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EGM

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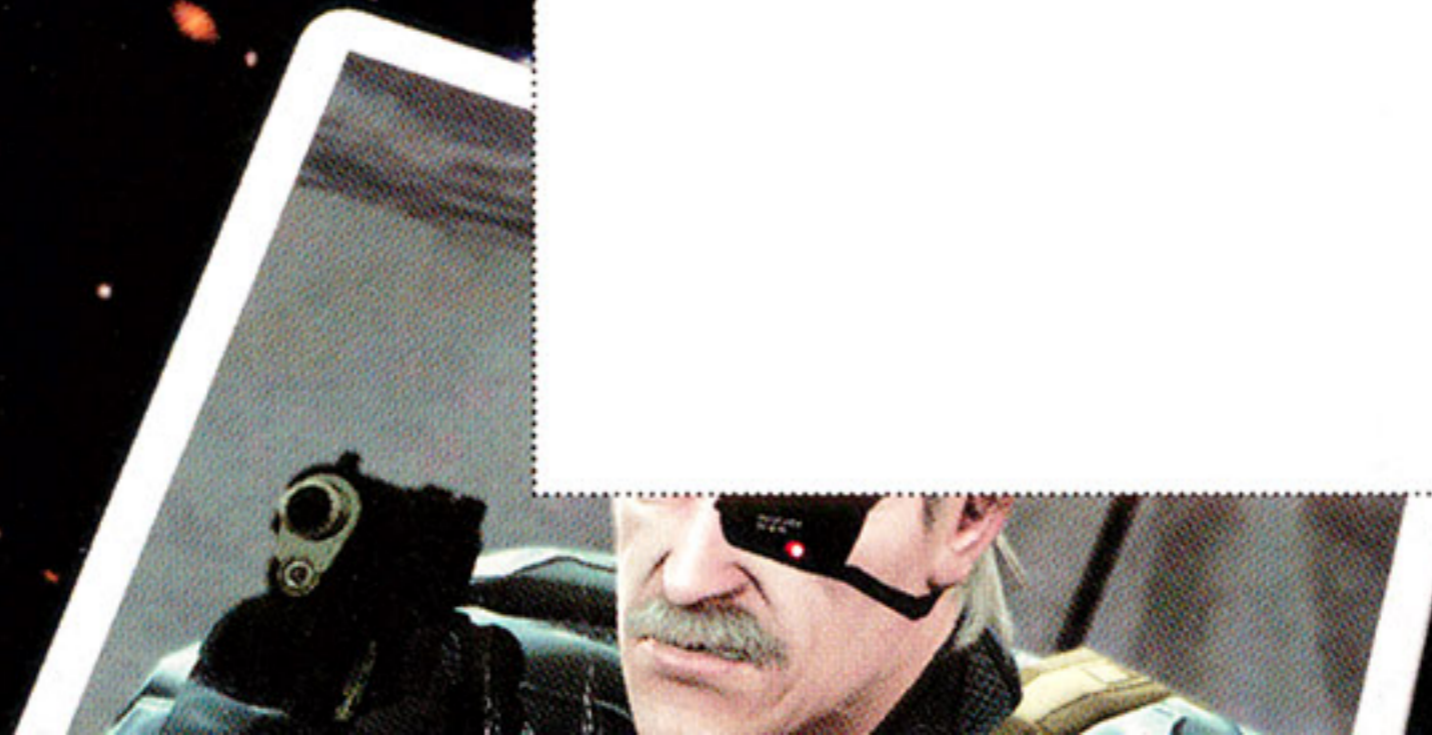
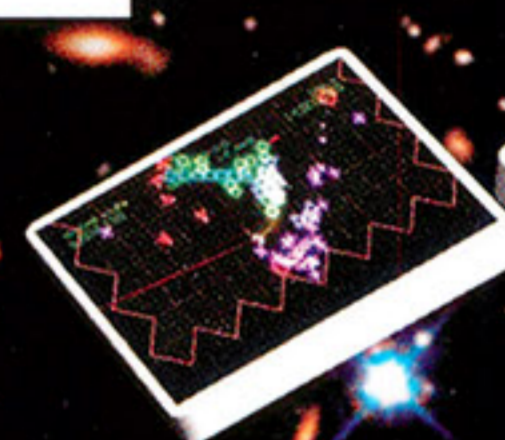
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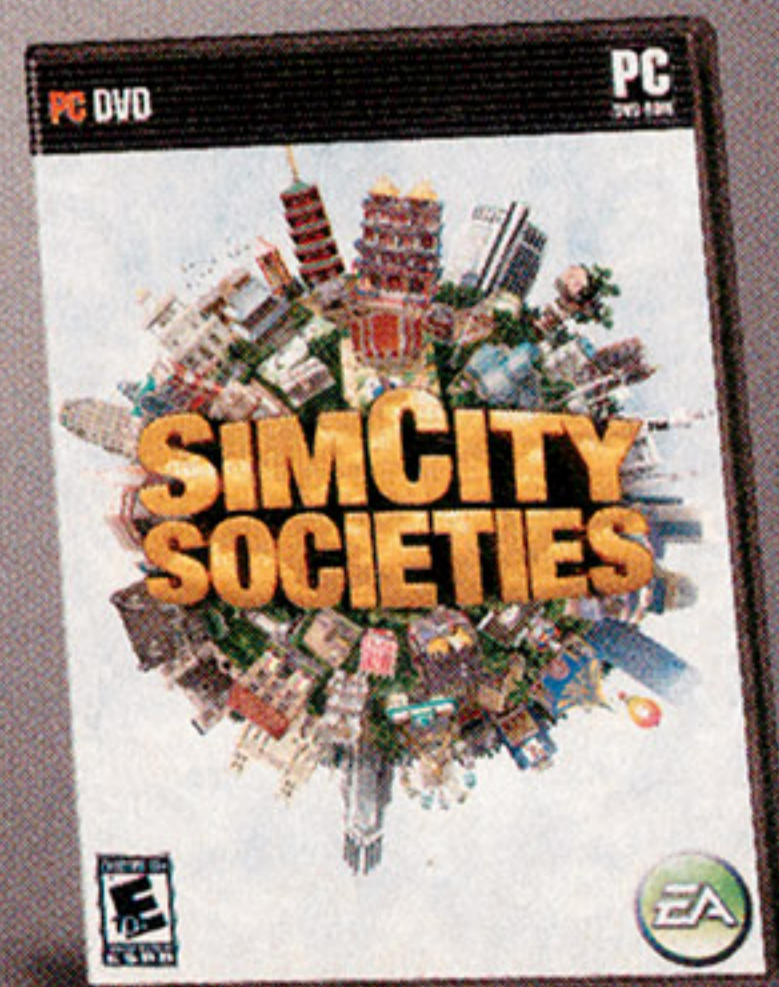


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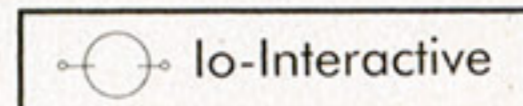
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John Brandon, Chuck Ernst,
Jon M. Gibson, Garnett Lee,
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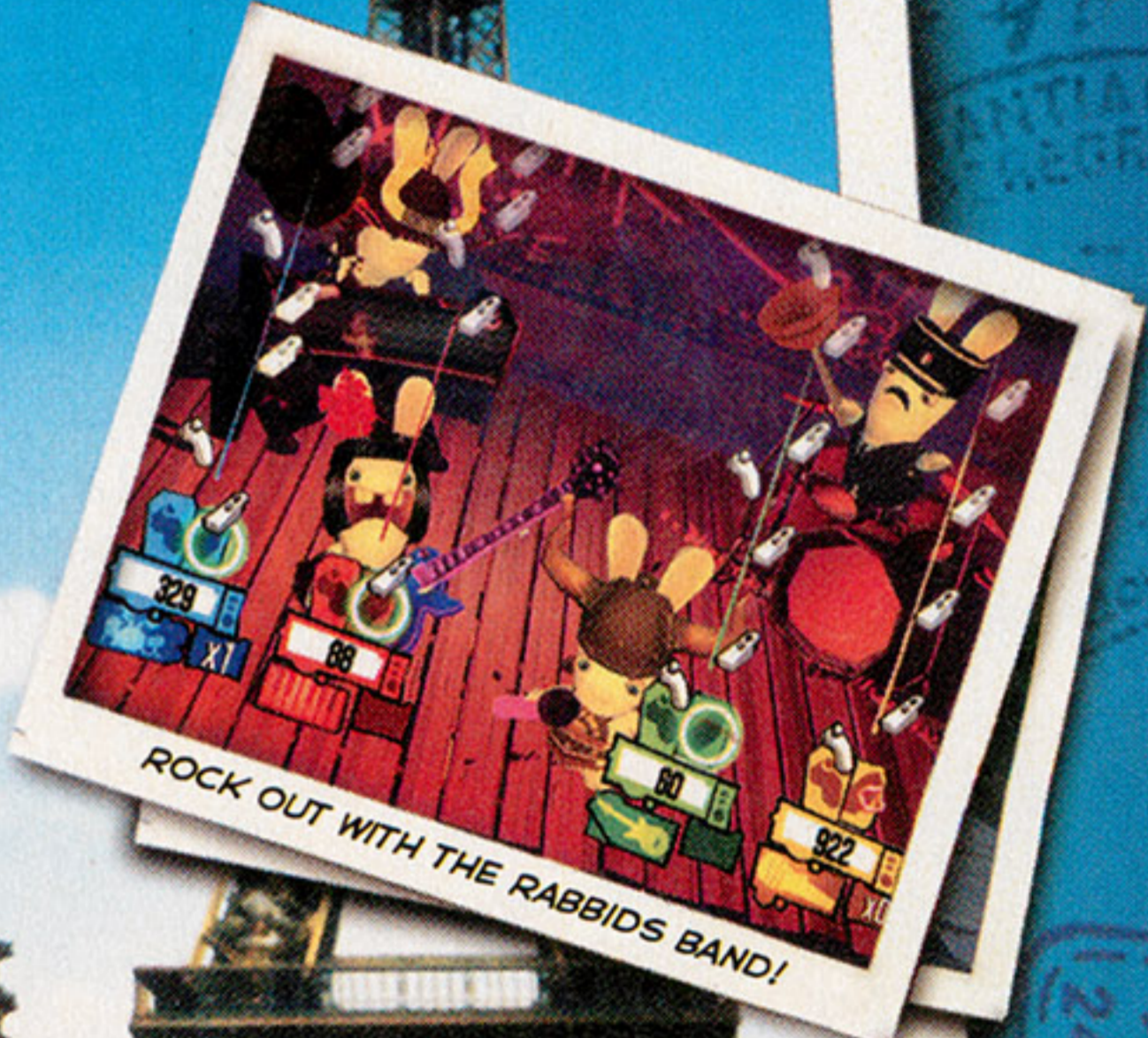
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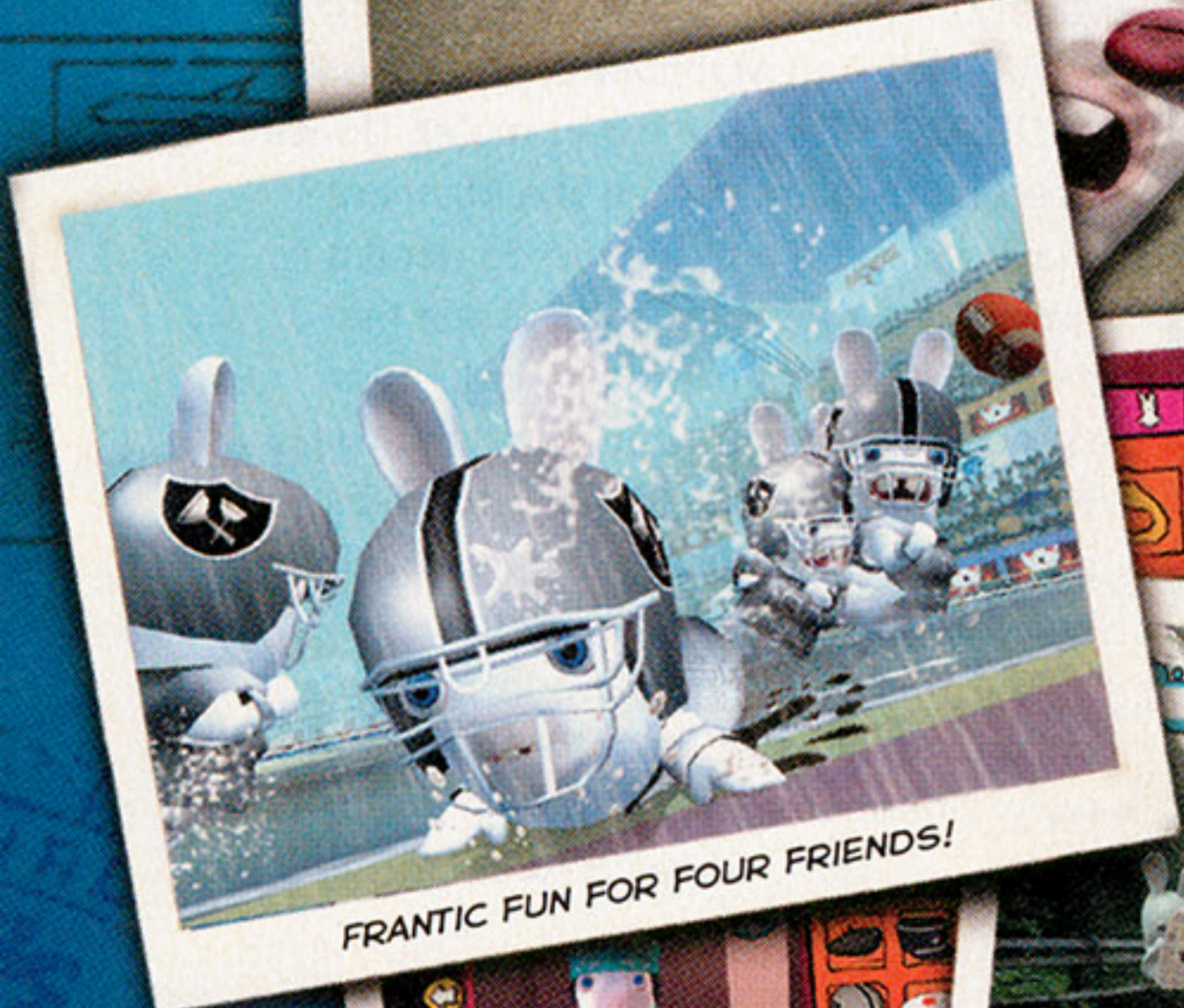
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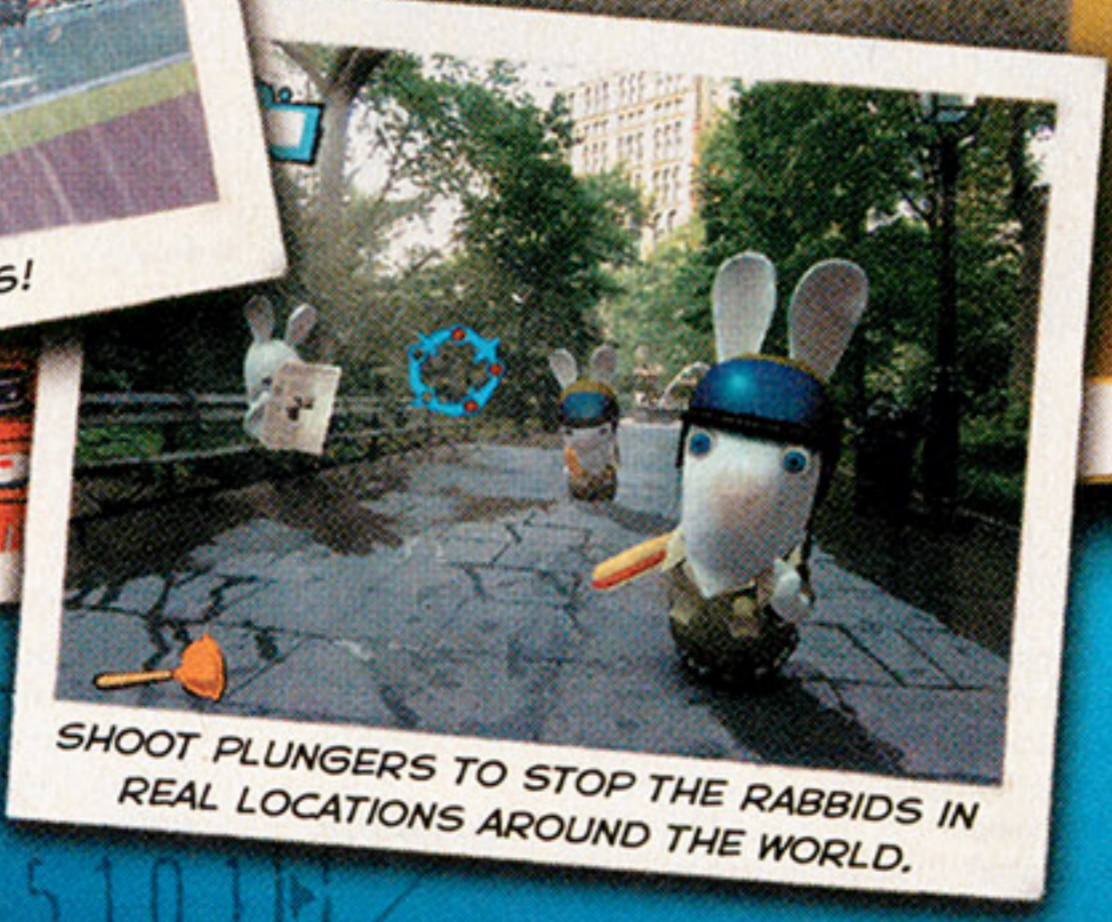


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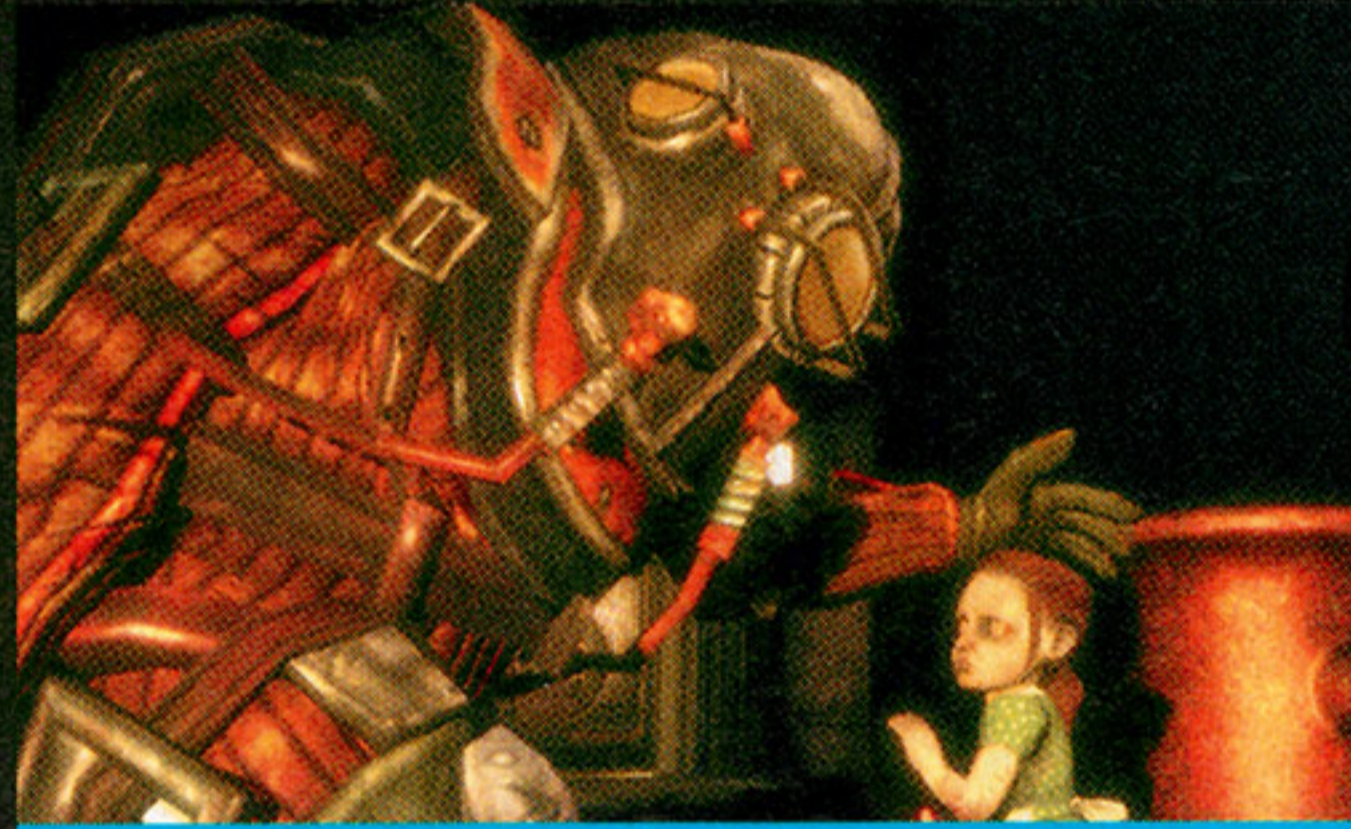
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Guitar Contest and Holiday Buyers' Guide
Win a custom *Guitar Hero* guitar and/or receive more holiday help from 1UP.com's annual holiday guide

Exclusive videos
Unreal Tournament 3, *Lost Odyssey*, and more!

SuperGuides aplenty (walkthroughs, cheats)
Kane & Lynch: Dead Men, *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare*, *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune*, and *Mass Effect*



And check out our podcast on EGMLive.1UP.com and our message boards at boards.1UP.com.

> EDITORIAL

DEFCON 2



IF YOU EVER NEEDED A CONCRETE reason to care about the violence-in-games debate, go play *Manhunt*.

Now go play *Manhunt 2*.

See the difference? Rockstar had to gimp the kill sequences with a bunch of noisy graphical filters in order to make a Mature rating (down from the retail-death Adults Only that the Entertainment Software Rating Board slapped on *Manhunt 2* earlier this year).

Folks, this is tangible evidence that sociopolitical pressure is changing the games that we play. It's not that we need this violence in our entertainment experiences (and believe me, the game is still plenty violent). But it's an absolute shame that this censorship had to happen just to get *Manhunt 2* to the original rating that its predecessor had! The series didn't get more violent; the standards have changed. This inconsistency is particularly disturbing because it's only happening in the gaming industry. Television and movies are seeing more blood and guts. Swear words are now normal, acceptable vocabulary within popular music. No, those aren't necessarily good trends for society, but why are only videogames getting caught in the net? Do people still view our hobby as "kids' stuff"?

That *Manhunt 2* had to be scaled back isn't breaking news, but now that I've played the finished product, I'm upset with the results. We can't blame Rockstar—it's in the business of selling games, and it can't do that with any AO ratings. But we can blame the ESRB for bowing to outside pressure and changing its guidelines on the fly.

After playing *Manhunt 2*, I feel like I'm at DEFCON 2 on the worry meter. Do we need ultraviolent games like *Manhunt*? Maybe, maybe not, but we do need a consistent, stable ratings system that works as well as the movie industry's, so adult consumers can decide for themselves. And we all need to be more aware of what's going on in this business before things get out of hand.

For more help and support on this subject, check out www.theeca.com and www.videogamevoters.org.

—Dan "Shoe" Hsu, Editor-in-Chief

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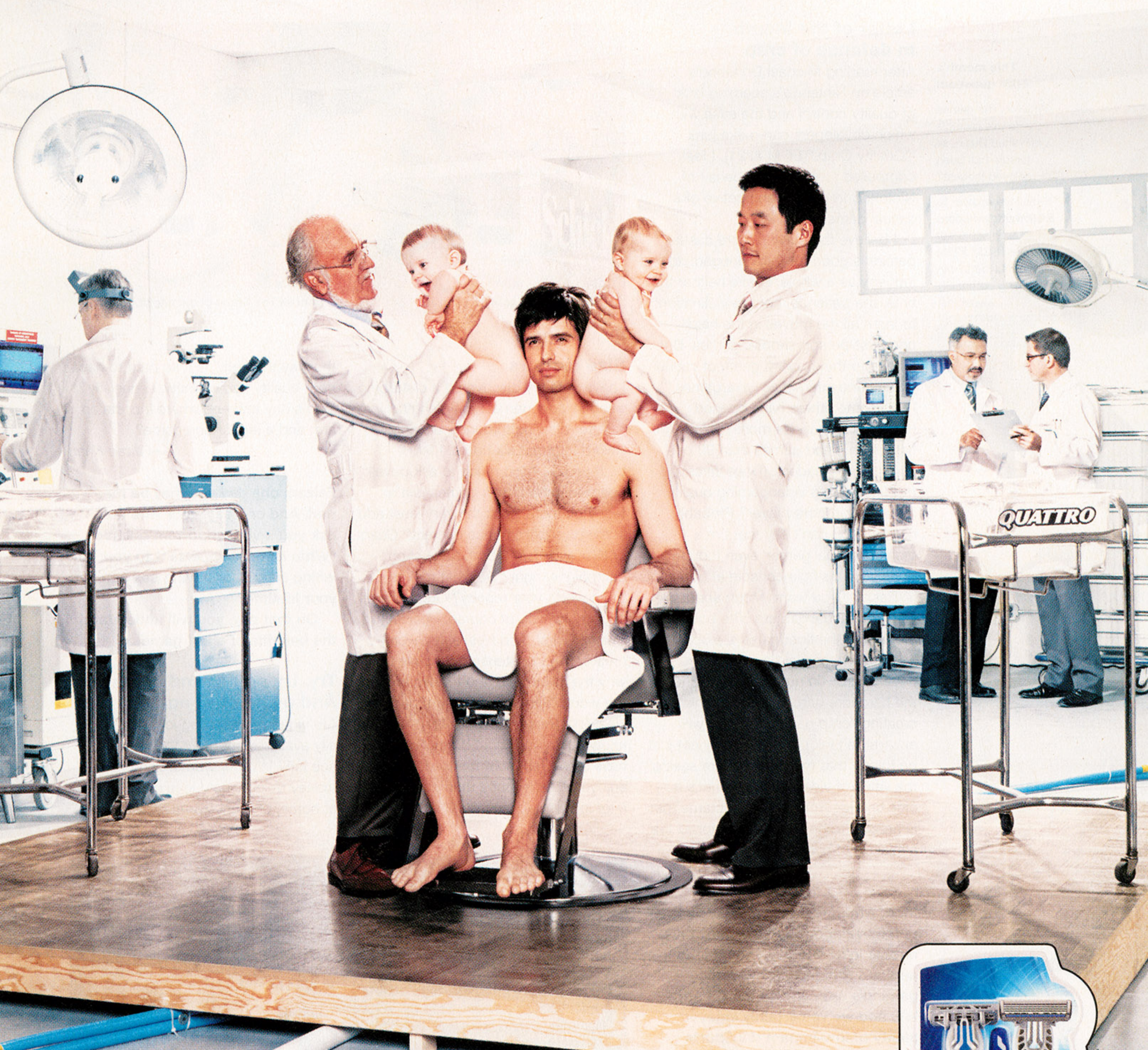
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LETTERS

> how casual gaming helps, how testing hurts, and what's between kratos' legs

> TRIVIAL ISSUE

This month's EGM question:

Which of the games in this month's Unfinished Business feature has been delayed longest?

E-mail the answer to EGM@ziffdavis.com

(subject head:

Trivia: EGM #223)

for a chance to win something potentially awesome.



Letter of the Month In defense of crap

After reading Michael Donahoe's article on Nintendo's seeming lack of quality control and the ease with which developers can make junk ["Quality Crap," EGM #221], I feel compelled to write in on behalf of Nintendo from the perspective of a casual gamer.

I believe that having more casual games is good for the videogaming industry as a whole. I have neither the time, the patience, nor the inclination to learn all the moves in the hard-core first-person shooter games. But thanks to the growing genre of casual games and interactive "exergames," I and some others have opened up a facility that has more PS2s, flatscreens, and games than 99 percent of your readers. (Does investing five figures into videogaming qualify me as a hardcore player? Probably not, but you can't say that I'm a diehard casual gamer, even though I don't own a single console at home.)

Bash all you want. Moan about the influx of casual gamers. The bottom line is that the floodgates are opened, and that we casual gamers will continue to grow in numbers. Why should the hardcore gamer care if all this is creating "crap games"? There will always be junk games, so why not just be happy that more people are seeing the value of videogaming? That's a nice change from the usual blame that is heaped upon videogames for all the social ills of our society.

—Ernie Medina Jr.

Man, who knew casuals were so defensive about a hobby they only dabble in? Seriously, though, we applaud Nintendo for widening gaming's appeal with the DS and Wii, and we've certainly enjoyed plenty of low-impact *Wii Sports* high jinks alongside our non-gaming buddies during the last year. But Nintendo's open-door publishing policy allows an abundance of quick-and-dirty minigame collections, second-rate clones, and licensed shovelware to choke store shelves. Microsoft and Sony have formal third-party approval processes in place for their consoles... why doesn't Nintendo?



Behold! The future of gaming approaches.

Size matters

I have recently discovered a disturbing trend in videogames: their length.

After blowing through *Heavenly Sword* in about six hours, I felt betrayed. Is it too much to ask developers to extend their games just a teeny bit more, or at the very least add some nice extra bonus content? *Gears of War* and *Halo 3* both have short campaigns, right? So what makes them worth your money? Great online support (which, of course, *Heavenly Sword* lacks). And *Heavenly Sword* creator Nina Kristensen's excuse for why the game's so short ranks among the worst. She states ["Afterthoughts: *Heavenly Sword*," EGM #221]: "I don't know about you, but I'd much rather have a shorter, more focused, and enjoyable experience than one that's a lot longer and isn't quite so good all

the way through." Is it so hard to have both quality and quantity, especially in this day and age where it costs an arm and a leg for one game?

—Faizan Khan

Faizan, one day you may be married. And one day, your wife may ask you a very important question: "What is more important to you: finishing *Halo 7*, or having sex again in your lifetime?"

On that day, you will understand the benefits of short games.

Try, try again. And again. And again. And again.

Are videogame testing jobs actually available out there for the average joe? In other words, can I make money doing what I love and staying at home, or must I venture out to the



For writing this month's winning letter, Ernie gets a copy of *Ultimate Ghosts 'n Goblins*... or maybe something else we have lying around.

> HOW HARDCORE ARE YOU?

Your proudest gaming moments

The next contestant in our monthly harder-core-than-thou competition arrives!

A few years ago, when Penny Arcade Expo (PAX) was just being first talked about, I figured I would try to put on my own miniconvention called Omegacon. I got eight TVs with Xboxes and copies of *Halo*. We had 20 computers in a LAN, and there was also a place for *Magic: The Gathering* and a *D&D* drop. We even gave out T-shirts as prizes. Sure, it wasn't quite PAX, but it was close enough for my friends and me.

—Jeremy Noell



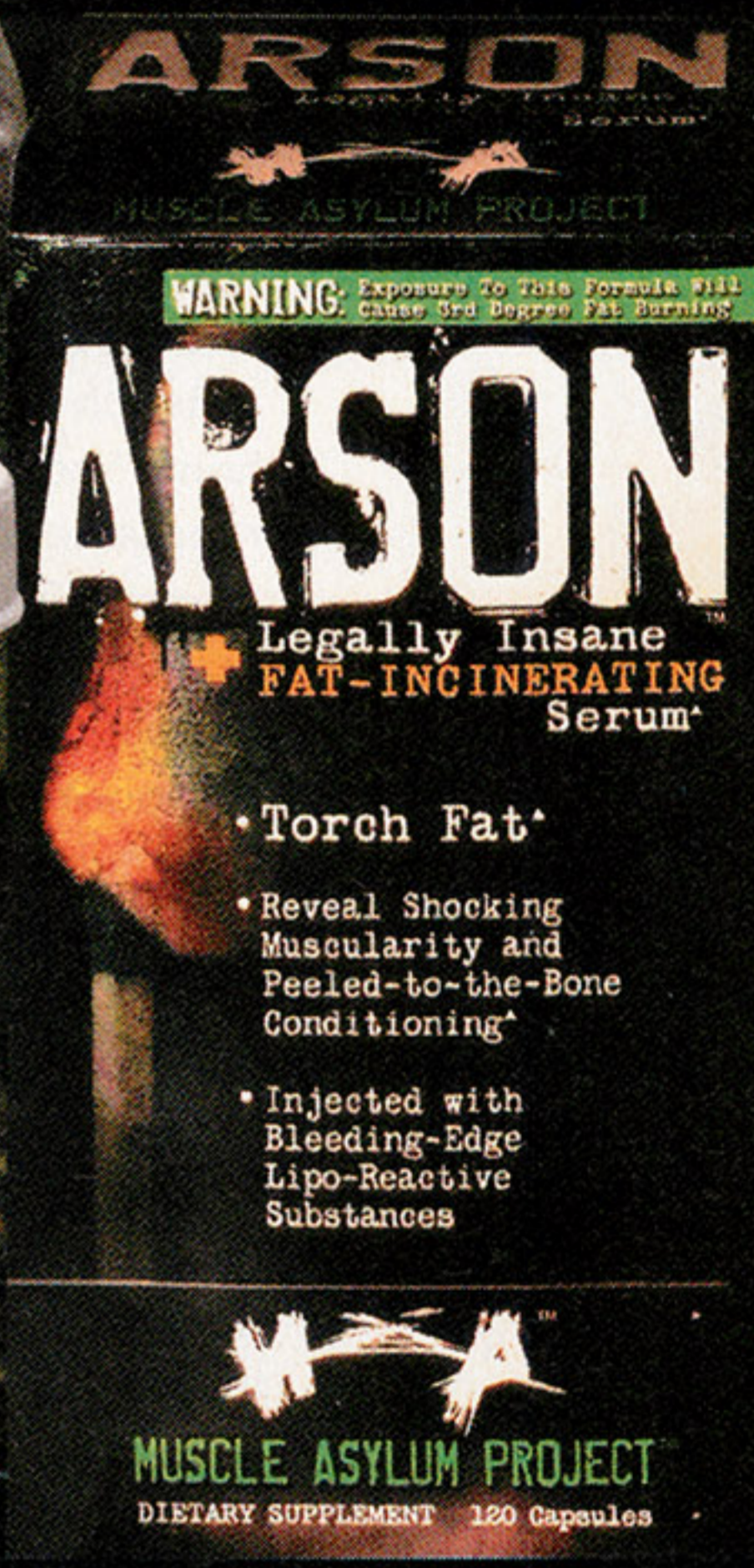
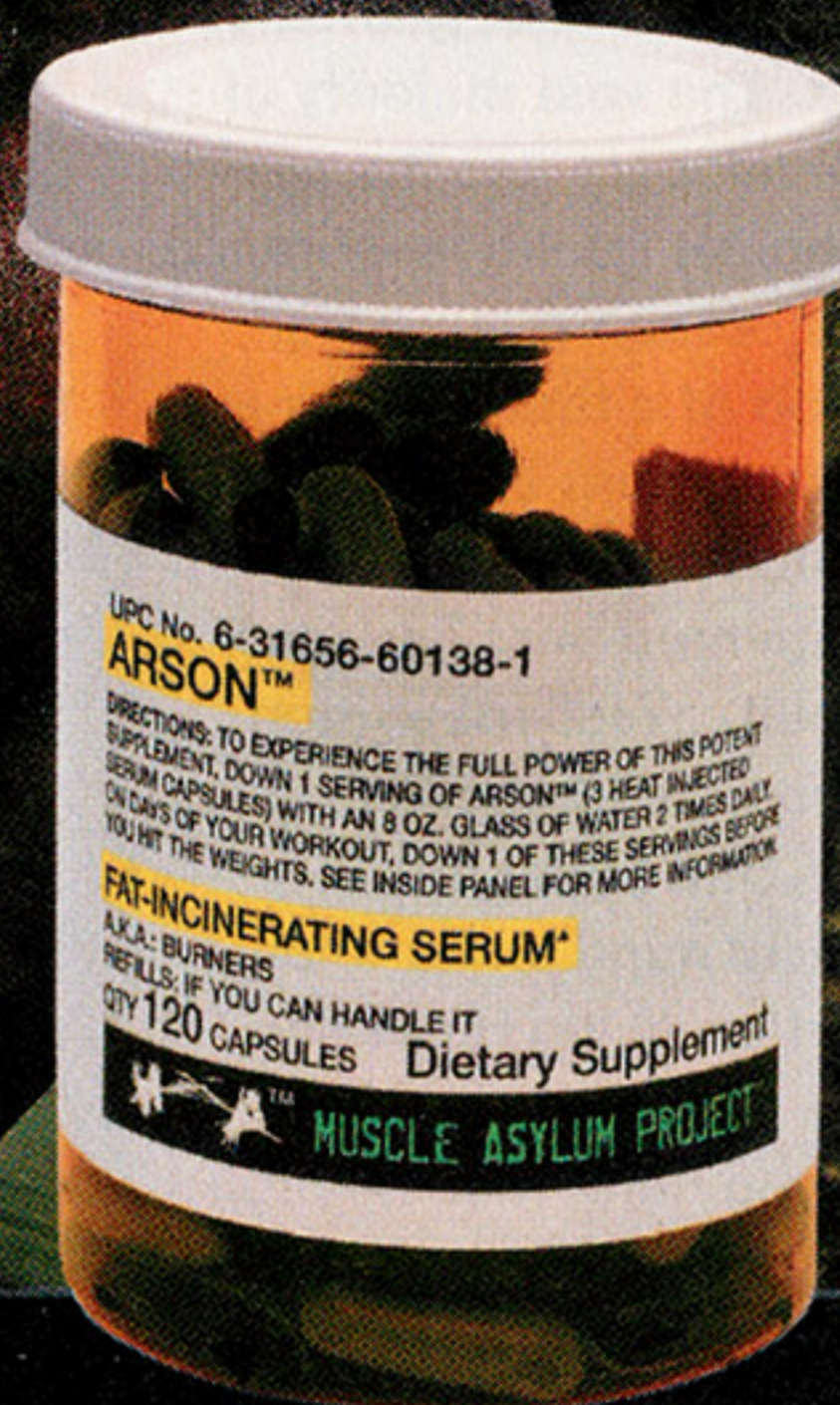
Well, it's the thought that counts.

Want to see your own story in this space? All you have to do is tell us how hard-effing-core you are. Dish up the goods on what makes you more into games than anyone else, and send it to EGM@ziffdavis.com, subject head: "I Am Hardcore." Remember, it doesn't count if you can't prove it, so send photos, too!

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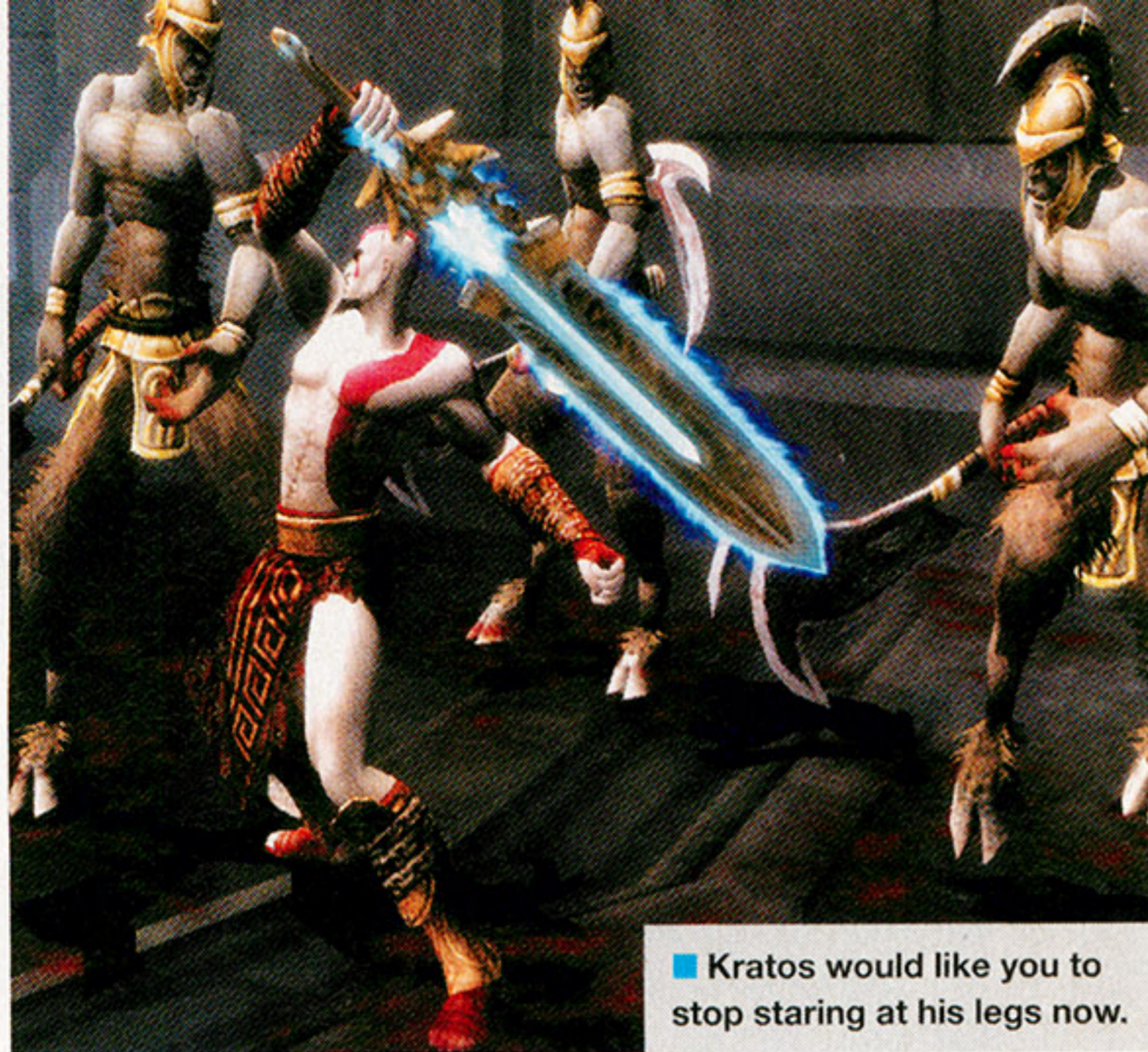
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■ Kratos would like you to stop staring at his legs now.

real world and move to a city with developers in it? And if there are not "average joe" testing jobs, how do I present myself to a developer or publisher as a viable employee with good testing skills? I am an engineering major in my junior year and was looking at jobs that I could truly enjoy.

—Zack Jackson

First of all, don't fall for the "pay us to teach you how to test games at home" scam. The vast majority of reputable developers use the permanent, in-house quality-assurance departments of their publishers.

See, the job of a tester requires an enormous amount of constant communication and feedback between team members and leaders. As a result, excellent written and verbal communication is one of the key skills of a tester.

An analytical mind and a tolerance for soul-crushing repetition also help, so your engineering studies may aid you here. Also helpful: a willingness to work insane hours for fast food-level pay, a limitless supply of patience, and the ability to ingest caffeine in amounts that would kill most mere mortals.

The upside: Testing really is a great foot in the door for the industry. Just don't expect it to be easy.

Breakin' too

I have destroyed a lot of game controllers in my time. I chucked a PS2 controller at my television over a *GTA3* mission ("Big 'N' Veiny"). Its replacement met its fate after being slammed to the ground over a *Kingdom Hearts* boss (Riku). I flung a WaveBird at my GameCube over *Super Smash Bros. Melee's* All-Star Mode and had to format the memory card. Long ago, I cracked the screen of an original Game Boy with a toy space shuttle. I'm not sure why.

All this pales in comparison to the time I stomped on a *Jet Grind Radio* disc until it snapped in half. What I am getting around to is this: I don't trust myself with a Wii Remote. Those things are designed like miniature javelins. What did they expect was going to happen?

—Ephraim Freed

Although Nintendo didn't originally expect Wii players to act like spoiled, overprivileged jackasses with nasty tempers, an epidemic of airborne Wii-motes quickly led to strengthening the safety strap and, just recently, the introduction of silicon "Wii Remote Jackets" designed to soften potential impacts. Existing Wii owners can head to www.nintendo.com in order to claim your free controller condoms.

Getting high

In *EGM* #221 ["50 Things You Didn't Know"], in the bit about *Assassin's Creed*, you mention that Altair's name means "the flying eagle" in Arabic. That is not correct—or I should say that it is a little hard to determine exactly what the word is in Arabic, since some Arabic letters do not have equivalents in the English alphabet.

With that being said, "altayr" in Arabic means "the bird," and "altaa'ir" (pronounced as "alta-er") literally means "that which flies." The word "assassin" is also of Arabic origin; it originally came from a word meaning "the frequent hashish smokers."

—Algwaiz

Well, that explains all those references to flying, doesn't it?

Rendering unto Caesar

You know, being that the videogame industry is a multibillion-dollar market, you'd think that more people would try to incorporate religion into games. (Well, the *Left Behind* game tried, but it failed with a method of "saving" that involved killing Jews. That's pretty bad.) I'm a Christian myself, and I would think that developers of all religions would incorporate them into their games.

—Dallon Moorefield

The answer is simple: money. Base your game around a real religion and you run the risk of offending anyone of a different faith (or denomination) enough that they won't buy your game. Make up a fictional religion (or refrain from including any sort of religion) and you don't offend anyone...or, at least, you offend everyone equally.

Most publishers don't like the idea of limiting a game's potential market in that way.

Sir Loincloth

I'm writing in response to the "Goddess of wardrobe" letter in *EGM* #221. The writer starts off by stating that "*Heavenly Sword* seems like a big-budget rip-off of *God of War*." He then goes on to rant and rave about how it's shameful that the main character, Nariko, wears so little clothing, and offers up the comparison to Ryu from *Ninja Gaiden* and how he's fully clothed. He then finishes by saying "Put [Ryu] in a loincloth and I'll stop complaining about Nariko's appearance." Well, since we're comparing *God of War* to the so-called "Goddess of War," why don't we take a look at Kratos' attire? Hmmm...a loincloth. Point. Game. Set. Match.

—Jeff Klein

We're pretty sure the appropriate response here is, "Oh, snap! You got served, yo!" But we could be a few years out of date.

You're all nerds to us

Why does it seem that whenever a large game releases, some of the biggest nerds on the planet line up or camp out at game stores? Watch the coverage of release-day mayhem: These people are fat, balding, overly skinny, full of acne, under the age of 12, or 35-year-old loners.

Is there really a need to have the game at 12:01 a.m.? Will it net you some greater reward in life? I've seen numerous people posting on message boards that they will be skipping work or school for days just to play *Halo 3*. Come on, people, it's a game after all.

—Kyle Roy

Kyle, with all the time you must spend sleeping with your harem of supermodels, working on your finely chiseled pecs, admiring your flawless complexion in the mirror, and styling your luxuriant hair, how do you ever find the time to write a letter to a videogame magazine? 🐘

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Soulcalibur Legends, a 3rd person action adventure, exclusively for the Wii console, follows the exploits of Siegfried and other Soulcalibur favorites. Fight in a new adventure set between the events of Soul Blade and the original Soulcalibur game. The Wii Remote™ and Nunchuk are your weapons of choice as you perform your attacks using orchestrated slashes and movements and fight like never before.



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CHARACTERS IN IMMERSIVE ACTION**



wii™



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TAKES ON A NEW DIMENSION



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Only on the Wii

The Lines Are Drawn...

Three years ago, Queen Elincia of Crimea won the war against the Mad King Ashnard of Daein, but the Crimean knights, led by Geoffrey, must quell unrest within Crimea's own borders. Ike and the Greil Mercenaries, meanwhile, find themselves facing an old threat.

Crimea

Fehre



The Laguz tribes unite to seek justice for a crime long unpunished. They are led by Skrimir, an untested general and heir to the throne of Gallia. Can he tame his thirst for battle long enough to see his troops to victory and peace, or will his rage lead all nations to the brink of ruin?

Zarzi

Gallia

Soze



Dheginsea, king of Goldoa, warns that the chaos of war may threaten the land's covenant with an ancient god. He struggles to hold his nation to its pledge of neutrality even as the events surrounding him lead the world to the brink of ruin.

Goldoa

Myron

Tibarn and Naesala put aside their differences to lead their clans to war. The raven king, however, carries a secret burden that may cause their alliance to crumble--and seal the fate of their cause.



Fantasy Violence
Mild Language

wii

Marado

Palmo

Daein

Sella

Nebula

Nox



With King Ashnard's death, Daein fell under the harsh rule of the Begnion Empire. Years later, Micaiah, Sothe, and the Dawn Brigade have taken up the struggle to liberate Daein. They pin their hopes on newfound Prince Pelleas, but can this mysterious youth rally Daein to rise up against her tyrants?

...But Every Story Has Two Sides.

Seliora

Gaddos

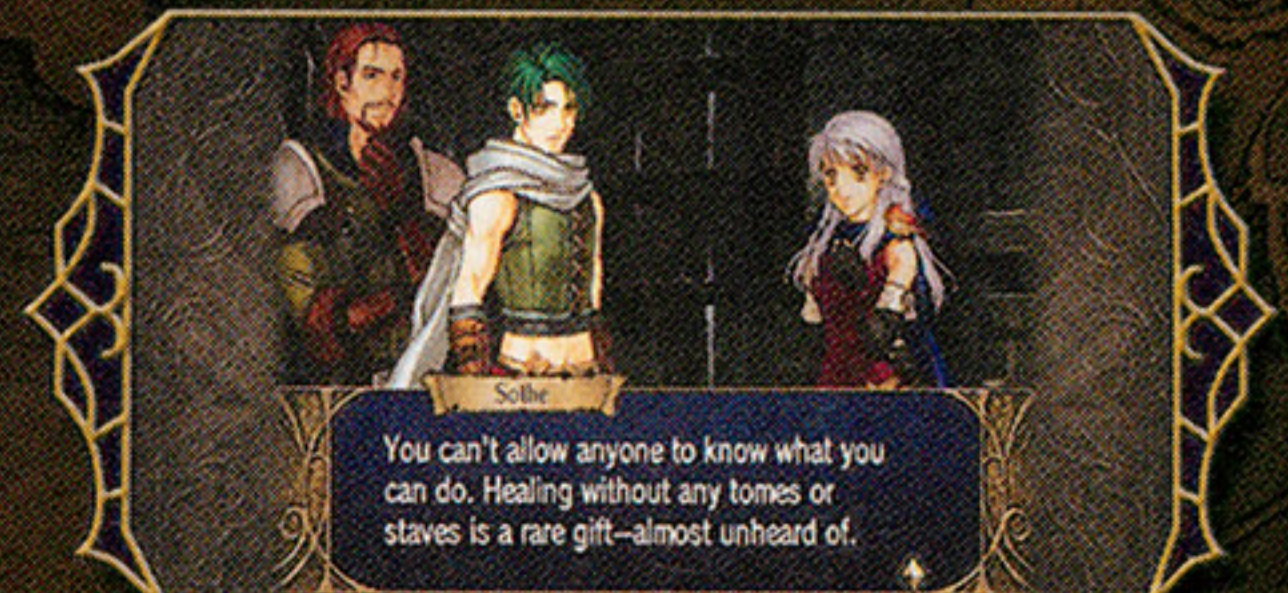
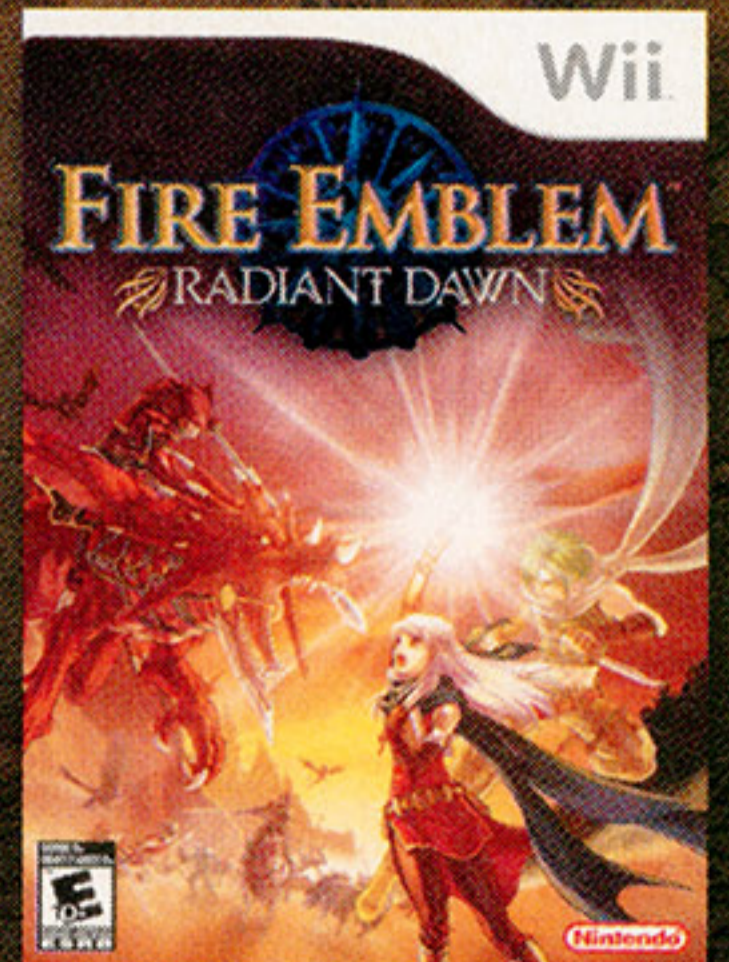
Culbert



Begnion's senators now rule Daein. They have given their military commanders free rein, all the while hiding their actions from the Apostle Sanaki. Beset by turmoil at home and abroad, Sanaki seems fated to be her nation's last apostle. Is Zelgius's sword enough to help her save all she holds dear?

Two Sides to Every War.

In a war fueled by chaos, who can say what is right and wrong? In a Fire Emblem first, you will play both sides of the war and judge for yourself. Fire Emblem: Radiant Dawn introduces a host of new features that make it a snap to pick up and a challenge to beat.



You can't allow anyone to know what you can do. Healing without any tomes or staves is a rare gift—almost unheard of.

PRESENTS START

› features, previews, underwater hotels, and other stuff



GAMES OVERLOAD!

Keep an eye to the stars—or rather the star-studded graphic above. You'll find it on every story that fits this issue's too-many-games concept.



> HOLIDAY BUYERS' GUIDE

Present **SENSE**

We pick the best (and worst) gifts to go with this holiday's biggest games By John Brandon and Crispin Boyer



NO NEED TO BUY HALO 3 for the shooter fans on your holiday shopping list—those guys already have it (and probably *BioShock* and *Call of Duty 4*, too). But as is *EGM*'s tradition with our annual holiday guides, we're not here to recommend the obvious. Instead, we're helping you pick unique gifts for the buddies who already have the big games, and we're ranking these goodies in order of expense and cool factor. You'll find fun cheap stuff for mere acquaintances and elaborate packages for that pal who pushed you out of the way of a runaway bus.

And it wouldn't be an *EGM* holiday guide if we didn't throw in some gag gifts for the enemies on your list, too. Because simply regifting *Bomberman Act: Zero* to the guy who slept with your girlfriend would be too easy—and probably too cruel....

> For the gamer who loves BioShock...



THE "BEST BUDDY" GIFT

Jules' Undersea Lodge

BioShock's Rapture was a great town to visit, but you wouldn't want to sleep with the fishes there. So send your best friend to a cheerier real-life alternative: this two-bedroom undersea hotel room in Key Largo, FL, complete with a kitchen, TV, and 42-inch windows that look out on tropical fish frolicking five fathoms deep.



\$475 per night • www.jul.com

THE "FRIEND" GIFT

VEXplorer Robot Kit

Hacking Rapture's security turrets and flying drones turns them into friends. Keep that Johnny Five feeling alive postgame with this build-it-yourself robobuddy that comes with a camera you can sync to a TV and operate remotely, Mars rover-style. It may not keep Splicers off your back, but its claw is perfect for getting you a beer.



\$200 • www.vexlabs.com

THE "ACQUAINTANCE" GIFT

Shock Ball

Until mad science makes real-life plasmids that rival *BioShock*'s gene-spliced superpowers, this gizmo will have to do. Toss the Ball like a hot potato to your friends and hope you're not palming it when it unleashes randomly timed electrical jolts. It looks like the game's Enrage plasmid; we bet it'll enrage anyone caught shocked.



\$20 • www.firebox.com

THE "ENEMY" GIFT

Pipe Dream (Game Boy)

BioShock's pipe-laying hacking minigame was tolerable because...it was just a minigame. Imagine playing nothing but that game with green-and-white graphics and bleepy sound, and imagine giving that experience—in the form of 1990 Game Boy puzzler *Pipe Dream*—to your least-favorite *BioShock* fan in the world. You'll have to scour the used-game racks for it, but the sadness on your enemy's face when he pops *Pipe Dream* into his DS will be worth the effort.

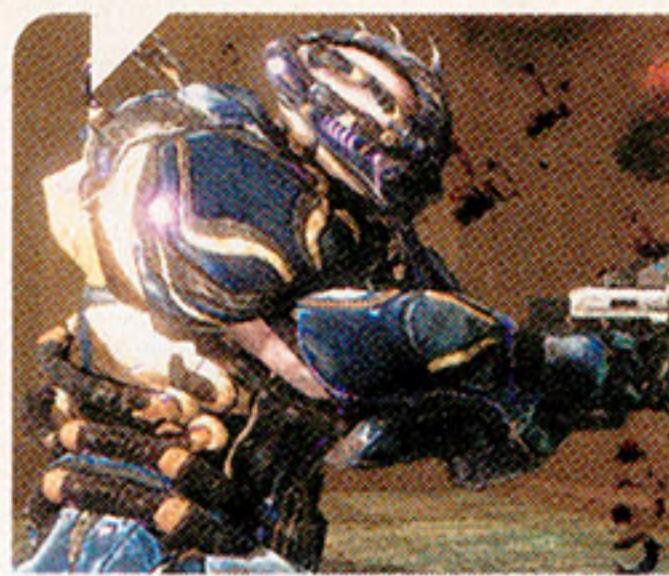


About \$12 used • www.gamestop.com



PAGE
32

Feature:
Pros know
their Halos



PAGE
38

Exclusive:
We get real
with Unreal



PAGE
40

Feature:
Comparison
swapping

➤ For the gamer who loves Guitar Hero III/Rock Band...

THE "BEST BUDDY" GIFT

Rock 'N' Roll Fantasy Camp

A guitar-slinging attitude and really great hair are all part of the rockstar persona, but chances are your best pal wasn't born with the Gene Simmons gene. So send him to Rock 'N' Roll Fantasy Camp (locales vary), where your buddy will jam with superstars like Slash and The Who's Roger Daltrey every day for a week, learning the ropes and writing songs together. The payoff: performing in front of a sold-out, possibly half-drunk, crowd.



\$9,000 for five days • www.rockandrollfantasycamp.com

THE "FRIEND" GIFT

AG RiffMaster

Give the *Guitar Hero* or *Rock Band* fan in your life some wood, literally, with these real Peavey guitars modified to work with the games. Colorado-based ArtGuitar—famous for customizing real guitars for musicians—have inserted the necessary controls, plus imprinted rockstar-themed designs on the bodies. Get them early, though. Each is built to order and takes weeks to ship—especially if you request custom art.



\$400 • www.artguitar.com

THE "ACQUAINTANCE" GIFT

i am 8-bit Guitar Straps

Even faux rock stars shouldn't settle for the pack-in straps accompanying *Rock Band* and *Guitar Hero*. Amateur legends, even if they can't compete on Expert, deserve something cool and comfortable to string around their sweaty necks. Thank the rock gods for these "limited edition" art straps, teaming the retro sheik of *i am 8-bit* with the quality of industry mainstay, Couch.



\$33 each • couchguitarstraps.com, www.iam8bit.com

THE "ENEMY" GIFT

Fisher-Price I Can Play Guitar

Guitar Hero and *Rock Band*'s plastic guitar peripherals get the job done but still look like toys, so what would irk a music-game fan more than sending him or her an actual kid-tested, mom-approved Fisher-Price guitar? The color-coded buttons'll help 'em learn to play like a Hanson brother. But the most rockin' air-guitar histrionics in the world would still look silly with this thing.



\$100 • www.amazon.com



➤ WIN ME!

Strut to EGM.1UP.com to find out how to win this custom EGM AG RiffMaster by listening to our *EGM Live** podcast.



➤ For the gamer who loves Halo 3...

THE "BEST BUDDY" GIFT

Real-Life Red vs. Blue

Send that special someone to a realistic first-person-shooter simulation in the Nevada desert or the Northern California forest. The Cimmericians have been re-creating historical battles with Airsoft guns for 15 years on every third Saturday of the month. Just pack your bud a gun...and good eye protection.



\$10 donation, plus travel • www.cimmericians.com

THE "FRIEND" GIFT

Plasma Rifle

It's a laser-tag gun that looks and sounds exactly like the Covenant plasma rifle (also available: the plasma pistol and energy sword). The rifle even makes an overheating sound—without causing third-degree palm burns. The gun comes with a laser sensor and the possible stigma of being seen in public playing laser tag as an adult, but whatever.



\$120 • www.hottopic.com

THE "ACQUAINTANCE" GIFT

Master Chief Mimobots

We're sure Master Chief would just love having his armored suit made into this superdeformed USB thumbdrive, but the guy's gotta carry Cortana around in something. You pop off the Chief's head and stick his body into the USB port on your computer for 1GB of storage (2GB and 4GB are also available). Green not your color? You can also get the Mimobot Spartans in red or blue.



\$50 • www.mimoco.com

THE "ENEMY" GIFT

Todd McFarlane Controller

Remember when artist Todd McFarlane drew *Spider-Man* and *Spawn* comics and everyone thought he was totally awesome? Yeah.... One look at either of his two custom-painted 360 *Halo 3* controller designs and you'll wonder just what we were all on back in the man's comic-book heyday.



\$60 • store.spawn.com



For the gamer who loves The Legend of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass...



THE "BEST BUDDY" GIFT

Real-life Princess Saving

Live Action Role-Playing (LARP) games are the closest most of us will get to actually slaying monsters or going toe-to-toe with otherworldly demons (well, except for high school). LARP.com lists events across the country, so pick a spot and tell your buddy to pack his finest breeches. Organizers recommend spectating first.



\$45-\$70 per weekend • www.larp.com

THE "FRIEND" GIFT

Zelda Ocarina

Professional flautist Darryn Songbird handcrafts "magical flutes of clay" inspired by Link's instrument of choice. Musical experience isn't required to coax soothing tunes out these impressive replicas, thanks to a songbook offering "Minuet of Forest" and "Summon Mom to Pick Me Up From the Cosplay Convention."



\$40-\$60 • www.songbirdocarina.com

THE "ACQUAINTANCE" GIFT

Zelda 20th Anniversary Shirt

The crossed Master Swords. Link's four different shields. The fanciful Hyrulian script. *Zelda* fans'll know your friend means to save the princess when he sports this stylish T from Japanese hipster-clothing site King of Games. Everyone else might think he's just a *Lord of the Rings* fan. As if Legolas is in Link's league....



\$40 • www.the-king-of-games.com/english

THE "ENEMY" GIFT

Zelda Animated Series DVD

Oldsters may remember that the *Super Mario Bros. Super Show* gave the plumbers Fridays off, choosing instead to showcase a godawful animated take on *The Legend of Zelda*. This DVD collects the entire sordid affair, which boils down to 13 episodes of a poorly-drawn Link saying, "Well, excuuuuuse me, princess!"



\$25 • www.amazon.com

For the gamer who loves Tony Hawk/Skate...



THE "BEST BUDDY" GIFT

Woodward Skateboarding Camp

Sitting inside playing games won't get your bud any closer to skating all gnar-gnar in real life—or even learning what "gnar-gnar" means. Only the pros can provide that kind of higher education. Send him to one of the adult sessions at the highly regarded Woodward action-sports camps, staffed with pro-skater senseis and scattered across the country. Ask him to explain the gnar-gnar thing when he gets back.



\$920 per week, plus travel, www.campwoodward.com

THE "FRIEND" GIFT

Tony Hawk Birdhouse Full Skull Complete Deck

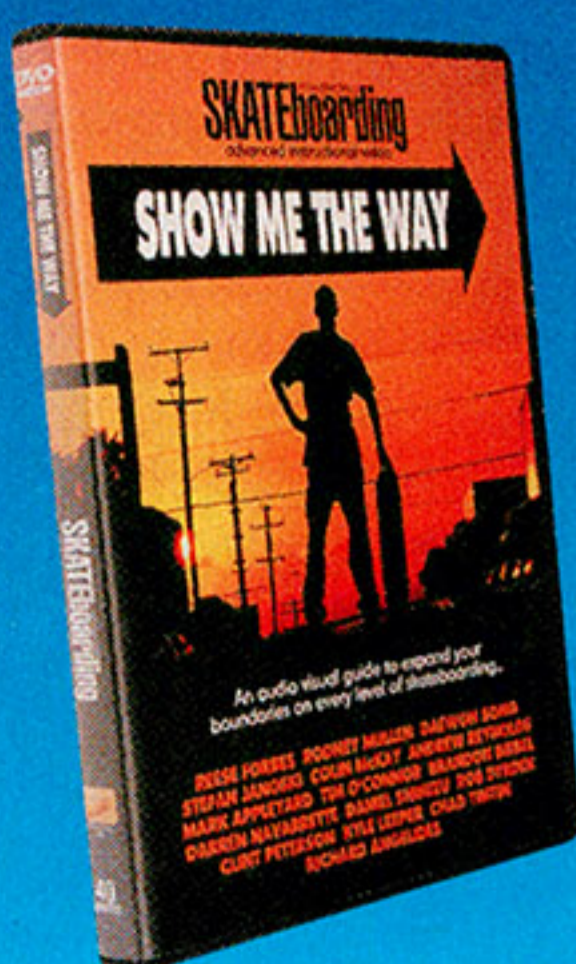
A Birdhouse board is more expensive than a Kmart special, but this is what the pros use. The "complete" package includes 99A polyurethane wheels, aluminum trucks, and ABEC 5 bearings, while the deck has seven layers of maple laminate. Your pal's skinned knee will provide the syrup.

\$100 • www.ccs.com

THE "ACQUAINTANCE" GIFT

Show Me the Way DVD

Skating games are fun but hardly edutainment. Watching pro boarders perform spectacular kickflips and grinds, however, will learn your giftee a thing or two about what it takes to be sick. *Show Me the Way* is an advanced instructional video (read: your buddy should be well-versed in the terms) from a Transworld skate mag that shows you every trick in detail.



\$20 • www.skatewarehouse.com

THE "ENEMY" GIFT

PlayTV Skateboarding

This Radica skateboarding simulator just screams "I'm a doofus" in about 15 languages—especially since it offers only three skate parks, the graphics look like vintage 1987 NES without the gameplay, and the age cutoff on the box is 12. Mad kudos if your enemy slips off the thing and cracks his coccyx while trying to go big.



\$40 • www.amazon.com

GO HEAD TO HEDGEHOG!

SONIC RIVALS 2™

Move your feet or be defeated in an all new race with 8 Rivals, 12 new courses, and unlimited speed. Battle your friends in 6 multiplayer modes or take off and explore the courses via Free Play mode. To stay ahead of the pack, upgrade your favorite Rival with 150 new cards. On your mark, get set, spin!



AVAILABLE NOW
www.sega.com/sonicrivals2



PlayStation®Portable





➤ For the gamer who loves Project Gotham Racing 4/Need for Speed...



THE "BEST BUDDY" GIFT

Drift Buffet

You could just send your best bud to test drive a BMW, but that requires convincing a snotty sales guy that your friend has the jing to actually buy one. Drift Buffet is a closed-course event for any driver, with any car that meets the specs, to race in a serious competition. The course is in San Bernardino, CA, and it follows an elimination tournament schedule several times per year.



Pricing varies by race • www.driftbuffet.com

THE "FRIEND" GIFT

Xbox 360 Wireless Racing Wheel

Smoke the online competition in *PGR4*, *Dirt*, or five other games that use force feedback for guardrail collisions. This racing wheel comes with brake and gas pedals (everything but the hula dancer for your dashboard). And it goes without saying that if *Gran Turismo 5* does hit the PS3 this December (Sony has yet to confirm), buy your buddy a PS3 wheel instead.



\$130 • www.xbox.com

THE "ACQUAINTANCE" GIFT

USB RC Car

For that special (and we mean extra special) geek in your life, this USB RC Car is a good five-minute diversion from work and/or videogame play. (Yes, the car only runs for about five minutes, but it's the most thrilling low-speed five minutes of your life, and the little car only takes twice that long to recharge.) It connects to a PC using a USB cable, while the included software lets you steer. Paperclip speed bumps not included.



\$30 • www.usbgeek.com

THE "ENEMY" GIFT

Pro Gamer Skid Gloves

Know a not-so-special someone who thinks he could parlay his mad racing-game skills into a pro career? Let cold reality crush his dreams, but in the meantime convince him he needs these fingerless driving gloves to help him look the part. Actually designed for the Wii to help sop the palm sweat from kids and soccer moms, the gloves look so silly that your "friend" is guaranteed to always finish last when it comes looking cool.



\$10 • www.amazon.com

➤ For the gamer who loves Super Mario Galaxy...



THE "BEST BUDDY" GIFT

Virgin Galactic Flight

OK, so this gift is best swapped between billionaires, but if you do have a spare 200 grand lying around and no plans to spend it until 2009, get an inaugural ticket for your best pal on Virgin Galactic. The deposit runs only \$20K—cheap considering you'll be sending him or her into frickin' outer space. Perfect for *Mass Effect* fans, too!



\$200K • www.virgingalactic.com

THE "FRIEND" GIFT

Nintendo by Torrell t-Shirts

Tell your buddy to try this on for size: Mario-themed shirts so haute, they're only crafted in lots of 1,000 and come with a certificate of authenticity. Pop-and-son apparel company Torrell is crafting this street-toughened line of Nintendo-licensed clothing decorated with everything from Bullet Bills to game-cartridge art.



\$45 (shirts) - \$150 (jackets) • www.torrelltorrel.com

THE "ACQUAINTANCE" GIFT

Mushroom Lamp

Punch it: The lights come on! Punch it again: The lights turn off! This mushroom lamp will transport your gift recipient back to—where else?—the Mushroom Kingdom in the *Super Mario* games, where he'll fend off the Goomba turtles and (hopefully, eventually) reunite with the Princess. For that, your buddy will want the lamp off.



\$12 • gadget.brandoo.com.hk

THE "ENEMY" GIFT

Mario Brothers Air Refreshener

This gift definitely sends a message to your worst enemy: His house and everything in it smells like a toilet in need of a good Mario plumbing job, and he should do something about it as soon as possible. It also says, "I'm not spending a penny more than eight bucks for your present."



\$8 • www.dealextreme.com

**I AM RIPPER.
TEARER.
SLASHER.
TEETH IN THE
DARKNESS.
I AM BEOWULF!**

BEOWULF™

The Game



Battle fierce enemies as you play through 30 years of Beowulf's life not seen in the movie.



Unleash Carnal Power and fight hand-to-hand combat with giant monsters.



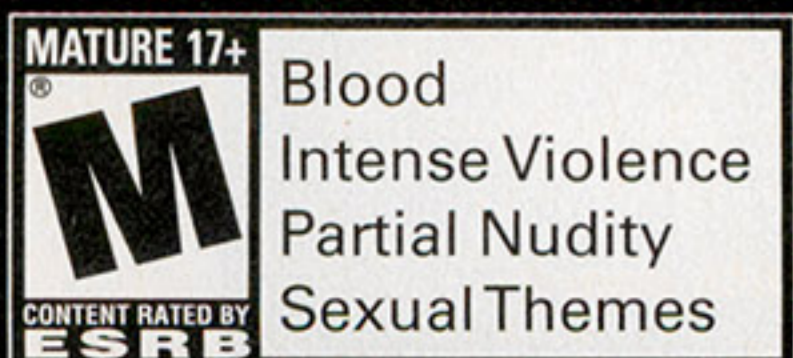
Lead your men into battle and become a hero king.

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BEOWULFGAME.COM



Coming soon for the PLAYSTATION®3 computer entertainment system and PSP® (PlayStation®Portable) system



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UBISOFT™



For the gamer who loves Madden...

THE "BEST BUDDY" GIFT

Josten's Madden Ring

It takes one hell of a gridiron iron man to unlock the three rings in *Madden NFL '08* (available only in the 360 and PS3 versions). Reward all that virtual field time and neglected social life with a real-life duplicate from ring-maker Josten's. The ring may say, "I've wasted hundreds of hours earning this," but it does it with 10-karat class.



\$500 • www.jostens.com/sports/easports

THE "FRIEND" GIFT

NFL Experience

Backyard football is great, but the NFL lets you get a taste for real football at an event that coincides with the Superbowl each year—for only \$15. This year it's in Arizona. Sure, NFL Experience is mostly for kids, but you can get autographs, watch competitions, catch a coach's or ref's clinic, or just hang out and drink beer.



\$15 plus travel • nfl.com/superbowl/nflxperience

THE "ACQUAINTANCE" GIFT

Mad Catz Team Controllers

So your fantasy-football buddy isn't content with merely brandishing his favorite team's name and logo on every throw pillow, article of clothing, and paintable surface in his house? Plug in one of these Mad Catz jobbies, available in the art style of every team in the league. Unfortunately, the controllers are only available for the PS2 and now-dead Xbox, but hey—isn't it the thought that counts?

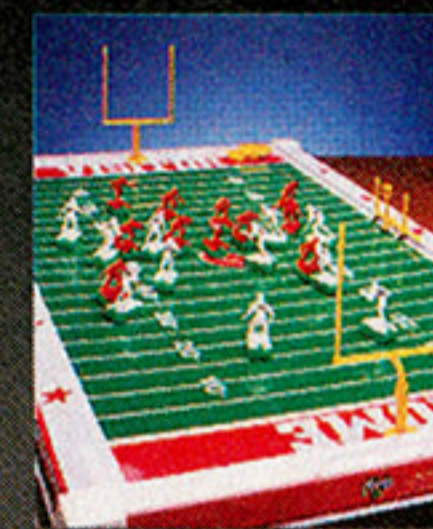


\$40 • www.nflshop.com

THE "ENEMY" GIFT

Electric Football

Zap, tingle, fuzz—those are the sounds of an electric football set, the tabletop game your dad played when he was a kid. It's funny these are still around, considering the players move randomly around the board and you have absolutely no control over the outcome. For anyone who doesn't understand football, this is the perfect gift.



\$70 • www.vermontcountrystore.com

For the gamer who loves classic games for Xbox Live Arcade/PlayStation Network/Wii Virtual Console...

THE "BEST BUDDY" GIFT

DreamAuthentics Katana

OK, time to stop playing the oldies with new-fangled joypads. This tabletop arcade simulator packs honest-to-god buttons, a joystick, and a trackball. You can customize the 70-pound unit (yeah, it's that heavy) with extras like a lightgun and game packages that include everything from *Asteroids* to *Yar's Revenge*.

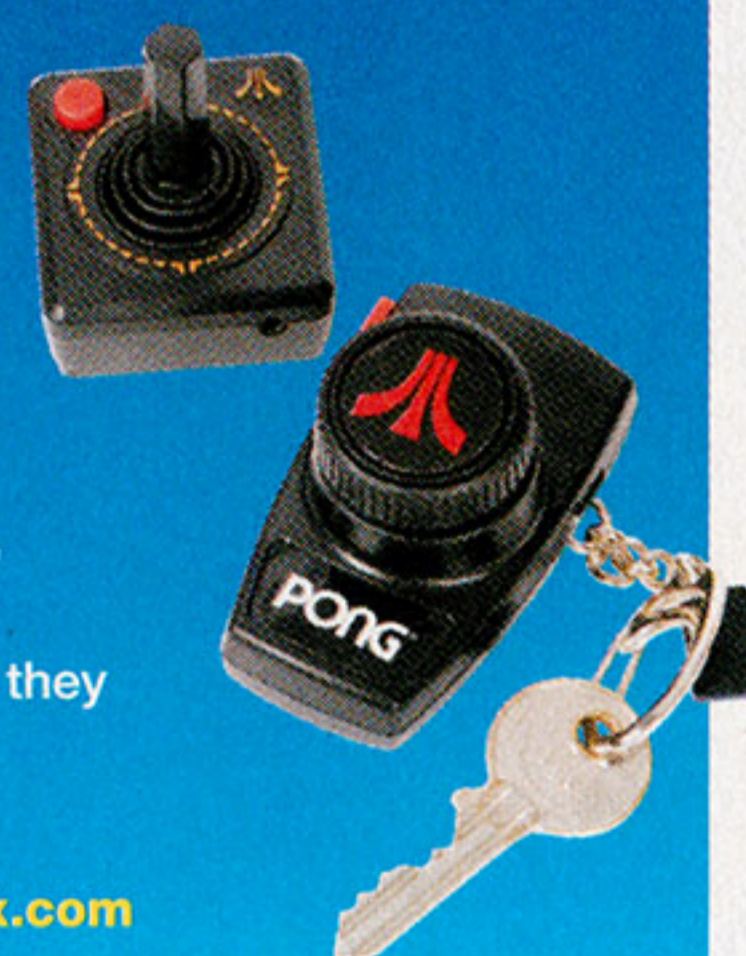


\$2,500 • www.dreamauthentics.com

THE "FRIEND" GIFT

Atari Keychain

It's only as big as your thumb, but these Atari keychains beat the older Atari all-in-one from last year hands down. Choose from three versions: one with *Yar's Revenge* and *Centipede*, one with *Asteroids* and *Millipede*, and a paddle version with *Pong*, *Warlords*, and *Breakout*. Oh, and they also hold your bud's car keys.



\$45 for all three • www.firebox.com

THE "ACQUAINTANCE" GIFT

8-Bit Tie

Don't stare too long at this classic console tie: It might make you feel like you got sucked into *Super Mario* world like in some cheesy '80s virtual-reality movie. It's a clip-on, which is handy for the tie-tying challenged, and the tie is so retro it's even made of polyester so it's spill resistant. We doubt it'll repel fireballs.



\$20 • www.thinkgeek.com

THE "ENEMY" GIFT

Billy Mitchell Hot Sauce

Coin-op champ/hot-sauce mogul Billy Mitchell is a strutting S.O.B. who will stop at nothing to defend his record *Donkey Kong* score—at least if you believe the depiction of events in the coming-to-DVD documentary *The King of Kong*. Turns out the film bends the truth, but that doesn't make the man's hot sauce—a family recipe marketed under the name "Rickey's Hot Sauce"—any less of a "What the...?" gift. Tasty on chicken, too!



From \$3 per bottle • www.800hotsauce.com

EGM Extras:
Our gift guidance continues at EGM.1UP.com, where you'll find a more traditional guide filled with sensible goods for every type of gamer.



THE STORM OF THE CENTURY

BLADESTORM
The Hundred Years' War



Real-time Medieval Action! Massive armies collide in unprecedented scale.

AVAILABLE NOW



PLAYSTATION 3



> FAR-OUT FANS

Awesome etcher:
Elliot Sharron

Sure, (terrible) videogame fan art is pretty common. But bitchin' game-inspired

Etch A Sketch doodles aren't exactly easy to find. Unless, that is, you know the work of Etch A Sketch pro Elliot Sharron. But odds are you don't, so we tracked down the gifted nob-twister to chat about his recent *BioShock* pic (see below). Check out his site (etchasketchist.blogspot.com) for more sweet sketches.

EGM: Why did you choose an Etch A Sketch? Do you suck at drawing?

Elliot Sharron: Nah, you kind of have to be [talented] to do anything on Etch A Sketch. But I'm not a great drawer, so if I did a bunch of drawings of *BioShock*, you wouldn't be coming to my website.

EGM: Come on, just admit it—you have awesome Etch A Sketch skills.

ES: It's not really that I have awesome Etch A Sketch skills, it's more that everyone else in the world is really terrible at it.

EGM: So, if Nintendo makes an Etch A Sketch game for the DS, are you totally going to be there day one?

ES: They'd have to make a nob attachment for the DS to make it cool. But there is an Xbox Live Arcade Etch A Sketch game coming out, and I'm totally going to be there first day.

EGM: Nice. Should we expect to see your name on the credits?

ES: When I heard about it, I e-mailed developer Game Shastra and gave them all my suggestions on how to make it the best ever. But I don't really have high hopes for it....



■ Shockingly simple Daddy.



> FOREIGN OBJECT/JAPAN

Doki Doki
MAJO SHINPAN!

The most perverted witch hunt ever

Platform:
DS

**Likelihood
it'll come
here:**

It's much easier to pass off gratuitous violence than it is to get away with gratuitous groping.



I have a bad feeling about this game already. As you should. SNK Playmore's *Doki Doki Majo Shinpan!* is certified for ages 15 and over by Japan's game-ratings board, which means that the majority of the girls (and one dude) you...well, touch (and pet and blow air on via the DS mic) in-game won't be able to buy this at a Japanese store. It's all for a really good cause, though, trust us—you play a junior high schooler named Akuji who's charged by a passing angel to ferret out all the witches on school grounds. It's kind of like playing *Phoenix Wright*, except instead of grilling witnesses on the stand, you're poking them here and there

with the stylus, searching for their telltale magic witch emblems.

What? Yeah, that's what we thought. But it doesn't take much to keep Japan's wannabe pervs happy—a whole bunch of *Majo Shinpan!*-based merchandise is on sale across Japan right now, and SNK quickly announced a sequel for a 2008 release. But even in an age when everything from *MLB Power Pros* (Wii, PS2) to *GrimGrimoire* (PS2) gets a U.S. release, *Majo Shinpan!* is one title we're reasonably sure will never, ever, ever, ever get translated for our shores. Sorry, sleaze hounds.

I Do Blu.

High Definition TV and Blu-ray...
a picture perfect marriage.



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Order of the Phoenix" and "Superman Returns" available from Warner Home Video.

BlurayDisc.com



CARNAGE REPORT

PLAYERS	KILLS	SUICIDES	DUMB MOVES	SCORE
LiL Poison	50	0	0	50
ItsT2forRealz	41	0	0	41
Abe Froman	38	0	0	38
Neighbor	35	0	0	35
GV David	29	0	0	29
New0001	5	1	0	4
YOU	-47	28	18	GOOSE EGG

Least Valuable Player: YOU

TOP MEDALS

- YOU Self-Killing Spree x4
- YOU Stuck Yourself x2
- YOU Suicide Splatter x2

> TRICKS OF THE TRADE

Pros Know BEST

Halo 3 matchmaking got you down? See how the best of the best play and follow their lead... By Shoe

In case you didn't hear in the million other places we've mentioned this already: Team 1UP Network recently beat Team GamePro in *Halo 3* in a best-of-five series. (Hey, they started the trash talking!)

Thomas "Tsquared" Taylor



Location: Syracuse, NY
Gamertag: ItsT2forRealz
Websites: www.mlgpro.com, www.gaming-lessons.com, www.myspace.com/mlgtsquared
Credentials: Captain of team Str8 Rippin; 2005 and 2007 All-Star MVP; instructor on *Halo* training program gaming-lessons.com
Look sensitivity: 4
Button Layout: Default
Stick layout: Default
Favorite "two hands" weapon: Sniper rifle or energy sword
Favorite dual-wield combo: Maulers
Taylor's multiplayer tips:

1. "Communication with your teammates is key. Be sure to run around the map and create names for parts of the map that are hard to call out."

2. "Try to aim for having complete 'map control.' What this means is: a.) Have control of the power weapons. b.) Higher ground and positioning—it's much harder to win a battle when you're looking up compared to looking down. c.) Have your teammates watching all of the flanks."

3. "Once this is accomplished and the lead is established, don't leave your setup. Be sure to make the other team come to you, and it's a sure victory."

4. "The bubble shield is *clutch* when it comes to Oddball, whether it is a team or free-for-all (FFA) game. Try focusing on getting control of the shield and wait for the opportunity. If you can get a set up with the ball inside of the bubble shield, there will be hardly anything the opponents can do."

5. "Sniping in *Halo 3* is completely different to *Halo 2*. If anything, it's much more similar to the *Halo 1* way of sniping. Instead of using the

autoaim, take your time and line up your shot—even lead it for farther distances."

Mason Cobb



Location: Mukilteo, WA
Gamertag: Neighbor
Website: www.mlgpro.com
Credentials: Tied for first (out of 1,000 players) in the Dallas Free-For-All tournament; second place in the Chicago 4v4 competition; first place in the Orlando 4v4; fifth place Orlando FFA
Look sensitivity: 4
Button Layout: Default
Stick layout: Default (no vibration)
Favorite "two hands" weapon: Sniper rifle
Favorite dual-wield combo: Maulers >

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PLAYSTATION 3



PROS KNOW BEST (cont.)

Cobb's multiplayer tips:

1. "Make sure you communicate with your teammates during the games (i.e., calling out positions of other opponents, timing power weapons)."
2. "Try not to get mad during online play—it makes you play worse."
3. "Practice your battle rifle."
4. "Try to predict your opponents' movements. If you can think a step or two ahead of them, you have the advantage."
5. "If you lose a game, try and analyze what you did well and what went wrong. This is the best way to improve."
6. "In Guardian Team Slayer, I like to have three of my teammates at the sniper tower. One of the guys is on the ramp that goes down to the trees (this guy is watching under the glass), another guy at the bubble-shield spawn just camping there waiting for people to pop out near the camouflage spawn. The other two teammates are just running around the snipe tower grabbing the overshield or using the sniper."

Joseph Tung/Luke Timmins



Location: Seattle, WA

Gamertags: New0001/
Abe Froman SK

Website: www.bungie.net

Credentials: *Halo 3* multiplayer producer (Tung), *Halo 3* engineer (Timmins)—two of the top players on the Bungie development team

Look sensitivity: 4/3

Button Layout: Default/default

Stick layout: Default/default

Favorite "two hands" weapon:

Tung: "Completely map dependent. Sniper rifle on Valhalla, shotgun on Narrows, Needler on Snowbound, etc." Timmins: "Agree about being map dependent. Sniper and shotgun if they are placed, then rifle-class [weapons]."

Favorite dual-wield combo: Tung: "If we are dual-wielding, it either means we are way ahead or losing badly." Timmins: "I dual-wield when I can't find a rifle. When I have to, Mauler in my right hand and Spiker in my left."

Tung and Timmins' multiplayer tips:

1. "Focus on grenade placement. Learn level geometry to be better with brute grenades."
2. "Know which weapons do head-

shot damage and how best to use them."

3. "Understand weapon matchups and when you will lose a firefight. Don't bring a knife to a gunfight."

4. "Focus on your kill/death ratio. You have a recharging shield for a reason, so stop rushing like a chump."

5. "Communicate with your team. If you can get another guy firing at your target or defending the right territory, you're going to win."

6. "Hold the lower 'goo chute' area on Isolation with a battle rifle, and kills will be fed to you."

7. "Learn the virtuous cycle on Guardian that keeps you invisible, armed with a hammer, and bubble-shielded."

8. "If you're on Construct and the other team is camping the lift, for the love of god don't run into the lift."

9. "Dumping grenades into the man cannons on Narrows is a good suppressant when combined with rifle fire."

10. "Jumping from the middle bridge on Narrows directly over to the flag location is a good thing."

11. "Firing off a few quick grenades down rocket alley on The Pit at the start of a round is a great way to get a couple of quick kills."

12. "The overshield location on The Pit is a great spot to hold with a battle rifle, as are the shotgun rooms."

Victor "LiL Poison" De Leon III



Location: Long Island, NY

Gamertag: LiL Poison

Website: www.lilpoison.com

Credentials: The youngest professional gamer in the world; once beat *EGM* editor-in-chief Shoe in *Halo 2* 25-0, then again 25-2.

Look sensitivity: 3

Button Layout: Green Thumb

Stick layout: Default

Favorite "two hands" weapon: Sniper rifle

Favorite dual-wield combo: Maulers or pistols (yes, those pistols...the human ones)

De Leon's multiplayer tips:

1. "Don't rush."
2. "Wait until the other team is down before you grab their flag."
3. "To get the other team mad, just teabag them."
4. "On The Pit, try to get at least two of your team members to rush

for rockets. Rockets are important on that map as well as snipers. One rush for snipes, two for rockets, and the third person for camo."

David Ellis



Location: San Francisco, CA

Gamertag: GV David

Websites: www.gamevideos.com

Credentials: The best *Halo 3* player in our office. Spiritual leader of Team 1UP Network. Yells at the rest of us a lot.

Look sensitivity: 6


Button Layout: Default

Stick layout: Default (no vibration)

Favorite "two hands" weapon: Spartan laser

Favorite dual-wield combo: Spiker and Mauler

Ellis' multiplayer tips:

1. "Don't be afraid to drop a grenade at your feet when you die. You'll often take your killer out with you."
2. "Learn to glance at your radar with your peripheral vision. Situational awareness is important."
3. "It may sound obvious, but always go for upper torso/headshots. They do more damage."
4. "If you and an enemy are face-to-face and shooting at each other, jump directly over him. While in the air, look down and melee. Most of the time you'll get an assassination for your ninja efforts."
5. "When using the shotgun in close quarters, *always* melee after firing the shotgun at your target."
6. "On Narrows, have your best sniper stand at the back of the map. Even if he doesn't kill everyone coming across the middle, he can call out enemy movements to the team."
7. "On Isolation, hold the rockets and ghost. It's difficult for a team to coordinate when someone is ramming into them every 10 seconds."
8. "On The Pit, if you have a good sniper to cover you from the opposing team's sniper, drop a regenerator by your turret. You'll be almost invincible on the turret and can easily take out several enemies by yourself."
9. "On Snowbound, control either the laser or sniper and the shotgun pit. If you have the laser, have someone on your team grab the ghost, as it's very effective on the map because the snowmounds provide ample cover from small-arms fire." 

EGM Extras:
Need more multiplayer and campaign mode help? Go to EGM.1UP.com for a link to our Halo 3 SuperGuide for more strategy and tips.

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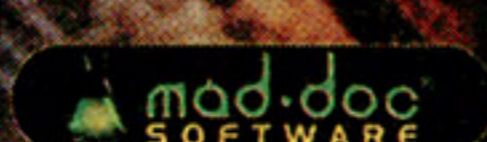
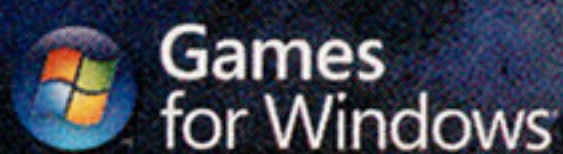


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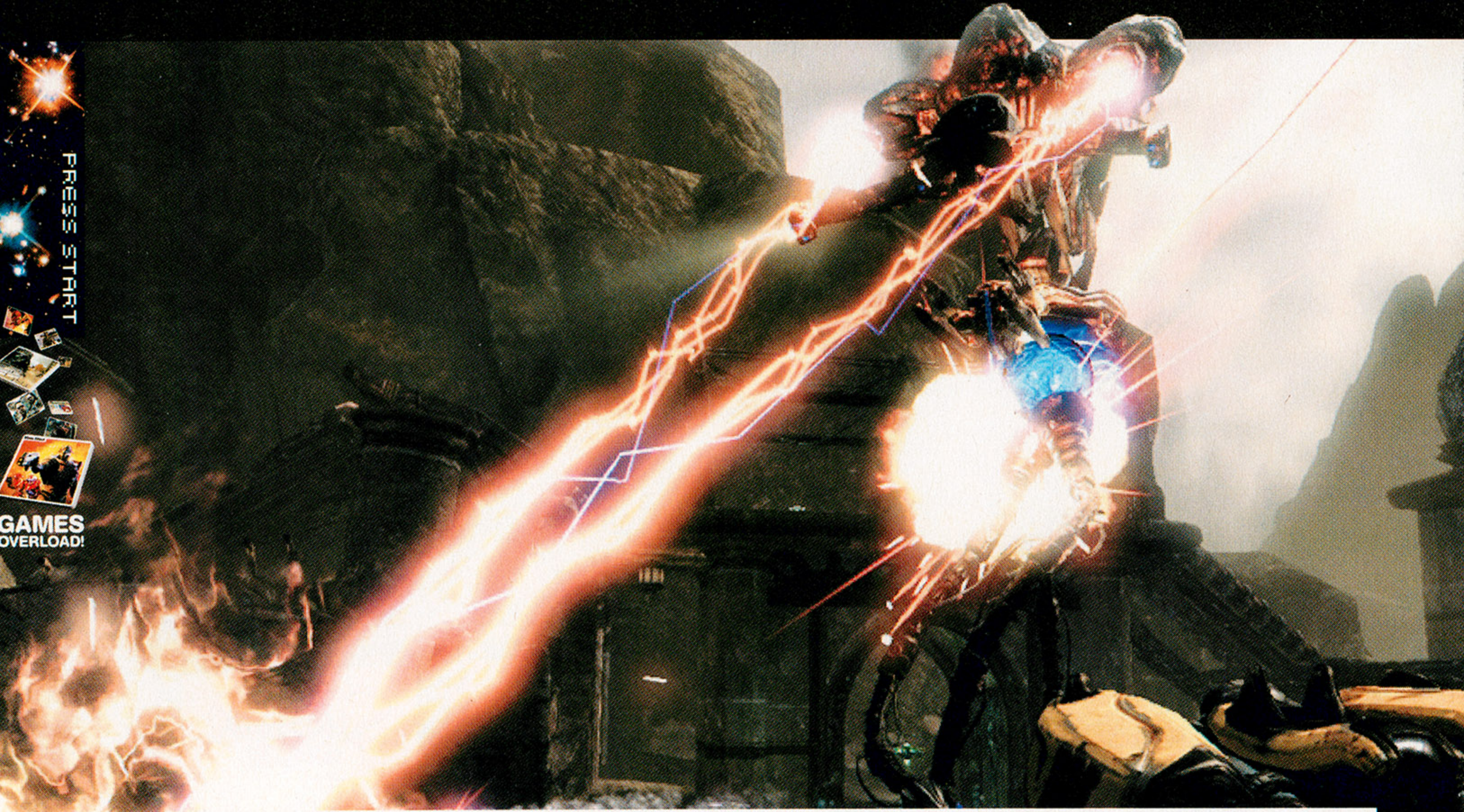
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> PREVIEW: EXCLUSIVE HANDS-ON

Unreal Tournament

Bringing a new form of firepower to the PS3
By Patrick Klepek

Platform: PS3
Publisher: Midway
Developer: Epic Games
Release Date: December 2007 / Early 2008

IF YOU'RE A CONSOLE GAMER, you can't really be blamed for automatically being suspicious of *Unreal Tournament* games—none have been a “sure thing” like on the PC. Despite several attempts from Epic Games to adapt its fast-paced, multiplayer-centric first-person shooter series for the controller-wielding crowd (*Unreal Championship 2* and its melee-centered combat being the most recent effort), the developer is still looking for a console home run.

The *Gears of War* maker will try to change that with *Unreal Tournament 3*, building the PC version right alongside the PS3 edition. Thing is, *UT3* doesn't play like any other shooter on a console right now. It's not *Halo 3*, *Gears of War*, or *Resistance: Fall of Man*—and one of those actually came from Epic. But just because it's different doesn't mean it can't be excellent in its own right.

UT3 VS. HALO 3 Master Chief this ain't

Halo's gameplay is deliberately slower-paced to create a sense of dread before an encounter. With only two weapons per player, planning is everything. Not in *UT3*. This game's matches, whether deathmatch, capture the flag, or Warfare (an objective-based gameplay mode requiring gamers to capture nodes), are frenzied fragfests where bullets, globs of goo, and body parts are constantly flying across the screen. Trust us, you will die here and die often, but most of the time it won't matter. Players instantly respawn, meaning dramatic match changes only take a single damage multiplier and a few multikills for someone to be right back on top. And whereas *Halo's* weapons have been fine-tuned across a trilogy to reflect specific strengths and weaknesses, every *Unreal* gun is capable of ripping someone apart. All the weapons feel powerful; every weapon hurts. Between the dozens of vehicles, weapons, and power-ups, *UT3* is less about fine-tuning any specific strategy as much as it's about getting blown up and jumping right back in. Think of it like an arcade game; every time you die, just pop in another quarter.



UT3 VS. GEARS OF WAR

Cover is for cowards

Charge into a group of enemies in *Gears of War* and it's pretty much lights out in seconds. Flanking, taking advantage of the environment's various means of cover, and deliberately hiding from the opposition until the timing is right is essential to its mechanics. Whether during the campaign or multiplayer, you're always working in teams, and combat's never about being a one man army.

Cover really doesn't exist in *UT3*. Gamers have a better chance of surviv-

ing by stocking up on armor power-ups and hopping in vehicles. In *UT3*, free-for-all and team-based games coexist, and unlike *Gears*, a single person can often turn the tide and save the day.

UT3 does share a weakness with Epic's 360 affair, though: the story. *Gears* tried to establish a unique mythology, but it rang pretty hollow. *UT3* only seems to succeed in dumping cut-scenes between otherwise standard multiplayer matches, except you're battling with (and against) the



surprisingly smart A.I. We're promised the story becomes more interesting later, but the first few hours do little but introduce us to flat space marines that could easily be mistaken for characters from the eventual *Gears* sequel.

Think of it like an arcade game; every time you die, just pop in another quarter.

UT3 VS. RESISTANCE: FALL OF MAN

Don't resist

Turns out we were lying: *Resistance* fans will feel right at home with *UT3*. The two games share the exhilarating speed (though *UT3* is undeniably faster) and nonstop action that uniquely defines their multiplayer experiences. Each also has a taste for strange and ridiculous weapons with alternate-fire options that provide dozens of options for any given combat situation.

But *UT3* offers a broader range of gameplay, thanks largely to the many drivable vehicles (including a new hov-

erboard) and the potential for users to infinitely carry on the life of the game via mods (see sidebar). Still, *UT3*'s single-player campaign mostly just demonstrates game types. For example, understanding how to command the A.I.-driven bots, crucial to remaining competitive in offline matches, is completely unaddressed. That might work for PC vets familiar with the series, but console folks are new to this.

Whether *UT3* ends up arriving for PS3 this year or next (Epic says not to



count it out of 2007 yet), it's shaping up to be a real treat for PS3 owners—meaning it won't embarrass those not versed on a mouse and keyboard.

MAKE IT YOUR OWN

Halo 3's Forge mode is cool, but a true level editor it is not. When *UT3* ships on PC, Epic will be bundling their complete suite of dev tools. PC developers have long made their tools available to the community—what's special here is that Epic is including PS3. This means PS3 owners will have access to fresh modes, weapons, and levels—even completely new games if people are ambitious enough.

The specifics haven't been worked out, but, essentially, the tools come with an "export to PS3" option that makes PC user content playable on PS3. You can download mods from the Web, store them on a memory stick, then immediately start playing with them. We're not sure how Epic and publisher Midway will filter the content, but they're committed to bringing this potentially revolutionary experience to PS3 owners.



EGM Extras: Head to EGM.1UP.com to see exclusive footage of this PS3 shooter, plus hear what the 1UP Network editors think about *UT3*'s chances in the console realm.



Learning a Trade

Swap your bad game gifts for rad ones with our guide to game-trading sites **By Kyle Orland**

Turning in used games for store credit is so pre-Internet, so we're rating the five biggest companies that let you trade online. Most of these sites use their own points-based pseudocurrency: You earn points for sending games requested by others and you pay points to get games you want (or you can buy points with a credit card). The sender pays shipping while the recipient pays a small fee to the trading company (listed as "recipient cost" below, which is how they make their money). Let's comparison swap....

	The Basics	Sign-up Bonus	Recipient Cost*	Selection	Interface	Overall Rating
Goozex goozex.com	Goozex's point system ranges from 100 points for clunkers like <i>Aero Wings</i> up to 1,000 for new stuff like <i>Blue Dragon</i> (you can buy points for about a nickel apiece). The big user base means a wide selection for recent systems, but you're SOL for anything before the Game Boy Advance. Also, new members can only have two trades going at a time until they build a good rating.	One free trade plus \$5 in points	\$1 per trade	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●
Game Trading Zone gametz.com	Growing out of a mid-'90s Usenet community, Game Trading Zone still resembles a message board more than a formal game-trading site. Instead of a point system, you have to propose direct trades of money/games with other users. There's no buyer protection either—members are on their honor to deal fairly. But the legwork and risk are worth it: Support for all sorts of classic systems and a community of over 4,000 members means you're sure to find someone with the game you want or who wants the game you're sick of.	None	None	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●
BarterBee barterbee.com	While other sites have preset point values for their games' prices, BarterBee lets traders set the values themselves. All that competition can make for great deals, but it also means you might overpay if you aren't careful. Despite the trader freedom and cheap, insured mailers, BarterBee's selection is a bit weak—especially compared to the site's CD- and DVD-trading branches.	5 points (enough for a crappy old game)	\$1 per trade	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●
SaySwap sayswap.com	Unlike other sites with point scales, SaySwap dumps games into four incremental groups. That's great for high-priced goods—nothing costs more than 40 points. But it also means all games in the \$20 to \$39.99 range cost the same in points. The price per trade is a bit higher than those of the competition and the interface leaves a bit to be desired, but the sign-up bonus and a decent selection make this one still worth considering.	\$20 in purchase points	\$2.49 for first trade; between \$3 - \$4 if you buy in bulk	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●
GameSwap gameswap.com	While GameSwap does offer a free membership option, you have to lay out \$20 to \$35 to upgrade your status, which yields preferred search placement and more initial trade credits to get you started. A limited selection (only the hottest games tend to be available) and a horrible Flash interface put this one at the bottom.	Varies by membership type	\$5 per trade (less for upgraded members)	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●	● ● ● ●

*These costs can vary slightly if trades are purchased in bulk.

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> PREVIEW: EXCLUSIVE SCREENS AND INFO

Lost ODYSSEY

Is Mistwalker's next role-playing game a blockbuster in the making, or just another Final Fantasy-come-lately?

By Jeremy Parish

Platform: LIVING FOREVER REALLY SUCKS.

XB360

Publisher:

Microsoft Game Studios

Developer:

Mistwalker

Release Date:

Spring 2008

That's what *Lost Odyssey* would have us believe, anyway. Developer Mistwalker's (*Blue Dragon*) upcoming Xbox 360-exclusive role-playing game tells the tale of five immortals drawn together after a thousand years of cranky, miserable undeath. To hammer the point across, the creators have even hired an esteemed Japanese novelist to flesh out the main character's backstory and prove that, yeah, it totally bites to outlive everything and everyone you love dearly by a matter of centuries.

Of course, this is a game directed by Hironobu Sakaguchi, Mr. *Final Fantasy* himself, which means that none of the immortals actually *remember* their long, dreary existences. In Sakaguchi's world, amnesia is less a tragic affliction than a way of life—and *Lost Odyssey* is nothing if not the heir apparent to his RPG legacy. Everything from character archetypes to the turn-based combat system

has been cribbed straight from the *Final Fantasy* playbook. Sure, it's all refracted through the unfamiliar lens of a new artist—legendary manga creator Takehiko Inoue (*Vagabond*, *Slam Dunk*) provides the character designs, which tend more toward the “lanky and busty” end of the spectrum than your standard hairsprayed *FF* warriors. But anyone who cut their teeth playing Square's blockbusters should feel right at home.

Still, many gamers might balk upon learning that 20 of the game's estimated 50 hours are dedicated to cinematics. Even RPG fans tend to prefer playing their games to simply watching them, especially when those story sequences suffer from eerily

unrealistic people acting and emoting in a not-quite-convincing way. Despite guidance from Roy Sato, who served as senior animator on the ill-fated flick *Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within*, *Odyssey's* characters lack a certain spark. Odd (and sometimes choppy) story animation aside, though, it looks pretty enough, with Inoue's detailed characters exploring beautiful environments. And that shouldn't come as a big surprise, given that Unreal Engine 3 (which also powered the likes of *Gear of War* and *BioShock*) is what you'll find under *Odyssey's* hood.

That's unusual for a Japanese-developed title; licensing game engines still hasn't caught on overseas. Then again, this combination

➤ **Still, many gamers might balk upon learning that 20 of the game's 50 hours are dedicated to cinematics.**

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of big-name Japanese creators and random nods to American sensibilities is one of *Odyssey's* defining features. Mistwalker clearly hopes to create an international hit with this RPG, not only aiming for near-simultaneous global release dates but even going as far as synching the characters' voice acting to the English dialogue. "Japanese gamers are used to seeing dubbed voices," explains Microsoft Product Manager Hees Kyung. "That's how Hollywood blockbusters are presented to Japan, and Sakaguchi wants this to be like watching an epic, emotional movie."

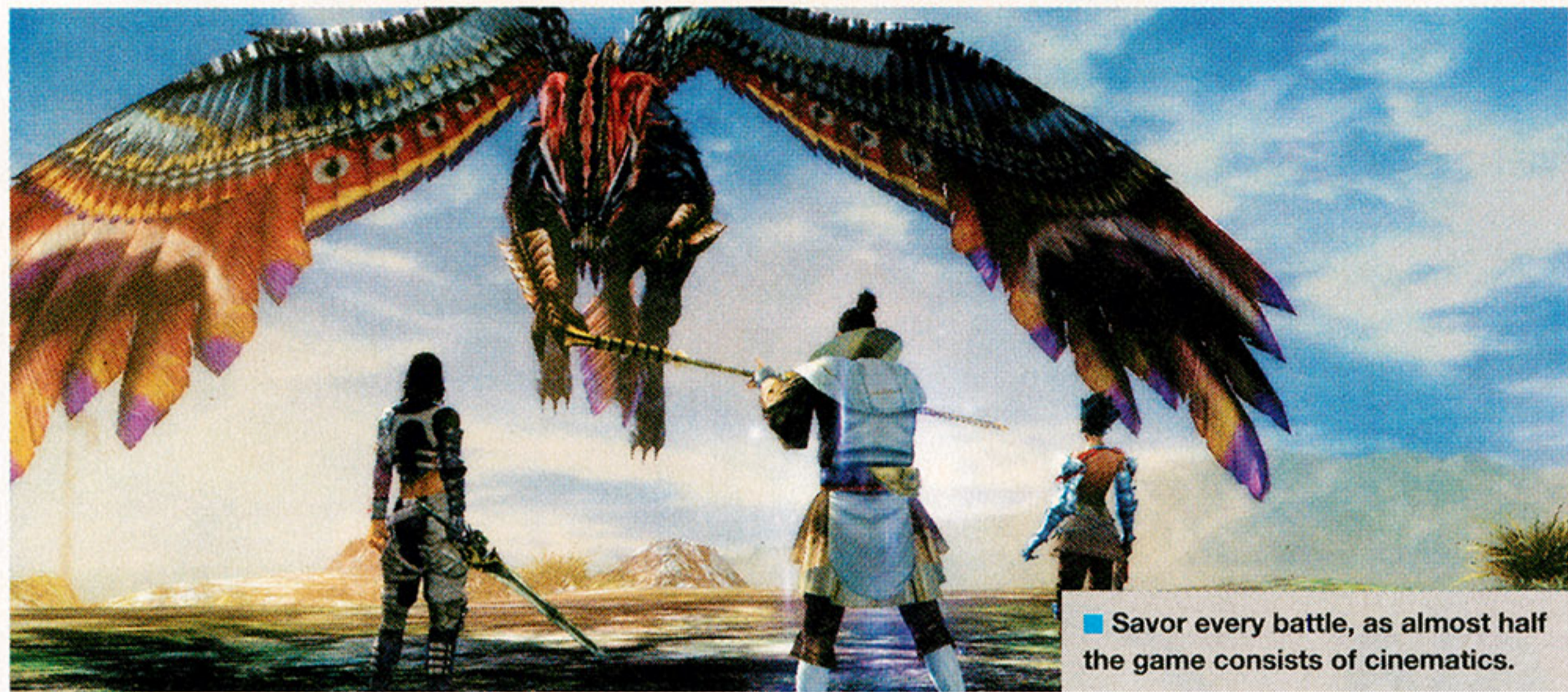
Despite the emphasis on story and the prodigious amount of cut-scenes, though, *Odyssey* is still an RPG first and foremost, and its gameplay mechanics should be familiar to Sakaguchi fans. Battles are turn-based, similar to *Blue Dragon*, with a set of icons indicating the precise sequence in which combatants will act. Players can boost attacks with proper timing; every basic attack is accompanied by an animated ring that can enhance or weaken a character's striking power. It's not unlike *Shadow Hearts' (PS2) Ring of Judgment*, but here players try to align multiple concentric circles rather than freezing a sweeping dial.

Players can also choose from the usual assortment of special moves and magic. Spells are divided into white, black, and spirit categories (healing, attack, and buffs, essentially), with a fourth category called composite magic, which allows players to mix spells from the other categories

and create new magic skills with a higher mana cost. Any combination is possible, which is likely where much of the game's strategy will come into play. For instance, when battling a fire-based monster with a habit of poisoning characters, a composite water/curative spell would hit the foe's

elemental weakness while keeping the player's party healthy.

The divide between mortal and immortal characters is more than just a plot device; it also affects combat. While the five immortals are far more powerful than their short-lived companions, they're also incapable of >



■ Savor every battle, as almost half the game consists of cinematics.

> YOU'RE LIVING IN DREAMTIME, BABY

While *Lost Odyssey's* story is very much the brainchild of Director Hironobu Sakaguchi, novelist Kiyoshi Shigematsu is responsible for fleshing out much of its past in the form of 30 vignettes about main character Kaim's history. Unlocked as the player progresses through the adventure, these brief story sequences are presented as simple text on abstract, static backgrounds, accompanied by mournful piano melodies by Composer Nobuo Uematsu (who many people will know from his work on the *Final Fantasy* series).

It's an unusual feature for a console game, though not entirely without precedent. Text-based "visual novel" games are a healthy niche in Japan, and even the Western-made *Metroid Prime 3* and

Halo 3 feature in-game text to help flesh out their respective backstories. Still, those action-game terminals offer dozens of words—a pittance next to the thousands in each of *Lost Odyssey's* "dreams."

One such dream tells of Kaim's encounter with an orphaned girl whose dishonest habits made her the bane of her hometown, and how Kaim's immortal perspective helped him see the realities that gave birth to her habitual lies. The text reads very much like Japanese literature: crisp, philosophical, and touching. More significantly, it lends substance to Kaim's character that the in-game cinematics (plentiful as they are) seem unlikely to realize. But we wonder if American gamers will cotton to so much reading?



■ *Lost Odyssey's* downloadable content will be along the lines of *Blue Dragon's*, so expect stuff like bonus dungeons.



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innately learning new abilities. Instead, they're forced to learn magic and special techniques from the party's active mortal characters. And since mortals possess higher innate mana, immortals will need to draw magic points from them during combat, too. The trade-off is that durable frontline characters can actively prevent back-row fighters from suffering severe damage in battle by keeping their wall meter—a sort of health-based shield—high. This works both ways, though. Enemy parties often employ their own wall meter to protect important foes, and some monsters can even siphon magic from their comrades, just like the player's immortals do.

Much about *Odyssey* remains maddeningly unknown. Microsoft still wasn't ready to show us certain underpinnings such as the Ring System, which apparently determines the party's abilities (and, we're told, some sort of character class structure). That's a little worrying with less than two months until the Japanese release...especially since the U.S. version is being developed in tandem. While *Odyssey* aspires to be the next *Final Fantasy*, Square Enix always takes the time to polish up its flagship titles and make them feel perfect, delays be damned. At the moment, *Odyssey* gives us the unfortunate impression of a game being rushed to meet a deadline—and if that's really the case, this RPG contender could end up as just another wannabe. 🐸

 **EGM Extras:** Go ahead and set your Internet browser to EGM.1UP.com for exclusive footage of Mistwalker's next Xbox 360 role-playing game.

> LOST FANTASY

Lost Odyssey feels a bit like the *Final Fantasy* that Director Hironobu Sakaguchi never made. Or rather, the one he would've made if *The Spirits Within* movie hadn't bled so much money that Square kicked him to the curb. The turn-based battle system builds on *Final Fantasy X*'s, while the Ring system (for developing character talents) sounds an awful lot like the *FFX* Sphere Grid. Consider as well these oh-so-*Final* factors:

- The immortal Kaim's an amnesiac—just like Terra, Cloud, Squall, Tidus, and pretty much every *FF* hero.
- It features a cantankerous old coot who flies an airship by the name of "Sed." We presume this is because they couldn't get away with calling him "Cid."
- Feisty young twins Mack and Cooke are essentially *FFIV*'s feisty young twins Palom and Porom, all the way down to the colors of their costumes. Plus, gloomy hero Kaim is a dead ringer for *FFIV*'s gloomy antihero Kain, while party member Ming closely resembles Rosa.
- Eventually, you will fly around this world in an airship. And the music will sound exactly like a *Final Fantasy* airship theme.

Derivative, or simply Sakaguchi reclaiming what he believes is rightly his? Either way, we're betting that gamers who hate *FF*'s recent massively multiplayer stylings and dread *FFXIII*'s one-two combo of zippers and too-aggressive franchising will love it regardless.



■ Main-man Kaim may be 1,000 years old, but he remains a loyal customer of Forever 21.

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RUMOR MILL

A boatload of scuttlebutt By Quartermann



Resurrected Rumors:

The Q has been on a roll lately. A few months back, I teased that publisher Capcom was resurrecting its classic platformer *Bionic Commando* for consoles. Looks like my little tease turned out to be true.

UGH—I PREDICT I'M GOING TO HAVE A HOLIDAY HANGOVER. Look at all the games in this issue. Just look! How am I supposed to search for juicy scuttlebutt when the gaming gods are flooding my floor with titles? Boy, I could really use an intern. And a time machine. Or maybe an intern that can build a time machine. Yes, now I'm getting somewhere. Anyway, feast on these festive rumors.

Blu-rapture

Jeez, I am getting doused with *BioShock* dirt. First, I hear it's going to eventually emerge on the PS3. Or so I thought—a couple of months ago, I got new intel saying that Microsoft fitted publisher 2K with a rather large moneyhat to keep it 360 exclusive. So is Sony really testing *BioShock*'s waters? Here's the latest gossip I fished up: It appears ***BioShock* is back on with the PS3.** Hey, 2K, will you kindly let this happen, please? Partly for your sake, but mostly for mine...so I can finally shut up about it.

Trivia touchdown

EA is extremely good at making games. Or should I say selling games? Either way, the publisher knows a lot

about videogames. But what about game...shows? No, EA isn't making *Wink Martindale's Tic-Tac-Dough 2009* (god, I wish), but it is teeing up *EA Sports GameShow*, a live, DJ-hosted sports-trivia game for PCs. And it seems like it wants to get console gamers guessing, too—my EA mole tells me **EA's trivia title will eventually appear on Xbox Live** and branch off into other entertainment topics like TV and movies.

Shrinking snake

Sure, it sucks that *Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots* isn't coming out until next year, but at least Snake is still slithering on the PSP this winter with *Portable Ops Plus*. And possibly

something else—my spy let slip that publisher **Konami is gearing up yet another *Metal Gear* game for Sony's handheld.** Oh, it's not another wacky spin-off, either, but something that harkens back to the early days.

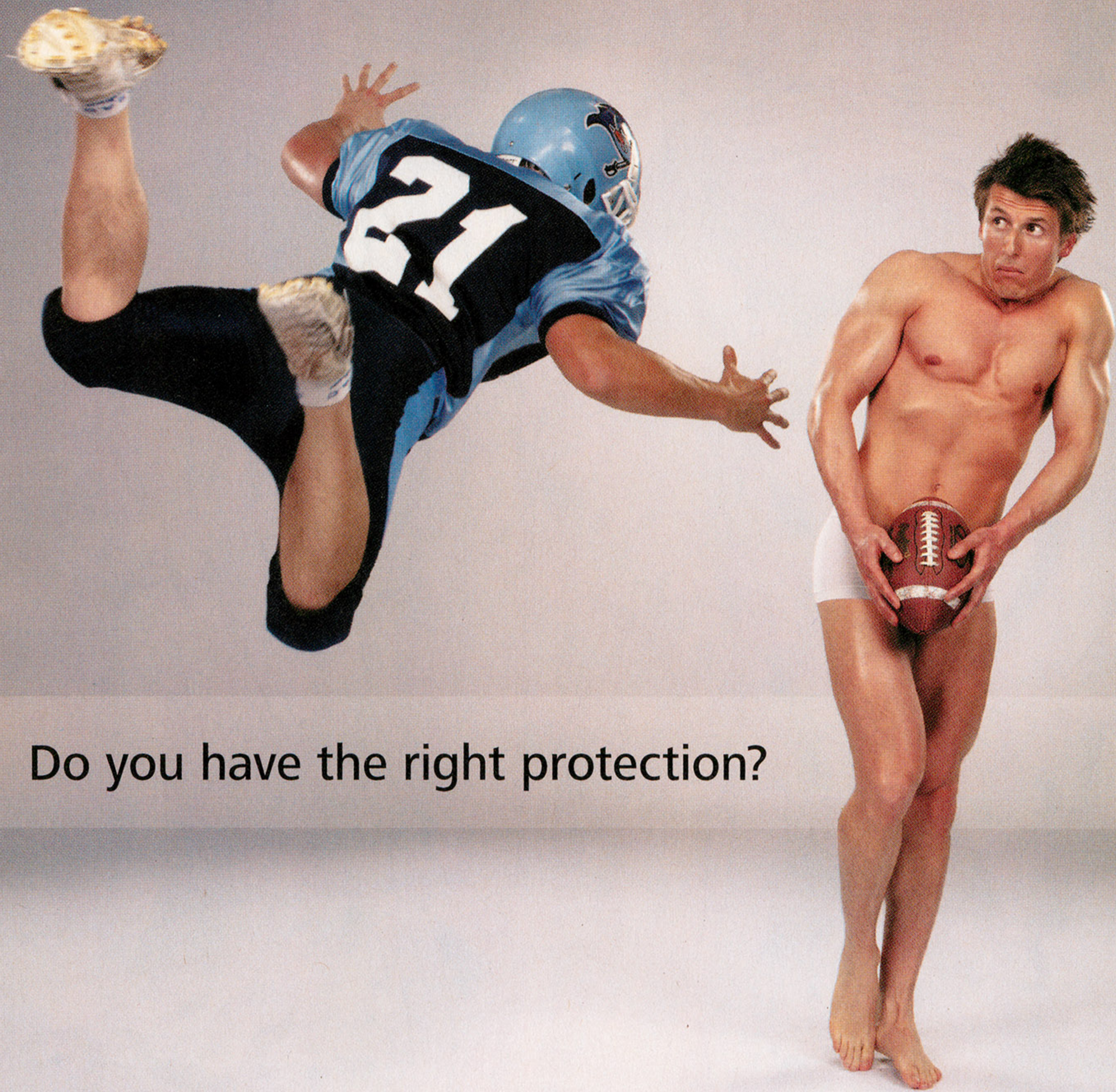
Real corporate hero

Back in the '80s, things were badass: cassette tapes transformed into robots, furies attacked mummies, and army men battled anaconda-loving terrorists. Isn't that totally rad? EA thinks so. It appears the **megapublisher is making a game based on the upcoming live-action *G.I. Joe* flick.** Not only that, but I also hear it's polishing up developer Shiny (*Enter the Matrix*) to make it. 🦖

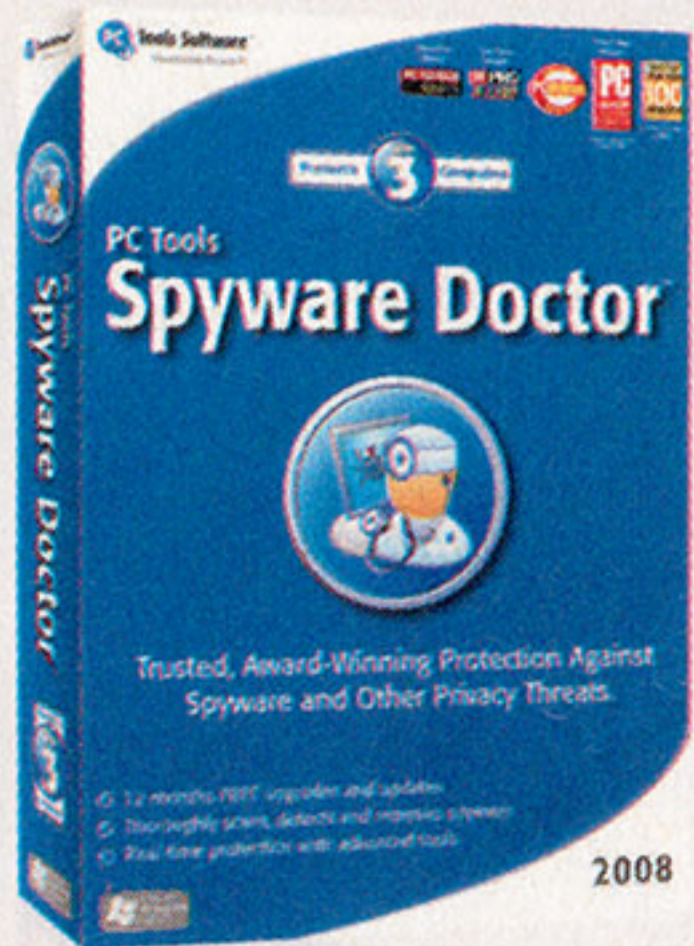
> Q-TIPS

- Wrestle buffs, I got two words for ya: *No Mercy*. Word is THQ is updating the Nintendo 64 classic with new rosters for Nintendo's new WiiWare service.
- Last year's *Sonic* left our heads spinning with disgust. But things may change—apparently, Sega is taking another stab at a real *Sonic* game.
- EA makes tons of racers, but one has been in the shop for a while. Not for much longer, though—my sources say a new *Road Rash* is in the works.

PC World 'Best Buy', October 2007, Best Anti-Spyware of the year 2006 Computer Shopper and 2005 PC Magazine.



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Mild Language
Violence
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PlayStation 2



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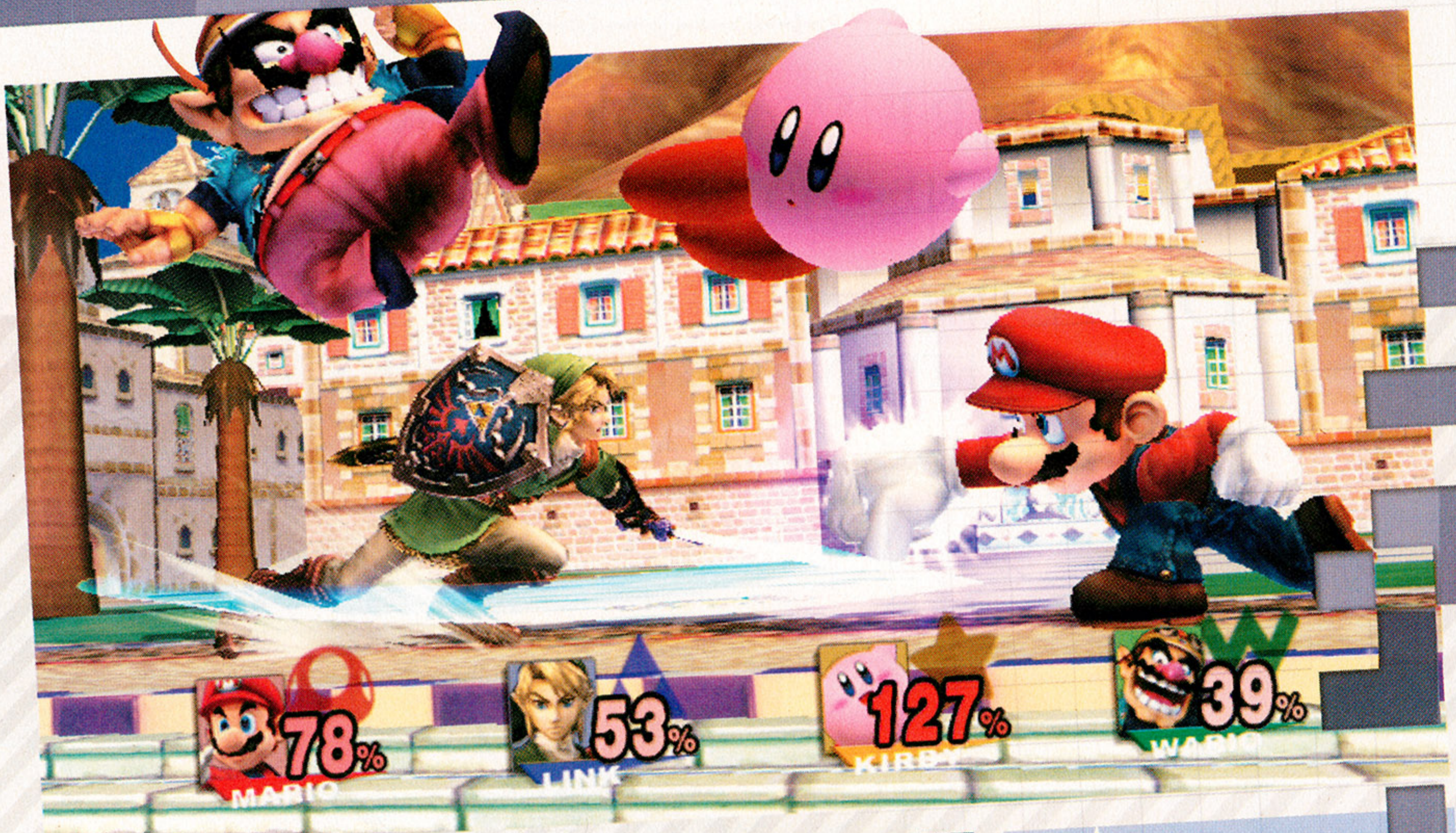
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Wii

SUPER SMASH BROS. BRAWL

■ Publisher: Nintendo ■ Developer: Nintendo ■ Players: 1-4 ■ ESRB:

Child-Predator Free

THE VERDICTS
(OUT OF 10)

SUSHI-X
??
ON HOLD

STEVE
??
ON HOLD

ED
?
HOLD

Delay of game

+SUSHI-X: Being EGM's official fighting-game expert and proud hater of anything Gamewise, my time with Super Smash Bros. Brawl was...
ing. Rev
p
te

STEVE: Is Brawl the best under the hood? As the

+ED: wrong about the fighter. Just

The Good: Online play, should be very polished
The Bad: We have to wait a few n

s couldn't be more Nintendo's four-way fact that you shi, that Brawl




Unfinished BUSINESS

Find out why some of the hottest games slipped into 2008, and more importantly, whether they'll be worth the wait

BEST YEAR EVER? That's definitely what we were thinking back in January, as 2007's release calendar featured an unprecedented amount of big-name titles (*Halo 3*, *Grand Theft Auto IV*, *Super Smash Bros. Brawl*, just to name a few). But then month after month, it was almost like Ebenezer Scrooge and his bah-hum-bug ways took over the videogame biz, pushing several major releases out of the holiday season.

So as much as we'd hoped to review the likes of *Metal Gear Solid 4* and *Too Human* in this very issue, it ain't gonna happen. Instead, we'll examine why these two—and many more—got delayed, and if they'll help make 2008 the year we thought this one would be. >

 **EGM Extras:** Visit EGM.1UP.com to see videos of several of the delayed games highlighted throughout this feature.

Super Smash Bros. Brawl

Wii • Nintendo • February 2008

Why was it delayed? In a sense, you can blame Shigeru Miyamoto. The *Mario* creator and Nintendo's head creative force once uttered these words of wisdom: "A delayed game is eventually good; a bad game is bad forever." It's basically become Nintendo's mantra, which is notorious for continually adjusting release dates for its homegrown software. So while the move of *Super Smash Bros. Brawl*'s launch from December to February is surely a disappointment for Wii owners, it's hardly a surprise.

What exactly led to the two-month delay? Nintendo isn't talking, but we bet it has to do with the online mode.

Game Director Mashiho Sakurai recently confirmed through the *Brawl* website that it would indeed feature Internet-based fights against three other friends or strangers. And since Nintendo doesn't exactly have much online experience, we wouldn't be shocked if that particular mode required a bit more testing.

Worth the wait? After getting in a few rounds with *Brawl*, we can say that the series has definitely made a successful transition to the Wii. Just don't expect any revolutionary changes to the skirmishes; the improvements are much more subtle. The first notable addition is the

Smash Ball, a glowing power-up that players will feverishly battle to break open because it grants their character the ability to execute what is essentially a finishing move, such as Samus' screen-wide laser shot or the blue blur's transformation into Super Sonic (yes, the hedgehog is finally part of the *Smash* roster). Assist Trophies are also new here. These items not only provide wonderful aid during fights, but from *Punch Out*'s Little Mac to the sprite-looking militia from *Advance Wars*, are also a very blatant form of Nintendo fan service.

And classic bouts are just a fraction of what *Brawl* has to offer. You've got online play, the new story-based adventure mode (it's basically a side-scroller that can be played cooperatively), and a yet-to-be revealed "creating and sharing" function. Yep, this game will pack quite a punch.

➤ **After getting in a few rounds with *Brawl*, we can say that the series has definitely made a successful transition to the Wii.**



Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots

PS3 • Konami • March 2008

Why was it delayed? Even the big dogs can fear the crowded shopping season, as *MGS3*'s poor sales in '04 helped convince Konami to push back Solid Snake's sneaky final tale.

Worth the wait? It's sure nice to know that the extra time is being used wisely. "It's affording me the opportunity to do playtesting in the U.S. and Europe," says Assistant Producer Ryan Payton. "This has never been done for an *MGS* title."



Star Wars: The Force Unleashed

Wii/PS3/XB360 • LucasArts • Spring 2008

Why was it delayed? Since LucasArts keeps the real reason close to its chestplate, we imagine the recent announcement of a Wii version contributed to *The Force Unleashed* being pushed back.

Worth the wait? Playing as Darth Vader's Sith subordinate does seem cool, but the unpredictable nature of *Star Wars* games (for every *Battlefront*, we get garbage like *Revenge of the Sith*) keeps our hopes in check.

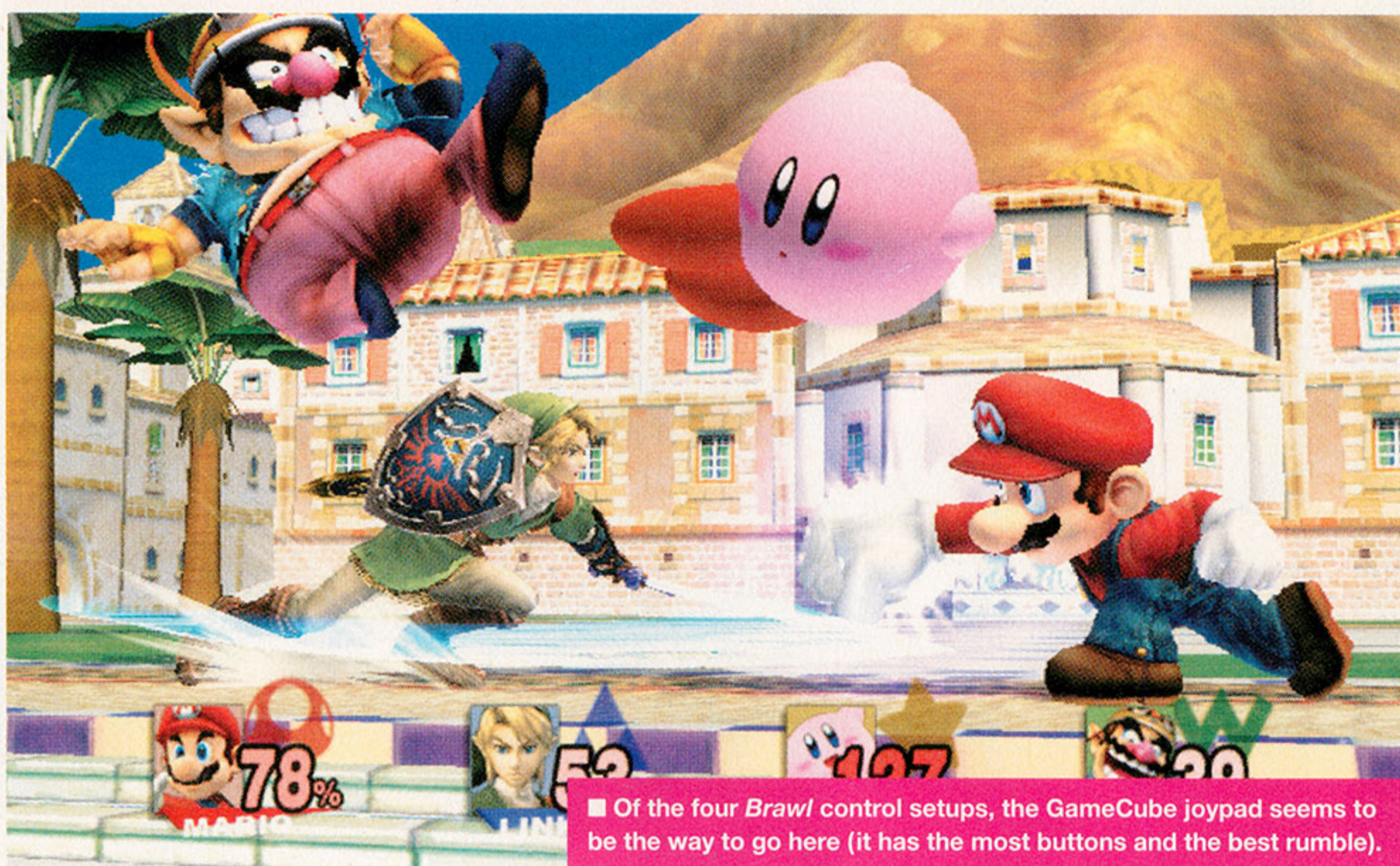


Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway

PS3/XB360 • Ubisoft • Spring 2008

Why was it delayed? "We could've cut corners and rushed it out," says President Randy Pitchford of developer Gearbox Software, "but [we] want the game to be really good."

Worth the wait? A few extra months for this WWII first-person shooter will equate into grander destructible environments and the addition of realistic-looking injuries (the total opposite of *Soldier of Fortune: Payback*).



■ Of the four *Brawl* control setups, the GameCube joypad seems to be the way to go here (it has the most buttons and the best rumble).

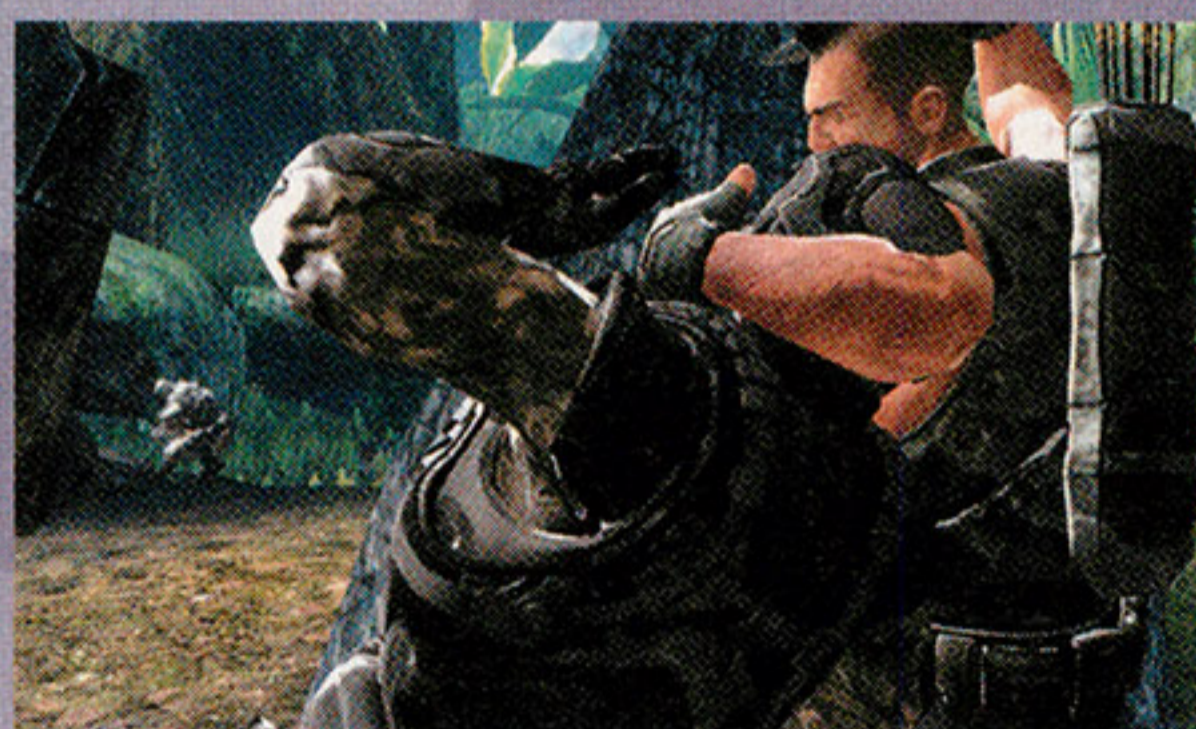


Dark Sector

PS3/XB360 • D3Publisher • Spring 2008

Why was it delayed? "It really boils down to the holiday rush," says Producer Sheldon Carter of developer Digital Extremes. "You get protective of it and really want people to be able to see it stand alone outside of the huge mix of holiday titles."

Worth the wait? A li'l more prep time is not only helping make the game and its blade-tossing newcomer prettier but also give the pacing a much-needed adrenaline shot.



Turok

PS3/XB360 • Touchstone • February 2008

Why was it delayed? "It's allowed us to put a lot of extra polish on the game," explains General Manager Josh Holmes of developer Propaganda.

Worth the wait? It looks promising, with a highly focused, *Halo*-esque approach to man-versus-dinosaur gunplay. "We don't want to win one of your magazine's Tobias Bruckner awards," Holmes tells us, referring to *EGM*'s annual craptacular accolade named after *Turok Evolution*'s silly villain.



Battlefield: Bad Company

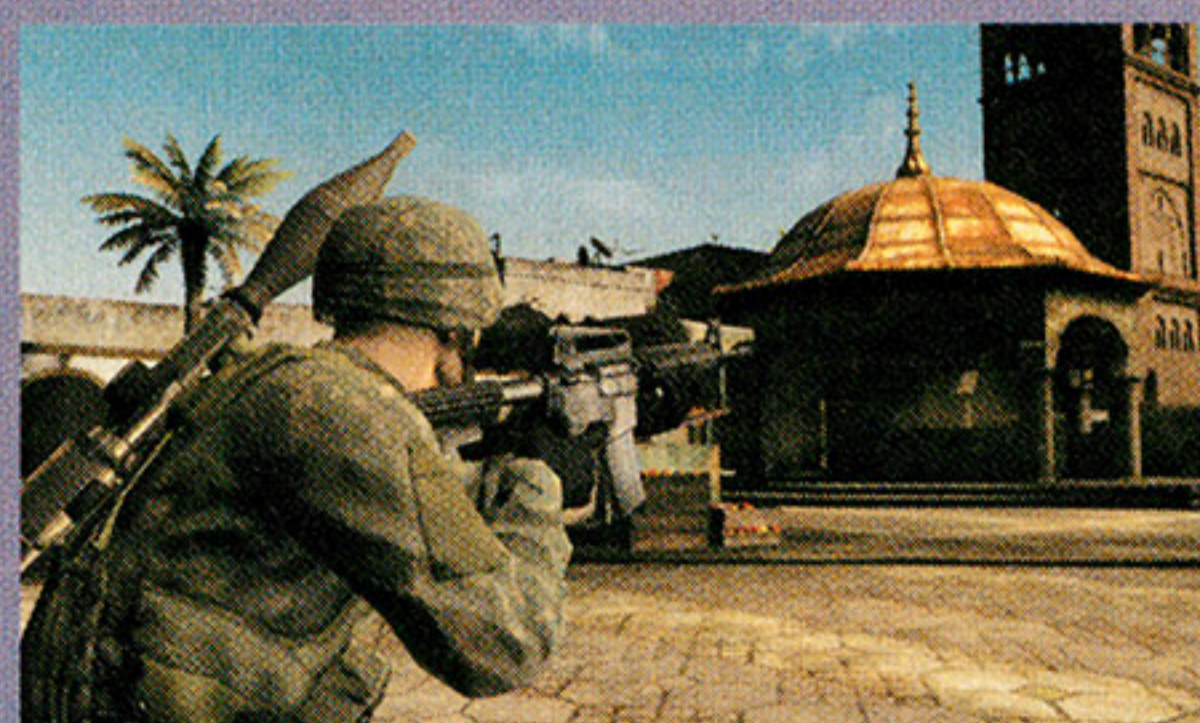
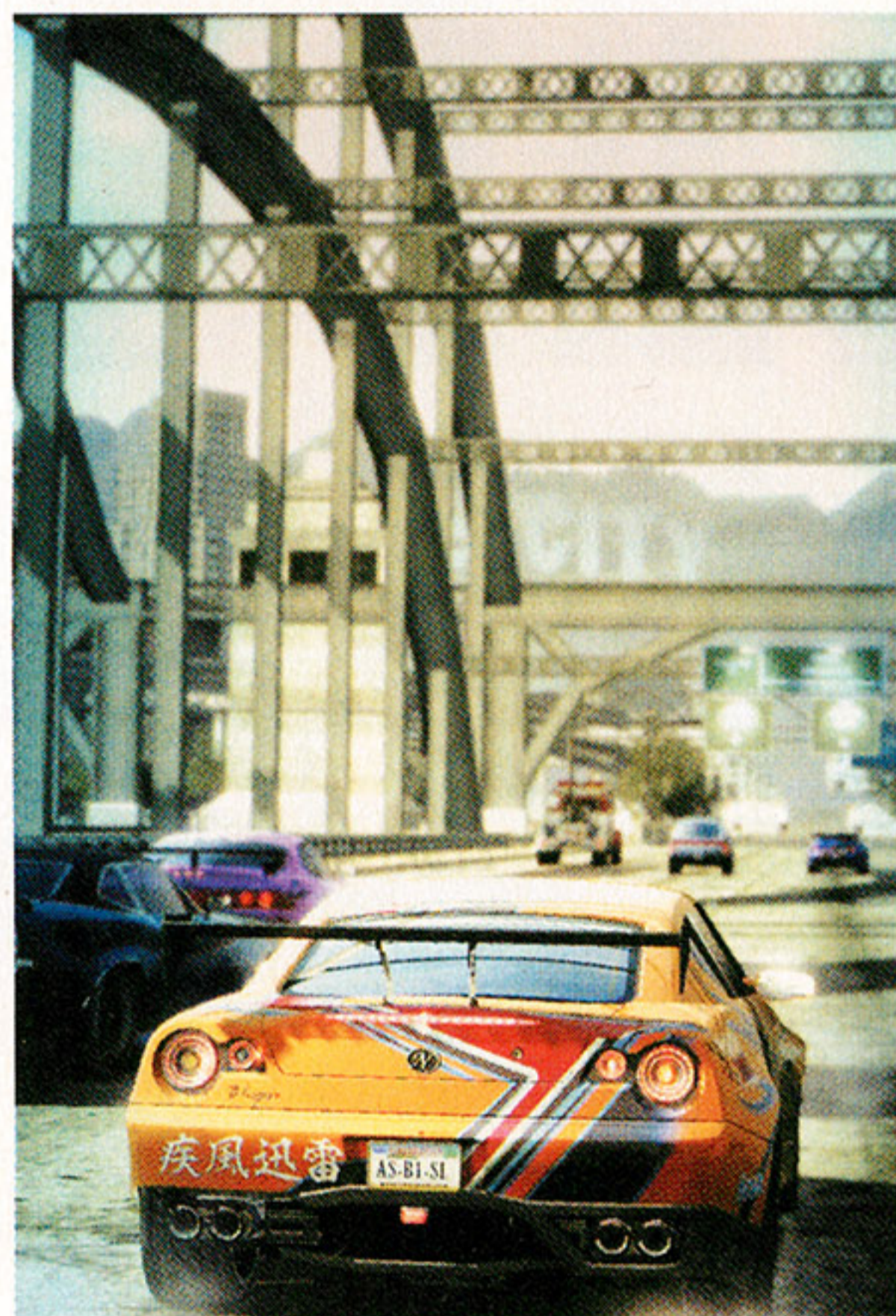
PS3/XB360 • EA Games • Spring 2008

Why was it delayed? The main contributors to *Bad Company*'s change in release date were a desire to flesh out this shooter's narrative and a need to make the environments more destructible.

Worth the wait? Since EA is emphasizing the single-player experience (most of the other *Battlefield*'s focused on multiplayer), it definitely won't hurt to give the developers more time to tweak the story.



■ Forget about *Burnout Revenge*; from gameplay to graphics, *Paradise* is the next-gen experience fans have been waiting for.



SOCOM: Confrontation

PS3 • Sony CEA • Spring 2008

Why was it delayed? “[It was] purely due to the fact that we didn’t want to compromise the quality of *SOCOM: Confrontation*,” says Sony CEA Producer Mark Rogers.

Worth the wait? Well, it can’t hurt—this squad-based shooter’s initial showing wasn’t too hot. But at least Sony recognizes this. “The title must reflect the excellence in online play that the franchise is known for,” says Rogers.

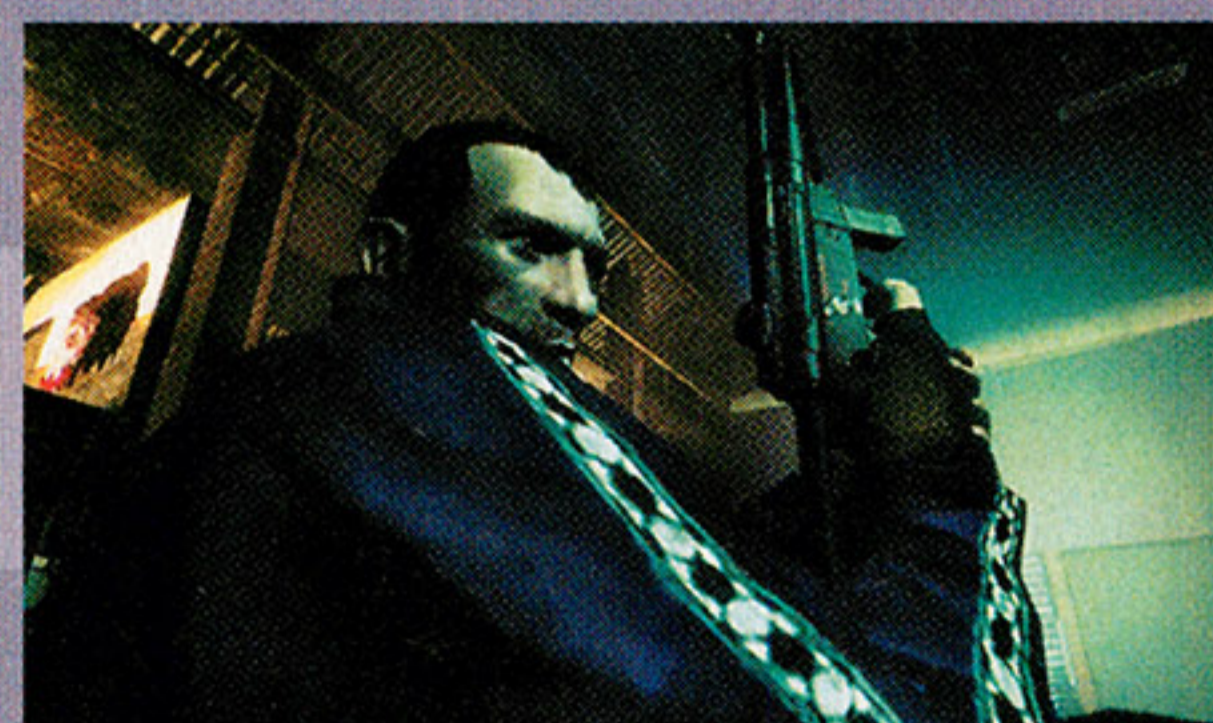


Alone in the Dark

PS3/XB360 • Atari • May 2008

Why was it delayed? “We’re trying to do things that have never been done before.... We’re pushing lots of innovative elements....” says Producer Nour Polloni of developer Eden Games. Who isn’t?

Worth the wait? As much as the structure of this Central Park thriller intrigues us (levels are broken up into cliffhanging, *Lost*-esque chapters), the constant chatter about Atari’s fate makes us wonder if *AITD* will ever see the light of day.



Grand Theft Auto IV

PS3/XB360 • Rockstar • March 2008

Why was it delayed? Word around town has development on the PS3 version trailing way behind the Xbox 360 version (which also didn’t run very smoothly the last time we saw it).

Worth the wait? Thanks to *GTA4*’s strikingly improved visuals, new targeting system, and online multiplayer (recent reports have it supporting 16 people), we fully expect this return trip to Liberty City to be as fun as the first go-around.

Burnout: Paradise

PS3/XB360 • EA Games • Spring 2008

Why was it delayed? Criterion's plans for *Burnout: Paradise* are ambitious. The developer is hoping to deliver a truly open racing world—one filled with traffic where you can do whatever you want whenever you want, that has absolutely no loading screens, and includes the ability to seamlessly join online. Executive Producer Matt Webster tells us that with all of those goals in reach, delaying the release is a matter of seeing things through to the end.

Worth the wait? From what we've played, *Paradise* looks capable of achieving Criterion's goal. Completely eliminating lobbies changes the entire complexion of the online racing experience. And forget about wasting time wishing the host would get things going—you'll hit the street the moment you join a game, and from there it's

totally up to you.

Paradise presents your options so well that it's all about deciding what to do next, not figuring out how to access this mode or that. The "Today's Best" leaderboards give you the latest stats to challenges such as biggest air, longest oncoming, and such. Also, every one of the game's 64 roads has its own events. Of these, fans of the old crash mode will surely become addicted to the "showtime" tasks—here you try to cause the highest dollar value in damage from a crash starting on a particular street.

For a more organized event, you

can create challenges on the fly by gathering the group of players anywhere on the map and picking one of 50 objectives. It becomes a natural thing to say, for instance, "Hey, let's meet at the lighthouse and see who can get the best stunt score from there." It all works: You become comfortable with *Paradise*—like you do the real world—because everything is based on landmarks and points of reference. And when you remember that nothing ever interrupts the flow of the game (no lobbies or no loading screens), you surely won't mind waiting a li'l longer to race through this *Paradise*.

➤ **Completely eliminating lobbies changes the entire complexion of the online racing experience.**

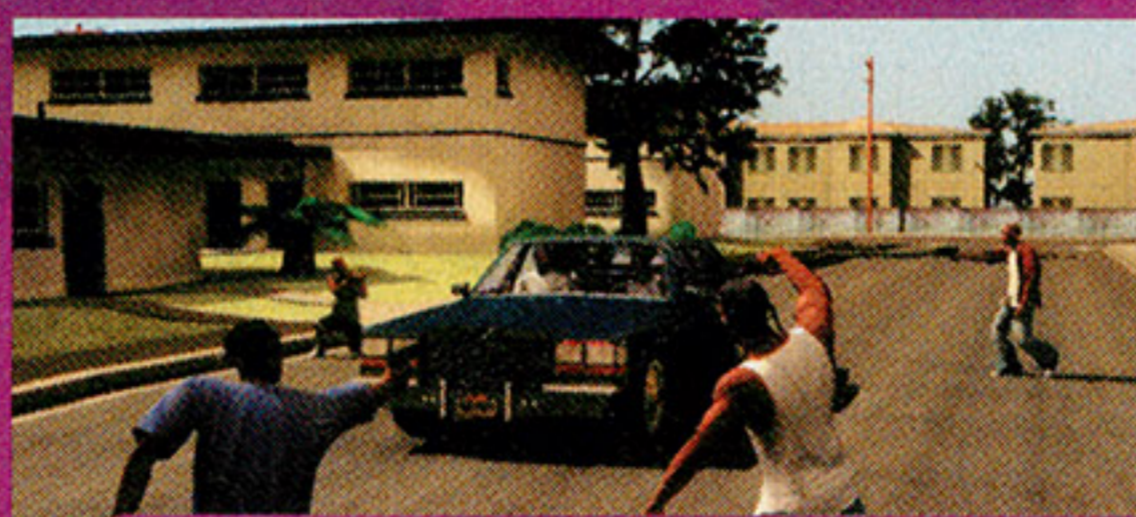


➤ NOBODY'S BUSINESS

Here's a list of games that still show up on retailers' websites in the "Coming Soon" section but for various reasons got sent to an early grave.



Coded Arms Assault • PS3 • Konami



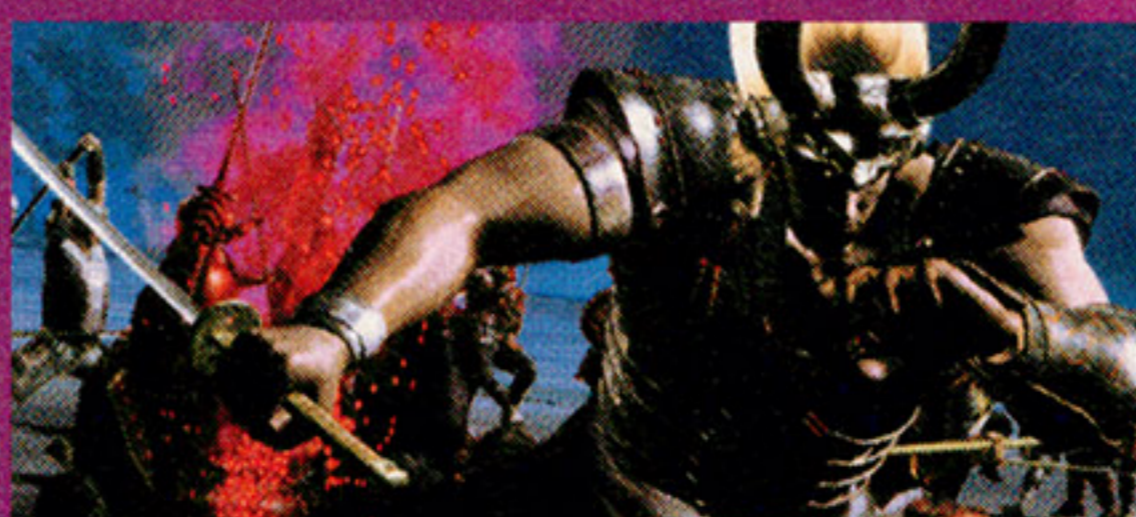
Fear & Respect • PS3/XB360 • Midway



Fifth Phantom Saga • PS3 • Sega



Killing Day • PS3/XB360 • Ubisoft



Ni-Oh • PS3 • Koei



Project H.A.M.M.E.R. • Wii • Nintendo

Too Human

XB360 • Microsoft Game Studios • March 2008

Why was it delayed? The word “delayed” doesn’t even begin to explain the status of *Too Human*, the first installment in an epic sci-fi action-RPG trilogy from developer Silicon Knights (*Blood Omen: Legacy of Kain*, *Eternal Darkness*). We guarantee that no other game in this feature has had a stranger gestation period. The project first began well over a decade ago, with scrapped iterations for both PS1 and GameCube lingering in the minds of both gamers and the company’s outspoken head honcho, maverick game designer Denis Dyack. And the game’s modern Xbox 360 incarnation hasn’t had an easy going, either—a disastrous demo at 2006’s E3 gaming summit and a high-profile lawsuit against developer Epic

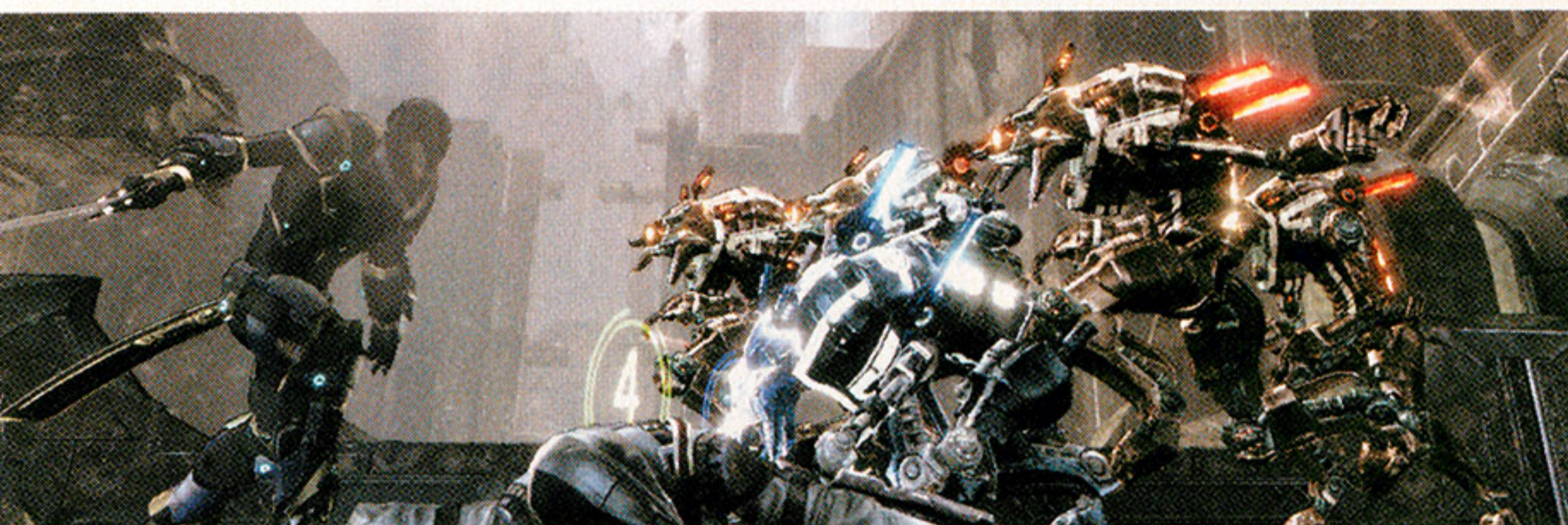
Games (creator of the Unreal Engine 3 middleware tools that Silicon Knights initially used in developing *Too Human* for the 360) stirred up plenty of bad buzz and set the project back a few months. “Clearly, our development difficulties are out in the public,” Dyack says. “We didn’t go into this intending to write our own technology; we were more or less forced to.”

Worth the wait? Now that we’ve played over an hour of the seemingly near-finished game, we feel that, yes, *Too Human* successfully bridges the gap between addictive online dungeon hacks such as *Diablo* and *Phantasy Star Online* and character-action offerings like *Devil May Cry* and *God of War*. But trying to

distance the title from all its poison press won’t be easy. “A lot of people have talked about *Too Human* in a very wrong way for a very long time,” says Dyack. “And I hope that we can recover from that. But even if we can’t, at least I know that I’ve created a good game.” Dyack believes that the backlash his opus has received isn’t unlike the doom-and-gloom reports surrounding another wildly ambitious creation—James Cameron’s *Titanic*. “While they were still filming, the actors noticed that all the advance press was saying that the movie was s***,” Dyack says. “And anytime when people say that long enough, it doesn’t matter who you are and how tough you are. It will get to you...and that’s why [people] want to get me Net Nanny—so that I can’t post on gaming forums anymore.” Luckily, Dyack won’t need to wade into message-board flame wars to defend his baby for long—he hopes to get a playable demo into gamers’ hands in early 2008.

➤ **A lot of people have talked about *Too Human* in a very wrong way for a very long time.**

—Silicon Knights President Denis Dyack



Army of Two

PS3/XB360 • EA Games • Spring 2008

Why was it delayed? After hearing all the complaints from folks like us while reviewing the game, EA eventually decided to push its co-op shooter into 2008.

Worth the wait? The Review Crew found *Army* plagued with technical hiccups such as unreliable teammate A.I., misplaced audio cues, and long load times. We wish more publishers would follow EA’s lead and delay obviously flawed software.

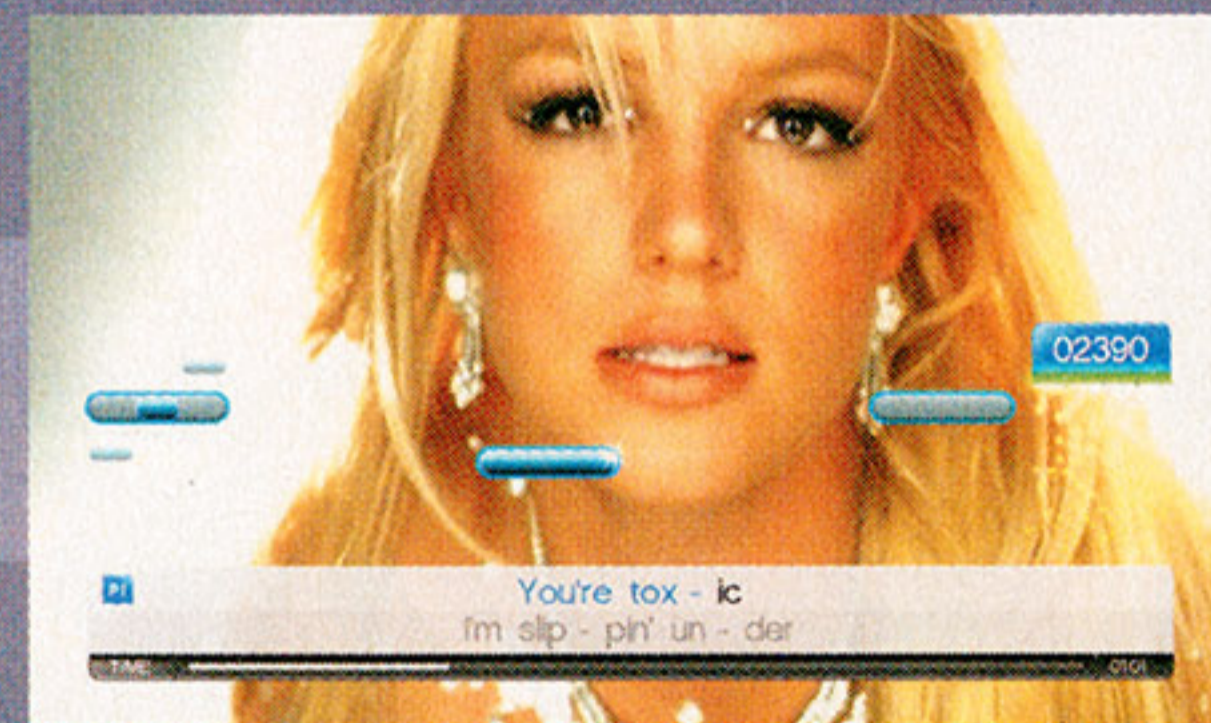


Indiana Jones

PS3/XB360 • LucasArts • Summer 2008

Why was it delayed? When the fourth *Indy* flick got the official go-ahead, it didn’t surprise anyone that LucasArts held the game so it would coincide with the movie’s release (historically, piggybacking on the Hollywood hype helps game sales).

Worth the wait? With *Uncharted* and *Tomb Raider* elevating the adventure genre, our favorite archaeologist has to bring more than the “revolutionary” rag-doll physics seen in the early demos.

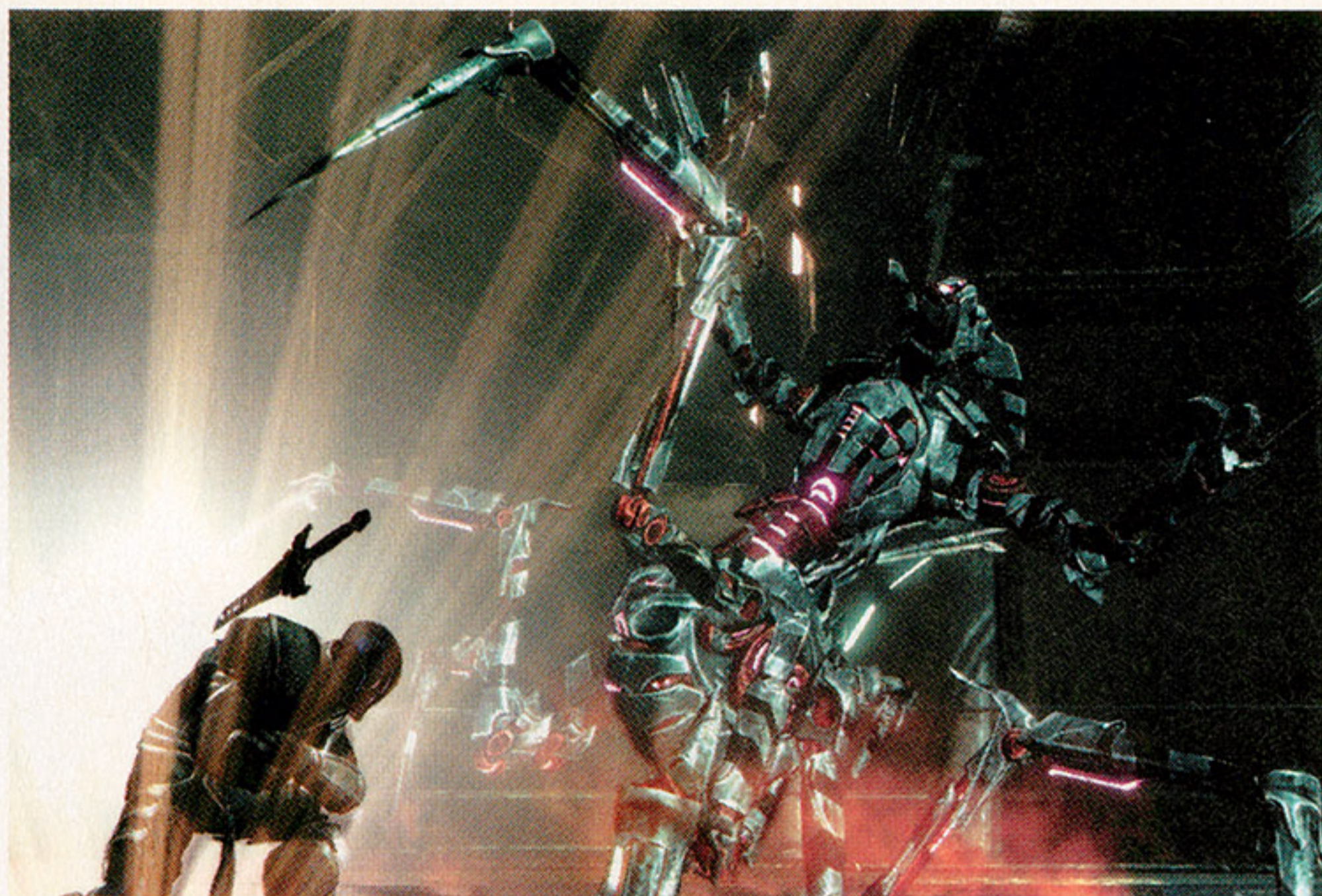
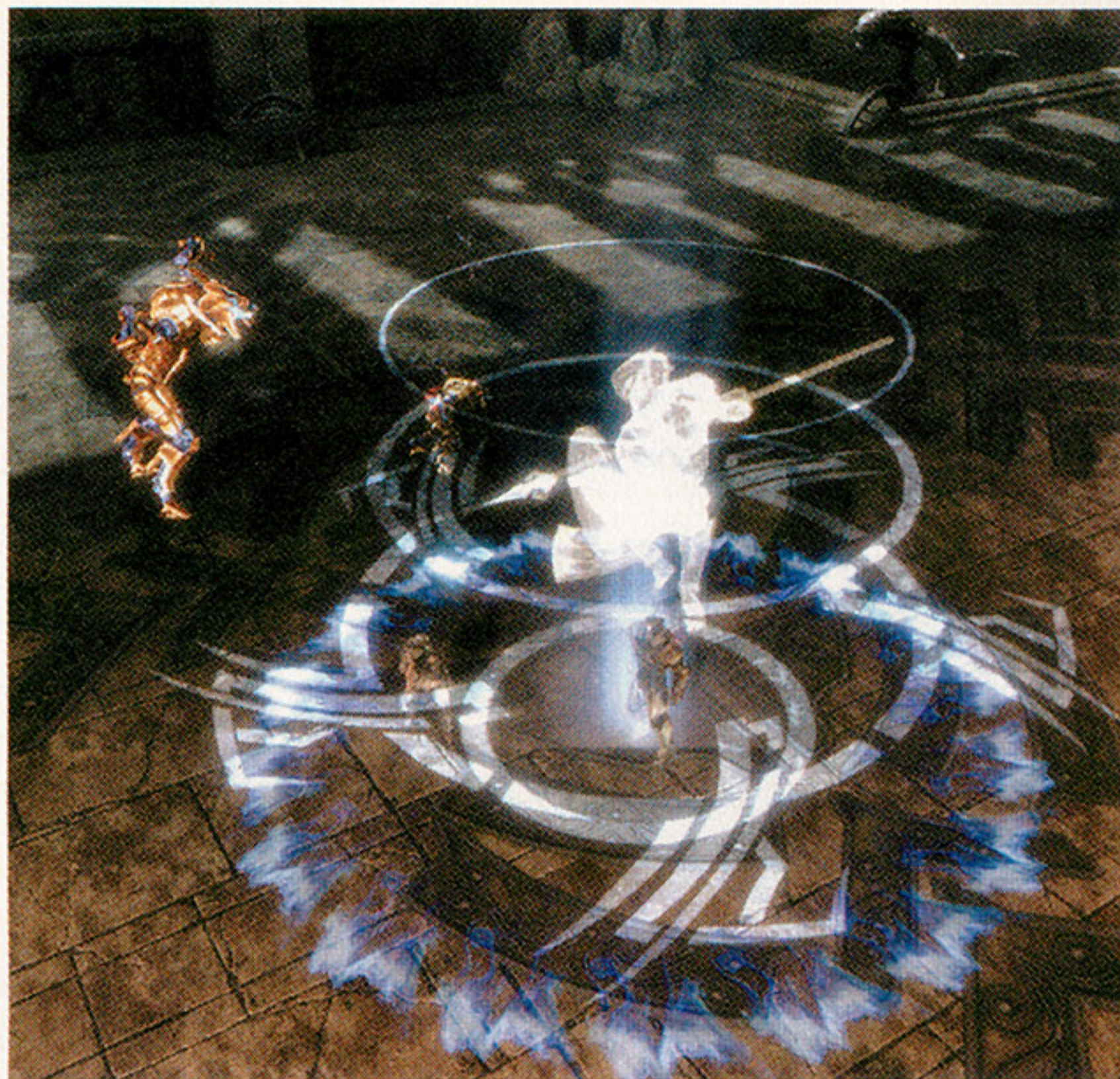


SingStar

PS3 • Sony CEA • Spring 2008

Why was it delayed? Sony’s first PS3 foray into its karaoke series aims to push the genre forward with an extensive catalog of downloadable songs/videos and user-driven, YouTube-meets-MySpace community functionality. But implementing those features is proving more difficult than expected....

Worth the wait? With *Rock Band* and *Guitar Hero III* already competing for your PS3’s music-genre attention, perhaps this delay isn’t a bad move.



■ Just like in *Phantasy Star Online*, you can take your customized *Too Human* character and hack-n-slash alongside three buddies across the Internet.



Dragon Quest Swords: The Masked Queen and the Tower of Mirrors

Wii • Square Enix • Spring 2008

Why was it delayed? With its own holiday lineup so crowded, Square thought it'd be best to push this first-person adventure into the new year.

Worth the wait? As the Wii continues to lack legit software, here's one we actually think might've benefited from a '07 release.

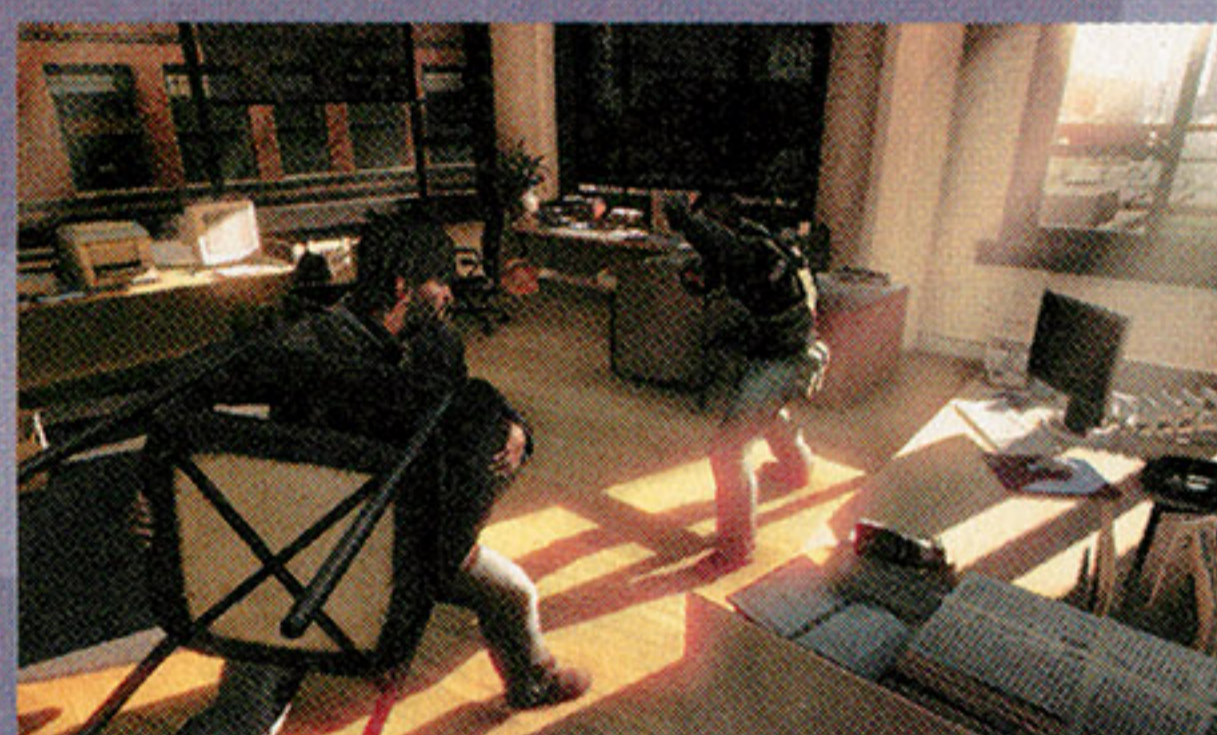


World in Conflict

XB360 • Sierra • Spring 2008

Why was it delayed? "The 360 version was basically finished," says Executive Producer Greg Goodrich, "but then we looked at it and decided that a few controller modifications just wasn't enough. We want to truly make a console game instead of a PC game ported to a console."

Worth the wait? This real-time strategy game was a PC hit, and with Sierra addressing the port concerns, we expect nothing but the same here.

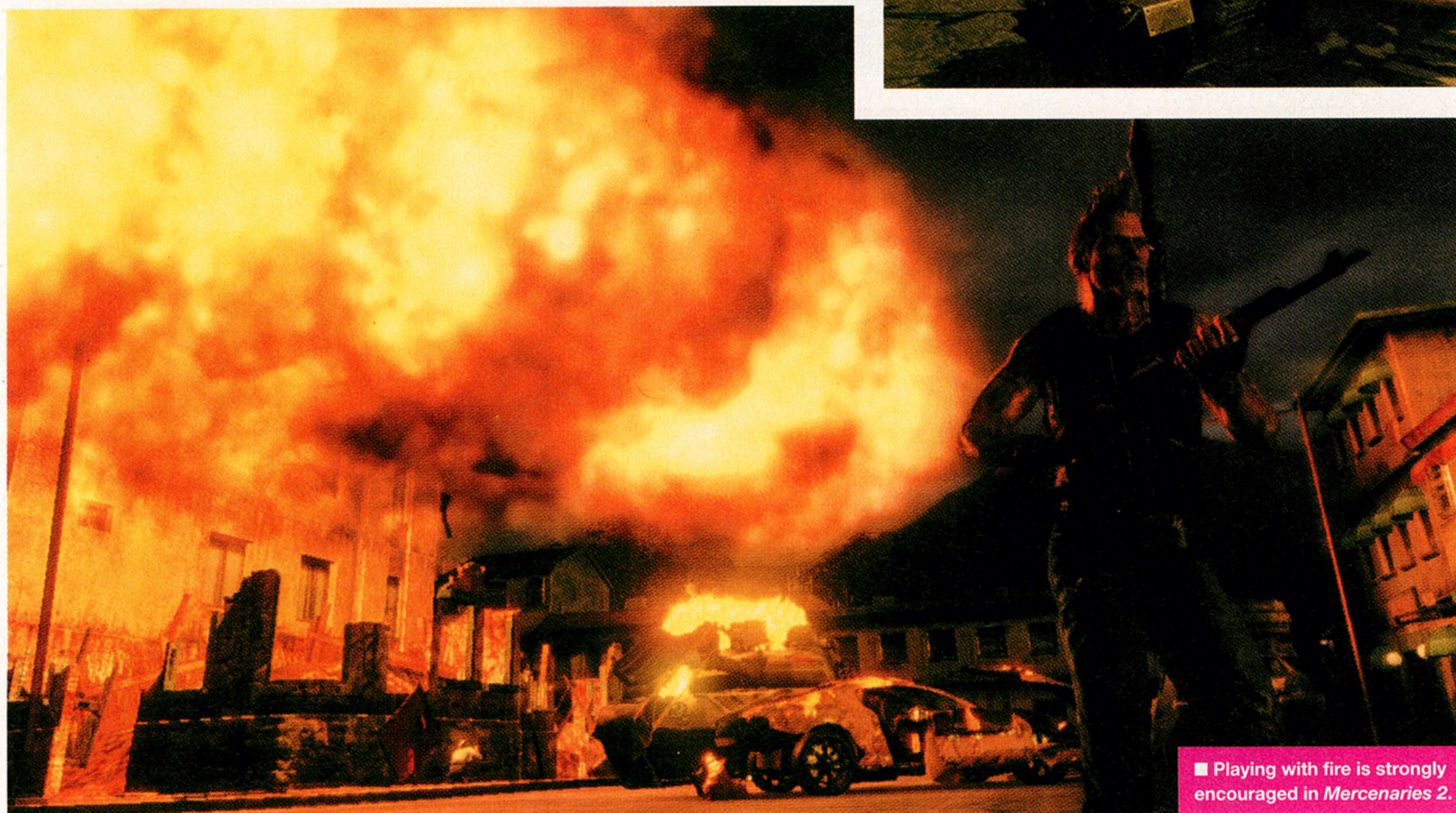


Splinter Cell: Conviction

XB360 • Ubisoft • Spring 2008

Why was it delayed? We wonder if Microsoft and its exclusive dollars had anything to do with this stealthy, 360-only effort being held back in order to face off with the PS3-only *MGS4*.

Worth the wait? *Conviction* promises to reimagine the somewhat repetitive series by giving sneaky protagonist Sam Fisher a Jason Bourne-style makeover, complete with urban combat and realistic crowd reactions.



■ Playing with fire is strongly encouraged in *Mercenaries 2*.



Frontlines: Fuel of War

PS3/XB360 • THQ • Spring 2008

Why was it delayed? The crowded holiday convinced THQ to push its futuristic shooter into '08.

Worth the wait? Yes, as a few more months should help the developer balance *Frontline's* 60-plus vehicles, weapons, and remote-controlled bots. Eerily, the team is also experimenting with a brain wave device (EmSense) to monitor excitement levels on the testers. Why? To spot the game's unnecessary dull moments.



Home

PS3 • Sony CEA • Spring 2008

Why was it delayed? The feedback culled from a closed beta test of Sony's immensely ambitious virtual online community resulted in some major renovations to both the layout and user interface.

Worth the wait? *Home's* lofty ambitions remain admirable, especially since it's a free service for PS3 owners that will continue to grow and evolve in the coming years.



The Club

PS3/XB360 • Sega • February 2008

Why was it delayed? "Giving *The Club* a release window of early 2008 will give it space to shine," says Design Manager Nick Davies of developer Bizarre Creations (*Project Gotham Racing* series).

Worth the wait? At the very least, it's allowing the creators of this combo-heavy shooter to bulk it up with additional content such as tournament mode. "It now gives focus to why players should play through," says Davies.

Mercenaries 2: World in Flames

PS3/XB360 • EA Games • Spring 2008

Why was it delayed? “We’re kind of perfectionists,” says Scott Warner, lead designer of *Mercenaries 2: World in Flames* for developer Pandemic. After several months of Internet speculation, Warner recently confirmed the game’s delay from its original holiday ’07 date to an early ’08 release. “We want to have everything be as well executed as possible,” he says.

The first *Mercenaries* was technologically impressive, pushing the last-generation consoles to present an open world in which a lot could be demolished. With the sequel’s even more ambitious plan—promising, among many other things, the ability to use lifelike fire as a weapon—we weren’t terribly surprised to

learn of *World in Flame*’s delay.

The game didn’t exactly blow us away the last time we saw it, either. In addition to some gameplay slowdown, we witnessed too much scenery pop-in throughout its Venezuela backdrop.

Worth the wait? “One of the biggest things we’re always looking at is performance of the engine,” says Warner, “making sure we’re maintaining a constant 30 frames per

second. There are also some design challenges: We’re adding a cooperative element, and that’s something very few people have experience with in open-world settings.”

So will all this late tweaking and polishing make much of a difference? Perhaps. But then again, open-world experiences are notorious for being nearly impossible to bug-test exhaustively, so we’re not sure another few months can have *that* big of an impact.

➤ **We’re adding a cooperative element, and that’s something very few people have experience with in open-world settings.**

—*Mercenaries 2: World in Flames* Lead Designer Scott Warner

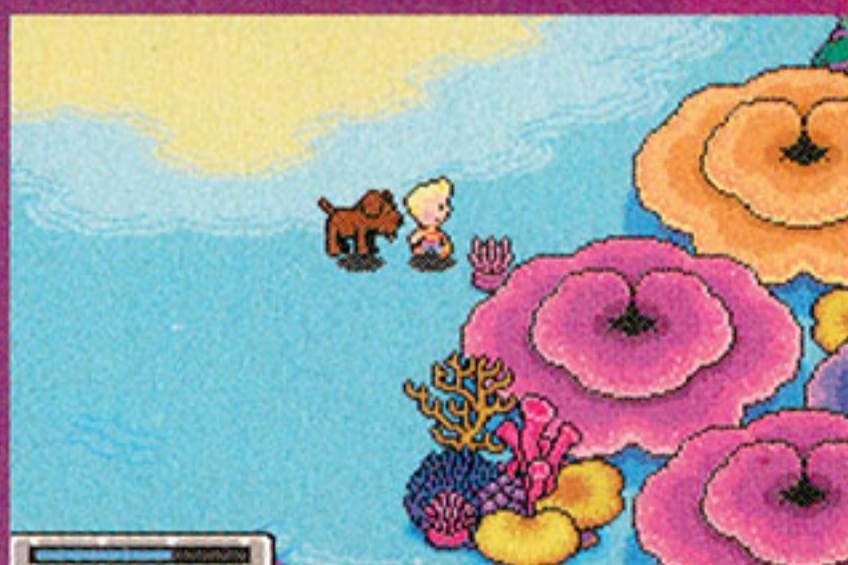


➤ A DECADE IN THE MAKING

Silicon Knights’ *Too Human* isn’t the only game that’s taken a full 10 years to come to fruition—several other titles have weathered the test of time, leaping across various platforms before finally landing in patient gamers’ laps.



Far East of Eden III: Namida: Hudson’s import-only role-playing series debuted back on the PC-Engine (TurboGrafx-16 over here) and its third installment, *Namida*, was originally announced in 1995 for NEC’s PC-FX console. But the underpowered PS1 competitor flopped so hard that this sequel was shelved for years. In 2005 it got revived for release on PS2, yet nobody noticed.



Mother 3: The only game in this role-playing franchise to ever make it Stateside was No. 2 (known here as *Earthbound* for the Super NES). After being announced in 1996, *Mother 3* didn’t come out in Japan till 10 years later on the Game Boy Advance. No word yet on a U.S. release.



Team Fortress 2: *Half-Life* developer Valve revealed this follow-up to the legendary PC multiplayer first-person shooter back in 1998, but a series of delays made fans wonder if it would ever see release. Luckily, the game resurfaced as part of the *The Orange Box* collection (PS3/XB360).



Duke Nukem Forever: Since this follow-up to *Duke Nukem 3D* was first announced in 1997, a steady stream of console offshoots have sullied the Duke’s good name. But the true sequel remains elusive. Developer 3D Realms claims that we will finally see it in 2008, but will anyone still care? 🐉

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REVIEWS

> alien ships, bitchin' kickflips, fish and chips, radar blips, and wars with gravity

REVIEWS
GAMES OVERLOAD!

82

MASS EFFECT
(GAME OF THE
MONTH, TIE)



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> THIS MONTH IN REVIEWS

Appealing to the masses

Double your pleasure, double your fun

THE HYPE TRAIN WAS IN FULL GEAR THIS MONTH...and it actually

pulled into the Game of the Month station without a hitch. *Call of Duty 4* and *Mass Effect*, amidst huge expectations, share the GOTM honors. And PS3 island-getaway game *Uncharted* wasn't far behind.

Interestingly enough, we were set to review another superhyped game this issue, one that was even on our cover (*EGM* #206, August 2006): *Army of Two*. And while we got reviewable discs in time and had our reviewers play it, write entertaining reviews, and make the obligatory tampon jokes, we received breaking news the weekend before we went to press that the game was delayed because of negative early buzz (which my reviewers' scores would confirm). So sure, I was kinda pissed that I had to that hole to fill, but I couldn't get too mad. If the game is better for it, it's worth the wait.

—Greg Ford, Reviews Editor

> HOW WE RATE

- 10 to 9 Excellent
- 8.5 to 7 Good
- 6.5 to 5 Average
- 4.5 to 3 Bad
- 2.5 to 0 Terrible

> SCORES AND AWARDS

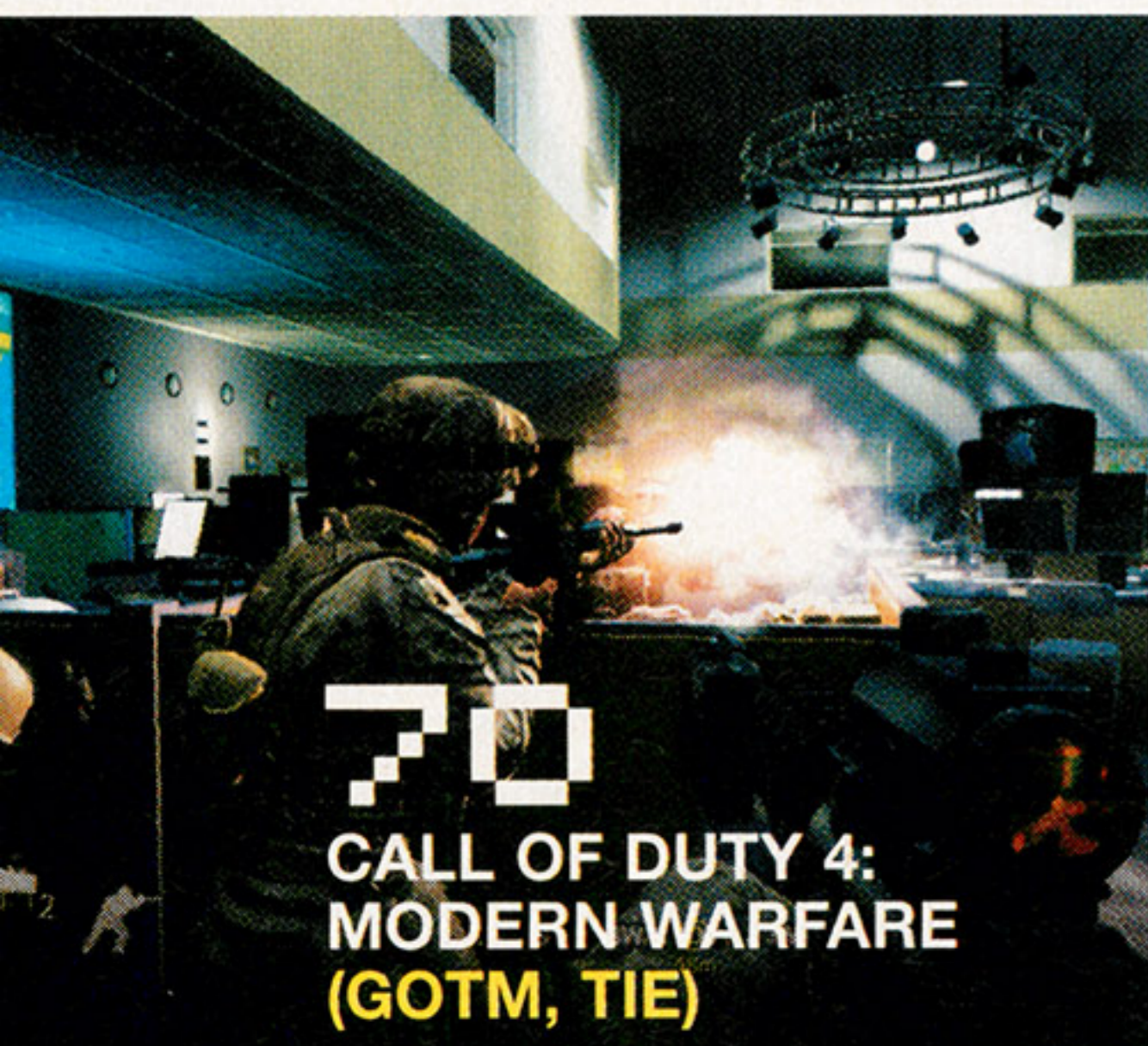
Reviews: You can also find the lead *EGM* review on 1UP.com. The second and third reviews—you'll find those here.
Awards: We dole out awards to games based on their scores. Platinum: all 10s; Gold: 9.0 average and up; Silver: 8.0 average or higher. Game of the Month goes to the highest-scoring game with unanimously "Good" scores, and Shame of the Month is the reverse. Simple.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

MARIO
9.0
EXCELLENT

SONIC
6.5
AVERAGE

TOAD
1.5
TERRIBLE



70

CALL OF DUTY 4:
MODERN WARFARE
(GOTM, TIE)



PAGE
69
Manhunt 2:
Worth all
the hoopla?



PAGE
76
Uncharted:
Drake's got
the goods



PAGE
86
Mama 2:
Comfort
food...again

THIS MONTH'S REVIEW CREW

Working 25 hours a day, eight days a week, 13 months a year



Dan "Shoe" Hsu

Editor-in-Chief

Shoe's been complaining about his slow "old-man hands" for years now, but they still seem to be functioning adequately: His Team 1UP Network recently beat Team GamePro three games to two in *Halo 3*...

Now Playing: *Adv. Wars: Days of Ruin, Halo 3, Mario Galaxy*
Blog: egmshoe.1UP.com



Shane Bettenhausen

Executive Editor

Attempting to conquer the old-school challenge presented by *Contra 4* pushed Shane's "Holiday Issue" mindset squarely into *Bad Santa* territory.

Now Playing: *Contra 4, Burnout Paradise, Virtua Fighter 5, FFXII: Revenant Wings, Super Mario Galaxy, Christmas Nights*
Blog: egmshane.1UP.com



Jennifer Tsao

Managing Editor

Jennifer's superhappy to have something new and fun to play on her Wii. But has her addiction to *Geometry Wars: Galaxies* gone too far? Does she really, y'know, need to carry it with her at all times?

Now Playing: *Mass Effect, Cooking Mama 2*
Blog: egmjennifer.1UP.com



Crispin Boyer

Senior Editor

When longtime pal and former EGMer Mark MacDonald told Crispin he was leaving the company to "walk the Earth," Crispin thought about joining him for the ultimate road trip. Then he thought about his mortgage.

Now Playing: *Uncharted, Halo 3*
Blog: egmcrispin.1UP.com



Bryan Intihar

Previews Editor

Bryan considered taking a "pick-me-up" to help finish the issue. Then he remembered Jessie Spano's SAT debacle on *Saved by the Bell* and quickly realized no one would appreciate his singing "I'm So Excited" in the office.

Now Playing: *Uncharted*
Blog: egmbryan.1UP.com



Greg Ford

Reviews Editor

Uncharted gave Greg a good idea: getting the hell away to some remote island when a 13th issue, packed with reviews, arrives. He's already started packing for the next one.

Now Playing: *Uncharted, Contra 4, Halo 3, Super Mario Galaxy, Rock Band*
Blog: egmford.1UP.com



Michael Donahoe

News/Features Editor

Cooking Mama 2 reminded Michael that he can't cook. But he sure can eat a lot. Actually, it's a good thing that Michael can't make his own food, because if he could, he would probably blow up...in a bad way.

Now Playing: *Rock Band, Mass Effect, Half-Life 2*
Blog: egmhoe.1UP.com



Andrew Pfister

Reviews Editor, 1UP.com

Andrew BLAM! is getting tired BLAM BLAM! of all the shooting BLAM! games this month, and was BLAM! hoping *Super Mario Galaxy* BLAM BLAM! would have made it in time BLAM! for review. It didn't. BLAMMIT!

Now Playing: *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare, Portal*
Blog: andrewpf.1UP.com



Nick Suttner

Reviews Intern, 1UP.com

Nick was prepared to go into debt by finally buying a PS3 for *Ratchet & Clank Future* and *Uncharted*, only to have the excellent fortune to play through them for reviews on a work system. Awesome.

Now Playing: *Everyday Shooter, Halo 3, Portal*
Blog: rocksolidaudio.1UP.com



Joe Rybicki

Staff Reviewer

At this time of year, Joe's particularly thankful for broadband Internet access, which lets him play co-op games of *Halo 3* online rather than locally. Finding a second player for splitscreen can be a bit of a challenge.

Now Playing: *BioShock, Halo 3*
Blog: opmjoer.1UP.com

Also on deck...

Sam Kennedy
Editor-in-Chief,
Site Director
1UP.com

James "Milkman" Mielke
Executive Editor
1UP.com

Garnett Lee
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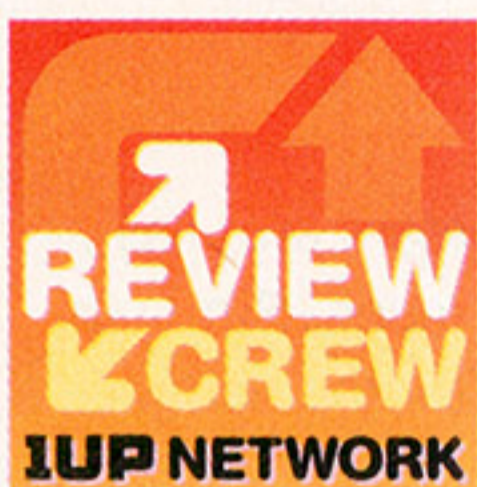
John Davison
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Andrew Fitch
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Gord Goble
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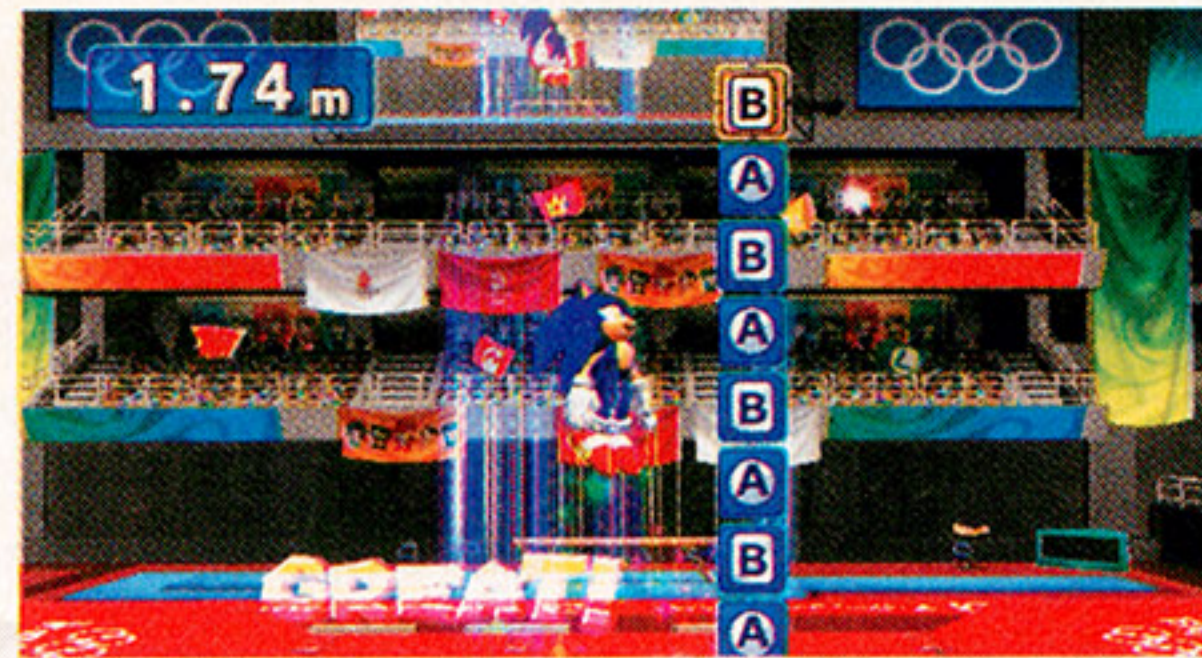
Greg Sewart
Staff Reviewer

Todd Zuniga
Sports Guy
Staff Reviewer



The Review Crew is the 1UP Network's ensemble cast of writers from all of our publications, both online and in print. We believe that games are more than the sum of their parts, so we tackle them subjectively, as experiences.

Head over to ReviewCrew.1UP.com to meet all of the 1UP Network's expert reviewers. And check out 1UP.com for reviews of games we didn't have enough time or room for.



■ Forget the medal: Two mascots enter, one mascot leaves.

Wii

MARIO & SONIC AT THE OLYMPIC GAMES

■ Publisher: Sega ■ Developer: Sega ■ Players: 1-4 ■ ESRB: Everyone

THE VERDICTS
(OUT OF 10)

A. FITCH
6.0
AVERAGE

BROOKS
7.0
GOOD

SHOE
6.0
AVERAGE

The Good: Nice variety of real Olympic events

The Bad: Poor control explanations

Bring Your Mii's: This game allows for full integration

Not-so-special Olympics

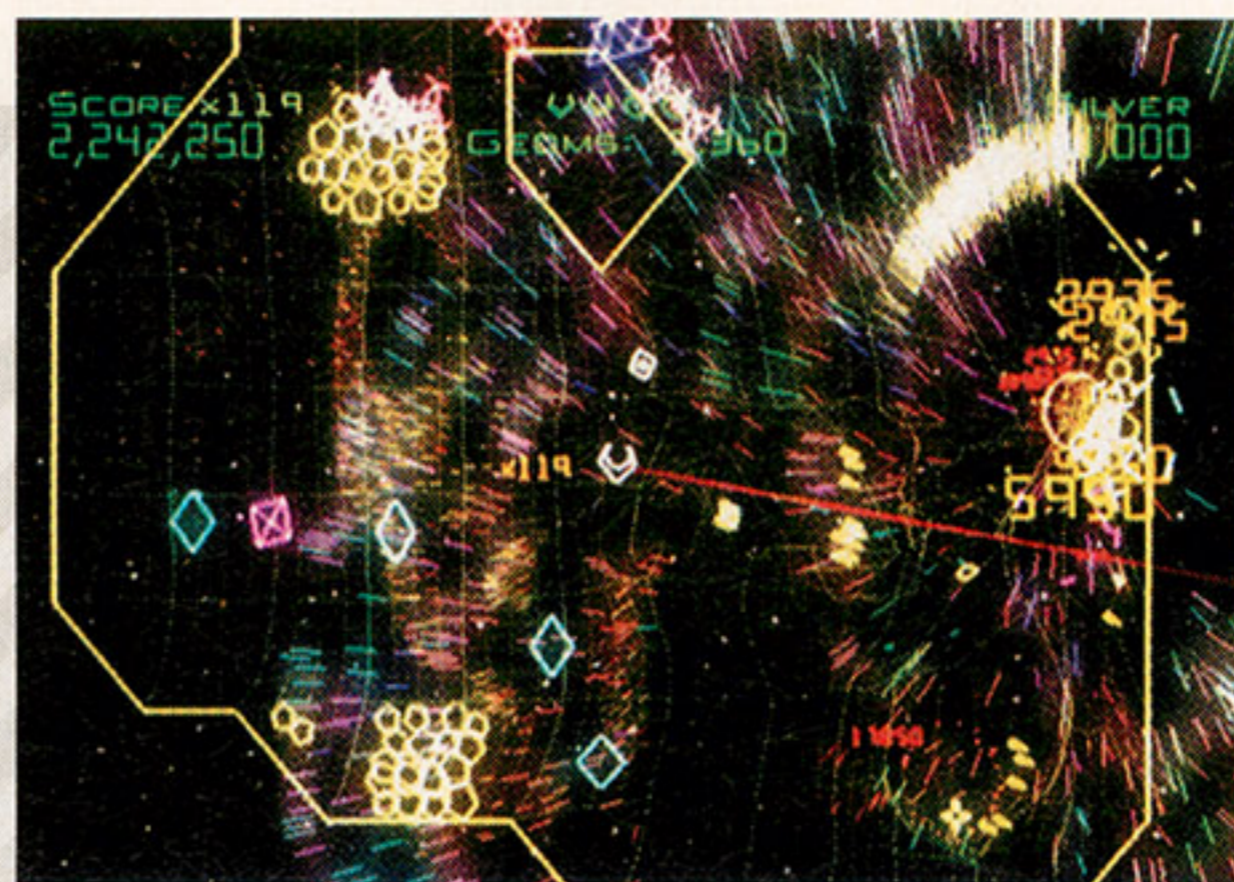
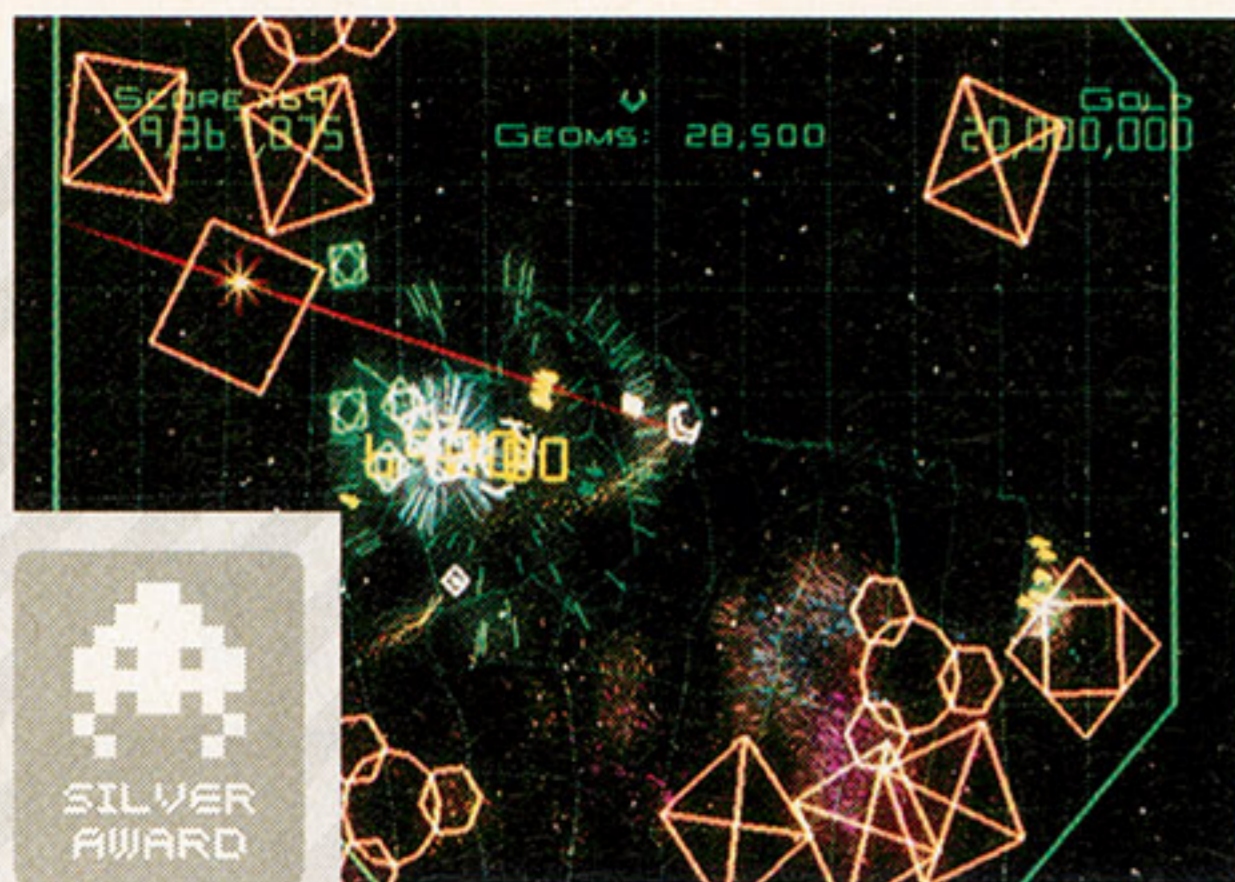
➔ **A. FITCH:** We've waited over 15 years for Sonic and Mario to team up, and we finally get it...in a *Wii Sports*-inspired competition based on next year's Beijing Olympics?! But despite its rather disturbing premise—the portly plumber and friends can represent despotic regimes like Iran and Saudi Arabia, after all—*Mario & Sonic's* 20-plus events capture the diverse athleticism of the real Summer Games, from the pure breakout speed of the 100-meter dash to the precision timing of fencing...if you've got the patience for some complex (not to mention tiring) control schemes. Swimming, for example, throws five different stroke motions at you at once without clearly demonstrating how to execute them—sorry, a wig-

gling onscreen Wii Remote ain't cuttin' it. Bringing in buddies for multiplayer livens things up, particularly in the 1-on-1 contests, but without the option to tweak event lengths or difficulties, this feels like just another souped-up minigame collection.

➔ **BROOKS:** While some of the traditional games, like the 100-meter dash, feature mundane action, other games provide a nice balance between mimicking NBC's real-life coverage of the Olympics and fantasy fun. The Dream Race, for example, is a *Mario Kart*-type dash complete with turtle shells, invincibility stars, and road hazards. Unlike Fitch, I found little fault with the controls. The gamer-friendly "attained max speed" scheme works

great, eliminating constant arm flailing during prolonged races. But man, my shoulder aches after the hammer throw. Where's the Icy Hot?

➔ **SHOE:** Let me help clarify: The controls aren't complicated on their own; they're just complicated for this type of gaming experience. Some events have 11 pages of instructions! That's too much reading and learning in what should be a pure pick-up-and-play party game. And call me a wimp, but some racing contests are too physically demanding, leaving me out of breath and hoping that my deodorant is holding up. But it feels good to sweat during a videogame, and the physicality makes the victories all the more exhilarating. 🏆



Wii

GEOMETRY WARS: GALAXIES

■ Publisher: Sierra ■ Developer: Kuju
■ Players: 1-2 ■ ESRB: Everyone



THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

JOHN
8.5
GOOD

NICK
7.0
GOOD

JENNIFER
8.5
GOOD

The Good: Sexy reimagining of some true classics

The Bad: Don't play it with the Nunchuk!

\$20 Extra: Because you'll need a Classic Controller

A good reason to buy a Classic Controller

+ JOHN: The classic gaming roots of the *Geometry Wars* franchise have clearly been pondered quite thoroughly for *Galaxies*. Beyond the frenetic intensity we've come to expect from the dual-stick shooter franchise (think *Robotron*), it has *Asteroids*-themed levels that have you breaking apart large versions of enemies until "normal"-sized guys pour out, as well as levels set in giant *Pac-Man*-like mazes, where the enemies discharge from each corner before exploding into showers of goodies that must be gobbled up as quickly as possible.

You'll find a *lot* of variety here, but it wins you over with an abundance of imagination and visual flair. What it *doesn't* win you over with, though, is the default control scheme. Trying

to play a twin-stick shooter with the Nunchuk and Wii Remote combo is an unintuitive, uncomfortable *mess*. It tries hard to make things easy for you by mapping a "laser sight" onto the screen so you can see where your shots will go, but the bottom line is that this is not the kind of gameplay this control setup was intended for. To enjoy this game, you *need* a dual-analog-stick Classic Controller.

+ NICK: Problem is even the Classic Controller lacks the precision of the Xbox 360 pad (used for *Geometry Wars: Retro Evolved*), thanks to the eight directional notches molded into the plastic. It seems like a picky complaint, but it makes all the difference in a game whose success rests so

squarely on its precision. It's still a fun formula, and all of the additions are excellent—multiplayer, your customizable buddy drone, inventive worlds and enemies—but if you've played the original you won't ever be able to fully forgive *Galaxies* for its control quirks.

+ JENNIFER: The sheer volume of board types and a few fabulous gameplay tweaks quickly got me past the problems. Harvesting "geoms" (multiplier niblets enemies leave in their wake) ratchets up the game's addictive nature. And is it weird that I had an almost emotional attachment to my handy li'l drone? With 64 levels, versus and co-op, and *Retro Evolved* included, *Galaxies* has tons to love, even if the standard control's busted.



Wii

FIRE EMBLEM: RADIANT DAWN

■ Publisher: Nintendo ■ Developer: Intelligent Systems
■ Players: 1 ■ ESRB: Everyone 10+

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

MICHAEL
9.0
EXCELLENT

RAY
9.0
EXCELLENT

A. FITCH
8.5
GOOD

The Good: Stellar gameplay untouched, snazzy cut-scenes

The Bad: Blah graphics, tough

Alpha Moms: Trust us, stay away—far, far away

The strategy still burns

+ MICHAEL: Nintendo's best smartypants franchise ironically isn't *Brain Age*. Nope, that title goes to *Fire Emblem*, the long-running strategy-role-playing game series made by the developer of *Advance Wars*. *Radiant Dawn* starts off tougher than its predecessors, but at least you can now save during battles (a *Fire Emblem* first). Sure, masochistic purists will likely scoff at the thought of Nintendo making this series easier, but this feature eases the frustration (since you can prevent characters from dying). Apart from this major tweak, not much else is *totally* different, but that's not a bad thing—the rock-paper-scissors gameplay still works well. And because this is a direct sequel to the GameCube's *Path of Radiance*, it's

sweet to see all the characters from that game come back for another battle. And fight they will—this game is long (45 frickin' chapters). Just sucks this head-scratcher will probably get lost inside Mario's galaxy this winter.

+ RAY: It would've been nice if *Radiant Dawn* looked a little better than its GameCube predecessor, but with *Fire Emblem* games it's the little things that matter. The quicksave function does seem to go against what the series stands for, but like Donahoe suggests, a little accessibility doesn't hurt. For me, *Dawn's* best addition is the terrain height variation, which makes you pay attention to enemies above and/or below you. And you should be paying attention, since

Dawn is so challenging and tightly designed. More technical additions like widescreen support and one-handed control make this sequel even easier to enjoy.

+ A. FITCH: Need further proof Nintendo's trying to hide this one from the casual crowd? You need a Classic Controller to get the most out of it, as that's the only way to zoom in and out on the action—no tacky, tacked-on motion controls here. A warning to *Final Fantasy Tactics* fans, though: This is more of a "puzzler" than you're used to—you've gotta beat levels the "right" way in a lot of cases—but that also helps fuel an *Advance Wars*-style addiction. It's not as cutesy or charming, but the strategy's still rock solid.



PS3/XB360

NEED FOR SPEED: PROSTREET

■ Publisher: Electronic Arts ■ Developer: EA Black Box ■ Players: 1-8 ■ ESRB: Everyone 10+



THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

GORD
8.5
GOOD

GREG S.
7.5
GOOD

GARNETT
7.0
GOOD

The Good: Killer car physics and A.I., tons of customization

The Bad: Confusing menus and interfaces

Online Play: Due to technical problems, we couldn't try it out

Feed your need

➔ **GORD:** EA's *Need for Speed* franchise has battled for the lead of the street-racing scene since its debut in 1994. But with *ProStreet*, the battle is no more—in terms of amenities, racing satisfaction, multiplayer innovation, and sheer freaking magnitude, this game's in a class unto itself.

Sporting completely rebuilt physics, *ProStreet's* cars are weighty, sophisticated beasts that feel wonderfully complex through the corners and downright simlike with assists deactivated. The A.I. competitors seem superbly real: remorselessly fighting you one moment, then backing off the next, and even committing accidental off-track jaunts just like real humans. *ProStreet's* diverse, ultradetailed environments are gorgeously gritty, and

its numerous vehicles exhibit damage and damage effects unlike anything before. The menus are undeniably confusing, but that's the apparent penalty for this many forms of competition (including tense drift and drag events), this many options, this level of car customization, and a tightly integrated, highly social online component. *Need for Speed* is back.

➔ **GREG S:** I have to say I completely welcome the lack of nighttime cityscapes and an overabundance of neon in the latest *Need for Speed*. But I don't totally agree with Gord's gushing. Yes, we've gotten rid of the ridiculous storylines (kinda) and gone back to a more pure racing experience, but *ProStreet's* nuts and bolts

are pretty much the same as they have been in *NFS* for a few years now: Expect familiar racing, drifting, drag racing (with needlessly complicated burnouts), and so on.

➔ **GARNETT:** While I too had a good time out on the tracks, *ProStreet's* bog-standard (but still superb-feeling) racing does little to evolve the series. Also, those garish menu graphics and incessantly babbling event DJs only serve to tag it as the "trying too hard" member of the class. But what works great are the three tuning levels that let you easily go from arcade- to sim-style driving. I just wish that when it comes time to step on it, the beautiful graphics didn't occasionally struggle to keep pace with the action.



PS3/XB360

TONY HAWK'S PROVING GROUND

■ Publisher: Activision ■ Developer: Neversoft ■ Players: 1-8 ■ ESRB: Teen

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

NICK
5.5
AVERAGE

JOE
6.5
AVERAGE

TODD
7.5
GOOD

The Good: Game mechanics remain fun

The Bad: Unpolished everything and overly complex additions

Bam Margera: We've seen enough of him in *Tony Hawk*

Tony definitely proves that his series needs a reboot

➔ **NICK:** The first few hours of *Proving Ground* are shamefully sloppy. Skating around an ugly, unimaginative city in the midst of trying to keep up with a confusing career structure isn't fun, and you can't even Nail-the-_____ (Trick, Manual, or Grab, one of the few interesting game mechanics introduced to the series of late) until you've been taught how. Once you've played enough to unlock a full arsenal of moves, things improve noticeably, but the narrative and competitions rarely offer more than the typically *Tony Hawk* tomfoolery. You'll find plenty to do but little motivation to actually get any of it done—unlike EA's recent *Skate*, a fantastic sim where learning *how* to skate is utterly rewarding and inseparable from the

experience itself. The nuts and bolts of *Tony Hawk* still provide some fun, but at this point it's just ancient leftovers of what used to be something special. Just like that, the series is a shadow of what a skateboarding game can truly be.

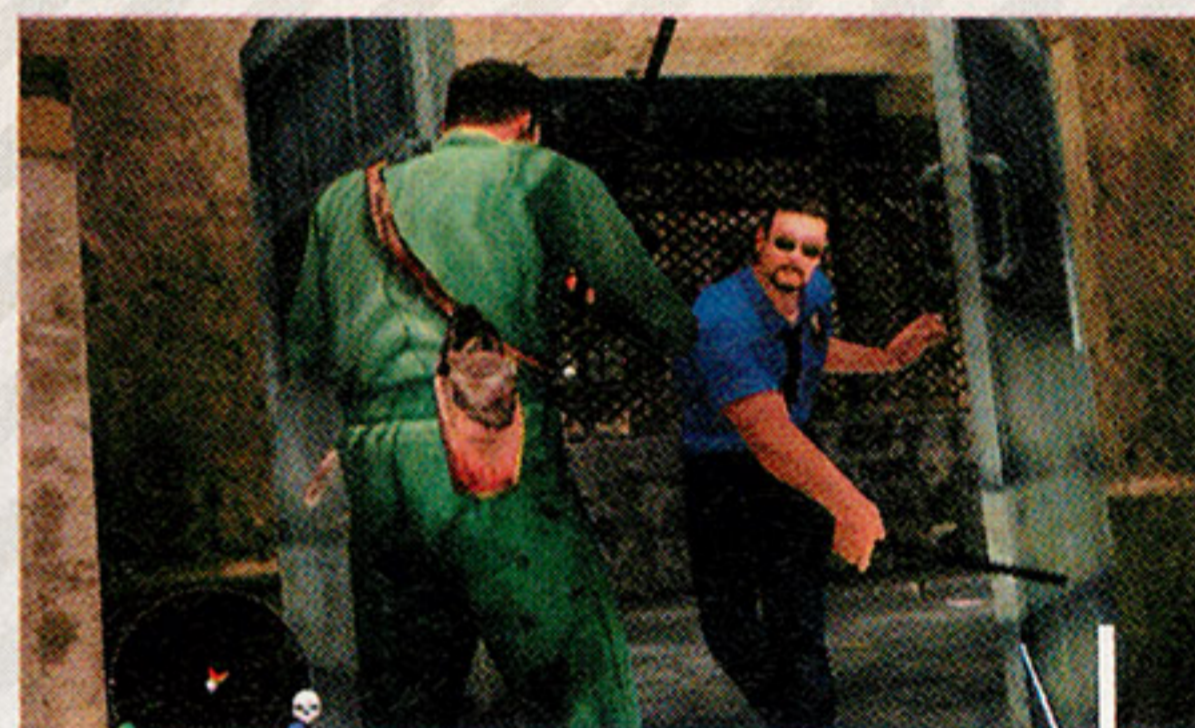
➔ **JOE:** Man, I am so glad I'm not the only one who thinks *Proving Ground* is almost unbearably sloppy. I found enough to keep me interested, sure. The "rigging" feature, in which you can use simple props to manipulate your environment, is particularly amusing. Also, the ever-more-vertical design of the levels offers some really ridiculous, over-the-top air. I'm also a big fan of the new, speed-boosting "agro kick." But what's up with the

stupidly hefty load times, the obnoxiously long intros to each objective, and the laggy, sloppy, utterly mediocre online play?

➔ **TODD:** As a die-hard *Tony Hawk* fan, it pains me to say this: Nick and Joe, you're almost right. *Skate's* a total bore (I'll argue this to my death), but *Tony's* ninth outing feels uninspired and too over the top now. The slow start frustrated me, too, but let's acknowledge how much content has been packed into this game! It's huge. I loved the video editing and working my way up to my own signature deck and shoe. But it's clear this series needs a mild rethink—a balance of both skate games seems to be the best way forward.



■ Watch for the skull on the radar: It means your attack can use the environment.



Wii/PS2

MANHUNT 2

■ Publisher: Rockstar Games ■ Developer: Rockstar Toronto ■ Players: 1 ■ ESRB: Mature

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

SHARKEY
4.0
BAD

SHOE
5.0
AVERAGE

MATT
7.0
GOOD

The Good: Creepy atmosphere and story stick with ya

The Bad: Murder was never so dull

The Ugly Truth: The censored content wasn't even that gory

Not much to see here

➤ **SHARKEY:** The original *Manhunt* was a disturbing stealth-action game—not so much because of all the stabbing guys in the eye with broken glass, but because of its premise and atmosphere. Being forced to murder for the purpose of entertainment was both disturbing and weirdly self-referential. The game had an ugly soul, but it had one.

Manhunt 2, on the other hand, doesn't really come close to nailing what made the original...well, not exactly great, but at least tolerable and a little thought provoking. The escaped-mental-patient story is more dull than upsetting. The more over-the-top gore has been forced behind a jittery, blurry camera. Not that you'll notice, because you'll be busy watch-

ing the corner of the screen for little popup icons to tell you exactly which wanking motion to make next.

The real killjoys in this sequel? Some unskippable goddamn cut-scenes in the Wii version (why?!), and combat that's either cake (when fighting a solo enemy) or infuriating (two or more will frequently leave you repeatedly stunned and unable to act).

➤ **SHOE:** I played the PS2 version, so I didn't have to worry about "wanking motions." But I was lamenting the archaic control scheme in this age of two analog sticks. And the poor A.I.—dumb goons with five-second memories don't make for scary foes. And the noisy, annoying filters the developers had to put over all the kill

scenes in order to make that new M rating. I agree that the premise isn't as intriguing as the first game's, but *Manhunt 2*'s still got plenty of creeps and creepy atmosphere—it's the *8mm* and *Hostel* of videogames.

➤ **MATT:** Sharkey seems hung up on the scenario, and I actually kind of like the way the story plays out, but he's right that everything feels generic. *Manhunt 2* could be any other third-person action game if you took away the execution kills and some of the kinky scenes. But if you look past the occasional enemy-intelligence issues, the stealth and puzzle-solving mechanics work pretty well—especially on Wii, where the restricted camera control makes sense. 🎮



REVIEWS

GAMES OVERLOAD!



PS3/XB360

CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE

■ Publisher: Activision ■ Developer: Infinity Ward ■ Players: 1-18 ■ ESRB: Mature

THE VERDICTS
(OUT OF 10)

ANDREW P.
9.5
EXCELLENT

CRISPIN
8.5
GOOD

GARNETT
9.5
EXCELLENT

The Good:
Outstanding scripted events, multiplayer

The Bad:
"Hardened" difficulty a little too hard

Cheat Mode Worth Opening: Ragtime

The thrilling theater of war

+ ANDREW P: By hitting fast-forward on the *Call of Duty* franchise by 60 years, developer Infinity Ward is taking a chance. "Modern warfare" implies a lot in this day and age, and applying the first-person shooter series' famed qualities to a theater of war that's far less fictional than is implied could easily go wrong. Bad writing and shallow characters could cheapen the experience, not just for the general game-playing public, but especially for those whose lives are currently affected by the real war in the Middle East. It's an already delicate issue being addressed in a medium best known for "dude, blow something up."

But as any fan of *COD* can tell you, the people at Infinity Ward are skilled storytellers and masterful scenarists.

It's because of this *COD4* finds itself in the company of movies like *Black Hawk Down*, rife with intense portrayals of very serious and complicated situations that, though perhaps not entirely realistic, still convey to the rest of the nonenlisted world how war might feel: completely f***ed up. It's obviously exaggerated for effect, but then again, it sort of *has* to be.

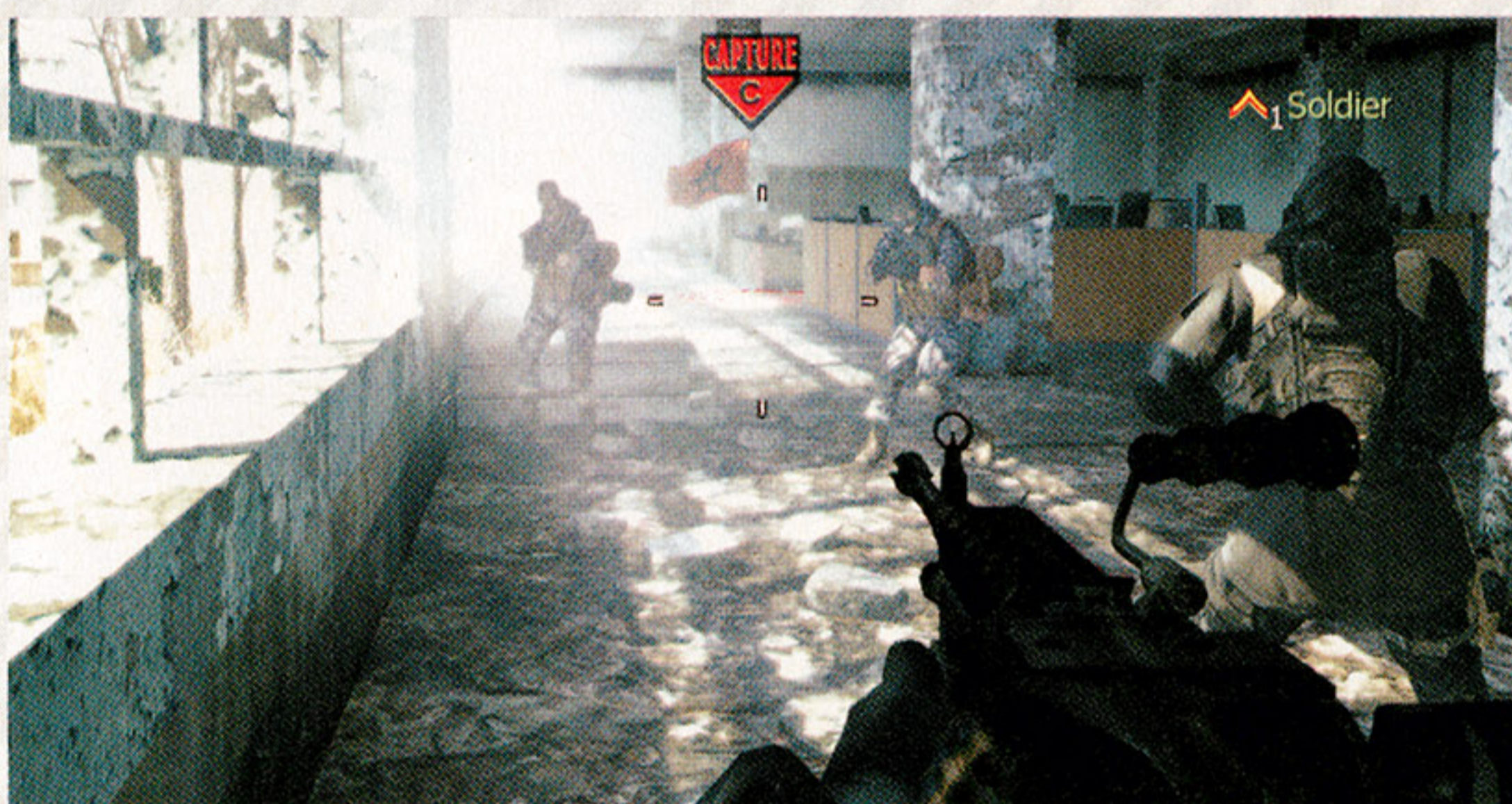
The trick to pulling off a successful linear shooter is breaking the player away from the rails every so often, and that's done by making encounters engaging and avoiding repetition. Jumping between American, British, and Russian troops worked well in *COD2*, and the same method applies for *COD4*. You alternate missions under the British SAS and Marine

Corps command, but both squads are linked by attacking the same goals from different angles, and because of this variance, it always feels like what you're doing is a vital part of winning the war. Moonlit rescue missions, frontal assaults and panicked extractions, sniper infiltrations and assassinations, ambushes and support roles, small teams and big squads...even though you're using the same guns and grenades throughout, every objective is a different, exciting experience.

Unless you're playing on the "Hardened" difficulty (a step below "Veteran"), for that's where the scripted nature works against it. "Hardened" is always a challenge but frequently a repetitive frustration. The checkpoint system is almost perfectly laid out, >



■ It's the minor graphical details that flesh out the intensity of COD's world war.



New Rules of Engagement



If you've ever played a *Call of Duty* game before, you'll be right at home with *COD4*'s basic mechanics and gunplay fundamentals: Maintain firing lines of sight, remain mobile to avoid the shower of incoming enemy grenades, and flank whenever possible. Sniper scenes still play a huge part, so you'll have to keep a steady hand, and you'll still encounter the occasional "plant explosives on key items" objective.

But it's not 1945 anymore, and military tech has come a long way. The new toys you get to play with you may have seen on CNN or YouTube. The standard weaponry features modern guns like the MP5, M14, and AK-47, each with its own special scopes, sights, and modifications. But you also get the Javelin tank-busting rocket launcher, helicopter gunship support and airstrikes, and even a mission that puts you high above the clouds in an AC-130.



but there are certain "brick wall" areas that overwhelm you with punishing enemy fire and little recourse—including an extraction level that ranks as one of the most difficult combat scenarios ever designed in the brief history of these games. In short, play through on "Normal" the first time and challenge your skills later.

While the campaign is a satisfying thrill, *COD4*'s multiplayer is treated with equal craftsmanship. A party system fueled by a wealth of playlists of differing maps and modes provides for near-endless entertainment. The create-a-class feature lets you customize your loadout for different situations, and you're given "Perks" that enhance your character even further (better stopping power, longer sprint time, etc.). But the addiction is born from the leveling system: As you move

up from level 1 to 55, you can unlock new weaponry and attachments, camouflages, weapon challenges (built-in achievements), and more—the carrot's always at the end of the stick.

With proven mechanics, steady writing, and excellent multiplayer, *COD4* is one of the best FPSes of the year—no small feat considering the competition.

➔ **CRISPIN:** "Disturbingly realistic" has never been a term I'd use to describe any previous war-themed console shooter, and it's not even one I'd apply to 90 percent of *COD4*, which in many ways is similar to the previous WWII-era installments. But one level in particular will likely awe—maybe even shock—anyone who's ever YouTubed military gun-camera footage. Set in the belly of a circling C-130 airplane, the level has you manning weapons

stations to blast ground vehicles and evildoers who appear as ghost-white stick figures in your whitewashed thermal vision. The plane's intercom crackles with clipped, all-business crew conversation, seemingly out of place with the carnage on the ground.

It's this sequel's most compelling sequence and proof that the genre has come full circle: Real-life military technology that for years has been described as "like a videogame" has wound up in a videogame that completely captures real life. The rest of the game, however, plays out more like a war movie than a real war. Or, to be more accurate, like a war movie turned into a theme-park ride. As in previous tours of *Duty*, this installment is linear, with enemies popping up in the same positions like tin ducks in a shooting gallery. Sometimes you get



■ Your squad is fairly smart, but most of the dirty work is left up to you.

the illusion of going your own way (like when you choose in which order to storm houses in a search-and-rescue mission), but the enemy A.I. here rarely transcends its tin-duck mentality or lives up to the standards of contemporary top-line shooters. That's not to say the campaign isn't fun—the narrative is packed with twists and “holy s***!” moments, including a super-long-range sniper hit that has you adjusting for the wind.

Multiplayer, meanwhile, finds its niche in the crowded online-shooter battlefield, providing worthwhile incentives for long-term players. Newbies, however, will likely find the whole thing daunting if they don't get in on the ground floor.

➔ **GARNETT:** That old adage “torn from the headlines” needs updating to

“video-captured from CNN” for *COD4*. Along with Crispin's favorite part, the entire game creates such a complete feeling of sensory immersion that it evokes the same sense of you-are-there I got from watching the embedded reporters during the war in Iraq. The aural and visual prowess of this game can not be overstated. In 5.1 surround sound, the rich soundscape rivals the best Spielberg moments. And after experiencing *COD4*, I also won't be too accepting of arguments that you have to compromise between graphical detail, lighting, and getting it all to run smoothly.

Though this presentation power gets put to use in a new era, its application remains as in prior outings. For 95 percent of the trip, *COD4* exemplifies the very pinnacle of cinematic action mixed with scripted design.

Countless times I thought to myself, “That was the most intense firefight I've experienced.” But the couple of times it comes off the track result in an equally unpleasant memory of repeatedly restarting to get past a staged sequence. That didn't change the fact that, sitting here writing this review, I'm stoked to play it again.

Actually, I'll probably start online. I love that Infinity Ward plans to watch the stats and make on-the-fly changes, including new modes, to keep it fresh. Add to that the experience and reward system, 16 maps out of the box, and the party system, and *COD4* delivers a knockout one-two single- and multiplayer shooter punch. 🏆

EGM Extras: That Ferris wheel extraction level giving you fits? Our SuperGuide at EGM.1UP.com can help.



■ Happiness is shooting some alien scum in the face. Sadness is then walking into an invisible wall.

XB360 (also on PS3)

BLACKSITE: AREA 51

■ Publisher: Midway ■ Developer: Midway Austin ■ Players: 1-10 ■ ESRB: Teen

THE VERDICTS
(OUT OF 10)

JOE
6.0
AVERAGE

NICK
5.0
AVERAGE

G. FORD
6.0
AVERAGE

The Good: Competent mutant-blasting

The Bad: Almost entirely forgettable

The Political: "Cut and Run," "Stay the Course," and "Misunderestimated"

You could find worse ways to spend a couple of afternoons

+ JOE: What exactly is *BlackSite: Area 51*? It's not really scary, though it has its moments. It's not notably funny, though the dialogue can be clever. It's not terribly deep, though it tries for relevance with sly nods to the war in Iraq. It's not graphically stunning, though it's by no means ugly. It's not particularly well scripted, and its plot isn't particularly satisfying.

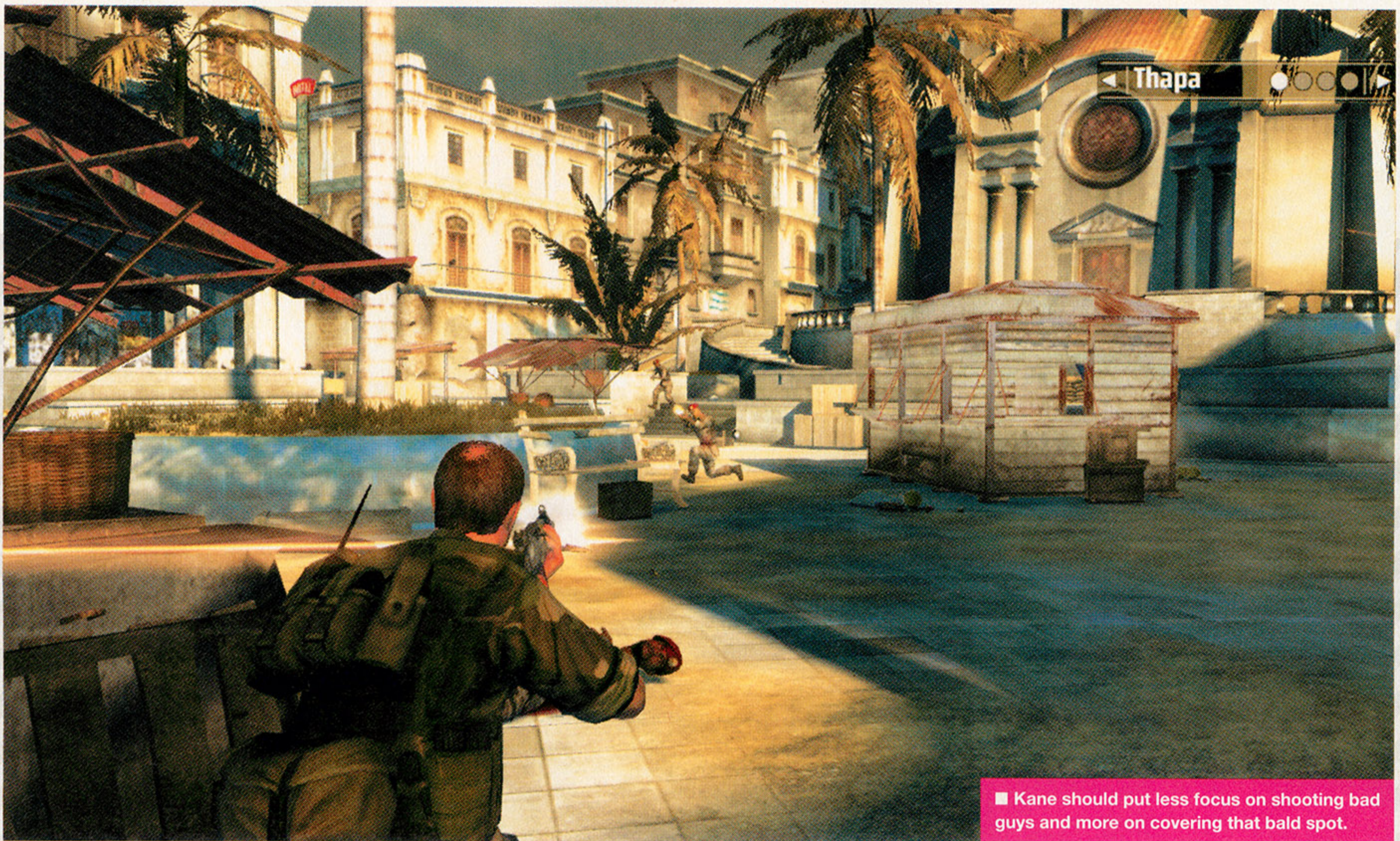
I'll tell you what *BlackSite* is: It's a popcorn movie in first-person-shooter form. It's about mowing down forgettable enemies with big guns and blowing stuff up—and not a damn thing beyond that. Do not misunderstand me; I don't *dislike* this game. Aside from a few minor graphical bugs and hiccups, *BlackSite* is competent at what it does. It's just that what it

does isn't particularly notable or memorable—in either a good or a bad way. It's not even memorably mediocre. It's just...diverting, for 10 hours or so. You could say worse things about a game.

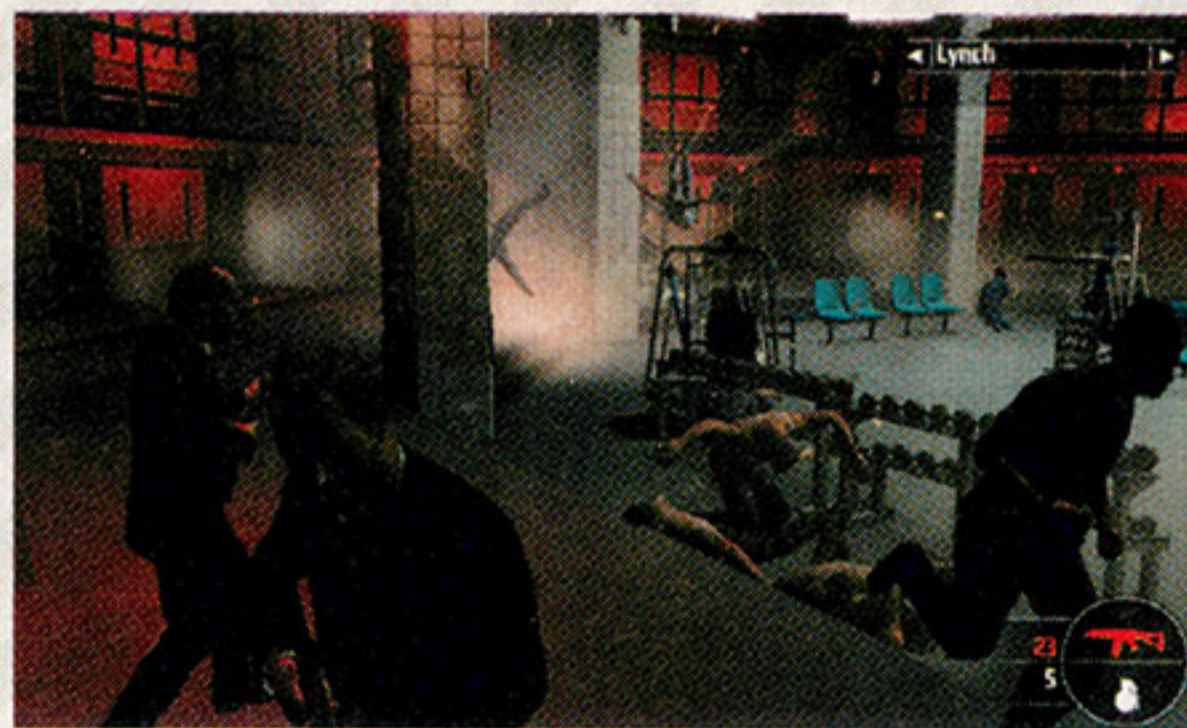
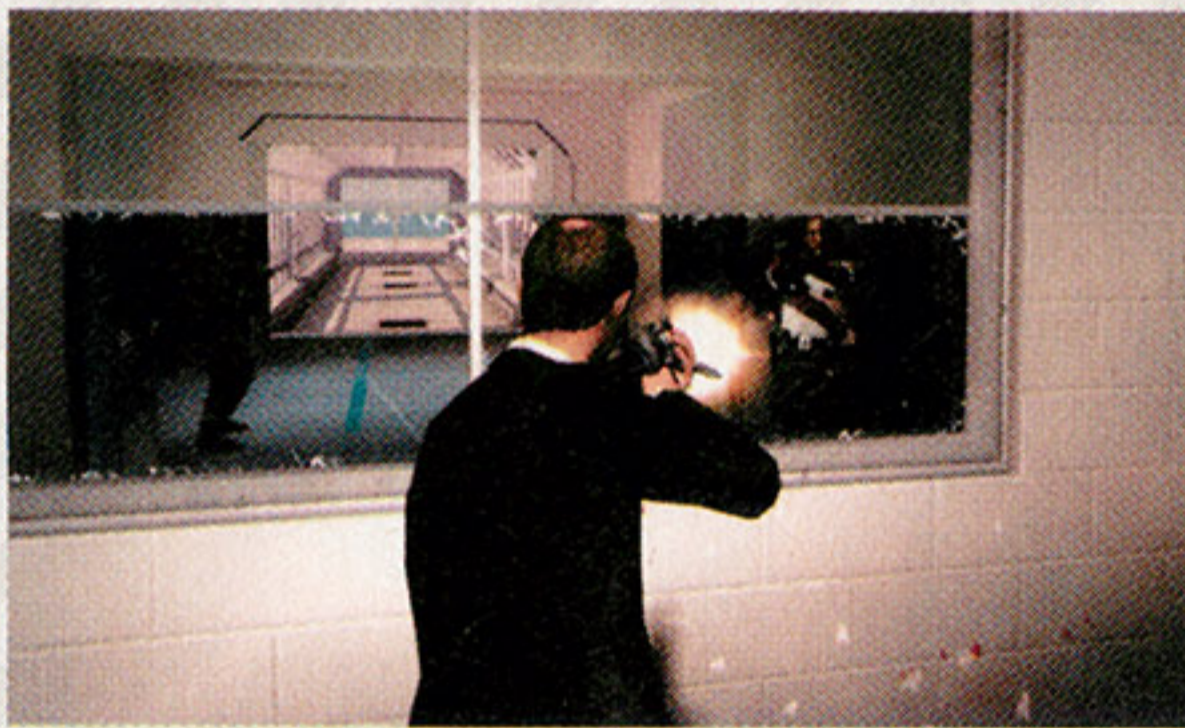
+ NICK: It took me less than half that time to get through *BlackSite* because I was playing on the easier Casual difficulty. Why? Because on the default (Hard), regular humans can absorb a clip of bullets and survive. Annoying. What else is annoying? Incredibly linear levels, inconsistent hit detection, and unnecessarily forced squad support. And too few weapons, enemy types, and levels. And perhaps worst of all, it has a sluggish movement speed and floaty aiming. At best, *BlackSite* is a poor man's *Resistance*;

at worst, it's half of an unfinished game with a few cool set pieces.

+ G. FORD: I'm in shock at Nick's Casual admission (this guy's a *Halo 3* god); *BlackSite* is just right on Hard. The bigger problem is that whole "not memorable" thing. I liked seeing alien critters crisscrossing lawns in the burbs, but in general this otherwise fine-playing game is forgettable and lacks polish. Vehicles control way too squirrely unless you turn down the universal sensitivity, which means you have to jack it back up on foot. Checkpoint placement is awful. And though online play ran smoothly, the standard deathmatches and infection variant won't steer you away from this season's huge-deal competition. 🐜



■ Kane should put less focus on shooting bad guys and more on covering that bald spot.



Xbox 360

KANE & LYNCH: DEAD MEN

■ Publisher: Eidos ■ Developer: IO ■ Players: 1-8 ■ ESRB: Mature

THE VERDICTS
(OUT OF 10)

MATT
7.5
GOOD

ANDREW P.
7.0
GOOD

G. FORD
7.0
GOOD

Alive on arrival

+MATT: Potential—a great word to hear in a preview, but never in a review. And *Kane & Lynch* seems to hit a wall each time it creeps up on its potential. In the campaign, the demented-duo-on-the-run story, settings, and characters are great, but poor enemy intelligence and on-again-off-again hit detection mean you'll be overusing ammunition.

In co-op, everything fits together perfectly, with one player taking Kane and the other Lynch (this game was built for co-op), but you can't play online. And the "Fragile Alliance" multiplayer mode, where everyone performs a heist as a group and then has to decide whether to betray each other, is unique—and online—but not skill-based enough to be more than a

gimmick. *Kane & Lynch* is a fun game to fly through in a couple days on "Aspirin" (easy) mode, but not deep or hardcore enough to hold up long term.

+ANDREW P.: I was more bummed about *Kane & Lynch's* unfulfilled story potential. The beginning was an excellent setup, paying homage to movies like *Heat* and *Reservoir Dogs*, but it eventually focused too much on Kane's clichéd family issues instead of Lynch's far more interesting insanity. It does deserve credit for some very cool scenario design (Tokyo skyscrapers, prison escapes, giant dump trucks), even though the win/lose conditions aren't always clear and getting into safe cover is inconsistent. Yet the writing and combat are strong enough

to make me hope for a sequel, hopefully called *Lynch & Kane*.

+G. FORD: I'm also a big fan of the ever-changing locations, and I loved how many bustled with activity (especially the dance club). Developer IO has carried the crowd mentality from its *Hitman* series over well. Too bad the cover system didn't receive more love. Since it's not button based, you'll stick to objects at seemingly random times, which hurts the generally fun combat. And yeah, the game shines during co-op...it's just a shame I had to share the screen with Andrew.

The Good: Great story, pacing, and variety

The Bad: Online... co-op...if only...

If You Shoot Someone In The Head: Shouldn't he die?

EGM Extras: Having trouble with that dump-truck driver? We did. Our SuperGuide at EGM.1UP.com can help.



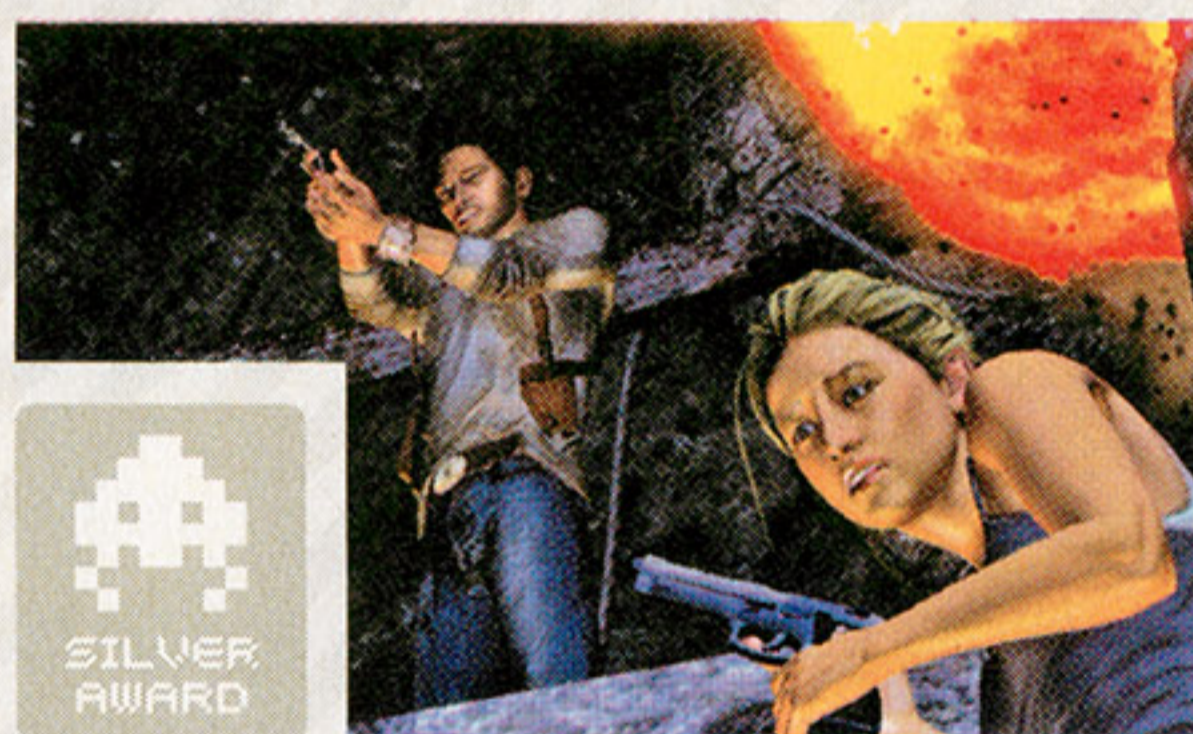
REVIEWS



GAMES
OVERLOAD!



■ Early enemies wear terrorist casual (below), but by the end they armor up.



PlayStation 3

UNCHARTED: DRAKE'S FORTUNE

■ Publisher: Sony CEA ■ Developer: Naughty Dog ■ Players: 1 ■ ESRB: Teen

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

G. FORD
8.5
GOOD

NICK
8.5
GOOD

CRISPIN
8.5
GOOD

The Good: Gunplay, acrobatics, charming characters

The Bad: Not much original here, lame puzzles

Sixaxis Controls: Let's not even bother

Unearthing a treasure

➔ **G. FORD:** As you play through *Uncharted*, don't be surprised if this island getaway feels a little familiar. And why shouldn't it, since you'll be stop-and-pop-shooting like you did in *Gears of War*, pulling off unbelievable wall-crawling acrobatics like a regular Persian prince, and traversing exotic locales à la *Tomb Raider's* svelte spelunker? Hell, it'd seem wholly appropriate for the cocksure lead to don a weathered fedora and sport a perpetual scruffy five o'clock shadow that'd laugh in the face of any Quattro. But don't think this culling of mixed inspiration makes for a lesser product. Developer Naughty Dog has brought together these pieces to create a compelling quest that embodies the word "adventure" throughout its 10-

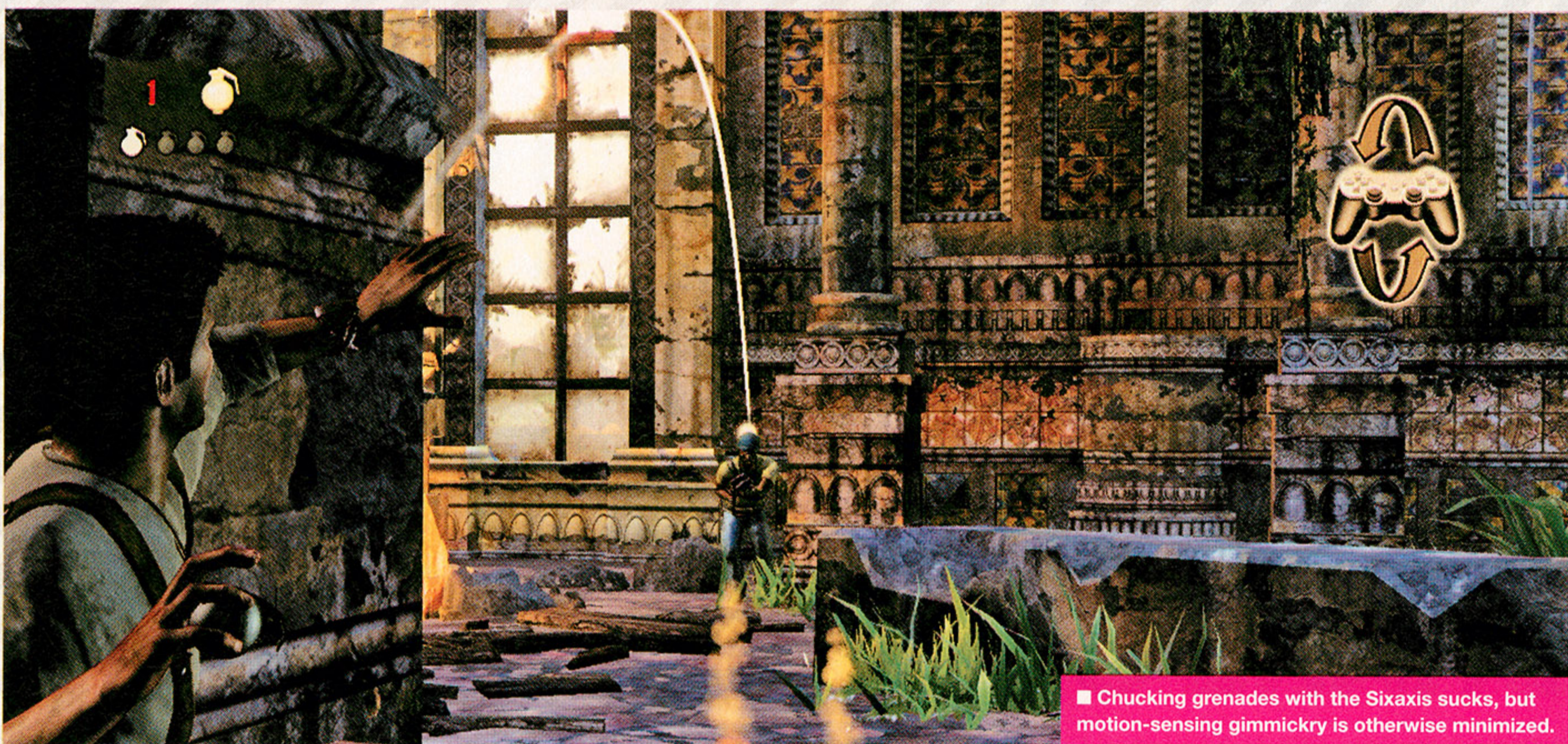
hour playtime.

The story puts you in the shoes of Nate Drake, supposedly descended from storied explorer Sir Francis Drake (whose diary provides guidance throughout), on a relic-finding documentary tour turned sour, which means lots of guns, fisticuffs, and platforming in this third-person action-adventure. It's not a terribly unique setup, to be sure, but *Uncharted* does move at a good clip, constantly pushing the story between locations and set pieces.

It's also easy to appreciate the visuals. Naughty Dog has created a stunning world, with impressive lighting effects that ratchet up the creepiness in torch-led treks through decaying labyrinths and crumbling architecture

that will leave you gawking. Tons of animations add to the immersion. Drake fills each moment with character, such as a clumsy stumble through a porthole. Of course, the enemies animate to a laughable degree, overacting each time you strike them with a shot, looking like they are ready to dance a jig.

But that's a small complaint within what's an otherwise great shooting system. *Uncharted* employs a cover system not unlike *Gears of War's*. You can "attach" Drake to almost any form of cover with the press of a button, from which point you can blindfire or lean out and bring up a reticule to aim (while also exposing yourself). It works quite well, and it's a good thing, since game progression typically



■ Chucking grenades with the Sixaxis sucks, but motion-sensing gimmickry is otherwise minimized.

involves you often hitting cover-filled rooms of enemies.

Complementing the combat are the scenes in which you get to make use of Drake's surprising acrobatic acumen. If the next goal is somewhere over you, Drake'll think nothing of scrambling to the top of a pillar, jumping to a groove in a wall, then hoisting himself up to a ledge. And that's an easy one. (Did Naughty Dog really try to sell this guy as a bumbling everyman? In addition to these impressive feats, he soaks up bullets like a sponge thanks to an appreciated *Halo*-esque regeneration system—good-bye first-aid kits.) Fortunately, the controls are responsive, and costly mistakes will be your own.

It's a shame then that the great combat and platforming aren't matched by equally impressive puz-

zles. Almost all of the handful or so you encounter require you to crack old man Drake's diary for a hit-you-over-the-head solution.

The breadth of *Uncharted's* entertaining acrobatics/gunfight gameplay mix easily makes up for its shortcomings, as does the safe but satisfying story (even if it does get a little ridiculous by the end). It may not be a system seller, but it's the type of game that makes you glad you have a PS3.

✦ CRISPIN: I dunno if "jig" is the right word for the enemies' bullet-dodging dance; these guys are often just a pair of puffy pants away from M.C. Hammertime. But pop-and-locking to avoid your pop-and-shooting is just one of many seemingly silly bad-guy behaviors that actually make for supremely satisfying gunplay. Enemies

hunker down not quite behind cover, giving you just enough exposed skin to score satisfying head shots (which are rewarded with Drake's dry commentary and even some Xbox 360-style "achievements"). They dart out and knee-slide to new cover positions, ostensibly to outflank you but in actuality just to keep this shooting gallery full of moving targets. And nothing's more satisfying than making a dude fumble his grenade toss and watching it go boom at his feet.

So—surprise!—this island adventure is actually a top-tier action game. And the actual adventure here—despite being so cliché-crammed and *Tomb Raided*-inspired—is breezy fun, well-paced with mild puzzles and vehicle-revving sections giving you a break just when the gunplay feels played out. It doesn't hurt that



Naughty Roots

Uncharted is clearly a combo of *Tomb Raider* and *Gears of War*, but developer Naughty Dog also takes inspiration from its own games...



The original *Crash Bandicoot* took place in a colorful tropical setting, with beautiful—though linear—jungles to explore. Sound familiar? During a few action sequences in *Uncharted*, you'll also find yourself running away from impending danger toward the screen, a camera device that *Crash* regularly employed. And what two vehicles are most closely associated with later *Crashes*' vehicle segments? A biplane and Jet Ski, both of which make appearances in *Uncharted* (though the plane is only in cut-scenes).



As for the developer's other big series, *Jak and Daxter* features the fatherly old man character giving you directions and the talkative sarcastic sidekick, just like *Uncharted* (though Elena is cute and charismatic and doesn't get on your nerves like that mouthy ottsel Daxter). Of course, the biggest similarity is the large-scale gunplay, which became more of a focus for *Jak* as the series wore on.



Drake treads the most postcard-ready environments ever seen in a console title. Grab a Corona and boot up this beauty in the snowy winter if you're hard up for Caribbean scenery.


➔ NICK: I can't overemphasize the *Gears of War* comparison. It's not something you think about much while playing due to the contrarily lush setting and platforming bits, but upon reflection the similarities are striking: You get waves of enemies in big open plazas utilizing a cover system (that is arguably *better* than *Gears*'), a random vehicle segment halfway through the game, an arc icon for grenade tossing, and combat that falters slightly in close quarters (being shot while slow-mo slugging an enemy sucks). Fortunately, *Uncharted*'s characters are a helluva lot more interesting than

the surly marines we're used to; both Drake and gal pal Elena are radiantly charming and legitimately funny at times, which makes their perfectly paced adventure all the more engaging—like in *Heavenly Sword*, the cut-scenes that break up the action here are expertly crafted and as cinematic as anything we've seen from the medium.

I can't say enough about how good this game looks, either. From intoxicating seaside sunsets to shrubs that brush aside as you pass by them to the way Drake walks up stairs like an *actual human being*, it's a thoroughly convincing environment to spend time in. Even the smaller details are in place, like the fluffy billows of smoke from explosions and the way the characters' clothes seem to cling to them after a swim through a stream;

by comparison, though, the lack of visual variety in the enemies is a bit disappointing (shotgun guy, sniper guy, etc.).

Unfortunately, while *Uncharted* looks astounding and almost plays the part, I can't shake the feeling that something's missing. Content with being a polished amalgam of ideas we've seen before, it feels at times like *King Kong* without the ape—an exciting island adventure that simply lacks a unique hook or a big reveal. Everything's fun and exhilarating, but it never builds to more than the sum of its parts. Just keep your expectations in the right place, and you'll enjoy your time in the tropical sun. 🐜

 **EGM Extras:** *Drake's hint-filled diary not doing it for ya? Leap to EGM.1UP.com for a SuperGuided tour.*



Xbox 360

NARUTO: RISE OF A NINJA

■ Publisher: Ubisoft ■ Developer: Ubisoft Montreal ■ Players: 1-2 ■ ESRB: Teen



THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

MILKMAN
6.5
AVERAGE

BROOKS
8.0
GOOD

GREG S.
5.5
AVERAGE

The Good: A beautiful re-creation of the *Naruto* milieu

The Bad: *Naruto* vets have seen this all before

Naruto: What an annoying voice

Rise of the new Naruto

➔ **MILKMAN:** *Naruto*'s had it good with game adaptations. You can find decent *Naruto* games on GameCube and PS2, and now the Xbox 360 has one as well. Visually, *Rise of a Ninja* is one of the system's best-looking games. But from a game-design standpoint, it's less successful. While optional, a surprising amount of "fetch the coin" subquests mar what would be an otherwise compelling tour through *Naruto*'s hometown.

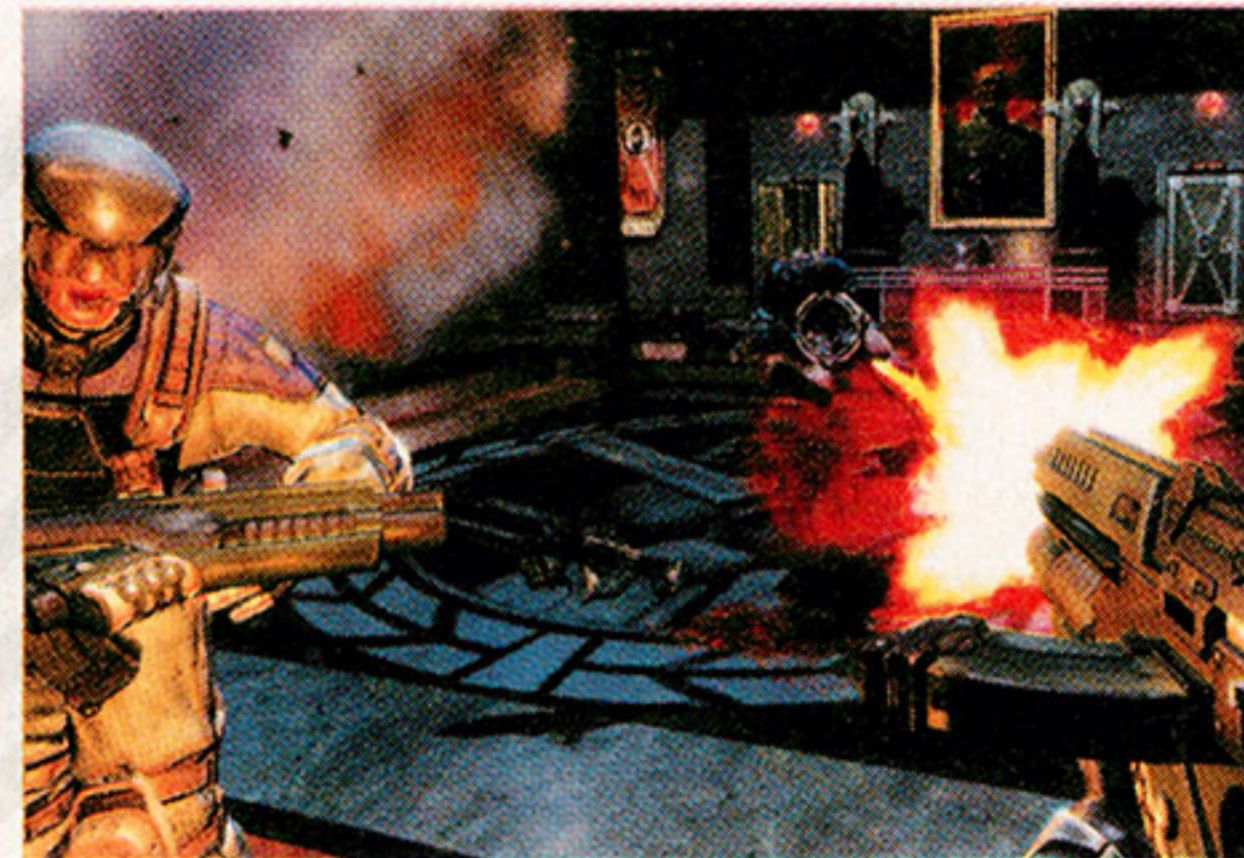
Things pick up once you get additional abilities, but much like the titular character in 3D *Sonic* games, *Naruto* moves too fast for the story mode's platforming elements. Plus, the fighting system's most powerful attacks rely on filling gauges via trigger buttons and analog-stick inputs,

which is overly fussy for a game where your opponents are the A.I. equivalent of button-mashers. Seeing the story unfold through 5-year-old animated cut-scenes really doesn't do the game any justice, either, making *Rise of a Ninja* a solid title that should have broken free from the license to do some real storytelling.

➔ **BROOKS:** Hey, Milky, sure you aren't a little bitter after an appalling 0-4 record against this *Naruto* noob? The fighting is more than fair in my book—the jutsu moves you speak of (filling gauges for powerful attacks) require the right opportunity, like when I beat you down with a heavy combo and left you temporarily defenseless. The beautiful-looking story mode has

many shining moments, particularly leapfrogging through the trees at breakneck speeds. Also, online buffs will appreciate the long list of playable characters and tournaments.

➔ **GREG S:** I think Milky's nuts to call previous *Naruto* games "good," but anyway.... *Rise of a Ninja* is a disappointing example of wasted potential. The large world and deceptive free-form gameplay seem awesome at first, until you realize the developers broke the game down into short bursts of fighting and fetching—and neither is handled particularly well. But I have to say I do like the idea of retelling *Naruto*'s story in a video-game, if only because I didn't watch all of this stuff when it first came out.



Xbox 360

TIMESHIFT

■ Publisher: Sierra ■ Developer: Saber ■ Players: 1-16 ■ ESRB: Mature

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

DARREN
5.5
AVERAGE

MICHAEL
5.5
AVERAGE

GARNETT
6.0
AVERAGE

The Good: Neat time-control powers, fun multiplayer

The Bad: Not being able to fast-forward to the end

PS3 Version: Coming in December

Time cries

➔ **DARREN:** I wanna hit rewind. When *TimeShift* nearly shipped last year, Sierra held off and decided to reboot everything. So instead of shooting my way through a unique steampunk world, I'm playing some *Half-Life 2* knock-off with a TiVo tuxedo.

I'm not saying the time-traveling star attraction of this first-person shooter stinks, but it does get slightly stale. Your suit's A.I. selects the most appropriate power (slow down, stop, or reverse) by default. But what works in battle actually botches the many puzzles. It becomes an idiot button—tap once and the suit solves everything for you, such as stopping time so you can walk across water. Hey, maybe it can play without me, too!

Aside from the slightly mishandled

time powers, the larger problem is apathy. The world's generic vibe fails to engage from start to the limp end-boss battle. The game is mostly competent and the enemy A.I. reacts intelligently enough, but about half-way into *TimeShift*, I was ready for the end. I like to think that in an alternate timeline, it would've turned out better.

➔ **MICHAEL:** Whoa, apathy I can agree with, but intelligent A.I. I can't. In one section, I blew apart a dude with an exploding crossbow, only for his clueless chum—mere inches away—to completely ignore it. See, instead of making the enemies brainy, the game instead decides to make up for the lack of difficulty by sending hordes of dullards at you at once.

But I'll admit, the combat is fun...until you realize that you practically rewind the same tactic over and over: Slow down time to pick off each baddie.

➔ **GARNETT:** *TimeShift* definitely looks a lot prettier than it did the first go-round, but once again it finds itself behind the times. Get too close to anything and that beauty dissolves into a muddy blur. Plus, the lack of interactivity gave me this disconnect of shooting my way through a still life. Multiplayer spices things up by packing the time powers into grenades. The ensuing chaos resulting from the spheres of distorted time (think *Halo 3*'s bubble shield) gives the game its best moments. That at least makes for a weekend's worth of novelty.

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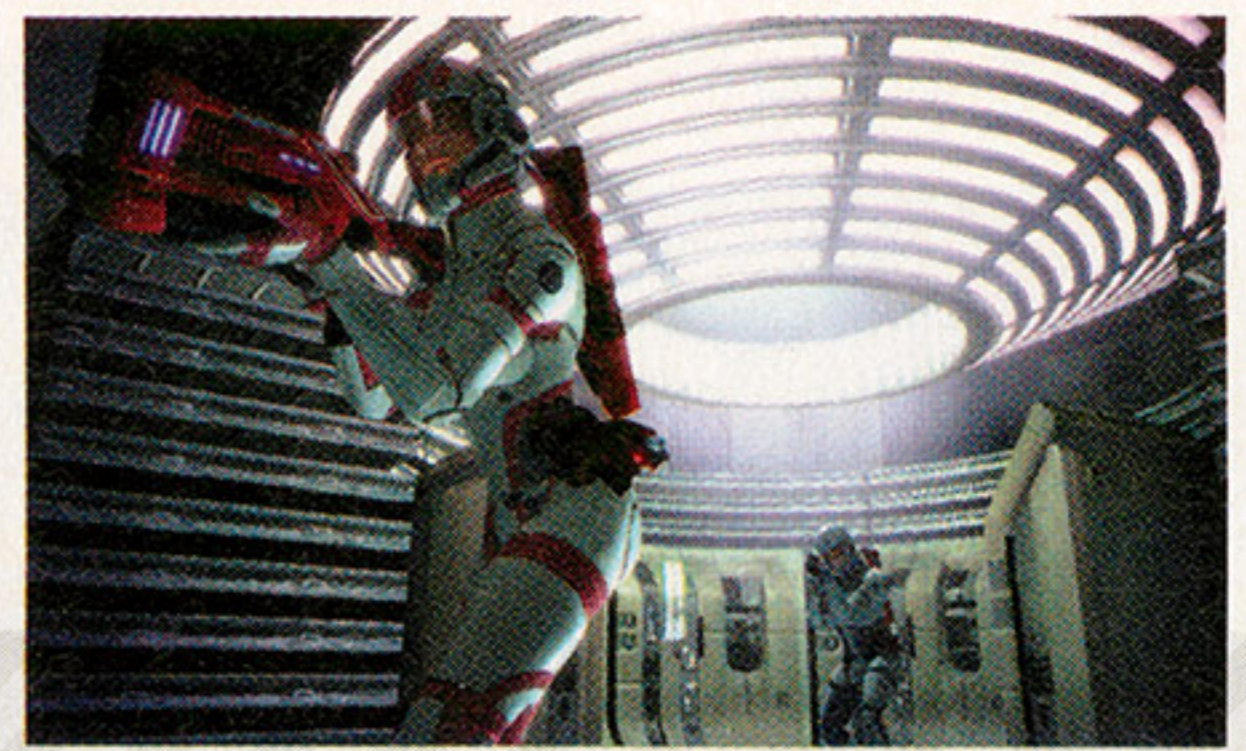
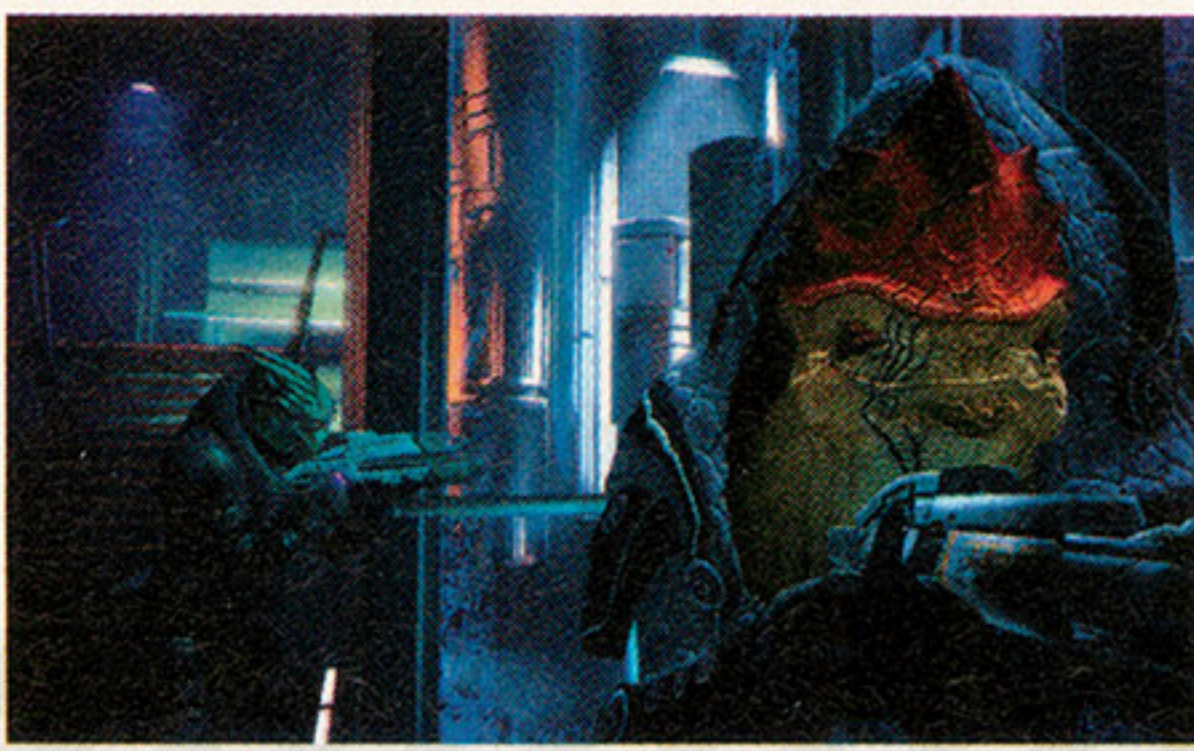
HANDS-ON MOBILE

ACTIVISION

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REVIEWS
GAMES
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Xbox 360

MASS EFFECT

■ Publisher: Microsoft Game Studios ■ Developer: BioWare ■ Players: 1 ■ ESRB: Mature

THE VERDICTS
(OUT OF 10)

JENNIFER
9.0
EXCELLENT

JOHN
9.5
EXCELLENT

BRYAN
9.0
EXCELLENT

The Good: Combat, story development
The Bad: Balance issues—not all classes created equal
Why Does the Future: Have so many elevators?

Advanced starfighter

+ JENNIFER: Allow me a single *Star Wars* quip—the Force is strong with this one—and then I’ll stop. It’s tough not to acknowledge that work when discussing *Mass Effect*, the action-role-playing game from BioWare, the makers of *Knights of the Old Republic*. You control a three-person squad, halting the action to cue up attacks. You battle foes with a magical force harnessed from the universe. Blue-skinned beauties dance in bars brimming with a diverse alien clientele. You half expect to find a Wookiee manning your spacecraft.

But enter your first battle, and the differences will make your heart race. The mostly real-time action, huge arsenal of powers, and underlying physics make this combat system

fast-paced, unpredictable, and highly entertaining. Party members use A.I. if you let them, but I paused constantly to micromanage them because it was so fun seeing all our powers working together. I’d have one squadmate lift an enemy, then overload his weapons myself, while my third guy blasted him with bullets. Those robots didn’t stand a chance, and if they did somehow beat me, I loved replaying fights just to see what would happen the next time. (And it was hard to make the same things happen twice.)

Much was made of the dialogue system throughout this game’s development. The results are subtler than expected—essentially, you still select options in a dialogue tree. But instead of knowing exactly what you’re

going to say (as in previous BioWare games), you pick the gist. When your character speaks, you’re hearing it for the first time. It’s a small—but exhilarating—change. I loved hearing how my character phrased the emotions I’d selected. The excellent character-creation system, too, helps. Though the mouth movements don’t sync up well with the voice acting, these characters look and sound like real people, making this one of the most immersive game experiences I’ve ever had. The story itself—a sci-fi mélange of *Star Wars*, *The Matrix*, *Battlestar Galactica*, *Contact*, and more—won’t win awards for originality. And yet, when things are illuminated near the end, it really stuck with me. It helped that the game’s last levels are, quite



■ Graphics whores will want to turn off the film grain effect (in Options).

My Favorite Martian

Mass Effect gives you six potential squad members, each with their own specialties to complement the class you choose for your main character. You can select which party members you want in your crew at the beginning of each planetary mission, and which you prefer largely depends on your style of play. Here are each of our reviewer's faves:



JENNIFER

Class Played: Sentinel (mix of tech and biotics)

Favorite Squadmate: Wrex

"My character was limited to a pistol in terms of raw firepower (unlike Bryan's brute). So I needed a strong soldier, and Wrex has the big guns.

I thought I'd want a pure warrior like Ashley, but the biotics were too much fun, and Wrex has a decent arsenal of these magical powers. I kept him with me till the bitter end."

JOHN

Class Played: Vanguard (mix of soldier and biotics)

Favorite Squadmate: Garrus

"Not because he's necessarily all that awesome (though his tech skills are handy) but because he's actually, secretly, the funniest character in the game. Do something particularly outrageous, and he always has a deadpan observation. Because of that, I brought Garrus along on just about every mission."



BRYAN

Class Played: Vanguard (mix of soldier and biotics)

Favorite Squadmate: Kaidan

"As Jennifer can attest, my version of Shepard was a shotgun-wielding stud in *Mass Effect's* Milky Way. And since my first instinct was always to pull the trigger, I just let the rest of my talented crew get techy or utilize their biotic powers. My best advice: Autolevel Kaidan and watch him launch foes into the starry night with his almighty Lift command."



simply, amazing and beautiful. You'll want to look around, take it all in, and think about it later.

But I did experience a hint of ennui at times in this very typically BioWare game with its all-too-familiar quest structure. Arriving at a big area filled with optional side quests feels tiresome. Rescuing the wayward sister, catching the cheating researcher, clearing up the lovers' quarrel....

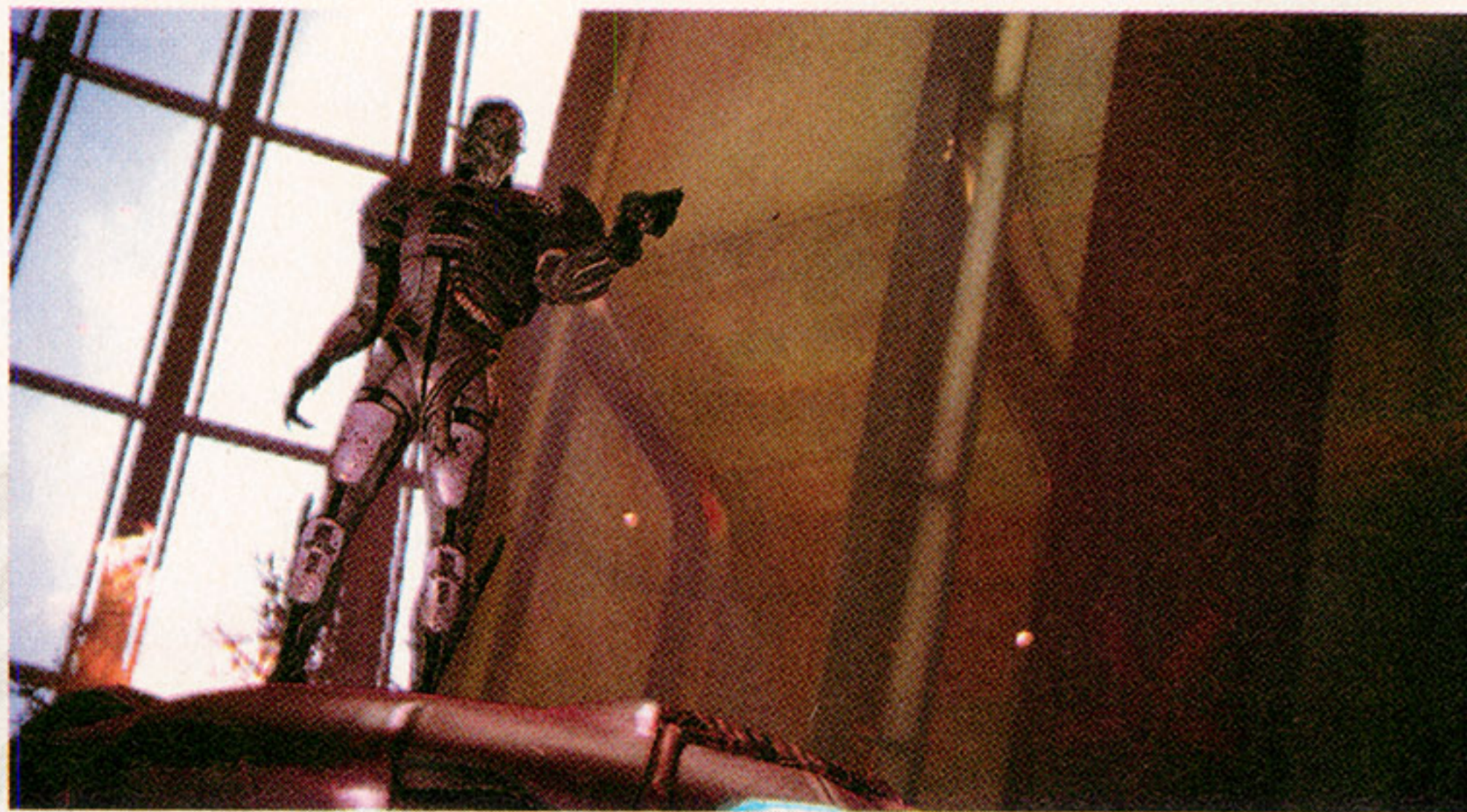
Impatient gamers (like Bryan) will want to skip this stuff—especially as they mostly take place early in the game, when you want more combat yet find yourself caught in wonderfully done, but all too lengthy conversations.

The game also lacks a certain polish. Inventory management is often painful and tedious. Money is nigh useless—making it even more annoying that I frittered away so many hours

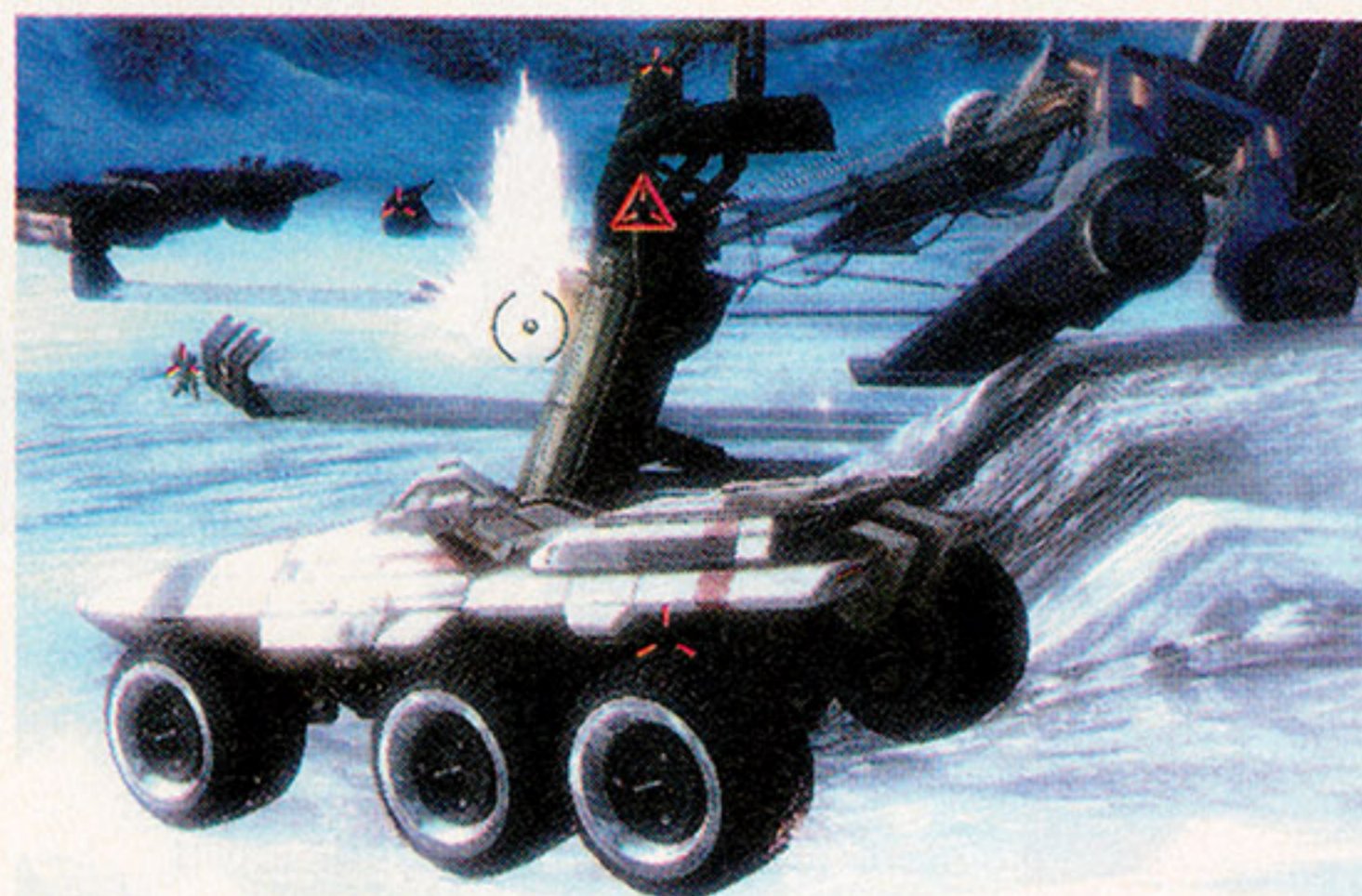
questing for money I'd never spend. The autosave points are badly placed, too. Why make me watch unskippable cut-scenes before a tough battle where I'm going to die and then have to watch the scenes over and over again? It's a minor quibble, and I suppose the brilliance is that, however many times I watched a scene or fought a battle, *Mass Effect* never truly lost its magic.

➔ **JOHN:** Far from feeling the conversations were too lengthy, I spent much of the game looking forward to chatting in the central hub locations. Early on, it was because my experience points made combat too difficult (unless you switch to "casual" mode, in which case it's a breeze), and I craved story development. But later, it was because the writing is just so

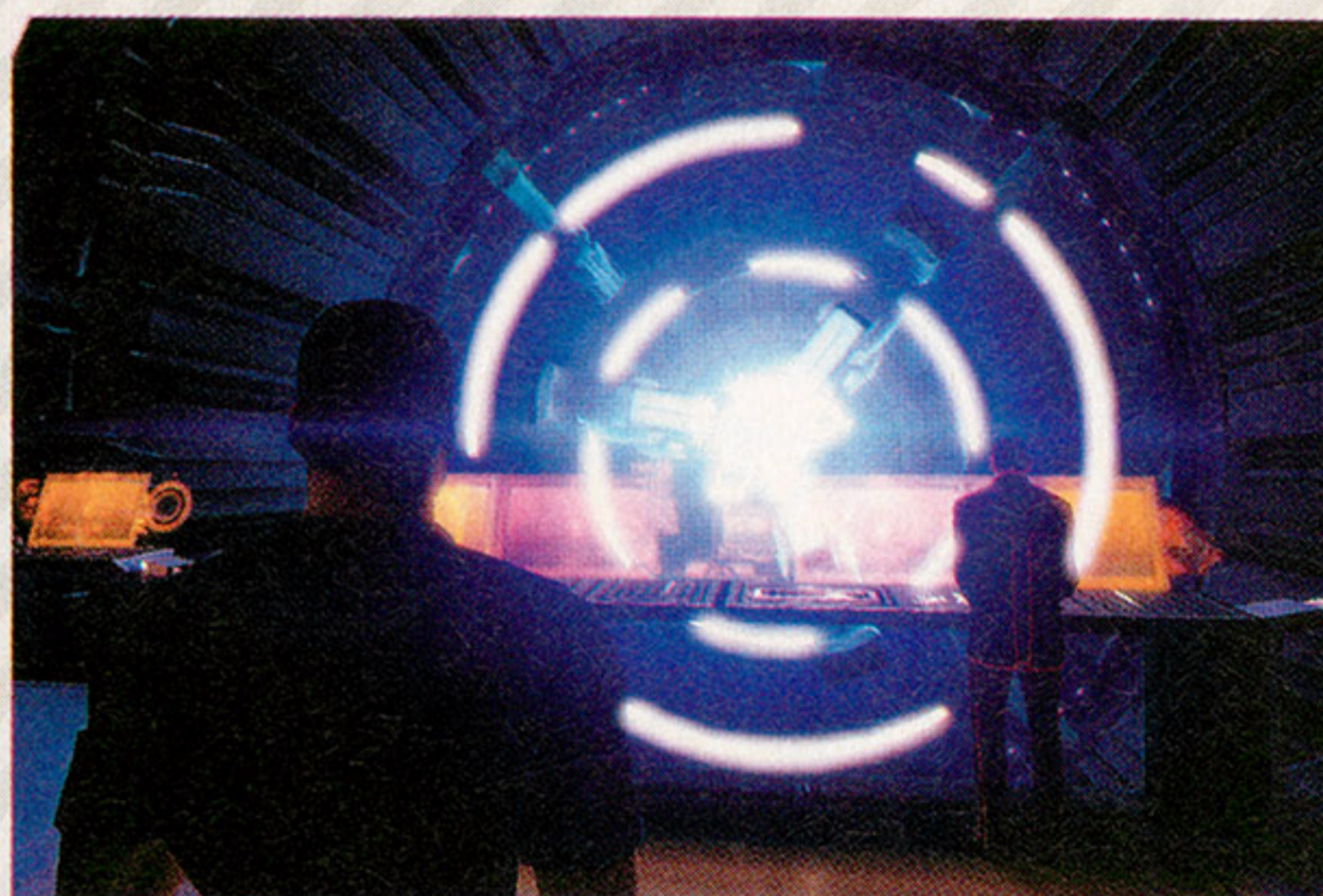
damn great. The characters are wonderfully fleshed out, and the voice acting is excellent without exception. As relationships developed, I started to notice a real bond both with the other members of my party, as well as my particular "version" of Shepard, too. Jennifer's *Star Wars* quip is apt, but it's worth noting that the acting here is at least on a par with—if not better than—that seen in the most recent trilogy. Far from being a ponderous sci-fi exposition, *Mass Effect* boasts a dynamic, well-constructed story with a broad emotional range. The wonderfully scripted dialogue provokes everything from chuckles to moments of real angst. It's also extremely well paced. The game introduces characters and then gives them some space to breathe before their true purpose is revealed, and the side quests, far



The Joy of Six



Once you've gotten the hang of hoofin' it around space stations and such, *Mass Effect* plops you into the Mako, a six-wheeled all-terrain tank that's used to explore uncharted planets and other rough turf. The first time you take it for a whirl, prepare for a steep learning curve (especially since the game doesn't provide any explanation whatsoever for how to use the thing). But give yourself a minute to figure out the basics: The A button jumps, Right trigger controls guns, Right bumper fires bombs, pushing in the Right analog stick zooms up close, and so on. Before you know it, you'll be off-roading with ease—and mowing down hordes of enemy Geth naive enough to get in your way. The thing handles pretty well; we couldn't flip it, no matter how hard we tried.




from being tiresome, provide real insight into the themes of the central quest. Sure, you can beat the game in 12 hours if you attack it with vigor, but do so and you miss a lot of background—and flavor. Jen mentioned that the later quests are “amazing and beautiful.” I'll reinforce that with a comment about the final hour, which brings together everything from the romantic climax of the story to the final action-packed denouement. By the very last scene, you'll be craving a sequel and keen to spend more time with Shepard and his crew.

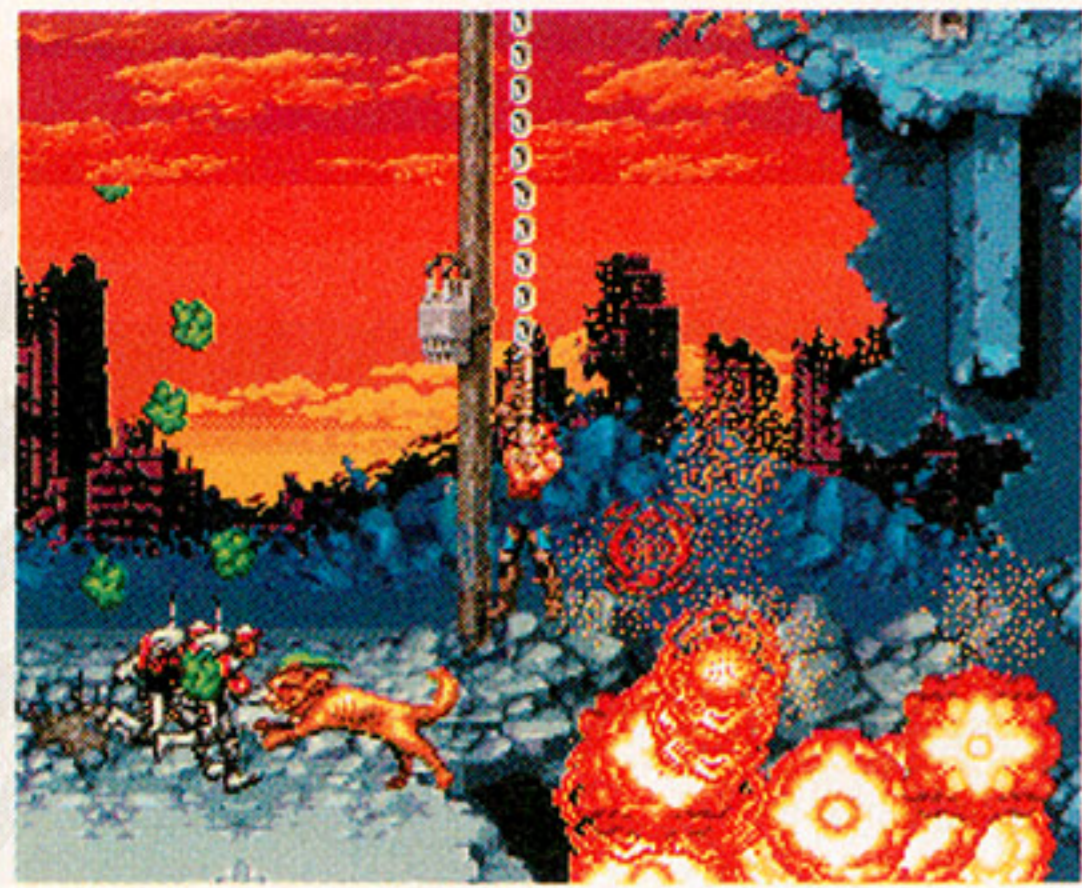
✦ **BRYAN:** These two sure seem like *Mass Effect* experts, right? But I'll bet 100 spacebucks they had to work really hard to become masters of this universe—the game doesn't teach you how to do anything! But once you're

done fumbling through fights, figuring out how to control your six-wheeler, and learning the nuances of weapon/armor upgrades, this gorgeous RPG is just as spectacular as Jen and John mentioned. And for me, it all begins with the combat. While you can start and stop the action like in previous BioWare games, the system here is so much more diverse that you can choose to play *Mass Effect* as a run-and-gun shooter, use cover, and then let your A.I. buddies bring the magic. Speaking of squadmates, these guys/gals/aliens sure do have a good head on their shoulders, as they'd always follow my commands and even show creativity on the battlefield (such as launching foes 60 feet in the air). The game's bad guys aren't dummies, either; I never expected to encounter enemies in an RPG that were so

intelligent. Instead of bum-rushing me while I patiently wait behind a box, they'd raise my cover spot just enough (via the Lift ability) so they could snipe me between the eyes.

Once you put the firearms away, *Mass Effect* still shines...but not quite as brightly as I expected. BioWare's trademark dialogue-tree system has changed for the better, yet it's not nearly as revolutionary as the developer initially billed (for example, what ever happened to being able to interrupt characters midsentence?). And please, for the sequel can we get a li'l more dynamic with the camera during conversations? I'm really tired of the over-the-shoulder look. 🤖

.....
 **EGM Extras:** *Those interplanetary minerals ain't gonna find themselves!* Hit up EGM.1UP.com for a galaxy guide.



DS

CONTRA 4

■ Publisher: Konami ■ Developer: WayForward
■ Players: 1-2 ■ ESRB: Teen



THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

SHANE
7.5
GOOD

G. FORD
8.0
GOOD

SAM
8.0
GOOD

The Good: Killer co-op play, massive bosses

The Bad: That gap between the screens

Nifty Unlockables: NES *Contra*, *Super C*, interviews, comics

We still love the '80s

➤ SHANE: In the 20 years since its debut, Konami's arcade-bred run-and-gun *Contra* franchise has seen its share of ill-advised series "reboots." From the schlocky 3D (via red-and-blue glasses, no less) visuals of PS1's *Contra: Legacy of War* to the blink-and-you'll-miss-it isometric action in PS2's *Neo Contra*, none of these tweaks improved upon the core *Contra* gameplay. This time, *Contra 4*'s developers have eschewed innovation in favor of unadulterated mimicry—1992's brilliant Super NES installment (*Contra III: The Alien Wars*) serves as the main inspiration here—and it's a winning choice.

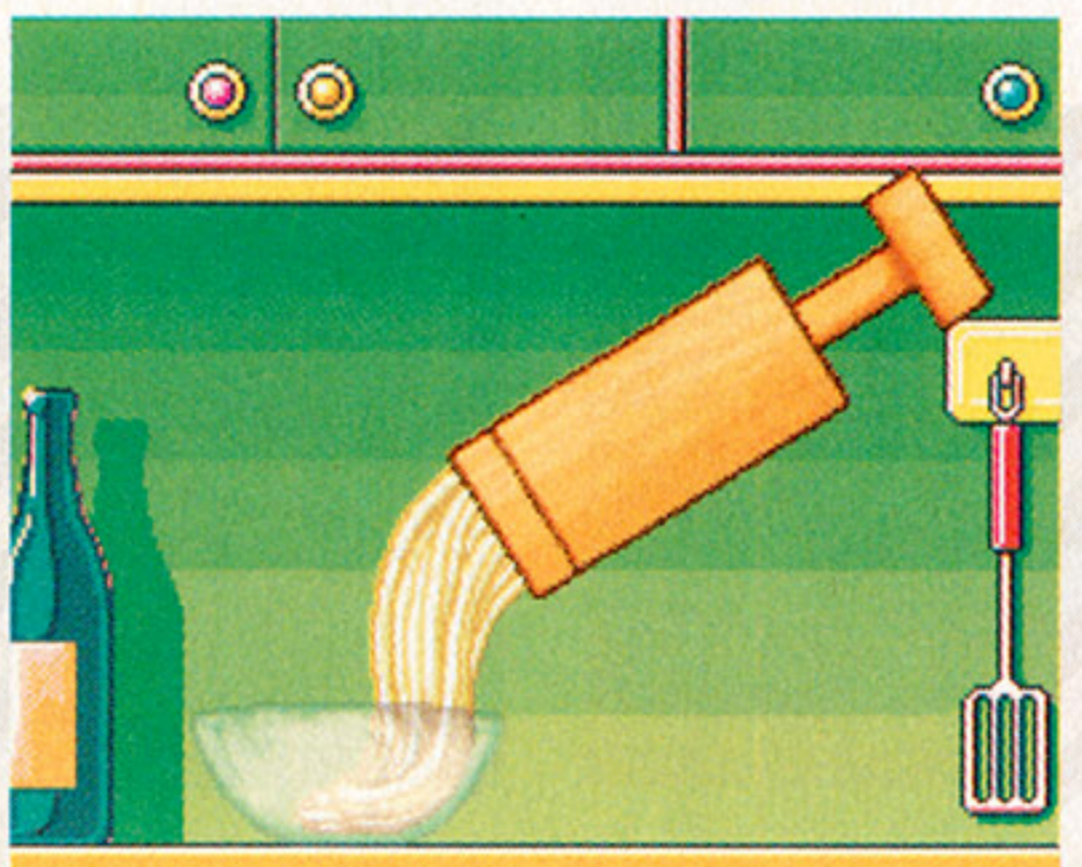
Contra 4 looks, plays, and sounds like some long-lost 16-bit sequel: Everything from the power-up arsenal

to the towering alien bosses feels like a throwback to the classic titles. Likewise, the demanding difficulty and rollicking co-op gameplay ensure that you'll want to return to it again and again. Expect to suffer a few cheap deaths from wayward bullets wafting in from the top screen, though....

➤ G. FORD: A few cheap deaths? How about when a turret or sniper is in that dead space between screens? Ugh—not fun, and easily the game's biggest flaw. But yeah, *Contra 4* is pure fan service that succeeds in most respects. It even sprinkles in a couple run-into-the-screen corridor stages. What really adds to the value, though, is its collection of challenges. These are 40 bite-sized levels that take place

in parts of the main game but mix up the enemies and give you a goal (think not shooting your gun or wiping out a set number of enemies). They're fun, get very tough, and best of all, are key to the unlockables, including a few classic *Contras*. Ah, nostalgia.

➤ SAM: Well, like in previous *Contra* games, deaths here are avoidable if you take the time to completely learn each level. Impressively, *Contra 4* makes good use of the two DS screens, and the grappling hook you use to move quickly from bottom screen to top is a cool addition. Developer WayForward has delivered what Konami of Japan was largely too afraid to give us: a straight-up, balls-to-the-wall, classic-feeling *Contra*.



DS

COOKING MAMA 2: DINNER WITH FRIENDS

■ Publisher: Majesco ■ Developer: Office Create
■ Players: 1-4 ■ ESRB: Everyone

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

JENNIFER
7.5
GOOD

MICHAEL
7.5
GOOD

JEREMY
7.5
GOOD

The Good: Several fun new minigames, unlockable items

The Bad: A few lame new minigames

Politically

Incorrect: Shark's fin soup

Can't beat Mama's home cooking

➤ JENNIFER: *Cooking Mama* is a silly, simple game. You use the touch screen to complete recipes that are divided into lots and lots of steps, steps that don't always make complete sense and involve a lot of rice, fish, and chopping. Wash the rice, swirl the rice, cook the rice, chop the ginger, descale the fish, fillet the fish, steam the fish....

The height of excitement (and one of the only new features in this sequel) is when you complete a meal for one of Mama's friends and they reward you with a bonus pair of eyeglasses for Mama, for cryin' out loud. Multiplayer is a bare-bones (and pretty boring) head-to-head competition to complete a single task (like breaking eggs) fastest. The control isn't always

spot-on, and some of the minigames (the stovetop stewing, especially) are a little dull. So why can't I put the game down? In its silly simplicity, *Cooking Mama* does what many can't: keep me heading back to the kitchen for one more snack.

➤ MICHAEL: I'm no king of the kitchen, but after sharpening my stylus for *Cooking Mama 2*, I'm confident I, well, still can't cook in real life. But in the game? Oh, man—I'm a regular *Top Chef* contender. Jen's opinions aren't half-baked, either—removing complexity from the game-design recipe is the key to making this simple series so enticing. Plus, making over Mama with the different unlockables definitely gives this somewhat shallow

title some extra shelf life. I just wish this sequel had included some sort of story mode.

➤ JEREMY: *Cooking Mama* worked so well with the Wii's analog controls that the move back to DS could have been a huge step backward. Fortunately, this sequel manages to sell itself in other ways. Recipes are much more varied this time, and stylus actions—while nowhere near as much fun as using a Wii-mote—feel a lot more convincing. Ultimately, though, the real hook is all the useless unlockable content. Like Jen says, there's not much to it, but earning ridiculous new items for Mama to wear makes this weirdly compelling game even more compelling. And weirder.



DS

FINAL FANTASY XII: REVENANT WINGS

■ Publisher: Square Enix ■ Developer: Think & Feel
■ Players: 1 ■ ESRB: Everyone 10+

REVIEWS

THE VERDICTS
(OUT OF 10)

JEREMY
8.0
GOOD

SHANE
7.5
GOOD

RAY
6.0
AVERAGE

The win beneath my wings

➔ **JEREMY:** Don't write off *Revenant Wings* right away. It may seem at first to be a pointless reprise of *Heroes of Mana's* "real-time-strategy lite" gameplay, directing squads of monsters about the battlefield to fight an enemy army, but *Wings* quickly establishes its superiority. You group units by leader, which makes for tighter controls and more effective squad-based tactics. And while it makes use of a chain of weaknesses similar to *Heroes'*, *Wings* adds elemental factors and unit rankings to the combat mix...coughed, of course, in familiar *Final Fantasy* terms. Ultimately, its main shortcoming is that the DS' tiny screens limit the gameplay. A lack of dynamic battles and more precise unit control keep *Wings* from being all it could have been. Still, it's about the best RTS you'll see on a portable system—and a surprisingly good sequel to a brilliant role-playing game.

➔ **SHANE:** Square Enix once again proves that DS RPGs don't have to be ugly: Solid 3D visuals and plenty of slick CG cut-scenes give *Revenant Wings* a touch of console-bred *Final Fantasy* class. Unfortunately, the narrative's not quite so upscale—expect nothing more than lightweight, giddy

kiddies-on-a-big-adventure fluff here (did *FFXII* really need more kids on hoverboards?). Jeremy's right about the iffy controls, but the ambitious gameplay still succeeds by blending *FFXII's* customization-heavy combat with equal parts RTS and *Pokémon*. It's not perfect—the difficulty spikes randomly throughout and spamming units produces easy victories—but it's a step up from *Heroes of Mana*.

➔ **RAY:** The way I see it, if you think of *FFXII* as *Star Wars*, this sequel is

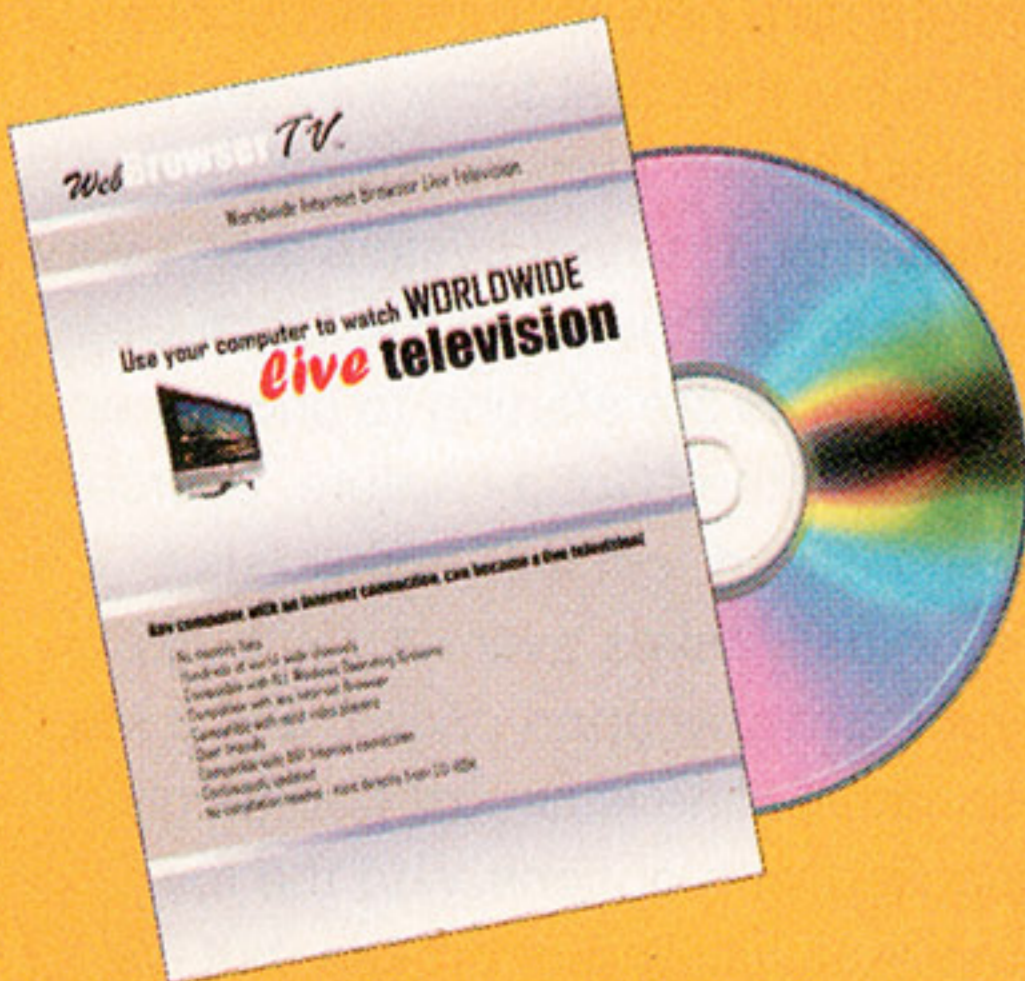
more like *Droids*, the Saturday-morning spin-off without the maturity. But I can accept that, as well as the controls. Thing is, for a real-time strategy game, you just won't find much strategy in *Wings*—oftentimes the best tactic really is to rush in with everyone, like Shane says. And if you're losing, just back away, heal, then rush again. I suppose the further adventures of Vaan and friends will be enjoyable to some, but that alone doesn't turn *Wings* into an awesome RTS. It'd need more strategy for that.

The Good: A great mix of role-playing and strategy
The Bad: So much action, such tiny screens
Hoochie: Penelo's apparently leveled up her "Skank" skills



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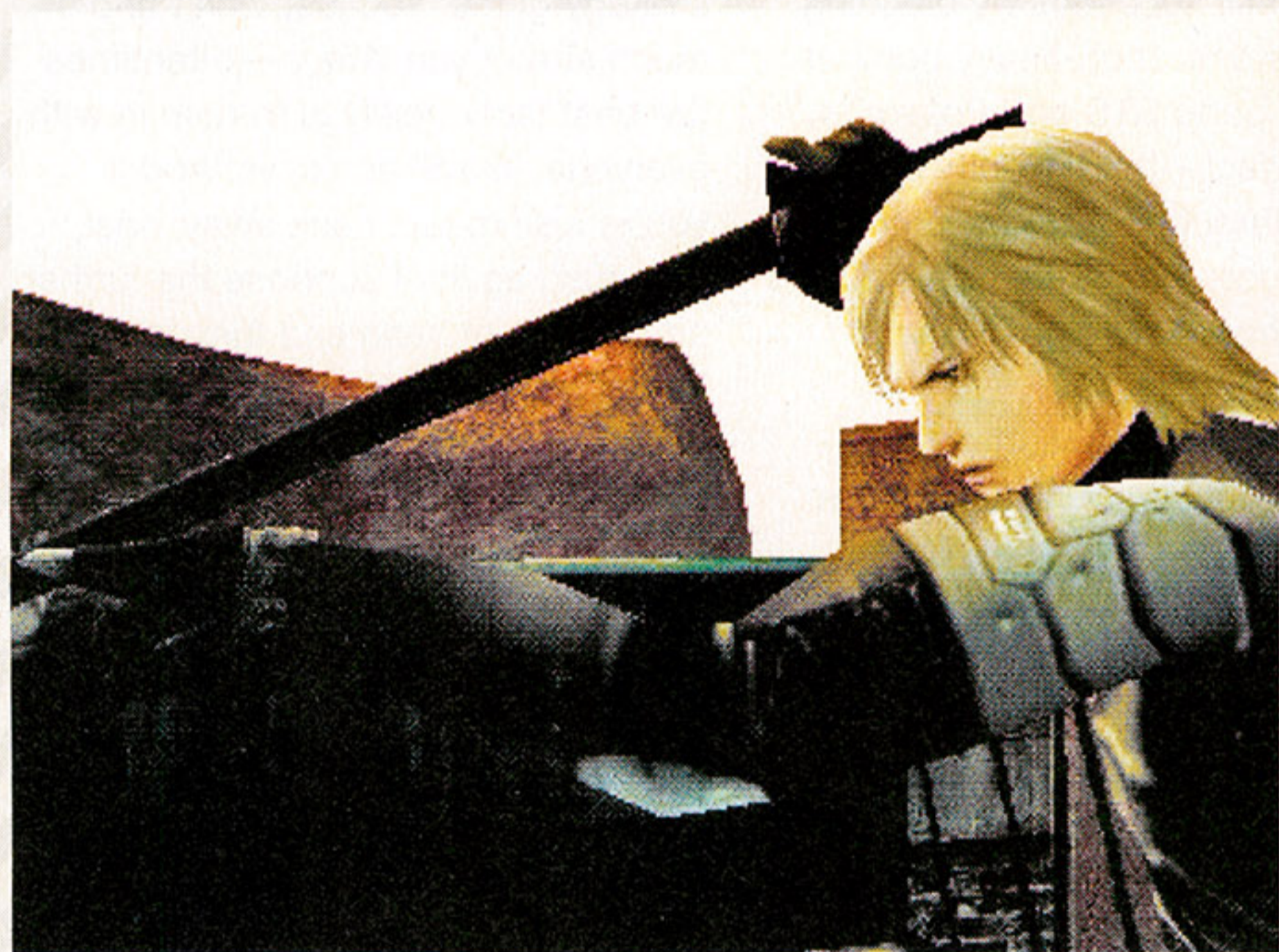


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PSP

METAL GEAR SOLID: PORTABLE OPS PLUS

■ Publisher: Konami ■ Developer: Kojima Productions ■ Players: 1-6 ■ ESRB: Teen

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

SHANE
7.5
GOOD

BRYAN
7.0
GOOD

ANDREW P.
7.5
GOOD

The Good: Cool new characters, low price, multiplayer

The Bad: Where's the story?

MGS4 Cameos: Old Snake, newly badass Raiden

Them's the snakes

+ SHANE: Less of a sequel and more of a stand-alone expansion pack to the excellent *Portable Ops, Plus* delivers another compelling dose of *Metal Gear Solid* stealth-action gameplay in a bite-sized form. The \$20 price tag should clue you in that it's not the meatiest of offerings, but *MPO* vets won't be disappointed (in fact, importing your characters from that game gives you a keen advantage here), and newbies may even find this pseudosequel to be an even more accessible entry point into the addictive world of multiplayer online *MGS*. The lack of a true story mode stings, but its replacement, Infinity Mission, lets you zip through a cavalcade of self-contained challenges without any of the convoluted *MGS* narra-

tive navel-gazing. Even so, the visuals, sounds, and gameplay haven't changed at all since *MPO*, which feels like a missed opportunity—implementing some of the pivotal control tweaks seen in the upcoming *MGS4* would have improved this game's somewhat cumbersome interface.

+ BRYAN: As much as I enjoy sneaking around and building yet another *Metal Gear* supersquad, it's disappointing that the gameplay goes relatively untouched here. It's still solid, but it could be even better. For example, what about adding a soldier class that drags bodies faster than my 84-year-old grandma with two bad knees? Anyway, at least *Plus'* mission structure is a step up; nixing the story

elements keeps your focus on how to play (which is more complicated than you might think) and really prepares you to take your troops online.

+ ANDREW P: The absence of a story might help new recruits focus, but if *Plus* is their first foray into team-based *Metal Gear*, the structure and army-management system aren't very welcoming. That, and the *Metal Gear* mechanics are starting to show their age. But the "Gotta capture, coerce, and convert 'em all!" compulsion eventually takes over as you build your army, weapon cache, and a killer squad. Online is almost dauntingly packed with options, and the roll move is still kind of broken, but it's hard to argue with the price. **A-**

REVIEWS WRAP-UP

The games that were too late...or too little

REVIEWS

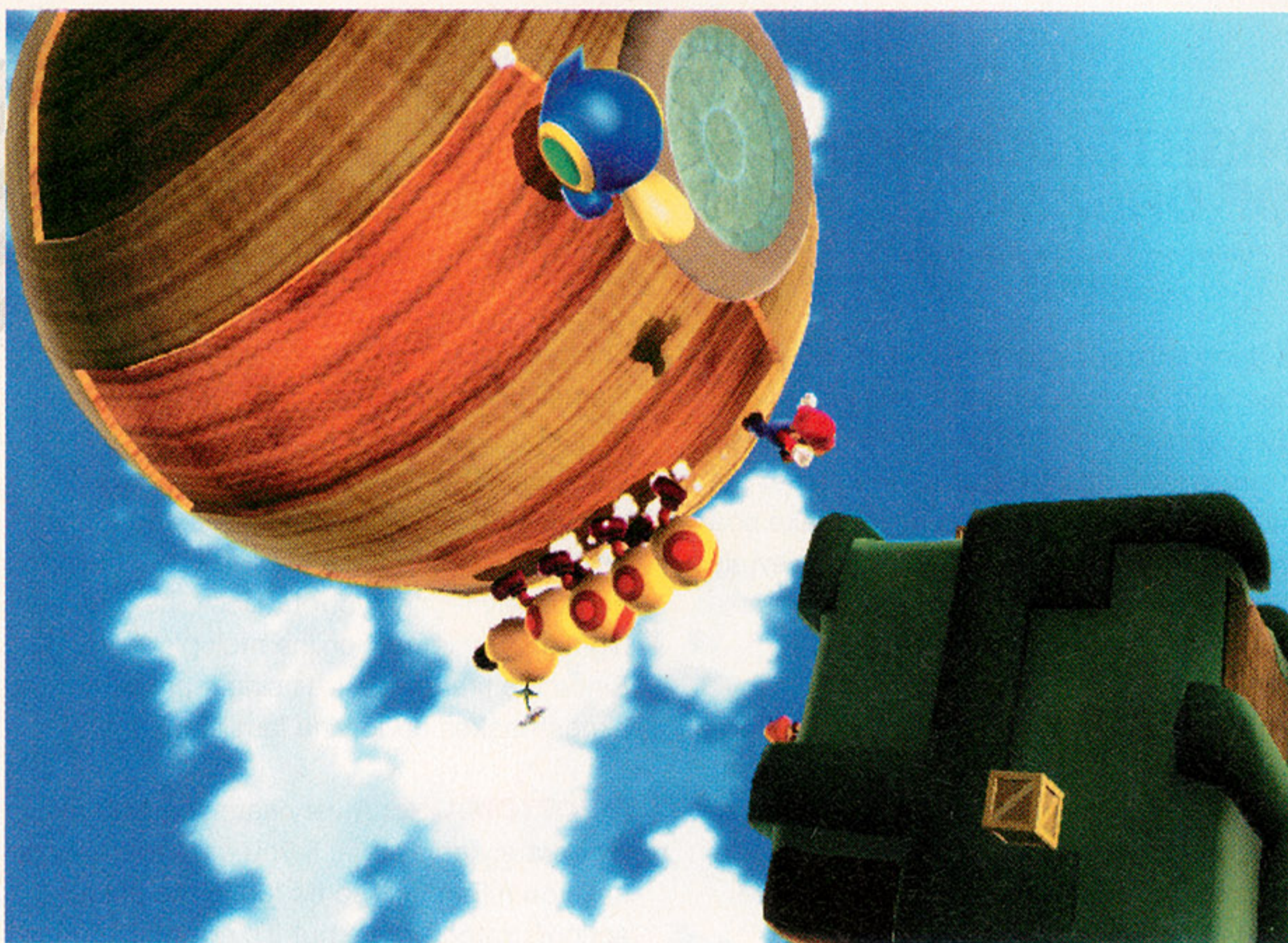
Wii

SUPER MARIO GALAXY

■ Publisher: Nintendo ■ ESRB: Everyone

Super Mario Galaxy didn't make its way to the *EGM* offices in time for a review, but we did get some time with it, and from what we've played—about three hours—we're in love. Packed with originality, variety, and mind-bending physics, *Galaxy* reminds us why the *Mario* series matters in the first place. It breaks your expectations about 3D platforming (think flipping around gravity) while feeling as whimsical and fresh as *Super Mario Bros. 3*. In other words: *Wow*.

➤ **BOTTOM LINE:** Brilliant, compelling, creative. Own a Wii? Great! Play this game.



PS3/XB360

ROCK BAND

■ Publisher: Electronic Arts ■ ESRB: Teen

Selfish rockers can go solo with *Guitar Hero III*, but the real fun is building an actual rock band with, uh, *Rock Band*. The setup is still the same—like in developer Harmonix's first rhythm rocker, you pretend to play real instruments to popular songs. But *Rock Band's* show is a helluva lot more social now that drums and singing have been added to the mix. After tearing up the arenas with four people (especially pounding on the drums), it's hard to go back to being a ho-hum hero.

➤ **BOTTOM LINE:** For wannabe musicians, *Rock Band* is by far the best bandmate money can buy.



PS3/XB360

ASSASSIN'S CREED

■ Publisher: Ubisoft ■ ESRB: Mature

Training to become a hired killer may seem hard, but learning how to control Ubisoft's acrobatic assassin may actually be more difficult (and far less deadly). The premise is nearly perfect, though: Hop around cities, collecting information for your various medieval hits. Too bad the tricky controls make performing kills, scaling walls, and, well, just about everything, a chore. Or at least in the few missions that we've played. So right now we're a little hesitant to hire this killer.

➤ **BOTTOM LINE:** If you can get a hang of the controls (something we could have done given more time), it's certainly a cool game.



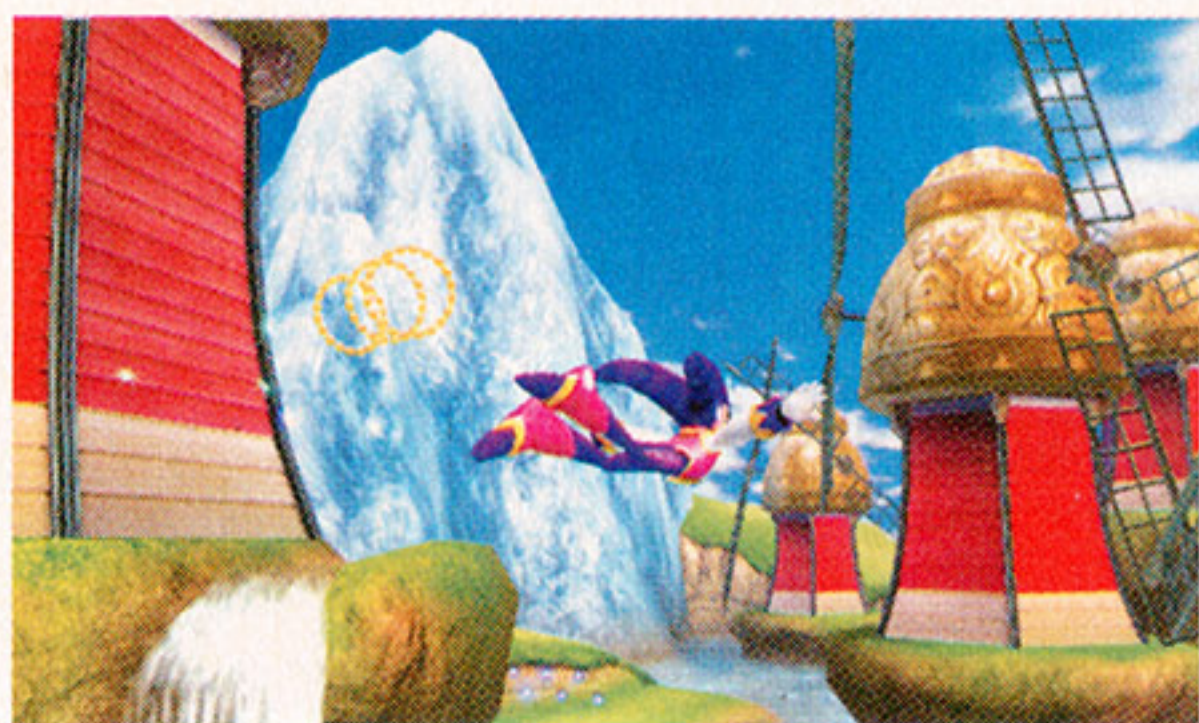
Wii

RESIDENT EVIL: THE UMBRELLA CHRONICLES

■ Publisher: Capcom ■ ESRB: Mature

If the slow pace of the older *Resident Evil* games bored you, *Umbrella Chronicles* retells the original stories in a faster, trigger-happier arcade game. Not only does it offer up plenty of enemies to shoot, but your bullets can also break background objects like vases and lights (try to avoid those, though). But this is still standard (i.e., shallow) light-gun fare, with linear progression and an obnoxious reloading system: You must first flick the Remote down and then back up, forcing you to readjust your aiming cursor every time.

➤ **BOTTOM LINE:** Doesn't do much for light-gun games or the *Resident Evil* legacy.



Wii

NIGHTS: JOURNEY OF DREAMS

■ Publisher: Sega ■ ESRB: Everyone

A decade later, Sega finally dusts off its gender-neutral purple jester for this long-overdue sequel to the Saturn cult hit. The basic on-rails level design remains the same, but streamlined Wii Remote controls make soaring through the skies a breeze. *Journey* also revives its predecessor's addictive, open-ended A-Life virtual-pet metagame.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** Younger players will go gaga for *Nights'* cuddly characters, vibrant DayGlo landscapes, and shockingly simple gameplay, but platforming veterans should stick with *Super Mario Galaxy* for a more refined hop 'n' bop experience.



Wii

BATTALION WARS 2

■ Publisher: Nintendo ■ ESRB: Teen

The original *Battalion Wars* was a late-life GameCube title, a real-time strategy game that let you control any soldier individually. Little has changed for the sequel—seriously. Sure, you have new areas and a few new unit types, but it's not like you'll have to completely rethink your tactics. The one real highlight is the new online multiplayer mode: Since the first game was single-player only, it almost makes up for the familiarity.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** A very safe sequel that's moderately enjoyable. If you missed the original, you might find some fun in the unique action/strategy style, but it's not a guarantee.



Wii

GHOST SQUAD

■ Publisher: Sega ■ ESRB: Teen

Sega first introduced light-gun shooter *Ghost Squad* three years ago in arcades. But with arcades now nearing extinction, the company's hoping the Wii's versatile Remote can effectively replace the lightgun of yore and breathe fresh air into an aging game.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** Three semilinear levels, each with branching abilities to locate the final boss, hardly warrant much replay value. *Ghost Squad* tries to hide this with over 25 unique weapons and alternate costumes, but it's still a 30-minute game. Partygoers will appreciate the four-player support, but the fun is short-lived.



Wii

SOULCALIBUR LEGENDS

■ Publisher: Namco Bandai ■ ESRB: Teen

We're only a few levels into Namco's *Soulcalibur* beat-em-up, but it seems awfully simple so far—run, lock on, shake the controller to fight a bit, take a few steps back, repeat. When the combat gets going, you can juke with the Nunchuk and roll that into combos nicely with the Remote, but the merely standard running-to-attacking-to-jumping transition animations remind us that this isn't a true *Soulcalibur* game.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** *Soulcalibur* fans are accustomed to one of the smoothest games around, and *Legends* is clearly not that. But it's less clear whether it's a bad game.



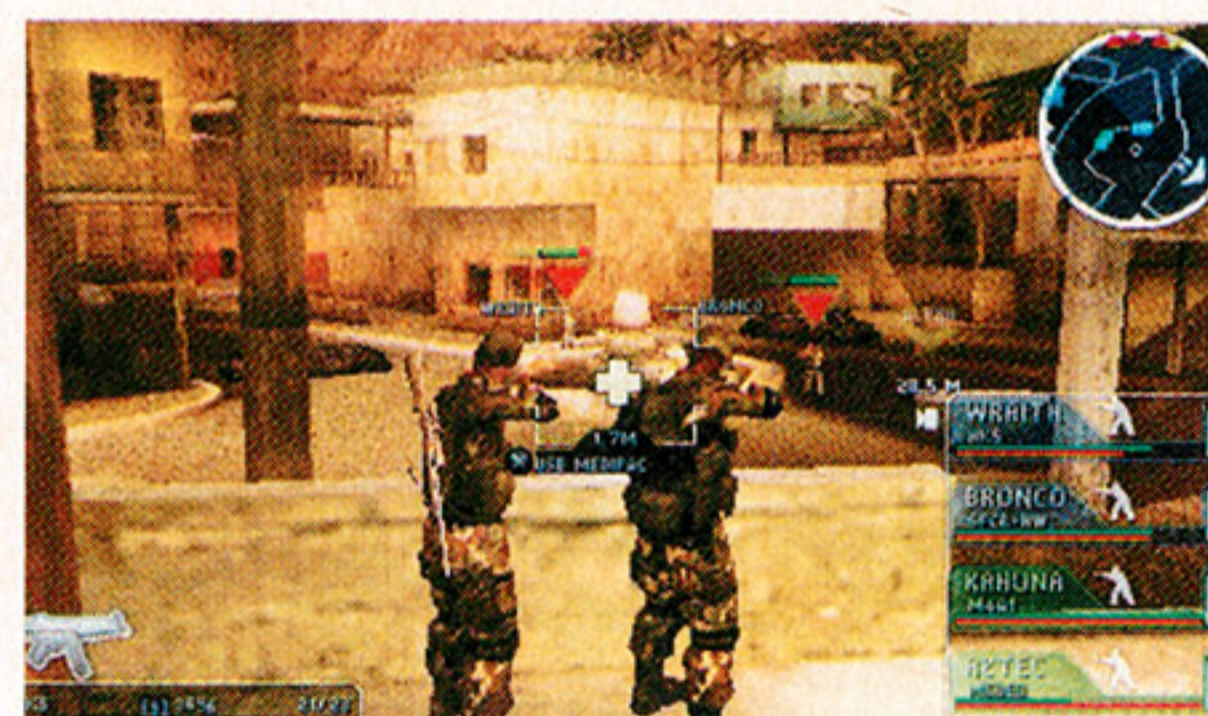
XB360

SCENE IT? LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION

■ Publisher: Microsoft ■ ESRB: Teen

Any gamer who's tried to get their nongaming friends to try out *Mario Party* or (shudder) *Fuzion Frenzy* knows it's not as easy to play these party games as it should be. Enter *Scene It?*, the movie-trivia game (originally available on DVD) with the funny controllers. It's refreshing to find a game with universally appealing content—tons of movie genres and eras are here, so nobody feels left out. And the big-button controllers make it easier for nongamers to participate.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** *Scene It?* actually delivers on the promise of a fun party game anyone can enjoy.



PSP

SOCOM: U.S. NAVY SEALS—TACTICAL STRIKE

■ Publisher: Sony CEA ■ ESRB: Teen

While the *Fireteam Bravo* games offered a slightly more action-oriented *SOCOM* experience on PSP, *Tactical Strike* goes back to the basics: stealth, strategy, and clever commanding skills. Don't expect a turn-based affair, but in allowing players to position and issue orders to each member of the four-man SEAL squad individually, *Tactical Strike* offers depth that rivals—and perhaps even bests—the campaign modes of the PS2 *SOCOMs*.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** Anyone who appreciated the challenge and depth of previous *SOCOM* single-player campaigns will dig the deliberate, strategic pace of this one.

THE SALES CHART

Amazon.com's Top 20 for Sept/Oct

#	Name	Platform	EGM Scores
1	Halo 3  By now you've probably explored all the multiplayer maps. Bet you want more, eh? Well, Bungie is currently testing new downloadable battlegrounds.	XB360	10 10 9.0
2	Halo 3 Limited Edition	XB360	10 10 9.0
3	Halo 3 Legendary Edition	XB360	10 10 9.0
4	The Legend of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass	DS	8.0 9.0 9.0
5	Dance Dance Revolution: Hottest Party Bundle	Wii	Not Reviewed
6	Wii Play (with Wii Remote)	Wii	4.5 6.0 5.0
7	Carnival Games	Wii	Not Reviewed
8	Brain Age 2: More Training in Minutes a Day!	DS	8.0 7.0 6.0
9	Heavenly Sword	PS3	8.0 8.0 9.0
10	Half-Life 2: The Orange Box  <i>Team Fortress 2</i> is mad fun...when it's not littered with lag. Luckily, developer Valve is issuing a patch, so things should be better by the time you read this.	XB360	10 9.5 10
11	BioShock  The world of Rapture may have ended, but we still have that <i>BioShock</i> buzz. Good thing creator Ken Levine says downloadable content is coming soon.	XB360	10 10 10
12	Brain Age: Train Your Brain in Minutes a Day!	DS	8.5 9.0 9.5
13	Metroid Prime 3: Corruption	Wii	9.0 8.5 8.5
14	Final Fantasy Tactics: The War of the Lions	PSP	8.5 8.5 8.0
15	New Super Mario Bros.	DS	9.5 10 8.0
16	MySims	Wii	6.0 5.5 6.0
17	Madden NFL 08  As if there weren't enough versions of <i>Madden</i> on the market, a Spanish-language edition now exists. Will people mistake it for a soccer game...?	PS2	Not Reviewed
18	Mario Party 8	Wii	5.5 7.5 6.0
16	Pokémon Diamond	DS	8.5 9.0 8.5
20	Skate	XB360	9.0 8.0 6.5

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GAME OVER

> press continue for kwanzaa cheer, orangina, and frantic santas



> SEANBABY'S REST OF THE CRAP

Christmas Is Canceled

Toilet-stuffers for the holidays



Seanbaby employs an army of Malaysian Elves to come up with his column each month. Their Christmas bonus is a free copy of *Elf Bowling*, the game.

IT'S A WEAK WRITER that starts an article with a quote from someone else, but I think Arnold Schwarzenegger's inner monologue said it best during the filming of *Jingle All the Way*, when it whispered, "One day, all of Christmas shall suffer as it has caused us to suffer. Swear this unto me, Arnold Schwarzenegger, and I shall make you governor." I take this lesson with me every day.

I'm not a grinch, but these facts are startling: For every child enjoying the holidays, there are 30 adults who can't find a parking space, 75 store employees replacing their brain

cells with Christmas Muzak, and a Jehovah's Witness sitting alone and Googling less-absurd religions. Christmas isn't fun for everyone, and just like when I got a sleeping bag while my brother opened the Ewok Village, I got it the worst. This Christmas, I was forced to review history's worst Christmas games. As usual, they will be judged on my unique rating system of one being the lowest and 10 being the highest. For example: six.

Note: Legally, I don't think you're allowed to call the holidays "Christ-

mas" anymore. It's impolite to Chanukah, the 17th most important Jewish holiday, and whatever a Kwanzaa is. However, instead of being sensitive to users of the crappier Christmases, I've chosen to just call it Christmas. I'm counting on you to keep quiet about this.

Note 2: Kwanzaa is a celebration-like event invented in the 1960s to give college diversity clubs a party theme. To put it another way, if Christmas and Kwanzaa were both vampire movies, they would be called *Dracula* and *Black Dracula*, respectively.

The Santa Clause 3: The Escape Clause (GBA)



"generic" barely begins to describe this game, then immediately finishes describing it!

Holiday Music: 2

Remember when Milli Vanilli was onstage and their tape somehow got stuck on "Girl you know it's! Girl you know it's! Girl you know it's!?" The composer of this game's eight notes

of background music cites that historical moment as his main inspiration. Then he was tagged by scientists and released back into the wild. He was a goldfish the entire time.

of background music cites that historical moment as his main inspiration. Then he was tagged by scientists and released back into the wild. He was a goldfish the entire time.

Holiday Cheer: 1

After *Home Improvement* on the Super Nintendo and now *The Santa Clause 3: The Escape Clause* on Game Boy Advance, Tim Allen has surpassed diabetes as gaming's least enjoyable side effect.

Consumers Who Bought This Gift Also

Bought: *The Shaggy Dog*, starring Tim Allen. "Raise the WOOF!" on DVD and Blu-ray.





PAGE
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Retro: More
nonsense
game plots



PAGE
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Grudge:
Dueling
Creeds



PAGE
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Comic: Hsu
& Chan in
Hauling Jolly

Santa Claus Saves the Earth (GBA)



Years ago, I noticed that peach products never come as simply "Peach." It's always something like "Harvest Peach," or "Peaches and Cream." Other fruits—for example, blueberries—seem to be descriptive enough to stand on their own, just not peaches. I told myself that one day I would come up with a joke or routine to go with this observation, and I'm obviously still waiting on that day. Like my future joke about peaches, *Santa Claus Saves the Earth* isn't quite entertainment yet. Someday, maybe.

Holiday Music: 1

You know how you can program a robot to pretend to be human, and sometimes it works too well and it ends up thinking it's real, only it's sort of stupid at everything? I think one of those robots made this music. "The soundtrack has been programmed based on the musical data that unit: me has observed—rising tempo followed by jovial musical tones and a digitally simulated high hat. Unit: me is feeling a previously undocumented energy surge. Is this what is called: I-love?SQUAAWKKK! Malfu— MURDER ALL BABY FACES."

Holiday Cheer: 0

Your attack in this game is to frantically flap a green purse. And it causes you to seize up and slide backwards. I didn't even know modern brains were capable of coming up with ideas this bad.

Consumers Who Bought This Gift Also Bought: "Hamglide, the Sportswear Made of Ham," from the makers of "Product Whose Inadequacies Are Apparent From the Title" and "That Same Thing, Travel Edition."

Elf Bowling: The Movie—The Great North Pole Elf Strike (DVD)



IMDB begins this movie's plot outline with, "Santa and his brother Dingle as a couple of pirates?" Yes, IMDB, that's what's insane here. A Christmas-themed bowling game is made into a movie, and wh-wha?! Pirate costumes?!

Holiday Music: 3

The music seems out of place, but how do you orchestrate the sound of mistake? Fart sounds, I guess.

Holiday Cheer: 0

This came packaged with *Elf Bowling: The Movie—The Mint-Flavored Pistol*. I don't see why it's mint-flavored, though. Oh, wait. I get it.

Consumers Who Bought This Gift Also Bought: Less lithium than prescribed by their licensed physician.

Christmas Country (CD-i)



One of the only remaining distributors of CD-i games praised *Christmas Country* as, "Ho, ho, ho. What a game!!! Finally, a platform game for CD-i with lot's of enemies." [sic] That was the best the world's last CD-i salesman could come up with.

Holiday Music: 0

They actually didn't put music in, no doubt in hopes that someone at a game magazine wouldn't play this 10 years later and notice.

Holiday Cheer: 0

This game requires you to jump a lot. The terrible designers thought, "How can we solve this?" Their solution was to multiply your speed by 8,000 percent during each jump. This means a funnier, herky-jerkier spazfest, but it also means you will certainly die every time you try it.

Consumers Who Bought This Gift Also Bought: A Gizmondo and freedom for their pen pal, the deposed Prince of Nigeria.

➤ Legally, I don't think you're allowed to call the holidays "Christmas" anymore.

➤ HOLIDAY MATCH-EM-UP FUN!

Burn the New Kids on the Block with these holiday snaps! See if you can match the track title from the New Kids' holiday soundtrack, "Merry, Merry Christmas" with the proper verbal abuse!

Track Titles

1. *Christmas Song*
2. *I'll Be Missin' You Come Christmas (A Letter to Santa)*
3. *I Still Believe in Santa Claus*
4. *This One's for the Children*
5. *Little Drummer Boy*



Burns

- A. I can't tell if you're calling the children tasteless or gay.
- B. Wait, is there even a way to take that where you're not having sex with Santa?
- C. Yeah, I sort of figured that. I guess "Dumbly Named Song" was taken?
- D. It makes sense that if your band ever did get a drummer, it'd be a little boy.
- E. Good, now you have two things in common with 5-year-olds. The other: peeing in your sleep.

Answers: 1-C, 2-B, 3-E, 4-A, 5-D

Elf: The Movie (GBA)



What sets *Elf* apart from other games about jumping for snacks is that you have an energy bar, yet every time you're hit, you fall off the screen and get sent back to the beginning of the level. It's as if two game designers were fighting over whether Will Ferrell should have lives or an energy bar, and they both lost.

Holiday Music: 3

Imagine the soundtrack to the worst 10 seconds of your life. It should go without saying that it is on repeat.

Holiday Cheer: 2

The gifts that come out of Santa's workshop are often depicted as crappy things like wooden trains and tops, and even by those standards, this game is a 2. If an Elf makes a toy like this, I think it's Santa's policy to destroy it. The Elf, not the product.

Consumers Who Bought This Gift Also Bought: Garbage Advance. Cartridge Trash Bags. Dispose of your Game Boy Advance games, up to four at a time, in style! Now in Harvest Peach.

WTFiction!?

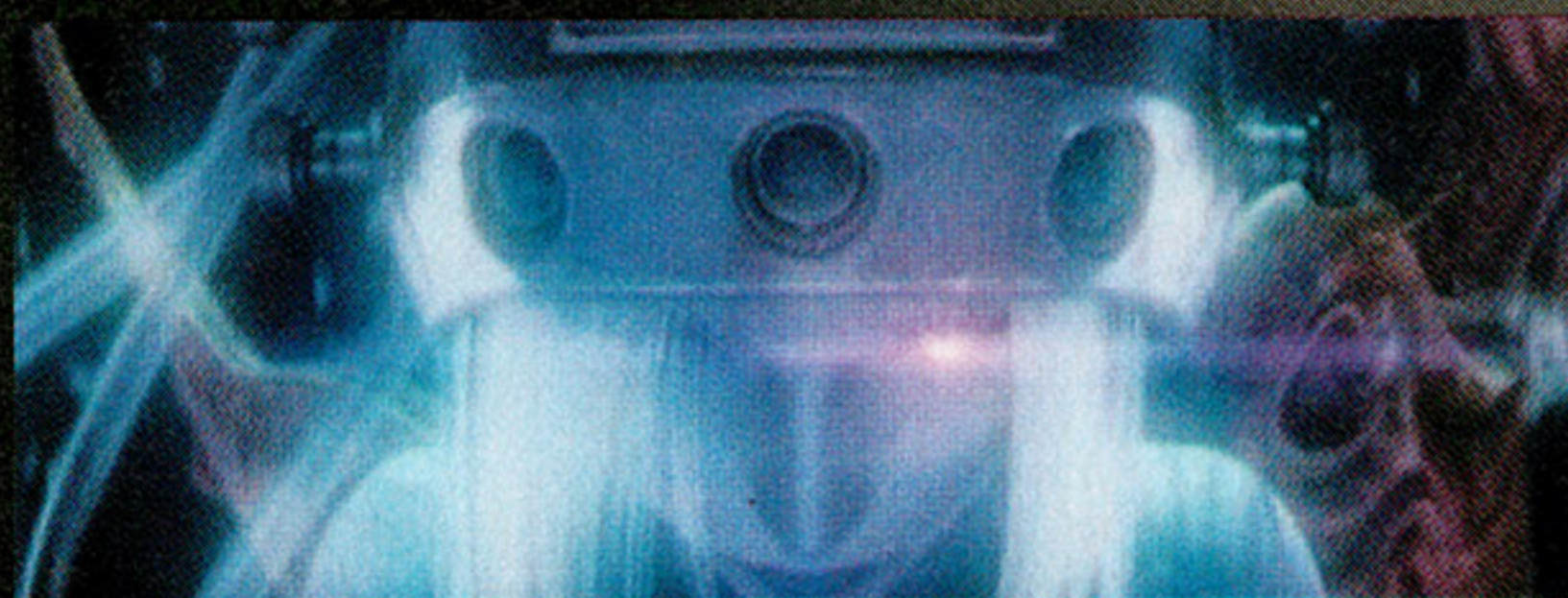
No. 3: Final Fantasy VII

Deciphering silly stories By Jeremy Parish

Final Fantasy VII may be one of the world's most beloved games, but that doesn't mean it makes a lick of sense...especially after its shoddy spin-offs and its beautifully shallow film, *Advent Children*. And that's why the world of *FFVII* is No. 3 on our list of the wackiest videogame stories ever.

START
HERE

1: JENOVA



The story of *Final Fantasy VII* begins with Jenova, a mysterious space being that crash-lands about 2,000 years prior to the game. It promptly begins to do horrible, horrible things to the Cetra, a special humanlike race who ultimately triumph after a long battle. Defeated, Jenova is sealed in a crater, only to be excavated much later by Gast, who enables its will to be manifested through Sephiroth.

2: GAST

The misguided Shinra scientist who revives Jenova's cellular material in the mistaken belief that he is actually helping save the Cetra from extinction. His experiments *actually* result in the Jenova-infused Sephiroth, who personally kills the last Cetra and tried to smash the planet as an encore. Whoops!

REVIVES

WORKS FOR

FATHERS

FRAGMENTS OF

12: REMNANTS



Sephiroth's death taints the Lifestream with Jenova cells. Exposure to the Lifestream results in

many people developing a disease called Geostigma, which Sephiroth hopes to use as a means to control the world. How so? Through his "remnants," a trio of silver-haired men who can transform into Sephiroth by coming into contact with Jenova. Cloud defeats them by shrugging off fatal wounds until it rains. Yes, *Advent Children* is ridiculous.

CORRUPTS

DRIVES TO EXTINCTION

11: THE LIFESTREAM

The bluish, glowy energy that serves as the source of all life on the planet, the Lifestream is a tasty target for the power-hungry, like Shinra and Sephiroth. In times of crisis, it can manifest a giant, transparent Aerith to perform godlike deeds.

EXPLOITS

JOINS

9: AERITH GAINSBOROUGH

Not just a button-cute flower girl in combat boots, but a war orphan determined to bring life to Midgar's desolation—and she's also the last of the Cetra. She hooks up with Zack, then (creepily enough) with Zack's psychotic impersonator, Cloud. Although she dies trying to stop Sephiroth's meteor from smashing the planet, she occasionally returns from beyond the grave when Cloud and friends need a handy *deus ex machina* to save the day.

HOOK UP

3: THE CETRA

A mystic race that falls prey to Jenova, the Cetra are able to stop the extraterrestrial menace at a great cost to themselves. They slowly die out over the centuries as normal humans rise to prominence, with Aerith as the last of their kind.

LAST MEMBER OF



5: HOJO

Gast abandons the Jenova project when he realizes the true nature of his work, but Hojo is more than happy to resume the project, taking a very *personal* approach to genetic experimentation by, uh, "volunteering" his own genetic material to create Sephiroth (insert sleazy sax solo here). He seemingly died in *FFVII*, but Square Enix revived him for the painfully unnecessary spin-off *Dirge of Cerberus* (PS2).



SUCCEEDS

WORKS FOR

4: SHINRA

The powerful Shinra energy conglomerate is something straight out of *Shadowrun*: a corporation that effectively serves as a government. Shinra doesn't simply control the world's largest city, Midgar—it also maintains its own standing army, SOLDIER. And its own roughneck enforcers, the Turks. And builds weapons of mass destruction. And wages its own wars against foreign nations. And conducts deadly genetic experiments. And siphons the planet's life away for cheap power. Even Halliburton ain't got nothin' on them.



GAME OVER

FIGHTS

10: AVALANCHE

Cloud finds himself in the employ of Barrett Wallace, Tifa Lockhart, and Avalanche, their motley group of rebels who want to put a stop to Shinra's machinations. Noble. But they use what could best be called "extreme terrorism" to do it. Not so noble. Especially considering the innocent body count they rack up.



CREATES

EXPERIMENTS ON, THEN KILLS

JOINS

8: CLOUD STRIFE



Cloud spends much of *FFVII* confusing his own identity with Zack's—not only does he mistakenly think he's part of SOLDIER, but he also adopts Zack's mannerisms...and even his woman, Aerith. Like Zack, Cloud also undergoes Jenova experiments but fails to become a Sephiroth-like supersoldier, yet that doesn't stop him from kicking Sephiroth's ass. Even though he saves the day, he gets all sulky again in *Advent Children*—despite hooking up with Tifa. What a schmo.

IMITATES

Next Month:
No. 2 Resident Evil

FATHERS

6: SEPHIROTH

Infused with Jenova's DNA in vitro, Sephiroth is born with amazing powers. Not amazing emotional stability, though; when he learns of his true nature, he flips out and kills an entire city. His rampage is ended by Zack and Cloud, after which he falls into the planet's Lifestream and sends Sephiroth-shaped Jenova chunks to do his dirty deeds, like ruthlessly killing Aerith. It was all part of his plan to become a god by smashing a massive meteor into the planet and siphoning the resulting energy. Though he is defeated, he later returns to stab Cloud a few times before being destroyed—presumably once and for all.



KILLS

FORMER COMRADES

MORTAL FOES

HOOK UP

7: ZACK FAIR

No, he's not Cloud with a bad dye job. Zack is actually a member of Shinra's SOLDIER corps who works with Sephiroth and his fellow warriors, Genesis and Angeal. Until he ends their respective rampages, anyway. Branded a traitor by Shinra, Zack undergoes involuntary Jenova-flavored gene therapy (along with Cloud) before escaping, only to die at Midgar's threshold.



> COMMUNITY REACTION

So Nintendo admits it may not be able to meet the massive Wii demand this holiday season. What do you think of its inability to produce enough systems for the market?



Al, Prize Fighter:
 "Wow, hearing that news makes me feel marginally better about paying \$1,000 for one on Craigslist last year."



Henry, Librarian:
 "If Nintendo keeps green-lighting gems like *Ninjabread Man* and *Chicken Shoot*, they probably won't have to worry about a demand problem anymore."



Gronk, Caveman:
 "If I could get a hold of one, I'd donate it to charity. Nah, I'm just messing with you. I'd sell it on eBay and blow the profits on \$20 hookers."



Gerald, Street Tough:
 "Hey, it wouldn't be Christmas without hordes of pear-shaped Wal-Mart shoppers getting trampled in a hardware-shortage stampede."



Exploding Barrel:
Kabooooom!

> GUESS WHO



- 1 Whoever came up with the rule that red means stop obviously must be color-blind.
- 2 Banks are not my business—I prefer to carry all my cash (and crap) on me at all times.
- 3 Unlike what some people say, being a father is as easy as walking through water.
- 4 Home Depot is my favorite hardware store. I just really dig buying drills.
- 5 I'm an easy going guy. Unless you threaten my friends—hard to ignore that jazz.

Who am I?

BioShock's Big Daddy

> GRUDGE MATCH

Holy S***

Give us somethin' to believe in

While religious rockers Creed may have broken up, it's hard not to be reminded of them when you read the title of Ubisoft's assassin game. Let's see who has more faith.

Assassin's Creed

VS.

Creed



Takes place in the Holy Land

Advantage: Assassin's Creed



Songs inspired by the Holy Land

Regional Ties



Skinny sword still packs a wallop

Weapons



Scott Stapp almost drilled his wife with an Orangina....

Advantage: Creed



Actually, we're not sure there's any hair at all under that hoodie....

Mane Attraction



North Florida ape drape

Advantage: Creed, by default



Altair knows how to work alone

Advantage: Assassin's Creed

Solo Projects



Scott Stapp... not so much



Jerusalem, Acre, Damascus

Advantage: Assassin's Creed

Venue



Acoustic set on NASCAR.com

Winner: Assassin's Creed

While Creed may have rocked the faces off some frat boys, the videogame *Creed* is a safer bet for solid, nonsecular entertainment.

Crowd Teaser

January Issue (#224) • On sale December 18

New Year's Punch


We're kicking off our first issue of the new year with a cover story so epic, we can't even tell you about it. Lame, right? But those of you with keen eyes might have already spotted some clues we've dropped, oh, here and there. Think of it as a mystery you'll solve in 30 days.

We're also taking a gander at the "YouTubing" of the game industry. **Little Big Planet** and **Halo 3's** Forge mode, for example, are turning players into amateur game designers who can then share their creations with people all over the world. But not all the hardware makers are on board with this idea and fear a few bad gamers could potentially spoil the movement for everybody.

What's more, we're also looking at how developers take crusty old franchises—such as **Golden Axe** and **Bionic Commando**—and modernize them for today's new systems. And as in all issues, be sure to check back with us for a slew of reviews and previews, including **Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots**. All this—and in-game marriage proposals!—in one month....



■ Golden Axe's memorable chicken beast: now a healthy 3D six-piece meal.

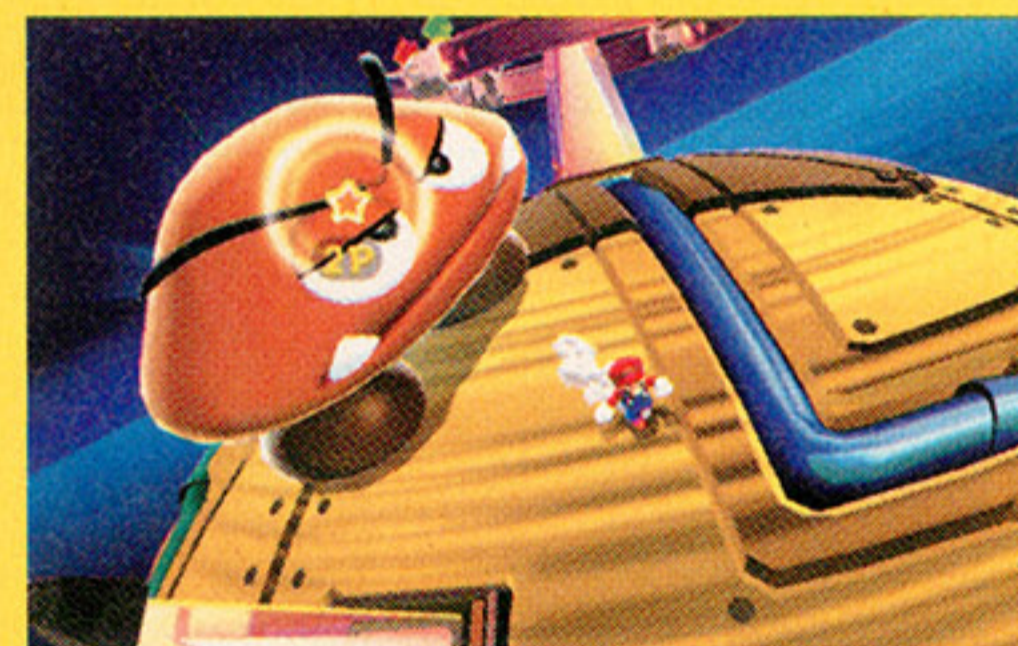
(All planned editorial content is subject to change.) 

> PREVIEWS



- Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots (PS3)
- Wii Fit (Wii)
- Killzone 2 (PS3)
- Halo Wars (XB360)

> REVIEWS



- Super Mario Galaxy (Wii)
- Ninja Gaiden: Dragon Sword (DS)
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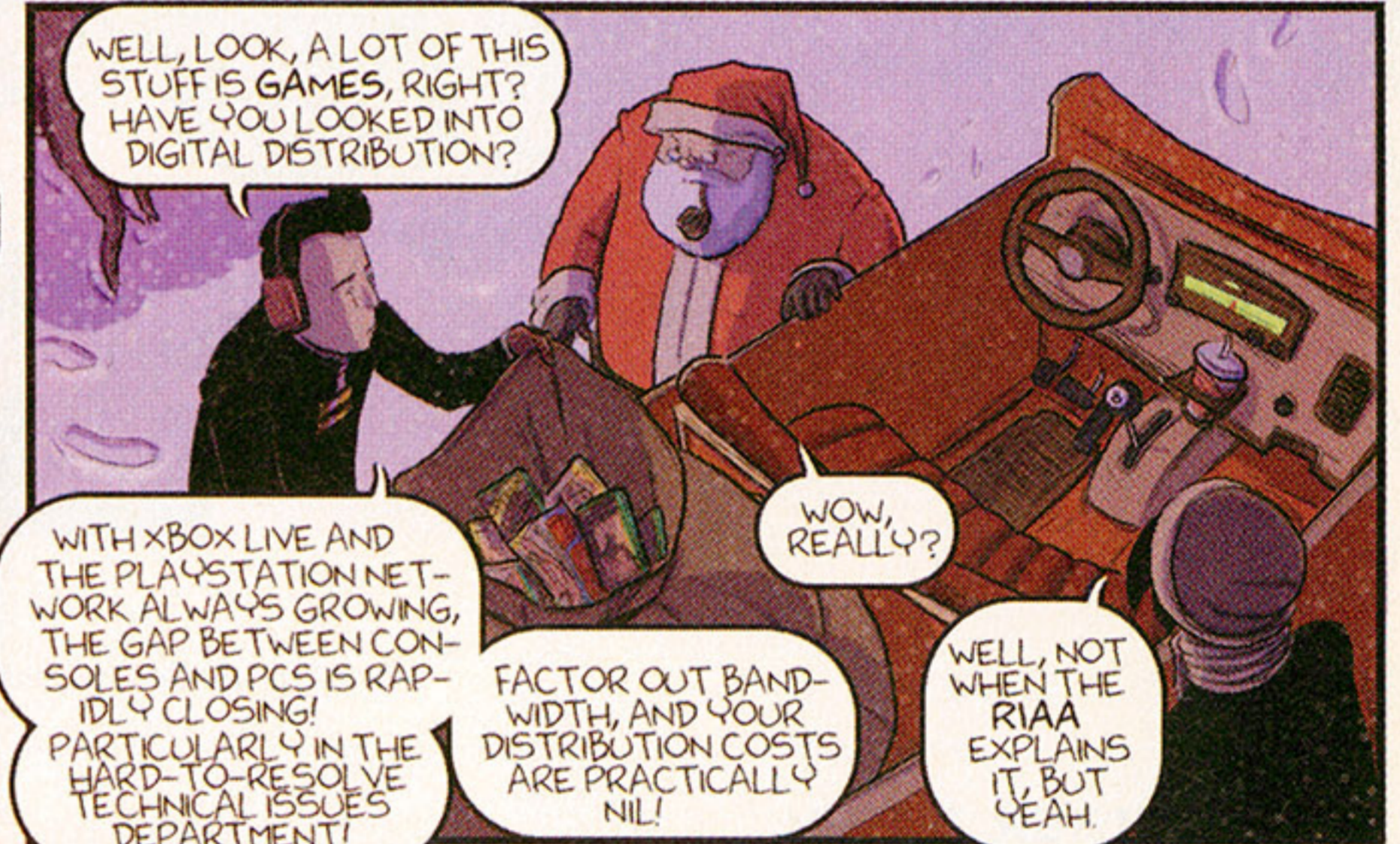
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Hauling Jolly

By Jeremy "Norm" Scott



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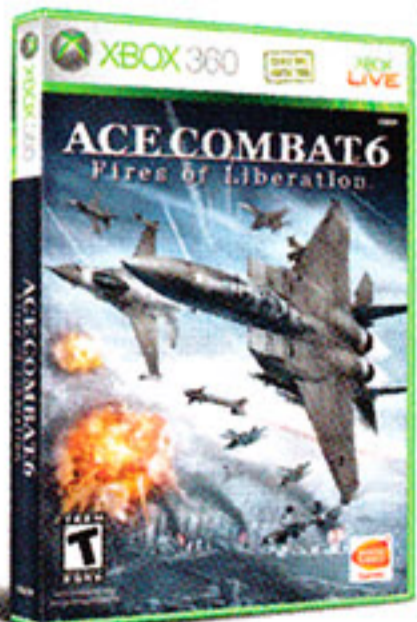
MILITARY vs CIVILIANS
ACE COMBAT 6
TEAM TOURNAMENT

\$15,000
CHAMPIONSHIP

ONE OF THESE IMAGES IS REAL.

THE OTHER 2 ARE FROM ACE COMBAT 6.

CAN YOU TELL THE DIFFERENCE?



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TEEN
Mild Language
Violence

ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org
Game experience may change during online play.

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ACE COMBAT 6

Fires of Liberation™

"SPECTACULARLY GORGEOUS!"
- OXM

"LOUD, LARGE, AND A WELCOME KICK IN THE
TEETH, ACE COMBAT 6 TAKES PLAYERS ON
A TESTOSTERONE-FUELED FLIGHT."
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