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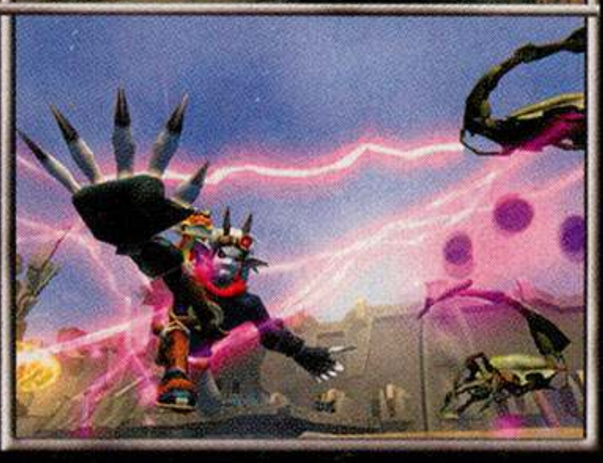

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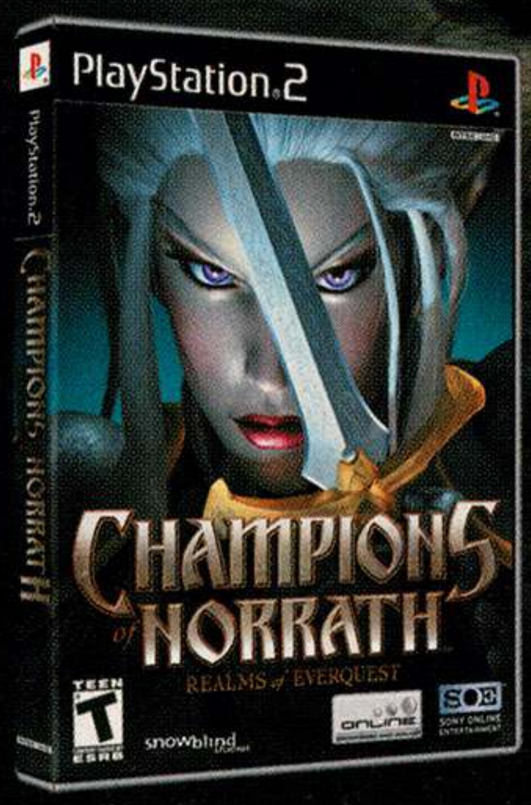

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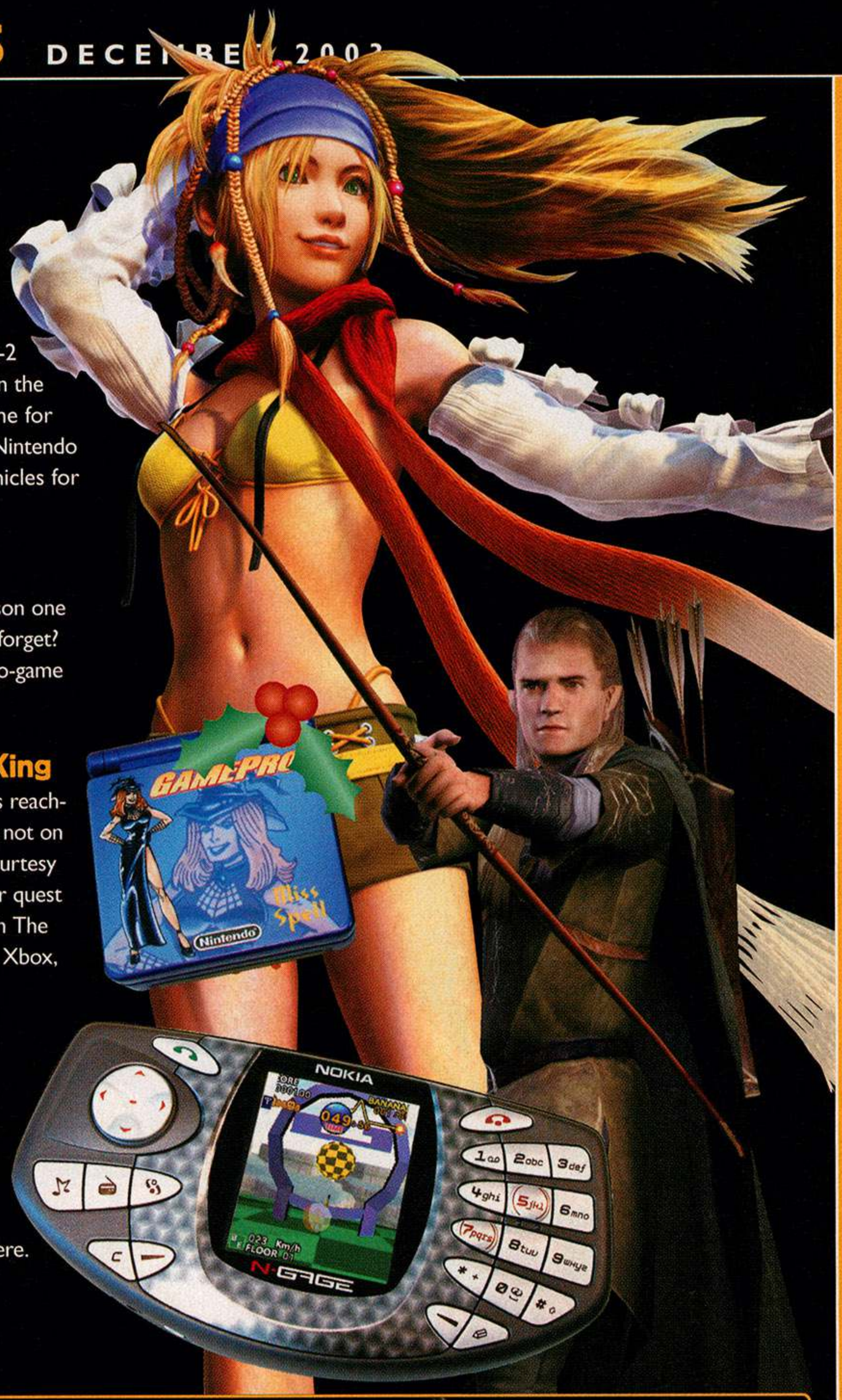

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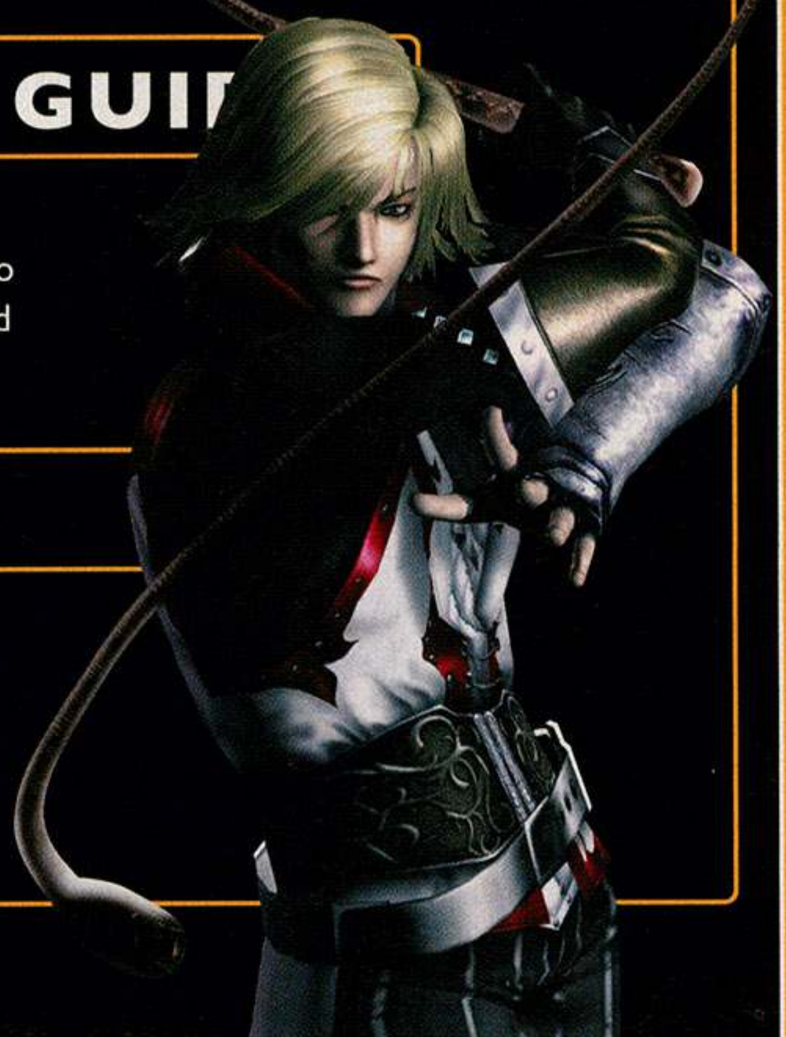

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EDITOR'S LETTER

The End of the Virtual World as You Know It

PC gamers playing online with PS2 gamers? Cats living with dogs...it's the end of the world as we know it. But that's what you can do with Final Fantasy XI.

Online console gaming may be at its formative stages, but it is here to stay. Sony recently reported that 880,000 PS2 online Adaptors were out in the world, and Microsoft launched its highly touted XSN Sports Network into a crowd of 500,000 Xbox Live subscribers (and, of course, every Xbox comes ready to connect right out of the box). Even Nintendo—known for its no-online-gaming-until-it's-time mindset—has quietly let on that the most current GameCube releases Mario Kart: Double Dash!! and 1080° Avalanche are LAN/System link capable, which some are calling Nintendo's online "Trojan Horse." Now if you can just hunt down a GameCube Ethernet adapter....

It's true that even with the impressive PS2 and Xbox numbers, they are nowhere near the mass of PC mouse-burners online. But there's no doubt that the way we play console games is expanding into a brave, new world of connected gameplay. We all know that playing head-to-head with friends is sometimes worlds apart from playing a CPU in single-player mode...and a different type of challenge altogether. Playing consoles online is yet another unique entertainment frontier. Now you get three entirely different ways to play in every box—a fantasy anything but final.

The GamePros
Oakland, CA
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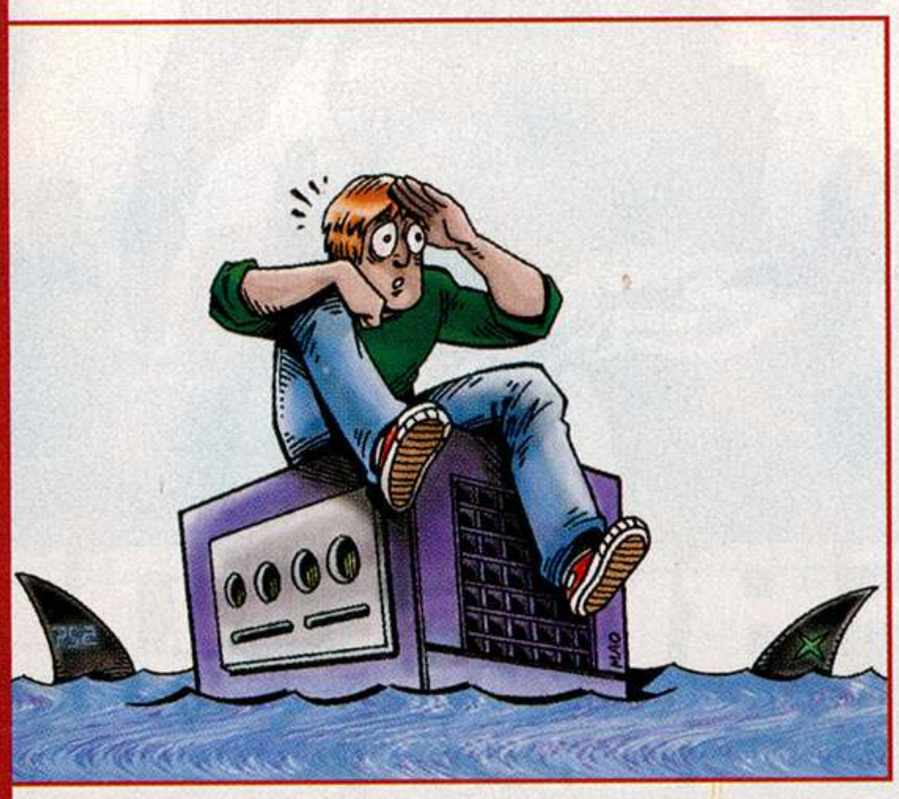
Give Me Liberty City or Give Me Console Death

I have noticed many things in the video-game industry, but one thing is repeating itself over and over: Games will make or break a system (cough Dreamcast, Saturn cough), and the GameCube gets left out on some of the best games while the other two systems (PS2, Xbox) get their share of the games. That does not make any sense. Why? Let's take Rockstar, which publishes and develops Grand Theft Auto and Midnight Club II. The Xbox will get ports of GTA III and Vice City, so why not the GameCube? All they have to do is make a port. Don't they understand that they will make *money* despite the fact that the GameCube's ranked in third place.

Okay, you might say that the GameCube doesn't have the customer support. Yeah? Then why the heck did Rockstar make Smuggler's Run: Warzones (an average sleeper hit) exclusively for the GameCube? And I know for a fact that most 'Cubers didn't even try the game. Almost nobody noticed its July 2002 release. But I can promise you that 'Cubers will notice GTA or Midnight Club II on their system. Please, can anyone explain why Rockstar makes crappy games but not good games for the 'Cube. Adding insult to injury, people and industry analysts say the GameCube sucks. It does not suck, it's just game deficient. Nobody gives it a chance. Can you guys *please* explain why the GameCube doesn't have Backyard Wrestling, Return to Castle Wolfenstein, Pirates of the Caribbean, and Jurassic Park: Operation Genesis? All of these games have above average reviews/previews. I know that Vivendi Universal will publish Metal Arms: Glitch in the System for the GameCube, so why the heck not Jurassic Park: Operation Genesis? Please, *GamePro*, on behalf of the millions of quality-game-starved 'Cubers, respond accordingly. We don't want our beloved 'Cube to be a Dreamcast this time next year.

▶ **Siddharth A.–Fort Worth, TX**

You may not want to hear this, Sid, but you may have answered your own question. Smuggler's Run: Warzones was an exclusive...and by your own admission, most GameCube owners ignored it. If a company doesn't see a return on its investment, it takes its money and goes elsewhere. As for all the other games you mention, if a publisher doesn't think it can make enough money with a game (not just *some* money, but whatever it deems to be "the right amount" to make it worth its time and trouble), that game won't appear, even if it's "just" a port. While that's primary business sense, that's not the only factor at work. If a developer doesn't like the hardware or the development tools or the controller or whatever, it might choose not to port that game over (and if the publisher really wants it ported, they'll hire someone else to do that dirty work, so you're back to the first reason). Also, the GameCube uses a proprietary 1.5 GB disc format—great for thwarting piracy but not so great for fitting big DVD games like Grand Theft Auto III. Could they do it on two discs? Sure, but those kinds of things sometimes pose problems that developers and publishers would rather not tackle. Again, is it worth the time and trouble? Only publishers can say.



A Thin Line Between Love and Hate

How come y'all like hate all of the Xbox's games except Halo and Splinter Cell? I have NFL Fever 2004, and it got only a 4.0. That is just plain wrong. NFL Fever is only second best to Madden NFL 2004. It deserves a 4.5 or a 5.0. You despise Brute Force, when everyone else on the planet gives it a 5.0. I love your magazine, but I disagree with some of your ratings on the Xbox.

▶ **Mastercheif228–Via Internet**

You're certainly free to feel differently than we do—but do you actually disagree? Anything 4.0 and up—including NFL Fever 2004—is considered a positive review; we recommend that people at least play those games if not buy them. Here are some other recent *GamePro* Xbox review scores:

Soul Calibur II	5.0 Fun Factor
ESPN NFL Football 2K4	5.0 Fun Factor
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4	5.0 Fun Factor
Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic	4.5 Fun Factor
Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Island Thunder	4.5 Fun Factor
Outlaw Volleyball	4.5 Fun Factor
Jurassic Park: Operation Genesis	4.5 Fun Factor
Burnout 2: Point of Impact	4.5 Fun Factor

There are plenty of different genres represented in that list, and it's not even complete. So...does that look like "hate" to anybody else? Good games get good reviews, regardless of platform. It's that simple!

Taking Note of Music

Music in games is a very important part of the whole gaming experience. I think back to the days of the Sega Saturn, which I believe had some of the best music. Sonic Team had some especially great

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music, and Nights had some of the best scores I've ever heard. I listen to my Sega Saturn games all the time since they could double as soundtracks. Games like Sonic and Sega Rally Championship had excellent audio also. Maybe I'm crazy, but I think a lot of people might agree with me. What music from a game do you guys at *GamePro* think is memorable?

▶ **Matt Long–Via Internet**

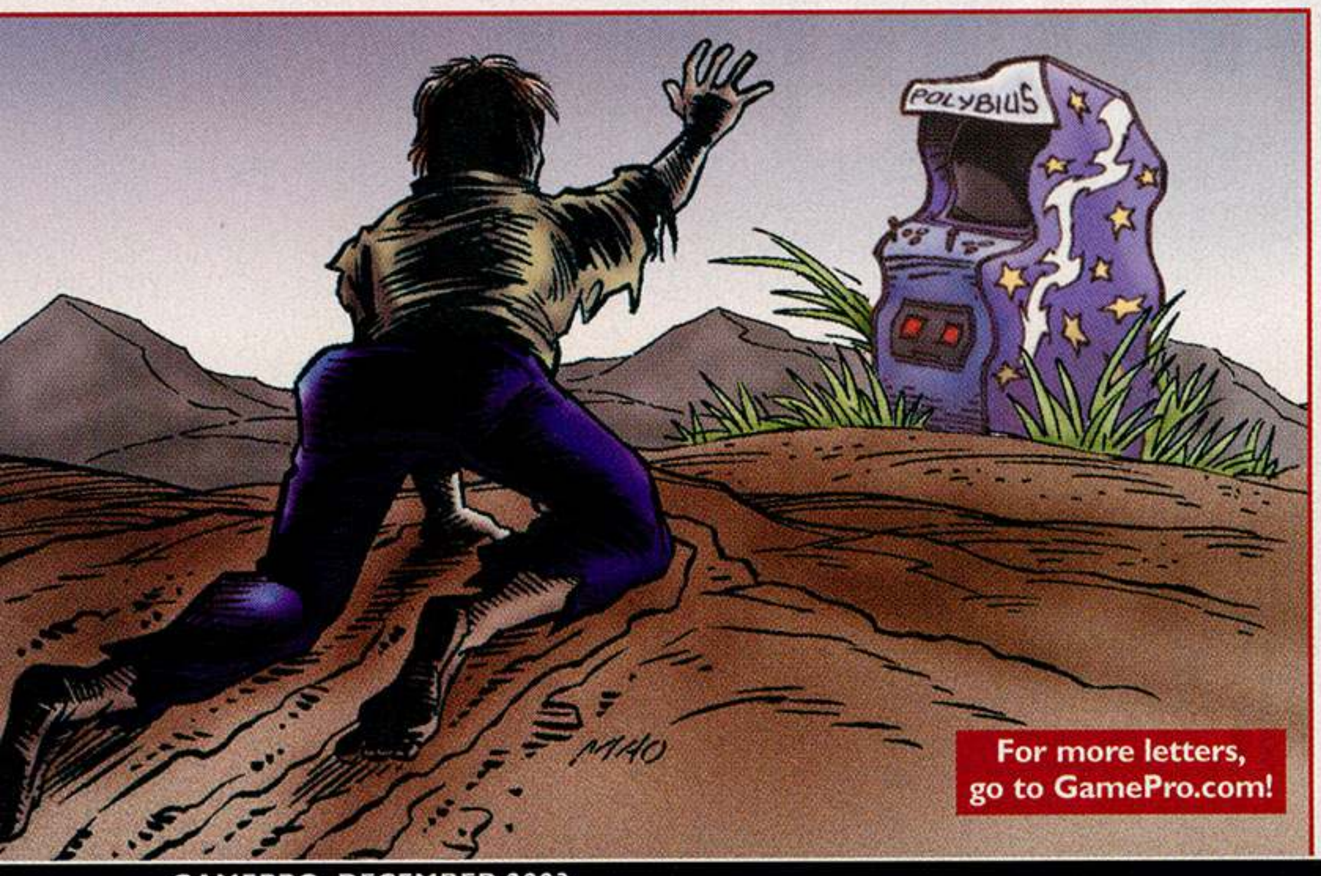
Game audio is often overlooked, so it's great that you appreciate the soundtracks so much. Try playing your favorite games with the sound turned down and see how much you miss! But be careful what you ask about staff preferences—you just might get an enormous answer. Major Mike was first to chime in with Final Fantasy III and VIII, along with the aptly named Castlevania: Symphony of the Night. Dan Elektro still thinks the music from Halo, The 7th Guest, and Wing Commander kicks ass. Speaking of which, Tokyo Drifter says, "Streets of Rage for the Sega Genesis was a musical breakthrough—funky beats with just a hint of techno were the choice for serious ass kicking." He also mentions that every Panzer Dragoon game has had incredible music. Miss Spell is partial to both Diablo games, while both Strafe Maru and Simon Limon screamed "Mega Man 2!" in unison. Air Hendrix says, "anything by Michael Giacchino," noting Medal of Honor: Allied Assault and MOH Frontline particularly. If you don't know who did the music for your favorite games, just read the credits and find out. They clearly deserve some love!

Too Much Booze Will Do the Same Thing

I was reading about the video-game urban legends ("Secrets & Lies," September), and I was wondering if you guys have any more info on the old arcade game Polybius. I was also wondering if there is a ROM I could download and where to download it because I want to see if I have nightmares and don't know where my house is.

▶ **Cameron Clarke–Via Internet**

Dan Elektro wrote that article, and he responds: "The feature story contained pretty much all known information, and the ROM has not appeared—which, after national exposure and lots of forum discussion on GamePro.com, leads me to believe that the game doesn't exist. After some of the unnerving research and interviews I did in conjunction with that story, I actually hope it doesn't." If you missed it, the story's also posted on GamePro.com.



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C. Atkins–Rocky Mt, VA

Z. Sabra–Hollywood, FL

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Zombies are nothing to be afraid of.
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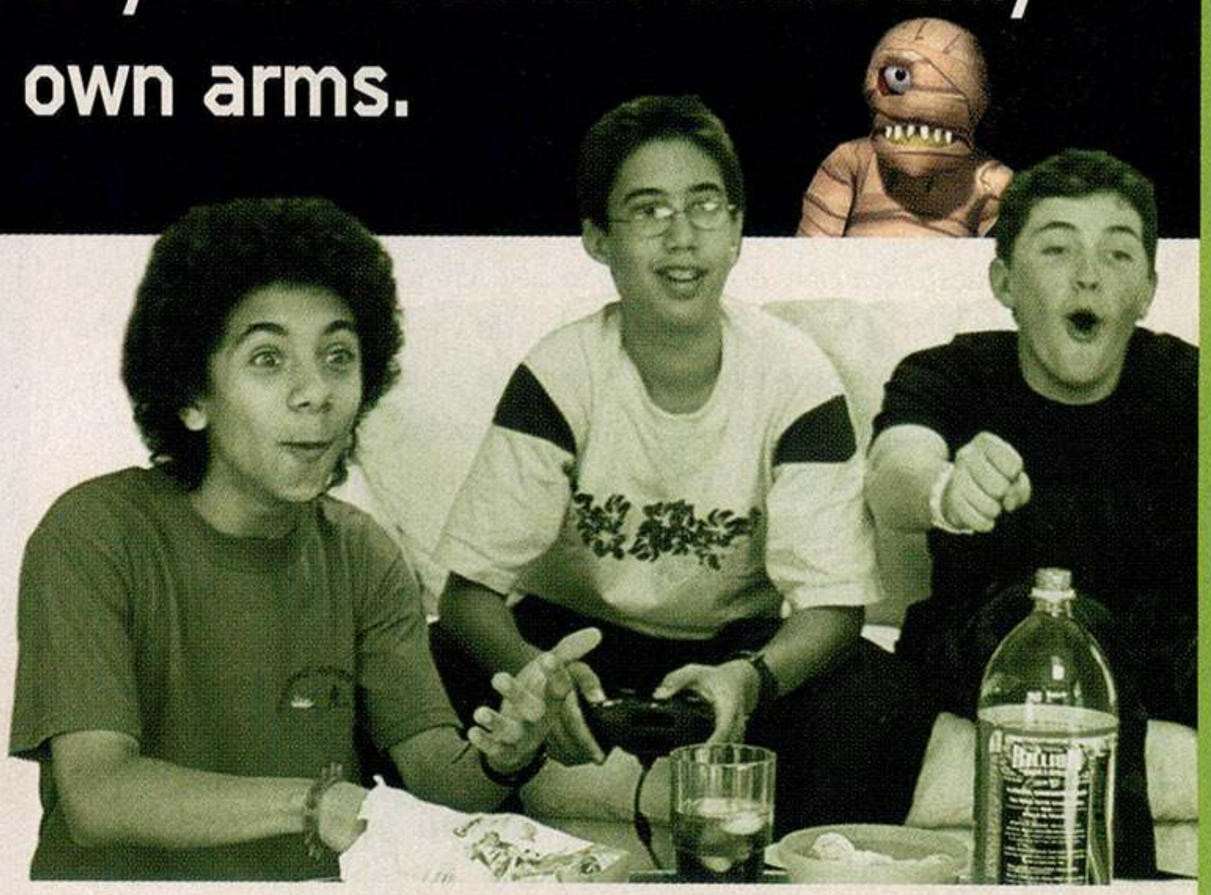

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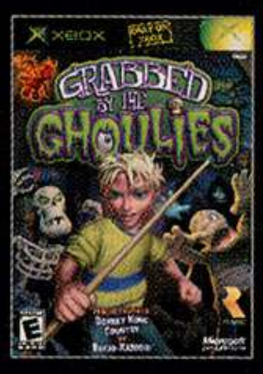

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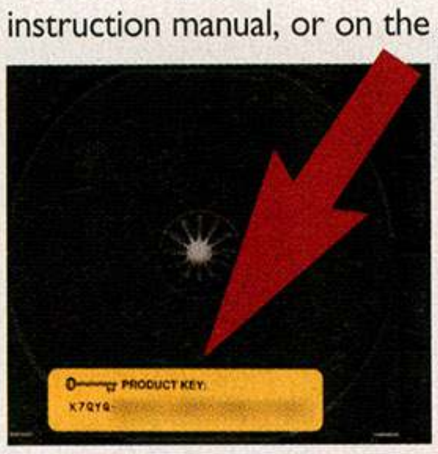
By The Watch Dog

Every once in a while you miss one, and this month The Watch Dog makes good for some bogus advice he gave in the October issue. Plus, witness the debut of a brand spankin' new section in this month's installment of Buyers Beware.

Q Am I the only person severely annoyed by the CD keys needed in PC games? Not only do we have to pay $50 for a game, but we have to enter a code every time we install it! What do we do if we lose the code? Several years after finishing Half-Life, I decided to kill some time with it again. I looked frantically for the key with no success, and now I can't play it. Do the companies realize that they are aggravating their customers? Now I have to make sure I have keys for the games that require them before tossing out the box. What is the point of these things?

Stephen Marston—Via Internet

A CD keys serve as a form of copy protection and antipiracy. For those of you who may be wondering what a CD key is, it's a string of characters, usually 20–25 letters and numbers that you enter during the installation process. The code is usually found on the game disc, inside the instruction manual, or on the packaging, and while you usually have to enter it only once, losing the key can be a huge problem since you need it to re-install the game (if your machine crashes or you upgrade). To be honest, if pirates are determined, they're going to find a way around CD keys anyway, so they're not so useful for standard PC games. They are very important, however, for online games like EverQuest and PlanetSide because online game publishers use CD keys to make sure that multiple customers are not using the same code. If that was the case, all players with the same key could be locked out of the game. Most CD keys are printed on the jewel case, so the best advice may be to simply hang on to your original packaging. If you ever choose to sell it or pass it on, the new recipient will want it anyway.



U In the October edition of Buyers Beware, we said that Xbox Live would work over DSL, cable, or satellite Internet connections. Well, two out of three ain't bad—and that last one is downright horrible. Unfortunately, satellite 'net connections are notoriously slow—good for e-mail and light web browsing, but little else. Several readers wrote in to say that cool online games (that is, anything other than checkers and cribbage) are pretty much unplayable via satellite hook-ups. Technically possible? Yes. Actually enjoyable? No. If you're seeking an Internet connection to use with Xbox Live, stick to land lines like DSL and cable for now. Sorry about the bum advice, but thank your fellow readers for their vigilance.

Submissions

At *GamePro*, listening is what we do best. When you have a problem with a product or feel you've been ripped off, we want to know. Write to:

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P.O. Box 22210
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Or e-mail us at:
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Having problems with hardware or software from Sony, Nintendo, or Microsoft? Here are the customer service numbers to call:

Sony: 800/345-7669

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Microsoft: 800/469-9269

Bug Alert

As video games are developed for multiple platforms, become more technologically sophisticated, and see hastened production schedules to make deadlines, game glitches are becoming an unfortunately all-too-common occurrence. Bug Alert will keep you up to speed on which games have known bugs, how serious they are, and whether anything can or will be done to fix them.

Madden NFL 2004 (PlayStation 2, Xbox, GameCube)

We're hearing about freezes and crashes for all console versions, but the biggest problem right now is corrupted and/or damaged save files when trying to import draft classes from NCAA Football 2004 to the Xbox version. At the time of this writing, EA had no solution to the problem but was researching the issue and urging every customer who is having this problem to call its Tech Support hotline and leave a message with their name and phone number. That number is 650/628-4322.

Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic (Xbox)

This massive RPG is experiencing typical freezing and crashing problems that occur in games of this size and scope—the more player options and freedom, the more opportunities for program error. The best thing to do is to save often so you don't lose too much progress if your game craps out on you.

Pirates of the Caribbean (Xbox)

Pirates of the Caribbean owners are suffering through crashes, corrupted save files, and gameplay glitches, all of which can seriously hinder the gameplay. Bethesda recommends a few tricks that may help remedy some of the freezing and/or crashing issues. First, if you have a memory card, copy the game data from the hard drive onto the card. At the very least, this will back up any saved games in the event of corruption. Next, erase all game data from the hard drive and turn off the system. Turn your Xbox back on and then copy the data from the memory card back onto the hard drive. You can also try this: Take any other three games (besides Pirates of the Caribbean) and insert the discs one by one. Allow each game to load, remove the disc, and turn off your system. This could help clear out the Xbox cache memory.

Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness (PlayStation 2)

Enter the Matrix (PlayStation 2, Xbox, GameCube)

These already weak games were made worse by flickering frame rates, lack of sound effects, audio skips and loops, disappearing graphical details, collision problems, and crashing. Both were rushed out the door—Enter the Matrix was likely hurried to coincide with the release of *The Matrix Reloaded*, and Tomb Raider, after many slipped release dates, was finally kicked out the door before the end of Eidos's fourth fiscal quarter. Gamers are not happy with the results, but there's not much they can do about it except cry.

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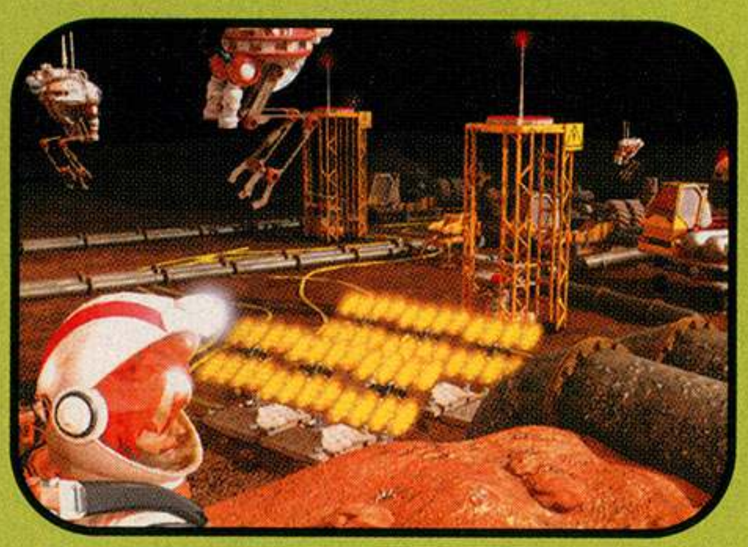

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NETPRO

PLAY FOR PAY

KNOW YOU GOT SERIOUS GAME? TWO NEW GAMING WEBSITES LET YOU PUT YOUR MONEY WHERE YOUR MOUSE IS. *BY AIR HENDRIX*

MOST ONLINE GAMERS have paid to play their favorite games at one time or another, but a pair of websites is hoping to draw crowds by reversing that proposition: Throw a few bucks into the pot before each deathmatch, then fight to earn back your stake and hopefully a profit with payouts for each kill. Because of the obvious gambling aspect, players must be 18 years old to jump into the fray, but for gamers looking to test their skills on a level playing field with solid anticheating measures, UltimateArena.com and YouPlayGames.com could be a tempting challenge.

You Play Games currently devotes itself to the more strategic deathmatches of Return to Castle Wolfenstein.

Ultimate Arena is clearly the leading site, offering the best selection of games: Counter-Strike, America's Army, Unreal Tournament 2003, and Unreal Tournament. You Play Games features only Return to Castle Wolfenstein, and both sites report that they're looking to bolster their lineups with additional games.

With money on the line, cheating would be even more intolerable than it already is, and both sites take it seriously, using extensive anti-cheat software and employing live admins to monitor matches. Ultimate Arena also uses an eBay-like user rating system, and for Counter-Strike, it records the point of view of each player during a match, storing it for 12 hours so that complaints can be investigated.

The sites make their money by taking a cut of the winnings, so there are no fees to join. The bets on an Ultimate Arena game range from $0.50–$20, and players are restricted from losing more than $100 a month. Ultimate Arena lets you quickly jump into a trial game so that you can test the action before going through the sign-up process, but You Play Games requires registration first. Its money model is also a bit more complex, paying for your frags and charging you for respawns using a "life cost" system.

Both sites functioned smoothly in tests, and for experienced FPS players, the prospect could be hard to resist. Games have never been a cheap hobby, but someone finally found a way to make them work for you.

Ultimate Arena's roster is packed with stars like Counter-Strike, Unreal Tournament 2003, and America's Army.

Geek Speak

The nerdy side of gaming in plain English

By MC Squared

Q This may sound extremely stupid, but I have always wondered how the frame rate for a game is calculated and if it is possible for the frame rate to be too fast.

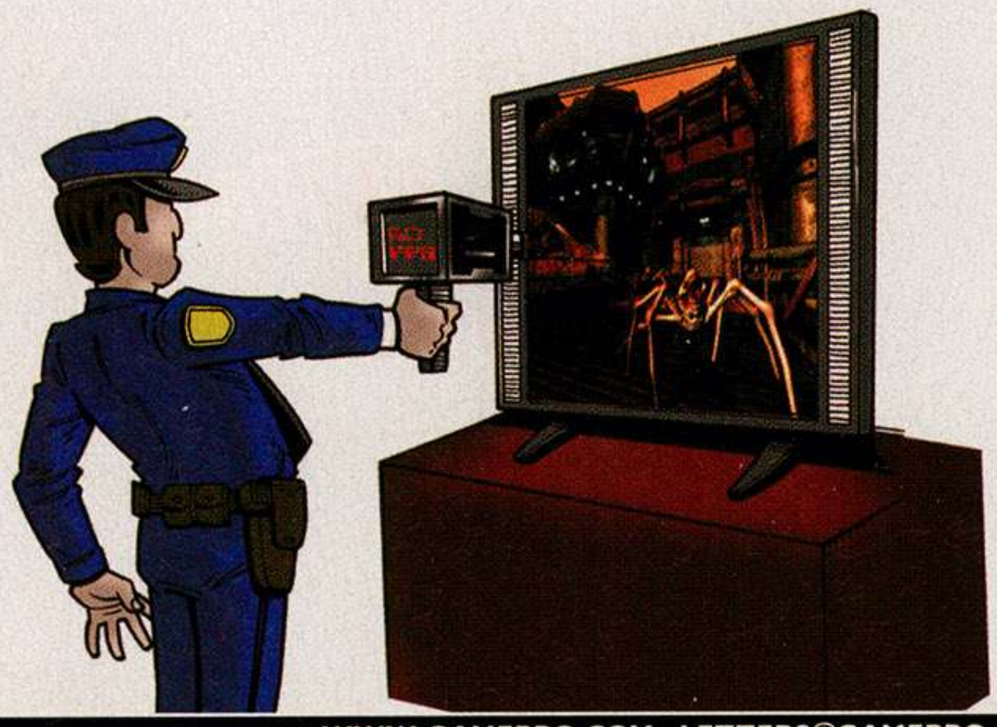
BUYPRODUCT—VIA GAMEPRO FORUMS

A Nothing stupid about it, Buy, but let's start with the basics. When you watch a DVD—say, a good double feature of two of my favorite films, *A Brief History of Time* and *Boyz N the Hood*—the images go by at 30 still pictures, or *frames*, every second. Your standard American NTSC television runs at a *refresh rate* of 60 hertz—the screen draws 60 *fields* every second, where each field is half the horizontal lines (either the odd-numbered ones or the even-numbered ones) that make up the full picture. Sixty fields in 30 frames means two fields equal one NTSC frame. Thus ends the basics.

When it comes to games, frame rate is limited only by how high the programmers wanted to make it (and still accommodate fog, colored lighting, and what have you) and/or the capabilities of the game machine's video chip. A game at 30 fps will look and play fine; that's been the standard since the 32-bit era. If a game runs at 60 fps (as many recent ones do), it's twice the smoothness—approaching Snoop-in-Versace smooth—and you'll probably notice it. However, anything above 60 fps on a console game is usually wasted because the frame rate matches the refresh rate exactly—one frame of animation/video data for each time the screen redraws a field, which is only half the picture anyway. Plus, it's hard for most humans to tell the difference above 60 fps anyway. (It's not that your eyes can't process faster frame rates on a biological or cognitive level—it's just that nobody cares.) So why waste more system power on a faster frame rate if a normal TV can't display it?

Oh, but your PC can. Computer monitors aren't locked at 60 Hz for the refresh rate; they can update the screen more often, usually at 72 times a second but sometimes as high as 120—*and* they use progressive scan (the entire frame is rewritten every time the screen refreshes, not just one field/half the image) for higher quality. Put all that together and you may hear people boast that their games run as high as 150 frames per second.

Impressed? Don't be—they're misguided fools who deserve your pity. A game's frame rate can never be "too fast," but it can be too fast to make a perceptible difference. All you really need to know is that 60 fps is the sweet spot for modern games. Console games that run that fast sure look pretty, and you should tweak your PC game settings to run at 60 fps with as many in-game special effects as you can manage without slowdown. For what it's worth, Doom 3 will have its frame rate capped at 60 as even the gang at id knows anything more is overkill and only takes processing power away from the graphical effects and atmosphere, which is what really makes games look interesting. And if you can't believe John Carmack, who can you trust?



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GAMECUBE DROPS TO $99

Change creates $80 price gap between the GameCube and PS2/Xbox

Begun, these holiday price wars have.

In late September, Nintendo of America dropped the price of the GameCube to $99.99. Setting the machine apart from both the PlayStation 2 and Xbox by $80, the move will be sure to stir up Microsoft, whose console sales are about even with Nintendo's.

"So far in 2003, the Nintendo GameCube is the only home console showing an increase in unit sales compared to 2002," said George Harrison, Nintendo senior VP of marketing and corporate communications. "Every time a generation of technology has moved into the true mass market, Nintendo has prospered. This incredible new price and our great software offers are designed to accelerate that trend like never before."

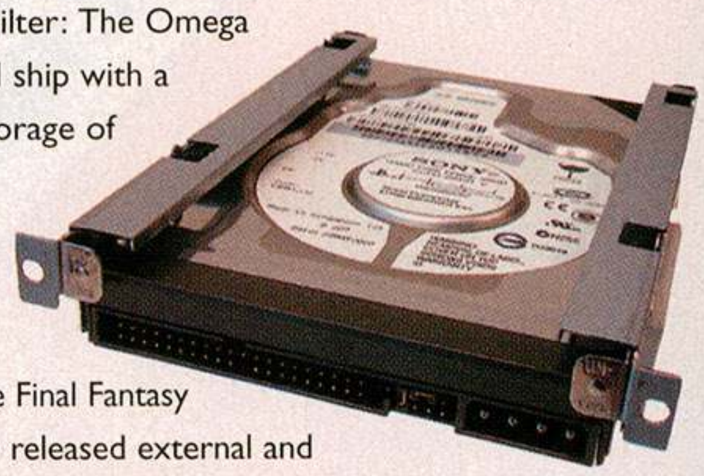
Boosters will say it's a savvy move by Nintendo to undercut the competition and increase the GameCube's install base; cynics, meanwhile, will call the price drop a desperation move in response to the most recent fiscal reports and a frantic scramble to start clearing out warehouses for whatever the next Nintendo console will be (see ProNews, November). Ultimately, it doesn't matter what Nintendo's motivation is—the gauntlet has been thrown, and Sony and Microsoft, each with core console packages priced at $179, now have a much wider price gap to substantiate.

Microsoft, however, has stated that its main benchmark in pricing will be the PS2 and not the GameCube. "We've been selling at a price premium to the GameCube since the first day," said Microsoft Senior VP Robbie Bach at a news conference in Tokyo. "I don't think that's going to change."

PS2 HARD DRIVE DUE IN MARCH

It's been a long time coming, but the PS2 is finally going to get a hard disk drive—with an accent on the "final" part.

Sony will release a 40-gigabyte, internal hard disk drive to the U.S. market in March 2004 for a price of $99. The unit, called simply the Hard Disk Drive, will come pre-installed with Final Fantasy XI (see this issue's cover feature for a preview) and will support content downloads from games including Syphon Filter: The Omega Strain and SOCOM II: U.S. Navy SEALs. In addition to FFXI, the drive will ship with a media player that enables viewing of digital photos, playback of MP3s, storage of audio CDs, and game save data management tools.



Originally promised for a November 2001 release in the U.S., the Hard Disk Drive (essentially a specialized version of a standard PC drive) slides into the expansion bay of the PS2 and works in concert with the already released Network Adaptor. Working loaner HDD units were sent out with the Final Fantasy XI beta test software, and installation has proven hassle-free. In Japan, Sony released external and internal PS2 hard drives in 2001 to accommodate both the original and redesigned versions of the console.

The U.S. launch of the HDD could have an interesting trickle-down effect. Whereas hardware add-ons traditionally have a hard time finding a footing in the marketplace, pre-installing a highly anticipated franchise title like Final Fantasy XI on the HDD could accelerate the install base of both the drive and the Network Adaptor, giving both peripherals a boost.

HALF-LIFE 2 HACKED AND DELAYED

Developer Valve Software officially announced a good reason why Half-Life 2 was not released on September 30 as previously promised: hackers. During the summer, unknown parties broke into Valve's computer network and stole roughly one-third of the game's source code. As a result, parts of the game need to be rewritten and Half-Life 2 will not ship until April 2004. Valve has openly requested help from the game community in tracking down the perpetrators.

Half-Life 2 will be delayed until April, giving Valve programmers time to rebuild the stolen source code.

Meanwhile, Wired.com reports that when Half-Life 2 does go on sale, it will be available both as a retail boxed product and a direct download. Gamers can purchase and download the game directly from Valve's online Steam network, or subscribe and essentially rent the game for $13 a month, which includes updates and mods. Expectations are realistic about the new program. "We've sold 10 million units of the Half-Life family of games at retail," said Valve's spokesman Doug Lombardi to the site. "We don't think everyone's going to go over to Half-Life 2 on Steam and that retail's going to get blanked. If that happens, we'll be as surprised as anyone."

Kingdom Hearts: The Sequels

Rumors were flying about, but now it seems they are true: Kingdom Hearts 2 will be released on the PlayStation 2. Although the details are sketchy, it will once again star Sora (as well as Mickey, Donald, and Goofy) and will take place one year after the first game. Sora will also appear in Kingdom Hearts: Chain of Memories for the GBA, which will possibly wrap up more of the loose story ends from the original Kingdom Hearts game. The battle system will let you use cards to unleash various attacks on enemies. Kingdom Hearts: Chain of Memories will be released for the GBA in Japan sometime in 2004. Kingdom Hearts 2 release details were still unknown at press time but were expected to be announced at the Tokyo Game Show. Check GamePro.com for an update.

Pokémon GBA Remakes En Route

Seven years after Pokémon Red and Green hit the Game Boy in Japan and started a revolution, Nintendo has announced remakes entitled Pokémon Fire Red and Leaf Green (note that Green in Japan is pretty much the same as Blue in the U.S.). The Game Boy Advance versions will be much the same as the old games, complete with the ability to trade and battle Pokémon across different versions of the game as well as the "nostalgic choice" between Charmander, Bulbasaur, and Squirtle as your starting Pokémon. Nintendo also announced that the games will connect to the upcoming Pokémon Stadium game for the GameCube, set to hit retail on November 21. No release date has yet been set for the GBA games.

Metreon's "Walk of Game"

In Hollywood, one of the greatest honors for a star is to have their name enshrined on the Walk of Fame, the sidewalks that adorn Hollywood and Vine. And since Hollywood has been stealing ideas from video games a lot lately, it's only fair that games steal back. The Walk of Game is currently being planned at the Sony-owned Metreon shopping center in San Francisco, in an attempt, according to a press release, "to commemorate some of pop culture's most indelible icons of the digital screen." Honorees have not been named, but gamers will be able to take part in the selection process. Metreon is already home to the swanky arcade Portal 1 and the official PlayStation store. More information can be found at metreon.com.

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PlayStation®2

HARMONIX

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GamePro Labs

Pelican AfterGlow

Rating: 4.0

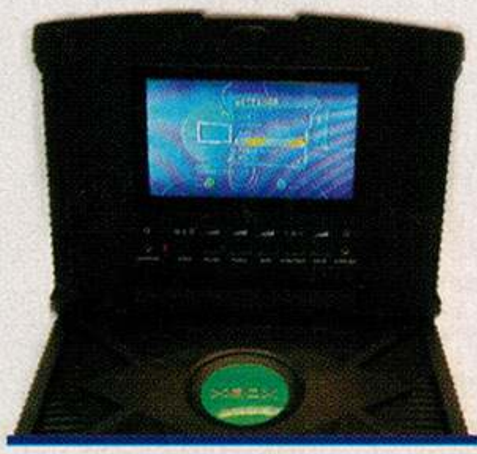
Greetings, programs! That famous line from *Tron* is all that comes to mind when you plug in the AfterGlow, a solid PS2 gamepad laced with a neon-like light filament. Available in two colors (red or blue), the AfterGlow feels and reacts identically to Pelican's Chameleon, so you're really paying $5 for the lights here. And that's okay because the cool factor is worth it, especially if you play your games with the lights dimmed. The split-level L and R shoulder buttons are an acquired taste—you either like it or you don't (or you learn to like it, so as to justify the purchase)—and the body feels slightly smaller than the standard Dual Shock. The digital directional pad required a bit of breaking in, which proved problematic in Tony Hawk's Underground, but hey…it's $20 and you've got strong fingers. You'll survive.—*Bad Hare*

Price: $19.95. Contact: Pelican, 323/234-9911, pelicanperformance.com

Intec 7.2" Color Game Screen

Rating: 1.5

Portable screens are getting larger, but here's proof that they're not necessarily getting better. Setup is easy—snap the screen on top of the Xbox, slide the locks into place, and plug in the large power adapter to an AC outlet—but performance leaves a lot to be desired. The picture isn't crisp on the LCD screen, so text isn't always easy to read, and there's blur on fast games like NBA Jam and Crimson Skies. The brightness and color controls need to be put all the way down and all the way up, respectively, to make the best picture, but even that doesn't offer "better game graphics than a TV" as the box claims. The widescreen display doesn't deliver true 16:9 ratios (there's some image framing issues on DVDs), but it doesn't actually promise to, either. The speakers, on the other hand, are fairly beefy, and the twin headphone jacks are a nice luxury for multiplayer games (sorry—just one volume control). Ultimately, though, the disappointing image quality sinks this product, not to mention its jumbo price. This non-TFT screen technology is a dying breed; best to let it die.—*Dan Elektro*



Price: $179.99. Contact: Intec, 305/908-5338, inteclink.com

Best-Selling Video Game Titles: August 2003

	TITLE	PLATFORM	PUBLISHER
1	Madden NFL 2004	PlayStation 2	EA Sports
2	Madden NFL 2004	Xbox	EA Sports
3	Soul Calibur II	GameCube	Namco
4	Soul Calibur II	Xbox	Namco
5	Silent Hill 3	PlayStation 2	Konami
6	NCAA Football 2004	PlayStation 2	EA Sports
7	Soul Calibur II	PlayStation 2	Namco
8	Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Island Thunder	Xbox	Ubi Soft
9	Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic	Xbox	LucasArts
10	Grand Theft Auto III	PlayStation 2	Rockstar Games

Source: The NPD Group/NPD Funworld

static

…al Fantasy XI…All in favor of handing over the entire Star Wars franchise to the folks who did Knights of the Old Republic, raise your hands. Who knows—*Episode III* might even make sense and be satisfying if you put these people in charge! • Okay, so Sony sponsored Ozzfest and the Vans Warped Tour, Microsoft got on the Lollapalooza bandwagon, and then Nintendo hit the road with Evanescence…but here's an idea: make these bands play one of your game's songs in concert. That's right—show some love, prove it's not all about money. If your band is going to be associated with video games, live it. Let's hear Ozzy's band crank out some of the Twisted Metal soundtrack. Let's hear Evanesence's take on any of the classic Mario or Metroid themes. We'll be listening next summer. (For the record, when the Foo Fighters played Sony's E³ party some years ago, they did perform some of the PaRappa stuff for the crowd.) • Oh, where would we be without Sony's arrogance? The PS2 HDD press release included this gem: "With the battle for console supremacy decided, we are departing from the status quo in an effort to broaden the in-home entertainment market with the release of the Hard Disk Drive for PlayStation 2." Oh, you mean that status quo that Microsoft broke at the Xbox launch two years ago? • Big love to toy company RC2 for sending some Outdoor Sportsman foam Blow Dart guns on the very day that we desperately needed a stressbreaker for this issue. So much fun, you'll hyperventilate! • You know, if you put a beard on *Queer Eye* food guy Ted, you'd have the spittin' image of Half-Life hero Gordon Freeman. • Hey, after all of Microsoft's moanin' and groanin' about the Xbox not having or needing a keyboard, the company went and made an official USB keyboard adapter anyway. It's true—an offer about it was included in copies of Phantasy Star Online: Episode I & II. Check out www.xbox.com/pso2/keyboardadapter.htm and see for yourself. • *GamePro* January 04…*GamePro* January 04…*GamePro* January 04…*GamePro* January 04…*GamePro* Janua…

HIDDEN CHARACTERS

"Scrabble Rousers" Part 2

Babble: Auch 'n Amrich Doodles: Mao

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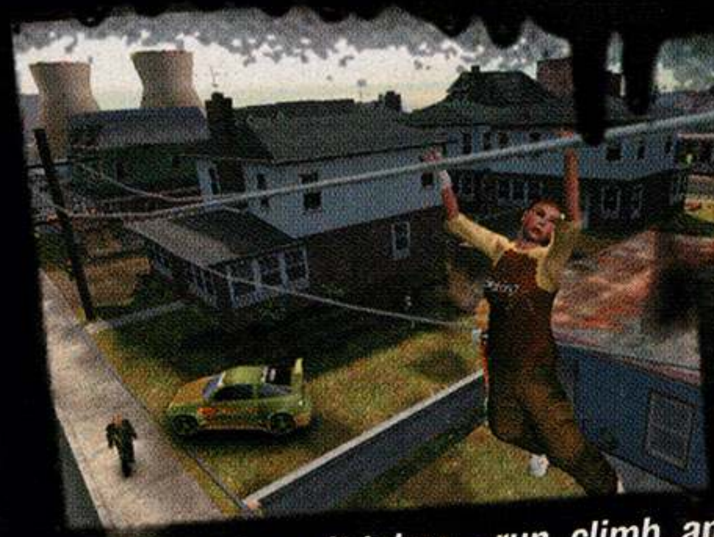
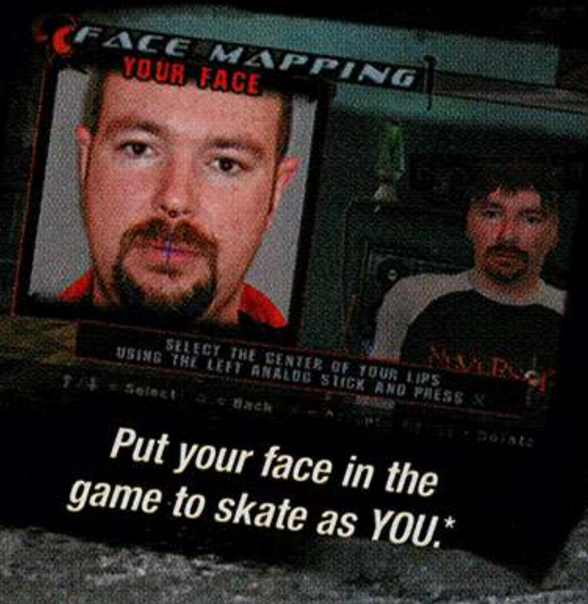


Do whatever it takes – run, climb, and of course, skate – to make it to the top.



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TEEN T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood
Mild Violence
Strong Language
Suggestive Themes

Game experience may change during online play.

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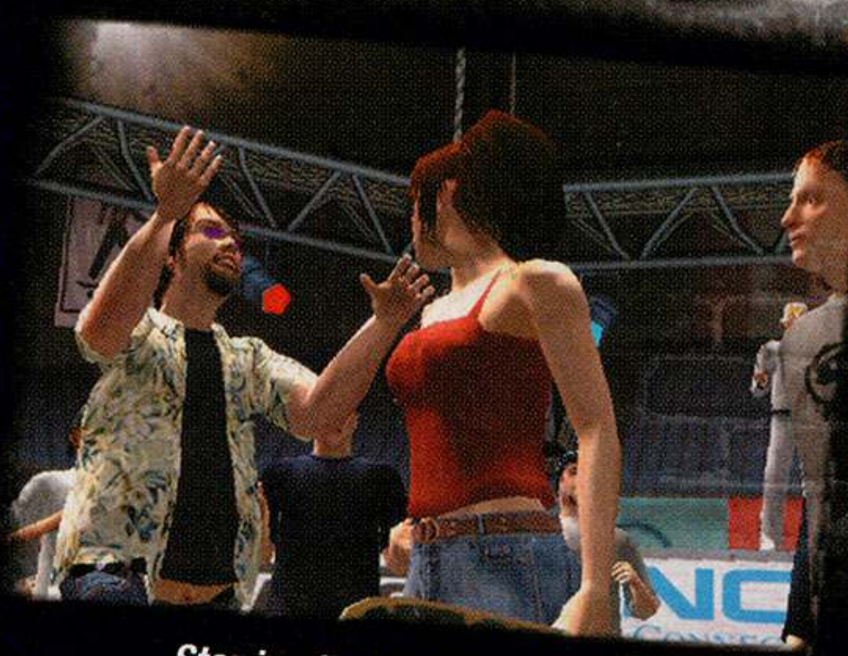
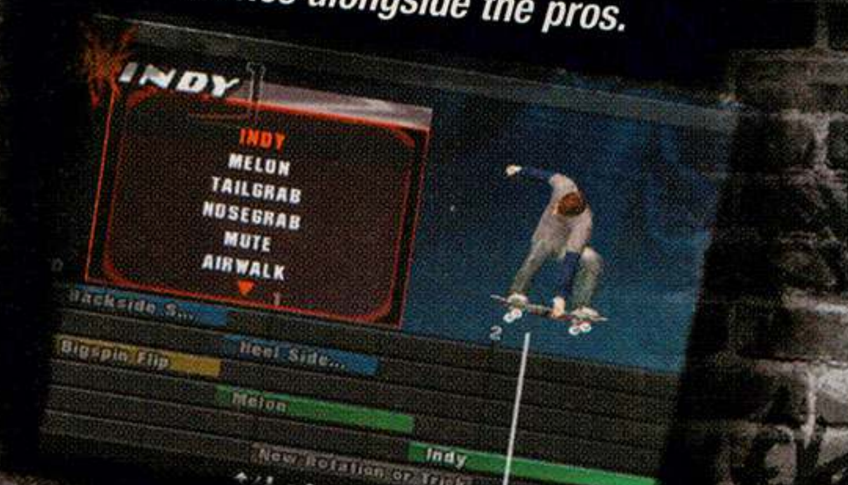


Star in all of the Story Mode movies alongside the pros.



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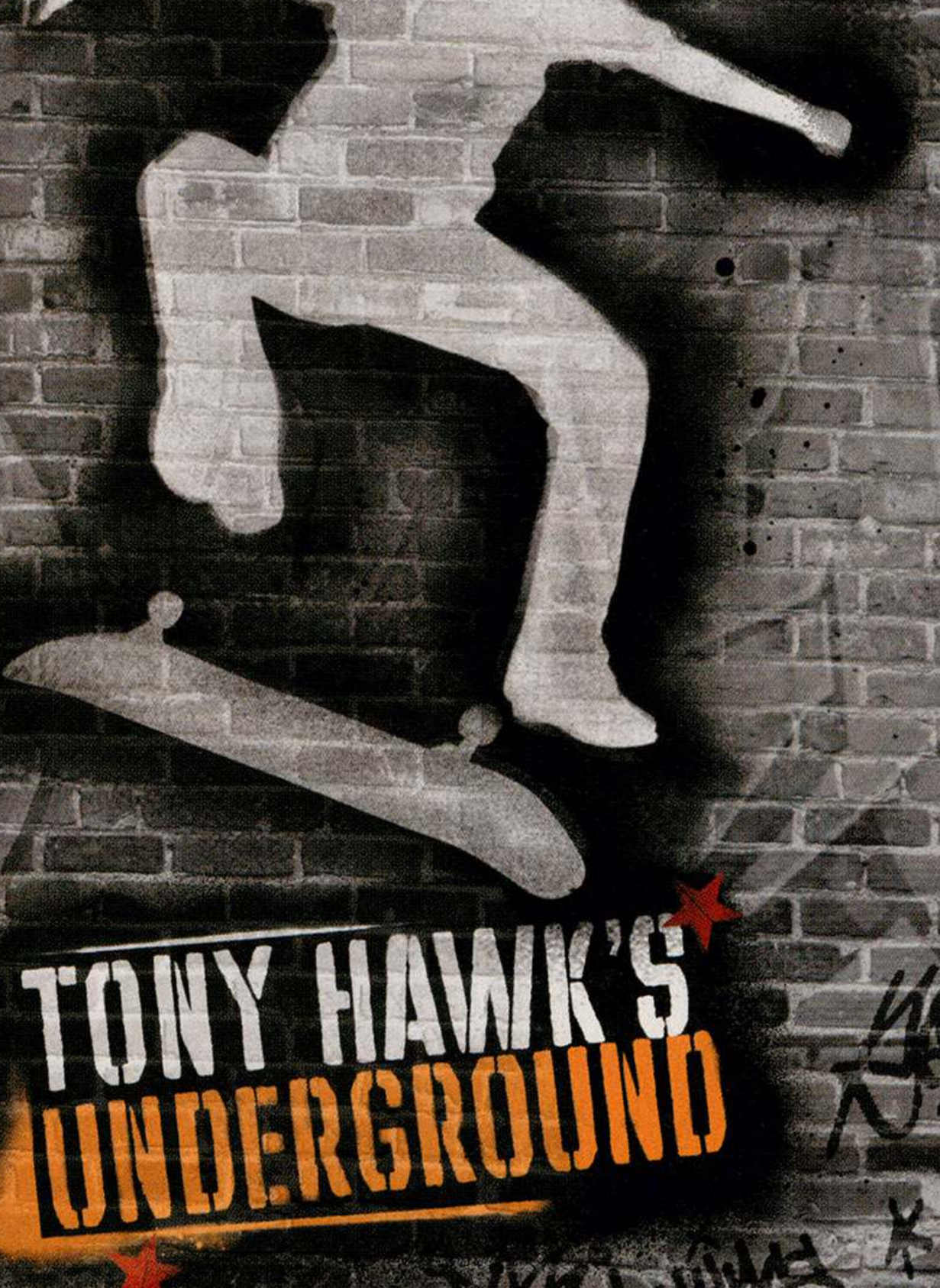

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TOASTER

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Strong Language
Violence

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Old Friends, New Frontiers

A return to Nintendo? An online-only adventure? And—gasp!—a sequel?! The myriad realms of Final Fantasy have never been more active or intriguing, thanks to X-2, XI, and Crystal Chronicles.

Final Fantasy X-2

SQUARE'S FINAL FANTASY is arguably *the* definitive RPG series of all time. It's only fitting that after every other successful role-playing franchise seemingly provided sequels, prequels, side stories, and (in some cases) fighting games that Final Fantasy finally take its own turn. Despite rumors that ranged from the game being an un-RPG ("there's platform-hopping!") to some kind of fashion show ("chicks change their clothes!"), X-2 incorporates unconventional elements into one of the most engrossing adventures you're likely to play this year.

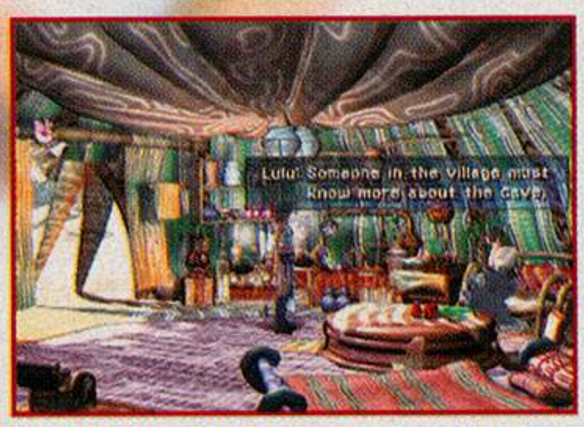
EDITORS' GAMEPRO CHOICE

"Let's Get Moving!"

To Square's credit, each Final Fantasy adventure has been fresh and unique with brand-new characters, spell-casting techniques, and worlds to explore (only a few elements have been carried over from game to game, such as cactuars and at least one character named Cid). As the only game with the FF name to feature a full continuation of a previous adventure, X-2 fits nicely for what it is: a sequel. But can X-2 hold its own as an engaging saga when there's no world to save from impending doom…and the most pressing issue at hand is how to reunite the main character with an old flame?

X-2 takes place some time after Final Fantasy X and finds Yuna ditching her staff and long dress for twin guns and short shorts. Along for the ride are X-vet Rikku and a newcomer, Paine. These

The three Sphere Hunters (from left): Rikku, Yuna, and Paine.



Interacting with characters from Final Fantasy X is a cool, nostalgic touch.

PROTIP: Cast Darkness on any enemies that frequently employ strong physical attacks.

PROTIP: When you fight Bahamut, look for a counter to appear in the middle of the screen that counts down from "5." When it reaches "0," Bahamut unleashes an attack that decimates the HP of all party members, so prepare accordingly.

PROTIP: You can get the Besaid Key from one of the people trapped in the Cavern of the Stolen Fayth.

self-proclaimed "hunters" hop around Spiria, searching for spheres that help unravel the mystery of Tidus's disappearance. The whole setup is awkward at first, but it gradually takes hold for an engrossing quest.

Looks That Kill

However, this isn't your traditional, linear Fantasy adventure. From an airship hovering over Spiria, you select from several destinations for missions that take place over five Chapters. Some visits are mandatory, others are optional, and the game overall should keep fanatics and explorers occupied for quite some time. Yet the activities and objectives are a mixed bag, and range from handing out balloons to escorting supply shipments to giving back rubs.

Besides the body massage, there's plenty of combat, and X-2 uses a brand-new Garment combat system, where the three principals change into different outfits during battle. Garments vary in terms of effectiveness and have a strong affinity with certain characters (Paine, for instance, is better with brute force, while Yuna is stronger with spells). One welcome addition is the Active Time Battle (ATB). As battles are fought in real time, you can interrupt foes that charge up or rush toward you and even chain your attack together with a colleague for extra damage. Switching between outfits in a fight provides one of the game's splashier special effects and is comparable to the introduction of an aeon in X.

PROTIP: Affiliate Paine with physical-attack Dresspheres, such as Warrior.

Gullwings Assemble!

The urgency and oh-so-serious tone of X has been replaced by something more relaxed and playful as is mirrored in the voice characterizations. In keeping with the lighter tone, there's plenty of *Charlie's Angels*–esque posing, and embarrassing dialogue never seems to be in short supply. Despite the disarming appearance, combat is fierce and challenging, and the Garment system offers surprising depth, especially when you begin to discover hidden dresses scattered across Spiria.

PROTIP: At the start of any fight, make Steal Rikku's first command so she can pinch valuable items from enemies.

PROTIP: When you're searching for survivors in the Cavern of the Stolen Fayth, be sure to look down each dead-end passageway.

That Old Square Magic

There's more emphasis on action in this adventure as some tasks involve platform hopping. Unfortunately, the dreadful jumping mechanics make this more hit-and-miss than a finger-twitching challenge of precision.

X-2 is a visual stunner, and although most surroundings and monsters are recycled from X, they're presented here with a steadier frame rate. As for the narrative, you don't have to play X to be up to speed with who these people are, but a refresher helps you enjoy the various nostalgic visits to landscapes and with characters you spent so much quality time with in the first adventure.

Final Fantasy X-2 is an interesting continuation of a strong story, and although hardened RPGers may find it too saccharine for their tastes, it's nevertheless an engrossing adventure—warts and all. X-2 is A-OK.

PROTIP: Search each area carefully for treasure chests that may be cleverly concealed from view.

PROTIP: When handing out balloons in Luca, examine the glass panel on the building to the north—when you do, the glass lowers with two more customers behind it.

PROTIP: After you find O'aka, send him to your ship and buy items only from him so he can pay off his debt.

Two of Final Fantasy X-2's less than successful play mechanics: ledge-climbing and platform-hopping.

CONTINUED ▶

GRAPHICS 5.0

Spiria is filled with color, atmosphere, and jarring environmental effects, and the rendered cinema sequences are as good as anything the PS2 can turn out. The various spells and monsters also pack a visual punch.

SOUND 4.5

The audio track is filled with high-quality voice acting and beautiful symphonic orchestrations. Some music pieces sound as if they are straight from a 1970s television series, though, which is distracting and decidedly out of place.

CONTROL 4.0

Navigating various menus and moving characters is straightforward and simple. The biggest sore spot is platform-hopping, which feels more frustrating than challenging. Lack of a custom controller configuration also hurts.

FUN FACTOR 4.5

Regardless of its shortcomings, Final Fantasy X-2 is an engrossing RPG that's worth the extensive time investment, although its missions and content may be a bit too awkward and saccharine for hardened FF vets.

BY MAJOR MIKE

- Developed by Square Enix
- Published by Square Enix U.S.A.
- $49.99
- RPG
- Available December
- 1 player

ESRB: TEEN

GRAPHICS	SOUND	CONTROL	FUN FACTOR
5.0	4.5	4.0	4.5

Final Fantasy XI

FOR YEARS, FANS of the Final Fantasy series have been happily combating strange and unusual creatures in an incredible variety of settings, but are console gamers ready for the immense and sometimes intimidating realm of online gaming? With this new, online-only installment, Final Fantasy XI offers PS2 gamers a chance to enjoy the community and freedom of existing in a completely different digital world.

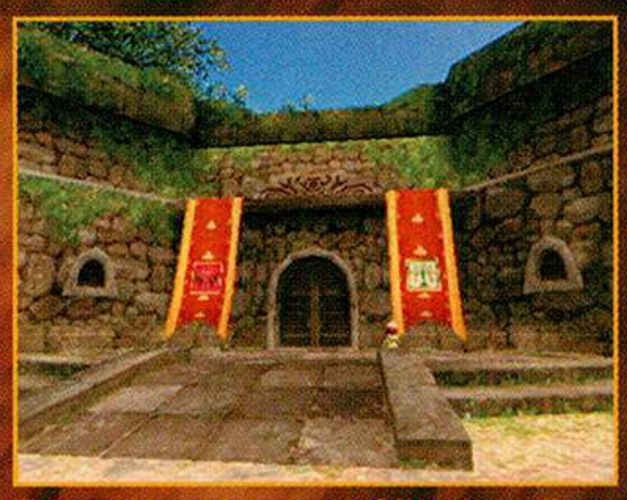
The Yagudo Beastmen are the primary enemies of the people of Windurst, and lower-level characters (Level 1–8) are going to want to steer clear.

So Little Time...

From playing the beta version, one of the most attractive things about FFXI is the tremendous number of things to do in the vast gaming environment. Players can choose to pursue craftsmanship and advance such skills as item synthesis in a number of different schools, including (but not limited to) boneworking, leatherworking, weaving, and cooking. Many of these "hand-crafted" items cannot be found for purchase in stores. Furthermore, they'll fetch fat sacks of Gil (the currency of virtually every FF title) at another of FFXI's special online community activities, the auction house, where gamers can bid on or sell hard-to-find items of all kinds. However, this is only one of many ways to hawk one's online booty, and fiscally minded entrepreneurs may choose to sell their own items themselves utilizing the "bazaar" function and converting themselves into a mobile mall—dealing directly with other players and NPCs using the "trade" function—or even the old-fashioned selling at the local item shop. For those who would rather catch their lunch than buy it (or make it out of defeated monster parts and power crystals), there's a pleasant and leisurely fishing craft.

Fish on! Probably not since crafts (like fishing) take an excruciatingly long time to improve.

Crafts aside, FFXI also sports the familiar "job" system, whereby each player specializes in fighting, spellwork, or thievery. The unique quality of the "job" system in FFXI lies in your character's ability to change jobs whenever in a town and the potential to have an extra support job later in the game. Players can even look forward to unlocking special additional jobs as their characters progress.



The simple architecture of Windurst illustrates the gentle nature of the Mithra and Tarutaru.

Whose Side Are You On?

To add even more diversity, the standard Humes (plain old humans), lithe Elvan (elves), tiny, cuddly Tarutaru, catty Mithra (who are all female), and hulking Galka (who are all male) coexist under the sway of the three nations: Bastok, San d'Oria, and Windurst. These three distinct nations form the basis of FFXI's "conquests" component, whereby those who have sworn fealty to

CONTINUED ▶

New attacks, like the devastating Fire Strike, reward players who progress through job levels.

Protection spells are a requirement for lower-level adventurers keen on keeping their skins intact.

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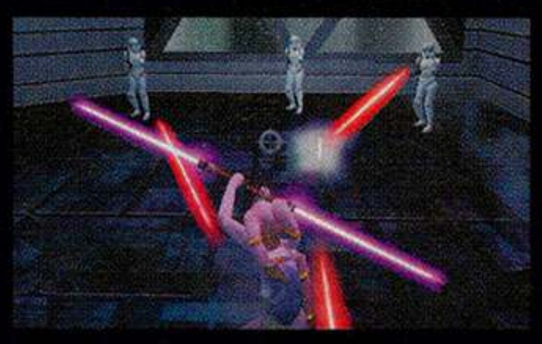

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Countries are broken down into smaller sections, which are actually not very small at all.

a particular nation can actually enhance that nation's status by defeating monsters on their home turf and abroad. Each nation's "influence" in a specific area is meticulously monitored, and agents of particularly successful nations will notice benefits in the form of new items and other perks. By far the most common avenue for adventurers is the path of open violence and item collection that FFXI classifies as "missions" and "quests." Both generally involve going to do or get something, but while missions are one-time adventures that advance the plot, quests are little scavenger hunts that can be revisited at any time and as many times as the player likes.

Wandering performers occasionally stop by the town to entertain gamers and enrich the feel of the "virtual" world.

The weavers' guild provides much-needed counsel regarding...well, weaving.

You can earn quick cash by bartering with the natives for random items found while adventuring. One man's trash is a Mithra Catgirl's treasure.

Spell acquisition is accomplished through the purchase of scrolls.

You know you want to ride a chocobo! Too bad you have to wait until Level 20 to get a license.

Pug Pugils are a great source of water crystals, though you won't need those for some time.

Party On!

By far the most intriguing portion of FFXI is its online multiplayer support. And while gamers cannot square off against each other in combat, forming parties and making alliances are encouraged (indeed, some missions cannot be completed without some help from your friends). The community of online beta testers is large, and there are always some high-level characters cruising Vana'diel with spare time to answer newbies' questions or (if they're feeling really generous) lead them to their goals. This is FFXI's greatest appeal for old-school role-players who remember the days of pencil, paper, and multisided die, and many will discover that chatting, plotting, trading, and partnering with other "real live" people is invigorating and incredibly fun.

The Price of Fun

All of this bounty is not without a downside, however, and FFXI has a few issues that seriously detract from its playability. Chief among these issues is the tremendous outlay of cash that it takes to get set up. In order to play the game, gamers must purchase the PS2 hard drive (game included), Network Adaptor, broadband Internet connectivity, and a USB keyboard (it's profoundly difficult to chat without one)! Altogether, these expenses could add up to over $200—somewhat more than an already financially strapped Santa may be capable of. Fortunately, Sony has announced that the hard drive will come with FFXI pre-installed, thus eliminating the three-and-a-half-hour ordeal of formatting the hard drive, installing the PlayOnline software, installing the FFXI software, and downloading the latest patches.

Item creation saves money in the long run by producing expensive items using junk found on the bodies of dead enemies.

The Yagudo come in many flavors, including fighters and mages.

Each player receives a moogle to tend their Mog House, which can be decorated with the spoils of war or stuff from Ikea...whatever.

In addition to being ridiculously cute, the Tarutaru can be very helpful in honing your craft skills, even offering recipes for item creation.

Final Analysis

Even with the financial drawbacks of this title, hardcore Final Fantasy enthusiasts should not hesitate to add this installment to their collection in March, and needn't worry about being disappointed. That is, as long as they don't find out that PC gamers have been doing this for years!—*Strafe Maru*

CONTINUED ▶

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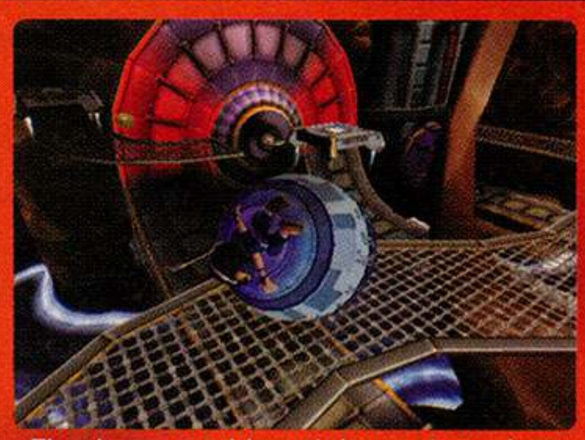
Gravity? Run up walls and tear through levels with moves only the most insane Ninja would try.

Use multiple weapons to take apart any foe that dares stand between Ninja and his missions.



Five huge worlds, mini-quests and grueling missions that will separate the Ninjas from the boys.

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Animated Blood
Violence

NINTENDO GAMECUBE
XBOX
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Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles

AFTER YEARS OF waiting (and eyeing PlayStations with a sense of longing), Nintendo console owners once again have a Fantasy to call their own. Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles believes that a console RPG should not be a spectator sport… or a solitary one. Get ready to grab your Game Boy Advance and go multiplayer in the FF universe.

My Cousin Zelda

The world of Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles is covered in poison, and only the power of the Crystals allows life to exist. In order to keep the Crystals working, every town must send out a caravan each year to seek out Mirula drops in the world's many dungeons. As the Tiba village's caravan, players adventure with either their faithful moogle or up to three friends in tow, exploring ancient ruins, active volcanoes, and other dangerous locales in order to save their village.

Based on extended play time with a Japanese version, this isn't your grandfather's Final Fantasy—that's for sure. In making the move to the multiplayer realm, Crystal Chronicles ditches the traditional Active Time Battle system in favor of a fully real-time combat engine that resembles The Legend of Zelda more than it does any Final Fantasy—right down to the heart icons that represent your health. Even the dungeons take a page out of Zelda's classic button-pushing, lever-pulling puzzles, from the "cast X spell on Y object to open Z door" system to good ol' pressure plates.

Crystal Methods

Combat is no longer the simple matter of pressing a button and watching the action unfold—you now have to switch between a limited number of commands on the fly and find the best angle to attack. Spells and ranged attacks must be charged up, aimed, then unleashed, though in exchange for this drawback, spell points have been eliminated. You can cast as many spells as you want, as long as you make sure nothing hits you out of the spell. Fast-paced action might not be what Final Fantasy fans expected, but it's what Square wants to deliver.

To keep math simple, experience points are gone, too, replaced by a power-up system that lets you choose between stat boosts, extra hearts, more command slots, and powerful items at the end of every dungeon. The system allows lower-level characters to catch up to their powerful buddies fairly quickly by grabbing the biggest boosts possible. Spells are obtained not by leveling up but by picking them up in dungeons and equipping them in open command slots.

Did He Say, "Paint Your Moogle?"

In the game's single-player mode, you choose your character from four races, each with its own specialty: The Clavat cultivate defense, the ultra-cute Lilty are masters of offense, the birdlike Yuke make great magicians, and the svelte Selkies are ranged experts. A faithful moogle companion follows your character's every step, carrying with it the Crystal Cage that holds Mirula and fends

CONTINUED ▶

The safety zone around the Crystal Cage is clearly marked. Step out of it at your own risk.

Each saved game can support eight characters–and their families.

Square's trademark orchestral stylings graced the Japanese version of Crystal Chronicles.

Writing letters home leads to free items, Gil, and even secret weapons.

Before each dungeon, every player can customize his or her command list.

The use of the GBA in town enables multiple players to visit shops and hold conversations at the same time.

KONAMI

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EVERYONE

E™ Mild Fantasy Violence

ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

GAME BOY ADVANCE™

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off the miasmic poison covering the land. Stepping out of the Crystal Cage's safety zone is a one-way ticket to pain, making the Cage-carrying moogle essential to survival. If you have a GameCube to Game Boy Advance link cable, the moogle also grants you access to several maps, depending on what color you paint it. A bare moogle grants you the area map, red moogles let you see the monster radar, green moogles give you enemy info, and blue moogles find treasure. Painting your moogle can also be a purely aesthetic choice, and the game lets you doodle on your furry pal to your heart's content.

Four for Fighting

Multiplayer is the heart and soul of this game, though. To get the most out of it, you will need friends who have their own Game Boy Advances and link cables. More than just a map, the Game Boy Advance becomes a full-fledged necessity in multiplayer, enabling players to access their inventories and change their hotkeys—err, command lists—without pausing the game for the other players. Each player gets one of the four radar displays on their GBA at random; shouts of "Lots of monsters this way!" and "Treasure's that way, too; let's do it" are common during play.

The moogle is gone in multiplayer, and so a member of the party has to carry the Crystal Cage around to keep his fellow adventurers from taking damage, putting it down to fight and heal—or not putting it down at all, in some cases. Teamwork is the key to success as the puzzles can require anything from coordinated button pushing to attacking crystals at the exact same time in order to advance. Also, unlike in single-player, two people need to work together in order to cast high-level spells like Curaga and Blizara (see sidebar, "Magical Cocktails for Two"). Multiplayer also lets you benefit from having four different families active in town—the storekeeper's child can buy items at a discount, the farmer's family can take seeds found in dungeons and turn them into items, and so on. But the competition can be as fierce as the teamwork is necessary as each player's GBA radar also lists a secret goal. At the end of each level, whoever earned the most points toward their goal has first pick at the power-up artifacts, which can turn every dungeon into a contest instead of a team-building exercise.

The Un-Final Fantasy

However you approach Crystal Chronicles—with your friends, against your friends, or alone with your moogle—it's sure to shake up how you perceive the Final Fantasy series when it comes out in February.—*Dom Ex Machina*

To pass from area to area, you need to make sure your Crystal Cage is the correct element.

Appropriately, the GameCube uses translucency to create some nice crystal visual effects.

Meeting other caravans can lead to new items, information, or even theft.

Unfortunately for you, the bosses don't need teamwork to pull off their big spells.

Magical Cocktails for Two

To combine attacks, simply have two players target the same area...

...and voilà! Two Blizzards turn into Blizara...

...two different elements turn into Gravity...

...and Raise plus an attack spell makes you Holy.

Bust it Up!

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Flaming Fur Ball or Radioactive Rabbit? Choose your weapon wisely or you will be forever subjected to a life of twisted animal testing. Shackled together, Spanx must use the indestructible Redmond as a weapon and tool for escape from an evil lab.

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HARE CLOG

- Flaming Fur Ball
- Bunny Grinder
- Radioactive Rabbit
- Bunny Fuse
- Hare-sicle
- Electro Static Rabbit
- Hungry Bunny
- Hare Clog
- Tug-O-Rabbit
- 10 Ton Bunny
- Bunny Cannon
- Helium Bunny
- Hyper Hare
- Stuffed Rabbit
- Chocolate Bunny

Demolish everything from security cameras to test equipment.

Dip Redmond in toxic waste to poison enemies, electro-charge him to zap attackers and more!

Knock out the evil lab staff with loads of combo attacks.

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Own the night. 12 seconds at a time.

Feel the unholy, addictive rush of pure speed like never before. Rip through drift, circuit and drag races getters and add authentic, aftermarket upgrades: turbos, suspension, body kits and, of course, nitrous.

EVERYONE
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Mild Language
Suggestive Themes
Mild Lyrics

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Achtung!

Hauptmann – Ihr Flugzeug brennt*

*(Translation: Hey, Captain! Your airplane's on fire.)

The fortunes of German pilots everywhere are about to take a severe downturn. In this intense WWII flight-action game, from Secret Weapons of Luftwaffe,® TIE-Fighter,® and X-Wing® creator Lawrence Holland, you'll join a secret, elite fighter squadron. Your mission: thwart the most insidious plans of the Third Reich. Over Europe and other theaters, you'll pilot nearly two dozen authentic aircraft, and face over 30 air-to-air and air-to-ground combat scenarios. And you won't need any flight training. Just nerves of steel, a steady hand, and a burning desire to rid the world of tyranny, one mission at a time.

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Makin' A List

...and checkin' it twice: once for the gifts you want to give this holiday season and once for the gifts you wanna get. Whether your budget is $5 or $500, there's nothing naughty here—everything's nice.

Under $10 Under $10 Under $10 Under $10 Under $10

gbaSKIN

Platinum, Cobalt, Onyx, Flame...that's it. What if your idea of an attractive Game Boy doesn't fall into one of those four colors? The gbaSKIN is a thin vinyl sticker with a low-tack adhesive. It beautifies, it protects, it's easily removable...you can even take it off, wash it, and reapply it without trouble. There are several designs available for both the original GBA and the SP (Zen rock garden, lightning bolts, bikini babes, hot-rod flames, even the original white Game Boy) for just $5. If you don't like those, you can create your own custom skin for an extra $2, which is what Miss Spell did. How cool is that?

■ $5 ■ GBA MOD ■ gbamod.com

❒ Give ❒ Get

Pelican Sound Kit for the GBA SP

Why didn't Nintendo include a headphone jack on the GBA SP? And why, after creating an adapter, didn't Nintendo ship any to stores? The world may never know, but that makes packages like Pelican's Sound Kit a great gift idea. The tiny package includes just what you need—a headphone adapter and a pair of bud earpieces with a retractable cord for easy storage—and, thankfully, none of the extra crap that some SP accessory kits force on you. Sounds good!

■ $7.95 ■ Pelican ■ 323/234-9911 ■ pelicanperformance.com

❒ Give ❒ Get

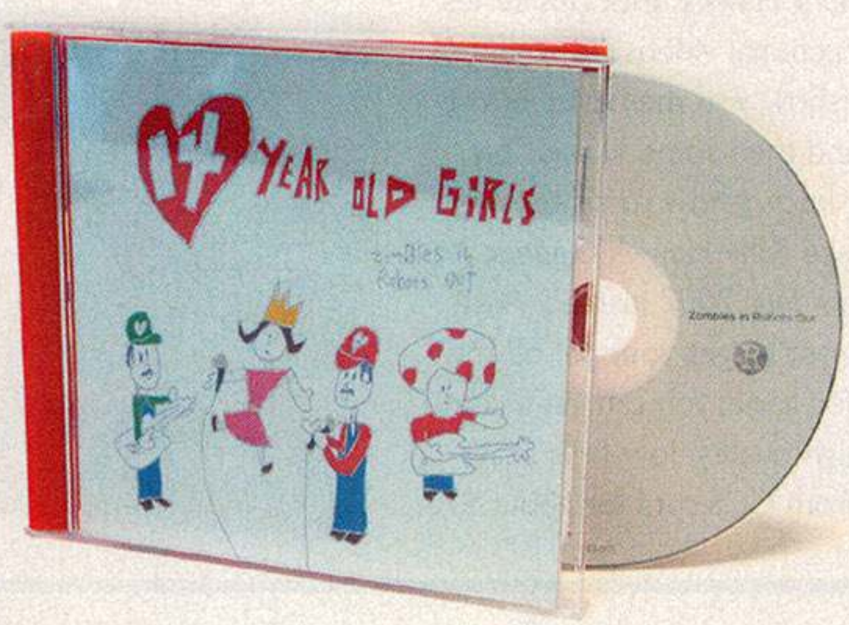
Nyko Power Switch Relocator

Sometimes the best ideas are the simplest ones. Case in point: Anybody who uses his or her PS2 as part of an entertainment system or has it on a small shelf might have trouble reaching the power switch in the back. What to do? Get Nyko's plastic doohickey, snap it onto the side of your PS2, and use the awesome power of levers (one of the seven basic machines!) to "relocate" the power switch to the front of the unit (on a temporary basis). You either need this or you don't, but for anyone suffering from Blocked Power Switch Syndrome (BPSS), this is 10 bucks very well spent.

■ $9.99 ■ Nyko ■ 888/444-6956 ■ nyko.com

❒ Give ❒ Get

14 Year Old Girls—Zombies In Robots Out



You've heard songs about love, society, cars, and various parts of the anatomy...but where are the songs about video games (except, you know, "Pac-Man Fever")? With songs entitled "Castlevania Punk," "Rayden on Prom Night," and "1-800-255-3700" (if you don't get it, call it), 14 Year Old Girls are the real deal. What *Zombies In Robots Out* lacks in length (most of the 16 songs last 90 seconds or less) and polish (think lo-fi Devo synth-punk), it makes up for in sheer street cred and gamer-geek flag-waving. The song "Tomb Raider U.K. Pop"—with lyrics like "Tomb Raider / your poly count is bad / Tomb Raider / your level design is awful"—is worth the low price of admission all by itself. *Zombies In Robots Out* is strange, done on a low budget, and not for everyone—in other words, true punk.

■ $10 ■ Retard Disco ■ 310/441-6556 ■ retarddisco.com

❒ Give ❒ Get

CONTINUED ▶

Under $20 Under $20 Under $20 Under $20 Under $20

Case Logic Game Cases

You play their games; will you buy their carrying cases? You could do worse than these rugged little man-purses, endorsed and co-designed by action sports icons Tony Hawk, Dave Mirra, and Shaun Palmer. Like their namesakes, these GBA cases are stylish and built to take a beating—the thick nylon, strong zippers, and generous padding definitely serve to keep things safe inside. Unfortunately for SP owners, these were designed with the original GBA and Game Boy Color in mind (especially Palmer's), and they could use more compartments for cartridges, batteries, and headphones—but they're still excellent pieces, and your SP (or camera or MP3 player or cell phone) won't suffer in the least.

■ $9.99–$11.99 ■ Case Logic ■ 888/666-5780 ■ caselogic.com

❒ Give ❒ Get

GamePro Editor Action Figures

Yes, it's a shameless plug, but if you missed them, you have only a little while longer to track them down. Dr. Zombie, Dan Elektro, and Major Mike have already been released, and Miss Spell has just shipped to, um, round out the collection nicely. Each figure is limited to 2500 pieces (100 of each are personally autographed by the editors) and could be tricky to track down in software stores, so you may want to order direct from JoyRide Studios.

■ $12.99 ■ JoyRide ■ 563/875-5959
■ joyridestudios.com

❒ Give ❒ Get

Tecmo Dead or Alive Xtreme Playing Cards

Admit it—Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball is one of the guiltiest pleasures in all of video games. You know it's not deep; you know it's about eye candy. Who cares? Celebrate the cheesy goodness with this set of playing cards—just like the ones you'll find in Zack's casino in the game. There are two decks (four suits means four girls per deck), and at press time, they were selling very fast on Tecmo's website. Once they're gone, they're gone, so don't disappoint the horndog on your holiday shopping list…and if you have a bigger budget, keep reading for an even more interesting DOAX collectable.

■ $14.95 per deck ■ Tecmo ■ 800/338-0336
■ tecmoinc.com

❒ Give ❒ Get

Game Elements Control Element

The original PlayStation lives on as an excellent portable machine, the PS one—and this joystick extends its life even further. Plug the one-piece unit into the front of the PS one for a compact but satisfying arcade feel with no extra wires messing up your laptop arcade. It's sturdy enough for action-oriented games like Incredible Crisis and Um Jammer Lammy, convenient for slower-paced stuff like Resident Evil and Xenogears, and really offers a satisfying, knobby-ball-joystick arcade feel on must-own PlayStation games like Metal Slug X and Poy Poy. (Oh, and if the PS one owner on your holiday gift list doesn't have Metal Slug X or Poy Poy…there are two more gift ideas.)

■ $14.99 ■ Game Elements ■ 973/471-9050 ■ gemini-usa.com

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For the Gamer Who Has...

...All the Tony Hawk Games

Tony Hawk DVDs—or a Deck

In the *Tony Hawk's Trick Tips* series of instructional videos, Tony and friends show you the basics of the sport and then some. If your pal already knows how to skate, they might like *Tony Hawk's Gigantic Skatepark Tour 2002* instead. And if you want to get your pal off the couch for good, you can get a complete high-quality, low-frills skateboard from CCS.com for about $70.

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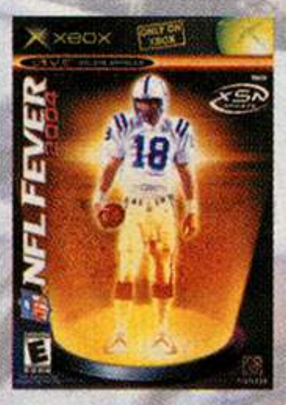
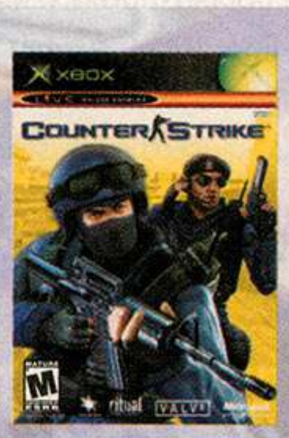


XBX-NFL Fever 2004

XBX-Top Spin

XBX-Amped 2



XBX-Counter Strike

M Represents *Mature Rating*

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EverGlide Gaming Mat and Optical Pads

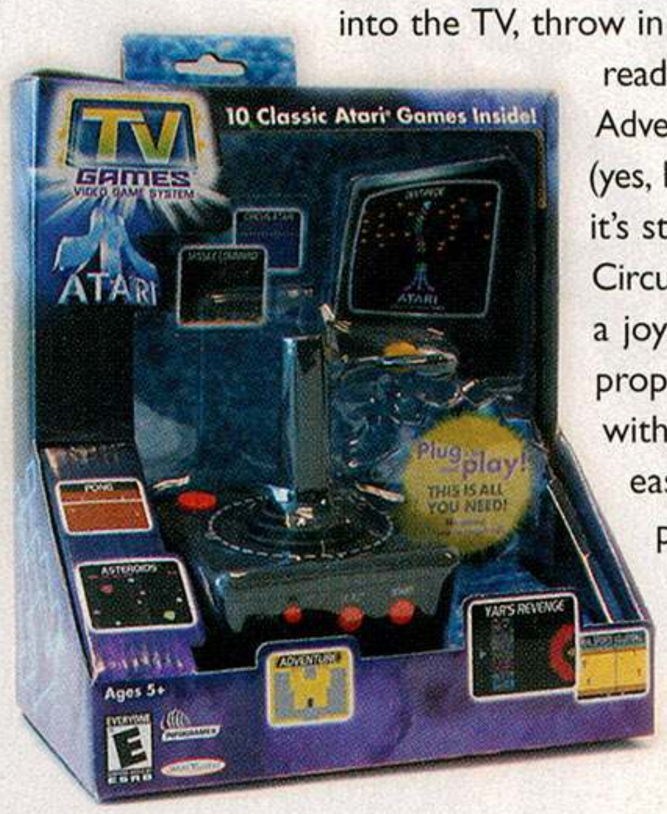
The best mouse pad you can buy for five bucks? Believe it—the EverGlide Gaming Mat is thin, super-smooth, and specially designed to give your optical mouse something to sink its sensors into. Available in six designs, it's attractive, but mousing is believing—you'll be able to tell the difference and find precise movements are easier than ever. If you're looking for something a little beefier for a little more money, the hard plastic Attack Pad and Giganta (seen here) are pretty much unbreakable, and they feature a glitter-like substance baked right in for maximum optical tracking. Dan Elektro uses both models and swears by EverGlide's stuff, but don't let that deter you.

■ $5–$14.95 ■ EverGlide ■ 903/595-0995 ■ gamerzstuff.com

❒ Give ❒ Get

Jakks Pacific Atari 10-in-1 TV Games

There's something about the old Atari joystick that simply defines gaming. Jakks wisely started there and built 10 old 2600 games into its base—plug it into the TV, throw in four AA batteries, and you're ready to play 10 old-school gems like Adventure, Asteroids, and Yar's Revenge (yes, believe the hype—it rocks). While it's strange playing paddle games like Circus Atari, Pong, and Breakout with a joystick, and it's not as good as a proper wood-grain Atari 2600 unit with cartridges and everything, it's easier to connect (standard RCA plugs replace the old RF switch), and it's definitely more authentic than playing emulated ROMs on your computer.



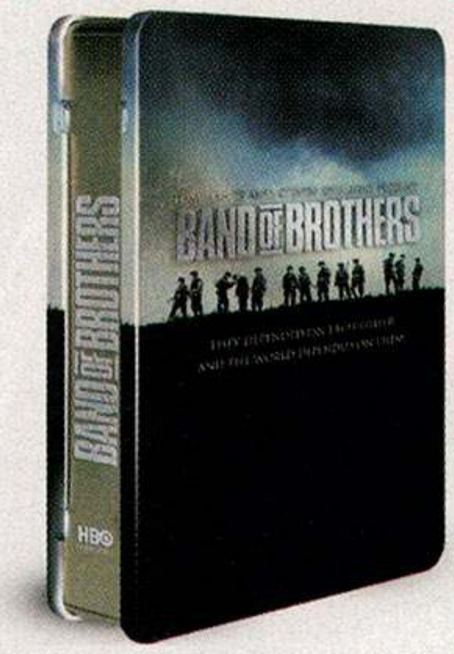
■ $19.99 ■ Jakks Pacific ■ 310/456-7799 ■ jakkspacific.com

❒ Give ❒ Get

For the Gamer Who Has...

...Medal of Honor

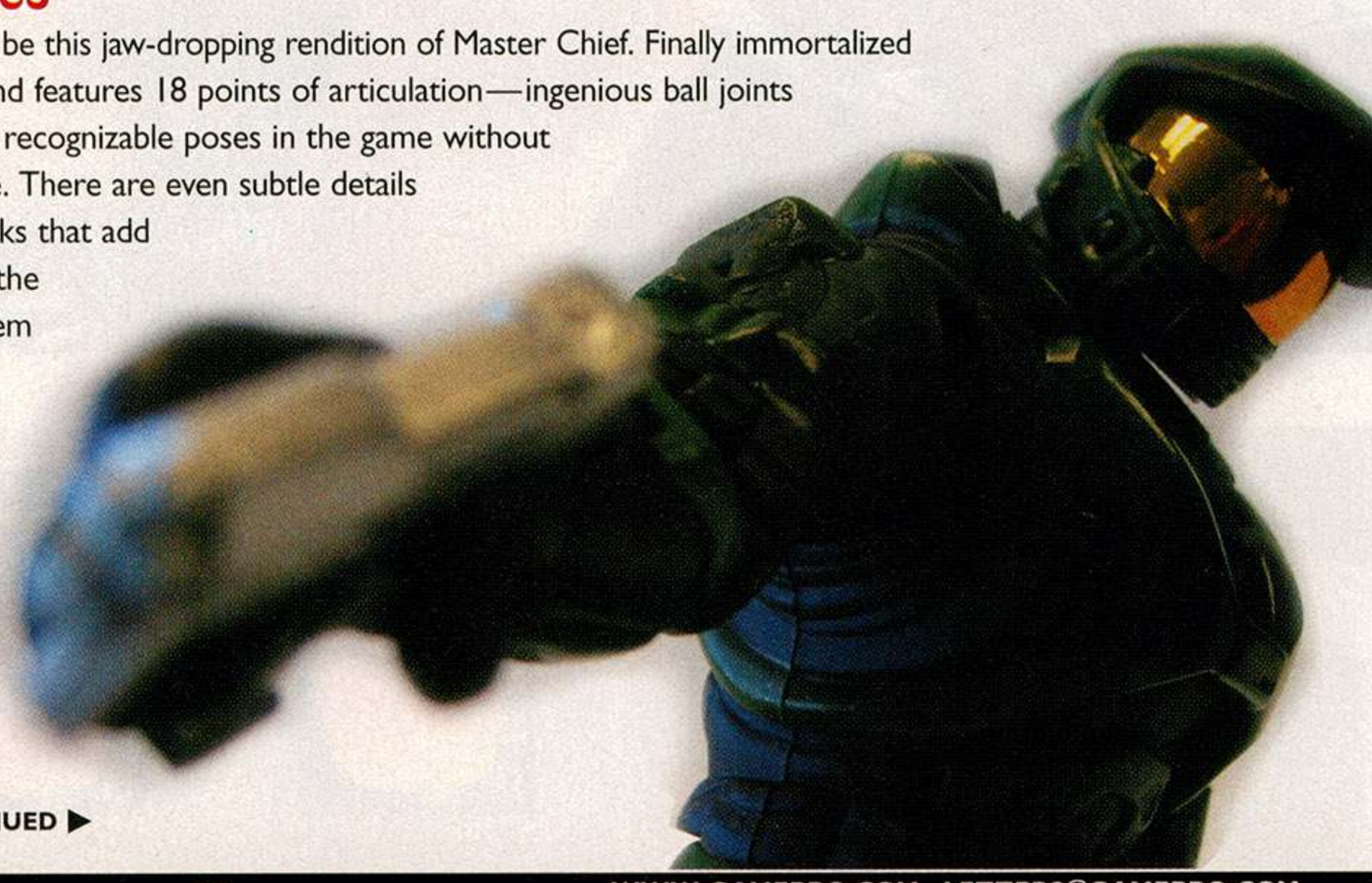
Band of Brothers DVD



If nothing else, the recent wave of World War II games should give everyone a deeper appreciation of what that conflict was all about and how many people fought and died for the cause. No Hollywood production better or more completely illustrates the human side of the war better than the 10-hour HBO miniseries, *Band of Brothers*. Shipping on six DVDs, this collector's set features the entire show (following its characters from boot camp to the end of the war) plus plenty of goodies like an 80-minute documentary and a making-of special. At $120 (less if you find it on sale), it's a special gift, but it might be the one they thank you for the most.

JoyRide Studios Halo Action Figures

If you get only one toy for the holidays this year, it should be this jaw-dropping rendition of Master Chief. Finally immortalized in 3D plastic, the hero of Halo stands seven inches tall and features 18 points of articulation—ingenious ball joints in the knees allow Master Chief to re-create most of his recognizable poses in the game without making him seem doll-ish like a Power Ranger or G.I. Joe. There are even subtle details like cracks in the armor and blemishes from enemy attacks that add to the sense of realism. Although he's molded in plastic, the dull finish and multi-hued paint deco make the armor seem to be convincingly made of metal. The highly polished chrome finish of the copper-tinted visor is the crowning touch to all the fine detail. An LED-lit Cortana and the Warthog are also available—but get them when you see them because they're selling like crazy.



■ $14.99 (Warthog) ■ $17.99 (Master Chief or Cortana) ■ JoyRide ■ 563/875-5959 ■ joyridestudios.com

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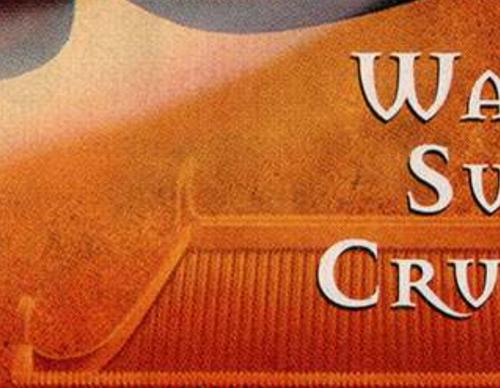
Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon™

Warriors of Legend. Sword of Destiny. Crusade of a Lifetime.

Rediscover the Legend.

Three years ago, **Ang Lee's** ***Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*** became an instant martial-arts classic, earning an Academy Award® for Best Foreign Film. Now, experience all the kung-fu fury from this martial-arts masterpiece as you execute over 90 wu-xia moves inspired by renowned choreographer Yuen Wo-Ping. Green Destiny beckons you. Rediscover the legend.



4 Playable Characters: Li Mu Bai, Yu Shu Lien, Jen, and "Dark Cloud" Lo.

Superhuman Martial Arts: Master the dizzying combos from the film.

Expanded Storyline: Unlock bonuses and experience multiple endings.

Enter the Green Destiny Sweepstakes at: http://crouchingtiger.ubi.com

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB — Violence

Genki

Ubi Soft www.ubi.com

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PlayStation.2

GAME BOY ADVANCE

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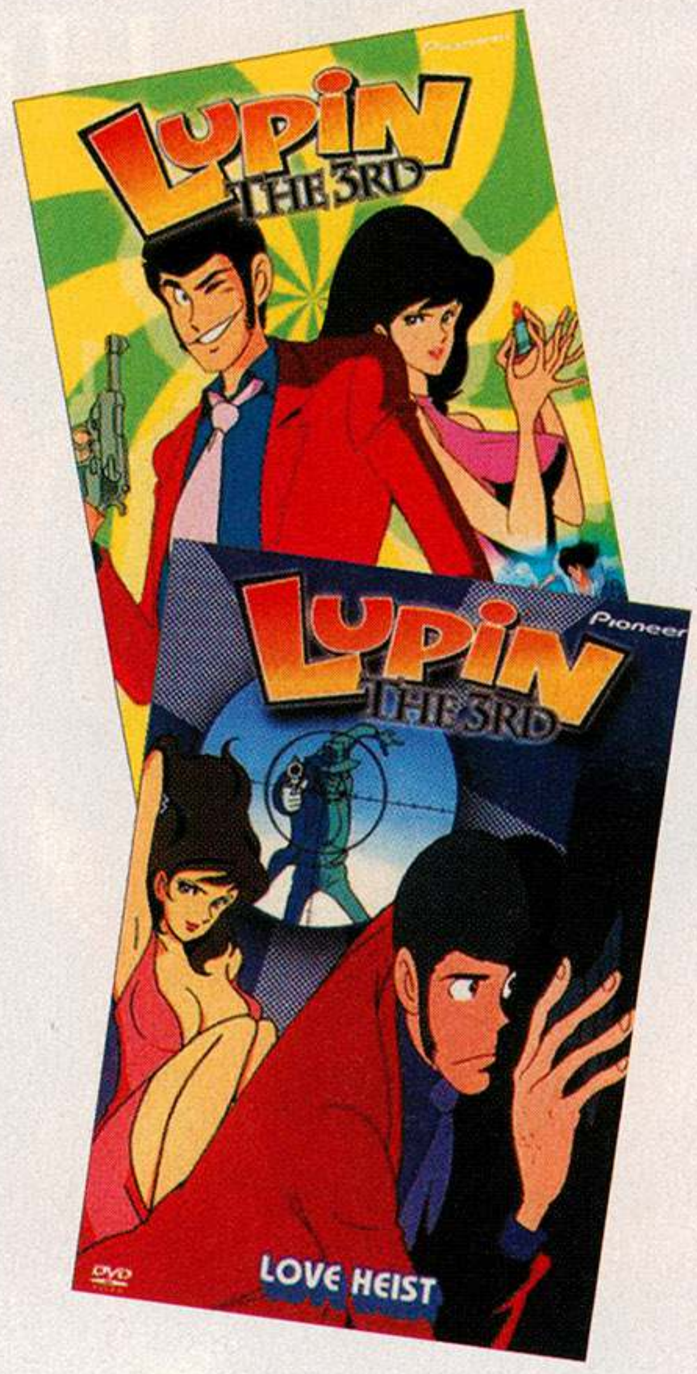
Broadband in Your Stocking?

More and more gamers are getting cable and DSL Internet connections every day. For some families, a high-speed 'net connection might be the Big Gift this year. If so, here's what you need to know.

- A broadband Internet connection is generally either DSL (for digital subscriber line) or cable (as in the folks who bring you TV). Prices vary depending on where you live, but expect anywhere from $40 a month up. Often, the further away you are from a big city, the more expensive it gets, but that's slowly changing. Visit dslreports.com and click on "Find Service" to see what's available in your zip code and how much it will cost.
- Connection speeds are measured as download/upload; a number of 1500/256 means you can download data at 1500 kilobits per second (or 1.5 megabits per second—you'll see these abbreviated as Kbps and Mbps respectively) and upload data at 256 kilobits per second. A speed of 1500 Kbps equals a little over 180 KB of data moving every second—around 10 MB a minute—but don't expect to see it move that fast all the time, if ever, since that's the maximum possible speed and few connections actually reach it. Your mileage will vary on any number of factors—everything from web traffic (sometimes a problem with cable modem service, depending on how many other users are sharing the wires in your neighborhood) to the physical distance of your house to your ISP (often a problem with DSL connections). Nothing is foolproof, but keep in mind that even a sometimes-slow broadband connection still kicks the stuffing out of a dial-up account, which generally offers only a measly 56 Kbps per second.
- If you want to connect more than one machine to the Internet at the same time—the family computer, multiple consoles, a laptop, or any combination of these—you'll need a router. A router will direct the Internet traffic inside your home and make sure that the right data goes to the right machines. It also provides automatic firewall protection against hackers (more a PC concern than for console gamers). Check out the popular and easy-to-install LinkSys EtherFast Cable/DSL Router, model BEFSR41 (about $50), which will let you connect four devices to the Internet at once. If you need something wireless to cut down on cable clutter, try the BEFW11S4 for about $25 more.

Under $30 Under $30 Under $30

Lupin The 3rd DVDs



Lupin The 3rd is one of those iconic characters of anime, a staple in Japan for decades. With an upcoming U.S. PlayStation 2 game (and a nostalgic history as the star of the old laser disc game Cliff Hanger), there's no better time than this holiday for gamers to catch up on Lupin's 1970s-era TV hijinks. The show is like a cross between *Austin Powers* and the Scooby Doo cartoons—a funky retro vibe with outlandish mysteries and adventures. The episodes range from the hijacking of a gold-filled 50-foot Jesus statue in Rio de Janeiro to a straight money heist from a huge soccer game. There's even an episode that involves the Loch Ness monster! The series is rated 13 and up, but some of the subject matter is a bit risqué—although far less so than any of the Austin Powers movies. A great gift for gamers looking for a funky, globe-hopping retro romp.

■ **$24.95 each** ■ **Pioneer** ■ **310/952-2025**
■ **pioneeranimation.com**

❒ Give ❒ Get

Logitech Extreme Action Controller

The finest sports cars feature leather-wrapped steering wheels; why shouldn't your hot rod offer the same luxury? Yes, the first PS2 controller with leather pads (instead of rubber or none at all) is here, complete with gold connector pins for superior contact. Asinine? Arrogant? No, just awesome—Logitech doesn't make crap, and this controller also features excellent ergonomic sculpting (wider than a Dual Shock, it's more comfortable for long periods of use), a two-speed assignable turbo function, and a beefy directional pad that won't leave you wondering which way you're pointing. It also works great and looks even better. It's a slick, executive controller for the scruffy, disheveled gamer on your list who wants to feel like a slick executive.

■ **$24.99** ■ **Logitech** ■ **800/231-7717** ■ **logitech.com**

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CONTINUED ▶

INTRODUCING A BRAND NEW PLAYABLE CHARACTER: AXL

VIBRANT GRAPHICS! A UNIQUE MIX OF 2D & 3D ACTION

DOUBLE-HERO CHARACTER SELECT FOR STRATEGIC BATTLES

MEGA MAN X EXPLODES ONTO THE PlayStation® 2

Join the Anniversary BASH

MEGAMAN 15th

MEGAMAN X7™

EVERYONE
E
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Cartoon Violence

CAPCOM

PlayStation.2

capcom.com/megaman

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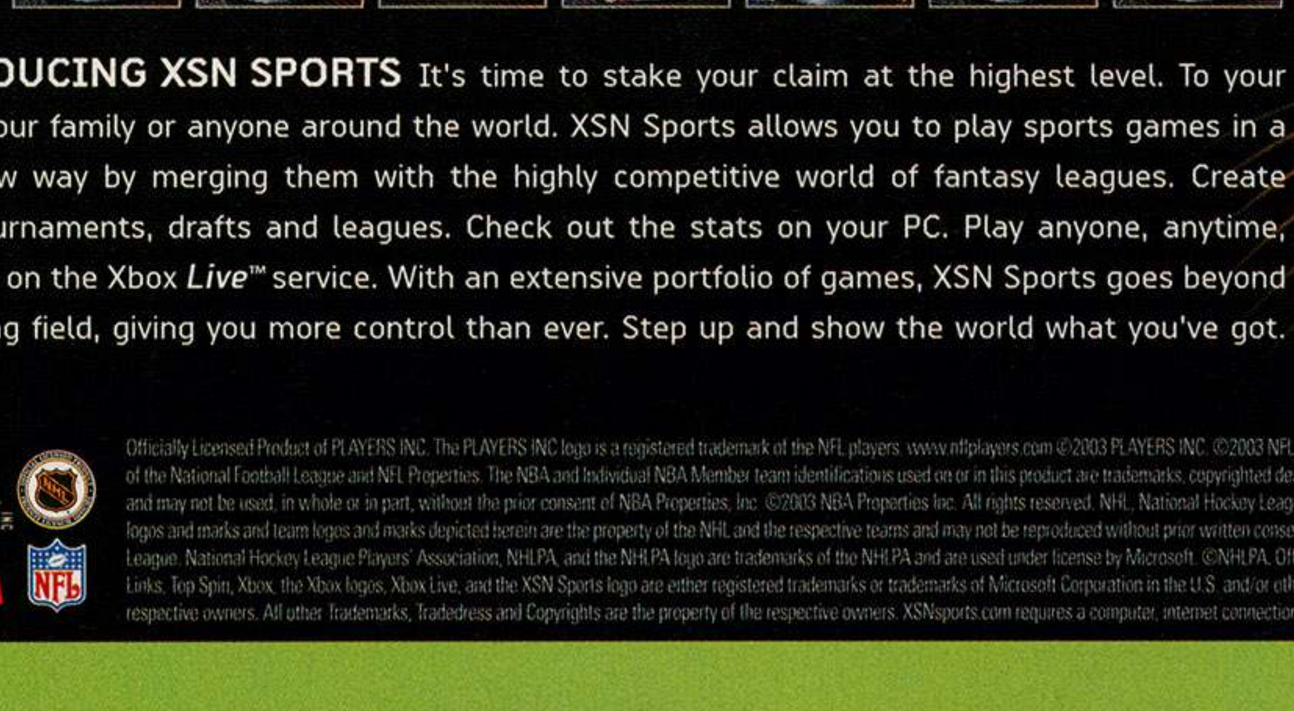
Fantasy leagues, meet video games.
Video games, meet fantasy leagues.



EVERYONE

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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

XSN SPORTS

INTRODUCING XSN SPORTS It's time to stake your claim at the highest level. To your friends, your family or anyone around the world. XSN Sports allows you to play sports games in a whole new way by merging them with the highly competitive world of fantasy leagues. Create online tournaments, drafts and leagues. Check out the stats on your PC. Play anyone, anytime, anywhere on the Xbox *Live*™ service. With an extensive portfolio of games, XSN Sports goes beyond the playing field, giving you more control than ever. Step up and show the world what you've got.

XBOX LIVE

XBOX

it's good to play together

xsnsports.com

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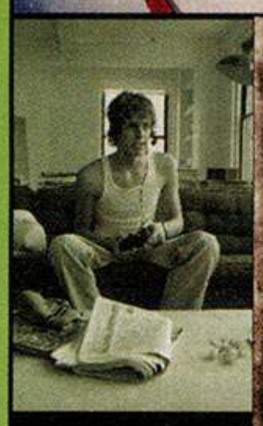
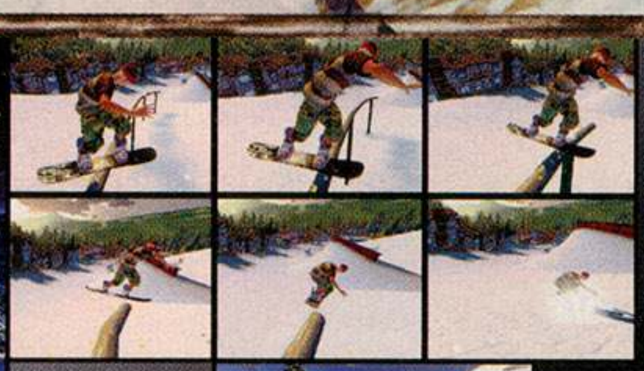
Throw a stylish backside 5,
impress the press, stoke your sponsor and
humble your cousin who's 7 states away.





EVERYONE

CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Microsoft game studios

Don't call it a sequel. Amped2 is here to declare itself the best freestyle experience on land, sea or air. Shred with friends from across the planet on the Xbox *Live*™ service and run your mouth as you go on endless runs. Compete with friends or take on some claimer through XSN Sports and get paid in praise. Over 300 indie tunes will play as you reap rewards for pulling tricks like stalls and butter with smooth style. It's your chance to ride with pros and try the new mountain sport, snowskate. The slopes are yours. How they're ripped-up is up to you.

XSN SPORTS

XBOX LIVE

amped 2®

XBOX™

it's good to play together

xbox.com/amped2

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Under $50 Under $50 Under $50 Under $50 Under $50

Digital Innovations Motorized GameDR

Nothing feels worse than realizing your $50 game—or your $15 music CD, for that matter—is worthless because you were a bonehead and accidentally scratched it. The new motorized version of the GameDR offers hope; like its hand-powered forebear, it comes with a bottle of "resurfacing fluid" and a wheel gizmo that tries to rebuild the outer layer of your CD, DVD, or game disc so your player can read its data again. The bright yellow AC-powered edition is much easier to use than the black-and-green hand-crank version (which usually works but is a pain in the…wrist). The Dr can handle some nasty scratches on audio CDs (expect to repeat the process multiple times for best results), but your mileage will vary depending on your CD player—the same disc might skip in one player and not skip in another (boom boxes and portables are especially picky). If you follow the directions properly and repeatedly, you'll walk away with an improved disc, if not a completely repaired one.

■ $49.95 ■ Digital Innovations ■ 888/762-7858 ■ skipdoctor.com

❒ Give ❒ Get

LASR GamePak

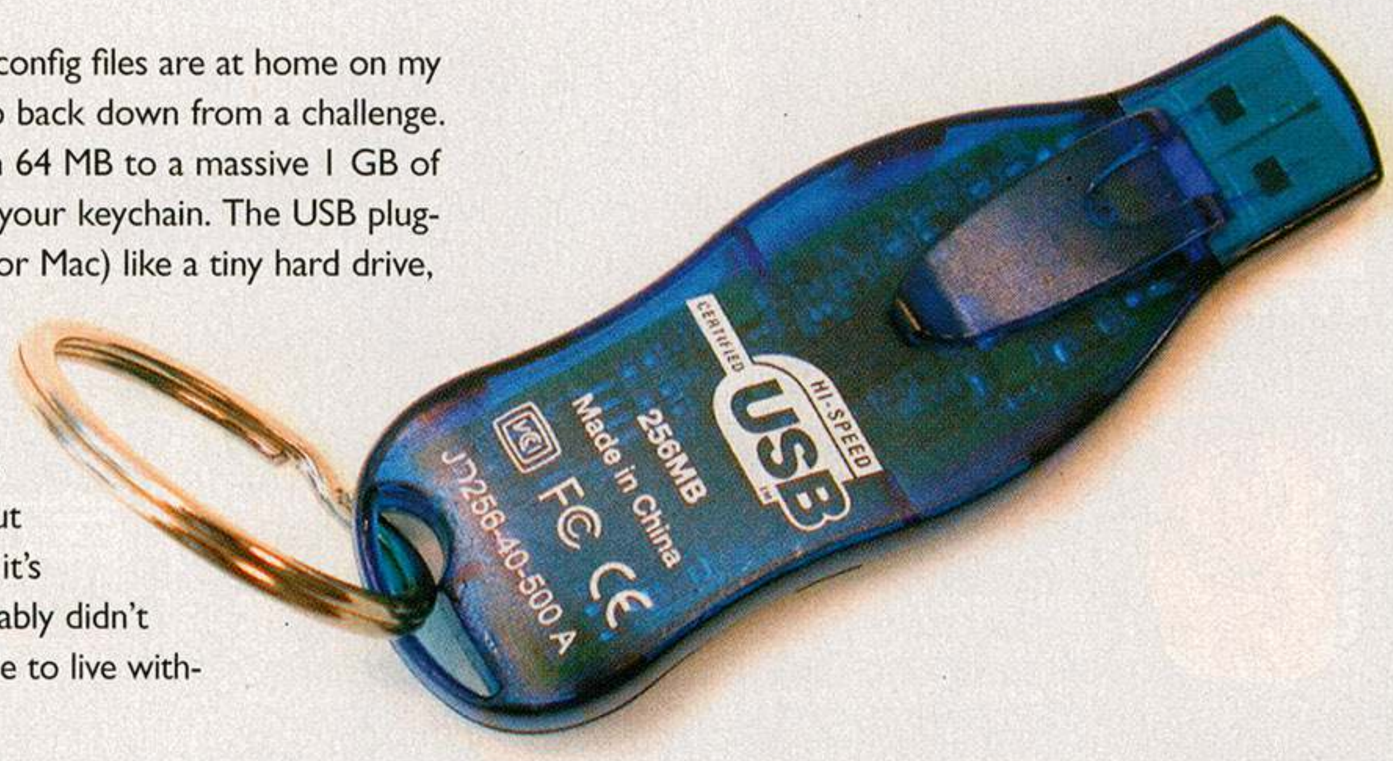
Your console: Don't leave home without it. Forced, long holiday trips to visit boring relatives require proper preparation, and the GamePak will let you carry your prized possession safely and surreptitiously, thanks to its fitted foam-lined pockets and total lack of major-brand logos. There's plenty of space inside for multiple games, controllers, cables, memory cards, the works—and you don't even need to take the console out of the case, thanks to the well-designed zipper pocket at the bottom. Just hook up the wires, and you're ready to play. If you don't like the backpack design, check out the GameCase, which is more of a shoulder satchel but works the same way: amazingly well. *GamePro* staffers use these things often.

■ $34.99–$39.99 ■ LASR Accessories ■ 714/841-8835 ■ lasraccessories.com

❒ Give ❒ Get

Lexar 64 MB JumpDrive

Never say, "I would kick your ass in Quake III, but my config files are at home on my PC" again—unless, you know, you need an excuse to back down from a challenge. Instead, get a JumpDrive, which packs anywhere from 64 MB to a massive 1 GB of data onto a wafer of memory small enough to fit on your keychain. The USB plug-and-play device instantly boots on any computer (PC or Mac) like a tiny hard drive, enabling you to keep your most important game saves, settings files, digital photos, Zinio *GamePro* issues (hint hint), and MP3 files on your person at all times. The purple JumpDrives are USB 1.1, and the blue ones are USB 2.0; both work in all computers, but since 2.0 is much faster (on 2.0-equipped machines), it's more expensive. This is a gift that your recipient probably didn't know existed but, once they start using it, won't be able to live without. Doesn't that make you feel good?



■ $49.99 (64 MB) ■ Lexar Media ■ 510/413-1200 ■ lexarmedia.com

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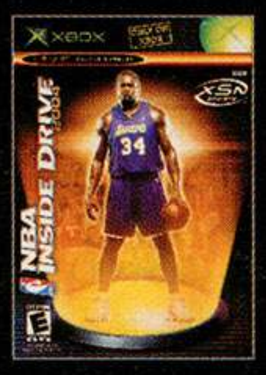
CONTINUED ▶

The guy in first leads the league in field goals.
The guy in last leads in goaltending.

EVERYONE
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Microsoft game studios



Make 'em think twice about coming down the lane or giving you space behind the arc. As part of XSN Sports, NBA Inside Drive 2004 gives you all the moves to make a championship run. Create teams, leagues, and schedules on the XSN Sports website, and check scores, standings and stats on your PC. Leave your man guessing with a hot new arsenal of moves like the drop-step and give-and-go, and then let your rival hear about it on the Xbox *Live*™ service. NBA Inside Drive 2004. Put your skills where your mouth is.

XSN SPORTS
XBOX LIVE
XBOX

NBA INSIDE DRIVE 2004

it's good to play together

xbox.com/nbainsidedrive2004

NBA

XSNsports.com requires a computer, Internet connection and subscription to Xbox Live. Additional fees may apply for Content Downloads. The NBA and Individual NBA Member team identifications used on or in this product are trademarks, copyrighted designs, and other forms of intellectual property of NBA Properties, Inc. and the respective NBA member teams and may not be used, in whole or in part, without the prior consent of NBA Properties, Inc. ©2003 NBA Properties Inc. All rights reserved. ©2003 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved. Microsoft, Xbox, the Xbox logos, the XSN Sports logo, the Microsoft Game Studios logo and Xbox Live are either registered trademarks or trademarks of the Microsoft Corporation in the United States and/or other countries. The ratings icon is a trademark of the Interactive Entertainment Ratings Board. The names of actual products and companies mentioned herein may be trademarks of their respective owners.

Under $50 Under $50 Under $50 Under $50 Under $50

Sony EyeToy

You've heard about Sony's digital camera controller, and maybe you're thinking that it's not worth it. Oh, but it is—and like all good gifts, it's something that a lot of gamers might find themselves on the fence about. Once you've played with an EyeToy, however, you soon realize that this is more fun than simply wildly waving your arms around has any real right to be. The mini-games—such as triggering fireworks, washing windows, and boxing cartoonish brutes—are silly, short, and playable by anyone, and if you're concerned about what the neighbors will think, consider this: If you open the drapes and they see you flailing around as if possessed by an evil spirit, they will stay the hell off your lawn.

■ $49.99 ■ Sony ■ 800/345-7669 ■ playstation.com

❒ Give ❒ Get

Nintendo Game Boy Player

Do you need it? No. Would it be cool to have? Sure. That's always a good description of a gift, and the Game Boy Player fits it nicely. Yes, the appeal of a GBA is playing games on the go, but this GameCube add-on lets you enjoy them while others watch (and it's definitely easier to show someone the twisted appeal of WarioWare than it is to try to describe it to them) and takes care of that old my-GBA-screen-is-too-dark problem, giving new life to dim games like Castlevania: Circle of the Moon. Plus, as with a real GBA, you can still play all your old Game Boy and Game Boy Color cartridges. It even supports link cable games, the WaveBird, and your now-dusty e-Reader. And you thought you didn't need it. Ha!

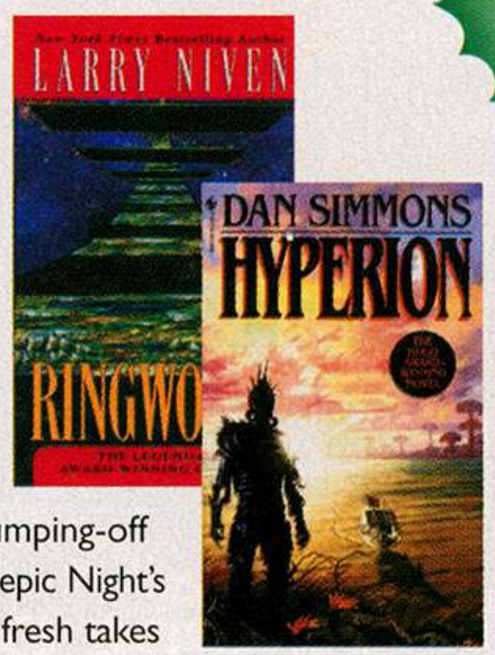
■ $49.99 ■ Nintendo ■ 800/255-3700 ■ nintendo.com

❒ Give ❒ Get

For the Gamer Who Has...

...Halo

Sci-fi Novels



Halo's action is great, but its story is just as engaging. If the war on the Covenant whetted your appetite for intergalactic intrigue, check out *Ringworld* by Larry Niven (which features similar, circular terrain). There's also *The Reality Dysfunction: Emergence* and *Expansion*, the first and second jumping-off points for Peter F. Hamilton's truly epic Night's Dawn series; the books are full of fresh takes on tales of galactic conquest. If neither of those will do the trick, try Dan Simmons' *Hyperion*, also the start of a series, this time about a galaxy on the verge of Armageddon and the quests of seven people within it. This stuff's all better read than explained, and each of these paperbacks will set you back only about $7.

For the Gamer Who Has...

...Grand Theft Auto

GTA: Vice City Original Soundtrack

Sure, you can buy your friends an automotive lockpick set as a joke, but face it: They're stupid, and they'd use it. Do you want to visit them in jail? Of course not. The safer gift is the massive Grand Theft Auto: Vice City Soundtrack box set, which is rapidly becoming hard to find. You can track down the entire seven-disc collection on eBay for $40 or $50, or you can spring for the individual discs, organized by radio station (Wave 103, V-Rock, etc.), for $14 a pop. Each CD features the same 1980s-era music you hear in the game, plus extra chatter from the DJs that you won't hear anywhere else.

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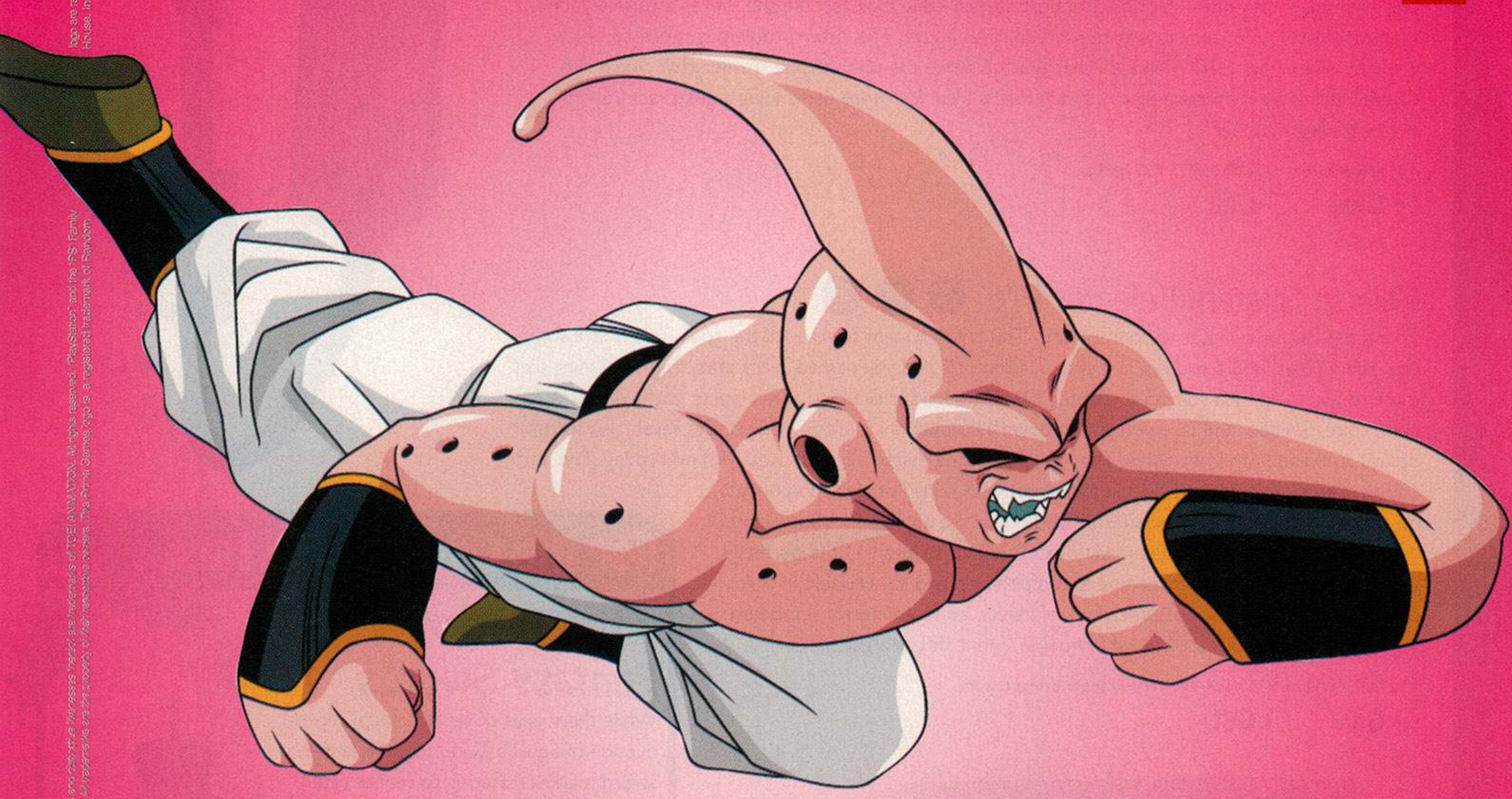
PRE-ORDER NOW

Ah, the joys of evil.

ATARI



Not only has Buu™ arrived, but you can fight as any of his three evil forms. Plus there's all new graphics, new fusions, new absorptions, and Dragon World, a new single player mode that lets you create your own DBZ® adventure. If you've got a favorite character, you've got a fight.

DRAGON BALL Z BUDOKAI 2 武道会

PlayStation.2

PRIMA STRATEGY GUIDE AVAILABLE
Limited DVD In Every Guide

FUNimation Productions, Ltd.

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Violence

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Under $100 Under $100 Under $100 Under $100

Neoya X2VGA High Definition VGA Pack

Don't you hate having a cool gaming feature you can't use? The fact is most Xbox owners don't own fancy HDTVs that display the maximum screen resolution for their system, which makes Neoya's X2VGA High Definition VGA Pack a neat solution for folks who happen to own a VGA monitor (which is anyone who owns a PC). This device plugs into the Xbox like a normal AV cable but outputs the signal to a VGA port. Connect a monitor and some external speakers, and you're done. There are several other brands that promise the same performance as the X2VGA, but this is the first one we've encountered that truly delivers crisp, high-definition pictures. The only two snags are games that don't support at least 480p look terrible and there's a chance your monitor's resolution can cause some screen ratio issues. The latter problem is more common with the sleek new LCD monitors that tend to force the picture size smaller than you'd like. Overall, this is an impressive piece of tech that is ideal for those demanding a great picture without upgrading their TV.

■ **$64.95** ■ **Neoya** ■ **702/552-2092** ■ **x2vga.com**

❒ Give ❒ Get

Pelican System Selector Pro

This is the system selector of your dreams. This is the system selector of the gods. This is as if someone said, "What would you like in a system selector?" and you named every crazy, top-shelf thing that came to mind and then someone replied, "Okay." It's kinda ridiculous: seven inputs, each with jacks for composite, S-video, and (are you sitting down?) component cables. Three of the seven also feature optical audio and Ethernet ports. They all lead to one massive output area with everything. The unit comes with 13 pre-printed, backlit faceplates with consoles and components on them—just pop the "PlayStation 2" title over the appropriate button and your system has a slick, professional look. The unit is sized to fit in perfectly with your other home entertainment components, and it's available in silver or black. Simply freakin' awesome. Tons of inputs, every connector a modern gamer needs, gorgeous looks…who wouldn't want this as a gift?

■ **$99.95** ■ **Pelican** ■ **323/234-9911** ■ **pelicanperformance.com**

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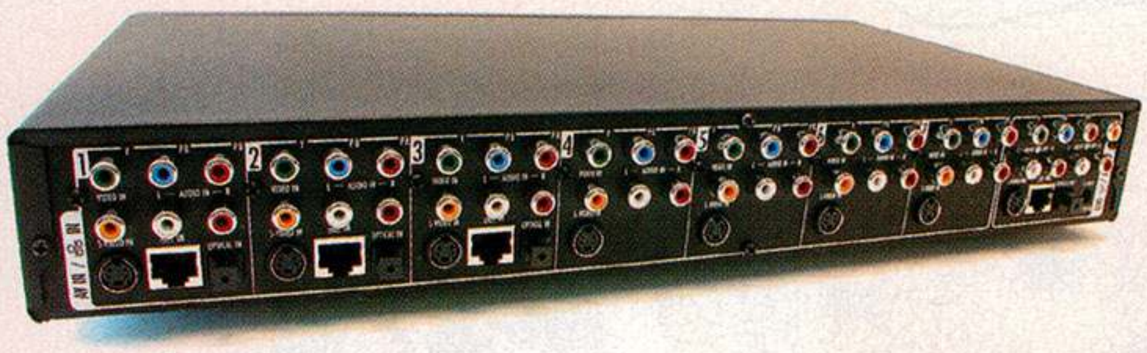


Nyko Wireless NetExtender

It's a common problem: You want to get your consoles online, but they're in a different room from the Internet jack and your loved ones don't take kindly to you stringing Ethernet cables around the house. Nyko's NetExtender solves the problem nicely: plug in one RF-based unit at the Internet source (as well as an AC outlet) and plug the other into an AC outlet and your console. Ta da—instant, hassle-free wireless online access without paying an arm and a leg, and with absolutely no setup problems—it's truly plug-and-play with no installation whatsoever. The NetExtender has a maximum range of 100 feet, encrypts your transmitted data for security, works through floors and walls (which will likely cut the signal to 50 feet, but that's still pretty good), and isn't fazed by hubs or routers—it works with whatever system you're currently running. The package even comes with Ethernet cables. It doesn't get any easier than this.

■ **$99.99** ■ **Nyko** ■ **888/444-6956** ■ **nyko.com**

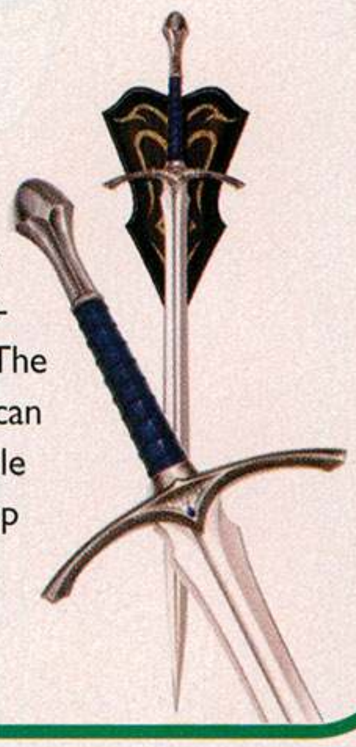
❒ Give ❒ Get

For the Gamer Who Has...

...Final Fantasy

Fantasy Swords

While there is as of yet no official reproduction of Squall's Gunblade, the fantasy sword market (catering to renaissance faire nerds, role-playing nerds, *The Lord of the Rings* nerds, and several other camps of nerds…um, all of whom work at *GamePro*) is actually a booming niche business. The fancier specimens at bladesbybrown.com can run you several hundred bucks, but people who actually use such stuff in combat shop at places like starfireswords.com, which will sell you excellent, hefty steel swords for as little as $100.



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PRE-ORDER NOW

It's fun. In a don't mess with me kind of way.

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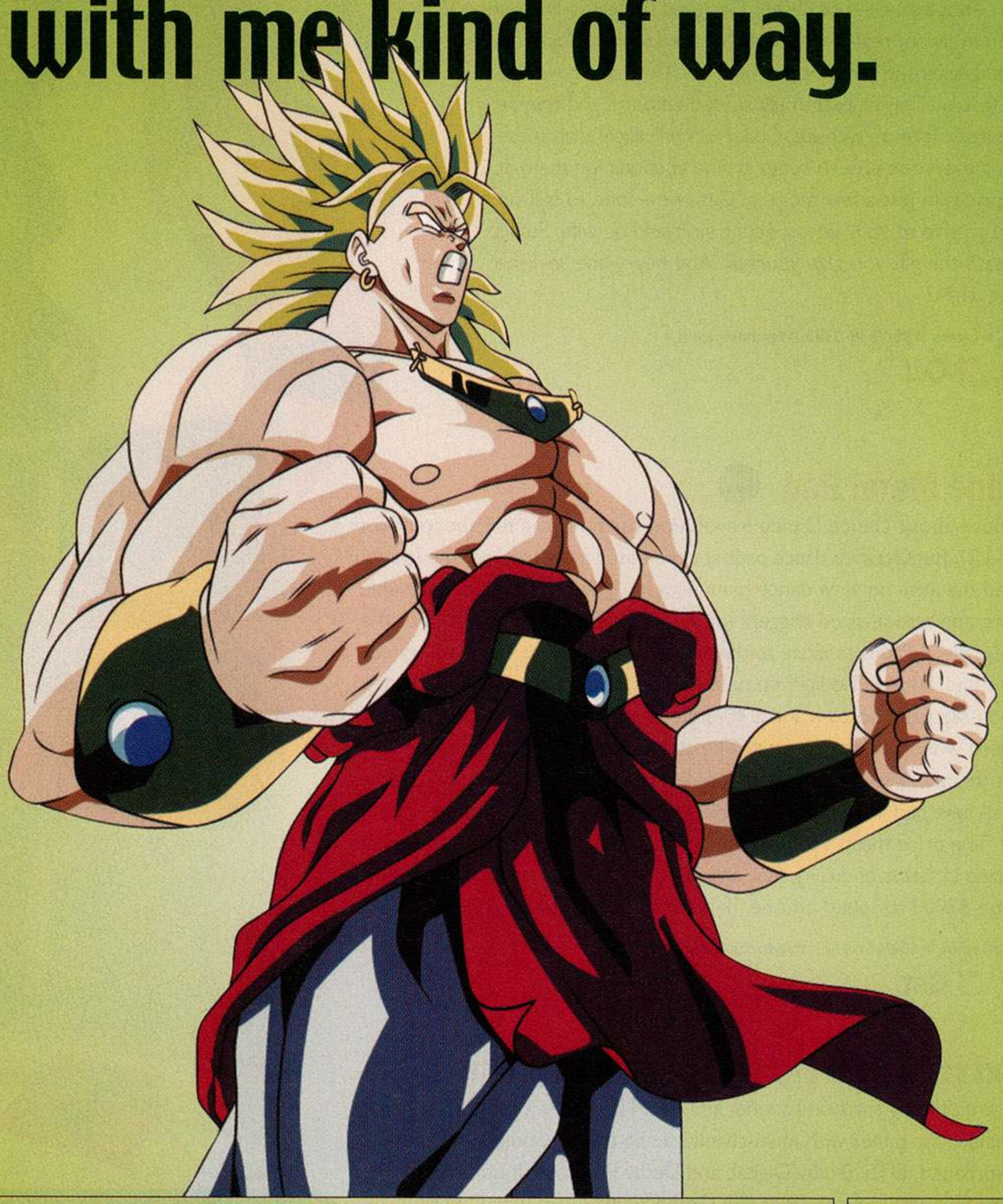

Be Broly,® the Legendary Super Saiyan. Or be Cell™, Frieza®, Buu™, or any of 11 other Dragon Ball Z® warriors. Fight alone or play against friends in versus mode. If you've got a favorite character, you've got a fight.

coming soon to:

GAME BOY ADVANCE

FUNimation Productions, Ltd.

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Cartoon Violence

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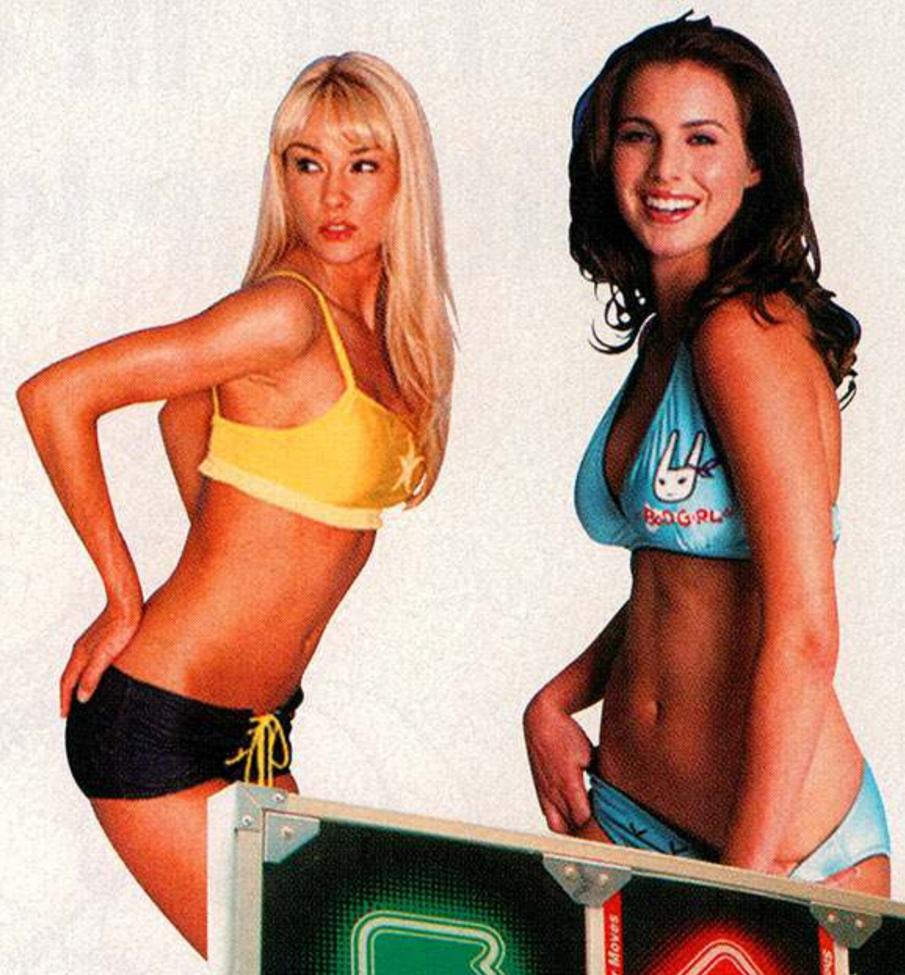
Over $100 Over $100 Over $100 Over $100 Over $100

Tecmo Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball Bikinis

Not a dream—not a joke—not cheap! Designed by Team Ninja and manufactured in Japan, real-life versions of the Lamina, Kepheus, Amaterasu, and Asterope swimsuits as seen in DOAX are now available for you to buy. They're extremely limited editions, and they're only available from Tecmo's website. Collectors will likely snap these up fast, leaving everyone else to scour online auctions for them at even higher prices in just a few months. Get two—one to sell on eBay and one to give to your unsuspecting girlfriend or wife. Suffice it to say that it's the gift you give yourself. And hey—she *said* she likes surprises, right?

■ $149.99 each ■ Tecmo ■ 800/338-0336 ■ tecmoinc.com

❒ Give ❒ Get



RedOctane Metal Pad

If you're serious about Dance Dance Revolution (or find yourself shopping for someone who is), RedOctane's dance pads are the best on the market. The Ignition Pad 2.0 upped the ante on vinyl dance mats with its jigsaw-puzzle-like removable stiff foam core and arcade-sized triggers (at $100, it's worth every cent), but the company's new Metal Pad is as close to the arcade experience as any home gamer could hope to find. Small LEDs light up on the edges of the arrows with each step, and with a non-slip foam bottom and a 40-pound heavy steel frame, this baby ain't going anywhere when you stomp on it. The tethered control box leads out to a PS2 plug, but the unit was designed with future Xbox compatibility in mind, too—why buy an all-new pad when all you'll have to do is plug in a different front end for this one? The price might seem steep, but your only other option anywhere near RedOctane in terms of quality, feel, and performance is a real DDR machine—and if you have $7000 to spend on one, hey, enjoy. Otherwise, seek this out.

■ $199.99 ■ RedOctane ■ 408/481-9121 ■ redoctane.com

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Kenwood HTB-506 Home Theater System

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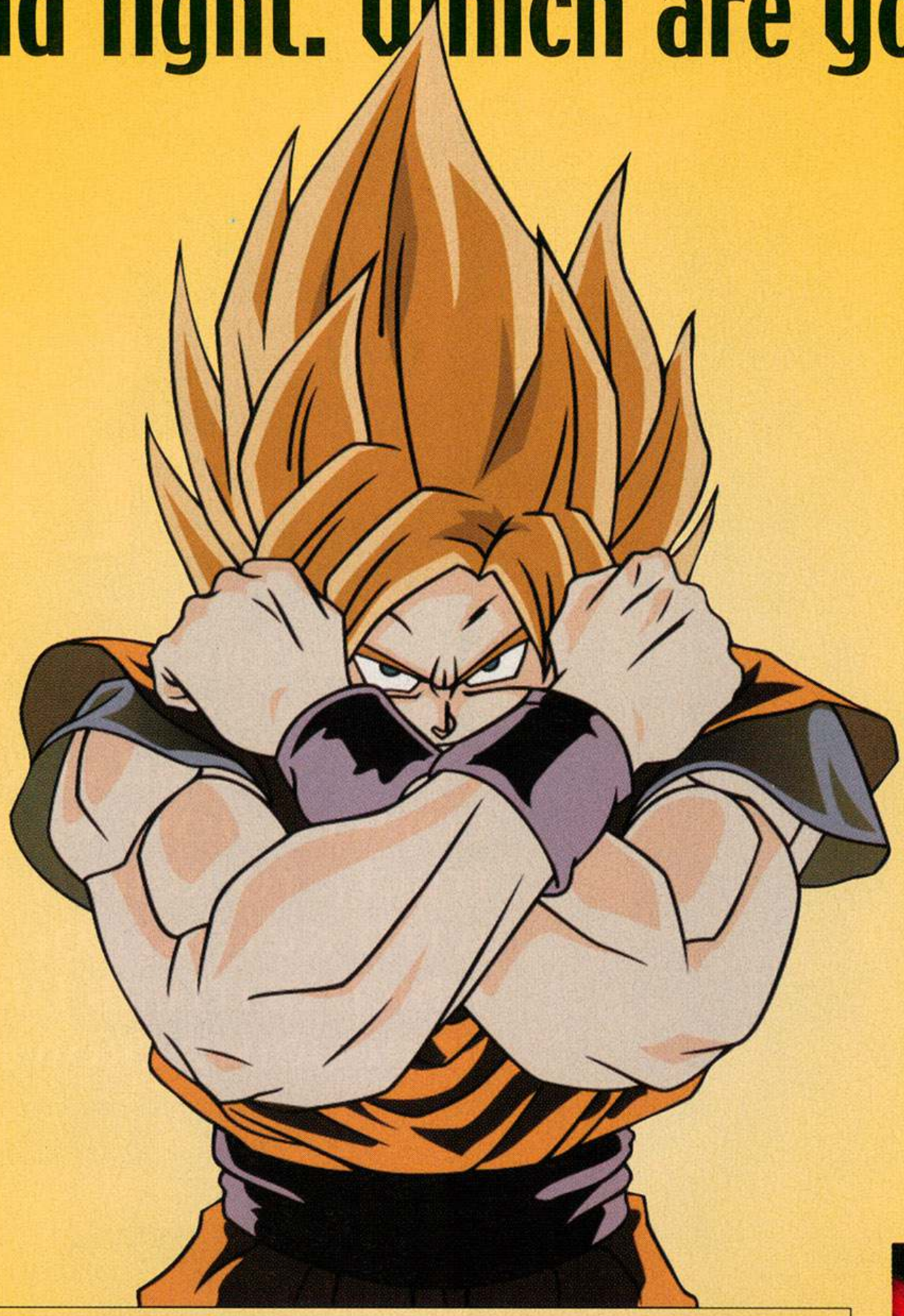

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NINTENDO GAMECUBE

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FUNimation Productions, Ltd.

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Animated Blood
Violence

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ONCE A FUTURE KING

AS THE EPIC LORD OF THE RINGS TRILOGY SWEEPS TOWARD ITS DRAMATIC SILVER-SCREEN CONCLUSION, EA'S GIRDING ITSELF TO REJOIN THE BATTLE WITH RETURN OF THE KING, WHICH GLITTERS LIKE ARAGORN'S IMPENDING CROWN. BY AIR HENDRIX

MOVIE-BASED GAMES suck, right? Most of the time, it's safe to reflexively nod in assent, but with last year's impressive Two Towers, EA finally shattered that trend as though it were Isildur's fabled blade. With only a year of development time to fashion The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King, the big question is whether EA will be able to forge another triumphant hack-n-slash extravaganza.

"We wanted to build something that's worthy of the property while exceeding what Two Towers accomplished," explains Neil Young, executive producer at EA. "It was very important that we deliver everything you felt you missed in the first game. The feedback we got was basically: 1) Awesome game. 2) Can it be longer? 3) Can I have co-op? 4) Where are Frodo, Gandalf, and Sam? We've been able to address all of these points in Return of the King."

WIZARDS ARE NEVER LATE

When you turn on the game for the first time, you don't get legal jargon or logos—the game puts you directly in control of Gandalf's staff as he arrives at Helm's Deep. "It connects you with your romantic memory of Two Towers," Young says, "and it makes you feel like, 'I'm Gandalf!'"

Afterward, the white wizard recaps the events thus far from his perspective, showing how he's the architect behind the scenes, moving chess pieces to accomplish the destruction of the ring and Sauron. "The story thread in Two Towers was a little weak," Young admits. "This year, we've been able to do a much better job of adding to the player's comprehension of the whole universe by telling a much stronger story that complements the film."

A LONG-EXPECTED PARTY

Return of the King's levels are broken into three paths. Playing as Frodo and Sam, you'll escape from Osgiliath, traverse Shelob's lair and Cirith Ungol, and reach the Crack of Doom. (Sadly, Gollum shows up only as an NPC.) As Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli, you'll tread the Paths of the Dead, then battle feverishly at the Southern Gate, Pelennor Fields, and the Black Gate. Gandalf will lend a hand with the destruction of Isengard and the defense of Minas Tirith.

Although the action remains focused on frantic, relentless combat, the levels benefit from much greater variety. The warriors battle oliphants with catapults at Pelennor Fields, while

CONTINUED ▶

the hobbits sneak past orcs in Cirith Ungol and set off traps that demolish hapless orcs. The environments are no longer scenery, either—your character will climb up walls, dodge explosions and toppling objects, and much more.

Each character now has their own tricksy special move—the hobbits use their elvish cloaks to become invisible and sneak past trouble or perform stealth kills. Gandalf casts a magical ball of light that defends him and damages foes, while the trio of fighters accelerate the pace of their Skill meter, leading to a flurry of Perfect-rated kills. The experience-point system was overhauled smartly, and players can now purchase upgrades for a single character or the whole Fellowship.

A Fellowship Is Born

Return of the King's two-player co-op was already a blast to play in a preview version, harkening back to the glory days of Golden Axe. PS2 players get an added perk: online play where two gamers can play through the levels as though they were side by side on the couch, talking over USB voice headsets.

In co-op or online, you play through the same levels as the one-player game, but the difficulty is ratcheted up and a respawn counter replaces checkpoints. The camera's also a bit different, employing an effective Gauntlet-style approach that doesn't require splitting the screen.

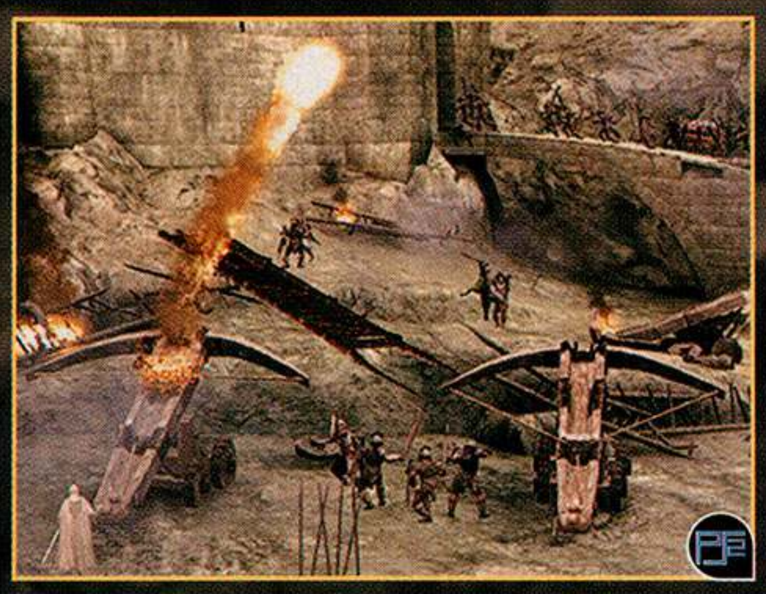
The Shadow of the Past

The core gameplay remains very familiar, but Two Towers pros will recognize a lot of slick tuning. The staccato feel of the combat has been deftly ironed out with far more responsive controls and a steadier, less devastating difficulty level. Parrying remains absolutely vital, but fierce attacks are no longer the magic move, and you'll actually get a lot more mileage by depending primarily on speed attacks.

The graphics have also taken a quantum leap forward, shining with sleek environments and gorgeous character models, particularly their faces. "Two Towers was an artist's interpretation of the film's universe," Young says. "With Return of the King, we used art assets directly from the movie."

It definitely shows. The only possible complaint is that, in the preview version, the camera strayed a bit, sometimes blocking the combat from view. Hopefully EA will manage to tune that before the game's released, but even if it doesn't, Return of the King already looks polished enough to rule with grace and honor as the series marches onto the PS2, Xbox, and GameCube in early November.

For a full-length interview with Neil Young, point your browser to GamePro.com.



Note: These screens were captured by EA, which removed the in-game HUD and repositioned the camera.

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N-GAGE THE ENEMY?

What if the Game Boy Advance and a Nokia 3300 had a one-night stand? Out comes the N-Gage, a hybrid handheld concept that brings wireless gaming to a new level...but not quite high enough. ***By Two-Fisted Shoe***

NOKIA IS HEATING up the competition in the world of portable gaming with the just-released N-Gage, a combination cell phone/"game deck" with high expectations and an even higher price tag. If you're wondering whether this hyped hybrid handheld is a taste of the future, a pace for the market, or a waste of your money, wonder no more.

FEATURES GALORE

The N-Gage could be mistaken for a Game Boy Advance; it shares a similar shape, curved along the bottom. But the myriad buttons on the front sets it apart, as does its thinness and light five-ounce weight; it uses a rechargeable lithium ion battery (enough for three to six hours of game time) and plays games stored on tiny MultiMedia cards. It's sculpted in all the right areas to fit within the curves of the fingers and palms; it feels natural when held. For menu navigation and player control, there's an eight-way directional pad called the Rocker.

The GSM/GPRS phone works well, but reception isn't spectacular. The FM radio is excellent, but the AAC/MP3 music player requires you to swap out the game card for a card for music. A built-in Bluetooth transceiver lets you play multiplayer games with other N-Gages as well as transfer files. Other notable features include a web browser and multimedia messaging.

LET THE GAMES BEGIN, EVENTUALLY

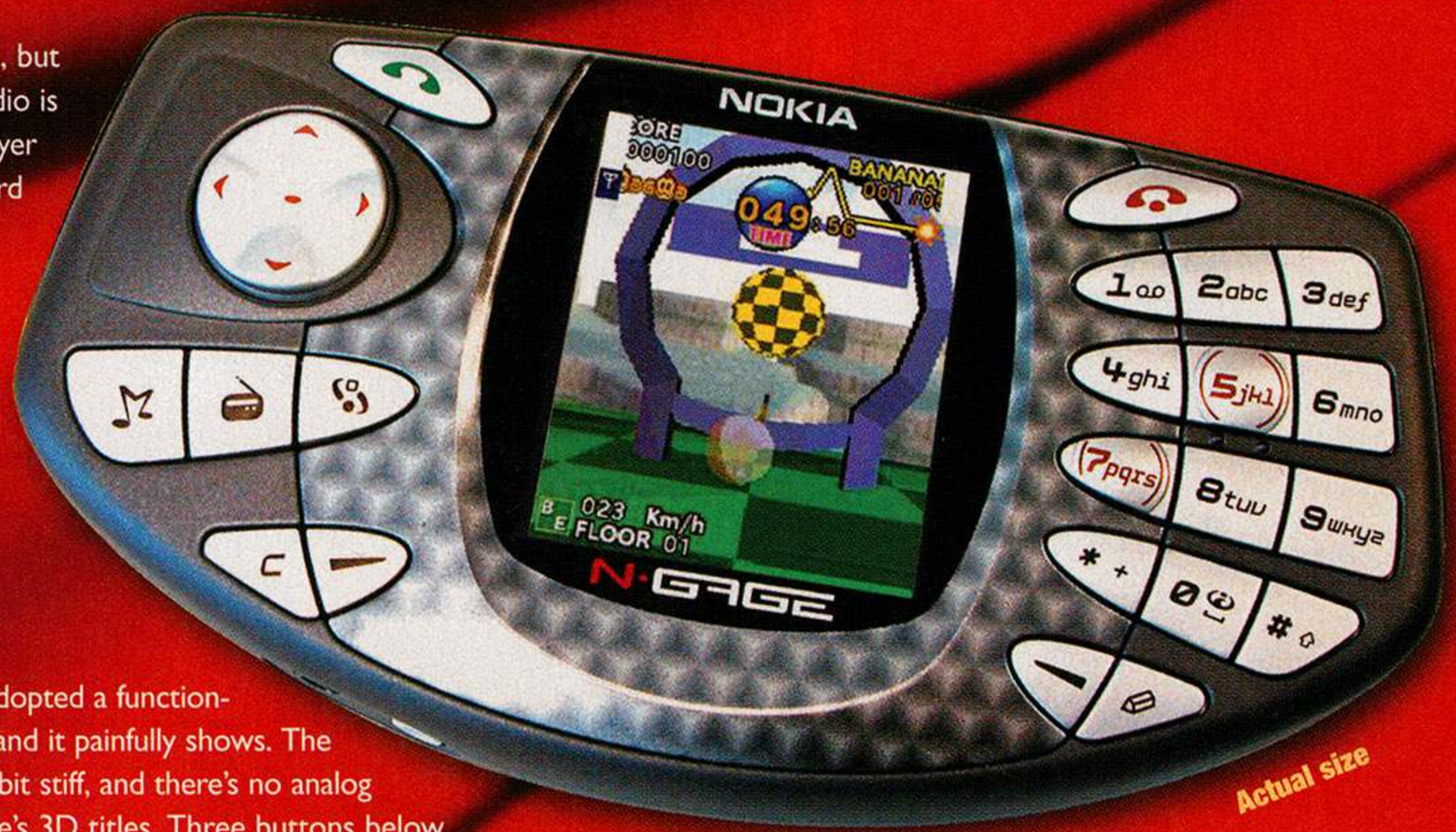
Unfortunately, Nokia designers have adopted a function-follows-form attitude in recent years, and it painfully shows. The Rocker directional pad is comfy but a bit stiff, and there's no analog controller, a drawback for the N-Gage's 3D titles. Three buttons below the directional pad give you direct access to the music player, radio, and menu, but none give access to the game. To load a game, you pull up the menu and select its title.

The biggest flaw is the way games are swapped: The back cover and battery must be removed. The current game slides out of its slot, the new one goes in, and then the battery and the cover must be replaced. It's certainly not a one-handed process. The N-Gage takes about 20 seconds to start up, adding more waiting time between games. Add to that the console-like long loading times, and it will be time for bed. Also, having the headphones plugged in before you load a game is a good idea. Game volumes are loud, and the volume for each game is adjusted in the game's options menu.

SCREENING YOUR CALLS

The A-list names among the launch titles are impressive. Recognized franchises like Tomb Raider, Tony Hawk's Pro Skater, and Splinter Cell should help the N-Gage garner some street cred. EA has signed on, and Nokia has acquired Sega.com to develop online games. Software runs between $30 and $40 per game.

But game performance should concern Nokia. In addition to the long loading times, the frame rates are slow, a blow to 3D and first-person shooter titles. The backlit display has decent graphics, but it's a bit small (less than two inches square, and unlike most game displays, vertical in nature), and colors are difficult to differentiate. The controls are awkward; different games use different buttons, and users will unintentionally push some wrong buttons. Bluetooth multiplayer games are easy to set up, but connecting between N-Gages varies from five to 20 seconds, and the connection is easily lost.

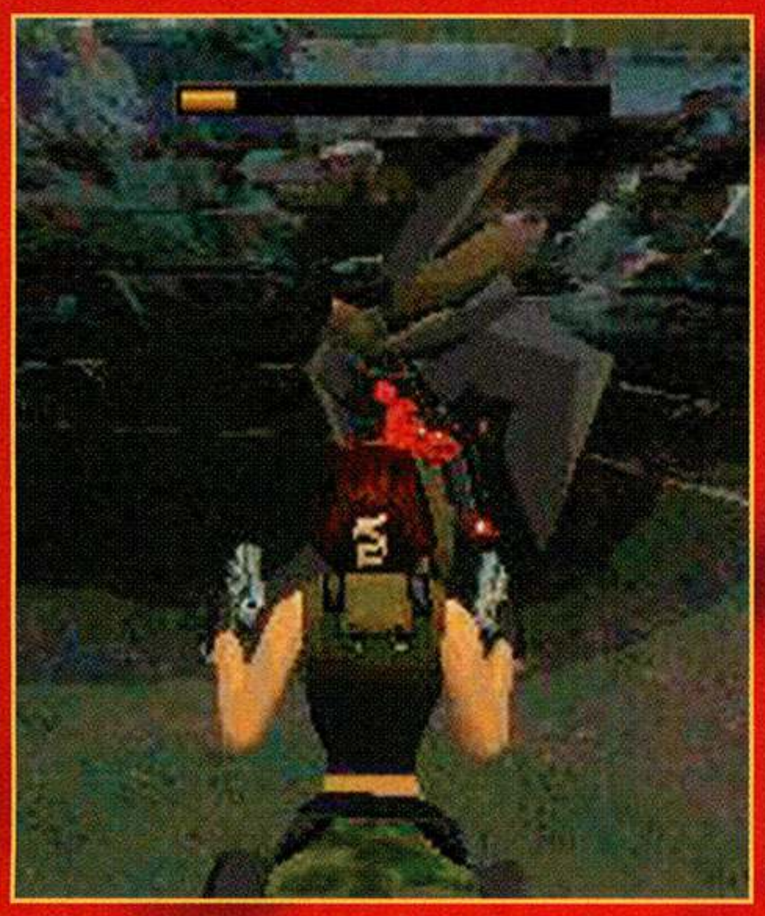


IT'S RINGING...PICK UP?

Talk isn't cheap: The $300 price tag (which doesn't include cell-phone airtime), awkward design and controls, and mediocre gaming performance will keep many away from the N-Gage. While it's targeting a different market, the N-Gage will face competition from the established GBA and heat from the upcoming Sony PSP, which will also incorporate mobile phone functionality.

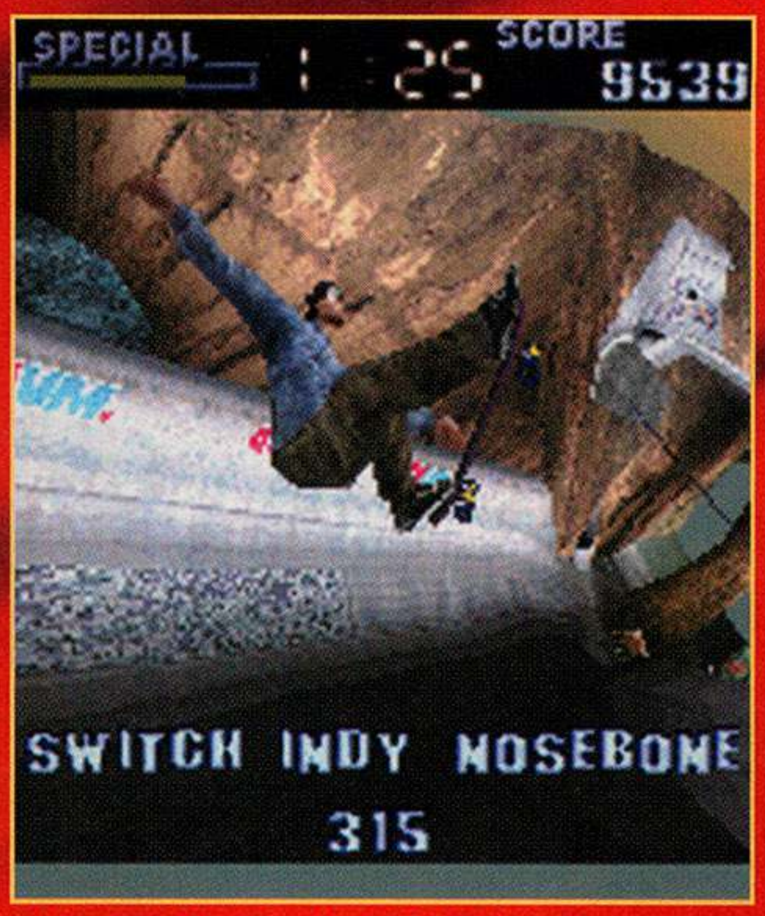
But don't count Nokia out—after all, this is the first generation of this technology. Flaws and all, it shows promise. For a company that has enjoyed great success from the toilet paper market of its heyday to the mobile phone of the late 20th Century, Nokia is onto a great concept...and the N-Gage 2 can get only better.

SOFTWARE SIX PACK



TOMB RAIDER STARRING LARA CROFT

In this port of the original game from 1996, Lady Croft searches through caves with two smoking guns and high-flying acrobatics. The background graphics are pixilated and blend in with the foreground easily, so you'll be crashing into walls and rocks often. The number pad calls up various actions like sidestepping and jumping, but remembering which number does what is hard.



TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER

Don't expect the detail of the third and fourth installments, but Tony Hawk's Pro Skater's graphics are surprisingly good. Skills will take time to master, especially without the aid of an analog control. Frame rates are smooth, and the soundtrack is extremely clear. You can also show off your moves in a multiplayer game.

SONIC N

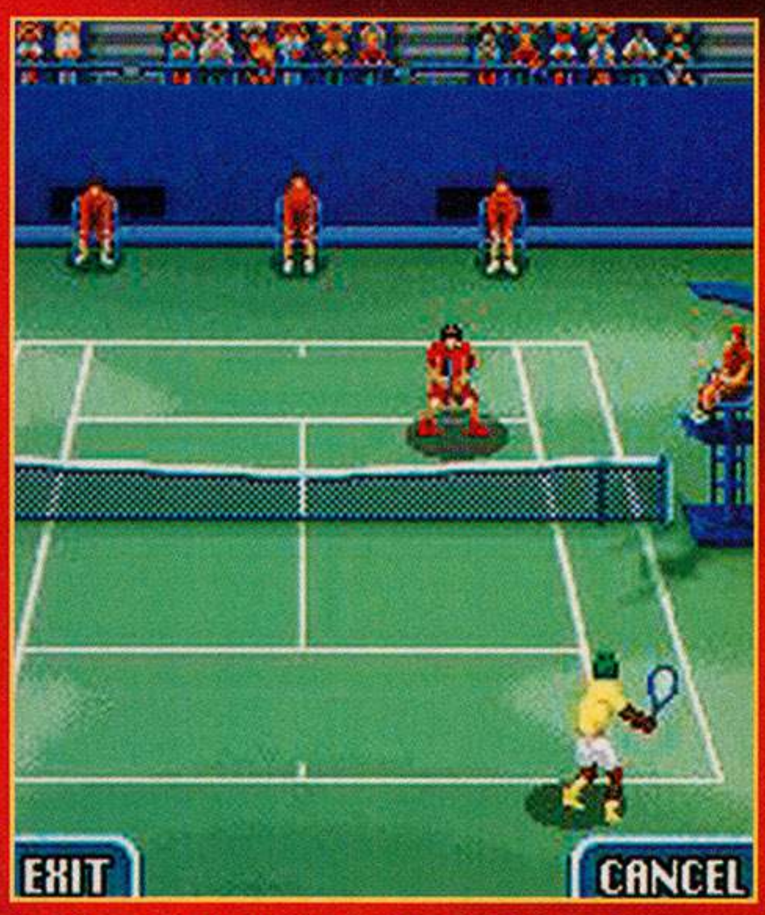
Old-school Genesis fans rejoice: In Sonic N, Sonic, Tails, Knuckles, and Amy zoom through the five 2D zones chock-full of baddies and platforms while collecting rings and getting to the Eggman (a.k.a. Dr. Robotnik). But what should be an easy and fun game is hampered by slow graphics, making Sonic more anemic than speedy.

SUPER MONKEY BALL

Everyone's favorite monkey game stays true to its format. You guide AiAi and friends in their balls through seemingly simple yet challenging timed levels. As you progress, you'll unlock the mini-games like Monkey Race. Controlling the ball with the directional pad is simple, but watch out for the edges.

PUYO POP

This Tetris-esque puzzle game will suck you in. You eliminate same-colored blobs by connecting four or more together. In Versus mode, the more blobs you get rid of, the more you send to the computer. The game is simple, but differentiating the blue from the purple blobs is frustrating.



VIRTUA TENNIS

Virtua Tennis offers the most engaging N-Gage experience yet, though it suffers from aspect ratio anomalies and depth-perception problems. Arcade, Exhibition, and World Tour modes give you several ways to flaunt your skills on the court. Bluetooth connectivity is the real superstar, bringing the joy of direct competition to an otherwise flavorless diversion.

SHIFT INTO SOMETHING MORE LETHAL

Take control of the all-new and fully loaded G-8155 Interceptor. Transform into new vehicles such as a sleek snowmobile and off-road 4x4.

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TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Violence

PlayStation.2

XBOX

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MIDWAY

"With huge levels, branching paths and different styles of gameplay, this isn't a half-assed sequel. It's a tricked-out and expanded new chapter of a burgeoning series."

- IGN

SPYHUNTER 2

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Recommended System Specs

- Windows 98/ME/2000/XP
- Pentium III 1.4 GHz
- 256 MB RAM
- 1 GB on HD
- 128 MB video card

HALO COMBAT EVOLVED

HALO BLEW AWAY Xbox players with its combination of superior graphics and gameplay. At long last, this much-anticipated translation will finally let PC fans see what all the fuss was about. But beware: If Unreal Tournament 2003's graphics stressed your PC, Halo is way out of your league.

Lord of the Rings?

Halo's single-player experience exactly mirrors the Xbox version, warts and all. But the PC version lacks the Xbox's cooperative mode, a damaging omission that will anger Halo purists. Luckily, the exclusive online multiplayer mode offers a compelling reason to invest in Halo for the PC. Players can choose from game types like Oddball and Capture the Flag, or simply create their own rules from scratch. Better yet, Halo's multiplayer performance is fast and stable, even over slower internet connections. While the multiplayer mode thoughtfully adds several bonus maps and weapons, it's not quite enough to compete with online heavyweights like UT 2003.

downward spiral

Though not a visual dynamo as compared to modern PC titles, Halo still renders eye-catching graphics on the PC. As in the Xbox version of the game, the vast outdoor environments and dazzling special effects attract the most attention. Sadly, some blurry textures mar the overall polish.

PROTIP: To improve your aiming ability with precise weapons like the pistol or sniper rifle, try increasing your horizontal mouse sensitivity to 6 or 7. Leave the vertical sensitivity somewhat lower.

Unfortunately, players may spend more time grappling with graphics settings than blasting aliens. In Halo's single-player mode, firefights frequently suffer from crippling slowdown, especially in indoor areas. Considering Halo's age, there's no explanation for why it runs so poorly. Though multiplayer performance fares slightly better, the frame-rate problems are impossible to ignore, and they end up costing the game dearly.

Halo supports crisp 5.1 surround sound for an immersive sonic experience, and the rousing soundtrack is also a standout, serving up pounding battle anthems to match the frenzied gameplay. Halo's controls have never felt better; the biggest improvement comes from the sleek new mouse interface.

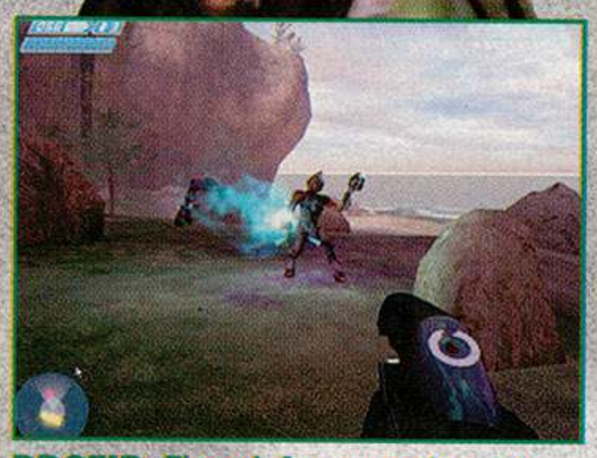
halo and goodbye

In the end, Halo's miserable frame rates overshadow an otherwise enjoyable experience, especially in the single-player campaign. If you're a diehard online fanatic with a world-class PC, you'll love Halo's multiplayer modes, but if you're just a casual fan, stick with the superior Xbox version.

PROTIP: This armored behemoth is tough to defeat without explosives. Get in close and wait until it performs a melee attack, then strafe to the side and blast it in the back.

PROTIP: The Master Chief's melee attack inflicts massive damage; one solid blow to an enemy's back is usually enough to take care of it.

PROTIP: To optimize online play over a slower connection, check that the Connection Type (under Network Settings) is accurate. Players with 56k modems should stick to small games and use the lag-friendly flamethrower and rocket launcher.



PROTIP: Though fragmentation grenades detonate more quickly, the plasma grenades will stick to enemies and vehicles.

PROTIP: To improve performance, first update your video drivers online. Next, disable all antialiasing and anisotropic filtering, and reduce Halo's resolution to 800x600 or lower. Finally, reduce particle and texture quality, and disable shadows and VSync. Also, try reducing sound quality and sound variation.

PROTIP: The plasma pistol's charge-up blast will home in on medium-range targets, making it useful in multiplayer matches. More importantly, the blast vaporizes all enemy shields.

GRAPHICS 3.5

Those outdoor environments may look great, but Unreal Tournament 2003 is still the graphical champ. Also, you can expect to disable many visual effects to fend off the brutal slowdown.

SOUND 5.0

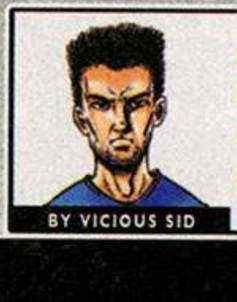
Halo's stirring orchestral soundtrack enhances the intense combat, while the crisp 5.1 surround sound lets you instinctively pinpoint nearby screams and explosions.

CONTROL 5.0

There's nothing to complain about here: Whether flying, sniping, or driving, Halo's controls are always precise. The new mouse-driven interface is also a big plus.

FUN FACTOR 4.0

Crippling frame-rate problems tarnish an otherwise engaging single-player experience. Ultimately, the addictive online multiplayer mode is the main attraction; without it, there's not much to see here.



BY VICIOUS SID

- Developed by Gearbox Software
- Published by Microsoft
- $49.99
- Action
- Available now
- 16 players

MATURE M — CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

GRAPHICS	SOUND	CONTROL	FUN FACTOR
3.5	5.0	5.0	4.0

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EVERYONE
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TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES

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THE TEMPLE OF ELEMENTAL EVIL

A CLASSIC GREYHAWK ADVENTURE

LOOKING FOR AN RPG that will really put hair on your chest? Then check out The Temple of Elemental Evil, a hardcore adventure based in Greyhawk, a classic world created by D&D innovator Gary Gygax. If you have patience (and a robust PC), this one's for you.

PROTIP: Make a charismatic sorcerer your party spokesman and increase abilities like Bluff and Sense Motive.

PROTIP: Fallen allies bleed 1 HP a round, so teach party members the Heal skill to avoid resurrection fees.

WITCHES' BREW

Judging by the clean menu design, The Temple of Elemental Evil's developers focused on creating the most intuitive control scheme possible. Unfortunately, the results are mixed: While the simple point-and-click navigation system is fine, party members often become separated in towns. TTOEE truly shines in its turn-based combat, the heart and soul of any old-school D&D title. You can easily access spells and skills via slick radial menus, while a color-coded action system makes tactical maneuvers a snap. The addition of D&D version 3.5 rules means characters also have loads of new abilities like Trip and Coup de Grace. Overall, TTOEE rewards the patient; once you learn the rules and grasp the controls, you'll be hooked for life.

In the visuals department, TTOEE 's environments boast eye-catching details like bubbling slime pools and swarms of butterflies. To see all the graphical details, however, you'll need a high-end PC, and even then you can expect some occasional slowdown. As for the audio, TTOEE offers a stirring soundtrack and atmospheric effects—just disable the irritating party chatter.

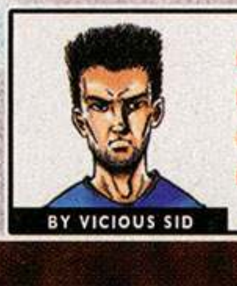
EXCELSIOR!

The lack of multiplayer options is a shame, but TTOEE is the best D&D title in recent memory, especially since parties of different alignments (good, evil, neutral) all face unique plots. This all adds up to one monstrous nonlinear RPG packed with plenty of replay value. If you're looking to kill roughly 200 hours of free time, here's the perfect opportunity.

EDITORS' GAMEPRO CHOICE

PROTIP: In combat, your fighters should form a front line (use the Formation command). This will shield your spellcasters, minimize cheap hits, and enable you to easily surround tough opponents.

Recommended System Specs
Windows 98/ ME/2000/XP
Pentium 4 2 GHz
256 MB RAM
1.1 GB on HD
64 MB video card



BY VICIOUS SID

- Developed by Troika
- Published by Atari
- $49.99
- RPG
- Available now
- 1 player

ESRB: TEEN

GRAPHICS	SOUND	CONTROL	FUN FACTOR
4.0	4.0	4.0	4.5

Ghost Master

FUSING DUNGEON KEEPER with The Sims while expertly balancing a spooky yet comedic atmosphere, Ghost Master delivers on almost every level but fails to add the frills, flairs, and fun factor to make this game a classic.

WHO YA GONNA CALL?

Ghost Master challenges you to put the spook back into the sprites, specters, and poltergeists in the eerie town of Gravenville. You'll enter 14 cleverly designed scenarios and scare the bejesus out of the mortals by strategically placing your ghosts to maximize their unique powers. Compelling role-playing elements enable you to choose your squad from a worthy stable of phantoms while earning the booty to improve their abilities. Some levels have more specific goals, like scaring particular humans (you can study their deepest fears to gain strategic insight) or leading the mortals to uncover hidden corpses that will join your team.

PROTIP: To free Whisperwind in "Summoners not Included," bind Aether to the bicycle and use his Shattering Song power.

Recommended System Specs
Windows 98/ ME/2000/XP
Pentium 4 1.5 GHz
256 MB RAM
750 MB on HD
64 MB video card

PROTIP: Bind a ghost with Earth Fetter to the banzai tree in the police station's lobby to free Banzai, a hidden character.

MASTER OF THE HOUSE

Eerie re-creations of sets from movies like *Titanic* and *The Amityville Horror* are evidence of developer Sick Puppies' love for the genre, and there's no doubt as to why the ghosts' spectral lighting effects send their victims into a maddening pit of insanity. The spine-chilling graphics are marred only by bland character design and some dull textures. Similarly, the morose voice acting and amusing Sim-lish that mortals speak makes for entertaining audio, but the repetitive and uncreative music will rattle your chains. Even the intuitive controls, which allow for easy camera shifting, stumble by failing to offer hotkey options.

PROTIP: In "The Calamityville Horror," bind Stonewall at the wall imprisoning Arclight and use Tremor to shake loose a brick.

Ghost Master's truly bloodcurdling flaw is its lack of customization options: There are no character creator, level editor, or multiplayer options. Setbacks aside, this is a worthwhile opportunity for the ghosts to finally bust back.

BY JANGO FATT

- Developed by Sick Puppies
- Published by Empire Interactive
- $39.99
- Haunting sim
- Available now
- 1 player

ESRB: TEEN

GRAPHICS	SOUND	CONTROL	FUN FACTOR
4.0	4.0	3.5	4.0

Back... in black.

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Unreal Tournament 2004

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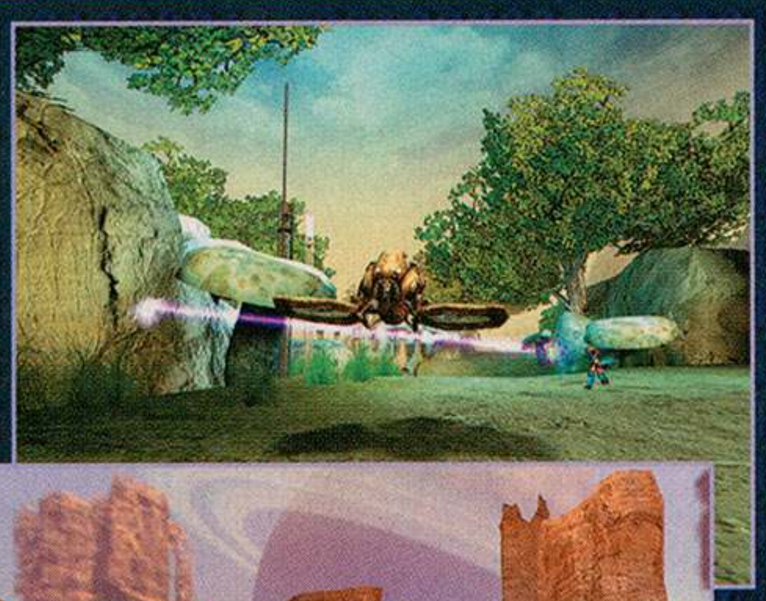
UT à la Mode

Though the major differences between UT2003 and this year's UT2004 might not be obvious at first—this year's version might seem more like an expansion pack to the uninitiated—the preview version showed that plenty of new stuff has been poured into the box. Atari also promises UT2003 owners a rebate, giving them pricing similar to an expansion pack.

UT2004 bundles all of the content from UT2003—including classic modes such as Capture the Flag and Deathmatch—and adds the free maps, weapons, and gameplay variations offered after last year's release. The bundle also features new maps and character models; updated weapon models and firing effects; and software rendering, so the most current graphic-board technology isn't required. A redesigned user interface makes it easier to find desired information and menu selections.

Vehicles give players more mobility—and additional ways to stomp their foes.



Chatter Cheese

Perhaps the coolest add-on is the incorporation of voice chat into the title. Being able to easily strategize with teammates on the fly is great, but players will surely enjoy gloating over their ownage so directly. Combatants no longer have to find ways to trash talk with just the ASDW keys.

From a gameplay standpoint, there's also a lot of fresh material. UT2004 revisits Assault mode with a total overhaul featuring detailed objective descriptions as well as onscreen 3D arrows, "wisp" trails, and distance indicators to comfortably lead team members to the next goal. A new mode, Onslaught, pits two teams against each other to control linked points on a map and ultimately destroy the opposition's power core. Assault and Onslaught have been further enhanced with various vehicles—some of which can carry multiple players—and stationary turrets that drive the intensity to a frantic pace. Bot A.I. has been heavily tweaked to make their actions less predicable and that much more deadly.

BY MANNY LAMANCHA

- Developed by Epic Games/Digital Extremes
- Published by Atari
- Target release date: November

PC WINDOWS

HANDS-ON

The Lord of the Rings: War of the Ring

THE *OTHER* LORD OF THE RINGS video-game franchise (the one licensed from the books as opposed to EA's film-licensed games) continues this fall with Lord of the Rings: War of the Ring. This real-time strategy game from the developers of Battle Realms hopes to show WarCraft fans who really invented the Orc.

War of the Ring offers a light-side campaign following the Fellowship on their quest to destroy the One Ring and a dark-side quest chronicling Sauron's nefarious armies massing in Mordor. The light and dark sides, the game's two playable "races," do battle in familiar Middle Earth settings, including the fortified Helm's Deep; the Rohan capitol, Edoras; and the sinister pass of Cirith Ungol.

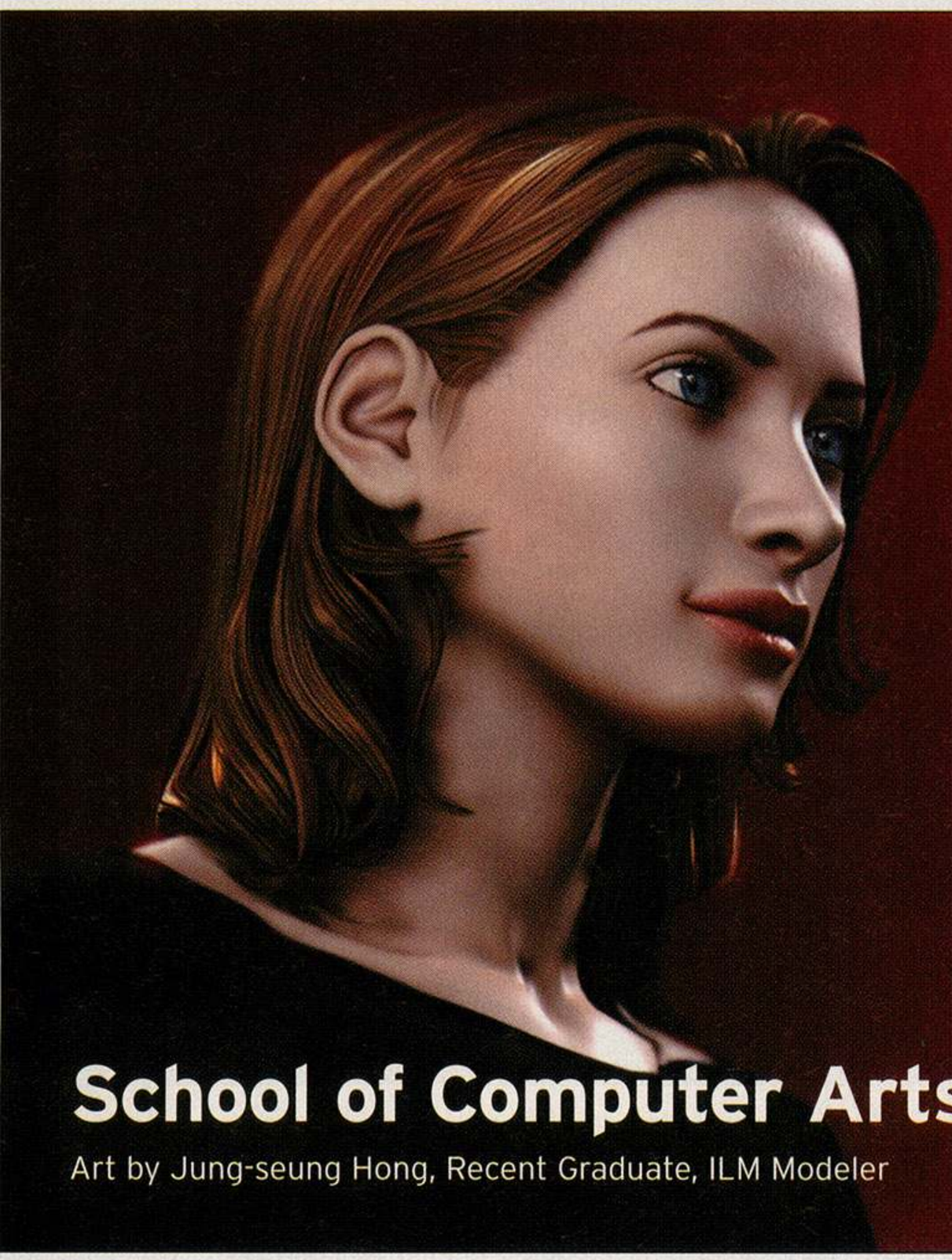
Our favorite characters are hero units in the war effort, serving up everything from healing spells to devastating summoned avatars like Balrog. There are several multiplayer modes and a level editor included, but the preview version of War of the Ring looked, felt, and played like a trimmed-down WarCraft III clone that offers fewer locations, races, and units. The game still has a ways to go, but War of the Ring has the potential to be the one RTS to rule them all.

BY JANGO FATT

- Developed by Liquid Entertainment
- Published by Vivendi Universal Games
- Target release date: November

PC WINDOWS

HANDS-ON



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Deus Ex: Invisible War

DEUS EX: INVISIBLE WAR is one of those games that just doesn't really come together until the end of its development. Up until very recently, the game has essentially been a tech demo showing off the insane things the folks at Ion Storm can do with lighting, physics, and creative texture mapping, but a recent look at a more advanced build of the game shows that Invisible War is turning out to be a Deus Ex game after all.

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The first level serves as a tutorial of sorts, getting you acquainted with both the world and the systems of the game, and the story quickly grants you a couple of biomods before sending you out into the wide world. Even compared to the slightly more finished (at least at press time) Xbox version, the PC build looked incredible since it ran at higher resolutions and had a much higher level of detail. Without a playable version, however, it was difficult to discern how the game's mouse-and-keyboard control scheme compared to that of the Xbox controller.

If you liked the original (and a lot of people did), Ion Storm thinks you'll find even more to like in the sequel. It's the kind of game you really need to play to judge.

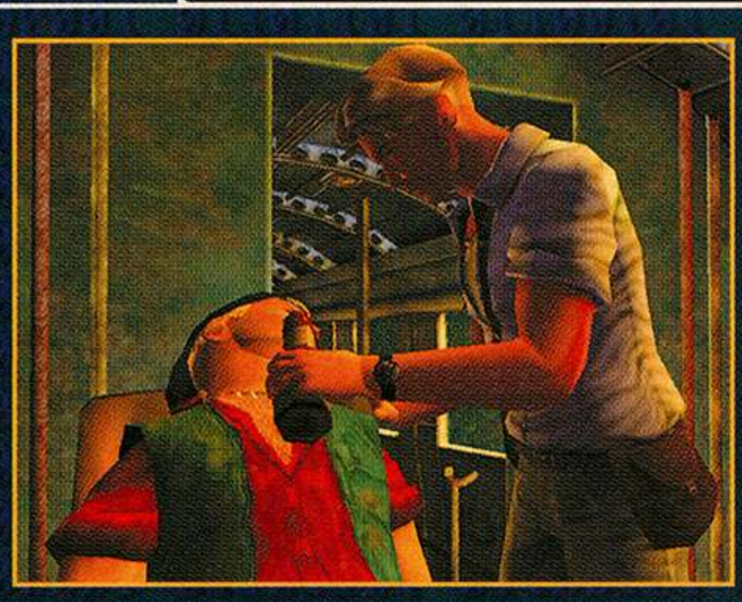
BY D-PAD DESTROYER

- Developed by Ion Storm
- Published by Eidos
- Target release date: December

PC WINDOWS

UPDATE

Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon

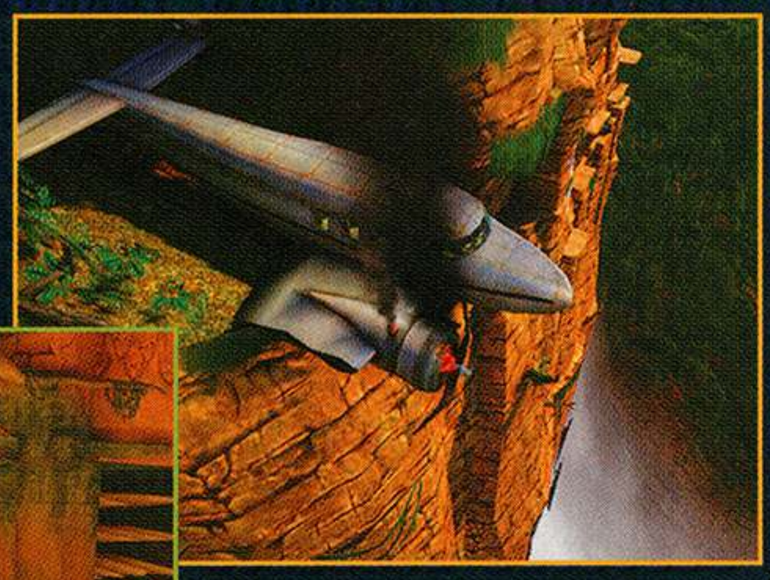


IN THE FOUR years since George and Nico's last death-defying romp (Broken Sword 2: The Smoking Mirror for the PlayStation), the graphical adventure genre has been pushed to the very edge of extinction by cancelled titles and shattered dreams. Thankfully, Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon is shaping up to be one heck of a resurrection.

Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon boasts a unique, stunningly simple interface and a gorgeous leap into 3D with an all-new graphics engine that maintains the style and flair of the best 2D graphical adventures. Surprisingly realistic facial animations choreographed to the characters' dialogue combine with a cinematic fixed-camera environment to make you feel like you're playing a mega-budget adventure film.

The epic exploits will lure your fearless heroes through an ancient sinister conspiracy winding through gothic castles in Prague, treacherous jungles in the Congo, and the gloomy, foggy back streets of Paris in a quest to discover the secrets of the Sleeping Dragon and (of course) to save the world.

There's still time for Revolution to put some finishing touches on this baby, but when the Sleeping Dragon awakens, the result may be every adventure fan's dream.



BY JANGO FATT

- Developed by Revolution Software
- Published by The Adventure Company
- Target release date: November

PC WINDOWS

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Max Payne 2: The Fall of Max Payne

BY THE TIME you read this, there's a good chance you'll be shoot-dodging and popping virtual painkillers like an expert, but for those of you who don't know, Max Payne is returning to the PS2 and Xbox. PC owners, however, get a two-month head start.

The original Max Payne was a gaming-noir gem, filled with charmingly over-the-top narration, a stylish comic-book-like story, and vein-exploding combat scenes. When the game hit the scene, people were saying, "This is the game people will be copying for the next couple of years," and they were right. You can't count the number of games that ripped off Payne's bullet-time effect on both hands. Go ahead, try it.

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Max Payne 2 sets out to tell a film noir love story with all the intensity and tragedy you'd expect. Of course, there will be tons and tons of violence, and this time the sensational bullet time will go alongside the ubiquitous Havok physics engine to create even more awesome combat sequences.

If these things come together, Max Payne 2: The Fall of Max Payne could be the title that unseats its own predecessor—something no other third-person action game has yet managed to do.

BY D-PAD DESTROYER

- Developed by Remedy
- Published by Rockstar Games
- Target release date: October

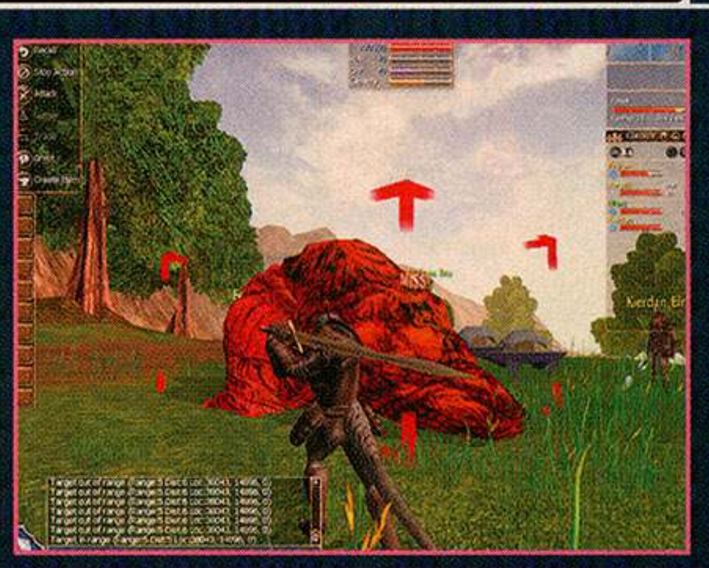
PC WINDOWS

FIRST LOOK

Horizons: Empire of Istaria

HORIZONS IS ALREADY shaping up to be a good entry into the MMORPG market, which is currently ruthlessly dominated by EverQuest and its expansions. Horizons (still in beta as of this writing) sets itself apart from its competitors by allowing players to play as dragons as well as the typical dwarves, humans, and other fantasy races, but the real difference is in the technology. Horizon's environments can be as many as 6 scale kilometers high, so Istaria's mountains can be higher than any peak on Earth, and Artifact's development technology enables it to make changes to the world without requiring massive patches. An extensive trade-skill system gives players the chance to forge their own tools, armor, weapons, and other gear, too. According to Artifact, about 40 percent of the beta testers are using the crafting options extensively, adding clout to what is usually a side hobby or afterthought in most other games in the genre.

With all that in mind, setting a game of this type apart from the MMORPG pack can be a huge obstacle. Time will tell whether Horizons: Empire of Istaria can make a dent in EverQuest's aging hide.



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BY DUNJIN MASTER

- Developed by Artifact Entertainment
- Published by Atari
- Target release date: November

PC WINDOWS

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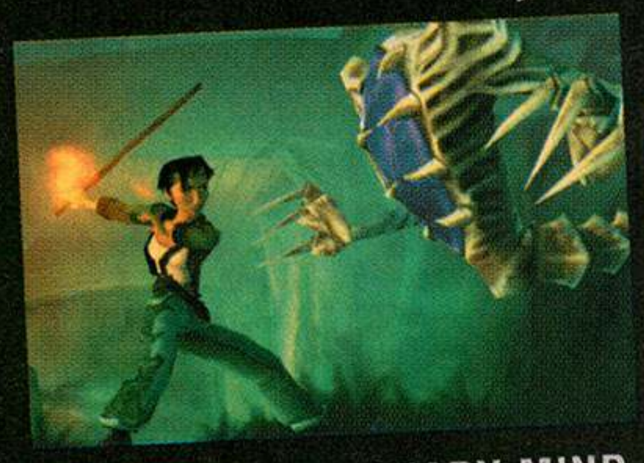

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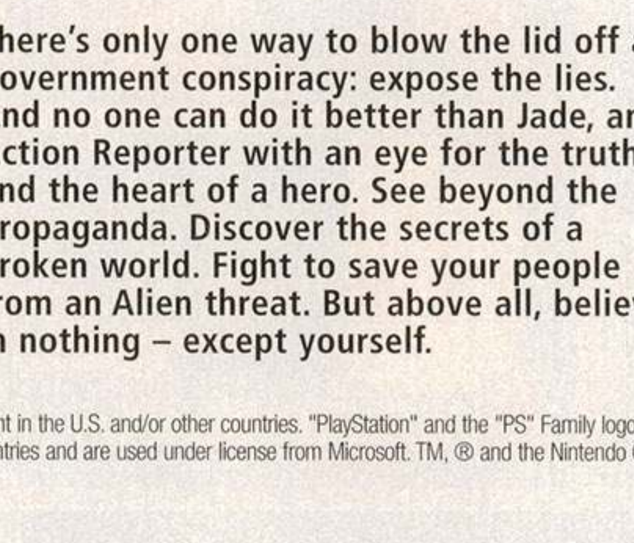

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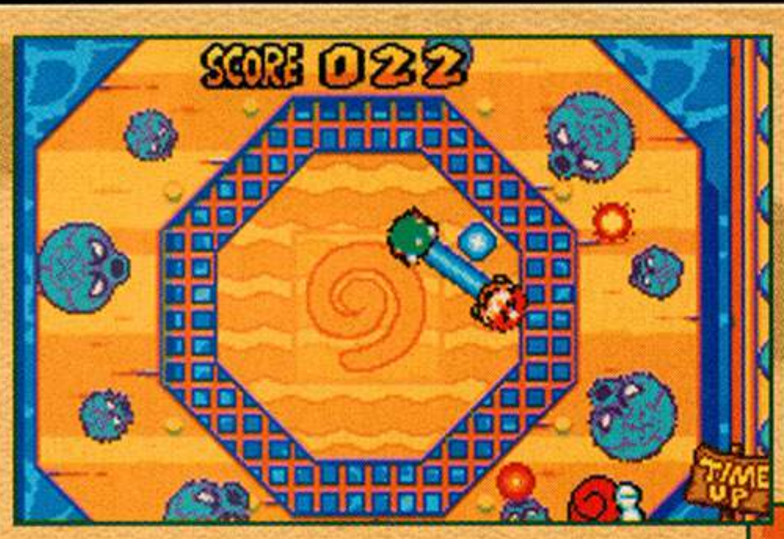
Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga



SING A SONG of Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga, the game of fraternal mutilation in the name of eradicating evil beans. In this all-new Game Boy Advance RPG (the "spiritual successor" to Paper Mario), Princess Peach has had her voice stolen and replaced by explosively unstable icons and symbols (no, really). Now it's up to Mario and his very reluctant brother to find the culprit and restore order to Peach's pretty little vocal cords.

Mario & Luigi seems to be setting itself up as the game to get if you dig the depth of role-playing games but hate the slow-moving battles that usually accompany them. The battles in the demo build were frenzied with well-timed button presses to attack and dodge being absolutely pivotal to success. Every single enemy has its own unique animation "hints" that give you a clue about who they're about to attack. Attacks featuring one brother "using" the other replace traditional magic and require a successful series of button presses similar to a fighting-game combo attack.

The adventure itself takes place in a strange, new kingdom that's one part Mario World and one part Hyrule (the overworld map looks like it was torn straight from Link's atlas), a pseudo-top-down exploration-heavy world with 40 hours worth of towns, dungeons, unique puzzles, and supremely whacked-out humor. First impressions might have led you to believe Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga was little more than a novelty act. First impressions, at least in this case, were quite deceiving.

BY STAR DINGO

- Developed by Alphadream
- Published by Nintendo
- Target release date: November

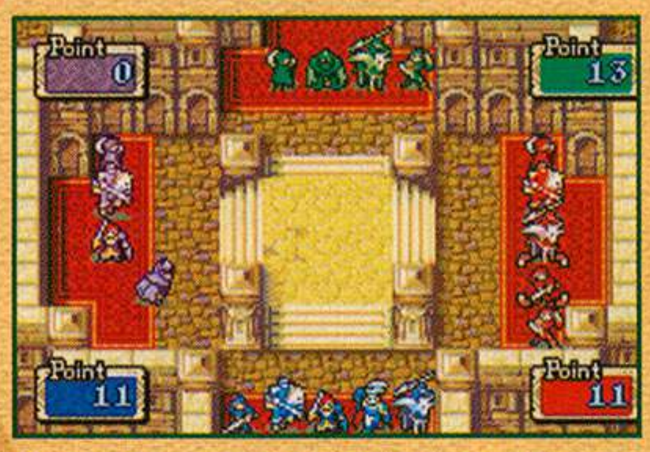
GAME BOY ADVANCE

HANDS-ON

Fire Emblem

JAPANESE GAMERS HAVE been playing Fire Emblem games since the dawn of the modern gaming era—over there, the series is essentially synonymous with tactical fantasy RPG gaming. Now, Fire Emblem is finally coming to America, filling up the Shining Force–styled fantasy niche that's been feeling pretty empty in recent years.

This Fire Emblem is technically a prequel to an earlier GBA game that was released only in Japan, but don't be worried that you'll be dropped into the middle of a convoluted story line; the game was specifically developed with the intent to branch out to an American audience. The gameplay in the preview version lies somewhere between the speedy, easily accessible Advance Wars and Square Enix's more complex, slow-moving Final Fantasy Tactics Advance.



As in Advance Wars, the battles take place on a top-down grid with turn-based battles that move along at a very fast pace. As in Final Fantasy Tactics, your units are able to level up, swap equipment, and participate in the much more involved story. Characters can equip themselves with three kinds of weapons—swords, spears, and axes—which work in a sort of rock-paper-scissors fashion, and they can switch between them as the situation demands. One important thing to note: If a character dies in battle, he or she is gone for good—a little quirk that either adds a layer of strategy or cranks up the annoying factor, depending on your perspective.

BY STAR DINGO

- Developed by Intelligent Systems
- Published by Nintendo
- Target release date: November

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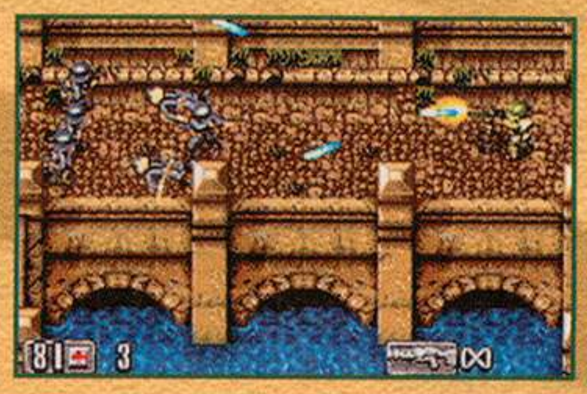
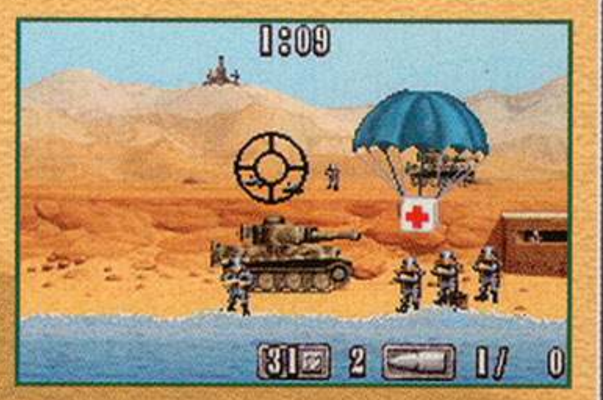
Medal of Honor: Infiltrator



HISTORY REPEATS ITSELF, which explains the barrage and success of WWII-based titles like Medal of Honor: Infiltrator. Infiltrator eschews the usual first-person shooter format of the MOH series in favor of a top-down view, hearkening back to Ikari Warriors, and combines that with levels of side-scrolling target shooting. You guide Corporal Jake Murphy through five missions against the Axis powers in three theaters across Europe and Africa. Murphy has access to tanks and weapons kits with contents ranging from frag grenades to bazookas.

The graphics are comic book–like but brilliant and colorful. Navigating Murphy around the map is simple, but he is always easily spotted in covert missions, so it's much more effective to go in with guns a-blazin'. Enemy A.I. in the preview build was a little wonky at times, but the bad guys were still lethal. While you won't get graphical realism, Infiltrator promises hours of challenge.



BY TWO-FISTED SHOE

- Developed by HotGen Studios
- Published by EA Games
- Target release date: November

GAME BOY ADVANCE

HANDS-ON

Shining Soul II

SHINING SOUL II marks the return of the Diablo-esque action/RPG to the Game Boy Advance. Both the gameplay and the cartoony graphical style are reminiscent of the original with a progressive story line based on single- or multiplayer questing.

There are now eight characters to choose from instead of just four: the ninja, light and dark wizards, an archer, two warriors, a priestess, and a brawler. The sequel features many more items and weapons to pick up this time around, and the levels are larger, but in the preview build, they still seemed to get repetitive; you complete various floors of the same thing before meeting the boss, which then unlocks the next area of the map. Entering the game's items menu or switching between weapons still doesn't pause the action, so you're vulnerable to attacks even if you can't see what's happening. Shining Soul II improves on the original, but you still may wonder if you're playing the first.

BY TWO-FISTED SHOE

- Developed by Sega
- Published by Atlus
- Target release date: December

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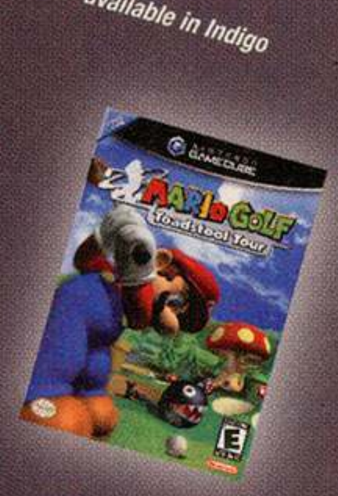

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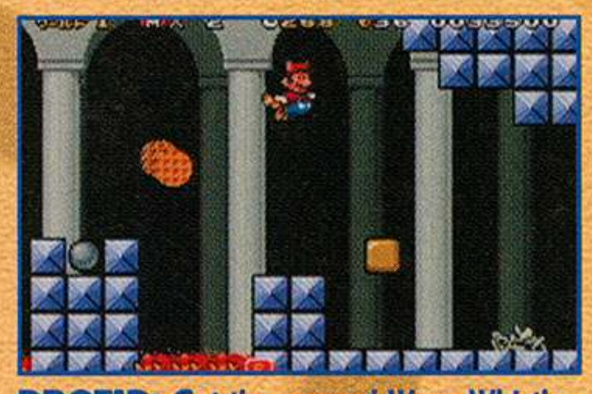
SUPER MARIO ADVANCE 4: SUPER MARIO BROS. 3

IF SUPER MARIO BROS. 3 was your favorite Mario game, then, dude, you're like seriously hardcore. Even back in the day, it was a skill3d gamerz game; today, it still seems ingeniously crafted to hone your hand-eye coordination and pattern recognition skills to cyborg-level. Heck, it's even a chore to *cheat* in this game. Why else would they have chosen it for the end tournament in *The Wizard*?



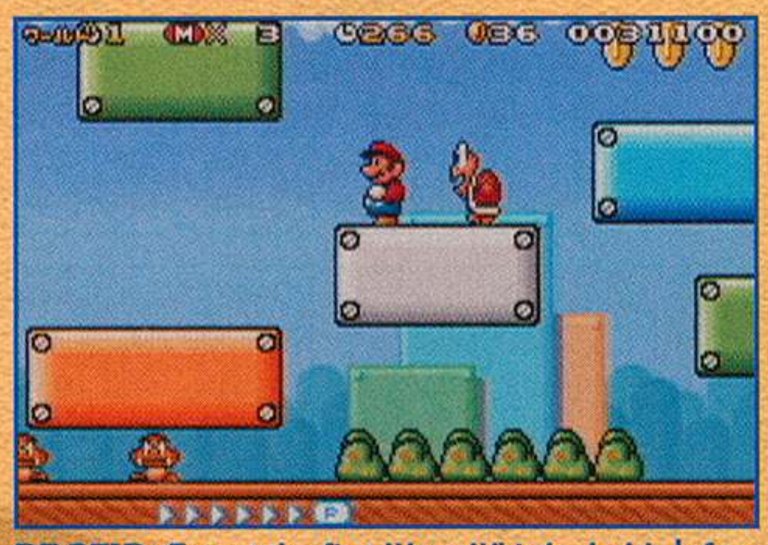
PROTIP: Get the second Warp Whistle by running and flying above the screen as Raccoon Mario in the World 1 fortress. Press ↑ when you're out of sight.

TANOOKI TALE

In case the Mario lore center in your brain is scrambled, here's a quick refresher: Super Mario Bros. 3 is the birthplace of Raccoon Mario and the Tanooki Suit; it introduced the "overworld map" concept to Mario games; and it's the game where Bowser's kids battle you with magic wands on airships at the end of every world. There are too many levels to count (and even more now, plus additional weirdness from other Mario games, if you have an e-Reader and special e-Cards), and really tough-to-find secrets are hidden behind rocks, dunes, and platforms.

The presentation is ripped from the Super NES remake in Super Mario Bros. All-Stars rather than the 8-bit NES original, so the graphics and sound are pretty comparable to latter-day SNES Mario titles. Sure, swimming is slow and tough, but it's by design rather than by way of poor programming—rest assured, Mario's jump rate, B-button acceleration, and coefficient of 'coon flight have been endlessly, carefully tweaked. It's Mario, for heaven's sake.

EDITORS' GAMEPRO CHOICE



PROTIP: To get the first Warp Whistle, hold ↓ for about five seconds while standing on this white block at the end of World 1-3.

PROTIP: Get the third Warp Whistle by using a Hammer in this corner of the World 2 map, then defeating the Fire Bros.

PLUMBER'S ANACHRONISM

Admittedly, Super Mario Bros. 3 seems like a weird step back from Super Mario World and Yoshi's Island, but that doesn't make it any less of a classic—it's a test of your true gaming mettle, a must for the Mario completist, and validation for your sense of nostalgia. G

Note: This review is based on the boxed Japanese version of Super Mario Advance 4: Super Mario Bros. 3. Nothing will be changed in the U.S. version except language.

BY STAR DINGO

- Developed and published by Nintendo
- $29.99
- Available now
- Action/platform
- 4 players

EVERYONE	GRAPHICS	SOUND	CONTROL	FUN FACTOR
E	4.0	4.0	5.0	4.5

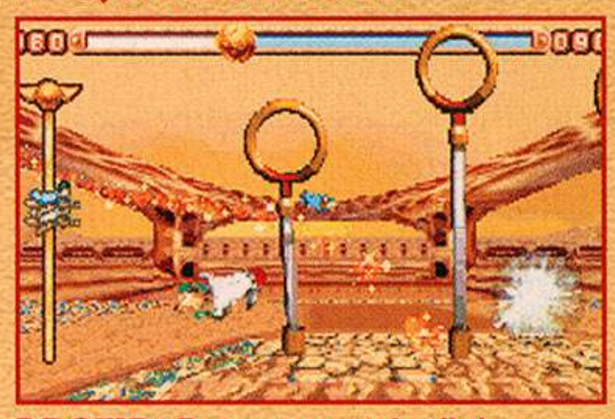
Spyro: Attack Of the Rhynocs

IN THIS GBA adventure, Spyro must stop the evil Rhynocs by collecting all the "Hearts of the Land" across 14 expansive levels. Spyro fans will note many similarities to the previous GBA title, Season of Flame, especially in the graphics department, where the stylish 2D characters and cheerful pseudo-3D environments boast crisp detail. As for the audio, the cutesy music and effects are effective, if a bit tinny.

Compared to previous GBA Spyro games, the biggest difference is the addition of new collectable abilities (including teleportation and lightning blasts) and magic items, which players can use to uncover hidden levels and mini-games. This RPG-lite twist ultimately becomes the game's best feature, easily outshining the repetitive platform-hopping segments. And with a GBA link cable, the head-to-head Byrd Rescue mode is a blast. Tight, responsive controls seal the deal, making Attack of the Rhynocs the most enjoyable GBA Spyro title to date. Older gamers should stick with Metroid Fusion, but younger players will love this magic dragon. G

PROTIP: Spyro's charge ability (tap R) is useful for smashing fireproof vases and frozen enemies. Holding R makes Spyro sprint, useful in race mini-games.

PROTIP: To glide, tap and hold A. To double jump, tap A while gliding. Use Spyro's shadow to judge distances.



BY VICIOUS SID

- Developed by Digital Eclipse Software
- Published by Vivendi Universal Games
- $29.99
- Available now
- Action/adventure
- 2 players

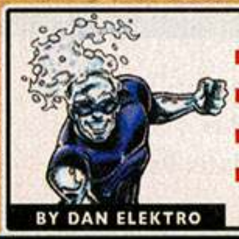
EVERYONE	GRAPHICS	SOUND	CONTROL	FUN FACTOR
E	4.0	4.0	4.5	4.0

Harry Potter: Quidditch World Cup

HARRY'S SPORTY EXPLOITS don't hold up too well on the small screen. The graphics look attractive enough and feature some fancy sprite-scaling effects (including the Mode 7–style Seeker mode), but during normal play, the players can get very small. Calling in Bludgers and Beaters as a graphical overlay feels distracting, the console version's interesting combo system is gone, and it's hard to select your goal while flying. The heroic music sounds far too scratchy to be effective; same goes for the sound effects. You can connect to the GameCube version to trade Quidditch cards and play cooperatively; while the handheld player does get to grab the Snitch, they also have to play a Pong knockoff until the 'Cube player releases it. Unfortunately, while it's fun for a rent just to unlock the GameCube goodies, it's not really compelling. A better portable Potter experience would be a paperback book. G

PROTIP: Be sure to grab all the energy balls you can while pursuing the Snitch—you'll never catch it without the extra boost.

PROTIP: Intercepting passes is fairly easy for being so effective. Set yourself up to read the lanes and swoop in on cue.



BY DAN ELEKTRO

- Developed by EA UK
- Published by EA Games
- $29.99
- Available now
- Action/sports
- 2 players

EVERYONE	GRAPHICS	SOUND	CONTROL	FUN FACTOR
E	3.5	2.0	3.5	2.5

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Cartoon Violence

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Double Dragon Advance

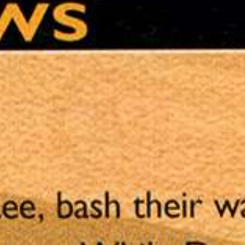
RETRO GAMERS ARE in for a treat as the Double Dragons, Jimmy and Billy Lee, bash their way onto the Game Boy Advance with the help of their indefatigable Sou-Setsu-Ken martial arts. While Double Dragon Advance sticks closely to the arcade and NES originals, Jimmy and Billy have picked up a few new tricks to help them rescue Marian from Willie's evil clutches.

The post-apocalyptic New York setting is now more dangerous than ever. Larger groups of enemies appear onscreen, so the Dragons require more potent attacks and weapons. Sticks and nunchaku go a long way toward evening the playing field, but nothing says, "Give me my girlfriend back!" quite like a knee to the face. The hard-brawling fun is also increased by the "hit 'em when they're down" attacks, which enable you to straddle a downed baddie and pummel his face or just stomp on his torso.

PROTIP: If you're surrounded by enemies, use a rush attack or head-butt to clear some space.

PROTIP: In the final battle, get Willie to shoot his own henchmen.

Graphically, the character animation is much improved. Cut-scenes resembling comic-book panels have been inserted between levels and offer more detailed portrayals of vanquished enemies (complete with silly dialogue). The authentic 8-bit musical score is a retro treat and may induce nostalgia and giddiness. The fun factor suffers only because of minor problems with the controls and collision detection. Nothing hurts more than falling off a ledge you were sure you were standing on or being hit by someone you thought was out of range. Still, Double Dragon Advance is better suited for the Game Boy Advance format than most of the muddy faux-3D titles out there.



BY DJ DINOBOT

- Developed and published by Atlus
- $29.99
- Available now
- Action/fighting
- 2 players

ESRB: TEEN

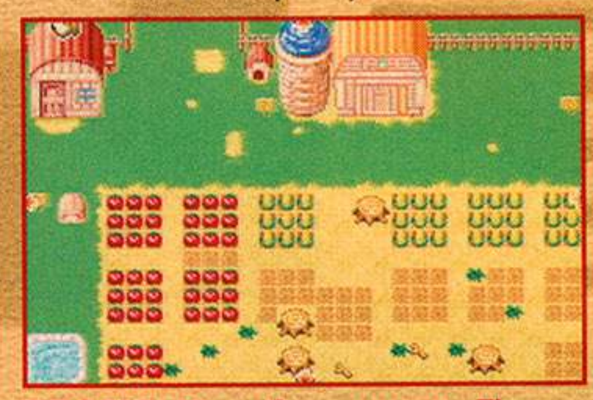
GRAPHICS	SOUND	CONTROL	FUN FACTOR
4.0	4.0	3.0	3.5

Harvest Moon: Friends of Mineral Town

UPGRADE YOUR HOE. Plant cash crops. Impregnate sheep. No, it's not some bizarre permutation of Grand Theft Auto. Behold the charming innocence of Harvest Moon: Friends of Mineral Town, whose lineage lies closer to Animal Crossing than GTA. As the heir to a ragged patch of farmland in Mineral Town, it's up to you to work hard and bring prosperity back to the ranch you loved as a child.

PROTIP: If you turn blue from over-exhaustion, head straight to the spa to rejuvenate.

Running the farm is only half the fun. Mineral Town's residents add invaluable flavor to what would otherwise be an unending nightmare of daily chores. Activities like Beach Day and the Chicken Festival provide recreational and social opportunities, as well as a chance to show off your animal husbandry skills. If you've lived in the city your whole life and don't know a dang thing about cows, don't fret none: the controls are easier than 'possum pie. While the game features mini-challenges to test your reflexes, the majority of gameplay relies on slow-paced, strategic resource management and single presses of the A or B button.



PROTIP: Diversify your crops. The Mineral Town Library is full of good advice for you.

Cutesy character art and a bucolic soundtrack create a tranquil ambiance for exploring Mineral Town. Most of the environments are beautifully detailed, but there are places where bland texture fills predominate the landscape. When Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life ships for the GameCube in January, you'll be able to link the two games together and "visit" across consoles. In this M-rated world, it's refreshing to find an enjoyable game that doesn't pander to the banal titillation of aggression and ultra-violence. Give peace a chance!

BY DJ DINOBOT

- Developed and published by Natsume
- $29.99
- Available now
- RPG/ simulation
- 1 player

ESRB: EVERYONE

GRAPHICS	SOUND	CONTROL	FUN FACTOR
4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0

SSX 3

EA'S VENERABLE SNOWBOARDING franchise finally returns in SSX 3, a slick, sleek snowfest that proves a bit too slippery to take the gold. SSX 3 features 10 selectable characters for its main career mode, where you'll compete to earn improved stats and souped-up gear. The focus is still on tricks with new combos and a three-tiered Uber trick system to put the flow in your snow, but instead of multiple locations, all 12 tracks are located on one mountain featuring super-pipes, race tracks, and ramp-frenzied slopes. Unfortunately, that means less eye candy.

PROTIP: If you hop onto rails with simple tricks, you can extend your combo one extra notch.

PROTIP: Punch out your opponents at every opportunity since it instantly fills your boost bar.

The fluid, mostly 3D visuals convey relentless speed and stomach-churning heights as your polygonal snowboarders streak across gorgeous vistas. The graphics do hit a couple of icy patches, though: Depth is hard to judge, and sometimes your character glitches in the half-pipe. That occasional hiccup also affects control precision, which is already off-balance from inconsistent collision detection and some course-edge blunders that can blind or strand your boarder. These are minor problems compared to the frustration of the A.I.'s catch-up programming, which makes your opponents inexplicably faster when you're ahead in the last legs. The audio is also a mixed bag: The seven original songs win points for novelty but sound garbled and quickly become repetitive. The sound effects, which are more akin to gunfire than a board cutting through snow, are a whiteout, too.

SSX 3's role-playing elements, variety of challenges, and speedy, kinetic thrills make it worth a ride, but its shortcomings might make you pass up the ski lift after just a couple of trips.

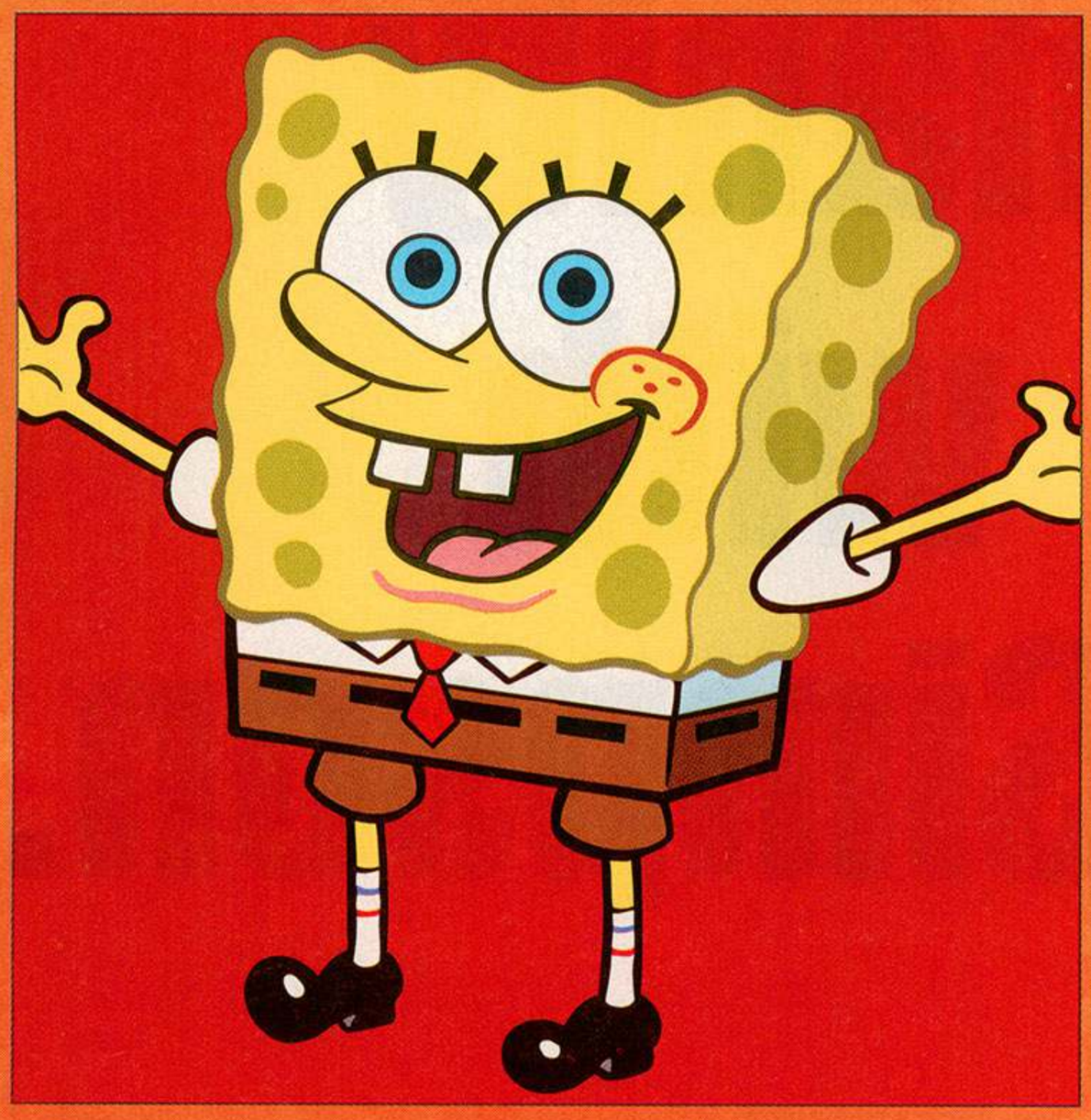
BY FLYIN' RYAN

- Developed by EA Canada
- Published by EA Sports Big
- $29.99
- Available November
- Snowboarding
- 2 players

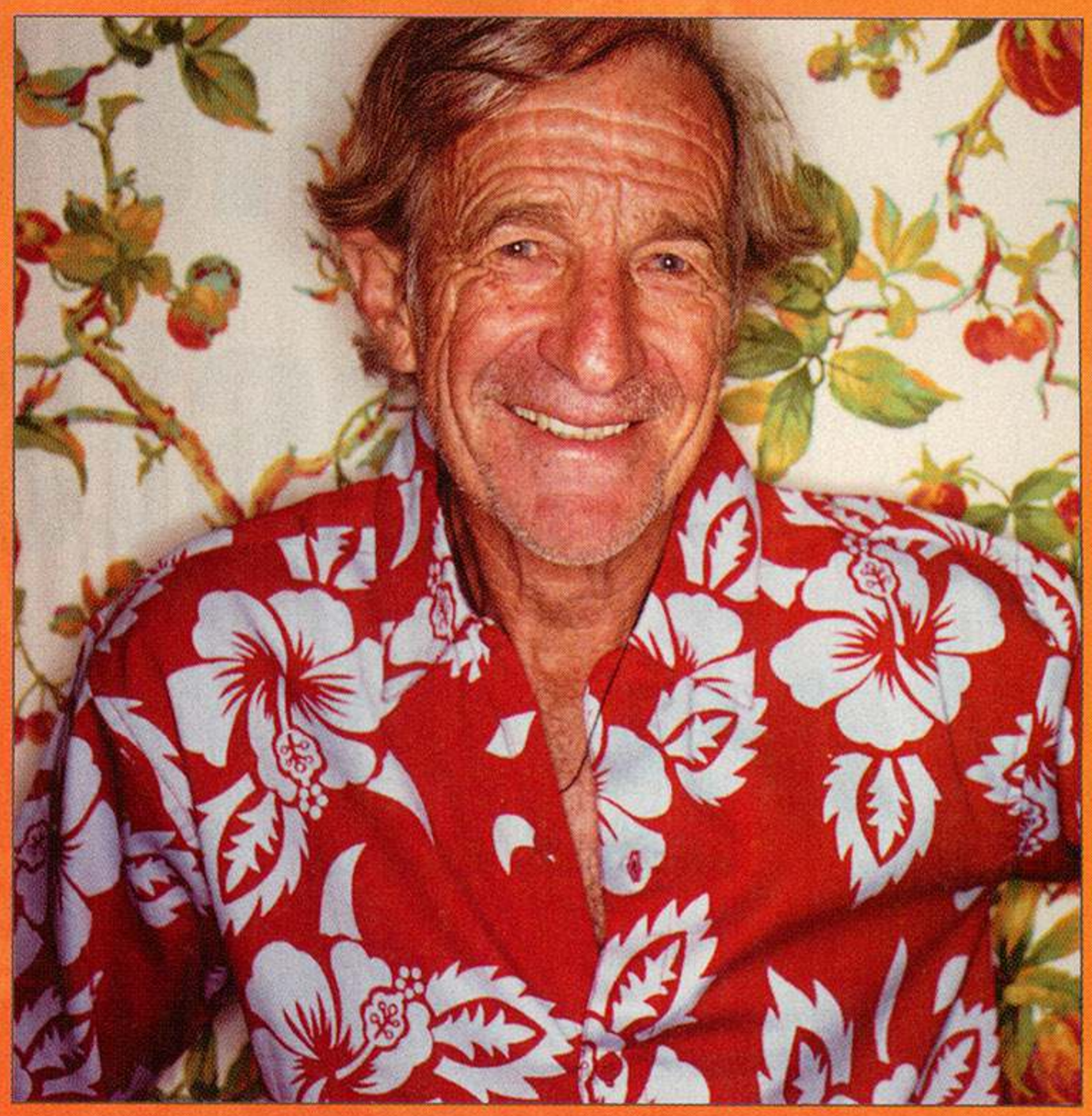
ESRB: EVERYONE

GRAPHICS	SOUND	CONTROL	FUN FACTOR
4.0	2.5	3.5	3.5

WHO MAKES A BETTER HERO?
SPONGEBOB OR A GUY NAMED BOB?



"I have square pants!"



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Mild Cartoon Violence

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SEASON MODE, CHECK.

LEGENDS, CHECK.

ELIMINATION CHAMBER, CHECK.

BRA & PANTY MATCH, HELL YEAH.

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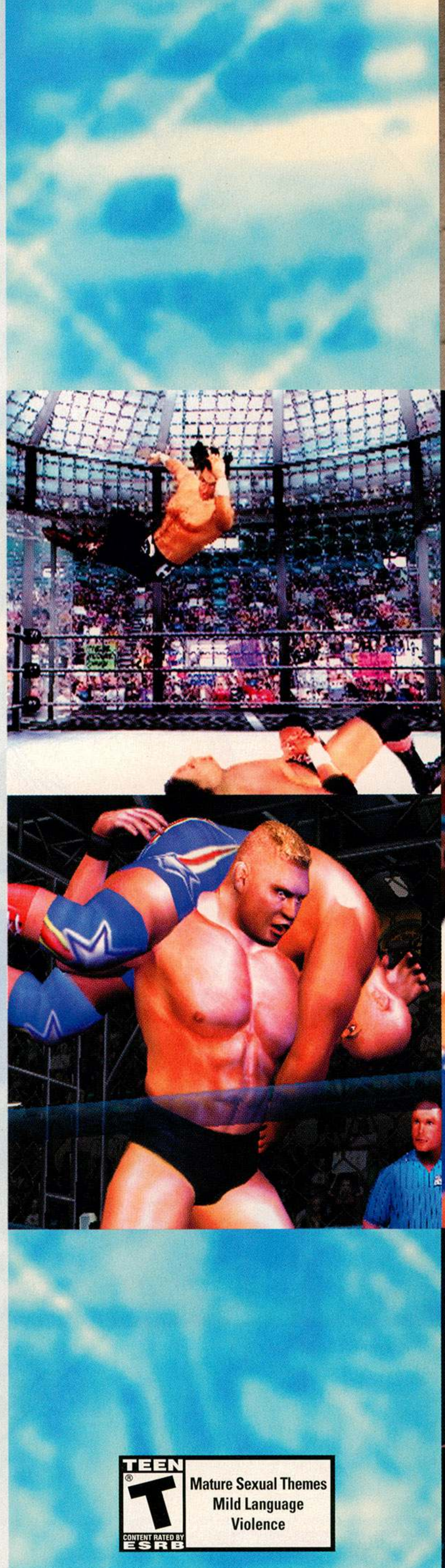

PlayStation®2

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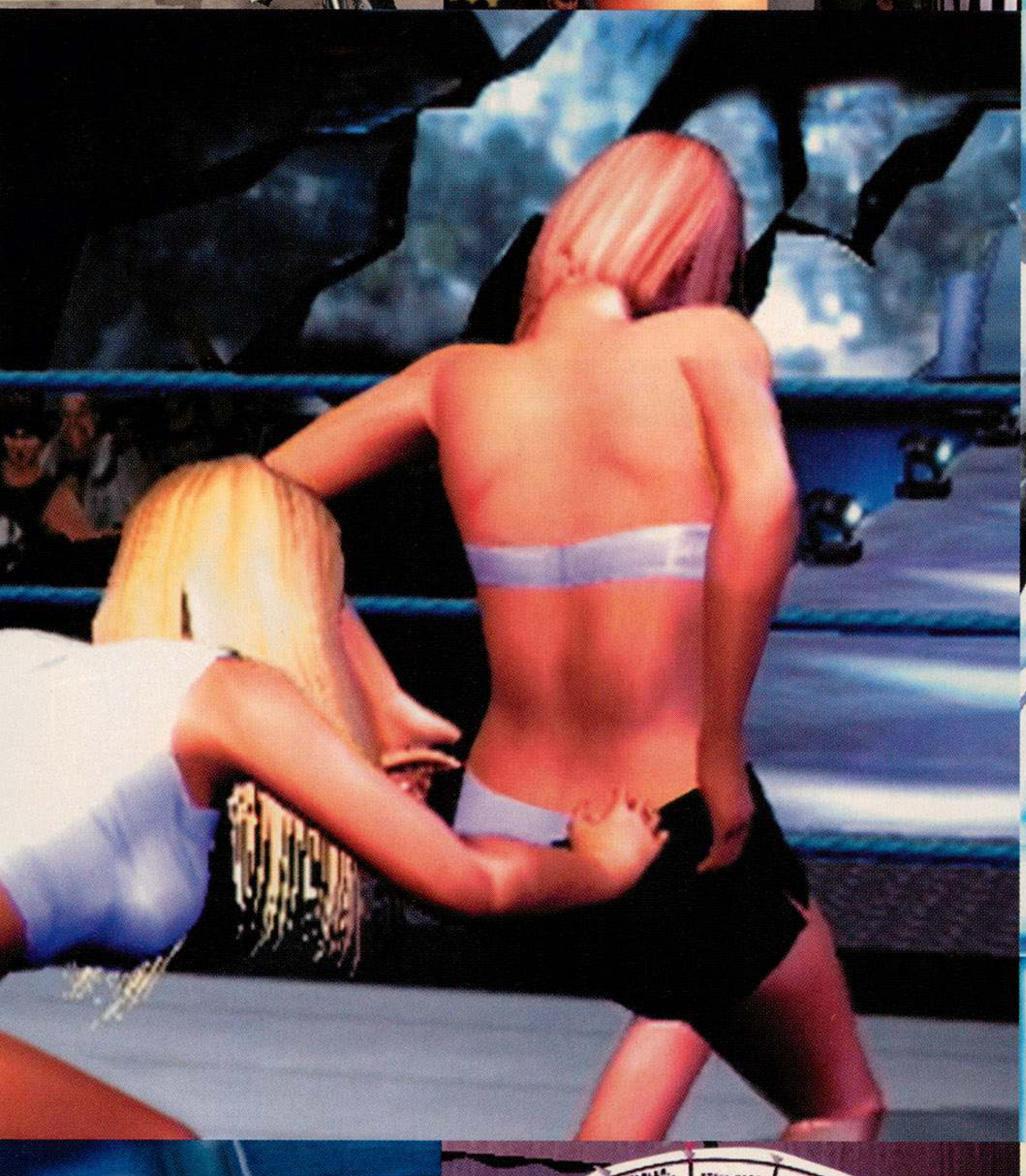

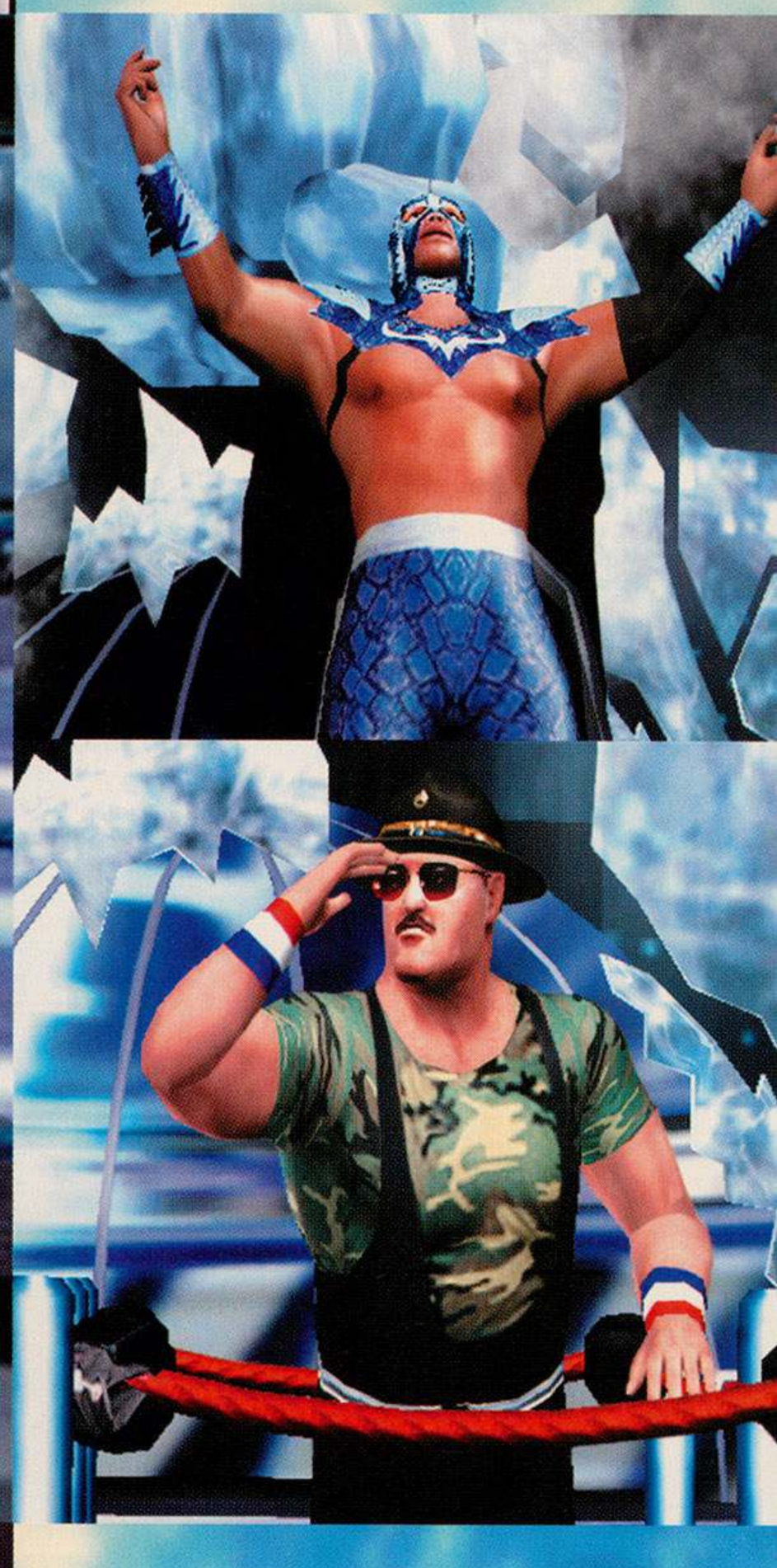

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Gran Turismo 4

Gran Designs

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In the world of video-game auto racing, the Gran Turismo franchise is arguably chasing itself. There are more copies of Gran Turismo 1, 2, and 3 A-spec in the world than there are cars by certain American automakers. But that hasn't deterred Polyphony Digital from pushing the envelope ever further…and faster.

Gran Turismo 4 represents the first major overhaul of the GT game engine. But the added horsepower isn't being used to blow the doors off previous versions so much as to polish them to some Ray-Ban–singeing sheen. The physics engine, for example, is just plain scary. Developers are tuning the "engines" in the GT4 cars to run at the precise miles per second rates of the actual cars running on the actual tracks. Don't worry, the tech boys at Polyphony have been out there—stopwatches, tape measures, and all! They're making no bones about claiming that Gran Turismo 4 is suitable as an entry-level training tool for those who desire to get into serious motorsports driving.

Postcard or screen shot? Gran Turismo 4 seeks to promote the idea that auto racing is more than a sport, it's a lifestyle.

Custom Styling

Of course, this wouldn't be Gran Turismo if it didn't look pretty, too. There are more than 500 cars available in the game, each composed of 4000 polygons. You can even see the disc brakes behind the wheels. In addition to the cutting-edge sports cars and rally roadsters, you get a serious stable of American muscle cars, and vintage vehicles will be available, too.

If the preview version is any indication, you'll be able to run your wheels across some of the most gorgeous landscapes you've ever seen. Polyphony has devoted some of the newly developed graphics muscle to refining the skylines and distance-scaling to paint postcard-perfect reproductions of such familiar places as the Grand Canyon and New York City on 50 courses with possibly some favorite courses from Gran Turismo 2 and 3 A-spec.

The Road Less Traveled

Gran Turismo 4 will also be online-capable for the PS2—the details of which Polyphony is keeping super secret for now. But you can expect head-to-head racing with up to six drivers per race, chat functionality, and downloadable extras, too. When it comes to driving games, Gran Turismo 4 definitely promises to turn some heads when it hits the road.

BY BROTHER BUZZ

- Developed by Polyphony Digital
- Published by Sony
- Target release date: Summer 2004

PlayStation 2

UPDATE

who are you?

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Counter-Strike

GO, GO, GO!

If you've played any online multiplayer PC games in the past two years, chances are you've come into contact with the phenomenon known as Counter-Strike. The insanely popular team-based military shooter finally arrives on a console this year—fittingly, the lucky console in question is the online-ready Xbox. Counter-Strike's team aspect helped elevate it above other deathmatch-style shooters on the PC, and Microsoft is banking on that same magic to draw people to its Xbox Live online service.

The ubiquitous online PC shoot-em-up, Counter-Strike, comes to the Xbox.

Follow me

Counter-Strike's simple premise has you joining a terrorist or counter-terrorist team and attempting to carry out your objective. Some missions require terrorists to guard hostages and counterterrorists to go in and rescue them, while other scenarios involve the former attempting to plant a bomb and the latter trying to prevent or defuse it. Working in concert with team members is absolutely crucial to success, so voice support via Xbox Live is a welcome boon. Other Xbox-exclusive features include graphically revamped characters, two new teams, 20 character skin variants, and seven new maps—along with 13 original ones that have received visual upgrades. Cool technical tweaks include 480p display support for a sharper picture and 5.1 Dolby Digital sound support.

Perhaps the coolest feature is the ability to use your Xbox as a customizable, dedicated server to host multiplayer games. Even if you don't choose to go that route, your friends can notify you of a current online match with the Xbox Live Aware feature.

enemies spotted

A current preview version exhibited marked control improvements over *GamePro*'s previous hands-on time during the E³ show this past May. The button layout was identical to that of Halo, and the aiming was just as precise. The voice support worked great through a LAN-based system link, but play over the Xbox Live service was not yet functioning. Still, you can expect frenetic shootouts when Counter-Strike locks and loads this November.

GET MORE www.gamepro.com ONLINE

BY KILOWATT

- Developed by Valve
- Published by Microsoft
- Target release date: November

XBOX

HANDS-ON

KONAMI

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PC CD ROM

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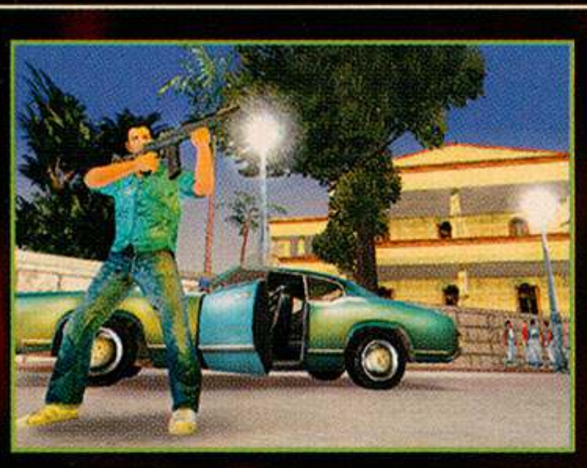
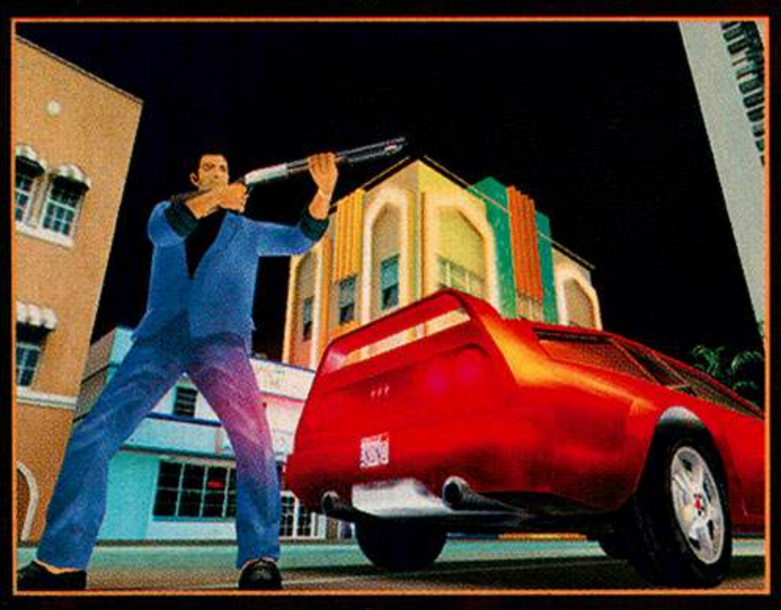
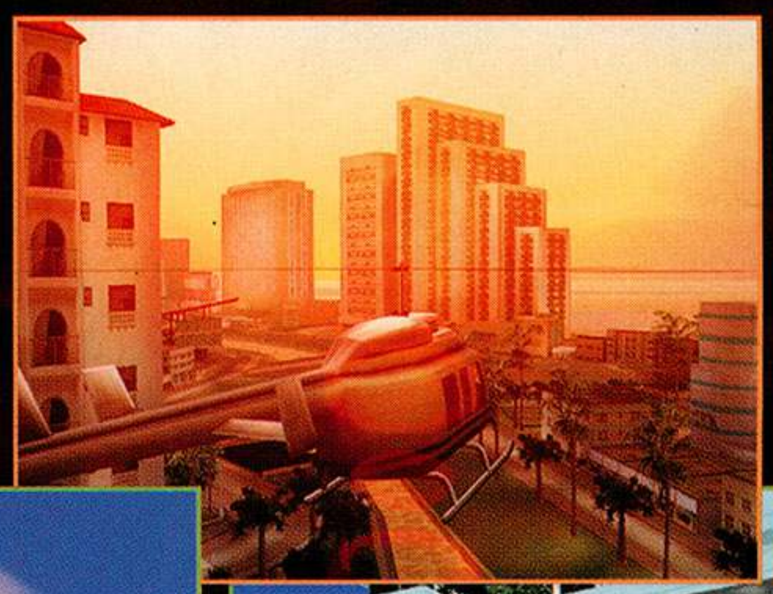
Grand Theft Auto: Vice City

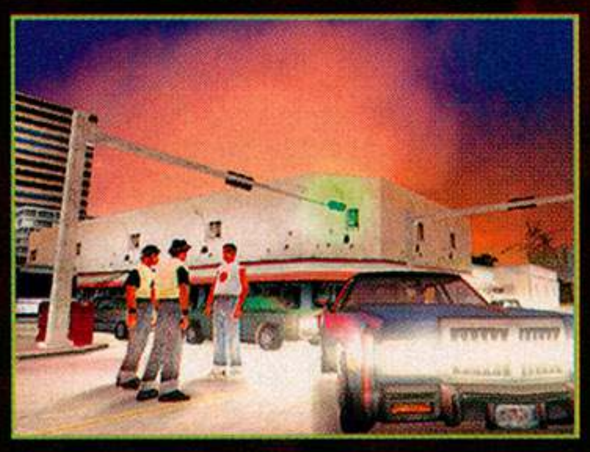


IT'S BEEN A long time, but Rockstar's crime-ridden specialty is finally served on the Xbox. Vice City, the latest installment in the Grand Theft Auto series, is set in 1980s-era Florida, where everyone is dressed in pastels and the crime world is about to wreak havoc in the bustling streets. As Tommy Vercetti, it's your job to take over Vice City using your highly recognized gangster reputation.

The gameplay has remained completely intact from the PlayStation 2 version; even the button setup remains the same, though it can be changed to your own preference. In a demo of the game, Vice City did have one recognizable change. The game's visuals have been greatly improved—there's much more detail not only in the cut-scenes (you can now see individual fingers), but also in the entire city. The game as a whole just looks much more sharper. You can read the signage clearly, plus you can play on HDTV and in widescreen format. Bundled together with GTA III but priced as a single game, Vice City will certainly make you post bail this November.







BY FOUR-EYED DRAGON

- Developed by Rockstar Vienna
- Published by Rockstar Games
- Target release date: November

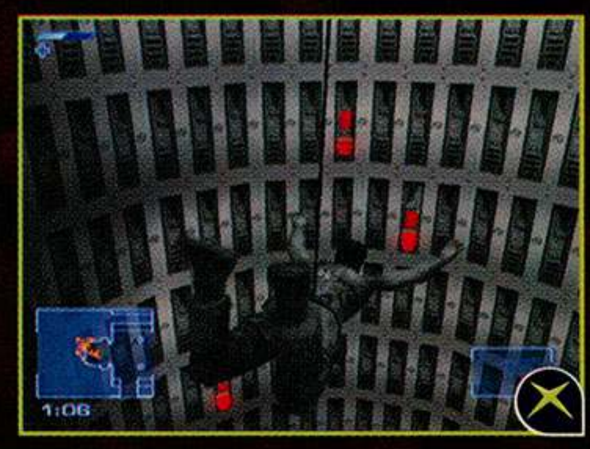
XBOX

HANDS-ON

Mission Impossible: Operation Surma

YOU CAN'T KEEP a good franchise down. Mission Impossible: Operation Surma is the latest installment in the Mission Impossible series, which hasn't been seen nor heard of since the N64 days. Ethan Hunt reprises his role as a covert intelligence agent who must hang, sneak, and shoot his way through a bevy of hostile secure locations in this original adventure.

Operation Surma is very reminiscent of Ubi Soft's Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell. The mission goals, gameplay, and even Ethan's sneaking suit look awfully similar. Ethan has all the same moves; a bigger bag of tricks, including cameras, zip lines, lasers, and computer decryptors; and a team of NPCs to help him on his way. The gameplay is a mixture of stealth, action, and complex puzzles that requires a lot of patience, luck, and skill. Many of the puzzles and cut-scenes are heavily inspired by the movies. The preview build of Operation Surma had some drawbacks, such as a cumbersome controller configuration, obscure objective description cut-scenes, and an A.I. that's too smart—hopefully, these will be addressed. With a little tinkering here and there, Mission Impossible: Operation Surma might easily stand up to current action/stealth games.



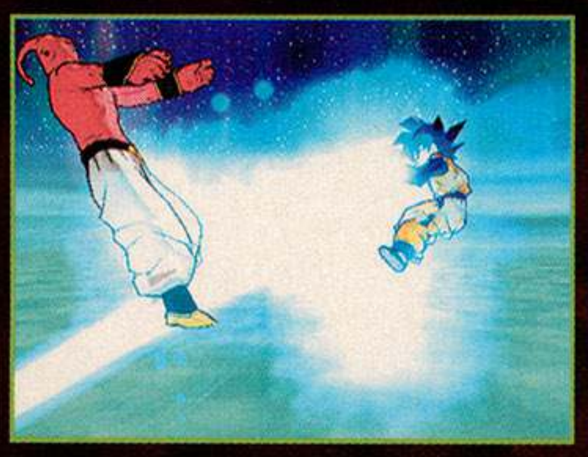
BY RICE BURNER

- Developed by Paradigm
- Published by Atari
- Target release date: December

PLAYSTATION 2 XBOX

HANDS-ON

Dragon Ball Z: Budokai 2



AFTER RELEASING what turned out to be (much to everyone's surprise) an actually-pretty-good Dragon Ball Z fighting game, Atari returns with another go at the Saiyan saga. The preview build of Dragon Ball Z: Budokai 2 for the PlayStation 2 shows off what a difference a few tweaks can make: Without a doubt, the new cel-shaded graphics bring the look much more closely in line with the show (and makes you wonder why they didn't take that route in the first place). The new Dragon mode acts as a series of board games, where you choose a couple fighters and take turns trying to beat your enemies to the hidden Dragon Ball on the map.

If you played the original, the fighting system should be familiar. There's more variety in the move sets and still tons of skill customization options, but it's all still a bit on the simple side. The focus is on quick, close-quarters button-tapping combos and counters rather than flashy posing, special effects, and weird controller motions; the match pauses for a second before enemies launch big attacks, giving you a nice chunk of time to think and dodge.

No, Dragon Ball Z: Budokai 2 probably won't turn out to be a Soul Calibur II–caliber fighting phenomenon…but give it a couple more iterations, and it might take Super Saiyan form.

BY EVIL STAR DINGO

- Developed by Dimps
- Published by Atari
- Target release date: December

PLAYSTATION 2

HANDS-ON

The Sims: Bustin' Out

THE SIMS HAVE been around the block a few times—and after seven PC expansion packs (and a sequel coming), an "experimental" online foray, and a console incarnation (not counting this one), you'd think they'd be out of stuff to do. *Au contraire!* In The Sims: Bustin' Out, your digital life-drones get to explore the world like never before as they've been suddenly granted the freedom to hop on a scooter or into a car to visit all sorts of locations—including the gym, the Love Shack, a haunted house, a nightclub, a military base, and a friend's trailer in the desert.

Along with this independence comes a sort of "quest" for your Sim as you use your newfound freedom and traditional Sim-ish powers of social consumerism to quash the plans of an evil rich dude named Malcolm Landgrabb, an unfortunate villain whose schemes are laid bare in his surname. The biggest problem in the PlayStation 2 alpha build was the intrusive loading—traveling from place to place took an annoyingly long time, and split-second instances of disc access were frequent—but that's something that could easily wind up eradicated by the time the game is released. Now all that's left is for Maxis to craft a version of the Sims that lets you interact with your job. Some of us are really curious to see what it's like to spend eight hours a day as a mad scientist or a mall clown.

BY STAR DINGO

- Developed by Maxis
- Published by EA Games
- Target release date: December

PLAYSTATION 2

HANDS-ON

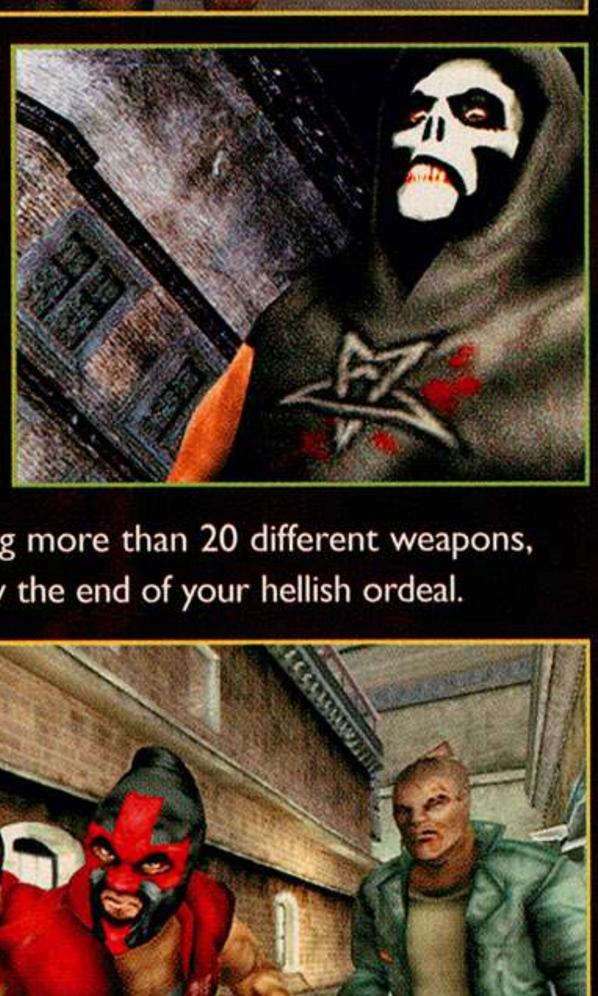
Manhunt

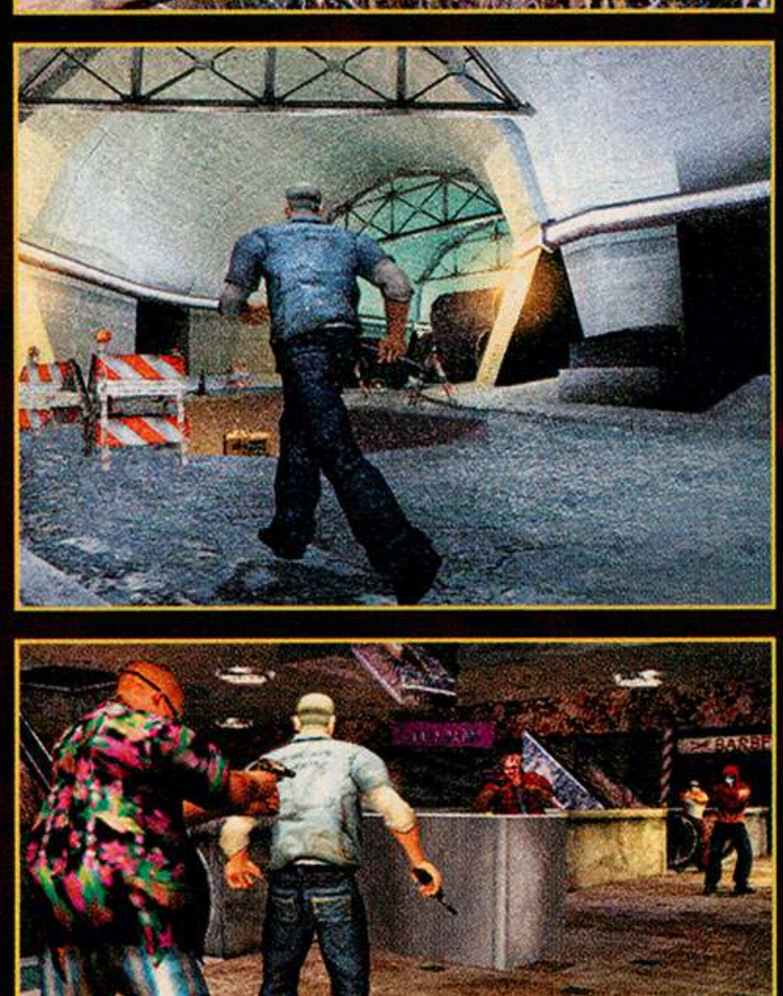
It's hunt or be hunted in Rockstar's next mature adventure.

Running Man

James Earl Cash thought his life was at an end. As a death row inmate, he was to be put to death by lethal injection; his torment would be over. But in a little twist of fate, James was saved. Saved, though, by a mysterious man known only as The Director, who, among other fetishes, enjoys watching snuff films. Now The Director wants to make his own degenerate film with James as the star.

Borrowing disturbing aspects from movies like *8mm*, *Jacob's Ladder*, and *The Running Man*, Rockstar's next mature-themed game promises to extract more than just a late-night yelp from you. In the game, you play as James, an unwitting victim of someone else's perverted fantasy. Apparently, The Director has hired ruthless gangs to hunt you down in a deserted city. It's you against everyone else, and your only help comes from the man who saved you. The Director suggests ways to kill off your hunters—always in a gruesome fashion—while he films every step you take. The better the kill, the better the rating you get.





A-Hunting We Will Go

An early preview build of Manhunt already displayed the unpalatable premise with depraved results. The game is based primarily on stealth as you use shadowy corners (safe zones) to hide and stake out your next unsuspecting victim. When an enemy walks past you, you must sneak up behind him and, when in range, perform a hideous and bloody attack for the camera using objects like glass shards, plastic bags, machetes, and bats. With multiple ways of decapitating your victims using more than 20 different weapons, you can expect the camera lens to be fully stained with blood by the end of your hellish ordeal.

The Right Snuff

Manhunt will be Mature-rated for one specific reason: extreme violent content. But despite the gore, the unique gameplay will certainly raise eyebrows, too. The hunt starts in November.

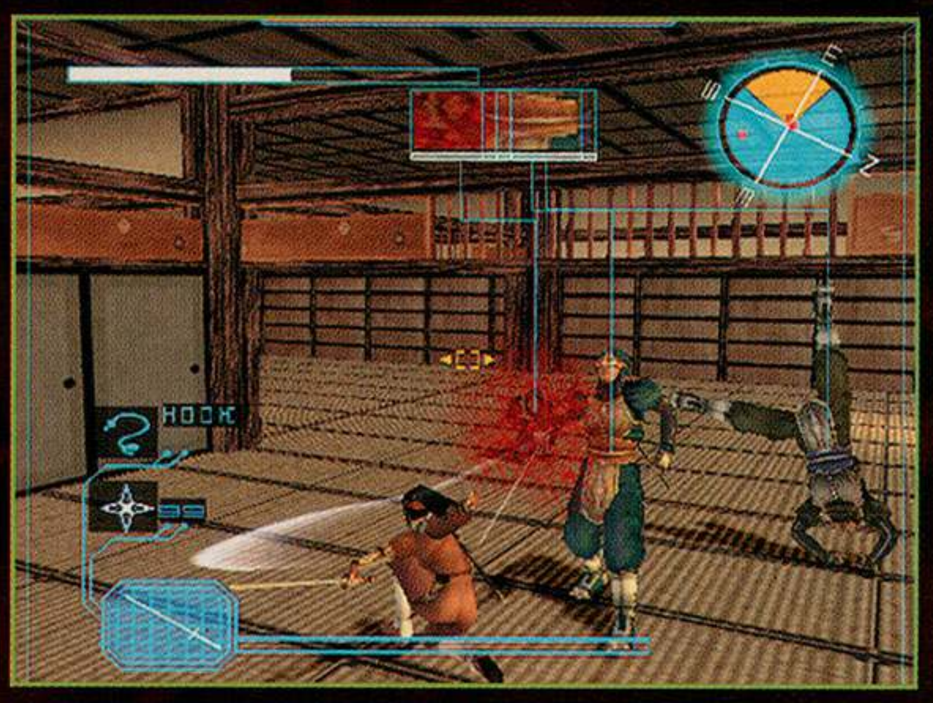
BY FOUR-EYED DRAGON

- Developed by Rockstar North
- Published by Rockstar Games
- Target release date: November

PlayStation 2

HANDS-ON

Cy Girls



KONAMI IS TEAMING up with Takara to bring the Cool Girl universe to your PlayStation 2. Its upcoming Cy Girls is a third-person action/adventure based on Takara's widely popular—and sexy—Cool Girl doll line. In it, you'll be able to choose between two "Divers," Ice or Asaka, as they fight rampant cyberterrorism in such exotic locales as Asia and the Americas. Each character will have a unique story line, weapons, and special movements, and both ladies will have the ability to dive into the virtual Cyber World to download new information and skills when the action gets too furious. Fanboys across the world, feel the foam beginning to amass on your lips in anticipation!

BY RICE BURNER

- Developed by KCEJ West
- Published by Konami
- Target release date: February

PlayStation 2

FIRST LOOK

Firefighter F.D. 18

KONAMI'S INNOVATION STRIKES again: In Firefighter F.D. 18, you'll follow the exploits of firefighter Dean McGregor and news reporter Emilie Arvin, who find themselves embroiled in a complex mystery to find a city-terrorizing serial arsonist. Their search brings them closer together, and closer to danger, as they race to find the perpetrator before more innocents are endangered. Gameplay will revolve around using water hoses, fire-retardant foam, and an impulse gun to save civilians from raging infernos. The game will feature the most realistic depictions of fire in a video game yet as players contend with backdrafts, flashovers, and chemical explosions. Firefighter F.D. 18 is set to seam together the high-intensity drama of man versus nature with the allure of a suspenseful mystery.

BY RICE BURNER

- Developed and published by Konami
- Target release date: March

PlayStation 2

FIRST LOOK

Auto Modellista

FOR THOSE OF you who played MMORPGs this past year, ignoring the sunshine and everything else, Auto Modellista was the first game to bring cel-shaded yumminess to the video-game racing genre. This latest incarnation, set for the GameCube, will have three modes of play, including single player, head-to-head, and a VJ mode that allows you to record, edit, and apply effects to your own racing footage. With 69 real-world vehicles from 17 car manufacturers and nine tracks, Modellista will be vast, and one of its most appealing features is the amount of customization you can experiment with in its easy-to-use menus. Although online network play will not be supported, Auto Modellista will be a welcome addition to the GameCube lineup.

BY RICE BURNER

- Developed and published by Capcom
- Target release date: Winter 2003

GameCube

FIRST LOOK

Syphon Filter: The Omega Strain

THE SYPHON FILTER conspiracy is preparing to infiltrate the PlayStation 2 with both single-player and online multiplayer commando action. Earning a promotion from his PlayStation adventures, Gabe Logan now heads a reformed Agency, and he's about to recruit you as his top operative. In Syphon Filter: The Omega Strain, Gabe works in the background as you create an agent with character customization tools to make him (or her) look any way you like and outfit him from an arsenal of 100 weapons. Your mission in this third-person espionage action/adventure is to investigate outbreaks of a mysterious and deadly virus. Seventeen massive single-player levels cover the world in such locales as Toronto, Belarus, Uganda, Brazil, and Tokyo.

Connecting online enables you to form a four-player team to tackle 13 of the single-player missions featuring new areas. Because players can carry only four weapons, online squad leaders determine exactly what the gear the team will need in advance. Omega Strain supports both the SOCOM headset and the PS2 USB headset for cooperative peer-to-peer gameplay. There are also special two-player maneuvers that you must master in order to overcome certain obstacles and to find shortcuts through the levels. For Syphon Filter fans, the wait has been long, but The Omega Strain is already looking like an infectious follow-up.

BY BROTHER BUZZ

- Developed and published by Sony
- Target release date: February

PLAYSTATION 2

UPDATE

Rise to Honor

RISE TO HONOR is looking to make an impression on PlayStation 2 gamers by featuring the flying fists and feet of martial arts superstar Jet Li. Rise attempts to capture Li's glorious kung fu technique (which graced such films as *The One*, *Lethal Weapon 4*, and *Once Upon a Time in China*) with a unique fighting system that flows around the right analog joystick. The martial arts combat covers a 360-degree perimeter, and you bust moves by quickly tapping the joystick toward your attackers. You can fire off eight combos, blocks with counter-attacks, grab attacks, and amazing Li kicks. The game also features a fair amount of gunslinging with bullet-time moves and two-character cooperative fighting techniques.

The game's 11 scenarios are set in Hong Kong and San Francisco, where a gangster's bodyguard (played by Li) attempts to relay the dying wishes of his boss to his daughter. Rise to Honor's graphics already display star quality in the preview version with Li's fluid martial arts moves faithfully motion-captured. Li recruited his regular film collaborator, Cory Yuen, to orchestrate the game's fight choreography, adding impressive authenticity to the visuals. It's time to defend the honor of the good old beat-em-up—Rise to Honor could be a formidable representative of the venerable genre.

BY BROTHER BUZZ

- Developed and published by Sony
- Target release date: January

PLAYSTATION 2

FIRST LOOK

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1080° Avalanche

GAMECUBE SNOWBOARDERS ARE finally getting their chance to ride the Avalanche. The follow-up to the original 1080° Snowboarding has been a long time coming, but it's reaching the slopes in fine shape. The hook here is flat-out speed as the game emphasizes racing down jaw-dropping mountainside courses. Of course, if you have the reflexes—and the nerve—you can launch a cool array of tricks, too, including flips, spins, grinds, and big-time jumps. Former 1080° stars Akari Hayami and Ricky Winterborn are joined by three new characters for single-player contests and four-player matches via split-screen views. Avalanche also features system-link and LAN gameplay via the GameCube Ethernet adapter for four GameCubes. Looks like Nintendo is preparing for a serious snow flurry.

BY ATOMIC DAWG

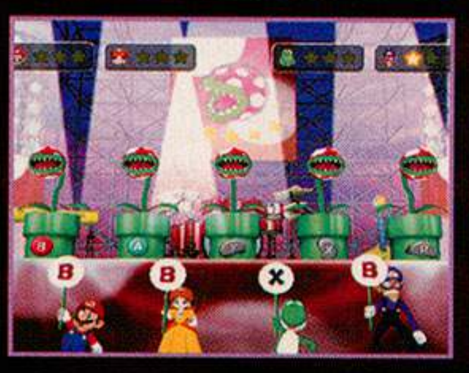
- Developed and published by Nintendo
- Target release date: December

GAMECUBE

UPDATE

Mario Party 5

GAMECUBISTS EVERYWHERE ARE no doubt looking for any reason at all to party hearty…so why not Mario Party? Mario Party 5 is rolling in with more multiplayer madness than ever. Mario and friends are involved in some sort of drama involving Dream Depot, but who cares? It's just an excuse to get to the new game boards and the 60 new mini-games. This time, many of the thumb-numbing tasks feature 3D gameplay views that up the skill level and challenge factors as you race for board space. Mario Party fans will appreciate the way the speedier A.I. keeps the game moving along by hurrying-up computer-controlled characters. Although all your favorite stars are on hand, there's a gang of new Party-goers, too, including the Koopa Kids.



BY BROTHER BUZZ

- Developed and published by Nintendo
- Target release date: November

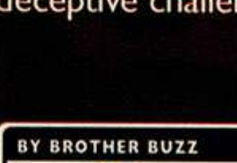
GAMECUBE

UPDATE

Kirby's Air Ride

AS SEEN IN a preview version, Kirby's Air Ride is the weirdest racing game of the year and possibly one of the most fun. You're going to need all the focus you can muster to master this wild and wacky contest. In Air Ride, the A.I. controls your accelerator, so it's all about steering…and sucking, of course, as Kirby mouths all manner of objects to use as crazy weapons. You just get to drive, but you'll have your hands full as you whip around all sorts of outrageously designed tracks. The key is using the A button and the joystick to nail the best line through the curves with a power drift à la Mario Kart. This Kirby derby is a deceptive challenge.

BY BROTHER BUZZ



- Developed and published by Nintendo
- Target release date: October

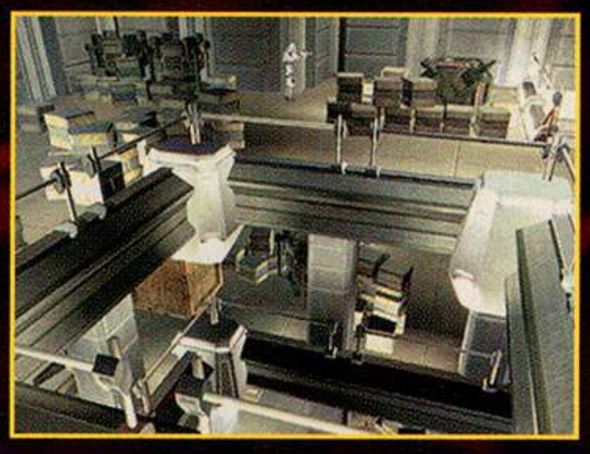
GAMECUBE

HANDS-ON

Area 51

AREA 51, ATARI'S popular shooter that rocked arcades in the mid-1990s, is coming to the PlayStation 2 and Xbox next year. In lieu of the arcade's dual light-guns, Area 51 will support online play for both consoles to preserve the multiplayer aesthetic. Midway has enlisted the aid of distinguished Hollywood talent to ensure that the game stands out in the crowded "science-fiction first-person shooter" arena. Thus far it has tapped Chris Vrenna of Nine Inch Nails fame to compose the music and Hollywood effects demigod Stan Winston (*Aliens*, *Predator*, *Jurassic Park*) for creature design. If blasting aliens with heavy weaponry isn't enough for you, Area 51's story will reveal once and for all the intricate conspiracies of the most recognizable top-secret military base in the world.

Note: All screens shown here are from the PlayStation 2 version.



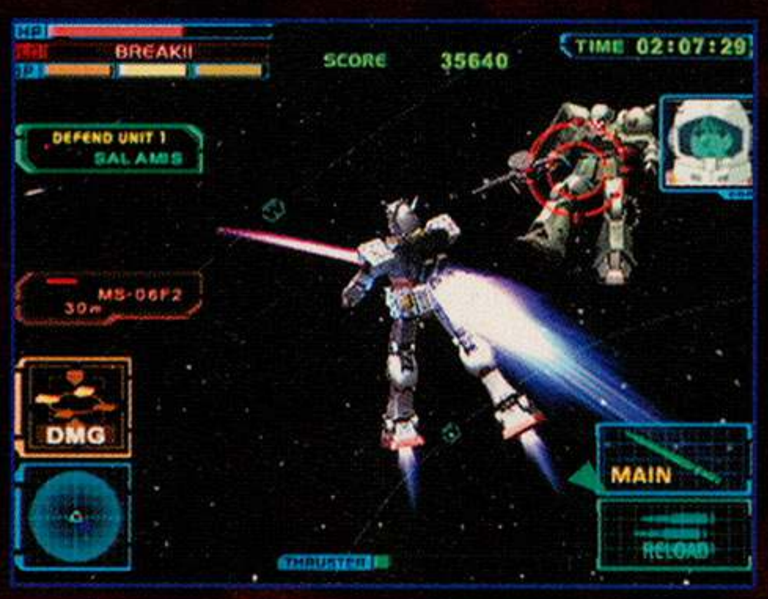
BY DJ DINOBOT

- Developed and published by Midway Games
- Target release date: Fall 2004

PLAYSTATION 2 XBOX

FIRST LOOK

Mobile Suit Gundam: Encounters in Space



THE LATEST IN a long line of video-game spin-offs, Mobile Suit Gundam: Encounters in Space places players in the second half of the original Mobile Suit Gundam story. As Amuro Ray, you must engage the Principality of Zeon in a series of space skirmishes. Side Story and Ace Pilot modes give players access to new Mobile Suits and characters created specifically for this game. The preview build contained lengthy cut-scenes that reinforced the game's connection to the animated series. The graphics were slick, and the mechs looked awesome, but the unintuitive controls took some getting used to and will hopefully be refined before the final release.

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BY DJ DINOBOT

- Developed and published by Bandai
- Target release date: December

PLAYSTATION 2

HANDS-ON

AirForce Delta Strike

SINCE 1999, AIRFORCE DELTA games have appeared on just about every non-Sony platform, but now Konami has set its sights on the PlayStation 2 audience. The forthcoming AirForce Delta Strike will spruce up the flight combat series with a futuristic story line spread over 60 missions. An ambitious collection of aircraft will include over 100 planes and over 20 playable pilots (Konami enthusiasts will be glad to know that the Vic Viper from Gradius is on the roster of available aircraft). AirForce Delta Strike remains firmly rooted in the arcade-style action of its forebears but will offer multiple endings and even take players into space. Apparently, the WWII prop planes will become less than useful as the game progresses.

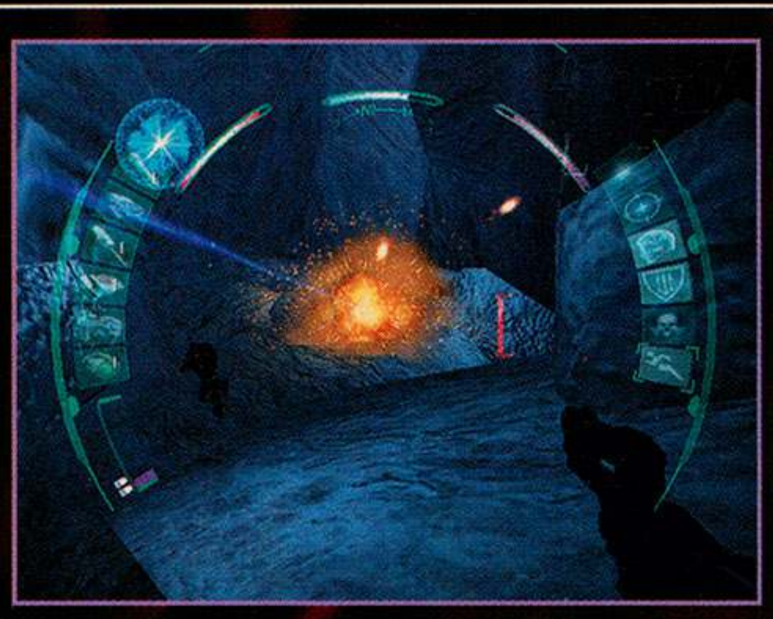
BY DJ DINOBOT

- Developed and published by Konami
- Target release date: February

PLAYSTATION 2

FIRST LOOK

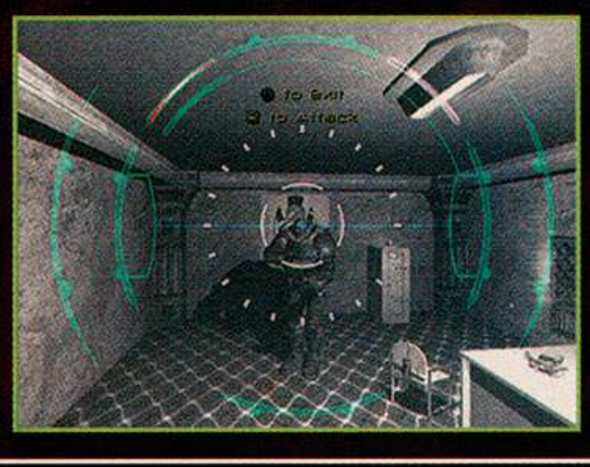
Deus Ex: Invisible War



WHILE THE FIRST Deus Ex gave action gamers unparalleled freedom in its day, Invisible War has to push even further than its predecessor. From a few hours' play on a nearly finished build of the game, it looks like it will pull it off with aplomb.

Aside from some frame-rate problems, Invisible War's graphics looked great and added to the game's highly touted sense of immersion into the world of near-future dark conspiracies and sci-fi paranoia. Ion Storm's use of the ubiquitous Havok physics engine makes an already deep world seem even more realistic. Some things, like the fact that thrown chairs simply bounce off human targets (and the targets don't seem to mind), are a bit disappointing in light of Invisible War's attention to physics, but the things you *can* do go much further than what you can do in just about any other game out there.

While the preview build was just a few months from release, the folks at Ion Storm made it clear that they were working like dogs to fix the frame-rate, control, and tiny physics problems. The story, which was already in place in the preview build, should make the game compelling even if Ion Storm can't fix that other stuff.



BY DUNJIN MASTER

- Developed by Ion Storm
- Published by Eidos Interactive
- Target release date: December

XBOX

HANDS-ON

Spawn: Armageddon

THE PREVIEW BUILD of Spawn: Armageddon delivers a gory romp through Todd McFarlane's world on the brink of the Apocalypse. Spawn fights hordes of demons, monsters, and angels as a key figure in the eternal struggle of good versus evil. The combat system is an indulgent mix of potent firearms and Spawn's unique melee weapons. Technique points are earned for particularly effective attacks and can be redeemed for power-ups or ammo between levels. One drawback is the target lock: Sometimes it selects objects instead of enemies, which can lead to awkward situations. But then, the battle axe is effective in close quarters. Though not yet fully integrated, Spawn's Hell Powers show a lot of promise. Six powers are available: Necroplasm Ball, Necroplasm Beam, Glow, Hell Dash, Hell Speed, and Demonic Fury. In the finished game, these powers will be necessary to get past certain critical points.

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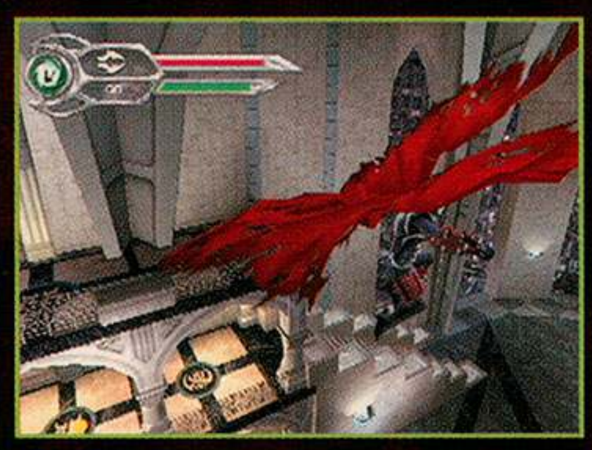
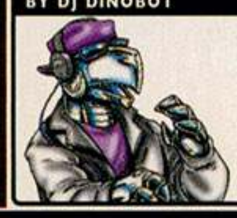
The twisted settings and macabre creature design add tremendously to Spawn's atmosphere. The environments are filled with destructible elements and range from simple and straightforward to detailed and grotesque. Suffice it to say that the Mature rating will be well deserved. The quality of the preview indicates that the finished product should be enjoyable even for those who haven't read the comic book.



BY DJ DINOBOT



- Developed by Point of View
- Published by Namco
- Target release date: November

PLAYSTATION 2

HANDS-ON

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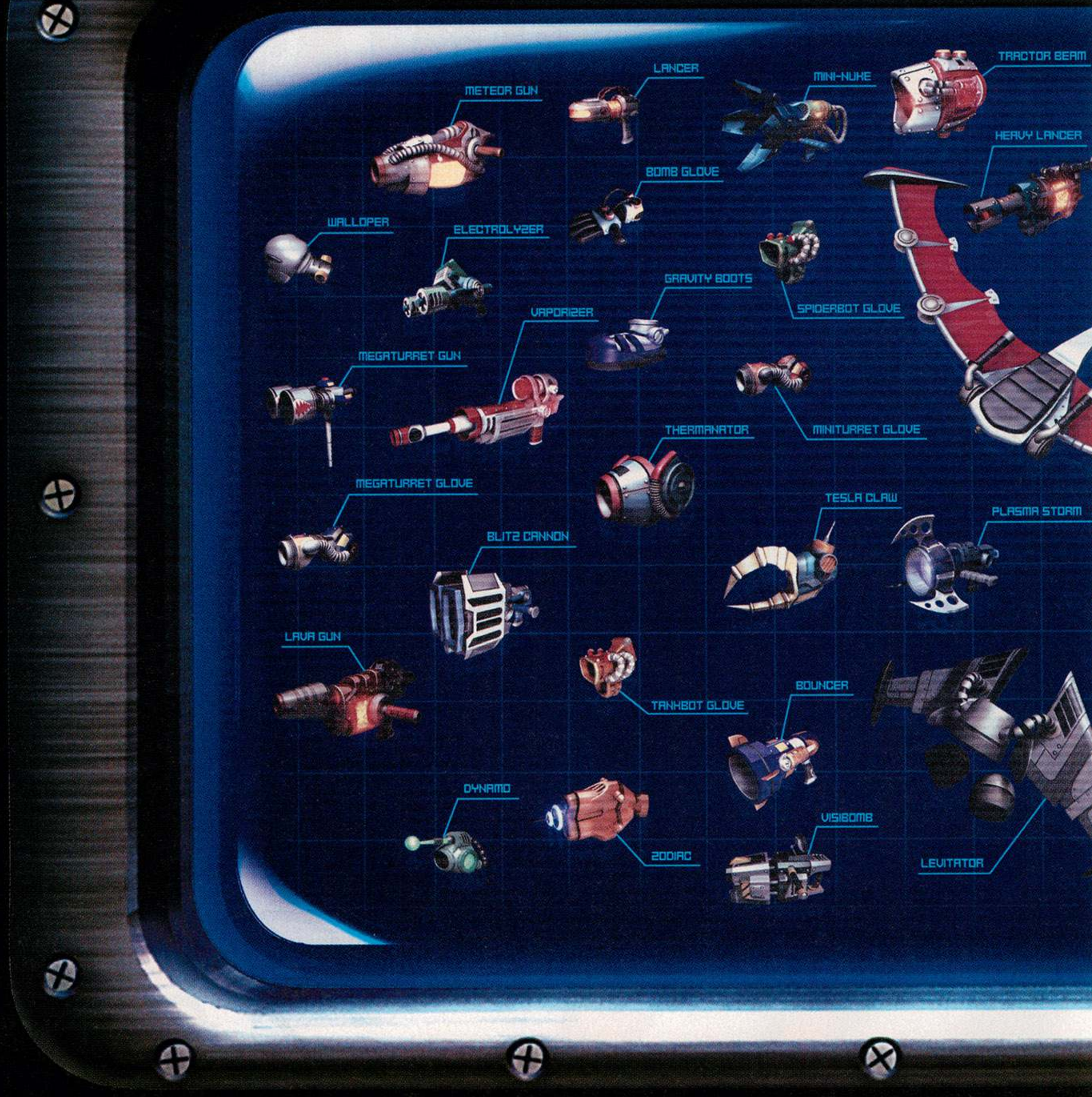

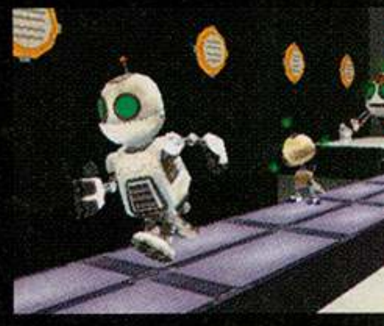

EENIE, MEENIE, MINEY, BOOM.

They're back. And they're itching for action. With tons of planets to conquer in a whole new gigantic galaxy, you better believe Ratchet & Clank are gonna sink their teeth into some destruction. Ummm, destruction. With weapon upgrades, mods, armor and the ability for Ratchet to get stronger and smarter as the game goes on, this could get uglier than The Grandmas In Bikinis Calendar after-party. Speaking of parties, there's also hoverbike racing, space combat and gladiator arenas. As far as weapons and gadgets go, Ratchet & Clank are stacked with 50 new ones, along with unlockable upgrades, so by the end of the journey, you'll go through more weapons and gadgets than a hungry fat man will go through chicken wings at lunch. Lock and load, baby, lock and load. **www.us.playstation.com**

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TEEN
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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Mild Violence

PlayStation.2

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Maximize your video-gaming fun! Make the right purchasing choices by knowing exactly what kind of content is inside each game.

The ESRB Ratings Guide

The interactive electronic entertainment industry utilizes a voluntary rating system developed by an independent organization—the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB)—so consumers know what to expect before buying a video or PC game. The following is a quick key to the most common ratings; for a complete description, check out the ESRB's website at **www.esrb.org** or call **800/771-3772** for more information.

EVERYONE Titles rated **Everyone (E)** have content suitable for persons ages six and older. These titles will appeal to people of many ages and tastes. They may contain minimal violence, comic mischief, or crude language.

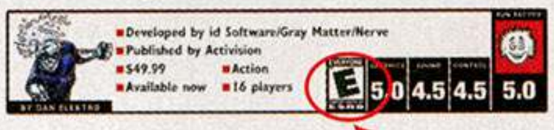
TEEN Games rated **Teen (T)** are suitable for ages 13 and up. These games could have violent content, strong language, and/or suggestive themes.

MATURE Games rated **Mature (M)** are appropriate for older gamers, generally 17 and up. Mature-rated games may contain more intense depictions of violence, stronger language, and, on rare occasions, sexual themes.

RATING PENDING The **Rating Pending (RP)** icon may appear in early reviews of soon-to-be-released products. Look for the actual ESRB rating icon on the game's package, check the ESRB's website, or call its toll-free phone number for updated rating information.

WHERE TO FIND THE ESRB RATING

***GamePro* understands that parents care about the content of the video games their children play. That's why every review printed in our magazine and posted on our website lists the ESRB rating. Below, we've circled this rating in a sample review box to help readers locate it throughout *GamePro*.**



Note: Previews do not carry an ESRB rating as games are often not rated until they're ready for review and purchase.

Backyard Wrestling: Don't Try This at Home
By Eidos Interactive

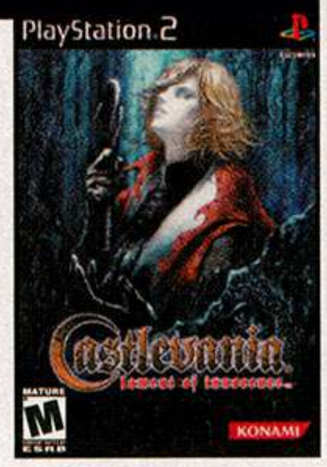
Blood, barbed wire, and babes abound, making Backyard Wrestling the biggest lowest-common-denominator guilty pleasure since Grand Theft Auto. The game's subtitle is "Don't Try This at Home," and that's for good reason.

Bloody Roar 4
By Konami

Bloody Roar 4 more than lives up to its name with plenty of brutal brawling and lots of red title matter. Playing as fighters who can transform into fanged alter egos, gamers can bite, slash, stab, and hack each other to defeat. There's no foul language—only brutal, bloody brawling.

Castlevania: Lament of Innocence
By Konami

You won't find any foul language or sexual content in Castlevania: Lament of Innocence, but there's plenty of blood. Defeated monsters meet their demise in puddles of blood, which is frequently splashed against walls. The main character, Leon, does a fair amount of bleeding when he is struck, and some bosses scream and writhe in agony when they die.

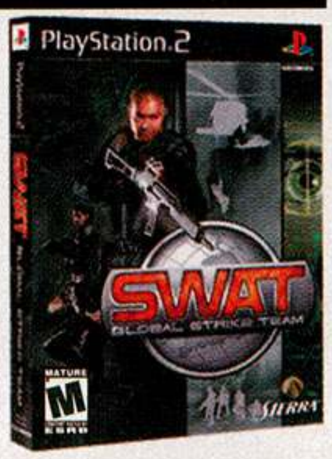


Halo
By Microsoft

Like Half-Life, Halo is a story-based combat game that revolves around battle with alien creatures. The fairly intense action involves gunplay on foot and in a variety of vehicles, and plenty of blood—both human and alien—is spilled. While the violence isn't over the top, it's realistic enough and frequent enough to make Halo unsuitable for younger audiences.

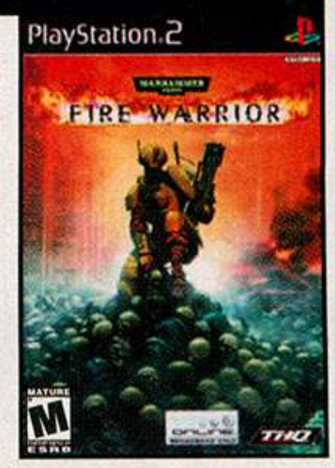
SWAT: Global Strike Team
By Vivendi Universal Games

This game revolves around stepping into the combat boots of SWAT police officers, so the focus is on gunplay and killing bad guys. Between the blood, the violence, and the hot pursuit of criminals, Global Strike Team is mature all the way.



Warhammer 40,000: Fire Warrior
By THQ

Warhammer 40,000: Fire Warrior is a violent first-person science-fiction shooter like Halo, and although the level of blood and gore may not be as high some other games in the genre, it's still present and accounted for. There are some religious themes that some may find a bit offensive, too.



ESRB RATINGS FOR ALL GAMES REVIEWED IN THIS ISSUE

Backyard Wrestling: Don't Try This at Home	M
Bloody Roar 4	M
Castlevania: Lament of Innocence	M
Halo	M
kill.switch	M
Rogue Ops	M
SWAT: Global Strike Team	M
Warhammer 40,000: Fire Warrior	M
Batman: Rise of Sin Tzu	T
Crimson Skies: High Road to Revenge	T
Culdcept	T
Double Dragon Advance	T
Dragon Ball Z: Budokai	T
Final Fantasy X-2	T
Ghost Master	T
Gladius	T
Goblin Commander: Unleash the Horde	T
The Haunted Mansion	T
Metal Arms: Glitch in the System	T
Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time	T
Ratchet & Clank: Going Commando	T
Secret Weapons Over Normandy	T
Sphinx and the Cursed Mummy	T
SSX 3 (PS2)	T
Star Wars Rogue Squadron III: Rebel Strike	T
The Temple of Elemental Evil	T
Time Crisis 3	T
Voodoo Vince	T
WWE Raw 2	T
XGRA: Extreme G Racing Association	T
Amped 2	E
ESPN NBA Basketball 2K4	E
FIFA Soccer 2004	E
Harry Potter: Quidditch World Cup	E
Harvest Moon: Friends of Mineral Town	E
Karaoke Revolution	E
Links 2004	E
Mario Kart: Double Dash!!	E
NBA Jam	E
NBA Live 2004	E
RPG Maker II	E
Spyro: Attack of the Rhynocs	E
SSX 3 (GBA)	E
Super Mario Advance 4: Super Mario Bros. 3	E
Tak and the Power of Juju	E
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles	E
Top Spin	E

EVERYONE
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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

ACT/RPG

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DARK & LIGHT

EVERYONE
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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

GAME BOY ADVANCE

RPG

ATLUS®

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SECRET WEAPONS OVER NORMANDY

WITH THE SPECTACULAR Secret Weapons Over Normandy, the creators of the renowned X-Wing series prove that the skies of World War II can deliver gameplay as compelling as the era's popular first-person shooters. There hasn't been a console air-combat game this good since the days when Colony Wars ruled the genre on the PlayStation.

Battlehawks

Secret Weapons Over Normandy soars to great heights because of a powerful combo of accessible, ingenious controls and absorbing, well-varied missions. If you can manage the controls of a first-person shooter, you'll be instantly at home in this cockpit, and several innovations neatly solve the obstacles that often limit the appeal of this genre. An L2-activated camera prevents the repetitive, spiraling pursuit of off-screen targeting cursors, while "reflex time" lets you slow the action when it gets too furious or accelerate it when commuting across large gaps.

In each of the more than 30 missions, you'll tackle new and engaging challenges. Playing as American pilot James Chase, you travel the globe to beat back the Axis, undertaking operations like covering escaping spies in North Africa, sinking Japanese convoys in the Pacific, or flying captured German bombers in surprise attacks on occupied France. Some are official sorties, some are optional challenges that are anything but the mini-games they sound like, offering exciting battles that fill in the story and provide useful instruction.

PROTIP: In dogfights, don't loop in tight circles at high speeds. Reduce your throttle and allow small gaps to open before turning in pursuit–but be aware this tactic means that you're sometimes a juicy target.

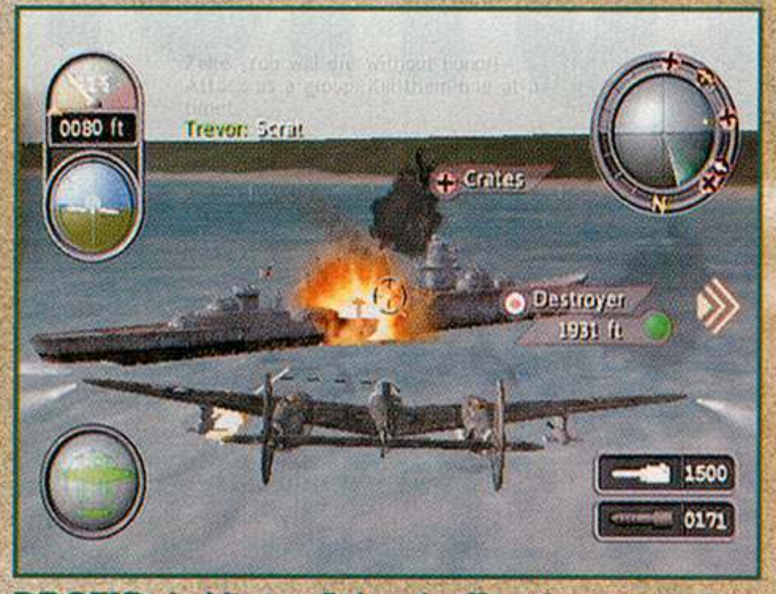
PROTIP: Tap ○ to slow the action and maximize the time you have to fire on a target; hold ○ to make time pass quickly when flying across long, empty gaps.

PROTIP: Carry rockets in the Betty Boom challenge–they're excellent for taking out the freighter and the heavy, slow bombers.

Flying Tigers

You'll fly more than 20 planes ranging from the P-38 to the Me-163, sometimes even manning anti-aircraft guns from the ground or from the ball turret of a B-17. And although the screen shows only airplanes, Secret Weapons' creators did a great job of personalizing the characters and story in a meaningful way—they actually start to grow on you.

The mission structure is gripping in a way that will feel pleasantly familiar to X-Wing vets. As each operation begins, you'll face an almost daunting array of possible targets. You'll quickly get caught up in devising and executing the best plan of attack, ordering wingmen to handle one target while you zip off to dispose of another. The game's helpful radio chatter ensures you'll never be clueless, and juggling all the priorities makes you feel like you're part of a bigger battle and a living world.



PROTIP: In Mission 5, break off at the start and focus on taking out destroyers with your cannon.

EDITORS' GAMEPRO CHOICE

Ace

Secret Weapons' deep multiplayer support gives this already-big game more staying power. In two-player split-screen action, you can play cooperatively or head-to-head in the challenges or in instant-action dogfights. Some might wish for online play, but regardless, Secret Weapons deserves top marks for delivering such a captivating take on a genre that had grown stale with disuse. It's truly one of the best action games of the year.

Also on the Xbox and PC

PROTIP: For successful bombing runs, approach the target at roughly 1000 feet. As you draw near, switch to the Bombing camera (tap △), dive in steeply, drop the bomb, and climb quickly away. Keep an eye on your altitude the whole time–it's easy to accidentally crash.

PROTIP: In Mission 3, carry medium bombs and target the fighter and bomber hangars first, then the landing craft. Land to restock as needed, but order your wingmen to attack specific targets while you do so.

GRAPHICS 5.0

Secret Weapons' visuals beautifully display the majesty of flight from the expansive, sprawling scenery to the reflection of moonlight on the ocean. Sharply detailed airplane models and powerful explosions also fill these skies.

SOUND 5.0

This audio tour de force starts with a rousing score that sets an appropriately heroic tone. Excellent dialogue breathes life into the characters, and the searing sound effects inject tension to moments like the concussive thud of nearby anti-aircraft flak.

CONTROL 5.0

Secret Weapons' easy-to-fly planes are a huge part of the game's appeal—there's nothing technical or demanding about them. Several slick innovations, particularly for targeting during dogfights, help break the genre's barriers to newbies.

FUN FACTOR 5.0

WWII action is getting to be a crowded genre, but Secret Weapons takes off in a fresh new direction with riveting air combat that mixes thrilling missions with simple controls, solid multiplayer support, and an intriguing story line.

BY AIR HENDRIX

- Developed by Totally Games
- Published by LucasArts
- $49.99
- Available November
- Air combat
- 2 players

ESRB	GRAPHICS	SOUND	CONTROL	FUN FACTOR
TEEN	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.0

People tend to look at you differently
when you stuff a voodoo doll full of laxatives.

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Mild Violence

Microsoft game studios

You and Vince, the third best voodoo doll in Madam Charmaine's shop, are charged with rescuing his maker from the evil Kosmo the Inscrutable. To get by pit frogs, imps, killadillos and more on the exotic streets of New Orleans, Vince must use his best weapon, himself. See Vince jump into a blender, stick himself with a pitchfork, step into a beartrap and over 25 ways in which Vince can hurt himself, which means he's really helping himself. So don't feel bad for Vince. It's what he does best.

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PRINCE OF PERSIA
THE SANDS OF TIME

THE LATEST INCARNATION of this 1989 masterpiece is much more than a down-on-his-luck Prince running through a castle full of deadly traps. It's an exciting and glorious-looking adventure that pays homage to a classic.

EDITORS' GAMEPRO CHOICE

Spoils of War

The Sands of Time puts a twist on the age-old Prince of Persia story. Sorting through the loot that they acquired after defeating the powerful Maharajah, the King and his son become owners of a mysterious hourglass and a magical dagger. Unaware of either object's true powers, the Prince is tricked into activating them, which releases the Sands of Time, destroying the kingdom and turning the people into murderous demons. To redeem his ignorance and, of course, to save his precious empire, the Prince must undo the effects of the sand by traversing a trap-laden castle in hopes of retrieving the priceless and now empty hourglass.

The Royal Treatment

In this edition of Prince of Persia, the story isn't the only new feature in the game. Most importantly, the control scheme has been more than just improved upon. Beyond running and jumping, the princely hero can perform a variety of cool moves such as running along walls, shimmying across ledges, and somersaulting over deep crevices. His battles with the demonic monsters are even more engaging. Hack-n-slash players can easily enjoy all of the action—simple button presses enable you to combo your sword attack on multiple foes. But the button mashing is uniquely accented with the Prince's magical dagger, which lets you control short moments in time. You can rewind right before you die, proceed in slow motion, or execute a devastating combination with pinpoint accuracy on everyone in the surrounding area.

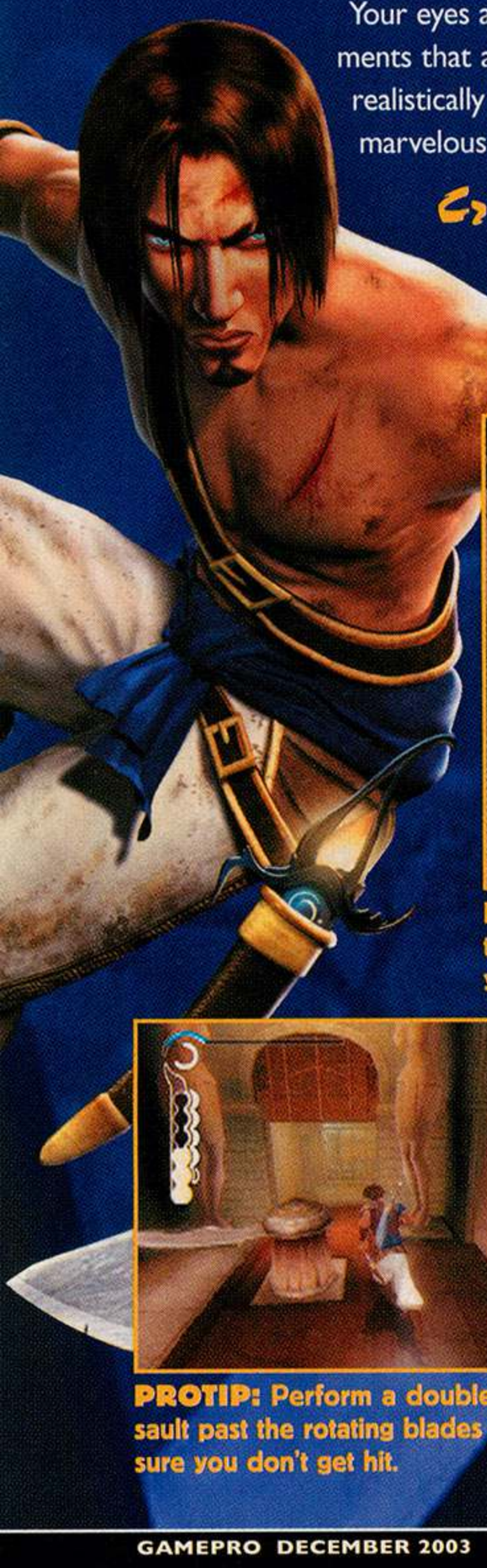
Your eyes and ears are in for a treat, too. Prince of Persia exhibits phenomenally detailed environments that are full of gorgeous visual effects. Characters animate with fluidity, and the level design realistically reflects Persian architecture. Great voice-overs that are actually fun to listen to and a marvelous soundtrack comprise the game's audio tour de force.

Crown Prince

A generous amount of mind-teasing puzzles completes this trip to Persia. As in previous Prince of Persia games, you must figure out how to unlock gates and get past deadly traps using your brain rather than your brawn. These challenges aren't too hard, nor are they too easy—they're made just right and fit well throughout the entire game.

Certainly, this young Prince has unquestionably matured into a crowned monarch who will have no problem ruling this generation's adventure-loving masses. Now bow down and give your respect.

Also on the Xbox and GameCube



PROTIP: Just as the giant birds are about to fly toward you, start swinging your sword. If you time your swings correctly, you'll hit them every time.

PROTIP: Perform a double somersault past the rotating blades to make sure you don't get hit.

PROTIP: Be patient when you're on your back. Block with your sword until you find an opening to stand back up.

PROTIP: Fight close to water so that when you're done with the first round of demons, you can drink up and replenish your health.

PROTIP: Remember not to get in front of Farah when she's shooting her arrows. She can do damage to you, too.

PROTIP: Don't attempt to jump over the bad dudes wielding the double-bladed spears. They'll just knock you back down.

GRAPHICS 5.0

Prince of Persia sparkles at every turn. Magnificent level designs capture the game's story with amazing detail. Acrobatic moves, menacing creatures, and brilliant visual effects never come up short.

SOUND 5.0

Sarcastic and humorous remarks from the cast of characters delight the ears and cut the tension during tough challenges. The music and sound effects don't miss a beat, either.

CONTROL 4.5

The camera angles can be questionable at times, but maneuvering the Prince through mechanized ambushes and lethal pitfalls is a challenging success. And during fights, the Prince is a class act with his blades.

FUN FACTOR 5.0

Don't mistake The Sands of Time for a rush job on an updated classic. Everything's been redone, inside and out, and the result is a brand-new and winning experience. The gameplay has just the right balance of challenging puzzles and finger-numbing battles to deliver an exceptional adventure whether you're royalty or not.

BY FOUR-EYED DRAGON

- Developed by Ubi Soft Montreal
- Published by Ubi Soft
- $49.99
- Available November
- Action/adventure
- 1 player

TEEN	GRAPHICS	SOUND	CONTROL	FUN FACTOR
T	5.0	5.0	4.5	5.0

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TEEN
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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Violence

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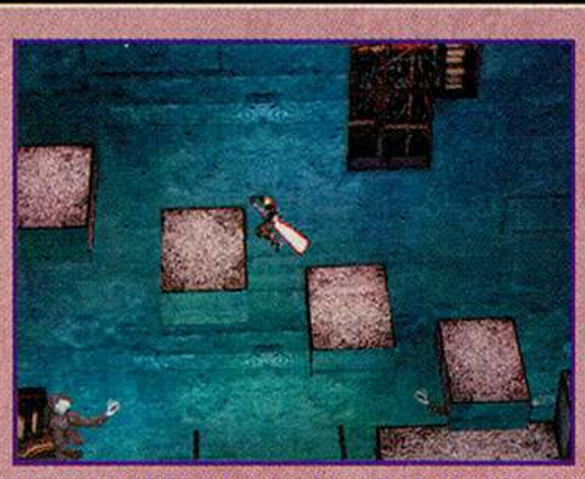
BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT CLASSIC ARCADE

Castlevania
lament of innocence

FOLLOWING SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT on the PlayStation in 1997, Castlevania's next logical step seemed to be the realm of 3D. Unfortunately, the series' initial foray into third-dimensional space on the N64 was a nightmare (as was the unnecessary, aptly titled sequel, Legacy of Darkness). Lament of Innocence smashes the perception that Castlevania and 3D don't mix: It's the best Belmont adventure in years and one that no fan of the series will want to miss.

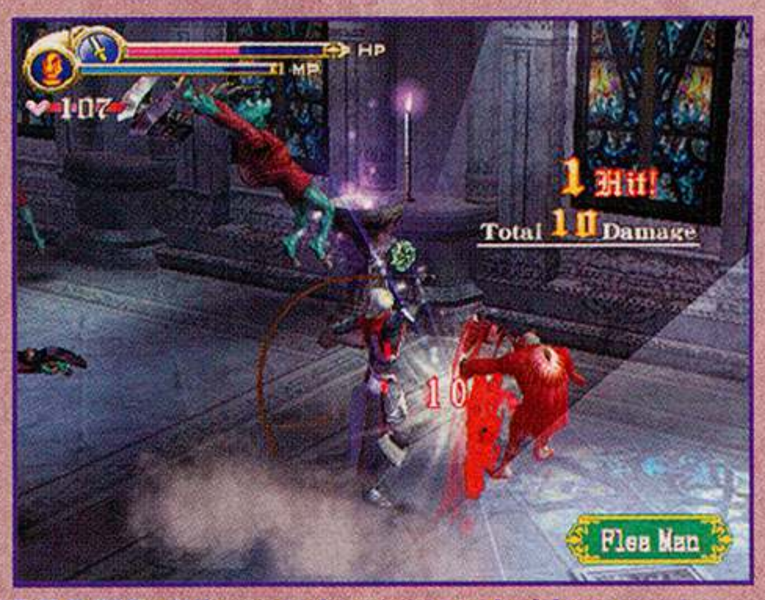


Lament of Innocence hardly lacks diversity: In addition to the usual monster killing, there are platform-hopping and puzzle-solving activities.

PROTIP: You can learn new skills by experimenting with various presses on the left analog stick in concert with button presses.

The Fearless Vampire Killers

Lament is the ultimate prequel ("this is how it all began!") as it is set before *all* the other games and follows Leon Belmont, a knight who reluctantly takes up the whip to rescue his kidnapped girlfriend from a big, creepy castle. The action takes place in 3D space but with a strict 2D feel: Lament is very easy to pick up and play, and although there's no auto-targeting feature, your attacks usually hit the mark, thanks to varying whip techniques and dead-on controls.



PROTIP: When you're surrounded by enemies, tap the Attack-Big button so your whip swings 360 degrees in a circular motion around you.

During the game, you'll unlock combos, magic spells, and other play techniques that add excellent depth to what easily could have been a two-dimensional play engine. The only complaint with the interface is the mandatory real-time menu access, meaning you can't use items while the game is paused. Instead, you have to cycle through menus, sometimes while taking damage during the heat of battle.

PROTIP: Mastering the Guard is essential–not just to defend yourself from incoming blows, but also to add energy to your MP meter.

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Pardon Me, but Your Teeth Are in My Neck

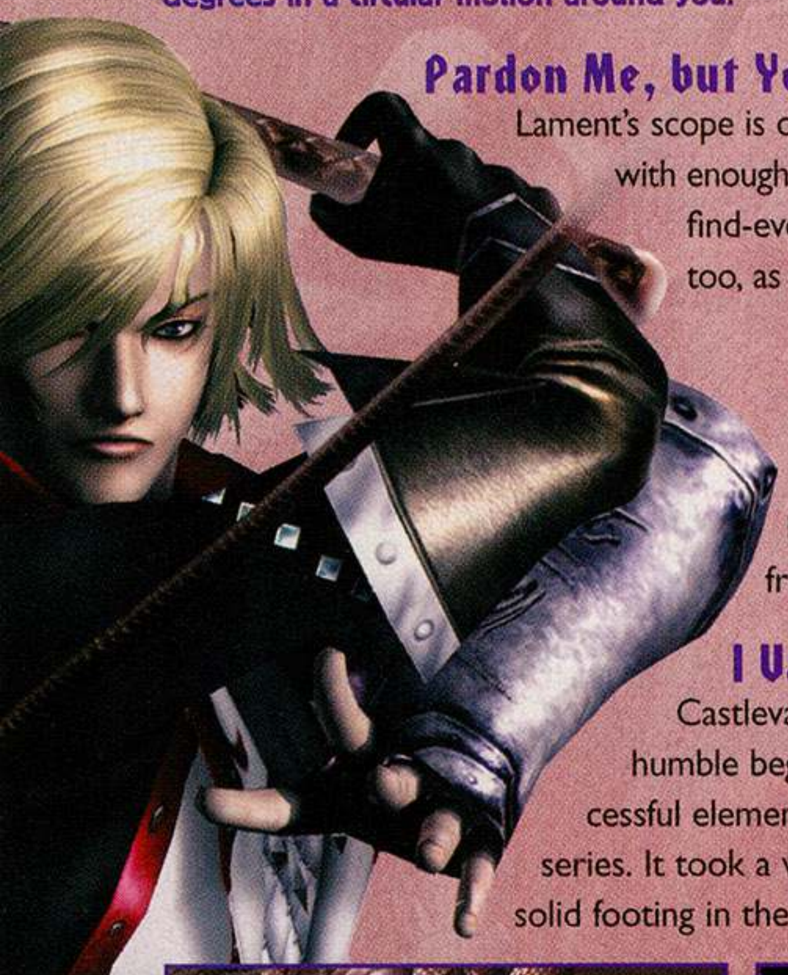
Lament's scope is on par with Symphony's (read: huge); you investigate a gigantic castle packed with enough secret rooms, puzzles, and hidden items to keep the most determined gotta-find-everything-or-die-trying explorers busy for days. There's atmosphere to burn, too, as the vivid graphics bring shadows, fog, brick, and other surroundings to life.

Then there are the bosses, a key Castlevania trademark, and Lament unleashes some real eye-popping whoppers. Got boss? How about the screen-filling floating Medusa head, complete with fully animated hissing snake hairs and nightmare-inducing eyes; or the extra boss, Forgotten One, who must be dismembered from his gut to his head.

EDITORS' GAMEPRO CHOICE

I Vampiri

Castlevania has been one of the most-beloved game series ever produced since its humble beginnings on the NES in 1987, and Lament of Innocence taps into all the successful elements from the best installments in the series. It took a while, but Castlevania finally found solid footing in the 3D world. G



It wouldn't be Castlevania without bosses, and Lament of Innocence features some of the most challenging in the series–such as this giant Medusa head with hissing snake hairs.

PROTIP: Dracula's Castle is filled with secrets, so be sure to explore each room carefully.

PROTIP: Beware of zombie vomit–it's dangerous to the touch.

GRAPHICS 5.0

Lament shines with potent imagery and excellent atmospheric effects. And although the camera angles are fixed, they never conceal vital information—such as enemies poised to strike—or create confusion.

SOUND 5.0

Gorgeous symphonic compositions and striking sound effects make Lament an aural treat. Toggling between Japanese and English dialogue is a feature more games should have. For maximum effect, play the game in Pro Logic II.

CONTROL 4.5

Simply put, the controls just feel right, and you never lose command of Leon, even after unlocking complex combo attacks. The game's only downside is the real-time menu access, which is cumbersome, especially in the heat of a boss battle.

FUN FACTOR 5.0

Complete with giant bosses, exciting gameplay, days of exploration, and an involving narrative, this is the best Castlevania game in years. More importantly, it's Castlevania in 3D but done right.

BY MAJOR MIKE

- Developed by KCET
- Published by Konami
- $49.99
- Available now
- Action/adventure
- 1 player

MATURE M CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

GRAPHICS	SOUND	CONTROL	FUN FACTOR
5.0	5.0	4.5	5.0

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TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Suggestive Themes
Violence

DOLBY DIGITAL PRO LOGIC II
Dolby Digital Surround EX

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PlayStation®2

SSX 3

AFTER A TWO-YEAR hiatus, the SSX team has returned to bring one of the most authentic—albeit ridiculously defiant of physics—snowboardercross games the world has ever known back to its fans with a completely new philosophy. After the somewhat minor improvements made in SSX Tricky, the developers decided to take some time to design a totally different approach to competition with a familiar control scheme and add tons of goodies like new tricks, courses, and riders.

It's Alive...and It Wants You Dead!

One of the most thrilling differences of SSX 3 is its single-mountain design, in which one gigantic (and malevolent) mountain with three separate peaks serves as the setting for all events. This mountain possesses even more varied terrain than its international predecessors from the previous games, and it more closely mimics the actual feeling of a day on the slopes (provided one is in the habit of taking a helicopter in order to get there). In addition, course events, such as terrifyingly destructive avalanches, blinding snow flurries, passing trains, and collapsing hunks of track, all take an almost perverse joy in pummeling your rider and add to the frenetic, adrenaline-junkie tempo of SSX 3.

PROTIP: Perform as many Uber tricks as possible. Not only do they score big, but they also build your Super meter, which increases boost efficacy.

PROTIP: Even short sections of the half-pipe can turn into big-point combo-land if you can keep up your momentum and stay within the bounds of the pipe.

Shaka, Brah!

The depth of gameplay in SSX 3 is extraordinarily expansive—whether gamers are performing incomparable chains of combos through the use of stalls, tail and nose presses, grabs, handplants, and two distinct levels of Uber tricks in Freestyle mode, or grinding across glistening, snow-covered branches (and virtually every other edge) in order to smoke the competition speedwise in Race mode. SSX 3 also makes it more appetizing to simply explore the mountain by offering tantalizing bonuses earned through the Freeride mode.

During all three of these modes, riders enjoy an even more advanced and tight control scheme than before, and an unbelievable soundtrack of thumping funk and techno tracks from such notables as Fisher Spooner, Jane's Addiction, and the Chemical Brothers. Winterstick fanatics rejoice—for the price of a lift ticket, SSX 3 provides longer runs with more hits and jumps than you ever thought possible.

Also on the Xbox and GameCube

PROTIP: Save up cash in order to gain new Uber tricks or just preview them in the Uber trick Setup.

PROTIP: Shift your weight using the right analog stick between big air opportunities to chain tricks for big combo multipliers.

PROTIP: First-level Uber tricks can be held like other grabs and will accumulate massive point scores.

PROTIP: The Lodge is not just for hot chocolate! You can buy fashionable boardwear and rider attributes in order to increase lethality on the runs.

PROTIP: Wait until the last possible moment to release your grab in order to rack up precious extra points.

GRAPHICS 4.5

New atmospheric snow effects add a sense of realism, while complex particle effects lend visual flare to the already insane amount of graphical detail afforded for both rider and mountain. Even sitting in a gondola is an optical feast!

SOUND 5.0

With such an incredible selection of licensed background tunes (which are all customizable through an easy-to-use playlist feature), an informative and lively Radio Big announcer, hilarious voice acting, and some of the most meticulously detailed sound effects ever, your ears will thank you.

CONTROL 5.0

The addition of the handplant and lean feature to the controller layout causes some pretty hectic thumb-work, but the overall controls are totally solid and even more refined than those in previous games. You can expect a blistering thumb workout that twitch-gamers should find utterly satisfying.

FUN FACTOR 5.0

Simultaneously increasing the realism of the experience of big mountain boarding and tearing the throat out of board-physics as we know it, SSX 3 completely revolutionizes the snowboardercross concept. Who needs snow when you've got this?

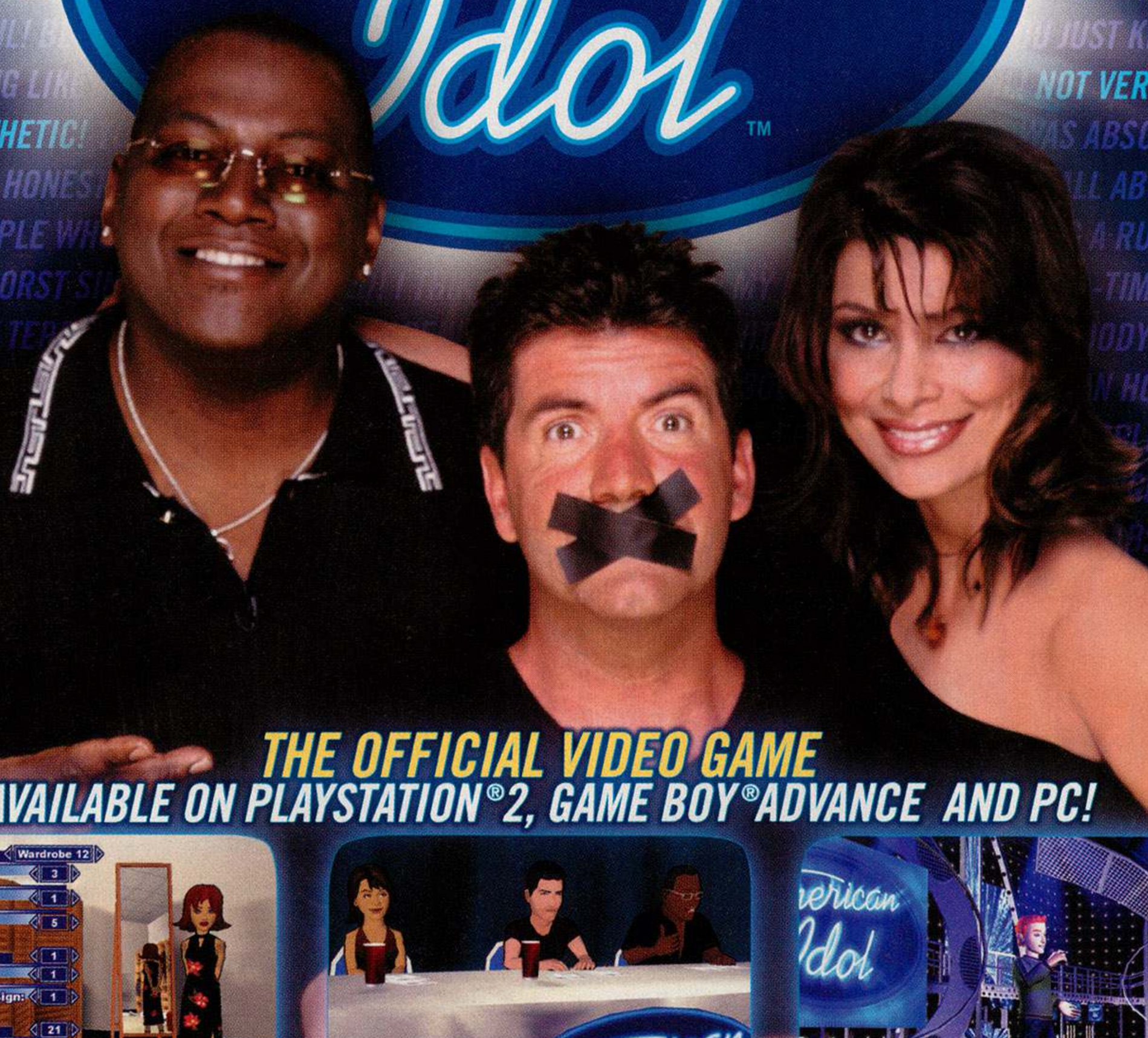
BY STRAFE MARU

- Developed by EA Canada
- Published by EA Sports Big
- $49.95
- Available now
- Snowboarding
- 2 players

TEEN	GRAPHICS	SOUND	CONTROL	FUN FACTOR
T	4.5	5.0	5.0	5.0

CARE FOR A GAME OF SIMON SAYS?

American Idol™



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EVERYONE
E
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

PlayStation 2

PC CD ROM

GAME BOY ADVANCE

19
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TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES

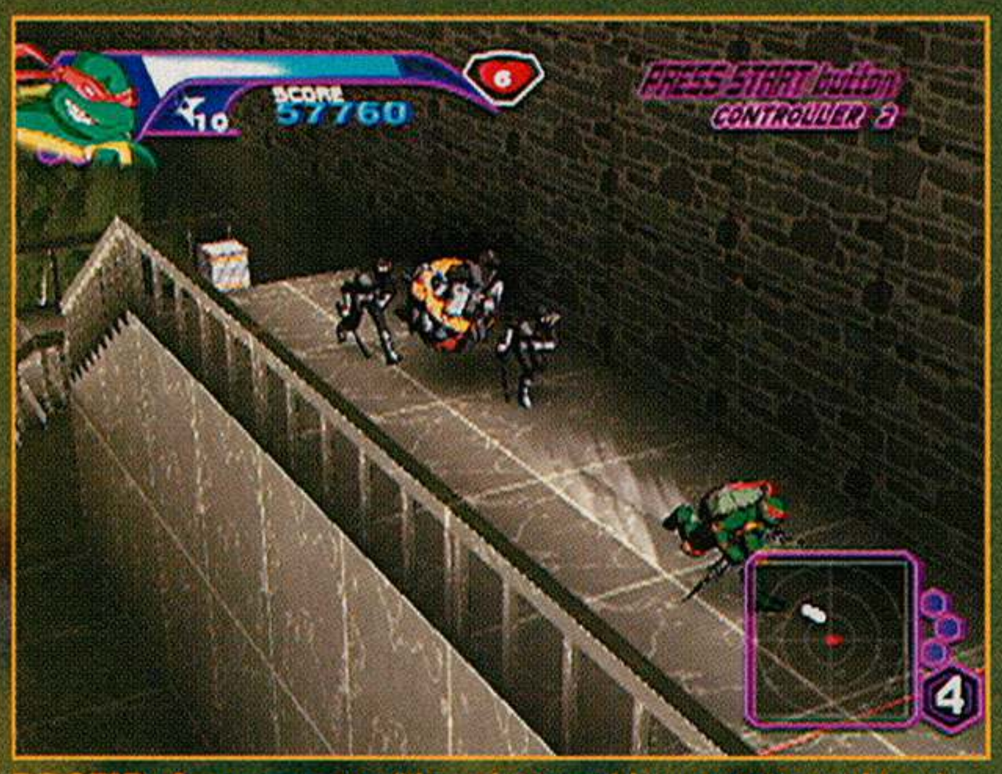
IT WAS A long time ago when the original Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles cartoon hit the airwaves. Now the forces of retro desperation are returning the green machines to the screen.

NINJAS ARE REPTILES

The story of TMNT is simple: Four wee turtles came into contact with some radioactive goop and were transformed into wee ninja turtles. After years of tutelage in the sewers by a rat-man ninja master, these ninja turtles turned into teenagers. That's about all you need to know.

This game is as retro as its subject matter, and it contains all the good and bad things associated with the Jurassic "go-right-beat-em-up" genre that made up about 97 percent of the game libraries for the 16-bit systems in the 1990s. A limited number of continues, improbable power-ups ("Ooh, someone left a floating pizza in that crate!"), and armies of identical bad guys will remind you of the days in which consoles had only enough memory to handle 10 enemies and just enough processing power to grant you a whopping six moves.

PROTIP: Hitting an enemy with a shuriken stuns them for a split second. Use them against bosses to open up the opponents for a good, long combo.



PROTIP: Some enemies (like robots and hover-ninja-car-things) explode when you kill them. Lure other enemies to them before they explode, and you can take out groups of enemies by killing just one.

COLD-BLOODED KILLAS

For all its throwback feel, Turtles has a lot of late-model shinyness and snappy presentation. The whole game (except a few cel-animated cinemas) is done in a nice cel-shaded look that, along with the pop-up visual sound effects (CRASH!, BASH!, etc.), gives the game a personality that takes it past similar beat-em-ups like Vivendi's Hulk. The well-acted voice samples are way too repetitious, though, and because you fight the same enemies throughout most of the game, the combat noises get annoyingly familiar as well.

Hey, it's a beat-em-up, what do you want? How about some combat variety? While the fighting is fun for the most part, the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles' limited moves make it seem like they just signed up for a self-defense course at the Y. Given the short moves list, though, the fighting action manages to be damn cool with ninjas flying and Turtles dashing about like, well, teenage ninjas.

Oh, and Konami, there are *four* Ninja Turtles (the theme song even counts them off). Why not give the world a four-player simultaneous Turtles game? Two-player mode is fun, but it's just not enough.

PROTIP: To beat Nano Monster Version 3, draw him into a corner and do your double-jump attack move on his head. Raphael's jump attack is perfect because it will hit him five times in a row.

PROTIP: When fighting the Elite Foot Ninja (and you will...a lot), ignore his dimly colored duplicates. The real ninja will always be brighter than the others.

EXTRA CHEESE, PLEASE

For old-school beat-em-up fans, Turtles likely will be a guilty pleasure. It's long, difficult, and a treat to the eyes and the nostalgic heart. It's just that humans have evolved a bit since this type of game ruled the world.

Also on the Xbox, GameCube, and PC

Turtles' refreshing cel-shaded look goes a long way to making it fun.

PROTIP: When fighting the Mystic Metal Ninja, keep dashing around until you see an opening, then lay down a little smack and get moving again.

PROTIP: Explosive barrels are more of a nuisance than anything else. You can get rid of them by hitting R2 to uppercut them away.

GRAPHICS	4.5

A slick cel-shaded look does the cartoon justice, but some dull level design and clone army–surplus enemies make it difficult to give it a perfect score.

SOUND	4.0

Make the Turtles stop talking! Repetitive voice samples accompany the Turtles' every combo, and the voices are kids'-cartoon quality, but the other sounds work well enough.

CONTROL	4.0

There are four Turtles, and each one has, according to the manual, about five moves. The game controls well, but if you're looking for fighting depth, you won't find it here.

FUN FACTOR	4.0

It's both fun and immensely frustrating, and it's so old-school you'd swear you'd have to blow on a cartridge to get it to work, but it's a very good example of an ancient, long-missing genre.

BY D-PAD DESTROYER

- Developed and published by Konami
- $39.99
- Action
- Available now
- 2 players

EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

GRAPHICS	SOUND	CONTROL	FUN FACTOR
4.5	4.0	4.0	4.0

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Ratchet & Clank: Going Commando

IF THIS WAS the first Ratchet & Clank game, it would probably be lauded as a masterpiece, a striking piece o' platforming (but not really) perfection. Does the existence of another, really similar game (also called Ratchet & Clank…go figure) detract from this sequel's successes?

EDITORS' GAMEPRO CHOICE

COPY MACHINE?

Superficially, Ratchet & Clank: Going Commando looks a hell of a lot like Ratchet & Clank a year ago, back when the duo wasn't necessarily goin' so commando. The graphics engine still produces pure prettiness (albeit slightly more efficiently), the game physics still work identically, the missions still follow the same format—and most importantly, you're still a cat (maybe) strapped to a robot with a heap-load of crazy-cool weapons to wield in clever ways.

PROTIP: If you want to buy the best weapons, find a Mega-Game you like and play the hell out of it for big bolts.

CAT GUTS

What actually makes Ratchet & Clank: Going Commando better than the first is very subtle…a collection of balance tweaks and design nudges rather than overt changes. Where it succeeds the most is in correcting the pacing—the original R&C was a "second-half" adventure, the kind of game that didn't really show its true colors until about halfway through. This R&C spreads its wings much sooner, giving you that awesome "James Bond" feeling by the end of the second mission rather than the ninth. New weapons are earned at a more even keel, and the smart shooting scenarios force you to abandon your wrench and learn the Ways of the Weapon pretty much by the end of the first level. The game's much-touted RPG system is really nothing more than a very cleverly disguised difficulty balancer, a nifty way to give gamers who suck a chance while making sure veterans don't feel overqualified.

Even the way it handles mini-games is tweaked—it gives you an easy "space-shooting mission" (or whatever) that you have to get through to progress, but makes subsequent "space-shooting" challenges optional—meaning you'll never be annoyed by that too-hard tone-breaking hoverbike race unless you really want to be. The dual demons of Frustration and Annoyance have been systematically targeted and destroyed by the Insomniac play-balance machine.

CLAK & RATSTER

Despite the perhaps too-striking similarities to its predecessor, Ratchet & Clank: Going Commando is still a great damn game, endlessly playable even if you've played the original endlessly. Between this and Jak II, Sony's served up two very different slices of prime platforming (but not really) goodness this season. Choose cat and robot. Choose elf and weasel. Either way, you've chosen wisely.

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PROTIP: Follow the tour guide at the MegaCorp Armory to the end, and you'll find a platinum bolt. Don't let any tourists die along the route, and you'll get a skill point.

PROTIP: Head southeast of the guru in the mining area on Tabora once you have gravity boots. A Raritanium mining vehicle awaits.

PROTIP: The Lava Gun is actually a bit better (and more fun) than its upgrade, the Meteor Gun–so use magma sparingly!

PROTIP: Swing the camera around to look for hidden platinum bolts while riding around on taxis.

PROTIP: The Shock Mod is a great mod for the Megaturret. So is the Lock-On Mod for the Heavy Lancer.

GRAPHICS 5.0

Still as gorgeous as ever and then some. The enemies all have immense personality (especially for automatons), the diverse backgrounds all warrant staring at, and new stuff like spherical worlds are just plain neat-o. Even the "Mega-Game" graphics are great.

SOUND 4.5

The music has been improved with more memorable sequences than the original's generic B-movie stuff, and the sound effects are punched up, but Jak II still edges it out. There's some funny voice acting…and Ratchet isn't a stupid dummy jerkhead anymore!

CONTROL 4.5

Ratchet handles just as well as he did in the last one (great but not perfect), but key little fixes have been made to the quick-select menu (it now pauses the game!) and weapon functions that really help quash former annoyances. The Mega-Games are fun.

FUN FACTOR 4.5

A magnificent example of fine-tuning, Ratchet & Clank: Going Commando sculpts the successes of the first one to near-perfection…but too many similarities to the original make it all seem just a teensy bit stale.

BY STAR DINGO

- Developed by Insomniac
- Published by Sony
- $39.99
- Available November
- Action
- 1 player

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

GRAPHICS	SOUND	CONTROL	FUN FACTOR
5.0	4.5	4.5	4.5

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ANYONE WITH EVEN the slightest urge to sing a tune to an adoring crowd should check out Karaoke Revolution, the latest music simulation game from Konami.

GOTTA SING

A singing simulator might sound daunting to some, but Karaoke Revolution makes it all very easy to get into and simple to understand. You just sing out the scrolling lyrics to the correct rhythm and hit the right pitch to complete a song. How harshly you're judged is fully adjustable as are the volume of the music, your earphone level, default vocals, and your own vocals. The main modes—Showtime, Arcade, and Karaoke—allow you to unlock extras like costumes and stages, go through mini-challenge levels, or just sing for fun with no judging parameters.

The game's voice recognition works great and enables you to switch from a low baritone to high falsetto without confusing the judging. Unfortunately, it doesn't distinguish whether you're actually singing the correct lyrics, so you can get by with just "na, na, na'ing" it when you're in trouble. Still, the important factor is that the technology works in a way that's fun and you don't feel cheated.

PROTIP: Nailing the special crowd boost phrases greatly shifts the momentum of your performance.

PROTIP: Carrying long notes is harder than you'd think, so definitely practice during the sound check.

KARAOKE IDOL

The 36 songs included cover hits from the 1970s to the present, and the choices are all quite good. Although the songs are licensed, they are not voiced by the original artists, but that isn't a big deal as the star of this show is…you! Even so, you run out of tunes fairly quickly and the replay value consists of achieving higher scores, raising the judging difficulty, and just singing casually with friends. There is an eight-player mode where you can take turns jostling for better scores that can be great for larger gatherings.

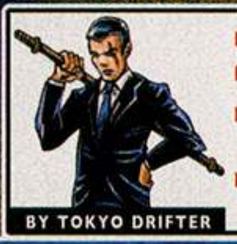
Karaoke Revolution is great fun, and you'll do well whether you're a closet pop star with a great voice or an average couch crooner with questionable talent. G

PROTIP: Getting a string of Great and Good marks continues combos, which are worth big points.

Doing well in Showtime mode unlocks costumes, songs, and videos.

PROTIP: Before starting, be sure to go through the game's practice tutorial.

EDITORS' GAMEPRO CHOICE


BY TOKYO DRIFTER

- Developed by Harmonix
- Published by Konami
- $59.99 with headset
- Available November
- Singing sim
- 8 players

EVERYONE	GRAPHICS	SOUND	CONTROL	FUN FACTOR
E	3.5	4.5	4.5	4.5

Sphinx and the Cursed Mummy

SET IN A mythological quasi-Egyptian wonderland, Sphinx and the Cursed Mummy aspires to be the PlayStation 2 answer to The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker, and though it never quite captures the charm and scope of Shigeru Miyamoto's masterpiece, it is still an engaging, rewarding adventure worth giving a chance.

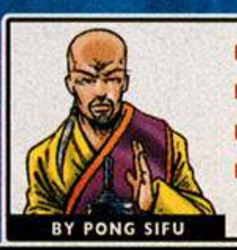
The game's hook is that you alternate between two characters, each with a distinct style of gameplay. As the compassionate young adventurer, Sphinx, you explore massive levels, solve simple puzzles, and fight indigenous creatures with an enchanted sword, a blowgun, and mind-controlled scarabs. You traverse immense worlds populated with characters who assign you tasks to complete in return for items and weapons that help you complete your quest. Meanwhile, as decrepit mummy Tutankhamen, you progress by solving more complex puzzles that demand careful observation of your environment. Play as Tut, and you'll satiate your sadistic urges by allowing yourself to be immolated and electrocuted in order to burn down barriers or supply energy to machines. Both characters' stories intertwine, and items you find as one can be transferred to the other, enabling both of their abilities to evolve.

PROTIP: Use the Shield of Osiris to deflect attacks from the Towers of Ra.

PROTIP: To avoid wandering around wondering where to go, be sure to jot down the names and locations of important places, such as the Cursed Palace.

Sticky controls and a temperamental camera makes for difficult combat. Sphinx showboats lush, densely populated environments, good texturing, and fantastic character animations. The music seeps into the background rather than sucking you into the action, and there is no spoken dialogue. All in all, Sphinx is a solid, whimsical adventure and a nice surprise. G

Also on the Xbox and GameCube


BY PONG SIFU

- Developed by Eurocom Entertainment Software
- Published by THQ
- $39.99
- Available November
- Adventure
- 1 player

TEEN	GRAPHICS	SOUND	CONTROL	FUN FACTOR
T	3.5	3.5	3.0	3.5

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TIME CRISIS 3

THE TIME CRISIS series is to the PlayStation 2 as apple pie is to America. The games are known automatically as the premiere arcade shooters that never jam in a heavy firefight. The latest console installment continues the legacy in surefire fashion.

IN THE KNICK OF TIME

If it weren't for the very best VSSE agents, the tiny country of Lukano would be overrun by the nefarious Zagorias Federation. As one of these special agents, it's your job to waste away the unwanted troops and put a stop to a missile attack on the Lukano citizens in nine intense gunfighting levels. Of course, Time Crisis 3 isn't about the story. The entire game is about your quick reflexes with your trigger finger.

If you use the GunCon 2, then your job is much easier and more enjoyable. As always, the GunCon 2 performs exceptionally well—it's super accurate, quick to respond, and comfortable to hold. And the ability to switch between the handgun, shotgun, machine gun, and grenade launcher while ducking only adds to the cool factor of split-second decision-making during the never-ending, fast-paced action.

PROTIP: Shoot the yellow-and-white–suited guy up to three times for extra ammunition.

PROTIP: Use the shotgun in close quarters for maximum effectiveness.

BULLETS OVER BROADWAY

Time Crisis 3 faithfully ports over the colorful visuals and cheesy sounds from the arcade version. The gun-toting baddies are detailed with a solid, cartoony palette of colors, and they animate with multiple reactions if you blast them in different body parts. The weapon effects are standard fare, while the voice acting remains the same under-achieving babble found in the entire Time Crisis library. Of course, as with the story, the first-rate gunnin' action takes precedence over everything else in the game. This is one crisis that all pistol enthusiasts should make time for.

PROTIP: Juggle enemies by quickly shooting them multiple times for extra points.

EDITORS' GAMEPRO CHOICE

BY FOUR-EYED DRAGON

- Developed and published by Namco
- $59.99 with GunCon 2
- Available now
- First-person action/ shooting
- 2 players

ESRB: TEEN

FUN FACTOR	GRAPHICS	SOUND	CONTROL
5.0	4.0	3.5	5.0

SWAT GLOBAL STRIKE TEAM

THERE'S NO CONNECTION between this game and the summer action flick, but they actually share a lot of similarities—light on realism and story, heavy on wham-bang action.

"Freeze!"

The interesting twist in SWAT: Global Strike Team is that because you are the cops, you can't hose down a room without first shouting for the bad guys to surrender, and you actually have to capture and arrest some of them alive. You work in a three-person unit, issuing simple but effective commands and cycling between the roles of sniper and team leader. The resulting dynamic is a mix of deliberate pacing and frenzied firefights that requires smart use of your trigger finger and your brain—but neither too heavily.

PROTIP: When playing as Lee, switch to tranquilizer rounds to restrain a suspect–her regular ammo is powerful enough to kill in a single shot.

PROTIP: If you're trying to arrest someone, hit them with single shots at slow but steady intervals while hammering the Issue Compliance button until they surrender.

PROTIP: One of your first upgrades should be to your weapon's sights–it grants you both a sniper view and the ability to lean around corners.

The silly part is that your team works worldwide, but fortunately, the bad guys patiently wait while you jet to their location to save the day. Other silliness includes highly trained operatives who can't jump over knee-high barriers and forcing cops to earn the equipment they need by first completing missions.

"Get Down!"

One of SWAT's big hooks is the ability to use a USB headset to bellow various commands. Unfortunately, it performs unevenly, though the other controls function smoothly. The missions unfold in a strictly linear fashion, but enemy locations change fractionally each time you replay a level. The A.I. isn't a very demanding opponent, and FPS pros will find the action easy but enjoyable even on the Hard setting. The graphics are mostly good, mixing great lighting and sharp interiors with feeble exterior scenery. The audio is weak, particularly the lame dialogue.

SWAT's action isn't of the highest caliber. But with 21 levels, some cool concepts, and great multiplayer support, it's a fine rental for most and an enjoyable mission for FPS fans.

Also on the Xbox

BY AIR HENDRIX

- Developed by Argonaut
- Published by Vivendi Universal Games
- $49.99
- Action
- Available now
- 2 players

ESRB: MATURE

FUN FACTOR	GRAPHICS	SOUND	CONTROL
3.5	4.0	3.0	3.5

Bloody Roar 4

PROTIP: BR4's beast health bar is like a second life line, and it can be recharged during human-side fighting to enable more damage to be taken.

WITH KONAMI PICKING up the superilliant Bloody Roar series, the publisher has promised that Bloody Roar 4 will be featuriffic. If you thought that was over the top, wait until you see BR4.

Konami is a publishing vet, though here it might mean "veterinarian"—the combatants are humans with beast alter-egos, including a tiger, a lion, and—yes—a rabbit. The latest take features 14 returning morphighters and adds three new ones: Nagi the Spurious, Reiji the Crow, and a team comprised of Ryoho and little girl/fox Mana.

The title packs in nine gameplay modes, including the Arcade, Time Attack, and Versus standards. Career mode offers a fantasy twist on the "make your fighter" option with DNA as a victory prize (along with the occasionally unlocked feature or fighter). It can be used to tailor the character's abilities in much the same way vehicles can be tweaked in racing games.

PROTIP: New character Mana doesn't do much to help Ryoho in human form, but as a fox, she can strike supplemental low blows.

Bloody Roar 4 takes the franchise's wild fighting to the extreme with a massive sensory assault. Every strike rattles the speakers, and lengthy combos are common, all accompanied by spellcasting-like bursts. Each blow also raises a spray of…is it red paint? It must be, because the fighters don't otherwise appear damaged during combat. However, "Wet Paint Roar" doesn't sound as cool. The accompanying audio is crisp, but the voice acting seems like an afterthought. While Bloody Roar 4 might not challenge for the Best Fighting Game crown, it does offer extremulicious action. G

BY MANNY LAMANCHA

- Developed by Eighting/Hudson Soft
- Published by Konami
- $39.99
- Available November
- Fighting
- 2 players

MATURE M — CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

GRAPHICS	SOUND	CONTROL	FUN FACTOR
4.0	3.5	3.5	4.0

Warhammer 40,000: Fire Warrior

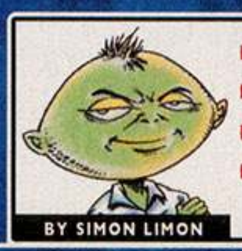
PROTIP: Explosive barrels and crates are located in most levels. Shoot the barrels when enemies are near them—if you don't, enemies may try to do the same to you.

FOR A TIME, every upcoming first-person shooter for the PlayStation 2 was a hopeful "Halo killer." Unfortunately, most of these titles fell below the bar that Halo set for console shooters. The upshot of all this is that failing to mimic a masterpiece usually results in a decent failure. That's pretty much how Fire Warrior turned out.

Based on the popular tabletop role-playing game, Warhammer 40,000: Fire Warrior puts you inside the helmet of a Tau warrior destined to fight against an oppressive human empire hell-bent on consuming the growing Tau race. The single-player campaign immerses you instantly, throwing you into a chaotic rescue mission with nothing but your commander's radio instructions and a feeble regenerating shield. Throughout 21 missions, a mix of scripted and unscripted events add a genuine feeling of futuristic strife. Sadly, efforts made to envelop you in Warhammer's medieval yet technological world are undone by sending you hunting for the blue door's blue key—only to reveal a red door with a similar keyless predicament. It's fair to say that most gamers prefer to have their goals disguised as something less obtuse.

PROTIP: During multiplayer battles, most weapons merely chip away at enemy shields. Learn to love your grenades.

Fire Warrior features online play and split-screen support for four players, but there's no visual cue to indicate if you're actually hitting an enemy. With only four maps, the multiplayer perk is short-lived. Overall, Warhammer is a decent game with graphics and gameplay that would have been much more impressive had it been released alongside older PlayStation 2 titles like Red Faction or TimeSplitters. G



BY SIMON LIMON

- Developed by Kuju
- Published by THQ
- $49.99
- Available now
- First-person shooter
- 4 players

MATURE M — CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

GRAPHICS	SOUND	CONTROL	FUN FACTOR
3.0	4.0	4.5	3.0

Batman: Rise of Sin Tzu

PROTIP: Save batarangs to disarm distant opponents.

UBI SOFT DELIVERS its best Batman game yet with quality animation, authentic sound effects, and an impressive cast of popular Batman characters and villains. However, this is a straight beat-em-up action game where the fun is in endless fisticuffs and button-mashing. If you're looking for an in-depth adventure game, you'll be disappointed with the simplicity of Rise of Sin Tzu.

You can play solo or team up with a friend as you choose from Batman, Robin, Nightwing, and Batgirl to face off against endless waves of thugs and some of Gotham's fiercest villains, including the evil Sin Tzu. You battle through each level using a variety of attack moves while earning credits to unlock other moves and weapons. Conquering the Challenge mode helps unlock special features, such as cinematics, 3D character models, and comic book art.

PROTIP: Dash your way to safety when surrounded or cornered.

Rise of Sin Tzu's graphics are faithful to the retro style of the animated *Batman* series. Special effects, such as the Scarecrow's reality-warping scare bomb and the fluttering of a flurry of bats, create yummy eye candy. Impressive cinematics advance a compelling story line, and sharp voice acting, sound effects, and variations of the Batman theme tell a solid story faithful to its comic-book roots. The controls are simplistic, making it easy to pull off the various combos and moves, as well as maneuver through each level.

This game is strictly for action junkies and can be completed in a quick weekend rental. However, the quality of the graphics and gameplay hints at the potential for deeper, more compelling Batman games to come. G

Also on the Xbox and GameCube

BY DR. ZOMBIE

- Developed and published by Ubi Soft
- $39.99
- Available now
- Action
- 2 players

TEEN T — CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

GRAPHICS	SOUND	CONTROL	FUN FACTOR
4.0	4.0	4.0	3.5

Tak and the Power of Juju

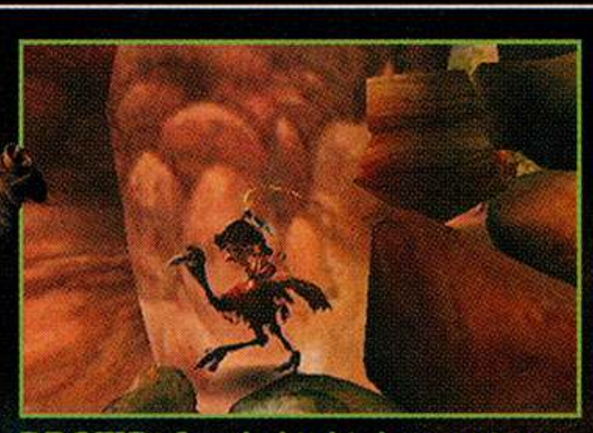
TAK AND THE POWER OF JUJU has at its core a concept that could have taken it away from the typical crop of platform titles. Unfortunately, it doesn't seem to trust that gimmick enough to truly embrace it.

PROTIP: Sheep are great animals. You can use them to power certain devices, carry them to disguise yourself and creep past guards, or use their feminine wiles to distract rams so they don't charge you.

Sheep Trick

As Tak, you have to help the High Shaman restore Lok, a great Pupanunu hero, to fighting form so he can take out the evil shaman Tlaloc. The game's story is one of its strong points, but the star concept is the pseudo-strategy gameplay involved in wrangling the indigenous animals across the game's levels. To complete a goal, you might have to distract an aggressive ram, carry a sheep on your head to sneak past a guard, or get a monkey to toss coconuts at an orangutan. Figuring out the animals' behaviors and how to exploit them is great fun, and it's a gameplay concept no platformer (save perhaps Eidos's Herdy Gerdy) has ever used before.

Unfortunately, this cool concept can't save the rest of the game from mediocrity. While its graphics are nice enough (with some frame rate and camera problems here and there) and its music is cool enough to forgive Tak's dumb, anachronistic sound bites, the controls just aren't responsive or solid enough to make for a good platformer. Combat is ridiculously imprecise, and the camera controls make every action an exercise in multitasking. Except for the ecological exercise with the animals, Tak is your average bargain-bin platformer.



PROTIP: Smack this bird to get it to stop running away, then hop on. You won't be able to control its speed, but you can steer it and make it jump.

PROTIP: Rhinos are great for knocking down wooden walls and bowling over enemies. They run fast, too, so they're good for covering distances.

PROTIP: Orangutans hang out next to the nearest tree. If you need them to catapult you from another tree, you'll have to find a way to lure them over.

Blockbuster Title

Innovation in the platforming genre is a good thing, but it needs a solid gameplay foundation to support it. Tak is good enough for a curious rental, but it's not really compelling enough to own. G

Also on the GameCube

BY D-PAD DESTROYER

- Developed by Avalanche Software
- Published by THQ
- $49.99
- Platform
- Available now
- 1 player

EVERYONE — CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

GRAPHICS	SOUND	CONTROL	FUN FACTOR
4.0	4.0	3.5	3.5

Backyard Wrestling: Don't Try This at Home

THE DEVELOPER OF the infamous Thrill Kill brings you Backyard Wrestling, a deceptively innovative title that glorifies the frighteningly popular antics of such backyard wrestling phenomena as Josh Prohibition, MDogg20, and Madman Pondo.

DON'T RUN WITH HEDGE CLIPPERS...

Backyard Wrestling's core gameplay places two fighters in an improvised ring of sorts. While the game's title promises wrestling action, the gameplay actually supports something more like Power Stone–esque hijinks: You run around, toss bricks and bicycles, and leap off impossibly high structures onto your opponent. The coolest thing about these levels is that each one has some sort of "unlockable" hazard; this and the improvised weapons scattered about make each match a little different and help avoid the "wrestle, taunt, wrestle, taunt, pin" pattern of THQ's WWE titles.

Backyard Wrestling's problem isn't in its concept but rather in its finish. It just doesn't look, sound, or play well enough to keep up with the cool core design idea. Collision problems and timing issues mar the otherwise smart rock-paper-scissors nature of the grappling system, and it's just too hard to avoid getting hit by thrown, apparently heat-seeking projectiles. The reversal system thankfully eliminates the thumb-destroying button mashing of other titles, but it takes tons of practice and split-second timing to pull off. On the good side, Backyard Wrestling's two-player matches can be great fun, despite the shaky physics and erratic collision and move timing.

PROTIP: Some weapons have special moves attached to them. Hitting □ makes you swing with this wrench, but × begins this wrenching "Lights Out" attack.

PROTIP: If you slam your opponent against the SUV in the mall level, the alarm will summon a guard who takes a cheap shot at anyone who comes near the elevator in the corner.

PROTIP: You can get really hurt jumping from great heights. Wait until your opponent is either Punch Drunk or committed to carrying a heavy item before you jump.

...YOU'LL POKE YOUR EYE OUT

Backyard Wrestling: Don't Try This at Home is notable for its clever design, but there's a bit too much sloppiness in its execution to really hook a wide audience. The chaotic action's fun enough, but only the most hardcore will ignore the game's faults. G

Also on the Xbox

BY D-PAD DESTROYER

- Developed by Paradox
- Published by Eidos Interactive
- $49.99
- Wrestling
- Available now
- 2 players

MATURE — CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

GRAPHICS	SOUND	CONTROL	FUN FACTOR
3.5	3.0	3.5	3.5

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PlayStation®2

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB — Suggestive Themes Violence

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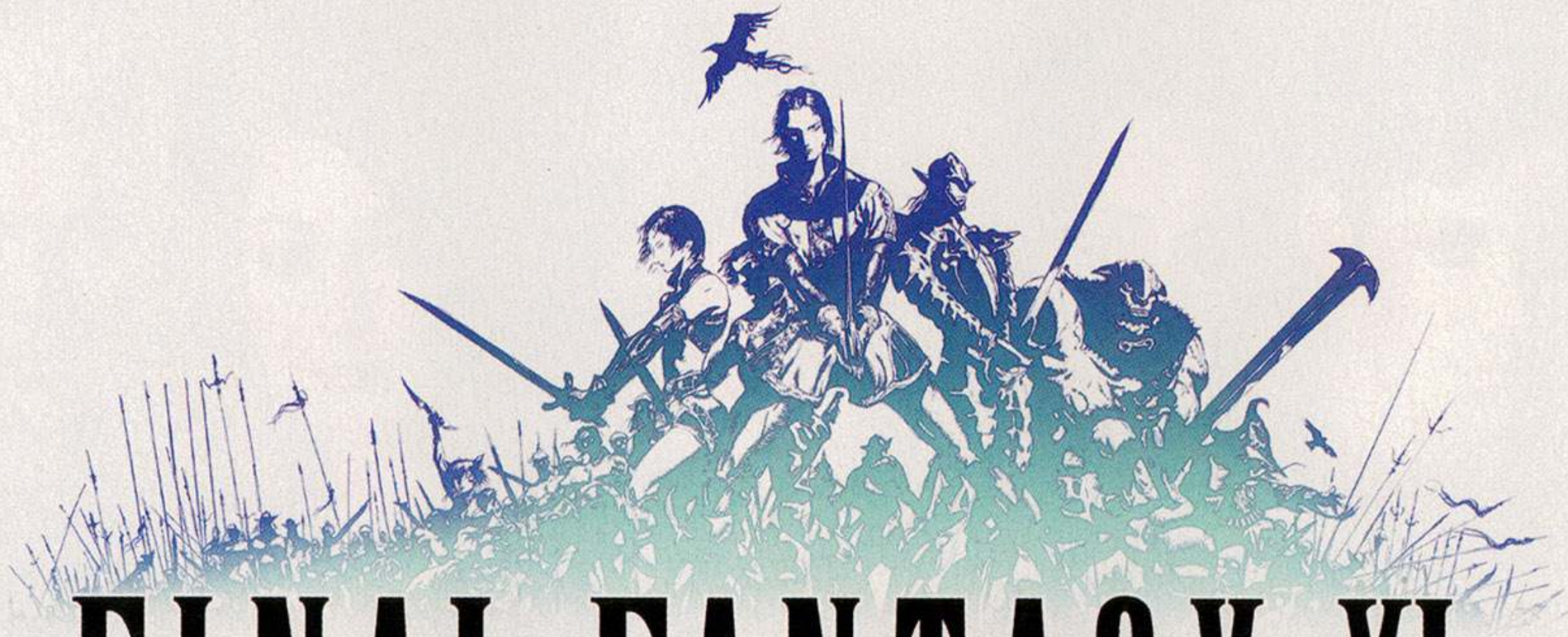

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TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Blood and Gore
Violence
Mild Language
Suggestive Themes

PlayStation.2 XBOX NINTENDO GAMECUBE VIVENDI UNIVERSAL games FOX INTERACTIVE™

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Score: 9/10 "If you are a *Buffy* fan, you'll want to buy *Chaos Bleeds*. If you're not a *Buffy* fan, you'll want to buy it because it's damned fun."

-PSM, October 2003

Score: 8.8/10 "More moves right off the bat, more areas to check out – it's an action gamer's dream, really."

-Official Xbox Magazine, October 2003

Score: 8.2/10 "...an excellent, well-put-together action adventure game that most fans of the genre should be able to enjoy and any *Buffy* fan will love."

-Gamespot, August 2003

Score: B+ "Not only does the game look better than its predecessor but it outperforms it in nearly every way."

-Play Magazine, October 2003

Battle as Buffy & 5 other favorite characters.

Multiplayer chaos - with support for up to 4 players on the same screen.

Story based on a lost episode of the television series.

GOBLIN COMMANDER

UNLEASH THE HORDE

Exclusive First Review

IN AN ATTEMPT to squeeze real-time strategy gameplay into the confines of a console (and its evil little RTS-hating controller), Jaleco has gone back to the drawing board and come up with a very cool game of smart little compromises. It plays outside the ancient RTS boundaries and deftly avoids the wild things waiting to tear apart its tender little throat.

PROTIP: Set up patrol routes between key targets (shrines, fountains, etc.) by holding down L1 and connecting the Clan's first and last waypoint.

PROTIP: Learn to recognize buildings that generate enemies. The Hellfire "barracks" has an unassuming red flag in front.

Goblin Commander's two-player split-screen mode is the best feature because all the stuff that makes it great is immediately accessible. There are 12 multiplayer maps all told…but no Xbox Live support.

PROTIP: Position Hellfire atop a hill. Their range is a huge advantage when they're above their enemies.

THE BENEFITS OF PACK MIND

Goblin Commander's philosophy basically boils down to one of immediacy: less to worry about for the long term, a lot more to worry about *right now*. It's much simpler than your average RTS in that there can be really only six effective "units" under your control at a time. The tech trees are straightforward, and base-building and resource-gathering are severely limited. It's more complex in that these units constantly require your attention and, in the case of the giant Titan units, your direct control. Strategy is actually more obviously imperative: You have to plan your battles and pick your positions carefully as your goblins are so limited, and you can't just adopt the usual "just make a bazillion units and send 'em over all at once" tactic found in other RTS games.

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THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL

The single-player campaign isn't the best showcase for the game's design achievements, however…and that's one of the game's big weaknesses: There are a fair number of missions (17 all told), but a lot of time is spent introducing the player to new concepts (there are a lot to deal with). As a result, the major three-clan frenzies and coolest Titans aren't really available until the final four or so missions of the campaign game. The story isn't StarCraft, either.

Traditionally, the multiplayer mode is where these RTS things really get to shine, and that's the case with GC, too. It has a very fun two-player split-screen mode in which you're given access to all the good stuff right from the get-go. It's the kind of game that's a natural fit for Xbox Live…but, alas, the support's not there.

CLASH OF THE TITANS

Goblin Commander is bursting with great ideas that are implemented with brains, but it's not quite fully realized. Still, it's tons of frenetic fun while it lasts, a really awesome way to kill an hour with a friend, and something unique in a game world dominated by hordes of the same.

EDITORS' GAMEPRO CHOICE

Also on the PlayStation 2 and GameCube

THE PS2 WAR EFFORT

The PS2 version doesn't quite measure up to the Xbox version in the frame-rate and graphical realms, but the controls are actually a little better due to the layout…get the Xbox version if you have a choice. Unfortunately, the GameCube version wasn't available for review at press time.

PROTIP: Once you have a big army, rally around one of your Titans. The Plaguespitter's Slime Titan slows as it gets bigger–excrete an Acid Blast to speed back up.

PROTIP: Purchase Moon Stones at the Observatory before tackling an enemy's lair. They don't last long, but they can seriously turn the tide of war.

GRAPHICS 3.5

Not the game's strong suit—the character models are simple, and the levels have a bit of a construction-kit feel—but GC nails it where it counts by keeping it clean. You never get lost in the chaos that constantly reigns.

SOUND 4.5

Entertaining (and not remotely serious) squishy sounds and fake goblin accents. The sound is carefully designed—when you zoom in, the goblin chatter gets louder; swinging the camera around accurately reflects changes in the aural environment.

CONTROL 5.0

Instead of forcing a square peg into a round hole, GC was very wisely designed with the console controller firmly in mind. The result is monkey-friendly, intuitive, and never confusing despite how complex the game's commands can be.

FUN FACTOR 4.5

Smart new theory kicks a dying genre in the butt and makes for a unique single-player and terrific two-player game. A less top-heavy single-player campaign and Xbox Live support would have pushed it past the limit. Oh well—maybe next time.

BY STAR DINGO

- Developed and published by Jaleco
- $49.99
- Available November
- RTS
- 2 players

TEEN — CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

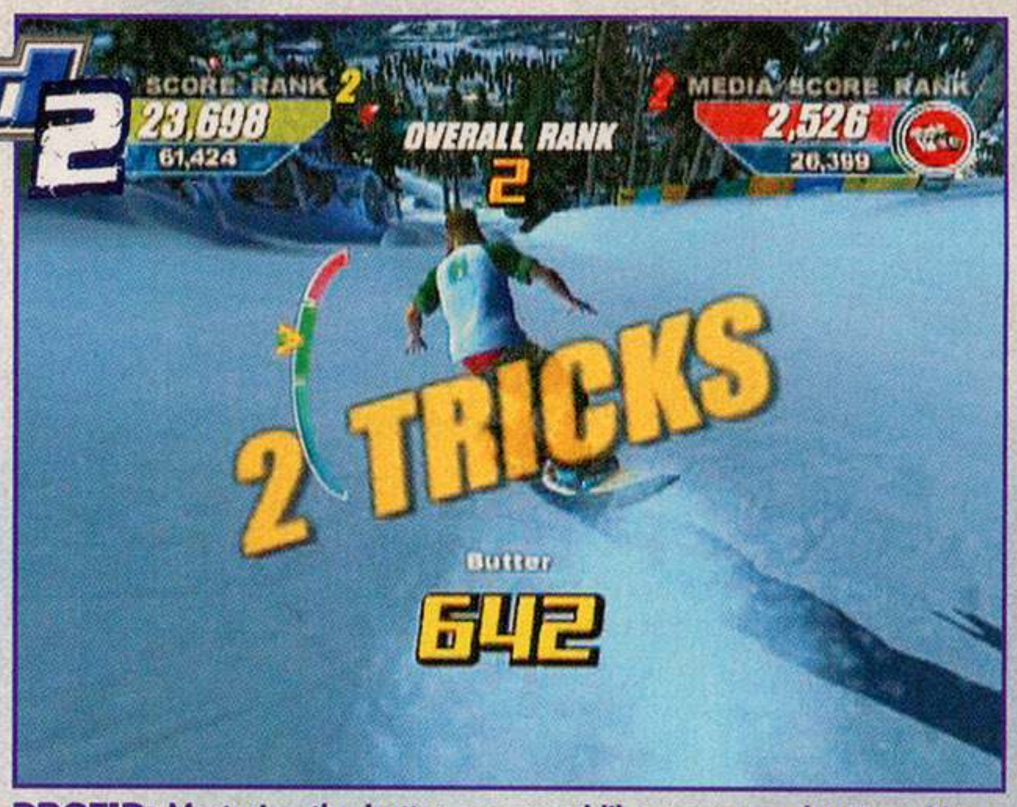
GRAPHICS	SOUND	CONTROL	FUN FACTOR
3.5	4.5	5.0	4.5

amped 2

MICROSOFT JUMPED INTO the world of snowboarding games with Amped, one of the launch titles for the Xbox console when it debuted in November 2001. Now with the release of Amped 2, it has taken the original game's foundation and built a solid addition to the franchise.

SLOW SNOW FLOW?

The sequel picks right up where its predecessor left off, featuring gorgeous graphics and smooth animation for a great look, as well as challenging, fast-moving action on the slopes. It also offers plenty of unlockables in the Career mode to keep you pushing for better scores and completion of new objectives.



PROTIP: Mastering the butter, a manual-like move used to transition from one trick to another, will generate sick combo points. The key is maintaining your balance between tricks.

Amped 2 also carves its own path with some notable additions. One of the most welcome is a full tutorial mode that steps players through the requirements—from the basic navigation to complex tricks to the elaborate chaining together of moves into combos—and enables guided practice sessions to hone the skills.

PROTIP: With Amped 2's tight trick control, using the tutorials to practice your skills will help your scores in later gameplay.

STICK SICK TRICKS

There are a load of tricks available to you, though completing them will have your fingers flying around the controller. It's also refreshing that, instead of a wilder arcade-like approach, the game portrays the sport more realistically; it's a bit more work to pull off a dizzying spin or flip, as it would be in real life. Though there's a high learning curve to the trick system, once you get comfortable with it, kicking out high-point tricks, grinds, or combos will be routine.

PROTIP: Pop a big trick at a camera icon for a large media score–and maybe a magazine cover.

While the Career mode offers plenty of goals for a player to complete, a whole new dimension is opened up with the addition of Xbox Live support for competition against others over the Internet. Amped 2 is one of the first games under Microsoft's XSN Sports banner, so it has the potential for player-created leagues and tournaments, as well as worldwide rankings over the World Wide Web. Two-player split-screen and System Link for up to eight Xboxes are available as well.

With a blizzard of snowboarding games this holiday season, Microsoft could have found itself on a slippery slope against the competition. Instead, it came out of the gate with a quality contest that won't leave gamers out in the cold.

PROTIP: If you're about to lose balance in a butter or a grind, jump out of it. It's better than dumping in the snow.

Microsoft promises to have plenty of downloadable content available right from the game's launch.

EDITORS' GAMEPRO CHOICE

- Developed and published by Microsoft
- $49.99
- Available now
- Snowboarding
- 8 players

EVERYONE E — CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

GRAPHICS	SOUND	CONTROL	FUN FACTOR
4.0	4.5	4.0	4.5

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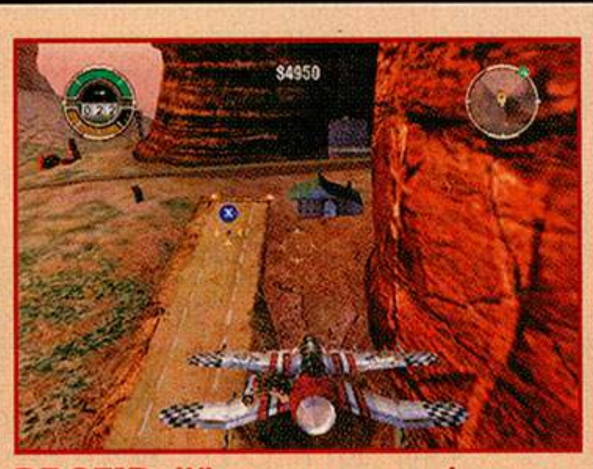
CRIMSON SKIES
HIGH ROAD TO REVENGE



PROTIP: When you see a plane on a landing strip, take it–you're a pirate, dammit. Fly it back to the Pandora, and you'll add it to your collection. You won't lose your old plane.

PROTIP: It's usually worth chasing down the repair kits that fall from destroyed enemies as garage-based repairs cost money. If the kits touch the ground, they disappear.

When Crimson Skies came out for the PC back in 2000, a lot of gamers who tried the arcade-style, action-oriented gameplay immediately said, "Wow, this would make a good console game." They were wrong—High Road to Revenge makes a truly *great* console game, easily one of the best console games of the year and an absolute must-own for Xbox gamers.

MEN OF VALOR

Based on the tabletop strategy game, Crimson Skies: High Road to Revenge once again stars Nathan Zachary, the ruggedly handsome, wisecracking leader of the Fortune Hunters, a Robin Hood–style air pirate gang with hearts of gold, flying the unfriendly skies of an alternate 1930s America. The nation has been split into warring factions, and fighter planes and zeppelins battle for territorial supremacy on a daily basis. Every character is indeed a real character, and the game overflows with melodramatic bravado and a winking sense of humor—thanks in no small part to the superlative voice acting.

PROTIP: When attacking enemy bases, look for the red fuel cylinders–blow them up, and they'll do the damage for you.

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MAD PROPS

While Crimson Skies' idealized look at the past is full of handsome heroes and dazzling dames, they're not all that's pretty. High Road to Revenge features some of the most gorgeous Xbox graphics since the mighty Halo. Beautiful landscape textures and intricately designed levels make Crimson Skies as much fun to explore as it is to take a dive into dogfights. Up to 16 players can join in on System Link or Xbox Live games, manning 10 different planes as well as anti-aircraft guns. They're all extremely easy to control—the game's not a flight sim by any means. Analog flight sticks and trigger-mounted weapons make navigation and combat as simple as possible, and the special stunt moves—which cause your plane to twist, flip, and roll for surprise attacks and quick escapes—simply make you feel like a badass hero.

While they might look like they wouldn't fly, many of the plane designs in Crimson Skies are based on real-world, flightworthy, experimental aircraft.

JUST PLANE INCREDIBLE

That feeling is really the key to Crimson Skies' appeal. The swelling chase music, idealized world, larger-than-life story, and easy-to-master controls combine to cut through the clutter of some more pretentious games and deliver a sense of majesty and bravery straight to your heart. You can't help but get wrapped up in High Road to Revenge, and you won't want to resist. Nor should you—Crimson Skies is escapist gaming at its finest.

PROTIP: Races are a great way to make big cash fast. Fly your first race with almost no money on the line, and then go back and bet the maximum amount once you know the track.

PROTIP: Whether you're in an AA gun or an airplane, remember to lead your targets: Don't shoot where they are, shoot where they'll be.

PROTIP: In "A Dark Night," use the Dauphin's brutal firepower (especially its rockets) to take down the mysterious electro-powered blimp.

EDITORS' GAMEPRO CHOICE

GRAPHICS 5.0

Lush environments, rusted zeppelin carcasses, planes that burst into flames before they burst into pieces…what's not to like? Cool plane designs, creative levels, and special effects like smoke, flaming engines, and explosions make the world of Crimson Skies exceptionally rich in all visual details.

SOUND 5.0

Here's a benchmark in voice acting, complete with barrel-chested heroes, slimy-sounding villains, and just enough cheese to make the meaty gameplay taste even better. Explosions and engine sounds dance around a full orchestral soundtrack that sounds like it came straight out of an Errol Flynn serial.

CONTROL 5.0

Nonreconfigurable but perfectly tuned controls make High Road to Revenge's combat intuitive and cool moves a breeze—you'll be doing barrel rolls, daring turns, and switchback 180s with a few simple clicks of the analog sticks no matter which plane you choose to fly. Heroic stunts have never been easier.

FUN FACTOR 5.0

It was a long time coming (the game was delayed to add Xbox Live support, among other things), but it was definitely worth the wait. Crimson Skies: High Road to Revenge not only lives up to expectations but also exceeds them. It's easily one of the best Xbox games to date.

BY DAN ELEKTRO

- Developed and published by Microsoft
- $49.99
- Action
- Available now
- 16 players via Xbox Live

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

GRAPHICS	SOUND	CONTROL	FUN FACTOR
5.0	5.0	5.0	5.0

WWE Raw 2

PROTIP: Don't go for the pin until your opponent's in the Danger zone. If your own bar is suitably pumped, you'll get the pin easily.

IF THERE'S EVER been an argument for the unification of THQ's WWE games across platforms, Raw 2 would probably seal the deal. The game's not *terrible*—its Season mode gives you more control over the evolving story line than any other WWE game before—but actually playing the game feels like the industry has devolved to the days when games could be exciting just for being wrestling games. Aside from its nice but dull looks and the neat customization options in the Create A Superstar mode, Raw 2 is a step backward in wrestling game quality.

For Xbox-owning WWE fans, Raw 2 has tons of superstars and match types, and WWE fans are known for being forgiving of poor gameplay if these other aspects are around. The four-player Season mode lacks polish and could use a few more months of work, but if you're looking for a WWE experience with your friends, you could do worse than Raw 2. The biggest problem with Season mode is that you can't skip your own matches; the options to stage surprise attacks on rivals, encourage friendly wrestlers to do well, and call out opponents for matches make for intriguing behind-the-scenes mind games that would have flourished in a game with a competent fighting system.

PROTIP: A surprise attack is a good way to soften up an opponent before a match, but if you get beat up backstage, you'll be weaker in the ring.

In fact, the Season mode is pretty much the only thing keeping this lump of disappointment afloat. There are much better wrestling games out there than this, and the WWE shows are on several times each week if you need to get your manly soap-opera fix.

BY D-PAD DESTROYER

- Developed by Anchor
- Published by THQ
- $49.99
- Wrestling
- Available now
- 4 players

TEEN	GRAPHICS	SOUND	CONTROL	FUN FACTOR
T	4.5	3.5	3.0	3.0

kill.switch

NAMCO'S TENSION-FRAUGHT, METHODICALLY paced military shooter distinguishes itself by forcing you to tactically use your environment for cover against enemy fire as much as possible. Despite lofty narrative ambitions, kill.switch's gameplay premise is a simple one: jaunt around political hotspots while rubbing out a veritable army of terrorists and enemy operatives. It's you against the world, so the only way to overcome ridiculously overwhelming odds is by hiding behind objects while picking off armed geeks one by one. Blindly firing around corners scatters enemies and keeps you out of harm's way, while breaking cover to take aim yields more accuracy but leaves you exposed.

PROTIP: Enemies cover the last place they saw you. If you can sneak away from it without them noticing and attack from a different spot, you will catch them off guard.

PROTIP: Camping out next to doorways often enables you to easily pick off enemies one by one.

Smart A.I. keeps the game compelling. Foes provide cover fire for one another, fan out to corner you, lob grenades to flush you out of hiding spots, and eventually begin using your blindfire and offensive cover techniques. This game can be nail-bitingly suspenseful as you have no radar or warning system of any sort, and never know when or from where enemies will pop out and peg you in the head. So go in all John Wayne, and you will suck. Tread lightly, exercise extreme patience, keep your eyes peeled, intelligently exploit the cover available to you, keep chanting, "I'm Sho Kosugi, I'm Sho Kosugi," and you'll get through in one piece.

Barring some stiff animation and occasional collision-detection fumbles, kill.switch's textures and character models are the stuff. The controls take a while to master, but once you do, they are super slick. Some of the voice acting is pretty haggard, but overall the sound is muscular. A mega effort.

Also on the PlayStation 2

BY PONG SIFU

- Developed and published by Namco
- $49.99
- Action
- Available now
- 1 player

MATURE	GRAPHICS	SOUND	CONTROL	FUN FACTOR
M	4.0	3.5	4.5	4.0

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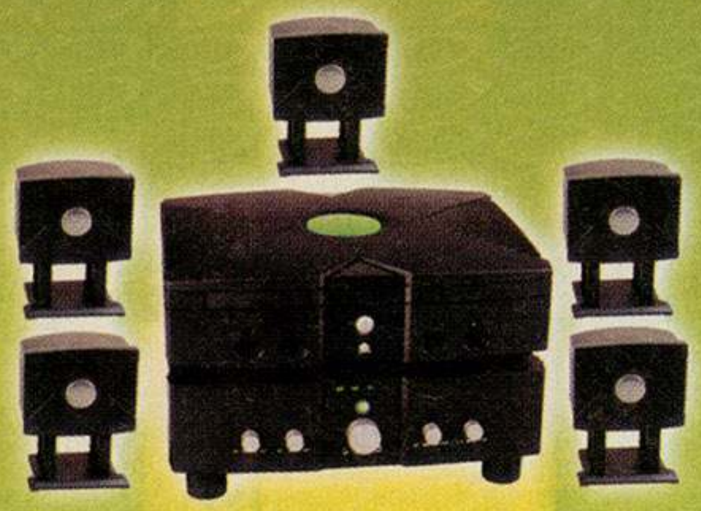
Racing Wheels



Sound Systems

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Gaming Screens

Maximum Gaming

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PROTIP: Fire at the Zombiebot King repeatedly until it pauses and opens its mouth, then lob a grenade into its mouth. Repeat a few more times to defeat him.

FLYING IN UNDER the radar, this massive third-person shooter from newcomer Swingin' Ape Studios features an epic scope, boffo production, great controls, and thoroughly enjoyable gameplay propelled by a somewhat cliché-ridden yet ingratiatingly humorous story.

As a heavily armed mechanical mite named Glitch, you wage a one-'bot war against a militaristic dictatorship led by General Corrosive. At the regime's disposal are legions of scrap-iron zombies, tower-sized titanium troopers, and military grunts that you vie against using machine guns, flamethrowers, rocket launchers, and spinning saw blades while collecting washers that are used to buy fenced weapons and upgrades from black-market barter 'bots. You can also use the droid army's strength against itself by hijacking turrets, tanks, and hovercrafts and—coolest of all—by hacking into enemy robots and using them to attack foes or infiltrate areas inaccessible to Glitch.

CHICKEN, FIGHT LIKE A ROBOT!

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Though the platform and puzzle elements woven into the action-laden fabric add depth, the hopping, key-fetching, and lever-pulling are kept to a minimum and never cause the game to lose its momentum. Immense levels, colorful character designs, first-rate animation, and an impressive amount of visual effects are boosted by impeccable, detailed sound design. You couldn't ask for a more intuitive, logically mapped-out control scheme, which will feel like second nature to anybody who's played a console first-person shooter.

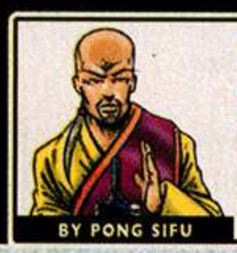
You and your friends can hack giant robots and pit them against one another in Possession Melee, one of Metal Arms' awesome multiplayer modes.

PROTIP: When inside the Command Compound, hack into a grunt, then use the grunt to board the tank and take out the nearby titans and grunts.

MACHINE HEAD

An impressive debut from Swingin' Ape (which features some of the talent behind Hydro Thunder), Metal Arms: Glitch in the System also features a kick-ass multiplayer mode. The game may not add much new to the shooter genre, but still, it's super-solid for what it is.

Also on the PlayStation 2 and GameCube



- Developed by Swingin' Ape Studios
- Published by Vivendi Universal Games
- $49.99
- Available November
- Shooting
- 4 players

FUN FACTOR

TEEN	GRAPHICS	SOUND	CONTROL	FUN FACTOR
	4.5	4.5	4.5	4.0

ROGUE OPS

IF SPLINTER CELL'S Sam Fisher had a sister, Rogue Ops' Nikki Conners would be her. Although she has a bit more brains than brawn, she still has just the right curves for some solid stealth action.

TIME TO SAVE THE WORLD...AGAIN

Nikki Conners can beat the stuffing out of you. She's an ex-Green Beret who's just been recruited by a super-secret American government agency to take on the deadly Omega 19 terrorist organization. In eight levels, you must guide Nikki through missions that require stealth, well-placed head shots, and plenty of mind-teasing challenges in order to save the world from imminent danger.

Sam Fisher's blood runs deep in Nikki Conners. Her moves look and feel copied—from her stealthy movement to how she tackles obstacles. But Nikki is also an independent woman. She possesses deadly attacks that can be performed with ease. She can even pick the pockets of unsuspecting hoodlums without killing them. But Nikki lacks a close-up front attack using her bare hands—sadly, she can use only her limited arsenal of weapons for her offense.

PROTIP: You normally don't have to backtrack to get further in a level. Look for air vents above and below you, which will lead the way to your next objective.

PROTIP: If you have a definite head shot in sight, use your throwing stars instead of wasting bullets. Afterward, you can just go by the body and pick up your star again.

VOGUE OPS

Nikki's world of covert operations looks good, but it's not outstanding. The special agent animates smoothly, and she definitely has the sexy-heroine appeal going for her. Levels, though, aren't as detailed as they should be on the Xbox, and the rest of the game's cast doesn't seem as visually impressive as Nikki. However, conversations and believable enemy chatter enhance this clandestine mission.

If you enjoyed the exploits found in Splinter Cell, try out Rogue Ops. It's not as intense or compelling, but the game still has enough action to satisfy even the most hardcore stealth hero.

Also on the PlayStation 2 and GameCube

PROTIP: It's risky, but pickpocket roaming troops. They walk on a set path and won't turn around unless they hear a sound.

PROTIP: The longer you wait to pull off a stealth attack, the shorter the analog stick movement combination you need to perform.

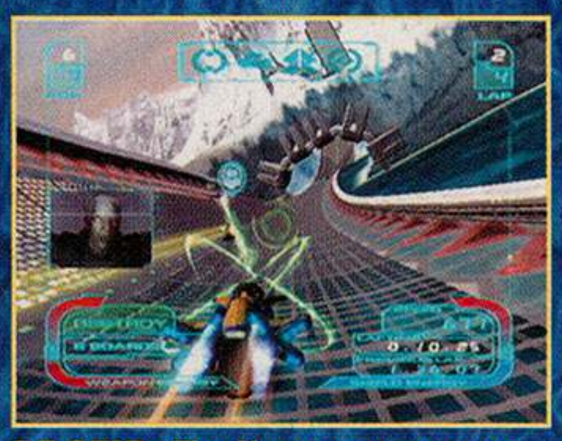
- Developed by Bits Studios
- Published by Kemco
- $49.99
- Available now
- Action/ adventure
- 1 player

FUN FACTOR

MATURE	GRAPHICS	SOUND	CONTROL	FUN FACTOR
	3.5	4.0	3.5	3.5

XGRA: Extreme G Racing Association

A HIGH-VOLTAGE, WEAPONS-BASED racer set in a dystopian hell on earth, XGRA's futuristic prognosis is one in which nuclear calamity, global warming, and rampant industrial globalization have turned hospitable habitats into ecologically devastated wastelands. Held in barren jungles, nuclear factories, teeming spaceports, and Martian mining colonies, brutal races force you to pilot the requisite twists, loops, free falls, bifurcating lanes, and secret routes while struggling against acid blizzards and thermonuclear dust storms that obscure your vision and make surfaces hard to grip. Play well while scouts are watching, and you'll be recruited to join a team that rewards you with better hardware for kiboshing key rivals, which include genetic freaks, ex-cons, adrenaline junkies, and angry robots.



PROTIP: The Vampyre is a great weapon when you're trailing behind, while mines are useful when you're leading the pack.

PROTIP: Follow the contrails of rival racers if you're having trouble seeing during extreme weather conditions.

Mind-bogglingly quick, XGRA is quite possibly the fastest entry in the futuristic racing subgenre—so fast that a lot of time is spent playing knock-hockey against barriers despite the game's tight controls. At least Acclaim revamped the cumbersome weapons system of the game's predecessor, Extreme G3, so that instead of fumbling with your inventory while trying to clear hairpin curves at 600 mph, you snatch weapon-bestowing orbs, freeing you up to concentrate on the race. Baby-ass-smooth frame rates and massive amounts of effects polish off the killer visuals, although XGRA occasionally wipes out—opponents materialize out of thin air in front of you and sound effects are prone to dropping out on certain courses. The only other drawback is the limp rock-techno hybrid score—can we please get something with some more guts to go with our speed, please? G

Also on the PlayStation 2 and GameCube

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BY PONG SIFU

- Developed and published by Acclaim
- $29.99
- Available now
- Racing
- 4 players

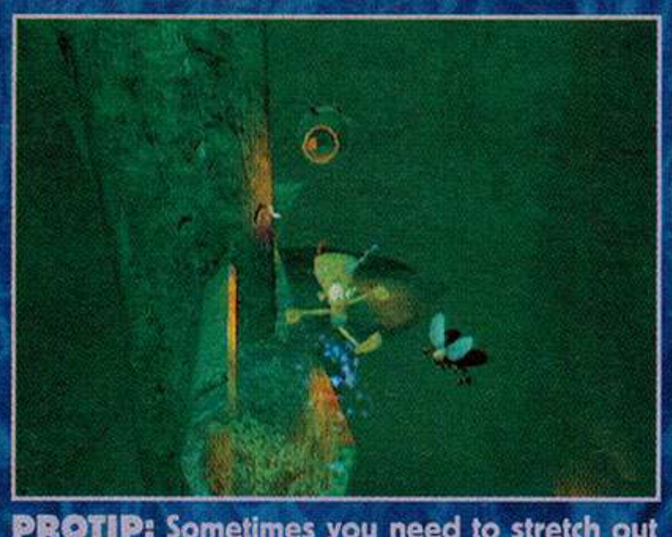
ESRB	GRAPHICS	SOUND	CONTROL	FUN FACTOR
TEEN T	4.0	3.5	4.0	3.5

Voodoo Vince

VOODOO VINCE IS a fun-loving and solidly built action/platform game in search of a little magic. You guide a cute, little voodoo doll who's on a quest to rescue his creator from an evil magic man and restore order to the secret world of magic in New Orleans. The Big Easy locales help the cartoon visuals score major style points, and they set the stage for some great Dixieland-style jazz licks in the audio score, too.

PROTIP: The purple skulls can lead you to shortcuts.

The game plays like an homage to the platform action made popular by a shipload of titles before it, including Donkey Kong. But so much of it is familiar that it walks a tightrope between being fresh and being too derivative.



PROTIP: Sometimes you need to stretch out your jumps. Double-tap A and at the height of the jump, press B to spin attack for a little additional distance. Hold L, and you'll glide even further.

Vince, however, features one-of-a-kind combat action in keeping with his voodoo-doll origins. Beat him up in all manner of goofy, insane ways, and you don't hurt him, but you will damage his enemies. For instance, summoning a magic anvil smashes Vince, but his foes wind up flatter than yesterday's pancakes! The 30 voodoo attacks are a little masochistic, but they're a ton of fun. The controls do a masterful job of keeping that voodoo you do in order, too. Vehicle races with mini-jets and fanboats, and a nice array of mini-games round out Vince's challenges.

Voodoo Vince isn't going to set the world of platform games on fire (although remember to ignite Vince once in a while), but it's a very nicely crafted addition to the genre. Who knows, Voodoo just might form a cult one day. G

BY BROTHER BUZZ

- Developed by Beep Industries
- Published by Microsoft
- $39.99
- Available now
- Platform
- 1 player

ESRB	GRAPHICS	SOUND	CONTROL	FUN FACTOR
TEEN T	4.5	4.0	4.0	4.0

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EVERYONE

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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Comic Mischief
Violence

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THE LORD OF THE RINGS™

WAR OF THE RING™

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood
Violence

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MARIO KART Double Dash!!

THE HIGH CONCEPT of placing classic Mario World characters behind the wheels of little go-kart racers worked magic in Mario Kart and Mario Kart 64, so placing *two* characters into little go-kart racers should be a winner, too…right? Right! With Mario Kart: Double Dash, the plumber and pals ride into town to remind us all why we should play GameCube games.

PROTIP: When you're airborne, anticipate the next curve. Lean the co-driver into it while you're in the air. Press the joystick toward the turn. You can hold L or R to powerslide as soon as you hit the ground, too.

THE ART OF THE KART

The names and the lanes may change, but the basic racing is the same. In single-player Grand Prix mode, you can still race at 50cc, 100cc, and 150cc skill levels in three contests: the Mushroom Cup, the Flower Cup, and the Star Cup. Eight karts roll up to the starting line, and the 16-character driver/passenger lineup is a veritable Who's Who of the Mario World with Mario, Bowser, Princess Peach, and the usual suspects as well as Waluigi and the babies, Luigi and Mario.

Double Dash's sights and sounds are just…er, peachy. Each of the 12 Cup courses showcases classic themes such as Peach Beach, Yoshi (Island) Circuit, Donkey Kong Mountain, etc. The scenery is colorful and rich with Mario references, but it's beginning to seem a little too familiar—as is the sound. But don't worry, the adrenaline kicks in as soon as Lakitu hits the green light—and you find yourself staring at Donkey Kong's butt!

The basic controls and simple driving mechanics have not changed. Mastering corners with the powerslide is still the strategy, and the smooth GameCube joystick enables you to finesse the Slide with ease. However, you're still going to wrestle with the stick in some impossibly tight curves.

PROTIP: Both drivers can grab power-ups. To save a power-up for use later, grab it with one character and then press Z to switch drivers. Now you can grab another.

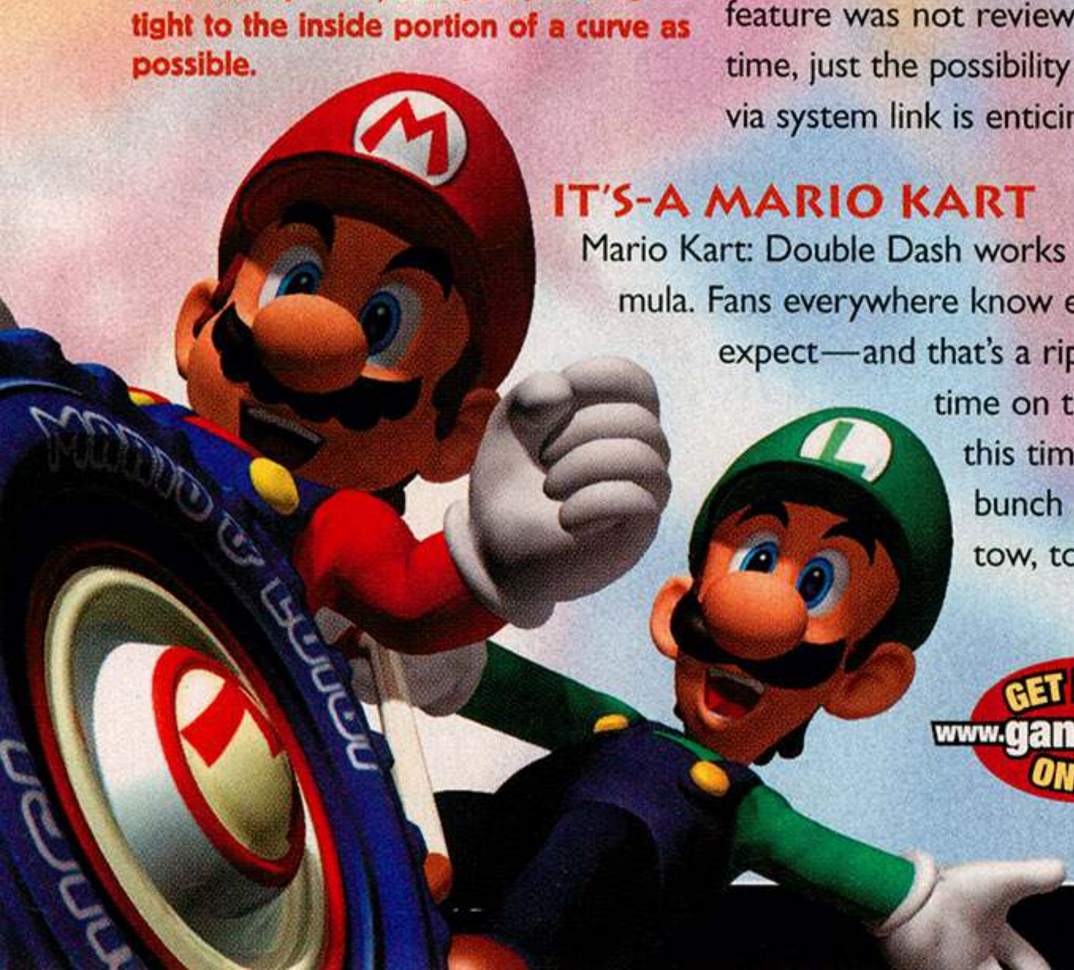
DOUBLE DASH, DOUBLE FUN

Teamwork in gameplay is where Double Dash really shines. In single-player modes, you can swap the driver and passenger to grab extra power-ups, but multiplayer games are a real gas! With four players, you can try any variation of head-to-head or co-op action. Co-op enables you and a pal to team up with one person driving and the other tossing power-ups or punching out opposing Kart-sters. Here the controls do a masterful job of managing the madness. Additionally, Double Dash is LAN-capable. Although this feature was not reviewable at press time, just the possibility of playing MK via system link is enticing.

PROTIP: To shave precious seconds off your lap time, always try to stay as tight to the inside portion of a curve as possible.

IT'S-A MARIO KART

Mario Kart: Double Dash works a winning formula. Fans everywhere know exactly what to expect—and that's a rip-roaring good time on the Mario road this time with a whole bunch of friends in tow, too.



GET MORE www.gamepro.com ONLINE

PROTIP: Master the powerslide! For the best slide, press L or R a few heartbeats before you enter a curve and not while you're already turning through it.

PROTIP: Keep an eye open for mushroom speed-ups laying on the road or vehicles carrying such items. Bump one or hit it with something, and it drops mushrooms that you can grab on your next lap.

EDITORS' GAMEPRO CHOICE

PROTIP: The heavier karts of Wario, Bowser, and Donkey Kong are best in loose or muddy terrain like Waluigi Stadium in the Flower Cup races.

PROTIP: Show no mercy with weapons during 150cc matches. None will be shown toward you!

GRAPHICS 4.0

The graphics and animation are great, but they're starting to feel a little too familiar. The addition of a second character actually adds a little more personality to the standard Mario Kart visuals.

SOUND 4.0

Classic Nintendo sounds abound. The audio effects and the music are safe and sweet, and the Mario Kart personality is perfectly preserved. But like the visuals, the sound package just feels like it's approaching old-plumber's-hat status.

CONTROL 5.0

The gameplay remains fast and furious, and the simple controls do a masterful job of literally keeping you on track. Kart response is crisp and tight. The interplay between the characters in two-player mode is particularly impressive.

FUN FACTOR 5.0

Once Lakitu gives you the green light, everything else gets thrown out the window, and Double Dash shows off that kart magic. The myriad multiplayer modes amplify the fun, and playing via LAN could be an extra treat.

BY BROTHER BUZZ

- Developed and published by Nintendo
- $49.99
- Available November
- Racing
- 4 players

EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

GRAPHICS	SOUND	CONTROL	FUN FACTOR
4.0	4.0	5.0	5.0

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STAR WARS REBEL STRIKE ROGUE SQUADRON III

A LONG TIME ago in the GameCube galaxy, the Star Wars craze made its star-studded mark in the form of Rogue Squadron II. Though the long-awaited follow-up has many new gameplay additions and strong improvements that will amaze fans, Rogue Squadron III still doesn't have complete control of the Force.

I'VE GOT A WEDGY

It's not all about Luke and his colorful gang of galaxy cohorts flying in big ships anymore. Well, most of it is, but in Rogue III, you can now control Star Wars craft with land-based modes of transportation like AT-STs, AT-ATs, speeder bikes, and tauntauns, along with the usual X-Wings and B-Wings. Parts of the game also include Luke and Wedge Antilles running around and blasting away at Imperial troops.

Certainly, Rogue III has much more gameplay variety that not only reveals extra Star Wars plot lines, but also challenges you to complete a wide assortment of objectives as best as you can and rewards you accordingly. The better you play, the more cool hidden extras are opened up, including the full versions of the original Star Wars arcade games.

REBELS ON STRIKE

The visuals have remained as sharp and detailed as those of the last Rogue Squadron game. Once again, impressive aerial combat is displayed with what seems like an unlimited amount of TIE Fighter squadrons gunning for you in every direction, sweet-looking explosions, and exquisite detail on every piece of aircraft you fly. On the ground, the graphics remain as strong. Stormtroopers animate with clonelike follies as they try to stop you, while the towering Imperial Walkers command an inspiring awe as you try to take them down one leg at a time. Well-orchestrated music and ear-crushing sound effects perfectly stay in tune with the Star Wars theme as well.

Despite the fantastic gains, Rogue III is still a Jedi in training when it comes to controls. You can't adjust the camera angles at any time; switching between cockpit and third-person views messes up your targeting; annoyingly random lock-ons constantly occur when you're fighting on foot; and the controls just feel loose on all of the vehicles you ride.

EWOK THIS WAY

If it weren't for the sloppy handling, Rogue III could have flown a perfect flight. Still, the gameplay variety is well worth the playtime, especially if you enjoyed Rogue Squadron II.

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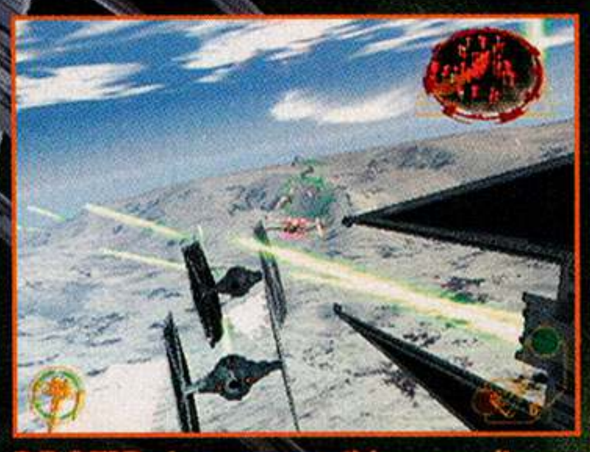
PROTIP: Juke your way through the laser fires by somersaulting and kneeling while blasting your targets.

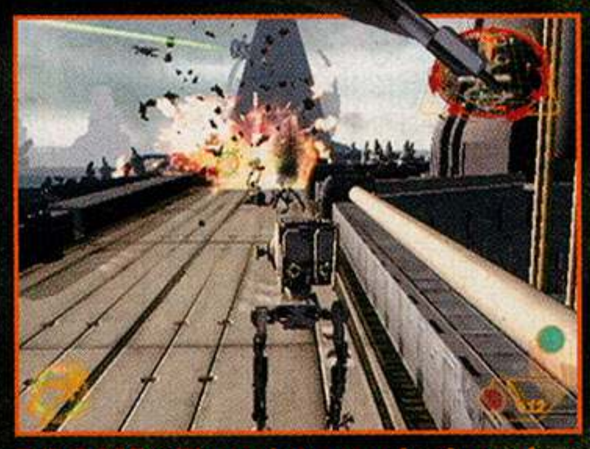
PROTIP: Have your teammates form around you and concentrate your fire on the main targets before going after TIE fighters.

PROTIP: Don't forget to issue orders to the Ewoks. If you don't, you're almost guaranteed to die inside the AT-ST by the onslaught of Imperial forces.



PROTIP: Lose your tail by speeding up and performing some tight turns.

PROTIP: On your way to destroying the Super Laser, make the Imperial Walkers come toward you on an intersecting path with the rail system.



PROTIP: Though it may look cool, the view from inside the cockpit is restricting. You'll have a better idea of the battleground in third-person view.

PROTIP: Put on your brakes for better cornering in any type of winged craft.

GRAPHICS 4.5

The game's special effects look as clean and sharp as they do on the big screen. Once again, there's so much going on during battles, that it's easy to just stop and look around at the impressive detail in each level.

SOUND 4.5

Your ears will recognize the entire *Star Wars* cast from the original movie trilogy, including Luke's pal, Wedge. The music score is as melodic as it is grand, and the sound effects are vintage Star Wars, from the exploding blasters to the roar of a speeder bike.

CONTROL 2.5

It's the worst part of the game. Everything from unadjustable camera angles and loose vehicle controls to a wacky targeting system is frustrating for the fingers. The simple press-and-shoot tactics can be repetitious, too.

FUN FACTOR 4.0

You're not only flying through the stars, but this time, you're also on foot and even on a tauntaun to defeat the Imperial forces. More game variety means more of a chance to enjoy this follow-up to Rogue Squadron II.

BY FOUR-EYED DRAGON

- Developed by Factor 5
- Published by LucasArts
- $49.99
- Action/combat
- Available now
- 2 players

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

GRAPHICS	SOUND	CONTROL	FUN FACTOR
4.5	4.5	2.5	4.0

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PLAYS BEST ON ALIENWARE

FANS OF J.K. ROWLING'S fantasy books have hoped for—nay, demanded—a video-game version of Harry Potter's favorite sport, Quidditch, since EA scored the license. It's a tall order (especially seeing as how the sport doesn't exist), but EA does an admirable job of bringing its core appeal to the small screen.

WIZARDS AND WARRIORS

Quidditch is like a mix of soccer and basketball, played 100 feet in the air on floating broomsticks. Seven-person teams fly back and forth above a playing field in an attempt to knock enchanted balls into hoops, while other enchanted balls try to knock the players off altogether.

As written, it's a fast-paced, dangerous sport played by both school teams and international, professional squads (both realms are represented here), but it's lost a little edge in an attempt to make it playable by mere muggles. Throughout most of the game, you control one of three Chasers, picking up the mantle of Seeker and Beater only for brief periods, and you never control the Keeper. In other words, your focus is almost entirely on offense—make a shot, get the Quaffle, repeat. Slick combo passes and trick shots keep the kinetic energy flowing, but it's easy to pass to nobody (there's no radar), and the game can get harder than you'd think faster than you'd think.

WHAT A LITTLE SNITCH

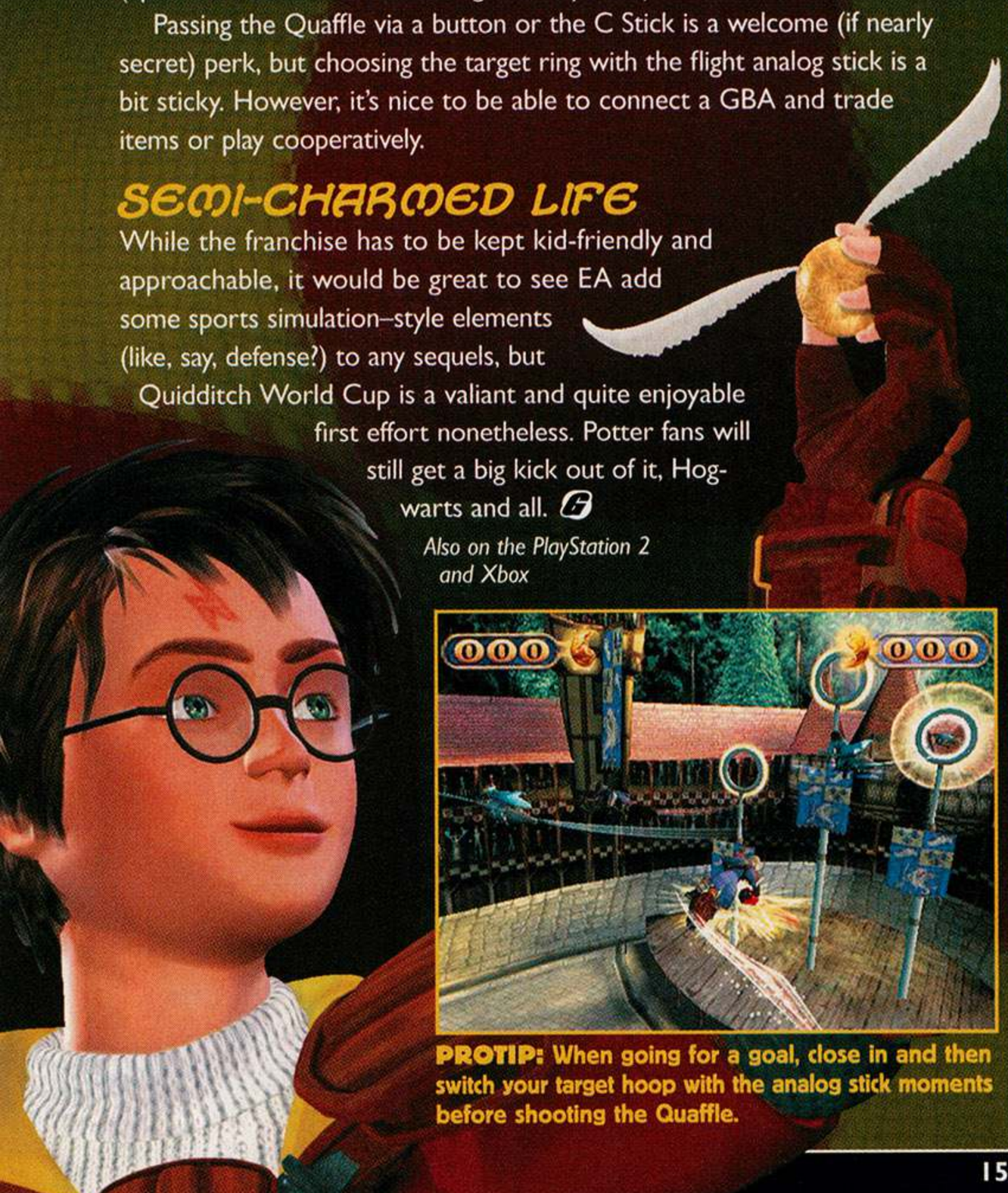
While the large-eyed characters are consistent with EA's earlier versions of Potter people, the pitches are gorgeously rendered—check out Spain's fountain gardens and the cracked Nordic ice. They can also be distracting, especially when there are 10 players whizzing around, all dressed in similar uniforms (Spain vs. Australia is a confusing mix of yellow).

Passing the Quaffle via a button or the C Stick is a welcome (if nearly secret) perk, but choosing the target ring with the flight analog stick is a bit sticky. However, it's nice to be able to connect a GBA and trade items or play cooperatively.

SEMI-CHARMED LIFE

While the franchise has to be kept kid-friendly and approachable, it would be great to see EA add some sports simulation–style elements (like, say, defense?) to any sequels, but Quidditch World Cup is a valiant and quite enjoyable first effort nonetheless. Potter fans will still get a big kick out of it, Hogwarts and all.

Also on the PlayStation 2 and Xbox



PROTIP: You really, really cannot be a ball hog if you want to win–the key to Quidditch is deft passing.

PROTIP: Use your Team Special Move as soon as you can–it's always a guaranteed score.

Harry Potter QUIDDITCH WORLD CUP

PROTIP: In general, careful passing is more important than quick passing. It's easy to throw interceptions, so focus on your targets.

PROTIP: To avoid a bludger, you want to put your Beaters between it and you. Many times this requires a quick spiral move.

PROTIP: If you connect your GBA and trade Quidditch cards, you'll score the GameCube's rarest one right away–Edwin Clogg.

PROTIP: When going for a goal, close in and then switch your target hoop with the analog stick moments before shooting the Quaffle.

PROTIP: The different brooms aren't about player performance so much as A.I. The Firebolt and Nimbus 2001 crank the overall game difficulty.

GRAPHICS 4.0

The ratio of gameplay to cinematic cutaways is about three to one, so you'll have plenty of opportunities to see the bright and friendly player models up close. Sometimes the players are tough to distinguish when they're swooping in packs, though.

SOUND 2.5

While Verdi's *Requiem* provides ample audible *sturm und drang*, the voices should have been better—announcer comments repeat far too often (worse, the same exact script was used for multiple nationalities).

CONTROL 3.5

The game has a pick-up-and-play feel—spot-on for a popular kid-oriented license—and it's fun to swoop around on a broom. However, the lack of true team sports–style pinpoint control is sorely missed; an "expert mode" would have been great.

FUN FACTOR 4.0

The intended audience will love Harry Potter: Quidditch World Cup, if only because it expands on the Potter novels' rich mythology. It's fun, and as a fantasy-sports game, it flies—but not as high as it could.

BY DAN ELEKTRO

- Developed by EA UK
- Published by EA Games
- $39.99
- Available now
- Action/sports
- 2 players

EVERYONE

GRAPHICS	SOUND	CONTROL	FUN FACTOR
4.0	2.5	3.5	4.0

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DRAGON BALL Z BUDOKAI

ALTHOUGH ITS PS2 debut was a year ago, Budokai still reigns as the best Dragon Ball Z fighting game yet. Nothing's changed in the GameCube version, so whether you're a Saiyan lover or an Android hater, you'll come out smiling after a few rounds of hard-knock bouts.

PROTIP: In Gohan Explodes, attack aggressively and don't let the Cell Juniors revive their Ki.

One Flew Over the Goku's Nest

Budokai faithfully follows the entire Saiyan Saga through Cell Games in its deep Story mode. It's like watching the *Dragon Ball Z* cartoon but in a different perspective. In this mode, you take control of key characters during the fight climaxes of each episode—be there when Goku trains in the underworld or when Vegeta, Perfect Cell, and the Android family come visit Earth. Truly, playing this mode is the best part of the game.

Compared with other fighting games, however, Budokai stumbles inside the ring. Button-mashing seems to be the best way to take down an opponent—moves for every white-knuckled baller are performed with the same exact button combinations. This in turn only makes your battles with all 23 warriors seem repetitive without any learning curve. Additionally, there's a slow button response, so all you get when attempting to perform multiple hard-hitting combos is frustration.

PROTIP: If an opponent is down and floating on air, you can get in a couple of cheap hits before they get up.

The Power of the Dragon

Visually, Budokai perfectly mirrors the *Dragon Ball Z* animated series. You're transported straight into the plain, bright, cartoony adventure, complete with underdetailed environments and simple-looking characters. The inclusion of the actual voice-overs and theme music from the cartoon definitely adds to the game, too. Fans of the show will also feel at home with the in-depth character-customization feature that enables you to build your own specialized Saiyan warrior.

Anyone who is at least remotely interested in the Dragon Ball Z craze should check out Budokai. For the rest of the bruiser club, however, you'll be sorely disappointed with this average brawler. There are certainly much better GameCube fighting games out there to play instead.

Also on the PlayStation 2

PROTIP: If you're not satisfied with Mr. Popo's recommended skill, exit and then re-enter his store to get another selection.

PROTIP: Double tap in either direction and hit Punch or Kick to perform a guard break.

PROTIP: For a powerful six-hit combo using Vegeta, tap Punch, Punch, Kick, Kick, Kick.

- Developed by Dimps
- Published by Atari
- $29.99
- Available now
- Fighting
- 2 players

TEEN T ESRB

GRAPHICS	SOUND	CONTROL	FUN FACTOR
3.5	4.5	3.0	3.5

The Haunted Mansion

WITH A LONG-STANDING thrill ride and a holiday movie release starring Eddie Murphy, Disney's Haunted Mansion is a hot property. TDK Mediactive's action/adventure tie-in sets Zeke Holloway in search of 999 shriveled souls that inhabit a mansion. If he can clear the mansion of its unwelcome tenants (using his upgradeable, energy-firing lantern), they'll rest in peace. Along the way, though, there are increasing hazards and more than a few unexpected sights: ghouls, spiders, skeletons, and a myriad of other nasties in his path. Unfortunately, Zeke is easily spooked, and if he can't keep his bravery high (like a health bar in other games), he'll faint and fail at his spirit housecleaning.

The Haunted Mansion features two dozen puzzles for Zeke to complete—some of them are cool brain teasers (such as the kitchen), while others border on the tedious (such as the graveyard). The voice acting is topnotch, advancing the story line and building the ominous mood, though the visuals are just average fare.

PROTIP: If you're having a hard time killing spiders without losing bravery, jump on something so they can't reach you, then shoot them.

PROTIP: You'll have the billiards game in your pocket if you can entice the cue to knock balls in.

Sadly, the game falters during certain combat segments. While the control mechanics enable locking in on an attacker, at times, there are so many adversaries charging at you that it's difficult to target a particular one. At other times, enemies emerge so close to you—or, in the billiards room, from multiple directions, even underneath you—that there's little time to save poor Zeke from a frightful jolt.

While there are ample startling moments, this is no Resident Evil. The Haunted Mansion will be good for a few days of spooks and smiles.

Also on the PlayStation 2 and Xbox

- Developed by High Voltage Software
- Published by TDK Mediactive
- $39.99
- Available now
- Action/adventure
- 1 player

TEEN T ESRB

GRAPHICS	SOUND	CONTROL	FUN FACTOR
3.0	4.5	3.0	3.5

who are you?

Leaving home and their differences behind, the brothers have set off on their craziest adventure yet. It's goodbye Mushroom Kingdom, hello Beanbean Kingdom in Mario and Luigi: Superstar Saga, a most ridiculous role-playing adventure.

EVERYONE
E
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

MARIO & LUIGI™
SUPERSTAR SAGA

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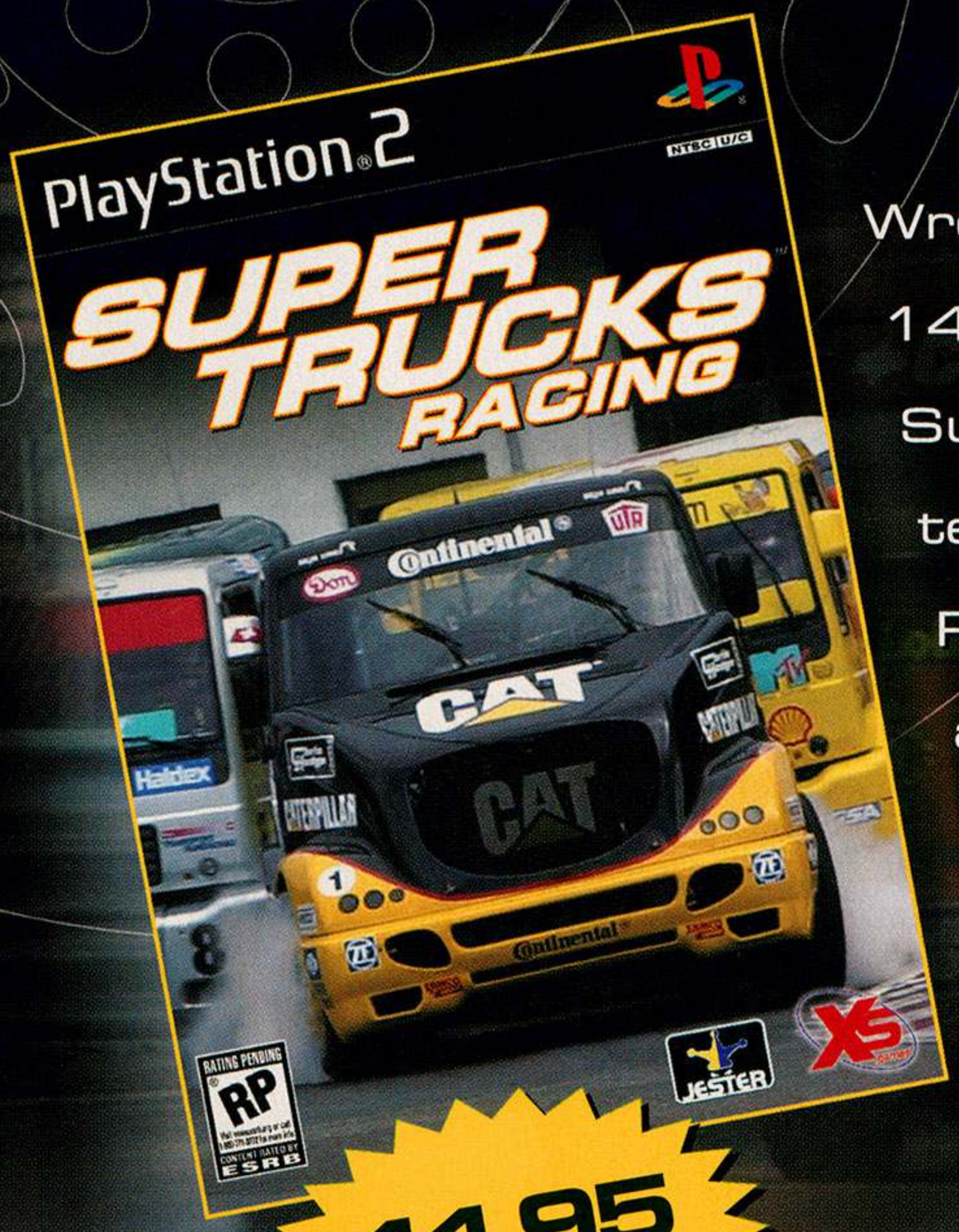

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ESPN NBA Basketball 2K4

THE NAME MAY have changed, but the desire to hold on to the championship remains the same. ESPN NBA Basketball 2K4 adds meaningful upgrades to its play mechanics and manages to stay one stutter-step ahead of the competition.

PROTIP: Successful pump fakes at the start of a possession can make for an easy lay-up.

PROTIP: Alley-oops are easier to pull off now, so look for teammates with an open lane to the hoop.

On and On

Last year, NBA 2K3 had some cursory elements of its deal with ESPN present in the game—that has clearly changed in a major way with the new brand name—but thankfully intact is the core gameplay engine that drove the series to the top. Perhaps the biggest slam against the 2K brand had been its high learning curve, and that's still a factor in ESPN NBA Basketball 2K4. You still need to be a student of the game and use your position players effectively, but the default difficulty is the most forgiving the series has seen since it began. This is a good thing as many players simply did not have the patience the past few years to enjoy everything the game had to offer.

This year's version implements many good gameplay additions, like the ability to lightly tap the pass button for a fake, the wide range of iso-motion moves, and delayed give-and-go plays. The coolest is the lead pass, which is downright deadly when executed with precision. The best thing about all these offensive features is that there is a counter maneuver on the defensive end to prevent abuse. It's now a bit too tough to pull off effective juke and spin moves, but it certainly is more realistic that way.

However, an element that is too tough is the new free-throw meter. As if the previous method wasn't hard enough, now you have to not only balance the side indicators to focus on the middle of the hoop, but also time a vertically moving ball inside it. Give me a break! Coming to grips with all of the above feels roughly the same with either the PlayStation 2 or Xbox controller.

PROTIP: Hiring a great coaching staff pays off big in games you want the CPU to handle.

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Around the Clock

The Season mode is back, and while it doesn't have as many bells and whistles as some of the competition, it's very deep and the level of customization keeps you in total control of your team's progress. The other major mode is 24/7, which takes your created character through training and myriad street games to move up in the world rankings. Similar to Animal Crossing on the GameCube, the game is tied to your console's internal clock, and certain match-ups and unlockable items are available only on certain days and times. It's another game unto itself and a great value, although your mileage with it will vary.

PROTIP: Free throws are slightly easier to make with the Xbox controller.

Both the PlayStation 2 and Xbox versions look and sound great with a slight edge in both going to the latter. The Xbox version also features widescreen support at 720p for a fantastic picture for televisions that support it. Both consoles are also online-enabled for broadband, and the PlayStation 2 version also handles narrowband play.

PROTIP: Use the new lead-pass feature with icon passing for maximum effect in your game.

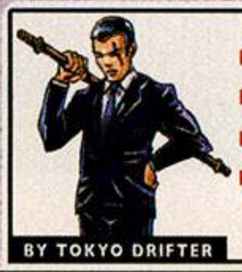
PROTIP: Icon passing in the paint can fake out the defense into thinking you're going to pass.

PROTIP: You'll have to switch up your shot often as blocked shots are more prevalent in ESPN NBA Basketball 2K4.

And the Winner Is...

The free-throw mechanic could be a deal-breaker for a lot of people with rampant foul abuse in online matches almost a given. Past that dark patch lies a game that is still a basketball technician's dream. Games against the CPU realistically mimic a real game, while scrimmages against friends received a boost of energy thanks to sped-up gameplay and better shot blocking. ESPN NBA Basketball 2K4 retains the top slot by just a hair.

EDITORS' GAMEPRO CHOICE



BY TOKYO DRIFTER

- Developed by Visual Concepts
- Published by ESPN Videogames
- $49.99
- Basketball
- Available now
- 4 players

		GRAPHICS	SOUND	CONTROL	FUN FACTOR
PS2	E	4.5	4.5	5.0	5.0
XBOX	E	4.5	4.5	5.0	5.0

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PlayStation.2

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NBA Live 2004

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NBA LIVE 2004 ramps up the defense and piles on the features for an impressive all-around game, but some game-balance issues remain.

Full-Circle Freestyle

The coolest feature in last year's game was the innovative Freestyle control that fueled a high-powered offensive experience. The problem was that the defense got left out in the cold, turning games against the computer into blowouts and reducing matches against friends to dunkfests. NBA Live 2004 corrects that issue in a major way—for better and for worse. Some tweaks, like the more effective shot blocking and steals, are great, but other additions, like the new defensive A.I., are extremely unforgiving. Setting traps and smarter teammates who set picks more often help boost the plus column. The fancy NBA Step move is cool, but it's way too powerful a move on offense and can be heavily abused to upset the gameplay balance.

Players who got comfortable with last year's default difficulty will be in for a rude awakening as performing well in anything above the rookie setting takes a great deal of practice—even scrub teams are hard to beat. Still, that's not such a bad thing in most gamers' books as long as the tools are there to master and beat the system. Luckily, Live 2004 supplies what's needed, and players should be back in competitive shape about a third of the way into a regular season's worth of games. Speaking of season, the revamped Dynasty mode takes a cue from other EA Sports titles and has come back with a large host of customizable features and unlockable items.

PROTIP: Holding the ball too long when caught in a trap almost always results in a turnover.

PROTIP: Trying to take a charge is not as effective as going for a block since default foul settings are on the loose side.

PROTIP: Your teammates set picks for you often, so take advantage of them.

System Shootout

The overall visual and audio presentation across all console versions doesn't vary too much from platform to platform. While the players in general look a bit cartoonish, they animate in a satisfying way that heightens the action on the floor. The Xbox version does have a slight edge in graphics, but it doesn't overshadow the others. Audio is uniformly great as well, offering fantastic commentary by Marv Albert and Mike Fratello. NBA Live once again takes the "best soundtrack" award with popular artists like Outkast and Chingy.

PROTIP: The NBA Step is now the most potent move in the game. Abuse it as if it owed you money.

When it comes to sports games, the GameCube's controller always seems to suffer in points due to its unconventional button arrangement, but surprisingly it's not an issue this year. The default setting has been specialized for the GameCube, and it works wonders. That said, the PlayStation 2 controller still handles all the action the best with the other two close behind. The toughest control-related item is the two separate shot buttons—one for jumpers and one for lay-ups/dunks. There's no good reason for this, and it can mess up your game at the most heated moment in a match no matter how accustomed to it you become.

PROTIP: You can now adjust your shot in mid-air to avoid getting rejected.

EDITORS' GAMEPRO CHOICE

Right Thurr

The match-up between NBA Live 2004 and ESPN NBA Basketball 2K4 has never been as close as it is this year. Live offers a large selection of special features, online play for the PlayStation 2 version, and a healthy dose of fun. If the offensive and defensive balance were just a bit more fine-tuned, and the Xbox and GameCube versions had online support, NBA Live 2004 would have the legs for multiple plays through the Dynasty mode and a clear shot as the top hoops game. Still, GameCube owners don't have any other hoop sim choices this year, so it's definitely the top game for them at least.

PROTIP: Abuse the lay-up/dunk button, and you'll foul out for charging.

PROTIP: Passes have a high percentage of getting intercepted, so take extra care passing into the post.

BY TOKYO DRIFTER

- Developed by EA Canada
- Published by EA Sports
- $49.99
- Available now
- Basketball
- 4 players

	ESRB	GRAPHICS	SOUND	CONTROL	FUN FACTOR
PS2	E	4.0	5.0	5.0	4.5
Xbox	E	4.0	5.0	5.0	4.0
GameCube	E	4.0	5.0	5.0	4.5

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NBA Jam

THERE WAS A time when the name NBA Jam was synonymous with action-oriented sports games—no matter what sport, if it had players bursting into flames and generally doing things no human being could ever manage, it was called a "Jam-style" game. That time has passed and so has the mantle, leaving NBA Street the current king of the kinetic courts. However, the relaunch of Acclaim's franchise is no mere pretender to the throne, and it earns back some of its old respect.

Jam's gameplay is peppered with flashy replays of impossible feats–and fans of the franchise wouldn't want it any other way.

NBA Jam (2003 Remix)

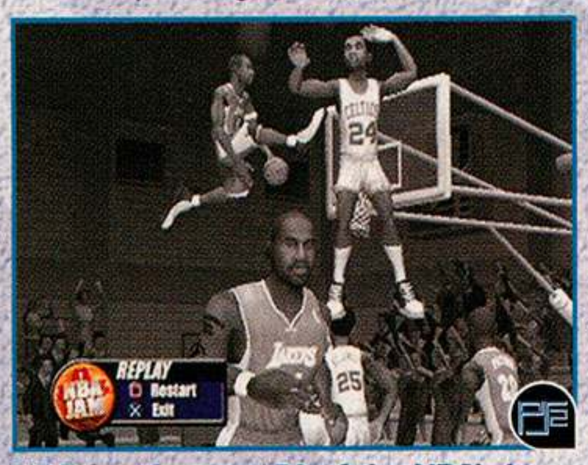
Mind you, the modern NBA Jam is still playing follow the leader. Half of its elements have been borrowed from Street's definition of roundball: three-on-three play with stylized, somewhat cartoonish pro players (including NBA legends like Bird and Chamberlain—but sorry, no Jordan), accrued points for special in-game moves, and a momentum meter that enables a super dunk.

The other elements have been, er, inspired by Midway's post-Jam arcade offerings, NBA Showtime and NBA Hangtime—namely the inclusion of a hotspot, a heavy reliance on alley-oops, and a trivia contest at the end of each game. Then again, can you blame Acclaim? Different for different's sake is not a recipe for good gameplay, especially in sports games; blending bits that are already proven to work simply makes sense.

PROTIP: Early in the game, use your hotspot ASAP so you can start rebuilding your meter–the more you earn, the higher the points will be each time.

Defensive Posture

The important thing is that Acclaim has made those elements work in harmony. NBA Jam is a fast-paced game of basketball that works for all audiences: It's a one-button, newbie-worthy procedure to throw up an impressive-looking alley-oop, but experienced players with good timing can dish off multiple 'oops, totally flattening the defense.



NBA Jam features 50 of the NBA's legends in a special tournament mode–and you'll play some of them in nostalgic black and white!

Unfortunately, killing the D is fairly easy. While the A.I. players are good at reading alley-oop opportunities on their own and will often give a good shove to opponents after the bucket to boost the team's Jam points (in fact, the computer always plays rough), your own teammates rarely go up for a rebound—they'll almost always wait for the opposing team to clean the glass. And while the controls respond well on both platforms, you'll find yourself frantically switching between team members in hopes of offering any kind of resistance to the offensive onslaught, and timing your swats is tricky.

PROTIP: Enter CREDITS as your profile name to unlock no less than 13 secret developer teams.

PROTIP: Go up for a shot and dish off into an alley-oop–the defense will be left baffled.

The New Old School

Both the Xbox and PS2 versions feature identically smooth player animations, 3D animated crowds, and sparkly special effects, not to mention the excellent retro modes. When you're playing the NBA legends, you'll view the action through a nostalgic filter—the black-and-white presentation of the 1950s and 1960s is worth a rental alone. The soundtrack features good crowd sounds, well-timed (if repetitive) announcing by original Jam voice Tim Kitzrow, era-specific arena music, and not only music tracks but also extra play-by-play commentary from legendary funk bassist/groovy weirdo Bootsy Collins. NBA Jam features created players and teams as well as tons of unlockable goodies, like old-school announcers, chain-link nets, and extra courts (including the classic Boston and Chicago arenas). Be warned: You have to earn a *lot* of Jam points to get that stuff or even make a competent created player.

All in all, it's nice to see Jam get its high-flying groove back; the break has done the franchise good, and the resulting relaunched game is worthy of its weighty legacy. NBA Street has a better all-around arcade-style game, but if all you care about are big dunks and big points, NBA Jam will deliver you to highlight heaven.

PROTIP: If you're having trouble seeing the passing lanes and ball movement, switch the camera to Sky High, if only to get your bearings.

PROTIP: If one man starts smoking (one bucket away from on fire), don't risk it–send him in as the alley-oop recipient, or go for an easy lay-up.

BY DAN ELEKTRO

- Developed and published by Acclaim
- $49.99
- Available now
- Fantasy basketball
- 6 players (PS2); 4 players (Xbox)

	EVERYONE E	GRAPHICS	SOUND	CONTROL	FUN FACTOR
PS2	E	4.0	4.0	3.5	4.0
Xbox	E	4.0	4.0	3.5	4.0

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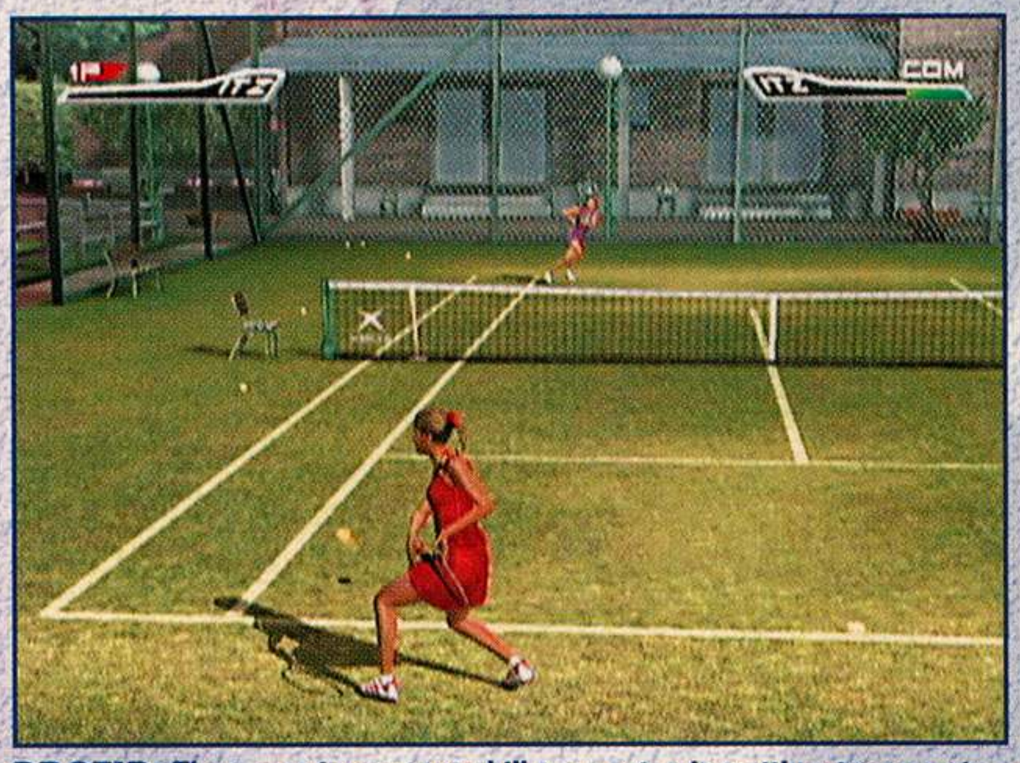
Top Spin



VIRTUA TENNIS PUT tennis games on the map. Between the glorious control and the phenomenal four-player doubles, it counts as one of the best multiplayer games ever—whether you're a sports fan or not. So after the Dreamcast faded into the sunset, there was a yawning chasm waiting to be filled, and Top Spin is the most promising, potential-packed replacement to volunteer for the job. Mostly it succeeds, mixing cool innovations with unfortunate missteps.

PROTIP: The most important skill to master is getting to a spot ahead of the ball with enough time to charge up a powerful shot by holding down one of the swing buttons.

40-Love

You can tell that Top Spin was made by a crew that respects Virtua Tennis's legacy. In that same way, Top Spin's controls and gameplay respond intuitively and naturally right from the start—the game just feels great to play. Improving on its spiritual predecessor, accidentally charged swings don't cement you to the court and remove you from the play.

But Top Spin has its own quirks—you have to be too precise about lining up your player with the ball at arm's length, so you'll often miss swings you know you should've drilled. Spins also don't have as much effect as they should, and the powered-up shots and serves are more challenging than they should be.

PROTIP: Judge what sort of shot placement would be most difficult to return. As your opponent runs to cover that spot, fool them by actually hitting the ball to the opposite side.

Deuce

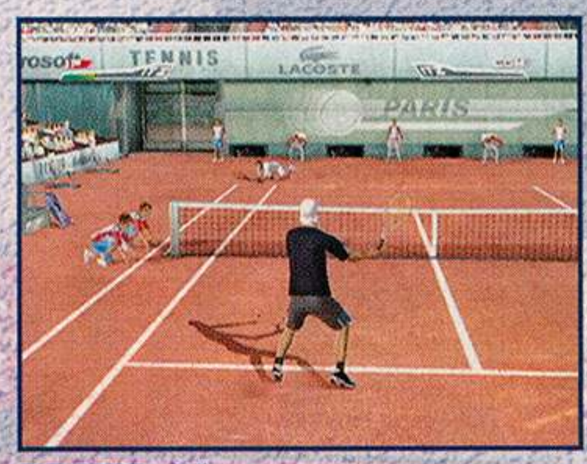
Top Spin's features provide a lot of depth. The headliner is online play supported by Microsoft's XSN network. Between tackling your own custom leagues and battling for rankings in the official world tournaments, you'll find plenty of action. The only downer is the lack of four-player online doubles—four players can gather around two Xboxes to play doubles online, but not four Xboxes, which just blows.

The one-player Career mode delivers plenty of offline meat and solid A.I. competition, though its pacing is a bit off as it's easy to train up your player too quickly. Stars range from Anna Kournikova to Pete Sampras, and the eye-catching visuals are one of the game's best features, particularly the slick one-player camera. The audio performs fine—what there is of it—but the game feels eerily quiet at times.

PROTIP: In singles, serve mainly into the corner, but go down the middle when your ITZ meter is charged and you can easily crank out a risk serve.

PROTIP: If you're stuck charging up a swing you actually don't want or you seem motionless as the ball approaches, release the swing button and move so that you're an arm's length from where the ball will pass.

Virtua Tennis fanatics will wish Top Spin was a little better than it is. But with no other worthy competitors in sight, it still reigns as the great tennis game of the moment, particularly for multiplayer or online matches.



PROTIP: When you see an opponent stumble or lunge after the ball, move up and return it with a volley shot.

EDITORS' GAMEPRO CHOICE

BY AIR HENDRIX

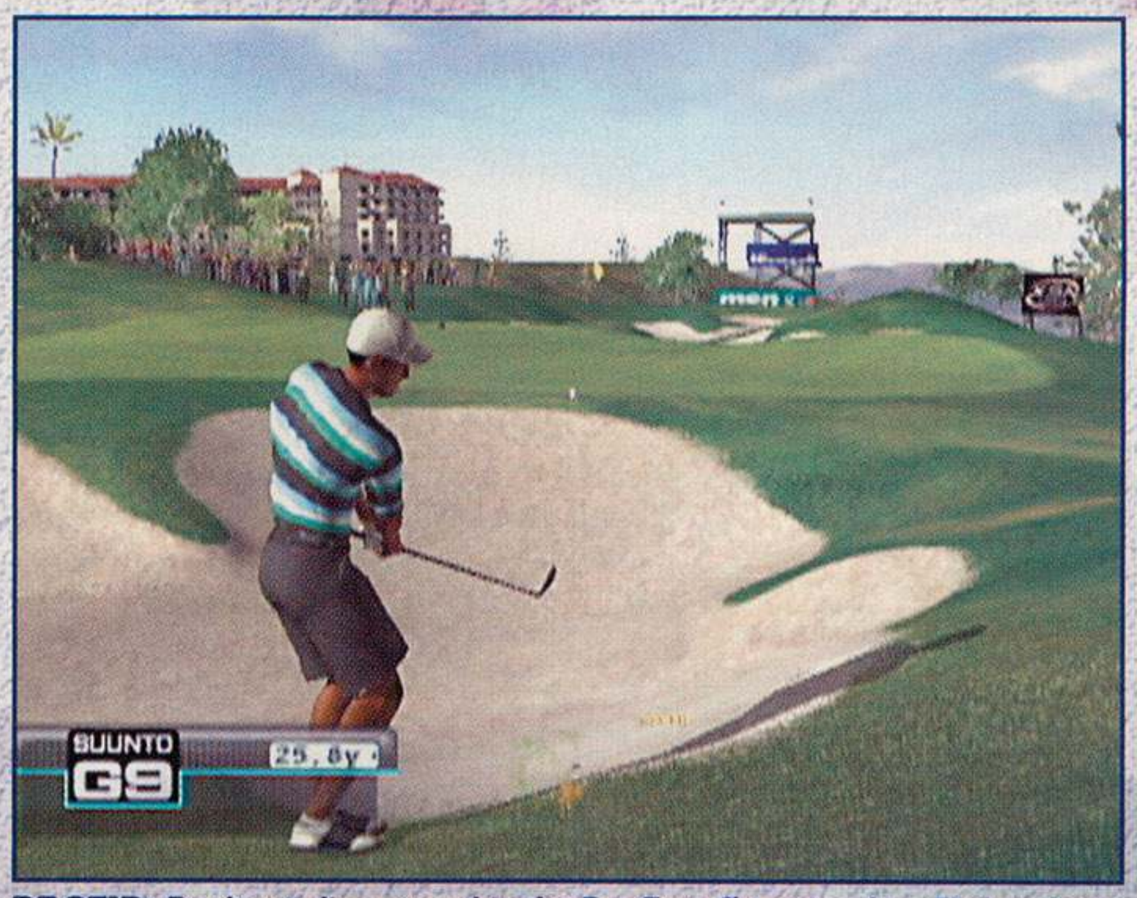
- Developed by Power & Magic
- Published by Microsoft
- $49.99
- Available now
- Tennis
- 4 players

EVERYONE E — CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

GRAPHICS	SOUND	CONTROL	FUN FACTOR
4.5	3.0	4.0	4.5

Links 2004

WHAT BETTER WAY to challenge the number-one golfer—both in real life and in a video game—than to have Sergio Garcia and Annika Sorenstam tee off against Tiger Woods. In Links 2004, the two pros (and the game's poster players) keep their cool and Woods finishes a tad short—relinquishing his top rank.



PROTIP: Don't get discouraged in the Pro Tour Championship–Faeber starts to choke after the third hole.

A Stroke of Genius

Links has always been the definitive golf game on the PC. This year, the undisputed champ shows why it's a legend and why it's a perfect fit on the Xbox. Much of its solid gameplay is attributed to the outstanding controls. Links brings a higher standard to real-time swinging, using the analog stick to whack the ball just the right way. Not only do you need to worry about how hard or how soft of a stroke you need to apply, but you must also have a good tempo that includes a smooth backswing and a firm follow-through. The stick has been calibrated just right and is further enhanced by the authentic shot-type options (flop, blast, punch, and so on) that are available to you. Truly, this is the best and most intuitive golf control scheme yet found in any video game.

PROTIP: If you're chipping near the hole, remember to read the green to see the slopes before you swing.

Worth Every Green Jacket

Links' fine visuals and superb sounds make this round of golf even more fun and entertaining. Its good mix of true-to-life and fantasy courses are nicely detailed. Each golfer, real or self-created, animates in a realistic fashion, including disappointing missed shots or celebratory skips of joy. Listening to the commentary makes you feel like you're watching an actual golf game—there's a solid balance between informational and entertaining comments throughout your 18-hole game. And if you need other noises, you can just rip your favorite music on the Xbox hard drive and then play your tunes during the game as well.

Links 2004 undoubtedly *is* the golf game for the Xbox. You'll be fully satisfied with it, both off- and online.

PROTIP: Use backspin to stop the ball from rolling, especially when you're hitting to a small green.

PROTIP: Use extra muscle in your strokes if it's raining.

PROTIP: Although not very accurate, a blast shot will help you get out of deep rough.

EDITORS' GAMEPRO CHOICE

- Developed and published by Microsoft
- $49.99
- Available November
- Golf
- 4 players

EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

GRAPHICS	SOUND	CONTROL	FUN FACTOR
4.5	4.5	5.0	5.0

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FIFA Soccer 2004

ONCE AGAIN FIFA reinvents itself, and once again the results are a vast improvement on the previous year. FIFA Soccer 2004 isn't perfect yet, but it's still an awesome effort.

Global Warfare

Last year's FIFA Soccer 2003 was a major wake-up call for the stagnant series and fittingly received high marks. What didn't factor into our review at the time was the subsequent U.S. release of Konami's World Soccer Winning Eleven 6, which quickly claimed the crown as undisputed "football" champion. This battle between EA Sports and Konami had been raging for years across the globe with the latter reigning victorious, but Winning Eleven 6 marked the franchise's first return to U.S. soil since its departure in the early PlayStation days.

The good news is that FIFA Soccer 2004 rises to the challenge and adds an incredible feature set that clearly sets it apart. The biggest bragging points are the 350 teams included and the new Career mode. Leagues and international teams from almost every part of the world are represented, although the Japan national team and J-League are notably missing due to licensing issues.

The Career mode adds even more long-term play value to the game and allows you to switch from club to club as your management prestige increases. While it's a step in the right direction, the depth of Winning Eleven's Master League mode still dwarfs FIFA's Career mode.

EDITORS' GAMEPRO CHOICE

Off the Ball

Controls were an issue with the 2003 version, but they're greatly improved in 2004. The buffering of moves is not as harsh, passing is more precise, and control of the ball while dribbling "feels" better. You also have interesting methods for handling corner kicks, free kicks, and set plays.

The coolest new gameplay tweak is the "Off the Ball" system, which lets you move a teammate into an opportune position while you dribble the ball. All three console versions control well, although accessing all the buttons is easiest with the PlayStation 2 controller.

As if having the best controller isn't enough, the PlayStation 2 version is also the only one that has online play. Having the ability to play gamers across the globe is an awesome option, but how many U.S. gamers will appreciate this feature remains to be seen. Domestic audiences should, however, appreciate the globe-hopping soundtrack, which is one of the most enjoyable out of the EA Trax line yet. New crowd chants also add authentic zest, and the commentary is, as always, solid.

Winning Pace

The improved aspect fans will appreciate most about the visual presentation is the high, steady frame rate. That's not a knock on the player models because they do indeed look very nice, but the smooth frame rate across all platforms has stabilized the game's speed, which last year seemed either too fast (as in the PlayStation 2 version) or too slow (as in the GameCube version). The overall graphics look almost identical on the PlayStation 2 and Xbox, but the GameCube version looks noticeably washed out.

FIFA Soccer 2004 is a solid simulation of the sport that offers more teams and unique options not available in its main and only competitor on the PlayStation 2, World Soccer Winning Eleven 6. Some minor control issues remain and the depth is still not where it needs to be, but it delivers a highly worthwhile experience nonetheless.

PROTIP: Always watch for teammates calling for the ball.

PROTIP: Try to plan two moves in advance where you'll head a pass.

PROTIP: The new corner-kick icons can reveal your plans, so try unexpected plays.

PROTIP: The effectiveness of right-analog-stick moves is skill based, so use them judiciously.

PROTIP: Studying the replay prompter is great for analyzing your strategy.

PROTIP: Practice centering the ball as it's crucial for setting up goals.

PROTIP: Use Off the Ball mode to control your runs as you prefer.

BY TOKYO DRIFTER

- Developed by EA Canada
- Published by EA Sports
- $49.99
- Soccer
- Available now
- 4 players

	GRAPHICS	SOUND	CONTROL	FUN FACTOR
PS2	4.5	4.5	4.5	4.5
Xbox	4.5	4.5	4.5	4.5
GC	3.5	4.5	4.5	4.5

ESPN College Basketball 2K4

For MANY FANS, the competition at the collegiate level is where the passion and raw intensity of sports are best on display. If that sounds like your M.O., you'll probably be interested in ESPN College Basketball 2K4 for the PlayStation 2 and Xbox. Formerly known as NCAA College Basketball 2K3, this series is still in its infancy and is hoping to catch up to rival EA Sports and its March Madness franchise. To do this, ESPN is adding and improving on a large checklist of features like crowd chants, authentic mascots, college-style plays, and Create-A-School and Rivalry modes. Rounding out the features list is online play support for both console versions. The Xbox preview version of 2K4 played and controlled much like last year's NBA game but included many tweaks that mirror school playbooks and personalities. It will be a tight final four this year.

BY TOKYO DRIFTER

- Developed by Kush Games
- Published by ESPN Videogames
- Target release date: November

XBOX

HANDS-ON

NCAA March Madness 2004

BOASTING NEW schools, improved gameplay, and all-new Mascot and Rivalry modes, NCAA March Madness 2004 is getting ready to take on all comers when it debuts on the PlayStation 2 and Xbox this fall. With a 30-year span and an additional 150 schools added to the rosters, the amount of time you'll be able to spend building a legendary team in the deep Dynasty mode is staggering. March Madness will showcase smoother analog controls to provide more freestyle-feeling crossovers, triple-threat moves, and strip steals. And for the Xbox players who won't be able to enjoy the bevy of online features that PlayStation 2 owners will, look on the bright side—at least your load times will be much quicker.

Note: All screens shown here are from the PlayStation 2 version.

BY PONG SIFU

- Developed by EA Canada
- Published by EA Sports
- Target release date: Fall 2003

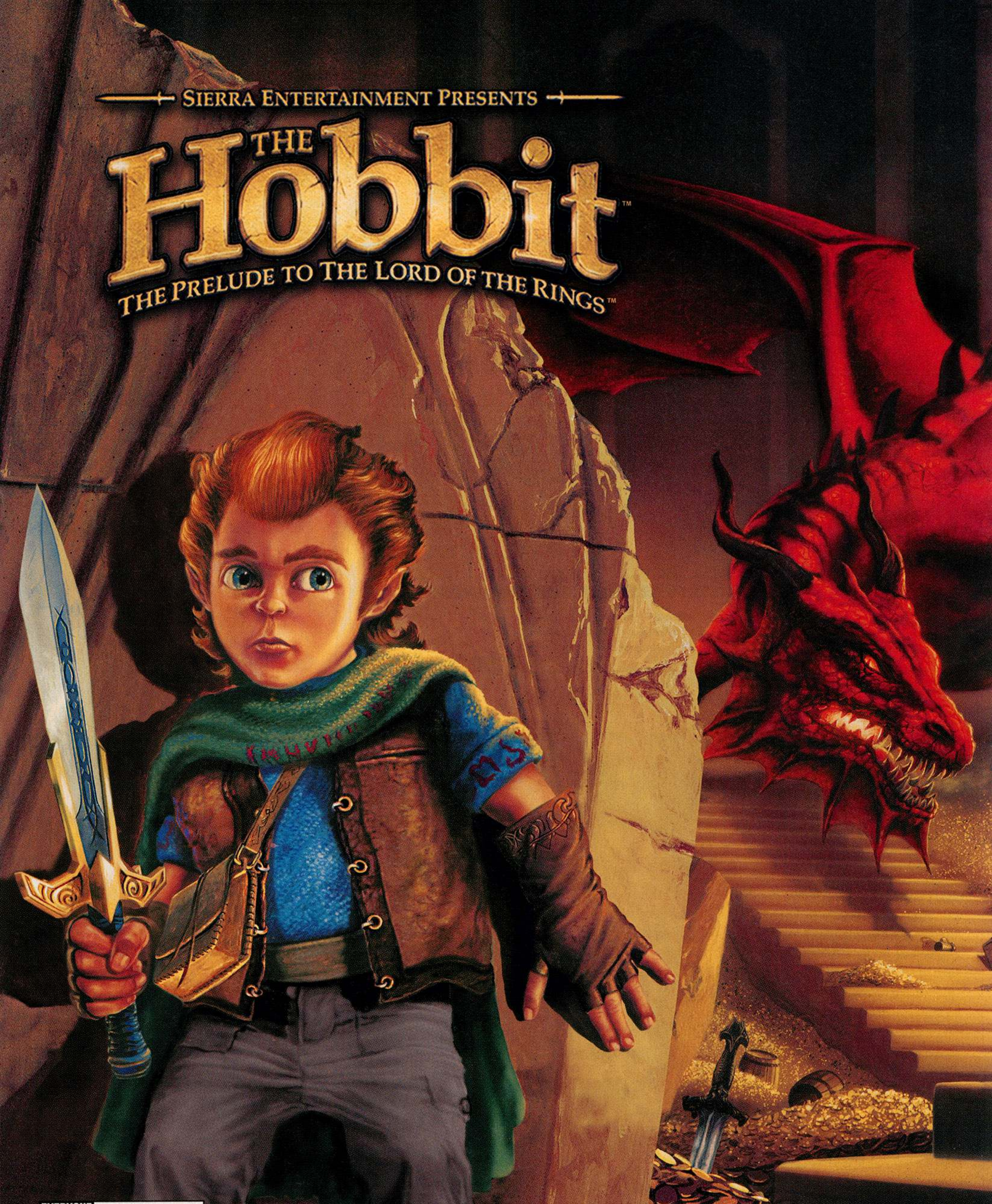
PLAYSTATION 2 XBOX

FIRST LOOK

SIERRA ENTERTAINMENT PRESENTS

THE Hobbit™

THE PRELUDE TO THE LORD OF THE RINGS™



EVERYONE
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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Violence
Comic Mischief

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PC CD-ROM SOFTWARE

NINTENDO GAMECUBE

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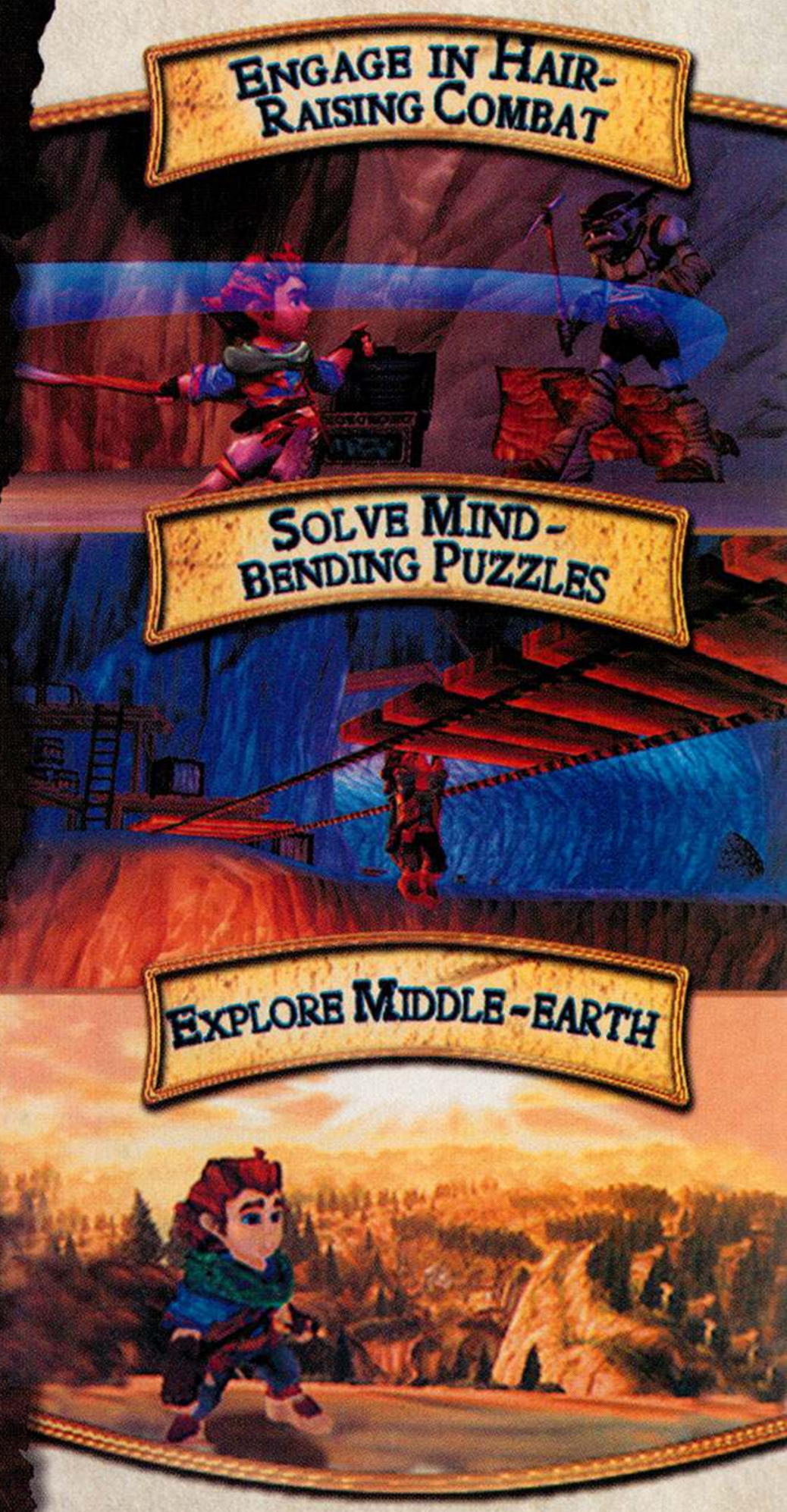
THE ADVENTURE OF A LIFETIME BECKONS



Long ago, the Lonely Mountain trembled as the Dragon Smaug destroyed the Dwarf-kingdom in fire and rage. Now, the Dwarves set out upon an epic quest to reclaim their stolen treasures. And I, Gandalf the wizard, send with them the most unlikely of heroes: you, Bilbo Baggins of the Shire.

thehobbit.sierra.com

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WELCOME TO MIDDLE-EARTH

GLADIUS

CREATING AN epic role-playing game based on the bloody exploits of angered gladiators seems like an oxymoron. How can you weave a compelling story into the fine craft of disemboweling hordes of beastly warriors? Gladius claims it offers this and more, but after a few swings with this hefty sword, it's clear that this game suffers the humdrums of a not-so-great role-playing game.

RIVAL SCHOOLS

Gladius puts you in a fictitious land dominated by gladiator traditions. After choosing from two main characters, you're off to form and lead a fighting school where the curriculum is all about how to best defeat your opponent. You and your band of bad-ass combatants travel to different towns, recruit wannabe warriors, buy equipment, fight in the local leagues, and if you're ready, battle in the championships. As you venture to distant areas, you slowly learn through standard cut-scenes that there's more than just blood instincts on your path to glory. Unfortunately, though, the well-written script doesn't outweigh the uninteresting and long, drawn-out story.

PROTIP: It may not be the warrior way, but when there are more than two teams fighting at once, sit back and keep your distance, then join in after everyone's beat up.

PROTIP: If you're unsure about your timing during your swing attack, remember that it's always better to press early in the orange section than later in the blue section.

TAKE A SKILL PILL

The actual gameplay of Gladius is innovative, but the execution is just as slow as the story telling. Combat is dished out through turn-based clashes; when an arena is filled with at least a half-dozen pugilists, the action tends to be very, very sluggish as you wait patiently for your next turn.

Tactically speaking, however, Gladius shines with tons of options. The game enables you to flex your logical mind in true character-building fashion. Before each battle, you can equip your team with a dizzying array of weapons and armor that all correspond with different elemental powers: earth, wind, fire, and water. Moreover, you must continuously keep yourself updated with each fighter's skill stats, like weapon accuracy, hit points, damage, and so on. It's up to you to make your team as optimally fit as possible based on their physical data. You must also take in to account the many different arena layouts, which can consist of elevation changes and random obstacles that might help in your overall assault on the enemy.

PROTIP: Get the crowd behind you by performing several critical hits in a row.

PROTIP: Light warriors who have the ability to throw their weapon should be included in every match as soon as possible.

PROTIP: Gang up on one warrior when fighting for points. You'll then be more likely to strike your opponent from the side and behind, which will fetch you bigger points.

While all of the preplanning may be solid, it's the actual battles that don't seem to be balanced. Determining the amount of damage you give out depends on the timing of your button presses, which can quickly become frustrating. Even if your warrior is at a higher skill level, you can easily lose a battle to a lesser opponent just by missing a button tap. Even worse, you have no control over how you defend yourself—it's done automatically, which only adds to the disappointing gameplay.

PROTIP: Your rivals are chosen at random, so if you don't like who you're going to fight, just exit once, then re-enter the league to get a different lineup.

PROTIP: Let opponents come to you when protecting your statue. Defeat them, then move forward and destroy the opposing side's monument with ease.

VICTORY IS NOT AT HAND

Only minor visual differences separate the PlayStation 2, Xbox, and GameCube versions. As expected, Gladius looks just slightly better on the Xbox than on the PlayStation 2; the GameCube version lacks the overall shine and polish, but still looks mighty good. A strong audio presentation, complete with great voice acting and some well-orchestrated background music, doesn't skip a beat in any of the versions, too.

Sadly, though, a strong graphics and sound package doesn't make up for the overall impression of Gladius. The controls are maladjusted, and the story doesn't unfold like an RPG story should. Mixing the two together only worsens this adventure into an unforgiving trip into gladiator lore.

BY FOUR-EYED DRAGON

- Developed and published by LucasArts
- $49.99
- Available now
- Combat RPG
- 4 players

	TEEN	GRAPHICS	SOUND	CONTROL	FUN FACTOR
PS2	T	4.0	4.0	3.5	3.0
Xbox	T	4.0	4.0	3.5	3.0
GC	T	3.5	4.0	3.5	3.0

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EVERYONE
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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Violence

FIRE EMBLEM

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PS2

RPG MAKER II

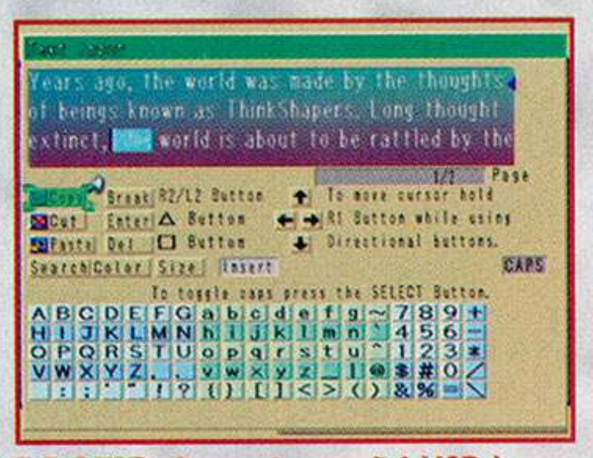
RPG MAKER II requires three things: a lot of time, a ton of imagination, and a solid USB keyboard. If any of these things are missing from your life, skip making RPGs and stick to simply playing them.

BUILD A BETTER DRAGON WARRIOR

To say "the graphics suck" or "the sound is generic" would do RPG Maker II a grave injustice because that's not at all what this baby's about. This is a game about making games, one that enables you to be an active participant in the dark art of video-game design.

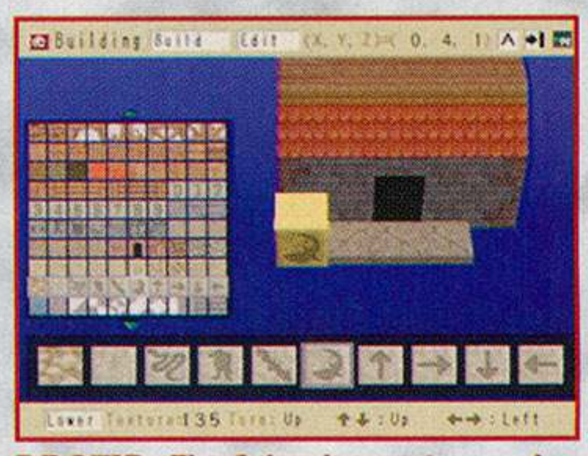
RPG Maker II makes a few significant improvements on the original, the most notable of which is the ability to plug in a USB keyboard and use it to enter copious amounts of dialogue and text. The level of tweaking you're able to do is pretty high (you can edit classes, level-up structures, magic types, enemy animations, etc.), but all the graphics are now wrought with prepackaged 3D building blocks, and you're more or less confined to a fantasy setting. Some of the joy of world building is lost when you're locked into a graphics toolset from a first-generation PlayStation Dragon Quest clone.

The game lets you edit lots of little details, but the amount of time it takes increases exponentially the deeper you go.



PROTIP: Invest in a solid USB keyboard if you plan on making anything with this game.

PROTIP: Play a bit (but not too much) of Fu-Ma, the game that's included–it will give you a good idea of what you can and can't do with the system.



PROTIP: The Select button is a godsend–you can leave different editing windows open while you tinker around in other areas.

THE LITTLE BROTHER OF INVENTION

RPG Maker II is definitely what you make of it. A small but active community of RPG makers exists out there on the Internet, even if you can't trade games online—you have to physically swap memory cards to exchange your games with friends. If you're really serious about this, better game-creating titles do exist, especially on the PC, offering easier interfaces and more freedom to mess with the basic building blocks. Still, this makes for an entry point into the vast realm of game design.

BY STAR DINGO

- Developed by Enterbrain
- Published by Agetec
- $49.99
- Available now
- RPG
- 1 player

ESRB: EVERYONE

FUN FACTOR	GRAPHICS	SOUND	CONTROL
3.5	1.5	2.0	3.5

PS2

Culdcept

IN A WORLD filled with shooters, fighting games, sports titles, and other well-worn concepts, it's always nice to see a publisher take a chance with a fresh concept. NEC's Culdcept falls into that realm.

PROTIP: Pay attention to the symbols when selecting a character for battle. They indicate whether the card is better, worse, or equal to your foe's–and the likelihood of a battle victory.

All Decked Out

Culdcept blends the board-game competition of Monopoly and the card-based battles of Magic: The Gathering with a dose of old-style RPG story and dialogue thrown in. The title refers to an ancient book of godly magic powers that are used by Cepters to do their bidding. As they travel, they face challenges from other Cepters, but instead of casting spells on each other, fights for control take place on a board. With each die roll, players receive cards from a stylish 480-card deck: Character Cards enable the placement of a guarding creature on that square; Spell Cards give the ability to cast a special effect; and Item Cards impart an offensive or defensive boost to a character or square.

PROTIP: Keep track of your holdings so that when you have a chance to transform land, you can create the biggest chain.

Card-Carrying Member

When one Cepter lands on another Cepter's square, the invader can challenge the existing character with respective Strength and Hit Points (and any influencing spells, items, or other enhancements) determining the victor. If the existing Cepter's character wins, possession is maintained and a toll is received (similar to Monopoly's rent), but if the invader is victorious, the land changes hands. Each match continues until one Cepter accumulates the gold goal stated at the start of a match. Versus mode enables up to four players to compete in individual card/board game matches.

Sure, the chatter between characters is pretty hokey at times, but that doesn't overshadow that Culdcept is an interesting and unique game idea. It's worth a look to see if it will offer you a break from the routine.

PROTIP: If you're coming up on an enemy, soften up the creature up with a target-damaging card in case you're drawn into combat.

PROTIP: Occupying land squares of the same element creates a Monopoly-like chain, providing a magic boost in battles on those squares.

BY MANNY LAMANCHA

- Developed by Omiya Soft
- Published by NEC Interchannel
- $39.99
- Available November
- Strategy/ card/RPG
- 4 players

ESRB: TEEN

FUN FACTOR	GRAPHICS	SOUND	CONTROL
3.5	3.0	4.0	4.0

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UNLEASH THE HORDE

TEEN
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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood
Violence

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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Mild Cartoon Violence

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PlayStation.2

XBOX

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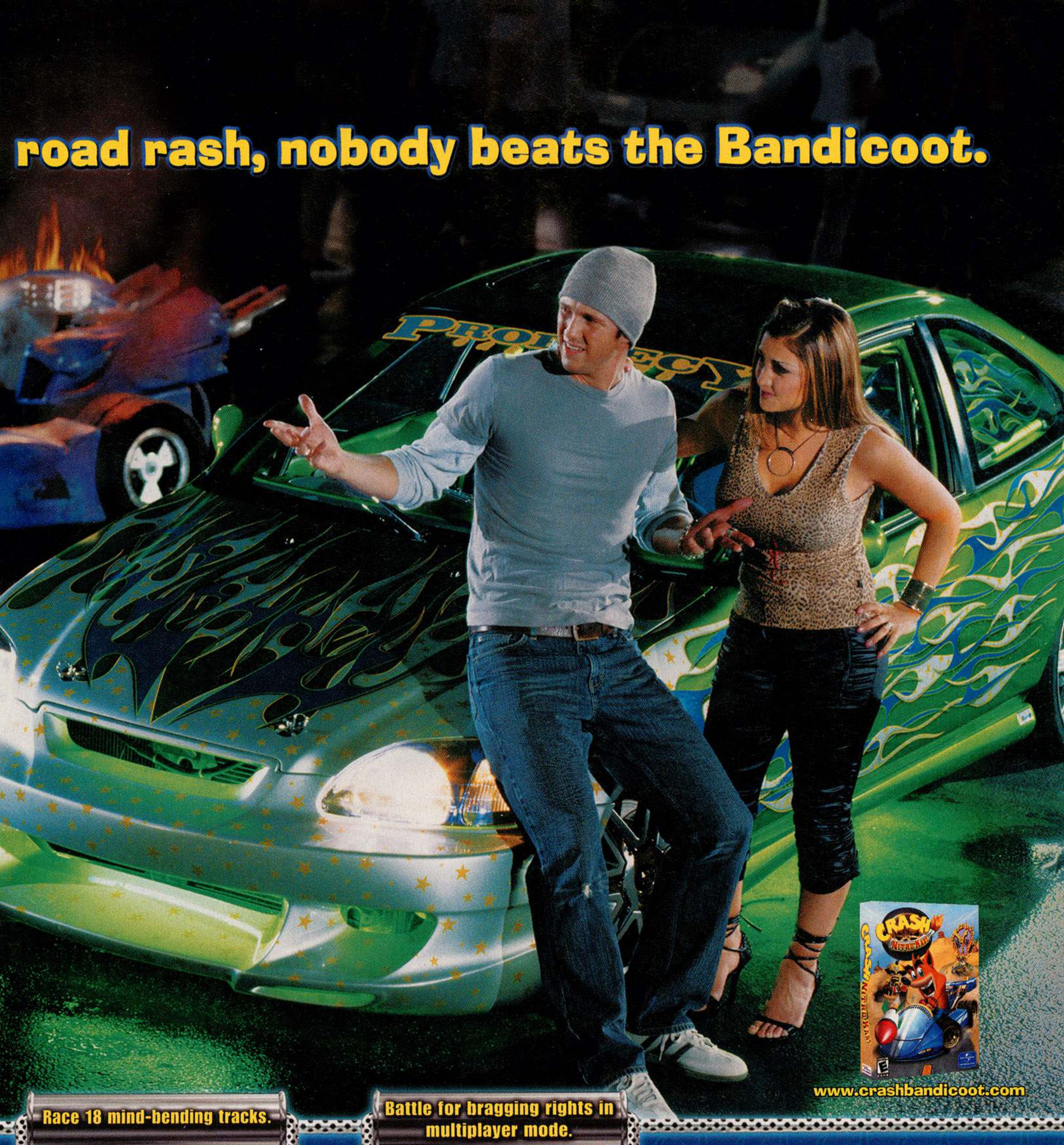

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Castlevania
lament of innocence

The latest installment in the Castlevania saga is filled with hidden areas, hard-to-find items, and a wealth of secrets. In this ProStrategy Guide, we show you how to find some of these goodies. By Monster Mike

Basics

Accessories and Items

Here are the locations of some of the game's key accessories and items, and their various effects. Some accessories and items can be purchased from Rinaldo; others are dropped only by particular monsters.

Accessory/Item	Function	Location/Monster
Anti-poison Ring	75% chance of nullifying poison attacks	Dropped by Poison Lizard
Arctic Ring	More resistant to lightning attacks	Anti-Soul Mysteries Lab 3F
Aroma Earring	Increases intelligence	Purchase from Rinaldo Dropped by Lesser Demon
Assassin Necklace	Occasionally produces a critical hit	Dropped by Evil Stabber
Bloody Cape	Converts damage to Hearts	House of Secret Remains B1F
Brisingamen	Increases usage time of Relics	Ghostly Theatre 2F
Cleric's Ring	75% chance of nullifying curse attacks	Dropped by Executioner
Coin of Happiness	Rumored to bring happiness to its owner	Dropped by Hanged Man
Draupnir	Improve attack power	Dark Palace of Waterfalls B2F
Heart Brooch	Decreases the amount of Hearts used	Ghostly Theatre 1F
Heart Repair	Recovers Hearts	Dropped by Death Reaper Dropped by Flea Man Dropped by Gargoyle Dropped by Mad Diver
Jade Mask	Destroys candle stands by touching them	Purchase from Rinaldo
Jewel Crush	Unleashes a special effect when you use a jewel	Garden Forgotten by Time 1F
Magnetic Necklace	Scattered money is collected automatically	Dropped by Skeleton Warrior
Mana Prism	Recovers MP	Dropped by Flame Demon Dropped by Frost Demon Dropped by Lesser Demon Dropped by Thunder Demon
Megingjord	The less HP you have, the greater the damage you inflict	Anti-Soul Mysteries Lab 3F
Member Plate	10% off store prices	Dropped by Spartacus
Perseus's Ring	75% chance of nullifying petrifaction attacks	Dropped by Gargoyle
Piko-piko Hammer	Improves the sound effect of your whip	Dropped by Cyclops
Piyo-piyo Shoes	Make piyo-piyo sounds when you walk	Dropped by Death Reaper
Qigong Belt	Increases constitution	Dropped by Heavy Armor
Ring of Fire	More resistant to fire attacks	Garden Forgotten by Time 1F
Ring of Thunder	More resistant to lightning attacks	Garden Forgotten by Time 1F
Sacrificial Doll	When your HP reaches 0, it's obliterated instead of you	Purchase from Rinaldo
Talisman	Sometimes nullifies damage from an enemy attack	Dropped by Lizard Knight

Orb/Sub-Weapon Combinations

You can collect five Sub-Weapons in the game. These weapons can unleash devastating attacks when used in conjunction with various Orbs. Here are all the resulting attacks from the five Sub-Weapons when equipped with the seven various Orbs. The number of Hearts each attack uses is in parenthesis.

Orb/Sub-Weapon	Axe	Cross	Crystal	Holy Water	Knife
Black Orb	Rapid Slash (8)	Six Saints (15)	Banish Stone (12)	Energy Wave (8)	Blade Serpent (12)
Blue Orb	Spinning Edge (5)	Divine Cross (8)	Hail Crystal (8)	Energy Gazer (4)	Needle Claws (4)
Green Orb	Hi-Speed Edge (5)	Holy Light (6)	Drain Stone (8)	Flame Sparks (4)	Force Cannon (4)
Purple Orb	Axe Tornado (10)	Michael's Sword (10)	Shatter Plane (20)	Cross Blazer (8)	Magic Missile (8)
Red Orb	Spiral Axe (6)	Double Cross (6)	Mash Crystal (4)	Roaring Flames (6)	Triple Dagger (3)
White Orb	Axe Trap (10)	Agena (12)	Judgment (20)	Aqua Disc (10)	Spread Gun (6)
Yellow Orb	Spirit Ripper (12)	Grand Cross (12)	Satellite (15)	Holy Symbol (4)	Astral Knife (10)

Jewel Crush

The Jewel Crush lets you use any jewel in your inventory for different effects. Most of these gems can be purchased from Rinaldo or are dropped by various monsters. Once you've acquired the Jewel Crush accessory (see the "Jewel Crush" section in "Garden Forgotten by Time" in this ProStrategy Guide), equip it as an accessory and then select a gem from your inventory for any of the effects listed below.

Diamond:	Total recover of HP, MP, and Hearts
Opal:	Inflicts damage on an enemy
Ruby:	Inflicts damage on an enemy
Sapphire:	Absorbs HP from an enemy
Turquoise:	Changes Sub-Weapon
Zircon:	Increases money

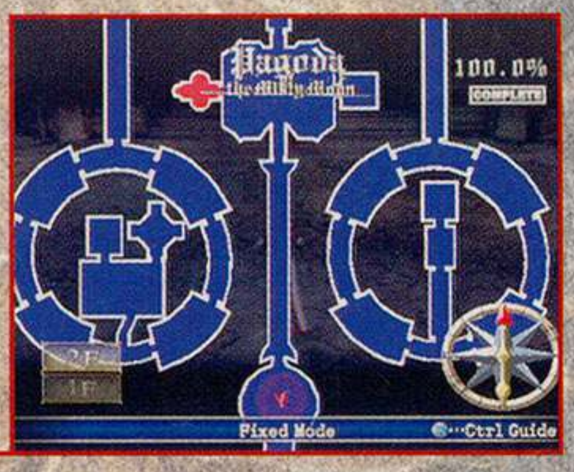
Skill List

Leon can learn different combo attacks and evasive techniques during the game using various button presses and movements with the left analog stick. Here is the complete list of Skills that Leon can learn:

A Extension 1:	While in the air, tap □, □, □
A Extension 2:	While in the air, tap □, □, □, □, □
Draw Up:	Tap □, △, □
Spinning Blast:	During Draw Up, tap □
Extension:	Tap □, □, □, □
Falcon Claw:	During a double jump, tap ×
Fast Rising:	Tap △, quickly tap □
Perfect Guard:	Guard at impact
Quick Step:	Press and hold R1, tap ×
Quick Step 2:	During Quick Step, hold R1, tap ×
Step Attack:	During Quick Step, tap □ or △
Vertical High:	Tap □, □, □, △
Rising Shot:	During Vertical High, tap □
Energy Blast:	During Rising Shot, tap △
Sonic Edge:	Rotate Left Analog 360 degrees, tap △

Dracula's Castle

Dracula's Castle is loaded with secret areas and hidden items. You can track your exploration progress in the upper right corner of the map screen or when you save the game. You can complete any area by defeating that area's boss, but unless the word "Complete" appears underneath the percentage while exploring an area, you haven't found everything in that area. Even if it says "Cleared!!" for an area in the hub room of Castle 1F, you may not have found everything for that area.



Guarding

One essential technique in Lament of Innocence is Guarding. Not only does Guarding protect you from harm, but it also restores some of your MP. Whenever an attacker glows purple before striking, that Guarded attack restores some MP. If you Guard a normal physical attack, no MP is restored. If you execute a Perfect Guard (pressing R1 at the exact moment an attack hits), a lot of MP will be restored—even if it's a physical attack.

Some boss attacks can be deflected only if you successfully execute a Perfect Guard against them.

Castle Entrance

White Bishop

You can purchase the White Bishop at Rinaldo's house on 1F at the start of the game.

Svarog Statue

You can find the Svarog Statue on 1F in the fifth room of the training area.

Black Orb

To get the Black Orb, you must defeat the Forgotten One—an optional boss but nevertheless the toughest in the game. Once you've acquired the Unlock Jewel (see "Unlock Jewel" in the "Pagoda of the Misty Moon" section in this ProStrategy Guide), you can open the sealed door on B1F; the Forgotten One resides in the aptly named Prison of Eternal Torture in B2F of the Castle Entrance area. If you decide to fight him/it/whatever, make sure you have the Knife as a Sub-Weapon (which you can find in one of the first rooms on 1F of Pagoda the Misty Moon).

The boss attacks in three stages, and you fight him from the ground up.

The first is the easiest to defeat—simply stand underneath the monster's rotting entrails and rapidly perform jump slashes. Your objective is to destroy the rotting lung-like tissue around the Forgotten One's heart, then destroy the heart itself.

Beware of the maggots that fall to the ground as you slash away—although they appear harmless, they can inflict Curse status. Also, be careful of the Forgotten One's blood, which inflicts Poison status on Leon if it touches him.

In the second round, things get tougher. Your primary target is the Forgotten One's left hand, which is his primary method of attack. The best time to inflict damage is when

the hand is suspended in mid-air—when it is, double jump next to it and execute an A Extension 2 attack. Another opportunity to inflict some damage is after the Forgotten One slams his hand on the ground. Again, be aware of the monster's blood because it inflicts Poison status.

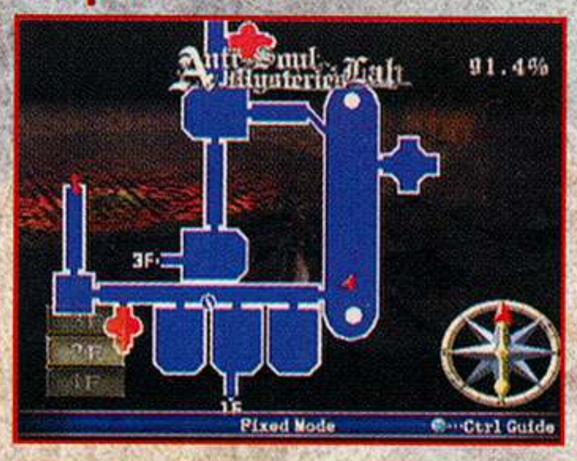
The final battle with the Forgotten One is against its head, and this is where the Knife plays a key role. To start, the Forgotten One roars and makes rocks drop from the ceiling—some rocks fall through the floor, while others remain on the ledge. Dodge the falling debris, and use the boulders as cover from the monster's other attack, a powerful fire blast.

When the monster stops spewing fire, launch a Magic Missile attack at him. Don't stay behind the same boulder for cover, however—make sure to move behind a different one after each round of flaming breath. If you have enough Hearts and Heart Repair items, you should be the last man standing at the end of the fight...

...and get the Black Orb as a reward.

Anti-Soul Mysteries Lab

Whip of Flames

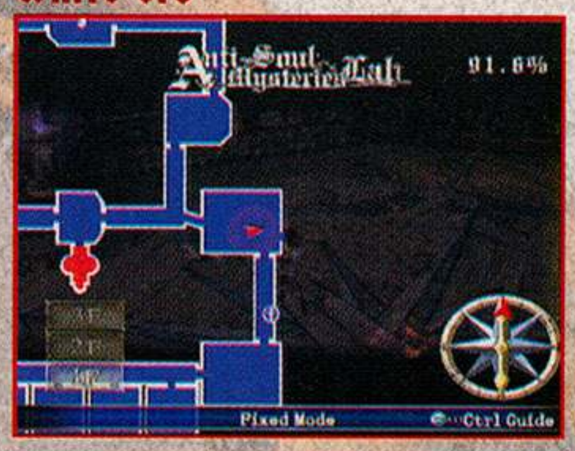


On 2F, go into the large room on the east side of the floor. Jump on the moving platform and then jump onto the south-most platform located along the east wall (there's a Potion on that platform).

Face south and look for the pole overhead—use your whip to grab that pole, then grab the second pole after that and swing to the ledge that's above you.

Beyond the door is a Flame Elemental. If you defeat him, you will get the Whip of Flames.

White Orb

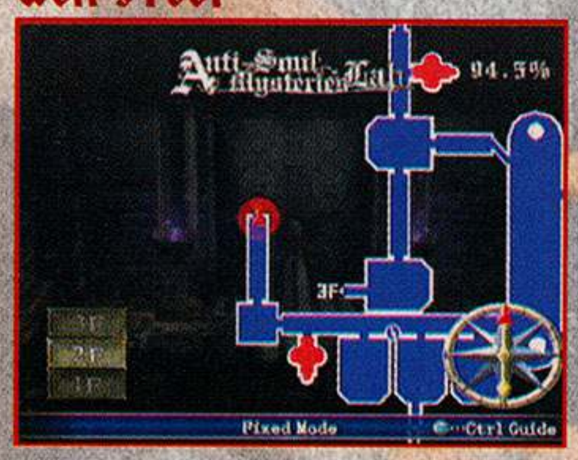


You've probably noticed a statue on floor 1F that's blocking a door along the east wall.

To destroy the statue, hit it with the Whip of Flames repeatedly until it glows bright red...

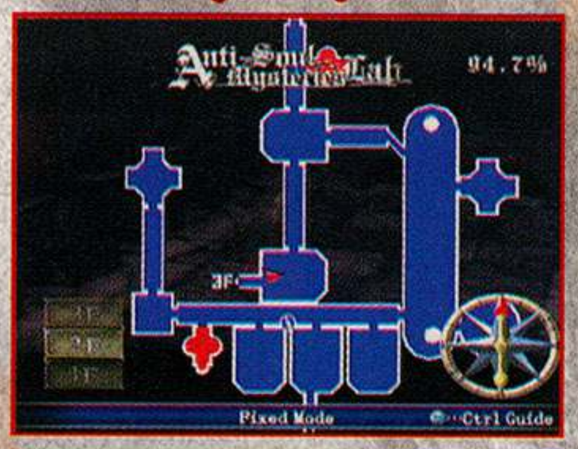
...at that point, switch to the Whip of Ice (see the "Dark Palace of Waterfalls" section in this ProStrategy Guide) and keep hitting the statue until it shatters. Go through the door, and you can find the White Orb in the next room.

Wolf's Foot



The Wolf's Foot is on 2F behind the door locked by the Red Phoenix Key (see the "Garden Forgotten by Time" section in this ProStrategy Guide).

Yellow Dragon Key



On 2F, in the room where you can take the staircase to 3F, stand on the single gold block near the staircase.

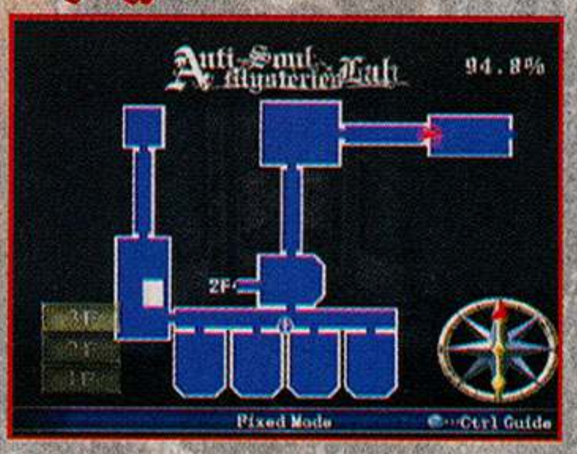
After a minute or so, the block turns into an elevator that takes you to a secret room on 1F with the Yellow Dragon Key in it. To exit the room, step on the block again.

Arctic Ring

On 3F, there is a painting at the east end of a long hallway.

If you jump into the painting, you'll land in a secret room with the Arctic Ring in it.

Megingjord



The Megingjord is on floor 3F. When you reach the northeast room with the narrow catwalk, equip the Wolf's Foot, activate your magic, and then run east across the catwalk. Although the catwalk will crumble behind you as you run, you should make it to the other side. The Megingjord is in the room at the end of the catwalk.

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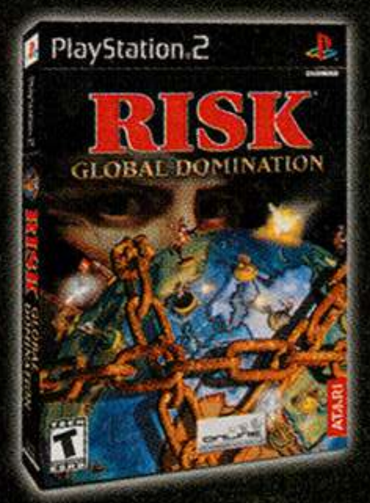

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Red Orb

If you defeat Golem, you will get the Red Orb as a reward. To make the monster appear, insert the "e" Tablet (which can be found on 3F) into the slot on the west wall of the large circular room on 2F.

Garden Forgotten by Time

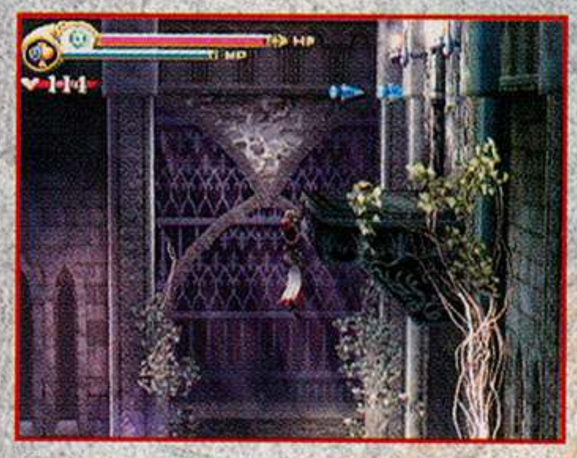
Jewel Crush

On 1F, in the room with the Man-Eating Plant, whip the base of the plant until it's near the north wall. When the monster's in position, stop whipping so its leaves fall away from the head and create a platform.

Jump on the leaves and then double jump to the ledge high against the north wall. Go through the door and take the Jewel Crush in the next room. Don't forget to whip the statue so it moves into the recess along the wall.

Whip of Lightning

On 1F, when you reach the Man-Eating Plant in the east room, move it into the north-east corner and then use it as a step to jump to the ledge on the east wall.



Go through the door, head east down the long hallway, and in the next room, go south. When you reach the room with the wrecked bridge, head south; unless you have the Wolf's Foot, you cannot go to the room to the east.

Ascend the long spiral staircase that leads to 2F. Once at the top, go through the door, whip the statue so it moves into the wall, and then head east. At the end of the hall is a green boss door. If you defeat the Thunder Elemental behind the door, you'll get the Whip of Lightning.

Saisei Incense

In 1F, if you have the Wolf's Foot, go to the room with the wrecked bridge (see "Whip of Lightning," above). Jump to the platform in the middle of the room, face east, activate the Wolf's Foot magic, and then perform a running jump onto the platform along the east wall.

Go through the next few rooms until you find the Saisei Incense.

Red Phoenix Key

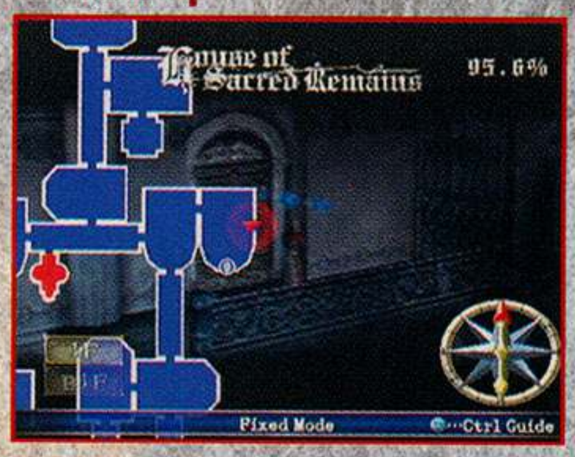
You can find the Red Phoenix Key on 1F behind the sealed door in the north-east room clustered together with three other rooms.

Purple Orb

If you defeat Medusa, you will get the Purple Orb as a reward.

House of Sacred Remains

MP Max Up



In 1F, in the east room to the north is a door that can be reached only with Wolf's Foot magic.

When you reach that room, jump onto the west balcony, face east,

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activate Wolf's Foot magic, and then perform a running jump to the railing on the other side of the room.

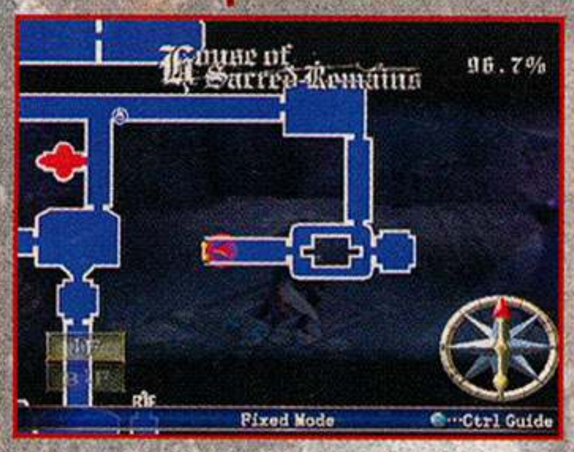
When you get close to the railing, use your whip to grab the railing and pull yourself onto the ledge. In one of the following rooms, you can find an MP Max Up.

HP Max Up

After acquiring the MP Max Up (see above), keep heading east. When you reach the room with the HP Max Up, take the item and then examine the bookcase along the east wall.

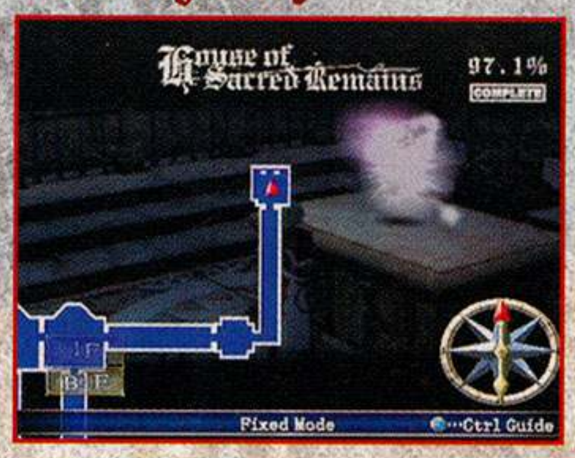
Press on either edge of the bookcase, and it should move aside, revealing a secret room. Inside the room is a pedal that unlocks one of the three seals on a door elsewhere in the House of Sacred Remains.

Black Bishop



On floor 1F, you can find the Black Bishop behind the door locked by the Yellow Dragon Key (see the "Anti-Soul Mysteries Lab" section in this ProStrategy Guide).

White Tiger Key

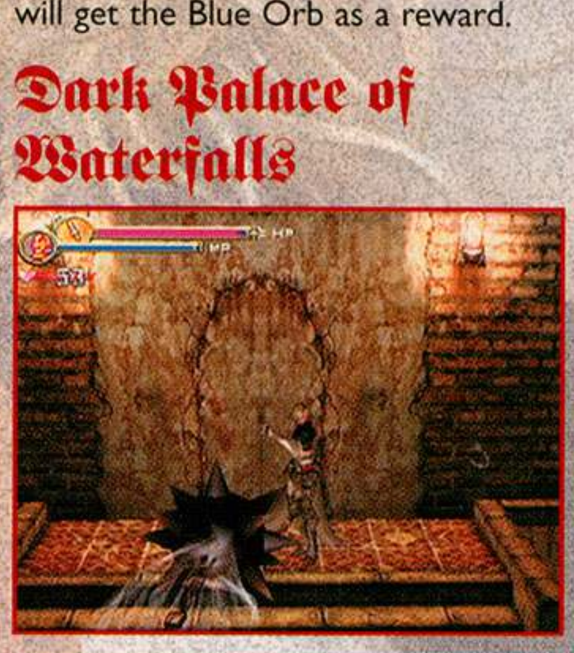


The White Tiger Key can be found on floor B1F, past the double doors sealed by three pedestal-locked seals.

Blue Orb

If you defeat the Undead Parasite, you will get the Blue Orb as a reward.

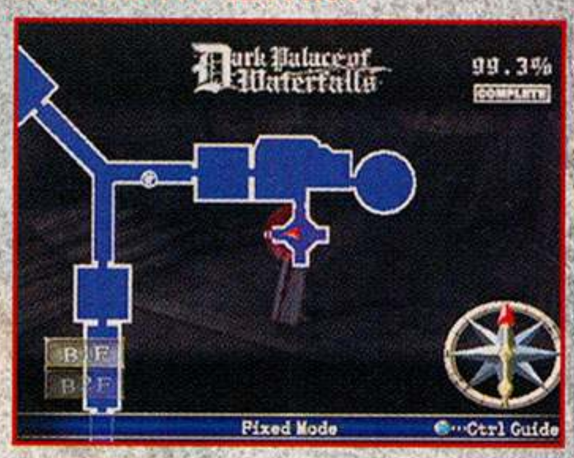
Dark Palace of Waterfalls



On B1F, when you walk to the end of the blocked east passageway, a Heavy Armor appears. Put your back to the obstructed wall and wait for him to swing his big spiked ball. The projectile should miss you and punch a hole in the wall.

Continue east until you enter a room with rocky cliffs covered with snow. Climb up the cliffs and then jump and look for a railing. Use your whip to keep ascending. Behind the first door that you encounter is an HP Max Up…however, that isn't the key secret of this room.

Meditative Incense



You can find an elevator in the room with the HP Max Up that leads to B2F. You can also score a Relic by taking the elevator to the floor below.

When the ride starts, run to the right side of the platform. After you grab five coins, move to the left side of the platform and collect five more coins. Return to the right side of the platform and repeat the pattern. The idea is to collect all 40 coins. Although the mines cause minor damage, don't go out of your way to avoid them.

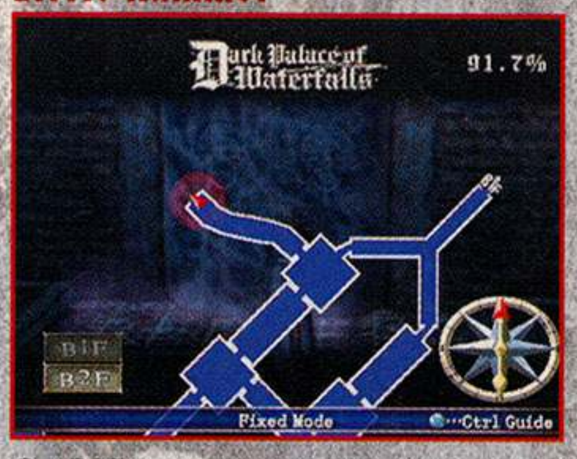
After you collect the last set of five coins, a bell sounds (you should be standing on the left side of the platform)—that's your cue to stand in the center of the platform and collect your prize, the Meditative Incense Relic. Return to the room on B1F where you boarded the elevator to B2F.

Whip of Ice

When you exit, with your back to the door you just went through, double jump off the ledge directly ahead of you—you should land on a narrow cliff. Use your whip to fasten onto any railings that you find until you reach a door with a boss insignia illuminated by a green flame.

Behind the door is Frost Elemental—defeat her, and you get the Whip of Ice.

Little Hammer



On B2F, you can melt the ice barrier blocking the door at the north-west passage with the Whip of Flames.

Once the barrier is gone, go through the door and take the prize—the Little Hammer.

Green Orb

If you defeat Joachim, you will get the Green Orb as a reward.

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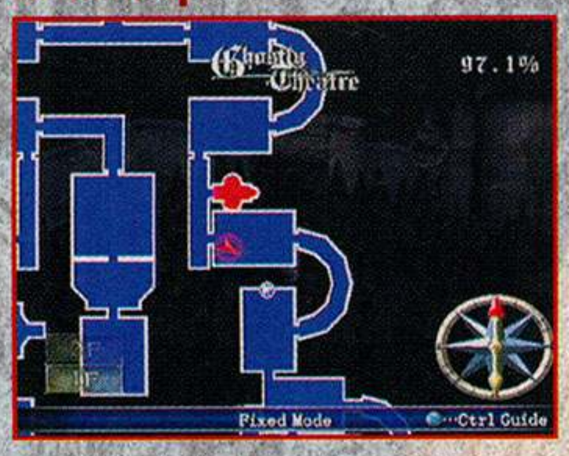
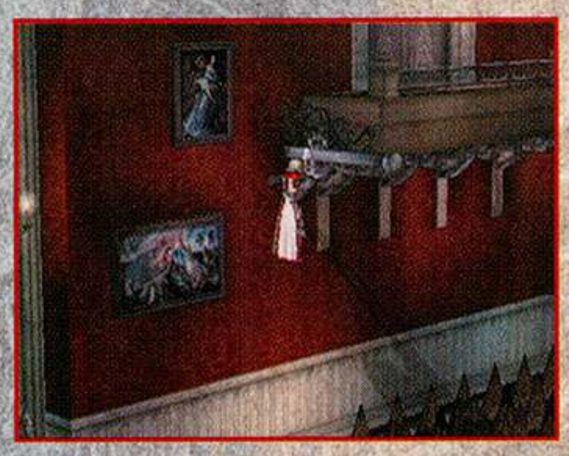
Ghostly Theatre

HP Max Up



On floor 1F, you can find a hidden HP Max Up in the first room with the falling spikes.

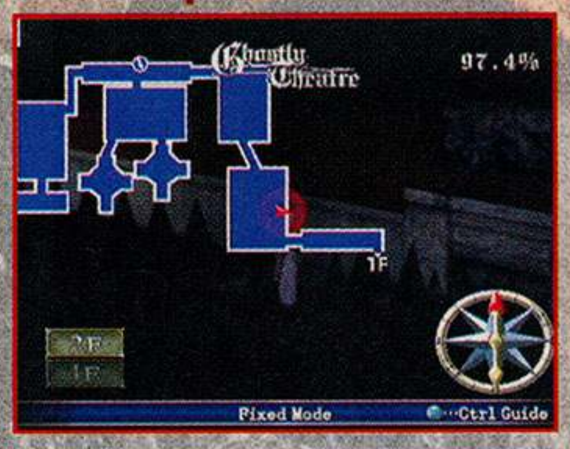


When you enter the room, go to the rectangular "safe area" along the south wall. Jump and look for a balcony above you. Perform a double jump, and use your whip to grab the pole near the balcony to pull yourself onto the ledge. In the next room is an HP Max Up.

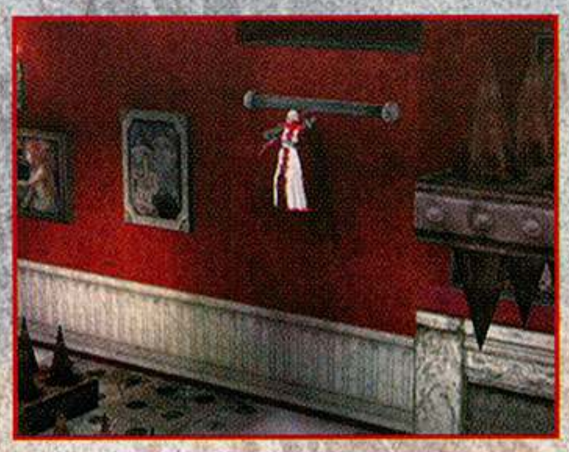
Heart Brooch

You can find the Heart brooch on floor 1F of the Ghostly Theatre behind the door that's locked with the White Tiger Key.

MP Max Up



When you reach the first room with falling spikes on 2F, look for the "safe spot" located along the middle of the east wall.



Face the wall, perform a double jump, and then use any whip to latch onto the pole extruding from the wall. When you land, face north and jump to the catwalk above you—you can find an MP Max Up at the end of the catwalk.

Lucifer's Sword

There's a second pole extruding from the wall. From where you collected the MP Max Up (see above), go south and use the double-jump-then-whip technique to land on the catwalk near the south end of the room.

Go through the door along the east wall and take Lucifer's Sword.

Yellow Orb

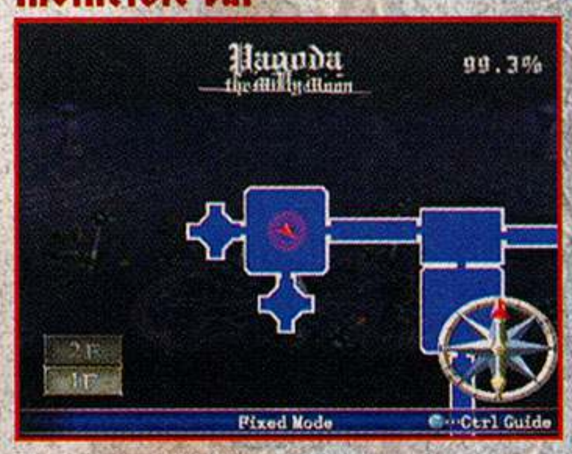
To get the Succubus to appear, stand in the middle of the big room with the curtain on 1F and ring the Curtain Time Bell (which can be found on 2F). If you defeat the Succubus, you will get the Yellow Orb as a reward.

Pagoda of the Misty Moon

Crystal Skull

The Crystal Skull is dropped at random by any defeated Phantom. You can find Phantoms on 1F and 2F.

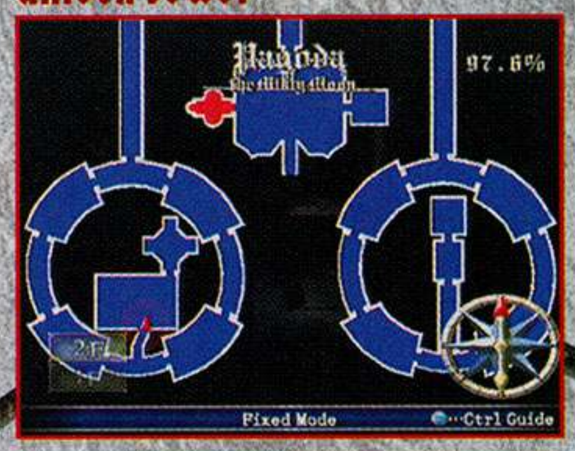
Invincible Jar



The Invincible Jar is dropped at random by the Mirage Skeleton, who resides in the big northwest room on 1F. The easiest way to defeat this slippery monster is to immediately move to the center of the room when you first enter it.

You should spot a lone skeleton walking around—that's the "real" Mirage Skeleton, so smack him with an Attack-big to launch him away from his imitations who quickly start assembling. Hammer away at the monster until he's destroyed.

Unlock Jewel



You can find the Unlock Jewel in the dark room in the west section on 2F. When you enter the room, double jump onto the platform directly ahead of you (north), then double jump onto the two sequential platforms to the west. Face the north wall and then double jump onto the platform directly ahead of you.

From there, double jump to the east—you should land on a platform with a door. Inside the room is the Unlock Jewel.

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Violence

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(s03)

Ubi Soft ENTERTAINMENT

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CODE VAULT

CHEATS · TRICKS · SECRETS

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MARIO GOLF: TOADSTOOL TOUR

Extra Tournaments

At the title screen, **press and hold Z**, and then **press Start**. At the Main Menu, select Contests, and at the Contests screen, choose Password Tournament. At the Password Tournament screen, enter the following passwords to unlock these tournaments. If you entered the code correctly, the tournament will automatically begin.

Camp Hyrule Cup:	OEKW5G7U
Hollywood Video Tour:	BJGQBULZ
Super Mario Open:	GGAA241H
Target Bullseye Tour:	CEUFPXJ1

Traci Lee—Wayne, NJ

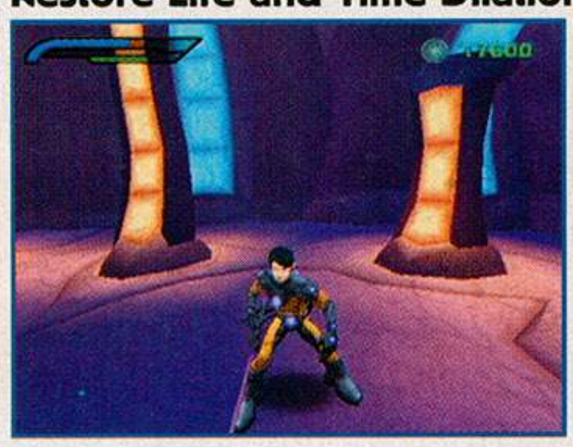
F-ZERO GX

Unlock Sounds of Big Blue

At the Select Mode screen, select Customize, and at the Customize screen, choose F-Zero Shop. At the F-Zero Shop screen, **press Z, Left, Right, Left, Z, Y, X, Z, Left, Right, Z, X, Z, X, Z**. If you entered the code correctly, you'll hear a sound and Sounds of Big Blue will be available at the Items screen. To activate it, **press Z** when selecting a Big Blue track.

ALTER ECHO

Restore Life and Time Dilation



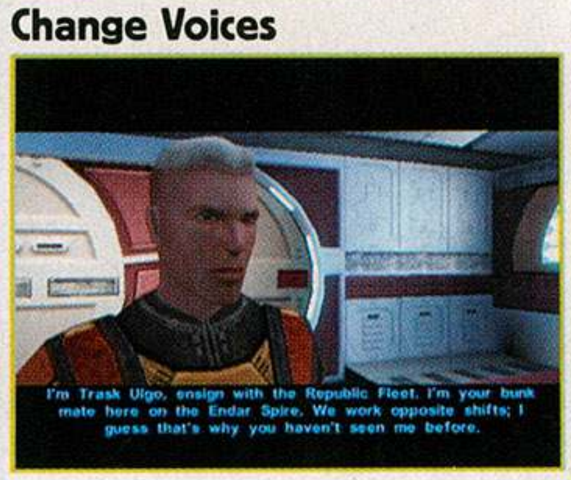
During gameplay, **press Up, Up, Down, Down, Left, Right, Left** and then enter the following codes to unlock these cheats. If done correctly, the cheat will immediately take effect.

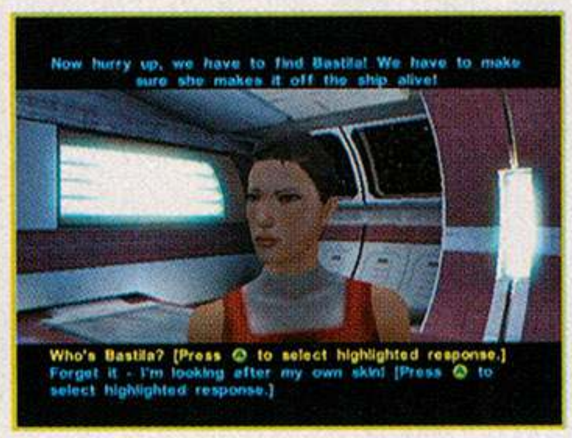
Restore Life: Press and hold L3, and then press Right.

Restore Time Dilation: Press and hold L3, and then press Up.

STAR WARS: KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC

Change Voices

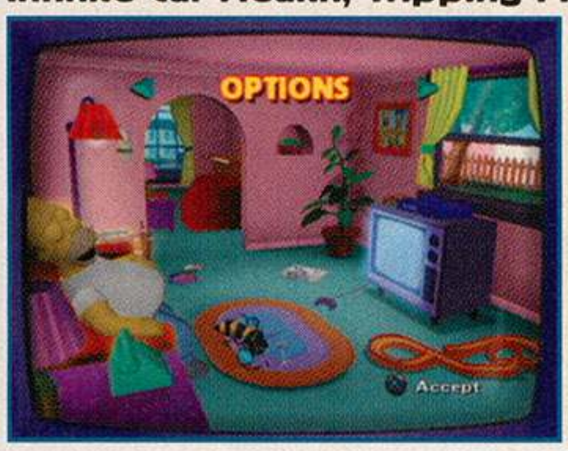




With one controller inserted into the first controller port, insert another controller into the fourth controller port. With the second controller, **press Black** to lower the pitch of the voices, and **press White** to increase the pitch of the voices.

THE SIMPSONS HIT & RUN

Infinite Car Health, Tripping Mode, and More



At the main menu, select Options. At the Options screen, **simultaneously press and hold L1 and R1**, and then enter the following codes to unlock these cheats. If you entered the code correctly, you'll hear a horn.

Credits: Press ×, □, □, △.

Faster Cars: Press □, □, □, □.

Fastest Cars: Press △, △, △, △.

Grid Mode: Press ○, ×, ○, △.

Infinite Car Health: Press △, ×, △, ×.

Leap: Press □, □, □, △.

More Camera Angles: Press ○, ○, ○, ×.

One Hit Kills: Press △, △, □, □.

Red Brick Car: Press ○, ○, △, □.

Speedometer Display: Press △, △, ○, □.

Tripping Mode: Press △, ○, △, ○.

NCAA GAMEBREAKER 2004

Unlock The Desert and The Hangar Stadiums

At the Main Menu, choose Scrimmage, and at the Team Matchup screen, **press** □ to bring up the Scrimmage Options screen. **Press L1**, highlight the stadium you want to unlock, and **press** □ to bring up the entry screen. Enter the following to unlock these stadiums.

The Desert:	CACTUS
The Hangar:	ALIEN

STARSKY & HUTCH

Funny Car, Invisible Car, and More

Pause the game and then enter the following codes to unlock these cheats. If you entered the code correctly, a message will appear.

Funny Car: Press Up, ×, **Down,** △, **Left,** ○, **Right,** □.

Invisible Car: Press Up, Right, Down, Left, L3, Left, Right, Left.

Low Rider: Press Up, Up, Down, Down, ×, ○, △, □.

Unlock Everything: Create a new profile, and at the Name Entry screen, enter VADKRAM as a name. If you entered the code correctly, all missions, cars, and extra features will be available.

THE SIMPSONS HIT & RUN

Faster Cars, Red Brick Car, and More

At the main menu, select Options. At the Options screen, **simultaneously press and hold L and R**, and then enter the following codes to unlock these cheats. If you entered the code correctly, you'll hear a horn.

Credits: Press A, X, X, Y.

Faster Cars: Press X, X, X, X.

Fastest Cars: Press Y, Y, Y, Y.

Grid Mode: Press B, A, B, Y.

Infinite Car Health: Press Y, A, Y, A.

Leap: Press X, X, X, Y.

More Camera Angles: Press B, B, B, A.

One Hit Kills: Press Y, Y, X, X.

Red Brick Car: Press B, B, Y, X.

Speedometer Display: Press Y, Y, B, X.

Tripping Mode: Press Y, B, Y, B.

THE SIMPSONS HIT & RUN

Grid Mode, One Hit Kills, and More

At the main menu, select Options. At the Options screen, **simultaneously press and hold L and R**, and then enter the following codes to unlock these cheats. If you entered the code correctly, you'll hear a horn.

Credits: Press A, X, X, Y.

Faster Cars: Press X, X, X, X.

Fastest Cars: Press Y, Y, Y, Y.

Grid Mode: Press B, A, B, Y.

Infinite Car Health: Press Y, A, Y, A.

Leap: Press X, X, X, Y.

More Camera Angles: Press B, B, B, A.

One Hit Kills: Press Y, Y, X, X.

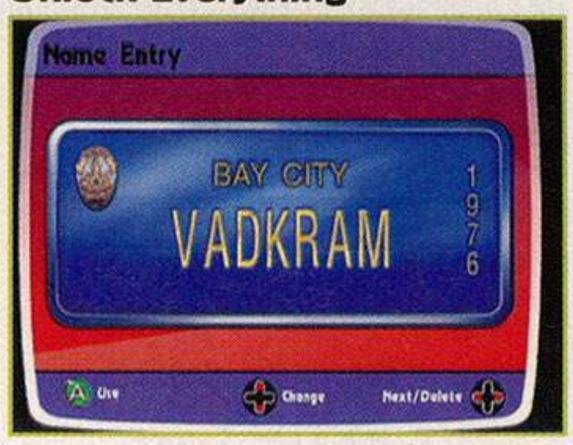
Red Brick Car: Press B, B, Y, X.

Speedometer Display: Press Y, Y, B, X.

Tripping Mode: Press Y, B, Y, B.

STARSKY & HUTCH

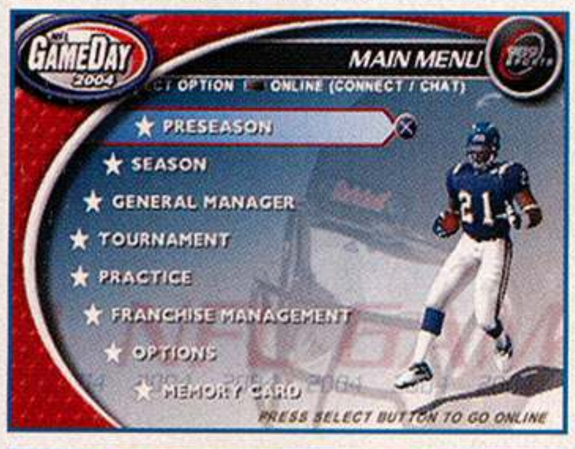
Unlock Everything



Create a new profile, and at the Name Entry screen, enter VADKRAM as a name. If you entered the code correctly, all missions, cars, and extra features will be available.

NFL GAMEDAY 2004

Stadium Passwords



At the Main Menu, choose Preseason, and at the Matchup screen, **press** □ to go to the Options screen. Choose Preseason Options, and at the Preseason Options screen, **press L1** to toggle the Home Team default stadium. Scroll to the stadium you want to unlock and then enter the following codes to unlock the selected stadium.

Note: A "_" designates a blank space.

Good Ol' Days:	SEPIA_TONE
Old Carolina:	CAROL

FUTURAMA

Unlock Levels, Immortality, and More

During gameplay, **simultaneously press and hold L1 and L2**, and then enter the following codes to unlock these cheats. If you entered the code correctly, the cheat will immediately take effect.

Ammo: Press Down, □, △, Down, □, △, ○, ×, R2, Right, Select.

Charge: Press Down, □, △, Down, □, △, ○, ×, R2, Left, Select.

Health: Press Down, □, △, Down, □, △, ○, ×, R2, Up, Select.

Immortality: Press Down, □, △, Down, □, △, ○, ×, R2, △, Select.

Level–Planet Express: Press Down, □, △, Down, □, △, □, △, Up, Up, Select.

Level–Sewers: Press Down, □, △, Down, □, △, □, △, Up, Right, Select.

Level–Subway: Press Down, □, △, Down, □, △, □, △, Up, Down, Select.

Level–Old New York: Press Down, □, △, Down, □, △, □, △, Up, Left, Select.

Level–Red Light District: Press Down, □, △, Down, □, △, □, △, Up, Down, △, Select.

Level–Uptown: Press Down, □, △, Down, □, △, □, △, Up, ○, Select.

Level–New New York: Press Down, □, △, Down, □, △, □, △, Up, ×, Select.

Level–Canyon: Press Down, □, △, Down, □, △, □, △, Right, Up, Select.

Level–Mine: Press Down, □, △, Down, □, △, □, △, Right, Right, Select.

Level–Mine Tunnel: Press Down, □, △, Down, □, △, □, △, Right, Down, Select.

Level–Junkyard 1: Press Down, □, △, Down, □, △, □, △, Right, Left, Select.

Level–Junkyard 2: Press Down, □, △, Down, □, △, □, △, Right, △, Select.

Level–Junkyard 3: Press Down, □, △, Down, □, △, □, △, Right, ○, Select.

Level–Market Square: Press Down, □, △, Down, □, △, □, △, Down, Up, Select.

Level–Left Wing: Press Down, □, △, Down, □, △, □, △, Down, Right, Select.

Level–Right Wing: Press Down, □, △, Down, □, △, □, △, Down, Down, Select.

Level–Temple Courtyard: Press Down, □, △, Down, □, △, □, △, Down, Left, Select.

Level–Inner Temple: Press Down, □, △, Down, □, △, □, △, Down, △, Select.

Level–Bogad Swamp: Press Down, □, △, Down, □, △, □, △, Left, Up, Select.

Level–Mom's HQ (Bender): Press Down, □, △, Down, □, △, □, △, △, Up, Select.

Level–Mom's HQ (Leela): Press Down, □, △, Down, □, △, □, △, △, Right, Select.

Level–Mom's HQ (Fry): Press Down, □, △, Down, □, △, □, △, △, Down, Select.

Lives: Press Down, □, △, Down, □, △, ○, ×, R2, Down, Select.

MIDTOWN MADNESS 3

All Cars

At the car selection screen, **press and hold the left thumbstick**, and then **press L, R, L, L, L, R, R, R, L, L, R, R**. If you entered the code correctly, all cars will be available.

OUTLAW VOLLEYBALL

Beating Tokens, Pit of Hell Court, and Unlimited Turbo

Beating Tokens: During a game in Exhibition mode, **press and hold L**, and then **press White, White, White**. If done correctly, you'll receive beating tokens.

Pit of Hell Court: During a game in Exhibition mode, **press and hold R**, and then **press X, X, X, X, X, X, Y, Y, Y, Y, Y, Y, White, White, White, White, White, White**. If you entered the code correctly, the Pit of Hell Court will appear onscreen.

Unlimited Turbo: During a game in Exhibition mode, **press White** to enter the Pick-A-Fight screen. **Press and hold L**, and then **press Left, Right, Down, R**. If you entered the code correctly, you'll hear a sound.

TOP GUN: COMBAT ZONES

Unlock All Levels and Planes

Start a game, and at the Enter CallSign screen, enter `SHPONGLE` as a name. If you entered the code correctly, all levels and planes will be available.

DOWNHILL DOMINATION

Always Stoked, Unlimited Energy, and More

During gameplay, **press Up, △, Down, ×, Left, ○, Right, □**. If done correctly, "Cheats Unlocked" will appear onscreen. Enter the following codes to unlock the corresponding cheats. If done correctly, the name of the cheat will appear onscreen.

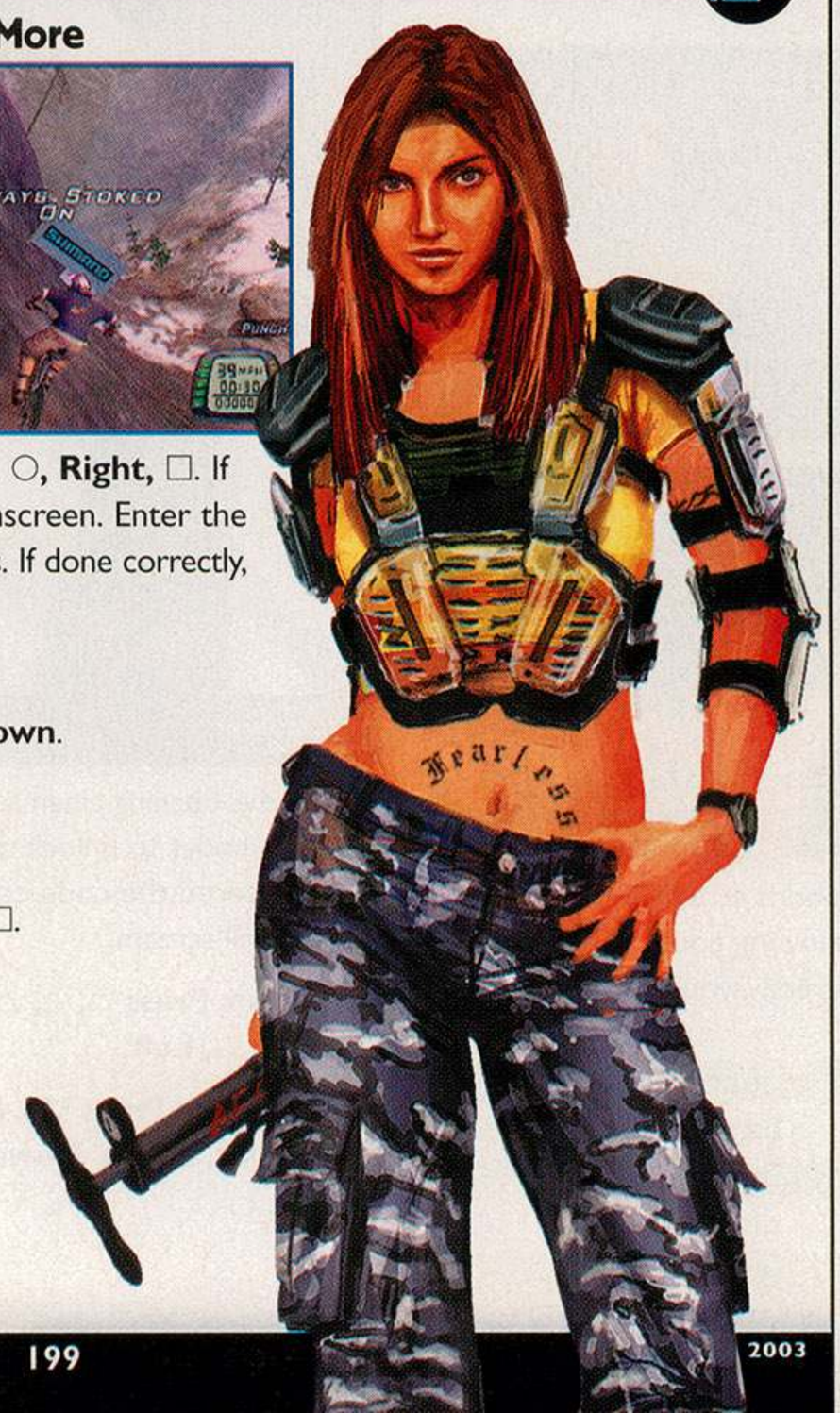
Always Stoked: Press Down, □, □, Left, ○.

Extra Smack Time: Press Left, Right, Down, Down.

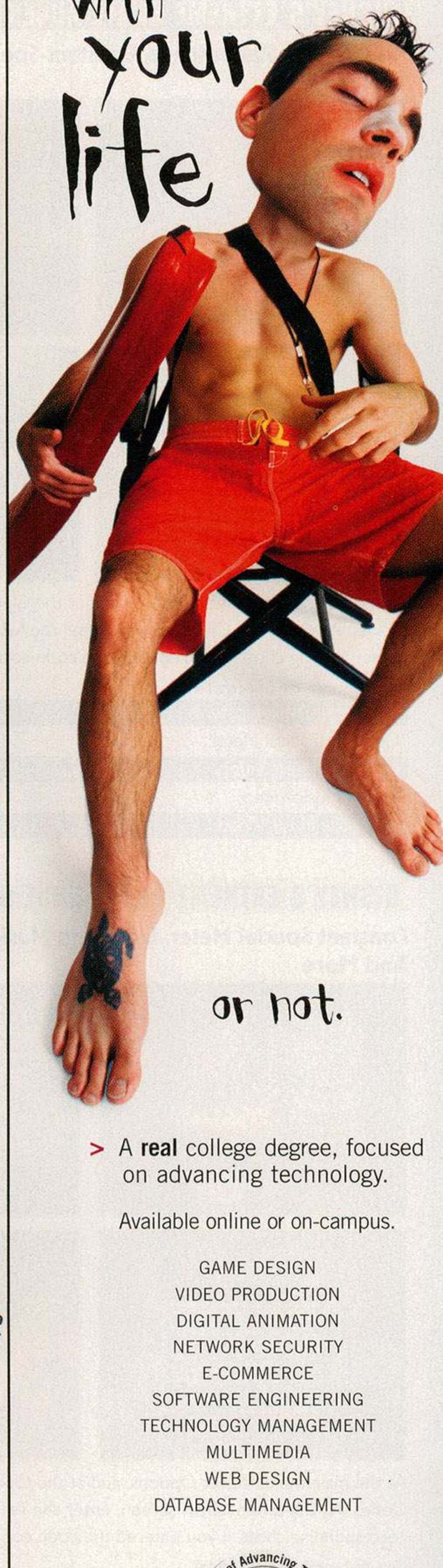
Infinite Bottles: Press Up, ×, Left, Left, ○, ○.

Speed Freak: Press Down, △, Right, Right, □.

Unlimited Energy: Press Down, △, Left, Left, □.



do something with your life



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DISNEY'S EXTREME SKATE ADVENTURE

All Create-A-Skater Items, Constant Special Meter, And More

At the main menu, select Options, and at the Options screen, choose Cheat Codes. At the Enter Cheat screen, enter the following codes to unlock the corresponding cheat. If you entered the code correctly, you'll hear a sound.

Note: Passwords are case-sensitive.

All Create-A-Skater Items:	sweetthreads
Constant Special Meter:	supercharger
Lion King Music Video:	savannah
Tarzan Music Video:	nugget
Toy Story Music Video:	marin

DISNEY'S EXTREME SKATE ADVENTURE

Constant Special Meter, Tarzan Music Video, and More

At the main menu, select Options, and at the Options screen, choose Cheat Codes. At the Enter Cheat screen, enter the following codes to unlock the corresponding cheat. If you entered the code correctly, you'll hear a sound.

Note: Passwords are case-sensitive.

All Create-A-Skater Items:	trendytrickster
Constant Special Meter:	inthezone
Lion King Music Video:	savannah
Tarzan Music Video:	nugget
Toy Story Music Video:	marin

DISNEY'S EXTREME SKATE ADVENTURE

Constant Special Meter, Lion King Music Video, And More

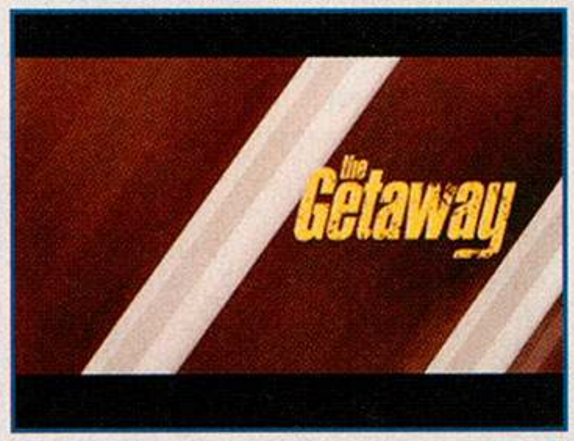
At the main menu, select Options, and at the Options screen, choose Cheat Codes. At the Enter Cheat screen, enter the following codes to unlock the corresponding cheat. If you entered the code correctly, you'll hear a sound.

Note: Passwords are case-sensitive.

All Create-A-Skater Items:	gethotgear
Constant Special Meter:	happyfeet
Lion King Music Video:	savannah
Tarzan Music Video:	nugget
Toy Story Music Video:	marin

THE GETAWAY

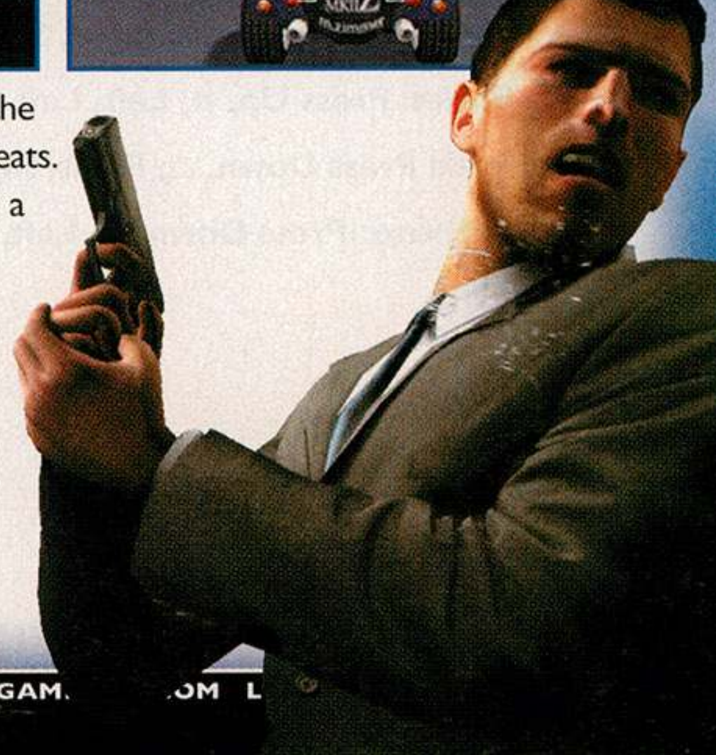
Free Roam and Infinite Ammo



During the opening cinema, enter the following codes to unlock these cheats. If you entered the code correctly, a woman will scream.

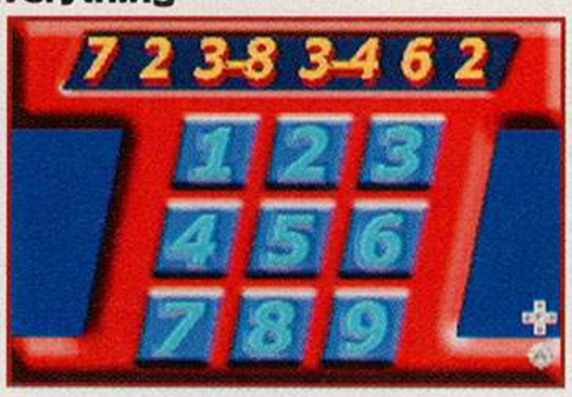
Free Roam: Press △, △, △, Left, □, △, △, △, Left, ○.

Infinite Ammo: Press Up, Down, Left, Right, △, Up, Down, Left, Right, □.



HOT WHEELS: VELOCITY X

Level Passwords and Unlock Everything



At the Main screen, select Password, and at the password screen, enter the following passwords to unlock these cheats. If you entered the code correctly, you'll automatically return to the Main screen.

Level 1:	123-17-543
Level 2:	143-24-813
Level 3:	141-38-985
Level 4:	249-48-723
Level 5:	294-16-277
Level 6:	457-51-438
Level 7:	112-86-545
Level 8:	447-65-112
Level 9:	368-54-466
Level 10:	718-59-438
Level 11:	363-95-545
Level 12:	373-65-848
Level 13:	171-49-211
Level 14:	373-59-216
Level 15:	373-62-927
Level 16:	718-42-276
Level 17:	358-59-355
Level 19:	573-77-683
Level 20:	188-58-352
Level 21:	766-46-341
Level 22:	187-98-394
Level 23:	188-12-234
Level 24:	786-84-747
Level 25:	466-59-979
Level 27:	447-62-191
Level 28:	614-81-432
Level 29:	641-18-239
Level 30:	399-68-584
Level 31:	662-84-635
Level 32:	476-63-843
Level 33:	616-67-341
Level 34:	384-97-475
Level 35:	363-13-298
Level 36:	521-71-135
Level 37:	543-17-658
Level 38:	782-57-387
Unlock Everything:	723-83-462

FAIRLY ODD PARENTS: ENTER THE CLEFT

Episode Passwords

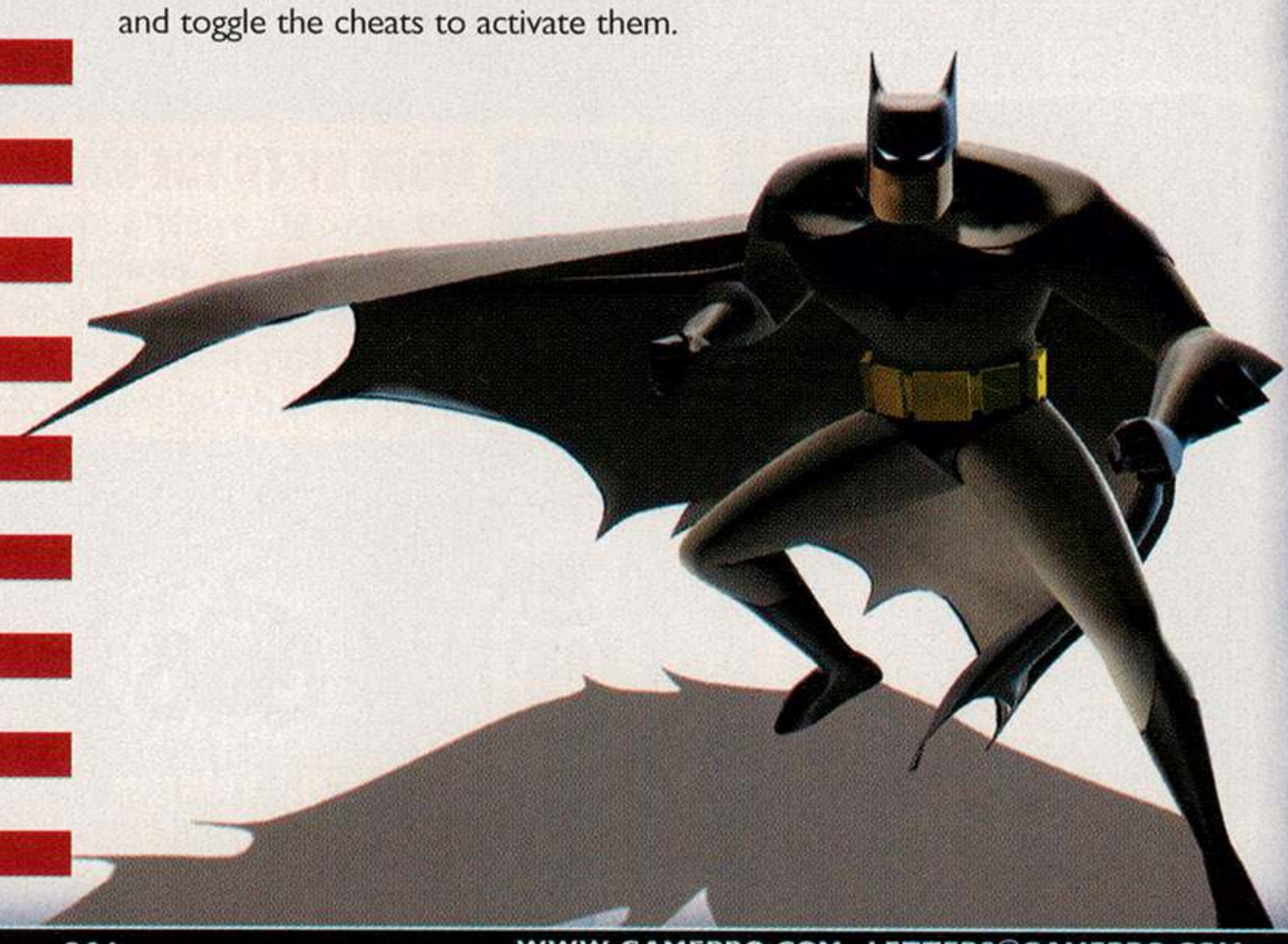
At the title screen, **press Start**. At the Game Select screen, select Password. Enter the following character icons in order to unlock the corresponding episode. If you entered them correctly, you'll automatically go to the Stage Select screen.

Episode 2:	Wanda, Vicky, Country Boy, Cosmo, Bronze Knee Cap
Episode 3:	Wanda, Country Boy, Wanda, Crimson Chin, Crimson Chin
Episode 4:	Bronze Knee Cap, Wanda, Country Boy, Bronze Knee Cap, Spatula Lady
Episode 5:	Crimson Chin, Country Boy, Country Boy, Crimson Chin, Cosmo
Episode 5-2:	Spatula Lady, Bronze Knee Cap, Crimson Chin, Country Boy, Timmy
Episode 5-3:	Vicky, Country Boy, Wanda, Country Boy, Vicky
Episode 5-4:	Spatula Lady, Bronze Knee Cap, Spatula Lady, Bronze Knee Cap, Wanda
Episode Finale:	Crimson Chin, Country Boy, Cosmo, Country Boy, Crimson Chin

BATMAN VENGEANCE

All Cheats

At the main menu, **press L, R, L, R, X, X, Y, Y**. If you entered the code correctly, you'll hear a sound. During gameplay, **press Start**, select Cheats, and toggle the cheats to activate them.



SPECIAL ADVERTISING SECTION

ACTION REPLAY MAX CODES!

The following codes require ACTION REPLAY MAX FOR PS2®

ROMANCE OF THE THREE KINGDOMS VII

Master Code – Must Be on	F5QE-FZ9P-8B4N7
	R69J-2XH2-K8U75
	1495-KT1M-Y0594
All Created Codes	W9DJ-0CBW-YVZAB
Infinite AP	36T0-APTN-JP5F2
	ZBYZ-HDA5-M3RY0
	CZZ4-HNAG-05GW7
Max Funds	QHHB-54WH-QCM6Z
	EM2X-1H3C-YEUR8
	PWNZ-XC17-28EYZ
Max Fame	VNUX-PHUU-667UE
	FCKV-FCXF-PB5YK
	PWNZ-XC17-28EYZ
Max Deeds	7YU7-QC8V-BK45G
	7PJU-NU0G-162GP
	PWNZ-XC17-28EYZ
Max Troops	N987-F6ET-P64C7
	504N-QV4Y-BH7NA
	PWNZ-XC17-28EYZ
Max Drill	DZHP-D01P-994M2
	DKXR-18RX-9550Y
	PWNZ-XC17-28EYZ
Max WAR	MKY2-NG0T-3754E
	QHC5-980N-5R699
	A8QN-EU42-6WCBV
Max INT	XM25-JE52-G0C8N
	DEQW-CNKM-9J37M
	A8QN-EU42-6WCBV
Max POL	0VNN-5R6Y-48YH9
	UDDP-XRMD-0J2T4
	A8QN-EU42-6WCBV
Max CHA	W6AC-P3NR-9T7CE
	1YC6-20UV-RRUPB
	CXTG-80NG-VYQMB

CHAOS LEGION

Master Code – Must Be on	6P02-EZVN-3CPGK
	N1W5-V7GK-617Y9
	VFE7-FK9B-M32EAKQE
Max Health	KJKX-PGNM-RVBXX
	FR8X-7553-CJ5DE
Max Soul	MG2V-VX2K-MET6F
	UDKG-BTPU-AAX6X
Infinite Soul	1HHQ-Y6R0-XXZDD
	F1Q0-6Y7C-KAVWY
Mega Moon Jump	AGKH-EQZT-8664Z
	NTPF-AHAW-U0VGA
	X3XC-GYP5-QCY6X

FINAL FANTASY X

Master Code – Must Be on	RWWY-W5QR-8MA82
	CZEU-6Z2K-11RAY
	AYUU-N20U-GRFRM
Infinite Gil	HNZZ-FMR7-P8Y2W
	8FQG-KPKR-BYZ8M
Airship Open	N4F1-UBHP-AKYRU
	BWN6-AR0R-PVRQH
Enemies Drop 8 Items	150N-2PCJ-B3H01
	054R-C0MB-1EXNG
Al Bhed Translated	AQA4-PQ40-C94Z1
	FBJK-3TC3-F76Q5
Low AP	V351-WA5M-5Q237
	CXM8-1RHN-1PHW9
	0Q2Q-Q8E3-3GZQ4
	UY0E-FATH-87GQJ
	JGG4-CBCU-BPGV6
	04DG-8TGD-B2YG9
	XH4P-D1X1-2XW9K
	09AU-8D1X-HJEFN
All Key Items	MVA4-8XFB-QHC1H
	CYB4-5CZQ-6X18E
	BAM8-CDRD-8A5PQ
	XT8D-MMT6-RB28E
	2VZK-T3UJ-KUNUE
All Overdrives	1RMZ-6HP4-WKHQ5
	F9XH-E28W-Y81WD
	R4EE-PFDN-HAC6A
	4KBP-N2VD-66NQA
Max Items	A0WW-K6UY-EVXDH
	QTN9-MZ2B-2UT3X
Infinite Item Use	BXM6-F2X6-PPGE3
	PAUP-5UU6-PEPEB
	4WBD-54XW-FWNPG

MADDEN NFL 2004

Master Code – Must Be on	6C5E-T632-EN2R9
	KB9A-MUZ8-DDTQY
Profile 1 Codes	CZHG-K4YG-2F642
Madden Card Points	40T7-7QCP-974Z6
	Q6W7-7AGZ-88YHW

You must start with a new, empty Card Book for the Super Pack codes

Super Pack 1	UBN1-UHWR-UEG6U
	R36D-99TW-Y4K6K
	MN4B-QNG2-47P13
	D9Q5-GPMY-NKR16
	ZHNN-HJ87-6YG84
	7Y2J-B2HK-59J2R
	190D-5FUT-YAZF1
	7TP3-ME6Z-FVECA
	437E-K97T-X5268
	NHF7-26M3-D9GTM
	Z11Z-NDXU-3VVYW
	XAWN-ZAXT-J1T22
	PJMJ-6KKZ-GP9F9
	H2VV-QHWZ-T8M5W
	DQEG-NNGX-KPMGE
	39DD-2X1A-CQ864
Super Pack 2	6HYA-20YG-CNUVY
	Z3DT-2HFM-ZDP1A
	NHKZ-J775-2R78X
	VXHE-QJJ6-BD2WP
	22H7-YWBC-4VN8Q
	EUXC-GTWX-02PT0
	B9HC-B3HH-MTC0N
	YA76-WC3U-WVC0F
	76VE-BB7X-U7N9J
	HB32-NXA6-7MHNK
	CGCV-NEQ8-UXFU6
	RXR8-WWX9-8G20V
	30B4-1NXN-Q0QCB
	Q2GF-REPY-ZZ726
	13W5-QD94-JK0W9
	GNDY-XMQZ-XJRF3
Super Pack 3	U3Y2-1V67-QN2H9
	MGED-VC1X-T5MTC
	08K0-TF7B-G8P33
	HVDJ-1M35-BKRGG
	WA9T-87HC-50W2J
	4NCQ-XTE7-AF4WU
	0AQ0-DKMD-4XDWF
	624A-HQMQ-TBZPY
	BPNF-TA61-K9XJJ
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	5P4R-Z7M0-KFAA4
	QMB0-NYV6-143BW
	R28T-8J87-MM6AY
Super Pack 4	AGZC-GMTF-83Y6T
	GDEN-56E0-DR15T
	0PG1-UK60-1GE6A
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FINAL FANTASY® X-2 Art Attack Contest

OFFICIAL RULES:

1. NO PURCHASE NECESSARY TO ENTER OR WIN.

2. ENTRY REQUIREMENTS: Hand print your name, age, complete address including zip code, complete daytime phone number with area code, and e-mail address (if available) on a 3" x 5" card and mail in a first class stamped envelope with your original artwork to: FINAL FANTASY® X-2 Art Attack Contest, P.O. Box 23040, Oakland, CA, 94623-0040. If entrant is under 18 years of age (hereinafter "minor"), a parent or legal guardian must give consent by simply writing on the above mentioned 3" x 5" card, "I, (parent or legal guardian's name), consent (entrant's name) to participate in the FINAL FANTASY® X-2 Art Attack Contest" and sign. Contest begins on 11/11/03 at 12:01 AM (PST) and ends at 11:59 PM (PST) on 2/11/04. Limit one Contest entry per person. Multiple entries will be disqualified. By participating, entrant (and entrant's parent/legal guardian, if entrant is a minor) agrees to these Official Rules.

3. ENTRY CONDITIONS: By entering, entrant agrees: (a) To abide by these Contest rules (exact compliance is essential); (b) To accept as final and binding the decisions of the Sponsors, judge(s), and their agents in all matters relating to this Contest; (c) That all entries submitted become the property of Sponsors and will not be acknowledged or returned; (d) To the collection of all information on each entry and to its transfer to third parties in aggregate form; e) That acceptance of prize offered constitutes consent to use entrant's/Winner's name, hometown, state, prize won, and likeness (except where prohibited by law) without further compensation for advertising or publicity purposes. If you are under the age of 18, you and your parent or legal guardian warrant and represent that you and your parent or legal guardian have both reviewed and expressly agree with these Contest rules.

4. SELECTION: All eligible entries received will be classified by age (on the date of entry) into the following groups; thirteen (13) to seventeen (17), and eighteen (18) and older. A total of six (6) Winners will be selected from all eligible entries received. There will be one (1) Grand Prize Winner, one (1) First Prize Winner, and one (1) Second Prize Winner from each age group. Francis Mao, the Senior Vice President and Director of Editorial and Creative Services for IDG Entertainment, will select the six (6) Winners on or about February 21, 2004. Entries will be judged on originality and creativity. Sponsors' and judges' decisions are final and binding in all matters. Winners will be notified by mail. Winners may not substitute, assign, or transfer prize or redeem prize for cash. Sponsors reserve right to substitute prize with prize of equal or greater value if advertised prize becomes unavailable.

5. PRIZES: The following prizes (with corresponding estimated retail values) will be awarded: Two Grand Prize Contest Winners will receive the following: one copy of FINAL FANTASY® X-2 for the PlayStation®2 ($50), one FINAL FANTASY® X-2 Yuna 1/10 Scale Action Figure ($15), one FINAL FANTASY® X-2 Rikku 1/10 Scale Action Figure ($15), one FINAL FANTASY® X-2 Paine 1/10 Scale Action Figure ($15), one FINAL FANTASY® X-2 for the PlayStation®2 official strategy guide ($15), one FINAL FANTASY® X-2 poster ($5), and a one-year subscription to *GamePro* magazine ($24.95). Two First Prize Contest Winners will receive the following: one copy of FINAL FANTASY® X-2 for the PlayStation®2 ($50), one FINAL FANTASY® X-2 poster ($5), and a one-year subscription to *GamePro* magazine ($24.95). Two Second Prize Contest Winners will receive the following: one copy of FINAL FANTASY® X-2 for the PlayStation®2 ($50). Total ERV of prizes is $539.80. Prize won by a minor may be awarded to parent/legal guardian.

6. ELIGIBILITY: Contest is subject to all U.S. federal, state, and local laws and regulations, and is void where prohibited, taxed, or restricted by law. Contest is open to legal residents age 13 or older of the contiguous 48 United States and Canada, except for Arizona, Quebec, and Puerto Rico. Employees of Sponsors and their affiliates, subsidiaries, distributors, retailers, and anyone involved with the design, production, execution, or distribution of Sponsors' products or related promotional materials and their families are not eligible. Canadian residents, in order to be eligible to win, must first correctly answer a time-limited, skill-testing question administered by telephone.

7. GENERAL: Prize Winners (and Winner's parent/legal guardian, if a Winner is a minor) will be required to sign and return an affidavit of eligibility and liability release, and where lawful, a publicity release within 14 days of notification or prize will be forfeited and awarded to alternate Winner. By entering this Contest, you expressly agree that all of the results and proceeds of the Contest entry are and shall be, from the inception of creation, a "work made for hire" for IDG Entertainment, Inc. "IDG." You further acknowledge, certify, and agree that IDG shall be deemed the author and/or exclusive owner throughout the world of any and all rights in, and to the entry and underlying composition embodied therein, and any renewal or extension of rights in connection therewith, and of any and all other rights thereto. In the event that the services rendered in connection with the entry are not deemed to be "work made for hire," then the rights therein shall be deemed irrevocably transferred to IDG by virtue of this agreement. You will, upon request, execute, acknowledge, and deliver to IDG such additional documents as IDG Entertainment may deem necessary to evidence and effectuate IDG's rights hereunder. If prize notification or prize is returned as non-deliverable, prize will be forfeited and an alternate Winner selected. Neither the Sponsors nor any of their agencies are responsible for lost, illegible entries. Persons found tampering with or abusing any aspect of this Contest, as solely determined by the Sponsors, will be disqualified. If disqualified for any tampering or abuses, Sponsors reserve the right to terminate entrant's eligibility to participate in Contest. Winner (and Winner's parent/legal guardian, if Winner is a minor) by acceptance of prize (a) agrees that Sponsors and their affiliate companies, parents, subsidiaries, advertising and promotion agencies, and all of their respective officers, directors, employees, representatives, and agents will have no liability whatsoever for, and shall be held harmless by Winner against, any liability for any injuries, losses, or damages of any kind to persons, including death or property resulting in whole or in part, directly or indirectly, from acceptance, possession, misuse, or use of the prize or participation in this Contest or participation in any Contest-related activity, and (b) except where legally prohibited, grants permission for Sponsors and those acting under their authority to use his/her name, photograph, voice, and/or likeness, for advertising and/or publicity purposes without additional compensation. All federal, state, and local taxes, registration fees, and/or other costs associated with winning the prize are the sole responsibility of the Winner. Sponsors shall not be responsible for any such taxes, fees, and costs. All decisions of Sponsors on all matters relating to this promotion are final. Unclaimed prizes will not be awarded. If an individual Winner does not claim his/her prize by March 31, 2004, the prize will be forfeited back to the supplier. Prizes cannot be claimed after the Contest has been completed.

8. For names of Winners, send a stamped, self-addressed envelope for receipt by March 15, 2004 to: FINAL FANTASY® X-2 Art Attack Contest, P.O. Box 23040, Oakland, CA 94623-0040.

9. Sponsored by: IDG Entertainment, Inc., *GamePro* magazine, and Square Enix U.S.A., Inc. Sony Computer Entertainment America takes no responsibility for this Contest.

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