

EXCLUSIVE! 18-PAGE GEARS OF WAR 2 BLOWOUT! P.52

GAMEPRO

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Issue 242 / NOV 08

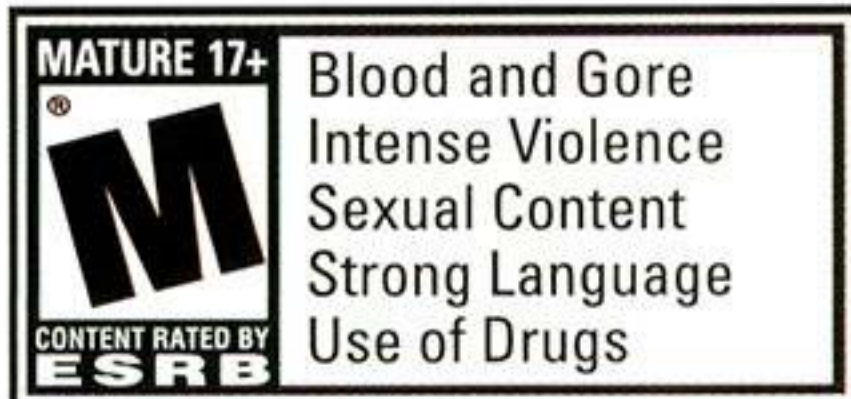
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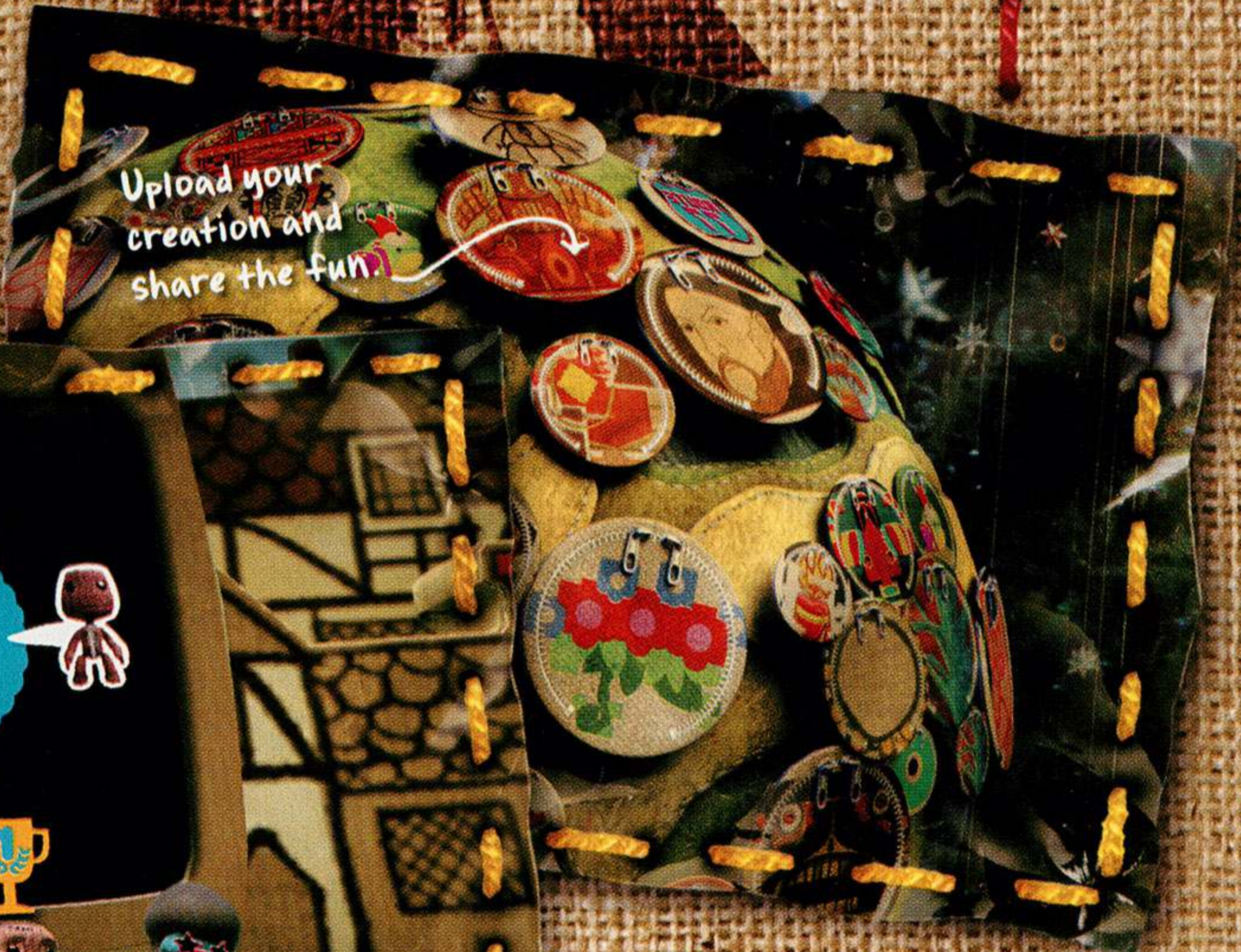


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FABLE II



MATURE TM M	17+ Blood Language Sexual Content Use of Alcohol Violence
ESRB CONTENT RATING	www.esrb.org

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XBOX 360 LIVE

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★ Features



52 Brutal Legend

GamePro plays the entire first act of the biggest Xbox 360 game of the year! Everything is revealed in this 18-page exclusive article: new screens, new enemies, new weapons, new secrets, and much, much more.



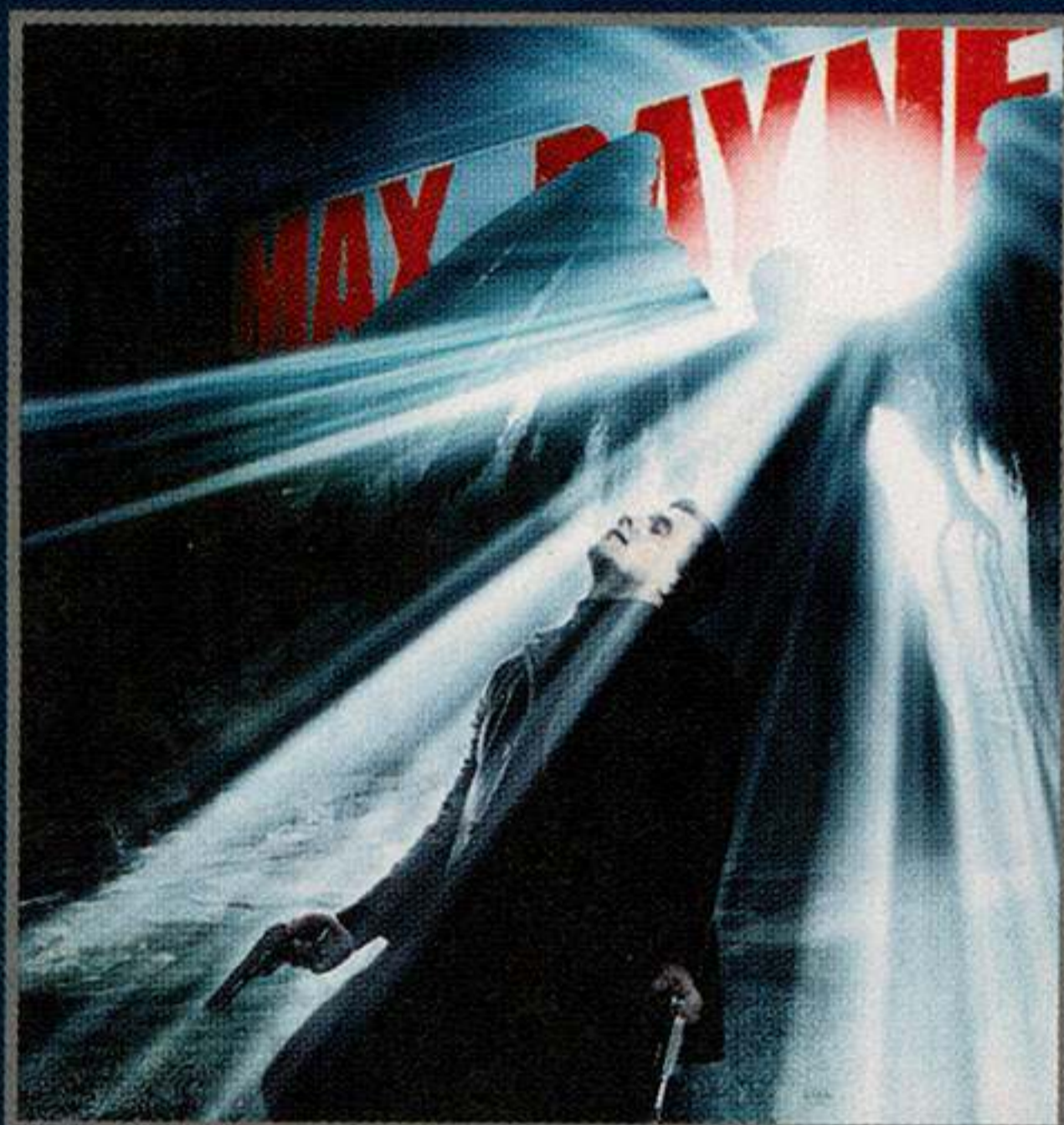
76 Game Girls Gone Wild

GameGirl.com's Raychul and Nikole answer your questions about sex and video games. What do Game Girls like?

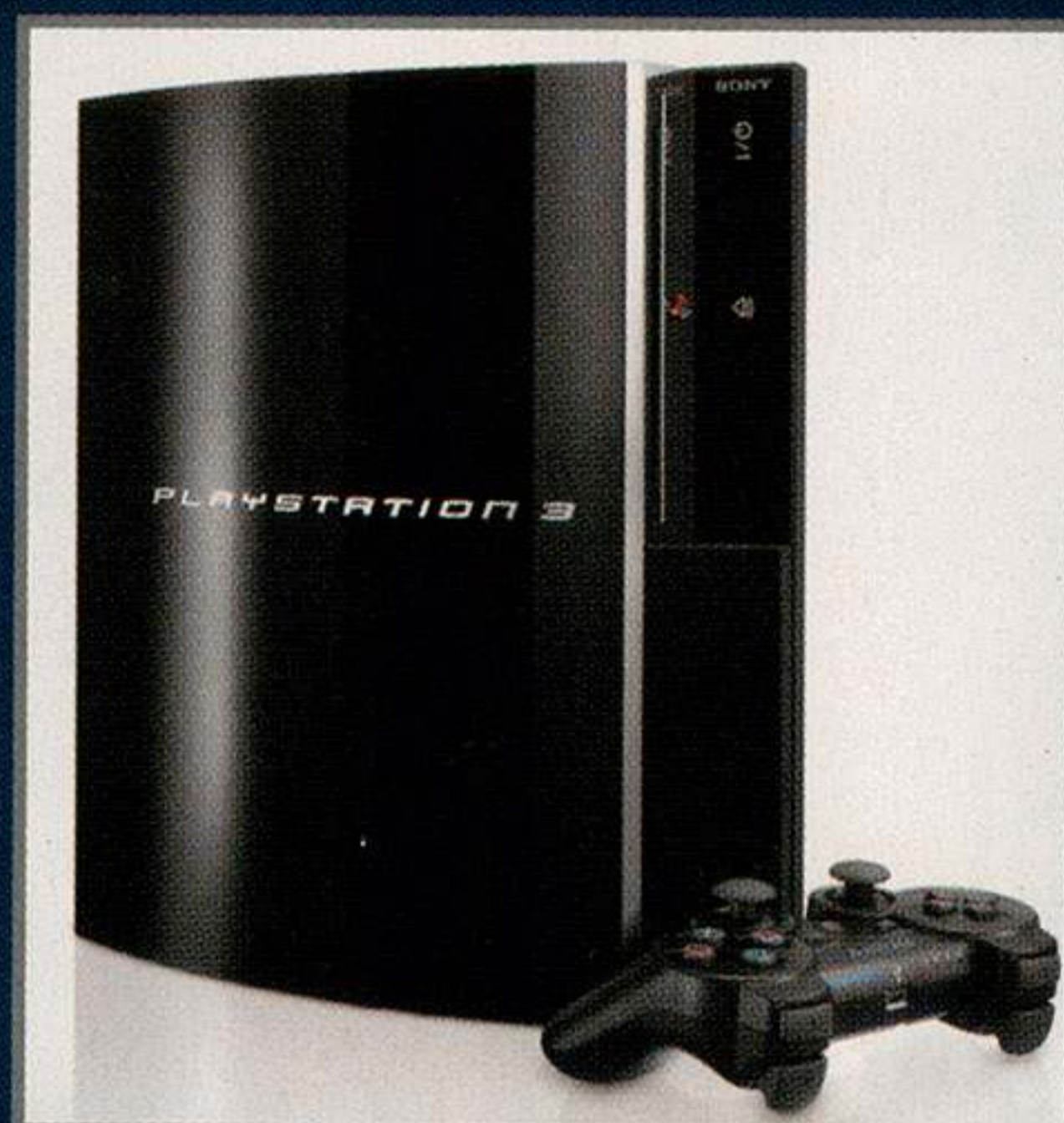
★ Departments

Spawn Point

25



25 **Max Payne Movie**
Mark Wahlberg and Mila Kunis give us the inside scoop on the live-action bullet-time flick, out this month.



32 **Super-size Your PS3**
Five easy steps to upgrade your PS3 with a whopping 500GB hard drive.

Opening Shots

12

Feedback

106

Parting Shot

112

Big Gears Keep on Turnin'

If you're reading this, we made it. Barely. Surviving the arduous birthing contractions of the magnificent new GamePro.com was no small task, but we persevered and, in the process, created what is clearly the finest video game site on the planet (I am biased, but only a little). True, there are still a few bugs to iron out, but overall the upgrade has been a massive success on all fronts. We've been particularly pleased by how much you, the readers, have been contributing to the new site in the form of user reviews (new-and-improved!), forum threads (mostly improved!), and comments (now tolerable!).

Keep it up, and help us turn GamePro.com into a refuge for more people like you—people who love games.

On another note, you may also be wondering what I thought of Gears of War 2. You can skip to our massive 18-page manifesto on page 52, but here's the short version: holy freaking crap. Longtime readers may remember that I greatly enjoyed the original Gears of War but felt it didn't tap into its full earth-shaking potential. I am happy to announce that, judging by what I've now played, all that pent-up potential is finally going to be unleashed in a big, big way. Trust me on this one, guys.

Gears of War 1.5? More like Gears of War 2.5. See you on November 7...

Sid Shuman
Senior Editor

Sneak Previews

42



Ghostbusters: The Video Game (PS3, Xbox 360, Wii, PS2, PC).....	46
Golden Axe: Beast Rider (PS3, Xbox 360)	47
LEGO Batman: The Videogame (PS3, Xbox 360, Wii, PS2, DS, PSP, PC)	48
MotorStorm Pacific Rift (PS3)	50
Naruto: Ultimate Ninja Storm (PS3).....	48
Red Faction: Guerrilla (PS3, Xbox 360, PC)	44
Saints Row 2 (PS3, Xbox 360, PC)	49
Tomb Raider: Underworld (PS3, Xbox 360, Wii, PS2, DS, PC)	42
Watchmen (PS3, Xbox 360)	50

Reviews

80



BioShock (PS3).....	103
Castlevania: Order of Ecclesia (DS).....	100
Fracture (Xbox 360).....	90
Infinite Undiscovery (Xbox 360)	94
Mega Man 9 (PSN, XBLA, WiiWare)	81
Mercenaries 2: World in Flames (Xbox 360).....	96
Naruto: Path of the Ninja 2 (DS)	103
Robocalypse (DS)	104
Rock Band 2 (Xbox 360).....	86
Silent Hill: Homecoming (PS3, Xbox 360).....	92
Sonic Chronicles: The Dark Brotherhood (DS)	105
Spore (PC)	82
Star Ocean: First Departure (PSP)	104
Too Human (Xbox 360).....	84
Viva Piñata: Trouble in Paradise (Xbox 360)....	102
Wario Land: Shake It! (Wii)	101
Yggdra Union: We'll Never Fight Alone (PSP).....	104

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 Violence
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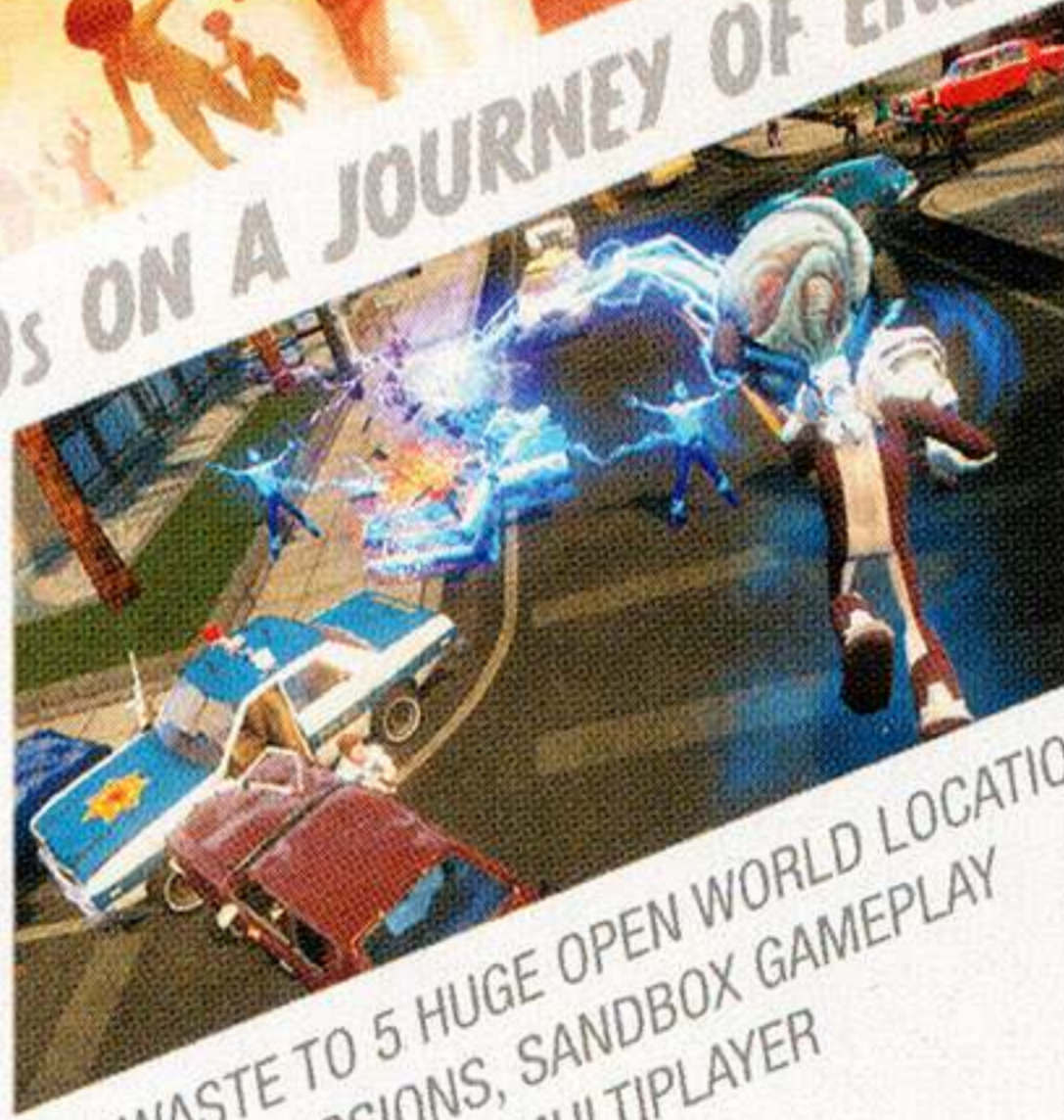
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BURN BABY BURN!

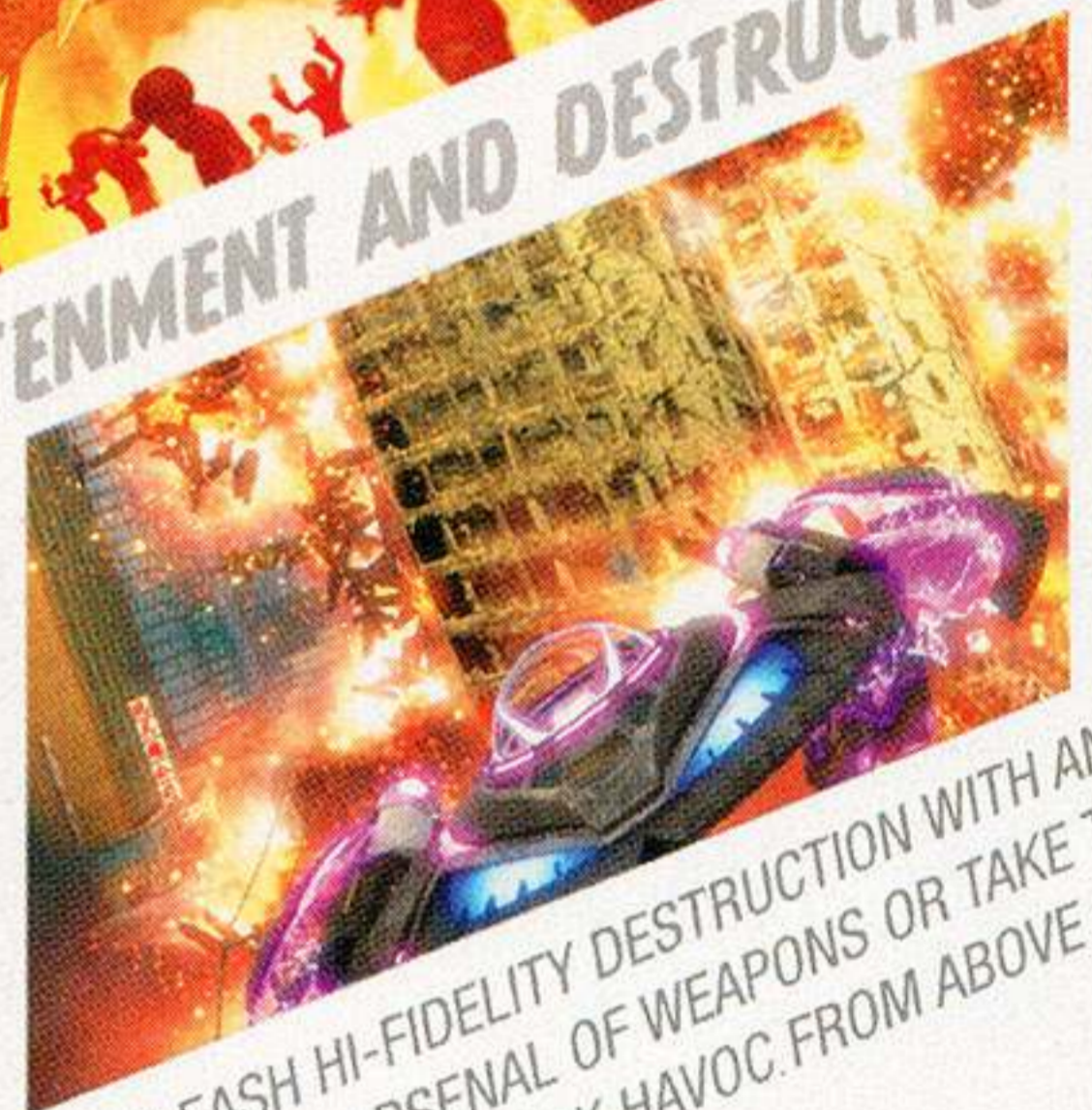
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Unlike most survival horror games, shooting enemies in the head will do nothing in *Dead Space*. Tear them apart, limb from limb, and even stomp on them to be sure they don't spring back to life!

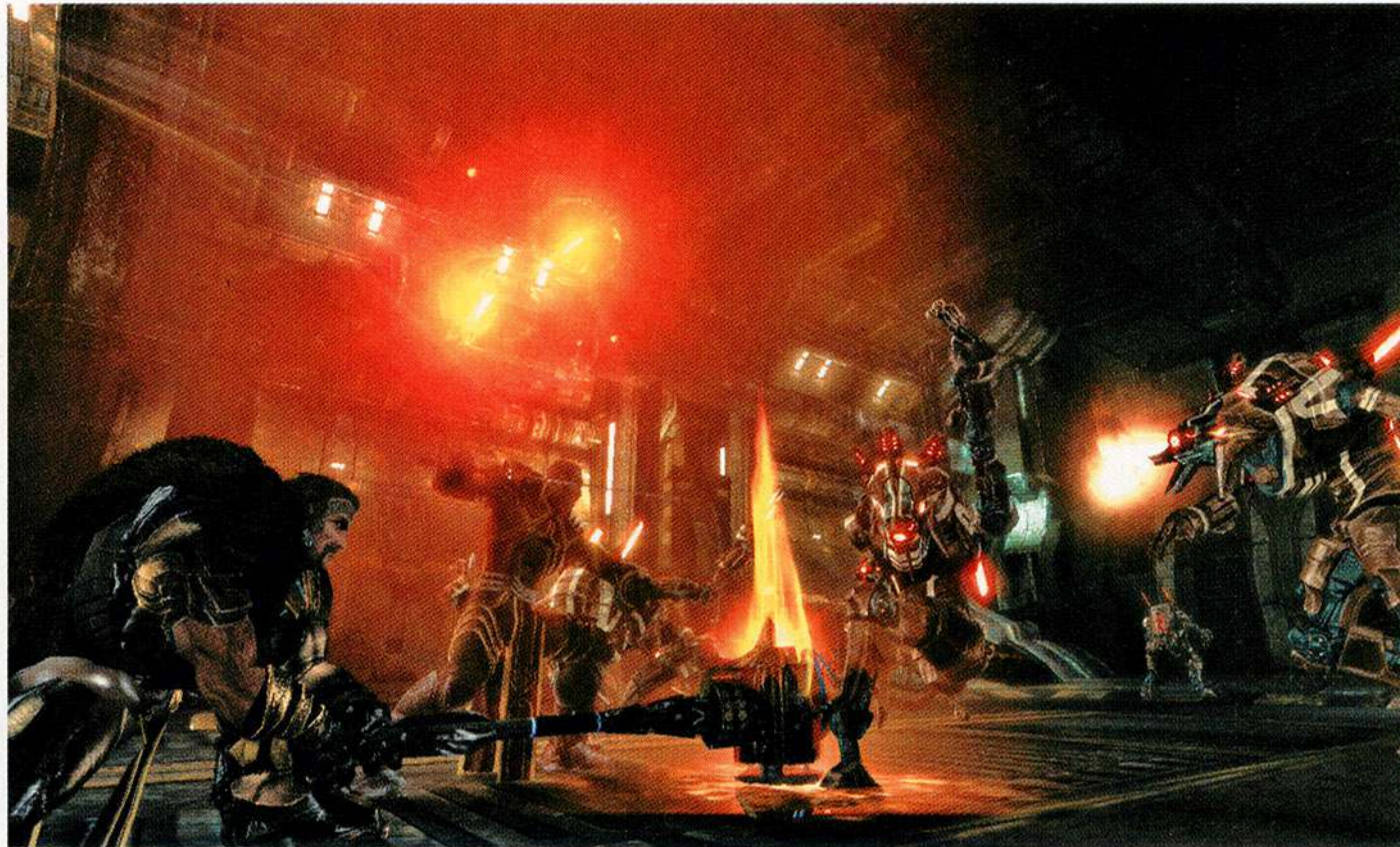
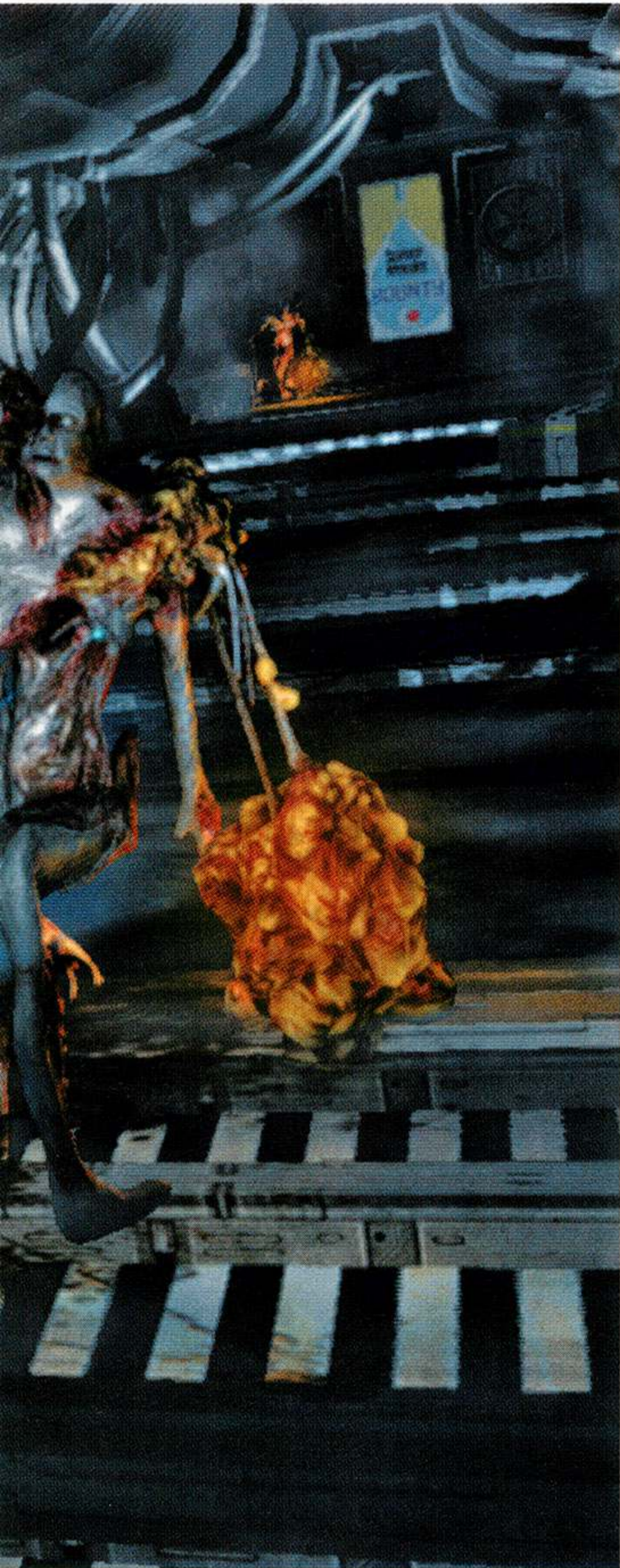
▼ *DEAD SPACE* PS3, Xbox 360, PC



▼ *LEFT 4 DEAD* Xbox 360, PC



▼ *MIRROR'S EDGE* PS3, Xbox 360, PC



▼ **TOO HUMAN** XBOX 360



▼ **FABLE II** XBOX 360



▼ **LEGENDARY** PS3, XBOX 360, PC



▼ **VELVET ASSASSIN** PS3, XBOX 360, PC



The Nazi war machine looks more menacing than ever, as they search for an inscrutable occult power source known as the Black Sun.

WOLFENSTEIN PS3, Xbox 360, PC



DAMNATION PS3, Xbox 360, PC



SONIC UNLEASHED PS3, Xbox 360, Wii, PS2, PC



FAR CRY 2 PS3, Xbox 360, PC



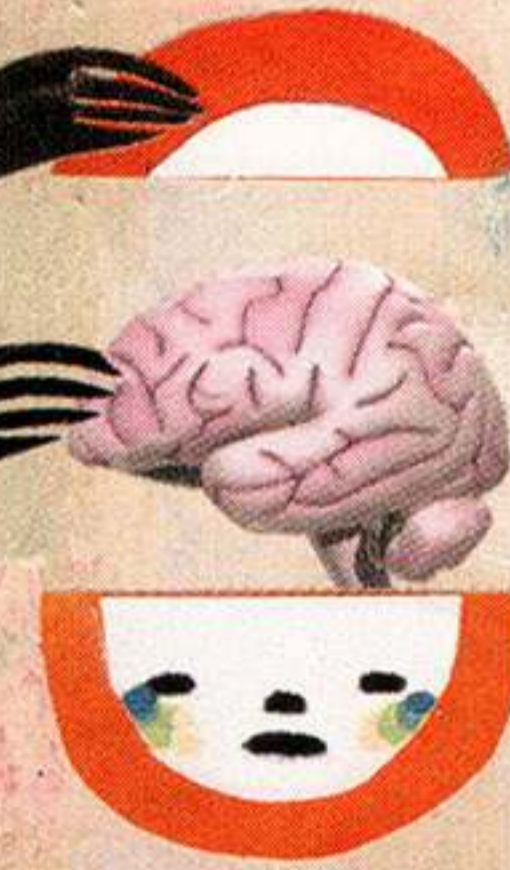
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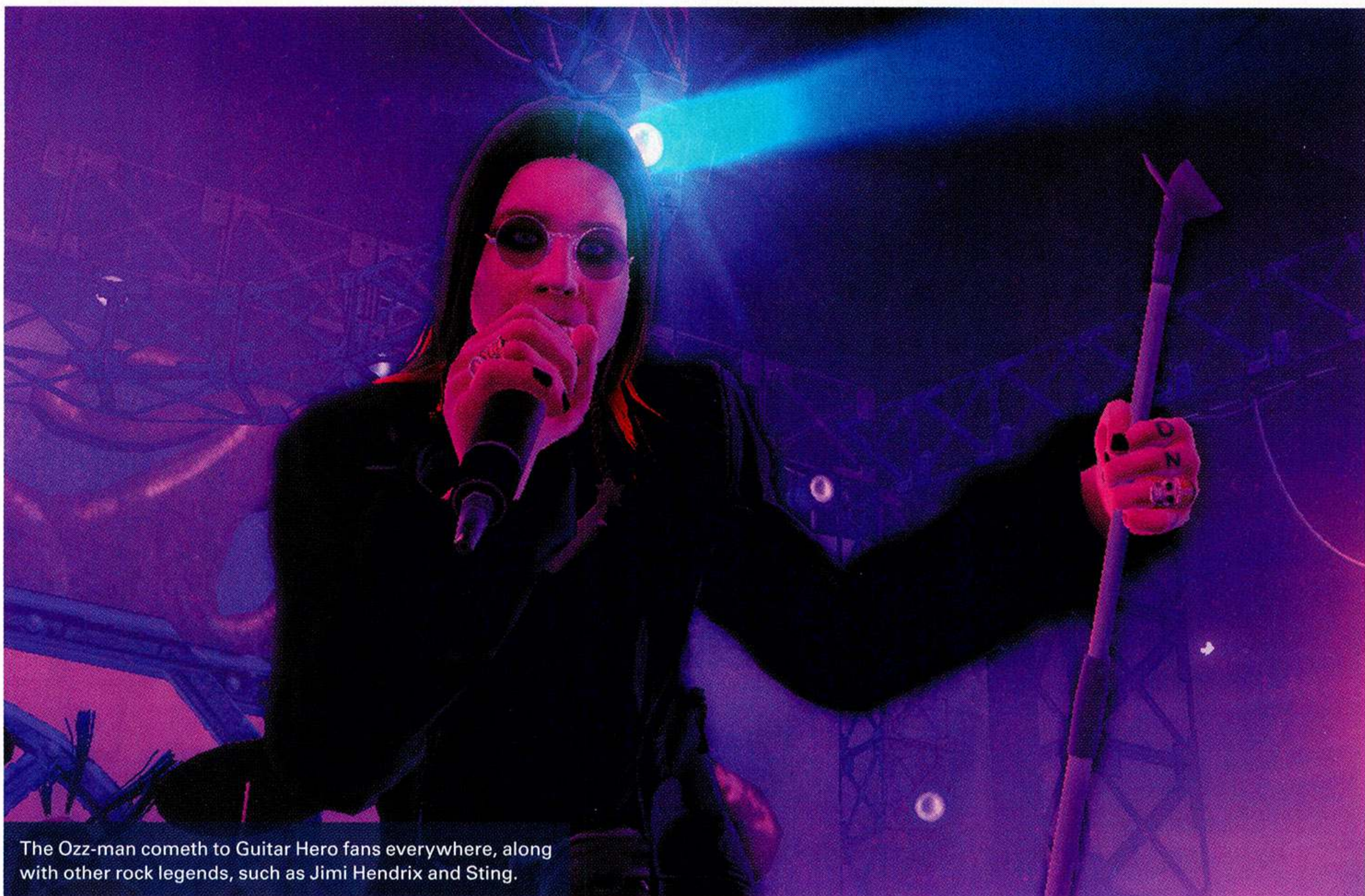
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WE CHEER Wii



SKATE 2 PS3, Xbox 360, PS2

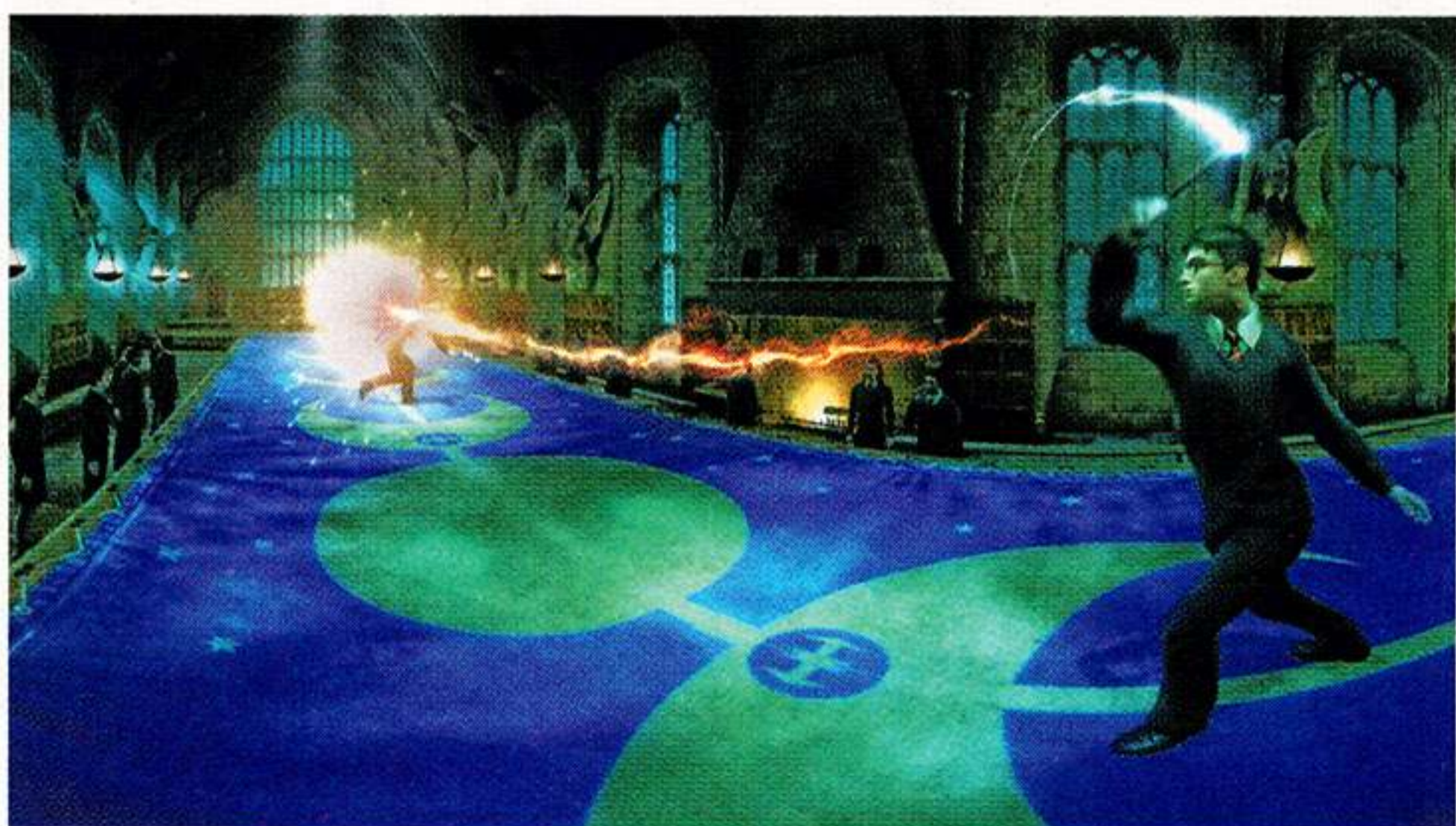


The Ozz-man cometh to Guitar Hero fans everywhere, along with other rock legends, such as Jimi Hendrix and Sting.

GUITAR HERO WORLD TOUR PS3, Xbox 360, Wii, PS2, PC



COMMAN & CONQUER: RED ALERT 3 PS3, Xbox 360, PC



HARRY POTTER AND THE HALF-BLOOD PRINCE PS3, Xbox 360, Wii, PS2, DS, PC

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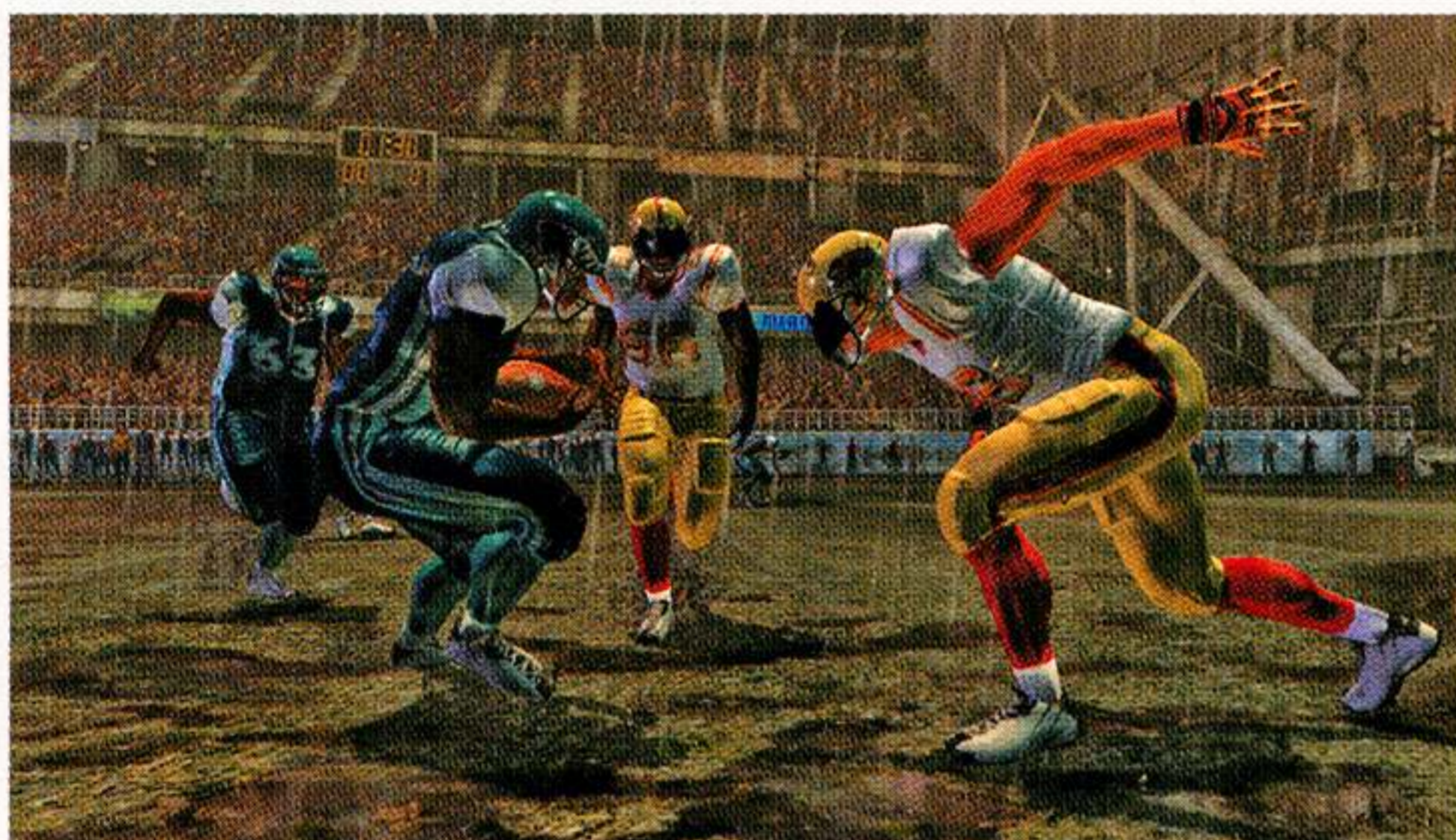
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Ever tried New  Gum?
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Over 30,000 polygons per model? Dynamic, interactive character animation? Yep, much like Rampage Jackson here, this game will punch you in the nuts.

▼ **UFC 2009 UNDISPUTED** PS3, Xbox 360



▼ **BLITZ: THE LEAGUE II** PS3, Xbox 360



▼ **TNA iMPACT!** PS3, Xbox 360, Wii, PS2



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▼ **SHAUN WHITE SNOWBOARDING** PS3, Xbox 360, Wii, PS2, PSP, DS, PC



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M	Blood and Gore Intense Violence Strong Language
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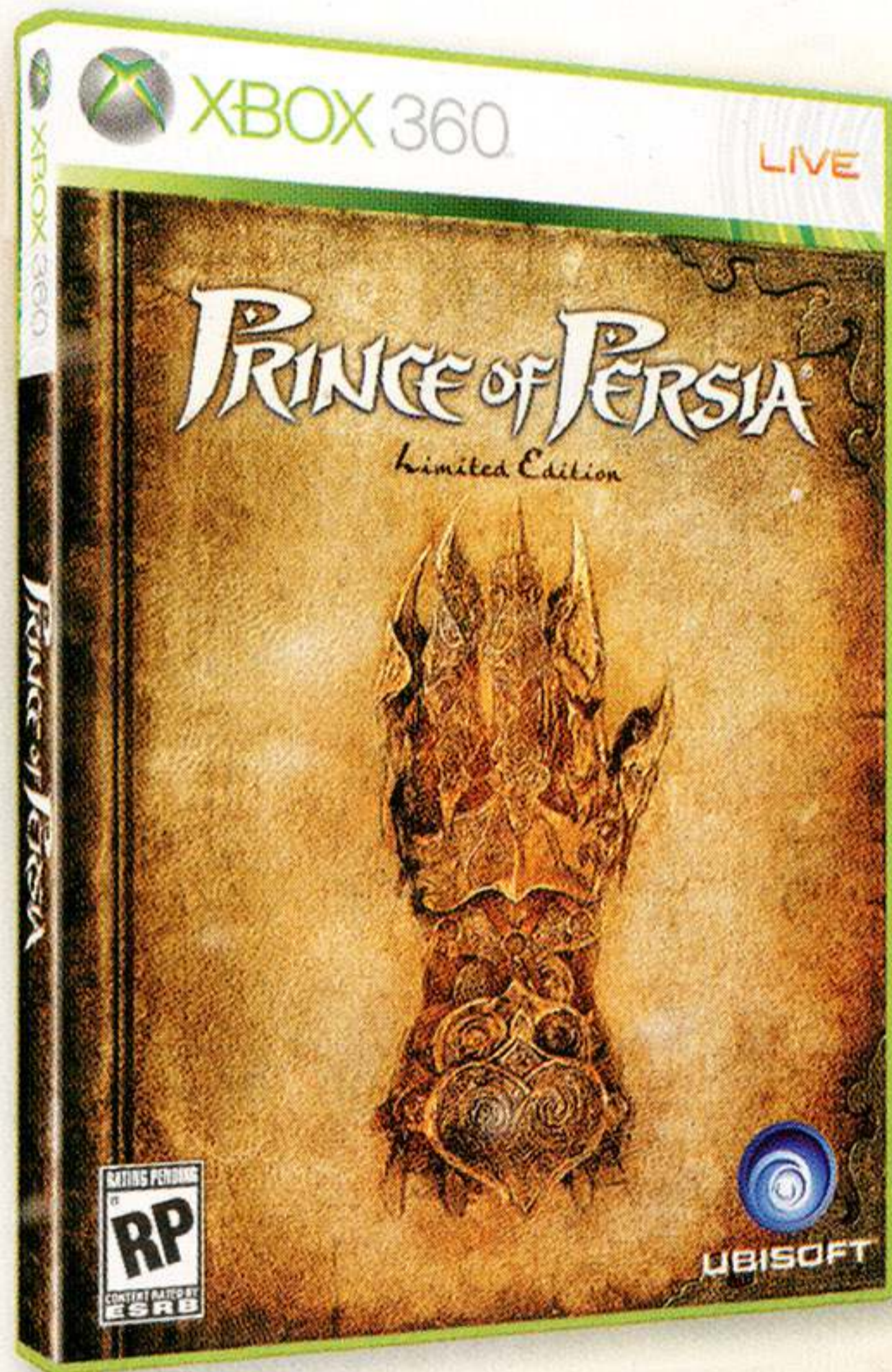
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INSIDE SPAWN POINT

Take This Job and Love It! . . . Page 30

The 500GB PS3 . . . Page 32

Six Most Powerful Game Studios . . . Page 34

Best DS Games . . . Page 36

BIG-SCREEN BULLET TIME

2003. That's the last time Max Payne dodged bullets and blasted bad guys in the film noir-style *Max Payne 2: The Fall of Max Payne*. Rumor has it a third game is in development, but for now, all eyes are on *Max Payne* the movie, in theaters this month. *Behind Enemy Lines* director John Moore is out to deliver fans a proper silver-screen rendition of the game, and *GamePro* went straight to stars Mark Wahlberg and Mila Kunis for the dirt. **By John Gaudiosi**

CONTINUED ►

Photograph by Michael Muller



The slow-motion, Bullet Time dive, Max's signature move from the Max Payne games.



Mila Kunis plays Mona Sax, Max Payne's tragic love interest in the video-game series.

Photograph by Michael Gibson

Gamers will finally get a chance to see Max Payne seek revenge on the drug dealers who murdered his wife and child at the multiplex on October 17. After 10-plus years of development hell, Mark Wahlberg steps into the role of the cop-turned-vigilante who literally has his emotions in his name.

"Max Payne wasn't an easy script to crack," said director John Moore (*Behind Enemy Lines*). "The game has a pre-awareness of the tragedy of this guy's life. It's a very negative scenario. It's not like a traditional movie structure where the bad thing gets undone and the hero gets the girl, or whatever. There's no reversing Max Payne's fate."

Fortunately for Hollywood Producer Scott Faye (*Alice*), 20th Century Fox stepped in to finance and distribute the film and Wahlberg loved the script—although he had no idea it was based on a video game.

"I always try to do something different, but this is the type of thing that's most satisfying to me," said Wahlberg, who was on hand at Comic-Con in San Diego to debut footage of the film. "People like myself—guys—want to see a guy kick some ass."

Moore said that Wahlberg always talked about the variance of the character of Max Payne while they shot outside of Toronto this past winter.

"There's no point in just being flat-line cool the whole movie," said Moore. "That's going to get old quick. For a story that's about a man losing his wife and child, for Mark not to show a range of emotion there would have been the wrong choice. He goes to places in this movie that are quite extreme."

To put it more succinctly, Wahlberg added, "I'm not running from sh*t in this movie."

CONTINUED ►

WHERE IS MAX PAYNE 3?



With Max Payne series developer Remedy Entertainment hard at work on its new game *Alan Wake*, there hasn't been a trickle of news regarding Max Payne 3 in quite some time. But that doesn't mean it's not on the horizon. Take 2 announced a sequel to Max Payne 2 back in 2004, but Remedy has told other sources that it will not be developing the third game.

So where does that leave Max Payne 3? We're not entirely sure, but considering the success of the series, you can bet it will see the light of day eventually. Here's hoping it doesn't take too long.

Photograph by Michael Muller



Family Guy and That '70s Show star Mila Kunis gets gritty as Mona Sax.

Photograph by Michael Gibson

FROM MILA TO MONA

Neither is Mila Kunis ("That '70s Show"), who plays Mona Sax, Max's love interest introduced in the original Max Payne game. She's fluent with both a gun and a billy club in this film and even passed the SWAT test for aiming her weapon. Being a gamer, Kunis talked about what fans of the game will find in this Hollywood adaptation.

"There's a scene where the nightclub Ragnarok is featured, which is a big aspect of the video game," said Kunis. "The design of Ragnarok is straight from the game. One of the scenes with Mark and Chris O'Donnell is taken straight out of a cut-scene. The subway station mirrors the video game. John was a fan of the game and so was Beau Bridges (Thorne), the writer, and hopefully people will appreciate that and enjoy it for what it is."



"I'm not running from sh*t in this movie."

Photograph by Michael Muller

IT'S IN THE GAME

While Chris "Ludacris" Bridges, who plays Jim Bravura (a character portrayed as a 60-something white man in the game), is a gamer and had played the Max Payne games; Wahlberg was not. He watched an assistant play the game, but that's as far as he'd go in preparing for this role.

"I didn't want to play it because I have an addictive personality and I have more responsibility now than I've ever had," said the father of two. "I don't want to spend 14 hours on a video game and then eight hours on the set. It wasn't going to work out."

Fox, which is adapting a big screen version of The Sims, had success with last fall's video game adaptation of Hitman. And Moore thinks Max Payne has the potential to continue that trend.

"The fact is Max Payne stands out in the video-game world, unlike comic books where you have comparative superheroes recycled in different tights or capes or whatever," said Moore. "Max Payne is something unique that you don't find in other games."

Since Gathering of Developers and 3D Realms released three Max Payne games (yes, the DS version does count), there's a built-in potential for a sequel. Moore and Wahlberg have both said they'd come back for seconds. And the director advises fans to sit through the film's closing credits.

"There's a hook at the end of the credits for the guy sweeping up popcorn in the theater," said Moore, which opens the door for another Max Payne adventure.



Photograph by Michael Gibson

SUCKS OR RULES

Changing the world, one insult at a time

SUCKS

Endless Wii Shortages For the third year running, Nintendo warns consumers and retailers that there may not be enough hardware to satisfy demand for the Wii and its peripherals this Christmas. When do you stop blaming the market, and start blaming incompetent oversight? **SUCKS**

Rage on the Xbox 360 John Carmack warns that unless Microsoft stops charging a fee to allow publishers to spread a game across three discs, Rage will be compressed onto only two, resulting in graphical artifacts not seen on the PC or PlayStation 3. Weak. **SUCKS**

Games & Religion Some blowhards who happen to be atheists are up in arms because the residents of Will Wright's Spore take up religion during the civilization stage of the game, proving that it's not just fundamentalist nut-jobs who need a constructive hobby. **SUCKS**

RULES

Playing in Harmony Sony managed to hammer out a deal between Activision, Harmonix, and Konami to ensure that different instruments work with different games on the PS3, thus saving acres of living room space around the world. **RULES**

Braid Jonathan Blow's masterwork is simultaneously an artsy tribute to old-school 2D platforming and an ambitious collection of wonderfully absorbing gameplay and storytelling ideas. If you buy only one downloadable game in 2008, let it be this one. **RULES**

LittleBigPlanet Talented amateur level designers will actually be able to sell their most inspired creations for cold hard cash. Here's hoping Sony's gatekeepers can figure out how to keep the open marketplace from turning into AmateurPornPlanet. **RULES**

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Take This Job and Love It!

Gears of War 2 is more than just Cliffy B. These days, huge teams of programmers, artists, and designers create our favorite games, and here's a handy explanation of some of the most common jobs inside of a game studio. **By Blake Snow**

ARTIST

Responsible for all aspects of game development that call for visual art, calling a game artist's work influential would be an understatement. Under the watchful eye of a director or designer, artists put a grin on our heroes and a sneer on our enemies. They also interpret all scenery, visual tones, aesthetics, and optical effects.



Artist: Tetsuya Nomura (Final Fantasy)

DESIGNER

When a new concept, idea, or genre is born in video games, you can thank a designer (sometimes called a "creator"). Designers are largely responsible for how a player interacts with a game; they make the rules and define objectives. They are the "idea people" and usually have a working knowledge of psychology, drama, fine art, and literature.



Designer: Cliff Bleszinski (Gears of War)

DIRECTOR

The person in charge of all creative aspects of video-game development. Interestingly, the term is almost exclusively used by Japanese developers (mostly for elegance)—the Western equivalent is a producer with creative chops.



Director: Hideo Kojima (Metal Gear Solid)

LEVEL DESIGNER

If the real value of a game is found in the journey, then a level designer makes sure players get from beginning to end in style, creating challenging obstacles and brain-busting environments for you to overcome. Level designers work closely with the director or designer to not only design the worlds, but develop specific missions and objections within.

PRODUCER

Put simply, someone who gets things done—the person responsible for ensuring that a game meets specifications and launches on time. Producers often focus more on the business side, but some deal with the creative side, too.



Producer: Jade Raymond (Assassin's Creed)



Artists: Massive Black (Army of Two)

PROGRAMMER

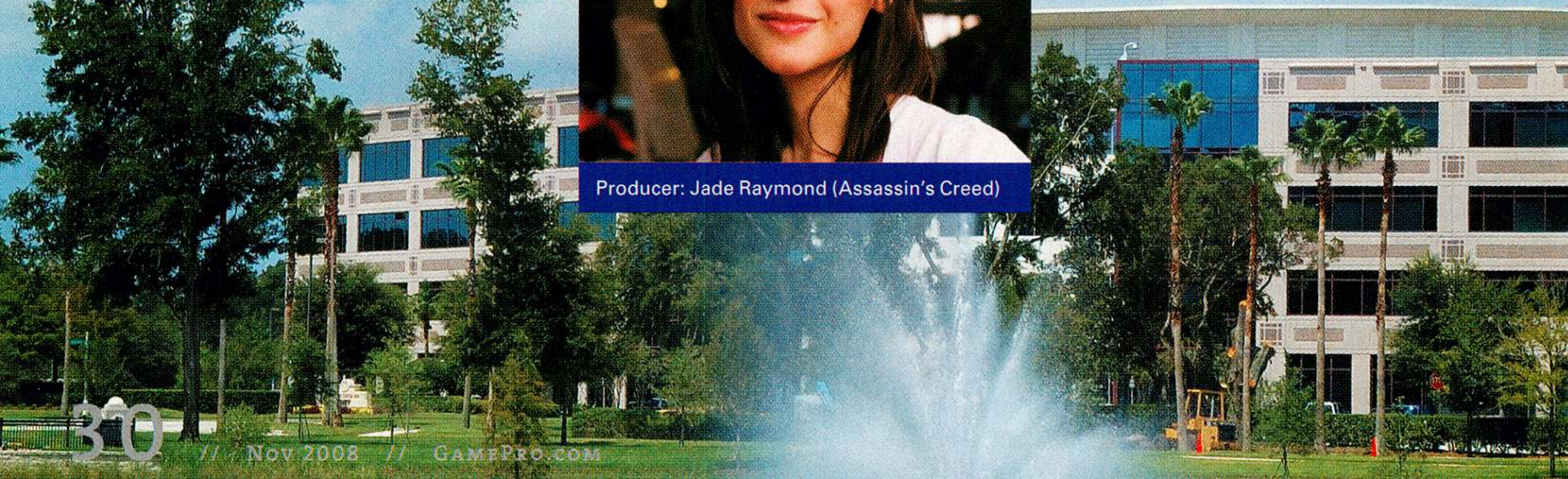
The individual most concerned with writing code—rendering imagery and art as playable software. Programmers might also concentrate on other types of programming, including physics, artificial intelligence, graphics, sound, and network features (think online multiplayer). If it weren't for these guys, we'd still be dreaming.



Programmer / Designer: Sid Meier (Civilization)

TESTER

The unsung hero of video-game development. If it weren't for these fastidious gamers, we'd all be playing much crappier games. In short, testers play an unfinished game over and over to catch, report, and verify bugs, glitches, and most importantly, boredom. They work long hours and get paid peanuts.





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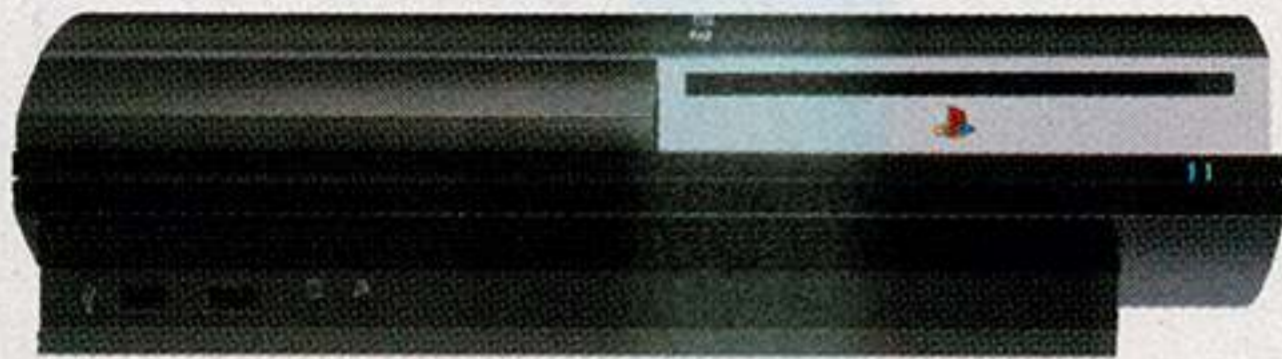


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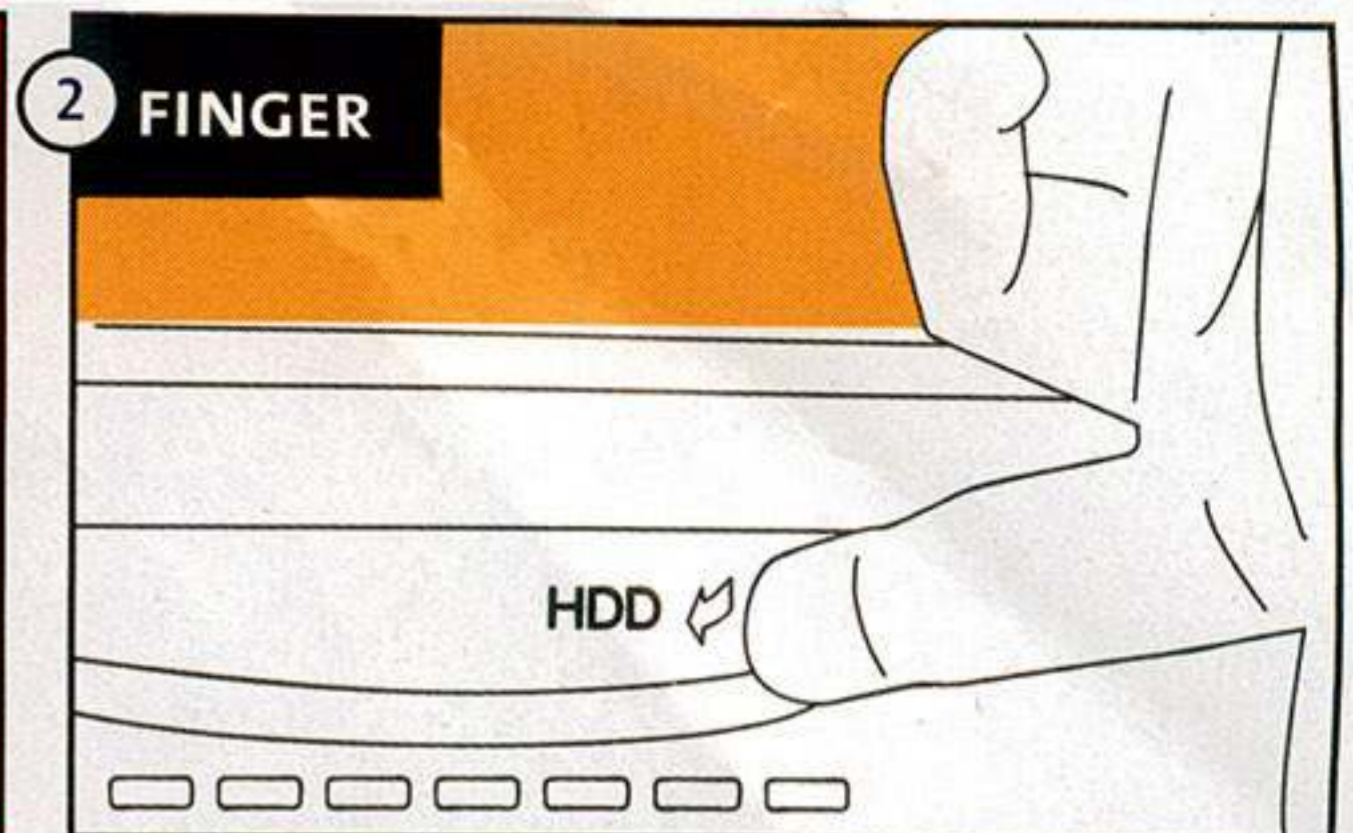
Specialist Carlos Villarreal
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Supercharge your PS3 ^{×●■▲}

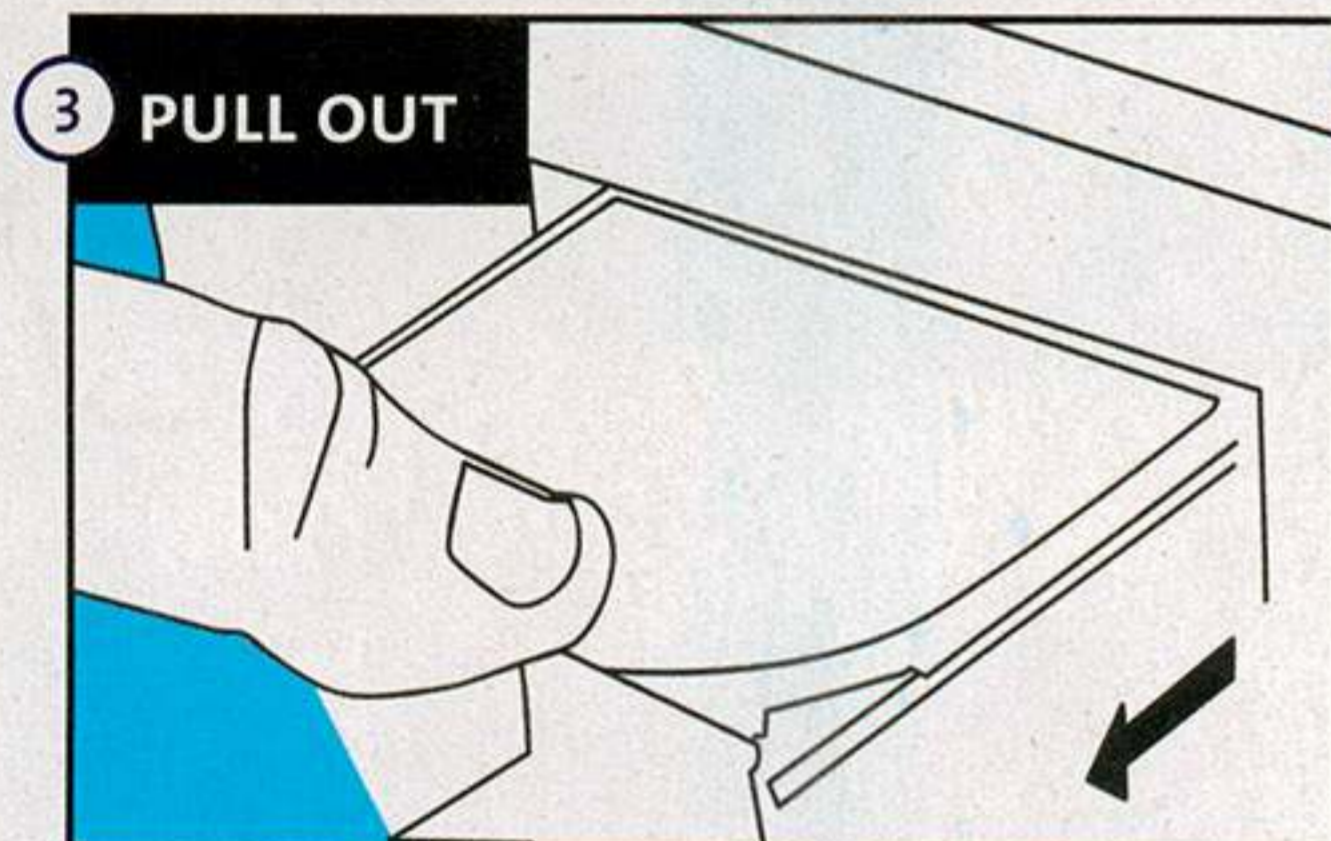
Is that measly 40GB hard drive keeping you from downloading all of your favorite movies and games from the PlayStation Store? Here are five easy steps to supercharge your PS3 to a whopping 500 gigs for all your downloading pleasures (gamepro.com has a helpful video walkthrough to go along with these instructions).



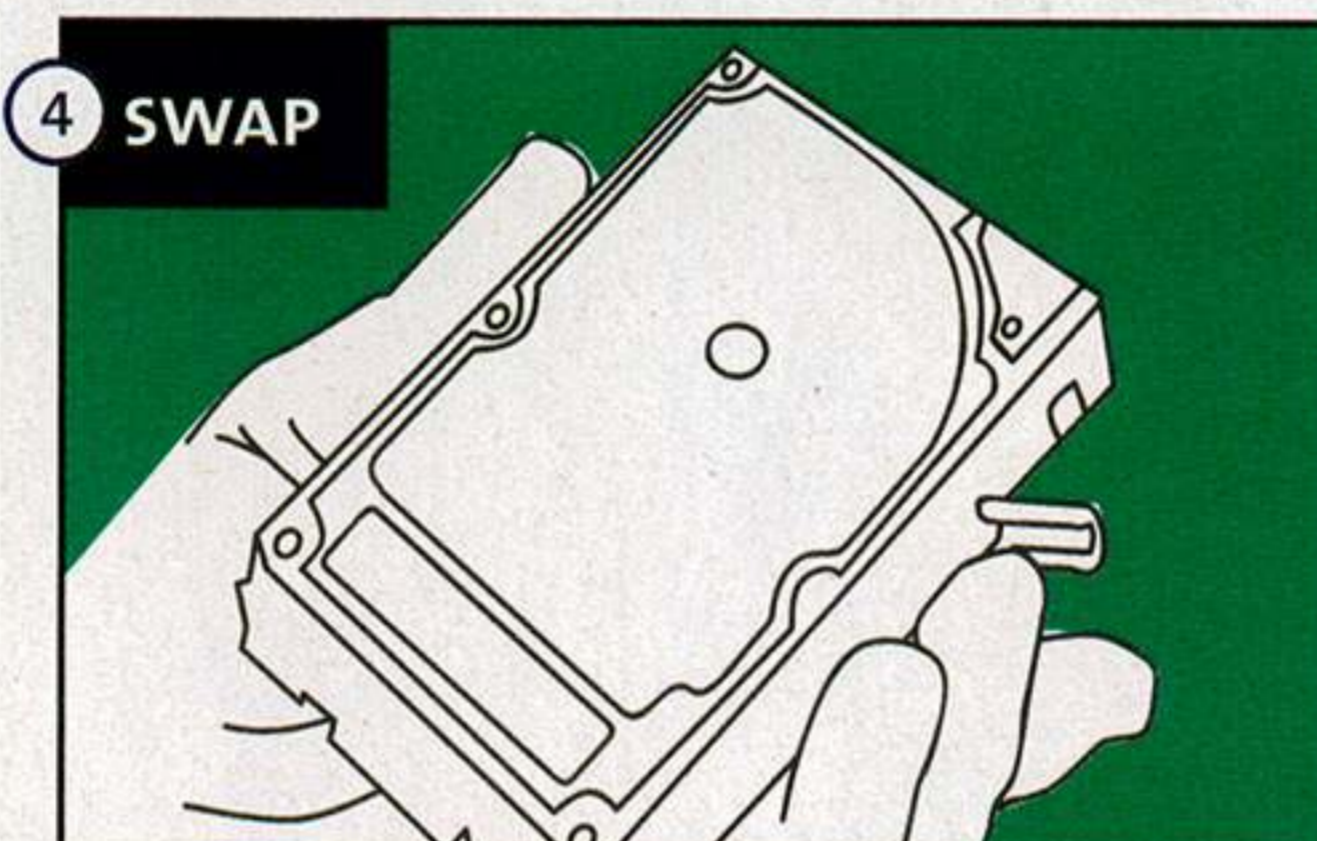
1 PURCHASE
Purchase the Samsung M6 500GB hard drive (widely available online for around \$230). Use the PS3's Backup function to transfer saves and other content to a USB drive.



2 FINGER
Unplug the PS3 and ground yourself by wearing an anti-static wristband. Open the PS3's hard drive access port, located on the side of the unit, with your fingernail.



3 PULL OUT
Carefully unscrew the blue screw using the correct screwdriver bit (Philips Precise). Use gentle pressure, and take care not to strip the screw. Pull out the metal hinge, and slide out the hard drive tray.



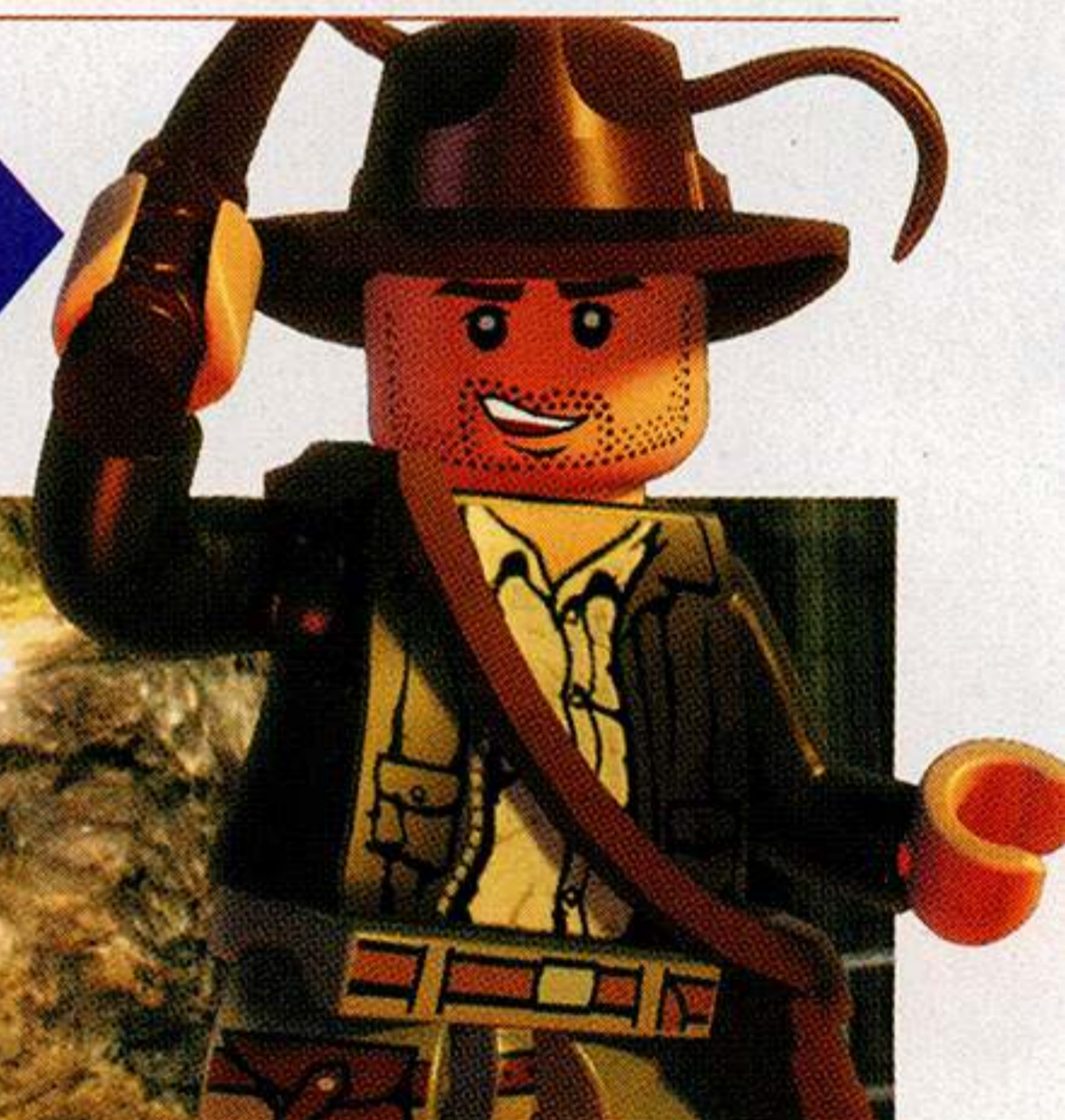
4 SWAP
Unscrew the four screws that attach the hard drive to the metal tray, and remove the old hard drive (place old drive in an anti-static bag). Attach the new Samsung 500GB hard drive to the tray, replacing the four screws from the previous step.



5 FINISH
Slide the hard drive tray back into the PS3 port, and snap the metal hinge back into place, then replace the blue screw. Close the access port, power up your PS3, and replace the data stored on your USB drive. Voila, you're done!

Versus Mode

Two classic characters, one classic brawl.



VS

Batman (LEGO Batman: The Videogame)

- Day Job:** Billionaire industrialist and philanthropist.
- True Calling:** Fighting criminal masterminds on the streets of Gotham City.
- Utility Belt:** Batarang, glide suit, and grappling hook.
- Licensed to Drive:** Batmobile, Batboat, and Batwing.
- Human Resources:** Robin, the boy wonder.

Indy (LEGO Indiana Jones: The Original Adventures)

- Professor of history and archaeology.
- Rescuing precious mystical relics from Nazi scum around the world.
- Worn leather whip and stolen enemy firearms.
- Enemy trucks, motorcycles, and a grounded airplane.
- Short round, Marion, Satipo, and many more.

OUTCOME:

Batman's a long way from Gotham when he confronts Indy in Marion's bar in Nepal, and the aging archaeologist seems ready for a rumble. Indy initially keeps the caped crusader at a distance with tossed bottles and a few cracks of his whip, but inside of ten seconds the two icons are exchanging chin shots and body blows. If only Indy hadn't started the

evening trading Tequila shots with his ex-girlfriend, he might not have wound up shackled to a bar stool and pinned with a friendly note to the local police.

DECISION: Batman >>>



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In terms of multiple hits, present impact, and cash money, these are the most influential video game developers in the world. Know your maker. **By Blake Snow**



EPIC GAMES

Headquarters: Cary, North Carolina

Notable Games: Unreal Tournament 3, Gears of War 2

Epic Games has been hawking hard-edged, sci-fi shooters to significant fanfare for nearly a decade. The debut of Gears of War on the Xbox 360 solidified the studio as a current-gen powerhouse, not to mention their lucrative Unreal engine which has been licensed by hundreds of other games.



EA TIBURON

Headquarters: Orlando, Florida

Notable Games: Madden NFL 09, NCAA Football 09, Tiger Woods PGA Tour 09

Meet the king of sports video games, the sultan of simulation, the Madden maker—EA Tiburon. It's a funny-sounding name, but the studio's yearly success and industry clout is no laughing matter, as Madden NFL Football is the highest grossing property in video game history.



MAXIS SOFTWARE

Headquarters: Emeryville, California

Notable Games: The Sims, Spore, SimCity

Thanks to its feminine appeal, The Sims has sold more than 100 million games worldwide—the third best-selling franchise of all time. It's no wonder then that company's new god game, Spore, is one of the most anticipated games of 2008.



BUNGIE

Headquarters: Kirkland, Washington

Notable Games: Halo 3, Marathon, Oni

If there's one developer still capable of killer-app launch hysteria, it's Bungie, makers of Halo. And not only does the famed studio design marketable blockbusters, it's credited for popularizing the most dominant console genre today, first-person shooters.

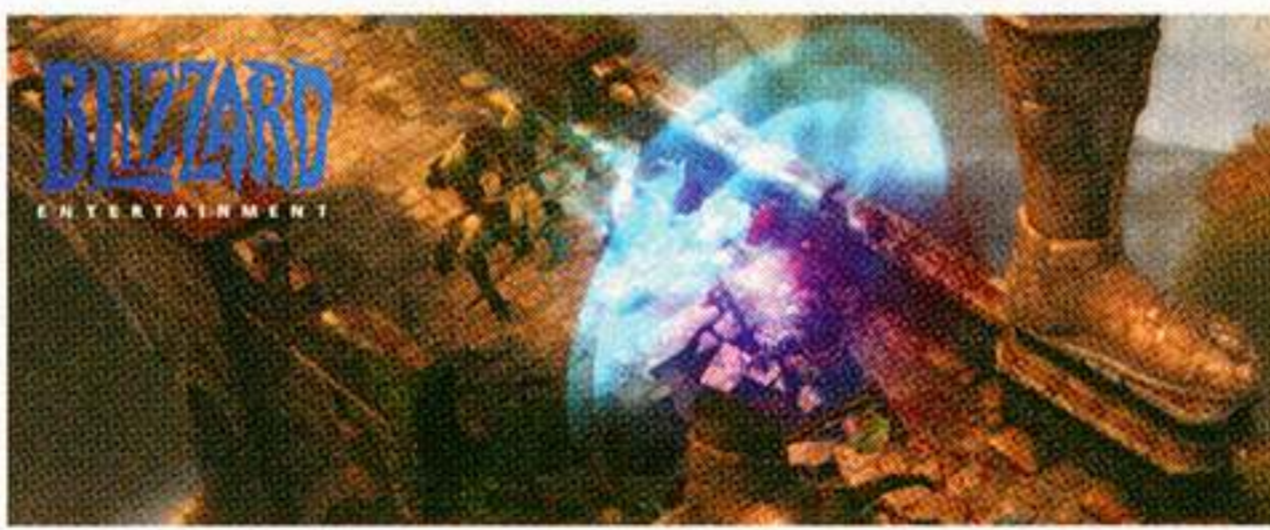


ROCKSTAR NORTH

Headquarters: Edinburgh, Scotland

Notable Games: Grand Theft Auto IV, Manhunt

It's funny to think that the creator of the adorable Lemmings would go on to develop one of the most controversial and politically-fueled franchises of the last decade, Grand Theft Auto. But Rockstar North did more than bank on shock-value to rise to the top, as GTA has become synonymous with sophisticated presentation, deft parody, open-world gameplay, and addictive loitering.



BLIZZARD

Headquarters: Irvine, California

Notable Games: Diablo II, StarCraft, World of Warcraft

This hard-to-put-down studio is notorious for making some of the most addictive games of all time, namely Diablo, StarCraft, and the granddaddy of them all, World of Warcraft. How else would you convince 10 million subscribing fiends to pay \$15 per month? This is one developer everyone wants to be.

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Presents:

THE BIG 5 RECHARGED

1 NINTENDO DOMINATES PUBLISHING

Nintendo blows away the other 19 entries on Edge Online's list of the top 20 publishers of 2008. While other industry giants lost hundreds of millions of dollars each, Nintendo profited to the tune of almost \$2.6 billion.

THE VERDICT: With those kinds of cash reserves holding the dam, Nintendo can afford to bankroll some risky new ideas. Hopefully they won't just content themselves to issue unnecessary handheld redesigns.

2 THE XBOX 360'S FIRST FULL-YEAR PROFIT

Microsoft's gaming division just posted its first ever full-year profit. In the fourth quarter alone, operating profits rose 34 percent over the previous year to \$426 million.

THE VERDICT: Quite a milestone for a group that once steadily lost money year after year. On the other hand, PlayStation 3 sales continues to gain ground, so this victory might be short-lived.

3 PLAYSTATION 3 GREATEST HITS

Sony launched its Greatest Hits series of PlayStation 3 releases, priced at \$29.99 each. The line-up currently consists of 10 bestsellers, including Resistance: Fall of Man and Ninja Gaiden Sigma.

THE VERDICT: Now that hardware sales are picking up real steam, the timing couldn't be better. New owners should be happy to build a library of fun games at half price.

4 STAR TREK ONLINE

At least one effort to turn the expansive Star Trek universe into a massively multiplayer online game was scuttled before release, but this latest attempt comes from Cryptic Studios, the experienced creators of City of Heroes.

THE VERDICT: Cryptic's previous games never achieved the popularity they deserved, but Star Trek comes with a built-in audience of potential hardcore devotees to mine. Beam us up!

5 NINTENDO VS. PIRATES

Nintendo and Japanese software publishers are bringing the legal hammer down on the makers of a device that facilitates the playing of pirated DS games.

THE VERDICT: Cut off a pirate's head, and another grows in its place, but at least Nintendo's legal maneuvering are having an impact. Look at what rampant software piracy did to the once vibrant PC's gaming outlook.

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The 7 best NINTENDO DS games



Nintendo's DS changed the spectrum of handheld gaming in a way that no one, not even the Nintendo faithful, thought possible. This pocket-sized marvel has sold over 70 million units worldwide, so if you've yet to get your dual on, here is a list of the handheld's best games.



CASTLEVANIA: DAWN OF SORROW
In the sequel to the stellar Game Boy Advance title *Aria of Sorrow*, Dawn upped the ante with amazing graphics, a superb story, and fantastic use of the DS touch screen, allowing the player to draw "Magic Seals" on enemies to cast deadly spells.



FINAL FANTASY IV
Sure, it's a remake, but the detail in this port is fantastic, and the 3D character models so closely resemble the artwork of Final Fantasy's Amano. The classic story of Cecil, Rosa, and Kain was long overdue for re-birth, and FFIV got a true reincarnation on the DS.



THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: PHANTOM HOURGLASS
Following the events of *The Wind Waker*, Link travels around Hyrule to save Tetra from the clutches of Bellum. With the exception of a full-3D camera, Hourglass features nearly everything featured in its predecessor, from cel-shaded graphics, to sailing from island to island.



MARIO KART DS
Nintendo: Mario Kart is at its best when it isn't being overloaded with stupid gimmicks. In between the mostly useless dual riders in Double Dash!! and the useless Wii Wheel in Mario Kart Wii, Nintendo gave gamers exactly what they wanted in Mario Kart DS.



NEW SUPER MARIO BROS.
While there were plenty of amazing 3D adventures and solid remakes of the older Mario titles (Such as Super Mario 64), *New Super Mario Bros.* reinvented the franchise by mixing 3D visuals and moves with classic 2D mechanics.



POKÉMON DIAMOND & PEARL
When Pokémon games went from colors to minerals, the gameplay was overhauled. Diamond and Pearl represent the biggest shift in the series, thanks to wireless online battling, global Pokémon trading, and a new-yet-classic art style that made the world come alive.



THE WORLD ENDS WITH YOU
If you enjoyed *Kingdom Hearts: Chain of Memories*, then you'll love this game. Every feature of the DS is taken full advantage of, from drawing your attacks onto the touchscreen, to screaming commands into the microphone.



...y Rain...Heavy Rain...Heavy Rain... • Good god, this fall's release schedule looks completely off the hook. Anybody else hoping for a few high-profile game delays... • Now that I have an iPhone 3G, I've been trying out downloadable games from the App Store. I'm disappointed by the quality of the current games, but I can see the iPhone will present some serious competition to the PSP and, particularly, the DS as it slowly matures. The pixel-perfect touchscreen, integrated motion sensors, GPS, and crystal-clear graphics are an unbeatable combo. Once serious game developers get on board, and Apple's gadget sees a price drop or two, don't be surprised if you see the iPhone dominating in the handheld gaming space... • If you love zombies, you've got to read Robert Kirkman's *The Walking Dead*. It's one hell of a roller coaster ride, and later plot developments will leave your jaw on the floor... • Have you checked out the new GamePro.com yet? What are you waiting for?... • I'm not sold on some of these pricey new downloadable games. Castle Crashers and Braid are great Xbox Live Arcade titles with real flair and creativity, but they're priced too high (\$15) to tempt many people into trying them out. I'm guessing that this fall's Portal: Still Alive is likely to follow a similar pricing scheme, but I still think that \$10 is the sweet spot for downloadable games... • I'm guessing the Xbox 360 is going to be a hot seller this holiday. Part of the reason is Gears of War 2, which you can read all about on page 52. But the biggest reason will be the Xbox 360's low, low price of just \$199 (for the basic Arcade model). Whether you're an Xbox fan or not, that is a seriously compelling price point... • Wanted...Wanted...Wante...



Pwned this month:
iPhone gaming
Free Time



e-mail Sid:
sid_shuman@gamepro.com

OMG MOVIES MOVIES FOR GAMERS

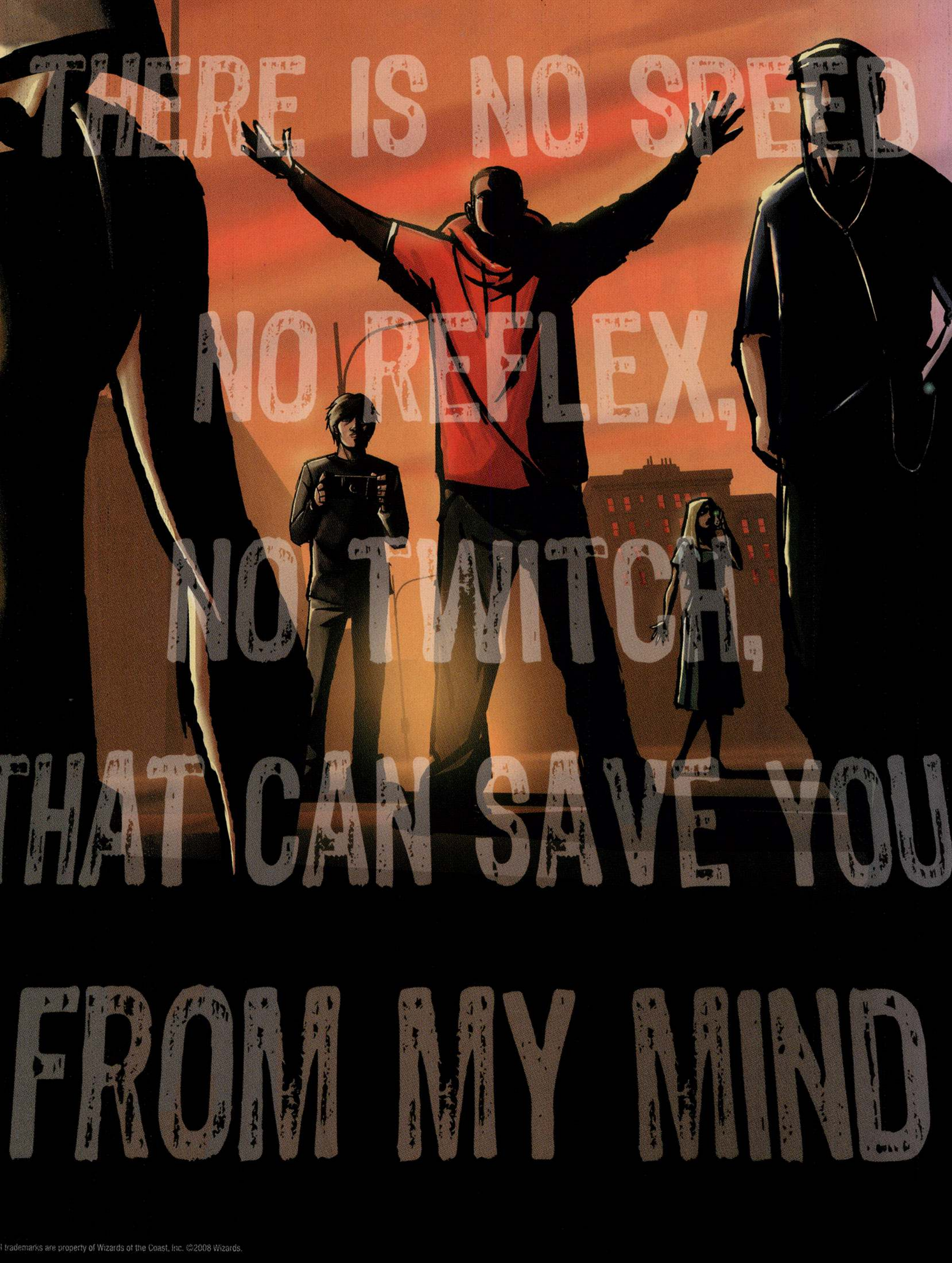


THE GODFATHER COLLECTION: THE COPPOLA RESTORATION
Francis Ford Coppola's acclaimed *The Godfather* trilogy about the Corleone crime family has been put through an exhaustive restoration process, and new documentary features shed fresh light on the struggle to create these cinematic masterpieces. *The Godfather* and *The Godfather: Part II* each won the Academy Award for Best Picture.
thegodfather.com
\$123.99 (Blu-ray); \$72.99 (DVD)

IRON MAN: ULTIMATE 2-DISC EDITION
Robert Downey, Jr. plays billionaire Tony Stark and his high-flying superhero alter ego to the hilt in this well-received adaptation of the long-running Marvel comic series. Includes deleted and extended scenes, and a bunch of behind-the-scenes goodies. Also available in a standard single-disc edition.
ironmanmovie.marvel.com
\$39.99 (Blu-ray); \$39.99/\$34.99 (DVD)



HOW THE WEST WAS WON
Originally presented in three-screen Cinerama, Warner Bros. painstakingly restored this 1962 MGM classic, and digitally eliminated the two vertical lines and distortion between panels for a single, seamless image. The two-disc Blu-ray edition has a sweet exclusive extra: a "SmileBox" version of the film that curves the screen to approximate the theatrical Cinerama experience. The standard DVD Ultimate Collector's Edition includes lobby cards, reproduction of the original press book, and more. Winner of three Academy Awards.
warnerhomevideo.com
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 XBOX 360 LIVE

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PLAYSTATION 3



PlayStation Portable

NINTENDO DS



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UBISOFT



Now that Lara's got a grappling hook, no fire-breathing totem head is going to stop her.

TOMB RAIDER: UNDERWORLD

Lara Croft is back in full force with a whole new set of moves and another dangerous adventure.

PS3 Xbox 360 Wii PS2 DS PC

Developer: Crystal Dynamics Publisher: Eidos Interactive Release Date: November

Don't count Lara Croft out of the action and adventure genres just yet. As an eight-game veteran in Tomb Raider: Underworld, Lara Croft has a whole new set of moves to show-off thanks to developer Crystal Dynamics. New moves that make Lara easier to control and the environment more expansive. Underworld is the eighth game in the series, but only the third title for Crystal Dynamics, who seem to be doing good things with the series. They gave Lara a

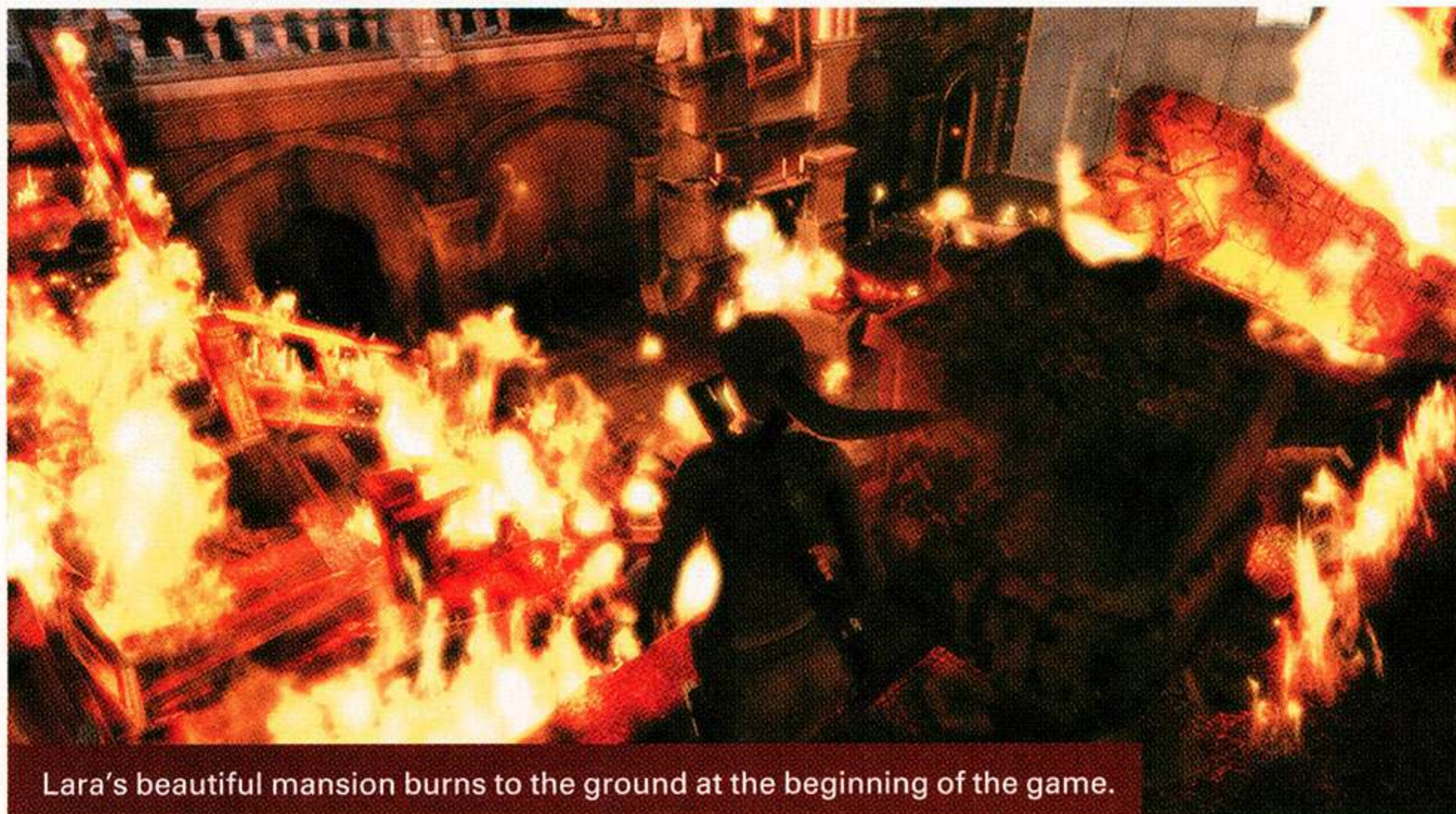
new look for Tomb Raider: Legend, revisited the past in Anniversary, and now they've given Lara near complete freedom. There's no underworld Lara can't traverse now.

THE MANSION BURNS

Tomb Raider: Underworld picks up at the end of Legend, briefly filling in the important plot elements from Legend and Tomb Raider: Anniversary via a cut-scene. Then the game leaps for-

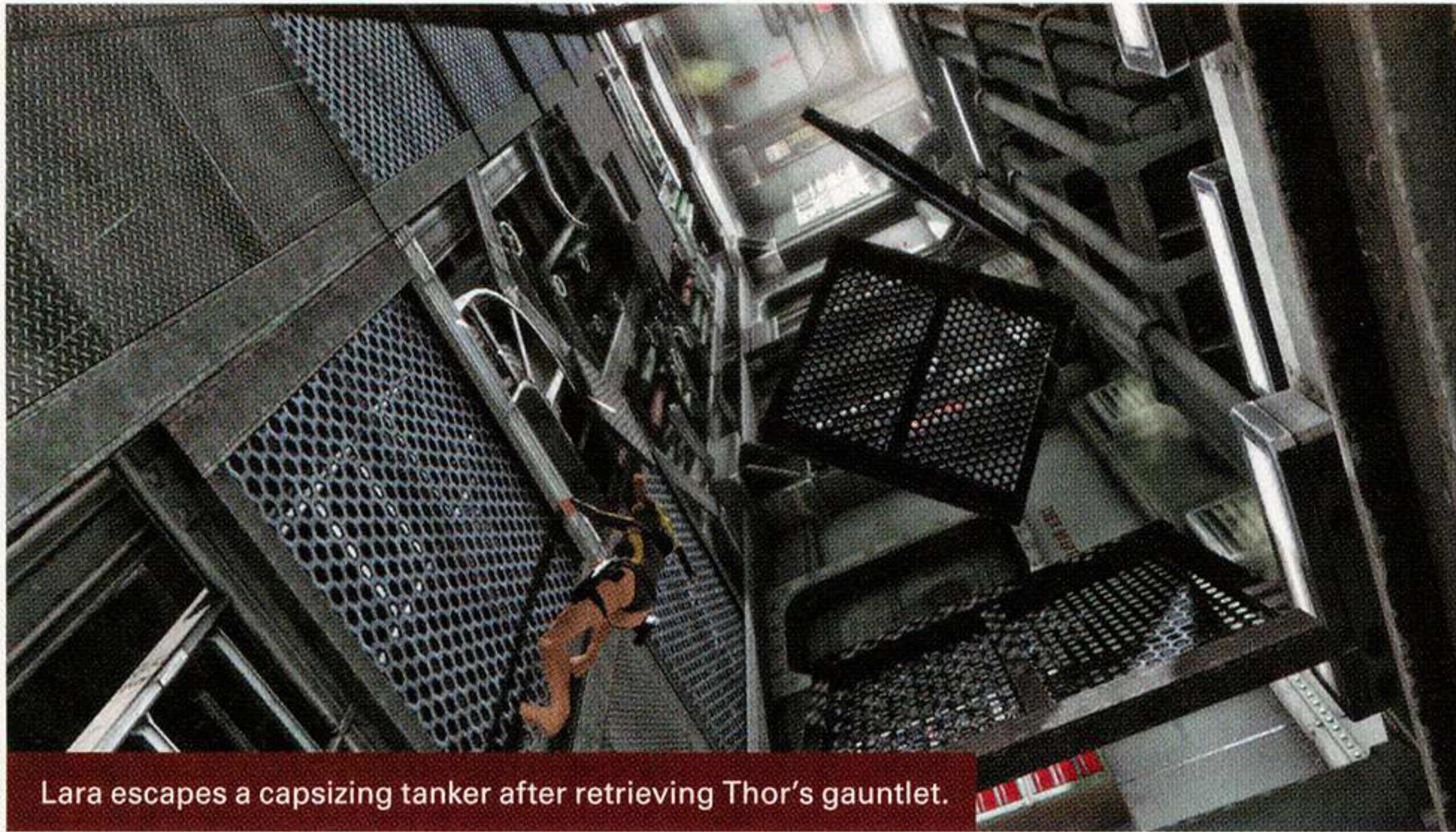
ward in time to "today," Lara's mansion is on fire and you're trapped inside. At this point, you take control of Lara and guide her to safety. The game then goes back in time one week earlier and you're on a boat in the Mediterranean Sea, with Lara Croft. But you're not sipping martinis, you're going for a swim in the first level of the game as Lara's searching deep underwater for Thor's hammer, the Norse god of thunder. Apparently, Lara is looking to kill a god, and she "need[s] the hammer to kill a god." Who could this god be?

Once you dive underwater it's immediately easy to feel how responsive the controls are and get a good look at Lara's new swim animations. She's even got a sprint that can be used underwater to swim faster. Swimming nearer to the bottom of the sea floor the murky water will dissipate and your path into an underground alcove is revealed. This alcove offers your first simple puzzle of the game. In classic Tomb Raider fashion, you will seek two rotating cranks to turn and align a symbol on the wall that opens the path to an underground cave.



Lara's beautiful mansion burns to the ground at the beginning of the game.





Lara escapes a capsizing tanker after retrieving Thor's gauntlet.



In Mexico, Lara faces a giant tarantula. Gross.

LARA'S NEW MOVES

Put away your deep-sea harpoon and oxygen tank when Lara gets out of the water. It's time to try out some of her new dry-land acrobatics. Such as rock climbing, which is a first for the series, handsprings, and flips. Lara is the most agile and maneuverable she's ever been in *Underworld*, which makes the game more flashy and accessible to newcomers. For instance, when Lara is on a balance beam, you can simply walk her gracefully across or throw in a leg twirl for extra pizzazz.

Fluid animations and visual queues speak for the graphics and accessibility of *Underworld*. In the level Thailand, Lara seeks an entrance to Helheim, the world of the dishonorable dead in Norse mythology. It is said that once you enter Helheim, not even the gods can leave. Why Lara wants to find this place you'll have to wait and see. Thailand really shows off why *Underworld* is a vast improvement over the previous games. You roll up with Lara on her boat and swim to a tropical rock face with dense foliage, exotic birds, and a waterfall. But now it's time to climb. Simply jump towards grooves in walls and Lara will automatically grab the rock face. Lara will also visually queue you if she can make a safe jump by dropping one of her arms towards the next pole or ledge.

It's a long but pretty easy hike to the top of the waterfall; just don't slip. Now it's time to go deeper into the jungle, climb some ruins, and engage pistol combat. As you head inland you'll get to try out Lara's grappling hook, which can be used to swing her across chasms and pull levers from a distance. Once you reach the ruins, tigers are the next challenge. Luckily Lara is equipped with dual semi-automatic pistols, and quite the kick too, which proves more useful than her guns most of the time. Thugs and tigers almost fall too fast from a simple jump kick-to-roundhouse combo.

UNDERWHELMING? NOT REALLY

Underworld could be the best Tomb Raider game in the series if the rest of the game keeps pace with the first few levels. Tomb Raider fans are going to definitely want to check this game out. If not for the new moves and adventure, then at least for the continued story where *Legend* left off. Or maybe you're a fan of Lara's tight-fitting wardrobe?—**Travis Moses**

W25Y

Get the link to **Tomb Raider** screens and news sent to your e-mail. Text **D377** to **59479**

Only standard text messaging rates apply

LIVE-ACTION LARA

GamePro interviews Alison Carroll about what it takes to be the one and only real-life Lara Croft. Carroll has been a professional display gymnast for 12 years.

GamePro: What does it take to become the official Lara Croft model?

Alison Carroll: The Lara models are chosen for specific reasons, whether it's for their looks, their attitude, or their physical ability, and for me it's because I'm a gymnast. Therefore, I train six days a week, going to the gym, running, or gymnastic training. I will also be undertaking SAS training, a course in firearms, and a crash course in archaeology. With all these skills, I will have the attributes to make the ultimate Lara Croft.

GP: What's in the daily schedule for the official live-action Lara?

AC: A run in the morning, then I'm off to an adventurous scuba diving shoot, followed by a quick bite to eat, and then jetting off to my next exotic location.

GP: What is the coolest thing about your job as Lara Croft?

AC: Having always wanted to play an action heroine who could do her own stunts, I feel that Tomb Raider and playing the role of Lara Croft has given me that opportunity. What I'm most looking forward to is traveling the globe and meeting the Tomb Raider fans.

GP: Have you played a Tomb Raider game before? If so, what was fun about it?

AC: I have played Tomb Raider Anniversary and I think I'm better at doing the real thing.

GP: Preferred position in Rock Band: vocals, drums, lead guitar, or bass? (If you play.)

AC: I haven't really played Rock Band, but if I did, I would be the singer.





The sledgehammer deals massive damage to buildings and enemy craniums.

RED FACTION: GUERRILLA

The new Red Faction multiplayer is smashing good fun.

PS3 Xbox 360 PC

■ Developer: Volition ■ Publisher: THQ ■ Release Date: January 2009

In the Red Faction: Guerrilla multiplayer beta, *GamePro* delved into a fair number of matches and had a fun time testing out the two available game types, three maps, five different backpacks, and a handful of weapons. Here are our hands-on impressions.

First off, Red Faction: Guerrilla plays a lot like *Gears of War* and *Dark Sector*. It's a third-person shooter—a first for the series—that takes place on the planet Mars, 50 years after the first Red Faction. There is no need for breathing apparatuses or moon suits since the planet has been terraformed, hence the fact that your character can breathe without a helmet. In multiplayer, two teams, the EDF (Earth Defense Force) and the Guerrilla Faction, square off in a variety of team-based modes, which grants you experience points and levels up your character (à la

Call of Duty 4). Each time you level up, bonuses are rewarded that affect how many experience points you get for kill assists, beat downs, or kill streaks just to name a few.

A DIFFERENT KIND OF MULTIPLAYER

What sets Red Faction's multiplayer apart from most shooters are the backpacks. Each map contains kiosk terminals where you can pick up different backpacks that grant you special abilities. For example, the rhino backpack allows you to crush through walls like the Juggernaut from *X-Men*, the jetpack lets you fly for a certain period of time, the concussion pack shoots out a radial shockwave that knocks enemies off their feet, fleetfoot packs let you run faster for a certain period of time, and the firepower pack increases your damage on all weapons. There were five backpacks featured in the beta, but the final game will feature upwards to a dozen packs with even cooler abilities.

The two different modes available were Team Anarchy, which is a fancy way of saying team deathmatch, and Damage Control. Damage Control is the standout gametype, and a unique twist on capturing command points. Three command-point structures are spread across each map and must be destroyed, then rebuilt to be captured by either team. The two best ways to go about this are

either plant a satchel charge on the command point or whack it down with the sledgehammer, as all structures in Red Faction are completely destructible. Once the structure is demolished, you must rebuild it with a special weapon that looks like a Ghostbusters proton pack. The gun regenerates, or rematerializes, any object that has been destroyed in the game.

THE GUNS COULD BE BETTER

On top of all this good fun are a variety of weapons that are unfortunately generic for a space-themed shooter, but a few stand out from the rest. The grinder in particular is a hack-saw piece of equipment that fires high-speed saw blades and kills opponents in one head shot or two body shots. It's quite fun and leaves a bloody mess. The enforcer assault rifle isn't as powerful as the standard assault rifle, but has tracking bullets that will slightly curve and follow whoever you're aiming at. Mix the enforcer with the firepower backpack and a five-man kill streak is almost guaranteed. And finally, the sledgehammer seemed to be the online favorite. Always equipped with a melee weapon, you can swing it horizontally or vertically. The vertical swing is better to smash a quick exit out the backside of a building, but the horizontal swing is what you want to take out your opponents. Get to swinging with Red Faction: Guerrilla in early 2009. —Travis Moses



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Outside the New York City central library, ghosts explode from gargoyles statues.

GHOSTBUSTERS: THE VIDEO GAME

Busting ghosts is not as easy as you think, but it sure is a lot of fun.

PS3 Xbox 360 Wii PS2 PC

Developer: Terminal Reality/Red Fly Studio Publisher: Sierra Entertainment Release Date: 2009

As the newest member of the Ghostbusters team, an early level of the game will have you investigating reports of paranormal activity in New York City's central library. With an experimental proton pack strapped to your back and ghost traps swinging from your hips, you will ascend the library's front steps aside fellow Ghostbusters Egon and Ray. Pressing the Y-button will pull out your PKE meter and gauge paranormal energy readings within the vicinity. Lo and behold, the readings are off the charts in the NYC central library.

TIME TO BUST SOME GHOSTS

Following a stream of ectoplasmic residue through the building leads you to a massive study hall. Entering the room incites a flurry of novels to bind together as a mean book golem. Normally we'd be against book burning, but given the aggressive reading campaign waged by the

library's ghoulish inhabitant you'd do best to turn over a new page and zap this book-bound ghost. Unleash a powerful proton stream to tear the book golem apart page-by-page, which showcases the game's impressive physics engine. When enough books have been knocked from its makeshift body, the energy will dissipate and the golem is defeated.

The proton beam is only one of the many handy weapons available for use. Depending on the type of ghost you're challenged with, you may find the dark matter beam to prove more effective. Additionally, you can wield a plasma gun for extra damage. Hitting the directional pad allows you to switch effortlessly between your available firearms. Each ghoul you trap nets you money, so concentrate on catching ghosts to earn more money.

THROW THE TRAP!

Firing off a proton stream is simple enough, yet actually catching ghosts demands more than just holding down the right trigger. When you've weakened a ghoul to a certain point by slamming it against walls, you have the option of trapping it. Egon or Ray will lay a trap if they're nearby, otherwise you can open one yourself with a tap of the X-button. It's much easier to catch a ghost with the aid of your team considering most ghosts have to be wrangled into a trap.



Watching a ghost go down is practically as exciting as actually doing it. Ghostbusters packs some of the most gratifying graphics of any game we've seen this year. Burn marks from proton streams mark up walls as the light from the stream reflects realistically on the characters. Objects, such as books, chairs, and tables, respond with uncanny accuracy to physical force. The book golem, for example, buckles as you shoot each book from his body. Hopefully Ghostbusters: The Video Game will come together in the same exact way this autumn, delivering on expectations for an action-packed, awesome-looking game. —Tracy Erickson

625E

Get the link to **Ghostbusters** screens and news sent to your e-mail. Text **625E** to **59479**

Only standard text messaging rates apply

GOLDEN AXE: BEAST RIDER

PS3 Xbox 360

Developer: Secret Level Publisher: Sega Release Date: October

Perhaps you remember the female amazon character from the first Golden Axe game that rocked arcades and the Sega Master System back in 1989? She wore a skimpy white bikini, wielded a long-sword, and lost both her parents to the villainous Death Adder. In Golden Axe: Beast Rider, Tyris Flare is back and looking sexier than ever with fiery red hair and a handful of barely there outfits...oh, the game is pretty good, too.



TAMING THE BEAST

Golden Axe: Beast Rider is first and foremost an action game with a heavy-handed focus on melee and vehicular combat; in this case five different beasts are the man-slaughtering vehicles. When confronted with Death Adder's army on foot, you can attack with light and strong attacks, which correlate to how Tyris swings her sword: horizontal or vertical. This is important to watch because enemies have the same attacks, and with a well timed button press you can parry or counter an enemy's attack based on a horizontal or vertical slash.

Beasts that you ride in the game are much more powerful compared to Tyris on foot, and each is unique unto its own with special attacks and abilities. For example, the Abrax lizard beast is smaller than the other beasts, making it more nimble, and attacks with bites, tail swipes, and fireball projectiles. Megabrax, the biggest beast that you can ride in the game, and believe us it's big, requires Tyris to stab her sword in its back to steer. When riding this T-Rex type beast, you must constantly feed it smaller beasts or Death Adder's minions or it will kick you off. The cool

thing about the Megabrax is that it uses its tail to impale enemies that can be saved for a later treat. Enemies will hang lifelessly from its tail until you decide that it's time to feed the Megabrax. Be cautious though when riding beasts, because no matter how strong they seem, you can be knocked off and your ride hijacked.

GOLDEN LEGACY

Even though Beast Rider is a huge departure from how previous Golden Axe games play, fun little legacy items have been littered throughout the game harking back to previous games in the series. Take the health and mana gnomes for instance. The same gnomes from the first game that run around like skittish rabbits as you desperately try to kick power-ups out of them. They're in Beast Rider and serve exactly the same purpose, but this time they laugh at you. There's even a very special appearance by the giant gladiator twins.

Golden Axe: Beast Rider is a solid action game for people that enjoy the hack-and-slash elements of Conan and God of War. It's not going to blow your mind like Kratos battling Zeus for the throne of Olympia, but Tyris Flare has her own score to settle with Death Adder. With plenty of extra content that ranges from battle arenas to unlockable weapons and outfits, Golden Axe: Beast Rider looks to keep action gamers busy until the holiday rush.—Travis Moses



Golden Axe rides back into action with a sexy lead female and the ability to ride monstrous beasts.

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PLAYSTATION 3



Cartoon Violence
Mild Suggestive Themes



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NARUTO: ULTIMATE NINJA STORM

PS3

■ Developer: CyberConnect2 ■ Publisher: Namco Bandai Games ■ Release Date: November



Naruto fighting games are a dime a dozen, each new title pummeling store shelves with quiet changes. It's difficult to get amped up about a new Naruto game when they come out every few months, yet you'd be hard-pressed to find a game as highly anticipated in the franchise as *Naruto: Ultimate Ninja Storm*. Beyond its status as a PlayStation 3 exclusive, Namco Bandai has drummed up intrigue with a furiously fast breed of fighting game that has caught eyes well outside the bounds of Naruto fandom.

A HEARTY FIGHTER

More than two dozen characters pulled from the series duke it out in *Ultimate Ninja Storm*, although we only had access to a pair. Title hero Naruto and ally Kakashi battled against each other utilizing a range of basic attacks and items combined with powerful jutsu. Hitting the circle button initiates

a basic attack, which is naturally effective when face-to-face with your foe. At range, you can lob shuriken with a press of the square button. Special items, such as ramen for restoring lost health, are mapped to the directional pad.

If you're aiming for victory in battle, however, throwing random punches and chucking shuriken isn't enough—you'll need to pull off jutsu. Basic attacks can be powered up using chakra, which requires holding down the triangle button for an energy charge. This puts a bit more bite behind your blows, but it's nothing compared to the devastation unleashed by ultimate jutsu.



NINJA JUTSU

Situated to the side of each fighter's health and chakra meters is a three-drop storm gauge. Filling these drops up with skillful fighting allows you to execute character-specific ultimate jutsu. A quick

simultaneous tap of the triangle and circle buttons and you're off. Naruto naturally performed his famous shadow clone jutsu that summons dozens of replicas. Should both characters attempt to use ultimate jutsu at the same time, the battle moves into mash mode. As button icons stream along both sides of the screen, the first to zip through them correctly gets to unleash their attack.

While the fighting mechanics are pretty basic, the move to 3D ramps up the difficulty. Even so, *Ultimate Ninja Storm* is surprisingly accessible. You won't need to be intimately familiar with the franchise or even well-versed in fighting games—this is definitely a game that promises to deliver on fast action without much fumbling over the controller.

—Tracy Erickson



LEGO BATMAN: THE VIDEOGAME

PS3

Xbox 360

Wii

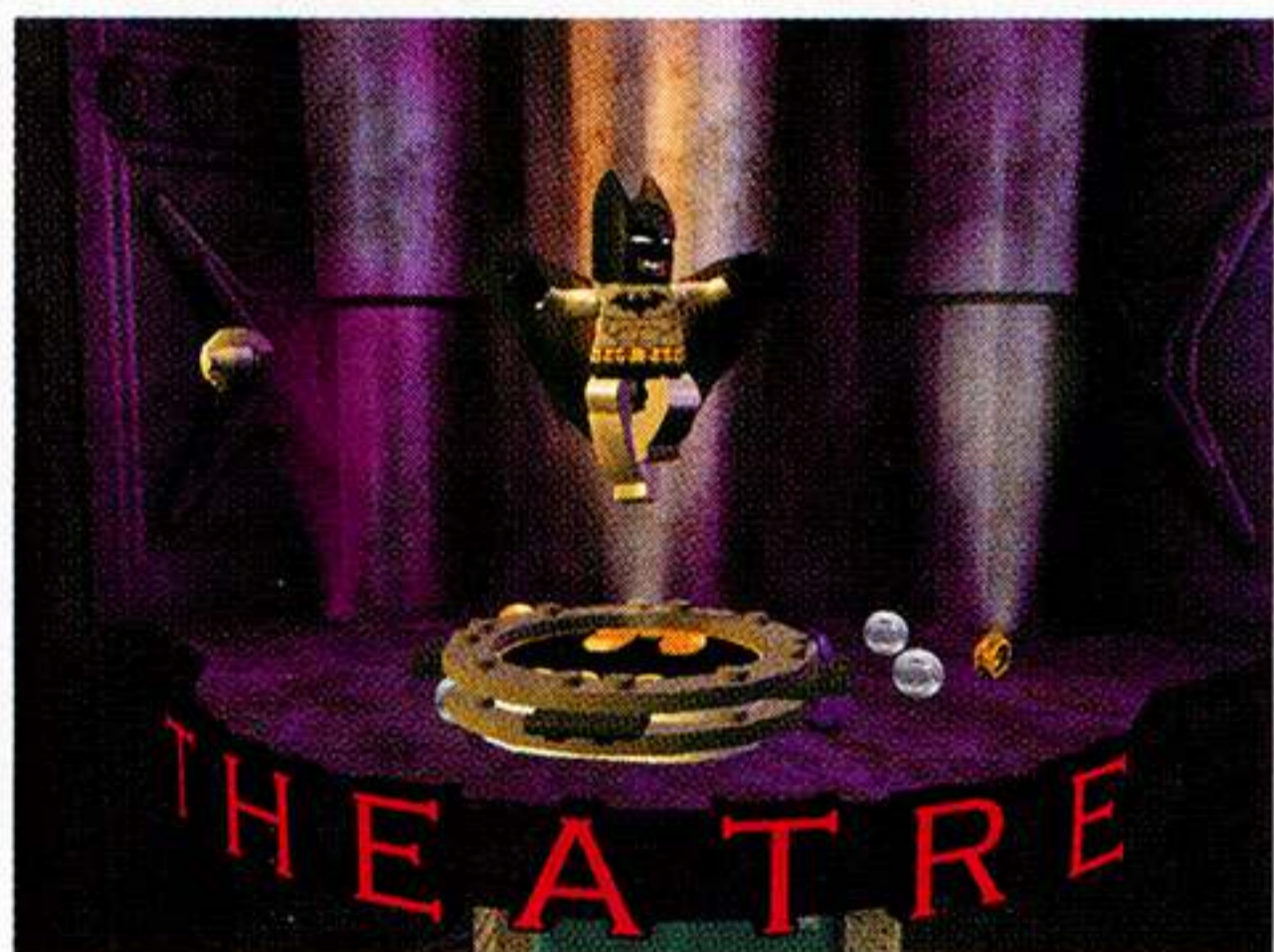
PS2

DS

PSP

PC

■ Developer: Traveller's Tales ■ Publisher: Warner Bros. Interactive ■ Release Date: September



Although *LEGO Batman* sticks pretty closely to the gameplay established by its predecessors, *LEGO Star Wars* and *LEGO Indiana Jones*, it incorporates a better camera and slicker graphics as well as a few new moves for the characters. The story line is all-original, too, penned by developer Traveller's Tales with approval from DC Comics and Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment. This gave the developer the opportunity to expand the Batman universe a bit and include a wide variety of characters.

HOLY FAMILIARITY, BATMAN!

Anyone who has played the former *LEGO* games will feel instantly at home with *LEGO Batman*. The basic gameplay remains the same with players

exploring levels while collecting LEGO pieces. The construction system is back, allowing players to build vehicles, switches, and other items to help them through the level. Also back for a return visit is the drop-in cooperative play that made the first games so much fun.

Being a superhero with no actual super powers, Batman must rely on his suit and gadgetry to get by. In the game, Batman and Robin start out in their classic costumes (Batman's grey and black and Robin's red and green) but both can take on extra powers by donning various tech suits that can be found around the world. Batman's suits will allow him to do things like glide across rooftops and plant bombs while Robin's let him climb up walls via a pair of magnetic shoes and even breathe underwater.



VILLAINOUS VILLAINS

The roster of super villains in *LEGO Batman* are well represented with a cast list that includes The Joker, Penguin, Poison Ivy, Catwoman, Mr. Freeze, The Riddler, Man-Bat, Killer Croc, Killer Moth, Clayface, Harley Quinn, and Mad Hatter. Each villain is playable and comes with his or her own set of super powers like The Joker's electric joy buzzer, Catwoman's whip, Mr. Freeze's freeze ray, and The Riddler's mind control.

While *LEGO Batman* certainly takes many cues from its predecessors, there is enough new material here to make it "not just another *LEGO* game." The addition of multiple villains and their attendant powers also adds to the fun. The easy gameplay and slick graphics make this a great choice for families, core gamers, and Batman fans alike. Get ready to accompany the Dynamic Duo in their fight against evil doers (or vice versa!).

—Flynn De Marco



SAINTS ROW 2

PS3 Xbox 360 PC

Developer: Volition Publisher: THQ Release Date: October

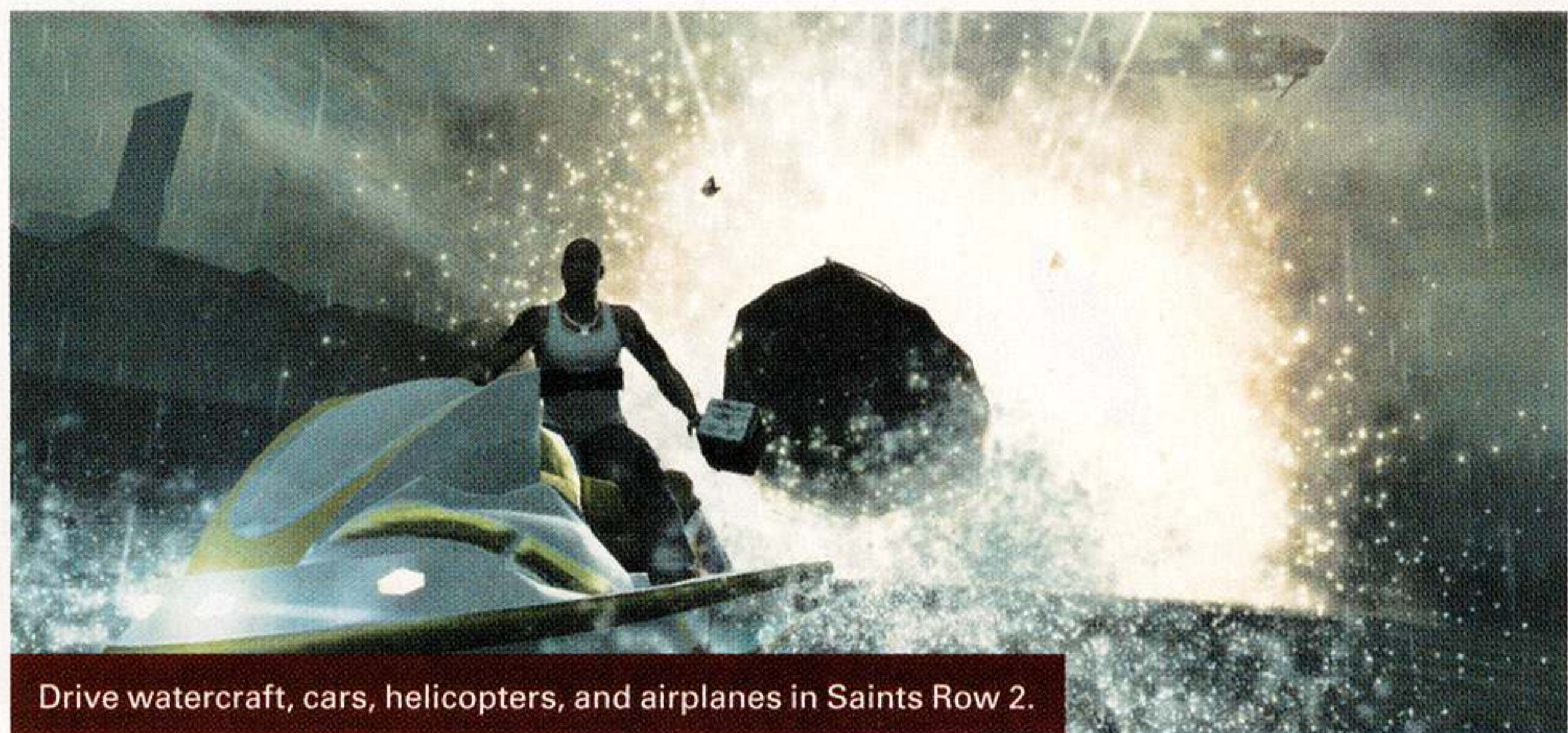
Now don't get your panties in a bunch, all you GTA fans. We're not saying that Saints Row 2 is the better game; that will have to wait until the review. All we're saying is that what we recently saw and played Saints Row 2 and it definitely opened our eyes to what could be a more fulfilling experience. There appears to be more content, more mission variety, and more of that sandbox-style gameplay action gamers crave.

The game demo started off with the Volition team pointing out that "this is the first time we've shown Saint's Row 2 on the PS3," just to prove that the game is *actually* running equally as good as the Xbox 360 version. We were apathetic, especially since the first Saints Row was initially scheduled to release on the PS3, but was ultimately canceled. As for Saints Row 2 on the PS3, the game is coming along nicely, with only minor frame rate hiccups which will surely will be ironed out before release, and features Sixaxis motion controls on all vehicles for the gimmicky gamer.

We played three missions that showcased the mission variety and play style. The first was a basic checkpoint race on a jet ski where we got to test out the Sixaxis motion controls. The controls were tight, but Sixaxis still feels ultimately awkward. Volition added that Saints Row 2 will have watercraft vehicles, cars, helicopters, and airplanes that can be driven. The second mission was a helicopter rail shooter. The objective was to blow up propane tanks and trucks on an enemy drug farm while an NPC helicopter pilot circled the field. Even though it was a rail shooter, the mission was rather fun yet challenging, with enemy foot soldiers firing rockets at our helicopter. The third and final mission was an on-foot shoot-out for an airport stronghold. This is where we got to play with all the weapons, including a samurai sword and explosive satchel charges. The mission ends after the hangar is secured and all the drug planes attempting to take off are blown up—we failed when we ran out of rockets for the last plane. Whoops.

In addition to the three missions, Volition showed us the new gang customization mode where you get to choose your posse's street apparel, graffiti tag, gang sign, and pimped out vehicles. With all this content, including cooperative play and competitive multiplayer, Volition has a true GTA competitor on their hands.

—Travis Moses



Drive watercraft, cars, helicopters, and airplanes in Saints Row 2.



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PLAYSTATION 3

VIZ media SHONEN JUMP

TEEN T Cartoon Violence Mild Suggestive Themes

BANDAI NAMCO Games

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WATCHMEN

PS3 Xbox 360

■ Developer: Deadline Games ■ Publisher: Warner Bros. Interactive ■ Release Date: 2009

The best part about the month of July was unarguably *The Dark Knight*. The second best part was the first *Watchmen* movie trailer that debuted during the coming attractions, with 300 director Zack Snyder set to unleash the awesomeness next March. Based on the renowned graphical novel of the same name, the anticipation will surely reach soaring heights as we gear up for the film's release next year.

A NEW ERA?

It comes as no surprise that Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment is publishing a *Watchmen* video game alongside the movie. What is surprising, though, is just how stunning the game is already looking, given how early in development this new title is. Developed by Deadline Games, the independent studio doesn't have the greatest track record, but if *Watchmen*, and its recently announced *Faith* and a *.45* are any indication, the studio could be about to make its mark.

Originally set in the year 1985, *Watchmen* takes place in a nuclear war-themed alternate history. The game is based 10 years prior, and focuses on the past lives of characters from the film, with playable characters Nite-Owl and Rorschach. Both character models look great, and being set in the 1970s, these guys are in tip-top shape, a sharp contrast to their later lives.

FIGHTING YEARS

The *Watchmen* game at its core is a gritty brawler with a strong emphasis on combat. Nite-Owl and Rorschach can be engaged in [split-screen] cooperative combat, grilling thugs in the game's dark streets. Being Mature rated, *Watchmen* spares no expense with blood and brutal combat. But the fighting engine looks simple enough for casual players to land vicious combos, and we were told the game's engine can handle as many as 20 enemies onscreen. Simple button presses and combinations unleash attacks and combos, and specially timed counters will let loose more powerful special attacks.

Watchmen is being developed using a proprietary engine, which emphasizes rag-doll physics and stunning visuals, making the combat stand out. Raw motion capture data is being used to create a realistic sense of action. The rag-doll effects work great when punching or kicking one enemy into another, where both foes will tumble pleasingly.

Warner Bros. has confirmed that *Watchmen* will be a downloadable title from the PSN and Xbox Live, but is also slated for PC and PS2. No details yet on whether or not it will see a disc-based release.

—Chris Morell



MOTORSTORM PACIFIC RIFT

PS3

■ Developer: Evolution Studios
 ■ Publisher: Sony ■ Release Date: October

There's no gear grinding in the sequel to the PlayStation 3's best-selling racing game since launch. The racetracks are all-new, four players can play in split-screen, and monster trucks make their big debut as the king of the road. *MotorStorm Pacific Rift* is better than the first game, and in many ways, possibly the best action-racing game coming in 2008. It's metal-mashing, turbo-fueled fun through sweltering jungles, searing lava pools, and thick, thick mud.

You may remember the first *MotorStorm* primarily featured dry, desert racetracks set in canyons and along cliff sides. That was all fine, but where *Pacific Rift* takes you offers more intrigue and wonder for the eyes; not to mention more of a challenge. Deep in the jungle island racetracks of *Pacific Rift* there's more color, overgrown vegetation, and plenty of water and mud. Water, in fact, serves more purpose than just a pretty visual effect. Driving through water will cool down your engine and, subsequently, boost meter. That means you can boost indefinitely as you drive through water without the worry of boosting too much and blowing up.

More environmental interactions have been added to *Pacific Rift* beyond water and its cool down effect. Some tracks have breakable vegetation and destroyable structures that can modify the path of the race, including roadblocks and new jumps. The vehicle most likely to cause this racetrack devastation is the monster truck. The monster truck is the biggest addition to *Pacific Rift* and drives accordingly. It's slower, but what the monster truck lacks in speed it more than makes up for in size. New to *Pacific Rift* is the ability to quickly ram your vehicle to the left or right with the L1 and R1 buttons dispatching other racers off course. Obviously, monster trucks are the worst to get rammed by as they carry the most weight in the game.

With all seven vehicle classes from the first game (bikes, ATVs, buggies, rally cars, racing trucks, mud pluggers, and big rigs), the addition of monster trucks, 16 island tracks, and 16 players online or four players racing split-screen, *Pacific Rift* is shaping up to be the hottest, most fun racing game coming out this year. We can't wait to see what the final game looks like, because even in early beta form, *Pacific Rift* drives like a dream.

—Travis Moses



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November, 2008

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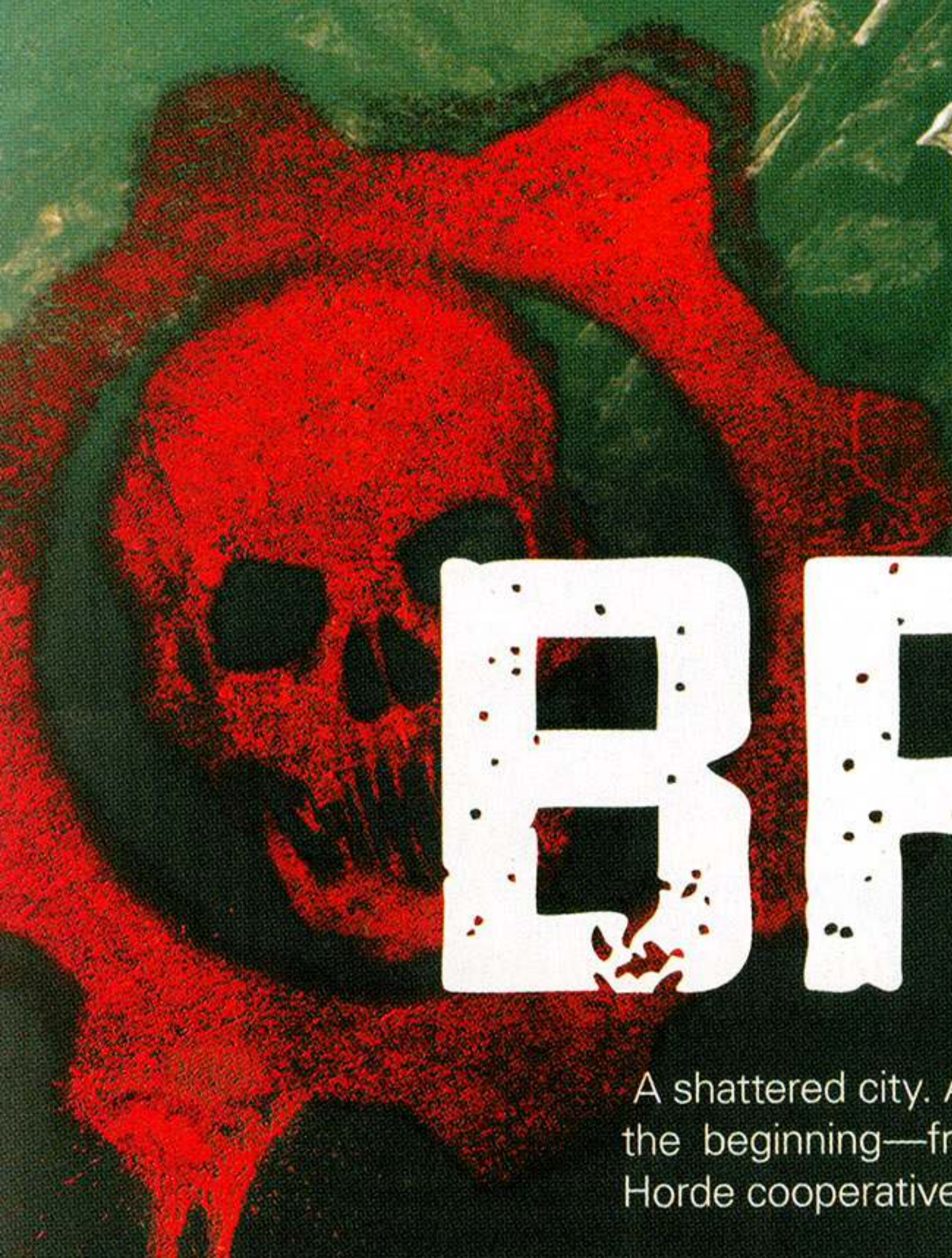


PLAYSTATION 3



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Feature



BRUTAL

A shattered city. A mysterious plague. A fleeting hope. Bigger and better is only the beginning—from the monstrous Campaign battles to the heart-stopping Horde cooperative mode, *Gears of War 2* is bloody brilliant.



LEGEND

Brutal Legend: Gears of War 2



What's perhaps most surprising about *Gears of War 2* is that the massive action set pieces don't feel robotic or scripted—they ebb and flow organically around you. With the addition of massive crowds of enemy Locust, the scale of some battles approaches *Lord of the Rings* proportions.

Released in 2006, *Gears of War* became the first bonafide smash hit for the fledgling Xbox 360. It instantly popularized an aggressive new breed of shooter, one in which finding cover and laying down suppressive fire are just as important as shooting straight. With its elaborate graphics, gushing gore, and pin-prick precise combat, *Gears of War* quickly inspired a wave of similar shooters, inferior though they were.

Now *Gears of War 2* is planning a full-scale blitzkrieg on the Xbox 360 this fall, and GamePro got an exclusive opportunity to play through the first of five acts. And we're happy to report that what we played was astounding.

"Welcome to Delta"

The original *Gears of War* was like one of those breezy summer blockbuster movies, the kind where you throw all logic to the wind, kick your feet up, and enjoy the goofy ride. But storyline and atmosphere take a more central, serious role in *Gears of War 2*. "We did good with gameplay in the first game," design director Cliff Bleszinski reminisces, "but we didn't go far into the narrative. We didn't even have an opening cinema!" With the extra development time since the release of the first game, Bleszinski and his team refined and rethought their storytelling techniques with *Gears of War 2*, and the result is a darker, more urgent tale that keeps your blood pumping in between the hectic shootouts.

Even in the first moments of *Gears of War 2*, a cloud of uncertainty hangs in the air. The opening scenes highlight the increasing desperation of the Coalition of Ordered Governments (COGs), a ramshackle collection of human survivors faced with impossible odds. The threat lies below, in the form of subterranean terrors called the Locust Horde. The opening cinemas replay the final moments of the original game, with the Lightmass bomb detonating underground and exterminating untold millions of Locust in a key victory for the COG.



The squid-like Reavers take center stage in *Gears of War 2*. As opposed to their strictly airborne tactics in the first game, Reavers will now slamdance on the ground, skewering humans with their thrashing tentacles as they weave between barricades. Reavers serve as flying steeds for Locust drones, a fact that Marcus and Dom exploit in a Reaver-based chase scene late in the game.



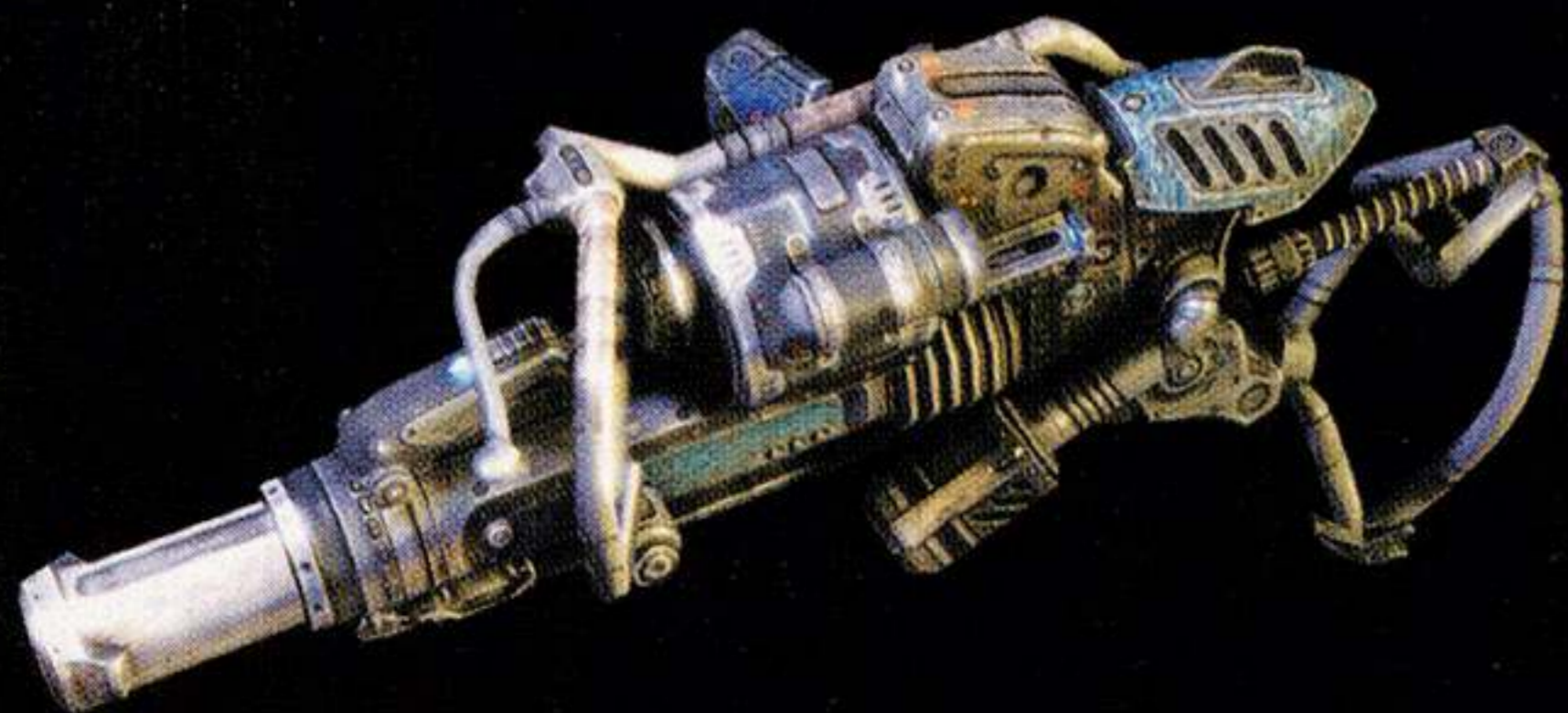
Chairman Prescott

One of many new faces in *Gears of War 2*. With a combination of icy charisma and ruthless drive, the COG Chairman has kept humanity fighting and surviving in the face of total annihilation by the relentless Locust Horde. In a matter-of-fact speech to the COG troops, he presents a desperate new plan: an invasion that will thrust humanity's remaining armies straight into the gaping maw of the Locust. At stake is the survival of the last standing human city.



Mortar launcher

Range: ★★★★★ Power: ★★★★★



Though it's a chore to lug around, this new heavy weapon launches an airburst round to carpet bomb a wide area. Firing from the hip isn't advised—you'll first want to deploy the tripod by holding the left trigger. Once you've lined up your shot, you can increase the firing range by holding the right trigger, releasing it to deploy the mortar round. The reload rate is glacially slow (active reloading helps), but the damage potential here is astounding. In multiplayer, be sure to listen for the distinctive "whizzing" sound of incoming mortars. In Horde, it's a godsend for its crowd-clearing capabilities. Fun fact: the subterranean-native Locust drones scream "sky fire!" as the blast rains destruction around them.

CONTINUED ▶



"If General Raam was a sledgehammer, Skorge is a scalpel," Bleszinski said of this enigmatic new villain. The leader of the Locust caste called Kantus, this agile aggressor wields a dual-bladed chainsaw staff with "surgical precision." Skorge ambushes the Delta Squad as they prepare to invade the Locust's subterranean strongholds. Separated and helpless, Marcus and Dom are forced to board the grind lift leaving Tai and Dizzy to fend for themselves against Skorge.

Now the Locust, licking their wounds in their subterranean strongholds, have decided to strike back. And this time, they're fighting dirty. The Locust have begun devouring entire human cities at once, sucking them into enormous sinkholes from below. Only the city of Jacinto, safely nestled on a pillar of solid granite, remains intact. But Jacinto's days, too, may be numbered. The COG's fleeting victory against the Locust has proven to be a curse: the Lightmass explosion sent contaminants blasting into the air, triggering an outbreak of a mysterious plague called Rust Lung. And a harsh winter is on the way, pushing the already haggard survivors to the breaking point. At the beginning of the game, the dead and dying are already clogging the hospitals of Jacinto.

The Road to Landown

It's in front of one such hospital that you begin playing Gears of War 2. As returning COG veteran Marcus Fenix, you arrive on the scene and hear the grim news: the Locust are on the move, and

advance word suggests that they've already conquered the nearby village of Landown. But before you tackle that problem, you've got to mop up a scattered band of Locust invaders that have taken refuge in Jacinto. The opening hospital scenario is suspenseful but brief, a welcome warm up to get you comfortable with moving and shooting in Gears of War 2. You'll only fight a few attackers at a time, and you'll always have plenty of help in the form of conveniently placed explosive fuel tanks, COG helicopters, and the other members of Delta Squad watching your back.

That safety net vanishes minutes later when you're riding on the back of a roaring Derrick truck that's hurdling down a mountain range, unleashing a Gatling gun at the teeming crowds of Locust foot soldiers that surge from their underground burrows. It's a truly mind-blowing sight—easily five or six times larger than the biggest battle in the original game—and it's barely fifteen minutes into the first act. The vibrant new scenery, with its lush valleys and snow-capped mountain ranges, also proves to be a welcome change from the

gritty, claustrophobic art of the first game. Visual variety takes a front seat in Gears of War 2, with just 30 percent of the scenarios taking place in the underground caverns that frequented the original Gears. The massive shifts in scenery and scale alone make Gears of War 2 a considerable leap over its predecessor, quickly silencing concerns that the game will be only a modest improvement, a mere "Gears 1.5."

Back to the action. The battle has devolved into pure chaos: 50 foot-tall Brumaks now stalk amongst the hordes of Locust soldiers, while squid-like Reavers ominously circle the skies. Red-lining the minigun, we mow down 30 or 40 of the scrambling figures and narrowly deflect several boarding attempts. Overhead, COG helicopters pump out blistering cannon fire, occasionally pin wheeling out of control into a nearby hillside or crowd. After a few more close calls, the most memorable being an ill-timed pit stop and hasty de-boarding in the middle of some Locust emergence holes, the truck arrives safely at our destination: Landown.



Welcome to the Hollows, located deep beneath the crust of Sera. Marcus and Dom reach this inhospitable world with the help of a grind lift, an elevator that drills through solid rock. The Hollows are home to many dangerous Locust creatures, but in our brief stay we only saw oversized mushrooms and some bioluminescent plant life.



Players can collect secret documents, internal memos, and other bits of refuse to piece together a bigger picture of the overall storyline. You'll collect and track all these items using the scrapbook-style War Journal, which also serves as your photo gallery, Achievement tracker, and high scores leaderboard.



Mulcher

Range: ★★★★★☆ Power: ★★★★★★



A heavy weapon in every sense of the word, this huge rotary cannon will halve your movement speed and reduce your evasive ability. When you pull the trigger, though, you'll see why it's been dubbed "the Mulcher" by the team at Epic. It's the most consistently devastating weapon in the game, especially if you can mount it on cover and rev it up to full firing speed. Overheating is a concern, but you can tap the left bumper to actively cool the barrels in between volleys. The blistering firing rate makes it well suited for the wall-to-wall Horde mode, where it can mow down wave after wave of enemies.



KALISO

One may int...
is the ink...
- this is...
Tai is more...
back and mut...
deep, proph...
about a situ...
He sees tru...
quiet and un...
confidenc...

Tai Kaliso

Marcus and Dom meet this spiritual warrior during the first act, as the Locust invade a local hospital. Tai is a gifted warrior with a calm, almost serene demeanor, and he joins up with Delta Squad to help Marcus and Dom escort the Derrick trucks. Tai is last seen struggling with the vicious Skorge as Marcus and Dom prepare to invade the Locust's subterranean breeding grounds. His whereabouts are unknown.

CONTINUED ▶

Monsters of Rock

The Locust invaders command a subterranean ecosystem called the Hollows, home to some freakish beasts.



Brumak

These walking Death Stars were planned to be introduced in the original game but were scrapped at the last minute (only to resurface later on the PC version). Brumaks are a frequent threat in Gears of War 2, and one you must take seriously since you'll be fending off several at a time. You can shoot off the guns and armor to expose the fleshy underbelly of the beast.



Butcher

Wielding massive cleavers, these melee fighters will charge in close to hack you to ribbons in the new Horde cooperative play mode. They take a huge amount of punishment, so you'll want to avoid getting cornered.



Grinder

These fatbodies wield the new Mulcher minigun, making them devastating opponents in Horde. Once that Mulcher kicks into high gear—and you hear their battle cry of "Griind!"—take the hint and make yourself real scarce.



Rockworm

These monstrous creatures are native inhabitants of The Hollows. Their enormous bodies are heavily armored and can be used as "living cover" from enemy fire. Little is known about the behavior of the Rockworm, though we know that Kantus priests can communicate with them in some way.

Mauler

The Maulers are vicious melee fighters in the Horde mode. Their explosive flails will dismember you at close range, and their Boomshields help protect them from incoming attacks while they steadily advance. Aim for their unprotected feet, or shoot them in the back as they attack another player.



Kantus

Members of this Locust caste live deep in the Hollows. Kantus fighters will chant to resurrect their fallen allies or summon creatures such as Rockworms. On the battlefield, you'll want to flush out any Kantus before they undo all of your hard work.



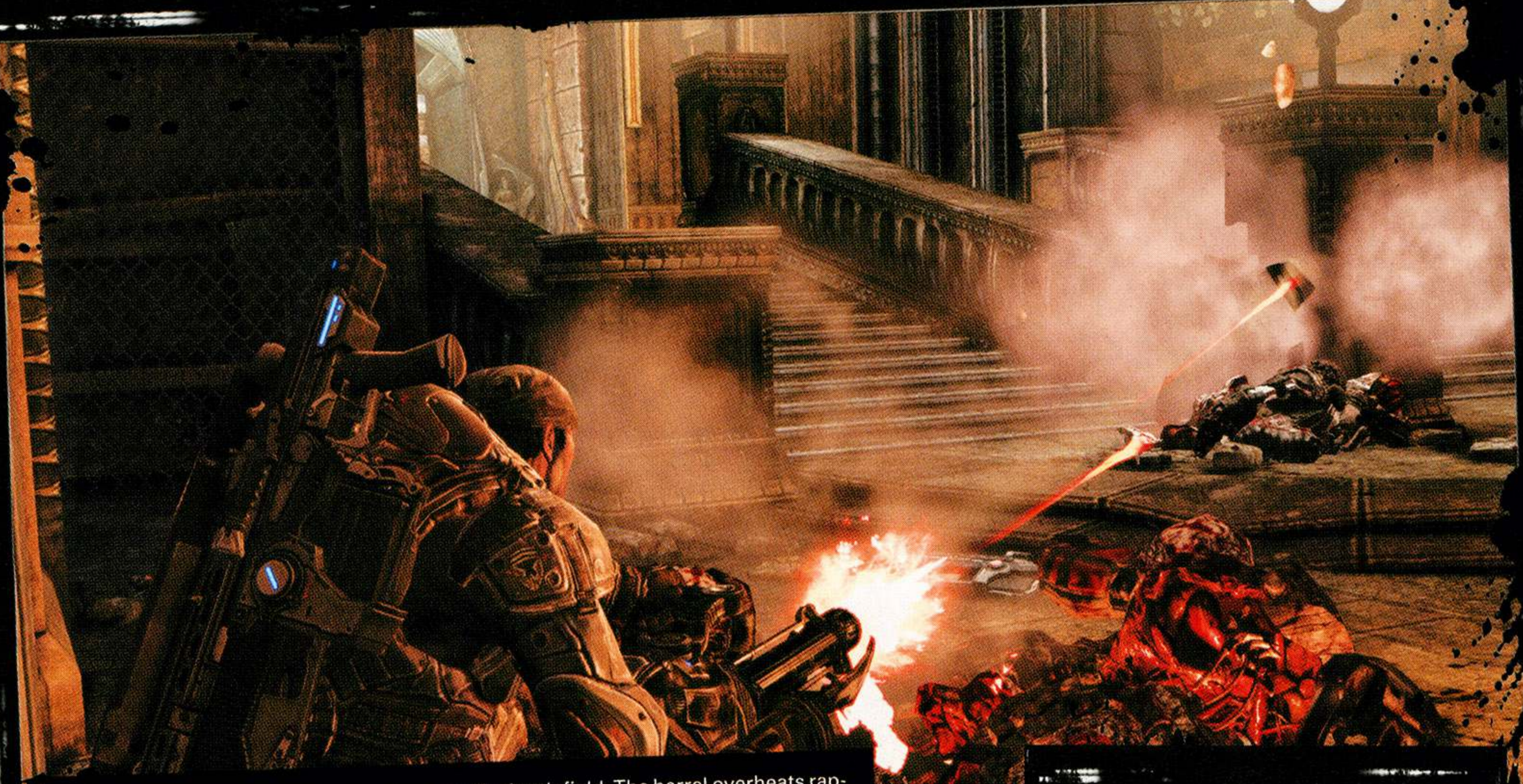
Photo Warrior

Prepare to 'say cheese' with Gears of War 2's new screenshot function.

In any Gears of War 2 multiplayer match, you will now have the ability to capture screenshots of the action while you're in spectator mode. These images are saved to your hard drive in HD resolution and can be uploaded to other Gears of War 2 players through Xbox Live. We played around with capturing screenshots in the Horde mode and found it easy to swap cinematic camera positions, free-roam the environment, or zoom in to nail the perfect action-packed screenshot. Fergusson mentioned that the game will grade you on your amateur photography skills—capturing big body counts, explosions, and gushing blood in the shot will boost your score—and that you can earn Achievements by snapping screens.

Though the details aren't final, Epic is hoping to hold community events—Screenshot of the Month and caption contests were mentioned—that tie into the new screenshot functionality. "We wanted to take that [post-death] downtime and let people do something interesting," explained senior producer Rod Fergusson. "The backend web presentation of photos will roll out slower." Fergusson explained that Epic hasn't had much experience in web connectivity for its games, so the studio plans to take "baby steps" in integrating player screenshots online in new and interesting ways. The full online features won't be present on day one, but Epic plans to roll them in slowly over time.

CONTINUED ►



This new Mulcher minigun is a true terror on the battlefield. The barrel overheats rapidly, but if you can keep it cooled with the active reload function, you'll be able to take on the toughest Locust monsters single-handedly. For added accuracy and damage, you can hold the left trigger to prop it on the ground or a piece of cover.



Gorgon burst pistol

Range: ★★★★★

Power: ★★★★★



If you're carrying a shield (or a hostage), find this powerful new Locust handgun. The Gorgon pumps out five bullets with each squeeze of the trigger, but ammo is limited. As always, go for the active reload to inflict even more damage.

Last Stand

In Landown, the gameplay shifts to a slower, more suspenseful pace with some survival horror overtones. The sleepy little town, long since abandoned, looks unassuming from the outside. But inside lurk Tickers, scuttling creatures that serve as living anti-vehicle mines for the Locust (see "How to Make a Monster," page 66). While picking through Landown, we came across a new "split-path" scenario that showed off some new cooperative play possibilities. One player can proceed into a ruined hotel, while the other can perch on a nearby rooftop and use the new mortar weapon to cover his teammate from afar. Already a strong point in the original game, cooperative play returns for Gears of War 2 with some added conveniences such as uninterrupted drop-in/drop-out matches and player-specific difficulty settings. Co-op play is still limited to two players (for reasons pertaining to pacing and storytelling,

Epic team members explained), but a new five-player Horde mode will help fill that hole nicely (read more about it on page 68).

We finally escort the Derrick truck to its designated drilling zone, a nearby graveyard, when a massive Locust force launches a last-ditch effort to halt the drilling. In this graveyard shootout, we noticed some new tricks with the physics engine: gunshots would chip away realistically at the headstones, and grenades would topple them altogether. We used this to our advantage, chewing through the rows of tombstones with the Derrick's mounted Gatling gun to reach the Locust troops hiding behind them. By the time the smoke cleared, the graveyard was strewn with corpses and the Derrick truck was set to deploy its payload. But a sudden ambush by a powerful new enemy, the Locust leader Skorge, leaves Marcus and Dom stranded underground and the COG plan in shambles.



Dizzy

This grimy truck driver was one of the Stranded left behind in the Locust's Emergence Day attacks. In order to buy his family freedom and safety, he's accepted a combat service term with the COG forces as part of "Operation Lifeboat." His hardscrabble resilience and engineering knowhow make him an invaluable asset to Delta Squad. He drives the Derrick truck, which can grant entry to the Locust's underground burrows.

CONTINUED ►



PSYCH

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Brutal Legend: Gears of War 2



The mortar is a powerful new heavy weapon in both the campaign and online modes. Setting it up with the left trigger is a time consuming process, but if you can detonate the round over your enemies, the results will be catastrophic. You can also fire it from the hip directly at enemies, but this didn't seem to be an effective strategy (read: we blew ourselves up every time we tried it).

Death Star

Our hands-on experiences with the campaign ended shortly after exiting the grind lifts, so we didn't get to clash with the new Rockworms or Kantus priests in the underground caverns. What we saw of the Hollows looked promising, though: bioluminescent plants, massive fungal growths, and tangles of twisted roots and vines gave the vast underground caverns an almost tactile level of visual detail. It's no stretch to say that Gears of War 2 is already one of the most technically impressive games we've seen on the Xbox 360 or the PlayStation 3, and is pushing the console's hardware into uncharted territory.

Contrary to some internet naysaying, we frequently saw evidence that Gears of War 2 will top the original game in every possible way. The graphics are stupendous, the storyline is vastly more interesting, and the new battles are bigger, better, and yes, more bad-ass. In fact, the biggest challenge for Gears of War 2's campaign mode will likely be in finding ways to match or exceed the intensity of the first act, which kept a manic, almost exhausting pace. If Epic Games can keep delivering shocking spectacles later in the game—and they swear they're holding back some of the biggest surprises—then Gears of War 2 will likely go down as a modern classic on par with Half-Life 2 and Call of Duty 4.

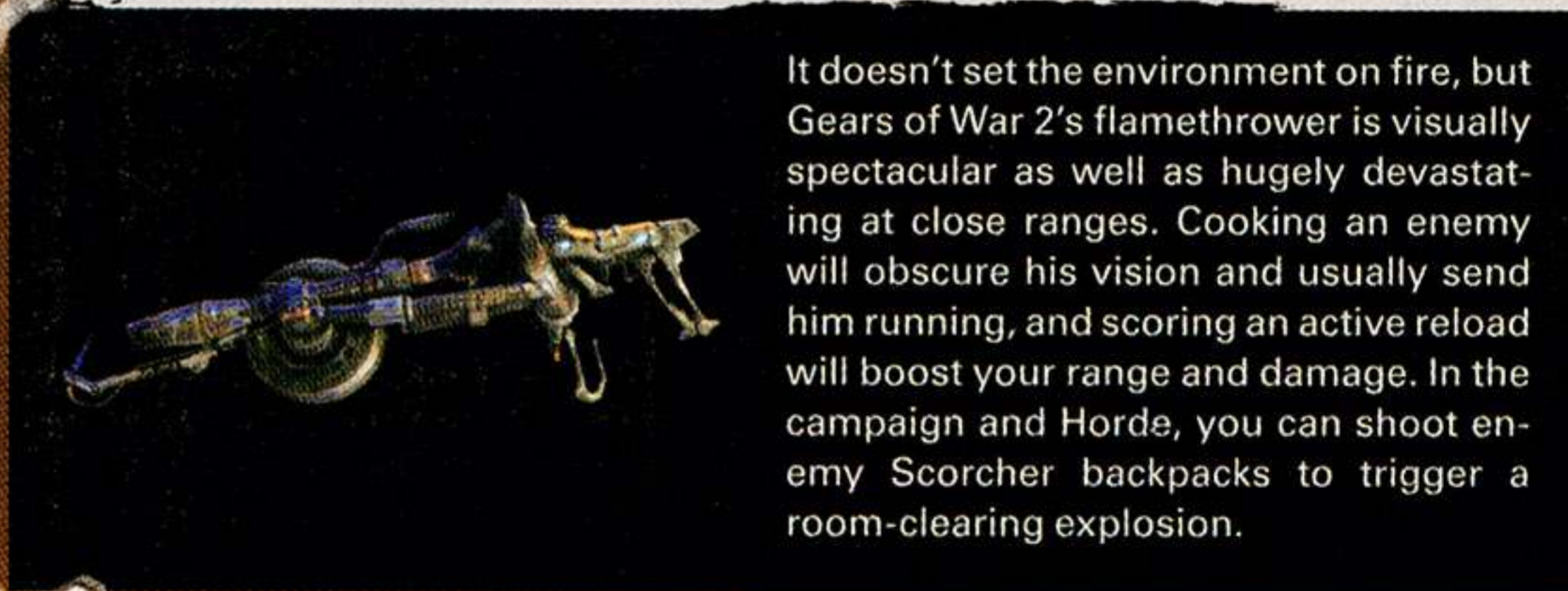
More Gears!

Read on for a massive Q&A with Cliff Bleszinski, the mastermind behind Gears of War 2, as well as hands-on impressions of the new multiplayer modes.



Scorcher flamethrower

Range: ★★☆☆☆ Power: ★★★★★☆

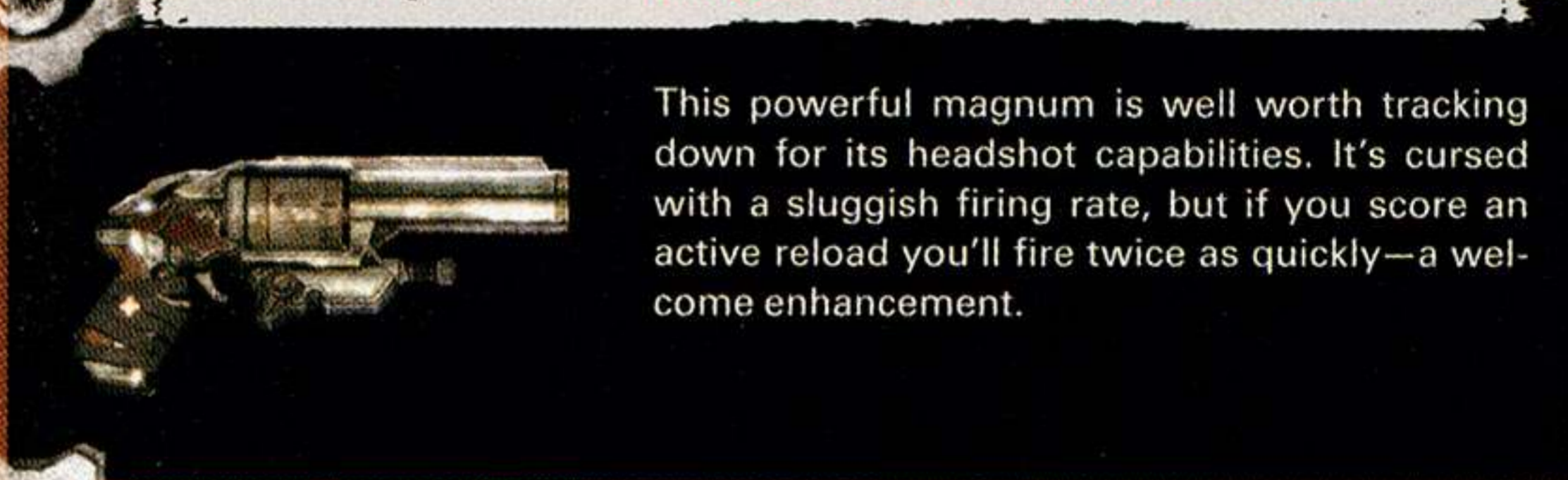


It doesn't set the environment on fire, but Gears of War 2's flamethrower is visually spectacular as well as hugely devastating at close ranges. Cooking an enemy will obscure his vision and usually send him running, and scoring an active reload will boost your range and damage. In the campaign and Horde, you can shoot enemy Scorcher backpacks to trigger a room-clearing explosion.



Boltok pistol

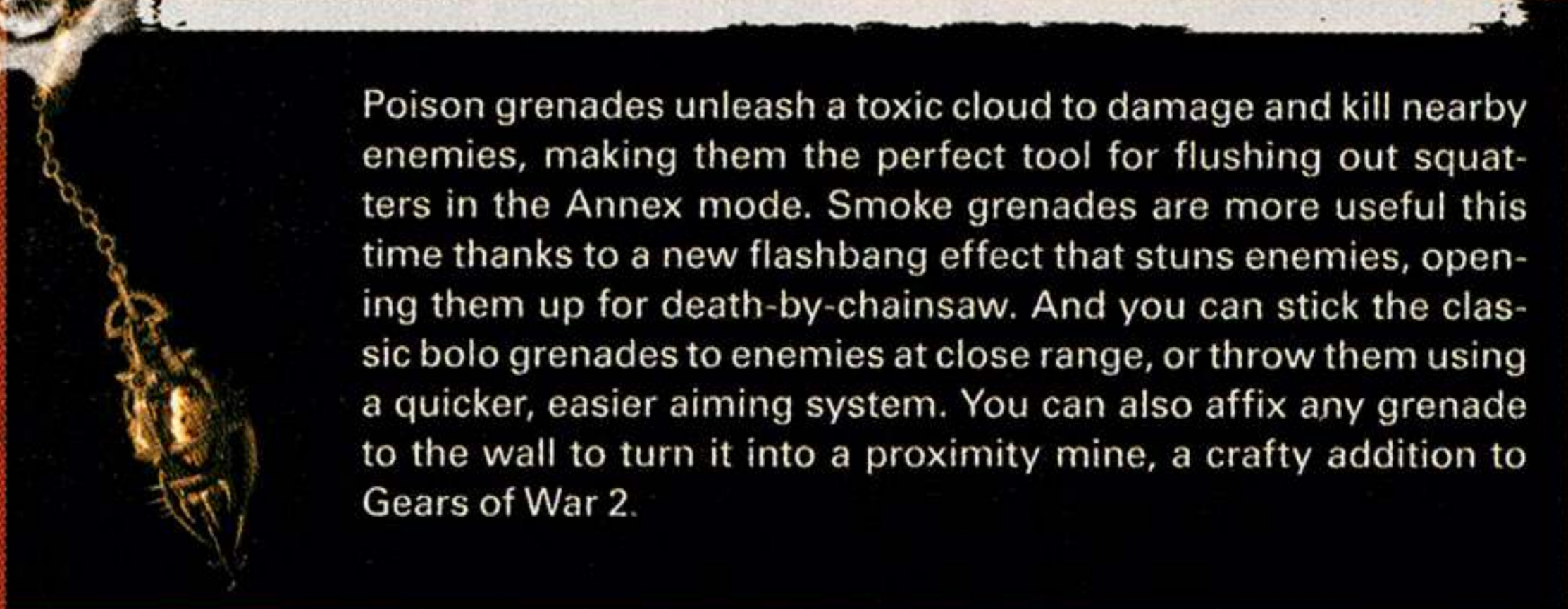
Range: ★★★★★☆ Power: ★★★★★☆



This powerful magnum is well worth tracking down for its headshot capabilities. It's cursed with a sluggish firing rate, but if you score an active reload you'll fire twice as quickly—a welcome enhancement.



Grenades



Poison grenades unleash a toxic cloud to damage and kill nearby enemies, making them the perfect tool for flushing out squatters in the Annex mode. Smoke grenades are more useful this time thanks to a new flashbang effect that stuns enemies, opening them up for death-by-chainsaw. And you can stick the classic bolo grenades to enemies at close range, or throw them using a quicker, easier aiming system. You can also affix any grenade to the wall to turn it into a proximity mine, a crafty addition to Gears of War 2.

J46A

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Brutal Legend: Gears of War 2

This Interview is Rated



Cliff Bleszinski answers every question we ask, and a few we didn't, about games, gore, and Gears of War 2.

Horde is a pleasant surprise. What was the inspiration behind it?

We definitely knew we wanted a bigger co-op experience. Five players make sense, because in multiplayer we support five-on-five now. Being able to help your buddies by voice chat after you're dead—"you've got two Boomers coming around the corner!"—shifts your role into a meta-strategy game, too. We wanted the campaign to be bigger, but we didn't want to arbitrarily string four players together like a chain gang. If you look at the online numbers for other games, the number of players that play four-player co-op are surprisingly small.

Why is that? Is that why the Gears 2 campaign only supports two players?

The thing is, everybody says they want four-player co-op...but as you add more players, the narrative experience decreases exponentially. Have you ever tried to watch a serious movie with four drunk people? Some have to go pee, some want to grab chips...I don't want to dis-

count that [larger co-op] experience, but we took what works with four or five players and moved it into a Smash TV or Geometry Wars style setting with Horde. For a story-driven campaign mode like ours, two players is kind of a sweet spot. It's easy to grab one buddy, whether you're online or on splitscreen, and just go.

How many rounds are in Horde? Do the enemies get stronger?

There are 50 waves, and in later waves the enemies will get modifiers such as double health and extra accuracy, so coordinating fire and active reloads become a very big deal. I think Horde is the dark horse of Gears of War 2—fans are going to be surprised by it.

What happens if you clear all 50 waves in Horde?

Honestly, I don't f*cking know. I've only gotten to wave 40! You totally caught me there—I need to beat it before we ship. Maybe it's a message saying, "A winner is you"...

For a modern shooter, how important is a cooperative play experience?

In the last few years, it's gone from being 'nice' to being 'necessary.' It's a feature that gets planned early on in a lot of games but later gets cut. In a post-Halo, post-Gears of War world, I think you've got to have it. It's a great way to expose an inexperienced player to a game, and allow them to have fun. It's great for getting girlfriends to play, too.

What games handle cooperative play the best, in your opinion?

Nothing lately, to be honest. Most people play Halo co-op, and Halo is one game that does it well. One thing I hate in co-op games is this [stoops over, gestures in a two-handed "lift me up" position]. That needs to go away. Of all the things you can do with co-op, your big unique idea is to give somebody a boost? Really?!

In Gears of War 2 co-op, we've got some cool puzzles that take full advantage of two players. In one level, Dom climbs into a crane's arm and Marcus pilots it to maneuver Dom around the level, a



In the new Horde mode, up to five players cooperate against increasingly difficult waves of enemies. Gears of War 2 design director Cliff Bleszinski compares it to arcade-style games such as Geometry Wars and Smash TV, and it serves as the game's large-scale co-op mode.



Vital Stats

GamePro editor Sid Shuman peeks inside the overactive imagination of Epic Games' virtuoso design director Cliff Bleszinski. What influenced him?

The movies

Cliff name dropped a slew of his favorite horror films during my visit, including *The Thing*, *Aliens*, *The Descent*, *Event Horizon*, and *REC*, a Spanish horror film he raves about.

The comics

Cliff's a big fan of *Preacher* by Garth Ennis and *100 Bullets* by Brian Azzarello. I recommended Robert Kirkman's excellent *The Walking Dead*. Knowing Cliff's love of horror, I figure it's a safe bet he'll like it. Plus, it's got zombies.

The games

Cliff peppered his conversation with comparisons to dozens of other games, the list of which reads like a who's who of video game excellence: *God of War*, *Resident Evil 4*, *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune*, *Call of Duty 4: Modern Combat*, *Halo 3*, and Wii games *Super Mario Galaxy* and *Boom Blox*. Say what you will about Bleszinski, the man has damned fine taste in games.



A Match for the Ages

Epic's Cliff Bleszinski and *GamePro*'s Sid Shuman squared off in *Gears of War 2*'s Annex mode, and it was a nail-biter of a match that was only settled in the final, grueling seconds. Who emerged victorious? Who tasted bitter defeat? Watch the full video (including a sweaty post-match Q&A with Cliff) on the new [GamePro.com](http://www.gamepro.com)!

www.gamepro.com/video

bit like the spotlight levels from *Gears 1*. There's another part where Dom and Marcus have to carry a huge bomb between them, while blasting at Wretches with pistols. That's like watching two guys wearing a donkey suit—if one player moves the wrong way with the bomb it messes both players up. There are some co-op driving moments, and there's a chase scene where Marcus and Dom each ride Reavers. That's a co-op experience, not this [makes the boost gesture again].

Can players expect more vehicle scenarios in *Gears of War 2*?

Sure. You can drive a Centaur tank, which works like a monster truck. The Centaur level is fun: you're driving up a mountain wall, across frozen lakes where you can hear the ice creaking and cracking, and powersliding through Locust crowds. And then you head underground... You also get to ride the Reavers, and there's a great chase sequence involving the Reavers. And of course, later in the game, you'll be riding the Brumack. It's a big middle finger to the Locust—you can watch the crowds running and screaming from you.

Speaking of which, I was fighting fifty or sixty Locust during some points in the game. How does the rendering engine handle those huge crowds?

It's true, they're no longer the Locust entourage. They're fully the Locust Horde this time. It's all intelligent use of your resources. We know those huge crowds are rendered at a distance, so we don't need to render their backpacks and close-range details. They don't need their full set of animations, because they're in a crowd so they won't

take cover. Even some of the choppers overhead are just 2D sprites.

Tell me about the new heavy weapons.

The mortar is something you have to learn how to use. We talked about making it easier, like with the grenade trajectory arcs, but I said, "let 'em learn it." It puts out a blast that's as big as a basketball court, so you can miss a little and still do major damage.

What about the Gatling gun?

You move slowly when you're carrying it and you can't evade. But if you manage to get it aimed and ramped up, you only have to touch an enemy with the spray and it's over. If it starts overheating, you can actively cool it and keep it spinning so you're ready to fire again. And it's a really retro, Gatling-style gun, you crank this big handle to spin it... With these heavy weapons, the encumbrance is so huge that if you manage to ramp them up, you're going to lay waste to everybody. If you get good with the mortar, you are going to smoke people from across the map. Of course, you've got to pick it up first and get into position.

Those heavy weapons might work well against the Berserker, huh? Do they return in *Gears of War 2*?

There are no Berserkers in *Gears of War 2*. There are no Krill, either. One of the things people would love to say is, "Oh, *Gears 2* is just *Gears 1.5*." Well, [our response is], we won't put Krill and Berserkers in. If you rounded a corner in *Gears of War 2*, and a Berserker burst through the wall and chased you down again, you'd be bored. If you had to do

those light and dark puzzles again [with the Krill... it would just be boring.

We have lots of new monsters: Blood Mounts, Grinders, Reavers that land this time, Ticklers, and tons of new boss monsters that we haven't revealed. We're letting those guys have their moment in the sun. Who knows? Maybe [Berserkers and Krill] will return sometime in a new and interesting way. We have plenty of monsters to fill in those gaps. We have new levels with different environmental hazards that aren't Krill. We're using something else this time, but you'll have to wait and see for that.

There are lots of *GamePro* readers screaming about Cole. Will he return in *Gears of War 2*?

Absolutely. But if Cole was in the beginning of the game, there wouldn't be any room for our new guys like Tai and Dizzy! I assure you, there will be plenty of Cole.

The overall tone of *Gears of War 2* seems somewhat darker. Even Marcus's over-the-top comments seem to be reigned in. Am I imagining things?

We dialed back a little on a couple of the one-liners. You've got to know when to use those [over-the-top] lines and when not to. It's a bit tongue-in-cheek, and it's a summer blockbuster of course, but we're taking things a little more seriously this time. You can see that with Dom. Instead of running from explosions, you've got Dom telling Marcus to keep searching for his wife in case he dies. That's serious sh*t. And it still feels like *Gears of War*.

CONTINUED ►

Brutal Legend: Gears of War 2

A lot of people still remember the first game as "gray corridors," and that perception matters. So we wanted to render more beautiful outdoor vistas in Gears of War 2. You'll also notice there's a bit more color saturation to the game. We're not going to go all *Mirror's Edge* on you, but we did add a slightly warmer look to the visuals. Even the underground looks beautiful—it will defy people's expectations of what a cave can be. It's very organic, with some huge caverns. You see Reavers flying through, sniping at squads who are a mile away. It feels like a war taken underground. But the underground sections are only about 30 percent of the game this time—this isn't *The Descent*.

The game obviously looks great. Are you starting to push up against the DVD limits? Will you have to go to two discs?

We did pre-render two or three cinematics in the game due to memory issues, but the rest are all generated in-engine, which saves space. It's a one-disc game, though the collector's edition gets a second DVD with behind-the-scenes videos and stuff.

Will you need to use multiple DVDs on a future game? I don't know. I like pointing to the Super Nintendo, back in the day. The developers would figure out

ways to get smarter with that one cartridge, using procedural textures and the like to save space. There's always a way to squeeze more water from that stone, man. And the Xbox 360's going to be around for a while, so we'll figure it out.

Weapon balance has always been key for Epic, going back to Unreal Tournament. What are the biggest changes in Gears of War 2?

The smoke grenades having a concussive effect is a huge improvement—it prevents these cover standoffs and stalemates from the first game. The concept of "stopping power" is huge in multiplayer, too. If you try to roadie run at me, and I shoot you, you lose the majority of your forward momentum. It's like, "talk to the hand." It keeps people from doing that shotgun rush bullsh*t from the first game. You have to learn how to flank enemies this time, or chainsaw them from behind, or tag a grenade into the wall. Crawling [after getting killed] is a huge addition, too, as is the ability to take hostages.

Any chance for a multiplayer beta for Gears of War 2?

"Nope. It's the same as hooking up with a girl just to say, "yeah, I f***ed her." I know that sounds

crude, but it's the honest-to-God truth. Once you play a beta, you can check it off your to-do list—you can say, "yeah, I played it." And you might not feel motivated to get that proper cherry popping from the final game.

Honestly, we could make a demo, but Gears of War 2 wouldn't be out until February of 2009. That stuff takes time to put together, man. Granted, we may need to tweak a few things in multiplayer after release through an update. People are going to find exploits we didn't anticipate. That's the reality of making a game—look at MMOs. We're prepared for that, but we think we're shipping a pretty great game out of the box here.

What games are you looking forward to?

"Fable II looks cool. And Resident Evil 5 is next year, right? I'm dying for that, I loved RE4. Street Fighter IV looks sick, and Dead Space also looks solid. I'm a fan of horror games—I loved Event Horizon and all of those movies, so they're making Dead Space for guys like me. I think *Mirror's Edge* will be great, too, but they're showing me too much parkour, I want to see the gunplay. I hope it's not all just running and jumping. As long as there's a helicopter or something chasing me. Even Mario had Goombas, you know?"

How to Make a Monster

Bleszinski talks about the evolution of the vicious new Tickers.

Tickers make a creepy addition to the Gears of War 2 bestiary, with their mounted bomb and audible *tick tick tick* sounds. You can swat a Ticker at close range to flip it onto its back, then shoot it for an explosive coup de grace.

"I'll walk you through the design process of the Tickers. We knew early on that we wanted players to go underground in Gears of War 2 using these grind lifts—kind of like in that crappy movie *The Core*. But we didn't know how the COG would transport the grind lifts. Would they drop them from helicopters? No, it would make more sense to transport them on a huge vehicle, which led us to concept of Derrick trucks.

"Next, we wondered how the Locust might try to stop the trucks. Well, they would probably use IEDs (improvised explosive devices) like you see in Fallujah in Iraq. But the Locust tend to use creatures [not machines], so we designed a beaver-lizard-looking monster with a bomb strapped to its back. Those were too small at first, so we made them bigger and adjusted the design. Then we gave them cockroach-like A.I. behaviors—they avoid, avoid, and avoid until the last minute when they attack. And I have a rule that anything dangerous needs to announce its presence, so we added a loud "ticking" sound to alert you, giving us the name of "Ticker."

"So from just one concept, the grind lifts, we got derrick trucks, the Tickers, and then the character of Dizzy who drives the derrick trucks. That was another question we had—why would there be a truck driver? Maybe he was stranded by the Locust attack and then rescued by the COG forces, and that's when we came up with the idea of the Stranded and Operation Lifeboat. So all of these concepts came out of that one initial—the grind lift.



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Meat Grinder

We hop aboard the express elevator to Hell in Gears of War 2's multiplayer modes Annex and Horde.

In addition to a lengthier, more varied campaign mode, Gears of War 2 features a larger array of on-line and splitscreen multiplayer match types that will prove irresistible to shooter veterans. Here are our first, hands-on impressions of what is shaping up to be a truly impressive multiplayer game.

For the Horde!

Horde was the standout of the bunch. It's a new five-player cooperative romp through Locust-infested territory, and the action is wall-to-wall insanity. You can play Horde on any multiplayer stage—even the classic maps that come as a day-one downloadable bonus (see sidebar "Day One DLC"). The goal in Horde is simple: defeat the incoming waves of Locust, stockpile powerful weapons, and stay alive! Following each wave of attacks, your team will be graded on its performance and earn points that will populate global Xbox Live leaderboards. The difficulty scales up with each wave, introducing tougher, more numerous monsters and heavier weapons and armor.

Most of our Horde experiences were based on a stage called "Day One," a desolate city intersection riddled with Locust emergence holes. The first few waves were short and sweet, producing a ragtag collection of Wretches and Locust Drones that went down quickly. Then the action started heating up. Massive Boomers began waddling

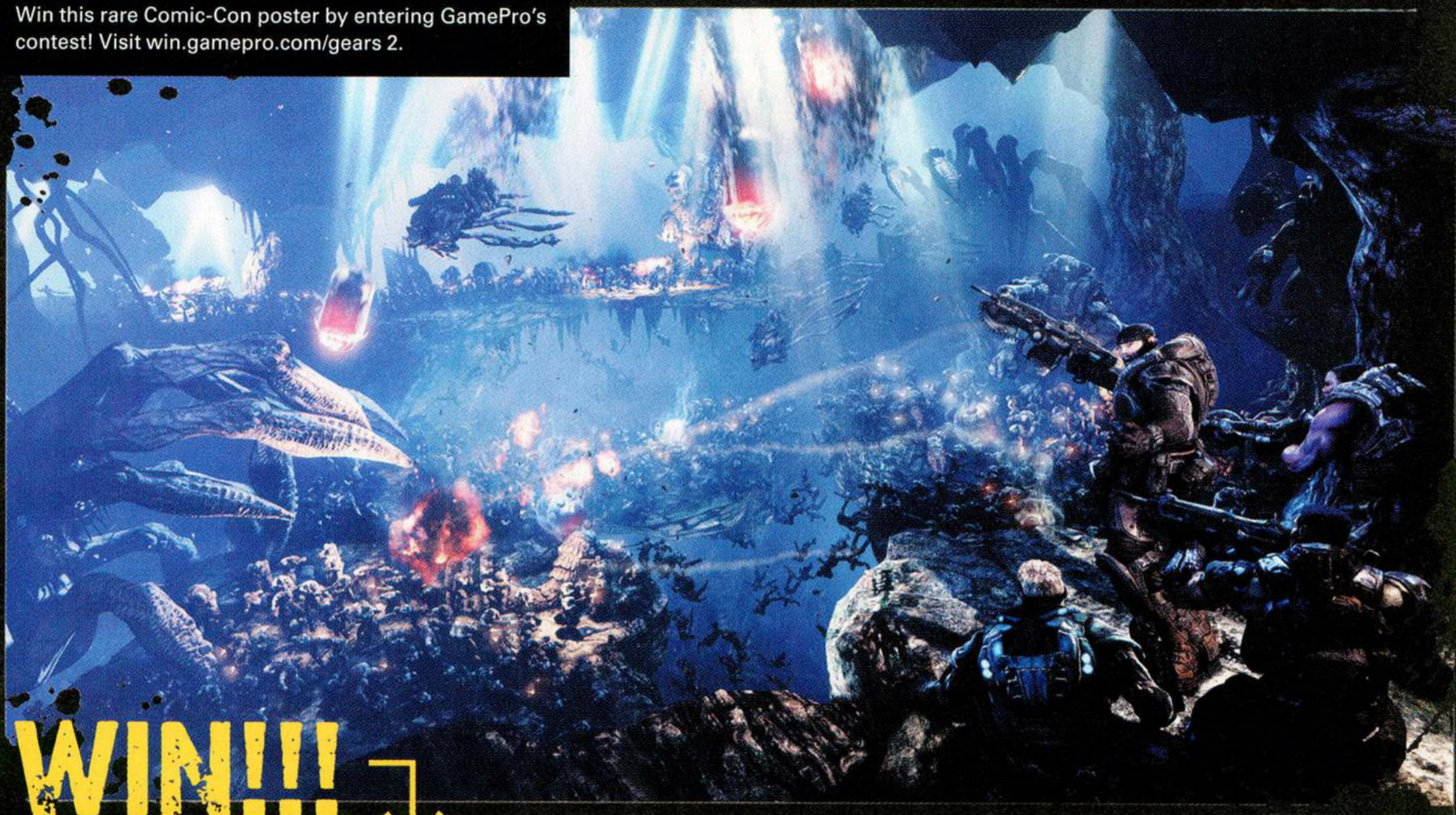
into the fray, absorbing more punishment and inflicting more damage than their lesser cousins. In later waves, we encountered never-before-seen variations of some iconic monsters, such as the cleaver-wielding Butchers (a melee variant of the tubby Boomer grenadiers) and the shield-wielding Maulers (tough hombres who can kill you with one whack of their grenade flails). On and on we went, blasting through the increasingly difficult creatures while struggling to stay in close proximity to our teammates. We quickly learned that team cooperation is a key factor in Horde, though prudence is always king: it's tempting to dart through enemy territory to rescue a dying teammate, but the risks sometimes outweigh the rewards. Even if a teammate dies, he'll respawn with the next wave, and can watch the rest of the round while providing valuable intel to his surviving buddies using the Xbox Live voice headset or taking screenshots for posterity (see sidebar "Photo Warrior").

By the tenth round, we were battling almost everything the game could throw at us: powerful Locust Priests, grotesque beasts of burden called "Blood Mounts," and a mysterious creature that we didn't recognize from any of the past games (Epic declined comment on this secretive monster). Upon reaching wave 11, the enemy patterns reset back to level one, with a key exception: they took twice as much punishment to kill. Hours later,

we reached wave 40 and were greeted by Locust enemies that were twice as accurate and twice as powerful as well, triggering some seriously frantic run-and-gun tactics from our surviving teammates. Our progress stymied by the steadily ramping difficulty, we reluctantly set out controllers down and prepared to experience the other multiplayer facets of Gears of War 2.



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GamePro readers get an exclusive chance to win rare Gears of War 2 memorabilia, including 10 Comic-Con posters and 10 copies of *Beneath the Surface: An Inside Look at Gears of War 2*, all signed by Epic Games design director Cliff Bleszinski. Visit GamePro.com's contest site for more details!

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Fancy Footware

In other Gears 2 giveaway news, footwear designer Globe Shoes is generously offering GamePro readers free pairs of its new Gears of War-themed FUSION skate shoes! For a chance to win one of 10 pairs of these limited edition kicks, search for "Gears of War 2" on GamePro.com and look for the contest details and entry form.



Snub pistol

Range: ★★☆☆☆

Power: ★★☆☆☆



The COG's basic sidearm, the Snub has a peppy firing rate but low damage so you'll want to try and hit an active reload every time. Once you learn its nuances, the Snub can harass medium-range enemies like no other weapon.



Lancer assault rifle

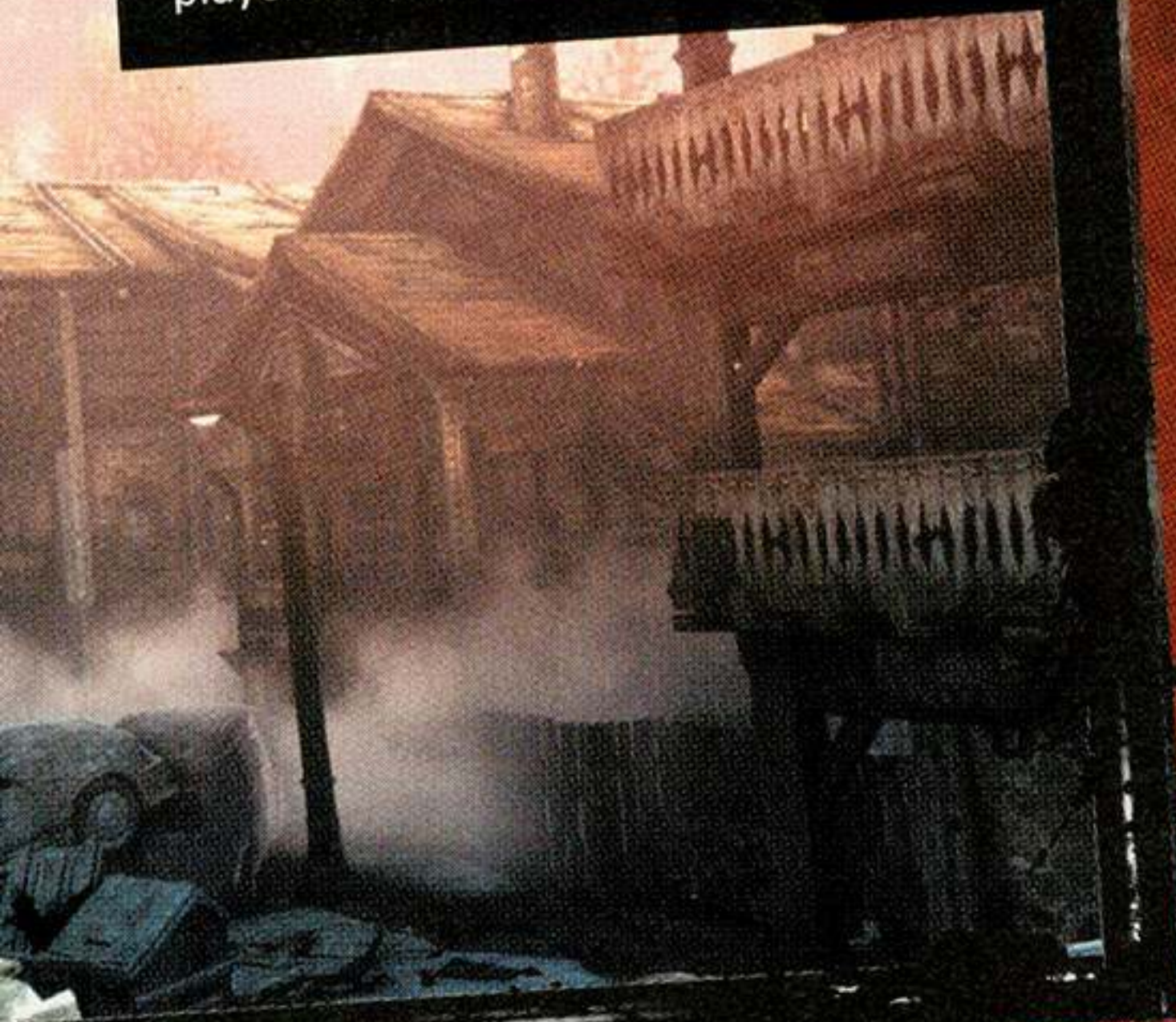
Range: ★★☆☆☆

Power: ★★☆☆☆



The iconic Gears of War assault rifle packs an under-barrel chainsaw bayonet, enabling you to instantly and spectacularly eviscerate any enemy at close range. New to Gears 2 is a "clash of the chainsaws" mechanic—if you lock saws with a foe, you can rapidly tap A to overpower him.

Avalanche is the first Gears of War map to feature an environmental hazard: a roaring avalanche that will wipe out other players and uncover new weapons.



CONTINUED ►

Brutal Legend: Gears of War 2



All the chaos of the new five-player cooperative Horde mode can be summed up with this one screenshot. Horde features armies of Locust enemies, some of which aren't even featured in the single-player Campaign.

Risk, meet Reward

Next, we turned our attentions to Annex, a fast-paced, King of the Hill-style multiplayer mode that will take a starring role in Gears of War 2. In this mode, two teams clash over a series of moving checkpoints. The goal is to capture and hold each checkpoint for as long as possible to boost your team's score and, ultimately, win the match.

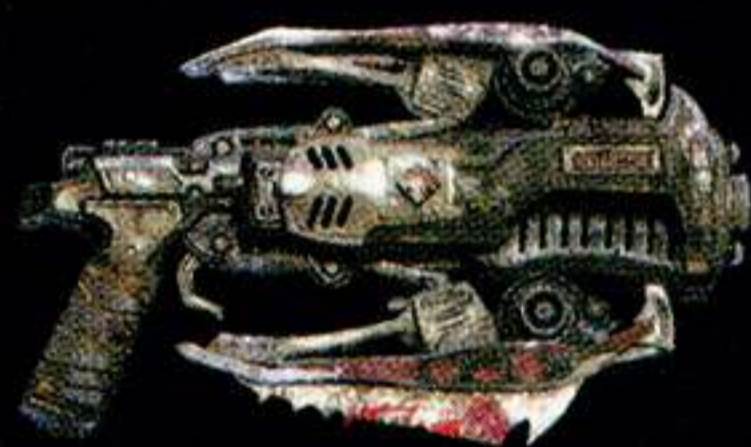
It's a simple premise, but in practice, the strategic possibilities are vast. When an enemy team set up shop in one well-defended checkpoint, we tossed poison grenades (new to Gears of War 2) into the center of the crowd and watched them scurry away like rats. The scoring zone now vulnerable, we swept into the deserted checkpoint and hastily prepared for the inevitable counterattack, setting up Boomshields for defense—until the concussive blast from a rogue smoke grenade set those barricades, and our hopes, toppling. It's this kind of rock-paper-scissors gameplay that already sets Gears of War 2's multiplayer far above its predecessor. For every attack, there's an equally powerful counterattack that will short-circuit your opponent's strategy. We found this out the hard way when trying to "shotgun rush" members of the Epic team. Veterans of the first game know that running straight at enemies is a powerful tactic, giving you an all-too-easy opening for the shotgun. But in Gears of War 2, incoming bullets will slow your roadie run to a mere roadie crawl. If you heartlessly exploited the multiplayer imbalances in the first game, you're in for a rude awakening with Gears of War 2.

The basics now (re)mastered, we fought back valiantly against our oppressors, bombarding the enemy team with fiery mortar blasts and withering volleys from the Mulcher Gatling gun. Heavy weapons are a particularly welcome addition to

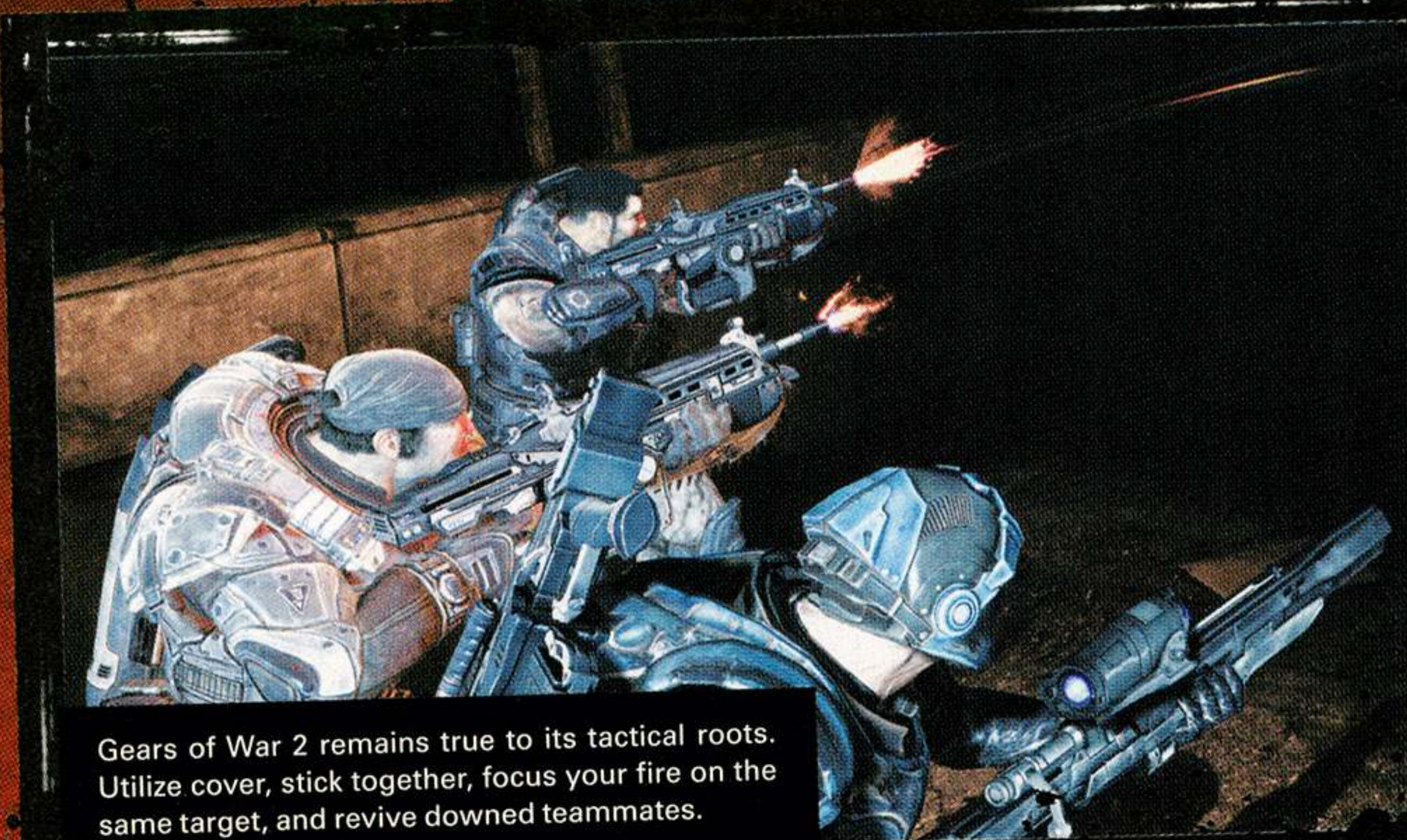


Torque bow

Range: ★★★★★☆ Power: ★★★★★★



Fierce but fussy. The explosive arrow will stick into its target before detonating with a deafening blast, and one shot will virtually always kill. On the other hand, it requires real finesse to use effectively—it's best to aim at a distance against one particularly tough opponent.



Gears of War 2 remains true to its tactical roots. Utilize cover, stick together, focus your fire on the same target, and revive downed teammates.

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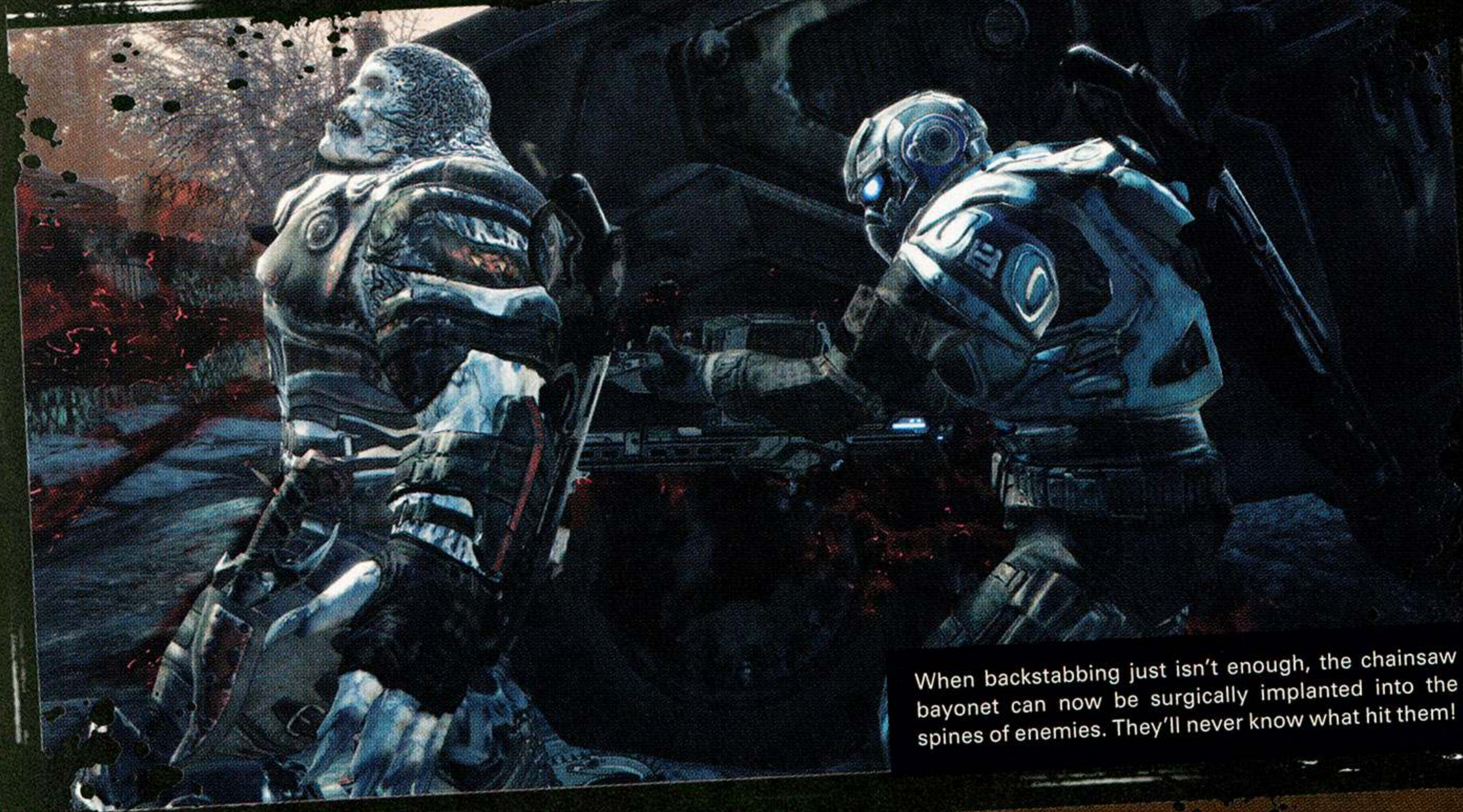


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Slang of War

Active Reload: After reloading, you have a brief chance to perform an "active reload" by hitting the reload button again in a simple mini-game. If you time it perfectly, you'll earn a brief boost to your weapon's power and effectiveness. If you fail, your gun will jam.

Roadie Run: Dashing into enemy fire with your head down isn't always a wise thing to do. In Gears of War 2 incoming shots pack more stopping power and can slow your sprint to a near crawl. Instead, run around the side to flank your foe.

DBNO: As in, "down but not out." After taking a fatal hit, your character will drop to his knees until a) he bleeds to death, b) an enemy finishes him off, or c) a friend revives him. When you're DBNO in Gears of War 2, you can crawl towards friends by tapping the A button, or call out for help using the right trigger.

Meat Shield: If you render an enemy DBNO, you can grab on and use him like a "meat shield" for a limited period of time. The body will protect you from chainsaw and grenade attacks, but you'll move slowly and can only fire a pistol.



Gnasher shotgun

Range: ★☆☆☆☆ Power: ★★★★★



Epic has tweaked the brutal shotgun to produce more consistent results. It's still exceptionally powerful in close quarters, but you'll no longer be able to dominate multiplayer matches with it.



Boomshot grenade launcher

Range: ★★★★★ Power: ★★★★★



"Boom!" There's a reason why ammo is always scarce for this powerful weapon. If you can hit an active reload, the explosive projectile is essentially a one-shot kill. It's particularly lethal when wielded by tough-as-nails Boomers in the campaign and Horde modes.



Hammerburst assault rifle

Range: ★★★★★ Power: ★★★★★



Somewhat lifeless in the first game, the Hammerburst has been transformed into a go-to weapon in Gears of War 2. The bullets pack a bigger punch than the Lancer, and you can rapidly tap the trigger to boost your firing rate at a slight tradeoff to accuracy. With a little practice, the Hammerburst is a headshot machine in Gears of War 2.

CONTINUED ►

SPRAY



Play as young prince Ray and use your two helpful spirits to spray slime, water, ice & other liquids on enemies and surfaces to solve challenging puzzles and ultimately wipe out evil! Make a mess, save the village, and be the hero!

Go Ahead, Make a Mess.

TECMO

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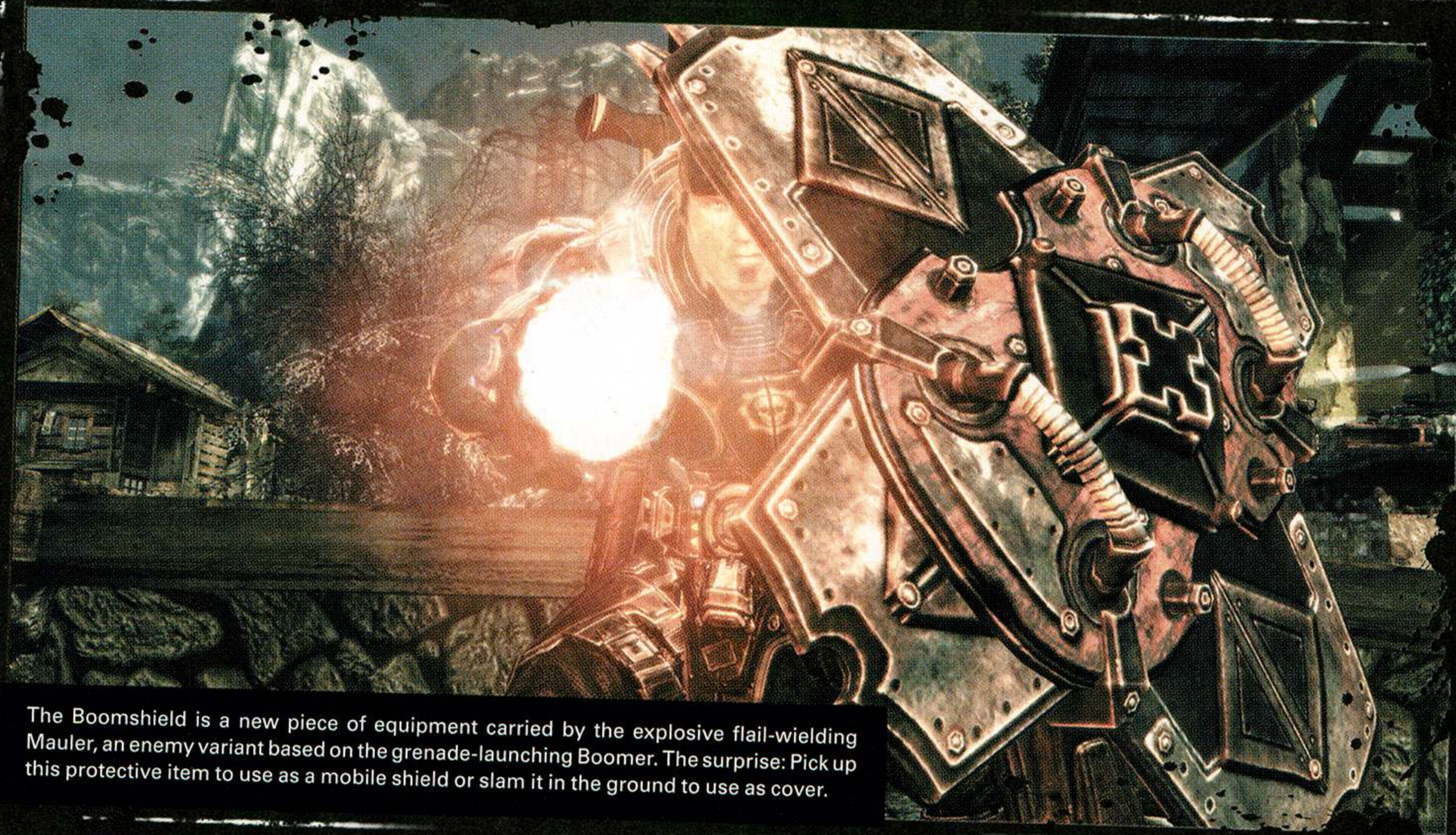

EKO

wii

EVERYONE 10+

Crude Humor
Mild Cartoon Violence
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

Brutal Legend: Gears of War 2



The Boomshield is a new piece of equipment carried by the explosive flail-wielding Mauler, an enemy variant based on the grenade-launching Boomer. The surprise: Pick up this protective item to use as a mobile shield or slam it in the ground to use as cover.

Gears of War 2's multiplayer, feeding into the game's omnipresent "risk versus reward" philosophy. Sure the mortar is obscenely powerful, capable of wiping out three or four enemies at a time. But it's usually located in remote areas far from the main battle. And even if you can find the mortar, your movement speed and evasive maneuvers will suffer greatly while you carry it. This is all part of Epic's plan, and we're happy to say that the mortar and Mulcher Gatling gun fit logically into Gears of War 2's already smart, satisfying arsenal.

More Please

It's hard to imagine anyone being dissatisfied with Gears of War 2's multiplayer component. We played it for five hours straight and we just wanted more, more, more. Epic has smoothed out virtually all the kinks from the first game, added subtle new strategies and, perhaps most importantly, introduced the crackerjack new Horde mode. Whether you want to rule the online leaderboards with an iron first, or just crack some Locust skulls with your buddies, Gears of War 2's got you covered. **GP**



Sid Shuman is growing increasingly concerned about the month of November. With Gears of War 2, Call of Duty: World at War, and Resistance 2 all launching within days of each other, he's not seeing a lot of time for biological concerns such as sleeping or eating.

Email Sid at: sid_shuman@gamepro.com

The Man With the Golden Chain

Two ways to score some battlefield bling.



Players who buy the \$69 Collector's Edition of Gears of War 2 will get more than an art book and a collectible metal case—they'll unlock an exclusive in-game **Golden Lancer** assault rifle that will draw some lustful glances in online multiplayer matches. Meanwhile, fans that wait in line at Midnight Madness events the night of November 6th will unlock an exclusive **Golden Hammerburst** rifle. And yes, you can earn both.

The golden guns are purely aesthetic tweaks and have no impact on the damage or effectiveness of either weapon... but they sure do look snazzy! Design director Cliff Bleszinski reckons they'll also help foster teamwork online, because the gleaming guns "help player visibility so you can spot friends more quickly."



Buy it new and unlock five classic multiplayer maps for free.

Day One DLC (for free!)

Epic's got a reward planned for loyal Gearheads with the free "Flashback" map pack.

Customers who buy a new copy of Gears of War 2 will find a special treat—a redeemable voucher. Cashing in the voucher over Xbox Live will grant you a free download of five classic multiplayer maps from the original Gears of War: Canals, Gridlock, Mansion, Subway, and Train Station. The "Flashback" voucher is only included with new copies of Gears of War 2, so be sure and buy the game new if you want the Flashback pack. Protip: These classic maps can be used in any game type, even the addictive Horde co-op mode.

Away

shuffle dungeon



Overcoming a Powerful Evil
Takes a Strong, Unyielding Sword



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EVERYONE 10+

E
10+

Alcohol Reference
Comic Mischief
Mild Fantasy Violence
Suggestive Themes

ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

NINTENDO DS™



Game Girls Gone Wild

We chat with GameGirl.com's lovely and talented lead writers Raychul and Nikole about what's hot in the world of video games. Nothing is off limits!

Female gamers are only becoming more and more prevalent, and GameGirl.com, a gaming blog run entirely by an all female staff, is just one of the many examples why girl gamers are here and they're here to stay. We ask GameGirl.com's Raychul Moore and Nikole Z. everything from their thoughts on Mirror's Edge's female protagonist to Rock Band. *By Patrick Shaw*



Raychel Moore

Age: 23

Location: San Francisco, CA

Favorite Game of All Time: I have too many all-time favorite games, so I will give you my top three: Super Mario 64, Silent Hill 2, and the God of War series.

Bayonetta. Sexy of just tacky? What are some of your first impressions of the game so far?

The whole idea of her hair doing the special attacks and transforming into shoes and monsters to kill her enemies does sound rather silly, but we will see once more info is available. Whether it will be sexy or not, of course it will be sexy. The hair thing will be the positive in this one. Since her hair is her outfit, and when she does her special moves the hair outfit must come off in bits and pieces, she's going to be more exposed the more she fights. Chicks who are half naked or wearing skin-tight clothing while shooting bad guys are always sexy!

What's the funniest/most outrageous thing you've heard over XBL/PSN?

Honestly, it's usually the same thing over and over: "Are you really a girl?", "Do you really play games?", "Will you show me your boobs?". No one usually gets very creative with their questions or insults anymore on Live. I do have a Live lady friend who keeps sending me pictures of herself topless—that is certainly outrageous.

Kratos, Old Snake, and Marcus Fenix—if you had to kill one, marry one, and hook up with one, who would you pick and why?

Tough one! I would kill Old Snake—that poor old guy needs to go down like a

man and not from old age. Then, I'd marry Marcus Fenix just so I could play with his Lancer all day long. And I would hook up with Kratos...he's a god for god's sake! I wouldn't marry Kratos only because I know what happened to his previous wife.

What's the sexiest piece of video game clothing that you own?

My sexiest piece of video game clothing isn't actually clothing, more like panties. They are my Mario panties that I made with a normal red pair of panties and a Mario patch.

What do you think will turn out to be the hottest game of 2009?

Resident Evil 5 is my pick for potential game of the year—it's going to be huge. Big guns, lots of zombies, and gorgeous graphics...now that's sexy!

Do you have a favorite position in Rock Band? Favorite Songs?

My preferred position in Rock Band would have to be bass guitar. I am no good at the drums, and no one would play with me if I were the singer, so bass guitar is my best bet. One of my favorite things in Rock Band is of course the customization of my character (man, I am such a girl!). My favorite songs in Rock Band are Rolling Stones's "Gimme Shelter" and The Who's "Won't Get Fooled Again."

CONTINUED ►



Nikole Z.

Age: 20

Location: Los Angeles, CA

Favorite Game of All Time: The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time

About: Nikole is the Associate Editor for GameGirl.com. She also co-hosts a video game podcast called The Game Show. It airs on thestream.tv. When not gaming, she is an avid fan of Lolcats, Irish Spring Soap and Internet culture.

Do you think Faith from Mirror's Edge could be the next big female game protagonist? What are some of your first impressions of the game so far?

Sure, she has all the makings of the next big female character. She is a strong, attractive character who is out to save her sister, rather than be saved. I don't really know how the fact that she is a woman will play out in the game. Mirror's Edge is different compared to other first-person games since there will be times when Faith will be visible from the torso up. So unlike other first-person games, you will be reminded of what you look like.

Mirror's Edge seems to have a lot of hype behind it. The female protagonist, the Unreal Engine, and the relatively new way to make a first-person game are all aspects that make me excited for it. It's not on my "to buy" list just yet, however.

Which video game controller feels the best in your hands?

I can't say the Xbox 360 controller is the best, but it is certainly what I'm used to. I'm probably not comfortable with the PS3 controller since my brother Zach just bought it a week ago. It doesn't feel right in my hands.

The most annoying controller is the Wii Remote. It makes sense for the "Wii Do Stuff" kind of games, but for action or RPGs, it doesn't work for me. Oh, and the Nintendo 64 controller is great, although I never use the directional pad side of it.

Leisure Suit Larry—funny or just a perv? Tell us why.

I'd say it's a silly game. I think it's designed to be tasteless and tacky, and from what I've seen, it does a pretty good job of that. I've never played it—the first installment came out before I was even born.

Preferred position in Rock Band? Why do you like it and what songs do you like?

Anything but drums, I have absolutely no aptitude for the drums. Singing is definitely the easy, narcissistic way to go. The slightest amount of alcohol can make some girls think they are the best singer ever, and they will fight you for the microphone. When this is the case, I'll gladly take over on guitar. Rock Band is certainly a party game and that's why I like it. The best songs are Portal's "Still Alive" and Rush's "Working Man."



You can find Nikole on Twitter:
@NikoleZ.

For more on Raychul, Nikole,
and the other Game Girls,
check out GameGirl.com

GEARS OF WAR 2

HOPE RUNS DEEP 11.07.08

www.gearsowar.com



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Jump in.



GAME OF THE MONTH

SPORE

You want to hear our theory on Will Wright? We think he's a super-advanced alien from an ancient galactic civilization disguised as a human being. Either that or he's from the far future where everyone's walking around with supercomputers embedded into their brains. Or better yet, maybe he's a super advanced alien from the future.

Seriously, how else can you explain the man's ability to create addictive games that touch on mind-bendingly expansive concepts like city management, evolution, and the very nature of human life in ways that make sense to even the most casual gamer? How else can you account for his ability to craft the easy to understand yet utterly complex game mechanics that serve as the foundation for classic games like Sim City and The Sims? It's practically out of this world.

Now, as if to prove our theories are right, Will Wright is back with Spore, a deep and complex game that somehow manages to be accessible and fun. It had us chained to our keyboards for countless hours crafting devious and diabolical creatures to do our bidding. We were enthralled by the Creature Creator, the five discrete phases of evolution and the vast Sporepedia, where user-created creatures of every imaginable permutation could be seen.

We then sent the game off to our reviewer, Andrew Dagley, who took his tribe of clawed centaur-like creatures from the depths of the primordial ooze into the cold vastness of space. His in-depth review awaits you, so turn the page and see what he had to say about our Game of the Month. Then go get the game and add your own creations to the Sporepedia. Our monstrous menagerie of beastly behemoths are eagerly awaiting the chance to rip them to shreds!



GAME REVIEWS:

BioShock (PS3)	103	Rock Band 2 (Xbox 360)	86
Castlevania: Order of Ecclesia (DS).....	100	Silent Hill: Homecoming (PS3, Xbox 360).....	92
Fracture (Xbox 360).....	90	Sonic Chronicles: The Dark Brotherhood (DS).....	105
Infinite Undiscovery (Xbox 360).....	94	Spore (PC).....	82
Mega Man 9 (PSN, XBLA, WiiWare).....	81	Star Ocean: First Departure (PSP)	104
Mercenaries 2: World in Flames (Xbox 360).....	96	Too Human (Xbox 360).....	84
Mushroom Men: Rise of the Fungi (DS).....	104	Viva Piñata: Trouble in Paradise (Xbox 360).....	102
Naruto: Path of the Ninja 2 (DS).....	103	Wario Land: Shake It! (Wii).....	101

GAMEPROARCADE REVIEWS

MEGA MAN 9

Available on WiiWare (1000 Points), XBLA (800 Points), and PSN (\$9.99)



We'd forgotten how brutally tough old-school games could be, but Mega Man 9, the new yet decidedly retro game from Capcom, quickly set us straight. A wonderful throwback to the glory days of the NES, Mega Man 9 looks, sounds, and plays like the classic Mega Man games of old. But that's definitely a mixed blessing because it's also freaking hard. Yes, Capcom did a masterful job of recapturing the old-school vibe—you'll swear you were back in 1987 when you play this game—but it's so freaking difficult that it's downright discouraging.

Navigating the devious trap-filled levels and killing off the cleverly designed bosses requires some serious skill; it almost feels like the developers were purposefully trying to make the game unbeatable. Hardcore gamers will no doubt want to complete it just for bragging rights, but what about the average gamer who's just looking to recapture some old school NES magic without getting their robotic asses handed to them over and over again? For these poor gamers, Mega Man 9 might be more trouble than it's worth.

We're still going to recommend you check out the title, though, because it shows that Capcom cares about its loyal fan base and because it's such a well executed throwback to the series' roots. Besides which, it's DLC so it isn't like you're going to break the bank on it. With that said, we're going to give you fair warning now that your gaming mettle will be tested and that, more likely than not, you will probably fail, over and over again.

For more reviews of downloadable games, check out GameProArcade.com!

GamePro Score: ★★★★★

GAMEPRO'S RATING SCALE

Behind the Stars



The best of the best. If you don't own this game, you should. Think Halo, Zelda, Resident Evil, and Metal Gear Solid.

4.5 to 5 Stars



Highly enjoyable, but falls short of true greatness. The Fight Nights and Tony Hawks of the world.

3.5 to 4 Stars



Approach with caution—try before you buy. Enter the Matrix and the Dynasty Warriors games fall squarely in this category.

2.5 to 3 Stars



Should come with a sticker: "Warning, contains poisonous amounts of suckage." Remember Backyard Wrestling?

1.5 to 2 Stars



An absolute insult to humanity. Kill it with fire and holy water.

0 to 1 Star



Games that score ★★★★★ or higher are awarded our coveted Editors' Choice Award.



In the Civilization phase, cities can be conquered or converted, so be sure to defend them carefully, lest you lose them to your opponents.

SPORE

Will Wright is back with an out of this world game that tackles life, death and everything in-between.

PC ESRB: E10+

Developer: Maxis Publisher: EA Games

As is the case with all of Will Wright's games, Spore is "immense" in every sense of the word: in terms of scope, ambition and length, the game reaches for and, for the most part, meets its lofty goals. It's an incredibly innovative title that attempts to chart life itself from its infantile beginning to its end. And yet, much like life itself, it's not exactly perfect. It has some issues that keep it from fully tapping into its vast potential but it's still one of the most original and interesting titles to come out in this or any other year.

A WHOLE NEW WORLD

It's been a long time since life on the planet Thorria emerged from the primordial ooze. In the intervening years, a civilization of four-legged reptilian carnivores—coaxed carefully along the evolutionary ladder by my guidance—has come to dominate the planet; they've even managed to go off-world and have encountered three alien species within the local cluster of stars around my home planet. Soon, I hope to guide my creations to the center of the galaxy.

That was my first experience with Spore, as I led my creatures

from the mud and the muck to the stars and the galaxy beyond. But the best part is that soon, you may encounter my marauding conquerors during your own time with Spore and taste their bitter wrath courtesy of the game's multiplayer portion. Being able to create digital life is one thing but to set it loose upon the world to prosper and multiply is quite another thing altogether.

THE FLAVOR OF LIFE

Spore's gameplay is a little hard to describe but in a nutshell, you create life over five discrete phases of development—Cell, Creature, Tribal, Civilization and Space. Each phase has its own set of goals that need to be completed before your species can evolve and move onto bigger and better things. The big decision that determines how this will all play out is what your created life forms eats. If they eat plants, then they'll take on the role of a friendly, diplomatic species that will work its way through tribal and civilization phases using good will and a strong pocket book. If their diet consists of meat, however, they'll frequently resort to wiping out whatever gets in their way as a means of conflict resolution.

Spore's first stage is set in the ocean at a cellular level. At this early stage you mature as a species by roaming around and eating other

creatures, which eventually lets you move onto dry land to live as a more advanced being. This is when you begin to add the final physical details that will define your how your species looks and acts. Throughout the Creature stage, you'll uncover new body parts, such as different types of legs, arms, eyes, and weapons that you can use to customize your creatures before you head into the tribal phase where your creatures begin to build primitive cities and evolve. Overall, each of these early stages offer a great deal of variety, and the creature creator, which almost counts as a game in and of itself, is supremely easy to use.





EVOLUTION REVOLUTION

From there, you hit the Tribal phase, the first of the last three stages of Spore development. These latter stages take a rather decidedly different tack from the earlier epochs of evolution. You're quickly shuttled away from basic evolutionary tasks like deciding which type of arm might be most beneficial to slightly more complicated game mechanics that clearly have their roots in real-time-strategy games. In the Tribal and Civ stages, the objective is not to survive and evolve but to take over the world—literally. You start out in a region and must first bring that under your control using one of several different means: you can pursue diplomacy, war, or in the Civilization stage, economic or religious methods. Then it's on to conquer the rest of the world and bring it under your influence.

Unfortunately both of these later stages seemed fairly lightweight to me. Without the creature evolution system that was present throughout the earlier stages, both the Tribal and Civilization phases felt like a bare-bones RTS game that was tacked on at the last minute. You are afforded the ability to still meddle with nature through simple tasks like designing vehicles and buildings, but on

the whole, these activities lacked the depth and fun that's found in the more complex creature creator. Thankfully, the Tribal and Civilization phases are relatively brief—the typical player will probably get through both in about three or four hours.

THE FINAL FRONTIER

So what's a species to do after leaving behind its primitive beginnings and working its way up the food chain until they've conquered the world? Head out into space, of course. The Space phase, which constitutes the end game, is where the real meat of Spore lies; once you've become the sole ruler of your home planet, you roam the galaxy in a single vessel—you can either design your own or use a premade one by either Maxis or other players—with little in the way of preset goals. You are encouraged to do certain things, such as taking on missions that require you to eliminate alien planets, plant colonies, and fetch individual species from far away planets but these are all optional.

The Space phase is the one that truly encapsulates the sandbox style of gameplay that was highly touted in most of the Spore previews. Missions are almost unnecessary and really only serve

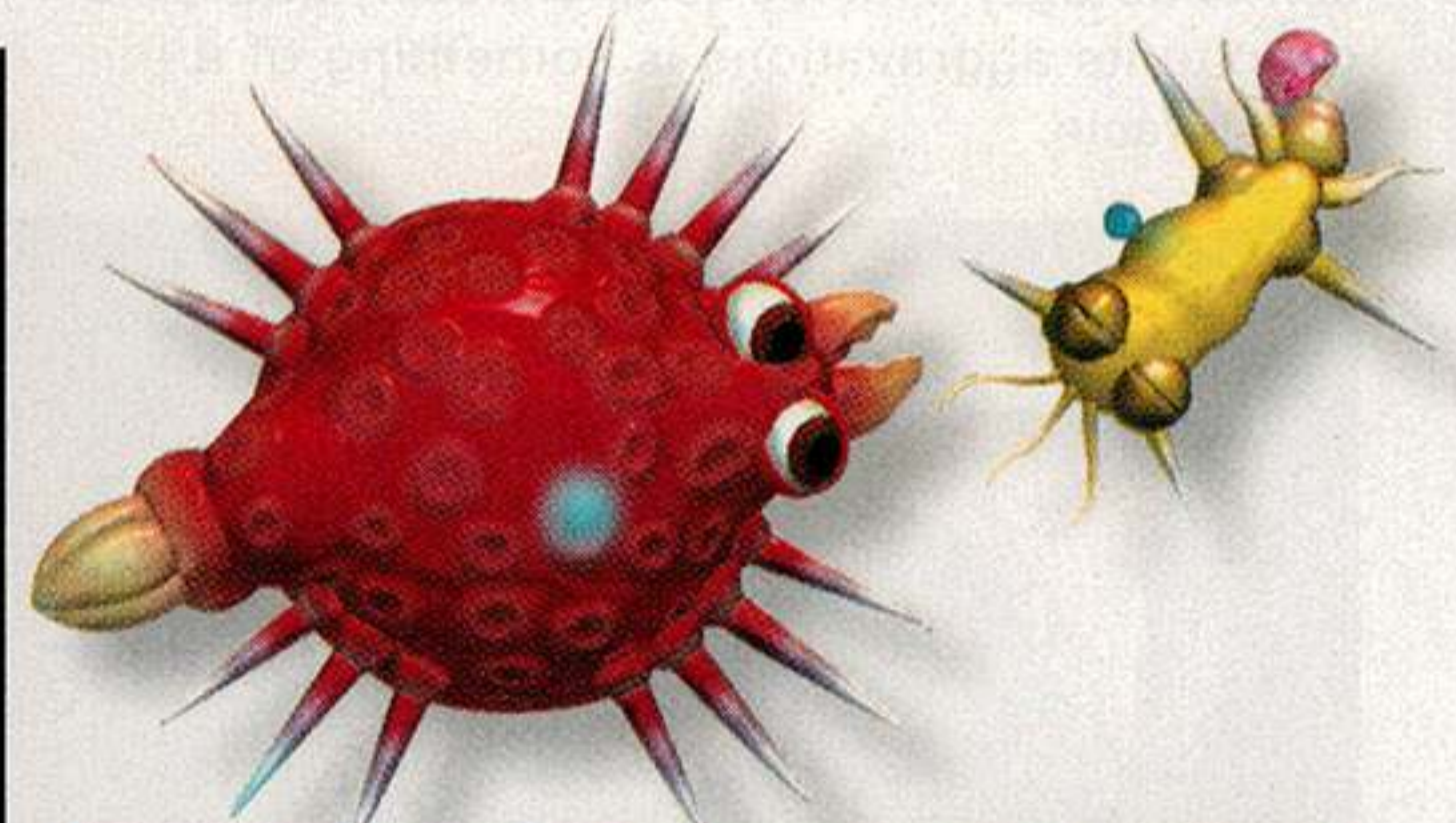
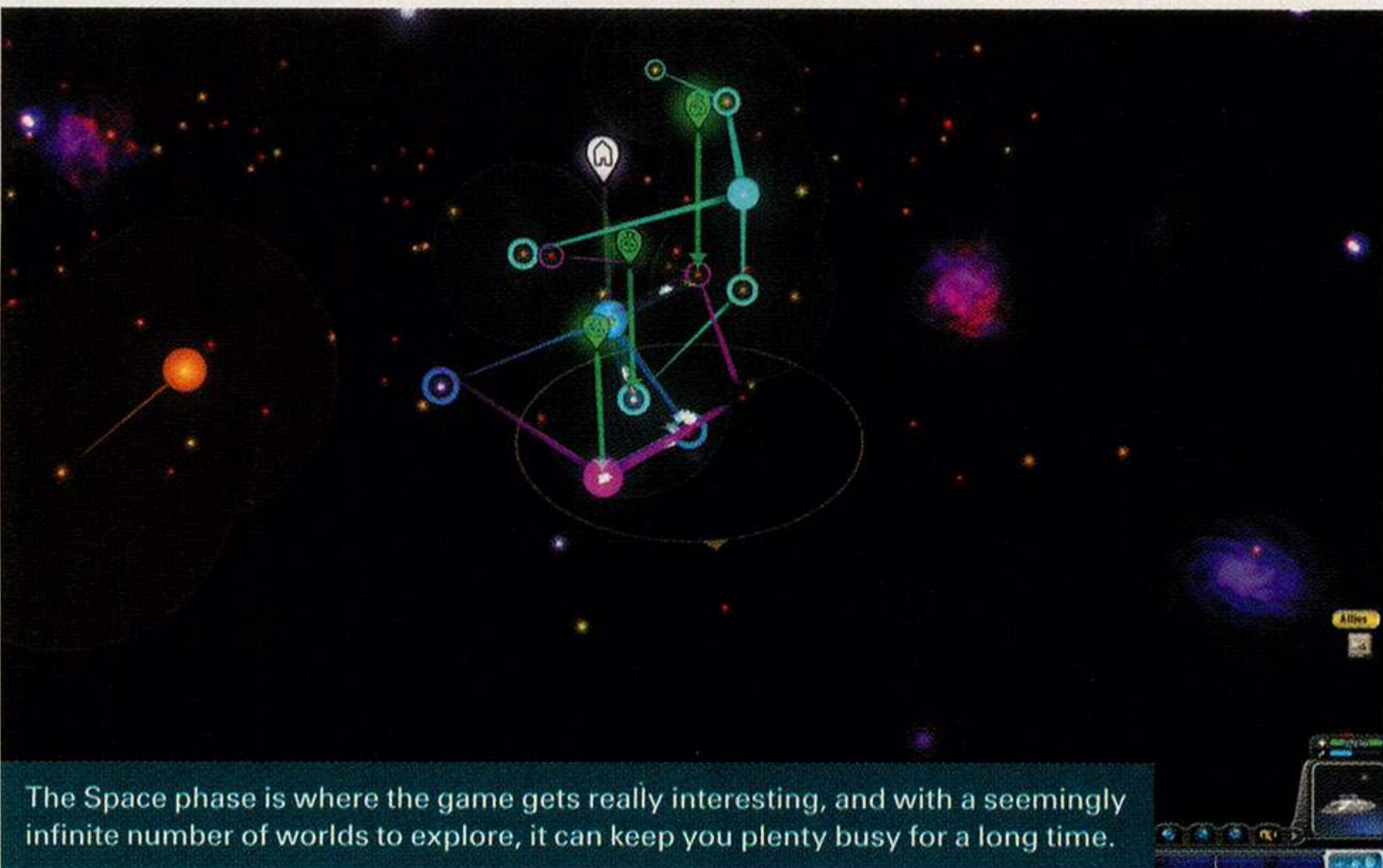


to fill your coffers for things like repairing ships and adding new parts. There's also a lot of content here as getting to the center of the large Spore galaxy will probably take weeks: there are literally thousands upon thousands of solar systems that lie between your home planet and the center and exploring them all can take a long time.

GOTTA CATCH 'EM ALL

As if that weren't enough to occupy your time, there is the social networking aspect of the game. By default, all of the creatures you're given access to from the moment you begin the game has been designed in house by the developers; however, each player is allowed to contribute to the massive index of creatures called the Sporepedia. With tens of thousands of users submitting their own unique designs, the shared galaxy that you can roam around will no doubt fill up with new creations very quickly. And as clever users have already demonstrated, the Creature Creator is quite flexible and holds a ton of potential.

After spending some time with the game, I've come to the conclusion that Spore isn't something everyone will agree on. I've no doubt that many gamers will hate it after the initial appeal wears off because they might see the game as being too simplistic. While the individual phases are interesting, they aren't as full featured or as well thought out as they could be. But I'm also sure that some gamers will instantly fall in love with its unique style of easy going gameplay. On the whole, Spore succeeds in its mission and while it does falter in some places, those who adore this style of game will definitely find reasons to fall in love with it.—Andrew Dagley

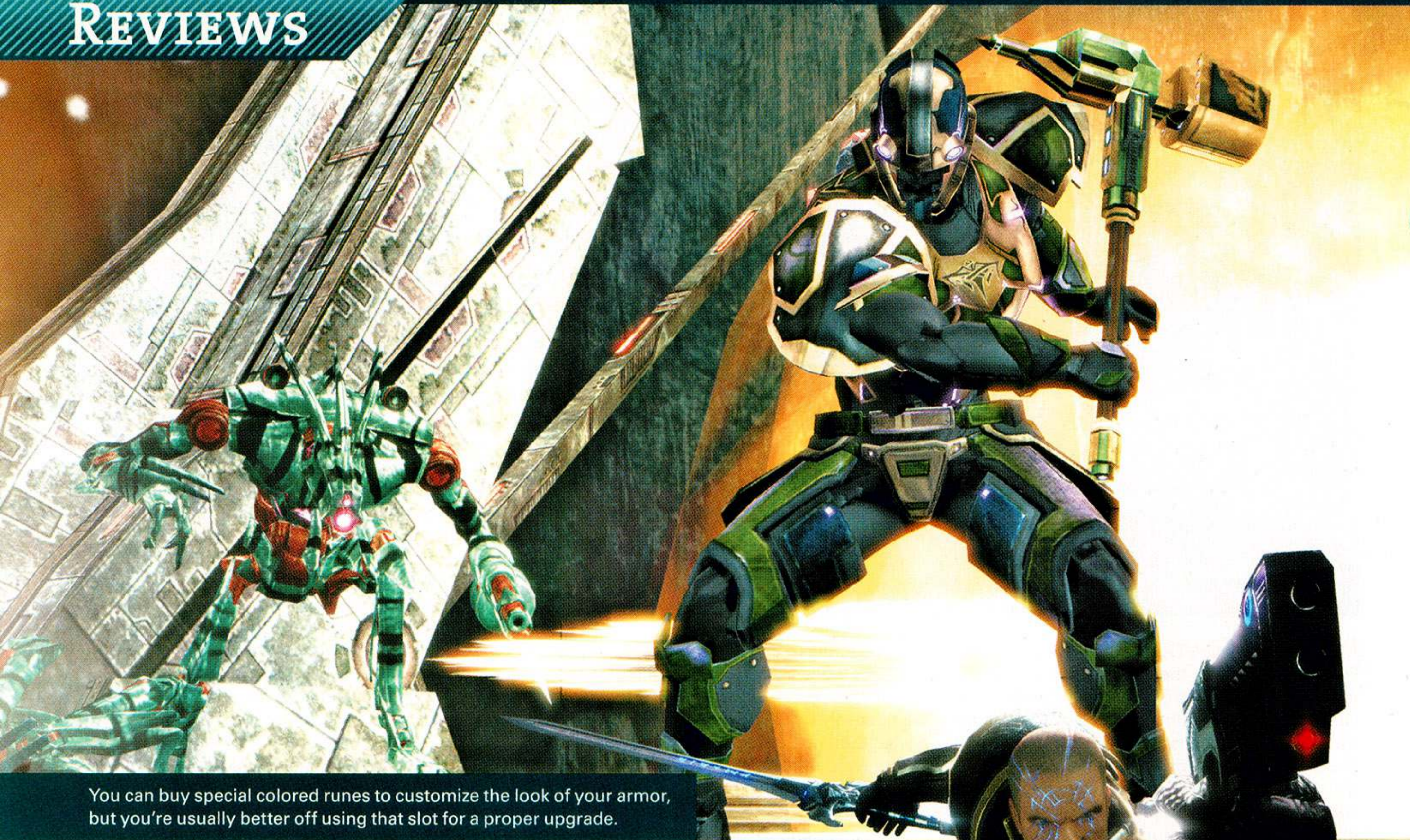


FUN FACTOR



PROS: Diverse gameplay; lovely for fans of sandbox games; creature creator is impressive

CONS: Some phases aren't fleshed out; lack of structure to the gameplay might upset some.



You can buy special colored runes to customize the look of your armor, but you're usually better off using that slot for a proper upgrade.

TOO HUMAN

Baldur might have all the flaws of a human, but he kicks ass like a god.

Xbox 360 ESRB: T

Developer: Silicon Knights Publisher: Microsoft

It may look like a straightforward action game with an RPG twist, but the truth about the opening chapter of Silicon Knight's planned trilogy is much stranger. Here's an Xbox 360 exclusive that proudly wears its lofty ambitions on its sleeves, and yet sometimes seems bent on self-sabotage. That it's so relentlessly addictive despite its aggravations is something of a minor miracle.

GODS AND MONSTERS

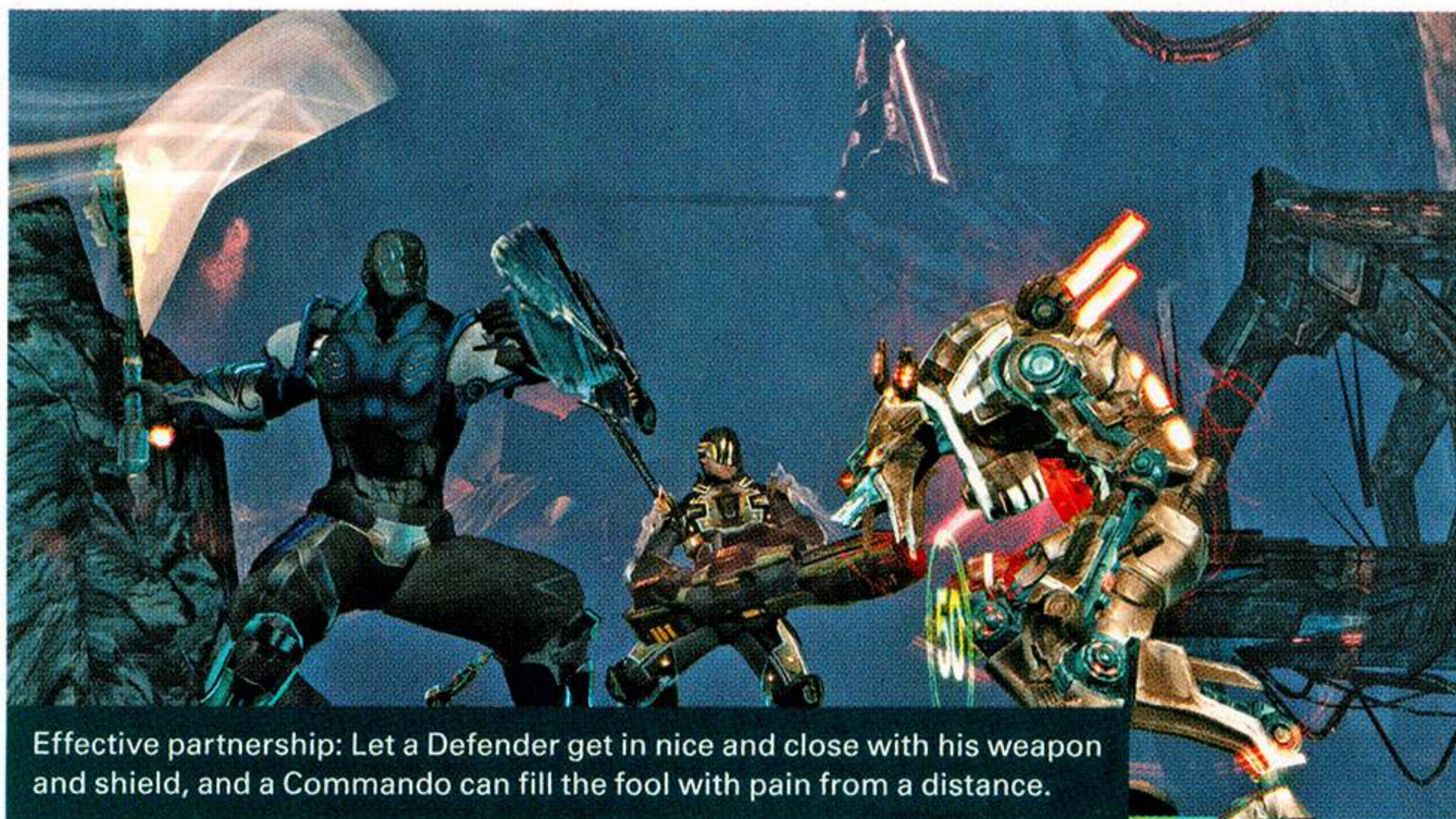
Too Human takes the rich world of Norse mythology and catapults it into a distant future where bloodthirsty machines stalk humanity, and even cybernetically-enhanced gods, like the Aesir, struggle to keep the ravenous flesh shredders at bay. Why are the machines so intent on harvesting our meaty bits? As the youngest and least augmented member of the clan, Baldur might seem

like an odd choice to lead an expeditionary force to the ancient Hall of Heroes to investigate, but between his amnesia and the death of his wife, the guy's got a drive that self-important thugs like Thor lack.

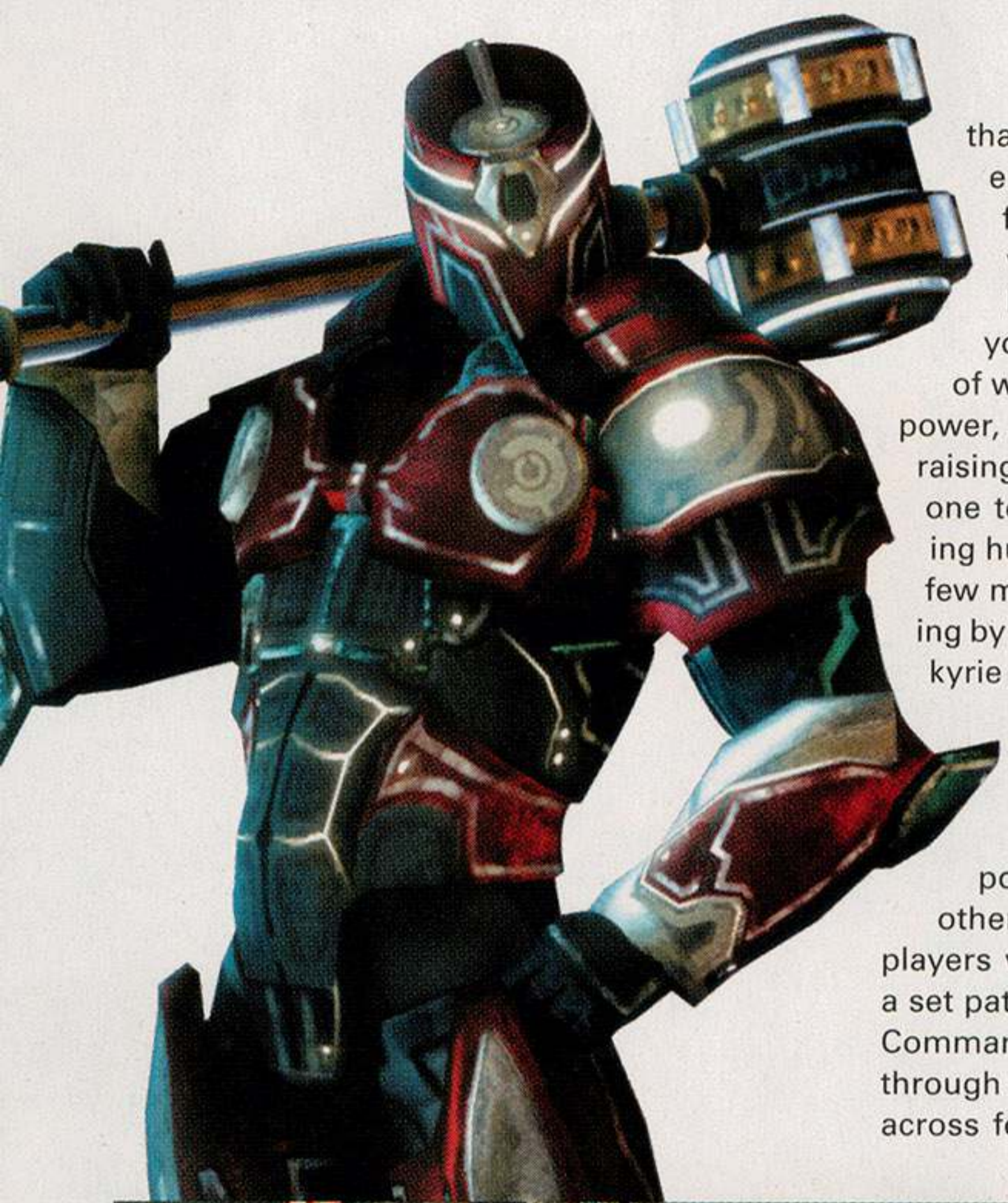
Baldur maybe a little bland and walks around like he's got something pointy in his boots, but put a crowd of enemies in front of him and he suddenly turns into an Olympic speed-skater. With simple rotations of the analog sticks, you can send Baldur flying across the screen like an angry hornet, doling out punishment with bright sparks and the satisfying clank of metal on metal. The combat system is pretty slick, letting you launch guys into the air and then juggle them with gunfire to rack up combo points for devastating "ruiner" attacks, or leap up to get out of the fray and bash them silly. I personally loved every minute of it. The targeting system is less helpful when using guns because it stubbornly "sticks" to one particular enemy when you're frantically trying to target another, but the action is intense and enjoyable nonetheless.

DEATH PENALTIES

It's just too bad Too Human's difficulty is so uneven. I got through the first mission just fine but a few minutes into the second mission, there was a sudden spike in difficulty and the game suddenly stopped offering me helpful guidance. The next thing I know, I'm being pummeled by rockets



Effective partnership: Let a Defender get in nice and close with his weapon and shield, and a Commando can fill the fool with pain from a distance.



that rained down on me from afar while elemental enemies exploded in my face and froze me in place. Oh, and my enemies were suddenly invulnerable to particular kinds of damage. Sure, learning to tailor your strategy to each enemy type is part of what gives *Too Human* a sense of staying power, but the game's insistence on suddenly raising the difficulty is sort of like letting someone test drive a Lamborghini and then throwing huge chunks of cement in their path every few miles. This was made even more frustrating by the absurd 20-second animation of a Valkyrie taking you to Valhalla every single time you die. And no, you can't skip it; you have to suffer through it after every single death.

Certain combat situations are also poorly weighted toward one class over another as well, and thus brutally punish solo players who customized their characters along a set path. For instance, my gun-crazed level 30 Commando could blast and carve his way through most hostile forces, but then he ran across four Troll bosses who were all impervi-



The Berserker class can dual-wield special melee weapons that no other class can touch, making him the master of close combat.



You start out looking pretty cool, but the equipment you get access to in later levels is positively beastly.

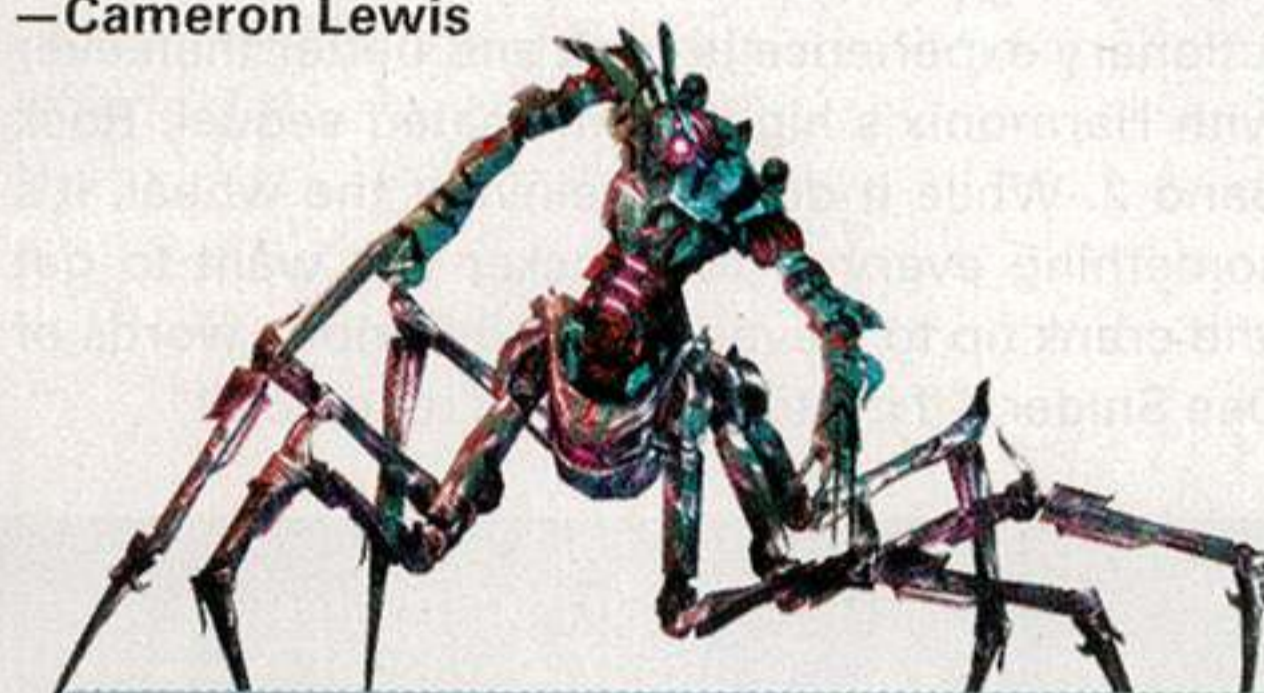
ous to bullets. Of course, I'd invested heavily in my ballistics skills and ignored melee training, which rendered me completely helpless against the bulletproof baddies.

DIVINE INTERVENTION

I know I've painted a less than rosy picture of the game and you're probably going to be surprised to hear that I kept playing through the teeth-grinding bouts of frustration. Want to know why? For one simple reason: the incredibly rich customization system. This stuff will appeal more to MMO addicts than straight-up action fans, but the possibilities are deep, and they actively encourage players to pair up online. Five classes range from hardcore specialists like the melee-obsessed Berserker to the well-rounded Champion. Each time you level, you get points to spend on branching class and alignment skills. Then there are the runes you can jam into an enormous library of beautifully designed weapons and armor, or plug into a hierarchy of charms that bestow yet more special abilities if you complete simple exploration, kill, and collect quests. You'll even find blueprints that allow you to craft the most powerful equipment in the game, including epic sets that fit together for still more bonuses.

All these layers carry over into actual combat in wonderfully concrete ways, from the Defender's damage absorption and redirection to the Bio Engineer's healing. Online co-op only supports two players, while the classes seem designed with twice that in mind, but it nevertheless enables an astonishing variety of skill-set permutations. The environments boast secrets and forking paths, and random ambushes strive to make your umpteenth time through an area fresh, but it's ultimately the inspired intermingling of the disparate abilities bestowed on partnered players that makes *Too Human* worth playing. After logging more than two dozen hours on these battlefields, the long resurrection sequences and flakey targeting still drove me up the wall, but the unpredictable online alliances, the varied loot, and rewarding combat kept me going back for more. No, it's not perfect but it's still pretty damn fun.

—Cameron Lewis



DY5A

Get the link to **Too Human** screens and news sent to your e-mail. Text **DY5A** to **59479**

Only standard text messaging rates apply

FUN FACTOR



PROS: Absorbing mix of melee and gunplay; deep customization options; tons of gear to acquire.

CONS: Game balance issues; crappy camera; uncooperative targeting system.



It's the same great Rock Band flavor that you know and love. Just looking at it makes you want to play, right?



ROCK BAND 2

The game that turned countless gamers into virtual rock stars is back for a melt-your-face encore!

Xbox 360 ESRB: T

Developer: Harmonix Publisher: MTV Games

Rock Band was never just a game—it was a bona fide phenomenon. It changed the way we looked at, listened to, and played music in a video game environment and now that revolutionary experience is back and better than ever with Harmonix's highly anticipated sequel, Rock Band 2. While it doesn't reinvent the wheel, it's something every virtual rocker will want to get and crank up to eleven. In the infamous words of Dee Snider, "if it's too loud, you're too old!"

"SAY YOU WANT A REVOLUTION"

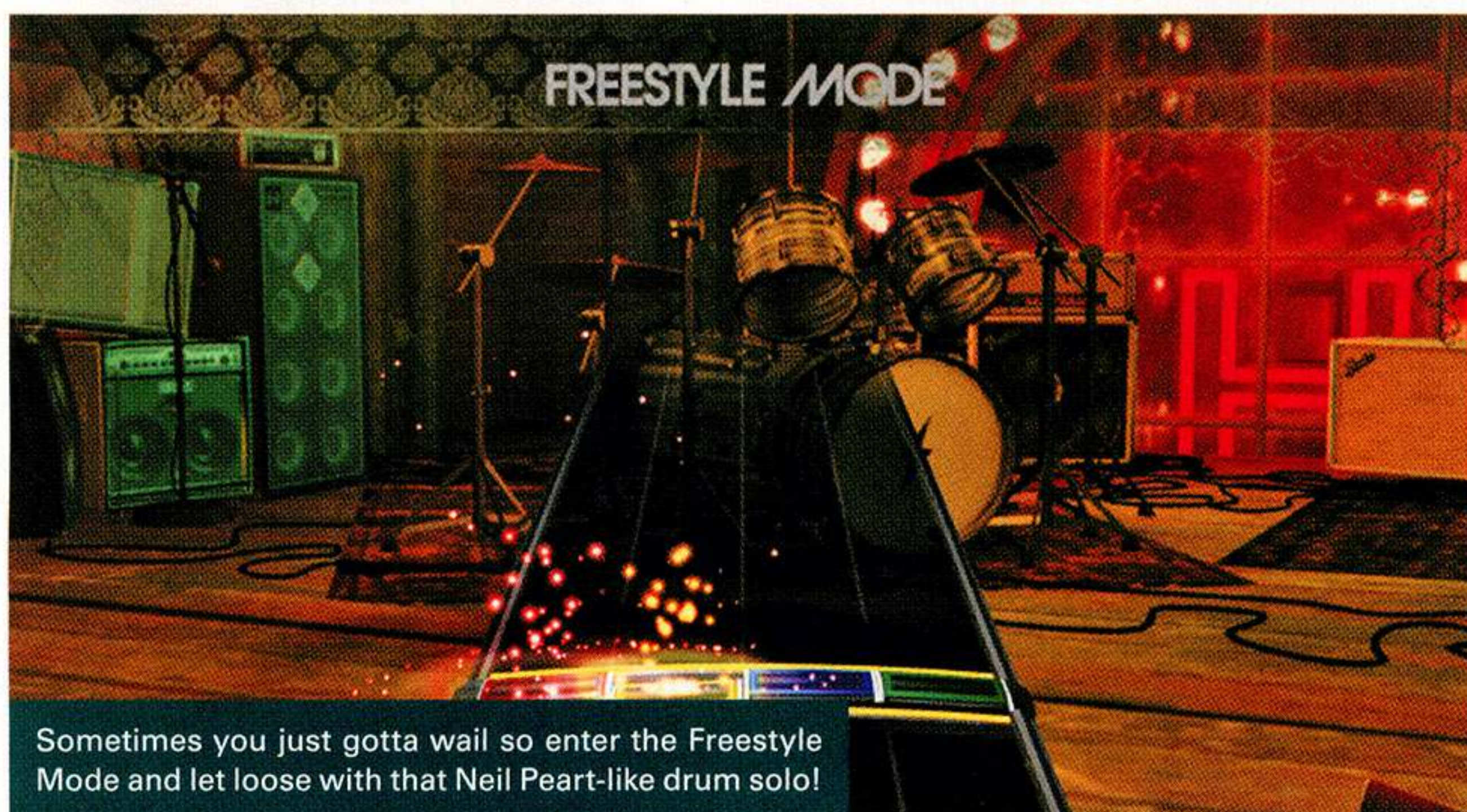
Let's cut to the chase: by this point, we all know what Rock Band's about, so there's no point in re-hashing the rhythm-based gameplay mechanics—if you haven't played it, go play it already! Like a good sequel should, Rock Band 2 takes everything that made the original title great and improves upon it. The graphics got an impressive boost, with subtle touches throughout. There are filters applied during live performances that make

it look like a real music video and the venues are more detailed than ever. The fantastic character designs really bring out the outlandish nature of the game as well.

But what really stood out for me this time around was insane amount of customization the game allows: you can alter your character's attitude and wardrobe with an even wider selection of shirts, tattoos, hairstyles, make-up, masks—you name it, you can rock out in it. Also available in Rock Band 2 is the ability to customize your band with a surprisingly deep Band Logo creation tool which lets you combine multiple layers and display your band's mark in-game during your gigs.

ALL AROUND THE WORLD

At first glance, Rock Band 2's World Tour mode doesn't seem like anything new—you still take your tattered garage band across the country and earn stars, fans and cash as you move up the music industry food chain—but the familiar formula



Sometimes you just gotta wail so enter the Freestyle Mode and let loose with that Neil Peart-like drum solo!



CONTINUED ▶



Wallpapers



wall7758

Themes



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Screensavers



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Games



game3650

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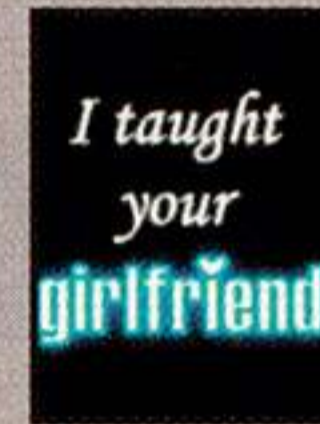
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game3653



game3654

3 Doors Down - It's Not My Time	song2350
Ashanti - Good Good	song2351
Chris Brown - Forever	song2352
David Banner / Chris Brown - Get Like Me	song2353
Jesse McCartney - Leavin'	song2354
Kardinal Offishall / Akon - Dangerous	song2355
Lil Wayne - Lollipop	song2356
Lil Wayne - 3 Peat	song2357
Metro Station - Shake It	song2358
Miley Cyrus - 7 Things	song2359
Nelly - Stepped On My J'z	song2360
Nelly - Body On Me	song2361
Pussycat Dolls - When I Grow Up	song2362
Ray-J / Yung Berg - Sexy Can I	song2363
Rehab - Bartender Song	song2364
Rihanna - Take A Bow	song2365
Rihanna - Disturbia	song2366
Savage / Soulja Boy Tell Em - Swing	song2367
The Dream - I Luv Your Girl	song2368
Three 6 Mafia - Lolli Lolli	song2369
T-Pain - Can't Believe It	song2370
Usher - Moving Mountains	song2371
Yung Berg - The Business	song2372

lil WAYNE
A Milli song2347
Got Money song2348
Mr. Carter song2349

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You can go at it solo or with another friend but to truly get the full Rock Band experience, you need four people rocking out at once.



The new Rock Band 2 guitar is solidly built with a wood finish for that realistic look.

ROCK BAND 2'S GREATEST HITS

Rock Band 2 boasts a stellar lineup of awesome tunes, but here are a few of the *GamePro* editors' personal favorites!

- AC/DC "Let There Be Rock"
- Elvis Costello "Pump It Up"
- Dream Theater "Panic Attack"
- Duran Duran "Hungry Like the Wolf"
- Bob Dylan "Tangled Up in Blue"
- Fleetwood Mac "Go Your Own Way"
- The Guess Who "American Woman"
- Billy Idol "White Wedding Pt. I"
- Journey "Anyway You Want It"
- Modest Mouse "Float On"
- Nirvana "Drain You"
- Red Hot Chili Peppers "Give it Away"
- Smashing Pumpkins "Today"
- Survivor "Eye of the Tiger"
- The Who "Pinball Wizard"

has been improved to to raise the ante to new heights. You can now hire roadies, merch crews, and even music promoters to spread the gospel of your band worldwide while opening up new gigs and venues across the globe.

One of my favorite additions to the Tour mode was the game's Challenges, where your band is given specific challenges before each show. Meet the criteria like getting four stars during a particular song and you'll get double the cash; get less, walk away empty handed. Throw in competitions to win touring vans, buses, and private jets, online multiplayer and a brand new set list and you have more than enough material to keep you jamming with friends long into the night.

ROCKING AND ROLLING

There's no denying the power of Rock Band's gameplay. There's a reason why it remains a popular game to play either by yourself or with your friends and Rock Band 2 just keeps the party going. If you already own the first game and all the instruments, this is a must-own title; if you haven't experienced the magic, this is a great place to start. Either way, you should probably go warn your neighbors now; better yet, invite them over for a few rounds. —Will Herring

FUN FACTOR



PROS: It improves upon the amazing Rock Band formula in almost every way.

CONS: There's really nothing to complain about. It's Rock Band!

ION DRUM ROCKER

An awesome drum kit for the serious Rock Band player.



There's no denying that the drum portion of Rock Band is what really helped set it apart from its competitor, Guitar Hero. Yes, the vocals were a fun addition but the drums added a kickass element to the overall experience. If you really liked drumming in Rock Band, then you owe it to yourself to consider the ION Drum Rocker. A premium set of virtual drums, the ION is a sturdy, professional looking kit that absolutely blows the stock drum kit out of the water.

It's well constructed, has sturdy pads that are lined with a soft material to dampen noise, and features fully adjustable arms so that you can position each pad exactly where you want it. It also has two cymbals that mirror the green and yellow pads (you can add a third optional cymbal for the blue pad); they add a nice element of realism to the experience, especially during solos. The all-metal foot pedal is also solidly built and won't go slipping around on the floor when you stomp on it and if you want to get really serious about drumming, you can plug the ION into a "drum brain" and use it as an electronic drum kit.

There's no denying the quality of the ION and we've replaced our stock drum kit with it here in the *GamePro* offices; obviously, we won't be going back. But here's the real kicker—the ION retails for \$300. The fact that it can function as a real set of electronic drums helps explain the high price tag, as does the quality of the materials and construction, but for the average Rock Band player, that's pretty ridiculously.

If, and it's a big if, you are serious about your Rock Band drum playing or if you're looking for an electronic drum kit, then the ION is pretty damn compelling. However, if you're just looking to have some fun, you're probably better off sticking with the stock drums.



FUN FACTOR



PROS: The ultimate Rock Band drum kit; can function as an electronic drum kit as well.

CONS: The high price tag means only serious players or actual musicians should apply.

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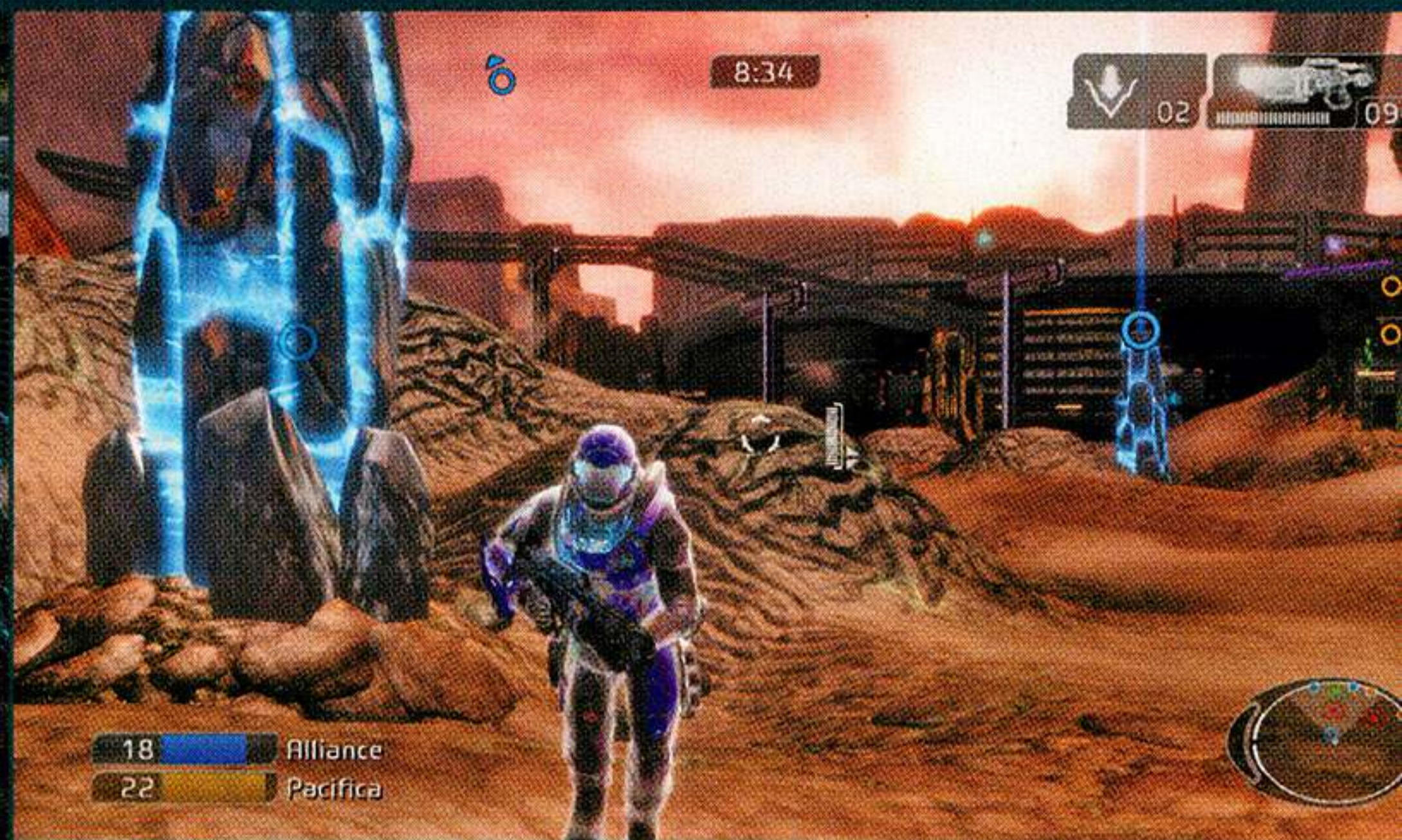
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The land might start out flat in most places, but it'll be a bulging and pitted battleground by the time you're done with it.

FRACTURE

It's like landscaping your garden—but with guns.

Xbox 360 ESRB: T

Developer: Day 1 Studios Publisher: LucasArts

Most action gamers are used to environments that remain static, no matter how much havoc you cause but *Fracture* brings something new to the table: its "terrain deformation" concept lets you change the very ground you, and most importantly, your opponents are standing on. It might sound like a gimmick but it actually pays off in a tangible way; it's just too bad that the rest of the game isn't as forward-thinking.

CIVIL WAR II

Messing around with the in-game terrain in *Fracture* is accomplished using the Entrencher, an intuitive tool that's dirt simple to use: point it at a patch of mud and launch beams that raise or lower the ground. The effect is unnerving because I've taken the solidity of game levels for granted all these years; watching solid ground that used to be immutable suddenly shift and change like so much Play-Doh is, at first, a little odd. To its credit, however, *Fracture* never treats terrain deformation like a mere gimmick—it actively affects nearly every aspect of gameplay, turning otherwise plain vanilla firefights into moderately intense engagements.

When I first started playing *Fracture*, I got my ass shot up regularly until I stopped trying to dodge bullets and hide behind existing cover, and started creating my own when I required it. Need a place to catch your breath and let your shields recharge? Put a wall of earth between you and

incoming fire. Running low on ammo in a tight space? Crush your foes against the ceiling, then scoop up their weapons. And why wait for enemy heads to pop out from behind cover when you can catapult them above it with the violent birth of a well-placed hill? The freedom to develop your own collection of tactical tricks serves the game well for at least several hours.

SAND TRAP

What causes *Fracture* to stumble over the long haul is its unwillingness to till fresh soil elsewhere. While many areas feature physics puzzles, usually centered on nudging key objects into or out of place, most are simply variations on familiar conventions. The more I played the game, the more I found my enthusiasm slowly dwindling. The surprisingly polished graphics and ability to reshape terrain aside, there wasn't much there to enliven the rather uninspired missions which were populated by equally dull opponents. Other minor issues, like enemies who can take three shots to the head and still keep on ticking, contribute to the problem.

Thankfully, the game's online modes give *Fracture* a second life. It features fairly standard variations on deathmatch, capture the flag, and control point camping, but the fact that all players can alter the terrain at will allows for some creative possibilities. Defensive play in particular is practically reinvented: Instead of simply waiting

for opponents to invade, you can construct elaborate hills and valleys around key assets, make sections of the world impassable, or catapult yourself across the map in moments.

HEAD IN THE SAND

And really, it's the online mode where the game's true potential lies. I can't wait to see what devious tactics online opponents come up with using the Entrencher. The single-player campaign is serviceable but its lackluster missions and staid enemy encounters—even the final boss fight is sort of disappointing—ultimately conspire to leave you feeling flat. But despite its faults, the terrain deformation and unique online twist is distinctive enough that it's worth playing, even if won't exactly alter the foundations of gaming forever. —Cameron Lewis

FUN FACTOR



PROS: Terrain deformation mechanics are engaging; sharp graphics; enjoyable multiplayer.

CONS: Dim bullet-sponge enemies; unimaginative missions and puzzles; disappointing finale.



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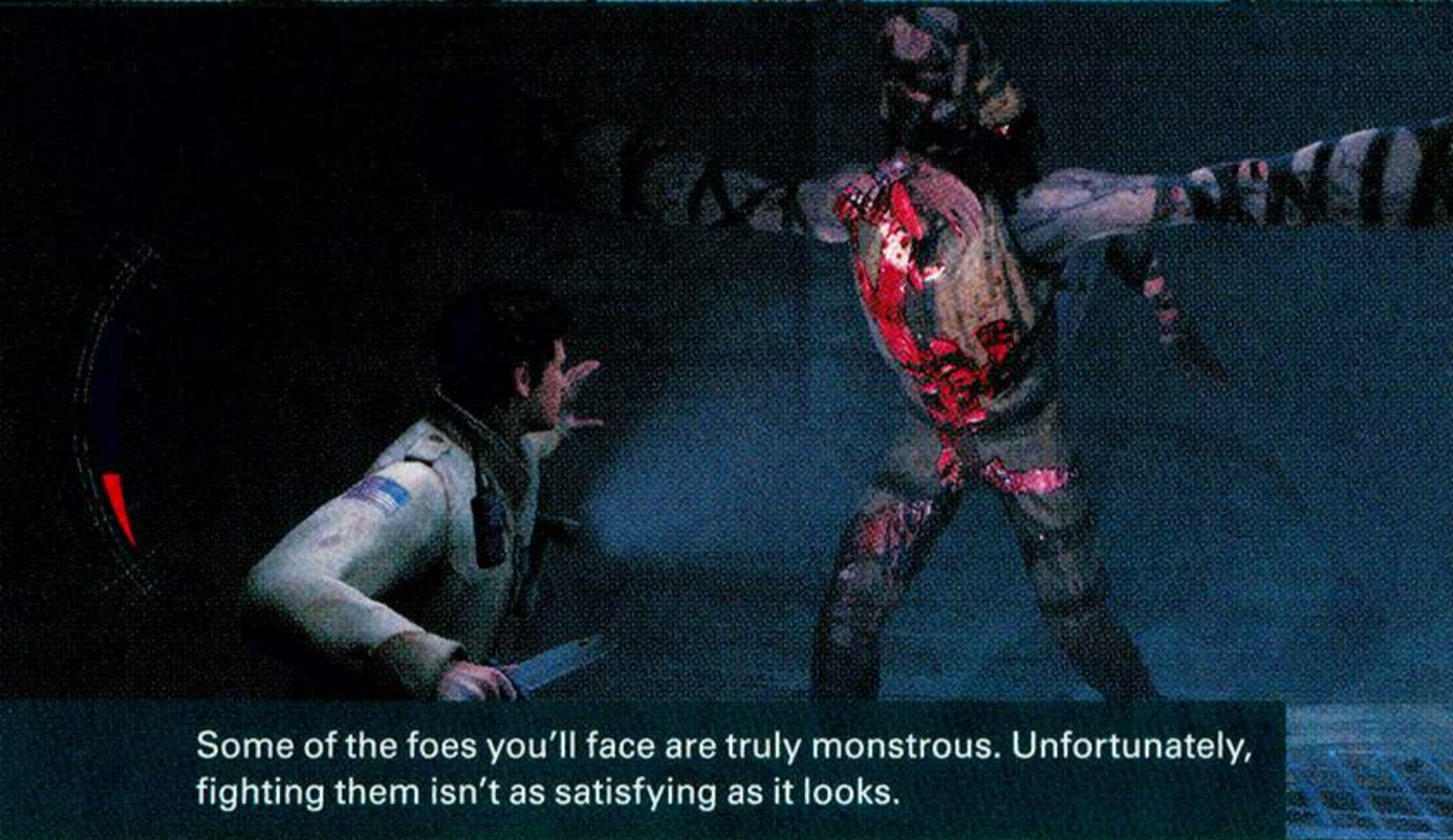
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Some of the foes you'll face are truly monstrous. Unfortunately, fighting them isn't as satisfying as it looks.

SILENT HILL: HOMECOMING

Proof that you just can't go back home again, no matter how badly you want to.

PS3 Xbox 360 ESRB: M

Developer: Double Helix Publisher: Konami

In the mood to jump out of your skin with fright? If you enjoy strolling the gritty alleys of the dark side of gaming, Silent Hill has long been a destination of choice despite an uneven entry or two. Sadly, though Homecoming boasts some genuinely intense moments of dread, its equally distressing gameplay flaws will take a big bite out of your enjoyment.

SECOND SIGHT

I'm lying on a stretcher, and someone's wheeling me down a hallway in a disused hospital that must double as a whistle stop on the route to hell, and I can't help but think how I saw a more horrifying version of the same scene in *Jacob's Ladder* almost 20 years ago. The line between homage and plagiarism might seem thin, but Homecoming makes no apparent effort to put a new spin on things. Horror aficionados will see every plot development coming from a mile away; and it's hard to get excited about a story that's content to lurch from one clichéd plot twist to another.

But while Silent Hill: Homecoming may lack in the story department, it makes up for it by creating an incredibly unsettling sense of mood and atmosphere. The upgraded visuals bestow a filmic quality to everything and the world's eerie transformations look better than ever. The audio, a series hallmark, is also amazing, setting the whole world alive with the slavering of monsters, the clattering of bumped obstacles, and unsettling

ambient drones that seem to come from inside your own head. Homecoming's haunting sound design is an oppressive din that made me surprisingly uneasy without ever getting on my nerves. I lost track of the number of times I found myself perched on the edge of a couch cushion, desperate to discern whether a sound was a harbinger of danger or an artifact of Alex's addled mind.

STREETS OF RAGE

I just wish the actual gameplay had lived up to the high bar set by the game's presentation. The game forces you to endure endless rounds of painfully clunky combat where you hold a trigger to lock onto a foe, tap buttons to dodge incoming attacks, and counter with simple flurries of your own. It sounds serviceable enough, but this simplistic step-counter-slice dance quickly wears out its welcome when the streets spawn a never-ending tide of filth for you to carve through, and bullets and shells are so surprisingly hard to come by.

There's no sense of balance or pacing here; expect to face off against up to half a dozen goons at once, only to see the monster population inexplicably restored inside of a minute or two. Finally, after I decided to simply run away from combat whenever possible, I started enjoying myself again. Sadly, I still had to endure a handful of one-on-one battles against memorably warped bosses who are nevertheless not much fun to fight.

BREEDING CONTEMPT

The tangible sense of dread and ominous ambience that hangs over Silent Hill 5 might be enough to salvage Homecoming for devoted scare-seekers, but *everybody* else will be more horrified by the aggravating combat and decayed puzzle conventions than the twists and turns of Alex's unfortunate past.

If survival horror is your bread and butter, then Homecoming is right up your alley; otherwise, you might be better served waiting for Resident Evil 5.

—Cameron Lewis



FUN FACTOR



PROS: Excellent sense of atmosphere; ghastly monster designs; helpful mapping system.

CONS: Weak combat system; predictable story; simple-minded puzzles; infrequent save points.

Complete your

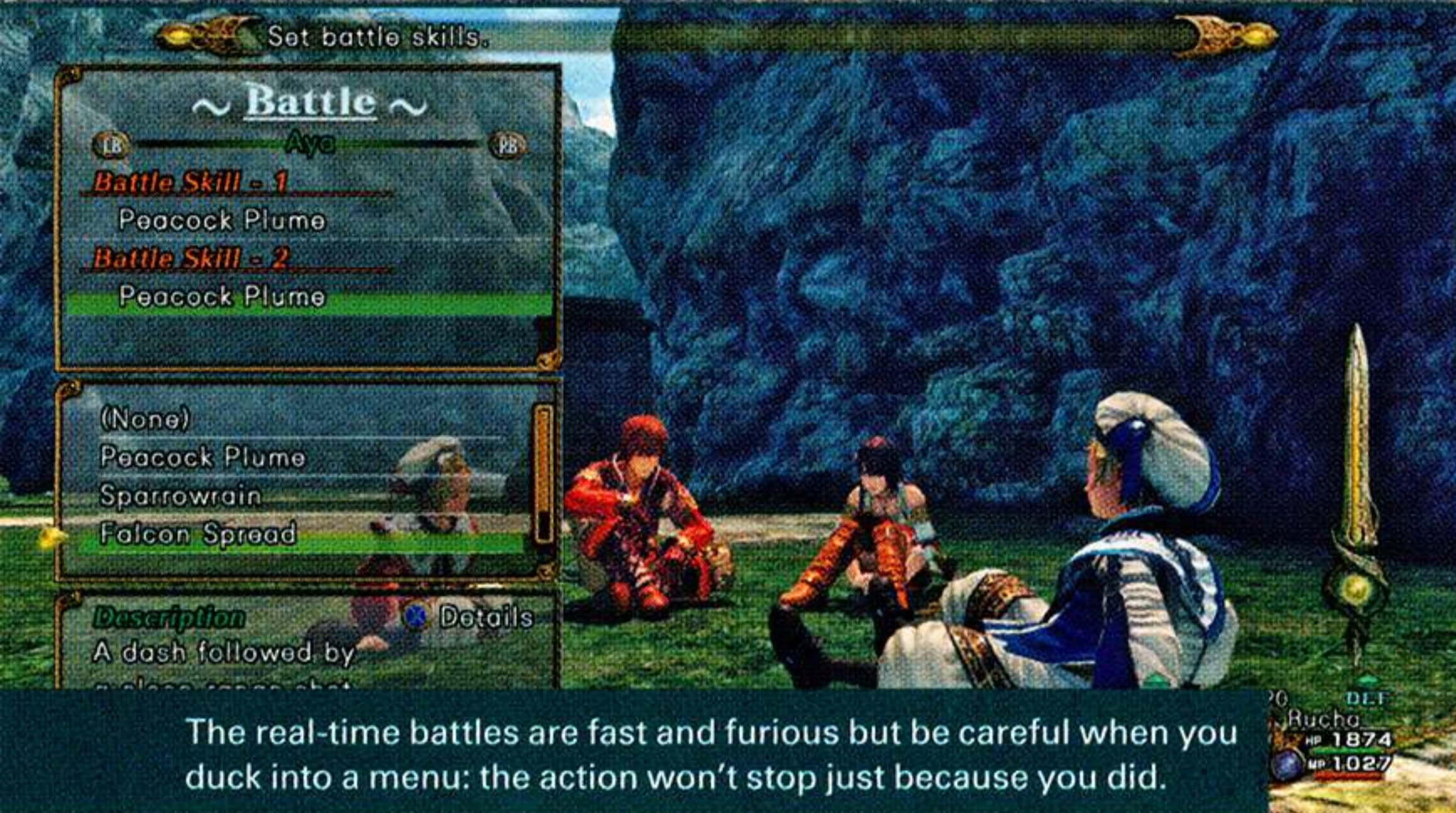
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The real-time battles are fast and furious but be careful when you duck into a menu: the action won't stop just because you did.

INFINITE UNDISCOVERY

Plagued with a linear story and middling gameplay, Infinite Undiscovery never rises to its potential.

Developer: Tri-Ace Publisher: Square Enix

Xbox 360 ESRB: T

Infinite Undiscovery had all of the ingredients for a potentially legendary role playing experience. Backed by world renowned publisher Square Enix and helmed by famed developer Tri-Ace of Star Ocean fame, the title has been garnering massive amounts of attention for its various claims of innovation, originality, and forward thinking concepts. Unfortunately, the final product never instills anything but a "been there, done that" feeling with a mediocre effort that fails to please.

CULT OF PERSONALITY

Infinite Undiscovery kicks off with a simple case of mistaken identity, as young flutist Capell is confused for a man known simply as Sigmund the Liberator and thrown in jail. When Capell is rescued by the beautiful and deadly Aya, he finds himself unwillingly thrust into an adventure that falls along standard "rag-tag band of rebels set out to save the world" fare. Still, it offers just enough new material to keep dedicated players guessing.

That the story is linear and borderline unoriginal I can live with; what bugged the hell out me, though, were the two-dimensional cast of characters. Capell, for instance, has to be one of the most apathetic and frustrating protagonists I've ever played as. He spends the first five hours constantly complaining and pointing out that he's not "hero material." I understand he's in a tough

spot but five hours of whining? Dude, shut up and go save the world already. The sad news is that the supporting cast is also modeled from various RPG stereotypes like the friendly and overzealous muscle man, the soft-spoken brainiac magician (complete with glasses), and the hotheaded oversized-sword-wielding warrior.

REAL TIME STRATEGY

Also problematic is Undiscovery's gameplay; it plays out completely in real time which, to the game's credit, works rather well except that when you pause to browse menus, the game still keeps going without you. Still, battles are eventful and rather enjoyable, although not incredibly challenging with simple button combinations, enough to take out most foes. The rest of your party offers helpful support and an innovative Connect feature lets you demand specific attacks or spells from your allies when needed. This also comes into play in puzzle situations where you'll have to Connect with another character and request a specific skill in order to move forward. It's a cool concept and can allow for some truly impressive team-ups, but the game doesn't take full advantage of it.

Then there's the slowdown: yes, in this age of high-powered processors and graphics hardware, Infinite Undiscovery suffers from slowdown. The game itself is gorgeous, with detailed character models and neat-o combat animations, but the

action tends to slow to a crawl when too many enemies clutter the screen; it could be caused by the fact that I was playing a review build but it was troubling nonetheless. Party members also have a terrible habit of blocking the camera, constantly causing the player to shift the view around the action just to see who's doing what.

DISCOVERY CHANNEL

In the end, Undiscovery isn't a bad game but it is seriously flawed. I'd recommend renting it before you invest your hard earned cash on a purchase, especially if you're new to the RPG genre. You might find something in the game to hook you and keep you coming back for more, but you might also end up wondering why you didn't just save your money for Final Fantasy XIII instead.

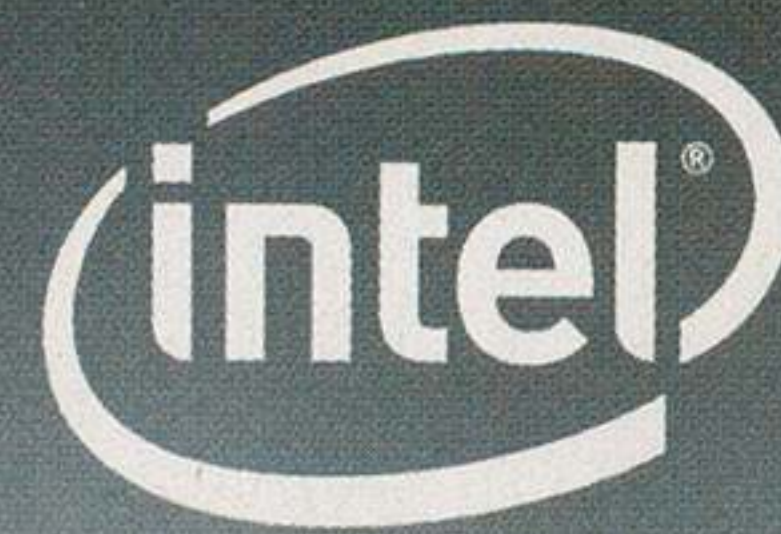
—Will Herring

FUN FACTOR



PROS: Beautiful graphics and innovative Connect system are bright points.

CONS: Linear gameplay; flat characters and story; terrible slowdowns.



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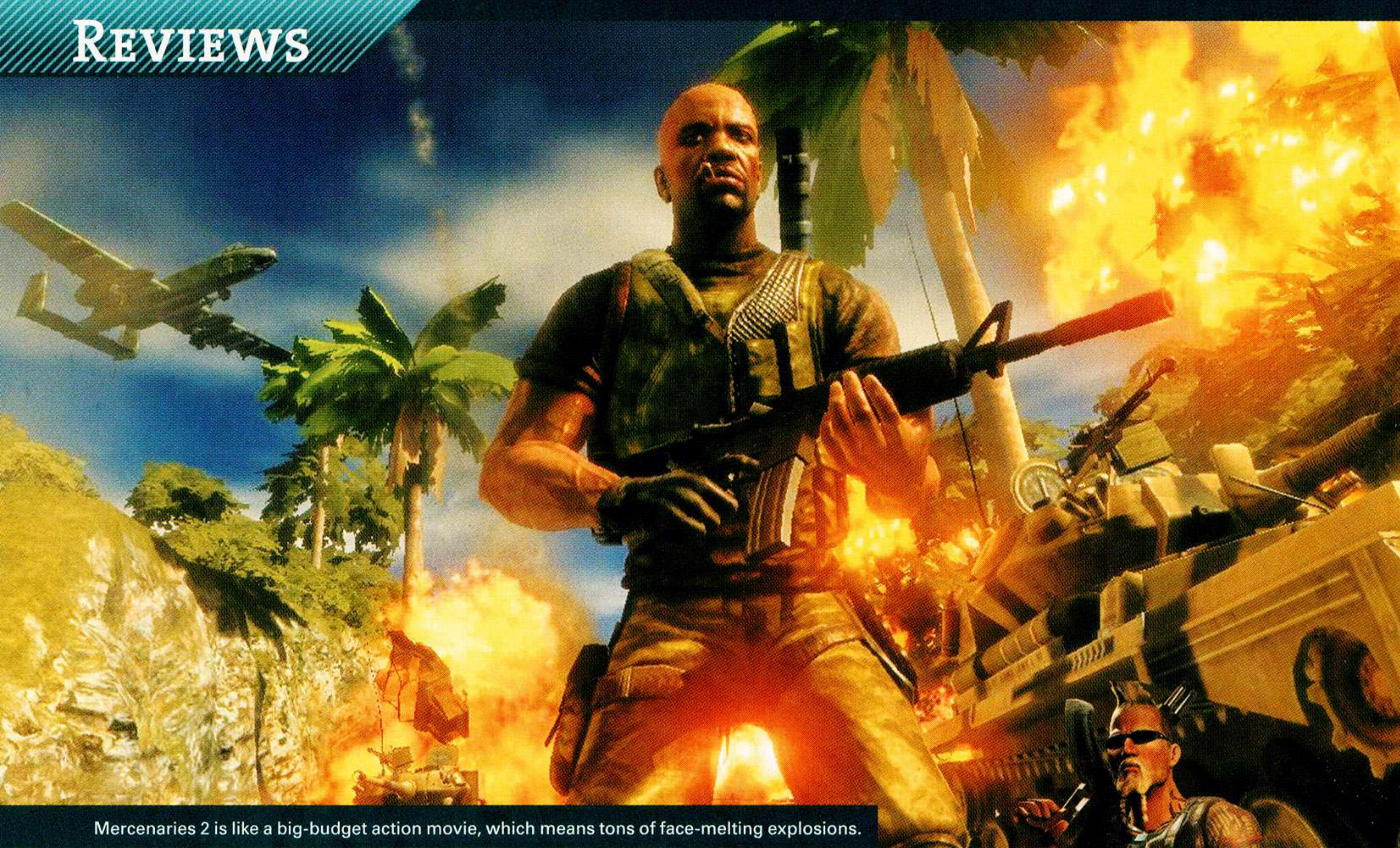


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Mercenaries 2 is like a big-budget action movie, which means tons of face-melting explosions.

MERCENARIES 2: WORLD IN FLAMES

It's not perfect and it ain't pretty, but it gets the job done.



■ Developer: EA Pandemic ■ Publisher: EA Games

Xbox 360 ESRB: T

When there's dirty work to be done and you're looking for a hired gun, looks and originality don't matter much—all that matters is whether they can get the job done. You can approach *Mercenaries 2* in the same way, letting it do its thing instead of obsessing about its shortcomings. Sure, it isn't exactly pretty and it doesn't reinvent the wheel, but it does pack a nice satisfying punch.

PAIN IN THE ASS

After completing a job for an Venezuelan oil tycoon with illusions of political grandeur you're predictably betrayed and shot in the butt as you flee the scene; worst of all, the jerk stiffes you on your bill. You refuse to take the situation sitting down—well, you actually can't sit down at all—



and decide to go after the wanna-be dictator. As one of three characters—the heavy metal Mattias, the buff Chris, or the slinky Jennifer—you wander the streets and jungles of Venezuela to slowly undo your rival's nefarious plan.

As in the first *Mercenaries* title, various factions pop up and offer you contracts; complete them and you can shake up the balance of power while also lining your pockets. That's not to mention the fact that blowing up buildings and shooting at bad guys is its own reward, especially because the paper-thin story isn't that great. Cinematically speaking, it's more Bruckheimer than Scorsese, meaning it leans on big explosions and flashy set pieces rather than a well developed plot and characters.

SUMMER BLOCKBUSTER

And much like a Jerry Bruckheimer movie, *Mercenaries 2* is entertaining and over-the-top, but suffers from some faults that keep it from being more than just another mindless shoot-em-up. Not only is the story shallow, but the main campaign missions, which almost always involves knocking someone off, saving a hostage, or obliterating a building, aren't as compelling as they could be. The optional side missions, however,

are great thanks to their unscripted nature—you never know exactly how things will turn out and that makes for exciting gameplay—and it's disappointing that this sort of unpredictability didn't extend to the core missions.

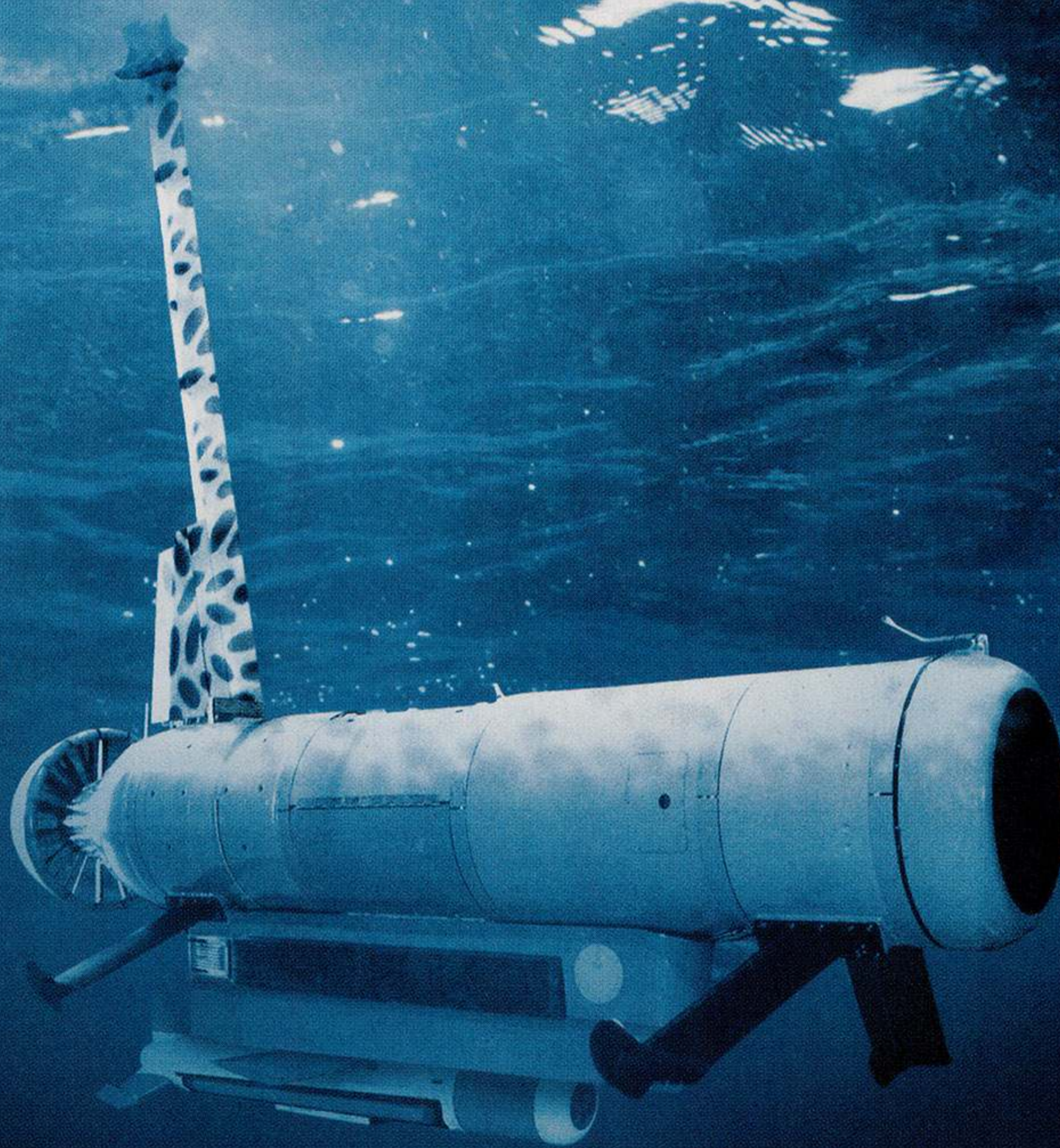
The game's focus on action does lead to some intense moments but the rest of the game doesn't instill the same sense of excitement. The gameplay is there but fundamental aspects like the presentation and graphics are fairly mediocre, which cuts into the fun. Still, while it isn't the prettiest game or the most original, it does get the job done when it comes to delivering some cheap thrills.—Tracy Erickson

FUN FACTOR



PROS: Loads of action ; great setting and plenty of content, weapons, and vehicles.

CONS: Mediocre visual presentation; paper-thin story; derivative open-world design.



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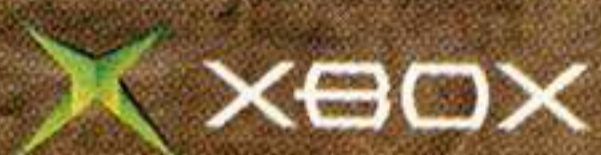


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He's baaaack: Dracula returns to cause more trouble in the latest chapter of the epic Castlevania series.

CASTLEVANIA: ORDER OF ECCLESIA

Some poor design decisions keep an otherwise excellent Castlevania game from greatness.

DS ESRB: T

Developer and Publisher: Konami



Take gorgeous graphics, intense action, and interesting gameplay concepts, marry it to the legendary Castlevania franchise and release it on the DS. Normally, that's the recipe for an instant classic, as was the case with games like *Portrait of Ruin*. *Order of Ecclesia* follows that formula closely and while the results are solid, the title suffers from some unfortunate design quirks that keep it from reaching the high bar set by its predecessors.

ALMOST PERFECT

Order of Ecclesia pretty much follows the standard Castlevania formula to a tee: you traverse intricately designed levels consisting of linked rooms, battle a gruesome menagerie of enemies, uncover hidden treasures and secrets, gain progressively powerful abilities, and take on cleverly designed bosses as you prepare yourself for an ultimate confrontation with the big daddy of the undead, Dracula. *Ecclesia* does feature a new Glyph system—magical symbols you suck in through a tattoo on your back in order to gain new attacks and abilities—as well as RPG-like mini-quests that adds some variety to the main quest that is pretty

engaging. All in all, *Ecclesia* is a lot of fun and I enjoyed it almost as much as I enjoyed the previous Castlevania titles.

Notice I said "almost." That's because *Ecclesia* has some aggravating quirks that cut into the fun. Take, for instance, the fact that it treats every attack as a magic spell, even those using physical weapons (this is where the Glyph system comes into play); this means you expend mana points every time you attack something. The mana regenerates quickly enough but this unnecessarily caps your offensive capabilities and often leaves you vulnerable in sticky situations; this is made doubly tough considering the game's high level of difficulty.

EARLY GRAVE

The boss fights will also frustrate you as you'll usually defeat them only after learning their patterns—something you can't do without first facing them multiple times—and there are confusing environmental puzzles that have no clear solution; I am currently hopelessly stuck in the game and have no idea how to proceed. At this point, I've resorted to sending an e-mail to Konami to beg

them for help. You'll have it easier, as online FAQs and strategy guides will be available when you play, but just know that you will probably run into problems with the game yourself.

If *Order of Ecclesia* didn't suffer from these poor design choices, the game would have easily been given an Editor's Choice award; as it stands now, it's a good game that deserves to be played, but it isn't as amazing as the Castlevania titles that came before it. I still recommend you get it because it's pretty awesome but it definitely will leave you frustrated at times. —Tae K. Kim

FUN FACTOR



PROS: A fun and complex addition to the Castlevania franchise.

CONS: It's ridiculously hard, has confusing puzzles and some design faults.

WARIO LAND: SHAKE IT!

Wii ESRB: E Developer: Good-Feel Publisher: Nintendo



Shake the Wii Remote up and down to squeeze every single coin you can out of any money bags you come across.

As far as spin-off characters go, Wario's had a pretty good career. Though he'll always live in the shadow of his more popular doppelganger Mario, he still manages to star in some awesome games like the frantic WarioWare. Now he's back with Wario Land: Shake It!, a fun and whimsical platforming title that's perfect for the younger Wii gamer.

ALL THAT GLITTERS

The more I play Shake It, the more I become enamored with the game's visual style. It really is one of the more vibrant and eye pleasing Wii games I've played. The cartoon-like graphics are really whimsical and it fits Wario's greedy and grubby persona perfectly. Everything, from the characters to the level environments, left my inner-child smiling; it really is like watching a Saturday morning cartoon.

The gameplay, however, didn't thrill me as much. The level designs are rather simplistic, though there are plenty of hidden nooks and out of the way crannies to hunt down, and the treasure collecting missions felt a little repetitive after a while. The boss fights are also rather easy and won't challenge experienced gamers.



MASTER SHAKE

Still, the game does make good use of the Wii Remote—you hold the controller sideways and use the motion sensing for things like shaking money bags and initiating a powerful ground stomp—and there plenty of side missions to keep gamers busy. And I'm pretty positive that fans of platform games will find enough depth to keep them entertained throughout the game's main levels.



Despite its simplistic gameplay, the game is still worth playing, especially for the casual Wii gamer. It's fun, it's simple, and it's charming, which pretty much describes most Wii games that hit big with that audience. And like I said, it's perfect for younger gamers so for them, it's an easy recommendation as well.—Tae K. Kim



FUN FACTOR

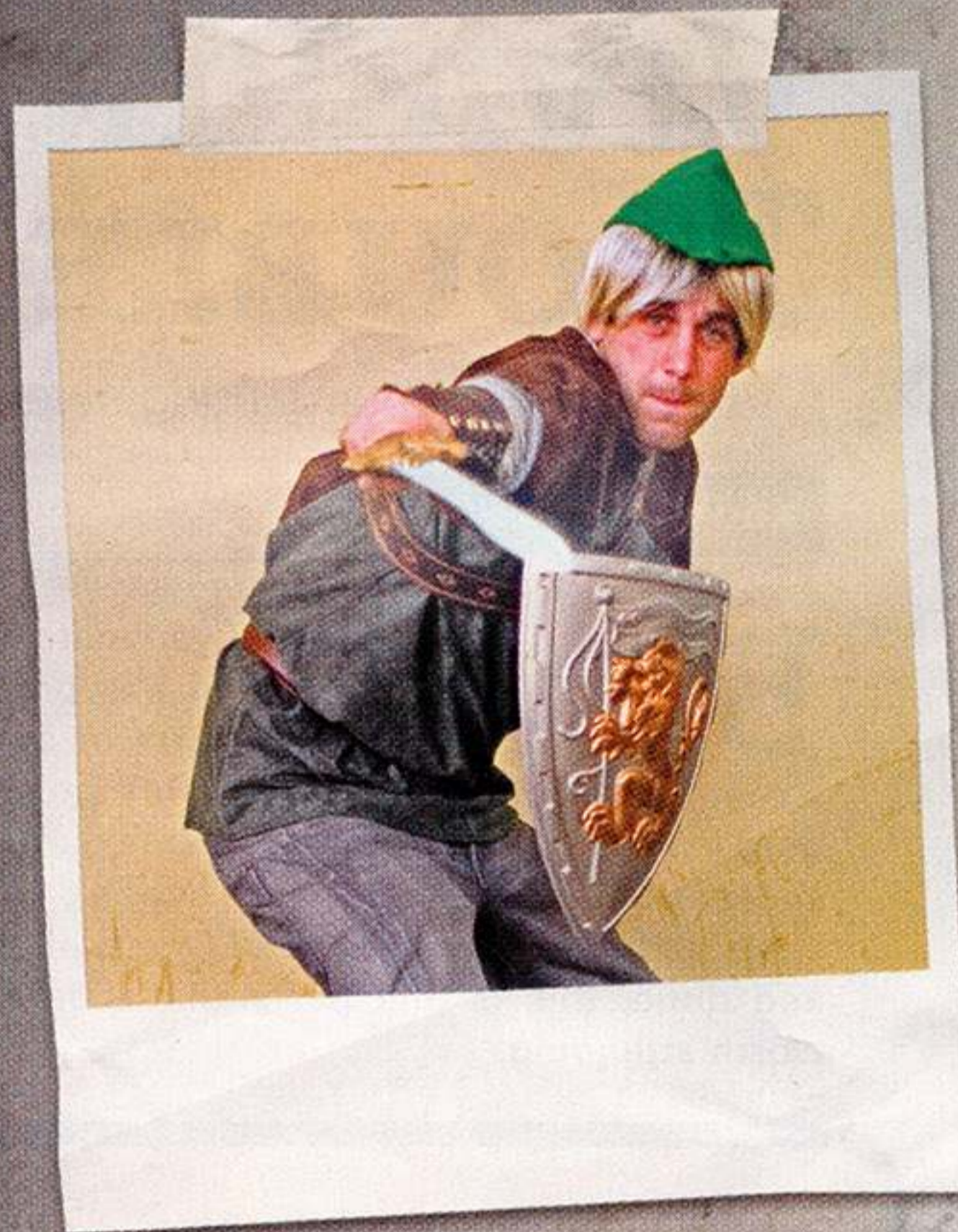


PROS: Highly engaging and eye pleasing visual style; perfect for younger Wii gamers.

CONS: Gameplay is a little too simplistic and repetitive for gamers looking for a challenge.

GAMEFLY

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This garden might seem idyllic but getting it up and running is sort of a chore.

VIVA PIÑATA: TROUBLE IN PARADISE

A tasty treat for your gaming sweet tooth, even if the gardening chores leave a sour aftertaste.

Xbox 360 ESRB: E

Developer: Rare Publisher: Microsoft

Breaking open a copy of Viva Piñata: Trouble in Paradise is sort of like breaking open a real piñata: all sorts of syrupy-sweet treats come pouring out. But the sweetness in Paradise is soured by a lame gardening chores that ruin the taste of the hyper-bright visuals and cute gameplay. Still, when all's said and done, this is one party that's definitely worth attending.

PARTY POOPER

The devious Professor Pester has trashed Piñata Central's computer system, wreaking havoc on the systems that micromanage the world of Viva Piñata. His party-wrecking ways have forced you to cultivate a garden and attract piñatas to get the party restarted. It's up to you to get the indigenous piñata population to your garden by planting flowers, constructing homes, and scaring away sour piñata varieties.

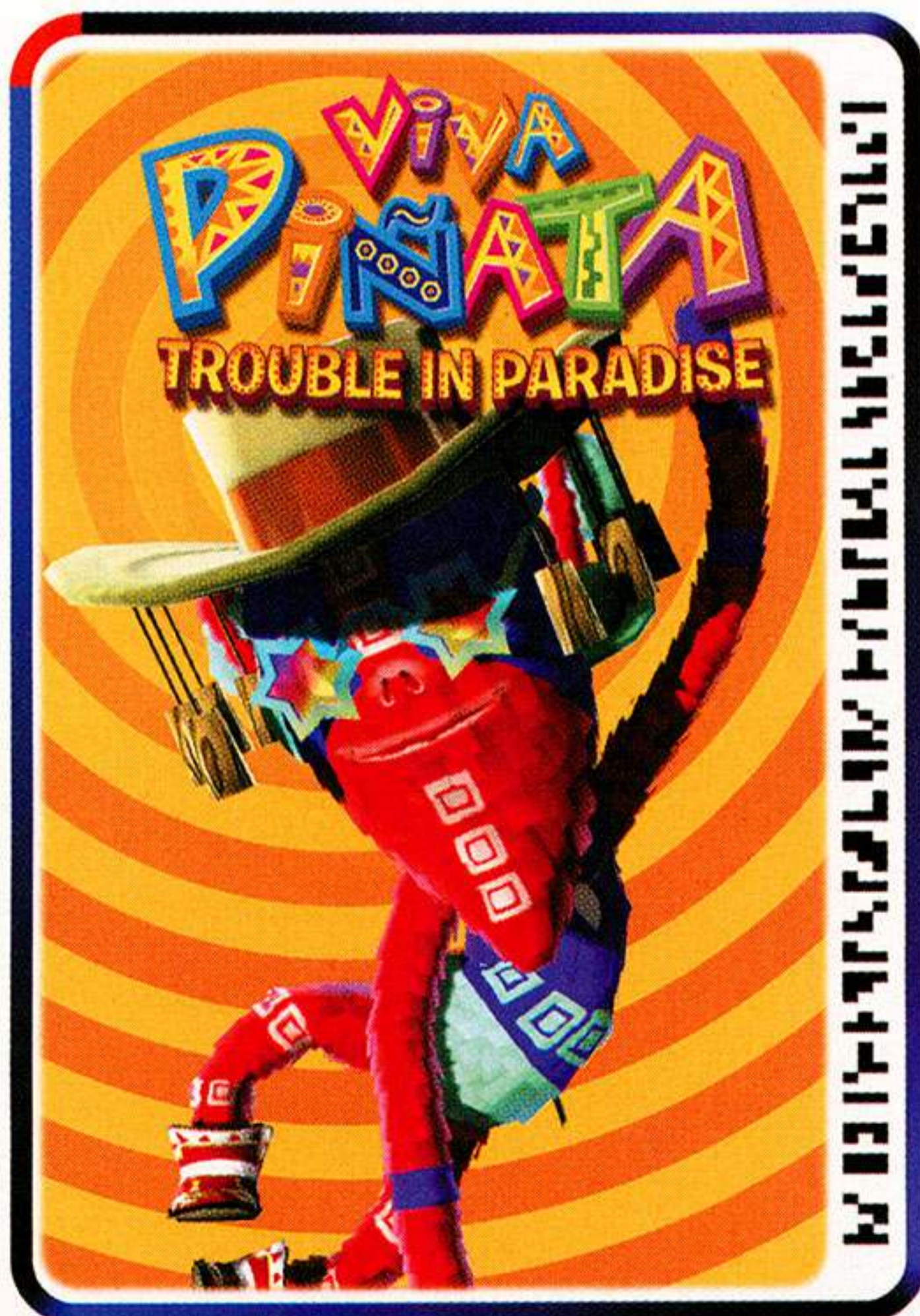
Over 100 piñata varieties, more than 30 of which are new here, ensure there's plenty of work to be done, as you'll have to cater to each one's specific needs. The game packs in more sickeningly cute piñata pals than you could possibly handle and they look better than ever. Vibrant, detailed visuals draw you in like a Moozipan to the slaughter. Unfortunately, a couple of minor design issues cut into the otherwise sweet gameplay.

GREEN THUMB

The main problem is that making your garden grow requires an insane amount of patience. Planting a simple daisy, for instance, involves at least half a dozen steps and excessive menus complicate things unnecessarily. There are some much welcome shortcuts but managing your garden takes far too much effort. Streamlining the process would have gone a long way toward making the game more enjoyable; focusing the action more on the piñatas themselves would have also helped. Thankfully, the a new "Just for Fun" mode largely gets around this issue by letting you hang out with piñatas without having to do too much work. Joining up with a buddy for some co-op gardening also alleviates some of the burden.

There are also some minor additions that attempt to sweeten the pot but they don't add

very much. The new trick stick, which allows you to teach piñatas tricks, and a wide range of toys are fun to play with, though. There's also support for the Xbox Live Vision camera which allows you to scan in special piñata cards, but it's a gimmick at best. Still, despite some irritating design elements, Trouble in Paradise is a fun game that retains the charm of the first Viva Piñata. It's sort of like trying to hit an actual piñata while wearing a blindfold—you'll be frustrated at points but it's still pretty awesome.—Tracy Erickson



Redeem the card shown above for an exclusive in-game Viva Piñata character!



FUN FACTOR



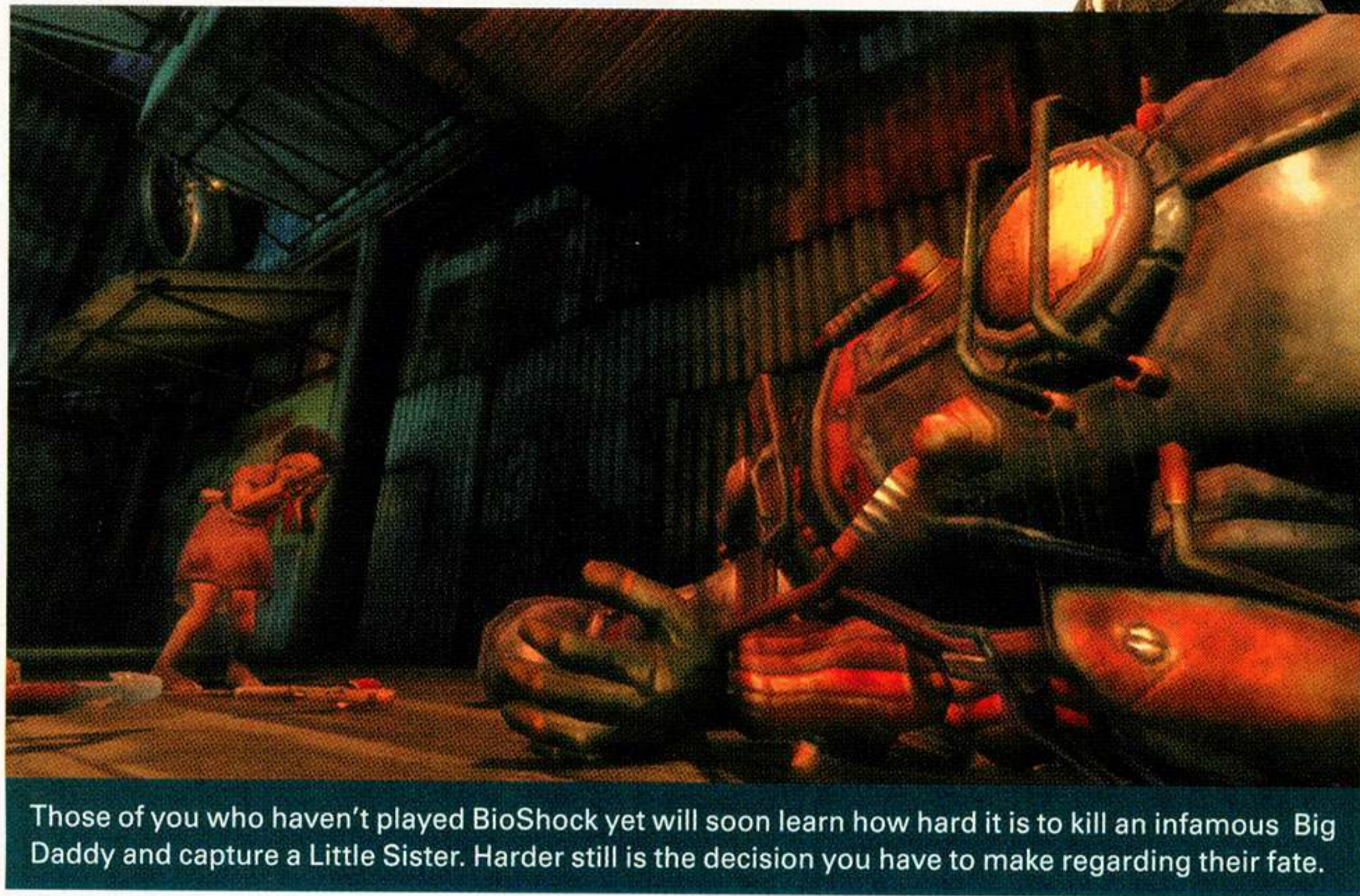
PROS: Loads of sweet new piñata; new co-op and "Just for Fun" modes; improved graphics.

CONS: Too much garden micromanagement; overly complicated menu system.

BIO SHOCK



PS3 ESRB: M ■ Developer: 2K Marin ■ Publisher: 2K Games



Those of you who haven't played BioShock yet will soon learn how hard it is to kill an infamous Big Daddy and capture a Little Sister. Harder still is the decision you have to make regarding their fate.

Novelist and philosopher Ayn Rand, whose work served as one of the inspirations for BioShock, preached that, no matter the circumstances, "A" would always equal "A." Well, it would appear that whether it's on the Xbox 360, PC, or PS3, BioShock will always be BioShock and that is a good thing indeed. Debuting on the PS3 over a year after it hit the Xbox 360, BioShock remains an engaging and utterly breathtaking experience from beginning to end and it gives PS3 owners the chance to see what all the commotion is about.

BEEN THERE, DONE THAT

I won't rehash the story of BioShock since it's been so well documented already, and I won't waste too many words telling you how awesome the game is, since it's a pretty straightforward port (it's still awesome, though). Instead, I'll focus on the extras that PS3 owners have to look forward to.

First, this port contains all of the Xbox 360 updates, so don't worry about missing out on any content like the new Plasmids and Tonics. But PS3 owners also get a brand new difficulty mode that cranks the game's toughness up to eleven. If you thought taking down a Big Daddy on Hard was challenging, wait until you go toe-to-toe with the metal behemoths in the aptly named Survivor mode with nary a Vita Chamber or First Aid Kit in sight. Thankfully, you can change difficulty levels on the fly, which is a nice touch.

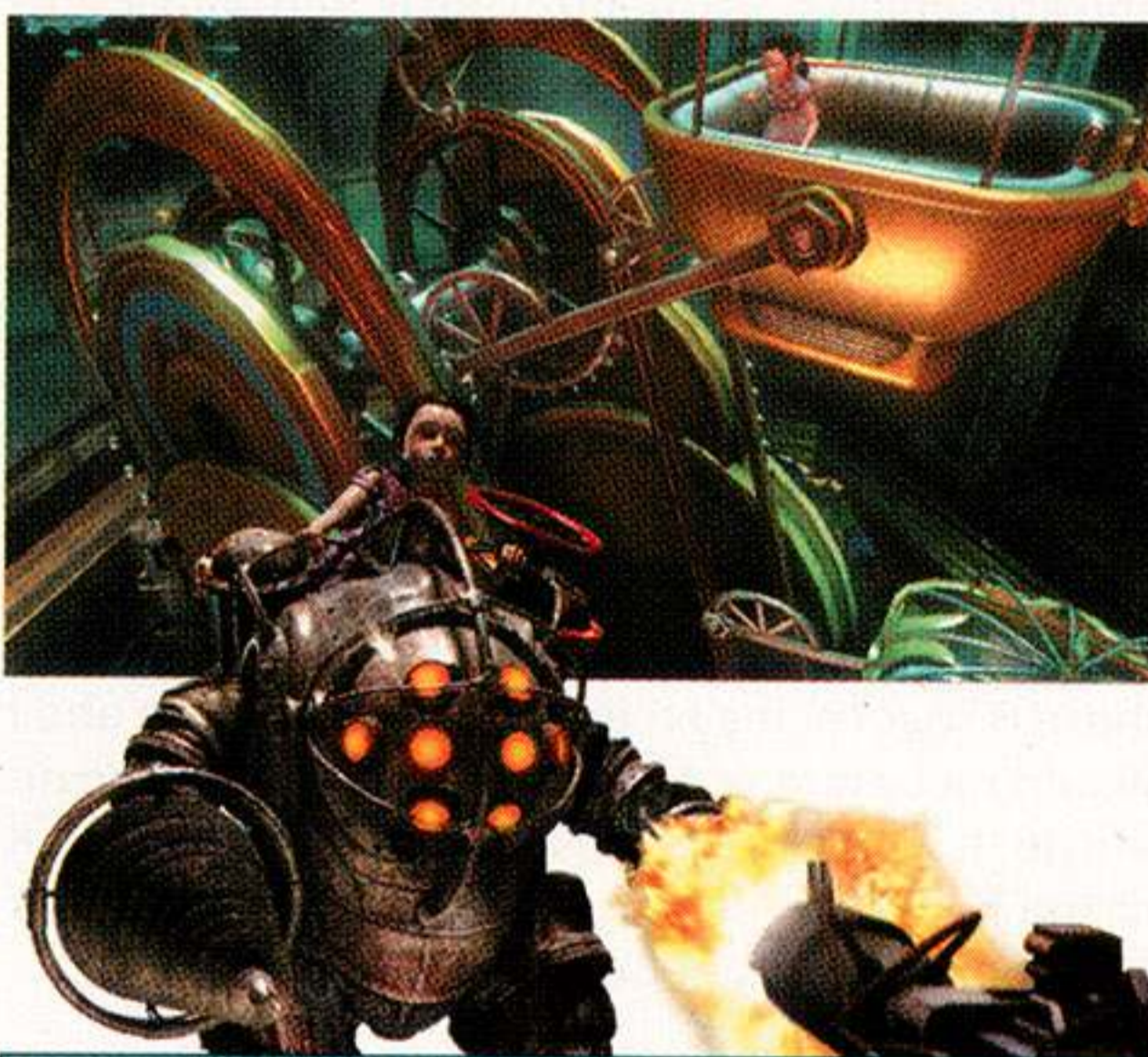
I CHOSE...RAPTURE!

Also integrated into BioShock is the PS3's new Trophy feature, which opens up a whole new



array of achievements for you hardcore gamers. Then there are the Challenge Rooms, which will be downloadable via the PlayStation Network soon; these chambers of death will allow hardened gamers the chance to tackle brand new levels featuring an array of enemies, puzzles, and obstacles.

From a presentation standpoint, BioShock feel right at home on the PS3 and the port retains the stellar sound design, gorgeous visuals, and tight controls of the previous versions. There's no doubt that BioShock is one of the finest FPS games ever made and the PS3 port is stellar through and through. I recommend it to anyone who has yet to witness the majesty of Rapture firsthand.—**Will Herring**



FUN FACTOR



PROS: The same breathtaking experience from yester-year, now on the PS3.

CONS: Nothing too new, and won't change your mind if you didn't like it the first time.

NARUTO: PATH OF THE NINJA 2

DS ESRB: E

■ Developer: Tomy Corp ■ D3Publisher/Tomy



The only ones who will like Path of the Ninja 2 are hardcore Naruto fans—it has plenty of character variety and gameplay gimmicks that you'll probably love. But if you aren't a fan, Path of the Ninja 2 isn't going to change your mind.

To its credit, Path of the Ninja 2 is a decent enough sequel that makes good use of the DS hardware. A team of four ninjas will engage in turn-based battles on a grid, using ninja tools and special DS stylus-activated ninjutsu against enemies. Your arsenal is augmented by special ninja cards which will grant you stat buffs or jutsu attacks. I also liked that your team formations can increase your attack or defense rating, and that designating a team leader gives your party a shared special ability. If you get deep enough into the game, you'll spend lots of time mixing and matching items, ninja cards, and team members to achieve that perfect balance of power, defense, and healing.

Unfortunately, once you level up enough, you can get through the game simply by mashing the "attack" button, which doesn't say much about the game's complexity. For me, the game got dull about halfway through, but fans of the first game and Naruto freaks will probably enjoy themselves until the very end.—**McKinley Noble**

FUN FACTOR



PROS: Tons of characters; lots of interesting customization options; wireless battle mode.

CONS: It probably won't appeal to you unless you're a diehard Naruto fan.



STAR OCEAN: FIRST DEPARTURE

PSP ESRB: T

Developer: Tri-Ace Publisher: Square Enix



Initially released in 1996 for the Super Famicom, the original *Star Ocean* was a groundbreaking debut for newly formed developer Tri-Ace and it became evident that established role-playing franchises such as *Final Fantasy* suddenly had a new rival to compete with. Unfortunately, U.S. gamers never got a chance to experience *Star Ocean*, a crime that's being rectified with the release of *First Departure* on the PSP. It's been 12 years since the original release, but man was it worth the wait.

One of the major distinctions between *Star Ocean* and other conventional RPGs of its time was its unique real-time battle system, a mechanic that has aged rather gracefully. Battles are fast paced and fun, allowing you to switch between any of your party members on the fly for plenty of variety, as well as giving the player the ability to assign spells or special attacks to the PSP's shoulder buttons. The biggest complaint I have with the battles is the games less-than-stellar A.I. Party members will often foolishly dash towards enemies and use costly spells on the simplest of foes. Thankfully the game gives you quite a bit of control over your characters in battle and the addition of a Tactics menu allows you to easily order your troops around.

All in all, *Star Ocean: First Departure* has aged very well, and remains a unique and innovative RPG full of life and personality. The story and some gameplay concepts are a little dated but there's also a lot of new and fresh ideas that make up for it. For both jaded role-playing veterans and newcomers alike, *Star Ocean: First Departure* is a journey that's absolutely worth embarking on.

—Will Herring

FUN FACTOR



PROS: Beautiful graphics; little to no loading times; fantastic voice acting.

CONS: Dense A.I.; story tends to drag; Rod-dick...walks...so...slow...

ROBOCALYPSE

DS ESRB: E10+

Developer: Vogster Entertainment
Publisher: Tecmo



I'm surprised there aren't more real-time strategy titles on the DS. The stylus and dual screens seem like a natural fit for the genre, but aside from a handful of titles, the RTS genre has been sort of overlooked on Nintendo's handheld. *Robocalypse* aims to fill that void with a simplistic robot combat title that more or less succeeds.

The story takes place in a factory where prototype robots and toasters are being produced—talk about an odd combination! But when military combat routines are accidentally installed into the new robots, it turns them into strategic killers. To save humanity, a factory worker named Myron creates a new batch of robots that have been implanted with the brain scans of retired World War II vets. The setup's pretty wacky but the gameplay definitely relies on tried-and-true RTS conventions.

The Campaign mode offers 17 unique missions complete with hidden objectives and a reward system for meeting specific criteria. There's also a good variety to the unit and weapon types, with each robot possessing its own set of skills and armaments. You control the action with a simple point and click interface that's complimented by an Action Flag system that greatly reduces the difficulty of commanding multiple units but it can be frustrating to search for a specific unit, especially in the heat of battle. Your bots are smart enough to make some decisions on their own, but I noticed some questionable behavior every now and again.

Despite these issues, I still liked the game's unique style and I'm happy to see the DS getting more RTS love. It's an easy game to pick up and I would recommend it to RTS lovers who game on the go. It won't make you forget about *StarCraft II* or the new *Red Alert* but it's a good way to kill a few hours. —Chelsea Cobb

FUN FACTOR



PROS: Simple and fun take on the RTS genre; good variety to missions and unit types

CONS: Questionable A.I.; selecting individual units can be difficult at times.

YGGDRA UNION: WE'LL NEVER FIGHT ALONE



PSP ESRB: T

Developer: Sting Publisher: Atlus



When *Yggdra Union* was released in 2006 for the GameBoy Advance, its intricate tactics system and engrossing story went largely unnoticed. Thankfully, developer Atlus decided to port the game for the PSP, topping off what was already a great game with an incredible amount of polish. *Yggdra Union* looks bolder, sounds better, and feels like an entirely different game than before—it's one title no PSP owner should overlook.

In *Yggdra Union*, you take the role of Princess Yggdra as she flees an evil empire that has overrun the peaceful Kingdom of Fantasia. You engage in turn-based battles using cards that dictate everything from field movement to attacks; there are also status cards that boost your unit's power and provide you with magic spells. There's a deep sense of strategy as you need to carefully manage your cards as well as take into account the advantages and disadvantages that your troops have against specific enemies and weapon types. *Yggdra Union's* card-based combat system can be intimidating, but fortunately, the difficulty curve is never too steep and there are various in-game tutorials to guide you.

I was also seriously impressed by the game's presentation. Hands down, *Yggdra Union* has some of the most memorable voice acting I've heard in any game. The cutesy art style is also charming, but it's nicely counterbalanced by a story arc that is serious and laden with tragedy, plot twists, and moral dilemmas. Worth noting is the fact that most of the artwork in the game is completely new and Atlus's efforts really show.

Although its overzealous combat system takes some getting used to, *Yggdra Union* is a rare gem that manages to stay interesting after hours and hours of playtime. In my opinion, it's a must-have for PSP owners and it is, without a doubt, one of the best titles I've played this year. —McKinley Noble

FUN FACTOR



PROS: A great port of a great game; Atlus really put a lot of effort into this one.

CONS: Some units are (still) severely unbalanced, which can cause headaches

SONIC CHRONICLES: THE DARK BROTHERHOOD

DS ESRB: E

Developer: Bioware Publisher: Sega



Let's get one thing straight right away: Sonic Chronicles is not Mass Effect Sonic, it is not Knights of the Old Republic Sonic, nor is it Baldur's Gate Sonic. While Bioware, a company with a reputation for crafting deep and complex RPG titles, developed Sonic Chronicles, it isn't as compelling as their previous efforts. Still, it's a decent enough RPG, especially for younger gamers.

HANDS ON

The Dark Brotherhood follows Sonic and his gang as they try to unravel the mystery surrounding the disappearance of Knuckles and a plot to steal the Master Emerald. The story is interesting enough and since this is an RPG, you have to pay attention to the plot, but it sort of takes a backseat to the actual gameplay.

Dark Brotherhood places a heavy emphasis on exploration, with enemy encounters sprinkled throughout. Just be warned, though, that the combat system is extremely high maintenance for a turn-based RPG. Rather than just input commands and watching the action unfold, you'll have to stay on top of the action and input tap and drag combos in order to earn special attacks and defend against enemy moves. It works fine but it's far too unforgiving: miss just one beat and your entire combo goes in the trash.

SIMPLE PLAN

The game does feature the usual RPG trappings, though, meaning you can level up your characters—in a nice touch, any character not in your immediate party still gains experience, so they don't fall behind—and hatch Chao eggs for mascots who give you elemental attacks and stat bonuses. Dark Chronicles also makes good use of the DS hardware—moving your characters around is done by simply dragging the stylus across the screen, for

instance—but the graphics aren't exactly dazzling, especially when compared to the visually sharp cut-scenes. The audio also leaves a lot to be desired, with a primitive sounding soundtrack and poor sound effects.

All in all, Sonic Chronicles: The Dark Brotherhood is a fairly easy and light RPG that I'm sure younger gamers will have a blast with. That said, the rest of us might want to wait for a Bioware's next meatier offering.—Emily Balistreri



FUN FACTOR



PROS: Fun exploration; lots of playable characters; engaging battle system.

CONS: Annoying sound effects; battle system requires a lot of your attention.

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LETTER OF THE MONTH CONTEST

GUITAR HERO II XBOX 360 BUNDLE

The Letter of the Month winner will receive the Guitar Hero II bundle for the Xbox 360. Rock on!



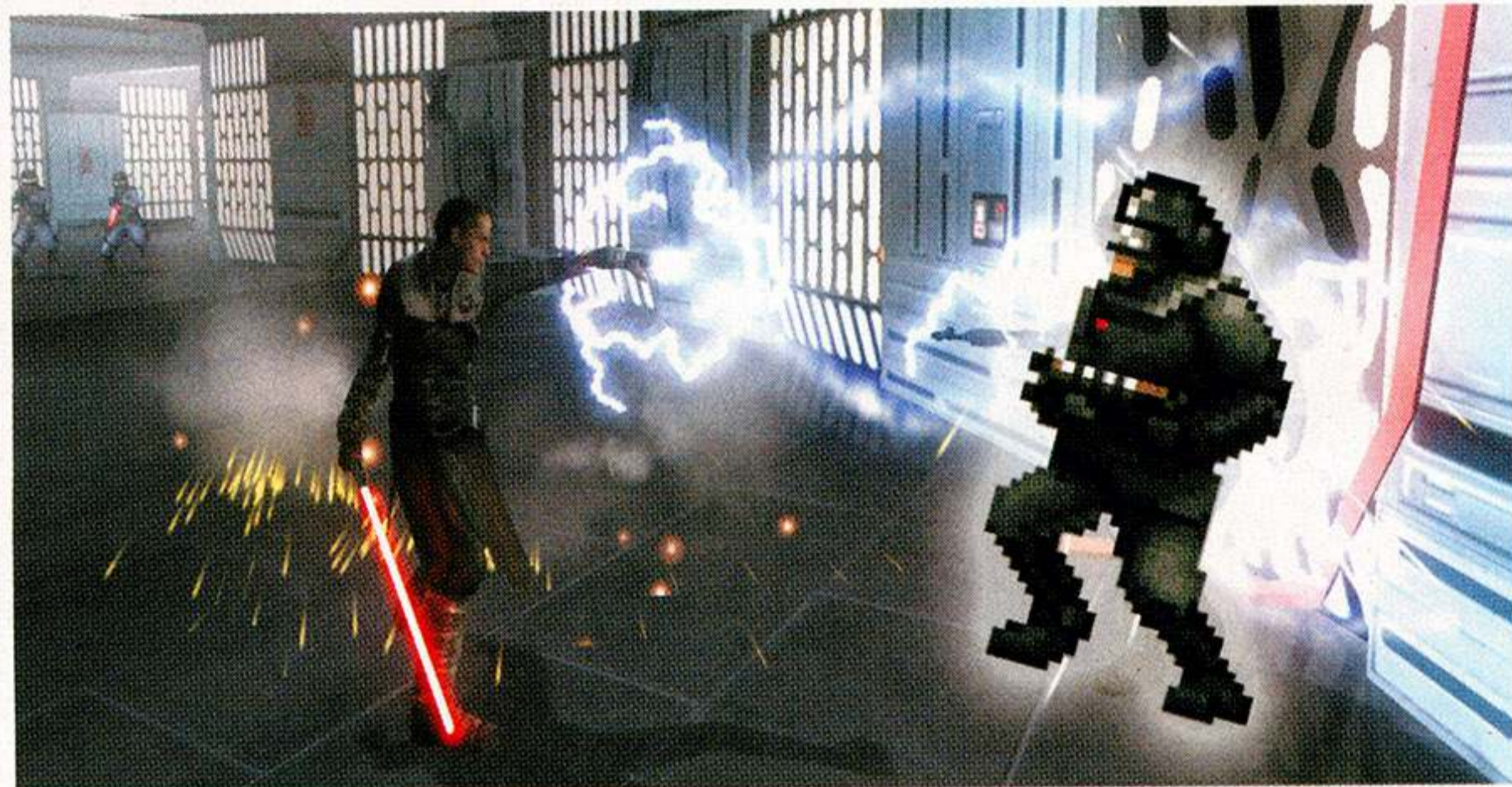
head start on the PS3. Maybe next year we'll give the nod to Xbox 360 or Wii, but I'm sure that won't diffuse the hate mail.

NICE GUYS NEVER GET THE GIRL

I like being a good person. I enjoy it. I do it in video games, too: in *Fable*, I tossed the Sword of Aeons away; in *Knights of the Old Republic 2*, I chose the Light Side, despite the more arduous path. Yes, there are less rewards, but you still feel good. However, after reading about *Fable 2* in your latest issue, it seems like it not only gives you no rewards, but it punishes you for being good! It's unfair that in exchange for saving a girl you should become horribly disfigured. What's the punishment for being bad, hmm? That NPC won't talk to you? Well, after all, you're bad. It's your nature to kill him and take what you want anyway! All I'm saying is, make the light path a bit more rewarding and make the dark path a little less so. Sometimes, heroes do want more of a reward than "thank you," whatever they may say.

Alex—Las Vegas, NV

If only you knew the power of the Dark Side, Alex. Join me, and I will complete your training!



MY GRAPHICS COULD BEAT UP YOUR GRAPHICS

Graphics. I am so tired of that word! It seems like everyone I know makes fun of me just because I have a Wii. Gaming isn't always about looks. Take *Star Wars: The Force Unleashed*, for example. I can't wait for it to come out on the Wii. It looks like a great game for the Wii's motion controls, but most people I know say it looks stupid on Wii because of (you guessed it) graphics. When will gamers learn that there is more to games than visuals?

Elijah Cooper—Nashville, TN

It's a delicate balance, ain't it? On one hand you hope developers start with enticing gameplay first and foremost—often times that's all that's needed. But on the other hand you don't want to encourage developers to skimp on graphics or audio, regardless of what the system is capable of handling. In any case, try something new instead of defending your preference for motion over graphics, Elijah. When rubbing elbows with your buddies, a simple, "You're right, I don't know why I enjoy the Wii, I just do," might get your point across better.

GIVE CREDIT WHERE CREDIT IS DUE

I noticed in several issues of *GamePro* that you only list one platform for a reviewed game, even though said game may be multiplatform and available on several other systems. Why? The only reason I can see is that you're listing the system that you tested a game on. If so, you should point that out—as I'd actually like to know that info—while also listing what other systems the games are available for. The average person doesn't follow video game news, so they often don't know what system a game is going to be on. As a magazine that covers all platforms, it's your journalistic duty to be unbiased, and give credit where it's due in all cases.

Mohan—Via Cyberspace

Thanks for your feedback, Mohan. Traditionally, we only list the platforms that we've actually reviewed to avoid confusion; if we only reviewed the Xbox 360 version, for example, we don't include the PS3 platform logo because we don't want people to think that the review covers both.

I don't agree that not doing so reflects negatively on our journalistic credibility or makes us biased in anyway, but you raise a good point and we will look into your suggestion of listing other available platforms as well.

AGREE TO DISAGREE

I was reading your July 2008 issue and saw that you did an Xbox 360 vs. PS3 exclusive games comparison. You are very wrong. First of all, you left out nine exclusive Xbox 360 games including *Dead Rising*, the first *Gears of War*, *Dead or Alive 4*, the *Project Gotham* series, *Quake 4*, *Viva Piñata*, and the almighty *Halo 3*! I did some research and found the Xbox 360 has more than 90 exclusive games, whereas the PS3 only has 70. I'm a big fan of your magazine, but you should do your homework before you publish a story.

Name withheld—Via Internet

In our defense, said feature compared upcoming games, not previously released ones. But without looking at the numbers, you are right about total Xbox 360 exclusives, which at the moment are in greater quantity, partly due to a one year



SHOVELWARE ONLY HURTS IF YOU BUY IT

Why does everyone focus on Wii shovelware, a.k.a. sloppily developed games released to make a quick buck? In my eyes, every console has its fair share of bad games, but it seems the Wii takes the brunt of the criticism these days. Why?

Hardcore—Via Internet

The Wii is more susceptible to publisher shovelware because it's the hottest selling console on the planet, that's why (much like the PS2 was last generation). But remember, sticks and stones may break your bones, but shovelware can never hurt you...so long as you never buy it. Problem solved.

SOMEWHERE A ZELDA FANBOY IS CRYING

I don't think you guys have any idea how amazing it was to have something little like a review I wrote about GTAIV published in your July 2008 issue. It's like I was immortalized. Imagine my surprise then when I opened up the August issue and saw my name yet again in *GamePro* for another reader review, *The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess*. The only problem was I have never played this game in my life and didn't write that review. I don't think it's worth printing a retraction, but I'm sure whoever wrote the review would certainly enjoy the feeling of having their name in your magazine as well.

Brandon—Via Internet

Thanks to you, Brandon, a copy editor lost his job. I hope you're happy now—have a nice day.

Smoking cigs gives you fresh breath and makes you sexy—like me!



FINAL FANTASY HATES SMOKING

I've always wondered if Final Fantasy was part of a "no smoking" campaign. One of the most annoying monsters to fight is Marlboro. And it's a little odd that his name is near identical to the tobacco company, Marlboro. Not to mention that Marlboro is known for his attack, Bad Breath, which smoking causes.

Anthony Gallo—Lake Grove, NY



I'm speechless. Perhaps Square Enix is an incognito sponsor of The Truth campaign against smoking or something. But yeah, smoking makes people smell like an ash tray. Gross!

MIXED REVIEWS AREN'T ALWAYS A BAD THING

I recently got *Blacksite: Area 51* because I loved the first game. Having enjoyed the sequel, however, I was disappointed to see some websites give the game mixed reviews, whereas *GamePro* gave it a respectable four out of five. The game has its flaws, that's for sure, but they aren't as bad as others make them out to be. I just wanted to write and tell you keep up the good work. I hope other gamers look to *GamePro* for a review of *Blacksite* so they won't get the wrong idea about it.

Zach Doyle—Mainville OH

Never let a critic make up your mind, Zach. It's important for *GamePro* and others to help gamers navigate their likes and dislikes when deciding which games to play, and to compare games with

other critically-acclaimed efforts. But ultimately you, the player, decides what to play—even if others don't share your taste.

MORE SPORTS, PLEASE!

I've been subscribing to *GamePro* longer than I can remember, and I still love the magazine. One of my favorite sections has always been the Sports Pages because that's the type of game I play most. So I was just wondering what has happened to coverage of sports games? I haven't seen a review for months. What gives?

Jeff Price—Via Internet

GamePro readers on the whole don't particularly care for sports titles outside of the bigger games like Madden, etc, it seems. In a 2008 reader poll, sports ranked dead last as the preferred genre, behind shooters, action/adventure, RPG, and other/music games, in that order. That said, I'm all for a good arcade sports title, and I'll bug my fellow editors for some more love on your behalf, Jeff.

GAMEPRO.COM POLL

Results as of September 2008

Do you pay for Xbox Live?

No. Not worth it

37%

Yes. It's the best!

44%

Don't own an Xbox 360

19%



ASK THE

GAMEGIRL



What a great year to be a gamer, am I right? Huge titles like *Grand Theft Auto IV*, *Mario Kart Wii*, and *Super Smash Bros Brawl* have already hit the shelves, and the year isn't even over! With the rest of the year to look forward to, I can't wait to get my hands on the next *Banjo-Kazooie* title, *Guitar Hero IV*, *Gears of War 2*, and *Dragon Ball Z Burst Limit*. My question is, which upcoming video games are you GameGirls anticipating the most?—Kevin



Ladyluck responds:

Of course, *Gears of War 2*. I loved the first game, and the second looks awesome. All of the screen shots and videos just make me want it more. I think the teaser trailer with the counter move for the chainsaw weapon, looks awesome. Plus being able to use bodies as a shield will also help out as well as be an interesting feature to use. And the game looks faster paced than the first *Gears*, due to the vehicles your riding on.

The other game I really want to get is *Tomb Raider Underworld*. I am a big *Tomb Raider* fan. I started on the PlayStation with *Tomb Raider*, and never gave it up. I've played both *Anniversary* and *Legend* on the Xbox 360, and they were great. I think they did an excellent job of revamping the *Tomb Raider* franchise for the newer systems. The new A.I. for the *Underworld* installment is suppose to be even better than before, creating a more difficult game play. I also think the way they implement real mythology and history into the games is a good idea. The story mode on the *Tomb Raider* series keeps me coming back for more. Plus, come on, who wouldn't love a female that kicks butt?

Glad you noticed, anon. Funny we try and focus more on actual games than anything else, eh? In any case, expect a lot more games and quarterly guides in future issues of *GamePro*.

WAITING FOR THE NEXT LEVEL...

Will Sega ever make another game console?
Shinobi Lover—Via Internet

While I loved my Genesis as much as the next guy, it's highly unlikely, if not wishful thinking, that Sega would develop more hardware. After all, the Genesis was their only commercial success. What's more, the company is doing better than ever now as a software-only publisher. But yeah, how cool would it be to have Sega release another sexy black console...



CALL OF DUTY 5 FOR Wii

I was disappointed not to see *Call of Duty 4* on Wii, but thrilled to learn that its sequel would be coming to the console. What kind of port can Wii owners expect? Spill the beans, *GamePro*!

Jonathon—Via Internet

The Wii version of *World at War* is going to offer everything the PC/Xbox 360/PS3 version of the title will, along with extra features the other versions of the title won't support, like the Wii Zapper and improved camera movement. Running on a modified CoD 4 engine, *Call of Duty: World at War* is one of the best-looking Wii games we've seen. If the gameplay can match the visuals, the Wii could finally have a FPS on par with the HD consoles.

Send your questions to the Game Girls at GameGirl.com

WILL IT BE GAMEBOY OR DS?

When will Nintendo launch a new handheld?
Matt C.—Via Internet

Good question. Noting that I'm not clairvoyant, my Spidey Sense tells me sometime in 2009, 2010 at the latest. Keep in mind that the DS is still the second (sometimes first) best-selling system on the market, so Nintendo has little incentive to release a new one right now. In any case, consider me one of several anxious gamers waiting to see what Nintendo does next in the portable space.

MORE GAMES IS ALWAYS A GOOD THING

I just wanted to say thank you for a job well done on the Fall Preview Guide (September 08). I can only guess how long it took to get that much information on that many games. Great job to everyone who worked on it.

Name withheld—The Information Superhighway

GAMEPRO + CONSOLES SITTING IN A TREE

How come you rarely cover PC and Mac games? I have a Mac and don't hear any news about the platform in your magazine, and there's little PC coverage. It would be swell if you could pay more attention to both now and then.

Seth Baetzold—Saint Paul, MN

But consoles are more fun...joking aside, Seth, we do keep the bigger PC and Mac games like *Spore* on our radar, and will continue to do so. But consoles have and still take precedence at *GamePro* headquarters.



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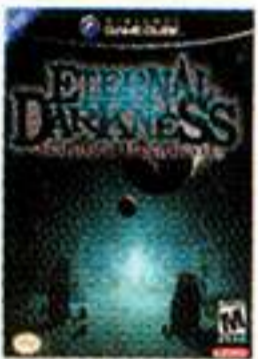


SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS

(PS2)
Bigger is indeed better in this stunning PlayStation 2 exclusive.
From GamePro, October 2005

As great as Shadow of the Colossus is, its moderate pacing and intricate boss fights won't appeal to everyone and might frustrate gamers looking for a faster fix with less cerebral combat. But having said that, Shadow of the Colossus remains an amazingly enjoyable and atypical action game worthy of any gamers collection. Hopefully, Shadow of the Colossus won't fall into the cracks of creative obscurity and suffer the lukewarm commercial fate of so many innovative titles. Do yourself a favor and give this one a try.

Fun Factor: ★★★★★



ETERNAL DARKNESS: SANITY'S REQUIEM (GC)

It's a good sign when a game opens with a quote from Edgar Allen Poe.
From GamePro, July 2002

The combat system is great, and Silicon Knights has implemented a wicked targeting system that enables you to lop off specific body parts of your enemies... If you're hankering for a rich story and solid gameplay with a hallucinogenic twist, then Eternal Darkness will not disappoint, as even survival/horror vets will find enough unique elements in it worth flipping for.

Fun Factor: ★★★★★

WRITE TO US:

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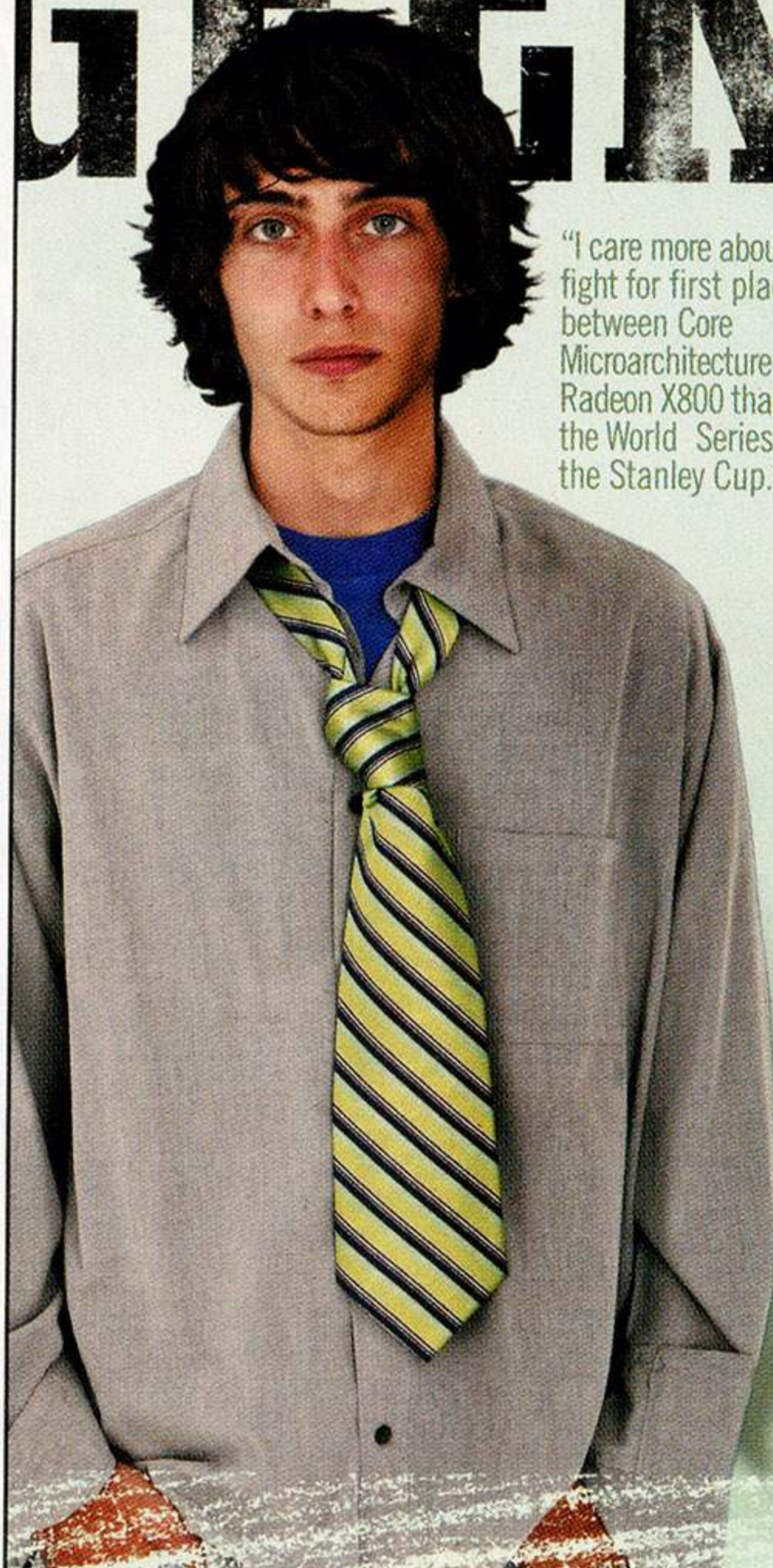
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"I care more about the fight for first place between Core Microarchitecture vs. Radeon X800 than the World Series or the Stanley Cup."

ART ATTACK!
This month's winner receives

Dance Dance Revolution Universe



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PICK of the Month!

Jayson Daniel Hotchkiss
of Portland, OR
pnutink.deviantart.com



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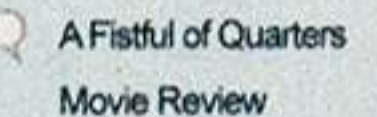
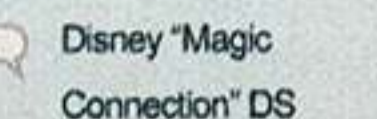
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Gran Turismo 5



Sony on Tuesday said the precursor to Gran Turismo 5 will be available on Blu-ray and as a download from the PlayStation Store.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

- Video Game News**
- Nintendo reveals its top selling Wii, DS games
 - Gran Turismo 5 Prologue coming April 17 to PS3
 - Guinness World Records: Gamer's Edition comes Mar. 11
 - Rumors suggest new 120GB, DualShock 3 PS3; Sony declines comment
 - Nintendo to introduce Virtual Console demos on Wii
 - In stores this week: Turok, Bomberman Land

Xbox 360	PS3	Xbox 360
		
Soul Calibur IV	Street Fighter IV	Iron Man

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game title platform

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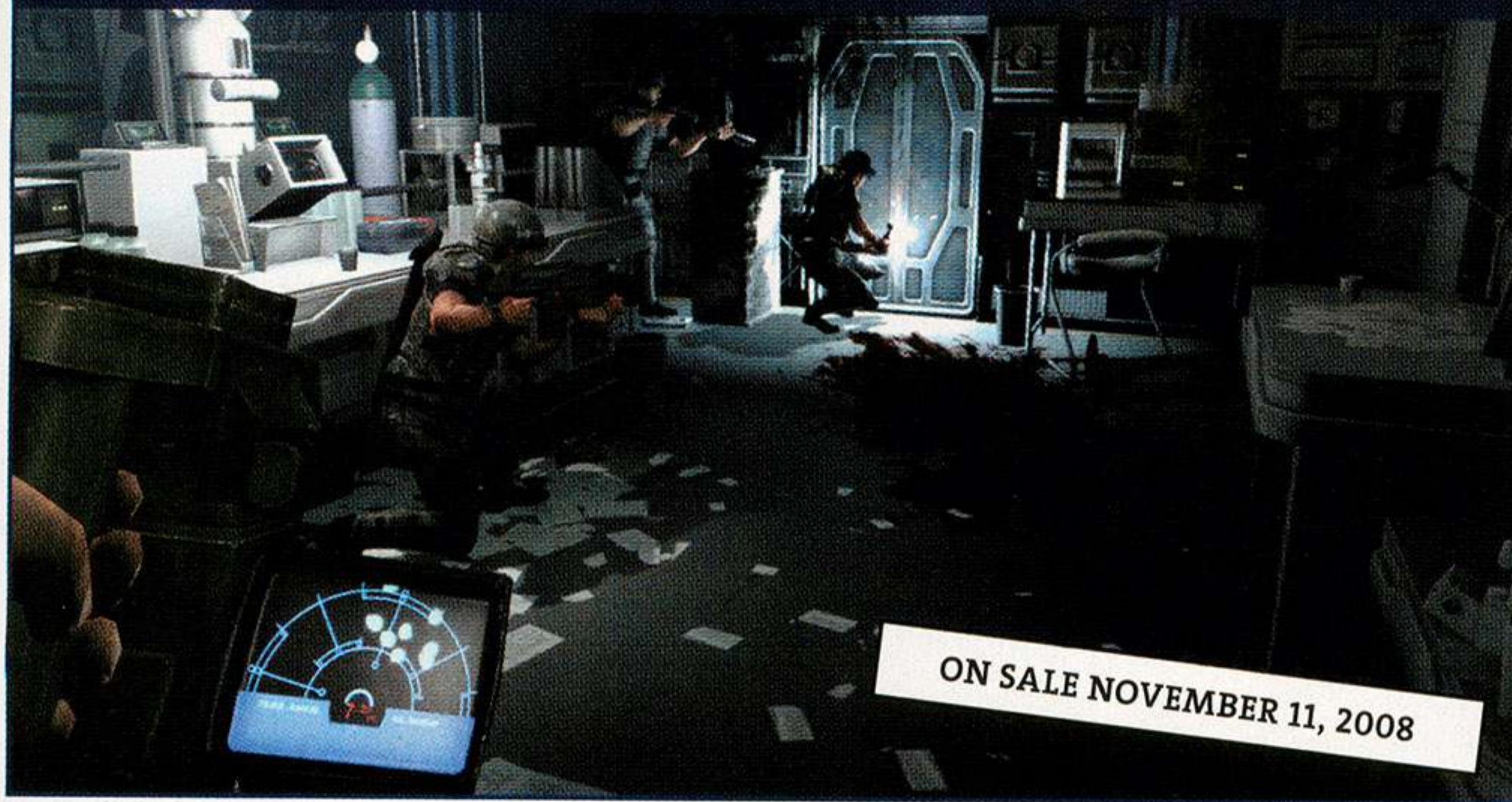
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 - Nintendo Shares
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NEXT MONTH—ALIENS: COLONIAL MARINES



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Activision..... 20-21 CALLOFDUTY.COM	ONDCP 15 ABOVETHEINFLUENCE.COM
Energizer 45 ENERGIZER.COM/ADVANCEDLITHIUM	Rockstar Games..... 63 ROCKSTARGAMES.COM/MIDNIGHTCLUBLA
Full Sail University 105 FULLSAIL.EDU	Sega..... 33 SONICCHRONICLES.COM
Gamecock..... 89 MUSHROOMMEN.COM	Sony..... 2-3, 19, 61 US.PLAYSTATION.COM
GameFly..... 98-99, 101 GAMEFLY.COM	Tecmo 71, 73 TECMOGAMES.COM
Intel 95 ABS.COM	THQ C2, 1, 8-11 THQ.COM
Jamster..... 87 JAMSTER.COM	U.S. Army..... 31 GOARMY.COM
Majesco 75 AWAYSHUFFLEDUNGEON.COM	U.S. Navy 97 NAVY.COM
Microsoft..... 4-5, 67, 79 XBOX.COM	UAT..... 109 UAT.EDU
Milk 29 BODYBYMILK.COM	Ubi Soft 22-23, 40-41 UBI.COM
Namco Bandai Games..... 47, 49, 51 NAMCOBANDAIGAMES.COM	Valvoline 35 VALVOLINE.COM/SYNPOWER
Nexon C3, C4 NEXON.NET	Wizards of the Coast 37-39 HEREIRULE.COM
Nyko 24 NYKO.COM	Wrigley..... 17 WRIGLEY.COM

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MORTAL KOMBAT vs. DC UNIVERSE

PS3, XBOX 360

In a surprise twist, Mortal Kombat vs. DC Universe will be the first game in the series not to receive a "Mature" rating, likely due to the fact that comic conglomerate DC is not cool with their indestructible superheroes getting their spines ripped out in classic MK fashion. According to Ed Boon, co-creator of the Mortal Kombat games, all MK fighters and DC villains will have fatalities (though not as gory as before), while DC superheroes will have brutalities. It's an interesting topic that has many fans astir; however, the anticipation continues to build as new characters such as DC's Joker, Green Lantern, Wonder Woman and MK's Jax, Kitana, and Liu Kang are announced.

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