyed beauty – the environments in Gears of War are places that were once breathtaking. The devastation throughout the game is made all the more heartbreaking by the realization of how splendid these cities once were. But perhaps the most important theme is redemption. Marcus Fenix is a character who has fallen from

grace. On the first day of the Locust attack, Marcus deserted his post in order to find and protect his father from the invasion. Although his intentions were noble, Marcus' actions landed him in jail. When he is released to rejoin the fight, his battle against the creatures serves at his attempt to rebuild his shattered reputation.

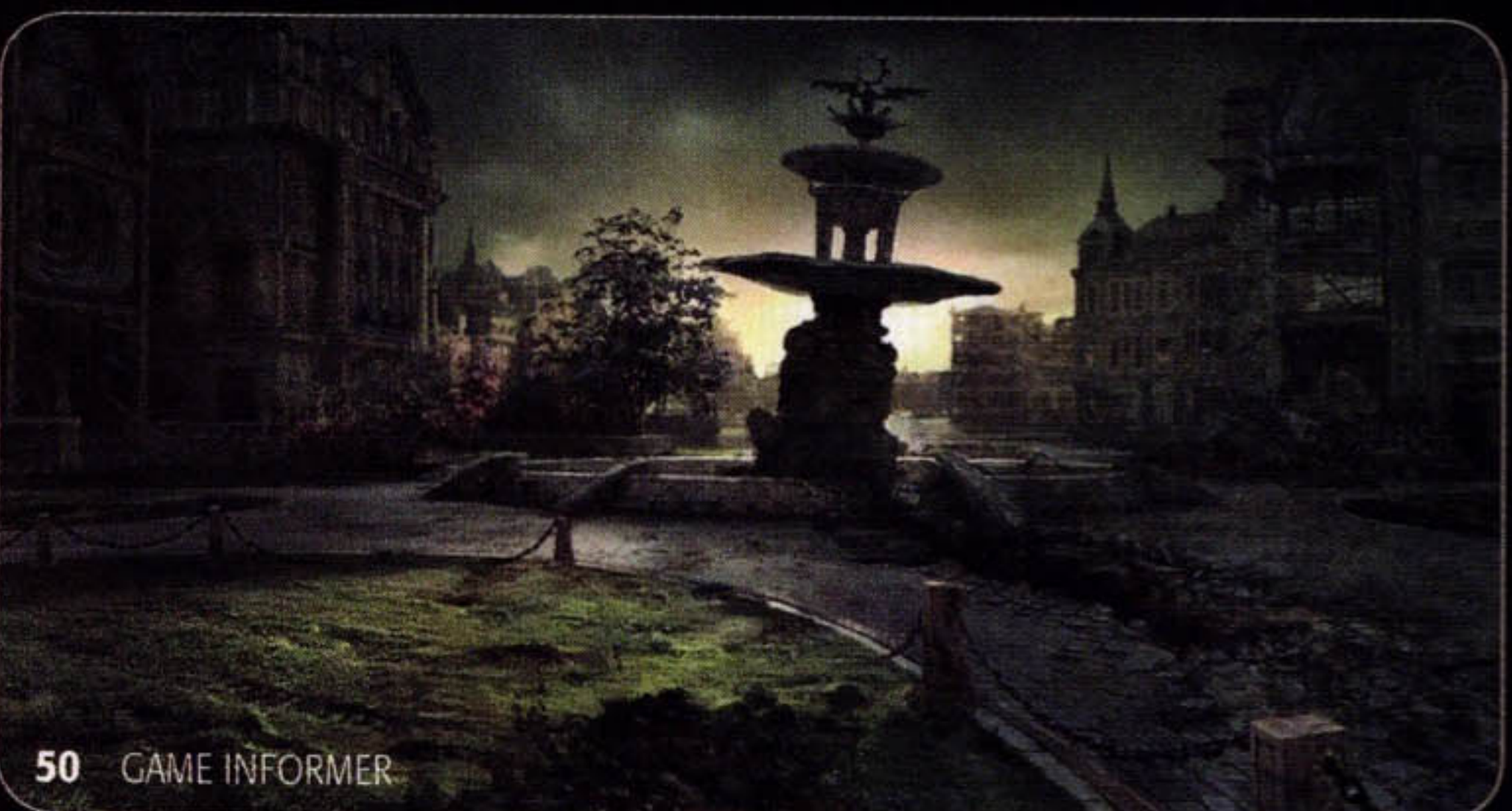
Bleszinski wants the story to resonate with players and hopes to deliver something more layered and complex than the usual game plot. He has even enlisted the help of Eric Nylund, writer of the Halo novels, for help crafting the best story and dialogue possible. He also wants to create a planet that feels real, one that extends beyond the areas seen in the game. Bleszinski calls this the iceberg theory. "If you create a universe



■ The Brumak is one of the huge enemies you'll face – notice how it compares to the four-story building nearby

and give it a few hooks, people will assume it is infinitely larger," he explains. By mentioning places that won't even show up in the first game, it makes players excited to hypothesize about what they might see in future installments of the franchise. Obviously, Bleszinski isn't promising sequels to Gears just yet, but it is obvious that the game has the potential to continue as a franchise.

It is also clear that Bleszinski wants the game to be far more than just a typical shooter with amazing graphics. He wants the game to deliver what he calls "water cooler moments" – unexpected, amazing pieces of action that are so cool you feel compelled to keep playing to see what the next such moment will be. These are the moments in a game that you tell your friends about. He cites Resident Evil 4 as a game that mastered the water cooler moment. "That game made me feel like I had a hook in my mouth, and the designer was on the other end saying, 'C'mon



■ This is the Academy, a military school run by Marcus' father

bitch, you know you want to see the next sequence.” exclaims Bleszinski, making a reeling motion for emphasis. “That to me is the ideal entertainment experience.”

As you would expect from Epic, Gears of War will feature a lot of frantic gun-based action, but this is by no means Unreal with new environments and characters. By focusing on climactic events, Bleszinski and Epic are creating a game with a much more deliberate pace than their primary franchise. Their goal with Gears of War is to constantly be throwing new things at the player – segments between 10 and 20 minutes in length that amaze the player so much that the game is impossible to put down. For obvious reasons, Bleszinski is reluctant to spoil the surprises of the game by giving explicit examples of these moments, but he reveals that there will be vehicular segments, weapon turret moments, stealthier sections, and many more. There will be plenty of straight-up gunplay as well, but only, as Bleszinski puts it “when

you’re between the really cool parts.”


Of course, Gears of War is an action game at its core, and with the Unreal team behind it, players can be sure the gunplay between the unique combat segments will be amazing in its own right. Unlike Unreal, Gears of War is not a first-person game. Bleszinski likes to refer to the perspective as “second person” – it is a third-person game that controls like a first-person game. Based on the hands-on time we had with the title, the second-person description fits well. Although Marcus is visible onscreen, the game plays very much like a typical console FPS, with controls that feel tight and responsive. The camera pulls in just over the shoulder for more precise aiming, which makes it far easier to pick off the Locust soldiers when they peek out from behind cover. It goes without saying that combat feels gritty and intense, thanks to weapons that are primarily grounded in the real world. Unlike the exotic arms of the Unreal universe, your

arsenal includes rifles, pistols, and shotguns. With a simple weapon-switching interface mapped to the d-pad, your whole arsenal of weapons (which are represented cosmetically on your character’s body) is readily available in any firefight.

In many combat situations, Marcus and the rest of Delta Company will face off with male Locust soldiers: hulking, ugly creatures with gray skin, beady eyes, and a mouthful of



■ By forcing players into confrontations with hideous monsters, Epic intends to mix elements of horror into the action genre



■ The Locust are huge and intimidating creatures, but these are some of the smallest enemies you'll face

razor-sharp teeth. These creatures are deadly in their own right, but far more dangerous adversaries await as you work your way through the quest. The types of creatures you encounter will also help define the water cooler moments Bleszinski is so intent on spreading throughout the game. You will face even deadlier enemies like the Berserker, a nine-foot-tall monstrosity that can't even be scratched by the weapons you carry on your first encounter. On your first meeting with this menacing foe, the only way to survive will be to find a powerful energy weapon carried by one of your squad. The problem is, that person is dead. You must survive the creature's attack long enough to find the weapon on a battlefield littered with bodies.

The Locust Horde includes all types of crea-

tures from the very small to the enormous – giant monsters will topple everything in their wake as they lumber towards you across the ground, burst through the ground at you from below, and even attack from the sky. One such creature that you will encounter are the Brumak, enormous monsters several stories tall that are bristling with weaponry. The huge beasts are so large that smaller members of the Horde actually ride them – they are the living equivalent of the COG's armored vehicles. All of the COG vehicles in the game will be based on reality, much like the weapons. Expect to see Armored Personnel Carriers, attack helicopters and the like, but no dropships or other standard sci-fi vehicles. Bleszinski is insistent that Gears of War will not feature any of the clichés of science fiction, such as “dropships, lesbian



commandos, and cigar-chomping drill sergeants." He wants the story and world of Gears to be unique, and plans to deliver gameplay that's just as memorable.

The trap that many third-person shooters fall into is that they give the player a set of enemies, an arsenal of weapons, and simply mix and match combinations of the two for the entire game. While Gears of War definitely features a large roster of both, Bleszinski is not shy about proclaiming the unique features in Gears that take it to the next level. Primarily, this is not a game that one can simply run through with guns blazing and expect to live. The combat revolves around the concept of taking cover. Unlike other games in which players can take cover to get a breather, Gears of War makes it a necessity. Every environment is littered with objects that can be used for cover, from crumbled walls and pillars to barrels, corners, and doors. By walking up to such an object, Marcus will automatically use it for cover, flattening up against walls or ducking low behind shorter barricades. He can pop up from behind cover to get a clear shot, fire blindly without putting himself in harm's way, clamber over short barriers, and roll from one piece of cover to the next. Of course, many of the cover elements are fully destructible as well, so if you stay in one spot too long, an area that was safe may quickly become a deadly choke point. With his trademark confidence Bleszinski boasts "This is the best cover system you've seen in a game."

Most of the battlefields are much more claustrophobic than those in other shooters, so using cover

is essential. You won't be sniping the Locust from across an open field; they will never be further than a few yards away. Because the Locust can burrow up from the ground anywhere, your enemy will always be in your face. Therefore, if you don't use your cover wisely, you won't last long. Your squadmates will take cover as well, but then again, so will your enemies. Firefights have an intensely cinematic feel as you'll constantly be ducking under cover and popping up to spray short bursts of ammo at clever foes who will also be weaving in and out of ruined buildings, trying to flank you. We were able to play through a few combat scenarios, and it quickly became clear how essential cover is to survival. Like in the war films that inspired it, rounds rip through the air chaotically, making the player feel truly besieged by the enemy. Bullets bounce off chunks of stone and explosions ripple across the battlefield. With the uncomfortably tight feel of the battles, every enemy encounter honestly feels like a life or death situation.

The close-quarters combat in Gears of War lends the game an atmosphere of what Bleszinski calls "intimate violence." He cites the scene in *Saving Private Ryan* in which a soldier wrestles with a German soldier and is slowly stabbed to death as an example of what he means. Because Gears of War places such an emphasis on up close and personal combat, there will invariably be times in which

Marcus goes hand-to-hand with a Locust soldier. But rather than hitting one button to deliver a melee kill, getting close to an enemy will trigger a minigame that, if completed successfully, results in the death of your foe. You may shove a grenade in his mouth or snap his neck – regardless of what action you perform, it will be far more brutal and disturbing than a simple punch.

The cover element and close-quarters combat alone add a lot of strategic depth to the action, but it isn't all that Epic has planned to take it out of the realm of a typical action game. Although the other members of Delta Company will make intelligent decisions on their own, Marcus will be able to issue squad commands to control their actions. Epic wants to make this smoother and easier to use than other tactical shooters, and is aiming at having only three different commands. What these are and how they will be used we don't know yet, but Bleszinski was more than happy to share another of Gears of War's takes on the team concept: co-op mode.



■ Every area in the game feels like a place where people once lived, and you'll sometimes encounter survivors amongst the rubble

In co-op mode, a second player assumes the role of Dominic, Marcus's friend and fellow member of Delta Company. Co-op is not a secondary mode rebuilt for two players à la *Doom 3* – it is the regular campaign without changes. However, the addition of a second player-controlled character adds new elements to the story mode. Many sections of the game will stress cooperation between two players, such as one scenario involving an infestation of light-sensitive flying creatures called kryll. The kryll swirl in the sky like bats, and won't attack those who stay in the light. Co-op mode offers a couple of different ways that two players can work together to obtain safe passage through this deadly area. In one section, the first player can run up inside buildings topped with spotlights. By manually aiming the lights at the courtyard below, the first player can create a moving safe zone for the second player to cross without being attacked.

Another way two players can get through a kryll-infested area is by taking cover near a burning car. The light from the fire keeps the kryll away, but the vehicle is far too heavy for one person to move alone. By pushing together, the two players can roll the car, again creating a moving safe zone. The car will start rolling down a hill so the players will have to run after it to remain in the light. At the bottom of the hill, the car runs into a refueling station, causing an explosion. As the flames die down, the only light is provided by the station itself, and Locust soldiers will try to shoot out the lights to allow the kryll to attack safely. It is then up to the players to defend the station's lights from the attacking Locust soldiers.

Playing co-op is not about blasting through the campaign mode more quickly by enlisting extra firepower, it is about experiencing situations in new ways through cooperation. Of course, working together won't always be an option. Sometimes the game will present players with situations that force them to split up and head down parallel paths. For example, certain areas may require one player to hold a switch to allow the second player to enter. In many of these cases, you may be able to see your friend, but you may not be able to help them.

Co-op mode will be available in both split-screen mode and online via Xbox Live. Thanks to the Live Aware features built into *Gears of War*, you won't even have to start a game with a friend to play co-op. Should a member of your friends list check your status while you are playing *Gears of War*, they can send you a message in-game and join you in the middle of your campaign. Currently, co-op mode is planned for two players, although four-player co-op is being considered. Competitive multiplayer will also be included, although the details for this mode are currently under wraps.

■ Taking cover is the key to survival in *Gears of War's* ravished world





Co-op mode and the cover system are two of the features Bleszinski touts which will set Gears of War apart from the other next-gen action games out there, but what he really believes is special about the game is its narrative quality. He's insistent that the water cooler moments will spur players continually forward, and shows us a diagram that details the flow of the campaign. Each section of the game that has a special, unique action segment is marked by a yellow sticker. Not surprisingly, there is a yellow sticker on nearly every one of the planned levels.

These highlighted action moments will certainly keep players going to see what the game has in store for them next, but the story will hopefully be every bit as compelling. Thanks to the beauty of the in-game graphics, there is no need for CG movies to relay the tale. Every cutscene will use the same engine as the game, and much of the plot will be revealed through conversations between the characters in a mission. Marcus is a tough, hardened soldier, but Bleszinski claims he's the type of character players will easily identify with and like. Over the course of the game, Marcus and the rest of Delta Company will encounter humans stranded in the ruins of their former homes by the destruction of the war, and these characters will both help out the soldiers and advance the plot. They also serve another purpose, one that is perhaps the most important of all. They are a reminder that in war, people are hurt, displaced, and killed. They help sell the world of Sera as a real place, one that has been through harsh times and seen much death.

It is a misconception that all the next generation of video game consoles will have to offer is better graphics. Improved visuals are only a tool that will be used by developers like Epic to achieve a much more inspired goal: increased realism. The staggering visuals in Gears of War serve to create the realistic illusion that players have stepped into the role of Marcus Fenix, and it is up to them to save the world of Sera from the onslaught of the Locust Horde. By constructing a world where the military conflict has consequences on the population, Bleszinski, Epic Games, and Microsoft hope to make a game that involves the player on a more emotional level than ever before. Video games are all about entertainment, and increasing the believability and emotional pull of games is the next step to enhancing the entertainment value. By making the player feel like there is more at stake, the triumphs of completing the challenges of a game are heightened. "The best gaming experiences are the ones that empower the player," offers Bleszinski. Gears of War will empower players by immersing them in a struggle against an overwhelming force, which will certainly make for one of the best gaming experiences of the new generation. ■■■



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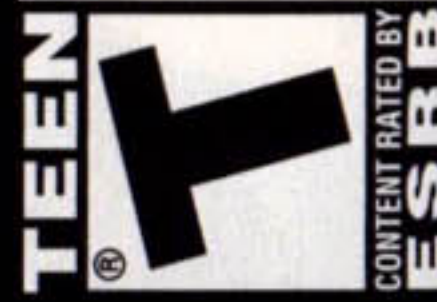
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Cartoon Violence
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EA LEADING

The next generation of video game hardware is no longer defined by leaked spec sheets and swirling rumors. With each new stunning screenshot and confirmed technical detail, it becomes increasingly clear that the future of gaming is bearing down on us, ready to change the way we approach entertainment. The strategies of all developers worldwide will contribute to determining the course of the industry in the coming years, but only one company is poised to be the standard bearer, leading the charge into uncertain territory: Electronic Arts. As the world's leading game publisher and developer, the way EA handles its core franchises and new titles in the next generation will shape the landscape for everyone. To get a glimpse of what the future holds, we visited EA's Vancouver headquarters, getting the inside scoop on the methods and philosophies that will carry gaming forward into a new era.

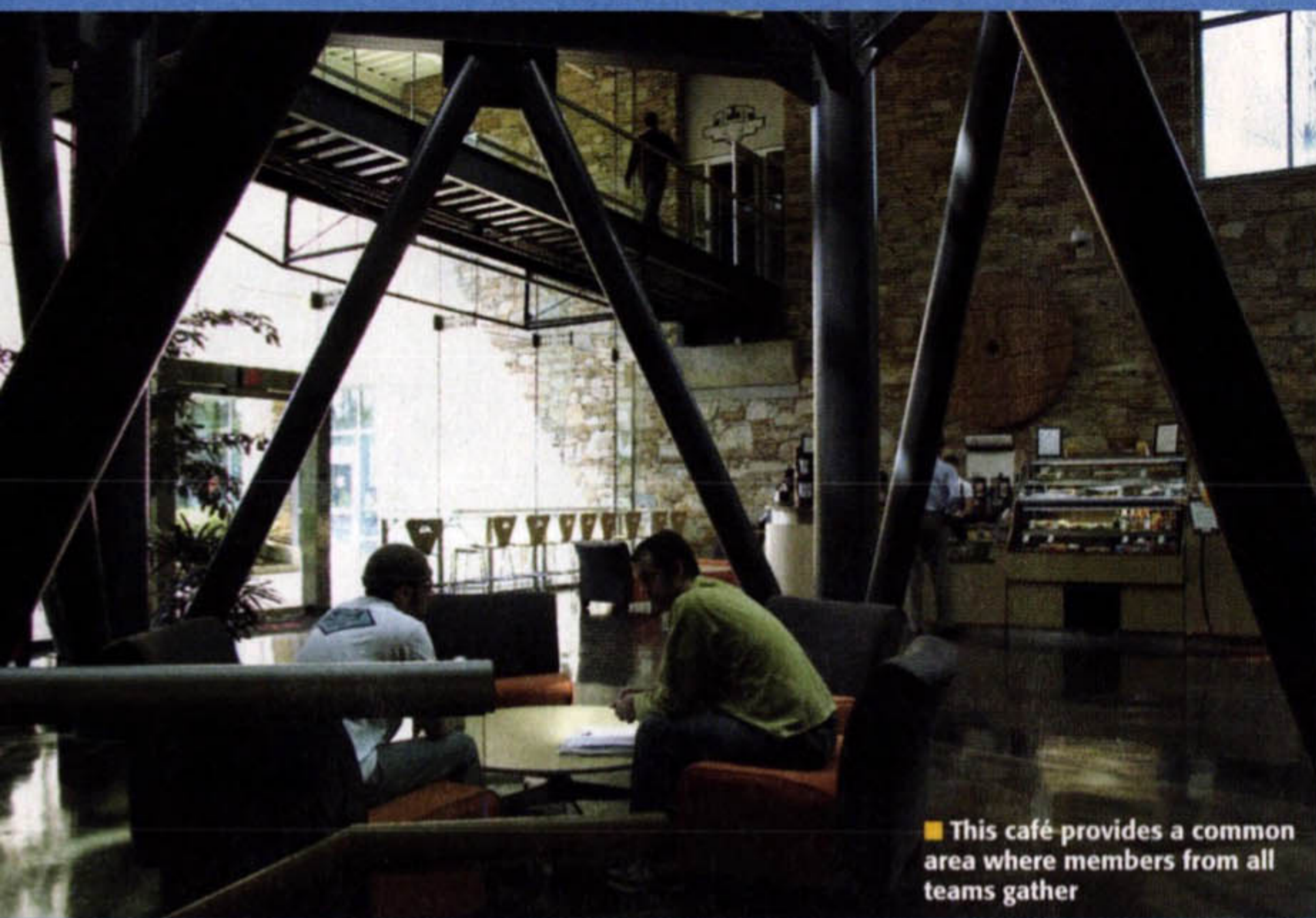


THE NEXT-GEN CHARGE



HOW EA WILL SHAPE THE FUTURE OF GAMING





■ This café provides a common area where members from all teams gather



■ The cafeteria does its part to fuel next-generation development

Even with studios all over the world, from London to Tokyo, EA Canada serves as the nerve center for many of EA's key operations. This is the location of the company's worldwide studios, and it is also the place where the graphical tricks and technology – currently focused on next-gen consoles – are developed for use among all branches of EA. The studio was founded in 1992, shortly after EA merged with Distinctive Software, founded by Don Mattrick in 1982. Mattrick, now EA's president of worldwide studios, has been largely responsible for the company's growth, especially during the current generation.

You might expect someone with a title like "president of worldwide studios" to constantly use phrases like "minimizing dependencies" and "synergy initiatives". When we actually speak with Mattrick,

however, he seems more interested in discussing his level 37 Night Elf in World of Warcraft: "Just two and a half more levels until I get my mount," he beams. As we enter his office (with a picturesque view of the city, complete with snow-capped mountains in the background), he asks us to pardon the mess, which consists entirely of three sheets of paper and a PSP surrounded by games on a coffee table. While all of the visible memorabilia is related to current-generation titles, there is no containing Mattrick's enthusiasm for what is to come.

"We started working on next-generation development 23 years ago," he jokes. "In all seriousness, anyone who's been involved in the game industry for a long period of time has fantasized about the point where the fidelity of what we create will match what people see in other forms of media.

With the emergence on the new platforms, we're moving into the high-definition realm. What it is going to allow us to do is create richer, more compelling experiences."

One of the challenges of crafting these new experiences, however, is the fact that until recently, no one really knew what the next lineup of platforms would be capable of achieving. This dead end is precisely where Glenn Entis' job begins. As EA's chief visual officer, Entis' enthusiasm recalls an eccentric scientist, surrounded by whirring technology and aiming for the impossible. His job, as he describes it, is to "pull the rabbit out of the hat." In other words, he and his team (the worldwide visualization group) made certain assumptions about the next generation, and have been working for years to develop new techniques and technology to make impossibly captivating visuals a reality. "The whole process

started about two years ago for us," Entis says. "The goal was to get one round of experience with the ideas that would define the platforms before even having any real information."

While the graphics may be the most apparent showcase of the team's efforts, the worldwide visualization group divides its efforts among three key areas: graphics, gameplay, and preproduction. Since it

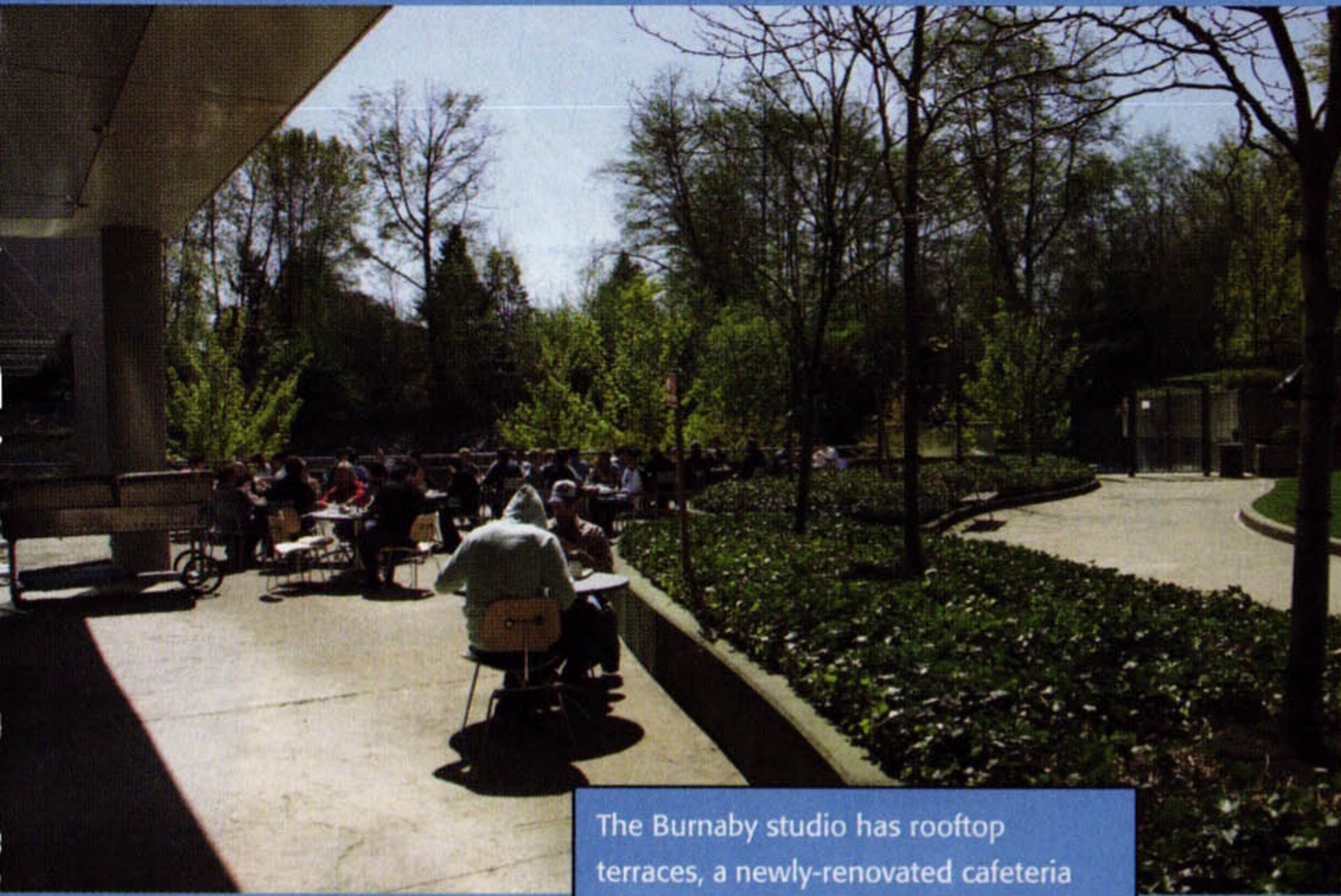
EA Canada is actually composed of two distinct locations with 1,550 total employees: an office building in downtown Vancouver housing the executive offices and some development teams (Need for Speed: Most Wanted), and the studio proper in nearby Burnaby, which is home to many EA Sports titles (like NBA, FIFA, and NHL).



"We've supported content on 60 different platforms, and I suspect there will be a 61, 62, and a 63"

**Don Mattrick
President of Worldwide Studios**

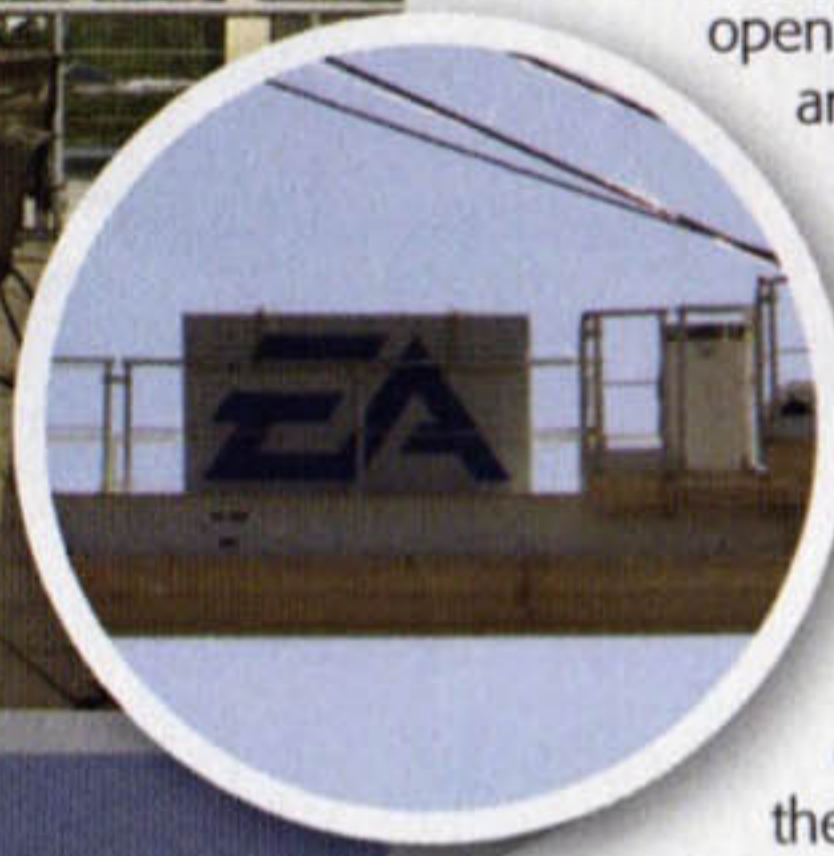
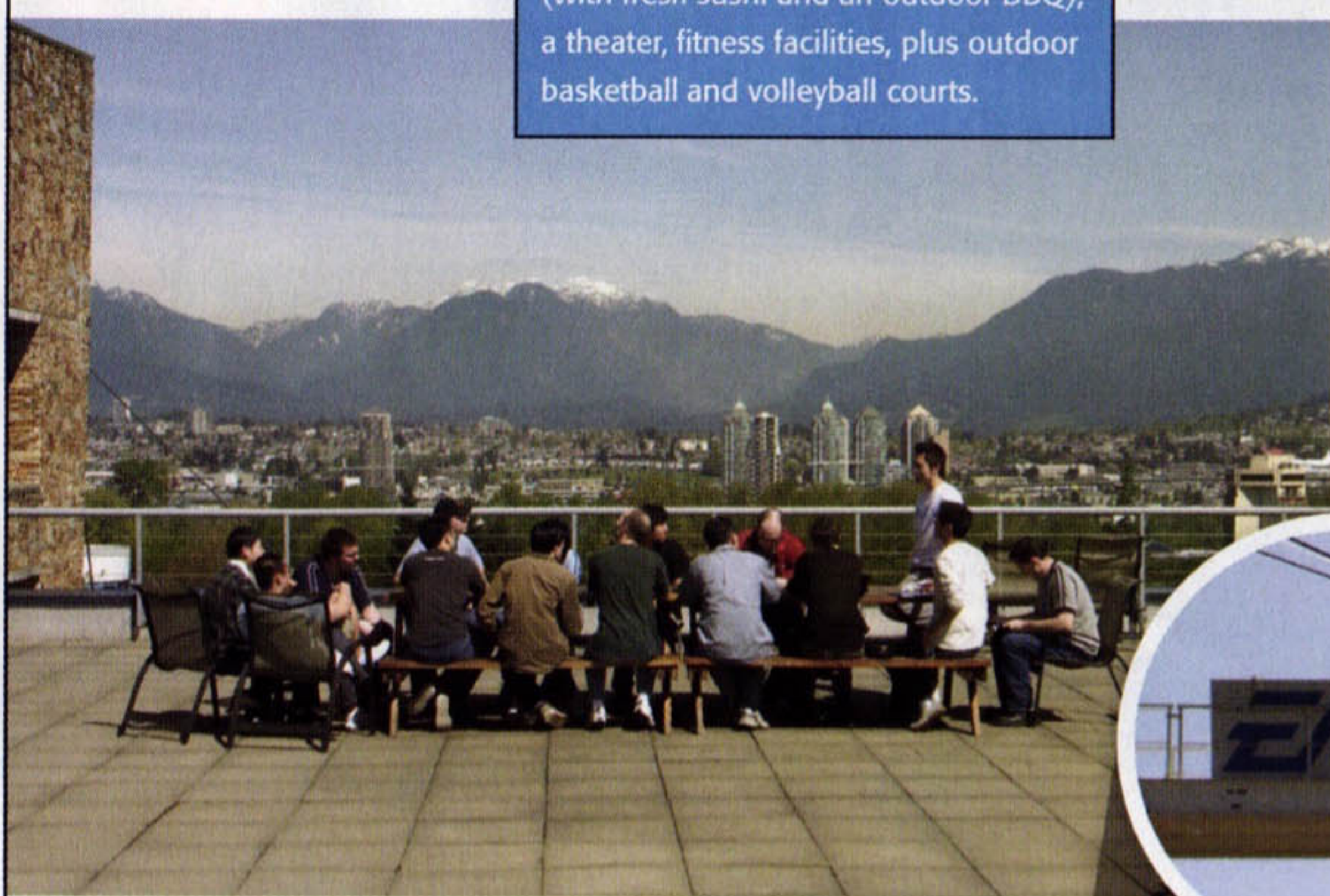




The Burnaby studio has rooftop terraces, a newly-renovated cafeteria (with fresh sushi and an outdoor BBQ), a theater, fitness facilities, plus outdoor basketball and volleyball courts.



EA's dog policy allows employees to bring their canine companions to work



doesn't actively develop specific titles, the group also spends a lot of time traveling to other EA studios in order to familiarize other teams with the new technology. Entis explains the need for this kind of internal education: "The tidal wave that is the next generation means that there are literally hundreds of new graphics techniques that, by definition, no one who is currently making games has had any experience with, since you can't use them on current platforms." If the screenshots from EA's opening salvo of next-gen titles are any indication (page 62), it looks like EA's teams are quick studies.

The fact that these new games look amazing shouldn't come as a surprise to anyone, however. Previous console generations have been largely defined by the quality of their graphics, and every gamer is expecting that the next one will present a heightened visual experience. So, if EA really plans to make jaws drop (instead of just raising a few eyebrows), it is going to need to deliver in other areas as well. "I think it's the goal to have the visual quality get to a certain level where consumers aren't wanting more fidelity," Mattrick states. "When we can get there, it's going to allow creativity to come to the forefront just

in terms of new ideas, new concepts, how you tell stories, how you immerse people inside the space – and that's the era we're entering into right now." Or, as Entis puts it: "The graphics only count if they're delivering on gameplay and entertainment."

In the past, how a game looked proved a barrier to some; not everyone could stare at two lines and a bouncing square and see ping-pong. As we approach an age where our games could start looking as good as what we see on television, the industry will have to focus on other aspects that shape gamers' expectations. "We'll have to start addressing other areas that are barriers," explains Mattrick. "Like game design, interface, length of play – so that companies like ours can create global hits that are selling 25 or 30 million units because they resonate with people in all parts of the world of all ages and genders."

One of the most important elements of this expanded appeal is EA's increasing emphasis on eliciting an emotional response in gamers. While the next generation doesn't immediately solve the technical hurdles of the past, it does make them easier to manage, and therefore frees up time for developers to engage players in new ways. "One good way of thinking about it is in terms of emotional impact," Entis clarifies. "Traditionally, most of the discussion and execution was about physical believability."

(continued on page 64)



EA's branding even extends to its construction equipment



Arcades are the perfect place to relax and take your mind off games



The Future At A Glance

No, they aren't genetically engineered supergames – these are just some early screens of what the next generation has in store for EA's core franchises. In addition to flashy graphics, each new iteration will be taking certain key mechanics to the next level. Keep in mind that some of these screens may be visual targets (not actual gameplay screens).

1 Madden NFL: As alluring as that commercial during the NFL draft was, the team at EA Tiburon promises us that the title's actual gameplay will, in fact, look even better. Let's just hope it isn't always snowing.

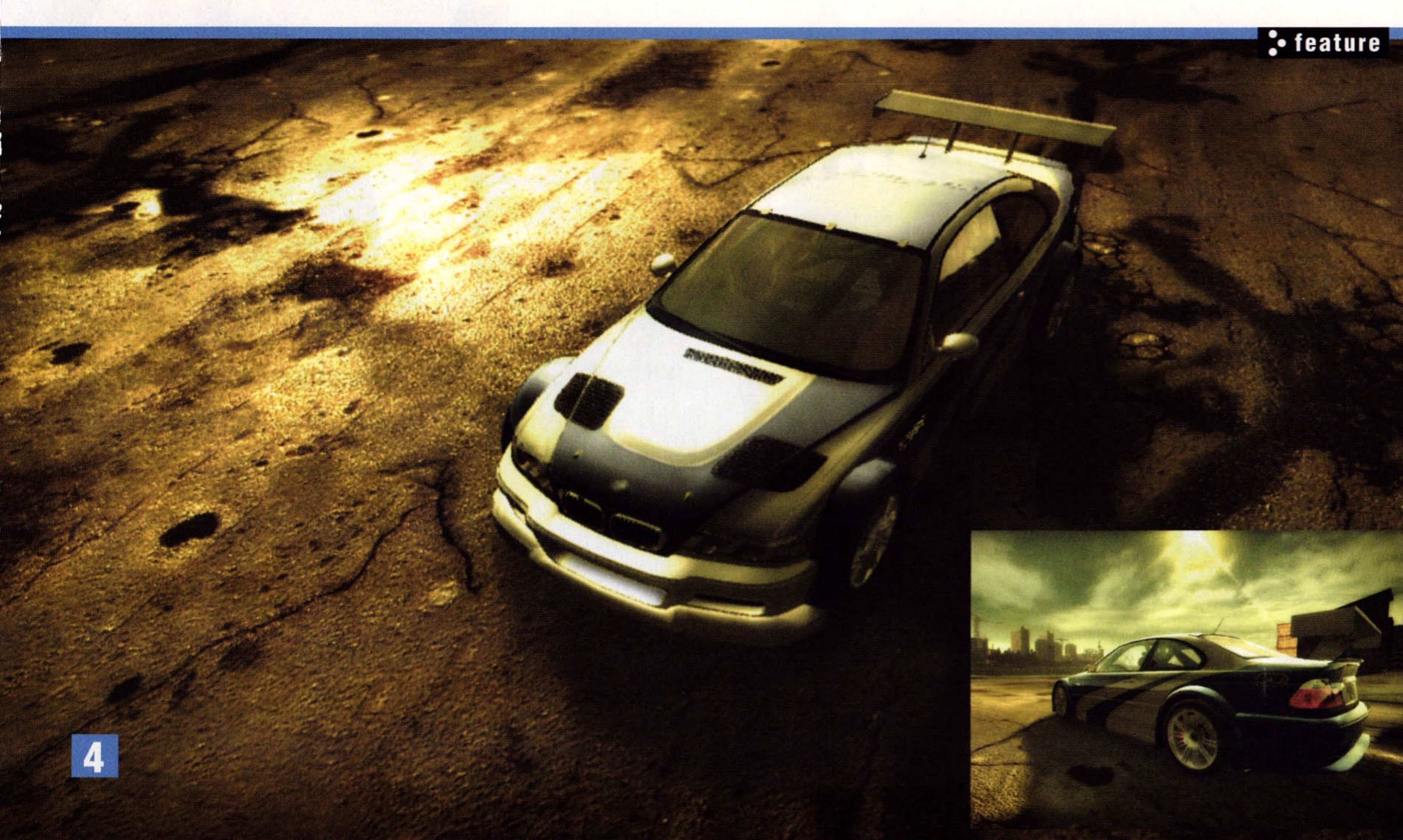
2 NBA Live: Featuring a greater emphasis on the physical aspects of basketball, players will witness more accurate collisions – from the dribbles to the fouls – and an expanded array of tricks on the court.

3 Tiger Woods PGA Tour: While photorealism isn't one of EA's explicit goals of the next generation, the next iteration of Tiger gets pretty darn close. "They have seven different kinds of grass," laughs Entis. "They have it down to the blade – no kidding."

4 Need for Speed: More than ever before, this next-gen treatment of illicit street racing hopes to deliver an unbelievable sense of speed. Plus, the environmental textures sport some truly impressive detail.

5 The Godfather: According to Entis, the way the characters, music, and scenes from the film come together will "trigger emotions already buried in anyone who's enjoyed the movie." Only time will tell if the game can do it without Al Pacino, though.





4



5



“The graphics only count if they’re delivering on gameplay and entertainment.”

**Glenn Entis
Chief Visual Officer**

In other words, it was a big deal that your feet didn't go through the floor or your head didn't go through the wall." However, as games become more cinematic, it will be crucial that characters are not only technically accurate, but emotionally compelling as well. This seems to solidify the similarities between the game industry and the film industry, but Entis points out one important distinction: "A director never says to an actor 'You're a really good actor! Your feet never go through the floor!'" While that is certainly true, we must be careful to remember that even though they are growing closer together, movies and games are still two separate art forms. Games are not passive entertainment; they require the attention and participation of the player. At the end of the day, no matter how great the story or how involving the characters, if this interaction falls behind the presentation, the game will be a disappointment.

EA's key strategy in keeping gameplay apace with the other enhancements is

an increasing focus on preproduction work for each and every one of its titles. This extends beyond simply doing more preliminary artwork and level designs; in fact, every employee of EA Canada – even those in areas like marketing and finance – recently participated in a workshop about preproduction in order to give the entire organization a shared background. But what does this training accomplish? "Great preproduction is the connective tissue," responds Entis. "It can tie next-gen graphics to next-gen gameplay. It's really about the creative process and the communication of the team." In the interest of fostering this communication, EA will actually be refining development into more of a cell-based process. Instead of every team working independently, with its own artists, programmers, and designers, much of the talent will be consolidated into groups that work on several games. A large core art team may do conceptual drawings for multiple titles, while another group of designers may be working on interesting game mechanics for many different genres.

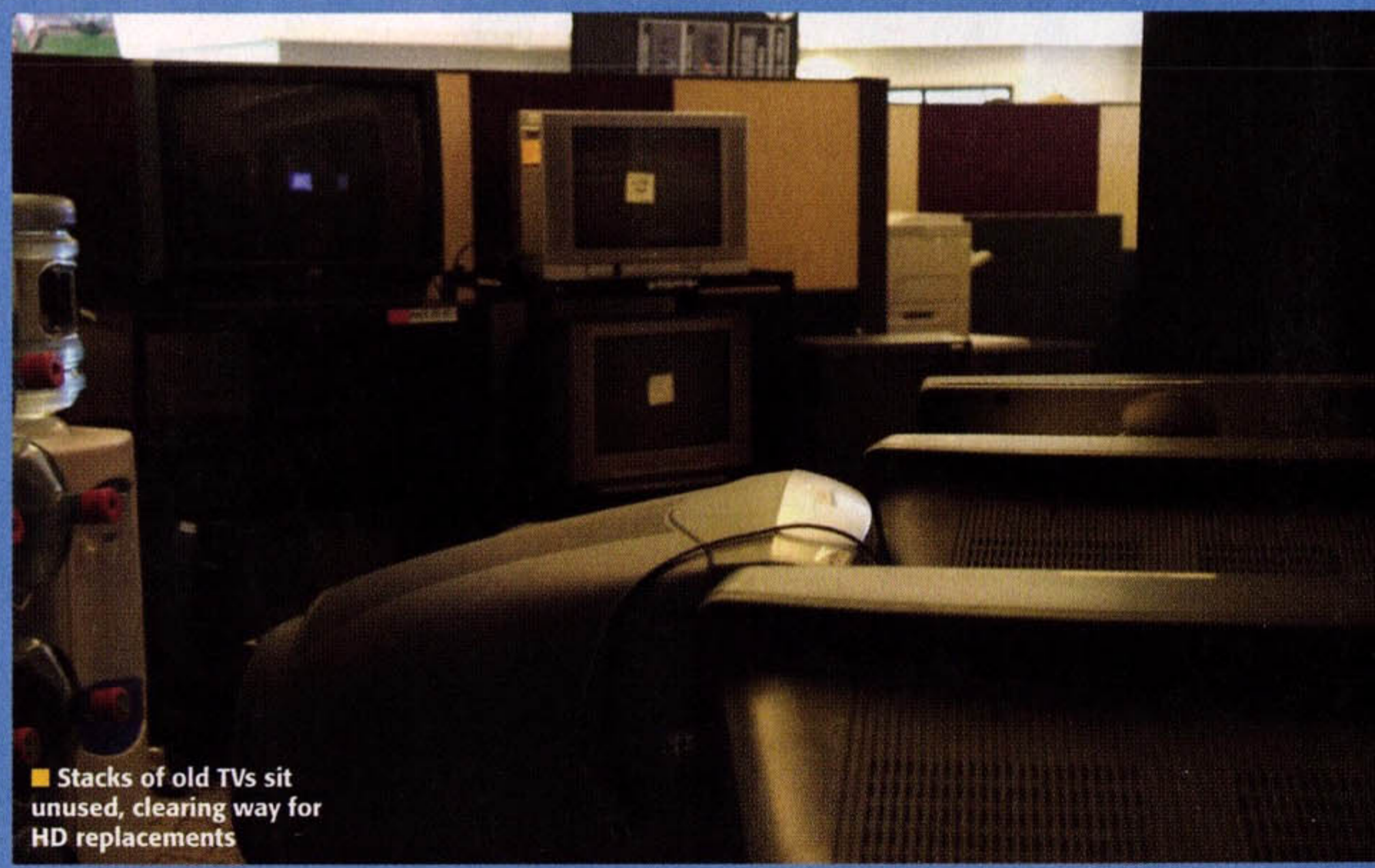
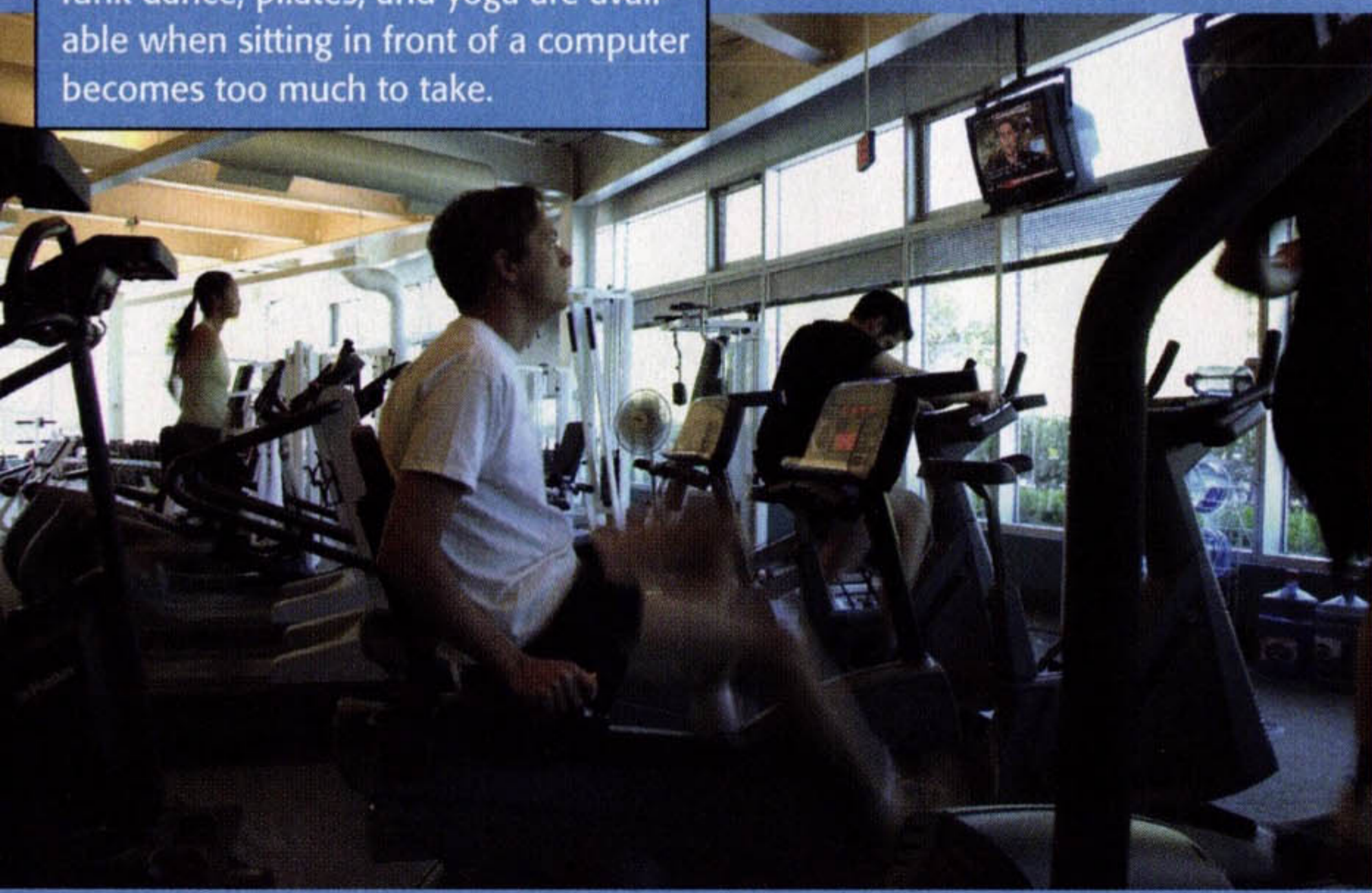
It may sound more like an assembly line than the traditional small, dedicated team approach, but it does give people the opportunity to work in a kind of creative think tank. So, through a shared preproduction experience and improved communication, the new development structure will hopefully lead to titles that push the boundaries of gaming.

The way EA meets the challenges of the next-gen market will undoubtedly define its future titles, but it is not a unique situation. Every development studio in the world focused on games for the next round of hardware will be faced with the same questions, and forced to implement new strategies. While the industry as a whole tackles these common issues, there are a handful of relevant questions particular to EA and its current position in the market. For instance, in light of its acquisition of the NFL and NCAA licenses, some have conjectured that a lack of competition will cause EA Sports titles to stagnate in the years to come. When asked how EA will address these naysayers, Mattrick simply replies:

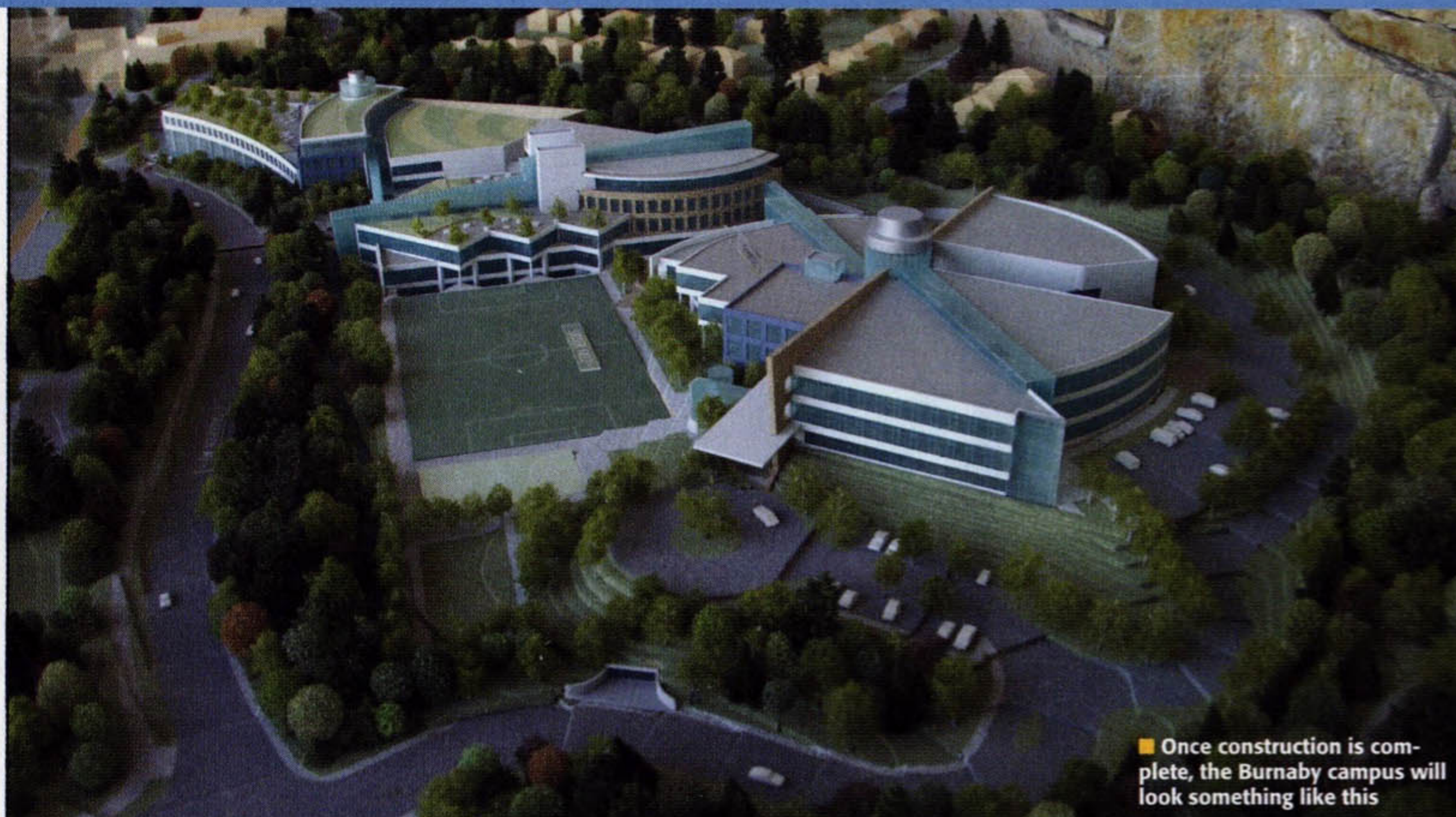
"We're going to bring the best product to market, and people are going to say 'This is the best version of Madden ever.'" He continues, "Take a step back – who were the people who were building and innovating in the first sports products? EA. We did it because we loved it, because we were passionate about it. We did it because we were sports junkies, and we totally get it. We get what competition is about. We get what sports are about. It's in our DNA." History is certainly in EA's favor, but the world of video game sports will just have to wait patiently and let the games speak for themselves in the new licensing landscape.

There are, of course, other changes to take into account as we make the move to a new batch of machines. With new graphics and more power, the danger is assuming that all next-gen titles are going to play like the current crop, just with a few extra bells and whistles. Mattrick assures us that gamers can expect to see both additions to and omissions from the familiar formula. "The goal of a new platform is to deliver a new experience, and for the teams to

Fitness classes like kickboxing, Latin funk dance, pilates, and yoga are available when sitting in front of a computer becomes too much to take.



■ Stacks of old TVs sit unused, clearing way for HD replacements



■ Once construction is complete, the Burnaby campus will look something like this

focus on and deliver what they think is the most interesting and impactful," he asserts. "There are times when features don't cross over from one iteration to another, even on a single platform. It's probably more likely to happen over the generation boundary, but the goal is that everything presented will be so fresh that everything else is just a minor detail." While this explanation won't assuage the pains of fans who see their favorite mode or feature fall to the cutting room floor, it isn't uncommon for titles to lose certain modes or features in a transition, and EA has the advantage of being able to follow through on its choices for several iterations, refining along the way.

EA has another weapon in its corner in the form of Criterion. Acquired by EA last year, Criterion is best known for developing the widely used Renderware engine, which is licensed out to developers across the industry. While their partnership has many benefits, it also provides an interesting conundrum: "Anything they develop goes into Renderware, so that's for the whole industry," Entis tells us. "Anything we develop, then there's the question of how much of that we can share with the community." Still, there have been some questions recently as to how much of the

Renderware technology EA is really willing to share, as well as the wisdom of having such a vital toolset under EA's lock and key. While it is in EA's and Criterion's best interest to create the best Renderware possible, EA also has to be concerned about what technology they keep for themselves to help them retain their edge in the next generation.

Unfortunately, when exactly the next generation starts is a bit foggy. Xbox 360 is expected to be available by the holidays, but it could be several months before the other systems hit, forcing developers to split their attention between the current generation and the next. This is nothing new to EA, however, which has historically created software for practically every gaming device on the market. "A single point in time doesn't define our strategy," declares Mattrick. "We're not going to say 'On December 1, this is the hardware out there, and therefore this is the only thing EA is going to do.' The timing really doesn't change our strategy as a business. We've supported content on 60 different platforms, and I suspect there will be a 61, 62, and a 63."

This all-encompassing approach to hardware support comes with a price,

however – literally. Consumers have essentially been paying the same retail price for games for years, while the costs of making the games have been rising steadily. This increases the financial risk for every title, and raises the question: going forward, will EA only greenlight sure-fire franchise and licensed projects? "No," Mattrick says definitively. "Any team that has an idea that could be a hit within the industry and within our company gets a serious audience." On one hand, this attitude is encouraging. On the other, it makes one wonder if there is any place in the next generation for games that aren't "hits." What about games like *ICO*, or *Beyond Good and Evil*? Hopefully the big-budget titles with franchise modes, all-star casts, and licensed soundtracks won't suffocate the smaller, concept-heavy titles that often become buried treasures of gaming history.

Not that all of these additional features are a bad thing. In fact, they will become even more prominent in upcoming games; EA is making an effort to build in value to its games so that, even if the retail price goes up, gamers still feel like they are getting a bargain. With better phys-

ics, improved AI, and more authenticity, EA's objective is to make gamers say (in Mattrick's words), "Wow, I'm taking these guys to the cleaners!" It isn't often that a company wants to convey the image that it is getting fleeced, but given the capabilities of next-generation console, it is certain that we will see things that we never thought were possible in video games. "Our goal is to blow you away," declares Entis.

Given the company's extraordinary influence and resources, EA's success ultimately affects the future of the entire video game industry, and the future looks bright. When asked to articulate a single message that gamers should take away from EA as they head into the next generation, Entis teases: "A generation of games is five years. The opening of this generation will be very exciting, and a great chance to see what the possibilities are, but realize that you haven't seen anything yet." ■ ■ ■

Employees have free access to an information resource center stocked with more than 5,000 video games, books, magazines, and movies available for research or recreational purposes.



■ The servers sit at the technological heart of EA's operation





BEST OF E3 2004



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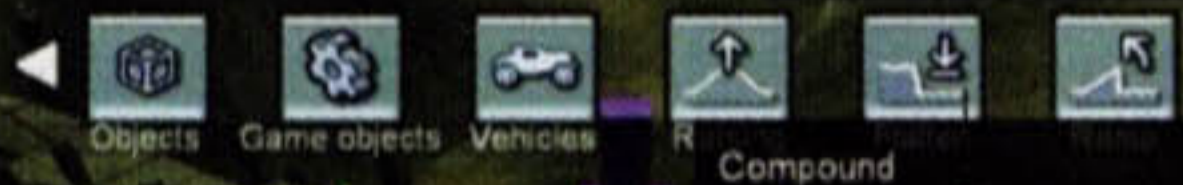
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XBOX 360

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION
(UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE)

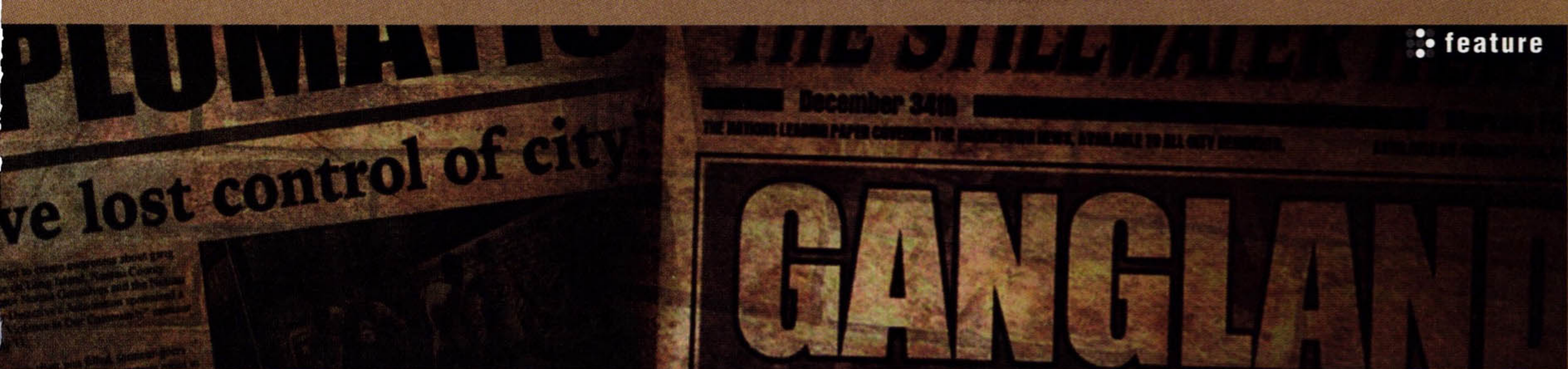
> **PUBLISHER** THQ

> **DEVELOPER** VOLITION

> **RELEASE** WINTER



As we sit in the darkened space of Volition's new conference room, there's a palpable feeling of excitement in the air. The game's lead designers are gathered around the table as Jacques Hennequet, the producer for Saint's Row, starts to speak. This is, after all, their biggest project to date. They've moved into these sleek new offices only recently, to accommodate the vast size of the endeavor. Their last game had a team of 40 – Saint's Row has close to 120 people all told. After almost two years in development, they're finally ready to show off the fruits of their labor, and this is the first time someone outside their inner circle will be seeing the game. Hennequet begins to speak about the next-generation technical achievements, the vast size of the game world, and the expansion of the urban sandbox concept into an online multiplayer arena. As he continues to outline the dozens of features, modes of play, and vast ambitions for the title, it gets hard to keep up. There's a wealth of information they have to share about this huge title, but as Hennequet turns to hand us the controller, we learn one thing right away – Saint's Row is on track to be one hell of a fun game.



As we run our character down into the busy city street, things feel immediately familiar. Cars drive past, police patrol the streets, gang members wander in small, tight-knit squads. The similarity to the stellar Grand Theft Auto series is unmistakable. However, as we play, and the team continues to tell us about the game, it becomes increasingly clear that this is much more than a clone of the popular franchise. Chris Stockman, the lead designer, offers his perspective. "After doing extensive research we found most gamers just loved creating mayhem and destruction within GTA. They played a few missions here and there but ultimately went back to just messing around in the world. Unfortunately, this type of freeform gameplay didn't matter that much in the GTA series. What we are doing with Saint's Row is taking this fun, freeform component and making it actually matter." We've certainly seen plenty of GTA clones in the past, but Saint's Row is poised to break the mold. Taking the template of the urban playground game, they are implementing dozens of the features that make the genre fun, and using that template to launch in an entirely new direction.

Saint's Row tells the story of the Third Street Saints, a gang in the fictional crime-ridden city of Stillwater. Your goal as a member of the Saints is to take back the city from the three rival gangs that hold most of the town. While much of this sounds familiar, it's the path to this goal that sets Saint's Row apart. From the technical marvels of the game to the progression of the story, there's a constant sense of dynamic reaction to every action you take. Stockman tells us more. "We're really adding a more open-ended feel to the game that we hope is refreshing to players. We're giving them an unprecedented amount of freedom to really play the game how they want to play it. They are no longer restricted to one linear story path to progress through the game."

Free to Roam

This player-driven mentality is present from the very opening of the game, thanks to one of the most extensive and involved character creation sequences we've ever seen. Dozens of sliders let you create a player of any size, shape, or ethnicity that you want. When we asked the team whether we could create a horribly deformed, hopelessly ugly

gang member, they just smiled and nodded. It's all about player choice. Your personal style offers up the same degree of flexibility. Instead of just choosing what clothes you wear, you decide how to put them on as well. Layer pieces on top of one another or wear them in unique ways. Zip up a jacket or leave it open. Wear your pants normally or roll them up. Button your shirt all the way or just fasten it at the top.

You start the game from your local crib, which serves as a hub where you can return to change clothes or access your garage of cars. Each district of the city you bring under your control garners you another crib, and your full collection of vehicles and apparel is available at each one. Once you emerge into the world beyond your safe house, an endless number of options await you. From the beginning of the game, the entire city is open and available for exploration. Every part of the game world streams directly onto your screen – there are no load times after you start the game. Run inside buildings, start new missions, or drive across town, and you'll never see a break for the game to load up the new area. You can immediately start the prologue story, which teaches

you the basics of gameplay. After that, each of the four gangs has its own story to pursue. Tackle them in any order – starting and stopping whenever you want. As you complete each gang's story, you'll conquer that area of town. You'll be able to play the game the way you want to play.

If you're like us, this means a lot of explosions, crashing cars, and high speed pursuits. In order to integrate this random chaos, destruction, and lawlessness into the game objectives, Volition is including a mechanic called activities. These are small mission-style events that weave seamlessly into the flow of playing around in the city, like tiny attractions at a theme park. "Activities are a crucial part of Saint's Row. They are one of the primary devices we use to let the user decide 'how much of what' they prefer to do," Hennequet tells us. "Activities can be performed anywhere in the city, any number of times, and the player can focus on his favorite type of activities without any penalties. If you would rather race than smuggle drugs, go ahead and race as much as you want. If you prefer combat-oriented activities, do more of those." While there are 13 activities in all, each time you encounter them they'll be slightly



different, with small mini-stories and characters for each time they show up. The Theft activity can be triggered at one of the local pawn shops. From here, the shop owner will encourage you to go and break into another store. You'll have to grab a car for the job, but choose wisely. An open bed truck may be able to store more, but it's slower, and packages thrown in the back may tip and spill out if you get in a high speed pursuit, while a speedy sedan may not have all the room you want. Once you reach the job site, your break-in will trigger a timed alarm, showing how long you have until the police arrive to bust up the party. Steal all you can, load up your ride, and get to the drop off point.

Alternately, take up the Hitman activity. You're given a mark to take down, and a weapon to do so with. Sometimes it will be to run him over with a particular car, while for others it might be a high-powered sniper rifle. You don't have to kill him that way, but you get a bonus if you do. Following a different tack, the Vandalism activity encourages you to cause as much public and private destruction as you can in order to distract the police while your employers commit a crime elsewhere.

Escort jobs have you serve as a limo driver for a stripper and her celebrity client. You'll have to avoid the roaming news and paparazzi vans long enough for the couple to share some quality time together in the back seat. Highjacking activities task you with getting ahold of a particular vehicle, while simultaneously eliminating the pesky driver. There are all sorts of Racing activities, including street races, demolition derbies, and throw down combat races. Then there's our personal favorite – insurance fraud. Here, an unscrupulous lawyer encourages you to hurt yourself as much as possible by throwing yourself down stairs, jumping in front of the train, or otherwise causing yourself grievous bodily harm. In these missions, you'll have an actual button press that fakes your fall, exhibiting the exaggerated ragdoll physics that abound throughout the game. Injure yourself well enough, and you'll get a cut of the payout. The focus for all of these activities is constant fun doing whatever

you like to do in the game. Each of the 13 activities is available in some form in every district of the city, so you'll never have to go far to start one up.

Choice and Consequence

When you've had your fill of random criminal deviance (as if that can happen), you can tackle the main story missions. Usually, several of these should be available at any one time, and there'll be 40 to 50 story missions in the final game. Many of the neighborhoods will only come under your control after completing one of the missions in that spot. Other neighborhoods are controlled by what the team calls a stronghold. Instead of a story mission, the only way to take over these parts of town will be by completing its stronghold task. In one area you might have to defend the building, and in others you'll just have to eliminate the entrenched gang leadership. There are over 25 strongholds throughout the city, and each can be brought under your sway. But like any large empire, don't expect to rule unchallenged. Rival gangs will occasionally push back and try to retake their stolen hideouts, and you'll have to return to defend your territory.

To tie the activities, missions, and random violence together, all of them go towards building up Respect. Respect is necessary to open up the new story missions or pinpoint the strongholds in a given area, and you'll only gain Respect from different gangs by completing tasks on their turf. As your Respect level grows, rivals on the street will cease insulting you and instead flash grudging gang signs your way. Girls will move from uninterested to fascinated, and they'll flock to your local crib. Pedestrians will begin to converse about you. The whole world is alive to your exploits.

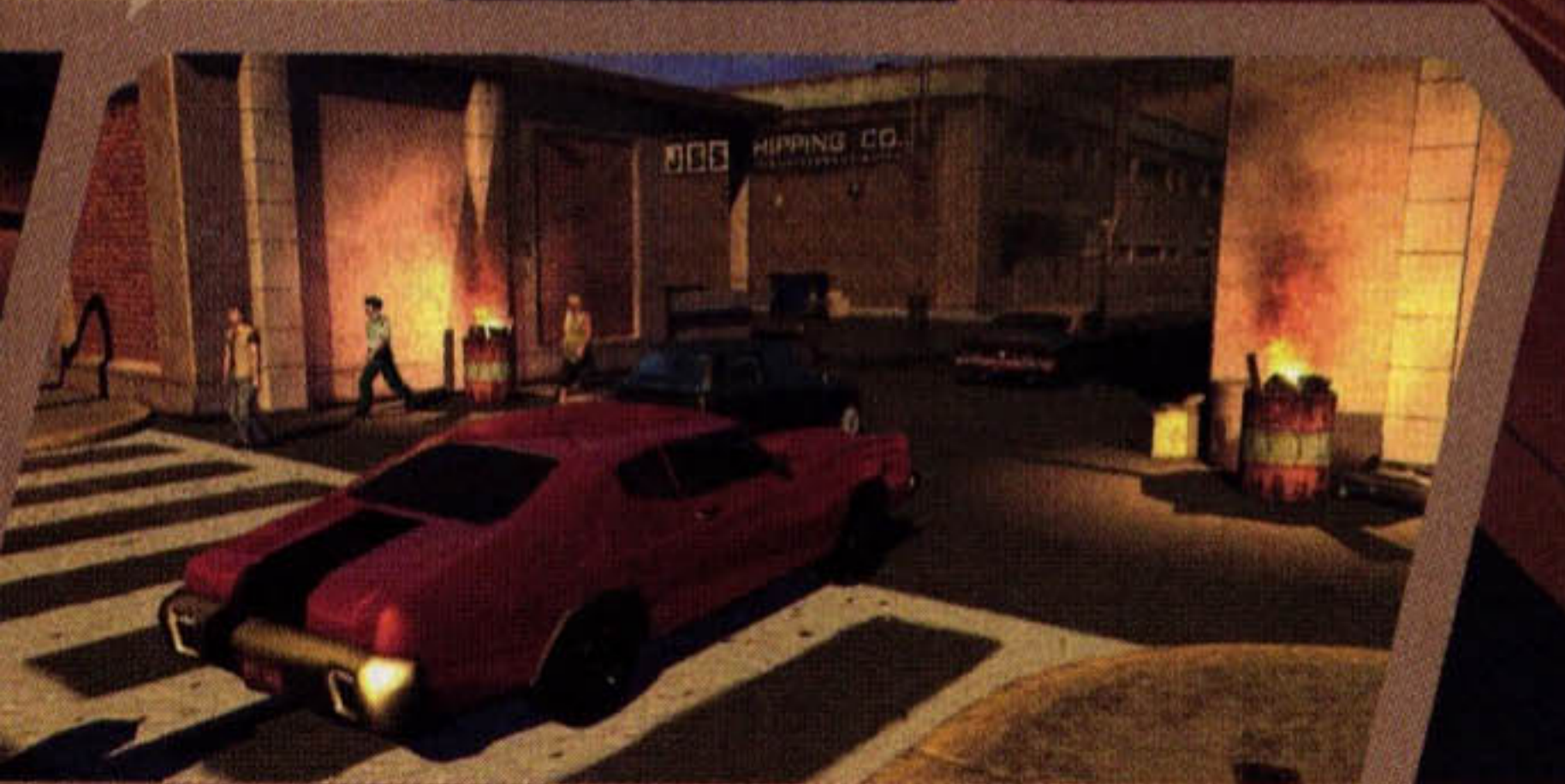
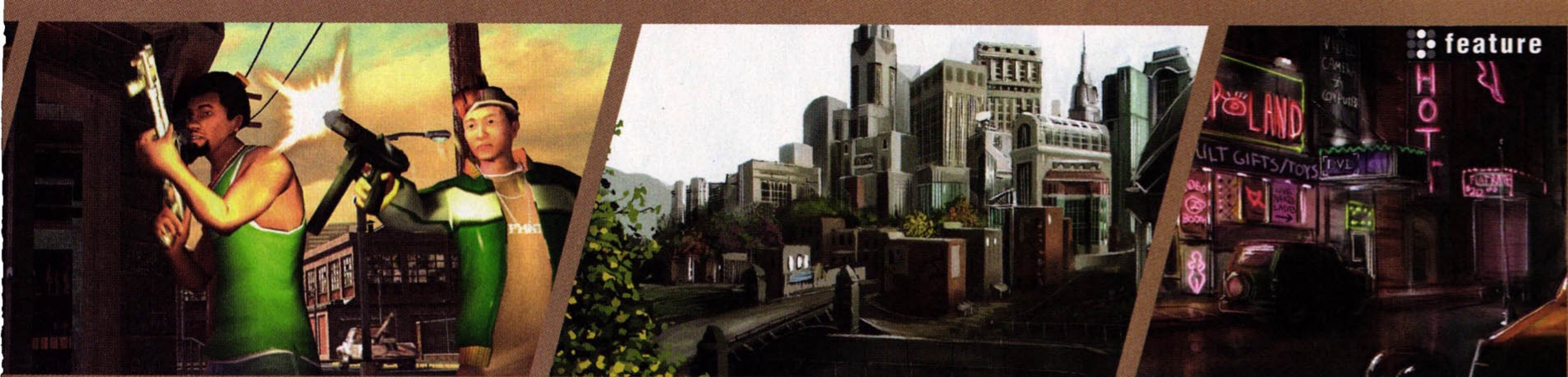
You'll also have to keep an eye on your growing notoriety in the city, which is tracked by two separate meters. If you attack or make moves against rival gangs, your gang notoriety will go up. Attack civilians, steal cars, or commit other crimes, and you'll find your notoriety with the police will rise

CONTINUED ON PAGE 72



■ All targeting is manual, with only a small assist from the game. You can always aim in 360 degrees, whether on foot or in your car





Rollerz
Los Carnales

Saints
Vice Kings



Starting from Saint's Row (in green), you'll forcibly retake the massive city of Stillwater district by district



Each of the gangs has its own unique appearance. The Vice Kings are the most organized, and are into the traditional gangsta thug look. The Los Carnales affect a more relaxed style, and are heavy into drug connections in Columbia. Meanwhile, the West Side Rollerz are down with the street racing scene – think *The Fast and The Furious*

significantly. Either way, you're looking at serious trouble for you and your crew. To decrease the danger, you can certainly lie low for awhile. Alternately, find a good forger to make up a nice fake ID. And if you're really feeling drastic, go to the local plastic surgeon. Here, you can effectively remake your character to appear entirely different. Beware, however – low cost surgeons don't always get things exactly right.

Even your bad habits have consequences. Alcohol is readily available throughout the city, and unlike in the real world, it manages to enhance your performance. Specifically, a moderate binge gives you "beer muscles", letting you throw drunken punches with the best of them, flinging your opponent high in the air and against the far wall. Overdo it on booze (or

the technical director on the game, and he explains the huge array of features the team has been able to play around with. "There is an amazing amount of power under the hood in the Xbox 360, both from a CPU and GPU [Graphics Processing Unit] perspective. On the graphics side we've been able to create a world where every light is dynamic and everything can cast real-time shadows." He exhibited exactly what he meant within the game by entering a command to speed up the passage of the day. On this cue, all the on-screen shadows began to rotate around in response to the sun moving overhead, perfectly displaying the shape of each image and form, from the highest building to the smallest curbside fire hydrant. Lawrance went on to explain the Xbox 360's support of Shader

of the Xbox 360 allows us to have many ragdolls simulating at once, and we don't shy away from that." To see what he meant, we fired off a rocket launcher at a nearby truck. A whole slew of nearby pedestrians were flung high into the air as the force of the explosion blasted outwards. We watched how the truck's damage modeling altered in direct response to the point of impact and force of the blast. The hood ignited with a tremendous burst, and one of the driver-side tires careened off and flew directly at our character, knocking him to the ground as the back end of the truck flew off in the opposite direction. Damage to all the objects in the game is similarly dynamic. Shoot out a tire, and the car will veer off in that direction. Slam into a vehicle head on, and you'll see the opposing



other intoxicating substances) and you'll find yourself waking up in a dark alley, stripped of your jewelry and clothes, and with no idea where you are – feeling in all respects dazed and confused.

The Look of the Future

As we brazenly wandered the streets of Stillwater, it was hard not to stop and marvel at the technical prowess with which the entire world has been rendered. The Xbox 360 allows for a tremendous leap forward in how a game environment of this size and complexity can be presented. Shiny, reflective surfaces cover all the cars. Weapon muzzle flashes light the face of a gunner. Intricately detailed textures cover the tall buildings. Alan Lawrance is

Model 3.0. The complexity of this tool can be summed up simply – it affords a huge range of options to make surfaces respond more realistically to the effects of light, including everything from the subtle shading of skin and hair to the fluid reflective surface of a watery pool.

While these features make the city look unbelievable, it's the action sequences that really need to pop off the screen. "We use Havok 3.0 in the game, which provides a strong physics base for us to build on," Lawrance told us. "We have spent a lot of time adjusting the ragdoll behavior to get the best results, and we feel we have the best looking (and behaving) ragdolls in any game out there today. The CPU power

driver come smashing right through his front windshield. All of the action is over the top – just slightly beyond the realm of realism so that it feels like a ridiculous action movie stunt. And you're right in the middle of it all.

Music To Your Ears

It's easy to forget the incredible effect that audio has on the gaming experience. Even with all the hyped up graphics and constant action, it's often the music, vocals, and sound effects that really pull you into the world – make it feel alive and breathing. To address this issue, the development team is pursuing excellence in audio with the same fervor that is being applied to the rest of the title. The in-game radio is

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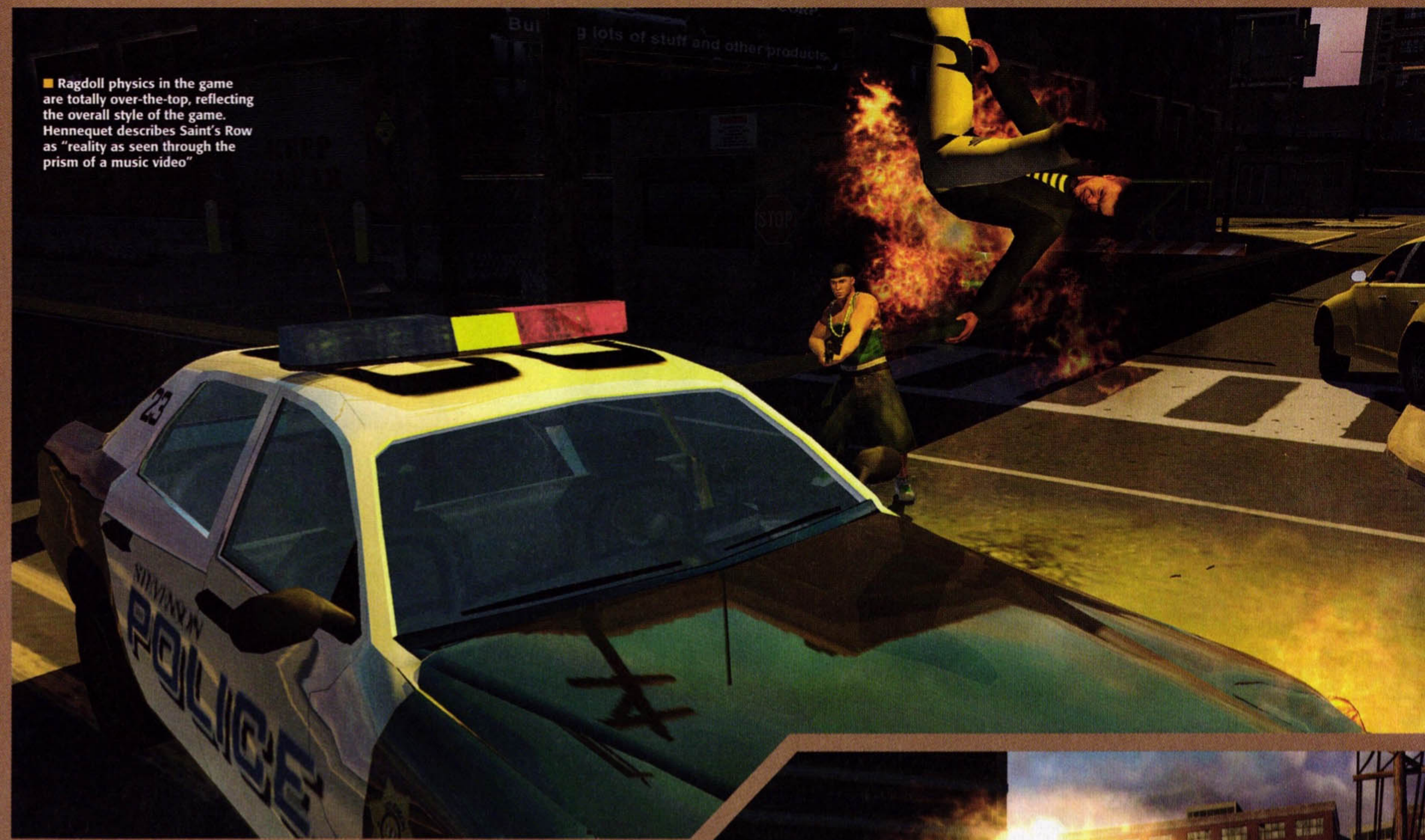


■ Run solo or bang with a crew – you'll be able to recruit up to three homies to help conquer the city



■ Combat is brutal and efficient, and all the damage you do is location specific – nail a guy in the leg and he'll start to limp

■ Ragdoll physics in the game are totally over-the-top, reflecting the overall style of the game. Hennequet describes Saint's Row as "reality as seen through the prism of a music video"



populated by a dozen full stations, 10 with music and two for talk. Plans include over 130 complete songs, including six unlockable tunes that have been written especially for the game. To fit the style of the title, a majority of the songs are being licensed from up-and-coming hip hop acts. However, if your preferences swerve in a different direction, you can tap into the dozens of rock, indie, euro dance, '80s, and '90s songs, or even a full-fledged classical music station. While we may have seen this sort of thing before, the team has distinguished itself with several cool features. First, the music won't be on a loop. Song order will change each time through, and the frequency of different songs will change depending on the time of day. Additionally, the on-air commercials will be dynamically connected to the world around you. If you hear a store owner advertising a big sale for the rest of that day, you'll literally have to get there before the sale ends to take advantage. You'll even have a personal MP3 player. With that, you can go to the local music store in-game and buy your favorite songs off the radio to listen

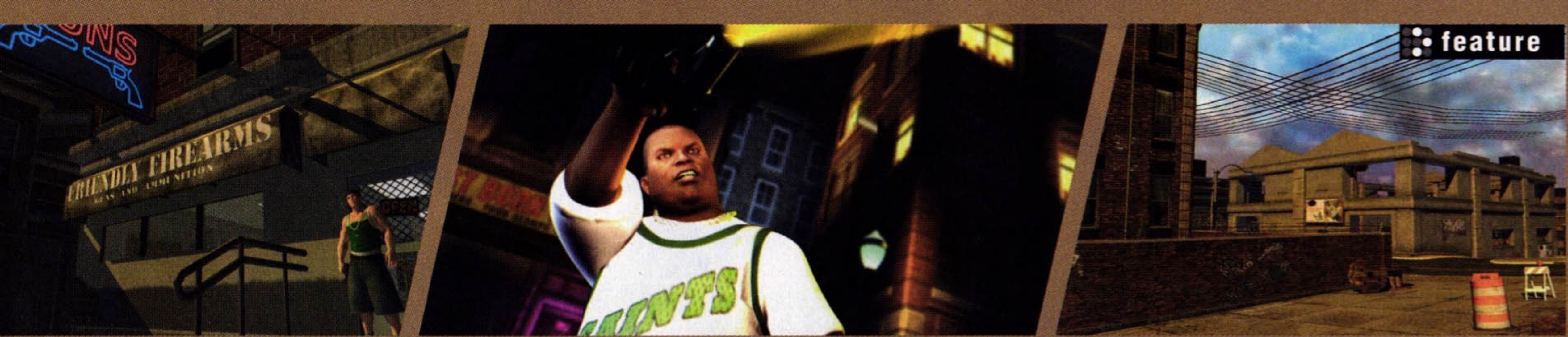
to as you walk down the street. Or, like any Xbox 360 title, you'll be able to use your own custom soundtrack.

An equal focus is going into bringing the world alive through its voice actors. Approximately 25,000 lines of spoken dialogue have been recorded for the game, with some of the rumored actors to include David Carradine, Mila Kunis, Tia Carrere, Michael Rappaport, and Freddy Rodriguez. The archvillain of the game is played by Clancy Brown, most recently seen as Brother Justin on HBO's *Carnivale*, but also known for his roles in *Highlander* and *The Shawshank Redemption*. For Saint's Row, he plays a truly despicable city politician in the midst of a reelection campaign. Feigning disgust at the city's gang warfare problem, he's actually playing a leading role in criminal actions throughout the town.

Two is Better Than One

There's one last thing that sets Saint's Row apart from so many other similar games in the marketplace, but it's a big one – online multiplayer. Microsoft's next-gen approach places a great deal of importance on the continued evolution of Xbox Live, and





Saint's Row won't be left behind. We were overjoyed to hear that you'll be able to play two-player online co-op through a set of objective-based games, including working together to see how long you can stay alive against an increasing barrage of police, SWAT, and helicopters. If you lean more in the competitive direction, you'll be able to jump into one of several gang warfare modes, in four-versus-four matches including such gems as Protect the Pimp. Here, a team will have to escort one of their members (the pimp) to the brothel before the other team takes him out. Don't worry, though. The pimp has his own protection, including a special attack called the Pimp Slap that results in a one hit kill. All of the

multiplayer modes have a familiar feel to them, but with an added humorous tinge to set them apart from other games. Blinged-Out Ride has your team earning money as fast as possible in order to trick out your car at the local chop shop, with the winner being whomever hits the upgrade goal first. There's Big Ass Chains (and Team Big Ass Chains, of course), in which you attempt to take out your opponents in order to steal their neck chains. And then there's the straight up deathmatch-style mode – Gangsta Brawl.

As you play online, you'll quite literally wear your status on your character. You can import your single-player character or make a new one to use online. Either way, completing

matches awards you money, especially if you win. This money can then be used to purchase new clothes, jewelry, and other accessories to show off your skills to competitors. We also heard of possible plans to include downloadable content in the future, with the possibilities ranging from new apparel and music to car types, and even new multiplayer stages.

Without a doubt, Saint's Row is an enormous undertaking. Not only is the feature list immensely ambitious, but the development team has all the struggles of dealing with entirely new hardware and the challenges that come with it. Thankfully, the team seems more than up to the task. Even many months before the game's planned release around the

launch time of the new Xbox, the game already plays and handles great. Lead designer Chris Stockman tells us their biggest goal is "giving the player the choice in how he plays Saint's Row. If the player has that feeling of freedom while playing the game, then we did our job. We're trying to build a franchise with Saint's Row, so we'll do what it takes to create a fun, polished – and most importantly – *entertaining* game experience." As gamers eagerly await the arrival of the first of the next gen consoles, we're sure that the huge potential of Saint's Row is almost certainly going to be yet another reason for anticipation to skyrocket. ■■■

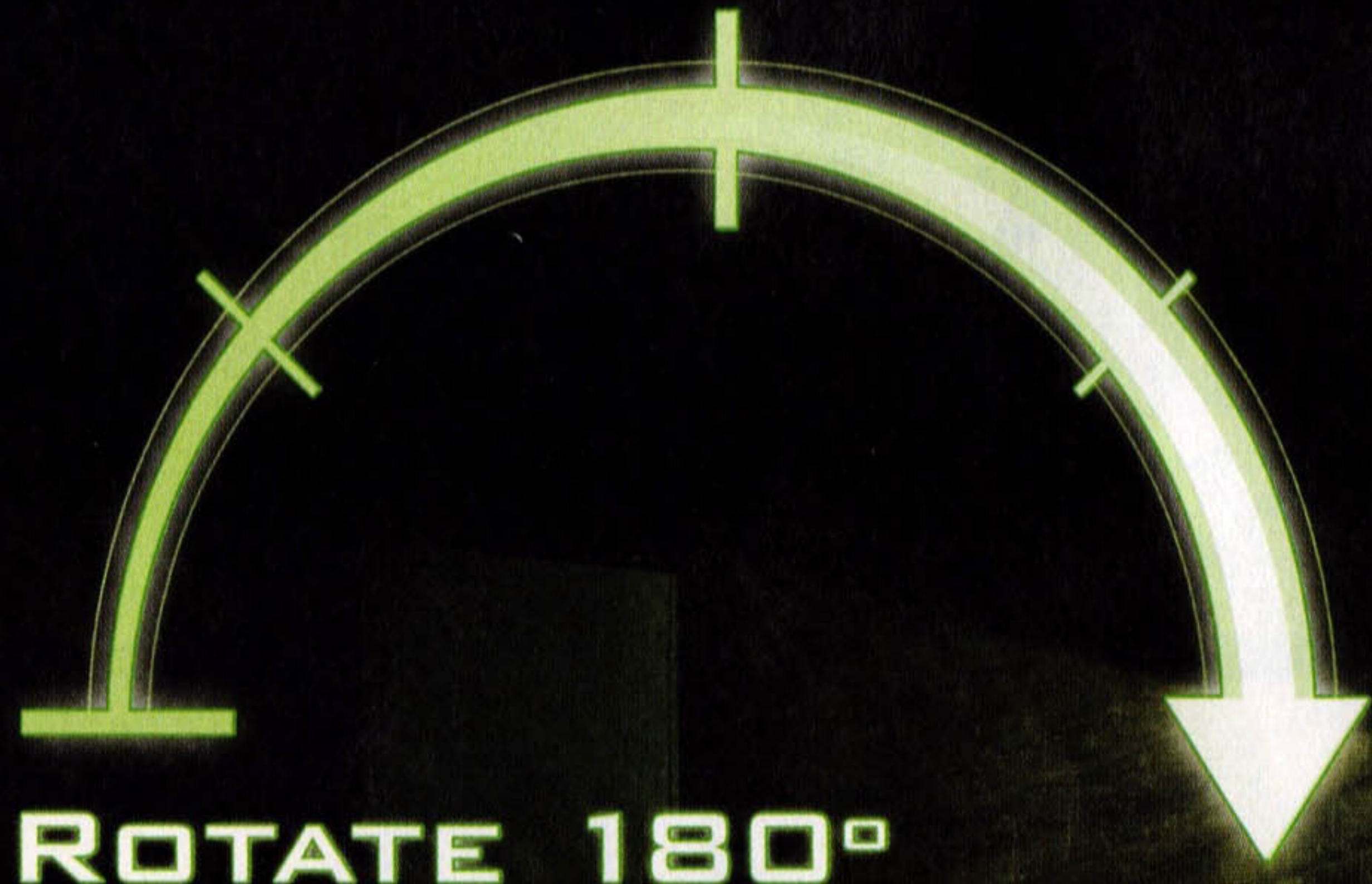


■ Vehicles morph realistically to the damage they take, but the massive explosions that often result from a crash are exaggerated and cinematic in scope



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What if an algorithm could crash the stock markets, black out New York, and hijack ballistic missiles? **This is 2007. This is reality.** The one programmer who has the key to this algorithm has vanished. Find him at any cost. Bring the battle closer to the enemy - bring it to their soil before the chain of chaos becomes unstoppable. You are Sam Fisher. You are a Splinter Cell.



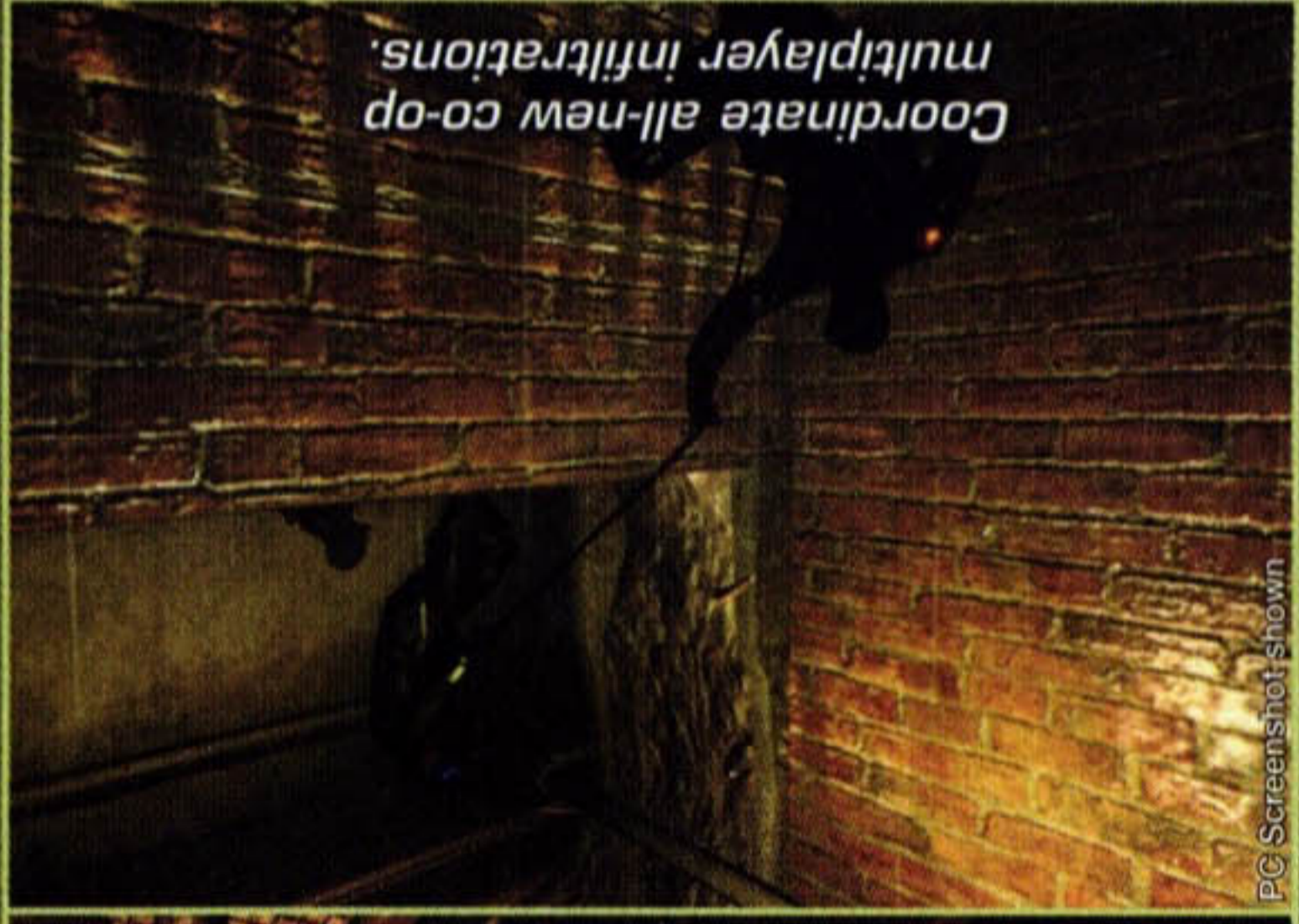
ROTATE 180°

"It's Simply Brilliant."
9 out of 10; 9.5 out of 10
Electronic Gaming Monthly



All-new, shockingly innovative spies vs. mercenaries online battles.

PlayStation 2 Screenshot shown



Coordinate all-new co-op multiplayer infiltrations.

PC Screenshot shown



High-adrenaline stealth kills, submission strikes, and firefights.

Nintendo GameCube Screenshot shown



Unpredictable enemy encounters through multipath levels.

Xbox Screenshot shown

SPLINTER CELL

Tom Clancy's

TWIST 360°



XBOX LIVE



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Soundtrack composed by Amon Tobin

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PREVIEWS

A Glimpse Into The Future Of Gaming



XBOX 360

Full Auto

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR SYSTEM LINK) > **PUBLISHER** SEGA
> **DEVELOPER** PSEUDO INTERACTIVE > **RELEASE** XBOX 360 LAUNCH

DEATH RACE 2005

Prior to last year's E3, Microsoft released a handful of videos designed to showcase the power of its next-gen XNA development tools. One of these videos was entitled *Crash*, and showed in shocking detail what happened to a high-end sports car as it collided with a wall. Featuring an amazing car model and incredible destruction, *Crash* quickly became the most talked about part of the XNA demos. Not surprisingly, it was really a part of a larger project – a next-gen title called *Full Auto*. But there is a lot more to *Full Auto* than simply high-speed, arcade-style racing.

Full Auto is most accurately described as a merging of *Burnout 3* and *Twisted Metal*, and publisher Sega is touting it as one of the most fully destructible games ever. The goal of each race is obviously to be the first one across the finish

line, but every car in this tournament is loaded down with deadly weapons. Each vehicle will feature machine guns, rocket launchers, missiles, or other heavy ordinance. Obviously, you can use your arsenal to blow up your rivals and get ahead, but that's not all. Everything in the highly detailed environments can be taken out, and the carnage that ensues is amazing. You can blow the faces off the buildings that line the streets, and the rubble can crush the vehicles underneath it. Gas tankers will explode, sending out shock waves that damage anything around them,

power lines will snap and spiral down to the ground, and cars will be ripped apart piece by piece. Everything in the world features the latest version of the Havok physics engine, so the massive destruction will occur realistically, and never the same way twice.

With so much carnage unfolding in every race, it's obvious that players will find themselves taking tons of damage and even exploding from time to time. Fortunately, *Full Auto* boasts a unique feature that will keep them alive on many occasions. By



taking out other vehicles and driving well, players will fill what is called the Unwreck Meter. When a player takes a huge hit or botches a crucial jump, they can trigger Unwreck to rewind time to the point before they made the mistake. Then the player can tackle the obstacle from a different angle or simply blow up the same enemy again!

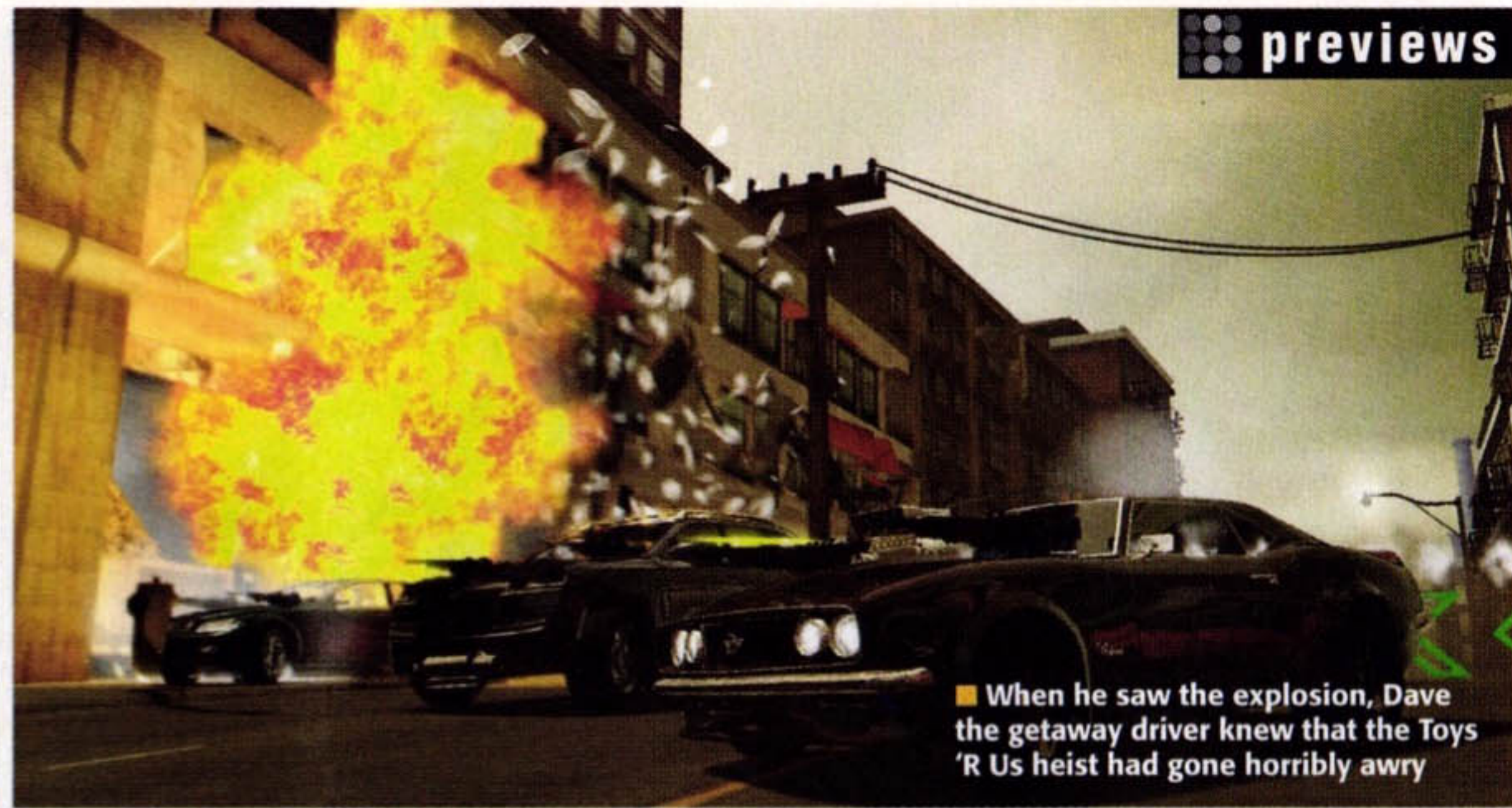
Obviously, *Full Auto* is set up to be a highly competitive game, and will thus feature robust multiplayer support. Not only will it support split-screen and system-link multiplayer, but it will also be loaded with different Xbox Live game types. Basic racing will obviously be supported, as will arena combat games focused solely on vehicular carnage. Custom matches will also be offered, so online players can tweak the balance between racing and mayhem to their liking.

The launch of the Xbox 360 is an incredibly exciting time, and there are a ton of games on the way for the system that look phenomenal. But out of all of them, *Full Auto* looks like it may be the most gleefully fun. And in the end, isn't that what video games are all about? ■ ■ ■

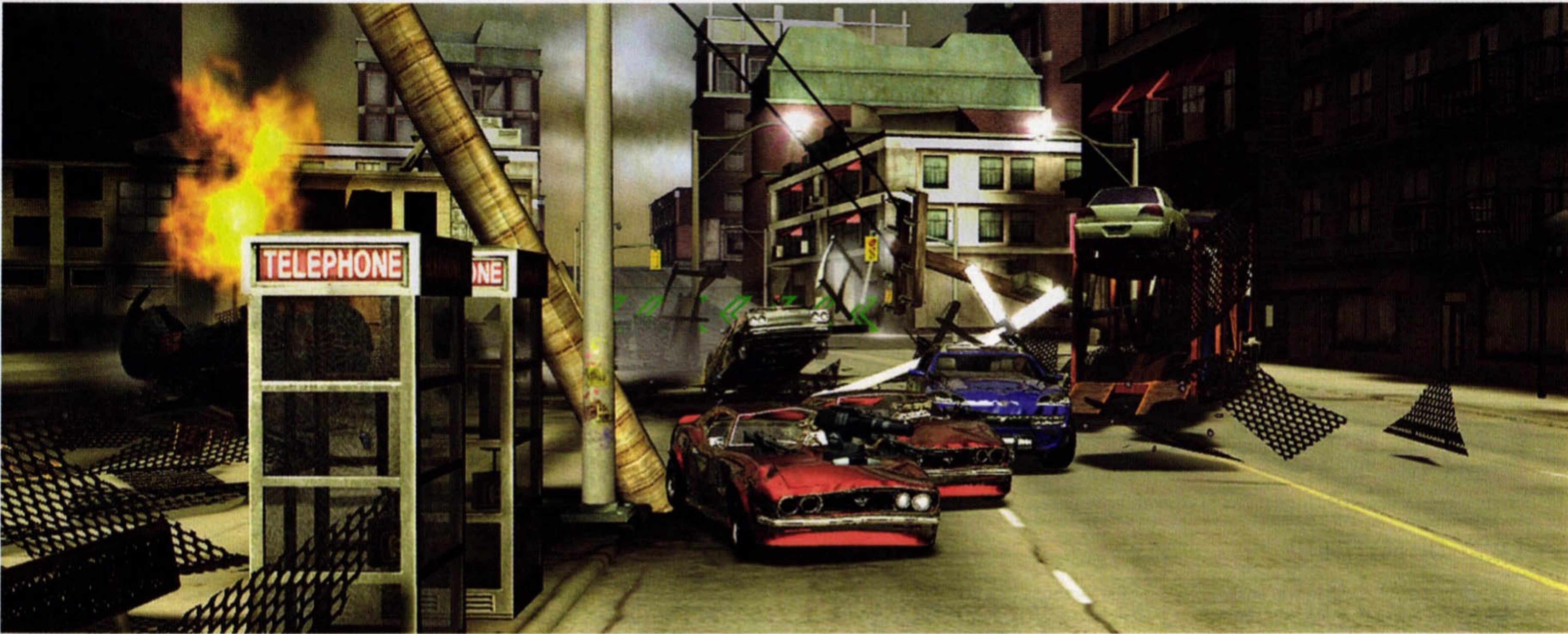




■ "Hydraulics!"



■ When he saw the explosion, Dave the getaway driver knew that the Toys 'R Us heist had gone horribly awry



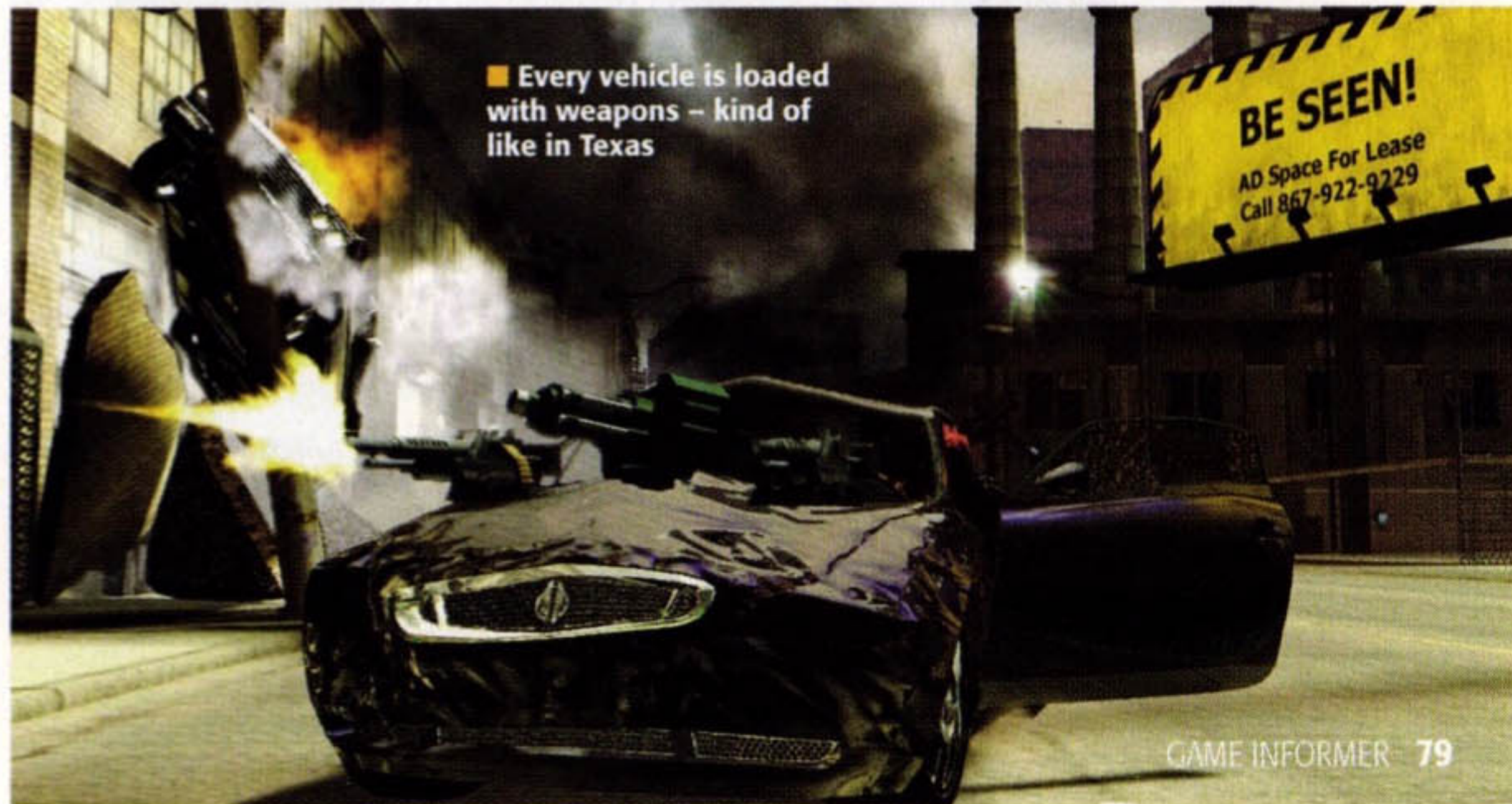
■ Those cars probably aren't flying through the air because Superman is driving them



■ Insert another juvenile flatulence reference here



■ The entire bridge can be destroyed, taking the train out with it

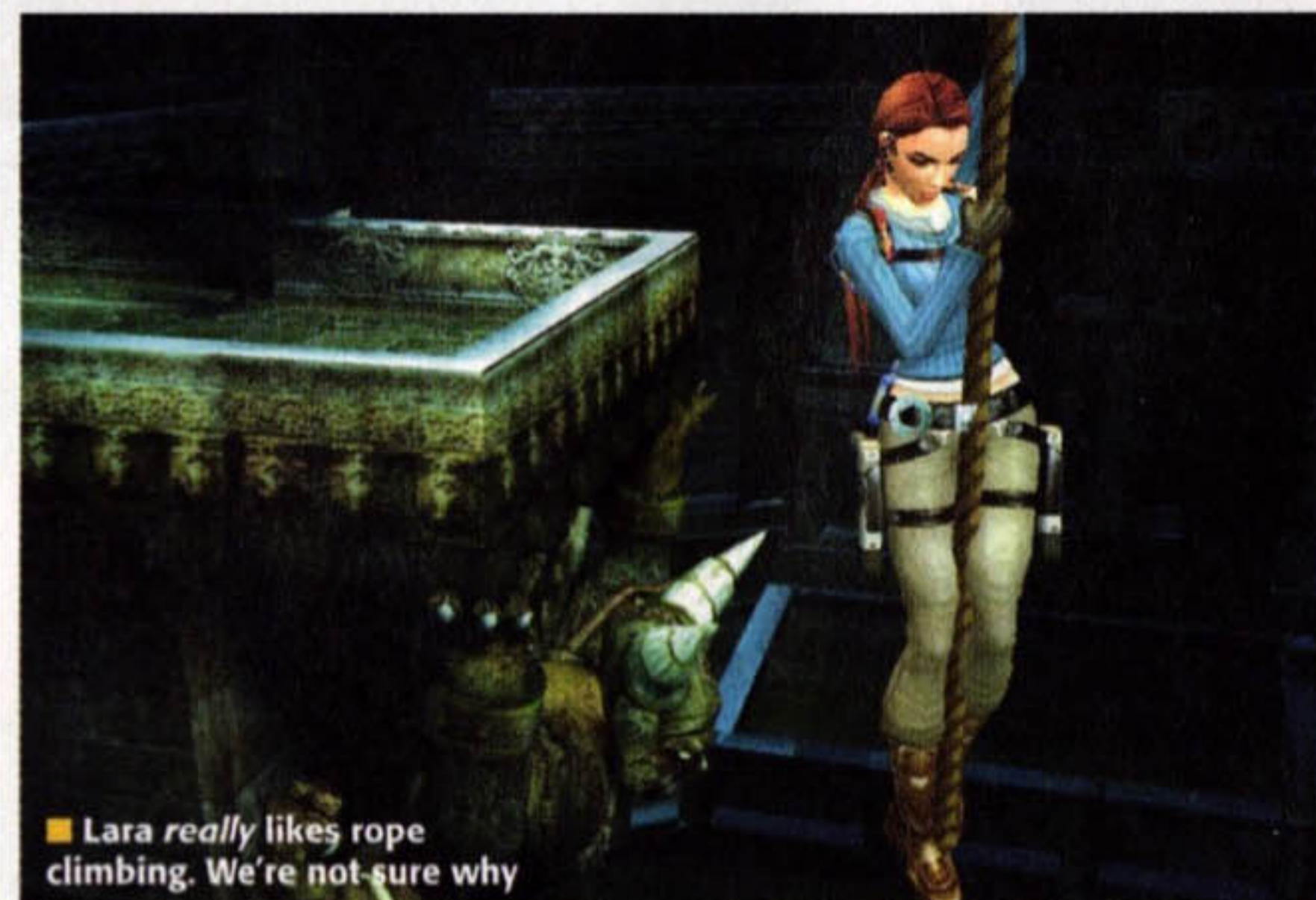


■ Every vehicle is loaded with weapons – kind of like in Texas

■ Lara's new outfit includes a buzzer that tells her when her table at Applebee's is ready



■ Gear utilization is a big deal this time around



■ Lara really likes rope climbing. We're not sure why

XBOX 360 | PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | PC

Lara Croft Tomb Raider: Legend

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER EIDOS > DEVELOPER CRYSTAL DYNAMICS > RELEASE FALL

LADY OF MYSTERY

Just when you thought you finally got the girl out of your life, she comes back looking better than ever. Isn't it always that way? Say what you will about Lara, but she certainly blazed a path for the gaming heroines who followed. Now, the intrepid raider of tombs is looking to regain her crown as the queen of gaming with an entirely new look and a totally redesigned approach to the action.

While these impressive screens speak volumes for themselves, Crystal Dynamics and Eidos are keeping their cards pretty close to the vest on this one. We know that Lara's newest adventure has her returning

to the locations that made her famous – the dank and ancient tombs and dungeons of her early games. This time around, it's a singular English artifact that she pursues, but story details beyond this tidbit are scarce. Revealed environments run the gamut between snow-covered ruins high in the mountains, verdant jungles, and hidden caverns far below ground.

The biggest change from previous games we've learned about relates to the way Lara interacts with her world. A top priority for the development team this time around is making the adventuress' movements seem both fluid and continuous. Lara will be able

to seamlessly interact with all the obstacles and hazards in her world. Given Toby Gard's return to the franchise, we're imagining he may be bringing elements of the intuition-based control scheme of his most recent project, *Galleon*, and applying those ideas in new ways for Lara. (Let's hope it turns out better this time.) Animation has been similarly brought up to speed, so that Lara will react realistically to every object in the environment. In addition, the new game will include a stronger focus on gear and equipment utilization. As an example, we heard about Ms. Croft's new usage of a magnetic grappling hook to aid her as she navigates

the dangerous underground precipices through which she journeys. She'll be able to quickly traverse spaces that previously necessitated a detour around.

We don't know whether to be worried or excited that there is so little information filtering out about the new Tomb Raider game. We've been burned before by the English heiress and her twin set of high-caliber weapons. However, these new screens are enough to pique our interest, and make Lara a girl to watch as we wile away the hot summer months. ■ ■ ■

■ Lara's search for tighter pants takes her to the Arctic



■ "And here I thought only men got hand cramps."



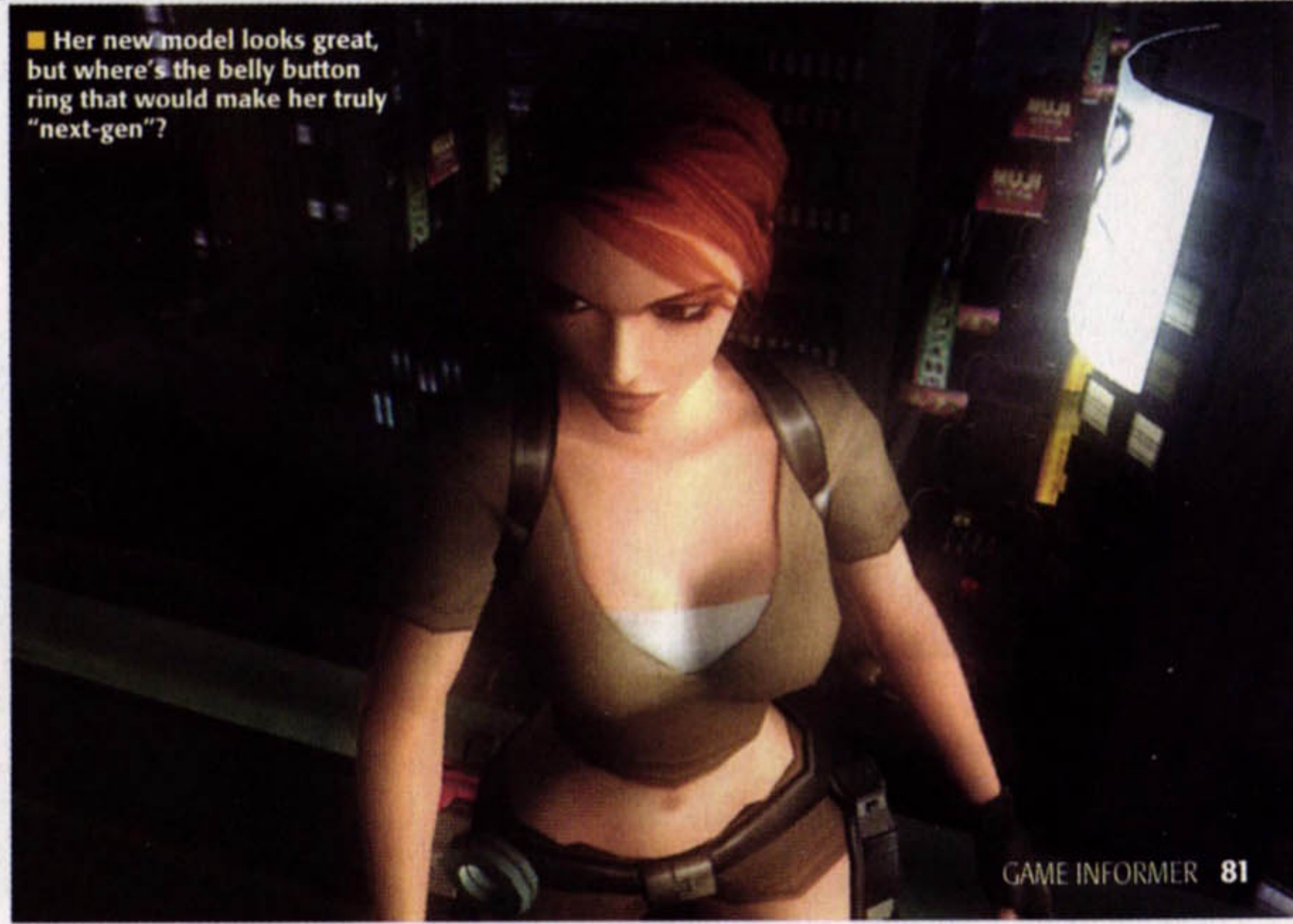


EXTREME MAKEOVER

For the new game, Lara's look has been completely overhauled to create a sleeker, sexier, and more up-to-date model. Compare her old Angel of Darkness look on the right to the new style shown on the left. A higher degree of detail is included on her skin and her proportions are (slightly) more natural. Polygon count has more than doubled, moving from 4,400 in the design from AOD to over 9,800 for her redesigned appearance. What you can't see from this shot are the innovations that show up during gameplay. Lara will get wet after swimming or dirty if she rolls around on the ground. In addition, a tremendous effort has been exerted to bring life and realism into her facial expressions and lip syncing, so that the character can dynamically respond to events and exhibit genuine emotions.



■ There are numerous new ways to navigate the environment



■ Her new model looks great, but where's the belly button ring that would make her truly "next-gen"?

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PlayStation 2



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■ Upgradable weapons will be a huge part of the expanded RPG elements



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PLAYSTATION 2

Onimusha: Dawn of Dreams

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

SAMURAI REMIX

Don't be alarmed – we thought that the Onimusha series was a trilogy, too. The survival horror/samurai title from Capcom was supposed to have its swan song in last year's time-shifting entry. That's what the team told us and what they told each other, anyway. One of the series' creators, Kenji Inafune, even stepped away from the franchise and moved on to the recently released *Shadow of Rome*.

Dawn of Dreams producer Yoshinori Ono tells us that during the development of *Rome*, he and Inafune, "saw the glut of samurai games in the market and thought, 'Is there anything more we can do than with this, [other] than what's already out?'" As the pair continued with *Rome*, it became increasingly clear that there were, in fact, places where these types of games could grow. But to do what they had planned, Ono says, "We're really going to have to work at it."

Loosely, the changes can be broken down into three areas: graphics, gameplay, and story. Those that we've gotten wind of are big enough that comparisons to another Capcom horror franchise enjoying a renaissance of sorts (*Resident Evil*) dribble from the mouths of everyone working on *Dawn of Dreams*. Think fully-3D environments, a free camera, increased customization and combat options, and a non-linear story path for starters.

Most of the changes spiral outward from the new system of five playable characters who each have their own story and skill set. Ono tells us that the tale can be played in a variety of

ways, "Think of it like a river with many streams coming into it. They each show different paths to the river, but they all end at the same place – the ocean." The water analogy goes back even farther for fans, though, when Ono brings up that the earlier games took place, "further upstream," than the adventure in *Dawn of Dreams* (which starts around 15 years after the end of *Onimusha 3*).

Having multiple playable characters necessitates dramatic changes in combat and narrative structure. As it stands right now, players will have a base camp of sorts where the two-person teams can be assembled and then head off to the area of their choice. Since each character has special skills, it behooves players to explore areas with different groups because one could leap into an area inaccessible to the other characters. In combat, players can switch between characters in real time and issue commands from a list that expands as the game progresses.

"We wanted [*Dawn of Dreams*] to have more replay value, more volume, than the earlier games," says Ono. Subtle allusions to additional surprises in *Dawn of Dreams* leads us to believe that even though the features revealed so far sound very substantial, the team has even more up its sleeve and just might be able to make the ultimate samurai game. ■ ■ ■

■ The two-character parties will be able to join moves for more destructive combo attacks

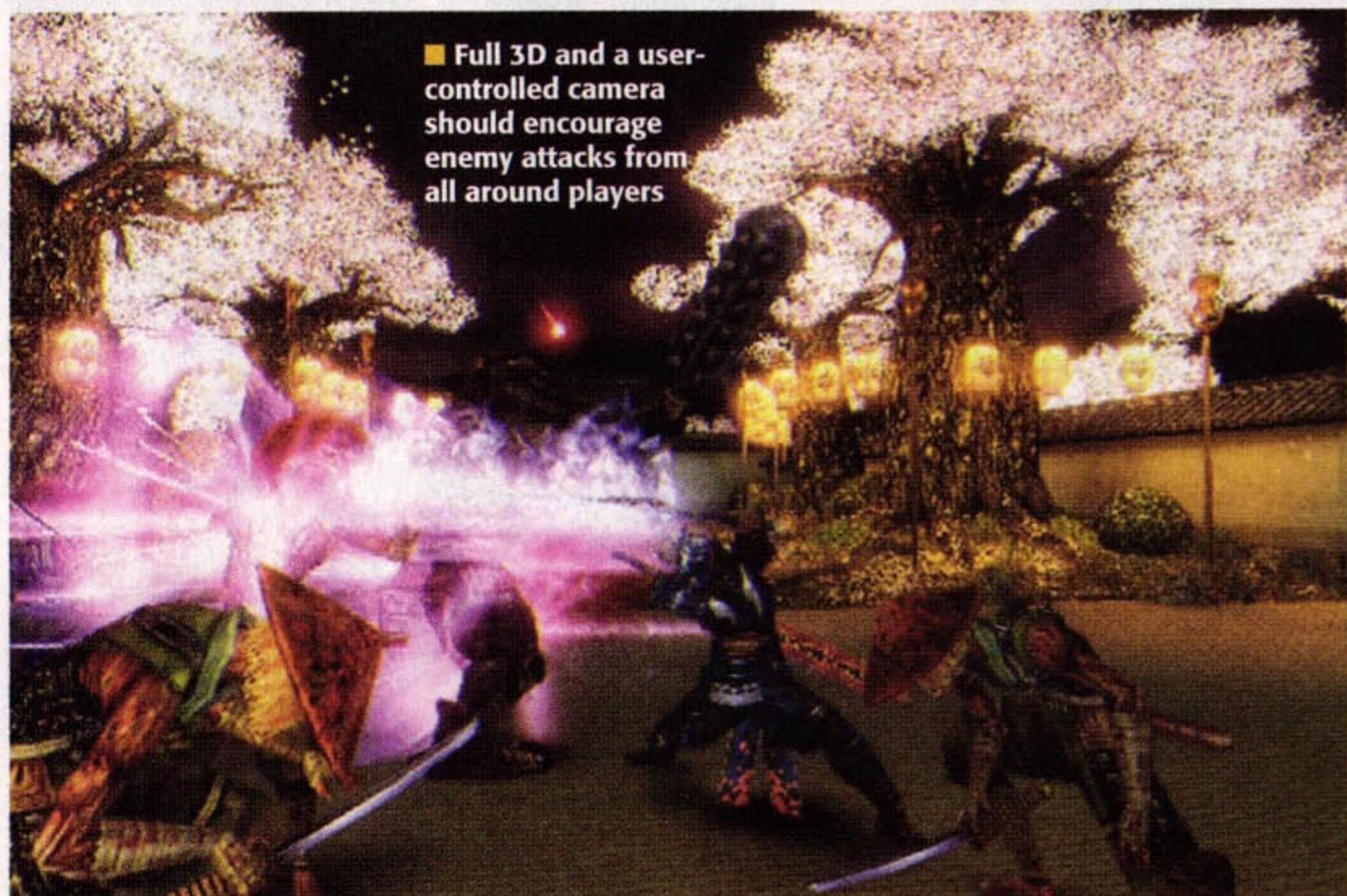


■ It's nice to see that fantastic (glowing cherry blossoms) and realistic elements are being blended together





■ Although the specifics aren't finalized yet, the team plans to let players combine weapons to form new arms



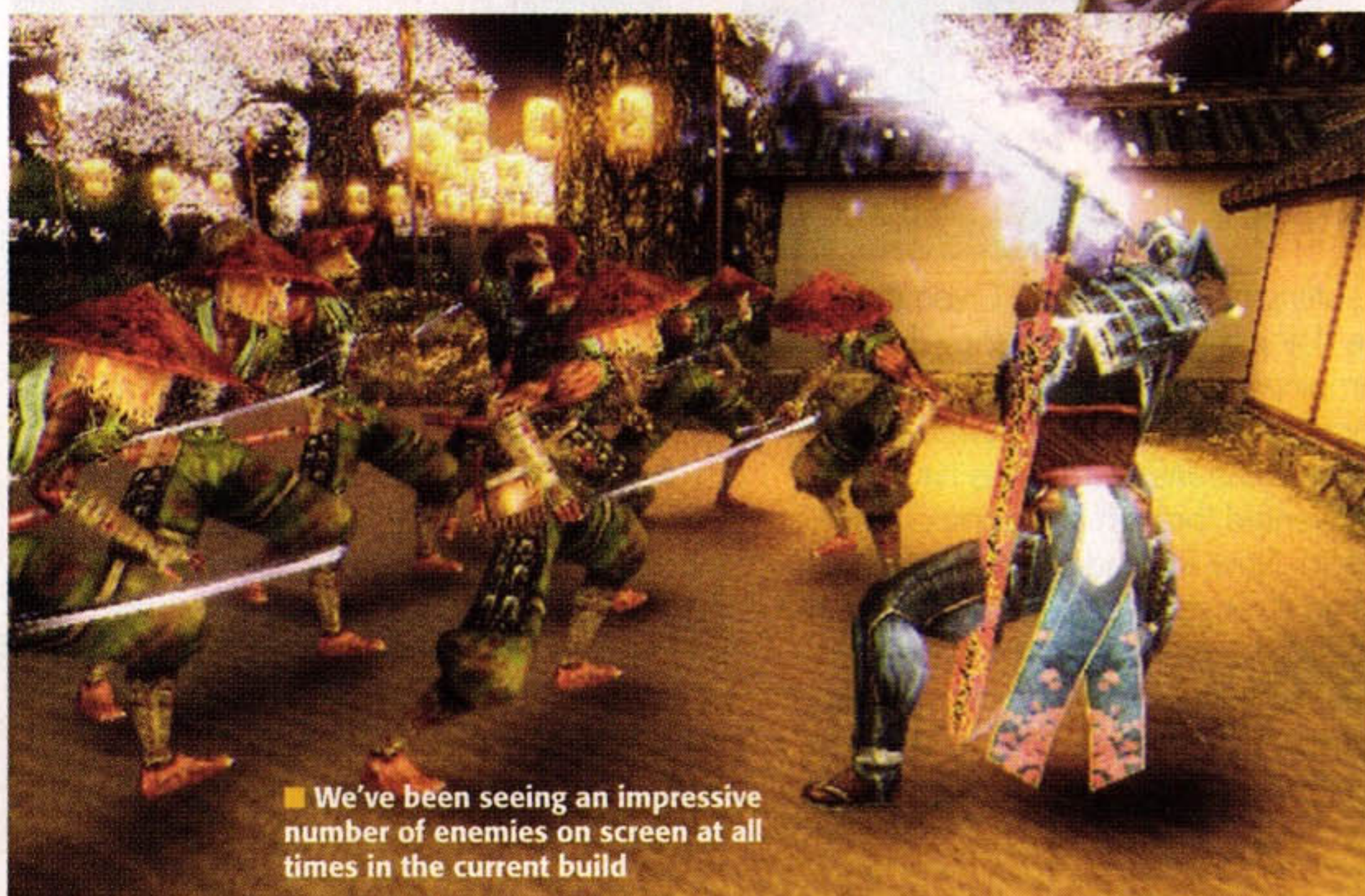
■ Full 3D and a user-controlled camera should encourage enemy attacks from all around players



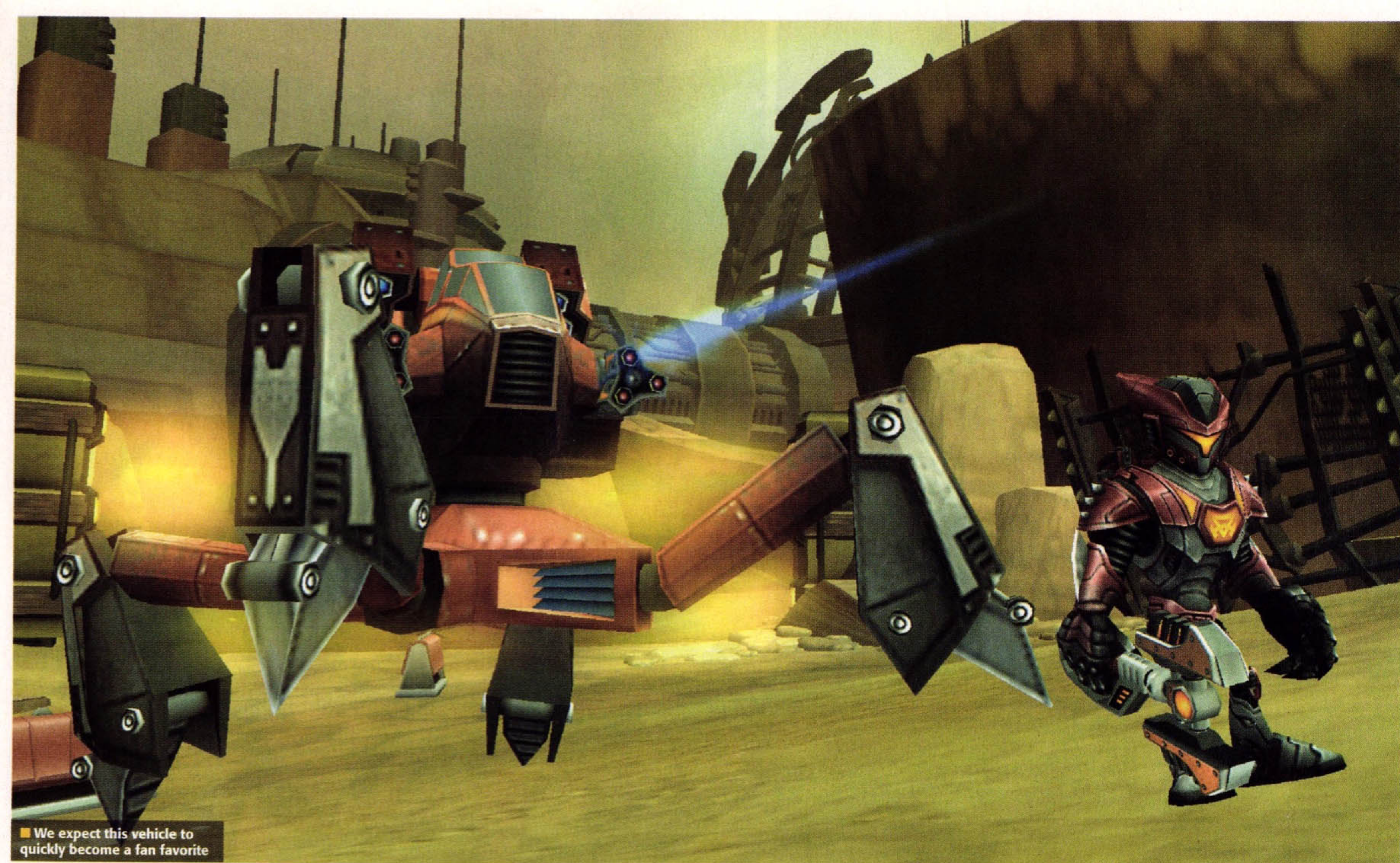
■ Without giving away specifics, Capcom has hinted that there will be nods to the earlier games hidden in Dawn of Dreams



■ Large-scale enemies are a thankful addition to the series



■ We've been seeing an impressive number of enemies on screen at all times in the current build



■ We expect this vehicle to quickly become a fan favorite

PLAYSTATION 2

Ratchet: Deadlocked

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA > **DEVELOPER** INSOMNIAC GAMES > **RELEASE** FALL

RATCHET – WITH A VENGEANCE!

Following up one of last year's most critically acclaimed games should be an easy job: Just give fans more of the same. Unexpectedly, Ratchet & Clank developer Insomniac Games is opting to take the series in a new direction.

One thing is certain: Ratchet: Deadlocked is not your typical platformer. In fact, it's not a platformer at all. The game continues the series' increasing focus on weapon combat, this time jettisoning the platforming elements altogether in a game that might be best described as a futuristic, squad-based action title. There is also a marked change in tone and feel, as the colorful cartoonish world of the first three titles has been re-imagined as a darker, more "adult" looking universe.

Since the end of *Up Your Arsenal*, Ratchet and Clank's fortunes have taken a turn for the worse. While searching for some missing galactic celebrities, the duo has been kidnapped by an evil media baron named Gleemon Vox. After fitting Ratchet with a Deadlock collar (which will explode if he tries to escape), Vox forces him to compete in a series of battles to the death on the popular show *DreadZone*.

It's the tapings of *DreadZone* that will

make up the bulk of the game. These battles will pit players against a host of Vox's most fearsome minions, each armed with massive firepower. Thankfully, you won't be going it alone. Online, you'll be able to team up and face off against up to 8 players from around the world, with full voice chat. There will also be a co-op mode, allowing you and a partner to tackle the single-player missions online or split-screen. In solo play, you'll command a troop of bots that can be given directions with simple d-pad inputs.

The levels we were able to play were reminiscent of *Up Your Arsenal*'s assault-style missions, as we eviscerated the enemy on large-scale, open environments. As previously mentioned, this is much more akin to a military shooter than previous titles, with an almost overwhelming amount of onscreen enemies being thrown at you from all sides. Teammate AI bots seemed to work well, and can even be commanded to turn node bolts with their wrenches to take a checkpoint. You can also board tanks and new spider-like "walker" vehicles to deal extra destruction.

After introducing the Lock/Strafe control scheme in the last game, Insomniac has made this FPS-influenced mechanic the

■ Co-op and online play are Insomniac's top priorities for Deadlocked



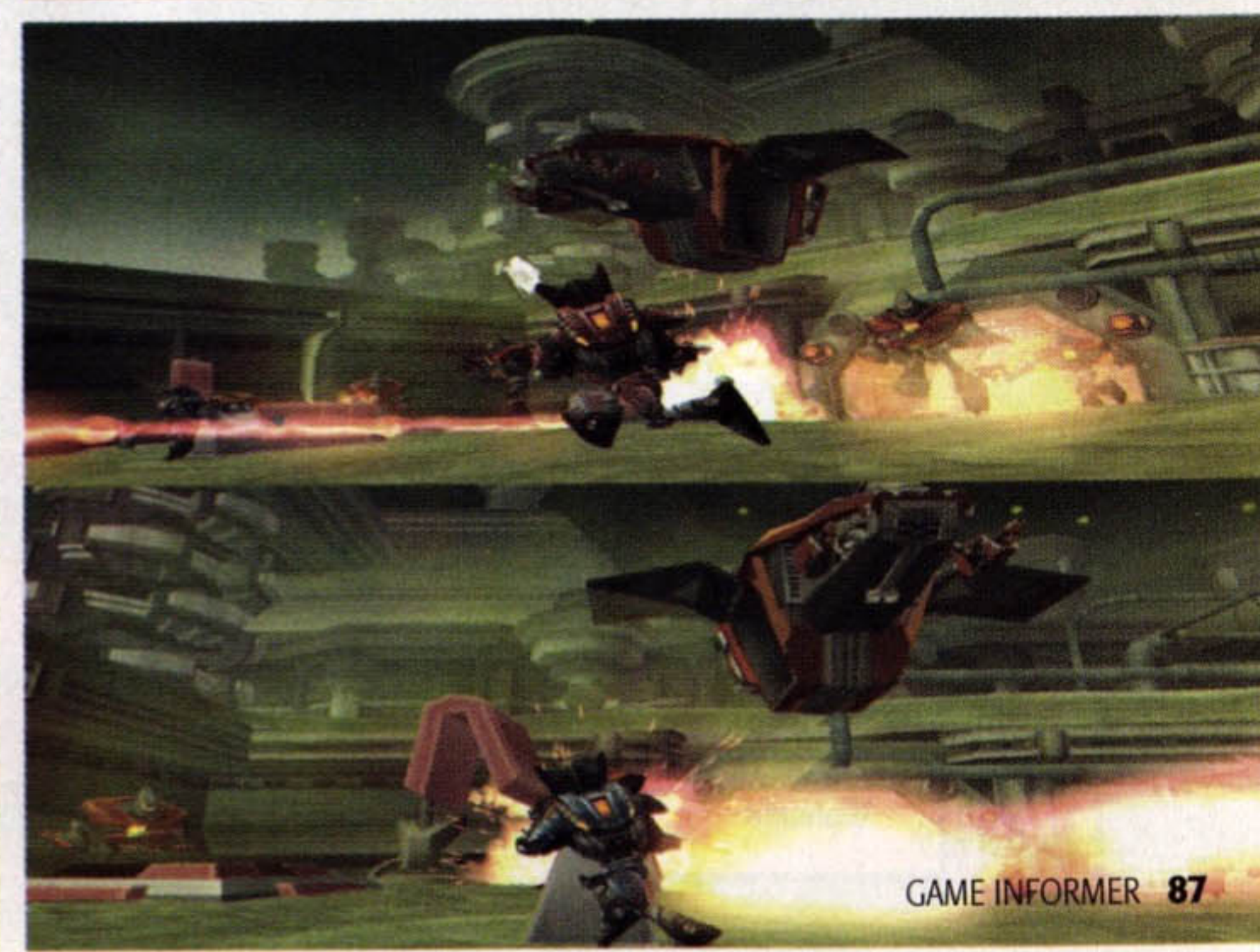
default setting for *Deadlocked*. Given that you'll be doing much more blasting than tricky jumping, we think that after a period of adjustment, this will be the preferred method of play. The weapons themselves have also been reinvented through a new modification system. Now, instead of having each weapon go through a set series of evolutions, you'll be able to use "Dread points" to buy mods like bouncing shots, homing, and even napalm on any armament. This translates into literally thousands of combinations, and

gives players much more flexibility in customizing their arsenal.

It will be interesting to see how longtime fans receive this new vision of the Ratchet & Clank universe. It's apparent that Insomniac feels that the online shooter aspects of the franchise represent its future, and the company certainly has the development chops to tackle any genre it sees fit. Hopefully, this won't come at the expense of the finely crafted levels and varied gameplay that has made the series such a success. ■ ■ ■



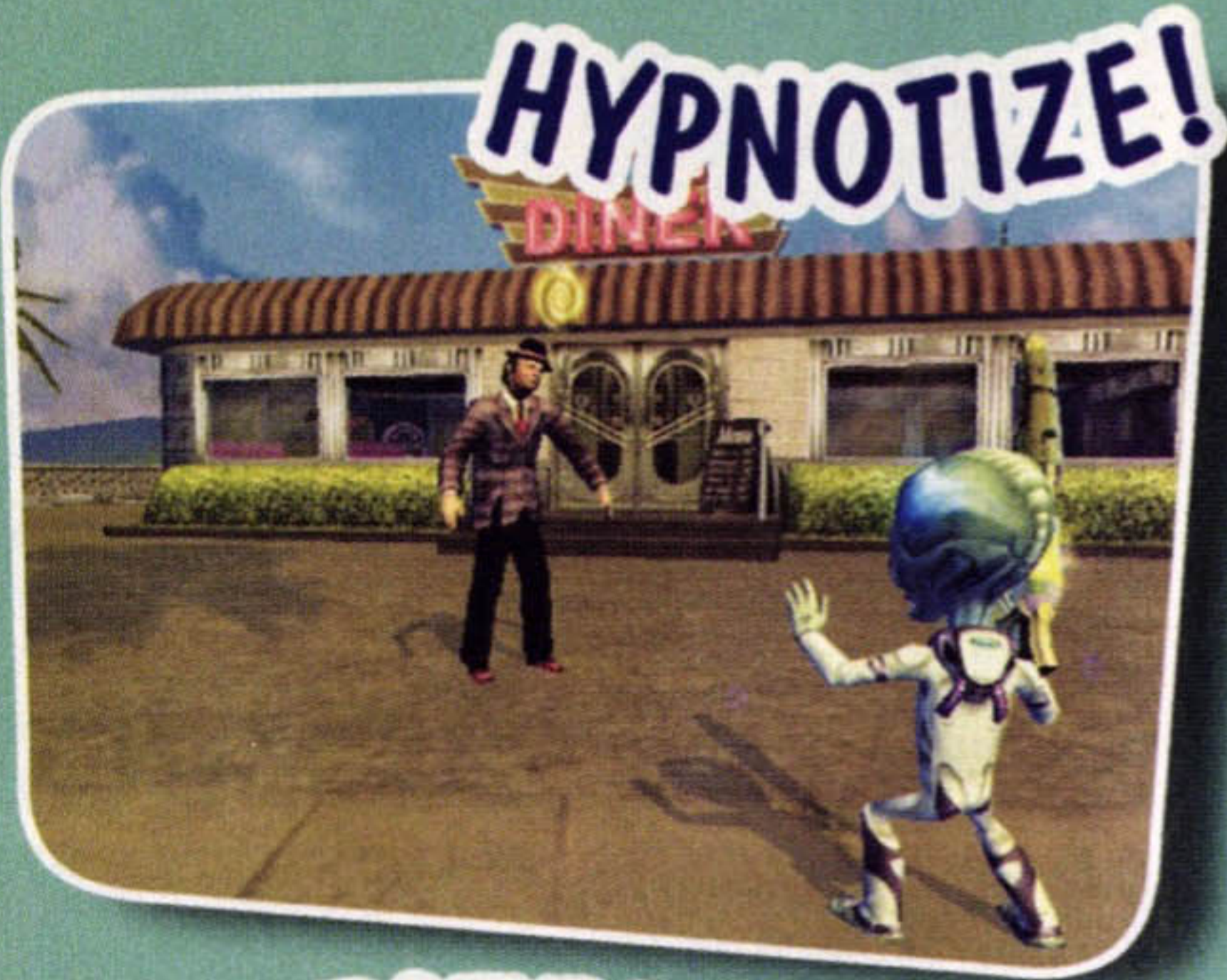
■ All weapons can be outfitted with explosive mod effects



■ The flail, a new melee weapon, is reminiscent of the lava whip from Up Your Arsenal

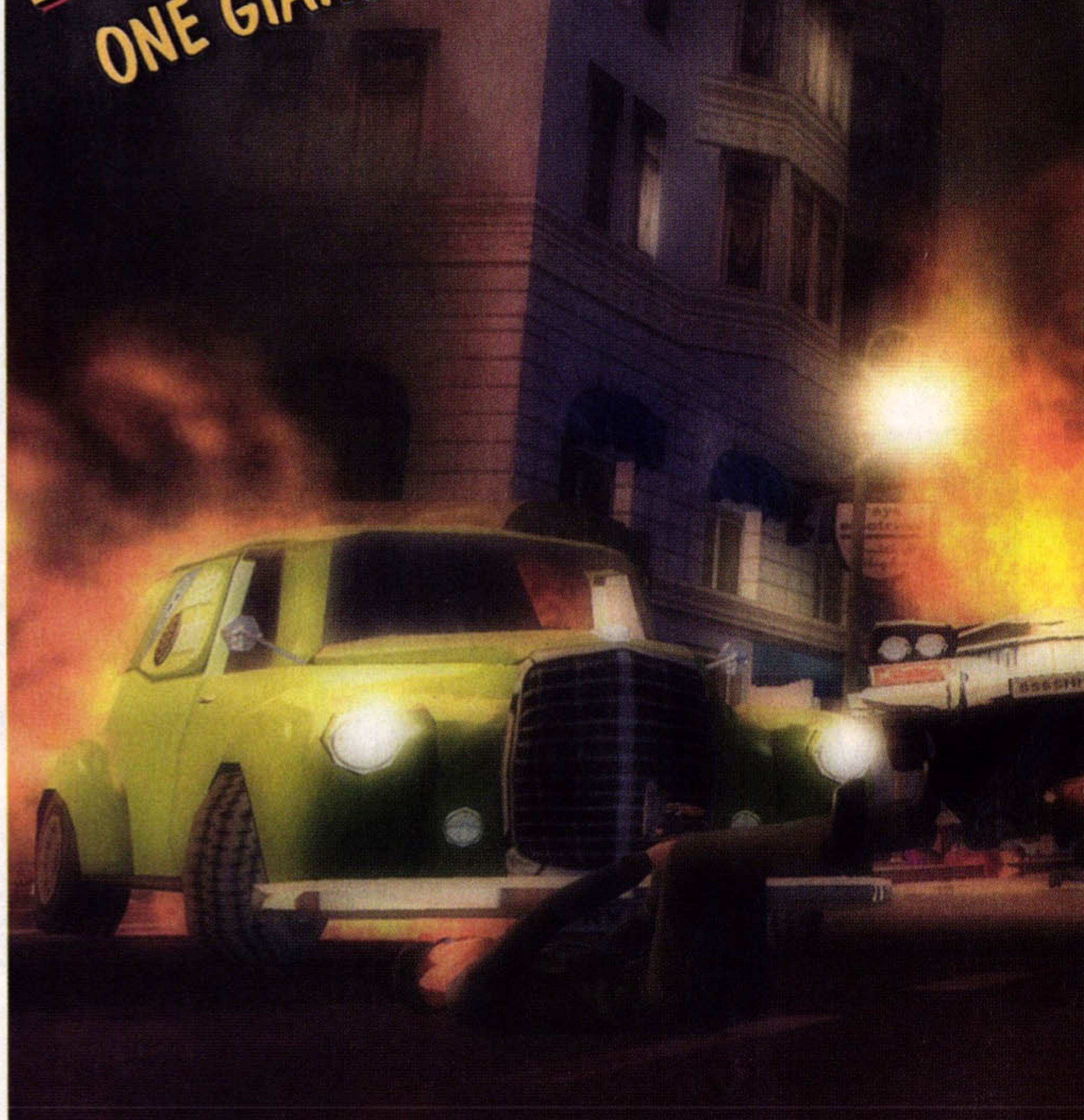


■ Ratchet's character model has been altered, resulting in a taller, more adult-looking hero



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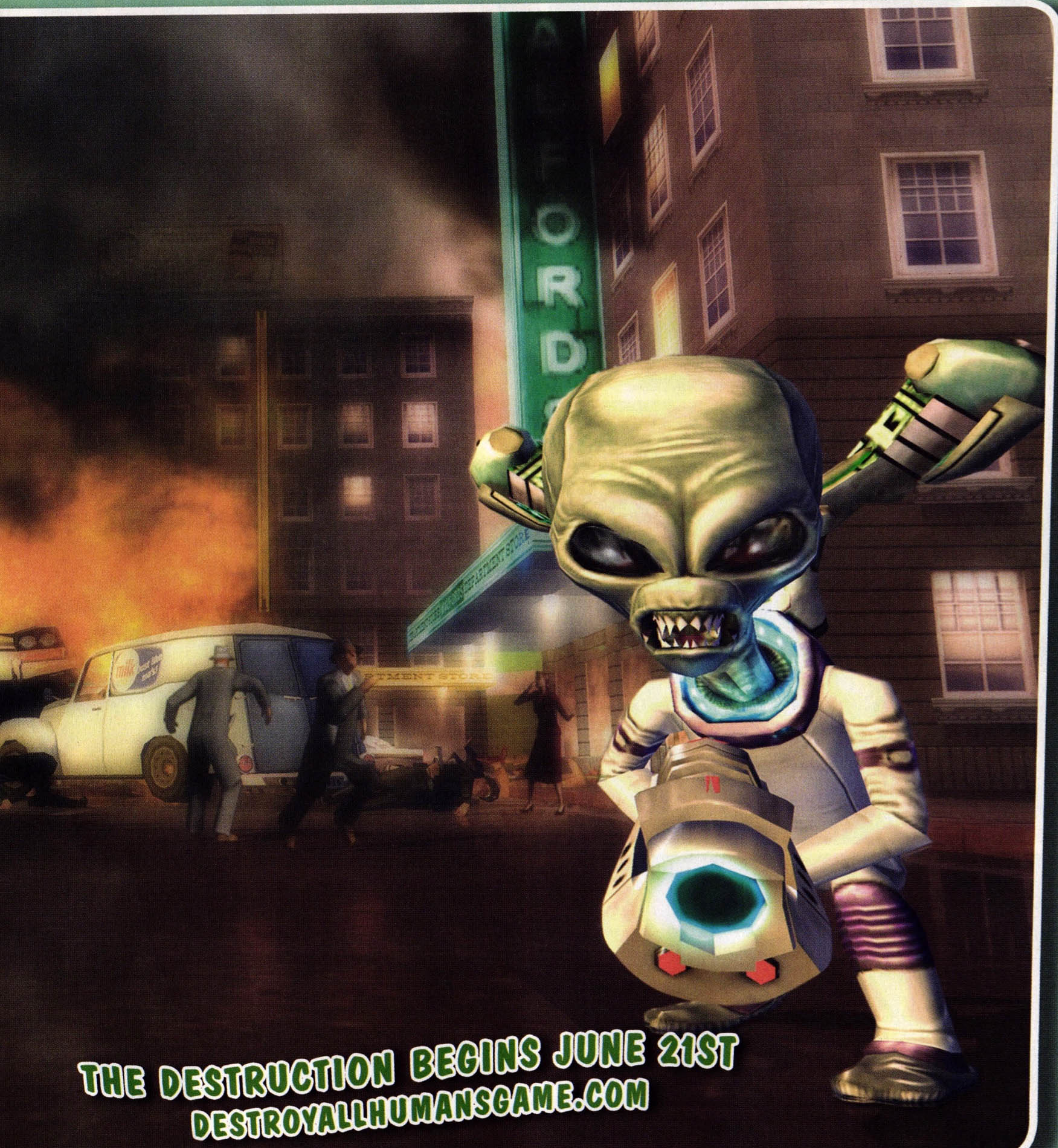


PlayStation 2



Language
Sexual Themes
Violence

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■ The things this woman's tailor can do with Spandex are mind-blowing



■ Throws and juggles are strong suits of the new character, Tira

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PLAYSTATION 2

Soul Calibur III

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER FIGHTING > **PUBLISHER** NAMCO
 > **DEVELOPER** NAMCO > **RELEASE** FALL

CAGE MATCH

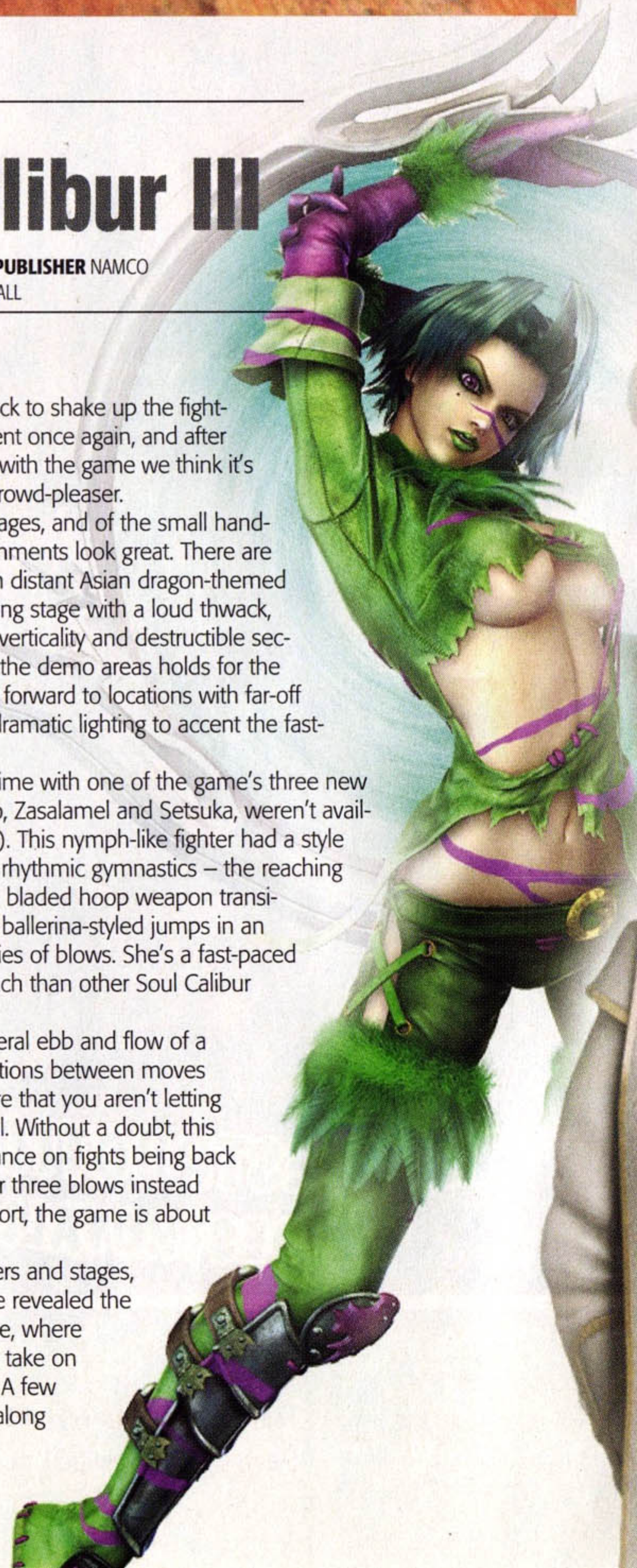
Soul Calibur III is on track to shake up the fighting-game establishment once again, and after some hands-on time with the game we think it's going to be another crowd-pleaser.

The title will offer all-new stages, and of the small handful that we played, the environments look great. There are flaming arrows launched from distant Asian dragon-themed boats, only to pierce the fighting stage with a loud thwack, while other areas have more verticality and destructible sections. If the design style from the demo areas holds for the entire game, players can look forward to locations with far-off details, weather effects, and dramatic lighting to accent the fast-paced action.

We spent most of our playtime with one of the game's three new characters, Tira (the other two, Zasalamel and Setsuka, weren't available in the build we sampled). This nymph-like fighter had a style that was most reminiscent of rhythmic gymnastics – the reaching throws and spins of her large, bladed hoop weapon transitioned with swirling kicks and ballerina-styled jumps in an impressive and distinctive series of blows. She's a fast-paced character that offers more reach than other Soul Calibur fighters.

As a matter of fact, the general ebb and flow of a match seemed faster – transitions between moves are smoother and making sure that you aren't letting yourself get boxed in is crucial. Without a doubt, this entry continues the series' stance on fights being back and forth exchanges of two or three blows instead of combo-heavy strings. In short, the game is about knowing your opponent.

Besides these new characters and stages, our previous look at the game revealed the Chronicles of the Sword mode, where players can create a fighter to take on a simulation/fighting journey. A few more details have emerged, along





with a few new questions. It is confirmed that the created characters will be playable in Versus mode and that the number of customizable options for each fighter is nearly endless. What we still don't know for sure is how many characters gamers will be able to store at a time – having a whole stable of warriors for different tasks is a sweet idea that came to our mind, but the specifics are still being worked out.

There are only two nagging concerns left after getting our hands on the fighter – the lack of online play and Namco's decision to release the game only on PlayStation 2. We can't help but wonder if these two decisions will limit the potential audience when two of the other big fighters (Mortal Kombat and DOA) have used online action to bring back the arcade feel of the genre. Still, calming our fears is the fact that Soul Calibur III already plays like a great fighter that its existing fanbase will appreciate. Who knows, maybe the Chronicles of the Sword mode combined with the series' great action will bring a whole new crew to the Soul Calibur side. ■ ■ ■



■ These stage shots show the depth of each level, but don't illustrate the sheer amount of stuff going on at all times (which is, to be brief, a lot)



XBOX 360 | PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE | PC

Ghost Recon 3 [Working Title]

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > PUBLISHER UBISOFT > DEVELOPER UBISOFT > RELEASE WINTER

BRINGING IT TO THE STREETS

In one of the world's largest and most chaotic cities, a meeting of international leaders devolves into kidnapping and urban combat. Who can the U.S. Army send in to handle this new breed of combat where the enemy and the general population are both on the offensive? In Tom Clancy's universe the only option is to send in the Ghosts.

The setting for Ubisoft's Ghost Recon 3 is Mexico City circa 2013 and, as a commander of the elite Special Forces team, players are tasked with regaining control of the city. It is in this locale that the Ghosts will stay for the entirety of the game – the development team has planned a fully streaming and alarmingly accurate representation of the Mexican capital. For players, this means that there are no mission briefing screens, no loading times, and no disjoint-

ing transitions from one objective to another.

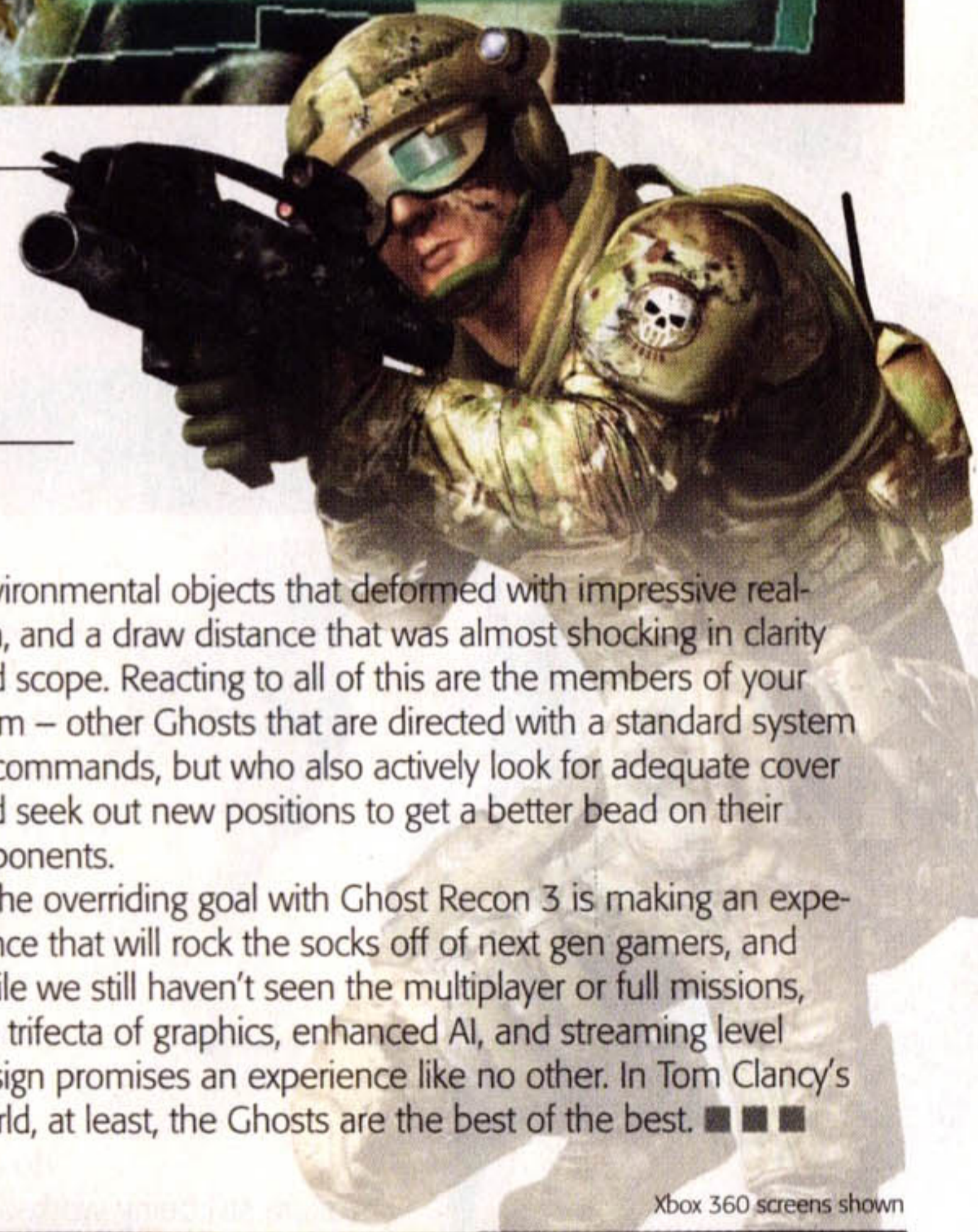
Instead of load-out or briefing screens, surveillance, mission objectives, and status reports are relayed to players through the Cross-Com (a device based on actual Army research), and its information doesn't necessarily appear between bouts of combat. Instead, players will have to manage their team, account for the new information, and react according to their current situation and new objectives. It feels nothing short of organic and downright realistic, heightening the urgency and immediacy of every moment spent in the city.

This being a next-gen game (although versions are planned for current hardware), the graphics are stunning. We saw large-scale explosions that knocked teammates backward,

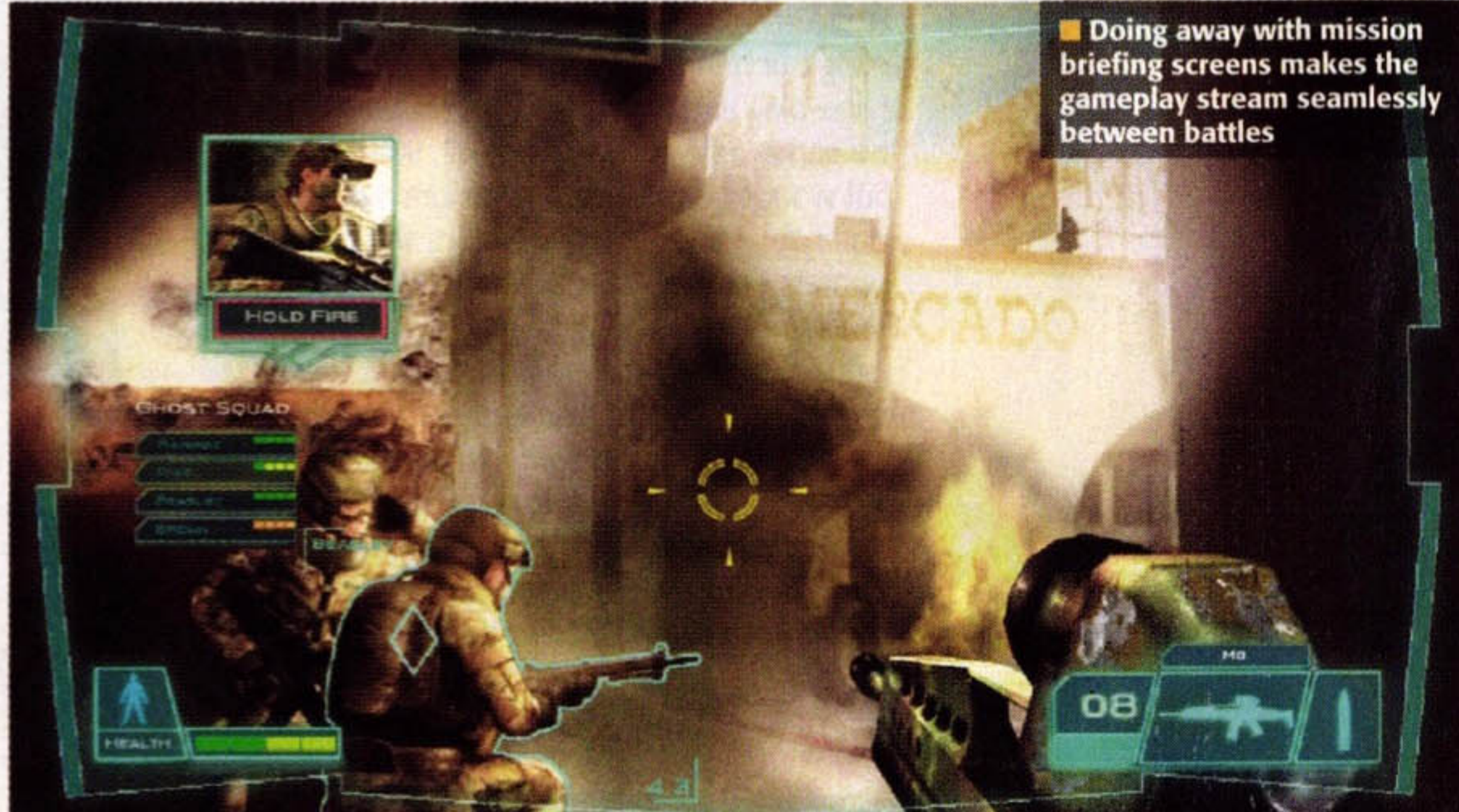
environmental objects that deformed with impressive realism, and a draw distance that was almost shocking in clarity and scope. Reacting to all of this are the members of your team – other Ghosts that are directed with a standard system of commands, but who also actively look for adequate cover and seek out new positions to get a better bead on their opponents.

The overriding goal with Ghost Recon 3 is making an experience that will rock the socks off of next gen gamers, and while we still haven't seen the multiplayer or full missions, the trifecta of graphics, enhanced AI, and streaming level design promises an experience like no other. In Tom Clancy's world, at least, the Ghosts are the best of the best. ■ ■ ■

Xbox 360 screens shown



■ The development team intends for each member of the Ghost squad to be more personal and important, but you'll still switch out special members as needed (like with the sniper shown here)



■ Doing away with mission briefing screens makes the gameplay stream seamlessly between battles



R

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PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Burnout Revenge

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **DEVELOPER** CRITERION

> **RELEASE** FALL

ROAD RAGE

With its fast-paced arcade-style action and addictive crash events, Burnout 3: Takedown was easily one of the standouts of last year's crop of racing games. Heck, any game that encourages us to cause massive property damage with our car is aces in our book. With our gooey, teenage crush over the third game, we're obviously all gaga over the new title in the series. Burnout 3 is old news, man – Burnout Revenge is the dreamiest!

After we regained our composure about this new entry, we calmed down enough to talk to the creative director at Criterion, Alex Ward. Ward was more than happy to talk to discuss some of the new features in Revenge, although he's keeping details about the new and improved Crash mode a secret. But he did talk about a new mode called Traffic Attack, which is likely to be just as popular. In Traffic Attack, you aren't penalized for hitting other cars – you're encouraged to! Your car will plow through the other vehicles on the road, causing chaos as you go. Ward is quite enthusiastic about this new game type. "The bigger the destruction, the more you're rewarded," he explains. "Imagine you hit a taxi, which goes into a station wagon that careens into a bus that then smashes into oncoming traffic and all this time you have to safely escape the mayhem! It's a really fun mode where you rack up points against the clock and

has that 'just one more' quality about it." Traffic Attack isn't the only new feature that will debut in Burnout Revenge. There are now three unique classes of vehicles: race, muscle, and stunt, each with their own unique properties. The entire game sports a new look, inspired by action movies, which is more realistic than the previous games. "This time we've decided to go for a much grittier filmic look that reflects Hollywood-style destruction," says Ward. "When the artists were building the tracks, they watched a lot of car chase films for inspiration and the result is fierce tracks built for fighting." This fierceness will be reflected in the game as a whole, which Ward says is even crazier than the previous games. "Revenge is principally about serious car-to-car combat," he exclaims. "If someone messes with you, you mess with them right back – but harder. Payback aggression is a really important part of the game and we've based our progression on it. Players must now work their way up a Revenge Meter to unlock everything in the game. As you rank up, you'll unlock special revenge events like Grudge Match, which is a full on one-on-one where a rival challenges you because you've seriously pissed him off!" As fans of the series, info like this has got us falling in love with Burnout all over again. We're even writing its name on our notebooks! ■ ■ ■

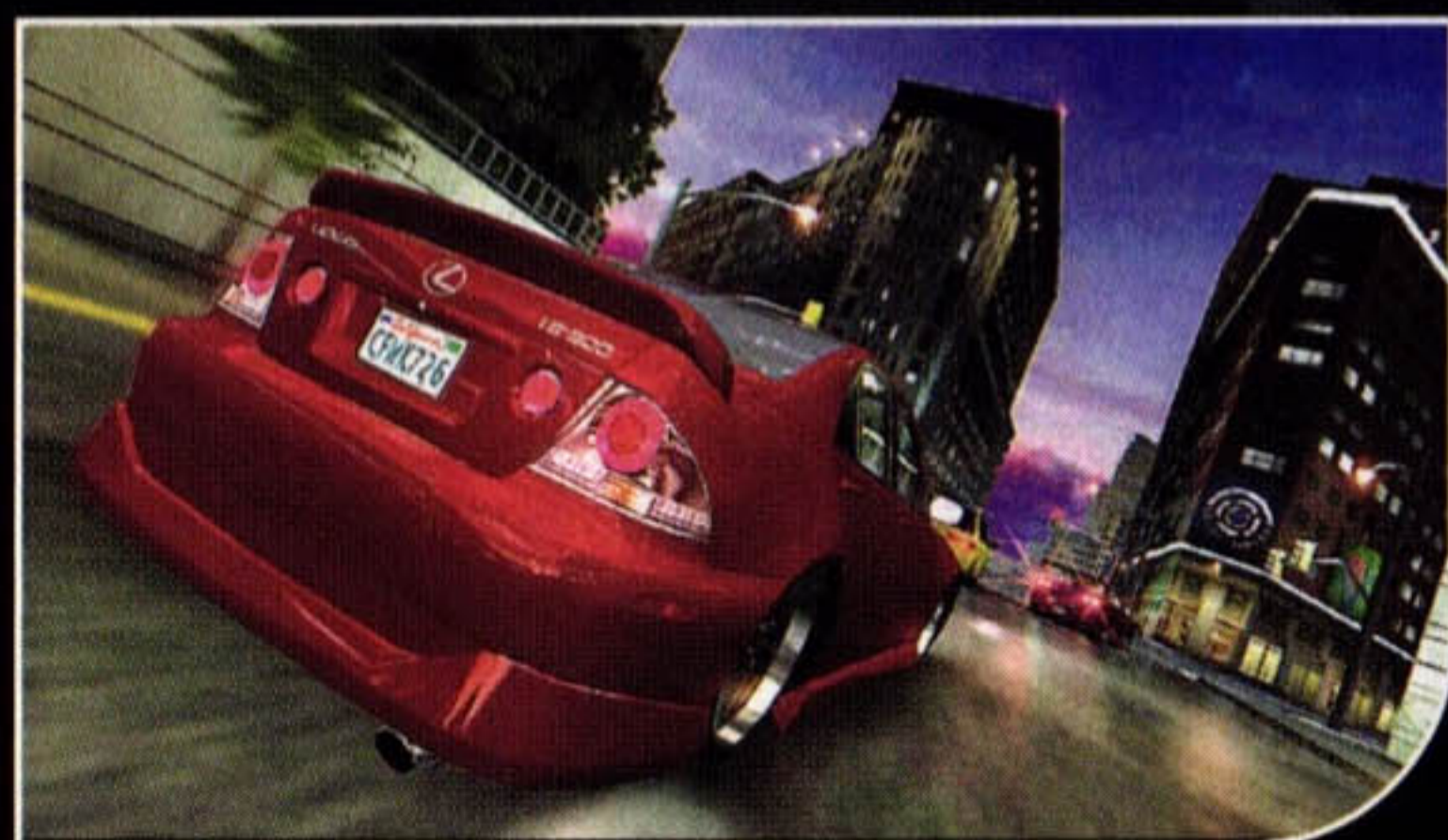
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■ "Hi, lunch!"

■ "I love you guys so much... let's go clubbing!"



じゃあせ オレたちも一緒に行って怒られるか

■ Sora teams up with Auron for some sparkly butt-kicking



■ Donald instructed the guard about the dangers of dropping the soap



■ Smoking turns your teeth yellow, even when they're actually some big snowplow thing



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PLAYSTATION 2

Kingdom Hearts II

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG > PUBLISHER SQUARE ENIX > DEVELOPER SQUARE ENIX > RELEASE WINTER

THE MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM

Have you ever noticed that Donald Duck doesn't wear any pants? You'd think that he'd get arrested for public indecency as a result, but somehow he never does. How he manages to get away with this is a mystery, but it's still not as mysterious as Kingdom Hearts II, the new Square Enix game featuring the randy duck. Although the company announced Kingdom Hearts II about a million years ago, little concrete information on the game has surfaced. Seriously, Solid Snake could take sneaking lessons from the folks at Square Enix.

We sent a dozen of our top agents to Square Enix's headquarters to smuggle out information on this new title, and although only two survived (guard Chocobos ate the rest), they did manage to smuggle out a few precious bits of info. Kingdom Hearts II takes place a year after the events of the GBA title Kingdom Hearts: Chain of Memories in Twilight Town, the village forever stuck between night and day. Our hero Sora, who has matured since the first title, is searching for his missing friends Kairi and Riku, while his companions Goofy and Donald (a.k.a. Mr. No-Pants) look for the whereabouts of King Mickey. Oh, Mickey, you're so fine!

Mickey and many other characters from the Disney universe will show up in Kingdom Hearts II, including Mulan and characters from that film. Familiar faces from the Final Fantasy world will appear as well, including the popular

swordsman Auron from Final Fantasy X. The success of the first game has made Disney more trusting of the development team's plans, and they will be allowed to make more daring decisions this time around. The sequel will be decidedly darker in tone than the original and there will be more mysteries to entice older gamers (although the game should still appeal to all ages). There will also be more events in each level, such as minigames, to keep the player wrapped up in the story. We instructed one of our spies to find out if there is a "put the pants on the duck" minigame, but that particular agent didn't make it back.

Whether that activity makes it in to Kingdom Hearts II or not, the game does have several new features we know about for sure. The camera system has mercifully been overhauled so that control is mapped to the right analog stick, and all of Sora's moves have been redone with improved animation. He also sports a new power called the Transformation Drive that grants him new moves by merging with a party member. There is so much new stuff in Kingdom Hearts II that it's even rumored to be a two-disc set! That's a lot of half-naked ducks – which, of course, we can't wait to see. ■ ■ ■





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We Love Katamari

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER NAMCO > DEVELOPER NAMCO LIMITED > RELEASE FALL

ROLLER DERBY



■ A big, sugary, sprinkle-laden ball of doughnuts is a reoccurring theme in many people's dreams...well, at least in ours



■ Two-player versus matches will be held in three different scales: pushpins, chickens, and office building sizes, for example

The world became so crazed with the off-kilter humor and forklift-styled controls of Namco's cult hit *Katamari Damacy* that the publisher/developer has decided to favor this great planet with a sequel. Granted, looking at the community fervor that the first entry inspired (patterns to knit a *Katamari*-styled chapeau along with a world of cosplay we shouldn't have checked out on the work computers, among even more random bits), a follow-up shouldn't have been unexpected. The feature set, on the other hand, does have some tricks up its sleeve that just may surprise the most loyal among us.

From the plot to the multiplayer options, it seems clear that the game's development team has been keeping its collective ear to the ground and listening to what inspired the most discussion from fans. In fact, fans themselves play a pivotal role in the new game's story. It turns out that the King and Prince have become such celebrities since restoring the stars to this galaxy that the whole family now roams public parks and gets mis-

sions from admirers sprinkled throughout. Players can choose the Prince or any of the cousins who are unlocked during the game to collect enough Earth stuff to replace the stars lost in the rest of the universe.

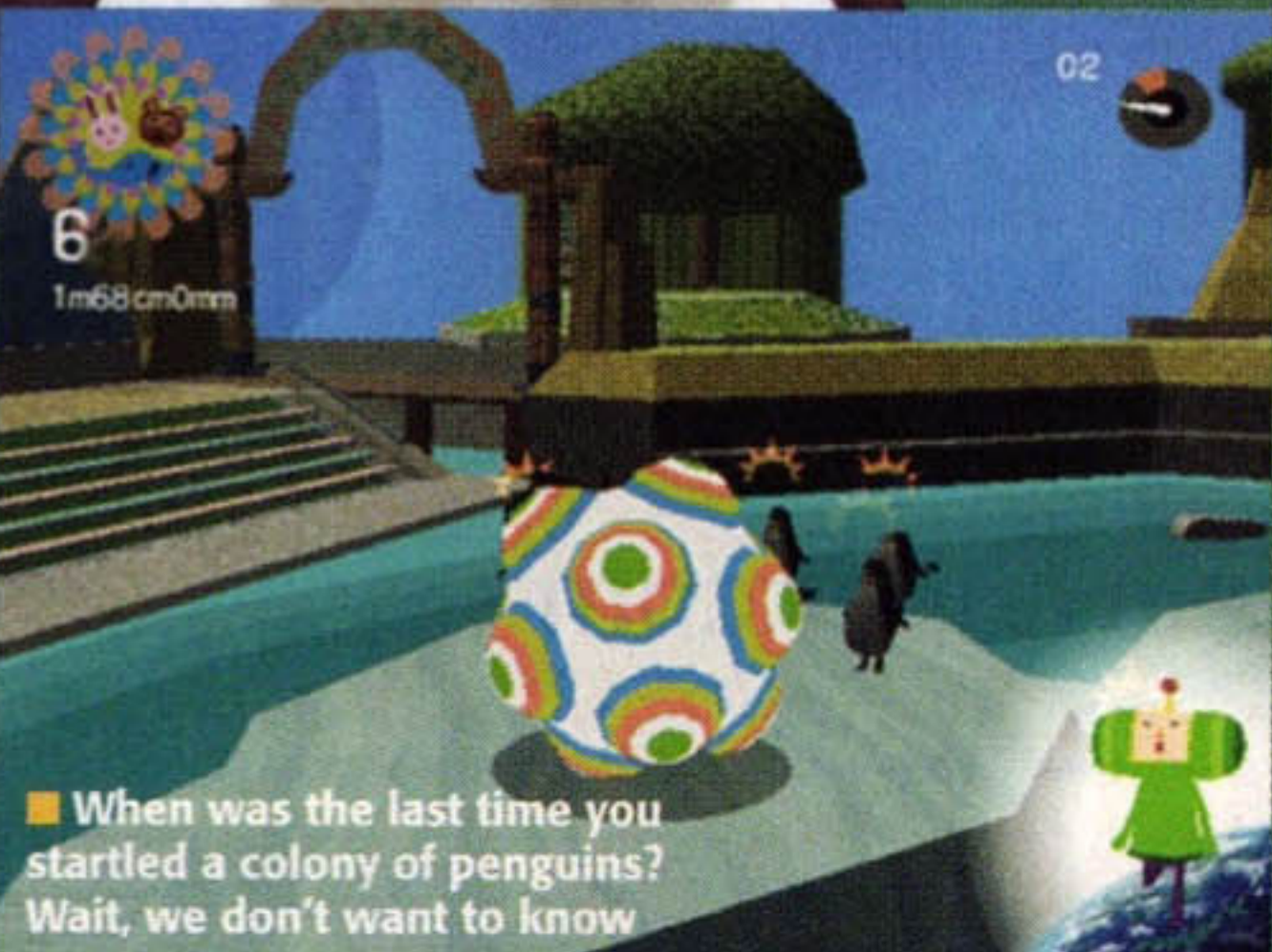
Besides more items, unique areas (including underwater and snow stages), and the alteration in mission acquisition, the sequel is changing up the multiplayer experience. Versus matches will now be held on stages of three different sizes, culminating in battles across entire cities. In addition,

the game will feature a two-player co-op experience with both gamers controlling one *katamari*. The specifics on how the controls will work for this mode are still unknown, but we're sure to hear more soon.

As a parting shot, Namco played one of the new songs for us. It was the *Katamari* theme barked by dogs – slightly disturbing but definitely funny, which is how we're hoping the series will remain. ■ ■ ■



■ Visually, the game isn't leaps and bounds above its predecessor, but the small additions will be welcomed by fans



■ When was the last time you startled a colony of penguins? Wait, we don't want to know



UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2

Colosseum: Road to Freedom

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER KOEI > DEVELOPER GOSHOW > RELEASE JULY

THE FALL OF A DYNASTY

Let freedom ring! Koei is kicking off the shackles of its *Dynasty Warriors* dependence and going in new directions with *Colosseum: Road to Freedom*. Fittingly, this title is not developed by Koei itself, but by Japanese company Gshow. In our first hands-on time with the game, we can already see that this infusion of new blood is working wonders for Koei. In fact, it's the most excited we've been for a game from the company in some time.

Despite the fact that *Road to Freedom* doesn't use the *Dynasty Warriors* engine, action fans dare not loosen their grip on their swords. Although not showing nearly as many characters on screen as the *DW* series, this game actually specializes in combat with multiple foes. The left analog stick not only controls movement, but when used in conjunction with the face buttons, it lets you strike at anyone around

you. The game's lack of a traditional lock-on can take getting used to, but the philosophy of the title's combat is to not focus your attention solely on who's in front of you. That's a good way to become a kitty snack. The face buttons are used to target body parts, while special attacks, the ability to throw objects, and a selection of parries gives this more gameplay depth than you've ever seen from a Koei title. You'll employ all your know-how in one-on-one duels, *Battle Royales*, and contests against tigers, elephants, and chariots. Outside of the arena, you'll train via minigames and upgrade your weapons and equipment.

With more gameplay depth requiring precise, strategic sword combat, *Road to Freedom* is looking like a great step forward for Koei, and should be a feast for action fans. ■ ■ ■



■ Think of that spiked pole as a human coat rack

■ Finding a weak spot on this behemoth is no easy task



PLAYSTATION 2

Shadow of the Colossus

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA > **DEVELOPER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT JAPAN > **RELEASE** FALL

LET THERE BE SHADOW

First we called it NICO. Then it was Wanda and the Colossus. A lesser game might be lost in the shuffle amidst these shifting identities, but with its breathtaking visuals, this one proved impossible to ignore. Under the new moniker *Shadow of the Colossus*, this upcoming game from the minds that brought us *ICO* has finally been confirmed for a U.S. release.

While speculation about *Shadow of the Colossus* has run rampant since we first saw a video at the 2004 Tokyo Game Show, details have been scarce – until now. We recently spoke with the title's associate producer Kyle Schubel about the story and gameplay experience, finally putting speculation to rest. "It's a love story," Schubel tells us. "The main character has lost a loved one, and he is taking her to a temple that might be able to restore her spirit from the ether." While in the temple, the hero interprets vari-

ous clues and realizes that in order to draw the girl's soul back into her body, he needs to defeat the 18 gigantic colossuses.

Hulking masses of living stone, these creatures come in all kinds of unique shapes and sizes, from bipeds and quadrupeds to fantastic approximations of mythological beasts. One battle, taking place at sea, will be against a gigantic eel. Another will be against a colossus reminiscent of the hellhound Cerberus. Plus, not all of the monsters are the size of buildings; some are as small as an SUV, while others would make the Washington Monument blush (the one from the TGS demo is only medium-sized, as a point of reference). Still, no matter how small or large, Schubel points out that every single fight is critical: "There are no minor creatures. You have 18 boss fights. That is it."

Since the story places so much importance on the defeat of the colossuses, it



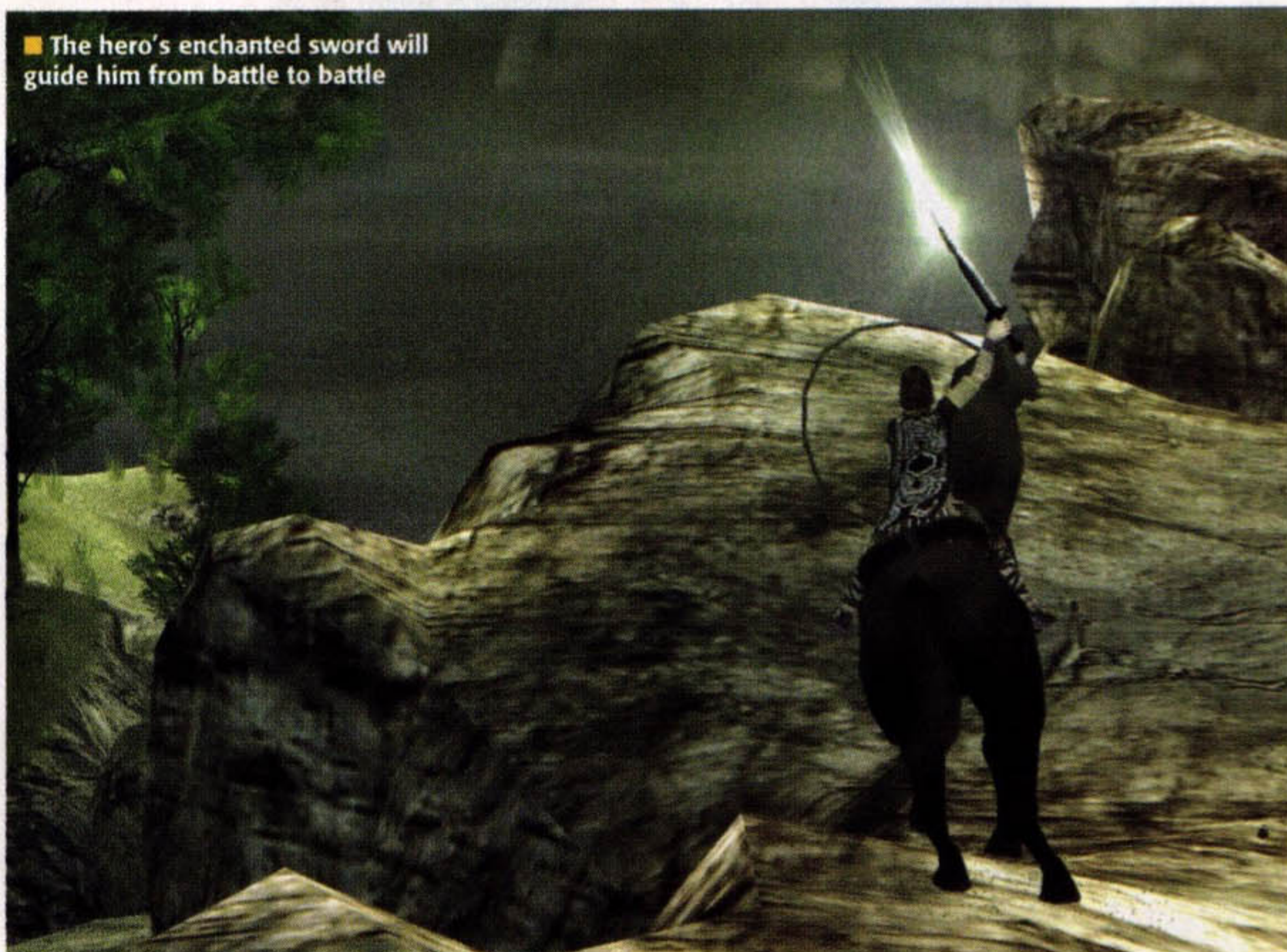
■ You'll need your horse to stand a chance against this terror

is no surprise that the game will be more focused on combat than *ICO* was. However, Schubel assures us that it will be carefully integrated into the exploration and puzzle solving aspects. "*Shadow of the Colossus* is part of a unique genre," he declares. "It's an action puzzle game." The puzzles involve not only overcoming physical obstacles, but each of the titanic battles against the epic beasts will challenge your mind as well as your dexterity. One colossus, a flying serpent, will need to be shot with an arrow in order to decrease its altitude. Then, as it skims the

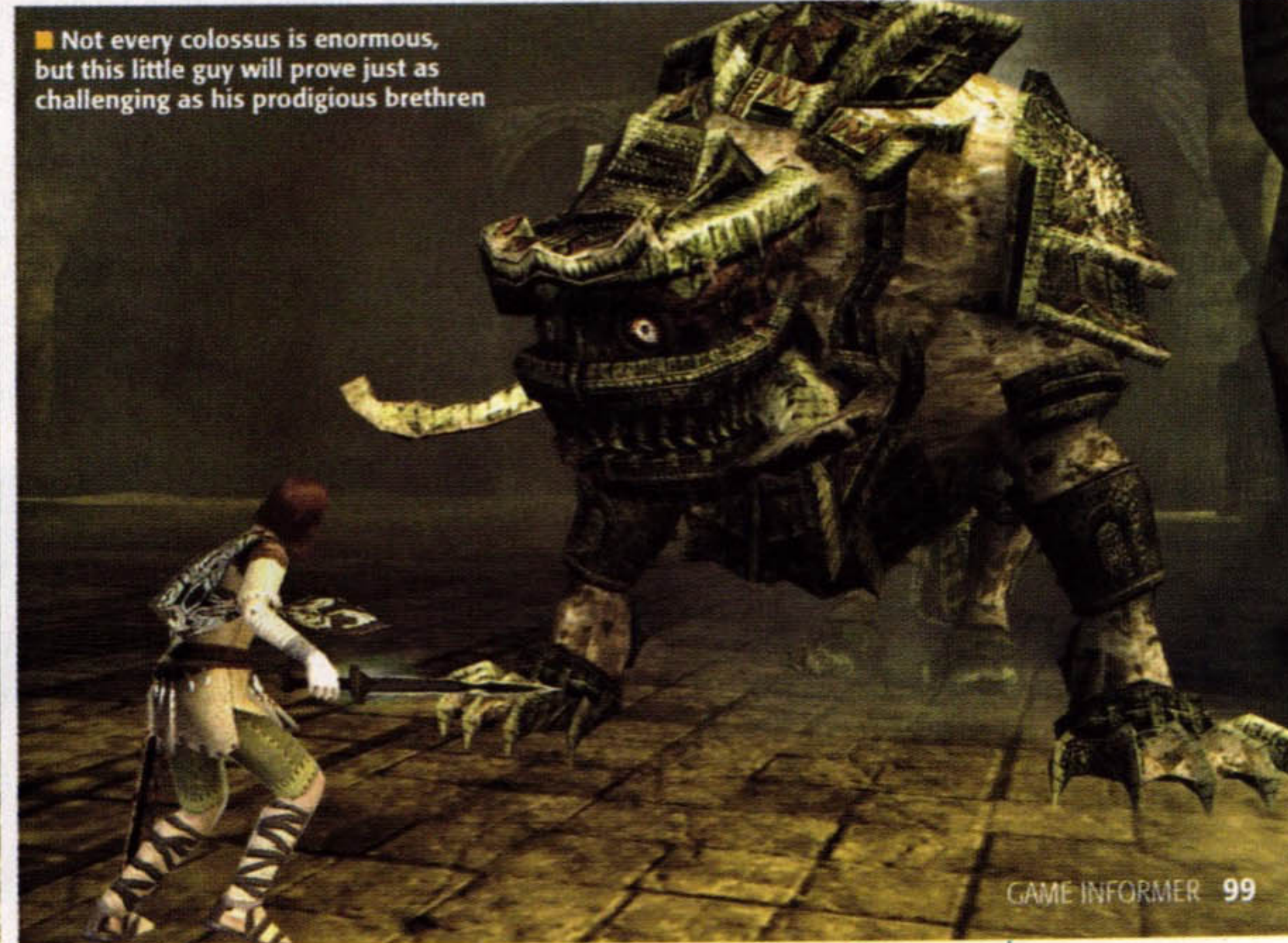
surface of the plains, you must jump from your horse onto its wings – then you attend to the matter of finding a weak spot.

However, even when you are victorious, it isn't necessarily a cause for celebration. "It's also a somber experience when a colossus goes down," confides Schubel. "You've killed a magnificent beast that's been around for a thousand years." That's quite a burden on your conscience, but the game's gorgeous landscapes and momentous battles will probably go a long way to help ease the pain. ■ ■ ■

■ The hero's enchanted sword will guide him from battle to battle



■ Not every colossus is enormous, but this little guy will prove just as challenging as his prodigious brethren





PC

Heroes of Might & Magic V

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (MULTIPLAYER TBD) > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT > **DEVELOPER** NIVAL INTERACTIVE > **RELEASE** 2006

HOLY GRAIL COMING RIGHT UP

There's a danger of being trite when making a fantasy game with demons, knights, monsters, and otherworldly saviors, but if Nival Interactive (of *Silent Storm* fame) has its way, *Heroes of Might & Magic V* will overcome the usual clichés of the genre. Graphical upgrades aplenty, five multiplayer modes, and a generally darker tone are each pulling their weight to bring this series back into the modern era.

We briefly got a sampling of what the new *Heroes* will offer gamers early next year. Starting with a bang, we saw a blimp-eye view of the human land — mountains, trees, clouds, and water flow across the continent. As the in-game camera zoomed down toward the streets, each feature of a traditional fantasy kingdom got more detailed and every step between a bird's to a deer's point of view was stunning. But trumpeting the graphics wouldn't be the whole picture unless we gently reminded people that this is the first time that the beloved fantasy series has been in full 3D — it has truly been a while since *Heroes* received a real, dramatic update.

This early in development, the eye candy is usually the most obvious improvement, but *Heroes* wouldn't be terribly interesting without some true depth. So far, developer Nival has announced that there will be six campaigns with more than 30 missions in solo mode. In addition, nearly every facet of the traditional strategy gameplay has been fleshed out just enough to encourage player control, but not so much that an empire cannot be managed.

For instance, you can cruise around your city and

fiddle with the resources of your settlement, but when you leave the town walls, a mini model-like version is accessible the entire time you're on the adventure map. From this wee representation of a city, players can see how the defenses are holding up, what's going on with the city's growth, and even the relative prosperity of its people.

Multiplayer modes are getting similar updates to bring the series closer to what players expect nowadays. Five modes are planned that can each be played via online, LAN, or hotseat play, and a map editor will let designers go crazy with the game's fantasy setting.

If Ubisoft has taught us anything about bringing favorite titles back to the forefront, it's that some time off often does the product good. With any luck, the company's guidance on *Heroes* will lead to a renaissance along the lines of *Prince of Persia*; and with a bit of a wait between now and early 2006, we'll surely be chomping at the bit for new information to arrive. ■ ■ ■



■ Sure, the demon succubus looks great, but check out the clouds and trees (less fiery, but still gorgeous)



■ A little resource management never hurt anybody



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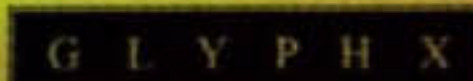
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UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2

Jak X: Combat Racing

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION/RACING (UP TO 6-PLAYER VIA PS2 BROADBAND) > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA
 > **DEVELOPER** NAUGHTY DOG > **RELEASE** FALL 2005

JAKKED UP AND READY TO RACE

The Jak series has always placed a strong emphasis on vehicular gameplay. However, with *Jak X: Combat Racing*, a recently announced sequel, the driving takes center stage in a full-on racing/combat title. While newer fans might be skeptical, old-school Naughty Dog admirers will remember that the company has already worked magic in the genre with the excellent (and underrated) *Crash Team Racing* on PSone, one of the better kart racers of its generation.

While exploring new territory for the franchise, Naughty Dog is making an effort to make sure the game feels like an integral part of the series. Just as the first three titles, *Jak X* features a story that is both dramatic and humorous. The game is set in Kras City, a futuristic, ersatz Las Vegas where

Jak and Dexter have traveled to attend the reading of Krew's (the dearly departed crime boss of Haven City) will. As you can expect, many of their old acquaintances have gathered to claim their share of the booty, including Torn and Ashelin. Somehow, Krew – who refuses to let death put an end to his schemes – will force the duo to enter the annual Kras City races.

A recent test drive revealed a game that, while not as epic in scope as the rest of the series, does look to be a very enjoyable entry in a genre that has not been well represented on the PS2. The game's vehicles are based on the rugged dune buggies that debuted in *Jak 3*. Of course, now that all of Naughty Dog's considerable technical skill can be concentrated in one direction, the vehicular physics and sense of speed have been significantly improved. You'll also be able to heavily customize all of the 12 buggy types with performance, weapons, and cosmetic upgrades. As you might expect, power-ups of all kinds abound, fueled by different types of Eco. By collecting Eco, you'll gain turbos, front and rear weapons, upgrade points, and health.

Jak X is also a bit more diverse than the usual kart racer, offering not only conventional races but also some *Twisted Metal*-style open arena combat levels. Outside of conventional race modes, the game also features *Death Race*, in which your goal is not to finish first, but to amass the most kills in the allotted time. To prevent "camping", point values for each kill will increase with each lap, so faster players will be rewarded. In the open arenas, deathmatches will be supple-



■ All vehicles can have front- and rear-firing weapons

mented by *Beast Hunt* contests, where you and your fellow players chase down hapless dinosaur-like creatures.

Speaking of "fellow players", *Jak X* will mark the series' first foray into the online arena. Up to six contestants will be able to compete in all of the game's modes, with full voice chat. You'll even have the ability to play split-screen mode online, with two players logged on through one PS2. Naughty Dog, known for its commitment to quality, has assured us that online will be everything its fans expect – from community options to stat tracking – and our experience in playing online thus far seem to lend credence to this claim.

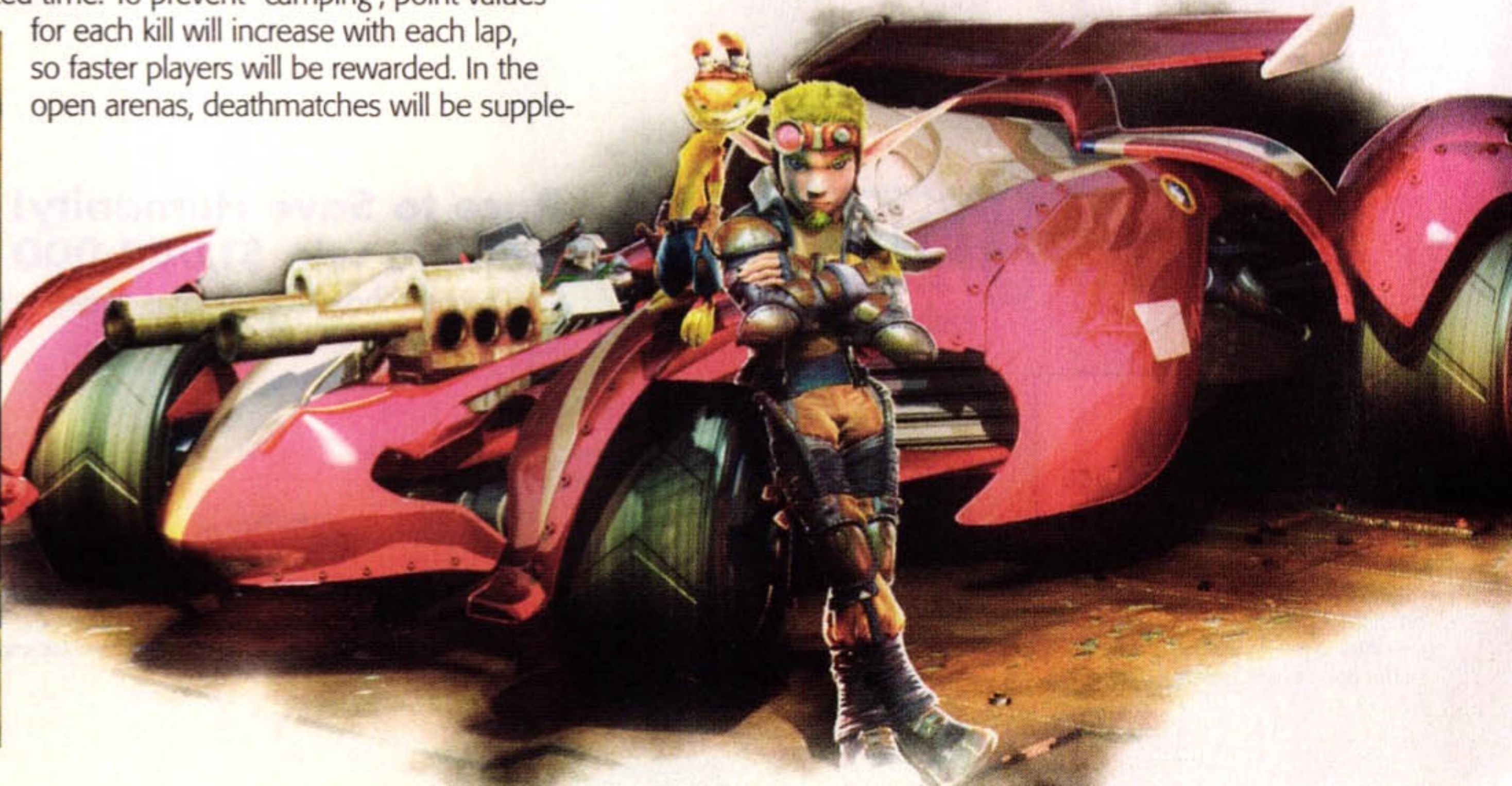
All in all, we're optimistic about *Jak X*. As much as we would have loved to see another full-blown adventure from Naughty Dog in this generation, a well-done action/racing title is nothing to scoff at. By adding some depth, solid online play, and dramatic storytelling to the genre, *Jak X* has an opportunity to both expand its audience and revitalize a style of game that has not been treated kindly by PS2 developers in recent years. ■ ■ ■



■ Despite the change of direction, *Jak X* will feature the same epic storytelling displayed in other games in the series



■ Along with the racing, there will be *Twisted Metal*-style arena combat environments





PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE | PC

Prince of Persia 3 [working title]

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT > **DEVELOPER** UBISOFT MONTREAL > **RELEASE** FALL

THE FABLED CITY

Hurling down the crowded, chaotic streets of an ancient Middle Eastern metropolis is a concept that's just ripe for action. It's so unbelievably plump with possibilities that movies going back to the first talkies have mined the idea for frantic chase sequences. And soon, another character will step into these cramped alleys.

To be more precise, in Prince of Persia 3 there are two characters that will find themselves in Babylon. With the plot picking up right where the alternate ending of Warrior Within put players...well, we don't want to ruin it all for you who haven't finished it yet. Needless to say that a time paradox has left Babylon with two Princes – one who has just returned from the Island of Time and another with a decidedly more brutal approach. One will possess the other, but if a little birdie told us right, it might be players who decide which Prince wins out.

In line with the team's earlier stance to always take risks and never become complacent with the critically successful series, the combat is getting a bit of an expansion along with the character list. The same high-flying, acrobatic action is back (with improvements, of course), and another layer

of attack options is being fleshed out: stealth. Now don't go and get all nervous that the ancient domain of the Prince suddenly has night vision – think of it more like encouraging players to maintain the element of surprise. It's almost always better to drop in from above, strangle from behind, or launch suddenly from the shadows, isn't it?

These shadowy nooks and exposed rooftops will undoubtedly be portrayed with the same dramatic lighting style and a similar camera system of games past. Even though the new Prince game takes place entirely in Babylon, it looks to be a big city no doubt harboring a collection of interesting locations. Where specifically the two Princes will end up is still totally unknown to us, but the art direction of Ubi's Montreal studio has never let players down.

So, there are changes in store for the Prince series. Does that mean that everything we've loved about the games is being chucked unceremoniously from the studio's third-floor windows? No way. Think about the streets of Babylon, the

■ Check out the background of this shot – archers await in faraway buildings that players will eventually explore



roofs of an ancient neighborhood, and the scale of a legendary city. Think about chasing and diving your way through those alleys. Try and think about how amazing even the existing Prince of Persia gameplay would feel in a place like that. Now imagine it with new moves, new enemies, and a new sense of wide-open possibilities. Thankfully, we only have to hold out through the summer until this hot commodity is in our hands. ■ ■ ■



■ Stealth doesn't necessarily mean high-tech gadgets and political espionage. Sometimes, it's just a boy and his knife



■ Chump-Fu: The art of swinging at thin air while getting shanked in the back



■ "Go ahead, jump! I'll catch you on my sword"



■ "I'm not left-handed either!"

PLAYSTATION 2

Genji: Dawn of the Samurai

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA > **DEVELOPER** GAME REPUBLIC > **RELEASE** FALL

BLADES AND BOOKS

Video game adaptations of literary masterpieces haven't exactly been the hottest items in the industry. Remember Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde on the NES?

Or the Sega CD's Sherlock Holmes: Consulting Detective? Fortunately, if things go in Sony's direction, there is still hope for the harmonious merger of academics and action in its upcoming title *Genji: Dawn of the Samurai*. Under development at Game Republic (founded by Onimusha mastermind Yoshiki Okamoto), *Genji* attempts to weave an ancient story together with elegant action and a distinct historical flair.

Originally composed in the 11th century, the tale of *Genji* is considered by many to be the first work of fiction ever written for popular consumption. "We're taking a loose interpretation of the story and moving it forward to make it more of a video game," explains associate producer Kyle Schubel. "You'll see shadow monsters and demons – it's mixing literary fiction and video game fiction to make a more compelling plot." To the modern gamer, the premise of *Genji* may sound like a summary of the last few seasons of *Smallville*: A man with extraordinary strength and speed is on a quest to right the wrongs committed against his family when he was a child. Of course, instead of an idyllic Kryptonian hero, the focus is the revenge-thirsty son of the emperor, imbued with rare abilities due to his royal heritage.

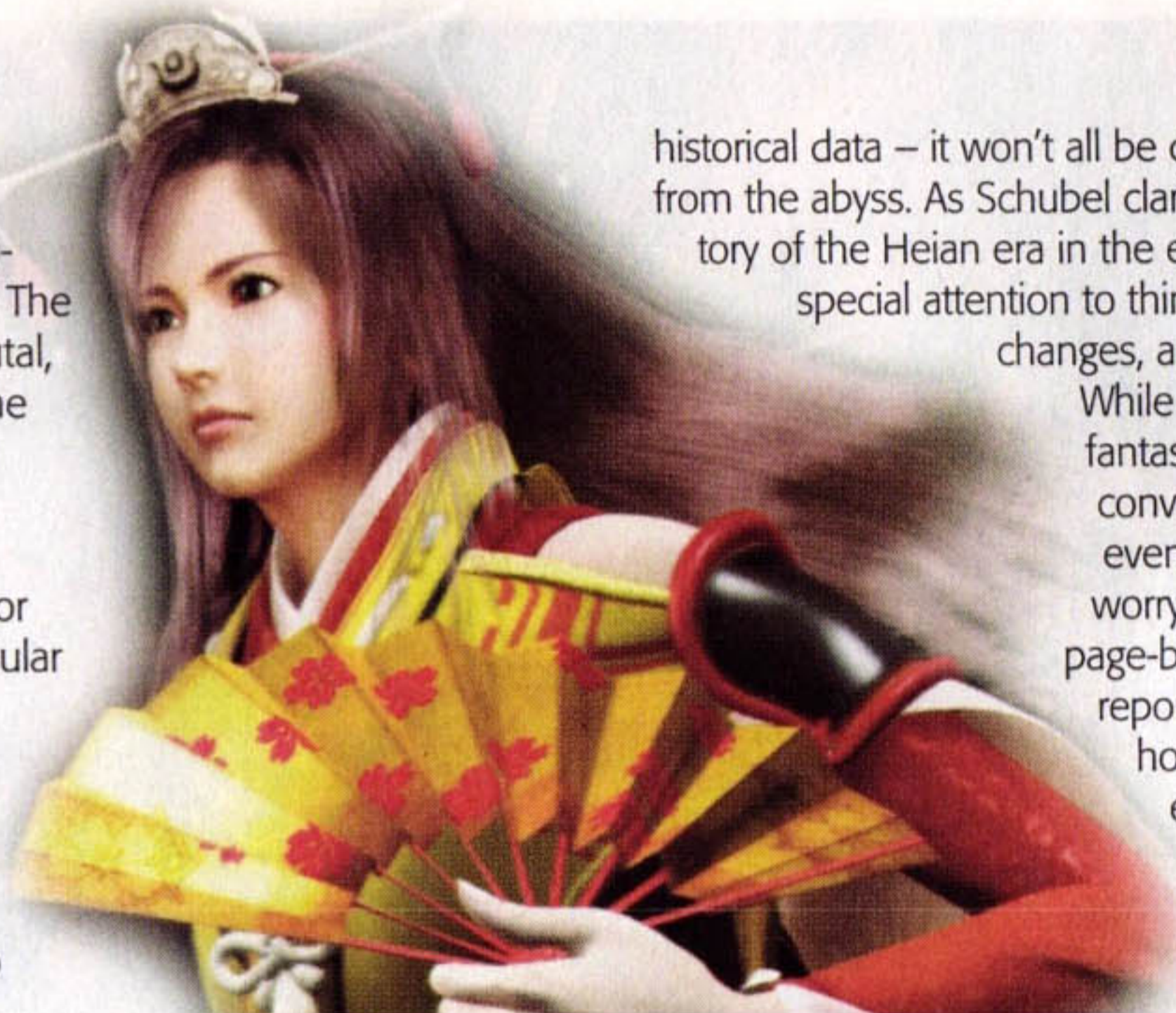
These unique strengths will afford the player a wide variety of options when it comes to fighting off legions of foes. While *Genji* is a traditional third-person action title in some respects, it sets itself apart in a few important areas. The first is an emphasis on Tate combat, which Schubel describes as "a cooperative action between the person cutting and the person taking the cut." The game demonstrates this philosophy when your character fills up a meter allowing you to enter the Mind's Eye mode. While this ability is in effect, time slows down and the gameplay shifts from traditional action to a slow-motion timing sequence allowing you to land critical hits on multiple foes. "If you get the timing right, you can actually string several of these

together," Schubel tells us, "taking your character through a dynamic choreographed battle sequence." The point of this isn't to be brutal, but rather to emphasize the nearly poetic quality of an intense duel.

Choosing to play as the emperor's son Yoshitsune or the massive Benkei (a popular character in Japanese folk tales), *Genji* will treat players to a fantasy-laden interpretation of 11th century Japan, though it still maintains strong ties to

historical data – it won't all be demonic tigers and enemies from the abyss. As Schubel clarifies, "You can see the history of the Heian era in the environments. The team paid special attention to things like architecture, seasonal changes, and costumes."

While many foes and bosses will be fantastic beasts, *Genji* will definitely convey a true sense of the period even in the midst of battle. Don't worry, though – despite the story's page-bound beginnings, no book reports will be necessary. We do, however, expect a 200-word essay on effective evisceration techniques and methodology on our desks by Tuesday morning. ■ ■ ■





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previews

PLAYSTATION 2

Top Spin

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** 2K SPORTS
> **DEVELOPER** PAM > **RELEASE** JULY

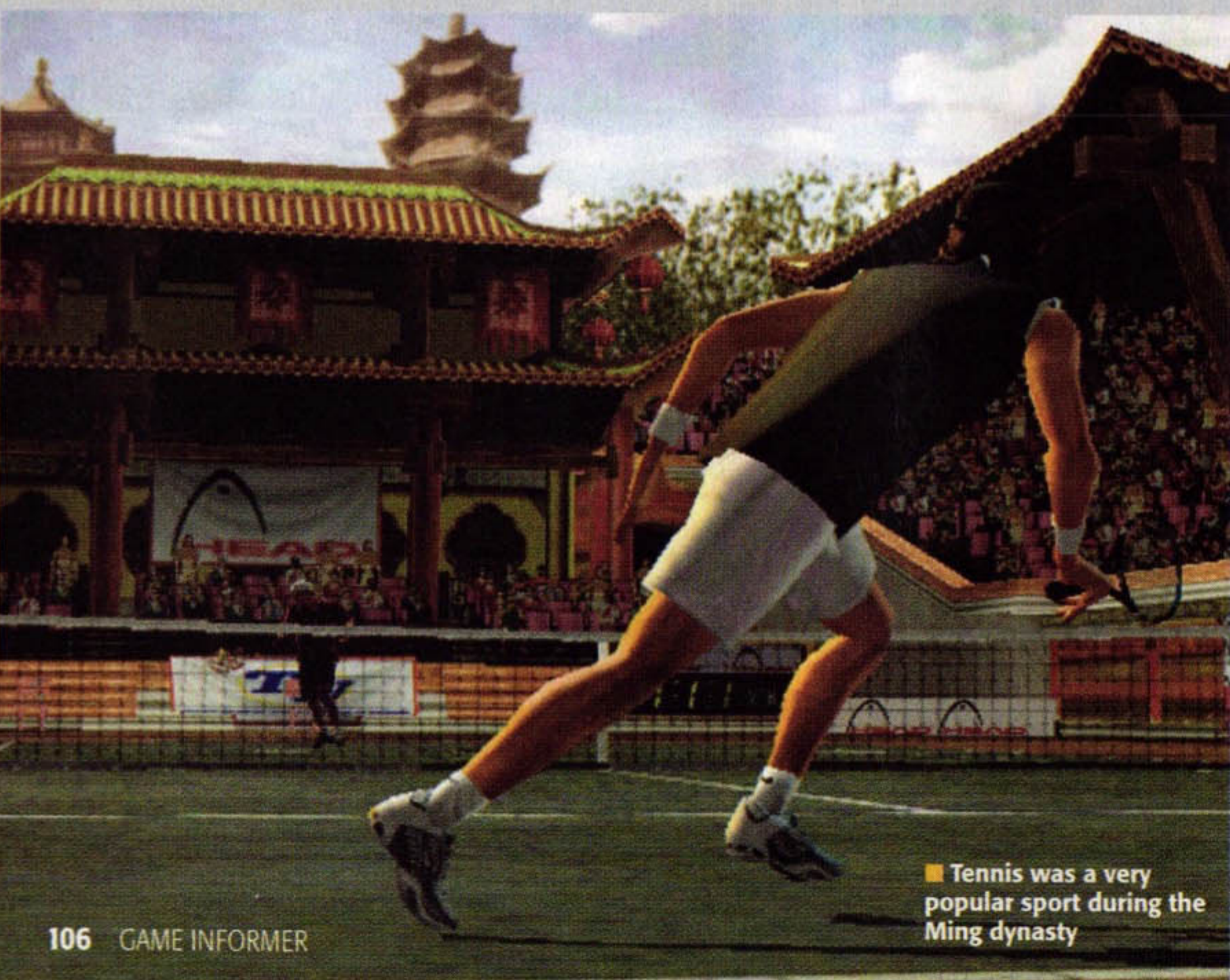
WE LIKE SHORT SHORTS

So let's cover up the confusion from the start. Top Spin used to be a Microsoft Game Studios title, bringing acclaim to an Xbox sports lineup that was lackluster at best. Now, however, in a scramble to secure sports titles in this post-EA NFL exclusive world, 2K Games has gotten the license for the Top Spin tennis franchise. But, it's not over. 2K Sports developer Visual Concepts is not making the game. Instead, 2K is having the creator of the Xbox game, PAM, handle this PS2 port.

Although there are details still unknown about the game, it is expected to keep all the player customization options that made the Xbox version such a success. You will design a character and lead him/her around the globe on the tennis tour, shooting commercials and signing with sponsors (and playing some tennis, too!). As you rise up the ranks, you'll encounter today's stars.

This PS2 edition includes Roger Federer and Maria Sharapova (among others), which is a smart move seeing as how the Xbox edition was noticeably short on star power. We can only hope that 2K Games goes one step further and includes the real Grand Slam tournaments such as Wimbledon and the U.S. Open along with their respective stadiums. One thing that is certain is that this PS2 edition includes online play, letting you test your skills against other people in white shorts around the globe.

Although this game seems to be a mere port of the Xbox version, we can't complain that this already sweet title will only get new love from the PS2 masses who've yet to experience its coolness. Besides, when Matt reviews a tennis game he has to do it wearing the old Borg shorts, headband, and wristbands, and it's a sight not to be missed. Serve it up! ■ ■ ■



■ Tennis was a very popular sport during the Ming dynasty

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

Ultimate Spider-Man

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION > **DEVELOPER** TREYARCH > **RELEASE** FALL

SPIDEY SWINGS AGAIN



When Marvel and writer Brian Michael Bendis chronicled the story of an updated Peter Parker in *Ultimate Spider-Man*, they introduced that wall crawler to a new generation of readers, and also created one of the most critically acclaimed superhero comics of all time. When Activision released the companion game to the box office hit *Spider-Man 2*, it not only had the best Spider-Man game yet on its hands, but also one of the best-selling games of 2004. It's not at all surprising that these two heralded versions of Spider-Man are coming together into what will no doubt be a comic fan's dream.

Developed by Treyarch, the team behind *Spider-Man 2*, *Ultimate Spider-Man* will build on that game's free-roaming engine with a host of improvements. The web-slinging travel that was the highlight of the last game will be refined even further, so expect a lot more variety in the random

missions this time around. These sidequests will be more involved, requiring longer time investments and even featuring multiple sections that will require choices on the part of the player. There will also be noticeable improvements to the combat engine, and Spider-Man will now more fully integrate his unique powers into hand-to-hand fighting.

All of the gameplay elements from *Spider-Man 2* have been polished and improved, but *Ultimate Spider-Man* has several new elements that make it stand apart from the movie-based games. The cel-shaded art style is designed to recall the comic, and will even use multiple panels to highlight certain elements of the story. And, as with everything else bearing the *Ultimate Spider-Man* name, Marvel's star writer Bendis has been tapped to create the game's story. That fact alone should be enough to get most comic readers on board. ■ ■ ■



■ Venom funds his evil ways by working part time as a car delivery service



■ Look upon my works, ye consoles, and despair!

PC

Huxley

> **STYLE** MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER > **PUBLISHER** WEBZEN
 > **DEVELOPER** WEBZEN H-STUDIO > **RELEASE** OCTOBER 15 > **ESRB** E

A NEW WAY TO PLAY

Star Wars, Final Fantasy, even Warcraft — many definitive franchises have moved into the massively multiplayer online space. However, they've all done as EverQuest and Ultima Online have before them, with leveling treadmills, largely hands-off combat, and tedious endgame tasks to get that last piece of sweet equipment. While there are a select few titles that have endeavored to break this mold (Planetside, et al), relative newcomer to the scene Webzen has a savory delight a-brewin'. This title, Huxley, will combine the thrills of first-person shooting with the community and persistent world of an MMO, all under the sparkly umbrella of delicious next-gen graphics.

To get a sense of what Webzen is trying to accomplish with Huxley, think of it as your favorite online FPS set in an ongoing universe. You'll have the opportunity to gain fame with NPC factions as well as with other players through your deeds. For instance, the better your kill/death ratio and win/loss records are, the more authority you'll have in battle. Additionally, the longer you play, the more skills you'll have access to; after enough time in-game you should have all the requisite capabilities to do everything from pilot a transport to sweep the streets with naught but small arms. Your avatar will grow in power as well, but the twitch-based nature of Huxley's FPS combat will no doubt make character stats

drastically less of a limiting factor than they are in more traditional MMOs.

What sounds truly interesting about Huxley, though, is the way that battles affect the lay of the land. In the sprawling city that serves as the backdrop for the game, multiple factions vie for control of a single resource that provides for every need. As battles are won and lost, access to this resource fluctuates. "Losing a battle means losing the resources to survive, and it will negatively affect the losing side's economy as a whole," says producer Kijong Kang. This mechanic extends to the ambitious goal of immersing players in a living storyline as well. "The narratives will naturally guide them into the epic storyline of Huxley's world," according to Kang. "The narratives will bind together and give purpose to every MMO act, such as battle, community, and trade."

It's clear from the screenshots that Huxley has little to prove graphically. If it turns out that Webzen is doing more than chasing an unattainable pie in the sky with the promises of evolving storylines and player-determined world states, this could be the kind of revolutionary title gamers dream about. And fear not if you're not a PC player — Huxley will very likely appear on next-gen home consoles as well, though Webzen won't comment on any plans for specific platforms. ■ ■ ■



■ Is a dystopian future ever not overcast?



■ The weapons look promising, to say the least



■ Bentley, now in a wheelchair, has some new gadgets at his disposal



■ Despite some troubles, Sly and Murray are back in business

PLAYSTATION 2

Sly 3: Honor Among Thieves

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA > **DEVELOPER** SUCKER PUNCH > **RELEASE** FALL

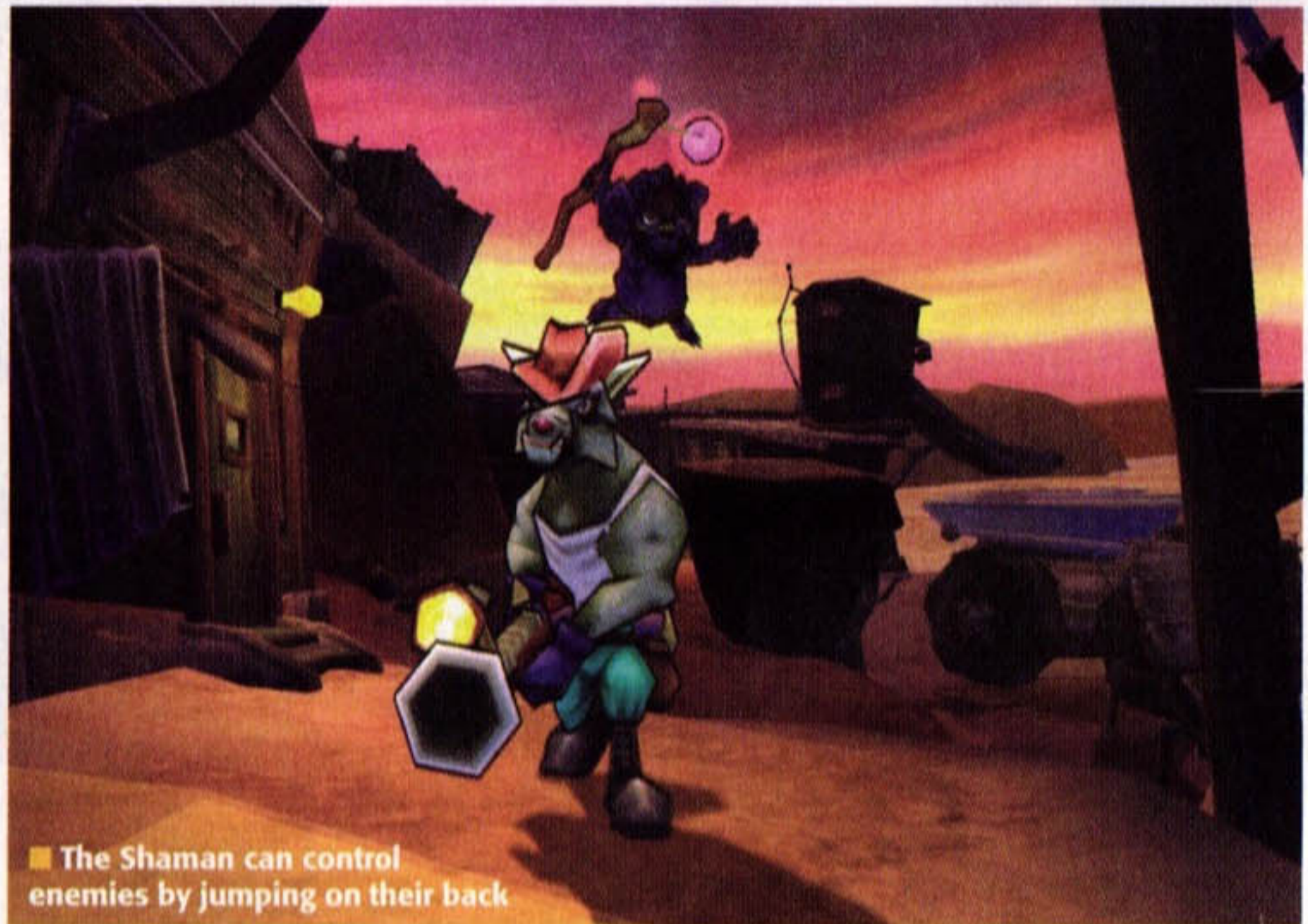
ONE MORE BIG SCORE

For Sly 3: Honor Among Thieves developer Sucker Punch's gameplan is simple: stick with what works while working to add variety and improvements to the existing package. As you'd expect, the series' trademark cartoon-influenced look is back, as are the hilarious comic book cutscenes. The tale at hand begins at the end of Sly 2, and finds the Cooper Gang's fortunes hitting rock bottom. Bentley, who was gravely injured in the final battle of Sly 2, is now confined to a high-tech wheelchair. Murray, wracked with guilt, has abandoned the life of crime and is traveling the world in search of enlightenment. Sly, as always, is struggling with a mystery surrounding his family's storied criminal past, specifically the location of a secret hideout that holds an abundance of ill-gotten booty. Of course, a new quest means new exotic locales to plunder, including Venice, the Australian outback, and China.

Events will conspire to reunite our heroes, who will be augmented by a handful of new playable characters. Responding to fan requests, you'll now be able to take on the role of the lovely Inspector Carmelita Fox. Even better, the beloved Lounge Lizard Dimitri, a Russian playboy with a knack for butchering American slang, is playable in addition to an amphibious frogman, which should add a welcome new dimension to Sly 3. The final new character shown was The Shaman, a mysterious koala who is Murray's spiri-

tual advisor. With his mystic powers, The Shaman can disguise himself as a bush, then jump on the back of an enemy and use his mental ability to control their movements. Although not technically a "new" character, Bentley (now wheelchair bound) is quite different than he was last time. Ironically, his superpowered chair actually makes him faster and more mobile, as it is equipped with booster rockets for jumping. He also has a fishing rod, which comes in handy for picking pockets at a distance. Sly has a new trick up his sleeve as well, and will be able to disguise himself to sneak past guards at certain junctures.

As expected, the series' familiar stealth-oriented, thieving gameplay is largely unchanged – and that's a good thing. However, in addition to the variety added by the new playable characters, Sly 3 is adding a bevy of new content to make sure that this is the most engrossing and expansive of the trilogy. Vehicles like boats and biplanes will be showcased during certain sequences, and we came away very impressed with how Sucker Punch is dealing with these new mechanics. There are also some humorous new minigame sequences, like a button-mashing lemonade drinking contest with some thirsty bad guys.



■ The Shaman can control enemies by jumping on their back

Another area that Sucker Punch felt needed to be improved was replay value, and it is delivering that in spades with Sly 3. Now, all missions can be replayed as "Master Thief" challenges with new objectives. The team promises that unlockables will be the order of the day, giving players reason to return to levels again and again. Although there is no online, split-screen multiplayer is being implemented with "Cops n' Robbers" mode, where one contestant is Carmelita and must stop Sly before he retrieves an artifact and returns it to his home base.

As you can see, Sucker Punch is intent on making this game its crowning achievement on the current generation of hardware. With its contemporaries taking detours into uncharted territory, it looks as though its Sly's time to step into the spotlight. ■ ■ ■



■ You'll now be able to play a little game of cat and mouse with a friend thanks to Sly 3's new split-screen multiplayer mode



■ The biplane sequence we played controlled surprisingly well

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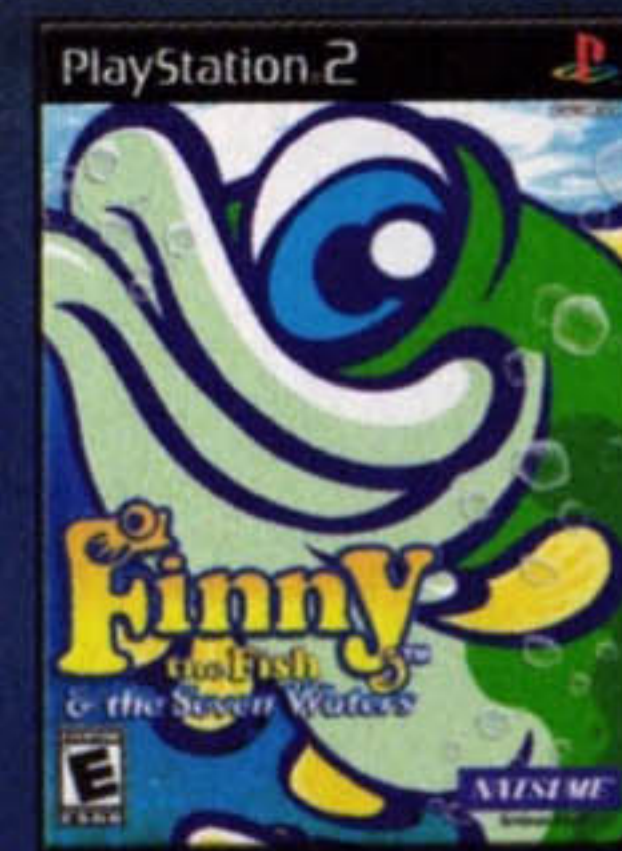
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■ The game will capture the show's signature look

PLAYSTATION 2

24: The Game

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** 2K GAMES > **DEVELOPER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT EUROPE CAMBRIDGE STUDIO > **RELEASE** TBA

ANOTHER REALLY BAD DAY

Why does Jack Bauer even get out of bed in the morning? As part of the Los Angeles Counter Terrorism Unit and star of the hit Fox TV show *24*, this guy has more bad days than Naomi Campbell's personal assistant. If we were him, we'd stay in bed all day eating cherry cordials and watching *Montel*. But that wouldn't make for a very exciting TV show, nor a very good video game.

In the video game adaptation of the real-time series, players will step into the role of Bauer and other CTU members as they experience yet another hellish day. Taking place between seasons two and

three, the game will fill in some of the blanks not addressed by the show, including how Jack's daughter Kim Bauer came to work in the CTU and what happened to President Palmer after the failed attempt on his life.

Like the show, the game will take place over the course of one 24-hour period, and will feature a variety of gameplay types. Obviously, there will be a huge emphasis on action and gunplay, but Jack's deductive abilities will also certainly be put to the test with a series of deadly puzzles. The story will unfold over the course of 100 missions, which will have players shooting, sniping, driving, and interrogating their way to answers.

The gameplay variety is designed to capture the feel of the television show, and the cast and crew is working closely with Sony to ensure it feels like a proper part of the *24* universe. Most of the major actors will lend their voices and motion-captured movements to the game, including Kiefer Sutherland, Elisha Cuthbert, Carlos Bernard, and more. The show's writers are contributing to the story, and its composer Sean Callery is handling the music. Overall, it seems like Sony is taking good care to appease the fans of the series. Hopefully, the game will turn out to be as uniquely compelling as the show. ■ ■ ■

■ "I think I was best in *Flatliners*...no, wait - definitely *Young Guns II*."

■ "That's pretty sexy, but are you sure you should be looking at that at work?"



UNLIMITED ENABLED

XBOX | PC

Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** ROCKSTAR GAMES > **DEVELOPER** ROCKSTAR NORTH > **RELEASE** JUNE 7

LOS SANTOS NEVER LOOKED SO GOOD

■ High-resolution textures have been reinserted into every inch of San Andreas



Rockstar's megahit Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas is coming to Xbox and PC. If you've played other ports in the series, you already know what to expect: a title that looks considerably better than its PS2 predecessor. As before, the textures and character models display a much higher resolution and more detail, and the lighting and reflective effects are even more impressive.

As before, the Xbox and PC versions will support user-created soundtracks, with one cool new twist. This time, in addition to sequential and random play, you'll also be able to listen to Radio mode, which will add in commercials and jingles inbetween your musical selection. This is being done so players who listen to their own tunes won't miss out on the full GTA experience. You'll also be able to save your last 15 to 30 seconds of gameplay as replays, which

can be shown to friends at a later date. Aside from the screen resolution, there are no real differences between the two ports, although Rockstar is still determining whether or not the PC version will have two-player missions.

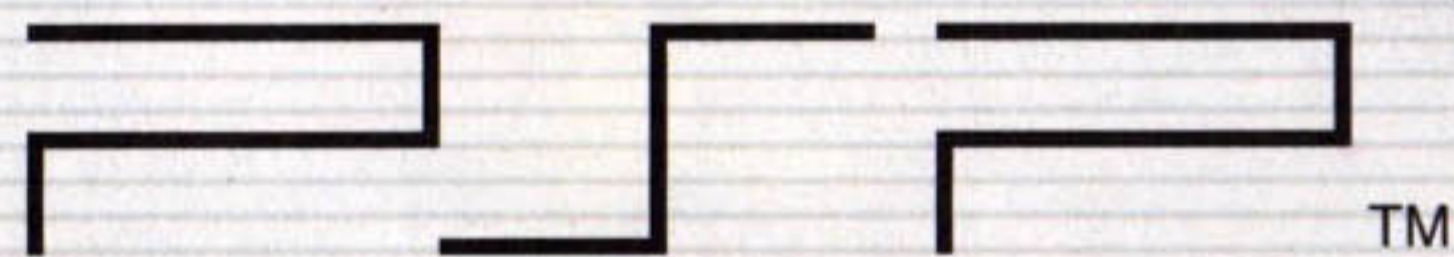
Honestly, what else is there to say? For Xbox owners that haven't experienced San Andreas, this will quite likely be the best game you play all year. ■ ■ ■

■ Reflective surfaces are even shinier on the Xbox and PC



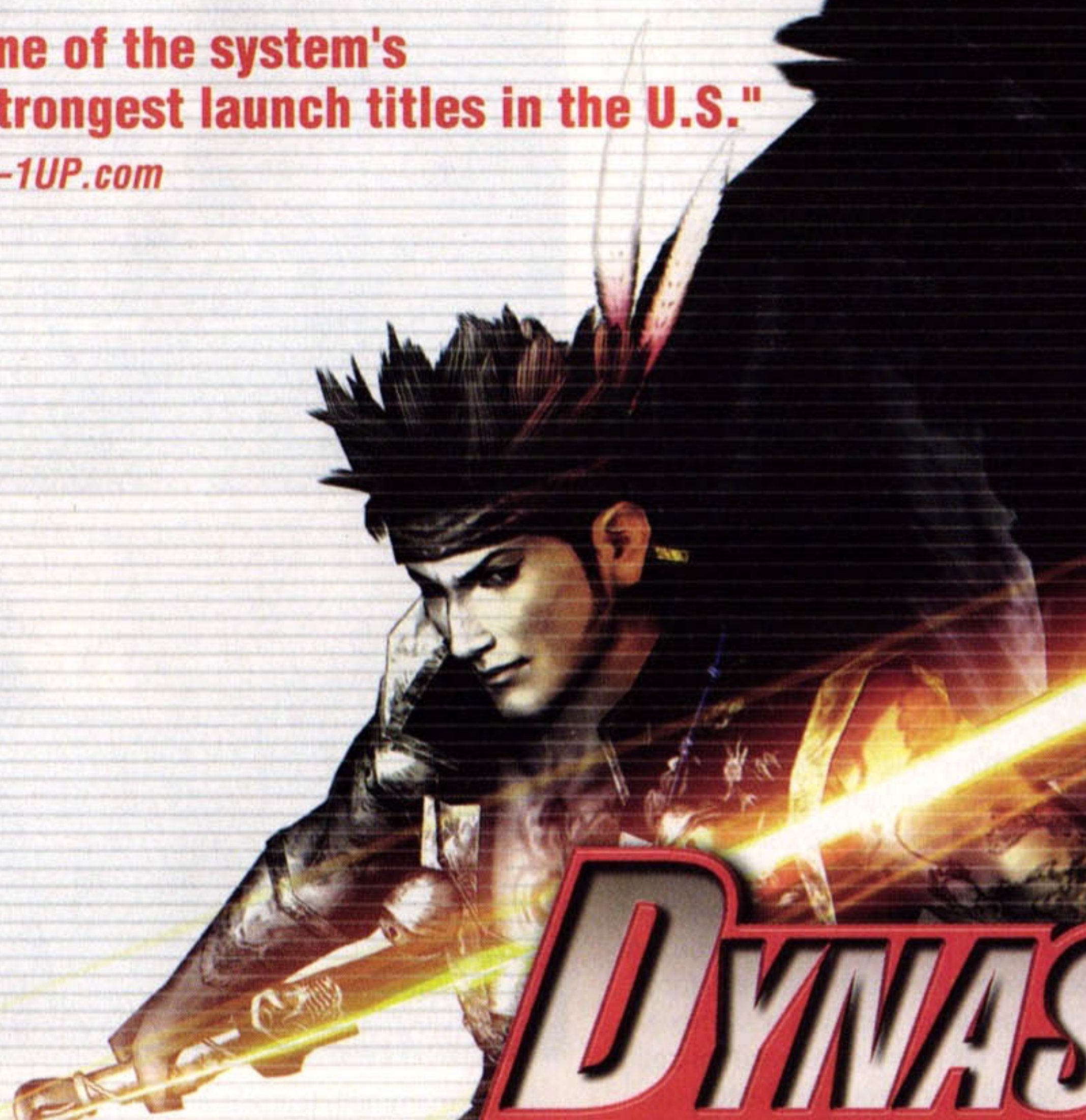
■ The character models have been significantly smoothed out and improved





"one of the system's
strongest launch titles in the U.S."

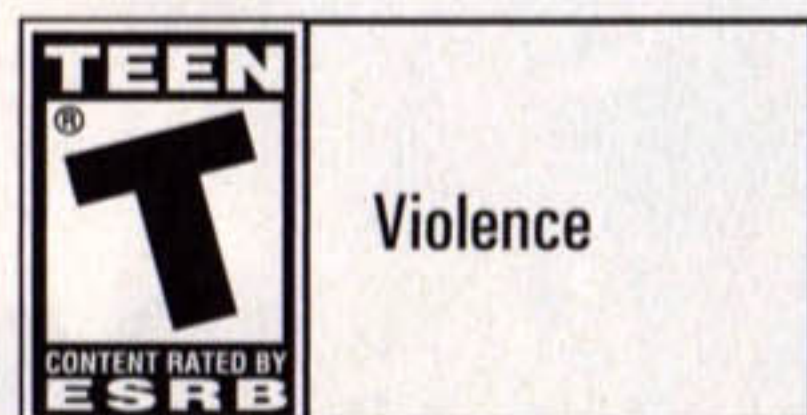
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■ Does the word "Custer" mean anything to you guys?



■ "Darnit, Bobby, stop shooting me in the back of the knee."

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | PC

Star Wars: Battlefront II

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (PS2), 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (XBOX) (UP TO 24-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE, UP TO 32-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE, OR UP TO 64-PLAYER VIA PC INTERNET OR LAN) > **PUBLISHER** LUCASARTS > **DEVELOPER** PANDEMIC STUDIOS > **RELEASE** FALL

THERE IS NO TRY

The first Battlefront game was a rousing success because it offered so many things that Star Wars fans had been clamoring for. While most were pleased with the chance to tackle all of those great cinematic battles, there was always a desire for more – more options, more battles, more game types, and more excitement. Thankfully, Pandemic feels just as fans did, and have quite a few surprises in store for the follow-up. With playable Jedi, enormous space battles, and completely redesigned gameplay, it looks as if we'll have plenty to look forward to in the Star Wars galaxy, even after the big movie release.

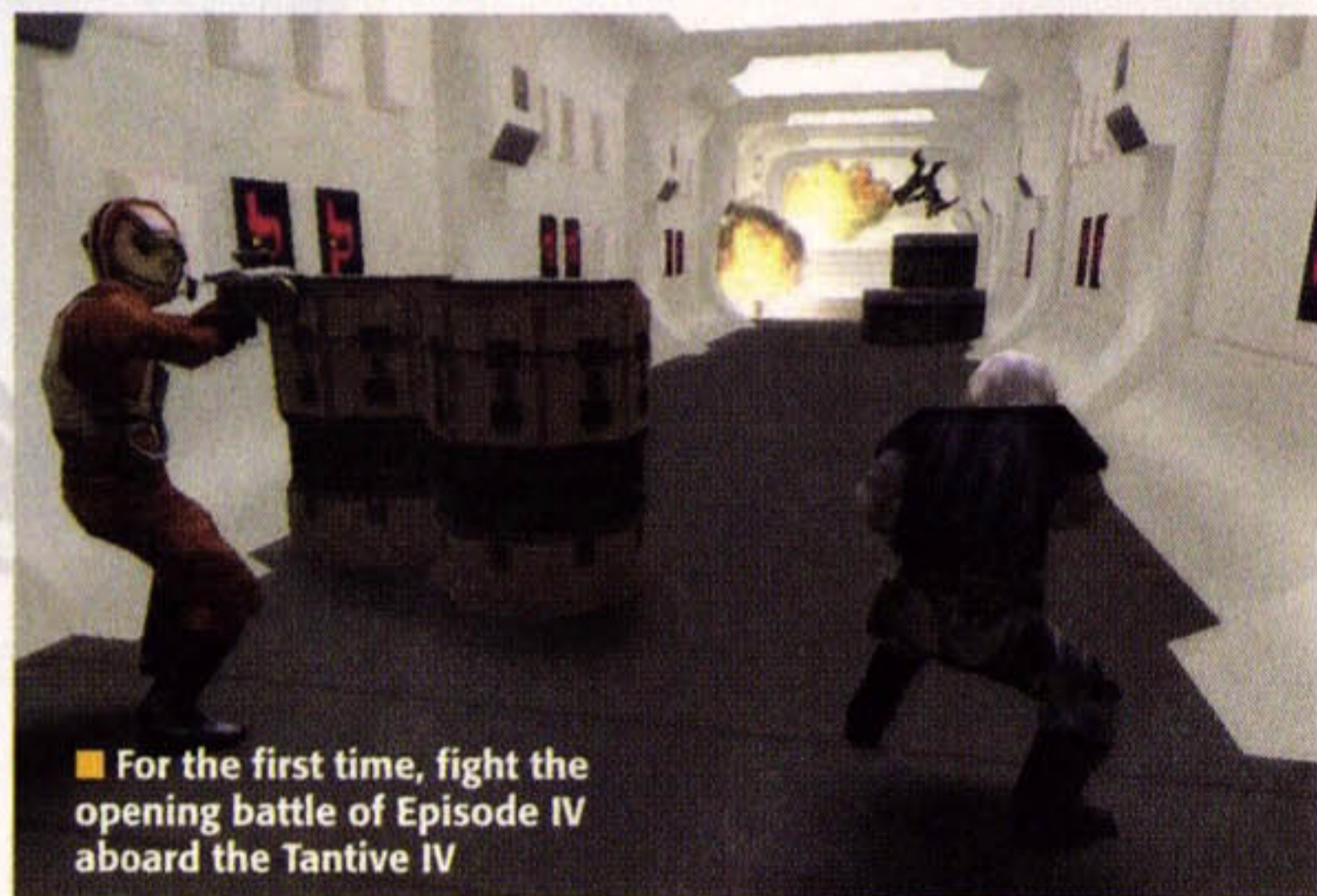
One of the most exciting additions is the playable Jedi hero characters. These feared warriors will be the crowning achievement on the battlefield, as they are planned as rewards for good playing. Pandemic director Eric Gewirtz explains: "In the single-player story, they become available

when the player achieves certain objectives in the campaign. In multiplayer, the game host can set the parameters for how the Jedi appear in the game. These heroes will only be usable for a limited period of time. This time can be increased by using the hero effectively, but conversely, that time will be shortened if the hero is killing teammates or getting hit by the enemy." While Gewirtz was hesitant to name hero names, our thoughts immediately turn to all the possibilities – taking control of General Grievous and decimating his foes or hurtling about the screen as Yoda. We'll have to wait and see.

As if this major addition wasn't enough, the new Battlefront is tackling the huge playground of Star Wars space battles as well. First, the team overhauled the vehicle controls. "A new boost feature allows vehicles to fly at high speed for brief periods of time," Gewirtz told us. "Second, we've added stunting to give the flyers more dynamics for combat. Stunts include defensive rolls and Immelmans for a quick turnaround." In addition, ships will now move faster overall, targeting has been redesigned for better use against other vehicles, and each will handle differently. We've also learned there will be all sorts of ships in the final game. Each of the four primary factions has four unique, flyable vehicles. For instance, the Rebel Alliance will have access to the X-Wing, Y-Wing, A-Wing, and a transport ship. In addition, many of the battlefields center around giant capital ships and even the Death Star itself! While the pilots have their fun out in space, other players will be able to fly in and enter hangars on foot in order to wreak havoc for the opposing team. You'll even be able to take over turret emplacements on the larger ships and turn the guns on the ship itself, letting you do things like knock out a Star Destroyer's shield generator with its own weapons.



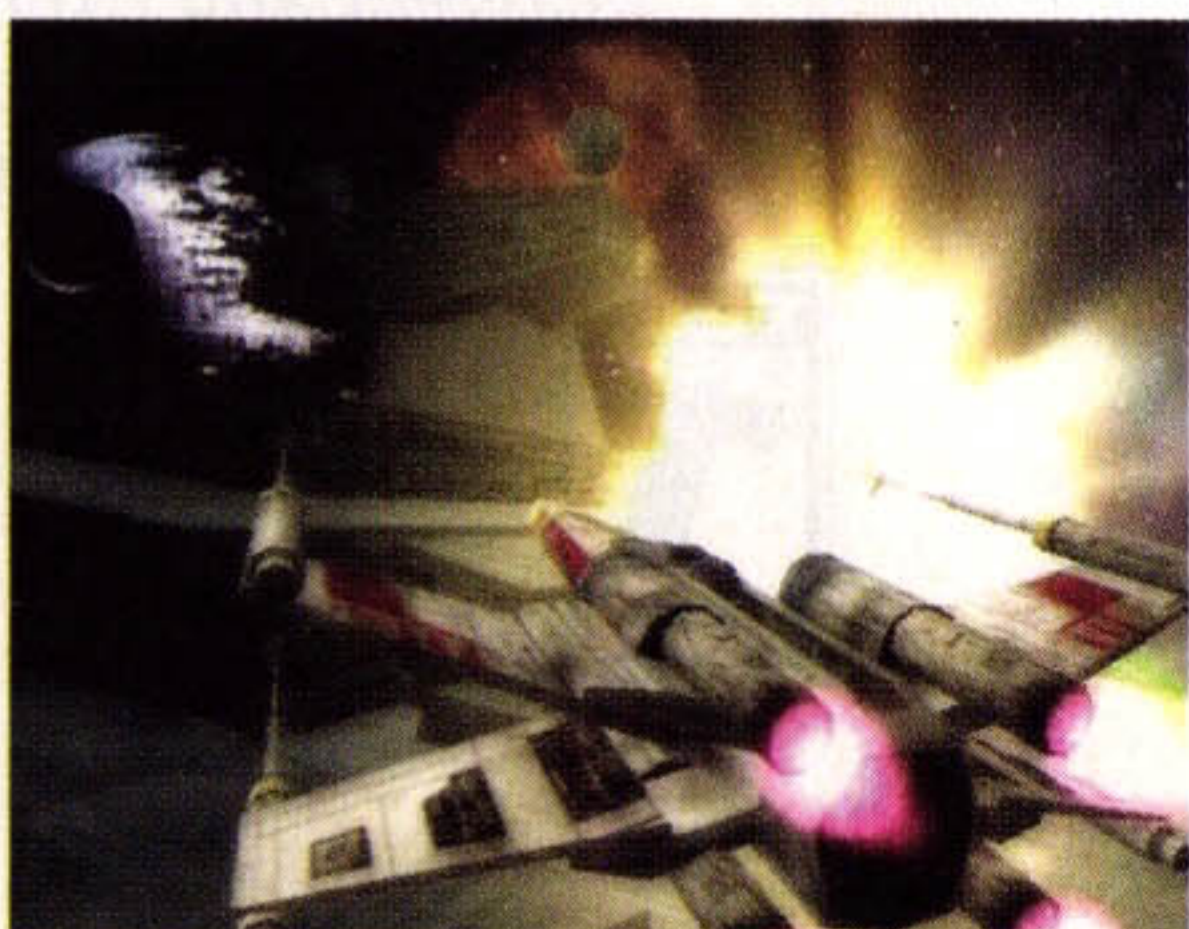
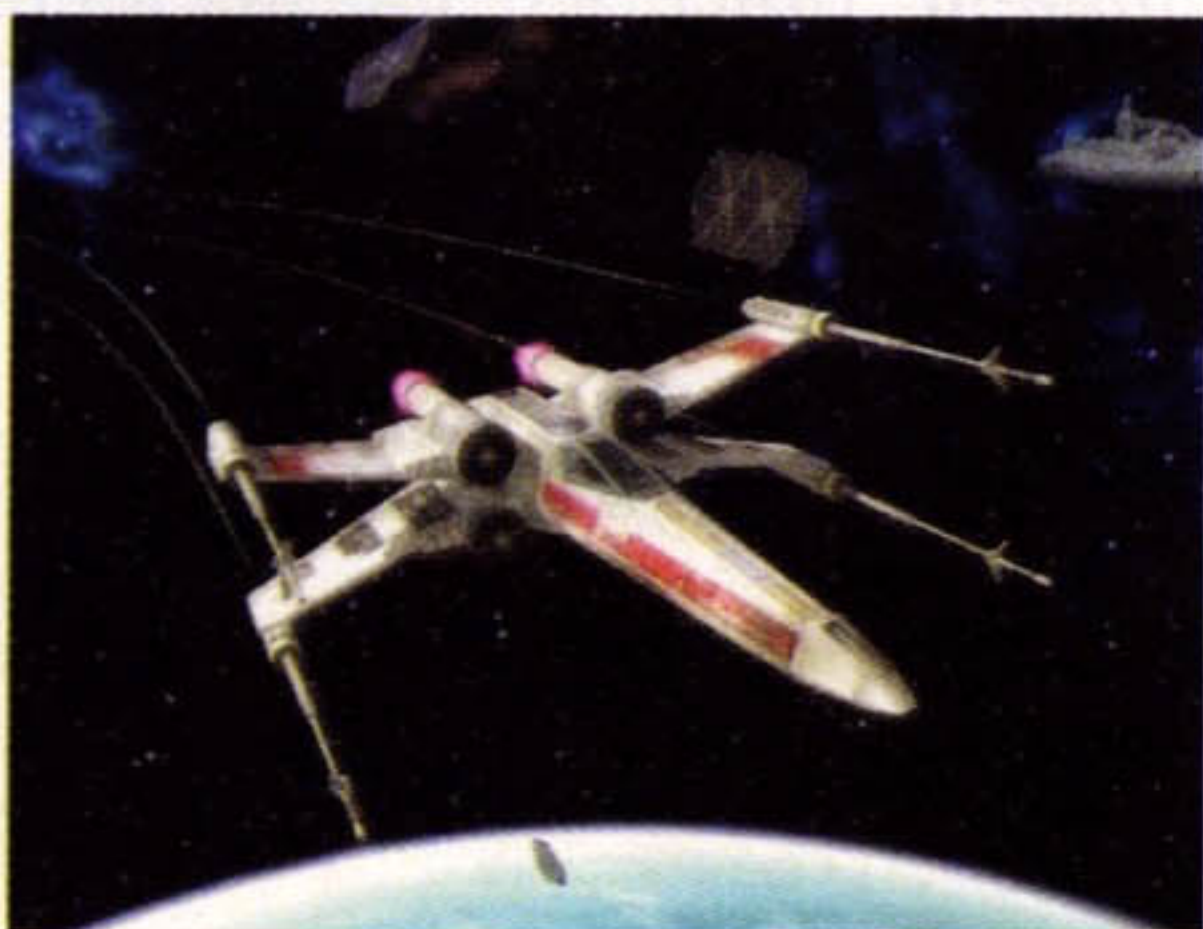
■ Fly into the hangar of the Death Star and sabotage its systems



■ For the first time, fight the opening battle of Episode IV aboard the Tantive IV

These mammoth features are only the tip of the iceberg. Diverse mission objectives like Assault and Capture the Flag are now included in addition to Conquest. In single player, you'll build your army over time, deciding how to allocate technology and resources – even while tackling a more story-driven campaign. Targeting and combat implementation has also been totally redone to allow for more ranged weapon flexibility, as well as lightsaber combat and force powers. There's even online two-player splitscreen available on the Xbox, or four players offline (PS2 has just two-player offline and no online splitscreen). All these signs seem to indicate that Battlefront II does just what we like in a sequel – staying true to the spirit of the franchise while drastically expanding options, flexibility, and fun. The Force is strong with this one. ■ ■ ■

■ Jim was always thankful that he worked on the non-exploding platform



XBOX 360 | PLAYSTATION 3 | PC

Condemned: Criminal Origins

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** SEGA > **DEVELOPER** MONOLITH
> **RELEASE** XBOX 360 LAUNCH (PS3 AND PC TBD)

INTO THE DARKNESS

Back in March, Game Informer introduced the world to Condemned, the first announced next-generation horror title. Published by Sega and developed by Monolith, Condemned is being touted as a whole new kind of horror game, one that will use the staggering visual capabilities of next-gen hardware to immerse the player in the most realistically frightening situations seen in a video game to date.

The game has undergone a slight name change since our exclusive first look (the full title is now Condemned: Criminal Origins), and it's looking more and more likely that it will be headed for PlayStation 3 as well as Xbox 360 and PC. The game places gamers in the role of Ethan Thomas, a member of the Serial Crime Unit for the FBI. Over the course of the game, Thomas will track down several demented serial kill-

ers and bring them to justice. However, the crimes of these twisted murderers aren't the real point of the game. As the story progresses, Thomas (and players) will learn what drives these people to insanity and confront that force himself. He will also face down hordes of marginalized street people who have been tainted by this corrupting power. With only his crime-solving training (and some handy weapons like pipes, shovels, and shotguns), Thomas must venture deep into the world of madness.

Condemned is a bold new direction for Sega, a company known best for family-friendly fare like Sonic the Hedgehog, but it's one that we're glad it has taken. Next-gen consoles like the Xbox 360 seem capable of delivering truly emotionally involving titles, and we've always been fans of a good scare. ■ ■ ■

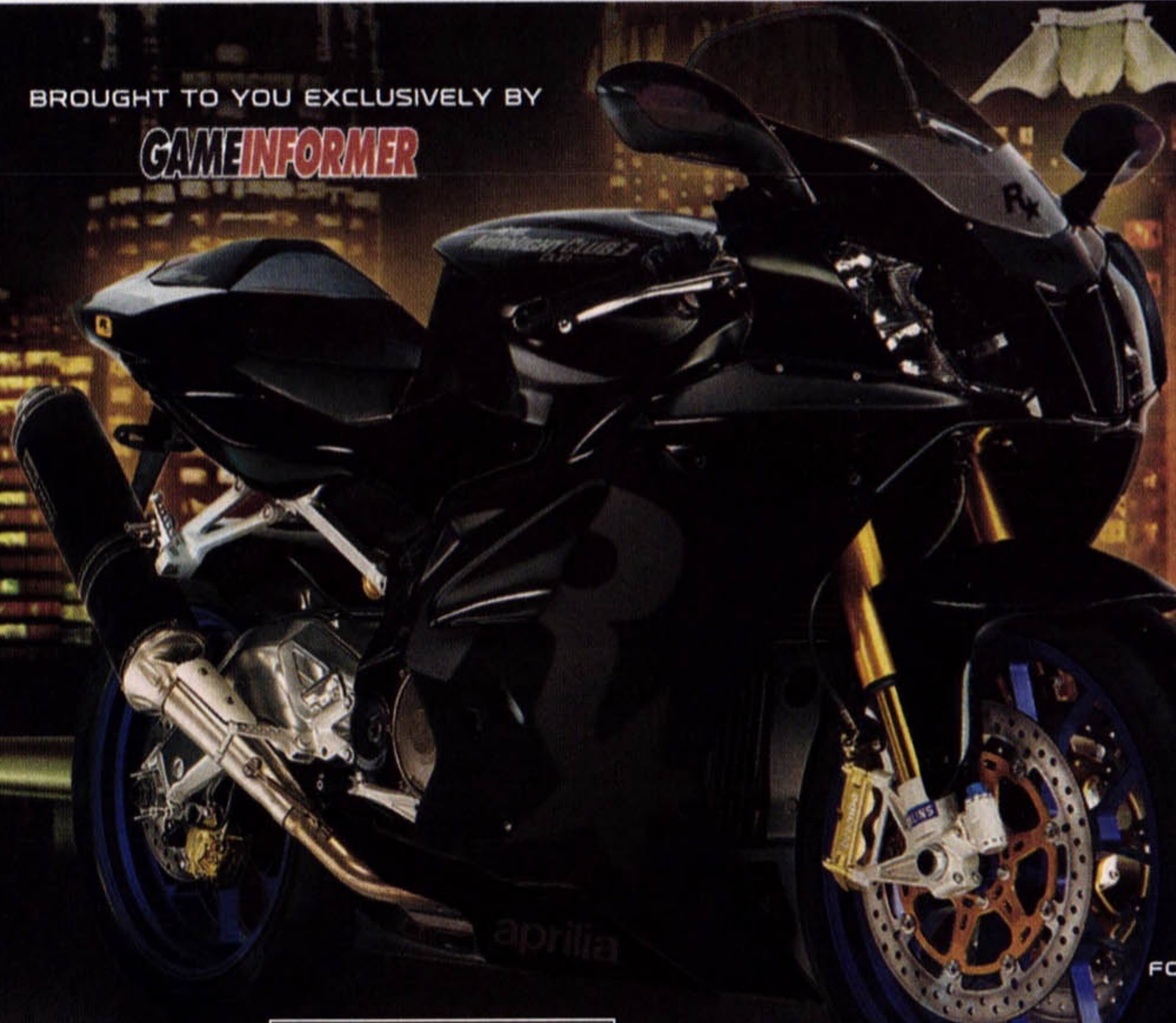


■ Rob Zombie doesn't take kindly to people bashing his crappy last album



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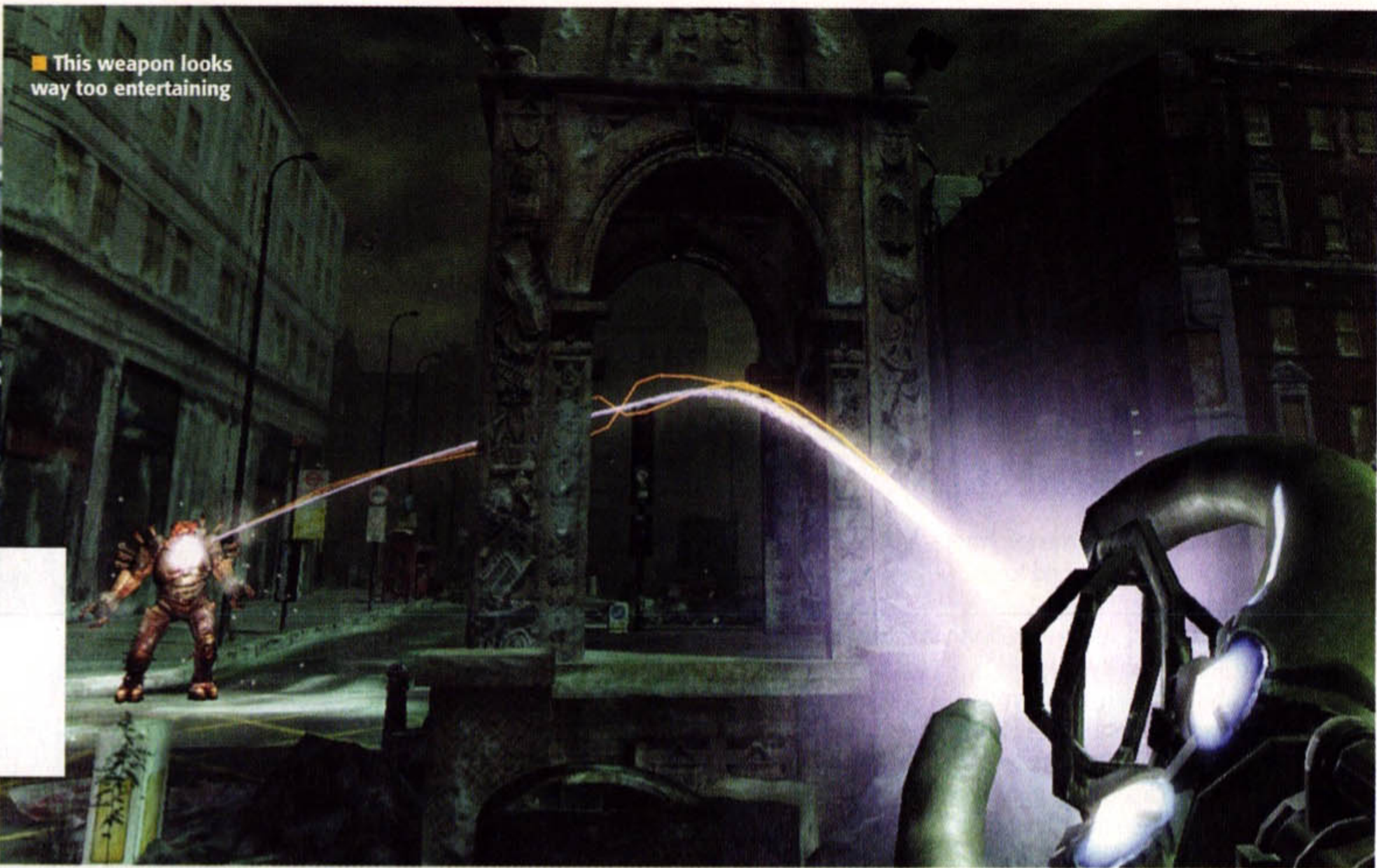
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■ This weapon looks way too entertaining

UNLIMITED ENABLED

PC

Hellgate: London

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG (MULTIPLAYER TBD) > **PUBLISHER** NAMCO
> **DEVELOPER** FLAGSHIP STUDIOS > **RELEASE** TBD > **ESRB** E

FROM DIABLO TO ENGLAND

Ever since hearing years ago that Bill Roper and much of the Diablo crew were leaving Blizzard Entertainment to forge their own destiny in the stormy waters of independent development, gamers everywhere have been wondering what became of this talented team. At long last, Roper's Flagship Studios has unveiled preliminary details of its first title. Hellgate: London may be a spiritual successor to the massively popular Diablo

II, but the merest glance at these screens makes it quite clear that this title is very much a unique entity.

In Hellgate: London's dystopian future, the forces of (you guessed it) Hell are making life miserable for the wretched survivors of the human race. Using whatever you can, whether it is sci-fi inspired gadgets and weapons or mystical powers, your mission is to save humanity from the depreda-

tions of the underworld. And, as much as the look of the game would have you believe otherwise, this title is most certainly an RPG. Behind all of the Doom 3-like visuals lurks a complex system of random rolls, skill checks, and damage modifiers that would make any nerd's dice bag slink into the corner and hide. Several character classes, branching skill trees, and robust item customization give the lie to Hellgate: London's FPS façade.

"The game may look like a shooter on the surface, but it plays like an RPG through and through," according to Roper. "Your character level, skills, spells, abilities, and items combined with your tactics and choices in and out of combat make for success in the game." With proclamations like this, Flagship's plans for the title have us far more excited than some mere gorgeous screens possibly could. "We're applying the randomization concept in new ways to areas where players are used to seeing it like levels or equipment, as well as in new parts of the game, like with skills," adds Roper. What do these cryptic statements mean? If our developer translator is working, the upshot is that this title will boldly go where RPGs have traditionally feared to tread. This tantalizing glimpse of the other side of the hill has some very green grass indeed.

With fully randomized environments and equipment drops, and the aforementioned extensive character and item customization, Hellgate: London is shaping up to give outstanding replayability along with the excellent hack n' slash entertainment that Flagship's pedigree nearly guarantees. Though the developer steadfastly refuses to discuss any sort of release date other than the infamous "when it's done," even these early tidbits are enough to get us more than amped for that eventual day. ■ ■ ■



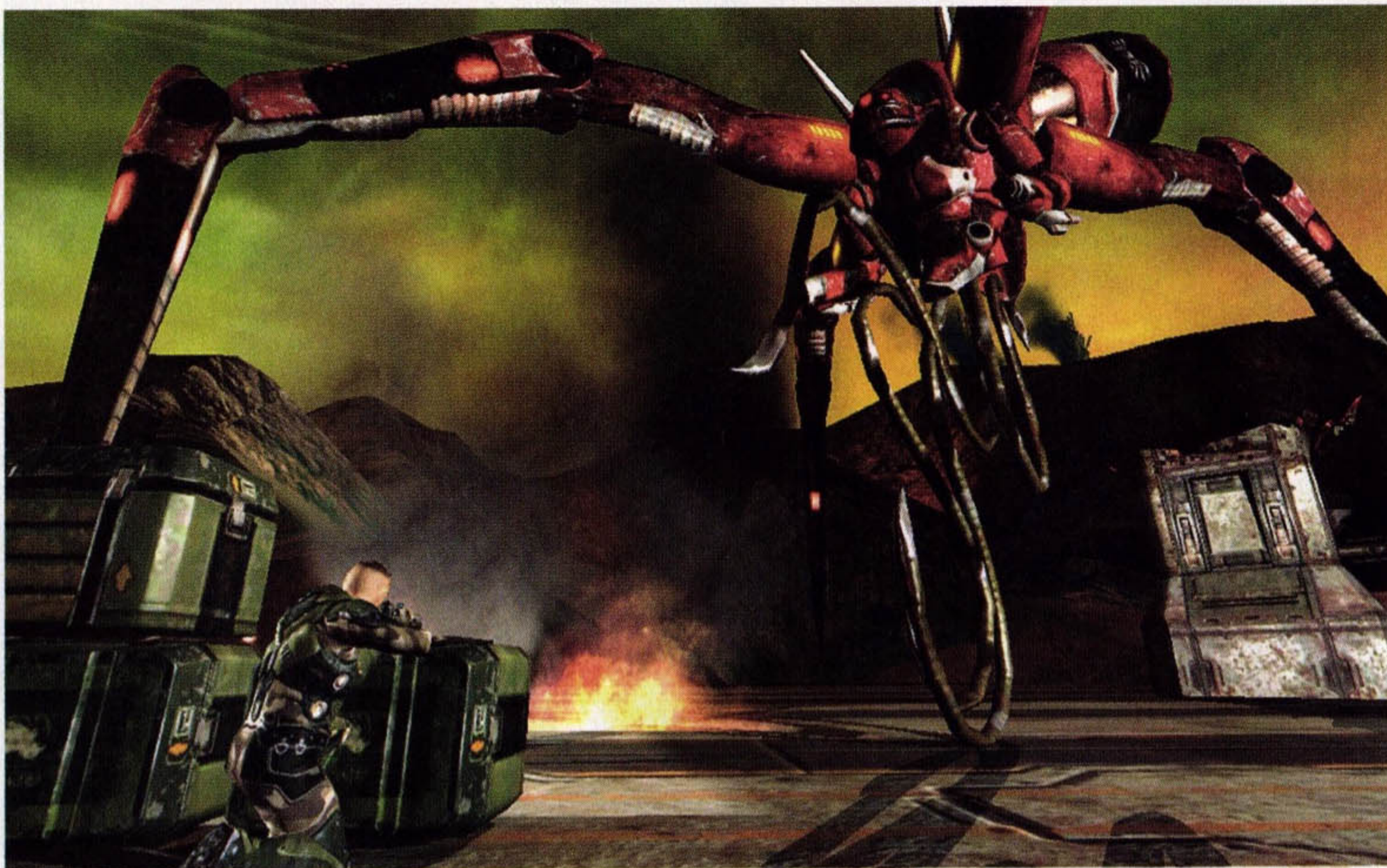
■ "I got your brains right here, suckas"

■ For some reason, most inhabitants of dystopian London are "cat people"



■ If we ever command an army of demons, the first tactic they learn will be, "Don't clump up when facing heroes that have area-effect attacks"





XBOX 360 | PC

Quake IV

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBD) > **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION > **DEVELOPER** RAVEN SOFTWARE/ID SOFTWARE > **RELEASE** 2005

YOUR BOX WILL QUAKE

Doom 3 has now found its way into the collections of many shooter fans, so it's time for another high-profile shooter to step into the spotlight. PC gamers have been salivating over Quake IV for months, and now console gamers will start feeling the anticipation. That's right: Quake IV is coming to consoles — more specifically, it's coming to the Xbox 360.

The Xbox port of Doom 3 performed admirably on the console, but it couldn't quite handle the full capabilities of the Doom 3 engine. According to Tim Willits, lead designer at id, the 360 is quite capable of handling everything that the engine has to offer.

Unlike most games that are ported from PC, Quake IV is being developed for both platforms in tandem, thanks to the similarity in power. The PC and 360 versions of Quake IV will be identical in visuals and feature sets. In fact, the only noticeable differences between the two will be the menus, control scheme, and Xbox Live features of the 360 version (which are still being finalized).

Quake IV marks the first time that id and co-developer Raven have worked on two versions of a game at the same time, but this isn't the only new element in this iteration of the series. For the first time in the franchise, the protagonist will be named. As Matthew

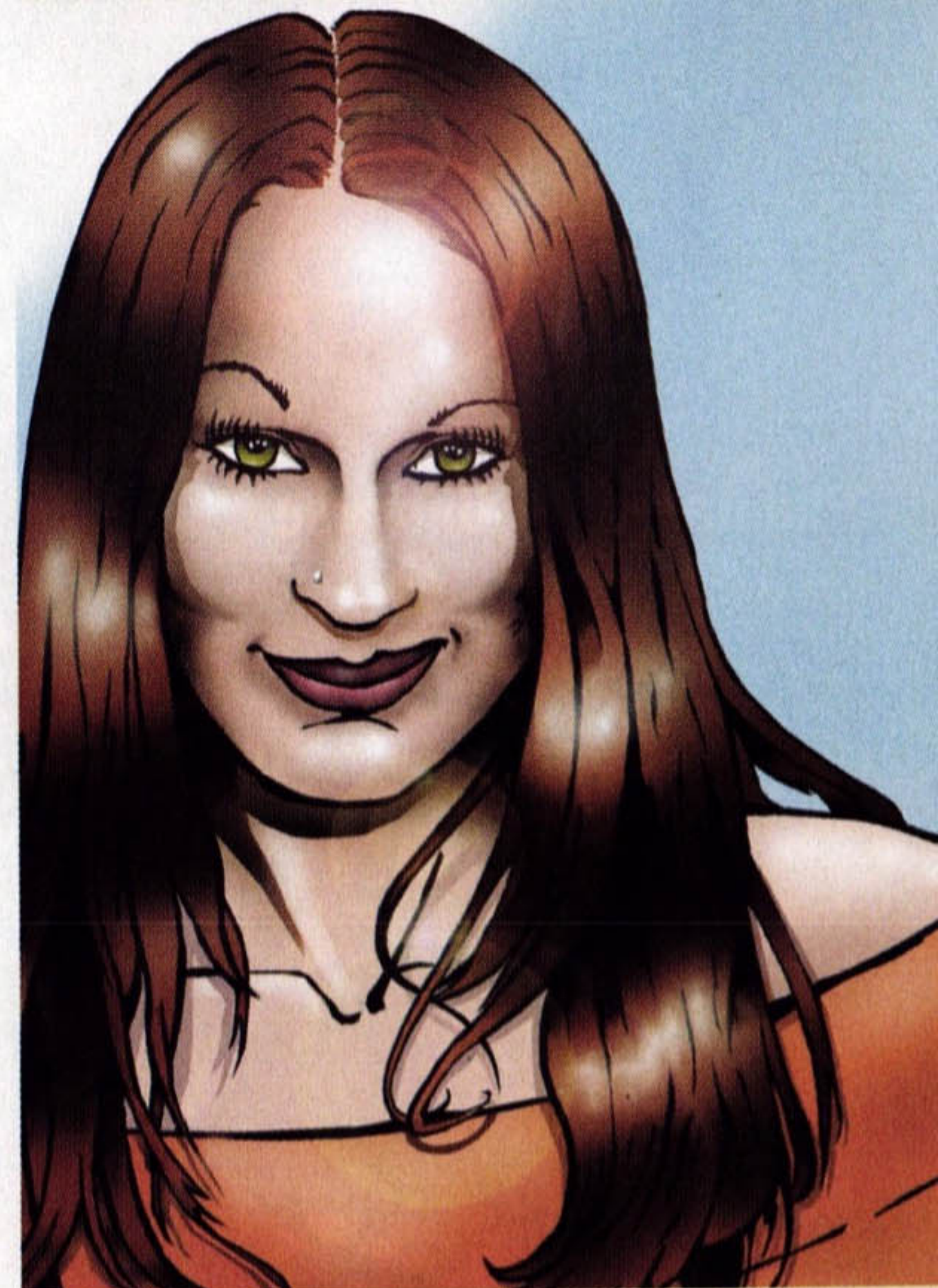
Kane, leader of the Rhino Squad, you will help lead the ground assault on planet Stroggos. Over the course of the quest, you will interact with the other military forces on the planet in an effort to destroy the Nexus, the construct that allows all Strogg on the planet to communicate instantly with one another. But during the offensive, Kane is captured and partially transformed into a Strogg himself. As the link between the human and Strogg armies, it will be up to Kane to destroy the Nexus and bring down the Strogg army. Fortunately, this epic quest will soon be available to PC and console gamers alike, and we can't wait to compare the two versions side by side. ■ ■ ■

■ "...and here you see how the Quantum Juice-O-Matic gets a full six glasses of human juice out of just one person. Now how much would you pay for that? But what if I throw in a free lemon zester?"



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

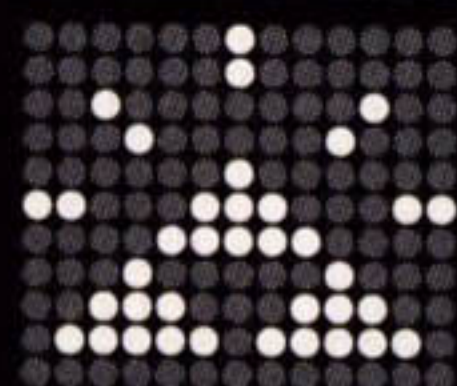
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PLAYSTATION 2

Phantasy Star Universe

For some reason, Sega has decided to move its online role-playing series Phantasy Star from the GameCube to the PS2. We can't for the life of us figure out why. Releasing this fall, Phantasy Star Universe will feature both an online campaign (mercifully free of card-based combat), and a full single-player experience. The single-player mode places gamers in the role of Ethan, a young man who will most certainly go through a series of trials that can only be described as "epic" or "heroic". The online campaign allows gamers to create their own characters, and takes place after Ethan has become a high-falutin' legend. It's like two games in one, and not in that crappy "checkers or chess board" kind of way.



PLAYSTATION 2

Shining Force Neo

This fall, Sega will release the newest chapter in their long-running Shining Force series for the PS2. Like the recent spinoff Shining Tears, Shining Force Neo has done away with the slower pacing of the previous games in exchange for a more involving action/RPG feel. Sega boasts that up to 90 enemies will attack the main character Max at once, and that 150 stat-buffing items can be equipped to truly customize the protagonist. With large-scale battles, character tweaking, a 35-hour-plus running time, and 11 party members who can join Max, Shining Force Neo has a lot going for it that will certainly please fans. And the fact that it will feature anime cutscenes produced by former Studio Ghibli (*Spirited Away*, *Princess Mononoke*) animators certainly doesn't hurt, either.



NINTENDO DS

AGE OF EMPIRES II: THE AGE OF KINGS

Of the many things we'd love to see the Nintendo DS do, baking us custard-filled donuts every hour, on the hour has to be first in line. A close second, however, is Age of Empires II: The Age of Kings from publisher Majesco, coming this fall. Developers Digital Eclipse and Backbone Entertainment are teaming up to bring the Ensemble Studios PC creation to the DS, complete with new additions like turn-based play, as well as series standards, such as over 50 different technologies and the chance to build one of five civilizations into a world power. The game lets you command the Britons, Saracens, Japanese, Franks, or Mongols, as well as hero units (like Joan of Arc) who have Hero powers that affect the battlefield. Four-player wireless play is also included. Your fifth friend will have to be the donut gofer.



XBOX

Blazing Angels: Squadrons of WW II

Nowadays, if someone calls you "Ace" you have the right to cold-cock them. After playing Blazing Angels, however, you may have a change of heart. This fall, Ubisoft is inviting players to experience the historic air battles of World War II. The surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, the bombing of Berlin, and 18 other events are captured with the utmost realism. Take to the skies in over 40 playable craft (including the B-17 Flying Fortress and P-51 Mustang), and put your skills to the test in Xbox Live dogfights that support up to 20 players at once.



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

Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire

J.K. Rowling fans insist that the Harry Potter books have gotten better with each installment. EA's video game series has done the same, albeit with baby steps. In Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire, the company is hoping to create the ultimate teen wizard experience. The spell-casting system has been made much more complex, allowing for you to team up with friends to create powerful co-op spells. On your way to a showdown with Lord Voldemort, you'll test your skills in the Triwizard Tournament, save your comrades from an icy fate in Black Lake, and explore strange dungeons. For PS2 owners, EyeToy functionality is also planned. Look for the game to bewitch players starting in November.



PLAYSTATION 2

Tales of Legendia

Last year's outstanding Tales of Symphonia was a GameCube exclusive, but unfortunately for 'Cube RPG fans, Namco's acclaimed Tales series looks like it is making its way over to the PS2. With real-time battles that bear a resemblance to fighting games (some Soul Calibur team members are even on onboard), this entry will continue to blend role-playing and action as players explore a strange and colorful world. Unfortunately, it's still a long way out; we won't see it on store shelves until February of next year. That should give you plenty of time to write angry letters to Namco about the ol' console switcheroo.



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Aeon Flux

We must admit to a certain degree of confusion on this one. Two fundamental human truths seem to collide in this upcoming title from developer Terminal Reality. The first is that Aeon Flux remains, even after all these years, blisteringly cool. The second is that Charlize Theron is unreasonably hot. Even so, the two together in one game seems odd somehow. Is it just us? Nonetheless, there is definitely some interesting potential here between the voice and likeness of the Oscar-winning actress (who is also starring in the movie version), the promised acrobatic combat, and the innovative speed stealth elements. We've even heard tell of a special power called "Flux" that lets Aeon slow time and create massive combo attacks. We're still a little scared to see Trevor Goodchild in digital form, however. That guy creeps us out. Look for this mind twisting sci-fi adventure to arrive from Majesco this October.



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE | NINTENDO DS

Crash Tag Team Racing

Platforming stars are no strangers to racing offshoots within their respective universes and, come this fall, the wacky Crash Bandicoot is going to get another shot at some hot racing action. Merging on-foot exploration (where players can find upgrades and unlock bonus tracks) with car combat for up to eight players (on consoles), Vivendi Universal's latest entry in the Crash saga has a lot to offer. More than all of this, though, is the promising ability to combine cars during races, leaving one player to drive and another to man the insane gun turrets at the back. Insane gun turrets! Really, does it get any better?



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | PC

Conflict: Global Terror

With a mammoth new feature list, it looks as if the Conflict series is really making a run for the big leagues this time around. Set in the very near future, we'll see a return to the squad dynamics and military tactics of previous installments. However, sweeping improvements have been made to both the enemy and ally AI, and your moveset has been expanded to allow climbing through windows, swinging down zip lines, and the extensive use of cover while moving. A brand new graphics engine offers a much greater degree of detail, particularly up close to objects and walls. We've been told there are more polygons in the backpack of one character than there were in an entire human figure in Conflict: Desert Storm. We'll see if 2K Games' big plans pan out when Global Terror attacks this fall.



PLAYSTATION 2

Romance of the Three Kingdoms X

An X-rated Romance game sounds titillating, but this isn't it. Instead, the tenth iteration of this Koei series based on Chinese history will appear this June like clockwork. This new edition puts you in the shoes of an officer, making a plethora of decisions that affect the fate of the land. Turn-based battles will either be regional or large-scale affairs that require the marshalling of forces, engulfing cities across the map. Wars of words also occur between politicians, so you can sling witty retorts like: "I knew Zhuge Liang. Zhuge Liang was a friend of mine. You sir are no Zhuge Liang." Or, "I own a timber company?! That's news to me."



PC

Boiling Point: Road to Hell

Seemingly in the vein of titles like Far Cry and the upcoming S.T.A.L.K.E.R., Boiling Point aims to take FPS action to the next level. Though publisher Atari is loathe to talk about many specifics of the title, the company has dropped several tantalizing hints about your actions affecting your course through the game, and other factions in the world remembering the way you've dealt with them in the past. Supposedly, Boiling Point will make 625 square kilometers of South American jungle your playground when it launches this spring.

Some Journeys Cost More Than Others

20 What Are You Willing to Sacrifice?



AVAILABLE ON DVD
May 31st

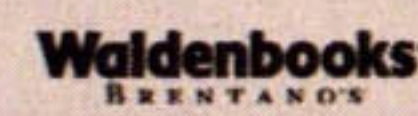
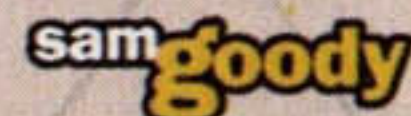
"Get in on the ground floor of this anime classic –
you won't be disappointed."

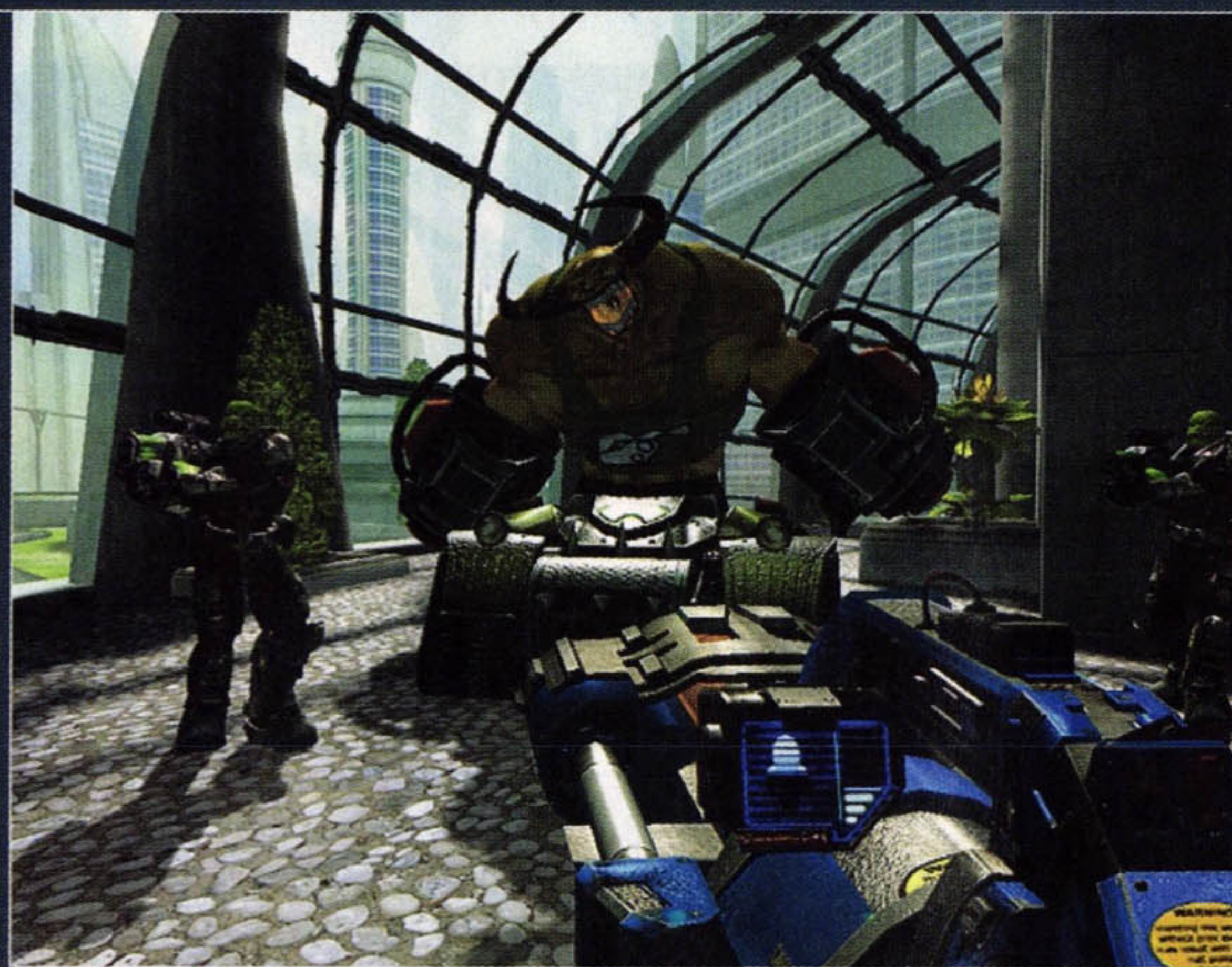
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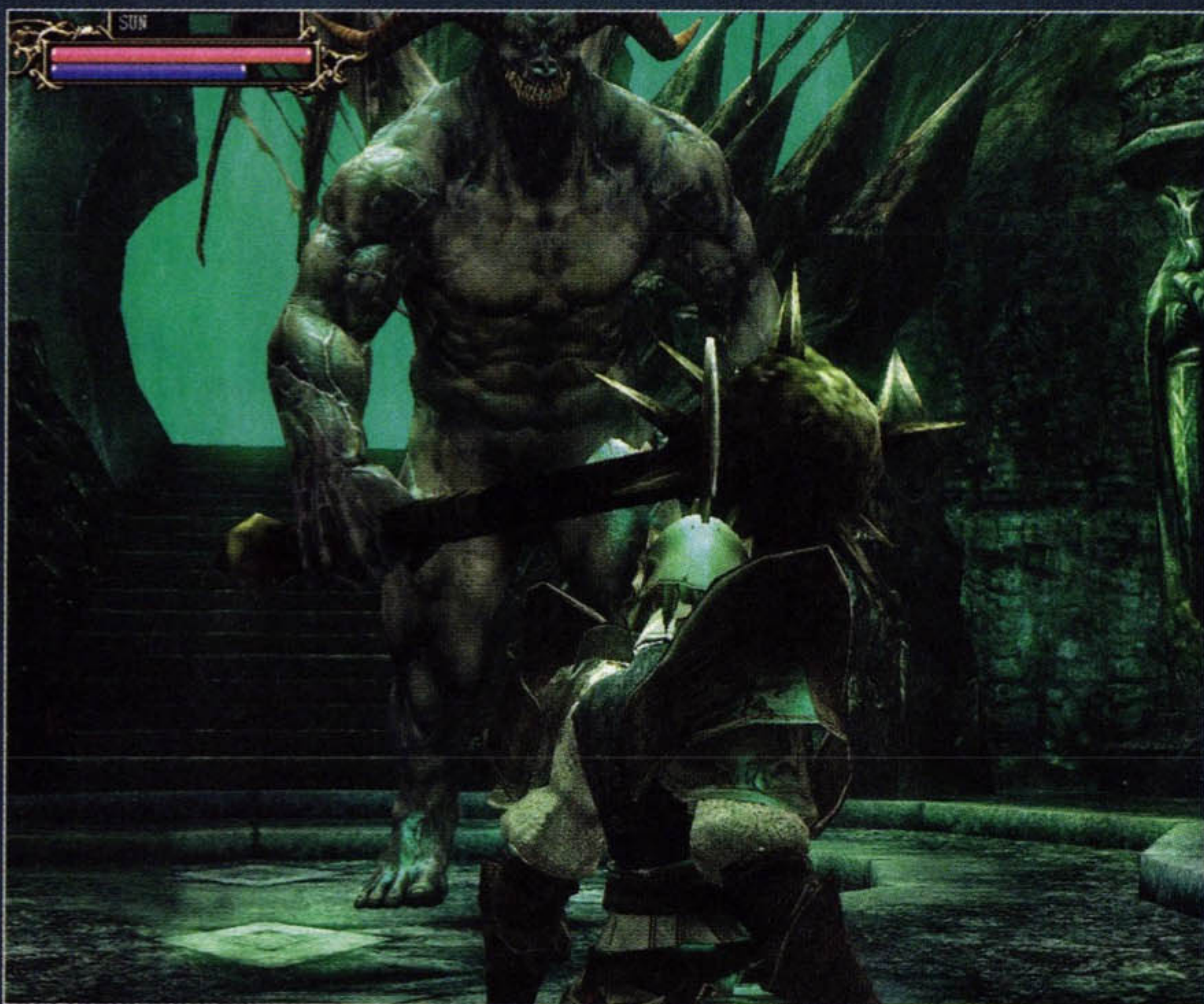




XBOX | PC

Serious Sam 2

Start stocking up on your ammo now. Sam is back, and all signs are pointing in the ridiculous fun direction. Following up on the complex human drama of the first games, Sam is now rocketing into space in pursuit of his nemesis, Mental. Aided by a council of zany wizards, he must assemble a mystical medallion to defeat the galaxy-conquering baddie. Destructible environments and spectacular weapon effects are just the tip of the iceberg in the gameplay department. The development team is also doing their best to break the world record for most enemies on screen at one time – we're talking in the hundreds here. Add in vehicular and animal-back combat and let your imaginations run wild. Keep an eye on this one when 2K Games releases it this fall.



PC

SUN

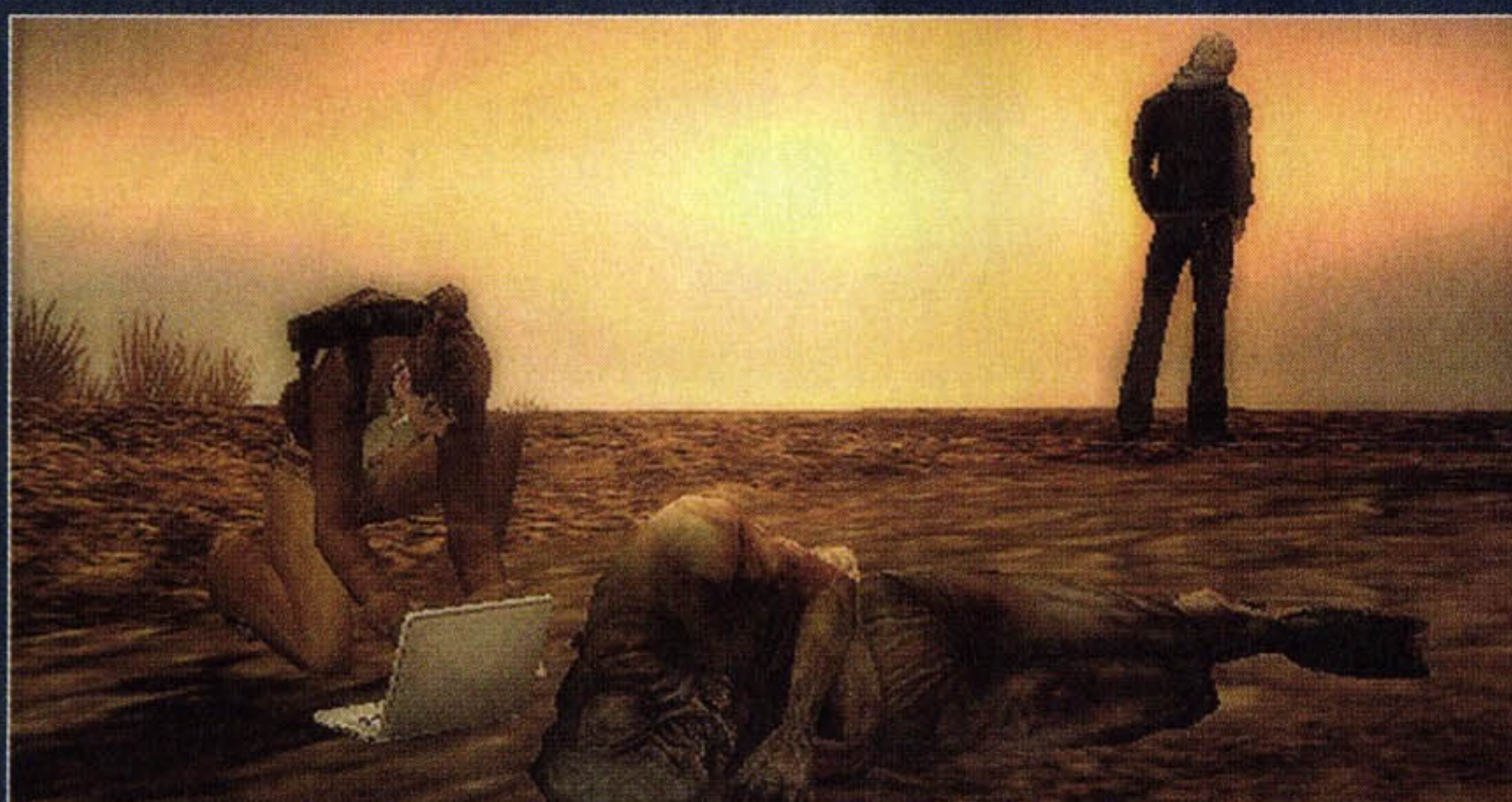
Developer/publisher Webzen, though until now largely unknown, has a number of projects in the works for release in 2005. One of these is SUN, a fantasy-themed massively multiplayer online RPG slated to go live towards the end of this year. This is far from yet another EverQuest clone, though. It seems that zones will be limited to holding only 10 players, and likely will be instanced (having a separate copy of the zone for each group of players) to accommodate the design. Apparently, some more action game-like mechanics will be incorporated into the combat as well. This being an MMO, hefty community tools as well as deep item and character upgrade systems will be part of the deal too. Cross your fingers for this one, because it sure would be nice to have a truly massive hack n' slash out there.



GAME BOY ADVANCE

Gunstar Super Heroes

This fall, Sega is bringing Gunstar Super Heroes to the GBA, just in time for the tenth anniversary of the critically-acclaimed 2D shooter Gunstar Heroes. Developed by Treasure, the fan-favorite masters of 2D action, Gunstar Super Heroes promises two different playable paths, references to classic games like Golden Axe, Altered Beast, After Burner and more, as well as huge bosses that will fill the GBA's entire screen. We wonder if these creatures will be as big as our leg after it was stung by that Portuguese Man of War. We hate jellyfish, but we love classic side-scrolling action.



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE | PC

Call of Cthulhu: Destiny's End

Who sleeps in R'lyeh under the sea? Great Lord Cthulhu! Who devours the world most violently? Great Lord Cthulhu! H.P. Lovecraft's most recognized bane of sanity, the Ancient One Cthulhu, is getting another video game treatment (not to be confused with Bethesda Softworks' Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners of the Earth) from Hip Games, scheduled for release in the middle of 2006. Players will take on the roles of overly-inquisitive scientist Emily and angsty teen Jacob in this survival horror title. They will have to rely on each other to not die the horrible deaths that the Ancient Ones have planned for them. The good part is that a friend can jump in and control the second character, so that you won't be at the mercy of a nefarious AI bent on your doom. Unless your "friend" has trouble distinguishing between co-op and deathmatch, anyway.



UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2

Urban Reign

Sometimes, even we look at our game libraries and bemoan the lack of four-player fighting experiences. Later this year Namco is filling that gaping yaw with its new Urban Reign title – a one to four-player free-for-all with 30 weapons, 100 missions, and practically unlimited chaos. If you don't have enough buddies around to fill the lineup, the game even lets you pick an AI-controlled teammate so you can still unleash the title's menacing co-op attacks. Urban combat is almost painfully hip right now, but there's enough going on in this game to make it stand out from the crowd.



PSP



CONSOLE

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE | NINTENDO DS | PSP | GAME BOY ADVANCE

The Sims 2

Those crazy sim-sters are breaking into the console world in a big way this fall. EA is promising editions for practically every device that has a screen (or two!), although the company is keeping mum on how the complex gameplay will differ between the home units and mobile sessions. What we do know that the games will feature direct control (similar to the GBA offering *Bustin' Out*) and the most items of any Sims title.



GAMECUBE

WWE Day of Reckoning 2

The first *Day of Reckoning* was THQ's best-yet GameCube WWE title, and *Day of Reckoning 2* (set to hit near the end of the year) is adding a slew of new features to further improve on the wrestling experience for Nintendo's system. No, we're not talking about adding Mario and Link as playable characters (although we would like to Princess Peach in a Bra and Panties match. Rawr!). THQ is adding new systems to increase the strategy involved in a match, like a Stamina meter that runs down after doing powerful moves and some minigames triggered by submission holds. When you think about it, wrestling really is all about strategy and intelligent tactics, right? Right?



TBA

50 Cent: Bulletproof

50 Cent's been busy lately. Between starting feuds with Nas, Jadakiss, Ja Rule, Fat Joe, and even an artist on his own label (*The Game*), killing his verse on the year's best single (*The Game's* "How We Do"), and releasing "Candy Shop", a nookie metaphor so hamfisted he might as well have called it "I'm Really Good At Having Sex", his schedule is quite full. But that doesn't mean he doesn't have time to kick ass in his own video game. On the contrary, this fall Mr. Half Dollar will be releasing his own ultra-violent action epic, published by Vivendi and due out in late 2005. Expect a licensed soundtrack with unique contributions by a number of hip-hop heavyweights.



UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | PC

TOCA RACE DRIVER 2006

Codemasters' TOCA series is all about variety, and this new edition (due this winter) is giving you even more freedom than ever before. If you want to race monster trucks, touring sports cars, and everything in between, then sign up for the World Tour mode, which returns in all of its plot-driven glory. On the other hand, you can specialize and climb up the ranks of a particular style, such as becoming a world-class Formula One driver in Pro Career mode. Either way, you'll be treated to Codemasters' damage modeling and its revamped driving engine, which simulates everything from fuel consumption to engine temperature.



REVIEWS

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Iron Phoenix

PC

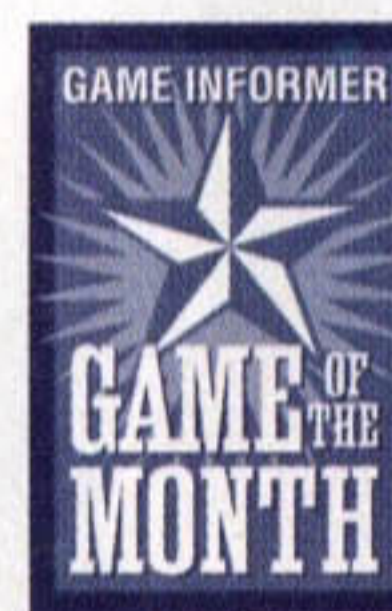


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The Matrix Online



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Forza Motorsport

Microsoft's much-anticipated simulation racer has finally hit and we're impressed with what the game has to offer. Blazing trails for the system is a hard path where many before have crashed and burned, but Forza offers a promising debut with lots of options to keep people interested. Online play galore, damage models, and more tuning than a room of warped stringed instruments are just the tip of the iceberg in Forza Motorsport. Finally, Xbox owners have a comprehensive racing Sim to call their own.

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

THE SCORING SYSTEM

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

- > **Concept:** What new ideas the game brings to the table and how well old ideas are presented.
- > **Graphics:** How good a game looks, taking into account any flaws such as bad collision or pop-up.
- > **Sound:** Does the game's music and sound effects get you involved or do they make you resolve to always play with the volume down?
- > **Playability:** Basically, the controller to human interface. The less you think about the hunk of plastic in your hands, the better the playability.
- > **Entertainment:** Flat out, just how fun the game is to play. The most important factor in rating a game.
- > **Replay Value**

- High** - You'll still be popping this game in five years from now.
- Moderately High** - Good for a long while, but the thrills won't last forever.
- Moderate** - Good for a few months or a few times through.
- Moderately Low** - After finishing it, there's not much reason to give it a second go.
- Low** - You'll quit playing before you complete the game.

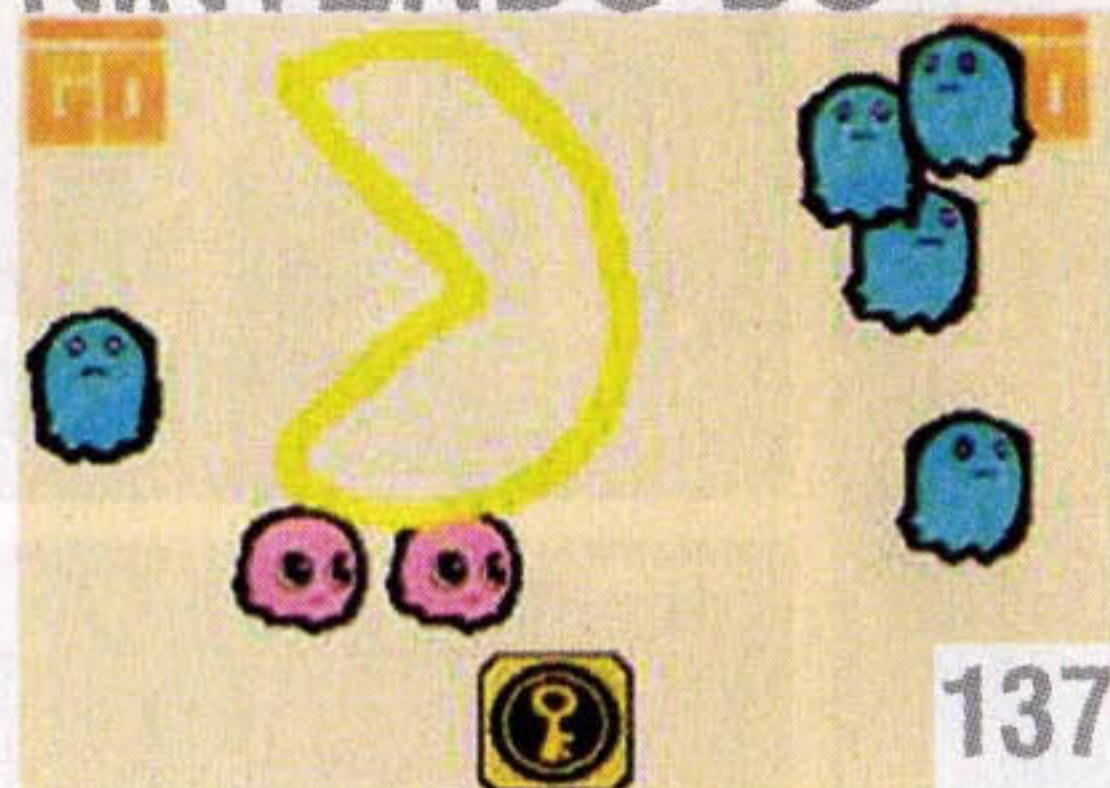
PSP



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ATV Offroad Fury: Blazin' Trails

NINTENDO DS

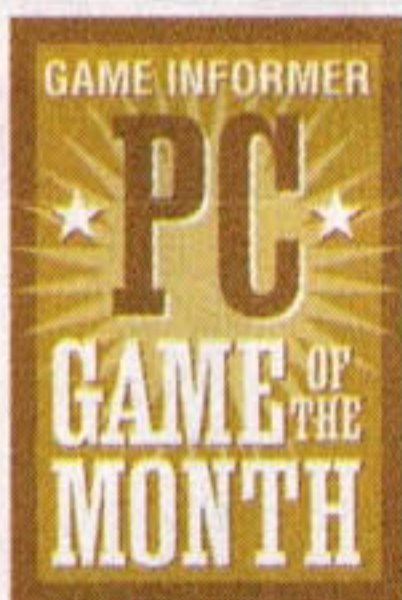


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Pac-Pix



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Doom 3: Resurrection of Evil

Just when you felt that you were done with Doom 3, that you had seen all the game offered, in comes Resurrection of Evil to rekindle the smoldering flame of passion between you and the destruction of Hell's army. Not only is everything we love about the original present and even better, RoE adds several elements to the Doom 3 formula in the form of new toys, awesome boss battles, and far more interactive environments. Page 135

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theedge

When All Games Aren't Created Equal

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

	Content suitable for persons ages 3 and older.		Content suitable for persons 17 and older.
	Content suitable for persons ages 6 and older.		Content suitable only for adults.
	Content suitable for persons ages 10 and older.		Product is awaiting final rating.
	Content suitable for persons ages 13 and older.		

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CG – Computer-Generated graphics

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

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

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

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

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

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

frontend – A game's menus and options

gamelancholy: The feeling reviewers get when playing too many games that suck

GBA – Game Boy Advance

GC – GameCube

HDTV – High Definition Television

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PS2 – Sony PlayStation 2

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

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

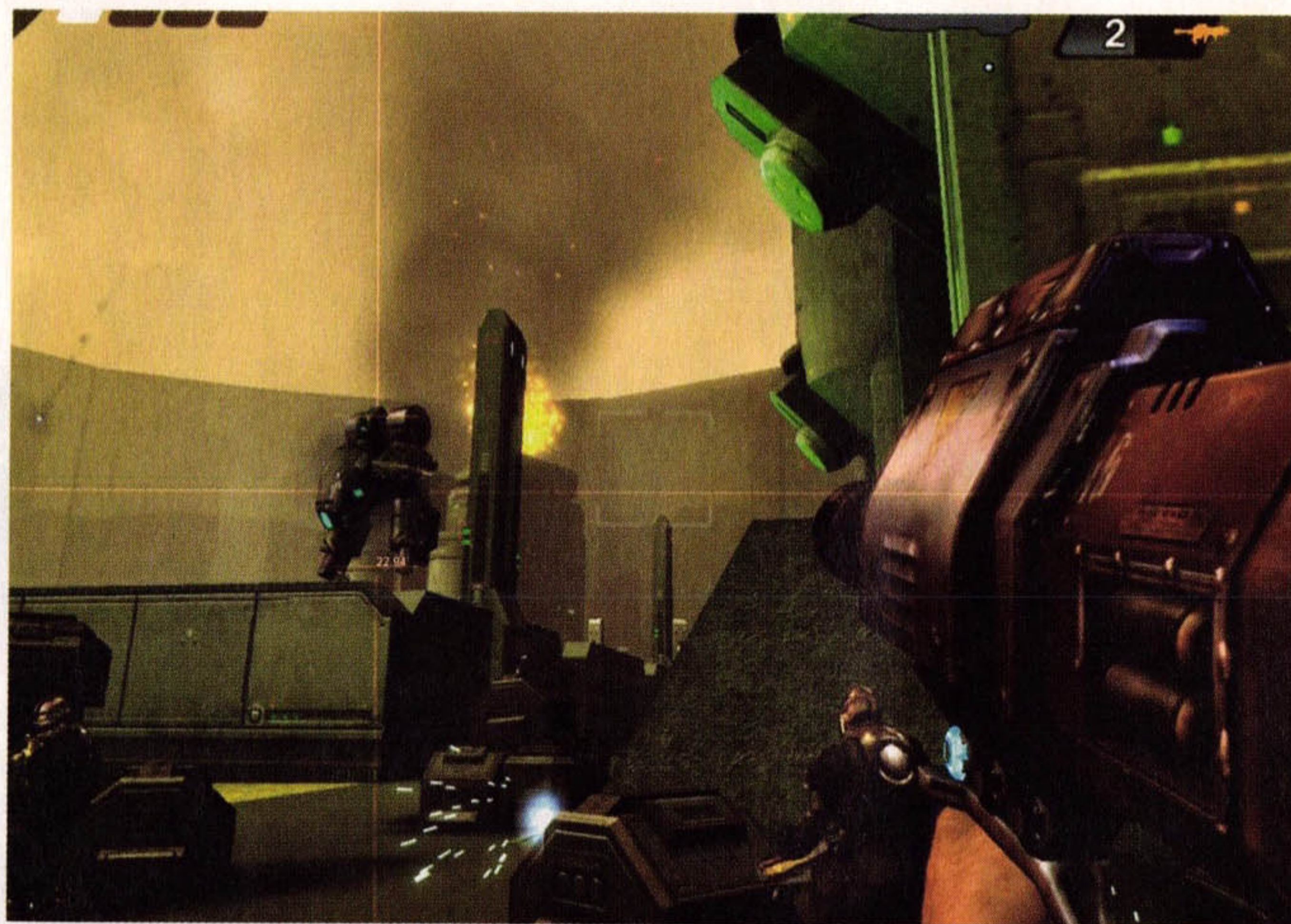
RPG – Role-Playing Game. A game that involves character improvement through collecting and spending points. A term we use for games like Final Fantasy and Xenosaga

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

sports – A term we use for games like MaddenNFL

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

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



BOTTOM LINE **8.5**

> Concept: The studio that brought us the Unreal Tournament series delivers pulse-pounding FPS excitement, plus a story that even the Wachowski brothers would find confusing

> Graphics: Simply divine. The world and its inhabitants jump off of the screen with lifelike detailing

> Sound: The soundtrack loops a bit much, but the voice acting is right where it needs to be

> Playability: Fluid movement, pinpoint targeting, finely crafted controls, and the best grenade launcher to date

> Entertainment: Single player is hit and miss, but this game absolutely soars online

> Replay Value: High



XBOX | PC
Pariah

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (XBOX), 1-PLAYER (PC) (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE & SYSTEM LINK OR INTERNET) **> PUBLISHER** GROOVE GAMES **> DEVELOPER** DIGITAL EXTREMES **> RELEASE** MAY 3 **> ESRB** M

FUN WITH GRENADE LAUNCHERS

Pariah's exquisitely crafted introductory cinematic hides nothing in telling gamers that they should buckle up for one hell of a ride. A ship carrying you (Jack Mason) and a highly guarded cryogenic chamber falls under attack and is knocked out of the sky. Upon regaining consciousness, a sea of wreckage lies before you. As you navigate the debris and duck beneath its vermiculated metal, it quickly becomes apparent that Pariah is a hearty feast for the eyes. Whether you find yourself marveling at the stylistic armors that adorn your adversaries, drooling over the stunning details that spill across every inch of the world, or applauding the spatial lighting effects, Pariah's visuals are blemish free.

It's no slouch when it comes to the execution of gameplay, either. Mason's movements are

divine, and although the arsenal that he wields is bit generic, the action explodes in a way that you wouldn't expect. In most FPS games, grenade launchers are usually the last weapon you turn to for consistency. Not in Pariah. It's easily the weapon of choice. Being able to lob grenades with a great rate of success is too much fun to deny. Especially when you tack on magnificent explosions that send bodies twirling high into the sky and structures crumbling to the ground. On the downside, once you use this mighty arm, you really won't want to use any other weapon.

Of course, you'll be forced into using everything you can. Given just how tricky your foes can be, you'll need every shell that you can scrounge up. Even the standard grunt can give you a migraine. Through impressive AI, they can pick you off from a great distance, will flank you if they have numbers, and will sidestep your shots in close quarter combat. Thankfully, the game is loaded with structures you can use for cover, and a handy weapon-wheel allows you to select any armament you want on the fly. You'll also be able to add a little kick to each firearm by upgrading them. While vehicles are included, they feel more like an afterthought than they do an integral gameplay component. Their slippery controls and ineffectiveness will likely have you passing them up and staying on foot.

Pariah's excellent gunplay provides a wicked multiplayer experi-



ence as well. Team Assault is insanely intense, and player skills really come out in standard deathmatch-ing. Balance is achieved through the extensive class types and on-the-fly weapon customization. Pariah also allows players to create their own battlegrounds and upload them for online play. The map editor features amazing depth and even allows players to modify the shape of the terrain.

So how can a game that plays like a dream and looks too good to be true fall from grace? In the most unlikely of ways: storytelling. The tale that Digital Extremes has woven is completely disjointed and nearly impossible to follow. The story as a whole feels like a movie trailer — all you see are tiny fragments of a larger picture, leaving the rest to your imagination. From the cryptic beginning to the confusing climax, I had no idea what my character's motivation was, I knew nothing about my adversaries other than the fact that they wanted to shoot me, and somehow or another, a virus was involved. This is concrete proof that games can no longer get by without a compelling story.

Even with this major drawback hindering the experience, Pariah's high-caliber gameplay is hard to deny. You'll tip your hat toward Digital Extremes every time you see a gas tank mounted on the back of an adversary catch fire and explore, and you'll have a hard time setting the controller down once you hop online. Digital Extremes provided a rip-roaring play, but neglected to make it mean something.—REINER



Get Your Friend Killed, Too
Although Pariah's menus show no indication that it supports cooperative play, it is possible to play through the game with a friend at your side. Just plug in a second controller and hit its Start button during play to activate split-screen co-op.

Second Opinion **8**

The first hour of Pariah had me totally entranced. A thrilling opening sequence unfolds into what at first appears to be a deep and involving sci-fi mystery story. As the game continues, it turns out to be a mystery all right, just not the one you were hoping for. The threadbare and fragmented script and cinematics make for one of the most confounding and disorganized messes I've seen in a recent title. Thankfully, most of the action remains distracting enough to let you ignore the plot holes. Weapon customization really spices up the single player or co-op campaign, and that same customization does absolute wonders for fleshing out the awesome multiplayer. Beyond the great game types and numerous maps, the simple but extremely powerful map maker gives Pariah some long legs to run on. I'm a sucker for a great story, which is why this game left a little sour taste in my month, but don't miss out on its other great features because you share that same disappointment.—MILLER

"Where you At?"



chicago

**Northside to Southside. Nationwide Boost™ Walkie-Talkie
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PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Dead to Rights 2: Hell to Pay

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER NAMCO > DEVELOPER NAMCO/WIDESCREEN GAMES > RELEASE APRIL 12 > ESRB M



HOW TO KILL A FRANCHISE – WITHOUT REALLY TRYING

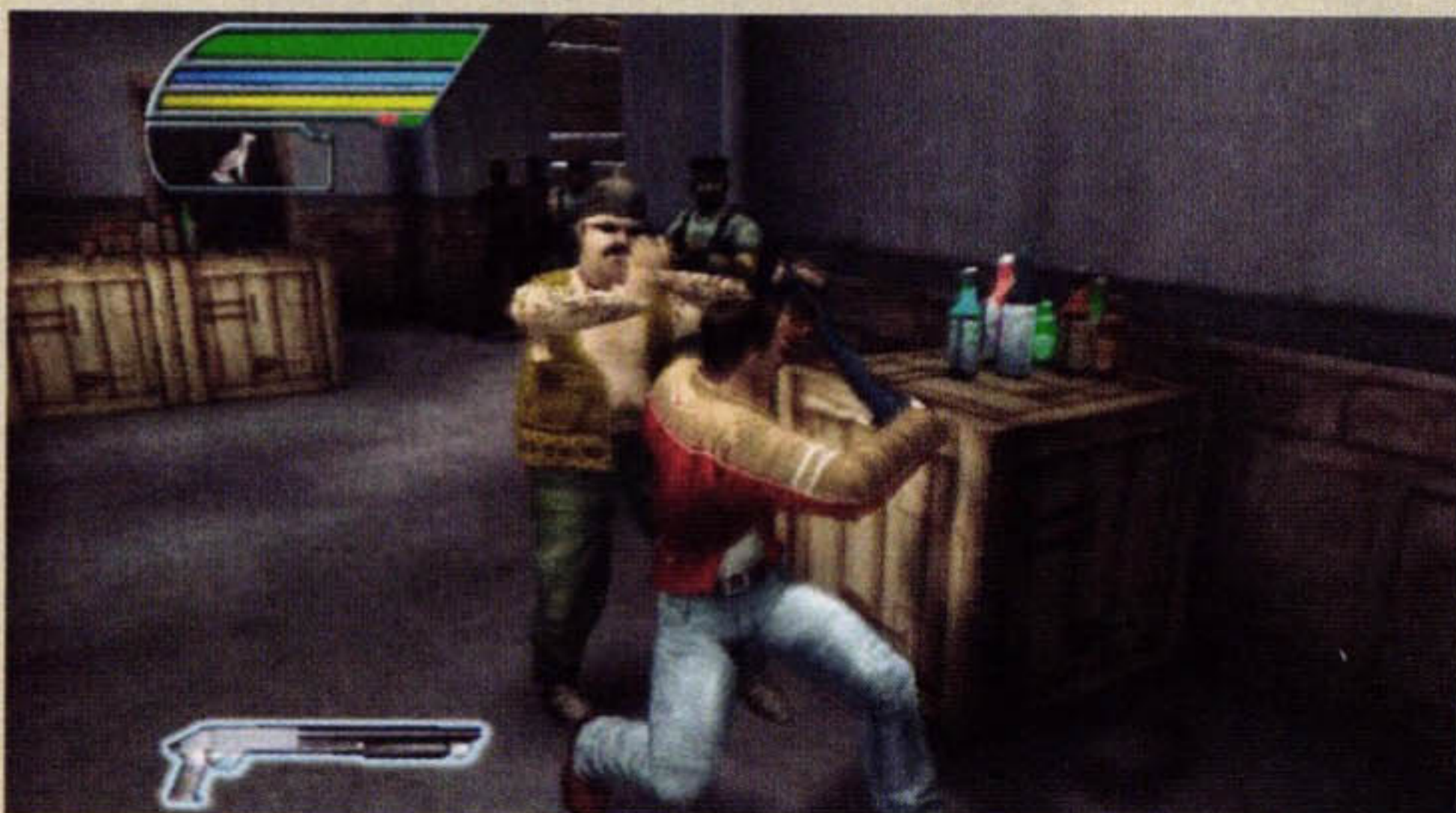
It takes slightly over 30 seconds but certainly no more than one minute of playing the Dead to Rights sequel to recognize you're in trouble. It's in that brief period of time that you see the bland backgrounds, hear the dull soundtrack, and experience the poor targeting. For those few moments, and for the agonizing hours thereafter, it isn't difficult to see this game for what it is – generic in every way.

While the first Dead to Rights may have been little more than a frantic shooter, it somehow still maintained a modicum of excitement and fun throughout its hectic levels. Those elements have been swept away in its sequel and replaced with shoddy production value and endlessly repetitive killing. Like many other recent games, Hell to Pay prides itself on the mindless and brutal violence that makes it more "adult". But like so many other titles of this ilk, it fails to back up the savagery with functional gameplay. Your enemies will sometimes stand stock still as you pump them full of lead. Other times you can't manage to get your gun to target the goon you want. As you get used to the overwhelming regularity

of problems like these, you begin to slip off into a nightmarish dream world where your hobby of gaming has somehow been warped into a fiendishly boring chore that is neither fun nor worth your time.

I wish I could offer some redeeming words about the plot or characters that might give fans of the series reason to hope. Unfortunately, the game stumbles and crashes to the ground in this regard as well. Nothing about the story is remotely interesting or even amusing. It serves as little more than a shaky foundational reasoning for why Jack Slate and his stupidly inept dog should move from one goon-infested nest to the next. Are they mafia? Are they evil bikers? It doesn't matter. Shoot them all and move on.

Dead to Rights 2 is a lesson in what happens when there is an unwillingness to evolve or risk new ideas. Jack Slate and his world are carved from such a recognizable cookie cutter that nothing feels impressive and every aspect of the game is quietly forgettable. If you like the series, do yourself a favor and go replay the first one rather than justify its sequel with your attention. —MILLER



BOTTOM LINE 5

> **Concept:** Shoot stuff. I wish there was more to say

> **Graphics:** Passable in that "I've seen this all before" sort of way

> **Sound:** Some musical tracks have no more than a five second loop. Draw your own conclusions

> **Playability:** Baleful targeting mars what is otherwise a functional control scheme

> **Entertainment:** Manages to turn the concept of constant action into an unassailable wall of heavy concrete boredom

> **Replay Value:** Low

Second Opinion 4

This game really needs to come packaged with a peripheral that jabs the player in the eye with a rusty spike every fifteen seconds because that's precisely what it feels like to play it. When I wasn't screaming in agony over the horribly designed and nearly broken gameplay, I spent most of my time hastily searching for a "commit suicide" button. The original Dead to Rights had a number of faults, but it still managed to deliver entertaining fire-fights. I don't know how this is even possible, but Namco managed to strip away all of the noteworthy material, leaving players with nothing more than shoddy controls, horrible graphics, and a mentally-challenged dog at their side. I've seen famed video game franchises plummet from grace before, but Dead to Rights falls faster than them all. —REINER

MULTI-SYSTEM QUICKIES

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE

BOTTOM LINE

5

Dragon Ball Z: Sagas

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER ATARI > DEVELOPER AVALANCHE SOFTWARE > RELEASE MARCH 22 > ESRB T



The following is a public service announcement for all Dragon Ball Z fans: For your own good, do not play Sagas. If you do, not only will you be treated to some of the most antiquated and broken gameplay available on modern consoles, but you will also send the message that you actually enjoy seeing the popular anime series' repeated desecration. Sure, it has Goku and company battling through the early DBZ story arcs, but that's all you get. Don't expect responsive controls, a passable camera, or compelling visuals. However, if all you want is the Dragon Ball Z cast surrounded by spiritless action and absurd level design, you've got it. You might also be interested in our special "cookie and a throat-jab" combo meal. —JOE

PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

BOTTOM LINE

2.75

Predator: Concrete Jungle

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER VIVENDI UNIVERSAL > DEVELOPER EUROCOM > RELEASE APRIL 26 > ESRB M



Playing the Predator's new game is about as much fun as being stabbed in the groin with his wrist blades, and then having the wound peed on. There are more issues in Concrete Jungle than there are action movie clichés in Predator 2, including all the regular offenders: a pitiful combat

engine, wonky controls, and a stroke-inducing camera system. The Predator may be able to take on Arnold and Danny Glover, but even he can't defeat Concrete Jungle's muddy graphics, lame missions, and ridiculous story. The world's fiercest hunter seems to be on a one-way street to drinking gin out of a bottle in a dark alley with The Scorpion King, Van Helsing's version of Dracula, and other movie villains who will never again appear in a video game. —JEREMY

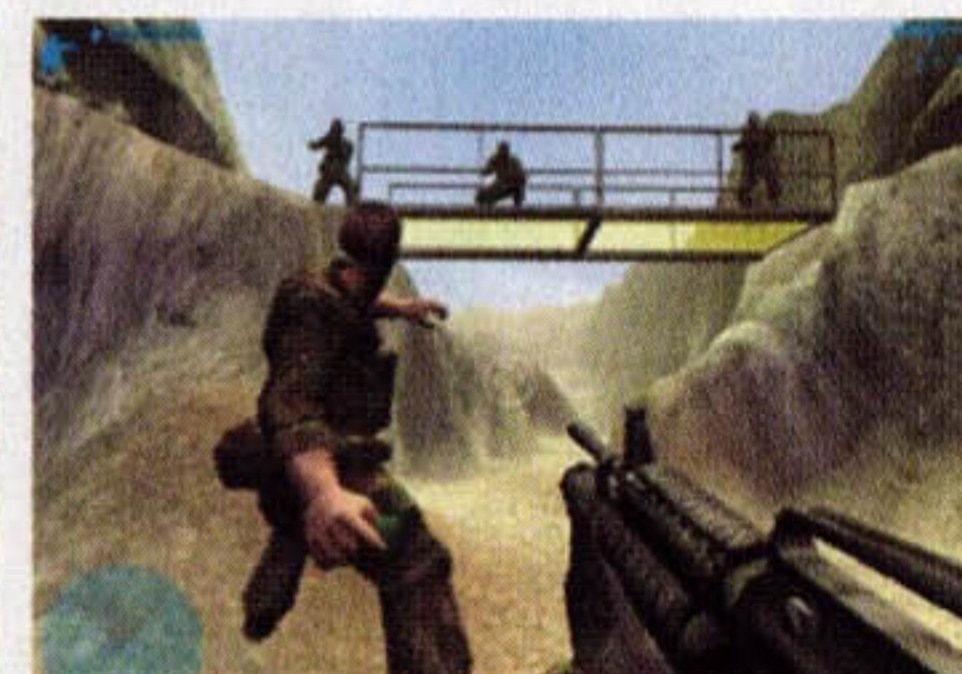
XBOX | PC

BOTTOM LINE

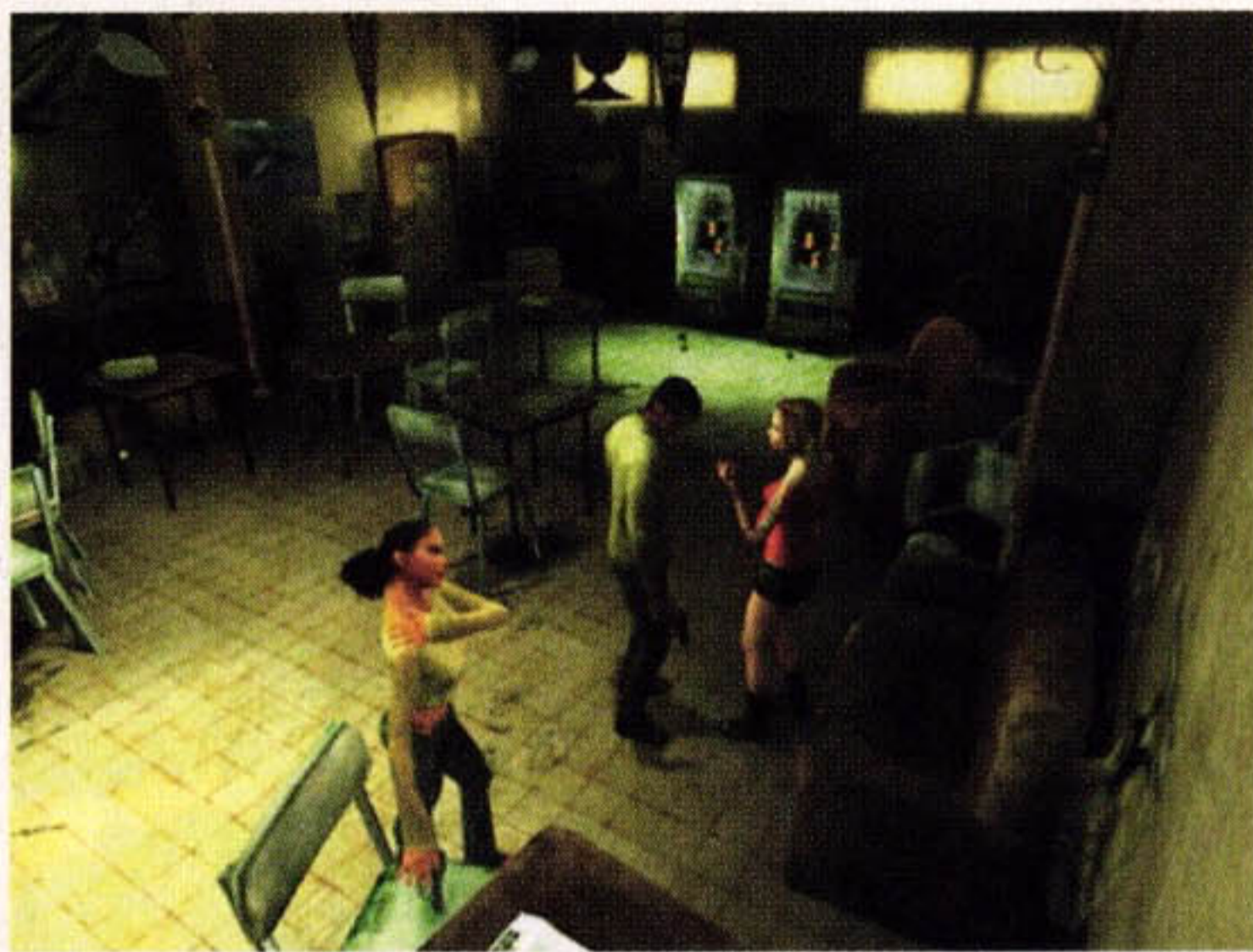
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Combat – Task Force 121

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR PC INTERNET/LAN) > PUBLISHER GROOVE GAMES > DEVELOPER DIRECT ACTION GAMES > RELEASE MARCH 25 > ESRB M



Rarely outside of the E-Machine aisle at Best Buy do I see something that screams, "The absolute minimum amount of money was spent in the creation of this product." Combat – Task Force 121 (even the name is painfully generic), however, is nothing if not budget-conscious. I suppose it might be considered merely painful and not soul-crushingly bad if one completely avoided the vomitous single-player and took it online. That would even be a stretch, though, since the graphics on the Xbox are on par with an N64 title (the PC version looks about as good as a current-gen Xbox title) and the action is as vanilla as can be. This level of sub-mediocre FPS boredom isn't even close to worth its \$20 price point. —ADAM



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Obscure

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION/ADVENTURE > **PUBLISHER** DREAMCATCHER INTERACTIVE > **DEVELOPER** HYDRAVISION > **RELEASE** APRIL 4 > **ESRB** M

MORE THAN A NAME

While there are some ideas that I really, really enjoy in *Obscure* (the enemy design is interesting and switching characters works well), there's just too much wrong here to make the experience something special.

The bulk of my issues with this game fall into two camps: the overly high suspension of disbelief that the game's universe requires, and the terrible gameplay decisions that continually rear up. With regard to the first, the stream of, "Oh, come on!" moments don't stop for a second and are far too numerous to list.

As for my second group of issues, they are most prominent in the game's co-op mode. I appreciate that it has this feature — I think it's really cool and I'd like to see more of it. What I would also like, though, is separate freakin' cameras for each player (at least when they're out of the current view). It's a terrible, terrible idea to have one player lagging behind, just begging to get stuck on some environmental object and die. This is only exaggerated by the many points where the puzzle design, level layout, and management of the teens' special skills are just plain clumsy and almost unusable. —**LISA**

BOTTOM LINE **6**

> **Concept:** Creepyville High, oh sorry, Leafmore High students are locked in and hunted

> **Graphics:** A generally cool look for both characters and environments is sometimes sullied by camera angles and blurring

> **Sound:** The idle teen chatter is often great, but everything else is forgettable

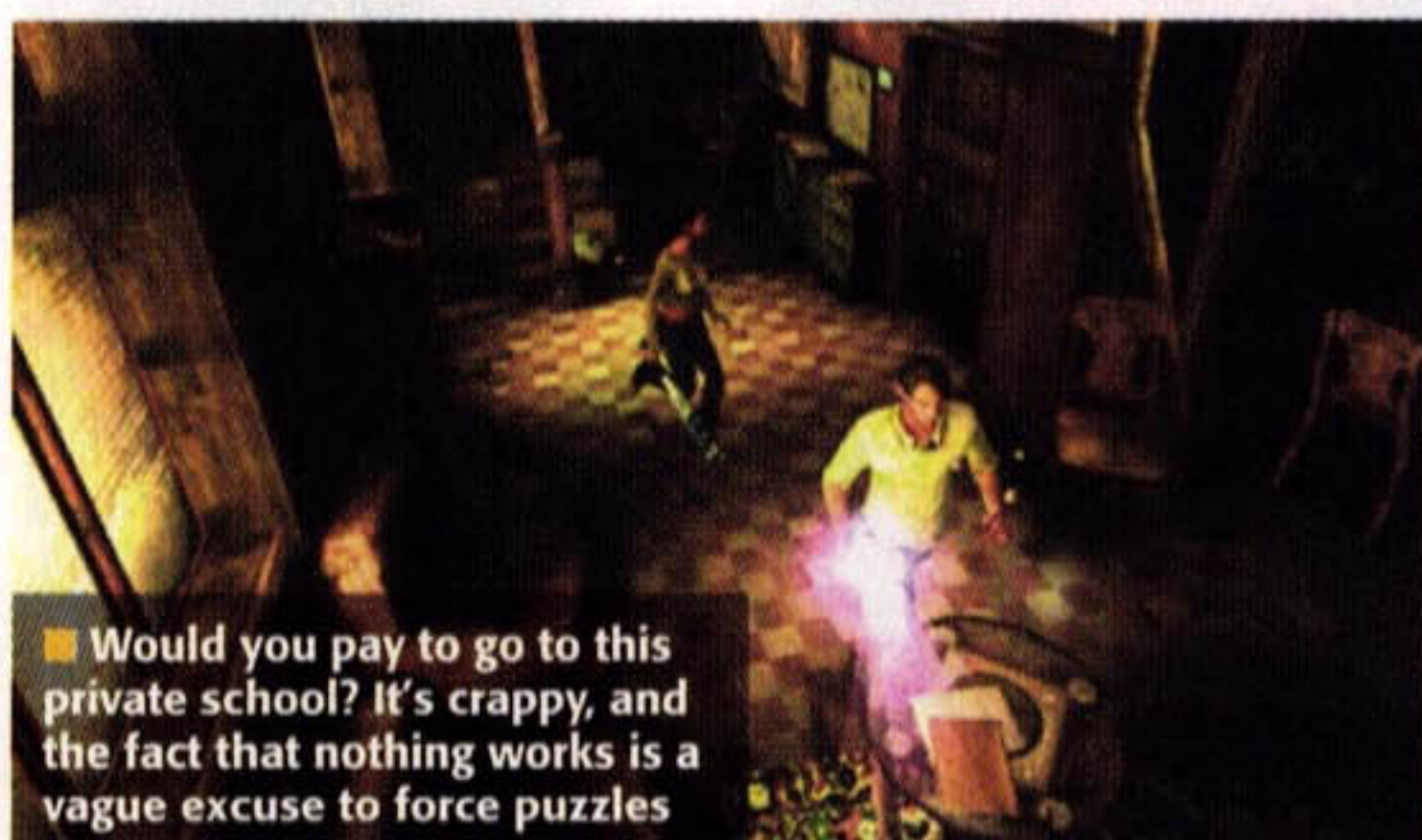
> **Playability:** There are so many issues with controlling these teens, maybe an *After School Special* is in order

> **Entertainment:** The side-effects for most over-the-counter medications offer more talking points and interesting options than this

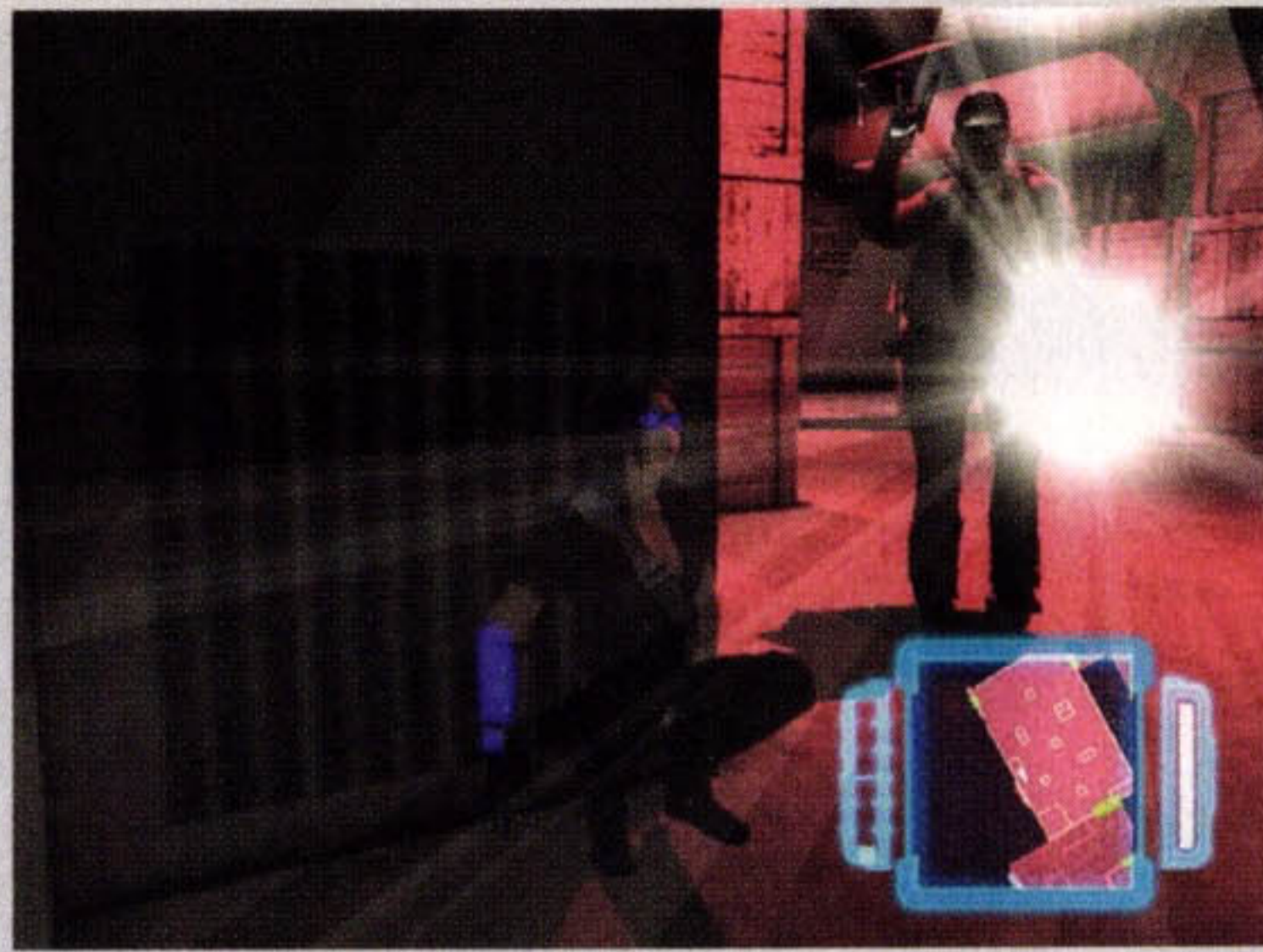
> **Replay Value:** Low

Second Opinion **6**

I'm sorry if this ruins the surprise for anyone, but if you go to a high school with looming (and occasionally bloody) gothic architecture, dozens of mysteriously locked doors, and an ever-decreasing student body, some nefarious administrator is obviously experimenting on students. The gameplay (especially the co-op) is ham-fisted and boring, and with a cast of tired stereotype teens, *Obscure* is a mixture of *The Breakfast Club*, *The Faculty*, and sliding pantsless down the rope in gym class. Burn! —**JOE**



■ Would you pay to go to this private school? It's crappy, and the fact that nothing works is a vague excuse to force puzzles



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Stolen

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** HIP GAMES > **DEVELOPER** BLUE52 > **RELEASE** APRIL 19 > **ESRB** T

STEALING YOUR PRECIOUS TIME

I'd go as far as to say that stealth/action is the most difficult genre to develop in. On one hand, there are a couple of shining examples to take your cues from, most notably the *Metal Gear Solid* and *Splinter Cell* series. However, it seems as though very few developers can manage to translate these influences into a coherent gameplay package.

Stolen is an example of this dilemma. During the training sequence, I was actually excited to begin my adventure. The main character, Anya, has a great set of acrobatic abilities, allowing her to run up walls, flip up on ledges, and swing from pipes. Also, as you might expect, she has an arsenal of cool gadgets, including tracking darts and a sonar x-ray vision, which lets you see through doors by whistling (I know, it sounds silly but it's actually pretty cool).

While these are good building blocks for a stealth title, the game falters where most do: level design, plot, and enemy AI. The enemies are painfully dull, and since you can't apply lethal chokeholds, you'll soon find it quicker to just run around them. The levels and missions are equally unremarkable, which makes for yet another promising stealth title that doesn't live up to its potential. —**MATT**

BOTTOM LINE **6.5**

> **Concept:** Hot girl, catsuit, high-tech gadgets — you know the drill

> **Graphics:** Really great. Nice lighting effects and character models, even on the PS2 version

> **Sound:** The music is mediocre, which means it's better than the voiceovers

> **Playability:** The basic moveset is solid, but the levels and missions aren't distinctive enough

> **Entertainment:** Like too many other stealth titles, this has the right ingredients but lacks polish

> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

Second Opinion **5**

Playing *Stolen* is like having a conversation with someone who, while animatedly describing their exciting weekend, has a conspicuous wet spot spreading across the front of their pants. You just can't appreciate this game's finer details when it is tragically peeing itself at every critical turn. With goldfish-caliber AI, a misguided focus on the sexy side of stealth, and the most hollow action this side of *Walker: Texas Ranger*, *Stolen* triggers nothing but pity and embarrassment. —**JOE**



■ "In retrospect, maybe I didn't leave my keys out here."



PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX

Metal Slug 4 & 5

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** SNK > **DEVELOPER** SNK > **RELEASE** MAY 10 > **ESRB** T

ONE MORE FOR THE FAITHFUL

They don't make 'em like this anymore" hangs proudly in the Cliché Hall of Fame in Terra Haute, Indiana, but in this case it's literally true. There are current games that pay tribute to the classic 8- and 16-bit eras of gaming, like *Viewtiful Joe* and the *Castlevania* GBA titles, but only *Metal Slug* feels like it emerged out of a wormhole from 1993.

This retro aesthetic is a blessing and a curse. There were a lot of things that games did well back then. There's really never been a real 3D replacement for the hectic action of a challenging 2D shooter. There's just something about it: the constant onslaught of enemies and the sublime pressure and satisfaction you feel as you jam the buttons and begin to master the patterns. *Metal Slug* delivers this like few others can, with visual flair and inventive vehicle sequences where you pilot aircraft, submarines, and other implements of war. However, there are a lot of things games like this lack: compelling stories and characters, depth of gameplay, and replay value. Old-school fans addicted to this series will be disturbed by the unlimited continues, but I say it's better this way: Finally everyone will be able to see everything these games have to offer. —**MATT**

BOTTOM LINE **7.75**

> **Concept:** A value-packed compilation of two *Metal Slug* arcade titles

> **Graphics:** The old-school look is long on charm, with great explosions as well as more subtle touches

> **Sound:** Rockin' like Dokken

> **Playability:** The slide move comes in handy, but mostly it's just quality runnin' and gunnin'

> **Entertainment:** A relatively short, but mostly sweet trip down memory lane. Shows all the strengths and weaknesses of the 2D era

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion **8**

It's good to know that games like *Metal Slug* are still around. Unapologetic in its cartoon violence and unforgiving in its overwhelming challenge make this the hardcore shooter fan's dream come true. I'm conflicted about the decision this time to include unlimited continues. While this makes the game much more accessible, there are certainly some who will feel this takes away the near-impossible difficulty that was present in the last console release of the franchise. I'm not complaining, mind you — just giving a heads up to those in the know. —**MILLER**



■ Fire bombs are the perfect excuse to start looting plasma TVs



Some enemies are almost too cute to kill. Almost



PLAYSTATION 2

Atelier Iris: Eternal Mana

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > PUBLISHER NIPPON ICHI > DEVELOPER GUST > RELEASE MAY 24 > ESRB T

GO WEST, YOUNG RPG

It's been some time since we've had a straight-up RPG in the vein of Final Fantasy that is worth playing. Xenosaga II didn't live up to expectations, FF XII is in development limbo, and the void needs filling. Enter Atelier Iris, the sixth title in a long-running Japanese series that has never before come to the States. While it's certainly no cinematic masterpiece like FF X or Xenosaga I, an incredibly deep set of character and item systems along with a masterful localization by Nippon Ichi make this a fantasy epic that's easy to sink many evenings into.

The story of young alchemist Klein and his companions is a servicable (if clichéd) plot replete with idealism, betrayals, and the inevitable enigmatic swordsman. The only problem is that it takes roughly four hours to get interesting. Fortunately, those four hours are spent gradually introducing the variety of complex systems present in Atelier Iris. Everything in this title has its own deep set of rules governing it: character development, item creation, item upgrading, Mana management, and even the inventories of certain shops can be influenced by combining the right resources. It's these layers of different, inter-related constructs that define Atelier Iris. For hardcore RPG fans, this game packs enough meat to keep you feasting on the possibilities for a long time.

The other element of this game that makes it stand above the crowd of average RPGs released recently is the unusually interactive environments. Though you'll randomly be sucked into the battle screen in standard fashion, exploring the towns, dungeons, and other areas of the world is far more interesting than the tired design of simply plowing through a linear map with a few side-paths that lead to treasure. Many pieces of the environment can be blown up and converted into Elements for later item synthesis, and as your power grows you'll gain new abilities for use outside combat. Several of these influence your mobility by allowing you to break certain roadblocks or

climb previously unscalable heights, lending an almost Metroid-like exploration aspect to Atelier Iris. There's nothing quite like finally reaching that treasure chest in the middle of town that you've been staring at for the last ten hours of gameplay.

The icing on this cake of RPG happiness is the clever and relatively gaffe-free localization. Nippon Ichi's crew did an excellent job in this department, making the characters talk like native English-speakers and throwing in plenty of entertaining references to American culture. When Klein told his furry female friend Norn that he couldn't sleep in the same bed with her because "the ESRB would go crazy", I chortled with glee for a good while.

While I'm clearly very high on this game, it's easy to spot things about it that could potentially turn more casual RPGers off to it. Although I find the hand-drawn backgrounds and character sprites charming, there's no question that Atelier Iris is technologically more on par with a nice-looking PSone game than anything released in the last several years. Also, as has been mentioned, it takes a fair amount of time in Klein's shoes to get accustomed to all of the complexity this title offers, not to mention the plodding first few hours of the plot. If you can muster the strength to get over these hurdles, though, a sublime fantasy adventure awaits. —ADAM

Nothing like a bumbling villain to keep the heroes occupied



Skills in battle take variable amounts of time to perform



The overworld map is easily the weakest part of the game



BOTTOM LINE 8.25

> **Concept:** Give the few, the proud, the rabid hardcore RPG crowd exactly what they want, complete with some pacing and story problems

> **Graphics:** 2D hand-drawn sprites at their finest, though a few more frames of animation would've been nice

> **Sound:** The voice-acting doesn't suck! The music will remind you just how much the noble Mr. Uematsu helped Final Fantasy, though

> **Playability:** It's a turn-based RPG. The menus and such work just fine

> **Entertainment:** If you can bring a decent amount of patience, there's a ton of deep RPG goodness here

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 8.5

If there are any RPG fans out there who haven't yet discovered the magic of Nippon Ichi, then this is the title that will make them take notice. Although not a strategy game like the company's normal fare, Atelier Iris has the likeable atmosphere of Disgaea in a more traditional RPG framework. The visuals are nicely retro, but don't look dated like some other games that have attempted the same style. I love that Atelier is legitimately funny, with some entertaining characters and great dialogue, but what's best about this game is how it's complex without being overly complicated. Over the opening dozen hours, the game keeps introducing new systems and abilities that add depth and create a unique feel, but are never confusing or convoluted. The Atelier series has been going for many years in Japan, and Atelier Iris so charmed me that I'd love to see more of this endearing series come stateside. —JEREMY

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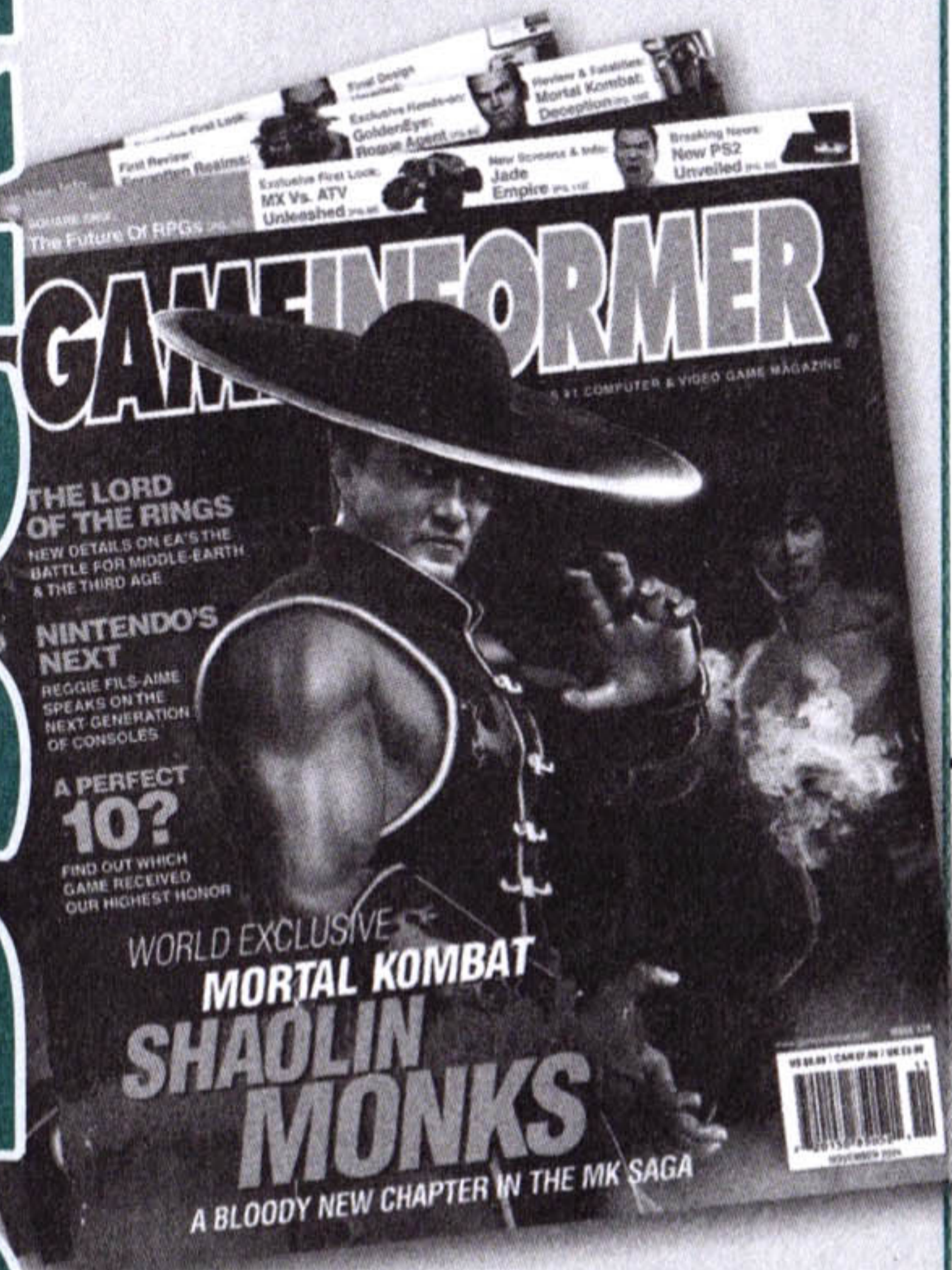
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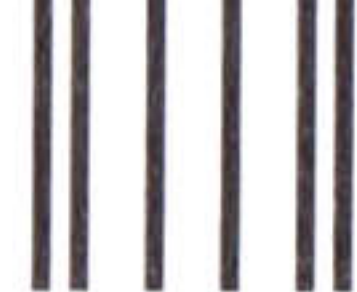
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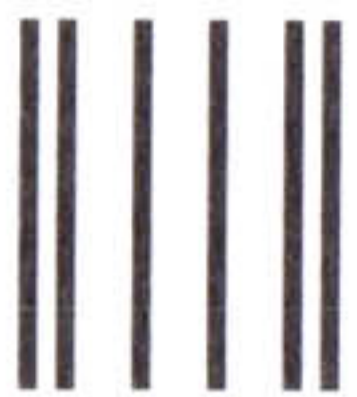
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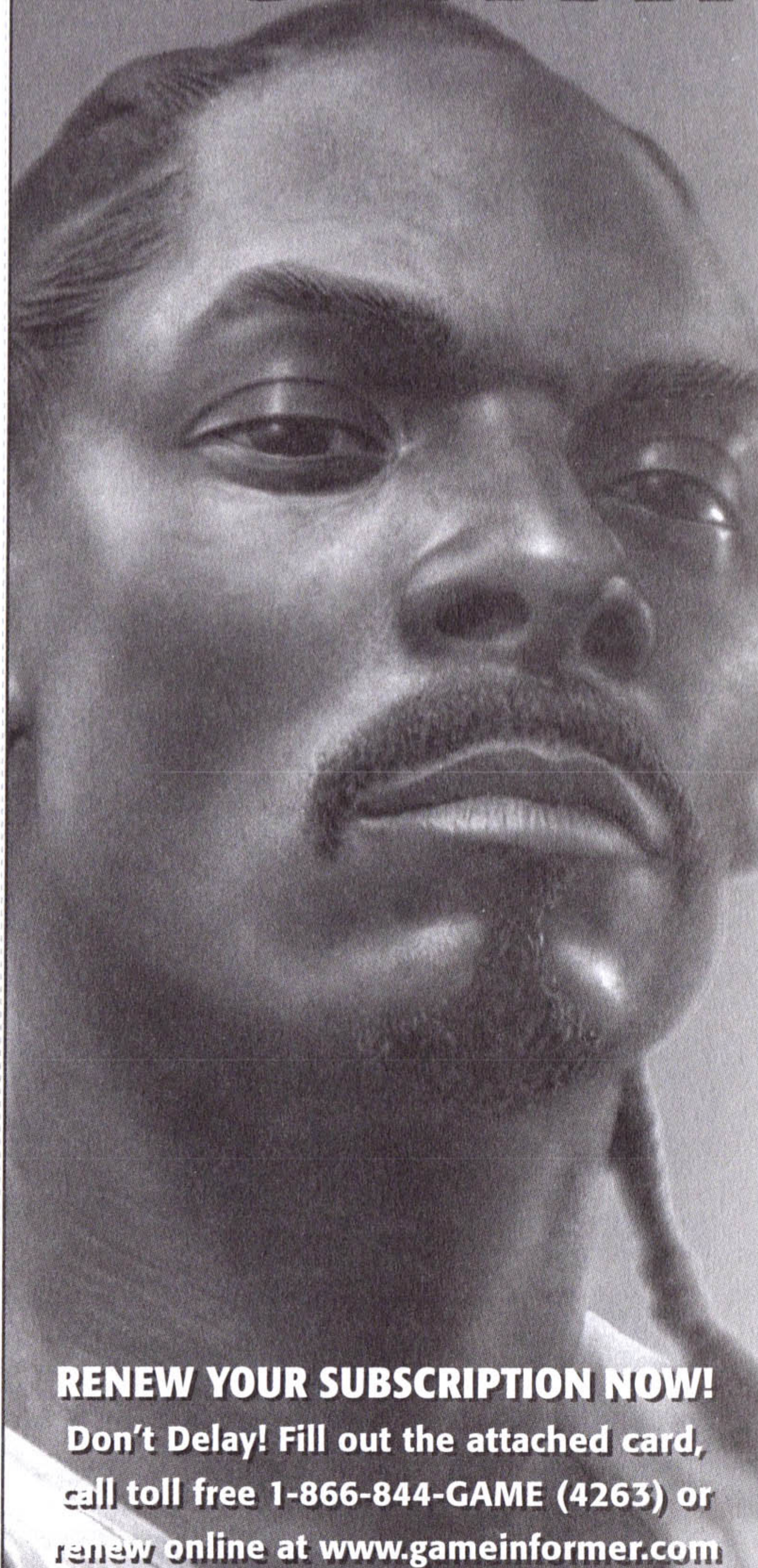
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PLAYSTATION 2

Cold Winter

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** SIERRA ENTERTAINMENT > **DEVELOPER** SWORDFISH STUDIOS > **RELEASE** APRIL 19 > **ESRB** M

WINTER SUCKS...BUT NOT ON PS2

The gameplay that Swordfish Studios has crafted takes the PlayStation 2 hardware for a serious spin. Squeezing the trigger and firing off rounds is a satisfying endeavor, but the one area where Cold Winter stands out from the rest of the FPS pack is the high level of interaction that it places into the hands of the player. The fact that these actions can be used to expand upon the gritty gunplay only makes it all the more impressive. You'll find yourself flipping over tables to create cover, picking up crates that can be hurled at your adversaries, and even lifting up the cushions of a couch to see if something may have fallen out of someone's pocket. This world is brimming with life — something that you rarely see in a shooter.

Make no mistake, however, Cold Winter is far more than an interactive playground. The plot reeks of a certain well-dressed Martini guzzler. Arms-dealing terrorists, secret societies, women seeking men who know how to handle a gun; if given the chance, this is a mission that James Bond would enthusiastically accept. The story is loaded with all the hooks it needs to keep you engrossed and wondering where it will take you next.

Intense pockets of action are the order of the day. When you least expect it, the game bombards you with frenzied firefights that tap right into the incredible physics engine. A good firefight often involves airborne propane tanks, vehicles on fire, and bodies missing not just heads, but a limb or two as well. In other words, this experience is absolutely insane. Dull moments are a rarity in Cold Winter.

It's not Halo, but PS2 owners finally have an exclusive FPS that is worth bragging about.

—REINER



BOTTOM LINE 8.25

> **Concept:** Avoids classification as another run-of-the-mill anti-terrorist shooter with its highly interactive environments, intense firefights, and outstanding story

> **Graphics:** The environments are a bit plain, but you hardly notice them under the unyielding assault of impressive effects and realistic physics

> **Sound:** The thematic soundtrack is a bit cheesy, but you gotta love the deafening weapon sounds and excellent voice acting

> **Playability:** Even with chaos clouding the screen, the framerate and smoothness of play never wavers. Multiplayer is well thought out as well

> **Entertainment:** Rewarding every step of the way, this sleeper hit is deserving of your dollar

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 8.5

Console FPS fans have had it good for several months now. Every couple of weeks it seems like another high-quality, high-adrenaline title has shown up to fill that aching void for blowing up and shooting things. Cold Winter fits solidly in this category with its exaggerated explosions and constant stream of quality shooting. What would have been simply an amusing romp becomes a seriously engrossing play because of an excellent script and some compelling voice acting, lending a truly cinematic flair to the whole game. Don't miss out just because this is an unfamiliar character and series. You might be surprised with this one. —MILLER

PLAYSTATION 2

Enthusia: Professional Racing

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING > **PUBLISHER** KONAMI > **DEVELOPER** KONAMI > **RELEASE** MAY 3 > **ESRB** E



TECH, SPECS APPEAL

Despite my belief that the good majority of Gran Turismo players only unlock a fraction of the game's cars, I know why millions of people love the series — it makes cars sexy. It's the successful merging of this with hardcore gameplay that captures the imagination. Enthusia is no less dedicated, but it does lack the glitz factor.

Cars' physics in Enthusia are just as good as GT, and it's the unwavering philosophy of this game that you are reminded of in every turn. The game's onscreen indicators are constantly giving you feedback about the inertia pulling on your ride and the grip of your tires. Along with the educational role of these indicators, the game does an excellent job of giving you a tactile sense of each car, imparting an understandable feeling to the racing that is more technical than emotional.

Because of this hardcore approach, many will not dig into the game as much as it deserves. Plus, its career structure isn't much more than a series of menus. For instance, I have a ranking, but it's just a number. There's no leaderboard with my name in lights or tangible competition. Luckily, the game's Enthu points (which prevent you from just banging into other drivers, although you stupidly get docked if other people run into you) and odds system prevent Enthusia from being just a boring crawl of races. The odds system determines how far you climb up the rankings

based on the relative difficulty of a race. I loved this because it gave variety and choice to the unfortunate inevitability of having to re-race tracks. It also encouraged me to try out more cars in my stable (which get better the more you drive them), making each vehicle more than just glorified trophies taking up space in my garage.

Car lovers should definitely get their hands on Enthusia. More casual gamers could learn a thing or two as well if they have the stomach for it. —KATO

TIMELINE

02:00 HOURS

Driving a Nissan March, my ranking is 950 out of a 1,000. I've attained Level 2 tuning on the car, meaning I've earned better handling.

05:00 HOURS

I've got over 20 cars in my garage, and now roll with a Mercedes-Benz C32 AMG. I've graduated to a new series of races.

14:00 HOURS

My ranking is at 480 and my garage has swelled to 47 cars. Getting under the 500 ranking was difficult because I kept running out of Enthu points and having to sit out a week — which dropped my ranking.



BOTTOM LINE 8

> **Concept:** As hardcore about racing as Gran Turismo, but in a workman-like, non-sexy way

> **Graphics:** First-person mode shows some great weather effects and a cool perimeter blur

> **Sound:** The soundtrack sounds like it was pinched directly from the Ridge Racer series. In other words, it's crap

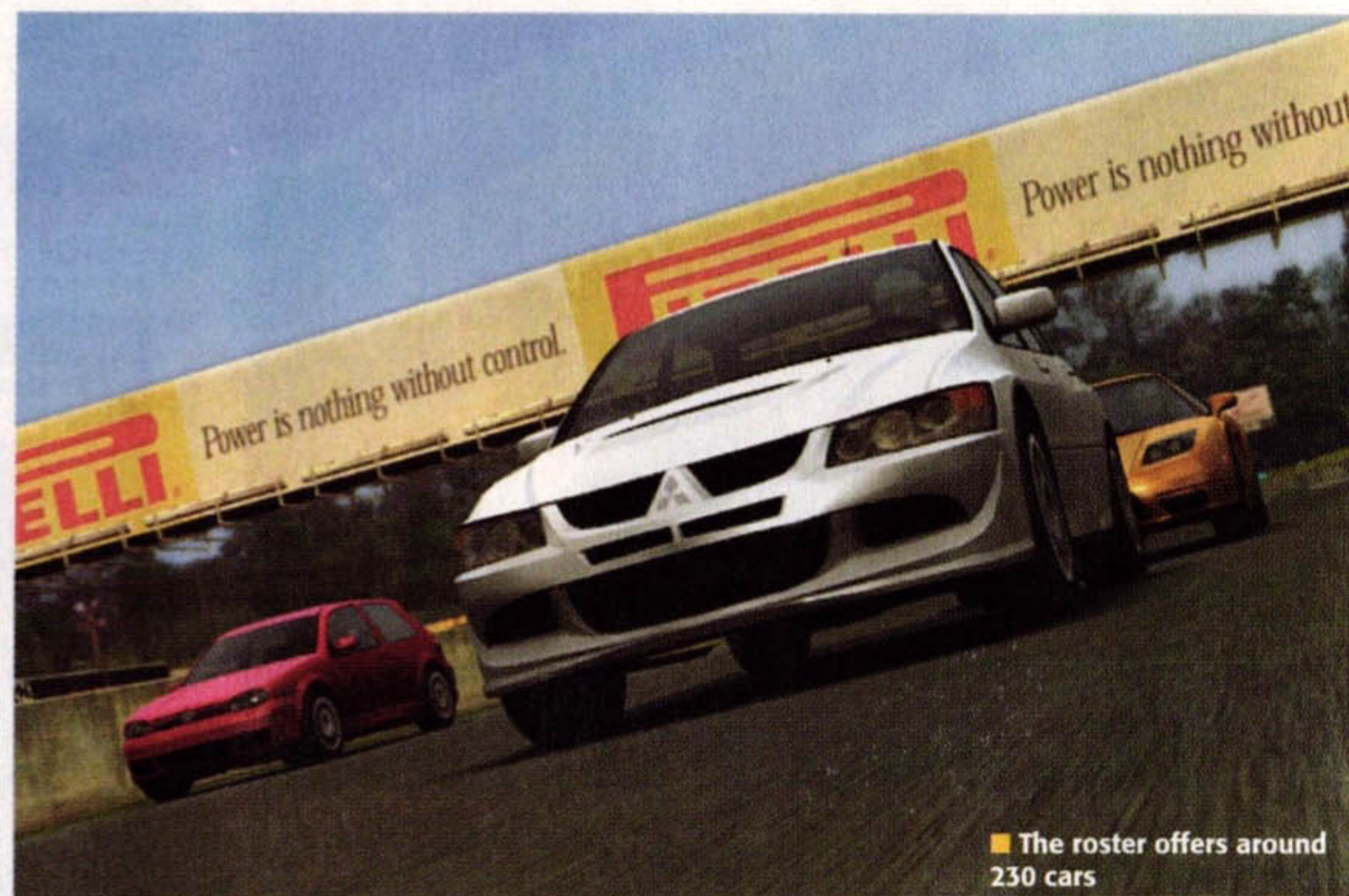
> **Playability:** The analog gas button would benefit from a little more subtlety

> **Entertainment:** This isn't a game for the faint of heart or the heavy of foot

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 8

There's a part of me, just nestled below the yearning for cheap car insurance, that loves nothing more than a good, fast drive. Because Konami's new Enthusia generally replicates this sensation with admirable clarity, I'm really in love with most of it. The sensations of a chassis' sway and back-end drift are relayed in a new and unbelievably clever way, but there are elements of the game that have room for polish. Really, it's just the details (menu navigation issues mostly) where Enthusia falters for me. For this promising debut, I am very happy; for the thoughts of what could come in this series, I am almost giddy. —LISA



■ The roster offers around 230 cars

XBOX

Forza Motorsport

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA SYSTEM LINK OR XBOX LIVE)
 > **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS > **DEVELOPER** MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS
 > **RELEASE** MAY 3 > **ESRB** E



THE BIG PICTURE

Where Gran Turismo 4 is about the cars as usable pieces of art and history, Forza is about almost everything else. Microsoft's hit back at the steady PS2 series succeeds in many areas that the other sim does not: real-time damage that is both cosmetic and has an effect on the driving, online options that will surely knock the socks off of many gamers, and the beginnings of street-tuning customization. I think that it succeeds, generally, more than it is lacking.

Even from the very first seconds of starting a profile in Forza, you have the ability to do a bucket of things. Career mode starts players off with a nice chunk of change and reasonable starting cars along with many race types. This wide-open gameplay

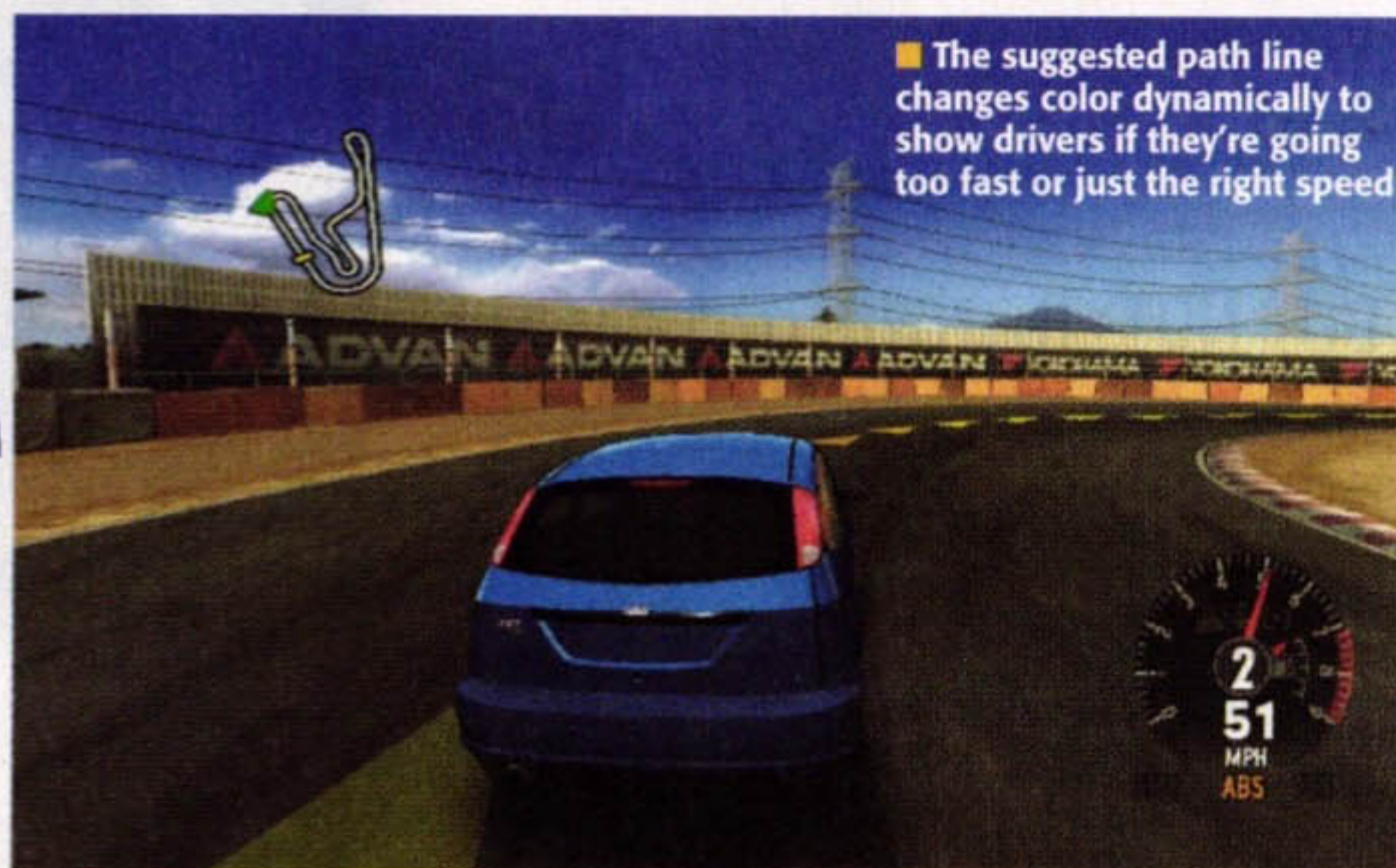
ONLINE OPTIONS

The online experience Forza offers is second to none. Eight-player races, downloadable ghosts of other speed demons, and the Car Clubs (where up to 100 like-minded racers join forces for Club Races and general camaraderie) are tops. Another great feature is that online races earn money that can be used in the offline Career mode to upgrade the cars in your garage. Finally, a tie between online and offline that makes sense!

is one of Forza's greatest strengths and also one of its faults. By not leading players to specific goals, there's less urgency to get deeper into the game, but perseverance will eventually show off the great tuning features where Forza really makes its mark (you can keep fiddling with a car's settings without leaving the test track — take that, Polyphony!).

Forza also has the interesting Drivatar system (where you can sub in the Drivatar to do a race for you). After running a series of tracks that use different skills, your Drivatar is trained, at least in theory, to race like you do. I found that training my CPU equivalent was fun and challenging, but that in a race it didn't take competition or aggression into account as much as I would have, and was kind of a letdown.

So how's the racing? As for the physics, I never really got a sensation of a vehicle's full heft as nearly all brushes and dings send most cars into a spin. It was too much, especially when you're racing in a pack. But, the tuning and on-screen path guide are awesome features that will be ripped off endlessly by other developers. I really like the damage model because it looks great and seems fair in how it affects the control of your car. But, on the



■ The suggested path line changes color dynamically to show drivers if they're going too fast or just the right speed

other hand, there aren't any major repercussions for bashing up your ride — you can restart an offline race without penalty at any time and the repair bills always seemed to get lost in the mail. In my mind, if you were going to put in damage, I'd like it to mean something.

Graphically, the sections where players aren't in control look stunning (Drivatar races use dynamic camera angles, making the experience a lot like a high-caliber TV broadcast). While still lovely, the game's main views while driving look almost cartoony in comparison to the other titles on the market, and I would have appreciated smoother reflections in particular.

Forza is certainly not a jack-of-all-trades in the bad sense, but instead, a racer that does a lot more than any other and is good, but not great, at most of those ideas. If there's an overall problem with Forza, it's that the game isn't polished into the slick experience that others have recently offered. —LISA

BOTTOM LINE **8.5**

> **Concept:** Give Xbox gamers something they've long hungered for — a driving sim with everything that GT 4 isn't

> **Graphics:** Replays, Drivatar matches, and menus look stunning. Normal racing looks less awesome

> **Sound:** The changes after upgrades are great and the noises of cars around you are also helpful (in some cases, funny too)

> **Playability:** Cars are consistently more spin-prone than I would like, but translating weight distribution and traction to real game feel is done well

> **Entertainment:** There's a lot here and the online options will probably change racing games as we know them

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion **8.25**

Microsoft has tried to establish itself in the racing genre with various franchises, but without a Gran Turismo-esque sim title. It seems odd that it would try to conquer the world with a rally game, but I'm starting to see why. Making a straight-up simulation racer is similar to vanilla ice cream. It's a good standby, but your taste buds usually crave something more exciting. Don't get me wrong, this game looks great (although not as good as GT 4), and has a bevy of cars, parts, and even online play. But it lacks a spark that makes you want to push the envelope and leave rubber on every track. Maybe it's the easy difficulty or limited track selection. Perhaps my opinion of Forza's solid but not super status is summed up in the Drivatar feature. Why would I want to give up the wheel to watch the AI race for me? In a great race game, you'd have to pry my cold, dead hands off the steering wheel first. Unfortunately Forza doesn't inspire such dedication. —KATO



■ The appearance customization offers 100 layers of vinyl and decals, but only a handful of paint colors





XBOX

Iron Phoenix

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** SEGA
> **DEVELOPER** INTERSERV INTERNATIONAL > **RELEASE** MARCH 22 > **ESRB** T

ASHES TO ASHES

Iron Phoenix is, for all intents and purposes, a piece of software. It comes on a disc, it fits in your console, and it executes a program on-screen. It's when you try to apply other familiar labels to it, like "game" or perhaps "entertainment", that the title runs into a snag. For it is on these fronts that the title fails to offer any redeeming sense of skilled combat or functional action. It's by avoiding basic tenets otherwise common to games, like a story for instance, that Iron Phoenix impales itself on its own blade and falls forgotten where it lies. Am I being unclear here? Iron Phoenix is not a good game.

There are actually a few redeeming qualities that have managed to squeeze their way through to the final product. Several of the level designs are really cool, sporting giant Asian-inspired statues and architecture. The flexible "wire-fu" inspired movement could have been sweet. Even the weapons and characters might have offered some exciting variety. Unfortunately, nothing really works the way it should. Animation is choppy and stiff, the framerate is inconsistent, and you can barely tell what's going on during a match due to the unmitigated chaos that dominates the battlefield. While in combat, facing off against an opponent usually feels like playing roulette rather than a contest of skill, mostly due to the poorly implemented lock-on and the unpredictable nature of the controls.

I'm aware of the numerous and constant problems that can get a game off track. Too little money, too little time, technology problems – the list is endless. It's hard to know which of these pitfalls Iron Phoenix fell prey to. But in the final analysis fall it did, and this bird will need a true miracle to rise again from this disaster. —**MILLER**

■ Can you tell what's going on here? Ya, neither can we



BOTTOM LINE

4

> **Concept:** Take up your mystical weapons and strike down your foes in a story-free online multiplayer scrapfest

> **Graphics:** Impressive level designs don't make up for the shoddy animation and framerate

> **Sound:** Completely unremarkable, but it gets some points for the availability of a custom soundtrack

> **Playability:** Terrible controls and even worse combat are the real offenders

> **Entertainment:** Go play something else – seriously

> **Replay Value:** Low

Second Opinion 3.5

Okay, Iron Phoenix, pay attention. The mere fact that you are capable of suffocating 16 players in your oily armpit of an online mode is not a bragging point. There are many things that exponentially decrease in quality the more humans you add, like crawl spaces, escape pods, and stew. You are among their ranks. Before trying to add over a dozen combatants, it might have helped to make sure that your gameplay wasn't totally broken and joyless. Don't go giving me those glitchy puppy dog eyes, either; you know what you did. The saddest part is the fact that any money wasted on you could have been spent on a real game. —**JOE**

XBOX

Raze's Hell

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 10-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR SYSTEM LINK) > **PUBLISHER** MAJESCO > **DEVELOPER** ARTECH STUDIOS > **RELEASE** APRIL 25 > **ESRB** M



PAVED WITH GOOD INTENTIONS

Raze's Hell has a passable conceptual hook: Instead of playing as a cute, cuddly creature (Kewletts in this case), you're trying to exterminate the little buggers who, as it turns out, are actually evil and bent on destroying the race that your character Raze belongs to. Along the way, the game actually manages to slip in some nice commentary on colonialism and cultural imperialism (no, seriously!) and some good laughs, most as a result of the Kewletts' condescending and silly dialogue. However, like a comedian that keeps laughing at his own jokes (paging Jimmy Fallon), the game isn't nearly as clever as it thinks it is, especially since Conker's Bad Fur Day used a similar schtick to much better effect over five years ago.

The admittedly amusing Kewletts also serve to upstage Raze, the game's protagonist, who comes across as nothing more than a grim, mute cipher. Throughout the game, I felt no connection to Raze or the

fate of his people, which hardly makes for a compelling experience.

The gameplay is straight-up, no frills third-person shooting accomplished through the conventional FPS mechanics familiar to any Xbox owner. Because Raze kills his prey by spitting powerful plant proteins, there are numerous types of projectiles ranging from long-range sniper fire to explosive grenade charges, adding some degree of variety. The game's strong point is the enemy AI, which reacts very realistically to your attacks, taking evasive measures and flanking your position. However, the level designs and missions are tedious to the extreme, and I quickly grew bored with the single-player missions. It's great that there are some minigames and online multiplayer, but neither can make up for the fact that Raze's Hell just isn't very compelling. No amount of bells and whistles or comedic concepts can disguise the fact that this is another run-of-the-mill shooter. —**MATT**



■ The cloyingly cute Kewletts provide most of the game's entertainment

BOTTOM LINE

6

> **Concept:** Obliterate some cute cuddly creatures with deadly spitting (!?) attacks

> **Graphics:** Looks more like an early Xbox game than a 2005 title

> **Sound:** Aside from the Kewletts' genuinely funny dialogue, there's not much of note in the audio portion of the game

> **Playability:** Does a decent job of providing basic third-person shooting without adding anything new to the genre

> **Entertainment:** Despite the developer's attempt to separate the game from the pack, Raze's Hell is a forgettable experience

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 5.75

Conceptually, Raze's Hell really strikes a chord with me: A hideous beast dissects and dismembers cute and cuddly beings. In a sense, it's a reflection of my childhood and the torture that I would exact on my sister's precious Strawberry Shortcake toys. Unfortunately, as clever as the premise is, it lacks a comedic punch, and the personality of the protagonist is paper-thin. The gameplay is equally disfigured, offering cookie-cutter level designs, commonplace weapons, and worthless stealth controls. What could have been a dark comedy ended up being a very dark day for gaming as a whole. Chalk this one up as another promising concept wasted by poor execution. —**REINER**

XBOX QUICKIES

XBOX

Myst IV: Revelation

- > **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ADVENTURE
- > **PUBLISHER** UBISOFT
- > **DEVELOPER** UBISOFT MONTREAL
- > **RELEASE** MARCH 28 > **ESRB** T



BOTTOM LINE

4.5

It hurts deep inside my soul to see this pockmark on the face of the Myst franchise. It's not

as if the game itself is bad, it's that the technology is so horribly mangled that the delicious puzzle-laden universe is almost unplayable on Xbox. How does a point-and-click game chug frames and not adequately load shots? I don't know the answer, but I do know that Revelation makes smart accommodations for console players (like the map and user interface) while leaving the game in a broken, unworkable state. There's no reason for adventure fans to put themselves through this experience. —LISA

XBOX

Spikeout: Battle Street

- > **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION
- > **PUBLISHER** SEGA
- > **DEVELOPER** AMUSEMENT VISION
- > **RELEASE** MARCH 22 > **ESRB** T

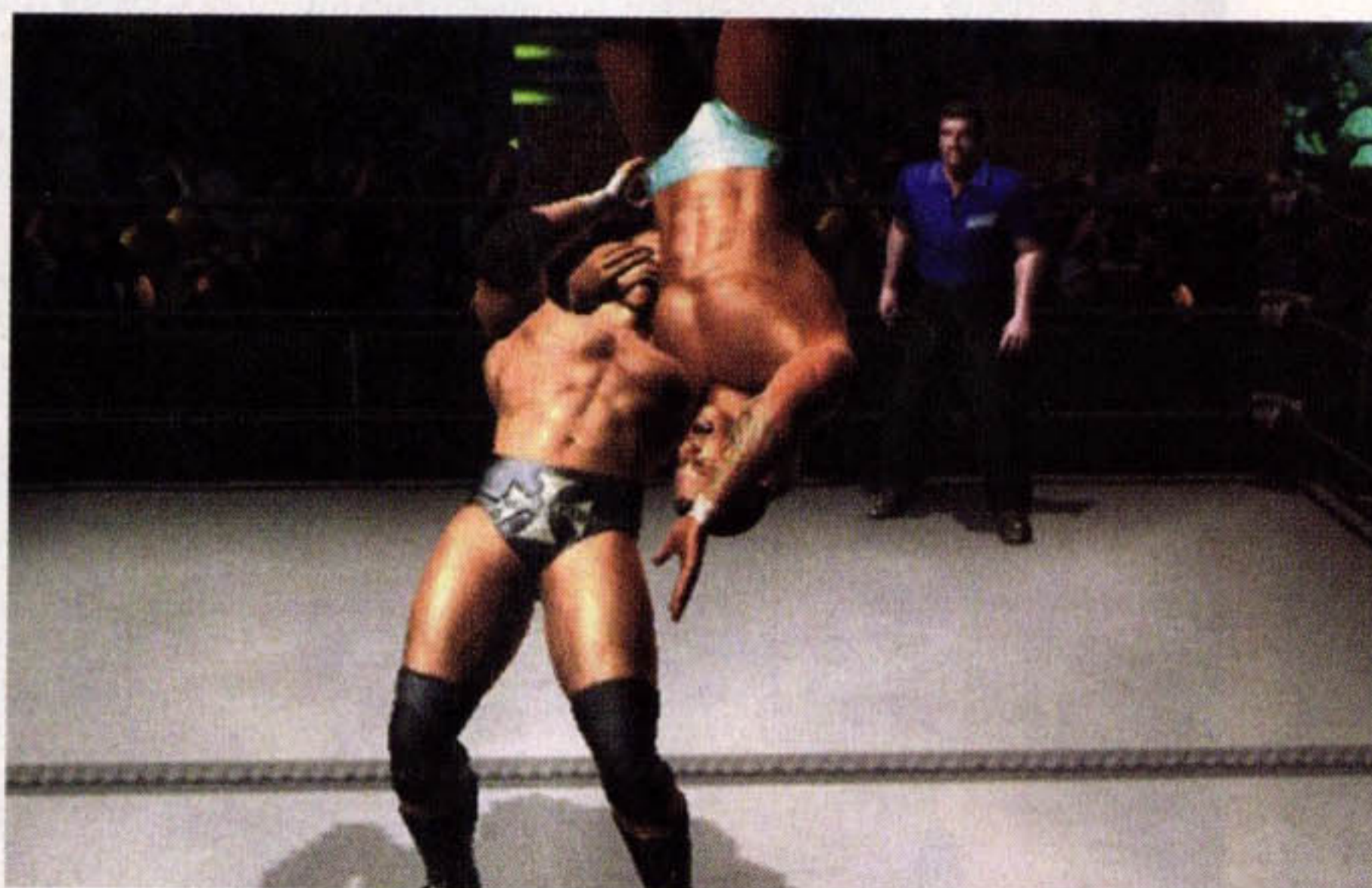


BOTTOM LINE

6.25

Spikeout: Battle Street is an old-school, arcadey brawler clearly inspired by games like

Streets of Rage and Final Fight, and playing it will definitely make you feel like you're playing an older game. The graphics look dated, and its combat is a creaky button-mashing affair. Sadly, it lacks a likeable personality, strategic depth, or any real variety. The main character, Spike Jr., is a total wiener, and the other playable fighters are equally lame. The four-player Xbox Live mode may offer some thrills for devoted brawler fans, but everyone else will want to stay away from this stale relic. —JEREMY



XBOX

WWE: Wrestlemania 21

- > **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER FIGHTING (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR SYSTEM LINK) > **PUBLISHER** THQ > **DEVELOPER** STUDIO GIGANTE
- > **RELEASE** APRIL 18 > **ESRB** T

A TOTAL JOBBER

Back in the day, it seemed that Hulk Hogan was the ideal wrestling superstar. He had a great image and tremendous popularity, but when it came right down to it, his skills were none too impressive. The new WWE title for Xbox is a lot like Hogan: at first glance, it appears to be the wrestling title we've all been waiting for, but it quickly becomes clear that Wrestlemania 21 lacks the solid fundamentals to be a true contender.

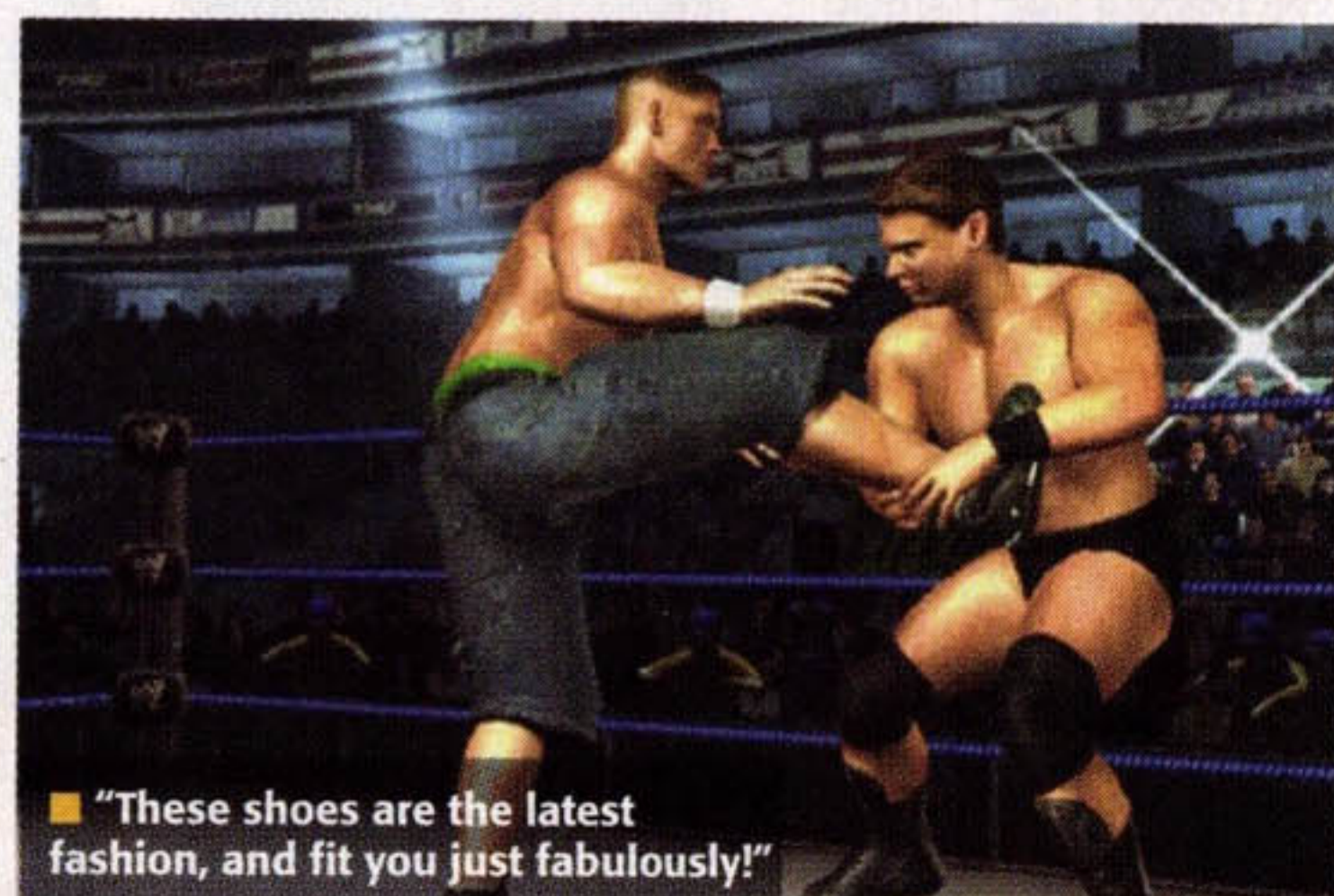
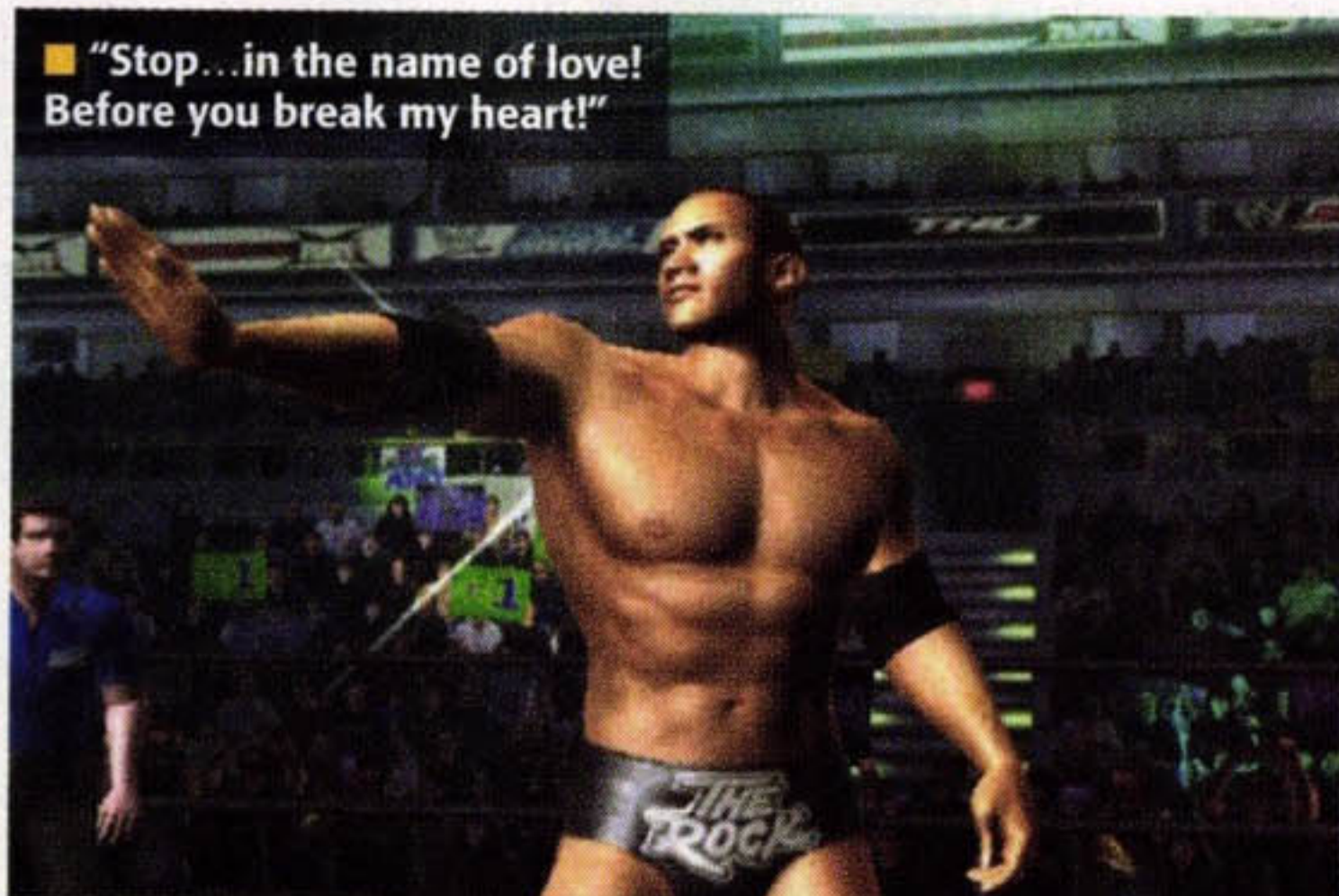
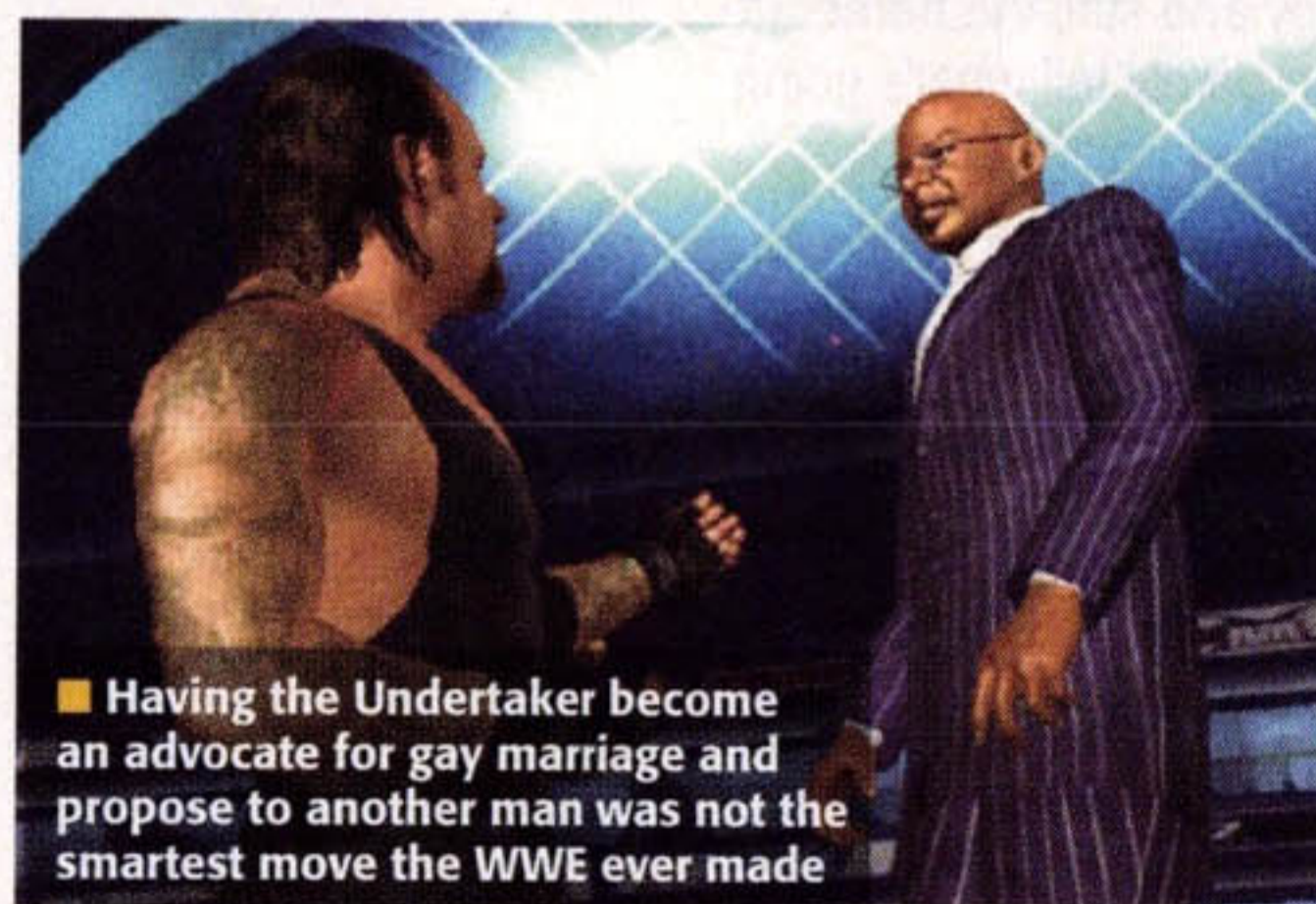
Without a doubt, this is the best-looking WWE game to date. The character models are fantastic and the presentation is great. However, this is where my praise ends. Everything about the game feels rushed. The AI is a mess — sometimes your opponent will make truly baffling decisions, and characters will come to the ring to cause interference only to wait harmlessly outside. I won countless four-man matches by letting two of my foes duke it out, while I simply concentrated on the remaining guy. They never lifted a finger to break my pin, even though it meant they'd lose the match. I know wrestlers aren't known for their mental prowess, but I doubt any of them are this dumb.

The combat engine is similarly spotty, with attacks prioritized in a strange way. Several times, I would throw a punch at my foe at the same time he threw a grapple. The grapple

would always win, and oftentimes my character wouldn't even swing, because the game had already decided I was going to get grabbed. As a result, the game feels really sluggish and unresponsive. The countering mechanic looks great when you can pull it off, but timing it right can be difficult. Overall, the gameplay makes me as frustrated as Ashton Kutcher trying to do algebra.

Although there is a lot of content in Wrestlemania 21, including online play, exhibition matches, and a cool create-a-championship mode, everything has the same incomplete feeling. The characters feel even a little less responsive online, and I even noticed some framerate issues. The commentators repeat the same lines over and over, and always refer to the wrestlers as male, even in the Divas-only bra and panties matches. Weapons simply disappear when broken, character and belt creation options feel slim, and the referees are even more useless than in

the real WWE. Even menu and loading screens look incomplete. The team behind Wrestlemania 21 obviously has talent as it has managed to make a visually amazing game, but everything about this title smacks of a product that was rushed out the door to hit a release date. Perhaps if it had been delayed to iron out the bugs, Wrestlemania 21 could have been a champion. —JEREMY



BOTTOM LINE **5.75**

> **Concept:** The latest WWE title focuses on great visuals and online modes, but completely fails on gameplay

> **Graphics:** Easily the high point of the game. The character models are great and the animation is smooth

> **Sound:** The announcers repeat lines all too often, and your character sounds like a complete tool in cutscenes

> **Playability:** Sluggish and unresponsive, characters control more like senior citizens than wrestling superstars

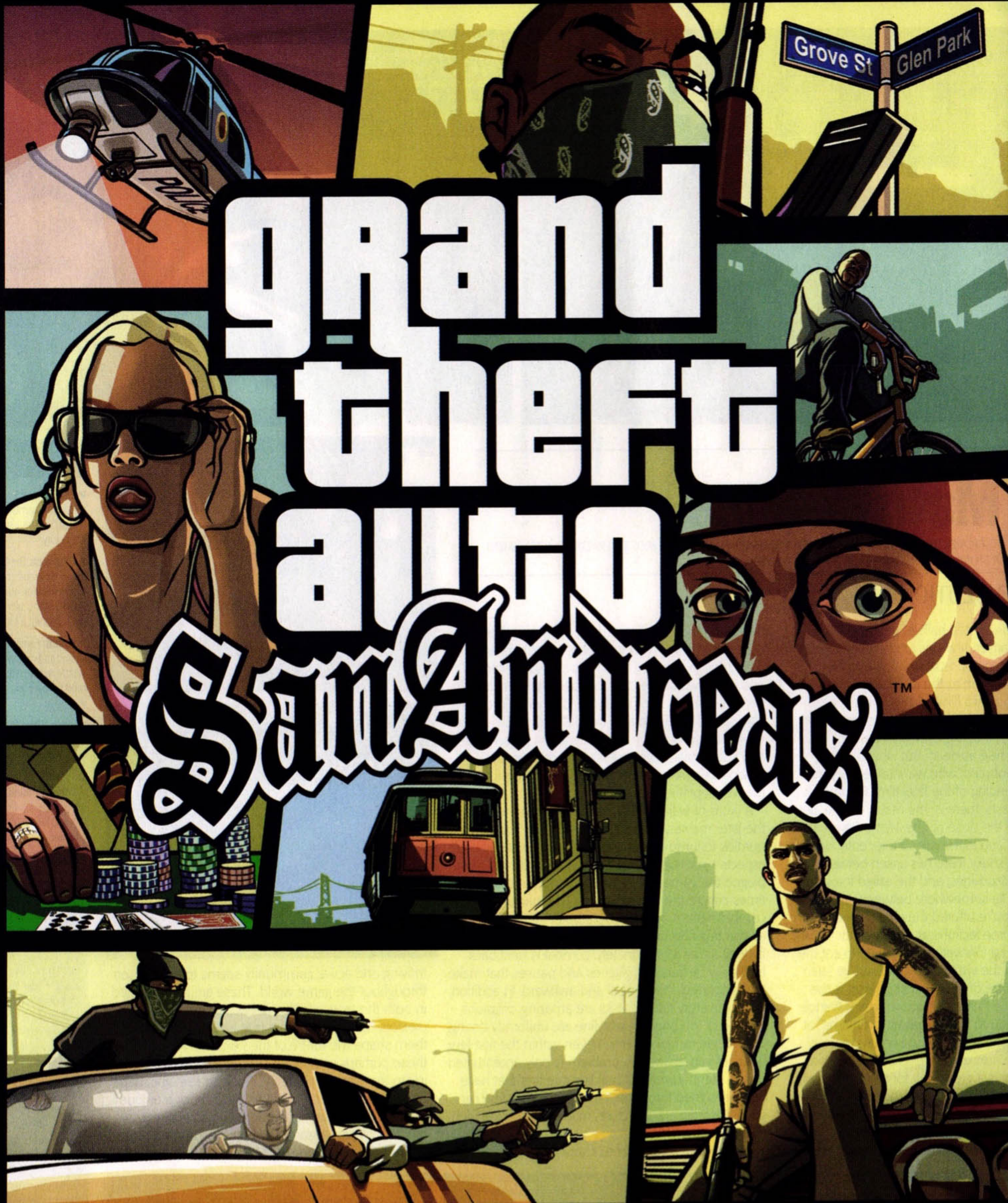
> **Entertainment:** Easily the buggiest and least satisfying wrestling game without the words "Backyard" or "Legends" in the title

> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low



Second Opinion **5.5**

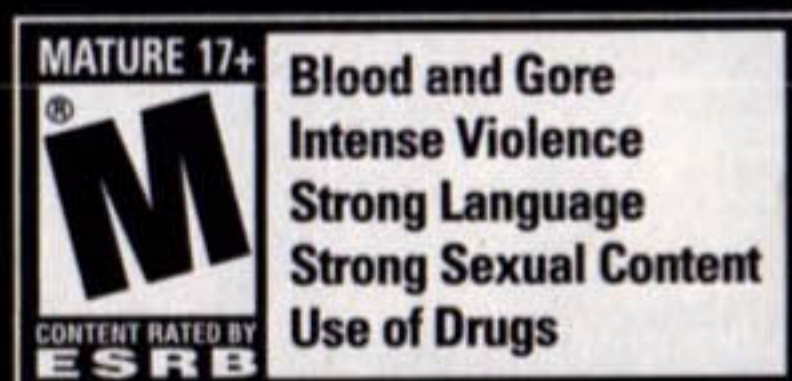
Did every wrestler take a nail gun to the head prior to entering the ring, or is this game plagued by some of the worst AI that I have ever seen? Even Napoleon Dynamite has better motor skills than these numbskulls. With drunken stupor emerging as the prominent driving force of the game, Wrestlemania 21's gorgeous character models and appropriately cheesy story go to waste and are sucked into the mighty swirl of the video game crapper. Sadly, there really isn't much to the gameplay, either. It's shallow, unresponsive, and a generation or two behind where wrestling games are today. It may flex its graphical muscles, but the lasting effect it leaves on gamers is that of being kicked in the unmentionables repeatedly, then getting a face full of Big Show's sweaty singlet. —REINER



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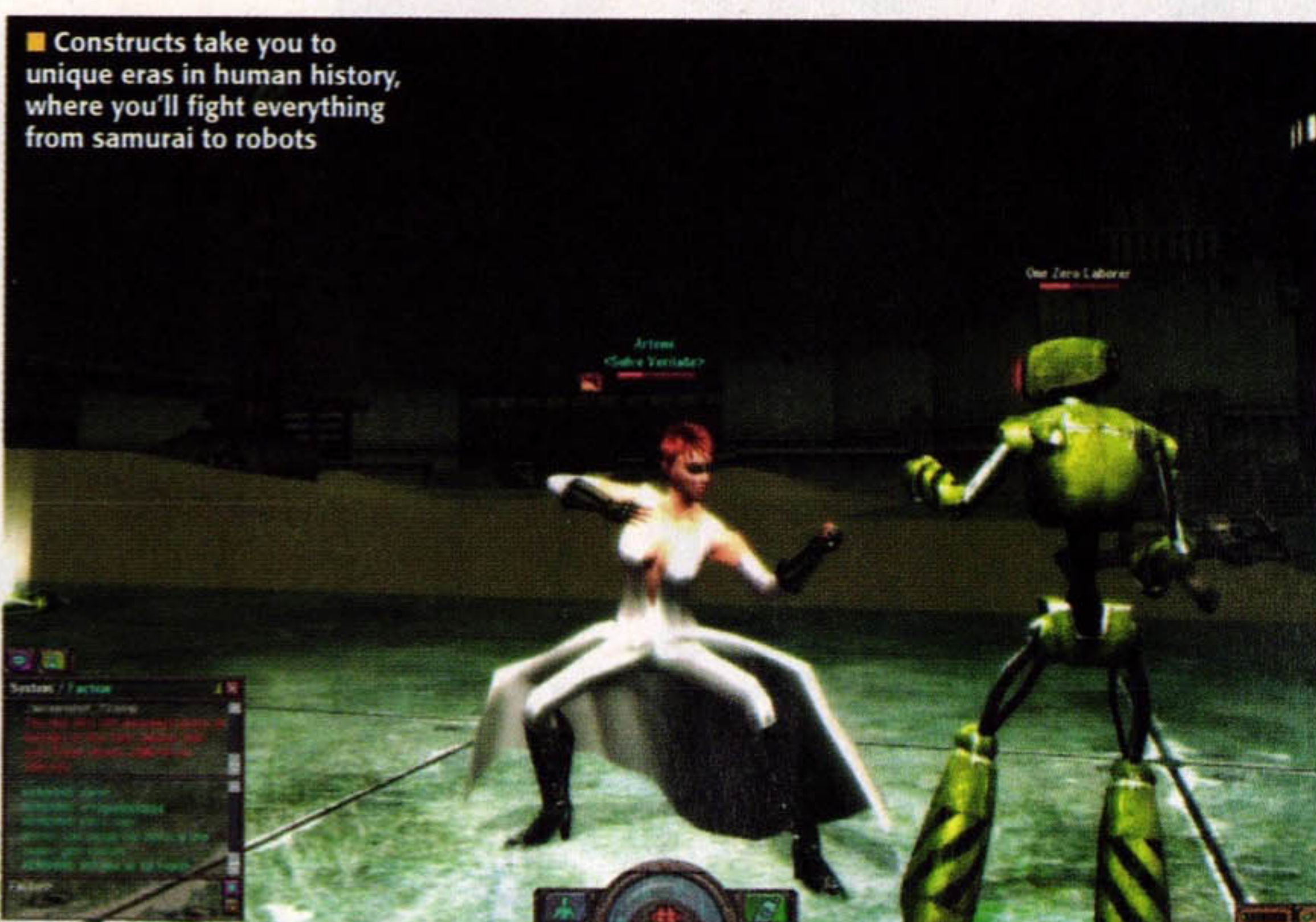
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■ Morpheus puts on his best smile for the camera



■ Constructs take you to unique eras in human history, where you'll fight everything from samurai to robots

PC

The Matrix Online

> **STYLE** MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** SEGA/WARNER BROS. INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT
> **DEVELOPER** MONOLITH PRODUCTIONS > **RELEASE** MARCH 22 > **ESRB** T

MATRIX EVOLUTIONS

In the not-so-vaunted halls of geek fandom, there have arisen few sins greater than admitting to an open appreciation of *The Matrix*. This is due in most part to the lukewarm reception of the second and third films of the series. It was there, due to convoluted plot twists and overblown existential musing, that most fans jumped ship and decried the franchise as dead. But what of those who remained onboard, who want to see beyond the unresolved ending of the final film? For those die hard enthusiasts, there is *The Matrix Online*. Set directly following the close of *The Matrix Revolutions*, the game places you in the role of a recently awakened "red pill." A shaky truce has arisen between the Zionists and the Machines, and the exiled forces of the Merovingian lie somewhere between. In this cold war stalemate, you're offered the chance to ally with any one of the three factions as each vies for power.

There are several innovations that help to set the game apart from the wealth of MMOs we've seen in the last year. One of the most significant is the branching skill tree that governs character advancement. Allowing you to load different "programs" at each log in, you can pull up your kung fu mastery one day, and the next enjoy life as a covert hacker. While this system is a great idea for MMOs, it is with its other major novelty that the game really shines – the Live Events team. This is a group of people from developer Monolith who are actually role-playing the recognizable characters from the movies as

they push the story forward. As I played, I attended a Zionist meeting held by Niobe, saw Morpheus preaching to a throng of players at a street corner, and even was challenged to a personal duel by Seraph, (who kicked me to the curb with unreasonable speed). Beyond this, there are regular in-game events that propel the story forward in meaningful and substantial ways, so that your choices and actions as a player can genuinely affect the future of the *Matrix* plotline.

A word of warning – like deriving enjoyment from the later movies, you're looking at some major hurdles to jump over in order to partake of the cool aspects I just mentioned. Numerous technical flaws plague the gameplay experience and can sometimes cripple the flow of action. The martial arts combat system has incredible potential, particularly as you begin to tap into the higher level skills and fighting styles. Unfortunately, combat is held back right now by frequent glitches and pauses that make the action feel mechanical and awkward. In addition, while the story-related tasks are amazing, missions outside of the ongoing storyline are uniformly boring. They begin to feel repetitive even within the first few hours of gameplay. This problem is only accentuated by the scant number of building interiors that have been designed throughout the city – while you can go into almost any structure, many of them are identical on the inside.

Despite these sometimes overwhelming faults, a



BOTTOM LINE 7.5

> **Concept:** Jack into the Matrix and battle agents, programs, and fellow humans across the vast Mega City

> **Graphics:** The background green glow and crisp city environments look quite fine on a good system, even if bloom has been pushed a bit too far

> **Sound:** Familiar musical strains and quality sound effects set the mood, while an in-game media player lets you set your own

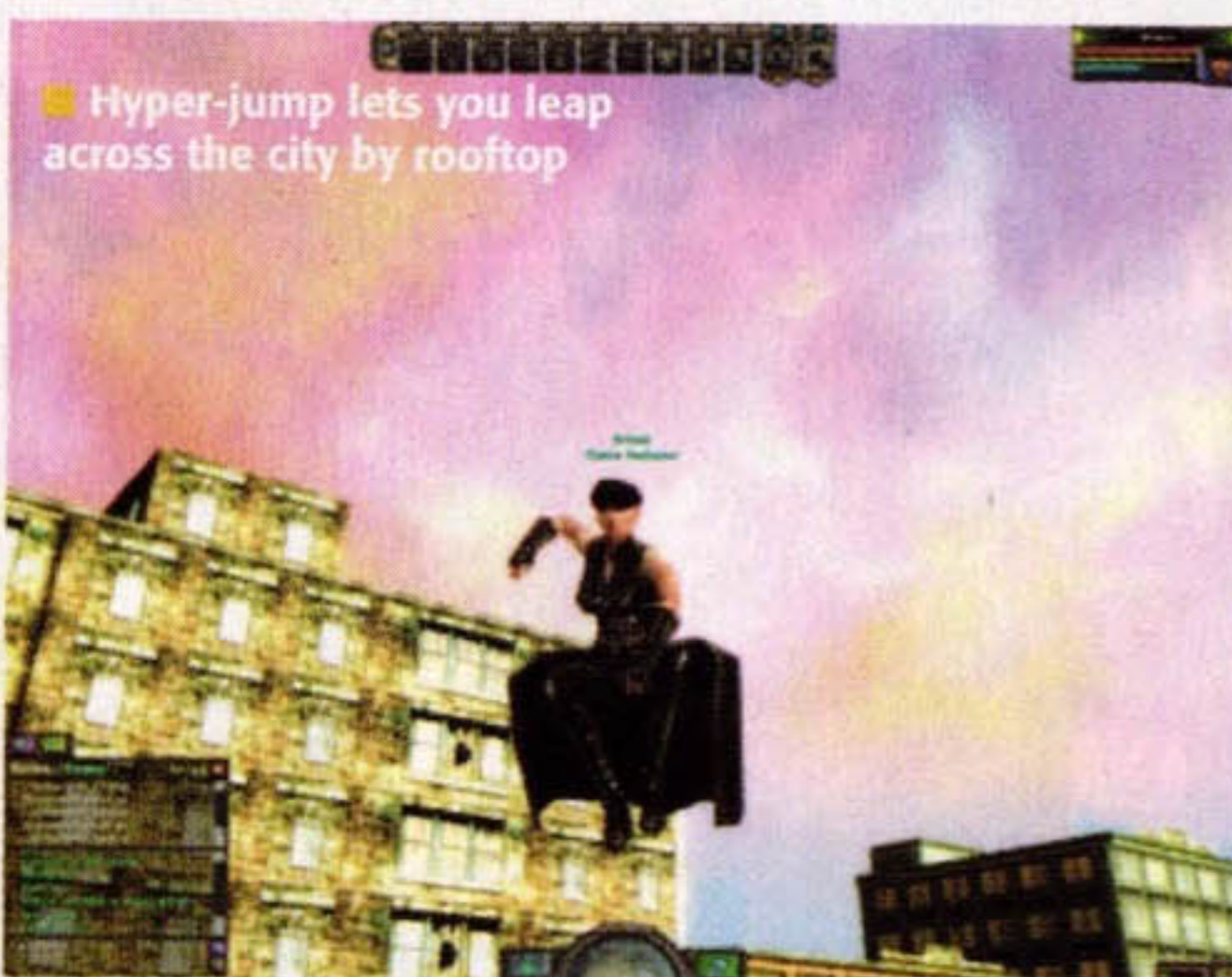
> **Playability:** Problematic combat and mission structure is at odds with the excellent skill and crafting system

> **Entertainment:** While the experience grind is overly tedious, fans will thrill to the continuation of the film's plotline

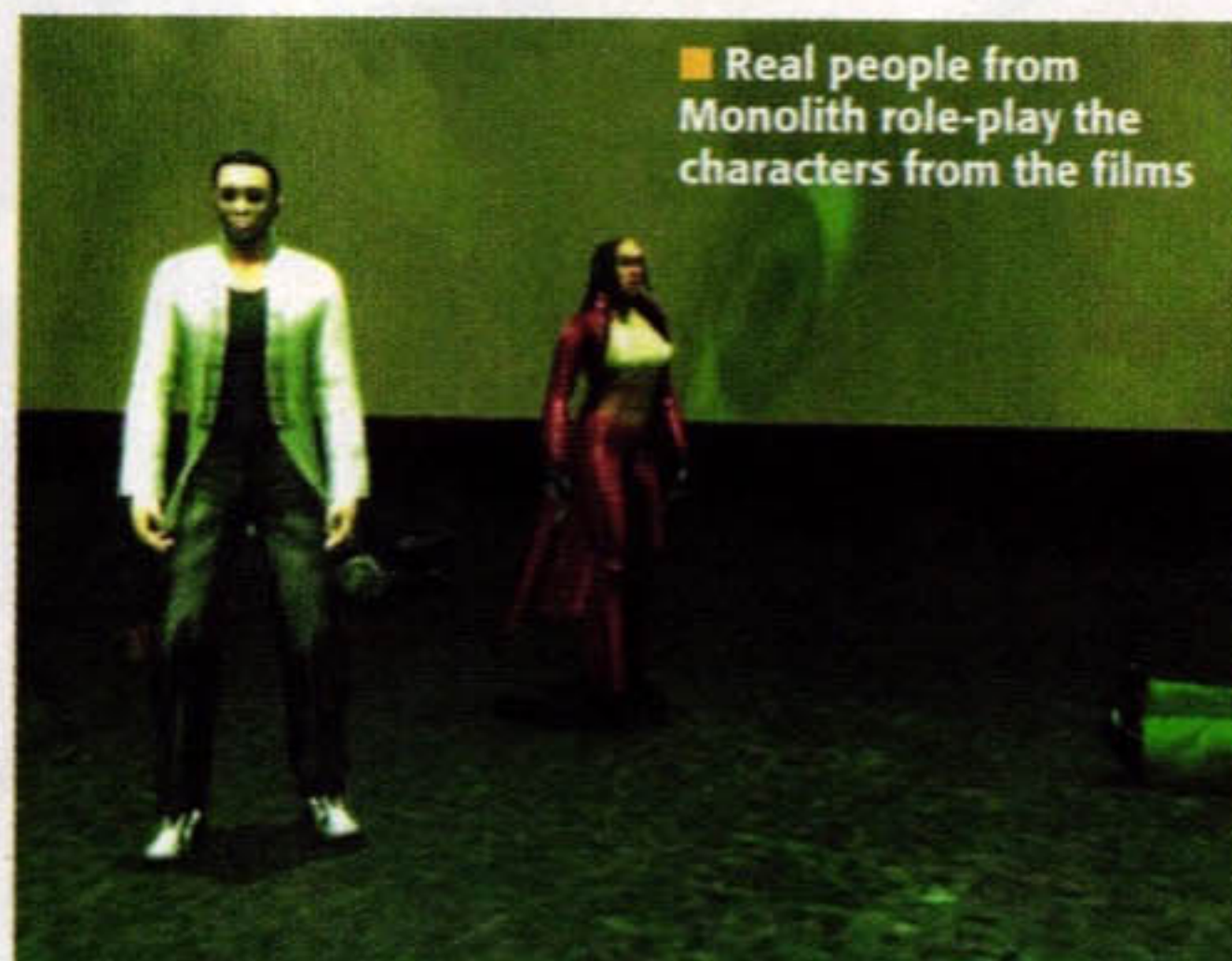
> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 5

Monolith has done the impossible. Somehow, the studio has created a game that takes a license that was already dead to me, dug up and desecrated its corpse, and nailed it to my porch. There might be some sort of redeeming factor or feature somewhere in *The Matrix Online*, but it's buried so deeply under laggy servers (even the low-population ones), dreadful mission and area design, and a completely broken combat engine, that it doesn't matter. Some people will no doubt retort that MMORPG launches are invariably rough while the developer irons out the problems that inevitably pop up. Indeed, there may be a playable, even enjoyable game lurking somewhere under this leprous skin. However, *The Matrix Online* is in such a sorry state that I'll be surprised if the game survives long enough to get even half of its bugs and issues worked out. —ADAM



■ Hyper-jump lets you leap across the city by rooftop



■ Real people from Monolith role-play the characters from the films



■ Agents still patrol the Matrix

■ Controlling armies is nothing short of painful



PC

Stronghold 2

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY/SIMULATION > **PUBLISHER** 2K GAMES > **DEVELOPER** FIREFLY STUDIOS > **RELEASE** APRIL 19 > **ESRB** T

GENRE-BLENDING GONE WRONG

I appreciate attempts to combine old ideas into something new and exciting. When it doesn't work, though, the result is often clumsy and hard to control. This is the root of Stronghold 2's problems – neither the RTS-style combat nor the castle sim elements of the game live up to today's standards.

Chief among its offenses is the woeful interface. For one, you'll have to dig through sub-screens to find out basic top-level information. Also, both unit AI and the means of controlling them are terrible. Going back and playing Warcraft II is less frustrating. These issues could be forgivable if the economic and social models were deep and interesting. Compared to similar simulation titles, they're not. The relationships between resource gathering, peasant happiness, and productivity are a bit too simplistic to be truly engaging. Once you've got your estate set up properly, there's often very little to do other than let things run on autopilot until you meet the victory condition for the scenario. Boring.

The other major problem that Stronghold 2 runs into is unfortunate campaign design. In several scenarios, your objectives are bizarrely balanced to the point of ridiculousness. Likewise, in many cases you'll have to distort your economy so badly that you run out of room to build the structures you need to win. I suppose some strategy fans might be able to forgive Stronghold 2's many flaws, but I'll be playing something a little more polished. —ADAM

PATCH ME UP

If you do decide to pick up Stronghold 2, make absolutely sure to download the latest patch. It's almost unplayable out of the box, but with the patch applied it's at least almost average.



■ Building up your castle takes time and patience

BOTTOM LINE 6.75

> **Concept:** Combine castle-building simulation with bare-bones RTS elements

> **Graphics:** As if being jaggy and low in detail wasn't enough, the framerate suffers horribly when lots of stuff is onscreen

> **Sound:** Some of the voiceovers are funny, but that's the only point of note

> **Playability:** Hands-down one of the worst interfaces to ever grace a strategy game

> **Entertainment:** This does little to stand out from either the strategy or sim crowds

> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

Second Opinion 6

During one of the early missions of Stronghold 2, I found myself staring blankly at my screen as my plodding peons attempted to enact my edicts and commands. I began to feel my head lolling off to the side – my eyes fluttering shut. No matter the amount of caffeine I ingested, I couldn't overcome the incredible ennui that the game so masterfully conveys. As a last resort, I left to do something else for 20 minutes. When I returned, my town was just as I had left it, only now slightly closer to gathering whatever silly resource I was after in the mission. Let me tell you, there's nothing I like more than an interactive game that doesn't need my interaction. —MILLER

PC

Doom 3: Resurrection of Evil

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) > **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION > **DEVELOPER** ID SOFTWARE/NERVE SOFTWARE > **RELEASE** APRIL 5 > **ESRB** M



■ The three infernal Hunters are serious roadblocks to your quest



HELL ON MARS

Resurrection of Evil is the kind of expansion that you simply must get if you own the base game. Doom 3's signature simple-yet-tense style of FPS action is even better in RoE, and the campaign is designed incredibly well. In survival-horror fashion, ammo is far more limited than before, forcing players to embrace the new tools at their disposal. Frustrating though it may be at first, once you become proficient in the use of your environment and the new toys, RoE will suck you in and keep you enthralled until the last demon lies gibbed at your feet.

The basic premise of using lots of explosive weaponry to tear through a demonic invasion is entertaining as ever in this expansion. Sprinkled into the mix this time around are the Grabber and the new artifact, both of which must be utilized well to overcome the steep challenge of RoE's hellish hordes. There's something primally appealing about slowing time to a crawl, grabbing an incoming fire-

ball, and returning it to its malevolent sender.

Tied into these new capabilities are the boss battles in RoE. Each one is an experience unique to itself, rather than the endurance tests of the original game. You'll have to figure out attack patterns, learn the tricks, and do all the things traditionally required to defeat bosses in console games. This is a great change, and it's nice to see a PC title actually learn something from its less technologically-advanced cousins.

Yes, the enemies still get repetitive and their AI predictable, though it's less prevalent in RoE. True, the game continues to rely a little too much on having demons jump out at you unexpectedly. Indeed, the multiplayer (while vastly improved) doesn't really stand up to that of other modern FPSs. But none of these issues get in the way enough to really bring down the awesome experience that is Doom 3: Resurrection of Evil. —ADAM



■ Every environment is hand-crafted to creep you out

BOTTOM LINE 9

> **Concept:** Demons. Shotgun. Dig it

> **Graphics:** It ain't like Doom 3 has gotten any uglier or less scary in the last nine months

> **Sound:** This title should be required study material for aspiring audio designers

> **Playability:** The new Grabber and artifact powers add just enough to the already-tight action

> **Entertainment:** Between vastly improved multiplayer, serious gameplay upgrades, and an all-new solo campaign, this is one Hell of an expansion pack

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 8.75

Given that Doom 3 is one of the most nightmarish and atmospheric games I've played, it's pretty amazing that they've managed to up the ante this time and make the expansion even scarier. Claustrophobic hallways and constantly unexpected encounters with Hell's denizens keep you continually frazzled and on your toes. Of the additions to your arsenal, the Grabber gun is almost certain to be your new favorite – with its ability to fling heavy objects or grab enemies' projectiles and hurl them back. The game can't help but feel a little bit like a retread of the action and story of Doom 3 – but if you enjoyed your first vacation to Mars/Hell, I don't see any reason why a return trip this time shouldn't be just as enjoyable. —MILLER



PSP

ATV Offroad Fury: Blazin' Trails

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA AD HOC OR INFRASTRUCTURE) > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA > **DEVELOPER** CLIMAX > **RELEASE** APRIL 19 > **ESRB** E

THIS GAME BROKE MY HEADPHONES

Despite being called Blazin' Trails, there's little pioneering in this game. Despite looking like a port of the PS2 version, this title does have surprises in store — and they're nasty.

This game controls like junk. Dead spots in the PSP analog stick will either leave you careening from side to side on the track or cursing at its unresponsiveness. More than a few times I'd barrel into the barriers at a corner, despite cranking the stick into the turn. Coupled with this is the fact that the pre-loading isn't as responsive as it should be. On the indoor supercross tracks, with their tight turns and quick jumps, the game's bad controls wreak havoc on your patience and ruin your races. I had to stop myself several times from chucking one of the office's PSPs across the room. I did, however, ruin a pair of Sony headphones (model number MDR-CD180). ATV broke my headphones, and if you're not careful, it may break your will.

The game's wireless features (such as leaderboards, head-to-head racing, and trading cards) are cool, but you won't be trading ATV cards with your friends. You'll be trading horror stories and talking about what you wish you would have bought instead. —**KATO**



Like its PS2 counterpart, this ATV includes custom waypoint courses and minigames

PSP QUICKIES

PSP

Rengoku: The Tower of Purgatory

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA AD HOC) > **PUBLISHER** KONAMI > **DEVELOPER** SUEMI JUN > **RELEASE** APRIL 14 > **ESRB** M



BOTTOM LINE
5

Three minutes after stuffing the Rengoku UMD into your PSP, you will already have extracted the vast majority of the entertainment value out of the disc. The stylish opening cinema is put to shame by the plodding slog of utterly boring gameplay that follows. Likewise, the deep upgrade system is completely wasted by the action itself, which is some of the worst I've ever seen. Maybe if the control was even remotely responsive or the enemy AI didn't totally suck, this could be a good game. Without either of these, and graphics that are bland at best, this title deserves to be left in gaming purgatory forevermore. —**ADAM**

PSP

Ape Escape: On the Loose

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM (2-PLAYER VIA AD HOC) > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA > **DEVELOPER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** MARCH 24 > **ESRB** E



BOTTOM LINE
6.5

As much as I'd love to declare an Ape Escape renaissance, I'm afraid this PSP port just isn't the game to bring my beloved simians back into the limelight. On one hand, I can see the logic in bringing Ape Escape to Sony's new portable: it's a colorful, fun in-house series in a genre that's woefully underrepresented on the system. However, those of us that love Ape Escape knew there was going to be trouble. Simply, the game was built around a (for its day) unique dual-analog control scheme. Since this isn't possible on the PSP, what's left is merely a slightly annoying, if charming, run-of-the-mill platformer. —**MATT**

PSP

MLB

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 2-PLAYER VIA AD HOC OR INFRASTRUCTURE) > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA > **DEVELOPER** 989 SPORTS > **RELEASE** APRIL 10 > **ESRB** E



A POCKET-SIZED SLAM

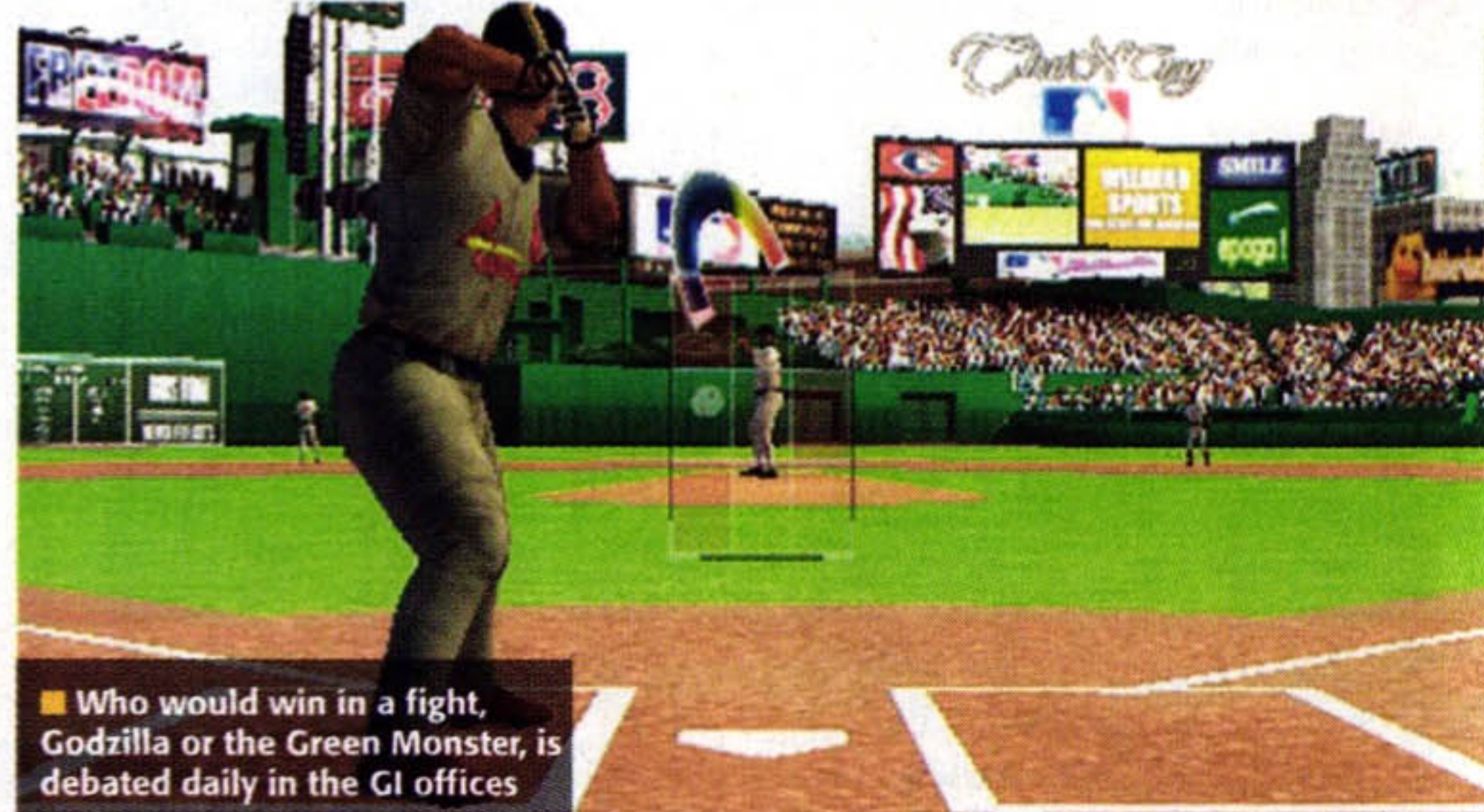
I don't know what knocked me out quicker: Miller's wild flailing of a baseball bat near my desk, or the fact that this game looks and plays almost identically to its console counterpart. Needless to say, 989 Sports has done a bang-up job bringing its flagship sports franchise to PSP.

When you step onto the field, you'll see that very little has changed. Every detail is accounted for in the stadiums, all of the big name hitters can be recognized by their signature stances, and the fielding animations are delivered with a Gold Glove grace. Most of the gameplay idiosyncrasies are accounted for as well. Pitcher confidence is gauged by the varying speed of the pitching meter, and batters can try to get into the mind of the hurler by guessing what pitch type is going to be thrown and where it will end up in the catcher's mitt. Although some sacrifices had to be made (such as the ability to manually lead off), the PSP accommodates the play nicely. The size of the ball has increased slightly for visibility and taking a cut has a nice feel to it. The sensitivity of the analog nub is perfect for fielding, but it is a bit loose when it comes to pitch placement. It takes a steady hand to paint the corners.

The gameplay has transitioned smoothly, but 989 scaled the remainder of the game down significantly. Presentation wise, the commentary team still calls one heck of a game, but it would appear that someone forgot to let the TV crew into the stadium. Replays and transitional animations are nowhere to be found.

Sadly, 989 also tore through the front office like George Steinbrenner with a stack of pink slips. Along with player creation, 989 cut both Career and Franchise modes. As consolation, Season mode is still intact.

MLB is a respectable game on console, and now it has a home on PSP. Baseball on the go is now just as powerful as it is on your TV. —**REINER**



Who would win in a fight, Godzilla or the Green Monster, is debated daily in the GI offices

BOTTOM LINE
8

> **Concept:** Remove steroids from baseball and the players shrink to the size of ants. Surprisingly, they still play one heck of a game

> **Graphics:** The presentation took a serious hit, but MLB is still a graphical powerhouse

> **Sound:** The commentators are very insightful, but I could have done without the PA if he only says, "Run scored" whenever a runs scores

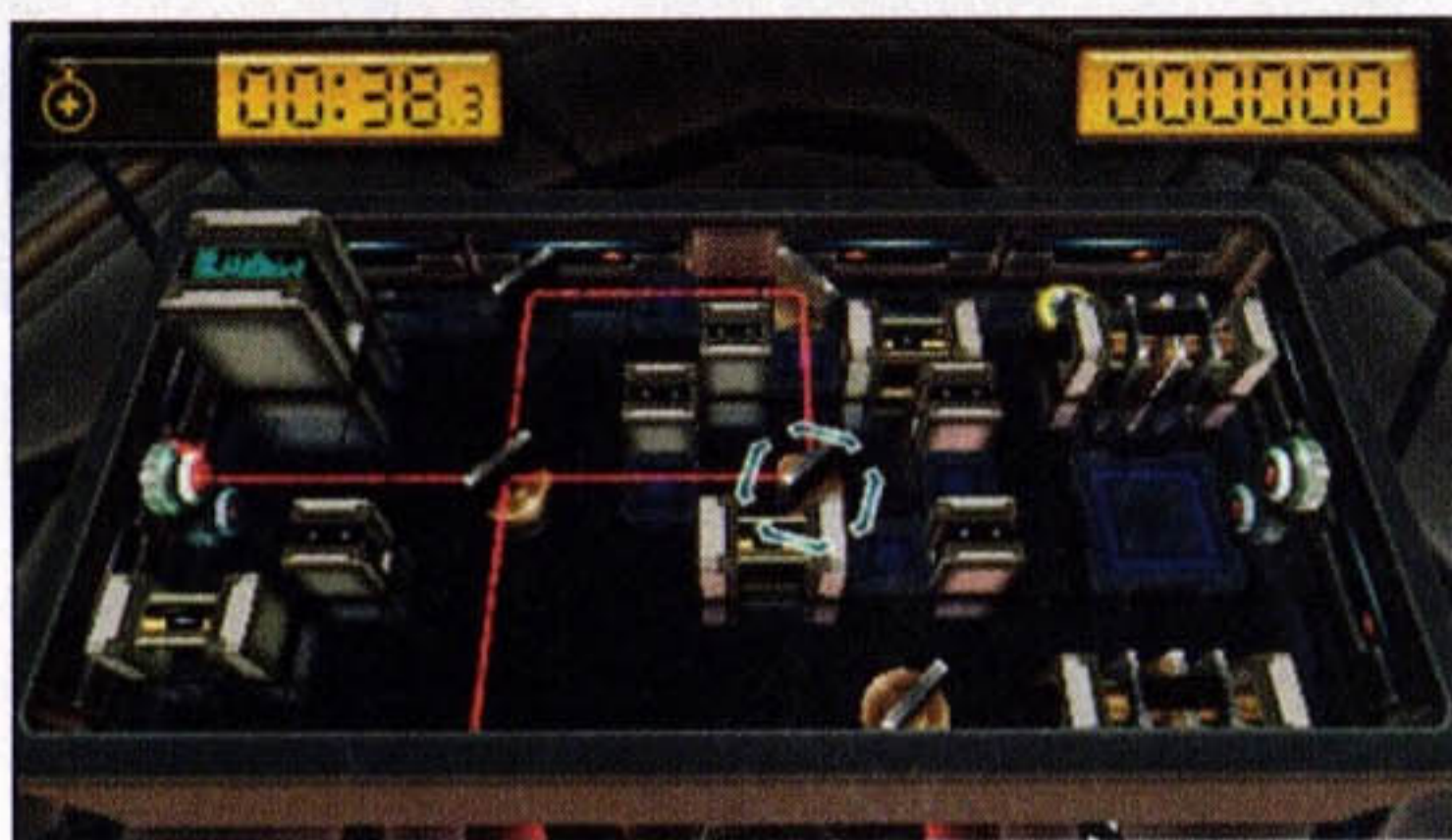
> **Playability:** If not for the slippery pitch placement, MLB's gameplay fires strikes

> **Entertainment:** Lacking the truly innovative features of the console version, but the gameplay is nearly identical

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion **7.75**

I applaud Sony's skillful replication of their PS2 MLB title (minus the franchise stuff), but it's so accurate that it even includes some of the bugs and inconsistent pitching. I thought that the movement of pitches and the tracking of strikes around the edges of the plate were off at times. Then again, it's a fast and entertaining on-the-go title that you will mistake for a home console game. —**KATO**



PSP

Smart Bomb

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER PUZZLE (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA AD HOC) > **PUBLISHER** EIDOS > **DEVELOPER** CORE DESIGN > **RELEASE** MAY > **ESRB** E10+

SMART BOMBED

Imagine, if you will, that the Unabomber wasn't actually cabin-dwelling lunatic Ted Kaczynski, but rather classic Batman villain the Riddler. That's basically the idea behind Smart Bomb. There are deadly explosives planted around the globe, and the only way to disarm them is by solving a series of puzzles inside.

Every bomb contains a set of puzzles which are all simple, timed tasks like positioning mirrors to aim a laser, guiding a robotic probe around a track, a Marble Madness-esque game, and many more. There is a lot of variety to the puzzles, but two main problems plague the game. The puzzles are more like minigames than actual brainteasers – you always know what to do, you simply have to accomplish it within the short time limit. Some of the tasks require a bit of thought, while others are simply reflex-oriented. None of them really strain your intellectual muscle, and get quite boring after the nth variation. Also, you must complete each puzzle in the bomb in a single run. Fail one game, and you'll have to do them all over. Many of the minigames simply aren't much fun the first time, but they become horrendously painful by the fifth try. In short, this Bomb is a dud. —**JEREMY**

BOTTOM LINE 6

> **Concept:** Disarm a maniac's deadly explosives – with the power of your mind!

> **Graphics:** Not bad, but certainly not the game to play if you want to show off the PSP's capabilities

> **Sound:** BOOM! Kinda like that

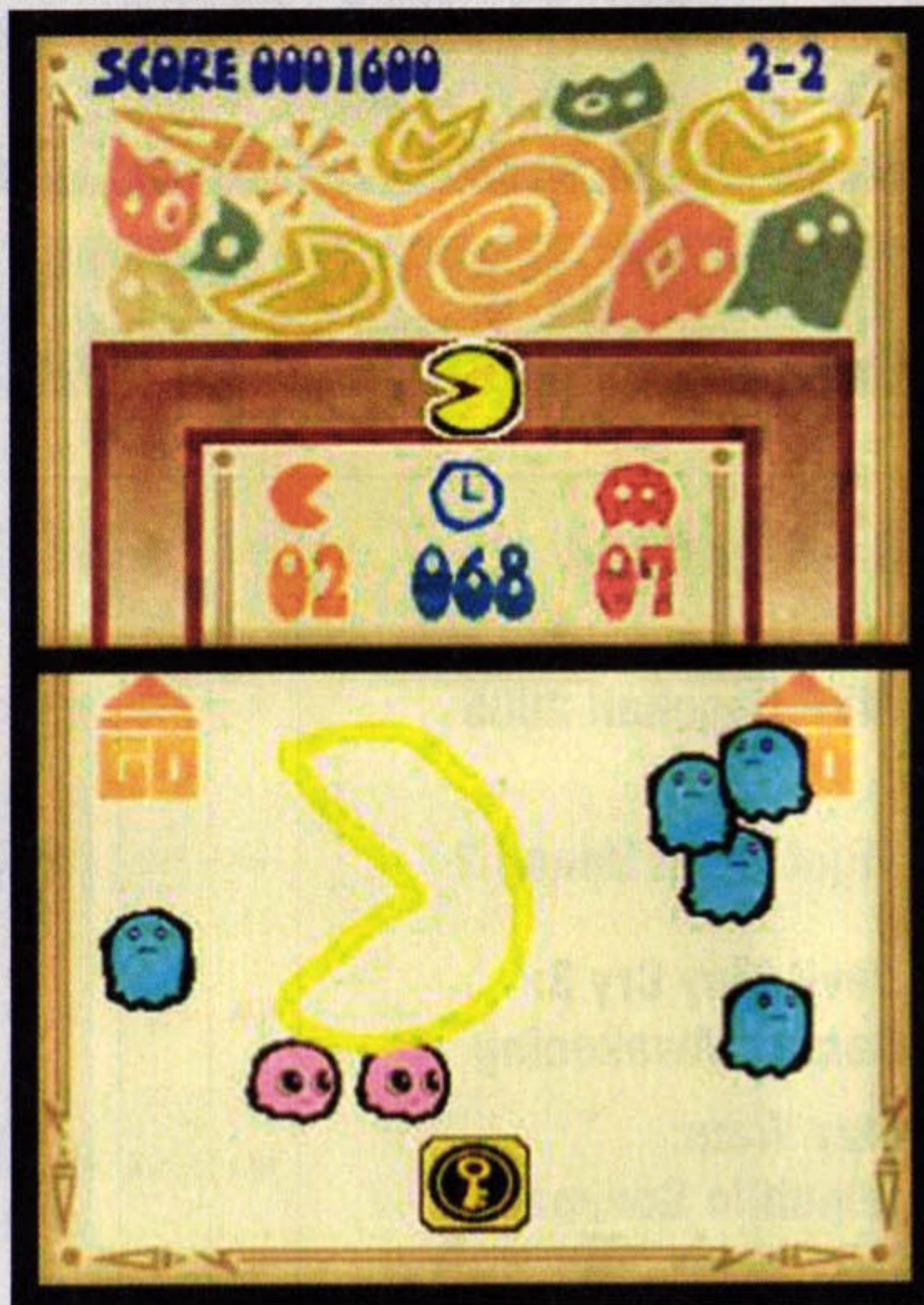
> **Playability:** If you have two or more thumbs, you can probably handle this

> **Entertainment:** The smorgasbord of puzzle types makes for a game a bit like WarioWare, only without the rapid pace or charm

> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

Second Opinion 7

Replete with originality and capable of bending player's minds in a multitude of ways, Smart Bomb is a hearty feast for puzzle fanatics and one of the most unique titles to come along in quite some time. Where it soars in offering up varied and inventive gameplay, it also brings about an incredible level of frustration. As amusing as some of the bomb-defusing puzzles are, many are either overly difficult or poorly designed. There's some great gameplay here, but you often have to suffer to reach it. —**REINER**



NINTENDO DS

Pac-Pix

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/PUZZLE > **PUBLISHER** NAMCO > **DEVELOPER** NAMCO > **RELEASE** APRIL 26 > **ESRB** E

DRAW THE LINE

Honestly, I saw a brief demo of this game at last year's E3 and didn't really pay it any mind. At first glance, it seemed to be little more than a cute gimmick to showcase the DS's touch screen features. Well, that's why we actually play the games, people.

Pac-Pix is a genuinely novel game, and probably the best-realized of this new crop of touch-screen oriented, arcade style titles that have proliferated on the DS. The basic mechanics are simple: you draw a Pac-Man on the touch screen, and then control his movements by drawing walls to change the direction he's heading. On each level, you must eat a specific number of ghosts using a limited number of Pac-Men. Thankfully, Pac-Pix actually develops and evolves over the course of gameplay, unveiling new mechanics and more complex levels. After a while, you'll be able to draw arrows to shoot down ghosts on the top screen, hit switches to unlock gates that allow Pac-Man to travel to the top playfield, and even draw bombs that can blow up obstacles and walls. There are also boss battles that force you to think outside of the box in clever ways. A nice addition to the DS library. —**MATT**

BOTTOM LINE 7.75

> **Concept:** Draw goofy Pac-Men and make them do things with surprisingly engaging DS play

> **Graphics:** Nothing spectacular, but the deformed Pac-Men I drew were an endless source of amusement

> **Sound:** Sing-songy, dinky video game music never gets old! Oh wait, actually it does

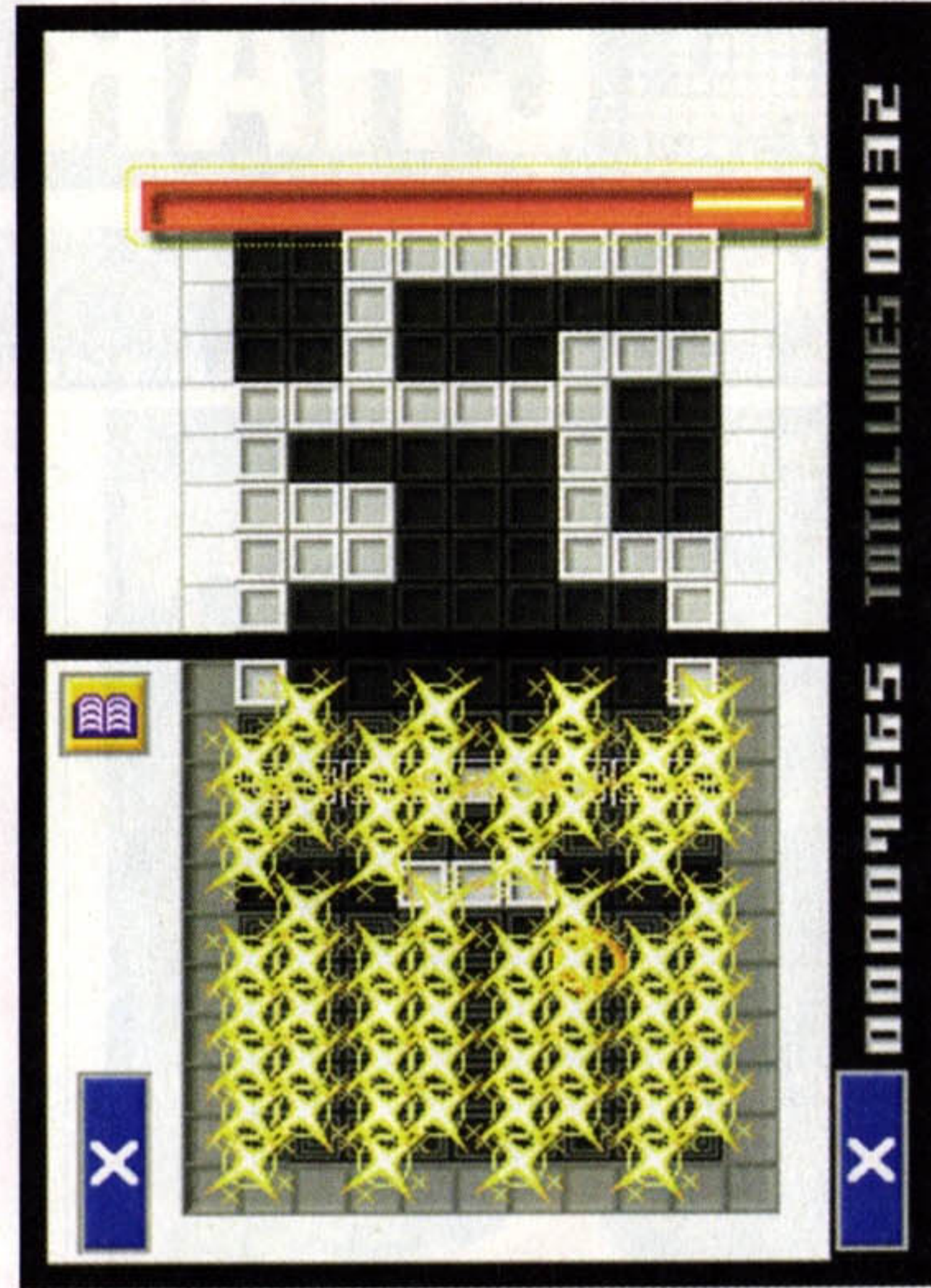
> **Playability:** A little tricky at times, but it's cool to see some depth being added to stylus gameplay

> **Entertainment:** A satisfying, inventive title for the DS crowd

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 7.5

What are you, Pac-Pix? Tech demo or full-fledged puzzle game? While my time in the first five levels pointed unwaveringly toward the tech demo idea, the title really grows after that hump into a full-fledged game. Now, I don't think that it's a terribly awesome puzzler, but there are some interesting ideas and a real sense of urgency the further you get into it. Pac-Pix uses the DS's hardware well, but lacks the addictive quality of a truly great mindbender. —**LISA**



NINTENDO DS

Polarium

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER PUZZLE (UP TO 2-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS) > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** MITCHELL CORP. > **RELEASE** APRIL 19 > **ESRB** E

NEXT LEVEL OTHELLO

The new generation of handhelds has led to the most surprising development of 2005: the reemergence of puzzle games. With the highly acclaimed Lumines, Archer Maclean's Mercury, Pac-Pix, and now Polarium, there are suddenly a number of interesting titles in a genre that had been in decline for years.

Polarium manages to combine concepts from a few classic puzzlers (Tetris, Othello, and Snake) into an addictive new gameplay mechanic that utilizes the DS's touch screen. Your basic goal is to turn the black and white blocks on the playfield one color, thereby eliminating them. You do this by drawing a line with the stylus that reverses the color of every block it touches. Like any great puzzler, it's simple at first but far deeper than it appears at first glance. In addition to main mode, where blocks fall from the top of the screen, there is also Puzzles mode (in which you must complete the screen with one stroke) and solid multiplayer. However, I really came to realize how great Polarium was when I went to bed after a long day of play. As I closed my eyes, visions of Polarium blocks began dancing through my head. That, for me, is the sign of a truly exceptional puzzle title. —**MATT**

BOTTOM LINE 8.25

> **Concept:** A beguiling mix of Tetris, Othello, and Snake

> **Graphics:** I guarantee you've NEVER seen blocks look this good. Or, maybe you have

> **Sound:** Thankfully, Polarium opts for a cool, techno-oriented soundtrack instead of kiddie tunes

> **Playability:** Other than some minor quibbles, it makes good use of touch screen control

> **Entertainment:** It takes a while to get used to the gameplay style, but after that it's very addictive

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 8

Good puzzlers are a delicious entrée for any handheld console, in my opinion. DS's Polarium is like the cream puff of Tetris-inspired games – deliciously fun, but not swoon-worthy; satisfying, but just not quite big enough to inspire lengthy sessions. What I really wanted from this game was a balance of speed and variety so that longer games would be both allowed and encouraged. As it stands, this is a nice puzzler that will warp your mind, but for only as long as a single bite. —**LISA**



CHARTS

An In-Depth Listing Of The Best Selling Games

TOP 20

Listings Based Upon NPD Data For March 2005 Based On Units Sold

1 GRAN TURISMO 4 (PS2)



Spring has always been the slow season for video games. If a publisher so much as hinted at releasing a game during this time, they were instantly stoned to death, then launched into space. This year, however, it would appear that the fear of Spring is gone. With GT 4 leading the way, we could be looking at a brighter future where games sell year-round.

2 MVP BASEBALL 2005 (PS2)



Baseball has once again reclaimed its crown as the most popular sport in America! Hooray! Wait... What's that? It's not the most popular sport? People watch football? So why do people love it? Throwing and kicking? It sounds kinda dumb. Wait... You say that they also rub their butts on stuff and moon people? Hot damn! You're totally right! Baseball has nothing on football!

3 FIGHT NIGHT ROUND 2 (PS2)



Before you read this, do us a favor: Make a fist, then punch yourself in the face. Repeat this process until you can hardly see. If you didn't enjoy this little experiment of ours or cried during the entire process, run out and pick up Fight Night Round 2. It's the safe way to box.

4 DEVIL MAY CRY 3 (PS2)



Message from Dante: "All I hear is people talking about how great God of War is. If it was so amazing, then why is my game totally kicking its ass in sales? Doesn't Sony know that games that don't begin with pizza parties are doomed? Idiots! It's more like God of Bore if you ask me."

5 STAR WARS: REPUBLIC COMMANDO (XBOX)



Another message from Dante: "Dear George Lucas... Bite me! My game totally whooped yours! Ha ha! LucasArts really should have known that real men don't wear shirts. Idiots! It's more like Star Bores if you ask me."

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	System	Score	Release	Price
1	Gran Turismo 4	1	PS2	9.25	02-05	\$49
2	MVP Baseball 2005	4	PS2	8.5	02-05	\$29
3	Fight Night Round 2	N/A	PS2	9.25	03-05	\$49
4	Devil May Cry 3: Dante's Awakening	N/A	PS2	9	03-05	\$49
5	Star Wars: Republic Commando	N/A	XBOX	8.25	03-05	\$50
6	God of War	N/A	PS2	10	03-05	\$50
7	Fight Night Round 2	N/A	XBOX	9.25	03-05	\$49
8	Major League Baseball 2K5	N/A	PS2	8.5	02-05	\$19
9	Brothers in Arms: Road to Hill 30	N/A	XBOX	8.5	03-05	\$46
10	MVP Baseball 2005	17	XBOX	8.5	02-05	\$29
11	Tekken 5	N/A	PS2	8.75	02-05	\$50
12	Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory	N/A	XBOX	9.75	03-05	\$50
13	Major League Baseball 2K5	N/A	XBOX	8.5	02-05	\$20
14	Twisted Metal: Head On	N/A	PSP	8.75	03-05	\$40
15	Need for Speed: Underground Rivals	N/A	PSP	8	03-05	\$49
16	MX Vs ATV Unleashed	N/A	PS2	8	03-05	\$40
17	WarioWare: Twisted!	16	DS	8.25	02-05	\$34
18	Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	3	PS2	10	10-04	\$47
19	Untold Legends: Brotherhood of the Blade	N/A	PSP	7.75	03-05	\$40
20	Robots	N/A	GBA	N/A	02-05	\$28

TOP 10 JAPAN

Rank	Title	System
1	Tekken 5	PS2
2	Winning Eleven 8: Liveware Evolution	PS2
3	Kirby: Canvas Curse	DS
4	Wild Arms: The 4th Detonator	PS2
5	Shining Force Neo	PS2
6	Dynasty Warriors 5	PS2
7	Egg Monster Hero	PS2
8	Mega Man Battle Network 5: Team Colonel	DS
9	Memories Off After Rain Vol. 3	GBA
10	Bleach	PSP



Source: Game Japan

TOP 10 GI

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	System
1	Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition	1	Multi
2	Jade Empire	4	Xbox
3	God of War	2	PS2
4	Doom 3: Resurrection of Evil	N/A	PC
5	Pariah	N/A	Xbox
6	Cold Winter	N/A	PS2
7	Lumines	7	PSP
8	Resident Evil 4	6	GC
9	Forza Motorsport	N/A	Xbox
10	Gran Turismo 4	8	PS2



The Staff's Favorite Picks

TOP 10 PC

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	Price
1	The Sims 2 University	1	\$34
2	World of Warcraft	2	\$50
3	The Sims 2	3	\$45
4	Brothers in Arms: Road to Hill 30	N/A	\$15
5	Half-Life 2	4	\$51
6	The Sims Deluxe	7	\$44
7	Star Wars: Republic Commando	5	\$20
8	The Matrix Online	N/A	\$44
9	Halo: Combat Evolved	8	\$29
10	Star Wars Knights of the Old Republic II: The Sith Lords	6	\$25



Based On Monthly Units Sold

PLAYSTATION 2

Ace Combat 5: The Unsung War	9	Dec-04
Alien Hominid	8	Dec-04
Ape Escape: Pumped and Primed	5.5	Jan-05
Area 51	8.5	May-05
Atari Anthology!	8.5	Jan-05
ATV Offroad Fury 3	7	Jan-05
Backyard Wrestling 2: There Goes The Neighborhood	5.75	Jan-05
Bad Boys: Miami Takedown	5	Dec-04
Bard's Tale, The	8.25	Dec-04
Battle Assault 3 Featuring Gundam Seed	4	Jan-05



Ys: The Ark of Napishtim - PS2 - Mar-05

Blood Will Tell	5	Nov-04
BloodRayne 2	8	Nov-04
Brothers in Arms: Road to Hill 30	8.5	Apr-05
Burnout 3: Takedown	9.25	Oct-04
Cabela's Deer Hunt 2005	4	Oct-04
Call of Duty: Finest Hour	8.5	Jan-05
Capcom Fighting Evolution	6	Dec-04
Champions: Return to Arms	8	Mar-05
ChoroQ	6.25	Oct-04
Cold Fear	6.75	May-05
Conflict: Vietnam	7	Oct-04
Constantine	6.5	Apr-05
Crash 'n Burn	7	Dec-04
Crash Twinsanity	6	Nov-04
Dance Dance Revolution Extreme	8.25	Oct-04
Death By Degrees	5.5	Mar-05
Def Jam: Fight for NY	8.75	Oct-04
Devil May Cry 3: Dante's Awakening	9	Mar-05
Dragon Ball Z Budokai 3	5	Jan-05
Drive to Survive	7	May-05
Dukes of Hazzard: Return of the General Lee	6	Oct-04
Dynasty Warriors 5	7	May-05
ESPN College Hoops 2K5	9	Dec-04
ESPN NBA 2K5	9	Nov-04
EyeToy: AntiGrav	7	Dec-04
FIFA Soccer 2005	7.75	Nov-04
FIFA Street	6.5	Apr-05
Fight Club	5.5	Jan-05
Fight Night: Round 2	9.25	Mar-05
Final Fantasy XI: Chains of Promathia	7.75	Dec-04
Forgotten Realms: Demon Stone	8.75	Oct-04
Fullmetal Alchemist and the Broken Angel	4.75	Feb-05
Funkmaster Flex Digital Hitz Factory	6.75	Oct-04
Gallop Racer 2004	8.25	Oct-04
Getaway: Black Monday, The	7	Feb-05
Get On Da Mic	5	Dec-04
Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex	7.25	Dec-04
Ghost Recon 2	6.5	Feb-05
God of War	10	Apr-05
Godzilla: Save the Earth	6	Dec-04
GoldenEye: Rogue Agent	8.75	Jan-05
Gradius V	6.25	Oct-04
Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	10	Dec-04
Gran Turismo 4	9.25	Mar-05
Gretzky NHL 2005	6.5	Jan-05
Growlanser: Generations	7.5	Jan-05
Guilty Gear Isuka	6.75	Dec-04
Gungrave: Overdose	4.25	Nov-04
Guy Game, The	3	Oct-04
Haunting Ground	4.75	May-05
Headhunter: Redemption	6.75	Oct-04
Hot Wheel Stunt Track Challenge	6.75	Feb-05
Incredibles, The	6.5	Jan-05
Inuyasha: The Secret of the Cursed Mask	4.25	Jan-05
Jak 3	9.25	Nov-04
Karaoke Revolution Volume 3	8.25	Nov-04
Katamari Damacy	8	Oct-04
Kessen III	7.75	Mar-05
Killzone	7.5	Dec-04
King Arthur	7.25	Nov-04
King of Fighters: Maximum Impact	6.5	Nov-04
Kuon	6	Nov-04
LEGO Star Wars	7.5	May-05
Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude	7.5	Nov-04
Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events	6.25	Jan-05
Lord of the Rings: The Third Age, The	8.5	Dec-04
Major League Baseball 2K5	8.5	Mar-05
Mega Man X Command Mission	6	Oct-04
Mega Man X8	8.25	Jan-05
Mercenaries	7.5	Feb-05
Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater	9.5	Jan-05
Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition	9.5	May-05
Midway Arcade Treasures 2	9	Oct-04
MLB 2006	8.25	Apr-05
Monster Hunter	5	Nov-04
Mortal Kombat: Deception	9.5	Oct-04
Musashi: Samurai Legend	8.25	Mar-05

MVP Baseball 2005	8.5	Mar-05
MX vs. ATV Unleashed	8	Apr-05
Nano Breaker	5	Mar-05
NARC	4.5	May-05
NBA Live 2005	8.25	Nov-04
NBA Street V3	9	Mar-05
NCAA March Madness 2005	8.25	Dec-04
Need for Speed: Underground 2	8	Dec-04
Neo Contra	7.75	Nov-04
NFL Street 2	7.5	Feb-05
Nightmare of Druaga: Fushigino Dungeon, The	4	Nov-04
Outlaw Golf 2	7.5	Oct-04
Pinball Hall of Fame: The Gottlieb Collection	6.75	Feb-05
Playboy: The Mansion	6.5	Apr-05
Power Rangers: Dino Thunder	6	Dec-04
Prince of Persia: Warrior Within	9.25	Jan-05
Project Snowblind	8.25	Apr-05
Punisher, The	7.5	Feb-05
Ratchet and Clank: Up Your Arsenal	10	Nov-04
Rapala Pro Fishing	8.25	Oct-04
Red Ninja: End of Honor	3.75	Apr-05
Red Star, The	7.5	Oct-04
Resident Evil Outbreak File #2	7.5	Apr-05
Rise of the Kasai	7	May-05
Robotech: Invasion	6.5	Oct-04
Rocky: Legends	6.5	Dec-04
Rumble Roses	7.75	Jan-05
Samurai Warriors Xtreme Legends	6.75	Jan-05
Sega Classics Collection	6.5	Apr-05
Sega Superstars	8	Dec-04
Shadow Hearts: Covenant	8	Oct-04
Shadow of Rome	8.5	Feb-05
Shaman King: Power of Spirit	6.5	Jan-05
Shark Tale	6.5	Dec-04
ShellShock Nam '67	6	Oct-04
Shining Tears	7.75	Mar-05
Shin Megami Tensei: Digital Devil Saga	7	Apr-05
Shin Megami Tensei: Nocturne	7.5	Nov-04
Sly 2: Band of Thieves	8.75	Oct-04
Sonic Mega Collection Plus	7.5	Dec-04
Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory	9.25	May-05
Spongebob Squarepants: The Movie	6	Dec-04
Spy Fiction	7.5	Oct-04
Spyro: A Hero's Tail	6.5	Nov-04
Star Wars: Battlefront	8	Oct-04
Stella Deus: The Gate of Eternity	7.5	May-05
Street Racing Syndicate	6.75	Oct-04
Suikoden IV	8.5	Feb-05
Super Monkey Ball Deluxe	8	Apr-05
Taiko Drum Master	7.75	Dec-04
Tak 2: The Staff of Dreams	7.25	Nov-04
Technic Beat	7.5	Nov-04
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 2: Battle Nexus	6	Nov-04
Tekken 5	8.75	Apr-05
Tenchu: Fatal Shadows	7	Mar-05
Terminator 3: Redemption	8	Oct-04
Test Drive: Eve of Destruction	7.75	Oct-04
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2005	8.5	Oct-04
Time Crisis: Crisis Zone	6.75	Nov-04
TimeSplitters Future Perfect	9	Apr-05
TOCA Race Driver: Ultimate Racing Simulator	7.5	Nov-04
Tony Hawk's Underground 2	9.75	Nov-04
Ty the Tasmanian Tiger 2: Bush Rescue	6.75	Nov-04
Under the Skin	5	Oct-04
Urbz: Sims in the City, The	7.75	Dec-04
Vietcong: Purple Haze	5	Dec-04
Viewtiful Joe 2	9	Dec-04
Virtua Quest	5.5	Jan-05
Winning Eleven 8	8.75	Mar-05
World Tour Soccer 2006	6	Apr-05
Worms: Forts Under Siege	5.75	Apr-05
WWE Smackdown! Vs. RAW	8.5	Dec-04
X-Men Legends	9	Nov-04

Area 51	8.5	May-05
Army Men: Sarge's War	5	Oct-04
Atari Anthology!	8.5	Jan-05
Backyard Wrestling 2: There Goes The Neighborhood	5.75	Jan-05
Bad Boys: Miami Takedown	5	Dec-04
Bard's Tale, The	8.25	Dec-04
Blinx 2: Masters of Time & Space	7	Jan-05
BloodRayne 2	8	Nov-04
Brothers in Arms: Road to Hill 30	8.5	May-05
Burnout 3: Takedown	9.25	Oct-04
Cabela's Deer Hunt 2005	4	Oct-04
Call of Duty: Finest Hour	8.5	Jan-05
Chicago Enforcer	2	Mar-05
Close Combat: First to Fight	6	May-05
Cold Fear	6.75	May-05
Colin McRae Rally 2005	8.25	Oct-04
Conflict: Vietnam	7	Oct-04
Constantine	6.5	Apr-05
Crash 'n Burn	7	Dec-04
Crash Twinsanity	6	Nov-04

Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events	6.25	Jan-05
Lord of the Rings: The Third Age, The	8.5	Dec-04
Mario Party 6	6.25	Feb-05
Mario Power Tennis	8.5	Jan-05
Mega Man X Command Mission	6	Oct-04
Metroid Prime 2: Echoes	9.5	Jan-05
Midway Arcade Treasures 2	9	Oct-04
Mortal Kombat: Deception	8.5	Apr-05
MVP Baseball 2005	8.5	Mar-05
NBA Live 2005	8.25	Nov-04
NBA Street V3	9	Mar-05
Need for Speed: Underground 2	8	Dec-04
NFL Street 2	7.5	Feb-05
Paper Mario 2: The Thousand-Year Door	6.75	Nov-04
Power Rangers: Dino Thunder	6	Dec-04
Prince of Persia: Warrior Within	9.25	Jan-05
Resident Evil 4	10	Mar-05
Scaler	4.5	Feb-05
Shark Tale	6.5	Dec-04
Spongebob Squarepants: The Movie	6	Dec-04
Spyro: A Hero's Tail	6.5	Nov-04
Star Fox Assault	7	Apr-05
Street Racing Syndicate	6.75	Oct-04
Tak 2: The Staff of Dreams	7.25	Nov-04
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 2: Battle Nexus	6	Nov-04
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Urbz: Sims in the City, The	7.75	Dec-04
Viewtiful Joe 2	9	Dec-04
Virtua Quest	5.5	Jan-05
WWE Day of Reckoning	8.25	Oct-04
X-Men Legends	9	Nov-04

XBOX

Area 51	8.5	May-05
Army Men: Sarge's War	5	Oct-04
Atari Anthology!	8.5	Jan-05
Backyard Wrestling 2: There Goes The Neighborhood	5.75	Jan-05
Bad Boys: Miami Takedown	5	Dec-04
Bard's Tale, The	8.25	Dec-04
Blinx 2: Masters of Time & Space	7	Jan-05
BloodRayne 2	8	Nov-04
Brothers in Arms: Road to Hill 30	8.5	May-05
Burnout 3: Takedown	9.25	Oct-04
Cabela's Deer Hunt 2005	4	Oct-04
Call of Duty: Finest Hour	8.5	Jan-05
Chicago Enforcer	2	Mar-05
Close Combat: First to Fight	6	May-05
Cold Fear	6.75	May-05
Colin McRae Rally 2005	8.25	Oct-04
Conflict: Vietnam	7	Oct-04
Constantine	6.5	Apr-05
Crash 'n Burn	7	Dec-04
Crash Twinsanity	6	Nov-04

Dead or Alive Ultimate - Xbox - Dec-04

Dai Senryaku VII: Modern Military Tactics	8	Mar-05
Dance Dance Revolution Ultramix 2	7.75	Dec-04
Dead or Alive Ultimate	9	Dec-04
Def Jam: Fight for NY	8.75	Oct-04
Doom 3	9.25	Apr-05
Drive to Survive	7	May-05
Dukes of Hazzard: Return of the General Lee	6	Oct-04
ESPN College Hoops 2K5	9	Dec-04
ESPN NBA 2K5	9	Nov-04
Fable	9.5	Oct-04
Fatal Frame II: Crimson Butterfly Director's Cut	9.25	Dec-04
FIFA Soccer 2005	7.75	Nov-04
FIFA Street	6.5	Apr-05
Fight Club	5.5	Jan-05
Fight Night: Round 2	9.25	Mar-05
Galleon	4.25	Oct-04
Ghost Recon 2	8	Jan-05
Godzilla: Save the Earth	6	Dec-04
GoldenEye: Rogue Agent	6.75	Jan-05
Gunggriffon: Allied Strike	6	Feb-05
Guy Game, The	3	Oct-04
Halo 2	10	Dec-04
Hot Wheel Stunt Track Challenge	6.75	Feb-05
Incredibles, The	6.5	Jan-05
Jade Empire	9.5	May-05
Karaoke Revolution	7.75	Dec-04
King Arthur	7.25	Nov-04
Kingdom Under Fire: The Crusaders	7.75	Nov-04
LEGO Star Wars	7.5	May-05
Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude	7.5	Nov-04
Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events	6.25	Jan-05

GAMECUBE

Alien Hominid	8	Dec-04
Bad Boys: Miami Takedown	5	Dec-04
Baten Kaitos: Wings of Eternity and the Lost Ocean	8.75	Dec-04
Call of Duty: Finest Hour	8.5	Jan-05
Def Jam: Fight for NY	8.75	Oct-04
Donkey Kong Jungle Beat	7.5	Apr-05
Donkey Konga	7	Nov-04
FIFA Soccer 2005	7.75	Nov-04
FIFA Street	6.5	Apr-05
Fight Night: Round 2	9.25	Mar-05
GoldenEye: Rogue Agent	6.75	Jan-05
Incredibles, The	6.5	Jan-05
King Arthur	7.25	Nov-04

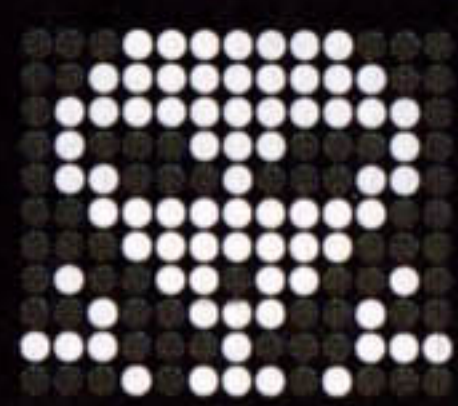


Alien Hominid - GC - Dec-04

Major League Baseball 2K5	8.5	Mar-05
Mechassault 2: Lone Wolf	9.25	Feb-05
Men of Valor	7.75	Nov-04
Mercenaries	7.5	Feb-05
Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition	9.5	May-05
Midway Arcade Treasures 2	9	Oct-04
Mortal Kombat: Deception	9.5	Oct-04
MX vs. ATV Unleashed	8	Apr-05
MVP Baseball 2005	8.5	Mar-05
NARC	4.5	May-05
NBA Live 2005	8.25	Nov-04
NBA Street V3	9	Mar-05
NCAA March Madness 2005	8.25	Dec-04
Need for Speed: Underground 2	8	Dec-04
NFL Street 2	7.5	Feb-05
Oddworld Stranger's Wrath	9	Feb-05
Otogi 2: Immortal Warriors	7	Oct-04
Outlaw Golf 2	7.5	Oct-04
OutRun 2	6.5	Dec-04
Phantom Dust	7	Mar-05
Pinball Hall of Fame: The Gottlieb Collection	6.75	Feb-05
Playboy: The Mansion	6.5	Apr-05
Prince of Persia: Warrior Within	9.25	Jan-05
Project Snowblind	8.25	Apr-05
Psychonauts	8.75	May-05
Punisher, The	7.5	Feb-05
Pure Pinball	5.75	Oct-04
Red Ninja: End of Honor	3.75	Apr-05
Red Star, The	7.5	Oct-04
Robotech: Invasion	6.5	Oct-04
Rocky: Legends	6.5	Dec-04
Scaler	4.5	Feb-05
Scrapland	6.5	Apr-05
Shark Tale	6.5	Dec-04
ShellShock Nam '67	6	Oct-04
Sims 2, The	8.75	Nov-04
Sonic Mega Collection Plus	7.5	Dec-04
Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory	9.75	Apr-05
Spongebob Squarepants: The Movie	6	Dec-04
Spyro: A Hero's Tail	6.5	Nov-04
Star Wars: Battlefront	8	Oct-04
Star Wars Knights of the Old Republic II: The Sith Lords	9.25	Feb-05
Star Wars: Republic Commando	8.25	Mar-05
Still Life	5.5	Apr-05
Street Racing Syndicate	6.75	Oct-04
Super Monkey Ball Deluxe	8	Apr-05
SVC Chaos: SNK vs. Capcom Syberia II	6.5	Nov-04
Tak 2: The Staff of Dreams	7.25	Nov-04
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 2: Battle Nexus	6	Nov-04
Terminator 3: Redemption	8	Oct-04
Test Drive: Eve of Destruction	7.75	Oct-04
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2005	8.5	Oct-04
TimeSplitters Future Perfect	9	Apr-05
Tony Hawk's Underground 2	9.75	Nov-04
Top Gear RPM Tuning	5	Apr-05
Tork: Prehistoric Punk	6	Mar-05
Tron 2.0 Killer App	7	Jan-05
Ty the Tasmanian Tiger 2: Bush Rescue	6.75	Nov-04
Ultra Bust-A-Move	7	Dec-04
Unreal Championship 2: The Liandri Conflict	9.25	Apr-05
Urbz: Sims in the City, The	7.75	Dec-04
Vietcong: Purple Haze	5	Dec-04
Wings of War	6.5	Nov-04
Winning Eleven 8	8.75	Mar-05
Worms: Forts Under Siege	5.75	Apr-05
X-Men Legends	9	Nov-04
Yager	7	Oct-04

PC

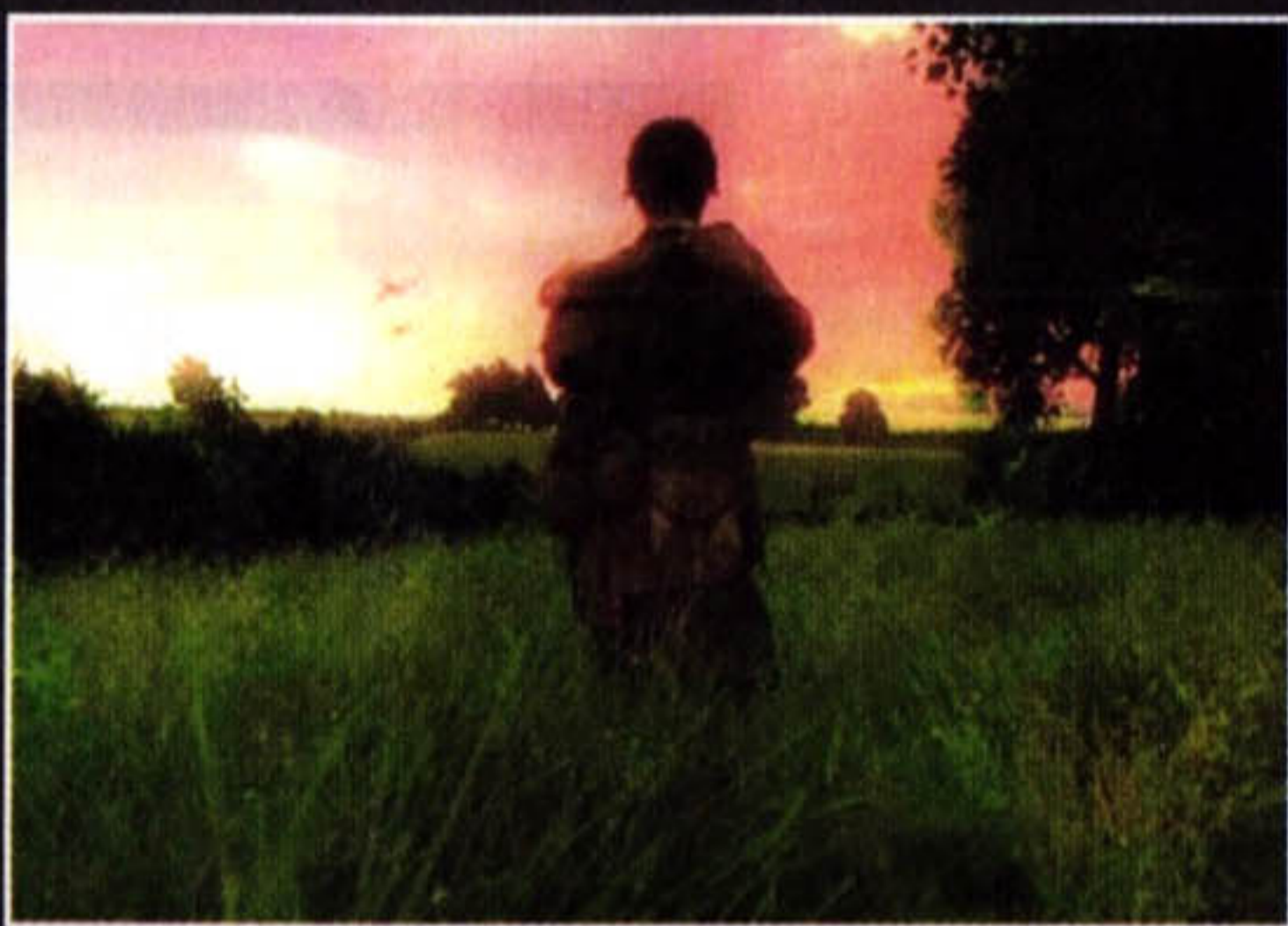
Act of War - Direct Action	8.25	Apr-05
Armies of Exigo	8	Dec-04
Aura: Fate of the Ages	7.25	Sep-04
Axix & Allies	7.75	Jan-05
Call of Duty: United Offensive	8.75	



Brothers in Arms



Multiplayer Tips Straight From the Development Team



AMBUSH AT ANTERBIEN

American Hint: The road is easily the most dangerous path, but it's also the fastest. The north side provides the most cover with many walled fields, but there are few places to hide. The south provides a stealthier route, but the open areas near the ponds are risky. Choose your path carefully.

German Hint: The Americans cannot win without the orders. Find the one carrying the orders and stop them as soon as possible. Once dropped, put all your defenses on that location. If you can't find it, fall back to the exit and hold fast.

SHATTERED WINGS

American Hint: The south gun is easier to get to and harder for the Germans to defend. But if you attack it first, the Germans will rally both fire teams around the north gun, which is much easier for them to defend and close to their insertion area. Early on, the Germans will likely split their forces, so consider attacking the north gun first while it is less defended, and force the major battle at the south gun where the Americans have the advantage.

German Hint: Use your Situational Awareness View! You must force the enemy to drop the explosives to succeed on this mission. There are too many paths, and the combat area is too large for you to win any other way. Track the enemy movements, kill the explosives carrier, and defend the explosives. Remember, there are two sets of explosives, so it won't be easy.

IN THE TRENCHES

American Hint: There are two explosives packs for the Americans in this mission. It is critical that they not be dropped in close proximity to each other. Doing this allows the German force to concentrate all their defenses in that one area.



German Hint: The German forces built these trenches for a reason – they make really good defensive positions. Take advantage of this cover and spread out your squads to defend as much ground as possible.

BLOOD ON THE CAUSEWAY

American Hint: The path is narrow, and the Germans have a strong position; so when an opportunity comes, you must move fast. As soon as you are able to punch a hole in their defenses, get past them without hesitation and make for the way station. This mission is a push, so never backtrack unless you absolutely have to.

German Hint: A strong position may make you overconfident. Keep abreast of your flanks! Don't let the Americans slip past without you even knowing it. Once the supplies are down, you have a strong advantage, so defend them well.

ETIENVILLE DAWN

American Hint: You have the advantage of starting near the codebook, but your path is more treacherous. Get the codebook as soon as possible, and move quickly. This will be a war of attrition, so try to keep your men alive.



German Hint: The Americans start nearer to the codebook, so you are immediately in a "stop them" mode. Set up your soldiers and hold the line. As soon as you get a chance, recover the codebook and push your way to the extraction point.

CROSSROADS AT PELLERIN

American Hint: Charging up the middle of the road seems like a quick option, but you will likely get cut down and find the explosives difficult to recover. Make use of the houses and yards around you. Your movement is hard to track in the back yards, and the cover is plentiful. Try to avoid the far side of the crossroads. The Germans are very strong there.

German Hint: It is absolutely vital that you engage the enemy early. This is a tight combat area and ten minutes will feel like a long time. Do not make the mistake of setting up your initial defense at the truck itself. Move your troops as far forward as you can and force the Americans to drop the explosives in the town. Then hold that position as long as you can, falling back as you need to. Remember that they only have one explosives pack.

A SHOT IN THE DARK

American Hint: You are outgunned and outnumbered, and the enemy knows where the explosives are. It might seem hopeless, but you have a sniper rifle. Use it. Keep your distance, and pick off the enemy from afar. When the mission begins, immediately move to the



nearest possible explosives location. You might get lucky and turn the tide. Once you have explosives, the Germans will be forced to retreat to defend the well-lit bridge. Now is the time to snipe. Remember that there are two bridge supports, and you can win by destroying either one.

German Hint: Your troops are on patrol. Keep them moving. If you let them stand still for more than a few seconds, expect to see the American snipers pick them off. Defend the explosives if you can, but as soon as the Americans recover them, move to the bridge!

IN THE CHANNEL

American Hint: The Germans have two routes they can take. Try to intercept them and make them drop the explosives. If you choose the wrong side of the river to defend, you will find yourself in a rough situation. They only have one set of explosives, so once dropped, defend that location.

German Hint: You have two paths you can take. The north side of the river provides more cover for both Americans and Germans. The south side of the river is easier for the Americans to defend, but a faster route. Once the explosives are planted, hold the locks! The Americans will come quickly to defuse them, and you will likely have to assault the locks again. Remember to watch your reinforcements count and the mission timer.

BEFORE THE STORM

American Hint: Move quickly and always stay behind cover. Don't stand still unless you are well hidden. Keep your fire team safe. Use them against any snipers you spot. A well-timed assault command can be highly effective against the Germans. You may be tempted to make a dash for the extraction point, but you would likely be cut down before you reached it. If you manage to kill a German sniper, try to get his rifle. That can shift the balance on this mission.

German Hint: The spotter is the sniper's assistant. He is there for a reason. Use him to guard your flank or to watch the enemy extraction point if you need to move away from it. If the Americans drop the documents in the open, make the Americans view that location with fear. You have a sniper rifle. Stay hidden. Be deadly.

QUIET BLUFF

American Hint: Running around in the fog is dangerous. You can expect sudden danger at every corner and well-placed ambushes from the German troops. Focus on the codebook. Once you have it, get to the extraction point as quickly as possible. This is the smallest combat area of any mission, so be prepared for constant action.

German Hint: The fog is your friend. Get lost in it. Keep both fireteams close. This is a tight combat area, so you can't afford to lose the codebook for more than a few seconds. Hop from area to area. Defend a location, and when you are discovered, move to a new location. Keep the Americans confused. You are the hunted. Make the hunt difficult.

Attention All Cheaters!

Cheat codes, by their very nature, are in many cases buggier than Virginia in August. So, unless you don't mind re-doing those 70 hours you put into the latest game, do yourself a favor and back up your save before using any codes.

On a lighter note, you can send your codes to secretaccess@gameinformer.com for a chance to be featured here and win a very special prize!

PLAYSTATION 2

Rise of the Kasai

Enter all codes at the main start menu. Once a cheat is enabled, you'll actually have to go to the Extras menu and enter the "Cheats" section in order to enable it.

Invincible Rau - □,○,×,□,○,□,×,○,×,□,○,×

Full Health Power - × (x4), □ (x4), ○ (x4)

Unlimited Arrows - ×,○,□ (x2), ×,□,○ (x2), ×,□ (x2), ×

Stronger Opponents - ×,○,□ (x2), ×,□,○,○,×,○ (x2), ×

Weaker Opponents - ×,○ (x2), □,×,□ (x2),○

Disable Arena AI - ×,○ (x3), ×,□ (x3), ×,○,□,×

XBOX

Doom 3

God Mode - During gameplay, hold down the left trigger and press X, Y, B, A. Note that the cheat will automatically shut off at each level reload. To manually toggle invincibility, just reenter the code.

Spy vs. Spy

For all the following, go to "Extras," then "Cheats" in order to enter the code.

All Levels For Single Player

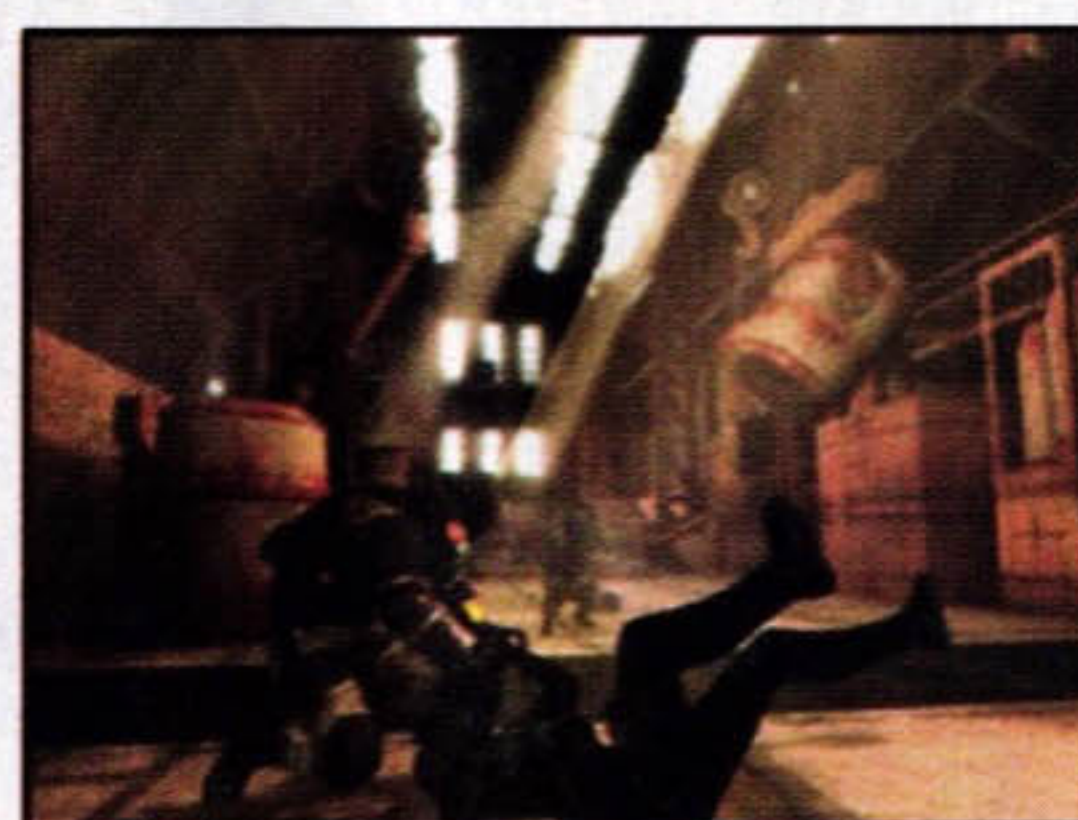
Modern Mode PROHIAS

All Spy DISGUISE

All Story Mode Levels ANTONIO

Invulnerability ARMOR
Multiplayer Levels MADMAG
Permanent Fairy FAIRY

GAMECUBE



Splinter Cell Chaos Theory

Unlock all levels - In the solo or co-op menu, hold down both triggers and press X (x5), Y (x5).

PSP



Darkstalkers Chronicle: The Chaos Tower

EX Option List - Hold down the L button and select "Options" from the main menu

Play as Marionette - At the character select screen, highlight "?" and press Start (x7), then press any punch or kick button

Play as Shadow - At the character select screen, highlight "?" and press Start (x5), then press any punch or kick button

"GI Droid"
(location unknown - last seen dumping beverages on Yankee outfielders)



Gretzky NHL

Unlock Everything - From the main menu, go to "Gretzky Challenge," then "Unlockables," then press Start, in order to enter the following code: SHOENLOC

Metal Gear Acid

Enter these codes to acquire these exclusive cards you can't get any other way.

Jehuty Card	Jehuty
Karen Hojo Card	Karen
Mika Slayton Card	Mika
Viper Card	Viper
XM8 Card	Xmeight

Mod World

THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND
Wizards' Islands



www.wizards-islands.com

Morrowind, Bethesda Softworks' epic fantasy RPG, has been around for some time - three years, in fact. Which is almost enough time to explore everything the massive game has to offer, especially when you consider the two expansion packs. Some fans, though, still aren't satisfied. Thus this gargantuan mod: Wizards' Islands has been in development for a freakishly long time, and has finally been released as a finished product. Feel free to download it at the URL above.



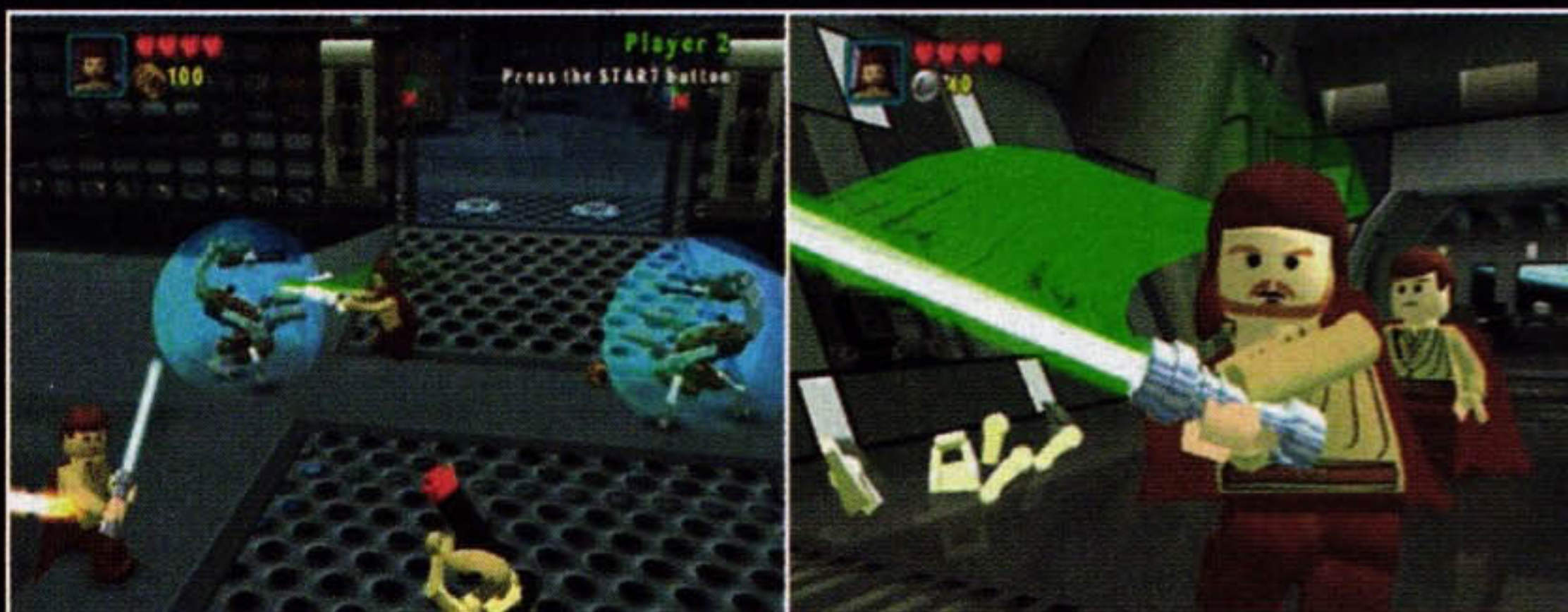
Where to begin with all of the content to be found in Wizards' Islands? For starters, there are over 200 NPCs to interact with, all with hand-scripted dialogue. These characters populate the Winter Island (the first in a planned series of isles which make up the Wizards' Islands), an area larger than the original game's Solstheim. Through conversations with them and numerous other clues scattered about, players can learn of the 3,000-year history of Winter Island and how the current situation has come to pass. Undoubtedly, the player will have a say in the outcome of this island's fate as well.



Finally, this mod features enormous amounts of new spells and effects, different ways to develop your character, bunches of original monsters, and many unique environments. You'll even be able to ride indigenous creatures for transport! With all of this available for a free download, Wizards' Islands seems like a no-brainer for any fan of Morrowind.

Code of the Month

LEGO Star Wars



UNLOCK EVERYTHING

If there's one thing we know about cute little LEGO video game characters, it's that we like to have lots of them. So instead of earning the right to play as these characters, feel free to enter one of these codes and buy them right away. You'll have to go to Dex's Diner to enter the codes. Note that the cheats only unlock the characters for purchase. You'll still have to spend the bolts to get them. Once you've had your fill of silly characters, check out the cheat codes as well.

CHARACTERS

- Battle Droid** - 987UYR
- Battle Droid (Commander)** - EN11K5
- Battle Droid (Geonosis)** - LK42U6
- Battle Droid (Security)** - KF999A
- Boba Fett** - LA811Y
- Clone** - F8B4L6
- Clone (Episode III)** - ER33JN
- Clone (Episode III Pilot)** - BHU72T
- Clone (Episode III Swamp)** - N3T6P8
- Clone (Episode III Walker)** - RS6E25
- Count Dooku** - 14PGMN
- Darth Maul** - H35TUX
- Darth Sidious** - A32CAM
- Disguised Clone** - VR832U
- Droideka** - DH382U
- General Grievous** - SF321Y
- Geonosan** - 19D7NB
- Grievous' Bodyguard** - ZTY392
- Gonk Droid** - U63B2A
- Jango Fett** - PL47NH
- Ki-Adi Mundi** - DP55MV
- Kit Fisto** - CBR954
- Luminara** - A725X4
- Mace Windu (Episode III)** - MS952L
- Padmè** - 92UJ7D
- PK Droid** - 92UJ7D
- Princess Leia** - BEQ82H
- Rebel Trooper** - L54YUK
- Royal Guard** - PP43JX
- Shaak Ti** - EUW862
- Super Battle Droid** - XZNR21

CHEATS

- Big Blasters** - IG72X4
- Brushes** - SHRUB1
- Classic Blasters** - L449HD
- Invincible** - 4PR28U
- Minikit Detector** - LD116B
- Moustaches** - RP924W
- Purple** - YD77GC
- Silhouettes** - MS999Q
- Silly Blasters** - NR37W1
- Tea Cups** - PUCEAT

Jay Johnson
Chicago, IL

Gran Turismo 4

Our Beginner Tips For Mastering The Road



GETTING STARTED

Choose your first car carefully. You may be driving it for a while as you get used to the game. Don't assume a new car is always the best option – the used car showrooms have some great deals. While there are lots of factors you'll eventually need to consider when looking at a new purchase, a good place to start early on is by examining raw horsepower. Find something with good HP that costs most of your initial money or buy something a little less expensive and immediately upgrade some basic components.

Alternately, tackle the license tests right off the bat. There are several excellent reasons to do so. First, completing either the B or A license tests will garner you a pretty reasonable start-up car, especially if you use the money you saved not buying a car to upgrade your win. Secondly, you'll almost immediately need the first couple of licenses to compete in several of the early races. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, license tests are definitely the best way to become a better driver.

Right after you get your first car, especially if it's used, stop by the GT Auto store and get your oil changed. You'll sometimes see a noticeable boost in horsepower, and the service only costs 50 credits.

Become familiar with the shortcuts right away. There are several ways to speed your racing experience along – we've listed some of the most helpful here:

- When you're in the main map of Gran Turismo mode, press L1 to immediately jump to the Home icon. You can also press R1 and go directly to your current car's manufacturing country.
- If you like watching the replays, but think they just seem to take too long, press L3 to go into fast forward. It acts as a toggle, so you can flip back and forth between normal and fast speed. It's a great tool to zoom ahead to that one spectacular crash or to quickly reach the view of that photo finish.
- One huge time saver can be found whenever you play B-Spec mode. When you do, press R1 to switch to the Race Monitor view. While there, hold down L1 and press Right on the d-Pad. This lets you speed up the race to double or even triple normal speed. You'll have to stay in the Race Monitor view, so when you need to make

adjustments or you want to watch the race up close, switch back to the normal Broadcast view and normal speed.

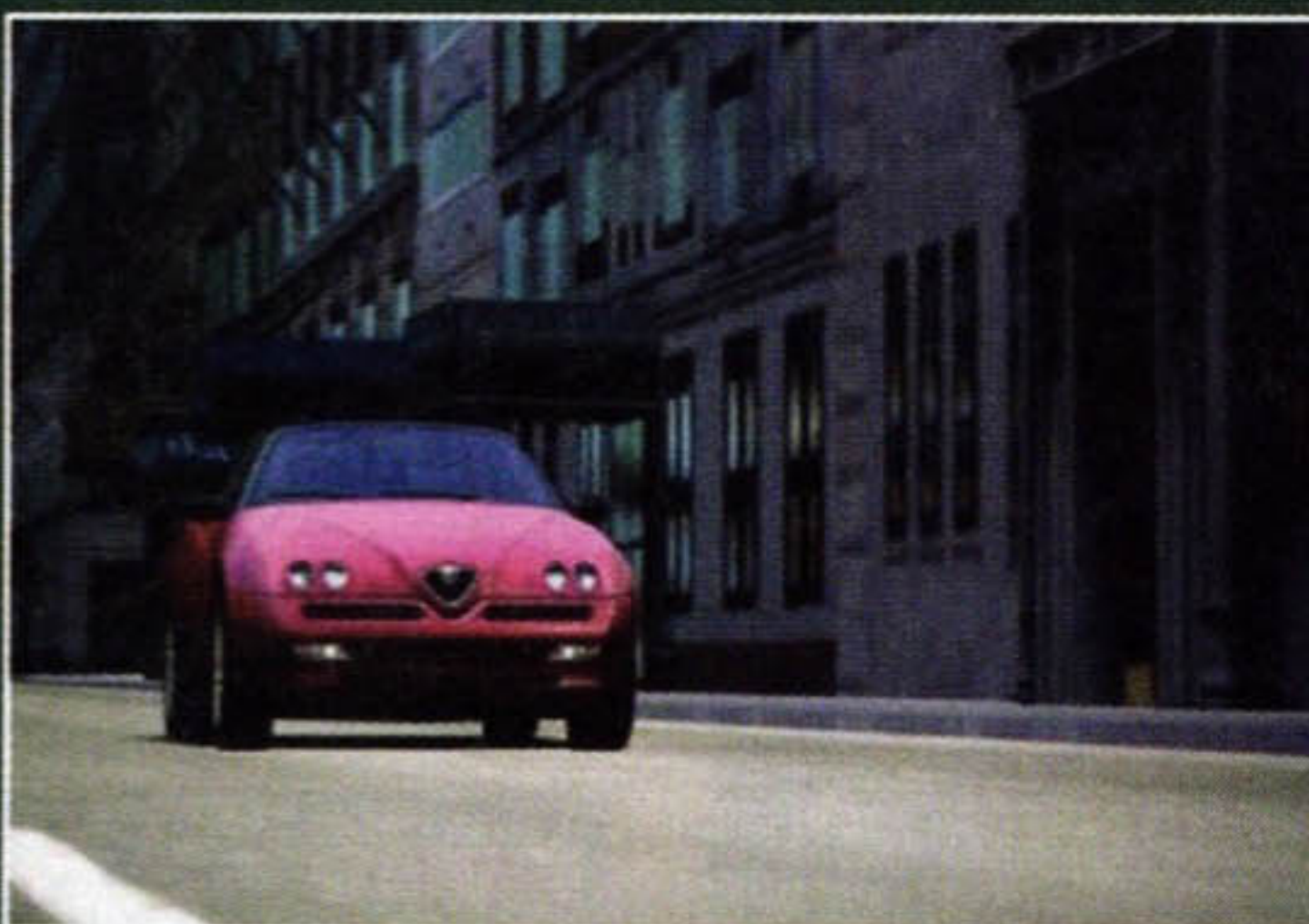
QUICK MONEY

There's a well-known trick you can tap into pretty early on in the game to get both an incredibly fast car and some really easy money. Spend some time upgrading your first or second car, and then begin to explore the Special Condition Races.

- Defeating the first race set there (Umbria Rally) wins you the Cadillac Cien '02. This beauty starts out at a hefty 760 horsepower, but a full range of upgrades is going to put you right around 1,000 HP! Not bad for just a few hours of play.
- Defeating the second race set in the Special Condition events (Capri Rally) will win you the Toyota RSC Rally Raid Car '02, which you can turn around and sell at your garage for a whopping 265,624 Credits. So much for your money troubles.

DRIVING TIPS

Find your line. If you haven't figured this one out, you're in trouble. This is perhaps the most important driving skill to master, and also the hardest. While textbooks could be (and have been) written about the art of finding the best racing line on a track, the general rule is this: You always want to approach a corner in such a way that you don't have to slow down too much going in, and you can begin to accelerate as soon as possible as you come out. This usually means starting on the outside of the track and hitting the inside of the track only at the apex of the corner, then exiting so that you end up again on the opposite edge of the road from the corner. To put it more simply, enter slow – exit fast. If you aren't already thinking this way, start now.



When you're driving an automatic, hold down R2 during a race to prevent your car from shifting up. This trick can really help get the most out of the high RPM range of a gear, and can offer a great acceleration boost right when you need it the most.

Once you're driving with nitrous, remember to save it for when you really need it. Hold down R1 for that speed burst, and grip on tight to the controls or you'll spin out of control. Look for long straightaways to take full advantage of your boost, and almost never hit the nitrous on a corner.

Stay on the road. It seems silly, but one of the biggest mistakes players make early on is putting the pedal to the metal and forgetting to slow down into corners, resulting in a long trip through grass, dirt, or gravel. While trying to pull away from the competition on a corner can be appealing, it's often better to keep in control and pass as you're leaving the turn instead.

If you just can't seem to resist the urge to hit that corner full tilt, then use your bravado to your advantage. If the car in front of you is slowing into the turn, take advantage of the lack of performance-affecting car damage in the game and ram the side of your opponent with your outside front bumper, then use the collision to help you pull you around the curve. This technique has

the added bonus of potentially throwing your worthy competitor into the ditch.

Take advantage of the slipstream phenomenon. If you scoot in directly behind another car, you can sometimes gain a small amount of speed since he is already displacing the air in front of you. This technique is known as drafting. It's like riding piggyback for a time, until you're ready to make your move past him. Remember to time your pass carefully, or he can use the same approach to get back in front.

UPGRADES AND TUNING

Lots of players really slow their progress by getting frightened about upgrading and tuning their car. The much better approach is to dive right in and try some things out. You can always re-adjust later. Try some of these ideas out to maximize your performance.



Early on, you're not going to have a lot of money for upgrades. But even with a small chunk of change, you can really boost your performance. To enhance engine performance, you might think about spending a little over 1,000 credits on the Racing Chip, which will maximize the functionality of your engine, often resulting in some hefty added horsepower. Around 1,500 credits will get you an improved exhaust and air filter, which can also make a significant difference. In addition, consider a stage one weight reduction. You might be surprised how much more pick-up this will give you.

After you make some bank through your winnings, a top priority should be some quality tires. Since you won't be hitting up the endurance races for some time, you should go after the softest tires you can afford. However, keep in mind, while those expensive super-soft racing tires may appeal, early on there are lots of races that will force you to switch back to your sports tires. You've been warned.

One of the best places to make regular adjustments is your transmission (once you purchase the customization upgrade), particularly as you begin to drive higher performance vehicles. By adjusting the transmission gear ratios of your car, you can drastically improve performance on a given course. Turn the automatic gear ratios to low numbers for higher acceleration, perfect for courses with lots of turns and switchbacks. Alternately, set the ratio high for a greater max speed, an ideal option for those courses with lots of long straightaways.

If you're having trouble with your turns, think about adjusting your brakes. Setting your front brakes on the high end will increase stability on turns. Alternately, set the rear brakes high to increase spin while taking a corner.

Test out your settings. If you're trying to get maximum speed, go to Driving Park and hit the Test Course. Always try various settings to see what works best. Remember that there's no specific right way to tune your car, but there are better approaches for a given course and style of race. Experimentation is the best teacher.



Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory



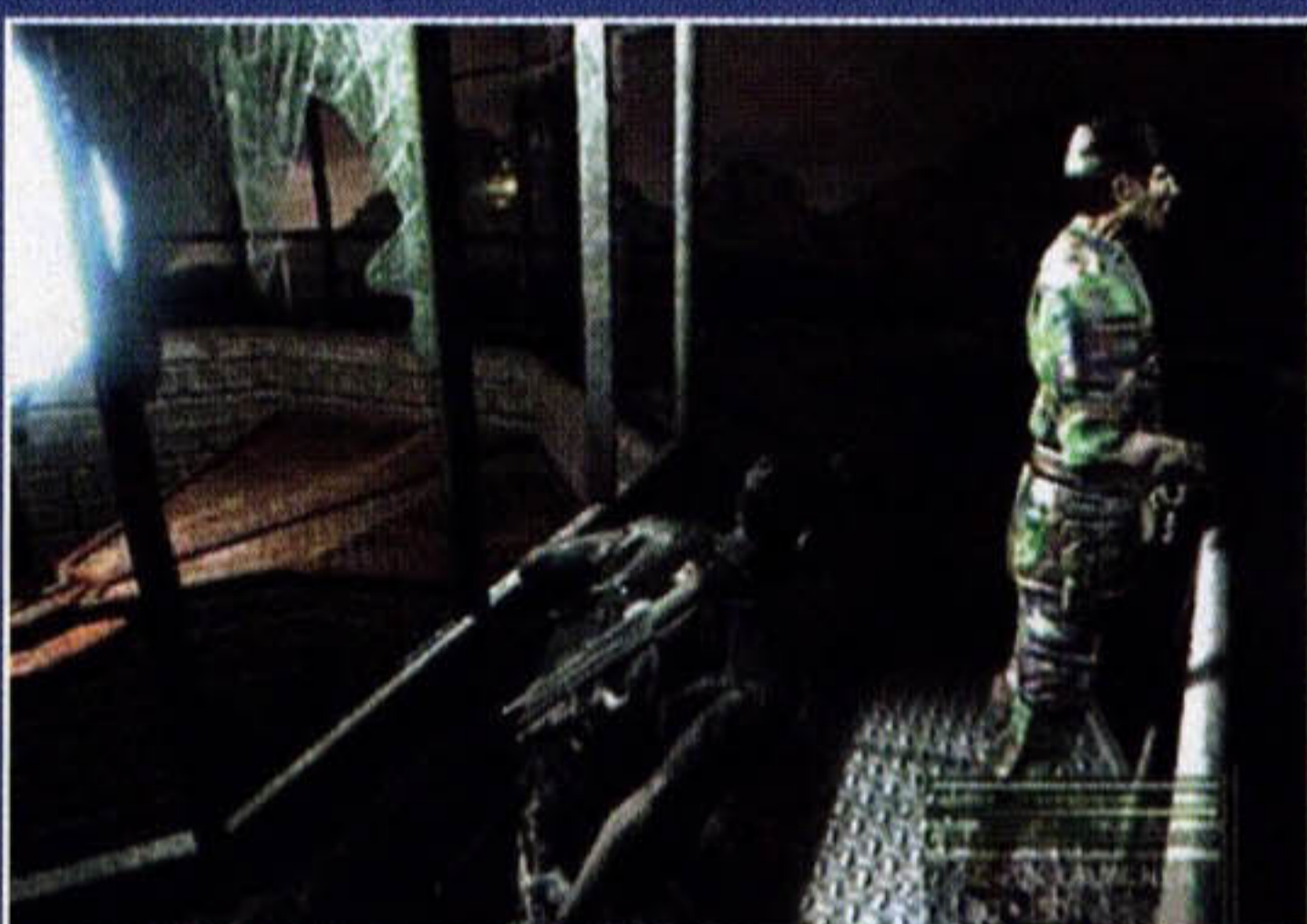
Ubisoft Developers Teach You How To Be A Better Spy

SINGLE PLAYER TIPS – CLINT HOCKING (CREATIVE DIRECTOR, SCRIPTWRITER, LEAD LEVEL DESIGNER)



The Nature Of The Game

Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory is a game of position, not a game of firepower. Stick to shadows whenever possible and move slowly. Where there are lights, use the OCP on your pistol to disable them and control the territory to allow you to move through it safely. When you are in a safe position, observe the enemy and their patrols, use sticky cameras if you need a better view. Anticipate their actions and plan a safe route before you move to the next position. When you must engage in combat, always try to do so at the time and place of your choosing. The enemy is much easier to defeat if they are unaware, and it is better to attack them when you decide to rather than to respond to their attacks because you've been detected. When in combat, never stay in the open. Move quickly to cover and return fire aggressively. Sustained fire on an enemy can force him to take cover and allow you to change position. If you can do so without being seen, the enemy will think you are in your original location and will act accordingly, eventually attempting to flank you and opening himself up for you to finish him.



Interrogate Everyone You Can

Getting close to the enemy is not only good practice for stealth and keeps your skills sharp, but it also gives you a lot of choices as to how to deal with an enemy. Interrogation is among the most useful. With a knife to the throat, most enemies will have something to say: Often they will give up door codes, tell you the location of useful equipment, or give you details on other enemies in the area. The more intelligence you can gather from the enemies themselves, the less you have to search for on your own.

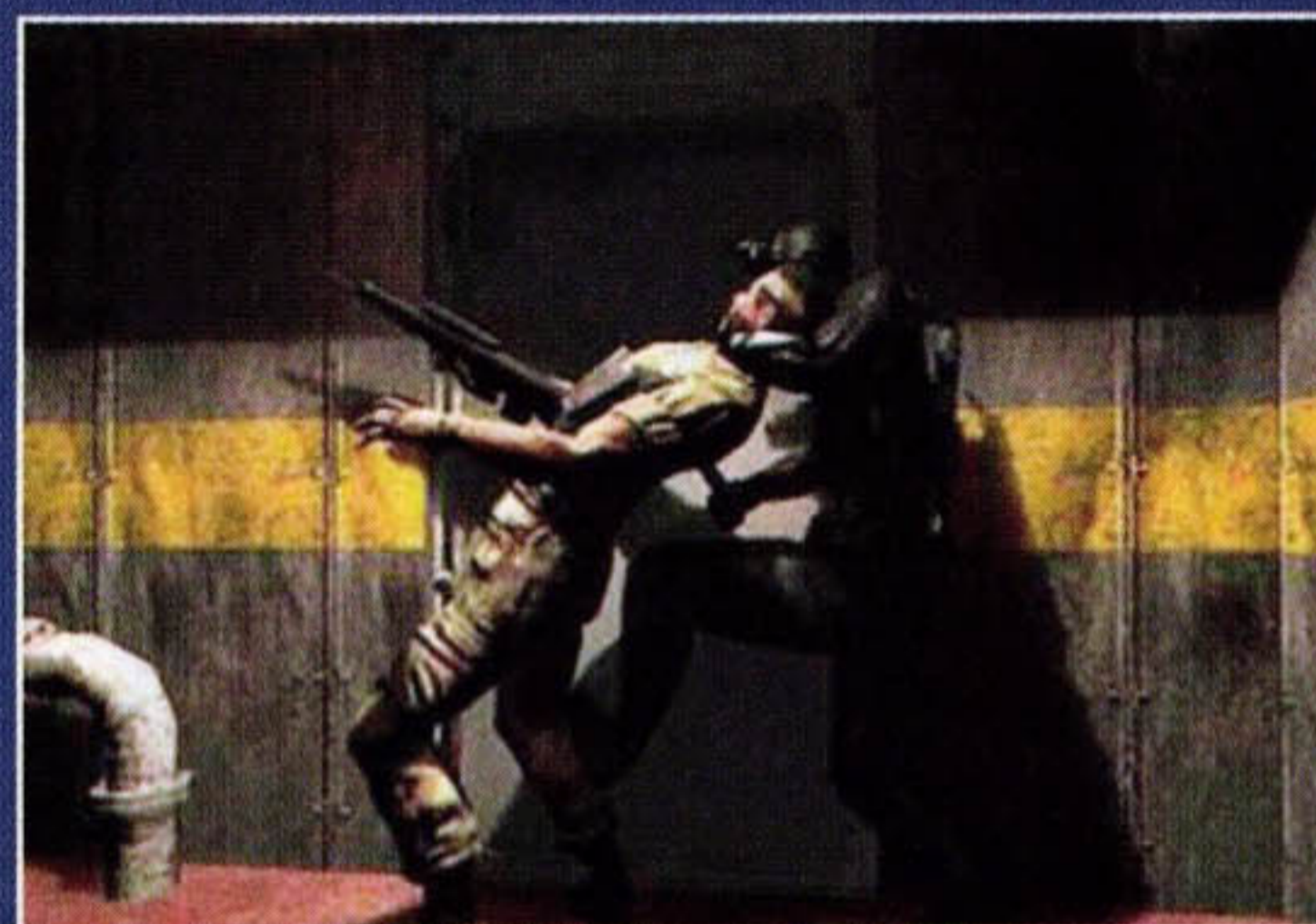
The Environment Is Your Friend

Use the environment to your advantage whenever possible. Something as simple as a stone or a tin can on the ground can make a useful distraction object to lure enemies away from their patrols. Lights can be turned off, disabled with the OCP, or shot out. Radios, generators, and other noise-making objects can be interfered with using the OCP to create masking noises. Computers can be accessed or hacked to disable different

security features, open alternate routes, or see through enemy security cameras. Always be on the lookout for ways to use the environment against the enemy.

Consider Your Options

Don't go in the front door. Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory offers many, many different ways to approach almost every problem. The most obvious path is also usually the best protected. Look for vents, windows, pipes, or ledges. Try to find another way to reach your objective and usually you'll get there faster and with less risk of detection. Often, by simply taking an extra second to look around in your different vision modes and check your OPSAT, you can bypass entire areas that may be full of patrolling guards or discover a shortcut to an objective.



CO-OP TIPS FROM AGENTS BLUEJAY AND REDFOX

Stick Close To Your Partner

Two guns are better than one. Use your advantage over your enemies by sticking close to each other and finishing firefights twice as fast. And if one of you goes down, it is easier if the other one is nearby to administer the miracle syringe and help you recover from your wounds before the time expires. Also, by working together, you can use advanced tactics like covering each other, creating diversions while your partner strikes from the shadows, or delivering suppressive fire while the other one is throwing a grenade to flush out well-covered terrorists. So, unless the situation forces you to be apart, always stick close together.

Communication Is Key

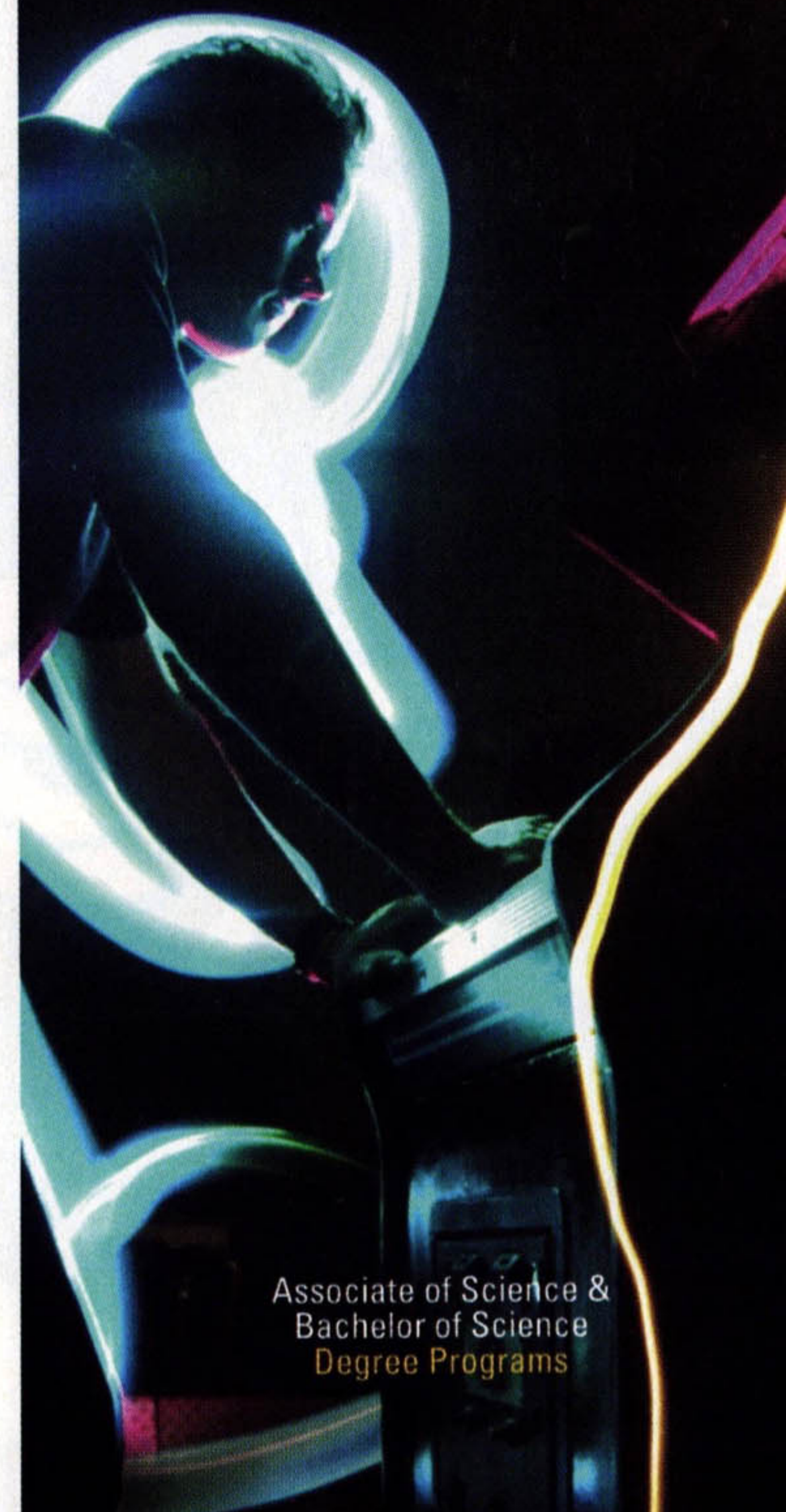
Communication between partners is the only way to accomplish your mission objectives. Having good communication with your teammate is the best way to keep track of your partner's location and intentions. This helps you coordinate your actions, from silencing two terrorists at the same time or disarming bombs in the sewers menacing the whole city. But keep the chatter to a minimum – it can be distracting and, in certain types of games, can inform the enemy of your and your partner's position. In those types of games, always remember to keep the message short, and whisper if possible.

Think As A Team

Remember that if Lambert has dispatched two agents for the mission, two agents are required to accomplish the mission. Look for places that seem inaccessible. With the help of your teammate, you both can reach places that are impossible for a single agent. Use the boost and human ladder combo to reach high windows, the Tomoe Nage to pass over fields of lasers, or the hangover to reach objectives below you. You can safely pass underneath cameras or in front of automated turrets if the other agent is using the Coop Jammer on it. Two agents working together can silently dispatch two terrorists at the same time. So, working as a team is the best way for agents to complete their mission.

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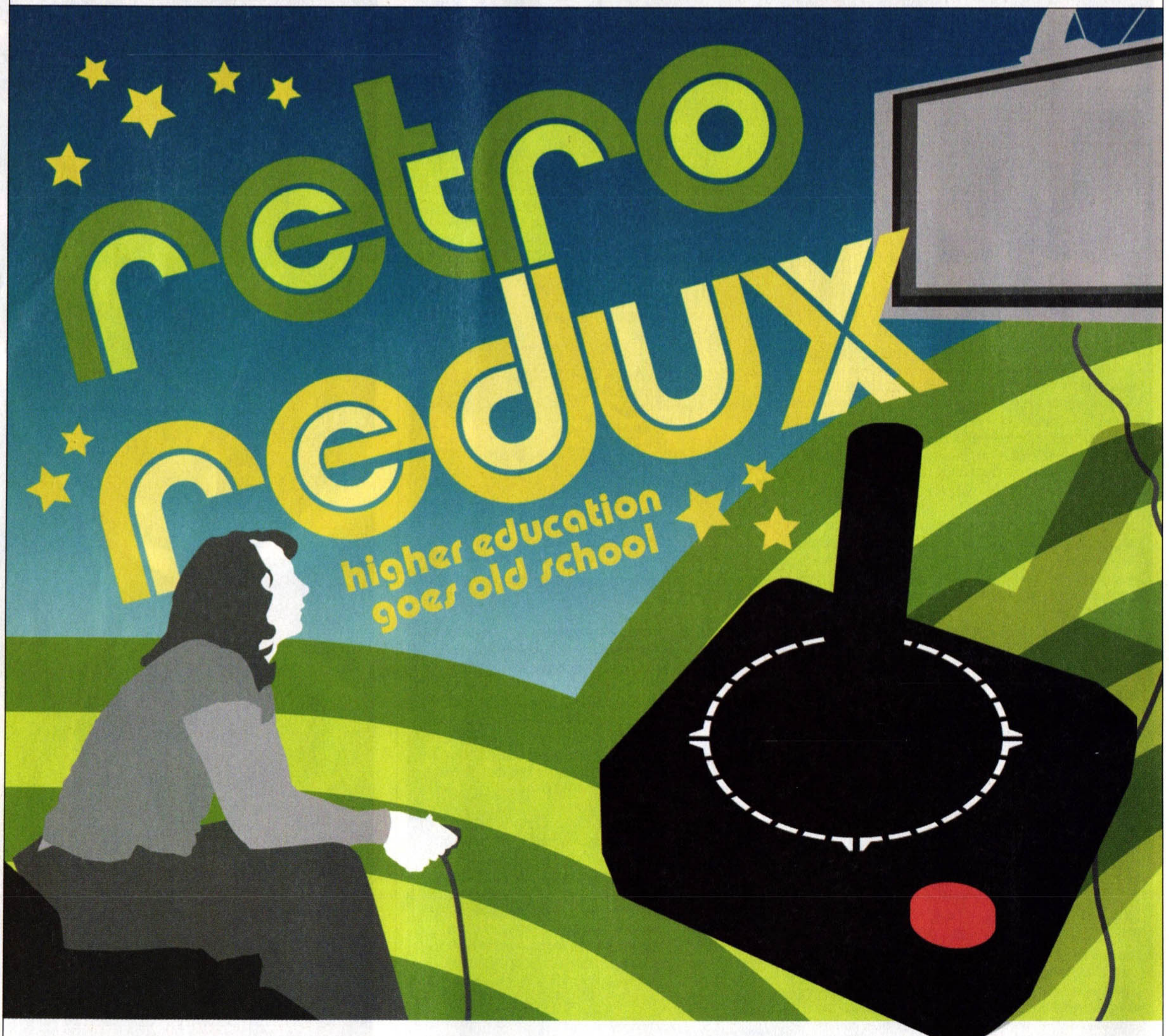
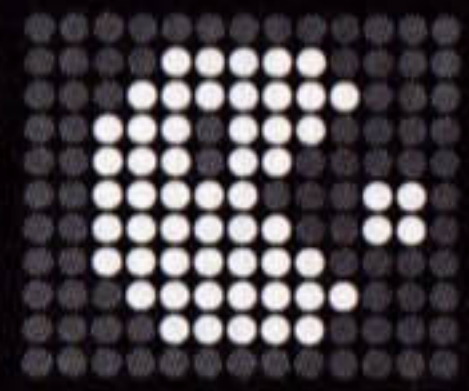
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higher education
goes old school

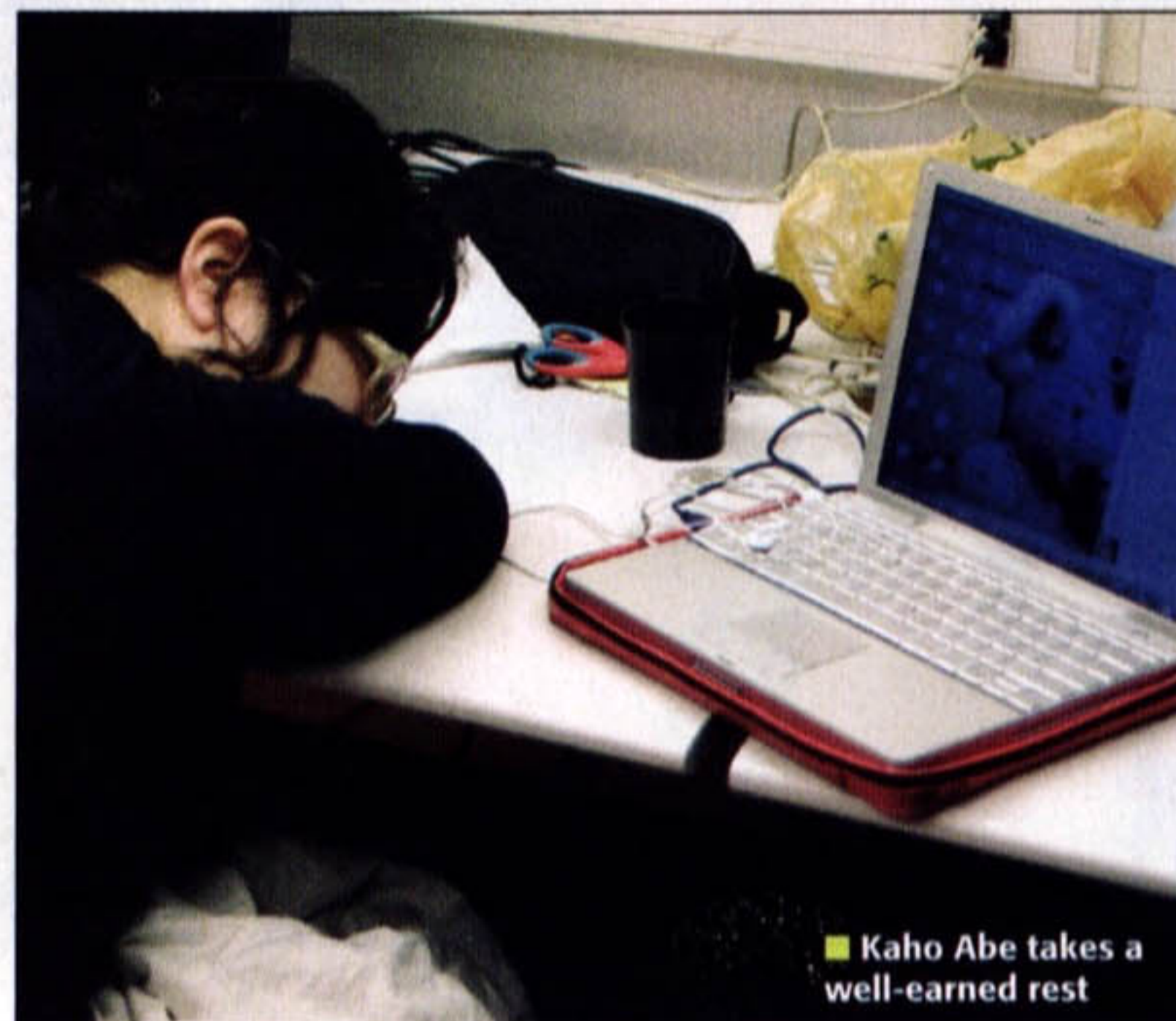
It's approaching 3:00 a.m. The familiar blips and bleeps of primordial video games are beginning to fill the air of a classroom where the students pound energy drinks and coffee to keep the midnight oil burning. The school staff members are playing World of Warcraft in the corner, and a 50-inch plasma television has been facilitating stress-relieving rounds of Katamari Damacy for the past three hours. It may not sound like your typical college all-nighter, but this isn't your typical university.



■ Program director Katie Salen helps Cynthia Arbore understand the Game Maker Software



■ G Bunch's Emily Gobeille works on elaborate background artwork



■ Kaho Abe takes a well-earned rest



■ The Superfriends work out the logistics of coding everything by hand



On April 2 and 3, the Design and Technology department of Parsons School of Design played host to a unique event: a 24-hour competition in which tomorrow's game developers test their skills against yesterday's technology. Dubbed "Retro Redux,"

the event challenges participants from five New York design schools to create a game to the specifications of the home console that defines old school: the Atari 2600. Every aspect of the title, from graphics to sound, must conform to the architecture of the venerable system that brought us classics like *Yar's Revenge* and *Adventure*. "By stripping away the focus on presentation, the students are free to focus on design," says Katie Salen, the event organizer and director of Parsons' design and technology program. Colleen Macklin, the department chair (who is wearing a hoodie emblazoned

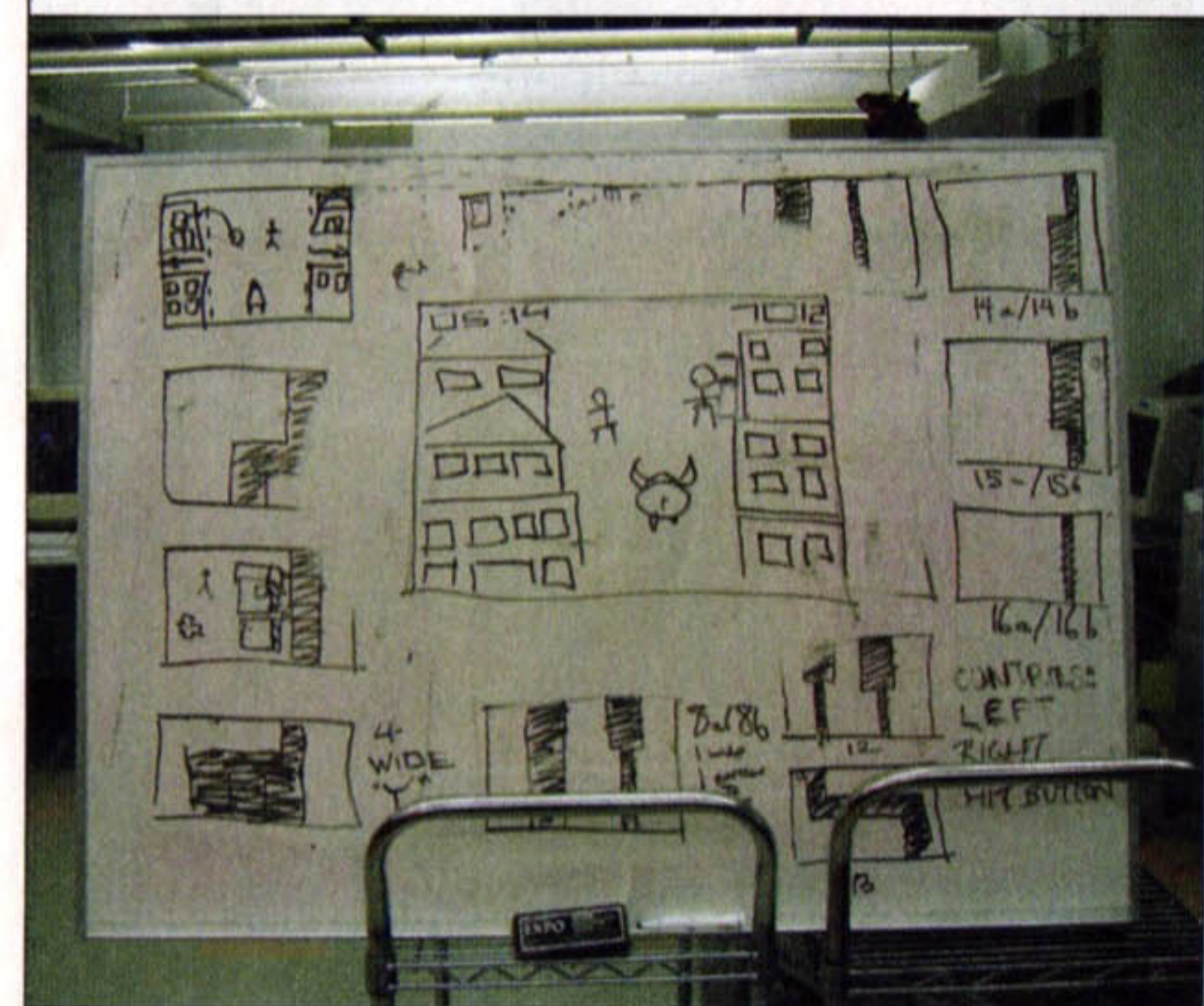
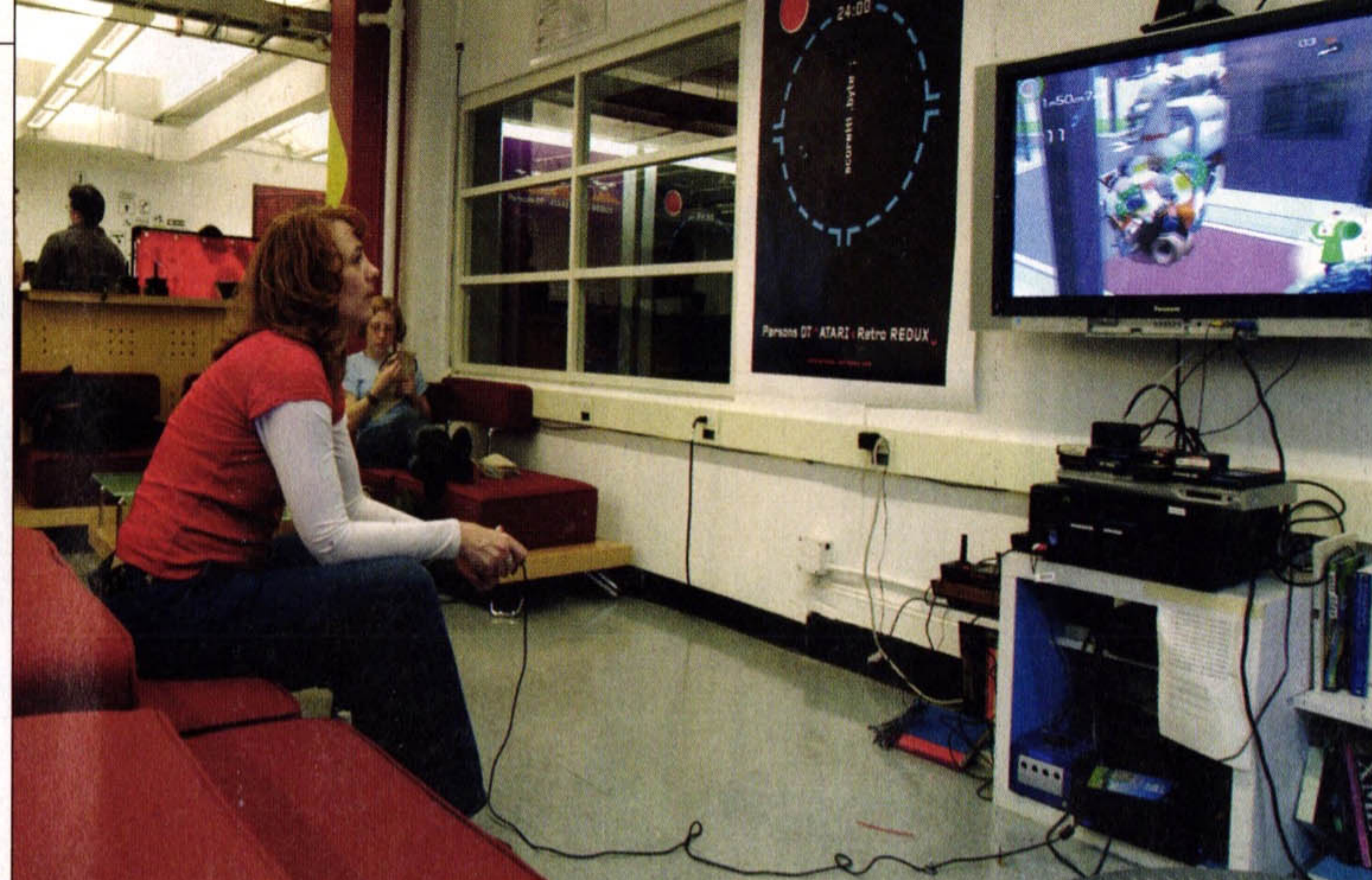
with a skull and crossbones), elaborates: "Good design is good design, no matter what the constraints are."

Still, even the most dreadful of 2600 games required more than 24 hours to construct (*E.T.* took an entire month). As such, students are not expected to use the same development tools that helped shape the industry back in the early '80s. Instead, a program called Game Maker will be used because of its unfamiliarity to the participants and easy-to-learn interface. The team that uses this program to craft the most outstanding game not only gains a valuable learning experience, but also the distinct honor of having its title included on an upcoming iteration of Atari's nostalgic plug-and-play device, the Flashback.

It may sound simple, but between 12:00 p.m. on Saturday and 12:00 p.m. on Sunday the groups will have to barrel through every aspect of making a game, from conception through execution. Add to that the inherent challenges of

learning new software, staying awake, and working in close quarters with conflicting personalities, and things are bound to get interesting.

As the teams begin to arrive and register, it is clear that each one will be contributing a unique personality and sense of style to the event. With names like Gatorade Presents: The Thirst Quenching Fun Bunch From Rehydration Hill (later shortened to "G Bunch"), Superfriends, and Pixel Pirates, the video game industry need not worry about a lack of creativity or humor from its future developers. Some teams even have a distinct fashion sense; the four members of G Bunch are each dressed as sports drink flavors like Fierce Berry and Ice Orange, wearing Gatorade labels as armbands. The modestly named Club Awesome is using this time to silk screen t-shirts with their pixelated team logo. The other teams, instead of worrying about their ensembles, simply collect themselves and enjoy the calm before the storm.



“Good design is good design, no matter the graphical constraints.”



■ Priorities are important. Club Awesome attends to their t-shirt project before starting their game



■ The trophies are actually fully functional Atari joysticks



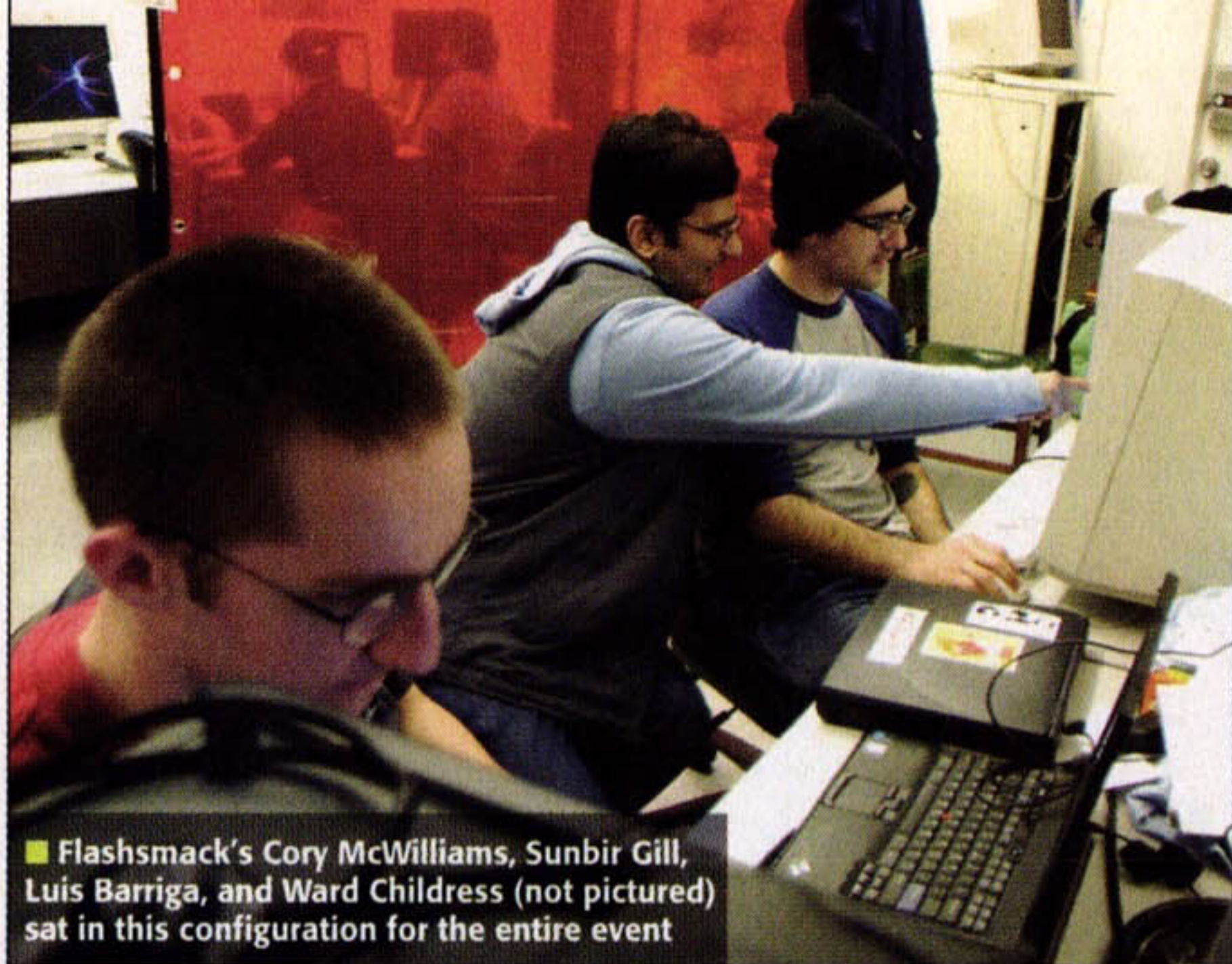
■ Matthia Romeo, Jason Corace, Victoria Fang, Austin Chang, and Aric Chestion gleefully watch digital piranha devour innocents



While they are here to make games for a historic system, these students have no plans to simply revisit concepts we've all seen before. In fact, three of the teams (G Bunch, QED, and Phatari) are composed of graduate students, each working on a thesis that explores and expands the boundaries of digital design. Brett Jackson is working on software for the Nintendo DS that would allow users to read comic books like e-books. Privthi Virasinghe is making a strategy game along the lines of Civilization that confronts the issue of globalization. Kaho Abe is working on new ways to integrate gaming and fashionable apparel. The days of games being simple lines of code are over, and with the next generation of consoles offering fewer restrictions than ever, the impact of artistic and creative design will only become more pronounced.

It is with this underlying emphasis on the purpose and potential of video games that all nine teams, when the clock strikes noon, energetically begin brainstorming and kicking off Retro Redux with a flurry of ideas that are so crazy they just might work. Among the most interesting is Club Awesome's desire to simulate online excitement along the lines of Splinter Cell; by using red and blue colored lenses to hide the corresponding colors onscreen, the team hopes to make a game about two ninjas in a field laying traps to eliminate each other. The Pixel Pirates are trying to invent gameplay around the concept of a character who mines Tetris blocks, while the teams from Mercy College (Show No Mercy and Bawls) push the boundaries of good taste by imagining a game that follows a baby's development from conception to delivery. As the outlandish and inventive ideas fly back and forth in the computer lab, each team does its best to craft a premise that will provide a unique experience while allowing them to showcase their creativity.

With preliminary work underway on most of the projects, a crisis starts to take form. The contest rules are inconsistent on the subject of pixel resolution, and participants are unclear as to whether they should be using 14x7 (the Atari 2600 standard) or 4x2 (used for the Atari 7800) pixels. After some deliberation, Salen holds a meeting and all teams agree that using the 4x2 resolution would allow for more detailed graphics and, more importantly, expanded gameplay opportunities. Unfortunately, this also means that teams who have already begun working with the larger resolution will need to entirely rework their existing graphics. Team QED (a latin abbreviation for the phrase "which was to be demonstrated") from NYU is one of the teams hit hardest by the decision. They were working on an approximation of the Manhattan street grid for a car chase game, but now it is effectively useless. Incidentally, members of this team were also involved in an interesting real life/digital game hybrid project last year called "Pac



Flashsmack's Cory McWilliams, Sunbir Gill, Luis Barriga, and Ward Childress (not pictured) sat in this configuration for the entire event



Atari EVP Wim Stocks congratulates the participants for a job well done



Club Awesome clarifies their games' mechanics for Salen as she makes the rounds to check each team's progress



The two teams from Mercy College brainstorm as a single group before splitting off to work on their individual tasks

Top 5 Bizarre Quotes from Retro Redux

- 5 "Could you imagine if Papa Smurf was driving around Vice City and Smurfette was, well, you know..." Bryan Clarke, Show No Mercy
- 4 "There are more bananas on the ground, so the hand of God is moving faster." Matt Slaybaugh, QED
- 3 "Gatorade wouldn't sponsor a team called 'The New Facists.'" Brett Jackson, G Bunch
- 2 "Those stupid tourists all wear sombreros." Travis Griggs, Pixel Pirates
- 1 "New for the Atari 2600: matchless brutality." Aric Cheston, Superfriends

Ye Olde Gamesmith

The Game Maker software used by the students during the event is available for download free of charge at www.gamemaker.nl. Featuring action scripting and a drag-and-drop interface similar to Flash, it is a relatively painless way to break into homebrew gaming and start building up your own game design portfolio. Plus, it can handle games far more technically advanced than those it produced at Retro Redux.



Manhattan" that got a fair bit of attention on the Internet. Slightly upset about starting from scratch, QED decides to embrace the simplicity of the hardware and make an almost painfully basic game. "We're just going to make the simplest game we can think of," says Chris Hall. "A dot. And it needs to move across the screen. That's it." While they initially approach this new project with sardonic detachment, it seems to grow on them as they flesh out the finer points as the evening sets in.

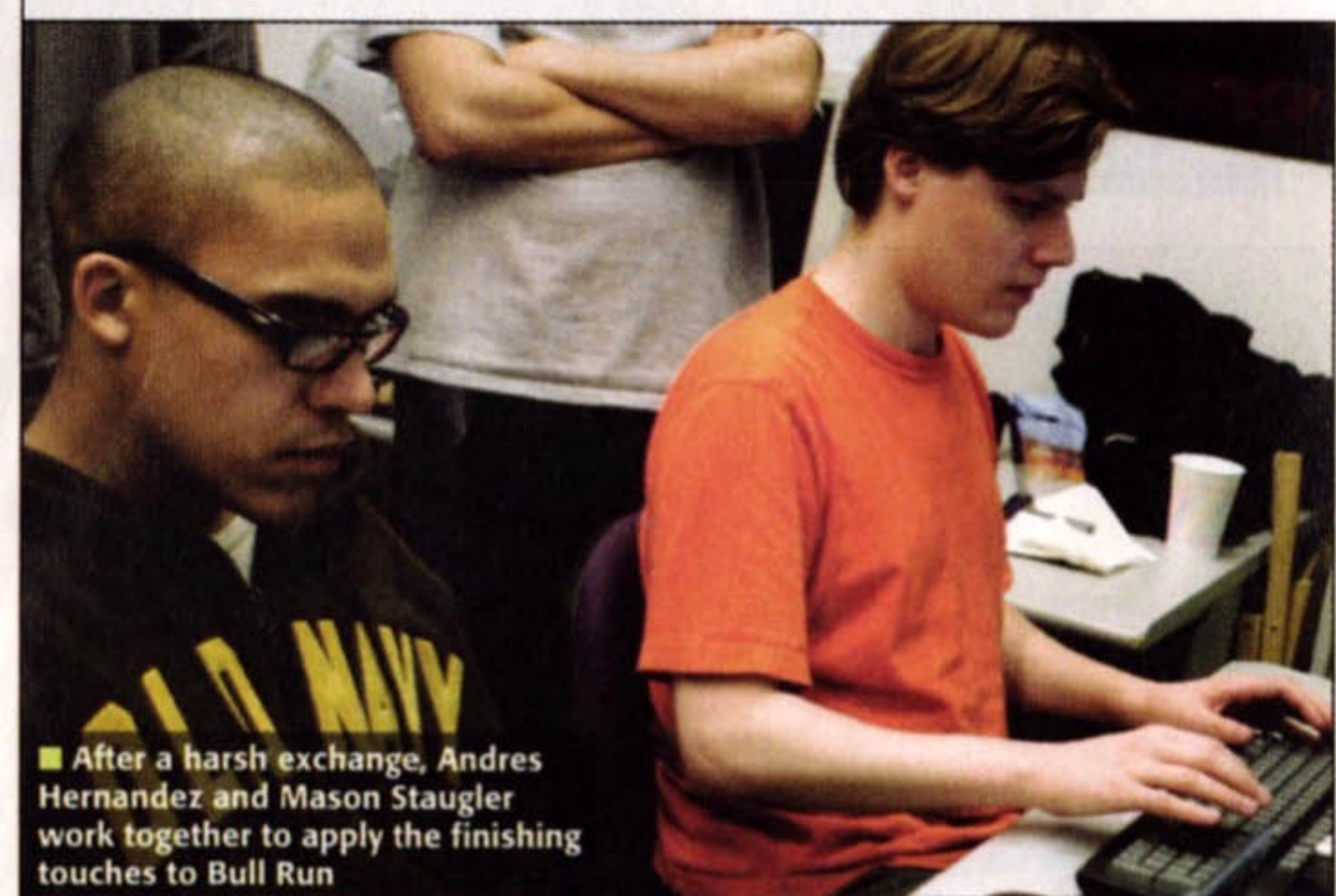
As other teams have been roaming around, holding animated discussions, and drawing level designs on whiteboards, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute's Team Flashsmack have been stoically sitting in an orderly row focused intently on their computers. What started as a game about a princess taking up the weapons of her dead would-be savior has evolved into a genre-combining effort that blends many mechanics from gaming's earliest eras. "The final boss fight will be really slick," explains

Ward Childress. "You'll stand on Breakout blocks, and you have to take out a giant Pong paddle." While they occasionally exchange jokes among themselves, Flashsmack generally has an unwavering focus on getting the job done which has left them further ahead of any other team in terms of having a playable, testable game.

Meanwhile, Club Awesome's multiplayer title hits a snag. While they have a lens that effectively cancels out the red ninja's actions, they are unable to locate a blue lens that will duplicate the effect. Team member Carol Chung sits with a phonebook open in her lap, searching for stores that might be able to accommodate them at this hour. Planning for the worst, they divide their efforts and begin work on another title. The rules state that a team is allowed to make multiple submissions, though the time constraints mean that it probably will lead to less time to playtest and refine any one concept.

The sky is brightening under the impending break of a

new day, and many of the teams are feeling the weight of an entire night spent staring at computer monitors. "I'm afraid that if I stop, I'm just going to die," quips Club Awesome's Theodore Watson as he replaces the placeholder graphics with fancy new sprites. The Superfriends are all sitting like statues in front of their computers, intently focused on fixing a problem in their game about a school of piranha. "It's a good action game," explains Aric Cheston. "It teaches you about real life, and what happens when you get eaten by vicious, ravenous fish." However, instead of using the Game Maker's graphic interface, the team chooses to do all of the coding by hand. While it does allow them to accomplish some effects not otherwise possible, it is very time consuming. When asked if he regretted the decision now, as others like Flashsmack are practically finished, Cheston simply responds, "Yep" with a resigned smile.



■ After a harsh exchange, Andres Hernandez and Mason Staugler work together to apply the finishing touches to Bull Run



■ Privthi Virasinghe, Donnie Budgen, and Jenks Whittenburg help their noise-making squirrels to fly



ome teams have far more than technical difficulties on their hands. The School of Visual Arts' Pixel Pirates are exhausted not only from a hard night's work, but also from their personal interactions. They had settled on making a game about the famed running of the bulls, and while much

of the coding has been finished, team member Andres Hernandez is proving very difficult to work with. Though he is certainly pulling his weight, he refuses to relinquish any control over the scripting, and is harshly criticizing the contributions of his teammates. "That's done?" he snaps as he looks at a graphic made by Mason Staugler, "I'm not gonna say anything." "Then maybe you shouldn't," replies Staugler. "Well, I wasn't gonna say it," continues Hernandez, "but if that's finished, and it's an indicator of the quality of our game, then we're in some serious trouble." An uncomfortable silence follows as the team exchanges awkward glances. "This has been a persistent problem," Staugler later confides, "He's been like this every time I've worked with him." Despite all of the friction, however, the team continues to playtest and tweak the game for the remaining hours of the competition. As the morning wears on, most teams are putting the

finishing touches on their games. The G Bunch has reassembled after a night apart (each team member worked on their assigned tasks at home), and they are now scrambling to bring all of the pieces together. In fact, by 11:30 a.m. all of the other teams have finished and have gone home for some well-earned rest, but the G Bunch stays until 1:00. Is that a violation of the rules? Not quite. From the beginning, this was to be a 24-hour competition. Oddly, no one seemed to realize that 2:00 a.m. on April 3 marked daylight savings time, making the night one hour shorter than usual. As a result, Macklin extends the event to accommodate the teams who feel they need the additional time, and this opportunity is all that allows the G Bunch to assemble their game (featuring a car that eats luggage) into a playable form.

With all of the entries turned in, the judges are left to play and evaluate. Four games will receive honors in the categories of best visuals, best audio, most innovative, and top overall game. Each winner will receive a trophy (mounted Atari joysticks), but only the top overall game will find a place on an upcoming Atari Flashback.

Fresh-faced and well-rested, the participants arrive at the awards ceremony on April 4 to learn how their games were received. Programming by hand paid off for the Superfriends as their title, Piranha, won for best audio

design, and despite some interpersonal problems, the Pixel Pirates' Bull Run was recognized for its superior visuals. The genre-defying Princess from Flashsmack won the team the trophy for most innovative, and even without colored lenses, Club Awesome's Ninja Garden snuck away with top honors.

"This is like the game geek equivalent of getting a book published," exclaims Evan Harper. "We spent so much time playing our own game, I thought we were just slacking. But it paid off." While the rewards are certainly exciting, most students agreed that the competition was never just about winning. It was about innovating with fresh design concepts while simultaneously paying respect to the technology that gave rise to the industry as we know it.

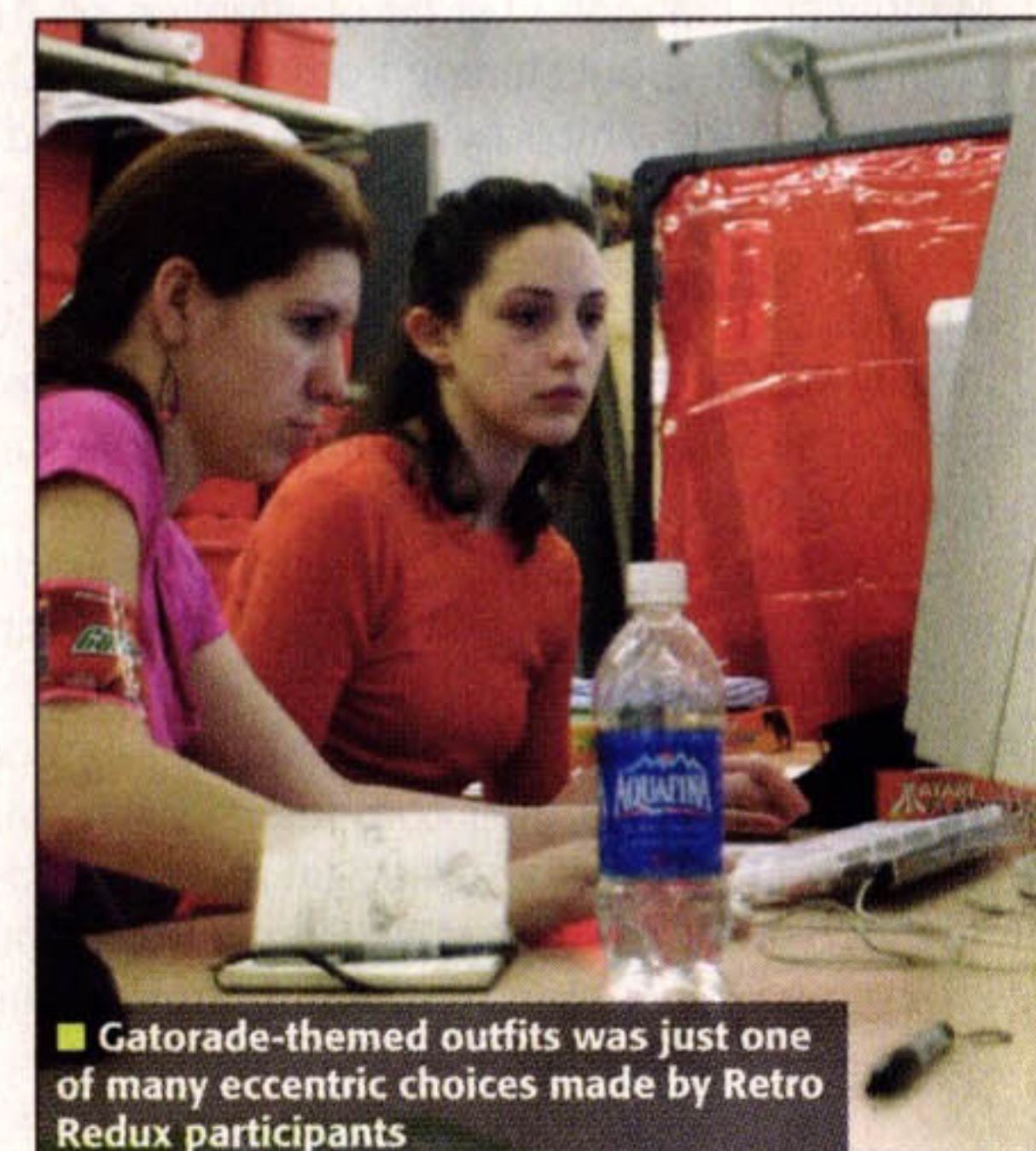
"We all grew up with these games. They're our history," articulates Carol Chung. Not only is it heartening to see our future designers so reverent of gaming's roots, but the submissions from all of the teams demonstrate a level of enthusiasm and ingenuity that promise to keep the industry alive and vibrant for years to come. If they produce these kinds of results with the architecture of an old Atari, the looming next generation of gaming could be even more promising than anyone had hoped. ■ ■ ■



■ Club Awesome's Raymond Zablocki, Evan Harper, Theodore Watson, Carol Chung, and Matt Brant showcase their game design skills and unique fashion sense



■ QED's Matt Slaybaugh (and a fledgling game girl) tries out the finished games at the awards ceremony



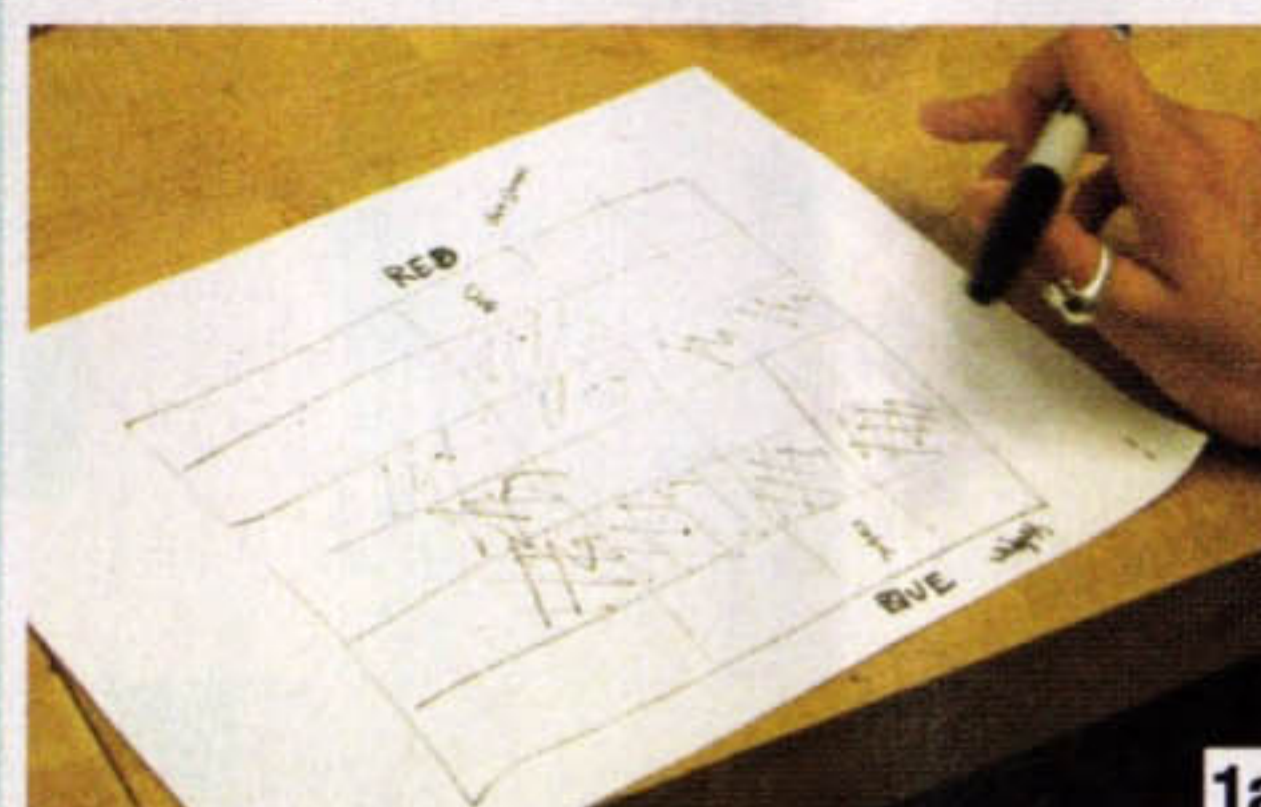
■ Gatorade-themed outfits was just one of many eccentric choices made by Retro Redux participants



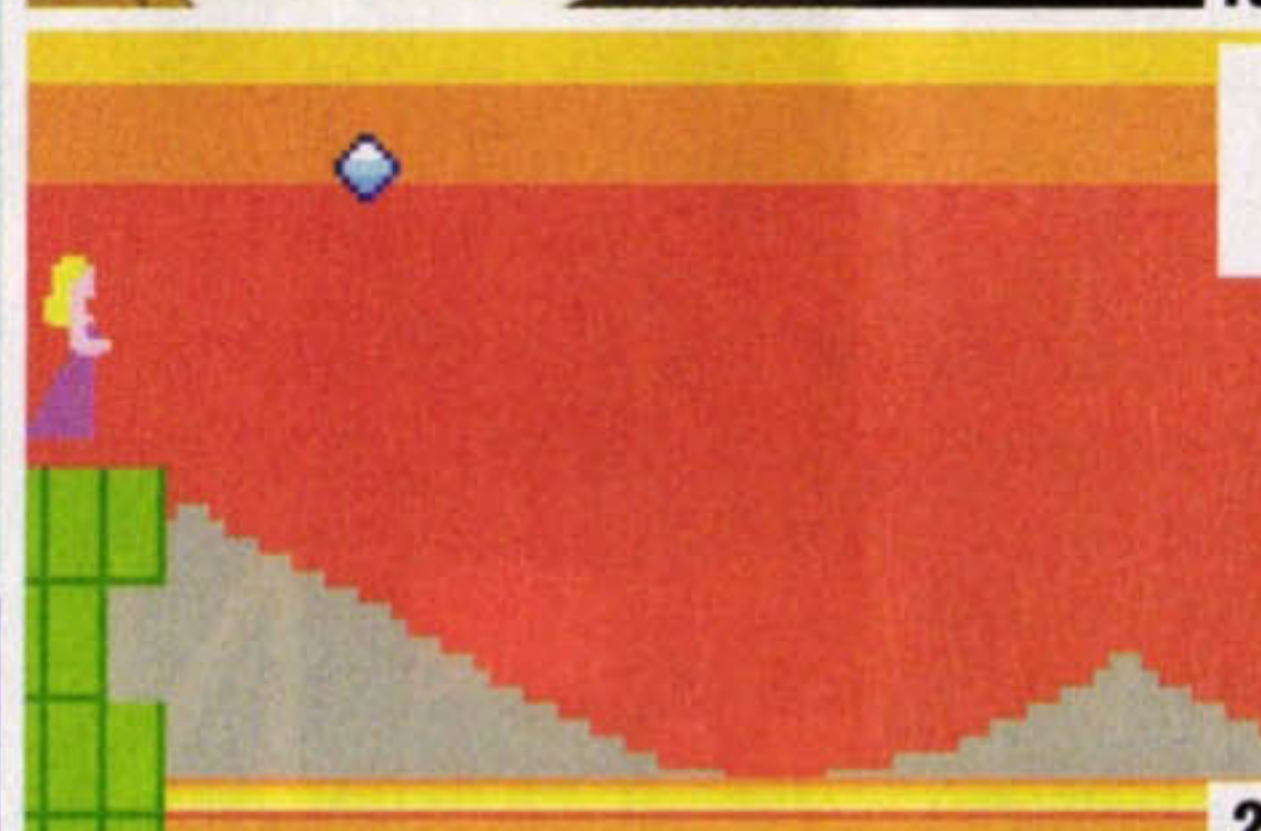
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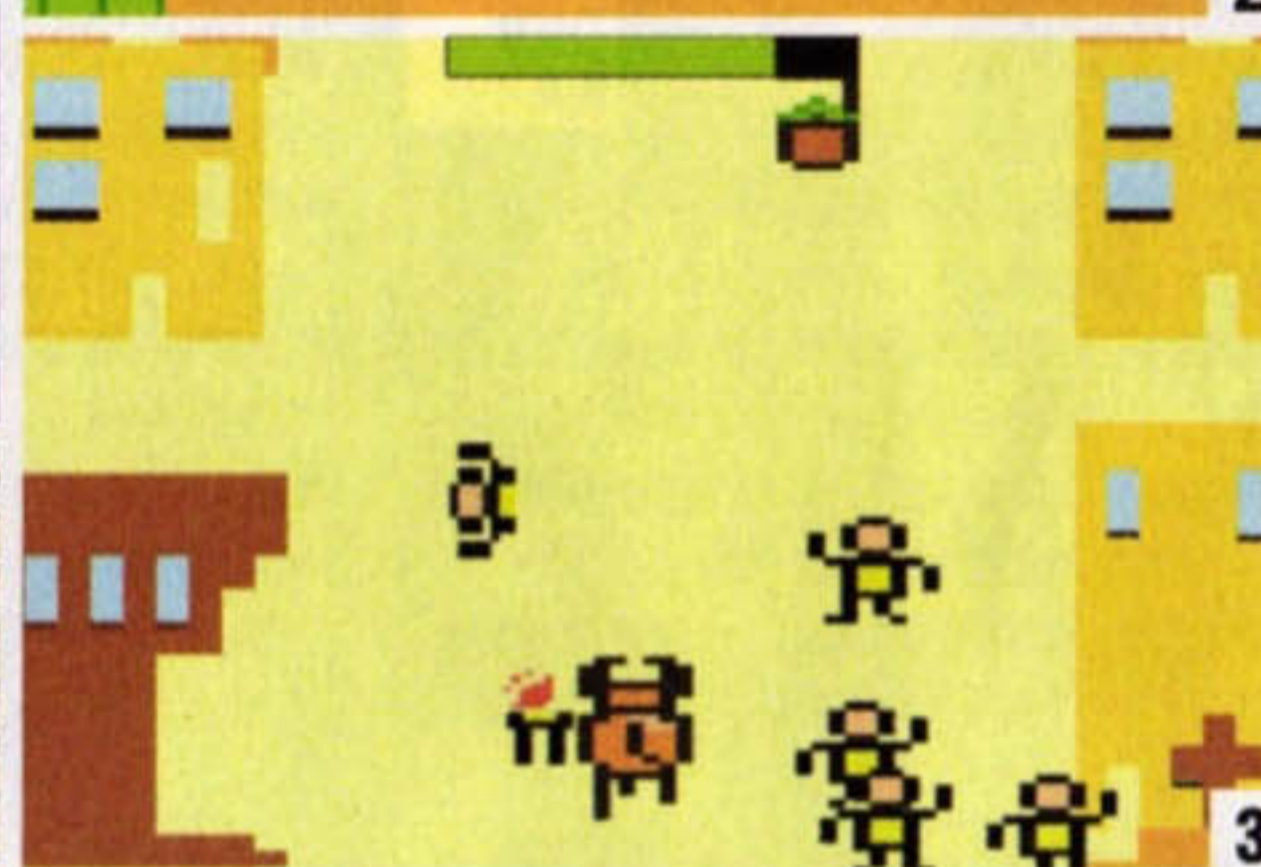
1 Ninja Garden Before & After
Though the game underwent some necessary changes, the final product still closely resembles the original concept art (drawn on the back of the contest rules)



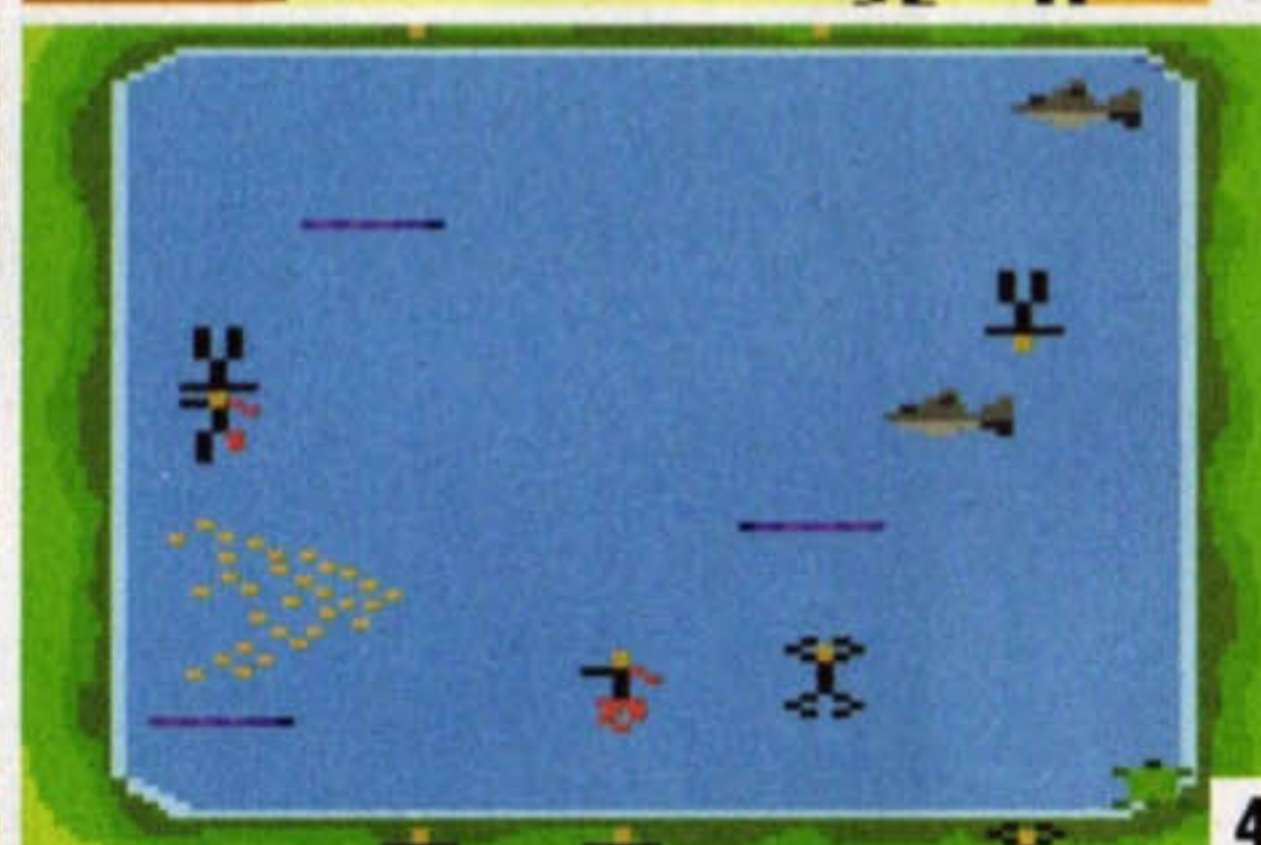
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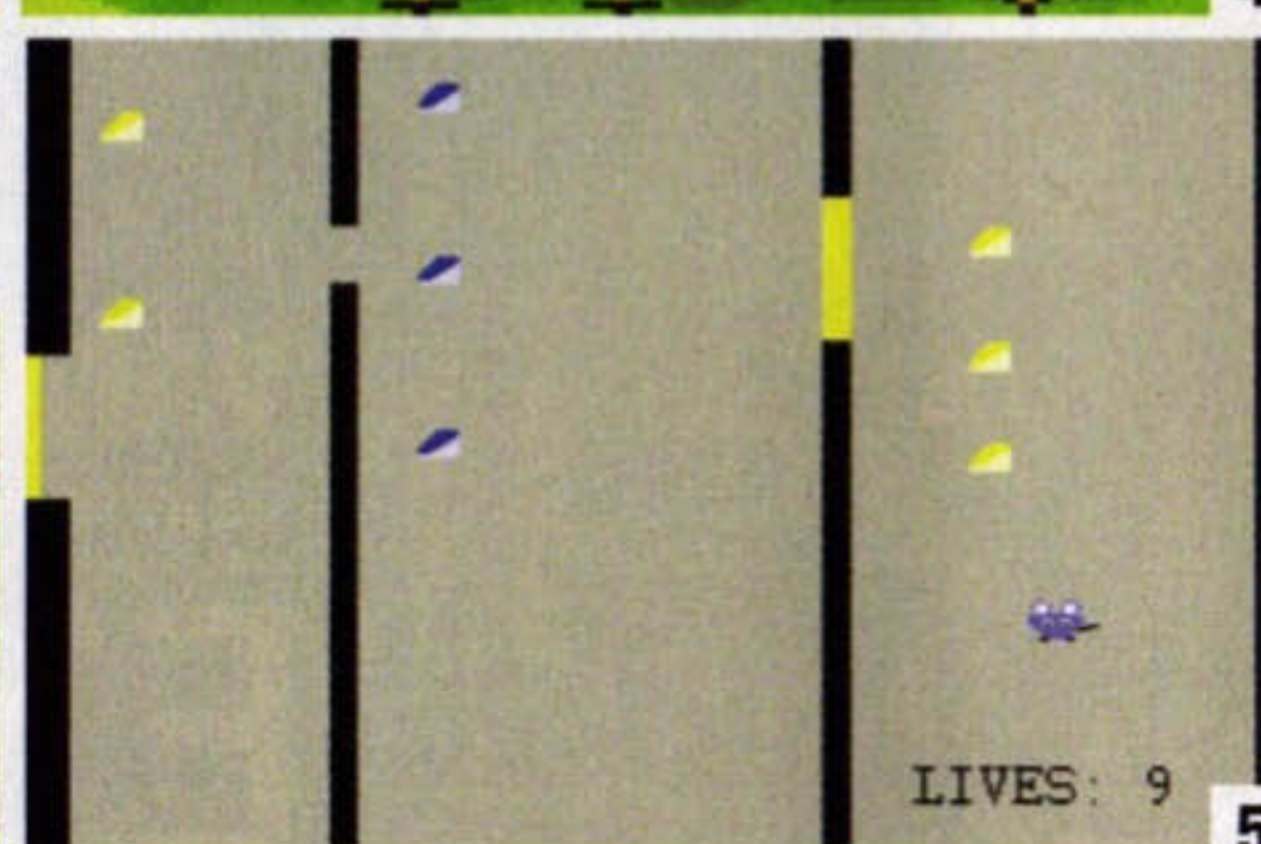
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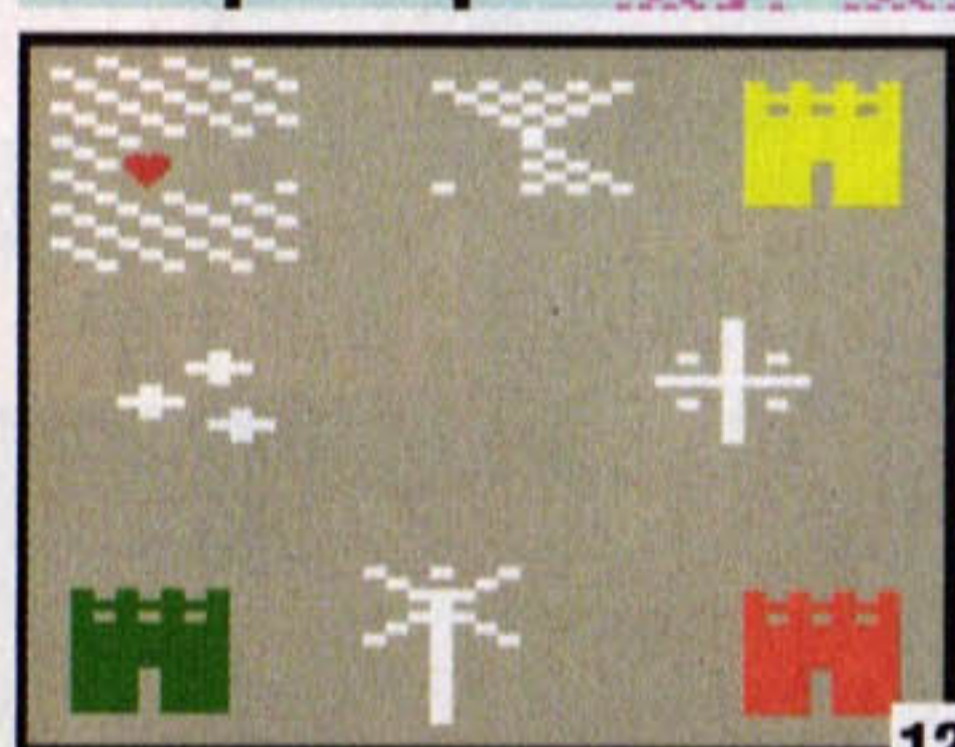
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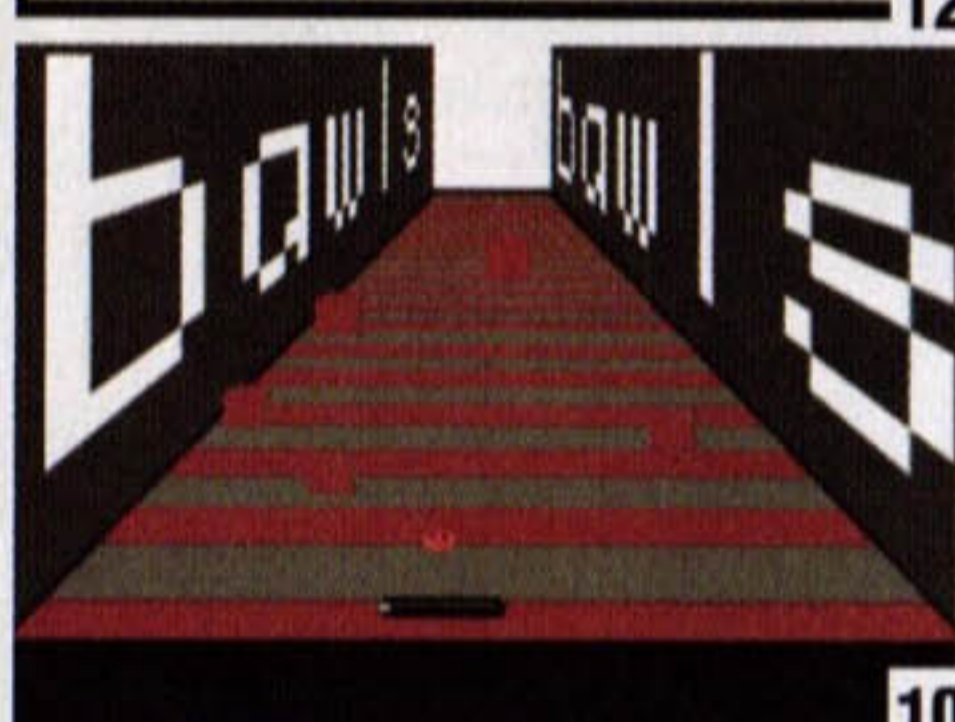
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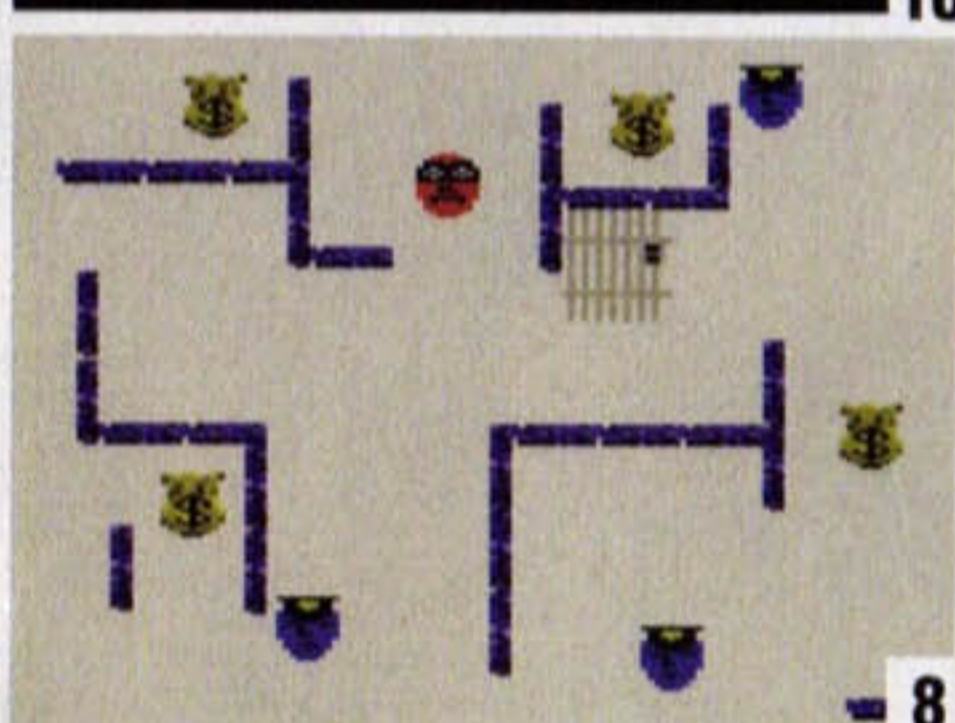
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1 Ninja Garden (Club Awesome)
Winner: Top Overall Game

The only two-player offering, this game has two ninjas whipping shuriken at each other as they collect explosives and destroy each other's pagodas. The action is frantic, addictive, and layered with surprising strategy. It is an entertaining and enduring creation that can easily stand alongside Atari's classics.

2 Princess (Flashsmack)

Winner: Most Innovative Game
Honorable Mention: Top Overall Game

Breaking down and recombining gaming conventions, the highlight of this title is the final boss fight. It pits a socially conscious, self-rescuing princess against the First Father of Gaming (a Pong paddle) atop a stack of unstable Breakout blocks.

3 Bull Run (Pixel Pirates)

Winner: Best Visual Design

Set in the streets of Pamplona, Bull Run follows one bovine's gory exploits as he flees to France and freedom. The top-down scrolling city, detailed animations, and hilarious mutilations had this title trampling the competition in the graphics category.

4 Piranha (Superfriends)

Winner: Best Audio Design

As an ever-growing school of piranha, the player's job is to eat hapless swimmers while avoiding pond predators like turtles and sharks. The music is catchy, but what really distinguishes Piranha is the brilliant scream of terror made by swimmers as they are slowly (and bloodily) consumed.

5 Cats + Mice (Show No Mercy)

Honorable Mention: Most Innovative Game

The lesson to be learned here is that yellow cheese makes you big, and blue cheese makes you small. If you're a mouse, that is. This puzzler has you balancing your size as you negotiate maze-like levels filled with cats.

6 Cart Joust (QED)

Less like a game and more like David Lynch meets Supermarket Sweep, Cart Joust has you punching evil Mohawk babies and dodging floating heads, all from the comfort of a shopping cart. You'll never look at the Gerber baby the same way again.

7 Run Rabbit, Run (Club Awesome)

Club Awesome's ninja-free offering is cheerful jaunt through the woods as a fuzzy rabbit as he collects carrots and dodges wolves. It has a clever interactive title screen and some sweet pixelated trees, but the levels suffer a bit from a lack of variation.

8 Family Jewels (QED)

A familiar "cops 'n robbers" theme with a unique twist. Playing like a puzzle game, Family Jewels has you controlling three police officers simultaneously, coordinating movements to herd a bouncing thief into a jail cell.

9 Squirrel Jam (Phatari)

If you punch squirrels in the face, they make noise. In fact, according to Squirrel Jam, they make music. This unique sound-sequencing game has you hitting the flying rodents as they zoom by, attempting to line up the rhythms in a specified order.

10 Bawls (Bawls)

It isn't often that a game can cite both energy drinks and Breakout as inspiration. Bawls has players destroying various obstacles with a ricocheting ball as they travel down a 3D hallway.

11 Dot's Dash (QED)

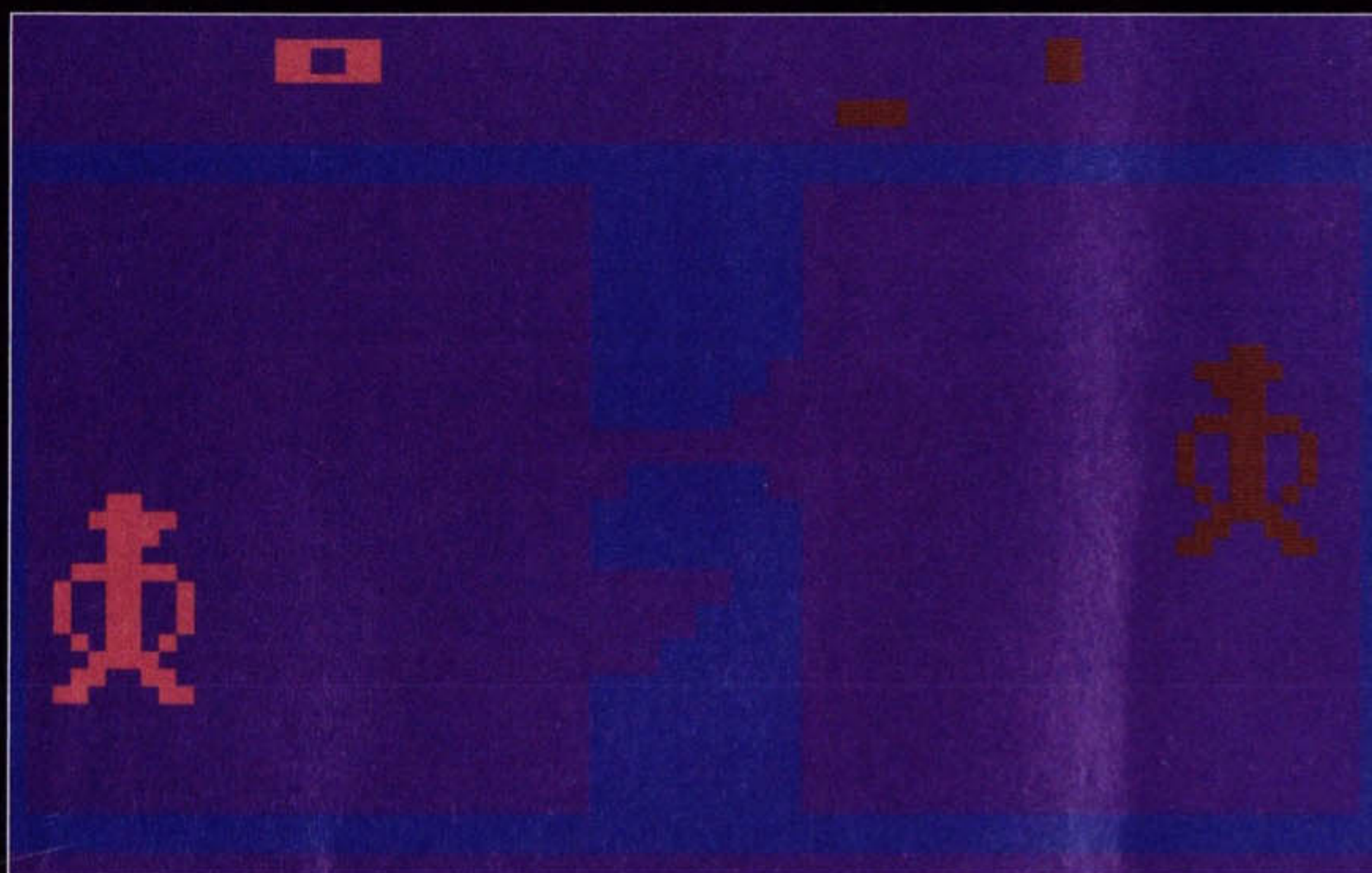
Finding art in simplicity, Dot's Dash has you guiding a single pixel through a variety of mine fields. Featuring steadily increasing speeds, a manic soundtrack, and one random banana, it strikes a solid balance between frustration and fun.

12 Heart Castles (Show No Mercy)

As a heart exploring four areas littered with pixels, you try to amass as many points as possible within a set time limit. While not exactly filled with excitement, the concept of collecting random stuff is almost as old as the industry itself.

13 Lugzie Goes to Australia Heaven (G Bunch)

A story about a luggage-consuming car that goes through the layers of the earth to get to Australia Heaven. The gameplay is simplistic platforming, but the background visuals (especially the "Dentist at the Center of the Earth" level) are colorful and creative.

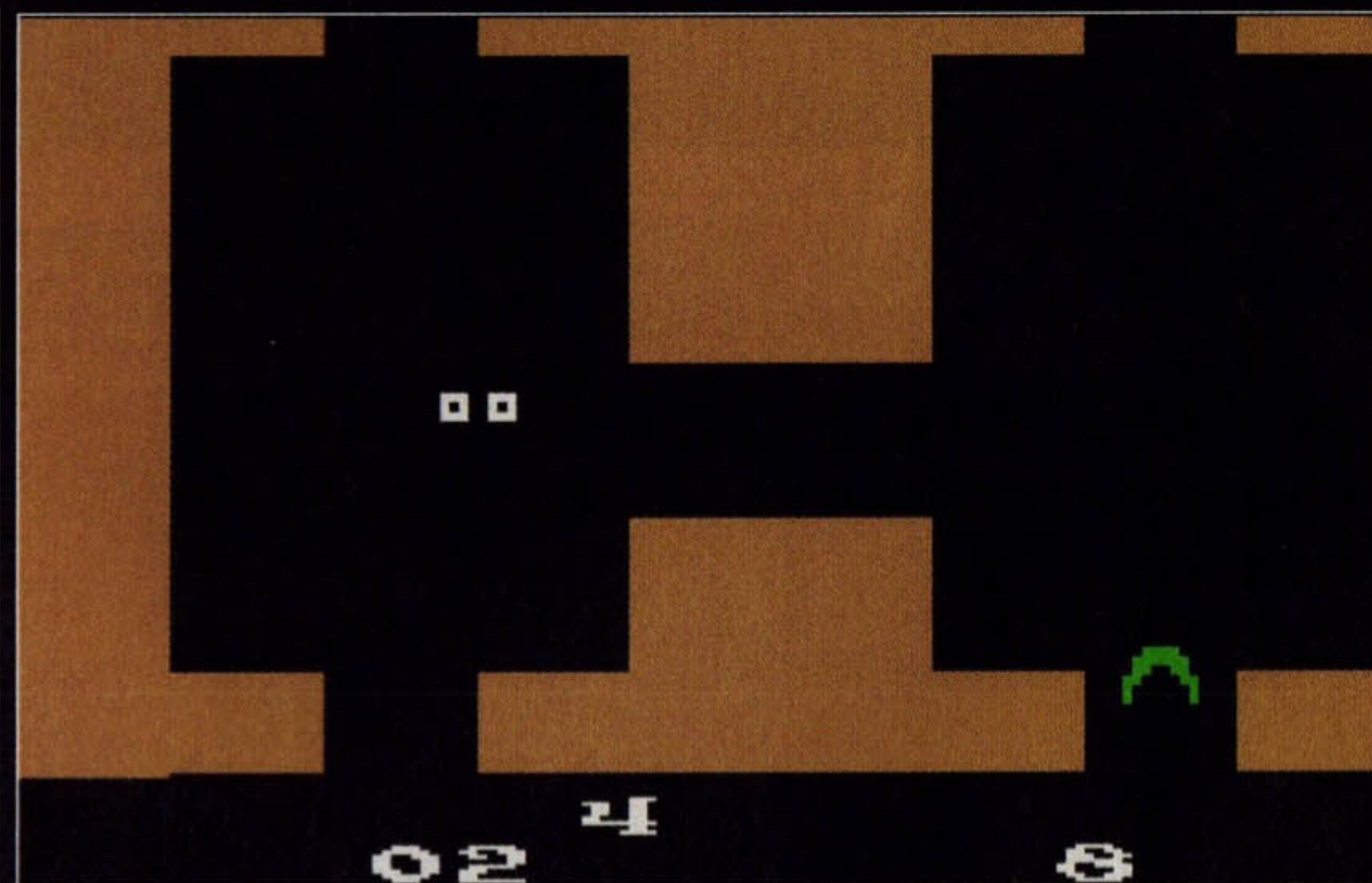
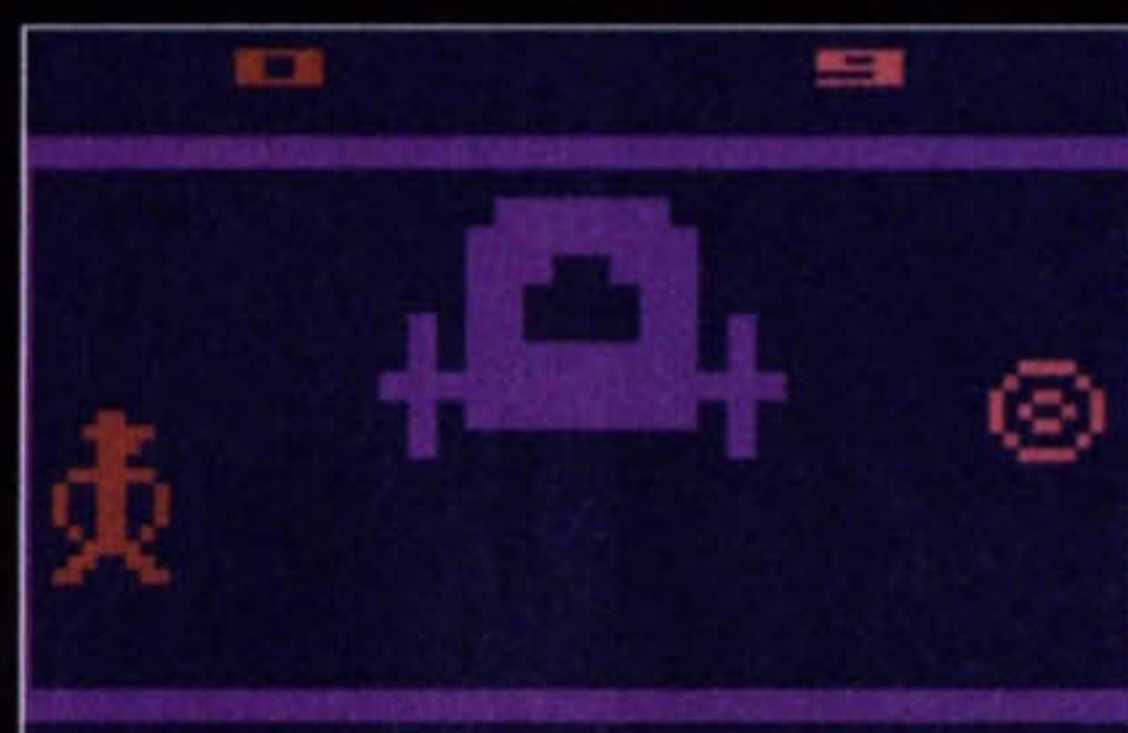


ATARI 2600

OUTLAW

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER ATARI > DEVELOPER ATARI > RELEASE 1978

Because of the enormous changes in technology between the glory days of Atari and today, reviewing a 2600 game by current standards is impossible. But one thing that never changes regardless of hardware capabilities is fun. Games like Outlaw have an inherent enjoyability about them that can't be diminished by time. Featuring 16 different game modes, Outlaw is a western-themed shooting contest for one or two players. Single-player modes have a blocky cowboy taking aim at a moving target, while two-player modes have the players shooting it out with each other. Chunky obstacles like wagons, cactuses, and walls appear between you and your target, and some modes allow them to be blown apart block by block. The single-player modes grows old quickly, but the head-to-head games have a simplistic appeal that's hard to deny. It may be no competition for the fast-paced deathmatches of today's games, but Outlaw still has some fun in store for those with a vintage Atari system.

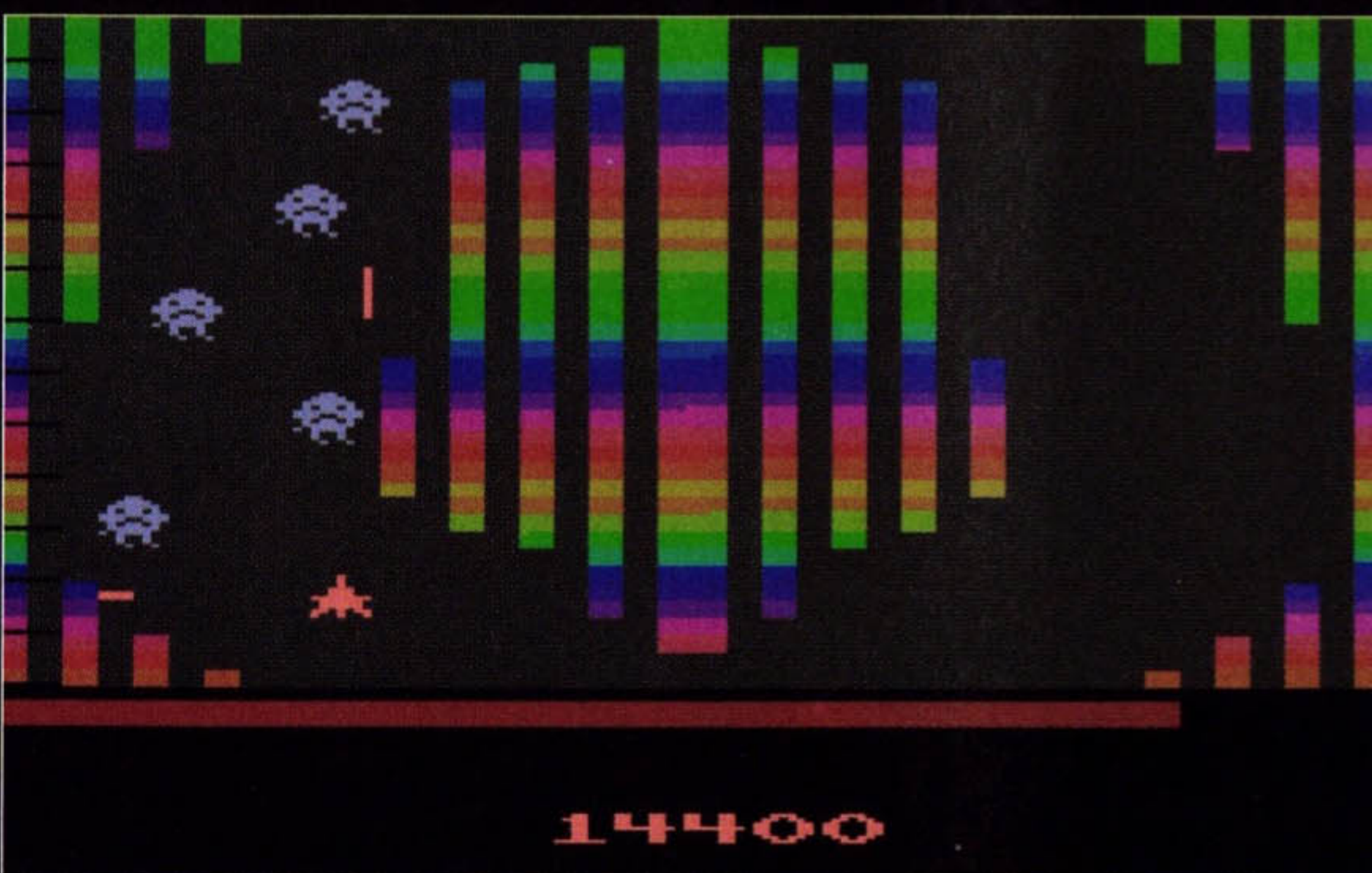
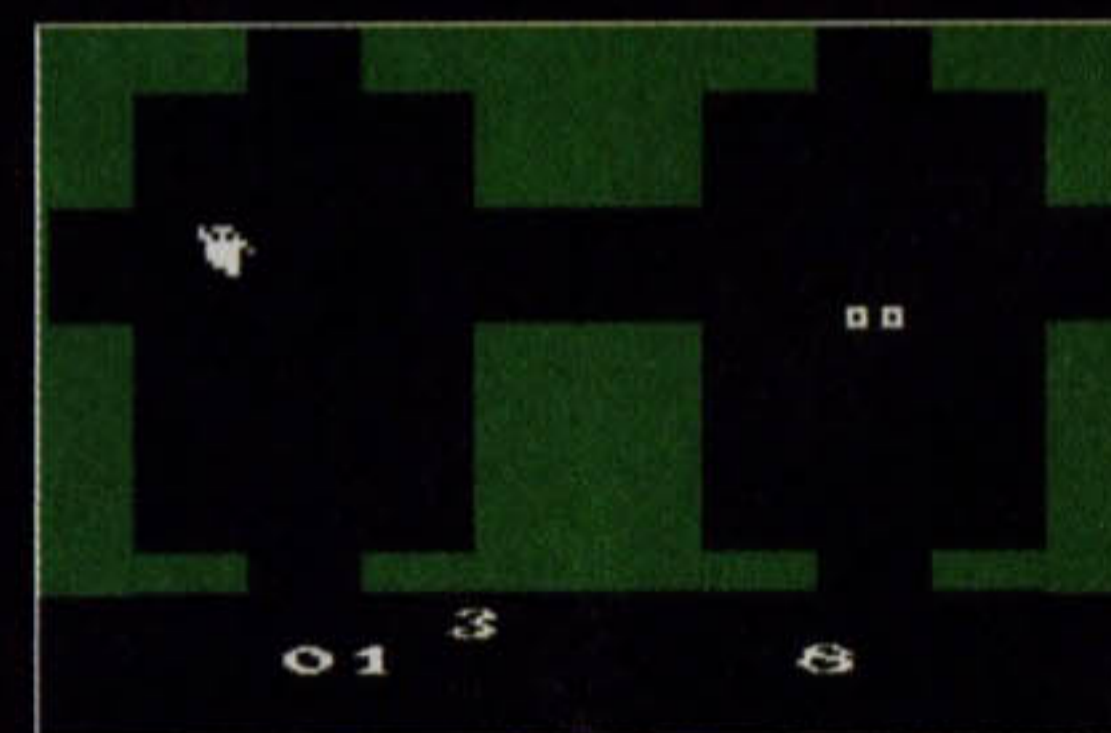
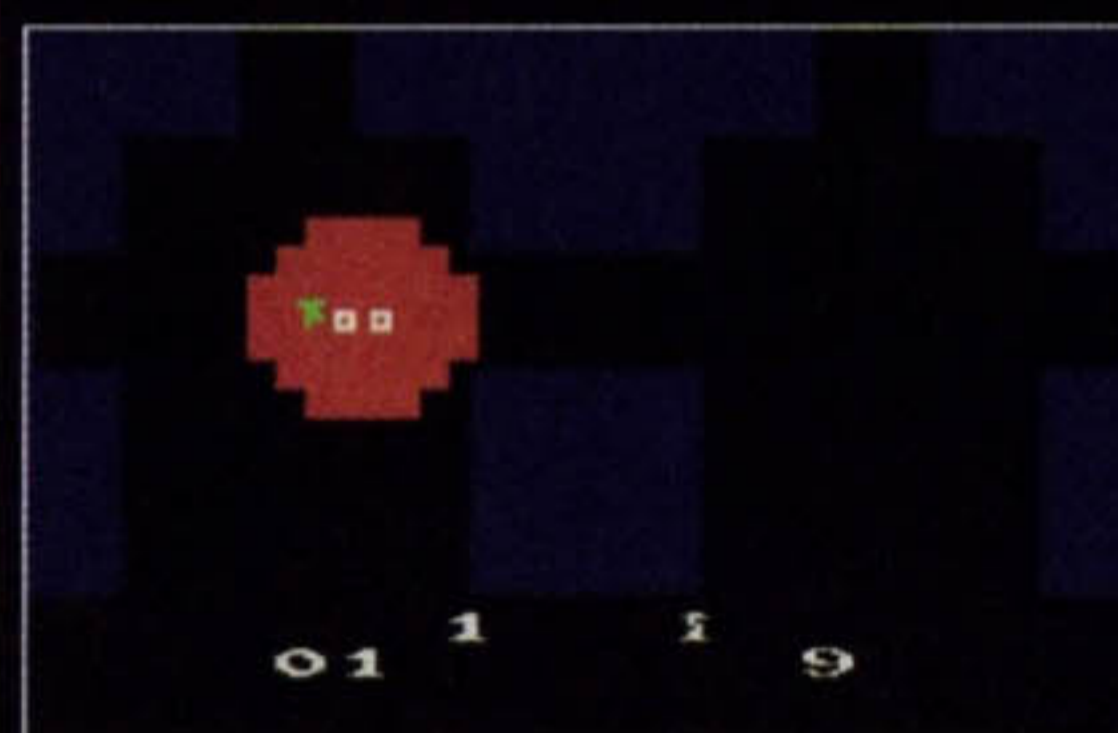


ATARI 2600

HAUNTED HOUSE

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER ATARI > DEVELOPER ATARI > RELEASE 1981

Not all survival horror games need to have evil corporations, shuffling zombies, and scarce ammunition. Considered by many to be the first in a genre that gave rise to modern favorites like Resident Evil and Silent Hill, Haunted House contained many other elements that would set the standard for spooky exploration. Dimly lit rooms, abundant locked doors, and running like hell from belligerent ghosts make up the core of Haunted House's gameplay. As a pair of eyes, it is your job to scour the dark, hazard-ridden mansion in search of the three shards of magic urn. The game even takes on heavy puzzle elements when you realize that you can only carry one item at a time, forcing you to juggle the protective scepter, convenient key, and game-winning urn in your single inventory slot. It may not have the visual razzle-dazzle or chilling moments of the genre's recent entries, but it did teach a generation of young gamers the word "urn," filling in that treacherous gap between "vase" and "carafe."



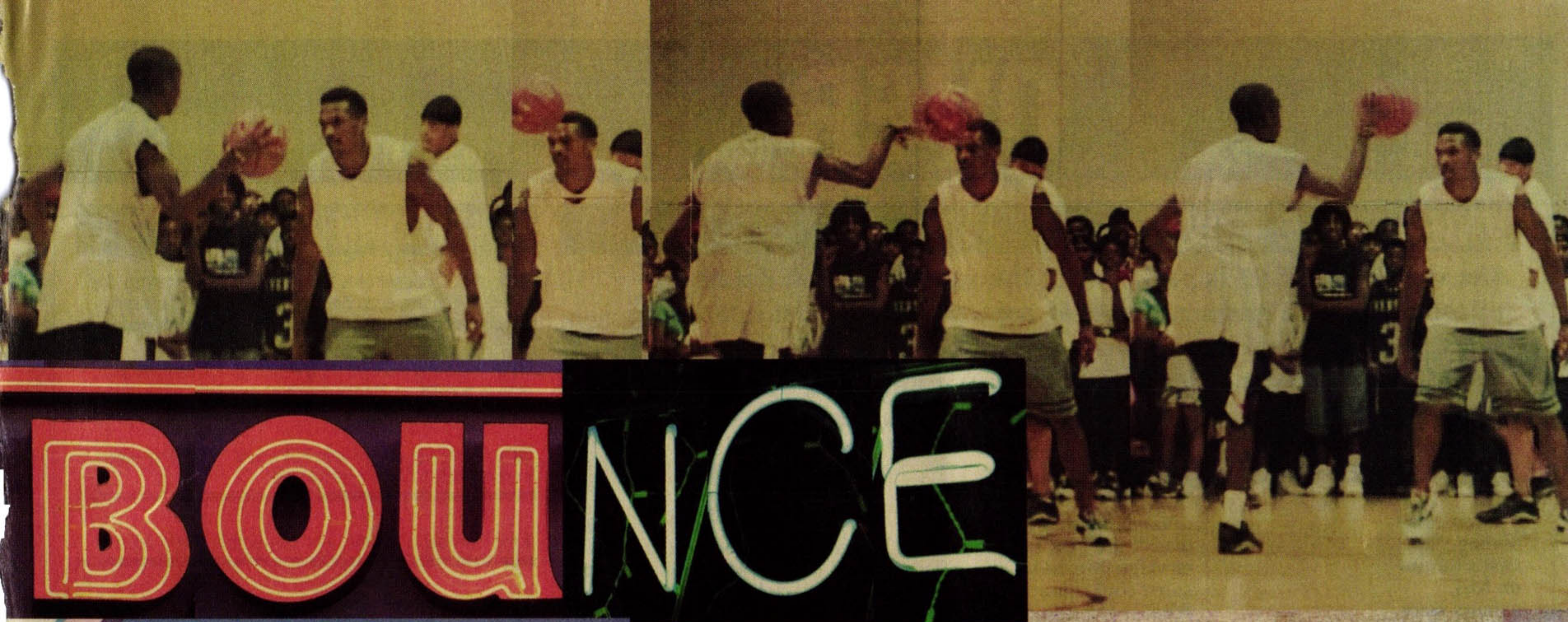
ATARI 2600

VANGUARD

> STYLE 1-PLAYER SHOOTER > PUBLISHER ATARI > DEVELOPER ATARI > RELEASE 1983

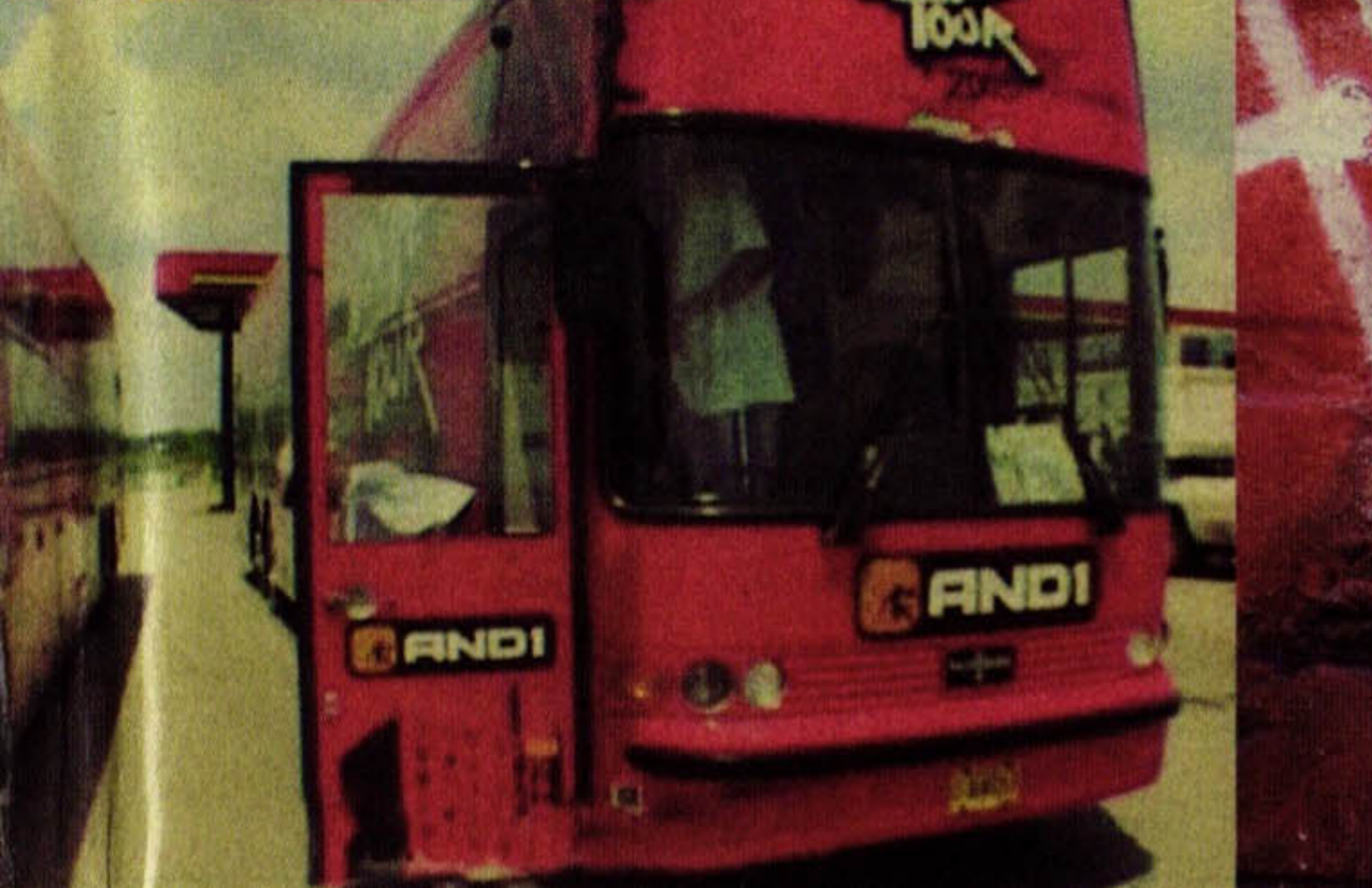
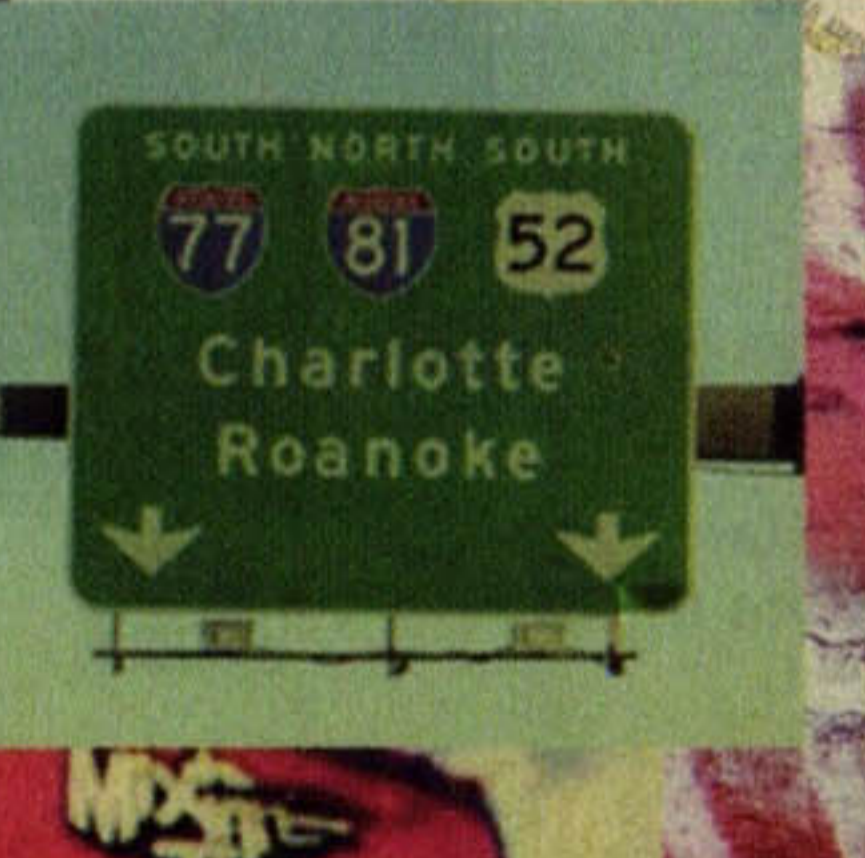
Early shooter fans should have little trouble recognizing this classic. Vanguard established several concepts that would show up time and again in later games within the genre. These included the ability to shoot in multiple directions, as well as pick up items that made your ship indestructible for a time. An advanced musical score (for the time) accompanied your travels through multiple stages (gasp!) that remarkably scrolled in different directions along the horizontal and vertical plane (double gasp!). In all seriousness, this was high-class stuff in its day, and was definitely one of those titles that heralded things to come. Unfortunately, this version on the 2600 wasn't quite up to snuff with its earlier arcade counterpart. Whereas the arcade version offered a separate control function for the multidirectional shooting, the simplified home console version had the action simply mapped to whichever direction you pulled the main joystick. It's still fun, but definitely a little awkward.





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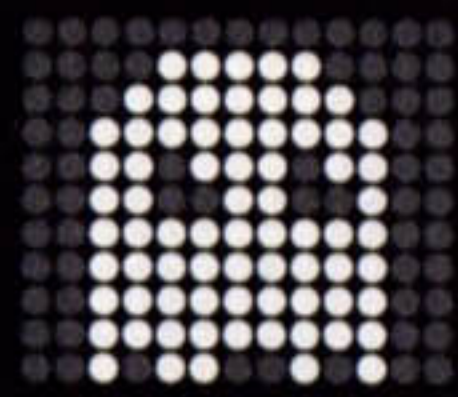
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GAMEOVER

Would You Like To Switch To Easy Mode?

VIDEO GAME TRIVIA

The show floor of E3 is packed with the games that will define the upcoming year in gaming. However, sometimes the most interesting titles can't be found in any kiosk; some companies show their most secret projects behind closed doors, away from prying eyes. Answer these questions to determine which highly classified game you'll get to see behind the scenes.

1 Upon completing Data East's Karnov on NES, gamers were treated to what final dubious onscreen reward?



- A. Congratulations! The End
- B. A Winner Is You! Game Over
- C. You Spooky Bard!
- D. A lengthy FMV where Karnov casts Holy and saves the planet

2 Which Warner Communication executive/Atari CEO served as the namesake for Howard Scott Warshaw's 1982 hit Yar's Revenge?



- A. Ray Jay Johnson
- B. Ray Kassar
- C. Ray Romano
- D. Yar Revengerson

3 Let's say that you are suddenly transformed into character from an RPG. Which of the following names would GUARANTEE that you will live to see the adventure's end?



- A. Tellah
- B. Crono
- C. Ness
- D. Lavitz

4 Vandal Hearts for PSone wasn't the best turn-based strategy title, but it sure offered some cool character classes. What is the title of the most powerful class attained by the main character, Ash?

- A. Piemaster
- B. Paradigm
- C. Paragon
- D. Vandalier

5 This is a screenshot from which of the following hopelessly uncool 8-bit games?



- A. Renegade
- B. Power Blade
- C. Low G Man
- D. Vice: Project Doom

6 What chases space mice? Space cats, of course! In Sega's quirky puzzler ChuChu Rocket, what are the space cats called?



- A. NaniNani
- B. Kame Hame Ha
- C. Kapukapu
- D. Lunch

7 As you chose whether to be a pretty evil god or a really evil god in Lionhead Studio's Black & White, which creature was never available as your deity's earthly incarnation?

- A. Zebra
- B. Dragon
- C. Cow
- D. Mandrill



8 Jehuty's pilot in Zone of the Enders II: The Second Runner has one of the worst video game names ever. What is it?

- A. Dingo Egret
- B. Zap Rowsdowner
- C. Max Cyclone
- D. Ethan Sabre

9 By what unsettling moniker is Kratos known in God of War? If you get this wrong, he'll come to your house and skin you alive. For fun.

- A. Tom Green
- B. Hades' Harbinger
- C. Axe of Ares
- D. Ghost of Sparta

10 Which of the following Star Wars games does NOT feature a battle on Hoth?

- A. Star Wars (Arcade)
- B. Rogue Squadron III: Rebel Strike
- C. The Empire Strikes Back (SNES)
- D. Star Wars: Galactic Battlegrounds

BREAKDOWN

40% of U.S. households have some type of system dedicated to gaming, according to Nielsen Entertainment

98% of Jeremy's diet is roughage. The remain two percent is nougat

50% of the first one million PSPs sold in the two days immediately following its release

7 the number of people who remember Turbo Teen

41% of surveyed Australians said they would knowingly purchase pirated games if the price was right. See what happens when you ban Leisure Suit Larry? Anarchy!

★ Trivia Score & Rank ★



0-1:
World of Army Men MMORPG



2-3:
Turokin'



4-5:
NintenDio



6-7:
Super E-Reader Advance SP with connectivity



8-9:
The Muppets Take Halo



10:
Splinter Cell in Space

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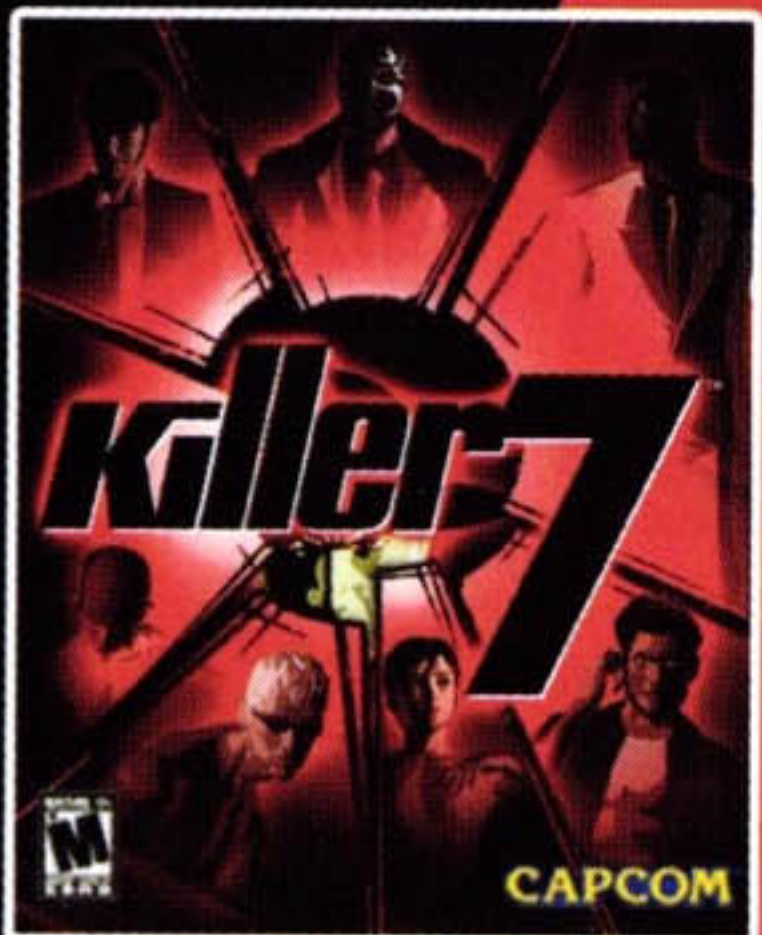
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