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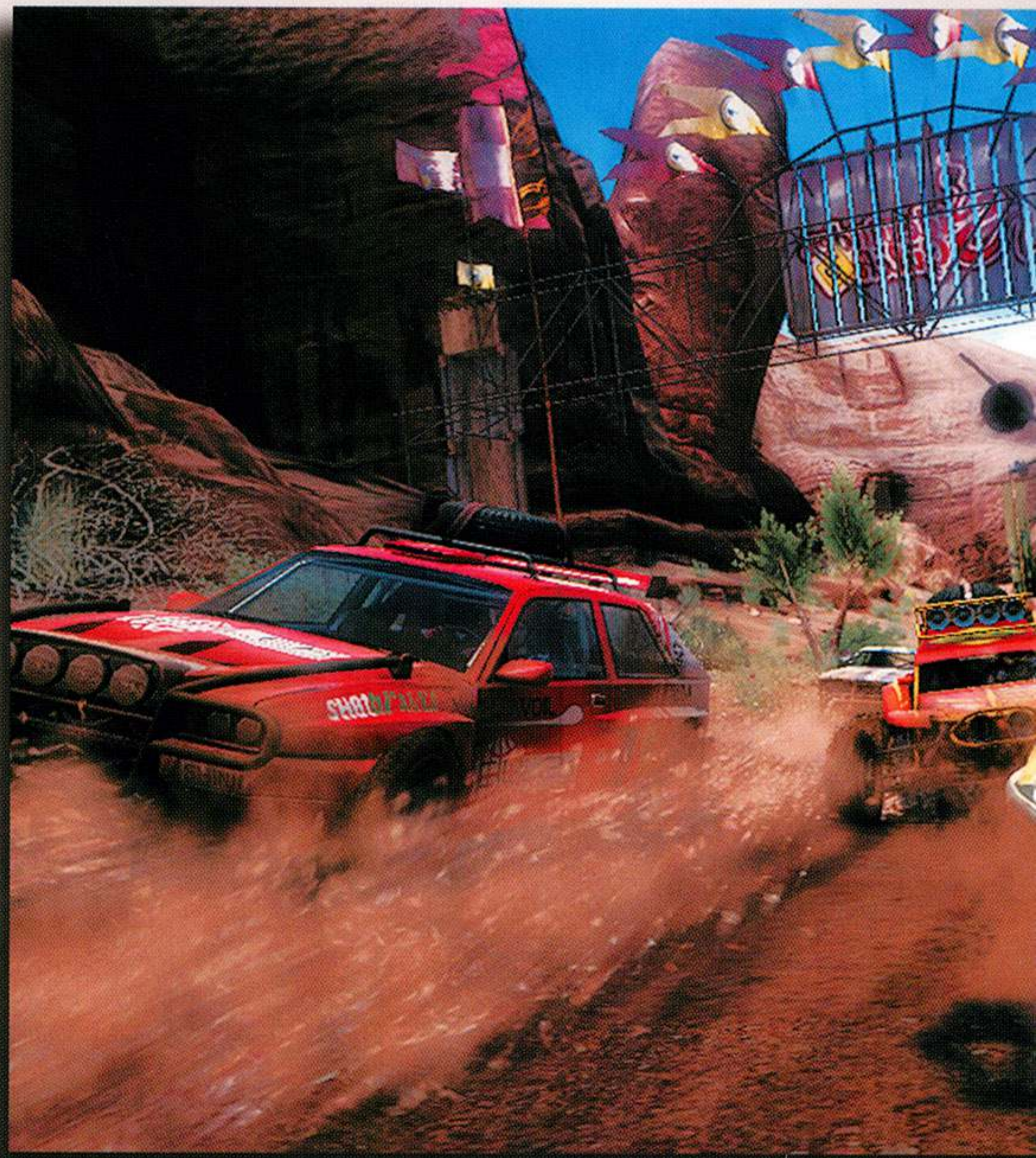
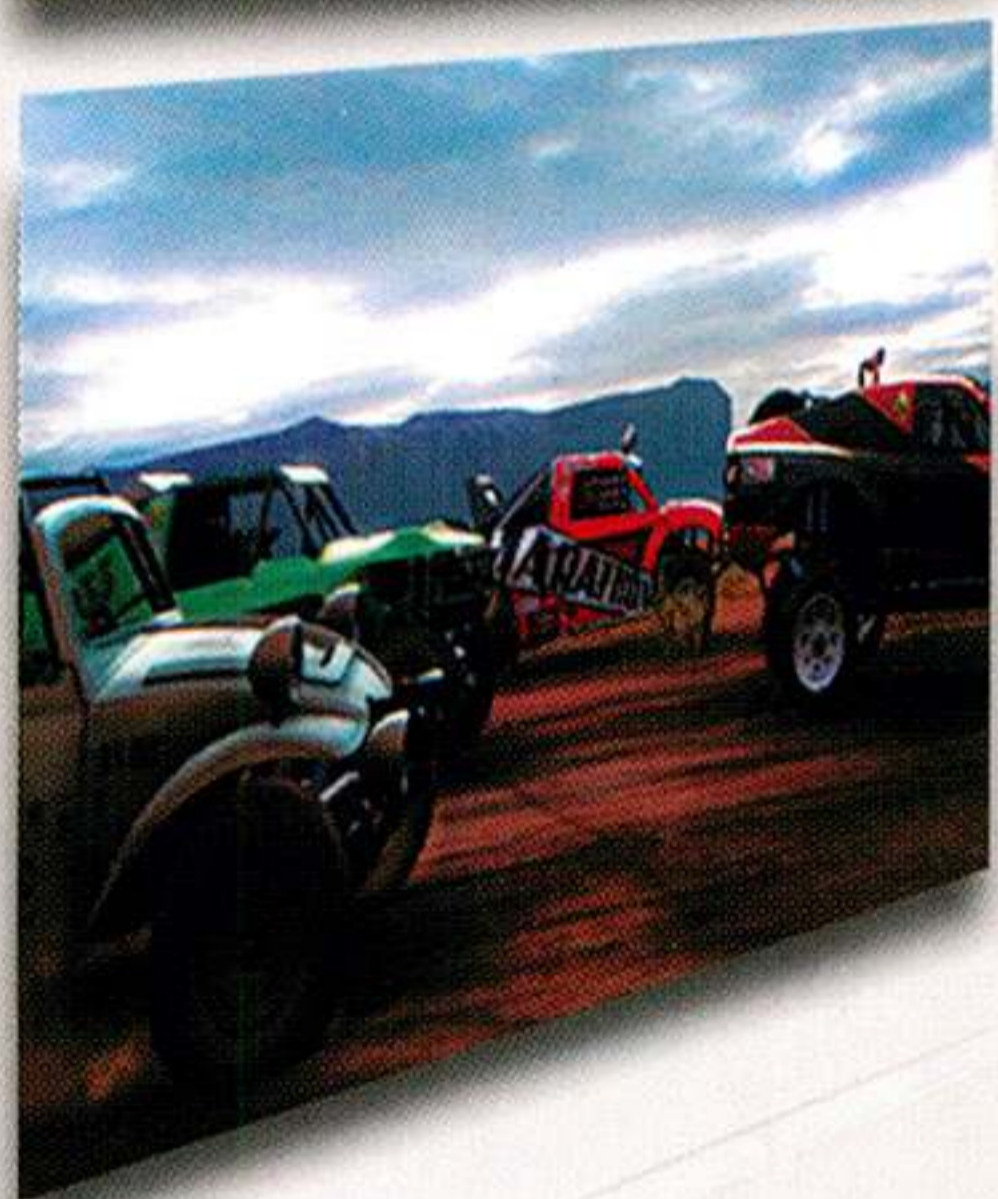
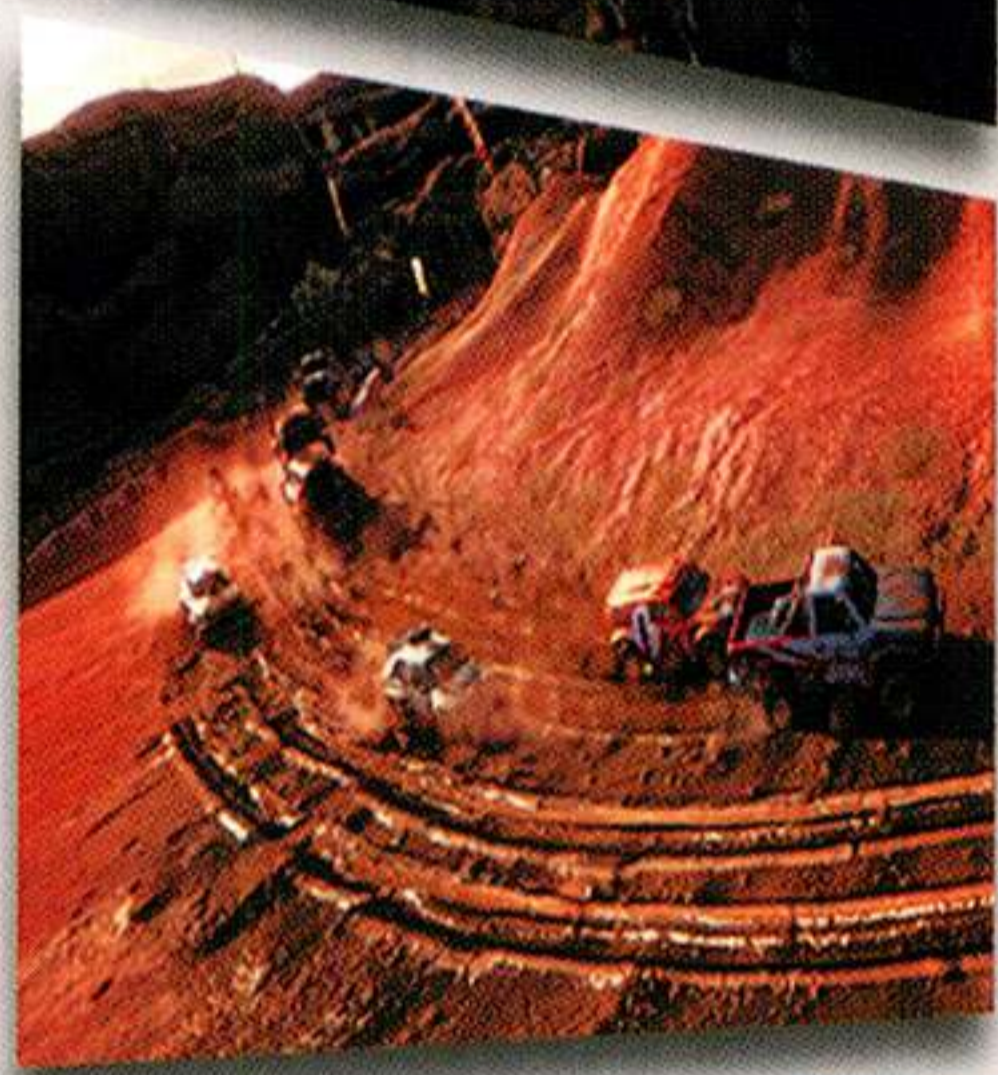
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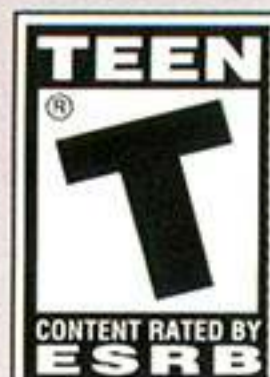


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MOTORSTORM

www.motorstorm-thegame.com



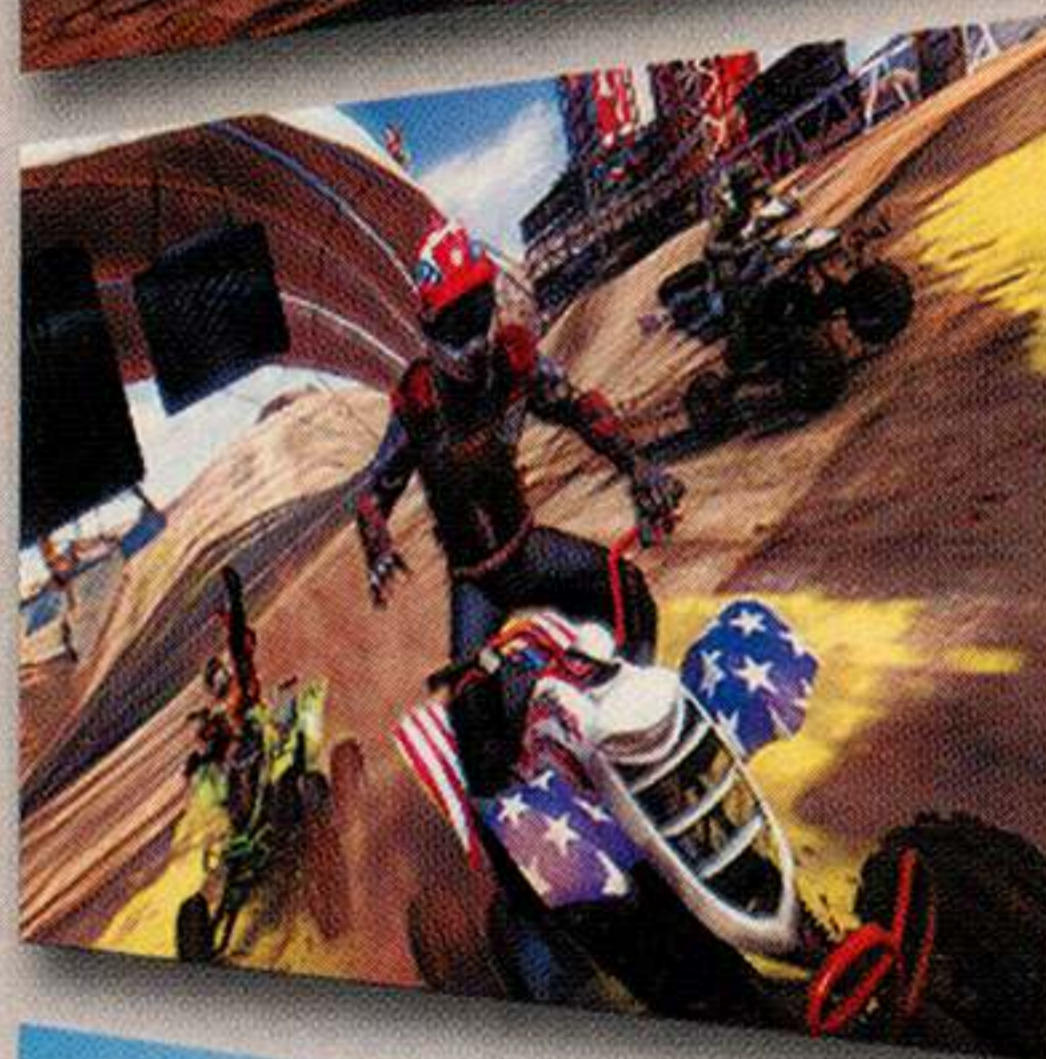
Language
Violence

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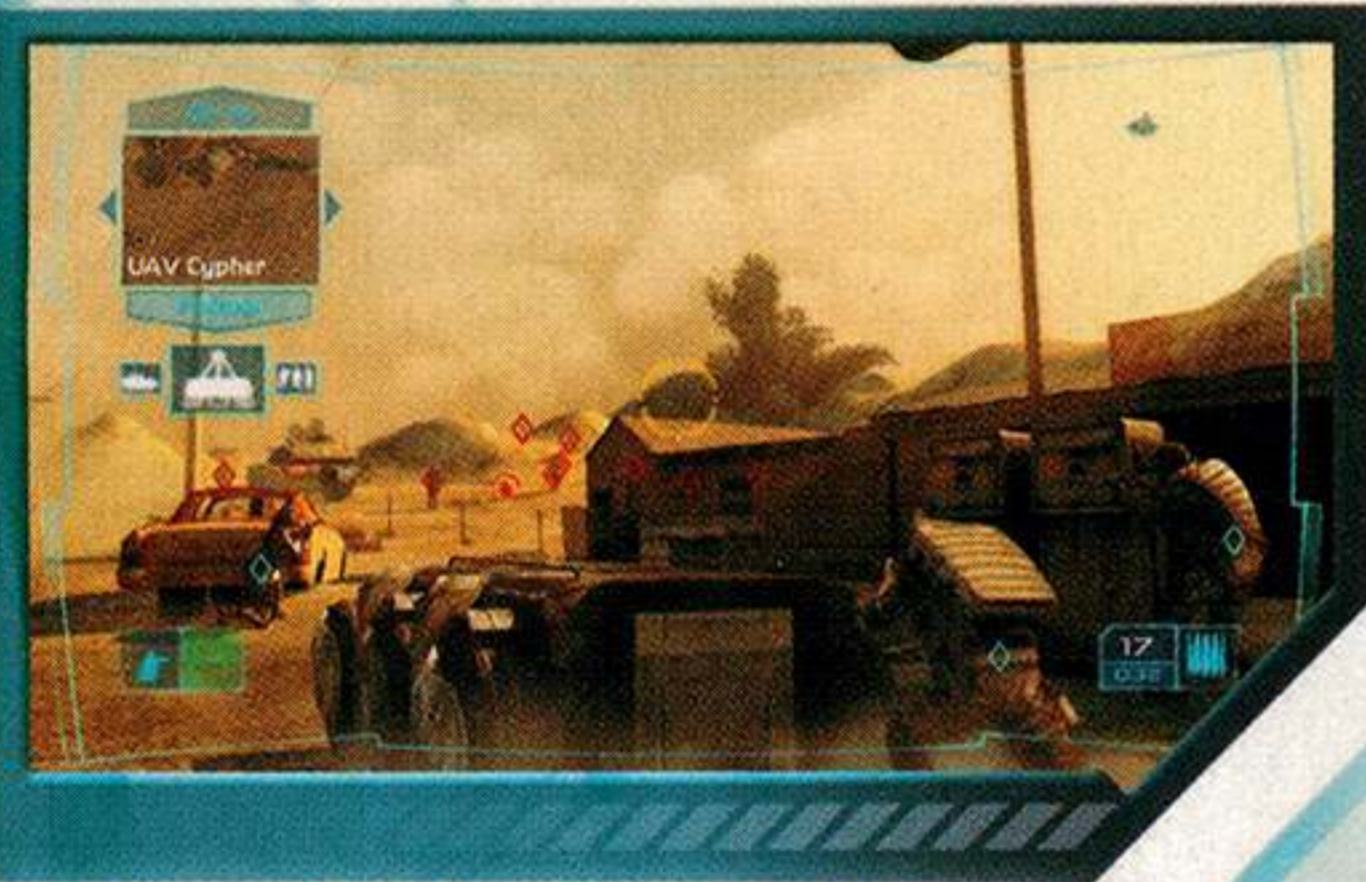
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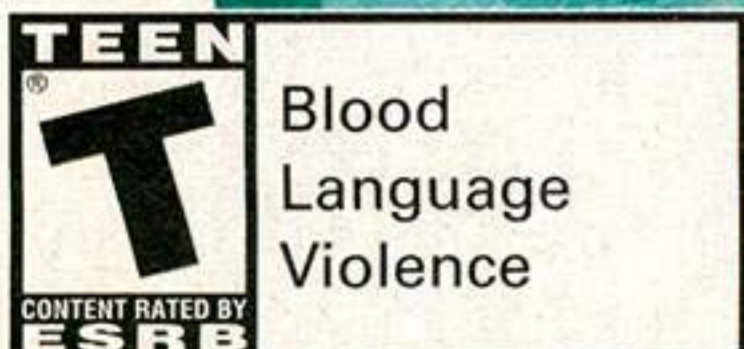
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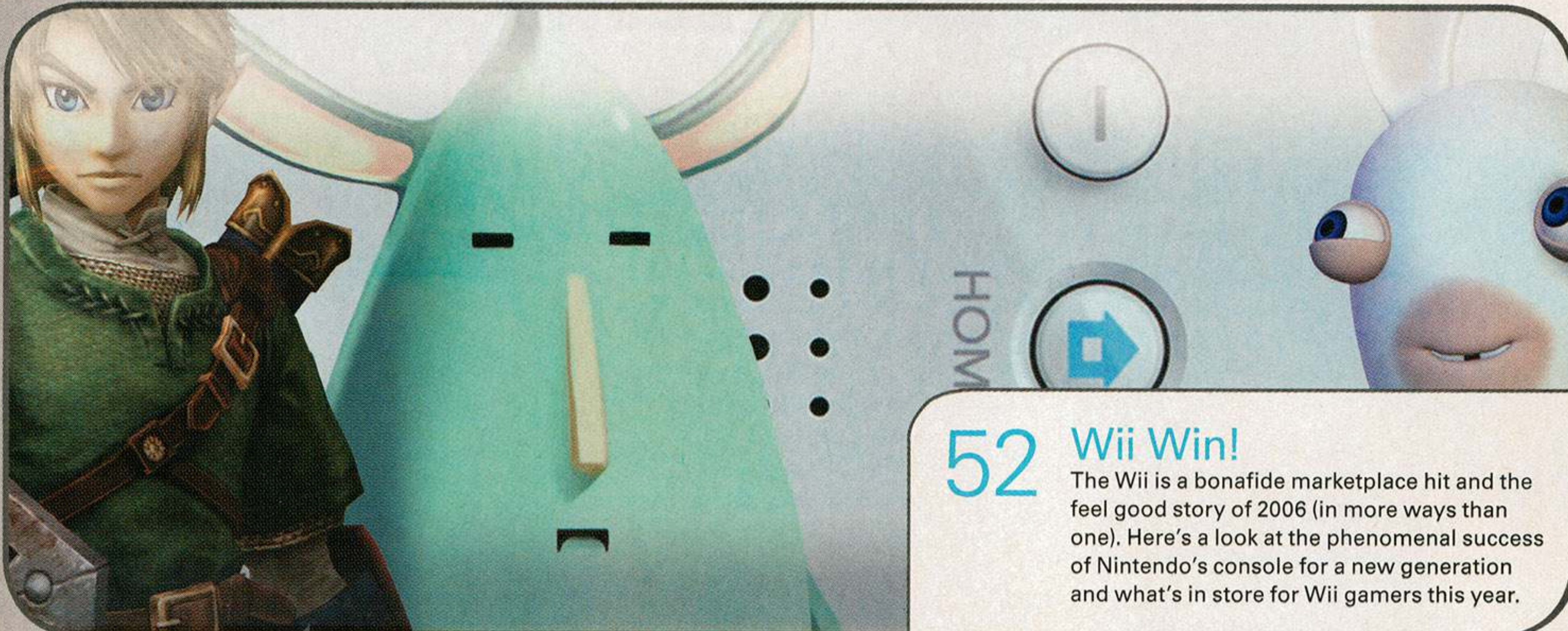
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★ Features



52 Wii Win!

The Wii is a bonafide marketplace hit and the feel good story of 2006 (in more ways than one). Here's a look at the phenomenal success of Nintendo's console for a new generation and what's in store for Wii gamers this year.



68 Online Store Wars: Xbox Live Marketplace and the Wii Shopping Channel

Has online shopping become all the rage for console gamers, too? Take a comparative look at what the Xbox 360 and PS3 have in store for you.

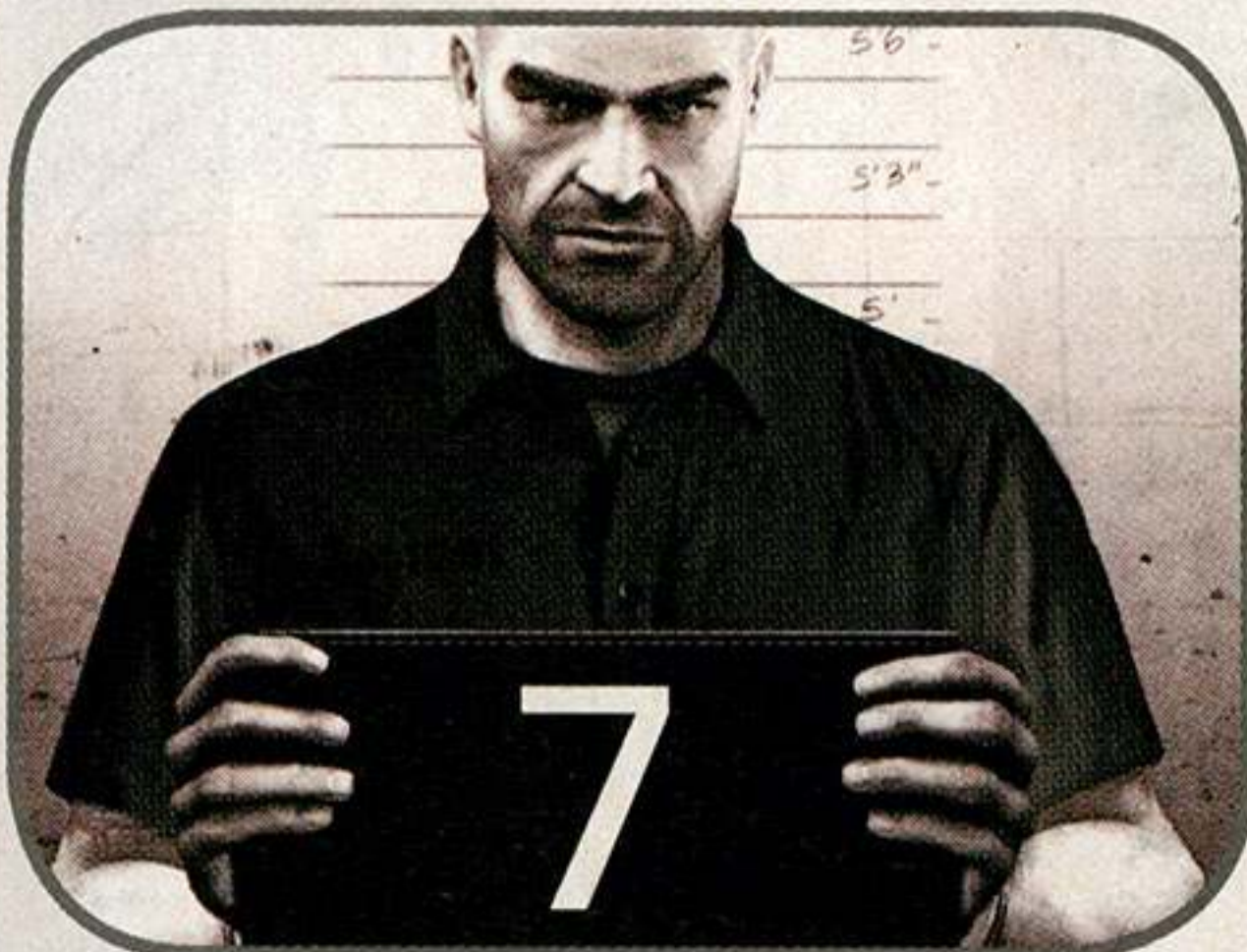


62 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles Return

Leonardo, Michaelangelo, Donatello, and Raphael once elevated awareness of amphibian ninjitsu and pepperoni pizza to amazing heights. The new Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles game from Ubisoft should raise a few eyebrows, too.

70 ProStrategy: Resistance: Fall of Man (PS3) Meets Gears of War (Xbox 360)

What do Resistance and Gears have in common? A rampaging mess of aliens! Here's a Chimera hunting guide for Resistance: Fall of Man and a breakdown of the seven most grueling battles in Gears of War.



64 7 Ways to Save Console Online Games

If you've yet to play a console game online, start here before you try. If you're already an online vet, maybe you'll agree with what the guys from Bungie Studios, Insomniac Games, Treyarch, and DICE have to say.

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Alien Wars

Those lovable Aliens are making a comeback and they're just aching to give gamers everywhere a nice big face hug and slip them a little tongue...or whatever.



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Oblivion Monster Manual

There's more to your favorite creatures from The Elder Scrolls than meets the eye.

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GamePro Rebooted!

The Wii and the PS3 aren't only big changes in the world of games for 2007. *GamePro* is unveiling a brand new look! You may have already noticed that our table of contents looks radically different but feels oddly familiar, too. That's because each issue the look and feel of the content pages will reflect the cover story, which this month stars the Wii. And that's not all!

We're streamlining the way we provide game information to you in the magazine and synching it all up at GamePro.com. As always, we're dedicating ourselves to providing you with the most entertaining and comprehensive video game info there is. Sure we've got more than our fair share of opinions, and in the next few months we're going to roll out even more feature stories, more previews, more reviews, and more game-busting strategy each issue. Log in at the GamePro.com message boards and you can share your ideas and work on the "new" *GamePro* with us, too. So strap in and hold on tight: it's going to be a wild and fun ride.

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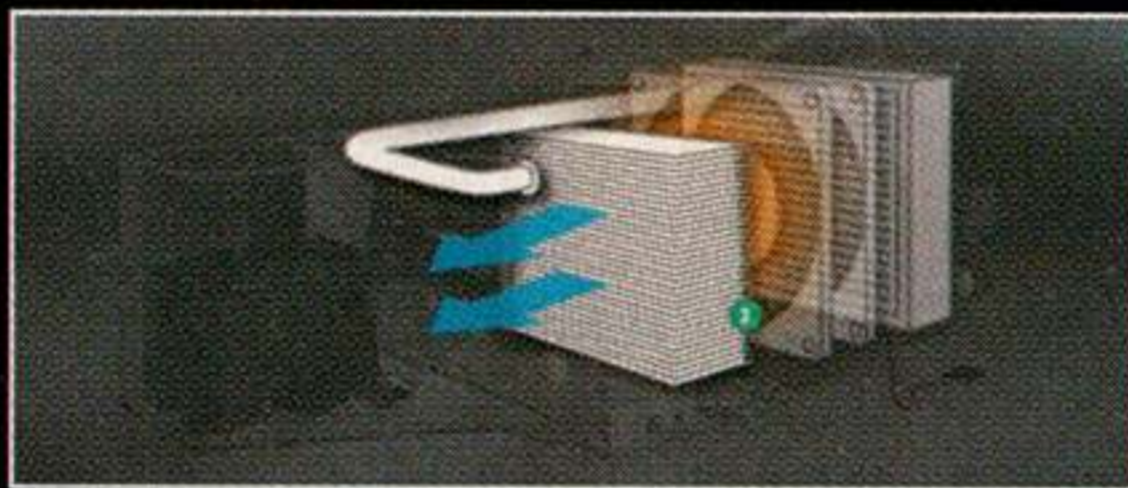
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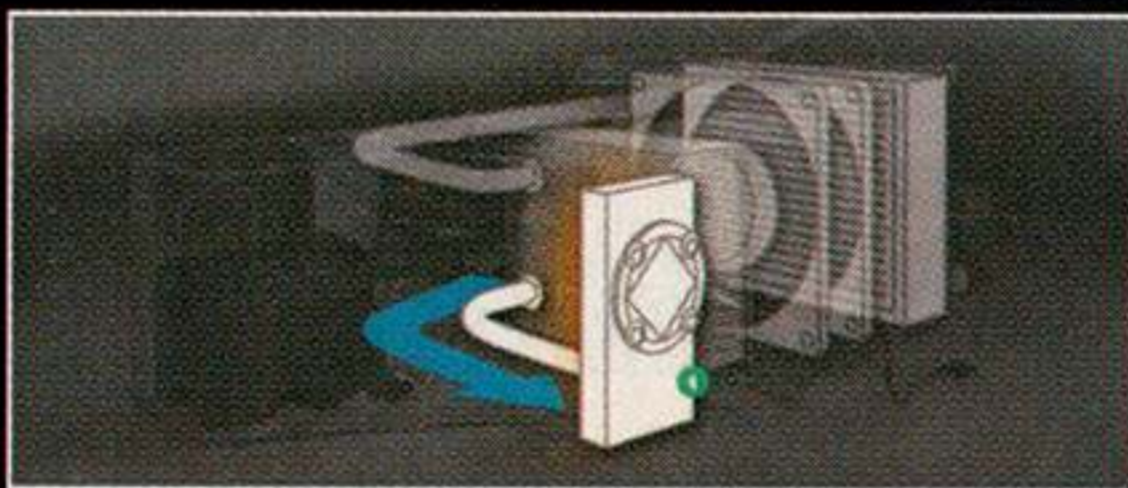
1. Inside-the-box innovation: Dell's exclusive H₂C hybrid technology.



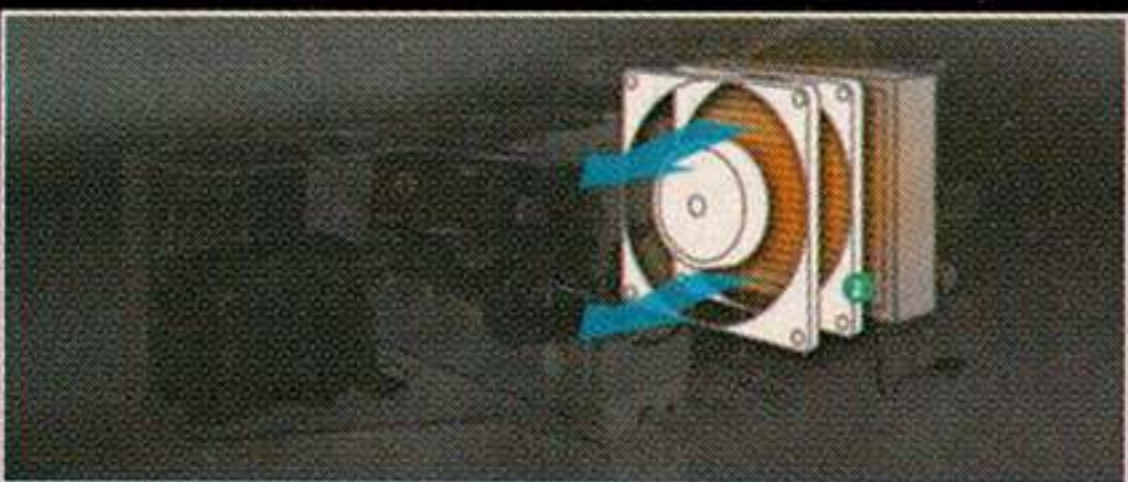
4. Fluid passes through the heat exchanger and is cooled a second time by the air system.



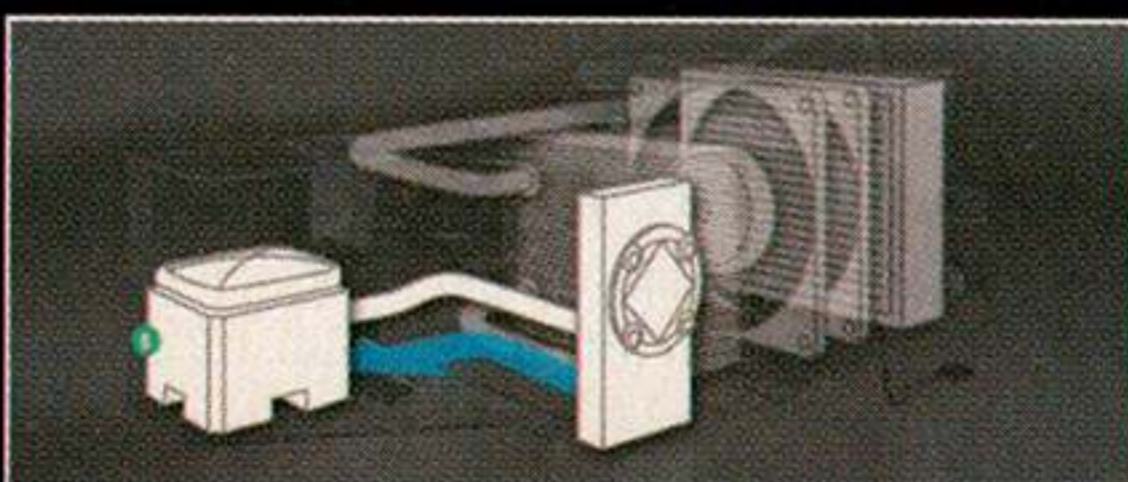
2. Heat from the air enters the radiator, beginning the cooling action.



5. Any heat dissipated by the CPU is transferred to the fluid system at the cold plate, which is cooled against the CPU.



3. The fan between the radiator and the thermoelectric heat exchanger pushes the air through, further cooling the flow.



6. The circuit board manages delivery of 12VDC power to the thermoelectric cooling devices and regulates the speed of the pump.

***OVERCLOCK:** Dell does not recommend operating the processor or other system component beyond factory default settings. Overclocking may cause system instability and reduce the operating life of your system components. Dell does not provide technical support for any hardware or software issues arising from any third party application, such as NVIDIA nTune 5.0, used to enable overclocking. Dell provides technical support only for overclocking settings available within the system BIOS.

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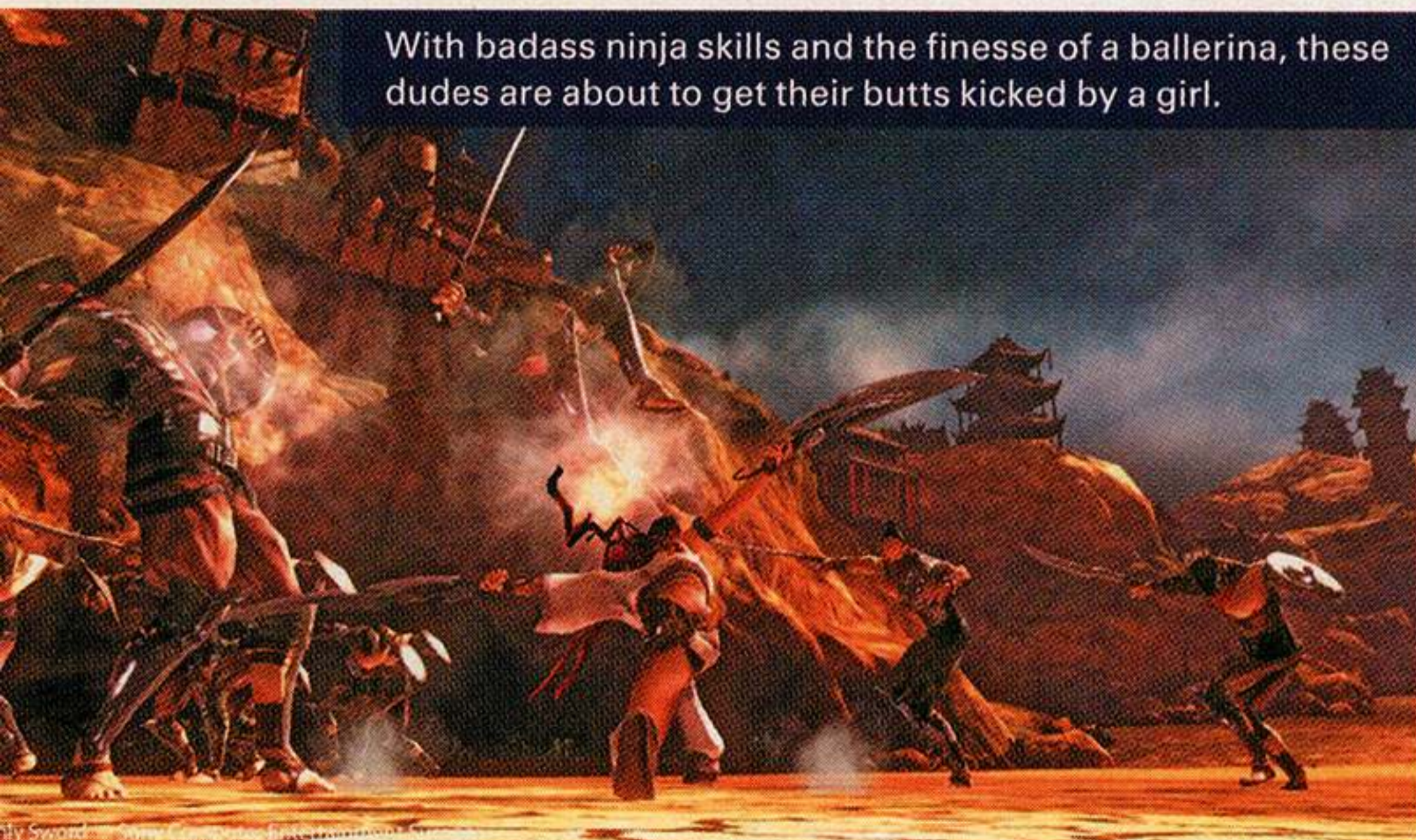


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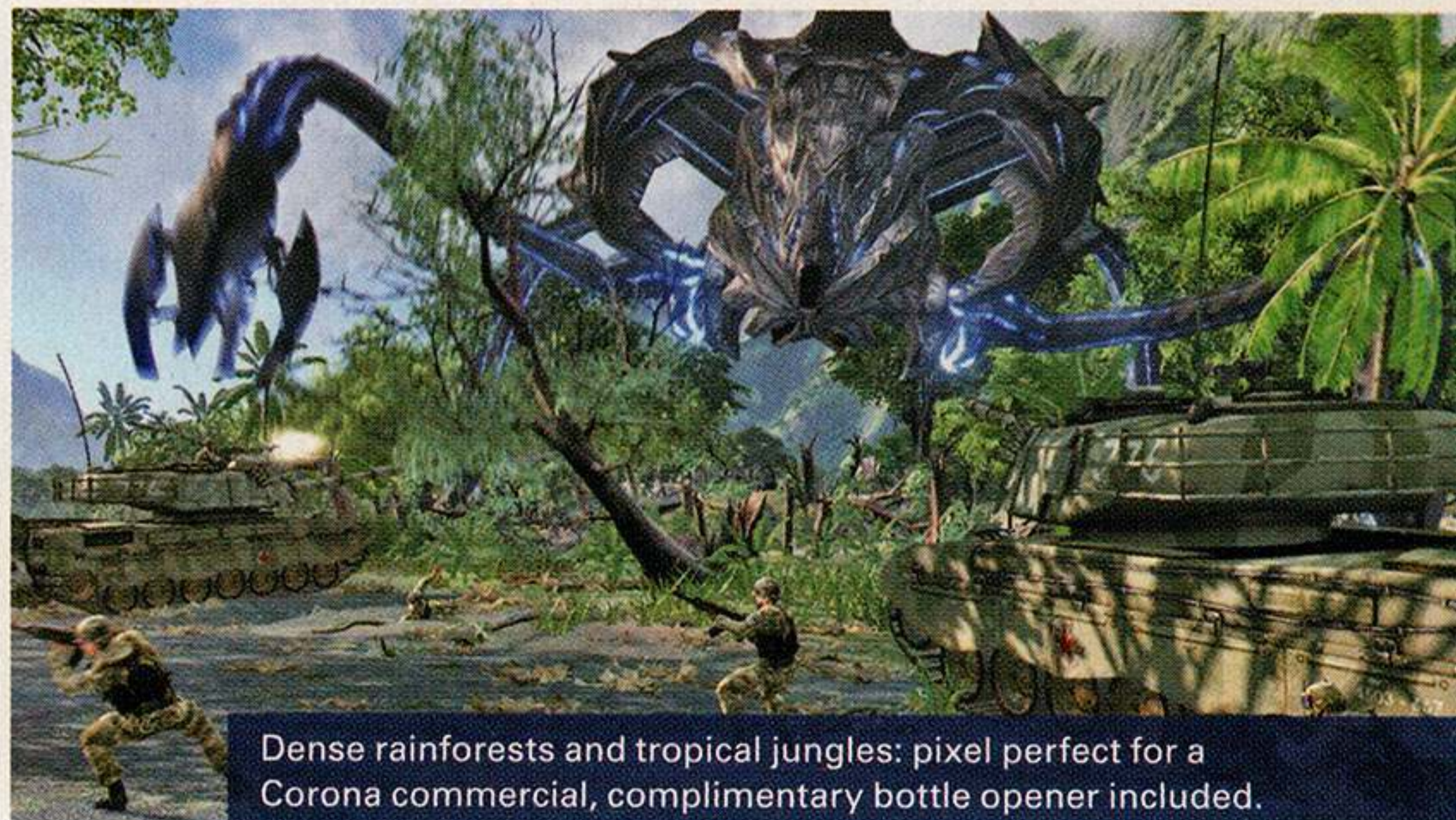
The pinnacle moment of assassination is better than waking up with Folgers coffee in your cup.

▼ ASSASSIN'S CREED (UBISOFT) (PS3, XBOX 360)



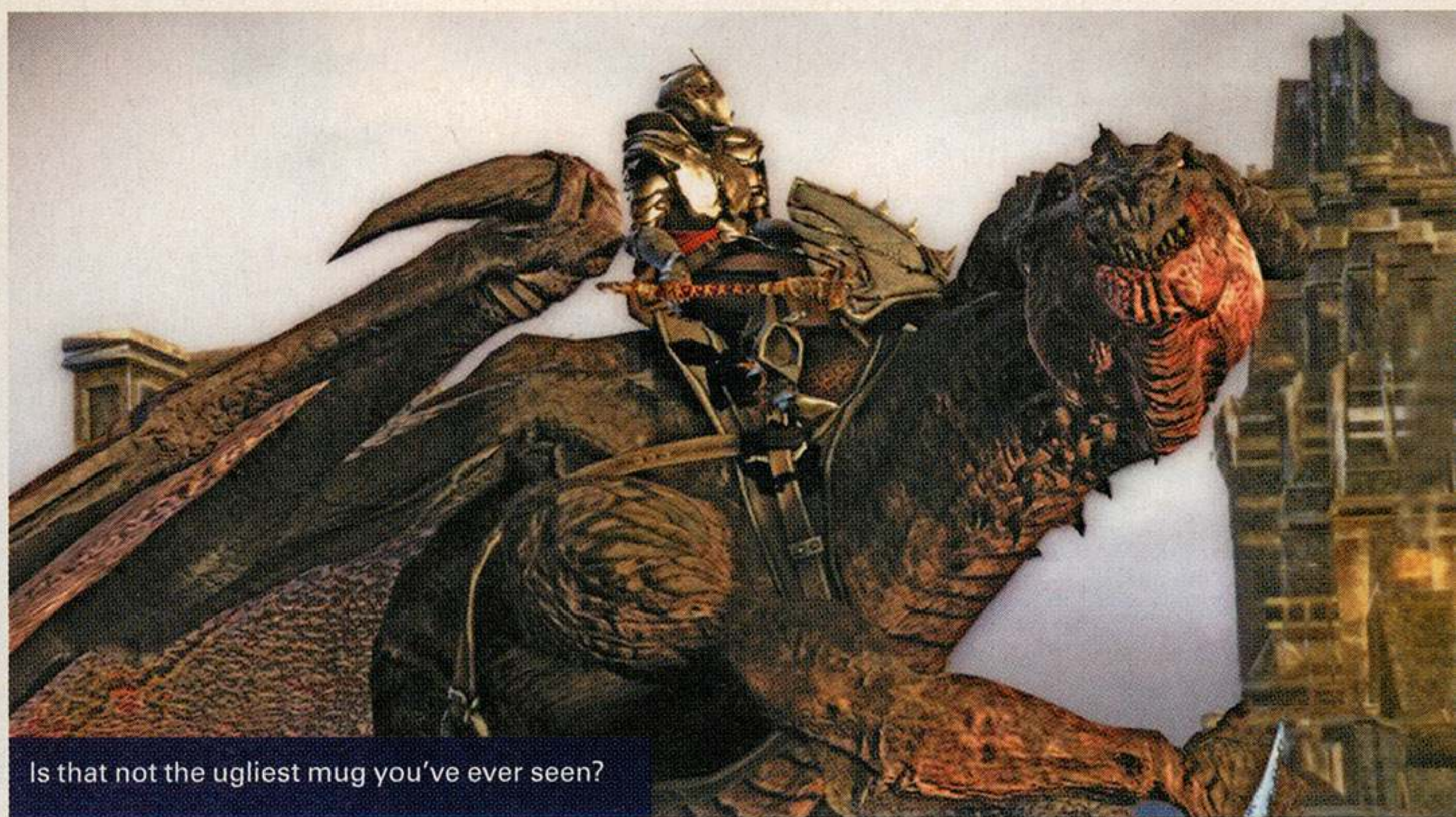
With badass ninja skills and the finesse of a ballerina, these dudes are about to get their butts kicked by a girl.

▼ HEAVENLY SWORD (SONY) (PS3)



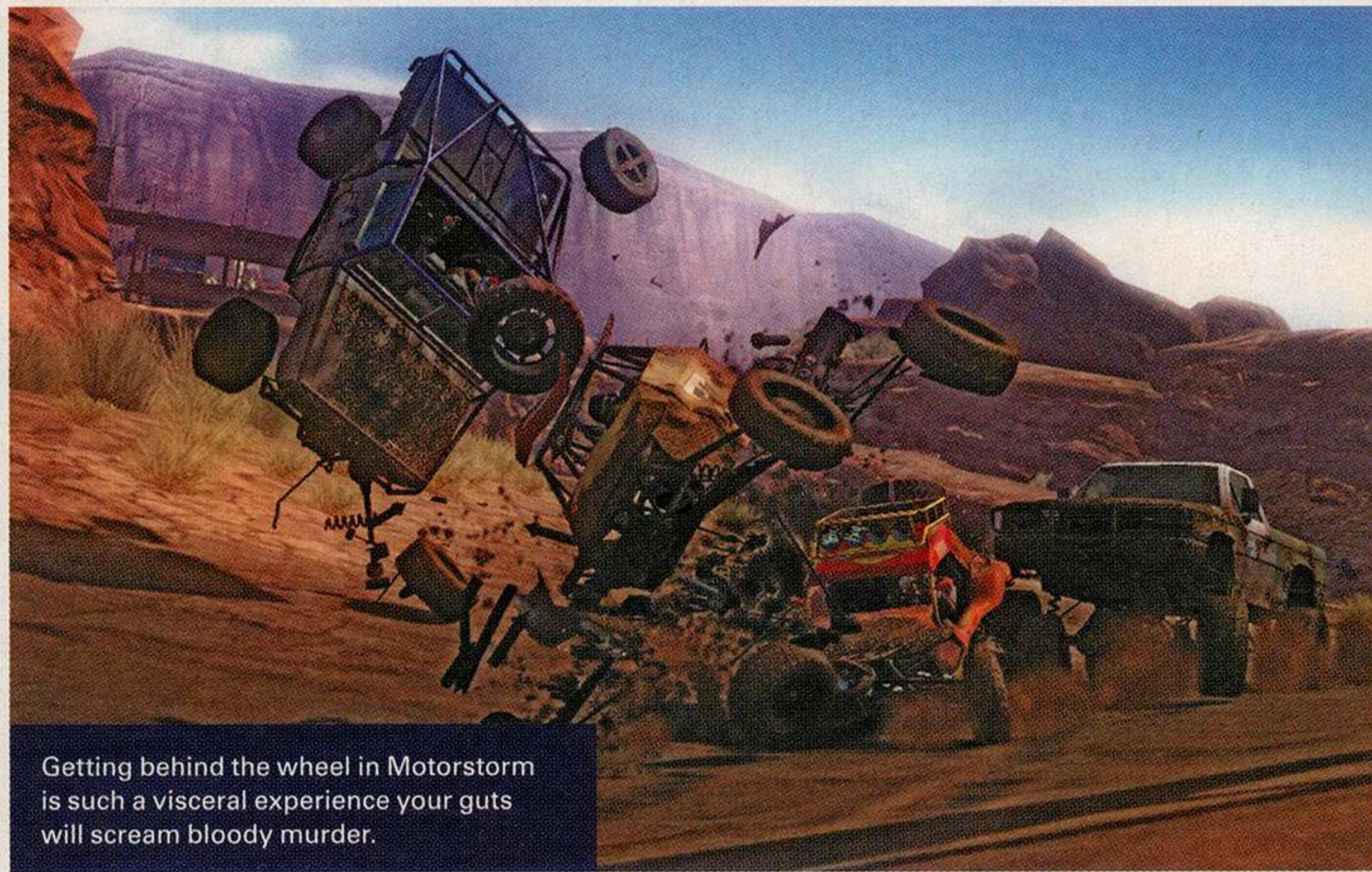
Dense rainforests and tropical jungles: pixel perfect for a Corona commercial, complimentary bottle opener included.

▼ CRYISIS (EA GAMES) (PC)



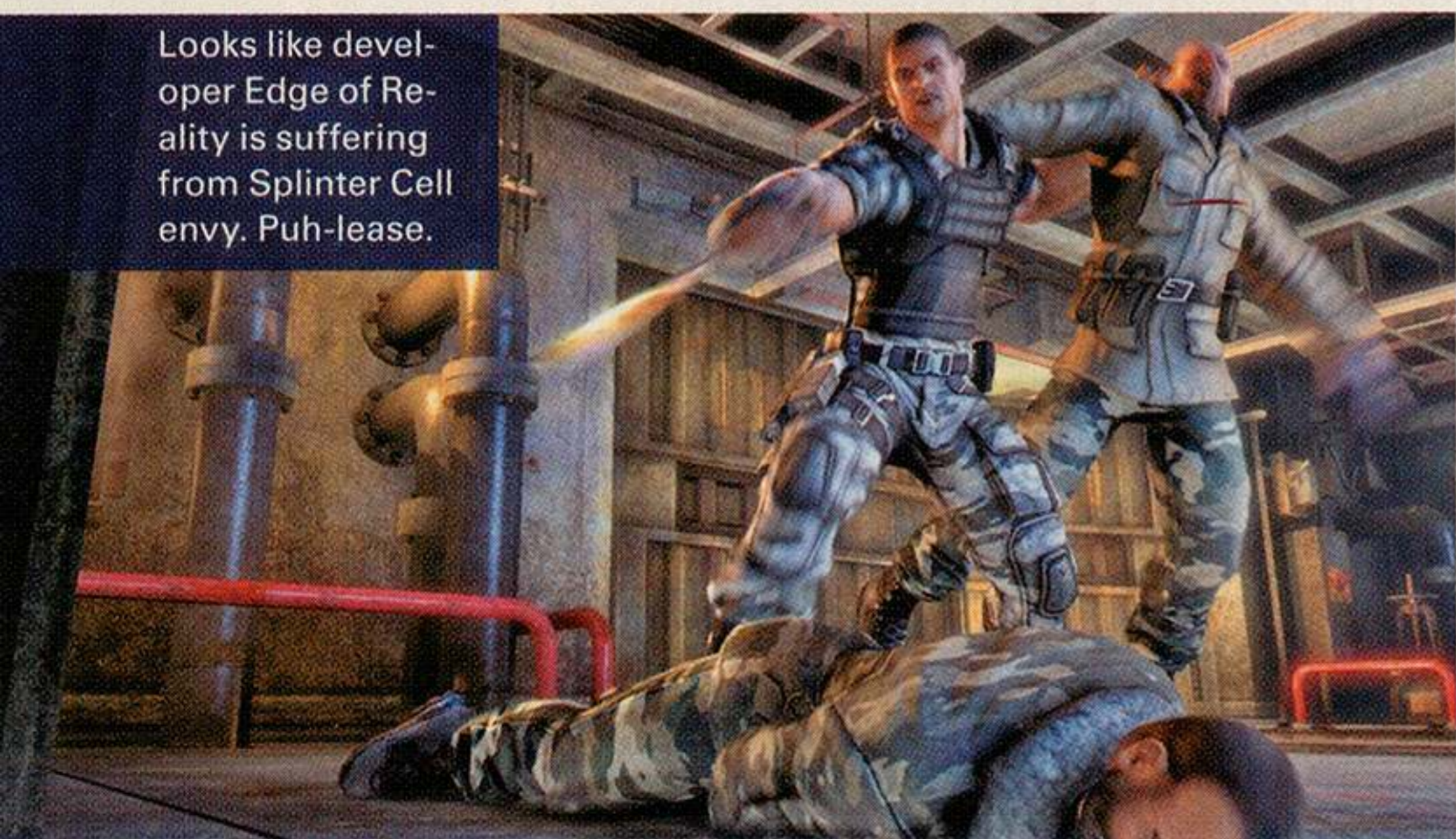
Is that not the ugliest mug you've ever seen?

▼ LAIR (Sony) (PS3)



Getting behind the wheel in Motorstorm is such a visceral experience your guts will scream bloody murder.

▼ MOTORSTORM (Sony) (PS3)



Looks like developer Edge of Reality is suffering from Splinter Cell envy. Puh-lease.

▼ CIPHER COMPLEX (EDGE OF REALITY) (PS3, XBOX 360)

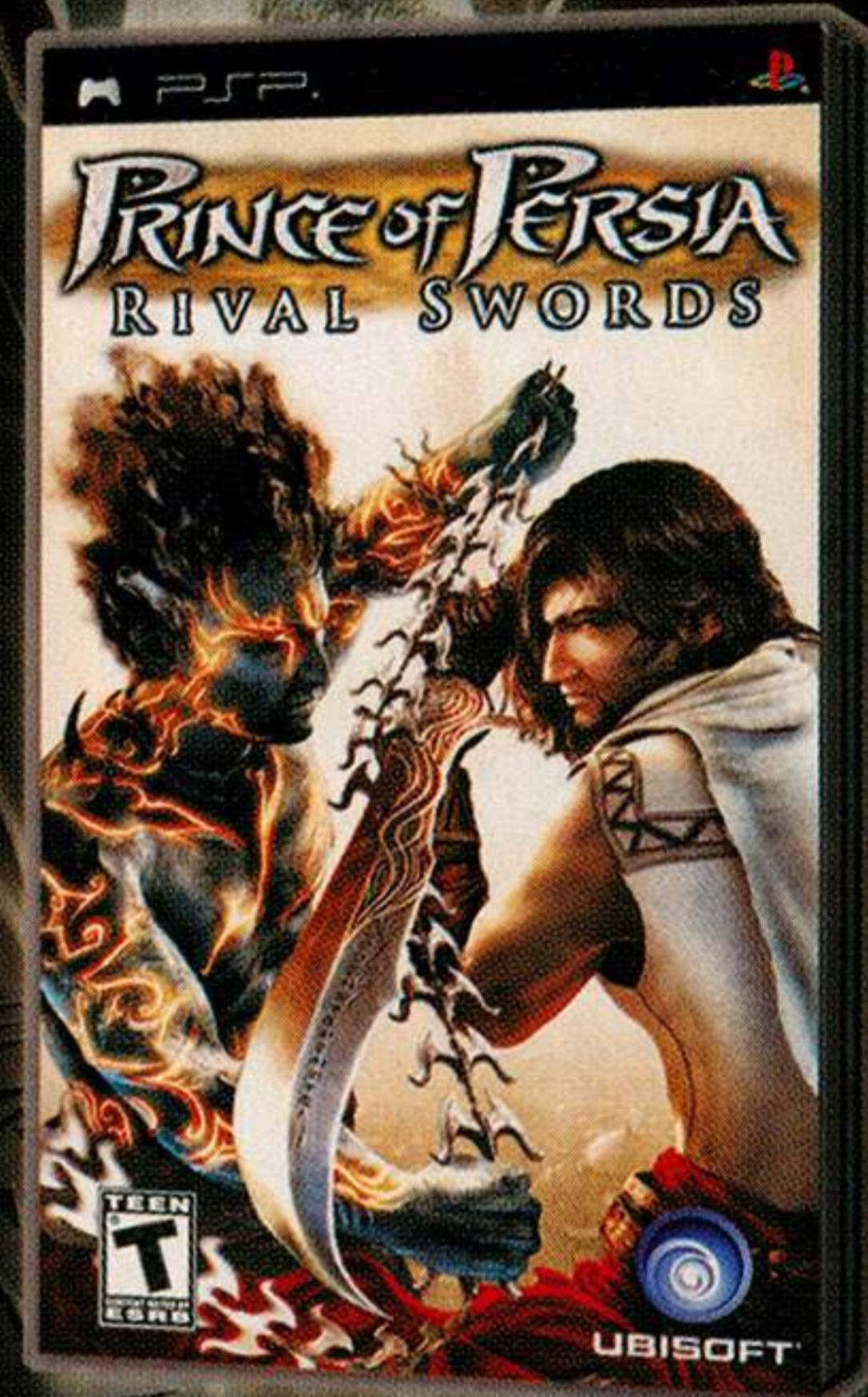
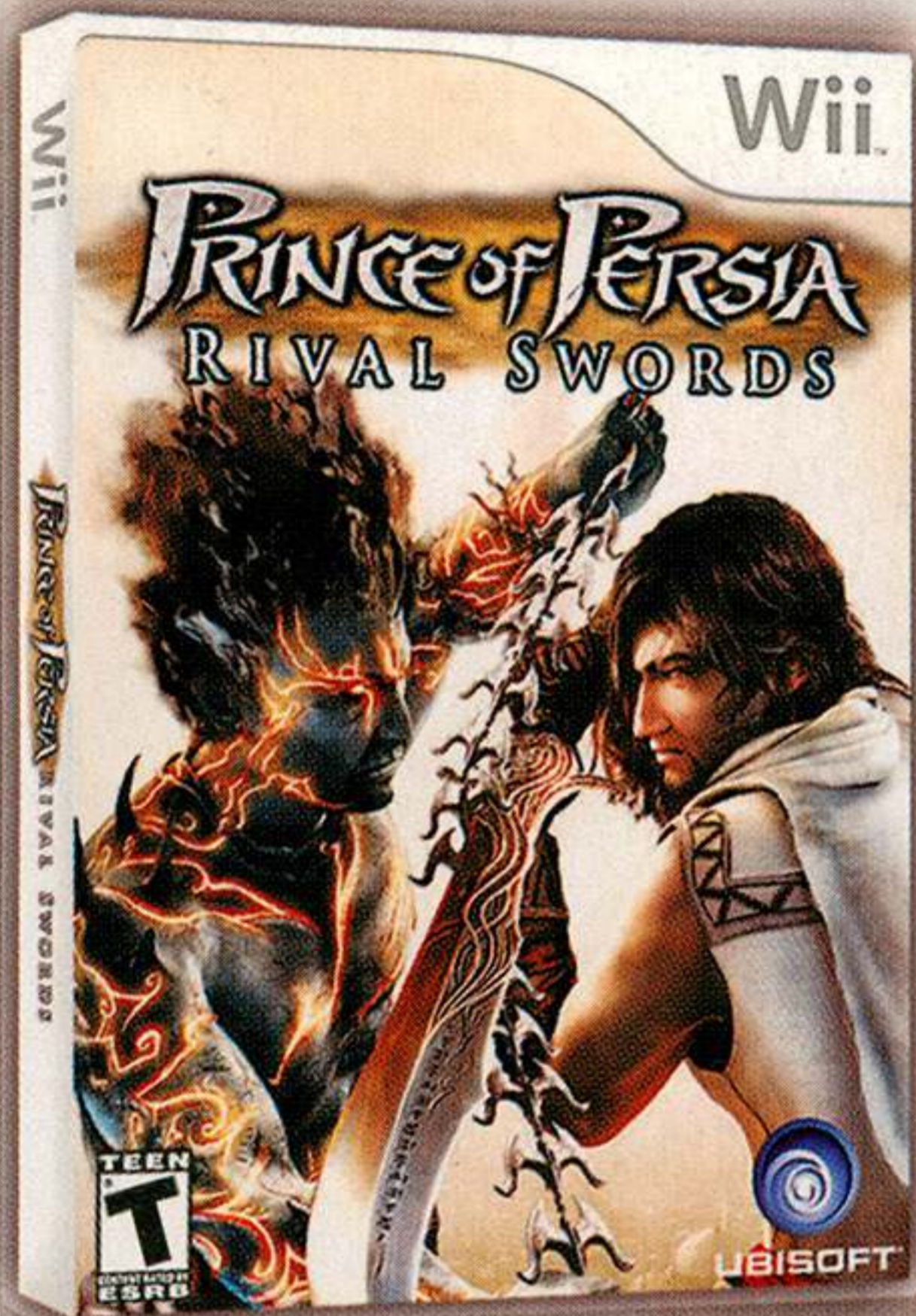


Sex sells, but did you know it could kill as well? Lightning eyes and thunder thighs crits for 9,999 damage.

▼ FINAL FANTASY XIII (SQUARE ENIX) (PS3)

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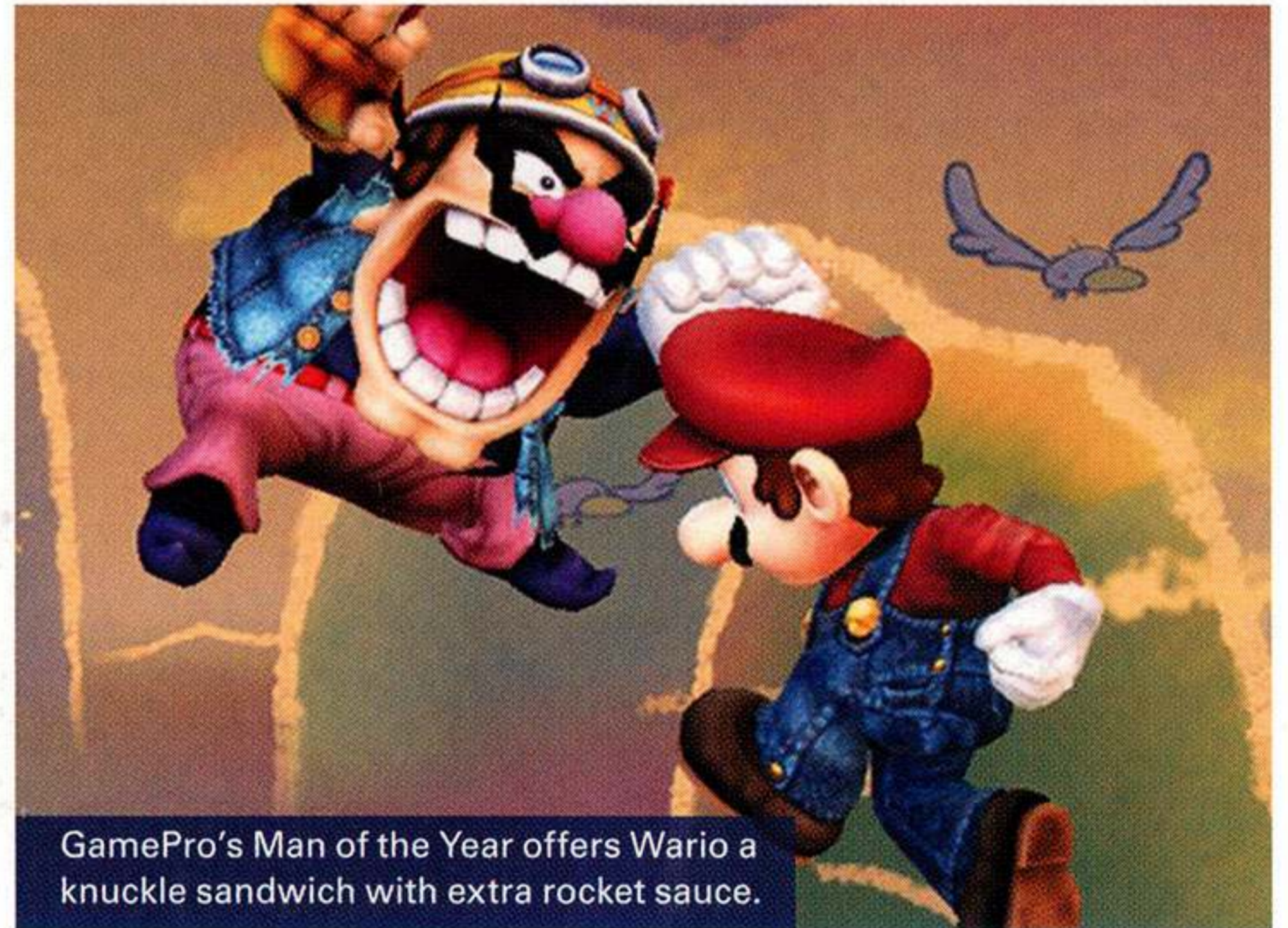
Luckily for our hero, Turok, that's not Dick Cheney behind that gatling gun.

▼ TUROK (BUENA VISTA GAMES) (PS3, XBOX 360)



To 11 and beyond.

▼ GUITAR HERO II (REDOCTANE) (XBOX 360)



GamePro's Man of the Year offers Wario a knuckle sandwich with extra rocket sauce.

▼ SUPER SMASH BROS. BRAWL (NINTENDO) (WII)



▼ GOD OF WAR II (SONY) (PS2)

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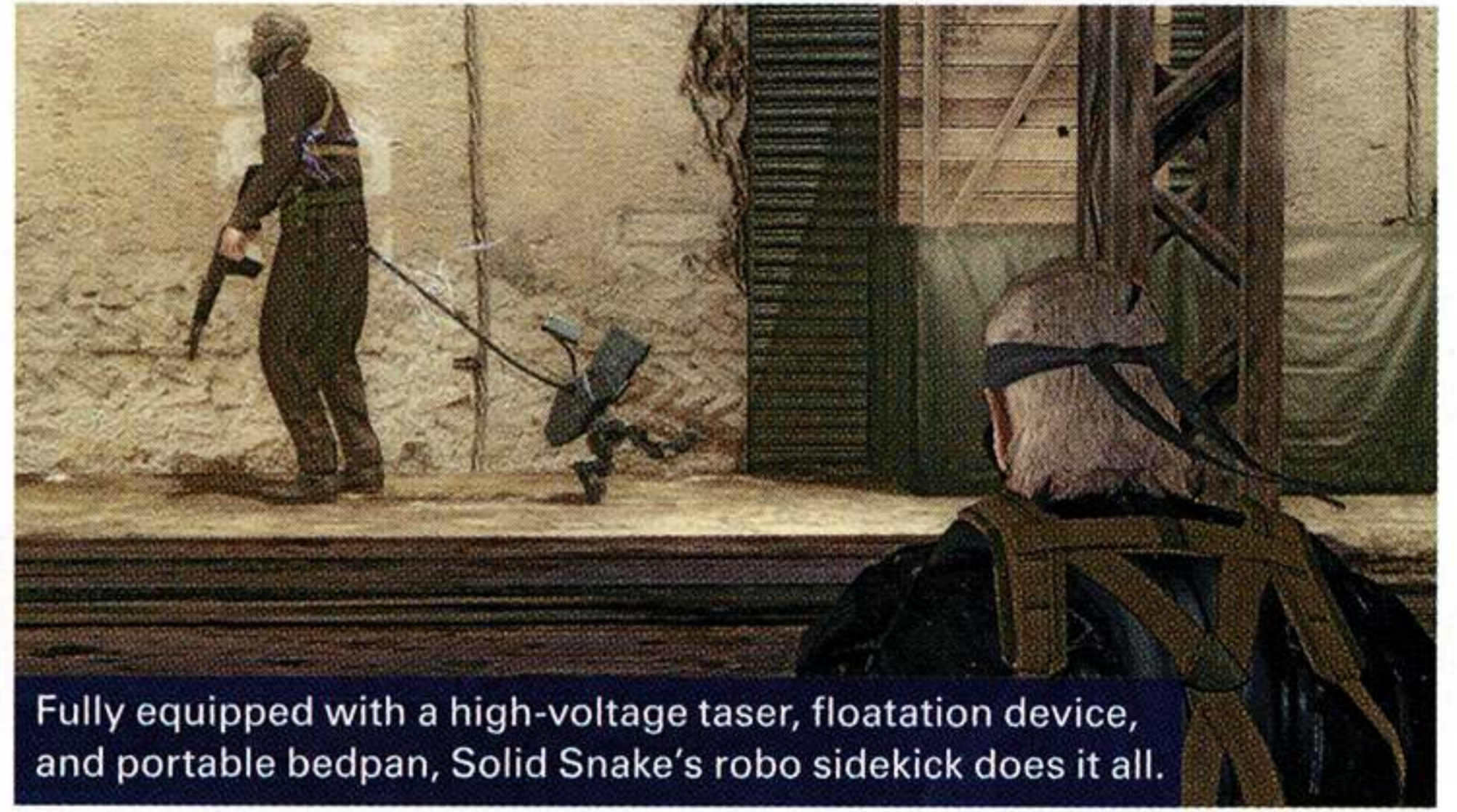


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Here, have a mouthful of the everlasting green zombie-stopper gun. Huzzah!

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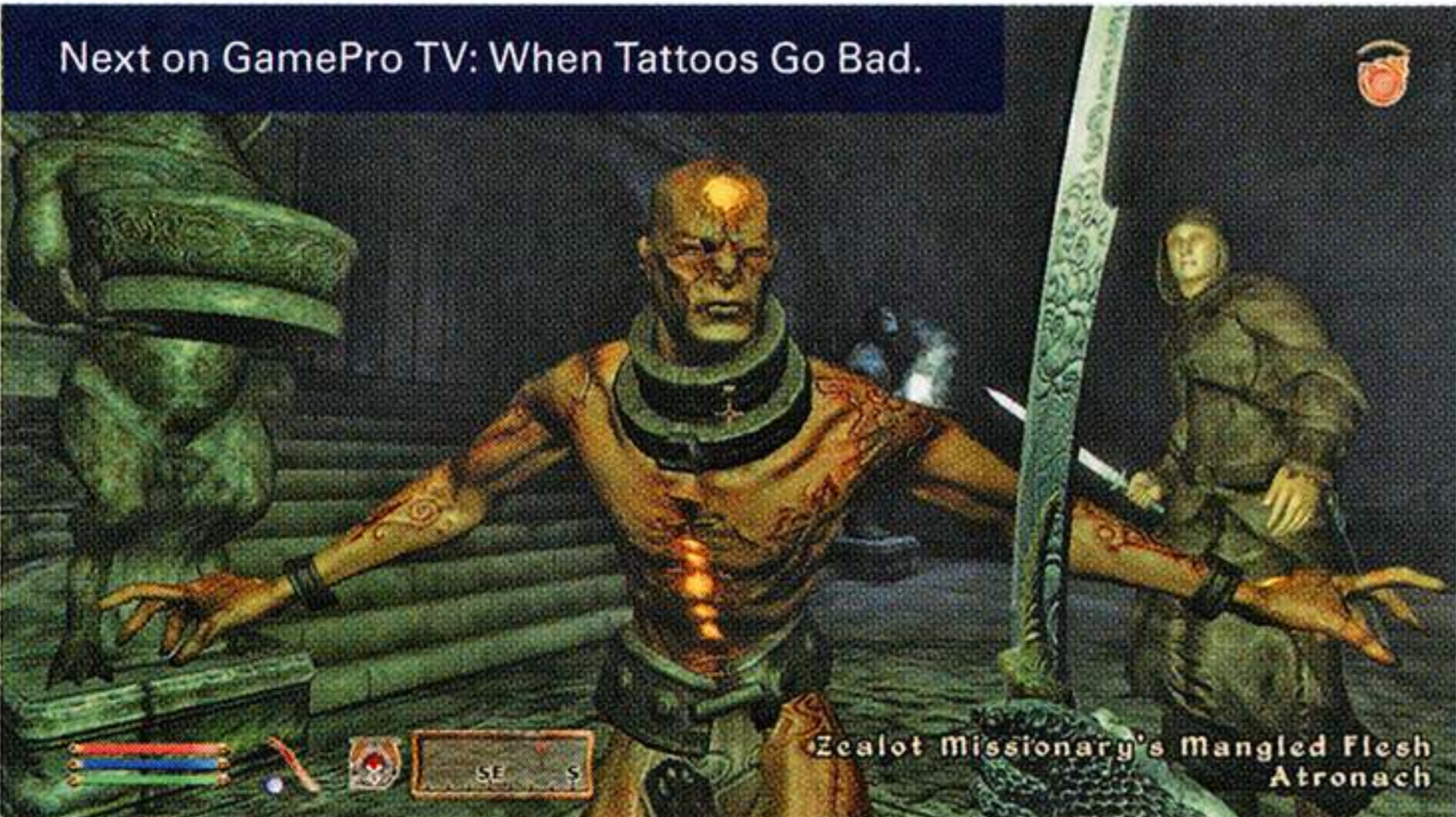
Fully equipped with a high-voltage taser, floatation device, and portable bedpan, Solid Snake's robo sidekick does it all.

METAL GEAR SOLID 4: GUNS OF THE PATRIOTS (KONAMI) (PS3)



This is a prime example of those awkward moments a man and a woman try to avoid.

MASS EFFECT (MICROSOFT) (XBOX 360)



Next on GamePro TV: When Tattoos Go Bad.

Zealot Missionary's Mangled Flesh Atronach

THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: SHIVERING ISLES (BETHESDA SOFTWARE) (XBOX 360) (PC)



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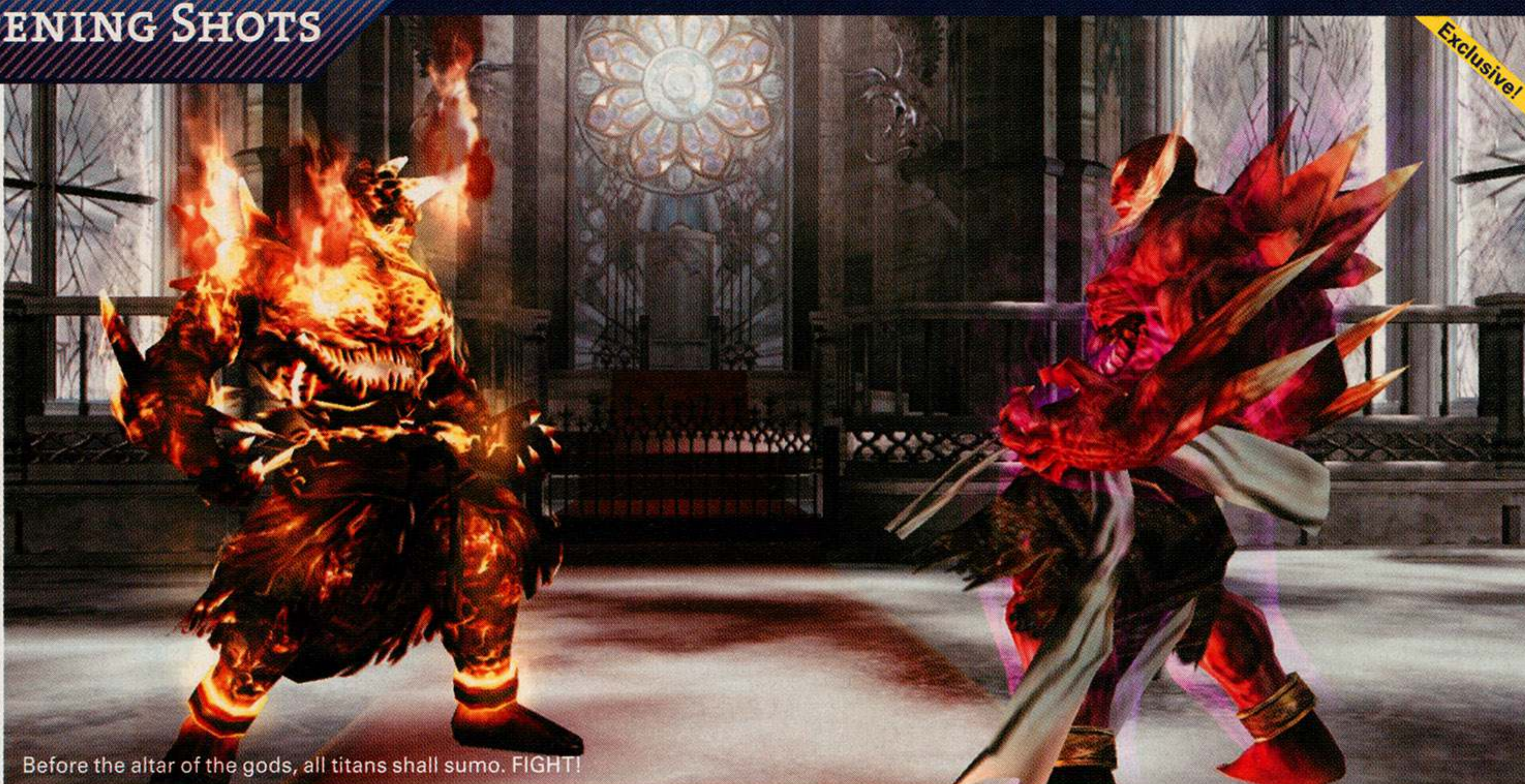
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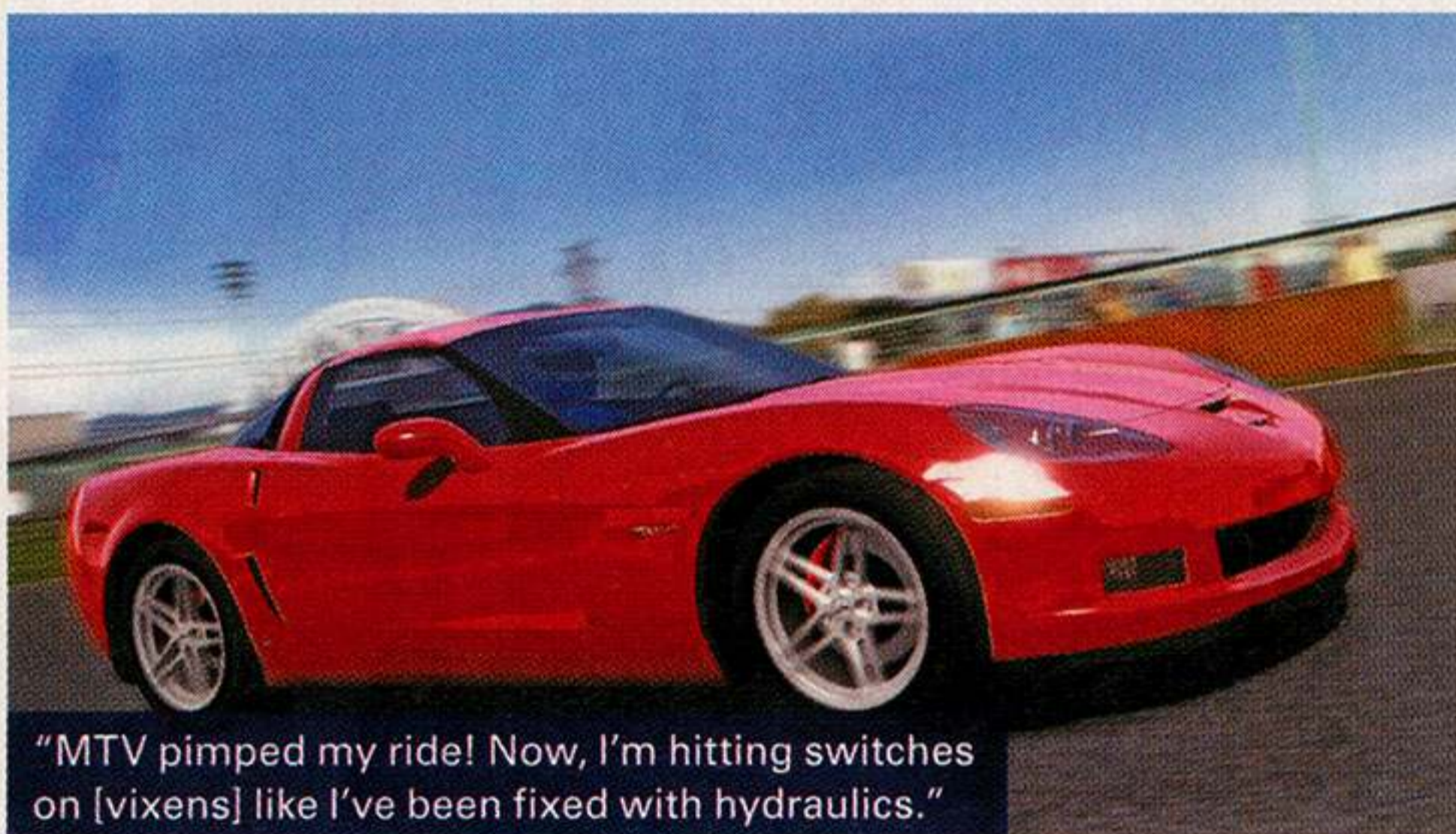
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Exclusive!



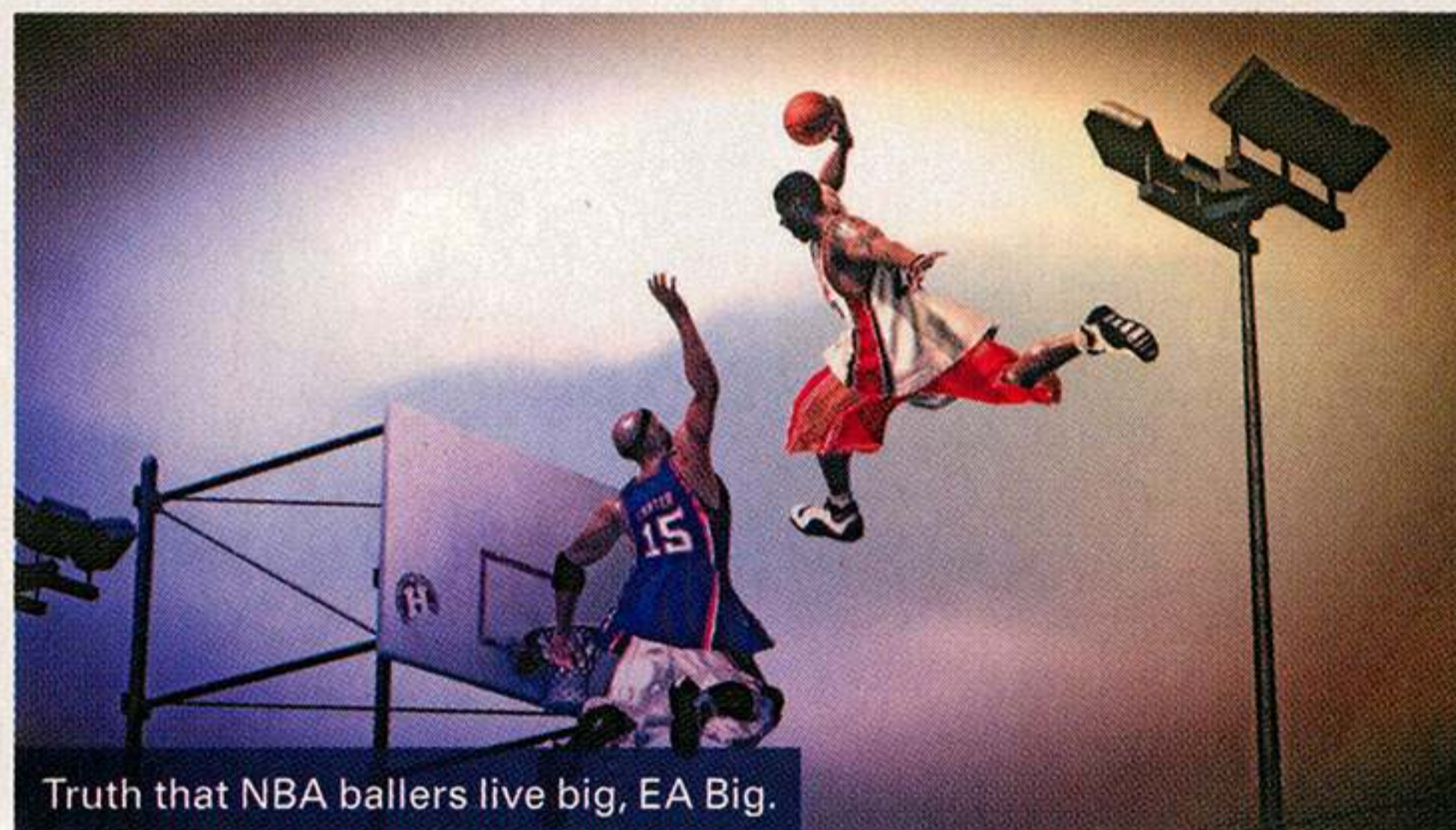
Before the altar of the gods, all titans shall sumo. FIGHT!

▼ **TEKKEN 5: DARK RESURRECTION** (NAMCO BANDAI GAMES) (PS3)



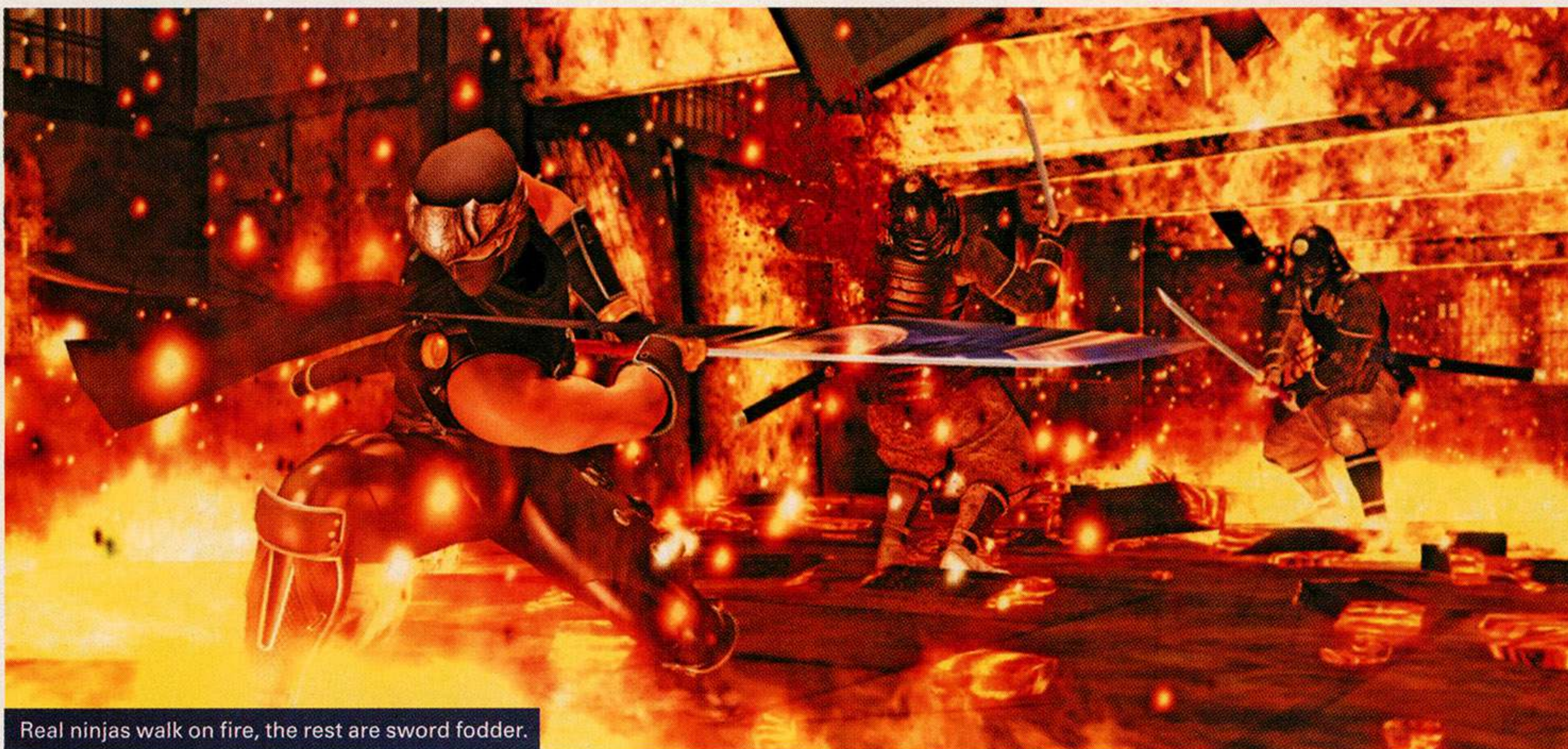
"MTV pimped my ride! Now, I'm hitting switches on [vixens] like I've been fixed with hydraulics."

▼ **FORZA MOTORSPORT 2** (MICROSOFT) (XBOX 360)



Truth that NBA ballers live big, EA Big.

▼ **NBA STREET HOMECOURT** (EA SPORTS BIG) (PS3, XBOX 360)



Real ninjas walk on fire, the rest are sword fodder.

▼ **NINJA GAIDEN SIGMA** (TECMO) (PS3)

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2K



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But now he must protect others from experiencing his hell on earth.



And bring the demon fires of hell to villains like Blackheart, Vengeance and Scarecrow...



... To protect the life—and soul—of his love, Roxanne.



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TEEN
T
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ESRB

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 Mild Suggestive Themes
 Violence

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ALIEN WARS COMING IN 2009

By John Gaudiosi

In space, no one can hear you blow stuff up.

Sega is taking the smash-hit *Alien* franchise and turning it into at least two next-gen video game franchises. Brothers in Arms developer Gearbox Software is working on an original first-person shooter set in the horrific sci-fi world of the *Alien* films. Separately, *Neverwinter Nights 2* developer Obsidian Entertainment is creating the first RPG based on the *Alien* universe. Both games are being targeted at next-generation consoles and PCs, though handheld versions are also possible.

According to Sega's vice president of business development, Rob Lightner, Sega has already made offers to actors like Sigourney Weaver (Lt. Ripley) and Lance Henriksen (the android Bishop), to provide likenesses and voice acting for these new games.

But the games won't just rehash the hit films. Mike Gallo, senior producer for the *Alien* games, said the developers want to provide a unique experience as far as gameplay and story are concerned. He added that both games will harness the power of next-gen tech to recreate the dark visual mood that is a trademark of the franchise. "We're looking at all *Alien* source material for inspiration," said Gallo. "We may incorporate some characters that fans know and love, and we may let gamers find answers to questions that were left unanswered in the movies."

That's the good news. The bad news is that the first game won't be released until 2009, the series' 20th anniversary. And you can forget about any *Aliens vs. Predator* action for now, although 20th Century Fox has hinted that a separate AvP licensing agreement could happen at another time.



SUX or Rules



Changing the world, one insult at a time.

SUX



Sony. Botched PlayStation 3 launch reads like a comedy of errors: mass shortages, inflated eBay prices, even real-life assaults. But 2007 could be a turning point, dontcha know. **SUX**

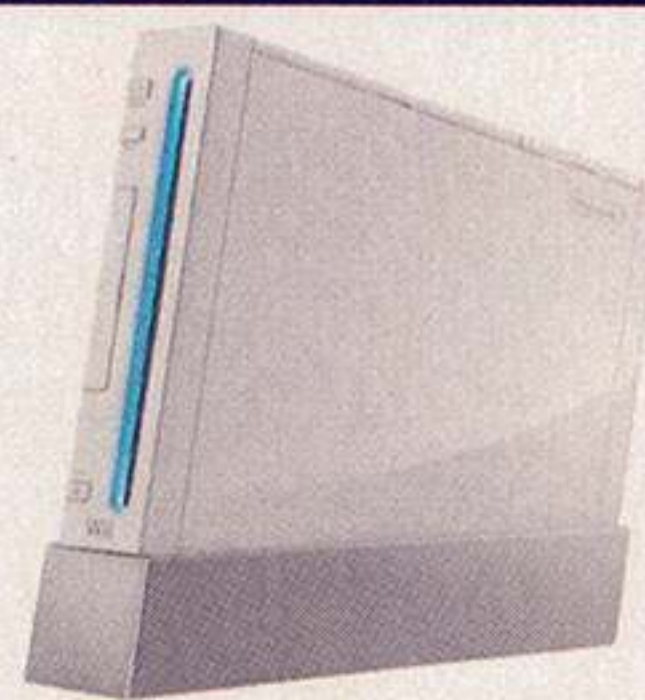


Ubisoft. Tough love time. Guys? The Wii ports of *Splinter Cell* and *Far Cry* are just bloody awful. Don't try to shoehorn Xbox 360 control schemes onto the Wii Remote—it doesn't work. We nag because we love. **SUX**



Atari. Struggling publisher encouraged us with *Test Drive Unlimited*, but the upcoming Xbox 360 clunker *Bullet Witch* brings our expectations crashing back down. Remember: quality first! **SUX**

RULES



Nintendo. "Spot shortages" or not, phenomenal Wii and DS sales prove that the original bad boy is still a force to be reckoned with. Now bring us Wii HD already! **RULES**



Sega. Scoring an *Aliens* next-gen games license is huge. Memo to the devs: think *Battlefield* with pulse rifles and facehuggers. They mostly come out at night. *Mostly.* **RULES**



Microsoft. *Gears of War* is hitting huge, and *Rainbow Six: Vegas* is likely to repeat the trend. Launching Xbox 360 early was the key decision for the boys in Redmond. **RULES**



TOP NEWS

SURPRISE: MICROSOFT EXTENDS XBOX 360 WARRANTY

One-year boost applies retroactively, covering most Xbox 360 owners.

Microsoft announced that the company would permanently expand the warranty for its Xbox 360 console unit from three months to a full year. The change is retroactive, covering all previously purchased consoles within the one-year warranty period. The Xbox 360's original warranty, three months, was considered average-to-below average by most consumer electronics standards. A one-year warranty, in comparison, is considered to be far more generous.

Better yet, consumers who paid out-of-pocket expenses for Xbox 360 hardware troubles "will be eligible for reimbursement of their console repair charges," according to Microsoft. The reimbursement checks are expected in ten weeks, and will be automatically processed and mailed by Microsoft. No consumer action is necessary.



+1 YR

THE BIG 5

Vicious Sid sounds off on the top stories on GamePro.com.



1 BK SELLS 2 MILLION XBOX GAMES

Pocket Bike Racer and Sneak King definitely deserve a place alongside 99 cent Junior Whoppers and "chicken fries."



2 RESIDENT EVIL 5 IN 2008?!

You know that old saying "the truth will set you free?" Yeah, I don't buy it either. This is gonna be one lo-o-ong wait, boys and girls.

3 PS2 TO OUTSELL PS3 IN '07, '08

The PS2 soldiers on with huge sales long after the GameCube and Xbox fizzled. But if the PS3 is still sluggish by 2008, things are gonna get ugly.

4 PS3 EXCLUSIVES GOING TO XBOX 360

First Assassin's Creed and GTAIV, now Virtua Fighter 5. And then those persistent rumors of Solid Snake creeping over to camp Microsoft...

5 SONY TO START PSP VIDEO DOWNLOAD SERVICE SOON

Do we need any other proof that the UMD movie format is officially dead? Sony must be hoping that Blu-ray doesn't share the same dismal fate.

Famitsu, Business Week

MOBILE GAMES THAT DON'T SUCK

1 Mafia Wars: Yakuza (Digital Chocolate)
Multiple weapons, unique boss battles, and an innovative auto-fire system power this excellent Asian-themed shooter. Yakuza is a true mobile killer-app.



2 Lost Planet: Trag Zero (Capcom Interactive)
Don't ignore this mobile side story just because it lacks the flash of its Xbox 360 cousin. Trag Zero is long, challenging, and conjures up great old-school memories.

- 3** Tennis Open 2007 (Gameloft)
- 4** Super KO Boxing (Glu Mobile)
- 5** Tim Burton's Nightmare Before Christmas (mDisney)
- 6** NOM (Gamevil)
- 7** Navy Battle (Vivendi Games Mobile)
- 8** Traffic Mayhem (Gamevil)
- 9** Night Club Empire (Digital Chocolate)
- 10** Muppets Puzzle Party (mDisney)

Geek Speak 2.0

Big words, small type.

Anti-aliasing: Rendering 3D visuals introduces jagged edges. Anti-aliasing creates a smoother, more realistic image, especially with higher levels of sampling.

Anisotropic filtering: Surface textures often look muddy and hazy at a distance, but anisotropic filtering cleans up that distortion from every angle.

Specularity maps: Adds highlights to objects and environments to add that "next-gen shine." Particularly useful for complex glossy effects, such as rusty or stained metal.



Ugly pixels (left); smooth anti-aliasing (right)



CREATURE COMFORT

With the PlayStation 3 release of **The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion** imminent, we spoke with Matt Carofano, lead artist for Bethesda Softworks, to reminisce about the design process behind one of most inspired and innovative RPGs in history.

MEHRUNES DAGON

"We decided to reinvent Dagon for Oblivion, so we intensified his look by adding horns, tusks, tribal markings, and a red skin tint. In earlier games he was only slightly larger than the player, but in Oblivion he's several stories tall for a more dramatic ending to the main quest."

"The end model stayed pretty true to the concept drawings. The only thing that didn't work out as well as we had hoped was his mobility. His enormous scale prevented us from having him move easily in the environment, so in the end we gave him a fixed position and worked on a more focused encounter."

TROLL

"This creature needed to reflect the forested environments of Cyrodiil, so we made him more ape-like with a mossy fur coat. The troll was one of the first creatures to be modeled, textured, and animated in Oblivion, [so it] was used as an early test for how all the creatures would behave."



LAND DREUGH

"We decided the Dreugh would fit better if we moved him from watery environments onto dry land. We stuck to marine life references and added elf-like facial features and a more humanoid upper body. The Land Dreugh stands out because of its multiple limbs and powerful back spine attack."



OBLIVION'S SHADOW

We got a sneak peak at the latest Oblivion expansion, **Shivering Isles**. What's in store for Oblivion players this spring?

With more than 30 hours of new gameplay, this official expansion is larger than many standalone games. Shivering Isles charges players with infiltrating an all-new region led to the brink of destruction by the forces of Mania and Dementia, and ruled by Sheogorath, the Daedric Prince of Madness. Expect all-new enemies, weapons, and, of course, side quests. Look for it this spring on Xbox 360 and PC. No word on a PS3 version, but we'll keep you posted.



GAMES TO DIE FOR

Our current obsessions



Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six: Vegas (Xbox 360)
This game came out of nowhere to steal our hearts and minds. But better than Gears? Quite possibly. Easily one of the top three next-gen games we've played yet.



MotorStorm (PS3)
Seeing MotorStorm running in 720p for the first time is an almost religious experience.



Battlefield 2142 (PC)
Although it got off to a slow start, Battlefield 2142 quickly picked up steam with a slew of recent updates and much-needed bug fixes. Once you master its nuances, the epic new Titan mode is intensity squared. Pure genius.

Vinsanity by Carter.
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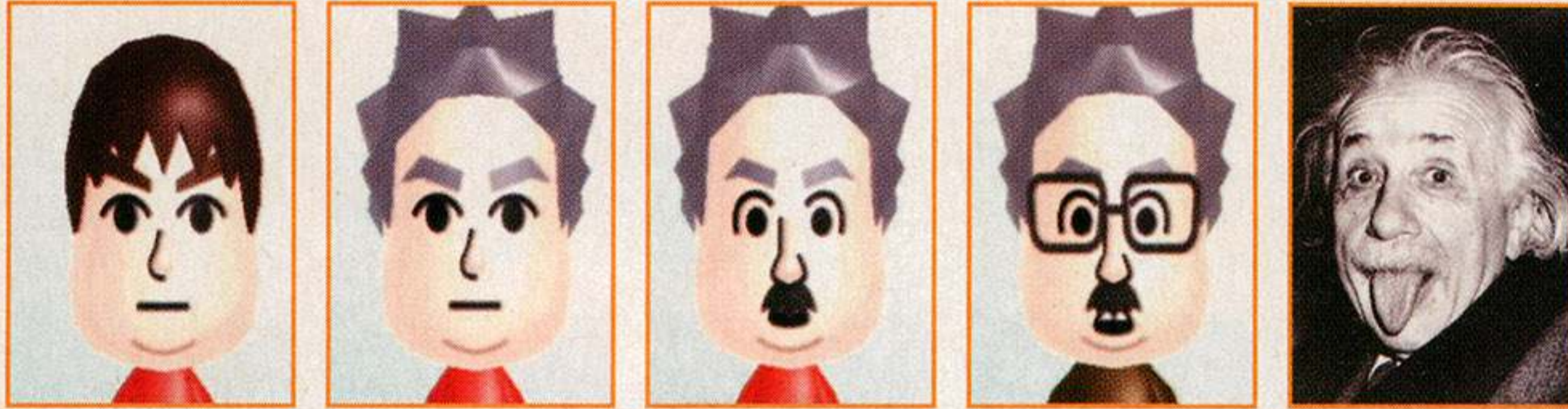
www.bodybymilk.com

GP D.I.Y.

So you've got a Wii...which means you've got a Mii. But why stop at recreating your own ugly mug? Here's a step-by-step guide to get you started with celebrity Miis.

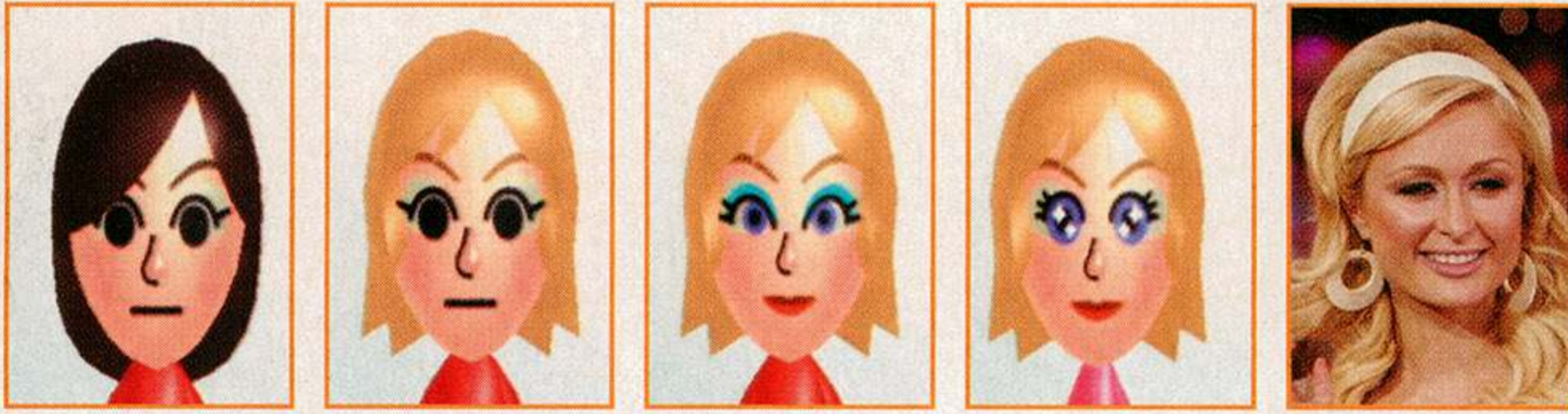
When it comes to creating lifelike Miis, it's not about hitting every high-def detail. Ask any political cartoonist—the key is to create a mannerist caricature that best represents the qualities of your subject without getting overwhelmed by minutiae.

ALBERT EINSTEIN



- 1 Start with the basic male template and add a double chin...
- 2 Hair and brows go a long way in making the man. Speaking of which, did you know thin, plucked eyebrows are currently in vogue? Our Cosmo subscription is paying for itself.
- 3 Big googly eyes and the signature 'stache help fill out our Wii Einstein. Don't forget glasses!
- 4 Voila! Theoretical physicists don't come any hotter than this.

PARIS HILTON

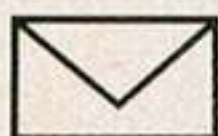


- 1 Nice rosy cheeks go a long way in creating the Hilton effect. We used the default nose but scaled it down a notch for cuteness.
- 2 Again, it's all in the eyebrows. Paris's whipcord-thin brows are the stuff of legend.
- 3 That pouty little mouth is just begging to be kissed, isn't it? What really makes a Paris Mii are the star-studded eyes, though that eyeliner might be a bit much,...
- 4 Yeah, the clean, fresh-faced look is the way to go. Viva la Paris!



Pwned this month: Gears of War, Blu-ray, and Microsoft Game Studios

A thousand pardons for the break, but it's good to be back slaying dragons and skewering cows... • The Wii launch-window lineup at a glance: 80 percent crap, 20 percent pure genius... • Microsoft Game Studios needs to kick it into overdrive, and I mean *now*. Viva Piñata ain't gonna stand up to the MotorStorms, Lairs, and Mario Galaxies of the world... • After months of play, it's clear that Rainbow Six: Vegas blows away Gears of War in almost every department. Way to knock it out of the park, Ubi... • Know the trick to switch your PS3 into low-res 480i mode? Restart the console as normal, then hold the power button for five seconds. Listen for the beep... • Vicious Vision #1: Shadow of the Colossus 2 online! Imagine crawling around on the colossi with seven other pals, or launching giant tripwires and nets to slow down the beast... • PS3 Prediction: few developers will bother with Six-axis motion-sensing controls because they feel too flakey. Resistance gets it right, though—shakeshakeshake... • Crysis just keeps looking better and better. But good enough to drop \$1000 on a slammin' new Windows Vista PC? Surprisingly, the answer is looking like yes... • Anyone else notice the Xbox 360 directional pad sucks for Xbox Live Arcade games? • If you don't have an HDTV by now, I'm revoking your gamer credentials. Look into DLPs and three-LCD rear projection sets, which give you giant, gorgeous 720p screens for under \$1,500... • The Blu-ray/HD DVD format war is tedious already. If only Sony would reign in their raging hubris and allow a unified standard... • MotorStorm...MotorStorm...MotorSt...



email Sid:
vicious_sid@gamepro.com

DVD PRO

Movies for gamers.



MUST SEE

RENO 911! MOST WANTED UNCENSORED

Featuring the talented guys and gals behind MTV's *The State*, *Reno 911* ruthlessly mocks gung-ho reality show trash like *COPS* and *America's Most Wanted*. With over two hours of side-splitting content, this disc will make you forget all about the sad tale of Dave Chappelle.

www.reno911.com
\$19.99

DR. TRAN: #1 AMERICAN ICON

Creators Johnson and Burns dose out raunchy, blistering comedy that recalls *Ren & Stimpy* in its prime. But don't let the pretty colors fool you—the humor is anything but kiddie.

www.beyondgrandpa.com
\$16.99

BATTLESTAR GALACTICA SEASON 2.5

Endlessly engrossing, this long-awaited set collects the second half of the terrific sophomore season (plus 10 hours of extras). The season finale is a masterstroke...and if you disagree, frak off.

www.scifi.com/battlestar
\$37.98

AVATAR: THE COMPLETE BOOK 1 DVD COLLECTION

Avatar marries the choicest bits of Japamation—lovable characters, humor, and loads 'o action—with an American storytelling sensibility.

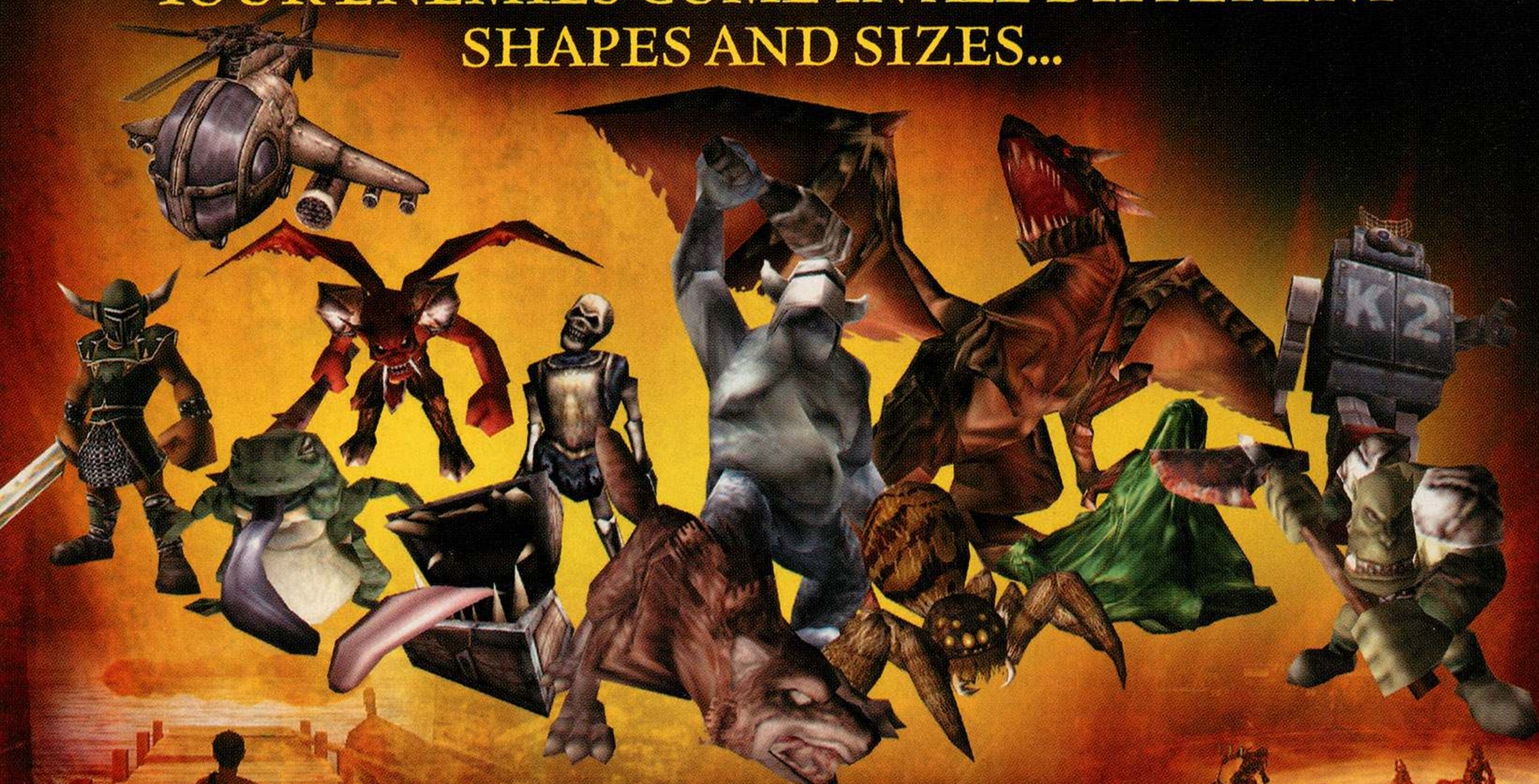
www.nick.com/avatar
\$61.99

LITTLE MISS SUNSHINE

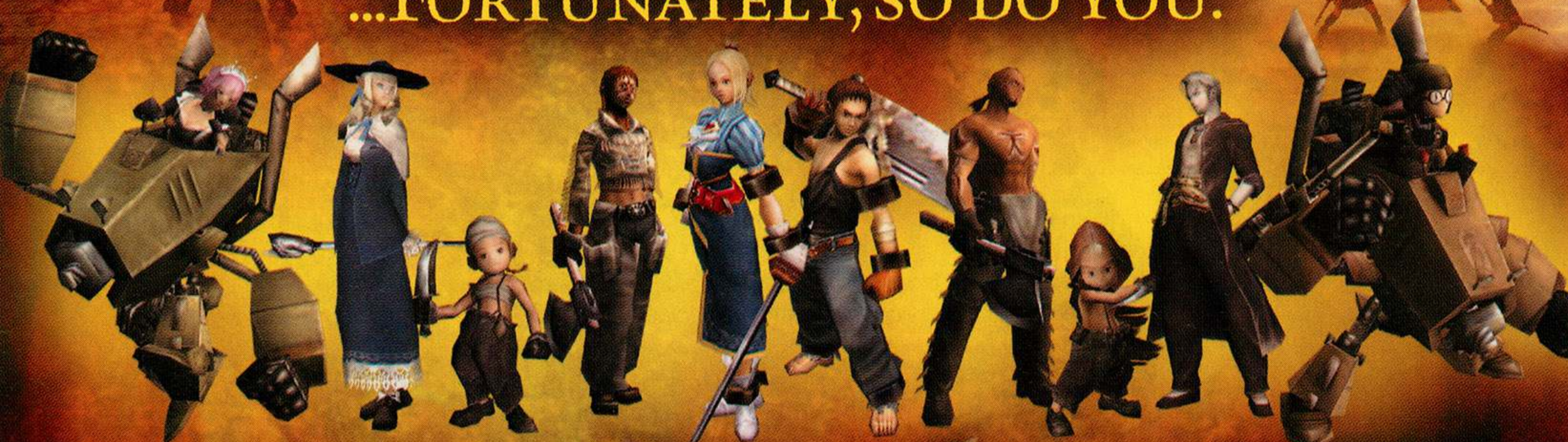
A scathing look into dysfunctional family life, this is one flick that you should definitely watch with your own family...if you're still on speaking terms, that is.

www.foxsearchlight.com/
littlemiss sunshine
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PlayStation Portable





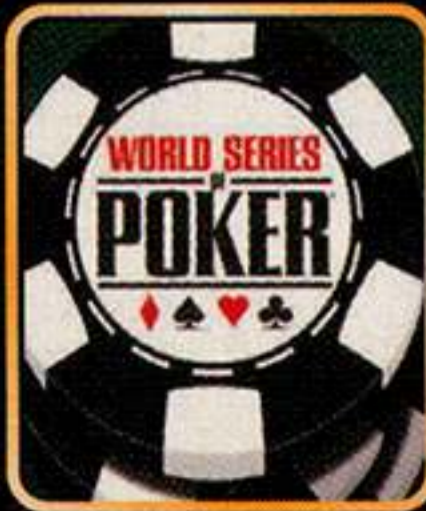
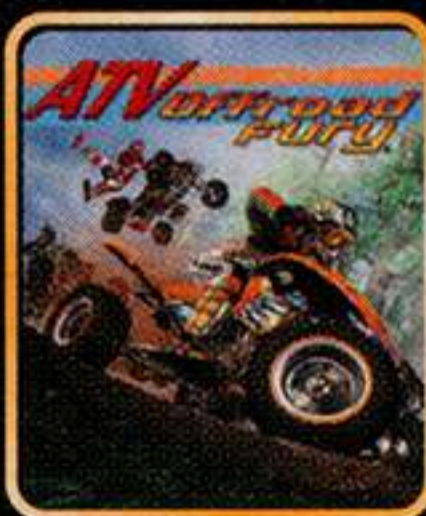
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KNOW YOUR...

HD VIDEO CABLES

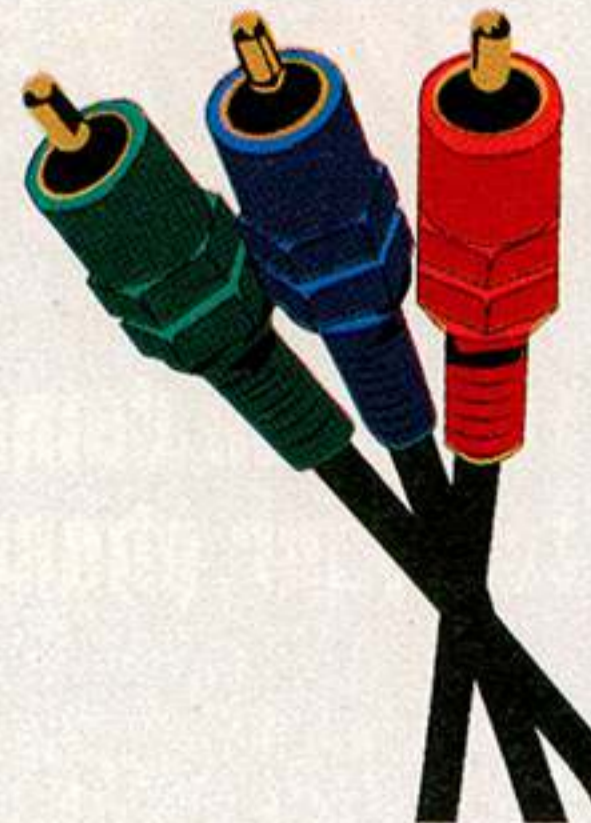
S-Video and Composite

These are NOT HD video cables! Avoid these dinosaurs unless you're completely out of options. They're limited to ugly old 480i, so expect blurry, jagged, stretched visuals. A waste on any HD TV set.



Component

The HD gold standard. Found on nearly all hi-def TV sets, these inexpensive analog cables can technically handle up to 1080p...though the signal won't look quite as crisp as HDMI. Still, component is always a solid choice.



VGA

A handy option for the Xbox 360 because it's compatible with PC monitors and some HD TVs. Though VGA looks crisp, you may prefer the bolder, brighter colors of component cables. Experiment!



HDMI

The future-proof option. Images look sublime thanks to the all-digital signal, so 1080p will crackle with detail. Integrated 5.1 audio is another key plus. HDMI is PlayStation 3-only for now, though Microsoft has hinted at future Xbox 360 support.



MINI-GAMES

1. Let's start easy. What's the name of the last boss in Xbox 360 blast-a-thon Gears of War?

- a) General Akabar
- b) Master Spaam
- c) General Raam
- d) Admiral Aam

2. You've just been called the "master of unlocking." What groan-worthy game are you playing?

- a) Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory
- b) Thief: Deadly Shadows
- c) Resident Evil
- d) Sneak King

3. Just weeks before launch, Sony gave PlayStation 3 one key hardware boost. What was it?

- a) A Blu-ray drive
- b) HD DVD compatibility
- c) HDMI 1.3 support
- d) George Foreman backward compatibility

4. Voxels: what the hell are they?

- a) What Vicious Sid calls his fluffiest pair of socks
- b) "Volumetric pixels," a technique for 3D details such as grass
- c) "Volume particles," such as clouds, dust, and fire
- d) "Volition textures," for enhanced clarity in Saints Row

5. Far Cry is to Crysis as...

- a) Mortal Kombat 3 is to Street Fighter II
- b) Doom II is to Quake
- c) Halo is to Halo 2
- d) Mr. Marbles is to peanut M&Ms

6. What classic rock song blares during the bar abduction scene in the first level of Xbox 360 shooter Prey?

- a) "I'm Burnin' for You"
- b) "Don't Fear the Reaper"
- c) "Iron Man"
- d) "Pinball Wizard"

7. What wireless standard does the Xbox 360 controller use?

- a) Bluetooth
- b) Wi-Fi
- c) Wireless USB
- d) 2.4 GHz radio frequencies

8. What speed does the PlayStation 3's Blu-ray Disc drive run at?

- a) 2.0x
- b) 1.5x
- c) 1.0x
- d) 16x

9. Which feature is NOT supported by the Nintendo Wii?

- a) SD card compatibility
- b) DVD movie playback
- c) Bluetooth wireless compatibility
- d) Integrated Wi-Fi

10. Spot the phony war shooter:

- a) Battlefield 2142
- b) Call of Duty 2: Big Red One
- c) Medal of Honor: Underground
- d) Brothers in Arms: Hell Hath no Fury

Scorecard

0-3: N00b! 7-9: Forum dweller
4-6: Recovering gamer 10: gameraous omnivorous

FAMOUS LAST WORDS

OVERHEARD THIS MONTH

"Nobody will ever use 100 percent of the PS3's capability."

Phil Harrison, president of Sony Worldwide Studios, while explaining how God of War II is "about as good as it gets" for the PS2.



"You know you're in trouble when you get beat by something called a Wii."

Time, in an article called "5 Things That Went from Buzz to Bust." For the record, O.J. Simpson's aborted tell-all took the top slot.



"I'm not being glib, but we're actually [already] looking at PS4."

Martin Kenwright, CEO of PS3 MotorStorm developer Evolution Studios, explaining how the games industry will "change beyond all recognition" in coming years.



"Busted. Nailed. Snagged...Guess we were trying to be just a little too clever."

Sony Computer Entertainment, admitting that faux-blog alliwantforxmasisp.com was a viral marketing campaign gone bad.



"We are not afraid of being compared to Duke Nukem Forever. They should be afraid of us."

Anton Bolshakov, lead designer of THQ's much-delayed PC shooter S.T.A.L.K.E.R., on frequent comparisons to the ten-year development process of Duke Nukem.

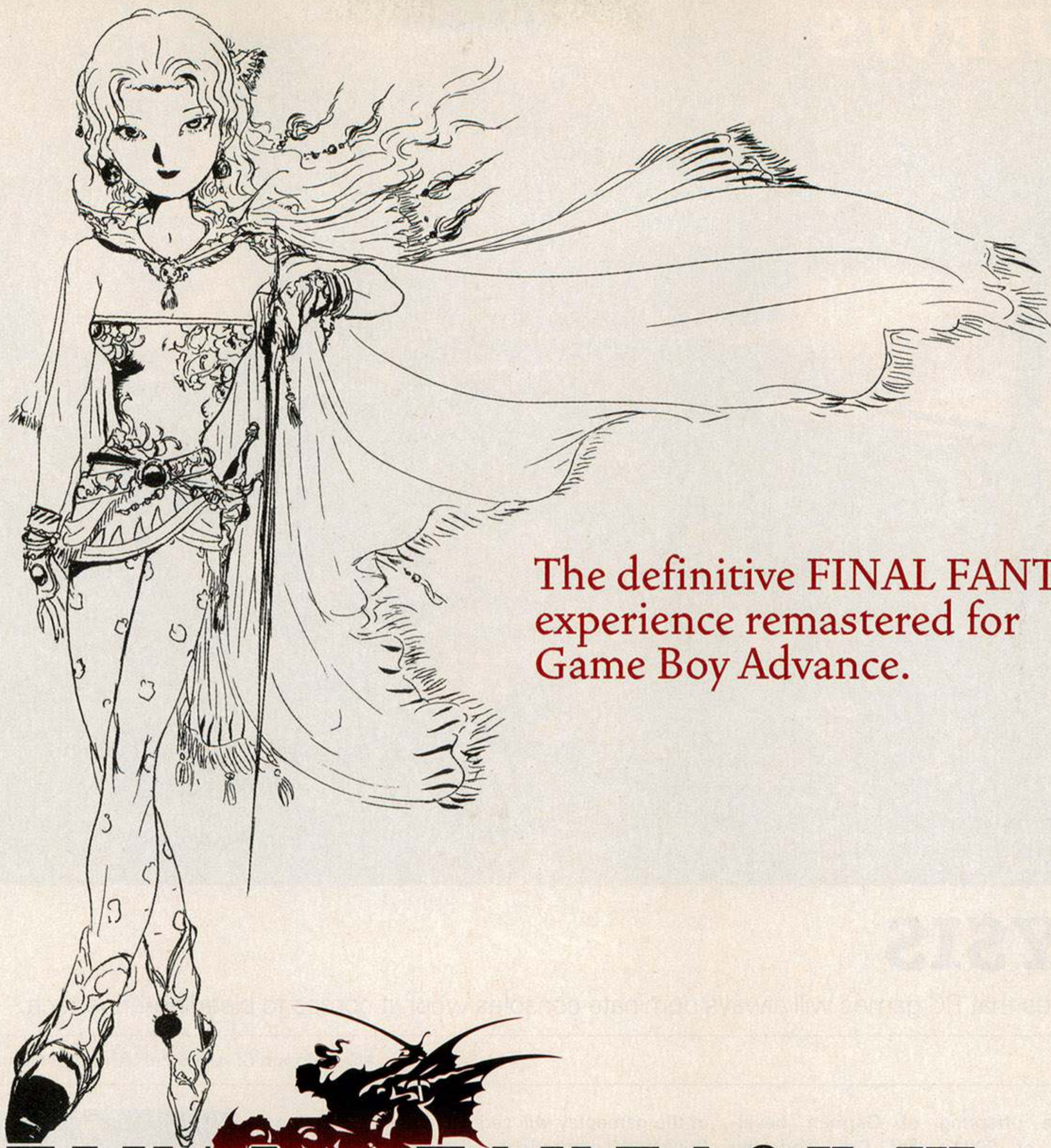
PS4

"To say that there will be no PS4 because of a management change is a bit far fetched."

Paul Holman, vice president of technology for Sony Computer Entertainment Europe, on rumors that an executive reshuffling at SCEI fore-shadows Sony exiting the video game hardware business.

MTV, Time, GamesIndustry.biz, Smarthouse

Answers: 1. c 2. c 3. c 4. b 5. b 6. b 7. d 8. a 9. b 10. d



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GAME BOY ADVANCE SP

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If you want Crysis to look like this, you'll need to throw some cash into your current rig.

CRYSIS

Crysis proves that PC games will always dominate consoles when it comes to bleeding-edge tech.

PC

■ Developer: Crytek ■ Publisher: EA Games ■ Release Date: 2007

Crysis is the offspring of German developer Crytek, of 2004's *Far Cry*, and the company's first game since joining forces with mega-publisher EA Games. Though they obviously share "Cry" in common, *Far Cry* and *Crysis* are two vastly different games. "There's no connection to *Far Cry*," says Cevat Yerli, CEO of Crytek. "Crysis is an entirely new game...and we are featuring an alien race that remains a closely guarded secret." *Far Cry* featured a race of genetically engineered mutants called Trigenes. But in *Crysis*, it's strictly an alien affair.

ALL ABOUT ALIENS

Crysis's blood-thirsty aliens thrive in a freezing, zero-G environment, which helps explain the mysterious freeze gun depicted in the latest screenshots. You can expect that a large chunk

of the gameplay will center on alien technology. But when it comes to the weaponry, Crytek wants to reinvent the core components of the tired shooter genre.

FUTURE KILL

"We decided that we wanted players to be able to customize on the fly," he says detailing the different customization options in *Crysis*, which so far include scopes, lamps, laser sights, and, of course, silencers. "In most cases, players can take an item from one weapon and put it on another," Cevat clarifies. "There may be no obvious reason to put a sniper scope on a shotgun, but it makes for really interesting gameplay options." There is also a feature called "tactical munitions," in which bullets can be controlled after they've been fired. There are a number of different ways to utilize tactical munitions in *Crysis*. "Sleep mode is a quick and silent way to down an enemy... you can then activate the trigger and put that target to sleep," Cevat gushes.

Even with multiplayer, Crytek is innovating the genre. Unsurprisingly, the Nano Muscle Suit is a key focus. "We expect to be surprised" by how crafty players will exploit the suit's futuristic capabilities, Cevat says. Crytek is not supporting online cooperative play at the initial



release of *Crysis*, but isn't entirely shutting the idea down. A mode called "Power Struggle," an objective-based multiplayer experience with a distinctly single-player feel, should fill the co-op void for the short term.

TECH WARS

Much of *Crysis*'s magic stems from its ultra-advanced game engine. Dubbed "CryEngine 2," its rendering technology has been improved in virtually every way. "Shadows are now soft, dynamic terrain has support for voxel technology to offer real 3D carving, and physics does support real-time breaking of vegetations, soft-deformations, advanced vehicles and an improved human physics simulation." It may all sound like tech jargon, but adding support for elements like voxel technology is no simple feat, certainly nothing a console system can handle...at least, not in the near future. And that's why it's doubtful we'll see *Crysis* on the Xbox 360 or PS3 anytime soon.

—Mr .Marbles



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VIRTUA FIGHTER 5

PS3

Developer and Publisher: Sega Release Date: February

Virtua Fighter 5 is no longer a PlayStation 3 exclusive, but that doesn't mean it's chopped liver. We went hands on with a near-final version of the PlayStation 3 brawler just weeks before its February launch. Here's what we saw.



KING OF THE IRON FIST?

The version we played was virtually complete in every way, and it showed. VF5 is the first game to make great use of the Sixaxis controller's directional pad, and it felt sensationally smooth when we executed the special attacks and dodging moves. Virtua Fighter's underlying gameplay, already heralded for its strategy and speed, has certainly come a long way, and Virtua Fighter 5 proves that in spades. Fighting fanatics will already know that VF 5 adds two new key characters: Kung-fu master Eileen and pro wrestler El Blaze. These newcomers join 15 returning char-

acters to make the largest Virtua Fighter character roster yet.

But in the Quest mode, you'll fight over 500 different CPU brawlers, some designed by gaming publications and members of the VF community. Although those 500 characters are all just cosmetic variations, they each have a unique fighting personality thanks to the game's highly flexible artificial intelligence. But why play the Quest mode? Because it's the main way you'll earn new costumes and items that help customize your brawler. At one point, we earned a colorful orb that we placed in a multi-socketed amulet. But what happens when you fill up that amulet? Saucy Sega reps wouldn't comment, but it's clear that VF5 will keep players busy for a long, long time.

FRIDAY NIGHT FIGHTS

The PS3 version of Virtua Fighter 5 runs at 720p—crisp enough to match the arcade version pixel for pixel. It will be interesting to see if the upcoming Xbox 360 version, which was recently announced for release in late summer of 2006, will be able to handle a higher-resolution treatment. But for the time being, the game looks fantastic, especially when you see intricate background effects such as splashing water, swirling cherry blos-

soms, and crunching snow. When it comes to fighters, VF5 unquestionably sets a new standard for visual beauty.

Though the game shows a ton of promise, it was sad to hear that there won't be any online multiplayer battles. Downloadable content is also out, though Sega says there are enough hidden costumes and content in the game to keep players busy for quite some time...at least, until the much-rumored Tekken 6 makes its PS3 debut.

—Vicious Sid



VIRTUA TENNIS 3

PS3

Developer and Publisher: Sega Release Date: March

Although it ultimately landed in the dust-bin of video game history, the plucky and vastly underappreciated Sega Dreamcast was home to a surprisingly lengthy list of triple-A titles. Included on that list is Virtua Tennis, which still stands as one of the best sports games ever made, so we were more than a little excited when we were received a early build of Virtua Tennis 3 for the PS3. After running around on the virtual courts, we can safely say that the franchise is still one grand slam of a good time.

BASELINE TO BASELINE

If you are one of the unfortunate few who never got to play Virtua Tennis, know that its seamless blend of action and strategy, along with its entertaining mini-games, are what helped make it so memorable. Rather than tinker with near-perfection, Sega simply did the smart thing for Virtua Tennis 3: it retained everything that worked previously and added to it. The on-court action is still blisteringly fast but the tight controls and mechanics make it manageable. The roster of playable players has been expanded and updated to include a number of current pros, like Roger "Headband" Federer and uber-hottie Maria Sharapova (that marriage proposal is still valid, Maria). You can also create your own player to take on the pros in World Tour mode.

There are also some new mini games thrown into the mix and much like the previous install-

ments, they have the added benefit of actually improving your skills. The familiar Pin Crusher, which mimics a game of bowling, helps to improve your serve while newcomer Avalanche improves your footwork by having you run around a court collecting fruit while avoiding boulder sized tennis balls.

FOREHAND SMASH

The other main upgrade lies in the graphics department. The Dreamcast version was no slouch when it came to the visuals but it can't compete with the power of the PS3. The art style is basically the same but everything looks sharper and cleaner. Those of you who own a 1080p enabled display will also be rewarded as the game looks great in full high definition.

We'll reserve the final judgment until we can get our hands on review code but for now, Virtua Tennis 3 looks like a clear winner, and it should give PS3 owners another reason to justify their expensive new toy.—Ahoy and Avast



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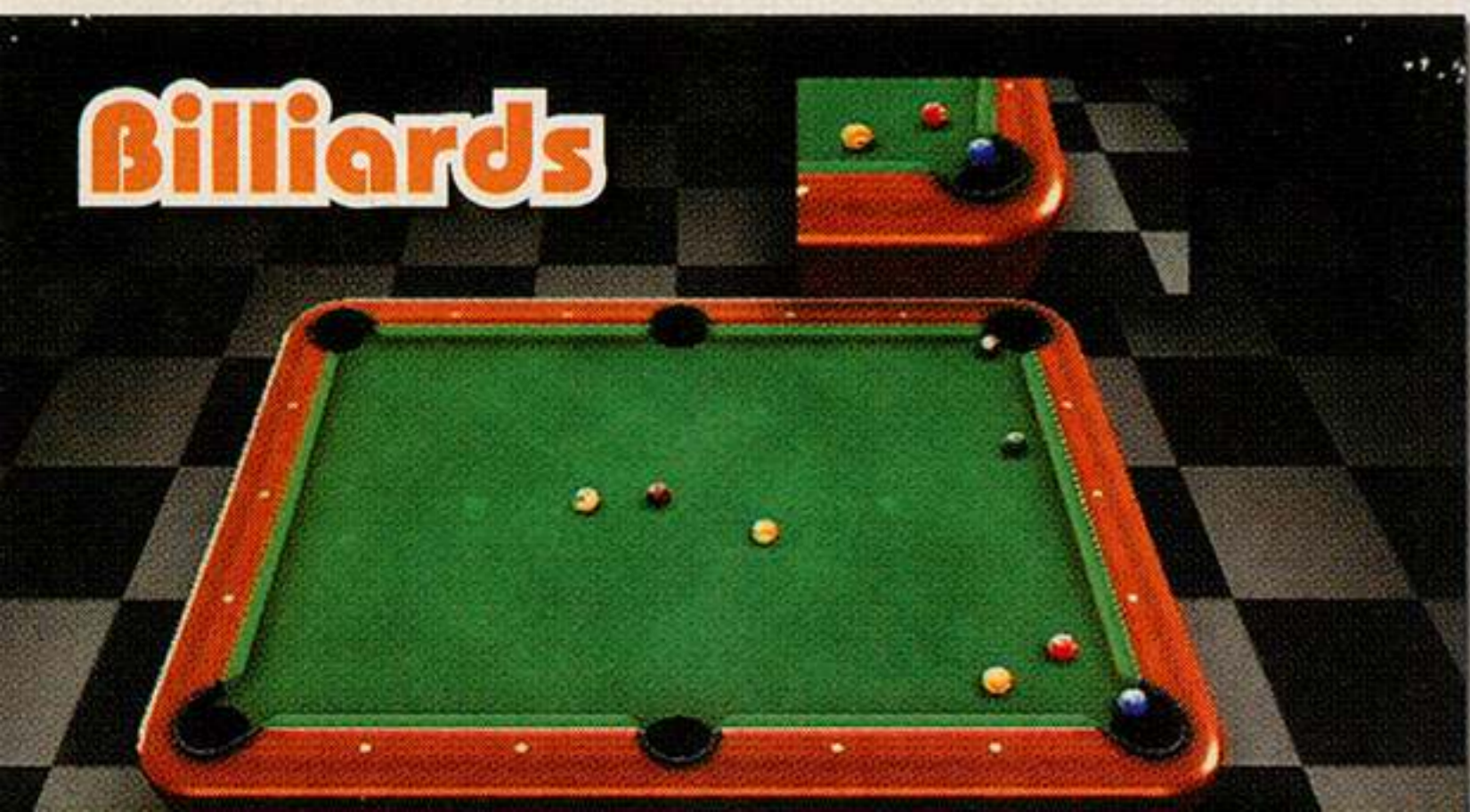
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Burnout Dominator will most likely perform and may even look better than most Xbox 360 and PS3 racing games.

BURNOUT DOMINATOR

Dominating on a PlayStation 2 near you

PS2 PSP

Developer: EA U.K. Publisher: EA Games Release Date: March

Burnout junkies rejoice. Before the potentially face-crushing Burnout 5 hits the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3, PlayStation 2 and PSP owners will get a new Burnout game. We chatted with Senior Producer Nick Channon on the latest Sony exclusive, Burnout Dominator.

1. IS EA SENDING A MESSAGE THAT THE PS2 STILL HAS A LOT OF LIFE LEFT?

Absolutely. There are millions of gamers out there looking for great software on the PS2 and PSP. Burnout Dominator has been designed specifically to take advantage of what these systems do best, and give past-gen gamers another great Burnout game.

2. IS DOMINATOR GOING TO BE A FULL BURNOUT EXPERIENCE?

Dominator is an all-new, full-featured Burnout game and a return to the intense reckless, skill-based racing experience at the heart of the series. It's loaded with dozens of new cars, tracks, objectives, features, and modes on top of old favorites like Burning Lap and Road Rage. Gamers will be busy unlocking everything in the game for a long, long time.

3. WILL SERIES FANS SEE ANY FAMILIAR THINGS?

Longtime fans of the series will also recognize "Burnouts" from Burnout 2: Point of Impact, which will make a return in the game. If you're not familiar, Burnouts are all about filling your boost

meter and using it all in one go. Then we challenge gamers to chain their Burnouts together for the ultimate (and insane) driving experience.

Another big addition is the all-new Maniac Mode, which is all about fighting the clock and chaining together as many crazy driving moves as possible to rack up huge scores.

4. IS THERE A SPECIFIC BURNOUT GAME THAT DOMINATOR WILL RESEMBLE MOST?

Burnout Dominator isn't modeled after any one single Burnout game, but rather the core of the entire series, which is dangerous, skilful driving at absolutely ridiculous speeds. Games like Burnout Revenge focused more on crashing and destruction, and while there are still elements of that in the Burnout Dominator, we wanted to focus more on the racing experience and the sensation of speed. We wanted gamers to *fear* crashing, which makes the high-speeds in the game even more intense.

5. WHAT ABOUT THE CRASH MODE?

We're creating a racing-focused experience with Burnout Dominator and have decided to let Crash Mode sit out this round and breathe a little. We've put the time into creating new race modes that capture the anarchistic spirit of Crash Mode, but wanted to keep the game at high speeds on the open road this time.



7. ONLINE?

We're currently focusing on creating a compelling offline game for Burnout Dominator on the PS2, but friends will be able to compete head-to-head in split-screen multiplayer, or challenge each other in Party Play Mode.

The PSP version will feature Ad Hoc multiplayer for up to six gamers. In addition, we're introducing a unique ScoreSync feature over Wi-Fi that lets players compare their best scores and race times with friends, and fan the flames of competition. We're also going to offer exclusive new PSP tracks for download after Burnout Dominator ships.—Mr. Marbles

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MOTORSTORM

PS3

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

At the risk of using cliché adjectives, *MotorStorm* screams adrenaline-fueled. Think *Burnout* but with off-road vehicles trudging through the dirt combined with some of the most realistic graphics seen on a console system. The objective is to win by any means necessary, so bashing your opponent off a cliff while you round one of the game's many hairpin turns is entirely encouraged. That's what makes the game so much fun. It's a do-as-you-please-racer that is minimalist in terms of management, but takes a heck of a lot of skill to cross the finish line in the #1 slot.

BURNING MAN?

Centered around a fictional gathering called the *MotorStorm* Festival, fans arrive in the desert to watch the insane display of races that the player will partake in. The story is definitely not the driving force of the game, just a way to lay out the races so it doesn't look like a big clumpy mess.



Races take place in dangerous dirt terrain and because the game uses Havoc physics, it's not unusual that a single rock can send your high-speed vehicle into a tumbling death spin. So you'll need to use boost, as well as caution, when taking the suicide turns that can easily lead you right off the edge. There are different drivable paths that are determined by what type of vehicle you are manning. For example, taking the high route in a bike just might be a great way to get a jump on the competition, but the narrow path is a risk-reward situation.

PLAYING IN THE MUD

Cars, trucks, bikes, buggies, and even big rigs are playable in *MotorStorm*, and each vehicle has very specific handling, speed, and damage stats. Lighter vehicles are incredibly fast, and there's awesome independent wheel physics on four-wheeled vehicles. With tons of rides to choose



from and awesome skins, to boot, there is more than enough variety in *MotorStorm*'s wheel department. And integrated realistic physics brings the whole thing together where rag-doll crash ejections are wonderfully addictive to watch.

Few finished details have been released about *MotorStorm*'s multiplayer, but we do know that Sony is promising at least 8-player online play, with the chance that it will be bumped up to 16. It's a nice feature to have considering the Japanese version was rushed out with no online support. —Mr. Marbles



FORMULA ONE CHAMPIONSHIP EDITION

PS3

■ Developer: Sony Studios Liverpool ■ Publisher: Sony ■ Release Date: March

Though it's going for a more arcade-y experience than previous Formula One games, *Formula One Championship Edition* is still going to be a simulation of the real life sport, F1. The game is based on the 2006 season, containing all of the events, drivers, and teams of the real sport. Developer SCE Liverpool is promoting a "F1 for everyone" type of experience, mainly because F1 games haven't done very well in the U.S. market (more of a European thing). So the non-F1 enthusiast can tear up

the track with little to no knowledge of the sport itself while paying less attention to the fine details of driving an F1 car.

DISSECTING THE FORMULA

There isn't a story in F1, per se, but the game is centered around the 2006 race season...and there's a career mode. That's something, right? And yes, the game is geared toward the arcade; but F1 is set in circuit tracks on real-world courses. Not too

exciting, but then again, it's not so much about the creativity of the tracks as it is about the difficulty of moving up in the ranks. As you'd expect, true-to-life F1 cars are featured and there's not much expansion on this. But turning on in-game damage will certainly change the way you drive them. If you take even a slight amount of damage to one of your wheels, you might be in OK shape, but get smashed from behind and lose your wing...then you're in a heap of trouble.

A PS3 PLEASURE

While it isn't a technical workhorse like *MotorStorm*, F1 is definitely not a throwaway in the visual department. The mapping of track terrain and detail on cars is almost breathtaking, side-view mirrors make excellent use of reflections, and inclement weather spews rain right onto the screen. Trees and other background objects don't push the graphical boundaries, but F1 as a whole is a more-than-pleasing visual experience.

As for online—there is promise of 11-player races, but there will also be the ability to add A.I. racers to bump the final number up to 22. No word on multiplayer specifics, but expect standard races and tracks from the single-player game. *Formula One Championship Edition* looks to couple with *MotorStorm* to form a fine racing duo that will drop this March. But which PS3 racer is for you? —Mr. Marbles



DEF JAM: ICON

PS3 Xbox 360

■ Developer: EA Chicago ■ Publisher: EA Games ■ Release Date: March

The **Beastie Boys** were known the let the beat drop. That's a lesson learned in *Def Jam: Icon* where the dropping beat is your best friend. With *Icon*, EA Chicago is out to create a true hip-hop lifestyle fighting game, and music is your main weapon.

ROCK THE RHYTHM

Def Jam is a fighting series, yes, but this latest installment, *Def Jam: Icon*, will be the first fighting game to make the music the most important element of play. Everything in the game reacts to the beat of the music, and using the interactive environment is just as important as punches, kicks, and throws. Every object in the background moves to the beat of the current track and specific beats trigger interactive hazards like exploding gas pumps, car wash brushes, and even hose sprays from ticked off convenience store clerks. Timing attacks with these events is the key to taking down an opponent for good.

The analog sticks also function as turntable controls to add an extra bit of brutality to combos. You can changes tracks with the sticks and scratch like a DJ to add beats and switch songs, which really changes up the gameplay.

BOUNCE TO YOUR OWN BEATS

There are 30 licensed tracks and 8 environments in the game, but because each level plays completely different with each track, you're looking at 240 different in-game environments. But hold the phone! You can also upload any song right into the game, and the background events will even sync to the beat. Just imagine bashing in Big Boi's head to the soothing sounds of "My Endless Love." The possibilities are indeed endless!



We played four different levels—the Gas Station, the LA Rooftop, the BET Studio, and the NY Club—all of which completely alter in personality according to the specific song that is playing. Fighters have different styles, too, and each one of the 35 artists is more powerful when one of his tracks is booming. To combat this effect, there is the option for the opposing fighter to power down a track and switch to one of his own with the DJ controls. But missing the beat means a dangerous backfire. The rest of the damage is done by linking together combos with the easy-to-use combat system. The more combos you string together, the faster you can hit someone. And taunts help to really rub in the humiliation.

The Build the Label story mode starts you off as an underground rapper, challenging you to essentially become a hip-hop icon by building your own label and signing other hot artists. You'll be just like Jermaine Dupri, but with talent. —Mr. Marbles



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SONIC AND THE SECRET RINGS

Wii

■ Developer and publisher: Sega ■ Release Date: February

Believe it or not, Sonic and the Secret Rings is the wily blue hedgehog's first solo adventure since the Genesis days. The Wii seems a good fit for Sonic, too. Realistic graphics, guns, and even obnoxious orange buddies couldn't help dig Sonic out of a lackluster decade. But perhaps the Wii can.

WHO NEEDS A MAGIC CARPET?

Sonic and the Secret Rings spins Sonic into the storybook world of the Arabian Nights, where Sonic will again play hero and stop an evil (obviously) genie from finding and using the power seven secret rings. One ring to rule them all? Not quite. Sonic will have to track down the rings, one at a time, to stop the genie in his tracks.



On the Wii, Sonic feels at home. The goofy 3D versions of Sonic failed in so many ways to capture the fun, speedy adventure of Sonic yore, but on the Wii, there is a distinctive feel of speed and fun. Sonic constantly accelerates as he runs, and the Wii remote (turned sideways) steers the hedgehog through the twists and turns of the desert and dinosaur-riddled terrain of the Arabian environment. As with any Sonic game, there are plenty of obstacles in his path such as trees, trap doors, and a variety of spiky devices to hinder his progress through over 100 missions. Turning and jumping are the basic dodge maneuvers, but other moves prove more advanced.

BONK'S ADVENTURE

Sonic's main attack is an in-air boost. After jumping, he locks onto an enemy, then bashes into him with a boost of speed. If timed correctly, Sonic has the ability to propel off one enemy to another for a mid-air combo of sorts. This "homing attack" works surprisingly well and is relatively easy to perform with the Wii remote and can double as a quick way to explore. Other ways of getting around include vaulting in catapults and little helicopter-like baskets that are activated by flinging and flapping the Wii remote, respectively.

Sonic and the Secret Rings is all about speed, and the perpetual motion of the game keeps it flying fast. Most of the time he'll be curling up in a speedy little ball, but some stages utilize different fast-moving techniques like surfing a log down a river. Up-to-four-player mini games will bring the rest of the Sonic crew—Knuckles, Tails, and Shadow—into the scene, so don't think this sneaky hedgehog is going completely solo. —Mr. Marbles



MLB '07 THE SHOW

PS3 Xbox 360 Wii

■ Developer: Sony San Diego ■ Publisher: Sony ■ Release Date: February



gest and most important addition is Road to the Show, a situational career mode that allows you to take a player through a MLB career, all of which take place in third-person perspective. You can liken it to "The Life" mode in Sony's NBA franchise, but a little less thuggish; unless you're Ronnie Belliard, that is.

Adaptive pitching and a pitch command system are the most influential new aspects of gameplay. The former

If I had a nickel for each and every time a sports franchise releases a candy-coated version of the previous year, topping it off with a so-called cherry of "new" features, I'd be a moderately rich man. Fortunately for Sony system owners, MLB is offering quite a different experience with MLB '07 The Show.

FEATURE THIS, FEATURE THAT

Okay, all the features from last year's games are returning, but it's the new games modes that are driving the majority of content for '07. The big-

has the catcher calling pitches based on the individual strengths and weaknesses of each pitcher, shadowing real baseball. And the latter implements a comfort/confidence level for each pitch that the pitcher throws. The more a pitcher throws a specific pitch, the more comfortable and confident he becomes with that pitch. It's justification for throwing that 3-2 knuckle ball. The other major addition is a robust online league mode where players can set up custom leagues with as few as 6 and as many as 30 teams with full stat tracking, point benefits and rewards.

TEACHING A NEW DOG OLD TRICKS

There are, of course, many returning characteristics that laid the foundation of MLB '06 that will carry right over into '07, such as a home run derby, user-controlled slides, and scenario-based game-time decisions. And possibly the best feature to make comeback is the Live MLB Ticker that serves as an online news service and headline news updater from MLB.com, because if I don't get my Dodger update, someone's really going to pay... big time.

The game is releasing on all Sony platforms, PS2, PS3, and PSP, but we're not yet sure what special features, if any, will be included on the PlayStation 3. —Mr. Marbles



GUITAR HERO II

Xbox 360

■ Publisher: RedOctane ■ Developer: Harmonix ■ Release Date: March



line only, but Co-op, Face-off, and Pro Face-off return on the Xbox 360 version.

Although we saw 480 progressive scan support for GHII on the PS2, the Xbox 360 version visually stuns with HD graphics. The enhanced character models and over-the-top lighting will rock your socks off. And with the enhanced audio capabilities in the Xbox 360, the sounds quality will make your ears bleed in ecstasy compared to anything you've heard on the PS2. The new X-Plorer controller, modeled after a different Gibson guitar than its PS2 counterpart, is a welcome edition to GHII on Xbox 360. It may be wired, but the directional pad allows for swift menu navigation and it even supports an Xbox 360 headset for chatting it up with fellow rockers. There's also an Ethernet port, but its functionality is unknown at this time.

With more goodies than your little brother's Halloween basket, Guitar Hero II on the Xbox 360 packs a wallop of new features over the PlayStation 2 version. Over 70 mesmerizing tracks, the new X-Plorer controller, leader boards, and downloadable content make GHII for Xbox 360 the ultimate rock package.

THE GIFT THAT KEEPS ON GIVING

Through Xbox Live you'll now be able to download new themes for the Xbox 360 dashboard, snag picture packs for your profile, get ranked on global leaderboards, and purchase a number of new songs and jam packs that will be available to wannabe rockers. Talk about lengthening product life. Multiplayer, however, is still limited to off-

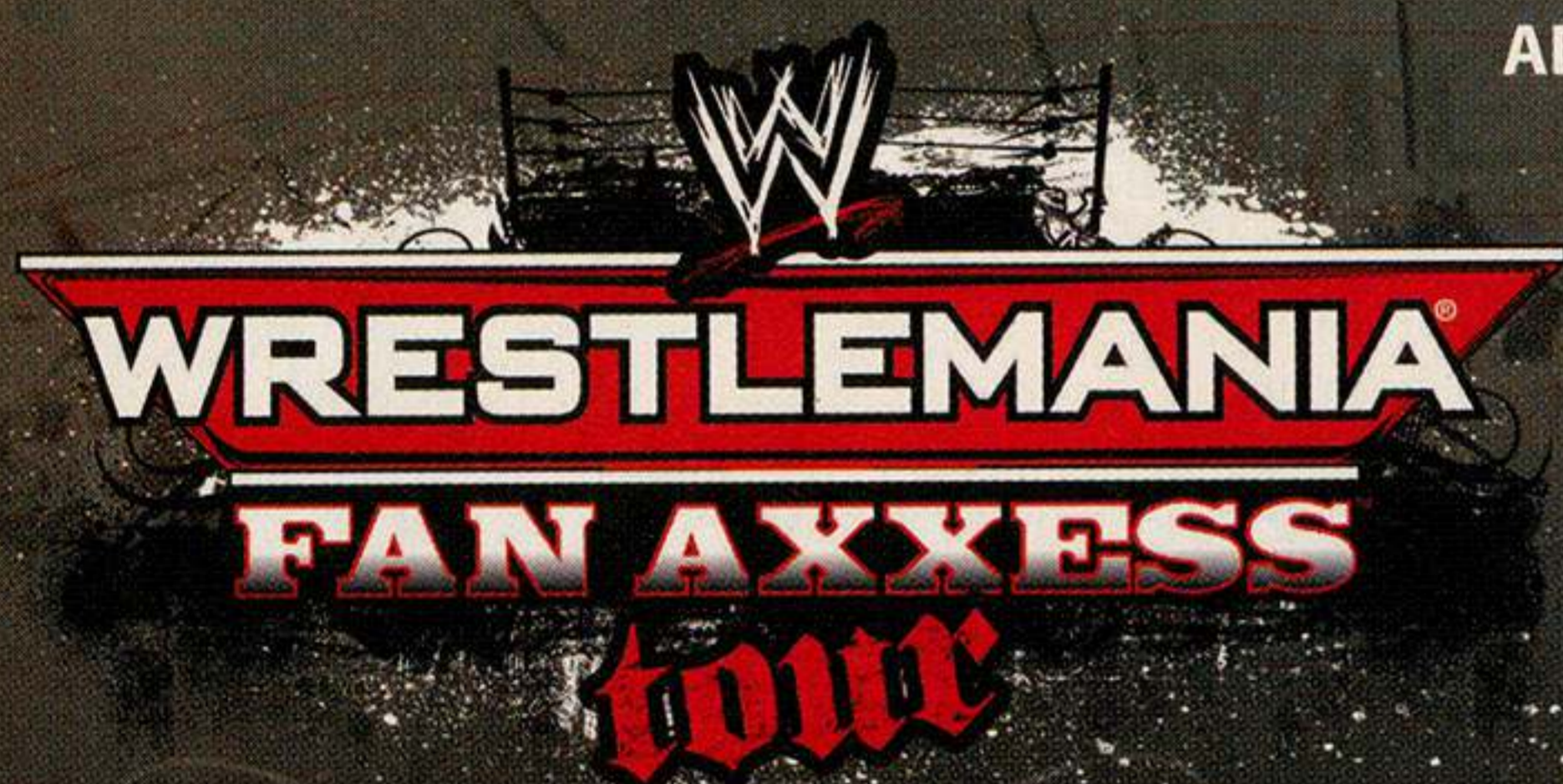
Essentially, GHII on the Xbox 360 is the same game we've all played on the PS2. However, the added level of depth and unlimited replay value through achievements and downloadable content make GHII: Xbox 360 the ultimate version to own. Throw your panties on stage this March.—Tenacious Moses

XBOX 360—NEW SONGS LIST

- "Billion Dollar Babies" (Alice Cooper)
- "Hush" (Deep Purple)
- "Dead!" (My Chemical Romance)—Master Track
- "Life Wasted" (Pearl Jam)
- "Rock 'N' Roll Hoochie Koo" (Rick Derringer)
- "The Trooper" (Iron Maiden)
- "Salvation" (Rancid)
- "Possum Kingdom" (Toadies)—Master Track



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RATCHET & CLANK: SIZE MATTERS

PSP

■ Developer: High Impact Games ■ Publisher: Sony ■ Release Date: February

With *Resistance: Fall of Man* on the shelf and *Insomniac* hard at work on the PlayStation 3 version of the only Lombax and robot duo in video games, the first PSP Ratchet & Clank game will fill the space between. Coined *Size Matters*, the pair's latest action-platforming adventure is the first by High-Impact Games, a studio fashioned by former *Insomniac* employees. But if you're worried about a potential quality drop, don't—*Size Matters* looks and plays like it was spewed right from the horse's mouth.

PERFECTLY PORTABLE

With the platforming genre wearing thin on console systems and the Nintendo DS supporting quirkier gameplay, the PSP is the prime place for action-oriented games like *Ratchet & Clank*. Taking place after *Deadlocked*, *Ratchet & Clank* hit the beaches of Pokitaru for a little time in the sun, but things turn cloudy when a little girl named Luna gets kidnapped right in front of our heroic pair. Fortunately, tracking her down will require the use of some over-the-top firepower fueled by

bizarre Ratchet-patented weapons. For where else could an excessively furry gunner sport a Bee Mine Glove and an Acid Bomb?

The whole experience looks and feels similar to *Ratchet & Clank* games on the PS2, with right-stick camera movement being replaced by the L1 and R1 buttons. Plus, a great auto targeting system means there's no wonky precision aiming to be had, and with the PSP's often jumpy analog stick, that's a good thing.

In typical Ratchet fashion, *Size Matters* will sport a number of upgradeable weapons that increase in ability the more they are used. And we're not just talking about an ammo boost; leveling up guns drastically changes their function and capability to where each upgrade can feel like a completely different weapon.

MULTIPLAYER MATTERS

Size Matters supports both off and online wireless game modes via Ad Hoc and Infrastructure modes, respectively, with variations of deathmatch and CTF including Iron Lombax mode, an objective based team competition that challenges players to capture opposing team homing beacons by bombing them with hover mines. And as a bonus, the massive maps will have hidden multiplayer-only weapon mods to add a little bit more destruction to an already overly explosive game.—**Mr. Marbles**



ETERNAL SONATA

Xbox 360

■ Developer: tri-Crescendo ■ Publisher: Namco Bandai Games ■ Release Date: 2007

You've got to love the Japanese. They can make anything (and I mean anything) weird and exciting. Take for instance the up-and-coming RPG for the Xbox 360, *Eternal Sonata*: Frederic Chopin is the main character. Yes, *that* Frederic Chopin; the famous pianist and romantic composer.

SWEET DREAMS

The premise of *Eternal Sonata* is that as Chopin lay dying in Paris, he dreams that he visits a fantastical world that is filled with people and places named after musical motifs. Chopin travels through this dream world with a young girl named Polka who, though sick and dying, has magical powers that she wants to use to help people. Polka specifically wants to travel to meet with the land's ruler, a count, in order to ask him to help her home village. As Chopin and Polka travel to the count's castle, they meet other characters along the way, one named Allegretto and another named Beat, who each have their



own reasons for appealing to the count. The hitch in the story is that Chopin knows he is dreaming, but as he becomes closer to his traveling companions, he begins to find himself more and more involved and concerned with their plight.

The world of *Eternal Sonata* is huge and brightly animated via anime-style cel shading, where the environments are enormous with plenty of rich detail all around. As you travel to the count's castle, you will have your obligatory enemy and monster encounters that you will battle via a turn-based system that will allow you perform actions while your time gauge is active. As the moment the gauge runs out, the next character's becomes active and they may attack or move accordingly. Enemy monster's stats and physical appearances will also change depending on if they're in light or shadowed spaces. Furthermore, Chopin's piano compositions will be featured as part of the soundtrack for the game, as performed by Russian pianist Stanislav Bunin.

THE BEST PLACE TO ROLE PLAY

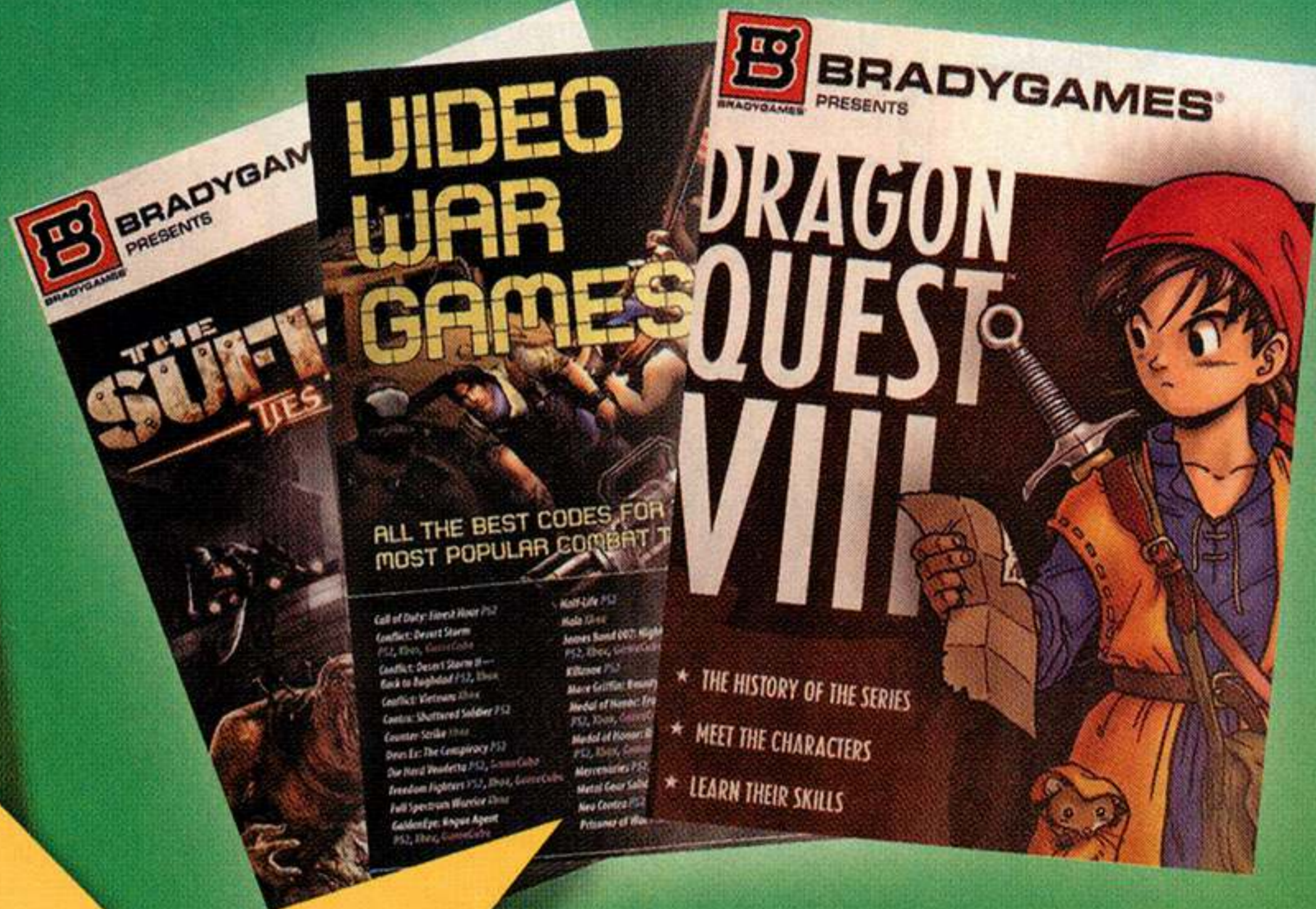
As more RPGs like *Blue Dragon* and *Eternal Sonata* get released on the Xbox 360, it's going to be interesting to see if the PlayStation 3 can retain the PlayStation 2's throne as console of choice for role-players. Visually, *Eternal Sonata* looks like it delivers; it's just a matter of time to see whether or not the story and gameplay content can produce, too.—**T3hPanda**



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HOME

WII WIN!

HIGHS AND LOWS IN THE BRIEF HISTORY OF THE WII

NINTENDO DECLARES WAR

May 11, 2004

At Nintendo's E3 pre-show press conference, company president Satoru Iwata announces the new system codename Revolution. "What should a new game machine do," Iwata says, "Something no other machine has delivered before. The time when horsepower alone made all the difference is over."

CONTROLLER UNVEILED

September 15, 2005

Nintendo drops a mega-ton bomb by unveiling the innovative "Revolution" controller, a small wireless device packed with motion-sensing gizmos. Pundits predict that Nintendo has lost its mind for good.

LAUNCH LINEUP

May 5, 2006

In a bold display of third-party support, Nintendo announces that over 30 games will be available for Wii's launch window. This is a major departure from past Nintendo consoles, which have slim game lineups at launch.

"WII" REPLACES "REVOLUTION"

April 27, 2006

Dropping the well-liked code-name of "Revolution," Nintendo reveals the final, whimsical moniker of its new console—Wii. The early backlash puts Nintendo on the defense. But in time, the name of Wii finds acceptance.

2004

2005



It looks like Nintendo was right after all: the Wii is a bona fide success story! And as legions of fanboys let out a collective sigh of relief, Wii's are flying off stores shelves, and Wii Remotes are flying out of the hands of gamers (new and old) everywhere. Here's a recap of the Wii's march to victory and a look at the games and other factors that will make the Wii the system to watch in 2007. *By Bro Buzz*

LOW PRICE, COMPETITIVE LAUNCH DATE REVEALED

September 14th, 2006

The Big N announces a price, \$249.99, and a launch date of November 19th, just two days after the PlayStation 3 launch. Gamers worry Wii will struggle against the hype of Sony's PS3...but soon enough, those fears are shattered.

WII LAUNCH

November 19, 2006

Nintendo fans line up with moms, dads, and other non-traditional gamers for a chance to score a Wii. In a new twist, demand and interest actually increase after the Wii's highly successful debut, in part due to ongoing mainstream media coverage.

NON-GAME FEATURES RELEASED

December 19, 2006

New interactive features such as the weather, news, and internet browsing bolster Nintendo's goal to make Wii appeal to gamers and non-gamers alike.

GRAPHICS NOT "NEXT-GEN"

June 5, 2006

It gradually becomes clear that Wii isn't targeting the high-def crowd. Early screens show graphics that only marginally exceed those of the four-year-old GameCube, sending a tinge of worry down the spines of even battle-hardened Nintendo fans.

WII-MOTE STRAPS BREAKING

November 24, 2006

Reports trickle in about breaking Wii Remote wrist straps, but Nintendo quickly addresses the situation.

2006

2007

CONTINUED ►



GAMES WII WANT TO PLAY

You don't have to worry about standing around with Remote and Nunchuk in hand and having nothing to do. Here are 78 reasons why you will want to make the Wii your console of choice. (Uhh, be sure to secure that Wii Remote strap, too.) *By Long-Haired Offender and PapaFrog*

WII ACTION/ADVENTURE GAMES

MORTAL KOMBAT: ARMAGEDDON

- Developer and Publisher: Midway
- Release Date: March

Midway is bringing your mom's least favorite blood-soaked fighter to the Wii. Along with all the great features that made Armageddon a hit on "those other systems" last year, the Wii version is rumored to offer full support of the Remote and Nunchuk to spice up the already awesome controls.

SUPER SMASH BROS. BRAWL

- Developer and Publisher: Nintendo
- Release Date: 2007

A huge roster of fighters will duke it out in the third iteration of Nintendo's royal rumbler, including some brawlers that you might not expect to see, such as Metal Gear Solid's Snake and even a puppy from Nintendogs. You heard us right, a puppy from Nintendogs. But whether you're using Link's sword to pop that bloated floater Kirby or you use a cuddly canine to gnaw the face off of Pikachu, you can count on Super Smash Bros. Brawl to power a Wii punch into your dome.

PRINCE OF PERSIA: RIVAL SWORDS

- Developer and Publisher: Ubisoft
- Release Date: March

This title is at heart Prince of Persia: The Two Thrones, but this time around players will be able to push the Remote and the Nunchuk to their limits by running on walls, surviving death-defying stunts, and ramming those amazing-looking shamsirs into your enemies. Any game is worth playing a second time through with the Wii especially when it's of Prince of Persia's caliber.



SUPER MARIO GALAXY

- Developer and Publisher: Nintendo
- Release Date: 2007

Princess Peach has been abducted (who would've guessed), and in order to save her Mario must go where no man has gone before: Mario Galaxy. Hopping from planetoid to planetoid, battling giant spiders, Goombas, and other Super Mario mainstays, Mario will be able to jump higher than ever, Houston, we have a mushroom.



100 BULLETS

- Developer and Publisher: D3 Publisher
- Release Date: Fall 2007

ALIVE

- Developer: TBA
- Publisher: Ubisoft
- Release Date: 2007

BATTALION WARS 2

- Developer: Kuju Entertainment
- Publisher: Nintendo
- Release Date: 2007

BLAZING ANGELS: SQUADRONS OF WWII

- Developer and Publisher: Ubisoft
- Release Date: March

BOMBERMAN LAND

- Developer and Publisher: Hudson Soft
- Release Date: 2007

DEVIL KINGS SERIES

- Developer: TBA
- Publisher: Capcom
- Release Date: 2007

DIGIMON

- Developer: TBA
- Publisher: Namco Bandai Games
- Release Date: 2007

DISASTER: DAY OF CRISIS

- Developer: Monolith Software
- Publisher: Nintendo
- Release Date: March

DISNEY'S MEET THE ROBINSONS

- Developer: Avalanche Software
- Publisher: Buena Vista Games
- Release Date: March

DK BONGO BLAST

- Developer and Publisher: Nintendo
- Release Date: Spring 2007

THE GODFATHER

- Developer and Publisher: EA Games
- Release Date: March

HARRY POTTER AND THE ORDER OF THE PHOENIX

- Developer and Publisher: EA Games
- Release Date: July

HARVEST MOON HEROES

- Developer: Marvelous Interactive
- Publisher: Natsume
- Release Date: 2007

HEATSEEKER

- Developer: IR Gurus Interactive
- Publisher: Codemasters
- Release Date: March

IRON MAN: THE MOVIE

- Developer and Publisher: Sega
- Release Date: 2008

KIRBY

- Developer: Hal Laboratory
- Publisher: Nintendo
- Release Date: 2007

LEGEND OF DRAGON

- Developer: Neko Entertainment
- Publisher: The Game Factory
- Release Date: Summer 2007

LOST

- Developer and Publisher: Ubisoft
- Release Date: 2007

MACHI KURI DOMINO

- Developer: Red Entertainment
- Publisher: Success
- Release Date: 2007

MADAGASCAR 2

- Developer and Publisher: Activision
- Release Date: 2008

NECRO-NEZIA

- Developer: Spike
- Publisher: Nintendo
- Release Date: October

NO MORE HEROES

- Developer: Grasshopper Manufacture
- Publisher: Marvelous Interactive/Spike
- Release Date: 2007

ONE PIECE: UNLIMITED ADVENTURE

- Developer: Ganbarion
- Publisher: Namco Bandai Games
- Release Date: 2007

POKEMON BATTLE REVOLUTION

- Developer: Genius Sonority
- Publisher: Nintendo
- Release Date: 2007

PROJECT H.A.M.M.E.R.

- Developer: NST
- Publisher: Nintendo
- Release Date: August

RATATOUILLE

- Developer: Heavy Iron Studios
- Publisher: THQ
- Release Date: Fall 2007

SADNESS

- Developer: NIBRIS
- Publisher: TBA
- Release Date: August

SAMURAI WARRIORS WAVE

- Developer and Publisher: Koei
- Release Date: Fall 2007

SD GUNDAM G BREAKER

- Developer and Publisher: Namco Bandai Games
- Release Date: August

WII SHOOTERS

METROID PRIME 3: CORRUPTION

- Developer: Retro Studios
- Publisher: Nintendo
- Release Date: Summer 2007

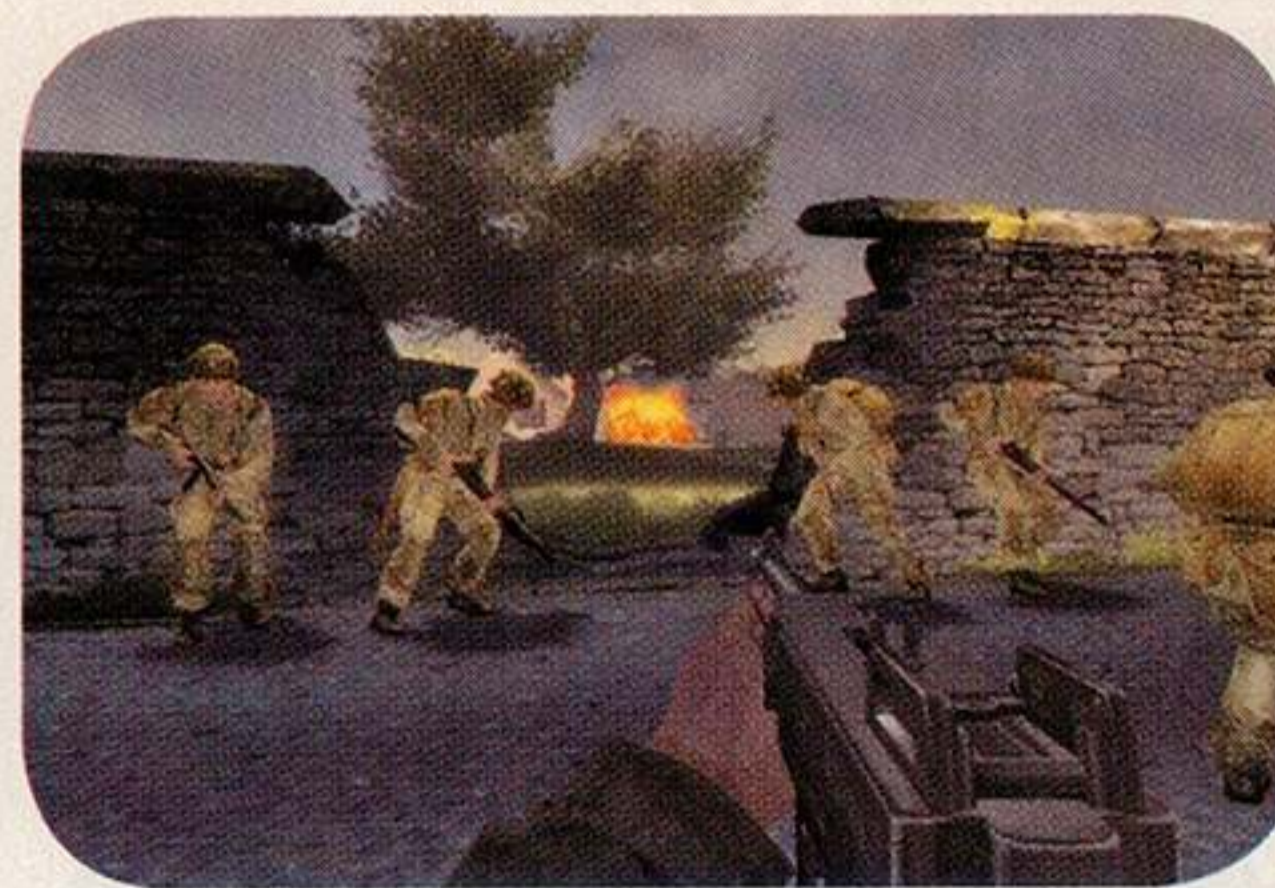
Bounty hunter Samus Aran returns in this conclusion to the Metroid Prime trilogy to once again battle the Space Pirates and her sworn enemy, Dark Samus. As the intergalactic war rages on, the planet-corrupting material known as Phazon infects Samus as well, granting her extraordinary abilities. Expect a bigger game with an epic storyline, and new features like Corruption's stackable beam system. It's surely not the last we'll see of Samus.



MEDAL OF HONOR: VANGUARD

- Developer: EA LA
- Publisher: EA Games
- Release Date: March

As Corporal Frank Keegan, you, the rest of the 82nd Airborne Division, and your Wii Remote will combat the Nazi war machine. Missions are based on actual WWII campaigns, and history buffs should note that Vanguard showcases recreations of Operation Varsity (the crossing of the Rhine) and Operation Husky (the invasion of Sicily).



RAID OVER THE RIVER

- Developer: Nibiris
- Publisher: TBA
- Release Date: 2007

Air combat meets cult demon-summoning (what?) in this shooter from Polish developer Nibiris. The game hurls you across space and time as you attempt to stop the evil cult Molayarius from summoning the demon Baphomet. The combat takes an overhead view of the action, as you fly through 10 missions featuring 4 different aircraft



RESIDENT EVIL: UMBRELLA CHRONICLES

- Developer and Publisher: Capcom
- Release Date: TBA

The rotting armies of the undead will plague the Wii once again in this Wii-exclusive version of the survival horror classic. Favorite Resident Evil characters such as Jill Valentine, Claire and Chris Redfield, Leon Kennedy, and many others will star in this shooter that sheds new light on the Umbrella conspiracy.

CONTINUED ►

WII SPORTS & RACING GAMES

SSX BLUR

- Developer: EA Montreal
- Publisher: EA Sports Big
- Release Date: March

EA's snow-shredder is bombing towards the Wii. Twist the Nunchuk to turn and carve your way down the slope, and when you catch some air or ride a rail the Remote enables you to choreograph the tricks.



MARIO STRIKERS CHARGED

- Developer: Next Level Games
- Publisher: Nintendo
- Release Date: 2007

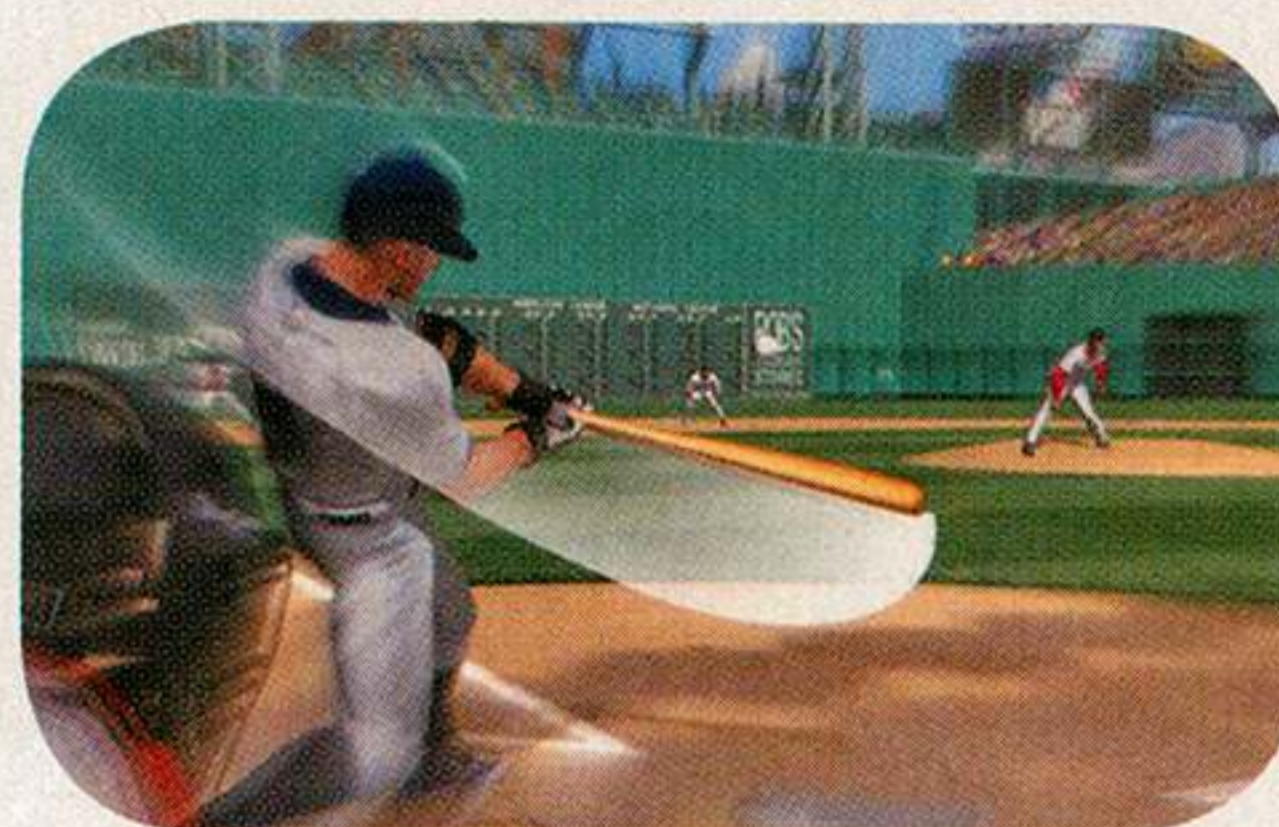
Mario Strikers Charged is the sequel to the Super Mario Strikers wacky soccer take-off. Each team has a captain, a goalie, and three sidekicks. Captains can perform Mega Strikes, where the metallic soccer ball multiplies, creating a major problem for the opposing goalie. Soccer may not be your thing, but when Mario & Co. get involved, even shuffleboard can get interesting.



THE BIGS

- Developer: Blue Castle Games
- Publisher: 2K Sports
- Release Date: Summer 2007

What would the game of baseball be if it was injected with arcade-style gameplay and explosive special moves? A game that we want to play, that's what. 2K Sports and Blue Castle Games are livening up America's favorite pastime with their next-gen slugger The Bigs. Break out your chew, cork your bat, and get ready for the big leagues!



MARIO KART WII

- Developer and Publisher: Nintendo
- Release Date: 2007

BLITZ: THE LEAGUE

- Developer and Publisher: Midway
- Release Date: March

BOXING ACTION

- Developer and Publisher: AQ Interactive
- Release Date: 2007

FINAL FURLONG

- Developer and Publisher: Namco Bandai Games
- Release Date: March

PILOT WINGS

- Developer and Publisher: Nintendo
- Release Date: 2007

TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 07

- Developer and Publisher: EA Sports
- Release Date: March

TNA IMPACT!

- Developer: and Publisher: Midway
- Release Date: 2007

WII MOTOR SPORTS AIRPLANE

- Developer and Publisher: Nintendo
- Release Date: October

WII SHOOTING

- Developer and Publisher: Nintendo
- Release Date: 2007

WII RPGs

ALIEN SYNDROME

- Developer: Totally Games
- Publisher: Sega
- Release Date: June

Those of you who remember the original Sega arcade game Alien Syndrome will be happy to hear that Totally Games, was inspired by the original hit. Syndrome will feature a character-driven storyline with action-RPG elements, such as earning experience, advancing levels, and managing an item inventory. But don't worry, there will still be plenty of alien goo splattering around.



DRAGON QUEST SWORDS: THE MASKED QUEEN AND THE TOWER OF MIRRORS

- Developer and Publisher: Square Enix
- Release Date: 2007

Every hero needs a sword, every sword needs a Wii remote, and that's exactly what Square Enix plans to grant you. Slash, stab, and destroy Slime, Golems, and the rest of the creatures from the Dragon Quest universe in a new first-person view mode.



FINAL FANTASY CRYSTAL CHRONICLES: THE CRYSTAL BEARERS

- Developer: Game Designers Studio
- Publisher: Square Enix
- Release Date: Winter 2007

Once upon a time, the role-playing goliath known as Final Fantasy existed exclusively on Nintendo platforms. This is the sequel to Crystal Chronicles, and judging from one of its breathtaking cinematics where a battalion of futuristic airships soars across the sky, it's already shaping up to be just as magnificent as the original. Crystal Bearers will also offer multiplayer adventure.

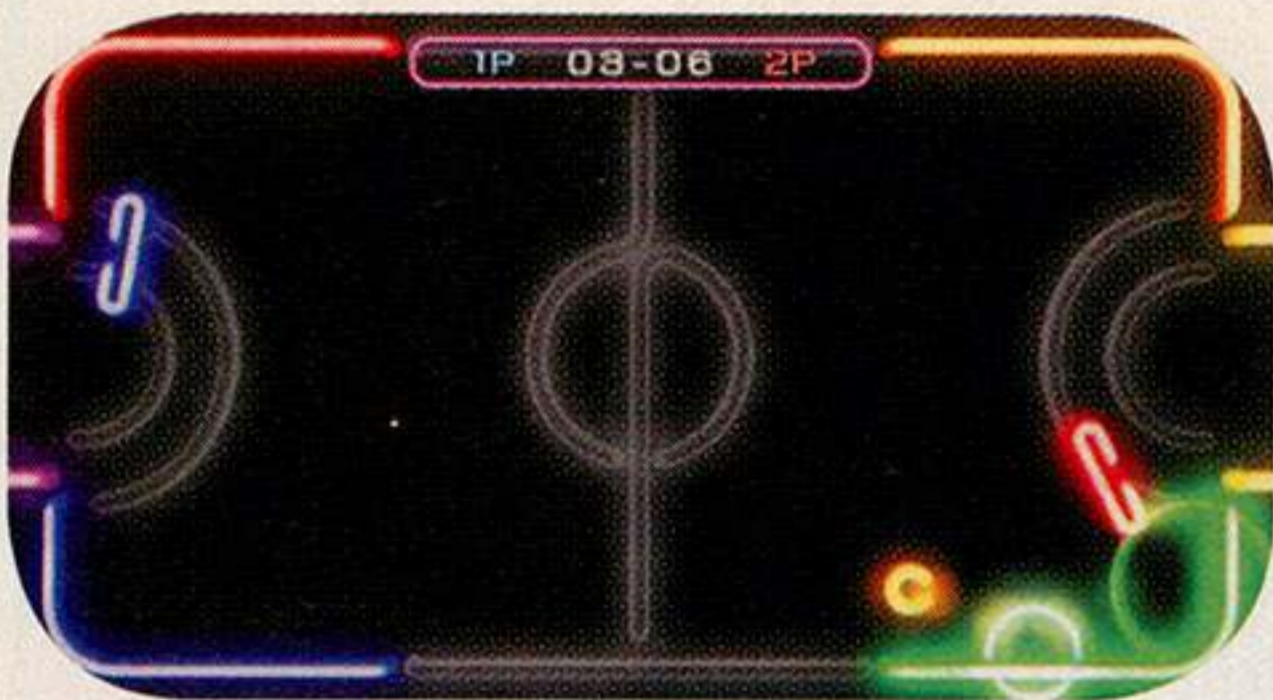


WII GAMES THAT DEFY CATEGORIES!

WII PLAY

- Developer and Publisher: Nintendo
- Release Date: February

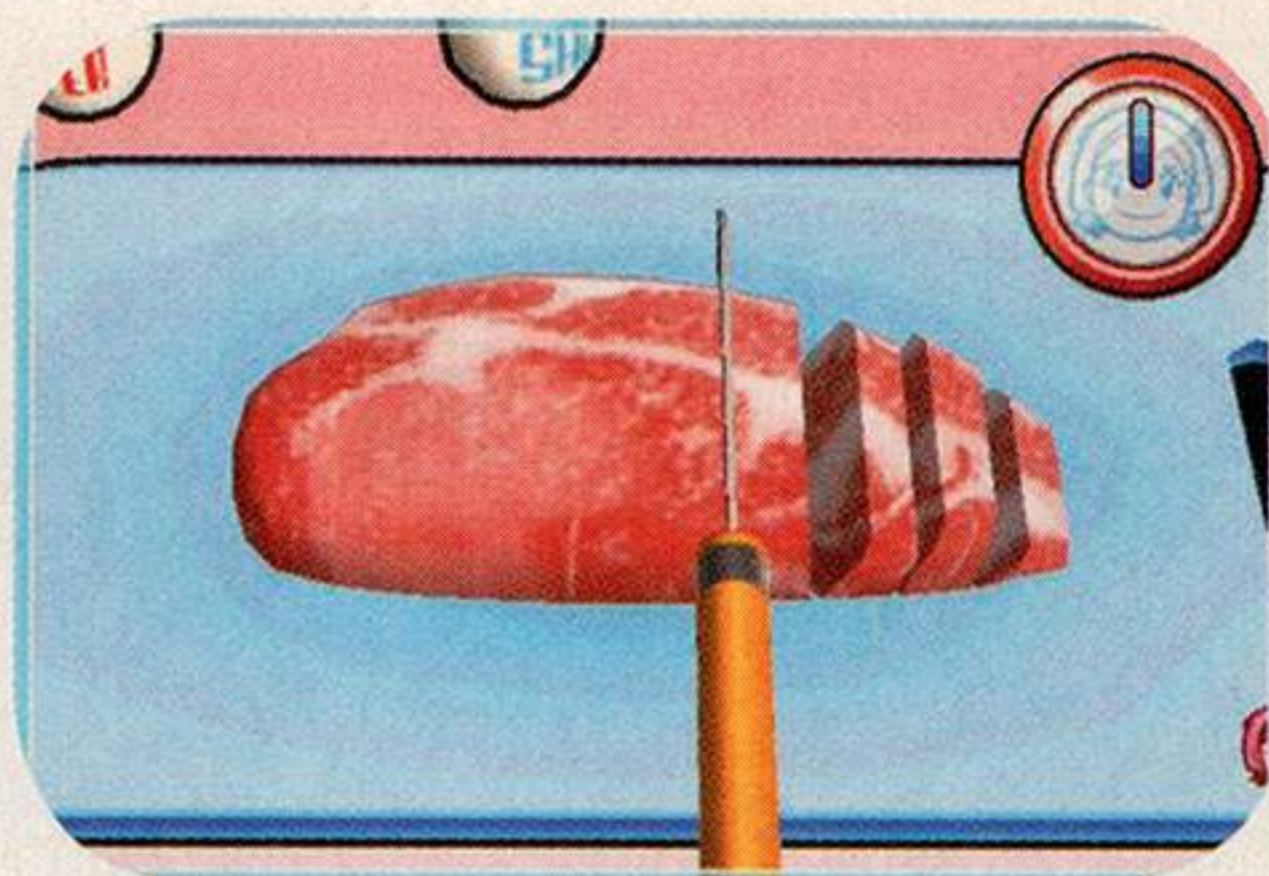
In case you didn't get the satisfaction of smashing your television set with your Wii Remote and Nunchuk during *Wii Sports*. Nintendo is serving up another seven game collection for you and your friends to enjoy. *Wii Play* includes a Where's Waldo-type game, an unofficial Duck Hunt game, ping pong, a fishing game, a bull-riding game, and much more.



COOKING MAMA: COOK OFF

- Developer: Office Create
- Publisher: Taito
- Release Date: March

The original award-winning *Cooking Mama* DS utilized the touch screen to prepare meals, but in *Cook Off* video chefs will use you-know-what to chop, stir, mash, fillet, and fry up cuisine from more than 300 recipes. A two-player mode will whip up one-on-one *Iron Chef*-like competition.



THE SIMS WII

- Developer: Maxis
- Publisher: EA Games
- Release Date: 2007

In this take on EA's incredibly-addicting life simulator, the Sims look like super-deformed Miis, rather than the usual Sims avatars. Players will develop friendships, design their homes, find jobs, burn casseroles, and continue their never-ending quests for self-improvement.



WARIOWARE: SMOOTH MOVES

- Developer: Intelligent Systems
- Publisher: Nintendo

Release Date: Available Now

No, people, this isn't your chance to lead Wario through scandalous dates with chubby bearded barmaids, it's another collection of minigames featuring your favorite Mario doppelganger. The visual style of *Smooth Moves* maintains the zaniness and of *WarioWares* past with the Wii you'll look like a spazzed out über-dork to any poor soul who happens upon you while you're playing.



ANIMAL CROSSING

- Developer and Publisher: Nintendo
- Release Date: 2007

BIG BRAIN ACADEMY

- Developer and Publisher: Nintendo
- Release Date: 2007

BUST-A-MOVE BASH!

- Developer: Happy Happening
- Publisher: Majesco
- Release Date: Spring 2007

DANCE FACTORY

- Developer: Broadsword
- Publisher: Codemasters
- Release Date: March

FOREVER BLUE

- Developer: Arika
- Publisher: Nintendo
- Release Date: 2007

GOTTLIEB PINBALL CLASSICS

- Developer: Farsight Studios
- Publisher: Play It
- Release Date: 2007

JAWA

- Developer and Publisher: Spike
- Release Date: 2007

JIGSAW PUZZLE

- Developer: Hudson Soft
- Publisher: Nintendo
- Release Date: 2007

KORORINPA

- Developer: Hudson Soft
- Publisher: Nintendo
- Release Date: 2007

MARIO PARTY 8

- Developer and Publisher: Nintendo
- Release Date: March

MERCURY MELTDOWN REVOLUTION

- Developer: Ignition Banbury
- Publisher: Ignition Entertainment
- Release Date: Summer 2007

MR. D GOES TO TOWN

- Developer: RED Entertainment
- Publisher: Mastiff
- Release Date: 2007

TAMAGOTCHI SPARKLING PRESIDENT

- Developer and Publisher: Namco Bandai Games
- Release Date: 2007

TURN IT AROUND!

- Developer and Publisher: Taito
- Release Date: 2007

WII MUSIC

- Developer and Publisher: Nintendo
- Release Date: October



CONTINUED ►

THREE FOR THE WII

The Wii opens up a world of gameplay possibilities. Namco Bandai and EA Games are looking to capitalize on its inventive control scheme and casual-gaming appeal.

The Wii blends innovation and simplicity in many of its early titles, but Nintendo's new console is also a place where uniqueness thrives. Here are three new games that take the Wii's motion-sensing control scheme to new levels of creativity and originality.



TAMAGOTCHI: PARTY ON! (WORKING TITLE)

- Developer: h.a.n.d. Inc.
- Publisher: Namco Bandai Games
- Release Date: Spring 2007

From the makers of the Tamagotchi digital pets that once infested the youth culture like an infectious disease, comes the first Wii title to star those ludicrously cute Tamagotchi characters in a 3D party game. Chock full of addictive mini-games, Tamagotchi: Party On! utilizes a variety of Wii Remote movements to make your home grown Tamagotchi the future president of Tamagotchi Planet.

VOTE FOR MII!

The premise of Tamagotchi: Party On! is like a mix of Mario Party and a junior-high school election. The goal is to guide your Tamagotchi character's popularity contest/election campaign to become the planet president. However it's spun, Party On! is essentially one giant board game where, like Monopoly, landing on certain spaces triggers specific events or random results. But don't call it Tamagopoly quite yet. Most spaces activate mini games that require you to swing, smack, and swipe the Wii remote in a variety of events that range from easy to surprisingly tricky.

Just as the original Tamagotchi pets are inherently addictive, so are the quirky mini games that make up the majority of the gameplay. Rolling the die can launch a mini-game, a chance event, or an opportunity to splurge at the shop to customize your character's political headquarters. Since it's a board game, up to four players can pass around one Wii Remote (one for each candidate).

HOW MANY MINIS?

There are 15 total full-featured mini games along with 10 Gotchi games, which are simpler interactive challenges such as rock-paper-scissors-like quick-decision events. The bigger mini games



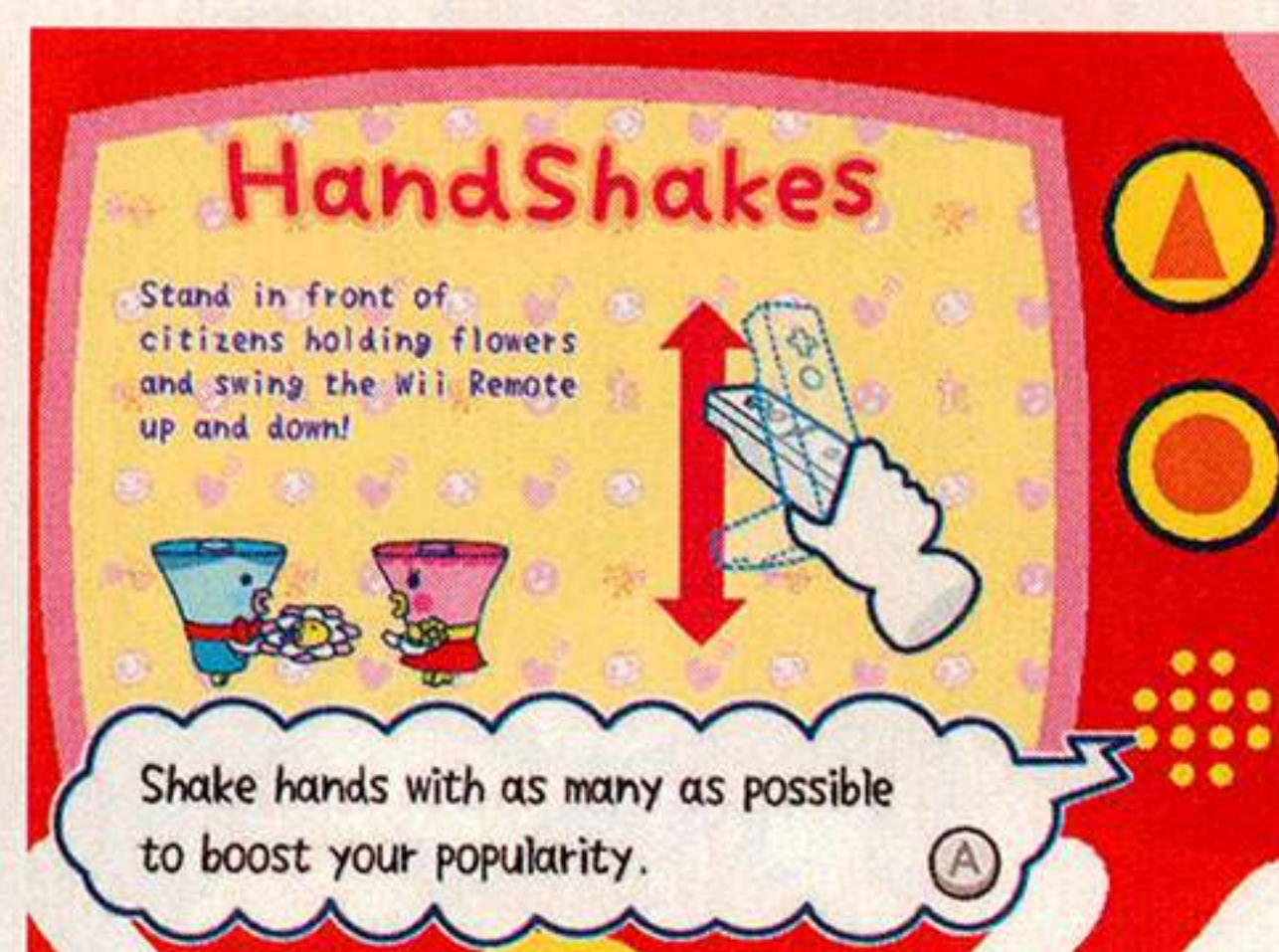
(excuse the oxymoron) are 3D character competitions that challenge players to use the Wii Remote in a variety of interesting ways. Here are the games we played, some bizarre, all with time-based objectives:

- Use the Remote as a flashlight to find hidden Tamagotchi kids in a classroom
- Twist clock hands to correspond to a digital time readout
- Bounce on a trampoline and toss tasty nuts to hungry tree squirrels

- Scoop fish out of a stream
- Ride a hot-air balloon and divvy parachutes to falling strangers
- Pump the remote to water plant seedlings

Chance events are similar to Monopoly's "You won second prize in a beauty contest" outcomes, though Tamagotchi: Party On! relies on the cuteness of its characters to suck players in, rather than the draw of colorful, fake paper money.

—Mr. Marbles



CONTINUED ►



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Staff Sergeant Jeremy Mutart
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ARMY STRONG.™

SPACE STATION TYCOON

- Developer: Wahoo Studios
- Publisher: Namco Bandai Games
- Release Date: Summer 2007

The first Tycoon game is coming to the Wii, but this one is literally out of this world. Space Station Tycoon takes the Rollercoaster Tycoon brand of simulation to the stars by using the Wii Remote. The game challenges you to create gravity points and interact with in-game objects by moving them with the controller. While catching asteroids to keep them from obliterating your space station should be trying, keeping pesky space pirates from blasting you with cannonballs may be your biggest problem.

Like other Tycoon games, practices good management techniques are the key to building successful space stations and spreading them throughout the galaxy. You'll need to expand by adding space islands while customizing them enough to attract visitors, or by creating luaus and tiki bars to suck the party crowd in. You'll play as über entrepreneur Shawn, and with the help of his monkey sidekick, Tam, you'll build a space empire the likes of which have never been seen...in space, that is.—**Mr. Marbles**



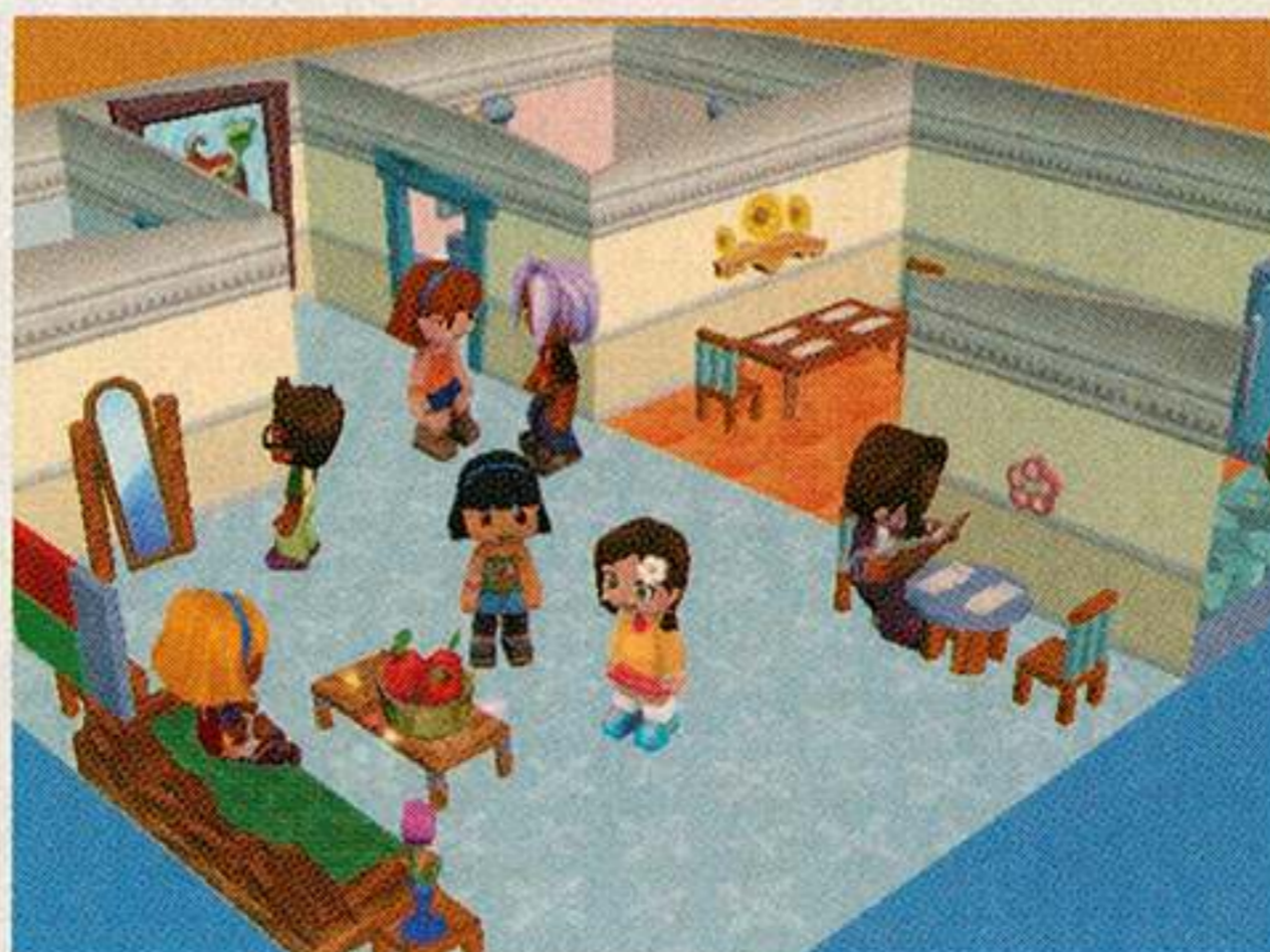
THE SIMS WII



- Developer and publisher: EA Games
- Release Date: TBA

Yes, it's official. The Sims is coming to the Wii, but these Sims are noticeably cuter. In fact, these little guys and gals look a lot like Mii characters. Apparently, Sims Wii will sport a detailed character creator that, like the Mii creation system, will allow for a nice amount of facial customization—great for replicating yourself and a variety of cheeky celebs. And the game engine will, as usual, slap a number of silly expressions onto your Sims faces.

Sims Wii lets you build your own home sweet home, other houses, and businesses...basically the entire town in which your Sims reside. There are rumors that you'll be able to travel to the worlds of other Sims users online, even with the DS à la Animal Crossing, but nothing is set in stone, yet.—**Mr. Marbles**



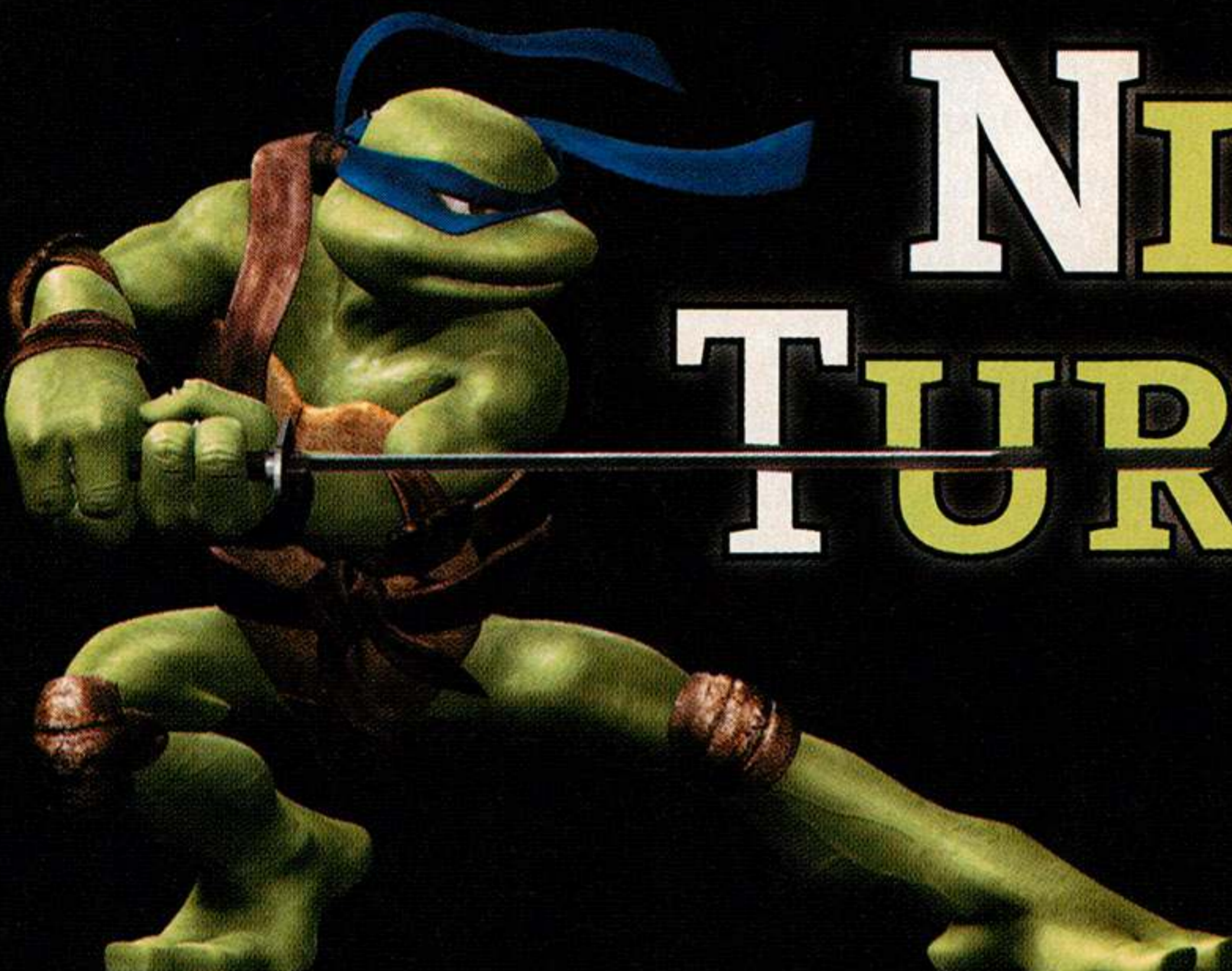
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TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES



PS2 Xbox 360 Wii Xbox GC DS PC

■ Developer: Ubisoft Montreal ■ Publisher: Ubisoft ■ Release Date: March

Whether you know it or not, there's a Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles rebirth on the horizon, and it's bigger than a slice of New York City pizza. It's a full-length CGI film starring all four of the famed green ninjas; Leonardo, Raphael, Michelangelo, and Donatello. It's a multi-platform video game launch that bestows the fate of the TMNT in your hands. But, ultimately, whatever it is, the TMNT are back and better than ever. Cowabunga dude!

You're probably too old to enjoy this resurgence, but your 10-year-old son most certainly is not. Growing up in the prime of TMNT and looking at where the franchise is now is disheartening, but for the new generation of youngsters, the TMNT are going to be the hottest thing this March.

The levels are obviously designed for this prime gameplay mechanic as fights are few and far between. Run along walls like Neo from *The Matrix*, swing from flagpoles like a gymnast, or use a turtle brother to fling you from rooftop to rooftop otherwise impassable alone. In the latest

rendition of TMNT, Ubisoft has integrated a lot of what makes the *Prince of Persia* games so much fun to play—freedom of stylized movement.

Le Parkour, or free-running, is all about keeping the momentum consistent and fast. There are so many "Oh, cool!" moments in TMNT as

FREE-RUNNING

The coolest element, by far, in the new TMNT is the overall sense of freedom and movement. Ubisoft has done something very different with TMNT than previous developers have. Focusing primarily on their athletic, ninja abilities rather than adept combat, the TMNT have been turned into free-running crime fighters. The results are actually quite intriguing, fun to play, and breathe new life into the 3D-platforming genre. By incorporating the up-and-coming athletic movement dubbed Le Parkour, the physical discipline of applying a continuous motion to surmount any architectural obstacle, as the primary focus for movement and platforming in the game; the TMNT bound and leapfrog across the skyscrapers of New York City like trapeze circus performers. The action is fast, cool, and yet extremely challenging at times. Like a real 3D platformer, frustration is abundant.





you run, jump, and perform acrobatic ninja tricks high above the streets of New York. This concept of free-running in TMNT is Ubisoft's crowning achievement.

WE ARE FAMILY

Personable and unique, each of the four turtles, Leo, Raphael, Michelangelo, and Donatello, have their own distinctive moves, which fully utilize their respective weapon of choice. Raphael strikes swiftly with furious Sais versus Donatello's wide range of devastation, and Leo's swords command the fighting arena as Michelangelo goofs off with nunchuks. Each turtle brings something different to the table, most valued of all is their special

move. Without these unique individual special moves, certain obstacles in the game would be impossible to pass. Leo can warp through walls like Night Crawler, Michelangelo uses his nunchuks to glide like a helicopter, Donatello pole vaults, and Raphael can climb walls faster than Spider-Man with the use of his Sais.

While each individual turtle is more than fun to play alone, going solo is for roundhouse studs like Chuck Norris or Steven Seagal. The TMNT are more than a team; they're family. When the family's together new levels of combat open up. Team Moves are far more devastating than any judo chop or slash from Leo's sword. It's as easy as a button press to switch between the four turtles,

and Team Moves vary from turtle to turtle. Donatello calls upon Raphael to summon lightning, Michelangelo spins Leonardo around by his ankles like a shellicopter, Raphael throws Leo like an Amazon spear, and Leo launches into the air with a brother to create the ultimate earth tremor.

GOING THE EXTRA MILE

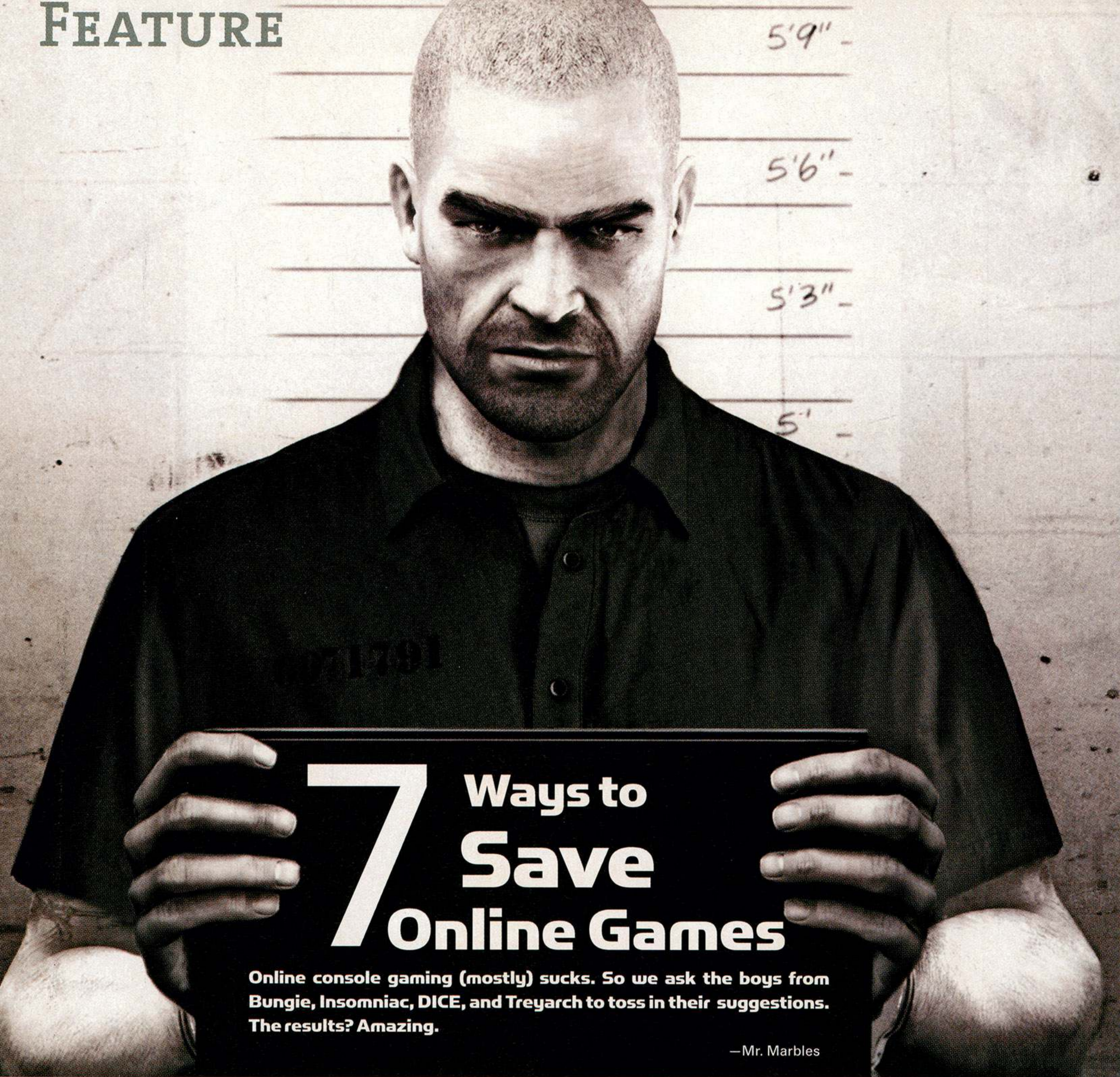
There are tons of goodies to unlock in the new TMNT game. Reward fiends will definitely enjoy the multitude of unlockables. Concept art, animation bloopers, movie clips, and even big-head cheats are all part of the fun of collecting shells throughout your adventure. At the end of each level you will be given a score based on your speed, combat skills, and coins collected. 208 coins to be specific, can you collect them all? Based on your performance a number of shells will be awarded, which allow you to buy the extra goodies.

There are also stats available for your viewing pleasure. Coins obtained, distance traveled, and total air time are just a few of the stats recorded. And for the time-attack fans, Challenge Mode will keep you playing well after beating the single-player campaign. Like Metal Gear Solid's VR missions, a virtual world of circuitry is created and your goal is to get to the final platform in the quickest time possible. Challenging? Yes, but the bragging rights you'll garner in elementary school are well worth the pain-staking hours of perfection.

It's difficult to say whether or not veteran TMNT fans will enjoy the game. The younger crowd, however, still old enough to enjoy Saturday morning cartoons while slurping up a giant bowl of Cheerios will be tickled by the cheesy dialogue and over-the-top personalities. The control scheme is simpler than a Super Mario game, and the visuals are just as cartoony.

Story wise, we can't reveal too much due to spoilers and tie-ins with the movie. We can say, however, that The Foot are back and there are a couple secret characters to be revealed soon enough.—Tenacious Moses





7 Ways to Save Online Games

Online console gaming (mostly) sucks. So we ask the boys from Bungie, Insomniac, DICE, and Treyarch to toss in their suggestions. The results? Amazing.

—Mr. Marbles

Driving home from the Target in Daly City, I couldn't wait. Because I'm a chronic nail biter with few sharp edges left on my ravaged cuticles, I stabbed into the game's shrink wrap with a ball-point pen and removed the security sticker, an operation that would save me 30 precious seconds when I finally got home and wedged the game into my Xbox 360 for some multiplayer action.

The game? Tom Clancy's *Splinter Cell: Double Agent*, the latest entry in one of my favorite gaming series of all time. But from the moment I signed into Xbox Live, I was crushed: seconds into the online game, *Splinter Cell: Double Agent's* Xbox Live mode was riddled with problems. From bugs, crashes, and heavy lag to the counterintuitive matchmaking and lobby system, *Splinter Cell: Double Agent's* online mode required more time and patience than I was willing to give. Despite my overwhelming love for the series and the clear potential of its online mode, I never played *Double Agent* online again.

My sour experience with *Double Agent*, as well as several other recent online-enabled console games, raised many questions. How important is an online mode to a console game? Why don't developers put as much, if not more, focus into the online mode as the single-player campaign? And just how long will an everyday gamer suffer a problem-ridden online game mode before he or she calls it quits?

In short, what's wrong with online console games?

These are big questions, and I needed some big answers. So I touched base with developers from some of the most well-known game developers of all time: Bungie, Treyarch, Insomniac, and DICE. Representing the teams behind *Halo 2*, *Halo 3*, *Call of Duty 3*, *Resistance: Fall of Man*, and the *Battlefield* series, these industry-leading developers are proven heavy-hitters in the online department; these are the guys who managed to get the online experience right.

What does the future hold for online console games? Let's find out.

The Current Sad State

If we were to say Splinter Cell is the only recent console game with online multiplayer problems, it would be a lie. The sad truth is that aside from Halo 2 and a handful of other popular console games, most online experiences are mediocre. With bugs and crashes running rampant, and lobby systems that feel like last minute throw-togethers, it's obvious that online components console games don't get the kind of developmental attention they deserve. But with online-only games like World of Warcraft proving that the future of online gaming is a very populated, popular, and profitable place, it's hard to understand why.

While simply adding an online component to an otherwise single-player-only console game may seem like a bonus feature to some consumers, others—specifically those looking for the next Halo 2—could be misled. Considering the \$60-plus price tags on new-generation games, no one wants to shell out that much money for a something they don't want, led by misinformation. Press reviews can help, but with varying tastes and a consumer base that is quickly expanding and becoming more diverse everyday, it's important that a game buyer know exactly what he/she is getting.



1 First Impressions Are Everything

Lesson: Gamers are a fickle bunch. That's why your first experience with an online game is so crucial. A quick, problem-free first play of an Xbox Live shooter is the key to keeping players coming back for more.

TYSON GREEN, MULTIPLAYER DESIGN LEAD—HALO 3 BUNGIE STUDIOS

"The really discouraging online experiences have more to do with other players than the game itself. If my first experience in Halo 2 was being murdered by a team of racist 12-year olds, squealing words they should not yet know as they corpse humped me, I'm not sure if I'd be back for a second helping. But I don't know anyone who had a good first experience with Counterstrike...still, players loved it and played it for years. So you can have a bad first experience (or at least, not necessarily a good one) and still soldier on."

DAN BUNPING, PRODUCER—CALL OF DUTY 3 TREYARCH

"I think that each game is specific. But I do think there's more of a learning curve with online games because you're playing against real players as opposed to A.I. You have to make the game accessible from the moment the person jumps into the game."

2 Matchmaking is Not an Option

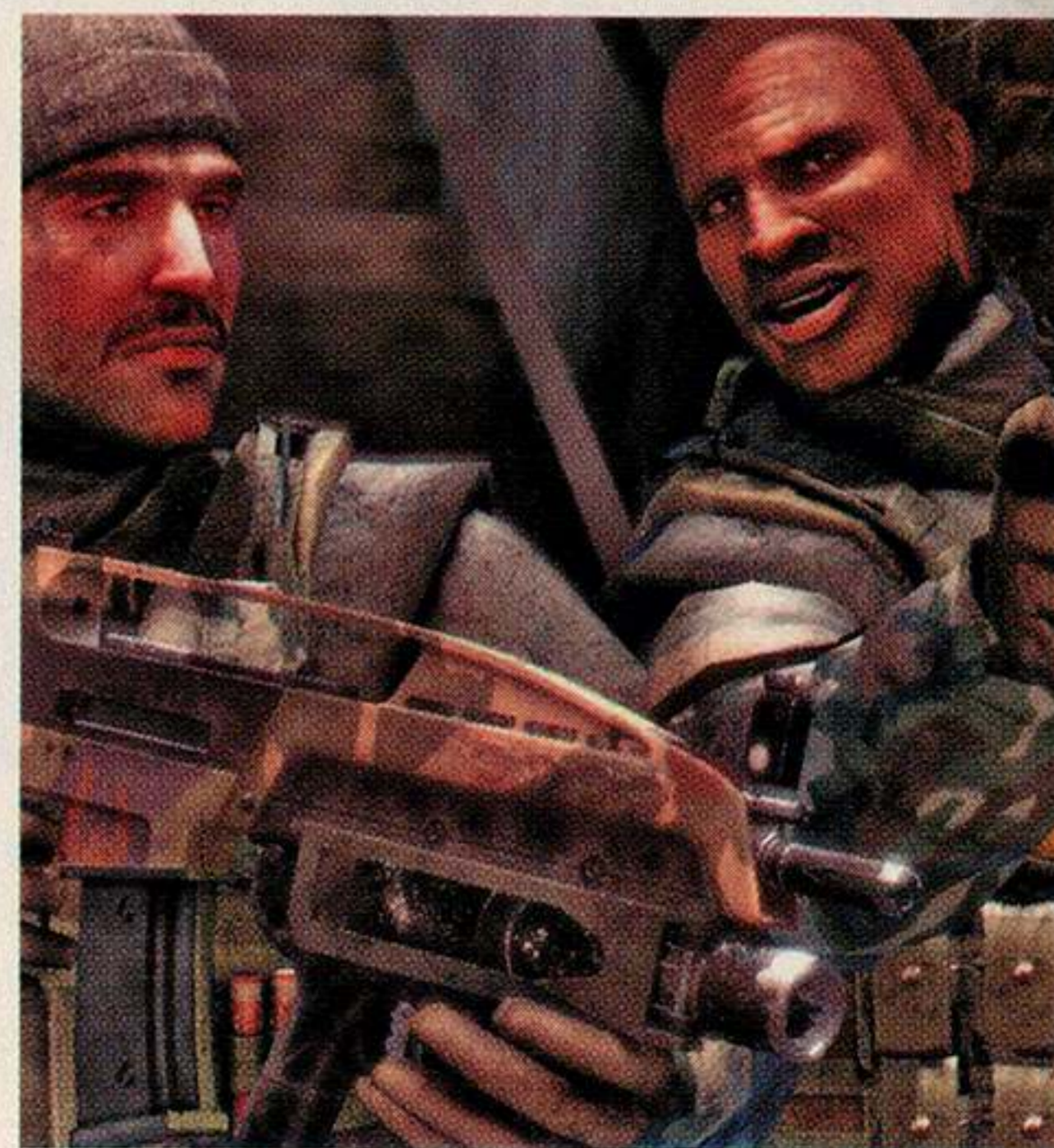
Lesson: Keeping players continuously interested in a game is important, but minimizing their level of frustration is a must. No one likes to lose—it's a fact. Getting your ass handed to you the first few times you play online might be enough to sour you on a game forever. Unfortunately, many online games have either a poor matchmaking system or none at all, leaving first-timers to get waxed by more accomplished players. You wouldn't match up a junior-high basketball team with the '86 Lakers, would you?

LARS GUSTAVSSON, LEAD DESIGNER—BATTLEFIELD: BAD COMPANY: DICE

"[When gamers go online for the first time], getting beaten up badly can definitely make them stay away and be that much harder to win back. Console games have made it easier for gamers to get online and find games via simplified menus, but it's still difficult to get matched against players of a similar skill level. I love driving games but don't go online to play Project Gotham Racing 2 since I haven't played it much and I know I'd get killed. So I just stick to [going online in] games that I'm really, really good at."

TYSON GREEN, MULTIPLAYER DESIGN LEAD—HALO 3 BUNGIE STUDIOS

"With server-browsing models, there were a lot of bad experiences to be had: servers on your list filled up before the list even finished displaying, or you chose a suboptimal one in hopes that nobody else was on. Still, with Halo 2, we worried that our community would react negatively to the loss of control (and they did for a while), and also that our population would not be large enough to support it (but it was). It was not a sure thing, but as the original Halo broke a few conventions, it seemed kind of exciting to take a shot at breaking another."



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3 Invent Interesting New Game Modes

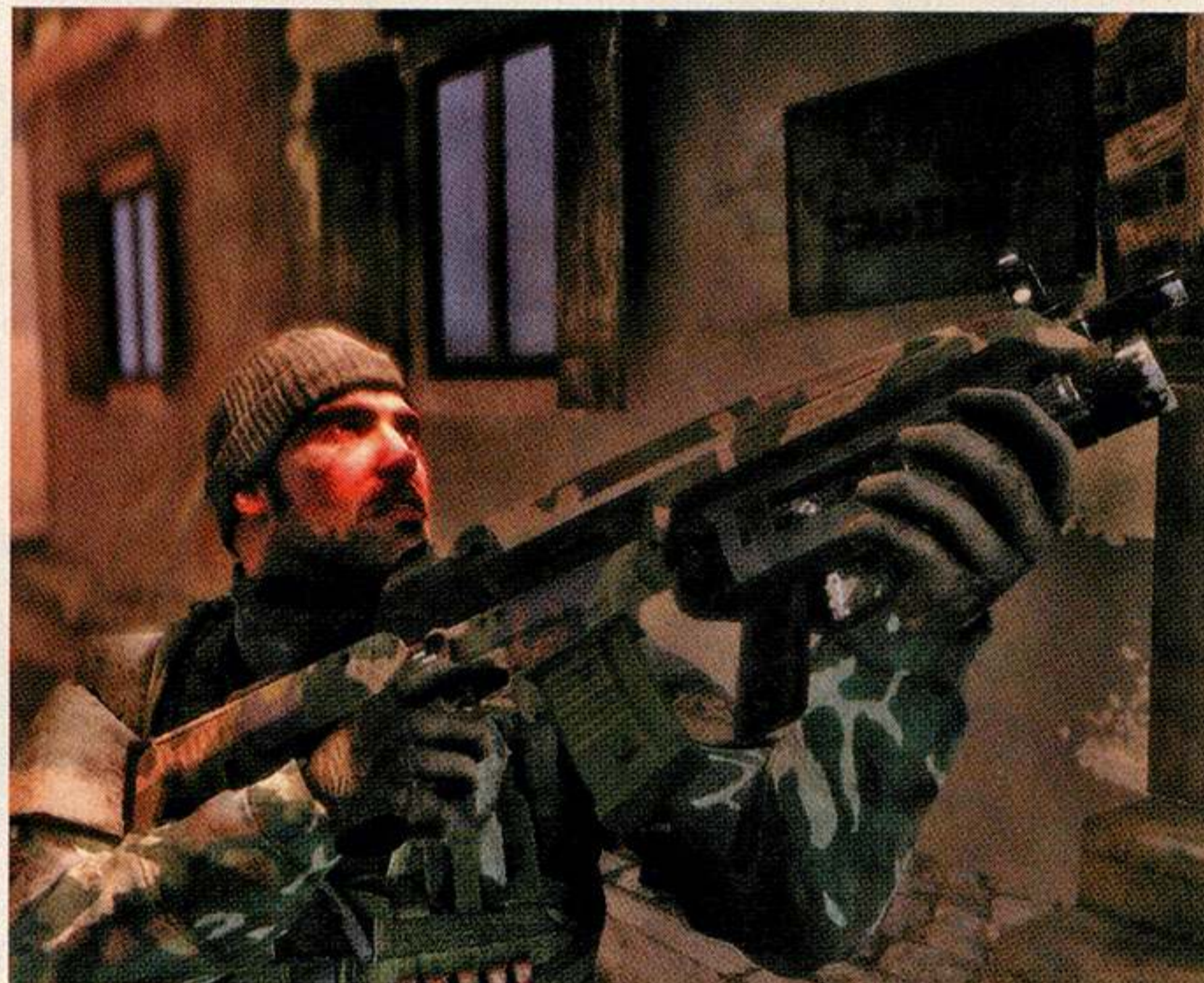
Lesson: Basic deathmatch and capture-the-flag modes will never die—they're just way too fun, and everybody already knows how to play them. But how often do you fire up an online shooter and find yourself wishing for something more than just another run-of-the-mill CTF game? Isn't there something more?

LARS GUSTAVSSON, LEAD DESIGNER—BATTLEFIELD: BAD COMPANY DICE

"Unimaginative gameplay definitely haunts many online console shooters today. I feel that the console community deserves something new and challenging when it comes to game modes, but most games still offer up the same modes that were around years ago on the PC. There's nothing wrong with a good round of CTF, but the console gamers of today range from casual gamers to real hardcores, so why not give them all something new and fresh?"

TYSON GREEN, MULTIPLAYER DESIGN LEAD—HALO 3 BUNGIE STUDIOS

"Halo is a really good sandbox at its core, and you can play a lot of good games with those solid fundamentals. Other games might be more driven by a fictional setting, or the nature of their gameplay. A rough-and-tumble mode like Oddball might not work so well in a lethal game like Gears of War...you need to be careful. Deathmatch is popular because it's simple, and if your game fundamentals are sound, it's instantly rewarding. If you feel forced into creating some grand game with complex rules, you risk frustrating those people who just want to compete mano-a-mano and enjoy the finer details of your gameplay."



4 Frag the Lag

Lesson: For some gamers, one sour experience with multiplayer lag or other bugs will be their last—they'll never go back, even if the problems are eventually patched in updates. This is why it's so crucial to polish a multiplayer product to the same glossy sheen you'd expect to see in a single-player-oriented title. Don't feel like spending the time to address issues like lag and bugs in your online component? Then forget it altogether—go big, or go home.

TED PRICE, CEO—RESISTANCE: FALL OF MAN INSOMNIAC GAMES

"Some of biggest problems are lag and frame rate. It's always challenging to create a complex online FPS with a lot of moving parts and make sure that everything is synced up. For Resistance, the solution was many, many months of testing where our QA, and Sony's QA played 40-player matches all the time. I mean they did crazy things like get into corners and all fire the same weapon at each other at once for 20 minutes at a time just to isolate the problems and improve the frame rate."

DAN BUNPING, PRODUCER—CALL OF DUTY 3 TREYARCH

"The one thing we are always limited by is bandwidth, and that won't be solved anytime soon. Until we get fiber optics, we're still going to be limited by the same bandwidth limitations. There are so many things that we want to do bigger, but we simply can't because we have the same bandwidth used in the average household. If we can move forward on just increasing the price for the average household, there's just so much more that we can do with networking."

5 Cheating Kills

Lesson: If you've played Halo 2 or Counter-Strike online, you're more than likely dealt with cheaters. From modding to de-leveling, cheaters will always find ways to poke holes in even the most robust online server architectures. But there are ways for crafty developers to halt this flood, and they needn't be costly or time consuming.

TED PRICE, CEO—RESISTANCE: FALL OF MAN INSOMNIAC GAMES

"We have a huge commitment to looking for cheating. We have an active community at InsomniacGames.com, and we expect to have an active community at myresistance.net that helps us police that as well and mention issues."



TYSON GREEN, MULTIPLAYER DESIGN LEAD—HALO 3
BUNGIE STUDIOS

"We play our cards close to our chest. Platform changes in the Xbox 360 have helped us, as have our experiences and tools developed with Halo 2. Still, some of the modding trailblazers are really quite brilliant, so I doubt we'll ever see an end to mods and hacks. But I'm optimistic that it will affect normal players less this next time around."

On match drops and de-leveling: "First of all, remove anonymity. Eradicate it as ruthlessly as possible. When you're not anonymous, you have a reputation to uphold. And persistent identity also helps your community self police, which can be very powerful. Then, make [de-leveling] as unbeneficial as possible. For example, you could have de-levelers lose their level but continue to match them against the tougher opponents that they're running away from. Sometimes this is impossible, but you need to do what you can."



6 Bigger Is Not Always Better

Lesson: As online gaming increases in popularity and influential MMO games gain more and more steam, many console developers seem to be hell-bent on upping online player numbers for the sake of creating a more MMO-like feel. But pitting armies of players against each other isn't always a smart move.

TYSON GREEN, MULTIPLAYER DESIGN LEAD—HALO 3
BUNGIE STUDIOS

"We don't think [huge team battles] are very good for shooters. It's hard to coordinate with two or three teammates, much less 20 to 30. If there's 16 other guys off in some other part of a big map, it doesn't really matter that much to your experience, does it? And when you're one guy out of so many, are you really significantly contributing to the effort? Did anyone notice that triple kill, or that assassination? As the game gets bigger and bigger, you're just playing a smaller and smaller role."

"So, it would be a mistake to assume that the smaller team shooters like Halo are doing so for technical reasons. To us, 16 players is already kind of a crowd. In Halo, we'd rather not scale down our art, blow out our maps, and throttle back our bandwidth usage so we can write '64 Players!' on the box."



7 Improve Accessibility

Lesson: Accessibility is key. Over the course of playing a game, you may spend more time navigating a user interface than even playing in matches. The very best online games—Halo 2 and Rainbow Six: Vegas come to mind—have sleek, simple menus that offer tons of options without overwhelming the player with useless information. Crafting a tight, intuitive in-game control scheme is also of paramount importance. Beyond the interface, offer something that players can't find in an off-line single-player mode: community interaction.

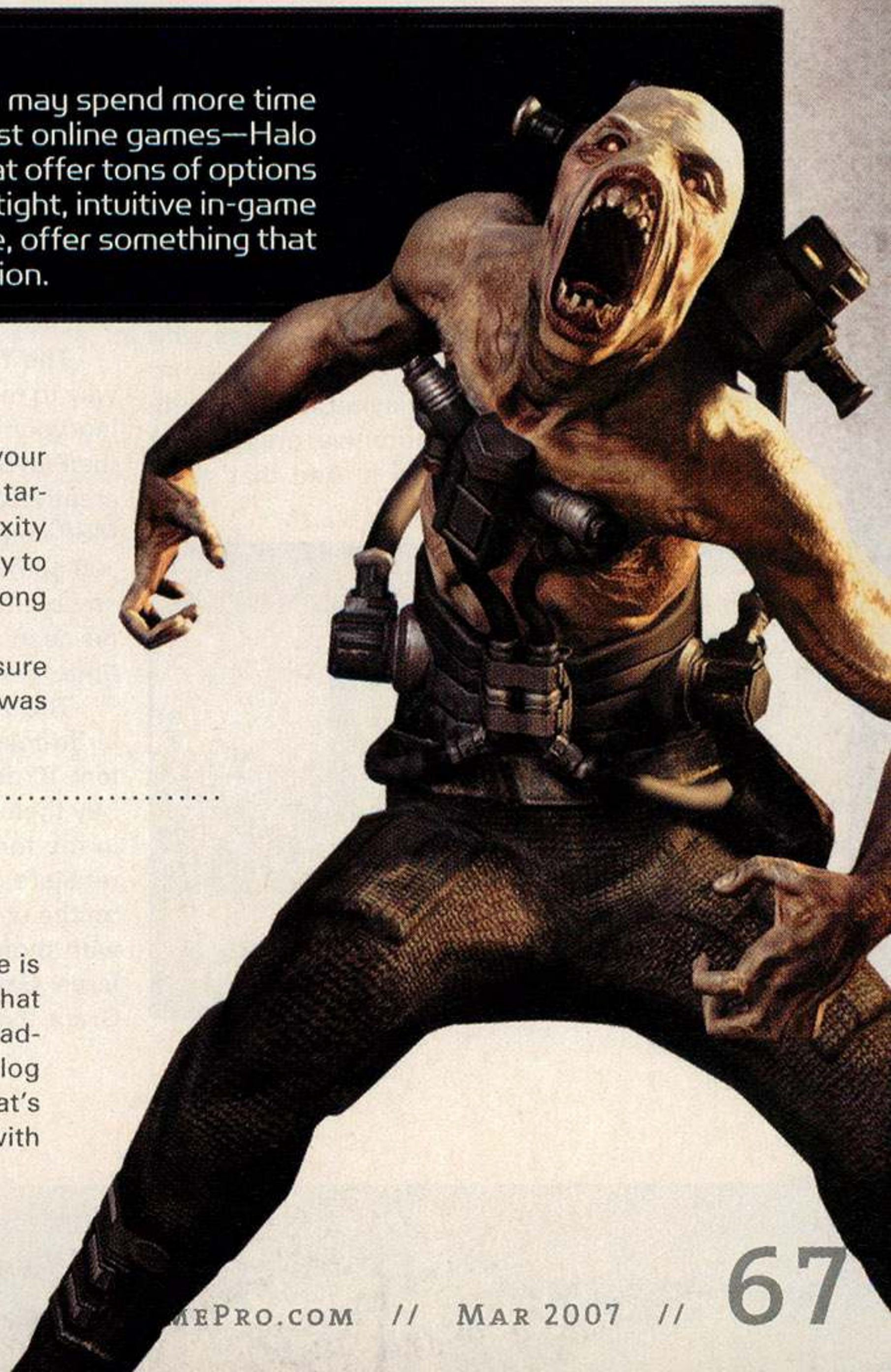
TYSON GREEN, MULTIPLAYER DESIGN LEAD—HALO 3
BUNGIE STUDIOS

"Know thy audience. Is your target broad appeal and a casual audience? Then level out your learning curve, beware of unnecessary complexity, and keep time investment short. If you're targeting a hardcore audience, then make your learning curve steeper, and add some complexity to the game that gives it longevity. But when you design a game for the hardcore and then try to pass it off to casual gamers, it's a disaster! The casual gamers don't want to play an hour-long game, and the hardcore players resent the dumbing down."

"Once your game is solid, spend time on your UI. Test the crap out of it. Nothing is more sure to keep someone from playing your game than a sluggish, frustrating, or inscrutable UI that was applied to your game, instead of designed for your game."

RYAN SCHNEIDER, COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR—
RESISTANCE: FALL OF MAN
INSOMNIAC GAMES

"It's important you create an environment that extends the experience. That's where online is heading in general. It's not just about what you do inside the console, it's how you extend that out into your regular world and the friends, and connections that you make as well. So in addition to it being a place where you can track and view stats, eventually you'll be able to blog there, clan-blog there, manage your own photo gallery, and custom manage content. That's what everyone wants now. They want to be able to customize their experience and share it with their friends."



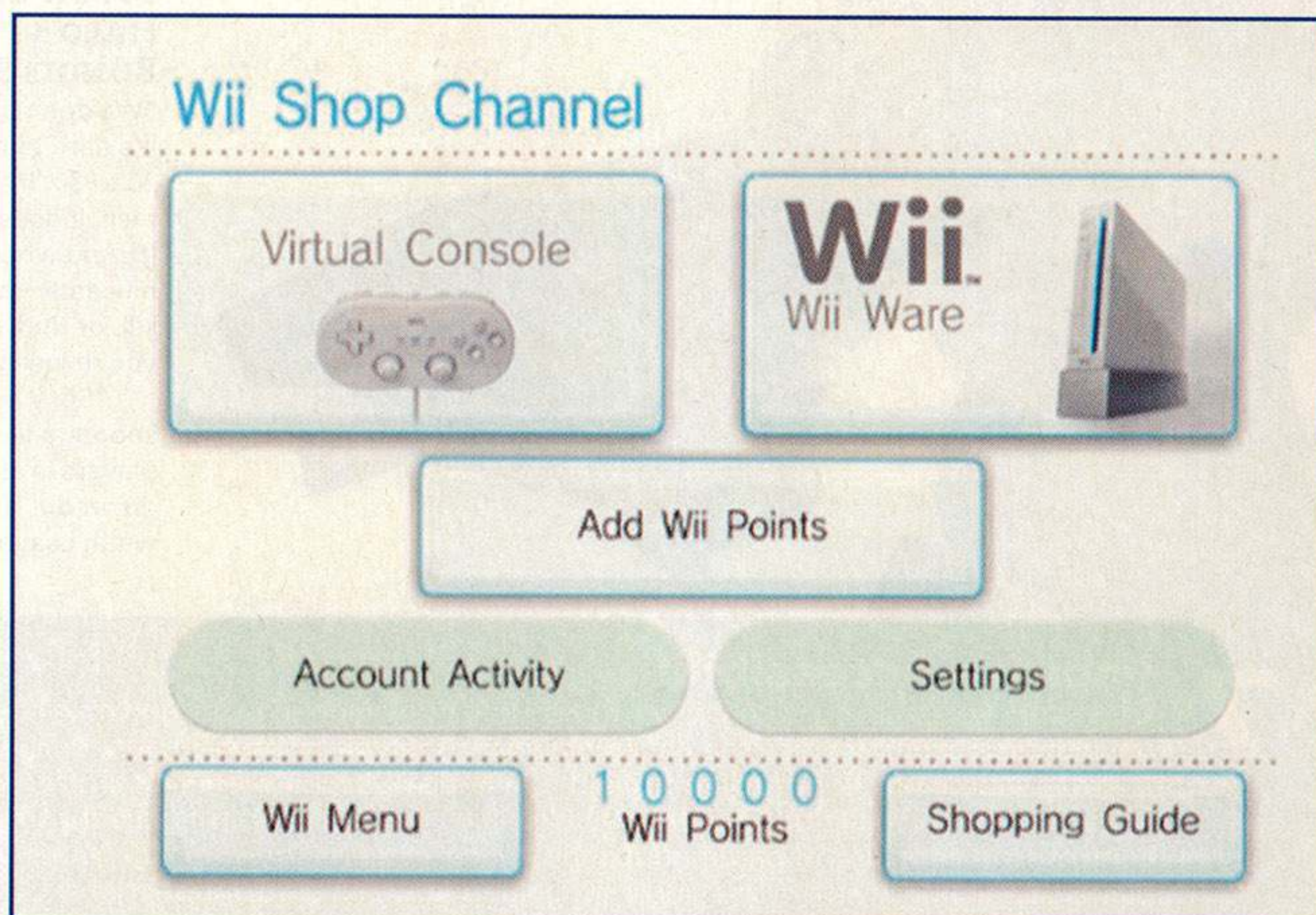
XBL MARKETPLACE



Which one is best for you?

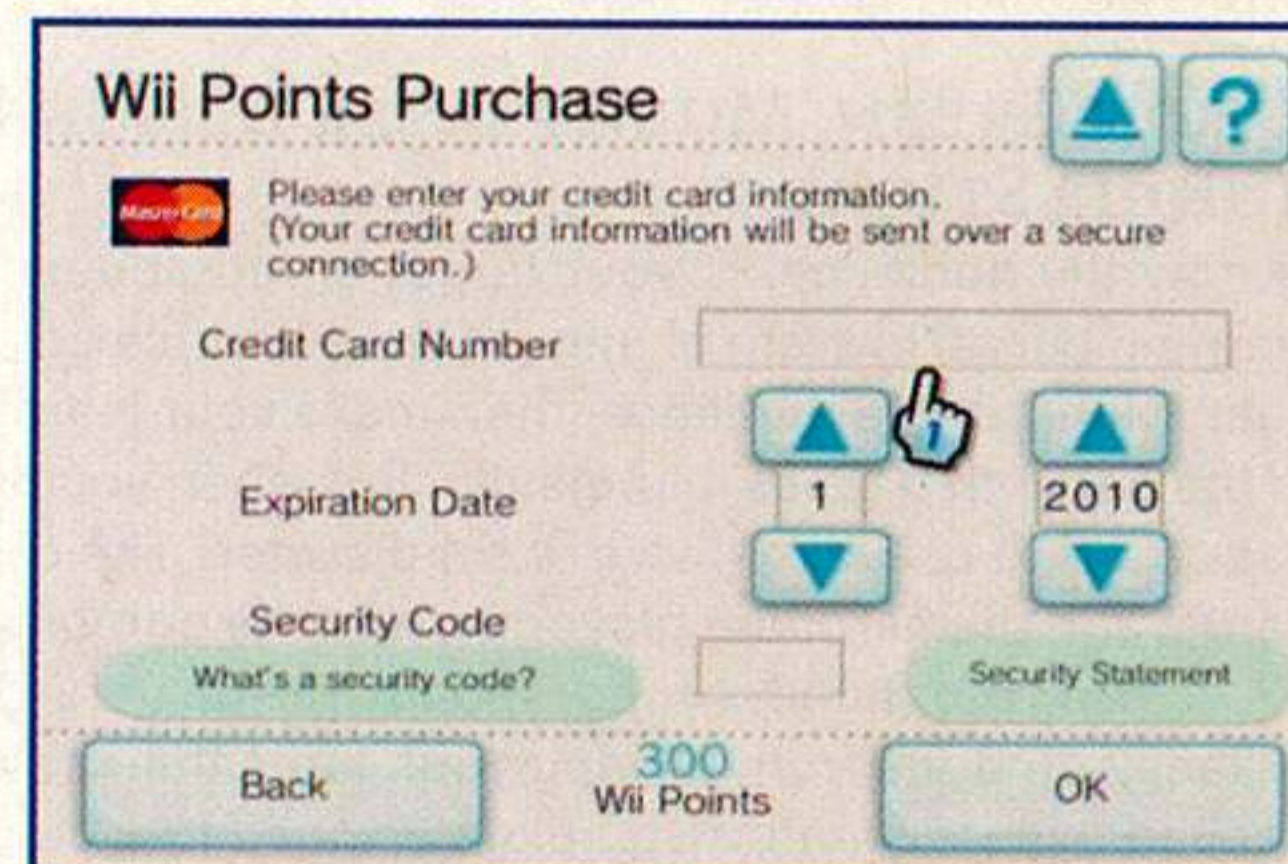
At this point in video gaming, a console's online offerings have become a major factor to consider when you decide to plunk your money down. The Nintendo Wii's brilliant Virtual Console is garnering a lot of press recently, temporarily overshadowing the considerable virtues of Microsoft's competing online offering: the Xbox Live Marketplace. Launched with the Xbox 360 in late 2005, the Marketplace is a virtual potpourri of so-called premium content, ranging from classic arcade games, to more modern diversions, to retail game add-ons. And as of recently, they've slotted downloadable television shows and movies. Much like the Virtual Console's retro line-up, the Marketplace's offerings are uneven, but there's more than enough compelling content to make it an essential part of the Xbox 360 experience.

But millions of people around the world have lassoed a Wii and rode it home. You already know that Nintendo's sleek new machine is drastically different from other consoles. Though it's designed with an innovative motion-sensitive future in mind, it still has one foot planted in the past, offering up the classics of yesteryear to young and old alike, via an online shopping channel. Kids just getting their first taste of Link's adventures with *The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess* can bond with parents who grew up playing the brilliantly designed, if comparatively primitive, original that birthed the long-running series. And that's just the beginning.



The first obstacle you'll encounter on your way to making a digital purchase will be converting your money into a token system (except for the PlayStation 3). The Xbox 360's version is uncreatively dubbed Microsoft Points. The dollar-to-MSP conversion rate is less than one-to-one, so 100 points will cost you about \$1.25. There aren't any bonuses for buying points in bulk, so there's no need to buy more than you need at a given time.

The Wii, on the other hand uses a direct dollar-to-token measurement that just multiplies by ten; 10 dollars gets you 100 Wii Points. You can buy them through the Wii's shopping channel, or in the form of points cards at most video game retailers and Best Buy. Prices are tiered based on the console the game originally appeared on, with more recent releases commanding steeper fares. Games for the NES run 500 points, TurboGrafx-16 titles are 600 points, SNES and Genesis



cards leech 800 a piece, and Nintendo 64 releases demand a full 1000 point tribute each. Sure, the prices seem a bit steep, given that you can sometimes buy last-generation games from the bargain bin for less, but there's something to be said for convenience.

The Xbox Live Marketplace offers dashboard themes, gamer icons, downloadable game demos,

S WII SHOPPING CHANNEL

By Cameron Lewis, Benjamin Turner, and GamePro Staff

game and movie trailers, and more related bric-a-brac. Some of this stuff, particularly promotional items like demos and trailers, is free to download. Cool. (You can pop for the Gold membership, but as far as downloadable content, it pretty much just gives you an occasional head start on the plebes.) What's less cool is the online browsing interface, which is clunky and relatively low-res, considering the Xbox 360's impressive capabilities. Microsoft has redesigned Marketplace's layout once so far, but it still needs work. You can only view about ten content items onscreen at once, and the interface is mostly a bare-bones series of menus. It gets the job done, but it sure ain't fancy.

The Xbox Live Marketplace offers TV shows and movies now, both in HD and SD resolutions, so this isn't a straight comparison. Overall, the XBLM is a more expansive service, but it's missing some things it will never have: Nintendo's first-party titles. And those days of blowing on the metal contacts to get your elderly NES to recognize software are in the past; those valuable bits now get stored in the Wii's internal memory. With over 2000 blocks available, and most titles hovering around the 25 block mark, you can pack a whole lot of classic entertainment in that little box. Should you ever find yourself running low on space, you can always pop in an off-brand SD memory card without spending a bundle. Should those games ever get erased, you can just download them again—but only onto that specific Wii.

There is still the occasional performance glitch or bug that crops up, for both the Xbox 360 and



the Wii. The XBLM version of *Contra* (arcade) was widely reported as having terrible sync issues in online co-op, meaning that your partner's character might randomly run around in circles or go flying to his death—while on his end, your character might appear to be doing the same thing.

For the Wii's part, the simple truth is that, although Nintendo's deft resurrection of these classics should appeal to the masses (even at what are arguably premium prices), all of these games look better on a modern computer screen than a living room television. Readily available emulation software will anti-alias sprite edges against scrolling backgrounds, render at higher resolutions, and even offer support for ancient Game Genie codes and the like. Adding these features would likely just confuse mainstream consumers, so they're unlikely to make their way to your new favorite console any time soon.

However, the Xbox 360 has some odd pricing structures to contend with. As we mentioned, Marketplace also offers "premium" content downloads for many games, which add or unlock new maps, weapons, etc. One offender is *Lumines Live*. It's a great game, but you'll miss out on a good deal of its content if you don't also spring for the "optional" Mission/Puzzle Pack. The game is already pricey at 1200 points (\$15), and the Mission/Puzzle Pack is 600 points (\$7.50). Word is there are at least two other add-on packs in the works.

Ultimately, the Xbox 360 is a better choice for all-around content, while the Wii's Shopping Channel is the only place to find first-party Nintendo releases and some hard-to-find TG16 titles. That is, unless DS versions come out...

PROSTRATEGY



GEARS OF RESISTANCE

Gear yourself up for killer ProStrategy guides of two of the hottest, and bloodiest, shooters out there

RESISTANCE: FALL OF MAN

Chimera Classes Hunting Guide

The repulsive Chimeran race of mutants in Resistance: Fall of man are anything but all the same. Where one breed of Chimera may be vulnerable to one type of weapon, the very same weapon may barely put a scratch on another Chimera. Grab your notepad and pay attention as we teach you how to kill every type of Chimera in the game!



Hybrids

What to Kill Them With: M5A2 Carbine
Weaknesses: Head

Get used to seeing these ugly bastards as they are the most common breed of Chimera you will encounter on the battleground. After a mission or two, you will have come up with your own technique for putting Hybrids to death, but there are a few key things to be aware of

when taking these guys on. Even though Hybrids vastly outnumber human soldiers, they go down relatively easily, and the M5A2 Carbine standard issue machine gun is the perfect tool of death to turn them into Chimera Swiss cheese. The reason for this is that the Hybrids are weaker than most other Chimera, so it's important not to waste more powerful weapons on them. If things get really hectic while exchanging fire with a group of Hybrids, or you just want to obliterate them quickly, there's always the 40mm grenade launcher attached to this gun that can do the trick lickety-split!

Leaper Pods

What to Kill Them With: Grenades
Weaknesses: Body

These pulsating sacks of goo are actually Chimera eggs, and when they hatch it ain't the miracle of life. The Leaper Pods explode like a lumpy patch of acne when vibrations are felt on the ground close to them. Once this happens,

swarms of Leapers climb out of the ruptured membranous pods, and you've got a problem on your hands. So if you see these globs in front of you, take a moment to make sure you're locked, loaded, and have the appropriate weapon to baptize these filthy pests to Hell. Grenades (particularly air-fuel grenades if you have them) or rockets are the way to eradicate the pods before they hatch. If you are unable to get them prior to hatching, use your Bullseye to blow them to bits.



Menials

What to Kill Them With: Anything
Weaknesses: Body

Menials are truly one of the more unattractive breeds of Chimera, not that any of them are much to look at. Their main purpose of existence is labor or menial tasks (hence the name "Menials"), but this doesn't mean that they can't bite a chunk of flesh out of you. Keep these slow moving freaks

as far away from you as possible and then shoot them with anything in your arsenal. The M5A2 carbine is recommended, because it doesn't take much to slay these guys and this weapon packs just enough of a punch to stop any Menial. If Menials get close enough to you they will grab hold of you and start biting. They also are found hauling around explosive orbs, so if you see one carrying a round object, they don't want to play catch with you. And if you really have some bollocks on you, one well-timed melee attack will take them down.

Howlers

What to Kill Them With: Rossmore 236 Shotgun
Weaknesses: Face/Front Half

If your reflexes aren't quick enough and you meet a Howler, you could end up as lunch for this four-legged beast. Howlers are sort of like wolves on

steroids, and should be dealt with accordingly and with extreme force. They have a thick coat that is literally resistant to light fire. A blast from a shotgun is the best way to cripple any Howler. After equipping a Rossmore 236 shotgun, aim at the Howlers front end and let rip either a one or two-barrel lead sandwich. Since Howlers are quick, move around while unloading on them, and they should go down after only a couple of hits apiece.



CONTINUED ▶

Advanced Hybrids

What to Kill Them With: *L23 Fareye or Auger*
Weaknesses: *None*

Like their name suggests, Advanced Hybrids are more highly developed in combat than regular Hybrids. Advanced Hybrids also have a special air-conditioned suit that cools their putrid flesh, which helps them maintain a constant body temperature during intense battles. This strain of Chi-

mera is defenders the Chimeran Towers and you need to eliminate them with something that can kill at great distances. The Advanced Hybrid is the reason why carrying around sniper shells for the L23 Fareye is a good idea. These Chimera can do a number on human flesh in close combat, so murder them from a mile away if you can. A rain of transient radiation fired from your Auger rifle is also good way to destroy Advanced Hybrids, especially since its blasts can penetrate solid objects. This works well enough for launching an attack on them from a far, and you can even catch them off guard if you do it right.



Titans

What to Kill Them With: *Auger or L209 LAARK*
Weaknesses: *Head*

You'll know a Titan when you see one. These Chimeran behemoths are definitely to be feared and can crush you like a hammer hitting an egg. The Titans hide is durable to the point where they do not need body ar-

mor. These beefy mutants are so vicious that they arm themselves with heavy weapons that are primarily found mounted on vehicles. When taking one of them on, it's generally a good idea to use the strongest weapon in your arsenal. The L209 LAARK rocket launcher is preferable, but the Titan can be defeated with the Auger rifle, or just a whole bunch of grenades. The trick to conquering a Titan is to not plan on fighting them for a long time, because the longer one of them is aware of you, the harder it's going to be for you to stay alive. Fight hard and unleash everything you've got.

Steelheads

What to Kill Them With: *Rossmore 236 Shotgun*
Weaknesses: *Head*

Steelheads are truly some tough customers, especially while moving in large numbers. Their heavily armored bodies can take a thrashing and that is why they generally can be spotted on the front-

lines, leading other Chimera in battle. Steelheads weapon of choice is the Auger rifle and they aren't stingy with their ammunition. Handle encounters with Steelheads by acting fast. Their armor is no match for a couple of focused shots with the Rossmore 236 Shotgun. Fire directly in between their snaggleteeth for best results. They may be Steelheads, but the stuff in between that steel helmet is as soft as pie, and just as easy to splatter all over the concrete.



Angels

What to Kill Them With: *L209 LAARK, XR-005 Hailstorm, Bullseye, or Bullseye Mark II*
Weaknesses: *Body*

Angels typically hang around Chimeran strongholds and they control over other lesser

Chimera. Although Angels are not bred for war, they are anything but "angels." They are just as responsible for human casualties as Chimera on the front lines. The flatulence that results from ingesting three gallons of jalapeño nacho cheese isn't anywhere as murderous as they toxic farts that come out of Angels. If you see them giving birth to spiky balls, get back because these things are filled with their evil butt gas.

Slipskulls

What to Kill Them With: *Bullseye or Bullseye Mark II*
Weaknesses: *Body*

The Slipskull is both a fierce and shrewd adversary. These stealthy fellas may look like they

haven't been fed for many weeks, but the damage they are capable of is nothing to scoff at. They are also known for firing cheap shots, so don't expect a clean fight against one or more of them. Slipskulls move faster than a mouse on fire running through a field, and in order to kill them you're going to need just the right weapon. The Bullseye is your best bet. Just fire a homing tag on the Slipskull and make guns go bang





Widowmakers

What to Kill Them With: *L209 LAARK or Splitter*
Weaknesses: *Face*

These Chimera aren't called "Widowmakers" for nothing. They attack in a couple of different ways:

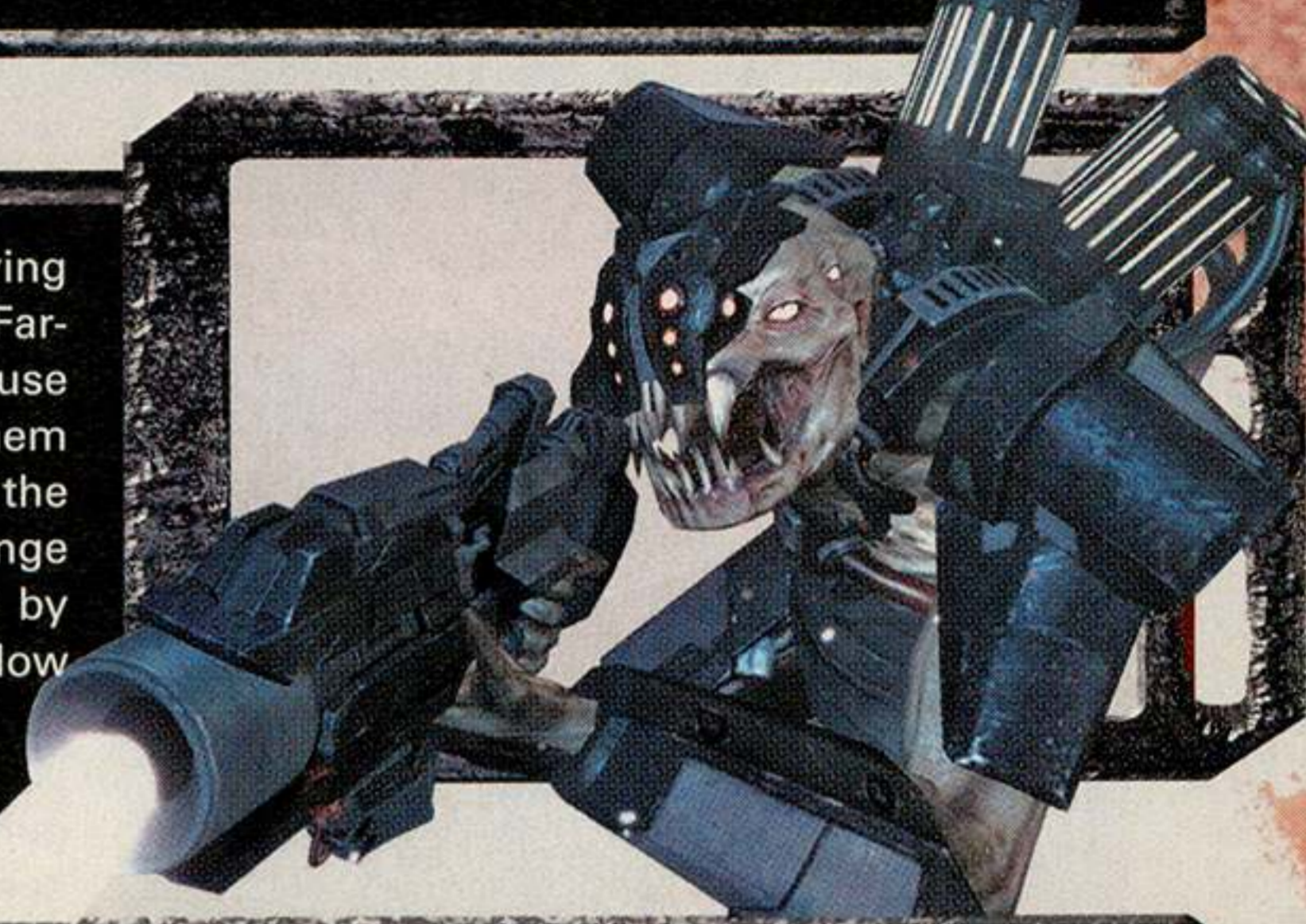
they try to impale you with their razor-sharp foretalons and they discharge an organic explosive, which can do just as much damage. Nasty. If you come into contact with a Widowmaker, the L209 LAARK (or Splitter if you have it) can put them to sleep permanently. As a rule, aim for the core of these fiends, and fire like there's no tomorrow.

Hardfangs

What to Kill Them With: *L23 Fareye or Rossmore 236 Shotgun*
Weaknesses: *Head*

The Hardfang thinks of itself as one hard mutha, but in reality these so-called "elite" Chimera strain sprint into any battle no matter how danger-

ous the situation is. They don't care about dying and you can make this come true with the L23 Fareye sniper rifle, which is the best weapon to use against Hardfangs. It's recommended to kill them off from a distance because they carry around the Arc Charger, but if you find yourself within range to shake hands with them, do the opposite by whipping out a Rossmore 236 Shotgun and blow them to kingdom come.



Rollers

What to Kill Them With: *Bullseye, Bullseye Mark II, or Air-Fuel Grenades*
Weaknesses: *Body*

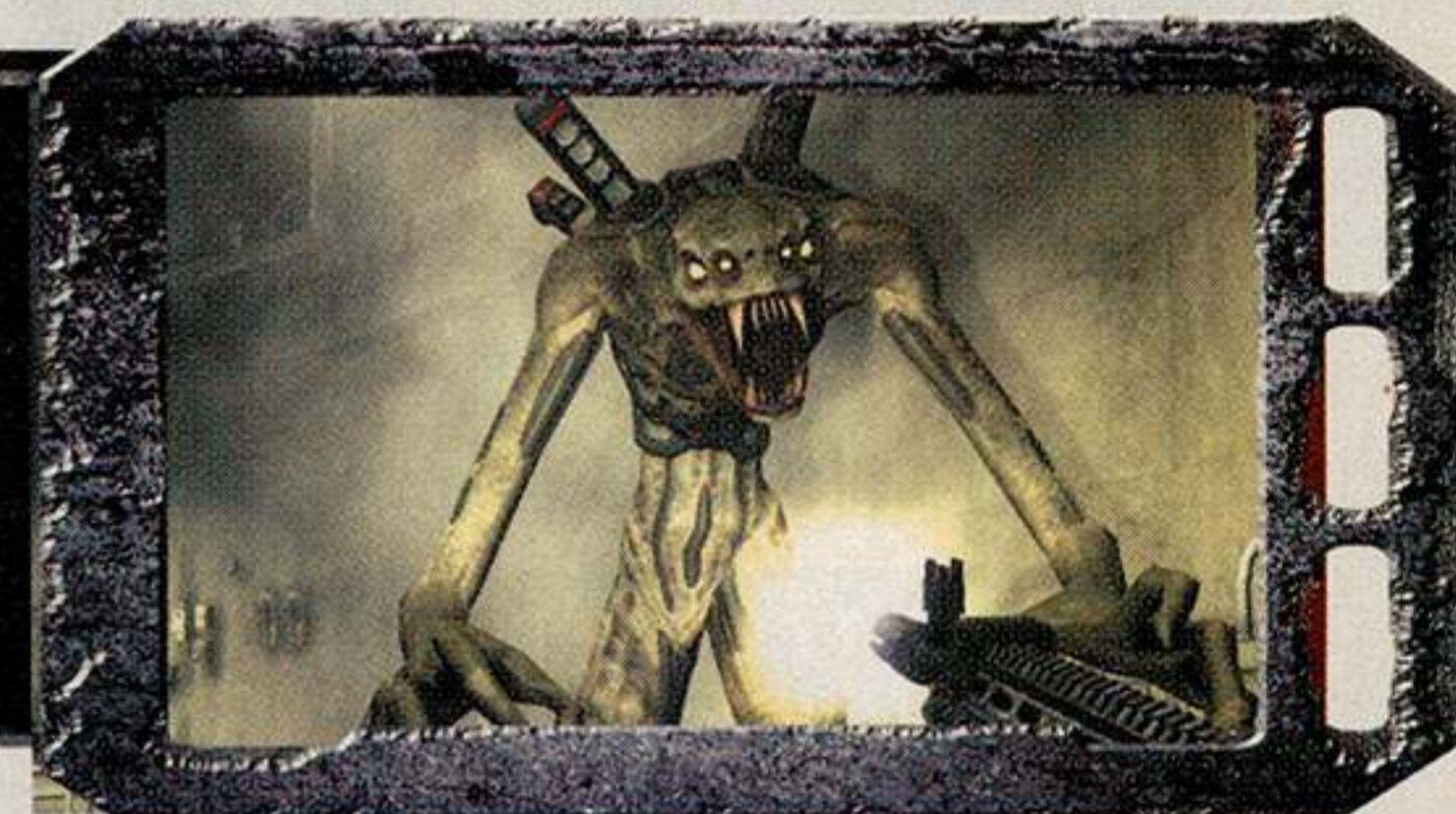
If you thought regular Leapers were fast, wait until you get rolled up on by a team of Roller Chimera. Rollers are actually the adult form of

Leapers and evolution has given them the ability to twist their legs around and turn themselves into a freakish cycle of sorts. But don't let their funny appearance fool you. Rollers love to spit, and their toxic loogies can blind. Watch out of their spit and use either of the Bullseye rifles on them. If you have an Air-Fuel grenade in your possession, let them burn!

Grey Jacks

What to Kill Them With: *Auger, Bullseye, or Bullseye Mark II*
Weaknesses: *Body*

The grandpas of the Chimera, Grey Jacks are tall enough to qualify for the NBA, and old age has caused them to literally outgrow their bodies. Grey Jacks also don't use weapons. Bring these lanky monsters down with the Auger or either of the Bullseye rifles. When encountering a Grey Jack, keep your distance because they have a wicked wide reach with their sharp claws.



Leapers

What to Kill Them With: *M5A2 Carbine or Bullseye*
Weaknesses: *Body*

Taking care of Leapers can be done in a jiffy and with ease if you don't let the situation get out of hand. As soon as you see some headed towards you, use either the M5A2 Carbine or the Bullseye to trounce them. A single Leaper poses no threat and you can even beat them to a bloody pulp with the butt of your gun, but don't let them gather as gangs of Leapers will make you FUBAR.

Non-Lethal Lethal Strains of Chimera

Crawlers

Close your mouth and plug up your nostrils if you ever see one of these little guys around the battlefield, because they will ram themselves into just about any orifice to infect you with the Chimera virus. Crawlers perish after they have done their business inside the body of a host. Thankfully, you won't ever actually have to kill one of these vile beetles.

Carriers

The Carrier's purpose is an atrocious one. They collect humans infected with the Chimera virus and bring them to a conversion center where the mutation process takes place. But the Carrier isn't simply a delivery boy with tentacles. It actually eats some of the people it's carrying whenever it gets hungry and doesn't have a Snickers bar handy.

Cocoons

There are no monarch butterflies in the making found in these cocoons. These runny pods are filled with one or more humans who are undergoing the "conversion process" (translation: they are becoming the very things you have been trained to kill).

CONTINUED ▶

GEARS OF WAR

The Seven Most Grueling Parts

Gears of War is anything but a mindless celebration of gore. Thinking that you can beat the game simply by firing bullets at anything you see will be your funeral. This horror-fused shooter is one of the toughest games we've played in a while, and that's why we've been so kind as to dissect the seven most grueling parts of Gears of War. Read our strategies and then tear those Locust warriors a new one!

ACT I: ASHES

Chapter: Knock Knock

Entering the House of Sovereigns



The Locust definitely don't want you to come into the House of Sovereigns as they put up one hell of a fight to stop you from entering. First, take out the Locust armed with a shotgun that bursts through the door on the far right. Use the pillars as cover. When you've killed the Locust holding the shotgun, move closer to the Troika gun, taking out the enemies that will pop out of the door in between the Troika and the enemy you just blew away. Even though the Locust manning the Troika is well shielded by the turret, the top of his dome is still

exposed. Use a bullet to crack open his skull. Eliminating the threat of the Troika will make it easier to gain entrance to the House of Sovereigns.

Don't be rash and charge in once the first wave of enemies has been crushed. An emergence hole will spew out several enemies that you need to waste. As soon as the hole is sealed, get outside and man that Troika. Enemies will storm in towards your location. Give them quadruple amputations by sawing into a bloody mess with heavy Troika fire.

ACT I: ASHES

Chapter: China Shop

Slaying the Berserker



This is the first time in the game where you will be faced with the menacing Locust known as the Berserker. But don't worry too much. Berserkers are more bark than bite if you know how to deal with them. As he smashes through the wall, get out of his way immediately because he will flatten you like a steamroller inside that narrow hallway. Go into the room to your right and **press Y** to view the destructible door. Stand in front of it and shoot at the Berserker to cause him to charge at you. Just as he is about to knock you into a coma, **press A** to roll out of harm's way.

Enter the next room and repeat the process of getting the Berserker to bulldoze himself through two more destructible doors. You only have less than seven minutes to lure him outside the tomb. Once he is outside, use the Hammer of Dawn and slice through his body with a scorching hot blast of energy.

ACT III: BELLY OF THE BEAST

Chapter: Tip of the Iceberg

Fighting on the Pumping Station



As soon as this chapter starts, go right where the path forks up ahead. On the butchered remains of a Locust Drone is a Torquebow that is vital to your survival for what is waiting for you on the pumping station. Also equip a Gnasher if you can. Start moving towards the pumping station when you are prepared to slaughter.

The cylindrical support beam that you will run into is perfect for cover. Cling to it and pick off the Theron Guards that walk off of the pumping station one by one. Use the Torquebow to destroy them. Be sure you have an open shot before **holding RT** with the Torquebow because you can only

hold it down for so long before the arrow is fired automatically. If they get too close, switch to your Gnasher and give them a taste of a shotgun blast to the face. The key to overcoming this battle is to try and focus on only one enemy at a time. Little by little, reduce the Locust threat by killing an enemy and then retreating. Keep checking on Dom to make sure that he is still on his feet. **Press X** to revive him if he is messed up. With some restraint, and quick reflexes and accuracy with the Torquebow and Gnasher, this battle will be over before you know it.

ACT IV: THE LONG ROAD HOME

Chapter: Campus Grinder

Securing the Courtyard



This chapter starts out with a hellish shootout that may take a few tries to pass. In order to stay alive during this intense battle, stick close to your men. There is strength in numbers, so make sure that they are all on their feet and ready to kick Locust head in. Revive your men if you need to. Make your way to the building with windows and a doorway where the enemies first emerged from into the courtyard. Toss a Frag Grenade inside to turn any Locust into ground beef. This will cause any survivors to run out. After ridding the small room inside this building of enemies, you can use

this room to fire on enemies attacking from the opposite side of the courtyard.

The courtyard is also a great place to exfoliate the faces of a Locust or two with the Chainsaw Bayonet because there are plenty of places in the yard where enemies can pop out of nowhere, leaving you with few options to attack effectively at close range. A couple of Boomers will appear once all of the enemies are cleared out. Stick a Torquebow arrow on one of them. Once one is dead, pick up the Boomshot that it drops and use it to kill the other Boomer.

ACT IV: THE LONG ROAD HOME

Chapter: Entrenched

Escaping Out the Back of the Estate



Leaving Adam Fenix's estate with all of your fingers and toes attached is harder than it sounds for several reasons. The most of annoying of these reasons is that there is no checkpoint in this part

of Gears of War. If you die, you cannot simply try again; you must play from the last checkpoint, and that can make you want to yank your hair out of your skull by the roots.

Another reason that this part of Gears of War makes this list of toughest moments is because there are two flabby Boomers that block your escape. When you hear them say "Boom," a rocket is headed in your direction. **Press A** quickly to roll out of the trajectory of the rocket. A Torquebow is never more useful than it is in this specific scenario. Sink its explosive arrows into one of the fatties and watch him come apart. If you don't have a Torquebow, use a Lancer or a more powerful weapon to slowly wear down one of the Boomers. Retreat to the area right in front of the backdoor when the crimson death omen flashes so you can regenerate health.

When you've successfully taken down one of the Boomers, cross the yard on the side where the dead Boomer (or what's left of him) rests. Leaving the other Boomer alive will give you a head start on your escape. After both of the Boomers are slain, you have a 30-second time limit to get to the APC which is straight ahead. Ideally, Dom will take care of the second Boomer, but if he doesn't you can attack him from the back. Again, being further away from the house is crucial to having enough time to get away. Once the second Boomer collapses, run like mad past the emergence hole and towards the APC. Pay no attention to the Locust that rise out of the e-hole. Just run right through them like they aren't even there. Do it before the timer runs out.

ACT V: DESPERATION

Chapter: Train Wreck

Thwarting the Reaver Attack



This is the deadliest encounter with Reavers in Gears of War by far. When Dom tells you to go up a ladder on the train, wait a second to pick up the Torquebow ammunition that is near the base of the ladder. Climb the ladder and to the left you will find some more ammo for your Torquebow. You will need it to blow the flocks of Reavers out of the sky. Your objectives will tell you to man either of the chain guns, but doing so should actually be your last resort.

Hopefully you have had a significant amount of practice with the Torquebow as it will help you annihilate your attackers. Carefully aimed shots with it will send Reavers crashing towards the

ground. If you are taking too many hits and the crimson death omen appears, jump back down the ladder and chill out for a few seconds until your wounds heal.

When your Torquebow is empty, get to one of the chain guns and destroy the rest of the Reavers. The chain gun has massive blind spots, so you will need to detach yourself from it when Reavers are behind you. It's important to keep moving because the Reavers can mow you down if you stay in one place for too long. If you are running around on top of the train away from the chain guns and without a Torquebow in your possession, aim at the Locust riding the Reavers and shoot them off.

ACT V: DESPERATION

Chapter: Pale Horse

Defeating General RAAM



No blood and bullet buffet is complete without a showdown with the final boss. General RAAM is one evil hombre, and if you don't have a battle plan to defeat him you're as good as naked with both of your arms cut off out there. Pick up the Longshot, Frag Grenades, and ammunition that are located in the car right before the one where RAAM is. Ideally you should have a Torquebow

equipped as well, but the Lancer is the next best thing to use.

There is a block of cement right in front of you as soon as the battle begins. Use it as cover pronto! RAAM is encased in a living cloud of Kryll that shield any bullets you send his way. Disperse the Kryll to give you an open shot on the General by either shooting him with a Torquebow arrow, when he is further away from you, or lobbing a Frag Grenade in his direction, when he is about halfway in between the car or closer. As soon as the swarm of Kryll scatter, get your Longshot out, zoom in, and then fire a sniper round into his ugly face. The Longshot's magazine carries only one bullet, so execute Active Reloads by **pressing RB** at the precise moment when the reload meter is on the white portion of the meter. This will allow you to reload faster and give you an 8 percent increase in damage on your next attack.

You only have a limited amount of time before RAAM makes his way over to your side of the

train's car. When that happens, you are toast, so get as many headshots with the Longshot as you can before he does. When he gets close, **press and hold A** to Roadie Run to the opposite side of the car and don't stop until you are at a safe distance from RAAM's wrath. You can also **press A** quickly to roll if bullets are burying themselves into your back as you are running. There is another cement block where you are running to that you can use for cover. You can repeat the tactic previously discussed, dispersing RAAM's shield of Kryll and blasting him in the face with sniper fire. There is a turret in this area that you can use to pummel him with chain gun fire. Manning the turret will leave you out in the open, so only use it right as the Kryll are flaking off of RAAM, or seconds before this. Killing the mighty Locust General requires a near flawless execution of these tactics, especially if you are playing on Hardcore or Insane. But once you get these strategies down, RAAM is as good as SPAM.

QUICK TIPS

ACTIVE RELOADING

The Active Reload is your new best friend in the war against the bestial Locust race. Successfully executing an Active Reload makes you reload your weapon faster. To do it, **press RB** once to bring up the reload meter, and then press it again at the precise moment when the marker is at white portion of the meter. A perfectly timed Active Reload also gives you a damage boost.

HONOR THE DEAD

Collecting COG tags scattered throughout Gears of War is a great way to earn Achievements. There are only 30 in the game and you'll have to comb your surroundings for them as many of the tags are hard to find. Look for the crimson death omen, which indicates that a COG tag is nearby.

IT'S HAMMER TIME

As sweet as it is to barbeque vile Locust with the crippling power of the Hammer of Dawn, you un-

fortunately can't use it to fry enemies in most situations. In order to use the HOD, you must be outside (or be in a building with a heavily damaged roof) and the satellite has to be aligned.

SHUT YOUR E-HOLE!

Emergence holes spit out a several enemies apiece. Cut down the number of baddies that climb out of these cavities by chucking a grenade into them, which seals them instantly. Doing this saves you bullets.

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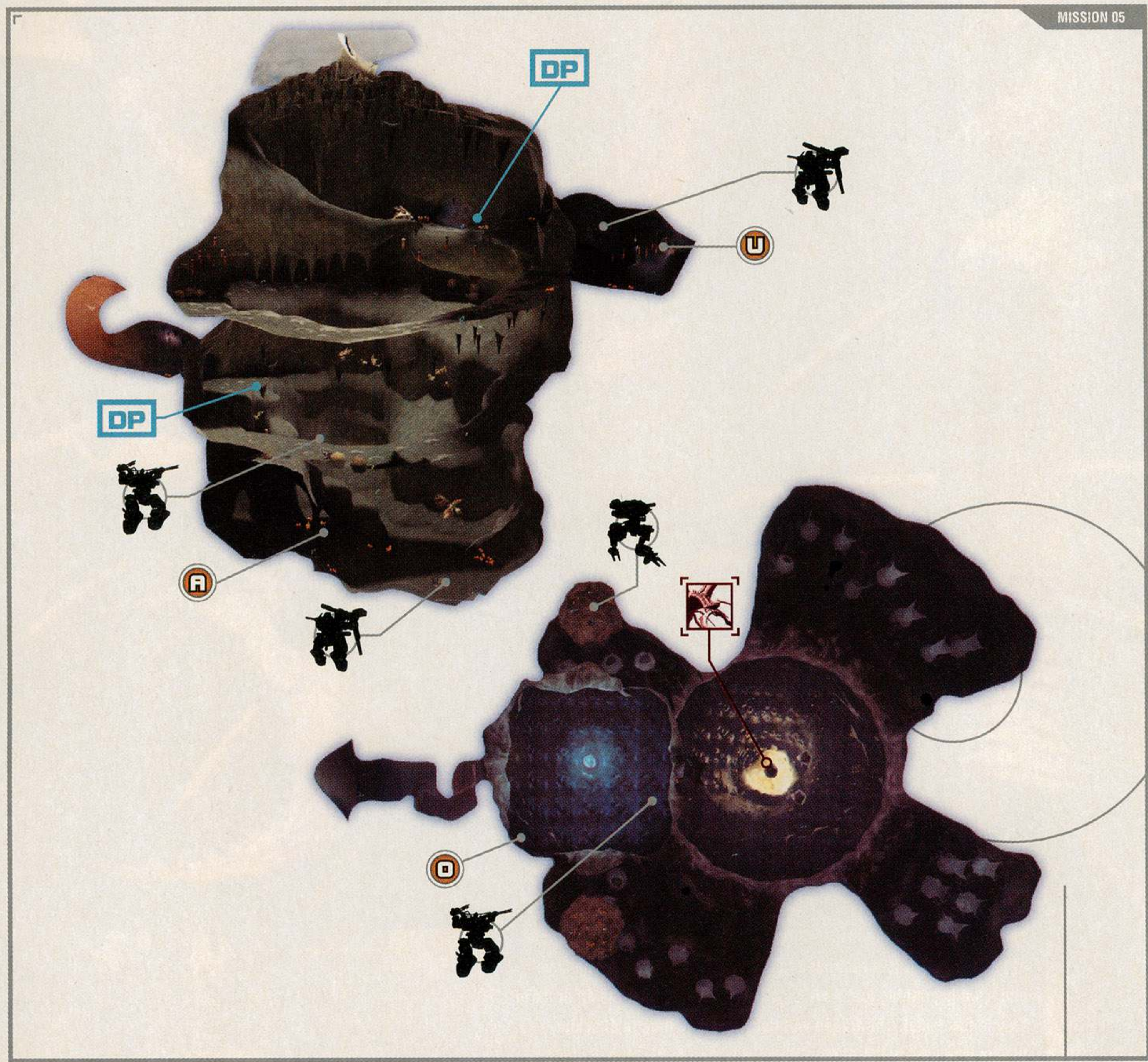
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TUNNELING THROUGH THE MOUNTAINS



CHAPTER
5

THE SPIRALING CAVE

Collect the Thermal Energy from the sacs growing on the ground and use the Machine Gun to blast your way through the swarming Trilid towards the Data Post straight ahead. Activate the Data Post and quickly jump down the giant rock staircase beyond the Data Post to reach the floor of the cave. Make a dash for the GTF-11 in the northeast corner of the cave and quickly climb aboard.



QUEEN

Height

66,000

Width

34,400

The Queen, unlike the lesser Chryatis that it resembles, is incapable of moving about. It is restricted to the hole in the center of the cave and it's a good thing too, as it is quite a bit bigger than the other Akrid Wayne has faced. The Queen will not waste any time in attacking Wayne when the battle begins, so quickly step to the side to avoid its freezing blast attack.



BOSS ATTACK TECHNIQUES

Freeze Blast

Dmg. Inflicted Low

The Queen will cock its head back and spit an icy blast of air with rock-crushing force at Wayne's direction. Strafe out of the way.

Horizontal Slash

Dmg. Inflicted Moderate

Watch for it to bring one of its arms up and back as this is the precursor to a nasty horizontal slash. This attack can be easily jumped over.

Ice Attack

Dmg. Inflicted Moderate

The Queen turns its head from side to side while spewing a blast of icy air that creates a row of razor-sharp icicles.

Ceiling Pound

Dmg. Inflicted Moderate

Watch for the beast to swing one of its arms in an uppercut motion repeatedly. It may look like it's missing you, but what it's really doing is setting loose a cascade of falling rocks!

Stomp Attack

Dmg. Inflicted Severe

This powerful overhead stomp attack comes quick and doesn't let up for some time. The Queen repeatedly slams one of its claws downward with tremendous power.

There are several weak spots on the Queen that Wayne can exploit.

Chief among these weaknesses are the

Thermal Energy deposits found where the Queen's

legs join the body. Although they can withstand a lot of damage, shooting them will gradually turn the Thermal Energy from yellow to red and then ultimately it bursts, thereby severing the leg. Not only does this inflict significant pain, but it forces the Queen to fall limp on the floor, giving Wayne a clean shot at the Thermal Energy in the beast's forehead. This is its true weak spot!



Wayne needs to use the GTF-11's Hovering ability (or the GTB-22's various jumping abilities) to avoid the Queen's attacks. These attacks consist primarily of it using its massive front legs to lash out at Wayne with various melee attacks, but it also uses the legs to occasionally pound the ceiling and cause a rockslide. Less obvious, but nearly as deadly is the beast's frozen breath. Watch for it to cock its head back and snap forward while blowing icy cold air at Wayne.

Early in the battle, this attack takes the form of a sudden blast of cold, much like a projectile attack.



Later on, however, the Queen swings its head from left to right and spray a mass of cold air that leaves a ridge of icicles across the arena. Pay close attention to the movements of the creature's head while fighting it and prepare to backpedal and leap out of the way when it is about to unleash one of its icy attacks.

Be sure to stay on the move during the battle, both to avoid the incoming attacks and also to collect the Thermal Energy and weaponry lying around. Use the Gatling Guns to shoot the stalactites on the ceiling to drop them onto the Queen and continue circling around it and shooting its much smaller legs, as they too have Thermal Energy in them and are sources of weakness. Equip the Rocket Launcher on the VS and use it along with the Gatling Gun to continue firing at the beast's legs and forehead. The legs grow back repeatedly, but each time one is severed, Wayne has a clean shot at the head. Have the Rocket Launcher loaded and ready to fire. It won't take long before Wayne clears the mountain of its final resident.



Written by Doug Walsh

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CHAPTER
5



GAME OF THE MONTH

ROGUE GALAXY

Space may be the final frontier, but in *Rogue Galaxy*, it's only the beginning. The newest RPG from genre vets Level 5 (*Dark Cloud 2*, *Dragon Quest VIII*) won us over with its rich story, interesting characters, and fantastic visuals. Reviewer PapaFrog was so enamored with the game that it gave him temporary *Final Fantasy XII* amnesia. See what the hub-bub is about in our in-depth review!

GAME REVIEWS:

Blazing Angels: Squadrons of World War II (PS3)	87	Metal Slug Anthology (Wii)	89
Brain Boost: Gamma/Beta Wave (DS)	90	MVP 07 NCAA Baseball (PS2)	91
Crackdown (Xbox 360)	88	Rogue Galaxy (PS2)	82
The Elder Scrolls IV: Knights of the Nine (Xbox 360) (PC)	85	Star Trek: Legacy (PC)	86
Full Auto 2: Battlelines (PS3)	87	Star Wars: Lethal Alliance (PSP)	89
Hotel Dusk: Room 215 (DS)	84	Super Swing Golf (Wii)	86
Legend of Heroes III: Song of the Ocean (PSP)	90	Tokobot Plus: Mysteries of the Karakuri (PS2)	91
The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess (GC).....	90	Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell: Double Agent (Wii)	89

MEET THE GAMEPROS!

Each month, members of the *GamePro* reviews staff will take on your burning questions in order to reveal more about what makes them tick. This month, we asked them the age old question, "If you were stranded on a deserted island (which has it's own power plant, of course), which next-gen console would you want to have with you: Xbox 360, PS3, or Wii?"



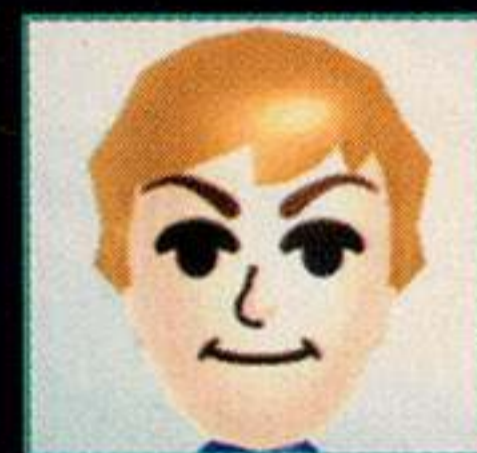
Vicious Sid

"The PS3, so I can watch Blu-ray flicks on my 1080p CoconuHD setup and play crappy ports from other next-gen palm trees."



Matt Peckham

"The Wii, because it comes with a Nunchuck, and you never know when you'll have to throw down with a tree-whacking, steam-blasting smoke monster."



Ouroburos

"The Xbox 360, of course. Who wants to get stranded with launch titles?"



The Watcher

"It'd just be me and my Wii, as happy as can be, sitting underneath a big palm tree."



Tenacious Moses

"I'd take the Xbox 360 because the beastly power supply could also serve as a weapon against the local monkeys."



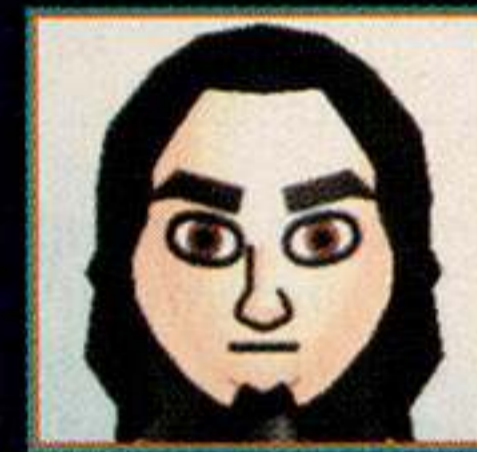
Ahoy_and_Avast

"I'd take the Wii and a Costco sized box of double A batteries. Also, a GPS locator that I'd turn on as soon as I beat Twilight Princess."



Mr. Marbles

"The Xbox 360 for Halo 2, but I'd also smuggle in a mincey-wincey Wii so I can perfect my bowling game in Wii Sports."



Long-Haired Offender

"I would take a Wii so I could do 'research' on human mating rituals using the built-in web browser. Wait, this island has wireless Internet, right?"



DaveMayCry

"If I had Internet access, I wouldn't trust the PS3 or Wii's online capabilities to help me communicate with the outside world. Thus, the 360 wins."

Have a question for the Pros? E-mail them to ahoy_and_avast@gamepro.com with the subject line "Burning Question of the Month!" If your question is chosen, we'll send you a copy of our Game of the Month!

GAMEPRO'S RATING SCALE

Behind the numbers:

5.00 – 4.50

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

4.25 – 3.50

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

3.25 – 2.50

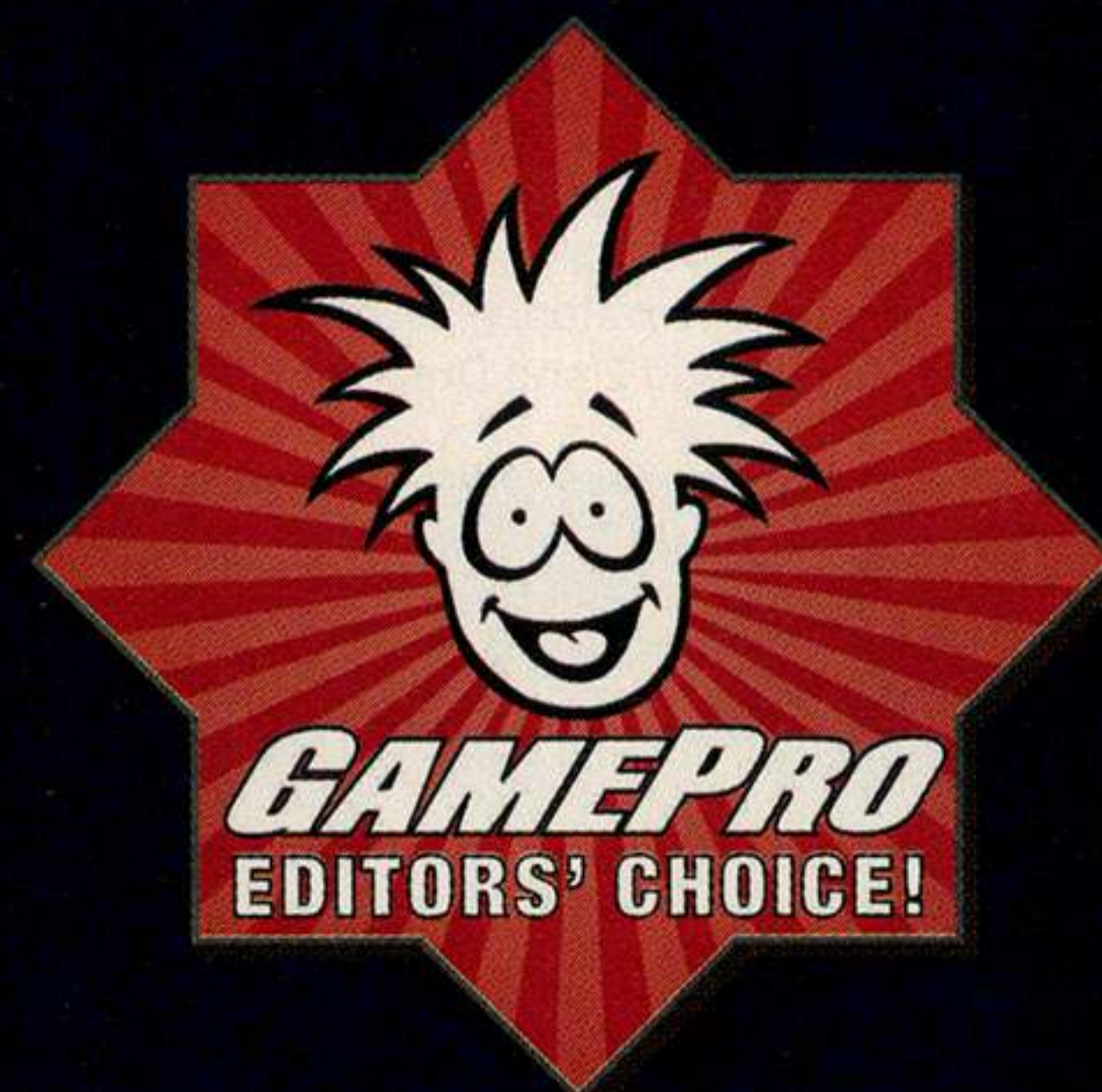
Approach with caution—try before you buy. Enter the Matrix and the Dynasty Warriors games fall squarely in this category.

2.25 – 1.50

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

1.25 – 0.00

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



Games that score 4.50 or higher are awarded our coveted Editors' Choice Award.



Rogue Galaxy is filled with great escapes and narrow misses. Maybe Jester should ask Akira to borrow his bike next time though, and ditch the motor scooter.

ROGUE GALAXY

An RPG that's good enough to help you get over your Final Fantasy XII hangover.

PS2 ESRB: T

Developer: Level 5 Publisher: Sony

Most of you are still probably fighting your way through the world of Ivalice; after all, with its enormous maps and epic storyline, Final Fantasy XII isn't a game that you beat overnight. But some of us, myself included, have already climbed to the top of that particular mountain and although the memories of our time with Square Enix's latest opus is still fresh in my mind, the need for the next great RPG game has been building ever since the ending credits began to roll.

A quick scan of the role-playing landscape turned up a few promising titles on the distant horizon but nothing really jumped out at me—at least, not until I put a copy of Rogue Galaxy into my PS2.

Talk about having your prayers answered. Rogue Galaxy is nothing short of excellent. It's the little sibling to developer Level 5's previous successes, Dark Cloud 2 and Dragon's Quest VIII,

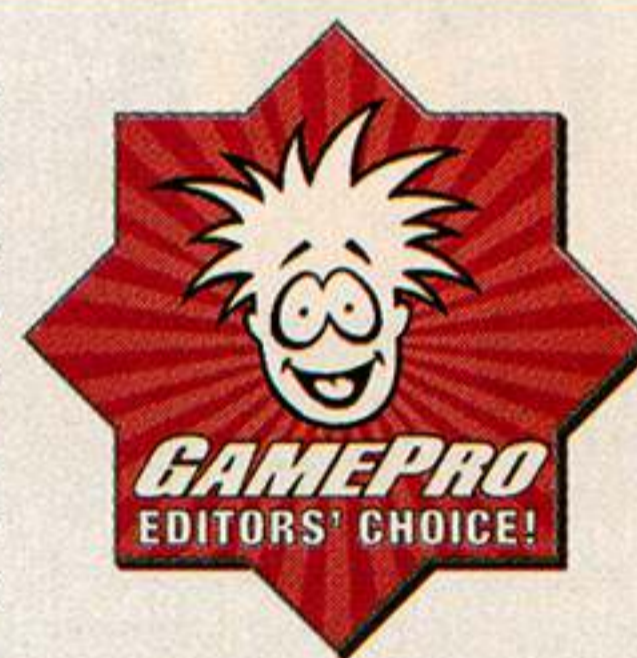
and it does just about everything right. Although it doesn't stray far from the tried-and-true RPG formula or genre conventions—the story, for example, follows the “restless youth must rise up to save the world/universe” formula to the letter—Rogue Galaxy is so brilliantly designed and paced that it's less a video game and more a genuine immersive adventure.

THE RIPPLING MUSCLE OF CEL-SHADE

Traditionally, RPG gamers have been the most forgiving when it came to a game's graphics. Take a look at some of the early efforts on the PC, if you need proof: Games from that era relied on simplistic pixels and blocks to represent monsters and treasure chests. Of course, the emphasis was on the story and the experience more than the graphics—it was the video game equivalent of the old adage, “It's what's on the inside that counts.”

However, thanks to a little title called Final Fantasy VII, console RPG gamers have become accustomed to a certain visual standard. Thankfully, Rogue Galaxy has the chops to reach that lofty peak.

The game has some of the finest graphics ever seen on the PS2. With smooth outlines and vivid color, there is so much detail in every character you can actually see the definition in their muscles. (Sorry Vaan, those tattooed on six-pack abs don't quite cut it.) The quality of the cinematics are also amazing: It's no exaggeration to say that they bring to mind the work of Hayao Miyazaki, the critically acclaimed director of such movies as *Spirited Away* and *Princess Mononoke*.





Adding to the richness of the storytelling is the superb voice acting, that gives every character, no matter how minor, unexpectedly rich personalities. Your party members will constantly talk to you, lending advice as to the task at hand, or simply to fill the quiet spaces with chatter. It's a nice touch, and one that really fleshes out Rogue Galaxy's gaming experience.

OH, MIGHTY AURON

I was also pleasantly surprised by the lack of loading times in Rogue Galaxy, a feature that really lends a sense of cohesiveness to the game. When it is time to battle, monsters appear organically creeping out of bushes and shadows to confront your forces. The battles are random, but due to the lack of load time, they feel anything but. They come at an even pace, and are never overwhelming or tiresome. When the battle finishes, a screen comes up displaying stat increases and items gained, but you can continue to play as this is going on.

Bear in mind that Rogue Galaxy's battle system feels limited and clunky, especially when compared to FFXII's Gambit system, but there is enough depth to keep you on your toes. Battles are fought in real-time with the typical party of three. You control one of the characters, while the other two fight according to pre-set orders. Party members shout suggestions on how to act next, as special moves and healing only occur by selecting them from the menu.

When this happens, info on what buttons to push to initiate actions appear. This crowds the screen, especially while battling in tight corridors making it hard to see what's going on. Special attacks in the game, called burning strikes, happen much the same way. After beginning the attack specific buttons must be pushed in sequence to deliver a powerful blow.

IT'S THE GIRTH THAT COUNTS

Rogue Galaxy isn't the longest game out there, but it is filled with entertaining extras that will keep you coming back for more. The story line should take somewhere in the neighborhood of 40 hours, but factoring in all the side quests and mini-games doubles that number.

Rogue Galaxy is what every RPG should strive to be: An immersive experience that places you in a new world populated by intriguing characters. It's backed by an engaging and accessible story, possesses an intuitive control scheme and maintains a sense of depth will have you gladly coming back for more. The game has a few minor annoyances—the battle system needs work, for instance—but Rogue Galaxy truly stands on its own, and is a game that every RPG gamer should experience for themselves. —PapaFrog

Pros: Everything you'd want in a console RPG.

Cons: The battle system is not as deep as it could or should be.

FUN FACTOR

5.00

OUT OF 5.00

HOTEL DUSK: ROOM 215

DS ESRB: T

■ Developer: Cing ■ Publisher: Nintendo

It seems like gamers have two choices these days: Either take the video game equivalent of a hammer to the head or a kick to the balls. Call me a crotchety-crusty gamer, but I prefer a little subtlety these days. And while I'll gladly take an in-your-face title like Gears of War out for a spin, I'd much rather exercise my brain than fingers.

So it was with a sense of hope that I plunged headlong into the dark and gritty world of the neo-noir DS game Hotel Dusk: Room 215. For the most part, I enjoyed my stay, as it brought back fond memories of a bygone era when compelling storylines, brain-teasing puzzles, and methodical gameplay ruled the roost.

Unfortunately, playing Hotel Dusk was also a bitter reminder of the reasons why the point-and-click adventure genre is currently languishing in digital purgatory, gathering dust like an overlooked museum exhibit.

ROOM WITH A VIEW

The first thing you'll most likely notice about Hotel Dusk, and with good reason, is its unique visual style. Reminiscent of the video for A-Ha's hit song, "Take On Me"—check Youtube if you've never seen it—the characters who populate Hotel Dusk are rendered in a shaded pencil-line style, which creates a graphic novel feel. This



fits the deep and engaging story line, which is admittedly a little hackneyed—a down-in-the-dumps former-cop finds mystery, and a part of his past, at a strange hotel filled with suspicious characters. But the dialogue is well written and the puzzles are, for the most part, intelligently laid out.

The controls are also a little quirky. You hold the DS sideways and use the stylus to navigate, interact with the environment, and make dialogue choices—but the thoughtful pacing of the game's story ensures that your fingers are never left fumbling.

However, much like classic adventure games of yore, Hotel Dusk suffers from some flaws that are inherent to the genre. First, there is a lot of

fluff and meaningless exchanges to sift through. Also, be prepared to wander around for long stretches as you try to figure out what to do next. Then there's the problem of item relevancy. Although you're able to interact with a wide variety of objects, only a small percentage of them will actually be useful to you. And yet, you feel compelled to interact with every object you come across, out of fear that you'll overlook something.

Hotel Dusk probably won't appeal to every DS gamer, as it requires a degree of patience and

thoughtfulness that only the aged (and insane) are capable of. But anyone looking for a cerebral and deliberate challenge should definitely check out this cool and unique title; just be patient with it, and don't let its minor faults discourage you from plumbing its depths.—This Old Man

Pros: Unique visual style is eye-catching. Compelling storyline.

Cons: Requires a lot of patience from the gamer.

FUN FACTOR

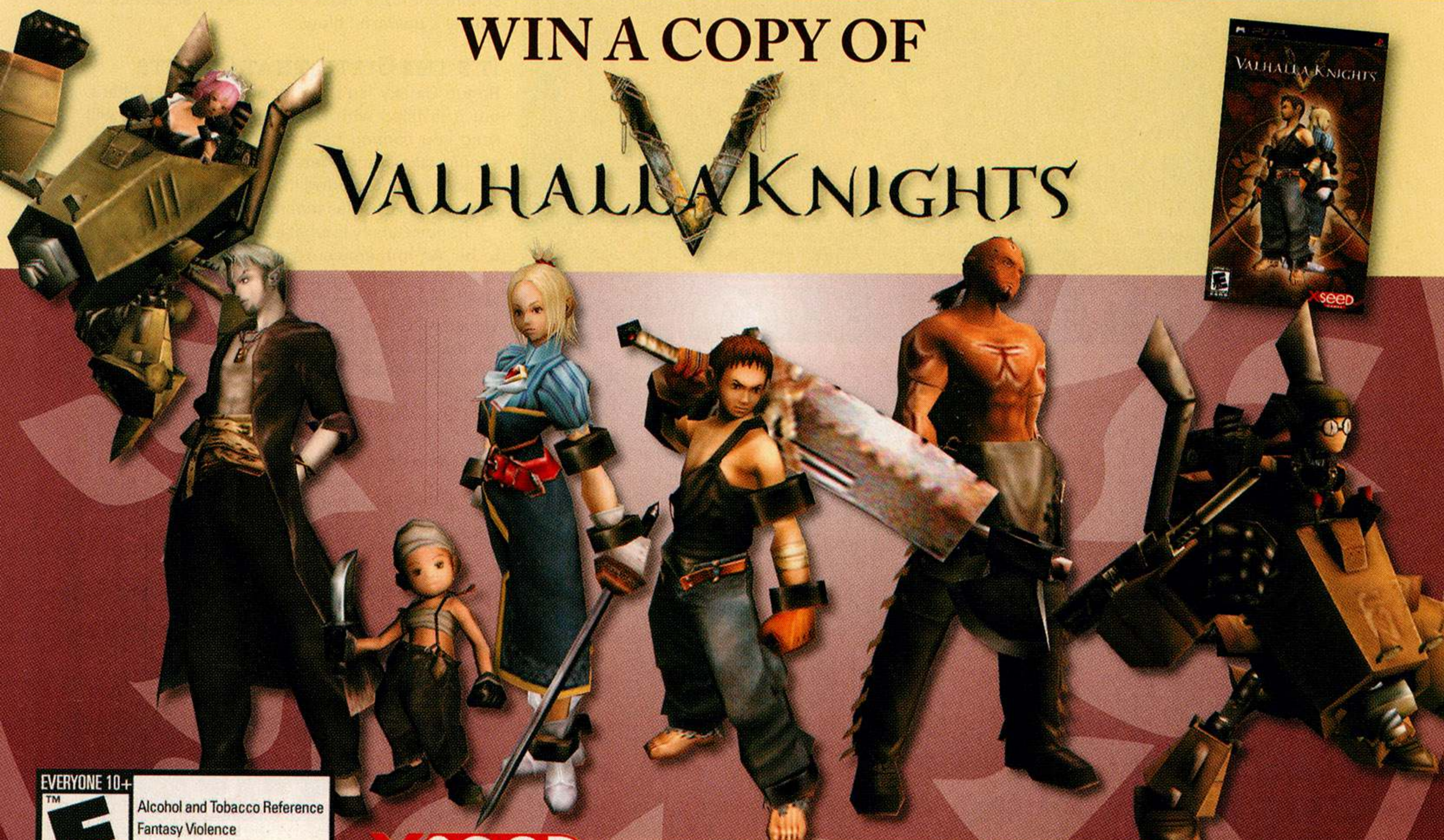
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THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: KNIGHTS OF THE NINE

Xbox 360 | PC | ESRB: M

Developer and Publisher: Bethesda Softworks



Helm of the Crusader

Bethesda has already released a few add-ons for their groundbreaking open-ended RPG Oblivion. Some of these, specifically the much maligned horse armor add-on, have earned the developer its fair share of criticism. However, most of the previous content packs have contained at most a new dungeon or a small quest line. Knights of the Nine, on the other hand, offers a full-fledged adventure which matches or exceeds the four main optional quest lines in the game.

EVIL DEAD

The basic plot involves the player finding, putting to rest and then rebuilding the order of the Knights of the Nine in order to vanquish a returned evil being. This is accomplished by collecting each of the various parts of the Armor of the Crusader, which is required to defeat said evil. It's a well told story, partially due to the newly voiced dialogue and characters, which matches the same high quality that was found in the original.

The expansion is also subtly integrated into the existing game. Previous content packs have notified you of their presence by popping up a little text notification. Knights of the Nine makes no such announcement—you have to actually explore to find the quest. Of course this isn't too hard, since nearly every inhabitant of one of the cities now has a new conversation topic about it, each with their own unique dialogue.

There are also some new enemy types to contend with and some new locations to visit. The real value, however, lies in the new and inventive ways that the developer uses the existing content to tell the story. Even the beginning of the quest, which requires you to wander the mainland looking for wayshrines, is made more interesting through encounters with other seekers who are trying to accomplish the same task.

MORE IS MORE

The expansions faults are few. The sparse new content doesn't really change the gameplay, which may disappoint some. Fans that primarily enjoy the free exploratory nature of Oblivion and don't really dig the main quests won't find much new to play with either. Hence, it feels less like an official expansion and more like a very large content pack. Still, given its affordable price and overall level of polish, these faults are more than excusable.

Knights seamlessly melds a good 6 to 10 hours of highly entertaining gameplay and maintains the level of quality Oblivion is known for. Sandbox players may be disappointed by the lack of game changing content, but for those who enjoy having a somewhat directed, immersive experience in the game's freeform world should definitely give this a try.—**Brian Newton**



Pros: Great storytelling. An epic quest that's just as good as anything in the original.

Cons: Doesn't fundamentally change or add to the nature of the gameplay.

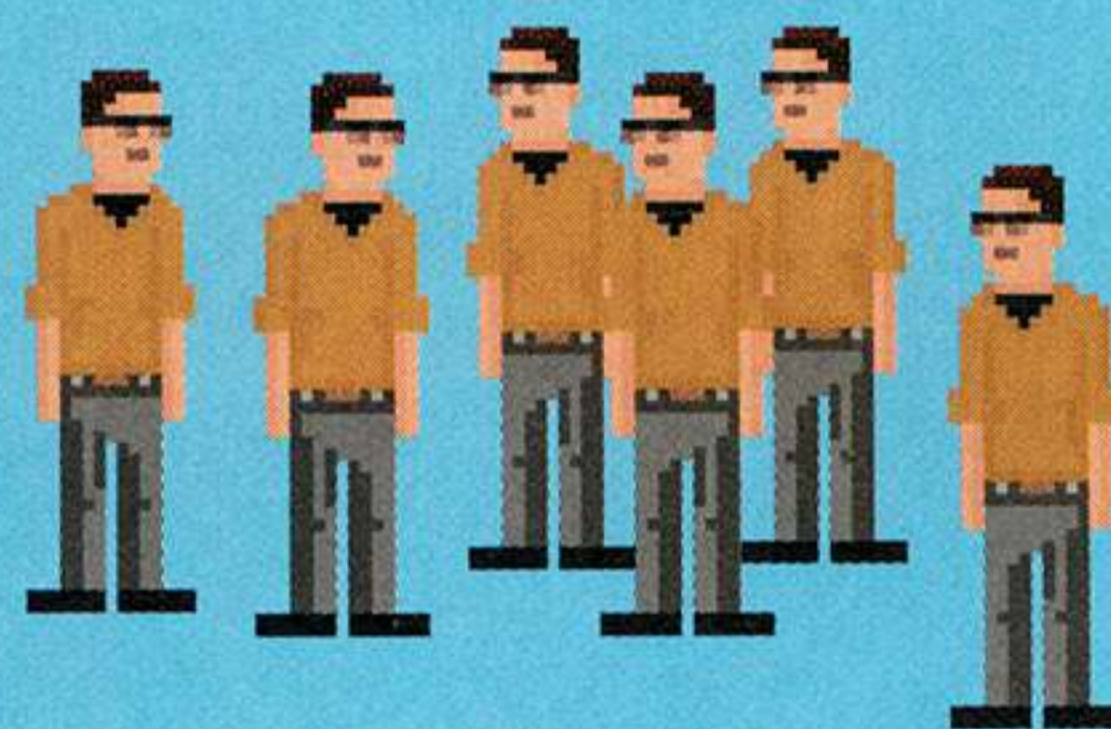
FUN FACTOR

4.25

OUT OF 5.00



(geek)



(clustergeeking)



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SUPER SWING GOLF

Wii ESRB: E10+

Developer: Ntreev Soft Publisher: Tecmo

After hearing about Super Swing Golf for the Nintendo Wii—with its swing mechanics and quirky, anime-style characters—my eyes lit up like a youngster on Christmas. I played Hot Shots Golf to death and dreamt of a day where I could play a virtual round while actually swinging some sort of device as if it were a real club. And here I am, playing Super Swing Golf, wondering how I came to subject myself to such mediocrity.

IN THE ROUGH

Super Swing Golf has a look and feel that's similar to the Hot Shots series, but it skews a little too far



into the land of Hello Kitty. It's almost obnoxiously cartoony, and the animations are more appropriate to Saturday morning 'toon than a new generation console games. While the game's bright, beautiful colors and appealing course designs are nice, this game might be better suited for the younger sister of a true golfer.

That's not to say that Super Swing Golf is a complete letdown. The swing system, while flawed, is relatively accurate and generally fun. The putting is somewhat shaky, but the full swing system and chipping mechanics are definitely a step in the right direction. There is also an option

to use a standard, button-tap system rather than taking an actual swing, which is quite refreshing given that a typical Super Swing Gold round can take up to forty-five minutes. A regular control scheme might have also been better for the Pangya campaign mode that can get pretty difficult and demanding in terms of precision.

FEARSOME FOURSOME

The multiplayer modes in Super Swing Golf are the game's most notable selling points. Up to four players can play

a variety of games that are relatively easy to learn. The most unique multiplayer game is the balloon pop mode which, challenges players to keep their scores low while attempting to pop each other's balloons. It can get pretty competitive, but don't let your nerves get to you—it just might affect your swing!

Maybe I'm spoiled, but I need more in a golf game than cartoon caddies and a morally congested story line about courage and kindness. That said, for the amateur duffer, Super Swing is a good way to spend some time on the virtual links. —Freck1es



Pros: Effective swing mechanic. Entertaining multiplayer modes.

Cons: Cartoonish visual style may turn some gamers off.

FUN FACTOR

3.00

OUT OF 5.00

STAR TREK: LEGACY

Xbox 360 PC ESRB: E10+

Developer: Mad Doc Software Publisher: Bethesda Softworks

Designing a video game based on a cult franchise can be a challenge, especially if that franchise has a fan base that is as devoted and rabid as Trekkies. Developers must not only please the diehards—never a small feat—while also making the game accessible enough for newcomers. The trouble with most games based on cult licenses—and Star Trek: Legacy is no different—is that it isn't appealing unless you possess a dedicated understanding of the source material.

FULL AHEAD, MR. SULU

The premise of Legacy sounds like a Trekkie's wet dream come true—command and control over 60 different starships from four different races, all spanning the Star Trek universe from Enterprise to The Next Generation and beyond. This is akin to Captain Janeway suddenly materializing in your bedroom wearing nothing but a—forget I said that.



The good news is that the ships all look as if they flew straight out of their respective shows and franchises, and all the captains lend their relevant voices to the game. And though the story, which involves a Vulcan scientist who discovers the Borg during the beginning of the Federation, comes close to being contrived, it still retains that classic Star Trek vibe.

Legacy also succeeds in channeling the spirit of Star Trek fleet battles. We're talking about a slower, more deliberate brand of combat, as opposed to the quick and twitchy dogfights of oh, say, *Star Wars*. And unlike the horribly buggy and incomplete PC version, the controls on the Xbox 360 feel more natural and approachable.

WRATH OF KHANNNNNNN!

But back the tribble-truck up. Even with the streamlined controls, there's a steep learning curve to figuring out and remembering the placement and button combinations for all the moves. And for all shiny graphics, some of the damage modeling looks almost amateurish; memo to the designers: Space stations and Borg cubes should not suddenly explode into huge chunks of bland, colliding textures.

There's other nagging issues too, like comatose voice-acting—I'm looking at you, Scott Bakula—and a save system that does not fit the lengthy missions you'll face later in the game.



Do these issues ruin the game experience? Not really. With an interesting story and a fairly robust multiplayer component, there's plenty of incentive to play Star Trek: Legacy. Unless, of course, you've ever given someone grief because of their Captain Kirk Halloween costume, at which point, you probably won't want to sit down in the captain's chair for this one. —The Watcher

Pros: Impressive array of Star Trek ships. Classic Star Trek feel.

Cons: Poor voice acting. Damage modeling is suspect. Of little interest to non-Trekkies.

FUN FACTOR

4.00

OUT OF 5.00

FULL AUTO 2: BATTLELINES

PS3 ESRB: T

Developer: Pseudo Interactive Publisher: Sega



Vehicular combat has a rich gaming history, stretching from the Twisted Metal series all the way back to ancient faves like Auto Duel. You'd think it'd be hard to muck up the joy of blowing horseless carriages into itty bitty bits, but Full Auto 2 somehow manages to do just that.



WRECKING CREW

For all its explosive mayhem, Full Auto 2 is wrapped in a lame story about a sentient A.I. and rolling gangs of heavily armed thugs. Luckily, this nonsense doesn't make its way into the actual gameplay, where your goal is pretty much to wreck as much havoc as humanly possible, whether you're running laps on streets pulled from the original game, or taking on a dozen rivals in the automotive equivalent of a Royal Rumble.

The resulting nightmare of screaming metal and unbridled destruction is undoubtedly Full

Auto 2's strong suit. Every inch of every track responds to weapons fire in some way or another, from the crumbling facades of bullet-ridden buildings, to each level's selection of disposable architecture, all rendered in stunning 1080p resolution. The sound effects do surprisingly little to emphasize the destruction you unleash, but there's no arguing the game's visual prowess.

GRINDING GEARS

And yet, Full Auto 2 comes up short in the most critical aspect of any driving game: the controls. Each whip at your disposal is beautifully rendered, with the most detailed damage model yet seen, but nearly every one handles with all the agility of a school bus in a swamp. This might not have been a big deal, had the tracks been designed to take advantage of the considerable sense of speed imparted every time you hold the boost button, but alas, every route is filled with right-angled corners and tricky switchbacks that only underline your inability to drift properly.

And for all the convincing environmental physics and damage modeling, it's just baffling that the vehicle physics are so poorly represented. Even after extended playtime, we never got a feel for controlling our rides. It's hard to imagine why the developers bound the cool time-reversing "unwreck" feature to the same meter as speed boosting, since the latter is usually far more useful.

DON'T BUY—LEASE

Full Auto 2 is certainly worth a rental, if only for the high-resolution destruction, but it's plagued by too many other irritating issues to be a true candidate for purchase. Unless you're absolutely hellbent on creating automotive anarchy, and you can't wait for something better, keep this one in your rearview mirror.—Ouroboros

Pros: Like a Ferrari, it's pretty and fast.

Cons: Like a Pinto, it handles poorly.

FUN FACTOR

3.25

OUT OF 5.00

BLAZING ANGELS: SQUADRONS OF WORLD WAR II

PS3 ESRB: T

Developer and Publisher: Ubisoft



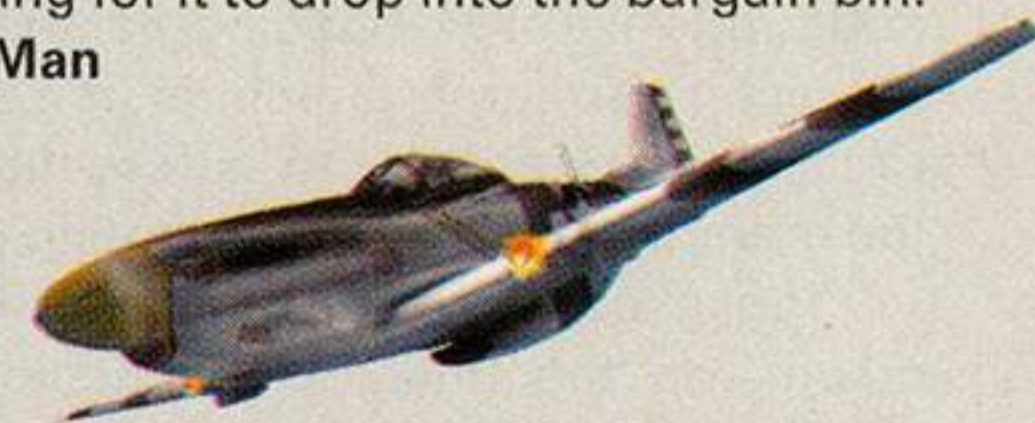
Making another World War II game is not only like beating the proverbial dead horse, it's like shooting it with a gun, setting fire to it, then putting the ashes into Mike Tyson's personal punching bag. Blazing Angel's saving grace, then, is that it takes us out of the familiar trenches and gives us a bird's eye view of the conflict, keeping it from being yet another WWII game.

PRE-FLIGHT CHECKLIST

As a port of the Xbox 360 title of the same name, Blazing Angels puts you in the pilot's seat of several WWII-era fighters and bombers as you take part in historic conflicts such as the bombing of Pearl Harbor. For the most part, the action is intense and compelling, but don't expect historically accurate recreations. But that's perfectly fine—this is a video game, not a history book.

The arcade gameplay actually works to the game's benefit because if you're too busy downing bogeys and torpedoing ships, it's easier to look past the game's many varied faults, including its wonky controls—the Sixaxis functionality is terrible—uneven difficulty and mediocre graphics. Also disturbing was the fact that the frame rate nose dives every time you fly through smoke. This is especially problematic when your plane is on fire and you're trailing a stream of frame rate killing smog. Ironically enough, the game actually sets your plane aflame during one mission.

Much like almost every other PS3 game that's been released so far, Blazing Angels is a mediocre title that won't exactly leave you bragging to your friends about your shiny new toy. It's good enough to keep your attention for a while but you'd probably be better off renting it for the weekend or waiting for it to drop into the bargain bin.—This Old Man



Pros: It isn't yet another WWII FPS. Good intense action.

Cons: Passable graphics. Poor Sixaxis functionality. Uneven difficulty.

FUN FACTOR

3.00

OUT OF 5.00





Propelled explosive weapons aren't the easiest to find, so save those precious rounds for the big stuff. And make sure you're not caught in the blast, pyro.

CRACKDOWN

Making the world your own personal jungle gym, one block at a time.

Xbox 360 ESRB: M

Developer: Realtime Worlds Publisher: Microsoft

Remember *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* when Charlie finds the Golden Ticket, and everyone's so excited that they forget all about the sweet, sweet candy that the Ticket came with? That's sort of what Crackdown is like: everyone's so busy salivating about the inclusion of a Halo 3 beta code that they're overlooking the deliciousness that's sitting right under their noses.

DAY-GLO DISASTER AREA

By now, we're all familiar with the go-anywhere, do-anything style of gameplay that was popularized by the Grand Theft Auto series. Much of the pre-release hype surrounding Crackdown pegged it as the "GTA...of the future!" and in many ways, they were right.

But whether it's the game's comic book sensibility—brought to life by its vibrant visual style and subtle use of cel-shading—or the fact that your character can jump buildings in a single bound, Crackdown does a lot to differentiate itself from the granddaddy of all free-roaming games.

You take to the streets of Pacific City to "crackdown" on the unlawful shenanigans of three

gangs which exert a virtual stranglehold on the different districts. You create a character, decide on a starter set of wheels, and dive into the deep end of a world on the brink of anarchy. Your charter is to bring peace to the streets while punishing the wicked and protecting the innocent.

LOCKED AND LOADED

Damn near everything in Crackdown is handled well. The aforementioned graphics are stellar, and in a pleasant twist, the game's audio pulls its fair share of the weight. An absolutely killer soundtrack keeps you in the mood to wage war, and great attention is paid to aural combat cues, making Crackdown a must-see and must-hear experience.

Finding your way around the intricate environment is also one of Crackdown's greatest joys. You're like a post-modern 'roid rage Prince of Persia, working your way from ground to sky in the time it takes mere mortals to put their shoes on. This incredible sense of exhilarating freedom is engaging enough to make for a worthwhile game in its own right.

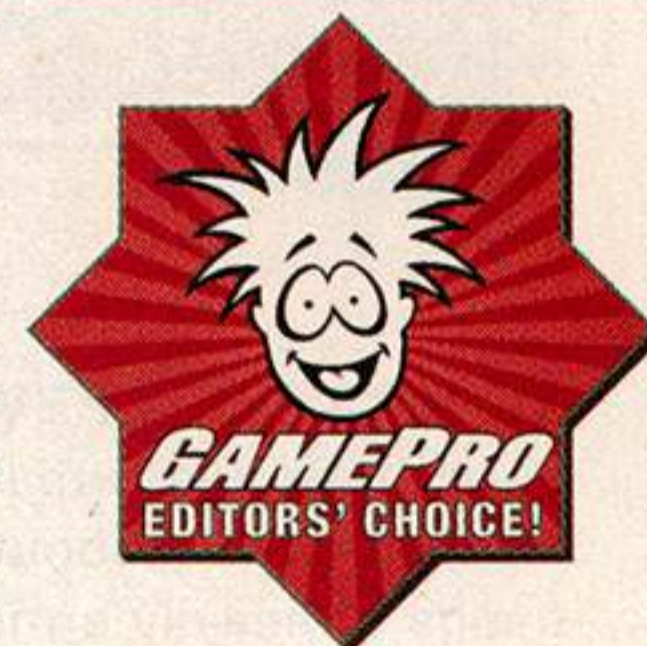
An ability upgrade system also sees your goon graduate over time from mildly impressive freak of nature to absurdly nimble human tank, and ever-present icons and meters on the left side of the screen keep you informed of your progress. Collect agility orbs from rooftops to jump higher and run faster, master the use of firearms and incendiary devices to improve auto-aim functionality and blast radii, pound mercenaries into hamburger until you can throw trucks life confetti,

and upgrade your driving skills with stunts, races, and vehicular homicide.

MAKING A DENT

I could find things to complain about—there's the wonky rag doll physics, the way gang hit squads sometimes materialize out of the ether, or the fact that every last baddie in the city knows exactly where you are at all times—and certainly, these shortcomings would cripple a lesser title.

But the explosive run-n-gun action, dynamic firefights, and vertigo-inducing high jumps absorb most of the frustrations before they can find a foothold. Besides, those are all things the developer can iron out in the all but guaranteed sequel. Crackdown is ridiculously fun, and that Halo 3 beta code might go unused for longer than you think.—**Ouroboros**



Pros: Fantastic presentation and gameplay. A killer addition to your 360 library.

Cons: A few minor issues that don't detract from the gaming experience.

FUN FACTOR

4.50

OUT OF 5.00



TOM CLANCY'S SPLINTER CELL: DOUBLE AGENT

Wii ESRB: M

■ Developer: Ubisoft Montreal
■ Publisher: Ubisoft



Oh Sam, what happened? We were so ready to mime your lithe, slinky moves with the Wii Remote, but then your designers had to go and flub it up by gumming on a sloppy control scheme that feels more like trying to type while wearing oven mitts.

DOUBLE, DOUBLE, TOIL AND TROUBLE

You know something's fishy when a game uses tutorial videos to introduce you to complex moves without once referencing the buttons or gestures necessary to pull them off. It takes much too long to get functionally comfortable with Sam's arsenal of abilities, and even then, it's like sitting on a wooden bench: You can never really get settled.

Tricky actions that feel natural using a standard controller just don't mesh with the free-wheeling Wii. For instance, the camera pivots with the Wii-mote but the pointer slips easily off-screen, momentarily bungling your view. It's even worse during firefights, where you're not so much battling bad guys as pitiless aiming margins—you'll need an arm stiff as a gun barrel if you want to reliably hit anything. Other bits like swinging the Nunchuk up to jump/climb or twisting it left/right to switch shoulders are more satisfying than thumbing buttons, but aiming and camera control make or break this sort of game, and the Wii Remote falls down squarely in "spastically flawed" territory.

The only thing that stands out is the story, which is a tad more expansive than the one found in the other versions of Double Agent, but that's about it.

With its sloppy controls and a total lack of online multiplayer mode—that's right, the Wii version has no "spies vs. mercenaries," battles, just a poorly implemented split-screen mode—it's tough to justify this version's existence. It's frankly the one to miss, unless you're stuck with just a Wii and a Sam Fisher fixation. —**Matt Peckham**

Pros: The story is okay.

Cons: Poor controls. No multiplayer.

FUN FACTOR

3.00

OUT OF 5.00

STAR WARS: LETHAL ALLIANCE

PSP ESRB: T

■ Developer: Ubisoft Montreal
■ Publisher: Ubisoft

Lethal Alliance puts you in the shoes of a Twi'lek mercenary named Riana Saren, who apparently has a bone to pick with the Empire. The story does a decent job of tying itself back into the series canon—you'll meet Kyle Kataran of Dark Forces fame early on, and find yourself involved in the stealing of the Death Star plans, for example—but it remains a pretty shallow experience.



ZEOO TOLERANCE

The controls in Lethal Alliance are also a mixed bag. The targeting is handled by automatically locking on to the first enemy that pops on to your screen. It sounds fine but it can be a pain at times, most notably when the auto-targeting locks on to something benign in the environment that causes you to do a 180 degree turn—say a barrel, for instance—and takes your focus off a much more menacing target.

Moving Riana can be a little sluggish, thanks to the PSP's imprecise analog stick. Also, as with many other 3D action games, Riana takes a second to get up to full speed and takes a second to come to a dead halt. From time to time this will end up causing you to plummet to your death, which is a problem common to the genre.

Other than that, the game is mostly made up of shooting sequences that are far too easy and marred by control issues. The fact that you have access to a ton of cool moves and a droid companion is nice, but it doesn't quite make up for the bland environments or the wimpy enemies. There are much better action games out on the PSP than this one, so pass it by unless you're obsessed with Star Wars. —**Hamsters4Sale**



Pros: Interesting arsenal of moves. Decent attempt to reference franchise history.

Cons: Awkward controls. Camera issues. Bland gameplay.

FUN FACTOR

3.00

OUT OF 5.00

METAL SLUG ANTHOLOGY

Wii ESRB: T

■ Developer: Terminal Reality
■ Publisher: SNK Playmore

Metal Slug Anthology collects seven Metal Slug games, including the surprisingly recent Metal Slug 6, into one convenient package. That sounds like a no-brainer recipe for success, and the emulation of each arcade original is impeccable, right down to the occasional slow-down.



CONTROL ISSUES

Trouble is, the only way to play the games without screaming in frustration is by cracking out an old GameCube controller. Not a single one of the Nunchuk/Wii Remote combinations feel right, whether you're holding the Wii Remote like an unmounted joystick, or clumsily dividing duties between your two hands. Come on, now: the developers could find a way to develop a workable control scheme for the elderly GameCube controller, but not for Wii Remote? Or even for the Wii Classic Controller?



It's probably a by-product of a rushed release, and there are other clues that support this. Most of the games force you to endure frequent loading breaks simply to get to the next area. Then there are the auto-fire and game save features, which work beautifully—except in Metal Slug 6, where the former setting is ignored, and the latter option is missing entirely. Consistency anyone? And the nail in the coffin: No support for 480p.

Assuming you have a GameCube controller, these classic games are still a blast to play, but this particular release of them is hardly the tenth anniversary treatment the series deserves. Hopefully one day SNK will get the job done properly. —**Ouroboros**

Pros: Seven Metal Slugs = a lot of action fun.

Cons: Wii Remote controls suck. Poor presentation.

FUN FACTOR

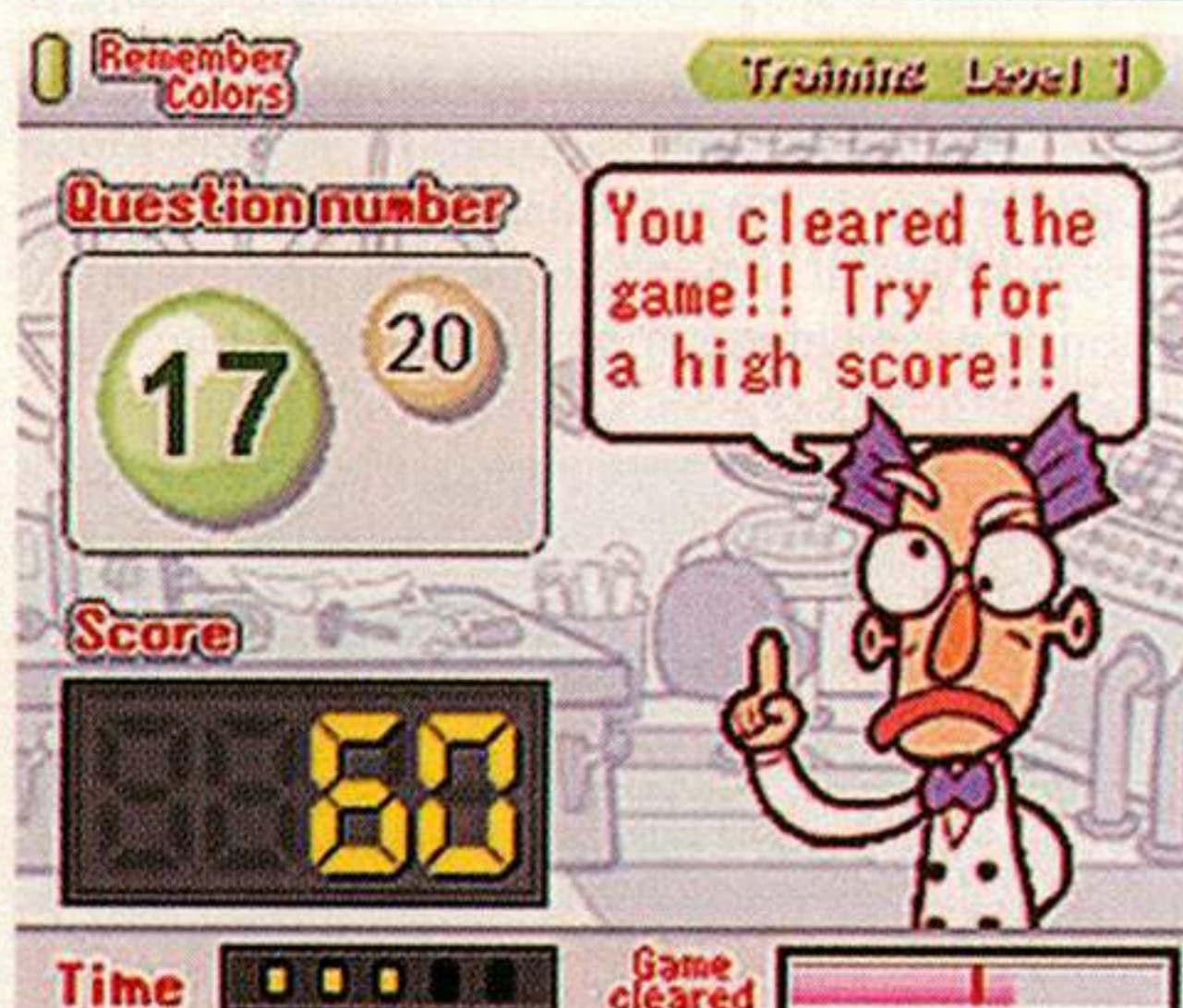
3.00

OUT OF 5.00

BRAIN BOOST: GAMMA/BETA WAVE

DS ESRB: E

Developer: Interchannel-Holon
 Publisher: Majestic



Like some sort of quack doctor, Brain Boost inflates its own worth by dazzling gullible gamers with fancy certificates and research—Dr. Makoto Shichida and his Right Brain Development Theory. The theory behind the two games, which honestly could have been easily combined into one, is fine but the shoddy lessons and presentation are anything but.

IS THERE A DOCTOR IN THE HOUSE?

Beta and Gamma Wave have five games each, and four difficulty levels for each game (which are challenging, but do little to mix-up game play). In fact, once you've mastered each level of every game—there are 20 total—there's really no reason to ever boot them up again.

Through repetition of images/shapes/patterns/numbers, Dr. Shichida's theory purports to activate the right brain and heighten its potential. Now, far be it from me to call into question the good doctor's work, but the scoring system in Brain Boost is mind bogglingly simplistic. The player's success rate is gauged on a scale of 0 to 100; so if you answer 6 out of 10 problems correctly, your brain is 60 percent developed. That's not exactly neuroscience, is it? Furthermore, there's no way of gauging the speed at which you complete the problems. Each one has a time limit of a few seconds, but there's literally no difference between completing a problem in one second or five. So it's impossible to tell if the game is actually working.

The lack of any head-to-head or multi-player functionality and unlockable content also disappoints. The games themselves are monotonous and don't really instill you with a need to play them repeatedly. Overall, Brain Boost: Gamma and Beta Wave are decent titles that might beef up your brain, but if you're really looking for a boost in brain power, take up speed reading or chess instead.—Flasherman

Pros: Some mildly interesting games.

Cons: Neither is worth playing repeatedly, which sort of defeats the purpose.

FUN FACTOR

2.00

OUT OF 5.00

LEGEND OF HEROES III: SONG OF THE OCEAN

PSP ESRB: E10+

Developer: Falcom
 Publisher: Namco Bandai Games

See if you can wrap your head around this one: The first Legend of Heroes game that was released in America was actually a localized version of the second Japanese Legend of Heroes game. The American "sequel," Legend of Heroes II, was actually the original Japanese Legend of Heroes. Now, add this little twist to the mix: the American release of Legend of Heroes III, is actually the Japanese version of Legend of Heroes V.

ALL MIXED UP

What's funny is that you really won't notice that the games are all out of order. It's easy to mistake one Legends title for another, as they're all alike, and fall into the same simple, conventional RPG category. Heroes III is also much like the other two in that it's fairly pretty to look at, downright lovely to listen to, and ultimately boring to play.



It features long-winded conversation trails, and dungeons that offer little in the way of variety or recognizable landmarks in its endless corridors.

The sad part is that game engine itself is pretty decent. The load times that nearly crippled the first game are all but gone and the visuals, while stylistically bland, are still sharp and pleasing to the eye. The in-game soundtrack is also series strength and Legends III continues this trend with a beautiful score.

It's too bad the rest of the game is such an uninspired and dull mess. What I wanted was a contemporary RPG that would fit the sleek style of the PSP; instead, I got a mid-'90s relic that was better suited to a long gone console and era.—DFS



Pros: Good graphics. Excellent soundtrack.

Cons: Dated game concepts. Repetitive, uninspired combat.

FUN FACTOR

2.75

OUT OF 5.00

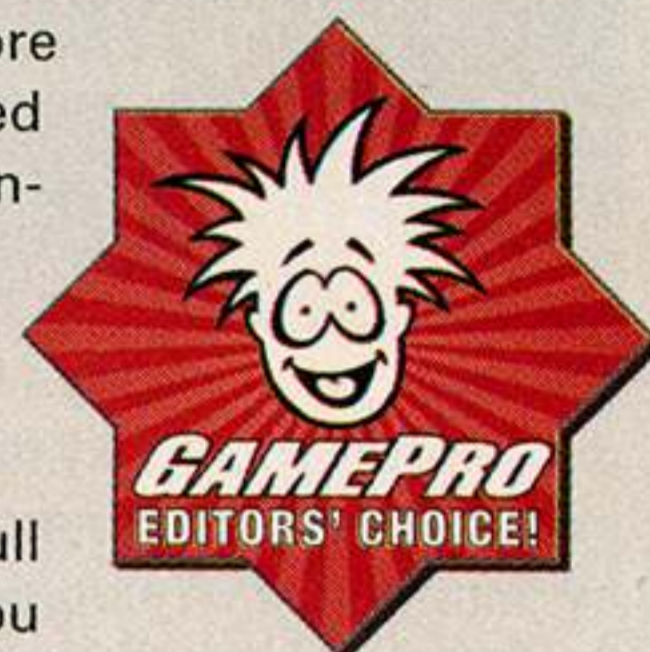
THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: TWILIGHT PRINCESS

GC ESRB: T

Developer and Publisher: Nintendo



We're not going to bore you with a long-winded review of Twilight Princess that explains every nook and cranny, as it's essentially the same as the Wii version; check out the full review online if you missed our review of Twilight Princess on the Wii. What we will do, however, is iron out that age-old question, "Which one should I buy?"



A WIN-WIN

It's simple, really—if you own a Wii, then get Twilight Princess immediately. If you don't, and for some insane reason you don't plan to buy one, then definitely get your hands on the GameCube version of Twilight Princess, as it's still one heck of a game even without the motion-sensing controls.

Speaking of which, you'll be able to pick up the GameCube controller and become familiar with the mechanics of the game in no time; after all, this is Nintendo we're talking about and they know what they're doing. However, the GameCube controller doesn't quite offer the potential of the Wii remote, so slicing down enemies and firing arrows isn't quite as engaging.

The second major difference between the two versions is that they are completely mirrored. If something is located to your left in one version, it's located to the right in the other, right down to the hand that Link holds his sword in.

Graphically, both versions look exactly the same—you'll want to play it in 480p if you have an HDTV—but the sound is better on the GC version if only because you don't have to listen to the crappy Wii Remote speaker. But regardless of what console you play it on, Twilight Princess is an instant classic that deserves a place in every gamer's library.—Tenacious Moses

Pros: This is the best Zelda game on any Nintendo console. Period.

Cons: No motion-sensing controls.

FUN FACTOR

5.00

OUT OF 5.00

MVP 07 NCAA BASEBALL

PS2 ESRB: E

Developer: EA Canada Publisher: EA Sports

Does it matter if the players in a baseball video game are recognizable? Does a game need a professional player to do his thing in front of a green screen just to capture his signature moves? Personally, I don't believe so, and the latest version of MVP NCAA baseball just proves further that you can use randomly generated players so long as the gameplay is solid.

HEY BATTATTA' BATTATTA'

As with last year's MVP title, pitching and batting are the name of the game. Your accuracy depends on your ability to successfully sync up a pitcher's wind-up, release and follow-through. Batting

operates similarly: You use the analog stick to simulate a real swing.

Fielding also feels like the real thing, in that there is a lot of waiting involved. When a ball is finally hit, the player nearest to it falls automatically under your control. Precision throwing uses the analog stick to direct where the ball is going—tap right to throw to first, up to second and so on. Just keep in mind that if tap is off center, the throw can go wild.

The game also features a Dynasty Mode, which is good for gamers want to settle in for the long haul. You can choose and manage a team on and off the field, allowing you the ability to delve into the finer points of the game including scouting for fresh meat to fill out your rosters.

THE GAME WITHIN A GAME

MVP 07 also comes with some mini games that are worth mentioning. Home Run Showdown pits you side by side with the computer or a friend to see who has better batting chops. Classic Batting is a game that challenges you to hit the

ball to a certain place in a certain way for points. Score enough and move on to the next round.

Because this is a PS2 game, the graphics didn't exactly blow me away, but they're serviceable. The playing fields are flat and lack detail, but grass is grass, right? Player movements are more fluid than in past games, which is a welcome upgrade. I also liked the presence of the college marching band music, but after a while, I had to turn the volume way down. And much like any other title that features commentators, the dialogue quickly becomes repetitive and boring.

The most important aspect of any baseball video game is the controls, and while those found in MVP 07 will test your patience at times, they ultimately add to the overall experience. Those who'd rather play as steroid-injecting hulks with billion dollar contracts can try the major league baseball games; for me, college is where the real action is.—**Kilgore**

Pros: Solid pitching/batting mechanic. Entertaining mini-games.

Cons: Dull graphics and audio presentation hardly put you in the game.

FUN FACTOR

4.00

OUT OF 5.00



TOKOBOT PLUS: MYSTERIES OF THE KARAKURI

PS2 ESRB: E

Developer and Publisher: Tecmo



Developer Tecmo has taken the robot-based title and ported it onto the PS2, but the jump to the bigger stage exposes some of the game's faults.

DOMO ARIGATO, MISTER ROBOTO

Tokobot Plus' story involves a prehistoric civilization that was so advanced, it had access to robotic technology. You play as Bolt, a young lad living in the present day who must save the world with the help of some nauseatingly cute creatures called Tokobots. The story is a little hazy, so you're never totally sure what you're saving the world from, but as the old saying goes, it's the journey and not the destination that counts.

Navigating through the ancient ruins of the robot-enabled civilization, you'll come across challenges and puzzles that can only be solved with the help of the Tokobots. Some obstacles can be overcome with a specific Tokobot move, while other challenges require a crafty combination of Tokobot shenanigans.

INSPECTOR GADGET

Teamwork is an essential aspect of Mysteries of Karakuri and losing even one Tokobot can hinder your ability to solve even the most basic of puzzles. Fortunately, as the game progresses, your Tokobots gain new moves, which is a good thing considering certain puzzles and bosses can only be defeated in specific ways.

What we didn't like was the pacing of the game, as the action really takes a while to pick up. There are several supporting characters and all of them are equally annoying; worse yet, they seem to pop up frequently, like unwanted relatives, and you'll find yourself hitting the X button over and over just to get them to shut up.

The game's graphics are about what you would expect from a late-gen PS2 title and there's really nothing that stands out visually. Also squeaking under the bar of mediocrity is the audio component, which is cheesy and repetitive, though oddly fitting with the spirit of the game. The controls are simple but they will try your patience at times.

Still, for all its warts, Tokobot Plus is a decent title with challenging puzzles that will reward your patience and dedication. It's probably best as an extended rental but some of you might find that it's worth the full price of admission.—**Kilgore**

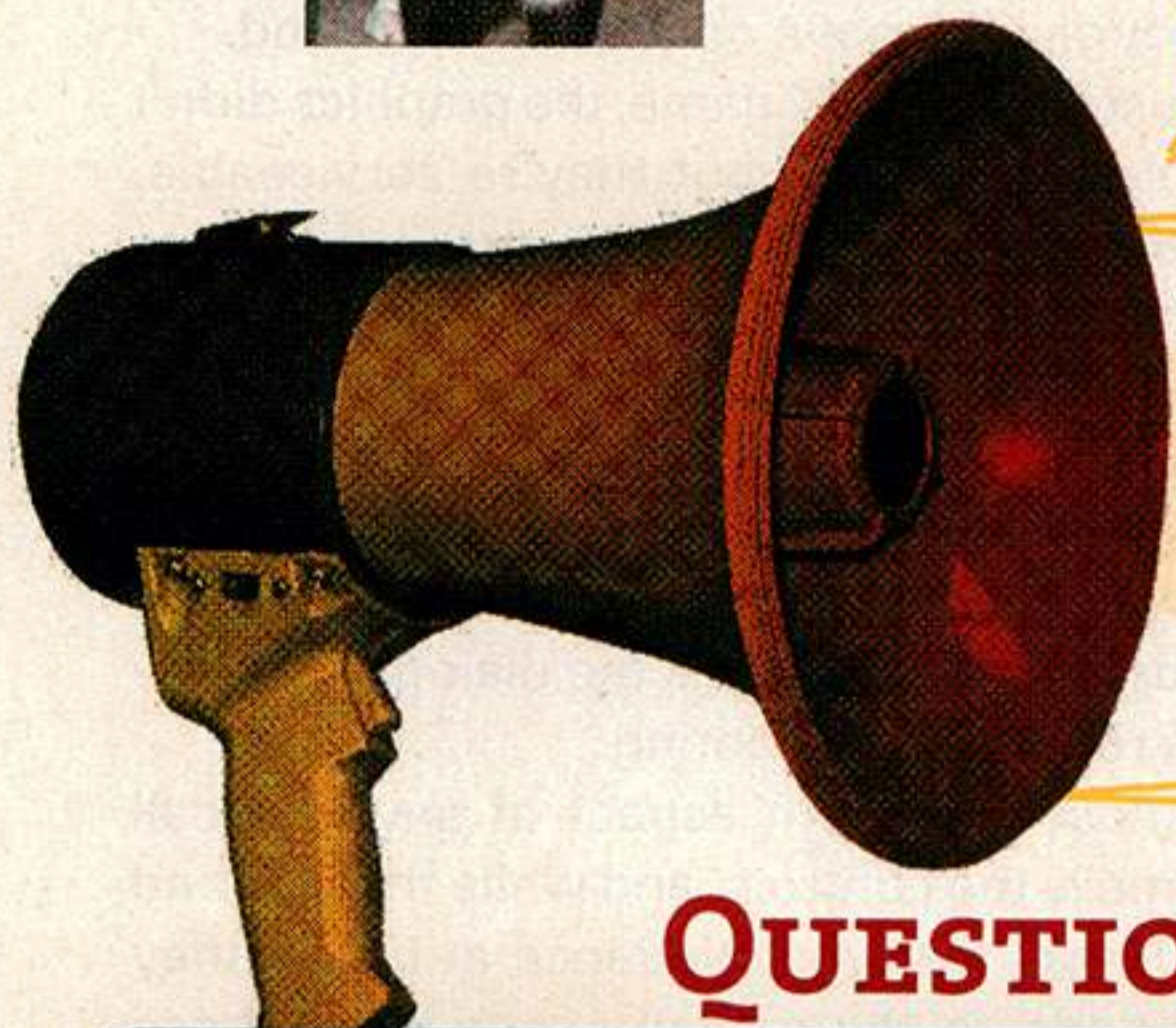
Pros: A good mix of challenging puzzles and engaging action.

Cons: Overly cute character design. Finicky controls.

FUN FACTOR

3.50

OUT OF 5.00



ASK THE PROS

You ask, we answer. Want a colorful Wii? Plus, why your Xbox games might not play on an Xbox 360.

QUESTION OF THE MONTH



Erag0n



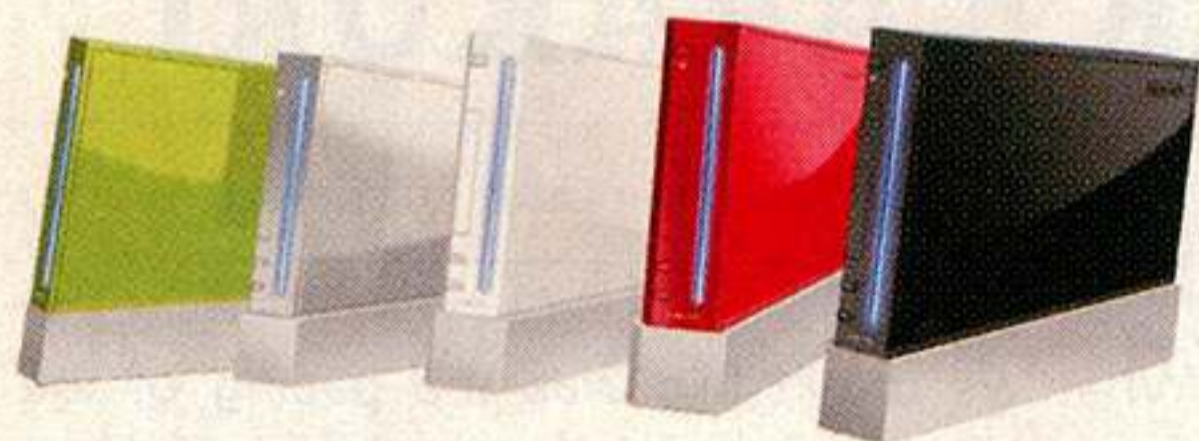
Ahoy_and_Avast

WHERE ARE WIIS?

Q: When will Nintendo ship more Wiis in the U.S.? Please, let me know because I want one! —Erag0n
Ahoy_and_Avast says: A lot of you (and I mean a lot of you) have written in asking when more Wiis will appear out in the world. Many of you are pointing to March as the magical rumored month when more Wiis will be available. I have no idea if that's true or not.

From what I'm seeing, there is a steady trickle of Wiis hitting store shelves but due to their popularity, they're selling out almost immediately. During the holidays there were rampant rumors of stores hoarding units and releasing them during prime shopping days, like the week before Christmas and New Year's Eve. Again, no idea if that was true or not.

But even with the holidays over, the Wii remains a hot commodity right now so your best bet is to simply play the waiting game. If you are determined, you should continued to stake out your local Targets, Best Buys, Circuit Citys, and whatever other store sells them on a regular basis, most preferably in the morning when they open. That, along with a good dose of luck, should help you get that Wii. But there's nothing wrong with a little patience, either. —Ahoy_and_Avast



THE COLOR OF WII

Q: Will the Wii be available in different colors other than white? —Lousyninja



Lousyninja



Ahoy_and_Avast

Ahoy_and_Avast says: Nintendo's been strangely mum on the subject of differently hued Wiis, Lousyninja. I've asked my sources and still do not have a definitive answer.

But Nintendo usually plays its cards close to its vest, so that's no big surprise. I think it's pretty much a guaranteed lock that Nintendo will eventually start offering Wiis in different colors, just like they did for the Nintendo DS Lite. I'm assuming it's all a matter of timing and production issues. I'm sure they're waiting until an opportune time to make an official announcement regarding the new colors. I'm also guessing it has to do with the fact that introducing a new case would require a tweak to the production process, which probably involves money and time. So if you can just wait it out, you might score yourself a non-white Wii. There are good Nintendo games to be played, like Twilight Princess, for example. —Ahoy_and_Avast

XBOX 360 BUT NO XBOX

Q: I'm probably the stupidest kid in the world for asking this, but I got an Xbox 360 for my birthday, and I can't play Halo 2 or any Xbox games on Xbox Live, only Xbox 360 games. Why? —unknown28874



unknown28874



TMac

TMac says: If your Xbox 360 does not have a hard drive, it will not support backwards compatibility, unfortunately. That's the only reason I can think of as to why it wouldn't work, since you say you can connect to Xbox Live. You can buy the hard drive for \$100. —TMac



LAPTOP DANCING

Q: What should I look for in a laptop so that I can play some of my modern PC games like Call of Duty 2 or maybe Company of Heroes? —qdoggphilly



qdoggphilly



Vicious Sid

Vicious Sid says: Lots of gaming laptop questions these days. And I thought I was the only one! (My sole computer is a dual-boot MacBook Pro). Shoot for a PC with one of the new Core 2 Duo CPUs to start with. Two gigabytes of RAM is also a must. For video, spring for a Geforce Go 7600 with 256 RAM. Another worthy option is a 7200 RPM laptop drive, but it's not essential. Also realize you'll have to make a few visual compromises compared to powerhouse desktop PCs. Still, this is a great little setup and fine for most games at medium settings. —Vicious Sid

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Rezarechshun

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Status: Hero
Total Points: 5164
Posts: 4586



kingconker64

#8

Status: End Boss
Total Points: 4527
Posts: 3263



polo972

#9

Status: End Boss
Total Points: 4447
Posts: 3784



Jetfire

#10

Status: End Boss
Total Points: 4349
Posts: 3921



JNM13

READER REVIEW OF THE MONTH



corndog53

Status: Button Masher

Final Fantasy XII

(Square Enix) (PS2)

User Score:

4.50



"I had high hopes for this game, that, sadly, were only partially fulfilled."

In the end, the reviews from gaming sites and magazines led me to expect too much from this late PS2 title. The story is phenomenal, as always. The Graphics, however, look sub-par compared to FFX. The camera and new battle system are my biggest complaints. I have not been able to perfect using the camera and in the end, I keep running into walls and enemies that I don't mean to. The battle system also feels like it drew a lot of the action and control away from me. The turn-based combat in FFX made me feel like I controlled the battles fluidly. But now in FFXII, I feel like I am just along for the ride since it is possible to let the characters run the entire battle.

Unfortunately since it came on the eve of the next-gen consoles, this game feels a little bit behind the times. Square knows how to make a great RPG, which is easy to find here. Square, stick to the old formula, making FF closer to a MMORPG doesn't quite feel right. —corndog53

AWESOME THREADS

Overheard on the GamePro.com message boards...

SCREW THE PS3

"By the way, I had the money to buy a PS3 but I didn't. Maybe I'll get one when it has more games that I can't get on the 360."

—BluSlime on buying a PlayStation 3

AREN'T WE ALL NERDS?

I'm sorry to say, the words I'm gonna tell you will hurt. You're only a nerd if you have a heavy IQ (like Dr. Eggman or Andross or... somethin') Or if you have a DS and play Big Brain Academy or some other smart game stuff, that's on you. And if you dress like a nerd and go to cheesy conventions like Star Wars or sci-fi crap, you'd definitely be a nerd. In this term, I've been here to see stuff. Not say random crap. In determination: You, my friend, are a nerd...I'm sorry. —wavedasher on being a nerd

GAMEPRO = ERRORPRO?

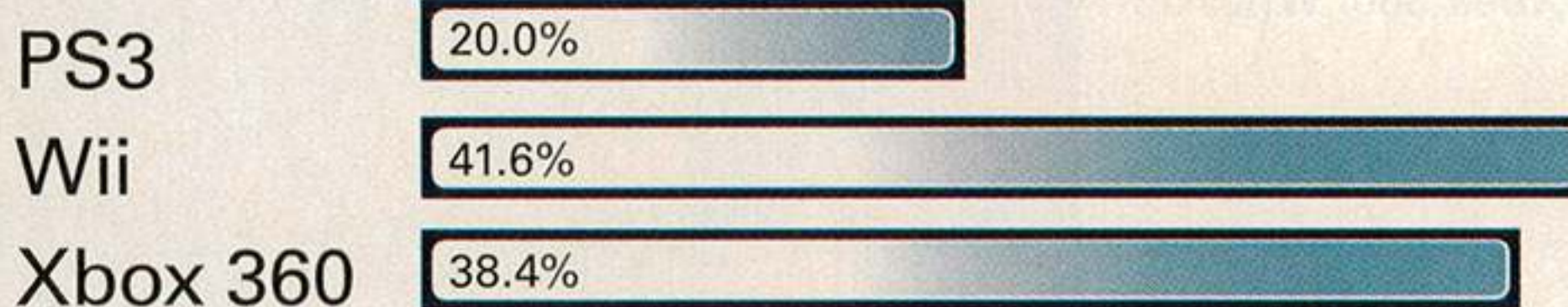
Don't get me wrong *GamePro*, I love your magazine, but your February 2007 issue was filled with mistakes. Here are just a few, each of which came from your ProReviews section: On page 78, you have reviews for Excite Truck and Elebits, but it shows both with the Excite Truck cover. On page 88, you have a review for the Wii version of Madden 07, although the box that rates graphics, sound, and control has a symbol for PS3. On page 87, you have a review for Wii Sports. Now I don't criticize your opinions, but you gave it a 5.0 for graphics! And even towards the end of the review Mr. Marbles says "the graphics don't exactly scream 'next-gen!'" I don't mean to be a grump, but I'm just saying you guys should really make sure your magazines become a bit more mistake-free! —wiifreak33 on *GamePro's* MistakePro February 2007 issue



Quick Poll

Results as of January 12, 2007

The holidays have come and gone. Who's winning this thing?



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H2H

HEAD TO HEAD

You write, we respond.

A DAY LATE AND A PS3 SHORT

I have a very sad story to tell you, *GamePro*. I'm a huge gamer, so when I heard that the PS3 was coming out, I was excited. I asked my mom if I could have the PS3. But she said no! When I asked why she said that: 1) I could not stay out all night to try and get one. 2) There are better things to spend the money on 3) If I did get one I would have to also buy memory cards, an extra controller, and some games, which all told would run close to a thousand dollars. So I'm stuck without the great PS3. *GamePro*, would you either be nice and give me a PS3 or would you run a contest so I can try to win a PS3? I would really like it if you sent me a PS3. Thanks, *GamePro*, for all the great magazines, too, you guys are the best.

Alex Valentovich—Via Internet
dudecrazy108@yahoo.com

BroBuzz responds: Sorry, Alex. Your lament is one among hundreds we've received, and we print it here to let you and your PS3-less brethren know that we feel your pain. We are not doling out PS3's, but a contest? Stay tuned.

XBOX 720 DREAMING

Although the Xbox 360 hasn't even been out for two years, yet, I am already thinking about the possibilities for the next version of the system. I would like to think that Microsoft will call it the "Xbox 720." I would like to see it have an HD DVD drive, an HDMI port, a 6-5 gigahertz microprocessor chip, a comparably powerful graphics card, 2GBs RAM, a 100 GB hard drive, built-in Wi-Fi, a killer ethernet card, an internet browser, key board and mouse support, six USB 2.0 ports and a controller with a motion sensor. It should also share music with the Zune. I realize that this is only a wish list, but it would be great if most, if not all this was in the new system.

Karl Boerger—Via Internet
darleneboerger@hotmail.com

BroBuzz responds: Okay, we'll play. You make some risky assumptions, but they don't go far enough. Increased memory and hard drive capacity, a high-definition disc drive that's already released to market, and other features that are readily available to consumers either on other consoles or as accessories to the 360? Who would have thought that! When the next-next-gen Xbox is unveiled, it will need to feature more advanced and unexpected components than these you've mentioned if it's going to offer an experience dramatically improved over the Xbox 360. What do the rest of you out there say?

Illustration by Francis Mao

LETTER OF THE MONTH CONTEST

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Make over 2 million friends in MapleStory—the 2D MMORPG everyone's playing! Free download:
<http://intro.nexon.net/>



WIN A Wii!

Submit the most intriguing letter this month (published in the MAY '07 issue) and you'll win a Wii courtesy of your friends at GamePro!



Great games create great experiences that in time become great memories. Nathan says it best: "You can't be a good game."

THE FAULTY FANBOY

Finally, the new console generation dawns upon us in its entirety, and all of us gamers are struggling to decide which system to choose. The fanboys will undoubtedly stick to their evolving systems...Sony fans will buy a PlayStation 3, Nintendo fans will buy a Wii, Xbox fans will buy their Xbox 360. But this is an old way of thinking. We are entering 2007, and my fellow GamePros, it is time for us to abandon our outdated ways.

Being a fanboy is entirely unnecessary. I was once a Sega fanboy. The Genesis was my first system. I loved Sonic with my life, and if anybody dare tell me that the Genesis sucked in comparison to Nintendo, I would go into a rage. But then I matured. The N64 came out, and I had to have GoldenEye 007 and Super Mario 64. When the GameCube came out, I traded in my 64 and all of its games. A year ago, the fanboy inside of me instantly switched to PS2 and I sold all my GameCube stuff so I could play great games like Shadow of the Colossus and Gran Turismo. Six months later, I miss my Smash Bros. tournaments and my Metroid Prime shootouts. I've even slowly come to love Halo.

I've finally recognized that you can't be a fanboy. You have to give each system's great games credit. I've decided that eventually I'll own all three next-gen systems. Each system may have its weak points, for sure, but you can't beat a good game.

Nathan Snelgrove—Guelph, Ontario, Canada

WORDS OF WAR

I'd like to respond to Vicious Sid's Gears of War review in *GamePro* Issue #220 (December, 2006). I agree with Vicious Sid's points about the awesome gameplay, the outstanding 5.1 surround sound, and the weakness in the story line. I too was hoping for more answers to fill in the blanks at the end of the game. But I disagree with his opinion that the dialogue is "campy to the point of being embarrassing."

I don't think the dialogue is bad at all. I think it rang true to the types of individuals that these future soldiers were. And that's just it, too, the characters are tough, die hard fighters who are probably clinging to their last ounce of sanity. They aren't Harvard graduates ready to quote Shakespeare or scripture from the Holy Bible. They very much reminded me of the characters in Arnold Schwarzenegger's *Predator* movie, and so did the music which, by the way, kicks butt. I actually enjoyed the dialogue because it made playing the game like watching a movie. A few of my favorite bits are: "Well, we're not here to sell cookies, so they must know that something is up"; or during the night scene when the Wretches poi-

soned by emulsion come out, "Yep. I saw it. Kinda wish I hadn't though." This type of dialogue may be campy for other types of characters in different story lines, but I think it's a perfect fit for the guys in Gears of War.

Jim C.—Via Internet
jimmc31@msn.com

Vicious Sid responds: We'll be the first to admit that Gears of War is mindless, violent fun, but we're sticking to Sid's comment. The dialogue in Gears feels less like what a battle-hardened soldier would say, and instead like what a game designer thinks a battle-hardened soldier would say. But, as our review says, it's a minor flaw for an otherwise outstanding game. Now if it had everyone's favorite California governor as one of the voice actors, we'd have no problem with the dialogue regardless of what it was.



* FRESH MEAT!

GAMES WITH A TWIST

Lately I've noticed that the story lines in games are becoming increasingly dull. They lack that unexpected twist that makes a great story. Games such as Okami and Metroid Prime: Hunters are perfect examples of great games that could be better with an unexpected plot twist. (Note: Spoiler Alert!) For example, in Metroid Prime Hunters, the creature Gorea could have sent out a phony message across the galaxy which spoke of the ultimate weapon. This message would have lured bounty hunters from across the universe to Gorea's prison in search of this weapon. But the bounty hunters would've accidentally released Gorea and he would go free and take over the universe. Instead, there actually was an ultimate weapon, and Gorea just seemed to be guarding it. In Okami, once you've entered the Ark of Yamato and the annoying flute-playing warrior Waka follows you in, you eventually have to battle the Dark Lord Yami. An epic and unexpected plot twist would be for Waka to be the Dark Lord in disguise. Instead, Waka turns out to be good, and the Dark Lord Yami is this strange metal ball with what appears to be a tiny whale inside. Both of those games are excellent except for their endings, which felt boring and unoriginal.

Brendan Reid—Via Internet
thehatofblack@hotmail.com

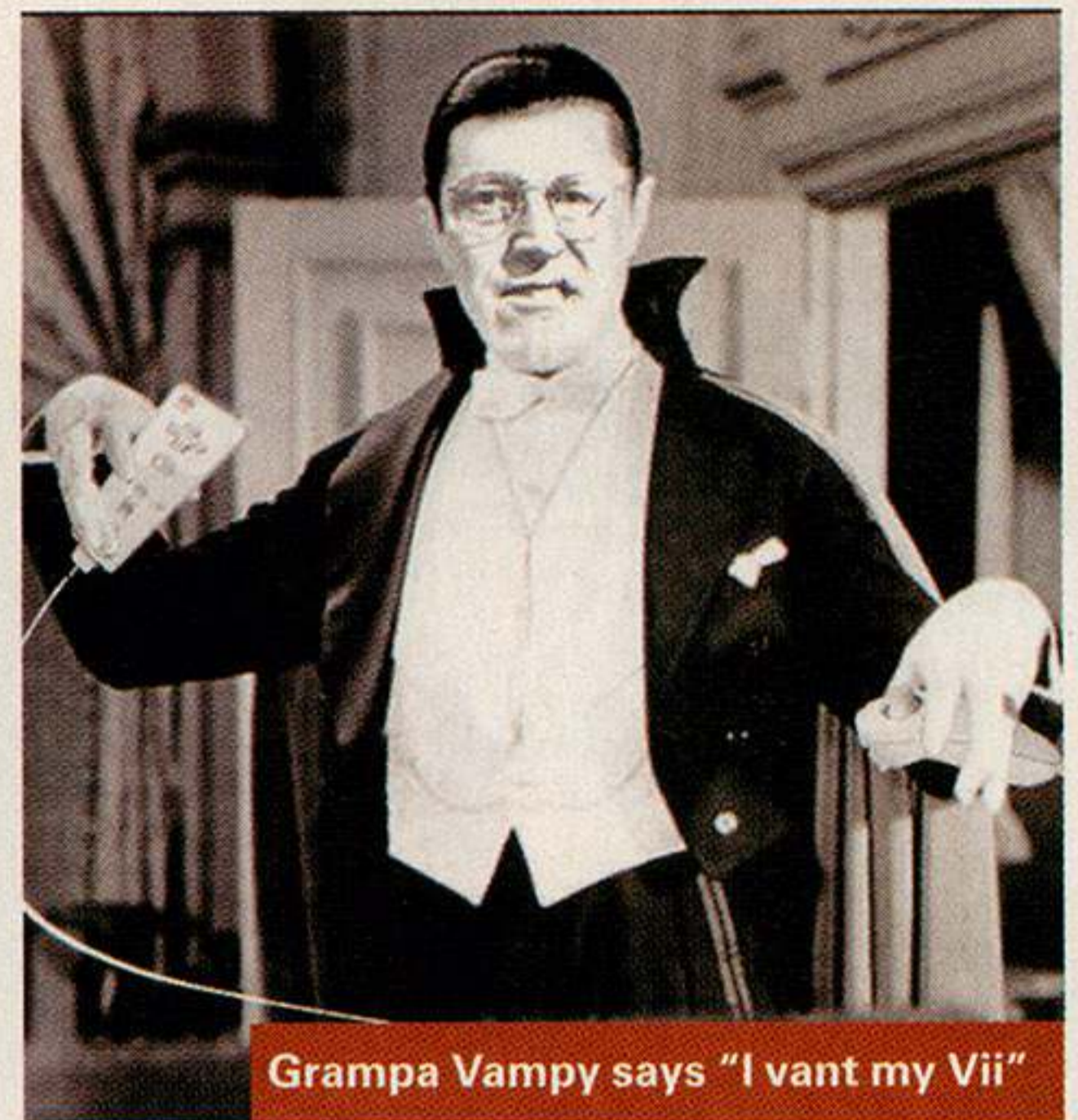
BroBuzz responds: Maybe you've been watching too many afternoon soap operas or M. Night Shyamalan movies, but not every story needs a twist just for the sake of it, especially since that alone certainly isn't guaranteed to make the game any better. But your point about better game endings is well taken. After 20-30 hours of gameplay every gamer anticipates and should get a pay off. We'd also like to see something done to spice up the ending credits, too. Those folks deserve recognition but less boring presentations...please!

WII WANT M

I picked up a Wii and my long anticipated copy of The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess. Zelda was exhilarating, and it stoked my hunger for more mature action. So, I bought Dragon Ball Z: Budokai 2 and that quenched my thirst for a while. Then as I continued to crave more blood and action I soon came to realize that Nintendo had no Mature-rated games. I looked to Microsoft and Sony and saw how well Gears of War and Resistance: Fall of Man sold while Nintendo had no mature games, with the exception of Call of Duty 3. One can only hope that Nintendo will look at this weakness in its game lineup; and I pray that the masterminds who created Zelda, Metroid, and Mario will heed those of us who cry out for mature games. Nintendo has much potential with the Wii; I hope they will use it to its fullest.

Joel Alcatraz—Via Internet
poultry663@hotmail.com

BroBuzz responds: What are you, some kind of game-playing vampire? There's no "blood" in either Zelda or Dragon Ball Z. But to your point, Nintendo is never going to depart from its family-friendly image. However, the Wii line up already shows that they aren't afraid to court game makers who aren't as apprehensive about presenting violence in their content. There are Mature-rated Wii games available—namely Far Cry Vengeance and Splinter Cell: Double Agent—that you failed to notice. And since you include the Teen-rated games Zelda and DBZ in your definition of "mature," Call of Duty 3 and Red Steel are other T-games that between them offer enough gunplay, sniper combat, and sword fighting to satisfy your bloodlust. Moreover, consider this: Resident Evil 5 is coming. The lament that games for Nintendo systems lack mature content held water five years ago, but now it's time to drive a stake through that notion once and for all.



Grampa Vampy says "I vant my Vii"

AN UPSIDE TO UPCONVERTING

Have you connected older consoles to an HDTV via composite or S-Video on an HDTV? There's at least a one-second game lag that makes older games unplayable. The recent releases of "retro collections" on newer game machines with progressive scan output is a great solution. Also, the Xbox Live Arcade downloads, Nintendo's Virtual Console, and Sony's upcoming PlayStation game downloads are great ways to offer these updated classics. Seeing Super Mario 64 in 480p component video (that was impossible with the N64) on the Wii is truly spectacular!

Scott Whitmore—Via Internet
email: Nobuo78@hotmail.com

BroBuzz responds: Even though a lot of old games have aged pretty well, having them display at 480p is a blessing for gamers with HDTVs. Who wouldn't want to play a classic like Super Mario 64 in quasi-HD? Now if only we'd get more games like that rather than Dig Dug and Alien Crush, then we'd really be happy.

ART ATTACK!

This month's winner receives

PlayStation 2



Dance Dance Revolution SuperNOVA

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PICK of the Month!



Raymond Berry—Washington, D.C.

WIN

>>>>

WHAT'S UP, DOG?



Win a limited edition Nintendogs Howl with Me plush puppy and a copy of Nintendogs: Dalmatian and Friends!

Just send us a photo of you playing with your DS in a unique or unusual location. We'll pick the best images and reward your creativity and imagination.

Identify the location of the photo and include your name, city, and state, too. You can attach a digital photo to an email, put What's Up, Dog? in the subject line, and send it to Letters@gamepro.com. Or you can send a regular printed photo to Head 2 Head, GamePro, Attn. Whats Up Dog, P.O. Box 22210, Oakland, CA 94623-2210.

PARTING SHOT

CHEW ON THIS.



HALF-LIFE 2:

EPISODE TWO (VALVE) (XBOX 360, PC)

This month we leave you hanging, like our good friend Alyx here, with a most suspenseful screenshot from Half-Life 2: Episode Two. Romp through the countryside of City-17, put an end to the Combine, and save the girl. Now that's an Xbox 360 achievement.

PC GAME OF THE YEAR

COMPANY of HEROES™

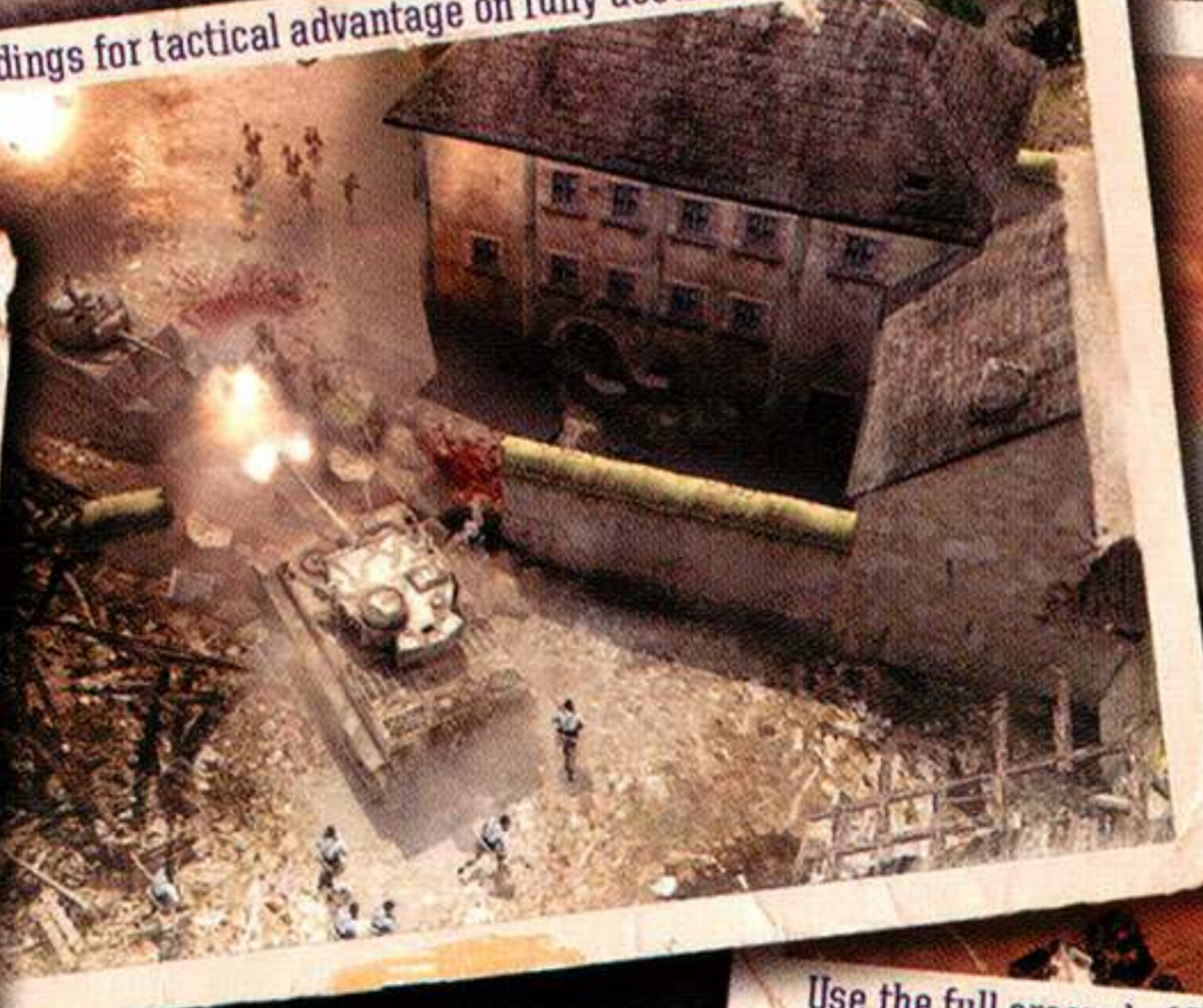


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