GAMEINFORMER

THE WORLD'S #1 COMPUTER & VIDEO GAME MAGAZINE

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a terrible
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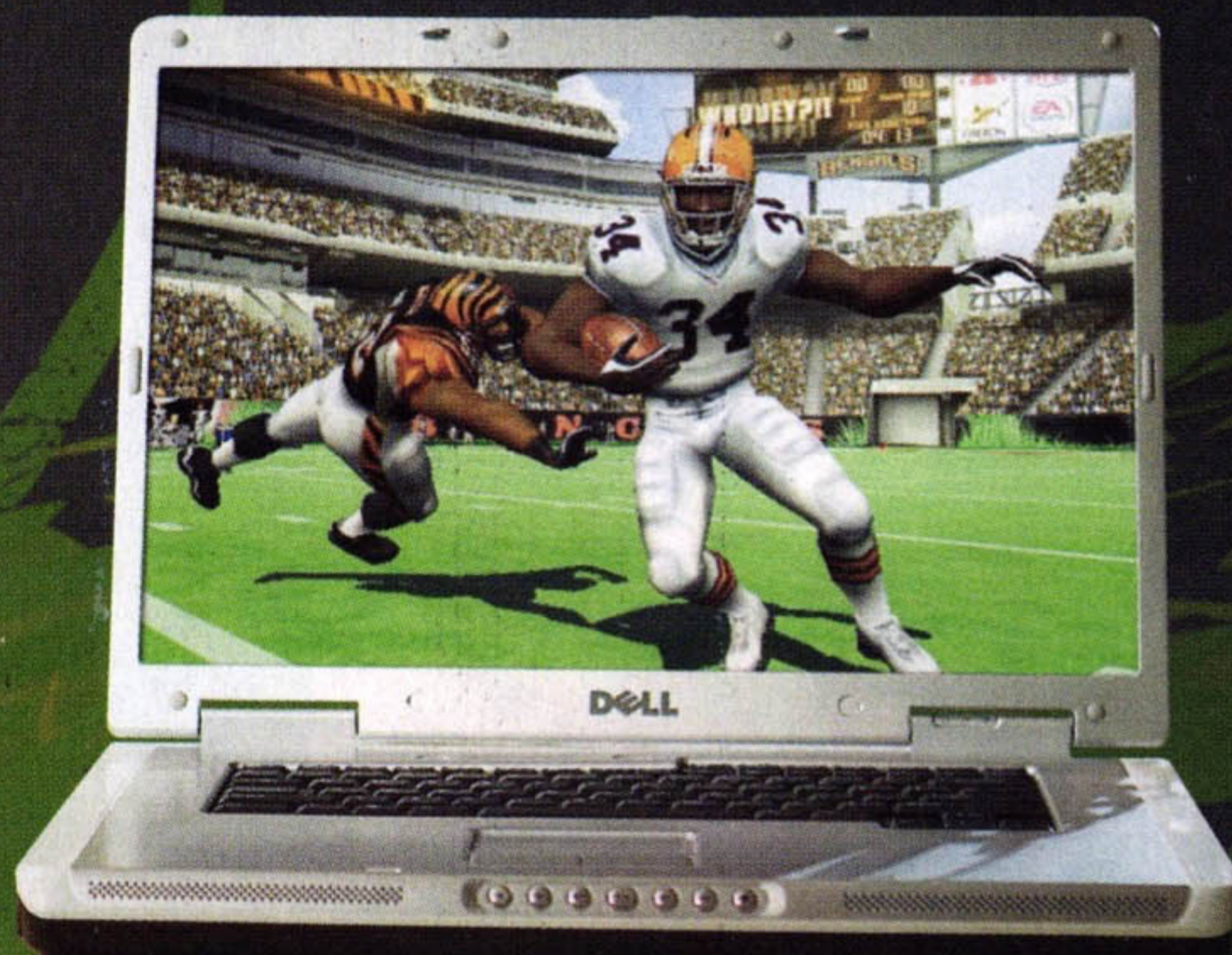
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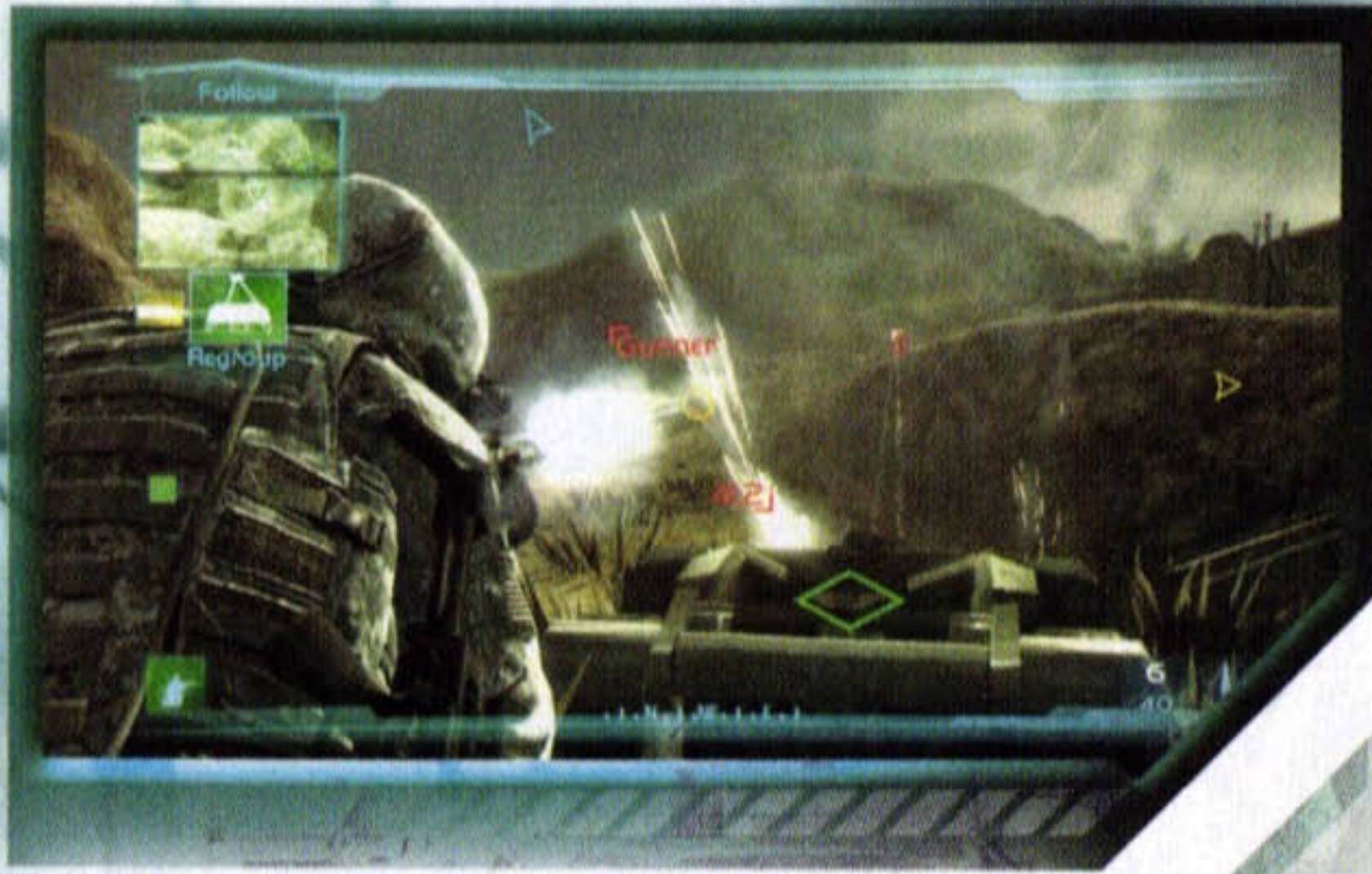
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The "Dude Raider" Issue

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STAFF

People Who Actually Get Paid To Play Video Games

DEAR MICROSOFT POINTS: YOU ARE STUPID

ANDY McNAMARA
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Ok, Microsoft, enough is enough. I've endured your crazy Microsoft Point system on Xbox Live long enough. I must now demand that you change this annoying tactic that is basically a giant scam to milk gamers for an extra buck or two.

How do I know this? Because I have seen this scam before. It's perhaps one of the biggest rip-offs of all time, perpetrated and perfected by one of the world's ultimate evils: the carnie. Oh yes, I'm talking about the crazy dude who operates rides and tries to scam you with a rigged bottle game.

Don't act like you don't know what I'm talking about. We have all been in a "beverage" line at a carnival or street party to eventually discover that the stand doesn't actually take any money; it takes tickets. Which, of course, means you aren't leaving this event without some worthless tickets and a lighter wallet, as the tickets never match up to the dollar amount.

I'll do the carnie math for you if you haven't figured it out already. Beverages are 8 tickets, but you can only buy tickets in packs of 20. Now replace tickets with Microsoft Points, and the picture becomes clear. Microsoft wants gamers to get stuck with points that you have no idea how to spend, simply because they think gamers are there to be taken advantage of. Why else would Xbox Live use this annoying and antiquated system? You sure don't see Microsoft selling Vista with Microsoft Points. They sell that with cold, hard currency from a little place known as the United States of America. It's called the dollar, and…amazingly enough…it's traded all across the globe. Not Microsoft Points. Not Final Fantasy gil. Not World of Warcraft gold. The U.S.-freaking-dollar.
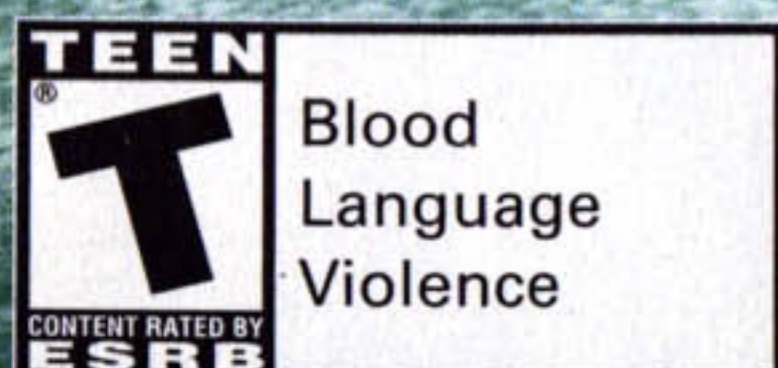
Sony offers online purchases on the PlayStation 3 in this "state-of-the-art" way. Hell, even the Xbox Live website sells all its merchandise using this "revolutionary system." It's almost like the whole world uses currency except for Microsoft's Xbox Live service and carnies. Don't be a carnie, Microsoft. Lose the Microsoft Points and let me just make purchases with my credit card for the stuff I want without you getting your free cash from my extra points.

Cheers,

PS: Nintendo's method is better, but still just as annoying…of course, if you converted to the dollar I would probably have to send a friend code to use it.

Andy >> andy@gameinformer.com
Handle: The Game Hombre **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Platform, Driving, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** Penn & Teller's BS On Showtime, Heroes, The Shins, Arcade Fire **Dislikes:** Bugged Encounters In World Of Warcraft (I Could Have Sworn We Just Killed The Shade Of Aran) **Current Favorite Games:** World Of Warcraft: The Burning Crusade, God Of War II, Guitar Hero II (Xbox 360), Guitar Hero, Crackdown

Reiner >> reiner@gameinformer.com
Handle: The Raging Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Action, First-Person Shooters, Strategy, Sports, Fighting **Interests:** The Chicago Cubs Winning The 2007 World Series (It Happened In A Simulated Season In MLB 07: The Show, So It Will Happen In Real Life!), Xbox 360 Achievement Rewards **Dislikes:** Knowing Most Of My Time In 2008 Will Be Spent In Halo 3 Or GTA 4, Sidecar Gamers (Watching Someone Play A Game Doesn't Mean That You Played It), All St. Louis Cardinals Fans **Current Favorite Games:** God Of War II, The Elder Scrolls IV: Shivering Isles, MLB 07: The Show, Ratchet & Clank: Size Matters

Matt >> matt@gameinformer.com
Handle: The Original Gamer **Expertise:** First-Person Shooters, Action/Platform, Action/Adventure, Action/Sports **Interests:** Bob Dylan's Theme Time Radio Hour, Deerhoof – Friend Opportunity, The Illusionist, Alex Ross Artwork In Kingdom Come, Qigong **Dislikes:** Artistic Dry Spells, Bands That Want You To Sign Contracts To Play Bar Shows, Weird Weather, Bookers That Don't Return Calls, Studio 60's Slow Slide Into Crap **Current Favorite Games:** NBA Street Homecourt, Guitar Hero II (Xbox 360), Ratchet & Clank: Size Matters, Burnout Dominator, The Warriors (PSP), Gears Of War

Kato >> kato@gameinformer.com
Handle: The Game Katana **Expertise:** Sports, Racing, Action/Adventure, Action/Platform **Interests:** Hammond B3 Emulators (Heavy Sound W/O The Heavy Lifting), Van Halen, Damn The Torpedoes, The Cary Tennis Files, Pho King, Tyra Tirades **Dislikes:** NHL Owners And Brass Running The League Into The Ground, The Super Mario Bros. Super Show!, The Classless Mexican National Soccer Team **Current Favorite Games:** Dark Tower (Board Game), MotorStorm, UEFA's Ultimate Mode, Saboteur (It's The Bob Ross Of Video Games), Brain Buster Puzzle Pak

Adam >> adam@gameinformer.com
Handle: The Alpha Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Strategy, First-Person Shooters, Fighting **Interests:** Exploring Everything Burning Crusade Has To Offer, Anansi Boys By Neil Gaiman, Abbey Road, Nick Cave And The Bad Seeds, Having A Clean House **Dislikes:** Spending My Saturday Cleaning The House, Fergie, Having Stress Dreams Waiting For Baseball To Start, Cats Who Jump In Front Of My Monitor And Cause A Wipe To An Easy Boss **Current Favorite Games:** World Of Warcraft: The Burning Crusade, Supreme Commander, MLB 07: The Show, Brain Age, Diner Dash

Joe >> joe@gameinformer.com
Handle: The Real American Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Adventure, Action, Strategy, Puzzle **Interests:** Tom Waits' Orphans, Finally Starting 24, Psionics, Ghost Rider (Or At Least Nicolas Cage And Sam Elliot), Sylar, Dwight's Continued Susceptibility To Pranks On The Office **Dislikes:** Plans, Fancy Snob Movies (Like The Departed And Children Of Men), Great Games Without Real Endings, Anything Miller Likes **Current Favorite Games:** God Of War II, Final Fantasy VI Advance, World Of Warcraft: The Burning Crusade, The Elder Scrolls IV: Shivering Isles

Miller >> miller@gameinformer.com
Handle: The Once And Future Gamer **Expertise:** RPGs, Action/Adventure, Fighting, Platform, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** Mrs. Featherbottom In Arrested Development, The Santa Monica Pier, The Luna Brothers' Girls, New Sofas **Dislikes:** Looming Legal Entanglements, Getting Used To New Sofas, People Who Hate On Something Just Because It's Well-Liked By Others **Current Favorite Games:** Uncharted: Drake's Fortune, Final Fantasy XII, Rainbow Six Vegas, The Legend Of Zelda: Twilight Princess, Vanguard: Saga Of Heroes, flOw

Bertz >> mattbertz@gameinformer.com
Handle: Lord Gamington III **Expertise:** First-Person Shooters, Sports, Action, RPGs, Strategy **Interests:** The Art Of The Cheesesteak, Pan's Labyrinth, The Tossers' Agony, Chicago Cubs Preseason Hype (The Billy Goat Curse Lives Suckas!) **Dislikes:** Moss To Packers Rumors (Don't Do It, Randy!), Outlandish HBO DVD Prices, Joe's Weak Movie Knowledge (Who Hasn't Seen Goonies? I Mean, Really!), People Who Hate On The Temple Of Doom **Current Favorite Games:** The Elder Scrolls IV: Shivering Isles, GRAW 2, FIFA 07, Supreme Commander, Tapper

Ben >> ben@gameinformer.com
Handle: Your Friendly Neighborhood Gamer **Expertise:** Action/Adventure, Action/RPGs, Platform, Survival Horror, First-Person Shooters **Interests:** Getting Some Lunch Today (Maybe A Sandwich, Maybe A Burrito, We'll See), Indiana Jones (Those Were Two Great Films) **Dislikes:** This Office's Poor Taste In Indiana Jones Films, Credit Card Bills (Why Is Magic Money So Easy To Use?), Waking Up To Cat Puke **Current Favorite Games:** Legend Of Zelda: Twilight Princess, Castlevania: Portrait Of Ruin, The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion, Guitar Hero II, SSX Blur

Bryan >> bryan@gameinformer.com
Handle: The Gamer's Advocate **Expertise:** Action/Adventure, RPGs, Survival Horror, First-Person Shooters, Rhythm **Interests:** Girls By The Luna Bros., Idiocracy, Veronica Mars, The His Dark Materials Trilogy, The Losers, Lily Allen (And I Don't Care Who Knows It) **Dislikes:** "Finalizing," Breaking Down To Buy A Wii LAN Adaptor, Accidentally Attending Goth/Fetish Shows **Current Favorite Games:** Saboteur, Guitar Hero II On Xbox 360, The Legend Of Zelda: Twilight Princess, Yoshi's Island DS

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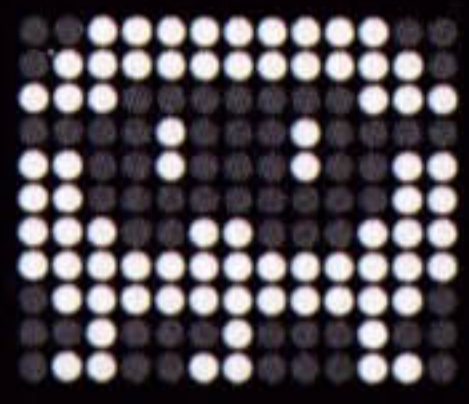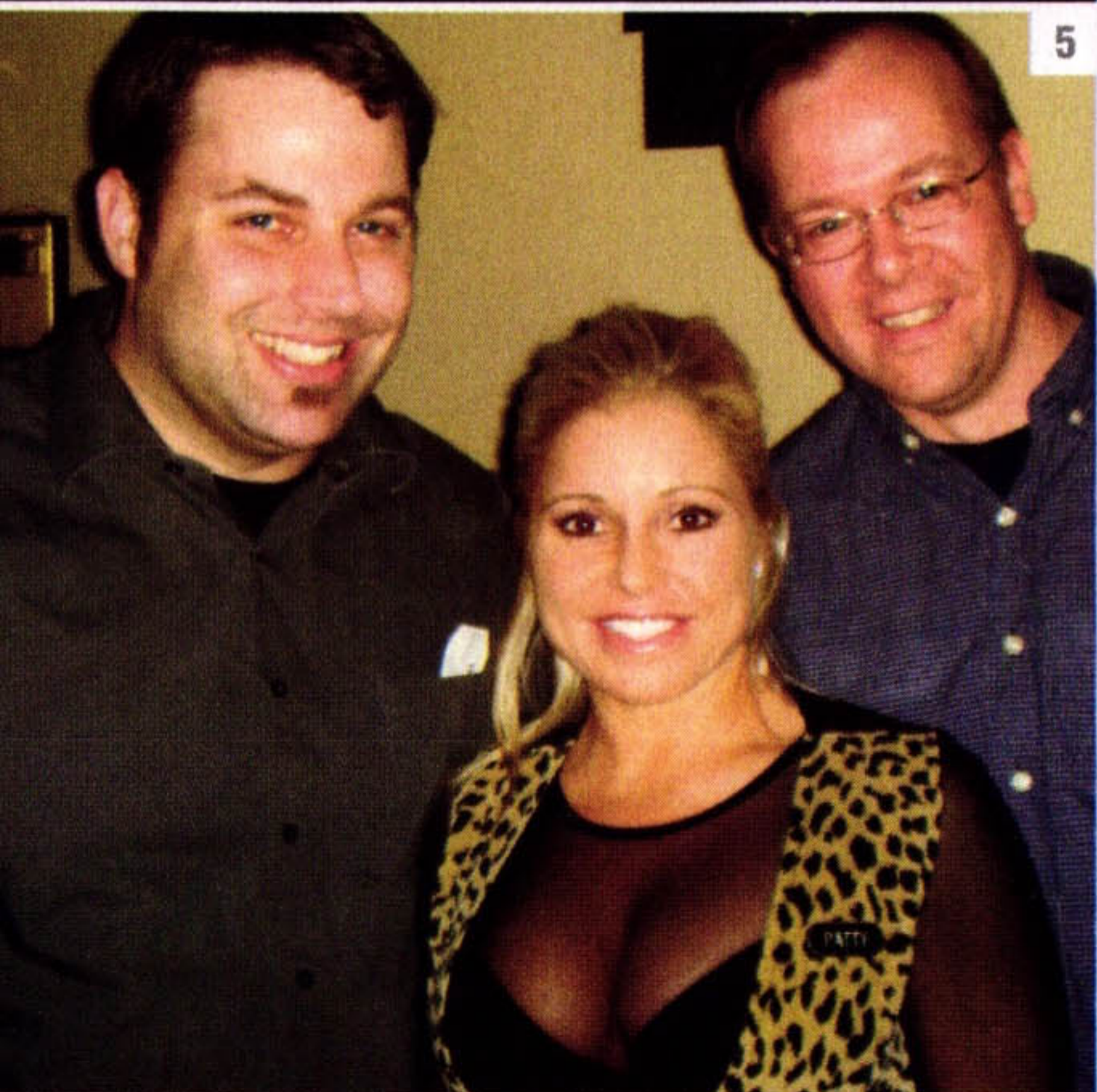
1 GI Online's steez machine Nick Ahrens carves up some…um…tasty…grinds…and uh…gets hella leX it at X Games while filming some rad snowskating! (Sorry Nick, we don't know extreme slang! But you've still got mad skills!) **2** Midway's Reilly Brennan, David Zucker, and Billy politic in Sin City **3** More X Games fun! William Borm, the son of GI's director of marketing Rob Borm, meets Olympic snowboarder Shaun White. For those of you that don't know, Shaun White is sort of like Nick Ahrens, except he has stupid hair and sucks at Flash and HTML **4** Epic Games' CliffyB and Mark Rein celebrate their big night at the AIAS Awards, where Gears of War won everything except "Best Children's Game" **5** Kohnke Communication's Sean Kauppinen and *OXM's* Rob Smith hang with Patty from the Hard Rock Casino **6** Andy Mac and Billy bookend some video game power players: Scarface producer Pete Wanat, *Newsweek's* N'Gai Croal, and Spike TV's Geoff Keighley…oh, and Matt **7** Billy learns the art of guitar heroics from the man himself, Harmonix's Alex Rigopulos, at the Green Valley Ranch in Las Vegas **8** Matt hangs with some Sony luminaries, from right to left Ted Regulski (not Regulsky!), Ryan Bowling, and God of War II director Cory Barlog

GRINDING GEARS

In your Gears of War cover story in issue 146, you talk about a giant, multi-story beast called the Brumak. Well, I just beat Gears of War, and I fought no Brumak at all.

Matthew Walukiewicz
via aol.com

I want to know who was it over at Epic that decided to remove the Brumak from gameplay segments and only reserve them for two quick cutscenes. Ever since I read the article about Gears in your magazine I was psyched to fight the awesome Brumak; it was one of the reasons I bought a 360. Why did Epic take it out?

Christopher Diaz
via yahoo.com

■ In game development, things don't always go according to plan. Our cover story was written about a year and a half before Gears of War released, and in that time Epic probably decided that it didn't have the time/resources to implement the Brumak as originally intended. In a recent interview with Game Informer Online, designer CliffyB admitted "it would have been nice to fight that creature that was in all the trailers. That would have been good." However, gamers who felt cheated can hope that the towering Brumak will play a larger role in Gears of War's inevitable sequel. Unfortunately, Baird probably will, too.

SHOCKING REVELATION

Every month it's the same old thing. You talk about how you like this game or that. You say how much you really like a certain system. Or another. Just face it – you're biased towards video games!

Erin Hoffman
St Paul, MN

You got us. We'd like to take this opportunity to come clean: We like games. A lot. And yes, we even like some games more than others. We are currently taking no steps to fix the problem.

HUGE ZELDA FAN, EH?

I've noticed that several pictures in your magazine have recently depicted Link holding the Master Sword in his right hand, and his shield in his left. I'm a huge Zelda fan, and I just wanted to inform the Game Informers that this is an error, because Link is actually left-handed!

Chris Spencer
Lamesa, TX

■ If we were petty and small, we could point out that this was not an error on our part. Nintendo deliberately changed Link into a right-hander for the Wii release of Twilight Princess, anticipating that most gamers would hold the Wii remote (thereby controlling the sword swings) with their right hands. Link was changed back into a lefty for the GameCube version, though. Not knowing this would be an embarrassment for any self-professed Zelda fan, which is why we're taking the moral high road and not making a big deal out of it. Man, we are so good at handling delicate matters!

GALACTIC LOVE

I have a question about Rogue Galaxy. You guys said that it was a great game. You even gave it a 9 out of 10. But you didn't even put it in your Top 50 games of 2006 list. Some games that only scored in the 8s made it on! Show a little love to the space pirates!

Anonymous
Via aol.com

■ Are you saying we don't love space pirates? That's a dangerous accusation to level at a bunch of nerds, mysterious reader. Here's the truth: It wouldn't have been accurate to include Rogue Galaxy in our Top 50 of 2006 because it released on January 30, 2007. Don't count ol' Jaster Rogue out just yet; we'll give the game another round of props when the Top 50 Games of 2007 rolls around...unless there are 50 games that score 9.25 or higher this year. In that unlikely case, you wouldn't even care about Rogue Galaxy anymore – your head will have certainly exploded from pure gaming bliss.

ALL THINGS IN MODERATION

Some psychologists with nothing better to do are claiming that addictions to video games are ruining friendships, marriages, and even getting people fired! That's complete bull. People need to get it straight: Video games are not a problem, and if you hate them, then you obviously don't play them.

Michael Morales
via yahoo.com

■ Sorry to extinguish your outrage, but these findings really don't sound that unreasonable. If you play games compulsively and neglect your familial, social, and professional responsibilities, those areas of your life are going to suffer. Surprise, surprise. Of course, when that happens, you should own up to the responsibility instead of blaming electronics – but no one is even saying the games are at fault here. It is just a simple cause/effect relationship, not an attempt to destroy the foundations of the industry. It's great that you want to defend video games, but that shouldn't include opposing every theory that doesn't say "games are totally awesome for everyone all the time and as much as possible."

-2 POINT CONVERSION

I really enjoyed your article on the decline of EA Sports in issue 166. It is about time someone called them out for it. However, I don't think you emphasized enough what a complete rip-off the next-generation titles have been. The biggest example has got to be NCAA Football. It didn't have as many teams, stadiums, or features as the current-gen versions. Is making us pay more for less a good way to show you care about the customer?

EA Sports doesn't get it. The representative's

PLATFORM PERJURY

I just received issue 167, and in the preview for Mercenaries 2 you list the game's platform as Xbox 360. I always thought this was exclusive to PS3. Has that changed?

Larry Foreman
Via hotmail.com

■ Yes, it has. We didn't know that last month, though. We mistakenly listed Mercenaries 2 as a 360 title; at the time it was PS3 only. Since then, publisher EA has officially confirmed what we all suspected: Pandemic's destructive adventure is going multiplatform. Given the widespread success the first game enjoyed on multiple consoles, this is probably a smart move. It also means that more gamers will know what it's like to be a Swede with a mohawk...an illuminating life lesson for anyone.

statement in your article basically means that they only care about sales, not quality. EA's exclusive deals have proven that they don't have to try as hard. Football fans are going to buy Madden because it is their only option, not because they like Madden anymore. I've loved Madden and NCAA for years, but I feel EA has turned its back on me.

They say it is irresponsible to only go by review scores. I say it is irresponsible to just go by the numbers. In the end, we'll all see what we already know. EA does care. They care about money, and that's about it.

Jack Fairchilds
Via aim.com

■ **Thank you for your thoughts, Jack. For those people who don't understand why sports gamers give EA a hard time, this letter does a great job of summing up several of the major concerns and complaints. Here's one thing to keep in mind, however: Even though the review scores for some EA Sports titles have been in decline, they still don't dip into the range of being downright bad games (except NBA Live 07). As a corporation, EA certainly cares about profits, but that doesn't mean that the execs are sitting in vast underground lairs, stroking evil cats, and planning ways to torture gamers. With a few exceptions, they're still releasing some pretty good stuff.**

UNPLUGGED

I just found out that there was a wireless controller for the original Nintendo! Do you guys remember it? How did it work? Good? Bad? I must know more of this fascinating thing – I thought the PSone was the first console that had wireless controllers.

Vic Tenorio
Via yahoo.com

■ **We remember it, all right. The NES Remote Controller was made by Acclaim, though it did carry the official Nintendo Seal of Assurance. From a practical standpoint, it worked just like a regular control pad, and utilized infrared sensors to function at a range of about 30 feet. However, it lacked many of the conveniences of modern wireless gaming. Because it used infrared, it had to be constantly aimed at a receiver above your TV. If you happened to put your feet up on the table and obstruct the beam, the signal would cut out. It also required four AAA batteries that never lasted as long as you wanted. If you were surprised that a system as old as the NES used this technology, prepare yourself: There was a wireless controller for the Atari, too. Did we just blow your mind?**

READER ART

APRIL WINNER!
WESTON STANDRIDGE
This is a sculpture of Revolver Ocelot...as an ocelot. If we could grow moustaches like that, we'd quit our jobs and become cowboys

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

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Reader Art Contest
724 1st St. N.,
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Mpls, MN 55401

SABRINA SMITH
If you have a lit fuse coming out of your head, your existence is short and bleak. This one's for you, Bob-omb!
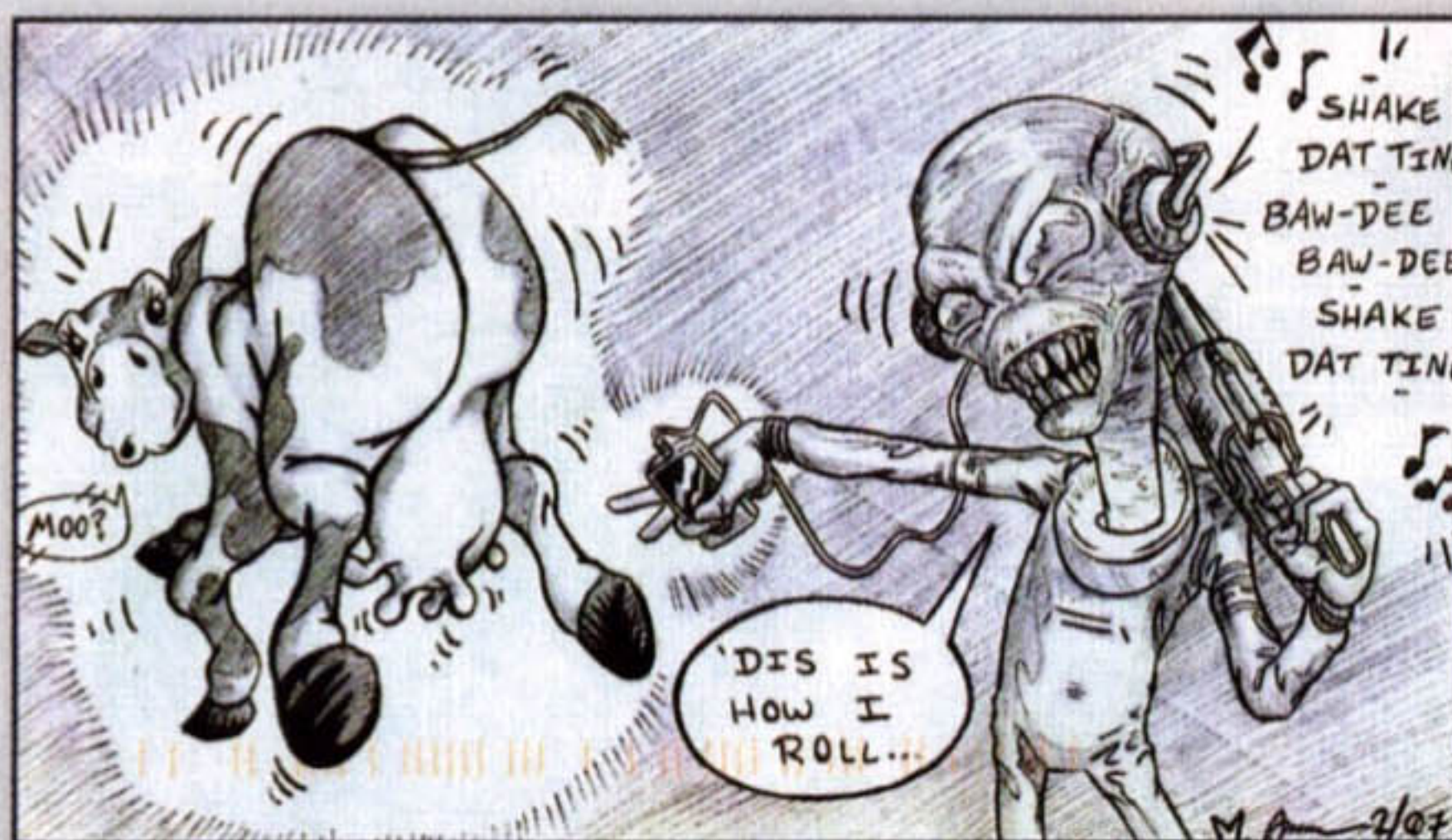
MIKE ASUNUMA
Umm...

CINDY LIMON
This wins the "most feminine art" award. Not a single male in sight!

CARRIE MUNFORD
Game Informer brand controllers: guaranteed to bring your games to life and break your TV

VICKY KAO
We didn't even know Mario had a car! We thought he just rode around on lame stuff like clouds, shoes, and public transportation

XBOX 360

THE RUMORS ARE ALL COMING TRUE

Microsoft plans to release a new Xbox 360 with a larger 120GB hard drive in late April. The new 360 model will retail for approximately $479 and come with an HDMI output and an HDMI cable. The updated 360 sports a sexy all-black color scheme that includes black accessories, which will also be sold separately.

Given the amount of downloadable content on Xbox Live Marketplace – including both standard-and high-definition movies and television shows – space is at a premium on some 360 owners' hard drives. Last month, Microsoft announced the addition of support for Internet Protocol TV (IPTV) to the 360's feature set, allowing your console to double as a digital video recorder similar to TiVo for those who sign on for the service. Thankfully, the 120GB HDD will be available on its own for those who strictly need the space for under $200.

THE XBOX 360 REBORN

LARGER HARD DRIVE ON THE WAY

At the time of this writing, Game Informer was unaware of exactly how or if gamers can transfer data from their old hard drives to the new, larger drive. As we explained in the last issue, Xbox Live Marketplace items are available for re-download under the same Gamertag. However, this does not address how the new hard drive will handle preexisting game saves.

While the new 360 shores up the system's hard drive size problems, it does not include HD-DVD playback. According to a source at Microsoft, high-definition movie playback is being withheld from the 360 because the "format's not proven." Despite the fact that it was first to market, the HD-DVD format is being outsold by competitor Blu-ray. The PlayStation 3 comes with a Blu-ray player as standard, while Microsoft is selling an add-on HD-DVD player for $199.99.

GI OPINION

It's a shame we all bought the supposed "premium" Xbox 360 already, but the extra space is very welcome for multimedia purposes. HDMI isn't too huge, but at least it'll give Sony one less PS3 stat to brag about. As far as the price tag for 120GB goes, what a rip-off! In two minutes online, I found a 500GB PC hard drive for around the same price. Plus, when you add in the price of an HD-DVD drive to this black box, you're looking at $680. Suddenly the PS3 doesn't seem so overpriced.—BRYAN

the top 10 videogame twists

You know that moment when a game turns your world upside down? You are just playing along and enjoying yourself, then everything changes. The floor drops out from under you and it feels like someone drop kicked you in the gut with a pair of steel-toed Doc Martens. Some people may call them plot twists, but they are really tricks that developers play on you, the gamer. This month we look at 10 of the biggest ones we're still feeling the sting from.

1 Metroid

You played this engaging sci-fi maze game for weeks just trying to figure out how to get past that stupid pterodactyl. When you finally finished the game, you found out that the awesome bounty hunter dude you played as wasn't a dude. This was *The Crying Game* moment of video gaming, but in this case, it was totally sweet instead of stab-yourself-in-the-eye disturbing.
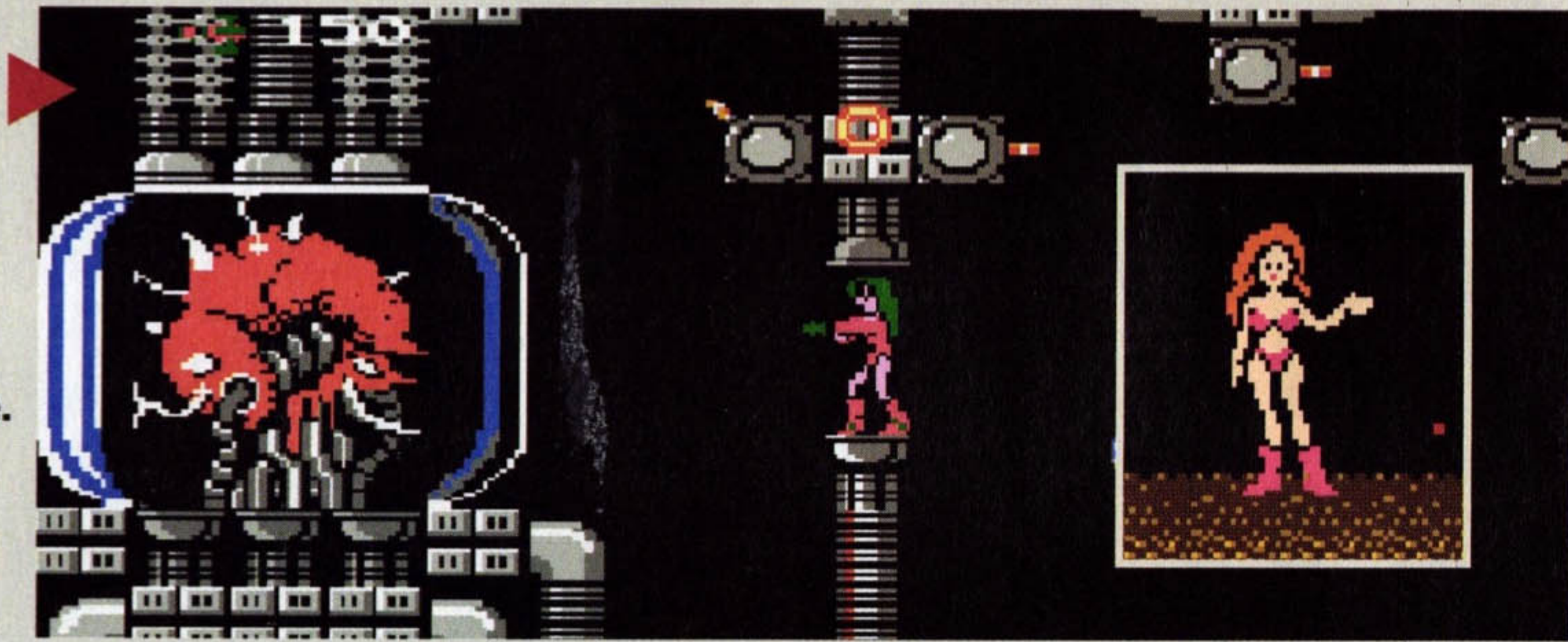
2 Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic

You woke up in the middle of a battle with amnesia (of course), then ended up with a ragtag group of strangers on a mission to hunt down the evil Darth Malak. You knew that Malak was once the apprentice of Darth Revan, a master Sith who disappeared a year ago in battle. Suddenly, you remembered something else. You were Revan! What's more, the Jedi Council knew all along. There's a little voice in your head that says "Kill them all." Can you hear it?

3 Metal Gear Solid 2

From Big Boss being Snake's nemesis in the first Metal Gear to Eva being a Chinese double agent in MSG 3, we could fill this whole page with Metal Gear twists alone. But the moment Metal Gear is still best known for is that point a few hours into MGS 2 when you find out that series standby – the lovable anti-hero Snake – isn't the main protagonist. This decision is still hotly debated by fans, but watching Snake through someone else's eyes only furthered his badass mythos.

4 God of War

You spend most of the game channeling Kratos' rage into destroying his opponents. But, after several hours you begin to wonder why this guy is so pissed off. Is whatever crawled up his butt really worth all this hassle anyway? Then you find out that the god Ares not only tricked Kratos into killing his own family, but that their ashes have also been bonded to his skin. In that moment, you understand. It's enough to make a guy want to…well…kill a god.

5 Jak 3

Naughty Dog had been building this up over the course of three games. The Precursors were an advanced race responsible for much of the planet's technology. It was just a backdrop to the story about Jak and his friend Daxter, who'd been tragically turned into an Ottsel. Who knew these two things were related; the Precursors were actually Ottsels themselves. This was a twist that not only tied off the series neatly, it pulled it off with Naughty Dog's signature brand of twisted humor.

6 Chrono Cross

Lynx was shadowy, mysterious, and one of the oppressed Demi-humans. He had thwarted your attempts to retrieve the frozen flame, and had your companion Kid poisoned. He even killed Kid's sister. Lynx was everything a bad guy should be. He was the bad guy! Yet, halfway through the game you end up switching places with him. You become Lynx. This twist was not only surprising, it changed how the game played, as you had to recruit new allies after losing all your friends.

7 Eternal Darkness: Sanity's Requiem

Not every game twist has to involve a story. We're not even sure we could provide a detailed synopsis of Eternal Darkness' story if we were being held at gunpoint. However, we could readily list off a dozen ways this game pulled pranks on us. Our favorite has to be the time it pretended to erase our game save. Don't worry, we got it back pretty good when we put red Kool-aid in its showerhead.

8 Final Fantasy X

Final Fantasy X has one of the most moving ending sequences in video game history. The game's 40-plus hours had all led up to the climactic fight with Sin – FF X's big bad guy. Yeah, we all saw that fight coming from a mile away, but maybe that is why learning that his father Jecht was Sin steamrolled us so well. We expected Tidus to find some resolution with his old man; we didn't suspect that it would mean Tidus would have to kill him.

9 Soul Reaver 2

The Soul Reaver series has more twists than a soup opera. Thankfully it's about vampires (and not the wussy Anne Rice variety, either) therefore infinitely more masculine. We'd been surprised more than once by Raziel's crazy hijinks, but when we found out that he wasn't just the Soul Reaver in a metaphorical sense – that he was actually destined to become the soul of the blade – our brains popped out of the back of our heads. Seriously.

10 Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath

His name? No one knew his name. The town folk called him The Stranger, and this Eastwood-esque bounty hunter was collecting bounties to pay for an operation he adamantly needed. But there was one bounty The Stranger mysteriously wouldn't take. He wouldn't find and kill the endangered and rarely-seen Steef. No one knew why, until we learned that The Stranger had four legs and was the last of his kind: a Steef.

news **UNLIMITED ENABLED**

THE EXIT INTERVIEW
GI TALKS WITH DOUG LOWENSTEIN

After his presentation at the D.I.C.E. Summit, Game Informer had a chance to talk to ESA founder and outgoing president Doug Lowenstein, who outlined some of the ongoing challenges facing the industry.
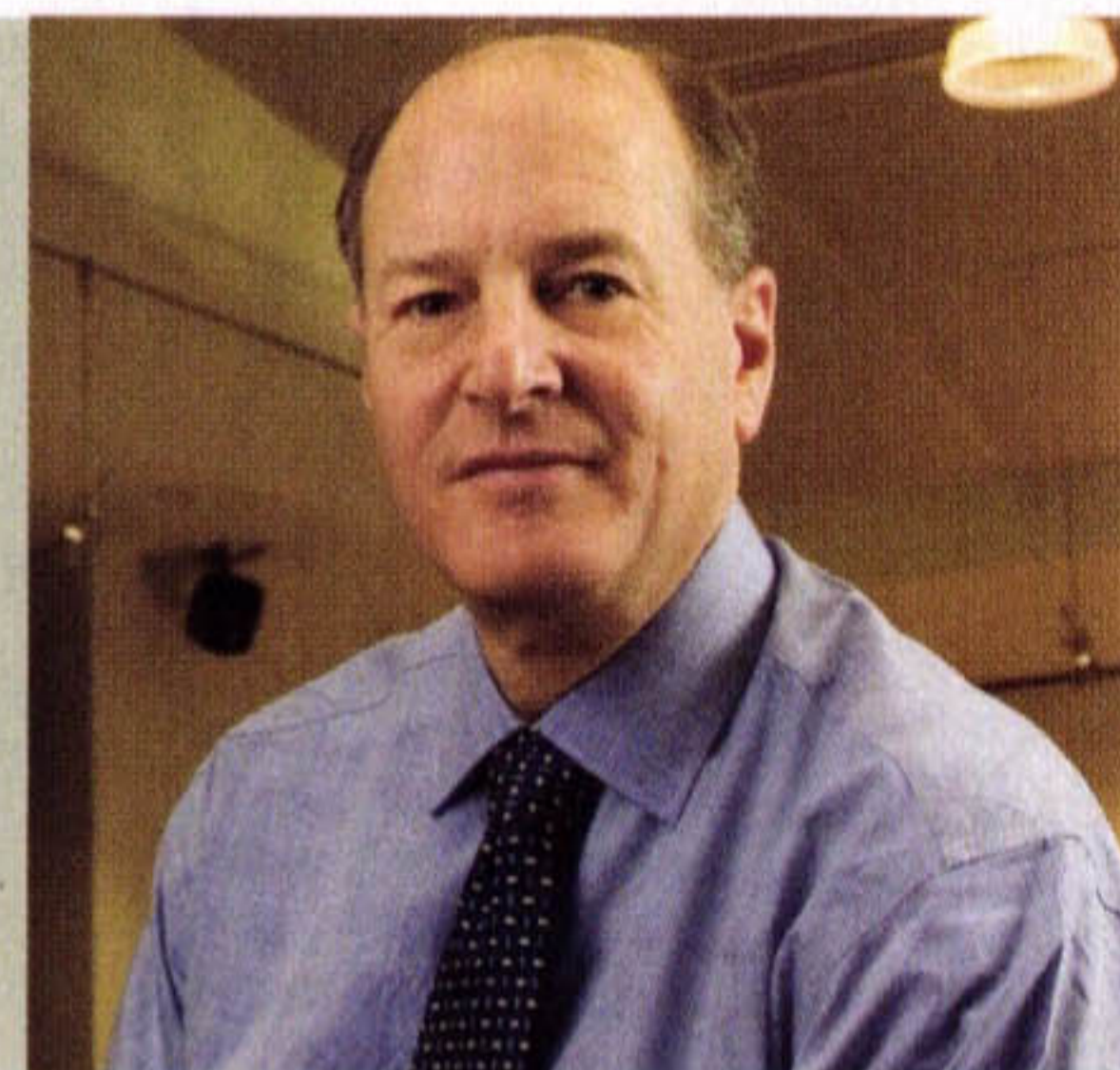
Why did you decide now was the time to leave the ESA?

It's very simple. I was given an extraordinary opportunity to start a new trade association for the private equity industry, which is perhaps the most significant player in global finance today, and the opportunity to build and create something for that industry at this stage in my life and career. To do another start-up was really irresistible. I was very content at the ESA. I loved what I did at the ESA, and I was not looking to leave the ESA.

What's your biggest accomplishment?

I think it's hard to single out one thing as much as it is to say that over the time that I was there, the industry has emerged as an industry that is taken very seriously. It has more credibility, more visibility, and more influence than it did when we started, so I think that's important. There are a lot of specific things in the course of the 12 years that I'm very proud about, but in sort of a 10,000 foot look-down, when we started ESA this was not an industry that was on the map. This was not an industry that had any respect, and it didn't have any visibility, and it certainly didn't have any political profile. I think today we have all of that. That doesn't mean that the job is done. That doesn't mean that everybody thinks of us as highly as we think of ourselves. But we're certainly a lot stronger than when we started this thing.

One of the highest profile things you've done is combating all the laws trying to impinge on the First Amendment rights of video games. Is this always going to be a battle the ESA has to fight?

This is evolutionary, I've said this on many occasions. By the year 2010, there will be 75 million Americans between the ages of 10 and 30, which will be more people between 10 and 30 than there are Baby Boomers. Baby Boomers still have the leverage of power and influence in this country, and that's the generation that hasn't grown up with interactivity as part of their lives. As the post-Baby Boom generation assumes those seats of power, their tolerance and acceptance of video games will make these sustained attacks a thing of the past. In 20 years we will have a president that will have grown up playing Grand Theft Auto. That's inevitable.

In your D.I.C.E. presentation you mentioned some of your pet peeves, and you chastised the industry for not being political enough, expecting the ESA to do the dirty work for them. Does not having Political Action Committees involved in fundraising hurt the industry?

It's absolutely hurting us. Let me be clear: Trade associations [like the ESA] ought to be doing the dirty work – that's why we're there. My point was: You can't win a war without an army. We have a lot of sunshine patriots, as Thomas Payne used to call them back in another era. It's easy to be a champion of the First Amendment when everybody else is on your side. But the fact is that a lot more can be done.

Look, I think it would be great if people called their congressmen, if they went down and asked for meetings with their local state legislatures. If you're a developer, you call and say, "I'd like to invite you to come down to my studio, meet my team, and expose you to what video games are all about." I think that would be great. That's what other industries do. Look, I understand not everybody has the time or inclination to do that, but all I'm talking about is, raise your voice. Get in the game, so to speak. Be part of the battle here because we need you. For anybody who has their livelihood tied in any way, shape, or form to the growth and success of the game industry not to do something politically to raise their voice, is a complete and utter inexcusable cop-out.

You also talked about your hope that games would try to touch on social or political issues or more meaningful stories.

Look, I'm not a creative person. I'm not a developer. I understand that nobody wants to make games that are politically interesting and don't sell anything. But I just gotta believe that given some of the robust subjects out there…take global warming. There are so many parts to that, and I don't believe that it's not possible to make a compelling interactive game experience which forces users – in an entertaining way – to confront the problems and challenges of global warming. Maybe I'm naïve. Maybe that's why I'm a political guy and not a creative guy. Maybe it's not possible. I hope it didn't come out that I think the industry has failed in this regard. I was really trying to express something aspirational. I hope we can do that.

But it goes to this question of being taken seriously, because why does a politician look at the film industry, and take it and say, "Even though I know there are some awful movies, but I can look at it and be supportive of the industry?" Well, it's because they see movies that really move them in ways and force them to think about it and confront problems in ways that games don't get. It's a different medium – I understand that. Storytelling is not yet the central part of games. Character development – those kinds of things are all a part of the evolution of games. But I gotta believe that somehow or other we get there. And when

we do I hope we make games that speak in the same way, because people will take them more seriously if they do.

We talked to a lot of publishers and developers, and everyone seems to be unsure of what's going on with E3 in terms of participation and format. Is the new E3 on track?

Yes. People are booking suites and meeting rooms. That process is going along quite rapidly. Companies are fully supportive. The invitation list is almost finalized. The intent of this new event is not to make everyone in the industry happy and not to find a home for everybody. It is designed for a very different, focused purpose. We want it to succeed, but I can absolutely guarantee you that there are things about it that won't work out that you and anyone else, without looking very hard, will say after it's all over, "That really sucked," or "What the hell were they thinking?!" because it's a first year event. But I think we got the right structure for this event, and I think we got the right business plan for this event, and I think it will execute very well. It's totally on track.

It's not going to be the scale of what everybody remembers E3 like, that's another thing to realize. By four of five months in front of [the old] E3, that was part of the problem. Entire companies were re-vectoring their whole business operations to plan what we were going to do at E3. That was a huge part of what this albatross of E3 was. E3 was determining how people were running their business. It was completely the wrong way to operate.

What different challenges will your successor face?

It's hard to predict the future. Certainly in the short term I think that everything we've been working on remains front and center for this industry. The content issue is not disappearing, at least, in the next year or two. I do believe that we'll make headway on the front. There's a lot going on in the global trading area that will affect the video game industry, and that's all in front of us, the anti-piracy issues.

Certainly one of things that we understand as we move away from an E3-type event, which was a huge catalyst for media coverage in the industry, was how do we replicate that and also spread it over a longer period of time? Those I think are all the challenges that my successor is going to have. I hope the person comes in and recognizes all the good that we've done and all the positive things we've done, and also comes in with a fresh set of eyes and ears and says, "Lowenstein's done it this way for twelve-and-a-half years, let's try something different."

THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY

When You Want Your News Categorized With A Sarcastic Editorial Spin

QUOTE

"WHEN WE FIRST THOUGHT ABOUT DOING IT, WE WERE TOLD, 'THE PSP HAS POTENTIAL. IT WILL DO WELL'"

– Castlevania director Koji Igarashi's backhanded slam about how he got roped into working on the PSP

GOOD

Electronic Arts wins developer Pandemic's "Who Wants to Print Money?" contest by being named the publisher for the studio's Mercenaries 2 game – which has now been confirmed for the Xbox 360 and PC, as well as the PS3. The first Mercenaries title was a huge success for publisher LucasArts, which must have been outbid for the sequel. Geez. No wonder they call EA the Death Star. It's got more money than even George Lucas!

GOOD

Metal Gear's Hideo Kojima recently declared that he'd like to make a 360 game, saying, "I do have a strong interest in creating something for the Xbox 360. In the U.S. and Europe, it is selling, and I think it will sell a lot this year as well. I'm a fan of Gears of War as well, it's very interesting." In other Kojima/Metal Gear news, Sony Pictures has announced that it has secured the rights to the long-mentioned Metal Gear Solid movie.

GOOD

Speaking to Canadian paper the *Edmonton Sun*, Dan Aykroyd revealed that he will be reprising his role as Dr. Raymond Stanz for an upcoming Ghostbusters video game. Universal Studios has the rights to the game, and Vivendi Games' parent company Vivendi SA has a major stake in the studio, so could we see Vivendi's licensed-games guru Pete Wanat on the project? We hope so, and trust us – you do too. For more on Wanat and his thoughts on licensed games, check out our feature in issue 166.

UGLY

From the minds that brought you the PS3 launch comes this latest deft marketing move. In an attempt to advertise a new trailer for the Gran Turismo HD download, Sony's PSP video download site ran an add using a picture – not from the demo – but from rival racer Project Gotham Racing 3.

UGLY

During its third-quarter fiscal report, Sony admitted that worldwide shipping numbers for the PSP handheld were down by 72 percent from last year. Only 1.76 million were sent out to stores.
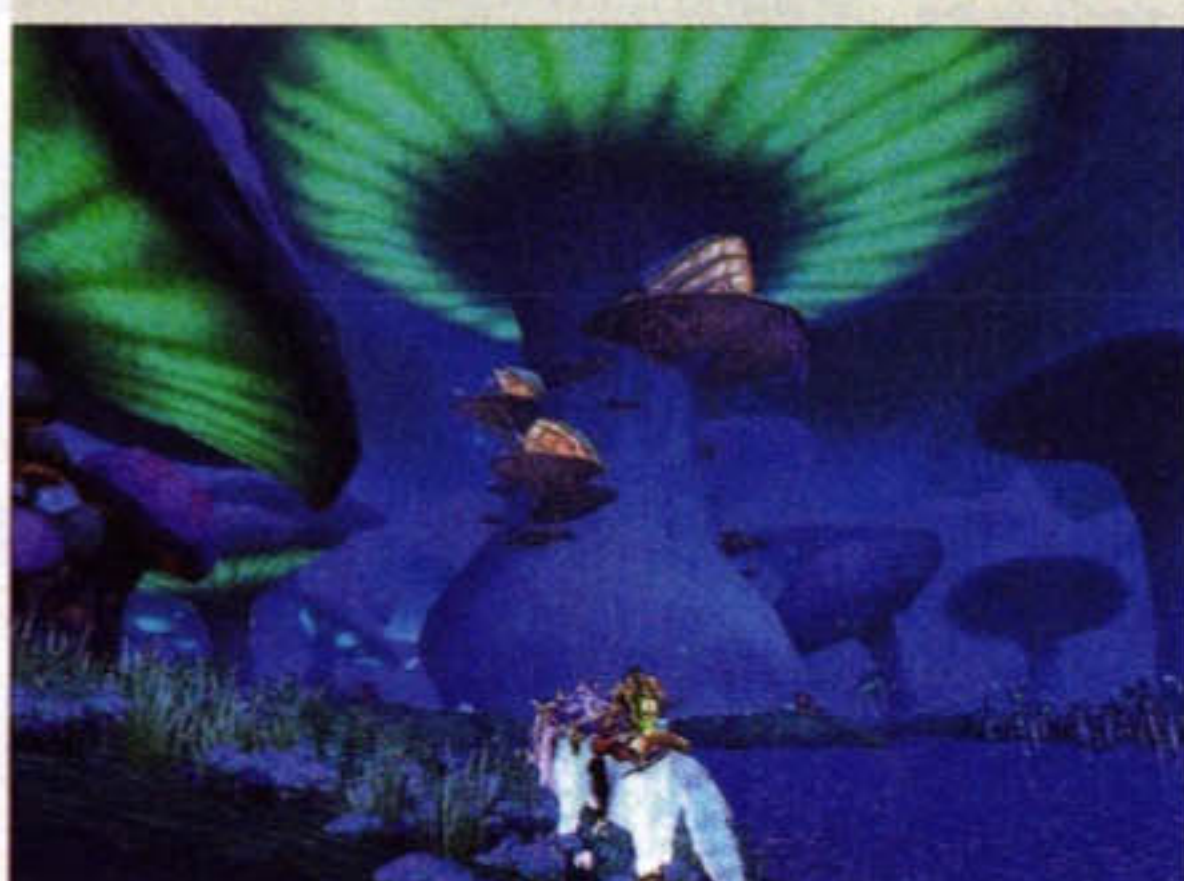
WOW

In its first 24 hours on the market in North America and Europe, World of Warcraft: The Burning Crusade sold almost 2.4 million copies – making it the fastest-selling PC game in both territories. Does the game even have enough mailboxes to accommodate that many dancing naked Blood Elves?

A HOW-TO GUIDE

TO PERSONALIZING YOUR XBOX 360

One of the best kept secrets in gaming is the media sharing on Xbox 360. Once you know the tricks of the trade, you'll be able to personalize the 360's look and sounds to your life-style. To do this, you'll simply need a PC. To connect your Xbox 360 to your PC you must have both devices running on the same network. You will also need Windows XP Service Pack 2, Update Rollup 2 for Windows XP Media Center Edition 2005, or Windows Vista running on your computer.

1 Open a web browser and visit www.xbox.com/pcsetup. Of the options listed, choose the solution that matches your PC operating system. For the sake of this walkthrough we are using Windows XP Service Pack 2.

2 Download the Zune software on the next page, which will allow your Xbox 360 to communicate with your PC.

3 Once the Zune software is installed and running, it will ask you to sync a Zune with the software. Hit the skip button. At the Library Settings screen, hit Express instead of Custom. Once this is done, the Stream to Xbox 360 screen will appear. Click the boxes for the media you wish to share with your Xbox 360.

4 On the next screen, create a new account or locate your Xbox Live account.

5 Once the software is up and running, click on the Zune logo in the upper left hand corner. Go to Library/Media Sharing. Make sure that Share By Media is enabled, and also check to see if there is a green check mark next to your Xbox 360. If not, click it to enable it.

6 Now, go to your Xbox 360 and access Music, Pictures, or Videos. Enable access from this end to your computer and all of your shared files will appear.

7 At this point, you'll be able to listen to your music, watch your videos, look at your pictures, and personalize the background image.

8 To add a picture as a background image, enter the Pictures folder and click the X button on the image you want to use as your background. It will appear immediately, and will also appear as an option in the Themes menu under Personal Settings.

You will learn to walk with honor.

You will gain the wisdom
to command with decisive resolve.

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the state of the art

More than any other art form, video games are constantly evolving. With each successive generation of console and PC technology, new horizons in game design and presentation open up. What was once considered the cutting edge in graphics or gameplay mechanics quickly becomes expected, even passé. For this reason, the people that create the games we love must be in a constant state of change, forever reinventing their craft to achieve new heights of excitement and artistry. At the recent DICE Summit, a three-day event in Las Vegas that draws top game developers from around the world, we sat down with some of the industry's most respected creators to find out their views on a number of issues that will shape the future of games.

Cory Barlog
Having worked under Sony Santa Monica's Dave Jaffe, Cory Barlog recently stepped into the spotlight as the director of the highly anticipated sequel God of War II, which manages to improve on the series' already amazing gameplay. For proof, see our review on page 100.

Richard Garriott
The creator of the Ultima franchise, Garriott is one of the true pioneers of PC gaming. With Ultima Online, he created the template for modern MMOs like World of Warcraft and EverQuest. His current project is Tabula Rasa, an MMO for Korean publisher NCSoft.

Todd Howard
The leader of Bethesda Softworks, Todd Howard and his partners have recently made the transition from successful niche developer to gaming superstars with the unprecedented success of The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion. Howard has also recently shipped the exciting Shivering Isle expansion to the game, reviewed on page 99.

Cliff Bleszinski
Epic Games' Cliff Bleszinski (better known as "CliffyB") is one of the most outspoken and successful game designers in the industry. Having recently shipped the breakout Xbox 360 hit Gears of War (which won Game of the Year at the AIAS Awards) Cliffy is now turning his attention to helping polish the company's upcoming Unreal Tournament III.

With the new technology available to you on PC or consoles, what are some of the new doors that are opening in game design?

TODD HOWARD: With open-world games becoming more popular, it's [about] letting the player do more things. The whole buzzword of "emergent gameplay." You see it in more areas than in the games where you'd expect to see it – games like our stuff or GTA. I'm seeing it more in all kinds of games, like Burnout – here's a car, go crash it. That's emergent. The technology allows you to do more of that, because you can open up a level and have more things in it. Your standard game where you go through and it's very scripted – a very polished action game of the last generation – if you just do that now with nicer visuals, the audience isn't responding to it. They look for something more that you can put your hands on as a player and press and touch and see what it does.

RICHARD GARRIOTT: If I had to pick one right now it's the fact that processor speeds are really allowing us to start thinking about things like AI in ways that we haven't be able to do previously. It used to be that 100 percent of the horsepower of a machine was invested in making the graphics work. Now, that's actually starting to free up, so we're starting to say, "How can we make physics in the world act in a more realistic way? How can we make the AI more than just magnets that attract to you and whack you on the head?" It's trying to think of radically more sophisticated ways to interact with the world, and I think that's going to enrich these experiences profoundly.

CORY BARLOG: I think community in the next few years is going to be a huge thing. It's already big – it's kind of like an animal that grew without everyone pushing – and suddenly everyone's saying, "Wait a minute…this is really important!" I hope it doesn't become too corporate, in that it's all very antiseptic and stupid. I think user-created content is awesome. I'm a huge proponent of that. But I'd want to make sure it's done so that it can be disabled. So it isn't something that's just haphazard…something like what Will [Wright] is doing with Spore. Everything is user-controlled. I'd love to see how people respond to that. I don't know if it's too much for people.

What are some of the greatest problems facing game designers right now?

CLIFFYB: I think there are a lot of problems in modern game design that need to be solved. If it were up to me there would be a list of rules that, if not in place, a game is not allowed to ship. Such as somewhat forgiving checkpoints in a single-player game, where I know that a game will automatically save my game and I know that I can go back without having to play through 20 minutes of previous gameplay. Every game needs to allow you to skip cutscenes. Games that have text dialogue boxes should be shipping with voice at this point. There's just a lot of no-brainer "win-wins" that people can do in games.

TODD HOWARD: I still think that people who make their own games still forget that it's supposed to be fun. I still play enough games where I'm really into it and there's something just amazingly frustrating. Never give the player a reason to put your game down.

You want to challenge them, but I still find that there is not a good benchmark to go to for how easy or hard something should be. Everyone complains about the end of Halo 2, more than the end of any other game. If they had finished more games, they'd probably complain about those endings. But that game is really well paced – everyone gets to the end.

CORY BARLOG: The challenge of knowing what you want out of your game versus what the public is expecting. You guys, journalists and gamers, kind of set a bar. How do we meet that? More importantly, how do we meet that and not lose sight of our goal, what our game is supposed to be, and not turn into this massive, bloated, confusing mess? I think the best games are saying, "This is what our vision is."

How do you rate the quality of storytelling in modern games? Are we approaching a Hollywood caliber of stories?

TODD HOWARD: I think the improvement there is faster than the graphics, actually. It's one of the areas that there's less of a technical boundary to. There's no reason not to have a good story…. Better writers are coming into it and people who've been making games for awhile are getting better at how to present that. It's got a ways to go, but I think it's very close to being on the level of Hollywood. I think, sometimes, because the characters don't feel real, maybe the story and the emotion doesn't come across, but I think a lot of games are telling stories that are every bit as good as books or movies.

RICHARD GARRIOTT: I don't believe that's true. There have been Hollywood movies made off of games. But what the game contributed to what became the Hollywood movie was valueless. [Look at] Tomb Raider. Tomb Raider is really Indiana Jones with a scantily clad female. When you ask what is unique to the intellectual property or story of Tomb Raider, there isn't anything. I'm not trying to be offensive to the property – it's a fantastic game. But it's fantastic because it's a good game, not because it told any particular story that was related to the movie industry…. I think I've at least attempted

to do detailed world-crafting and tell detailed stories. But I compare that to a real writer of linear prose, the difference in quality when you're looking at it from a prose standpoint is night and day.

CLIFFYB: I think we're still in our infancy. We are not one where a director can just sit back with a screenwriter and dictate the entire, manipulated experience. We still have to figure out how we can tell great stories that the player is participating in and crafting himself. It's going to be an ongoing challenge over the next 10 years. I think we still have a ways to go.

CORY BARLOG: I think there are many games out there that tell good stories. To me, the story is more of the experience – like in Advent Rising; I love the fact that who you saved at the beginning would determine the final boss you fight…. With God of War II, we wrote maybe 12 different stories, throwing everything out and starting from scratch. I wanted it to be a trilogy, and I wanted everything to have a relevance to the first and potentially the third game.

Halo 2
"Halo 2 is really well paced – everyone gets to the end."
– Todd Howard

God of War II
"God of War II shows that you can have an amazing experience on a console that's how many years old."
– CliffyB

The Wii is historically unique in that Nintendo is betting that better graphics won't matter, that gameplay innovation will be enough to carry it. Do you think that's true?

RICHARD GARRIOTT: I do agree with their philosophy. I'm a big believer that console games are inherently games that are a single-purpose machine that you turn on and it immediately goes into that game. It's a 30-minute experience that you have casually on the couch that you have sitting far away from the TV. If it's social at all, you socialize with the people around you in the room, like PaRappa the Rapper – that compelled me to buy a console for myself and all my friends and family. That was the quintessential console experience to me – the shared experience in the living room.

CLIFFYB: I think Nintendo knows that their IPs are so ingrained in an entire generation of gamers that Mario, Link, and Pokémon don't need incredibly next-generation graphics to pull off what they want to pull off. Nintendo is going to continue to do just fine with the Wii. I have mine at home and I thoroughly enjoy playing WarioWare and Wii Sports. I'm glad that I have a different gaming experience in my living room…. It doesn't always have to be a completely and totally next-gen experience in regards to graphics, because that's what we're doing on the Xbox 360.

CORY BARLOG: It depends on the person playing the game. If you were talking to a slice of North American gamers, yes, graphics abso-

lutely matter. That's the flashiness that they're going to see at Wal-Mart on the display and say, "Wow!" looking at the latest military shooter. That matters to them. And there are art-house gamers – people who pride themselves on playing obscure titles. To those guys, innovation is totally the key. But there is a big selection of people where both matter. If [Nintendo] has the software to support it, innovation is awesome for them. But if all they're going to show is Wii tennis and bowling, innovation will only go so far. The same thing goes for graphics. If all you have is pretty cars, it's not going to go very far. You need to have something that people want to play.

TODD HOWARD: I disagree with that, meaning that it's not like people aren't responding to the 360 or the PS3. People do respond to that stuff. But, if Nintendo was to do that as well, I don't know that anyone would be that interested. I think they took the right direction for Nintendo. I still think that Nintendo in general, for a long time, have been the best game makers there are. I think they have a different mentality, too. They don't come at making a console and making video games from a "we are going to crush the competition" angle. They very rarely reference the competition. They see themselves as Nintendo and they do Nintendo things and that's it.

Spore
"I think user-created content is awesome…something like what Will [Wright] is doing with Spore."
– Cory Barlog

South Park
"South Park is done on high-end graphics machines. But it's a stylization that is by no means photorealistic."
– Richard Garriott

Some people think we're hitting the wall with graphics and approaching photorealism. Is that true?

CLIFFYB: Graphics and presentation matter, but there's the idea of "good enough" for your average consumer. You look at the previous generation of consoles to this generation of consoles and there's a fairly significant leap. But for this generation and beyond? There will be a leap, but will it be as great? Probably not. At a certain point it comes down to working with what you're given as a developer with a certain console and doing an amazing job. If you look at a game like God of War II on PlayStation 2, that shows that you can have an amazing experience on a console that's how many years old.

TODD HOWARD: No way. I don't believe any developer says that. Every developer has artists where you have to go by and say, "You have to take half that crap out, it's too slow." No way…We always want to put more in…. When I looked at Gran Turismo on PlayStation 1, I said,

"That looks totally real." I remember in the '80s – "Come see this game Pole Position, it looks f----- real!" [Laughs] Everybody always says that – "We're approaching photorealism" – but we're really not. It's getting better, but it's not there yet.

RICHARD GARRIOTT: I don't think we're hitting a wall anywhere, personally. Even the simulations we're doing of photorealism now are just simulations of photorealism…. What I find more interesting is the fact that the same incredible power in the 3D hardware allows you to do things that are non-photorealistic graphics, but have some very interesting. [For example], an anime look or even *South Park* – that show is done on high-end graphics machines. But it's a stylization that is by no means photorealistic.

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COUNTING UP

VIDEO GAMING'S MONEYMAKERS

EVERYONE LIKES TO KNOW WHO'S ON TOP, SO WE COMPILED THESE LISTS OF THE TOP-SELLING VIDEO GAME PROPERTIES. THE FOLLOWING CHARTS SHOW THE TOP-SELLING VIDEO GAME FRANCHISES TO DATE AND THE NUMBER OF UNITS SOLD WORLDWIDE. (UNLESS OTHERWISE STATED)

TOP 20 SELLING VIDEO GAME PROPERTIES*

1. **Mario** (193 million)
2. **Pokémon** (155 million)
3. **Final Fantasy** (70 million)
4. **Madden NFL** (56 million)
5. **Grand Theft Auto** (55 million)
6. **The Sims** (54 million)
7. **The Legend of Zelda** (49 million)
8. **Donkey Kong** (48 million)
9. **Sonic the Hedgehog** (44 million)
10. **Gran Turismo** (44 million)
11. **Lineage** (43 million)
12. **Dragon Quest** (40 million)
13. **Crash Bandicoot** (34 million)
14. **Resident Evil** (31 million)
15. **James Bond** (30 million)
16. **Tomb Raider** (30 million)
17. **Tekken** (29 million)
18. **Mega Man** (26 million)
19. **Street Fighter** (25 million)
20. **Command & Conquer** (25 million)

Curious about what licenses are the hottest? Check out this list of gaming's top IPs that originate outside of gaming. These are U.S. figures sold during the last console generation.

TOP 10 IP'S OUTSIDE OF GAMING IN THE US*

1. **NFL Football** (26 million)
2. **Star Wars** (15 million)
3. **Tony Hawk** (13 million)
4. **Tom Clancy** (12 million)
5. **NBA** (10 million)
6. **ESPN** (9 million)
7. **World Wrestling Entertainment** (9 million)
8. **NCAA Football** (8 million)
9. **James Bond** (7 million)
10. **Spider-Man** (7 million)

We're not done yet. These figures do not include units sold as pack-ins with a console.

TOP 10 BEST-SELLING GAMES OF ALL TIME*

1. **Super Mario Bros. 3** (NES – 18 million)
2. **The Sims** (PC – 16 million)
3. **Diablo II** (PC – 15 million)
4. **Super Mario Land** (Game Boy – 14 million)
5. **Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas** (PS2, Xbox – 14 million)
6. **Grand Theft Auto: Vice City** (PS2 – 13 million)
7. **Super Mario 64** (N64 – 11 million)
8. **Gran Turismo 3: A-Spec** (PS2 – 11 million)
9. **Grand Theft Auto III** (PS2 – 11 million)
10. **Gran Turismo** (PSone – 11 million)

*We compiled these lists using information supplied by the games' publishers and the NPD. All numbers are in units sold, and have been rounded up to the nearest million.

WE ASKED A FEW PEOPLE IN THE INDUSTRY WHAT THEY THOUGHT ABOUT THEIR BEST-SELLING FRANCHISES. HERE IS WHAT THEY SAID.

"Very few companies have franchises or products that have this type of history, and we're proud to be part of this elite group… Our directors and producers are charged with creating amazing experiences for gamers, and the majority of them take up this gauntlet with enthusiasm, in many cases exceeding even their own goals."

Chris Kramer, sr. director of community and communications, Capcom

"To keep a franchise strong, it is important to stay true to what made it so popular in the first place. We can never get lazy and rely on our lineage to present the product. Innovation, creativity, high production values – all of these elements must be in each Dragon Quest or Final Fantasy title for it to live up to the expectations of the previous releases as well as those of our strong following."

Daishiro Okada, president and COO of the North America offices, Square Enix, Inc.

LOOSE TALK
Hot Gaming Gossip

PS3 GAMES READY TO GO

Newly launched systems often do not have enough titles to sate game-hungry owners looking to run their new consoles through its paces. The PlayStation 3 definitely suffers from this problem, but that will be resolved if what we've heard is true. Some publishers have PS3 games done and ready to ship, but before they do so, they are first waiting for the platform's installed base to increase.

■ Are some PS3 games already ready?

THE Wii WAITING LINE

Nintendo has historically not had good relations with its third-party software partners, and despite the Wii's popularity, this may be a continuing problem. Loose Talk has heard that developers who want to make games for the new system are being put on a three-month waiting list before they can even get development kits. With supply to consumers already a problem for the platform, this was one aspect of Nintendo's new system we'd hoped it had rectified in advance.

NEW RED FACTION?

THQ CEO Brian Farrell may have tipped his hand regarding the company's future plans. During a recent investor's conference call, Farrell said that THQ would bank on some of its "proven owned intellectual properties." Later on, Farrell listed Red Faction as one of core franchises, implying that it would be one of the franchises the company would lean on for its future. However, Farrell made no specific mention that a new Red Faction is in development.

NINTENDO CHARGING EXTRA?

It's great that Nintendo has finally decided to join the online party, but perhaps it still needs to figure out a thing or two. Loose Talk has heard at least one report of a Wii owner getting charged extra money due to the system's always-on configuration. Since the Wii Connect24 transfers data automatically, depending on your online plan you may be charged for going over on your MB usage. The feature can be turned off (or maybe your online plan is more forgiving), but making use of the platform shouldn't require these kinds of sacrifices.

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

NAME THAT GAME
Test Your Sight

Back in the eighties, developer Cinemaware made a name for itself through quality graphics (for the time) and its use of movies as inspiration for titles such as Sinbad and the Throne of the Falcon and The Three Stooges. This month's PS2/Xbox/PC title resurrected the franchise that Cinemaware was most known for in 2003, and added a new hero to its medieval setting. The game itself combined turn-based strategy with real-time action sequences that included archery, sword fighting, and jousting. This Capcom-published title never did much, but Cinemaware has just announced it is adding a new title to this franchise for PC gamers.

(Answer on page 34)

THE CONTENT MICROSOFT DOESN'T WANT YOU TO HAVE

MICROSOFT RESTRICTING FREE DOWNLOADS?

Microsoft's Xbox Live Marketplace is in full swing, and buying downloadable goods is a phenomenon that all next-gen console makers have embraced. But is there something that Microsoft isn't telling us? Could there be significant free content available in the Marketplace that the company is withholding?

Game Informer spoke with multiple contacts within the industry about the process that publishers and developers have to go through to get their content on Xbox Live Marketplace. We also found out that there is free content that companies want to offer, but Microsoft is mandating that consumers pay for it.

When a publisher has goods it wants to put up for sale, those prices must first be submitted to Microsoft. As part of an agreement with the company, publishers have signed a document that hands over final say to Microsoft regarding Marketplace pricing. From here, Microsoft takes a look at the market and prices items to maintain a balance among items of similar value.

Game Informer talked to Aaron Greenberg, Xbox Live/Xbox 360 group product manager, who denied that Microsoft has final say over Marketplace pricing. "It's ultimately up to the publisher," he told us.

However, according to our sources, it's not up to the publishers, and free content is being withheld from consumers under the speculated motive of Microsoft wanting to make gamers accustomed to paying money for goods above and beyond wallpapers. Said one industry insider we talked to, "They want you in the store and they want you buying stuff that is at full price." We've even been told that the rules of the game may vary depending on how much clout your company has with Microsoft.

Greenberg denied knowledge of any motive to restrict free content, but admitted that the company does indeed adjust download prices. "There may be some situation or unusual case where there's content that's significant in nature and it would make other content look out of line, but I'm not aware of any case where we've told them that they couldn't offer it for free."

TOP TEN
Lists...Everybody Loves Lists...

Top 10 Game-Related Inventions of 2012

10 Solid Snake's Paternity Test: Find out who your daddy is in three easy steps

9 Toilet Pants: These are gross, even in the future. World of Warcraft players insisted on having them anyway

8 Xbox Live Genetic Culler: Scans and disintegrates all users with the newly-identified genetic marker for stupidity. This eliminates all players with Gamertags following the "xX<name>Xx" pattern

7 Cell Processor Mark III: Lowered production costs drop the PS4's retail price to $1,900

6 RealityShift Brain Implants: Makes the new Dynasty Warriors appear cutting-edge and innovative

5 Smack Talk Generator: Never be left without a zinger. This machine automatically selects one of 10,000 pre-made insults and slings them at your opponents. A "your mom" add-on is also available

4 Sunglasses of Graphical Dampening: Disguises outdated graphics as passable. For use with Duke Nukem Forever, pending the game's release

3 Nintendo TS: The third smell-sensitive screen opens up countless possibilities for scent-related gaming

2 Gaming Homonculi: For the busy gamers who just can't find the time for their hobby. These creatures play the games so you don't have to!

1 Wired Controllers: Retro chic dupes idiots yet again

Name That Game Answer: Robin Hood: Defender of the Crown

games

EA'S WHITE COUNCIL ON HOLD
NEW LINE STOPS EA IN ITS TRACKS?

Early this year rumor broke that Electronic Arts had cancelled its Lord of the Rings: The White Council RPG project. Recently, EA CFO Warren Jenson upgraded the game's status, but the news still isn't good. In a strangely worded statement, Jenson said that The White Council is indefinitely postponed. "The Lord of the Rings product is back in development in terms of being on hold." He also said that the company is "looking at the creative positioning and feature set on the Lord of the Rings franchise," and that if released, the game would not be released before March 31, 2008.

Interestingly, the timing of the original cancellation rumor comes suspiciously close to news that movie studio New Line Cinema is planning a prequel movie preceding the events in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, as well as *The Hobbit*. Given that EA has a licensing agreement with the studio, it is possible that the planned content in the White Council overlapped with the plans New Line has for its films. This may have caused the studio to step in and affect the game's development to suit its future plans.

Matters may be further muddled by a complex set of circumstances involving studio New Line and the original trilogy's director, Peter Jackson. Jackson and New Line are suing each other over an audit of the income earned on *The Fellowship of the Ring*. These lawsuits have created bad blood. Jackson doesn't want to make *The Hobbit* with the studio until the whole thing is settled, and New Line head Robert Shaye has said, "[Jackson] will never make any movie with New Line Cinema again while I'm still working for the company."

New Line has decided to go ahead with both films with a different director. However, the studio has a limited amount of time to make them, because their deal with Saul Zaentz, who licenses out the LOTR rights in the first place, is going to expire. EA might feel that making the game and releasing it to coincide with New Line's already rushed time frame might be too much. Furthermore, since Jackson will not presumably be directing any New Line LOTR productions any time soon and Saul Zaentz has publicly sided with Jackson, perhaps EA believes it's more advantageous to try and wait out New Line, hoping to team up with Jackson and Zaentz after the studio's rights lapse back to Zaentz. Or maybe EA is hoping Jackson and New Line make up, at which time they'll be poised and ready to deliver. Regardless, all this is unconfirmed speculation, and to make a long story longer: We won't be seeing The White Council anytime soon.

games

MANHUNT'S MOST DANGEROUS GAME BEGINS AGAIN

Wii HANDLES THE RAZOR WIRE

The original Manhunt drew reactions of attraction and repulsion

If you thought Rockstar was sick for coming up with a game like Manhunt, you'll be shocked to discover that the company is not only putting out a sequel, but that the franchise is heading to Nintendo's Wii! Thought you were pretty good with a bat in Wii Sports? Well now you can put that skill to practical use by cracking skulls. Or, if you prefer the stealthy approach, why not start suffocating people with plastic bags, getting your hands dirty with the series' snuff film ethos? Manhunt 2 will be available this summer, and the game will also appear on the PlayStation 2 and PSP.

In less shocking news, Rockstar has just released its PSP hit Grand Theft Auto: Vice City Stories on the PlayStation 2. As with Liberty City Stories, we expect this to be a fairly straight port with some graphical differences. Stay tuned for our review.

KUDO TSUNODA

GENERAL MANAGER, EA CHICAGO

>> Thanks to its success with the Fight Night and Def Jam franchises, EA Chicago has become one of the company's most successful studios. We recently spoke with the studio's general manager, Kudo Tsunoda, about EA Chicago's past, present, and future. <<

Where there any lessons you learned at 3DO that you brought with you in your career?
3DO was some of the best experience I've had in my career, because the business strategy there was based around not giving the development teams the budget, time, or ability to make good games. The teams that I worked with there learned so much about how to get the most value out of every single dollar and day that you're spending on development, because you had so few of them. Then, when you come to a company like EA where the focus is on quality, you take the production methods that you learned and get so much more into the games. I've kept my same guerilla attitude.

Talk about the development of Fight Night. Up to that point, most boxing games – even Knockout Kings – were based around a formula that dated back to Punch-Out. How did you come up with the concept of the all-analog control scheme?

quality. Secondly, we want to define a new way of playing on next-gen consoles. Like in Def Jam, really having the music affect how you play and being able to control the music with our DJ controls. I think that we have a good expertise in fighting games and we will continue that. Also, we need to take that experimental approach to games and extrapolate that out next to a more action-oriented type of game.

So, a game that's not necessarily a fighting game, but a 3D action game?
Yes, totally.

Do you have any new licenses that you're working with or do you plan to create new, original franchises?
We're working on a couple of new projects. One is a pretty big license, but we haven't announced it yet. When you're working with a license, people will say, "That company isn't innovative." But, in lots

like any creative endeavor, you go and do your research. We get a good knowledge of what has come before. It's a bit hard with Japanese games, because I think there is a Japanese style of development that is more oriented towards their culture. So, while I think there are things that you can learn from game, I'll never be as good at making a game that's targeted specifically towards Japan as a Japanese developer.

You've worked on both PS3 and 360. Are there any significant advantages or disadvantages to either one in your opinion?
As far as each of the consoles goes, they are very different machines. It's not that one is better than the other as much as the actual wiring of the machines is different. You can't just take a PS3 game and port it over to the 360 and expect it to be easy. The people that are making high-quality PS3 or 360 games are developing the game specifically on that hardware and for that console. For

> ## "We want to put a stamp of innovation on every game that comes out of EA Chicago."

I'm a huge believer in the "method acting" way of game development. If you're going to make a game, you have to totally immerse yourself in the world of the game. The first month or two that we worked on Fight Night 2004, we'd come in at 9:30 and do hardcore boxing training. Then, break for lunch, and all afternoon we'd play boxing games. Through that process, a couple of things became really clear. One, how important it is to have control of your fists. You're getting that hammered home to you all morning long by boxing instructors. Then, you play all the boxing games and realize "I have absolutely no control over my fists – I just hit a button and the punch animations plays!" The second thing was responsive defensive controls. Defense is such an important part of boxing. All the boxing games before Fight Night 2004 barely had defense – it was all about who hit the other person the most times. I can tell you that the first time you step into the ring and get hit in the face, it becomes really clear that boxing is about [protecting yourself].

What's your vision for EA Chicago? Do you want to remain focused on fighting or branch out into other genres?
We want to put a stamp of innovation on every game that comes out of EA Chicago. No matter where you are in a series – whether it's the first game or the third game – you've got to deliver high

of ways, you have to be more creative in those areas to deliver something new. There are more restraints. But, we also need to take that creative approach to how we run our studio, with developing IP from the ground up.

One thing that makes innovation difficult is the pressure to deliver sequels on a yearly basis. Do you feel obligated to have a new Fight Night every year, or will you be taking a break?
No matter what, with any of the games, it's not about the timelines. Boxing is different; it's not like a Madden where if you don't have the new rosters and players out that's really bad. You need to have a game for football season. There isn't so much a "boxing season." That gives us some liberty. It's more important that we're keeping up the level of the games than the timeline. But, either way, our studio is capable of deliver a high level of innovation, whether it's a year or two years.

Chicago is focused on fighting. Japanese developers have traditionally driven that genre. What could you learn from Japanese fighting games and what can they learn from your games?
I wouldn't be so presumptuous to go around and tell people what they need to learn from us. Just

Def Jam Icon, we built two separate games, even though we wanted the same end result on both systems.

Do you have any desire or plans to work on the Wii?
The Wii would be a fun development experience – to take a gameplay feature like the Wii controller and design a game around that. If you look at the games we've worked on, lots of them are based on the same kind of gestural control philosophy that the Wii is based on. In fact, I like to joke that the idea for the Wii controller was based on Fight Night. [Laughs]

What's the single biggest challenge in running a development studio?
You read that everyone wants to see new things in games. But I think the real challenge is that, when you put out an innovative game, people are so trained in one way to play a game. If you actually deliver innovation, it takes awhile for consumers to wrap their head around what you're trying to do without falling back on "This isn't like every other game, so it's bad." We saw that with Fight Night 2004. People were so trained on hammering the buttons in a boxing game that the initial focus tests and feedback from the press wasn't that high.

THE ART OF FIGHTING

KEYS TO VICTORY

The right keyboard and mouse combo can spell the difference between rocking head shots or whizzing bullets past your enemy. GI breaks down the field of competition and crowns the winners.

CREATIVE FATAL1TY GAMING KEYBOARD

OK ●●●●●●○○○

PRO This is the slickest looking keyboard of the bunch. We like the backlighting, and the patented scissor keys have a super sweet response time.
CON The compact design is great for travel, but it comes at a high price. There are no extra bells and whistles – not even a USB port.
$59.99 • www.creative.com

IDEAZON MERC GAMING ZBOARD

PASSABLE ●●●●●○○○○○

PRO The price is certainly favorable, but that is the only advantage this board has over the others.
CON We're not fans of Zboard's gaming-specific layouts; the keys feel a little cramped, and the keyboard has no extra USB or headphone ports.
$39.99 • www.ideazon.com

LOGITECH G11 GAMING KEYBOARD

GOOD ●●●●●●●○○

PRO The G11 has a full feature set: 18 programmable macro keys, backlit keys, a USB port, and media hotkeys.
CON Aside from this board being a little on the large side, the macros can be somewhat confusing to program.
$69.99 • www.logitech.com

SAITEK ECLIPSE II ILLUMINATED KEYBOARD

OK ●●●●●●○○○

PRO As the name implies, this board's most notable feature is its backlit laser-etched keys. The Eclipse can switch through three different colors and comes with a built-in dimmer.
CON We wish the lights were a little brighter. The keyboard also lacks USB ports.
$69.95 • www.saitekusa.com

GAME INFORMER EDITORS' CHOICE ★

RAZER TARANTULA

VERY GOOD ●●●●●●●●○

PRO Ten programmable macro hotkeys, customizable keymaps, two USB ports, microphone/headphone jacks, and 32kb of onboard memory to store up to a hundred profiles add up to this being our favorite board.
CON You can buy an attachable light, but Tarantula itself lacks backlit keys. Like the PSP, the keyboard's finish collects fingerprints at an ungodly rate. The price might also be a little too high for some.
$99.99 • www.razerzone.com

IDEAZON REAPER GAMING MOUSE

BAD ●●●○○○○○○○

PRO The Reaper has seven remappable buttons and three optical speeds up to 1600 dpi that can be adjusted on the fly.

CON The killer here is its non-ergonomic design; the Reaper just doesn't feel right in your hand.

$39.99 • www.ideazon.com

CREATIVE FATAL1TY GAMING MOUSE

AVERAGE ●●●●●●○○○○

PRO The three mouse buttons give you some nice options, and changing the mouse's weight with swappable cores is easy.

CON Sticking to simplicity (which seems to be FATAL1TY's signature), this mouse doesn't have a lot of extras, and somehow still fails to fit comfortably into your hand.

$59.99 • www.creative.com

LOGITECH G7 LASER CORDLESS MOUSE

VERY GOOD ●●●●●●●●○○

PRO The G7 has nearly all the strengths of the G5, except in a cordless package. Instead of being able to change the weight, you can swap batteries on the fly.

CON The lack of weight balancing and including only one thumb button is unfortunate, but the biggest downside may be the steep price.

$99.99 • www.logitech.com

RAZER DEATHADDER

OK ●●●●●●●○○○

PRO Not only is this one of the best-looking mice, it tracks smoothly and the buttons are highly responsive.

CON The DeathAdder lacks the swappable side buttons and quick dpi switching of the Habu.

$59.99 • www.razerzone.com

LOGITECH G5 LASER MOUSE

SUPERB ●●●●●●●●●●

PRO The G5 may be the holy grail of mice. Its feature set covers all the bases: three different dpi settings of up to 2000, a comfortable fit, two thumb buttons, smooth tracking, and a nice weight balancing system.

CON There isn't a lot for us to hate on here. Trust us, you should own this mouse.

$69.99 • www.logitech.com

MICROSOFT HABU

VERY GOOD ●●●●●●●●●○

PRO This mouse is similar to the DeathAdder (Razer helped make it), but better. The Habu tracks suberbly, has on-the-fly dpi adjustment, and features two swappable thumb buttons for maximum comfort.

CON The Habu could contend for the title with a weight balancing system. The firmware update was a hassle as well.

$69.95 • www.microsoft.com/hardware

SAITEK GM 3200 LASER MOUSE

OK ●●●●●●●○○○

PRO This bad boy can cycle through four dpi settings of up to 3200, meaning it's freaking fast. The 3200 also has removable weights so you can adjust the heft to fit your style of play.

CON This mouse has a J.Lo caboose and feels awkward in our hands, but some people might like a little more junk in the trunk.

$59.95 • www.saitekusa.com

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etc.

OTHER STUFF WE KNOW YOU WANT
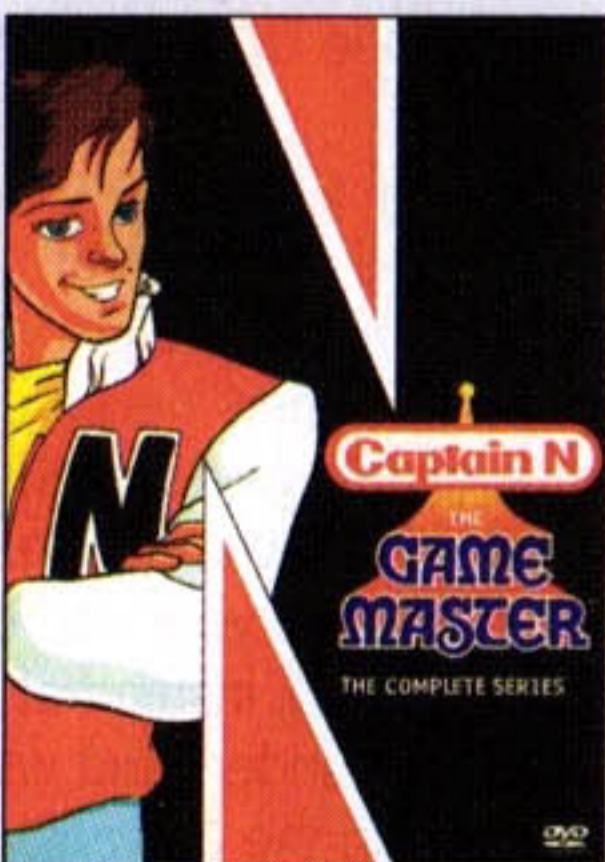
CAPTAIN N: THE GAME MASTER – COMPLETE SERIES ON DVD

Back in the late '80s it was a common dream among children to be able to travel into the video game realm, make friends with poor representations of gaming's favorite characters, and fight evil with their dog. Now you can relieve that with all 26 episodes of *Captain N* on DVD.

$29.98 • www.shoutfactorystore.com
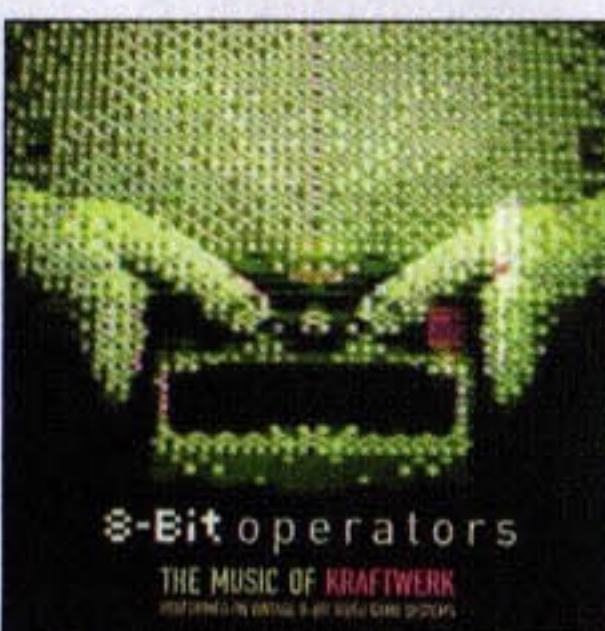
8-BIT OPERATORS

Whether you call it "chiptune" or "bitpop," making 8-bit music that is actually enjoyable to listen to ranks as an extraordinary feat. This 15-track CD features some of the top circuit-bending artists across North America, South America, and Europe reworking classic Kraftwerk songs on their 8-bit consoles.

$12.99 • www.8bitoperators.com

PHILLIP'S AMBX PC GAMING PRO GAMER KIT

AVERAGE ●●●●●●○○○○

As if your eyes don't get dry enough while you play games, now Phillips has come up with a peripheral that blows air in your face while you play. The amBX also adds some new and nifty lighting effects to your games. We didn't think the audio was the best, but the lights add a fun touch and work pretty well even for games they weren't designed for.

Three different kits from $199.99 – $399.99 • www.ambx.com

SPACE INVADERS

IS CASUAL GAMING DESTROYING VIDEO GAMES?

BY MATTHEW KATO,
SENIOR ASSOCIATE EDITOR,
GAME INFORMER

You've probably been hearing about the casual gaming revolution for a while now. You've read about how much money cell phone gaming rakes in, and how middle-aged women in the suburbs love playing games on their PCs when they aren't watching *Oprah*. We've even seen companies like Nintendo flat-out declare that it's a priority to capture as many of these non-traditional gamers as possible. But is this really what the industry needs?

I understand that publishers are excited about this possibility because it means extracting money from segments of the population that they normally don't reach, but I don't care about their profits. I care about people like you and me: the hardcore gamer. No offense to your mom, grandma, or seven-year-old brother/sister, but I don't care what they think about video games – or even if they ever get into video games. Call me selfish, but I do not want the industry to cater specifically to these segments of the population at the expense of the hardcore gamer.

I certainly think that everyone should play video games, but we – hardcore gamers who stand in line for the systems, spend plenty of money throughout the year on stuff, and who have always been there for the industry – should not be held hostage by the politics of demographics and by financial concerns that don't feel that a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. I don't want to make concessions for them that could dumb down the games we play. Luckily, I don't think this will be necessary.

With kids getting into games at younger and younger ages, and with over 25 years of controller, interface, and gameplay design evolution behind us, I don't think that today's games necessarily freeze out people from playing them – especially when the high quality of graphics is more likely to attract people than intimidate them. Besides, anyone who's gone online can tell you that young kids are having no trouble mastering games and head shotting everyone in the process. Go online with Madden or Halo 2, and you'll see that it's not kids who are crying that games need to be easier and more accessible and casual.

There's a difference between being suitable for younger audiences and insulting them with overly simplistic gameplay. Video games should inspire and challenge kids, not patronize them with forced mediocrity. When I was young playing games, it was that delicate line between challenge and reward that fired my imagination and spurred me on. Defender, Tempest, and Super Mario Bros. were age-appropriate titles that did not care how old I was, and they rewarded me handsomely because of it. I hate to think about destroying that sense of discovery and feeling of accomplishment if we assume that ten-year-olds shouldn't ever have to see a "Game Over" screen.

I feel that older generations of would-be gamers see time and effort as a barrier to entry, and that's understandable. Even when I want to play an RPG, for example, I find it hard to find the 40-hour commitment I know it's going to take to finish the game amidst my busy life. But there are ways around this with the right save systems and story/gameplay pacing. Also, let's not mistake adults' love of the casual escapism that is found in a PC puzzle game as a sign that they are a gaming demographic ready to seriously invest time and money into gaming like we do. Should we sacrifice depth and gameplay features in our games because grandpa likes to play online poker to blow off some steam?

Apart from financial reasons, I'm not sure why we would want to turn to older generations for approval like a child looking for their parents' consent. Video games are a multi-billion dollar industry that makes sizable consumer electronic waves in the big kids' pool. I fear what might happen if non-gamers get too large a say in matters. Do you think teenagers in the fifties wanted their parents to like Chuck Berry? Or worse yet, imagine the awful music he would

> **Go online... and you'll see that it's not kids who are crying that games need to be easier and more accessible and casual.**

have created if he sought the older generation's input and approval for what he wrote. Besides, as old fart gamers like myself get older and have kids, we'll still be gaming and creating an instant older demographic for companies to tap.

There is room and reason for casual gaming and simplistic titles for little kids. I'm not saying that seven-year olds should be playing Grand Theft Auto. Parents should always monitor what their kids play to make sure it's appropriate for their age. I certainly don't think Dora the Explorer should become Lara Croft all of a sudden, or that a fun little puzzle game poses any threat to the games I play. Nor am I attacking Nintendo and its systems – even if they want to snare casual gamers. In fact, I see The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess as a perfect example of how you can create a game that appeals to a broad swath of ages, skill levels, and which can even make cash for the stock holders (there it is again). It serves everyone by patronizing no one.

Want to incorporate more casual gamers into the fold? I think that a good tutorial mode, intuitive controls, and a balanced learning curve are important tools in helping casual gamers become accustomed to supposed "hardcore" games without much fuss at all. I also think hardcore gamers like us can lend a helping hand. Next time your dad or sister sits down and watches you play, instead of brushing them off as too stupid to understand what you're doing, invite them in, explain the controls, and let them play. Think of it as if they were playing a sport for the first time. Instead of berating them and snatching away the controller, let them make some mistakes and just enjoy themselves. Because nobody is inspired or has a good time by being patronized – a lesson that our industry would do well to heed. ∎ ∎ ∎

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U.S. ARMY

ARMY STRONG.℠

sun	mon	tue	wed	thur	fri	sat
01	**02**	**03**	**04**		**06**	

01 BASEBALL OPENER
The baseball season kicks off tonight at 8:05 (ET) with the new look New York Mets traveling to the home of World Series champs St. Louis Cardinals. The game will be televised nationally on ESPN2. This game is irrelevant, however, as the Cubs are going to win the World Series. (snicker)

03 NEW RELEASES
- Bust-a-Move: Bash! – Wii
- Cooking Mama: Cook Off – Wii
- Final Fantasy Fables: Chocobo Tales – DS
- Guitar Hero II – 360
- MLB 07: The Show – PS3
- Resident Evil 4 – PC
- The Settlers – DS
- SNK Vs. Capcom: Card Fighters – DS
- Winter Challenge – PS2

04 BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER SEASON 8
Sunnydale's slayer may never see the light of day again on television, but her amazing story is continuing in comic form. Series creator Joss Whedon is penning Season 8 himself, and Georges Jeanty is providing the art. Buffy fans, there's a reason to live.

06
Quentin Tarantino and Robert Rodriguez's new film *Grindhouse* makes its theatrical debut today. We could tell you what this movie is all about, but really all you need to know is that Kurt Russell is in it and Rose McGowan has a machine gun leg. That's what we call motion picture perfection.

Hot Fuzz in theaters 04/13

08		**10**	**11**	**12**	**13**	**14**

08
Fans of slow-moving and highly depressing dramas should tune into HBO tonight to catch the first episode of *The Sopranos* final season. We predict that nothing will happen, other than Tony talking about those stupid ducks again.

10 NEW RELEASES
- Rapala Trophies – 360
- Super Paper Mario – Wii
- *Twin Peaks: Season 2* – DVD

14 INDIE MMO GAME DEVELOPER CONFERENCE
Held in Minneapolis, MN, this two-day conference will explore how small development houses can get a piece of the World of Warcraft pie. We'll be there pitching our *Being John Malkovich* MMO. It's perfect. You only have to render one character!

Monster Madness: Battle for Suberbia – 04/17

	17	**18**		**20**	

17 NEW RELEASES
- Code Lyoko – DS
- Dead Head Fred – PSP
- The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion – PSP
- *The Game* – HD-DVD
- *The Jerk* – HD-DVD
- Legend of the Dragon – PS2, PSP
- Monster Madness: Battle for Suberbia – 360, PC
- PuzzleScape – PSP

18
- *Spider-Man 2: Unrated Extended Cut* – DVD
- Test Drive Unlimited – PSP
- Toodoku – DS
- Touch the Dead – DS
- Valhalla Knights – PSP

The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion – 04/17

20 RACHEL PVP STATUE
No Ninja Gaiden collection of statues is complete without demon hunter Rachel. We're certain that your wife will love you even more if you display this incredibly detailed sculpt proudly in the living room. Look for it today!

22		**24**		**27**	

22
The Pokémon craze continues today with the releases of Pokémon Diamond and Pokémon Pearl. Ben is already claiming that his Widdlydoodle is stronger than your Charmander, and that his Dangadingler will kick your Squirtle in the face. Ben is six.

24 NEW RELEASES
- *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* – HD-DVD
- The Lord of the Rings Online: Shadows of Angmar – PC
- Mortal Kombat: Armageddon – Wii
- Super Collapse 3 – DS

Mortal Kombat: Armageddon – 04/24

27 "NOT YOUR PROBLEM" DAY
Are people always trying to hold you accountable for your actions? Not today! Did you "accidentally" erase your friend's Final Fantasy XII save? Not your problem! Did you "accidentally" roll a Paladin in WoW? Wait…Why would you even do that? Shame on you.
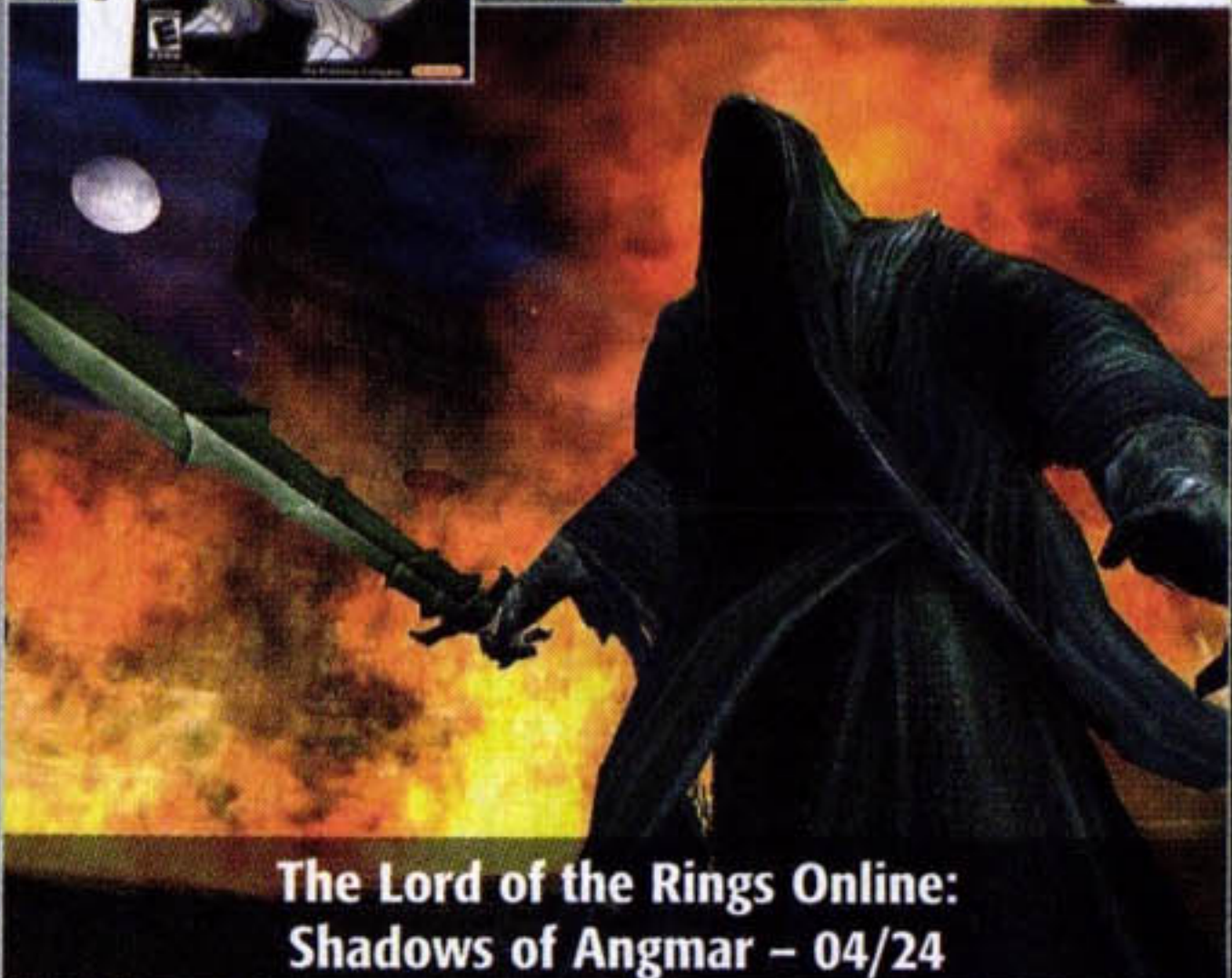
Grindhouse – 04/06

The Lord of the Rings Online: Shadows of Angmar – 04/24

april

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

UNCHARTED:
DRAKES'S FORTUNE

T E R R A   I N C O G N I T A

Sir Francis Drake had a wealth of titles to his name by the time he died at sea in the winter of 1596. To his English countrymen, he was a hero – an explorer who circumnavigated the globe, a sea captain who sunk dozens of ships in the Spanish Armada, and a knight by Queen Elizabeth's own hand. To his enemies, he was the worst sort of villain – a marauder that heartlessly destroyed their ports and colonies, a pirate that ceaselessly stole their chests of gold, spices, and jewels. Whatever people called him, his infamous adventuring career came to an end when his body was tipped over the side of his ship off the coast of Panama over 400 years ago. But what if that lead coffin held no body? What if there was instead a mysterious book that hinted at his last great adventure? What if you found that book?

Naughty Dog has a long history of making games for Sony. Its 1996 hit Crash Bandicoot was a runaway success for the fledgling PlayStation game console, giving the system an iconic character of its very own to draw in gamers weaned on Mario and Sonic. Five years later, it brought to life the colorful antics of a goateed elf named Jak and his wisecracking sidekick Daxter. After years of caricatured faces and funny looking creatures, it came as more than a little surprise at E3 2006 when a video of its newest game was revealed. Dubbed "Dude Raider" by a joking press who had no real information on the game, Naughty Dog's latest title hinted at a realistic character who would jump and shoot his way through a gorgeous jungle backdrop. Upon our visit to the studio, Naughty Dog president Evan Wells filled us in on the dramatic shift in style. "On PlayStation 1, we had to go very iconic – it was about oversized heads and it was very cartoony. On PlayStation 2, there was more technology, and we were able to go to not quite human, but not an animal – it's an elf, very stylized, but with more human movements, and we were able to start adding in more story and character. Then we looked at the technology the PlayStation 3 afforded us, and we realized now we can go full-on human and still capture all that great gameplay from our past games." Now, months after that first E3 video, Uncharted: Drake's Fortune has far more to get gamers excited than an announced name. After hearing about the game's cinematic story, seeing the technology that backs up that exciting plotline, and playing the game for ourselves, we're sure about one thing. This is one title that should give hold-outs against the pricey PlayStation 3 a reason to pause and look again.

■ Chase sequences of all kinds are a big part of the genre, and they won't be missing here

■ While vehicles certainly aren't the main focus of gameplay, Naughty Dog knows how much fun it is to take a break from the normal flow of the action to hop on a cool ride. One jet-ski level has players navigating submerged buildings in search of clues. Another has you speeding down the treacherous rapids of a white water river
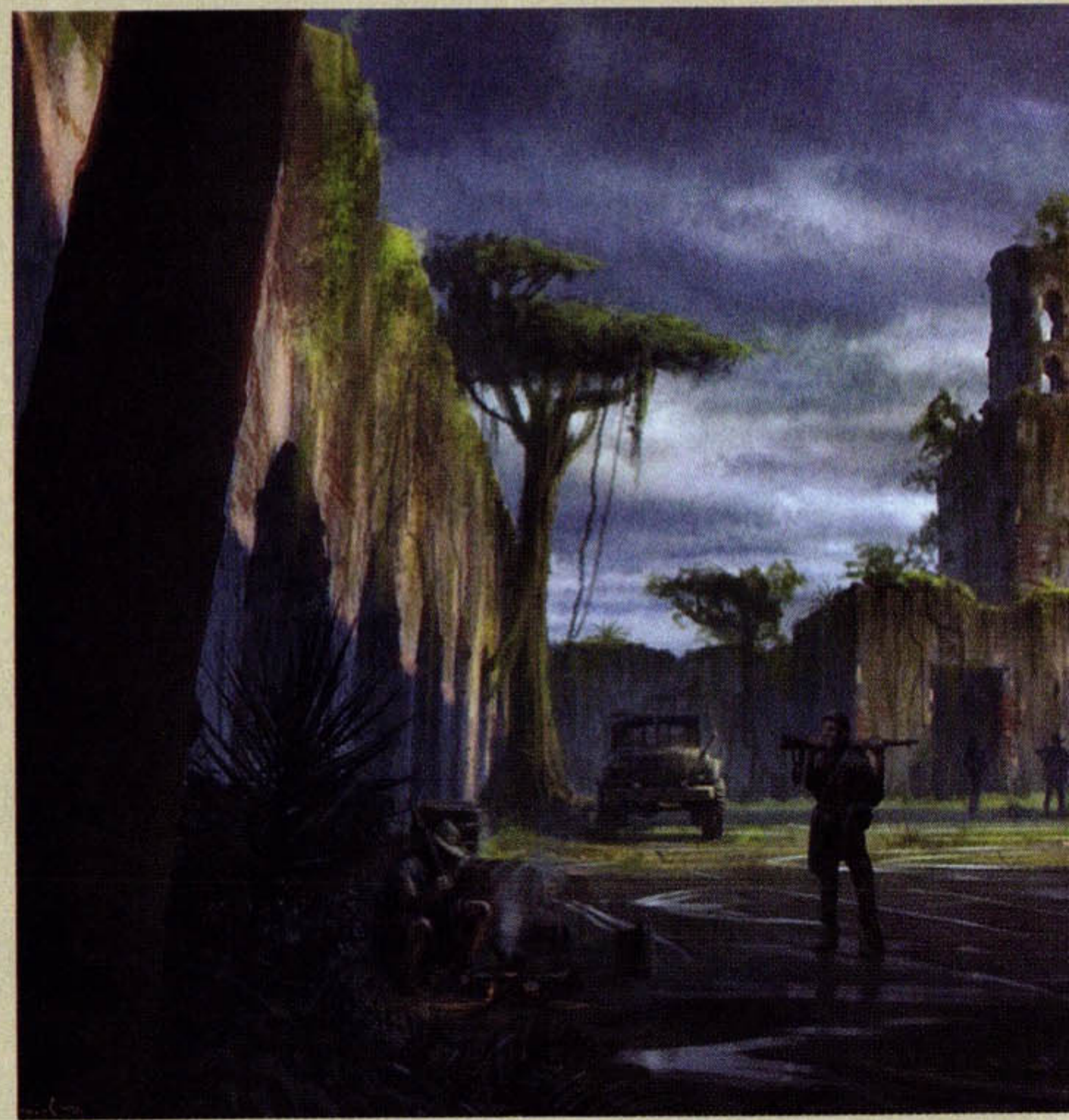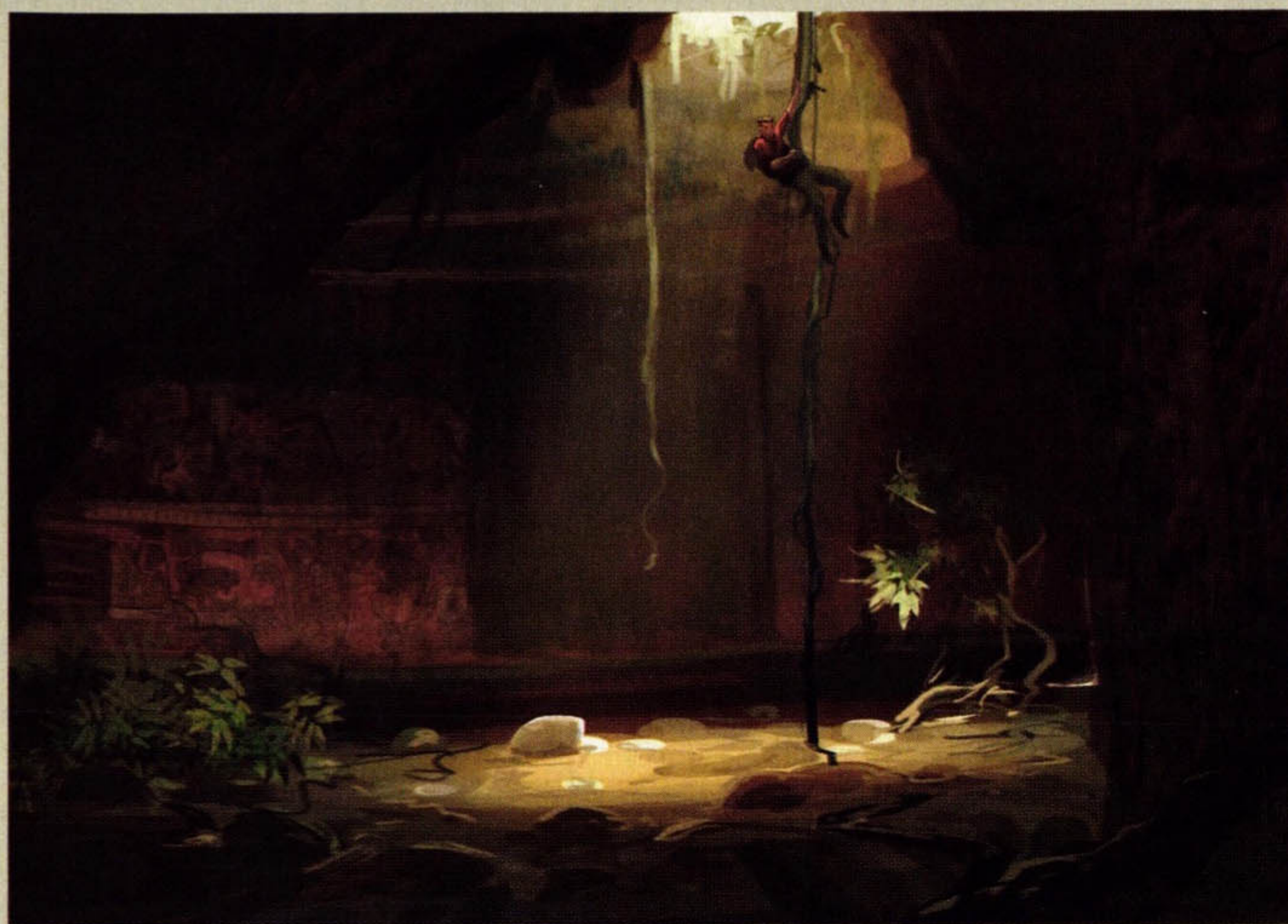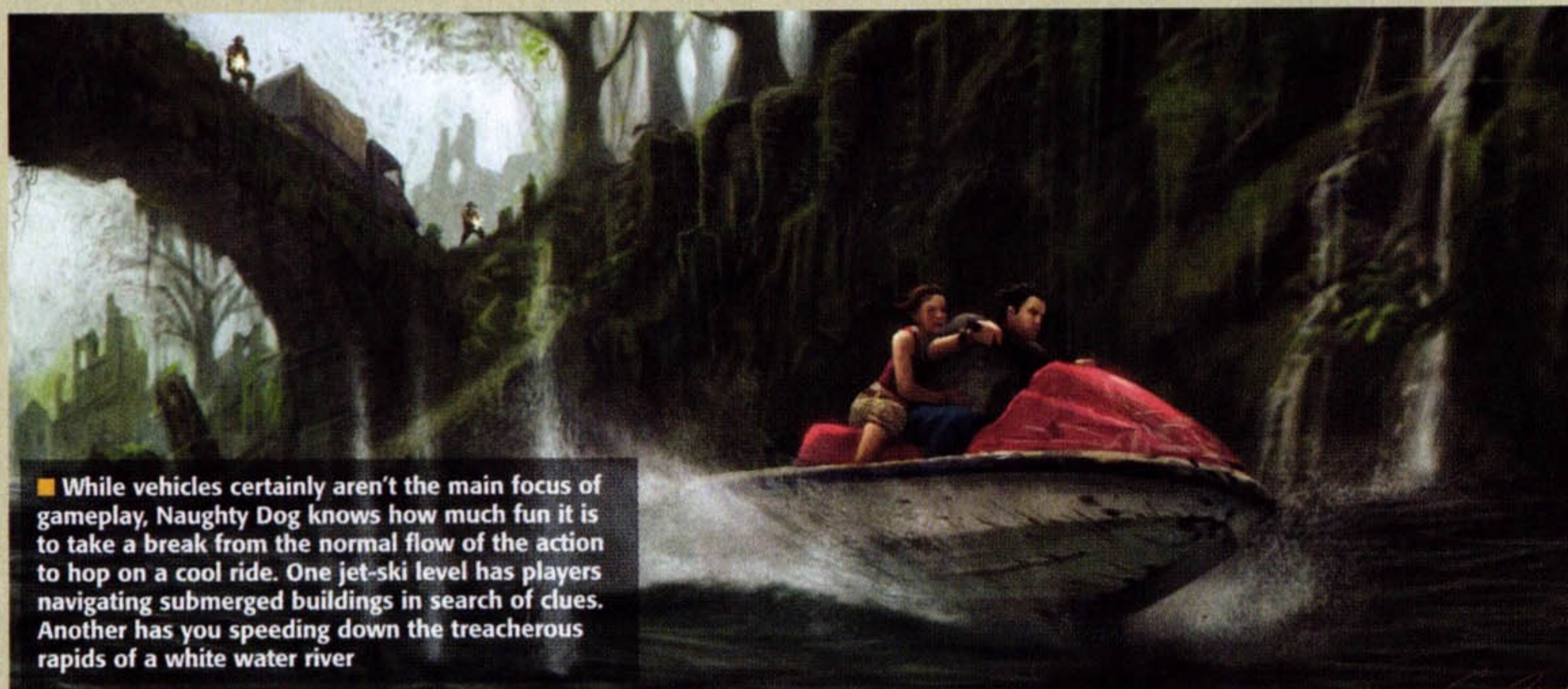
■ Audio in the game serves as a major emotional cue to deepen the experience. Audio director Bruce Swanson puts it simply: "If I could have a metric for how well the game is doing sound-wise, it would be how far I can get through this game with my eyes closed"

Nathan Drake is your classic everyman — it just so happens that he makes his living doing things the everyman only dreams about. For the protagonist of Uncharted, Naughty Dog wanted a character that emulated the great cinematic heroes that had come before. "We wanted to draw from the long history of the classic action/adventure genre, all the way back to the adventure pulps, to the Saturday morning movie serials, to Indiana Jones, all the way up to the contemporary historical detective stories like *The Da Vinci Code* or *National Treasure*," game director Amy Hennig tells us. "The hero is not some badass mercenary soldier. What makes him heroic is the fact that he's tenacious and resourceful, not the fact that he's wearing a hundred pounds of armor, he's tough as nails, and he's got some massive weapon on his back. With everything in the game, we have to make sure that human quality comes through."

To tap into this vibe, the team created Nathan Drake, a finder of lost and forgotten objects who moves in the shady world of treasure hunting, shoulder-to-shoulder with arms dealers and smugglers. Self-educated and with a knack for figuring out the puzzles left behind by history, Nathan has a secret that shouldn't be hard to guess — he thinks he's a descendant of the famous

■ Victor Sullivan

and reportedly childless explorer Sir Francis Drake, and he's out to prove it. A silver ring he wears has been passed down through the family with a strange clue etched on the inside – the date of 1597, the year after his supposed ancestor died. It's the first stop in a long trail of breadcrumbs where things are rarely what they appear to be, as Hennig relayed to us: "One of the recurring themes throughout the game is the juxtaposition of the expected and the unexpected, and the sense of dislocation and intrigue that comes from discovering things where they don't belong."

■ Elena Fisher

From the beginning of production, a big goal for Naughty Dog has been to avoid the dry and emotionless stories that have typified action games for years. "When we talked about what games move us, and so few really do, inevitably it's because you've got somebody that you're playing through with," Hennig explains. "Whether it's Half-Life 2: Episode One, or Shadow of the Colossus with your horse, or even Gears of War with your partners – it's a whole different experience than going through it alone." To emulate that feeling, the supporting cast plays a big role in Uncharted. Elena Fisher steps into the role of the spunky female lead as a documentary filmmaker who has attached herself to Drake's hunt. We also meet Victor Sullivan, an older version of Nathan in many ways. He's an adventurer who's been into the suspect scene of treasure hunting
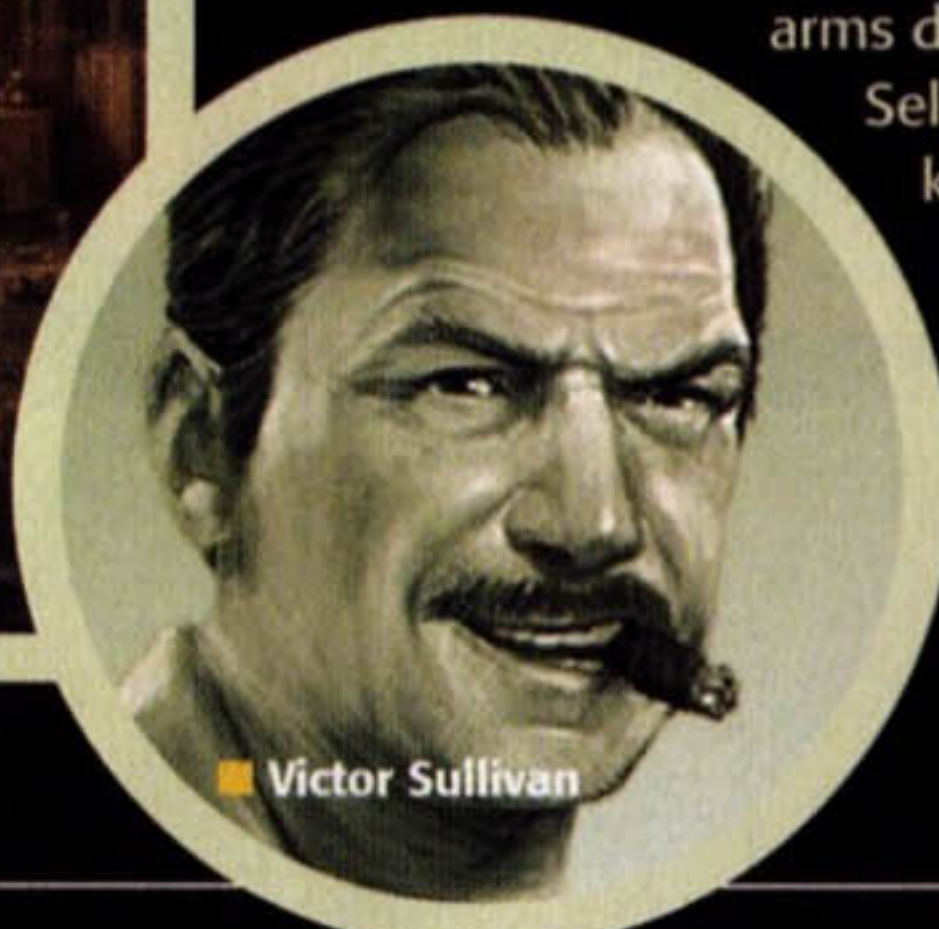
for years, and has the enemies and unpaid debts to show for it. Despite Sullivan's checkered past, Drake looks to him as a mentor of sorts – a friendship that plays a big part in the story that follows.

As the game opens, Nathan and his tagalong camera-wielder Elena have discovered the apparent object of their search: the sunken lead coffin of Sir Francis Drake. Instead of a body, the diary within hints that the great explorer might not have died, but instead headed into the Amazon on one last quest. Before they're able to learn more, their salvage ship is assaulted by a horde of modern day pirates, and the player gets his or her first taste of action. Fending off the onslaught, it's soon clear that it's a hopeless scenario – until Sullivan's sea plane swoops in and rescues them.

The whirlwind of locations and situations that follow keep with that same spirit of uncanny surprises that just never seem to add up. Deep in the Amazon, Nathan and his friends find a wrecked German U-Boat in the middle of the rain forest – its long-dead occupants brutally murdered. The clues they find there launch them towards a forgotten island lost in the vastness of the Pacific. There, a strange Spanish colony lies in ruins, forgotten by history and housing that last secret treasure that Sir Francis Drake was willing to fake his own death to pursue.

■ Jumping is context sensitive, evoking the childhood experience of leaping from rock to rock
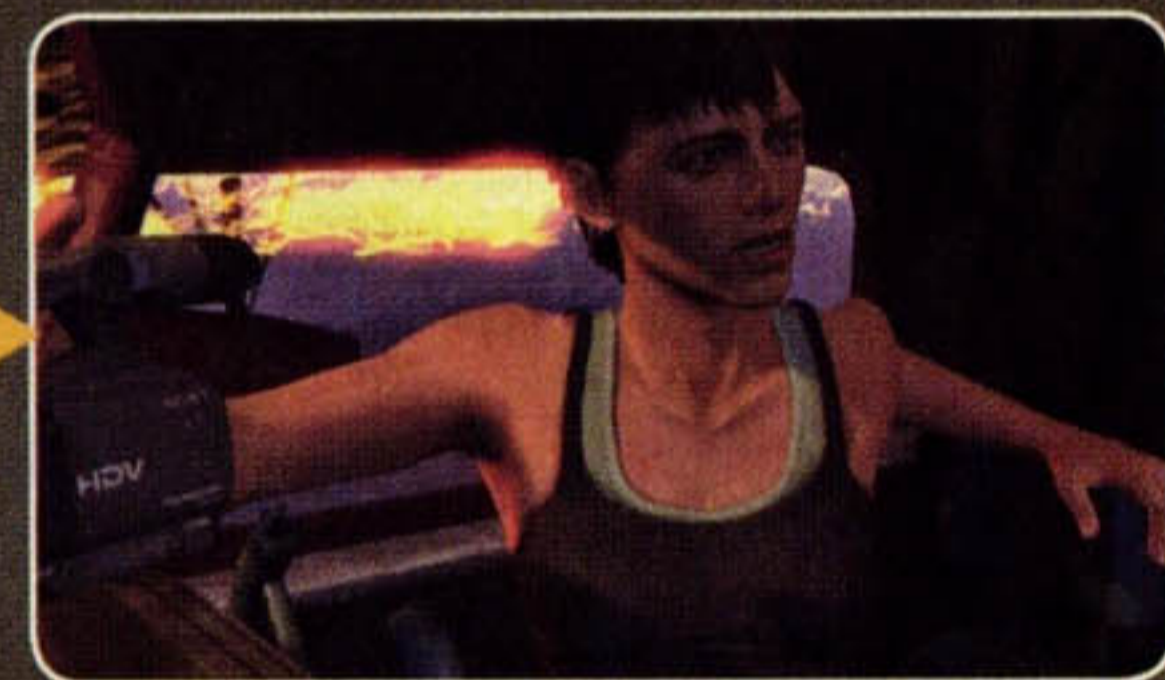
Out to the Movies

"Being a gamer myself, any time I see a cutscene that's kind of half-assed, it bugs me. If I'm going to sit and have the game control taken away from me, I want to enjoy it," lead cinematic animator Josh Scherr tells us. While a big part of the story and character development in Uncharted occurs in the midst of the action, nearly an hour's worth of cinematics are being included to flesh out the plot. After a cinematic sequence is fully plotted out in animatics, a live action director runs a motion capture shoot to establish a starting point for the animation of the cutscene.

A

Here, actors Nolan North and Emily Rose enact the scene in a set built to represent the seaplane. "It's important for the performances that the actors have as much to interact with as possible – pantomiming the actions never looks correct," Scherr explains.

B

The upper area in this image shows the live-action reference, while the lower left is the mo-cap data that comes out of those shoots. Minor differences often emerge during the shoot which vary from the storyboards, shown here in the lower right.

C

While the actors speak their lines during mo-cap, a more polished voiceover session is completed later to produce higher quality audio. The same actors watch their mo-cap performances as a reference while they record.
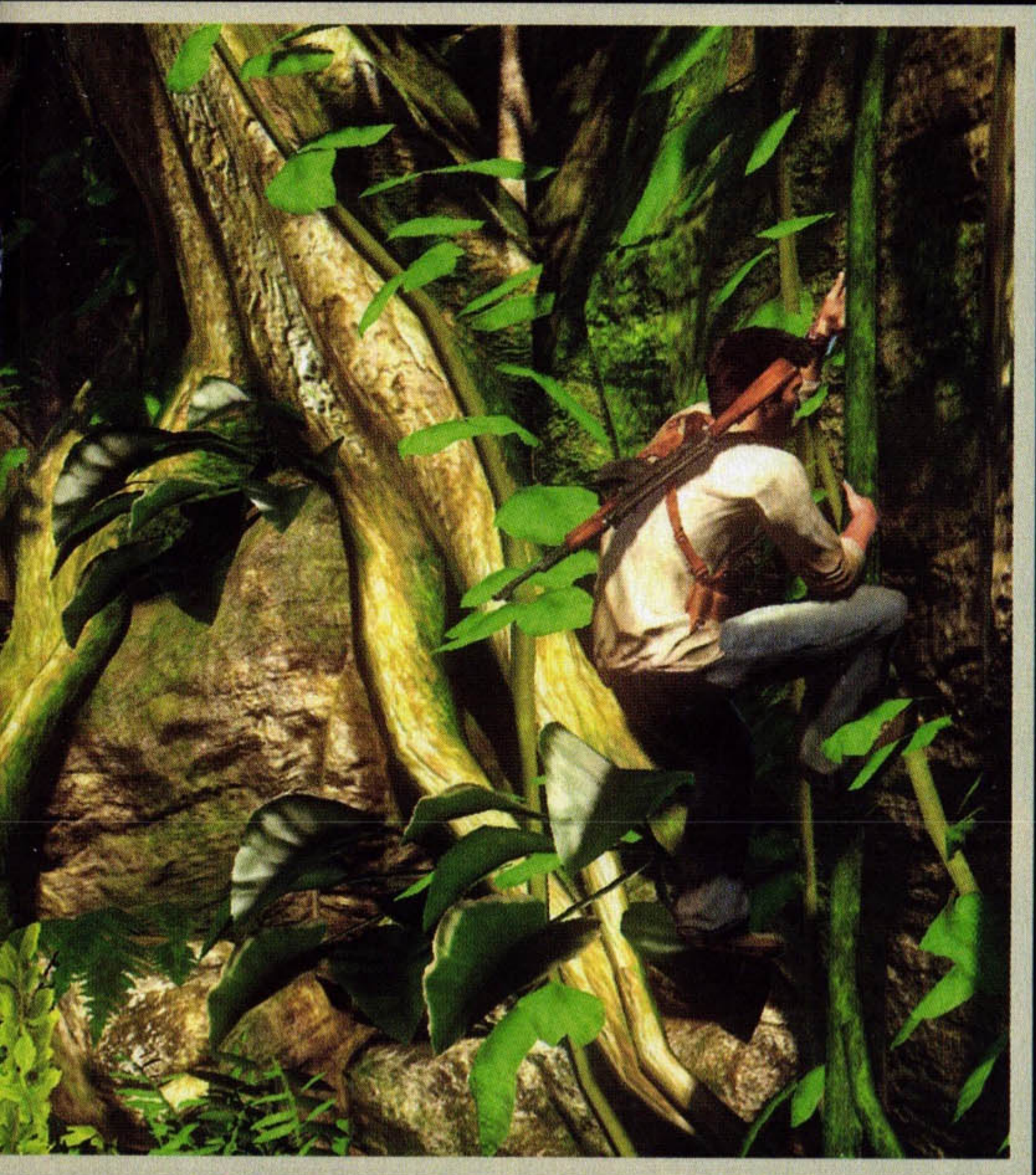
To deliver the by-the-seat-of-your-pants gameplay they're out to achieve, the team at Naughty Dog has approached Uncharted with an eye towards all the hallmarks you'd expect out of a movie with this subject and characters. This doesn't mean, however, that they're trying to turn gamers into movie buffs. Instead, they've examined what makes books and movies about exploration and adventure so exciting and tried to set those ideas into an interactive framework.

Several hallmarks of style and action have emerged into the game. Over 50 minutes of cinematics allow for ample character growth, humor, charm, and romance, while the game's action is punctuated by close calls, impossible escapes, near misses, and seemingly insurmountable odds. The developers we spoke with seemed to turn whatever they were working on back to this grounding in story delivery and emotion. It's a focus that they feel is essential to make the hours of gameplay carry weight and excitement for players. Like many of the great heroes of cinema, Nathan Drake is fallible and even sometimes clumsy. In a gunfight, he's likely to blindly fire back over his shoulder as he dives

for cover rather than calmly line up a long distance sniper shot. Throw him into a brawl and he has no fancy martial arts training to fall back on, but a wild haymaker might just do the trick.

We were offered the incredible chance to be the first outside of Naughty Dog and Sony to put our hands on the controller and find out exactly how it all felt. The near final cinematic we watched and the subsequent level we played take place as Nathan and Elena are making their way to the mysterious uncharted island where the majority of the game occurs. Aboard Sullivan's sea plane, the island appears on the horizon ahead. As Elena films a teaser bit for her documentary, a tremendous crash shakes the plane. Elena rotates her camera out the window to reveal the wing's engine wrapped in flame from an apparent anti-air attack. An exasperated Drake shouts for her to turn off the camera and grab the parachutes. Totally out of her element, Elena takes Drake's questionable advice on proper skydiving technique, hopes for the best, and leaps shrieking from the plane. Without Elena there to impress any more, Nathan realizes how insane it is that he's still at the controls of a rapidly crashing aircraft. He rushes to the windblown entrance, only to smash headlong into the deck as he trips over the cockpit doorway. Questioning aloud what in the world he's doing here, he takes one last glance at the rapidly approaching jungle below and flings himself out the exit.
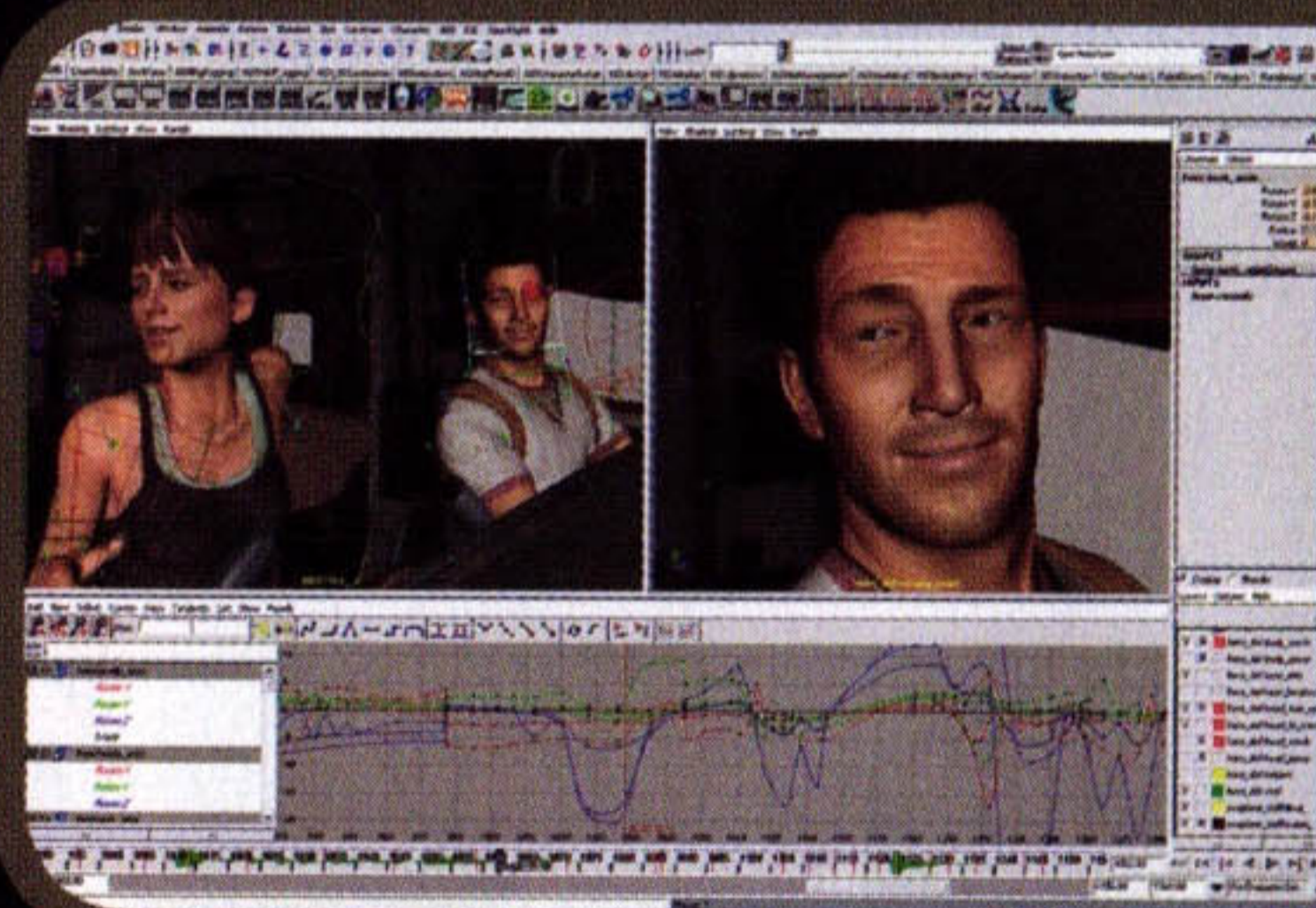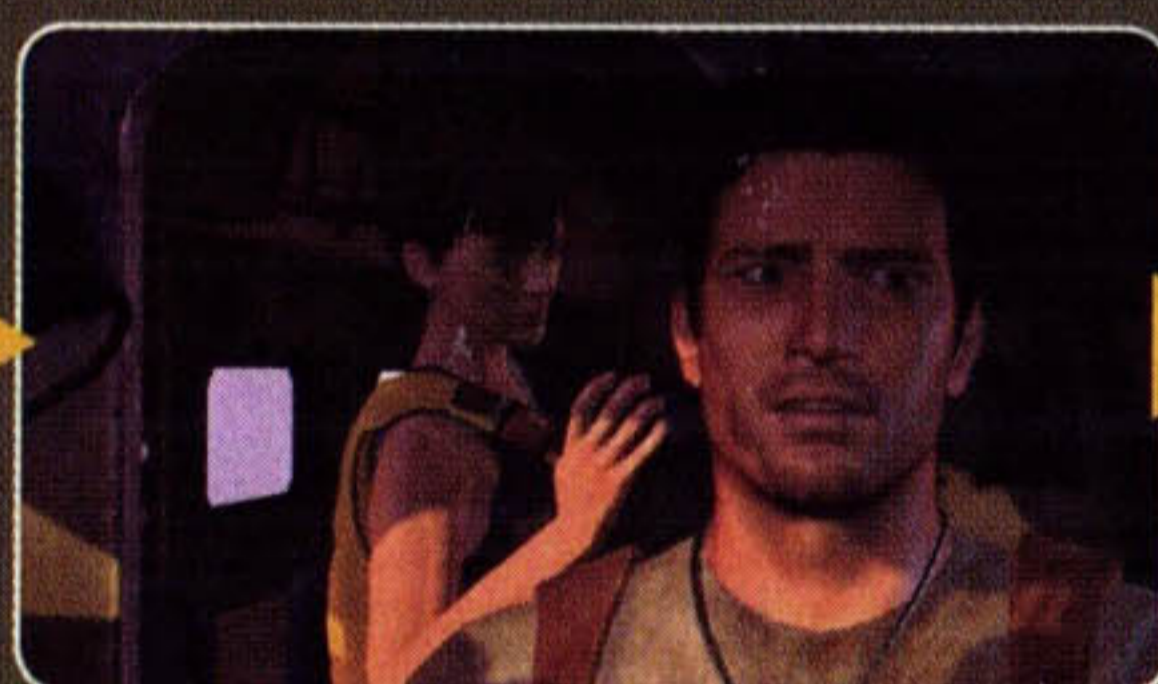
D

All the mo-cap data and audio is then brought into a computer program called Maya, where additional animations can be added by hand. For Uncharted, while the cinematic animators use the videos and motion capture as a reference, all of the facial animation is completed by hand.

E

A lighting pass adds depth and color to the image before the final cinematic emerges.
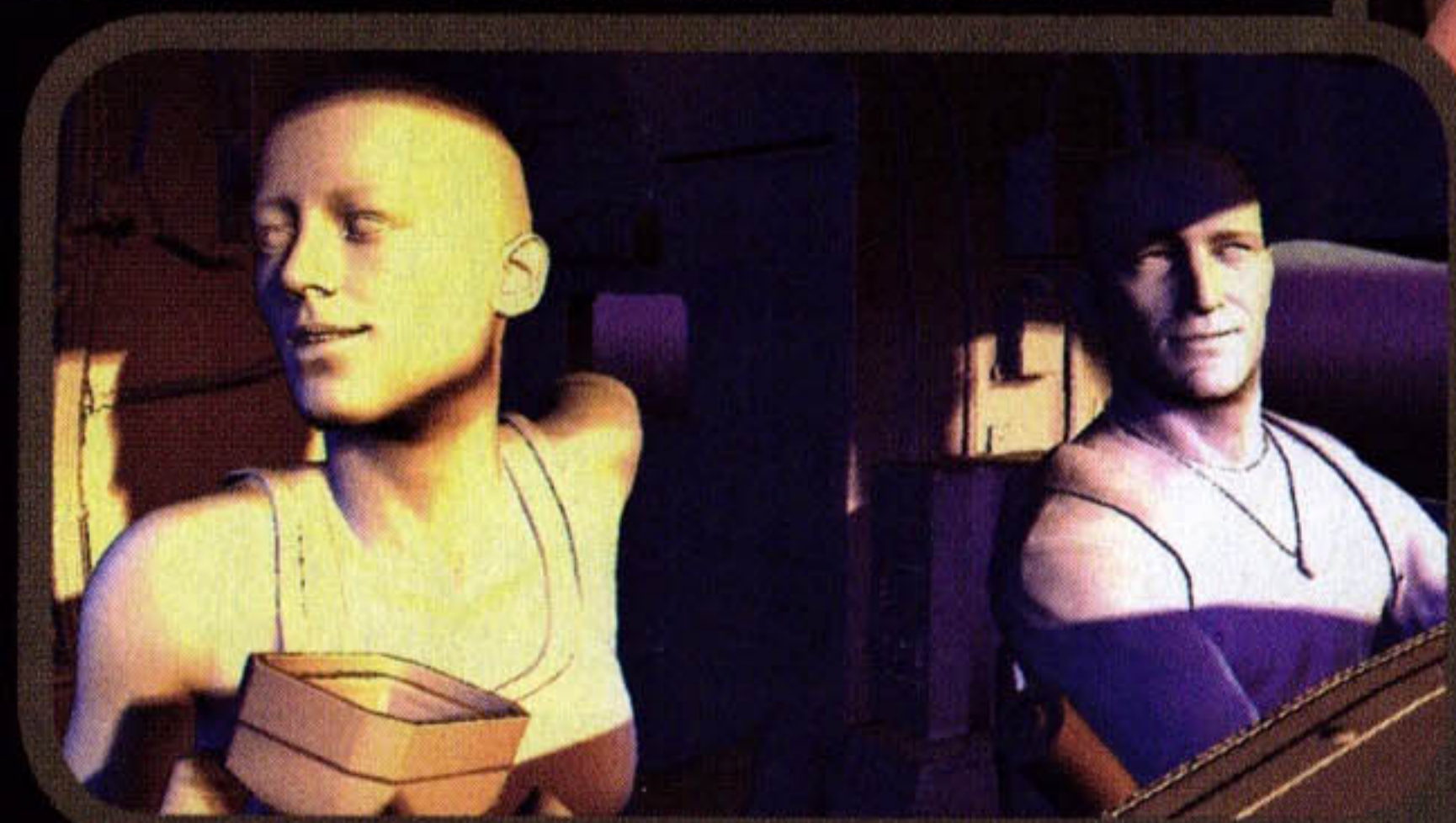
Control of the action was in our hands in the level that followed. Having survived the drop, Nathan finds himself in a stunning moss-covered forest, with a streaming waterfall nearby. Climbing the rocks, we ascended up out of the basin. A wide gap between the cliffs above required a wild leap to the opposing ledge. Barely grasping the far edge, Nathan banged hard against the far rock wall, knocking his breath away before we pulled up and over onto the far side. A downed tree in the next area served to illustrate one of the game's uses of the Sixaxis controller. As we walked Nathan across the narrow beam, we controlled his balance by twisting the controller from side to side, which unsurprisingly resulted in him tumbling belly first onto the log before we managed to inch him across. Once there, we heard the shouted arrival of enemy pirates, soon to be followed by whizzing bullets. As Nathan instinctively ducked, we ran him for cover behind a nearby boulder. Leaning out amid heavy returning fire, a few wild shots from Nathan's pistol dropped his foes, and we ran forward to a hanging vine to continue our climb. Next, we saw the first signs of the strange, misplaced Spanish ruins of the island as more scruffy pirates arrived to attack us. Diving from rock to tree amid a hail of enemy fire, we occasionally scurried aside at the sound of a grenade dropping by our feet. Standing still for very long is almost never an option, as enemies are constantly flanking for better position. With another wave of pirates defeated, we platformed from one ruined Spanish wall to another to reach an ancient metal grate. A button press sent it spinning off its rusted hinges, and beyond, another troop of pirates poured over an old wall as the music swelled into high gear.

■ The Sixaxis controller's motion sensitivity comes into play in balancing acts like this
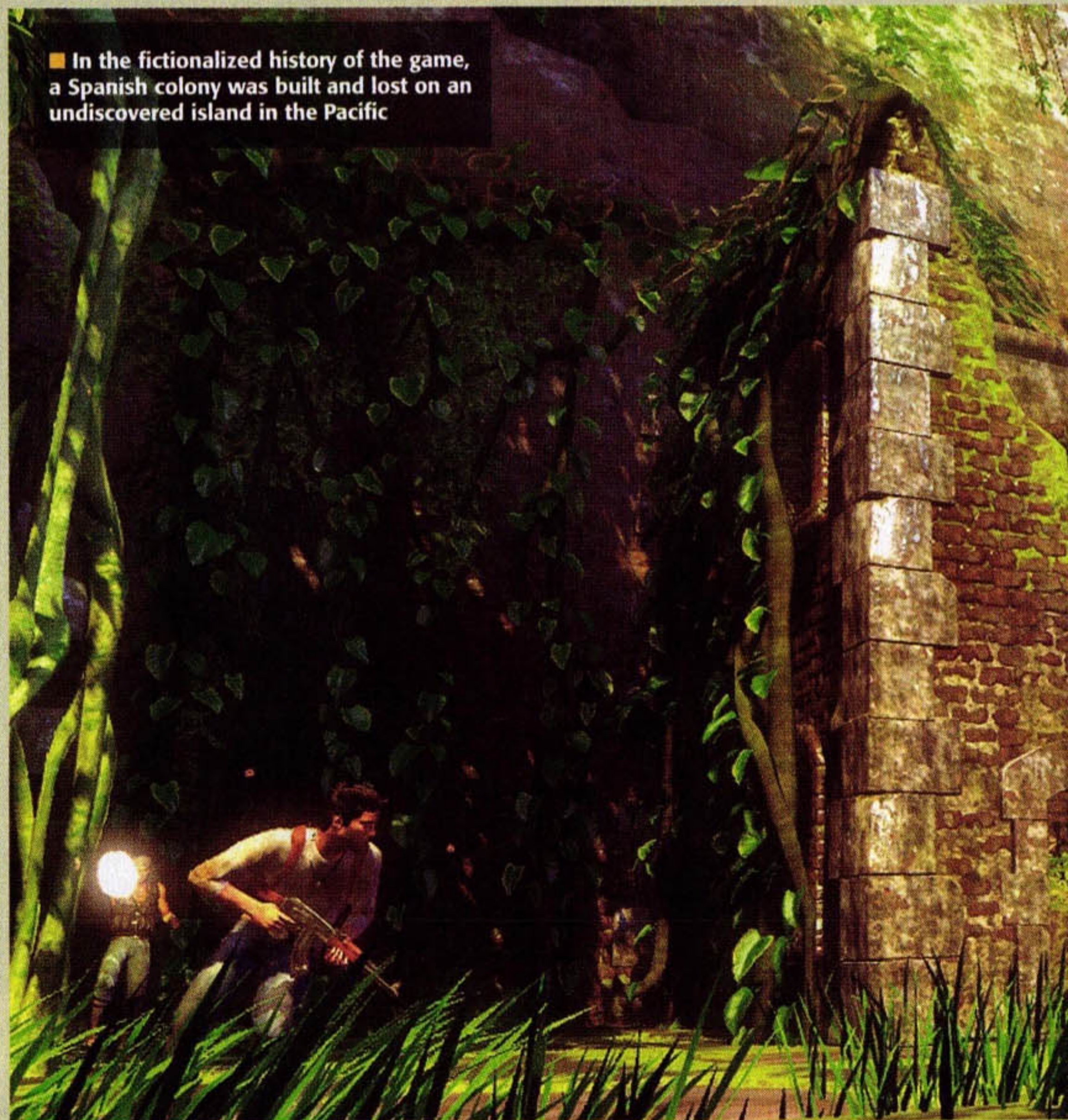
■ In the fictionalized history of the game, a Spanish colony was built and lost on an undiscovered island in the Pacific

All the high adventure, hidden treasure, and frantic gunfights in the world aren't enough to keep a game afloat on the PlayStation 3 if there isn't some impressive tech going on behind the scenes. Luckily, the folks at Naughty Dog are widely recognized as some of the most savvy programmers and technicians in the industry – a fact that was hammered home as we spent hours during our visit with them touring the inner workings of Uncharted.

Nowhere is the expertise of Naughty Dog's creative team more on display than in the complex animation system that governs movement and combat. Three major goals found themselves at odds with each other as the animators began their work. "We wanted him to have realistic movement and believable weight and physics – to feel like he's a 190-pound guy moving around. We wanted him to move fluidly without popping from state to state or from one animation to the next," lead character animator Jeremy Yates explains. "But almost contradictory to those first two goals, we wanted him to feel very responsive to the player." The answer to the dilemma is less a simple trick and instead a commitment to an immense amount of work to make all three goals come together. At the time of writing, Nathan Drake's character has approximately 1,200 unique animations to his name, with more being added daily. The final tally is expected to hover around 3,000. As a point of comparison, Naughty Dog's great PS2 hero Jak had around 200.

Taking Cover

Nathan Drake currently has over 1,200 unique animations that bring him to life in Uncharted. What does that mean to you? Take a look at how Nathan takes cover after leaning out to take a shot. Every time he returns to a neutral stance, minor variations in his posture, hand position, and expression add variety and realism to his actions. It's rare that you see your favorite film hero adopt exactly the same pose multiple times in the same movie – why should your game hero aspire to less?
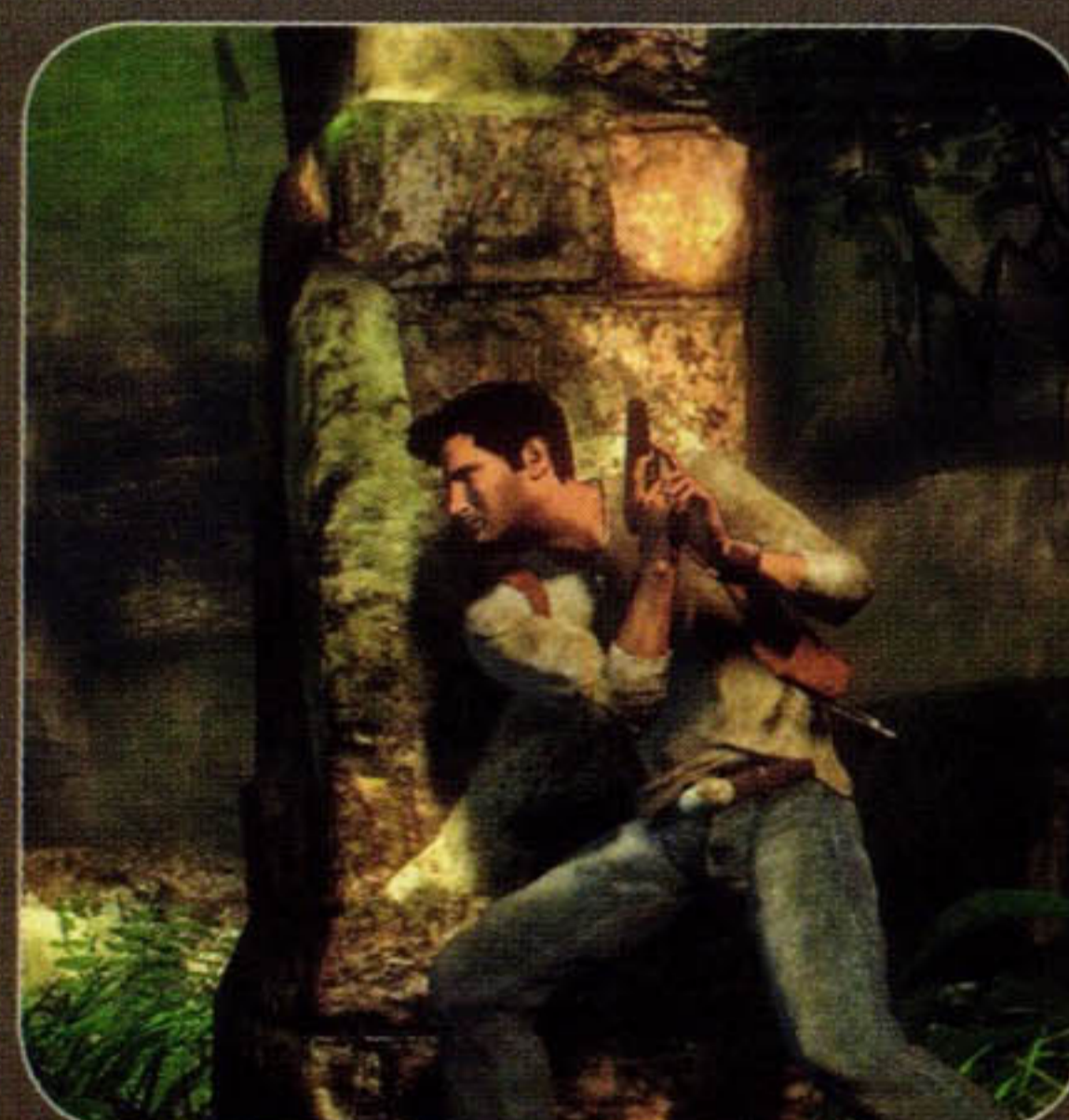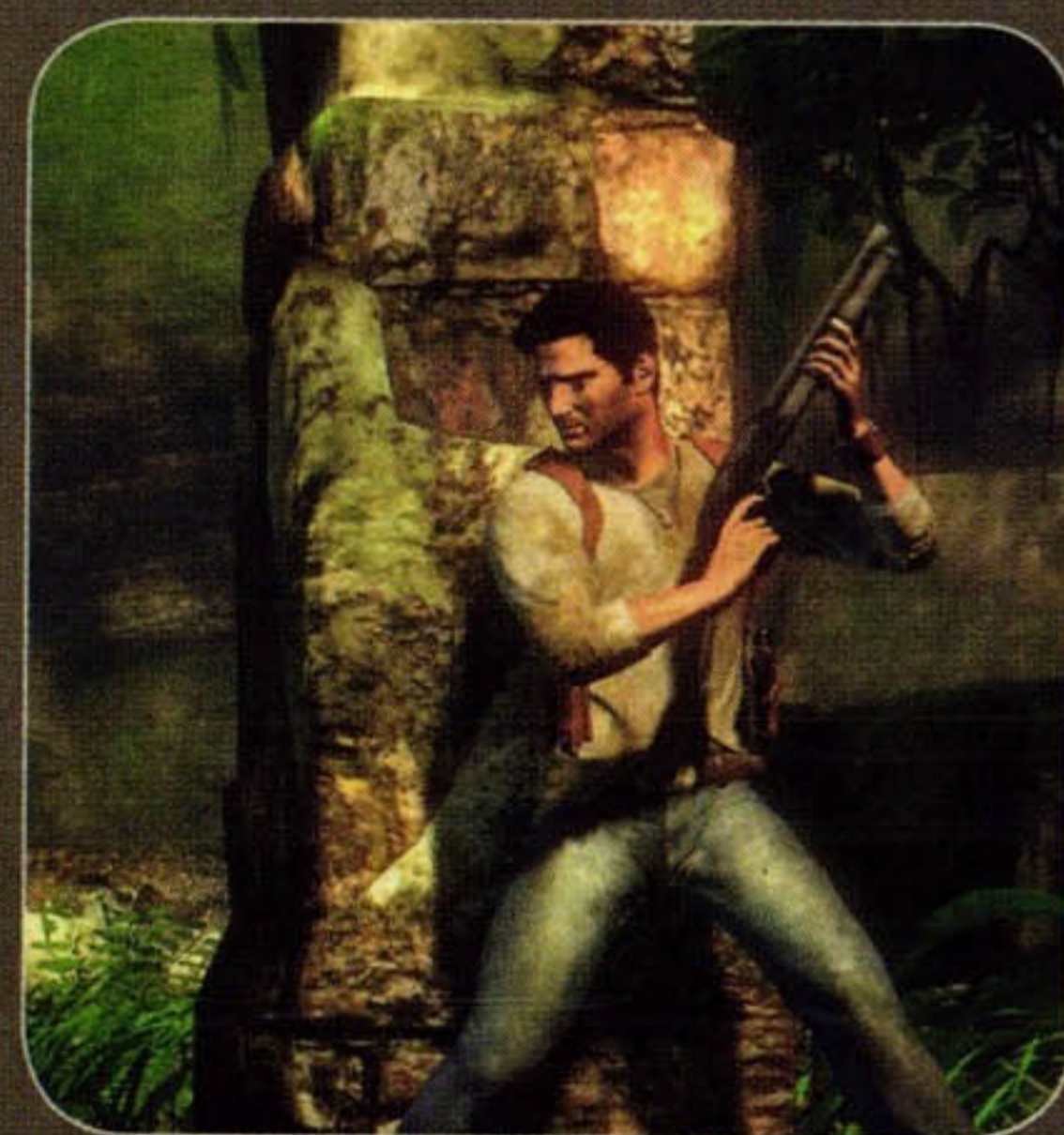
With such a wealth of movements available, the team is aiming for the illusion that you never see the character repeat himself. That's because among the hundreds of unique animations, many of them can be layered on top of each other. This impressive animation technique farms much of the moment-to-moment combinations out to the PS3 SPUs, allowing for Drake to display any number of poses, emotions, and movements all at once. For instance, picture the main character sprinting across a wide-open clearing to reach cover. His running is combined with a frantic ducking and weaving as bullets begin to fly from a nearby cliff face. He's been running for a long time, so his frame is visibly shaking from hard breathing. Simultaneously, he's desperately reloading his rifle so he can fire back. To top off the picture, his face wears a combined mask of fear and determination, assuring an emotional and cinematic component is always present, even in the most action-packed scenario.

Character and environmental artists are hard at work to deepen the immersion. To avoid the "uncanny valley" of eerie and disturbing character realism, Naughty Dog has chosen instead to make artistic choices that are just enough out of the realm of photorealism to be emotion-laden, but not overly exact. "We're not looking at other games and thinking, 'what does this game do?'", explains lead character artist Rich Diamant. "We're looking at film – at the highest end of what people are doing right now, and saying: 'What can we do? Can we mimic this?'" All the characters and environments are modeled from scratch, rather than

acquired through scanning, to allow for total artistic freedom in how those characters appear. An array of complex shaders dictate the way light interacts with objects, including some amazing applications of sub-surface lighting, such as the diffused light of a torch appearing behind the skin of a flesh-colored hand, or sunlight shining both around and through the thin leaf on a tree. Light shining on a bright red sphere reflects off, so that a nearby granite wall is also tinged crimson.

Unlike the simple tile-sets you'd see in older games, every element of the background environment is unique, since the layered textures of moss, rock, and any other surface can all be overlaid in different patterns to create individual objects that are unlike any others that

are visible in the game world. With the power of the PS3 backing them up, the team can create moveable joints on objects like tree branches, so that wind shakes each individually, casting moving shadows onto the ground. And with the aid of high-dynamic range lighting, your character's eye must adjust to drastic shifts in brightness. Have Nathan Drake stare straight at the sun for several seconds, and then stare down into a cave, and your ability as a player to see clearly will emulate his iris' dilation into a darker environment. All these tricks combine to create a world that appears almost soft to the touch – from the hair and clothes of characters to the refracted appearance of the ground beneath a spinning pool of water.
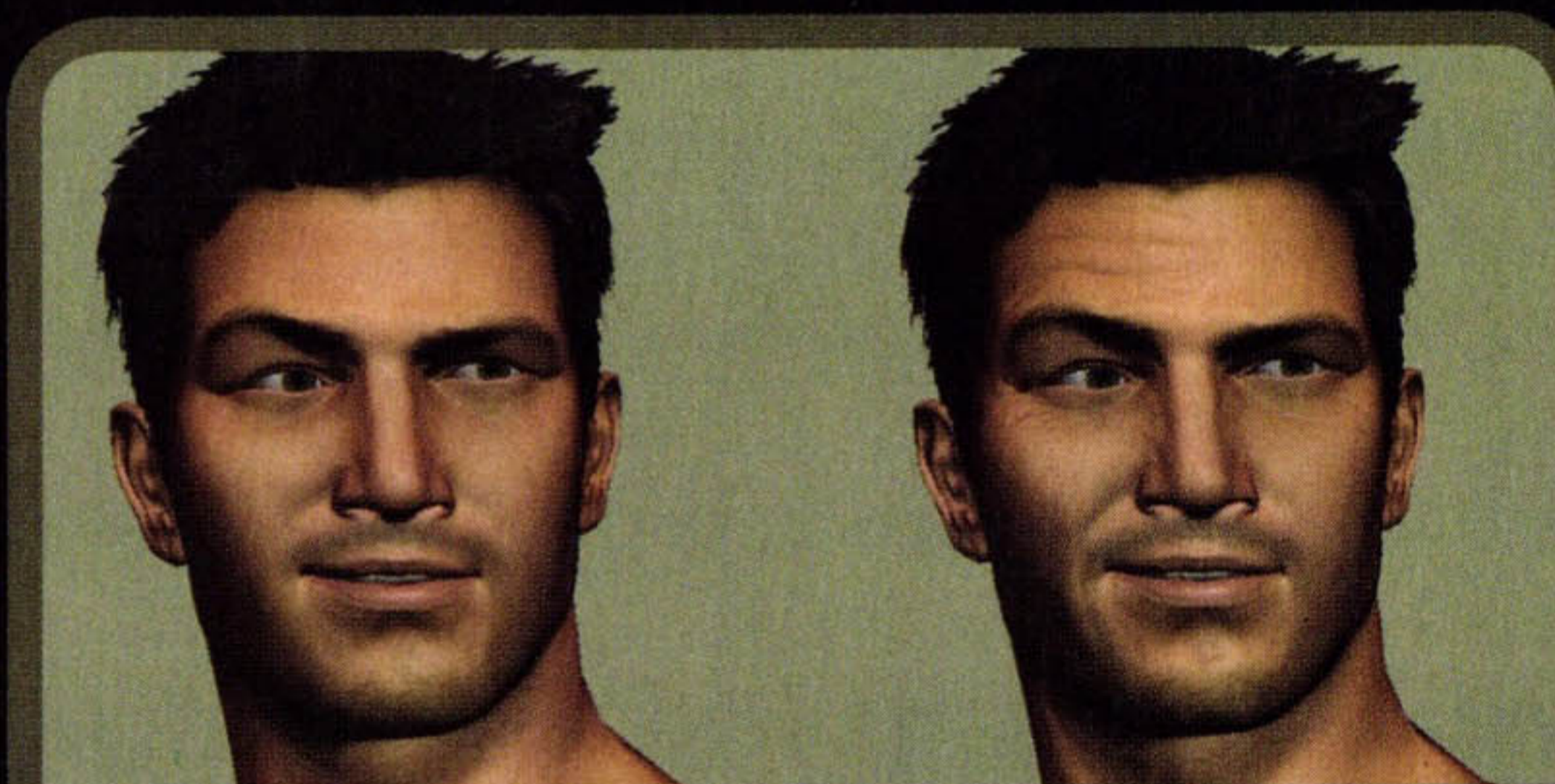
What's in a Wrinkle?

On top of characters' clothing and faces, Naughty Dog has overlaid a wrinkle map that might best be described as a reactionary texture to the shifts in the normal map that lies beneath it. In essence, as the joints in the face or body move into new positions, the wrinkle map responds to create startling realism in both flesh and cloth.
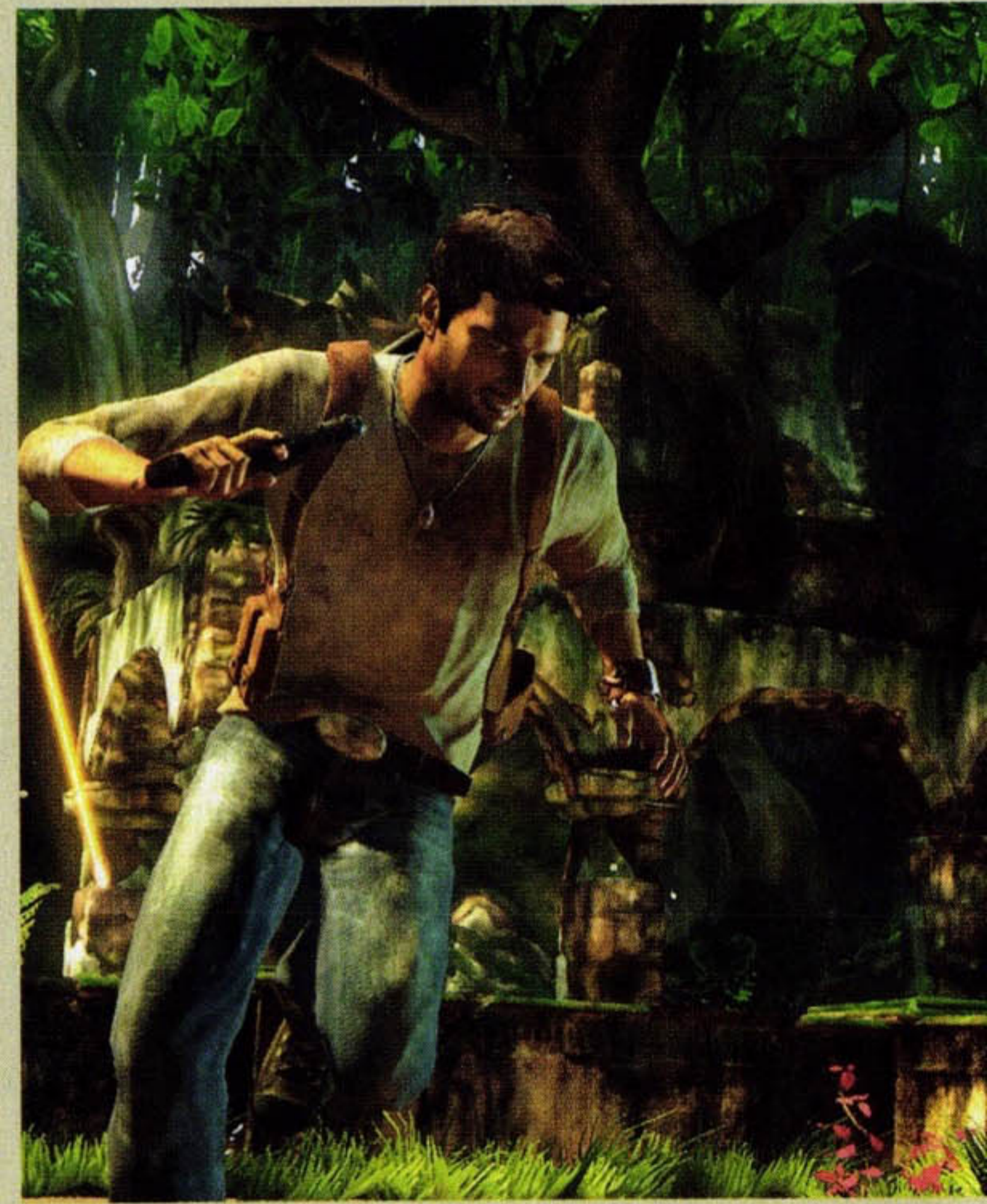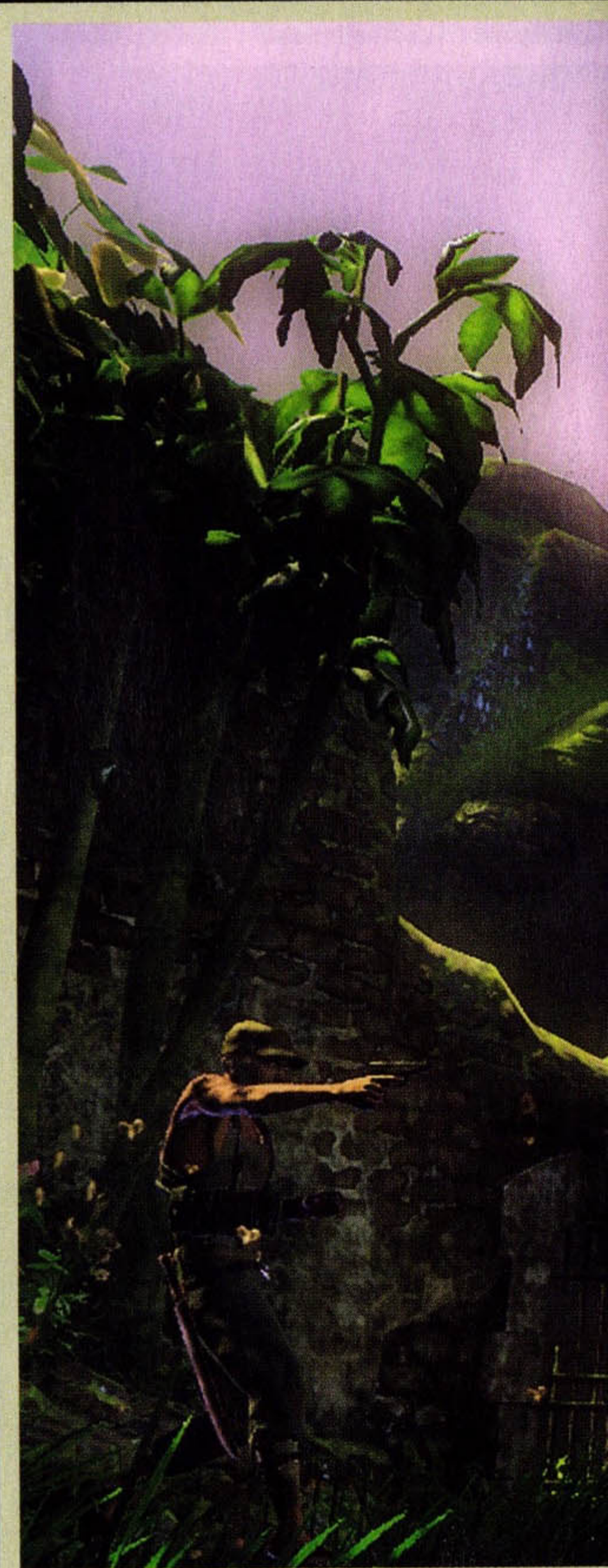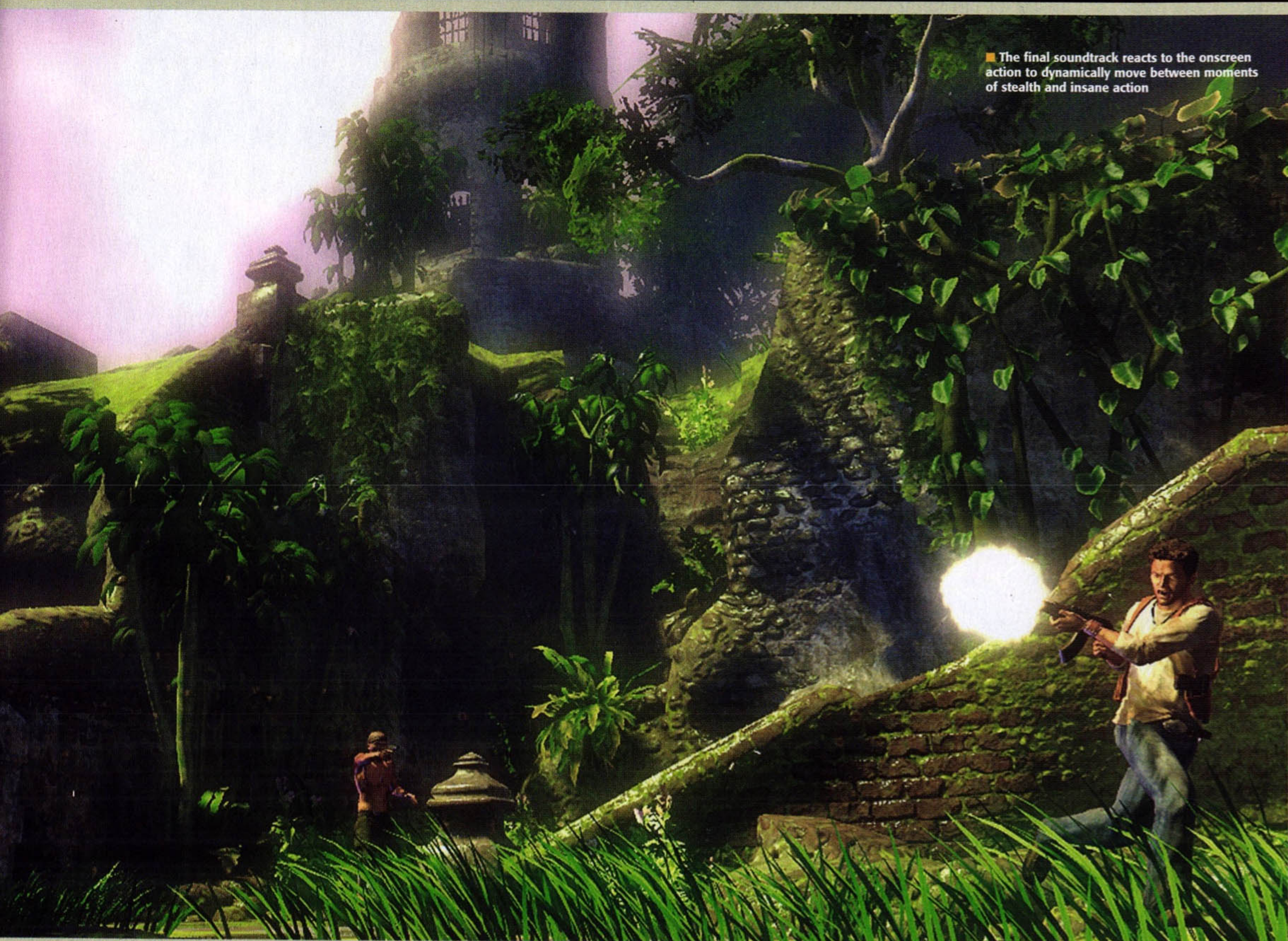
■ The final soundtrack reacts to the onscreen action to dynamically move between moments of stealth and insane action

The question remains: what kind of a game is it? Like many developers, Naughty Dog is hesitant to shoehorn their creation into one genre or another. However, like any game, even one as fun and innovative as Uncharted, clear inspirations are apparent. Ties to classic adventure films serve as the root of the story, from the freewheeling antics of Indiana Jones to *Die Hard's* John McClane, with his penchant for wrong places and wrong times. Gameplay, meanwhile, shares its roots as much with great platformers like Tomb Raider and Prince of Persia as it does with cover-and-shoot action hits like Gears of War. Ultimately, however, Uncharted is looking to establish its own identity as a game that steps beyond the traditional boundaries of running and gunning to tell a story which players will truly care about. Having had a peek at the mystery, humor, and excitement that lies at the game's core, it's easy for us to mark another check in the pro column for why gamers will want a PS3 by this year's holiday season. Uncharted is more than a title to describe an unmapped mystery island in the Pacific. For Naughty Dog, Uncharted is a step into new territory, and its first steps in that direction exemplify what's remarkable about where gaming is headed next. ■ ■ ■

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | WII | PLAYSTATION 2 | PSP
NINTENDO DS | GAME BOY ADVANCE | PC
> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION
> **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION
> **DEVELOPER** TREYARCH (PLAYSTATION 3, XBOX 360),
VICARIOUS VISIONS (WII, PLAYSTATION 2, PSP,
NINTENDO DS, GAME BOY ADVANCE), BEENOX (PC)
> **RELEASE** MAY 4

SPIDER

It's hard to know what it is that people like so much about Spider-Man.

With all the superhero characters and movie franchises that have been attempted over the years, Spider-Man stands high in the public consciousness -- a hero that everybody seems willing to cheer for. There's certainly something fascinating in the idea of swinging wildly through the city from one building to another. Perhaps people love the stable of villains that seem to get thrown at Spidey, making his exploits all the more exciting to vicariously live through. But if there's one thing that sets the webslinger apart from the dozens of comic characters that have met with less success, it's his humanity -- the pain of losing family, the demands of a real romance, and the responsibility of stepping up to do the right thing. This year, moviegoers and

taking on supervillains in desperate battles wherever they're found. So why should gamers be ready for another day in Spidey's shoes?

The answer lies in the vast number of changes Treyarch has made to step up their game, many of which are responses to the problems that players encountered in their earlier releases. The city has been dramatically expanded, adding a wealth of building interiors and a full sewer and subway system to explore, among other things. A totally rethought combat system abandons the button mashing of the old games and encourages observation and quick reflexes. The storyline has expanded into every area of the game -- side missions now have a measurable effect on the world and provide new moves and power-ups as rewards. Finally, the game embraces the mythos of the movie by giving players the chance to experience the film's events in several exciting ways, from the raging

own progression through the game." Unlike previous games, 10 unique storylines are open to players, many of which are available simultaneously. Click on an icon for any one of these missions, and an unmissable shaft of light appears in the game world to guide you to your chosen destination. Where previous games offered a seemingly endless string of basically meaningless purse snatching missions and carjackings, the crime in Spider-Man 3 has been incorporated into longer story-based conflicts with three different gangs that have swept into Manhattan. "Colors on the map will indicate gang control," Pass explains. "At any time I can go and launch into gang missions. Through that story progression I'm exploring different mission objectives, solving various crimes, handling these gangs and diminishing their influence in those areas." We got to play through a mission halfway through the storyline of the Dragon Tail gang, a group intent on stealing ancient

-MAN 3™
THE WEBSLINGER RETURNS

game players alike will go along for the ride as Peter Parker's humanity is tested in the defining story that has long stood as a favorite with fans: Spider-Man gives in to his frustration and rage to don the black suit. With a brand new approach to the game formula it helped invent and popularize, Treyarch is delivering a huge new title to accompany this year's sure-to-be blockbuster summer movie hit. This month, we sat down to play its creation and find out what's new, what's returning, and if Spider-Man still has the goods to keep us swinging.

While Treyarch has created a brand new game engine for its first foray with Spider-Man onto next-generation hardware, the resulting look and style are remarkably familiar. Spider-Man is still jumping and zipping through the city of New York, still beating up criminals in the name of justice, and

attacks powered by Peter's mysterious black suit to newly added interactive cinematics that evoke the insane action and excitement of the movie. All told, it's not a complete departure. It is, however, an upgrade to almost all the problems that have plagued the first entries in the game franchise.

The game world of Spider-Man 3 is gorgeous to behold. Drop into Times Square, and the blinking signs and busy traffic are inviting and detailed. Pause the game and the camera pulls back into a fully rendered 3D map of New York. You can zoom in and out to take a closer look at the numerous labeled dots that spot the play area. "At any given time, the player has access to all sorts of different missions," producer Brian Pass says as he shows us around the game. "There's no checklist -- nothing gating the player except their

art pieces for reasons Spider-Man can't fathom. While the mission involved simply protecting a helpless art dealer, it did show off how much plot and voicework are being poured into these independent mission lines. In addition, instead of a point-based experience system, players will unlock new actions and combat moves through these side missions, offering an added edge as you tackle the major conflicts of the movie plot.

We also got the chance to experience the opening of the game, which finds Spidey in conflict with a mad bomber as he attacks a downtown building. Here, as we flipped and kicked our way through his minions, we got a good taste for the expanded combat system. A major push from the folks at Treyarch seems to have bolstered the importance of dodges and counters. As an enemy
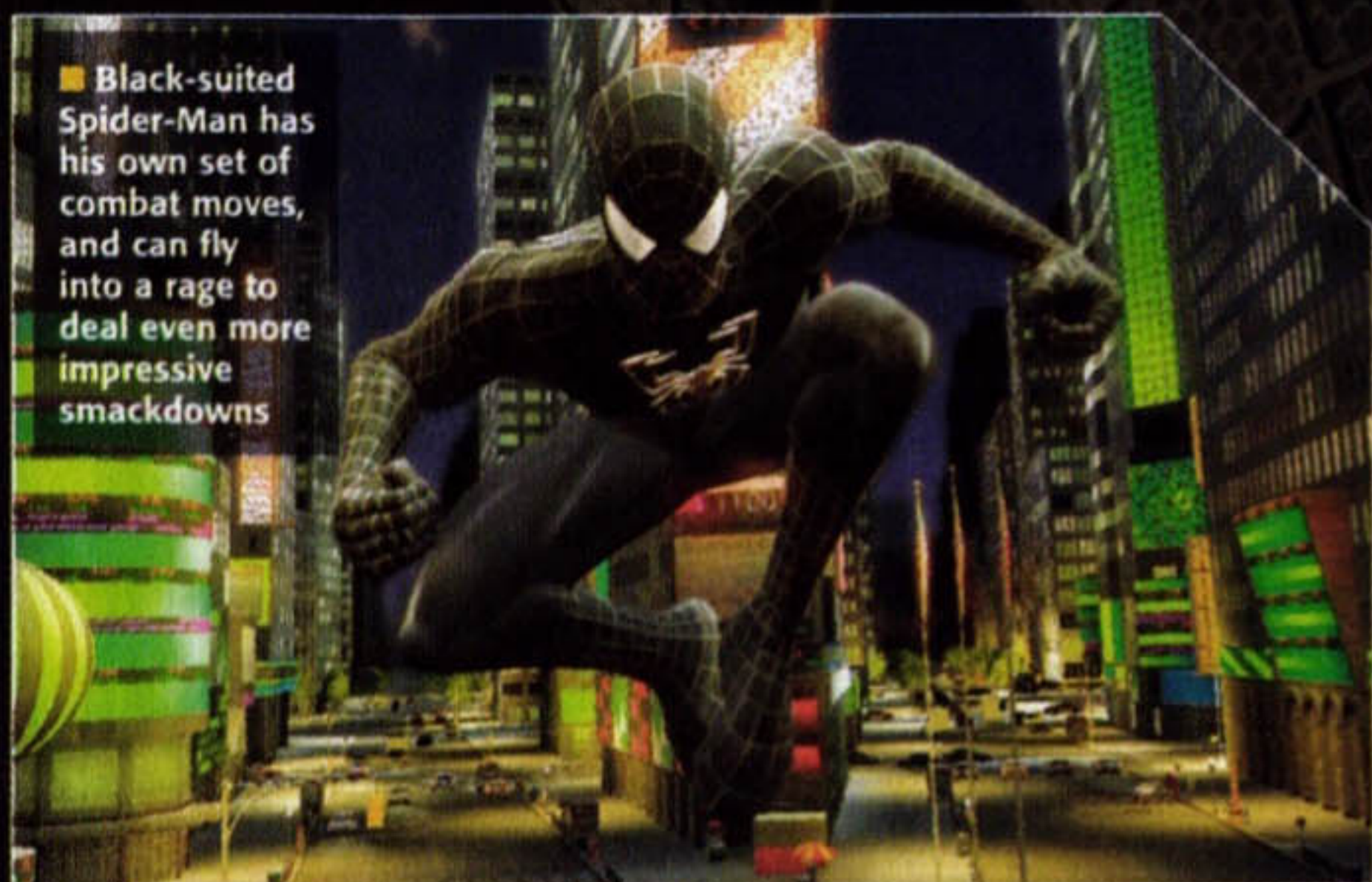
Black-suited Spider-Man has his own set of combat moves, and can fly into a rage to deal even more impressive smackdowns
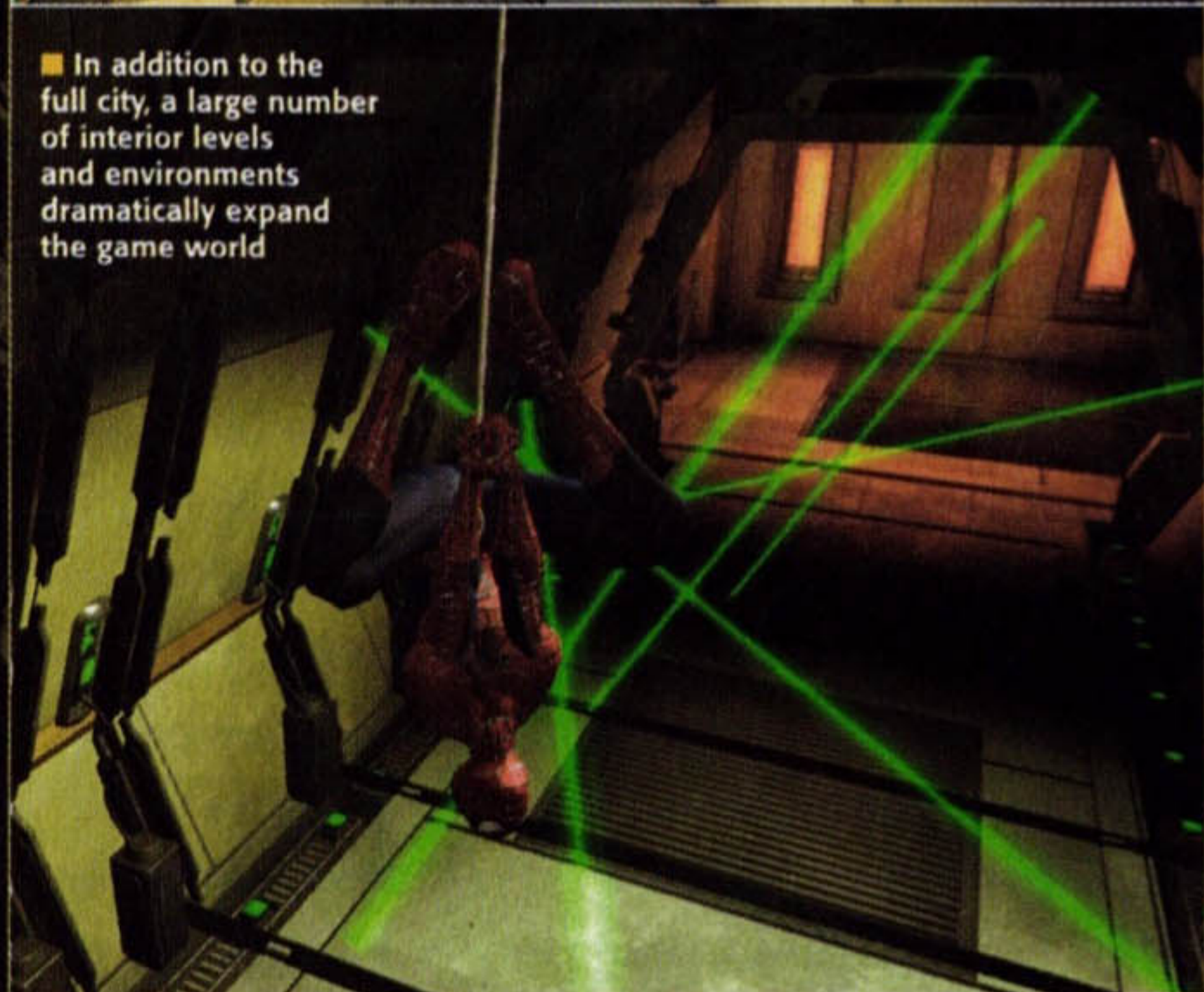
In addition to the full city, a large number of interior levels and environments dramatically expand the game world
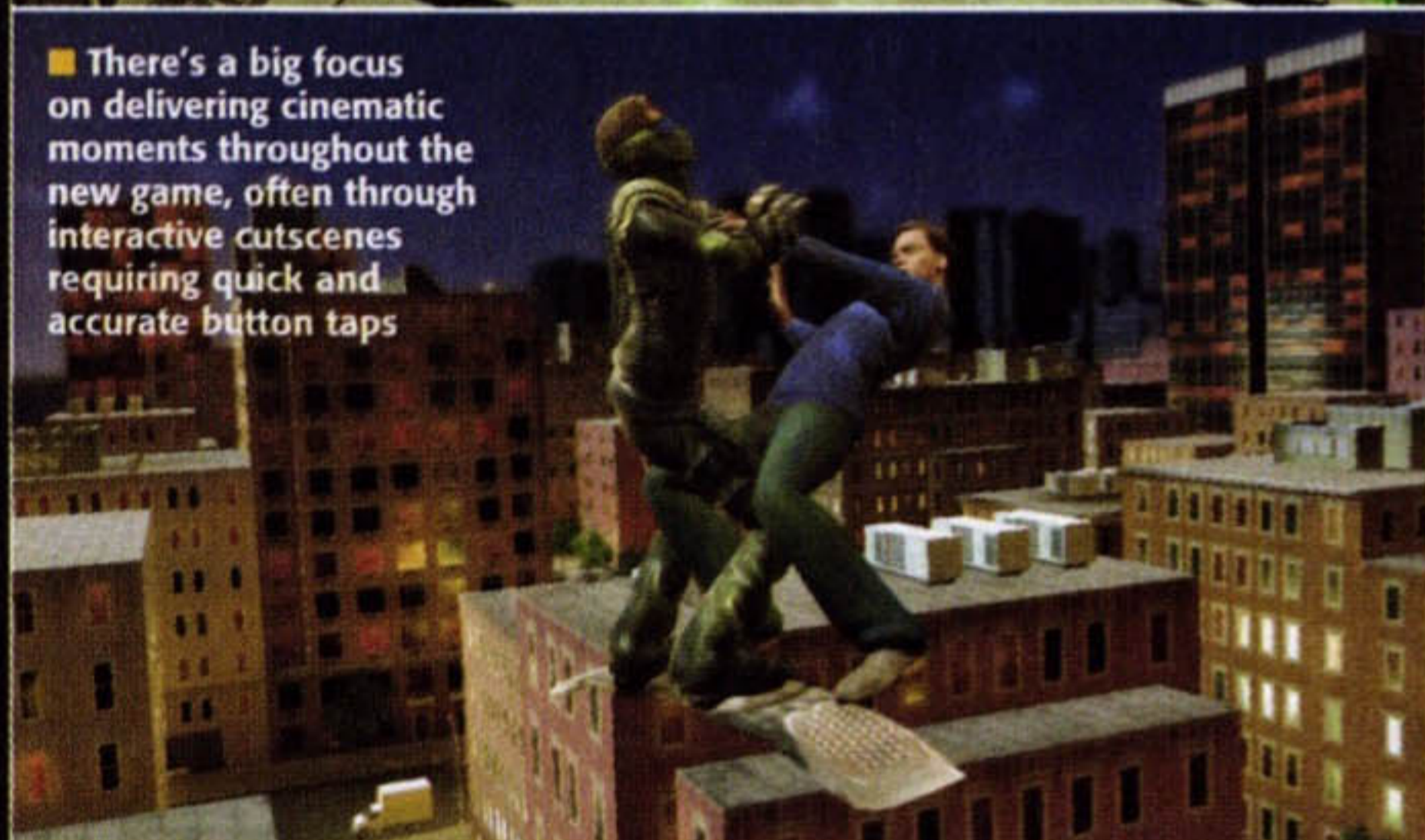
There's a big focus on delivering cinematic moments throughout the new game, often through interactive cutscenes requiring quick and accurate button taps
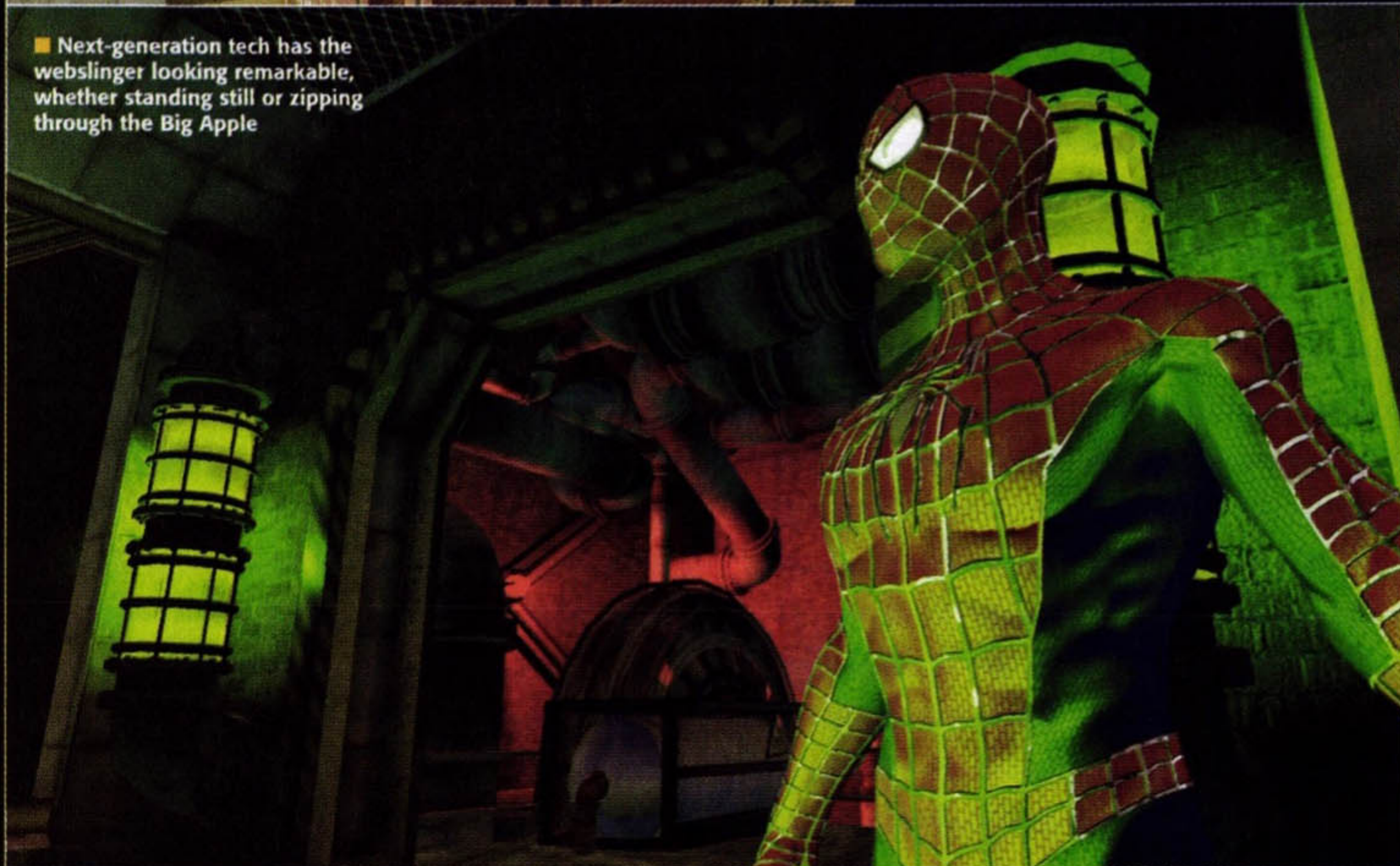
Next-generation tech has the webslinger looking remarkable, whether standing still or zipping through the Big Apple

prepares to throw a punch or take a shot, a quick pop-up icon offers a split second dodge move, while a second button press lets players respond with a quick attack. As Spider-Man you'll also be able to manually trigger Spider-Sense, which overlays the screen with a clear image of where threats lie in the area by outlining them in red. A new blue meter by the health bar delivers a rechargeable Spider Reflexes power, letting players slow down time while Spider-Man remains at full speed, with some obvious benefits. All told, 40 different combat moves become available throughout the game, many of which are upgradeable as you play. Among these are the anger-induced actions enabled by wearing the black suit – when adopted, a whole new suite of attacks become available. Once Peter dons these darker accoutrements, he'll move with greater speed, attack with more power, and generally be even more of a nightmare to the street thugs who get in his way. "He's got his own set of moves. It's a darker side of Spider-Man," Pass says. "He's got attitude, and the power set lines up with that new attitude." The black suit also enables a rage mode that amplifies these abilities even further. When we played, both suits felt great, with the exception of a jerky camera that feels like a holdover from earlier installments. If it addresses this issue, Treyarch should have some happy players out there exploring all the options that the combat system affords.

Treyarch knows that there's a wide variety of players who will be tackling their new game, from casual movie watchers to rabid comic fans. Rather than cater to one or the other, the team has opted to do both by including a wealth of different characters and events to keep everybody happy. Dr. Connors will make the unfortunate transformation into the Lizard in one quest line. The gang storylines seem to inevitably converge on the presence of Kingpin in the game. We even played through an exciting encounter with Scorpion: In a secluded science lab, we encountered a mechanized version of the popular villain, who has been forced into criminality against his own will by a form of mind control. After trashing the lab, the fight boiled over onto the streets of the city, where

a challenging chase sequence began. "Fights are no longer contained to walled-in interiors. I can take this battle right out onto the streets if I want to. I can go up on building tops – I can go pretty much wherever I want to," Pass tells us. As we were running down Scorpion, we tried another new feature: cinteractives. It's a fancy word to describe the button-press minigames popularized by the original God of War. In Spider-Man 3, these minigames are designed to provide action sequences akin to the cinematography of the movies while keeping control in the hands of the player. Chasing Scorpion down the street, he turned at one point and began to hurl cars back at us to slow us down. With adept acrobatics and some well-timed button inputs, we twisted and flipped our way past the flying cars to continue the chase. These cinteractives play a big part in the game, and add just the right amount of movie-like excitement without pulling players out of the base fighting system.

Of course, the movie has its own share of new villains to challenge the webslinger. We got a kick out of the level we played that had Harry Osborn ambushing Peter, flying in to tackle the out-of-costume hero as the New Goblin. Aboard his sky board, Harry was flinging bombs and blades at lightning speed, necessitating some judicious use of Spider Reflexes and counters to take him down. Our demo of the game wasn't about to call it quits there, though; a fight in the subway with new villain Sandman was also impressive. There, as subway cars hurtled by, Spidey and Sandman engaged in a furious exchange of blows, with the villain throwing up shields of sand and transforming his hands into hammers and maces.

While there may be several other characters to surprise fans, one last encounter remained under wraps – the appearance of (and inevitable fight with) Venom. The black-suited symbiote will undoubtedly play a huge part in this summer's movie, so we expect to see a titanic fight in the game as well. In the meantime, we'll have to

content ourselves with some other treats that are headed to lucky PlayStation 3 owners. The PS3 collector's edition will include interviews with the likes of Tobey Maguire, Avi Arad, Thomas Haden Church, and Bruce Campbell. Far more exciting, however, is the inclusion of an exclusive playable character – PS3 players will be able to switch over and play as the New Goblin, flying through the city and engaging in his own special missions.

Rather than scrapping what was amazing about its first Spidey games, Treyarch has created a new game that embraces those qualities – a choice that may leave some gamers feeling flat and asking for more sweeping changes to the formula. For the rest of us, Spider-Man 3 seems to address most of the major missteps that seemed to hold back their other efforts. With luck, the game we'll be playing this May will have been polished to a sheen that can satisfy more than passing movie enthusiasts and step forward into the realm of great standalone action games. ■■■

■ Sandman is one of many villains that players will take on – others are culled from both the movie and the long history of Spider-Man comics
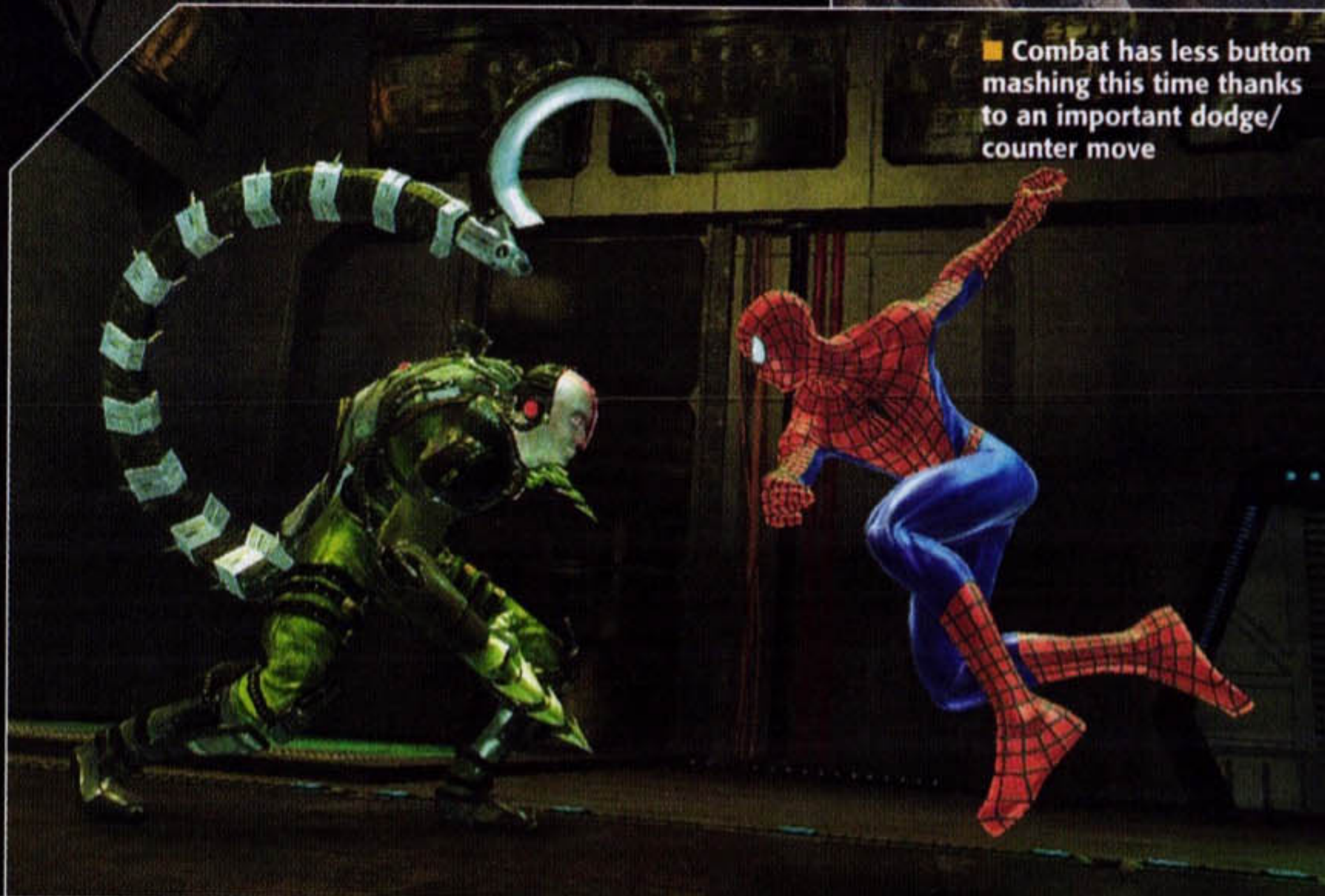
■ Combat has less button mashing this time thanks to an important dodge/counter move
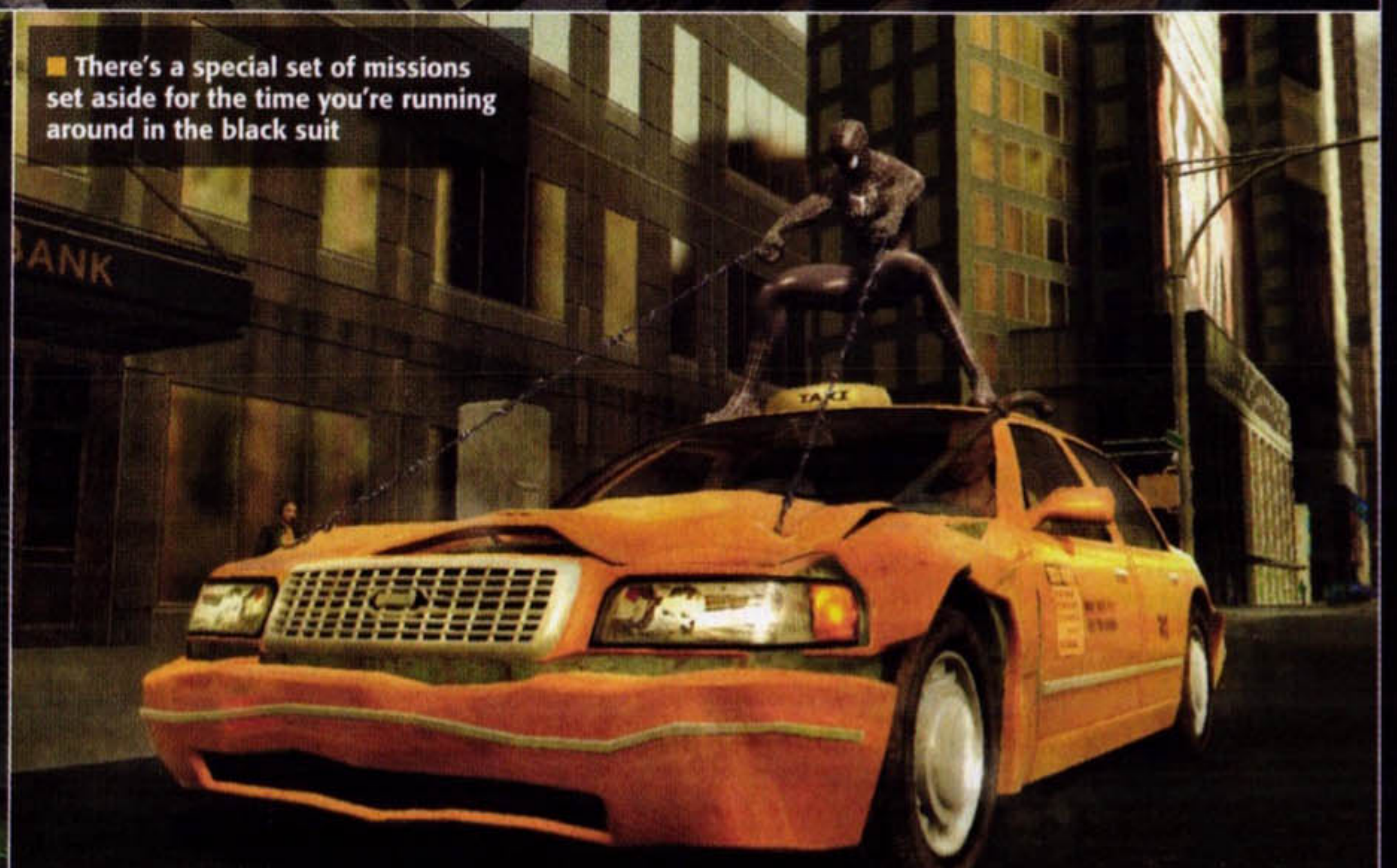
■ There's a special set of missions set aside for the time you're running around in the black suit

■ An entirely new combat engine combines favorite moves from previous games with new ways to tap into Spidey's unique powers

■ The PlayStation 3 Collector's Edition will feature a sweet bonus – the ability to play as the New Goblin and fly freely through the city

SABOTEUR
VIVA LA RESISTANCE

>>> The last several years have seen a glut of World War II games flooding the market with everything from cinematic thrill rides to bottom of the barrel budget titles. What is so compelling about this war? Perhaps it's the massive scale of the war and the numerous fronts on which it was fought. Maybe it's the clear-cut "good guys versus bad guys" nature of World War II that is lacking in more recent conflicts. Still, some gamers are becoming fatigued with the genre – which is why developer Pandemic is going to great lengths to distance itself from the pack of WWII games with its new title, Saboteur. Known for such franchises as Full Spectrum Warrior, Star Wars: Battlefront, Destroy All Humans, and Mercenaries, Pandemic is utilizing its particular brand of creativity to make a WWII game that's not about raiding the beach at Normandy or taking back Stalingrad. Saboteur is equal parts *Sin City* grit, Prince of Persia platforming, Indiana Jones cinematic action, Splinter Cell stealth, and Grand Theft Auto open world freedom. Find out how they plan to blend it all together while taking players on a surreal ride from pulpy black and white to blindingly bright color as they liberate occupied France from Nazi rule on a personal quest for revenge. <<<

NOT ANOTHER RANDOM SOLDIER

On the eve of World War II, an Irishman known only as Sean has been frequenting racing circles in Paris, even participating in the French Grand Prix. Nazi presence is increasing every day, but Sean doesn't necessarily consider it his problem…until one day, when everything changes.

"Many of the people that he's very close to are killed by the Nazis because he was in the wrong place at the wrong time and saw something he shouldn't have," says Saboteur director Trey Watkins. "He ends up caught up in this, and they come down with the heel of the Nazi boot on him and everyone he knows. So we strip everything away from him, and the story follows him finding himself and forging new alliances and exacting revenge on the specific Nazis who were responsible for what happened."

Pandemic is vague at this point on plot details, but they have revealed that Sean is primarily after a certain Nazi general who authorized the attack. However, he'll have more face time with Dierker, the general's number two and assumed killer of Sean's friends and family. This focus on vengeance within the backdrop of World War II is one of several factors that Pandemic hopes will make Saboteur stand out among other titles in the genre.

"Ultimately we're not really concerned about winning the war because we know how that turns out," says producer Phil Hong. "We're more interested in telling the story about winning the personal battles."

Sean quickly finds that working alone won't get him far. He will eventually join up with the underground French Resistance, performing several acts of sabotage to weaken Nazi power in the area in hopes of opening the path to his final targets. This is where some groundbreaking use of color comes into play.

■ Sean's character model features independent lighting from the environment, producing a glowing outline

■ Slight color highlights punctuate the black and white areas in a manner reminiscent of Sin City

In transitional areas between color and black and white, tones are gradually muted

Both black and white and color areas will exist side by side

STEALTH AND SABOTAGE

While an area is directly under Nazi control, everything appears in dour shades of black and white. Soldiers choke the streets, citizens walk around hunched over in fear, and a general tone of despair and oppression hangs in the air. It's here that Pandemic hopes to focus on stealth and platforming elements.

When Sean is navigating these occupied areas, players won't have to constantly worry about being seen, an alarm going off, and tons of Nazis chasing them down. As long as he is acting "normally," the Nazis will treat Sean as just another average citizen. It's when he starts sprinting, hanging out near Nazis too long, wielding a large gun, or climbing up a building that the soldiers will confront him.

"Just because we're blending in stealth elements doesn't mean we want to have the stealth pacing," says Watkins. "This isn't going to be sneak, wait, watch the whole elaborate long patrol path. We want you to move in, snap a guy's neck, take his gun, hide in the shadows, and move on to your next objective." As a part of the quickened pace philosophy, the team is also doing away with dead body management. Players will never have to stop what they're doing to drag an enemy into a dark alley or stuff them into a locker.

If you do happen to draw Nazi attention, there is more than one way to handle the situation. Players can take on smaller groups of opponents with melee attacks to try to knock them out before more are alerted. "At first they don't perceive you as that much of a risk. They think they can kick your ass," says Watkins. Players will be able to form various brawler combos with the two attack buttons mixed with a grab maneuver and standard blocking mechanic. You can chain a grab-and-punch maneuver with a finishing headbutt (complete with

bone-crunching sound effects), or simply toss your victim into the crowd of surrounding soldiers. Several close combat options will be at players' disposal.

If you decide to strip a gun from one of your opponents and start shooting, the gunfire will most assuredly attract every Nazi within two city blocks. Enemies will continue to pour into the area until you're dead, so it's probably a good idea to get the hell out of there.

Enter the clambering system. Much like the modern Prince of Persia games (and the upcoming Assassin's Creed) Sean can utilize things like windowsills and drainpipes to smoothly escape to the roofs of Paris. Once you're out of danger it will only take 30 to 45 seconds before the Nazi guards completely cool off. The developers want players to be able to come at an obstacle from several different angles if need be without having to put up with a

bunch of "game over" screens or tedious crouching behind a box.

Of course, the ideal would be to avoid conflict altogether. Players can use any combination of streets, shady alleys, and rooftops when planning the route to their next mission objective. Stealth kills are key here. Sean can perform everything from neck snaps to cliff push-overs to the satisfying "tap on the shoulder then punch in the face" maneuver.

But these noir-soaked segments are only half of what Saboteur is all about. Remember, this is an open world game, after all. To more easily navigate the expansive environment, you're going to want to liberate the area you're operating in and bring a little color to the proceedings.

Dierker is one of Sean's primary targets

A BREAK IN THE CLOUDS

If players can complete enough acts of sabotage in a certain area, it will transform from dreary black and white to vibrant color in real time. One example of a color changing moment we saw tasks players with breaking into a Nazi train yard. After systematically taking out a few guards, Sean runs out onto a bridge carrying a pack of TNT. As the train chugs toward him he sets the charge and runs like hell. A bright orange fireball punches through the plain black and white as the bridge begins to crumble underneath Sean's feet. He

barely makes it to solid ground as the train and bridge fall to the canyon below in a mass of flaming wreckage. As you take in the beautiful destruction, you'll notice the world around you coming to life. Canyon walls shift to a pinkish granite tone, shrubs become bright green, and the river below takes on a brilliant blue. The rich color saturation provides an entirely different look, but the changes are far more than cosmetic. Additional citizens will populate the streets and are more likely to resist Nazi threats.

"You've inspired the people to struggle," says Watkins. "It's not like you're going to show up and the NPCs are tossing the Nazis out on their asses. We still want the Nazis to be bad, and we're not going to pull all of the Nazis out. Nazi patrols will be less frequent. They'll be more focused just around their bases rather than everywhere in the streets. When a confrontation does happen in the streets, instead of running away the NPCs will actually join in it. We're not pulling it all out, but we want it to feel arguably different. It should feel like you're

making progress. We want the player to feel that reward."

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of Saboteur's color system is when players come across the borders between zones. If standing in a fully colorized world while peering into a black and white landscape (or vice versa) isn't surreal enough, try walking between them. As Sean runs from a fully colorized world while peering into a black and white landscape gradually drains down to zero over a span of approximately 20 feet, and black storm clouds swoop in to cut off the bright blue sky.
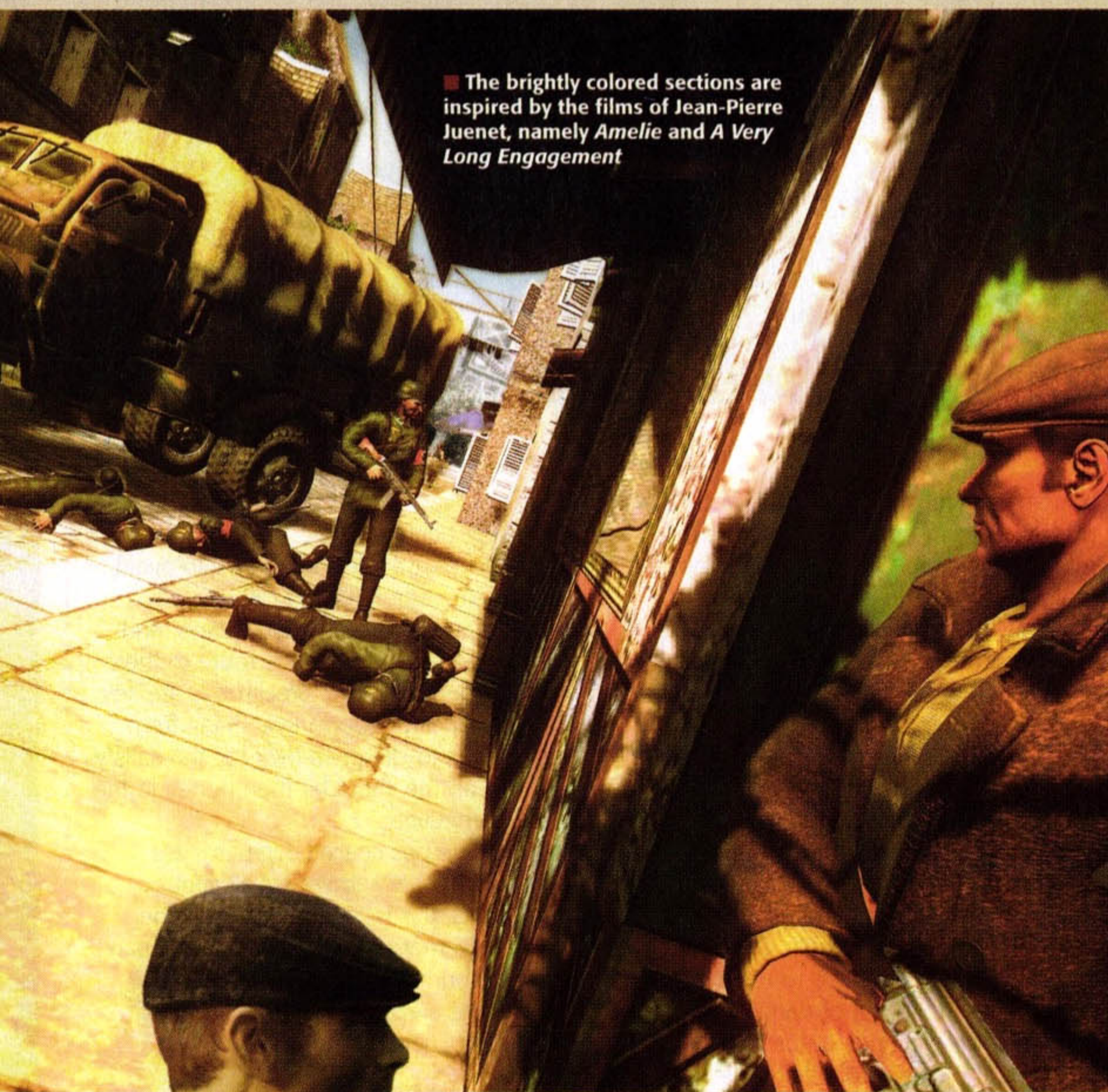
■ The brightly colored sections are inspired by the films of Jean-Pierre Juenet, namely *Amelie* and *A Very Long Engagement*

■ Pandemic is still on the fence as to whether to incorporate multiplayer elements into Saboteur. "Honestly, we're looking at what makes the most sense given the gameplay," says director Trey Watkins
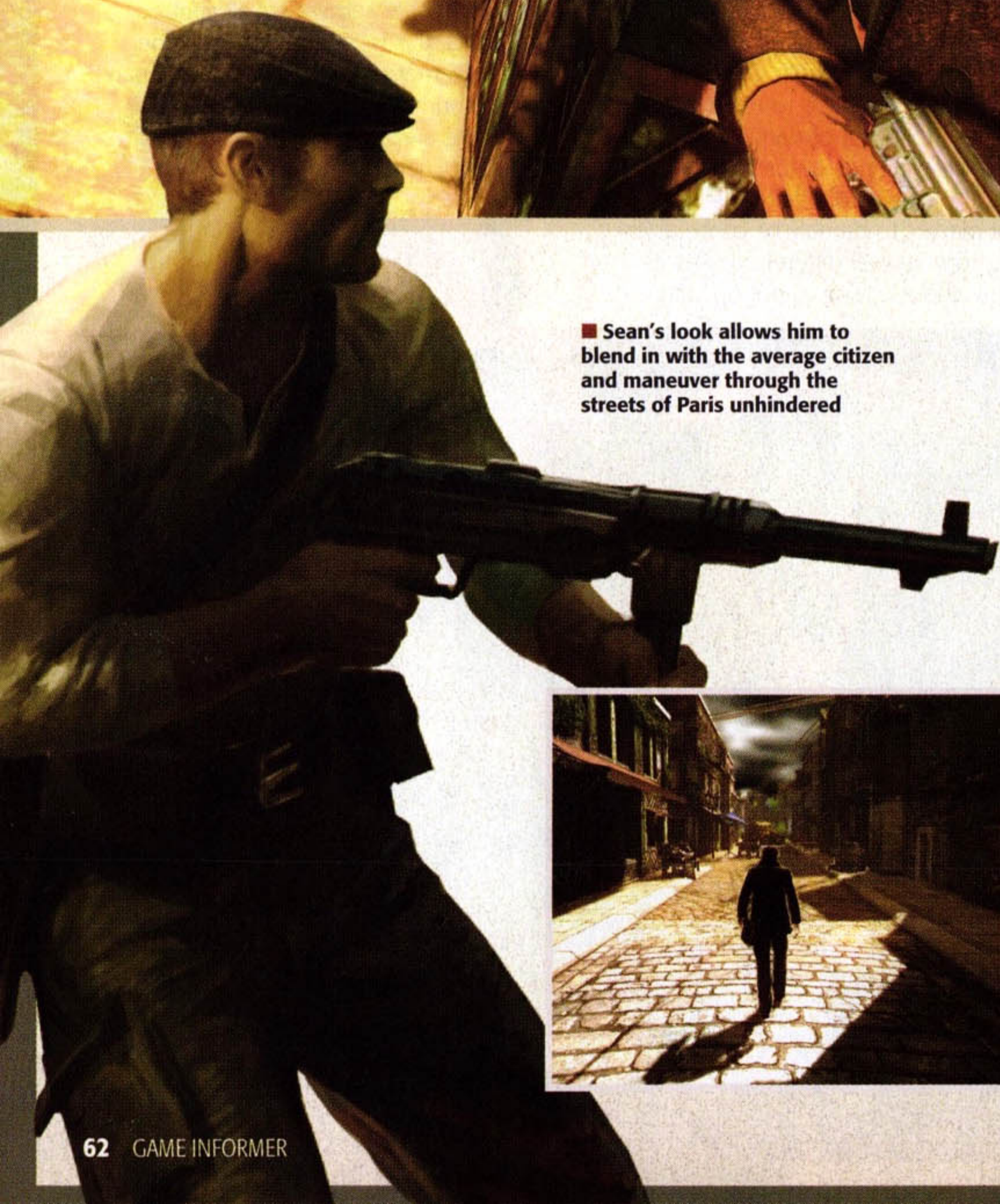
■ Sean's look allows him to blend in with the average citizen and maneuver through the streets of Paris unhindered

TAKE WHAT YOU NEED

"We're sticking with the rule of if you can see it, you can use it," says Watkins. This applies to everything from weapons to uniforms to vehicles. Players can only hold one large weapon, like a machine gun or a rifle, and one small weapon, like a pistol. Most of the time you'll have to a procure specific weapons on site from a storeroom or a Nazi currently holding the weapon. This is further underscored by the fact that you will be attacked if you are even seen holding a larger weapon. So players will have to either stick to the rooftops or place larger guns like the sniper rifle in something like a violin case.

This same freedom to pilfer applies to every Nazi outfit in the game, as long as you use stealth kills. After all, bullet holes and bloodstains have traditionally been known to raise suspicion. Once that messy business is taken care of, you can score everything from lowly Nazi grunt duds to those of a high-ranking officer or a train worker's coveralls – even a fancy suit to crash a Nazi gala.

Though we only saw a few vehicles in action, Pandemic promises that players will be able to drive pretty much whatever they want: roadsters, armored cars, tanks, and more. Sure, cars are a great way to get from point A to point B quickly, but they also serve as an opportunity for some high action. We saw Sean ramp over a moving train, jump from a car to a truck, toss the driver out, take the wheel, and then hop out as the truck careened toward the gate to a Nazi base, causing a huge explosion. But there are also plenty of opportunities for more subtle actions. For example, at Nazi checkpoints you'll have the option to show your papers to get through, blow everyone away, or drive around a blockade using a sneaky side route. Showing documentation is obviously the smoothest way to handle the situation, but it will take several missions in a certain area before you can earn the papers necessary to move freely there.

ACTIONS OF SUBTERFUGE

Missions will work a lot like those in Grand Theft Auto. There will be several available at any given time, which are split up into free play and story categories. Free play missions allow players to search out new weapons like the bazooka or work on creating more colorized zones in the world. These basically will help make the story missions a little easier to swallow. However, the high action, set piece-based story missions won't ever be all that simple.

"[One mission] is going to be focused around infiltrating a Nazi castle, which happens also to be a docking station for this enormous Nazi zeppelin. Then go leaping off a tower and grab a hold of [the Zeppelin], climb up inside, beat up a bunch of Nazis," says Watkins. "Then you'll climb your way through the interior gas bags of the zeppelin as the Nazi colonel you're pursuing is shooting at you. This ends up catching the whole thing on fire. You actually fight your way up through the lattice

work of this zeppelin with explosions going off around you, and ultimately end up on top of it and have a confrontation with him. You then make your escape by parachuting down off of this burning zeppelin that you've managed to destroy."

From everything we've seen of Saboteur, we're confident that Pandemic can pull off such a thrilling sequence. And that was only one example of the many things they're working up before the 2008 release. "There's a lot more to this game," teases Hong. "And we're really excited for the course of this year to reveal more and more to the public about what we've got cooked up. I think we're just kind of scratching the surface." ■ ■ ■

BASED ON A TRUE STORY
The character of Sean is actually inspired by a real racecar driver turned war hero. Get the full story in this month's Unlimited.

■ Any vehicle in the game can be hijacked

■ Grapple attacks will remind players of how Indiana Jones takes care of business

WHO'S THE PUBLISHER?

Up until Pandemic recently announced that EA will publish Mercenaries 2: World in Flames, speculation ran wild with everyone from Activision to LucasArts as suspected publishers. It appears things will be no different this time around.

"Basically, since joining forces with BioWare, we're self funding for a good portion of the development until we find the right publishing partner, so we're signing on much later," says director Trey Watkins. "We go even a couple years into development before finding that partner. Obviously, we want to find them in time enough in advance of the title so that their organization has time to really maximize their capabilities. That's why you would find us announcing prior to a publishing arrangement."

Even though Pandemic won't say exactly what next-gen platforms Saboteur will appear on, Watkins dropped this hint while discussing the color changing system: "We'll probably, for the ridiculously hardcore players who want to transform as much of the world as possible, we'll give them a little Xbox Live Achievement, but that is not a focus of the gameplay."

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METROID PRIME XTREME

TECMO'S TEAM NINJA GIVES SAMUS HER DAY AT THE BEACH

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APRIL O'NEIL WUZ HAWT

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MAJOR TURTLE FETISH 2007

PARODY

GAME INFORMER 65

I THINK WE CAN ALL AGREE…

…That I'm basically the raddest dude in the world. Is there anyone who can even compete with my awesomeness? Duh! No! But this one stupid dingleberry keeps trying. His name is DarthClark, but I call him "total wiener dumphead." Whether I'm playing the rockinest new shooter or owning noobs in an MMO, DarthClark is always on the other team trying to beat me. Well, I've got a message for you, DarthClark: The only reason you beat me in Gears of War is because the 360 d-pad sucks. And my Bluetooth cut out when we were racing each other in MotorStorm. And my mom made me clean my room in the middle of whatever Wii game we might have been playing online. I am the greatest, most unbeatable gamer ever made! If you are too dumb to know that, DarthClark, then I'll prove it to you once and for all at E3…if you're even cool enough to get invited – which you soooo aren't.

DarthClark. I award him "Worst Gamer of the Year"

Garnadan,
Editor-in-Chief

Garnadan

Chad >> chad@chad.chad
Handle: The Chad Gamer
Expertise: Madden, Chicks
Interests: Football, The Patriots, MTV, Dane Cook **Dislikes:** Nerds, Dweebs, Dorks, Geeks, Poindexters, Mel Gibson In *The Patriot* (False Advertising!) **Current Favorite Games:** Madden 05, Madden 06, Madden 07, Every GTA, Halo, Halo 2

Gene >> questionable
source@gameinfarcer.com
Handle: The Beta Gamer
Expertise: Dubious At Best
Interests: Claiming I've Played Games That Don't Exist, Intercepting Alpha Builds Via Satellite (It's Totally Possible!) **Dislikes:** Being Called Out For My Obvious Lies, eHarmony's Empty Promises, Not Being In The Credits For Halo 2 (I Invented Dual Wielding) **Current Favorite Games:** Halo 4 & 6 (5 Sucks), World Of Starcraft, Kingdom Hearts III (Spoiler: Donald Dies), Madden 09 (I'd Tell You The Rosters, But I Signed An NDA)

Jacques Bronson >>
chasethatambulance
@gameinfarcer.com
Handle: The Reactionary Gamer
Expertise: Shouting, Making Phone Calls **Interests:** Passing My LSAT Someday, Drawing Nonexistent Connections Between Life And Video Games, Sending Unsolicited Letters And Emails, The Children **Dislikes:** Fun **Current Favorite Games:** Microsoft Word, Tax Break 2004, Minesweeper

Augustus "Cole Train" Cole >>
thetrain@gameinfarcer.com
Handle: Can't Stop The Train
Expertise: Third-Person Shooters, First-Person Shooters, Side-Scrolling Shooters, Top-Down Shooters, Jim Beam Shooters **Interests:** Bringing It On Against Suckas, Thrashball, Being Mama's Little Boy, Trash Talking **Dislikes:** Suckas, Doing It Klingon-Style, The Locust Horde (Shoot At Baird, Not Me!), Bikini Briefs That Ride Up Your Beefcakes **Current Favorite Games:** Gears Of War, Madden Thrashball, Hide The Grenade In The Locust's Mouth, SpongeBob SquarePants: Creature From The Krusty Krab

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THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY

Also Known As "Us, You, and Your Mom"

GOOD
Playing Xbox 360

BAD
Getting mauled by a bear while playing Xbox 360

CRASH!

ARGGGH!

UGLY
Bear owns

UH… SORRY GUYS, I'M BACK

---

connect interview

TOMTHORNE

>> After it was revealed that 80 percent of PlayStation 3 consoles eventually explode with enough force to incinerate a city block, Sony has been mired in legal problems. Even more shocking is the company's decision not to issue a recall. We sat down with Sony's Tom Thorne to talk about this controversial choice and how it will affect the PS3 in the future. <<

How do you expect a potentially fatal product to compete against the Wii and Xbox 360?
The PlayStation 2 remains the best-selling console on the market. If you want to talk about gaming consoles, let's talk about that. We are fully committed to providing content for the PS2 with robust offerings like God of War II. Has Microsoft offered the same unwavering support for their original Xbox? Absolutely not.

But the PS3 will physically maim or kill its owners! Why has Sony not issued a recall?
The PlayStation Network is a unique and unparalleled service that allows users to explore a variety of online content. In one streamlined interface, users can access downloads, pictures, music, and even transfer files to their Sony PSP for viewing on the go.

Are you even human?
If you want to toss around meaningless words like "human," let me throw a few words out there: "Cyborg." "Automaton." "Corporate Machine." I am programmed with a vast vocabulator, but that isn't what consumers care about. They trust the Sony brand implicitly.

Is that a "yes," or a "no"?
Sony: Play beyond.

PARODY
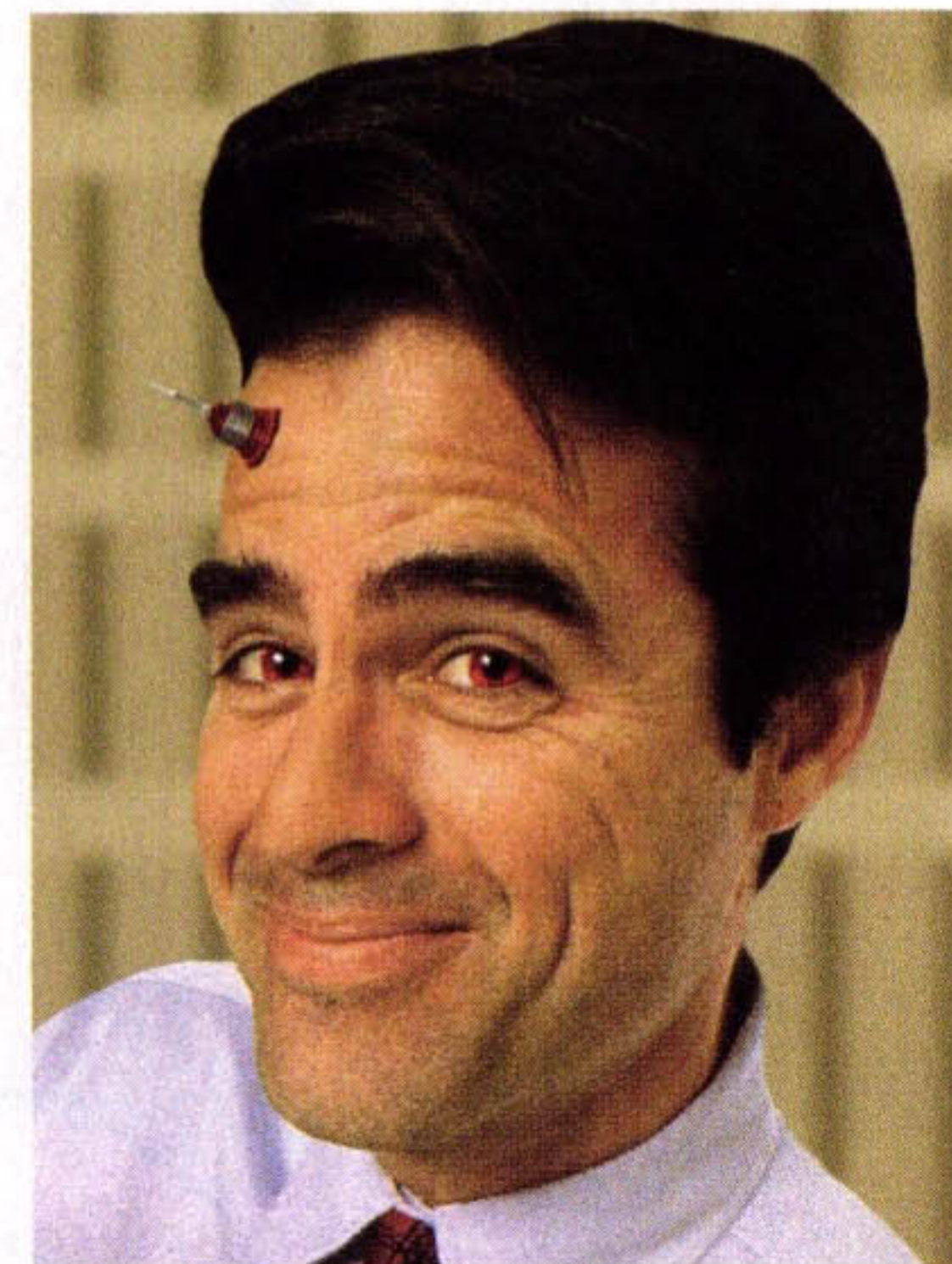
what ever happened to J Allard?

MICROSOFT TO USE "LIFE ACHIEVEMENTS"

REALITY GETS QUANTIFIED

To Xbox 360 owners, the sound "boop-boop" means a job well done. Those notes accompanying the words "Achievement Unlocked" are a chance for gamers – usually unsuccessful in other areas of life – to feel meaningful. But what if gamers could feel that validation in their bleak, everyday lives? Now they can, thanks to Microsoft's new Life Achievement system.

Still in the testing phase, this new technology includes a device that clips to your belt and monitors your actions, rewarding you with LiferPoints for positive accomplishments. "The world is full of things to do!" shouts Microsoft corporate vice president J. Allard. "We saw this as a golden opportunity to encourage people to do specific things, then award meaningless points that cannot be spent or otherwise redeemed."

Preliminary results show that response to the program is very positive. "By purchasing the Zune, I unlocked the rare 'Already Obsolete' Life Achievement, got 100 LiferPoints, and was entered in a drawing to win Fuzion Frenzy 2!" gushes one test subject. "Totally worth it." The technology will hit retail shelves in November, with the first bug-fix patch (necessary for the system to function) following several months later.

SAMPLE OF MICROSOFT'S LIFE ACHIEVEMENTS	• Taste Glue • Draw Marker-Moustache On Passed-Out LAN Party Attendee • Hold It For Two Days	• 10,000 Kills • Hoffa Found • Mock Nindendork And Stupid Wii	• Ride Pony • Vista Installed! • Vista Uninstalled! • Kiss Friend's Wife

Achievement unlocked

flaccid

AIR NOT INCLUDED

NEW DOWNLOADS FOR MADDEN 08
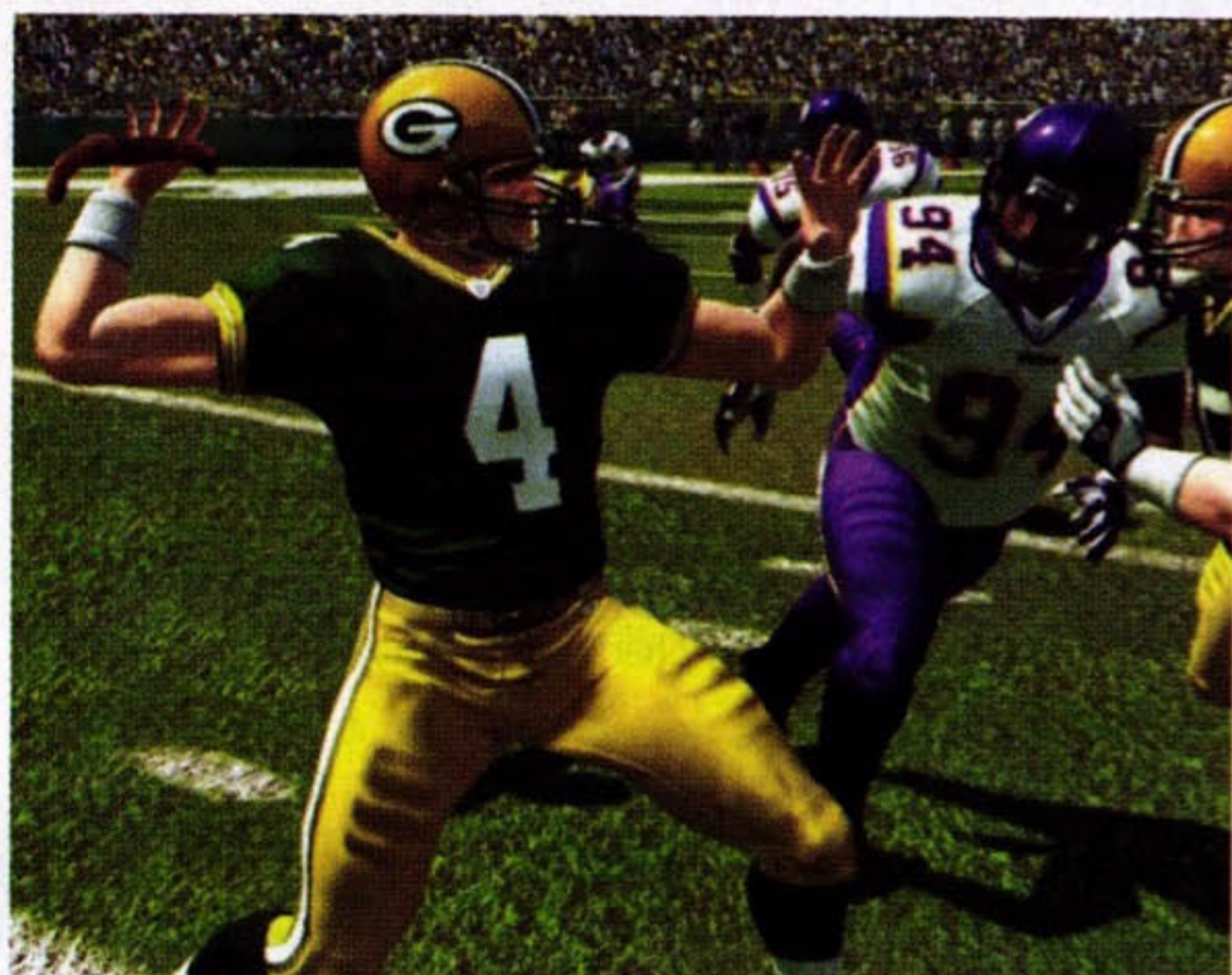
Downloadable content is on the rise, and after successful implementation in series like Tiger Woods and Need for Speed, EA is counting on Madden 08 to push the boundaries of what gamers will tolerate. The new football title will have players spending real money to obtain a variety of in-game items; helmets, mascots, and air for the ball must all be unlocked via credit card purchase.

Electronic Arts claims all these items will be totally optional. "We're not forcing anyone to buy anything," asserts a representative for EA Sports. "Players who elect to not purchase air for the ball still have a shot at the Super Bowl. They may just have focus more on their running game." This means that a significant financial investment will lead to a much better team, just like in real football…unless you're the Redskins, of course.

If trends like these continue, video games will evolve into nothing more than interactive catalogues – mere conduits for digital transactions. When faced with this issue, the EA rep's eyes lit up. "I'm gonna be so rich," he responded.

true

GAME PUBLISHERS DEMAND WORLD WAR III

UBISOFT, ACTIVISION SAY ALL EXISTENT BATTLES "TOTALLY TAPPED"

Has the beach at Normandy been stormed to death? Definitely, according to the industry's biggest publishers of military games. To reinvigorate waning interest in war shooters, representatives from Ubisoft and Activision stood before the United Nations with a bold proposition: Begin World War III.

The influx of new conflicts would provide fresh content for dozens of upcoming games, giving former staples a much-needed rest. "At this point, I just want to tell Stalingrad to defend itself," asserts Activision CEO Robert Kotick. "And don't even talk to me about Market Garden." In a plea before the delegation, Ubisoft president Yves Guillemot explained the dire situation facing all publishers of military titles: "We're resorting to games about the Civil War here, people. The *Civil War*. There's only so much we can do with muskets. Please, we need this." He then added gravely, "Gamers need this."

If passed, the resolution would give certain game publishers exclusive rights to the numerous combat hot zones across the globe, with the option to incite additional conflicts if the games are successful. Players will even have the opportunity to download new maps and battles as the situation worsens. Preliminary documents indicate that Activision is hoping to secure the rights to the Mediterranean theater, with Ubisoft setting its sights on Greenland. "EA can have France," Kotick chuckles.

ZONE OF OPERATIONS
GREENLAND

DATA FILE

Why Won't She Call Me Back?

FOODZ PLZ

In another victory for Blizzard Entertainment, the Chinese government has approved measures to make World of Warcraft gold the nation's official currency. According to a recent report, WoW gold farming is the country's number one industry, narrowly surpassing gold farming in Lineage II.

UNDENIABLE FACT

The Xbox 360 is officially doomed. Industry analyst John Savage released a report predicting the ultimate failure of the console by late 2007. "Sales of the 360 plummeted between the hours of 3am and 5am on January 20 in Topeka, KS and the surrounding areas," Savage pontificates. "Dreamcast ahoy! These figures irrefutably indicate a nationwide lack of consumer interest in Microsoft's console. Tell your friends!"

HOLD IT!

Bethesda announced that over 100,000 gamers have purchased the most recent add-on to The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion. Called the Bathroom Pack, this download installs outhouses throughout Cyrodiil and requires players to use them every few hours – or face humiliating penalties. "My level 24 Spellsword crapped his pants while defending Martin Septim," lamented one gamer on Bethesda's message boards. "Now the townspeople only call me High Lord Heavypants." Stories like these illustrate the potential dange…Oh, we get it! "Heavypants!" That's classic!

LOOSE TALK

Babies Can Choke On Games

"WHO IS THIS!?"

Sources tell us that a sequel to Condemned, Sega's atmospheric Xbox 360 launch title, is in the works. The game will reportedly be developed by the once-passable Sonic Team. Calls to the Sonic Team offices were not immediately returned. They were, however, prank calls.
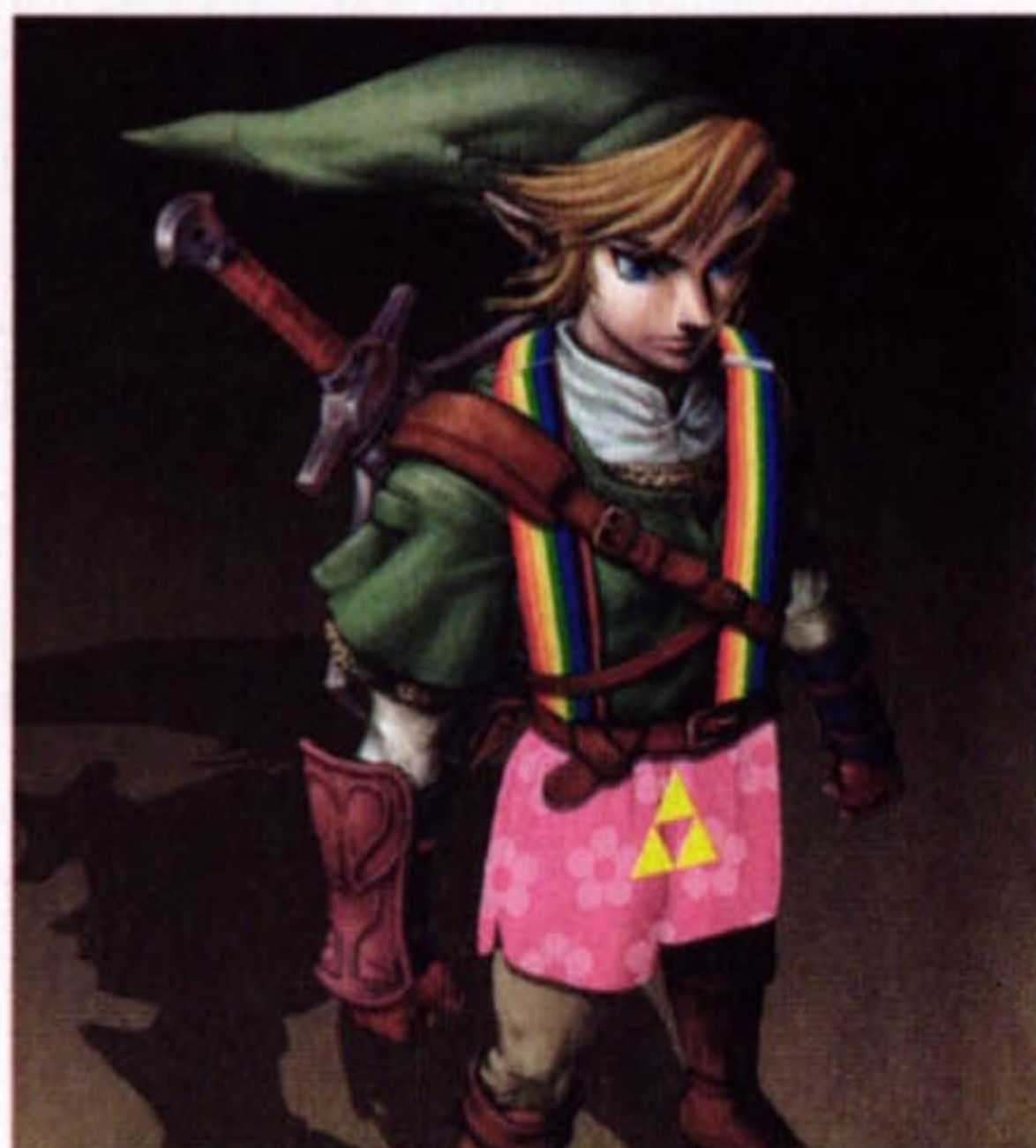
Wii (TO BE CANCELLED), Wii 2

The Legend of Zelda:
Trousers of Redemption

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER UNQUESTIONED ADORATION > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO
> **DEVELOPER** DOESN'T EVEN MATTER > **RELEASE** WOULD YOU BELIEVE…2008?

RETREADING NEW GROUND

The unveiling of a new Zelda game is a momentous industry event, but Nintendo recently lost its chance at a big reveal when a secret internal document leaked. This detailed form not only reveals the whimsical title of the upcoming entry – it clearly describes every major weapon, item, and dungeon in the entire game.

WARNING: The following paragraph contains major spoilers! Link will start the game with a weak, wooden sword. However, after several hours, he will obtain something known as the "Master Sword," which is significantly stronger. He will also use bombs, arrows, and a hookshot to explore a land called Hyrule and its puzzle-laden dungeons. The dungeons will incorporate environmental themes; one contains a lot of fire, another is full of ice, and there's even one out in the desert!

"As you can see, this game is totally revolutionary," says a Nintendo rep speaking on the condition of anonymity. "This is the exact same cutting-edge innovation that Zelda fans have enjoyed since 1987." At this point, the only other mystery that remains is who will be the final boss: Ganon or Ganondorf. You'll just have to play the game and enjoy the surprise!

TOP SECRET DESIGN DOCUMENT!!
The Legend of Zelda: ~~Ocarina of Time~~
Trousers of Redemption

BIG GAMEPLAY GIMMICKS	DARK WORLD	CRAP WE CAN CALL
• Link plays some kind	• Maybe	"REPLAY VALUE"
of instrument		• Fishing
• Horses	**FINAL BOSS**	
	• Ganon (Ganondorf?)	**VOICE ACTING**
		• None
DUNGEONS	**ITEMS**	
• Fire	• Arrows	
• Ice	• Bombs	
• Desert	• Master Sword	
• Castle	• Hookshot	

I'LL NOW CALCULATE YOUR TEAM HEALTH

DS

NFL Team Doctor

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER INVASION OF PRIVACY > **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS
> **DEVELOPER** YOUR COACH > **RELEASE** GAME DAY

BETTER THAN A RECTAL THERMOMETER

"When we realized how we could open up new gameplay avenues with the DS, we actually all started to laugh because it was so obvious," says Cal Edgegrad, creative director of NFL Team Doctor. "I mean, why hasn't anyone ever thought of taking a whiz on a DS before?" NFL's Team Doctor's interface is so groundbreaking that it may be impossible to judge it by today's gaming standards. Charged with overseeing the health of a football team, players will use the DS touch screen to analyze urine and stool samples (through physical contact), and perform other important medical tasks. Is your running back a little sluggish? Sit on your DS to see if he has hemorrhoids! Remember to treat your herpes, you don't want to look like Ron Mexico before the big game. Steroid tests are a snap with Team Doctor – just draw anyone's blood with the stylus (this may require several tries to master) and blot it on the lower screen. Search through your own stool to find that waitress' earring. "In real life, colostomy surgery is a very unfortunate and painful experience," laughs Edgegrad excitedly. "But just wait until you see how we handle it in the game!"

PLAYSTATION 3

Metal Gear Solid 5:
Snake Skin

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER POSTHUMOUS ESPIONAGE ACTION > **PUBLISHER** KONAMI
> **DEVELOPER** KOJIMA BEACH HOUSE PRODUCTIONS > **RELEASE** SUMMERTIME!

LIFE AFTER DEATH

After the shocking suicide of an elderly Solid Snake at the end of Metal Gear Solid 4, people thought the popular series had come to an end. They couldn't be more wrong. In Metal Gear, a deceased protagonist is just the beginning.

In this new tactical stealth adventure, the government needs an elite operative to infiltrate the International Intelligence Summit in Malibu, and Solid Snake is the only man for the job – dead or not. Players will control both Meryl and Raiden as they cart around the legendary soldier's limp body, plan a Luau, and fabricate clumsy excuses for Snake's bizarre behavior. The corpse will also skydive at some point, though all other story details are still a mystery.

"I always drew inspiration from films like *Escape from New York* and the James Bond series," admits famed developer Hideo Kojima. "But I think it is time my games establish a new identity that is less influenced by popular films."

---

family jewels

Wii BALLS

Moving a remote back and forth is fine, but sometimes you just need to wrap your hands around something meatier. This swingin' peripheral introduces a new angle to your Wii experience: touch-sensitivity. Thanks to sensors implanted in the globes, your games will detect whether you're squeezing the balls, twisting them, or cupping them gently in your hands. Upcoming titles currently slated to use this functionality include Locker Room Rumpus, Is It Ripe?, and Mario Party Balls. If you reserve your pair early, you'll even get a bonus: a custom carrying sack that comes in two colors: flesh and blue. So pre-order soon, grab your sack, and get ready for action!

Manufacturer: Dangle Brothers
Website: www.hanglazy.com
List Price: $40

WiiBalls

aphrodisiac

NERD CALENDAR

Farrah Fawcett, take a bow. Betty Page, eat your heart out. Marilyn Monroe, roll over. America finally has some new heartthrobs to live up to the legends. The Wii has swept the nation with a frenzy unmatched since Kirstie Alley snuck into Old Country Buffet, giving rise to a radical new life-fitness model. These nerds from Yeehaw Junction, FL are laying it bare in this semi-professional calendar, and they have the lovely man humps to make Olive Oyl swoon. After all, they've been close to photographers – who have been close to supermodels – so they're basically supermodels by proxy. These hunks are sexier than women with tattoos, and probably even easier.

Manufacturer: Boys of Wii
Website: www.workthatforearm.com
List Price: Your Pride

PARODY
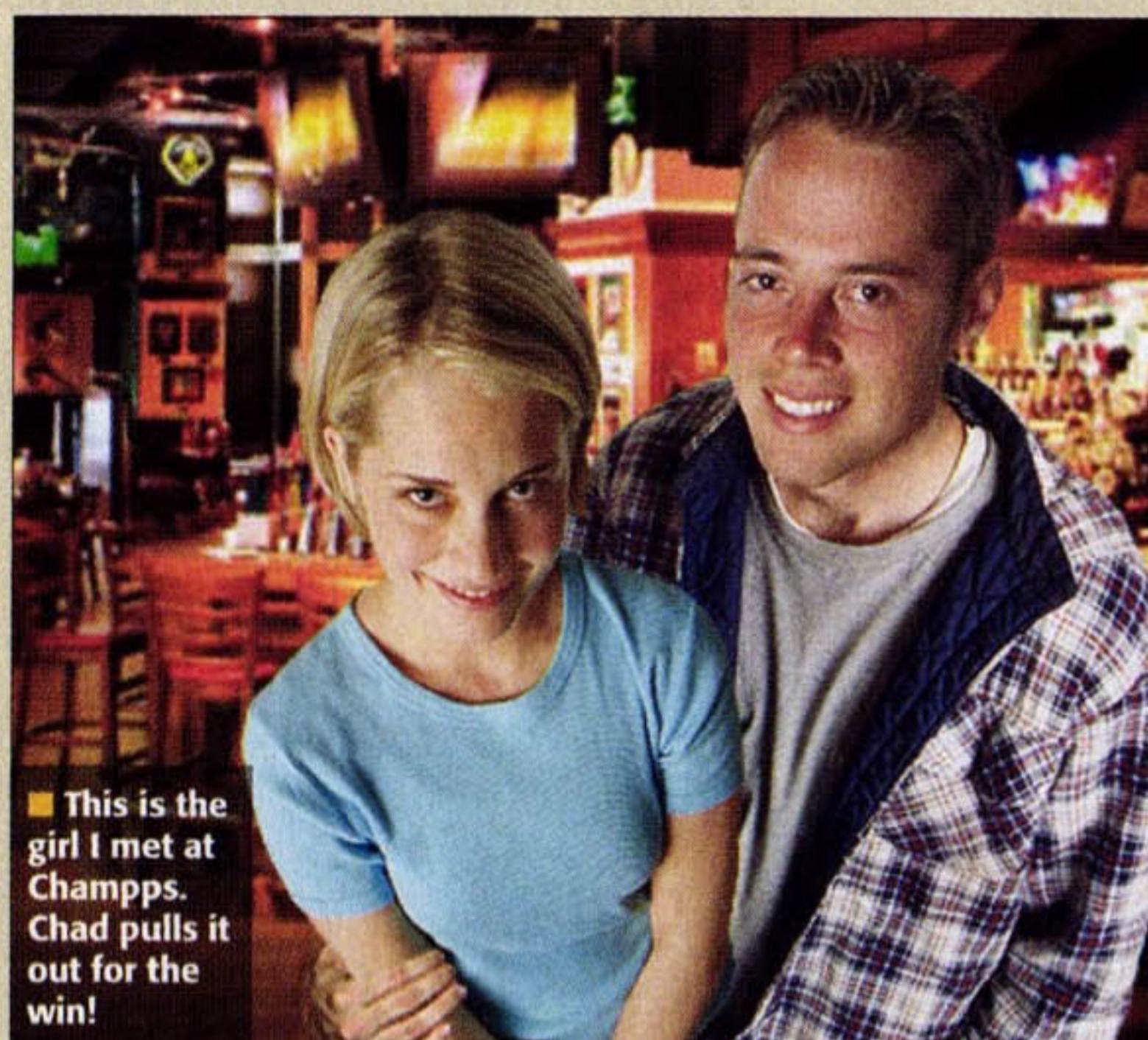
■ This is the girl I met at Champps. Chad pulls it out for the win!

BOTTOM LINE	Chad Scored

> **Concept:** Look, I don't know what this word means

> **Graphics:** People kinda wear uniforms, except instead of jerseys, they're sissy dresses. Do they play for the Lions?

> **Sound:** How am I supposed to know what's happening without Al Michaels telling me?

> **Playability:** I got tons of play with this game

> **Entertainment:** One time, me and Beez broke the antennas off of every car in the IHOP's parking lot. That was, like, super funny

> **Replay Value:** Hell yeah! Three times! Chad is a stud!

PC

World of Warkraft:
The Burning Sensation

> **STYLE** MASSIVE HOOK-UP > **PUBLISHER** A BUNCHA NERDS
> **DEVELOPER** WHO CARES? > **RELEASE** DORK O'CLOCK > **ESRB** ESRB

ELVES ARE EASY

I know. You're wondering what a dude like Los Chadarito was doing playing this nerd simulator. Let me tell you: booty. Sweet booty. There are hot half-naked elf chicks dancing around everywhere, all of them hungry for some Chadloaf. Now I know why they call it an "expansion pack," because Dr. Chadly here was definitely fully expanded.

This one girl, Dasanna, kept asking me if I wanted to meet in person, and she wasn't a horseface in the game or anything, so we decided to hang at Champps sports bar. When I got there, I grabbed a Bud Lite, and sent my tight end down the seam…if you know what I mean. Then I heard this dude say "Are you Chad?" Turns out "Dasanna" was some guy named Bobby, all makin' eyes at Chad.

After the ambulance left, I started talking to some fine chica instead (who wasn't really a dude – I asked right away). I took her back to my place and totally painted her endzone, if you follow me. Touchdown Chadmeister! Wooo!—**CHAD**

Second Opinion	01100

When I was originally begged to beta test this expansion two years ago, I wasn't sure if I would be able to do it since I was in the midst of the Half-Life 3 and Gears of War 2 betas. I'm really busy, since I am the sole member of every QA team in the entire industry. I am also a rocket-car test pilot in my spare time. This game would have been better if they had fixed all the bugs I found, but no human is capable of working at my pace. I've played so many games that I actually speak their binary code. At night I mentally transfer my persona onto developers' servers and alter their data to do things that they never would have thought of. Driving in GTA? Yeah, that was me. You're welcome.—**GENE**

BOTTOM LINE	-10

> **Concept:** Under the guise of learning how to cook and share with less fortunate, this game teaches our children to kill

> **Graphics:** Yes! Terribly graphic! More realistic than a movie!

> **Sound:** To me, this sounds like the collective screams of America's desecrated youth

> **Playability:** Perfectly intuitive, like a sniper rifle

> **Entertainment:** Only for those twisted antireligious freaks who have sold their black hearts to Satan

> **Replay Value:** You play this once, and you forfeit your soul forever

Wii

Mother Theresa's Feed The Starving Children

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SAINTLY COMPASSION > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** ANGEL STUDIOS > **RELEASE** DELAYED DUE TO LEGAL DISPUTES > **ESRB** E

TASTES LIKE HOT COFFEE

It's a well-documented scientific fact that video games influence the frontal lobe of our children's brains. The frontal lobes are where we house our intuition, judgment, and sexual behavior. Do we really want Mother Theresa anywhere near the sexual centers of our kids' brains? This game claims to be a cooking simulator, but the players use knives. Do you know the most common use of knives in the U.S. is gamers stabbing each other? That is an unverifiable fact. It is also a well-known controvertible truth that any child can walk into a store and buy whatever game they want regardless of ratings. This is my challenge to the industry: Create a game that is actually about helping those in need and making a difference – like Phoenix Wright, but with less shouting. And if somebody makes this game I will personally donate $5,000 to a charity that feeds the homeless.* On a side note, the Wii Balls peripheral works great with this game. Whether you're using the Wii Balls to pick succulent fruit or crack open some tasty nuts, this is some of the smoothest ball action I've ever experienced.—**JACQUES**

*This does not legally obligate Jacques, in any way, to actually donate to charity.

Second Opinion	#83

Whatever mama cooked at our house, the Train had to eat, cause mama raised a growing boy and if the Train didn't obey, he might end up having to drink from the toilet again. I never went hungry and I'm glad, cause that's some scary s---, dog. The children in this game are so starved that they didn't even know who I am. I'm the Cole Train, baby! They didn't know I played number 83 for the Cougars. For real! I tried to make them feel better by giving them signed jerseys and letting them feel my biceps, but like a pack of wild zombies, these little urchins just wanted food. They didn't even know what Thrashball was. This is the scariest survival-horror game I've ever seen.—**COLE TRAIN**

Love U, xxoxx Albert

Small Mammal

DAVE JAFFE ACTION FIGURE

Manufacturer: Gamer Teats
Website: www.milkitforallitsworth.com
List Price: $.50

David Jaffe is one of our favorite game developers, and who wouldn't want to hang out with him all the time? Now you can pretend to be his friend with Gamer Teats' new line of game developer action figures. This David Jaffe figure is ¼ scale (12" high) and comes with a miniature PSP, plus a corporate flunky who won't leave his side, to make sure he doesn't reveal too many details. Jaffe says adorable things like, "I made God of War. What have you done with your life?" "Kratos is really a sort of self-portrait," and "Hehe! That tickles!"

secret access

Play To Perfection

LOST PLANET
1. Shoot the orange bits.
2. Watch the end credits.
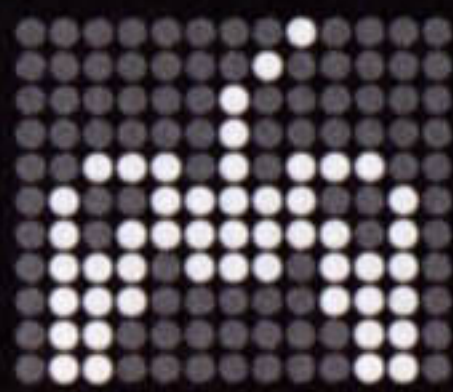
■ Unleash hot death with the Dark Walker

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

Unreal Tournament III

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > **PUBLISHER** MIDWAY > **DEVELOPER** EPIC GAMES > **RELEASE** SECOND HALF 2007

SURE BEATS MINING

No, the above information is not riddled with typos. Unreal Tournament 2007 has been redubbed Unreal Tournament III, and it will be released on Xbox 360 as well as previously announced platforms PS3 and PC. So why all of the big changes? We spoke to some key players at Epic to find out, and got some hands-on time with the game as well.

It turns out that Unreal Engine 3 is one of the primary reasons the number three is appearing in the title. "If you look at the Unreal Tournament timeline, you can really draw up two lines there," says lead producer Jeff Morris. "There was the original Unreal tech, which we used for Unreal 1 and UT. Draw a line there. Then there was UT 2003 and 2004, which used Unreal Engine 2. We drew a line after that and said that the new technology is worth bringing up." Morris also credits a renewed focus on the single-player mode as a reason behind the name change.

Obviously, this will also give Epic some wiggle room in case the title slips out of 2007. "I won't deny the whole 'when the game's done' methodology we have — we didn't want to sell the game called 2007 if it took us more than 2007 to do," says Morris.

As far as the addition of the Xbox 360 version, Epic vice president Mark Rein is making no effort to conceal the fact that healthy sales of Gears of War figured into the decision to bring UT III to the system. "We had a little success on Xbox 360 [with Gears of War], and we might be able to sell a few copies [of UT III] there," Rein wryly claims. Another major factor also figured into the equation: mods on home consoles. "That was kind of the one thing, we wanted to make sure we'd be able to bring user-created content to the [Xbox 360] before we made a firm commitment to it," says Rein.

We played on a vehicular capture-the-flag map called Corruption, an open mountainous area with multiple paths and caves, and Asian-style architecture "corrupted" by technology from an invading alien race called the Necris. This invasion provides a twist on the traditional Unreal Tournament plot (brutal deathmatches fought to entertain bored workers on a mining colony) that will be more fleshed out in the single-player campaign. But for now it was Necris versus the Izanagi corporation.

A limited variety of weapons were available, including a green blob shooter and the flak cannon, but it was hard not to just go crazy with the rocket launcher. The new hoverboard mechanic toggles smoothly into gameplay simply by pressing the "q" key. Speed into the fray after respawning or use the board to zip back to base after you nab the opponent's flag. Players can't fire weapons from the board, and if they get hit while riding it they'll tumble off and take a brief moment to get back up. This leaves players wide open for attacks, so they'll have to be very careful when using it.

But the vehicles were the standout feature. The Izanagi side used Axon vehicles, including a futuristic bike, an ATV-type of machine, and a big old tank called the Goliath. The Necris side utilized their form of a hover bike, a floating tank that raises and lowers to trade off firepower versus mobility, and the massive Dark Walker. This thing towered over everything on the battlefield atop its writhing tentacle legs and could instantly scorch just about anything with its orange heat rays.

A UT III demo is expected to hit (at least) PCs about a month before the game's release, but it never hurts to give console gamers something to play around with as well. ■ ■ ■

Cleavage shots: the weak point of the future

WHY YOU SHOULD ACTUALLY CARE ABOUT SINGLE PLAYER THIS TIME AROUND

While only multiplayer was ready for our preview, lead producer Jeff Morris promises that the single player experience will be more than just a way to kill time while waiting for your buddies to come online. "It used to be this sort of ladder you'd work your way through," Morris says. "We fooled around with different ideas like swapping teammates and stuff, but it really was a ladder. The single-player story we're doing in UT III is very different. It really has a beginning, a middle, and an end. It's four acts right now. It's still being written and it's still in development. It allows us to really take all the people who never went online with UT, which is a staggering number of people – like 50 percent of UT buyers never went online – and give them something that really merits their offline experience, not just slugging through this ladder."

Bikes are one of the fastest ways to get around
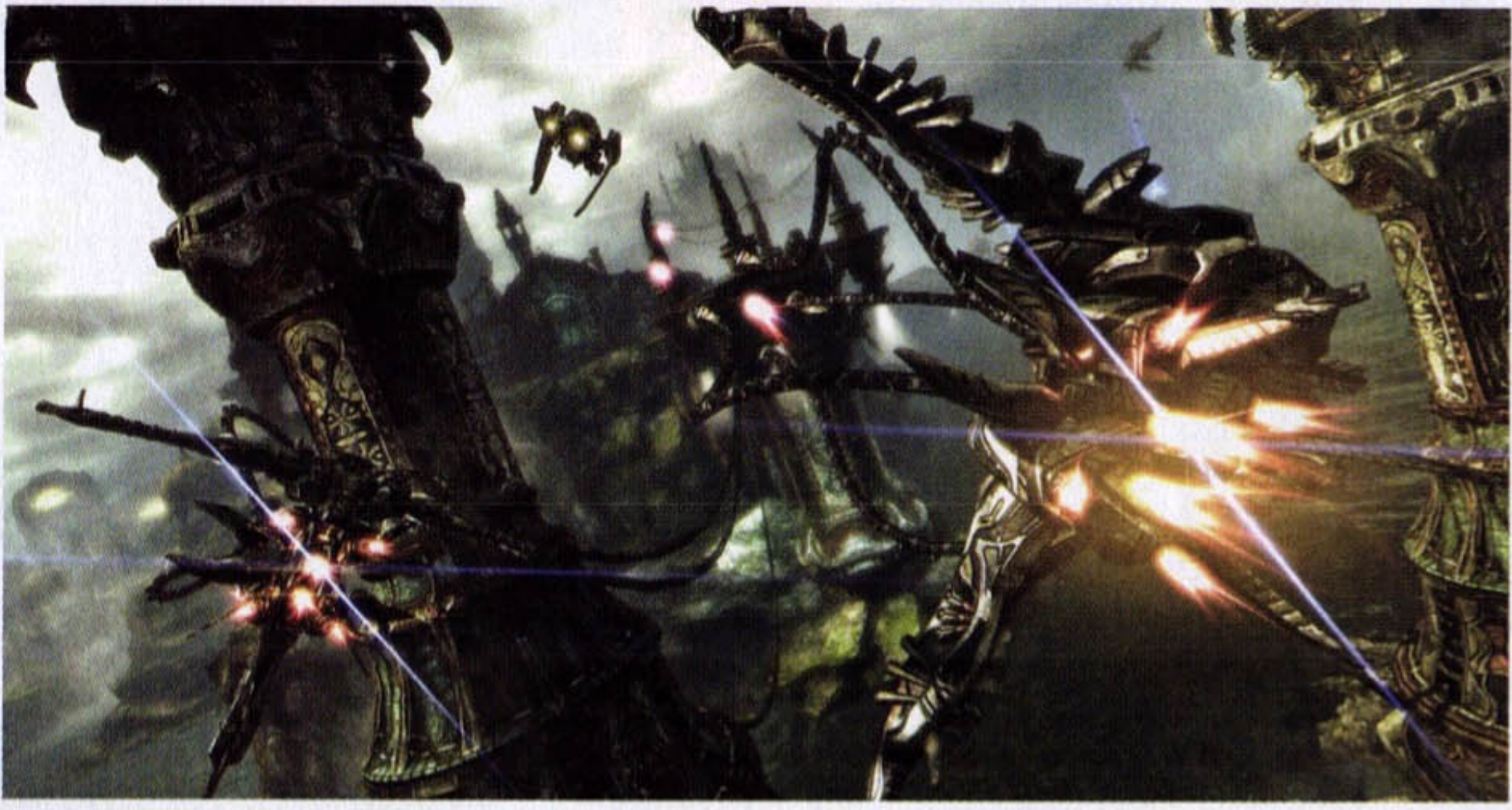
Alan realizes the value of a good portrait shot

Ouch. Just, ouch

Kane & Lynch:
Dead Men

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE OR PC ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** EIDOS > **DEVELOPER** IO INTERACTIVE > **RELEASE** JUNE

DEAD MEN WALKING

Despite what you may think, the developer behind the Hitman series and Freedom Fighters has been busy. There has been a conspicuous lack of new info on Kane & Lynch since we unveiled it last year, but that doesn't mean IO Interactive isn't working hard to ensure the title lives up to expectations. In fact, when asked what area of the game has seen the most progress in the last few months, designer Jens-Peter Kurup responds: "It's the whole package – cover systems, blind fires, camera controls, difficulty tweaks, performance optimizations, locomotion, AI, crew commands, co-op specific code – everything has been sharpened."

The most compelling aspect of Kane & Lynch is how it is built for co-op. Combining two violent criminals with a lot of firepower is one of the game's central concepts, as is teamwork. This may seem tailored for a two-player approach, but the team is making sure that the experience is the same even if you're going solo. "Kane & Lynch differs from most single-player and co-op games in the way that the game is 'born' as co-op," Kurup tells us. "A lot of the single-player gameplay is already based around flanking and diversions – the bread and butter of the co-op experience. We've focused on keeping single player and co-op as similar as possible."

Part of what makes this possible is the inclusion of guns-for-hire, flunkies who follow the two main characters and follow instructions. It will be necessary to use these soldiers strategically to gain an advantage; they can provide covering fire, carry ammunition, and even revive you. They won't be available in every situation, though, so sometimes it will just be the calculating Kane and mentally unstable Lynch working together to get the job done.

Given the game's focus on teamwork, multiplayer matches seem like a natural fit. Details regarding the online features are still under wraps, but we assume there will be interesting options beyond standard deathmatch and capture the flag. Unfortunately, that's all speculation at the point. "We're still keeping this to ourselves for now, but you'll hear about it later in the year," Kurup teases. Since the game's June release date is coming up fast, there isn't much time left for big reveals. That means gamers can look forward to some illuminating announcements about Kane & Lynch in the very near future. ■ ■ ■

GET SERIOUS

Kane & Lynch may feature some squad mechanics similar to those in Freedom Fighters, but gamers will find that the overall aesthetic of IO's projects are very different. "The story and characters are really what set these two games apart," explains Kurup. "Freedom Fighters was a parody on an alternate history of which people during the cold war were genuinely afraid. There is no such tongue-in-cheek humor to be found in Kane & Lynch. They're grim characters." The gameplay may invite comparisons, but this mature thematic approach promises that Kane & Lynch will establish its own unique identity.

■ In the buddy movie tradition, Kane & Lynch features a crazy heist

■ When playing co-op, it is possible to earn achievements by playing Lynch "in character." Get ready for some team kills!

■ Cue theme from *The Bodyguard*

■ "Heaven help me, I will Breathe Rite or not at all!"

■ The game will feature a mixture of indoor and outdoor areas

■ Kane and Lynch are not happy. Apparently it is not all about the Benjamins
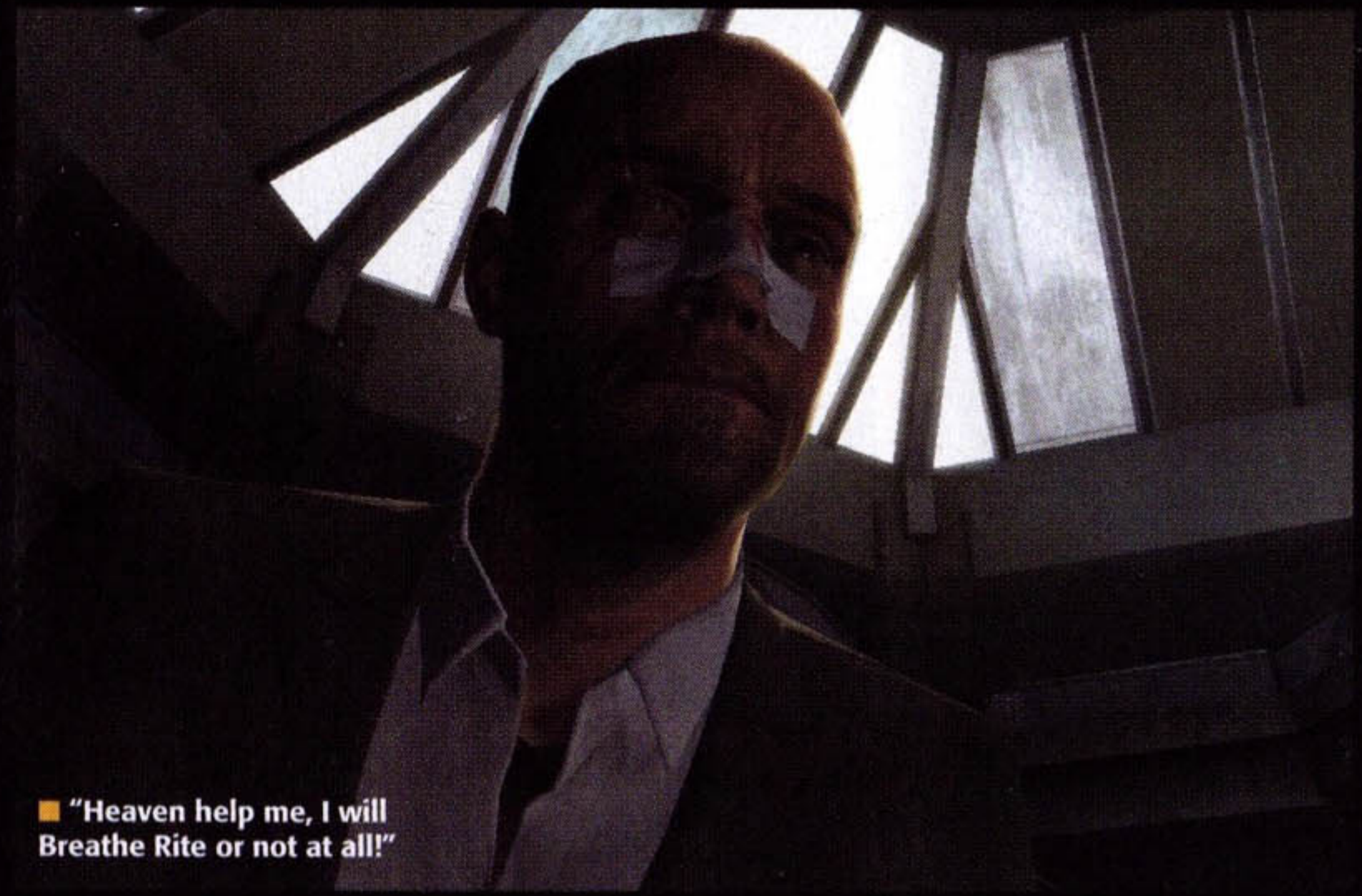
Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** DISNEY INTERACTIVE STUDIOS
> **DEVELOPER** EUROCOM > **RELEASE** MAY

BOARDING EVERY CONSOLE

"It's not just about fighting, it's about cheating."

– senior producer
Nick Bridger
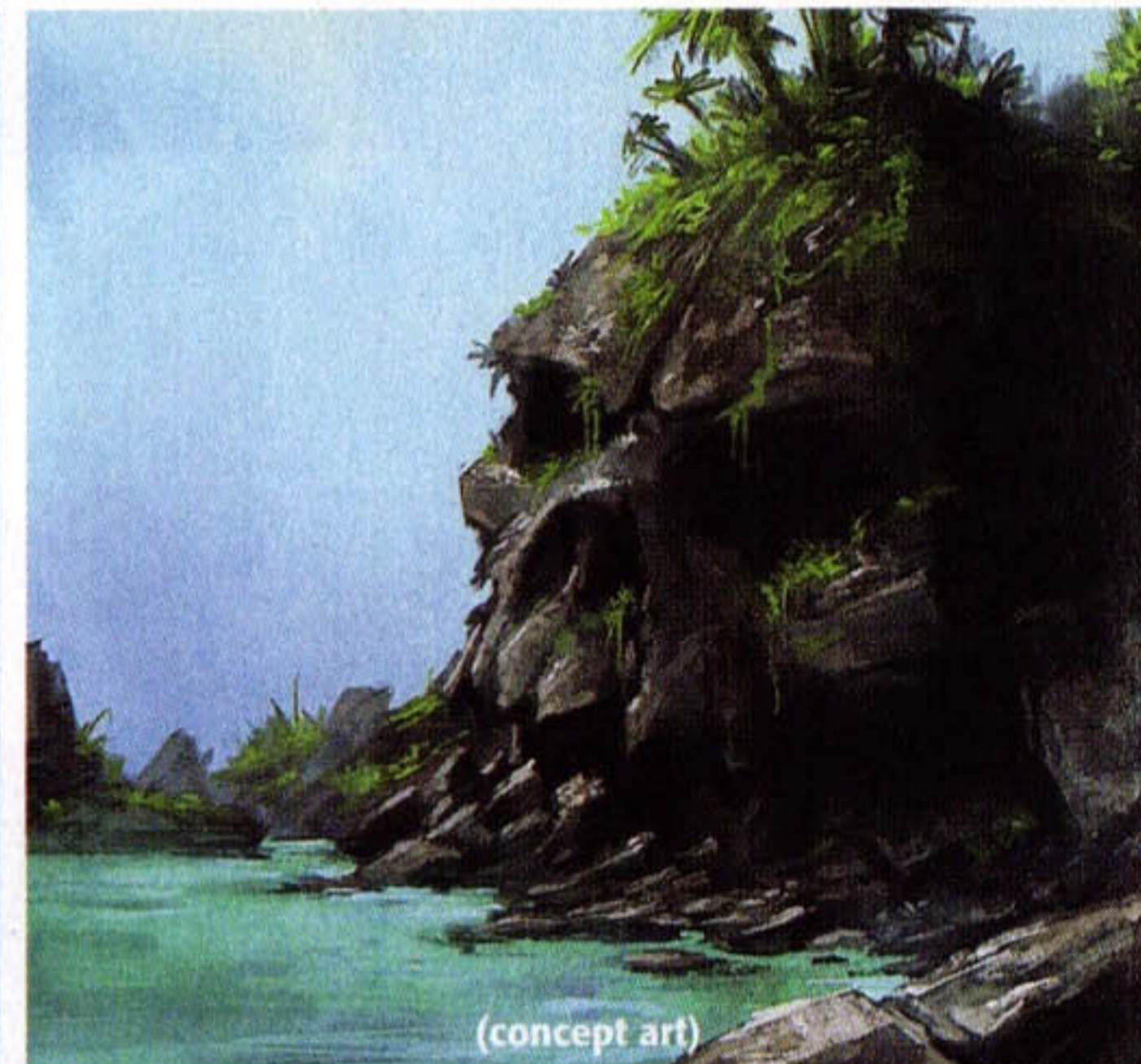
(concept art)
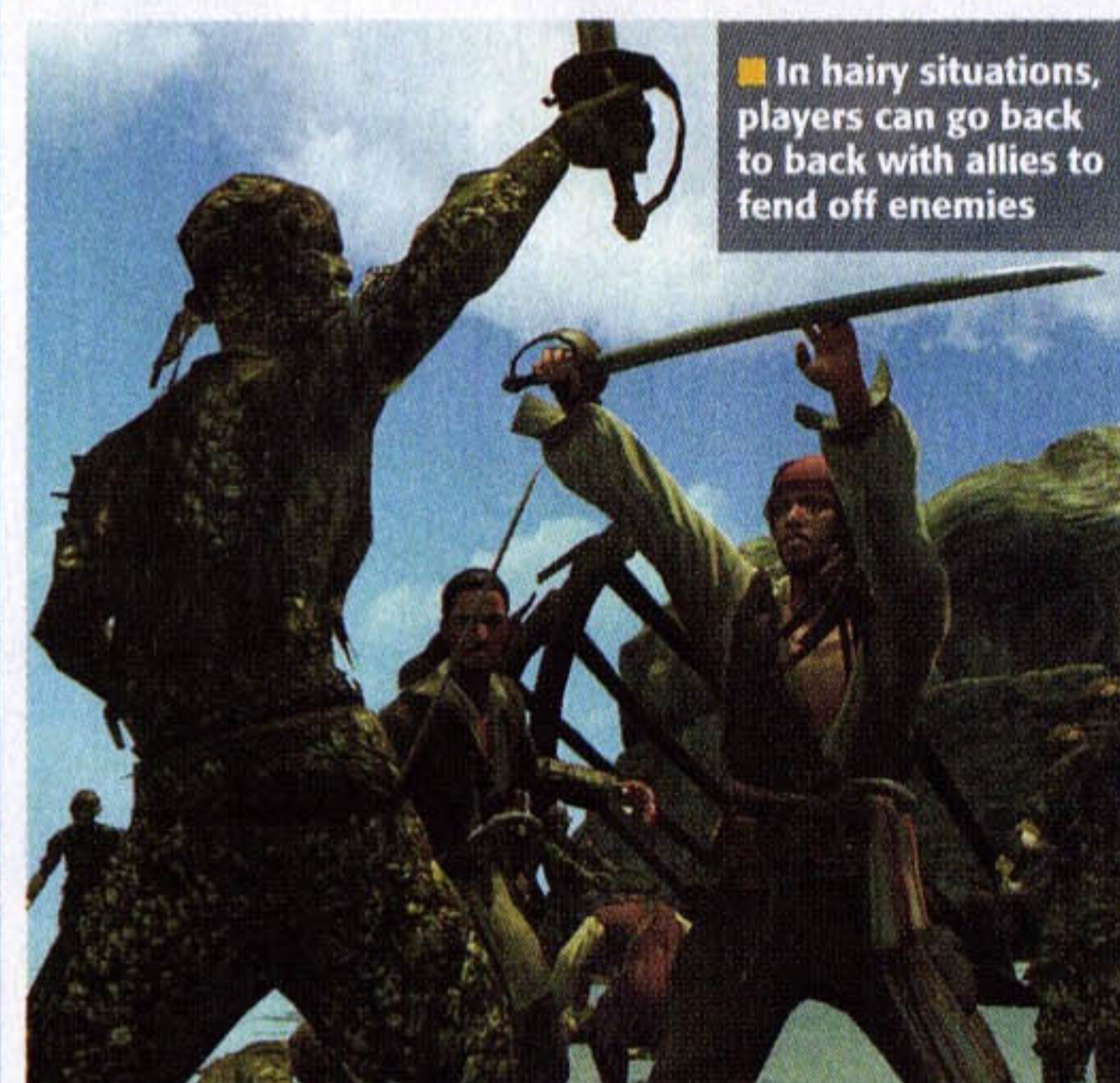
In hairy situations, players can go back to back with allies to fend off enemies

Just as the filmmakers are putting the finishing touches on *Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End*, Eurocom is grinding away at a game of the same name. However, it will incorporate elements from *Dead Man's Chest*, *At World's End*, and then some. "From the outset, we always wanted the Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End game to complement the films, but not be a slave to them," says senior producer Nick Bridger. "There's so much rich material in Pirates of the Caribbean, so many untold stories and plots, which we wanted to try and bring some of this to the player." The team worked closely with an original Pirates scriptwriter, Terry Rossio, to add new content to the story and expand the connections between the second and third films.

Players can toggle freely between main-stays like Jack, Will, and Elizabeth, and will briefly control characters like Pintel, Ragetti, Barbossa, and Cotton. You'll take on rival pirates, tribal warriors, British marines, East India Trading Company officers, and Davy Jones' crew members like the lobster man and the hammerhead shark guy in locations like Tortuga, Cannibal Island, Port Royal, and the Turkish prison that Jack escapes from at the beginning of *Dead Man's Chest*. Players will even get the chance to take a crack at the Kraken.

Eurocom is trying to bring the theatrical, over-the-top swordplay from the films over to the game. "It's not just about fighting, it's about cheating," says Bridger. Standard fare like swords, fisticuffs, and throws are supplemented by environmental attacks like smashing a bottle of rum on an enemy's head, pulling a knife out of a dead guy and throwing it into an attacker, or dropping cargo on your pursuers. The three leads also have signature finishers that can be upgraded over time.

Outside of straight up combat, At World's End also features platforming and environmental puzzles, many of which require the use of your sword. "You'll use it to climb walls, slide down zip-lines, move around objects, even slide down sails using your sword to control yourself," says Bridger.

Multiplayer modes will be completely offline. One option will be a one-on-one versus mode featuring characters like Jack, Barbossa, Davy Jones, and Admiral Norrington. Players can also co-op against several opponents in an arena mode.

The Wii version will take full advantage of the motion sensing controls. Players will slash and thrust the Wii remote to attack enemies, and also toss axes and grenades. Eurocom is especially excited about Jack's maneuvers. "Jack's special moves on the Wii are really cool moments where the player fully uses the Wii's unique accelerometer and pointing device features to get through a number of tricky, and very Jack-centric situations," says Bridger.

Though Johnny Depp, Keira Knightley, and Orlando Bloom's likenesses appear in the game, their voice work has yet to be confirmed. However, Mackenzie Crook, Stellan Skarsgård, and the Dread Pirate Roberts himself, Cary Elwes, are on board. Apparently, *The Princess Bride* star will be playing an all-new pirate not seen in the movies. ◾◾◾

Davy Jones will be a playable character in the versus mode

Attack him from the front and he'll never see you coming
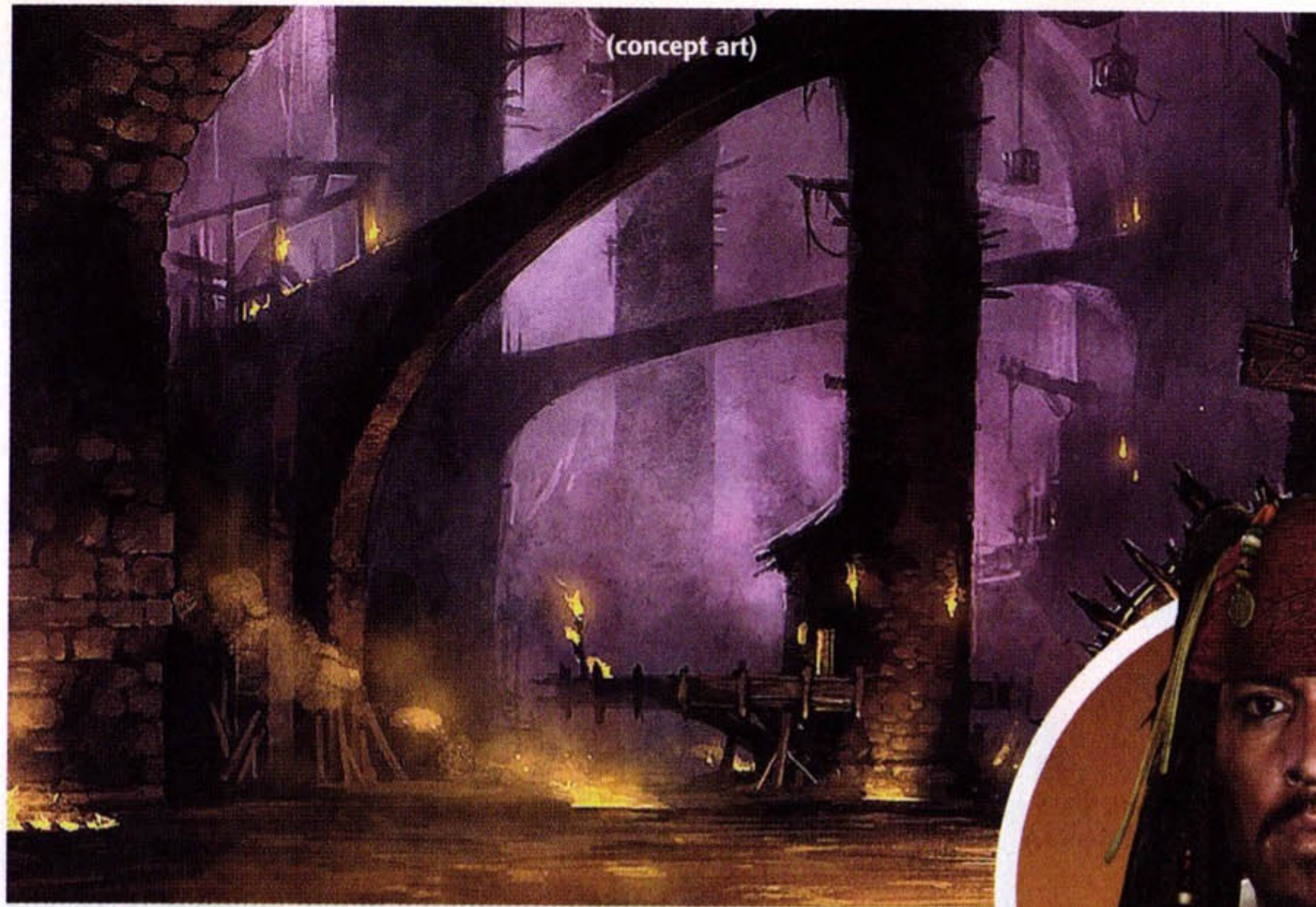
■ One-on-one battles will end up
on precarious locations such as this

■ Though there won't be any sailing
gameplay, ships will still serve as a
frequent battle environment

(concept art)

■ The character models
are incredibly detailed

■ It's occasionally tough to tell where the 2D collision box is on the 3D models
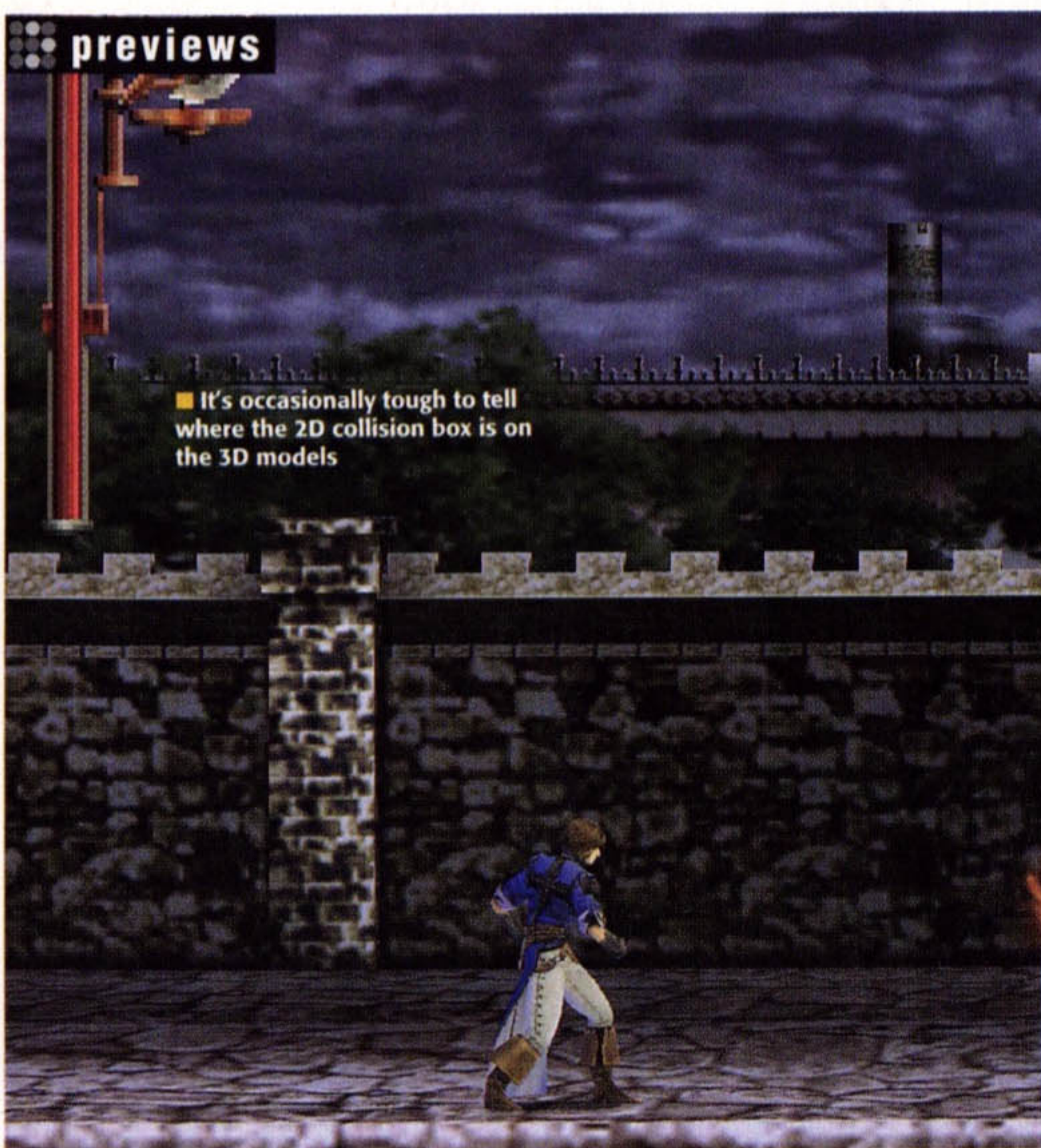
■ Who builds a castle without floating ooze these days, anyway?
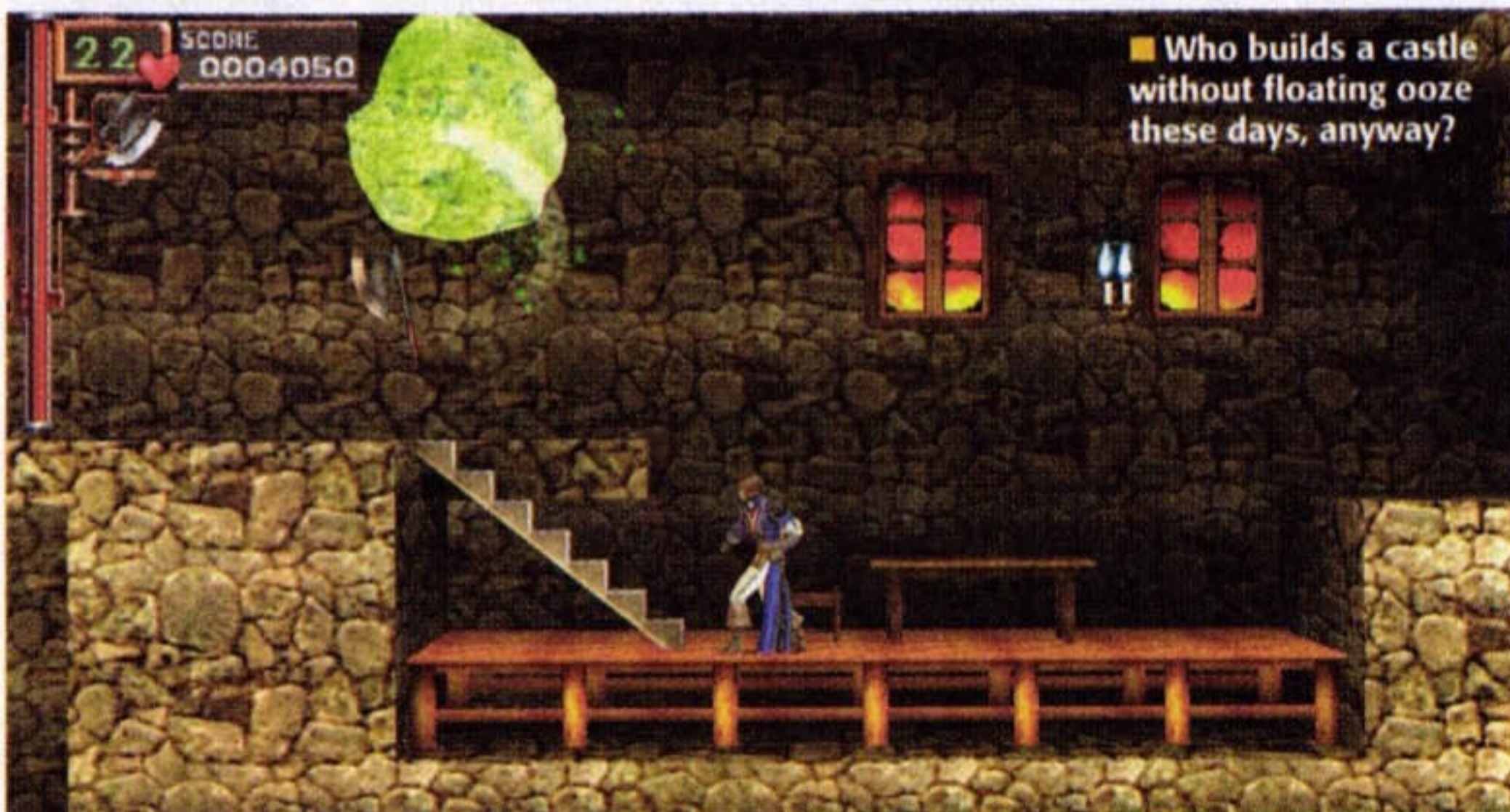
■ Blowing your hearts on an Item Crush attack is sometimes totally worth it
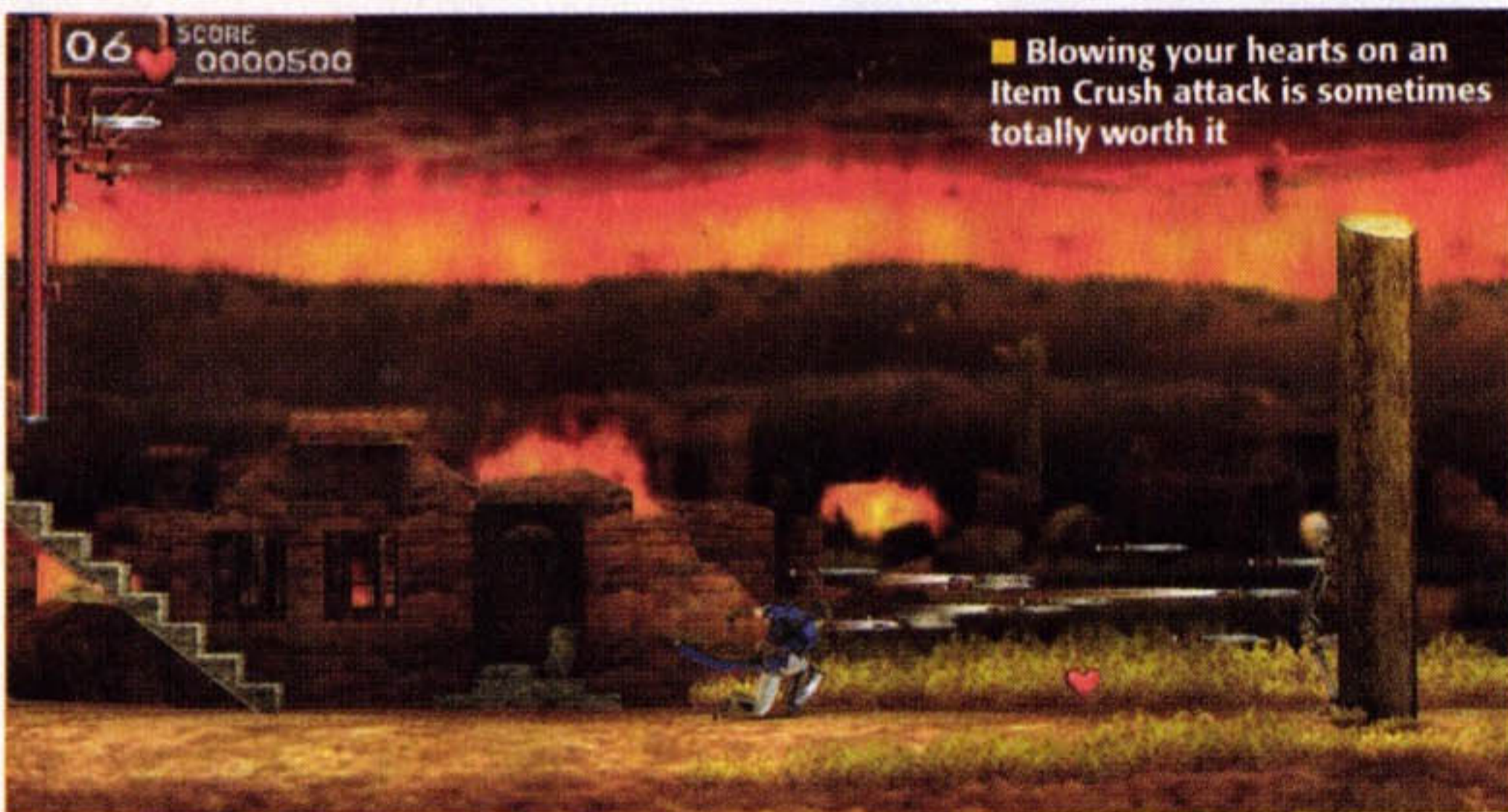
■ Breaking certain walls will reveal new alternate paths

Castlevania: The Dracula X Chronicles

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER KONAMI
> DEVELOPER KONAMI > RELEASE 2007

DO YOU KNOW THE NAME RICHTER BELMONT?

Most American gamers have never gotten the chance to play Dracula X: Rondo of Blood, the direct precursor to the beloved Symphony of the Night, as it was only ever released in Japan. Konami is finally rectifying that oversight, porting the game over to PSP and retooling the graphics to take advantage of the handheld's power. After spending some hands-on time with it recently, it's clear that classic Castlevania is just as fun as we remember it.

Not to spoil anything, but you'll take the Belmont du jour, Richter, into a castle full of undead monsters with the ultimate goal of killing Dracula and sending the evil castle back to the abyss whence it came. As this is no more than a visually enhanced port (with a bare few smidgens of added alternate paths here and there), Richter doesn't have any fancy acrobatic moves or crazy weapons. A jump, backflip, and the classic whip and subweapons are the extent of your options, and the game doesn't pull any punches when it comes to difficulty. Bosses are huge and impressive, and there's quite the variety of settings and enemies new and old. It's Castlevania, no doubt about it.

The graphics are sharp, the animation's smooth, and the gameplay is timeless. Look for this to be a highly entertaining addition to the PSP library shortly. ■ ■ ■

THE KEY TO THE CASTLE

The Dracula X Chronicles isn't the longest game ever; the original ten stages from Rondo of Blood are it. What you get for your money doesn't stop there, though: Unlockable full versions of the original Rondo of Blood and Symphony of the Night, as well as a secret character for the base game, are there for your gaming pleasure. Heck, most of us would pay $40 just to get Symphony of the Night on our PSPs. The fact that it's a bonus within a larger package is pure gravy.

Tonight's dessert special: Homicidal man

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

Stranglehold

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > PUBLISHER MIDWAY > DEVELOPER MIDWAY CHICAGO > ESRB SUMMER

DO ALL YOUR OWN STUNTS

The video game sequel to John Woo's *Hard Boiled* has been long in the making. As the release date nears, Midway has unveiled a new playable level showcasing Inspector Tequila in action. We tried out the incredibly destructible Chicago Historical Museum recently, and destroyed countless priceless artifacts along the way.

Unlike in Max Payne and the countless other games that utilize bullet time, players will use "Tequila Time" liberally as a means to earn special moves rather than it being the special move itself. Players can initiate this with the right bumper on the Xbox 360 version or hold down the L trigger for a brief slo-mo dive. This will also kick in automatically as Tequila seamlessly slides over tables, rides on top of dining carts, and swings from hanging pterodactyl skeletons. Combining several kills in one sequence will raise your special meter faster, and it happens to look pretty cool in the process.

All four special moves, or "Tequila Bombs," are mapped to the d-pad, and a circular meter in the lower left corner of the screen will fill up as players rack up kills. Drain it with a health boost, a spinning multi-kill takedown, a powered-up rapid fire shooting fest, or a cinematic sniper shot. In that last attack, players will aim and fire in slo-mo and the

camera will actually follow the bullet to the intended target. Enemies react accordingly depending on where they are shot – clutching their necks, eyes, shoulders, etc. as the blood flows. Though Midway isn't talking details just yet, competitive online multiplayer has been confirmed. It'll be interesting to see how (or if) slo-motion and specials will be incorporated.

Hired goons weren't the only things we were filling full of lead. Tyrannosaurus skeletons, stuffed dodo birds encased in glass, large dinosaur fossil blocks, precious vases, ancient statues, and Roman-style columns all crumbled in a hail of gunfire. It was quite satisfying to run up the spine of a dino skeleton while dropping enemies dangling from ropes attached to the ceiling.

The simple, yet flashy gameplay of Stranglehold will make anyone look like an ass kicker. We're just hoping the glossy sheen holds up after playing deep into the game. ■ ■ ■
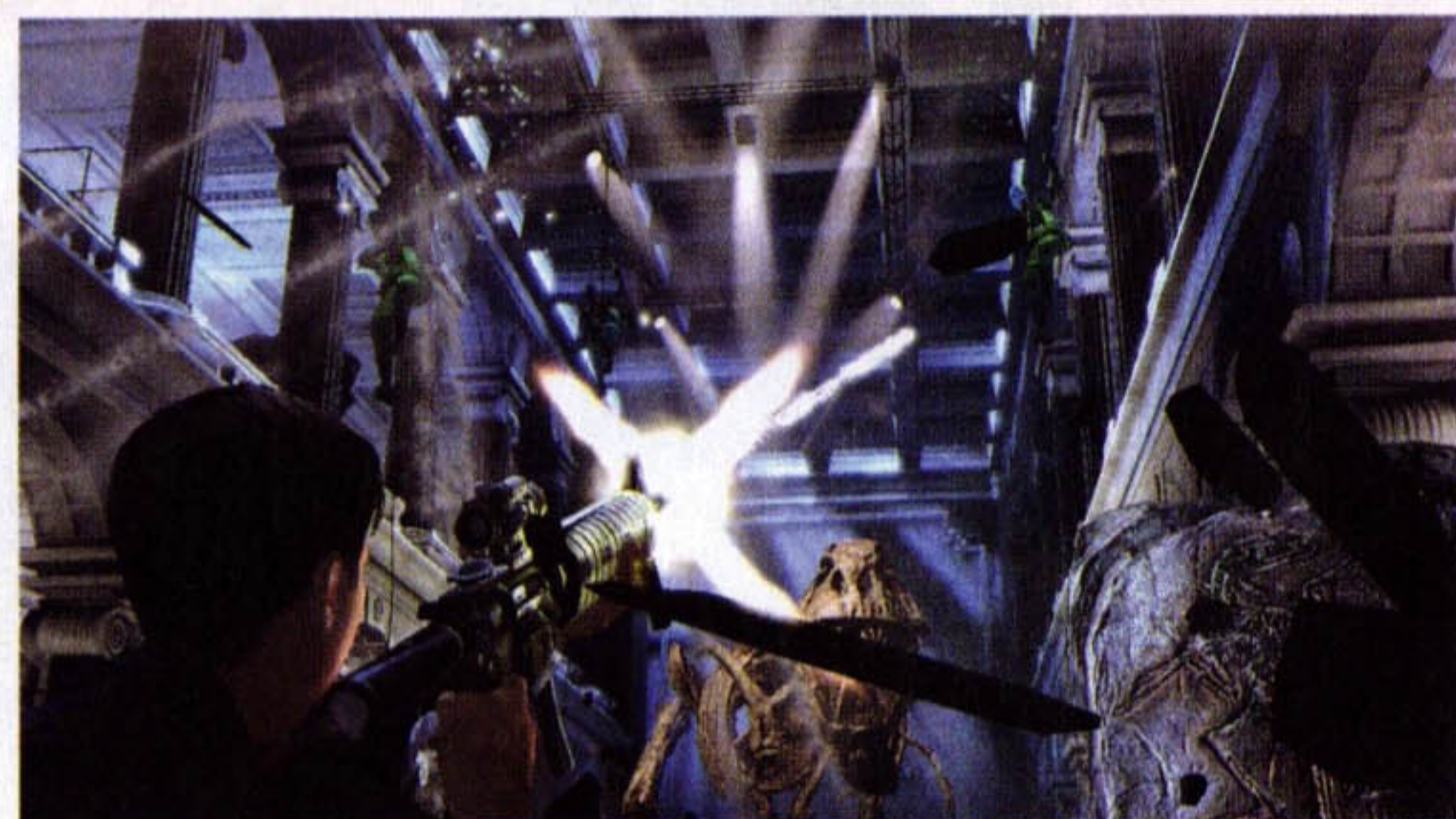
The columns are almost as fun to shoot as the guys

Like Lara Croft, but angry...and fully clothed

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

Sega Rally Revo

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER RACING (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > **PUBLISHER** SEGA > **DEVELOPER** SEGA DRIVING STUDIO
> **RELEASE** 2007

COLIN MCWHO?

Before the stinky Scot Colin McRae (j/k Colin we luv u – bff!) became the number one name in video game rally racing, the Sega Rally series helped establish the genre in the arcade and on home consoles. Now, with a new, revamped title called Sega Rally Revo, the company hopes to regain the off-road championship on the PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360.

Sega has promised the game will look like these gorgeous screenshots, so here's to hoping. The gameplay will seek out a niche somewhere between over-the-top arcade antics and McRae's strict simula-

tion. You'll be able to race one of many 2WD and 4WD vehicles against computer-controlled opponents (which will feature vastly improved AI) or friends online. Sega hasn't revealed any details about online, other than the fact that Revo will have it. The biggest new feature of the game will be deforming tracks, similar to Sony's MotorStorm, which means terrain that changes and ruts based on wear and weather. As with any racer, we won't really know how good this is until we get our hands on a playable copy, but we're certainly looking forward to this one. ■ ■ ■
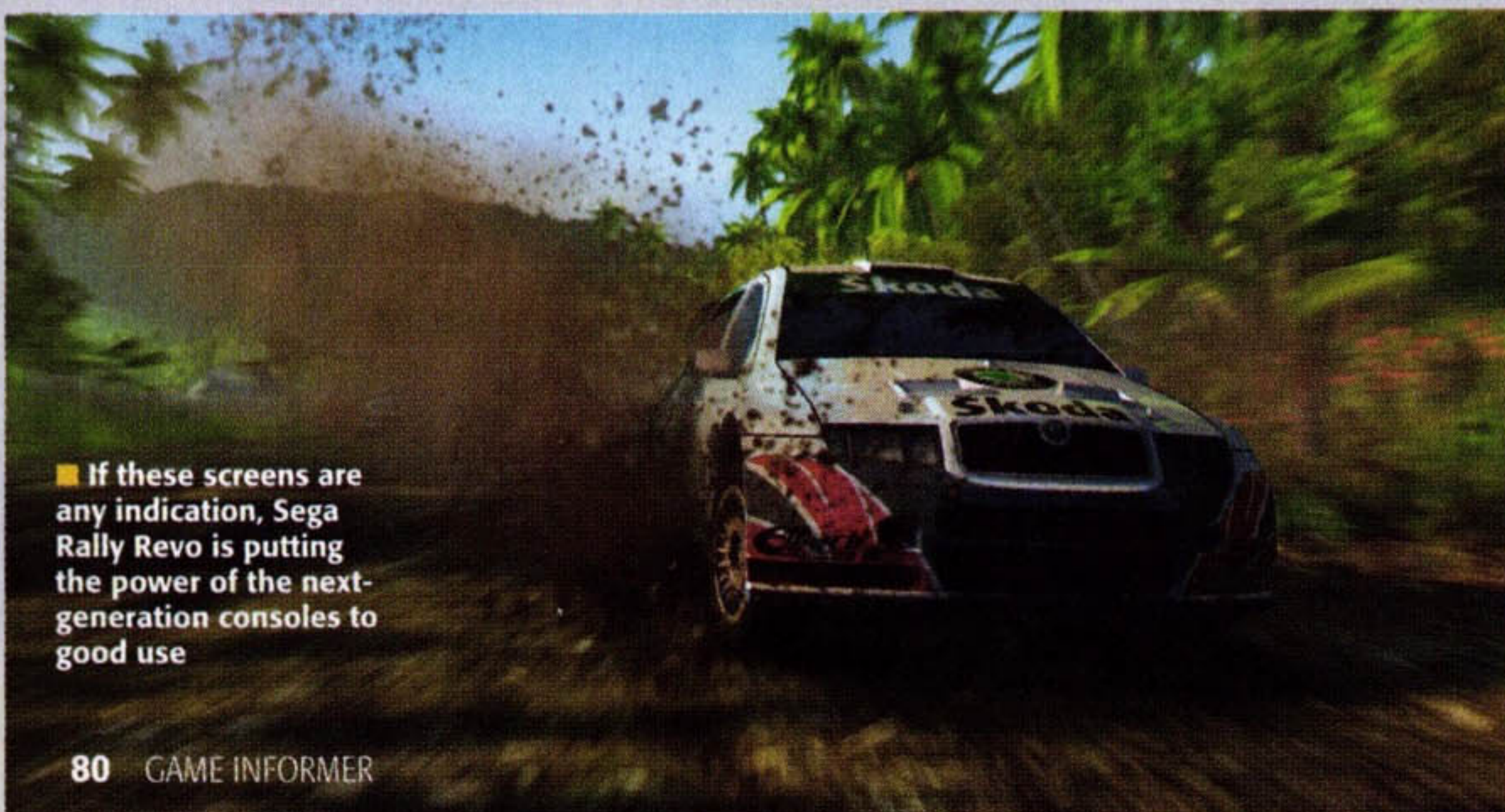
■ If these screens are any indication, Sega Rally Revo is putting the power of the next-generation consoles to good use

PSP

Call of Duty: Roads to Victory

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 6-PLAYER VIA AD HOC OR INFRASTRUCTURE) > **PUBLISHER** ACTIVISION
> **DEVELOPER** AMAZE ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** MARCH

THE NEW THOUSAND YEAR WAR
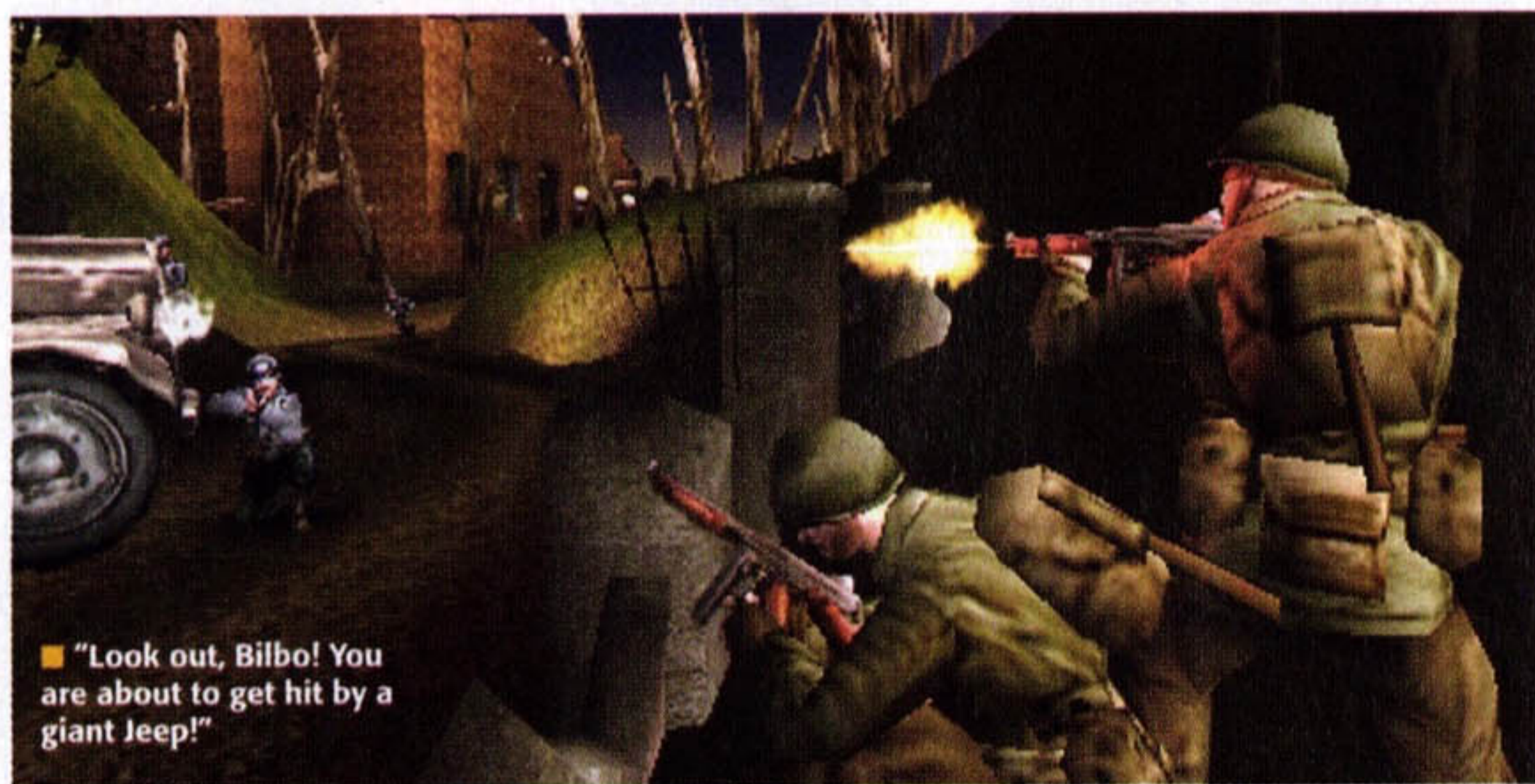
■ "Look out, Bilbo! You are about to get hit by a giant Jeep!"

The sales numbers don't lie; gamers bask in reliving the gore and glory of World War II. The latest game to feature Hitler hunting is Call of Duty: Roads to Victory, the critically lauded franchise's first appearance on a handheld.

Comprised of 14 entirely new missions, Roads to Victory follows the standard Call of Duty structure. The campaign takes place in a variety of locations across the European Theater, with gamers controlling three different soldiers: an American paratrooper from the 82nd Airborne division, a Canadian First Army rifleman, and a British commando. The missions themselves look and feel like classic Call of Duty, with you and your fellow soldiers engaging in intense, epic firefights against the Nazis. Roads to Victory also lets you experience the war as a gunner in a B-24 Liberator, which must make a bombing run in the midst of firing flak cannons and attacking Messerschmitt squadrons.

As many ported shooters have discovered, translating the FPS experience to the PSP often ends in futility. Developers still haven't found a way to compen-

sate for the PSP's lack of a second analog stick. Roads to Victory developer Amaze Entertainment hopes to circumvent these problems by offering four different control schemes. We had a chance to test out these different schemes in a short preview of the game's first four missions. Though each option will get you through the battle, we couldn't shake the same feeling we have with every PSP shooter: The controls are too clumsy to translate twitch reactions into kills.

Roads to Victory will also offer a basic multiplayer mode. Using either Ad Hoc or Infrastructure, two-to-six players can compete in standard deathmatch, capture the flag, and king of the hill matches. Look to start stomping Nazis sometime this March. ■ ■ ■
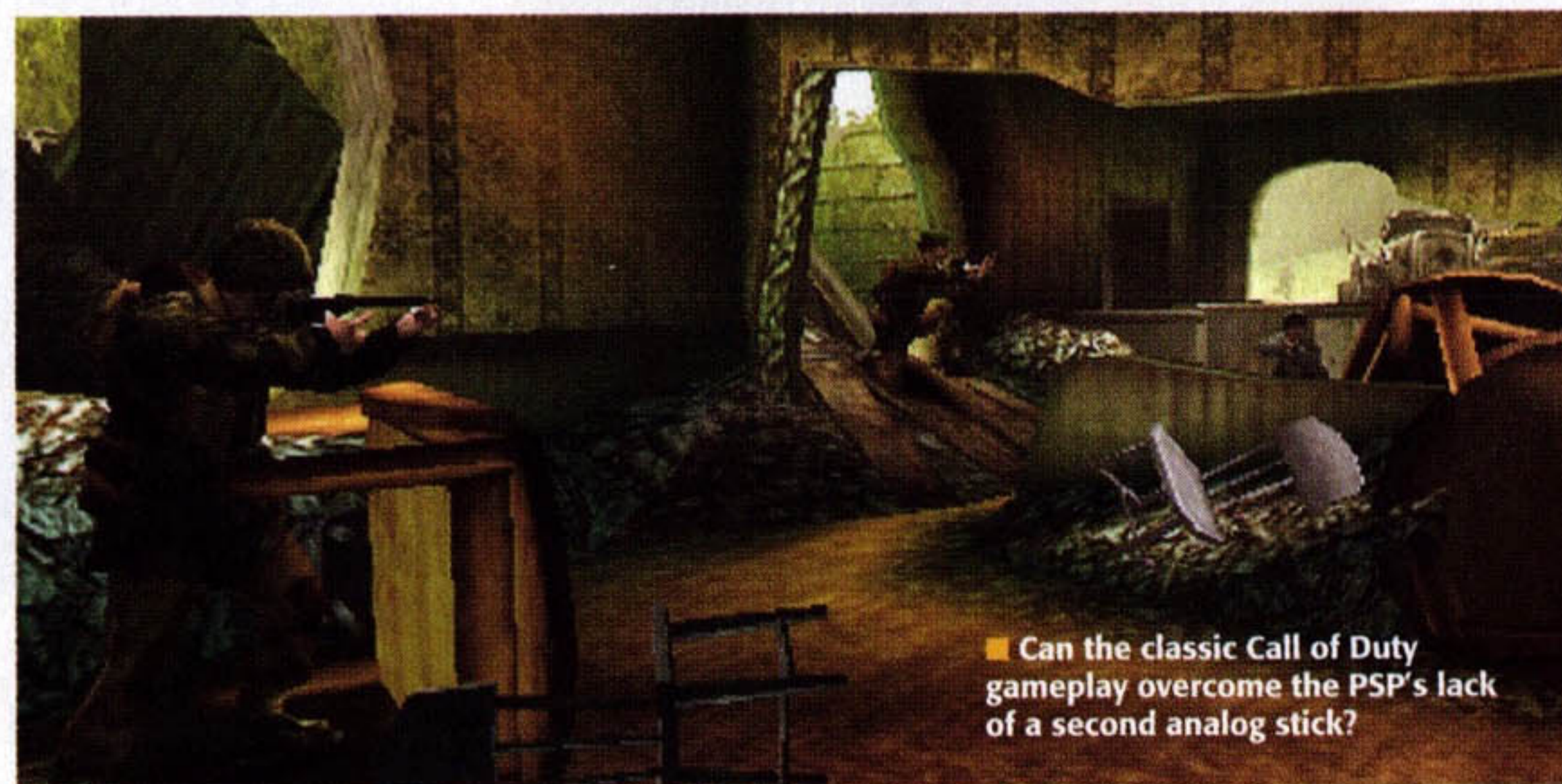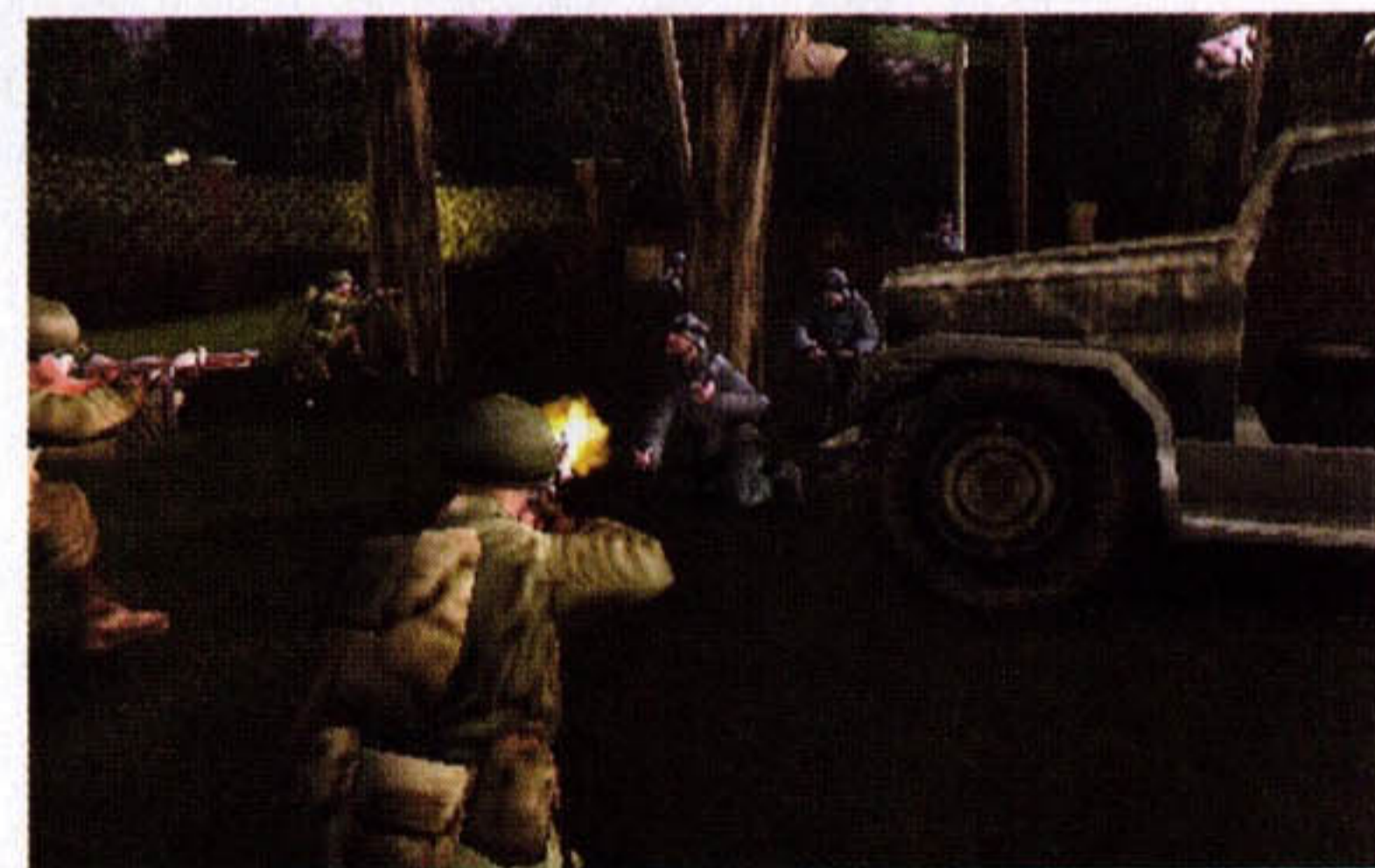
■ Can the classic Call of Duty gameplay overcome the PSP's lack of a second analog stick?

■ These little guys will crawl up onto you to try and take you down
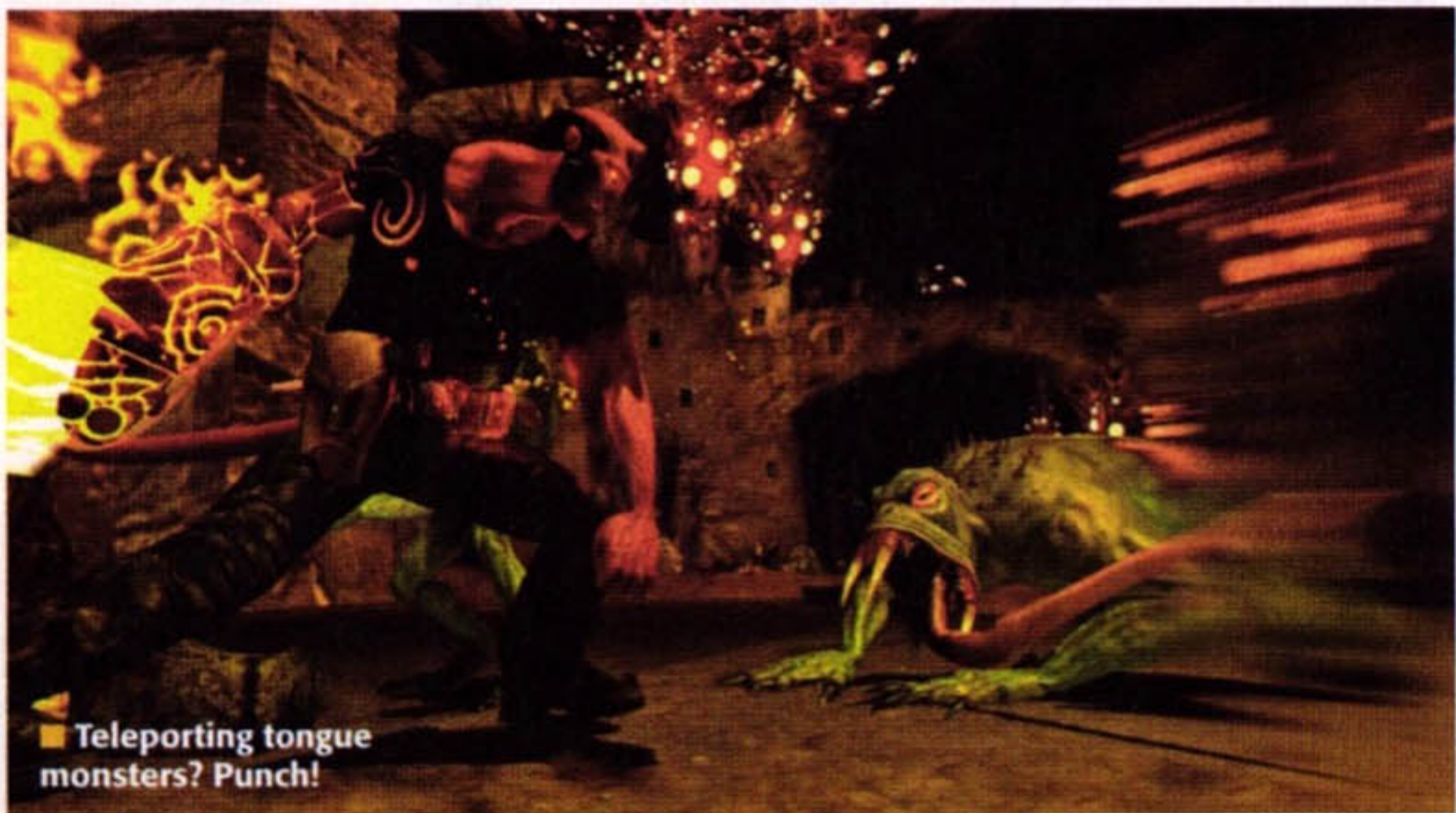
■ Teleporting tongue monsters? Punch!

■ Evil gremlin monsters? Punch!

■ Gas mask Nazi monsters? Punch!

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PSP

Hellboy

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (ONLINE TBA) > **PUBLISHER** KONAMI
> **DEVELOPER** KROME STUDIOS > **RELEASE** FALL

THOSE DARN NAZIS

We have to admit that we didn't exactly have the utmost faith in this next-gen brawler from Konami when it was first shown. After spending some time with the latest build of the Xbox 360 version of the game, we're ready to hop on the Hellboy train. Not only is it graphically outstanding, it plays well and the action is freaking brutal. When Hellboy decides that it's time to wreck some shop, he doesn't mess around – a quality faithfully reproduced in this video game adaptation.

En route to stopping a crazed Nazi from some kind of world domination plot, Hellboy will encounter plenty of fodder on which to test out his face-smashing skills. An emphasis on grappling attacks sets the action apart, and you'll have access to a variety of weapons picked up or ripped out of the destructible environments. There's even a bit of strategy involved in trying to take out the leaders of enemy packs, which will throw the rest of the group into disarray.

Celebrity involvement in the form of voiceover by actor Ron Perlman and creative input from Hellboy creator Mike Mignola and the film's director, Guillermo del Toro, are some nice bits of window dressing. Co-op play (as either Abe Sapien or Liz Sherman) is a bit more substantive, and something that should be a part of every brawler. Sure, it's shaping up to be a fairly by-the-numbers beat-'em-up, but it looks amazing in motion and, well, beating up bad guys is fun. ■ ■ ■

■ This screen showcases Hellboy's delicate moral dilemma: punch fascist monsters' heads off or throw them into each other with bone-crushing force?

PSP? SAY WHAT?

Konami tells us that the portable edition of Hellboy will be very similar to the next-gen versions. While the brawling gameplay remains largely intact, the levels are broken up into smaller, more travel-friendly chunks. The visuals obviously can't reach the high bar that the 360 and PS3 are setting, so the PSP game will feature a more stylized, cartoony look that nonetheless works perfectly well on the handheld. It's no next-gen console, but the PSP can certainly handle itself just fine when it comes to stopping evil Nazi plots.

■ Rat Fact #1: Rats can carry the Bubonic plague. Quarantine them near your food

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | WII | PLAYSTATION 2 | GAMECUBE | PSP | DS | GBA | PC

Ratatouille

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > **PUBLISHER** THQ > **DEVELOPER** HEAVY IRON (360, PS3), ASOBO (PS2, PC, Wii), HELIX (GBA, DS), LOCOMOTION (PSP) > **RELEASE** JUNE

IT'S FRENCH

The best-selling game of 2006 was, predictably, Madden NFL 07. Can you guess what title took the number two spot? It wasn't Oblivion, Zelda, or Final Fantasy; it was the game based on the movie *Cars*. Hoping to duplicate this success, THQ will be publishing the video game version of Pixar's newest film, *Ratatouille*, when it hits theaters this summer.

Players will control a young rat named Remy, who dreams of becoming a great chef in Paris. You explore the highs and lows of the famous city, traversing its streets and running through its sewers using an array of familiar platforming tricks. In total, Remy will see five different worlds taken from and inspired by the movie. There are also over 20 missions and mini-games, some of which will allow you to play against your friends in multiplayer.

As with The Incredibles and Cars titles, Ratatouille will feature a mixture of events taken from the film in addition to new content exclusive to the game. The movie's voice talent will even be reprising their roles. Every Pixar film has been cinematic gold, and while the games may not always be of the same outstanding quality, Ratatouille is aiming for accessible gameplay that will give it appeal for gamers of all ages. If nothing else, this will probably be the best game this year based on a rodent chef. ■■■

■ Rat Fact #2: Rats do not lay eggs. They lay mini exercise balls

■ Rat Fact #3: Dustin Hoffman played Ratso in the 1969 film *Midnight Cowboy*

Wii | PSP | NINTENDO DS

Godzilla: Unleashed

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER FIGHTING > **PUBLISHER** ATARI > **DEVELOPER** PIPEWORKS SOFTWARE > **RELEASE** FALL

■ Burninating the countryside

KING OF ZILLAS

The on-then-off series that started on GameCube with Godzilla: Destroy All Monsters is coming to the Wii. Developer Pipeworks Software hasn't announced the full monster list, but it says the Japanese movie companies' A-list of monsters will be included, as well as a few surprises.

The brawlers in Unleashed are grouped into four factions, and each group has its own motivations and goals within the game's overarching story. Players will be able to directly impact how the story plays out – changing certain story events and team-ups – by making different choices within the gameplay.

However, since this is a Wii game, the most important element could be the game's controls. The Wii's nunchuk handles movement and jumping while the remote dishes out all the attacks. With these controls, monsters will now be able to perform all their primary actions independent of their movement. For example, Godzilla can now walk in one direction while attacking an enemy with his claws in another, fire a weapon at a different enemy, and swing his tail at a third target, all at the same time. No wonder this guy is so good at destroying Tokyo.

Unleashed's levels will reflect the post-apocalyptic storyline about crystals growing inside the Earth's core. Like previous games in the series, buildings are completely destructible. Pipeworks has created a new destruction system from the ground up for the Wii. Buildings now crack and crumble more realistically. Even the sound effects have been punched up to help sell the devastation. After battles are over, players will be able to look back over the level and see the swath of rampage they produced. Unfortunately, no online multiplayer is planed, but maybe Pipeworks will fix that oversight before the game ships this fall. ■■■

■ Robot Godzillas cannot love. They are the lucky ones
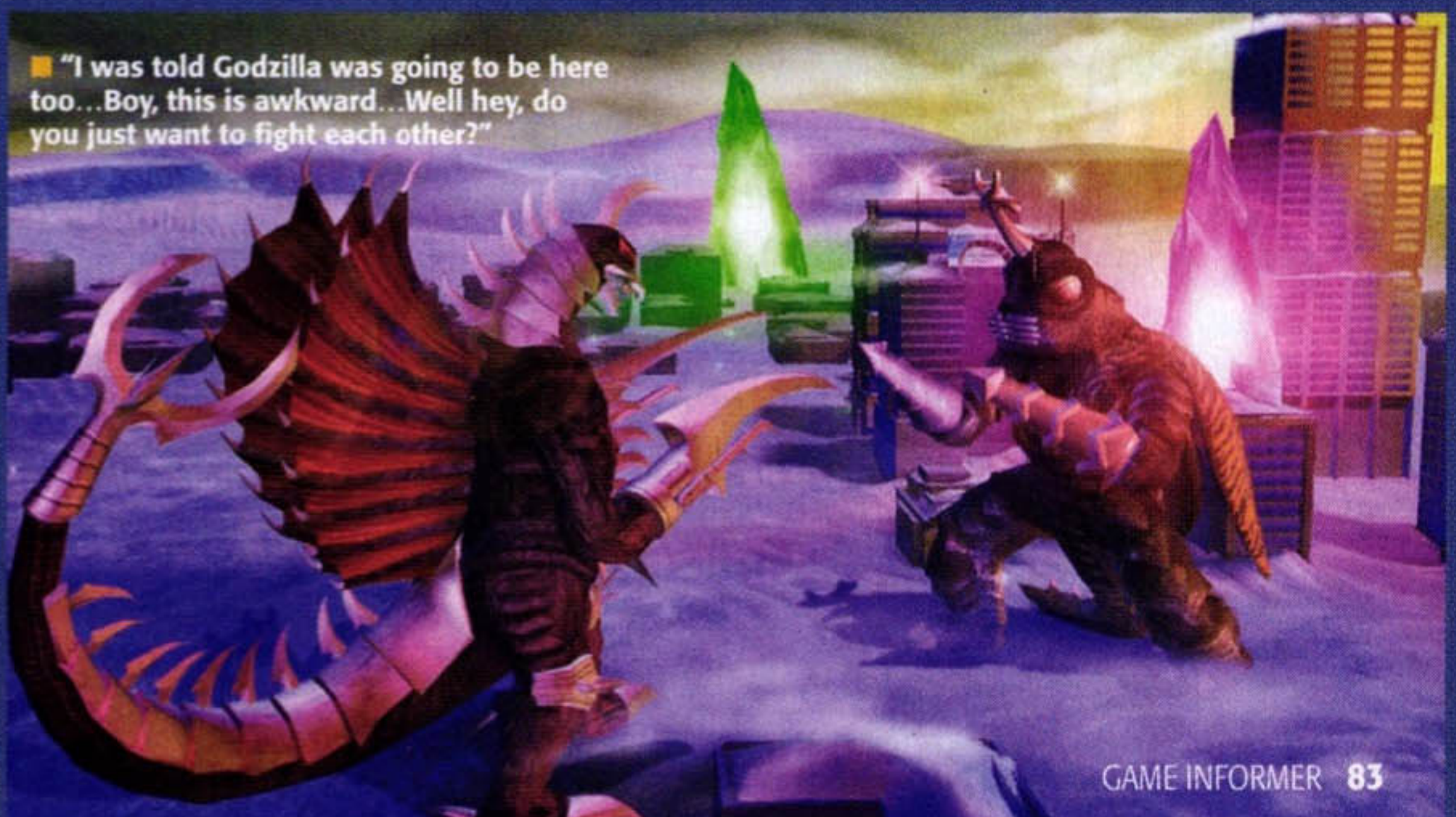
■ "I was told Godzilla was going to be here too…Boy, this is awkward…Well hey, do you just want to fight each other?"
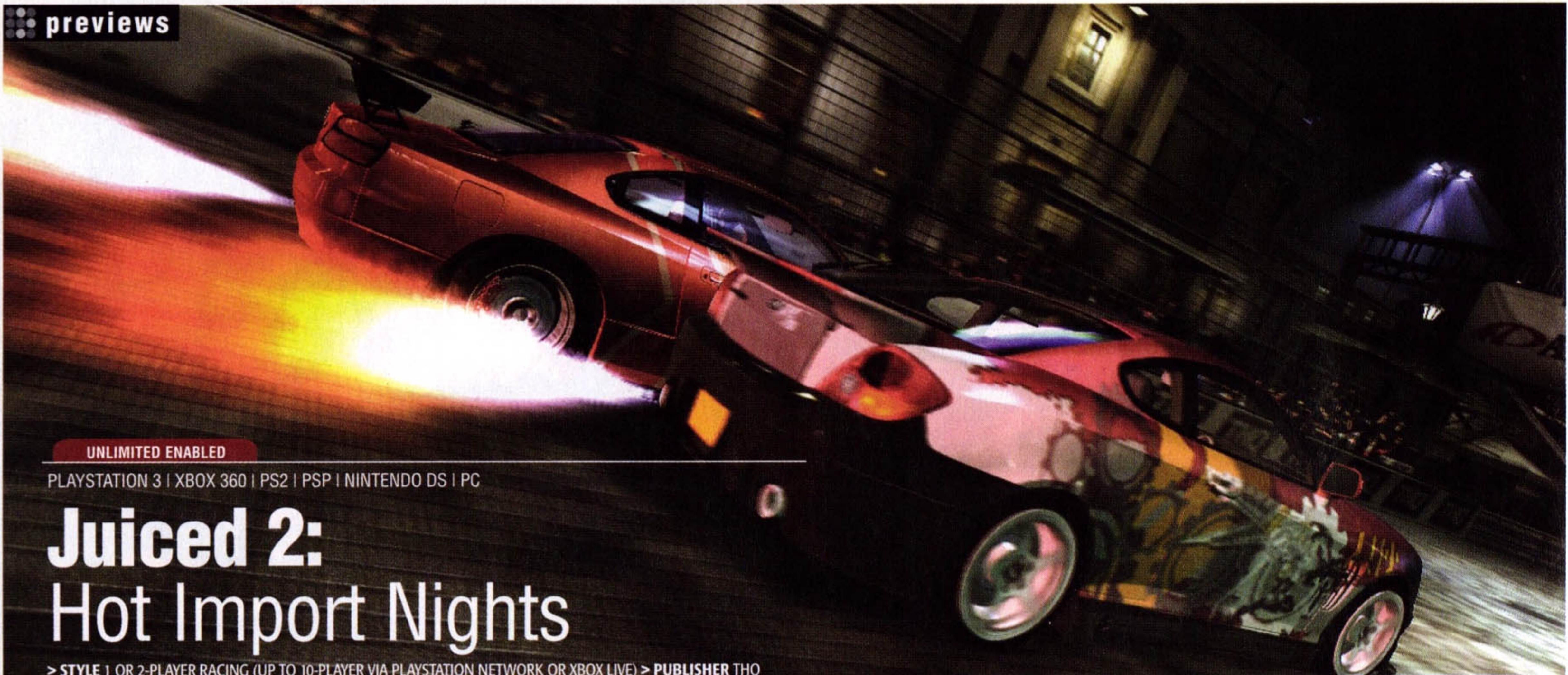
PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PS2 | PSP | NINTENDO DS | PC

Juiced 2:
Hot Import Nights

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 10-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK OR XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** THQ
> **DEVELOPER** JUICE GAMES > **RELEASE** FALL

IN THE SHOP AGAIN

I f ever there was a custom job, it was the one that THQ did on the Juiced franchise back in 2005. Like a car confiscated by the cops after a coke sting, this series was on the chopping block to the highest bidder after the death of Acclaim. THQ figured, "What the hell?" and picked it up. But instead of just hanging an air freshener off the newly glued-on rear view mirror, THQ and Juice Games put some work into this new acquisition, turning Juiced from an unplayable hunk of junk into a game that was enjoyable at times.

Now Juiced is back and is benefiting from full publisher and developer support from the get-go. This is immediately evident in Juiced 2's inclusion of official Hot Import Nights events (see sidebar for more), which will boost the game's culture of pink slip racing, teammates, and customizing. But more importantly, the series needs to expand its scope.

The first Juiced had small tracks lacking variety that the game asked you to race over and over. Hopefully, Juiced 2 will be sufficiently expanded with the addition of cities such as London, Tokyo, Rome, and more. We hope Juiced 2 not only makes the racing circuits bigger, but also more varied in their layout and the challenges they pose. It will be interesting to see how these new settings affect the game's gang, neighborhood, and racing style dynamics, which were important parts of the first title.

No matter where you end up going on the globe, you can retain your indelible sense of self with Juiced 2's extensive customization features. Not only can you avail yourself of over 250 aftermarket mods including scissor doors, body kits, and decals, this time your character itself will be tweakable. Players can create their own driver right down to the clothes. Your friends can even become an integral part of the racing experience thanks to the game's Driver DNA feature. It tracks over 100 attributes as it creates a driver profile that your friends can upload online. You can download and use this profile to create a personalized crew member who will ride alongside you during offline races. DNA profiles from the game's online high score tables can also be used for your crew. Your friends can join your racing posse online, but little else is known about this feature of Juiced 2.

Street racing games come and go like blurred headlights in the night, but if the story of the first Juiced title was any indication, THQ and Juice Games should know that even a little effort can go a long way. ■ ■ ■

Rookie

Cash $9,878,506
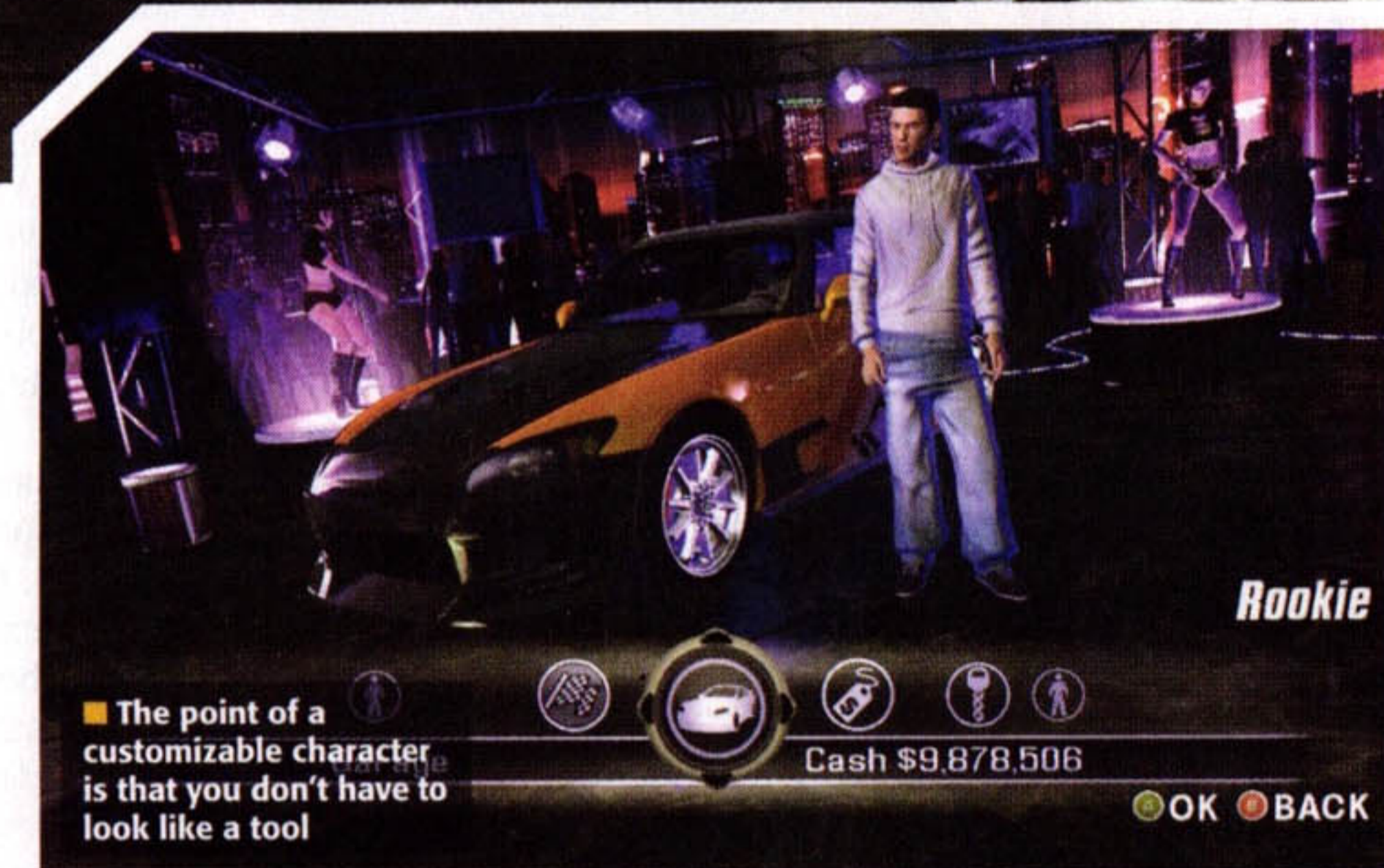
◉ OK ◉ BACK

■ The point of a customizable character is that you don't have to look like a tool

■ The series' emphasis on drifting remains
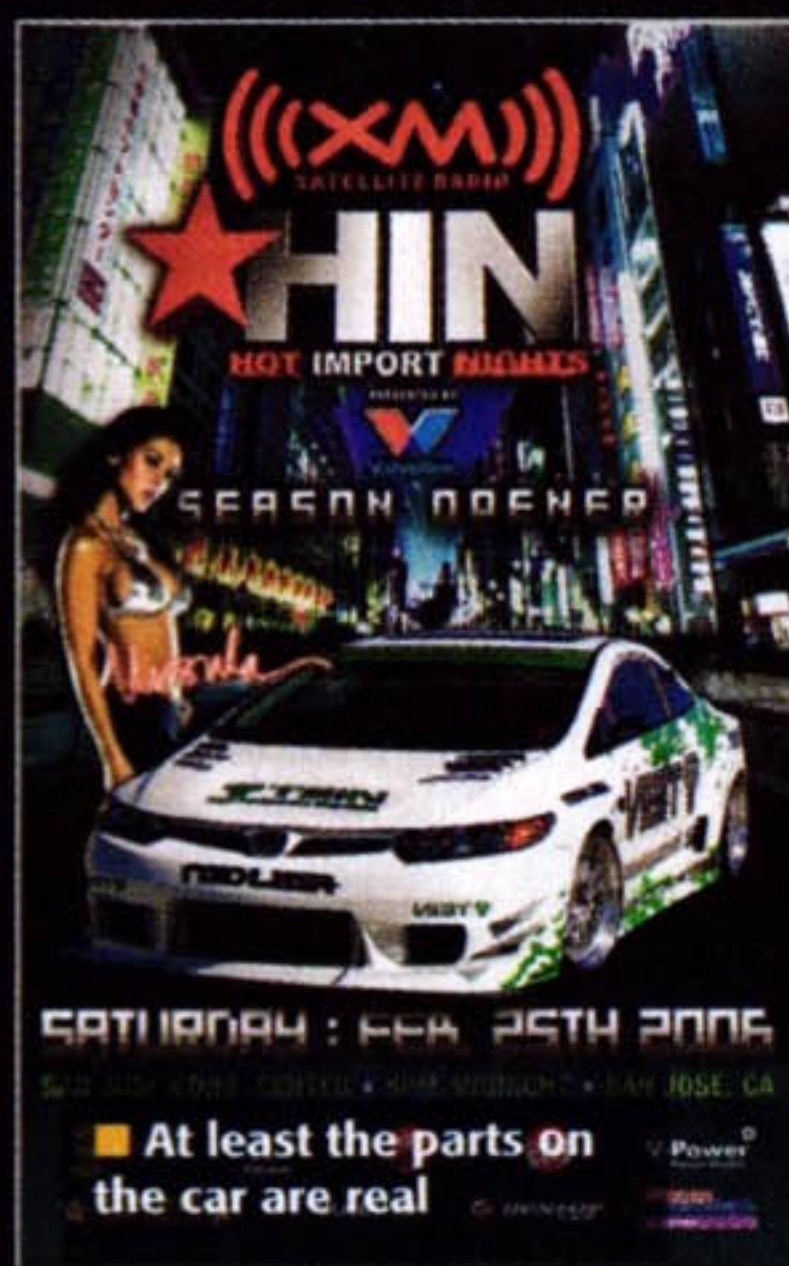
HOT IMPORT NIGHTS

This auto tour holds roughly two events a month in cities across America, letting the locals enter their rides for showcasing while bombarding show-goers with DJs and bikini-ed models. It's unknown at this point how much Juiced 2 utilizes the show's license, but given that the game features hot podium dancers, we're thinking that you might not want to blow all your money on your car.

■ At least the parts on the car are real
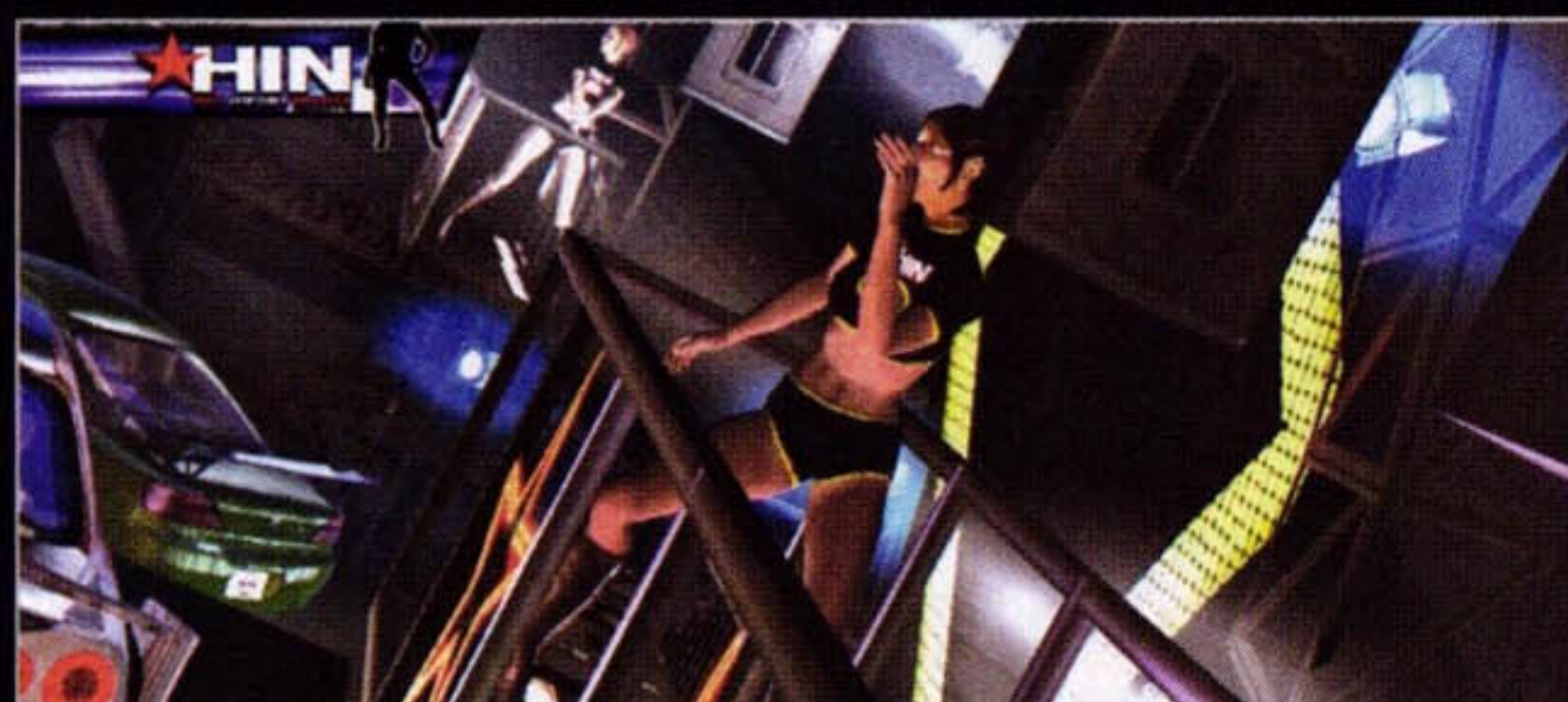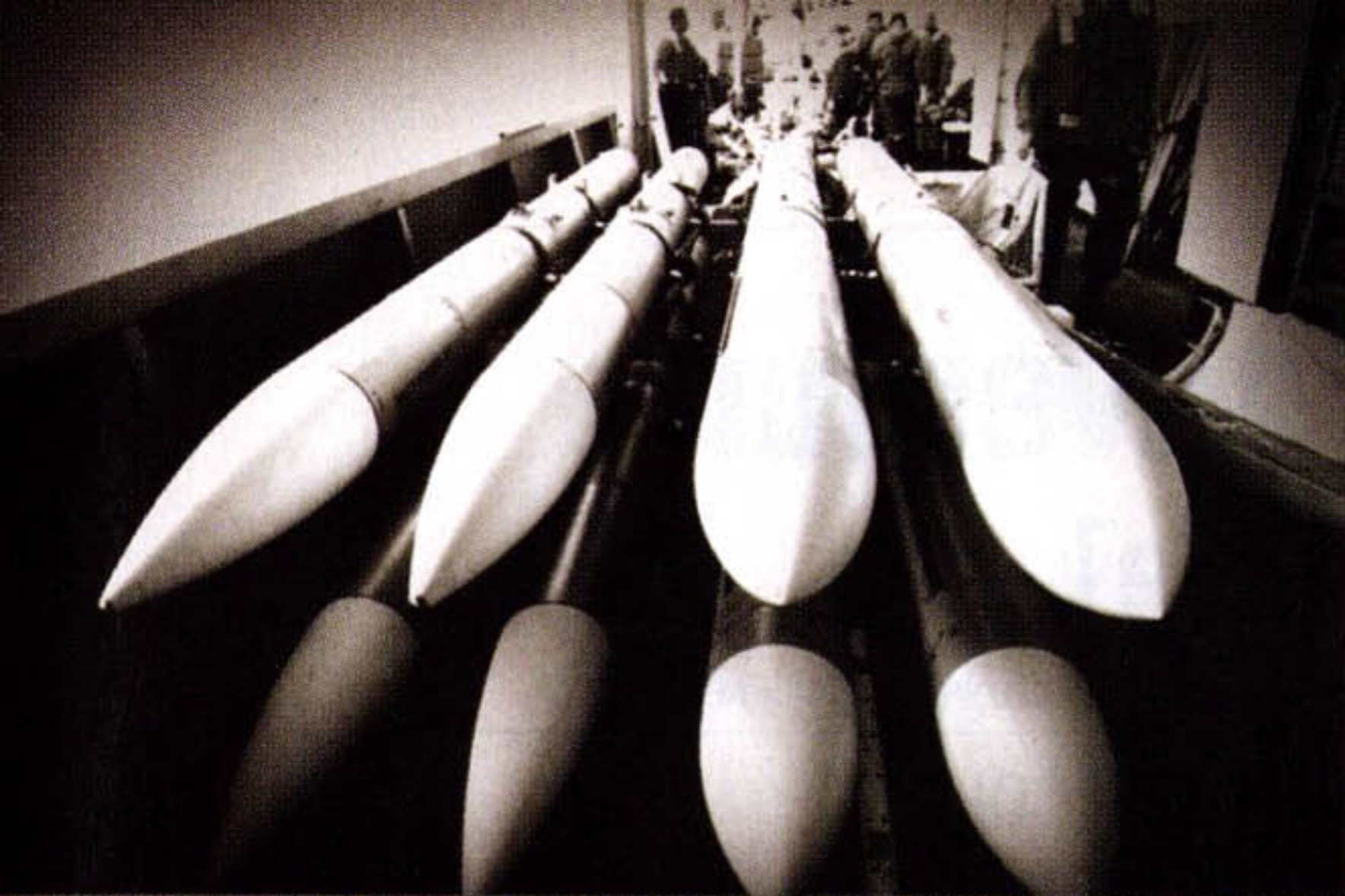
STUDYING ROCKET SCIENCE IS MORE
FUN WHEN YOU ACTUALLY HAVE ROCKETS.

There's only one place you can get hands-on training with the most advanced
technology in the world and that's the U.S. Navy. If you're up to the challenge,
log on the Life Accelerator at navy.com or call 1.800.USA.NAVY.

NAVY
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NATIONAL POKéDEX
191 ----
192 ----
193 ----
194 WOOPER
195 QUAGSIRE
196 ----
197 ----

SEEN   OBTAINED
180   073

ⓑ QUIT

SEARCH POKéMON

SWITCH POKéDEX

Check Pokédex

:BERRIES

NINTENDO DS

Pokémon Diamond/Pearl

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS, NINTENDO WI-FI CONNECTION TBA)
> **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** GAME FREAK > **RELEASE** APRIL 22

TOUCH MY MONSTER

Nintendo must be rubbing its hands together with excitement as the latest installment in the Pokémon franchise nears its U.S. release. The company recently confirmed that Diamond and Pearl are the fastest-selling games in Pokémon history; it has shipped 5 million units in Japan so far. Perhaps this comes as no surprise to anxious fans who have had to slog through countless offshoots and spinoffs waiting for a "proper" Pokémon game.

Over 100 new monsters await the faithful in the all-new region of Sinnoh. The general flow remains unchanged from previous Pokémon games: collect badges from the eight gym leaders and eventually become Pokémon League Champion while dealing with villainous rivals (this time it's Team Galactic).

There are plenty of monsters to collect and evolve, and the new version of the Pokédex allows you to scroll through your catalogue by spinning a Pokémon ball on the touch screen. Battles play out on the top screen, while players select commands via panels on the lower screen. The new Pokewatch showcases a digital watch, a pedometer, a calculator, and a status readout of your Pokémon. Word is that you can enhance this device to perform up to 20 different functions such as item or berry locators.

Diamond/Pearl features full day and night cycles in addition to all of the days of the week. This will figure heavily into when and what kinds of monsters you can capture at any given time. For example, some rare monsters can only be captured on, say, Friday afternoon.

The Japanese version of Diamond/Pearl features online battles with voice support and Pokémon trading, but Nintendo has yet to give solid confirmation for any specific features that will make it over to the States outside of slapping the Nintendo Wi-fi logo on the concept box art. ▪ ▪ ▪

22:00

BUIZEL ♂Lv10

Chatot ♂Lv50
134/136

What will Chatot do?

FIGHT

BAG   RUN   POKéMON

Dewy's Adventure [working title]

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** KONAMI > **DEVELOPER** KONAMI > **RELEASE** 2007

GLOBAL WARMING AND COOLING

▪ "I'm-a gonna drink you, little water guy!"

If you had to pick a developer to take advantage of the Wii's unique input scheme to make a charming character-based puzzle-oriented platformer, Konami wouldn't be the first name that comes to mind. Nonetheless, the team behind Elebits is hard at work crafting this project, tentatively titled Dewy's Adventure. What we've seen of the game has us eager to try our own hands at guiding this little blob of water in his quest to bring life and color back to the world.

Controlling Dewy involves tilting the Wii remote (like you're tilting the gameworld) to get Dewy flowing in different directions. Enemies to defeat, platforming tasks to complete, and puzzles to solve are unsurprising additions to the gameplay. The element that has us very intrigued, however, is the ability to change the state of both Dewy and his surroundings via temperature. Since the protagonist is made

▪ We can already hear Joe maniacally cackling

of water, heating things up will turn him into a gas that can float over obstacles, while freezing the world will turn him into a block of ice that is much stronger against enemies. Changing form even affects the physics that govern how Dewy reacts to your control inputs. It seems that the environment will respond to these stimuli as well, with ponds freezing over to allow safe passage and the like. In a more impressive display of power, shaking or waving the remote in different ways can create earthquakes or shoot lightning bolts.

Dewy certainly has no shortage of options in how to approach a situation. If Konami can build clever levels around these interesting core mechanics, Dewy's Adventure could be exactly the kind of title the Wii needs to further broaden its library in innovative ways beyond the Nintendo stable. We can't wait to dive into this colorful world, but Konami hasn't set a release date more specific than 2007 yet. Let's hope it's sooner rather than later. ▪ ▪ ▪

▪ Dewy doesn't like to get drunk. Get it? We're hilarious

DIY DEWY

A platforming playstyle doesn't lend itself very well to online play, but Konami will be including a level creator with Dewy's Adventure, as well as a network infrastructure on WiiConnect24 to share your created levels with friends. We just hope that Nintendo's crippling Friend Code system doesn't categorically prevent good user-made levels from being shared with the world. If we're stuck playing the kind of drivel that our circle of friends will inevitably put out, this is one feature that we won't find much use out of. A rating system and central download location online will make all the difference in the world.

Healer/tank/damage party mechanics are alive and well in Middle-earth
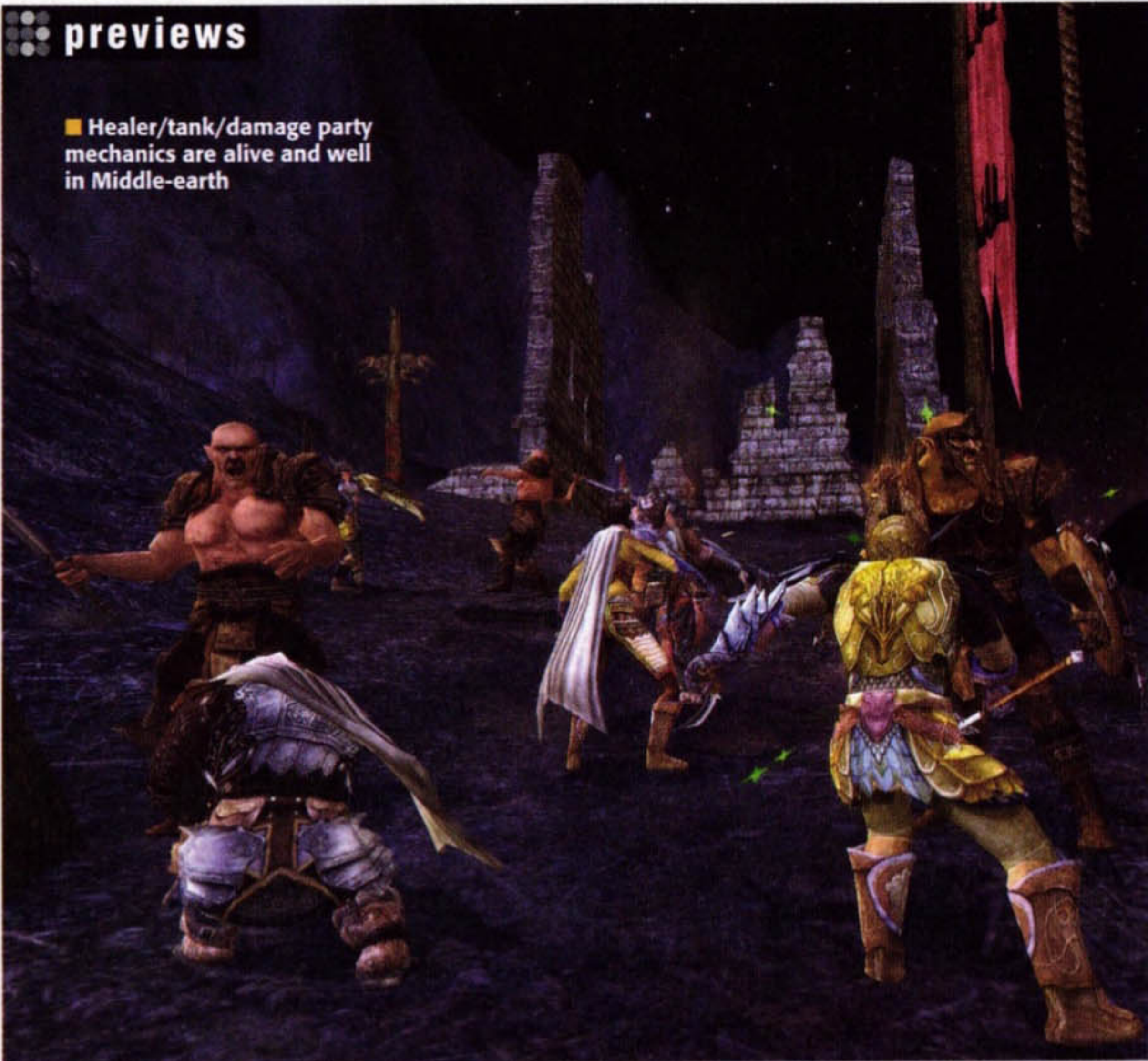
Orcs are just one of many monsters available for monster play

It's not Jackson's Rivendell, but it's fantastic nonetheless

PC

The Lord of the Rings Online: Shadows of Angmar

> STYLE MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING GAME > PUBLISHER MIDWAY > DEVELOPER TURBINE > RELEASE APRIL 24

HOBBIT LFG

If you can't beat 'em, join 'em. The Lord of the Rings may be the grand-daddy of all Western fantasy, but World of Warcraft in all of its Tolkien-derived (and Warhammer-inspired) glory is the undisputed modern benchmark. Turbine's Lord of the Rings Online borrows heavily from WoW in terms of its game design, but the content remains very faithful to Middle-earth.

Over 1,500 quests pepper the game's playable landscape of Eriador – the Shire and some surrounding areas including Rivendell, more or less – ensuring that you'll have plenty to do on your trip up to the level cap of 50. Performing particularly heroic or notable tasks will reward players with "deeds," which are cool in and of

themselves but also lead to cosmetic titles (things like "the Orcslayer" for killing a few hundred Orcs) and Traits (which can be equipped and serve to specialize your character like WoW's talent system). Dungeons abound, with all of the scripted boss fights and higher risks and rewards that you would expect. Endgame activities seem largely centered around 24-person raids, though some of the deeds will no doubt require lots of time and dedication – but will surely confer plenty of bragging rights.

Aside from leveling up and getting better loot, LOTRO offers "monster play" where players can take control of the monsters in a special high-

level zone (Ettenmoors). This is basically LOTRO's PvP game, with monsters and normal heroes fighting back and forth for control of various points and the right to quest unmolested. Success in this arena will be reflected by rankings on leaderboards and rewards like temporary buffs or cool titles. You'll even get the chance to take control of tougher and more awesome monsters if you do well enough in the Ettenmoors.

Even now, in the beta phase, LOTRO plays well and has interesting content that can hang with the big dogs of the MMORPG scene. If The Burning Crusade has lost your attention by April 24, or you're simply a Tolkien fan looking for a new way to experience Middle-earth, this may save your day. ■■■

There are no dwarven women in the game. Read up on your Tolkien if you don't get the joke

Though Turbine doesn't have the license to use material from the films, the art is outstanding

"Dread" will cloud your screen and suck the life and color out of everything when you're near big evil like this guy
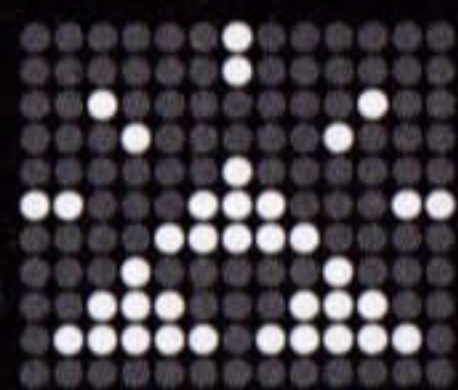
XBOX 360 | Wii | PLAYSTATION 2 | GAMECUBE | PC | NINTENDO DS | GAME BOY ADVANCE

Meet the Robinsons

Disney Interactive is hitting dang near every system under the sun with its upcoming Meet the Robinsons, based on the CG animated film of the same name. While all the versions take a unique spin on the character action genre by way of some neat puzzles and novel gadget-based gameplay, the Wii version (which we recently played) stands out from the rest by providing some well-done motion-sensitive mechanics that utilize both the remote and nunchuk. Look for the Avalanche Software-developed game to release for all systems on March 31.
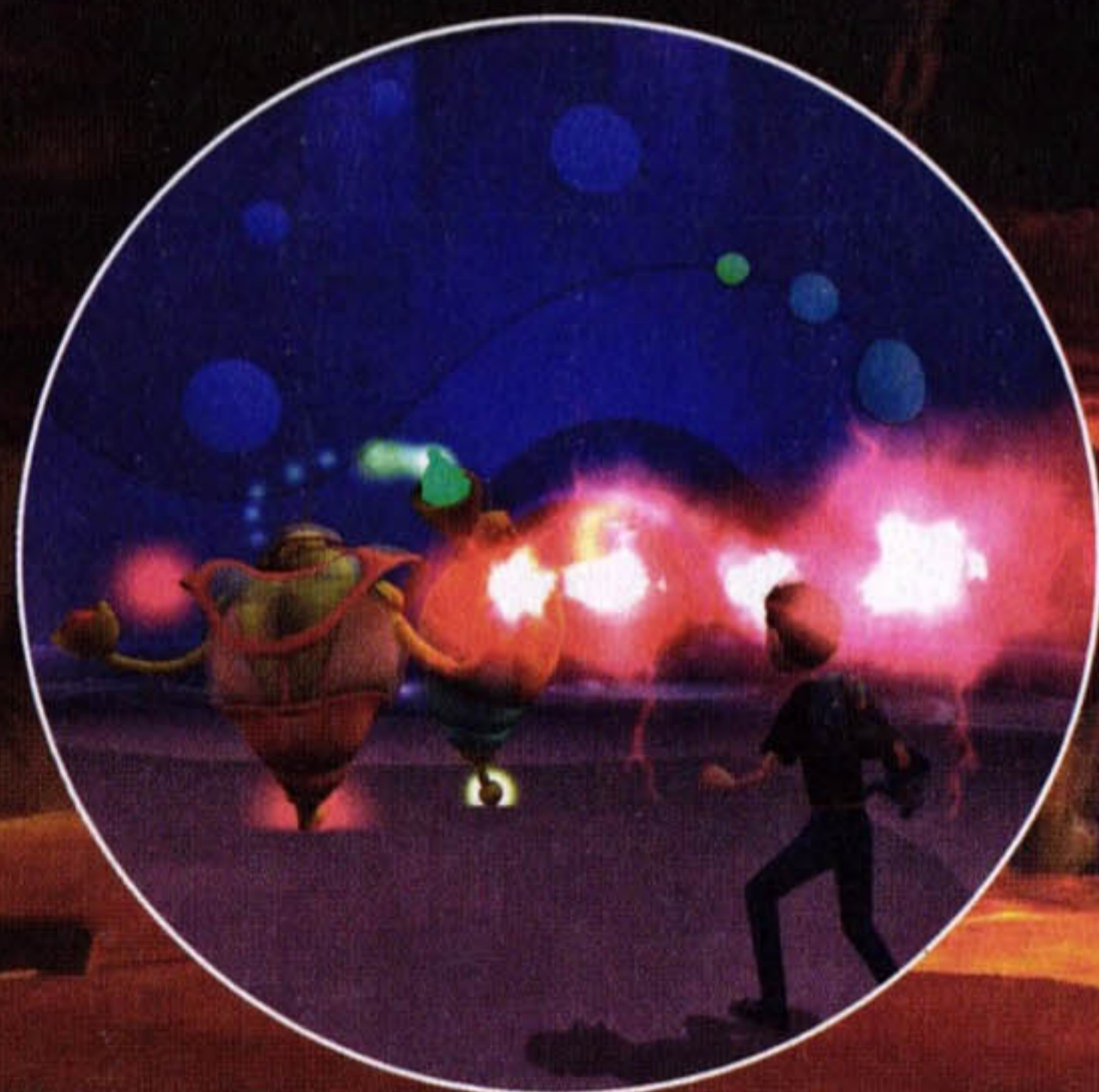
NINTENDO DS

Diner Dash

This old downloadable PC game is getting a DS release this spring courtesy of Eidos. Using the touch screen, players must juggle multiple parties of restaurant-goers and their demands for menus, food, drinks, and dessert. It may not sound like much, but once you've gotten your hands on Diner Dash it can prove to be very addictive; keeping your guests happy enough to stay – even though you're the only waitress dealing with six or more tables – is a challenging task. Unlockable levels in a sushi bar and buyable items to spice up your diner's demeanor should keep Diner Dash entertaining for plenty of hours.

PSP

Final Fantasy Tactics

After traveling to Ivalice again in Final Fantasy XII, Square Enix is giving gamers a chance to go back to where it all began. A part of the Ivalice Alliance project (which also includes FF XII: Revenant Wings and a brand new Final Fantasy Tactics Advance), this game is an enhanced port of the PSone original. In addition to improved graphics and new cutscenes, the Onion Knight class will be included, and Balthier from FF XII will appear in a prominent role as a playable character. There are also plans to add a wireless multiplayer mode, though Square Enix isn't discussing any specific details. This strategy/RPG classic should be resurfacing on store shelves in the later months of this year.

NINTENDO DS
Touchmaster

You know those touch screen games you see out at the bars? Well now you can save your quarters because Midway is bringing their Touchmaster series home for the first time. Mess around with 23 different game types including Mahjong Pairs, Trivia, Solitaire, Pyramid 13, Double Take, and Gem Slide. Check the leaderboards for each game via the Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection or battle a friend using local wireless multiplayer. Midway will also host tournaments from time to time to find the best Hot Hoops player in the land.

Wii
Mortal Kombat: Armageddon

Nintendo's wholesome console is getting a little blood on it this April when MK: Armageddon hits. The game will include the same features from the current-gen versions plus an Endurance mode, a new character named Khameleon (who only previously appeared in the N64 version of Mortal Kombat Trilogy), and motion controls. So how does this work? The game uses simple actions to activate special moves. For example, swing the remote from left to right to activate Scorpion's spear, or move it up and down to teleport. However, those who appreciate the traditional control scheme can still use a GameCube controller or a Wii classic controller.
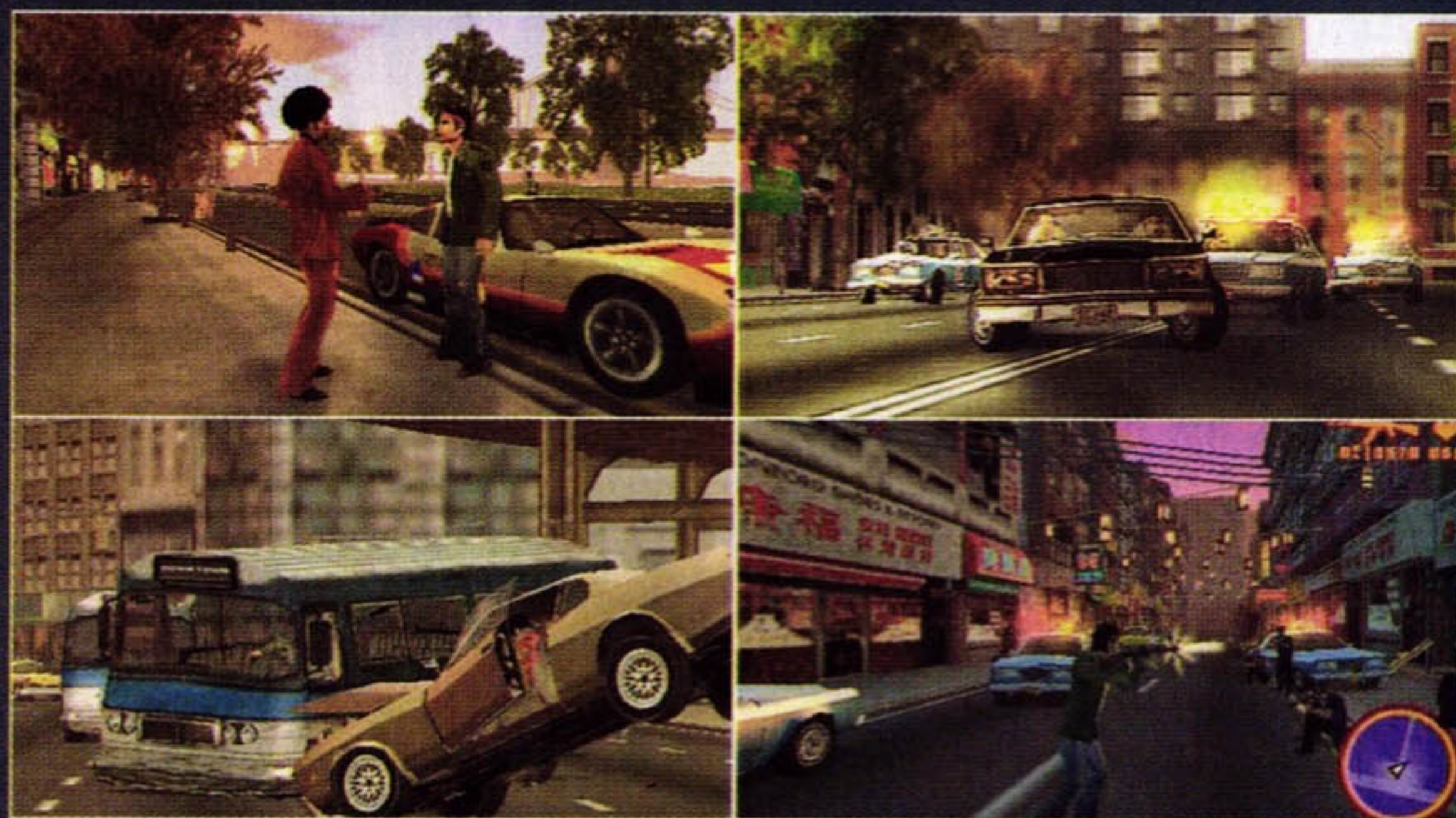
PSP
Driver 76

Ubisoft picked up the Driver license and developer Reflections in the Atari fire sale, and now the mega-publisher is looking to revitalize the beleaguered franchise with an all-new PSP game entitled Driver 76. Not surprisingly given the moniker, it's set in the world of 1970s New York City. Developed in cooperation between Sumo Digital (OutRun 2006: Coast 2 Coast, Virtua Tennis: World Tour) and Reflections, it will feature 27 new missions and six separate plotlines. After earning dirty money both in and out of a variety of vehicles, you'll be able to use your cash on an extensive car upgrade system. Not content to provide just a single-player experience, Driver 76 will also feature unique minigames and wireless multiplayer modes. Be ready to pop this hot number in your PSP sometime in March.
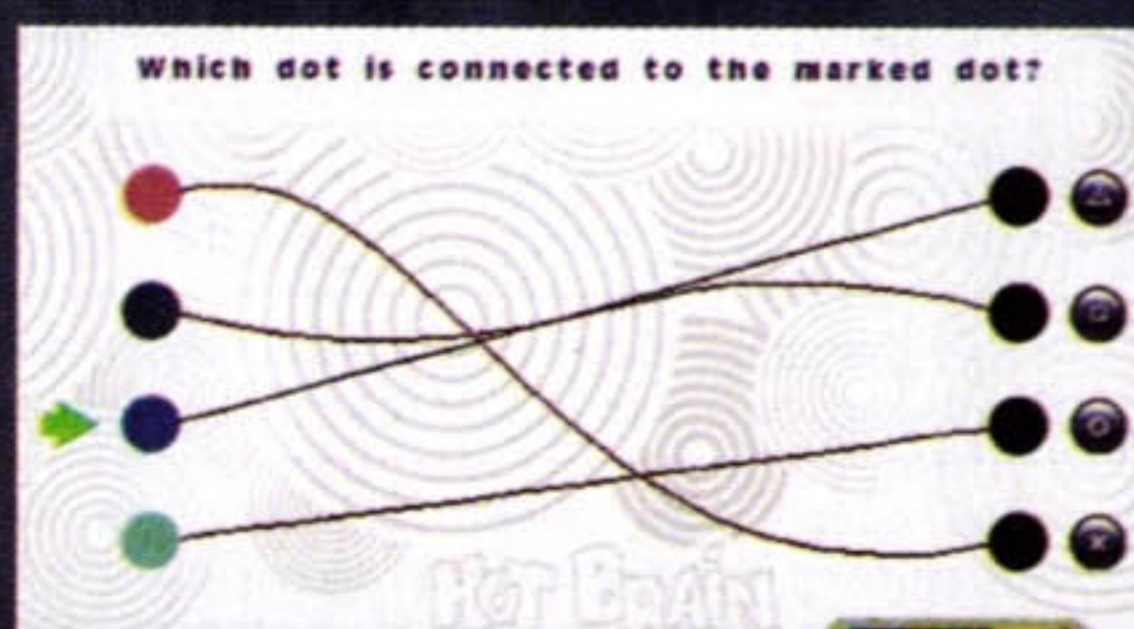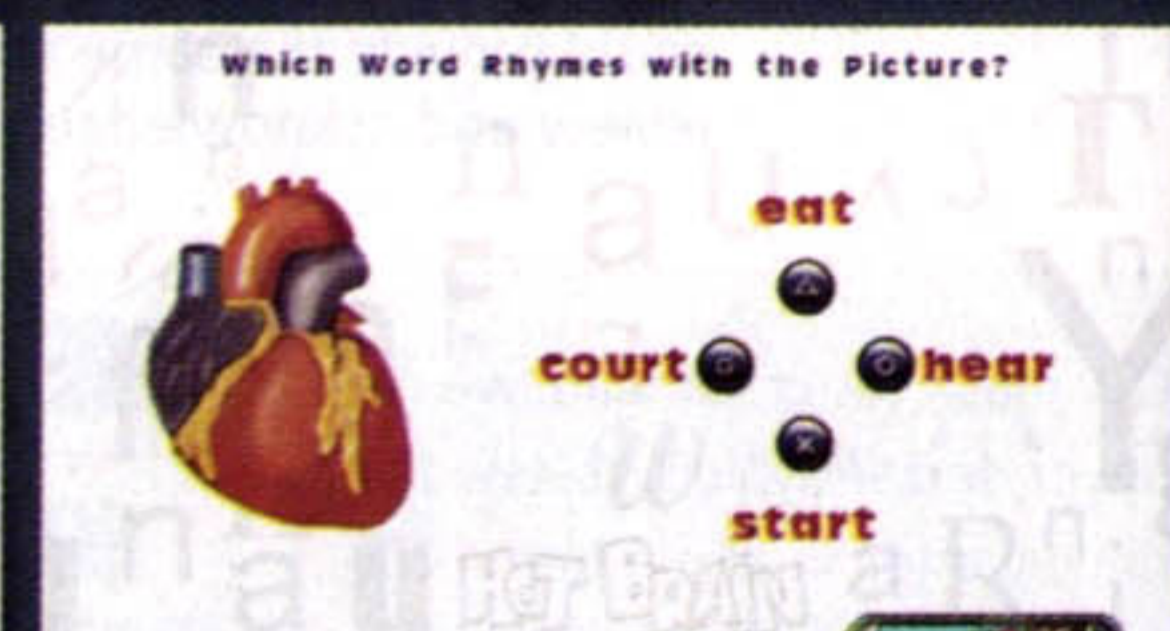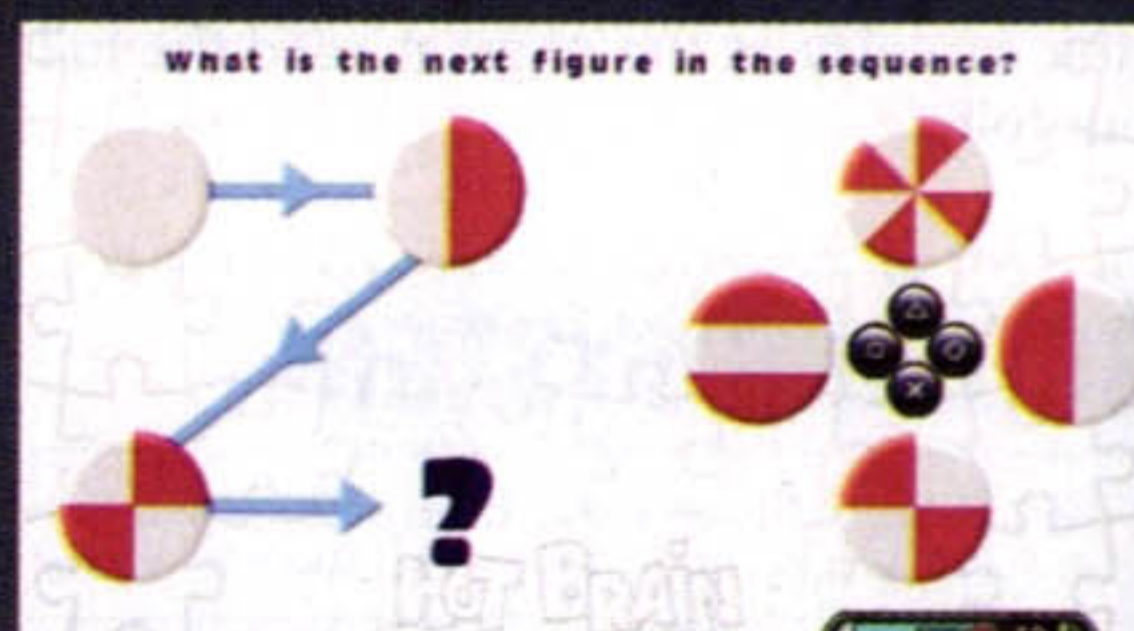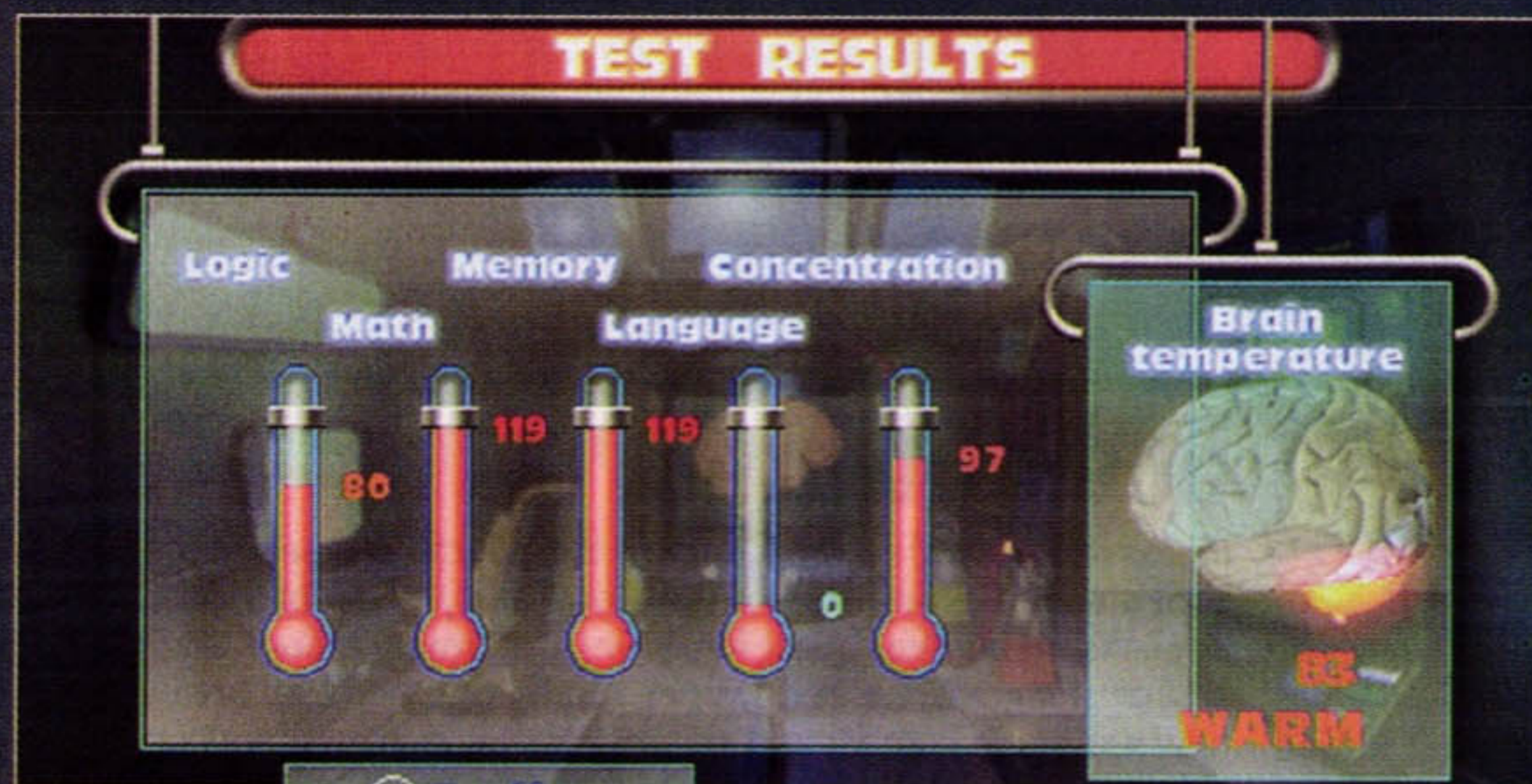
PSP
Hot Brain: Fire Up Your Mind

Midway is trying their hand in the brain training genre this summer with Hot Brain. Raise your brain temperature in five categories: logic, memory, math, language, and concentration. Fred Willard (known from movies like *Anchorman* and *A Mighty Wind*) will handle the hosting duties rather than some crusty doctor, so hopefully there will be some good comedy sprinkled in. Up to four players can face off via ad-hoc wireless to be the first to cook their mind up to the "red hot" level, or they can all work together in a cooperative mode.
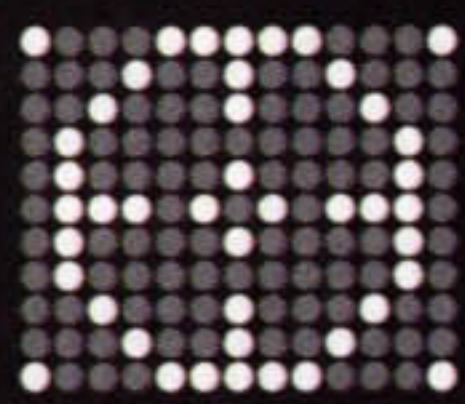
MULTI

94

The Elder Scrolls IV: Shivering Isles

PS3

97

MotorStorm

Wii

102

SSX Blur

XBOX 360

104

Guitar Hero II

100

GAME INFORMER
GAME OF THE MONTH

God of War II

Kratos returns with a vengeance in this spectacular sequel from Sony's Santa Monica studio. The bloodthirsty Ghost of Sparta embarks on another quest for revenge, storming Mount Olympus and crushing anyone in his way – mortal or otherwise. Breaking new ground in combat and cinematics, the improvements here are epic in nearly every way. If you had any doubts that God of War II could provide the same mythic brutality as the original, read the full review and acknowledge your folly.

108

GAME INFORMER
HANDHELD GAME OF THE MONTH
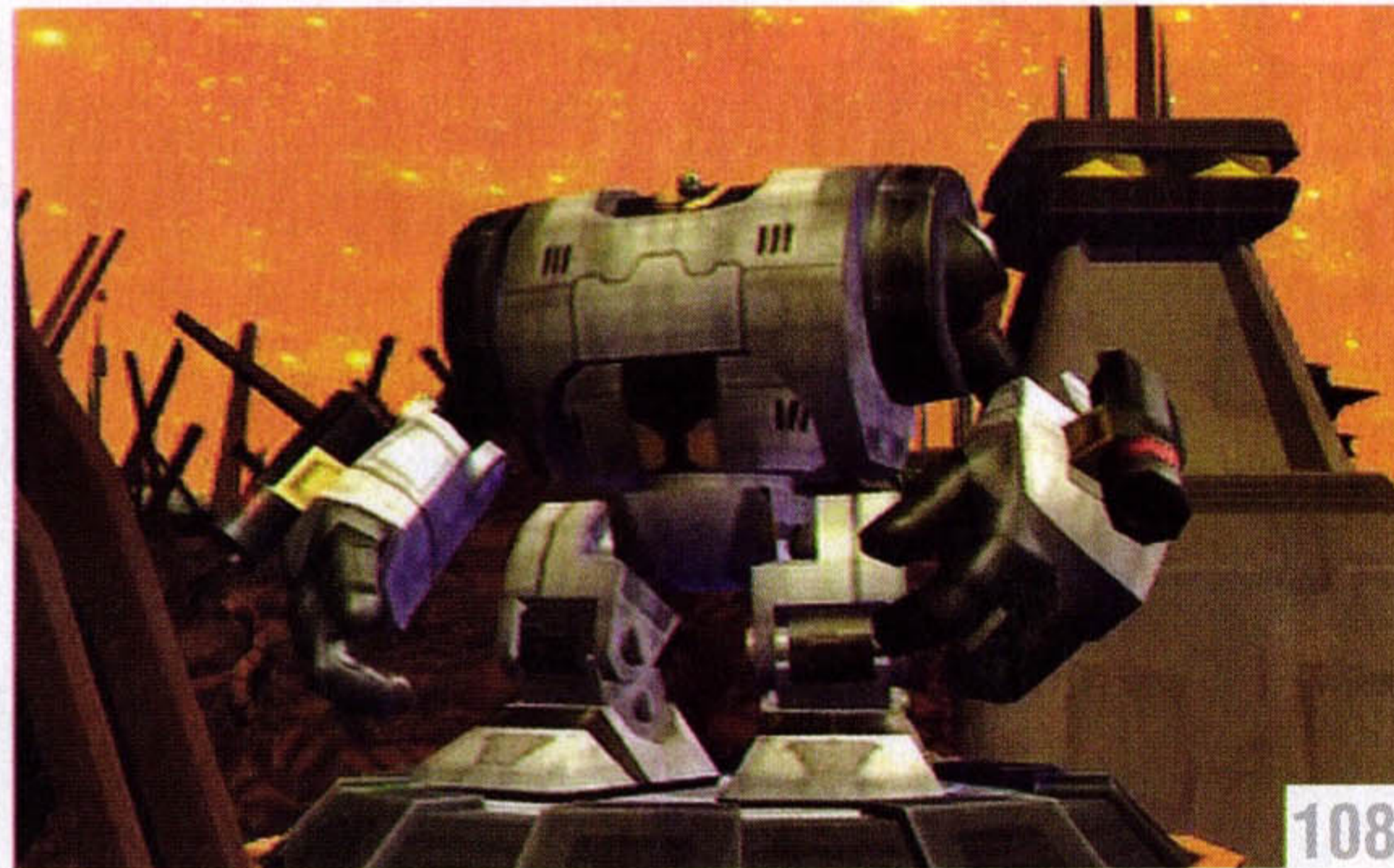
Ratchet & Clank: Size Matters

Who says that handheld gaming can't be exactly like the consoles? Ratchet & Clank: Size Matters isn't a port or a goofy side chapter. This is a full-blown sequel that takes our beloved duo on an incredible journey. As a new enemy rains destruction across the cosmos, Ratchet will go to places that he never thought he would, and will even shrink in size to save his chum, Clank. The PSP has been in desperate need of high profile titles, and they don't come much larger than Ratchet & Clank: Size Matters.

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

THE SCORING SYSTEM

10 Outstanding. A truly elite title that is nearly perfect in every way. This score is given out rarely and indicates a game that cannot be missed.

9 Superb. Just shy of gaming nirvana, this score is a high recommendation because the game reviewed is head-and-shoulders above its competition.

8 Very Good. Innovative, but perhaps not the right choice for everyone. This score indicates that there are many good things to be had, but arguably so.

7 Average. The game's features may work, but are nothing that even casual players haven't seen before. A decent game from beginning to end.

6 Limited Appeal. Although there may be fans of games receiving this score, many will be left yearning for a more rewarding game experience.

5 Passable. It may be obvious that the game has lots of potential, but its most engaging features could be undeniably flawed or not integrated into the experience.

4 Bad. While some things may work as planned, the majority of this title either malfunctions to varying degrees or it is so dull that the game falls short as a whole.

3 Painful. If there is anything that's redeeming in a game of this caliber, it's buried beneath agonizing gameplay and uneven execution in its features or theme.

2 Broken. Basically unplayable. This game is so insufficient in execution that any value would be derived in extremely small quantities, if at all.

1 Platypus. It's ugly and impossible to like. Worst animal ever.

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

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

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

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

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

> **Replay Value**

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

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

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

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

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

PC

106
Supreme Commander

HANDHELD

108
Capcom Puzzle World

107
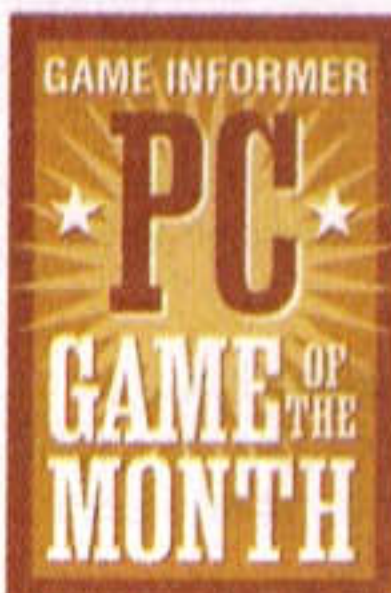
World of Warcraft: The Burning Crusade

2.4 million copies in 24 hours. Think about it. That's how fast The Burning Crusade flew off of store shelves, absolutely obliterating the previous sales record for PC games. After digging deeply into this expansion, we have to say that Blizzard richly deserved every one of those sales. This is the kind of release that has players not just willing, but eager to send in their $15 every month to keep playing. Find out what's so great about Outland on page 107.

pg. 109

theedge
When All Games Aren't Created Equal

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

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

ESRB Ratings:
- **C** Content suitable for persons 3 and older.
- **E** Content suitable for persons 6 and older.
- **E10+** Content suitable for persons 10 and older.
- **T** Content suitable for persons 13 and older.
- **M** Content suitable for persons 17 ages and older.
- **AO** Content suitable only for adults.
- **RP** Product is awaiting final rating.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

frontend – A game's menus and options

GBA – Game Boy Advance

GC – GameCube

HDTV – High Definition Television

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

our sisters – You stay the hell away from our sisters

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

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

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

PS2 – Sony PlayStation 2

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

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

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

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

sports – A term we use for games like Madden NFL

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

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

■ The new selection of weapons will make Oblivion nuts drool

■ As you work your way through this adventure, you'll develop a close relationship with gate keeper

Dark Seducer
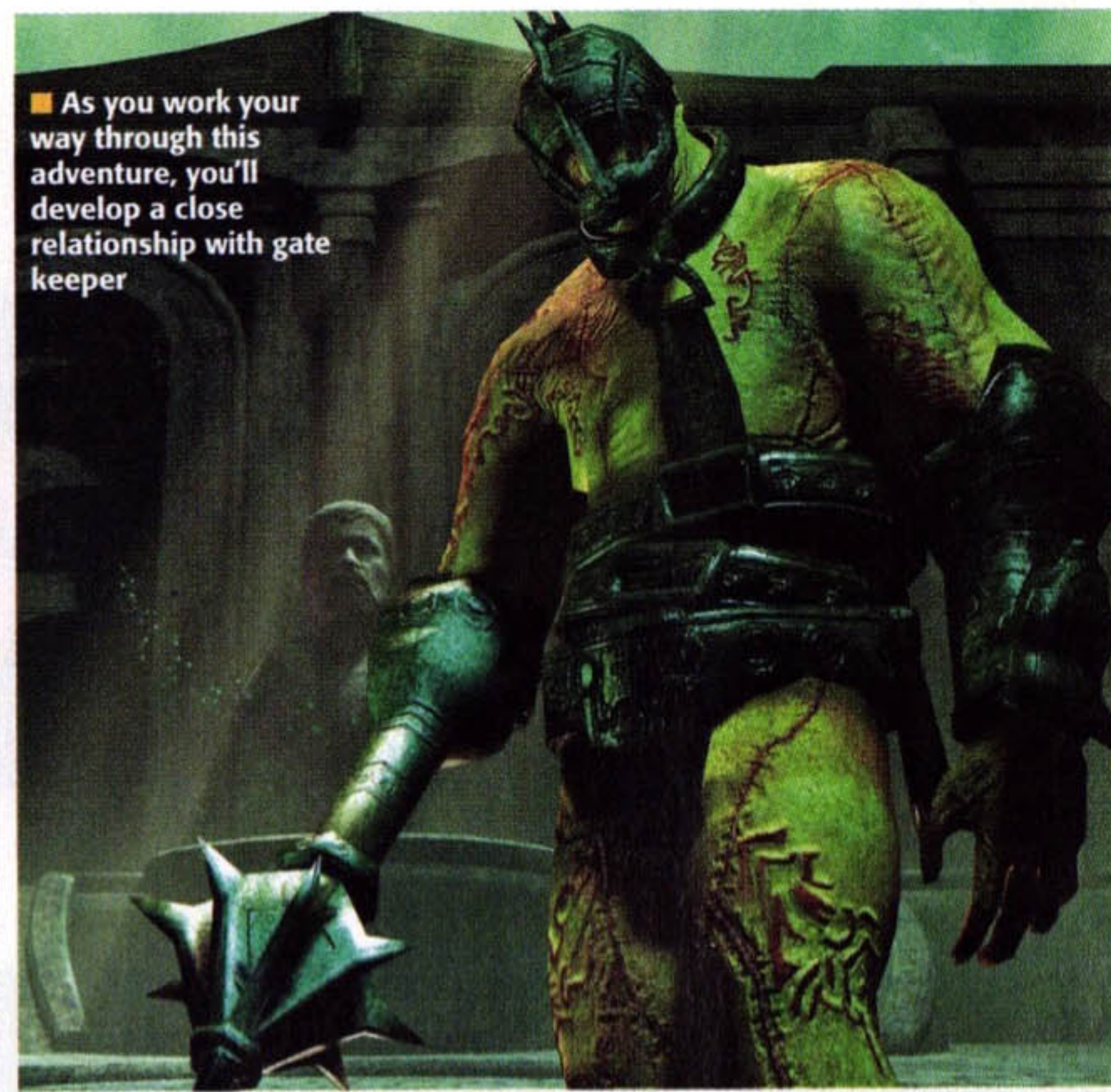
XBOX 360 | PC

The Elder Scrolls IV:
Shivering Isles

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG > PUBLISHER BETHESDA > DEVELOPER BETHESDA > RELEASE MARCH 27 > ESRB M

THE SHADES OF MADNESS

As a comic book reader, I have come to terms with the fact that I will likely never see the conclusion to any of the stories that I am reading. If Batman stays popular, his life (which has already spanned eight decades) will far outlast mine. A similar realization may soon flutter into the minds of gamers as well. Using the Shivering Isles as an indicator, the future of video games could be very similar to comic books. Expanded content empowers games with immortality. As long as the video game industry is built upon transitional hardware cycles, it is highly unlikely that we'll ever see a single game with the staying power that could keep it alive for decades. But we are starting to see games like Elder Scrolls that could survive an entire console generation without owning a true sequel.

With a steady flow of downloadable content, Bethesda has done a tremendous job of keeping Cyrodiil alive and well. Shivering Isles, the first full-blown expansion, shows us that expanded content

can serve a purpose greater than simply making a game longer – it can make a game better. In the time following the release of Oblivion, Bethesda has honed its craft, tightened the code, and recognized exactly what was needed to take this game to the next level. With that said, it should come as no surprise to hear that Shivering Isles is a bona fide masterpiece and the best that the Elder Scrolls series has to offer.

The element that received the most drastic improvement is the main quest. As much as I enjoyed aiding Martin Septim in Oblivion, the story that unfolded around him didn't really bring out a "Oh my God, I have to see what happens next!" response. The story in Shivering Isles does. The majority of the plot revolves around a new character named Sheogorath, a remorseless wise-cracker who sounds a bit like a Scottish pirate or a drunken Sean Connery. Almost every line of dialogue or quest that this amazingly well-written character sends you on is a treat. The missions have been intentionally streamlined to offer more action and less conversing. As the plot unfolds, you find yourself bouncing from one dungeon to the next, most offering a different set of fun tasks – such as escaping a collapsing cave or choosing whether you kill or torture a party that appears to be stripped from a Dungeons & Dragons campaign.

■ Shivering Isles is crammed to capacity with new monster types
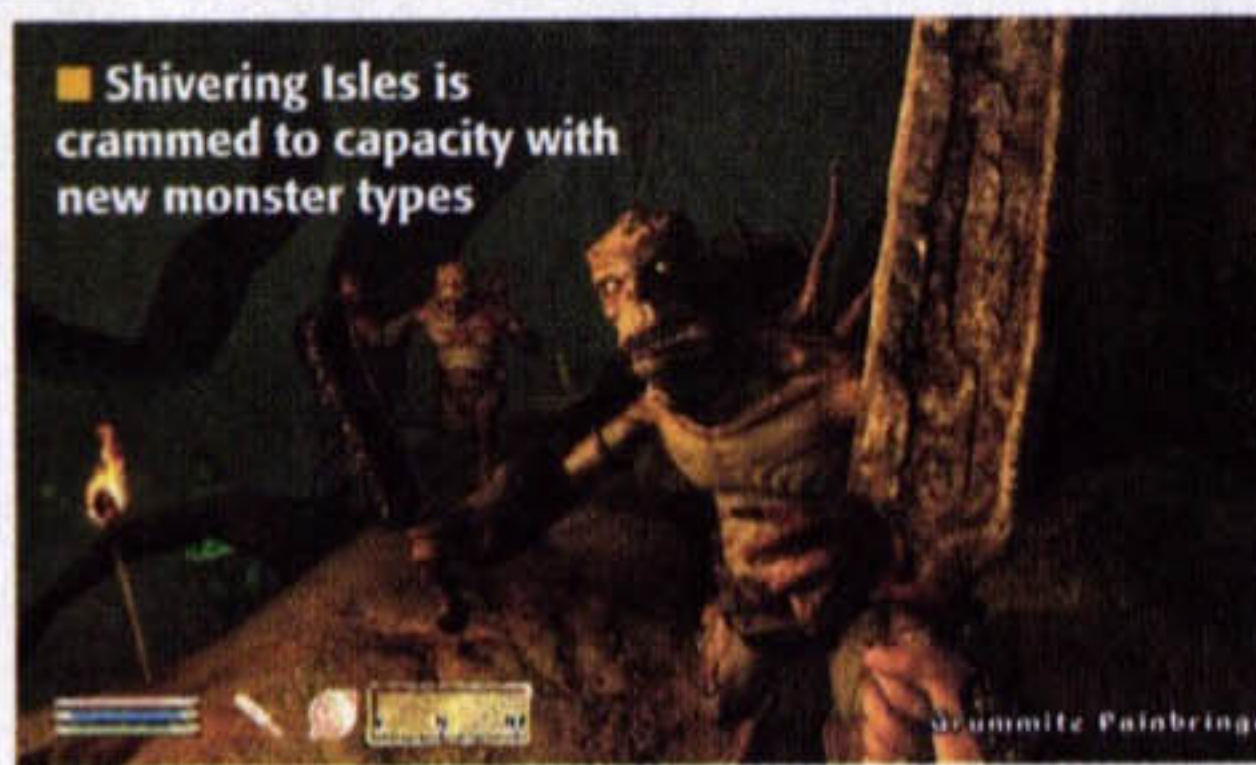
■ "Who wants to get punched?"

Since Shivering Isles is a completely separate island (you'll find the portal that leads to it in a lake near Bravil), all of the scenery, inhabitants, and items are new. This kingdom is split into two realms: Mania, a colorful, almost *Alice in Wonderland*-like place, and Dementia, a place so dark it feels like death is constantly closing in. These two distinctly different areas overcome the biggest complaint that I had with Oblivion — it all looked the same. In Shivering Isles, everything seems fresh and new, which leads to a constant sense of wonder and awe.

Part of the allure of The Elder Scrolls games is unearthing new weapons and armor. There are plenty of new blades (some forged of never-before-seen metals) to wield, and equally as many exotic fabrics to try on, but don't be surprised if you find yourself falling in love with one particular blade and using it for the entire game. Much like the world, this sword has two forms, Duskfang and Dawnfang, which alter upon sunrise and sunset. The sword's magic recharges as it shifts between forms, and it becomes more powerful as it extinguishes souls.

Without tackling any of the side quests, I completed the critical path in less than 18 hours. With side content, the game offers over 30 satisfying hours that are balanced beautifully between higher-level characters and newly created ones.

It's uncertain where this series goes from here, but like a great comic book, Shivering Isles leaves you craving more.—**REINER**

■ The colorful landscapes are teeming with life

■ Playing fetch with a sharp knife can lead to cosmetic upgrades

Skinned

BOTTOM LINE 9.5

> **Concept:** An expansion pack that places players in an entirely different world with the series' most entertaining quests

> **Graphics:** The detailing is similar to Oblivion, but the world is more colorful and dynamic, and the architecture shows a higher level of variety

> **Sound:** The soundtrack and most of the voiceovers are exactly the same. If you've played a lot of Oblivion already, this sucks

> **Playability:** The inventive missions are joined by a slew of new weapons and spells that open up amusing combat options

> **Entertainment:** It's not as long as Oblivion, but this expansion offers the best we've seen from this series

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 9.5

During my time touring the Shivering Isles, I became a torturous dungeon master, violent drug fiend, ruthless inquisitor, and a creator of mutilated beasts. In short, I had a better time visiting the worlds of Mania and Dementia than I ever did in Cyrodiil; that's saying something considering that I logged more than 100 hours into Oblivion. Even speaking with the demented leader of this realm was a blast — the Daedric Prince of Madness Sheogorath's hilarious mutterings spoken in a broken Scottish accent had everyone at the office in stitches. Though I felt they could have pushed the townsfolk to more extreme degrees of madness, it's tough to take anything away from an expansion pack that offers so many amazing moments.—**BERTZ**

FALL OUT BOY AND HONDA HIT THE ROAD

The 2007 Honda Civic Tour brings together two hot hybrids - the pop-punk/emo-rock sounds of Fall Out Boy and the stylish/fuel-efficient technology of the Honda Civic Hybrid. Infinity on High, the eclectic new album from Fall Out Boy, perfectly complements the refined styling of the Civic Hybrid. See the band's fresh take on the green scene - their tricked out Civic Hybrid - and get all the tour dates and details at www.hondacivictour.com

PLAYSTATION 3

Formula One:
Champion Edition

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 11-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK OR UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA LAN)
> **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT > **DEVELOPER** STUDIO LIVERPOOL > **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 27
> **ESRB** E

F ME? F YOU, TOO!

I know what you're thinking: "I can't play an F1 game." Yes you can – you just have to resist the compulsion to smash into other cars at full speed and break off your front left wheel. Luckily, this game is going to help you with that with its well-rounded racing experience that caters to all skill levels.

You have to want to be a good driver to become one, and a large part of that is going through the car Evolution process and practice sessions (see below). I like this feature, but it doesn't go far enough. In order to help you understand the car better, and for you to give more meaningful feedback to changing it, players should be told the exact trade-offs of changing the camber or whatever.

This game hits the essentials without trying to do much else. Online is fun – especially since you can make the AI cars ghosts and you can respawn if you get wrecked. However, the game's based on the 2006 season, the Sixaxis controls are useless, and there's a general lack of gloss in the five-year career mode that belies exactly how sexy and glamorous the world of F1 actually is. These drivers get treated like absolute superstars, and ungodly amounts of money get poured into these racing programs, but that's not conveyed enough here. I don't want a caviar-eating minigame, but I think the series should reflect that F1 is about more than just fast cars.—**KATO**

BOTTOM LINE **8**

> **Concept:** Sony returns to F1 and offers a more comprehensive package

> **Graphics:** Very solid but not mind blowing. The sense of speed is good and the rain effects are mesmerizing

> **Sound:** The commentator updates during practices and races are pretty cool

> **Playability:** There's nothing to be scared of. Yes, you too can race an F1 car

> **Entertainment:** The racing's right, but a larger focus on the world of F1 would garner more fans

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion 7.75

It's rare that a racing simulator can pull me away from the insane flips and unrealistic motion blurs of the Burnouts and Midnight Clubs of the world. Formula One does exactly that, thanks to its all too authentic sense of speed and remarkable visuals. A convoluted and sometimes boring career mode is worsened by some repetitive voicework and inflexible progression, but the races themselves are amazing in whatever mode you play. Car physics feel spot on, and a number of driving aids open up the game to a slightly wider crowd than the normal sim enthusiasts. With its frequent race-ending crashes, this still isn't for the faint of heart, but for tense realism it's hard to beat.—**MILLER**

EVERYBODY'S WORKING FOR THE WEEKEND
Here's how to make the most of a grand prix weekend.

Evolution: This not only lets you get an idea how the car's going to feel as the race goes on, it also lets you test out and tweak different downforce, camber, suspension, balance, and toe in/out settings.

Saturday Practice: Good for any last minute car tweaks and making sure you know the course inside and out.

Qualifying: The beauty here is you get 15 minutes per session to run as many laps as you can (even if you smash up your car), with your best being the one that counts. Make sure you participate in both qualifying sessions, otherwise you'll end up in the later-half of the field no matter how good your first session was.

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Armored Core 4

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK, XBOX LIVE, SYSTEM LINK, OR WIRELESS LAN) > **PUBLISHER** SEGA > **DEVELOPER** FROMSOFTWARE > **RELEASE** MARCH 20 > **ESRB** T

CORE MECH VALUES

File the latest entry in the Armored Core series under the category of "announced for PS3, but quietly coming to Xbox 360 as well." In fact, this is the first AC title to release on anything outside of a PlayStation console. Perhaps this qualifies as the most drastic shake up to FromSoftware's hardcore mech franchise this time around, outside of the next-gen graphical upgrade.

Mechs look pretty much as good as you'd expect them to, but it's the ambiance that really impresses. You'll infiltrate an enemy base in the pitch black night lit only by the occasional overhead flare, gunfire, and after burners; dash through a blinding sandstorm; and make your way across polar ice as it cracks and floats away under your massive robotic body. Of course, there are still plenty of standard future cities and open deserts.

Missions are pretty straightforward (destroy these guys, protect these guys, etc.), and don't usually last more than a few minutes. Combat is fast-paced and easy to pick up, unlike everything else in the game. The story is so convoluted you'll eventually just stop caring why you're taking out rebel factions and neo-terrorists.

Mech customization is just as complicated as ever. What will make the hardcore AC fan drool will completely turn off the average action gamer (do we really need to worry about four separate booster categories?). Armored Core's persistent fault as a series is its inability to cater to both audiences.

Multiplayer is what's really going to get the fans riled. After fine-tuning your ideal mech in single player, you can bring it online and face off against anywhere from one to seven opponents. Unfortunately, there's not a whole lot of match variety outside of deathmatch and team deathmatch, and there's no respawning so matches don't last much longer than five minutes tops. But the framerate remains solid and it's a good forum for the AC set to talk shop and trade schematics.—**BRYAN**

BOTTOM LINE **6.5**

> **Concept:** Take the insanely deep customization formula and unintelligible story from past games in the series and add some graphical polish

> **Graphics:** Cool lighting and environmental effects, but some textures are a little bland

> **Sound:** Missiles, machine guns, explosions, and radio squawk. Nothing special

> **Playability:** Ground combat is fast and smooth. Flying battles could use some work

> **Entertainment:** Caters to hardcore AC fans only...once again

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 6

I guess I approached this game with a little too much naiveté. While watching the tutorial I thought that this Armored Core might finish with a decent score. Ten minutes later Bryan and I were letting loose a liberal stream of "damn yous" while the rest of the office laughed at us. It's not that I didn't enjoy this game because it is really a large collection of complicated, unintuitive menus, or because it has sparse next-gen graphics, or because its learning curve is steeper than the PS3's price...no, actually it is all those things. This game just too technical to be fun.—**BEN**

PLAYSTATION 3

MotorStorm

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER RACING (UP TO 12-PLAYER VIA PLAYSTATION NETWORK) > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT
> **DEVELOPER** EVOLUTION STUDIOS > **RELEASE** MARCH 6 > **ESRB** T

WEATHERING THE STORM

Once you cross the finish line, it doesn't matter how you got there. Whether you took a few liberties with a defenseless motorcycle or the guy ahead of you over-boosted and destroyed himself just feet away from the end, history will know you only as the victor. Each MotorStorm race is filled with vehicular carnage and a level of unpredictability that always has you pushing hard to the end.

Developer Evolution Studios has taken its rally expertise and added an extra layer. The game does an excellent job of not only enticing players to come in first, but also making them fight more than a few battles along the way. It's like running the gauntlet in high school, only instead of getting hit by socks filled with quarters, you're trying to keep from getting smooshed by a hard-charging semi while hitting all the right jumps and keeping

yourself on course. Also, don't forget to watch your boost consumption. Use it too much and you'll blow yourself sky high.

If this was all there was to MotorStorm, it wouldn't be as good as it is. Evolution has deftly tailored the AI so it rubber bands to surround you with action. At the same time, however, it's not cheap. You always know
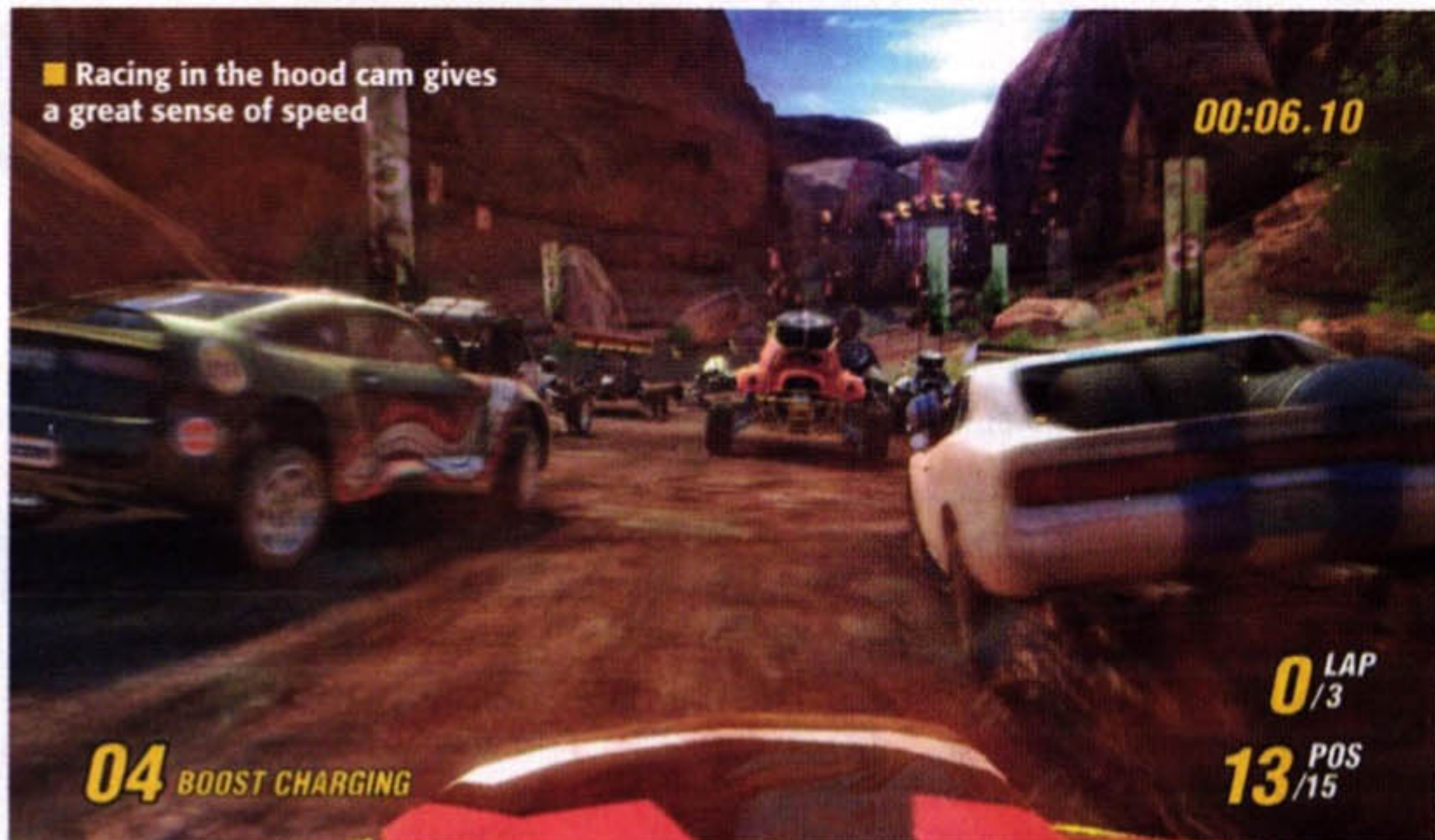
■ Racing in the hood cam gives a great sense of speed

■ The game's use of boost is balanced perfectly

that if you take your corners right and choose the appropriate path for your vehicle, your superior racing skills will serve you right. Perhaps more importantly, MotorStorm's other racers are just as desperate for a win. Instead of being mindless bots, the game's AI competition makes the whole world feel alive. Without using obvious scripted events, you'll see wrecks happen right in front of you as hunks of burning metal scream past you at high speeds. It's not just you against everyone else, it's a full-on battle royale where anything can happen. I loved it when I'd be racing along, and then all of a sudden a car would literally drop out of the sky in a crunched heap as it fell off some overhead pass that I didn't even know was there, and I'd think to myself, "What the hell happened?" Online races are just as surprising and fun — it's just a shame that you can't fill them with AI stand-ins if you don't have a full field of 12 people.

As much as MotorStorm does right, it's obviously just a first step. The game doesn't get as gonzo and death-defying as it could, which is especially noticeable since you hit the same tracks throughout the game. It's also shorn of much embellishment. Small things like a create-a-character, minigame mode, or a fleshed-out career mode could go a long way. As it stands, however, the mayhem that MotorStorm creates is enough to have you gunning for the finish line and doing whatever it takes to get there.—**KATO**

CHOOSE YOUR WEAPON

A large part of surviving MotorStorm's races is making sure you hit the right lines for the vehicle you have chosen. Some races you get to pick which vehicle you want to use, and others you don't. Regardless, if you're a buggy, you don't want to be thrashing it out in the mud with the big boys when you should be up top. Here's a quick rundown of the game's vehicles.

LIGHT (Bike, ATV): These two are made for the above-ground canyon passes, so it's imperative you stay out of the mud. As agile as this pair is, beware of their quick turning radius, which can cause you to lose control.

MEDIUM (Rally Car, Buggy): These cars are versatile. The Rally Car's speed must be tempered at times (like on the cliffs of Rain God Mesa, for instance), and you should anticipate your turns early. The buggy feels nice in mud or in the air, but there are instances you lose time on straight-aways and in sticking landings because of its bouncy suspension.

HEAVY (Big Rig, Racing Truck, Mud Plugger): The Big Rig is self-explanatory, and although you can hit jumps and ledges with both the Racing Truck and Mud Plugger, there are some trade-offs. The former might take some extra time getting up to speed, while the latter is a little top heavy and can tip over.

If you're like many players we've talked to, the siege of Kvatch might be the last you see of the main story for a long time as you get distracted by other pursuits

Is it just us, or was fighting these little guys the biggest pain in the butt in this game?

Knights of the Nine was downloadable on the 360 and PC, but is included in the retail release on PS3

BOTTOM LINE **9.5**

> **Concept:** Sony gets its own trip to Oblivion in a picture-perfect port of the bar-setting next-gen role-playing title

> **Graphics:** Amazing – if anything, the visuals might be a little better than on 360

> **Sound:** From the impeccably orchestrated score to the wealth of great voiceover, the audio doesn't disappoint

> **Playability:** Strong responsive controls, but the menu system is awkward to navigate

> **Entertainment:** One of the best role-playing games available on any console, this port only hangs behind its 360 version in its current lack of downloadable content

> **Replay Value:** High

PLAYSTATION 3

The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG > **PUBLISHER** BETHESDA > **DEVELOPER** BETHESDA
> **RELEASE** MARCH 27 > **ESRB** M

SAME AS IT EVER WAS

It's been right around a year since the fledgling Xbox 360 and PC were graced with the arrival of Oblivion. In the time since then, thousands of gamers have had the chance to spend time wandering the endless avenues of adventure that Cyrodiil provides. It would be a scary number to add up the hours on each save game for all those players combined. With such a tremendous success under its belt, it should come as little surprise that Bethesda has transported the exact same gaming experience over for PS3 owners to join in the fun. There are few differences to separate the platforms, and certainly not enough to make this worth a second purchase on a new system. Another way to say that, however, is that Oblivion on PS3 is one of the biggest and most impressive role-playing games in history, and you owe it to yourself to play it if you haven't already experienced it elsewhere.

In case you've been vacationing in the Amazon for the last 12 months, The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion casts you as a prison escapee inextricably tied to a quest to bring the dead emperor's lost

heir to power and defeat the hordes of extraplanar invaders who are out to stop you. Along the way, it's totally expected that you'll spend hours delving into side plots, wandering the wilderness, and heaving treasure up and out of long-forgotten dungeons and tombs. Beyond the main story, several other story-based missions are available, from the dastardly assassinations available by joining the Dark Brotherhood to learning the secrets of magic as you push to the top of the Mages Guild. Tack on a robust (if sometimes flawed) character upgrade system and a number of different races and classes to try, and there's plenty of replay to bring you back even dozens of hours later. One of the only notable flaws beyond the easily exploitable leveling system might be the way combat fails to evolve later in the game, maintaining the same general hack and slash flow it did in the first hour. Maybe while I'm at it I can look for problems in Beethoven's Ninth Symphony.

There's really not very much in the PS3 version that should validate a second purchase. Basically,

you're looking at some moderately improved shaders that improve the appearance of some textures in the game world. For an example, check out the comparative screens we've included on this page. The game loads are also a tiny bit faster. Finally, and of greatest significance, is the inclusion of the Knights of the Nine set of missions. However, given that both the 360 and PC versions of Oblivion have this content available online for a small fee, it's hard to call it much of a bonus for the PS3. In fact, the current lack of the 360/PC downloadable content is one reason you might not want to get into the PS3 version in the first place, even though Bethesda has promised that content for the PS3 at a later date.

To sum up: The fourth installment of the Elder Scrolls is indeed a mighty success – those who refuse to play it simply because it is popular have been and continue to be missing out. Further, both the PS3 and Xbox 360 are fantastic platforms on which to experience the game, but experiencing the game on both is, at the least, an almost certain waste of money.——**MILLER**

Second Opinion **9**

There are some gamers who want to turn this title into a battleground for next-gen hardware, presuming whoever has the superior Oblivion wins the console war. I'm sorry, but after spending many hours with both versions and some side-by-side comparisons, the conflict just isn't there. When the core content of a game is this wonderful, a few minor tweaks don't revolutionize the experience; the PS3 version loads marginally faster, chugs a little less in combat, and the outdoor draw distance is slightly improved. On the other hand, with all of the extras available for the game on 360 and PC, the PS3 release feels like it is coming out of the gate a few paces behind. All cross-platform considerations aside, The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion is still one of the best games out there. The vast world, countless quests, and endless potential for exploration make it an adventure you need to play in any form you can.——**JOE**

A MINOR VARIATION

Xbox 360

PlayStation 3

BOTTOM LINE **9.75**

> **Concept:** Eviscerate the notion of "sophomore slump" and deliver one of best gaming experiences on any console

> **Graphics:** A visual masterwork. Whether in-game or CG, the images generated by the PS2 are simply unbelievable

> **Sound:** In addition to the epic score, you will also hear yourself saying "This is so awesome" every few minutes

> **Playability:** Combat is barbaric and satisfying, with new additions like boss fights and flying segments breaking up the action perfectly

> **Entertainment:** The pervasive brutality and sheer inventiveness behind every facet of the game creates a continuous adrenaline high from beginning to end

> **Replay Value:** High

■ You just don't mess with a dude on a flying, flaming horse

■ Several foes from the first game make reappearances

Second Opinion **9.75**

As giants drop like flies, and the inhabitants of Olympus are subject to unthinkable pain and suffering, gamers are treated to one of the most ferociously entertaining adventures to date. In God of War II, we learn that you should never underestimate the wrath of a fallen god. If you thought that Kratos had some issues before, just wait until you see how he reacts when he is stripped of his powers. With his intensified rage comes an influx of unforgettable moments. I continually found myself thinking that I had to play through the game again to see Kratos' barbaric actions for a second time. The gameplay, which is greatly enhanced by Kratos' angst, is a razor-sharp package that will put a grin on your face. The puzzles are more ingenious, the combos are more devastating, and the bosses fall even harder. God of War II will surely put a nefarious smile on your face, but the experience is humbled in a number of ways. The story lacks the big reveals of the first, and far too many enemy types are recycled. With this said, however, God of War II is impossible to put down, and easily one of the best games to date.—**REINER**

PLAYSTATION 2

God of War II

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT
> **DEVELOPER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT SANTA MONICA > **RELEASE** MARCH 13 > **ESRB** M

GAME INFORMER
GAME OF THE MONTH

OLYMPUS GETS OWNED

Where can you go from the top? Just like Kratos perched on his throne high atop Mount Olympus, the original God of War ascended to epic heights amid universal praise. In the face of these high expectations, it might seem that the only direction a sequel could go is down. Thankfully, Kratos does not resign himself to the petty predictions of mortals, and God of War II delivers with a vengeance; it's a ferocious, blood-soaked adventure that is bigger, grander, and more over-the-top than ever before.

Made mortal once again by the trickery of Zeus, Kratos embarks on his rage-infused mission to change his fate and exact revenge on the king of the gods. Even with the loss of his powers, players will discover that Kratos has a vicious array of new tricks. On a fundamental level, the combat is similar to the first game, but it feels more calculated; moves have more specialized purposes, which gives the player more control over any given situation.

Your dominance in battle is augmented by two new major sub-weapons: a spear and a hammer. These aren't throwaway additions like the sword from the last game – each has its own deadly and delightful uses. You can launch an enemy off the ground (though aerial combat has been deemphasized considerably) and switch to the hammer to bludgeon him in mid-air. The sub-weapons do suffer from being added to the mix a bit late, but if you ever get sick of whirling your flaming blades (if that's even possible), you'll have some solid alternatives.

There isn't enough room in a one-page review to list all of the other improvements and adjustments, but fans of the first game

can rest assured that the cool stuff is cooler, and the weaknesses have been addressed. The timed button-press cinematics are more clever and entertaining, the puzzles are deviously original, and there are no spinning Hades blades to be found. Even better is the inclusion of more titanic boss battles, where Kratos is usually up against another mortal straight out of Greek mythology. Some of these conflicts rely on puzzle elements, while others are just a matter of figuring out attack patterns, but they all add gruesome-yet-cathartic moments just when you need them. Seriously, Theseus totally has it coming.

The only area where God of War II doesn't surpass its predecessor is in the story. Revenge is still the primary motivation, but the tale has fewer shocking reveals and less sense of Kratos' grim purpose. Plus, with a third game looming as a forgone

■ The grapple mechanic makes this heart-pounding sequence possible

conclusion, the team was free to leave things less tidy at the end. Without spoiling anything, I can say that the ending helps the arc of the series as a whole, but it definitely diminishes the ultimate payoff of this entry.

While the story issues and a slight "I've done this before" factor stop it just short of perfection, God of War II is a title you simply cannot miss. It never stopped being one of the best games I've ever played. Consider this fair warning, though: From the moment you pick up this game, your life will transform into a constant struggle. Should you fulfill your everyday responsibilities or play God of War II? Responsibility will lose the battle often – but even then, you win.——**JOE**

■ The Icarus Wings allow Kratos to glide, adding a new dimension to the platforming

THE END BEGINS

Much like the last game, once you beat God of War II, the fun is far from over. In addition to a second bonus disc full of featurettes, there are plenty of reasons to play the game through again. You can start anew with all of your weapons, orbs, and power-ups (including the end-game weapon in fully upgradeable form) in the bonus play mode, or you can tackle the unlockable Titan Mode (the hardest difficulty). There's also another series of specific challenges that test your skill and endurance. Success in any of these endeavors grants you rewards like new costumes and other secrets.

PLAYSTATION 2

MLB 07: The Show

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT
> **DEVELOPER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT AMERICA SAN DIEGO > **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 27 > **ESRB** E

SWINGING FOR THE FENCES AGAIN

With the PlayStation 3 taking center stage, I was a bit worried that Sony would phone in the highly dreaded "this console is dead, so let's just update the rosters" sequel. MLB 07: The Show may show a lack of creativity in the naming convention, but through a number of innovative enhancements, it turned out to be the most impressive follow-up that Sony has put together so far. All eyes may be looking to the next-generation, but for baseball, you are going to have to turn your gaze toward the PlayStation 2. For hardcore baseball nuts, The Show is the game to get.

Being able to create a player and try out for a spot on the team has always been the main allure of this series. Not only does it create a personal tie to the experience, it makes you appreciate each at bat more than you would in any other game. In this year's edition, we are seeing exactly how deep this experience can get. In addition to batting, you are now tasked with playing defense and running the bases. Playing the field could be yawn-inducing affair, but thankfully, you never have to wait around for a ball to be hit to you. Like the batting sequences last year, the game automatically fast-forwards to when a ball is hit to you. Knowing when a ball is heading your way may seem cheesy, but this system allows you to get a proper jump

on the ball without having the disorientation of the camera switch you see in other baseball games. The fielding itself is incredibly fluid and extremely fun, but the game still makes questionable decisions regarding which animation will be used. This can lead to some grounders getting through the diamond, or a sure out turning into a runner on base.

The batting and pitching battle has also been streamlined to further bring out the realism of the sport. If a pitcher is on fire with a pitch, he will gain more confidence in that specific pitch. Like 2K's game, catchers are no longer static. They call for specific pitches and locations, and through this, accurately work the arm of individual pitchers. If Johan Santana has you down 0-2, there's a good chance he'll make you look stupid with a "12-6" curveball.

On the batting front, you can really tell when you get good wood on the ball or if you are going to dribble it foul. You also have to read the umpire. In any given game you can have one of three different umpire types: one with a tight strike zone, one with a wide zone, and another who calls the game fairly. The online leagues are also pretty slick and allow for a high level of customization and control.

I love the look of 2K's game on PS3 and Xbox 360, but this game rules the base paths with its remarkable gameplay.——**REINER**

> **BOTTOM LINE** **8.75**

> **Concept:** The array of improvements lead to the highest level of realism and the most rewarding experience this year

> **Graphics:** Smooth animations, but details are lacking

> **Sound:** The three-man booth (Rex Hudler, Dave Campbell, and Matt Vasgersian) accurately calls the game, and properly recognizes most situations

> **Playability:** Not just a game of batting and pitching. Players must now learn the art of base running and fielding

> **Entertainment:** This is easily the deepest and most satisfying baseball game this year

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion **8.25**

I'm impressed. Despite the regrettable lack of an analog swing, The Show delivers the absolute best pitcher/batter faceoffs in video games to date. Umps are stingy with strikes, which forces pitchers to really work for those backdoor on-the-black calls. Protecting the plate on two-strike counts is also much easier, since you can foul off pitches that you can't afford to take. Some missteps on infield defense and a paucity of analog controls hold this title back from true greatness, but the PS2 won't see many more releases this entertaining.——**ADAM**

PS 2 QUICKIES

PLAYSTATION 2

Lumines Plus

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER PUZZLE
> **PUBLISHER** DISNEY INTERACTIVE STUDIOS
> **DEVELOPER** Q ENTERTAINMENT
> **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 27 > **ESRB** E
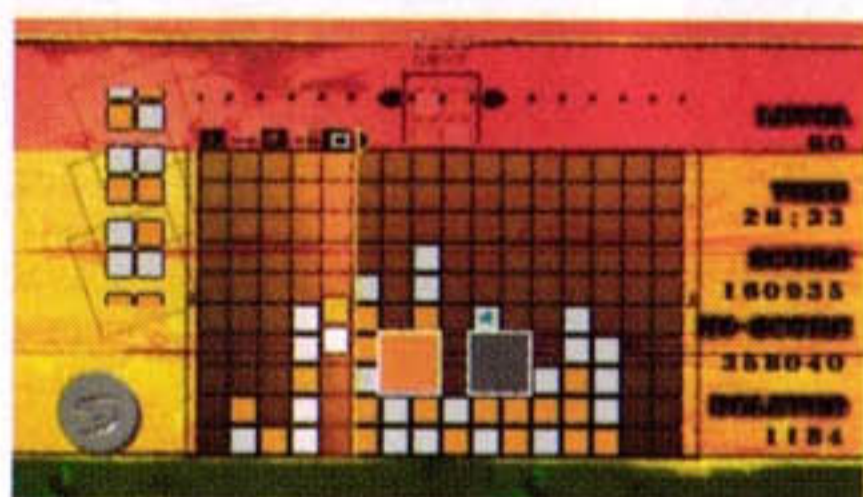
BOTTOM LINE **7.5** Lumines Plus offers the exact same brand of addictive rhythmic block-dropping as its brethren, but almost every aspect feels diminished. It is practically an exact port of the original with a few notable exceptions: There are a few Lumines II skins thrown in, the graphics are far less vibrant, and now there is at least five seconds of total silence between skins as the sounds load. Of all of four Lumines games on the market, this one is the least impressive. Be that as it may, if you don't have a PSP or Xbox 360, it's your only option if you want to see what all the Lumines fuss is about.——**JOE**

PLAYSTATION 2

Arena Football: Road to Glory

> **STYLE** 1 TO 8-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER VIA PS2 ONLINE)
> **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS
> **DEVELOPER** EA TIBURON
> **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 20 > **ESRB** E10+

BOTTOM LINE **6.5** Don't mistake Arena Football's run-and-gun play style for an exciting video game. Between the receivers' lack of ball awareness and the game's horrendous slowdown – which interferes with just about every play – this title is anything but high octane. This year's inclusion of the Af2 minor league and a kicking minigame do little to add any value. Although the mid-air collisions and the ability to control a WR are undoubtedly cool, there isn't even a solid gameplay foundation to make this anything more than a box with the AFL logo on it. AFL? Send me to the CFL instead.——**KATO**

PLAYSTATION 2

Chulip

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER SIMULATION/RPG
> **PUBLISHER** NATSUME
> **DEVELOPER** VICTOR INTERACTIVE/PUNCHLINE
> **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 14 > **ESRB** T
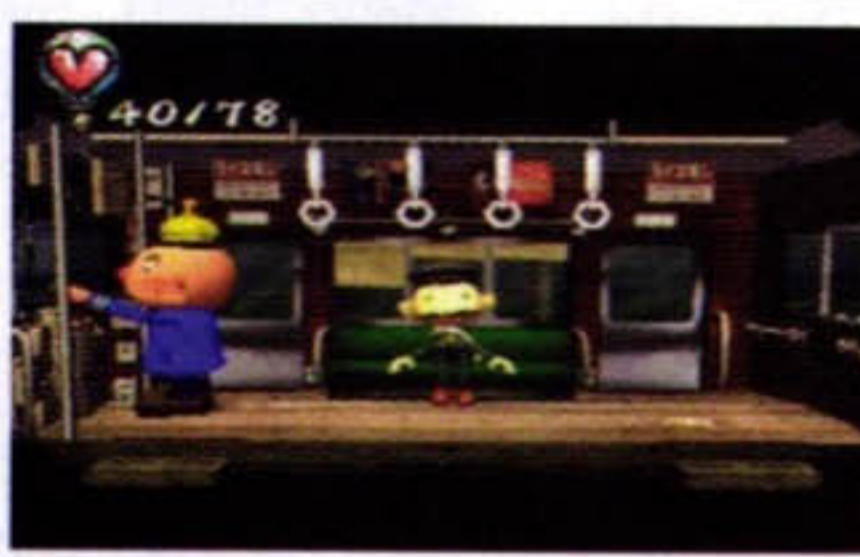
BOTTOM LINE **3** This is a quirky Japanese kissing game. I say kiss it goodbye, because it's not worth your time. Some games are just made broken. I don't mean broken in the bug-riddled sense, but Chulip is probably one of the most poorly designed games I have ever played. Figuring out how to accomplish your goals is hard enough, but often you don't even know what you are supposed to be doing in general. I don't want to know how many times I died accidentally by searching through the garbage for money and finding poopie instead, or getting run over by a scooter from out of nowhere. What I do know is that each time I died it felt cheaper than a sophomore prom date.——**BEN**

PLAYSTATION 2

Shining Force EXA

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG
> **PUBLISHER** SEGA > **DEVELOPER** SEGA
> **RELEASE** MARCH 20 > **ESRB** 10+

BOTTOM LINE **7.5** Given the Shining Force series' recent track record, I was fully prepared to hate on some generic anime-infused hack n' slash garbage for this review. Imagine my surprise when I started having some genuine fun with it. The basic combat is entertaining though the enemies are dumb as posts, and the scenarios you find yourself in showcase some creativity now and then. The two main characters even play totally differently! Even so, these good elements aren't anything more than what we should expect out of a modern action/RPG. Nothing stands out here to make this a must-play title in any sense of the word. There's nothing wrong with enjoying some average-quality anime-infused hack n' slash, though.——**ADAM**

PLAYSTATION 2

Burnout Dominator

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER RACING
> **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS
> **DEVELOPER** CRITERION GAMES
> **RELEASE** MARCH 6 > **ESRB** E10+

BOTTOM LINE **8** Burnout Dominator feels like a bit like a filler title to keep the franchise making money while Criterion works on the promised reinvention of the series that's planned on next-gen consoles with Burnout 5. That said, the core racing gameplay is solid enough that it's still probably the best PS2 racer that will come out this year. I like the structure of the main career mode, which lets you compete in a number of different event types to unlock new vehicle classes. If you've played this series on the 360, it's a little hard going back, especially since this lacks online and the addictive Crash mode. Still, this has more than its share of thrills; it's a fender mangling joy that few games can match.——**MATT**

■ The art style is completely different from previous games

> **Concept:** Move SSX 3 to the Wii and find some way to pull off the tricks with the new remote

> **Graphics:** Not as blurry as advertised. Actually, the graphics might be the best part of the game

> **Sound:** Not very impressive. No licensed songs, no character voices, and the dynamic music system doesn't add much to the experience

> **Playability:** The Wii controls won't appeal to everyone, but those it clicks with will have a good time

> **Entertainment:** The new controls work, but always concentrating on what you are doing prevents you from being fully immersed

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Wii

SSX Blur

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION/SPORTS > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS > **DEVELOPER** EA MONTREAL > **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 27 > **ESRB** E

AN ODDLY FAMILIAR RIDE

I'm happy to see that SSX is feeling a little refreshed after its tour. SSX 3 is still my favorite, and I always wanted to see a return to that entry's style – and SSX Blur is that and more. Blur's peaks are the same ones you logged so many hours on in SSX 3, yet this is not a complete retread.

The biggest change to Blur is the new control scheme. You'll use the nunchuk to steer down the mountain, and these carving controls are actually intuitive and smooth. The rest of the control scheme takes a little more getting used to. There is no prewinding in this game; you flick the Wii remote in the direction you want to spin and hold the Z button while flicking the nunchuk in different directions to perform the grabs. It sounds confusing, but after a couple minutes it doesn't feel that bad. The one real problem I have with this game is that the ubertrick system doesn't work nearly as well as it should. The new controls do add something new to the series, but almost the entire time I pined for something more traditional.

Blur is a bit more streamlined than previous entries, meaning there isn't much do to aside from shredding the mountain and entering tournaments. For some reason, the characters aren't

as customizable as they have been in previous entries. I don't mind that the game lacks this, as I would rather have a solid trick system, but the fact that it's missing feels like a small step backwards for the series. It would have been nice to see more new trails. Also, why don't any of the characters say anything? It's a little eerie not hearing Moby's narcissistic diatribes as he is speeding by the slower contestants.

Still, I can't complain too much since I had more fun with Blur overall than I did with On Tour. Pulling off a Triple Front Flip Nosebleed in the middle of a race down sheer ice is always fun, and there is just something about the sound a snowboard makes on fresh powder that always gets me pumped. But for all the fun I had with this game, it really just whetted my appetite for something a little meatier. ——**BEN**
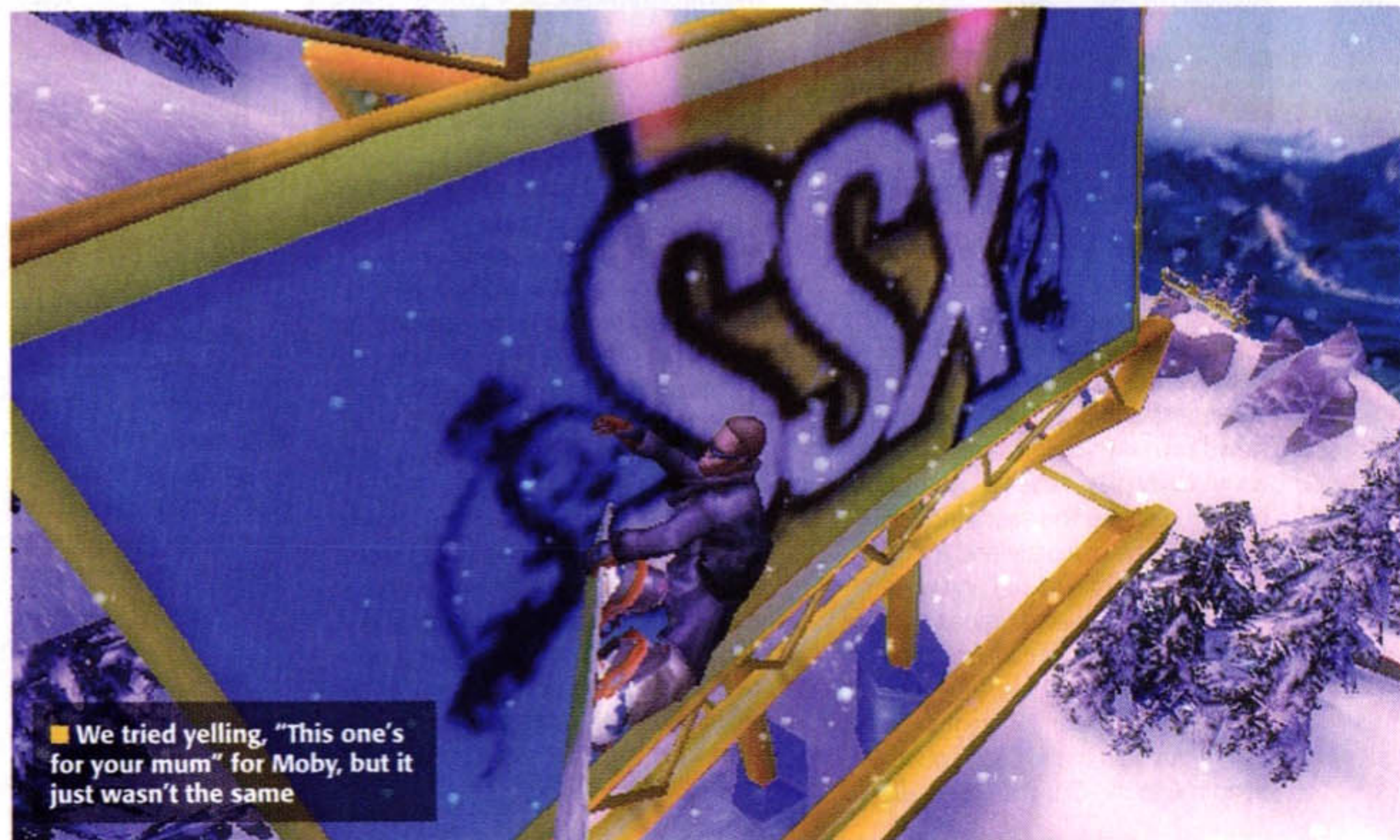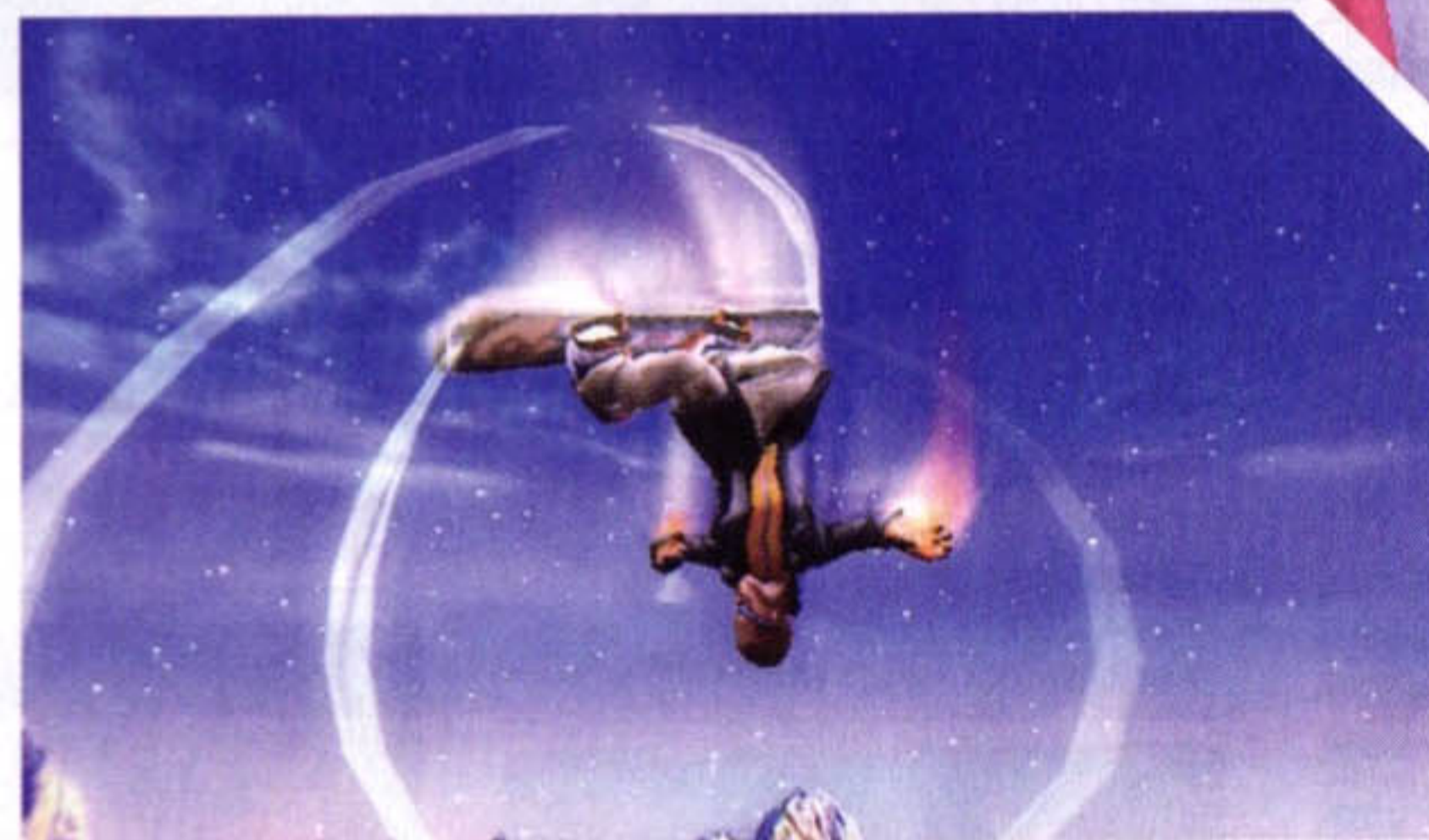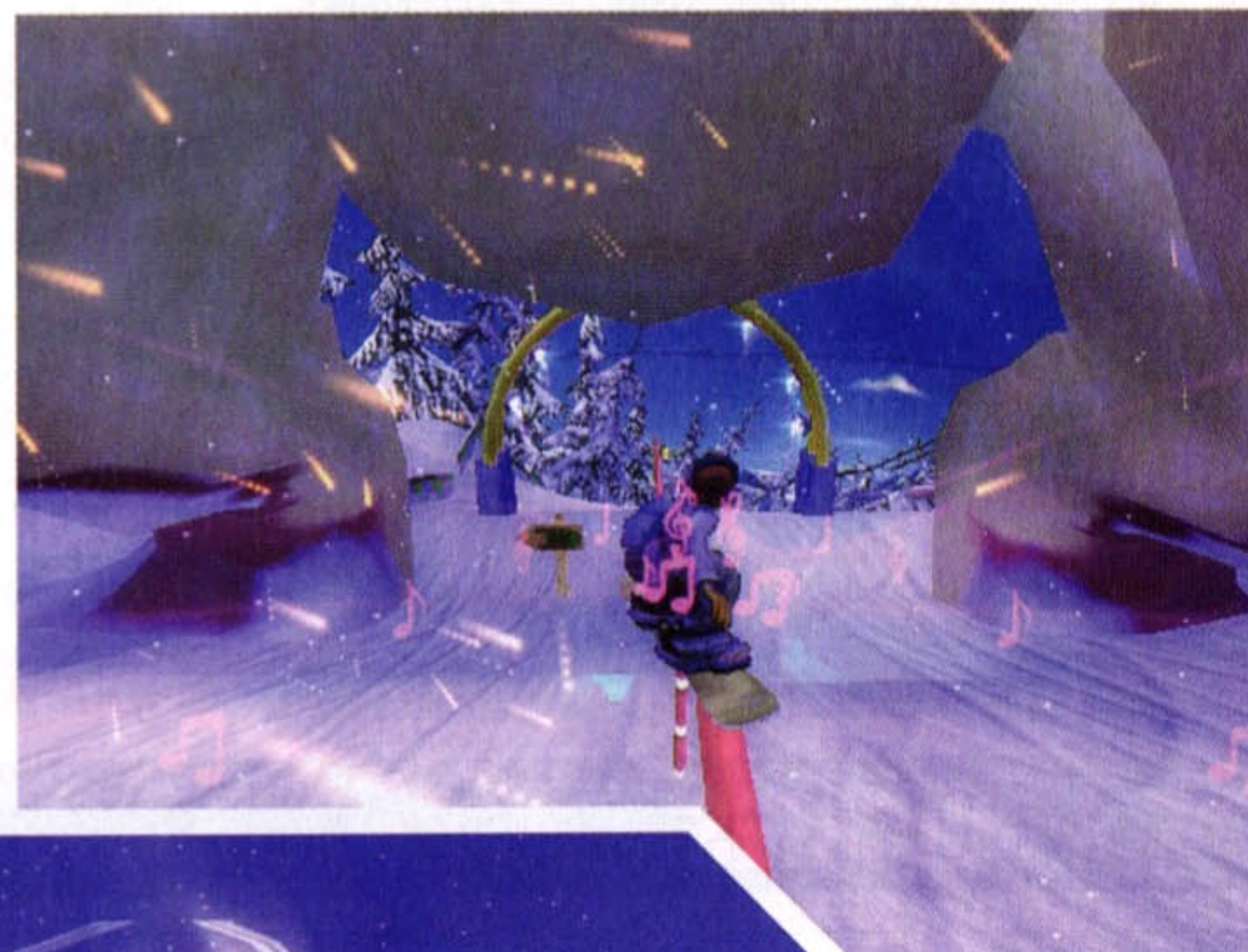
A Wii Problem

If you want to succeed in Blur you will have to learn how to pull off the game's somewhat finicky ubertricks. These moves require you to draw certain shapes with the Wii remote while in the air. We experienced some frustration just learning how the new system worked, so here are a couple tips that should help you ease into play. Remember to draw the shapes in the air with the remote, not on screen. Exaggerate your movements a little bit, but don't go too fast and keep your movements fluid and sweeping. Practice a few times in the practice mode to refine your movements and you should be tearing up the slopes in no time. Good luck.

■ We tried yelling, "This one's for your mum" for Moby, but it just wasn't the same

I love the fact that developers and publishers are making a real effort to tailor their Wii titles to the system's unique control scheme. Like Madden, Tony Hawk, and Call of Duty, the long-running SSX franchise has completely reconfigured its control to make use of the Wii remote. Unfortunately, like those aforementioned games, I'm not sure if "different" necessarily means "better." The basic controls for steering work great – I really like the new carving mechanics. However, the mish-mash of inputs required to trick – pressing buttons, tilting the nunchuk, and tracing shapes with the remote – ultimately feels muddled and confusing. There will be a brief period of time after you get the hang of it where you'll think, "Wow, this actually works! Cool!" This will soon followed by the feeling that, while this is fun, you'd rather be ripping down the mountain the old-fashioned way.——**MATT**

Wii Play

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO > **DEVELOPER** NINTENDO
> **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 7 > **ESRB** E

THE RETURN OF DUCK HUNT

Had Wii Play and Wii Sports been included together as one game, it might have produced a halfway decent package. Instead, one was served up as a pack in to be hailed by non-gamers as the best thing to happen to gaming since Ms. Pac Man, and the other now needs to be ransomed to its potential purchasers by including an extra Wii remote in the deal.

While the nine games that are included in Wii Play are certainly amusing, it would take several dozen more of them to constitute a purchase of comparable value with almost any other game released in the last several years. With that said, the ten minutes you'll spend playing each game for the first time is a blast. The Shooting Range may emerge as a clear favorite for many since it's basically a beefed up version of Duck

Hunt, sadly minus any giggling dogs. The inexplicable cow racing game also offers some laughs, especially when you bump your fellow racers into the ditch. Tanks also entertains in a way almost identical to a certain old Atari 2600 game, which maybe tells you something about the level of sophistication they were shooting for here.

While you can play any of the games solo, Wii Play is clearly designed as a pastime for friends; every one of the nine is best played with two remotes. It's also a little odd that the entire game seems oriented towards teaching players how to use the Wii remote. It wouldn't surprise me in the least to learn that Nintendo had this title originally earmarked as the pack-in option until the more U.S.-friendly Wii Sports title nudged it out. I suppose if you're out to buy yourself an additional Wii remote, you may as well cough up the extra few dollars for Wii Play. Just don't get your hopes up too high.—**MILLER**

| BOTTOM LINE | 7 |

> **Concept:** Learn to use the Wii Remote in nine simple minigames

> **Graphics:** Light years beyond the bar set by the Nintendo Entertainment System

> **Sound:** Pretty much on par with the bar set by the Nintendo Entertainment System

> **Playability:** Very easy to pick up and play, it could be a blast to play at a very short party

> **Entertainment:** While I have few complaints about any of the included games, none of the thrills last very long

> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

| **Second Opinion** | 6.5 |

The comparisons here to Wii Sports are unavoidable. Like Wii Sports, Wii Play is simple, sometimes fun, and not fully fleshed out. Like Wii Sports, Wii Play is a lot more fun to play with other people. And like Wii Sports, you will quickly tire of Wii Play's minigames after only one or two playthroughs (except maybe the Duck Hunt game). Unlike Wii Sports, however, this game doesn't come free with a console. It does come with an extra Wii remote, effectively making each of the nine minigames worth about a dollar apiece. Whether that sounds like the deal or not is up to you.—**BEN**

Sonic and the Secret Rings

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** SEGA > **DEVELOPER** SEGA > **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 20 > **ESRB** E

NEW SYSTEM, SAME SONIC

This game got some pretty good buzz out of E3, and I can't for the life of me figure out why. I love my work, but it never feels more like a job than when I have to review a Sonic game. Although the recent PSP title Sonic Rivals showed some signs of life, Sonic and the Secret Rings takes this franchise right back into the intensive care unit.

There are any number of things I don't like about this game, but let's start with the most important. The control scheme is poor. While it "works" on a basic level, steering Sonic through levels like an Excite Truck vehicle while flicking the remote to attack enemies is, more often than not, a mess. You'll often find yourself having to awkwardly back up to attempt a jump again, something that really detracts from the (admittedly nice) sense of speed. The thing that really got my goat were the power-ups – yes, POWER-UPS – that make the

control more fluid! Seriously? I have to earn good control?

I'd criticize the ludicrous plot and static cutscenes, but I doubt many of you even expect the storytelling in a Sonic title to be any good at this point. While some of the levels look nice enough, you often repeat the same course, or slight alterations thereof, numerous times before advancing to the next world.

While it's nice that they included minigames, in actuality not many of them are much fun, and there are often totally arbitrary "events" like whirlpools that kept Bryan from winning our Pirate Cove contest even though he was consistently doing better than me.

I wish I could say that this was a disappointment for the once-great franchise, but that would be a lie. By now, this is pretty much what you can expect from Sonic the Hedgehog, and that's a shame.—**MATT**

| BOTTOM LINE | 5.5 |

> **Concept:** Create exciting new motion-sensitive ways for Sonic to suck

> **Graphics:** It's fine, but no major step over the last-generation Sonic titles

> **Sound:** Know what to expect: '80s pop metal wankery. Although the theme song is almost great in how ridiculous it is

> **Playability:** It's an "interesting" Wii take on the familiar Sonic controls

> **Entertainment:** Repetitive gameplay, poorly designed levels, and spotty control make for a rancid fillet of hedgehog

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

| **Second Opinion** | 5.75 |

"Seven rings in hand/ Arrowed hearts catch fire now." So goes the chorus to Sonic's latest metal theme song. Sonic is shot with a flaming arrow by an evil genie and must collect seven rings to survive. You see? The song talks about what's going on! Anyway, the game works best when you combine eventual "power-ups" that improve left-to-right movement and enemy targeting with long solid stretches of land. Once Sonic Team introduces frustrating platforming elements, horrible camera angles, sections where you must slowly inch along a narrow edge, and walls that won't break until you back up and kill a few enemies, everything falls apart. Sonic is about reckless speed, so why is he constantly getting slowed down?—**BRYAN**

BOTTOM LINE **9.25**

> **Concept:** An enhanced 360 port of the PS2 classic with a new Gibson Explorer-style ax and hot new tracks

> **Graphics:** Some nice enhancements, but I never have time to pay attention to the graphics

> **Sound:** Ten new tracks, including "Hush" by Deep Purple and "The Trooper" by Iron Maiden

> **Playability:** Smooth as silk gameplay, although I don't like the placement of the start and select buttons

> **Entertainment:** It's simply one of the most purely fun games of the last few years; Xbox owners need to check this out

> **Replay Value:** High

XBOX 360

Guitar Hero II

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER MUSIC > **PUBLISHER** RED OCTANE/ACTIVISION > **DEVELOPER** HARMONIX
> **RELEASE** APRIL 3 > **ESRB** T

NEW CONSOLE, SAME AWESOME

By now, you've either played Guitar Hero, heard about it from a friend, or read us raving about it for the last year. I don't have a lot to add to the conversation about this game, but I did want to relate a brief anecdote that I think illustrates why this game has been so successful.

This past New Year's Eve, Andy had a party. A large group was down in the basement, where he has his games setup, and inevitably a game of Guitar Hero got started. While the people from GI in attendance were already converts, what really interested me was the way that this game draws new people under its spell. I'd say that at least half of the

people there were not avid game players, some not gamers at all. Still, after an hour, there were constant lines of partygoers who — after having just played a few songs — were working their way through the first batch of tunes and not-so-patiently yearning for another turn. Suddenly, the line for Guitar Hero was longer than the line for booze, which is saying something. It's pretty rare for a game to have this effect, and I think it's a testament to Harmonix development expertise that Guitar Hero is addictive and inviting for everyone from the most novice player to the most hardcore.

Guitar Hero II, as you likely already know, improved on the original by adding a great guitar/bass duet mode, more real-world gear endorsements, encores, and "Freebird." I heard some complaints from people that felt the soundtrack could have used more "hits," but I honestly liked having a few more dark horses in the race. Those whiners should be happy that quite a few of the 10 new songs are well-known songs by the likes of Iron Maiden, Deep Purple, Rick Derringer, Rancid, and Toadies. Also, I couldn't fail to mention just how crucial the

■ The character models have been smoothed out and improved

■ Guitar and bass duets are where it's at, daddio
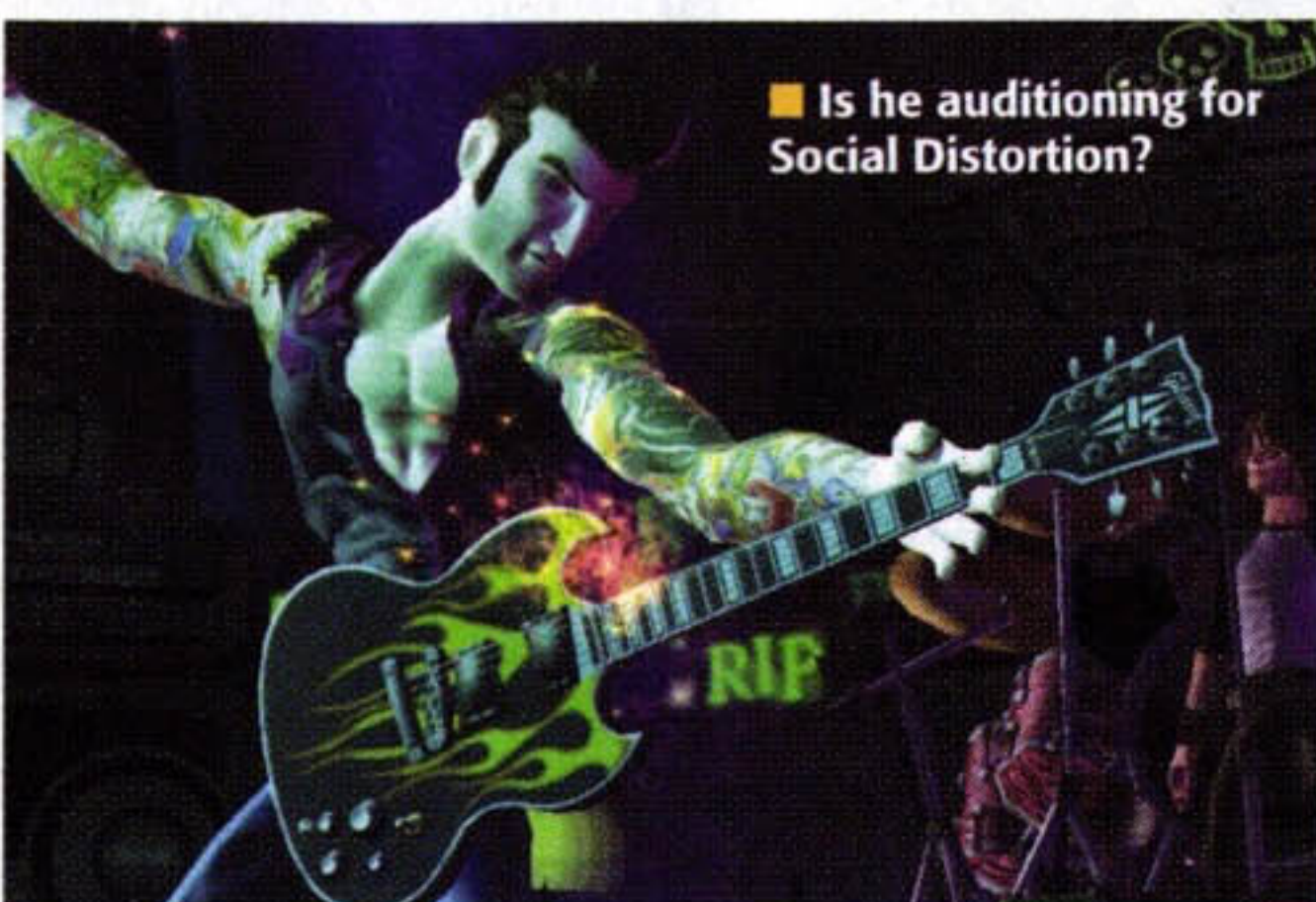
■ Is he auditioning for Social Distortion?

SELECT YOUR OUTFIT

LEATHERS
FEATHERS

LIKES: MAKE-UP, HAILSTORMS, LEATHER

DISLIKES: SMALL TALK, THE BEACH

CONTINUE   BACK   UP/DOWN

inclusion of "The Trooper" is — Maiden's scorching leads have no peer in the world of metal.

I have few complaints about this package. It's not dramatically better than the PlayStation 2 version, but it's great that a whole new audience is going to have the opportunity to play Guitar Hero II. I'm glad they included some new songs, and am excited at the prospect of downloading future tracks on Xbox Live, but a little disappointed that it wasn't possible to include online multiplayer, a feature that would have taken the GH experience to the next level. Also, I have a problem with the placement of the Xbox 360 Guide, start, and select buttons, which I frequently found myself hitting by mistake — pausing the game — with the palm of my picking hand. To be fair, I was the only one in the office who had serious complaints about this, so maybe it's just my own overly zealous strumming style that's the culprit.

These slight quibbles aside, Guitar Hero II is a fantastic game. If you haven't already, go out and buy it. It's just that simple.——**MATT**

Second Opinion **9**

The first time I heard that Guitar Hero was coming to Xbox 360, I had the following reaction: "Yes! They'll have downloadable songs, online rock-offs, and a tasty wireless guitar controller." Unfortunately, GH II only has one of these features and, as of press time, there's still no word from RedOctane on the nature and frequency of the downloads. However, all of the Guitar Hero action players are accustomed to is perfectly captured here in high-def (not that that's a huge deal for this type of game). The eight new licensed tracks help to beef up the career mode and most of them are top-notch. I particularly enjoyed "Possum Kingdom," "Dead!," and "Hush." For me, I don't think I'm ready to leave behind the $160 I spent on the PS2 versions and then blow $90 on another setup for a few new songs. But if you own a 360 and have held out on buying any form of Guitar Hero so far, this is definitely a must-buy.——**BRYAN**
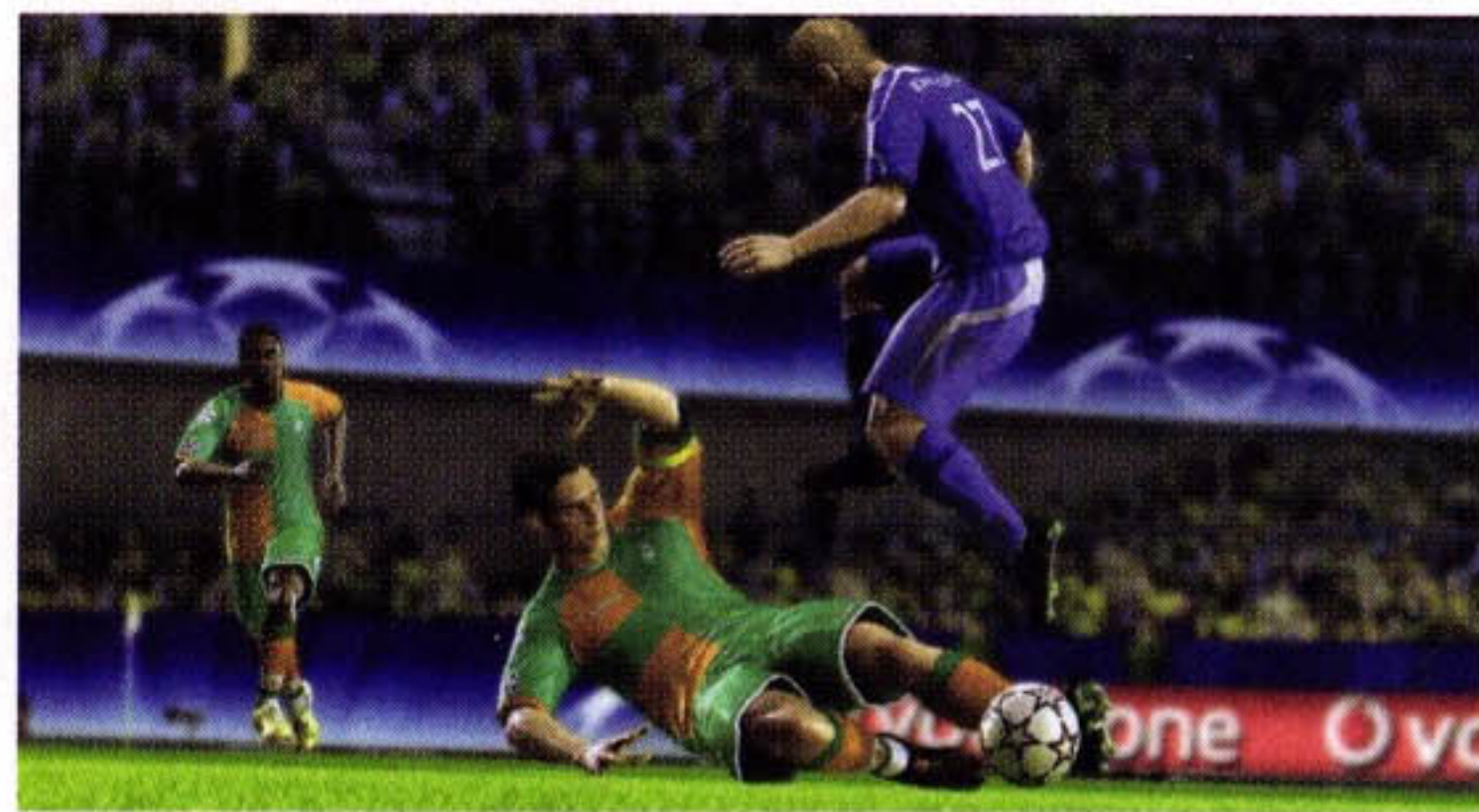
XBOX 360

UEFA Champions League 2006-2007

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER SPORTS (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE)
> **PUBLISHER** EA SPORTS > **DEVELOPER** EA CANADA
> **RELEASE** MARCH 20 > **ESRB** E

GETTING KAKA FOR RONALDINHO

Maybe you don't know what UEFA is, but don't worry – it's not what's really interesting about this game. While I usually roll my eyes at EA when it tries to stuff an offseason FIFA title down my throat, this time the publisher does indeed come bearing gifts.

The new Ultimate Team mode is addictive as it combines regular gameplay and managerial acumen with a trading card component that entices with a constant sense of accomplishment and attraction. You buy packs of cards that contain player, coach, staff, and action cards with points you earn throughout every mode in the game. Since you are constantly using cards for training, contracts, and even while you're playing on the pitch itself, this mode is about always buying new packs of cards and availing yourself of the best players and card bonuses. Although I don't get into its structure of fixtures (I want a more concrete league format), it's very addictive and balanced well. You can always get points to buy cards, even if you lose, but you also have to continually buy card packs because your players' contracts will constantly expire. Being able to trade cards online is a great idea, and you can set how many credits you want to trade your cards for.

What this UEFA achieves in this new mode it loses in the actual gameplay. The reduction in the speed of the game and its continuing problem with close quarters player-on-player interaction make the pace of play too deliberate. Soccer is a fluid game filled with bursts of inspiration and beauty. I don't feel that when I play UEFA. Hopefully the next FIFA can shore up its gameplay problems and retain this exciting new mode.—**KATO**

BOTTOM LINE **7.5**

> **Concept:** Spice up the typical EA FIFA stopgap title with a new mode that's worth checking out

> **Graphics:** The face models have gone back to being waxen and ugly

> **Sound:** Not much change here from the standard soccer fare

> **Playability:** This category continues to be EA's weak point

> **Entertainment:** The Ultimate Team Mode is better than the actual soccer, which is too bad

> **Replay Value:** Moderately High

Second Opinion **7.25**

On its own merits, UEFA offers a decent match of soccer, even if the gameplay itself feels pretty inconsistent. Defensive AI often makes the most ridiculous decisions, and ball control and passing don't feel tight at all. What saves the game from mediocrity is the collectible card system, a unique, albeit gimmicky, way to let players build their own team and trade online. Why this and the European teams themselves couldn't have been incorporated into the most recent FIFA is a question I'll leave to more astute minds, but it does make you wonder, doesn't it?—**MILLER**

XBOX 360

Dance Dance Revolution Universe

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER MUSIC (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE)
> **PUBLISHER** KONAMI > **DEVELOPER** KONAMI
> **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 27 > **ESRB** E10+

BOTTOM LINE **7.5**

It's unusual and unfortunate that the inaugural DDR on the 360 fails to implement the coolest thing that's happened in dance games recently – inputting and grooving to your own tracks. In the absence of that feature, a few more well-known artists make an appearance, such as Kylie Minogue's sultry ballad "Slow" and Cascada's sickeningly sweet pop hit "Everytime We Touch." However, by and large the tunes meld together into a synthy soup flavored with way too many dashes of Euro dance seasoning. With the exception of some inane new modes, gameplay is the same as ever – an addictive blend of exercise and looking like an idiot, with not the barest hint of a change to the formula that has sold so well for them these last eight years.—**MILLER**

XBOX 360

Samurai Warriors 2: Empires

> **STYLE** 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION
> **PUBLISHER** KOEI > **DEVELOPER** OMEGA FORCE > **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 27 > **ESRB** T

BOTTOM LINE **4.75**

I like to try to look at the bright side of things. Take, for example, Samurai Warriors. Sure it plays like every other Dynasty/Samurai Warriors game ever made, but that's just Koei playing off its strengths, right? So maybe the battle system and AI still suck, and the graphics look like an original Xbox game. Is that really a big deal? Building up an army and conquering a nation is still fun. Who cares if hundreds of other games do it better? And sure the game suffers from some slowdown and odd glitches, but maybe if Koei takes a little more time and polishes it up…What? You're telling me this game is out already? Oh, my.—**BEN**

XBOX 360

Fuzion Frenzy 2

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA XBOX LIVE) > **PUBLISHER** MICROSOFT
> **DEVELOPER** HUDSON SOFT > **RELEASE** JANUARY 30 > **ESRB** E10+

■ Due to horrendous controls, this game is nearly unplayable

NOT THE WORST GAME EVER, BUT CLOSE

The Fuzion Frenzy franchise has been rightfully dead for five years. It accompanied the launch of the Xbox on November 15, 2001, and died the day after. Why Microsoft decided to resurrect it I'll never fully understand, but it does serve a purpose. It clearly pinpoints the biggest difference between the original Xbox and Xbox 360; in this generation, Microsoft has eliminated most of the garbage from its first-party lineup. Fuzion Frenzy 2 is a reminder of how far this company has come as a publisher.

If you played the original game, your brain may not allow you to fully believe my next statement. This sequel is light-years worse than its predecessor, which is surprising since this is basically the same game from a design standpoint. Once again, the goal of the game is to battle against three combatants in minigames that are dispersed on different planets. Earn enough points in these games, and you'll win a planet. The first person to secure the designated number of planets wins the game.

Of the 40-plus minigames, I only found myself amused by a few. I wasn't amused because these games are entertaining, but rather because they are so laughably bad. All of the games range from incredibly boring to nearly broken.

The worst part of Fuzion Frenzy 2 is the announcer. This meathead talks up a storm, but he only has a few lines of dialogue at his disposal. In one match, I heard him say "Was that a lot of damage Player 2?" seven times, and "I've never seen a battle this crazy" four times. Mind you, this match only lasted 49 seconds. He's like Chris Tucker from The Fifth Element, but twice as annoying.

Even if you are strong enough to stomach the miserable gameplay, excelling at the minigames doesn't necessarily mean victory. Rather than having skill stand on its own, the game balance is thrown out of whack thanks to multiplier cards that players can earn. If you were to place second in a match, you would earn six points. If you had a six-time multiplier, this point total jumps to 36. Victory usually falls into the hands of the person who has multiplier cards.

The only good that this game serves is that it keeps Fuzion Frenzy's legacy of being synonymous with "bad game" alive for another generation. Even if Microsoft offers it as a five dollar download on Xbox Live Arcade, pass on it – unless, of course, you collect Worst Games of the Year.—**REINER**

BOTTOM LINE **2**

> **Concept:** Over 40 crappy minigames in space!

> **Graphics:** Not even close to the best that the original Xbox had to offer

> **Sound:** Join me in creating a petition to demand that Microsoft publicly execute this announcer in a video on Xbox Live

> **Playability:** Playable in the sense that you can move your character. Not playable in the sense that your character doesn't respond how you like

> **Entertainment:** Entertaining solely for how bad it is

> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

Second Opinion **1.25**

I respectfully disagree with Reiner's headline. Fuzion Frenzy 2 is most certainly the worst game I have ever played. The only part of this game that I didn't completely despise was the main menu screen, which features some green lasers. Just when I thought I had played the most half-assed, hard-to-control, piece of s— minigame of all time, the very next one turns out to be worse – again and again and again. FF 2 will probably sell a few copies… to Satan. This is the perfect game for the eternally damned.—**BRYAN**

PC

Supreme Commander

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (UP TO 8-PLAYER VIA INTERNET OR LAN) > **PUBLISHER** THQ > **DEVELOPER** GAS POWERED GAMES
> **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 20 > **ESRB** E 10+

■ Screenshots don't come close to doing the visuals justice

ON TOP OF THE WORLD

Do you intuitively know to set production buildings to hotkeys so that you can reset their rally points in a split second, queue construction orders for builder units on the fly, and scout enemy bases during the first two minutes of the match and constantly thereafter while fighting a multiple-front war and ensuring the balance and growth of your economy? If not, prepare for some pretty serious beat downs while you learn Supreme Commander's ropes. This is a real-time strategy game that makes no bones about targeting genre enthusiasts. It's also one of the best releases that the RTS genre has ever seen.

Winning an RTS match is ultimately a question of turning the map's raw resources into fiery death more efficiently than your opponent. Supreme Commander, with its focus on economy and its massive armies made up of faceless robots, strips the genre down to this core conflict. The groundbreaking user interface makes this both possible and massively entertaining. Instant full-battlefield vision via the slick zoom feature and powerful task-automation controls allow players to focus on macro-level strategy, rather than being bogged down in the minutiae of low-level command. Once you've mastered this UI, it's keyboard-smashingly frustrating to go back to more primitive RTSs. On top of all that, the massive maps, varied troop types, and high unit caps provide lots of room to develop and counter esoteric strategies.

Perhaps more so than any other RTS, Supreme Commander caters to a slower, even "turtling" playstyle. Every faction has access to expensive, slow-building, game-breaking units in the endgame. They all have their counters – anything can be blown up with the proper application of nuclear, chemical, or laser weapons – but good luck surviving against an artillery piece that can toast your base from five kilometers away. Static defense is incredibly powerful; any assault against a competent player will require a massive invasion force to accomplish anything. Matches tend to last an hour or more – Starcraft-style furiously quick matches are not what you'll find here.

As much as I love Supreme Commander, it won't be for everyone. The gameplay style is markedly different than traditional RTS, and it's a difference that not everyone will appreciate. Economic expansion is perhaps too powerful; the speed at which resource generation accelerates in the hands of a knowledgeable player means that a single missed beat of tempo can bury you under an uncounterable swarm of units. However, the overall high level of polish and deep macro-level scheming are enough to cement its place in the upper echelons of strategy gaming, regardless of personal taste.——**ADAM**

BOTTOM LINE	**9**

> **Concept:** Make an RTS so huge, so fantastic, that the utter lack of personality and flavor doesn't matter

> **Graphics:** Great when you're zoomed in, functional when you're zoomed out

> **Sound:** "Transport is full. Transport is full. Transport is full." Enough already!

> **Playability:** The ability to automate nearly every task is necessary given the scale of the game

> **Entertainment:** It's a different sort of RTS, but one that works brilliantly once you get a handle on it

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion   9

This game isn't for weak-kneed generals. Even graduates of advanced military tactics classes at West Point will have their hands full with Supreme Commander's frantic, challenging battles. Intimidating AI aside, this game should become the de facto example of how to execute an RTS interface. Queuing commands, amassing troops, and moving the camera from hot zones to base camp has never been more fluid. My only wish is that the factions had more defining characteristics on the battlefield. Rarely did I feel one of my forces had a distinct difference compared to my enemy unless I unleashed one of the earth-shattering experimental units. Noobs take note – the strong enemy AI and poorly executed tutorials keep Supreme Commander from being a good introductory RTS. But if you are a hardened war vet or a new recruit capable of stomaching a long learning curve (which will invariably include a few ass whoopings), this game is tough to pass over. ——**BERTZ**

PC

Vanguard: Saga of Heroes

> **STYLE** MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT > **DEVELOPER** SIGIL GAMES ONLINE > **RELEASE** JANUARY 30 > **ESRB** T

FACELESS

I've got nothing against Vanguard. It's an entirely competent MMORPG, and if you can find a decent group of people to play with, it can be an absolute blast. At the same time, though, you're still jumping through a series of hoops dictated by a game design that hails all the way back from text-based MUDs. And Vanguard doesn't pull it off with the kind of aplomb that World of Warcraft does.

There are some cool ideas and systems here. The diplomacy minigame, for instance, provides an entertaining distraction that adds a dimension to exploring new areas. Crafting is a much deeper and more complex web of interactions than you'll see in most MMOs. Much of the content does a good job of allowing players to see and interact with one another – which creates the illusion of a cohesive world much better than sequestering players in instances a la WoW – while discouraging griefing. Each class features cool mechanics for both solo and group play, and the combat is fast and entertaining.

Unfortunately, Vanguard also has its share of flaws. The sheer scale of the game world has resulted in huge tracts of land being devoid of any meaningful content. This spread-out design can make it unlikely you'll run into other players and start making the social connections that make MMOs special. And the game doesn't do much to help new players over the relatively steep learning curve, which can be a barrier even to MMO vets.

If a slower-paced, more complex title in the vein of EverQuest is what you're looking for, Vanguard will serve you well. A lack of polish in several areas and strong competition keep this game from being particularly special, though.——**ADAM**

BOTTOM LINE	**7.5**

> **Concept:** Many of the original brains behind EverQuest get back together to make the next-gen MMO they always wanted to

> **Graphics:** Grand vistas and outstanding battle animations make this a pleasure to behold if you have the PC to do it justice

> **Sound:** Like any MMO, you'll be best served running iTunes in the background after a few dozen hours

> **Playability:** The weird lag issues and bugs that plague most MMO launches are thankfully under control here

> **Entertainment:** This is yet another take on the EverQuest model. It's a decent one, but you're still grinding mobs and gaining XP

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion   7.75

Vanguard is a really big game, mostly to its benefit and in some cases to its detriment. MMO players looking for something new could do far worse than the huge variety of races, classes, and professions that are offered by Vanguard's immensely flexible design. In particular, I found the diplomacy missions (carried out by a simple but fun card game) to be a great alternative to the normal monster grind. The familiar combat engine has just enough innovation to keep it interesting, and some of the in-game art is breathtaking – a fine accompaniment to the great musical score. However, the huge, often-empty expanses between major locations is a turnoff, and the game as a whole is trying to offer so many races, locations, and options that it's hard to really find a focus early on. Still, never let it be said that there aren't plenty of things to try out and explore.——**MILLER**

Human Conjurer

■ The chess event in Karazhan is pure genius – and free loots

■ Flight paths are still in the game, but at level 70 you can purchase a flying mount of your own

PC | MAC

World of Warcraft:
The Burning Crusade

> **STYLE** MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT
> **DEVELOPER** BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT > **RELEASE** JANUARY 16 > **ESRB** T

GAME INFORMER
PC GAME OF THE MONTH

WHEN IT ITCHES IT BURNS

I am what you would consider a hardcore World of Warcraft player. Before that, it was EverQuest, with plenty of other games in between – from Dark Age of Camelot to Anarchy Online. One thing has been constant with every MMORPG I have ever played: Each expansion gradually destroys the thing that made the original game so fascinating.

There are many pitfalls that await an MMO expansion. Sometimes it's the extra experience levels that ruin all the previous content; other times it's a new race or class that throws off any semblance of game balance. Burning Crusade was unable to find a solution to the new levels and items that basically render the original content worthless (going back to the two old continents now feels like attending a funeral). However, it does manage to reinvent itself in many ways to make the expansion feel fresh and, on the whole, more engaging than the original.

This is obvious the moment you walk into Outland (the world where most of the new content is). The new zones are huge in comparison to the original game and graphically lush. But it's the content inside them, the quests and the instances, that make the whole game tick.

Blizzard has worked very hard to create encounters and quests that not only offer content to the casual player, but to the hardcore player as well. The dungeons, which range from a five-man crawl to a 25-man raid, offer challenges for all types of players. This is especially true for the five-man content that offers a normal and heroic mode for those that want a bigger challenge from the game's easier-to-complete content.

Before this review, I managed to get through the game's five- and ten-man content and had started on the raid content. It's very challenging at almost every level, with the best encounter design I have ever seen in a game of its ilk. Since Blizzard

has been very stingy with its itemization, many of the "upgrades" you get in the game are more like "side-grades." While unsatisfying to a degree, it does keep the challenge and interest in the game and doesn't allow players to blast through the content in a matter of weeks – which, in this reviewer's opinion, is a good thing.

However, like any MMORPG, Blizzard can always offer updates to smooth out the rough edges of the game, as is far too often the case, ruin the experience by catering to the clamoring masses begging for easier content.

My hope is that Blizzard doesn't cave in, at least not for a long while, as The Burning Crusade is easily the best expansion to an MMO I have ever had the pleasure to play. From the thrill of soaring through skies on this game's flying mounts to the rush of defeating Nightbane in the bowels of Karazhan, The Burning Crusade is a gaming itch that is a joy to scratch.—**ANDY**

Quel'dorei Wraith

■ The Horde received the Blood Elf race and the paladin class...

■ ...while the Alliance got Draenai race and the Shaman class

PSP

Capcom Puzzle World

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER PUZZLE/ACTION (2-PLAYER VIA AD HOC) > **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM
> **DEVELOPER** CAPCOM
> **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 6 > **ESRB** E

BOTTOM LINE 7.5

No company loves revisiting its history as much as Capcom. Now PSP owners can get their hands on a new collection that packages one bona fide classic (Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo) alongside some lesser known arcade games. Super Puzzle Fighter helped create the template for the modern puzzle game (see: Lumines), and remains as addictive as ever. Even some rarely seen Japanese versions of the title are included here, which will be a boon to collectors. The other stuff – three Buster Bros. titles and an Arkanoid clone cleverly named Block Block – is just fine, but hardly crucial to anyone but the most ardent Capcom fan. Still, Puzzle Fighter alone might make this worth the $30 for a lot of folks.—**MATT**

PSP

Sid Meier's Pirates!

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ADVENTURE (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA AD HOC) > **PUBLISHER** 2K GAMES
> **DEVELOPER** FIRAXIS
> **RELEASE** JANUARY 23 > **ESRB** E

BOTTOM LINE 8

Avast! After a few years adrift on the Xbox and PC, Sid Meier's Pirates! has brought its booty to a new port – the PSP. To the great fortune of pirate fans everywhere, the classic game has developed nary a bit of scurvy during its voyages. Pirates offers the same great mix of addictive minigames to which we sea dogs have grown accustomed. By fencing famous pirates, raiding rival trade ships, and wooing governor's daughters, you can turn your swashbuckling buccaneer into one of the most infamous pirates on the open seas.—**BERTZ**

■ No concessions were made in bringing ratchet to the PSP

■ Players can once again mod their weapons and armors

PSP

Ratchet & Clank: Size Matters

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA WI-FI) > **PUBLISHER** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT
> **DEVELOPER** HIGH IMPACT GAMES > **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 13 > **ESRB** E10+

GAME INFORMER **HANDHELD GAME OF THE MONTH**

AN AMAZING HANDHELD ADVENTURE

When a major console franchise moves to handheld, there's usually a stigma attached to it. Is this game going to be a hand-me-down port, a side story, or a completely different entity altogether? With Insomniac Games focused on bringing Ratchet & Clank to PlayStation 3, first time developer High Impact Games was called in to bring the gun-toting rodent and his robotic companion to the handheld realm. This development scenario screams for a side story similar to Daxter, Metal Gear Acid, or Grand Theft Auto: Vice City Stories. But surprisingly enough, Ratchet & Clank: Size Matters is a direct sequel that doesn't skip a beat in delivering the high-octane thrills you've come to expect from this series on console.

Size Matters feels so similar, in fact, that I'm beginning to think High Impact is a secret alias for Insomniac, much like Steven King's pseudonym Richard Bachman. The trademark humor, outrageous weapon designs, and unforgettable cast of characters appear to be stripped straight from Insomniac's portfolio. Which is not to say, however, that High Impact is simply connecting the dots that Insomniac has laid out.

The best parts of Size Matters stem solely from High Impact's creative minds. This is most prominent in the story, which delves deeply into Captain Qwark's personal life. High Impact also leaves its mark on the level designs, which are some of the best the series has to offer. In one stage, Ratchet shrinks to microscopic proportions to infiltrate Clank's body. In another level, which is just as outlandish as the highly acclaimed Milkman stage in Psychonauts, Ratchet traverses an ever-changing dream world that dazzles the eye with mind-bending imagery and hypnotic effects.

We may have said this hundreds of times already, but navigating 3D space without a second analog stick is no easy task. High Impact did a commendable job making Ratchet's fast-paced play feel at home on the PSP, but as you would expect, the movement isn't as graceful as it is on the console. Many different control schematics are offered, but I found that the best system is to use the d-pad to perform basic strafing functions and the shoulder buttons for turning. It's a bit awkward, but the game does a good job of keeping the action in front of you, and the auto-lock targeting is highly effective.

Holding true to its lineage, Size Matters dabbles in space combat, racing, and an assortment of minigames. Clank, who continues to be used more and more with each passing game, is a part of two gorgeously crafted space combat levels. He also competes in a fun destruction derby, plus several other modes that we've seen in previous games. This variant gameplay is not as kind to our long-eared friend. Ratchet's hoverboard racing controls are so frustrating that the developer seems to have compensated by dumbing down the AI to the point that no skill is required other than to keep your board from crashing.

As always, players can level up their weapons (the bee gun is especially amusing in later levels), purchase weapon mods, unlock new armors, and unearth Skill Points and Bolts. Multiplayer is once again present, but it's by no means as frantic or fun as the console offerings. Your choices are limited to just four players and a selection of fairly boring maps.

Size Matters isn't the best that this series has to offer, but it's definitely a welcome addition to the family, and a must-have for fans.—**REINER**

■ Clank's space combat stages will bring a tear to the eyes of the Star Fox faithful

BOTTOM LINE 9

> **Concept:** Ratchet has lost none of his alien-splattering spunk in his first handheld adventure

> **Graphics:** Some stages seem designed to show how many particle effects the PSP can display at once. In other words, it's beautiful

> **Sound:** An upbeat soundtrack with familiar voices and sound effects

> **Playability:** Not quite as intuitive as the console games, but the action is just as dynamic

> **Entertainment:** An amazing game from start to finish. Like all Ratchets, replay is offered in questing to unlock the hidden Bolts and Skill Points

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 8.75

Ratchet & Clank is one of my favorite series of all time, so I had high expectations for this new handheld adventure. I'm happy to report that Size Matters meets nearly all of them. The core of what makes R&C great – awesome weapons, gameplay variety, and humor – is represented in every minute of this title. The game offers quite a few new ideas, some that work (the Clank space shooter levels and new multiplayer modes) and a few that don't (the Robot Wars inspired minigames and hoverboarding). Sadly, the lack of a second analog means that we have to bid farewell to the FPS-style control scheme that I felt helped the series' multiplayer come into its own in Deadlocked. Still, this is a rollicking ride, and sure to be one of the best PSP games this year.—**MATT**

PSP

Gurumin:
A Monstrous Adventure

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG > **PUBLISHER** MASTIFF/NIHON FALCOM CORP > **DEVELOPER** NIHON FALCOM CORP
> **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 12 > **ESRB** E10+

HP 100/100

9279   589

■ The town is pretty expansive. Actually, this screen covers most of it

I DIDN'T HATE MY WEEKEND

Parin is a young girl sent by her parents to live with her absent-minded grandfather. But the town that her grandfather lives in is a mining town with no other children, and the first fat hairy guy she runs into turns out to be a pedophile who starts hitting on her. It's no surprise that to escape from her world of sin and loneliness, Parin crawls through a hole in the wall and makes friends with a city of friendly invisible monsters. This premise might make a pretty sweet independent film, but we don't review independent films in this magazine, do we? (Sigh) No…no, we don't. And Gurumin turns out to be a childlike fantasy adventure with plenty of odd moments like the one above.

The problem with this game is…uh…well the problem is… actually, I have some trouble pointing out anything fundamentally wrong with this game. Nothing is outright broken here. In fact, I found the graphics to be pleasing and the music enjoyable. I

think the problem with this game is that it's too simplistic. As a result Gurumin is very relaxing to play, but never gets exciting or engrossing.

What we have here is an action/RPG done by the numbers. There are dungeons filled with monsters and puzzles, nothing headscratchingly hard, but you will have to do some exploration. Parin is equipped with only one weapon, but you can upgrade it with new moves and imbue it with different elemental energies. You can also gain new outfits and purchase accessories that can be upgraded by collecting junk from fallen enemies. Some of the characters are very memorable and the game has a few scenes that are so bizarre they're laughable, but the plot as a whole is pretty lame. Gurumin is perfect for a lazy weekend or a long road trip, but not something you'll be pulling out your PSP to play every free moment of the day.—**BEN**

BOTTOM LINE 7

> **Concept:** Straightforward action/RPG with a Saturday morning animated TV concept and characters

> **Graphics:** Cartoony, but in a smooth, very clean way

> **Sound:** The music is actually above average and the voice acting is decent

> **Playability:** The camera works and the controls don't feel awkward

> **Entertainment:** A very straightforward experience. More like a merry-go-round than a rollercoaster, which is both good and bad

> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

Second Opinion 7

It's nice to play a game that manages to be uncomplicated without being insulting. Gurumin mixes combat and exploration in a formula that, while not very ambitious, provides straightforward fun. Upgrading your equipment and battling through different areas couldn't be much simpler, but it's enjoyable thanks to the attractive visuals and funny characters. Gurumin is definitely kid-friendly, but anyone looking for a low-impact, lighthearted adventure will find plenty of appeal here.—**JOE**

HP 77 /100

9279   589

■ You can collect different outfits in the game. Not all of them are as ridiculously cute as this monkey suit

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NINTENDO DS

Spectrobes

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG (UP TO 16-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS)
> **PUBLISHER** DISNEY INTERACTIVE STUDIOS > **DEVELOPER** JUPITER CORPORATION > **RELEASE** MARCH 13 > **ESRB** E

GOTTA DIG UP THE FOSSILIZED REMAINS OF 'EM ALL

Even if Spectrobes is aimed squarely at pleasing a younger crowd, it's been stuffed with enough fresh ideas that it might have had a chance to pull in some older fuddy duddies (you know, over 13?) had those new ideas been better integrated. Sadly, such is not the case, and this creature collection system has all the sophistication you might ask of any seven-year-old, which I suppose is probably the point.

Spectrobes has a neat twist on the "I've got a monster! You've got a monster! Let's have 'em fight!" idea. In this case, those dangerous little guys are actually fossils that you have to dig out of the

ground. You'll have to smell them out, dig them up with drills and other tools, and then take them back to your spaceship to magically awaken them from fossilization. It's a neat trick. You bring them to life with your own voice, feed them minerals to make them grow, and evolve them into finely crafted killing machines, all in the name of saving the solar system from certain doom. The combination of frantic stylus rubbing and microphone use is surprisingly fun for a while.

Repetition kills the buzz. The slowly paced story turns the fossil digging into a chore, and the real-time battle system starts to feel the same not long after that. Multiplayer, meanwhile, has some meat to it. Big wireless tournaments are supported for ambitious recess get-togethers, and online leaderboards and downloadable content gives the game some legs. There are even real-life collectible cards to trade around to get some of the cooler breeds. With all the hallmarks of a title that might just grab that elusive kid audience, there are nonetheless a number of more engaging titles that I'd wish on the younger gamers I know.—**MILLER**

BOTTOM LINE 6.5

> **Concept:** Collect creatures and level them up in this innovative twist on the familiar idea

> **Graphics:** Some more detail in the characters, monsters, and environments definitely would have held my attention longer

> **Sound:** I turned the game off only a few minutes ago, and it's hard even now to remember the audio component

> **Playability:** Very friendly and easy to get into, even without any complex tutorials

> **Entertainment:** Simplistic and repetitive, the new ideas are only entertaining for a few minutes

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 5.5

All of the monsters that were deemed too lame to make it into a Pokémon game now have a place to call home. Spectrobes, a science fiction twist on the monster-collecting craze, seemingly fails in every key area. As ambitious as the game is, it's light years away from being entertaining. The real time combat system is painful to the point that it should inflict bodily harm on the user. The monsters, or I as call them "the-soon-to-be-euthanized," are neither cute nor cool, just lame. There's something exciting about traveling to different worlds to find new critters, but the gameplay just isn't strong enough to back up this venture.—**REINER**

Komainu

Child

Komainu

Corona

Komainu has extremely advanced intuition which makes him quite useful when searching. He's a truly faithful ally and loves having his soft curly ears petted.

NINTENDO DS
Lunar Knights

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG > PUBLISHER KONAMI > DEVELOPER KOJIMA PRODUCTIONS
> RELEASE FEBRUARY 6 > ESRB E10+

HIDING FROM THE SUN

Vampires have cloaked the Earth in perpetual night. Humans are kept as cattle in their undead overlords' domains. If only there was some dude with a mysterious past and an enormous sword to rectify the situation. Of course, he would need a spunky kid to help him out and provide an enthusiastic counterpoint to his dark brooding.

Lunar Knights may have a setup that makes *Scooby Doo* look like a creative tour de force, but the gameplay it throws at you is no joke. We've had some mediocre efforts from Square Enix's Mana series in recent years, but this successor to Boktai is a great way to remember what makes this style of gameplay fun.

Lunar Knights employs the same isometric hack n' slash formula we've seen for years, but offers a level of polish that keeps it from getting old. The cool systems that are layered on top of it are what make it engrossing.

Collecting items to power up your various weapons, managing recovery and boost items, and growing your two heroes' skills through experience points are all deftly executed and very enjoyable.

As entertaining as the core of Lunar Knights' gameplay is, the game's ancillary elements are less skillfully done. The story, as mentioned, is mediocre at best. Slogging through clumsy dialogue between dungeons is a chore, and the space flight minigame is a simplistic distraction that goes on for far too long. It's good that all these things will only take up a fraction of your time here; the vast majority of the game is in the dungeons.

Sure, leveling up and collecting new items requires nothing more than going through the motions for seasoned gamers. But any title that can throw in as many new systems and nail the core gameplay as well as Lunar Knights does has a spot waiting for it in my library.——ADAM

BOTTOM LINE 8

> **Concept:** Show everyone how isometric dungeon crawling is done

> **Graphics:** As usual for the DS, the visuals are nothing special

> **Sound:** Competent English voice actors exist. Why none of them ever do anime-themed titles (including this one) I have no idea

> **Playability:** Accidentally triggering the dash move gets irritating after the 50th time

> **Entertainment:** You won't find many better action/RPGs on handhelds

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 8.5

As innovative as Boktai's sun-sensing gameplay was, it really didn't find a home with the basement dwelling gamer. Lunar Knights, the spiritual successor to Boktai, is designed with this nocturnal crowd in mind. Unlike its predecessors, it doesn't require sunlight to play. Removing this gimmick doesn't change the experience – the sun and moon are still the foundation of gameplay – it simply allows you to stay glued to the infectious hack n' slash play well after the sun goes down. Whether you are chopping demons to bits with a fiery sword, or blasting them from afar with the solar powered gun, Lunar Knights combat is surprisingly complex and amazingly satisfying. The dungeon designs are a bit bland, but it's rare to find hack n' slash play this addictive. Lunar Knights is a must for action fans.——REINER

NINTENDO DS
Trioncube

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER PUZZLE (UP TO 2-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS)
> **PUBLISHER** NAMCO BANDAI
> **DEVELOPER** NAMCO
> **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 20 > **ESRB** E

BOTTOM LINE 6

If your idea of stellar art and storytelling is exemplified in the Teletubbies, then boy do I have a game for you. Puzzle gaming has had a number of complex entries recently, and this isn't one of them. It is, however, a fun diversion for about an hour. The block-dropping gameplay mirrors the presentation – simple and colorful. By creating 3x3 blocks, you build a combo that is usually easy enough to expand and beat a level in one try. If things ever got more complicated, I'd give it some credit – but they don't, and I won't.——MILLER

NINTENDO DS
Quickspot

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER PUZZLE (8-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS OR NINTENDO WI-FI)
> **PUBLISHER** NAMCO BANDAI GROUP
> **DEVELOPER** NAMCO
> **RELEASE** MARCH 13 > **ESRB** E
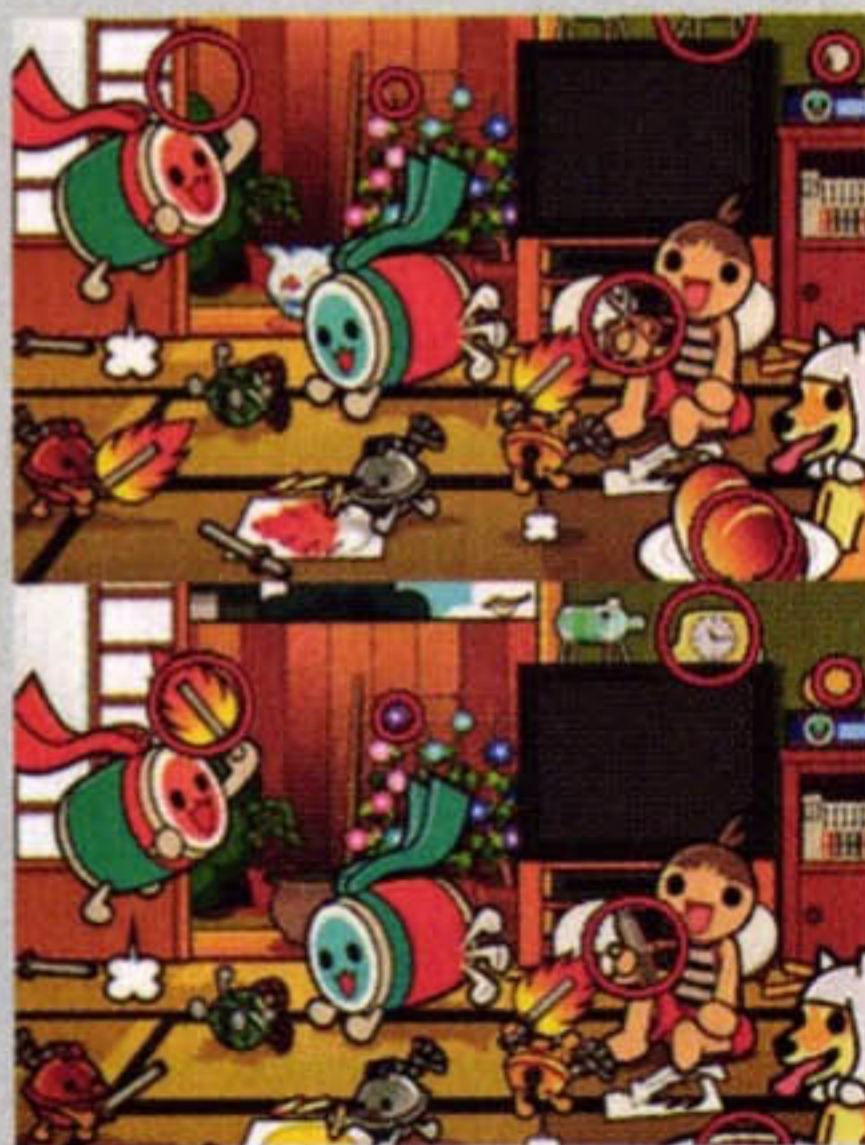
BOTTOM LINE 7.5

This game is kind of like those "find the differences between the two pictures games" I used to play in *Highlights* – the magazine my mother would buy for me when I was a kid because we couldn't afford a Nintendo. It's not the kind of game I would buy a Nintendo to play. That said – there is something very relaxing about finding what is wrong in the pictures (maybe it's the annoying nursery rhyme music) and circling it. You can also play the Rapid play mode where you work under the clock with the Brain Age twist, but honestly, there isn't much else to this game.——BEN

GAME BOY ADVANCE
Final Fantasy VI Advance

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** NINTENDO
> **DEVELOPER** SQUARE ENIX > **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 7 > **ESRB** E10+

KEFKA WINS

Final Fantasy VI is one of the best RPGs ever made, and this version doesn't sacrifice any of its inherent awesomeness. From the huge cast of characters and their special moves to the memorable scenes like the opera house event, it is all intact and as good as you remember.

Unlike some of the previous Final Fantasy GBA titles, this one isn't marred by any significant technical problems. The only slowdown I noticed was surprisingly even better than they did on SNES, like when Sabin uses his Fire Dance (now called "Rising Phoenix") Blitz. In short, everything works as good or better than before, making this the best version of Final Fantasy VI to date.

Even though Final Fantasy VI has already reappeared once on the PSone, this isn't just a port of a port. The refined translation clears up some potentially confusing story bits, and there are new espers and dungeons waiting for you in the endgame. Even though this content is a nice bonus, it doesn't have a significant impact on the main progression. Luckily, the core game is still amazing by itself, and no one should need some fancy-pants excuse to go back and play this timeless classic.——JOE

BOTTOM LINE 9

> **Concept:** The last Final Fantasy holdout finally gets the portable treatment

> **Graphics:** Sprites and Mode 7 at their best. It runs smoothly, too, with little to none of the choppiness of previous ports

> **Sound:** The best soundtrack in the Final Fantasy series lives on. A few changes here and there, but they're all for the better

> **Playability:** Great on the GBA. It also works on the DS, but there are some button issues (like the placement of select, and the d-pad and shoulder sensitivity) that make it harder

> **Entertainment:** If you can't enjoy this game, you just don't like RPGs

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 8.5

Far more than an antiquated classic, this installment of the vaunted franchise is worth another play because it remains a fantastic RPG from beginning to end. Optional story paths make this more freeform than most titles in the genre. From Gau's Rages to Sabin's Blitz attacks, the unique options for each character make battle an active and interesting mechanic, rather than just a time waster between story events. An improved translation, enhanced tech in the graphics and sound departments, and a few new gameplay elements are ultimately minor changes, but welcome nonetheless – high marks all around.——MILLER

Ah, Memories

If you're playing FF VI Advance for nostalgia's sake, you're probably curious as to whether certain tricks have changed for this port. We checked out our favorites, and here's what we found.

- Use the level-up exploit on the river? Sort of. Holding the A button won't work, but you can mash it repeatedly.
- Cast Vanish then X-Zone for instant kills? No. This was fixed. Vanish/Doom won't work, either.
- Suplex the Phantom Train? Aw, yeah.
- Does Gau still suck? Of course he does.
- Get General Leo? No. You never could. Deal with it.

■ Hopefully, the movie focuses less on man ass

■ Elephant strategy guide: block, stab, repeat

WAR ELEPHANT

PSP

300: March To Glory

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION > **PUBLISHER** WARNER BROTHERS INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT
> **DEVELOPER** COLLISION STUDIOS > **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 27 > **ESRB** M

NOT ENOUGH TO SATE OUR SWORDS

I really want to see the movie *300* (being a fan of Frank Miller's original graphic novel), so I was hoping that this game would provide a sneak peek at the film and maybe some good times in the process. 300: March to Glory only delivers halfway on both counts.

Players will control the Spartan king Leonidas as his small band of elite troops takes on the entire Persian army. This can be misleading, however, since you'll only be fighting six or seven enemies at a time with even fewer Spartans at your side. Chop off the foes' limbs with swords, spears, and shields. Upgrade weapons and armor, and unlock new combos and special moves. Defend against multitudes of arrows raining from the sky. It's all pretty standard hack n' slash – nothing really awesome or particularly crappy.

As a quick diversion from the main game, Leonidas will line up shoulder-to-shoulder with his troops in a phalanx formation, pressing forward while stabbing any soldiers who get in the way. What starts as a harmless minigame where you get to eventually slay some elephants later becomes a pesky pain in the ass with several cheap deaths.

The few puzzles that appear in the game are brainless lever-pulling exercises, and the limited stealth sections only serve to make you curse the usually passable camera. Cutscenes are a mix of comic book images and the in-game engine. The latter mostly consists of the camera zooming in on ugly character models as they all do a repeating knee bending animation in unison.

Players can unlock movie trailers and stills by playing through the game and collecting golden lambdas, but most of this stuff you can already see online. I guess this might be a fun game to rent and beat on a Saturday. After all, developer Collision does add a little something at the end of the game to make it not as much of a downer.——BRYAN

BOTTOM LINE **6.25**

> **Concept:** If you're only going to put out a licensed game on one console, it better be PSP…wait a second
> **Graphics:** Plain and repetitive. The blood sprays are a nice effect, though
> **Sound:** A cinematic score mixed with a bunch of yelling dudes
> **Playability:** Mashing the X button will get you through all but a few situations
> **Entertainment:** The movie trailers and Frank Miller interviews are pretty cool
> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

Second Opinion **7**

It's interesting that they called this 300, because that is about how many times you jam on the X button in the first minute and a half. Then again, there is something mindlessly appealing about beating up endless waves of dudes. You can upgrade Leonidas by buying new weapons, armor, and combos, but I didn't really find it necessary to buy combos. And the few puzzles consist solely of pushing over walls or boulders by tapping more X. You can find worse games, but the only thing this game really excelled at was getting me excited for the movie.——BEN

HANDHELD QUICKIES

NINTENDO DS
Pogo Island

> **STYLE** 1 TO 4-PLAYER PUZZLE (2-PLAYER VIA WIRELESS) > **PUBLISHER** ELECTRONIC ARTS
> **DEVELOPER** EA CANADA
> **RELEASE** MARCH 26 > **ESRB** E

6 card streak!

NEW HAND
UNDO
OPTIONS

BOTTOM LINE **6.5**

EA has basically swiped the top five titles from their Pogo.com casual games website, slapped a tropical theme on all of them, and added a board game-style progression system. The good news for fans of the site is that you can transfer points earned on the DS game to the website and enter to win real cash and prizes. Up to four players can pass around a single DS to compete in any of the games, but local wireless play is only supported on one of them. The offerings are generally pretty decent (Word Whomp, Tri-Peaks Solitaire, and Poppit! are among the best), but there should be a lot more, considering that the website has hundreds to choose from.——BRYAN

PSP
Chili Con Carnage

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (UP TO 4-PLAYER VIA AD HOC) > **PUBLISHER** EIDOS
> **DEVELOPER** DEADLINE GAMES
> **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 13 > **ESRB** M

BOTTOM LINE **7**

Ah, Mexico. Who doesn't love the land of Spring Break, Montezuma's revenge, and old-fashioned shootouts on drug plantations? Chili Con Carnage serves up a steaming hot burrito of the latter. When a drug kingpin takes down his father, Ramiro Cruz sets out for revenge by turning up the vigilante action to caliente. Much like its spiritual predecessor Total Overdose, Chili Con Carnage is all about smoking gringos with acrobatic headshots, well-tossed Molotov cocktails, and the occasional environmental explosion. The third-person camera sometimes causes frustration, but otherwise this by-the-book action shooter serves up a spicy helping of mindless bloodshed.——BERTZ

PSP
The Warriors

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION (2-PLAYER VIA AD HOC) > **PUBLISHER** ROCKSTAR GAMES
> **DEVELOPER** ROCKSTAR LEEDS
> **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 12 > **ESRB** M
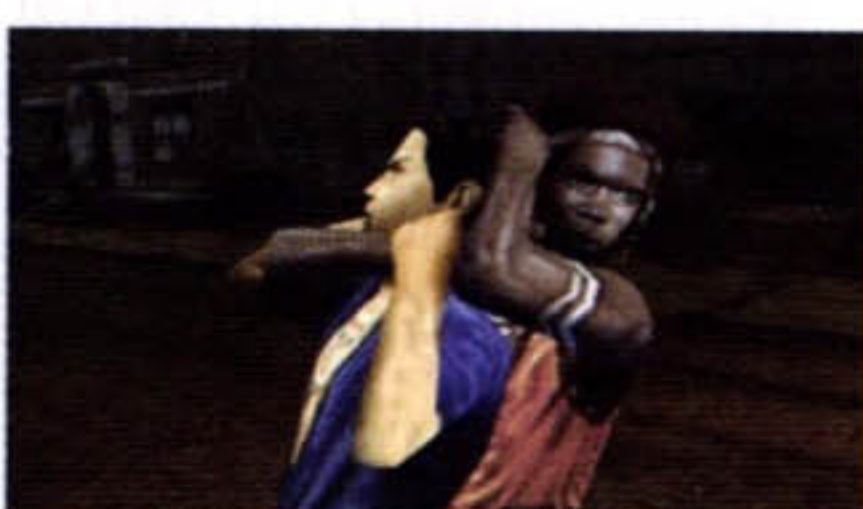
BOTTOM LINE **8.5**

Rockstar's The Warriors showed that it's possible to make a brawler with more depth and cinematic flair than the usual beat 'em up. Using the '70s cult classic as a template, the game was inventive and fun – though sadly hamstrung by a bizarre multiplayer co-op mode that kept switching the camera between full and split-screen. Thankfully, that problem has been solved on PSP, as both players now have their own screen when playing an ad-hoc story mode. Other than that, it's exactly the same, with identical features, minigames, gameplay, and graphics. If you missed out on this, or are looking for a reason to pull your PSP out of mothballs, The Warriors is a great purchase.——MATT

NINTENDO DS
Brain Buster Puzzle Pak

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER PUZZLE
> **PUBLISHER** AGETEC
> **DEVELOPER** JALECO/NIKOLI
> **RELEASE** APRIL > **ESRB** E

Item
Menu

BOTTOM LINE **8**

What this game lacks in charm, it makes up for in numbers. Containing over 200 Sudoku and Kakuro puzzles alone (not to mention the infinitely generated training sessions), this title is packed with five different types of Japanese puzzles games. Each has valuable tools to help you such as being able to put down markers on squares and erase stuff, and there are even tokens you can accumulate which you can cash in for hints. This game won't calculate your Brain Age, but we're probably all too stupid to make it through this gauntlet of genius.——KATO

NINTENDO DS
Izuna: Legend of the Unemployed Ninja

> **STYLE** 1-PLAYER ACTION/RPG
> **PUBLISHER** ATLUS > **DEVELOPER** SUCCESS
> **RELEASE** FEBRUARY 20 > **ESRB** E10+

BOTTOM LINE **3.5**

Izuna tries to hide its appalling design within the trappings of a happy-go-lucky dungeon crawler. It has some funny characters and dialogue, but those are just tiny pockets of air in the baleful cloud that pervades this pile of shame. Following the Mystery Dungeon formula, the combat is unbelievably tedious and frustrating. In fact, I would rather just watch Izuna die than participate in the infantile mechanics, except that you lose all carried items and money when that happens. Punishing players and withholding any reward adds replay, right? At first I thought this game was a joke, but I was wrong. It's a joke *and* total garbage.——JOE
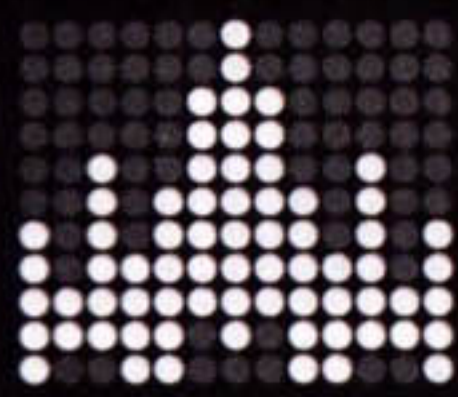
TOP 20

Listings Based Upon NPD Data For January 2007 Based On Units Sold

1 LOST PLANET: EXTREME CONDITION (360)

Unfortunately, due to the inclusion of Game Infarcer this issue, we have used up all our funny budget. We really would have liked to make a joke about Lost Planet and extreme cold and shrinkage, but due to financial constraints that will not be possible this month.

2 GUITAR HERO II (W/GUITAR) (PS2)

The cutbacks have been hard on everyone here. It's a little known fact that all of the jokes in Charts come from a group of leprechauns with magic pencils that we keep locked up in the basement. Recently, they have taken a liking to Guitar Hero. It's too bad we don't let them play it. For ten minutes on Thursdays we pile them into a glass room and let them watch us play Wolfmother.

3 GEARS OF WAR (360)

Maybe Gears of War could have used some leprechauns. Wouldn't it be great if in the sequel a space faring group of leprechaun mercenaries come to Earth's aid. Fenix could fight alongside the leprechaun commander Shorty – a take-no-prisoners leprechaun with a lust for treasure but a heart of gold. It wouldn't be worse than the story it already has.

4 WARIOWARE: SMOOTH MOVES (Wii)

Don't drop it!

Okay, the GI funny budget is in the red now. We probably shouldn't have made that joke about Gears of War. It was all Shorty's idea. He really wants to be in the next Gears. He has been dealt with. We made him start wearing pink underwear (humiliating for leprechaun kind), and all his jokes about WarioWare have been rolled up and used for beating him.

5 THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: TWILIGHT PRINCESS (GC)

Charts has official filled for Chapter 11 funny bankruptcy. Thereby all jokes about Legend of Zelda, men in green tights, and tingling fairies will be put on hold. All joke leprechauns slaves will be released, and all magic pencils, giant rubber chickens, and Walt Disney's frozen head will be retained by the courts until such time that Charts finds itself in a stable humorous position.

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	System	Score	Release	Price
1	Lost Planet: Extreme Condition	N/A	360	8.25	01-11	$65
2	Guitar Hero II w/Guitar	3	PS2	9	11-10	$80
3	Gears Of War	1	360	9.5	11-10	$59
4	WarioWare: Smooth Moves	N/A	Wii	7.75	01-11	$50
5	The Legend Of Zelda: Twilight Princess	5	Wii	10	11-10	$49
6	Madden NFL 07	2	PS2	8.25	08-10	$31
7	The Legend Of Zelda: Twilight Princess	4	GC	10	11-10	$50
8	Resistance: Fall Of Man	N/A	PS3	9.5	11-10	$60
9	Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six Vegas	12	360	9.5	11-10	$63
10	New Super Mario Bros.	7	DS	9.25	05-10	$34
11	Brain Age: Train Your Brain In Minutes A Day	15	DS	8.25	04-10	$19
12	Call Of Duty 3	8	360	8.5	11-10	$58
13	Rayman Raving Rabbids	N/A	Wii	8.5	11-10	$48
14	Madden NFL 07	N/A	PS3	8.25	11-10	$59
15	WWE Smackdown Vs. Raw 2007	6	PS2	8.75	11-10	$49
16	Nintendogs: Dalmatian & Friends	13	DS	NA	10-10	$31
17	Grand Theft Auto: Vice City Stories	N/A	PSP	8.5	11-10	$30
18	Yoshi's Island DS	9	DS	8.25	11-10	$31
19	Halo 2	N/A	XBOX	10	11-08	$30
20	Final Fantasy XII	N/A	PS2	9	11-10	$49

TOP 10 JAPAN

Rank	Title	System
1	Virtua Fighter 5	PS3
2	Wii Sports	Wii
3	Wii Play	Wii
4	DS Training for Adults: Work Your Brain 2	DS
5	New Super Mario Bros.	DS
6	Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	PS2
7	Wario: Master of Disguise	DS
8	Bokujou Monogatari: Kimi to Sodatsu Shima	DS
9	Luminous Arc	DS
10	Let's Make a J-League Pro Soccer Club 5	PS2

TOP 10 GI

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	System
1	God of War II	N/A	PS2
2	World of Warcraft: The Burning Crusade	1	PC
3	The Elder Scrolls IV: Shivering Isles	N/A	multi
4	The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess	2	Wii
5	Ratchet and Clank: Size Matters	N/A	PSP
6	Supreme Commander	N/A	PC
7	Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six Vegas	3	360
8	Crackdown	4	360
9	Guitar Hero II	7	multi
10	Final Fantasy VI Advance	N/A	GBA

The Staff's Favorite Picks

TOP 10 PC

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	Price
1	World Of Warcraft: The Burning Crusade	N/A	$37
2	World Of Warcraft	2	$25
3	World Of Warcraft: Burning Crusade Collector's Ed	N/A	$69
4	The Sims 2	3	$41
5	The Sims 2: Pets	1	$30
6	3333 XP Games JC	N/A	$10
7	Vanguard: Saga Of Heroes	N/A	$50
8	Battlefield 2142	8	$44
9	The Sims 2: Nightlife	N/A	$31
10	Age Of Empires III	N/A	$49

*Source: NPD Interactive Entertainment Service • Kristin Barnett-Von-Korff (516) 625-2481
Based On Monthly Units Sold

Source: The NPD Group/NPD Funworld®/TRSTS® • David Riley 516-625-2277

REVIEWSARCHIVE

PLAYSTATION 3

Title	Score	Date
Blazing Angels: Squadrons of WWII	7	Feb-07
Call of Duty 3	8.75	Jan-07
Def Jam: Icon	7.75	Mar-07
Fight Night Round 3	9	Jan-07
Full Auto 2: Battlelines	7.5	Jan-07
Genji: Days of the Blade	6	Dec-06
Madden NFL 07	7.75	Jan-07
Major League Baseball 2K7	8.5	Jan-07
Marvel: Ultimate Alliance	9.25	Dec-06
Mobile Suit Gundam: Crossfire	3.75	Dec-06
NBA 07	7	Dec-06
NBA 2K7	8	Jan-07
NBA Street Homecourt	8.75	Mar-07
Need for Speed: Carbon	8.5	Dec-06
NHL 2K7	8.25	Jan-07
Resistance: Fall of Man	9.5	Dec-06
Ridge Racer 7	8	Dec-06
Sonic the Hedgehog	6.75	Jan-07
Tony Hawk's Project 8	8.75	Jan-07
Untold Legends: Dark Kingdom	8.25	Jan-07
Virtua Fighter 5	8	Mar-07

XBOX 360

Crackdown – Xbox 360 – Mar-07

Title	Score	Date
Battlestations: Midway	6.5	Mar-07
Bullet Witch	6	Mar-07
Call of Duty 3	8.5	Dec-06
College Hoops 2K7	8	Feb-07
Crackdown	8.5	Mar-07
Dead or Alive Xtreme 2	7.5	Jan-07
Def Jam: Icon	7.75	Feb-07
Eragon	6.25	Feb-07
F.E.A.R.	8.5	Dec-06
FIFA Soccer 07	7.25	Dec-06
Gears of War	9.5	Dec-06
Godfather, The	7.75	Oct-06
Just Cause	7.25	Oct-06
LEGO Star Wars II: The Original Trilogy	8	Oct-06
Lost Planet: Extreme Condition	8.25	Feb-07
Madden NFL 07	7.75	Oct-06
Major League Baseball 2K7	8.5	Mar-07
Marvel: Ultimate Alliance	9.25	Dec-06
NBA 2K7	8.25	Nov-06
NBA Live 07	5.25	Dec-06
NBA Street Homecourt	8.75	Mar-07
NCAA 07 March Madness	7.75	Feb-07
Need for Speed: Carbon	8.5	Dec-06
NHL 07	7.25	Oct-06
NHL 2K7	8.25	Oct-06
Phantasy Star Universe	6	Jan-07
Samurai Warriors 2	6	Nov-06
Sonic the Hedgehog	6.75	Jan-07
Splinter Cell: Double Agent	9	Dec-06
Star Trek Legacy	7.75	Jan-07
Superman Returns	6	Jan-07
Test Drive Unlimited	8.25	Nov-06
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 07	8	Nov-06
Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six Vegas	9.5	Jan-07
Tony Hawk's Project 8	9	Dec-06
Viva Piñata	8	Jan-07
Winning Eleven: Pro Evolution Soccer 2007	8	Mar-07
WWE Smackdown vs. Raw 2007	8.75	Dec-06

Wii

Title	Score	Date
Ant Bully, The	6.5	Feb-07
Call of Duty 3	7.25	Jan-07
Chicken Little: Ace in Action	7.25	Jan-07
Dragonball Z Budokai Tenkaichi 2	6	Feb-07
Elebits	7	Jan-07
Excite Truck	7.75	Jan-07
Far Cry Vengeance	4.5	Mar-07
Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess, The	10	Jan-07
Madden NFL 07	7.75	Jan-07
Marvel: Ultimate Alliance	8.25	Jan-07
Metal Slug Anthology	7.5	Jan-07
Rayman Raving Rabbids	8.5	Jan-07
Red Steel	7.5	Jan-07
SpongeBob SquarePants: Creature from the Krusty Krab	6.75	Feb-07
Super Monkey Ball: Banana Blitz	6.75	Jan-07
Super Swing Golf	8	Feb-07
Tony Hawk's Downhill Jam	5	Jan-07
Trauma Center: Second Opinion	8.5	Jan-07
WarioWare: Smooth Moves	7.75	Mar-07
Wii Sports	6.5	Jan-07

PLAYSTATION 2

Title	Score	Date
Ant Bully, The	6.5	Feb-07
Ar Tonelico: Melody of Elemia	6.75	Feb-07
Arthur And The Invisibles	6.75	Mar-07
ATV Offroad Fury 4	7.5	Jan-07
Bully	8.5	Dec-06
Capcom Classics Collection Volume 2	7	Dec-06
Destroy All Humans 2	8.5	Nov-06

Title	Score	Date
Dot Hack//G.U. Vol. 1//Rebirth	5.75	Dec-06
Eragon	6.25	Feb-07
Family Guy	5.5	Jan-07
Fast and the Furious, The	6	Nov-06
FIFA 07	7.75	Oct-06
Final Fantasy XII	9.25	Nov-06
Ghost Rider	6.75	Mar-07
God Hand	6	Nov-06
Guitar Hero II	9	Dec-06
Just Cause	7.25	Oct-06
Justice League Heroes	7.25	Dec-06
Legend of Spyro: A New Beginning, The	7	Nov-06
LEGO Star Wars II: The Original Trilogy	8	Oct-06
Madden NFL 07	8.25	Oct-06
Marvel: Ultimate Alliance	9.25	Dec-06
Mortal Kombat: Armageddon	8.25	Nov-06
MVP 07 NCAA Baseball	7	Mar-07
NASCAR 07	7.75	Oct-06
NBA 07	7.5	Nov-06
NBA 2K7	8	Nov-06
NBA Live 07	7.5	Nov-06
Need for Speed: Carbon	8.5	Dec-06
NFL Street 3	7	Feb-07
NHL 07	7.75	Oct-06
NHL 2K7	6.75	Oct-06
Okami	9.5	Oct-06
Phantasy Star Universe	6	Jan-07
Reservoir Dogs	5.75	Jan-07
Rogue Galaxy	9	Jan-07
Rule of Rose	6.25	Oct-06
Samurai Warriors 2	6	Nov-06
Scarface: The World is Yours	8.5	Nov-06
Sega Genesis Collection	8.5	Jan-07
Shield, The	4	Mar-07
Shin Megami Tensei: Devil Summoner	7.75	Dec-06
Sims 2: Pets, The	6	Dec-06
SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs Combined Assault	6.5	Jan-07
Sopranos: Road to Respect, The	6	Feb-07
Spy Hunter: Nowhere to Run	3	Nov-06
Star Trek Encounters	7.25	Jan-07
Tales of the Abyss	7.25	Nov-06
Thrillville	7.75	Dec-06
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 07	8	Nov-06
Tokobot Plus: Mysteries of the Karakuri	7.25	Dec-06
Valkyrie Profile 2: Silmeria	8	Oct-06
Winning Eleven: Pro Evolution Soccer 2007	8	Mar-07
WWE Smackdown vs. Raw 2007	8.75	Dec-06

GAMECUBE

Title	Score	Date
Ant Bully, The	6.5	Feb-07
Baten Kaitos Origins	7	Nov-06
FIFA 07	7.75	Oct-06
Legend of Spyro: A New Beginning, The	7	Nov-06
LEGO Star Wars II: The Original Trilogy	8	Oct-06
Madden NFL 07	8.25	Oct-06
Sims 2: Pets, The	6	Dec-06

XBOX

Title	Score	Date
Capcom Classics Collection Volume 2	7	Dec-06
Destroy All Humans 2	8.5	Nov-06
Eragon	6.25	Feb-07
Family Guy	5.5	Jan-07
FIFA 07	7.75	Oct-06
Just Cause	7.25	Oct-06
Justice League Heroes	7.25	Dec-06
Legend of Spyro: A New Beginning, The	7	Nov-06
LEGO Star Wars II: The Original Trilogy	8	Oct-06
Madden NFL 07	8.25	Oct-06
Marvel: Ultimate Alliance	9.25	Dec-06
Mortal Kombat: Armageddon	8.25	Dec-06
NASCAR 07	7.75	Oct-06
NBA 2K7	8	Nov-06
NBA Live 07	7.5	Nov-06
Need for Speed: Carbon	8.5	Dec-06
NHL 07	7.75	Oct-06
NHL 2K7	6.75	Oct-06
Painkiller: Hell Wars	7.75	Oct-06
Reservoir Dogs	5.75	Jan-07
Scarface: The World is Yours	8.5	Nov-06
Spy Hunter: Nowhere to Run	3	Nov-06
Thrillville	7.75	Dec-06
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 07	8	Nov-06

PC

Title	Score	Date
Age of Empires III: The Warchiefs	7	Dec-06
Ant Bully, The	6.5	Feb-07

The Lord of the Rings: Battle for Middle-earth II – Rise of the Witch-King – PC – Feb-07

Title	Score	Date
Battlefield 2142	8.5	Nov-06
Battlestations: Midway	6.5	Mar-07
Company of Heroes	9	Oct-06
Dark Messiah of Might & Magic	9.25	Dec-06
Dungeon Siege II: Broken World	7.5	Oct-06
F.E.A.R.: Extraction Point	8	Dec-06
Gothic 3	5	Feb-07
Heroes of Annihilated Empires	6	Feb-07
Heroes of Might & Magic V: Hammers of Fate	8	Feb-07
Just Cause	7.25	Oct-06
Lord of the Rings: The Battle for Middle-earth II – Rise of the Witch-King, The	8	Feb-07
Maelstrom	4	Mar-07
Mage Knight Apocalypse	6	Dec-06
Medieval II: Total War	9.25	Jan-07
Neverwinter Nights 2	8	Dec-06
ParaWorld	7	Dec-06
Phantasy Star Universe	6	Jan-07
Reservoir Dogs	5.75	Jan-07
Sid Meier's Railroads!	8	Dec-06
Sims 2: Pets, The	6	Dec-06
Star Wars Empire at War: Forces of Corruption	7.5	Dec-06
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 07	8	Nov-06
Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War – Dark Crusade	8.75	Dec-06

NINTENDO DS

Title	Score	Date
Dragon Quest Heroes: Rocket Slime	8.25	Oct-06
Diddy Kong Racing	7	Mar-07
Elite Beat Agents	6.75	Feb-07
Final Fantasy III	8	Dec-06
Gunpey	7.75	Feb-07
Hotel Dusk: Room 215	7	Mar-07
Kirby Squeak Squad	7.75	Feb-07
Konductra	6.25	Feb-07
Mage Knight: Destiny's Soldier	4.5	Dec-06
Magical Starsign	6.5	Nov-06
Mario Hoops 3-on-3	6.5	Nov-06
Mario vs. Donkey Kong 2: March of the Minis	6	Nov-06
MechAssault: Phantom War	7.75	Oct-06
Mega Man ZX	7	Oct-06
Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney Justice For All	8	Jan-07
Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Blue Rescue Team	3	Nov-06
Pokémon Ranger	5	Dec-06
Scurge: Hive	7.5	Nov-06
Star Fox Command	8	Oct-06
Touch Detective	6.75	Nov-06
Yoshi's Island DS	8.25	Dec-06

PSP

Lumines II – PSP – Dec-06

Title	Score	Date
50 Cent Bulletproof: G Unit Edition	6.25	Nov-06
Ace Combat X: Skies of Deception	8.25	Dec-06
Bounty Hounds	6.25	Nov-06
Death Jr. 2: Root of Evil	8.25	Nov-06
Dungeon Siege: Throne of Agony	8	Jan-07
Dynasty Warriors Vol.2	5	Dec-06
EA Replay	6.75	Dec-06
Every Extend Extra	8.25	Nov-06
Gangs of London	6	Nov-06
Gitaroo Man Lives!	9	Dec-06
Godfather: Mob Wars, The	4.5	Nov-06
Grand Theft Auto: Vice City Stories	8.5	Dec-06
Gun Showdown	7.75	Dec-06
Gunpey	7.75	Dec-06
Killzone: Liberation	7.25	Nov-06
The Legend of Heroes III: Song of the Ocean	6	Mar-07
LocoRoco	7.5	Oct-06
Lumines II	9	Dec-06
Medal of Honor Heroes	6.75	Dec-06
Metal Gear Solid: Portable Ops	9	Feb-07
Miami Vice	6.75	Oct-06
Monster Kingdom Jewel Summoner	6	Mar-07
Mortal Kombat: Unchained	8	Feb-07
Power Stone Collection	7.75	Nov-06
SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs Fire Team Bravo 2	7.5	Jan-07
Sonic Rivals	6.75	Feb-07
Spectral Souls	5.5	Nov-06
Star Wars: Lethal Alliance	6.5	Feb-07
Ultimate Ghosts 'n Goblins	7.25	Oct-06
Valhalla Knights	4.5	Mar-07
Warhammer: Battle for Atluma	7.5	Feb-07
WTF	7	Nov-06

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Title	Score	Date
Final Fantasy V Advance	8	Jan-07
Summon Knight: Swordcraft Story 2	7.25	Jan-07
Yggdra Union	7.25	Feb-07

Supreme Commander

PC
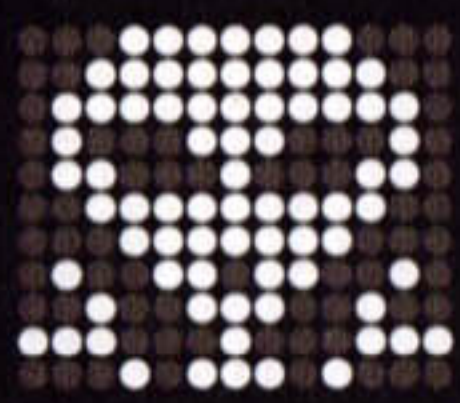
Strategies to help you finish the UEF campaign straight from the experts at Gas Powered Games

By William Harms, Editorial Manager

You've battled your way across the galaxy, crushed countless Cybran and Aeon armies, and now the final battle is at hand: the defense of Black Sun. Complete this operation and the Infinite War will come to an end and the UEF will emerge triumphant. This strategy assumes that you're playing on the medium difficulty.

OPENING MOVES

You begin with a pre-established base, and the final parts for Black Sun are being ferried in from the east. One of the transports is shot down, so your first objective is to recover the component the transport was carrying.

Queue up 20 Tech 3 Engineers and send them to the middle part of your base. Begin to construct two Quantum Gates (and queue up Support Commanders) and build two Strategic Missile Defenses, one in the middle and one on the northwestern edge of your base.

Begin to construct a never-ending stream of T3 Assault Bots. Have them move to the northern part of your base and establish a defensive line. Reinforce them with T3 SAM [Surface to Air Missiles] launchers, shields, and Point Defenses.

While you're doing this, build SAM sites along the eastern edge of your island and construct T3 Gunships and a large navy. Once the SAMs are complete, queue up a long line of T3 Fabricators and Fusion Generators. You're going to need the resources.

Finally, upgrade your ACU so that it has all of the available resource and construction enhancements. Begin to build an Atlantis and a Strategic Missile Launcher. Assist the latter with 10 T3 Engineers and start pumping out nukes.

RETRIEVING THE COMPONENT

When you have a good-sized navy and several T3 Gunships, begin your assault on the Aeons defending the component. Take out the initial line of defense and rebuild as necessary.

Once you've punched a hole in the Aeon defenses, flood the area with your Gunships and Interceptors and send in a Transport. The Aeon ships will target your other air units, so if you time it right, your Transport will be able to get in and out unharmed.

DESTROY THE AEON ISLAND

Once you have the component, UEF techs will work to complete Black Sun. However, it is revealed that an Aeon Commander is on an island to the southeast of your position. You must eliminate the threat.

There are two ways to do this: brute force or nukes. I prefer the latter, so I immediately let the nukes fly. There are two Strategic Missile Defenses on the island (one to the south and one to the north), so the key is to strike outside of their range.
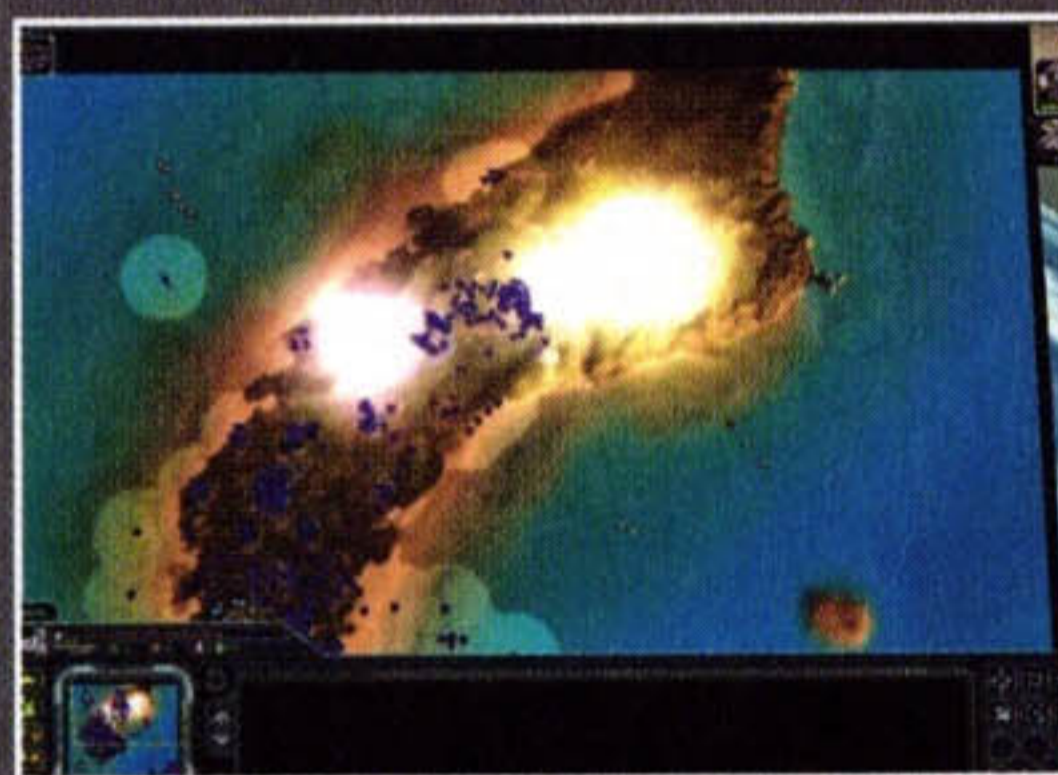
First, nuke the naval facilities to the south, then send in T3 Gunships and target the Missile Defense. Once it is down, nuke that area two times. Load up three or four T2 Transports with T3 Bots and land them on the southern edge of the Aeon island. March them north.

Continue to nuke the island and send in Bots. In no time at all, the Aeon will fall.
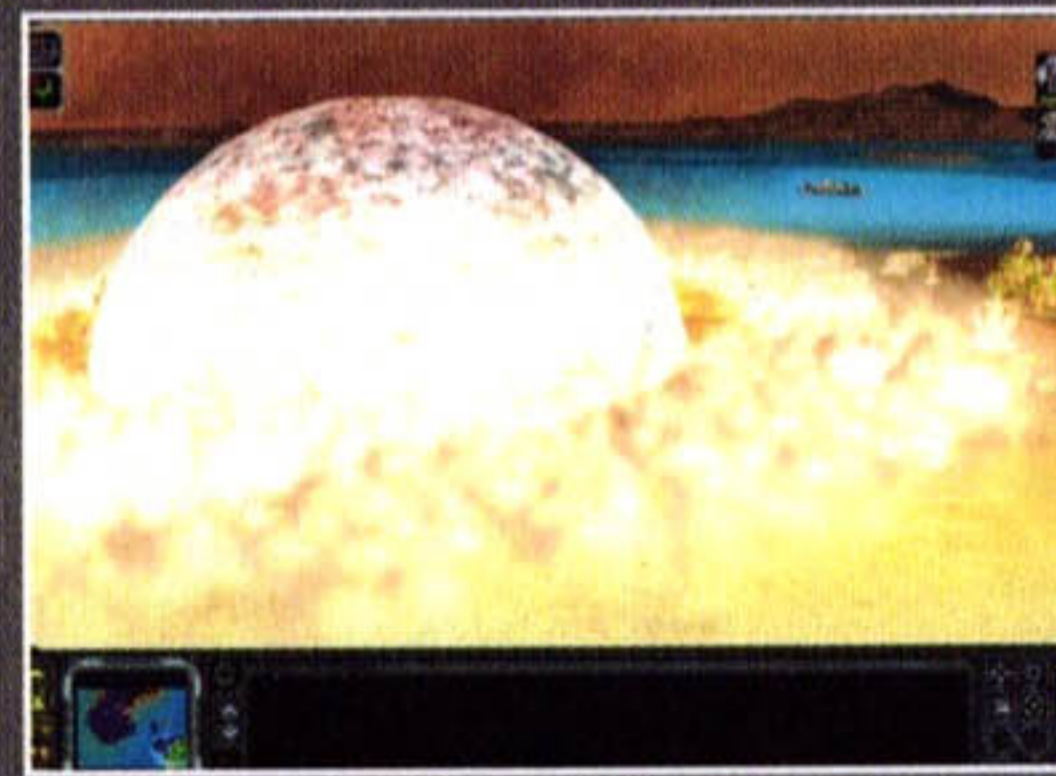
THE END

Once the Aeon Commander is defeated, the Cybrans will send in three Monkeylords (and other units) from the north. By this point, you should have a solid defensive line. Use every weapon you've got to deal with the threat. If the Monkeylords get through, it'll get ugly. Use nukes to hit the enemy as they approach your position.

At the same time, the enemy will begin to fire nukes at you. If you have Missile Defenses, you'll be fine. If not, you're in serious trouble. (If you find yourself hitting the unit cap, destroy all non-essential units and structures–select them and press CTRL + K–to free up space.)

In the end, Arnold will appear on the scene and you'll have to deal with two Aeon experimental weapons. Take them down and then destroy Arnold. Black Sun is now ready to fire–select it and press the Fire button! You have just ended the Infinite War.


Mod World

MYST ONLINE: URU LIVE
http://www.mystonline.com
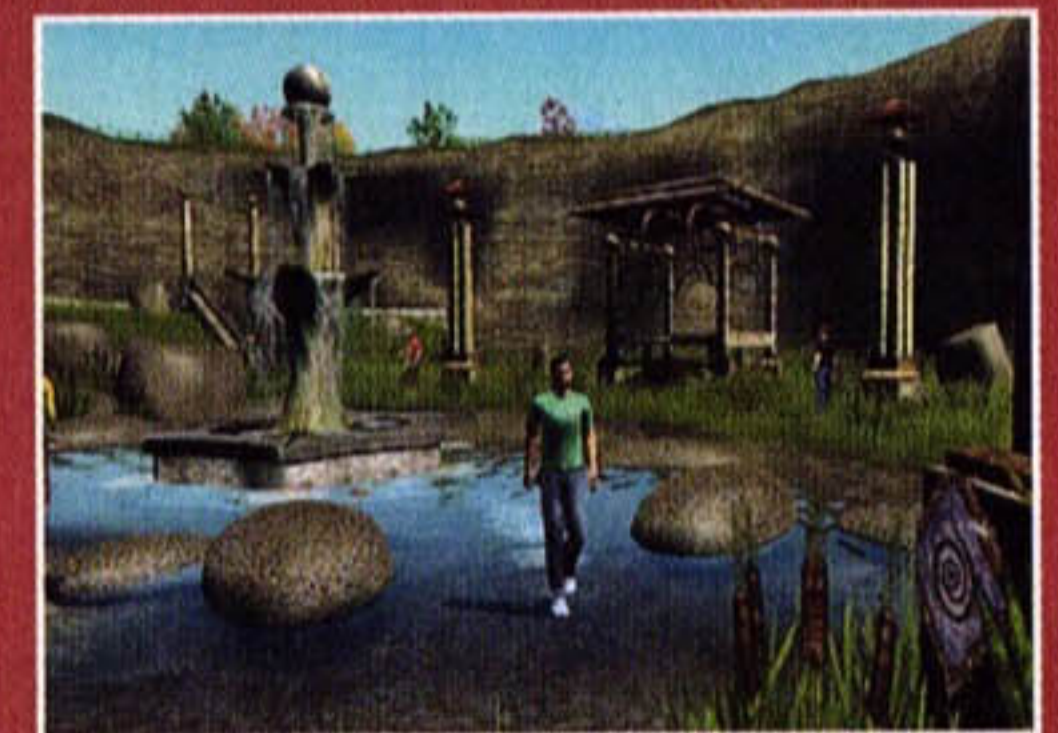
Cyan Worlds' high-concept online portion of Uru: Ages Beyond Myst never really materialized; financial problems and lower than expected sales of the game prevented the developer from realizing its vision. Internet gaming provider GameTap saw something it liked, though, and Cyan Worlds is getting a second chance to make good on its promises. The online portion of Uru lives as of February 15th.
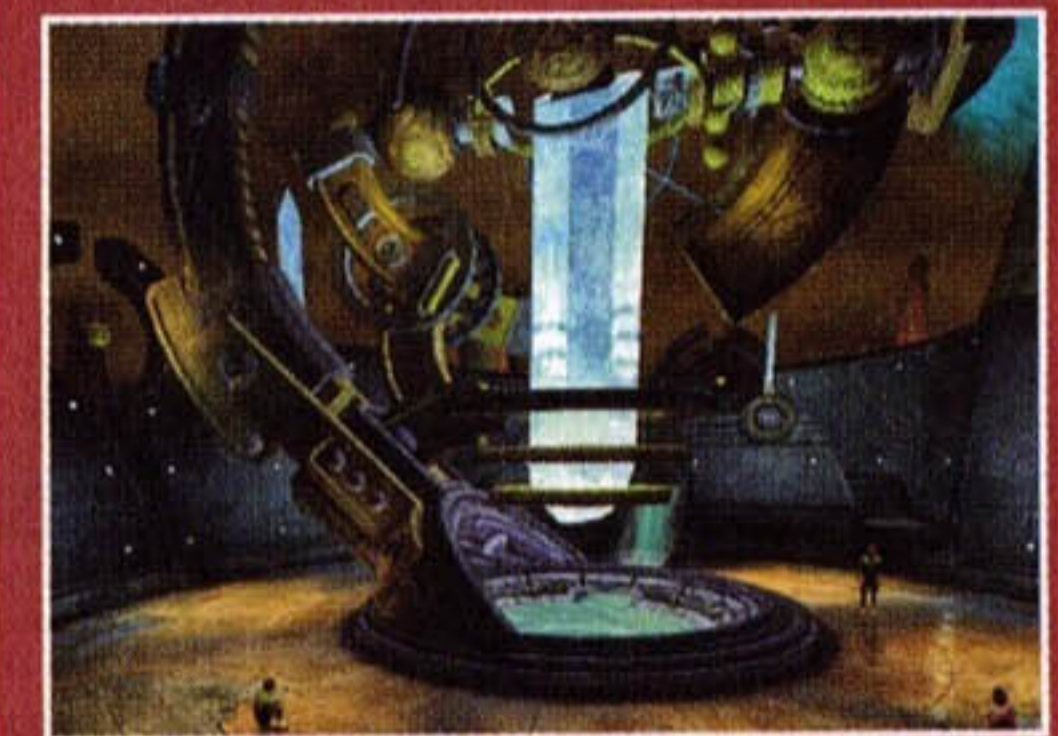
Though GameTap is offering a free trial for Uru Live, it does require a subscription to the service ($6.95 per month, and you get access to the rest of GameTap as well). For adventure game fans, though, it's a small price to pay. Uru Live is more or less a massively multiplayer adventure game, with puzzles that require the effort of many people working in concert to solve. Knowing how far Myst fans will go in their dorking-out over the worlds, their histories, and the puzzles that link them all together, the community won't take long to get up and running.

Yeah, it's not technically a mod or free, but Uru Live is a big enough deal that it's more than worthy of going in this space. Head over to the URL above to learn everything you need to know about the game, and even sign up and download the trial or full version. If adventure is your genre, you should be aware that nobody does it better than Cyan Worlds, traditional delivery method or not.

PLAYSTATION 2

Eragon

Pause the game and enter the following to enable the effect. You'll hear a sound if you entered the code correctly

Fury Mode – Hold L1, L2, R1, and R2, then enter □ (x2), ✕ (x2)

"GI Droid" (location unknown – last seen shaving pop stars' heads)

Reservoir Dogs

Go to the Extras menu and select Cheats. Enter any one of the following codes from that page to unlock it – you'll then be able to enable or disable the code whenever you like.

Adrenaline Rush – ✕, L1, ○, ✕, L1, ✕, Start
Art Gallery – ○, ✕, L2, R2, ○, ✕, Start
Battering Ram – L2 (x2), ✕ (x2), ○, R2, Start
Bulletproof – L1, R1, ○ (x2), R1, ○, Start
Magic Bullet – R1, L2, ○, ✕, R1, ✕, Start
Movie Gallery – L1 (x2), ○, ✕, L1, R1, Start
Time Out – R1 (x2), R2, ○, ✕, L2, Start
Unlimited Ammo – R2, L2, ○, L2, ✕, R2, Start
Unlock All Levels – L2, R2, L2, R2, L1, R1, Start

XBOX

Reservoir Dogs

Adrenaline Rush – A, L, Y, A, L, A, Start
Art Gallery – Y, A, Black, White, Y, A, Start
Battering Ram – Black (x2), A (x2), Y, White, Start
Bulletproof – L, R, Y (x2), R, Y, Start
Magic Bullet – R, Black, Y, A, R, A, Start
Movie Gallery – L(x2), Y, A, L, R, Start
Time Out – R (x2), White, Y, A, Black, Start
Unlimited Ammo – White, Black, Y, Black, A, White, Start
Unlock All Levels – Black, White, Black, White, L, R, Start

Wii

Avatar: The Last Airbender

Go to Extras, then Code Entry, in order to input these cheats.

All Treasure Maps – 37437
Character Concept Gallery – 97831
Double Damage – 34743
Neverending Stealth – 53467
One Hit Dishonor – 54641
Unlimited Chi – 24463
Unlimited Copper – 23637
Unlimited Health – 94677

Chicken Little: Ace In Action

Enter these codes using the d-pad by selecting the Cheat option before you begin a level.

Unlock All Levels – Right, Up, Left, Right, Up
Unlock All Weapons – Right, Down, Right, Left
Unlock Unlimited Shield – Right, Down, Right, Down, Right

Code of the Month   PS3

NBA Street Homecourt

So you're not as street as you thought you were? Don't worry, dawg. We got your back. While there are not a lot of cheat codes for Homecourt, the ones there are certainly should help you along. You'll need to go to the main menu and press L1 and R1 (LB and RB on the 360) before you can enter the codes. You'll also need to re-enter the codes every time you turn the game back on.

Unlock All Courts – Up, Right, Down, Left
Unlock All Teams – Left, Right, Left, Right

*Justin Oliver
Spokane, WA*

Xbox Live Arcade Spotlight

Eets: Chowdown

We've had a kick playing with the PC version of Eets, and now that little smiling guy is headed to the 360. The Live Arcade version of Eets includes 120 never-before-seen levels of insane puzzle piece collecting. Not unlike Lemmings, Eets stars a happy-go-lucky critter blissfully unaware of his strange cartoony surroundings. By feeding him different power-ups like radioactive ginseng, you'll change his emotional state from happy to scared to angry. If he's frightened, he'll tiptoe up to a ledge and turn around – piss him off and he'll wildly leap from that same precipice. Using a stange assortment of tools you'll guide Eets around the board to collect the required item. It's a puzzle game with its own insane twist. Just consider the newly added Marsh Madness mode, where players must do all in their power to hold off an invasion of evil marshmallows.
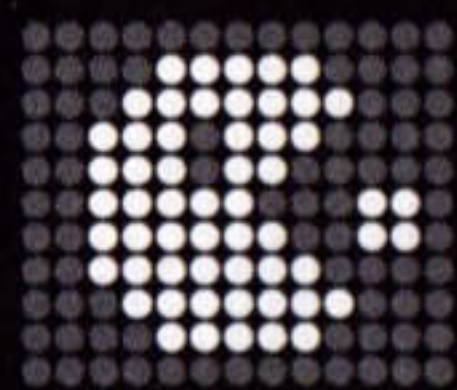
UNLIMITED ENABLED

THE MAN WITH THE GOLDEN GAME

LOOKING BACK AT OUR FAVORITE BOND ADVENTURE

It was 1997, and a new James Bond movie, **Tomorrow Never Dies**, was hitting theaters in December. That August, a James Bond video game had been released based on the movie – not the new one – the one that had come out more than a year and a half prior. At E3 that year, GoldenEye 007 seemed to slip under the radar. The hype for this game was dreadfully low. To make matters worse, GoldenEye was a first-person shooter on the N64, and everyone knew that FPS was a PC genre; they didn't work on consoles. No one expected this game to be any good. The world had no idea what was in store for it.

Winding Journey

Nintendo had purchased the James Bond license and was originally interested in making a 2D sidescroller for the SNES. They approached Rare about doing a movie tie-in, but enthusiasm for the project quickly started to run low and the game languished on the back burners. Finally, in early 1995, work began on a James Bond game. It was originally envisioned as an on-rails shooter similar to Virtua Cop. However, throughout the whole first year of development, Rare didn't have any of Nintendo's development kits, so it had no idea how the game would ultimately control.

Aside from James Bond series, the GoldenEye team started to draw inspiration from John Woo films like *Hard Boiled* and games like Super Mario Bros. Super Mario 64 was the big game of 1996 and it featured levels that could be replayed in order to complete different objectives. The GoldenEye team liked this and tried to incorporate something similar into its game, ultimately coming up with different difficulty settings with varying lists of primary objectives. Work on the game quickly slipped past its first deadline, but the game showed so much promise that Rare wasn't prepared to cancel it. Fast forward to August of 1997, GoldenEye released to some moderate critical success. It started to sell…and kept selling.

Lasting Impact

Despite being released in 1997, GoldenEye was almost the top-selling game of 1998. It reminded us why there were four controller ports on the front of our N64s giving us a reason to play with friends. GoldenEye opened the door for the console FPS. It was the game being played in dorm rooms all across America. Rare understood the limits of putting the genre on consoles and used them to its advantage. GoldenEye left a lasting impact on how FPS would be played on consoles.

People fondly remember GoldenEye's remarkable AI. Guards had patrol routes, and when they saw Bond they would run to activate the alarm. This sounds basic now, but at the time it was revolutionary. It also created some nice gameplay mechanics. In one scenario a player might enter a room where two guards would start shooting while another ran for the alarm. The player was immediately faced with the dilemma of who to shoot first.

GoldenEye was also very flat. Players didn't have to aim vertically very often, but this was an era before dual analog controls, and Rare made it work. The level designers started with little guidance; there were no early level designs that dictated where enemies or items would be placed. The designers' main goal was to create interesting environments for the players to roam around. This design plan might have been sloppy, but the results were levels that felt more realistic and engaging. More impressive than any of this, however, is that GoldenEye is still fun to play with friends even 10 years after its initial release. Every classic is worth popping in from time to time.

Breaking Stereotypes

Unless you really liked 1992's Aladdin, there really wasn't a video game that had taken a movie license and done justice by it. Then GoldenEye came along and proved that our industry could make a good movie-game. This paved the way for games like The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape From Butcher Bay, Lord of the Rings, and Spider-Man.

Numbers Game

Maybe they should have called him double-0 eight million, because that is how many units GoldenEye has sold since it's launch. Ahead of Mario Kart, Super Mario 64, and Ocarina of Time, GoldenEye is the best-selling N64 game in the U.S. It even outsold every title to ever come out on GameCube (but we're not really sure if that's impressive).

Play It Again, James

Want a fresh take on this classic? You can download a Half-Life 2 mod called GoldenEye: Source (see screen on left). This mod recreates the spirit of what made playing GoldenEye 007 so enjoyable. Check it out at www.goldeneyesource.com.
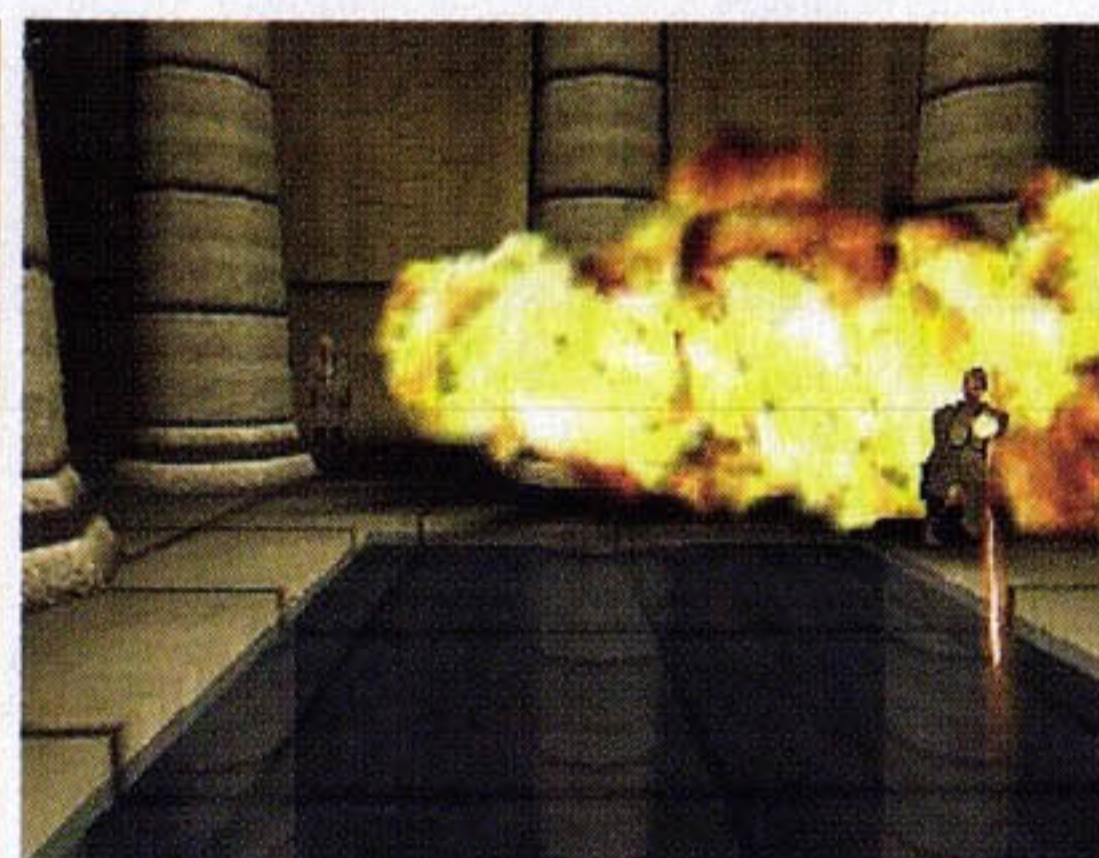
A BOND FOR ALL SEASONS

Not many people realize that Bond has had nearly as many games as he has movies. Here is a quick recap of all his games to date.

James Bond 007 (1983)
Atari 2600, Atari 5200, Commodore 64, Colecovision
Publisher: Parker Brothers
Developer: Parker Brothers

James Bond 007: A View to a Kill (1985)
Apple II, PC
Publisher: Mindscape
Developer: Angelsoft, Inc.

A View to a Kill (1985)
Commodore 64, PC
Publisher: Domark
Developer: Domark

James Bond 007: Goldfinger (1986)
Apple II, PC
Publisher: Mindscape Inc.
Developer: Angelsoft, Inc.

The Living Daylights (1986)
Commodore 64, PC
Publisher: Domark
Developer: Sculptured Software

Live and Let Die (1988)
Commodore 64, PC
Publisher: Mindscape
Developer: Elite Systems

007: License to Kill (1989)
Commodore 64, PC
Publisher: Domark
Developer: Quixel

The Spy Who Loved Me (1990)
Commodore 64, PC
Publisher: Domark
Developer: Domark

James Bond: The Stealth Affair (1990)
PC
Publisher: Interplay
Developer: Delphine Software

James Bond Jr. (1992)
Commodore 64, NES, SNES, PC
Publisher: THQ
Developer: Gray Matter

James Bond: The Duel (1993)
Sega Master System, Sega Mega Drive
Publisher: Domark
Developer: Domark

GoldenEye 007 (1997)
Nintendo 64
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Rare

James Bond 007 (1997)
Game Boy
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Saffire Inc.

Tomorrow Never Dies (1999)
PSone
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: Black Ops

The World Is Not Enough (2000)
PSone, N64, GBC
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: Eurocom

007 Racing (2000)
PSone
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: Eutechnyx

Agent Under Fire (2001)
PS2, Xbox, GameCube
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: Electronic Arts

Nightfire (2002)
PS2, Xbox, GameCube, GBA, PC, Mac
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: Eurocom

Everything or Nothing (2004)
PS2, Xbox, GameCube, GBA
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: Electronic Arts

GoldenEye: Rogue Agent (2004)
PS2, Xbox, GameCube, DS
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: Electronic Arts

From Russia with Love (2005)
PS2, Xbox, GameCube, PSP
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: Electronic Arts

THIS MONTH IN GAMING HISTORY

Fervently working to make their project presentable for MIT's annual Science Open House in May, Steve Russell, Peter Samson, Dan Edwards, and J. Graetz complete their work on Spacewar in April, 1962. Spacewar, generally considered the first video game ever made, was originally written on a PDP-1 computer, and the vector-graphics screen it used cost $50,000 alone. The video game was born.
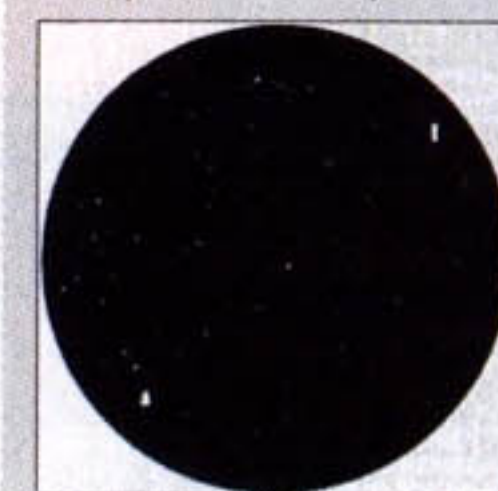
SUPER NINTENDO

SONIC BLAST MAN

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER TAITO > DEVELOPER TAITO > RELEASE 1992

Whatever fond memories you may have of side-scrolling brawlers, Sonic Blast Man defiles them. Forget controlling some cool dude on a noble quest to save his girlfriend; Sonic Blast Man looks like he wandered away from Dragon Con and started getting shanked by thugs. While it is satisfying to see the dingus get stabbed and sucker-punched, the game's feeble attempt to capture a kind of comic-book feel was clearly a higher priority than actual gameplay. Your moveset, though full of quirk, is unpredictable and clunky, and the variety of bad guys to pummel is poor even by brawler standards. As a throwback to the original arcade version of the game, between levels you play a minigame where you punch a goon in the face. If you do well, you are rewarded with points, which are used for absolutely nothing. It's hard to know which part of Sonic Blast Man to hate the most, but maybe that's to be expected from a "super hero" who is obviously wearing some kind of homemade radio costume.

RETRO RATING
NOW 5
THEN N/A
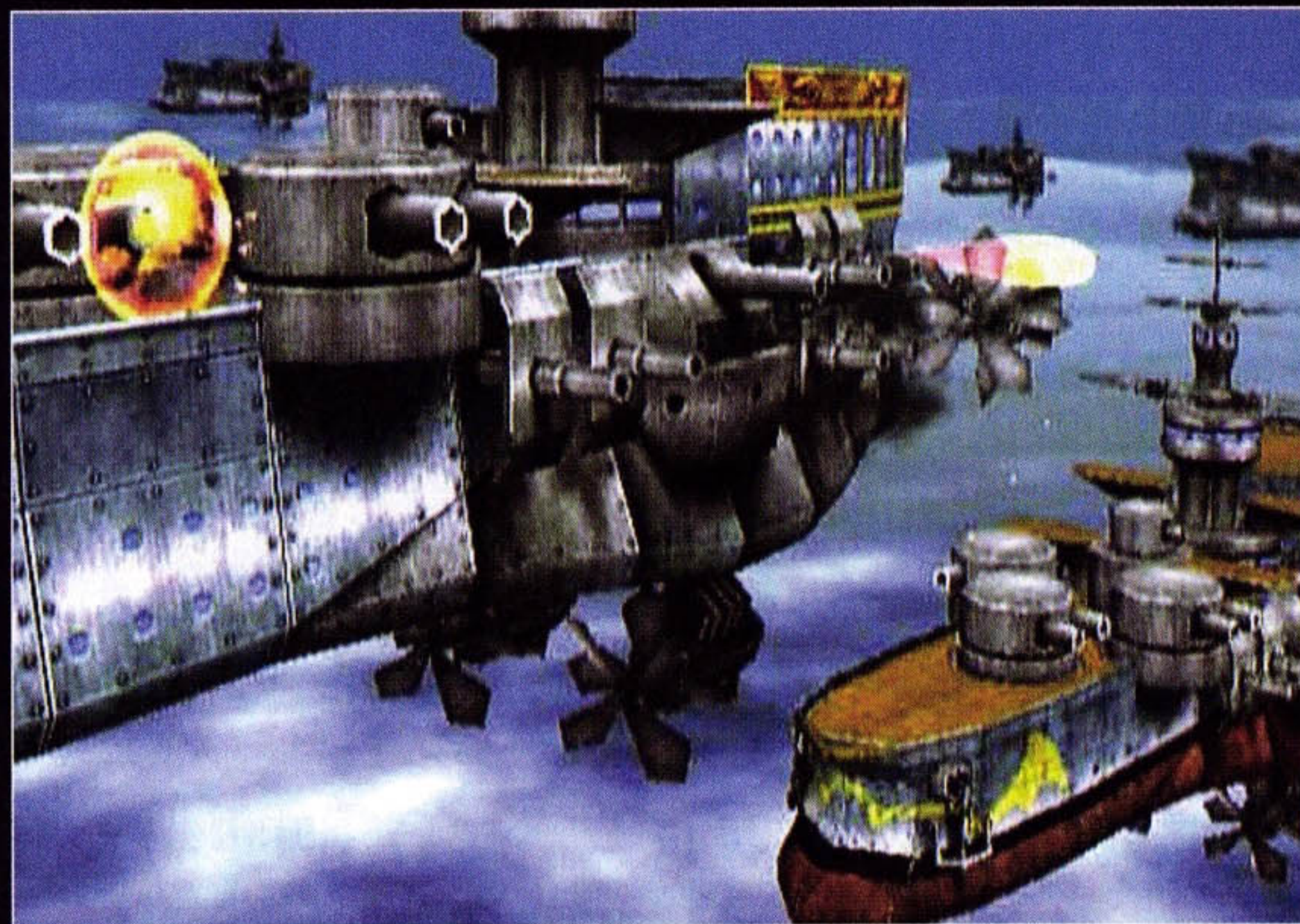
DREAMCAST

SKIES OF ARCADIA

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > PUBLISHER SEGA > DEVELOPER SEGA/OVERWORKS > RELEASE 2000

Skies is a pretty standard RPG. It covers all the bases: you travel around in an airship, talk to townspeople, and do your fair share of random battle level grinding. Even the story can hardly be called original. So why is this game so good? Even though Skies plays like almost every other RPG throughout time, it does it all so well that you remember why RPGs were ever fun to begin with. All the weapons in the game are imbued with different elemental powers that can be swapped in or out of the battles. Not only will you will need these various elements to beat certain enemies, you will learn different abilities and magic by leveling up the assorted elements. Unlike most RPGs, the airships in Skies also participate in some battles, and you will have to upgrade and repair your ship throughout the game in order to stay in top form. The sky ship battles are fun enough that someone could (no, should) make a game just about them. Like all classics, time has done little to age this great game.

RETRO RATING
NOW 8.5
THEN 8.5*

PLAYSTATION

UM JAMMER LAMMY

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER MUSIC > PUBLISHER SCEA > DEVELOPER NANAON-SHA > RELEASE 1999

After the cult hit that was Parappa the Rapper, there was an even smaller cult that embraced its spin-off. Um Jammer Lammy puts players in the shoes of Lammy, the lead guitarist of an all-girl band just before their first live gig. Under the advice of a wise-talking onion sensei, Lammy learns that she can conquer any situation by pretending she's playing her beloved guitar, from flying a plane to manhandling a fireman's water hose – think absurd more than funny. The gameplay is of the timed button press variety, with the added bonus of freestyling for the highest points, even if the technique for succeeding at such an effort is never really addressed by the game. A second unlockable playthrough as Parappa is a cool treat, but it's hard to believe anyone once defended this game for its amazing music – to call these tunes an acquired taste is granting them a huge favor.

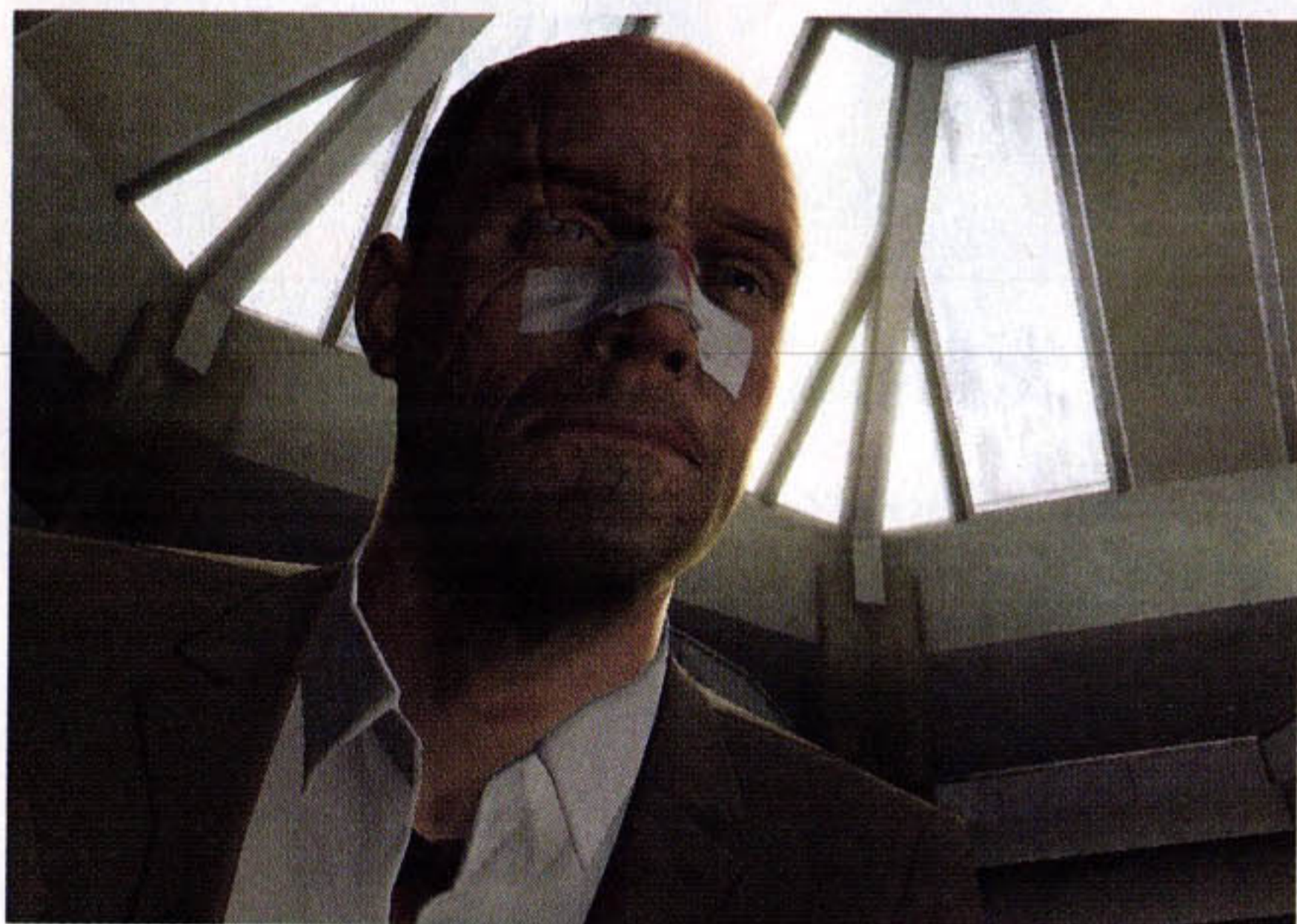**RETRO RATING**
NOW 7
THEN 8.25*

*Score given to the game when it first appeared in Game Informer. Skies of Arcadia (GI #93, 01/01) Um Jammer Lammy (GI #77, 09/99)

GAME**OVER**

"It Won't Be A Stylish Marriage. I Can't Afford A Carriage"

VIDEO GAME TRIVIA

Video game characters are cooler than you are, and they will only continue to get exponentially more awesome. With each over-the-top cinematic, protagonists keep raising the bar for what is considered "extreme." Answer the questions below to see where this trend will lead, and what unbelievable feats our heroes will be performing in the future.

1 RPGs released at a console launch tend to be forgotten quickly. Prove that you never forget by identifying which one of the following games was not a PS2 launch title?
- **A.** Eternal Ring
- **B.** Orphen: Scion of Sorcery
- **C.** Summoner
- **D.** Dark Cloud

2 In addition to be being a great platformer, Duck Tales for the NES also used the coolest character from the cartoon: Gizmoduck. In what level did this cyborg wonder appear to blast a wall for Scrooge McDuck?
- **A.** Himalayas
- **B.** Amazon
- **C.** Transylvania
- **D.** Moon
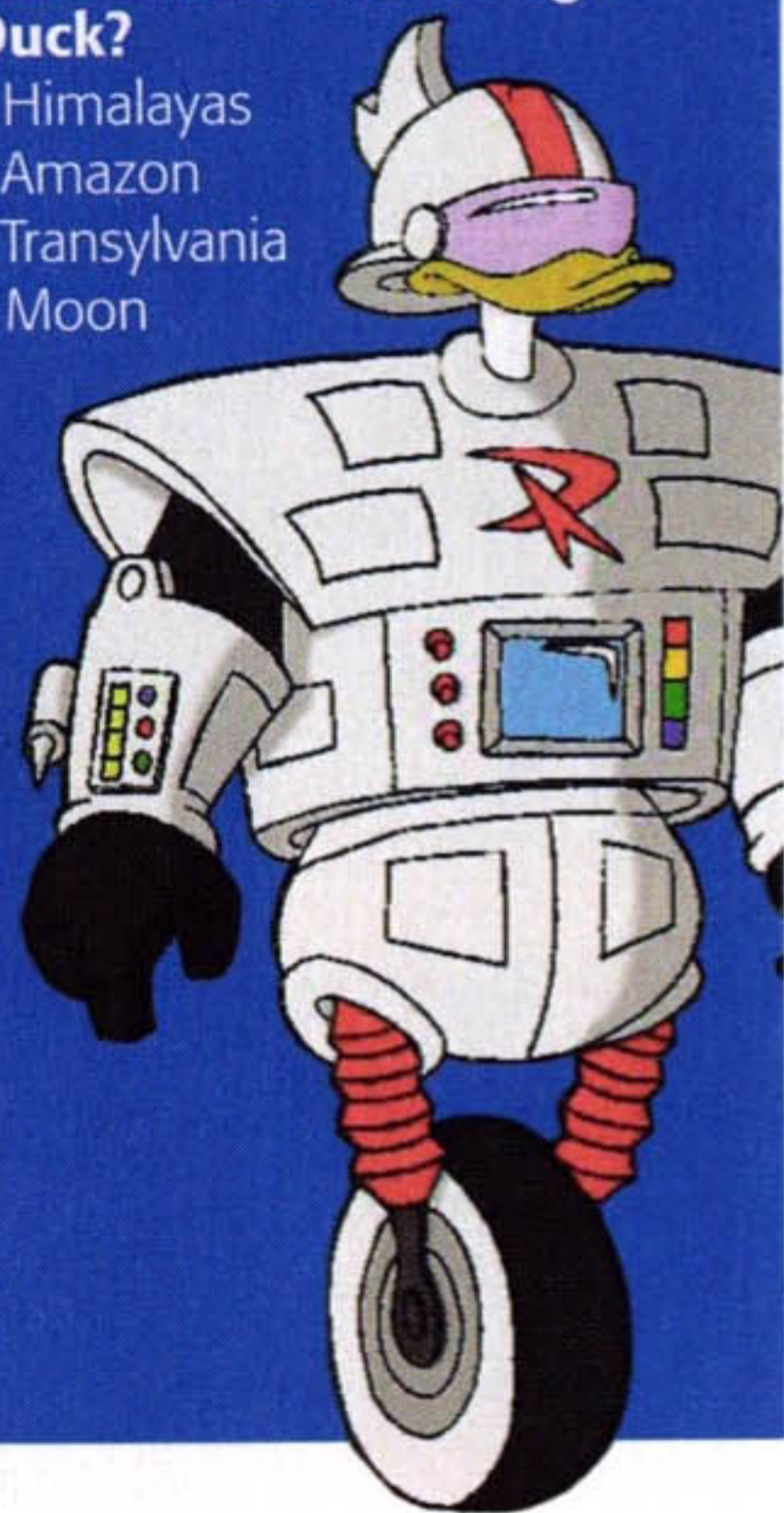
3 Metal Gear Solid: Portable Ops is full of secrets to be discovered. Which of these characters is not made playable by entering a password?
- **A.** EVA
- **B.** Null
- **C.** Gene
- **D.** Campbell

4 Anime series often see game adaptations, but they don't always make it to our shores. Which of these popular series has not had a game released in the U.S.?
- **A.** Samurai Champloo
- **B.** Neon Genesis Evangelion
- **C.** One Piece
- **D.** Naruto

5 Do you know your history? In the original game entitled Mario Bros., which of the following levels did NOT have a warp zone?
- **A.** 1-2
- **B.** 4-2
- **C.** 5-1
- **D.** There were no warp zones

6 Are you living in the HD era? Prove it by identifying which of these designations doesn't correspond to one of the signals in analog component video.
- **A.** Ct
- **B.** Pb
- **C.** Pr
- **D.** Y

7 In Mega Man 2, what robot from the first game reappears as a tank boss in Dr. Wily's castle?
- **A.** Guts Man
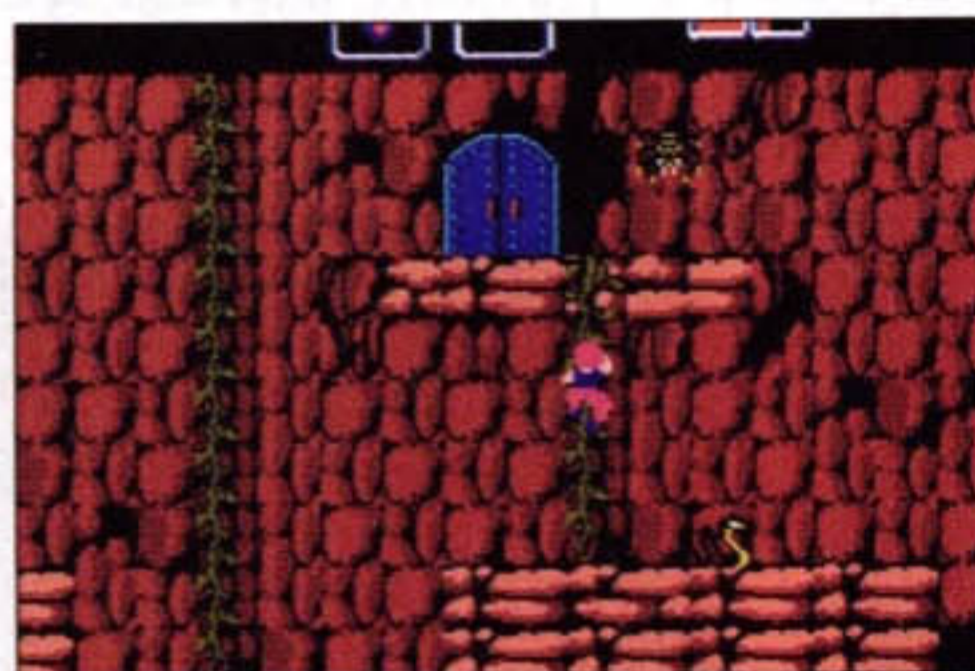- **B.** Elec Man
- **C.** Fire Man
- **D.** Juwanna Man
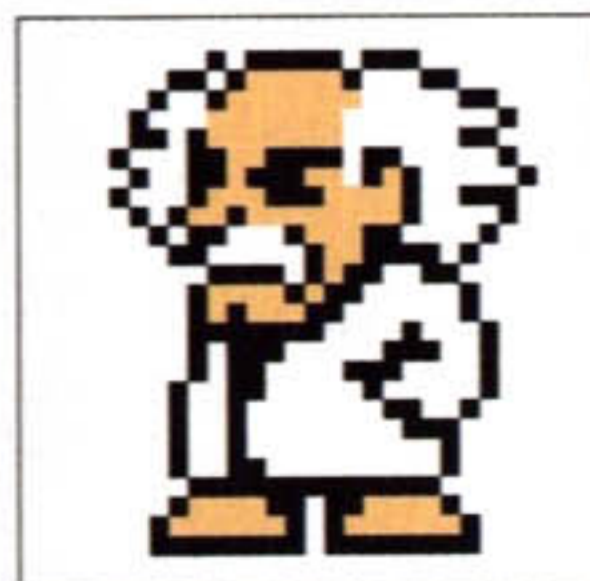
8 False or Super False: Thundercats would make an awesome video game.
- **A.** False
- **B.** Super False

9 The title of this licensed NES game suggests it is based on a movie sequel, but a film with the same name doesn't exist. What game is this screen from?
- **A.** The Stuff II
- **B.** Goonies II
- **C.** Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles IV
- **D.** Ghoulies III

10 The 1990s were a golden age of quality video game boxes. This art, complete with boxing kangaroo, adorns the cover of what 1994 Genesis title?
- **A.** Streets of Rage 3
- **B.** Final Fight 3
- **C.** Double Dragon III
- **D.** Defenders of Dynatron City 2

BREAKDOWN

10 Million DS and DS Lite units have been sold in North America since its 2004 release

-17 degrees Fahrenheit is pretty cold. Minnesota uses natural selection to weed out pansies

0% of Square Enix games using Unreal 3 should be Dirge of Cerberus II

19 of Nintendo's first-party titles sold over one million copies worldwide in 2006

100% of the GI office's "sick" days in January and February were due to an inflammation of the crusade. Wow, it burns!

★ Trivia Score & Rank ★

READY, SET, GO, GAME OVER!

0-1: Alex Kidd Gets A Job

2-3: Wario Implements Nano-Games

4-5: Sam Fisher Uses More Tech

6-7: Cloud Wields Bigger Sword

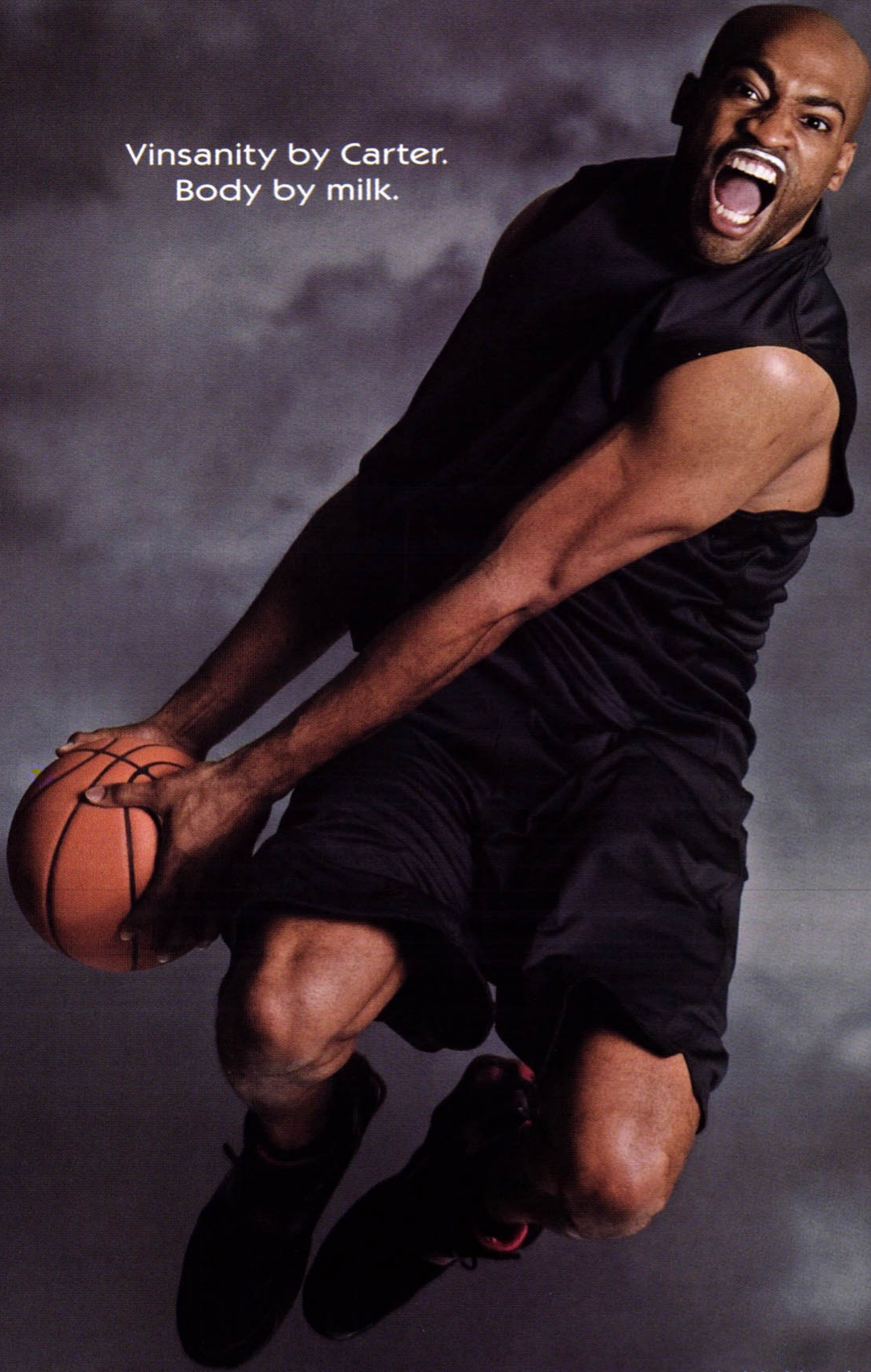**8-9:** Link Plays Four Ocarinas

10: Kratos Flys a Dinosaur

Video Game Trivia Answers: 1. D 2. D 3. D 4. B 5. D 6. A 7. A 8. B 9. B 10. A

Vinsanity by Carter.
Body by milk.

Slam it. The protein in milk helps build muscle and drinking it
regularly along with exercise will help keep your body toned. Staying active,
eating right and drinking 3 glasses a day of lowfat or fat free milk helps
you look great and stay in shape. So grab a glass and go crazy.

got milk?
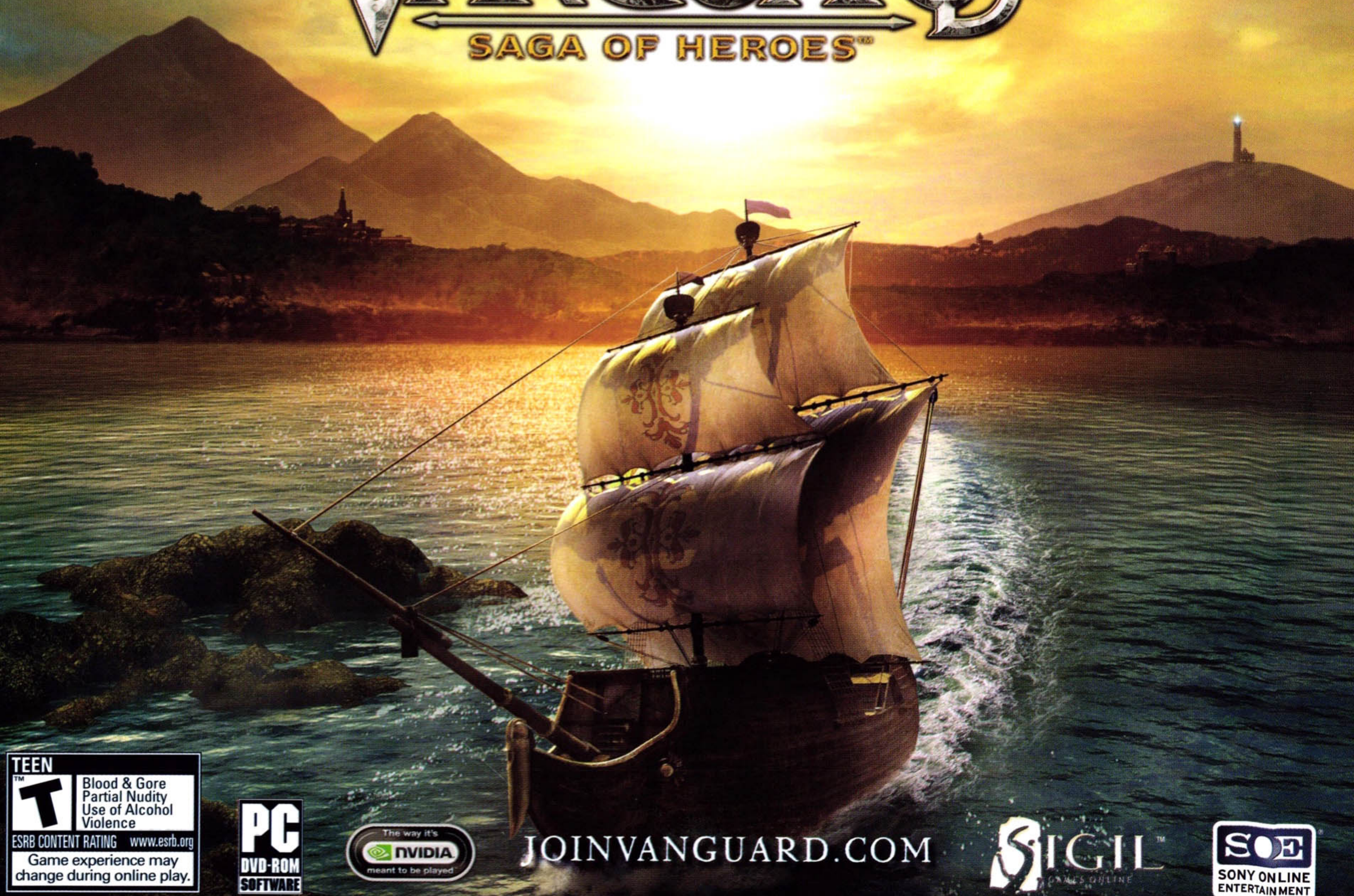www.bodybymilk.com

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